



Province of Alberta

The 24th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

February 17, 2000 to November 28, 2000
and Index

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, February 17, 2000** **3:00 p.m.**
 Date: 00/02/17
 THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order! All rise, please.

[The Clerk read the Royal Proclamation dated January 26, 2000, summoning the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to convene on this date]

THE CLERK: Please be seated.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order! Order! Mr. Speaker.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Speaker, accompanied by the officers of the Assembly, entered the Chamber and took the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Would you please join me in the opening day prayer? Almighty God, author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask Your guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments for the benefit of all Albertans. Amen.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Please join us in the language of your choice.

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

Entrance of the Lieutenant Governor

[The Premier, the Clerk, and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, while we await the arrival of Her Honour, I thought I might take this opportunity to say a few words relevant to the history and role of the Office of Lieutenant Governor. The post of Lieutenant Governor was established by the British North America Act in March of 1867. This act united the provinces under a central government with each province retaining its own Legislature to preside over matters not under federal jurisdiction. In Alberta the Office of Lieutenant Governor came into existence when the federal government created the province of Alberta from the North-West Territories in 1905.

Since the Statute of Westminster of 1931 Canada has been a sovereign state but has chosen to remain a member of the Commonwealth. Her Majesty the Queen is head of the Commonwealth. The Lieutenant Governor is a representative of the Crown in our province. Over the years the Lieutenant Governor's role has gradually changed and is now focused primarily on her responsibilities as the sovereign's representative and chief executive officer of the province.

One of the most important responsibilities is to ensure that the province always has a Premier. If this office becomes vacant because of death or resignation, it is the Lieutenant Governor's responsibility to see that the post is filled. The Lieutenant Governor has the same responsibility if the government resigns following a defeat in the Legislature or an election. She summons, prorogues, and dissolves the Legislature and reads the Speech from the Throne at the opening of each session.

With the advice of the Premier she appoints and swears in members of the Executive Council, or cabinet, and is guided by their advice. The Lieutenant Governor gives royal assent to all measures and bills passed by the Legislative Assembly except on rare occasions when reservation is considered necessary. She also signs orders in council, proclamations, and many other official documents before they become law.

The Lieutenant Governor is host to members of the royal family and heads of state visiting the province. She is not involved in political activity, which permits her to represent Alberta at ceremonial and state occasions, and she is a patron to a wide variety of activities which contribute to the betterment of the lives of Albertans of all ages.

The Canadian Crown is a distinctive and essential part of Canada's heritage and character and thus a focus for national pride. It's an important symbol of unity, serving to bind Canadians together in their common ideals and aspirations. It is a visible proof of the vitality of our traditions.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Ladies and gentlemen, all rise, please.

Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

THE SPEAKER: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[A fanfare of trumpets sounded]

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Their Honours the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Lois E. Hole, CM, and Mr. Hole, their party, the Premier, and the Clerk entered the Chamber. Her Honour took her place upon the throne]

head: Speech from the Throne

HER HONOUR: Pray be seated.

Fellow Albertans, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Fourth Session of the 24th Alberta Legislature. I am honoured to speak to you today as Alberta's Lieutenant Governor, a role I accept with pride and a full appreciation of its time-honoured place in our cherished democratic system.

As Alberta and Canada welcome the new century, let me begin with a quotation from the first throne speech of the previous century and the first-ever presented in Alberta. It was delivered by Lieutenant Governor George Hedley Vickers Bulyea on March 15, 1906.

Our thanks are due to Divine Providence for the bountiful harvest with which we were blessed during the past year. Inasmuch as the fruits of the soil are at the basis of the material prosperity of any country, the glorious heritage to which the people of this Province have been called justifies a boundless confidence in the future.

With that eloquent endorsement of Alberta's potential so began the province's journey as a partner in Confederation. Today Albertans look back with tremendous pride at what they achieved through the 20th century and look forward with confidence to the challenges and opportunities of the new century.

We are honoured to have in this Assembly today an Albertan who was born in the year that first throne speech was delivered. Mrs. Mathilda Hirsch of Edmonton, seated with the Premier's guests, was born in Wetaskiwin. And, Mrs. Hirsch, I must say that Wetaskiwin is a lovely city; I've been there many times. She represents four generations of Albertans, men and women who weathered the storms of war and depression to bequeath to us and to our children a province well poised for growth and prosperity in the coming century. We thank Mrs. Hirsch and the many Albertans like her, some still with us, many not, who worked so hard throughout the 20th century so that the new century could offer such promise.

Also present today are 13 students of the class of 2000 along with their teacher, Mr. Jeff Larbalestier. These students, from the international baccalaureate program at Stratford campus of Jasper Place high school, will be Alberta's first graduates of the 21st century. They are beginning their journeys to adulthood in our province.

These students represent the generation that will continue the work of Mrs. Hirsch in the coming years. Among them lie the potential of today and the energies that will fuel tomorrow. These young Albertans along with their classmates and peers in high schools across the province inspire great confidence and hope for Alberta's new century.

Finally, I wish to introduce baby Micheal Tustin along with his parents, Theresa and Dwayne Tustin. Baby Micheal was born at the Grey Nuns hospital early on January 1, 2000, and is one of Alberta's millennium children. With baby Micheal and all those born in the opening months of the new century lies the potential of tomorrow. Every child born in Alberta is blessed with a birthright of Canadian citizenship in this province, a birthright of economic opportunity, personal freedom, clear choices, and safe communities. They in turn will grow into adults who will work to ensure that birthright endures for their children.

As this Legislative Assembly begins its first deliberations of the new century, the government reaffirms its commitment to maintaining this birthright for baby Micheal, for the class of 2000, for Mrs. Hirsch, and for all other citizens in this province who together turn potential into reality.

This birthright is based on certain values that have distinguished Alberta within Confederation since the time of Lieutenant Governor Bulyea. Albertans are confident, confident in their province, in their ability to succeed, and in the strength of their province. Albertans are entrepreneurial people who believe that citizens should have the freedom to pursue their goals. They also value innovation and are not afraid to take risks or try new ideas if the goal of these actions is worth while.

Self-reliance is another key value for Albertans. Albertans accept personal responsibility for their lives while recognizing that many of their neighbours sometimes need assistance, which they are happy to give. Albertans are also a spiritual people who embrace their faith with a quiet passion while respecting the faiths of others. Recognizing that their province is blessed with unmatched natural beauty, Albertans also place a high value on enjoying and protecting our natural environment.

It is these values, the values that have shaped almost a century of Alberta history, that will guide the province through the 21st century. It is also these values that shape the principles by which this government will govern over the next year and beyond. These

principles are fiscal responsibility, which has become the basis of Albertans' confidence in the economy; innovation, which means making effective change that benefits the province; equity, which includes fairness for all citizens and respect for diversity of culture, age, gender, and other characteristics; and balance, especially balance between revenues and expenditures, saving and spending, and development and sustainability.

Today this government recommits itself to these principles and lays out a plan that is based on them. The plan, like Albertans themselves, is bold and forward looking. It respects the values of Albertans while recognizing that a new century holds new challenges and therefore requires new ideas to meet those challenges.

When Lieutenant Governor Bulyea spoke of Alberta's bountiful harvest, he spoke primarily of the province's agricultural strength. Today Alberta's harvest spreads beyond our expanse of farmlands. We reap the harvests of a vibrant energy sector, of an energetic retail and service sector, of a public service delivering health and education and other services, of a growing high-tech sector, and of a bustling international trade sector.

But just as in 1906 the harvest of plenty begins on Alberta farms. Agriculture will continue to be a cornerstone of our provincial economy. While making up 9 percent of Canada's population, Alberta accounts for 20 percent of the nation's primary agricultural production. One in every three jobs in Alberta depends on agriculture, from the farmer in the field to the person working at the supermarket.

The government recognizes that these are challenging times for agriculture, that this industry that holds together countless Alberta communities is at a crossroads. Some family farms are in jeopardy, and the ties that bound neighbours together in Lieutenant Governor Bulyea's time risk being severed. Our government will not stand idly by to let this happen. The family farm of a century ago is bound to undergo change, but the agricultural industry will remain vital to this province's prosperity.

As a result, the government has begun to develop a plan to ensure the long-term sustainability of this diverse industry. The recent agricultural leaders' workshop will lead to regional meetings throughout Alberta in March. The process will culminate in Ag Summit 2000, to be held on June 7 and 8. The government will continue to provide a responsive safety net package for farmers facing disaster. A review of Alberta's hail and crop insurance program will also be undertaken, resulting in a restructuring of risk management programs to better meet the needs of our producers.

We will also continue to work with the federal government to advance Alberta's interest in improved trade rules and market access for the industry. The focus is on expanding access for value-added products that use Alberta agricultural products as input. As Alberta has many farmers who depend on commodity exports, efforts to remove barriers and subsidies in the European Union and the United States will continue to be a priority.

In other areas of economic activity we also commit to maintaining a plentiful harvest. This spring the government starts work on implementing an updated economic strategy for Alberta. The strategy will help create an environment in which Albertans can build on the province's economic strengths by forging strong links among economy, innovation, learning, and quality of life. The strategy lays out a comprehensive plan for the future that focuses on competing in the global economy and maximizing the human talent and ingenuity of all Albertans.

Alberta's aboriginal peoples are key players in the province's economic future. Following consultation with First Nations and Metis leaders and organizations, industry, municipalities, and others, the government will release a new aboriginal policy framework. The

framework will guide government in its relations with aboriginal peoples and create an environment in which aboriginal peoples can better participate in the Alberta advantage.

In the area of innovation and science the government recognizes that Alberta can and must be a leader in the areas of information and communications technology and leading-edge research. To that end, this year the government will work with its partners to connect communities across Alberta with high-speed, high-bandwidth Internet access. This will create enormous opportunities for all Albertans, regardless of where they live, to benefit from distance learning, electronic commerce, and better access to government services.

Legislation will be introduced to establish the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research. This \$500 million endowment fund will enhance research in the fields of science and engineering in Alberta and help the province maintain a leadership role in areas that will play crucial roles in the future of the province. It will encourage Alberta's brightest minds to stay here in Alberta and to recognize that Alberta is the place to be. For the Alberta of the 21st century it creates a legacy of excellence.

In addition, over \$90 million will be allocated to support research initiatives in the areas of agriculture, bioscience, health, forestry, energy, and industry. From these funds the nationwide brain drain problem will be addressed by an allocation of approximately \$18 million to continue supporting faculty at Alberta universities and research hospitals and a further \$10 million to support the informatics circle of research excellence, which will attract communications and technology researchers to Alberta.

Attracting researchers is important to Alberta's economic success. Equally important is developing a well-trained and highly educated workforce right here so that Alberta's economy can respond effectively to changing market demand and industry needs. The government will continue to create a positive and stable labour climate that fosters one of the highest productivity rates and most impressive workplace safety records in Canada.

This government will also continue to help build a strong and skilled labour force through expanded programs to help youth entering the workforce get the training they need to find meaningful employment. Changes will be introduced to provide more flexibility in Alberta's apprenticeship and training system while maintaining the province's high industry standards.

Recognizing that a competitive tax regime is essential to economic growth, the government will continue to reform the provincial tax system. In this session legislation will be introduced to put into law Alberta's tax reform plan, including a phasing out of the remaining surtax, the elimination of the eroding effects of inflation on workers' salaries, a significant increase in personal exemptions, the removal of 132,000 Albertans from the provincial tax roll, and the move to a new 11 percent, single-rate provincial income tax all by January 1, 2001.

A comprehensive business tax review will be completed in the coming year. It will examine how business and corporate taxes can be reformed to enhance the Alberta advantage. Whether they be small family businesses or globally competing corporations, all forms of enterprise will be included. We will also conclude the review of provincial fees and charges and ensure that these fees and charges are reasonable and reflect the cost of the services provided.

In the area of nonrenewable resources the government will proceed with the orderly restructuring of the electricity industry. Deregulation and the introduction of retail choice in 2001 will create a competitive marketplace for new generation and retail services that will offer options to consumers and ensure that Albertans continue to benefit from a reliable power supply. Our government will work

to ensure Albertans understand their options and rights in this new electricity marketplace so that they are well equipped to make informed choices when choices become available. A regulatory framework will be developed that focuses on consumer protection and awareness and a fair marketplace with a high standard of business conduct.

This year the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2000, will be introduced. The act will expand the current abandoned well program. It will enhance the Energy and Utilities Board's ability to manage site abandonment and reclamation in a responsible manner that ensures safety and protects the environment and the public purse.

The government is committed to ensuring Alberta's international marketing activities are globally competitive, co-ordinated, and focused on promoting continued economic growth and prosperity. Therefore, the government is developing an international strategy focused on building relationships with foreign governments, removing barriers to trade, and promoting investment, trade, and tourism in partnership with the private sector.

A significant opportunity to build global relationships will be Alberta's participation at the 2000 World Exposition in Hanover, Germany. The Alberta government will use the 2000 World Expo as a high-profile venue from which to launch its longer term European strategy. Alberta's Expo participation will focus on technology and innovation.

The people of Alberta work hard and with pride to reap the economic harvests that make Alberta strong. They know, however, that economic prosperity is not an end in itself. Albertans expect that the results of their commitment will be a good education system, quality health care, effective social programs, a clean environment, and safe, strong communities. The government will take action in each of these areas over the coming year.

Our government will work to make Alberta's education system a leader in Canada. It will introduce a new \$3 million academic scholarship program that will benefit approximately 3,000 second-year postsecondary students and reward them for their hard work. The government will also increase student financial assistance levels and will continue to improve the student loan application process to make it easier for students and will work with students to enhance available information to help in planning for a postsecondary education. Our government will also expand the child health benefit to cover children of low-income postsecondary students.

A key area of emphasis will be on continuing a collaborative, flexible, and responsive learning system that encourages Albertans to be lifelong learners. The Minister of Learning will work with government's education partners on school and student improvement issues such as literacy and class size. As well, fund-raising in the primary and secondary school systems will be reviewed to ensure that students and parents are not fund-raising to meet the basic educational needs of their schools.

The government will work with institutions on enhancing access through technology and will work with partners to promote second language programs to help students participate in the global economy.

In the area of health and wellness a six-point plan will be implemented to keep Alberta's health system sustainable and effective in the face of mounting pressures. Alberta will continue to play a leadership role across Canada in working to strengthen the system and will renew its pledge to respect the principles of the Canada Health Act and maintain a single-tier, publicly funded health system that is accessible to all Albertans on an equitable basis. Legislation will be introduced to help protect and preserve the publicly funded health system by putting Alberta's commitment to

the principles of the Canada Health Act into provincial law and enabling health authorities to pursue new, innovative ways of delivering publicly funded health services.

The government will implement the overall directions for enhancing continuing care resulting from the long-term care review, and it will also work with regional boards to follow up on the review of the persons with developmental disabilities program to strengthen support for Albertans with developmental disabilities.

Government will continue to focus on maintaining and improving the health of Albertans through prevention of illness and injury by expanding screening programs for breast and cervical cancer and by launching a new three-year immunization plan, and government will increase access to essential services by increasing frontline staff levels in the health system and by reducing waiting times for surgeries and diagnostic procedures.

We know that the harvest of prosperity is not always equally shared by all members of society. Therefore, programs to protect and assist those in need will continue to be a focus in the coming year. We will continue to support those who need assistance and help people ready and able to re-enter the workforce. The Human Resources and Employment minister's Employability Council will look at ways to ensure that all Albertans have the opportunity to contribute to the strength of the province.

To address the pressing problem of homelessness, the government will work with public and private partners to co-ordinate programs that provide access to affordable housing and shelter for those in need.

For children the government's emphasis will be on providing early support for children and families to promote healthy development. The government will respond to and act appropriately on recommendations from the Alberta Children's Forum and the Task Force on Children at Risk. The government will also address issues and needs of adolescents through the Youth Secretariat.

An external review of the factors leading to rising child welfare caseloads will be completed. In addition, the mandate of the office of the Children's Advocate will be reviewed to make sure the voices of vulnerable children and youth are heard. The government will continue to back its groundbreaking legislation to protect children involved in prostitution.

Government continues to focus resources on crime prevention so that communities in Alberta are safe. Continued support for policing, for the active pursuit and prosecution of organized crime, and for local crime prevention initiatives will help reduce the provincial rate of adult and youth crime. The government will continue to increase the efficiency of Alberta's courts, using mediation and other effective dispute resolution measures. The government will also review Alberta's Police Act and continue its work to improve access to the justice system for Albertans.

An important part of Alberta's communities is seniors, who today number about 300,000 and who are a vital part of all Alberta communities, contributing energy, wisdom, and time to the development of the province. The Alberta government will continue to provide support to seniors who need it. In the coming year the government will increase financial support to the Alberta seniors' benefit program so that cash benefits for clients reflect rising costs. Additional funding will also be provided for the special-needs assistance program, a highly successful initiative that has helped thousands of seniors deal with financial emergencies. The government will also complete its study of the impact of the aging population and will consider recommendations that will strengthen programs, services, and housing supports for seniors to enable them to live in security and dignity.

Recognizing the importance of heritage in communities,

legislation will be introduced to return objects of religious importance to First Nations peoples. This repatriation legislation will ensure that First Nations communities have full ownership and responsibility for these spiritual artifacts.

Effective ties with other orders of government are important to the province and its communities. Over the next year we will work with municipalities across the province to strengthen our partnership with local governments. The government will work to improve service in its approach to provincial/municipal policies and programs and eliminate unnecessary overlap.

Our government will also work in partnership with other governments toward common goals. Alberta will continue to seek a strong, productive partnership with Ottawa and the provinces to address issues of national concern effectively. This partnership is essential to ensure that initiatives from the two levels of government complement each other rather than duplicate and that programs are responsive and accountable to the needs of Albertans and Canadians.

To improve the way government provides services to Albertans and communities, a wide range of services, products, and information will be made available through a one-window approach. This will enable Albertans to get what they need without having to know from which department to get it. It will also allow them to decide how they want to get it, whether over the counter, over the phone, or over the Internet.

The government will continue with its \$900 million, three-year reinvestment in provincial infrastructure systems, ensuring that the province's roads are safe and meeting the needs of Albertans.

Albertans desire a clean, safe natural environment. The government will continue to show leadership in preserving and protecting Alberta's environment and, with it, Albertans' health and quality of life. The government will build on last year's consultations to address issues such as climate change, sustainable development, protection of endangered species, and parks policy. Through Climate Change Central the government will work with industry and communities to continue to develop practical strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

As well, the government will monitor the status of species at risk in the province and develop management strategies to restore populations to sustainable levels. Alberta's diversity of wildlife and habitat are parts of a natural heritage that citizens want to protect and enjoy for the new century and beyond. The government will continue to strike a balance between preserving Alberta's natural heritage and sustaining its use as a contributor to outdoor recreation, nature appreciation, and development.

In conclusion, in this first year of the new century Albertans can expect to be blessed with a harvest as bountiful as that which ushered in Alberta's first year as a province in the 20th century. The values that characterized Alberta in Lieutenant Governor Bulyea's time still shape this province today, and they will continue to mold the government's agenda in all of its aspects.

As Alberta begins the 21st century, the government commits itself to doing all it can to nurture the province's bountiful harvest of prosperity, safety, and quality of life. At the same time, the government recognizes that Albertans achieve best when government does not erect barriers to their success. Therefore, the government pledges to stay out of people's lives when intervention would only be intrusion.

Alberta's new century begins with a recognition of the importance of the agricultural industry, a new economic plan, a renewed commitment to the Canada Health Act and the quality of health care for all Albertans, a strong and responsive education system, a sound fiscal plan and a commitment to lower taxes, and a variety of initiatives to strengthen communities and those who live in them.

This plan bodes well for Alberta. It is as bold as Albertans themselves. It is rooted in the soil of the province's rich past and will be nourished by the promise of the province's future.

To Mrs. Hirsch, to the class of 2000, to baby Micheal, and to all Albertans: the government promises to work with all of you to ensure that in the new century this province continues to write a history of greatness and a legacy of hope and promise for all of its citizens. We trust that our deliberations in this Assembly will continue to be for the common goal of achieving what is good for Alberta and that the citizens of this province here today will see fit to judge their harvest bountiful.

Now I leave you to the business of this session confident that as elected representatives you will in every way fulfill your responsibilities to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly, I pray that the blessing of God may rest on your deliberations, just as it did on Alberta's first Assembly in March 1906.

God bless Alberta.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Their Honours, their party, and the Premier left the Chamber as a fanfare of trumpets sounded]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

[The Mace was uncovered]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, while we await the return of the Premier to the Chamber, perhaps I might just make a few comments with respect to some of the traditional formalities that will occur in the next few minutes.

The first order of business will be the introduction of a bill by the Premier. Introduction of a bill asserts the right of the Assembly to deliberate and pass legislation, thus taking its business into its own hands. Introduction of a bill is the first of three reading stages a bill must pass through before it can become law. In addition to three readings, bills are also considered in more detail in a committee composed of all members.

Following introduction of the bill, I will table a copy of the Speech from the Throne to form part of the official records of the Assembly.

A series of motions will then be moved by the Premier and several ministers of Executive Council. The first will be a motion by the Premier that the Speech from the Throne be taken into consideration next Tuesday. That debate will be the main item of business for the consideration of the Assembly for the first week or so of this session.

The Deputy Government House Leader will then move that the Votes and Proceedings of the Assembly be printed. This document forms the official record of the proceedings in the Assembly and contains a summary of all actions or decisions by this House.

A series of motions will follow sponsored by the Government House Leader to appoint the Assembly's seven standing committees and their membership.

At the conclusion of its business the Government House Leader will move that the Assembly adjourn until Tuesday afternoon, Monday being Family Day, which is a statutory holiday in Alberta, the only province in Canada to celebrate such a special day.

As this is a ceremonial occasion as well, the Speaker will leave the Chamber in procession through the main doors of the Chamber. All members and guests will then exit and proceed down the grand

staircase to be received by Their Honours the Hon. Lois Elsa Hole and the Hon. Ted Hole, the hon. Premier of the province of Alberta, and the hon. Mrs. Klein.

[The Premier returned to the Chamber]

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Mr. Premier.

Bill 1

Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 1, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this bill puts into place a \$500 million endowment to enhance science and engineering research in Alberta. Hopefully it will help to keep the brightest and keenest scientific minds right here in our province.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a first time]

head:

Tablings

THE SPEAKER: I have the honour to table a copy of the speech graciously given by Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

head:

Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the speech of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to this Assembly be taken into consideration Tuesday, February 22.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Votes and Proceedings of this Assembly be printed after first having been perused by Mr. Speaker and that he do appoint the printing thereof and that no person but such as he shall appoint do presume to print the same.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the select standing committees for the present session of the Legislative Assembly be appointed for the following purposes:

- (1) Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund,
- (2) Law and Regulations,
- (3) Legislative Offices,
- (4) Private Bills,
- (5) Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing,
- (6) Public Accounts, and
- (7) Public Affairs.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek the Assembly's unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 49(1), providing for the establishment of a striking committee to prepare, recommend, and report a list of the members, chairmen, and deputy chairmen to comprise the Assembly's seven standing committees.

[Unanimous consent granted]

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, again I seek the Assembly's unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 38(1)(a) in order to move the motion appointing the chairmen, deputy chairmen, and members to comprise the Assembly's seven standing committees.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the following members be appointed to the Assembly's seven standing committees:

- (1) Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund: Mr. Trynchy, chairman; Mr. Doerksen, deputy chairman; Mr. Bonner; Ms Carlson; Mr. Clegg; Mr. Hierath; Mr. Lougheed; Mr. Shariff; and Mr. Stevens.
- (2) Law and Regulations: Mrs. Tarchuk, chairman; Mr. Doerksen, deputy chairman; Mr. Amery; Mr. Broda; Mr. Boutilier; Mrs. Burgener; Mr. Coutts; Mr. Dickson; Mrs. Fritz; Mr. Johnson; Mrs. Laing; Ms Leibovici; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Melchin; Ms

Olsen; Mr. Renner; Mr. Severtson; Mrs. Sloan; Mr. Thurber; Mr. Trynchy; and Mr. Yankowsky.

- (3) Legislative Offices: Mr. Langevin, chairman; Mr. Friedel, deputy chairman; Mr. Dickson; Mr. Ducharme; Mrs. Fritz; Mr. Hierath; Mr. Jacques; Ms Olsen; and Mrs. O'Neill.
- (4) Private Bills: Ms Graham, chairman; Mrs. Burgener, deputy chairman; Mr. Bonner; Mr. Cao; Mr. Coutts; Mr. Jacques; Ms Kryczka; Mr. Langevin; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Magnus; Mr. Marz; Mr. McFarland; Ms Paul; Mr. Pham; Mr. Renner; Mrs. Sloan; Mrs. Soetaert; Mr. Strang; Mr. Tannas; Mrs. Tarchuk; and Mr. Thurber.
- (5) Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing: Mr. Stevens, chairman; Mr. Boutilier, deputy chairman; Mr. Cao; Mr. Clegg; Mr. Dickson; Mr. Ducharme; Mr. Fischer; Mrs. Forsyth; Mr. Gibbons; Mrs. Gordon; Mr. Hlady; Mr. Klapstein; Ms Kryczka; Ms Leibovici; Dr. Massey; Mr. Renner; Mr. Sapers; Mr. Severtson; Mr. Strang; Mr. Tannas; and Mrs. Tarchuk.
- (6) Public Accounts: Mr. White, chairman; Mr. Shariff, deputy chairman; Mr. Amery; Ms Blakeman; Mr. Cao; Mrs. Forsyth; Ms Graham; Mr. Herard; Mr. Johnson; Mr. Klapstein; Ms Kryczka; Mr. Lougheed; Dr. Nicol; Ms Olsen; Mrs. O'Neill; Dr. Pannu; and Mr. Yankowsky.
- (7) Public Affairs: Mr. Strang, chairman; Mr. Fischer, deputy chairman; and all members of the Assembly.

[Motion carried]

[At 4:03 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, February 22, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/02/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Please join me in the prayer, and at the conclusion of the prayer would you please remain standing.

Father, on this day of a new beginning we ask for Your guidance in the responsibility we have undertaken and Your help in fulfilling our duties. As Members of this Legislative Assembly may we faithfully serve all Albertans and, in serving them, serve You. Amen.

As is our custom, we pay tribute on our first day to former members of this Assembly who have passed on since the House last met.

Mr. Earl M. Hardy

September 6, 1913, to January 15, 2000

THE SPEAKER: On this day we remember Earl Hardy, who passed away on January 15, 2000. Mr. Hardy was first elected to the Alberta Legislature in the general election of August 17, 1948, and served until June 17, 1963. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Bruce for the Social Credit governing party.

During his years in the Legislature Mr. Hardy served on the following committees: Select Standing Committee on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education, serving as chairman of this committee for the First Session of the 12th Legislature; the Select Standing Committee on Municipal Law, serving as chairman for the 13th and 14th Legislatures; the Standing Committee on Private Bills; the Select Standing Committee on Railways, Telephones and Irrigation; and the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

We are honoured by the presence of Earl Hardy's family in the Speaker's gallery today.

Anders Aalborg

August 22, 1914, to February 13, 2000

THE SPEAKER: Today we also remember Anders Aalborg, who passed away on February 13, 2000. Mr. Aalborg was first elected to the Alberta Legislature in the general election of August 17, 1948, and served as MLA until August 30, 1971. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Alexandra for the Social Credit governing party.

During his years in the Legislature Mr. Aalborg served as Minister of Education from September 9, 1952, to July 30, 1964; as Provincial Treasurer from July 29, 1964, to September 9, 1971; as Minister of Railways and Telephones from July 13, 1967, to December 11, 1968. He also served on the following select standing committees: Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Municipal Law; Private Bills; Railways, Telephones and Irrigation; Public Accounts; Public Affairs; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing. He also served on the special committee reviewing workers' compensation.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember Earl Hardy and Anders Aalborg as you may have known them. Rest eternal

grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Please be seated.

Hon. members, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta was the first to proudly display the flags of the country's provincial and territorial flags in its Chamber. I would now like to continue building on our Assembly's firsts vis-a-vis our provincial and territorial counterparts by adding the singing of our national anthem on a limited basis to our daily routine. Would all those members in favour of granting unanimous consent to provide for the singing of our national anthem on the first day of each sessional week for the duration of the Fourth Session of 24th Legislature, to be sung immediately following the daily prayer, please say aye.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I would now invite you to stand, and I'd like to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of the national anthem. Mr. Lorieau is in the Speaker's gallery. Please join us in the language of your choice.

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

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to the Assembly on your behalf the family of the late former member Mr. Earl Hardy. We have the following members of the family: Inez Reil and Sharon Mason, daughters; Doug and Trish Hardy, son and daughter-in-law; Kim Pudlowski and Kerry Bednarski, granddaughters; Darren Mason, grandson; and Janine Bednarski, great-granddaughter. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to present a petition that states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

One thousand and seventy-eight signatures by Edmonton area residents.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table petitions with 1,003 names on them from Edmonton, St. Albert, Ardrossan, Sherwood Park, and Stony Plain. In the petition the Albertans signing it ask for "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition. It's signed by 1,027 people from Evansburg, Stettler, Two Hills, Edmonton, St. Albert, Morinville, Spruce Grove, Innisfail, Red Deer, Edson, and Onoway. This is the petition.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce this afternoon a petition signed by 1,059 Albertans residing in Calgary and High River urging the Legislative Assembly to urge the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to table a petition.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Assembly to urge the government . . . to stop promoting private health care and undermining [our public system].

The signatories of this petition are from Edmonton, Stony Plain, Wabamun, Lloydminster, Drumheller, Hanna, Three Hills, Stettler, Morinville, Jasper, Wetaskiwin, Whitecourt, and St. Paul, bringing our total today to 5,188 Albertans. It's just the beginning; there are many more to come.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 111 Albertans. The petition reads as follows:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

These are 111 of thousands of other signatories on this petition.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I will move that written questions and motions for returns appearing on tomorrow's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on a Standing Order 40 application.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 40 I'll be asking for the unanimous consent of the Legislative Assembly to debate the motion which calls for banning private, for-profit hospitals in this province. I have copies for distribution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 38(1) regarding notice to allow the introduction of Bill 202.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I am tabling the quarterly report, the budget report as required by the Government Accountability Act. This report shows that as far as we can determine now at the third-quarter, the government will be experiencing an unanticipated revenue increase of about 2 and a half billion dollars, a significant portion of that coming from the oil and gas sector and a very significant portion coming from increased personal taxes, which is more people working, more people paying taxes and at a lower rate. I will table that third-quarter report.

Along with it, I'll be tabling the Alberta heritage savings trust fund quarterly report, which shows that the investment earned, we think, by the end of this fiscal year will be \$260 million higher than we had anticipated, showing the fund performing well. Of all the increased spending, the most significant portion is in the area of health.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. First is six copies of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development's annual inspection report on university animal facilities for 1999.

The second is six copies of the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council annual report for 1998-99, and six copies of the Alberta Surface Rights Board and Land Compensation Board annual report for the calendar year 1999.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file eight copies of a Framework for Alberta's International Strategies. This framework was developed to guide the Alberta government's international policies and activities. One-third of Alberta's economic activity is now linked to exports, so this is a very important document for our government.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I wish to table with the Assembly five copies of the statement on the delivery of surgical services; in addition to that, five copies of a policy statement on surgical services, questions and answers; thirdly, five copies of the publication We are Listening: Here's What We've Heard as urged and responded to on behalf of Albertans; and finally, five copies of eight studies that support looking at alternatives in terms of the delivery of surgical services in health care systems. I would like to add that unlike some studies that are circulated, these have all been subject to peer review and are quality pieces of information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a notice of motion pursuant to Standing Order 57(1) relating to subcommittees A, B, C, and D of Committee of Supply. I'm tabling it now so that all members will have notice of the proposed makeup of those committees.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table copies of the letters I've sent to the great kids of Alberta who have been rewarded for their very hard work and commitment to their studies and their community and to congratulate those young Albertans and their families for the wonderful work they do in making sure that all kids are successful in our province.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings to make. I wish to table five copies of Bill 201, the Medicare Enhancement Act. This bill would ban outright the establishment of private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta, which is what Albertans want.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a financial statement for the year '98-99 of HRG, Health Resources Group Inc., and this financial statement shows that HRG last year incurred \$2.1 million in losses.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling a letter from the Van Camps of Edmonton, who outline the deplorable treatment their young, handicapped son got in a local hospital as a result of lack of adequate staffing in the hospital system.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling a sampling of several letters from individuals in Calgary and Sherwood Park asking the government why they are continuing to promote private health care. There's a series of letters from Mr. and Mrs. Gould and letters from Mr. Clarkson and from Ms Rose as well.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a flyer produced by the Edmonton Osteoporosis Support Group. This is giving information on the largely preventable disease of osteoporosis and contains contacts and other information.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have copies of two letters I'd like to table with the Assembly. They're both from constituents. The first is from Miss Eleanor Goss, who informs me that based on information she's received from the United Church of Canada, private health care is not wanted or needed in Alberta.

The second piece of correspondence is also addressed to me from Mrs. Shupac in my constituency, who tells me to please do everything I can to speak up to preserve our health care system as we know it in Alberta and not to allow for privatization.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a brief letter that I've received from the Premier dated January 26. In it we were going to discuss the shortage of health care professionals across this province and across this country, and we will, hopefully this winter during the session.

Thank you.

1:50

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and table five copies about a health care debate that is being held in Edmonton-Riverview. Invited panelists include the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, Dr. Donna Wilson, Ms Wendy Armstrong, and Ms Wanda Cree. All panelists are confirmed except those representing government. Both the Premier and minister of health have declined to attend.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to section 23(6) of the Conflicts of Interest Act I table with the Assembly the investigation report by the Ethics Commissioner into allegations involving the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, Mr. Howard Sapers, dated January 25, 2000. The report was distributed to members on January 26, 2000.

Pursuant again to section 23(6) of the Conflicts of Interest Act I table with the Assembly the investigation report by the Ethics Commissioner into allegations involving the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, Mrs. Janis Tarchuk, dated January 25, 2000. This report was distributed to members on January 26, 2000.

Pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act I table with the Assembly five copies of the following Members' Services orders: 2/99, being constituency service amendment order 5, and 3/99, being transportation amendment order 3.

head: Introduction of Guests

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly, the first-ever Great Kids as appointed and selected by a judgment panel for the government of Alberta. They are seated in the members' gallery. I am going to ask them to stand as I read their names so that we can honour their contribution both to their families and to their community: Christopher Cromwell from Edmonton, Kayla Moody from Calgary, Michelle Shopland from Westlock, Ian Ullrich from Hinton, Tannis Boudreau from Saddle Lake First Nations community, Jordan Keenan from Calgary, Irfan Kherani from Edmonton, Jasmine Poitras-John from Bonnyville/Keheewin reserve, Danielle Bizon from Grassland, Terina Pare from Innisfail, Samir Pradhan from Calgary, Jeesan Chowdhury from Edmonton, Jacqueline Dueck from Ryley, Danny Lee from Calgary, Mandy Uglem from Bawlf. Edward Hofer from Westlock is not with us today. These young people were presented with the Premier's presentations yesterday in Calgary and join us today. Please join me in congratulating the Great Kids of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, if I might have permission to introduce some great parents of great kids also seated in the members' gallery. If they would all please rise, they should be applauded.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you four individuals seated in the members' gallery: first, Cheryl Christie, who effectively and efficiently manages my constituency office; she is joined by her mother-in-law, Judy Christie, who hails from Nanton, which is in the constituency of Highwood, as well, Chris Tannas, who is the esteemed wife of the hon. Member for Highwood, and Mary Tannas, the granddaughter who is shadowing and studying her grandfather, as well as his assistant, Phyllis, as part of a school project. Often it's

a small world. Judy Christie and Chris Tannas graduated together in 1994, receiving their bachelor of nursing. I would ask the ladies to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I am very delighted to introduce some students from the Edmonton-McClung constituency. These are students from the Good Shepherd school, and there are 54 students in our gallery, accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Bertolini and Mr. Rob Madunicky. Parent Mrs. Esther Siry accompanies the group. I would ask them all to rise and receive a very warm welcome from this Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four sets of introductions today, and all of the persons that I will be introducing have requested that I indicate to the House their total opposition to the legalization of private, for-profit hospitals in this province.

Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to introduce two prominent Albertans, Dr. Eugene Egert and Mrs. Jean Egert. Dr. Egert is a former chair of the department of Germanic languages, University of Alberta. He taught at the University of Alberta for 29 years. Mrs. Jean Egert is a homemaker and actively involved with her church, school, and community. They are sitting in the public gallery. I'll ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, with your permission I'm pleased to introduce a group of five Edmontonians this afternoon. These are Bruni Beg, Joseph Mafe, Anna Schupak, Erna Taron, and Christel Trojan. I'll ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I take special pleasure in introducing Travers Sweatman, who is a resident of Edmonton-Strathcona, and he is here today to see us go into business for this spring session. I'll ask Mr. Sweatman to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of introducing Larry Derkach, who just retired after 24 years in a very responsible executive position with the Bissell Centre in Edmonton and is now one of the five contestants for the nomination for Edmonton-Highlands. He is accompanied by his son, Barry McTavish. They are both sitting in the members' gallery, and I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three very active Norwood volunteers: Audrey Proulx, Mike Granberg, and Bernice Caligiuri. They were responsible for getting over 40 pages of our health care petition signed and in for today. I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a political science student at the University of Alberta. Her name is Jennifer Krauskopf. She worked in my office last summer, and she's here with a friend, I believe, but I've forgotten her name. I'll get that into

the record later. I would ask them both to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Ministerial Statements

Great Kids Awards

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today and read into the record a prepared statement about the Great Kids awards. Our children and youth are our greatest resource. They are also our greatest hope for the future. On Family Day 16 young people from throughout Alberta were presented with the Alberta government's first Great Kids awards. The Great Kids awards recognize young Albertans who are making a positive difference at home and in their communities. It honours young people who care about others and take the time to help them.

Three hundred and eighty nominations were received from communities ranging from all points of the province. We were surprised and pleased with this tremendous response to our new award program, and I must congratulate the nominators and the communities that took that initiative. It was difficult for our selection panel to judge and choose 16 recipients from the worthy individuals nominated. Both the number of nominations submitted and the quality of individuals nominated clearly illustrate the potential of youth in this great province. It's encouraging and uplifting. Our 16 Great Kids awards recipients represent the very best of the nominees.

2:00

Unfortunately, though, we hear often about children who do not do well. These 16 seated in the members' gallery are outstanding children. They are aware of their environment. They do well with their families, and they do everything possible to assist in their communities. These great kids indeed exemplify everything that's good about our province. They represent our very promising future.

To ensure that they participate in shaping this future, I've invited our Great Kids award recipients to act as informal advisors to me, to our government, to the Ministry of Children's Services through their newly received prizes of computers as donated by the corporate sponsors. They will provide us with their perspective and advice on issues relating to young people. With the generous support of the sponsors, IBM and AT&T Canada, we'll stay connected electronically. This communication will provide young Albertans with an opportunity to shape the work that we are doing on their behalf, and it will also give them a greater voice.

Mr. Speaker, providing young people with more opportunities to voice their thoughts is something every Albertan should do and was a recommendation in fact made by Albertans at the children's forum held last October. Through this initiative, the Great Kids awards, we can take steps toward this goal. Our hope lies in our young people, and these are 16 of the best.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, the distinction of recognizing the achievements and contributions of Alberta's children is a most worthy initiative and one deserving commendation. I would join with the Premier and minister in welcoming our 16 distinguished great kids and their families to the Assembly to officially record and celebrate their accomplishments: dedicated and hardworking, academics and athletes, volunteers to a variety of special causes and charities, bilingual in languages of French, Spanish, and Cree, leaders at home, in their schools and in their communities. On behalf of Nancy MacBeth and all members of the Official Opposition it is a privilege to congratulate you, the 16 young men and women who are recipients of Alberta's first Great Kids awards.

Special congratulations, as well, to the parents, siblings, grandparents, teachers, and mentors who have contributed to the development and achievements of these fine Albertans. As we celebrate your success today, may we also as provincial policymakers commit ourselves to the enhancement of provincial programs and services that will enable all Alberta children, despite their immediate circumstances, to reach your heights.

Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In forum after forum across this province Albertans have come down to one question every single time. The question is: why? Why is this government trying to expand privatization in our public health care system when a revitalized public system will provide far greater benefit now and in the future? So in trying to get to the truth, we in the Official Opposition wrote to the government to ask for the government's policy, statements, anything, on private hospitals. What we got back was this document: censored information. Thirty blank pages when it comes to the whole issue, whited out, withholding information from Albertans. Now the Premier is sending out truth squads to spread the private health care propaganda. My question is to the Premier. What truth is the Premier hiding from Albertans in these 30 censored pages?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we're not trying to hide anything. If the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition wants the answer, it's in the policy statement, and if she wants a further answer, wait for the legislation. It will be mailed to her in addition to every other household in this province so we can engage the public in a reasonable, meaningful, sensible debate on this particular issue.

Mr. Speaker, if she wants the policy statement, all she has to do is ask for it. It's right there.

MRS. MacBETH: Not quite, Mr. Speaker. We asked for the policy statement, and we got 30 blank pages.

You know, interestingly, Mr. Speaker, the headings on these blank pages refer to private hospital policy when in fact we thought the Premier was talking about private clinics. So which is it? Is the truth somewhere in these blank pages that he's withholding from Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, if there's anyone listening there in the gallery, perhaps they can go and retrieve a copy of the policy statement, and I'd be glad to send it over. In the meantime, she can have this document. It answers most of the questions that the Liberals and the Friends of Medicare and everyone else want to ask.

As I pointed out, the legislation will be sent to every household in this province, and the people of this province will be able to decide what we are proposing in law. It's a very simple read, Mr. Speaker. The fundamentals of the legislation will be about eight pages, enough even for the Liberals to handle.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting because we're talking about the privatization that's going on right now in this province, and my question is to the Premier. What truth is being hidden from Albertans in documents that we got from the freedom of information process? Blank pages, this government withholding information from the people of this province.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as far as I know, we are not withholding any information. I have no idea about the documents to which the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alludes, but maybe the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness can shed some light on this situation.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that in our overall direction that we've taken in health care in this province – and that is to improve it, to innovate, to move ahead with the needed changes – we do have an initiative under way. We have published a policy statement on the delivery of surgical services, which we are consulting with Albertans on, and we are providing all possible information to them.

Mr. Speaker, if something has gone wrong with the hon. leader's mail service, I'd be happy if you'd allow me to give a copy to the page to take over to her.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the tradition of question period is that one person will be recognized to raise a question and another person will be recognized to respond. All this chit chat and going across the way really makes it difficult for the chair to hear the answer so that he can actually recognize an additional member at some point in time.

Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the document we're working from is one from the information services unit of this minister's department, sent to us on February 3, copies of which I'll table in the Assembly right now. This is from the minister's own department.

Getting back to the Premier, Mr. Speaker, I think this whole question is that it is the government's own policy documents that we're talking about with its 30 censored pages. Albertans are well aware that private health care is more expensive than public health care. We've tabled study after study to show that. Perhaps this is the page where that discussion takes place, the page that's being hidden from Albertans. Will the Premier tell the truth to Albertans as to what's really going on?

MR. KLEIN: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will tell the truth. That's why we are sending to every household in this province a copy of the legislation, and the people of this province will be able to judge for themselves. The legislation will be longer than eight pages, but as I say, the fundamentals of the legislation will be about eight pages in very understandable, easy language, language that even the Liberals can understand, and they might even support it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, evidence shows that the waiting lists for hip replacements will in fact increase under a private/public mix system. Is this the blank page of the government's policy that will explain the truth to Albertans about what's really going to happen when he gets his privatization scheme through?

2:10

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I just had delivered to me the policy statement on the delivery of surgical services. This is the policy statement. This is the framework and the foundation for the legislation that will be introduced perhaps in early or mid-March. I'll table this policy document, and if the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition hasn't read it . . . Again, it's only – what? – four pages.

It has charts, no pictures unfortunately, but you know, it's very simple reading.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can understand why the Premier won't debate me. It's because he doesn't have any information or anything to back up his contention.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the Consumers' Association of Canada, its own Alberta branch, shows that wait lists are longer, that it costs more, that care is poorer. Where's that in this statement? Perhaps it's on this blank page of the government's own documents requested through the freedom of information process.

MR. KLEIN: You know, in my political career that spans almost 20 years now, I have never looked forward with more enthusiasm to the time when this bill will be tabled so I can debate in this House in front of the television cameras this Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, with an independent referee like yourself, sir, to make sure that it's absolutely not stacked, that it's unbiased, that it's done in the most revered Chamber of this province, right here in the Legislative Assembly. I look forward to that debate, and I hope she does too.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has been talking about his private health care legislation for three years. He's still making Albertans wait. He still hasn't brought it forward. In fact, he's getting one of his backbenchers to bring forward that legislation because he's too afraid to sponsor it in this Legislature. My question is: is this the page, the blank policy page, that shows the return to shareholders that they'll receive using Alberta taxpayer dollars to subsidize private hospitals? Is this the page that has that discussion? Is that the truth this Premier is withholding from Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: The truth is in the policy statement. The truth will be in the legislation. You know, Mr. Speaker, they don't want to consider the legislation, but I can let them in on a little bit of the legislation. I can't tell them totally, because they might even support it, and then we would know that there's something really wrong.

Mr. Speaker, fundamental to the legislation in the preamble – I'm going to share this. [interjection] No. This is Canadian. You know, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora said that I'm un-Canadian.

MR. SAPERS: No, I didn't.

MR. KLEIN: Yes, he did. Well, that's what I heard on the radio, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Oh. Well, it was his voice. If it wasn't, it was his twin brother, you know.

Mr. Speaker, fundamental to the legislation is absolute adherence to the Canada Health Act, both the spirit of the law and the principles of the law. Now, if he doesn't agree with that, I would suggest that he is un-Canadian.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question was about taxpayer subsidies for private hospitals, and again this Premier refuses to give the truth to Albertans.

My question is: is this the page? Mr. Speaker, is this perhaps the page where the Premier identifies the list of his friends who might benefit from taxpayer subsidies to private care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, she's holding up pieces of paper. I can hardly read the paper from here, never mind from across the way. You know, she alludes to a piece of paper. I don't know what that piece of paper is saying. [interjections] That's why I don't have

laser treatment. I prefer to wear glasses. Then I can take them off, and I don't have to look at them.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I can believe why he doesn't want to face up to those who know full well that this government is back in the business of being in business, and the business is the promotion and the subsidization of private health care. Is this the page where they discuss their new business plans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member was part of the government that was in the business of being in business. She was part of the government that wanted to have magnesium plants and wanted to have NovAtels and wanted to have – you name it – I mean, everything from barbershops to butcher shops. She was all part of it. Right.

THE SPEAKER: Well, let's see if we can get some decorum in here. The hon. interim leader of the third party.

Health Resource Group Inc.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are getting increasingly angry over this government's reckless scheme to legalize private, for-profit hospitals. All of the credible and overwhelming evidence shows that for-profit hospitals cost more and deliver less, yet the Premier persists with this scheme to bail out a few well-connected Tories involved with HRG. The government's proposal for a for-profit hospitals bill should more accurately be called the HRG refinancing bill. My question is to the Premier. Why does this government say no to hundreds of thousands of Albertans who want an outright ban on private, for-profit hospitals while saying yes to funneling taxpayer dollars through HRG, which last year incurred an operating loss of \$2.1 million?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, in one breath he's talking about for-profit health care, and then he's talking about an operation, a private operation, that lost a whole bunch of money. That's hardly for profit. You know, it sounds to me like it's a for-loss health care clinic.

Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness explain the policy. This is not about promoting private health care. It is about protecting the publicly funded health care system and providing alternatives within the confines and the absolute strict parameters of the Canada Health Act.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta is pursuing the development of the best possible publicly funded, publicly administered health care system in Canada, and I think that was shown a few months ago by the selection by no less than *Maclean's* magazine of the Capital health authority as a leading health authority, a leading deliverer of service to Albertans in terms of health care compared to the rest of Canada. That particular type of achievement did not come about by sticking with the status quo. There was innovation. There was change. There were new approaches taken in the Capital health authority to improve the health care system, and if time permitted this afternoon, I could go through a number of areas with respect to certain types of surgeries and certain types of procedures where Edmontonians and Albertans are being better served than ever before.

We are looking here in our policy statement, Mr. Speaker, to control under the public health care system, publicly administered, adhering to the Canada Health Act, alternative methods of delivery and approaches to delivering services in an efficient manner, and we are looking at the potential for private surgical clinics.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans want to hear the truth, not claims and claims and claims. Why does the Premier make the outrageous claim that contracting with for-profit hospitals will save money when HRG's own documents show that its administration costs are three times higher than those in public hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know anything about the finances of HRG. As I understand it, this is a facility that contracts to WCB under federal legislation and also does uninsured services. It has nothing to do with the proposed policy. The proposed policy simply says that we will adhere to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act and that we will protect the public health system at all costs but that we need to find better and more efficient and more effective ways of delivering services to ease pain and suffering. That's what it's all about.

2:20

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Premier's scheme how will the government guarantee that not one red cent of taxpayers' dollars will be used by HRG directly or indirectly to repay the \$400,000 in accrued interest they racked up last year?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness answer this question, but I don't see how this government would be involved in any way, shape, or form with HRG. This is a private operation that contracts with WCB, I understand, with other insurance agencies and provides uninsured medical services that are purely elective. We have no involvement whatsoever. I stand to be corrected, but I'll have the hon. minister clarify, if he will.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member seems to be ignoring the fact that there is absolutely no guarantee that HRG or any other particular entity will obtain a contract or an arrangement with a regional health authority. That whole matter of looking at cost-effectiveness and benefits to the system will be very, very carefully examined. That is a very essential part of the policy statement, and it will be an essential part of the legislation we will be putting forward.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Senatorial Selection

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Alberta has had legislation in place since 1989 called the Senatorial Selection Act. The legislation allows Albertans to determine who should be appointed to the Senate to represent Alberta. In light of the recent resignation of Senator Ron Gitter, could the minister please outline the process for Senate appointments?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, appointment to the Senate of Canada is made by Prime Minister Chretien in this instance. The Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, though, correctly outlined that this Legislature passed a Senate election act in 1989, and frankly the Prime Minister of the day appointed the choice of the people of this province, Mr. Waters, to be a Senator to represent this province. In 1998 again the people of this province chose two Senators-elect in the names of Bert Brown and Ted Morton, and it's worth noting that there was a very high voter turnout at that election process. They are certainly available to be appointed.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What could the minister do to encourage the Prime Minister to appoint my constituent, Bert Brown, the senatorial nominee who received 330,000 votes in the 1998 election, to the Senate?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, certainly we are encouraging the Prime Minister to do the right thing and appoint the persons that the people of this province have spoken out by going to the polls and voting for. In fact, the Premier has sent a letter to the Prime Minister, and he's recommending in that letter that Albertans desire to be represented in the Senate, to have recognized their own choice of an elected representative, and I guess that through this letter we are asking the Prime Minister to respect the wishes of Albertans and appoint one of these persons, Bert Brown, who was the first choice of the people of this province in 1998, to the Senate.

MS HALEY: My final question to the same minister: do you think that we will as Alberta continue to have elections for our Senate nominees?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, this government respects the wishes of the people that we serve, who are the citizens of this province. In 1989 the legislation was passed to elect a representative to the Senate. The people of this province continue to tell us that they want an elected Senate. In fact, they want a triple E Senate. They want an elected, effective Senate. This government will continue to respect the wishes of our constituents, and we'll continue to press the federal government and indeed other provinces in this country for Senate reform.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was hoping I would have a chance to further question the Premier, but in view of his having left the House, I'm going to put my question to the . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling

Referring to the Absence of a Member

THE SPEAKER: Before that point of order really comes up, it is totally against the traditions and the rules in our Assembly to make note of that. There are extenuating circumstances, many, many kinds of circumstances to see hon. members having to depart the House. This happens frequently, periodically. There are dozens of reasons, and there is no aspiration on anybody to be spelt out to anyone with respect to that matter. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition knows that.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. MacBETH: I'll withdraw my comment, Mr. Speaker, and I will go to the Acting Premier with respect to this document, which obviously the government has been caught red-handed not having. I just wanted to quote the first paragraph, which is:

I am pleased to respond to your request for copies of significant records documenting the development of the policy on contracting out for insured and non-insured surgical services with private providers.

And this is what we get. These are the 30 censored pages. So I have questions to the Acting Premier on the whole question of subsidizing the private sector, which is what's going on with this government's policy, and subsidizing is an issue which Albertans cannot stand. So my question is: is this blank page the one that shows how many

doctors and nurses will move from our public health care system to work in the Premier's private hospitals?

MR. DAY: I hope that the member is here on budget day, in two days, because there'll be a report on how many more doctors and how many more nurses are being hired in the system right here in Alberta, and it's very exciting news, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Acting Premier obviously doesn't know this government's policy as enunciated in their own policy document, perhaps we can go here and ask how much more it is going to cost for those doctors and nurses to work in the Premier's private hospitals than it does to work in the public hospitals.

2:30

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, using the physicians as an example, the physicians will be paid out of the same fee-for-service pool that all other doctors in the province are paid out of. So per service per qualified doctor the answer is that there will be no difference, no increase.

I'd like to just add, Mr. Speaker, that this question is kind of ironic. I do sympathize with the fact that the hon. leader seems to be somewhat concerned, but I can't help but think back to 1990, when the hon. Leader of the Opposition was minister of health. You know, it's really quite ironic that there is all this concern right now, by her at least, because there were 30 private nonhospital surgical centres approved by the College of Physicians and Surgeons at that time, and you know, they were charging facility fees. As I recall – and I was in the Legislature at that time – there was no particular concern raised about it. So I wonder just where the newfound concern about this is coming from.

MRS. MacBETH: In fact, Mr. Speaker, as the health minister I brought forward an ambulatory care policy, which was refused by your caucus.

Mr. Speaker, the question remains: how many of our physicians now in our medical schools at the U of A and the U of C and how many of the new doctors that are going to be provided for in the Provincial Treasurer's documents which are going to come out on Thursday are going to be moving over to the private sector? Another subsidy of the private sector by this government. You don't have an answer, do you?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have an answer, and I could take longer than I'll be allowed to, I'm sure, with the pleasure of the Assembly. First of all, Alberta has been very successful both in retaining physicians trained in this province – we have a higher rate of retention than in years previous – and also in attracting physicians from outside the province. Members of the Assembly would note that a short time ago we announced that we were recognizing the additional cost of having a larger physician force by adding some 15 millions of dollars to the AMA physician payment pool.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the possible contracting with a private provider for a designated surgical service, there will be, I'm sure, doctors working in those clinics that are very, very well qualified, as they are in clinics such as the Remington clinic in Calgary right now or dozens of other clinics in the province doing surgical services. The quality will be there. They will be paid for under the AMA fee-for-service pool, which we negotiate with physicians across the province. I'm sure that the hon. leader would not be wanting to say that doctors should not come to this province. We've certainly been successful as a system in attracting doctors, and we want to attract doctors where they are needed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Relay 2000

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Relay 2000, being sponsored by Alberta Trailnet, is a cross-country run being proposed in part along the northern part of the Little Bow constituency. In fact, the route is proposed to take in part of a major irrigation canal owned by Alberta Environment. My questions today firstly are to the Minister of Community Development. Mr. Minister, has your department approved or funded any part of Relay 2000?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member points out, Relay 2000 is in fact a relay that started on February 14 in Tuktoyaktuk to bring water from the three oceans to a commemorative fountain in Ottawa. So you'll have vessels of water being brought forward from the Arctic, from the Pacific, and from the Atlantic to Ottawa. The intent of this activity is to focus attention on the Trans Canada Trail.

In direct answer to your question, there's no financial support from the province for this activity, and there are not any approvals required from the province, from Community Development, with respect to it.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary to the same minister: although there may not be a Fisheries' permit approval required from the federal government for the transference of water, will local landowners be involved in the routing for this Relay 2000?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: I'm not too sure as to how much of an involvement that will be there except to say that the routing is intended to follow the proposed Trans Canada Trail, which is about 50 percent approved to this point.

With respect to your comment on the irrigation canal, my understanding is that the relay team, which will only be about six or eight people, would follow the service roads in the area as opposed to the canal, but that's just my understanding.

MR. McFARLAND: My final supplemental is to the Minister of Environment. Mr. Minister, has your department approved access and use of the Carseland/Bow main canal for Relay 2000?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is public land, and as such it is not required that there be a permit given unless it's a publicly advertised event. To this point the organizers of the event have not contacted the Department of Environment. If they wish to make it a publicly advertised event, I would encourage them to contact our department as soon as possible.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Wainwright.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier this afternoon stated that the answers to his private hospitals – and that's not surgical clinics, minister of health. You know, I wish the two of them would get it together. Either they're surgical clinics or they're private, for-profit hospitals. But, really, you should make up your minds. The Premier stated that the answers to his private hospitals are in the policy statement. What is interesting to note is that the

public cannot see the real answers. There are a series of blank pages that we received under freedom of information that deal with focus groups that were held on October 21, 22, and 23 and also blank pages that deal with key points on private hospital policy. My questions are to the minister of health. Can the minister explain why the public can't see the real truth that's on these blank pages, the pages that deal with private hospitals policy? Thank you.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it appears that the hon. member across the way has been too concentrated on drawing blanks this afternoon, and she should have perhaps heard my tabling. I tabled a report on what we had heard, what the responses were with respect to our overall feedback on the policy statement. They were duly tabled with the Assembly.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the focus groups were paid for by taxpayer dollars, can the minister explain why these pages, key points, focus groups on private hospitals, are blank and why key pages on public focus groups conducted in Calgary, Lethbridge, and Edmonton to test the principles and government's proposals and statement on private hospitals which outline options, policy objectives, and recommended actions are blank as well?

MR. JONSON: I would just like to remind the hon. member, if I may, Mr. Speaker, through you – and I'll have to speak a little louder – that I did table the report on those consultations and what we'd heard from Albertans in the appropriate place on the Order Paper this afternoon.

MS LEIBOVICI: That tabling did not deal with these public focus groups.

The question is: if the truth on the private, for-profit hospitals is so obvious, why does the government need truth squads? Why do you need them?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think the goal of government as very clearly stated in all matters but certainly in this very important area of our policy statement is to get the correct information out to the public of this province, and as has frequently been communicated to us by the public of this province, very significantly and forcibly at the health summit, the public of this province wants the government to provide all necessary information on policy initiatives, on legislation. That is something that we are doing and we are doing in a major and thorough and accurate way with respect to this initiative.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Liquor Sales

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Gaming. One promise that was made when the liquor stores were privatized was that there would be no liquor sales in grocery stores. My constituents and my retail liquor store owners are concerned about recent reports promoting the sale of liquor in Alberta grocery stores. Could the minister indicate if the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission is currently looking at allowing the sale of liquor in the grocery stores?

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, the member probably got the question, as he started to frame the question, in talking with constituents when he went through Lindbergh, Alberta, a pretty darn nice little town, and the Paradise

Valley general store. Those two stores are agencies actually, and they do sell liquor with their groceries. In fact, there are 60 locations now in Alberta that do sell liquor with their food. There are also more than 800 private liquor stores in Alberta today. I think it was about 250 in 1993. They sell over 14,000 products as opposed to 3,000 before privatization, with 2,400 full- and part-time employees versus 1,300 before privatization.

2:40

In fact, Alberta has some of the lowest prices in the country and well below preprivatization prices. Buying in some of these grocery stores in small communities where they're more than 15 kilometres from a liquor outlet – right now the policy of the government is that grocery stores can own and operate a liquor store, but in most cases any liquor operation must operate separate from the grocery store.

This model of privatization has worked. In fact, the major grocery chains have about 7 percent of the market. The next 23 percent of the market is characterized by large retailers, and the rest is made up of small entrepreneurs, the very backbone of all small business in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, right now there are no proposals nor anything before the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission with respect to any changes on where liquor is now sold and how it is sold throughout the province.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering if the minister currently is considering any changes to the private model for liquor stores.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, with any form of competition the market continually undergoes change. It undergoes pressure from those who want to sell more. There are changes in the type of business arrangements that are made. Again, we have not seen any specific proposals allowing the sale of liquor in any food store, but just as this government is committed to deregulation, is committed to be less intrusive, as the throne speech pointed out, we look for ways in which we can be out of the way of business in Alberta, out of everybody's way in business in Alberta, and let them proceed on a competitive model and maximize their profit. That will be maximized through optimum service to the consumer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Regional Health Authority Contracts

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Official Opposition asks this government questions about its plans to privatize hospitals and health care in this province. We get nonanswers. We use the freedom of information legislation, and we get back blank pages. Not only is this government hiding existing contracts with private health operators, but it wants to put hundreds of millions of dollars at risk through its scheme to subsidize private hospitals in this province. Now, my questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why don't contracts between regional health authorities and private providers meet the guidelines established by his very own department?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, on the overall matter of the policy statement, the information has been provided there. We have indicated in the course of the debate that when we have the legislation before the House, there will be provision there in terms of the openness of the information provided in contracts. That is part of our overall approach with respect to this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I would just say that within the next several days we

will have legislation before this House, and we will be able to show in print, in black and white, what the actual legislation looks like in terms of our overall policy.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I'll table a copy of the February 18, 1998, letter from Alberta Executive Council, from the government, to RHAs specifying the contract requirements that aren't being met by his department and led the Auditor General to find that \$517 million is not being disclosed in relation to contracts between voluntary and private operators and RHAs. So I will ask the minister one more time: will the Minister of Health and Wellness admit now that he is hiding the details of these contracts because they don't meet his department's own contract guidelines?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, now it has been revealed by the member across the way that they are referring to the reservations in the Auditor General's report. Alberta Health and Wellness takes those reservations and recommendations seriously, as always, from the Auditor General's department. We will be discussing with the Auditor General his concerns and rectifying that particular problem as much as possible.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll try again. Will the Minister of Health and Wellness release to Albertans the examination of the benefits of the private service delivery contracts that are in place for each contract, will he release the contract risk assessments, and will he tell Albertans about the audit process that's in place, all pursuant to the government's existing policy? If he won't release that information to Albertans, why not? What are you hiding?

MR. JONSON: As I indicated, Mr. Speaker, as the Department of Health and Wellness we certainly wish to comply with the requirements of the Auditor General and proper accounting policies as they exist in this province. We will certainly be responding to the Auditor General's recommendations. After all, it is on record that we have accepted the recommendations of the Auditor General and are working with that office to provide additional accountability both through Alberta Health and Wellness and the regional health authorities.

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

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canada Health Act requires that all provinces insure medically necessary physicians' and hospital services. Regional health authorities must provide health services that are deemed essential or insured under the Canada Health Act. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. My constituents are wondering why private MRI clinics owned and operated by independent radiologists are able to charge fees to patients which are not covered by the Alberta health care insurance plan.

MR. JONSON: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to preface the answer by indicating that the provision of expanded diagnostic services, in this case particularly MRI, magnetic resonance imaging, is a priority within our overall business plan. We have recently added in conjunction with the regional health authorities considerable capacity in terms of MRI services in, for instance, Lethbridge and Red Deer.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the direct answer to the question is that the

interpretation that is taken by the federal government and by all provinces of Canada is that because the actual MRI procedure is conducted by nonphysicians, it is possible to regard this particular part of the MRI procedure, as opposed to the actual interpretation of the screen, to be an uninsured service, and therefore it is possible for it to be charged for.

So what you have in this province, yes, and in other provinces across Canada are MRI clinics in which the actual service for the running of the machine, if I could use that term, is charged for as a facility fee. It is in compliance with the rules which exist across the country. I would like to emphasize, though, Mr. Speaker, that the diagnostic assessment by the physician is paid for by the government through the Alberta medical fee-for-service pool.

MR. COUTTS: Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: what has Alberta been doing to make sure that more MRIs are available in public hospitals so that patients who need them do not have to pay?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, we have put several million dollars during the past number of years at an increasing rate into the very sophisticated, expensive diagnostic equipment, including MRIs. As I indicated, most recently an MRI clinic was established within the hospital in Lethbridge. One is installed but hasn't started up yet in Red Deer. There are plans in the works to have at some date not too much in the future an MRI service in Grande Prairie in the Mistahia region. I also understand that in addition to the ones that have been added recently in Edmonton, there is further capacity planned in Edmonton and Calgary. It is funded by Alberta Health through our capital allotments for equipment, but also we've been very fortunate in having a number of foundations contribute significantly to the capital costs as well.

2:50

MR. COUTTS: My third and final question, once more to the Minister of Health and Wellness: could the minister say if the government is taking other steps to improve waiting times for MRI exams?

MR. JONSON: I think, Mr. Speaker, that the thing I could just add is that, as I've indicated, the MRI capacity in the province has increased significantly and will, with the plans that are under way, increase significantly in the years ahead. The government overall is making a very significant contribution to improving our high-tech equipment and diagnostic ability in the health care system in this province, be it MRIs, CAT scans, or some of the other new and very, very effective equipment.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the minister of health. What criteria were utilized by the government in the selection of the truth squads? The ability to read blank pages perhaps?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, that might be the member of the opposition's criteria. It's certainly not the criteria of government. We have in government many, many very capable representatives of the people of this province, and every single member of our caucus is prepared to discuss with their constituents, to provide correct information to their constituents to counter the misleading insinuations that come from across the way. I think that any member

of caucus could serve on a committee which is going to be out there providing added information and communicating with Albertans and, most important, listening to their concerns and responding to them.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What policies will members of the truth squad speak from? Blank ones?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as one example – and I know I'm not supposed to, as the members across the way do, display objects. Nevertheless, I would just remind the hon. members across the way that I did file with the Assembly this afternoon a number of pieces of information which are public. They are there to inform Albertans.

Further, Mr. Speaker, our whole direction here, our priority is to make sure that information gets to Albertans in an accurate form, and when the legislation is available in this House, all members of this side of the House, the government side of the House, will certainly be communicating in a fair and accurate way with their constituents and all Albertans, including those in their constituencies.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, where do Albertans find the truth when the truth squad's meeting schedule is blank and the minister of health and the Premier refuse to attend public debates on their own private health care policy? Where do Albertans find the truth?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, all members on the government benches of this Assembly are meeting with their constituents. Whether in coffee shops or in formal meetings, they are out there communicating with their constituents. Yes, they will certainly be putting a priority on communicating with their constituents, because their constituents, in fairness to them, should be able to get accurate information as well. Therefore, the government will be making a major effort to get that information to all Albertans.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call on the first of three hon. members to participate in Members' Statements. Then we will proceed to, I believe, eight points of order, and then we will go to a Standing Order 40 submission.

Hon. members, prior to calling on the hon. Member for Calgary-East, I'm going to recognize the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations for a tabling that she advised me she wanted to do before, but in terms of all the paper I had with respect to all the purported points of order, I mislaid it.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the House. When I was answering a question earlier, I referred to a letter that the Premier had written to the Prime Minister, and in keeping with the practice of this House, I should have tabled at that time the appropriate number of copies. So I would do that at this time, and I thank you for that.

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

Tara McDonald Murder

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with sadness that I rise today to speak about a senseless and sickening act that took place in my constituency on February 17 between 11 p.m. and midnight, when a young woman lost her life at the hands of a thief. It's hard to imagine that a human being would commit murder, rob a young woman of her life, her dreams, devastate a family, and disturb the whole community for a lousy \$50.

Mr. Speaker, Tara Anne McDonald is described by her family as a gutsy, hardworking woman, and her customers thought her to be friendly and remember her as one who always wore a warm smile. She wanted to get ahead and had just been approved for a student loan. She wanted to upgrade and was going to go into a victims' assistant program, but it was she who became the victim when a punk with robbery on his mind stole her life and her dreams. The senseless murder outraged the whole community and planted fear and disgust in the minds and hearts of small business owners along the international avenue and in the community of Forest Lawn.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents I strongly urge the Calgary city police to pursue every available avenue at their disposal to catch that murderer and place him behind bars. I also urge the minister of human resources to consider the possibility of amending the labour laws so that it be mandatory for at least two people to be working during night shifts and to call that amendment the Tara McDonald Amendment.

I would also like to recognize and thank the brave efforts displayed by two young men, 19-year-old Ryan Smith and 20-year-old Stephen Jelly, who tried to help and revive Tara during her final moments.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to express to Tara's family on behalf of the Assembly our deepest sorrow and condolences and assure them that our hearts and thoughts are with them during this very difficult time.

Thank you.

3:00

Friends of Medicare

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the Friends of Medicare, a broad-based coalition of Albertans who have joined together because of a deep belief in our public health care system. The group represents Albertans from all walks of life and from all over the province. We should all take notice when a large number of people band together to address an issue.

This grassroots uprising against the government's attack on medicare is instructive but also disturbing. A group whose stated goal is to preserve a single, comprehensive public health care system accessible to all citizens should not have to form anywhere in our country, where the benefits of medicare are obvious and where people overwhelmingly support the principle of public health care. That such a group has risen in Alberta shows just how out of touch this government has become with its citizens. It is interesting that in a province with a \$4 billion surplus not enough resources can be found for public health care. Even worse, the government continues to push ahead with a privatization plan that goes against all available evidence, economic common sense, and simple logic. No wonder Albertans are banding together against their government.

I'm thankful, as all members of the opposition are, for the Friends of Medicare and look with pride on a group of Albertans who volunteer their time and resources to fight for what they believe in. The Official Opposition joins them in their fight to preserve medicare. This government will only privatize health care against the wishes of its own people, and if that occurs, Mr. Speaker, it will be a sad day not only for Alberta and Canada but for democracy.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

High River District Health Care Foundation

MR. TANNAS: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's been said that great opportunities to help others seldom come but that small ones surround us all daily. The High River District Health Care

Foundation enables people in the communities of Okotoks, High River, Nanton, Cayley, Longview, and Blackie to translate individual actions into great opportunities to help. I wish to share with you one set of opportunities to help that this foundation facilitated in the past year.

Early in 1999 Dr. Karin Verstraten, a Calgary ophthalmologist who had been consulting at the High River hospital for some years, approached the foundation with a proposal to establish a cataract clinic at the hospital. The foundation gave the proposal serious consideration and agreed to take on the task of raising the \$80,000 needed for equipment. The call went out to the communities served by the High River hospital, and at the foundation's annual spring fund-raising banquet \$25,000 was raised in one night. The area's Lions clubs raised 16 and a half thousand dollars locally, and they also obtained support from Lions International to bring their total to over \$40,000. In only a few months, Mr. Speaker, the communities served by this hospital raised all the money, and the equipment was soon acquired and installed.

The first three patients had their cataracts removed in August of 1999, with postoperative care being given at the High River hospital as well. Mr. Speaker, the community takes ownership and pride in its hospital and demonstrates it through its collective generosity. It has provided a great opportunity to serve. The High River hospital currently has 29 acute care beds and 73 long-term care beds.

Mr. Speaker, hon. members, this is just one story of how a community of communities didn't just wait for their boat to come in but rowed out to meet it. Congratulations to the foundation, to the Lions clubs, to the Headwaters regional health authority, to the High River hospital, and a special congratulations to the communities who care about their hospital and do something about it. Well done.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, including the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, we now have to deal with what appears to be seven points of order. Recently I sent a memo to all Members of the Legislative Assembly advising that I would expect that when raising a point of order, the proper citations would be provided.

So, hon. Government House Leader, please proceed with your point of order number 1.

Point of Order Preambles

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I raised nine points of order today, and I believe that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora raised one, which would make 10. That's probably more points of order than I raised during the whole last session.

The first one, under *Beauchesne* 409 and 410, relates to the length of preambles, and perhaps with your concurrence I could relate that the seventh point of order also relates to the same question. It's important to raise these points of order on this first day of the session. You did send out a note to all members with respect to decorum in the House. You did indicate that we should pay particular attention to the rules of the House.

In my submission the Leader of the Opposition in all of her four questions, her three questions that she is accorded as Leader of the Official Opposition and then one question which she managed to get your eye for after that, thereby depriving other members of the House of the opportunity to raise questions – her first question was in the order of a speech. I didn't time it, but she certainly took longer than the one sentence which is referred to in *Beauchesne* 409(2), which reads:

The question must be brief. A preamble need not exceed one carefully drawn sentence. A long preamble on a long question takes

an unfair share of time and provokes the same sort of reply. A supplementary question should [require] no preamble.

Beauchesne 409(1):

It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate.

I think if you review the Blues, anybody that was in the House today could see from the preamble to the first question that it was "an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation," and debate. It was certainly not brief. It was certainly not one sentence. It was certainly not concise.

Again, *Beauchesne* 410:

(7) Brevity both in questions and answers is of great importance.

(8) Preambles to questions should be brief and supplementary questions require no preambles.

I won't go on any further, Mr. Speaker, other than to ask that you admonish the Leader of the Opposition and all members of the House that preambles to questions use up time that is afforded members for the opportunity to ask questions important to their constituency. It's unfair to all members of the House, and it is inappropriate. It's a clear abuse of the rules and, quite frankly, an intended abuse of the rules. It should be stopped now.

I would make one other submission, Mr. Speaker, and that is that if that type of abuse of the rules prevails, then I would ask you to take points of order when they're raised so that one doesn't have to deal with 10 points of order in a row on the same type of question without any way of curtailing the flagrant abuse of the rules and abuse of the privileges of the members of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Also referencing your February 11, 2000, letter setting out the authorities that would obtain during the spring session, I refer my friend across the way to clause 3(b), where the authorities that will be governing our proceedings are, firstly, Standing Orders, but secondly, "usages and precedents of the Assembly."

You, Mr. Speaker, in fact have dealt with this on February 25, 1998, at page 556 in *Hansard*. You said that the Leader of the Opposition would have some additional latitude. In fact, the question then was whether the leader was taking too long to ask her question. So I refer you to February 25, 1998.

More to the point, on February 17, 1999, when I raised a similar point of order against a series of questions asked by a government member, you pointed out to me, sir, that the issue was: if the issue is one of length, then the appropriate time to raise that is at the conclusion of the three questions, the original and the two supplementaries and responses. You admonished, sir, that sometimes the first question may be a little longer, that the other two may be shorter as a result.

I listened carefully. Now, I didn't have my stopwatch with me today. I left it in Calgary. My best recollection was that this took something like three and a half minutes, the entire exchange in terms of the leader's first three questions and the responses. So if in fact, then, we are using usages and precedents of the Assembly and if we rely on your instruction of February 17, 1999, at page 20 in *Hansard* and of February 25, then we would find that the entire exchange was within what you've indicated I think informally would be sort of the outside limit of a question-and-answer exchange.

Those are my observations on this particular point of order. Thank you.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: Thank you to both the Government House Leader and the Official Opposition House Leader for those comments with

respect to it. Neither hon. member chose to quote from the House leaders' agreement for the 24th Legislature, dated the 30th day of April 1997, to which both have affixed their signatures. Well, the previous Opposition House Leader had affixed his signature to it, but it still has the same credibility in the eyes of the Speaker. The current Government House Leader had not affixed his signature to it, but the previous Government House Leader had affixed his signature to it, and in the eyes of the Speaker the same credibility applies.

So having one quoting from *Beauchesne* and the other one from previous statements, perhaps I could just quote for both House leaders what exactly they have agreed to do. Item (4) in that House leaders' agreement:

A member asking a question shall, in the discretion of the Speaker, be allowed a succinct preamble, a main question and two supplementary questions to which there shall be no preamble. Any member who, in the discretion of the Speaker, abuses the opportunity to give a preamble shall be called to order.

Now, that's what everybody agreed to.

I guess the chair has a choice: to either accept that if a House leader puts his signature to something, it has some validity or completely ignore anything that the House leaders provide to the Speaker. That's one option. As a matter of fact, in most parliaments that usually is the option. The Speaker governs the question period accordingly. Everybody comes in and sits down and then throws up their hands, and the Speaker recognizes eight or 10 or 12 at random. But we have evolved into a rather sophisticated situation here where in fact there's some consultation with House leaders and asking them to provide some guidance. One has to assume when one is in the chair that the House leaders have some credibility within their own caucuses, and if they affix their signature to a particular document, it must have some meaning.

Now, the chair also has to assume that the House leaders have some guidance that they provide to their caucuses and that in fact their caucus members even accept that guidance from time to time. You can't have it both ways. You can't quote for the chair one thing and then see the abuse the next day.

So having brought that to the attention of everyone, let's then look at the specifics of this first point of order. The specifics of this first point of order show that in terms of time approximately five minutes were used in the exchange of the three questions and the three responses, three questions by the Leader of the Official Opposition and three responses by the leader of the government. The total time frame in that was five minutes.

Secondly, in terms of the question at stake, if the note that I have in front of me from the Blues shows it correctly, there are actually seven sentences prior to the actual question. So one can say, quite frankly, that the preamble was long within the total time frame of management within the question period. We had 12 sets of questions today, which is slightly above the average, but that really is a reflection of two things. Periodically a certain member would have a short question, and periodically a certain responder would have a short answer.

Clearly, without any doubt, I really like the agreement that all three House leaders actually came to at one time, and I repeat it.

A member asking a question shall, in the discretion of the Speaker, be allowed a succinct preamble, a main question and two supplementary questions to which there shall be no preamble. Any member who, in the discretion of the Speaker, abuses the opportunity to give a preamble shall be called to order.

Now, I like that. As a matter of fact, I like that better than anything written in *Beauchesne* and anything written in any other order.

So could I ask all the House leaders to actually review what they had signed and perhaps have a discussion with their caucus members

tomorrow? Perhaps we won't have this kind of point of order of today. But there is some merit in what was raised here, some merit in the response. Actually, the greatest merit came from the chair in reviewing the matter for the benefit of everyone.

Government House Leader, the second point of order.

Point of Order Exhibits

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of times throughout the last session and actually in the history of this parliament there has been reference to the use of exhibits and the inappropriateness of using exhibits. In particular, *Beauchesne* 501 and 502 speak to the question of using exhibits in the House. *Beauchesne* 501 states that "Speakers have consistently ruled that it is improper to produce exhibits of any sort in the Chamber." *Beauchesne* 502 also deals with the use of exhibits.

Actually a number of the points of order deal with this specific question. The Leader of the Opposition again flagrantly, I believe, and in conscious violation of the rules held up a document, about which she then purported to say: is this the document which sets out the policy; is this the blank page?

Mr. Speaker, that is a flagrant abuse of the rules, and it actually speaks to exactly why the rule is there. The rule is there so that you cannot grandstand before the cameras and show something – I mean, she could have been holding anything up – as an exhibit and say: is this what you're referring to? It's totally inappropriate. It's totally against the rules, and *Beauchesne* 501 rules it out of order. I would ask that you rule it out of order now and admonish members of the House not to bring exhibits into the House during question period or debate or at any other time.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I can't for the life of me imagine why the Government House Leader would be suggesting that we deprive the Premier of his one constant prop, which is a chunk of paper in one hand that he waves and refers to.

The point is this. For you to rule that a document, that a piece of paper is an exhibit within the meaning of *Beauchesne* 501 and 502, where they talk about "boxes of cereal," "samples of grain," "use of potatoes" – you know, political buttons and lapel pins don't constitute an exhibit. I refer you, sir, to the ruling you made on May 6, 1999, *Hansard*, page 1533, where you also address the question of exhibits. It seems to me that the authority is clear and logic would be equally compelling that you cannot hold – with respect, I'm suggesting that no one would be able to hold that a piece of paper, a document, particularly one that had been tabled moments before in this Assembly, would constitute an exhibit.

If you were to do that, sir, the first member of this Assembly that's going to be denuded, the first member that's not going to have something to wave around, is going to be the first minister of the province, and I don't think we'd want to deprive the Premier of that prop. I certainly wouldn't want to, because he relies on it mightily.

Thanks very much.

MR. HAVELOCK: I'll be very brief, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to remind you that at one time in the House, when the Premier was actually using a piece of paper or an exhibit, I believe you did rule that out of order previously or else asked him to table it. So I would ask that you again respect the arguments being made by my colleague.

I am, however, impressed that off the top of his head the hon. member is able to quote from May 1999, page one thousand five hundred and whatever. [interjection] I guess that's what he did all winter.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, this question about exhibits is always a rather interesting one, and *Beauchesne* 501 to 504 have some guidance for us. With respect to *Beauchesne* 501, to be reminded, it says:

Speakers have consistently ruled that it is improper to produce exhibits of any sort in the Chamber. Thus during the flag debate of 1964, the display of competing designs was prohibited. At other times boxes of cereal, detergent and milk powder have been ruled out of order.

This member has been here long enough to note that one time he was in this Assembly in fact when a member of Executive Council stood up and tabled a hamburger. The hamburger came from the cafeteria in this building. The member of Executive Council was making the strong suggestion that the food was inedible.

Beauchesne 502 says:

When a Member produced samples of grain in the House, the Speaker deprecated the practice, saying, "If we allowed Hon. Members to produce such exhibits, we would get ourselves involved in a position where perhaps all too often Hon. Members would want to table dead fish, herrings, or red herrings, damp grain or wild oats."

Beauchesne 503 says, "Members may be 'pun-ished' for the use of potatoes as exhibits."

Beauchesne 504: "Political buttons and similar lapel pins do not constitute an exhibit."

Those are basic guidelines, and we've had statements in this House as well.

Not too long ago, when there was a debate in the Canadian House of Commons, certain members had a flag, the flag of our nation, on their desks in the Canadian House of Commons. It was in a context in which one had to deal with it. There was a great big uproar. Then we had another hon. member, in this case a member of Executive Council, who came in and put a similar flag of his nation on his desk, hoping to get some attention. It was ignored, and it didn't happen again.

3:20

This thing about exhibits is really important, because in this case what we're talking about is a document that was tabled in this particular Assembly, a document that in essence came out of an office created by this Legislative Assembly. The freedom of information officer is an officer of this Assembly, created by this Assembly. I believe that the source of the document was a freedom of information request in response to a legal request under the laws of Alberta. An hon. member stood up and basically referred to a document that was obtained under legislation provided for by this Assembly, and the voted funds are paid for by this particular Assembly.

It would seem to me that there would be some authority provided to the document in question. One member may argue that that is an exhibit, but there has never been a case where documents, reports have been argued to be exhibits. On a daily basis some members will stand up with a piece of paper in their hand and purport it to be notes for them to raise in a question. Perhaps that's their prop. I don't know. It could be the legitimacy of the notes that they would use.

You know, at the highest level of all of this members would come in with nothing in front of them, and the highest degree would be that all members would be responding to questions and answers in a spontaneous way and debates would be given in a spontaneous way and all arguments would be provided in a spontaneous way. We've now evolved to the point where we've got laptop computers in front of us as assistance guides.

This chair has a great deal of difficulty knowing the veracity of a

document that a member may respond and refer to. It is true that members of Executive Council oftentimes pick up documents and refer to them. It's also true that private members do the same thing. This chair has to assume that there is authenticity in a document that an hon. member is referring to at any time in this Assembly. If it were to come to pass that the document was a fabricated document, was a make-believe document, was a document that the member was suggesting had authenticity but was to be referred to later as having no authenticity, then that member would have committed a very serious breach of the ethics of this Assembly, because that member in essence would have lied to the Assembly. If that's what that member would have done, that would have been a very, very serious breach.

There is not much need to wave document, to wave prop, to wave exhibit, but it is done on a daily basis by hon. members. This chair will ask the question again, the same way he asked the question the last time. If it is the wish of this Assembly to proceed with no documents, then kindly advise the chair by way of the three House leaders at some time in the future. In the interim let's use some discretion with respect to the waving of documents and papers and make sure that they are authentic.

Third point of order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today in question period, in response to a question put by the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Premier made an allegation which I believe is offensive on several grounds. First I'll cite our own Standing Order 23(h) in terms of making an allegation against another member, and in a moment I'll refer to a couple of sections of *Beauchesne*.

The question put by the Leader of the Official Opposition had to do with government policy and waiting lists and costs of private surgical care, and in response quite gratuitously and unprovoked the Premier took it upon himself to lean across over his chair, gesture at this hon. member, in fact referred to me directly as the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and make a statement, that he attributed to me, referring to the Premier as un-Canadian. Now, while the Premier may feel guilty about his patriotism, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that at no time did I say that the Premier was un-Canadian.

Now, I believe that the Premier, when I immediately reacted and said, "I did not," went on and said: yes, you did; I heard you on the radio. Mr. Speaker, now *Beauchesne* 409(10) makes reference to comments "made outside the House," and I believe that the Premier should be called to order on that point if no other.

Also, *Beauchesne* 408(2) says that "answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised, and should not provoke debate." Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that the Leader of the Official Opposition asked the Premier whether he was Canadian or not or whether he felt that in my opinion I thought he was un-Canadian or not, so clearly the Premier also violated *Beauchesne* 408(2). Further, I will refer you to *Beauchesne* 417, which also says that "answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate." Now, that's a slight retelling of the earlier point that I just made.

Now, what I did say, Mr. Speaker, just so it can be clear, is that the Premier, having been accused of being un-Canadian by some, seemed to wear that as a bit of a badge of honour. In fact, he talked about how others have called him un-Canadian and he's proud of it. He cited a couple of examples of his government's policies, and I said: that sounds to me like the Premier is a health care separatist, because he is doing something which is contrary to the will of the Canadian people, contrary to the social policy that is stated in this

province, and contrary to a federal/provincial agreement to which this province is a signatory.

I'll also say that the Premier went on to aggrandize his statement by saying that he was going to reveal a little bit of upcoming legislation and how they were going to include some reference to the Canada Health Act in an upcoming bill. Well, words and deeds, Mr. Speaker. It was this Premier and his government that voted not once but twice against principles of the Canada Health Act, including an opportunity where this member, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, actually put forward a private member's initiative to bind this government in legislation to the Canada Health Act. This government voted against it.

So I would ask you to call the Premier to order and ask him to withdraw that allegation.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, obviously that wasn't a point of order but an opportunity for the Member for Edmonton-Glenora to make a speech about a number of things. I'm not sure what the point was. If I had been in his position and had been making remarks of the nature that he agreed he made, I too would want to be getting up in the House and distancing myself from them, which is what he did very admirably. There's no point of order.

Beauchesne 409(10) indicates that "a question ought not to refer to a statement made outside the House by a Minister." Well, the Premier clearly wasn't asking a question and therefore wasn't referring in a question to anything outside the House, but what I find interesting is that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora then went on himself to refer to issues outside the House, therefore obviating his own argument.

Beauchesne 417 and brevity. I think you've dealt with the question of brevity. We raised the issue in an earlier point of order with respect to questions and answers, and I think you pointed out quite succinctly to the House that even though the preambles that the hon. Leader of the Opposition utilized in her questions were relatively long, we still managed to get 12 questions in, and that was presumably because of the brevity quite often of the answers.

THE SPEAKER: Well, as I understand this point of order, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora raised the point of order because he heard the leader of Executive Council refer to him as suggesting that he was un-Canadian. If I understand this point of order, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora was rising because he believed that the leader of the government said that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora had referred to him as un-Canadian – right? – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora standing up and saying, "No, I did not refer to the hon. leader of the government as un-Canadian; I simply referred to him as a health care separatist," which didn't come up during the point of order. So would any other member like to participate in this particular discussion on this point of order so we have absolute clarity as to who referred to whom as un-Canadian?

3:30

Well, the chair heard both of the statements. The chair knows who referred to whom as un-Canadian on this matter, and the chair also heard publicly who referred to somebody else as a health care separatist. I don't listen to all the radio stations, so in terms of dealing with this point of order, I don't know if there was another radio station that in fact made these statements. I can only refer to the ones that I heard. The chair also knows that one has to accept the word of a member in this particular Assembly, and that's really the bottom line to this particular point of order. So in this case you get to accept everybody's word. But it only begets one point: if we

focus on policies, we won't have these kinds of points of order. This is not a personal and personality business. This is a policy point of business.

As far as the other aspects with respect to the length of the questions and answers and everything else, we already covered that one. So let's try and get to the actual truth here.

Now, Government House Leader, point 4.

Point of Order

Imputing Motives

MR. HANCOCK: I will abandon a number of the other points of order because you've dealt with some of them, but I want to speak to point of order 4 because it again refers to the use by the Leader of the Official Opposition of exhibits during her questions. Again I would refer to *Beauchesne* 501 and 502.

With the greatest of respect to the Speaker and the comments you made earlier, there is a significant difference, in my humble submission, between a member using notes to raise a question or to make a speech, a member referring to a document and perhaps raising the document when referring to it so that people know what they're talking about, and somebody who uses an exhibit, which is under the dictionary definition: to exhibit something or to show it; to make a show of it. Which is clearly what the Leader of the Opposition was doing. In my humble opinion, it wasn't a document that she tabled that she was exhibiting during her questions but was indeed a "red herring" that she was showing the House.

MR. DICKSON: Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I thought you'd already addressed the question of documents. With respect, it seems like we're having a second kick at the cat.

I think, with all due respect, you've heard arguments in terms of the use of documents. I've offered my argument. You made your ruling, and I think it's entirely inappropriate for the Government House Leader to have at it. In law there's a principle called *res judicata*, that means that once the officer has made the decision, you don't come back to another judge to try and open the thing up and hope you get a more favourable ruling a couple of questions later. I'd hope you'd give that advice to the Government House Leader, that he's raised his argument once.

He has three or four other points of order. I hope he's not looking to retool his arguments and then recycle them before we get onto the regular business of the House. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The chair obviously, hon. member, has no idea what the context will be of any of these points of order, so the chair simply keeps notes. I do believe, though, that I have dealt with a similar point of order, that was raised a little earlier, with respect to the documents and the papers in front of us and did provide a statement with respect to veracity and authenticity and seriousness of the document that is being used.

Once again we'll repeat that if the hon. members would like to have the House free of documents, the hon. chair will deal with that, no difficulty whatsoever, in fact would think that would be the highest level of responsibility and responsiveness and preparedness by all. It might be quite an example to all the members of the world that follow this form of government. Oftentimes members of Her Majesty's government in Great Britain, including members of Executive Council, do sit on the front bench with nothing accompanying them, and it is a high form.

We seem to rely on that, but the bottom line is that we have to be careful in terms of what we use in front of us and how we use it so that it does not denigrate either the questioner or the responder with respect to that matter.

I do believe, according to my notes, hon. Government House Leader, that point 5 had to do with a statement one member made with respect to the absence of another member, and I interjected and immediately dealt with that one.

The next one. Hon. Government House Leader, I still have you on the list.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MR. HANCOCK: I suggest that Mr. Speaker dealt with the question raised by the acting leader of the third party, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, in the preamble to his question, and I refer to Standing Orders 23(h) and (i): "makes allegations against another member," and "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member." In raising this point of order, I know the response that I'm going to get, but I want to raise the point of order in any case because it's important. In the preamble to the question the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona made some very serious, unfounded, and inappropriate allegations about the motives of the government.

We've heard from you previously with respect to the question of 23(h) and (i) referring to motives of an individual member, but in this case in the way that the question was framed, improperly imputing the motives of the members of the government, I believe the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona went too far in suggesting inappropriate and improper motives of all members and impugned the integrity of all members of this side of the House in indicating that there was anything in terms of the motivation of members of this House and members of this government with respect to HRG or any private facility and any particular profit making or lack of profit making in that regard.

I would ask you to admonish the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that that is going too far, that that besmirches the character and reputation of all members of this House when those types of statements are made.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect, I would like to suggest that there is no point of order here. I certainly did not intend to and I think in my question didn't impugn the character either of the leader of the government caucus or intend to attribute motives to any other member of this House.

The Premier in late '99 launched a campaign publicly to support proposed legislation that would allow regional health authorities to contract with private, for-profit providers for surgical services requiring overnight stays, effectively creating private, for-profit hospitals in the public health care system. So my questions were directed to the Premier in terms of the consequences of the proposal that will lead to the preparation of a bill that will come before this House, certainly, Mr. Speaker, any questions that I raised about the possible ramifications, if this bill passes, for how it may affect HRG and its relations with the public health care system, something that's clearly a matter of debate in this province.

All of us are trying to grapple with: what are the real implications of the proposal that the Premier has brought before us and the proposed legislation that he continues to repeat is going to be brought before this House very soon? My constituents are asking these questions. Albertans in general are asking these questions.

The intent of my asking these questions today was to draw attention to how this proposed legislation, if passed, will impact on the operations of and the relations between HRG and the regional health authorities. Officials of the Calgary regional health authority

have publicly stated that they would encourage the development of such relationships between private, for-profit surgical facilities with overnight stay authorizations, which means that these for-profit hospitals will be authorized to deal with regional health authorities, starting with the Calgary health authority.

So, Mr. Speaker, I submit to you respectfully that there is no point of order here in the questions that I raised today. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I think it's really important that again we just remind ourselves that personal comments don't raise the level of what we're doing in here. Let's just stick to the facts.

3:40

Number two. The purpose of question period – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona used this on several occasions. He used the word "debate." That is not what question period is. Question period is not a debating environment. It offers an hon. member the opportunity to raise a question of urgency with respect to the government. We're not here to debate. Now, having said that, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is not the only one to whom these words are directed. Certainly there are enough argumentative words. Because of the sensitivities of all of us, we may in a particular circumstance believe that a word may cause a response of a nature and a degree that we don't really want.

So let's deal with policy, policy, policy, policy. Ignore personality, personality, personality, personality. Brevity, succinctness, fewer preambles, shorter answers, no props and, wow, we can move on.

I think we're up to number 7 now; are we, Government House Leader?

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of your last admonition about no props, brevity, succinct questions, no preambles, and keeping the personalities out of it and dealing with the policy issues, I think I'll withdraw the remaining points of order as they dealt with lengthy preambles and inappropriate use of exhibits, being those documents which are inappropriately exhibited rather than utilized as documents.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, what I was giving out was a plea for co-operation from hon. members to deal with and apply to this. Now, we'll see what happens tomorrow. We all know well that 10 minutes into it we will all have forgotten what we have done today, but if we're reminded very often, things might just get to where we have to be.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on a Standing Order 40 application.

Private Hospitals

Dr. Pannu:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly, recognizing that the public health care system is the most cost-effective way to deliver quality health services, urges the government to ban private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta and provide the necessary funding to maintain the integrity of the public, universal health care system.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will speak to the urgency and the pressing necessity of this motion. In doing that, I must of course refer to some of the reasons, which may touch on the

substance, but I'll try to limit my comments as much as I can to the two issues involved here.

This member in the House was denied the opportunity to change sponsorship of a private member's bill, Bill 201, which stood in the name of the former leader of the NDP in this House. The private member in whose name the bill stood resigned eight or so days after the deadline for changing sponsorships had passed. I made a request to you, and you, given the rules of the House, indicated to me that you had no powers to change the situation, that you could not change that sponsorship to my name. That was quite fine, Mr. Speaker.

Then following that, I requested from the two House leaders, my counterparts, the Government House Leader and the Official Opposition House Leader, their agreement to allow my name to replace the name of the sponsor of Bill 201 as it stood at the time. That agreement, or that consent, was also in practice denied. I haven't heard in writing. I wrote letters to both the Government House Leader and the Official Opposition House Leader last week. I have yet to receive a written reply from either of them. I could understand the Government House Leader denying it, but I am somewhat puzzled why I got the same response from the Liberal Party House leader, Mr. Speaker. It is because this House has been, in a sense, denied the opportunity to debate this bill, Bill 201, the Medicare Enhancement Act, that I rise here today to request that this House agree that the matter of banning private, for-profit hospitals be debated in this Assembly at this very moment.

It is an extremely urgent matter. Albertans are extremely concerned about this issue, Mr. Speaker. They are writing to me in the hundreds and hundreds, and by way of their letters, e-mails, phone calls they're calling on the members of this House to debate the issue here and now rather than depending on the so-called truth squads to relay the information.

So, Mr. Speaker, I conclude . . .

THE SPEAKER: Please, hon. member, urgency to the point.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, at noon today there was a citizens' vigil outside on the steps of the Legislature. Both I and the Leader of the Official Opposition addressed these citizens, who had gathered there on their own. They're not members of any organization. They came here spontaneously, again, to call on this House, all of us, by their presence outside the Legislature this noon to debate this matter in this House today, because today would have been the day that Bill 201 would have come up for debate. Albertans would have been informed. They would have heard the truth from every side as to whether or not banning private, for-profit hospitals is a good thing, and if you fail to do that, whether or not that will threaten the future of public health care in this province.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude and hope other members of the House will want to speak on this matter.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, under Standing Order 40 there must be unanimous consent of the Legislative Assembly to debate this matter and waive the other routine of the afternoon.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: Orders of the Day

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request unanimous

consent to waive Standing Order 38(1) regarding notice to accommodate consideration of Motion other than Government Motion 501.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Service Learning Program for High School Students

501. Mrs. Gordon moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to incorporate as part of the high school curriculum a service learning program encouraging students to become involved in activities that promote and demonstrate good citizenship, community service, and personal responsibility.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Assembly. Over the last couple of weeks this motion, being the first motion that the entire Assembly will debate this session, has garnered a great deal of media attention, thereby generating a great deal of public reaction. I have welcomed these many and varied interviews as they have provided me with the opportunity to discuss at length examples, background, overall purpose, strengths, and yes, even weaknesses in relation to what is now before you under my signature as Motion 501. I have particularly enjoyed guesting on four lively talk radio programs, indeed an excellent medium, not only one that provides good exposure but an effective means to gauge public opinion. As such, I am pleased today, Mr. Speaker, that I can report to you and the Assembly that more callers favoured the concepts involved in Motion 501 than not.

You ask: what is it, hon. member, that you are seeking? I am asking for your support so that together we can urge the government, namely the Minister of Learning and his ministry, to incorporate as part of the high school curriculum a service learning program that encourages students to become involved in activities that promote and demonstrate good citizenship, community service, and personal responsibility.

3:50

My purpose relative to the community involvement requirement component is quite simply to encourage students to develop awareness and understanding of civic responsibility and of the role they can play and the contributions they can make in supporting and strengthening their own communities. Although this requirement will benefit communities, my primary purpose and our focus should be on the contribution made to the student's own development.

Service learning, a widely agreed upon definition by educators across the United States and likewise used today in many Canadian jurisdictions, is learning that utilizes a partnership-type approach whereby service projects are co-ordinated in collaboration with the student, school, and community.

In order for this initiative to be successful, I think a number of factors need to be contemplated. One, I am suggesting that a service learning program be established in secondary schools in the form of a curriculum option for credit, similar in nature to drama, industrial art, and other optional courses available to the student. For those seeking continuity, these courses should well be considered for inclusion as an option in all three grades: 10, 11, and 12. From a philosophical perspective, an oxymoron if you will, the program if made mandatory would defeat the purpose of encouraging youth to volunteer or donate their time and energy to the betterment of their community.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

Two, community involvement activity should be allowed to take place in a variety of settings: businesses, not-for-profit organizations and agencies, and public-sector institutions, including, of course, hospitals, nursing homes, and senior citizens' lodges. Students themselves should be allowed to choose and make a choice regarding the community activity they wish to be involved in. Flexibility is key.

Three, as much as possible structured times should be provided during the school week for this activity, and follow-up reporting should take place as well. It is important that the young person think, talk, and write about what he or she did and saw during the actual service activity. Research has shown that reflection has some positive impact on the attitudes of participants concerning service learning. The best practice occurs when the participants have the opportunity to reflect both privately and publicly using many forms of communication.

As well, recognizing service efforts is very important in establishing a good service ethic amongst our young people. While reflection allows youth to show how they value their own efforts, celebration and recognition go a long way in showing them how others value their worthwhile work.

Some examples of some similar programs in other jurisdictions. Let's start right here in Edmonton. One of the requirements of the international baccalaureate middle years program at the Victoria School of Performing and Visual Arts for students enrolled in grades 6 to 9 is the compulsory requirement to complete a community service project or projects of their choosing. This is an in-house, individual school policy. Although there is a required time commitment at each grade level for completion of hours, the intent of the service is not simply to complete a prescribed quota as to time. This school recognizes that each of their students is unique and as such each has a unique situation. Thus, there is considerable flexibility allowed in expectations as to how, when best, and where this community service can be carried out.

Some of the volunteer placements partnered with this school include the Good Samaritan Society, the SPCA, St. John Ambulance, the Canadian Red Cross Society, the Provincial Museum of Alberta, the Bissell Centre, the Cross Cancer Institute, the YWCA of Edmonton, the Winnifred Stewart association, McCauley Senior Citizen's Lodge, and I could go on and on. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, a good cross section of solid, not-for-profit organizations and agencies willing and able to partner with Victoria school.

What are the students' views regarding the Victoria school service learning program? "I've learned that community service is a good way to prepare ourselves for our actual life," said one 13 year old. "It's kind of fun to do, and it seems like a real accomplishment once you get it done," said an 11 year old. "It gives you more of a sense of what you want to do. I want to be a lawyer, so I would try to do my community service accordingly," said a 12 year old.

Here is what one of the student's parents told me, and each and every one of you knows this parent, as it's Ashley Geddes, who works for the *Edmonton Journal*.

I am a parent of a grade 8 thirteen-year-old student at Victoria school in Edmonton who has participated for the past three years in a community service program which is a requirement of the international baccalaureate program. My son Daniel's experience with the community service activities has been extremely positive, and I highly recommend making the opportunity available to other students and families. Daniel has helped the SPCA by walking animals, picked up litter in the river valley, and provided assistance at a pre-school centre as part of the program. The first two years 30 hours of community service were required over the course of the year. That dropped to 22 hours this year with a heavier homework schedule. The community service program at Daniel's school is part

of a holistic, big-picture approach to learning that provides a broader focus than just classroom activities. It allows students to develop work and leadership skills and to feel pride and connection with their community. I think the key to a successful program is to allow considerable flexibility, both in the type of activities that can be selected and in the number of work hours required.

In 1993 Maryland became the first state in the U.S. that required all public students to engage in service learning activities as a prerequisite for high school graduation. In Maryland schools students must complete 75 hours of student service that includes preparation, action, and reflection components, and at the discretion of the local school system that may begin during the middle years. In Maryland they have a locally devised program in student service that must be approved by the state superintendent of schools. Thus, all 24 school districts in Maryland have this program but have developed a program that's unique to their own needs, both academic and community needs. The graduation class of 1997 was the first impacted by the state of Maryland's mandate: 45,532 students, or 99.9 percent, graduated with their service learning requirement fulfilled. Only 49 students out of the total failed to graduate solely due to the student's failure to meet or fulfill the service learning graduation requirement.

In Canada Ontario has incorporated this program, and 40 hours of community service are required in order to graduate, in order to receive a diploma. This work in Ontario must be done outside of school hours, and a reporting process is in place. The province of Manitoba right now, just as I hope we will be, is looking at incorporating service learning, or community service, as an option available in their high school curriculum.

Before I close, I would like to read the following into *Hansard*. This particular testimonial was given to me by a parent, and the second one I will read is from a retired schoolteacher.

As a mother of two teenagers, I think that Mrs. Gordon's motion to introduce service learning into the high school curriculum is a positive step for both the student and the community. I think students involved will gain a sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction – increasing their self esteem by doing something positive for others. I feel students will have greater exposure in seeking employment after graduation by volunteering in the community. I do believe that parents have a responsibility to [always] be an example to their children [and particularly as it relates] to community involvement and leadership,

but unfortunately it is not always the case and sometimes it is not always possible.

4:00

A retired teacher wrote that

the motion is an excellent idea because it will provide an opportunity for students to interact with others in the community. Sometimes we feel that teenagers are isolated within their own peer group, and this would give them a chance to make a difference, have an impact in their community, and feel valued. It would provide them with an opportunity to develop behaviors and attitudes that will [hopefully] continue through adulthood.

Although my area, the constituency of Lacombe-Stettler, and indeed all Alberta itself is known for its volunteer efforts and its volunteer component, there is always a definite need for more. Mr. Speaker, every community service club, organization, or agency will tell you that they need more help and will always welcome and appreciate it. This program could effectively fill in some of those gaps. Making it an option for students is the only way to proceed. Mandatory could only result in a half-hearted approach or effort. By making it an option, no one is forcing students to take part. Those participating will want to be there and will most certainly want to see results for themselves and their communities. This, then, will be a wholehearted approach.

These efforts in my estimation will prove very valuable to

students. They will learn a great deal about themselves, about aspects of life, things necessary for young people that age, young people on the very verge of stepping out on their own, creating their own lives in their own communities, communities that they have been part and parcel of. Service learning will provide life experiences that schools alone may not be able to provide.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, our children are our greatest asset and Alberta's future. I would ask the support of all members of the Assembly in the passing of this motion.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of Motion 501, as presented by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler. I have to admit that that support doesn't come without a number of questions being raised, and I would appreciate, hopefully sometime in the debate on the motion, some clarification.

One of the first problems that I think the motion presents as it's worded is a conceptual problem. That's when you take and put the notion of good citizenship, the notion of community service, and the notion of personal responsibility into one motion. I think traditionally in our province they have been treated, at least in the school systems, quite differently, so I think there needs to be some clarification. As the member spoke, she spoke about a service ethic and community involvement programs. I think we need to be clear – and I think the member added some clarity – on exactly what it is we're voting for.

Usually the context of a motion like this comes out of some particular circumstance, and I'm not sure I'm clear from the member what that circumstance was. Was it a community event? Was it some criticism of the present social studies program? That's often the case: it's the criticism of a program like the social studies program that results in this kind of a motion. Was it the result of voter turnout in a particular election? I think we have an opportunity here to learn from the mover exactly what prompted this motion to be before us. If it's put forward as a criticism of schools, which it often is, I think that if we look back historically, the attempts to promote and commit to civic education in schools has always been difficult.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

If you look, for instance, in this province at the current focus on schools, there's great attention being given to literacy, there's great attention being given to mathematics programs, and there is great attention being given to science programs. Civic education or citizenship education, whatever we want to call it, and community service programs are in pretty stiff competition, particularly when schools find themselves being rated in the local media based on students' performance on achievement and diploma exams. So the civic education, the citizenship education, has traditionally found itself – although people will say that they support it – always taking a backseat to other school programs, in particular programs that are labeled as being the basics.

I would really like to know where the motion is rooted. I think the member as she spoke has a particular concept or notion of civic education that she would have the province adopt, and I'm not sure it's a notion that is shared by all. There are some, for instance, that will argue that there's a wide range. Being a good citizen just means that you vote, and that's beginning and end of it. At the other end of that spectrum I think is where the member has placed herself. She believes that there has to be some active participation on behalf of the learner.

I was reminded, when the member made her comments, of a social studies program that we had in this province at the beginning of the '70s. The elementary program at that time I think was called experiences in decision-making, and the senior high school program was called responding to change. The goal of that program was to actively involve students in community affairs and making decisions, and part of that was an emphasis on values and value clarification. Those programs were not received wholeheartedly by the community, to put it mildly.

One of the things that happened was that a number of the projects put youngsters at odds with community values. I recall one group of youngsters participating in a survey of landfill projects in their community and community members being quite adamant that this wasn't the purview of schools, to send youngsters out on projects like that. The program was eventually watered down and phased out. So I think it's important that before we send out youngsters or involve youngsters in projects, the dimensions of those projects are understood by everyone.

I looked in preparation for this afternoon at the advice that's given to social studies teachers in a publication called *CIVITAS*. It's a publication by the National Council for the Social Studies, and if I could just quote the advice they give teachers.

It is not the proper role of the schools to indoctrinate students to participate but rather to develop competence and a democratic orientation that increase the likelihood of effective participation and self-government.

Further on:

Students should be introduced to a wide range of forms of participation and given experience in their use. But, the student's decision to participate in any given activity with any particular frequency must be a matter of individual choice.

I think the member addressed the problem, indicating that the courses would be optional, that students would have the choice of enrolling in the course, but of course once in the course, that option of being involved in a particular project could be lost. So I think the conception of citizenship that the member has put forward needs to be carefully examined before we go so far as to incorporate it into school programs.

4:10

As the member indicated, there are a number of opportunities now to do what this motion intends, and I mentioned the social studies program. There are numerous opportunities within that program for the kind of activity that the member has outlined, and I was pleased that she made mention of the international baccalaureate program. I had the privilege of being on the school board in Edmonton when that program was introduced and of having seen the Pearson College of the Pacific students in action, where the service program is a huge part of the focus. The students out there when I visited stopped studying at 2 o'clock every day and then spent the rest of the day in community service. They're noted for the program they have in terms of channel safety, rescuing boats in distress. They also had a huge project in Victoria, where they were helping handicapped children. So it is a program that has a huge opportunity for community service. However, I think its transfer to urban schools has not maintained that same focus, and I say that having just spoken to a number of high school students about the service component of the international baccalaureate program they're involved in.

The question has to be raised: do we need to put in courses, or can we take and modify and make stronger the opportunities that already are available in the curriculum as it now stands? The pressure on schools and on school curricula I think are really very intense. I had the privilege to see a list of courses that has been requested by various groups across the province, courses that the advocates

proposed be introduced to schools, and the last time I saw that list, there were over 40 proposals for schools to take on new obligations and new courses. I think we have to be careful that we take advantage of the opportunities that already exist for this kind of information to be placed in our schools.

I'm not sure that there's much more I want to say, Mr. Speaker. I do support it, and I've raised some questions and some queries. I think we have to proceed carefully before we adopt this in schools, and I know that would be the case should this motion be passed, that there would be some pretty careful consideration in terms of how it was incorporated in our schools and in school programs.

I applaud the Member for Lacombe-Stettler for bringing it forward. As an old social studies teacher I couldn't be happier to see goals that are compatible with the goals of the social studies programs in the province being emphasized and gaining the kind of attention that she's been able to bring to this.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to also offer my general support for Motion 501, sponsored by my colleague from Lacombe-Stettler. This motion urges the government to incorporate service learning as an optional course in Alberta's high school curriculum to encourage students to become involved in service learning projects and activities within their communities.

As a former teacher and administrator it is my view that the concept of service learning as proposed by this motion could be of great value to our students and communities. I, too, offer some cautions, as did the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I certainly would not be in favour of any type of watered-down curriculum if this is what is meant by this motion. However, I see great opportunities to actually enhance the curriculum, and that's why I would be supportive.

Service learning in schools is not a new concept. A number of American communities and youth have benefited from the existence of service learning curriculums in their schools. This is certainly evidenced by the popularity of these programs. In fact, according to 1999 U.S. Department of Education statistics 57 percent of American students in grades 6 through 12 participated in some form of service learning.

Mr. Speaker, similar programs in a number of Canadian provinces are planned or are already in place at local levels. For example, as the Member for Lacombe-Stettler mentioned, Manitoba is in the process of establishing provincial guidelines that would introduce a service learning option for credit that would entrench service learning courses that are currently being offered and approved at the local level. In Saskatchewan life transitions 20 and 30 are optional courses which have an action component project for credit. These independent learning projects are school based and allow elements of service learning to be part of the action component.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In the province of Ontario the education curriculum goes a step further than that which is proposed in Motion 501 by requiring students to participate in service learning, designated as community involvement activities, in order to be eligible for high school graduation. The primary objectives of Ontario's program are similar to those proposed in Motion 501 in that both serve to instill young people with an awareness and understanding of their responsibilities

and expectations as members of the community by making a difference through meaningful interaction and contribution. Mr. Speaker, Ontario's program involves a co-operative effort between school boards, principals, parents, students, and community organizations and receives no specified targeted funding.

I believe that the partnership opportunities involving the co-operative planning and programming between Ontario schools and communities also exists here in Alberta. The opportunity to combine citizenship and leadership learning through Alberta schools and partner those initiatives with that of community programs such as 4-H, the Rotary exchange program, recreation and arts, cadets, and other youth programs would serve to strengthen Alberta schools, community programs, and the community itself. While encouraging young people to actively choose to participate in community learning opportunities, the benefit of receiving credit for their efforts would elevate expectations of involvement and also heighten the value of the service.

Mr. Speaker, there is one notable and significant difference between the programs which I have mentioned and that which is proposed in Motion 501. The motion before us recommends that service learning be introduced as an optional course rather than as a mandatory requirement, as has already been mentioned. In view of the many curriculum demands, especially in terms of the core curriculum and the diversity of interests and talents of Alberta students, I agree with the motion's intent, that service learning courses be introduced on an optional basis.

This motion offers the opportunity to bridge a gap between curricular and extracurricular learning while providing for unified objectives. For example, we need better qualified coaching in our men's and women's community hockey programs. Through a service learning program a high school student interested in learning the art of coaching could co-ordinate practical aspects of learning by working with a minor hockey coach and team with theoretical aspects through a high school physical education course. In this way the learning experience in the physical education course could be enhanced, as with the learning experience in working with a minor hockey team. In this situation additional credits perhaps could be awarded. Through such co-operative ventures students with an interest and inclination would be able to enhance their education by choosing to perform service learning.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Motion 501 could fill a niche in our high school curriculum and perhaps complement other electives that currently exist, such as work experience, career internship programs, or special projects. Work experience, for example, is an optional course available through grades 10 to 12 which provides experiential learning activities under the co-operative supervision of both the teacher and employer. The student's personal development, career planning, and employability skills are enhanced through work experience participation. Work experience courses are components of an off-campus education program which provides students with the opportunity to apply themselves in a workplace setting in order to discover their career interests and aptitudes through work-related activities. Service learning courses could work in much the same way but with a different focus.

Career technology internship programs are another part of the present high school curriculum providing yet a different focus than work experience by entering students into the registered apprenticeship program. The focus of these courses is on preparing students for entry into trade, technology, and service careers through apprenticeship learning pathways.

Finally, high school students presently have the option of

obtaining credits for an approved special project which is designed to recognize work undertaken by students on an individual or small group basis which satisfies two major conditions: firstly, that the students become involved in the selection, planning, and organization of their own program, and secondly, that the students pursue activities in which they have considerable interest or ability but which are not within the scope of the regular curriculum or the programs being offered in the school. This option provides students with the opportunity to supplement or enhance their education in areas in which they have considerable interest or aptitude.

So, as you can see, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta high school curriculum already addresses the value of real-life education that supplements the traditional curriculum with experiential learning. These existing programs alone do not specifically or completely meet the intentions and objectives of service learning. A service learning program will supplement and enhance existing programs, incorporating learning components outside the classroom. By making classroom learning more relevant and meaningful, by capitalizing on practical learning experiences in unique ways, students could choose an innovative approach that supplements textbooks and lectures. For example, in my own constituency the Big Valley Jamboree offers great marketing and promotional experience in a major entertainment event for students that may choose to be involved, or the Viking Cup international hockey tournament offers a unique opportunity for students interested in international relations and protocols. Surely such experiences could enhance learning experiences in such courses as social studies, music, and other courses. Furthermore, leadership and good citizenship skills acquired in the process would be of lasting benefit to the community.

Today's classroom extends well beyond its four walls. The greater community offers so many valuable learning experiences. Motion 501 encourages educators and students to find another avenue to expand the classroom, to tap into nearly limitless learning resources. In doing so, students would be encouraged to explore new horizons that would result in a more well-rounded student and a better community. By encouraging students, schools, and communities to work together as partners as Motion 501 does, Alberta students would have the opportunity to begin finding this balance early in their lives and learn how to maintain it throughout adulthood.

Mr. Speaker, service learning is about instilling a connection to the community and a recognition of the impact that individuals can make in bettering their communities and themselves. It's about encouraging and empowering students to learn positive values such as leadership, citizenship, and personal responsibility.

In thinking about the goals of service learning in schools, I noticed a similarity to the goals of Alberta's 4-H clubs. By combining the two, opportunities could be further extended to students to explore better ways of co-ordinating the leadership development of 4-H with academic courses in the school. By the way, I was in the 4-H club once, and I know what great programs they do have.

Another example, which my niece experienced, was her involvement with an organization called Up with People. Up with People offers talented youth the opportunity to entertain in the performing arts throughout the world for a period of a whole year. During that time, in addition to the group's performances, participants must complete a number of hours of community service in each city they visit while learning aspects related to the entertainment industry, making for an obvious service learning partnership with performing arts courses found in the education curriculum.

These examples illustrate the potential merit of service learning when curriculum and extracurricular opportunities meet. The inclusion of learning to do by doing raises classroom learning objectives to new heights. The student and the community are the

beneficiaries. To me that's what service learning should be all about.

It is important, Mr. Speaker, that the learning opportunities which are included as part of a service learning program be carefully selected. Students should not be involved in activities that are of no real educational value to the community and especially the students themselves, nor should service learning be a substitute for paid employment. Service learning activities should be approved by the school in conjunction with the community stakeholders involved with the project, with the school ultimately deciding whether the project is substantial enough to assign the student credit upon its completion.

There should be clear guidelines established that qualify what is acceptable service learning activity relative to the merits of the student's proposal and its impact on the community and the student. It is then through the result of the student's participation that benefits are realized by community organizations and the community as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a great deal of discussion throughout North America about a graduation requirement for service learning rather than offering it as an optional program. It is clearly evident that what advocates of service requirements are trying to say is that service learning is rooted deeply in the mission of education and that it has the capacity to improve the well-being of our community and therefore our society. It seems to me that service learning is a better learning tool when it is available as an option for students who wish to explore and contribute to human interest causes beyond the classroom and not as a mandatory requirement compelling students to perform a requisite number of community service hours in order to graduate.

The inclusion of service learning in the high school curriculum will foster and develop within our youth important values. The move would encourage positive contributions that will improve the community's quality of life. At this stage, Mr. Speaker, the important consideration is to offer an opportunity to further motivate students to give of their time, their talents and efforts for the benefit of themselves and others. As an individual who gives of their time in learning, they will receive as they give.

I would ask that all members of the Assembly support this motion. I think it's a good motion, and I think it has great potential to enhance our curriculum. Thank you very much.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak to this motion this afternoon, a motion which raises many more questions for me than it answers at this stage, and I hope that we will have the opportunity throughout the debate to get some of those questions answered.

First, I would like to address the issue of its order on the Order Paper. It's interesting to see that a motion that deals with education that will require additional funding or additional reorganization of resources in the education system in terms of writing the curriculum, monitoring the programs, and seeing those programs actually completed comes before a motion that talks about this government's commitment to the five principles of the Canada Health Act. I wonder why that is, Mr. Speaker. Here we are in a province that is seen . . .

Speaker's Ruling Private Members' Business

THE SPEAKER: Okay, hon. member. Please. This is a private member's matter, and I have to clarify that, because I think integrity

in this Assembly is right. Our rules allow all members to put their names in a hat. Their names are drawn, and the private member whose name is drawn has the motion or the bill that comes up. There is a suggestion, the second time today, that these are interferences by the government.

These are matters before the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, which is independent from the government. There is a prescribed procedure for this, a well-known public procedure. These are private members' matters, and there's no manipulation of the process. Any suggestion by any member that there is means that this Speaker, this chair, and those officers associated with him are being manipulated, and that can lead to a very serious matter. A very serious matter.

Now, the time frame for this matter has now been dealt with.

4:30

Transmittal of Estimates

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm now tabling the '99-2000 supplementary estimates, No. 2. This follows the earlier tabling of the quarterly budget report, which serves as a revised consolidated fiscal plan. That, of course, is required by section 8 of the Government Accountability Act. In this regard I have received a message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor which I now transmit to you.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

THE SPEAKER: The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2000, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Haley moved:

That an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

MS HALEY: Mr. Speaker, it's truly an honour for me today to rise in the Legislative Assembly and move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne. The speech presented by Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor served to open the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature. It is particularly special in light of the fact that it is the year 2000 and this is the first Speech from the Throne of the 21st century in this Assembly. When I was asked to move the motion on acceptance of the Speech from the Throne, I tried to reflect not only on our wonderful province and where we are today but also on what has been accomplished in Alberta in the 100 years, since the last turn of the century, and where Alberta might be going in the new 21st century. It's truly an exciting time, not just to be alive and not just to be an MLA but to live in this province and in this country, to have so many opportunities and possibilities spread out before us that no one could even have imagined 100 years ago.

Just pause for a second and consider what life was like 100 years ago without a few of the things that we take so for granted today. There were no televisions, no computers, no phones, and no plastic, to name just four things that we assume everyone has always had.

When we want to go somewhere today, we get into a car, on a bus, or we get into an airplane. Distances that would have been impossible to imagine traveling just 100 years ago can now be covered in minutes and hours. Did you know, Mr. Speaker, that the reason so many of our rural towns and villages are about 13 kilometres apart is because that was the distance a horse-drawn wagon could reasonably be expected to travel in one day?

While people with really creative imaginations in the horse-drawn wagon era might have been able to imagine that one day man would land on the moon or that space shuttles would routinely go up into space or that it would be possible to map the entire globe in just a little over a week, as the space shuttle *Endeavour* just did this past week, who could have imagined that it would be possible to have conversations with people from all over the world simply by sitting down in your home in front of a computer screen and a keyboard and hooking into something as simple as a phone line or cable? Because they didn't exist then. Who could have imagined that you could sit in the comfort of your home and do research at a library or university thousands of miles away from where you are? I'm guessing here, Mr. Speaker, that the reality of 100 years ago meant life was just a little more pragmatic than imagining those types of things.

Important elements to life such as light and heat were not provided at the flip of a switch. Grocery stores as we know them now did not exist. The general stores that were open would have been just as likely to have sold nails or hunting knives or shotgun shells as they were to sell sacks of flour or salt or bolts of cloth, and while there were doctors and there was some health care, there were no polio shots and no penicillin.

Life was very different 100 years ago than it is today. You had to be strong to survive here and they were, from the natives who had inhabited Alberta for thousands of years to the incredibly adventuresome and resilient settlers that came here. We have been born of such people, people that were not afraid of a challenge, people that built a very strong foundation for all of us that live here today.

A very wise person once wrote that the only thing constant in life is change. The past 100 years have provided change on such a massive scale that no one 100 years ago could have begun to imagine what Alberta would be like today, yet change is occurring at an even faster rate now than ever before. Our knowledge base is doubling at an unprecedented rate, and the challenge today is not just trying to keep up with the pace of change but also trying to plan ahead and manage that change.

How can one even begin to imagine what the future holds? I do know that 100 years ago I could not have had a job like the one I do today, and my gratitude is everlasting to the suffrage movement and the Famous Five, who fought for equality and won the Persons Case. It is in fact, Mr. Speaker, such a privilege for me as a woman to be here and be able to move a Speech from the Throne, the first one in this year 2000, the beginning of a brand-new century.

I am more than a bit in awe of how far we have come. It is also a privilege for me to represent the constituents of Airdrie-Rocky View in this Assembly. To me Airdrie-Rocky View has just a little bit of everything, everything that makes Alberta great. We have from the golden wheatfields to our beautiful rolling foothills to the beautiful vista of the majestic Rocky Mountains.

Airdrie-Rocky View is where the plains meet the mountains and where urban meets rural. We have strong rural communities, farms, and intensive livestock operations as well as over 1,100 businesses that range from major manufacturing to the small businesses of the fastest growing segment of our economy today. From the growing, thriving city of Airdrie to the towns and villages like Chestermere, Crossfield, Irricana, Beiseker, Langdon, Madden, Kathryn, Keoma, Delacour, and, of course, the part of the Bears paw area that is in my

riding, all of which are located inside the rural municipal district of Rocky View, this constituency wraps around much of Calgary. And I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I totally love the diversity of this riding, just as I love the diversity of our great province.

As I thought about the past century here in Alberta, I recall the Chinese proverb which I believe is just as relevant to our province today as it was a hundred years ago. The proverb goes like this: if you want one year of prosperity, grow grain; if you want 10 years of prosperity, grow trees; if you want 100 years of prosperity, grow people. Mr. Speaker, these are exactly the things that Alberta has been doing for a century now, and what an incredible job she's done.

Alberta was founded on an agriculture base which remains solid to this day. Agriculture as an industry, however, is not without some problems, Mr. Speaker, and that is why we are so hopeful that the agriculture summit in June will help all of us at least start to address the issues that are negatively impacting this proud and important industry. Our natural resource sector, from coal to the tar sands, conventional oil and gas, as well as the forestry sector, has allowed Alberta to grow and be successful, but it is the people of Alberta who have made this province so strong, so vibrant, and so prosperous. It is truly amazing to think of how much has happened in Alberta in the past 100 years.

In 1900 the province that we know of as Alberta was still part of the North-West Territories. However, exciting things were already happening here five years before Alberta became a Canadian province. In 1900 the foundation of Alberta's economy was just being laid. Several key industries were being established, many of which are still the backbone of our economy today.

Agriculture industries such as grain farming, cattle, hog, sheep, and horse ranching as well as dairy production were beginning to thrive. In addition, timber, fishing, and mining industries were growing and attracting people to Alberta. It was in the early 1900s that the drilling for oil and gas first began here. These industries are what brought people to Alberta and continue to bring people to Alberta today.

This was a time in which the spirit and values of Albertans were being shaped, and it was from these early settlers and their families that the impetus for the Speech from the Throne was created. Our forefathers laid our foundations on characteristics such as confidence, entrepreneurship, innovation, self-reliance, and a love for our natural environment. But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, they passed on to us the belief in and love of family and community, and they are in fact the very foundation of our society today.

At the turn of the 20th century the population of what is now Alberta was growing rapidly, just as it is now with the turn of this century. In the 10 years between 1891 and 1901 the population of Alberta nearly tripled, from 25,277 people to 73,022 people. Even 100 years ago people were looking to Alberta for a better life for themselves and their families. They knew then, just as we know now, that Alberta is a place where hard work and perseverance will be rewarded.

4:40

Today Alberta is Canada's fastest growing province, a testament to the quality of life and standard of living that exists here. People and businesses from across Canada and around the world are moving to Alberta to experience the Alberta advantage and to enjoy the tremendous quality of life that Alberta has to offer. The population growth that we are experiencing in Alberta is clearly evident in Airdrie-Rocky View. There is no part of that constituency that is not growing at an incredible rate. Airdrie-Rocky View has about 4,300 square kilometres. It covers an area just a little bit smaller than Prince Edward Island. Prince Edward Island has about 110,000

people, and Airdrie-Rocky View has about 40,000, and we're gaining on them. No one is really sure of the exact population today as it's hard to track; the growth rate is so high.

While growth does create some problems such as pressure on our infrastructure system, such as roads, getting our schools built fast enough, and recruiting enough doctors, it also presents many opportunities, opportunities that make it very rewarding to work with such great people as we have elected to our municipal councils and our school boards. I would say that they are inspiring and stimulating challenges, Mr. Speaker, and in fact many people would say that they are enviable challenges for any government.

It is clear to me that the Speech from the Throne recognizes that Alberta is moving in the right direction as we face the challenges of the 21st century. It tells me that we are committed to the things that Albertans want and need from their government: quality and accessible health care delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible; a first-rate education system with excellent teachers and professors that rivals results achieved anywhere in the world; exceptional services for Alberta's children under a newly created department, a department that will strive to bring all government programs that impact children together to ensure that services are co-ordinated, and children's services will continue to evolve as communities on an individual basis will be able to get the programs they need tailored to what their specific community wants; a commitment to make the best senior's program in Canada even better. I think everyone in this Assembly is aware that many seniors from across Canada are in fact moving to Alberta, in part because we have the Alberta seniors' benefit program, and it is recognized as the best in Canada.

In terms of health care Alberta is taking the lead among Canadian provinces, as Alberta does on so many issues. The government will draw on the innovative spirit of Albertans in looking for better, more efficient ways of delivering health care services, and one of the results of an aging population is mounting pressure on our health care system. We're all aware that we have an aging baby boomer generation and that over the next 15 years our seniors population will double. Our system better be able to handle the increased demand that will be placed on it, and rather than waiting till it's too late, we are being proactive in looking for ways to make health care more accessible and sustainable for future generations.

It can be very important, Mr. Speaker, to occasionally look back at the origins of a specific program, and in light of the current discussion surrounding health care, I thought it might be interesting to just mention how we got here. The Medical Care Act of 1966 proposed an arrangement in which the federal government paid 50 percent of the national per capita cost of insured services. There were four provisions in the Act of 1966, and they were as follows. One, all services rendered by medical practitioners that are medically required must be covered. Two, provinces must operate the plan on a nonprofit basis by a provincial public authority. Three, plans must provide for insured services on uniform terms and conditions to all insurable residents of a province. Four, plans must be portable.

At that time the federal government estimated that the national average of medical care costs was \$34 per person. Even then provinces were concerned about being able to fund and control the expected rising costs associated with the national plan. No one could have estimated the dramatic rise in cost that has occurred in the 34 years. Mr. Speaker, we went from spending \$34 per person in 1966 to about \$1,600 per person today. That's a 47-fold increase in 34 years. If that rate of increase were to continue for the next 34 years – and at this point we have no reason to believe the demand will decline or that the rate of increase will miraculously slow down, stop, or reverse itself. While we can hope that that might be the

case, we have to be more prudent in that if we don't want to repeat the past, we should at least be aware of it.

So at a 47-fold increase, at that historical rate of increase, Mr. Speaker, it would mean that in the year 2034 Alberta would require \$75,200 for every man, woman, and child in this province to cover health care costs as health care exists today. At that rate of \$75,200 per person, in constant dollars with no consideration for inflationary pressures, even at today's population of 3 million we would need \$225 billion to cover health care costs for Albertans. It should give us all a reason to pause and time for the Provincial Treasurer to calculate what rate of growth our provincial economy needs to grow at to handle that type of program expenditure, let alone what rate of income tax might be necessary to pay for it.

This might be a reasonable time to ask where the federal government is on the issue of payment. Of course, the federal government has dropped from the original 50 percent commitment to something resembling 13 percent today. More and more of our total responsibility for funding health care is falling on the shoulders of all the provinces and less and less on the federal government. I do, however, appreciate the federal minister's comments of last week that the health system in its current form is not sustainable. He is correct. So it is important for all of us to find new and innovative ways to look at health care delivery, to enhance delivery of service, to shorten waiting lists for diagnostic as well as surgical services.

As well, Mr. Speaker – and this is key to everything that we do today – we must ensure that our system is sustainable not just for our seniors of today but also for the baby boomer generation as they age and that it be here for today's and tomorrow's children. Changes to the Alberta health care system will be made with an unwavering commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act. It is so very important that the government continue to be forward-looking in its delivery of health care so that in the future Albertans will continue to have access to the excellent services that we enjoy today. Sustainability, innovation, and not being afraid to try things will become even more important than it is today, and just as our forefathers were willing to try new approaches to old and new problems, so must we.

The future of Alberta of course depends on our children, and I am delighted that government will further enhance its commitment to education. From the throne speech I see a firm commitment to fundamental issues like literacy and class size. It is also encouraging to know that there will be continuing emphasis on programs to help students learn the skills that they need to participate in the global economy.

As Albertans our fiscal strength depends on our ability to export our goods and services. The global marketplace will continue to become more important to Alberta as technology enhances our ability to move goods and services at an ever increasing rate.

It is exciting to see that our postsecondary institutions will be focusing on knowledge-based and high-tech disciplines that will prepare Albertans to participate fully in the economy of the 21st century. I am also pleased about the new \$3 million academic scholarship that will benefit 3,000 second year postsecondary students and will complement the Rutherford scholarship program by helping our university and college students get through the first years of their advanced education.

The Speech from the Throne also makes it clear that the Alberta advantage will be strengthened. While our dependence on oil and gas is lessened, it is still a major factor in determining our ability to deal with the needs of Albertans. The ability to enhance our infrastructure with onetime spending is a direct result of the volatility of oil and gas markets. One year ago oil was selling for \$10 per barrel, and this week it is \$29. As Professor Booth of the

University of Alberta pointed out, Alberta has the most volatile economy in North America.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The ability to direct spending on a onetime basis as opposed to building it into the permanent program base is a key to the future stability of our province. With the net provincial debt eliminated and the gross debt declining, Alberta is poised to lead the country in tax reform. With the implementation of a single-rate income tax on January 1, 2001, all Albertans will be paying less income tax in the years to come, and 132,000 lower income Albertans will no longer be paying any provincial tax at all. Combine this with our newly announced business tax review and you can see that our goal is to ensure that Alberta is not only on the right path for the 21st century but that our commitment to retaining the Alberta advantage stays on track.

To assist Alberta in positioning itself for the future, my government has introduced Bill 1, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act. The original \$500 million, which we are all hopeful will grow to a billion over the next five years, will do for science and engineering research what the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research has done for that community, and that is to attract the brightest and the best to do their research here.

The original \$300 million invested in the Alberta foundation for medical research has now grown to over \$800 million and has spun off over 2 and a half billion dollars in medical research spending in Alberta over the past 20 years. The goal for the new foundation is to create exactly the same type of situation for science and engineering research in Alberta. The new foundation will attract some of the brightest minds not just from Alberta and Canada but from around the world. It will help us attract and retain the types of businesses that will make Alberta a leader in this century, a place where all are welcome, a place that will be as successful in the 21st century as we have been in the 20th, a place that we might all have difficulty imagining but a place that I hope our founding peoples of all backgrounds would be proud to call home.

I am proud to be an Albertan, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to have this opportunity to speak in this Assembly and move this Speech from the Throne.

4:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the Lieutenant Governor for her eloquent reading of the Speech from the Throne to open the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature of Alberta. I would also like to congratulate the Hon. Lois Hole on her recent appointment as the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. I am sure that she, like all of us in this Legislative Assembly, is honored to represent the needs and interests of our community throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to stand here today representing the constituents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and second the motion put forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View to accept the Speech from the Throne. With the expressed views of my constituents in mind I am pleased to support the Speech from the Throne, its positive messages and overall direction for Alberta.

The constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan is a microcosm of this great province. We have the special combination of rural farming areas, the urban centre of Fort Saskatchewan, the

rural acreage developments, the heavy industrial sites where the petrochemical industry is established, as well as high-tech research.

Recorded history of the district is traced back to the visit of Anthony Henday in 1755, and then in 1795 Fort Edmonton was established close by. In 1874 the North-West Mounted Police made their trek across the prairies and after wintering in Fort Edmonton set out to build their second fort on the prairies. The first was built the previous year at Fort Macleod. There are several reasons why they chose to construct their permanent fort 20 miles downstream from Fort Edmonton. One was transportation. The lower banks would allow easier railway crossings than the steep, high bank in the Fort Edmonton area. Secondly, the farming potential was much greater in the fertile land surrounding the area. Third, there was an economic advantage because the lumber could be supplied more cheaply outside of Fort Edmonton by people such as the Lamoureux brothers just across the river from where Fort Saskatchewan exists today.

Similar economic advantages exist today, as the region is a hub of economic activity. In 1952 Sherritt Gordon Mines Limited established a multimillion dollar nickel refinery in Fort Saskatchewan. Over the succeeding years the region, including the northern portion of Strathcona county, experienced steady growth. Petrochemical industries and other industries started to move into the area, attracted by the availability of land, easy transportation access, salt deposits, an abundance of water, natural gas, and electricity, a skilled and dedicated workforce, and, more recently, a supply of petrochemical feedstocks like ethane.

The origin of the name Clover Bar is an interesting story and is also rooted in economic development. One of the earliest prospectors in the area was a fellow from Missouri who had been to the Caribou and California gold rushes and then came to Fort Edmonton to start panning for gold in an area east of the fort in the year 1860. For several years he worked the sandbar located between the current Clover Bar bridge and Fort Saskatchewan. The sandbar came to be known as Clover's bar, and eventually the whole district was called Clover Bar.

As I reflect on this Speech from the Throne, I think back to why I first decided to campaign for the position of MLA for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. I believe it is important to know what the constituents want the government to do and to represent those views at the caucus and committee tables.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I am often reminded by longtime residents of the constituency about two long-serving MLAs from Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. Mr. Floyd Baker was elected in 1935 and represented the region until 1967, when he was succeeded by Dr. Walter Buck, who served until 1989. These men were re-elected many times because they knew the people and knew what was important to them. Four years ago I determined that the principles of fiscal responsibility and social commitment were very important to me and to the people of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and stood for election committed to uphold both of those principles. I am therefore pleased that this throne speech reflects those two themes. The Speech from the Throne gives a broad outline of the government's future plans. The statements it makes and the goals it sets reflect the government's priority and, most importantly, Albertans' priorities for the future. I am very encouraged by the Speech from the Throne because I believe it will lead Alberta confidently into the 21st century.

The throne speech begins by discussing agriculture and the important role it plays in our province. Agriculture is a part of our history; it's also a part of our future. I believe it's important that our

government recognizes these are challenging times for agriculture and that we develop a plan to ensure its long-term sustainability. I am pleased the government is undertaking such a broad consultation in planning programs such as Ag Summit 2000. Agriculture was a major factor in the successful establishment of the fort on the Saskatchewan River and will be crucial for the success of Fort Saskatchewan-Clover Bar and the province in the future.

Mr. Speaker, jobs and the economy were identified in the Speech from the Throne as another priority. These are issues that are of great importance to my constituency, which is an essential part of Alberta's industrial heartland. The heartland region is more than 48,000 acres in size, designated for long-term heavy and medium industrial growth. It's already home to over 30 world-class companies.

The industrial heartland is a major player in Alberta's industrial sector. Agrium is one of the top North American fertilizer producers. The Westaim corporation is a research centre for advanced industrial materials with developments in batteries, ceramics, and the electronics industry. Sherritt International produces nickel and cobalt powder and briquets at its refinery. Dow Chemical houses numerous world-scale facilities within their Fort Saskatchewan site. The area is also part of an extensive pipeline corridor.

There are many reasons why Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan is home to so many world-class companies. For some of these companies it was the abundant natural resources of the area that attracted them. For others it was Alberta's economic strategy, especially our commitment to fiscal responsibility and a competitive tax regime. I'm pleased that the Speech from the Throne indicated that this aggressive approach to fiscal responsibility and balance will not waiver and in fact will be strengthened to ensure that we can continue to lead the way in Canada and compete in the global economy.

The people of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan have told me that they want low taxes, Mr. Speaker. While our taxes are already the lowest in Canada, they can and will be lower still. The move to a new 11 percent single-rate provincial income tax by January 1 of 2001 is a move my constituents support.

Mr. Speaker, I'm thankful that while we continue to be a leader in economic issues, our government is also maintaining its strong social commitment. Priority areas like health, education, social services, and infrastructure have been targeted for reinvestment, and our government will continue to work to make our programs the best in Canada.

As a former teacher and school administrator education is of particular interest to me. I was pleased to hear of the exciting programs being committed to by this government, programs like the Alberta initiative for school improvement that will enable us to address issues like literacy and class size. I know from the schools in my constituency that our international student programs have been very successful. We are well positioned to have the best school systems in the country.

In the area of health and wellness the Speech from the Throne speaks to the fact that Alberta will continue to play a leadership role across Canada in strengthening our publicly funded health care system while looking at ways to improve its delivery to Albertans. We will renew our pledge to uphold the principles of the Canada Health Act and maintain a single-tier, publicly funded health system that is accessible to all Albertans on an equitable basis and represents the level of excellence that Albertans demand.

I'm particularly pleased with this government's focus on prevention of illness and injury. Prevention of injury is something I feel strongly about. In 1997 accidental injury was a leading cause of death in Alberta for people under the age of 44. In that same year

three Albertans lost their lives to injury every day. We must do all we can to reduce these appalling numbers.

Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to serve as the chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. It was appropriate from my perspective to hear in the Speech from the Throne that our government will continue to enhance and strengthen support for Albertans with developmental disabilities.

5:00

I'd like, too, at this time to introduce and acknowledge in the members' gallery Bryan Sandilands, a member of staff for the Premier's council, and Margaret MacCabe, a council member for the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Initiatives like the Human Resources and Employment minister's Employability Council will look at ways to ensure that all Albertans have the opportunity to contribute to the strength of the province. These initiatives are of particular interest to me because they are part of a disability strategy that is being worked on by the Premier's council and the members of the disability community throughout Alberta.

There are four core areas that the disability community has said need to be looked at: full citizenship and the opportunity to fully participate, disability supports to live as independently as possible, financial supports to guarantee safety and growth, and the opportunity to contribute to Alberta's growth through employment. With the help of council members like Margaret McCabe, the Premier's council will look at these areas and make a difference for the disability community in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, in the Speech from the Throne our Lieutenant Governor stated that one of the principles of this government is equity, equity which includes fairness and respect for diversity of culture, age, and gender. As chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities I will continue to work with persons with developmental disabilities as well as all other persons with disabilities to promote and advocate fairness and respect for diversity of ability as well.

Mr. Speaker, it's been a great honour to rise today and second the motion to accept this Speech from the Throne. I am pleased the Lieutenant Governor expressed in her speech the government's commitment to continuing the policies of social commitment and fiscal responsibility, policies I embraced from the beginning of my candidacies, policies I know my constituents support, and policies that will guide us to a successful future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the privilege to rise and address Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor and the Speech from the Throne. I think at the outset I would like to say how refreshing it was to have our Lieutenant Governor, newly appointed, one week appointed Lieutenant Governor, read the speech in the Assembly.

I have known Her Honour Lois Hole for many years, first as a purchaser of house plants and gardening supplies from her very successful and important business in the St. Albert area, but more directly I knew Lois Hole when I was first appointed minister of education. She was at the time a trustee for the St. Albert separate school district. I can tell you that her commitment that she spoke of in the Speech from the Throne, her commitment to public education in our province is really second to none. Albertans truly have an advocate for public education in our Lieutenant Governor. Her words are the words of a woman of action, a woman who believes

in the continuity of legislation, and in education, a woman who has served as the chancellor of our fine University of Alberta, and a woman who I am sure will be a wonderful Lieutenant Governor representing the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I thought there were some very excellently written sections in the throne speech. My compliments to the writers. I thought the review and the reminder to us all of the role played by the first government of Alberta, under the very astute premiership of the hon. Alexander Rutherford, of course the first Liberal government of Alberta - I thought it was very fitting to see the Progressive Conservative government return to some of the reminders of the seriousness with which the original government of Alberta dealt with the issues that affect Albertans.

I think it's important to add to the citation that was in the throne speech a reminder of some of the things that were established in Alberta under the Rutherford government: things like public health nursing were very much a part of that early government, and that tradition continues today; the Universities Act, the establishment of the University of Alberta as a very, very prime role that the Premier saw for his contribution to Alberta; the establishment of thousands of miles of railway to link Albertans to one another. The issues of uniting us with one another and uniting us with other Canadians are certainly some of the things where I think we can look back at that first government of Alberta and realize how precious the things are that were created with that earlier government, that first government, and how important it is for us as legislators to ensure that that vision for public health care, for public education, for linkages which join Albertans right across this province, rural and urban, men and women, north and south, Edmonton and Calgary, that the work that we do as legislators strengthens that fabric of our province. Certainly that is our intention in our actions as an Official Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, I as well would like to express my thanks for the privilege that it is to represent the people of Edmonton-McClung. The constituents of Edmonton-McClung are certainly working Alberta families, families who have their children in schools, in public schools. In fact, in the constituency of Edmonton-McClung we have 13 public schools made up of nine public and four separate schools. We have one private school. Without question, the issue that is the most sustaining concern and the issue which affects directly on a day-to-day basis the people of the constituency of Edmonton-McClung - clearly, education, public education, is a main goal.

Obviously, the issue of health care is one that is vitally important, and I wanted in this first installment of my remarks this afternoon, to be resumed this evening, to take some time to look at the issues of health care and particularly to fix upon the comment that is in the Speech from the Throne, the comment saying:

Legislation will be introduced to help protect and preserve the publicly funded health system by putting Alberta's commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act into provincial law and enabling health authorities to pursue new, innovative ways of delivering publicly funded health services.

That's a wonderful statement, Mr. Speaker, a very, very fine statement, and when the Lieutenant Governor read the statement, I thought: jeeppers, maybe these guys are going to actually get it right; they are actually going to strengthen the public health care system.

Interestingly, following the Legislature session today and the activities or lack of activities in question period, certainly a lack of answers, it was interesting to see the Premier standing before his media conference talking about how he was defending private hospitals, how he was trying to distinguish them from privately run, extended term, overnight surgical facilities and trying to draw the

distinction between the two. If it weren't so important to Albertans and to where this debate is going, it would have been quite comical. Unfortunately, it was very, very disturbing.

5:10

So I thought that I would look at some of the issues that I think need to be dealt with within this paragraph in the throne speech, the issue of new and innovative ways of publicly funded health services being delivered, and speak first of all to some of the things that we on the Official Opposition will be arguing for. The first one is to stop the creeping privatization which we have seen happening in this province since this government took over in 1992.

The creeping privatization can be quantified in the following way. When the government took over in 1992, the private sector as a portion of total spending, both private and public in Alberta, was at about the 22 percent level. I've referred to this before, Mr. Speaker. We now see that it's over 31 percent, and that 50 percent increase in the growth of private-sector involvement in health care is what causes concern to all of us. So when the government talks about legislation being introduced to help protect and preserve publicly funded health care, let's hope that the government comes forth with legislation which in our view has to be accomplished with a moratorium on the existing private health care facilities in order to give time for this Legislature to create the environment and the framework for the legislation that must exist, and then we can go on and lift the moratorium if that's one of the options but with a legislative framework in place.

The problem with the government's point of view, Mr. Speaker, identified not in this throne speech but identified at the Premier's news conference less than one hour and a half ago, is that the government is trying to say that they want to protect the Canada Health Act. Those are the words. But, at the same time, they want to expand the role of private hospitals. The thing is, Mr. Speaker, that they can't have it both ways. Their own news release of today's date says: "Evidence on both sides of public vs. the private hospitals question." As a very astute reporter from our legislative press gallery said: why is the government defending private hospitals in their own news releases if it's not part of their policy? Clearly it's part of the policy of this government.

So, Mr. Speaker, let's look at what we would like to do within the creeping privatization. Let's make sure that there is, in fact, a legislative framework of a similar nature to that which exists across the country in several of the provinces: Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, British Columbia, to some extent in Quebec. That is the legislation with respect to independent health facilities. You know, interestingly, there is not one of those pieces of legislation that allows private, for-profit services to be contracted out to private facilities for surgery that is an overnight stay. Not one of them does. In fact, they have incredible controls to ensure that that kind of thing doesn't happen.

This government needs to come forward with legislation which is going to allow Albertans to evaluate and control both the quantity and the quality of services that may be able to be delivered off-site of the hospital, outpatient services, ambulatory care, call it what you will, but should not extend to private hospitals for many, many reasons, which of course we have articulated in times past and will continue to do so.

So that's the first thing, Mr. Speaker. It's to stop the creeping privatization. That is what the legislation that's needed must do, not expand it. Albertans understand that too. Albertans understand the need for that control.

So what else needs to be done, Mr. Speaker? I think the second thing that needs to be done is to renew a commitment to public

health care in this province. This government has chipped away at public health care in this province. It has now coming up to three times tried to bring this legislation into the Legislature. Twice it's been shot down by Albertans, who said: that's not the way we want to go. They've had their growth summit, which affirmed the value of the public health care system. They've had their own health summit. Now they have focus groups identified in government documents which they won't even share with Albertans, and their message is: trust us, we're going to be the protectors of public health care.

Mr. Speaker, is it any wonder Albertans are suspicious of this government given its record on public health care in this province? That's what the letters are saying. You know, I had the privilege over the last five days to read the letters that have come into my office with people expressing suspicion about this government and where it intends to go on health care. Before someone on the government benches says that that's not what's being said in those letters, I would remind them that a lot of them have been written originally to MLAs on the government side of the House and copied to me, a lot of them have been written to the Premier and copied to me, and a lot of them have been written to the minister of health or the associate minister of health and copied to me. The message that is coming through is a public that is very, very suspicious of this government when it comes to health care.

Mr. Speaker, let's look at some of the things that could happen within our reaffirmation of support for a public health care system. The first thing that I think needs to happen is to find a predictable, sustainable funding framework for health care in this province. That includes the federal and the provincial governments. Providing that framework will prevent the kind of thing that the health care system has gone through in the last seven years in this province.

Recall that health care spending in this province was at the most controlled level of any province in the country. Despite the rhetoric that came out of the provincial government, this was the province from '88 to '92 that had the best cost control record of all the provinces in Canada. So then what happened, Mr. Speaker? There was a plan. There was a plan in place to protect the public health care system, a plan that had the buy-in of health providers right across this province, a fiscal plan that was about the sustained value, the predictable funding formula for the next five years. That was what was there in the plan that was there for Albertans, Mr. Speaker, and Albertans bought into it.

Then this government came along. This provincial government came along, and it cut. It went from very level sustained spending to a cut. Well, we know, Mr. Speaker, that that cut was unsustainable. That cut was unsustainable. And what are they doing now? They've jacked it right back up again, and that's unsustainable, too. What the health care system needs in this province is a sustainable, predictable funding framework, and these guys blew it, and they know it.

What's the second thing that needs to be done to affirm and confirm our commitment as citizens and as a Legislature to public health care? Well, the second thing that needs to happen, Mr. Speaker, is to involve health providers in this province in the discussion and in the development of policy affecting that system, the very people, the physicians, the nurses, who were excluded from this government's work on health care with the term that they were special interest groups. Well, you bet they're special interest groups, Mr. Speaker, and their special interest is the preservation and the enhancement and the sustainability of our public health care system.

The third thing, Mr. Speaker, that needs to happen is, yes, innovation, innovation within the public health care system. I thought it was interesting to listen to the minister of health and the

Premier today talk about innovation but forget to mention that the innovation that's needed – and in fact some very good examples are being carried out – is within the public system. This government seems to equate innovation with the private sector. Well, I don't. I stand on this side of the House, as I have always stood in this Legislature, saying that I'm very, very much a proponent and supporter of the private sector. I always have been. I see the private sector as the engine of growth for our economy, but what I don't see is the need for the taxpayers to subsidize the private sector.

So, Mr. Speaker, on the one hand we have the sole member of the New Democratic Party being a very solid supporter of banning private enterprise through the private hospital framework. I accept that. I accept that as something that he believes very firmly and continually has. In contrast this government has talked about being out of the business of being in business. That is a bunch of empty rhetoric, because we're now seeing that this government wants to provide taxpayer dollar subsidy to a market for the private sector that they couldn't make a profit in otherwise, and it is absolute baloney. We on this side of the House believe in the private sector, and we believe that it can stand on its own two feet, and we will do everything we can to ensure that happens.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, because I see the hour is moving along . . . [interjections] This is just the first installment. Don't worry. There's more.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, you know, the Premier has talked about the possibility of the Official Opposition supporting the legislation which the government is about to bring in. Well, I think that possibility does exist. I actually think that possibility exists if this government brings in legislation which is going to control the growth, control the quantity, and control the quality of some off-site services. If it's documented how that's going to be done, we might support that legislation. But if this government brings in the legislation – and the thing is that we don't know, of course, what the government's bringing in because they've talked out of both sides of their mouth. On the one hand, we see the Premier at his news conference saying: no, we're not going to have private hospitals. On the other hand, of course, as we know, the rhetoric is: we are going to have private, overnight, extended stay surgical facilities, but they're not private hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize the hour, but I just want to make recognition of some of the many things that have happened in our province since the Legislature has been out, in fact many of the things that have happened in our province since this government first tried to bring in private hospital legislation and was shot down by the people of this province. First of all, the government still has not brought forward any real solid analysis on the whole issue of where they wish to go with their privatization of hospitals. You know, I know they brought in their list of eight studies today, but it's interesting to note that five of those studies are from the Fraser Institute report, the report that was dubbed empty by Dr. Bob Evans, a very noted health economist right here in this city, actually, when he spoke to a conference on health care.

Interestingly, that conference on health care was addressed in the first instance by the minister of health. The junior minister of health was there as well, as well as several other MLAs. It was very interesting to note that following the minister's presentation, there was Dr. Bob Evans' presentation, and then there was a question period. Oh, and by the way, I didn't mention that Albertans had to pay \$99 to attend this conference.

Anyway, at the end of that discussion, people came to the microphones to ask the minister of health if he would be willing to

answer questions. Of course, he stood at the side of the room and shook his head and said no. The junior minister didn't answer any questions; he refused to answer any questions. Lo and behold, guess who answered the questions on the part of the government? The Member for Calgary-Glenmore. The good Member for Calgary-Glenmore. As I have said, he did yeoman's service, Mr. Speaker; he was dynamite. He was trying to tread that wonderful path: how do you describe what the difference is between a hospital and a private, overnight, extended stay surgical facility?

I compliment the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. I would also say – and I said this to the individual, but I'll repeat it here on the record. You know, I've never seen an MLA have to take the heat for cabinet ministers at a conference the way this member had to take it because the ministers wouldn't respond to the questions. I think, in fact, that he should be in the cabinet. He should at least be paid for the work he's doing. Anyway, just a little aside there, Mr. Speaker.

Okay. I could do a little more, I think, before the adjournment time. So, Mr. Speaker, let's go to another interesting report with respect to health care in this province, one that, by the way, was not on the government's list of reports and studies today, and that is the report by the Consumers' Association of Canada, Alberta branch, which did an incredible job of documenting what has happened with respect to cataract surgeries in this province and which needs to be put on the record in this Legislature, which I'm going to do.

I think it's important to look at what is happening across the province with respect to cataracts, because here we have in the bell jar in the province of Alberta a home-grown example of what happens when services are privatized. Yet this government ignores the report, doesn't talk about it, doesn't take the research and perhaps analyze it, perhaps answer for Albertans as to some of the things we could do. So let's just look at that study, just in case any of the members opposite haven't read their report. What the report says is something very, very disturbing.

First of all, it looks at the city of Calgary. The city of Calgary currently is doing 100 percent of its cataract surgeries in these clinics that are away from the general hospital site. One hundred percent, Mr. Speaker. Upgraded lenses in those facilities off the hospital site cost on average \$450 to \$750 and above that for an individual to pay. So when the Premier stands and holds up his little health care card and says, "You can take this and go to any facility in this province and get the health services you need," uh-uh, Mr. Speaker. If you want that upgraded lens in Calgary, you pay \$450 and up for it. But let's look at something else. Not only is it more expensive – that's what private health care is; it's more expensive, the thing that they deny in question period. It's more expensive. It's also less efficient. What's the measure of that? The waiting list. The waiting lists in Calgary are from 16 to 24 weeks according to the Consumers' Association of Canada. So here we have a home-grown example: longer waiting lists, more expensive.

Now, if you happen to be somebody from the city of Edmonton and you want to have a cataract done, in fact in Edmonton you'll find that 80 percent of the cataract surgeries are done in the general hospitals; only 20 percent are done in the private clinics. So let's examine the efficiency measurement, the wait lists. Well, guess what? The wait lists in Edmonton are from five to eight weeks compared to 16 to 24 weeks. Okay? What about the cost of the upgraded lens? The cost is \$250 in the Edmonton hospitals. It's available for \$250 in the Edmonton area. Well, isn't that an amazing thing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in deference to my good colleague from Lethbridge, let's go to Lethbridge and examine what's happening down in Lethbridge. Well, in good old Lethbridge – and maybe the member for Lethbridge-West would like to take a note of this too –

guess what? According to the Consumers' Association of Canada, 100 percent of cataract surgeries are done in the public hospital, and when you want the upgraded lenses, do we know how much they cost? I'll tell you how much they cost. They're provided in the public system. No charge. You take your health care card into Lethbridge, and you get the upgraded lens from the public system.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let's examine the efficiency measure, the wait list. Guess what the wait list is in Lethbridge. Four to seven weeks,

one-quarter of the wait list in Calgary, where they're privately delivered. Let's see this government take that study, analyze it, and do the job they need to do to find the evidence that it won't work.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I could go on, as you've probably guessed, and I will beg leave to adjourn debate and return this evening. Thank you.

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, February 22, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/02/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

head: **Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Ms Haley moved:

That an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate February 22: Mrs. MacBeth]

MRS. MacBETH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had just completed talking about the issue of cataract costs in Calgary with the private-sector model that is employed there and the fact that the wait lists there are three to four times that in the public sector and the costs are less. Those are important issues which are identified by the Consumers' Association of Canada, Alberta branch, and I think they are very good issues for this government to address as it talks about some of the reports that are available. Here, of course, is a homegrown example which needs to be examined, studied, and I was frankly surprised that the minister of health stood in his place today and didn't even acknowledge the study.

Moving from that, Mr. Speaker, onto another study which has come out using the Alberta example, and that is the one from the University of Alberta, Private Profit or Public Good: The Economics and Politics of the Privatization of Health Care in Alberta, written by Kevin Taft and Gillian Steward, an excellent review, an excellent case study of Alberta, and frankly a pretty excellent review of some of the literature. In fact, I know the government put out its list of eight studies today which have been questioned, all of them, in terms of their accuracy, in terms of their relevance. Certainly data from the '70s and '80s, while it may be helpful from a historical perspective, certainly doesn't help us as we look to 2000 and beyond and how we might build our health care system. I would simply recommend that the minister look at the bibliography if nothing else in the Private Profit or Public Good document and see the level and study of documents that are available on this issue of privatization.

Let me highlight just a couple. In a 1999 review *The New England Journal of Medicine* said: "For decades . . . no peer-reviewed study has found that for-profit hospitals are less expensive than" not-for-profit hospitals. Secondly, in 1997 from *Health Affairs* magazine, a very accepted journal of health economics, in North America at least, said: "Neither the historical data nor the limited current data suggest that for-profit hospitals can use the assets more efficiently than nonprofit hospitals." Thirdly, a 1986 study from the Institute of Medicine, American National Academy of Sciences, said:

Studies of hospitals provide no evidence to support the common belief that investor-owned organizations are less costly or more efficient than are not-for-profit organizations. With one exception all available studies that have controlled for many confounding factors . . . show the opposite to be true.

Very important information and studies, Mr. Speaker, which clearly point us in the direction of enhancing and sustaining our public health care system, not falling off the wagon and going onto the private health care system.

Mr. Speaker, just to close off this whole discussion on health care, I think it would be important to talk about the issues facing health care today. It was shocking to many of us who care a lot about mental health within our province to find that the words weren't even mentioned in this throne speech, a very, very big omission. We've seen in this province in the last week an alliance come together of mental health professionals, mental health caseworkers, community advocacy groups, in fact the largest coalition ever formed on the mental health front in Alberta, called Alliance Alberta, the Alliance for Mental Illness and Mental Health. This organization presented an excellent review and some major questions in terms of this government's directions when it comes to mental health.

I think it is very fitting to quote a physician, a psychiatrist, an acting president of the Medical Staff Association and Medical Advisory Committee of Alberta Hospital Edmonton, when he writes – and this was a letter to the editor, and one that I think is important to read into the record. Mr. Speaker, he says:

On behalf of 44 physicians at the Alberta Hospital Edmonton I must applaud the . . . coverage of the poorly thought-out use of taxpayers' money in the mental-health area.

He says:

I have worked with my patients in mental hospital "back wards" for most of my career and it is time that some money was spent in providing decent, humane, safe living conditions for severely ill patients. The expenditure of \$95 million in one location – the health minister's riding – is, however, obscene.

I go on.

This is another example of the poor management and judgment that has plagued what passes for mental-health reform in this province. Last year this board managed to generate a deficit of \$3.8 million as well.

It's about time the mental health system healed itself. This, the third board in five years, appears to be going the sorry way of its predecessors – failing to meet the real needs of the mentally ill in Alberta.

Agencies and health care staff on the front lines are becoming tired of covering for their mistakes, and families and patients are becoming tired of the constant fight for service.

The press coverage indicates Alberta Hospital Edmonton has also been allocated some money: \$55 million? If so, it's news to me.

Of course I only work here and am only a doctor. Our medical staff has recently formally indicated their lack of confidence in the board and Alberta Hospital administration because of issues such as this, so I am not surprised.

Mr. Speaker, an indictment, an indictment of mental health issues, a model that is going to return to an institutional model as opposed to building the community model in mental health which is so feverishly needed in this province.

If you look at the mental health issue, you can find a model for improving health care in this province, and that is to reinforce the community side with some institutional care absolutely but to make sure that we have the supports built into the community side, which is exactly the same issue which needs to be addressed on the acute care side for physical health as well. Let's get on with the job.

Mr. Speaker, let me go on to the issue of education. I mentioned at the outset that the people of the Edmonton-McClung constituency were very concerned, and usually top of mind was the issue of education. My constituency represents a lot of people who have kids in schools. In fact, we have a lot of schools in our constituency, as

I had mentioned, and if there's one issue that they talk about even more than health care, it's the issue of education.

Many of the ideas that were identified in the throne speech on basic education such as literacy, class size, reducing reliance on fund-raising by parents and students came in fact from this Official Opposition, and we are pleased that the government has at least acknowledged in their most recent throne speech the constructive recommendations that we have put forward. However, we are somewhat skeptical about whether the government's words will actually translate into good deeds in the area of basic education. The legacy of this government's actions in education over the past seven years is in fact an abdication of leadership, a promotion of privatization – again that theme – dismissing the concerns of parents and teachers and off-loading of costs onto parents through fund-raising.

So let's look at some of the results of this government's choices in education over the past few years. These are the targets, the goals that the government has identified. The percentage of parents who believe that their children have the knowledge and skills to get a job is 46 percent, Mr. Speaker. Less than half of our parents are confident that their children can get a job. If that's not disturbing, perhaps the government's target of 55 percent is even more disturbing. You know, if the goal of education is to build good citizens, which I think it is, part of that is to have those young people prepared to join the workforce, to advance their own education, to go beyond their capabilities, and to support them in that. The target is unacceptable, and government's missing the target is even more unacceptable.

Secondly, the number of parents who believe that their children are prepared to enter postsecondary education and training is 52 percent, just over half. The government's target is 75 percent. Mr. Speaker, that's a 23 percent difference between the target and the actual, an indictment of this government's performance.

8:10

Next, the rate of high school completion within six years of entering grade 9 is 70 percent. The government is setting a target of 75 percent, but in the seven years of this government's performance that measure has been in place, and the target of 75 percent has never, ever been reached. This government talks about Alberta being the leader in education in Canada, and that's just not good enough. We in the Official Opposition believe that a first priority of any provincial government has to be the improvement of public education, and their record is not acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans know that our class sizes are amongst the highest in the country, that classrooms with 30 children are not uncommon even in the early grades of K to 3, where the education level that is deemed to be the most appropriate is 17 kids per class. Our Official Opposition class survey found that of the total of 5,012 teachers in 245 communities who responded to our survey, only 19 percent of the kindergarten classes met or bettered the recommended target of 17 or fewer students. That's not good enough for our kids. This is simply not manageable, and with the integration of students with special education needs and the vast variances between children in terms of their background and life experiences, it just isn't good enough.

Mr. Speaker, obviously fund-raising and user-fee levels are too high. That's something the government has identified. However, we would like to see a major review done of the basic funding and the per pupil grants in this province, not just a review of fund-raising. Parents are fully aware of the kind of fund-raising that's going on, but what they want to see is the cause of that fund-raising, and a review of the basic grant per student is what needs to follow. This government missed it in its throne speech.

Mr. Speaker, we need a new vision. We need a new vision for basic education in a new century, and that's why we in the Official Opposition will be proposing the establishment of an Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education in our province. It hasn't been done since the late '60s, when the Social Credit actually put together a plan called the Worth report to look at the furtherance of education. We think it's a very important idea. We'll be bringing forward a motion, and we'll look forward to support from the government benches in terms of creating that commission.

This isn't a summit. This isn't the usual take a weekend off and go lock away with cabinet ministers and do a poll and do a focus group and do all those kinds of things. This is about involving professionals in education, educators, parents, superintendents, and Albertans in looking at the future of education and in looking at the overlie of how we will look at education into the future. We think it's a very excellent suggestion and one which we will look forward to hearing the government's response to.

I would be remiss if I forgot that area of education which seems to have been lost in the shuffle, the shuffle of the Ministry of Learning, and that is the whole issue of advanced education. Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of students that go to postsecondary education from the constituency of Edmonton-McClung, as there are from constituencies right across this province. From Fort McMurray to Taber, from Manning to Brooks, right across the province we have students in postsecondary education. But it's interesting to note that while the government did build the \$3 million academic scholarship program and increase student financial assistance levels, they are really rather a mere tinkering on the margins and do little to address the fundamental issues of the rising tuition load and high debt load that our students are carrying.

Between 1995-96 and 1998-99 the average student loan debt has increased from \$15,518 to \$17,360, an increase of 12 percent, Mr. Speaker. Tuition fee revenues as a percentage of funding for credit institutions at the postsecondary level have increased from 14.9 percent in '93-94 to 21.3 percent, a 50 percent increase. In other words, the load for the cost of postsecondary education is being shifted onto our students and away from the provincial government that used to fund it in a different way. The average tuition fee in Alberta is now over \$3,100 per student, one of the highest levels in Canada, unacceptable with a government that has a \$4 billion surplus. In constant '98 dollars government grants per full-time equivalent student have fallen from nearly \$2,500 in '92 to less than \$2,000 in '99. Meanwhile, tuitions and fees per student have increased from about \$1,800 per student in '92 to \$3,000 per student in '99.

We believe that it's time for this government to implement a tuition freeze policy on all postsecondary institutions rather than continuing to off-load more of the costs onto our students. If this government truly believed in education, Mr. Speaker, they'd take our suggestion.

Let me move on, then, to another group, another issue, and that is the whole issue of municipal governments. I think it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that in the throne speech there was a brief, brief reference to municipal governments and the repeat announcement of the infrastructure dollars that came in the springtime, and those were certainly welcome dollars, dollars that are needed within the municipal infrastructure area. However, again there's no plan, and what the throne speech did not mention was the need to find a new relationship between the province and the municipalities.

You know, as we become more global, as we are able to buy anything from financial services to a pair of new running shoes on the Internet, it's important to people that the communities in which they live are the communities where they relate with their families,

their neighbourhoods. Those are the areas where we need to look at a new relationship between the province and the municipalities.

You know, this government since the early '70s, when it first took office in this province, has always had the view that the municipalities were the children of the province. In fact, a former deputy Premier of that government said back in the mid-70s that the municipalities are the children of the provincial government. Well, you know what? That wasn't just a slip of the tongue. That in fact is the policy of this government, and it's very evident by the way they have treated municipalities for the last almost 30 years, as a matter of fact, since they've been in power.

Our municipalities have been subjected to a financial squeeze by the provincial government. Not only were the grants to municipalities reduced, in fact cut in half, but the province has also taken over access to a major portion of the local property tax base. Let me simply say that between '92 and '98 the general and specific purpose grants from the Alberta government to municipalities declined by 48 percent, the second-highest level of decline of any province in this country. Meanwhile, the provincial education property tax burden on residential properties in Alberta has increased by 13 percent, or over \$87 million, between '95 and '99. In case they missed it, Mr. Speaker, that's a tax increase. That means that property tax payers are paying more of the provincial education tax. They're gouging property taxpayers. So let's just make sure that the truth is out there.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General of Alberta made the following comments on the issue of infrastructure planning:

I believe the quality of the government's capital planning initiative is critical to managing these expenditures in a way that establishes an equilibrium between legitimate program requirements and funding provided. Proper planning will make the difference between a reactive mode . . .

which I think we can argue this province is in,

. . . which merely distributes allocated funds, and a predictive mode, which anticipates and justifies funding required.

What we believe is that we need a plan. We need to look at the role of municipalities, which has increased over the last decade, a role which now sees them involved in a major way in housing issues, issues for the homeless, off-loading of the property tax base, off-loading of the load on the welfare side. All of that off-loading has to be quantified. We have to look at a new relationship with our municipalities, and that's why we'll be bringing forward a bill in this session which uses, as an example, a sharing of the revenue between the provinces and the municipal governments.

It's not the only model that could be used, Mr. Speaker, but it is an option. At least it will get the discussion going. Instead of treating our municipalities like children, we will respect and regard the maturing of those municipalities and have a corresponding relationship with the provincial government.

MRS. NELSON: Corporate pooling. Right back to the old way.

8:20

MRS. MacBETH: We can have a great discussion on corporate pooling actually and the way these guys muffed it, but we'll just go on. It's resulted in a tax increase, pure and simple.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I would like to give colleagues on the other side of the House some opportunity to speak to this Speech from the Throne. Let me close by saying that we in the Official Opposition are going to be fighting for Alberta's working families, the people who are going to be affected by a flat tax, which of course shifts the burden of taxation onto that middle-income group. We're going to be fighting for those small businesses, which are a major, major part of the economic engine within our province, not even mentioned in this government's throne speech. We're going to be fighting for

those people who believe in and need health care and public health care and always will. Finally, we're going to be fighting for those parents who worry whether or not their kids are going to be able to afford postsecondary education because tuition and debt load just keep going up.

Mr. Speaker, we believe in supporting Alberta's working families. We believe that there are major policy decisions that are benefiting the well-to-do in this province and which are having an impact on many, many people in Alberta. We look forward to the debate on this Speech from the Throne. We look forward to the budget. We look forward to reviewing the legislative program of this government.

Thank you very much.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. It is an honour to rise this evening in response to the Speech from the Throne marking the commencement of the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature of Alberta. At the outset, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to tell the constituents of St. Albert how proud and honoured I am to represent them in this Assembly. I wish to thank them once again for their confidence and their endorsement, and in this new millennium I renew my commitment to do my best on their behalf.

I would also like to congratulate personally my dear friend and outstanding constituent the Hon. Lois Hole on her recent appointment as Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. I am very pleased to be able to say that the first Lieutenant Governor of this province for the 21st century is from St. Albert.

As I reflect on the Speech from the Throne, it occurs to me that one of the prevailing themes is the importance of innovation. Throughout the speech I heard a willingness on the part of this government to adjust and respond to the changes facing us in the 21st century. I see a bold new plan for the future of Alberta, a plan that recognizes that a new century holds new challenges and requires new ideas to meet those challenges.

Albertans have always been a confident, self-reliant, adaptable people. These characteristics and values have shaped this government, its principles, and now its plans for the coming century. We have recognized that the status quo is not an option, and I believe that we are a government that is willing to make effective changes that will benefit this province.

The necessity of being a society that is willing to innovate and adapt echoes throughout the throne speech. In agriculture, for example, we have recognized that these are challenging times, and we will not stand by without doing everything possible to ensure the long-term sustainability of this strong and diversifying industry. Our plan to address and respond to the inevitable changes facing the family farm will culminate in Ag Summit 2000 in the month of June.

With respect to Albertans' jobs in the 21st century we know that it's inevitable that the workplace and indeed the workers must change and evolve if we are to remain competitive in the increasingly global economy. To that end we have an updated economic strategy for our province. I was especially pleased to hear that we will focus on maximizing the human talent and ingenuity of all Albertans. I strongly believe that Albertans, with their intelligence, respect for each other and the planet, their resourcefulness and dedication, are our economy's most valuable resource.

This government has also recognized that we have the chance to create a legacy of excellence in the areas of information and communication technology and leading-edge research. Initiatives such as connecting communities across Alberta with high-speed Internet access and programs like the Alberta foundation for science

and engineering research ensure that we as a province are in a position to take the lead in an area that will be a significant part of every Albertan's future. We must be able to respond effectively to changing market demands and industry needs, and this government is clearly willing to be flexible and adapt to challenges in this new century.

Mr. Speaker, I am very excited about the creation of the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research. This is an historic development that will commit \$500 million to provide stable, long-term funding for research and development. We will be able to attract investment to our province and top researchers to our universities. Providing our young Albertan students with the chance to train with the best minds while using the best technology is the greatest gift we can give them and give our province's future.

If provincial finances permit, the endowment fund could reach \$1 billion by our province's centennial in 2005. The fund is an investment in Alberta's strong science and engineering base at our universities and in the industrial sector. It is a vital part of the province's strategy to build our knowledge-based economy. This is a milestone. It's a testament to the fiscal accomplishments that this government has made during its mandate and is yet another example of the prosperity we enjoy as Albertans. It's also a recognition of how important research and innovation are to the future of this province.

Mr. Speaker, this government has also created the informatics circle of research excellence program, that provides grants of up to \$1 million to fund researchers in information and communications technology at Alberta universities. This program aims both to attract other international talent and to retain Alberta's best. The Alberta science and research fund awarded Alberta universities and research institutions \$22.3 million in 1999-2000. The fund will have an immediate impact on researchers and students, and they are long-term benefits for Albertans that are great causes for excitement. We will be a force to be reckoned with in the 21st century.

Alberta is already well positioned and Albertans are already working in the IT, or the information technology, world. This government is committed to creating an environment that supports and nurtures world-class research. Alberta has the best fibre optics and wireless communication network in Canada. We have the highest concentration of personal computers per capita in Canada. Alberta is a world-class centre for wireless research and development and production and is home to world-class research institutes including TRILabs and the Alberta Research Council.

Stable funding for research and development is critical for sustaining our prosperity in the new millennium. The global economy is increasingly knowledge based. It is very farsighted of this government to invest now in what will surely be the future of Alberta. This is a long-term investment in Alberta's future, in all of our futures.

Another example of our government's willingness to innovate and forge ahead as a leader in Canada is the reform of our provincial tax system. Of course, low taxes and a competitive regime are nothing new to this province, but the new 11 percent provincial income tax represents an unprecedented innovation for Canada. We will not be satisfied with the status quo. We will continue to strive to improve, and we will not be complacent.

Under this new tax system 132,000 Albertans will be removed from the provincial tax roll. There will be a significant increase in personal exemptions, and there will be equal spousal exemptions. Something I've always felt: unequal exemptions to be very unfair.

8:30

Our government has also had the largesse of interpretation stemming from the Eurig decision to request a full review of the

government's direct fees and charges. The Speech from the Throne indicated that Albertans will benefit from this review.

In the area of education the Speech from the Throne tells us that we must have "a collaborative, flexible, and responsive learning system" that encourages continuous lifelong learning. We are constantly working to make Alberta's education system a leader in Canada, and we are constantly alert to the potential of each and every student in Alberta. We are prepared to tackle issues such as class size, literacy for all ages, fund-raising, second-language programs, and access to technology in our schools.

As a former educator, this government's education policies are particularly important to me. They are also very important to my constituents. I'm proud to say that St. Albert has a very well-educated population. Fifty four percent of our citizens have some form of postsecondary education, and half of those have attended university. Alberta as a whole is highly educated, with over 42 percent holding postsecondary degrees, diplomas, or certificates. A well-educated population is vital to our future success, and this government is committed to ensuring that we have the best education possible.

Another area of government responsibility that is of particular importance to my constituents is health. The Speech from the Throne illustrated this government's willingness to implement strategic initiatives in health and wellness. We have created a six-point plan to keep our health care sustainable, accessible, and effective in the face of mounting pressures. Alberta is willing to play a leadership role across Canada in working to strengthen the public health care system. Legislation will be introduced that will not only reaffirm and put our commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act into provincial law, but it will also enable health authorities to pursue new, innovative ways of delivering publicly funded health services.

As we begin the 21st century, the ability to adjust to new demands on our existing system is one of the most important attributes of this government. Throughout the Speech from the Throne it was made quite clear that this government is willing and able to make the changes necessary to ensure long-term sustainability of everything from agriculture to health care.

As the Member of the Legislative Assembly for St. Albert, I would like to conclude by once again congratulating the Hon. Lois Hole on her appointment as Alberta's Lieutenant Governor and wish her much strength and success as well as peace and joy in her role, from all in her community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne. When I was elected in March 1997, I identified four priorities that would improve the lives of people living in Edmonton-Norwood, and I'd like to review these four priorities and issues in the context of this throne speech.

First of all, I know that school funding, Mr. Speaker, is an issue of importance for anyone living or teaching in my community. The Conservative government has refused to admit that class size was linked to student achievement. We Liberals made the case based on well-founded research. It seems now that the government at last is willing to change this picture for elementary schools. They've decided finally that the Liberals, educators, and parents were right: there just might be a link. But some things have not changed; any increase in school funding has strings attached. This is an issue, I might add, where school needs differ.

Let's talk about speech therapy. This issue has been brought up to me in my constituency. Some of my schools desperately need a

speech therapist. Others don't. They have other needs they should be addressing, but because of the strings attached to the funding, that won't happen, Mr. Speaker. Whatever happened to board autonomy? We have democratically elected school boards, but they have no control over expenditures. They don't even have control over appointing their own superintendent.

Let's address another issue in education. Funding for public schools has only increased by about 6.5 percent overall from '94-95, but, Mr. Speaker, increases for private schools stand about 61.5 percent.

Let's revisit the democratically elected school boards. When I first began my career in the Legislature, I was only sure of one thing: I was elected by the constituents of Edmonton-Norwood to represent them in this Legislature. When public school trustees are elected, their constituents expect the trustee will be able to do the same. Not so. What we saw was a government who had the gall to fire a democratically elected school board in Calgary. Why, Mr. Speaker? I suspect it was because they didn't buy this government's mantra about education. I know the constituents of Edmonton-Norwood disapprove of this heavy-handed, antidemocratic muscle flexing by Mr. Klein and his truth squad.

Mr. Speaker, I know many of my constituents whose level of assistance is tied to the safety and security of their family. This should be an important issue for all of us, not just for me, not just for Alberta Liberals, but for everybody. I believe that cuts to welfare are one of the single most responsible causes for the increase in child welfare files. A 40 percent increase has occurred in these files while I have been in office. The government consistently denied and denies that their cuts are tied to the number of child welfare cases, but data from organizations such as the Edmonton Social Planning Council show otherwise. We understand now that the government has sheepishly retreated on this issue and has decided to, well, study it. This, friends, is not the Alberta advantage.

Another issue I want to talk about and that I brought up in 1997 was law enforcement. This is a serious concern for people who live in my neighbourhood. Policing across this province is woefully underfunded. The executive of the Edmonton Police Service and their counterparts in other cities are forever trying to balance the budget. The RCMP are running a deficit, and this forces them to pick and choose what crimes are more important than others to investigate. The provincial government has literally stolen, Mr. Speaker, stolen \$33 million from police agencies in Alberta since 1993. Small communities like Fairview that were unlucky enough to have a murder occur in their own backyard can't even afford to conduct a proper investigation. This is from a government that has a surplus of about \$3 billion. Law and order clearly is not a priority for this government. I would go so far as to state that Mr. Klein and his Conservatives are soft on crime.

Finally, health care. This is a big priority not just for the residents of Edmonton-Norwood but for all Albertans. I stated on April 21, 1997, that the community health model I see this government introducing calls forth images of a system that creeps noticeably closer to a private health care system. Today we as citizens of Alberta have the biggest battle in front of us. The Conservative government has said yes to private hospitals. In fact, this government doesn't care what Albertans want. You see, Mr. Speaker, it was by design that the Premier ensured that his friend and past Provincial Treasurer, Jim Dinning, was appointed as the chair of the Calgary health authority and that his friend and past adviser, Rod Love, was appointed to oversee communications with the Calgary health authority and that his friend and past deputy minister of the Premier's office, Jack Davis, was hired as CEO of the Calgary health authority.

The Wong brothers, otherwise known as a private corporation –

who incidently, Mr. Speaker, are snuggled up with the Minister of Gaming in an online constituency picture. They're all kind of cozy there. They've purchased the Holy Cross hospital, and they purchased it at a fire sale price: \$4.5 million. This was after this government renovated this with the use of taxpayers' money, and that cost over \$30 million.

8:40

Now, why is all this such a big deal? Simple. These friends of Ralph Klein support private hospitals. Over 70 percent of Albertans stated that they did not have enough information to decide whether or not they could support private hospitals, but do you think Mr. Klein and his band of truth squad participants listened or care? No, and we'd all be fooling ourselves if we thought they did. See, Mr. Klein wants to tear apart the single most valued social program in this country in the same way Mr. Bouchard wants to tear apart Canada. We must ask ourselves why. Why would the Premier of the richest province in this country want to do this? Why would he want to endorse private hospitals? Who asked for private hospitals? Well, it wasn't the seniors, it wasn't the sick, it wasn't health care workers, and it wasn't the constituents of Edmonton-Norwood, nor was it the citizens of Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

This then begs the question of who will benefit. Well, it's not me, and it's not the residents of Edmonton-Norwood. It will be the private insurance companies, a few elite doctors, and quite likely a few friends of the Premier. The Premier is trying to pick a fight with Ottawa over this issue. This is the same Premier and government that fired nurses, closed hospitals, and blew up buildings, and now he wants to blame the federal government. This privatization concept is a home-grown issue created by Premier Klein. The Premier is on his own, however. He's like the groom left at the altar. No other Premier in this nation is prepared to walk down the aisle holding his hand.

The private hospital fight is not just about whether the Premier is breaking the law or not. It's not just about whether a titanium hip is better than a stainless steel hip. It's about what's good for all Albertans and what citizens of Alberta want, and they don't want private hospital facilities, Mr. Speaker.

The government's truth squad or propaganda machine will not be able to restore this government's vast credibility gaps with Albertans on public health care or education. I find it interesting, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about – and the Premier stated that he's got a bold new plan for a new century, yet he uses language that should never be used in this day and age. Let's not forget about the Canadians who fought for democracy in this country when language like "truth squads" was commonplace in Nazi Germany. Let's not forget about that.

As the MLA for Edmonton-Norwood I have promised my constituents to be their voice in the Legislature, and what they have asked me to ask the Premier is: what part of no, Mr. Premier, don't you understand?

Thank you.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to be able to speak in this House today in support of the Speech from the Throne, to represent the views and priorities of my constituents. Along with the other members of the Legislature I would like to pay tribute to the Lieutenant Governor for her articulate delivery of the throne speech which opened the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the constituency I serve, Calgary-Fort, is a wonderful, diverse area of Calgary both in geography and demographics.

It is home to proud Calgarians of many different ages, ethnic ancestries, religions, and economic backgrounds. Indeed, I think Calgary-Fort is a true reflection of the diversity, spirit, and energy that exists in this province. The people of Calgary-Fort represent the high standards and sensible choices that are typical of the people of Alberta. We live in the best province in Canada and are determined that it should remain the best in the future.

There are many families in my constituency in which husband and wife are working hard in the workforce and others in which one parent has chosen to stay at home to raise the children. These families are hardworking and hold high standards and expectations for themselves, their children, and the officials they elect to represent them well. They demand government which listens to them and does not erect unnecessary barriers to individual pursuit and choices.

Mr. Speaker, I would like at the outset to express my full support for the themes and principles espoused in the Speech from the Throne. It is important that we work to strike the right balance. This emphasis on balance shows a responsible approach on the part of our government to properly manage and support all of our resources: economic, natural, and human. In planning for the next year and further into the future, we must ensure that we do not lose sight of either our fiscal responsibilities or the importance of Alberta's quality of life. I believe this government has kept both these fundamentals in mind by emphasizing careful reinvestment alongside lower taxes as we maintain a balanced budget.

In my remaining time I would like to touch on those areas discussed in the throne speech which have been of the greatest importance for my constituents: education, health care, services to seniors, and jobs and the economy. The throne speech emphasized the importance of our responsibility as a society to our children. Part of this fundamental goal is a continuing focus on providing the best education possible for our children and youth. The future of this province depends on having a well-trained and educated workforce. We must also allow our current workforce to adapt and learn throughout their careers. In this ever changing economy lifelong learning is a necessity, not a luxury.

Health care is the number one issue of importance to all Albertans. We must ensure an in-depth debate and discussion on the recent initiatives for surgical services. Albertans need to understand why this legislation is needed and that this government is dedicated to the principles of the Canada Health Act and the maintenance of a single tier, publicly paid health system that is accessible to all Albertans.

We need innovative approaches in delivering public services. The private sector can and does play an important role in complementing our publicly operated system. However, we have to make sure that any facility set up in Alberta is in the best interests of Albertans. I urge the government to ensure that any private surgical facility be closely monitored and that any contract with public health authorities be kept in line with the rate of return from the low-risk investment.

I believe one of the key functions of government is to get the most services out of the tax dollar. What I mean is effectiveness and efficiency. To me, Mr. Speaker, profit is a good thing. It is the energy that drives our social locomotive. What's bad is greed, the excessive monopoly profit enjoyed by individuals or professional groups at the expense of the general public.

On services to seniors, with the aging population and new medical advances that are creating more demands, we must prepare for the future and embrace new ideas. Our seniors are on fixed incomes, and with the cost of living rising, we need to look into the seniors benefits programs. I'm encouraged that the government initiative in this area has been proclaimed.

Alberta's ability to maintain quality education, health care, and other services depends on a strong, diversified, and growing

economy. This is a practical reality as we look at the world. It is clear that Canada is moving away from its traditional resource and manufacturing economy, and we must embrace a new future, a future where the scarce resources are human talent and other intangibles such as entrepreneurialism and intellectual capital. I'm glad to see that this government is embracing this future.

A well-educated workforce will go a long way to helping to maintain Alberta's standard of living, but our workforce must be welcomed and embraced at home and not be slowly drained away to better opportunities in other locales. The entrepreneurial spirit that built this province must be maintained in this province for all Alberta to benefit.

The foundation for booming economic development is a strong physical infrastructure as well as a strong human resource. My constituency is a part of the fast-growing city of Calgary. There is a real need for infrastructure development to meet the growth of Calgary. In the Calgary-Fort constituency I can say that we have a beautiful park and river valley. We also have an expansive industrial park. Industrial development and the natural environment stay side by side in my constituency. Along with economic development, I'm encouraged with the government's commitment to preserving and protecting our natural environment beyond our generation.

Mr. Speaker, those are the thoughts and views representing my constituents. I will continue to represent my constituents' views and opinions in the coming months in our legislative session. I believe that the government has set the course leading Alberta into a bright future. Our children, our parents will have the best place to live, called Alberta.

Thank you.

8:50

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to respond to the Speech from the Throne. When I was thinking about what I would say tonight – you know, it was in 1993 that I first got to respond to the Speech from the Throne, and I was nervous and thoughtful about some of the things that I hoped for Alberta. Some of those changes have happened, and some have not. So I intend to talk a bit about that tonight.

I would like to start, as well, by praising our new Lieutenant Governor. You know, such a woman with such a charitable heart, she must be a Liberal. Oh, some people don't like that, but it's the truth. We all, I think, respect our Lieutenant Governor for what she has given to our province and to our communities, and I think we all share that pride that she will be a wonderful Lieutenant Governor for our province.

The good people of my riding – St. Albert, Sturgeon, and Spruce Grove – are great people, and they feel free to call me on all kinds of issues. It was interesting that Friday in my office the phone never stopped ringing. All the concerns, with the exception of probably three phone calls, were about health care, a real concern that it's going to be privatized and that it will cost people money out of pocket aside from their tax dollars, aside from their extra health fees. This is going to be very expensive for people. A lot of calls from seniors. They said, "You know, my cataracts didn't bother me when I was 45, but I'm 70 now. My hips didn't bother me back then either, but they do now." So if you tie seniors and health care together, you've got quite an issue there. They're very, very concerned about the privatization that this government is going on.

It says: a bold, new step. Well, Franklin's expedition was bold too, and he got stranded and died in northern Canada. So we'd better watch how bold we get in our exploration of private health

care, because that may well be the Achilles' heel that brings down this government. Certainly the way it's going, it will be. [interjection] "Aha," says someone. Are you even running again? Well, you're too afraid to run.

Mr. Speaker, I was also thinking about the first speech to the throne. At the time Laurence Decore was the leader of the Liberal Party, and he had a great vision for this province. Part of it was a strong public education system, and this government has undermined a strong public education. When I look at the class sizes around this province, they're far too large.

It was interesting. I was in a grade 1 classroom the other day, and I gained once again an amazing respect for certainly teachers of grade 1 students. When I thought of how they bring those little people to such a level in such a short time, it's amazing the work they do. It's amazing. If you have 16 children in that class or if you have 28, you get half as far with 28 as you do with 16. I'm looking forward to seeing what the budget's going to say about that and how it's going to address that, because that has been one of our platforms for a long time, that we have to reduce the class size in this province. Hopefully, they'll have listened.

You know, Laurence Decore also had a vision of parliamentary reform. Regretfully, that is not even mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. Does that happen when a government's been in for so long, that they don't think they need to have parliamentary reform? Does that happen? I remember one of the things that Laurence said: you know, when we're government . . . And it was a pity that he didn't make government. But he said: when we're government, we will accept ideas from the opposition; they have good bills and good ideas too. That's never happened in here. Parliamentary reform, free votes: I haven't seen it on that side of the House. [interjections] Woke them up. You know, Mr. Speaker, we have a long way to go when it comes to parliamentary reform.

One of the things I wanted to talk about is equity. One has to do with health care, and the other has to do with education. When you talk about equity in health care, it is not equitable across this province. Maybe that's the reality of living outside of Edmonton and Calgary, but I'm very concerned about the lack of equity in this province. I know of an example of a young man who was flown in from Fort McMurray to Edmonton for health care needs. As it ended up, he needed to be on IV therapy for six weeks, but he wasn't allowed to take the portable IV from the capital health authority up to Fort McMurray. Why not? Wonderful question. Because – you know what? – that piece of equipment would be crossing that boundary. That's why. [interjection] If you want me to document it for you, Member for St. Albert, I'll gladly give it to you.

Scott MacGregor is his name. He's a teacher in Fort McMurray, and he is my nephew. That's why I know that story. They didn't have one for him in Fort McMurray because somebody else was using it, somebody who probably needed it more than Scott. That's the reality of lack of equity across health boundaries.

You know, it's interesting. We talk about funding and fund-raising for education. Are we now going to ask parents to fund-raise for the DARE program? In St. Albert and Spruce Grove they are talking about not having the DARE program because there isn't enough funding. Now, we talk about prevention. We talk about police enforcement. We talk about jails. Here's a program that is educational and preventive. And what have we done? Underfunded it, and it's going to die. One of the best preventive programs that I've ever seen, that works wonderfully in our schools. We have policemen across the province giving this program. The students buy into it. I think every person in here has gone to a DARE grad and has praised the program and the kids, and here we sit, and there's no money for it. We are losing it in parts of St. Albert and parts of Spruce Grove and all around the province. So I'm very

disappointed in that, and I'm hoping that can be addressed.

A couple of other things I just wanted to mention as I was going through the Speech from the Throne. I mentioned seniors. They're very worried. I think this cash benefit that has been talked about may work out to 10 bucks extra a month for them. Well, I'm sure they'll be grateful for 10 bucks more, but I don't know if that will give them a level of security.

9:00

Deregulation was mentioned in here, and you know that's going to be an interesting one, because we've once again put the cart before the horse here. We don't know if this is going to work, and we don't know if it's going to cost you and I more. This all got deregulated and changed without knowing that. Is there no way of doing that homework, or do we just boldly go without any homework? That seems to be the reality of that.

I see the infrastructure dollars, and of course I'm always supportive of that. Of course, a third of highway 794 is done in my riding. There are two-thirds more to go, which I'm sure will be part of the big plan. That's exciting for me.

Maybe I missed it – I don't know – but you know what? I don't think I saw the word "integrity" in here. Maybe that's because that's what's lacking right now in the way this province is governed. I don't see integrity in health care. I don't. If we had integrity in health care, there wouldn't be issues about boundaries. If we had integrity in education, there wouldn't be issues of fund-raising for essentials like books. [interjections] People are upset with the truth. Well, that's too bad. Maybe they'll have to send a truth squad out to Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to check it out. You know what else? I found the truth squad comment very offensive too, and so did people in my riding. No wonder they couldn't put integrity in this speech, because it didn't apply to this government.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know if I've hit on everything I really wanted to tonight, but I think there are big concerns about health care and education.

The other thing is the hidden dollars in health care. You know, we talked about Bovar, MagCan, NovAtel, all those boondoggles this government got us into debt over, and here we go. In a couple of years we're going to discover what contracts were given out and what money we lost and that was mismanaged by private companies we subsidized with taxpayer dollars to provide health care. We can't get that information. It should bother the minister of energy that that information about where our tax dollars are going is not available. Maybe he knows about it. Maybe he knows, but certainly the general public doesn't, and that's one of the things they deserve to know. It's their money. I want to know where my tax dollars are being spent, and I think we deserve to know that with these health contracts.

DR. WEST: That's what we're asking the federal Liberals.

MRS. SOETAERT: Absolutely, absolutely. I was tempted to compare that same situation with the federal government to our health care contracts. The same analogy: can't get the information as to where and who they're giving our money to. So you know what? The same analogy. Thank you for giving me that comparison.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak. [interjections] They're comparing some of the ministers across the way to the Jane Stewarts of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, seriously, I have never had so many phone calls lately about health care concerns. Honestly, when I'm in schools, I hear lots of education concerns from parents but never such a cross-section of people concerned about what is happening in health care,

what those private contracts are doing, and what is implied by truth squads going around the province. That's terribly, terribly offensive, and I would hope that we can get some truthful answers in this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to rise today to respond to the throne speech. On behalf of my Wainwright constituents, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our new Lieutenant Governor and wish her all the best in her new post. The Hon. Lois Hole brings warmth and friendliness along with her great knowledge of our country to this historic position, and Albertans will be well served by her talents and her dedication.

Mr. Speaker, I have listened, I believe, to 18 throne speeches. Each speech has laid out a plan, and for the most part those plans have been followed. When I look back at those plans and the direction that our Progressive Conservative government has taken us, then I feel very proud and honoured to be part of it. Each year we have made huge improvements. Today we have a beautiful province that offers one of the highest if not the highest standard of living in the world, and that is for us, for our kids, and for our grandkids. That was the direct result of 29 years of very strong leadership and planning by our Conservative government. There is not one province in Canada that can match that success. So I think we should all remember that Alberta is the envy of many countries of the world, maybe all of them.

As the MLA for Wainwright, I am privileged to represent the views and the concerns of my constituents in this Assembly. My constituents have told me that our government is on the right path of balancing economic and social issues and continuing to set the standard for knowledge, quality, and excellence in Canada.

Coming from a mainly rural constituency, I feel that it is my job to represent the views of many families involved in farming and agriculture. As we strive to become leaders in the emerging information and knowledge-based global economy, we must remember that agriculture has been for a hundred years and still is the foundation of this province. I liked the government's commitment to agriculture in the throne speech. The agriculture summit is very positive.

In our fast-changing world we must continually change with new ideas. Our new technology and computerization are really changing the way that agriculture is doing business. The biggest change that computers and the Internet have given us is going to be in marketing, and I dearly hope it will open up the marketplace, allow more small businesses and mid-size businesses to compete against large companies and monopolies. Many have heard me say before that marketing is the very weak link in the production chain of agriculture.

We continually improve our genetics with new seed through research and development, at a big cost I might add. I know that sometimes today you can pay \$6 or \$7 for one pound of canola seed. For those of you that aren't farmers, you've got to have at least five, usually six or seven pounds per acre in order to put your seed in. We have new and better farming equipment and new and better practices, and certainly the machines and the new equipment are also very, very costly.

We also are very hopeful that our transportation and delivery system is improving, and it also is very costly. I think everyone notices that the elevators are disappearing around the country. Almost all of them will be gone in another year or two. Yes, we're replacing them with some throughput fast-flow loading systems, but most of the storage cost is back on the farmers, and that is a very

substantial cost as well. So, then, what does happen to us? When we go to market our grain, we get less now than we got 40 years ago with all these costs. We have to have more competition in the marketplace to make it work properly. We don't have an aggressive enough marketplace anymore. Big business markets our mainstream products, and they do it now really without the fear of competition. Certainly you can say that about the grain and about the Wheat Board.

I was talking to a farmer the other day that had started out with two B train loads of grain to an elevator which was about 75 miles away. He sold \$10,000 worth of grain, and by the time he got it from his throughput elevator out to the coast and loaded onto the boat, his cost was \$2,950. It was a \$10,000 value in the grain, so about a third or close to a third of it now goes for the cost of moving the grain.

9:10

One other thing that I see happening that I would like to see our government move into is with the total integration of some of these major companies now that are working with – I use meat for an example, where they've got hog farms. In the U.S. they've got some hog farms that are as big as all the production here in Alberta. They slaughter them and market them and do it all and control the price that way. I think we have to do something in this country to offset that, because it really is ripping apart our once free-flowing competitive system.

I think you can look at machine dealerships, the chemical and seed companies, for instance, with the monopolies that they have. They have those monopolies simply because we as governments – and I don't say that it's we as the Alberta government – give them patent protection and different protection through legislation that allows them to do this. I really believe that our government in the future is going to have to study this issue a lot. I know they're doing a lot of work with it now in the U.S., and I think we need to do that here. I hope the ag summit that is mentioned in the throne speech will bring out some of these issues.

We must get small business back into marketing, and we've got to find the niche markets so that we can move into the new things that are happening all the time. We're very slow at getting into that. I have to say that the [inaudible] harvesting is one of those markets that we need to get into. I'm sure our government will be looking at some of those types of marketing strategies for us.

The Speech from the Throne makes several references to the need for innovation, and I believe this government and this province are committed to making changes when needed. As Albertans we pride ourselves on the fact that we are not afraid of change. We've always been the most self-reliant yet forward-thinking province in Canada. Mr. Speaker, I was happy to see that in the new century we have not forgotten this. We are about to undertake a bold new tax strategy that will truly give the province the economic environment primed for prosperity. The new 11 percent single-rate income tax will be the envy of the country and maybe even the world when we get finished with that. It may be a little bit too early yet to tell, but I think that might help solve some of the problems I was talking about before.

As well, we are investing heavily in the area of research and high-tech. Initiatives like the heritage foundation for science and engineering research will ensure that Alberta remains one of the most information and knowledge based provinces in the country. This will also present us with the chance to leave a lasting legacy for our children who will be tomorrow's scientists and doctors.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention health care for just a minute. It does relate to not being afraid of change. I want to say to the many people that want to fear monger and talk about health care in such a negative way that every one of us in this House, including our

opposition, dearly cherish our health care system. There isn't anyone in here that is trying to hurt it and upset it. All of us know that we're going to get old and we're going to use this system ourselves, so I think we need to work together on this health care and make it work for the betterment of all our people in this province.

With education I'm glad to hear that the throne speech is still keying in heavily on education. I know that in the Wainwright constituency we are doing some great, innovative things in education today, and I'm sure that you are in all the other areas as well. I'm very proud of some of our school divisions there who have upgraded our computer systems. We have a 5 to 1 ratio now and some of the latest technology. It's wonderful to go into those rooms and see how the students can adjust to that and to go into the shop classes, the industrial arts classes, and watch them use some of their equipment that is all computerized, whether it be sewing machines or routers or any kind of carpentry equipment that's computerized. It's just absolutely amazing, and we are going to be turning out some very, very excellent specialists in the near future.

I wanted to mention one other thing that this government believes strongly in, and that is our seniors. I know that there has been a shortage of long-term care beds. We've had a big influx of seniors from other provinces. We have a lot of people that are reaching that age, and we're keeping people alive a lot longer. We can be proud of those figures when you compare them to any other country in the world.

I would like to mention that our seniors in the Daysland community are putting in a beautiful new aging-in-place complex. People can buy their units. They can rent the units. Part of it is going to be assisted living, and it is going to be community owned and operated. They've got it more than half built already, and we are very proud of what they're doing there. They're going to keep their seniors in the community, where they would like to be.

The other thing that I wanted to mention – and the throne speech does mention this – is challenges facing children. To do this, our government has created many excellent programs aimed at improving children's health, education, and safety. I would like to comment that along with the great programs what our children really need are strong, strong families. It seems that we are seeing a rise in violence among young people and in many cases a lack of responsibility in these children. Mr. Speaker, accountability for your actions starts with the family. Parents need to be willing to take the responsibility of being a parent and instill in their children this basic concept.

9:20

I had the opportunity to be on the lifelong learning committee that the minister appointed us to and went to Fort McMurray. One of the things that came out loud and clear was that there was a big need to have some parenting courses to help parents advise kids and bring kids up so they are able to cope with the way things are today. With that comes respect and responsibility, and we as government can help in a big way if we can create the proper programs and give them the proper tools to work with.

To end, I would like to say that our government was elected for the past 29 years because we were not afraid to act against the status quo when the status quo wasn't working, and I'm happy we are embracing the change that is needed to ensure the long-term prosperity of Alberta. This throne speech and plan is the right one. This plan creates the blueprint for a century of unlimited success.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure this evening to get up and respond to the Speech from the Throne. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: I recognized the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

MRS. NELSON: He adjourned debate before the other speaker.

THE SPEAKER: No, he did not. He said thank you and sat down.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's quite an opportunity to review the things that were said in the context of the intention of the next year, the next millennium for Alberta, and it was quite appropriate, I think, that the government kind of couched this year's Speech from the Throne in the format and the theme that was presented in Alberta's original Speech from the Throne in March of 1906, when they talked about the prosperity and the bountiful resources of the province that we live in.

Mr. Speaker, we see that as we look across the province and look at the coming hundred years of our province. The homesteaders, the rural pioneers that established and moved in and settled most of rural Alberta, the wildcatters and roughnecks that went out and brought into the province our oil industry and our gas industry have really created that kind of province, along with all the entrepreneurs that started the businesses that are providing us with the support services to provide the opportunity for these agriculture- and mineral-based industries to really expand.

The focus that the Speech from the Throne takes is to look at: where do we go in the next hundred years, the next millennium? The idea is that the government is recognizing the fact that transition is accelerating. Change is becoming a greater part of what we have to deal with on a day-to-day basis, and they're providing some really good focus in this Speech from the Throne in the context of the need we have as a province to move into a knowledge-based, technologically driven economy away from the resource economies, and we have to look at that in the context of some of the programs that were suggested in terms of the initiatives the government is going to undertake.

On that basis, Mr. Speaker, I really wanted to compliment the government on the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research. This is a real opportunity for our province over the next probably 10 or 15 or 20 years to achieve the status in the research area in science and engineering that the heritage medical research endowment fund has created and provided for us. Our medical research facilities in Calgary and Edmonton now are world renowned, providing some very, very exciting results in terms of new treatments and diagnostic procedures for medical needs and support for the medical community. So if we look at the opportunities now that we'll have with this science and engineering research endowment, what we'll have is a future that we can look to, you know, probably in 10, 15, 20 years, as I said.

I hope that no Albertan expects to see great things from this in the next two or three years, Mr. Speaker. These kinds of endowments and to develop that critical mass of research is a time-consuming, ongoing process, and we have to start thinking about this as being something that's going to be 10, 15, or 20 years down the road, when we'll achieve the worldwide reputation that we have in the areas of agriculture research and medical research. So that's the comment and the kind of focus I wanted to take on the transition that's implied in this Speech from the Throne.

The other issues that we want to deal with are more in the area of: how are we going to deal with the people part of it and how are we going to take Albertans and build them into that plan? As we look

at it, I see that the government is committing now to provide more dollars in support of students, that what they'll be doing is trying to make sure students have some additional support with scholarships for second-year students in the advanced education areas. Identifying it as being important for the second-year students brings it out so that the college students that are in two-year programs also have access to this, but when you put it to the rest of that paragraph, there are implications there that they're going to "also increase student financial assistance levels and . . . continue to improve the student loan application process."

I think everybody will applaud the idea that they're going to try and improve the student loan application process, but when they're going to try and increase the financial assistance levels, what this does, even given the \$3 million that's going into the scholarship program, is effectively recognize, by the government, that students as they go through their education process are going to get more and more in debt.

Mr. Speaker, that creates a real economic barrier to advanced education and to the possible participation of young Albertans in the future of our province in a way that would contribute to their potential, because they're looking at it and saying: our family doesn't have the resources to provide some assistance or full assistance to get an advanced education degree or diploma. So they have to make a decision based on can they or do they want to undertake a debt load that would give them the opportunity to get that education.

What we're seeing is that the government is creating essentially a different opportunity, and it kind of goes against one of the principles they talked about at the beginning of the speech when they were talking about one of the things that they wanted was equity, including fairness for all citizens in Alberta. Well, what they're doing is in essence creating an economic barrier for some of our young people to really get in and achieve their potential. So those are the comments that I wanted to make on that part of it.

We've heard a lot of discussion about the health care agenda, the proposals in health care, the privatization, the contracting out, the transition in our health care system. Mr. Speaker, I just want to put it on record that when the people in southern Alberta come to me and want explanations of what the government is proposing, their concerns boil down to two things. First of all, there's the philosophy of how our health care system should be run, the public system or private. This is the debate that they see. But the real issue and the real concern that most Albertans have, at least most of the constituents that approach me, is about the potential for these changes that are being talked about to create a two-tiered health care system in the province, where they don't see the equity of access being there for each of them, for their families or for their friends when they need the health care service. They're seeing again an economic issue developing where those with the economic opportunity can afford and will get a different level of health care in this province than the person who doesn't have the economic resources to access that private health care system.

9:30

So that's the real concern that they're expressing to me, and I guess what I can say on behalf of those constituents is that that's the issue we'll be looking for when the government introduces their legislation on the potential for contracting out, private hospitals, private health care. Whatever we want to call it and whatever the title the government's going to put to that bill, those are the kinds of criteria that we'll be looking at and judging that piece of legislation on. Does it maintain the equity of access and the economic opportunity and the prevention of that two-tiered system?

We go from there and look at the impact the proposals are going

to have on the education system and on children, and we see that really again we're going to have to wait and see when the budget comes out exactly how these promises are going to be carried out so that we'll be able to say: yes, this is going to assist children; this is going to assist in the education system so that these children can reach that potential they have and have an opportunity to be part of the equitable treatment of all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, one thing I want to talk about in a little more depth, mostly because it falls into my critic area but also because from southern Alberta's perspective it's really an important issue, is the government's plan and proposals for agriculture. Again, as I said at the start, the whole Speech from the Throne is built around this area of, you know, the role of agriculture, the growing of our province. They try to make it appear that they're talking in the context of a farming focus.

There's a reference in there to the family farm as the basis of Alberta at the turn of the century, the last century when our province was getting started, but they also say that that family farm has to undergo change, and when we look at what the government has been trying to do in the agriculture community in the last five or six years, it's really difficult to focus on what the government perceives as that change.

Even when we talked to people who attended the initial planning session for the process that will lead up to the ag summit in the period of the 7th and 8th of June, there was a lot of discussion and a lot of hypothesizing about how we create – and the term that they're using on a number of occasions was an industrial agriculture, a commercial agriculture. So, in essence, that phrase that comes out from the people who were attending that planning workshop for the ag summit tends to give some indication that the concept of family farm, the community that's built around the family farm concept is not as integral to the government's vision for rural Alberta as a lot of Albertans and a lot of rural Albertans would like to see.

One of the things that we have to recognize is that the transition that goes on in rural Alberta is quite different from the transition we see in an urban area or some of our major centres in Alberta. You know, in rural Alberta when a farm family either decides to quit farming or is forced to quit farming for economic reasons, in most cases, unless they're retiring and intend to stay in the community, they pack up and move out of the community. Their land base is amalgamated into a joint farm or another farm operation in the community, and that community loses a family.

Now, in an urban area – Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge – when we see a small business fail or a small business owner decide, "I want out," and they leave with their equity, if there is any, they usually stay in the community. They either go into another business or they take employment. So they stay there. The community doesn't lose that family unit. In rural Alberta when that family unit leaves, that's one less family unit to support all the other services that are in that community: the school, church, service clubs, sports teams, all the other things that make a community.

As three or four or five of those families start to leave a community, we see a domino effect in the sense that those are families and incomes that are taken out of that community, and that causes the loss of a local grocery store, maybe a local service station, later on a farm machinery dealership, because the larger farms that have amalgamated with the small ones spend their dollars in a different way. As a larger farm they are still usually one family, so there's no more human resource to participate in the community even though they're farming and having the same turnover of agriculture expenditures and income.

So essentially the community has lost that core human component, the family component, not necessarily the turnaround dollars. The turnaround dollars are spent differently. They go into agriculture

inputs. If there's a profit at the end of the year with that farm, it goes into reinvestment rather than into the expenditures families make in supporting that community. So what we see, then, is that this domino effect is essentially going to create a depopulation in rural Alberta unless we can support rural Alberta with some of the other initiatives that are necessary to facilitate the transition.

Mr. Speaker, one of the interesting things that was noted in here was the intent of the government to try and put high-speed, high-bandwidth Internet access across the province. Now, how are they going to make the decisions as to which communities get it and which don't? Is it going to be based on the viability of the community? If people are leaving that community in a rush, then what we're going to see is a situation where the community is collapsing on itself, and there won't be a core left that would make it a viable community to even justify the expenditure that would be necessary to kind of revitalize it, give it an alternative means of growth by having access to this high-speed Internet system.

So it's important that we look at some of the things that are going on. The government's talking about a review of crop insurance, sustaining the farm income disaster program, the income support program, and what we've got is kind of a piecemeal approach here. A lot of the farmers that I'm talking to are saying to me: "Ken, we don't find a crop insurance program works for us. We don't find the FIDP program works for us. Yet we seem to be in a cash flow crisis. We're having trouble making our payments." Mr. Speaker, it's quite easy to think about options where a combined crop insurance/farm income disaster program can be created where it rolls together and effectively becomes a farmer participatory program focusing around sustaining and maintaining income levels in a crisis situation, when there's a hailstorm, when there's a drought, when there's a world decline in prices.

Mr. Speaker, there wasn't very much in the Speech from the Throne indicating the government's direction they want to go in terms of trying to help create an environment for international trade in agriculture. They talk about going over and participating in the European World Expo, and here they want to focus on technology innovation. I don't know very much about that, but I know that

Europe has a lot of opportunity for us to market some of our high quality, value-added food products, our agriculture technologies. Why are they not included in this list of things that we want to take to the World Expo? Now, maybe the agriculture component is not part of that. That's a question that we can search down later. But when you see that and we look at trying to promote the value-added components from our agriculture community, why isn't it included in that list?

9:40

Mr. Speaker, this is kind of the direction that I think we want to see the government going in more in terms of: let's have a comprehensive policy that recognizes where we're going to go in rural Alberta over the next 10 years. Are we going to be able to facilitate the transition from a smaller farm to a viable economic agriculture unit and create other opportunities for rural citizens to be there as well at a point when we don't have that loss of the human component in the community?

Mr. Speaker, I think that covers the issues that I wanted to address. There's a number of others that we'll be looking for. On that basis, I'd like to adjourn debate if it's possible.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. member, your time for debate had expired, so I'll recognize the hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will follow the lead of the hon. member opposite and ask to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd better make sure I do this right. I don't want to be ruled out of order. I move that the House do now stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[At 9:42 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, February 23, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/02/23

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

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

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly executives from two very distinguished groups: the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties and the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. Joining us from the AUMA are Mr. Lorne Olsvik, president; Mr. George Rogers, vice-president of cities; Mr. Ernie Patterson, vice-president of towns; Mr. Mike Senych, vice-president of villages and summer villages.

Joining us from the AAMDC is Mr. Jack Hayden, president; Mr. Bart Guyon, vice-president; Mr. Eugene Wauters, director of district 1; Mr. Pat James, director of district 2; Mrs. Phyllis Kobasiuk, director of district 3; Mr. Ben Boettcher, director of district 4; and Mr. Sid Hinton, director of district 5.

Both groups are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 104 Albertans calling on this House "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals" in this province.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to present a petition signed by 251 individuals from Edmonton and area urging the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to submit a petition as well that requests the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta. It states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care. Two hundred names from Edmonton and area.
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to present a petition on behalf of 254 Edmontonians "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care" and not undermine the public health care of Alberta.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I tabled yesterday signed by 111 Albertans and asking this House to take legislative action to ban private, for-profit hospitals be read and received.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that my petition that was tabled yesterday in the House with 1,003 signatures from various parts of Alberta be received and read.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to support for public health care that I introduced yesterday be now read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the petition with my name on it in terms of stopping the promotion of private health care in Alberta that was introduced in the Legislature yesterday be read today in the Assembly.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask as well

that the petition I presented yesterday in support of public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

**Bill 3
Statute Revision Act**

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 3, being the Statute Revision Act.

The Statute Revision Act will allow for the provision of revised statutes of Alberta both now and on an ongoing basis.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

**Bill 4
Surveys Amendment Act, 2000**

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a bill being the Surveys Amendment Act, 2000, which will augment the definition of cadastral maps to satisfy the original intent of the Surveys Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

**Bill 5
Land Titles Amendment Act, 2000**

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 5, being the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2000.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 5 be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 202
Marriage Amendment Act, 2000**

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 202, the Marriage Amendment Act, 2000.

This bill introduces a definition recognizing marriage between a man and a woman that is ground in our legal tradition and reflective of our religious and philosophical traditions.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

**Bill 204
Agricultural and Recreational Land
Ownership Amendment Act, 2000**

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 204, being the Agricultural and Recreational Land Ownership Amendment Act, 2000.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

1:40

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file with the Assembly six copies of my response to Motion for a Return 182 as amended April 21, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today six copies of the Alberta Opportunity Company 1998-99 annual report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a letter which I sent this morning to the minister of health requesting that he disclose the pages that are blanked out in the document that I referred to and tabled yesterday with respect to the government's private hospital policy and of course noting that the information and the disclosure of the information can clearly be done within the public interest sections of the freedom of information act.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of the minutes of the board of directors of the Health Resource Group, known as HRG, for two meetings, one held on March 25, 1999, and the second one on April 30, 1999, as well as the agenda for May 31, 1999.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a notice of a town hall meeting that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and myself are co-hosting. It's entitled Private Hospitals in Alberta: Who Wants Them? As the Associate Minister of Health Wellness – my condolences go to him and his wife, Christine – will be unable to attend, we do hope that someone else from the government or from the truth squad will take up our invitation to attend that particular town hall.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in question period I referred to a document and had one copy of it to table. At this time I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the correspondence between Jack Davis, who was then the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, to Peter Valentine, the Auditor General, regarding the government's 1998 accountability framework. Of course, it includes all of the items that are necessary for contract approval for contracting services.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly four constituents that I just noticed as I came in this afternoon. Ken, Silvia, Rodney, and Sharla McFarland are here from Nobleford, Alberta, and we have more than the last name in common. Ken's great-grandfather and my great-grandfather homesteaded south of Pincher Creek in the Twin Butte area in 1898. His mother has been involved in local municipal politics with the MD of Pincher Creek. I think it's worthy to note that Ken's aunt was the first lady dean of recreation at the University of Alberta. I would ask that they rise in the gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a real pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a great group from Camilla school in Riviere Qui Barre in my riding. They are here with parent helpers Mrs. Maxine Brennan, Mr. Joe Dwyer, Mrs. Anne Brosda, and Mrs. Lori Tailleux. They are a great group of students. They had great questions for me. They are also here with their teachers, Mrs. Arlene Whitson, Ms Amanda Langford, and my personal favourite, Mr. Raymond Soetaert. He happens to be my husband. I would ask them to please all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. With your permission I'd like to start with a very special school, students from which are visiting here today. That school is in my constituency, so it is my pleasure to introduce 17 grade 10 students from l'école Maurice-Lavallee school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Ms Catherine Deren.

Mr. Speaker, this school is a very special, very outstanding school. Let me just indicate a few of the great achievements of this school last year. One of her students, Marie Franz-Carriere*, was the proud winner of an essay contest in 1999 on being a Canadian. The school also won the junior high basketball championship in '99. It also won four prizes at the Kananaskis drama festival in 1999, and the last one, the school publishes *La Griffé*, the best student paper in western Canada.

The students are sitting in the members' gallery. I'll ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The second set of guests, Mr. Speaker, are the citizens opposed to the legalization of private, for-profit hospitals. They are Helen Achten, Mike and Trudy Aldridge, Larry Derkach, Anita Kamal, Therese Kracher, Euneke Lorberg, Cecily Mills, Olga Mattis, Blanche McKnight, Eva-Maria Nelson, and Bob Settle. I think they are seated on both sides of the House. I'll ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The last introduction, Mr. Speaker, with your permission, is Bill Kobluk, a retired high school teacher and a former NDP candidate in the city in the provincial election, and Dr. Julian Laychuk, professor emeritus, Russian and Germanic studies, University of Calgary and resident of Calgary-Foothills. I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was sitting here doing a little bit of work, and I happened to notice that I had a constituent that snuck into your gallery. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House my predecessor, Shirley Cripps, who was an MLA for that area before I was. I'd like, Shirley, for you to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce some constituents of mine. They are Dr. MacDougall and Mrs. MacDougall. For those who don't know the MacDougalls, they are strong supporters of public education. Dr. MacDougall was the former chair of the Edmonton separate school board, and he also plays a mean bagpipe and looks great in a kilt. With them is a student from Korea, Mr. Taejin Jeong. If they could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly our daughter Jacqueline, who is going to be heading to the University of Chile in Santiago to do a semester's study from the University of Alberta, and my husband, Jack. They are in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier denied Albertans answers to the questions when he was confronted with the truth within his own cabinet documents describing his private hospital policy. Now it appears that he's running away from even sponsoring his own private hospitals bill. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the Premier running away from sponsoring his own private hospitals legislation?

1:50

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not running away. As a matter of fact, I sponsored Bill 1, which was a very significant bill, to put \$500 million into engineering and science research. That to me represents the future, whereas the official Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about the past. And she should.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is the Premier standing in this Assembly and saying that he is going to sponsor his own private hospitals legislation or not? Tell the truth.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's not private hospital legislation. I allude to *Hansard* yesterday, where the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition said:

The Premier has talked about the possibility of the Official Opposition supporting the legislation which the government is about to bring in. Well, I think that possibility does exist.

That's dangerous; right?

I actually think that possibility exists if this government brings in legislation which is going to control the growth, control the quantity, and control the quality of some off-site services. If it's documented how that's going to be done, we might support that legislation.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I say to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition: stay tuned.

MRS. MacBETH: So, Mr. Speaker, why is this Premier appointing truth squads when he censors access from Albertans to his own private hospital policy with its blank pages? Why does he need his truth squads?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to the media – and the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was there – yesterday was an unfortunate use of words. It's now called the health information panel.

Mr. Speaker, basically we want to get the facts out, and we want to have a reasonable, rational discussion on this particular issue. It's very, very important.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, we want to get the facts out too, and it's interesting to look at the government's document with its blank pages. No facts, just blank pages, and for a document, frankly, that says so little, it says volumes about this government. This is from the document which we tabled yesterday, which of course is from the health information services of the department of health. Key Points: Focus Groups on Private Hospitals.

On October 21, 22 and 23 six focus groups involving approximately 65 Albertans were conducted in Edmonton, Calgary and Lethbridge (2 groups in each location) to discuss the proposed "policy statement" on the future role of private hospitals in Alberta. The main themes and issues raised in these focus groups were:

But that's where the censor stepped in, Mr. Speaker. The rest of it is just blank. So my questions are for the Premier. Did the focus groups tell this government that the words "private hospital" are unacceptable to Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Really, I have no idea, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't privy to the focus groups.

Relative to the specifics of the FOIP request, I'll have the hon. minister reply. [interjections]

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, yes, I would like certainly to reply. I think one of the very important points that should be made in this Legislature at this time . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Health and Wellness, please. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness does have the floor, and the chair would like to hear the answer, and the only way the chair can hear the answer is if certain people zipped it.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think this Legislative Assembly, acting on behalf of the people of the province, debated long and thoroughly the establishment of our current Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation, and it was a debate on that particular piece of legislation that was long and I think also thorough.

I think it is important, though, at this particular time, in response to the question from the Leader of the Opposition, to point out that on page 2346 of *Hansard* the Member for Rocky Mountain House

moved third reading of Bill 18, as it was called at that time. There was a call to all members of the Assembly, and on final approval that bill passed unanimously. That means, I think, that it was a very constructive and a very rare time in the history of the Assembly when all people agreed upon a piece of legislation. Of course, any legislation passed in this Assembly is the law of the province and must be adhered to.

Mr. Speaker, I think that background is very important to the question, and that is that the Department of Health and Wellness adhered very rigorously and correctly to the rules that were established under the FOIP legislation and in filing the documentation the Leader of the Opposition is quoting from.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, what that gobbledygook just said was that the public interest of Albertans is to hide the truth from them.

The question is: did the focus groups tell the government that "private hospitals" was a term unacceptable to the people of this province?

MR. KLEIN: Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, the truth is in the bill, and the truth is in the law, and the law will say that the legislation will confirm Alberta's commitment to publicly funded health care and to the principles of the Canada Health Act. It will ban private hospitals. It will bring surgical facilities under the control of the public health system. It will give health authorities one more option for delivering services to relieve pain and suffering. Facilities will not be able to charge patients for medically necessary services. Queue jumping will be illegal, and we believe it's the right thing to do.

Now, all of those principles will be in the legislation, and I would think the Liberal opposition will support it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, did the focus groups tell the government that if they called it a private, overnight extended-stay surgical facility, somehow they might be able to bluff their way through banning private hospital language? Is that what the focus groups told them?

MR. KLEIN: You know, it's a moot point. As we see this legislation through, Mr. Speaker, the proof will be in the legislation, which will go to every household and which will have as a matter of principle the banning of private hospitals, bringing surgical facilities under the control of the public health system. Health authorities have one more option for delivering services to relieve pain and suffering. Facilities will not be able to charge patients for medically necessary services. Queue jumping will be illegal. That's the bill.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier has a choice. He can continue to duck and spin, or he can tell Albertans the truth. So my question is: isn't it true that a private, overnight stay, extended stay surgical facility is in truth a private hospital?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, a hospital is a hospital. A surgical facility is a surgical facility.

This hon. member knows all about surgical facilities. In 1991 the Morgentaler clinic started up in Edmonton under her watch as the minister of health, Mr. Speaker. In 1992 the Kensington therapeutic abortion clinic started up under her watch; the Gimbel eye clinic in Edmonton, 1990. The Mitchell Eye Centre: well it started in 1969,

but she didn't do anything to close it down. The Northern Alberta Eye Institute Inc., 1990, Edmonton; the Coronation Day Surgery Centre Ltd., under her watch; the Surgical Centres Inc., Foothills, 1990, under her watch; the Surgical Centres, Southland, under her watch; the Rockyview surgical centre; the Banff outpatient surgery centre, plastic surgery only, under her watch.

You know, what is she talking about? What is she talking about? Is she talking about the kinds of things that she allowed, promoted, and fostered during her watch as minister of health?

MRS. MacBETH: Duck and spin, Mr. Speaker, duck and spin. Not one of those is overnight stay.

Does this Premier mean to tell Albertans that they are going to be having major surgeries in a so-called clinic with no emergency and no intensive care backup? Is that what he's telling Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the legislation will be quite clear. The fundamentals related to the legislation will be based on the policy statement that has been released to all Albertans.

Relative to the intricacies of the legislation I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the legislation will be coming forward. I really find it very interesting that the opposition will probably have nothing to talk about once the legislation is in, because they're having a wide range of speculation about the legislation which goes far beyond the policy statement on which the legislation was built.

Nevertheless we are, yes, speaking in the legislation to the approval of surgical clinics and putting in place something which we have not had properly ensconced in legislation, Mr. Speaker: the rules and regulations with respect to the current surgical clinics, the cataract surgeries, the cancerous growth surgical facilities that are currently in place. We want to put in place what is a legislative gap right now, legislation to correct that in terms of regulation and governance.

And, yes, we intend to put in place legislation which will put clear direction, clear rules in place for surgical clinics providing overnight stays which deal with a particular area of health care, Mr. Speaker. We think there's a potential there for innovation and efficiency, and that will be judged by the regional health authorities.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, if this Premier seems so sure about what's going to be in his legislation and this minister of health seems so sure about what's going to be in this legislation, why is it taking so long for that legislation to come into this Assembly? [interjections]

MR. KLEIN: My colleagues have already provided the answer. This is day two.

THE SPEAKER: The interim leader of the third party.

Health Resource Group Inc.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has the floor.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier said in this House that the government is not involved with HRG in any way, shape, or form. The board minutes of HRG that I tabled in this House just today tell a very different story. My question is to the

Premier. Will the Premier confirm or deny that HRG has within the past year lobbied members of the Calgary caucus in pursuit of expanding its private, for-profit health care business?

MR. KLEIN: I have no idea. [interjections] No. I have no idea. I don't know. There are 64 of us.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier obviously has decided not to answer my first question. Let me try another one. If, as the Premier said yesterday, HRG is only doing uninsured and WCB services and denied any government involvement with WCB, why do HRG board minutes say that due to the shutdown of seven of the 14 operating rooms at the Peter Lougheed hospital during the summer of last year, "an agreement has been concluded at \$275/hr. hour for the use of the surgery suites at HRG"?

MR. KLEIN: I have no idea, but I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it would probably be more than a year ago, but I have met with the Health Resource Group. I remember the content of the last meeting that I had with them. Yes, they had the idea that they felt they had a service to offer to the public health care system. I said that there's no way we could go ahead and we didn't intend to go ahead without having a proper framework in place with respect to governing these kinds of situations.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if in view of the minister of health's statement the Premier would like to retract his statement that he made to the House yesterday.

My last question . . .

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, no, I won't retract anything. As a matter of fact, when you talk about HRG lobbying and speaking to various members of caucus, I understand that they had the former leader of the ND opposition down for a daylong tour. When we had lunch, she told me that, and she said that there was nothing wrong with the facility but politically she had to oppose it. That was from Pam directly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

Medically Required Services

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister advise what action is being taken to address the concerns of Albertans that they will have to pay for medically necessary cataract surgery?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we do not have, as has been identified to the Assembly before, the proper regulations and legislation in place to set definitive rules with respect to cataract surgeries offered in independent or private clinics. We do have a policy statement, however, which has to a large degree been adhered to at this particular point in time. The policy statement deals with individuals being able to access medically necessary cataract surgery through a private clinic provided that clinic has a contract with the regional health authority whereby the facility fee is paid under the contract and the doctor is paid under the AMA agreement. Therefore, there would be no cost to the individual for the medically required service of cataract surgery.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental question

is also to the same minister. If the publicly funded health system pays for cataract surgery, why are patients in some communities required to pay for the soft or foldable lenses while in other communities those lenses are provided free of charge?

2:10

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the requirement is that there is a lens provided as a basic appliance I think it's called, and that is provided free of charge. It is what is deemed to be medically required. The hon. member is quite correct that there is some inconsistency across the province in terms of what certain physicians deem to be the type of appliance or the type of lens that they want to use and provide free of charge.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we have under way right now is contact with the College of Physicians and Surgeons to develop and to verify certain clinical practice guidelines so that there is a standard of appliances or of implants that is agreed to across the province, and when that standard is officially in place, Alberta Health and Wellness will make sure it applies consistently across the province.

MRS. LAING: My last question, Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: what action is government going to take to protect Albertans from any unethical or illegal practices in terms of patients being pressured into paying for goods or services they don't really need?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, perhaps not in great detail but certainly implied in the code of ethics of physicians and other health care practitioners in this province, I think that this is not at all an appropriate practice. However, I would like to assure this Assembly that in the upcoming legislation with respect to the whole health care system and specifically the issues that have been discussed in question period today, this is perhaps an area which has not been given its proper priority, but we will be addressing that particular concern in that legislation to make sure there is equitable access and equitable treatment for medically required services and appliances across this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Freedom of Information

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go back to the infamous document with the 30 whited-out pages. Now, as the Premier will recall from his 1993 flagship bill, when it comes to freedom of information, there are discretionary exceptions where a minister may allow information to be disclosed, and there are a few mandatory exceptions. With the 30 whited-out pages in all but four tiny cases the exception cited was a discretionary exception. So my question is to the Premier right now. Why is it, Mr. Premier, that your government, when it had the choice and was permitted by provincial law to release that information, chose not to? Why did you exercise that discretion, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, I didn't exercise any discretion in this particular . . . [interjections] No, Mr. Speaker. The FOIP request did not come through my office. The FOIP request came from the Liberals, as I understand it, to the department of health. It had absolutely nothing to do with my department.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I beg your indulgence here. We in Alberta Health and Wellness take seriously the FOIP legislation.

We proceed according to its rules, and we did so in this particular case.

If I might, Mr. Speaker, I could refer the overall policy regarding FOIP and the legislation to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: There are limited reasons for nondisclosure of information under FOIP, and certainly if the requester is really so concerned about the information and they've made the FOIP request, they always have the opportunity to appeal to the commissioner. They well know that, and certainly given how familiar the opposition is with the FOIP Act, I'm sure they know very well about the discretionary appeal that's there.

Certainly there is an opportunity to take it to the next level if indeed there is concern that the minister has been nondiscretionary in his release of the information. The FOIP Act has allowed for a very clear process to be followed, and ultimately I'm sure the hon. member is quite aware of that process, because he was an integral part of the discussions during the passage of the FOIP Act.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, this has all happened on that Premier's watch.

My follow-up question would be to the Premier again. Given, Mr. Speaker, that four times an exception was claimed, called a cabinet confidence, and given that a cabinet confidence falls away, disappears once the decision is made by cabinet, as it was when the policy statement was issued last November, why has this government refused to share that information with Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I take it that all of the officials in the Department of Health and Wellness complied with the principles and the law of the freedom of information legislation. This is a very interesting piece of legislation that was supported by the Liberal opposition, as the hon. minister pointed out.

You know, it's very, very strange. When we develop policy, there are certain things under FOIP that are confidential and that are privileged, and one of the strange things about it is that when the Liberals are developing policy, they don't share anything with anyone. They're unFOIPable. Right? They talk about open and honesty. They share absolutely nothing.

MR. DICKSON: The Liberals aren't dismantling our public health care system.

My final question to the Premier would be this: given that section 31 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act obligates "the head of a public body" – and that would include the Premier – to disclose information where there's "a risk of significant harm" to the public or where the information is "clearly in the public interest," why would this Premier not invoke the public interest override and share that information and share it now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we will share all the information that is required under FOIP legislation.

Notwithstanding legislation that applies to the government, will this hon. member commit in this House today to share all the documents relevant to policy development as it relates to the Liberal party? Will he do that?

North American Free Trade Agreement

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, one of the common questions that I get on the policy for allowing regional health authorities to contract out health services has to do with the North American free trade agreement. My questions today are to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Will the minister advise the Assembly what provisions are contained in the North American free trade agreement with respect to health care?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there has been an alarmist analysis of the dangers of NAFTA for Canadians and social programs for about 15 years. That's about when the negotiations commenced. I think it's time we actually dealt with the facts of what is in NAFTA, and I'll endeavour to do that for the hon. member today.

In fact, the provisions of NAFTA offer triple protection for our health care system. Number one, there is a NAFTA obligation to deal with national treatment, and while it generally treats American and Mexican service providers no less favourably than Canadians, it does not – and I repeat not – require Alberta to sign a contract with every service provider even if one is signed at some point.

Two, NAFTA obligations do not apply to provincial or state governments. They apply federally only. That means that provinces have the right and can discriminate on the basis of nationality for contracts for service provision.

2:20

Thirdly, and the most important one, Mr. Speaker – and this is the one the hon. member I think would want to relay to those who are concerned – there is a complete carve-out, or reservation, you may call it in their terminology, for the public health sector in NAFTA, and the Canadian government signed that reservation, ensured that that reservation was in place. [interjection]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, it seems that at least one member, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, wants to participate in a debate. I want to remind the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview that this is not a debate.

North American Free Trade Agreement (continued)

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude very quickly on the carve-out. The carve-out does protect the Canadian social services sector as long as the services are established or maintained for a public purpose. Public purpose does not mean that the service must be entirely publicly provided, but it does mean that the public service that is provided is funded publicly to fit the carve-out. The issue on the carve-out is public access, not ownership. That is very clear in NAFTA.

One last thing I should point out on NAFTA, a point of interest. There has been no American interest, problem, or complaint on the Canadian social or health service issue since NAFTA came in.

Mr. Speaker, I will further, for the use of the hon. member and any other member, table a copy listing the reservations, the chapters they apply to, as well as the wording of the carve-out.

MR. DOERKSEN: Given that the carve-out applies to social services for a public purpose, when the regional health authorities contract out health services to private service providers, does this negate government control on health care providers?

MRS. McCLELLAN: No, Mr. Speaker. The policy document that was released last November is very clear. If the regional health authority contracted a service, it would be for a public purpose, and that would be to provide health services to the public. The most important element in this discussion is the purpose of the service and to whom it's provided, not the service provider. Public access is the determining element in this discussion.

MR. DOERKSEN: Okay. My last question is: does the carve-out clause relate primarily to public policy in health, or does it also provide opportunity to control foreign ownership interests?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we want to be very clear: the carve-out covers the way we treat investors under both the investment and services chapters of NAFTA. Therefore, the province could, if it wished, control foreign ownership services under the provisions of those NAFTA chapters. It is within NAFTA and within our ability to do that.

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

Hip Replacement Surgery

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hip surgery is one of the procedures being considered for contracting out. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why an operation of three to five hours will not require a facility with an emergency and ICU backup?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the legislation will clearly define the rules and the parameters under which a regional health authority can contract. Fundamental to the legislation is that it must prove to be cost-efficient, it must prove to reduce waiting lists, and it must prove to alleviate pain and suffering. That's what it's all about.

Mr. Speaker, under the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition's watch abortion clinics were allowed: Morgentaler's in Edmonton and Kensington in Calgary. Eye cataract clinics were allowed: Gimbel, Mitchell, Northern Alberta Eye Institute Inc. Under the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition's watch as minister of health orthopaedics, dermatology, urology, ENT, plastic surgeries were allowed: the Coronation Day Surgery Centre, Surgical Centres Inc., Foothills; Surgical Centres Inc., Southland; Rockyview Surgical Centre; Banff outpatient surgery centre. I don't know if they had all of the, you know, ICU and trauma backups, but she allowed them all.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I know that this is only the second day on this, and I know there's lots of exuberance that comes about from being away from this Assembly for a day or two, but I also want to draw to the attention of hon. members all the rules governing question period. They're located in *Beauchesne*, and they go on and on and on. The questions should basically deal with matters of urgent situations. They don't ask for opinions.

What's so startling and interesting about this is that we're basically having a debate in question period about something that hasn't happened. [interjection] We don't know. The chair does not know if any legislation is going to come. There is no legislation, yet we're having a debate on legislation. [interjection] Well, the fact is that the chair does not know if there will be any legislation. So let's get on with a question of an urgent, important nature.

Hip Replacement Surgery (continued)

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect, Mr. Premier, this is about hip operations, and it's important to seniors.

My second question is: why is there a cap on the amount of operating room time and the procedures that orthopedic surgeons can now perform?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I do not micromanage the system, but relative to the specific question I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is an allocation system operating in our major hospitals which do a number of the very serious types of surgery. For instance, from 1992-93 to the present time we've had an increase in organ and bone marrow transplants of 116 percent in terms of volume. Where we've had neurosurgery increase by 19 percent, where we've had very significant increases in orthopedic surgery, the number of hips, the number of knees, and so forth that are done, there does have to be the allocation of surgical time and resources. Therefore, there is a waiting list for orthopedic surgery that is longer than we would like, and various surgical treatments or procedures have to be prioritized.

Mr. Speaker, I do think it's important. This is a concern that we have as a government and one which we are addressing in successive years with more and more funds being directed to these surgeries. There is a greatly increased demand, and we are responding and doing more than ever before in this province in terms of those particular procedures.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. My final question is to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier explain why the wait list for surgeries in Edmonton in the public system can be erased with the addition of \$4.5 million to that public sector but can't in Calgary?

MR. KLEIN: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is a question that is specific to the Capital regional health authority. The hon. minister is probably more familiar with the situation than I am, and I'll have him respond.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, in terms of both regional health authorities we have been in discussion with them. We are putting a priority on reducing waiting lists, and we will be increasing very significantly in the coming year the amount of funds committed to what are called provincewide services, which deal in the categories that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is mentioning.

I do repeat, Mr. Speaker, that the system is performing well in terms of increasing the volumes of such procedures, and if the member across the way has related this somehow to the proposed legislation and policy statement discussion, the system and approach is the same right now in both regional health authorities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

2:30

Provincial Fiscal Policies

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Provincial Treasurer, and it has to do with the financial health of our province. I noticed in the third-quarter update that our revenues are up substantially this year, and the question arises again and again: did the government not anticipate this increase, or why did it not? I'd like to hear your answer for the record, sir.

MR. DAY: Well it's a good question that I guess I could partly answer by saying to the member, "Do you want to be a millionaire?" because the way to become a millionaire is to be able to anticipate where oil and gas prices are going. But it is a fair question.

I can say that about this time last year when we tabled our budget, we had finished a consultation process with major analysts and experts around the world, around Canada, and in this province, and based on their estimates, estimates that we work with in our department of resources and energy, we estimated that the price of

oil for the year last year would be \$13.50 for WTI. That's U.S. As a matter of fact, all other experts were right in that same range with us, even the Liberals. I'm not saying that they're experts, but they were right in there with us.

As it turned out, Mr. Speaker, as you know, about this time last year oil was about \$12.60 a barrel, so when we said \$13.50 some people accused us of being optimistic. We were just taking the expert analytical approach at the time. That's basically why we did not anticipate it. The rest of the world didn't anticipate it. The rest of the world is now dealing with oil at close to \$30 a barrel.

To protect us from the times when we can't get it perfectly right, we set aside an economic cushion at the start of each year. We figure out what our overall revenues are going to be, we take 3 and a half percent of that, and we set it aside as an economic cushion just to protect us in case oil goes up or down or gas goes up or down.

I should just note quickly, Mr. Speaker, that the other area of unanticipated increase was the amount of personal income tax that came in last year: \$646 million more than we had anticipated.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased that you mentioned personal income tax. You have mentioned repeatedly that personal income tax revenues are on the rise, and I thought we were reducing taxes in Alberta. Can you explain why this is happening?

MR. DAY: Well, quite right, Mr. Speaker. We have been consistently reducing tax rates in this province. Premier Klein says consistently that the only way taxes are going in Alberta is down, and the fact of the matter is that we have said consistently that when you reduce taxes, you will invigorate the economy and in fact create more opportunity, more jobs, more people working and paying taxes at a lower rate.

That's the wonderful thing that's been happening over the last few years in Alberta, and certainly last year was no exception: more jobs being created because of our policy of government backing out and creating the environment where people can move ahead, create their hopes and dreams. So, in fact, the member is correct. We took in last year more money in provincial income taxes than the year before, but that was because there were more people working at higher paying jobs, and all of those Albertans were paying a lower tax rate.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Provincial Treasurer. I understand from the fiscal update that we are putting money into the heritage savings trust fund, and I'd like to know why this decision was made.

MR. DAY: Another good question, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that when we talk to people around the province one of the things that continues to surprise us is that many Albertans still are not aware of the size of the heritage savings trust fund and how much income is being earned from that particular fund. As a matter of fact, something over \$900 million is coming in from income interest from that fund.

We were able this last year, because income and revenue from all sources were beyond what we were expecting, to take some \$230 million and put it into the fund to protect it against the effects of inflation. There's only been two other times since the early 1980s that the province has been able to do that. That's why it went in there, not because the fund is in trouble, but as a matter of fact because it's performing very well. Now it's made even more stable by us being able to protect it from the effects of inflation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Private Health Services (continued)

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier hid from further questions when he was confronted with the truth about the real agenda behind his private health policies. Now it appears that he's running away from even sponsoring his own private hospitals bill. My questions are to the Premier. Isn't it the truth, Mr. Premier, that you won't put your name to the government's private hospitals bill because you don't want to go down in history as a health care separatist, as a destroyer of medicare in Canada?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, a health care separatist. You know, I apologized for truth squad but a health care separatist? My gosh, the preamble to the legislation – and it will come; it will be there – will be absolute adherence to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. I mean, that's Canadian. That's not being . . . [interjection] Well, if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora doesn't want to support it, then he'll be un-Canadian. I'll be very much a Canadian, to support those fundamental principles and those policies of the Canada Health Act. That is fundamental to the legislation. If they don't want to support it, then they will be the health care separatists, not me. I'm a Canadian and proud of it, and I support the Canada Health Act.

Speaker's Ruling **Oral Question Period Rules**

THE SPEAKER: I would hope that all members of this Assembly would continue to deal with policy, policy, policy and avoid . . . [interjection] The hon. Minister of Resource Development might just bear with us for a second. I would hope that all hon. members would focus on policy, policy, policy.

Name-calling has no place in this Assembly, none whatsoever. That includes "un-Canadian" and that includes "health care separatists" in the eyes of this chair.

Private Health Services (continued)

MS OLSEN: Well, isn't it a truth that the Premier won't put his name to the government's private hospitals policy coming forward because he knows it's all about importing American two-tier health care to Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: It's not about that at all, Mr. Speaker. It's about protection of public health care as we know it today. That's what it's about.

MS OLSEN: Okay. Isn't it the truth that the Premier won't put his name to the government's private hospitals policy because he knows it will lead to massive delisting of health insurance services?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the legislation has not, as you clearly pointed out, been introduced, but if the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and his associate want me to put my name to that bill, the health protection act, that subscribes to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act, I'll be glad to put my name to that bill.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Applied Science and Engineering Technologists

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For a change of pace my

questions are all to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Given that Alberta has the highest percentage of certified technicians and technologists in the country per capita, will the government enact legislation to recognize the profession of applied science and engineering technology?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the question the member is calling for some legislation. I'd like to remind Mr. Speaker and other members of this Assembly that, in fact, we had brought in legislation at the last session. In that legislation we actually created a new category that would apply to experienced and professional technologists. It's under way as we speak, and we're gaining more experience with it. So far we've been receiving I think fairly positive feedback from those engineering technologists that are involved.

2:40

MR. MAGNUS: Mr. Speaker, given then that the government has overhauled or is in the process of overhauling professional legislation for many other fields, why is the government not considering unique legislation for applied science and engineering technologists?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I think there are a couple of reasons, Mr. Speaker. For the first one I would revert to an earlier answer in the sense that we are currently getting experience with the recent change to legislation, but also I would want to indicate to the hon. member and to all members of this Assembly that it would be a simple thing and a simple matter for us if we had complete agreement by all stakeholders on how we should approach this situation. As we currently stand today, we do not have that total agreement.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once more to the same minister. Given that technologists feel that the public is forced to hire professional engineers for jobs that are better suited to them, current definitions of engineering prevent engineering technologists from providing services they feel they can provide to the public. Will the minister remove barriers to professional practice and allow independent practice by qualified technologists?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, we're not prepared at this moment in time, Mr. Speaker, to go that far. We of course fully support the professional associations that are here in the province. The hon. member is right. We've been working with a number of them on various aspects. In fact, legislation should be forthcoming later this session for the veterinarians. But I must urge the hon. member as best I can that being aware of the current situation, we would ask you to help us in any way you can in getting full support of this qualification from all stakeholders.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, today we'll have five hon. members who will be participating in Recognitions, and we'll begin the process in 30 seconds from now.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Black History Month

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'd like to recognize the month of February as Black History Month. In Alberta events marking this occasion are co-ordinated by the local chapters of the National Black Coalition of Canada, the NBCCA. I was able to attend several events this year, including the opening ceremonies at Edmonton city hall and the Black Odyssey book

launch and reading at the Stanley Milner Library. This event was co-ordinated and cosponsored by the Congress of Black Women and the Edmonton Public Library. I had a fabulous time at both events. The NBCCA puts on a great show for their opening: gospel singers, Movements dance company, steel drums. It was a joyous kick-off.

The book launch was equally great, with lots of Alberta history mixed in with readings of prose and poetry by Cheryl Foggo, Gwen Hooks, and Nigel Darbasie. Musical interludes were provided by music students Jorgianne Talbot and Allison Kwan. I learned a lot, and I had fun doing it.

Other events still to come include a discussion seminar on economic and social challenges on the 25th, a banquet and awards ceremony on the 26th, and a film festival on the 27th. I urge everyone to participate in these events. My congratulations to the National Black Coalition of Canada, Edmonton branch, for a successful event-packed month.

THE SPEAKER: The time limit for recognitions is one minute.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

Bert Brown

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pride that I rise today to recognize a constituent, a friend and a great Albertan. I'm speaking about Bert Brown, also known as Mr. Triple E. This man single-handedly got more votes in a senatorial election than did all the Alberta federal Liberal candidates in the last federal election. Thanks to the hard work and perseverance by Bert and the triple E committee, Albertans no longer accept the fact that the Canadian Senate needs to be a political dumping ground for patronage appointments. As Albertans we have said that it can be more. It can, if allowed, be used to reflect our beliefs and our values as Albertans.

We have said that the Senate must be in reality a place of sober second thought for legislation impacting Canada. That is the message that is being sent to Ottawa by our senatorial election. It is a message to our Prime Minister that we value democracy, and I hope that you will all join me in asking the Prime Minister to appoint our Senator, Bert Brown, to represent us, a man who has the backing of Albertans, a man who has earned the right to be there.

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

Dr. Marsha Hanen

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize the appointment of Dr. Marsha Hanen as president of the Sheldon M. Chumir Foundation for Ethics and Leadership. Dr. Hanen brings to the role an impressive background: previously a PhD from Brandeis University in philosophy; academic positions at the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard, Brandeis, Dalhousie, and the University of Calgary; published extensively, including a recent paper on ethics. She has an honorary doctorate of law from York University in 1999.

The Sheldon M. Chumir Foundation for Ethics and Leadership was created from a bequest by Sheldon Chumir, 1940 to 1992, Rhodes scholar, lawyer, businessman, civil libertarian, and a Calgary-Buffer MLA. Mr. Chumir believed that ethical values are fundamental to a healthy society, and he wished the foundation to operate so as to foster ethical actions in the practical world of government, business, and community. The foundation promotes community-minded action in public life by providing a forum for informed discussion of the ethical dimensions of public issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

2000 Alberta Winter Games

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to rise today to bring recognition to the successful and exciting 2000 Alberta Winter Games, the 13th Alberta Winter Games. For the past 24 years the Alberta Winter Games have provided young people with an opportunity to learn about commitment, hard work, leadership, and sportsmanship. These are valuable qualities and are a substantial part of growth and development in sports. Held February 17 to 20 in Strathcona county, Alberta's largest multisport and cultural event welcomed approximately 2,800 athletes and coaches to successfully showcase their athletic ability. An estimated 3,500 volunteers donated their time to organize and stage the games as well, making this event a community success.

Amateur sports systems in the province play an important role in the development of youth. Local, regional, and zone competitions prepare athletes for broader national and international competitions, and this year 665 individuals received medals. This is an outstanding accomplishment for our young athletes, and we're pleased with their hard work and determination. Let's recognize as members of this Assembly the fine athletes who took part in the 13th Alberta Winter Games.

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

Raging Grannies

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today to recognize a very special group of seniors, better known as the Raging Grannies. The Raging Grannies are known and respected activists for many worthwhile causes and make their case in entertaining but effective ways. They can often be found out of doors on cold, blustery days raising citizens' awareness on issues of concern such as health care and poverty. They have very capably brought many issues to the attention of media and politicians. They are an engaging and learned group of women who very often go out of their way to assist others. These women are a most valued part of our community and worthy of our deepest respect. I salute them today for their unwavering commitment to public good.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following notice given yesterday, I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Following notice given yesterday, I move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

2:50

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 73(1) to accommodate second reading of Bill 202 on the same day as its introduction.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Bill 202 Marriage Amendment Act, 2000

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to begin debate today on Bill 202, the Marriage Amendment Act, 2000. Bill 202 amends the current Marriage Act by adding a preamble, adding a definition, and indicates that the act operates notwithstanding the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The preamble makes three statements that underline the value of marriage as an institution within our society and recognizes that marriage between a man and a woman has a long-standing legal, philosophical, and religious tradition. It is curious that the existing Marriage Act is silent when it comes to defining marriage. It could be that both the definition and importance of marriage at that time were self-evident and that the drafters never imagined that marriage as an important institution in society would ever be challenged as to its worth or even as to its definition.

With the preamble added to the Marriage Act, the Legislature is making statements about its view of the value of marriage. I would like to read them into the record at this point.

Whereas marriage is an institution the maintenance of which in its purity the public is deeply interested in; and
Whereas marriage is the foundation of family and society, without which there would be neither civilization nor progress; and
Whereas marriage between a man and woman has from time immemorial been firmly grounded in our legal tradition, one that is itself a reflection of long standing philosophical and religious traditions.

The wording for the second statement of the preamble is taken from a quotation used by Mr. Justice Gonthier in the 1995 Miron versus Trudel case. In that case Justice Gonthier characterized the family as a foundation of society which, because of its important place in society, deserved the support of legislators.

The wording for the third statement of the preamble is taken from the statement of Justice La Forest in the Egan case, where he held that

marriage has from time immemorial been firmly grounded in our legal tradition, one that is itself a reflection of long-standing philosophical and religious traditions. But its ultimate *raison d'être* transcends all of these and is firmly anchored in the biological and social realities that heterosexual couples have the unique ability to procreate, that most children are the product of these relationships, and that they are generally cared for and nurtured by those who live in that relationship. In this sense, marriage is by nature heterosexual. It would be possible to legally define marriage to include homosexual couples, but this would not change the biological and social realities that underlie the traditional marriage.

The religious tradition of marriage goes back to the account where the Creator made them male and female. He said: for this reason a man will leave his mother and father and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh; therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate. The Creator's view of marriage

indicates a complete commitment to the person you are marrying so that each person in the marriage gives of oneself for the benefit of the other. He often uses the marriage relationship as a symbol of His relationship to His people and of His faithfulness to them even when they rejected Him. However, because the religious significance of marriage is understood or at least recognized by members of this Legislature, I will not elaborate further on this aspect.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

To make the argument that marriage is in fact more than just religious and philosophical tradition, I have gathered numerous empirical studies from the social science area which conclude that marriage is beneficial. I would like to table this afternoon a document that highlights 33 different research documents that I have used to demonstrate the social science research. The document I table itemizes some of the studies, articles, and references which I have reviewed that demonstrate empirical evidence on a number of indices that support the benefits of marriage not only for the wife and husband in that marriage but which also – and in my view more importantly – benefit the children of the marriage and, finally, benefit society as a whole.

Linda Waite of the University of Chicago wrote a paper in 1995 entitled *Does Marriage Matter?* Her objective was to pull all of the evidence together in order to inform the reader what their decision about marriage and family potentially means for them. She argues that marriage typically provides important and substantial benefits to individuals and, while not examined in the paper, important benefits to society as well. She notes in the area of healthy behaviour that research indicates that marriage promotes self-regulation of behaviour such as alcohol use, drug use, et cetera, resulting in less risk taking.

The benefit of marriage is a factor in mortality rates, likely due to healthy behaviours, emotional satisfaction, and a greater likelihood of material well-being.

In the area of sexual satisfaction the commitment of persons in marriage to each other brings a higher level of sexual satisfaction. Studies show that in the absence of this level of commitment, survey respondents indicate lower levels of sexual satisfaction compared to their married counterparts.

Yet for me the greatest benefit of marriage has to do with the benefits it provides to children. In a society that values its children as much as we say we do, how can we overlook the fact that on virtually every count children have the best chance of success and well-being when they are raised by their natural father and natural mother, who are committed to each other through marriage? It would seem to me that we promote best practices in medicine because it gives the best outcomes, that we promote best practices in taxation so that the economy remains vibrant, and so on. Government policies are put forward to obtain the best possible results over a whole range of measures. We should therefore also promote best practices in raising children.

Linda Waite in concluding her paper says that

social scientists have a responsibility to weigh the evidence on the consequences of social behaviors . . . [and] an obligation to point out the benefits of marriage . . . [and] an obligation to make policy makers aware of the stakes when they pull policy levers.

Sociologist David Papineau, who has studied families extensively, made the following statement: social science research is almost never conclusive; there are always methodological difficulties and stones left unturned; yet in three decades of work as a social scientist, I know of few other bodies of data in which the weight of evidence is so decisively on one side of the issue; on the whole, for

children two-parent families are preferable to single parents and stepfamilies.

Having dealt with the preamble, we move briefly to the addition of the definition in Bill 202 where marriage is defined as being "between a man and a woman." This reflects the intent and message of the preamble, which we have already discussed at length. The use of the notwithstanding clause is deliberate in the drafting of this bill. For a brief review on the history of the notwithstanding clause, I refer to the publication of the hon. Peter Lougheed's 1991 Merv Leitch lecture *Why a Notwithstanding Clause?* It was interesting to note that Mr. Lougheed and his government first introduced a notwithstanding clause in section 2 of the Alberta Bill of Rights in 1972, long before the Charter came into being.

3:00

Nine years after the Alberta Bill of Rights, in the debate over the Charter the western Premiers were arguing for the importance of the supremacy of parliament over the appointed judiciary. To appease both sides, Mr. Lougheed introduced the concept of the notwithstanding clause within the Charter of Rights, which of course is now reflected in section 33. He reinforced that position on November 21, 1983, in answer to questions put forth by Mr. Notley. His reply indicated that we, being the Premiers of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, did not want to be in the position where public policy was determined by nonelected people. In other words, the Legislatures needed a clause where they could insert their will over the nonelected judiciary.

He goes on in his lecture to examine the concept of notwithstanding at some length and notes that while the Charter raises an unprecedented level of protection of rights and freedoms, it is acknowledged that democratic society at times requires the abrogation of these rights for important reasons.

He also noted that in 1983 the Alberta government declared in advance of a Supreme Court ruling precluding the right of hospital workers to strike that it would invoke the use of the notwithstanding clause if the legislation was deemed invalid.

Janet Hiebert, in her essay *Wrestling with Rights*, reviews the Charter's effect on legislative decision-making. She presents two different views, one being that the Legislatures use the Charter as a refuge to avoid, delay, or put off difficult and moral decisions. Others feel that judicial review works as a partner with parliament in constitutional interpretations. I think both views have validity and likely depend on the matter at hand.

I would encourage all members of the Legislature to read those two very informative articles.

Given the history and intentions of the notwithstanding clause, it is my view that the use of the notwithstanding clause is a legitimate and in fact instructive mechanism whereby Parliament and the Legislatures can assert their will in matters of important public policy.

Concerning the institution of marriage, the Alberta government has announced that its policy on marriage allows for marriage only between a man and a woman and that the government would oppose any legal challenges to this law, including, if available, use of the notwithstanding clause. The government further asserted that in the case of marriage, use of the notwithstanding clause would be exempt from a referendum. Bill 202, before you today, merely puts that policy into a legislative format and follows through on that commitment.

Some will argue that this bill in effect accomplishes very little since the provincial jurisdiction in this matter is limited to the solemnization of marriage. Others will argue that the provincial government has no role to play in these kinds of social matters. It is my view that governing involves the establishment of policies and legislation which provide the best possible good for the people it

serves. I can think of no more important a role for government than to encourage marriage between a man and a woman as a platform from which to build the success of its families, of its children, and of its country.

As each member of this Legislature examines the concept of the bill and as you refer to the legal, philosophical, and religious tradition along with the evidence from social science research, I know you will vote in favour. More importantly, you know that this is a law written on the hearts of all men and women.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Always an interesting challenge with the first bill that comes forward. Usually when bills come in, we have more of an opportunity to study and review them. It occurs to me that we'll have to try harder in the future to ensure that for the first couple of bills all members have a chance to see the text in sufficient time in advance.

Mr. Speaker, I guess one of the things that we start off with is trying to determine: what's the mischief that this bill would remedy, and what's the purpose of the bill? Our friend from Red Deer-South has fairly pointed out that with the division of powers in Canada there is a limited role for a provincial Legislature in terms of this. The question might be: is it simply to protect the sanctity of marriage, to preserve marriage, to refer solely and exclusively to a legal union between a man and a woman? If that's the goal, then that's a goal that Alberta Liberals support. I think it's a goal that most Albertans support.

I think that the words "marriage" and "spouse" – and I've said this before when we were talking about Bill 12 and the Insurance Act amendment – have centuries-old meanings. They've been invested with importance and meaning for a very, very long time. It's certainly not the part of this member nor I think of any of my colleagues to tell people now that they mean something different, that a marriage that we widely, clearly understand to be a union between a man and a woman is now going to be between two women or two men, whatever. You know, I think the issue is: is this legislation necessary? So let's sort of look and see what the peril is. In what fashion is marriage currently being threatened?

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity in another career before this one to practise a lot of family law, and from my firsthand experience I can tell you that people head towards marriage just as they did in my parents' generation. It's still seen as being a relationship that people want to be part of.

The definition of marriage comes from an 1866 British case that held that marriage is the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. I still think that reflects the concerns of most Albertans, most academics, and the courts. The courts have upheld the constitutionality of that definition. You know, when we see this bill coming forward, is there currently a court decision that has ruled otherwise? Hardly.

The Ontario court, general division, recently upheld in the *Layland and Beaulne* case the definition of marriage. In that decision a majority of the court said: unions of persons of the same sex are not marriages because of the definition of marriage; I do not think the Charter has that effect. That is referring, of course, to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In fact, on June 8, 1999, the House of Commons passed with an overwhelming majority a resolution sponsored by Eric Lowther, the Member of Parliament for Calgary Centre. The motion was to this effect:

That, in the opinion of this House, it is necessary, in light of public

debate around recent court decisions, to state that marriage is and should remain the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, and that Parliament will take all necessary steps within the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada to preserve this definition of marriage in Canada.

I know of no jurisdiction in the world that defines marriage as being something other than one man and one woman. You know, even in Holland and Norway and Denmark, that recognize same-sex relationships, they still are very clear that that's something different than a marriage. In fact, the Norwegian government issued a 1994 statement that said that

a same-sex relationship can never be the same as marriage, neither socially nor from a religious point of view. Registered partnerships [as they exist in Norway] do not replace or corrupt the heterosexual marriage, and the opportunity for homosexuals to register their partnerships . . .

As, I say parenthetically, they can in Holland and Norway.

. . . will not lead to more people opting for homosexual relationships other than marriage.

So if one surveys what's going on, I'm not sure that, as it appears our colleague for Red Deer-South apprehends, marriage is under some sort of assault, is in some kind of peril as a consequence of the Charter or action of courts and court decisions. If he knew of cases like that, I expect he would have been happy to marshal that as part of his argument. So let's recognize that that's sort of the context we're dealing with.

Now, if in fact my friend for Red Deer-South is concerned about protecting marriage from some sort of Charter challenge in the future, there's a much better way of doing it than to use the notwithstanding clause. That's the thing I have a problem with. I've stated my position in terms of protecting "marriage" and protecting "spouse."

3:10

Does no one recall the furor that ensued when the existing government in this province chose to invoke section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to beat up on the victims of sexual sterilization? I think what that depth and intensity of public response taught us is that people value the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. They don't want to see those rights being suspended hastily by a Legislature.

So we have a couple of ways of protecting marriage if indeed it's under assault, and I don't accept that it is. I don't think there's empirical evidence to suggest that. One is to use the notwithstanding clause, and that's what our friend from Red Deer-South would have us do. But I'm going to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that there is a far better way of doing it, and I go back to what I'll call the Liberal alternative. When we debated Bill 12 last spring, we put forward this thesis, this proposition, that if you want to protect marriage, if you want to ensure that the word "spouse" continues to mean what we understand it to mean, let's make our legislation in this province Charter-proof.

You know, it's not really tough to do that. We put forward a proposal that would do something similar to what Ian McClelland, the Reform Member of Parliament, suggested, with a major change, which is to recognize that two adults should be able to enter into a contract. If they wish to live in a mutually supportive relationship, they should be able to enter into a contract where certain legal rights and responsibilities would ensue once they enter into that contract.

We developed that model, and one of our points in terms of trying to persuade members to support that Liberal proposal on Bill 12 was to say that this would absolutely make our legislation Charter-proof so that we'd never have to worry about a court under any circumstance coming along and changing it. What the courts are concerned

about is not the meaning of a word as much as equality in terms of rights and privileges. If you can create an ability to be able to respect and recognize that two adult Albertans can enter into an arrangement in terms of how they're going to order their affairs and ensure that we let them do that and that we not by law tell them what kind of relationship they can enter into or what they can't, that's a far, far better way, in my respectful submission, in terms of addressing key issues of rights and remedies and responsibilities. That's, frankly, all that the courts are looking for.

I can't conceive of a court that wants to change the term "marriage" or change the term "spouse." The way we prevent that absolutely from happening is by being able to recognize that notion of a domestic partnership. Mr. McClelland from the Reform caucus would have two people have to go and register at a vital statistics office. The Liberal alternative is, I think, a more discreet and more effective one. It just means that two people enter into a simple contract. What could be more basic than that? We put forward that proposal in Bill 12. We said at the time that this could be readily adapted to deal with a host of statutes, and the government said: no, we're not interested. When the Insurance Amendment Act came in the fall of 1999, we put forward the Liberal proposal again, and the government wasn't interested then.

As I say, we have two very different options to I think achieve the end of our friend from Red Deer-South. If he wants to protect marriage and ensure that under no circumstance is that going to be redefined – I don't want to see it redefined; my colleagues don't want to see it redefined – why don't we make the legislation Charter-proof?

The notion of invoking section 33 of the Charter is one of those things – and I mean no disrespect to the sponsor of the bill – that as an approach is not a very creative one, Mr. Speaker. It's not a very creative one.

I think what it does is take what seems like an easy out, when what we're not doing is recognizing those other Albertans who aren't protected in a marriage relationship. This bill only deals with sort of part of the problem. It protects marriages, but it doesn't respect the fact that in the year 2000 – I have lots of constituents, and I'd challenge any member here to tell me that they don't have constituents living in a host of different kinds of relationships.

The Liberal proposal was not necessarily to tie it to a sexual relationship. Two adult people, two adult sisters living together ought to be able to agree by contract to have certain rights apply. You know, we can imagine different kinds of relationships like that. That's the reality in the year 2000. It's not all heterosexual or homosexual couples. I mean, in some respects that's a bit past. I think we've moved past that.

What Alberta Liberals would like to see – and I know that it's a private member's bill and I shouldn't be speaking so casually about Alberta Liberals, but this is the position I suspect some of my colleagues support. We have to find ways in our legislation to ensure that people are treated equally and that we respect their right to enter into different kinds of relationships.

You know, it was the Premier who practically brought tears to my eyes at the unveiling ceremony of the Famous Five historic monument just a block from city hall on 8th Avenue in Calgary. It was the Premier who said:

When we recall the efforts of the Famous Five we're also reminded that the considerable rights and freedoms we enjoy as citizens of this country are truly precious and worthy of our respect and protection.

I don't have my copy of the throne speech handy, but what I remember is that the Lieutenant Governor talked about some values that are essential, that are the basis for this province. One of the

values was respect for differences and an ability for Albertans to be able to find ways to work together even though we're different. Maybe a poor paraphrase, but I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, you heard it in that throne speech.

I'm not sure, if we simply pass this bill with the heavy-handed approach to invoke the notwithstanding clause, that we're honouring the comments of the Lieutenant Governor. I'm not sure we're honouring the comments of the Premier, who spoke so eloquently at the Famous Five statue unveiling.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know there are others who want to participate in the debate, but I just find myself wondering why the government would sooner go down the road of using the notwithstanding clause when we've provided them with our meagre resources what I think is a pretty darned good proposal to make legislation Charter-proof. If in fact members of the government caucus who were animated by an interest in making the legislation Charter-proof – why wouldn't they be taking that sort of positive proposal, which addresses equal treatment yet protects marriage, protects spouse? This, I think, is frankly an inferior way of doing it.

You know, reasonable men and women can disagree over how to achieve the end. Our friend from Red Deer-South has his proposal, and some of the Liberal members in this House have suggested different ways. But clearly what we agree on is that marriage should not have its meaning changed. We agree on that. It's simply a question of what's the tool to be able to ensure that happens.

Mr. Speaker, I'd go on and say that when I saw some of the hysteria in the government ranks after the Vriend decision came out and remember that anxious week while the Premier of our province dithered and dallied and tried to decide whether we were going to accept the Vriend decision or not, there were a lot of people who expressed strong views. I got mail from the Canada Family Action Coalition. I got a host of letters and faxes and e-mail from some groups and some individuals. Pretty scary in terms of their focus on this. They wanted to see the notwithstanding clause trotted out, and they wanted to see the heavy artillery roll across the landscape of Alberta and basically bulldoze, mow down, run over anybody who didn't conform to their view of an appropriate relationship.

3:20

My concern with a bill like this – and I think it's well intended. I think our friend from Red Deer-South really is just trying to protect marriage. You know, it feeds some of those other kinds of notions that sound a little bit too prescriptive for a province as populous and diverse as we are. This is one of those times when I know, whether you lived in Ponoka or whether you lived in Calgary-Varsity or you lived in downtown Calgary, you recognize that there's a difference between populism and pluralism. We live in a pluralistic community, not a populist regime, and in a pluralistic community that means we have to design legislation and legislative regimes that recognize the differences that exist.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be looking forward keenly to the debate that ensues. I'm going to be using all of my limited persuasive ability to try and convince my friend from Red Deer-South to make a couple of changes to his legislation that will still achieve what he said he wanted to achieve without dragging out the howitzer, section 33 of the Charter. Maybe we can work together to find ways to make Alberta legislation Charter-proof and ensure that marriage will continue to mean what the Member for Red Deer-South and the Member for Calgary-Buffalo both feel strongly it should be restricted to.

Those are my comments. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the minister responsible for the administration of the Marriage Act I am delighted to be able to participate in this private member's bill, and I would applaud the Member for Red Deer-South for bringing forward this amendment this year. The reason I say that is that I agree with him that in the definitions that are present in the Marriage Act, obviously one was missed, and that was: what is marriage? I do appreciate this amendment, as it's coming forward, that would fit into the preamble of the Marriage Act to clarify that position.

I imagine that at the time it was drafted and crafted and thought out, there was an automatic assumption, as he stated, as to what marriage was. I'm sure there was never any anticipation that that would be questioned down the road. This is an old act and one that isn't brought to the table often, and I do appreciate him bringing it forward.

I also appreciate the reason, I believe, why he has put in after section 1:

- 1.1 This Act operates notwithstanding
 - (a) the provisions of sections 2 and 7 to 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I think he put that in place because, I hope from the arguments that I'm going to present, it seems reasonable that people assumed it was there. So why not have it there and the question not revisited again down the road? It is set in Alberta Statutes and law and everyone knows it and it stays there without question or challenge.

I did a different type of research, Mr. Speaker, on this bill. I did some of the same. I looked at some of the questions that had been raised in other jurisdictions and some of the legal cases that had come forward in those jurisdictions to question what marriage was. But my research focused on a different angle. I talked to young people, teenagers, and asked them what they thought marriage was. I talked to cultural groups and asked them what they thought marriage was. I talked to spiritual groups and asked them what they thought marriage was. Then I brought all of these together to come up with some thoughts on what should or should not be in this bill. In fact, I have to say that, without fail, all three groups came to the conclusion that marriage was a relationship between a man and a woman, period. I can probably go through some of the studies in my research that will show how that has been the case for thousands of years. I appreciated the comments.

I went, of course, through the spiritual groups because marriage really came about, as was stated, either through a spiritual relationship or a cultural relationship or a combination of both. Marriage was something that was adopted by religious groups and cultural groups as a way of life. Some had it as a reason for living and being and others did not, but by and large all had the same purpose. It was a relationship between a man and a woman that could not be broken or amended. We know that in our society that isn't always the case.

I then looked at the reasons for a marriage to break down. Again, without fail, they almost all had the same reason, and they were very strict. I then compared it to our divorce laws in Canada and found that our divorce laws really had anticipated a lot of the cultural and spiritual reasons for marital breakdown but did not really promote that. I just wanted to read into the record a few of the responses on the reasons of some of the groups that I checked with. I had a very interesting chat on the cultural side with people from different ethnic backgrounds.

The Islamic community was very interesting because I didn't have an awareness of this, and I appreciated the openness and candidness that was brought forward when I asked what they thought of marriage. There are some very definitive passages from the Koran that relate to marriage and how marriage involves strictly the union of a man and a woman. I think it would serve members well if they in fact checked with it.

Friends of mine who are members of the Hindu faith and culture, the Ramian, also had some very definitive ideas on marriage and what was not only culturally acceptable but spiritually acceptable to their community.

I also talked with people from the Jewish community, and there are some very definite ideas in the Torah – I may be saying the name of some of these religious books wrong. The Torah very much dealt with the relationship of a marriage between a man and a woman and how very special that was to the Jewish faith, which I absolutely admire.

I then talked to people from the Buddhist faith and asked them about the relationship of marriage and the togetherness that it presented to the family in the whole. Again, Mr. Speaker, that relationship was special and between men and women.

I talked to people from the Mormon community and asked them what they felt about marriage and men and women being married spiritually and culturally. Again, the strength of that unit coming together was phenomenal.

I then talked to one of the priests of the Chinese Pentecostal diocese, in fact the fellow who was the head of it. He was kind enough to share some of the doctrines of the church and the community with me as well, which I wasn't aware of. I'm going through this because I found this very interesting and very informative. He sent me a passage on the positions and practices of the Pentecostal association which I think summarized, in essence, the basis for all of these groups' beliefs, spiritually and culturally, and how they came together.

3:30

I'd like to just put this in the record, Mr. Speaker, because I think it is a summary of what the definition of marriage really is. This is from the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. They say:

Marriage is a provision of God whereby a man and a woman enter into a lifelong relationship through a marriage ceremony which is recognized by the church and legally sanctioned by the state.

Marriage establishes a "one-flesh" relationship which goes beyond a physical union and is more than either a temporary relationship of convenience intended to provide personal pleasure or a contract which binds two people together in a legal partnership. Marriage establishes an emotional and spiritual oneness which enables both partners to respond to the spiritual, physical and social needs of the other . . .

Marriage is to be an exclusive relationship that is maintained in purity. It is intended by God to be a permanent relationship. It is a witness to the world of the relationship between Christ and His Church.

Marriage requires a commitment of love, perseverance and faith.

When I looked at this and asked people, whether they were of my own faith, of the Christian faith, in the Anglican church, whether it was in the Pentecostal church, whether it was through the Islam faith, the Muslim faith, the Buddhist faith, the Jewish faith, or the Hindu faith, they all came back to the same thing: the importance of the relationship spiritually between a man and a woman.

So when I look at this preamble, I think that all we are doing here, quite frankly, is what our society would want us to do. I asked the question in each case: is it important to have in the Marriage Act a definition of marriage? The answer from all groups was: yes, that is important. Was it important to have it protected by the notwithstanding clause so that it couldn't be challenged down the road? Yes, that was important. No one wanted to have challenges come forward when it wasn't necessary and it was the norm. So I supported this.

The interesting thing, though, Mr. Speaker, was the one group that I found that I think we need to carry this forward to were the young

people. I have, as you know, a young family and quite often have a number of teenagers in my home. En route to a hockey game the other night I asked the group what marriage means to them? For the first time in the car there was dead silence. One of the friends, who is 17, said: that's a tough question. And I said: "Well, I hope you remember that when it comes time for you to enter into it, you think hard and long before you enter into the relationship. But can you give me an idea from your perspective as to what it is?"

Of the kids that were there, some said: well, you get married so you can have kids. Others said: you get married cause someone's your friend. Others said: you get married because you want to be with that person forever. Others said: well, marriage is passe. So there was a variety pack. They said: well, what really is marriage? So it gives an adult time to reflect on what is marriage.

To me marriage is probably the most important institution that you enter into. It should be lifelong; it isn't always. I think the hon. Member for Red Deer-South identified that there is an impact on marital breakdown and the lack of marriage with children. I've seen that firsthand, and I agree with him. It is devastating for children, but it's not something that can't be overcome. It's something that can be worked on. Why take that away from the children? Why not give them that solid stability within this act so it can't be changed, can't be worked on, can't be challenged? Put it in the act. I'm sure it should have been there from the very beginning. It was overlooked. Let's put it there and leave it there and leave it unchallengeable.

That's why I would support this bill, and I really commend the Member for Red Deer-South for bringing this forward. I know his commitment to family and marriage is very strong, and I agree with him wholeheartedly, as do the number of communities and cultural groups that I have checked with. They are all in favour of this and in fact were surprised that it wasn't already there. So I said that we would be bringing it forward and that hopefully the members of our Assembly will in fact endorse it. I told them we would be sending them copies of the *Hansard* to see the support, and they're looking forward to that.

Those are my few comments. I do support this, and I thank again the Member for Red Deer-South for bringing this forward.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in second reading on Bill 202, the Marriage Amendment Act, 2000. A couple of observations as I begin this. The first is that I'm impressed with the sincerity and the thoughtfulness and the depth of feeling and the research that the three speakers preceding me have brought to this debate, the informed language of this debate. It's very encouraging to see. Very thoughtful.

Secondly, I think it's important to note that attempting to debate a bill an hour after it was introduced, having barely seen the text of the bill, is an ongoing frustration for this member of the Assembly. I understand that the government members probably had more time to have a look at the text than other members of the Assembly, but I wanted to make that point.

This bill has really three parts. One is a preamble, the second is a definition, and the third is a mechanism or a process to sort of enforce it. It's dealing with the issue of the definition of marriage, but I think it touches on a number of other areas, and a couple of things have come to mind. I've been jotting down notes as I've listened to others debate it.

There's been some talk of rights. I'd like to mention that I think there's this idea of a bucket of rights, that there's a limited number of rights in the world, the idea that if rights are given to one group,

somehow this subtracts them from another group, that somehow rights are finite in themselves. I'd like to dispute that. I fundamentally disagree with that. Let me give you an example of that, because I have found in my experience that when rights are given – and I'm not even specifically speaking here about marriage or non-marriage but about the idea of the rights that we have here.

For example, the rights of the physically disabled. We had a number of adjustments and remedies that we put in place to accommodate persons with disabilities. These were rights that were conferred upon a specific group of people. I think that those rights and accommodations, remedies, and responsibilities in fact benefited everyone. For example, we've got ramps that lead into buildings. You know who else uses those? Moms with strollers and people having difficulty with mobility problems for whatever reason. It isn't just people in wheelchairs or with walkers who take advantage of that. Other people who do not in fact have a physical disability were able to take advantage of it. Those easy-access doors is another example. You know who I see using them? The elderly. I see people with a temporary disability using them.

So we've had a little discussion as part of this debate about rights and conferring rights, and I think it's important to remember that they're not finite and that in some cases rights that were granted to one group of people have in fact enabled many others.

Similarly, the emancipation of women has allowed and encouraged much greater participation of fathers in the lives of their children in a much more intimate and on a daily basis, and I think that's been a good thing as well.

3:40

This bill is dealing with the meaning of marriage, and I think that's actually spelled out in here. I have to say that we'd heard a bit about this bill coming. I think it was announced by the member back in the fall. So I was able, like others who have spoken before me, to confer with various constituents of Edmonton-Centre. I have to say that I heard all kinds of things. You know, I have a large gay and lesbian community in Edmonton-Centre, and from members of this community I heard from people who really don't feel very strongly about having a gay and lesbian marriage. It really doesn't matter that much to them. I also heard from people to whom it matters a great deal, and they would like to have access to this.

From people outside of the gay and lesbian community I also heard the same thing. There are some people who care deeply about this. For them it is a sanctity, it is a solemn occasion, it means everything, and it should not be opened up or changed or corrupted. That was the kind of language that was used to me. So some people cared a great deal, and other people really didn't care very much about it. When questioned, they didn't seem to feel very strongly one way or another.

I know that there's a Canada-wide survey that's saying that there is in fact some support for the idea of not limiting formal marriage as defined by legislation to heterosexual couples. More importantly, in that survey what we did see was overwhelming support for remedies and benefits and responsibilities for other kinds of domestic relationships outside of marriage. That's where people were really interested, and I'd like to talk about that for a little bit. I've spoken before, certainly in the debate of Bill 12 and also in the debate we had on the Insurance Act in the fall of 1999, that I do recognize, as I've just said, that some of my constituents in Edmonton-Centre feel very strongly about this, and I have no wish to threaten that.

Certainly the Member for Calgary-Buffalo gave a number of examples of how the concept of marriage could be upheld or left alone. I'm of course referring specifically to the Liberal amend-

ment, that has been offered on two occasions now, with Bill 12 in the spring of '99 and with the Insurance Act in the fall of '99, which really was offering the government a Charter-proof method of being able to offer and ensure remedies and benefits but also responsibilities for people that are in a domestic relationship without threatening or opening up the concept of legalized marriage that we have today, as established by legislation.

We should recognize – and some people have alluded to this already – that in Alberta people exist in many different kinds of relationships. You know, we have first-time married people, we have stepfamilies, we have blended families, we have single-parent families, and we have siblings living together in a long-term, dependent relationship. I always get a little uneasy if there appears to be any sort of drive to say: this is the one and only definition that is ever accepted, and everybody better be like this. I'm really uncomfortable with that because I recognize the diversity of what exists, and I think we need to deal with the diversity of what exists.

Once again, I don't need to stand up here and say that marriage should be threatened in any kind of way, but I do say that we need to deal with what is actually in front of us with the population. If that can be done in a way that leaves marriage alone and leaves those people that feel very strongly about it with their way of thinking, good. So be it.

So I once again encourage this Legislature to consider that opening, that inclusion of others with the Liberal proposal for the partnerships, which very simply was allowing for a contract to take place that would give coverage, would include specified relationships under the benefit of the law and with the remedies and responsibilities that came therein.

Certainly that is the one thing that I've heard the most around this issue. I hear about people who want to know about pension sharing, about property division, about insurance coverage, and about intestate law. Those are all issues that are affecting people's ability to take responsibility for themselves and to look after the loved ones in their family. The law as it stands right now is precluding that, and there are people that want to take that responsibility.

So I think it's important to work on that part that is doable, what is possible and is the right thing to do. It's clear to me from the research that I've done and the research that other members have done in their communities and in their constituencies that we have not reached a point of comfort on the idea of opening up the definition of marriage. There is a variety of opinion there. There is not an overwhelming direction that is being taken.

The third part of this bill – and this is the one that causes me the most concern – is the proposal that the notwithstanding clause be used to enforce this proposed definition of marriage, which quite clearly is saying that marriage would be between a man and a woman – that's it – and it would be enforced that way, that if there were any attempt to do anything else, the notwithstanding clause would come down like a guillotine and cut off any further debate or movement in the law.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I have spoken a number of times in this Assembly about my – it's much greater than discomfort. This is a repugnance about using that notwithstanding clause against any specific group of people. I really believe that is wrong, and I have great difficulty with it. I've noticed that this government does tend to like to narrow things, to get involved in people's intimate, personal lives, set the restrictions, and build that fence to enclose things very specifically. What is the purpose of law? It is to address an issue or a situation to offer a remedy, to confer a responsibility or an expectation of responsibility.

So I find it interesting how often this government wants to mold everyone into following the same dictate.

In Alberta I can remember that not many people approved of Quebec using the notwithstanding clause against the English speakers. In this case that was against a minority in that province. So why would it be okay, then, to use the notwithstanding clause in this instance? I don't think it is. I think that notwithstanding clause is there to be used only in very extraordinary circumstances, and I honestly do not feel that this is the extraordinary circumstance that that calls for.

I'm proud of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I'm proud of the Constitution in this country, and I'm proud of it particularly because it does protect the minorities from the tyranny of the majorities and also protects minorities from the tyranny of other minorities. That's important to who we are as Canadians, and it's important to who I am as an Albertan.

I don't personally believe that the use that's being suggested with this bill was part of an envisioned purpose in having the notwithstanding clause included in the Charter. So I cannot support that part of the bill and the using of the notwithstanding clause to enforce that. I just feel that is wrong. It's stepping beyond what is appropriate for us to be authorizing as a group of legislators and as leaders in the country.

I realize that my time is growing short. I know that others wish to address this issue, and I'm sure I'll have other opportunities to speak to this. It has been a very interesting discussion, and I look forward to what others will be bringing to the debate. Thank you for the opportunity.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before we proceed, could I have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:50

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce this afternoon three distinguished visitors that are here watching the proceedings in the Legislative Assembly. Earlier this month my family and myself along with the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness and a former colleague in the Legislative Assembly, Andrew Beniuk, had the occasion to celebrate the new year at the Vietnamese Buddhist temple. In the gallery this afternoon we have – and unfortunately I don't have your name written out here – the most reverend from the temple along with Hang Linh and Daniel Zierler* to watch the proceedings in the Legislative Assembly. I would like to welcome you all. The temple is a beautiful and special place that I encourage all Members in the Legislative Assembly to visit. So welcome and thank you.

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 202

Marriage Amendment Act, 2000

(continued)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am

pleased to rise today to speak in strong support of Bill 202, the Marriage Amendment Act, introduced by my hon. colleague from Red Deer-South. I think that the introduction of this bill and the debate around it underlines the importance of private members' bills and the opportunity to bring those bills forward and debate them in this Legislature, and I have always supported that process.

I have appreciated certainly the debate or the contributions, I might say, which is more to the point of this bill, because I think it has been contributions from first the member that introduced the bill and the Member for Calgary-Buffer. I'll have a couple of things that I just want to mention, and I probably will get some reaction either in the House or after or some illumination from the hon. member on a couple of points. I look forward to that, also to the comments from my colleague from Calgary-Foothills and the discussions that she had with the various communities in her area and, of course, the latest contribution from the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Most Albertans I believe understand marriage to be the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. In fact, I think that's used in a number of ceremonies. I think in most marriages there is a mutual, sometimes tacit, sometimes intentionally deferred, sometimes unintentionally deferred, intent to have and to raise children. I think that this biological aspect essentially defines marriage as a heterosexual institution. In fact, in a survey of some thousand Canadians that was conducted I think by the Feedback Research Corporation in 1998, about 58 percent of those surveyed said that a family should be defined as a heterosexual pair, not simply as any pair or any group.

I think what's important in this discussion this afternoon is that this bill is about marriage. It's about the institution of marriage. It is not about benefits or the extension of benefits. Certainly in Canada marriage and divorce are a matter of federal jurisdiction. However, the solemnization and licensing of marriage are matters of provincial jurisdiction, and hence we should discuss those matters here today.

I believe that this bill protects the institution of marriage in Alberta as a fundamental building block of our society, and it will do that by protecting that institution and that activity for heterosexual couples. I believe on the question of who can marry whom that the Alberta government has been clear that it supports that concept, and I believe this government has made it clear that they would oppose any legal challenges to this status up to and including the use of the notwithstanding clause. Here I get into some risk with my colleague from Calgary-Buffer on speaking to the use of that clause, and I want to spend just a bit of time on that.

Sometimes this clause is called a legislative override, and really what it does in my simplistic layman's thoughts is allow a provincial government to declare a law as in force even if the courts say that law is in violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There has been a notwithstanding clause in the Alberta Bill of Rights since its passage in 1972, and it was the first piece of legislation that was introduced, I believe, by the newly elected Lougheed administration at that time. I think what that did was recognize the role – and I think it's a key role – that we as legislators have to play. We're here at the wish of the people to develop policy for the people, and I think that this fundamental, democratic rule should not be undermined by an appointed judiciary. Hence the use of this notwithstanding clause would be an extraordinary legislative action in my opinion, and I believe that the use of it must be rare. I believe that very strongly. I think the use of the notwithstanding clause should be subjected to the closest scrutiny of the people of this province.

But what is equally clear to me is that marriage is so fundamental

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

and that there is such societal consensus that the protection of this institution would not require a referendum. This bill I believe focuses on marriage, who can and cannot get a marriage licence. As I indicated before, this bill is not about benefits or the extension of benefits. I think that's the subject for another discussion.

Now, I read section 2 of the Alberta Bill of Rights, and it's written, as usual, in plain language, but I want to read it into the record.

Every law of Alberta shall, unless it is expressly declared by an Act of the Legislature that it operates notwithstanding the Alberta Bill of Rights, be so construed and applied as not to abrogate, abridge or infringe or to authorize the abrogation, abridgment or infringement of any of the rights or freedoms herein recognized and declared.

Also, section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms contains the notwithstanding clause.

Now, I recall that its inclusion might be considered a compromise. I'm admitting something when I can recall some of this debate, but I recall that the Premiers – I believe it was Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta – argued that a charter was not needed and that an elected parliament should prevail over an appointed judiciary. I believe that was the argument at the time. But as a compromise it was agreed to include a charter of rights with a notwithstanding clause to ensure that legislators and not the courts would determine matters of public policy. This argument is fundamental to my support for the use of that clause in Bill 202.

4:00

Some notable people, former Premier Lougheed, described the notwithstanding clause as a balance between two competing interpretations of our democratic system, and those two interpretations are a British historic tradition of parliamentary supremacy and the American tradition of judicially enforced constitutional rights. It has been used in prior times in Canada sparingly and rightly so, but I believe having that notwithstanding clause in our Charter is a Canadian compromise, and I support that. I believe it allows us to protect human rights but also leave legislators room to maintain important collective social arrangements like marriage. Do we as legislators have the final say on important social issues? I believe, as I said earlier, that we are elected by the people to develop policy for the people, and I think we would not be elected long if our policies did not reflect the values and the wishes of the people who elect us. I think that is a given.

I want to just read in – I think I have a moment – one other paragraph that Peter Lougheed included in his 1998 paper *Why a Notwithstanding Clause*. That was the title.

If an important socio-economic initiative is being obstructed by a Charter interpretation over which reasonable people of good will might disagree, then it may be legitimate for a legislature or Parliament to invoke the override.

Madam Speaker, in my view marriage is one such important socioeconomic initiative, not only for the man and woman undertaking it but also for the society in which we live. Albertans are reasonable people. They are people of goodwill. They are also generally agreed that marriage is between a man and a woman. That is something that is deep and fundamental to us in this province. For this reason and others that I've outlined I am supporting fully Bill 202 to help ensure that the institution of marriage is maintained in Alberta as the foundation of family and society. I urge all members to support this bill, to protect this longstanding legal and religious and cultural tradition from challenge under the Charter.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am delighted to take some opportunity today to rise and speak to Bill 202, the Marriage Amendment Act, 2000, to speak to a few issues actually, first as to why I feel that this act is important. I certainly fully support my colleague from Red Deer-South for the introduction of this act. I'd like to speak as to why this act is important. Also, then I would like to address a few issues more to do with the reasons for why in our society and in all societies traditionally marriage has been enshrined in law and in traditions throughout the world in time, those areas of the definition of family, the public contract, the privileged status of marriage versus the rights, the preferred choice of the citizens of nations, certainly the question of standards versus tolerance, and finally the notwithstanding clause.

With this act, just even this week I had a constituent call me, in light of maybe confusion, with regards to federal legislation being introduced or changes in family laws not necessarily related to marriage, but there is quite a bit of confusion amongst people today with what constitutes a marriage. Despite that the definition hasn't changed, that it is between a man and a woman, there still is a need to help reclarify and reinforce that policy. It's precisely because the definition of marriage is being challenged – and I would say not necessarily before the courts today but certainly in public debate – that people are trying to define or otherwise assess that they could have benefits totally like unto or that they would, if preferenced, have the full status of the definition of marriage to include different relationships. It's precisely because of all the debate in the public and the change in family law that it's important to reclarify the position of the government today.

Our act has been silent, surprisingly enough – and maybe not surprisingly, as others have said – in that it has not included the definition of marriage to mean between a man and a woman. Therefore, certainly to facilitate courts in the future, to facilitate those in the Legislatures of the province in the future, better to have it expressly stated than, given the context of today, where the debate does continue to be brought forward.

For some of my speech today I will refer to quotes that I've taken from a few different individuals: Bruce Hafen, from the World Congress of Families, a speech that he gave in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in March of '97. I'm going to refer to some articles of Lynn Wardle, a paper that he did on the critical analysis of the constitutional claims, and a couple of quotes from William Gairdner on a paper that he developed on the topic of democracy.

Family law can regulate family life by answering two very different questions. So we could say that the first question is: should the law define the kind of relationships and moral commitments that qualify to be protected as families? Secondly, should the state be allowed to intervene in ongoing family life? Recent family law has been saying no to the first question and yes to the second. Thus the trend in most countries today is towards letting people decide for themselves how and when to form and dissolve marriages and parent/child ties.

The law imposes few moral commitments on these laissez-faire relationships, but it then encourages broad state intrusion when trying to bandage the wounds among the personal casualties within the family anarchy it has created. By giving higher priority to personal convenience than to family obligation, this legal approach undermines the family members' entire sense of commitment in belonging to each other. I consider that this pattern, actually established in trend, is backwards, that family law should first exert its authority to define the family and what society expects of marriage partners, parents and children.

Then on the second question, law should limit state authority so that it intervenes only in cases of real abuse in formal families in

order to nurture family members' long-term personal growth and stability.

A quote from Neal Maxwell said that we should concentrate on purifying the headwaters of family commitments rather than spending so much energy trying to control downstream pollution. We talk environmentally all the time today with respect to pollution in our streams and in our waters and talk about the treatment plants that we should put in place to ensure that our water quality is there. The same issue is probably more important today given the problems of today's family and the breakdown of many of our traditional families and the stability of the family unit. We ought to concentrate more on purifying the headwaters of what constitutes preparing people for defining the kinds of relationships and commitments that would be both privileged and protected as families.

4:10

The major change in family law has facilitated the change in marriage from being a permanent, familistic, social institution to a temporary contractual source of personal fulfillment. Unfortunately, when trouble comes, the party to a contractual marriage seeks happiness by walking away. They marry to obtain benefits and will stay only as long as they're receiving what they bargained for. But when trouble comes to a familistic marriage, the husband and wife work through it. They marry to give and to grow. Law cannot make people love each other, but it certainly can do much to encourage, more than it does now, our willingness even to obey the unenforceable. We need a legal model in which law unapologetically defines the family, marriage, and child/parent ties in a familistic entity that expresses community interests as well as individual needs. Then law should do all that it can to protect this formally structured family from premature intervention while encouraging spouses and parents to stay together when the trials of life do occur.

With respect to the definition of man and woman, the heterosexual dimension of the relationship is at the very core of what makes marriage a unique union and is the reason why marriage is so valuable to individuals and to society. The concept of marriage is founded on the fact that the union of two persons of different gender creates a relationship of unique potential strength and potential value to society. The essence of marriage is the integration of a universe of gender differences profound and subtle, biological and cultural, psychological and genetic associated with sexual identity. Thus the definition of marriage as a cross-gender union is not merely a matter of arbitrary definition or semantic word play; it is fundamental to the concept and nature of marriage itself. I suspect it's for those kinds of reasons that our acts in the past have not defined marriage. We have understood, whether explicitly or implicitly, that marriage does define the heterosexual element.

I would like to speak secondly with regards to the public contract that is and has always been part of marriage. When we look at marriage, it hasn't traditionally been a private contract but very much a public act involving three parties: the man, the woman, and society itself, represented by the state. We might ask even today: should government be involved in the role of sanctifying marriage at all? Why not leave it to the church or other organizations? Should government even have a part to play in the sanctifying of marriage?

I will simply say that the public and the government are a significant and fundamental part of what marriage in society and its benefits are about. It's not simply a private voluntary contract, but it's much more of a social institution whose privileged legal status derives from it social as well as individual benefits, and thus government does have at its core a responsibility to sanction and approve and see that it's a public contract. This attitude enforces a

role of law in bridling human passions by establishing society's expectations about the commitments family members have one to another. Bridled love passionately nourishes families, while unbridled passion destroys families. Guests do come to a wedding for a reason.

Wendell Berry says that couples must not live for themselves alone; they must finally turn from their gaze at one another back toward the community. If they had only themselves to consider, one would need not marry, but they say their vows to the community as much as to one another, and the community gathers around them to hear and to wish them well on their behalf and on its own. Pledging themselves to one another until death, they are joined by this vow before the community as no law or contract could ever join them. If the community cannot protect this giving, it can protect nothing. Marriage joins them to one another, to forebears, to descendants, to the community, to Heaven and Earth. It is the fundamental connection without which nothing holds, and trust is its necessity.

It's precisely the public nature of marriage, society's great stake in the outcome and the offspring of each marriage, which distinguishes it from all other relationships and contracts. Marrying makes a public commitment that one accepts responsibility to the community and its values. Society itself must determine which relationships and commitments satisfy these social interests. For this reason, the law must enthrone lifelong, familistic, heterosexual marriage as a crucial element to both personal development and social stability.

Today much is asked with regards to rights and not necessarily easily, but arguments can always be advanced that rights should be part of different groups for a variety of reasons. Marriage was not enshrined necessarily because of a natural right but has always been part of an acknowledgment of the significant benefit that it is to society that it was granted special, privileged status. Law historically gave marriage a preferred position under inheritance tax, property laws, not only because marriage matters to the individual, but because it matters so much to society. To achieve this benefit, our laws have not only tolerated formal, heterosexual marriage; they have endorsed and sponsored it. It's precisely because of the privileged status that our laws form, not what one might argue with regards to rights but certainly because of the tremendous and most fundamental benefit that it plays to the stability of our society.

I'd like to also then speak a little bit about choice. We live very much in a country today where choice and the freedoms of our land have been enshrined. Maybe despite what some would define as the defining characteristic of our country – sometimes it is used as health – I would actually say that the defining characteristics of our country come from the freedoms and the liberties that we've enjoyed and that have provided the foundation for us to supply all that we might choose. It's literally these freedoms that have brought Canada to the greatness that it is.

The liberty that we enjoy is much more in place, though, because of our common-law traditions. We've had centuries of experience and a foundation of values through the common people in practising marriage. It hasn't been something that our society has invented. It has certainly been part of all societies, and this common-law tradition of ours has set great precedents in establishing customs, experience, and developing preferred practices. When we speak of changing or wanting to change anything like unto marriage or even family, we should not be too quick to ignore what common law has provided both in the foundation of law and in tradition and certainly in custom and practice. It's because of these that in our society we choose – it puts a binding force amongst the individuals; it puts a commitment to the man and the woman in marriage. It puts a commitment to ancestors, to descendants, and to neighbours. It's

precisely because of common law and the freedoms we enjoy that the voluntary association willingly allows us to bridle our passions in light of the responsibilities that we bear for the good of society and certainly for our own selves.

When we speak of freedoms, it's not so much the freedom to do whatever we want, but it's the ability to bind ourselves by choice. In business we do it by contract; in family we do it by marriage. It's these binding commitments, not necessarily to be able to be both single and married, that allow us the choice of being able to go one path or the other and to bind ourselves to the commitments of that choice.

4:20

We also speak somewhat of wanting to be I would say tolerant of many viewpoints. I wouldn't and no one would be in favour of expressing viewpoints that would by discrimination harm another person, but certainly there is an issue of having to decide what are the standards of our society versus what are those acts that we tolerate. Most people intuitively recognize that if the law endorses everything it tolerates, we will eventually tolerate everything and endorse nothing except tolerance itself. I would say that even the simplest moral standards automatically invite judgment enforced by stigma and above all emphasize not the equality of persons and their behaviours but their subtle differences and distinctions.

Today we are informed that this is not in the democratic spirit, that we should not speak of standards but of a diversity of values. Indeed, the democratic equation now insists that because all values are chosen by people of equal worth and rights, all values must be equal in rank. To insist otherwise is to impose your values on mine. However, neither the family nor society as a whole can survive as moral communities without the multitude of positive discriminations in the form of rewards and stigma required to defend some common conception of the good, which is the ongoing job of society to elaborate and articulate.

So the question "Shall we have family at the centre of a good society?" hangs on our prior decision whether we want to encourage virtue in citizens, whether to argue for standards and the social hierarchy this entails or merely just personal values. Policy will naturally follow accordingly. It's not to mean that we don't tolerate, in the sense that we're compassionate toward the ideas and views of others, but it is of prime importance in law to establish what society views is of the good and to establish better practices for better outcomes. For this, all law will have to establish one set of standards or another.

In that regard, I bring you back to marriage; that is, marriage that has both by public contract, by privilege, by choice, by definition, and by intuition set the standard of what constitutes one man and one woman being married. When we try to then be sympathetic to others of other viewpoints and other forms of relationships to make them like unto marriage, it does not mean that tolerance is such that society in having to choose its standards should be changed but that certainly we would not harm those of other differing viewpoints.

I would also like to speak just a little bit with regards to the notwithstanding clause that's in here and whether this really adds to the powers that we might ask. It certainly is argued that the notwithstanding clause, in which sections it may apply, may not have the powers in the end to do what we might ask. As other members have suggested, there are no challenges before the courts at this time. However, the notwithstanding clause does put in place the express policy of the government with regards to letting the public know with clarity, and certainly those that might want to interpret for whatever reason, the express purpose and will of society with regards to marriage, that we do much more than just be silent on the matter.

I'm pleased that we take the approach to send the signals that this is an institution that needs work. It is an institution that has found more failure in recent decades than in past. It is an institution where if we put more time to headwaters, we might resolve further problems of pollution downstream. To this end, I support Bill 202.

Thank you.

MR. DAY: Madam Speaker, in the few minutes allotted to this discussion, I will try and briefly summarize what I think to be the position of my constituents on this, also a position which I share. In looking at the actual bill, I think I'm hearing support for that from some in the House on all sides of the political spectrum. Nobody can say that they want to not support marriage. From that there are concerns, however, that are flowing forward.

The reason marriage, of course, has always had a position of honour down through the centuries is because we in society have recognized that two people form a bond with the original intent, at least in most cases, of being for life – we know it doesn't always work out that way, but that's been the original intent, anyway, down through the ages – and then in that bond take on the responsibility of procreation, not just of procreation but in fact of raising, educating, making sure, and determining that the health and well-being of those children is secured and that they move on to be responsible members of society. That's a fairly comprehensive task, one that takes no small amount of resource – physical, emotional, spiritual, and financial, I might add – but one which human beings down through the centuries and the eons have said in the long run is probably worth it. At least that's the determination of most of us as parents, and I'm glad my parents felt it was a worthwhile exercise also.

In doing that, at different times in society different countries or jurisdictions have also accorded some benefit to that in a tangible financial way. It might be a tax benefit, or it might just be a place of honour in the village square, but there's always been something accorded to that very significant task of procreation and not just passing on the physical heredity of which we are a part but in fact passing on to civilization, one generation to another, that which makes a civilization strong.

Now, throughout time also there have been varying degrees of other types of adult relationships which people choose to become a part of. There have been varying degrees of tolerance for other types of relationships down through civilization, ranging from a lot of tolerance to very little tolerance. I think in today's society it can be safely said that there's a high degree of tolerance for people making other choices of partners, be it life partners or short-term partners or mid-term partners. I think there's a high degree of tolerance for people's choices. The question comes down to according the benefits that have normally been left for the heterosexual married relationship.

Here are two questions I think we have to face. Number one, Madam Speaker: when the majority of our citizens want the system as it is, do we have the mandate as legislators to change it without having our citizens being the ones to say in a very significant way that it should be changed? The second one is that there's no defining – and I know that some people are talking about other types of relationships. Leave the definition of marriage as it is. Most people agree with that, maybe even the Liberals here. Leave it as it is, but allow the tax-supported benefits of different types of relationships to be accrued to others.

There's a concern that's raised there. Number one, is it affordable that we can give tax support and that businesses would be forced to give financial support to a variety of other relationships? It does not just stop at a two person, same-sex relationship. There are many

types of relationships that we face today that people make the choice of. We hear about them all the time. In my own constituency – and I've talked about this in the Legislature – I was asked by somebody who had two wives. He was from another country, but he had two wives, and he wanted me to lobby to change the law to accommodate that so there could be tax-supported benefits. I said: I'm sorry; I don't have a mandate from my citizens to do that.

The concern there is that if you take in all the variety of arrangements. I just read in a newspaper publication about two women, same sex, who had a surrogate husband/father provide the semen for the impregnation of one of them. Then they would raise the child, but the surrogate father would live with them, also with his female friend, and they would be a family in their definition. Now, if that's their choice, that is absolutely up to them in a tolerant society. But do we accrue tax-supported benefits to that?

That's the question that we have to answer before we move into changing definitions, and to simply pass more legislation which says that all other forms can be accommodated – I think we need this discussion. The concern is that we can't afford every other form imaginable. What about two men living together for years? They may not be in fact homosexual, just friends, but they have a commitment to stay together. Do we accrue to them tax benefits? How many and to what variety of forms?

4:30

Then the concern here – and I'm going as quickly as I can – is that if you allow a variety of other forms, eventually there will always be one relationship somewhere that's not included in the list. They will then challenge in legislation their ability to be funded, and if the challenge is lost in court and the courts say that everybody has to be funded, every relationship or none, then a government may well say: we can't afford it all, so even the marriage relationship as presently defined will no longer have any tax support. That is not a far-flung situation, because we have a challenge to the widow/widower pension that we have right now. What we're saying to widows and widowers who are over 55 is that if you are left at that age because of death . . .

MRS. McCLELLAN: You've got 10 minutes.

MR. DAY: How does that work?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, I just checked. Trust me. I don't want you to talk so fast. I can't keep up. My ears are getting lost.

MR. DAY: That present situation is now working its way through the system, and the challenge there is this, Madam Speaker. If somebody who is not a widow or not a widower but is over 55 feels that they, too, should have tax-supported benefits the same as a widow or widower and is successful in their challenge and should the courts determine that the government is discriminating and causes the government to write in the legislation to also accommodate everybody over 55 who's in a tough financial situation to be accorded that pension, the government of the day, possibly this one, might look at the financial implications of that and say: you know, we can't cover everybody, so we will cancel the widow/widower program. I'm saying that could be a possible outcome.

So there's where we have the concerns of those which are the majority, who feel that for centuries civilization and society has felt there should be some special benefit accorded to marriage as presently defined, the time-tested definition, and that moving away from that would actually result in these recognized places of benefit being dissolved either through court action or a variety of challenges.

It is not, Madam Speaker, a case of people who want to support

the heterosexual definition being intolerant, being not loving, being disrespectful of other people's choices. It is plainly and simply a matter that we don't have the mandate, as I see it, from our citizens to change this centuries-old definition, nor do we have the mandate, without a full discussion, to stand up and say that we will set up a directory and every other kind of relationship that you can imagine can then qualify.

I know and I understand, for instance, that two males having a same-sex relationship is a definition that some people are wanting to be accommodated in terms of being recognized for tax-funded support. I appreciate that, but how can those two people, those two males in a same-sex relationship, let's say, turn and say to my constituent who has two wives and wants taxpayers' support for really a *menage a trois*, "No, you don't qualify."? What gives them that right to make that distinction? How could anybody in this House with two friends who are living together, have lived together for years and the only thing they haven't done is actually have sex, say to them, if you're moving beyond the present time-tested, centuries-old definition, "No, you don't qualify; you can't have taxpayer-supported benefits."? How can we make those distinctions once we begin to move beyond the present distinction which society is supporting?

I appreciate the fact that there's been good discussion on this today, and I do hope the message goes out that everybody here, certainly that I have listened to and had the opportunity to hear, has done this in a respectful manner and I think in a caring and loving and tolerant manner in saying that whatever choice people choose to make among adults, let them do that, and let them not be dishonoured for doing that. But when we get into changing the definitions and moving into legislation, it opens up ramifications and implications which need serious consideration. We can't simply move ahead and do these changes without a full understanding of what we're saying and what we're approving.

I appreciate the Member for Red Deer-South bringing this forward. It is interesting, in the venue in which we live and move and operate today, that when somebody talks about this type of thing, they do so at some risk and even face some levels of scorn. It's been a fascinating thing to watch, but I appreciate the fact that that hasn't happened in this Assembly today and that as we continue to speak about these things and as people continue to write and report about them, it not be done in the language of the pejorative but in the language of a serious discussion about something which has been beneficial to the human race for centuries and about which we should be very serious if we consider its alteration.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Two members rose]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I actually did see the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat first.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll keep my comments brief, so hopefully we can get to the hon. Minister of Justice shortly.

I as well just want to congratulate the Member for Red Deer-South for bringing this bill forward. I think that if it passes, it marks an important step in what this Legislature says about marriage, the importance of marriage to our society. You know and we all know as we move down this path that marriage is fundamentally important to children, children having a mother and dad in a relationship. I mean, you can talk to almost any schoolteacher and see in the schools the results of broken marriages, broken families, family decline. We see it in the court systems. We see it everywhere in our society.

What we need to do as a government and what all members of the Legislature need to do is to provide ways of supporting and strengthening families. I believe that a bill like this does exactly that. It takes the decision out of the hands of the court to arbitrarily say to Albertans that marriage consists of something different than a heterosexual couple. If that were to happen, then we have in this bill the notwithstanding clause, which certainly could be used and would be used in this case.

So I think it's very worth while. I think it points out again the strength of families. I think there's too much in our society that has broken down families, that places stress on families. I believe it's fundamental. I believe the family is fundamental to our society, fundamental to the strength of our society. If we do not have healthy families, we will not have a healthy society, and I think that is clear from everything that is happening in our society today. So I am pleased to be able to support this bill.

I once again congratulate the member for having the courage to bring this bill forward, and I hope that all members of this House stand and vote unanimously to support this bill.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to speak briefly as well to this bill just to explain to the House and to people why I think we should not be supporting the bill. First of all, I'd like to say that I endorse and agree with the principles set out in the preamble. I believe that marriage is a very, very important institution in our society and that marriage as a union between man and woman is something that doesn't need the force of legislative law to carry it forward. It's an institution, a religious institution. It's a faith institution. It's something that we take to ourselves without the government, either federal or provincial, intruding in our right to do so and intruding in our definition. It's very clear in the common law of this country, without any need of legislative sanction, that marriage is between man and woman.

The problem I have with this act really is threefold. First of all, the question of how you break up a marriage comes under federal law and federal jurisdiction. I have always been a very strong believer that Legislatures and Parliament should stick to their areas of jurisdiction. If there is a jurisdiction for defining marriage, I think that jurisdiction is very clearly in the federal House and not in the provincial House. So I would have to speak against this bill simply because bringing a definition of marriage into the provincial Marriage Act I think would offend that constitutional custom.

I'd also point out that the Marriage Act we have provincially is really sort of like criminal law. I hate to align marriage with criminal law, but it is in a way the right to legislate marriage. The right to legislate criminal law is federal; the operation of it is provincial. So we have a Marriage Act which provides for the giving of licences, the procedures in which we would create a civil marriage, and adding a definition of marriage into that act really has no force or effect. It doesn't do anything other than allow us to have this very important debate, which is, I think, necessary in society, to talk about what marriage is and what our fundamental values are. It doesn't do anything for the law. I think we have to be careful when we're bringing forward laws and regulations to do things which are meaningful in the context of the law.

4:40

I know that I'm quickly going to run out of time, so I'll just end by saying that the third concern I have with the act is the use of the notwithstanding clause. It's my firm belief that the notwithstanding

clause should be used carefully and specifically because we're dealing with the concept of individual rights. I'm a firm believer that we are all as individuals born with rights. We have all the rights that might be accorded a person. I think that's a fundamental Conservative philosophy. Government by legislating intrudes on our rights as an individual, and it should only intrude on our rights as an individual when it's absolutely necessary for the better functioning of society.

We have developed institutions over time, religious institutions such as marriage, which are very, very important institutions. Those are things that we come to voluntarily as a matter of faith, as a matter of belief, and as a matter of how we see ourselves in a society. But governments should not be involved, in my view, in dealing with my rights as an individual, either giving me rights or purporting to give me rights, because I don't believe government can give anybody rights. I think we start with a full bundle of rights and certainly should not be involved in taking away rights. I hear some pounding from the opposition, but they won't like what I have to say next.

I believe that when you start to define rights that people have, you don't give people more rights. You actually detract from the rights they already have by putting definitions around them. So I'm very concerned about the operations of charters of rights and the corollary of that, the operations of notwithstanding clauses, and I don't think they should be used on a global basis. I think they should be used on a very specific basis and only when it's very clear that a fundamental concept that we want to protect for society's benefit is being challenged.

I'll go back to where I started. I believe fundamentally in the concept of marriage. I believe it goes without saying in legislation that marriage is between a man and a woman. I don't believe that adding this preamble, all the principles of which I agree fundamentally with, adding these principles to the Marriage Act adds anything to the written law of Alberta, because in fact the Marriage Act doesn't deal with the concept of marriage. It deals with the solemnization of marriage. It deals with the process and the forms. Adding the definition doesn't add anything to our law, because first of all the law again very clearly deals simply with the methods of solemnization. Dealing with the notwithstanding clause I think does something on a global basis which should be done more particularly and more specifically on a case-by-case basis.

For those reasons I would encourage people not to vote for this bill, even, in doing so, when we strongly stand in favour of the institution of marriage in our society.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South to close debate.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll just make a few comments in closing. I appreciate the work and the debate this afternoon and the various positions that have been taken. It's been a good discussion. I do also want to put on record and thank Jennifer Peterson for all her work and help on the research for this, and I wanted to make sure I noted that before I forgot.

With respect to the Justice minister's comments, it's always dangerous to disagree with a lawyer when you're not a lawyer. Also, referring to the case that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo referred to earlier, the Layland case, this was a provincial challenge on the basis of solemnization. So for the Justice minister to suggest that this would only apply to a federal jurisdiction – clearly it's not, because it was challenged under provincial legislation. While the ruling was upheld that the couple would not obtain a marriage licence in that case, there was a dissenting opinion which does reflect very much the mind-set that the definition of marriage is very

much open to challenge in our court system. It hasn't happened yet, and the reason for the use of the notwithstanding clause at this point is to say at a time before that challenge takes place that we will put into legislation our policy that we have put forward to make it quite clear and to make a statement about the value that we place on marriage.

So, Madam Speaker, with that I will close my comments and assume we'll have more debate when it passes at second reading. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:46 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Hlady	Nelson
Broda	Jacques	Paszkowski
Burgener	Johnson	Renner
Cao	Jonson	Shariff
Clegg	Klapstein	Stevens
Coutts	Kryczka	Strang
Day	Laing	Tannas
Doerksen	Langevin	Taylor
Ducharme	Lougheed	Thurber
Evans	Lund	West
Forsyth	McClellan	Woloshyn
Friedel	McFarland	Yankowsky
Haley	Melchin	Zwozdesky
Herard		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Olsen
Bonner	MacDonald	Sapers
Dickson	Magnus	White
Hancock	Nicol	

Totals: For - 40 Against - 11

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a second time]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I seek unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 73(1) to accommodate second reading of Bill 204 on the same day as its introduction.

[Unanimous consent granted]

5:00

Bill 204
Agricultural and Recreational Land
Ownership Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Bill 204 is the result of the thoughts and ideas of many Albertans. For many years people have expressed a concern over the future of our agricultural businesses, our rural communities, and our next generation of young Alberta farmers.

There appears to be three problems in the farm community today.

One is immediate, and that is the input costs and cash returns. The second, a medium-term problem, is the large land holdings in some of our municipalities and counties. The third is a long-term problem: what does the future look like, and who will hold our land? There is a real fear in rural Alberta that the land producing the primary product from a finite land resource base will be owned or controlled by a few very large operators or corporations. Bill 204 does not attempt to address the first concern. It does reflect the views expressed for many years about the mid- and long-term problems that many see on the horizon.

Let me begin, Madam Speaker, by making it very clear that this bill is not, as some media reports have portrayed, a thinly veiled disguise to attack one religious group. There is no attempt on my part to deny anyone anywhere in Alberta anytime the freedom to practise or worship in a religion of their choice.

I would like to thank those Albertans who have contacted my office supporting this bill and the concept of creating level fields of competition in the pursuit of agriculture. To date over 90 percent of the letters, phone calls, and faxes that I've received are in support of the bill.

Bill 204, the Agricultural and Recreational Land Ownership Amendment Act, 2000, would propose a reasonable restriction on the amount of deeded arable land that could be owned in any one of the 66 municipal districts or counties in Alberta. This ownership would be limited to 15 percent of the total arable acres in the municipality or county by any individual, by any corporation, or by any religious group. In my research for this bill individual or corporate ownership in any municipality did not exceed this 15 percent guideline. The intent of this legislation is to promote independent production by the family farm as we know it today, to promote small businesses in our noncity communities, not to hinder corporate operations, including religious groups.

It is a fact that the number of independent farms in Alberta has decreased over the past 40 years. Those independent farms have helped form the backbone of Alberta's economy and culture. Ever since the very early 1900s settlers from the U.S., England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and those settlers from Europe moved to Alberta to create our communities. Without them our cities wouldn't exist today.

Farming has become more than a way of life. It's become a big business. The infrastructure, our schools, rural hospitals, post offices, stores, and dealerships rely on the farm. However, I feel we're at a crossroads, Madam Speaker. Consolidations of large land holdings in many parts of the province put these communities and services at risk. Many people have asked me if monopolies or oligopolies are just around the corner. Do we as legislators not have the duty to lay out the road map for our next generation? Free enterprise is a great idea and laudable. But in order to compete, don't the rules of competition have to be the same? I submit that today the starting line has already been moved ahead for the largest operators. Remember, the 15 percent restriction that this bill proposes would not limit the remaining 85 percent of the land that could be bought, sold, or owned by any individual or corporation.

Should we as legislators not be concerned about the potential for multinational companies to own everything from primary production to processing the final product? Do we endorse total ownership from gate to plate in communities that could ultimately be controlled by a handful of corporations? Would the consumer be the beneficiary of an oligopolistic system or of a monopoly? Is there justification to say that there can be reasonable controls on foreign ownership, as there exists today in the prairie provinces, Quebec, P.E.I., as well as the U.S. states, and to not have a reasonable control on Canadian or Alberta-based corporations?

We do compete in a global economy. That's true. However, we already select who those producers will be if they're non-Canadian. Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota already limit corporate ownership in some form or they regulate production. It would appear that they have reacted to the danger of a corporation controlling the primary source of their processed product well in advance.

May I offer for thought to you, Madam Speaker, and to my fellow colleagues in the Legislature some of the ideas that have been expressed to me from residents throughout Alberta. The first question was: will government respond before it's too late to state very clearly if their policies will protect this resource ownership? In light of a nonsubsidy era of free enterprise competition, will all legislators, regardless of political allegiances, let our next generation of rural communities, small businesses, and farms know they're important enough to be maintained and encouraged to continue? As I stated before, my statistical research showed no individual land holdings anywhere near the 15 percent restriction in Alberta. Similarly, although there are some large corporate farms involving equity shareholders across the province, it does not appear that these operations control anywhere near 15 percent of the arable land.

Madam Speaker, may I remind my colleagues that the average municipal district and county in the southern part of Alberta is composed of between 800,000 and one million acres. Fifteen percent of this land base, as proposed in Bill 204, equates to more than 200 sections of land. That's more than 800 quarter sections that could be controlled by any individual, any corporation, or any religious group. It is significant to note that of all of the individual operators and corporations that make up 53,000 farm operations today, there are 162 arms of one church that controls in excess of 1.6 million acres.

I believe it's important to discuss some facts with respect to religious groups. There are those who feel that anytime the subject is raised, it is based on a lack of understanding, a lack of tolerance. It would appear that those same people who demand tolerance and understanding are intolerant themselves when it comes to looking internally at the individual operation. Madam Speaker, Bill 204 would apply to every farming operation regardless of business status.

As I indicated before, there is only one church in Alberta today that approaches the 15 percent, and that's the Hutterian Brethren Church, which was incorporated by a special act of Parliament in 1951. This was and is still today an important act to recognize their freedom to worship, their freedom to be members of their church and follow through with their religion.

It's also important to note Justice Mahoney's comments in the decision Hutterian Brethren Church of Wilson versus the Queen:

Nothing in its objects expressly contemplates that corporation . . . that corporation being the church, Madam Speaker, . . . engaging in any business and, in particular, the business of farming.

There is a fundamental difference that should be remembered and is too often forgotten: religion and commercial farming are not one and the same. Currently in Alberta the Hutterian Brethren Church has 162 arms of the church incorporated as charitable, not-for-profit organizations. The same Justice Mahoney stated that these charitable, not-for-profit organizations, one, are not natural persons, nor does paying income tax affect the ability of an individual in this church to practise their religion; two,

In addition, the evidence establishes that the plaintiff's religious activities, as distinct from its commercial activities, are almost exclusively internal.

5:10

So contrary, Madam Speaker, to the method that this particular group incorporates under the Companies Act in Alberta, their sole

purpose is to promote their religion for the general betterment of the general public community. The Chief Justice indicated that almost all their activities were "almost exclusively internal." Justice Pratte in the same decision made the observation that the evidence shows that the business of farming for profit – not not for profit but for profit – was the appellant's main activity and most of its resources were used to buy farmland and agricultural equipment.

Madam Speaker, I don't bring these comments to the Legislature to provoke members of this church. I do so to state for the record that unless my research is wrong, this is the only church, the only charitable, not-for-profit corporation in Alberta, that wants religious freedom but is also the single largest farming unit in Alberta, that is also approaching closer than any one of the other groups the 15 percent limitation in one of the 66 municipalities, that I propose in Bill 204.

Albertans question the fairness in this method of incorporation as truly being charitable, not for profit. If there's no advantage to setting up a religious commercial business operation in this manner, Madam Speaker, do we as legislators not have the obligation to encourage all farm operations and small business to similarly incorporate?

Madam Speaker, those of us who were raised and live in small communities shouldn't have to apologize for wanting to maintain the viability of our lifeblood. I will also submit that our independent producers in Alberta are the most efficient when it comes to a gross output per capita comparison. If every producer in Alberta was only producing enough food to sustain ourselves and our families, there would be hundreds and hundreds of thousands of producers. The fact is that every producer is responsible to provide abundant, low-return, quality, safe food for mankind throughout the world. We do so with pride and without referring to our individual, ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds. We practise as individual producers our own religious beliefs and cultural or ethnic practices without the benefit of special provisions in law or policy.

Education is an important component of our well-being and our communities as well. We have a public education system that includes the Catholic faith available to our young people. These students receive 100 percent provincial student funding across the board. Throughout the province we also have funding for supporters of private or independent schools. I'm sure that many of us have been in the independent schools and talked to people of the Christian faiths that have their own schools within the counties and MDs from which we come. Their supporters build their own schools, provide busing, power, utilities, and other amenities. These schools receive 60 percent of the public level of funding.

In recent years we have witnessed communities with public schools losing high school programs, junior high programs. We've also seen school grades combined in an attempt and an effort to maintain the public community schools as a service for our rural Albertans.

Ironically we also have a parallel private school system being funded at the 100 percent level on many of the 162 charitable, not-for-profit arms of the church. Is this, Madam Speaker, an attack on one religious group? I believe this is a concession above and beyond reason in today's society. As this particular organization continues to grow, we will witness further pressure on our smaller schools. We'll continue to see the erosion of small businesses in our communities. It goes without saying that it's not the fault of any one religious group, any one corporation, or any one large individual landholder. It is a fact that our farms, especially the farms that we've come to know and call family farms, aren't truly what they were 40 years ago. They have become larger, more efficient, and they're fighting to be sustained.

Will it continue to be equal opportunity for educational opportunity for Albertans or disproportionate funding levels for one unique single group of people whose children are for the most part removed from formal education on their 15th birthday? A reasonable limitation on land ownership would help support the preservation of educational facilities in Small Town, Alberta.

Madam Speaker, that was the text of a prepared statement that I had, but I also wanted to assure everyone here that the issue that I've heard from people from Caslan to Milk River, Alberta, and as recently as Arizona indicates the same thing: we shouldn't be afraid to make a statement in defence of our smaller communities, of our businesses. We should be concerned about the potential for large consolidation of land holdings. We should be concerned about the potential for the monopolies that seem to be waiting to take over.

As you know, we've got the livestock feeding capital of Canada in our riding. Madam Speaker, that livestock feeding capital is controlled by a few very large operators, but many of the people in the surrounding district are also fearful of the day that the large multinational corporations, the Cargills, the IBPs, take over the feeding industry in Alberta.

They're also concerned over the potential that we have now with potato production in Alberta. Accordingly, in Idaho, H.R. Simplot has virtual control on 75 percent of the land and the production of potatoes. P.E.I. has put in a type of legislation to protect the producers from being taken over by the large processing plants. So when I made a fair bit of reference to, Madam Speaker, in this case a religious group, it's by no means limited. It has to do with the preservation of our agricultural independence for production.

I believe, Madam Speaker, that people don't want to hear the terms our way of life, our cultural values, or our family farm, so I'm not going to dwell on those, but I will indicate that many of the constituents have been kind enough to express a very similar train of thought not just to myself but to some of my colleagues. I know it's

a very uncomfortable position that I've taken, but I feel that as an MLA representing constituents, not just in our riding but across the province, who have been able or unable to bring the matter up for discussion anywhere that I'm aware of for the past number of years, it is also my duty to inform this Legislature and to make their wishes known, because if we continue to quietly put our heads in the sand and not discuss what people feel is a very, very long-term serious issue, then we won't have served the public well.

Madam Speaker, I know my biggest concern is the future generation and what this province will look like in the next generation or two. We've got many young people that would love to be able to farm, but they can't compete with the capital purchasing power of large corporate groups, and I guess that's part of free enterprise. But by the same token, when our average age on the farm is approaching 57 or 58 years of age, I don't think there's a great opportunity sitting there waiting for our young people to take that giant investment in competing on the world market with capital purchase prices that far outstrip the rate of return.

5:20

Madam Speaker, given the hour and the length of my speech already, I want to thank everyone for their kind consideration in listening to my comments. I want to assure everyone again that I only have the best interests of agriculture and rural communities at heart. I will say to the Hutterian Brethren Church of Canada that I am not after their operation. I am concerned as much about their children as I am about any other children.

I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:21 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, February 23, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/02/23

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please be seated. Before we begin tonight's deliberations, I wonder if we might get unanimous consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this evening on behalf of Pamela Paul, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs, and I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 16 visitors from the 180 Cumberland Scouts who are in the gallery. They are accompanied this evening by Mr. Ray Hamilton, Mr. Garry Erdmann, Mr. Harold Petrich, and Mr. Rick Morrison. They're also accompanied by one parent helper, Colin Hamilton. I would ask all scouts in the party and their leaders to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

head: Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Haley moved:

That an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate February 22: Mrs. Nelson]

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased this evening to have an opportunity to respond to the throne speech 2000, and I have to start by congratulating the speechwriter, the individual or individuals who crafted the speech that was delivered in this Chamber by the Lieutenant Governor. I think reaching into the past and using an agricultural metaphor was really an important reminder of our roots, and having read some of the material from that First Legislature of Alexander Rutherford and having looked at some of the election materials from that era, the Speech from the Throne rang true. I think it was also a tribute to the background of our recently appointed Lieutenant Governor.

In recent days we've heard two speeches from Lieutenant Governor Hole. In the first she very eloquently at some length expressed her passion and her concern for the young people of our province and in particular for education, and that's understandable given the Lieutenant Governor's background as a parent and as a long-term school trustee.

In the second, the speech where the content had been structured by the government, the reference to education is much briefer. In fact, in looking for the references to the K to 12 education system, there are but 10 lines, and even though the reference is brief, the items that are raised in the Speech from the Throne are very important. Two of them are extremely important.

Let me deal with the first, and that's the issue of class sizes. Last evening the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and I attended Education Forum 2000 in Fort Saskatchewan. It was sponsored by the ACE parent group. ACE is a parent group dedicated to working at improving school conditions and in particular class size. After the panel members had made presentations, we heard from six schools, and again from each of those six schools we heard reference to class size.

We heard of a grade 1 class with 28 students. We heard of a grade 1/2 split class with 27 students. We heard of a grade 3 class in Win Ferguson school with a size of 32 students. Later in that evening when the microphones were opened for comment from the audience, we heard from a kindergarten teacher with a total of 52 kindergarten youngsters in her two classes. So throughout the evening from the schools and from the parents that spoke, the theme was the same: classes are too large, too large to do the kind of job that they felt needs to be done in working with their youngsters and making sure those youngsters reach their potential.

The information from those parents echoed what we found in an informal survey of class sizes that we conducted across the province. We sent a survey to 1,800 schools, and we are pleased that 5,201 teachers responded to that survey, sending us information about their class sizes. The interesting thing was that those responses came from 245 different communities across the province. So from north to south, east to west we had responses.

Because of the nature of the survey, the way it was done – all we did was fax out the survey to the schools and say: share this with the teachers on your staff, and fax it back to us – some may charge that all we got back were the responses from those teachers that had large classes. That may well be true. We wouldn't deny it. We have no evidence that that's not true. But having heard from 5,000 teachers from those various geographic locations, I have some confidence, when you couple that with the comments we heard from parents last night, the comments we've heard from parents at other forums, and the comments we've heard from the SOS petitioners, that the information we received accurately reflects the picture in terms of class sizes across the province.

We were primarily interested in three questions. We were interested in what percent of kindergarten through grade 3 classrooms have 17 students or fewer, what percent of grade 4 through grade 9 classes have 25 students or less, and, finally, what percent of junior and senior high school teachers have classes which total less than 80 students. So those were the three questions.

We chose those numbers – 17 for the primary grades, 25 for the intermediate grades, and 80 for the junior and senior high schools – because those are the standards used in part by the Pew Foundation and Education Week in the United States. Those are the standards that they use to rank American states and their effort in terms of class size.

It was interesting. Were we being ranked by the Pew Foundation on the basis of the results that we received, about 20 percent of our kindergarten children are in classes of 17 or fewer. So from our sample 80 percent of kindergarten children are attending classes that are larger than 17. In grade 1 the results were rather startling. Less than 5 percent of grade 1 children are in classrooms where the population is 17 or less, 95 percent of them in classrooms of greater than 17. In grade 2 about 6 percent of the sample were in

classrooms of 17 or less, and in grade 3 only about 2 percent of students were housed in classes of 17 or less. For grades 4, 5, and 6, when you move up to 25 students as a standard, in grade 4 about 43 percent of the students were in classes of 25 or less, in grade 5 about 40 percent were in classes of 25 or less, and in grade 6 about 37 percent of them were in classes of 25 or fewer. When we heard from the junior high and high school teachers, only about 25 percent of them handled less than 80 students.

8:10

I think the usefulness of the survey is to give us a snapshot, if you will, of class sizes in the province. That's why when I saw the Speech from the Throne and class sizes were mentioned, I was delighted. We have to move past the position that was held by the previous minister of education – and I think the government has moved past that position – that class size didn't make a difference. We know now that it really does.

I think the early research in the '80s was somewhat inconclusive. Some of those early research studies were studies that were not done in controlled situations. There were not control groups that could be measured against experimental groups where class sizes were reduced and student achievement tracked. But that's no longer the case. We have some very good evidence from some very large studies south of the border that class size makes a difference. Students in class sizes of 17 and less in K to 3 in particular do better on achievement tests than do their counterparts who are in larger classes. We know it makes a difference in terms of how those students perform.

In 1985 Tennessee's project STAR, the student/teacher achievement ratio, was a four-year study that involved over 7,000 students each year in over 300 classrooms. It was an exceptionally well-designed study, and the results were positive for small classes year after year, kindergarten through 3rd grade, in all subjects, in all settings: rural, inner city, and suburban. The results were similar for both boys and girls. So it didn't matter which group they came from, what their gender was; they made the gains. The results were greater for those in smaller classes. The results were greater for children attending inner-city schools, and the benefits that they were able to track lasted through at least grade 7. So a very large study and one that has been matched by others elsewhere.

The SAGE study in Wisconsin in 1996 and '97 compared youngsters in small classes. They actually varied the classroom arrangements, one teacher to 15 students, two teachers with 30 students, and then four other different arrangements. They tried different configurations and then tested those youngsters on achievement scores to see what made the difference, and again the differences were attributed to class size.

So given that kind of research, the Americans have moved heavily into class size legislation. If you look at the reviews of class size legislation, you'll find that states like Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah, and Wisconsin now have or are actively considering class size legislation, and that legislation varies in the way it's written. Others have moved to spending massive amounts of money. California began a massive class reduction program in 1996-97. In 1997-98 their program provided school districts with money to reduce class size to 20 students per teacher for 1.9 million children, and it required 18,000 new teachers. So south of the border they're taking class size reduction very, very seriously.

We don't know what Alberta is going to do. We've had it foreshadowed in the throne speech that something is going to be done. I'm not sure it's going to be as ambitious as the Californians;

in fact, I'm quite sure it won't be. I hope that whatever we do, we learn from the things that have happened there.

One of the first things that I think we have to address is the whole business of standards. What is the class size that we would like to have for our young children in K to 3, 4 to 6, and in junior and senior high schools? I would urge that we adopt an independent measure, not one that's homegrown, that most people can have confidence in.

I'd also urge that we suggest some targets. Class size reduction is a very, very expensive proposition, and I think we would be well served to look at targets, much as we did in the early '70s, when the government of the day decided they wanted to move teacher education and accreditation from one year, as it was for most elementary schoolteachers, to four years. If you recall, at the time there was a great outcry that the province would never be able to afford it, that it was going to be too expensive. The target was set, and a year at a time the requirements before you could enter a classroom were increased until it arrived at the point where we are today, where a hundred percent of elementary school classroom teachers have at least one university degree, and many of them have two or more. So I think it's that target setting, as we've done in the past, that's an important first step.

I think that target setting allows the kind of planning to go on that hasn't occurred south of the border. They have run into an acute teacher shortage, and there are many teachers in classrooms now in California without teaching credentials. They've run into a space shortage. They created so many new classrooms they don't have the space to house those youngsters, and the pressure on building and infrastructure is really quite incredible. By setting targets, I think we could avoid that kind of difficulty.

I think it's also important, and I heard the Learning minister at a parent forum agree, first of all, that small class sizes K to 3 were very important, and I was delighted, as I think most parents there were, to hear him make that statement. But he followed it up with the observation, when someone asked where the money was going to come from, that that money might be taken from grade 4 to 12th grade classrooms by increasing sizes there and redirecting that money to primary grade classrooms. As parents last night at Fort Saskatchewan reminded us, that's not acceptable. Class sizes need to be reduced across the system.

Last session I had Bill 222, the class size reduction bill, on the Order Paper, and I was very excited about it, but the session was short. I wrote a note to the Minister of Learning suggesting that he might want to support Bill 222, and this is what I got back from the Minister, Mr. Speaker: "If it comes up this session you can count on my support!!" signed by the minister. I saved that note, because this session I have another class size bill, Bill 215. The targets are the same. The only difference is that it calls for full funding for kindergarten. I'm going to suggest to the minister that he might want to write me a similar note about 215, because I'm sure that it will be raised.

I would like to leave class size and briefly dwell on another issue that arose in the throne speech, and that was the reference to parent fund-raising. The previous minister of education was very dismissive of the concerns raised in this Chamber about parent fund-raising and constantly reassured us that that fund-raising was only being done for frills, for extras, and that it wasn't being done for essentials. Last night the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and I heard again about parent fund-raising fatigue. Parents are tired of fund-raising. I think one of the fathers at that meeting expressed it very well. He said: how many chocolate almonds do I have to eat to keep our school running? It was greeted with applause from the 150 assembled parents who agreed with him. They also were very

clear that they were not raising money for extras. They were raising money for basics.

So the reference to parent fund-raising in the Speech from the Throne I hope is not going to result in some regulations that will govern the behaviour of parents but will lead to some substantial funding of the underfunded K to 12 system so that parent fund-raising can again return to those extras that parents like to supply the children in the schools they work with.

8:20

The third thing and the thing that's missing is any kind of long-term plan. We see the two references to class size, to fund-raising, but what is missing is any kind of long-term planning for education, any long-term vision, and it's what's been missing since the very day we walked into the Chamber in 1993. I would commend to the government the efforts of the school boards, teachers, and the superintendents of the province and the school business officials in their *A Vision and Agenda for Public Education*. These people have taken the task of putting forward a vision seriously, and again I commend to the government this publication, because I think it points the way one might expect a responsible Department of Learning to move.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As has been echoed in the Chamber, it is a privilege to speak on behalf of the government in response to the Speech from the Throne. A number of accolades have been given with respect to the content and the delivery and also, I think, for the promise of the future with the new Lieutenant Governor, who was sworn in a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to focus a few of my comments on what I believe to be at the heart of the Speech from the Throne. It's not a question of a range of issues and items that are at random. It's not about 17 or 18 ministries. It's not about half a dozen task forces whose work comes to the fore at a formal time in our legislative work. This is about the fact that the government chooses to look at a range of issues with an integrated strategy, and I'm very pleased to see that we don't talk about fiscal reform at the expense of our children. We don't talk about higher education at the expense of agriculture. We are looking at the relationships of a healthy workforce. We are talking together about the impacts of a quality education system. We're talking about an economic strategy. Its focus is not simply on job creation but about market development, about international strategies, about where Canada and Alberta places themselves in the international marketplace.

In some of the highlights that the Lieutenant Governor spoke to, which are referenced early on in the speech, she uses about three or four key phrases. One is when she talks about Albertans in the sense of their confidence and the fact that they're an entrepreneurial group of people. That is not a quality that is exclusive to the wealthy. It's not something that is owned only by the young. It is a cross section across all ages, genders, and spectrums of our society. People are confident that if they apply themselves to where their tasks might be, be that education, be that in their seniors' centre, be that in communication on behalf of someone who's less fortunate, the goals and objectives they're trying to achieve will be met. They are entrepreneurial, and that's not seen as simply an economic strategy that people use. Entrepreneurial does have in it a context of innovation, people who are prepared to try and risk different strategies, so therefore I think we have to look at being

entrepreneurial as a quality of our human nature and not something that's strictly looked at as an economic element.

The whole concept of self-reliance: you know, it's very interesting that we look at people who are in need and offer them the supports that are available both as a community and as individuals, but the concept of being self-reliant is also about how to access and find ways for our own situations to be improved upon and being resilient in the face of adversity, not necessarily adversity that is caused by someone else but even personal challenges that individuals take on.

We also make note of the fact that we are spiritual people, Mr. Speaker. I think the fact that this Legislature commences every day with a prayer and a hope that as governors of the province of Alberta we will be able to use the spiritual wisdom we have on behalf of our community is something that is worthy of note. I am very pleased to see that in the Speech from the Throne.

The whole concept of looking at our natural environment and some of the environmental and heritage issues that face us as a province. We are a young province, but some of our heritage dates back centuries, thousands of years. Whether you're talking about some of the forest landscape, whether you're talking about its rivers, whether you're talking about newly discovered mineral opportunities, we have incredible resources. There is a commitment within this province to protect those and use them to the advantage of all Albertans.

I think the reason those highlighted comments stand out for me as something worth noting is the fact that we are taking those qualities of individuals, qualities of our systems, qualities of our organizations and applying them on a broad base of policy development. We definitely do have a reputation and a responsibility to continue to lead this country on our fiscal responsibilities. We will be delivering a budget tomorrow that continues to landmark and showcase and identify for all of Canada what can be done when you have your fiscal house in order and the innovation that can come from having discretionary income, the opportunities that arise for individuals when they have resources for their own purpose and not for the needs of government.

The concept of equity: we have a recognition within our financial system and within our supply of programs and services that we have to be fair to all citizens and for all causes in a way that is consistent with the responsibilities we hold as a province. We have to recognize that gender and race and age, areas where your fiscal impact can be compromised or have a different advantage, is not something that we should neglect. We have to be attentive to it. When we look further on in the Speech from the Throne at some of the issues around support for our seniors, some of the support for education, which my colleague just spoke so passionately about, the equity of how we spend our funding and how we collect our funding is a component that should not be lost.

The fact that there has to be a balance between revenues and expenditures: you know, a statement the Premier has been making since he came into power in 1992 as the Premier is that the spending problem is something that we are responsible for and that managing our revenues is at best a situation, with Alberta and its energy resources, that can sometimes be a little bit sporadic but that when you have your spending under control, when you have your priorities in place, and when you have a process to balance the two, you are on track and you're not at risk of falling back into some of the past strategies that have been used.

I want to comment a little bit about the focus that was given to the agricultural community, and needless to say, coming from an urban riding one treads carefully when you start talking about farmers and agriculture, but I have been schooled. I have a few colleagues in the Legislature that remind me what my agricultural limitations might be.

I would like to suggest that what is recognized in the Speech from the Throne is not specifically limited to an agricultural philosophy that is about the prairies. It's not simply about the crop. It's not simply about whether or not the community can deliver on the promises they hope for with respect to their farming commodities. It has to do with the fact that there are real frustrations between this province and our other provincial trading partners with respect to barriers. We do have work to do across international marketing strategies. The value-added component of our agricultural product is integral to our integrated economic strategy. It's not simply about farming and about agriculture as much as it is about the future of the economy of this province and giving it the prominence that that deserves, whether it's the technology of the machinery and the equipment, whether it's the biotechnology with respect to different strains of grain and products that can be harvested, whether it has to do with trade barriers with the European Union. That is the range of issues our agricultural community expects us to speak toward and expects us to champion, and I'm quite excited about the fact that that holistic approach to our agricultural economy was featured and showcased so well in the Speech from the Throne.

Again, as I spoke at the beginning about this integrated strategy, I've had the privilege to do a little bit of work on behalf of the minister of economic development and tourism over the last several months, just completing the tourism destination review report. There is no doubt that in traveling around the province and meeting with the various regions and communities, marketing our tourism strategies, marketing our tourism products, and showcasing what we have to offer in Alberta are keen concerns for many of our communities. Whether it's the Chamber of Commerce, whether it's a local outfitter, whether it's our national parks and our ski organizations, we have a responsibility in our economic strategy to look at tourism in a comprehensive way, and it speaks similar to what I mentioned in agriculture.

8:30

It's not just about having visitors come to this province, though they come in droves and they love what they see. It's all about fair exchange rates. It's about having high-class and quality accommodations. It's about programs that they can become involved with. It's about the quality that their tax dollar is being spent on: programs and tourism opportunities. So I'm pleased that some of that tourism work is being recognized and given the showcase that it should in the Speech from the Throne. We are a beautiful province, and we have boundless opportunities when we collectively market that strategy well.

In addition to that, as the House is more than aware, I was recently named as chairman of the MLA liaison for the Alberta Film Commission and last week appointed to their board of directors. I'm delighted to have this opportunity to work on behalf of the film industry in liaising with the various departments within government and on international issues to recognize this emerging industry for all its potential. Again, it's bigger than just location shooting. It's about technology. It's about employment. It's about finance. It's about culture and development and those aspects, and I'm pleased the government continues to recognize this as an emerging issue and part of its overall economic strategy.

Some conversation has already been tabled in the House with respect to the endowment fund, the \$500 million and that whole area of initiatives in biosciences, health, and forestry, to name just a few of the areas of technology and research that we'll be exploring. Alberta can be very proud of its track record with the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, that was put in place decades ago and which has returned on its investment significantly

for Albertans from a cash point of view and helped to stabilize some of our financial picture.

More important than that is how it's given us the leg up on the biotech industry, on medical research, and carved out a name for Albertans, shared among its postsecondary institutions, shared among its leading teaching hospitals, shared among its colleagues who provide leadership in the areas of research. So we can only expect that a similar marketing strategy and the similar guidelines in this new area will return results for this province to the same extent if not greater.

What's very interesting in the Speech from the Throne is that if you follow it through, not only do we talk about the financial support for these research issues. What you get also is the sense of a recognition of our young people in the employment field, not simply as students but also as young people who are looking for creative ways to be employed, who have to take what they have learned through their education and transfer that into meaningful employment. So the competition for a good-quality employee who is well educated and has skills and assets that an organization can utilize is recognized in the expanded programs to help youth entering the workforce.

This is a very unique initiative to the province. It's been pilot-tested, as you may be aware, over the last couple of months in the larger centres. It's being expanded over the next few days in another announcement. We know that our young people are reaping the benefits of a quality education and an economic environment in which they can participate fully, and the good news about it is that the choices they're making about their employment are targeted and focused to meet their own needs. It's not the job creation model that comes out of Ottawa. It's very much focused on matching a young person's employment interests with the skill sets they have and supporting them to bridge those two issues if there is a gap.

We continue in our financial picture to review the cost of doing business in Alberta. There's no doubt that we have to remain competitive. That was one of the hallmarks of both our Premier and our Treasurer, that we will be the most competitive tax regime in the country. The fact that we have undertaken to review our business taxes to see the implications of that on our employment opportunities, on our market share, on our ability to attract head offices and corporate entities to the province is very important. The review of the provincial fees and charges is another way to look at the cost of doing business in the province and ensure that we continue to be competitive.

In addition to that, we are looking at the component of deregulation on a range of issues. It's consistent with what we've been doing since 1993: what the core business of government is, who should be doing it, and what regulation should be in place to ensure that whatever is provided in the private sector is well monitored and meets the expectations of Albertans on behalf of their government. I think that's an appropriate strategy to have in place, because deregulation is an option we have to move toward. We have different global initiatives, whether it's in energy, whether it's in electricity, whether it's in natural gas. We have a whole range of deregulatory components that have to be considered, and what you need from the government is an appropriate strategy and framework under which that can transpire and an appropriate oversight system so that as you move into that and as you implement, you are not off track.

So those are some of the initiatives that I find very, very important, that I want to highlight for a few minutes in this opportunity to speak to the Speech from the Throne.

I also have a few comments I want to make with respect to Alberta seniors in that they have definitely been a part of the Alberta

advantage. They are contributors. They are supporters. They have, like every Albertan, carried the burden of the deficit reduction and debt elimination component. The ability to renew and review the issues that affect them as the aging population changes is something this government can be incredibly proud of. The seniors that I talked to and continue to receive information from have concerns not only about the quality of their health care but about their quality of life. Quite frankly, you can't separate the two.

There are so many other opportunities and options being made available to them that they need to have a comprehensive understanding of what this government is prepared to look at in terms of their needs: some of the work being done in the long-term care strategy, some of the work that's being done with respect to enhancing home care, the community supports and resources, the Alberta Seniors Games, some of the education communities that are developing. I have a large group at Viscount Bennett Centre in my community that is exploring opportunities for seniors, looking at family violence with respect to seniors.

When you look at issues with respect to fiscal dependency and how they will transfer wealth and a whole range of issues that seniors have asked us to look at in a comprehensive way, if any group of people will suffer if we do it in on a piecemeal basis, it would be seniors. So I'm pleased to see that they, too, are recognized specifically in the Speech from the Throne and that they are seen as being an integral part of our community and are quite prepared to assist us in shaping policy for the next generation of Albertans.

I want to just close my comments by making an observation with respect to the children at risk opportunities that are spoken to in the Speech from the Throne. Definitely, healthy families are at the core of our ability to be a healthy society. Some of those initiatives have been spoken to. The work that's been recently done with respect to the Children's Forum, the resiliency campaign through AADAC, some of the issues we're dealing with with respect to fetal alcohol syndrome and that whole early risk and early identification model will reap benefits. Those are not just financial benefits, although those will accrue, but the stability of our communities and of our society. When you have healthy children, it just goes without saying that you are building a very strong foundation.

In the work I have done on family violence, the unspoken tragedy of those domestic disputes deals with the fact that the children are the ones who have to witness and endure not only the horror of some of those circumstances but also the terrible uncertainty of being in shelters, having to flee, dependency on different adults for their economic support and support from an emotional point of view, and how damaged those children can be. Our programs must identify those children who are at risk and do everything possible to bring them in to some sense of normalcy. This is where the resiliency campaign that AADAC has undertaken has a very strong basis in research and support, because when given the needed support at a young age, some of these horrors that our young children have to endure can, fortunately, be turned around, and they can be brought into more productive and healthy lifestyles.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, I am very, very proud of the fact that we have a Speech from the Throne that addresses in a comprehensive way a range of issues meeting the needs of Albertans, that because of our monitoring of our financial situation we are able to deal holistically with a range of issues that Albertans expect us to. We are past the piecemeal stage of knee-jerk policy. We are looking at the impacts of the education system on a whole range of departments. We are looking at the success of science and technology across a whole

range of sectors. We are looking at public policy. We're looking at deregulation to maximize what we can offer to our community. We have the support of Albertans to continue to proceed in that direction.

So in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would just encourage all members of the Legislature to share this document with their constituents. We get criticized some days that there is no plan, and I find that as kind of a shallow comment to make, because when you read the Speech from the Throne, you see the range of issues, the articulate way in which they are laid out, the expectations for implementation. That indeed is the plan, and it's a good one for Alberta.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered on February 17 by Her Honour the Honourable Lois Hole, Lieutenant Governor, in the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature.

It was a pleasure to see the new Lieutenant Governor take her seat and radiate dignity and a sense of compassion and affection that she certainly symbolizes for all of us. I want to compliment her for her readiness to accept this important public responsibility after having spent long years of her life in different public positions serving the people of Alberta.

I've known the Lieutenant Governor for many years. I got to know her even more closely over the last three years during our frequent meetings on a variety of occasions. I've been most impressed, and I think we're all very fortunate to have her in the position she occupies today.

Mr. Speaker, this certainly is a throne speech which presents a sort of framework or a restatement, if you wish, of this government's commitments to Albertans with respect to the values that it subscribes to, the values that guide its programs, and it certainly sets the stage for the deliberations of the new century for Alberta. Alberta will soon be 100 years old, and certainly at the turn of the century it's important to re-examine, revisit some of the basic fundamental values and principles that undergird our society, our programs, our government institutions, and our policies.

Mr. Speaker, the speech, well written as it is, is as significant in what it says as in what it doesn't say. The silences, the absences are as important as what's been stated quite clearly and well.

I find on page 2 that baby Micheal was ushered into this Assembly to show our commitment to the children of Alberta, baby Micheal being the millennium child and representative of Alberta's millennium children. The reference that is made there is to the birthright of baby Micheal and his cohorts to "economic opportunity, personal freedom, clear choices, and safe communities."

All well and good, Mr. Speaker, but baby Micheal and others of his age need economic security before they can have economic opportunity. They need strong and caring families before they can learn to exercise personal freedom. They need to have secure schools. They need to have secure guarantees of nutrition and other things that are needed for growth as children before they can exercise clear choices, and certainly safe communities are the context in which our children have the right to grow. That certainly is a precondition.

So the statement on birthrights in my view skips certain other important conditions and important guarantees that we as adults, that we as the government of this province, that we as the Legislature of this province need to give to our children. I find that those are

missing here. What we find are sort of nice and pious announcements about economic opportunity and personal freedom and choice but nothing about the economic security that children can have only if their families have that, no guarantees of hot lunches for children who come to school every morning without being fed at home. I had hoped that at least in this new century, when we're trying to renew our commitment to our children, there would be some concrete indication of the way in which we will commit ourselves and our resources, which are available in abundance, to our children and particularly to those children who are in the greatest need. That, I find, is missing in this speech.

Mr. Speaker, again talking about the principles. The principles are very nicely stated here, but there is also a distinction that needs to be made between words and deeds. Any government, including this government, must be judged by not only what it says but what it does. That means its policies and its programs, and I'll come to those in a moment. The principles, the administration of the principles, will have to be judged in the course of the year to see how they translate into concrete policies, be those policies about education, about health, about hospitals, about seniors, about our children, about our environment, or about our economic and development policies in general.

Mr. Speaker, let me turn to these matters in some more concrete ways, but one or two other statements should preface those remarks. The throne speech in many ways is self-congratulatory in tone. There's not even a modest recognition of the problems we need to address in the area of health care: waiting lines, emergency room problems, and the general inability of the health care system to respond to the legitimate and pressing health needs of our population. It would have been nice if, along with some of the accomplishments and some of the statements about what we have achieved, there was some recognition that there are problems to be addressed so that we can then begin to have a public debate on how to address those problems.

8:50

There is a certain degree of smugness which seemed to pervade the pages of the throne speech. There's certainly a statement about our growing economy, increasing provincial revenues, but there is no commitment here, as I see it, to achieving a reasonably shared prosperity. The economy may be prosperous, but there have been lots of people who are poor. We know that persistent poverty, endemic poverty, is a major problem, a major challenge that we as Albertans must address together and not leave it to individuals who suffer from the conditions of poverty to be responsible all by themselves for their poverty. So there is this lack of commitment to reasonably shared prosperity as a provincial goal, and that's disappointing, Mr. Speaker, particularly in light of the health of the economy, the general wealth that's being created in the province. The problems are with its distribution, where this wealth ends up.

Turning to some specific themes, Mr. Speaker. The Speech from the Throne is not by and large a forward-looking document, despite all the feel-good rhetoric. The initiatives in the throne speech are throwbacks to the past bent on destroying the valuable social institutions Albertans have worked so hard to build. Public health care, public education, labour rights, and fair taxation: all are on the chopping block in this government's 21st century Alberta.

The government likes to brag about all the money being put back into health care. I urge the government not to waste this money on costly privatization experiments. There is a real danger that if this government proceeds with the legalization of private, for-profit hospitals and then authorizes the RHAs to contract out to these private, for-profit hospitals, this is precisely what will happen: we

will waste public funds without achieving the results that we are promised will accrue to us if we move in this direction.

The evidence from Alberta and elsewhere is overwhelming. Private, for-profit hospitals cost more and deliver less. The government would get a bigger bang for its health care bucks if they went into public facilities rather than being drained away by those looking to profit from our health care system.

Here I want to very quickly draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to the conclusions of an important report just released three weeks ago from the University of Alberta, from the Parkland Institute. The title of the report is *Private Profit or Public Good*. It poses certain questions related to the government's proposed initiative and comes up with the following answers.

1. Are private hospitals cheaper and more efficient than public ones? No. Almost invariably they are more expensive and less efficient.
2. Do market forces work with health care like they do with products such as food and consumer goods? No. Health care is widely regarded by economists as a case of 'market failure.'
3. Will for-profit health care raise costs to the public system? Yes. The inefficiencies, conflicts of interest, and other problems inevitable in for-profit medicine drive up the costs of the public system.
4. What effect will private hospitals and surgical clinics have on waiting lists? They will likely make them longer. Public health care systems are more efficient than private ones, and dollar for dollar, the more efficient system will have the shortest waiting lists. Increasing the flow of funds to the private system can actually lengthen waiting lists if those funds could otherwise have gone to the public system, because an efficient provider is being replaced by an inefficient one. Alberta's experience with cataract surgery confirms this

I could go on, but time is limited. Let me quickly move on to some other issues here.

If privatization were the way to go, the U.S. would have the least expensive health care system in the world. We all know the opposite is the case. The U.S. has by far the most expensive health care system in the world, with per capita health care costs 50 percent higher than those in any other western industrialized country. Does the U.S. at least have healthier citizens? The answer again is no. By every major health indicator, the U.S. ranks near the bottom of the heap among the industrialized countries. What the U.S. does have is the most unequal health care system, where access is determined by ability to pay and more than 40 million people, close to one and a half times the population of Canada, at any given time have no access to health care insurance. Will the government's scheme to legalize private, for-profit health care reduce waiting lists? Again the answer is a clear no.

A recent survey by the Consumers' Association of Canada, Alberta branch, has clearly shown this. They recently studied waiting lists for cataract surgery in Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge. In Calgary the surgery is all done in private clinics, and the waiting times are the longest. The next longest waiting time is in Edmonton. Lethbridge, which has all cataract surgeries done in the public system, has the shortest waiting list. If the government scheme will cost more and won't reduce waiting times, why are we still pressing ahead? It's a good question and one that many Conservatives who value our public health care system are asking as well. The only explanation I can find is that they're caving in to the pressure from a few squeaky-wheel private business interests.

Earlier this week I made public information about the murky world of private, for-profit health care. The information shows two things: one, that these special interests are fierce lobbyists, and second, that the only way they can make a profit is by feeding off our public health care system.

What do we need? The New Democrats propose an outright ban on private, for-profit hospitals. Bill 201, which unfortunately didn't come before this House, was an attempt to do precisely that. I would invite Albertans to look at that bill to see that there is an alternative, a better alternative than the one that's being proposed from the government side. We haven't had them in the past, and we don't need them in the future.

The New Democrats also advocate an independent cost-benefit analysis of existing day surgery contracts. If, as expected, the study shows that contracting out day surgery costs more and delivers less, tighter controls would be imposed.

A progressive tax system is the hallmark of a civilized society, Mr. Speaker. The flat tax that the government is proposing to legislate during this session of the Legislative Assembly threatens this. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry, hon. member. We appear to have several people who want to enter into debate on the Speech from the Throne, and we would invite them to take their turn. Right now it is the turn of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope you will give me an extra minute as a result of this interruption.

The government's proposed flat tax massively shifts the tax burden from the wealthy onto the middle class. The flat tax is an issue which has not received the scrutiny it deserves. The fact is that the only reason the government may be able to get away with it is because Alberta's fiscal good fortune has allowed the government to hide the regressive redistributed effects of the flat tax behind other tax cuts. The fact remains that those with yearly incomes above \$100,000 will receive a financial windfall while middle-class earners will receive little or no benefit. A much fairer way of providing a comparable amount of tax relief would be to abolish costly and inefficient health care premiums. This would save every Alberta family, regardless of income, \$816 dollars a year.

The Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, says that the government will improve financial assistance to postsecondary students. Providing a little bit of relief for student debt loads is a clear example of treating the symptoms rather than the underlying cause. The underlying cause is skyrocketing tuition fees guaranteed by this government. So what we need to do is roll back the tuition fees, change the base funding formula for the universities and colleges so that they get larger financial assistance from the government so that the universities and colleges can move to reduce tuition fees and roll them back.

9:00

Treating the symptoms rather than the underlying causes also applies to the children's initiatives from the throne speech. As I mentioned before, there are lots of children living in poverty. They need immediate action. Every year lost in poverty by a child is a year that cannot be recovered, and it does irreversible damage to that child. Therefore, we need immediate action, and nothing is promised in this throne speech.

It also fails the homeless. Instead of directing dollars to community agencies to build affordable housing, the government keeps looking for private-sector solutions in an area where there's a clear-cut case of market failure. The real estate market serves 80 percent of the housing market well but not the bottom 20 percent.

Without government leadership and involvement the ranks of Alberta's homeless will continue to grow.

The throne speech fails Alberta's environment, Mr. Speaker. There seems to be a clear retreat by this government on the environmental front. Bill 15 was withdrawn from the last sitting of the Legislature. There's no indication here that the government is willing to take any legislative measures to protect our special places and environmentally sensitive areas in the province or to do something about gas flaring, which is a major problem.

I will conclude, Mr. Speaker. Are there any positives in this throne speech? Yes, if you search hard enough for them. The legislation to set up the science and technology endowment seems positive and so is the legislation to return sacred artifacts to First Nations communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I intend to speak for a very brief time and address some of the concerns that have been mentioned by the hon. members speaking opposite, specifically the last speaker, from Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Speaker, within the throne speech there is a reference not only to the forum but to the task force for children at risk. There is a reference to the reviews that are under way for both the caseloads and also the other things that we are doing for children. Further, there are references, I know, from other colleagues about supports for children. Because so many times we think the sky is falling on the children of Alberta, I want to quote from the Canadian Council on Social Development, who have the following observations as they portray children and youth. They state in fact that "most children live in two-parent families," that "more than half of all Aboriginal people in Canada are children and youth," and that "more young Canadians live in families that speak a language other than English or French." They finally talk about what contributes to child and youth well-being.

Mr. Speaker, here is the point that I want to stress most of all. The best contributor to a child and to the welfare of youth, the best possible contributor is the parent. In fact, government, with their Children's Services ministry and with any other positive support mechanism, does not tend to take the place of a good parent.

"Family life is positive for most children" in Canada. "More families are having trouble balancing their work and family responsibilities." Herein, Mr. Speaker, from this quote, I would contend, lie some of the social difficulties we have today.

More youth are delaying leaving home . . .

Only one-third of Canadians say their financial situation has improved over the past two or three years . . .

Child poverty rates remain high

not only in Alberta but elsewhere. In fact, if there's any consolation, over the last two years we have improved better than most other provinces in decreasing child poverty. However, it does remain on the incline.

Children and youth are safer from crime . . .

Fewer youth are killed in car crashes . . .

Dangerous chemicals in food, air and water still pose poorly measured risks to Canadian children.

So it's not all bright, Mr. Speaker, but clearly it's no worse in Alberta than it is in other places.

The majority of young teens feel safe [at home and] at school most of the time . . .

Public spending on education rose by about 3% between 1992 and 1996, but it fell as a proportion of gross nation product.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the record in Alberta in public education – and I remember when my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods and I were similarly involved as trustees.

We had probably quite a different environment than we have today, but the technological influences today, I think, have grown to provide even a more enhanced education than we had then.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, infant mortality rates continue to fall, and in Alberta we show the highest rate across Canada for breast-feeding, one of the positive indicators of healthy starts for children. While more teens are smoking and the risk of sexually transmitted diseases among teens is worrisome, throughout our review at the forum and also from the Task Force on Children at Risk, we are finding what seems to be true across Canada, that in fact youth crime rates are declining and more is being done by parents on behalf of their children, not only low-income parents but all parents.

Mr. Speaker, so much of what has been stated in this Assembly about children over the past two and a half years in my experience sounds as if Alberta is neglecting the children, but quite the opposite is true. In closing I want to just give credit to two models. The child help model in the city of Edmonton, developed by the local police, and the community conferencing model in the city of Calgary will, I think, gain great benefits by co-ordinating police, volunteers, medical personnel, directors of social services, mental health, and prosecutors together in assisting children.

Mr. Speaker, raising a child takes a village. It takes the commitment of parents, teachers, child welfare workers, and indeed the government. If we are to provide fully integrated teams with a community focus, we will lend our support, our advocacy to those groups, and I am very proud indeed of the references in the throne speech to what this government will do for children.

On that note, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 1 Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll start my comments by saying that knowledge is our most important renewable resource. Today as I proudly move second reading of Bill 1, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act, this government, our government, my government . . .

MS HALEY: Mine too.

DR. TAYLOR: . . . and the member opposite's here too, makes a very clear statement to Albertans and to the rest of the country and indeed the rest of the world. I'm just going to take a few minutes, Mr. Speaker, because this really is a momentous occasion. We have to realize that this is Bill 1 in the new millennium, the first bill of a new millennium, the first bill of the year 2000.

Alberta is the home of innovation. Yes, we are the home of innovation, and that is because Albertans are not afraid of challenges. We embrace challenges. We do not see obstacles but opportunities. From my own personal experience—and I know other members were in business during the 1980s, and there were many challenges during the 1980s, but if we saw those, as we did in our own personal businesses, as opportunities, we survived. Others survived because they didn't see the glass half empty; they saw the glass half full.

Albertans are bold entrepreneurs. We are forward thinking, and we are innovative. This Bill 1 of the new millennium is another example of Alberta as a trendsetting province. Alberta is a national leader, Mr. Speaker, in policy and in good government, and I can tell you that we are the envy of other people across this country and across the world. In fact, once we announced what Bill 1 would be, once we announced the \$500 million heritage foundation for science and engineering research, colleagues from universities were telling me that they had their colleagues from around North America phoning them and saying: "Is this really true? Is this really happening?" So we are the envy, Mr. Speaker.

9:10

With the launch of Bill 1 we embark as Albertans, as a government on another bold plan which will really launch Alberta into the forefront of global knowledge. It will launch us into the knowledge-based economy. What this does is build on our most important renewable resource, as I've said, which is knowledge, and knowledge is critical to our success in the new century.

Most certainly my caucus colleagues and I have worked hard to find ways to build on our strong foundation, to capitalize on the potential of the new millennium, to capitalize on the young people, provide opportunities for the young people in the province. To the Premier and to all my colleagues here I say sincerely: thank you for your support over this last period of time when we've been working on this.

Other individuals—and I want to mention just a few, and there are many of them. You know, you're not supposed to mention names, Mr. Speaker, and I know I'll probably miss a few, but I want to mention a few names that have been influential and have been a great help in developing this fund and also encouraging the government to make it Bill 1.

First of all is Dr. Bob Church. He's the chairman of the Alberta Science and Research Authority. He is a constituent of the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View and is a great supporter of the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View. Bob is truly a tireless champion of R and D in Alberta. Bob has been involved with science and research a long time. He's a former associate dean of medicine at the University of Calgary. He's a world-recognized figure in the area of medical research. He presently ranches just outside Airdrie—he's gone back to his roots—but is still intimately involved with science and research in this province. So to Bob I say thank you. I can tell you that he has been tremendously influential, influential on me. I respect Bob's advice. Bob, my cowboy hat is off to you. And for those of you who haven't seen me in a cowboy hat, I do wear one. You are going to have to come down to my constituency to see me wear my cowboy hat.

MS HALEY: I live for that, you know.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, I see members are saying that they live for it, so by all means come and join me.

Another person that has been influential in this process is Eric Newell, president of Syncrude. Of course, we all know Syncrude is a strong Alberta company which has directly benefited from Alberta's investment in R and D. He's also the chair of the board of governors of the University of Alberta. He recognized early on the merits of a foundation such as this. He was and continues to be a strong advocate, and I very much appreciate Eric's support and help in promoting this fund.

Adding to really a large group of people are some others: university presidents and vice-presidents Rod Fraser, Terry White, Howard Tennant, Roger Smith, Len Bruton, and Sheamus O'Shea.

I say thank you to all of them for pursuing a brighter future for Alberta's youth.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, there are others, and I won't mention — one I don't want to forget because he's sitting in the gallery is my executive assistant, Ken Faulkner. Ken has been very helpful and a tireless worker, and I know other ministers would desire an executive assistant such as this. I don't want to say too much in case they try and recruit him, but Ken has been very valuable and a very wise adviser.

To the rest of the people that have been involved in helping us promote this fund whose names I haven't mentioned, on behalf of my colleagues and all Albertans, on behalf of the youth of Alberta because they are the future of Alberta, I say thank you. In summary, Mr. Speaker, through their support and encouragement Bill 1 was born.

To fully appreciate the effects that Bill 1 will have on Alberta, I think we have to take a very brief look, Mr. Speaker, at the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, because Bill 1 and the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research model AHFMR — somehow, Mr. Speaker, AHFMR sounds better than AHFSER. We've got to think of a better acronym. Perhaps it can be AFSEER. So I'll refer to AFSEER.

Now, I won't go into a detailed history of AHFMR, but I will read a letter from Mr. Al Libin, who is a former chair of AHFMR. He was the chair of AHFMR for 10 years. Al says in his letter:

When I was appointed the AHFMR Board Chairman in 1990, I recall my amazement at what the Foundation had accomplished in just 10 [previous] years. With the creation of AHFMR in 1980, it was possible for bright young scientists, both Alberta born and from around the globe, to realize their dreams and ideas with long-term Heritage support. In a very short time, Alberta could boast of a top-flight research community that was increasingly lauded in national and international research circles. When my tenure began, it was clear that Alberta had yet another natural resource that was, and is, envied throughout the nation: a superlative repository of scientific brainpower.

Our province truly has a presence as a centre of research excellence in the scientific world. That this has been achieved through AHFMR's direct and indirect contributions to biomedical and health research successes, many of which have resonated throughout the world, is for me, as outgoing chairman of AHFMR, a source of immense pride and satisfaction.

That's just a quote from Al's letter.

I have a number of other quotes I could read, but I just want to read one from Susan Jensen. She's the professor and chair, department of biological sciences at the University of Alberta. Susan says in her letter to the Premier:

I recognize and appreciate that a very large sum of money is involved, and that you could no doubt have won greater political rewards by spending it on more visible programs. It is a credit to your commitment to the long term well being of Alberta and of Albertans that you have chosen to spend the money in this way.

I think that summarizes for me what the fund is all about.

This fund, like the AHFMR fund, like our science and research fund, will leverage other dollars from outside, and it will create great scientific advancements. To mention just two from the AHFMR, I'm sure all of you remember that last summer we had Patrick Lee at the University of Calgary with his discovery of the reovirus, a virus that can eat cancer. Folks, this virus is going into human trials this year. Now, can you imagine that difference if this actually works in human trials. That we have a virus that can cure cancer, can you imagine what that means to the world? It's a huge accomplishment, a huge endeavour. That was funded by the AHFMR, and that's the kind of thing that will be funded by AFSEER.

One other example I'll mention is Dr. Lorne Tyrrell. Some of you

may know Lorne. He's the dean of Medicine. Lorne has the first and only treatment, cure if you wish, for hepatitis B in the world. This product came on the market this year. It is a fascinating story to listen to Lorne talk about how he started with small research dollars. He had his parents on his parents' farm looking after the ducks he was using for research experiments, and Lorne and his wife and kids would go out to the farm every Saturday and clean duck cages. I mean, it is an amazing, fascinating story to listen to Lorne Tyrrell talk about this. You can see I'm getting excited about it, because I've listened to him. I'm excited about his story.

That research was accomplished through funding by AHFMR. Without AHFMR Lorne Tyrrell would not be in Alberta, the cure for hepatitis B would not be an Alberta cure, and Glaxo Wellcome, one of the biggest drug companies in the world, would not be in Alberta funding today Lorne Tyrrell's research and funding his research on hepatitis C. There is no cure for hepatitis C. Will Lorne discover it? I have absolute faith that he will. It'll take him some time but he will have a model, and there are some exciting things happening with hepatitis C. Once again, funding through AHFMR.

From 1996 to 1999 AHFMR funded \$108,277,772 worth of research. Just think of that: in three years over \$100 million funding for medical research. That's the kind of thing the science and engineering fund will talk about.

9:20

In fact, just today I was talking about this fund to a *Globe and Mail* reporter writing an article that she says will appear in the *Globe* probably this weekend, and when I explained some of the things we were thinking about as a government, the direction we were going as a government, her comment was, "Wow, I can't believe it." So we will be recognized as a leader in North America, Mr. Speaker, for the establishment of this fund.

In conclusion, there are just a couple of comments, and I'm going to read them again. One is, once again, Al Libin's comments. Al, as you know and I've already indicated, was the chairman of AHFMR for 10 years, and he said:

The growth in programs has been made possible by the parallel growth of the endowment. At March 31, 1999, the endowment from which grants and awards are made by AHFMR stood just below \$1 billion. That endowment, and the more than \$570 million invested in research excellence over the years . . .

Now, you'll remember, Mr. Speaker, that this fund started at \$300 million. It is now worth a billion, and they've invested more than \$570 million.

. . . exemplifies the sound stewardship of the Board of Trustees and the responsible investment management of Alberta Treasury. It is a perpetual resource for excellence in biomedical and health research in our province for our children and their children

And that's what this is about, a source of research excellence for my children, my grandchildren, your children, your grandchildren. That's what this is about.

I'd like to quote just for interest's sake as well from *Hansard*, November 9, 1979. This was when AHFMR was brought in. I think Premier Lougheed's comments are very valuable. In concluding his comments, he said:

Mr. Speaker and members of the Assembly, over the decades we've had a brain drain to the United States. I think we're changing a fair number of things in Canada. Certainly, that can get us into a number of other subjects as well, as to what we're changing.

The very same could be said today.

But one thing we are also starting to change is that whole concept of the brain drain to the United States. I think one of the very exciting possibilities I'll look back on, in terms of presenting this Bill to the Legislature, is that in a very clear and specific way it may reverse that, to the benefit of this country as well as to this province.

I believe that in medical research, Mr. Speaker – my comments now – we have a brain gain, and there's good evidence of that. I believe that once we do this fund, we will have a brain gain in science and engineering research.

Premier Lougheed goes on to say:

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to conclude with my final references to the Bill. I've said what it's not. It is not a supplementary funding for universities, it's not to displace voluntary fund-raising organization efforts, and it's not to supplement the traditional funding available to researchers in Canada from the Medical Research Council and other government departments.

But what it is is very significant. It will be a major supplement to Alberta in making this a brain centre in Canada. I believe it will attract young Albertans into lifetime research careers in science. It will provide both the continuity and security so necessary for those researchers, with the lack of interference from government or the Legislature. It [will] enhance the quality of life of people everywhere. And it will in time, I hope and I believe, make Alberta an outstanding medical research centre in the world.

And you know what, Mr. Speaker? Premier Lougheed was right. His predictions of 20 years ago have come true. Alberta is an outstanding medical research centre in the world. We will become an outstanding centre for research in science and engineering in the world because of this fund, because of the future vision of this government, because of the commitment to this.

As Professor Susan said in her letter, we could have spent money on "more visible programs", short-term programs that might have reaped more political gains. But this shows us, Mr. Speaker, the future. This shows us the commitment of my government, of Albertans' government, to our children, to our grandchildren, and it is absolutely essential for our future.

One further comment I'll read is from the Leader of the Opposition at the time, Mr. R. Clark, and I'm sure most of us know him. Once again, this is in *Hansard*, November 9, 1979.

Mr. Speaker, in taking part in the debate on second reading of Bill 62, The Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research Act, I want to say at the outset that it's the intention of my colleagues and me to support the Bill in second reading.

That was the opposition at the time. I trust the opposition at this time will be able to say exactly the same thing.

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act. I listened with interest to the remarks of the minister, aware that at second reading we're expected to speak to the principles of the bill. Although he didn't speak to the principles of the bill, he spoke with such enthusiasm that it was hard not to gain a little bit of the kind of hard work and the kind of consideration that has gone into putting Bill 1 in place.

I'm pleased to speak in favour of Bill 1 and to speak for the critic for Innovation and Science, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and to speak for our caucus. We will certainly be pleased to support this bill. The critic's advice to me when he was talking about this evening's presentation was: let's pass it and let's pass it now, as quickly as it can be done. That doesn't mean that he doesn't have a small amendment that he would like to see put forward when the bill comes to committee, but certainly there's great enthusiasm on this side of the House for it.

I think that because it is an important bill, we have the obligation to look at the principles and to make sure that those principles are

clear. Some of them of course are very self-evident from the text of the bill. One of the major principles, of course, is that the foundation will engage in a wide range of activities in supporting "a balanced long-term program of science and engineering research." That's very important: that it be balanced, that it be long-ranged, and that it focus on engineering research. That's a principle that I think is worth reiterating, because there are parts of the world where science research has been used by governments for ends that were not worthy of the human race. So the principle that this be balanced.

A further principle: that the new knowledge should improve our economy, our communities, and our environment. When you couple those two principles together, I think we have the assurance that the activities of this foundation are going to be those that all Albertans will be proud of and all Albertans and Canadians will benefit from.

The focus is rightfully on the discovery and the application of new knowledge. I've spoken before in the Chamber, and I know from the members, the personnel that the minister listed who have been involved in the creation of the fund and have given the minister advice, that there is a concern that between discovery and – basic research is not the word they use anymore; they don't use "basic research"; there's a new name for it – applied research, there's a balance and that all research, the kind of necessary research that has to go on that doesn't always have a gizmo in mind at the end of the project, those kinds of serendipitous things that happen in research are going to be allowed to happen under the auspices of this fund. So, again, an important principle is that it's going to focus on the discovery of the new and the applications so that they are separated out of knowledge.

9:30

The minister talked about the very successful Alberta heritage fund for medical research and that that model, that has been so very, very successful, is the model that is being used for science and engineering. Again, it assures us that the fund will be successful, that the heritage fund for medical research has set a precedent in the province for research and endowment funds.

Another principle is that the fund will be closely linked to our advanced education institutions and that it's not going to be used by the government in terms of funding of research, looking at the research of those institutions and cutting back or judging the kind of research money that they'll be given based on what is happening for this endowment fund. I think that's as it should be. This is a stand-alone, independent fund, but it's going to be rooted in our postsecondary institutions.

The principle that there shall be an international review panel of course is basic to quality research, and the manner in which that is set forth in the bill makes it abundantly clear how important this component of the research that's conducted will be. It's really the only guarantee of quality of research when we know that it's being overseen, being judged, being reviewed by the best minds in the world and that those minds are drawn from the international community.

A further principle is that the fund will publicly report. It's only as should be expected that there's going to be close monitoring and that there's going to be a very careful accounting of the activities of the fund. That's a principle that, again, all Albertans would expect.

There are a number of other principles that could be teased out of the bill, Mr. Speaker, but I think all in all we're delighted that the bill is here. I think our critic would like to take some credit because he has raised in budget debates in past years the need for funds such as this and was good enough to supply me copies of *Hansard* giving proof of that claim. But it doesn't really matter where the ideas came from. It's important that it's here and that it's in front of the

Assembly and that it's going to have the wholehearted support of both sides of the House.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate on Bill 1.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech
(continued)

[Adjourned debate February 23: Ms Evans]

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was interesting to me to see the government, through the agency of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, hark back to the first Lieutenant Governor of the province and quote with apparent approval a statement that had been made by the first Liberal government of this province.

I always appreciate historical perspective, but actually I was thinking of going a little further back. I think we might sooner take instruction from Girolamo Savonarola. That's about 500 years earlier. Mr. Savonarola was the courageous man who more than 500 years ago challenged the vices and the excesses of Pope Alexander VI. Savonarola was a Dominican friar who distinguished himself for his eloquent critique of the government of the day. He ended up being burned at the stake in 1498 so paid the price of his convictions.

The reason I think of Mr. Savonarola is that earlier this year the mayor of Calgary, Al Duerr – and, I might mention, the most popular mayor the city has ever had – delivered at a downtown Rotary club . . . [interjections] The numbers, Mr. Speaker, speak for themselves. It may be that some from outside the city may think that someone else succeeded in winning with the biggest plurality of any mayor and may not realize that in fact Mr. Duerr holds that special acknowledgment.

I think my point, though, is this: when Mayor Duerr was delivering his state of the city speech to the downtown Rotary club earlier in 2000, he talked about something that I think hearkened back to the days of Mr. Savonarola. He talked about wanting Calgary to be an ethical city. I thought that was really interesting and really instructive because at a time when we're so focused on jobs and money and balanced budgets, how refreshing to have the mayor of one of the two largest cities in the province talk about the importance of striving to be an ethical community. In fact, I'd mentioned today that the Sheldon M. Chumir foundation has hired an executive director, Dr. Hanen. It's a foundation that's looking to heighten the focus on ethics in our communities and in public affairs.

So when I come to the throne speech, I guess I'm looking to find some resonance, something in this throne speech that Mr. Savonarola would have been impressed with. Is there even a faint echo of Mayor Duerr's call for an ethical community? To be fair to the government, we see some glimmers. On page 3 of the throne speech we see a reference to "equity, which includes fairness for all citizens and respect for diversity of culture, age, gender, and other characteristics." This is cited as being one of the governing principles of the province.

Ironically, the first two bills we deal with in the Legislative Assembly are Bill 202, one to invoke the notwithstanding clause, and Bill 204, a bill specifically targeted to Hutterite colonies in southern Alberta. One can say they're private members' bills, but

when we see that that's the way we're starting out with the legislation we first look at, I have some problems with that.

Persons with developmental disabilities. You know, there's a large community of the most vulnerable men and women in this province, and what we find in the throne speech is that we're going to follow up on the review of the persons with developmental disabilities program to strengthen support for Albertans with developmental disabilities.

Has nobody cottoned on yet, Mr. Speaker, that the biggest part of the problem are the PDD boards? When the chairman of the Calgary PDD board left and there was some tension between Mr. Sparrow and the provincial PDD board and the Calgary PDD board, you know who advertised for the new chair of the Calgary board? It was the provincial board.

Mr. Speaker, we know the amount of money that has gone into the PDD boards. We know it certainly isn't going into the agencies and the services and the support for persons with developmental disabilities. It was disappointing. We not only have not seen the report that had been promised for the beginning of the year, but the Minister of Health and Wellness still has not stood up in this House and tabled that report, so that is a frustration.

9:40

We see a glimmer of an ethical consideration, I suppose. There's a reference to homelessness on page 9, and the suggestion is that "the government will work with public and private partners." I see that the Minister of Municipal Affairs was here speaking of this a moment ago. The difficulty is this. When this government talks about partnerships, Mr. Speaker, usually what it means is that we want somebody else to do the work and take the responsibility and put up the dough; the province will be there to pat you on the back. The federal government came along, and in no small measure due to the diligent work from the Member for Calgary-Bow, who has worked very diligently on the homeless situation in Calgary, the federal government has put a substantial amount of money available to deal with homelessness in the city of Calgary.

AN HON. MEMBER: Was that Jane Stewart?

MR. DICKSON: Oh ho. We have the Minister of Community Development, who didn't have the opportunity that the Member for Calgary-Bow and I did to go to McDougall Centre. The Hon. Claudette Bradshaw was there, and she was roundly applauded by the agencies, Mr. Minister, through the Speaker, that are providing services to the homeless people in Calgary. Now, the minister may think he knows better than the people representing CUPS and the Booth Centre and the Mustard Seed. Maybe the minister knows something those people don't, but they were delighted with the commitment of the federal government.

So what do we see here? We hear some talk about partnership, which, as I've suggested before, is usually fiscal off-loading. Where's the financial commitment from this province to address the number of homeless people in the city of Calgary?

You know, just the other day there was a little announcement in one of the Calgary daily newspapers, and it talked about yet another homeless person dying on the streets in Calgary. The Minister of Community Development may not know that last year we had about 12 people who died, 12 homeless people who died on the streets of downtown Calgary. I was disappointed to see an announcement of this other death just a matter of days ago. One person dying on the streets of this province is too many, and I'd want that minister to work as hard as his colleague from Calgary-Bow is to do something about it. Simply empty talk, Mr. Speaker, about working with private and public partners doesn't do it.

As June Callwood said when she was at the housing conference . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Face the chair.

MR. DICKSON: I can look anywhere I want as long as I'm directing my comments through the Speaker, Mr. Speaker.

I think that when June Callwood two years ago came to the housing conference in this city, she made the observation after hearing the Minister of Municipal Affairs that the private sector will provide low-cost affordable housing when pigs can fly. When pigs can fly, Mr. Speaker. I think June Callwood is absolutely bang on. I think she's right. What we look for in the throne speech is something more than simply vague talk about partnerships.

Mr. Speaker, the Children's Advocate. The Minister of Children's Services, formerly Municipal Affairs, has said that there's some good news going on, and we see that "the mandate of the office of the Children's Advocate will be reviewed to make sure the voices of vulnerable children and youth are heard." You know, where was this minister when the Dignity Foundation in this province held a conference two years ago off Macleod Trail in Calgary? They brought in the Children's Advocate from Saskatchewan and the Children's Advocate from British Columbia, and they told us what had to be done. What they told us was that we need a Children's Advocate office that's independent of the Legislative Assembly, much like the Ombudsman and the Auditor General. They told us that you need the Children's Advocate office to be able to do what the Saskatchewan office can do, which is investigate children in crisis whether they're in the care of the province or not. If you've got poor children in poor health, why does it matter that they're not a ward of the province, that it's not a child welfare file? Surely that should be the kind of thing this government is dealing with.

So I'm disappointed to see a review to make sure the voices are heard. I don't remember seeing one of those 20 Calgary MLAs or the minister at the Dignity Foundation meeting. I think my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood was at it. I know my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview was there. There was good advice. We don't have to have a review. What we need is a commitment to legislative change and a commitment to make the office of the Children's Advocate work, full stop.

Mr. Speaker, I see reference here to the Alberta seniors' benefit program. Well, I have a heck of a lot of senior constituents in Calgary-Buffalo, and the single message that they would want me, I think, to communicate to my government and their government is: let's address the cutoff thresholds. Instead of simply putting more money in the special-needs assistance fund, not necessarily a bad thing, surely the more fundamental kind of reworking that has to happen is re-evaluate what are unrealistic and unfair and punitive cutoffs.

Now, the minister of intergovernmental affairs I know knows what I'm talking about, because when she was Minister of Community Development, she met with those seniors' groups at the Kerby Centre and the Golden Age Club and the Renfrew Sixty Plus Club. She knows what those people told her, and I'm hoping that she carried that message back to cabinet. I'm sure she did, and unfortunately there's no indication of that in the throne speech, Mr. Speaker.

Surely the province that we build for baby Micheal Tustin has got to be something more than high-bandwidth Internet access. It has to be something more than a competitive tax regime, and it surely must be something more than new roads and infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, when I look for some of the other concerns that my

constituents have, I think of the Broda report and the talk about what's coming from that. I also look and recognize that when it comes to standards, this province is probably one of the most poorly served provinces in all of Canada in terms of standards and regulations.

DR. WEST: That's a bunch of bunk.

MR. DICKSON: I'm looking forward to the debate later when we hear from the government defence. Mr. Speaker, I can't control the low outrage threshold of the minister of energy.

The concern I've got, Mr. Speaker, is that we have to address standards. We don't need more studies. Ontario has done a terrific job in terms of having some of the finest standards for nursing homes anywhere in Canada. We could replicate some of those in a flash, and we'd be vastly better served than we are right now.

In terms of homelessness there's still a concern. The biggest single issue throughout 1999 in Calgary-Buffalo was finding safe, affordable housing. The vacancy rate in Calgary forecast for 2000 is 2.3 percent, which is much better than 0.5 percent and 0.6 percent in 1996-1997. But, you know, we've got a real problem. In fact, there were 4,118 multifamily units started between October 1998 and October 1999. Only 234 units were slated for the rental market, and 142 of those were for a seniors' lodge project. Nobody is building affordable accommodation in downtown Calgary. It's a problem when I hear from people in Calgary-Varsity, from that seniors' complex just across from Market Mall. They're worried about it. They want to see that concern addressed in this throne speech by this government in this session.

Mr. Speaker, we see some talk here about efficiency of the courts, and this is always an area of particular interest to me. We're going to increase the efficiency of Alberta's courts. Maybe we could start with public legal education. You know, in this province the government provides virtually no support for public legal education. It comes from the Alberta Law Foundation, that the government has nothing to do with. I don't think a nickel comes from the Minister of Justice. I stand to be corrected on this, but I don't ever remember in any of the budget estimates where I asked what this province is doing in terms of empowering citizens to be able to use and access their own court system . . .

DR. WEST: Twenty-two million in legal aid, and you drew on the pot when you were in private business.

9:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. The hon. Minister of Resource Development is reminded that he'll have an opportunity.

DR. WEST: He asked the question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, and it's a rhetorical question, and you're not the Minister of Justice either.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, you know what's so frustrating? Before you worry about lawyers, if the Minister of Energy can appreciate it, if we empowered citizens by giving them more information about their legal processes, about their legal system, maybe they wouldn't always require a lawyer. Maybe citizens would be able to find remedies that they could utilize themselves. That's what we need in this province.

DR. WEST: Over 5,400 of them. Can't you get a job?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Order. Hon. minister, perhaps you would like to go outside and have a coffee and regain your composure. Then we can hear the rest of this speech.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, that's one down and 34 more to go.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to carry on. I'm happy to see on page 5 that the Alberta government wants us to be a leader in information technology. Well, that's wonderful. I do and my constituents want to be as well, but why is it that while we want to be leaders in terms of technology, we are at the end of the line when it comes to protecting the privacy of citizens? You know, with Bill C-6 in front of the House of Commons currently, other provinces have said that this is going to have a big, big impact on every business in Canada. In B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario they're holding public hearings. The government is going out and saying to citizens: as we embark on a high-tech program in each one of those jurisdictions, we want to involve citizens of those provinces to be current.

Well, I've been asking for three years, Mr. Speaker, when we're going to do something, and each time I'm told that we're doing some internal consultation, probably another one of those darn focus groups that's so easy to manage and so easy to control. We're not letting Albertans in, and that's what we have to do. So if we want those high-skilled, high-paid jobs from the kind of technological world our children are coming into, that means we've got to make investments, not only respecting privacy and building popular support for that technology but a huge investment in education.

The most positive thing in the throne speech is the \$500 million

endowment for research. I think that's an extremely positive item in the budget.

MR. JONSON: In the throne speech.

MR. DICKSON: In the throne speech. I'm sorry. Maybe there'll be some follow-up in the budget too, Minister of Health and Wellness.

But that's something I'm happy to applaud and encourage.

The other observation I'd make as my time runs out is that we're concluding our review of provincial fees and charges, and I still marvel – I absolutely marvel – at how the government can take something they've been forced to do kicking and screaming by the courts of this country and somehow turn it into a claim that this is some farsighted kind of revenue re-evaluation. The only reason this happened was because the Supreme Court in the Eurig decision left this province absolutely no alternative. There's a message there to the Minister of Justice through the Speaker that maybe we should try and for once get ahead of the locomotive. Maybe we should do a little better job in this province understanding the trends and issues that are coming and try to head them off instead of always reacting after the fact.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 9:55 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, February 24, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/02/24

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition that I would like to table. It's signed by 218 Albertans, and they are requesting:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here signed by 542 people from Lethbridge, Coaldale, Taber, Barnwell, Daysland, Nanton, Canmore, and High River. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by several hundred Albertans. The petition reads as follows:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to file a petition on behalf of 581 residents of southern Alberta from Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Coaldale, Hillcrest, Blairmore, Bellevue, Cardston, Pincher Creek, and Taber asking the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care" and undermining the public health care system. This brings the total today to 1,385 submissions.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Assembly on Tuesday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to the support of public health care that I introduced yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday in support of public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request the reading and receiving of the petition that I presented yesterday in the Legislature.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I tabled yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder and chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today and it's fitting just before the new budget that as chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I do hereby submit five copies of the report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for the Third Session of the 24th Legislature.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of my responses to written questions 197, 198, 204, 211 through 217, 237 and motions for returns 200 through 203.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of the triennial report on the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. It's titled Progression and Excellence. It highlights the work of the HFMR and its substantial achievements over the last three years. It's my sincere hope that in just a few years we will have another report like this to be tabled from the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is from Ann Lockwood from Vermilion, who has sent a letter to all the Premiers across Canada requesting their help in stopping this Premier from privatizing our health care system.

The second is a report from New Zealand that indicates that the doctors want long waiting lists, that in fact what happens when you have private and public systems working side by side is that the public system ends up with longer waiting lists.

Thank you very much.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two sets of tablings. The first is a series of six letters from residents of Northern Alberta and Edmonton who have sent a letter to the Premier requesting him to protect the Little Smoky area in the northern part of the province.

The second set of tablings are letters from 10 Albertans who live in the Kananaskis area who are opposed to the Genesis land development there and make reference to a petition signed by 750 people in this province who would like the government to legally protect the entire Kananaskis County.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to file six copies of a letter that our Premier has written to the Prime Minister of Canada today voicing our concern about the fact that the Liberals in Ottawa are not treating farmers equitably across Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. [interjections] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings

today. The first one is a leaflet that's put out by the Friends of Medicare, and it states: Say No to Private, For-profit Hospitals.

The second tabling today, on budget day, Mr. Speaker, is an interesting, exhaustive article that appeared in the *Construction Canada* magazine in July of last year. It's called Pine Shakes: The Whole Rottin' Story.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table five copies of a presentation recently made to the standing committee on health and safe communities by the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses. They recommended that the government consider the staffing issues relative to the privatization of health care and in hand shared statistics about the increase in safety concerns being reported by registered nurses in the province over the course of the last year.

Thank you.

1:40

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of letters from Dr. Lue Russell, Gayle Lancaster, Madeleine Sabourin, and the Hansons expressing concerns with PDD funding in the province of Alberta.

The second are the appropriate number of copies of letters from Allan Bell, Paul Dornian, Richard Mercer, and Quenten Doolittle asking for more government support for the arts in Alberta.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three really special people I would like to introduce through you to the Assembly today. The first is a lady that runs my office here in this building. She's worked here for many years, over 10, 12 years, and I found out the other day she had never been introduced in this Assembly. She runs my office with an iron fist. Commonly referred to as "she who must be obeyed," I'd like to introduce Loretta Fontana.

Seated next to her is a young man that's come up from my constituency for today's budget. In addition to being my summer student since he started university four years ago – he's in fourth year poli-sci at the U of C now – he also works in my Airdrie office during the week on a part-time regular basis. We could not function without all of the assistance that we get from him, Mr. Jason Ennis.

The last person, Mr. Speaker, that I'd like to introduce is my caucus director, who has been working with me since last June, when I got the job as government caucus Whip, and that's Mr. Joel Palmer.

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

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature Mr. Rob South, who is president of the students' union at the University of Calgary as well as acting chairman of the Council of Alberta University Students. The Minister of Gaming and I had the privilege of meeting with Rob at noon today, and we know he is here to listen with great interest to the budget. Rob is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you and to members of the Assembly Mr. Tom Ferguson from the town of Pincher Creek. Tom operates a very successful farm just outside of Pincher Creek, and in addition to those duties he had a distinguished service in public service as councillor and reeve of the MD of Pincher Creek, No. 9, for 20 some odd years, I believe. In addition to that he's also served on many community committees, particularly being very effective in his work with seniors on the Crest View lodge program in Pincher Creek. He's now continuing his public service, just being appointed as a member at large for southern Alberta on Mr. Treasurer's Alberta Tax Review Committee. He's here today for the budget debate, and I'd ask Tom, seated in the members' gallery, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: M. le Président, je veux vous présenter aux membres de l'Assemblée législative Mme Corinne Sangret et ses deux filles, Caroline et Rachelle Sangret, qui sont la famille de notre députée d'Edmonton-Norwood, Sue Olsen. Je demande aux membres de l'Assemblée de leur accorder le bon accueil de notre Assemblée.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce Mme Sangret and her two daughters, Rachelle and Caroline, who are the nieces of our Member for Edmonton-Norwood, Sue Olsen. I'd like to welcome them to our Assembly.

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

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Ray Reckseidler. He's the mayor of the village of Delburne, and he's seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask Ray to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three separate introductions to make to you and through you to the members of this Assembly today. First, it's my pleasure to introduce Mimi Williams and Shannon Phillips. Both of them are graduate students in the department of political science at the University of Alberta. Mimi Williams is one of the seven contestants for the Edmonton-Highlands nomination. I'll ask them to rise and please stay standing.

The second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is of Ken Nixon, a senior whom I've come to respect over the years for his continued involvement in matters of public policy and social activism. He's also in the public gallery.

The last two are Mary Heacock and Malcolm Smith, who are here on this very important day to witness Alberta democracy at work.

I would ask all of them to rise and ask my colleagues to give them a warm welcome.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Legislature three court reporters who have recently been advised they will be replaced by digital tape recorders in the courtroom. Would Brenda Fusco, Nelia Stephens, and Carol Hnidan please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a student of the University of Alberta who is a very astute observer of the political process. Her name is Michelle Mungall. She is in the members' gallery, and she's accompanied by her grandmother, who looks anything but grandmother age, Vivian Mungall. I'd like to introduce both of them and ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly three guests that are in, I believe, the members' gallery. The first couple I'd like to introduce are Mr. and Mrs. Achilles, who are very active in terms of observing politics and being involved in important social issues, particularly the protection of universally accessible, comprehensive health care. I would ask them to rise and be welcomed by this Assembly.

Also in the gallery today is Mr. Con Duemler, who is a well-known Edmonton seniors' advocate and assistant to many of Alberta's seniors in terms of preparing taxes. I know he's well known to the former Minister of Community Development for some of his interventions. I'd ask Con to rise as well and be welcomed by the Assembly.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce some of the participants in a rally that's being held on a daily basis on the steps of the Legislative Assembly. They are members of the group Citizens Opposed to the Legalization of Private, For-profit Hospitals. I would like to welcome them to the proceedings in the Assembly. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. They're on both sides, I think.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like elected officials and senior public servants the people of Alberta need the best information possible to make the best decisions. Albertans are being asked by this government to jeopardize our public health care system and endorse this government's plan to undermine medicare. I can think of no more important issue on which the citizens of our province require complete and timely information or, in short, on which they deserve the truth. My first question is to the Premier. Will the Premier reveal the 30 missing pages of the private hospital information for the citizens of Alberta, and if not, why not?

1:50

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I understand that that was a FOIP request. There is a procedure. Relative to appeal, if the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition feels that she's not getting the information, then she can appeal the decision. I understand that a lot of the information that was excluded was information as it pertained to participants in focus groups, who were promised anonymity on the basis of their participation.

Relative to her other comment about undermining medicare, Mr.

Speaker, I would ask this hon. member if she agrees with Alberta's commitment to publicly funded health care and to the principles of the Canada Health Act. Does she believe in that? Does she believe in legislation that will ban private hospitals? Does she believe – and obviously she does because she okayed a whole bunch of private surgical clinics, so obviously she believes in it – in legislation that will bring surgical facilities under the control of the public health system. It will give health authorities one more option for delivering services.

Does she believe in this principle? Facilities will not be able to charge patients for medically necessary services. Does she believe in the principle that queue jumping will be illegal, that you can't jump the queue by paying more?

Mr. Speaker, I would think she would believe in all those principles. We do. That's not undermining health care. It's the right thing to do.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, is the Premier now telling the taxpayers of this province that they can't see the information they paid for?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there are procedures under FOIP. The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition knows that there are some items that by law and by the very nature of the FOIP legislation are excluded. If the hon. member wants that information, she can appeal to the Privacy Commissioner. That's the process.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier used tax dollars to pay for his propaganda research and he won't let the taxpayers see that research, will he at least tell Albertans how much it cost them to be kept in the dark?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I hardly think the use of citizens from a broad spectrum of Alberta society is a propaganda exercise. Now, what is a propaganda exercise is the malicious campaign of misinformation supported by taxpayers' dollars and being launched by the Liberal Party.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and his special backers want private hospitals. The health minister wants to cover up the private hospital research, and now the truth squad commander says that private hospital information should be released, but the Premier just ducks and spins. So just who is in charge of the private hospitals policy over there? Is it the Premier, the minister of health, the truth squad commander? Just who is it that's calling the shots?

MR. KLEIN: Well, interestingly enough we had a good discussion on this issue today at caucus, Mr. Speaker, and it was unanimous that all 64 of us are responsible for this legislation, and we're all behind it.

MRS. MacBETH: Okay. So now we know that the Premier said that he's in charge. Will he make sure that his name is on the bill when it comes forward in this Assembly?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, she is not listening. The Premier is not all 64 members of this caucus. This bill is the responsibility of the caucus collectively, and we speak with one voice on this legislation, because it is the right thing to do.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, my second supplementary is to the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. Has his position now changed so that he now supports the continued cover-up of the private hospitals documents?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, there has never been any cover-up of any kind. That's number one. But I'll tell you what there has been. There's been a very pointed attack to obscure the truth and to misrepresent some of the truth by some members over there, and that's the fact.

Now, the other thing I'll just comment on is that I said yesterday – and I'll say it again here so everybody hears it, including members of the media – was that I would support the release of whatever information is able to be released under the rules. If you listen to the whole clip, you'll understand that, and if you'd like it in another language, I'd be happy to provide it in any one of five.

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

Rod Love

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, that was too good. Okay.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of the spin doctors the Premier's old friend Ralph Love is – Rod Love, rather. Sorry. That was a Freudian slip. Rod Love. His old friend Rod Love is back in the news, and lately he's been spending his time rooting out Communists in, of all places, Canmore, Alberta. So can the Premier tell the people of this province exactly what is the role of the health communications consultant to the Calgary regional health authority, Rod Love, in brokering his private hospitals policy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what Mr. Love's role is. I know he consults with the Calgary regional health authority on communications matters, but Rod Love is no longer part of my staff, is no longer part of my government, and I can't speak for what he's says or what he doesn't say.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, does the Premier share the position of his former aide that the people who stand for the public interests of a town council like Canmore are Communists?

MR. KLEIN: No, I don't share the view.

THE SPEAKER: The interim leader of the third party.

Health Resource Group Inc.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has been recognized.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Three years ago Health Resource Group of Calgary lobbied the New Democrat caucus to seek our support for their attempts to open Alberta's first private, for-profit hospital. We told them an emphatic no and ended up getting sued for our position. HRG aggressively lobbied the Premier and the rest of his Calgary caucus, and before you can say two-tier health care, the government decided to come up with legislation giving HRG what they want. My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, did the government bow to HRG's aggressive lobbying because it lacks the courage to say no to those at HRG who have close personal connections to members of the government?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it is false, it is malicious for this hon. member to say that members of HRG aggressively lobbied me. I don't know the situation relative to other members of my caucus. The only lobbying that I know did take place was the lobbying of the two ND members, and I'm very happy that the hon. member at least admits that. But to say that I was lobbied by HRG is wrong, it is false, and I would ask that he apologize.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Did the Premier bow to HRG's aggressive lobbying because he was afraid of being sued by HRG and their private shareholders for saying no?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I haven't bowed to anything because I haven't been excessively lobbied. I have not been lobbied on this particular issue.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation that will be introduced very shortly in this House is called the health protection act. It's legislation that is being brought about so that the minister will have some control over private surgery clinics. Right now there is no legislation to control these clinics. Everything that we want to do we want to do within the parameters of the Canada Health Act, to uphold and adhere completely to all the principles of the Canada Health Act.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If this government can't say no to aggressive lobbying by a wanna-be private, for-profit hospital now, why would Albertans think this government will say no when private, for-profit hospitals aggressively lobby to award them juicy contracts for hip replacements?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again there's some assumptions there that are false, at least as they pertain to me. I have not been lobbied, excessively lobbied or lobbied in any way shape or form, relative to HRG. Yes, I'm familiar with the operation of the hospital insofar as they provide services, as I understand it, for WCB and some private insurance companies and uninsured services.

But this legislation is much, much, much broader than HRG. This legislation speaks to banning private hospitals. It speaks to bringing surgical facilities under the control of the public health system. It will give health authorities under very, very strict conditions one more option for delivering services under very strict conditions and under all the guidelines of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. It will absolutely prohibit facilities from charging patients for medically necessary services. The legislation will outlaw queue jumping. It will outlaw this notion that people can pay more to get faster service.

Mr. Speaker, I would think that even this hon. member will support the legislation once he sees it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Genesis Land Developers Corp.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Environment. Many constituents are raising numerous concerns about the proposed Genesis project up in Kananaskis Country. What they would like to know is why such a project in a very environmentally sensitive area like Spray Lakes is being allowed to go through a review process.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, let me say at the outset that this government will never allow development that threatens an area's environ-

mental integrity or wilderness character. The overriding principle in Kananaskis Country is the protection of the environment.

Now, as people are aware, in the past when developments have sought approval, there has been a very stringent environmental review and plenty of opportunity for public input. Mr. Speaker, as we are here at this very moment, we are gathering Albertans' views about development in the Spray Valley, information that will play a very vital role in the environmental review in determining whether this development is in the public interest.

Last December I ordered Genesis development corporation, the company proposing the Spray Lakes development, to combine the environmental impact assessments for their proposed heli-cat operation on Mount Sparrowhawk, the four-season resort, and also the downhill ski area at Tent Ridge. From an environmental perspective it only makes sense to look at the cumulative impacts of all three of these.

Mr. Speaker, finally, I'd have to say that there have been a great number of people who have commented on the environmental impact that this proposal would have, and that must be taken into account.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister assure me that the concerns of constituents and Albertans elsewhere are being considered?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I want to give that exact assurance to the hon. member that her constituents' concerns are being considered. Hundreds of responses have been given, not just from the hon. members constituents but from people from throughout the province of Alberta. I encourage those people to continue to have their comments brought forward through the hon. member, to the director of environmental assessments in the city of Edmonton here, to me, to the minister's office.

Albertans are expressing their views about Spray Lakes development proposals, and, Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat my assurance to this House and all Albertans that my overriding concern is the protection of Kananaskis Country's environment. I have heard many comments of concerned Albertans that there is a serious issue with respect to this. I have heard no comments in favour of this proposal.

User Fees

MR. SAPERS: The Premier has said that a user fee is not a tax, a fee for service is not a tax. He's also claimed that fees have been adjusted to reflect the cost of providing a service. Apparently, Mr. Speaker, he was wrong on both counts. In fact, hundreds of user fees in Alberta have been found to be illegal taxes, bilking Albertans out of millions and millions of dollars. My questions are to the Premier. When is the Premier going to return the \$80 million in user fees he and his government have illegally collected from the pockets of Albertans since the October 1998 Supreme Court decision?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, that court decision was an Ontario court decision and had nothing to do with legislation or fees for services here in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, relative to our program as it relates to fees for services, that will be outlined in the budget presentation later this afternoon. The Provincial Treasurer has undertaken a complete review of all fees and services, has given Albertans assurances that fees will not go up but in many, many cases will come down.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. For the Premier's benefit I'll send over a copy of the intervention by the Attorney General of

Alberta into the Supreme Court decision in the Eurig estates decision. So it's clear that Alberta felt it had a role and a concern in this regard. I will make a copy available.

If he can get on the right page, why has the Premier not been telling the truth to Albertans all these years about user fees when we know that at least 100 of these user fees are in fact illegal taxes?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the hon. minister . . . [interjections] Oh, that's wishful thinking on his part, certainly not my part.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is asking a legal question, and I'll have the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General respond.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. members, any question that asks for a legal opinion in this Assembly is prohibited under *Beauchesne* 411(1), 408(c).

MR. SAPERS: It was asking for a fact, for some truth. It wasn't asking for a legal opinion, Mr. Speaker.

I'll go on to my third question, because clearly the government doesn't want to answer the last question. Will the Premier agree to release the cost-of-service studies for each and every one of his more than 800 user fees, or is the only thing Albertans are going to receive for their tax money is more blank pages?

2:10

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was a complete review done of all the fees for services, and that issue will be addressed in the budget presentation later this afternoon.

I do remind the hon. member that it was he who brought up the point of legality, not me. He did.

MR. HANCOCK: Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, I could supplement by saying that under the Eurig decision, which was referred to, which was an Ontario decision referring to an Ontario case, Alberta voluntarily came forward with the fees and regulations review act, voluntarily decided to review all of its fees, and voluntarily brought forward fee reductions for Albertans and for Albertans' benefits which will be reflected this afternoon in the budget.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. GORDON: Yes, Albertans do want information on the whole health care delivery, but they want factual information, and as such I am seeking clarification on behalf of my constituents regarding the proposed policy on private clinics. They want to know the various players, the various roles, and how they are in regards to the proposed policy on private clinics. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What will be the role of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in this process, to this process? What is their involvement?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, under the policy statement that the hon. member is referring to, the role of the medical profession through the College of Physicians and Surgeons would continue to be very much as it is now. They would be responsible for the accreditation, licensing if you will, of the medical practitioners that would practice in a surgical clinic.

Further, Mr. Speaker, they would be responsible for accrediting, setting the standards, making sure they are met with respect to the nature of the facility, the supports that are available in that facility, the services that are provided, and all of the necessary plans to deal with any contingencies that might come up in the operation of the provision of that service.

So the College of Physicians and Surgeons would certainly, as they do today, play a very, very key role, a professional role as a professional association in doing this evaluation and providing for that accountability.

MRS. GORDON: What will be the role of the family physician in this process, and will they be sending patients directly to these private facilities?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the same process would be in place as is the case today. I would advise and I'm sure all members of the Assembly understand that the referral process would of course be one which in almost all cases would start with the family physician, the local physician, the general practitioner. Those individuals at the front line would refer through to the specialists themselves cases that needed that specialization, that expertise that specialists provide. They would assess the case. They would look at the best method of treatment and follow right through. The proposed policy that we have before Albertans and before this Assembly does not in any way alter that relationship among professionals in the medical system.

MRS. GORDON: What will be the role of the regional health authorities and you as minister?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, under the policy the regional health authorities would be responsible for assessing any proposal that might come in for a specialized surgical clinic. They would be responsible, as the policy indicates, to look at the overall benefit of the particular proposal. First of all, of course, they would have to decide on whether there was a need. They would have to look at the overall benefit of the proposal. They would have to make sure, in consultation with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, that any facility, any equipment, any supports that were going to be provided were adequate for the maintenance of quality health care and the protection of the individual patient and the public interest.

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

Seismic Drilling Holes

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the annual meeting of the Surface Rights Federation yesterday I heard from landowners across Alberta who are upset because the government is failing to monitor and enforce rules to protect the land and water from oil and gas well drilling. With the drilling of seismic test wells even the rules are unsatisfactory, particularly as compliance with these rules is not monitored or enforced. All of my questions are to the Minister of Environment. When will the government do its job and ensure that all seismic holes are filled and capped as many landowners and municipalities have ongoing problems that are not resolved?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Environment has worked in collaboration with the department of energy on a number of different issues including approval processes and the issue of enforcement. I'd have to say as a general observation that the oil and gas industry has behaved very responsibly with respect to their access to the resource in the province of Alberta. There are, of course, exceptions to every rule. It is our intention to work very strongly, again in collaboration with the Department of Resource Development, in dealing with those operators within the oil and gas industry that are not operating within the rules.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, he hasn't answered the question. The people in Alberta want to know when this government is going to do their job to ensure that all seismic holes have been properly filled and capped. We have ongoing problems in many municipalities, like Rocky View and Foothills, who have been working on this issue for literally years.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the question has been asked and answered.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, given that the study on this issue in the Pine Lake area has taken so long and we've had absolutely no progress reports on what's happening there, will the government impose a ban on drilling seismic holes in ditches in the interim, as many people and many municipalities have asked him to do?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'll take the hon. member's question under advisement.

DR. WEST: Sometimes the opposition is very clever, because they lob the question in a direction where it shouldn't be handled. It should be handled right here. I'm responsible for the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, which has looked at this over the years with many people doing research on it; that is, the filling in of holes from seismic exploration. The jury is out. A lot of the geologists and those in the geoscience of seismic have studied this intensively and have not agreed on the issues that have been brought forth by the Surface Rights Board.

Furthermore, throughout North America and throughout Canada in every province there is research being done on this very issue as it relates to the various structures, the various formations that we drill through and the effect that seismic has as we go into the aquifers. I would say to the hon. member that this province is probably more responsible than anyone I know in the follow-up and the study and research on this issue.

One other thing. Last year the EUB, who looks after that, filed 22,000 applications in this province with only 22 appeals that actually went to hearing. I would say the track record in this province, looking at all of these issues, is excellent.

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

2:20

Special-needs Education

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In consulting with a number of teachers at various schools in and around my constituency recently, a number of concerns were brought forward to me regarding the program unit funding for students with special needs. My question today is for the Minister of Learning. Will the minister explain the present program unit funding formula relative to the qualifying criteria for students with special needs?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Program unit funding, PUF, is available to children two and a half to six years of age. Its intent is to prepare children that have severe disabilities for grade 1, grade 2, grade 3, and on into school. These children are eligible for very close to \$20,000 in funding. They must, however, have a severe disability, physical, mental, or deafness or blindness. As well, they must have an individualized plan tailor-made to that child. This is an excellent program that has been going on.

The other thing that I would say is that the handbook for program unit funding has been distributed to all school boards and is available through all school board offices.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary to the same minister: can the minister assure members of this Assembly that adequate staff and resources are available in Alberta schools to ensure that all students in integrated classrooms have the opportunity to reach their full learning potential?

DR. OBERG: I certainly can, Mr. Speaker. Today is budget day, and there will certainly be some announcements for children with severe special needs. I would ask the hon. member to wait and see what happens in the budget.

A couple of things I would say. Over the last summer I lifted the caps on special needs, on special education. A student health initiative was put in, which we anticipate will help the severe special-needs students considerably.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that the resources are there. I feel that it's something we have to keep being very vigilant on, and we have to ensure that these students get the absolute best possible education in Alberta.

MR. MARZ: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The minister may have answered my third question, but just to be more specific, can he assure my constituents that these programs will be available in the future?

DR. OBERG: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, again, I would suggest to the hon. member to await this coming budget, and I think he will be very impressed and very happy.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I would add to this is that this morning actually I returned from the Canada Council of Ministers of Education.

MRS. SLOAN: Was that in Mexico?

DR. OBERG: No, that is not Mexico. It was the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada. When I say Canada, usually it means Canada. That's C-A-N-A-D-A.

One of the very important issues that we discussed as ministers was the whole issue of special-needs funding, special-needs education, and we certainly agreed that this is an issue all across Canada and is something that really needed to be looked at.

We are establishing a task force with ministers from across Canada to take a look at the issues surrounding special-needs funding and actually look into it more. This is a task force from across Canada that I really feel will help us get to the bottom of special-needs funding in two ways, in both forms of prevention and better ways of teaching these children and better scholastic techniques.

Thank you.

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

Calgary Herald Strike

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The department of labour has disappeared, but the persistent troubles have not. Today there are over 200 employees entering the fourth month of their strike at the *Calgary Herald*. This is the second long, divisive strike that has occurred in the city of Calgary in recent memory. My first question this afternoon is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Given the disruption that this strike is having on the employees, what does the minister plan to do to resolve this long dispute?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, this strike has been gaining a

lot of attention, perhaps because it's one of the media outlets. Certainly in terms of the history of labour disputes in this country and in this province it is something that no one wants to see particularly, but I would remind the hon. member that we as a department and as a government are doing the things that are proper under the legislation. We've been providing mediators. Mediators have been accessible to both parties and are there, of course, when needed.

This is a part of democracy. As the hon. member knows the employees have the right to bargain collectively. They've chosen to accept that right, and of course the employer is also free, then, to bargain collectively as well. The hope of all of us – and I hope it includes the member opposite – is that the two parties will come to a proper agreement.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Given that the government has intervened in the past to solve disputes, like with the Calgary public school board, why won't the minister consider binding arbitration to resolve this long strike?

MR. DUNFORD: No. The intervention that is being discussed by the hon. member, just so that we have the record clear, was a disputes inquiry board. The disputes inquiry board can be used. It's one of the tools that we have if there are misinterpretations or some misunderstanding about what the actual issues are. I don't think there's any misunderstanding in the dispute between the management of the *Calgary Herald* and the employees of the *Calgary Herald*. The positions have been clearly documented on both sides. Intervention at this time by the government would be extremely heavy-handed, and this minister is not about to do that.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is also to the same minister. Is the minister so nonchalant about this strike because he is on the side of management, the same management that his government has signed sweetheart secret deals with to give the *Herald* scoops on stories whenever they're not to speak to the opposition about those stories? Is that what you're about?

MR. DUNFORD: Name names, Hughie. You obviously went off the script, Hughie. Name names. This situation, sir, requires a response. If he has some information that he'd like to present me, we'll be glad to look at it. Other than that, it's just simply some grandstanding on the part of a very good hon. member.

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

Gun Control Legislation

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. The Supreme Court of Canada heard arguments this week on the registration of guns under Bill C-68, which passed in 1995. There are many, many law-abiding, peaceful gun owners in this province and in my constituency who are very opposed to this federal government encroachment into their lives. To the minister: what have Alberta and for that matter other provincial governments done to oppose this unnecessary intrusion into provincial rights?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, an important question, and there needs to be, I think, some clarification. Bill C-68 contains a number of things, one of which is the gun registry process, but others

are amendments to the Criminal Code that strengthen provisions relating to the criminal use of firearms. Alberta supported the proper use of federal jurisdiction in proposing amendments to the Criminal Code and cracking down on the criminal use of firearms, but Alberta objects strenuously to federal intrusion in the area of provincial jurisdiction when it comes to property rights. The registering of guns is, in fact, a registering of a property right.

2:30

So Alberta took a reference case to the Court of Appeal. There was a split decision on the Court of Appeal, so we have appealed that to the Supreme Court of Canada, which, as the hon. member has correctly referenced, was heard on Monday and Tuesday. We oppose the federal government's intrusion into provincial jurisdiction, as Alberta always has opposed federal intrusion into provincial jurisdiction, and we oppose the colossal waste of money that the federal government has put into this in trying to control the property rights of Albertans.

Speaker's Ruling Sub Judice Rule

THE SPEAKER: Ordinarily, hon. members, the chair would intervene as the matter might properly be viewed as being sub judice. We certainly do have a situation here where there is a court review of a matter. But in this case, because of the uniqueness of the question, the only prejudice that might be given to this case would go to those who are intervening.

AN HON. MEMBER: Which is us.

THE SPEAKER: Correct.

Gun Control Legislation (continued)

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. What does Alberta propose as an alternative to this federal legislation, which is clearly not working?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not clear that we need to occupy this field, but if the Supreme Court were to rule that the federal legislation related to property rights and was unconstitutional, it may then be appropriate for Alberta to bring in legislation with respect to the licensing of firearms acquisition or the licensing of people who utilize firearms to make sure that there was proper training in place or that people who had criminal records, for example, didn't have access to firearms.

MR. THURBER: My final question, Mr. Speaker, is to the same minister. Could you please reassure these law-abiding, peaceful gun owners that any policy that may be put in place in Alberta will not reflect the attitude or the intent of Bill C-68?

MR. HANCOCK: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we wouldn't bring in legislation without properly consulting Albertans about the nature and content of the legislation to be brought in. Secondly, we would be looking at the question. Quite frankly, all the people involved in this discussion, the responsible firearms association and others, have talked about the appropriate type of legislation in this area and the registration of firearms as proposed by the federal government being a colossal waste of money, money which could be better used fighting crimes if they did more to deal with the criminal use of firearms. We would not propose to waste resources in that manner.

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

Support for Voluntary Sector

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report *Building on Strength: Improving Governance and Accountability in Canada's Voluntary Sector* prepared by the federal government was released a year ago, in February 1999. The voluntary sector has joined the public and private sectors, becoming the third pillar of modern society and providing many of the programs formerly offered by government, including providing shelter and food, support services for health and wellness, recreation, arts, youth, et cetera. My questions today are to the Minister of Community Development. Will the minister tell us what action he has taken on multiyear funding commitments, or does he perhaps not agree with this?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Well, I don't quite know where the hon. member's question is leading. Obviously, we are committed to funding the programs that we endorse, and we do it year to year, and normally they increase. So, quite frankly, if she'd like an answer, then I'd ask that the question be a little more specific.

MS BLAKEMAN: No. I think I got that answer.

To the same minister: what is the minister's response to recommendations on training, capacity for technology, and innovation in communications?

Speaker's Ruling Questions outside Government Responsibility

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, if I understand the preamble to the question, the hon. member raised it in the context of a report that was released by the federal government, which is clearly not a matter of administrative competence of this Assembly.

MS BLAKEMAN: If I might, there were specific recommendations to all governments included in the report, and I'm asking what the policy is that this government has on these areas.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, again, administrative competence in this Assembly deals with issues originating in this province, not elsewhere.

Now, if the hon. minister wants to take a shot at this, go for it.

Support for Voluntary Sector (continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Again to the same minister: could I ask what policy and plans the department has developed to take into account the costs of core operations, including staffing, volunteer training, board development needs, and information technology? What's the Alberta government policy on this?

MR. WOLOSHYN: I would seek, first of all, Mr. Speaker, a bit of clarification on the question. However, having said that, if the hon. member would be so kind as to be a little bit patient, she'll see that we have three-year business plans. The budget is going to be brought down today. All these questions as presented, if they pertain to our activities in government, will be answered very thoroughly and to the minutest detail that she might have in mind.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Fishing Closures

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are avid anglers. Yesterday the Minister of Environment announced numerous spring closures. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Why is it necessary to put closures in place?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, our fish populations are under a tremendous amount of sportfishing pressure. Just the other day I was meeting with one of the biologists in the Department of Environment who was talking about the number of lakes that fish are in in the province of Alberta. There are approximately 800 lakes in the province of Alberta that have fish, compared to over 90,000 lakes in Saskatchewan and over 250,000 lakes in the province of Ontario. There are 350,000 licensed anglers in the province of Alberta, which means that the pressure is at the rate of 400 anglers per lake in the province of Alberta. In Saskatchewan and in Ontario it's approximately two anglers per lake.

So, Mr. Speaker, this spring we are implementing a complete fishing closure on the majority of lakes and rivers and streams and canals within the parkland prairie zone and the northern boreal zone. These closures for the spring are being implemented to protect fish species during this very important spawning period.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is also to the Minister of Environment. Why has it taken until now to put these management measures into place?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we've had a number of different types of management techniques that we've used to maintain the Alberta fishery. Because of the tremendous pressure on our fisheries in the province of Alberta we cannot have the same kinds of rules and management techniques as they have in places like Saskatchewan or Ontario. The closures are important to help protect species now so that sportfishing opportunities will continue in the future.

Historically we've used techniques like size limits, bait bans, closures on a lake-by-lake basis or on a species basis. These closures for spring are another management technique. They will provide a maximum benefit for a wide variety of species over a large area. Mr. Speaker, it will cause disruption to some of our sportsfishermen, but it is a minimal disruption so that over the long run we can continue to have this sportfishing as an important part of the recreational experience in the province.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is to the same minister. Money from sportfishing is an important source of income for many of the people in my area. Anglers purchase fuel, use hotels, restaurants, and supplies and equipment. Will there be any major impact from the closure of these from an economic perspective?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, any impact should be minimal. The closures will last for approximately one month. They will be detailed in the 2000 Alberta Guide to Sportfishing Regulations. I think that people will understand and most Albertans will agree that the long-term benefits of having a healthy and sustainable sportfishing opportunity are worth a short seasonal closure during this important spawning season.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have expressed how important fishing is to them both as anglers and with respect to the economic impact on their communities. We're confident that these are good measures that are for the long-term health of the fisheries in the province of Alberta.

2:40

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of three hon. members to participate.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Big Valley Jamboree

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to recognize that a wonderful event in my constituency, the Big Valley Jamboree, had its Festival 2000 kickoff today at Molson House. Since its arrival on the festival scene six years ago Big Valley Jamboree has earned the reputation as being one of North America's finest country music events. People gather at the Camrose recreational centre to experience four days filled with activities like listening to the best artists the country music world can offer, daily bull-riding events, lumberjack contests, and a trade show.

The Big Valley Jamboree is one of the largest outdoor country music festivals held in North America. Sixty thousand fans gathered in Camrose last year for the August long weekend.

Today at Molson House this year's lineup was revealed, including such entertainers as Sawyer Brown, Tracy Lawrence, Patricia Conroy, Charlie Daniels, John Michael Montgomery, Lace, Danny Hooper, Dwight Yoakum, and many others.

What makes the Jamboree Canada's premier outdoor festival is that it is a family experience. Careful consideration was given to plan an event that would appeal to every age group. A family stage and separate family campground are available for those with young children, while the main stage and several festival events cater to an adult crowd.

This is a very important event to my constituents. Hundreds of participants from Camrose and the surrounding area come together to put on an event that has attracted fans from around the world. Many dedicated people including those of the Camrose Regional Exhibition and Panhandle Productions Ltd., the sponsors, have devoted countless hours of their time to make this weekend the wildly popular event that it has become. I'd like to thank them here today and congratulate them on their success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Vietnamese and Chinese New Year

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to recognize and join in the celebration of the Vietnamese Tet and Chinese lunar New Year, observed earlier this month. The year 2000 is the year of the golden dragon, a very auspicious and special year under the Vietnamese and Chinese calendars.

Lunar New Year and Tet are celebrated as family affairs, a time for reunion and thanksgiving. Anyone who attended the Edmonton Viets society gathering at the Shaw Conference Centre in late January would agree with me that this was a family affair and a community celebration.

February 5 was the official lunar New Year for both Vietnamese and Chinese, and Tet also marks the beginning of spring. I always find the similarities between cultures interesting, and starting the new year with a clean slate, forgiving others, paying one's debts, and endeavouring to correct one's faults seems to be a universal approach to a new year. Events and celebrations have extended throughout February and are hosted by a variety of organizations.

I've mentioned before in this Assembly the great respect and value I have for the many people of Vietnamese and Chinese-Vietnamese heritage who live in my constituency of Edmonton-

Centre. Individuals and organizations provide many services and programs in the community as well as contributing overall to the safety and vibrancy of our neighbourhoods.

I'd like to mention a few of the many organizations and individuals who share their rich cultural heritage with us and who continue to work to improve the quality of all of our lives. The Edmonton Viets Association, Changing Together, the Hai (Quang) Ninh Community Association, the Vietnam Chinese Senior Citizens Club, Edmonton Chinatown Multicultural Centre Foundation, the *Vietnam Time Magazine*, Association of Professionals and Entrepreneurs from Vietnam, Indochina Chinese Senior Citizens Association of Edmonton, the United Calgary Chinese Association, Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association, and more than hundreds of others.

Thank you very much, and I wish everyone an auspicious year of health, happiness, and prosperity.

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

2005 Goodwill Games

MR. HLADY: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy and honoured to be able to stand and speak today about Calgary being awarded the 2005 Goodwill Games. This celebration will be a wonderful way to kick off the 100th anniversary of this great province that we all live in. At least \$160 million in economic benefit to Calgary and Alberta is expected to be brought about because of the Goodwill Games coming to Calgary and Alberta.

The structure of the games will be about 10 days. Fifteen or more sports are yet to be decided. A lot of them are decided, with others to be added over the next six months. One thousand plus athletes will be competing. The unique structure of this allows for only invited athletes. Therefore, only the best in each sport will be representing their countries here from around the world.

Ted Turner from Time Warner Sports, Mark Lazarus from Time Warner Sports, and Mike Plant, the president of Goodwill Games, said that it was an easy decision to be able to pick Calgary and Alberta because of the wonderful legacy of infrastructure we have left over from the '88 Olympics.

The Goodwill Games committee in Calgary has six months now to finalize the plans. The unique format that was experienced, as an example, in 1998 in New York, where it was the summer games, allowed for figure skating to be a participant sport. The potential for that is to possibly see summer sports in the winter games in Calgary if we feel that's the best way to present and see things happen in Calgary. Questions for the committee now are to make sure that we know what facilities have to be upgraded, what the costs are, and if we can afford to make it happen with the private sector and with government.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Doug Mitchell, chair of the Goodwill Games committee, and the rest of the members of the committee for their many hours of time to bring the games to Calgary. I believe that over the next six months the committee will put together a proposal that will make 2005 the best Goodwill Games ever.

Thank you.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 7(5) I'd invite the Government House Leader to apprise us of the activity we will be undertaking next week.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tempted just to say the budget, but I'll go through it.

Monday, February 28, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders the introduction of interim supply Bill 9; motion with respect to subcommittees A, B, C, and D to establish committee membership; response to the budget; address in reply to the Speech from the Throne; and day 1 of supplementary supply. Monday evening we can anticipate finishing what of the afternoon's business we haven't completed.

On February 29 at 4:30 p.m. interim supply Bill 9 for second reading and Community Development main estimates. On Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, subcommittees of supply: in the Assembly International and Intergovernmental Relations, committee B, day 1 of main estimates, and in room 512, subcommittee of supply, committee A on Gaming. Post 10 p.m., Community Development main estimates, address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, interim supply Bill 9, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, March 1, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, in the Assembly, subcommittee of supply, committee C, Government Services main estimates; in room 512, committee D, Economic Development main estimates. Post 10 p.m. in the Assembly address in reply to the Speech from the Throne; interim supply Bill 9, Committee of the Whole; and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, March 2, in the afternoon, under Government Bills and Orders, designated Committee of Supply as per the rules and interim supply Bill 9, third reading.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I was standing under Standing Order 13(2) hoping for some clarification. The basis would be that in the exchange from my colleague from Edmonton-Centre there was a question about a federal report about volunteerism apparently with recommendations to other levels of government, and you intervened at that point, sir. My question is this. Just seconds before, we had seen a question about a piece of federal legislation, the federal gun control statute. I've always understood that questions had to be confined to matters within the legislative competence of the government of the province of Alberta, but I had not understood before the proposition that questions could only relate to matters that arise within the province. I'm wondering if I could get some assistance from you, sir, in understanding that ruling you made moments ago.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. members, there was no ruling made several minutes ago.

What is really important in this House is that all members pay very, very careful attention to the questions that are being raised and, quite frankly, to pay as much attention to the answers being given. Oftentimes hon. members get up, raise their question, and members are chitchatting and talking to one another and there's a hum in here. One thing the chair does is listen very attentively. The chair even has access to an additional microphone in here so that he can listen to all of the words of all of the questions, and part of that attention to the question is to make sure that there's some connection between what is being raised in the preambles and the ultimate question.

There was an intervention with respect to the question from the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. Those questions, in terms of reflection by the chair, quite clearly had to do with the policy of the government of Alberta with respect to responses to certain things.

When the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre raised a question, the chair rose as much for clarification in the chair's own mind as it was for an intervention. There was no ruling that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre could not proceed with her questions. The chair simply said: I hope that I understand all of this. The chair also has had some experience sitting on the front bench in the past and knows full well that questions can go in different directions, so the chair has learned to keenly listen with his own ear to all of the words. In this case there was no intervention, but the chair does appreciate the request for clarification with respect to this.

Now, hon. members, I do believe, that being the case, I'm going to exercise an authority that the chair does have, that perhaps the chair should exercise a little more often. So as to allow proper time for the necessary preparations to be made prior to the Budget Address this afternoon, the House is now recessed until 4 p.m. today.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:53 p.m. to 4 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: I'm going to call you back to order.

The Hon. Provincial Treasurer.

Transmittal of Estimates

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

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

THE SPEAKER: The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

head: Government Motions

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm first tabling the government's consolidated fiscal and business plan, as required under section 4 of the Government Accountability Act. Budget 2000 also includes business plans for each ministry, which must be made public under section 13 of this act.

8. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2000-2001 estimates and business plans, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 8 carried]

9. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2000-2001 lottery fund estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker . . . [disturbance in the gallery] Let the record show that my grandson interrupted me, Mr. Speaker.

10. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(2.1) the number of days that the Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2000-2001 lottery fund estimates shall be two days.

[Government Motion 10 carried]

11. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 1999-2000 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

12. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(6) the number of days that the Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 1999-2000 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund shall be one day.

[Government Motion 12 carried]

13. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

[Government Motion 13 carried]

14. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly resolve itself into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

head: Budget Address

15. Mr. Day moved:

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

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, Budget 2000 is the result of the thoughtful input of every government MLA seated here today, and it's input based on government MLAs following the instructions of our Premier, who above anyone else reminds us in a regular way that we need to listen to our bosses, our bosses being the people of Alberta. This budget is a budget from the people of Alberta. It's also the first budget to be tabled this century by any provincial or federal government. It's a first in that way, and we are told that it's also a first in terms of a number of things that are being accomplished or will be accomplished simultaneously with this budget.

This budget in a brief term will be reducing debt significantly, reducing taxes, increasing spending on priority areas like health, education, and people services. It will be freeing 132,000 low-income Albertans from having to pay any provincial income tax. It will be eliminating bracket creep, the first government to do that. It will be increasing by a quarter of a billion dollars the value of the heritage savings trust fund. It will be putting in place a half a billion dollar fund to encourage science and energy research and development in the province. Overall, Mr. Speaker, I think that's not a bad way to launch into the 21st century.

Now, we are told that we have been able to accomplish this, some

people would suggest, by luck or windfall revenues. I want to address that momentarily and bring our attention back to 1985-1986 when of all the corporate revenue that we took in as a government, approximately 60 percent came from the oil and gas sector. As we close out the books for 1998, we see that all of the revenue which we took in from the oil and gas sector made up approximately 10 percent of corporate taxes.

There has been a huge broadening of the base of the economy here in Alberta. There has been a huge diversification. It has not been luck. It has not been goodwill. It has been hard work, Mr. Speaker. Our Premier has led this particular initiative, and the government policies based on caring but limited government, leading to unlimited opportunity, have caused Alberta to be the most people-friendly place, we believe, in which people can pursue their hopes and their dreams.

Mr. Speaker, Stephen Leacock once said that he believed in luck and that he also found that the harder he worked, the luckier he got. We've been working hard on the priorities of Albertans, and the results are here.

We would also like to bring attention to some changes – I call it an evolution of sorts – in the entire budget process. There's been an evolving transformation. Budget days used to be and still are in some jurisdictions and with some governments the result, the culmination, of a year of secret meetings. Then budget day would arrive and there would be a revelation, a revealing of shocks and surprises and hopefully good announcements. The expectation from government was that citizens would be thankful that we had planned their lives for the next year and also consider that we would be eminently wiser and would have been able to figure all of these things out. That has taken on a different change under the direction of Ralph Klein, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

We work very closely and MLAs work very closely with our partners throughout the year. Budget day is no longer an announcement. Those announcements used to be especially scary at election time, Mr. Speaker. I won't suggest this government necessarily, but governments generally would use an election year budget, if this were to be seen as one – but every year is an election year in Alberta – would use those times to announce all kinds of goodies, sugar-plums that had not yet even danced in the heads of the taxpayers, and it was presented in a way to make the government sweet enough to re-elect.

Mr. Speaker, under the direction of Ralph Klein we clearly operate with an understanding that we do not buy votes. We work hard to earn them. We work hard throughout the year with our partners – municipalities, regional health authorities, school boards, people in the business community – to develop the kinds of things that need to be done and need to be said and need to be directed. We take those priorities, build them into a budget, a budget that now has three-year business plans. We project three years into the future. We don't want to see surprises. There's always the inevitable that happens, but we have three-year business plans, which we then monitor on the short term every 90 days. Every quarter we report on the progress of spending and on revenues coming in.

Budget day should not be a day of surprises. It should be a day in which government accounts for where they think the revenues will be going and where they think the expenditures will be going in the year ahead, and that's what this is all about, working closely with our partners, Mr. Speaker.

As we look at other things that need to be done, as we move to a discussion on the spending areas of this budget – and there is spending in this budget very clearly – I would like to suggest that we

may want to think of adjusting the language that we use when we talk about spending. We hear from critics from time to time, and it's good and positive to have critics there. It helps us to be even better and to respond. Sometimes the way some critics present spending is as if nothing is being spent at all in priority areas. It's as if everything is bleak and horrifying, and unknowing Albertans, vulnerable Albertans, are sometimes taken advantage of by the criticism. I think that just as we demand honesty in advertising, we need to demand honesty in criticizing. And when we look at spending, I would suggest that we put things in a better context. If we look at the areas of spending and if we're talking about spending increases, then we say to our citizens: what we're talking about is not more spending but even more spending. Even more spending. That puts it in context, Mr. Speaker.

As we look at that and consider the language of how we address this, sometimes I wonder if our critics fully understand from whence the money comes. There's a thought from time to time, as I hear some individuals, that there's a great vault in this building and in that vault are untold millions and billions of dollars and all that is required is that we go down to the basement and dig some money out of the vault and just pass it around or that there are bags of loonies on my desk or on somebody else's desk and that we toss those around.

Mr. Speaker, we need to have a clear picture of where the money comes from. The money comes from the people of Alberta. It's their money, it's their budget, and it's their security. That's what we're talking about. And every two weeks, as hardworking Albertans look at their paycheques, what happens is that we as government come up to them, albeit in an understanding way, and say: "We're from the government, and we're here to help you. We're here to help you carry that heavy load in your wallet and your purse. We're here to take some of your money from you." We say that every two weeks. In most cases Albertans recognize that some taxes need to be paid and that money has to come from them. But all the money comes from the people.

We need to remember that if we ask for even more spending, what we're saying to Albertans every two weeks is: "We need to take even more money from you. You're going to have to work even harder. From somewhere you're going to have to come up with more dollars." That's what we need to keep in mind as we talk about even more spending, and we are spending even more in some areas. We have tremendous growth in this province and tremendous pressures that come with that growth.

We are spending even more in the area of health. There are growth pressures that are coming from all sides in that particular area. With this budget we are not backing off the fact that we're seeing approximately just over a 9 percent increase in spending on health. That will increase to 21 percent over the three-year business plan. A 21 percent increase. Even more spending on health. We will be moving at the end of that three-year plan to the \$6 billion mark in spending. That's a lot of money, Mr. Speaker.

It means very definite things will happen this year and in the next two years following this year. It means that 2,400 nurses and frontline workers will be hired. It means that 90 more doctors will be hired. It means that even more procedures will be done. Shorter waiting lines is the goal of some of that spending. Mr. Speaker, 5,950 heart procedures. That's an increase of some 600 heart procedures. And 1,430 dialysis procedures. That's an increase of about 140. We'll see 161 bone marrow transplants. These are real things happening to real people that we can provide for. A 10 percent increase in the number of liver transplants that will be done. A 16 percent increase in the number of heart transplants that will be done. Add to all of this, Mr. Speaker, untold numbers, thousands of

joint replacements and then everything else that happens in the medical care system, hundreds of millions of dollars into infrastructure to build the hospitals, to do the renovations, to take care of the lodges, to do the extended care units and you can see how it's very easy to arrive at a spending of \$17 million a day to operate this health care system. We think Albertans are worth that, and we're committing those dollars to that.

As we do that, we look back, though, with some caution, because we see that 22 percent of our budget was based on health care spending in 1980. We move to 1990: 26 percent of our budget on health care spending. As we finish out this three-year business plan, 33 percent of our budget will be spent on health care. I recently met with a minister of finance from another province. In their province they are looking at 40 percent of all the taxpayers' money being spent on health care.

Any government that cares as much about the principles of the Canada Health Act as we do must look to ways of seeing efficient services delivered in innovative ways so that we can keep the growing costs of health care to a manageable limit. This is not just an Alberta situation, Mr. Speaker. This is right across the country. I can tell you that many governments are afraid to even address the issue. This is a new century. We need to be bold and caring at the same time, and this government is addressing the issues. The reason other governments are sometimes paralyzed with fear to address the spending issues around health is because of the accusations that often are heaped upon you when you say that you are trying to do something to improve the system.

It almost saddens me to comment that some people would even reflect that this government is actually trying to destroy health care, in fact to destroy Canada. We hear incredible things. I would ask people as we enter this debate to think of us as legislators, if it's possible, as human beings, because we are, and when we're in the debate, to look at us as legislators. We have children. We have grandchildren. We have aging parents who are facing the increased cost of advanced care in their sunset years. Do people really think anybody in their right mind would want to destroy the health care system that is there for their children, for their grandchildren, and for their grandparents? Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that it's time to put away the political scalpels and to drop the name-calling and accusations and engage in positive, co-operative discussions on how services can be provided in a way that takes the cost increases away from every health care system in this country.

Here's what we're talking about, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about looking at approaches and solutions that will bring shorter lineups, better care, no cost to the consumer, and all within the Canada Health Act. We're talking about improving the health and life of Albertans. Anybody with solutions that don't meet those criteria need not apply, and we will guarantee that in legislation.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, we are doing even more in the area of learning and education. We have a huge increase in students in this province. We are looking at increases this year in education, in terms of a percentage increase in our spending, of 9 percent and stretching that to over 19 percent over the three-year period.

What does that mean in real terms? It means 2,200 new teachers and aides in the classroom. It means more money going to programs that will achieve higher levels of achievement: \$66 million going to programs directly focused on achievement and progress and learning, \$60 million for computers in the classroom this year. Sixty million dollars. That is very significant. We are concerned, Mr. Speaker, and we want to see our children moving into the global economy equipped to handle whatever they face.

It also means, as we broaden this out to the postsecondary area, that we'll be seeing a 9.2 percent increase in postsecondary spending, moving up to 16 percent. We will see 23,000 new spaces created in the postsecondary system. We will see assistance going to students who are faced with the weight of loans in order for them to be educated. This year we'll see a 22 percent increase in assistance to students. Mr. Speaker, by the end of the three-year plan we will see a 50 percent increase in assistance to students. We know that about half of the postsecondary student population in this province in fact do not access provincial student loans, but that means that half of the students do, and we're going to be there for them. We're going to be there as they move into the 21st century, and we don't apologize for that. We are excited about that.

Around the province people continue to move here in great numbers. We know that that puts huge pressure on infrastructure in our towns and in our cities. We had over 50,000 people again this year move into this province. Just think of it, Mr. Speaker, 50,000 people. That's like another city of Red Deer just coming right up out of the ground every year. It's a wonderful thought, but that brings with it some extra cost to government. We have said to our municipalities that with the growth rate that we are experiencing, a population growth rate that is twice what Ontario is growing, we are going to assist the municipalities to address those needs to the tune of \$725 million this year in this budget. That's on top of the \$1.1 billion that is presently being expended on infrastructure, and that's not just roads. That is water systems, that is schools, that is hospitals, and that is seniors' lodges, all of the areas of infrastructure which presently are dealing with the positive results of the Alberta advantage.

In agriculture we have seen across western Canada this year the results of several years in a row of low commodity prices and on a regional basis devastating weather conditions. We have seen our friends and neighbors and relatives in Saskatchewan and Manitoba going hat in hand to the federal government, asking for assistance, something that will help them with that. Mr. Speaker, we can't stand by and wait for the federal government to dither about this particular problem. We are stepping to the plate. In last year's budget and this year's we are expanding the abilities of the farm income disaster program to handle those pressures and disasters beyond the control of our farmers. These are global items that are beyond their control. As we negotiate at the world trade level, trying to bring down this whole issue of subsidies around the world and of tariffs on the agricultural side, as we work to do that, we will not — we will not — see our family farms moved to extinction. We will be there for them.

Murray McLaughlan sang a song, a tribute to farmers, some years ago. He said: thanks for the meal; here's a song that is real from a boy from the city to you. You know, that's a nice song, Mr. Speaker. That's a nice song, and I will resist the request to break into song at this particular moment, but I can tell you something. A song will not put diesel fuel into that tractor. A song will not buy the seed that needs to go into next year's crop. A song will not buy the silage that's needed over the year to feed the cattle and see them through the winter. We're doing far more than that, and we can say to our farm community a similar thing. We can say thanks for the meal; here's some help that is real from all over the province to you.

Mr. Speaker, our seniors, especially those on low and fixed incomes, have faced several years of slowly rising inflation and other costs. We feel it's time, that the Alberta advantage and the bold plans that we have for this century have given us the fiscal capacity to be able to address the need of low-income seniors, so we are announcing an increase in low-income seniors' benefits of 10 percent, which will assist our low-income and fixed-income seniors as they move through the years ahead. Those seniors have worked

hard. They've served well. They continue to be generous. We will be there for them. We will also see an increase of 16 percent in a special program just dealing with special needs for seniors. That is important, and we are there for them.

As we look from one end of the age spectrum to the other, in terms of children's services there's the Alberta Children's Forum that took place this year, chaired by Colleen Klein. Through that forum and that process we have seen and been brought forward insights and recommendations on how to deal with some of the items that are being faced by children and families today. We know, Mr. Speaker, that as a Conservative government we cannot invade the area of family. We cannot intrude in that area, and we don't want to do things that would increase dependency. We want to foster independency. With the recommendations that are coming from this forum, there will be a 6 percent increase in our funding for Children's Services. That will extend to 16 percent over three years. Children are our future. We're going to be there for them.

Mr. Speaker, we have through the year addressed a number of other areas. On the question of the Canada pension plan people continue to ask us what we are doing in that particular area. I want to remind people and update them that Alberta has come forward with suggestions on how that plan could be improved, that if they were adopted across the country, the plan would be improved for all Canadians.

But we can't wait while these plans, these items that we have researched and that we believe have some real possibilities for improvement sit on a federal shelf and gather dust, so we have asked the other provinces and the federal government to join with us in a working committee, which we now have in place for six months, to explore the Alberta approach to pension plans and to proper funding and to open up opportunities especially for young people who are working and investing in that plan and to guarantee the seniors who are already in the plan that their benefits will be there. We're working with the federal government and the other provinces, but it's a two-track system, Mr. Speaker. At the end of that six months we'll evaluate whether there is progress and ability to move ahead, and we will continue at the request of citizens to look at the feasibility of an Alberta plan.

We are not saying, Mr. Speaker, that we are pulling out of the Canada pension plan. We are not making that comment. This is not a threat. It is saying that we are responsible for the pension dollars that our citizens invest. We want to make sure they're properly invested in the best way. We'll be there for them. We're exploring those possibilities.

As we look at the area of investment, we're excited that we can report that we have just completed adding \$230 million, almost a quarter of a billion dollars, to the heritage savings trust fund. We have increased that fund. We will not allow inflation to erode it, and we will be there.

Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, that fund this year will earn in income for Albertans approximately the same amount of money we will take in from oil royalties. So here is this fund, that has been built up over the years from oil and gas royalties, now producing, the fund is producing, interest at the same rate that royalties are being produced in an annual way out of the ground. I think that's a firm platform of security for us in the 21st century.

We will continue to do even more to address debt and debt pay-down. We have just posted, as we move to the end of this budget year in which we are now, a record down payment on that particular debt, the remaining debt, \$1.6 billion being put down on that debt. This will be the first time in 12 years that the interest costs of our debt will be less than \$1 billion. We're moving in the right direction, Mr. Speaker.

The reason we focus on that is because we know that debt costs; it does not pay. As we move to debt reduction, we lower the interest cost and we lower the cost to the bankers, as it were, Mr. Speaker, the creditors around the world. As we move to paying that down, we will create savings that we can then apply to health and education and other areas.

4:30

In 1994 our debt servicing costs were \$1.7 billion. This year as we move to under a billion dollars, that means we have three-quarters of a billion dollars of unborrowed money that we can be investing in health, education, agriculture, and the areas of people services. That is the track that we have been on. It's proven to be viable.

We do get questioned from time to time, Mr. Speaker, in terms of our ability to continue to pay down debt, and that brings into discussion the whole area of how we forecast. How do we know what revenues are going to be coming in in a given year? What will we put to debt, and what will we put into our various areas of program spending?

We are forecasting this year, in and after consultation with leading experts and analysts around the world, that the price of oil for the budget year, which will begin April 1 and extend to March 31, 2001, will average \$19 a barrel. In a day when we're looking at close to \$30 a barrel, I know some would say: you're budgeting too low; you should have that higher.

Mr. Speaker, we do our forecasting based on consultation with the analytical experts in the province, in the country, and internationally, and we were all together in our budgeting last year when we said that oil would be \$13.50. This day one year ago we need to remember that oil was \$12.61, and when we said \$13.50 last year and put it in the budget, we were accused of being too optimistic. As you can see, we were low. Now we are saying, as closely as we can after consultation, that we see \$19 oil; we see natural gas at a Canadian dollar price of \$2.50. Those items, again, are developed in consultation with the industry.

The way we make sure that we will have cushions in place – because, as we know, Alberta more than any other province has fluctuating income streams. Income goes up and down more radically than any other province. When we have a good year like this year, we forget a year like 1998, not long ago. In 1998 the amount of revenue we took in from our oil and gas royalties was 1 and a half billion dollars less than we had taken in the year before, in 1997, and the economy did not shudder to a stop. We did not come screeching to a halt because of the expansion that we have in the economy, but people forget that.

We will not base our budgeting on the mountaintop peaks of the price of oil. We will budget carefully on what we think it will be. To protect us from a fluctuation as prices plunge downward or as they rocket skyward, every year we estimate what all of our revenues will be, we take 3 and a half percent of that estimate, and we set that money aside in case we have a fluctuation.

We do get criticized from time to time because of the fluctuating revenues, and can't we forecast closer? The whole world was wrong last year at \$13.50. Maybe the whole world will be wrong this year, and we join most other experts in that \$19 to \$20 range.

I can tell you that our toughest critics, Mr. Speaker, are the credit rating agencies. Those people review every province's budget and the budget of every state and every sovereign territory, Standard and Poor's international credit rating agency being one. In their review of our budgeting, in the words of their own evaluation, they commend us for how we budget: the prudent fiscal management – this was in their latest review – and the fact that we take into account

the variability of the income stream. They not only gave us credit for that; they gave us the best credit rating in the country for how we handle the dollars of the people of Alberta.

There are other dollars out there, Mr. Speaker, that we take as a government. It's in the whole area of fees and charges. Earlier this year there was a court decision in Ontario which looked at a particular fee that was being charged because the protest was being made that the fee being charged was in excess of the service being delivered. In the process of the court's determining that, they said to the Ontario government and they said to all governments: you can do one of two things. They didn't say that you have to get rid of the fee. They didn't say that you have to lower it. They said: you could protect the fee; you could bring it into legislation and protect it, or you can lower it.

So far every other government has rushed to protect those fees that were determined to be too high. Premier Ralph Klein said: "Why are we rushing to protect the government? Why don't we rush to protect the people?" That's what we're doing with our fees and charges review.

So, Mr. Speaker, we did a review, an analysis, a huge review of all the fees and charges that are being assessed in various government departments. We found out that in the majority of cases most of those fees and charges in fact do not cover the cost of the service or only approximately cover the cost, but there was an area in which those fees and charges were considerably higher than the cost of delivering the service. We did not and we are not going to protect those high fees. We are going to lower them.

It is in the whole area of what it takes to register related to estates and wills, related to house purchases, land and property registration, and business incorporation, all of those areas, Mr. Speaker. We are announcing that effective midnight tonight we will be reducing approximately 100 fees, and in that process we will be leaving \$60 million in the pockets of Albertans. That's caring about taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, to give people an idea of which areas will be affected, for young home buyers, for instance, looking at a \$150,000 home with a \$140,000 mortgage, if you can get such a deal, before midnight tonight the fee, the charge that the government was allocating to those people to register that was some \$365. We are lowering that by two-thirds, to \$133. That's a significant saving for young home buyers.

We are also looking at the area of processing those probate letters related to wills and estates, something apparently we will all face at some time in our lives. For a modest estate value of \$150,000, there has been an assessment of \$600 to register the letters of probate with that. Six hundred dollars. We're lowering that to \$300, Mr. Speaker.

In the area of business incorporation, it has cost \$150 simply to incorporate. In a day when more and more people are becoming self-employed, when more and more people are becoming self-employed contractors and registering as such, we are lowering that fee from \$150 to \$50. We care about people, Mr. Speaker. We are going to see that this continues to be a vibrant economy here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the area of taxes is one in which I believe we see revealed the heart and nature of people when we get into a discussion on taxes. We are so pleased and excited that because of our fiscal situation we are able to accelerate and move up by an entire year a brand-new tax plan for Canada and definitely one that will be registered here in Alberta. When we asked Albertans about this, I believe Albertans revealed their heart and their nature when they responded in the area of taxes, because the first thing they said was that any tax changes had to be of immediate assistance to low-income families. We will make adjustments in this new tax system,

which begins only 10 months from now, that will relieve some 132,000 low-income, hardworking Albertans from having to pay any income tax at all.

That was the first response from the heart of Albertans, who said: this should be the first thing that you do. Then we saw the heart and nature of Albertans when they said that the system needs to be fair. They pointed out to us that we were taxing in an inequitable way the earnings of either a one income earning family or a two income earning family, and they said: don't punish or reward; leave that choice to families. By moving the spousal exemption from \$6,020 to \$11,620, a 90 percent increase, we equalized that playing field, Mr. Speaker, and we make family choices. Family choices, not government choices.

Then people went on to say – Albertans revealed their heart and nature by saying that a tax system needs to be honest. One of the areas in which taxes have not been honest – and this is at all levels of government – is this whole area of bracket creep, whereby exemptions have not been indexed to inflation. As people's salaries have been inflated, for years those exemption levels have not moved up also. Government has quietly reached around with a hand into the back pockets of people and slipped those extra dollars out and made as if they took nothing. In fact, it has cost Albertans, it has cost Canadians millions of dollars.

4:40

We looked around in this area of bracket creep. We said: how do we fix it? We looked in the mirror. We realized that we were the creeps. We are going to fix it, Mr. Speaker. We are tying these exemptions to inflation. We will be the first province to put an end to bracket creep.

The final thing that Albertans said about a tax system, again I think revealing their own hearts, Mr. Speaker, is that a tax system needs to be understandable. It was a famous person who said: the hardest thing in the world to understand is the income tax system. That person was Albert Einstein. If he couldn't figure it out, I sure can't and most of the people I know can't. So we are simplifying the system. That is why as of January 1, 2001, we will be the first jurisdiction in Canada where people can take all of their deductions and refunds on the federal side, all of their deductions and refunds on the provincial side, and claim all of those. There will be a single amount left, a net income, and to that net income a single rate of 11 percent will be applied. Openness and understandability in the tax system.

Mr. Speaker, the results of everything that we've been doing for the last few years mean continued growth here in Alberta. We are projecting growth of between 4.5 and 4.8 percent in the economy this coming year. That is very aggressive, very significant growth. That means 48,000 new jobs, most of which will be in the private sector: high-paying, high-tech, value-added jobs, long-term opportunities for Albertans. That's the type of growth that we will continue to see in this province as a result of the steps that we have taken.

Mr. Speaker, we haven't got it all right. We haven't got it all figured out. We still make mistakes, and as we do and as we are informed of those, we will move to correct them. You've heard about a 9 percent increase to health and 9 percent to education and 21 percent over three years. The overall increase from last year to this year in this budget that we are tabling today is slightly over 2 percent. That's not bad management considering all that we have faced and the continual pressures that we face in an annual, monthly, and daily way.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we are moving to a new era as we move boldly into this 21st century. I believe that we have a platform

of security that has been built because of certain policies. It's policies that will cause an economy to grow or to retract. If it's small "l" liberal – and this is not partisan; I'm talking liberal philosophically. We have enough history, as we go back through the 20th century, to know that small "l" liberal philosophy which talks about government moving to heal all the ills of the world, which talks about the growth of government institutions and government programming in every area of life – we know and we found out in an experiential way in Canada that that leads to increasing deficit, eventual increasing debt, to debt loads that eventually crush the air of incentive out of the lungs of private and free citizens.

It's time to reverse that thinking. We have reversed that thinking for a number of years. A small "c" conservative approach philosophically, Mr. Speaker, is an approach that recognizes limited but caring government, an approach that has faith in communities, families, and individuals, that moves to true freedom. When we talk about 132,000 low-income people no longer paying provincial income tax, that's a whole new definition of freedom. That type of freedom will be enjoyed by all of our citizens as we move this way.

Mr. Speaker, I believe we are now moving to a new era where once almost unthought-of dreams are within our grasp. We have seen the rate at which we have paid down debt. I don't want to optimistically raise hopes, but we have seen the aggressive rate at which we have paid down debt. We have seen that we have been able to reduce taxes continually year to year, incrementally some years but exceedingly more in the year ahead. We have seen the heritage savings trust fund increase in value. We can see other revenue streams where investment is happening now coming into this province.

4:50

If we maintain prudent fiscal management, the day is coming soon – will it be 2005, in time for our birthday? I don't know, Mr. Speaker – when Albertans will be the first to be able to consider if we should even have provincial income taxes. They used to laugh at us in Alberta when we had those kinds of dreams. You know what's been happening every year under the Klein government? Every year we say that things can be accomplished. Every year many people say: you will never accomplish it. Every year it gets accomplished.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the history of the 20th century for Alberta has been an epic of challenge and triumph. I believe it's that kind of boldness that moves us into the 21st century, and I'm absolutely convinced, understanding the heart and nature of Albertans and understanding the energy that comes from their heart and soul, that if we continue to harness that, if we continue to allow that to thrive and move ahead, if we understand and allow that to be unleashed, then combined with the providence of God and an understanding of divine and human nature, the dreams we have for ourselves, for our children, for our grandchildren are attainable. That's where we're going, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suspect that we've heard enough hyperbole for one afternoon, so at this time I beg leave to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 4:52 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, February 28, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/02/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, after the prayer please remain standing.

On this day let us be guided by Your eternal wisdom and confidence that You believe in all of us. Amen.

Hon. members, I'm now going to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Mr. Lorieau is in the Speaker's gallery.

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

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 220 Albertans. They are asking

the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a bill banning private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

This brings the number of petitions submitted so far to 653.

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to present a petition signed by 258 people from Edmonton and the surrounding area urging the Legislative Assembly to "urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased today to rise and table petitions signed by 255 Edmontonians.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the public health care system].

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

This petition has been signed by over 273 Edmontonians and brings the total today to a great number.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care [in the province].

This is on behalf of 214 residents of Edmonton and area.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the public health care system].

This is signed by 252 Edmontonians and is the last of five petitions submitted today with the great number being a total of 1,252 for today.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled the other day regarding private health care and public health care please be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I would request that the petition which I presented in this Assembly on February 24 signed by hundreds of my constituents in protest of the government's plans to privatize health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now request that the petition I presented on February 24, last Thursday, signed by several hundred Albertans calling on the Assembly to ban private, for-profit hospitals be read and received now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a Standing Order 40 application.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I give notice now that immediately after the daily Routine I will move as follows:

Be it resolved that this Assembly affirm the importance of open access to reading material by recognizing February 27 to March 4, 2000, as Freedom to Read Week.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

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

**Bill 6
Special Payment Act**

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, being the Special Payment Act.

Mr. Speaker, this is enabling legislation to allow the Workers' Compensation Board and certain widows to enter into negotiations.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

**Bill 9
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 9, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, in keeping with our commitment to open and accountable government, I'm happy to table today in accordance with the Legislative Assembly Act and the Conflicts of Interest Act the report of selected payments to members and former Members of the Legislative Assembly and persons directly associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly for the fiscal year ended March 31, '99.

It's also my pleasure to table on behalf of the government caucus a number of reports entitled Allowance and Travel Expenses for the 12 months ended March 31, '99. These reports are accompanied by copies of personal expense claims, copies of capital residence allowance claims, and copies of vehicle expense claims. I'm pleased to report that this is a comprehensive list of expenditures including all 12 months for the fiscal year ended March 31.

I'm also pleased to table the report on the general revenue fund, details of expenditure by payee, everything you always wanted to know about every dime of government spending, right here, and where it went. Unlike the federal government we keep track of our expenses, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table answers to Motion for a Return 205 regarding inventory of oil field wastes in Alberta.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to table five copies of the responses to Motion for a Return 207 and Motion for a Return 209, accepted on April 28, 1999.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of answers to questions asked regarding Alberta Health and Wellness supplementary estimates on December 1, 1999.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to table two reports. The first report is from Donna Wilson, who's a professor in the Faculty of Nursing, University of

Alberta. It's entitled Regional Health Planning and Delivery in Alberta: A Basic Cost-Benefit Analysis in Response to a Health System Performance Issue as presented to the standing policy committee. What it indicates is that a cost-benefit analysis is required and a more in-depth appraisal of regionalization before the regional health authority boards assume responsibility associated with contracting out major surgery to for-profit firms, the same like the Treasurer. It is also concerned that the funds which were used to build and are now used to sustain a regional health system are not available for direct patient care.

The second study is a study by Kevin Taft and Gillian Steward which is entitled Private Profit or Public Good: The Economics and Politics of the Privatization of Health Care in Alberta. It indicates that for several decades and in various countries private, for-profit health care has been shown to consistently fall short of nonprofit and publicly provided health care and that when compared to publicly provided health care, private, for-profit health care typically costs more.

Thank you.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Mr. Blyth Irvine, who is a constituent of Castle Downs. He has written the letter because he has experienced firsthand what the health care system is like in Britain, which includes both private and public health care, and he is in full support of the initiative that the government is taking on.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling the appropriate number of copies of a speech by Dr. David Schindler. Dr. Schindler is the world's most distinguished freshwater ecologist and one of Canada's most honoured scientists. This is a speech he gave on February 9 of this year entitled The Urgent Need for Endangered Species Legislation in Canada, in which he criticizes the provincial government for their lack of effort in this regard.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a project description: Making Justice Accessible, women's access to legal services. The project is sponsored by Women Looking Forward, an organization in Calgary, and it's described here in their February 2000 newsletter, which is also filled with all kinds of other useful and necessary information.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a report concerning investigations conducted by the Ombudsman on injured workers, and it contains five recommendations on how they could be improved.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of the program on the investiture of lifesaving honours which were conducted today at Government House and presided over by the Hon. Lois Hole, Lieutenant Governor of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings to make. The first one is copies of a letter that I've just had delivered to the Premier's office requesting the Premier to intervene on behalf of Leticia Cables, who'll be leaving the country tomorrow at 11:45 unless the deportation order is rescinded. So I have requested the Premier in writing to intervene as quickly as he can.

Mr. Speaker, my second set of tablings is three in one bunch. They deal with privatization of health care and the economics of contracting out public health services. The first tabling is the executive summary of the study by Kevin Taft and Gillian Steward, *Private Profit or Public Good: The Economics and Politics of the Privatization of Health Care in Canada*.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the keynote address delivered by Professor Robert Evans, professor of economics, the University of British Columbia. The title of the paper is *The Role of Private and Public Health Care Delivery in Alberta*. This paper was delivered at the health forum sponsored by the Alberta Congress Board.

The third set is consumer experience with contract surgery and private clinics in Alberta, a study done by the Consumers' Association of Canada, Alberta branch, and released just a little while ago.

Mr. Speaker, turning to the other tablings, there's a letter that I received from Dale Henkel of Trochu, Alberta, expressing his deep concern about the rising costs of fuel and the impact of it on farmers in this province.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, deals with the Spray Valley area development. Both Bonnie Nasim and the other writer – the name is here; I can't find it at the moment – are opposed to the development of Spray Valley and are asking the government to take action to stop that development.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of a report called *Budget Highlights*. It's done by Nesbitt Burns, as you know a very reputable financial firm, and it praises our moves to clear the net debt, pay down the remaining debt and gives positive words on ensuring that Albertans pay the lowest taxes. It also gives positive points for the government taking "a balanced approach in this . . . budget, offering up both tax reductions and increased social spending." I'll table those copies.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair would like to table five copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Red Deer-South requesting that Bill 202, the Marriage Amendment Act, 2000, be brought to the Committee of the Whole on Wednesday, March 1, 2000.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table today for the information of all members of the Legislative Assembly a press release from Georgia-Pacific dated August 18, 1997, in which they express a willingness to compensate homeowners for exterior hardboard siding which absorbed moisture and rotted prematurely in America.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a very large group of grade 6 students from Westlock, Alberta,

which is in the constituency of Barrhead-Westlock. They are seated in both the members' and public galleries and are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Dan McDonald, Mrs. Sue Chapotelle, and Mme Annette St. Arnaud. Also accompanying them are parents Mrs. Diane Tymchuk, Mrs. Tammy Graff, Mrs. Joanne Potts, Mr. David Nelson, Mr. Wes Latimer, Mrs. Colleen Marks, Mr. Erik Clausen, Mrs. Theresa Sterling, Mrs. Colleen Jackson, Mrs. Pat Towle, and Mrs. Florence Waldner. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

1:50

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the galleries today we have a number of guests who are here to observe the introduction of Bill 6. I would like to introduce various representatives of both the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group and the Workers' Compensation Board. Here representing the disenfranchised widows on the executive committee are Carolyn Berube, Shirley Fry, Val Benoit, Leta Schmaltz, Joan Snow, and Penny Frederiksen. Also from the Workers' Compensation Board is Doug Mah, their legal counsel. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all the members of the Assembly.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an extreme pleasure this afternoon to rise and introduce to you a group of 24 grade 8 students from Gracefield, Quebec. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Dominique Dery, and parents Stephane Charlbos, Marguerite Todd, and Debbie Patrick from Edmonton. These students are part of an exchange program with Laurier Heights school in the Edmonton-Riverview constituency. They arrived in Edmonton on February 23 and will return home March 1.

With your indulgence I would like to share with the Assembly some of the highlights of their visit. This is their first visit to western Canada. They have been to an Oilers/Bruins game, have spent a day at Laurier Heights school, have traveled to Jasper, to West Edmonton Mall, to Edmonton city hall, are touring the Legislature today, and will also be touring the Canadian Petroleum Interpretive Centre, and will go rock climbing at Vertically Inclined. I would like these students to rise and receive the most warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

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

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four members of the 189th Pathfinders from Silver Springs in Calgary. They are led by their leader, Lorna Stevens, and accompanied by Samantha Todd, Gillian Siddall, and Naomi Piovesan. They've been visiting a number of the sites in Edmonton for the past weekend and spent today touring the Legislature to observe the proceedings of the Legislature. They're in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of all members.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 10 keen and inquisitive

students of the Grant MacEwan College social work program. They are accompanied today by their instructor, Duane Massing, and I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the Legislature. They're in the public gallery.

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise today and introduce another member of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group. A very keen observer of this particular Bill 6 that's coming forward is Pauline Knittle, who is here along with some friends. I'd her and her entourage to rise and take the warm blessings and reception of this House please.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly more members of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group. I would like to introduce to you Muriel Johnson, Jeff Johnson, Mary Wasylkiewicz, Walter Wasylkiewicz. The husband of Pauline Knittle was not previously introduced: Werner Knittle. Those constituents are good friends of mine, and I'm very pleased to see them here for the introduction of this bill. Would they please stand and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly. They are in the members' gallery.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Melissa Johnson, a graduate student in health promotion at the University of Alberta. Melissa also works at Canadian Blood Services and is a member of the Health Services Association of Alberta. She is seated in the public gallery. I'll ask Melissa to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly some other members of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group. They are Colleen Korbisser, Bob Prest, Pat Dober, Evelyn Frericks, Margaret Leonard, Mary-Ann Charbonneau, Joyce Neve, Bernice Pagee, Iris Penner-Sumpka, Carol Ross, Nora Biggs, Irene Lagace and Mary MacKenzie. They are seated in the members' and the public gallery, and with your permission I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, as I call on the hon. Member for Fort McMurray, would you join with me in extending to him the best of happy birthdays today on his birthday.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you so much for that reminder, Mr. Speaker. I will ensure that you will be reminded on yours.

It's my pleasure today to introduce a constituent of the city of Fort McMurray, Mme Kjersti Powell. Kjersti presently is the chair of the Keyano College board of governors, where she has sat for the past six years, and she's also the immediate past chair for the provincial council of board chairs for the colleges and technical institutions. She's a senior manager of Syncrude Canada, which is responsible for workplace learning. I'd ask her to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of all legislators.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to further introduce more members of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group that were forgotten in the earlier ones. They are Edmonton residents Mary and Ralph Dietz. If they'd please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Opted-out Physicians

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier advise Albertans what negotiations are occurring with the College of Physicians and Surgeons with regard to physicians opting out of the public health care system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not privy to any of those discussions. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness is, and I'll have him respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any negotiations taking place with respect to that particular item. Certainly we do consult. We do have meetings periodically with the College of Physicians and Surgeons over issues of mutual concern. Actually, this sounds like something of a rhetorical question from the hon. Leader of the Opposition, because it is the Liberal Party which is advocating that physicians get out of the public health care system and practise privately.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, it's not rhetoric; it's draft policy guidelines of the College of Physicians and Surgeons on opting out, which I'm happy to table.

My second question, Mr. Speaker, is: can the Premier provide any information on how this process of opting out will work?

MR. KLEIN: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is a responsibility of the Department of Health and Wellness, and I'll have the appropriate minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there has existed for some time under the provisions of the health insurance act in this province a set of steps or a process for a physician to opt out of the insurance program. I'm happy to report that to my knowledge there is only one physician in the province who has taken the formal steps of opting out under a procedure actually supported by legislation, which has been in existence for a long time.

2:00

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is in fact a new process. So the question back to the Premier is: why has this opting out process been drafted before the legislation is introduced and without public input?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have no knowledge of any policy being drafted. Again, if the hon. minister has some knowledge, perhaps he can expound on it, if he has any knowledge.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, there is a policy and set of steps that exist right now in the province – and it's in accordance with the rules and rulings under the Canada Health Act – that a physician may opt out of the health care insurance plan.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier explain what would happen in an emergency if an entire specialty had opted out of the health care system?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that indeed is hypothetical, but relative to the policy, the minister has explained it once. If the hon. Leader of the Liberal Opposition doesn't understand it, perhaps he can explain it again.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated but don't mind at all repeating, under current legislation, under current provisions – and I think this is basically common to all the provinces of Canada – there is the right of a physician to move out of the coverage under the payments of the health care insurance plan. I think our record really in the province is exemplary in that at this point in time, as far as I'm aware, we have only one physician that has chosen to take that particular step.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why was the public not informed that these negotiations were under way given the severe impact on physician services in this province?

MR. KLEIN: As I have said about – well, this would be the fourth time now. I don't know of any negotiations under way, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. minister has pointed out, only one person has preferred to opt out. I can't conceive of a whole group of doctors associated with one discipline in Edmonton or in this province opting out. It's beyond comprehension that that would ever happen.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, what would happen if a patient were seeing an opted-out physician, and they needed emergency or ICU care?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I stand to be corrected, but any individual, any person in this province who has to go to a hospital is entitled to go to the hospital and receive whatever procedure is necessary under Alberta health care.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Before calling on the Leader of the Official Opposition for the third main question, I'd just like to reiterate *Beauchesne* 409(3), which says:

The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations.

The hon. Leader of the Official of the Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans still haven't seen the blank pages on the private hospital policy, so the question is: how can Albertans trust the government when it says that it's talking about private clinics, yet its own focus group documents say that they're talking about private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Well, my answer to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition is wait and see what the legislation says. As a matter of fact, the hon. member has said before that she might even support this legislation, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm just going to give her a little hint. This is a quote from *Hansard*. She says:

The Premier has talked about the possibility of the Official Opposition supporting the legislation which the government is about to bring in. Well, I think that possibility does exist. I actually think that possibility exists if this government brings in legislation which is going to control the growth, control the quantity, and control the quality of some off-site services.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's what a lot of the legislation is going to be about. I hope that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is going to be good to her word. I really do hope. I hope that she is going to be honest and truthful and not back down like she has on so many other issues. I hope she's going to be honest, and I hope she's going to be good to her word.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, how can Albertans trust a government that won't reveal the results of focus groups paid for by Albertans' own tax dollars?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, many of the comments offered by members of the focus groups were contained in the document *We Are Listening: Here's What We've Heard*. I'd be glad to table that document in the House. There are numerous quotes from members of the focus groups, but certainly those people participated in the focus groups on the condition of anonymity.

Relative to the freedom of information legislation the Liberals know what the legislation is all about. They use it more than any other body, so they know what it's all about. If they don't like what they get under the rules of FOIP, there is a course of appeal, and I would advise them to take it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has a choice, and he knows it. He says that he can't, and the truth is that he won't.

How can Albertans trust a government when they know their government is hiding the results of those focus groups?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the FOIP request came through the Department of Health and Wellness. [interjections] Well, it didn't come through my office. It came through the Department of Health and Wellness, and I will ask the hon. minister to respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation was an important piece of legislation debated by this Assembly and ultimately supported unanimously. In it is outlined a process, a set of procedures, certain prohibitions. The hon. members across the way know that legislation. They supported it. We are providing information according to that legislation.

As the hon. Premier just mentioned, there is an avenue of appeal if they are not satisfied with some particular information that is provided or its nature, and we invite them to follow the appeal process.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. interim leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government has announced plans to send copies of its private, for-profit hospitals legislation to every household in Alberta any day now. The New Democrats have no problem with sending a copy of the legislation itself. However, Albertans would be better served if the householder contained balanced information about the pros and cons of government plans. My question is to the Premier. In the interests of Albertans receiving balanced information, will the government include in the householder a copy of the executive summary of a January 2000 study by the Consumers' Association of Canada which

conclusively shows that Calgary's privatization of contract surgery has not reduced waiting times or saved money? If not, why not?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that study is open to another study or lots of other studies that say quite the opposite. I mean, we can get involved in tabling study after study and study, one study disagreeing with another study.

2:10

Mr. Speaker, what we will be tabling is the proposed legislation. There is nothing more powerful. No study in the world is more powerful than a bill that is to become law. There is nothing more powerful than the law. That is what is going to be sent to every household in this province, a bill that proposes to become the law of this province. Nothing, not all the studies in the world, is more paramount, is more important than what this Legislature decides to do in bringing about the law of this province.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the Premier agrees that balanced public debate is important on this bill, so I'll ask him again: in order to ensure that Albertans receive a balanced perspective on health care privatization, will the government include in the householder a copy of a study entitled *The Role of Private and Public Health Care Delivery in Alberta*, which was presented to the recent Alberta Congress Board health care forum by respected health economist Bob Evans?

MR. KLEIN: Here again the only thing that will be mailed out to Albertans is the proposed bill, an explanation, of course, of the various principles of the bill, Mr. Speaker, and again I stress that there is nothing more paramount than a bill that is proposed to become the law. We could mail out study after study after study, one study contradicting the other study. What matters is the bill.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, the bill is not, as the hon. member so falsely states, the private, for-profit health care bill. That is wrong. That is absolutely wrong. He has not told the truth in this Assembly by stating that that is going to be the name of the bill. He has not stated the truth. The title of the bill will be the health protection act.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I won't call the Premier to order on what he has just said, but I want to again challenge him. Why won't his government release to the public, along with its own householder, information they so desperately need in order to judge for themselves whether the government is telling the truth or not?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I give Albertans a tremendous amount of credit for intelligence, the ability to see through a bill that proposes to become law and decide for themselves whether it is the right thing to do. There is nothing preventing this member from duplicating and copying as many copies as he wants of all the studies he wants and mailing them out. I hope not at government expense, because it goes on and on and on. There are literally hundreds of studies out there on this particular issue. What we want to get out is the bill that proposes to become law relative to the delivery of health care services and the protection of the public health care system as we know it today. That's all we want to do.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. On Saturday I attended a public forum on health care in my constituency organized by the Alberta

Teachers' Association local. Also in attendance was the Leader of the Opposition, a representative of the New Democrats, along with a nursing representative. Anxious to hear Albertans' views, the Minister of Health and Wellness dropped in to the public forum just in time for the question and answer period. I asked the moderator if the minister could join me during the question and answer session. His participation was totally refused. For the record, Mr. Minister, are you willing and able to get out and talk to Albertans about the health care proposal under discussion, and if so, how do you plan to give Albertans accurate, current, factual information so Albertans in turn can decide on their own whether or not this is a sound proposal and policy?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, could I ask your indulgence to hear the question? I couldn't hear the question.

MRS. GORDON: For the record, Mr. Minister, are you willing and able to get out and talk to Albertans about the health care proposal under discussion, and if so, how do you plan to give Albertans accurate, current, factual information so Albertans in turn can decide on their own whether or not this is a sound proposal and policy?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as has been outlined in this Assembly prior to this, we have provided initially a policy statement which is available to all Albertans. That was some months ago actually. We have followed that up with such communications to the public of the province as the one which provides the results of our consultation to date, what we've heard about this particular policy paper. There are various other initiatives that have been taken.

As we move towards the very important aspect of debating the legislation in the House, Mr. Speaker, it is our plan, as the Premier has certainly well outlined, that every household in this province will be provided a copy of the bill so that they can read it and study it and judge for themselves. Certainly overall we are working through the media and through the printed word to provide information.

As far as attendance at meetings is concerned, Mr. Speaker, I have been going to meetings on this particular topic. Most recently I was out at Mundare speaking to a group of good people out there. I will continue to make myself available as much as possible.

MRS. GORDON: Again, my question is to the minister of health. What will be the role of the MLA health information panel in supporting communication efforts? Do you feel their work will be muzzled as well?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the health information panel will be a very, very important aspect of our overall communication program, both in terms of getting information out but even more importantly in listening to what Albertans have to say with respect to the legislation. The work of these teams will be very, very important to hear to bring back to government caucus the response to the legislation so we can proceed according to their views.

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Minister, what opportunity will there be for changes to the proposed legislation if it should not meet the priorities of Albertans once they've had a chance to look at, study it, and talk about it?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we feel that we are developing sound legislation, but certainly legislation is subject to the will of the Assembly. Any amendments that may be made will be dealt with in this House of course, but they will be based on what government members hear in the extensive set of meetings and

consultations and print material that is going to be out there for Albertans to respond to. Of course, if it should occur, we are always open to constructive views from across the way to help with the improvement of the legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc.

Regional Health Authority Contracts

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans cannot trust a Premier who appears to put the public health care of citizens after the private interests of the friends of government. Now, this presents a particular problem in the Calgary health region, which is now effectively run out of the Premier's own office. The Calgary regional health authority is paying out more than \$250 million a year to private contractors, but when we ask, when Albertans ask for particulars of the contracts, we are flatly denied. My question is to the Premier this afternoon. How can Calgarians trust a government that has stubbornly refused to tell them how much of their public money is being diverted away from public health to private facilities owned by the Premier's backers?

2:20

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I consider that question to be at least improper, certainly rude. I would like to know what clinics, you know, what private operations are being supported by my backers. Your boss's brother is involved in one of these. I don't think he's one of my backers. [interjections] Well, I don't know if he is or not.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the question of how Albertans can trust this Premier, I see in this House 64 Conservatives. There's a lot more of us than there is of them. And you know how that came about? It's because they trust us a lot more than they trust them.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my follow-up question would be this: how can Calgarians trust a government that has set up no mechanism to screen, evaluate, and deal with conflicts of interest when the Calgary regional health authority pays out its \$250 million in secret contract deals?

MR. KLEIN: Give me some specifics. Is he talking about the Bethany care centre, for instance? Is that one of them? I asked the question. Maybe the hon. member will answer the question. Is he talking about the Bethany care centre? Or is he talking about the Morgentaler therapeutic abortion centre? Right. That's one of them. You know, be quite specific. I'll ask the hon. member to be quite specific as to the clinics he's talking about.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Gimbel's maybe.

MR. KLEIN: Well, maybe Gimbel's, yes. Well, I will admit that Mr. Gimbel's daughter is on my board. Shameful, shameful. I mean, that can happen. I would think that he might have some people on his board who might, just might be involved in some kind of a private diagnostic operation.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Oh, I don't think so.

MR. KLEIN: Oh, no. No. He's that pure.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that this hon. member will support the legislation if he is indeed honourable. Right now the only legislation relative to those contracts is under FOIP. The legislation, without going into the details, purports to make those contracts much more open and transparent, and I hope that he'll support that.

MR. DICKSON: Long answer and totally nonresponsive.

So I'll go back and ask the Premier again: how can Albertans have any confidence in this government's ability to be fair when they've set up absolutely no mechanism to screen, identify, and deal with conflicts of interest when they're paying out that \$250 million of public money?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, wait until the hon. member sees the legislation.

If he has instances right now of conflict of interest, table them. You know, don't do this by innuendo. I know that they're good at innuendo, because that's all they've got. I know they're good at innuendo, but if they have these examples, get them out there. Help us with this.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Federal Support for Agriculture

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the minister of agriculture. This government has engaged in significant dialogue with the federal government on the issue of farm income. We have made enhancements to our program, and the minister has been encouraging Ottawa to do the same through a number of meetings. The Premier wrote to the Prime Minister last month demanding federal action on reducing grain transportation costs. Despite this, the Prime Minister has announced a onetime payment to Saskatchewan and Manitoba farmers amounting to \$240 million. So, Mr. Minister, the question is: why wasn't Alberta a part of this announcement?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, we don't understand how the federal Liberals came to the conclusion that hardship in farming stops at a provincial border. I must remind the hon. member that it is not only Alberta that's left out. There are some seven other agricultural provinces that are left out, and we find it extremely distasteful.

I know our Premier has on a number of occasions talked to the Prime Minister and brought it up at the ministers' meeting. Our Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations has discussed it with her counterparts. I have brought the issue up at three ag ministers' meetings. As a matter of fact, the last agricultural ministers' meeting was just on this issue. I've made three trips down to Ottawa and had private meetings with the federal minister of agriculture. In every one of those meetings we've said that we have farmers that are in just as much difficulty as those in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. We're not saying for a moment that the people in Saskatchewan and Manitoba don't need and deserve the money. However, we also need to have some recognition of the difficulty that our farmers are having, and we intend to push the issue.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: My understanding is that this aid is to cover the higher costs of grain transportation in the absence of the Western Grain Transportation Act. Do Alberta farmers not face higher grain transportation costs as well?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, the federal Liberals' excuse is about the most bogus thing that I could imagine. The fact is that in some 44 stations in Alberta the freight rate is higher than it is in Saskatchewan. So, in fact, to say that the freight is the problem is simply not the case.

It's very interesting when you look at what happened in the past.

Back in the late '80s, when the federal government was talking about paying out the Crow, there was just about \$7 billion on the table. Saskatchewan and Manitoba were the two governments that objected to that payment. So what did we get? One point six billion dollars.

Really I think that to talk about transportation is just not true. As a matter of fact, since the Crow was paid out, freight rates for Alberta farmers have gone up 116 percent.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: What steps will the minister take to ensure that Alberta farmers are treated equally with those who just happen to live across a line on a map?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been in contact with other provincial ministers, and we will continue that dialogue. We plan on going to Ottawa as soon as we can arrange some meetings. I was in Ottawa some two to three weeks ago, had the opportunity to meet with some eight federal ministers along with the Privy Council, the Prime Minister's office, and treasury.

There is one thing that the federal government could do that almost immediately would very much help the situation, and that's directly related to transportation. That's to accept the Estey/Kroeger report and get this thing moving, get the Wheat Board out of the management, the handling of grain and move forward.

Now, I was in Ottawa along with the Prairie Farm Commodity Coalition. This coalition represents some 90,000 producers across the prairie provinces, so it's not just an Alberta organization. We also had along with us a very progressive grain company, United Grain Growers, a company that's interested in the producer, not just their corporate structure. We recommended that the federal government get on with this. There's \$200 million to \$300 million available to farmers, not tax dollars, farmers' dollars, on a yearly basis if the system were changed. So that'll be one of our thrusts.

Another, of course, is to try to get the federal government to back off their fuel taxes. There's some \$600 million going out of this province every year to the federal treasury, and we get nothing back.

MR. SMITH: How much?

MR. LUND: Zero. As a matter of fact, it's very interesting that in the most recent studies for every dollar we get out of the federal government, it costs us \$1.40, and that does nothing for federalism.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to follow on that same line of questioning, but I'm really looking for the truthful situation behind this. You know, the other day the Premier cited the Prime Minister as saying that farmers expect their government to work together to find solutions. So my question is to the Premier. Why didn't the Premier or his minister of agriculture go to Ottawa with the Premiers of Manitoba and Saskatchewan last fall to make the case for Alberta farmers?

2:30

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that Premiers Romanow and Doer went to Ottawa seeking something in excess of \$1 billion in direct farm aid. I think the hon. minister has pointed out why we weren't there. We feel that, yes, if there is going to be money, then it should go to all provinces equally and not be singled out. If there is going to be money. The Prime Minister first indicated that there was going to be no money. Last week he phoned me and said that there was going to be some money. He didn't say that he was going to exclude Alberta or any other province.

We have stressed time and time again that the solution to this

problem is not the Liberal solution, where they would just like to put their heads in the sand with their hand out. Our solution is to accept the recommendations of the Estey/Kroeger report and have the Canadian government develop a strong stance at the WTO table to get rid of all subsidies. There's a third component to this, and that is to allow dual marketing under the Canadian Wheat Board so that our farmers can add revenue to their products and contract directly. That's the solution.

MR. LUND: Since you brought up the trip that two other Premiers made, I want to tell you that in fact I was in Ottawa. I met with the federal minister of agriculture the night before those Premiers did. Consistently we have said that if there is more money – and as the Premier pointed out, consistently the Prime Minister and the federal minister have said that there is no more money, so we were working within the envelope of \$1.1 billion. As a matter of fact, just before we made the changes to our FIDP program, I went to Ottawa and warned the federal government that we were going to make the changes and that if there was any new money, I wanted their 60 percent, because that's what the old formula is. So we will continue to push to get our share of the money.

MRS. SOETAERT: Given that the Premier wouldn't go to the table with the other Premiers, I want to know: will the Premier make it up to those farmers? Will he make up the amount that they would have received from the federal government had Alberta participated in the request to the federal government? It was at least \$28 million.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, because of our responsible approach to the province's finances we were able to put in a hundred million dollar program, a program that was beyond the capability of the other provinces to put in to accommodate those farmers experiencing disastrous situations. We do not believe that it is appropriate simply to go to Ottawa and say: give us a billion dollars and bail us out.

I have sat down with the hon. minister and members of the Prairie Farm Commodity Coalition to develop a co-ordinated approach to this issue. This coalition represents, I believe, by and large the majority of the commodity producers in this province. Their position is our position, and that is that the way to solve this is to give a better overall deal to farmers relative to transportation costs, get the Wheat Board out of where it ought not to be involved, Mr. Speaker, and allow dual marketing. That will return literally hundreds of millions of dollars to the farmers. That is the solution.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question: how can we possibly trust a Premier who ignores hardworking Alberta farmers and refuses to go to Ottawa and fight on their behalf?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I find it so interesting that the Liberals would be talking about – the last time I heard a Liberal talk about anything to do with farming it was the late hon. Laurence Decore, who wondered how you could catch all the cows flatulating so that we could . . . [interjections] Well, I've never heard them talk about farm programs before, but this hon. minister has been working night and day with the farmers to find reasonable long-term solutions.

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

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans want more information about what the government proposes under its

policy on the delivery of surgical services. There are certain groups in the province which claim that this government is introducing private, American style health care or some type of two-tier, for-profit design to erode our medicare as we know it. Now, many people in this province are given the impression that they will have to pay for medical services under this new policy. My question is to the minister of health. Will any Albertan have to pay from his or her own pocket to get health care under the government's new proposal?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear now and will be very clear in the legislation that individual Albertans and their families will not have to pay for medically insured, medically covered services. That will be ensconced in the legislation.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you. My supplemental to the minister of health is: can the minister assure Albertans and this House that the rich won't be able to jump the queue and pay for faster services under this new proposal?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as we have indicated very clearly in our policy statement and we intend to follow-up very precisely in the legislation, the government is committed to ensuring that no one is allowed to queue-jump or to get faster treatment for insured services by virtue of their paying extra. That will not be allowed.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister is: what impact will this type of proposal have on recruiting and retaining physicians and health care professionals within this province?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the policy statement evolves into legislation, the legislation, I think, will provide a sound structure for health care professionals to practise in this province. It will remove the legislative gap that was identified some time ago which we were addressing with Bill 37. It was, of course, opposed by the hon. opposition. They did not like that legislative gap to be closed.

There will be a legislative framework which invites innovation and change and a new way of delivering services, albeit within the principles of the Canada Health Act and with no queue-jumping and no other discrepancies with respect to the Canada Health Act's application. I think it will provide us with a good structure. It will provide certainty and a good overall governance model in which physicians and nurses and LPNs and the whole health workforce can work cohesively.

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

Education Funding

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Wednesday, prior to tabling the budget last week, the government told Albertans that 2,200 teachers and teaching aides would be hired. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. How was the number 2,200 determined to be the appropriate number of teachers and needed teaching aides?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is absolutely right. An example of 2,200 was given. If those dollars were used exclusively for hiring teachers, there would be around 2,200 teachers' aides and teachers that could potentially be hired.

In the budget, as the hon. member well knows, I gave the school

boards flexibility in how they use that money. So, Mr. Speaker, they have the ability to use that money, to put that money where they feel the most important need is. Whether it's in the Northland school district or down south, the school boards have the flexibility to put it to the students' greatest needs.

2:40

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the promised action on class size, what kind of reductions can parents expect to see with this announcement?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, there are several areas in this budget where if class size can be decreased, as one of the things that I have already announced in the budget, which is the Alberta initiative for school improvement, I fully expect that a lot of the school boards will be using that \$66 million per year, \$170 million over the next three years, to decrease class size. With the 3 percent general grant that is also out there, they also have the ability to decrease class size.

The second part of the question that the hon. member asked was: where do I expect to see class size? Mr. Speaker, there has been research done in the States that shows that in K to 3 we should drop class size to 17 or lower. There are a lot of variables in that, but as a general rule that is the class size that I would like to aim for.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With contract settlements increasing by 3 percent over the next year and an additional 8,000 students, how will boards achieve class size reductions and provide parent relief from fund-raising with this?

DR. OBERG: When you look at the budget, there are two elements to the budget. First of all, there is a 3 percent general increase to the grant of this year. But, Mr. Speaker, more importantly, there's a full 8.8 percent increase that goes directly to the school boards that will go directly to the classroom.

The hon. member raises an interesting point, which is a point about enrollment, and indeed there have been comments in the media about these dollars not keeping up with enrollment and inflation. Mr. Speaker, interestingly, our enrollment increase in Alberta last year was just slightly over 1 percent, so despite the fact that we're seeing a lot of people coming into Alberta, the actual number of students is only going up around 1 percent. As I said before, the overall grant increase to the school boards was 8.8 percent versus 1 percent on the enrollment.

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

Alberta Children's Hospital

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the *Calgary Herald* today there was an article outlining the possibility that the Shriners of North America could become involved in operating the Alberta Children's hospital, which is located in my constituency. One of the reasons that the Shriners were given for considering Alberta as an area of interest was the perceived very positive climate in this province. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: could the minister advise whether or not there are plans at this time for the Shriners to begin operations in this province?

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister and hon. member, *Beauchesne* 408 clearly says that "such questions should . . . not inquire whether or not statements made in a newspaper are correct." Proceed with the second one. Perhaps you can phrase it differently.

Alberta Children's Hospital

(continued)

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that the development of the Alberta Children's hospital is under consideration either on its current site or possibly under operations on a new site, could the minister please advise this Assembly whether or not the Shriners will be involved in any of those discussions?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I am well aware that the redevelopment of the Children's hospital in Calgary by the Calgary regional health authority is at the top of their capital construction priority list. Further, I know that they are looking at the location. They're also looking at partnership arrangements, particularly with the Calgary health foundation, which will be providing a tremendous amount of financial support to enhance the actual building that is planned.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, a highly reputable organization such as the Shriners, who have had decades and decades of service to children all across the world, for that matter, but particularly in North America, would be welcomed in terms of discussions as to how the overall contribution of the Shriners and the regional health authority and the government could work together to have an even more world-class facility than we have now for children's care.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the minister. With respect to the capital planning for the regional health authority, could the minister please advise the Assembly whether the Children's hospital will be able to meet the current and future needs of Calgary and southern Alberta children?

MR. JONSON: Well, the answer, Mr. Speaker, as I understand the overall plan: it certainly will.

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

Western Heritage Centre

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The scandal of the Western Heritage Centre in Cochrane continues. Despite the advice of the time pointing out the lack of support, the wildly optimistic business plans, and the failed fund-raising attempts, the government subsidized the building of this centre by over \$5 million, and the government is now back in the business and has stepped in to take over ownership and operations of this Tory white elephant. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. What was the government decision-making process, the rationale for putting money in to build this centre in the first place?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, I think we should put some real, relevant facts on the table. First of all, there was a provincial commitment of some 5 million dollars. There was also a commitment and a payment of \$2.5 million from the federal government. There was also a \$5 million fund-raising venture, a very successful one, that was put forward by the society which ended up in the construction of a \$12 million facility.

There was a bit of discussion around this particular facility, granted, back in 1990. One of the stipulations in the contract was that they would lease the land from the provincial government for some 99 years. Another stipulation, which I'm sure was anticipated, is that they would not come asking for operating dollars. Currently the group was having some difficulty. We had discussions over a year, and it was deemed that if the centre folded, the province would end up getting the centre returned to them in a good manner, without

any liability or encumbrances. So we've chosen to take the centre back, as we would have no choice as per the agreement, but secondly and more importantly, Mr. Speaker, in order to ensure that the people of southern Alberta and that area continue with the fine program that was coming out of there, the operations and the cost of the operations stay with the society. So we only have the building that we're looking after.

MS BLAKEMAN: To the same minister: did the department ever request advice from the Auditor General in judging the feasibility of this project, either in the beginning or recently?

MR. WOLOSHYN: No, Mr. Speaker.

MS BLAKEMAN: To the same minister: since no additional funding for this project shows in the museum's budget, where will the money come from to subsidize this problem-plagued centre?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, I'm rather dismayed that the hon. member hasn't completed her research. As I indicated, the operations, the programming are still the responsibility of the centre. They will be funding it all. There isn't any Community Development money going in there. That building is now owned by Community Development, and as such and as it would be with the Provincial Museum, the Tyrrell Museum, and any other provincially owned buildings, the maintenance is looked after through Infrastructure.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six hon. members to participate today.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

2:50 Provincial High School Wrestling Championships

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to recognize the hard work and dedication of the competitors and volunteers of the provincial high school wrestling championships, that took place in Wetaskiwin this past weekend. The sport of wrestling is one of the oldest and purest sport competitions. There is likely no greater test of strength, agility, speed, and discipline offered than through this sport of individual competition.

The Wetaskiwin composite high school did a great job of hosting this event, and it was a great success, with enthusiastic participants and spectators. I'd like to congratulate the Wetaskiwin team for winning the 3A boys event. I'd also like to recognize Wetaskiwin individual medalists Real Bouchard and Tyler Weaver, who each won silver; Josh Tarnasky, who won bronze; and Wade Clark, who took sixth.

The sport of wrestling has been with us for thousands of years, with its origins in ancient Greece. I'd like to thank the participants and organizers for continuing this proud sport tradition.

Thank you.

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

Scout/Guide Week

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to recognize this past Scout/Guide Week of February 20 to 27. Scouts Canada members participated in events across Canada in special camps, expeditions, mall displays, banquets, and church parades. Scouts Canada is the country's leading youth organization, which offers fun, safe, and exciting outdoor adventures for boys and

girls ages five to 26. Scouting is based on three principles: duty to God, duty to others, duty to self.

I was honoured last Wednesday evening to be at the fourth Spruce Grove annual Lord Baden-Powell banquet. I was inspired by these young leaders who volunteer many hours in our community. I was impressed and entertained by the Beavers, Cubs, Scouts, Venturers, leaders, and parents of these dynamic children. I was honoured and humbled to have been invested by the group and to take the Scout oath, which is: "On my honour I promise to do my best, to do my duty to God and the Queen, to help other people at all times, and to carry out the Scout law." My heartfelt respect and admiration go to all of those involved in the Scout movement.

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

Meningitis Immunization Campaign

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today will bring to a conclusion the Capital health authority's targeted meningitis immunization operation. The campaign began on February 14 for 15 to 19 year olds, and an expanded campaign for two to 14 year olds began in the Capital health authority's region on Wednesday, February 23, in response to an increased incidence in this age group and significant public concern. An 80 percent completion target for 15 to 19 year olds and two to 14 year olds is expected by the end of the campaign today.

On Saturday I had the opportunity to tour the operation at St. Albert Place with supervisor Joanne Rigby. It was a remarkably impressive sight of efficiency and caring. Today I'd like to commend Dr. Gerry Predy, under whose direction this entire operation took place. In addition, I applaud Marianne Stewart and her organization in staffing 9,000 additional nursing shifts.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask all members of the Legislature to join me in thanking everyone who made this a successful operation.

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

Freedom to Read Week

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February 27 to March 4 is Freedom to Read Week. A clenched fist slamming a book shut is the symbol adopted for this week, signifying the censorship of ideas. Censoring is what some citizens would have us do with ideas that are morally contrary or troublesome. Freedom to Read Week is a fight against such censorship.

The focus on reading this week reminds us that our democracy rests on a set of freedoms: the freedom of conscience and religion; the freedom of association; the freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression; and, important for this week, the freedom to access the thoughts and ideas of others. Supporting intellectual freedom in a democracy often puts citizens to the test. Certainly it is easy to defend the freedom to read when we are confronted with Shakespeare or Mark Twain. The test comes when we are forced to confront ideas that, although within the law, are deeply disturbing, offensive, or odious. As we go about our Freedom to Read Week activities, let's remember Voltaire's advice: I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.

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

Gold Cup Soccer Championship

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and recognize the Alberta-based Canadian national soccer

team. This team, which plays and practises regularly at Edmonton's Commonwealth Stadium, made international news yesterday by upsetting Colombia, a World Cup soccer regular, in a 2-0 clinch in the first Gold Cup title. It is the premier championship event in soccer for the Americas. Before the historic winning of this tournament Canada was ranked only 85th internationally. However, with its three straight sudden death play-off wins over teams ranked well above it, it became 10th in the world and has won the berth in the prestigious Confederations Cup. As a result of this tremendous effort, Team Canada has risen to a 30th world ranking.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all dedicated soccer players and their parents and this community and the government of Alberta, which supports minor sports, which definitely has had a role to play in the development of this national team, and on behalf of the students and young people I know that play in the Calgary community, including my son David, I want to congratulate them for this prestigious and tremendous upset.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: Now I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a Standing Order 40.

Freedom to Read Week

Mr. Dickson:

Be it resolved that this Assembly affirm the importance of open access to reading material by recognizing February 27 to March 4, 2000, as Freedom to Read Week.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm standing with respect to the notice I'd given earlier. On the matter of urgent and pressing necessity, it's my respectful view, Mr. Speaker, that as elected leaders in this province it is not enough for one member to pay tribute. It's important that every elected leader in this province signal their support for it.

Three points I'd make in terms of pressing and/or urgent necessity. Firstly, the week is being celebrated this week. This is the appropriate time to do it, with events in Calgary and Edmonton and right across Canada. It affects many librarians, book publishers, booksellers, authors, poets, and Canadians everywhere who love to read.

The second point is that our minister responsible for this area had produced an information bulletin on February 25, 2000, and there's a serious error that has to be remedied. The notice refers to: "Our libraries provide equal access to people of any origin, age, race, religion, economic status or view." Since it's clear that the hon. Minister of Community Development completely misapprehends what Freedom to Read Week is about, it's important, Mr. Speaker, that we have a chance to debate that and signal that it's not about getting into the library, that it's about what books you can read and take out once you get through the doors.

The third thing is that we've had a series of problems, most recently at the Chapters bookstore in south Calgary, where books have been destroyed. We've had a situation where the Calgary Public Library has recently dealt with a controversial policy with respect to Internet access.

Mr. Speaker, I think these are all compelling reasons, with respect, why we should at least briefly debate this and then as elected leaders in this province register our support for this very important event. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, under a Standing Order 40 notification the proponent of it asks for unanimous consent, so I will now ask the question of the Assembly.

[Unanimous consent denied]

3:00

head: Orders of the Day

head: Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd call the Committee of Supply to order.

The chair will recognize the Opposition House Leader. Go ahead.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. There are some housekeeping things we have to deal with. I understand one of them is for the opposition to designate the five departments pursuant to Standing Order 56(2)(a). Unless you tell me otherwise, I'm assuming that it's in order now for me to make that designation or at least to confirm written notice that's gone earlier to the Government House Leader. The departments that will be designated pursuant to that are Health and Wellness, Learning, Children's Services, Environment, and Human Resources and Employment. Those are the five departments being designated pursuant to Standing Order 56(2)(a). I think that's all you need from me at this point.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Calgary-Buffalo.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would regret to inform the Assembly that as of this moment there is not an all-party agreement governing the use of time in designated supply subcommittees, the Official Opposition wanting to make sure that we appropriately designate the third party in that one and the third party wanting to maintain its designation. However, we can continue under the ordinary rules of the House until such time as we are able to obtain an agreement.

The hon. Opposition House Leader has indicated to the Assembly which of the five departments it wishes to appear before designated subcommittees of supply, so I'm now pleased to table with the House a list of the members of those five subcommittees of supply for the information of members.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you have enough copies for each member of the Assembly?

MR. HANCOCK: I don't have enough for everybody here today, but I assume that that's been provided to the Clerk's table earlier.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. We'll get some made.

MR. HANCOCK: We'll get them copied and circulated.

Also, Madam Chairman, on Tuesday of last week I tabled for all members in the House in the form of a tabling a copy of a notice of motion for the proposed membership and to establish the A, B, C, D committees. Since then there have been a couple of minor changes from both sides of the House incorporated into the motion, and I'd like to bring them to the committee's attention before moving the motion and reading it into the record.

On the government side, Mrs. O'Neill was on committee A and Mr. Klapstein on committee C, and those two have been reversed. On committee A Mr. Cao replaces Mr. Marz.

On the opposition side, on committee A Mr. Wickman replaces Dr. Massey, on committee B Dr. Massey replaces Mr. Dickson, and on committee D Mr. Sapers replaces Mr. Wickman.

Madam Chairman, I'd like now to move the A, B, C, D motion with those changes.

Subcommittees of Supply

Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that:

1. Pursuant to Standing Order 57(1) four subcommittees of the Committee of Supply be established by the Committee of Supply with the following names: subcommittee A, subcommittee B, subcommittee C, and subcommittee D.
2. The membership of the respective subcommittees be as follows:
 Subcommittee A: Mrs. Gordon, chairman; Mr. Severtson, deputy chairman; Mr. Bonner; Mr. Boutilier; Mrs. Burgener; Mr. Cao; Mr. Cardinal; Mr. Ducharme; Mr. Dunford; Mr. Friedel; Mr. Hierath; Mr. Klapstein; Mr. Jacques; Mr. Johnson; Mr. Lougheed; Mr. Mar; Dr. Pannu; Mr. Sapers; Mr. Smith; and Mr. Wickman.
 Subcommittee B: Mr. Tannas, chairman; Mrs. Laing, deputy chairman; Ms Blakeman; Ms Calahasen; Mr. Doerksen; Mrs. Forsyth; Mrs. Fritz; Ms Graham; Mr. Hancock; Ms Kryczka; Ms Leibovici; Dr. Massey; Mrs. McClellan; Mr. Melchin; Ms Olsen; Mrs. Sloan; Mrs. Soetaert; Mr. Stelmach; Mr. Stevens; Mrs. Tarchuk; Mr. Woloshyn; and Mr. Zwozdesky.
 Subcommittee C: Mr. Tannas, chairman; Mr. Fischer, deputy chairman; Mr. Cao; Ms Evans; Mr. Gibbons; Mr. Jonson; Mr. Lund; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. McFarland; Mrs. Nelson; Dr. Nicol; Dr. Oberg; Mrs. O'Neill; Mr. Paszkowski; Mrs. Soetaert; Mr. Strang; Mr. Thurber; Mr. Trynchy; and Mr. Yankowsky.
 Subcommittee D: Mrs. Gordon, chairman; Mr. Renner, deputy chairman; Mr. Amery; Mr. Broda; Ms Carlson; Mr. Coutts; Mr. Havelock; Mr. Herard; Mr. Hlady; Mr. Langevin; Mr. Magnus; Dr. Pannu; Ms Paul; Mr. Pham; Mr. Sapers; Mr. Shariff; Dr. Taylor; Dr. West; and Mr. White.
3. The following portions of the main estimates of expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, unless previously designated by the Leader of the Opposition to be considered by the designated supply subcommittees, be referred to the subcommittees for their reports to the Committee of Supply as follows:
 Subcommittee A: Executive Council; Gaming; and the Provincial Treasurer.
 Subcommittee B: Community Development; International and Intergovernmental Relations; Infrastructure; and Justice and Attorney General.
 Subcommittee C: Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; Government Services; and Municipal Affairs.
 Subcommittee D: Resource Development; Economic Development; and Innovation and Science.
4. When the Committee of Supply is called to consider the main estimates, it shall on the six calendar days after agreement on the motion establishing the subcommittees, excluding Thursdays designated by the Official Opposition, when main estimates are under consideration, resolve itself into two of the four subcommittees, both of which shall meet and report to the Committee of Supply.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, since this is a debatable motion, there are some things I wanted to say to it. You know, I'm struck every year when we create these A, B, C, D committees. I marvel at the fact that 83 intelligent, thoughtful, bright men and women from all over the province come together and have not been able to date to achieve a more satisfactory means of examining in this case about \$19 billion in expenditure.

It's gainsaid, I think, that probably the single most important thing we do as elected representatives is to deliberate on the budget for the province of Alberta. It's not that I subscribe to the notion that money is everything. The reality in government is that money drives the

programs and runs the programs. The concern is that provinces like Ontario have taken actually a Laurence Decore idea, which is to create powerful budget committees that have the power to bring in witnesses, that would meet six months before this time so that at the very time the Provincial Treasurer is starting to pull together the nuggets, the elements of his next year's budget, there would also be an all-powerful, all-party committee that would be sitting.

In the Ontario model that committee has powers to bring in witnesses, to examine things in detail. They wouldn't do all 17 government departments. They might choose six departments for a given year, and they would study them in depth. I think that Ontario has shown some great leadership there. It's vexing to my colleagues, I think to a man or a woman, that instead we're in these A, B, C, D committees. What's wrong with it? A couple of things, Madam Chairman.

You may not remember some of the concerns I raised last year about the A, B, C, D committees. I suspect that there are even some government members – maybe I could ask them to raise their hands now. Is there any government member that thinks we can do better than the A, B, C, D committees? Well, I understand they're a little bit sheepish, while the Government House Leader is here, to raise their hand, but we can maybe ask him to cover his eyes with his hands, and then we could ask everybody to indicate if they'd like to see a better way of doing it. [interjections] Well, my friend from Peace River and my friend from Cypress-Medicine Hat are quick to indicate in an indirect way – I think there's some sympathy to the point of view I'm expressing.

3:10

In any event, Madam Chairman, the process we have now brings no respect to our work as legislators. It brings no respect to this Chamber, and it does a huge disservice to the people of this province that the single most important job for their elected legislators to do is done in such a crummy, inefficient fashion. You know, maybe if you've got 64 members, it doesn't matter. You've got a dozen people to send upstairs to room 512 and a dozen to keep another committee going down here. The people I represent in Calgary-Buffalo may have interest in the committee upstairs in 512. They may have interest in the committee down here in the Chamber. We may be talking about seniors' issues up there. We may be talking about the advanced education portion of Learning down here.

I've tried. You know, Madam Chairman, I can be accused of not having enough imagination or just not running fast enough, but I've come down here and waited my turn to ask my question about advanced education, and I've just run as fast as my little legs would carry me upstairs to 512. You know what I find when I get there?

MRS. SOETAERT: It's over.

MR. DICKSON: Well, if it isn't over already, there's a long list of people who have been waiting there to ask their questions. [interjections]

You know, some helpful members have suggested that maybe there's a way to carve this up, but let me put it to you this way, through the chair. Ought it not to be a fundamental principle that an elected person who represents more than 30,000 constituents, that includes seniors and includes people at the high-income end and people at the low-income end and people who are new immigrants and people who are longtime Canadians and people who work in different industries – they're teachers and students and health care workers. Is it an unreasonable proposition to say that any single elected member should be able to offer commentary on the budget for any one of those departments? I think in fact it's a solid

proposition that that should happen. That should be accommodated, and the budget process we're about to vote on doesn't allow that to happen.

I know from my side conversations . . .

DR. WEST: Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Can you give me a moment, hon. member?

MR. DICKSON: Oh, certainly.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

DR. WEST: Would the hon. member entertain a question in debate? It's 482 of *Beauchesne*.

MR. DICKSON: Of course I'd be happy to entertain a question from the esteemed minister.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, Mr. Minister.

Debate Continued

DR. WEST: Given that I've attended a lot of these debates in 512 as they relate to the budget and that many of the members from the loyal opposition just read out a long list of questions, never raising their heads, could the hon. member answer me this question? Is it true what has been told to me, that you just get the questions without doing research yourself and just read them out without any prior knowledge of what you're doing?

MR. DICKSON: The short answer to that, Madam Chairman, would be this. Either the minister has never been in a room when this member has been asking questions or he hasn't been paying careful attention. I'd say to this minister – and each member can speak for themselves. I attempt, with the limitations that I have as an individual, to do my own research, to reflect the views that I hear from my constituents.

DR. WEST: That wasn't my observation.

MR. DICKSON: Well, the minister may have a contrary view, but if he watches me carefully – I'm going to make a point, Madam Chairman, of trying to go into that minister's department, and he'll see me looking at him eyeball to eyeball. He'll see me reading questions, and I may be reading questions that I've received from Calgary-Buffalo constituents. I would expect this minister to accord those questions the very same respect that he accords any other question asked, and I would think that this minister would recognize that every single member of this Assembly should be respected in that very same way.

DR. WEST: I just asked the question. You don't have to be defensive.

MR. DICKSON: Well, in fact, Madam Chairman, I see some back skating. The hon. minister skates backwards beautifully, almost as elegantly as he skates forward and from his seat.

In any event, the point I'm making, Madam Chairman, is this. When these A, B, C, D subcommittees come up for a vote, I cannot

vote for the committees because it is a process that has been demonstrated to be inadequate. It undermines the important work we do here. It undermines the quality of the representation that any of us provide. I'd make a special plea to those members – I see some of my friends from the Calgary government caucus are here, and I know they're always very involved in the budget process. I'd ask them to consider but for a moment being in my position and how they would manage.

You see, to somebody who isn't part of a standing policy committee, who isn't part of that caucus review – somebody may say that I'm lucky; I don't have to attend those meetings. The point is that those members have an opportunity and their constituents have an opportunity through their agency to be able to find out what's going on in the budget long before we see it brought in here. We have an independent member and we've certainly got some members in the Official Opposition caucus and we have a New Democrat member. I don't think any of us have that opportunity to attend those standing policy committees or government caucus meetings. We're denied that opportunity.

Now, Madam Chairman, I'm happy that I'm represented by an MLA with a distinguished background in accounting. I'm proud to be represented by an MLA who understands budget documents and the nuances and the notes that appear in the back of the statement. I would think, although I haven't specifically addressed this with my MLA, that he understands how important it is to adequate budget scrutiny that every member be able to deal with every single department and that nobody be denied the chance to both ask questions in 512 and ask questions here. Obviously we can't do it at the same time, but that opportunity ought to exist.

So I think I've talked about how Ontario does it better. I know that the Government House Leader has been sympathetic when I've gone on complaining about the frustration we experience, so I think there is some will to come up with a better system. All I can say, Madam Chairman, is that I have to hope this is the absolute last time, the last spring that we ever have to constitute A, B, C, D subcommittees. I hope we will have an opportunity to come up with a far, far better process.

Now, I know there are people anxious to do a throne speech. To members who are interested in pursuing my criticism or opposition criticism, I refer them to the debate in *Hansard* of March 15, 1999, starting at page 509 and continuing on, which goes through and in detail indicates concerns raised by my colleagues and myself. For all of those reasons I'm going to be voting against this motion and looking forward to the throne speech, that will be coming along.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Just a few brief comments about my concerns about this budget process. I think it's no surprise to people in here that I've often spoken about being in two places at once being physically impossible. We all represent thousands of people, and though the procedure of getting the budget where it is is unfair, that having been said, we have the opportunity in this Legislature to debate it or to discuss it or to ask questions. When we're divided up to be in two places at once, if I have a concern about libraries in my constituency and then a concern about the environment, I can't be at those two places at once, and I find that patently unfair.

3:20

I know I've said this since we started this process. I was hoping that this time an agreement could be made to change it. However, maybe because it's an election year, they're not going to do that.

Maybe it's not. Who knows? I would really appreciate an opportunity to change this process, that I know we've made suggestions to change.

There's one other thing about room 512, and I've said it every time I've been in that room. I always hope that the committees I'm on meet in here, because I detest that room. It is way too close for people who sometimes disagree on issues. If we respected the traditions of the Assembly, we should be two sword lengths apart, and we truly aren't in that room. So when looking at the process for another time and another place, could that be part of the considerations taken?

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you ready to vote on the motion?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

AN HON. MEMBER: Waste more time.

MS BLAKEMAN: I disagree with the hon. member on the other side. I don't think debate is a waste of time. It's an interesting exchange of ideas and opinions in this Chamber, so I would like to do that despite the attempt at silencing from across the way.

This motion is about dividing all members of the Assembly into the four subcommittees of supply. When I try to explain to the constituents in Edmonton-Centre what has happened to the budget debate process and the scrutiny of the budget, they can't believe it. We by law are supposed to have 20 days of debate. Now, a day, if you ask most people, would be eight hours, 10 hours perhaps if we were being hopeful. But no. A day of debate in the Alberta Legislature is less than two hours, as generally spoken.

My colleagues have already mentioned being divided into committees so that in fact they're able to have one committee meet upstairs in room 512 and the second meet here in the Assembly Chamber, and that then counts as two days of debate, because there are two committees going on at the same time.

I, too, represent 35,000 people who have varied interests and would like me as their representative to be involved in as many different debates as is possible. We've already had some fairly vivid descriptions of trying to run up and down the stairs in order to get in line to ask questions, and I have spoken before about my extreme displeasure at only being able to capture 48 minutes of debate on the portfolio of Community Development, which has happened in the past.

So this motion to dissolve us into these four subcommittees of supply really does allow the government to telescope the time that the budget is being debated. Any member of the public who is interested in this and following it wants to know what's going on, and this shrinks the time that they can find out what was debated the previous day and be able to get their input through to their MLA and get it brought up. So I think that the very setup of it is precluding input from citizens to contribute to the debate.

I'd also like to point out that since the last time we were debating the budget, we now have several superministries, that have brought together a number of sectors that used to be separate entities. On top of the fact that we're divided in half and trying to debate these ministries in under two hours, we're now trying to debate superministries.

If you look, for example, at the Ministry of Learning, that used to be two separate entities: advanced education and education covering K to 12. What used to be two separate departments is now lumped into one possible time for debate. Or let's look at Human Resources and Employment, which is covering things from AISH and SFI, labour standards, consumer and corporate affairs. I mean, that used to be four different departments. All in one department, all to be

debated in a two-hour time span. So I have a real problem with this.

Now, the minister of energy – and actually it's thanks to him that I'm debating; he engaged me so much that I had to rise to speak to it – was questioning something about opposition members just having a list of questions run off by somebody. Well, I can assure him that I run those lists of questions off myself because I'm interested in them and I'm following through on the questions that have been brought forward to me by the people that live in Edmonton-Centre. You bet I've got my head down racing through those questions, with only 20 minutes to get every possible question out on entire departments, which, as I've just described, could be a department that used to be four separate departments. [interjection] The Minister of Justice is going to get into this debate. I can see he's been inspired by what's happened so far. I'm looking forward to his input.

We now have a budget that is presented on a Thursday, and by the following Monday we are debating one of the departments under that budget. So it means that citizens in Alberta, boy, have got to be with their fingers right on the button in order to get hold of a copy of this document, go through it, get in touch with their MLA, and hopefully be able to transfer that information or those questions to them prior to the beginning of that debate on a Monday.

So I have a real problem with Standing Order 57(1), putting us into four different committees, because I think this is going against the principle of an open and free and democratic debate on this budget process. That's all the money that is spent on behalf of this government for everything that happens for Albertans. We are now debating two and three departments a night in all of these different committees and racing through it as fast as possible. I strongly disagree with this, and I will be voting against the motion.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:28 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Haley	Melchin
Broda	Hancock	O'Neill
Burgener	Havelock	Pham
Calahasen	Herard	Renner
Cao	Hierath	Smith
Cardinal	Jacques	Stelmach
Clegg	Johnson	Stevens
Doerksen	Jonson	Strang
Ducharme	Klapstein	Tannas
Dunford	Laing	Taylor
Evans	Langevin	Trynchy
Forsyth	Lougheed	West
Friedel	Magnus	Woloshyn
Fritz	Mar	Yankowsky
Graham	McClellan	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Gibbons	Soetaert
Bonner	Olsen	White
Dickson	Paul	

Totals:

For – 44

Against – 8

[Motion carried]

3:40

Designated Supply Subcommittees

Moved by Mr. Hancock:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 56(2) five designated supply subcommittees be established by the Committee of Supply with the following names: Children's Services, Environment, Health and Wellness, Human Resources and Employment, and Learning. Be it further resolved that the membership of those committees be as follows:

Children's Services: Mr. Melchin, chairman; Mr. Cao; Mr. Cardinal; Mr. Johnson; Ms Kryczka; Mrs. Laing; Mr. Lougheed; Mr. MacDonald; Dr. Massey; Ms Paul; Mr. Shariff; and Mrs. Sloan.

Environment: Mr. Hierath, chairman; Mr. Amery; Mr. Boutilier; Ms Carlson; Mr. Coutts; Mr. Ducharme; Mr. Langevin; Mr. Magnus; Dr. Pannu; Mrs. Sloan; Mr. Strang; and Mr. White.

Health and Wellness: Mrs. Tarchuk, chairman; Mr. Broda; Mr. Dickson; Mr. Doerksen; Mrs. Forsyth; Mrs. Fritz; Mr. Herard; Mr. Jacques; Ms Leibovici; Dr. Pannu; Mr. Pham; and Mrs. Sloan.

Human Resources and Employment: Mr. Friedel, chairman; Mr. Bonner; Mr. Ducharme; Mr. Gibbons; Mr. Klapstein; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Marz; Mr. McFarland; Ms Paul; Mr. Renner; Mr. Thurber; and Mr. Yankowsky.

Learning: Mr. Stevens, chairman; Mrs. Burgener; Mr. Dickson; Mr. Fischer; Ms Graham; Mr. Hlady; Mr. Johnson; Dr. Massey; Mrs. O'Neill; Dr. Pannu; Mr. Severtson; and Mrs. Soetaert.

[Motion carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Madam Chairman, I would move that the committee rise and report progress and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports the approval thereof. I wish to table for the official records of the Assembly copies of the resolutions agreed to by the Committee of Supply on this date proposing the establishment of four subcommittees of the Committee of Supply.

Madam Speaker, I wish to table for the official records of the Assembly copies of the resolutions agreed to by the Committee of Supply on this date proposing the establishment of designated subcommittees of the Committee of Supply.

I would also like to table copies of the letters tabled during the Committee of Supply this day for the official records of the Assembly, designating the five designated supply subcommittees by the Official Opposition.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Haley moved:

That an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate February 23: Mr. Dickson]

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand in this Assembly with a response to the Speech from the Throne. I'm very proud to be the representative from the Edmonton-Manning constituency in this Assembly. The Edmonton-Manning constituency is a diverse, urban/rural constituency made up of the maximum-security penitentiary, Alberta Hospital Edmonton, Evergreen mobile park, and the new Northeast health centre.

This was the first Speech from the Throne in the new millennium year 2000 delivered by Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, Lieutenant Governor of our province. What a wonderful Albertan to be chosen for this position. At every function that I have attended at which she has been a guest speaker over the past few years, I've been totally impressed. I haven't heard anything but admiration and praise.

Our province has a strong history since becoming a province in 1905. I have a strong history in this province, with all four sets of great-grandparents having settled in this province prior to it becoming a province.

Madam Speaker, this throne speech isn't about bold plans for the new century. It's a rehash left over from the past century. It's a rehash of announcements that have been made many times before, a rehash of the money that was announced and accounted for in previous budgets. We've heard the promises before: reduce class sizes, improve literacy, plans to ensure the sustainability of the agriculture sector, expand training programs for our youth, long-term care, preventative and community-based health, programs to alleviate housing shortages, reduce poverty and homelessness, and tax relief for Alberta. What's lacking from this government is the commitment to move forward and take action in these areas.

This is also a throne speech of omission. What we have received in the throne speech is the same old stopgap, trickle-down, pressure-point, crisis-reduction approach that this government has followed over the past seven years, with the spin over the past few years from this government: trust us. You know, Albertans are not buying into this anymore.

What are Albertans now thinking about the truth squads? What a mistake this was. I answered a couple of phone calls in my constituency last Friday from seniors who said that they have never voted for anybody but Socreds and the Progressive Conservatives over their voting years. They were very vocal that they went off to Europe to fight in the Second World War against a leader who spoke about pushing the truth squads. In the past few days the calls came in from seniors with concerns about health care and the fact that this government is actually mentioning seniors in their plan as if they weren't residents of this province.

The throne speech talks about increasing financial support to

Alberta's seniors' benefit program to reflect rising costs. This is a positive step. It is a step that is long overdue. But, you know, Madam Speaker, 29 cents isn't a lot. Between 1992-93 and '96-97 this government took \$132 million, or 12 percent, out of the seniors' programs in this province. They shredded seniors' reports and failed to adequately consult with seniors on major changes to seniors' programs. Wouldn't it be nice to provide our 320,000 seniors with a better sense of security and well-being for the future? I would hope that this government is finally realizing that many seniors, some in my constituency, are still on a fixed income.

Madam Speaker, the government is proposing to use Albertans' money to subsidize the profit margin of a few chosen friends while ignoring the needs of 2.9 million Albertans who live throughout this province and pay the bills. The government is back in the business of business subsidies. No government truth squad or propaganda machine will be able to restore this government's vast credibility gap with Albertans on public health and public education.

3:50

Health care. Despite the infusion of \$2 billion since 1995, nothing seems to have changed. Waiting lists for joint replacement are unacceptable. Fewer nurses are employed, and long-term care replacements are stalled. Fewer beds are open. It's like pouring water into a jug with a hole in it. They keep on pouring, but the water keeps leaking out the bottom.

Where's the money going? The truth is that this government has systematically undermined the public health system and created the pain and suffering in order to promote the real agenda – and maybe it's their only agenda – American style health care. The government has opened up the spending taps of Albertans' money in order to siphon off the money to private health operators. They're admitting that private health care is expensive.

Now, mental health is one thing that is really a problem, the unfairness in the funding between the minister of health's and my constituency. The lack of planning for community caregivers versus the institutionalizing of mental health patients is disgraceful. It is shocking to many of us who care a lot about mental health within our province to find that the words weren't even mentioned in the throne speech. This is a huge omission.

We've seen in the last week that this province has come up with an alliance with mental health professionals, the mental health caseworkers community, and advocating groups; in fact, the largest coalition ever formed on the mental health front in Alberta and called Alliance Alberta, the Alliance of Mental Illness and Mental Health. The organization presented an excellent review of some of the major questions in terms of the government's direction as it comes to mental health.

Now, on the last few trips down into Red Deer it was very concerning that as of March 31 of this year we will be seeing the lack of dollars and any funding going to the Canadian mental association, and all of a sudden workers will be sent out from Ponoka. Isn't it funny? Maybe somebody is creating a kingdom down there.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, it's very concerning. Alberta health is very important in my constituency, and maybe the minister should come into my constituency, which has the largest mental hospital in the province, and start answering some phone calls. Workers in the community are what we need, not putting money into Ponoka.

We have a history of having very strong municipal and school board relations in our province with our provincial government. We

have seen this deteriorate over the last few years. The quality of life within our communities is dependent on the availability of local infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, communities are the backbone of Alberta society. As Albertans we can take justifiable pride in the development of our provincial economy, for we are emerging as leaders among all Canadian provinces in the global economy. Yet while we may compete and prosper in the global economy, we live and work and raise our families in our local communities and neighbourhoods. Our global competitiveness is in the first instance dependent upon the quality of our local environment and the attractiveness of our family life in our towns and cities. Unless our communities are attractive to people, our province will falter. Today our communities face a number of serious challenges. We need leadership which will move us forward to this solution in partnership with local governments.

Mr. Speaker, municipally the quality of life within our communities is dependent on the availability of local infrastructure. Maintaining our infrastructure is critical to Alberta's future competitiveness, providing the means and adding value to the products and services we produce and sell both here in Canada and abroad. Infrastructure planning should and must be the core business function of the provincial government in close collaboration with our municipalities. The province likes to take the credit for the \$4 billion surplus at the provincial level, but why do they refuse to take responsibility for the infrastructure deficit at the local level? Our municipalities have been subjected to a financial squeeze by the provincial government. Not only were the provincial grants to municipalities reduced; the province also took over access to a portion of the local property base.

Between 1992 and 1998 the general and specific purpose grants from the Alberta government to the municipalities declined by \$402 million, or 48 percent, the second highest level of decline in any province in Canada. Meanwhile, the provincial education property burden on residential properties in Alberta increased by \$87 million, or 13 percent, between 1995 and 1999. The Alberta government collected nearly 46 percent of real general property tax generated in the province in 1998, the third highest percentage among all Canadian provinces.

A constant mill rate which is under the market value assessment is one thing that we could be looking at. I would like to challenge the committee of three MLAs who are studying or should I say tinkering with the mill rate, tinkering with the capping of the education tax. Why don't they just freeze it at a level and then start building it and finding out where it's going to go from there and how in Alberta, as it is a vast province, the market value and education tax will work?

You know, Mr. Speaker, in the absence of leadership Alberta will not reach anywhere near its full potential. However, because of the downloading and offloading by the provincial government for the past seven years, municipalities face hidden infrastructure deficits which they have yet to solve. Our municipalities throughout Alberta deserve to have more than a three-sentence paragraph in the throne speech.

The sentence I like the best says "over the next year." Is this saying that the three-year plan they've been talking about over the last year has only been a spin and now we're back to the one year? We've seen a series of ad hoc measures implemented over the past several months. These measures don't reflect a cohesive view. We repeatedly hear that the present status quo is unsatisfactory. The AUMA and the AAMD and C have been strongly pushing for a five-year business plan. They also have been pushing for some recogni-

tion of the education tax and that the capping, like I said before, was just tinkering.

Mr. Speaker, instead of pointing fingers at other levels of government, the province needs to engage Albertans in a search for new solutions. It's time to acknowledge our local governments as full, mature partners in building Alberta. The old view of municipalities being the children of the province is out of touch with today's reality.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General of Alberta made the following comments on the issue of infrastructure planning.

I believe the quality of the government's capital planning initiative is critical to managing these expenditures in a way that establishes an equilibrium between legitimate program requirements and funding provided. Proper planning will make the difference between a reactive mode, which merely distributes allocated funds, and a predictive mode, which anticipates and justifies funding required.

This was in the Auditor General's report of 1998-99. The Official Opposition believes that Alberta needs a plan in place to ensure that our local governments have adequate access to resources needed to fulfill these responsibilities over the medium and long term.

4:00

You know, Mr. Speaker, these are the challenges. How do we move forward? In our view, we need a new partnership between the province and the local governments based upon respect, fairness, and farsighted views of our future. To accomplish this, we must do three things: develop a comprehensive provincial/municipal agreement or charter that sets out each player's roles, responsibilities, and resources; the second one, find the means to provide municipalities with primary access to the property tax and a long-term, stable, and progressive source of revenue – just think of what Bill 207 is talking about over the next few days; and create an environment in which municipalities are totally accountable to their taxpayers for all sources of revenue and expenses to meet their core responsibilities to engage in long-term planning.

Mr. Speaker, the government needs to move forward as a leader in developing a framework designed to treat local governments as equals, to improve the lines of accountability, and to respect local autonomy and decision-making, to increase co-operation, collaboration, and most importantly to provide stable and predictable funding to our local governments. Constitutional amendments recognized municipalities as our partner, the third level of government in Canada.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I've got a few points or questions to ask around municipalities and to put on the record. When faced with inevitable pressures of growth, can the city of Calgary or other municipalities across the province continue to rely on a system of provincial grants that has proven to be unstable and uncertain? Now, is there a better funding approach that would allow municipalities to meet their roles and more responsibilities? We believe that the time has come for serious consideration of revenue sharing as an alternative to the provincial grants. This is what our private member's Bill 207 is about, and I hope everybody takes note of this, because in other provinces, like Manitoba for example, municipalities are provided with a fixed percentage of personal and corporate income tax based on population. This was something that was brought in in a previous government which was a Conservative government. Tying in the transfers of civic sources of revenue, such as personal income tax, should reduce the fiscal vulnerability arising from the uncertainty over the future grants, particularly the onetime grant programs for infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, as we move on to looking at other things, municipal is very important, but one of the large ones – and we noticed this in

our question period today – is agriculture. After watching the January 31, 2000, TV address, we were able to view the very nice scenic pictures of rural Alberta and our agriculture scene out there, to a degree of 20 percent of the total time on the TV address, paid for by our taxpayers of Alberta. But, you know, it said nothing that particular night. There was nothing said, no promises made to rural Alberta. Then when we were presented with the throne speech, which included 30 percent of the entire delivery talking about rural Alberta, there were no promises, no commitments, no plans for agriculture. Why didn't this government participate in the negotiations with the other provinces, for example Saskatchewan and Manitoba, when they were negotiating with the federals?

The rest of the story has been written in the past few days, Mr. Speaker, nontruths to Alberta's agriculture community. Will rural Alberta buy into this lack of commitment? Only a two-day agriculture summit to be held in June of 2000. I believe this is much too late. The \$100,000 interest free loan is much too late, and is it going to where we need it in northern Alberta, the Peace country, and all the way down along the northeast part of Alberta?

You know, agriculture is a huge part of our history, a huge part of what we should be looking at. We should be fighting very strongly with whatever level of government we have to fight with. It is nice to see that there is being something in the review of hail and crop insurance program.

MRS. SOETAERT: We suggested it.

MR. GIBBONS: We did suggest it. Thank you, my hon. member here.

We support the need to develop a long-range plan that will ensure the sustainability of our agriculture sector and improve the trade rules and market access for industry. We need to continue to work with agriculture sectors to find innovative ways to add value to agriculture products, particularly in the area of agriculture processing. We also need to work with agriculture communities and commercial financial institutions to ensure that there is access to capital to facilitate farming financing and a new transmission of farmers short on loan collateral.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to stress to the government a quote: the time to plan properly is when times are good. Have we missed the fact that times are good in this province right now?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad for this time to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I had been talking to constituents in Edmonton-Centre prior to the throne speech, and I had some opportunity after, as well, to be able to test what people's reaction was and what they were looking to see out of the throne speech. Really what I'm about to speak on is the effect of the government policy on the constituents of Edmonton-Centre and as that is demonstrated to us through the throne speech. So a few different areas I want to focus on: the voluntary sector, health care, mental health, schools, seniors, postsecondary education, and then some other general notes that people gave me.

Interestingly, a lot of head offices for the larger nonprofits are in Edmonton-Centre. Well, not surprisingly; it's the downtown area. There are things like the CNIB, the Canadian Mental Health Association, the United Way. Lots of the large groups have their offices in Edmonton-Centre and are really good about sharing their perspectives with me, as well as a number of smaller ones. Azimuth

Theatre is just around the corner from my office, and that's quite a small organization.

I had asked a question in the House at the end of last week about the voluntary sector. There has been a very thorough and thoughtful report put out by the federal government in which a number of recommendations are made. One of the points they make is that the voluntary sector is really now the third pillar of our society, joining the public sector, in other words government, and the private sector, and certainly I have seen that. As a taxpayer I'm very aware that it's one pocket that's generating all of these taxes. When the federal government downloads onto the province and the province onto the city, the city has nowhere else to download after that except onto these voluntary organizations, and they have taken up a tremendous load of programs and services that were previously offered by one level or another of government.

In the examination of whether these organizations are going to be able to sustain this kind of activity, one of the things that keeps coming up over and over again is capacity building, whether the organizations literally have the technical equipment and know-how to be able to keep up with all of this, and the answer is no. I gleaned through the paragraphs of the throne speech. I looked for an understanding of this, perhaps some assistance that might be coming. That assistance doesn't have to be financial. It can be done through advice, through partnerships, because one of the things that I think government should be doing is providing leadership.

In particular I'm thinking of a board member from a nonprofit organization that said: you know, Laurie, we look to government for leadership. This person was responsible for distributing fairly large amounts of money through one of the private corporations, and they said: well, you know, if government isn't putting money into the nonprofit sector, then we kind of get the hint that nobody is really interested. He felt very strongly that we needed to look to government to show the leadership in that sort of thing. So I'm looking to the government to be showing leadership in helping that voluntary sector be able to support the workload, the programs and services that they have taken on.

4:10

Another point that was raised to me under the heading of voluntary sector is the games. I understand how important games are to cities, to civic pride or provincial pride, to young people, the leadership skills they can learn, the teamwork plus all of the nutrition and wellness factors that are built into it, but I do notice something really interesting. I remember reading an article in which the emissary for the government was going off to put in the bid for the Goodwill Games and speaking of how our arts and cultural sector was going to be the clincher in getting the games here.

I found that in a couple of instances it's no longer enough to be providing the infrastructure, the support for athletic games, whatever kind of athletic games that is. There is an expectation now that for the other people who come to that and to be able to make it a wider, more interesting experience for people, there needs to be a cultural component. So I notice that in fact there is money going into the sports side of things, but having promoted the wonderful arts and cultural sector here, made it a part of the bid, there doesn't seem to be any additional funding going into the arts and cultural sector that indeed helped them clinch the bid, so to speak. I think the same could be said about the 2001 Championships in Athletics. So just a little reminder there.

I know it's convenient to just take pictures of the tens of thousands of people lined up on Gallagher Hill watching the Folk Festival and then use those pictures in wonderful brochures, but those activities do

need support in order to exist enough in the first place to have the tens of thousands of people lined up on the hill.

MR. MacDONALD: We're talking about Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MS BLAKEMAN: I'm hearing from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, his pride in having the Edmonton Folk Festival in his riding, and indeed we're all proud of it.

I'd like to go on and talk about health care now. I know that a number of my colleagues have spoken eloquently on this issue, but I'd like to talk specifically about the issues that have been brought forward to my office and to me around this. One of the most serious is about home care waiting lists. I think there has been a deal broken, or at least people feel that they can't trust the government around this issue. When there was a plan – well, I guess the truth is there wasn't a plan. But when there were tremendous cuts in health care in the early '90s, the deal that was put forward at the time was: no problem; yes, you'd be out of the hospital in less than a day or very quickly, but home care would be there for you. Home care would be waiting as soon as you got home.

Well, now we're finding that home care in fact has waiting lists, and really it frightens people. Also, there is a distrust that is building about this government and anything that it says about health care. Here was something that was for sure a done deal, and it's not happening. We have certainly had to make phone calls in my constituency saying that this person has been sent home from the hospital after an operation and there's no family there. They are living alone. There is an isolation factor. We're really concerned and had to sort of advocate and wrestle with the distributors of that in order to get them faster home care.

A corollary to that issue of home care is housekeeping services. Often the services that home care in fact offers are very specific to individual personal care: to help someone get out of bed, to get dressed, perhaps to have a shower or a bath, to eat a meal. But a number of the people who are receiving home care in Edmonton-Centre want to be living in reasonably tidy surroundings, and it doesn't seem that the home care contract covers provision of housekeeping services. People just start to feel that there's something wrong when, you know, they can't get somebody to help them vacuum the floors or the rugs or wash or clean the bathroom. Especially for someone that's not feeling well, this becomes really important, and I think that's an area we need to look at. I am aware that in some cases – and they seem to be fairly restricted cases – minimal housekeeping can be arranged for, but this seems to be an increasing problem for the people in Edmonton-Centre, and I'm hearing more and more about it.

I have raised this point before, but I need to raise it again. With the waiting lists that have been created by the way the government has handled health care, one of the things I see is that people have to wait so long to get the surgery that in fact when they do get the surgery, they're so sick from all of the extra things that happen to someone when you're that sick for that long that they get the surgery and they die. So the operation was a success, but the patient died because they were just so sick from having waited that long. I've had that happen to three people that I know of in my constituency. There's something really wrong with the system when that happens. There are a lot of other things to be said about health care, but I'd like to move on and raise some other points.

Mental health. We estimate that mental health issues are underlying an estimated 80 percent of the cases that we work on in our constituency office. That's a large number. We find often that someone is obviously in distress, needs help, needs someone to go out and talk to them. They need to be able to see and talk to

someone. They need counseling. They need someone to go and check, you know, go into their apartment to try and help them. Is there any food in the fridge? Are there any blankets on the bed? Has anybody been in to see this person or check on them in any way? Even in a downtown area with all those 35,000 people crammed into 20 square blocks, isolation is still a real factor there, and there's no one to refer to. Anywhere that we are able to try and send someone for counseling or for help, their lists are full up. They're jam-packed. Those are the nonprofit groups that are operating, some of the ones that I referred to earlier when I was talking about the voluntary sector taking on programs that government used to provide.

I'm increasingly concerned about this. We cannot find anyone to refer these people to for help, and once again it's a matter of not being able to trust the government anymore. There was a deinstitutionalization of mental health care patients into the community, and the community was willing to take that and welcomed the idea with open arms and worked hard to put structures in place, but that can only be overloaded so long until it can't support itself anymore, and I think that's the point we're at. So we have a long way to go in being able to properly support those people with mental health issues in our community who want to be independent.

I'm aware that we've been waiting for the PDD report, which I think was promised in December. We're now going into the 1st of March later this week. We've waited an awfully long time for this report. We need it. There needs to be much more prevention done around this issue and once again better support for the community organizations that are offering the programs and services. You just can't keep dumping these things on the voluntary sector and expecting that it's somehow free. It isn't. It's cost for the volunteers, and it does cost money to keep the doors open and the lights on.

Oh, there isn't enough time.

I'd like to talk about schools and education. I have been able to speak with some of the teachers and principals in my schools, and you're aware that all of the schools in Edmonton-Centre are classified as inner-city. They're very poor children, and the staff that are working in these schools are absolutely extraordinary in their dedication, their creativity, their initiative to provide everything they can to get these kids moving ahead in life. It is truly inspiring.

A couple of the points that were raised with me were about the Children's Forum report. Big disappointment there. There was no prioritizing that came out of it, no definitive action. As it was put to me: if there had been one statement, even one statement, that said that all schools could have hot lunch programs or that those would be established, that would have been a huge step forward, particularly valuable in the schools that I represent.

4:20

Another point. It's important that we don't lose sight of the funding for full-time kindergarten. One of the things that we were starting to see is that there are some private donor kindergartens – and that's a wonderful thing – where you have an individual who's a philanthropist and puts forward enough money so that someone can run a kindergarten in the area. That doesn't cover all the kindergartens that are in my riding or others' ridings. They kind of get left out. It's important to remember our commitment to that full-time funding for kindergarten.

I cannot repeat often enough how important prevention is for these schools and in all aspects: early prevention, early intervention, early intervention, early intervention. These children are perfectly capable of becoming successful, prosperous, contributing citizens, but they are starting this race from way back in the starting blocks, and they

have got to get help to get them to the starting blocks so that they can run that equal race with everyone else. We have to be aware of that and to work hard on that.

Once again, mild and moderate special-needs funding is still needed. This has not been addressed fully. It's very difficult in my schools to get parent volunteers to fund-raise or even to come in and work in the schools. The parents of these children are working low-income parents. They are working at two or three minimum wage jobs, and each parent is working. They're working hard to keep their head above water and to be proud of what they're contributing. That doesn't leave them any time to be selling almonds door-to-door or Christmas cards or Christmas wrap or whatever else is expected. That's just not a possibility in these schools, and I think we're letting these kids down.

I have about three and a half minutes left and much more to say, so I'll go on to speak about seniors. I was very disappointed in what was brought forward in the budget and as manifest in what was put forward in the throne speech. Once again, immense distrust of this government. What is said and what is done are two very different things. We were hearing about a 10 percent increase for seniors.

Well, in one place I actually did find where it was a 10 percent increase for the Alberta seniors' benefit, which is, in fact, the truth. In other places it was this broad statement about a 10 percent increase for seniors. That simply wasn't true. That's a 10 percent increase for those seniors who are receiving the cash portion of the Alberta seniors' benefit, about 130,000 seniors in Alberta, of which the average is about \$100 a month. So these people are now looking at an increase of \$9 to \$10, 29 cents a day. I'm sorry, but this is not going to address rents that have doubled. This is not going to address phone costs. It is not going to address increased utilities. This is not going to address the cost of gas for transportation or rising food costs. Twenty-nine cents a day is an insult, and I'd say that it was an insult if we didn't need the money so badly for these people. We'll be grateful for that 29 cents, but it's certainly not acceptable.

The special-needs benefit, which is the second part of that, to me demonstrates that the cuts this government made to programs and services that were accessed by seniors has truly had a terrible impact on our seniors in Alberta. That program has had a doubling of the subscription demand in this year, so I think seniors have used up all their savings. They've scrimped and saved and cut everything they can. They've borrowed from their family. They've done everything they can, and they've reached the point where there's no more meat left on that bone. There's no other place to get it from, and they've had to go cap in hand to this government saying: please can I get special-needs benefit money for a winter coat? A winter coat, winter boots.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's shameful. That's shameful. They laugh on that side. They think that's funny.

MS BLAKEMAN: I don't know why they would laugh. If they think it's funny that seniors have to go and beg for money for a winter coat, it's a sad situation in Alberta.

MR. DUNFORD: Tell the truth. Tell the truth.

MS BLAKEMAN: That is the truth, and I've got the casework to prove it. Those are the people that have come to me. I'm not going to stand here and make things up. What for? I've got enough cases to talk for days up here.

I think we need to look at funding of seniors' centres. That is a preventative measure, and a penny of prevention is worth millions

of dollars in cure. If we're going to end up spending 1,200 bucks a day in an acute care bed for a senior who could have been participating in wellness sessions, in activities, in meals, breaking that isolation through a seniors' centre, I think we seriously need to look at funding seniors' centres. This is prevention. It's going to save us a lot of money down the road.

We also need to be looking at affordable housing for seniors and others, once again looking to the government to provide leadership in developing these policies, not just dumping it on some other sector.

I also want to talk about postsecondary students. I represent Grant MacEwan Community College, NorQuest, Alberta College – and I'm out of time. There's far too much to say.

If I can please adjourn this debate.

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry. No, hon. member, you cannot. The time expired for your speaking.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: I'd move adjournment of debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

15. Mr. Day moved:

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

[Adjourned debate February 24: Mr. Dickson]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be privileged to address the budget which was brought down in the Assembly last Thursday by the Provincial Treasurer, and I'm pleased to look at some of the issues in that budget that we think are important and perhaps some lost opportunities in that budget that, frankly, we were looking for as we proceeded through the debate. I know that the Provincial Treasurer spent a good deal of time practising the speech. He certainly had some interesting stunts around the speech, but I think there have been some issues of a pretty fundamental political nature that are perhaps some mistakes that this government made in that budget. We only had to listen to some of the people that feel they have lost touch with the government they elected as we listened to their comments and their concerns about the budget and the things the budget forgot to do.

You know, it's a pretty fundamental law of politics that you always respect that core group of people that support a political party, respect the people that have done all the legwork to get that party to where it is, and to ignore that group and the growing numbers of that group as it gets to close to its 30th year in power is one that presumably those people will have a chance to respond to when the next election comes around. So, Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do today is to identify some of those groups that feel that this government has lost touch with the things that they're saying, the things that matter to them, the people who put this government where it is.

I would like to start right off the bat with the whole issue of tax cuts, Mr. Speaker. Really, it's interesting to go back in the history of this government over its last eight years and realize that the only way that taxes have gone in Alberta over those eight years is up: \$54 million from over 400 new or increased user fees between '92-93 and

2001-02, a \$236 million increase in health care premium taxes between '92 and 2000, a \$333 million increase from video lottery terminal taxes between '93 and 2003, \$164 million in casino gaming terminal taxes between '93 and 2003, \$204 billion in cumulative revenues collected from Albertans as a result of the provincial personal income tax bracket creep between '93 and 2000, and a \$181 million increase in education property taxes between '92 and 2003. That's a total of \$3.4 billion in tax increases by this government, undertaken or planned or promised by the Klein government between '92 and 2002. So who has the government lost touch with in this very, very important area?

4:30

Well, the government has lost touch with those hardworking Alberta families who were waiting for the announcement of a tax cut last Thursday, a tax cut that would have affected them directly. But, no, the tax cut announced last Thursday was the tax cut affecting only 25 percent of Alberta taxpayers, and that was with the elimination of the surtax on the 8 percent for the high-income level. Nothing for the hardworking families in terms of the tax cut they deserve, Mr. Speaker, deserve because of what they've been through over the past eight years with this government in terms of fees, taxes, and the impact of budget cuts on them all.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I said that the Provincial Treasurer had practised his lines, obviously, as he delivered that speech last Thursday. While the government talks and teases Albertans about tax cuts, in fact it hasn't come up with the results, and that's what people are saying, the people who feel this government has lost touch with them, those people in that middle group who are so essential to our family life, the working families within our province.

Let's look at the record, Mr. Speaker, over the last four months. We went back and looked at the teasing and the taunting that's been done to Albertans. On November 23 last year the Premier said that the government might lower the 9 cents per litre gasoline tax; that is, he might. He mused about that. On November 25, two days later, the Premier mused about a gasoline tax rebate. On December 29 the Premier talked about providing Albertans with a \$100 rebate for everyone right across the province. On January 7 the Treasurer said that the government was considering a personal income tax cut in the year 2000. On January 17 the Treasurer said that the government was considering a reduction in health care premiums. On January 18 the Treasurer said that the surplus would be used to pay down the debt rather than being used to cut taxes in 2000.

Talk about tax policy-making on the fly, Mr. Speaker. That's why Albertans feel that this government has lost touch with them and the things that matter to them. So that's a pretty important part about the taxes. It's one that certainly the people phoning in to those radio shows are concerned about, that this government talks about tax cuts but not one that's affecting them this year.

Let's move on and look at education property taxes in this province. Why did the Premier and the Provincial Treasurer tell Albertans to expect substantial tax relief on their property taxes in the current fiscal year and then proceed to announce a property tax cut that amounts to about \$31.50 for an average Calgary homeowner and \$22.50 for an average homeowner in Edmonton? How can the Premier and the Provincial Treasurer call an 18-cent reduction in the education property mill rate a tax cut when the facts are that provincial revenues from education property tax imposed by the province will actually increase by \$18 million in 2000 and 2001 and between now and 2003 education property taxes are projected to increase by \$48 million? That's a tax increase, Mr. Speaker, plain and simple, no matter how their spin-and-duck tactics on communications try to say otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, let's move, then, to the flat tax. What have we seen so far on this 11 percent flat tax scheme? Well, in the first instance what we've seen is that it's been announced on 14 different occasions but still hasn't been delivered on. A \$160 million tax cut that applies to only 25 percent of taxpayers through the elimination of the 8 percent tax, as I said earlier, is the only cut that is going to take effect this year. So, again, all about the spin and the ducking.

Let's look at that flat tax, Mr. Speaker. The middle 39 percent of Alberta tax filers, with an income category of between \$30,000 and \$70,000, will receive an average of a 9 percent cut in their provincial taxes under the Klein flat tax when in fact it comes in, if it comes in, but the top 1 percent of Alberta tax filers, in the income class of \$150,000 and above, will receive a tax cut of 18 percent in their provincial taxes under the Klein flat tax. So who benefits, and who benefits the most? The people in that high-income level, interestingly the very people who are going to benefit from the federal government's action on tax cuts in this fiscal year, not the hardworking Alberta families that were waiting for some relief in this budget.

Let's look at the impact of the Klein flat tax on marginal rates, Mr. Speaker, a very interesting thing which the Provincial Treasurer doesn't like to talk about, but let's examine it. Marginal rates for the province are rates of tax that an individual pays on the last one dollar earned, as we all know. The marginal tax rate for taxpayers with taxable income in the low-income bracket – in other words, those paying 17 percent at the federal level, which comprises 52 percent of Alberta taxpayers – is higher under the Klein flat tax proposal than under the current tax system. In other words, that provincial marginal rate is currently 7.48 percent for those Albertans that are paying at the 17 percentile of the federal tax. That 7.48 has to go up to a marginal rate of 11 percent under the flat tax. There's no denying that the provincial marginal rate will go up for those least able to pay on the tax side.

Let's look at the marginal tax rate for taxpayers with taxable income in that middle-income bracket, Mr. Speaker, those that are paying at 26 percent. That's 35 percent of our taxpayers in this province, and it is essentially the same, interestingly, under the Klein flat tax as under the current tax system of tax on tax. In other words, it will go from, at the current rate, 11.44 percent to 11 percent.

But most interesting, Mr. Speaker, is to look at the marginal tax rates for that group at the high-income level, those paying at the 29 percent federal rate, which comprises only 13 percent of Alberta taxpayers. Under the new Klein flat tax proposal yet to come, the tax adjustment will be from 12.76 as a provincial marginal rate down to 11 percent.

So who benefits, Mr. Speaker? The high-income group benefits. The middle-income working Alberta families and those at the lower end either get a saw-off or they get a substantial increase in that provincial marginal rate. That's what's behind all of this, and that's something Albertans understand, and that's why they feel this government has lost touch with them.

Let me move on, Mr. Speaker, to municipalities, another group that feels that the provincial government has lost touch with them, perhaps because they've been in power for almost 30 years. But most recently, in the last eight years, municipalities through their municipal associations, like the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, have spoken out very strongly against this budget. Our communities are in fact the backbone of Alberta society. We work, we raise our families, and we live in our neighbourhoods within these communities, and the quality of life within our communities is very much dependent on the availability of local infrastructure. Maintaining our infrastructure is critical to Alberta's future competitiveness, providing a means of adding value to the products and the services that we produce and sell both here in Canada and abroad. Infrastructure should be and must

be a core business function of a provincial government in close collaboration with our municipalities.

But let's look at what has happened, Mr. Speaker. This province announces close to a \$4 billion surplus, but municipalities can't get the long-term predictable funding formula which they have been asking for year over year over year from this government. Between '92 and '98 general and specific purpose grants from Alberta government to municipalities declined by 48 percent, the second highest level of decline of any province in Canada. Meanwhile, of course, as we've noted, the provincial education property tax burden has risen by 13 percent between '95 and '99.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, we have seen a series of ad hoc measures implemented by the province over the past year: two announcements of onetime infrastructure funding, a 5 cent per litre fuel tax grant to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, and in the budget the government announced the acceleration of this \$475 million in funding for transportation in 2001. While these measures are both welcome and overdue, they do not reflect the realities of today, the need to create a stable, sustainable, long-term funding arrangement between the province and local governments to support a system of comprehensive infrastructure planning.

In its response to the provincial budget the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association made the following comments: "an increase in the infrastructure dollars for municipalities is welcome news, however, short term funding is no substitute for long term planning," and "the Government still has not addressed the need for long-term financial solutions," an indictment, Mr. Speaker, by the municipalities of this province.

Let's move on, then, to the Auditor General of Alberta, who made the following comments on this whole issue of infrastructure planning when he said that

capital expenditures do not occur in isolation – they create a stream of subsequent operating costs that are often not fully recognized at the time of the original investment . . . I believe the quality of the government's capital planning initiative is critical to managing these expenditures in a way that establishes an equilibrium between legitimate program requirements and the funding provided. Proper planning will make the difference between a reactive mode, which merely distributes allocated funds, and a predictive mode, which anticipates and justifies funding required.

Even the Auditor General is trying to point the way for this government. He said at the end, "At present, there is not enough performance reporting to usefully assist in capital asset management."

Mr. Speaker, we in the Official Opposition believe that Alberta needs a plan to replace and ensure that our local governments have adequate access to the resources they need in order to carry out the responsibilities that have been downloaded by this government. To accomplish this, we believe we need a new partnership, a new vision between the province and local government based on respect, on fairness, and on a farsighted view of the future, not just dangling the carrot in front of the municipalities. The municipalities are saying: no, it's not good enough anymore; this government has forgotten us.

We believe we need to develop a comprehensive provincial/municipal agreement that sets out each player's roles, responsibilities, and resources, a commitment, Mr. Speaker, a long-term commitment, a respect for another level of government to say: this is what we need. We believe that we need to find a means to provide municipalities with primary access to the property tax base and long-term, stable, and progressive sources of revenue that will respect the importance of their role in the life of our province.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of that, we will be bringing forward a bill which will be an example of a way that we believe is this govern-

ment's point of view when it comes to municipalities, of the municipalities being the children of the province, a view that was expressed back in the mid-70s, which this government is still following. That bill will consider a revenue-sharing alternative to the provincial grant model that this government depends on, the dangling carrot, and tying the transfers, as other provinces have done, to specific sources of revenue. A very small first step was made with the fuel tax for Edmonton and Calgary, but it is a small one, and it's one that needs to be built on for all municipalities in this province, not just the big cities.

In conclusion with the municipalities, Mr. Speaker, this is a provincial government that has lost touch with our local governments, with their aspirations, has forgotten the importance of a partnership role with our municipalities, a partnership that we in the Official Opposition believe is fundamental to getting on with in fact new ways, a new vision for the future in a new century.

Next, Mr. Speaker, I would like to go to the issue of education. In this sector of the budget the provincial government has lost touch with the parents, with the teachers, with the students in postsecondary education, has lost touch with the very people who depend on this government to be recognizing their needs, their responsibilities, and thanking them for the work they've done over the last several years while there have been cuts. Now infusions of cash, which I think the government thought particularly the basic education people might have responded to by saying: oh, thank you very much for all this new money.

But, you know, our parents, our teachers, our people involved and committed to public education in this province could see through the smoke screen, and they saw through the smoke screen in very short order. Out in the lobby of this Legislature, with the communications plan that the government set up – and it was actually very good. I thought the way we were able to talk to all of the groups at once in the foyer was actually very good. But what they were saying in that foyer when it came to basic education is that this is a government that gave dollars for student growth in population and inflation, but there's really nothing in the budget to address the primary concern of parents, and that is the basic per pupil funding, the dollars that need to be there for creating smaller classes in our province.

So Albertans are getting smarter than this government is, because they're starting to see through the government, reluctantly dragged kicking and screaming, throwing a bit of money at them. What they want, particularly in the area of education, is that those dollars are going to be sustainable, that they are going to be able to see some effect on classroom sizes. We even saw the lateral arabesque performed by the Minister of Learning today. When asked about the 2,200 new teachers that were going to be coming onstream – and I'm paraphrasing, Mr. Speaker – he said: oh, no, no; it's not really any 2,200 new teachers. He said: that's one example of what school boards might want to do. Gee, a whole different message.

Then compare that to attending education forums in this city, where 500 parents would be out at an education forum and the minister is standing up and saying, as he did today, that educators, even those in the States, are saying that 17 pupils in a classroom from K to 3 is the optimum number, and that's a really good thing. He let all those parents think he was actually going to do something about K to 3 and reduce the number of kids in those classes, but he didn't. He didn't, and now he's calling it something that some of the school boards might want to do.

You know what? I talked to principals who told me: "You know what I can do with the dollars I've received? I might be able to buy some of the textbooks I need. I can't hire another teacher. I'm going to have even bigger classes next year." So, you know, let's call a spade a spade.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the future, we have been thinking very seriously about this issue of classroom sizes and always have. In fact, there was a motion in 1998 on classroom sizes, and of course we will be bringing forward another motion this year about targeting that 17 in the K to 3 level. Also, we have a plan that would say that there would be a full, tuition-free 475 hours of kindergarten, essential for an early foundation for our kids and an early detection of problems. Clearly that was a recommendation made in the Children's Forum, both the kindergarten and the class size, but of course there was nothing on that in this government's budget.

It's no wonder Albertans get frustrated when they hear their words, you know, thrown back at them by the Children's Forum report and then the opportunity to see real action on the part of the government is just ignored. They hear their words in the good PR message of the Children's Forum report, but when it comes to the action, things this government could do to put those things into play, it's not there, and Albertans are getting tired of it, Mr. Speaker.

We need a new vision for basic education into the new millennium. In fact, we need a new vision for the future of education in the new millennium. That's why we are going to be talking about a new commission to look at the future of education in Alberta, one that looks at early childhood learning, early detection of problems in learning, works with kids through the basic level, reduces those deficits in their own learning through the basic level, has them graduate from high school with strong opportunity to go into public institutions at the postsecondary level, to be good citizens, and then move on to the postsecondary level beyond. Regardless of all else, education has to be the first priority of any provincial government.

4:50

I do want to make some remarks as well about postsecondary education, Mr. Speaker. Postsecondary is another area that really feels they have been forgotten by this government. While there's the \$3 million academic scholarship program, the \$17 million for remission on student loans, and the \$16 million to pay the risk premiums to banks, there is still showing that between '95-96 and '98-99 the average student debt load increased from \$15,518 to \$17,360, an increase of 12 percent for our students at the postsecondary level.

Tuition fees as revenue, as a percent of funding for credit programs, has increased from 14.9 percent in '93 to 21 percent in '98. In other words, with the cutbacks towards the postsecondary institutions, tuition is taking a larger and larger part in fund-raising for our postsecondary institutions. As a result, the average university tuition fee in Alberta is now over \$3,100 per student, one of the highest levels in Canada. Shocking, appalling, Mr. Speaker, in a province that boasts of close to a \$4 billion surplus.

Mr. Speaker, the whole issue of postsecondary education is a very big issue, and what this government has lost touch with are those families who see an ever increasing rise in tuition, those hardworking Alberta families who wonder whether or not they're going to be able to ensure that their kids go on to postsecondary education. What an indictment of this government and what a forgotten group, who will in fact be the source of our prosperity as we move into the next century.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move to the whole issue of health care. In no other area, I would say, has this government not only lost trust with the people of the province, but they have in fact broken the trust with the people in this province when it comes to health care. This is the government that inherited a cost-controlled health care system in this province when they took over in '92, this is the government that rapidly cut out close to 20 percent of that health care sector, and this is the same government that now,

realizing the error of their ways, is throwing money back at health care, trying to buy back support from the people of this province. And you know what? Albertans aren't buying it.

I would like to challenge any of these MLAs to have been in the seat of their colleague from Lacombe-Stettler on Saturday while she tried to defend this government. It's no wonder she raised those questions in this Legislature today, Mr. Speaker, because she's got the heat coming from her constituents, people who say: will she resign? That's what they asked. Would she resign if this government, as we all know full well they are headed towards doing, rams through this legislation?

The truth is that Albertans do not trust this government when it comes to health care. It is so abundantly clear. If the government, instead of avoiding and ignoring what Albertans are saying, would go out there and listen to those people on the steps of the Legislature at noon today, if they would go to the forums right across this province and listen to what Albertans are saying, if they would read their own correspondence, they would see what Albertans are saying. Albertans are saying – you know what? After roundtables, after blue-ribbon panels, after growth summits, after health summits, after trying to introduce this legislation on two occasions, you know what, government? Albertans don't believe you. They don't believe them anymore. That's what they're facing, a credibility gap. It has nothing to do with communication.

You know, Mr. Speaker, they think they're so clever, because they're going to come in and try and fudge their way through the legislation, have something they think is innocuous. But you know what? They're not going to be able to do it. No matter what kind of legislation they bring in, Albertans know that their real agenda, whether it's expressed today or expressed the day after the next election, is the privatization of health care. They see it as the solution. We're going to stand up and fight for public health care, and we're going to do it through the next election.

Mr. Speaker, there are some things money can't buy. It can't buy trust, and it's what they're trying to do. This is the 16th separate funding announcement since September of '95, with nearly \$2 billion thrown at the system they broke. This is day 1,611. Remember the Ralph Klein 90-day plan? There's no wonder Albertans don't trust this government. They don't trust this government to manage the health care system now. They don't trust this government, whatever kind of legislation they bring in. Albertans want to see the provincial government ensuring that public dollars are going to go to public health care. You know, people right across this province – it's amazing – understand, they know that the flow of dollars is from their pockets into a regional health authority and then diverted over to a private-sector operator. It is a subsidy of private operators. They are back in the business of being in business and back to paying taxpayers' dollars to subsidize it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to participate in this budget debate and to point out the number of ways that this government has lost touch with the people of this province because they've become arrogant, because they have forgotten that it's not their money, that it's Albertans' money. Albertans care about the future of this province. They care about their families, they care about their seniors, they care about their kids needing postsecondary education, and they care about their local municipalities, all those things that this government takes for granted. The day of reckoning is coming. A day will come soon when this government will finally understand what it is that Albertans are saying and what they care about and what they're feeling.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to participate in this debate. I look forward to hearing the ministers defend their own budgets, the gaps in their budgets. Certainly our caucus has been working hard

over the weekend and will continue to do so as we challenge the ministers to support their budgets.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address this budget.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak on Budget 2000. I note that the budget is presented in a very interesting way, as *New Century: Bold Plans*. I've been reading the budget documents very closely to find out what those plans are, how carefully thought through they are, and what the time span is over which they stretch. I don't plan to start coming to these conclusions right away, but one thing that seems to be a pattern from looking at the budget documents is clearly that the time span or the planning, if we can call it planning, seems to be done for a maximum of three years.

5:00

We're talking about the new century. We're talking about transforming this society, this society which is most highly educated, which enters the so-called information age, which therefore will be committed to providing opportunity across to young people, across income levels, opportunity they see as equal, not more opportunity for those who happen to be born into families with large incomes and limited and vanishing opportunity for those who are unfortunate enough to have parents with low incomes, unsteady jobs, or multiple jobs with very, very low wage rates attached to them.

Mr. Speaker, before I get to that, I think the overall impression that one can't help but get from reading the budget is that this may be the current Provincial Treasurer's last hurrah as Treasurer, that he may be getting ready to jump the provincial ship and try and move elsewhere. This is in a sense an agenda they would like to sell nationally in pursuit of his new dreams, and I wish him good luck on it. What kind of a legacy this Treasurer will leave for the province, for its children, for its seniors, for its educational institutions, for its teachers is a question that we all must ask, because the Treasurer holds the key to the available revenues, the resources of the province. How those resources are to be allocated to priorities clearly a government in power has to define, and hopefully those priorities should reflect the hopes and dreams and the needs of Albertans. If the Premier's plans to introduce a flat tax regime becomes a reality, I think the Treasurer's legacy will be one of a less fair and less compassionate Alberta.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I must also note that the budget presented in the first week of the sitting instead of the second or third week, which is a long-standing tradition, simply reflects the hurry that the Treasurer finds himself in. He wanted to presumably outwit and outsmart the federal budget and the Finance Minister in Ottawa, and then in his desire to do this, he left open the possibility that he'll have to make adjustments to the budget that he just presented a few days ago once the federal budget comes in. I was at the Premier's press conference this afternoon, and already we find that the Premier is now saying that he's going to throw an extra hundred million dollars into the health care budget, while their own budget hasn't quite dried up. So that tells you something about the sort of strange way in which the presentation of the provincial budget has a sequence in relation to the federal budget and the kind of problems that it inevitably creates.

The federal budget announced today is an interesting document in itself. The announcement in the federal budget means that the

Alberta budget presented last week is already, as I said, out of date. So instead of waiting for the budget to come down so that the necessary adjustments to the provincial budget could be made, the government chose to let the Provincial Treasurer bring his budget down first for no other reason than to upstage the federal government and the federal Liberals.

There's no doubt, no question that the Treasurer's time in office has been marked by a strong economy thanks to the OPEC success in controlling the supply of oil internationally thereby raising the prices of oil sky-high. Gas prices have been high as well, so certainly he's hit a lucky stretch over the last few years. Since our economy is so energy centred, every other economic activity in the province reflects the sort of buoyant nature of the oil and gas markets at the moment. This good fortune has resulted in a sort of so-called embarrassment of riches flowing into the provincial Treasury for this government, which only until last year or two years ago were talking about: we can't afford this; we can't afford that.

The affordability was the mantra they were using. All of a sudden you find today that there's not any concern about affordability, but the Treasurer has been trying to play Santa Claus now to just about everyone. He has the flexibility of course to reduce taxes – the question is, "Who benefits from the tax reductions," and that, I'll come to in a moment – to address spending priorities while simultaneously paying down the debt.

What Albertans have to judge is the fairness of this government's approach in addressing these priorities: social, economic, educational, and others, as well as fiscal priorities. I respectfully submit to you, Madam Speaker, that this government's approach does not meet the test of fairness either.

Let me start with this government's wrongheaded flat tax. Stockwell Day's flat tax represents an unprecedented transfer of the provincial tax load from the wealthy onto the backs of middle-class Albertans. This unfair and complicated flat tax is nothing more than a handout to the wealthy paid for by working Albertans. The Provincial Treasurer claims that he will cut provincial income tax by an average of 15 percent next year. The key word here is "average," not that everyone will experience a 15 percent cut but an average.

What he fails to point out is the unfair distribution of these tax cuts. In fact, according to the government's own budget documents, some middle-income Albertans will actually face a tax increase due to the introduction of a flat tax. For example, the government's own documents show that a single person making \$30,000 a year will actually face a tax increase of some \$28. This simply isn't fair, but this government doesn't seem to be about fairness. It doesn't seem to be concerned about equality. It doesn't seem to be concerned about just and fair policies.

Meanwhile, for the second straight year the government has refused to calculate tax savings at income levels above \$100,000. Albertans are curious and wonder why. Why is it, Madam Speaker, that the government wouldn't calculate tax savings at levels above \$100,000 and show them in its own documents? Well, the answer is fairly clear. Because it would expose the flat tax for what it really is: massive tax breaks for those with incomes over \$100,000 totaling thousands of dollars per year, nonexistent tax savings for the middle class, in some cases actual tax increases.

I'll point out one thing, Madam Speaker. Lower and middle-class Albertans would have been better off had they stayed linked to the federal tax brackets over the next five years rather than being subjected to the Provincial Treasurer's regressive flat tax. They would have at least some tax reductions, whereas under this government's flat tax some middle-income earners will actually see their taxes go up.

5:10

Instead of forcing Alberta families to pay for giant gifts to the wealthy, the New Democrats proposed – but the government wouldn't listen – that this government should eliminate health care premiums. With one stroke of the pen the government could put \$816 annually in the pockets of every working family in Alberta while forgoing a comparable amount of revenue.

Health care premiums are the worst kind of flat tax, the most unfair flat tax that could be found anywhere. You pay the same \$816 per year regardless of whether your family income is \$20,000 a year or \$200,000 a year. Health care premiums are also costly to administer and place an unfair burden on seniors and those employed in lower paying jobs without benefits. The cost of collecting defaulted premium payments in itself runs into several millions of dollars a year. No one benefits from it except the collection agencies and companies.

So it's a flat tax that's unfair. It's expensive to administer. It leads to wastage of public revenues in the collection from those who cannot pay. Yet this government wouldn't consider eliminating, scrapping, this unfair flat tax and thereby benefiting a large majority of Albertans, all Alberta families who now have to pay \$816 a year regardless of their income levels.

I want to mention a couple of other items on the revenue side of the budget before proceeding to the expenditure side. One has to do with net profits from gambling, which are estimated to go up again to \$838 million. This amount is \$200 million more than the government estimates they will take in from conventional oil royalties. On a per capita basis the Alberta government extracts by far the highest amount of money from addicted gamblers of any Canadian province. The government has maxed out VLTs in bars and hotels. So what does it do? It allows a massive expansion of electronic slot machines in casinos. It introduces new forms of gambling like keno and high stakes poker. This government's gambling addiction is taking a growing toll on Alberta's families and communities.

The other revenue item that bears mentioning is the continuing giveaway called the Alberta royalty tax credit. This tax credit will cost the government an estimated \$200 million next year. Can anyone recall why we still have this corporate welfare holdover from the 1980s? How can we justify singling out the oil and gas industry for special tax breaks not available to other economic sectors? How can we justify giving \$200 million a year to the energy industry during a period of near record oil and gas prices and, by implication, near record, unprecedented corporate profits in this sector?

The fact is that this kind of corporate welfare can no longer be justified. The royalty tax credit should have been scrapped, but it has not been. I think Albertans are asking why this government feels itself so beholden to this particular economic sector, industrial sector, that it doesn't have the courage to save Albertans this \$200 million a year, that those companies don't need, that cannot be justified, and that we can use to good effect to reduce the class size in a classroom or help our seniors pay their ever increasing costs, whether it be rental costs, whether they are utility costs, whether these are property taxes, so that seniors could live their last years in dignity in this province.

On the expenditure side of the budget, Madam Speaker, the government has followed through on previously announced increases for health care and education. While the general increase that's being indicated here is welcome, we need to look more closely at how these increases will be phased in and whether or not they'll be adequate to address the pressing needs caused by the government's own thoughtless policy over the last six or seven years.

The federal Finance minister also announced today a significant

increase in transfers to the provinces for health and education. Will the government be adding the increased federal transfer to the health budget for next year? If so, where will these additions go? Will they go into private, for-profit hospitals and the hands of their owners, or will they be retained within our publicly funded hospitals, where we need to open new beds, where we need to decrease pressure on our frontline workers, and where we need to reduce the pressure in our emergency rooms?

The increased funding for health care announced in the budget should not be wasted on costly privatization experiments, Madam Speaker. Private, for-profit health care costs more and delivers less. The evidence of this fact, both in Alberta and worldwide, is overwhelming. The Premier is simply wrong when he says that there are studies on both sides of this question. There are not. Market medicine does not work. If privatization were the way to go in health care, the U.S. would have the lowest cost health care system in the world, but of course they don't. The U.S. spends about 50 percent more per capita on health care than any other western developed country, including Canada. Meanwhile, more than one and a half times the population of Canada in the U.S., close to 44 million Americans, are at any given time in any given year without health insurance and health coverage. Another 100 million Americans are underinsured.

While this government proposes to expand private, for-profit involvement in health care, other countries are moving in the opposite direction. Countries like Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore all made forays into market medicine during the past 15 years. In New Zealand right now the present government has abandoned the contracting-out policy because it miserably failed over the last 10 years. It has been reversing completely the trend that was set many years ago, but they're finding that once the genie is out of the bottle, it's very hard to get the genie back in. Governments that try to displace commercial interests face lawsuits and other obstacles. As a matter of fact, the New Zealand government is facing such expenditures right now.

Madam Speaker, there are some hon. members who want to take the floor, and I'd be very happy, if they so wanted, to give them priority here.

There is absolutely no jurisdiction, Madam Speaker, for the contracting out of major surgeries requiring inpatient care to private, for-profit hospitals. I see the hon. minister asking me to sit down. I guess he doesn't want to hear the truth. I'm not surprised about that, because they have truth squads out there trying to exterminate the truth, not listen to the truth.

The government scheme also overlooks the fact that hospital costs are declining compared to other areas of health expenditure. In 1975 45 cents out of every health care dollar went to hospitals.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. member. Your time is up.

DR. PANNU: All right, Madam Speaker. If the time is up, I'll sit down.

Thank you.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Madam Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on this issue.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

MR. HANCOCK: Madam Speaker, I move that we call it 5:30 and that when we reconvene at 8 p.m., we do so in Committee of Supply.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion by the hon. Government House Leader.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. The Assembly stands adjourned until 8 this evening, when it will reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:20 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, February 28, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/02/28

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: For the benefit of all those in the gallery, I would like to explain that this is the informal part of the Legislature. It's called committee, and we're called Committee of Supply, where we go item by item. Hon. members do not necessarily sit in the places they've been assigned. They must speak in the places they are assigned, but they are free to take off their jackets and have a coffee and that kind of thing. So it's the informal session where you can get give and take going back and forth.

head: Supplementary Estimates 1999-2000 General Revenue Fund, No. 2

THE CHAIRMAN: We had some discussion as to which would be the first item. Is it agreed, House leaders, that we're going to start with Justice? You're agreed. Okay.

Justice and Attorney General

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Justice to lead off tonight's discussions.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, I'm pleased to speak to the supplementary estimates with respect to the Department of Justice. The amount we're requesting from the Legislature tonight is, I believe, the sum of \$5,700,000 as supplementary to Justice spending. That money is being used, quite succinctly, with respect to the court services area of our department and will be applied to the revitalization of some of the technology that we have, most specifically to revitalizing the courtroom recording technology to put in digital technology.

As a result of doing the upgrades to the technology, which needed to be upgraded in any event, Mr. Chairman, we will be in a position to record court proceedings through the new digital technology recording devices, which will eliminate in good part the need for manual court reporting. Now, I should say in making reference to this that the court reporters we have in this province and the court reporting that we have . . .

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members of the committee, it is the informal part of the Legislature, but that doesn't cover lively discussions. I wonder if we can perhaps . . . [interjections] Are we disturbing you, hon. minister? If you have conversations that are going to be audible to other people that are at some distance from you, would you please do that outside, in the back, in one of the chambers at the side, so we can hear the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General explain why he needs this extra money?

Hon. minister.

Debate Continued

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I was saying, the sum of \$5.7 million is being requested from the Legislature in order to carry out a onetime revitalization project in Justice by allowing us, through the use of approximately \$3 million of that, to replace the recording technology in our courtrooms across the province. As

a result of replacing that recording technology with digital recording apparatus, it will be possible for us to provide transcripts through that process without the aid of manual court reporters.

We will be retaining some 16 court reporters nonetheless, because there's some concern about the transition to digital recording. So in the interim we'll be retaining 16 positions in Edmonton, Calgary, and perhaps in other locations throughout the province. It is our belief that while we're upgrading the technology, this will afford us an opportunity to redirect some of the resources of Justice to some of the frontline projects that were requested by the people of Alberta during the justice summit.

The total of \$5.7 million that's being requested includes approximately \$3 million for the new digital recording devices, and the remainder of it may be needed for the purposes of assisting those court reporters who will need to be relocated in the Department of Justice or, if they should so determine, to find other opportunities in the private sector or elsewhere in government. I want to be perfectly clear that this is not a downsizing initiative. We are not engaging in this initiative for the purpose of eliminating government employees. We are engaging in this initiative because, number one, it's absolutely necessary for us to improve courtroom technology. The recording technology we have in place right now is fast becoming out of date, and in doing so, it affords this opportunity to redirect some of the resources in the department so that we have more money available for community justice initiatives and other initiatives in the department.

We do want to make sure that we are very fair to all the employees in the department who are affected. They've provided good service to the people of Alberta and the province of Alberta, the government of Alberta. They are professionals. Some of them have been in position and providing court reporting services for a considerable number of years, some as many as 20 years with the government. So I want to assure this House, as I know you'd all want to know, that we have made sure all the people displaced by this refurbishing of the technology have been offered the opportunity to stay on with Justice in other positions. However, if they want to stay within their court reporting profession, we will assist them with packages to relocate into the private sector.

So that's the \$5.7 million we're asking for. In the event that a large number of employees stay with the government, we may not need to utilize all the resources being requested, but we want to make sure we are in a position to be fair and equitable to all employees affected by this move and therefore are requesting the sum as set out in the supplementary estimates.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, I'd say that the hon. Minister of Justice quite misapprehends the concerns that exist around this. I've had the opportunity to practise in the courts of this province for some 22 years, long enough, I think, to understand the importance of quality court reporting. You know, I hear the minister say that the funding is to "improve courtroom technology." One might have thought the government would say that this will improve the quality of legal services, this would improve the quality of decisions, this will improve access, but no, it doesn't do that. What it's going to do is improve the technology.

The reality, Mr. Chairman, is this. We are going in a direction that perhaps is consistent with what this government has done in other areas. It's a government that always seems to be driven by providing services at the lowest possible cost, and quality be damned.

What we do know about the kind of digital recording technology, the road down which Alberta is now going to proceed, is that it has been tried in numerous other jurisdictions, and if you talk to the

Canadian Bar Association – interesting that the Justice department did not talk to the Canadian Bar Association, the organization that represents lawyers in this province, to get feedback.

Shaun Dunnigan, the current president of the Canadian Bar Association, has written a letter to the Minister of Justice. I don't have it in hand, but it's three or four pages long. Mr. Dunnigan makes the point that there are very serious concerns about scrapping the former process of having actual court reporters in the room. He talks about the potential compromise of the quality of recording, and he talks about some of the delays and additional costs that will be part of particularly our civil justice system.

The minister talks about "some concern about the transition." The concern, hon. minister, through the chair, isn't with the transition; it's with the direction. The concern is that to shave a few dollars in this area – what's now going to happen is that instead of having a live court reporter in the room and when there's a problem, the judge or counsel can ask to have a particular exchange read back and you get that read-back opportunity almost immediately, we're not going to have that. We're going to have to rely on a recording.

8:10

The Minister of Justice surprises me. You know, we now have a Minister of Justice who has actually practised in the courts of this province. He knows how it works. He knows how it works in that room. When you have two or three people speaking over each other, if you have somebody whose first language is not English, it is often exceedingly unreliable to rely on a tape. We've seen this in provincial courts where they have gone with an electronic court reporting system. It's simply not as good.

So here's what will happen. My prediction is that what we're going to find is that those lawyers in civil trials involving two resource companies and perhaps tens of millions of dollars at stake are going to make sure – you bet, Mr. Chairman, that they're going to have court reporters in that room, because they want a record that's immediately accessible and they want to ensure that you have the higher quality of editing that goes along with having a live court reporter to take down that viva voce evidence, that testimony. People who don't have a lot of dough, Mr. Chairman, aren't going to have that opportunity, and so what you've done is created a two-tier justice system.

It's bad enough that we get on this road . . . Well, the Minister of Justice I can see is shaking his head and obviously disagreeing with what I'm saying, but I challenge the minister right now, this evening, to tell us what studies, what specific studies the Department of Justice in this province is relying on to show that this is going to mean an enhanced quality of judicial service in this province. What studies? If you look at what happened in Ontario, if you look at what happened in British Columbia – the lawyers in British Columbia want reporters back in the courtroom because they have experienced a sufficient number of problems with this fully automated system. They want to go back, but Alberta is going to proceed down this road.

We maybe have a parallel. We go down a road to private health care without a single scintilla of evidence, a single documented case that it's going to enhance the quality of health care. Now we're doing exactly the same thing when it comes to court reporting. We're going down a road where the evidence suggests that you may save a few dollars but you compromise the quality of the reporting that exists in those courtrooms.

So can the Minister of Justice tell us, if he wants the support of the Liberal opposition, what studies he's relying on that will show that the service will be at least of the same quality that we have right now and will not deteriorate? On what basis does he think the technology

in the year 2000 is sufficiently sophisticated to be able to deal with the raft of problems that happened, as I said before, the two lawyers talking at the same time? A little bit like the Assembly sometimes, Mr. Chairman: you get more than one person speaking at a time even though they're not supposed to.

Those kinds of things happen, so it's not good enough that you shave a few dollars off the cost. If my constituents are going to have more difficulty getting justice in the civil court system of this province, this is a step backwards.

I want to know why there was no consultation with the Canadian Bar Association. I want to know why there was no consultation with the Law Society of Alberta before the decision was made. I'm not talking about some frantic chat after the decision was announced. I want to know what discussions there have been. I'm not talking about just the Chief Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta. I want to know what discussions have taken place to involve the – what have we got, hon. Minister of Justice? – about 70 or 80 Queen's Bench judges in this province. I want to know what opportunity those justices of the Court of Queen's Bench who hear the trials in this province have had to sort of register their concerns.

Anyway, those are some of the concerns I've got. You know, I take the minister at his word. He wants to be fair to the employees, and I'm mindful of their concerns, but my primary concern is the quality of justice, access to justice, quality of court reporting in this province. I just hate to see us take a step backwards, and I hate to see a situation where litigants who don't have a lot of dough end up getting compromised court reporting services, because sure as guns when a couple of big oil companies are suing each other, they're going to have a live court reporter there. I think that what's good enough for those corporations is good enough for somebody in that wrongful dismissal trial or that breach-of-contract action or that tort claim.

Those are the concerns I've got. Our Justice critic, the Member for Edmonton-Norwood, chatted with me the other day. She's actually been able to do some research and has got quite a bit of interesting material around this that shows some of the problems with this direction we're going. So I think I've registered the concerns I have.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What we've heard from the Member for Calgary-Bufferalo I think exemplifies a lot of the discussion that's happened around this, and that is that it's discussion relating to systems in other provinces, which have no bearing on the system we're going to bring in.

The specific references made to B.C. trying it out and wanting to go back – in fact B.C. does not have any of the digital recording equipment that I'm advised we're talking about. They don't have the state-of-the-art equipment that we're talking about. In fact, in terms of studies done or how this decision was arrived at, members of the Department of Justice did a site visit in Halifax, where digital court reporting is being utilized and I'm advised is being met with very favourable results, and also attended a number of court reporting conferences in the U.S. relating to digital court reporting.

This is not a new item. This is an item where the technology has improved and changed over the years. There's yet a new iteration of the technology, which is being utilized very effectively, I'm given to understand, in Halifax and other sites in the U.S. The technology is available. The utilization in B.C., as I say, is a different type of technology. They've had some good successes, but they've had some problems.

We do not expect, with the new technology that's being brought forward, to have those problems. I'm satisfied that it's been appropriately studied, that it can be implemented effectively. I'm just mindful of the fact that anytime you bring technology in, there are always the naysayers who say that it won't work, that we shouldn't try it, that we've got something tried and true.

I'd be the first to say that we have very good, high-quality court reporting services in this province. We want to have high-quality court reporting services in this province. We believe that using this technology, we'll be able to continue to have high-quality court reporting services in this province. Unfortunately, it will mean relocation of some of the people that have provided such good service to us over the years.

I've investigated the concerns that have been registered by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and other concerns that have been brought to my attention, and I'm satisfied that the concerns that have been raised with respect to problems they've had in Ontario and B.C. relate to a different type of equipment and a different experiment.

So I would just assure the House that we have every intention of maintaining a high-quality legal service accessible to the public of Alberta. The hon. member will see, when we bring forward the justice statutes amendment act shortly in this session, that our commitment is to provide access to justice to people who can't afford it, to people who don't want or can't pay high fees to access justice. Those opportunities will be available through greater access to mediation, through greater access to the Provincial Court, in many other manners. This is just one other way in which we can best utilize the resources of the people of Alberta to provide as much service as we possibly can at as high a quality as we possibly can.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, of course my heart soared like an eagle when I heard the minister talk about the new justice statute coming in, but something he said concerned me considerably. If the technology coming into Alberta is not the same technology that, if not discredited, at least demonstrated its weaknesses in Ontario and British Columbia, will the minister particularize in what jurisdictions the technology that will be employed in this province has been used and used successfully? Will the minister make available a bibliography of the studies or experiments that have been done with the precise same technology, the one we're going to bring in here? I hope the minister isn't suggesting we use a brand-new technology that's not been sufficiently field-tested in some jurisdiction around the country.

So I ask for clarification by the minister. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

8:20

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I guess I want to start where my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo left off because I saw that the minister was preparing a response, and this might make it easier. You get two for the price of one tonight, Mr. Minister.

This whole issue of a new but not tested technology does give me pause to think. You know, Mr. Chairman, there was a political party in this province that tried a brand-new electronic technology for a leadership vote, and I'm told there were some glitches in that system. It worked out okay in the end, but it was not a learning experience that I would want to wish on anyone.

So when I hear that we're going down this path not particularly because we want to downsize and not even necessarily in terms of cost saving but because we want to modernize, it makes me think: I want to meet the salesman or saleswoman that pitched this system to this government, because this was a salesperson of some

considerable talent. What we've heard here tonight is that we're going to spend a few million bucks on a system that's unlike any other system, a system that is absolutely guaranteed to go right, like that old joke about the computerized recording message: nothing can go wrong, can go wrong, can go wrong. I guess I want to hear the minister's response to my colleague's query about where this technology is in place and what the track record is.

I'm interested to know some other things, too, like maintenance schedules and for how long the hardware and software is guaranteed and whether or not you are forced to sole source, or in other words a vendor-supplied maintenance regime, or whether public works, or whatever we're calling it these days, is going to be responsible for the maintenance of this system and upgrading. If we build new courthouses, what happens? How portable is this technology? Just a whole host of those kinds of issues which would suggest that some forethought and planning has gone into this, as I'm sure there has been.

Now, I also want to ask some questions about the court reporters that currently provide service to Alberta Justice. I heard the minister give some assurances that he was sensitive to the fact that these were valued employees. I can tell you from the few I've spoken to that they're not feeling particularly valued right now, Mr. Minister. So do your assurances of minimum disruption in the lives of these court reporters mean, in fact, that every person who is currently employed by the province of Alberta as a court reporter will be given the option of similar work at the same rate of pay without any disruption in career or benefits or standing, without any penalty to their future career growth, in the same geographic location, in the same city? Do your assurances go that far? I think if they do, that's terrific. If they don't, then that is a matter of some concern, particularly to those individuals and their families.

So please address the issues about what's going to happen with the court reporters but also put my mind at ease about this technology and where we can look at experience with this exact same technology. What are those down-the-road implications that I enumerated earlier in my comments?

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Chairman, I don't know whether I should rise to answer questions or not because they obviously don't listen to the answers. I distinctly heard myself say that before making the decision to proceed with this, certain site visits were held, one of which was in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where digital court reporting is currently in place and being well received by the bar, the judiciary, and justice there. [interjection] The same type of equipment that we talked about now, yes.

With respect to acquisition of the equipment, there will be a request for proposal going out with respect to provision of the equipment, so we'll have to see when it comes back how many different suppliers might be interested in supplying. I can't tell you at this point in time whether it's one sole source of equipment.

Clearly the equipment is being utilized in a court in Canada. It has been viewed on site by Justice department officials before this decision was made as well as having attended conferences and, I believe, courts as well in the U.S. I can get further detail for the hon. members, should they desire it.

With respect to court reporters, I've made it perfectly clear that we will continue to employ anyone who wants to continue to be employed with the Department of Justice. Can we employ them in a similar job? Unfortunately, court reporting is a unique type of skill. It's a unique type of profession, so it's hard to relocate somebody into another job in Justice that's the same as or similar to

court reporting. So there is a need for some retraining. There's a need for reclassification, but they will be kept at their same salaries. There should be no interruption in benefits. There should be no need to interrupt any of their prospects for the future with respect to their employment with the government. Can we employ them in a similar capacity? Unfortunately, no, because court reporting is a fairly unique area. However, we've given the choice to the court reporters.

MR. SAPERS: Same locale?

MR. HANCOCK: In the same locale, yes.

I can't guarantee that, but I've indicated to the department and to the court reporters that we will make every effort to ensure that there is a spot for them in Justice. If there's not a spot for them in Justice, there's a spot for them in government, and it's the choice of the reporter to determine whether they wish to leave government to continue to pursue their profession as a court reporter or for whatever other reason or to stay with the department and with government. I will be firm on that commitment.

This is not an intention of downsizing. This is really an opportunity to continue with quality court reporting while reallocating other resources into some of the areas where we can so desperately use them: in community conferencing, in restorative justice processes, providing access to the courts, providing better mediation services, quicker access to family and youth courts. All of those require resources. So when we have the opportunity for onetime funding to both upgrade the technology but also continue the quality of service and the level of service that we need to have and divert resources into other areas which will provide better access for Albertans to justice in this province, we have an obligation to do that.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the minister. I appreciate the clarification and the certainty with which you've made some guarantees to the personnel involved.

But I am now more confused than I was before about the equipment, the technology. I want to make sure that I heard you correctly, because I don't want to be the target of another scathing, sarcastic rejoinder. What I thought I heard the minister say just now was that an RFP, a request for proposal, will go out, seeing what vendors are out there who may be interested in providing this type of equipment. I just want to know: has a specific technology been decided upon or not? Digital recording doesn't really answer the question. There are all kinds of ways to digitally record audio. So what I want to know is: has the technology been decided upon or not?

I heard the minister talk about Halifax, but I didn't hear the minister directly answer the question: will it be the same equipment so that we know we've got some track record? If there is a software component involved, as I'm certain there is, who supplies the software? Is it, again, the same software as is being used in Halifax?

8:30

So it's not just a general question, Mr. Minister, about us going to go to digital recording and that Halifax has had some success with it. Are we using the exact same hardware and software, or are we going to be looking at a request for proposal inviting all who may be interested to provide tenders and then somebody in Justice is going to decide which one of these technologies, which I think the minister would have to admit may in fact be a new and untried technology, would be put into Alberta courtrooms?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Chairman, now I'm confused. First there are concerns raised about sole sourcing and then wanting a specific direction. All I can do in response to the hon. member's question is to say this. First of all, we have to get the authority to spend money before we can spend it. Then we have to go out and source the equipment. I'm purposely not going to get into specific details with respect to the equipment here, nor would I want to. First of all, I don't micromanage the department to that extent, and secondly, this is a competitive process, and there are a number of suppliers, I'm given to understand, who can supply the appropriate technology, the appropriate equipment. I'm not going to get into details as to a specific piece of equipment or a specific piece of software, because it would interfere with our ability to go out and get the competitive process under way, which we're bound by law to do. So it's sort of betwixt and between.

I'd be happy to share as much information with the hon. member as soon as it's appropriate to do so, even after this process of supplementary supply is done, in order to assure both hon. members and anyone else that's interested that we're getting good-quality equipment that's got a track record. We're not being leading edge in this, but we are doing better than other provinces who have tried other forms of recording technology.

I'm satisfied that the technology is there. It's been used in application in courthouses. It's effective technology and can do the job to the satisfaction of the bar and the bench and to the satisfaction of litigants. But I'm not going to give chapter and verse tonight nor could I give chapter and verse tonight as to the type of equipment, the exact specifications of the equipment, the suppliers of the equipment, or those sorts of things, because that would really interfere with the competitive process. I'd be more than happy to share that information with anybody who requests it at the appropriate time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. Well, you know, at the risk of further convincing the minister that I'm just a slow learner – in any case, let me put myself at that risk, Mr. Chairman. The words that the minister just shared with us convince me now that I have more concerns than I started with. Really this wasn't going to be the major thrust of my comments. I was more concerned about the men and women who have been providing public service to this province in the employment of Justice up to this point as court reporters.

You know, we have a minister who I think just told the committee that he really doesn't know what technology we're going to end up with, at what price, yet we're being asked to vote \$3 million. We were told in the introductory comments that we know we're going to spend this \$3 million well, because of this example in Halifax, but that we may not be using the same technology, the same equipment that's in place in Halifax. Because we're going to go to this competitive bidding process, we don't really know if the \$3 million is too little, too much, or about right.

So we've got a minister who's come to us in supplementary supply with his best guess about a price tag for some equipment that we may buy from somebody to put into our courtrooms. I'm not satisfied that that represents the best way to do business. I would have expected the minister to come to the committee and be able to answer the simple question. "We've carefully looked at three or four different kinds of equipment. We've narrowed it down to a type. We've talked to some vendors. We have some cost estimates. We've looked at maintenance costs, at upgrading, at portability, and yes, here are the studies and the information and the material to back it up." Frankly, I think it's a little bit cavalier to say: well, I don't

micromanage my department, so I can't give you that information.

You know, I have to account for this \$3 million to my constituents. I know that it's a very small bit of the \$4 billion surplus or the \$17 billion budget, but it's still \$3 million, Mr. Chairman. I guess I've come to expect more detail from this particular minister, who I think has done a pretty good job of coming to the committee when he's requested supply. So if there's more that he can tell us, I'd sure appreciate hearing it now before we're asked to vote on this expenditure.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the vote?

Agreed to:
Operating Expense \$5,700,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Health and Wellness

THE CHAIRMAN: We will call upon the hon. minister of health.

MR. JONSON: Good evening and thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to draw members' attention to pages 21 to 25 in their supplementary estimates book. As you can see, we do not have a large number of items to deal with at this particular time, so my remarks this evening will be fairly brief. In fact, Mr. Chairman, we have a single item to look at, and that's the supplementary estimate of \$10,412,000 to provide for an unanticipated increase in the number of physicians and the services they deliver.

As hon. members may have heard last week, I announced that an additional \$15 million would be provided to the medical services budget for 1999-2000 and the upcoming budget year. The increase, Mr. Chairman, will help pay for the approximately 80 additional full-time equivalent physicians who came to Alberta this fiscal year, bringing the total number of new full-time equivalent physicians to 170 this year. That, I think, is a very positive factor. It indicates that a significant number of physicians are finding Alberta an attractive area in which to work.

This funding that we are requesting approval for under the supplementary estimate is in addition to the already approved \$910 million for the 1999-2000 medical services budget. This additional funding is in keeping with the findings of the Physician Resource Planning Committee's report setting out a direction for Alberta's physician workforce. The report sets the stage for physician resource planning by identifying the current number of physicians in Alberta and developing an understanding of the numbers of additional physicians that might be needed both now and in the future.

Mr. Chairman, although we're increasing the medical services budget by \$15 million to pay for these new physicians, the supplementary estimate only shows an increase of \$10.4 million because the balance will be absorbed within the ministry's overall allocation. As a result of changes in priorities, we've been able to realign the budget to meet the increased cost of part of this overall amount.

The final point that I would like to make, Mr. Chairman, is that we have worked with the physicians in administering jointly the overall

physicians' agreement that we have right now with the AMA. While the whole management exercise is one of managing and keeping the expenditure on physician services within the budget allotment, it was recognized in the last round of bargaining that there should be some flexibility that can be applied when you have clearly a significant number of additional physicians that are needed here with respect to the increases in the population.

When there are a significant number of additional physicians, it has to be recognized that the agreement that we arrived at about a year and a half ago was in fact an agreement for the cohort, or the physicians that were in the province at that time. With the very positive development of more physicians practising in Alberta, to the tune of 170 individuals, it was only reasonable, in our view, that we work with the AMA to provide an additional amount of money to recognize that growth in the overall physician supply.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8:40

THE CHAIRMAN: The Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My understanding of the comments made by the minister is that this roughly \$10.4 million will accommodate 80 new doctors within the system. [interjection] So 80 new ones on top of what was there previously.

THE CHAIRMAN: The committee and *Hansard* have had the benefit of the question, but since it was offered in an off-microphone way, I wonder if we could have the minister either give his reply or save it until the hon. member is finished with his series of questions.

Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The number of new doctors or new physicians we're talking about may seem substantial, but if we break it down and look at the various municipalities throughout Alberta and look at the difficulties in rural Alberta in terms of attracting doctors, even if we break it down on a per constituency basis, with 83 constituencies how many new physicians per constituency? When I look at the medical system – and unfortunately I've had the opportunity to see it firsthand – it was a real eye-opener in a lot of instances.

Family doctors, for instance. We tend to think that we go to them because we have a medical problem and that we're going to go to their office and that's the end of it. We know, for example, that if we have to get a blood test, going to a lab might take five minutes. You get your blood test; you're gone. But you can't go to the lab and get a blood test. You've got to go to the family doctor first.

When we talk in terms of the WCB and we talk in terms of injured workers, before WCB will approve an expenditure for a prescription, there has to be a letter from the family physician or a doctor stating that that is related to the original injury. We look at AISH applications. Doctors have to fill out those AISH applications and the CPP applications. I even found in the hospital that under Alberta health care if you stay in a private room for more than 30 days, before Alberta health care will cover the additional cost – and one is paying the premiums for that additional cost – a doctor has to send in a letter saying that, yes, the person was in there for whatever reason.

What I'm trying to say is that the demands on family doctors are very, very intense. My family doctor, for example, when I go to see him – and he's a fine gentleman – has a sign on the door that says: not accepting new patients. One of my questions I would ask the minister: is there any indication as to how many family doctors throughout Alberta are in that situation that they simply can't accommodate new patients? I commend the minister for recognizing

that there is a shortage, that there is a need for these additional physicians, but I guess the question I'm asking: is that even going to be sufficient?

We know we are in the early days in the restructuring of the health care system, and we've got to remember that no matter how much you try and rebuild a health care system that really underwent a great deal of damage – let's face it – to rebuild that or attempt to rebuild it, pouring in more and more money, unless you have sufficient doctors in the province, to access that health care system becomes virtually impossible. You have to have a sufficient number of family doctors.

I hear from constituents waiting months and months and months, six months in some cases, to see a specialist. Of course, to see that specialist, you first have to go to your family doctor to get a referral. We know that in the early days when the restructuring first took place, many doctors left the province to look for greener grass south of the border. They felt that the working conditions were better. They felt that they were appreciated there, and of course their earning potential was somewhat greater as well.

One other question I would have for the minister. In the 11 years that I've been here, I've never understood why there is such a reluctance to attempt to sit down with the so-called foreign doctors who come here from other countries. They would just love to practise, and we have parts of rural Alberta that we know are dying for family doctors. Why is it impossible? Why haven't we been able to co-ordinate, assist these foreign doctors who are eager to learn, that are prepared to go to rural Alberta, where there's an extreme shortage of doctors, to provide their services there?

I don't know if the reluctance is at the college level. It could be argued, I guess, that in some cases the training may not be the same in their particular country as it is here, but I'm sure they're willing to train, take that additional training if they know that they can enter the system and that they can utilize their particular skills they brought with them. We read articles in newspapers all the time about specialists and family doctors that come over here and they're doing very, very manual-type jobs, jobs where they're earning a very, very low income, and they're not putting to use that special skill and talent they have that is much needed.

So I'd like to have the minister respond and tell us: does he feel totally comfortable that these additional positions are going to fill the bill, that we're not going to have a further shortage of doctors, that it's going to reduce the waiting list, particularly to see specialists, that it's going to mean that more family doctors can take down their signs saying "no more new patients"? The question of the foreign doctors being able to access the system and lend their skills and look at places like rural Alberta, possibly signing contracts to practise for two or three years, whatever: cannot that somehow be accommodated?

If those questions can be answered, Mr. Chairman, I'll be quite satisfied, up to a point, for tonight.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, I do not have a specific number, but there's not a large number of general practitioners who are not accepting new patients. I do acknowledge that there are certainly some that just have such a client base that they do not want to sacrifice quality by taking on more than they feel they can handle.

I think, though, that we should also recognize – and this is a fact that we have to face, Mr. Chairman – that there are a certain number of physicians who, for whatever reason, may wish to work part-time. They may want to take more than the usual breaks for family reasons or whatever. It's totally reasonable, you know, considering family circumstances, and that is a factor as well in some people limiting the number of patients they accept. So we do have to plan for that.

I'm not indicating here, as the recent physician supply report indicates, that the number of physicians here indicates that we've brought the number of physicians in Alberta up to an ideal level, but we have made progress in that direction in a quite significant way, both in terms of recruiting doctors for rural as well as for urban practice and some of the specialties.

The question was raised with respect to a topic which is not really dealt with in the estimates, but I would just comment briefly on it. There was a recent announcement, Mr. Chairman, from Alberta Health and Wellness to the effect that we were increasing the number of internships available at our two medical schools to 20 in this year and 40 in the following year. There is a portion of that number of internships that will be reserved for the first time – I don't know if it has ever been done in Alberta, but for the first time in my memory – for the foreign-trained physician. There's always been a bit of an unfair difference there, I think, in that training under the auspices of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons was recognized to a much greater degree here in Canada and in Alberta than that from other nations because there was always that connection to the British model of medical training, and the requirements to qualify, quote, here in Alberta were somewhat easier for someone coming from one of the Commonwealth countries. So that's why I think you see a very strong influx of South African doctors, for instance, into Alberta.

8:50

Finally, I think the overall direction, though, that Alberta Health and Wellness is taking that's really important here is that we are, through our innovation fund and other initiatives – in fact, there's a special fund as part of the AMA agreement for alternative methods of payment. We do need to look at more use of the primary care model of health care where a significant amount of the doctor's workload can be shared, often under the doctor's supervision but nevertheless shared in a primary care clinic where you involve other health practitioners: the physiotherapist, the dietician, the public health nurse. It's that which I think is one of our solutions here. Not the total solution – we are going to need more doctors – but it will certainly take the load off doctors in many of these very specific cases of treatment or care or advice that other practitioners can be involved in in a team type of approach.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to ask a couple of questions to the minister about this notion of 170 FTE doctors, because I heard the minister in his comments talk about the equivalent of 170 full-time docs or 170 doctors. He used both terms, and I'm just wondering whether we are in fact talking about 170 individuals practising medicine in this province now, over and above what we had at some previous time – and I think he said: new this year – or if it is in fact some calculation that we are now being told is a full-time equivalent. I'd be interested to know what Alberta Health is considering an FTE doctor, and does it vary by type of medical practice? It would seem to me that if we're talking about family practice medicine, that means one thing. If we're talking about a subspecialty like pediatric neurosurgery, that would mean something else entirely different.

The other comment I have. This is sort of a general comment, but it particularly struck me when I was reading the estimates for supplementary supply for Health. Because Health has been under so much scrutiny and because we've been on this topic of physician supply for many years and because the relationship between the government and the AMA is one that needs ongoing attention and

care and feeding, I'm wondering why this \$10 million – and now the minister said it's really \$15 million, but they only need \$10 million of new money – is being sought at this time. I mean, we're close to the end of the fiscal year; there are mechanisms within the AMA agreement in terms of making up for shortfalls, and the government is talking about its reinvestment into health care. Of course, that's going to be a debate for another day, but we're supposed to be working on rolling three-year business plans, and we're at the point where we are . . .

DR. WEST: By the time you get through talking, we'll already have spent it.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Chairman, could you ask the minister of energy to hold his comments till he has the floor? Because it's really distracting to hear him sort of bubble up like that.

As I was saying, if we're dealing with three-year rolling business plans and then we see this kind of a figure come in, which is really not an overly large figure, it makes me wonder about the planning process. Cynically I could say: well, are we on three-month business plans, or are we on three-year business plans? So I would like some more clarity as to how the department got to this point where we're looking at an additional need for \$10 million for professional services at this particular point in time. You know, it's a pretty interesting point in time in terms of not just the larger political issues around health care but also, of course, in terms of the budget cycle.

Finally, my question – and the minister may find this particularly provocative. I don't mean it to be. Of this additional \$15 million, which is outside of the budgeted amount that was supposed to be based on the agreement between the AMA and the province of Alberta for the provision of professional services, I'm very interested to know how much of this additional money will be paid to physicians providing surgical services in private clinics.

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

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Chairman, perhaps there's not a wish to understand here, but the fact of the matter is that we negotiate an agreement with the Alberta Medical Association on the basis of the overall workforce, if I could use that term, of physicians in the province at the time of our negotiations. We were also at that time making a major effort – for instance in our rural physician action plan, which is part of that agreement, and in our overall effort at our universities – to retain the physicians that are trained here, et cetera. We were making an overall effort in Alberta Health and Wellness to attract and keep more physicians in the workforce here in Alberta.

So rather than it being taken as a negative, I regard the fact that we have had that significant additional number of physicians locate here in the province of Alberta as a positive. Because we do not fund the physician pool in anticipation of having, say, 50, 150, or 170 more doctors when we negotiate the agreement, it was understood that if there was a significant increase in the doctors of this province, then we would have to look at a reasonable increase in their base budget, and that is what this is about, Mr. Chairman. That simply is what we're responding to, in good faith.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. Mr. Minister, that wasn't particularly helpful. It's not that simple. You said 170 doctors. You said 170 FTEs. Which is it? I asked some specific questions about the planning process, and you didn't address that in your comments at all. I asked if you know how much of this additional \$15 million

was paid in terms of professional services for surgical services performed in private clinics, and you didn't address that either. Do you have answers to those questions?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, by far the bulk of these physicians are engaged in the public system in family practices or in specialist services in our major centres. I do not have a breakdown on the chance that four or five of the doctors might be working as pathologists in connection with one of our laboratory companies or something of that particular that have contracts in this system.

But as I've indicated over and over again – and the opposition seems to fail to want to recognize the truth or the reality of our system – you have a private component, people working across the health care system right now in various capacities providing service. Laboratory companies are one of the best examples, Mr. Chairman. One of the alternative payment plans in here is to provide a model for crediting doctors with the service they provide to long-term care centres, and I suppose one of those long-term care centres might be a privately-owned one. We have quite a number in the province, and they haven't done any harm so far.

If you want to bring in that particular element, Mr. Chairman, I do not have a specific number. I am quite confident, though, in saying that practically all of these new physicians in the province are working in rural areas. They're working in areas of high need within the public system.

9:00

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the minister. You know, one of the wonderful differences between the committee process looking at supplementary supply and question period is that in this committee we do expect answers and we don't expect the same kind of offhanded treatment that happens when the cameras are on during question period.

Now, I didn't say anything about long-term care centres. I asked about surgical services, and unless the minister is telling me that surgeries now take place in long-term care, that would be information he should share with the House. So I will take from the minister's comments that he doesn't have any comments to enlighten the committee in terms of the planning process, to tell us why we got to this point in the budget cycle where we're asking for this money, that he doesn't know whether it's 170 positions or 170 full-time equivalents, that he won't share with us the calculation for FTEs, and that he doesn't know how much of the \$15 million is going to be paid for surgical services in private clinics.

Now, those are some pretty specific questions. The minister should be able to say: I have the answers, I don't have the answers, or I'm willing to get you the answers. I'd like to hear one of those responses.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, in terms of the number of these new doctors that might just possibly be working in a, quote, private clinic, I do not know the number. I'm not aware of any, quite frankly, but I will get the number if there is one for the hon. member across the way.

In terms of the calculation for the 170 physicians, Mr. Chairman, this was worked out on an average basis with the Alberta Medical Association through their agreement. They know we have 170 new doctors. The joint committee which administers the agreement, which is made up of AMA representatives and members of Alberta Health and Wellness, sits down and looks at the average payment that is made per physician in a particular category in Alberta, and

that's what the calculation is based on. Of course, we're not quite through the year yet. We would have to wait until next year to calculate the dollars and cents that any particular new physician had charged the plan. But I'm sure we'll be very, very close, because we do have the averages of the different types of doctors in the province, and that's what it's based on.

THE CHAIRMAN: Having considered the supplementary estimates No. 2 for 1999-2000 of the Department of Health and Wellness, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expenses \$10,412,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.

Environment

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to present a supplementary estimate for Environment in the amount of \$6 million to cover the day-to-day operations of Climate Change Central. Projects initiated under Climate Change Central will go ahead with a firm commitment of cash and/or resources from all partners. At the climate change roundtable last spring Albertans asked for immediate partnership action to address climate change. The Premier responded with a commitment to creating Climate Change Central, and last November we formalized that commitment.

Climate Change Central is a partnership agency that will bring together industry, researchers, municipalities, concerned Albertans, and government to identify and guide our action as a province to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. Bringing such different perspectives together will help us develop creative and visionary solutions to pursue our economic growth while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

These two goals, economic growth and reduced emissions, come together in our new economic strategy. In that economic strategy this government makes a commitment to leadership in climate change. This commitment recognizes the impact climate change has on other engines of economic growth like our forestry industry, agriculture, and tourism, which, in turn, directly affect the opportunities we are able to create for Alberta's children.

Including climate change in our economic strategy also recognizes that we measure the province of Alberta and the Alberta advantage and our quality of life in more than just dollars. We measure it in clean air and water and the rich diversity of our land and wildlife.

Alberta's plant, aquatic, and animal life evolve under specific climatic conditions. A change in climate directly affects those natural resources. For example, a few extra degrees of summer heat can encourage the growth of aquatic organisms that can cause disease in fish and rob our waters and fish of precious oxygen. Rain delivers oxygen back into our waters, but in 1998 there was very little rain. That year fish losses to warm temperatures and lack of rain were serious enough to warrant an official department response.

The year 1998 was also our worst forest fire year ever, followed by the second worst in 1999. At the same time, farmers in

northwestern Alberta faced drought. I already moved the start of the official fire season up by one month this year because of continuing dry conditions. It is too early to know if these situations are a temporary blip or the result of climate change, but we cannot wait to find out. We do not want to look back someday and wish that we had somehow started in 1999 or 2000.

Actually, while Climate Change Central is a new initiative, it builds on actions already taken. While the economic strategy makes a commitment to leadership, that commitment continues a leadership position that is already well established. We were the first provincial government to register an action plan with the national voluntary challenge and registry. That plan earned us a national award. In 1997 alone we reduced energy use in government-operated buildings by almost 7 percent, which is equivalent to approximately 26,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions. By 1998 our government had reduced its greenhouse gas emissions from all sources by over 17 percent, below 1990 levels. That government effort plus a significant effort by Alberta industry is bringing down the growth rate of greenhouse gas emissions. In 1994 emissions grew by 4 percent. In 1995 emission growth was only 2.5 percent, and between 1996 and 1997 growth was only 1 percent. That same year our economy grew by 4 percent.

Alberta industry, led by the energy sector, is exporting its expertise and technologies in reducing greenhouse gas emissions around the world. Even the federal government acknowledged Alberta's national leadership in addressing climate change. At Alberta's climate change roundtable last spring the Hon. Ralph Goodale, federal Minister of Natural Resources Canada, said:

I want to pay a particular tribute to Alberta and Albertans. In a great many ways . . . you are leading the pack. You are making the greatest single effort. You are bringing the most intellectual capital to the table and you are making the biggest difference for the better.

Mr. Chairman, I think you will agree it is rare that the federal government achieves such insight into Alberta and rarer still that they express their support in such an ebullient way. We are achieving progress. We are learning to reduce our emissions and still pursue economic growth.

Climate Change Central recognizes that we need to do more and that we need to do it together. The reason lies in the challenge we face as Canada's energy capital. Alberta is working overtime to provide the world with cleaner burning fuels. More and more markets are choosing natural gas instead of coal or heavy oil fuel. This cuts emissions at the point of consumption, which is good news for our global climate, but it also moves some of those emissions up the pipeline to its source in Alberta. Our economy continues to grow in part by exporting the fuels that reduce emissions elsewhere, and in 10 years time, Mr. Chairman, our emissions could be 40 percent higher than they were in 1990.

Our efforts to reduce emissions so far show that we are reducing the link between our economic growth rate and emissions growth rate, but we do need to do more. We need to include new and innovative options for addressing climate change. For example, we may be able to capture emissions and store them in oil and gas reservoirs, where they may help increase our resource recovery. We're also looking at injecting carbon dioxide into deep coal beds, where it forces out methane that then can be used as a cleaner burning fuel.

9:10

One way to encourage this kind of innovation is to provide credits for new ways of doing things. Canada's joint ministers of environment and energy are working on how to address the issue of credits as part of a national action strategy for climate change. We

also are working to ensure that international agreements recognize our contributions and abilities to reduce greenhouse gases, and that includes the Kyoto protocol itself. The protocol states an intention to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 6 percent below what they were in 1990 and for Canada to achieve that by 2010. Canada signed the protocol in 1997, but we're not yet bound by it. The next step is ratification, but that is a national decision that could be some years off.

At international meetings called the Conference of the Parties, or COP for short, the world continues to negotiate issues like emission trading and carbon dioxide sinks which would factor in the amount of carbon dioxide that is absorbed by forests and agricultural soils. The next COP meeting, COP 6, is planned for late this year to finalize the details of the Kyoto protocol before ratification. I continue to negotiate with my fellow environment and energy ministers about just what Canada's ratification would mean to each province and territory. Those discussions will be on the agenda at the joint ministers' meeting in Vancouver at the end of March. In the meantime Alberta may not be bound by Kyoto, but we are bound by our own commitment to address climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Alberta. Climate Change Central will help us act on that commitment.

We established Climate Change Central as a partnership agency to identify and guide that action. The Premier is the executive chair. David Tuer, president and CEO of PanCanadian Petroleum Limited, has joined me as a co-chair. This executive is now working on appointing a board of directors from stakeholders, including environmental organizations, who can bring different perspectives to the table and help develop creative and visionary solutions. These will be people who are committed to action and to pursuing win/win solutions to our challenge of pursuing economic growth while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The first job of this board will be to develop a plan with performance measures to serve the interests of all sectors and encourage the participation of all Albertans, and it is this last point that is most essential. We will achieve success only if every Alberta business and industry and every Albertan who uses energy is a participant. Through Climate Change Central we will leverage that participation in cash and in kind.

If we meet the challenge, if we're able to lower greenhouse gas emissions while we build our economy, we will maintain and strengthen our own long-term competitiveness by protecting our natural resources and assets, by becoming more energy efficient at home, and by becoming more attractive for business. We can turn our leadership on climate change into an economic advantage as we market our expertise, new technologies and processes to the world, and that fits right into Alberta's new economic strategy and our vision for the future of this province.

The bottom line is that the return on investment on this \$6 million is measured in terms of our economy but also our environment. Therefore, I ask for your vote to approve these supplementary estimates.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. You know, it's clear the Minister of Environment has thrown himself with his usual kind of enthusiasm into his new task. I have trouble purging from my mind a bit of your photograph. It was shortly after this minister had assumed his new portfolio. I have visions of the minister and the mayor of the city of Calgary in hip waders in a stream in northeast Calgary, and from the look of pure joy on his

face one could tell that he had found a portfolio he was really excited about, and with the kind of enthusiasm he speaks in speaking to his department, that's abundantly manifest.

As somebody who is a bit of a concrete thinker, Mr. Chairman, I have to ask for some help. We heard considerable discussion about the Kyoto accord, about emission controls, about things going on around the world, about interprovincial negotiations, and so on, but at the end what I understood the minister to say – and I know very little about Climate Change Central – is that he and David Tuer are going to co-chair Climate Change Central, and they're going to find a board of directors, but that hasn't happened yet.

So I'm sitting here and thinking this, Mr. Chairman. We're dealing with supplementary estimates. That means this is stuff that can't wait until the next budget year. Here we are virtually a month away from the end of the current budget year and we have a request for \$6 million going to Climate Change Central. The big gap for me is: what's going to happen between now and the end of March? Anything after the end of March presumably will get picked up in the budget for 2000-2001.

We heard reference to projects. Well, I guess what I'd want to know is: specifically what kinds of projects, how many projects? What's the total budget for Climate Change Central? As I understand it, this is one of the sort of private sector/public partnerships. I don't know what the budget of Climate Change Central is. I don't know what portion the \$6 million represents of the whole. I don't know whether this is sort of seed money to get this thing started. If there's no board of directors, I don't know how there would be projects already started.

I want to be clear, Mr. Chairman, that I support efforts to control emissions. We've been a leader in energy production. I'd like Alberta to be a leader on this continent in terms of emission control. We've got incredibly talented engineers and a sophisticated petrochemical industry. There's no better place in Canada for us to do the pioneering and to provide that leadership, but the case in hand is why we need \$6 million now that can't be addressed in the budget for 2000-2001. I'm assuming that Climate Change Central perhaps didn't even exist at the time the budget for 1999-2000 was done, but I have to know more information about the kinds of projects that are currently under way and I guess, in part, just why the \$6 million is being sought by way of interim supply.

That's the thing I can't quite figure out, Mr. Chairman, and nothing in the minister's remarks made that any clearer for me. In fact, it made it even more puzzling, because virtually his entire presentation was prospective, in terms of what we intend to do and what may happen and so on. I have an expectation – and maybe I'm alone in this. Maybe I'm the only one in this Chamber that thinks this way, but I have this notion that for supplementary estimates we come in and these are things that – either we've hired more doctors than we've anticipated or we have an immediate expenditure that we have to deal with in this province that can't wait until the next budget year, that this is something that's happening right now. I didn't frankly hear anything – and maybe I wasn't listening closely enough or didn't understand some of the nuances in the minister's presentation, but I didn't get an answer to that question: what has to be done now that couldn't be done in the budget that we're going to be able to deal with in some considerable depth over the next four weeks?

I'm not necessarily opposed to supporting Climate Change Central. Climate Change Central makes sense, to try and do some collaborative effort with industry, the private sector and government. That's a perfectly appropriate place to put some public money to help that thing along, but I need some stronger sense of timing of expenditure and the number of projects and the kinds of projects and those sorts of things.

9:20

I have to know, Mr. Chairman – once again, maybe everybody else in the Assembly knows this: is this unique to Alberta? Does this operate outside the boundaries of the province of Alberta? Is it something that includes all of western Canada or all of Canada? Is this unique to Alberta? I don't know that. Fairly basic questions but they're the kinds of things that would be really helpful in terms of voting the \$6 million.

Thank you very much.

MR. MAR: Mr. Chairman, I'm often impressed by the comments made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and his comments this evening are no exception. Perhaps the starting point is with respect to: is Climate Change Central unique to Alberta? While a national strategy dealing with the issue of climate change is being worked on with the federal government, individual provinces have also put together their plans, but I would have to say that an entity like Climate Change Central is unique to the province of Alberta. It is the reason why Minister Goodale and others from the federal government, including David Anderson, federal Minister of the Environment, have commented on Alberta's leadership role in the whole issue of climate change.

Mr. Chairman, to address the issue with respect to the timing, Climate Change Central will be incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation by the end of the month of March 2000, and a funding agreement will be put in place between the Department of Environment and Climate Change Central.

With respect to the issue raised by the hon. member on what this money is for, he is correct that the projects are prospective. This \$6 million is not for project money. This \$6 million is simply for the day-to-day operations of Climate Change Central in terms of administration for the next three years. So, Mr. Chairman, he is correct that the projects that have been discussed and that may come forward are not being funded out of the \$6 million but, in fact, are prospective and have not yet been reviewed by the agency known as Climate Change Central.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the proposed supplementary estimates for the Department of Environment, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense	\$6,000,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Community Development

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to introduce these requests for supplementary funding and to speak briefly to them. The first is income support for seniors under the special-needs assistance grants. I think every member in this Assembly has had some experience with constituents and the special-needs program. I think almost without exception members would agree that it is a good program, that it is proactive, and that it does address quite adequately those special needs seniors might encounter at any given point.

I recall when we were looking at this program. It was introduced by a previous minister. I asked the department officials exactly what would happen if a senior's furnace failed on December 21 at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and it was 40 below. They said, "Well, they would apply," and I said, "And then what?" "Well, it would be reviewed, and it would be answered." And I said: "You know that that's not acceptable. We have got to be able to respond immediately."

Coincidentally, after the changes were made that allowed that to happen, almost that very circumstance did happen. Officials made a point of calling me and saying: you know, Madam Minister, we had something so close to what you outlined to us, and we want you to know that within two hours that senior's furnace was in operation and their needs were met. That told me that while it may not be perfect, it certainly was a good step in the right direction to making sure that seniors had security of knowledge that if they had an emergency, it could be met.

I must give credit to the staff in this program in the regions, because they certainly have reacted. It is difficult to anticipate exactly what the costs will be in that area. I do think it is very important to support the additional funding that's required to meet those needs. I know that they are needs and that they are special needs and that those dollars are going to a very good cause.

What were some of the increased pressures? Well, we know that increased prices in property taxes, utilities, heating – these high costs have been an issue. So I am speaking in support of that and hope that members can support those additional dollars.

The Alberta Social Housing Corporation: I think the explanation speaks to itself. There are actually shortfalls in delayed sales of land and property.

Special purpose housing: this is really a cash management issue; it doesn't affect the bottom line. I would ask that the Assembly also approve a supplementary budget in that manner.

With those comments I would do my best to answer any questions members might have or ensure that the minister does answer them for members at a later time. Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few questions about the Community Development supplementary estimates. The minister answered partly the need for the increase in income support for seniors. And it is a good program. I've had some of my seniors well served by the program, so I appreciate it being there. I guess one of the questions is: will that amount be carried over into the next budget? Will it be increased by that amount? Was it the number of people applying, or was it just that the amount required was more than what was budgeted for in the first place?

I had a little bit more difficulty in tracking down the special purpose housing, and with some help from my colleague I found it in the Municipal Affairs section of the budget. Assistance to Alberta Social Housing Corporation there is \$77,892,000. I heard the minister say that this was really a cash flow problem. This is in addition to the \$77 million, I assume. I guess I have some questions about that. What are the reasons for the delay in the sales of those properties? Exactly what are the kinds of properties and land that are affected by the delays?

Is there a plan? I couldn't find a performance measure or a goal, and it may just be that I didn't locate it in the right place in the budget, Mr. Chairman. There's no sort of performance measure that I could find dealing with this particular item, and I wondered if it was because it wasn't appropriate to generate a performance

measure for it, that it was something that doesn't lend itself to that kind of measurement. But there must be some sort of plan in terms of the disposal of properties and land, and I wondered what the measures are, if there any that exist. How will they determine whether or not they are doing as they are charged to do in the budget?

9:30

Under 5.0.6, the \$1,470,000 loss. What kinds of alternatives were considered before that loss was taken? Where there some alternatives that were looked at? In terms of the properties, is that list made public, and exactly what kinds of properties are involved?

I think with those brief questions, Mr. Chairman, that concludes the questions I have on this portion of the estimates.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I will certainly get an answer to those questions. You are right that in my comment these are a cash management issue, from the information I have. Yes, this was transferred from Municipal Affairs to Community Development, so I am not in any position to give you the detail that you'd like in your answer. I will pass those requests on to the minister, and I know that he'll respond to you very quickly.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the proposed 1999-2000 supplementary estimates for the Department of Community Development, are you ready for the vote?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Thank you.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$8,991,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$1,470,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Having dealt with all of the votes necessary under the matters brought before the House for supplementary supply, I would move that the committee do now rise and report progress and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, supplementary supply estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2000, reports the approval of the following estimates, and requests leave to sit again.

Community Development: operating expense and capital investment, \$8,991,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,470,000.

Environment: operating expense and capital investment, \$6,000,000.

Health and Wellness: operating expense and capital investment, \$10,412,000.

Justice: operating expense and capital investment, \$5,700,000.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Haley moved:

That an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mr. White]

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

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I had the privilege of serving as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta during the International Year of Older Persons last year, and I want to report to this Legislature on some achievements and highlights of the year. I would like to share some of the vision and inspiration that members of the council and I carried forward from the International Year of Older Persons. We look to the future confidently, knowing that there will be challenges, but there will also be opportunities.

First of all, I want to say that we appreciate the attention given to seniors in the throne speech. The presence of Mrs. Mathilda Hirsch as a guest of the Premier underlined the respect we all feel for the men and women who helped build our province. We also appreciate the Lieutenant Governor's words of thanks to

Mrs. Hirsch and the many Albertans like her, some still with us, many not, who worked so hard throughout the 20th century so that the new century could offer such promise.

We appreciate the fact that baby Micheal Tustin and members of the class of 2000 shared the spotlight with Mrs. Hirsch.

Alberta's seniors are justifiably proud of the legacy they pass on to Alberta's children and youth. Our seniors are also aware that they still have much to offer young Albertans as they prepare to take up the challenges and pursue the opportunities of the next century. Seniors, for example, look forward to Alberta's centennial year in 2005. They want to celebrate past achievements, of course, but they also want to help shape and define the future for the province, for their children and grandchildren, for themselves, and for the growing number of seniors who will come after them.

We will face unprecedented demographic pressures when the baby boom generation enters its senior years. The first baby boomers will turn 65 in 2011, just over a decade from now. By 2016 the number of seniors in Alberta will double, from around 300,000 today to 600,000. Our overall population will also increase, so the percentage of seniors in the total population will not rise quite so dramatically. It will go from around 10 percent to just over 11 percent and peak at around 14 percent soon after that. This impending demographic shift represents a clear and present challenge for Alberta, as it does all over North America.

We can take pride in the knowledge that the government of Alberta has anticipated this challenge for at least a decade. Alberta is a leader in research and programming for an aging population.

Our government has taken bold, decisive action to anticipate and prepare for what we might call the seniors boom. Community Development Minister Woloshyn is responding proactively, as did his predecessors as ministers responsible for seniors.

9:40

I am proud that I've been able to contribute as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council, as chair of the steering committee for the governmentwide study on the impact of the aging population, and as vice-chair of the Long-term Care Review Policy Advisory Committee. I'm grateful to have had those opportunities. My experience has helped me understand the challenges we face. It has also assured me that we have the will, the commitment, and the means to respond effectively and that we have the dedicated and knowledgeable departmental support to respond efficiently.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I would like to turn briefly from the real and significant challenges of a rapidly aging population to talk about the opportunities. Let me tell you something about today's seniors and the seniors-to-be in the baby boom generation. They are living longer as a group than their parents and grandparents. They are likely healthier, more independent, and better educated. They are energetic, motivated, accomplished, and capable people who possess a wealth of experience and an impressive diversity of capacities and abilities. At 65 most can look forward on average to 15 good, productive years. Alberta seniors embody the distinguishing Albertan values that were singled out in the throne speech. They are confident, entrepreneurial, innovative, self-reliant, spiritual, and environmentally aware. Our seniors are role models for future generations, or they can be if we work as hard at integrating them into our communities as we do at meeting the economic and social challenges they represent.

I have traveled all over Alberta, especially during the International Year of Older Persons. I have learned about Alberta seniors and a lot more from them. They command respect and attention not only for their years but also for the quality and diversity of their concerns and vision, their knowledge and experience, and their sense of humour. Our seniors are a tremendous resource, one that we may not appreciate or use to its potential. As we anticipate and prepare for an aging population, we must not focus too quickly and narrowly on the potential burdens on our resources. There are and will be costs, to be sure, but there are tremendous potential benefits if we can recognize and embrace them.

Some of our seniors will need long-term care, an issue that was addressed by the Broda committee in its meetings with Albertans and in its report to Health and Wellness Minister Jonson, but many of them will be able to spend all or most of their later years at home. They will be able, willing, and in many cases anxious to participate in community life and activities. When he released the Broda committee report last November, Minister Jonson said that we need to plan for a future where increasing numbers of seniors will have access to continuing care when they need it, and he noted that we need to create a culture that supports seniors living in their own homes and contributing to their families and communities as long as possible.

The report also stresses the need for healthy aging in supportive communities, a new generation of continuing care centres, and aggressive recruitment and training of health care professionals and providers. As I said earlier, I had the opportunity to serve on the Broda committee and help prepare the report. It indeed reflects the comments, priorities, and suggestions of health authorities, government departments, stakeholders, and Albertans.

I also had and still have the privilege of chairing the governmentwide study on the impact of the aging population. Community

Development Minister Woloshyn asked us to first review current government programs and services. We then reported to Minister Woloshyn in June last year. The report presents 11 issues and makes 19 recommendations based on information gathered from government departments and agencies that provide services to seniors or who have an interest in seniors. The report was released in July last year with a request for public response to its recommendations.

Next was a series of 17 focus group consultations with nearly 700 Albertans throughout Alberta. The governmentwide study steering committee used the report, the public responses to the report, and the information from the focus groups to prepare the discussion guide for a symposium on aging held in Edmonton November 18 to 20 last year. Nearly 170 Albertans attended the symposium. They represented stakeholder groups and Alberta's constituencies. Constituency representatives, who were randomly selected, ranged in age from their late teens to their 80s. Symposium participants looked at a broad range of questions. They brought a variety of perspectives and offered valuable insight and inputs and helped develop a vision for the future of seniors' services and programs in Alberta. That vision is the central focus for our report that we will present to Minister Woloshyn this spring. Symposium participants asked us to consider the potential economic, social, and cultural impact of an aging population with special emphasis on education for health and wellness, healthy lifestyles, and responsible financial planning.

Speaker's Ruling Referring to a Member by Name

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just a general reminder. We don't call the members by their names; we call them by their cabinet position or their constituency. Once is forgivable, but repeated times, we'll have to remind you.

MS KRYCZKA: My apologies.

Debate Continued

MS KRYCZKA: They also emphasized the need for government to monitor services and programs for seniors and asked us to include all age groups in further discussions. Symposium participants also highlighted a need for supportive communities, communities that are safe and committed to the well-being of seniors, that support intergenerational interaction, and that include and integrate seniors.

Healthy aging was another important theme. Participants focused on active living, community involvement, and strong families. They recognized that we lay the foundations for healthy old age in childhood and support them with healthy lifestyles in our young and middle years. This led to suggestions for lifelong education and healthy lifestyle choices. I know many of the seniors' service organizations look forward to exploring opportunities for partnership in the new emphasis on lifelong learning offered by the Ministry of Learning and the minister.

Last year's restructuring of the government placed responsibility for seniors' housing under the Minister of Community Development. This change was part of a continuing initiative to consolidate seniors' programs under one roof. The consolidation initiative gets further support in the throne speech through the government's commitment to providing one-window access to all services and programs. The goal is improved access and efficiency for all Albertans, but I know it has special significance for seniors who may not be as mobile as they once were. The focus on crime prevention and policing will also please seniors. Personal safety, security, and protection from fraud and intimidation are major concerns, and seniors will be happy to see those concerns reflected in the throne speech.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to affirm on behalf of my colleagues on the

Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta that the throne speech is a positive, forward-looking document. It addresses important concerns and challenges, and it offers many opportunities for Alberta's seniors to live productive, satisfying lives in health, dignity, and respect. The Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta appreciates the fact that the government of Alberta will continue its commitment to supporting the independence and well-being of seniors through a wide range of income support, health, and housing programs worth more than \$1 billion. This commitment was demonstrated when short-term support was announced by the Minister of Health and Wellness soon after he received the long-term review report in November 1999.

The overall government long-term plan for seniors will include long-term responses still to come from the minister of health and further responses to come from the Minister of Community Development to the report on the governmentwide study on the impact of the aging population that will go forward from the steering committee in the spring. Of course, the throne speech itself includes increases in the Alberta seniors' benefit program and a special-needs assistance for a seniors' program.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of my colleagues on the Seniors Advisory Council and the governmentwide study on the impact of the aging population, thanking them for their contributions and support. I also want to thank the chair, the MLA for Redwater, and the Albertans who were members on the long-term care review committee for the opportunity to participate and contribute.

On behalf of my council and steering committee colleagues and the senior citizens of Alberta I would like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this occasion. I would also like to thank the Premier, the cabinet, my caucus colleagues, and the members of this Legislature for their continuing support for and attention to the needs and concerns of Alberta's senior citizens.

Thank you.

9:50

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me start off by saying that I would hope our in-house wanna-be Prime Minister watched Paul Martin's budget today. There was a bold, balanced document. I look at what the Treasurer here has presented in terms of tax reform, and I have some difficulty figuring out the so-called advantage it's going to be, particularly to a certain category of Albertans.

Certainly with the increase in the personal exemption we will see a number eliminated from the provincial tax roll totally. Then when we go to the next category, those that are taxed at that first level of 17 percent, we look at the existing system. The existing system is 44 percent.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Is this the budget?

MR. WICKMAN: This is throne speech. The budget was referred to in the throne speech.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at 44 percent of 17 percent, that to me is roughly 8 percent. Under the flat tax they're going to pay 11 percent. That's 3 percent more. Even with the increase in the personal exemption I'm not sure those people are going to get a break. The people that will get a break: if you're making \$90,000, \$100,000 a year, of course you're going to get a break.

MR. SAPERS: Jim Dinning is getting a tax break.

MR. WICKMAN: Oh, there's going to be a whole number of those people getting a tax break. So that I don't understand.

The second point I want to direct to the minister of human resources, and I would ask that he take note of this. I recognize that in the throne speech there was reference made to concern for persons with disabilities. As a result of that, we saw in the budget increases in two categories: one being the developmentally disabled, and secondly, those on AISH.

Now, the reference is made to expanding the AISH program. Yes, I recognize it is going to allow for the entry of an additional 650 recipients, but one thing that hasn't been addressed or referred to in the throne speech is the existing situation where the new legislation that was implemented put a \$100,000 ceiling on the assets a recipient could have.

We have this situation, Mr. Speaker, to the minister, where a great number of the AISH recipients were forced to apply for CPP. Of course, if they got the CPP, let's say \$600 a month, that was deducted from the AISH. That was considered earnings. Now, if they have, say, \$40,000 locked away in RRSPs for their retirement, even though they roll that over, they don't touch it, they don't take any of that interest, just let it roll over like I do with mine, like I would venture to say most everybody in here does so it's there when we head to our retirement, it's deemed as earnings. Even though they don't touch it, it's deemed as earnings, and it puts them over that level that they become eligible for AISH. It forces them every year to cash in a certain amount of their RRSP. Mr. Speaker, to the minister, I didn't comprehend in the first piece of legislation that it was going to have that type of consequence to those individuals.

The second point I want to make. We talked in terms of education in the throne speech; education was one of the areas that was highlighted. There are a couple of points in education that really, really are a sore point with me. One is the numerous requests now that elementary students have to make of their parents and grandparents and neighbours in terms of fund-raising. We're talking in terms of asking little tots in grade 1 and grade 2 to go out there and raise funds for their schools. It's happening at the school my grandchildren go to. I'm sure it's happening to the school the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry's children go to. I'm sure it's happening through virtually every school in the province, where little tots are being asked to go out and hustle chocolate-covered almonds.

What I do, because I don't want to have to see my grandchildren go knocking door-to-door, hustling \$2 boxes of chocolates, is buy them all and give them out. But not all the grandparents and parents can buy them all, so these little tots are forced to walk the streets carrying a box of chocolates. The bigger kids know they're carrying these chocolates and they're carrying money, and we hear at Halloween what happens. Well, the same situation can occur. I don't think, if we talk in terms of a good educational system, that we should be encouraging a system where we're asking little tots to go door to door to hustle \$2 chocolate bars, and that is a direct result of a shortage of funding to education. We can talk in terms of the throne speech and the promises made in terms of expanding the educational base and such. It was fine.

Now, another area that was touched upon in the throne speech was postsecondary education. Postsecondary education is becoming more and more difficult for students to access. Student loans – and I realize there have been some reforms that were announced later in the budget. Nevertheless, the tuition fees have continued to rise, and the demand on student loans and the shortage of summer employment that pays sufficient wages to allow them to at least store a little bit makes it very, very difficult for potential postsecondary

students to access the universities, the colleges, and the technical institutions.

One thing, Mr. Speaker, that is very, very dear to our hearts is the opportunities for our young people to develop the skills so they can go out on a global basis – we're not talking provincially; we're not talking nationally; we're talking now globally – and compete, to have the skills, to have the educational background so they can effectively compete. That has to be a concern to every parent, to every grandparent, to every legislator in this Assembly, and that has to be addressed.

Now the health care system, of course, was one of the main focuses in the throne speech. The best way to sum up the health care system to me, at least from my point of view, sort of in a nutshell, is that it's sort of like you take a car, you demolish it, and then you're going to rebuild that car part by part. We all know it's probably going to cost four times, six times, 10 times as much as the original automobile. That seems to have happened to the health care system, where a number of years ago it was virtually demolished. Now the government is attempting to rebuild it piece by piece by piece, and the cost continues to escalate, get higher and higher and higher, yet the quality of the health care system continues to deteriorate. There is more and more concern. We hear more and more about waiting lines. We still have the problems on occasion with ambulances driving around without an emergency room to take the patients to.

So health care is a problem, and how the government intends to fix that health care, what kind of plan they're going to have, I don't know. In my opinion, the answer is not to go in the direction the government appears to be going, and that is to sell the system to the private sector.

Earlier this afternoon one of the members stood up in the House and tabled a letter about a gentleman from Britain that participated in a dual system and praised that system. Well, I have heard from other people from Great Britain that have lived over there, that know that system, and they disagree. Just like in the United States, in terms of the health care system there, it is clearly a two-tier system, and for those who have the dollars, who can buy the insurance to insure that they have sufficient access to the health care system, it's fine for them. But for those that can't, it's a whole different story. We all know and hear of cases where Americans are bankrupted simply because they had to go in the hospital for a few days.

I don't want to see us leap to that type of system, and it appears the government is determined to get its foot in the door. We can talk about overnight stays in private hospitals, but what happens after that's allowed? Albertans come to their MLAs and say: "Look, I need hip surgery, but I'm going to have to wait six months. I can go into this private hospital, but they won't allow me because I have to be in for more than three nights." The pressure is going to be on the MLAs, the legislators, to increase that overnight stay to three overnight stays. Pretty soon we're going to end up with private hospitals that are there competing against the public system at a much greater cost and that tend to serve only a segment of the population. I really, really urge the government to heed the direction that they're heading.

10:00

DR. WEST: There are no private hospitals. No private hospitals.

MR. WICKMAN: The minister is shouting over, "No private hospitals." I'm talking about a foot in the door. Don't allow that foot in the door. If you get that foot in the door, that crack becomes wider and wider and wider until the door is totally open and it's a full-fledged system. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, you're all invited in the course of the debate on reply to the speech by Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor. You're all entitled to that, but the courtesy of the House and the practice of the House is that we have but one member speaking at a time. That member is, of course, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford at this moment.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: Two last points, Madam Minister. One to you. I appreciate and I'm sure seniors appreciate the additional funding in the special needs that was talked about earlier. There was reference made to seniors' programs and a 10 percent increase in such in the throne speech. It's welcomed. Some say that it's not sufficient. If it's not sufficient, I would hope government will address that to ensure our seniors are provided the dignified lifestyle that they've earned themselves, that they're entitled to by contributing to this province over a good number of years.

My very last point again to the minister of human resources. I would just urge him in his WCB review to allow for some opportunity other than just a questionnaire for interested Albertans, interested groups to actually make submissions as to what they feel is wrong, what can be corrected with the Workers' Compensation Board.

On that note, keeping within my 10 minutes as promised, I'll conclude.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I want to make a few comments on the Speech from the Throne. First of all, I want to commend Her Honour on the very gracious manner in which she presented the speech which outlined the government's agenda for this session. I believe that drawing the relationship between the first Speech from the Throne, delivered many years ago, to the very young, the first baby born in the year 2000, to a lady who heard that first speech firsthand, to a young graduating class rather talks about the excitement I think we all feel of moving into a new century and a new opportunity to work together collectively to make this province, indeed, the absolute best place in this country and in the world to live and to raise our families. I think each and every Member of this Legislative Assembly shares that.

Mr. Speaker, the hour is late. I do wish to add some more comments at a later date, but at this time I would move adjournment for this evening.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 10:05 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, February 29, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/02/29

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O God, grant that we the members of our province's Legislature may fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all of our people. Guide our deliberations this day and every day. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Klaus Glaremin, acting consul general, the Federal Republic of Germany. He's accompanied by Mr. Fritz Koenig, honorary consul of the Federal Republic of Germany based here in Edmonton.

Germany is a major international player with the third largest economy in the world. Alberta has been fortunate to have a very close trading relationship with Germany, fostered in part by the strong German-Canadian community in Alberta. There are over 530,000 Albertans of German heritage here in our province, making Germans the second largest ethnic group in Alberta. Germany is currently Alberta's ninth largest export market, with exports from Alberta to Germany totaling \$164 million in 1998. Germany is also one of the top European investors in Alberta, particularly in our high technology, communications, and oil and gas sectors.

On behalf of Albertans I want to wish our honoured guests very productive and enjoyable work in our province, and I'd ask our honoured guests, seated in the Speaker's gallery, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition from 23 of my constituents opposing private health care and supporting a universal health care system. I am not only pleased to table this petition, but I support it. In fact, all of my colleagues and I are a hundred percent in favour of a publicly funded, publicly administered health care system. As the petition says: we want a universal health care system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I really appreciate your enthusiasm for a petition, but please remember that I sent a letter to all members several days ago saying: let's proceed with some degree of hastiness with respect to several items. There's no need for editorial comments.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of 140 Albertans from Cold Lake urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to present a petition signed by 120 people living in the Cold Lake area, and they are asking "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 140 people in the Cold Lake area, and they are urging this government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 237 residents of the Cold Lake area. That, I believe, brings the total from Cold Lake to 797 requesting that the government of Alberta "stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to you and to the Members of the Legislative Assembly on behalf of 160 residents of Cold Lake, Alberta, another 160 residents, and that brings the grand total of what you've heard . . . [interjections] It does amount to a great number of people in that town that again "urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care," sir.

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg permission to present a petition signed by 80 citizens in northeast Edmonton urging the government to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools. It was filed after the budget last week.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to present a petition signed by 75 people from north Edmonton. I attended and spoke at an Edmonton PAC meeting last week, and the organizers asked me to present this. This is urging the government to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to present this petition signed by 220 Albertans who are asking this Assembly to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to have the petition now read and received that I introduced to the Legislative Assembly yesterday regarding defending public health care.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would rise as well and ask that the petition I tabled yesterday in regards to support for public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like the petition I presented yesterday to be now read back.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday be read and received today.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to support of public health care that I introduced yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday supporting public health care, not this government's plan for private health care, now be read back.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative

Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will be moving that both written questions and motions for returns that appear on tomorrow's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

head: Introduction of Bills

Bill 7

Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act, 2000

DR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce Bill 7, the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act, 2000. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

The act consolidates all parts of the new Department of Innovation and Science under one piece of legislation and streamlines multiple acts into one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

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

1:40

Bill 10

Securities Amendment Act, 2000

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 10, being the Securities Amendment Act, 2000.

The primary focus of this bill is to address the loss of powers arising from the recent conversion and merger of the Alberta and Vancouver stock exchanges to form the Canadian Venture Exchange Inc., or CDNx.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 10 be moved on to the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 205

Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I request leave to introduce Bill 205, being the Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000.

This bill proposes to add a second official tartan, a dress tartan, as an official emblem of Alberta that would complement the existing Alberta tartan.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

**Bill 206
School (Students' Code of Conduct)
Amendment Act, 2000**

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 206, School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act, 2000.

This bill will instruct boards to develop and implement a written policy respecting student conduct.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I have a number of tablings. First of all, I wish to table with the Assembly the report of the World Health Organization, the World Health Report for 1999, entitled Making a Difference, along with a news release outlining some of the key features of this report, which outlines the World Health Organization's position of supporting a role for the private sector in health care systems providing there is public finance and governance.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the College of Physical Therapists of Alberta for the year ended September 30, 1999.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table with the Assembly the final audited financial statement of the Calgary Health (Crown) Foundation for the period ended December 9, 1998.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table with the Assembly the final audited financial statement of the Health Region No. 6 (Crown) Foundation for the period ended December 9, 1998.

I am pleased to table with the Assembly the final audited financial statement of the Capital Health (Crown) Foundation for the year ended December 9, 1998.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Alberta Dental Association for the year ended December 31, 1998.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the report of findings Waiting for Health Care and the Waiting for Health Care Technical and Statistical Appendix, prepared by Burke & Associates in conjunction with Ronald Wensel, professional corporation, and Harris McConnan, chartered accountants, an analysis of wait lists in Alberta.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings here. These are copies of letters sent to the Premier by Albertans. The first one is by Professor Shirley Stinson. Shirley Stinson is a well-known scholar in Alberta, has done lots of work on health care, and she expresses grave concern about the proposed privatization of health care in Alberta.

The second letter is from Mr. Ron Clarkson, who experienced a serious delay in receiving a timely operation for his ruptured appendix. He also expresses grave concern that the policies pursued by this government will undermine public health care.

The third letter is to the Premier from Mary Jane Pedersen from Canmore expressing her opposition to the development in the Spray Valley area around Canmore.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased this afternoon to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter I received from a constituent of Edmonton-Castle Downs, the Reverend G.E. Ingram. Reverend Ingram's letter reflects his support for the private member's bill, the Marriage Amendment Act.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the interest of the House this afternoon document numbered 001245 that I received from the Minister of Municipal Affairs concerning untreated pine shakes through a freedom of information request. This document is titled Response to Consumers, and it is blank.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the Report of the Court Reporting/Recording Committee out of British Columbia.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table correspondence relating to the Ombudsman's investigation into the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. The failure of the committee to investigate the death of Mr. Wayne Oles has been clearly established as an abdication of their legislated responsibility.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first one is copies of correspondence from the Leader of the Opposition to the Premier requesting that the government reverse its position and allow MLA expense claims to be accessible under the freedom of information act.

The second item is copies of expense claim forms for each member of the Alberta Liberal caucus, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I am pleased to today to table copies of a report entitled allowances and travel expenses for the 12 months ending March 31, 1999, as they relate to the Member for Barrhead-Westlock.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 59 bright, energetic grade 6 students from my hometown of Redwater. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Kathleen Baker, Miss Dawn Parkinson, and parents Mrs. Crystal Hrycun, Mrs. Debbie Clark, Mrs. Wendy Fairweather, Mrs. Lorraine Harynuck, Mrs. Karen Ullman, and Ms Trish Swinton. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I'm happy to introduce to you and to other members of this Assembly Nola Bietz, who is here today representing CAPP, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. In addition to her association with CAPP many here will know Nola through other means. Nola used to work in the building as executive assistant to Jim Dinning in the mid- 80s. She is a long-time supporter of the PC party of Alberta, and in particular she is a supporter in my consistency of Calgary-Lougheed. In fact Nola was very instrumental in my presence here in that she was my campaign manager in the '97 election. If she hasn't already risen, I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of visitors from l'école Beausejour, which is a Francophone school in Plamondon. In the group we have 13 students from grades 10, 11, and 12. They are accompanied today by Mr. Andre Roy, who is the principal of the school; Mr. Claude Lamoureux, a teacher; Mr. Leo Piquette, the board chairman; Mr. Reed Gauthier, who is the president of l'ACFA; and also a parent, Mrs. Sylvie Walton. I would like to ask our visitors to rise and be recognized by the Assembly.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Mr. Skip Gordon, our Liberal candidate in the next election for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. He's in the public gallery. With your permission I'd like him to now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, Mr. Leo Piquette is also a former member of this Alberta Legislative Assembly.

head: Ministerial Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Freedom to Read Week

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I rise today in recognition of the 16th annual Freedom to Read Week, being held February 27 through March 4. During this week Albertans are encouraged to visit their local public libraries and, more importantly, exercise their right to read. Initiated by the Book and Periodical Council in Ottawa in 1984, Freedom to Read Week celebrates access to information and freedom of expression in Canada and is celebrated nationwide.

Taking time to celebrate this week is of utmost importance in Alberta. Libraries mark Freedom to Read Week by setting up displays and holding special events such as public readings and book displays.

The Committee for Freedom of Expression of the Book and Periodical Council of Canada states that freedom to read is a precious heritage; it is part of a much larger heritage common to the human spirit which we call freedom of expression. As minister responsible for libraries in Alberta as well as for human rights I applaud this statement.

Libraries provide equal access to people of any origin, race, religion, economic status, or view. Albertans are fortunate to live in

a country where this right is protected. In this province the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act ensures that all Albertans are offered equal opportunity to earn a living, find a home, and enjoy an array of services available to its citizens. This door of opportunity is open to all, and we can enter a world filled with information, opinions, and ideas. We can exercise our minds and discover the diversity of cultures and people that reside in our communities. It is up to all of us to experience lifelong learning and use the valuable tools available in our libraries in our journey of discovery.

In recognition of this event I invite all members of this Assembly to join me in supporting Freedom to Read Week.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to reply on behalf of the Official Opposition to the minister's statement. As I indicated in my recognition yesterday, the organizers have adopted a clenched fist slamming shut a book as a symbol for this week. The symbol focuses on censorship, on those forces in our society who, based on their personal and moral codes or ideas they find troubling, would deny others access to those ideas.

Recent discussion of material that some find odious on the Internet is a game putting citizens to the test. What do we do when we are forced to confront ideas that fall within the law but are deeply disturbing or offensive? Supporting intellectual freedom in our democracy is easy when we find it in the abstract. How we treat the Internet concerns will prove our commitment.

A first step would be clarification of the government's support for freedom to read. On February 25 we had a release from the Community Development minister indicating that the week has something to do with giving Albertans regardless of skin colour or creed access to libraries. Yesterday the government members denied unanimous consent to recognize the week, and today we have a ministerial statement asking all of us to support Freedom to Read Week. Maybe next year the Learning minister should be put in charge.

head: Oral Question Period

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the special interests that are backing him are waging a huge propaganda campaign with public money on a scale never before seen in this province to promote their privatization agenda. Albertans are paying for spin doctors when what we need are medical doctors. As the Premier has already refused on many occasions to release the costs of the focus groups, the subject of these blank pages, will he table today the full costs, the contracts, and the agencies used to promote his privatization scheme?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, there are no special interest groups backing this legislation unless the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is alluding to all 64 members of the Conservative caucus.

We want to do the right thing. I just got off a conference call with all the Premiers of this country and the three territorial leaders, all of whom agree that there needs to be a full restoration of the Canada health and social transfer for health care funding. The amount that will come to Alberta will fund our health care system for about six or maybe six and a half days, Mr. Speaker. All of the Premiers agree without question that the status quo is not acceptable, that meaningful changes must take place. None of the Premiers were critical of Alberta for taking some bold steps to alleviate pain and suffering and to shorten waiting lists.

Now, Mr. Speaker, relative to organized campaigns, relative to spin doctoring, I'm going to read from an e-mail. It's from Joan Swain. I think she's a Liberal researcher, and it was sent to the MLAs for Calgary-Buffalo, Edmonton-Glenora, Edmonton-Gold Bar, Edmonton-Whitemud, Edmonton-Calder, Edmonton-Ellerslie, Edmonton-Glengarry, Edmonton-McClung, Edmonton-Meadowlark, Edmonton-Mill Woods, Edmonton-Norwood, Edmonton-Rutherford, Edmonton-Manning, Edmonton-Centre, Lethbridge-East, and Edmonton-Riverview. It was entitled Health Petitions, and it reads:

Hi all. Just to let you know that as of today, we have 12,910 names on the petitions. If you have any more at your offices, please send them in . . . [as soon as possible]. We would . . .

[interjections] Wait a minute. Just a minute. The best is yet to come, Mr. Speaker. The best is yet to come.

We would like to have the presentation strategy finalized and it helps to know just how many we have, or [how many more we] can expect to receive.

Keep up the good work and keep them coming!

If that's not organized, what is?

2:00

THE SPEAKER: And it would be appropriate to have the document tabled as well.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I can understand why the Premier won't answer the question, but let's try it again. Will the Premier at least have the courtesy to tell taxpayers how much of their sweat-soaked loonies are being used to convince them that privatizing health care isn't wrong?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition to wait and see the legislation, and maybe she'll be true to her word that she might support this legislation. There is a possibility she will support this legislation because it contains everything that she has been asking for.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the Premier doesn't have to shake his fist at me.

Isn't the real reason why this Premier refuses to . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, it works both ways.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, isn't the real reason this Premier refuses to release any details on the costs of his propaganda campaign that Albertans would be shocked to find out how much of their tax dollars are going towards dismantling public health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I wasn't shaking my fist; I was making a point.

I just tabled clear evidence—clear evidence—of who is orchestrating a campaign. It is not this government. It is the Liberal Party orchestrating a campaign of malicious misinformation.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, let's try it again. Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, earlier today we tabled a report documenting how this government has undermined public health care and created longer waiting lists and increased stress and suffering, yet this Premier insists on spending public dollars to promote his privatization agenda rather than dealing with the health care needs of Albertans. I'll say it one more time: spin doctors won't cure our health care system and the problems this government

has created. My questions are to the Premier. Given that four out of five of all physicians surveyed felt that the waiting times had increased during the term of this government, why should Albertans trust a Premier who ignores the evidence that private health care increases the wait lists?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition wait and see what the legislation says. I can give her a hint. It's all in the policy paper. Obviously she hasn't read it, but basically it sets in place some very stringent regulations relative to contracting to private surgical clinics. It also provides regional health authorities with some options to shorten waiting lists and to alleviate pain and suffering. That's what it's all about. I don't see how the Liberal Party could be opposed to something that is so basic and so fair.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are sick of waiting, and they are sick of this Premier's nonanswers. Given that three out of four physicians in our province believe that the number of patients awaiting health services has increased—increased—in the past four years, why should Albertans trust a Premier who keeps saying he has a plan when Albertans know that that plan is more and more and more privatization?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, private/public partnerships are nothing new in this province. Again, I would remind the hon. member that under her watch the Morgentaler clinic was started in Edmonton in 1991. Morgentaler clinic two was started in Calgary in 1992. The Gimbel clinic, 1983, was operating under her watch. Another clinic was established in Calgary in 1990. The Mitchell surgery centre, 1969, continued to operate. The Northern Alberta Eye Institute, 1990, was established under the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition's watch when she was the minister of health.

Relative to orthopaedics, dermatology, urology, plastic surgery, the Coronation Day Surgery Centre Ltd. was established in 1982 and allowed to operate. Surgical Centres Inc., Foothills, 1992, was established under her watch. Surgical Centres, Southland, Calgary, 1988, was probably established before her watch but was allowed to operate and continue under her watch. The Rockyview Surgical Centre, 1989, in Calgary was started under her watch. The Banff outpatient surgery centre, 1969, was allowed to operate.

If anyone knows about private surgical clinics, Mr. Speaker, this hon. leader of the Liberal opposition knows more about it than anyone else because she was responsible for bringing most of them about.

MRS. MacBETH: You know, Mr. Speaker, the Premier is right. I was the health minister of this province, but I didn't have a fine of \$3.6 million from the federal government when I was minister.

Given that three out of four physicians in this study felt that the quality of health care available within their region had declined during the term of this government, why should Albertans believe a Premier who refuses to elect members to the regional health authorities and only appoints those who agree with his privatization scheme?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, elections will be held in conjunction with the next municipal elections, and two-thirds of the boards will be elected.

Relative to the comment of being fined, for 10 years facility fees were allowed. This leader of the Liberal opposition, when she was minister, did absolutely nothing to address the problem. We had to address the problem when the then federal minister, Ms Marleau,

took it upon herself to interpret what we were doing to be in violation of the Canada Health Act. She did nothing, Mr. Speaker. This person who was minister of health did absolutely nothing to curtail that particular activity. We had to take the action.

2:10

I would also remind the hon. member, when she is talking about being fined \$3.4 million, that under our watch we had to take a \$3.4 billion structural deficit and turn that into surpluses year after year after year.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair did make a plea for some decorum prior to the initiation of that second set of questions. It did not improve, so perhaps it's now timely to just review what *Beauchesne* says about the question period. Let me take you to *Beauchesne* 409.

A brief question seeking information about an important matter of some urgency which falls within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the specific Minister to whom it is addressed, is in order.

- (1) It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate.
- (2) The question must be brief. A preamble need not exceed one carefully drawn sentence

There's no need for preambles on these supplementaries.

- (3) The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations.
- (4) It ought to be on an important matter, and not be frivolous.
- (5) The matter ought to be of some urgency.

There are additional items in number 409, but I want to just highlight a few from *Beauchesne* 410. It's been observed in the past that

- (1) Television has made a marked impact on Parliament and public perception thereof;
- (2) While some previous guidelines remain valid others have fallen into disuse . . .
- (3) Time is scarce.
- (4) In the view of the watching public, decorum is of importance.
- (5) The primary purpose of the Question Period is the seeking of information and calling the Government to account . . .
- (7) Brevity both in questions and answers is of great importance.
- (8) Preambles to questions should be brief and supplementary questions require no preambles . . .
- (9) Questions should not repeat questions already asked although this does not mean that other questions on the same point are out of order.

And I might go on.

This is important public time, hon. members. Decorum is important.

Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, your third main question.

Calgary Regional Health Authority

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, yesterday Albertans heard the head of the Calgary regional health authority, the former Provincial Treasurer, the Premier's handpicked lieutenant of Calgary, and the architect of the cuts say, and I quote: it's better to experiment than to plan. This is an incredible insult to Albertans who depend on public health care. My questions are to the Premier. Does the Premier agree with his former Provincial Treasurer now responsible for a budget of nearly a billion dollars of taxpayers money when he says that it's better to experiment than to plan?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear those comments come out of the former Provincial Treasurer's mouth. I can tell you that the only plan I know of that he was the architect of was the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition's unsuccessful leadership campaign.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, Albertans see through this Premier's nonanswers.

Will the Premier fire his chosen chairman of the Calgary regional health authority given his reckless disregard for public health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I understand that the leader has some concern about Mr. Dinning being chair of an entity which has a \$1 billion budget. Actually it's somewhat higher than that. I think that's something of a comedown financially from managing a \$12 billion budget for the provincial government and for all Albertans and doing a very fine job of balancing it and moving this province towards a more sound financial footing.

Now, with respect to the speech that I understand the former hon. Provincial Treasurer, now chair of the CRHA, made, I think he is exhibiting leadership in the context of his duties in Calgary, Mr. Speaker. He, I think, has excellent qualifications to look at the future needs of the system down there from a positive perspective for health, and certainly I would not in any way consider recommending his dismissal. Certainly not. He's doing a fine job. I think the overall board down there is working hard to provide for the health needs of Albertans.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit, as his handpicked chairman has, that the Premier has no plan, just an experiment in privatizing that could end up destroying public health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is a plan, and it's a very bold and a very energetic plan. That plan will unfold when the legislation is tabled.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. interim leader of the third party.

Private Health Services (continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Friends of Medicare chairperson, Christine Burdett, received a telephone call earlier today from a reporter from the *National Post*. The reporter claimed to have knowledge of the contents of the government's private, for-profit hospitals legislation. The reporter said that the legislation bans private hospitals. He also added that that would cause Friends of Medicare to reverse its position on the legislation. As the interview continued, it became clear that the legislation does not ban private, overnight patient stay facilities. My question is to the Premier. How can the government justify leaking the contents of its private, for-profit hospitals legislation to a Toronto-based, right-wing newspaper prior to introducing the legislation in this Assembly?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, is the hon. member saying that if the *Toronto Star* had phoned and asked the same question, it would be appropriate?

Well, Mr. Speaker, basically the foundation for the legislation is contained in the policy paper. I can assure the hon. member that that reporter, hopefully, and no other reporter has a copy of the legisla-

tion. If they do, I would like to find out who gave it to them.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, why is the government using all manner of questionable tricks, which most Albertans are sure to find insulting and offensive, in a desperate, last-ditch effort to persuade Albertans that contracting out of major surgeries requiring overnight patient stays should be legalized?

MR. HANCOCK: Point of order.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would advise the hon. member to wait and see the legislation before commenting on it. At that time, he will have ample opportunity to debate any points that he might want to raise in this legislative Chamber. That is the time and the place, when the legislation is tabled, to debate the specific points that might or might not be there.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplementary to the Premier: if the government really wants to ban private hospitals, why don't they simply amend the Hospitals Act to require any procedure necessitating an overnight patient stay to be performed only in a public hospital?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this refers to a very specific act that is under the purview of the Department of Health and Wellness, and I'll ask the appropriate minister to respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member posing the question has read our policy document, he will note that we are proposing a much more comprehensive policy with respect to protecting publicly administered, publicly funded health care in this province than would be possible through simply making an amendment to the Hospitals Act. I can assure the hon. member – and he, I think, would be aware of that if he had read our policy document instead of whatever else it was he was reading. It will certainly address the overall plan that we have. Legislation will follow through from the policy paper according to what we've heard from Albertans. It will protect the public health care system, and it will have a number of prohibitions on such things as queue-jumping and being able to get preferential treatment because of the payment of money. Those kinds of protections will be built into the legislation.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, I did catch notice of your anticipated point of order that you want to raise. Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you want to . . .

2:20

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to stand on a question of privilege pursuant to Standing Order 15(1) and reference specifically . . .

THE SPEAKER: You've given me notice. We'll deal with it later.

MR. DICKSON: Fine. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Federal Support for Agriculture

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Last week we heard that the federal government had announced a joint prairie farm disaster assistance program but restricted the benefits to only

Manitoba and Saskatchewan, excluding Alberta. Agriculture has been hit very hard in my area in the past few years, and farmers are calling me to find out what's going on here and if the federal government is playing favourites. To me this looks a little bit like the middle finger salute that someone else in Ottawa was famous for a few years back. I'll make it short and sweet with just one question: can the minister of agriculture tell us just what is going on here, and can he do something about it?

MR. LUND: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday, we haven't been able to figure out how it is that the Liberals feel that farmers across the country should not be treated equitably. We found out today that they have somehow figured out a magic formula using transportation costs, which certainly makes absolutely no sense.

As the hon. member that asked the question correctly indicated, in the Peace River country they have major transportation difficulties and costs. As a matter of fact, in the province of Alberta 44 stations have higher transportation costs than in Saskatchewan. Our costs since the Crow was bought out amount to an increase of about 116 percent. So we will be very anxious to see exactly how the calculations were done to figure out that in fact Alberta doesn't qualify.

We are going to be going down to Ottawa later today, and the objective will be to try to indicate to the federal minister that in fact there has to be equitable treatment of farmers across the country. I have consistently told him and his colleagues that we have situations in Alberta that are similar to Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

We are also going to be pressing that now is the opportunity for them to move ahead with the Estey/Kroege report, because quite frankly there are several millions of dollars, estimates all the way up to 300 million of farmers' dollars, that have been wasted right today in the fact that the transportation system and the handling system are not efficient in this country. Those are dollars that we need to see coming back to the farmer. So we'll be pushing them to move. They have used the excuse in past times that it would disenfranchise Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Well, they have now paid a pile of money to those two provinces, so we should be able to move ahead.

We will also be questioning the role of the provincial ministers. We thought that co-operation was a proper way to operate within Confederation. So we will be questioning that at this point, because, as you know, the two ministers that ended up getting money walked out of the meeting. So we question how that works: how does that work for unity in the country? Those will be the objectives of the trip.

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

Education Funding

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the Wednesday before last week's budget the Treasurer promised Albertans that 2,200 new teachers and teaching aides would be hired. The 2,200 teachers and aides were part of a list that supposedly included more computers, severe disability funding, expanded early literacy programs, and increases in teachers' salaries. My question is to the Provincial Treasurer. Did the Treasury Department come up with the 2,200 teacher and aide figure, or was it supplied by the Minister of Learning?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, all of the budget matters, as I clearly indicated even in my opening comments on the budget, are an entire product of input from all MLAs, not just the Treasurer, not just the Minister of Learning, but in fact from all government MLAs

following consultations with school boards, regional health authorities, and business groups all over the province. The dollars that are allocated there definitely have that ability to hire that many teachers.

Now, the Minister of Learning has also been quite correct in saying that we want to respect the autonomy of those school boards. An individual school board may say: well, we're not going to hire 20 teachers; maybe we'll hire 18 and three teacher's aides. Those types of micro decisions are certainly left to the school boards, and we respect that.

The dollars are there that have the capacity to do that, and I would think it would be in that range by the time the business plan is completed. The member could tally it up and see if we were close or not.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. To the Treasurer: why did the Treasurer fail to tell Albertans that the list of education promises was a list from which boards would choose?

MR. DAY: Sorry. I think I just said that, along those lines. I thank him for echoing my remarks there, Mr. Speaker.

DR. MASSEY: Will the Provincial Treasurer set the record straight and tell Albertans exactly the number of teachers and aides that are in the budget and that they can count on being hired?

MR. DAY: I'll try it again, a little slower this time, Mr. Speaker. The budget is put together by all members and, in fact significantly on items to do with learning, by the Minister of Learning. The needs of all the school boards are taken into account, and then the money is allocated in such a way that those needs, should the school board so decide, can be met along those lines.

Now, should a school board have a different idea, they have the autonomy; the Minister of Learning wants to allow for that to flow. He may want to comment further on that.

We should also remember that the growth and the increase in spending actually goes beyond inflation and beyond student growth. So maximum flexibility is provided along those guidelines, Mr. Speaker.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The number 2,200 actually came from the calculation. When you take into account that the actual enrollment growth was calculated at around 1.4 percent, 1.4 percent of 550,000 is roughly in the area of 6,000 to 6,500. If you use an average of between 20 and 25, there are 300 students per year there, for a total of 900 teachers.

Mr. Speaker, the other place where there will be aides hired: there's a 15 percent increase in the special-needs funding. As we know, when it comes to special needs, we're anticipating a huge increase. There's a 10 percent increase for enrollment of kids with special needs, and we anticipate that there will be significant hirings there.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Treasurer is absolutely correct. This budget was about flexibility for the school boards. The school boards asked me for that flexibility. They wanted those dollars to be able to be put in the places they deemed absolutely necessary. We gave them that ability to do it.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, critics of the government's policy statement on the delivery of surgical services have stated that no studies or reports exist to support private-sector involvement in a

publicly funded health care system. Using studies not directly relevant to Alberta's proposal, these critics repeatedly pontificate that no recognized authorities support even minor private-sector involvement in a public health care system. My questions are to the minister of health. Are there any major studies from acknowledged authorities to support Alberta's proposed policy to allow some surgeries to be contracted to private providers?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly, as I think has been referenced in this Assembly, there are a number of studies, some reputable, some not, on both sides of this particular question. A couple of days ago I tabled in this Assembly . . . [interjections] The hon. people across the way want me to name them. I would invite them to read, you know, the names on top of the studies that I tabled a short time ago.

2:30

In addition to those studies, Mr. Speaker, that were very credible – they'd undergone peer review – I tabled today the 1999 report of the World Health Organization, which is a very prestigious organization. It's entitled Making a Difference, and it does lay out, I think, a very credible, documented, supported set of arguments pointing out that a health care system, provided it is publicly financed and publicly governed, can benefit from a degree of competition from new ideas, from innovation that could be provided by the private sector.

I would like just to conclude my answer by noting that the director general of the World Health Organization is Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, and she is supportive of the findings of the report. She's a very, very credible expert in the field of health care from the country of Norway.

MRS. GORDON: Again to the same minister: recognizing that you just said that they were credible, who exactly is the World Health Organization? Where are they from, and what do they do? My constituents want to know. [interjections]

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I have to remark that I find it rather incredible that the members across the way laugh at the title of the World Health Organization, which is an agency of the United Nations. The United Nations is one of the major, I think, accomplishments of the 20th and now 21st centuries in terms of co-operation and credibility among the nations of this world. So that, I guess, is reflective of their overall attitude.

The World Health Organization is noted for its work in terms of looking at the way of developing and improving health care systems across the world, certainly in the areas of disease control and immunization as well as in terms of managing and designing future health care systems.

MRS. GORDON: Could the minister please explain how this organization's report is relevant to and interacts with the Alberta proposal?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the report focuses on the pressures that are on government-run health care systems all across the world. It looks at the key factors that are involved in terms of improving and sustaining these particular health care systems, and of course it looks at the comparative effectiveness of them as they exist right now. It concludes in a general way – and I invite everybody to read the report – that the health care systems of the world that are run by governments would benefit from innovation, including very much so the competition, the different ideas that can be brought into a

system to improve it for the years ahead, provided of course that government takes responsibility for regulation and for standards. That is something, of course, that we've said over and over again. We do it now, and we will certainly be doing it in our proposed legislation.

Income Tax

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I think it's about time the government sent out their tax plan truth squads. I mean, if you were to listen to the Provincial Treasurer, you'd believe that he is responsible for \$216 million worth of federal tax cuts. Will the Treasurer confirm that the federal government in fact will be making over 52 percent of the provincial personal income tax cuts in Alberta during the 2000 tax year?

MR. DAY: You know, that was quite a convoluted question. I might have to get it in writing from him. It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, how even when you try and do something nice and proper, the opposition still kind of gives you a hard time. I guess they think that's their role in life.

If people would observe yesterday, the Premier, in responding to the federal budget – this is to a different political party – actually made positive comments in some areas about the federal budget, and I made those comments, too. We give credit. I'm saying this live, here and on television. We give credit to Mr. Martin and the federal government for some of the good things in that budget. They listened, and they responded. We give credit for that. We're not taking all the credit for it.

Some people have suggested that Alberta, that the Klein government leading and setting the example affected the thinking. I don't know if it did or not, but I give them full credit for some of the good things they did in terms of reducing income taxes for all Canadians. Good for them.

MR. SAPERS: It's a simple question, Mr. Speaker, that could be answered with a yes or no. So I'll repeat it for the Treasurer. Will he confirm that in fact the federal government will be making \$158 million, or 52 percent of the total personal provincial income tax cuts in Alberta, during the 2000 tax year? Yes or no?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, we haven't run the numbers on that. I can tell you a couple of things that I can confirm, and I will. The average tax reduction for Albertans that will come into play because of the Alberta tax reform plan will be about 15 percent across the board. The average reduction for Albertans as a result of the federal cuts will be about a 6 percent reduction. So ours is more, but at 6 percent nobody is going to turn that away.

On the area of bracket creep I really want to commend the federal government and Mr. Martin, because as late as a week before his budget he was saying that the federal government would not move on eliminating bracket creep, and in fact he did. I want to congratulate him for that.

In terms of percentages, as the critic is asking, they will move up the basic exemption levels. The federal government will move those basic exemption levels upwards about 1.8 percent. That's better than nothing, and we appreciate that. Our exemption levels are moving up. The basic exemption level is moving up 70 percent, and the spousal exemption is moving upwards 90 percent. They're moving theirs up 1.8 percent. We'll take that. That's fine. More importantly, they also are eliminating bracket creep. We give them full credit and congratulations for that.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard of tax avoidance before but not tax question avoidance.

Mr. Treasurer, given that the federal government is able to direct

42 percent of its fiscal dividend or surplus to tax cuts, would you explain why, with your supposed leadership, Alberta is only directing 12 percent, only 12 percent, 30 percent less, of its fiscal dividend or surplus to tax cuts?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to hear almost a tone of anger that we're reducing taxes. Next year the combination of the federal tax reduction and the provincial tax reduction for a family – now this is an approximation – in the middle-income range, say around \$55,000, is going to be over a \$1,000, and depending on the number of dependents and what refunds they have coming to them, an average middle-income person, because of what the provincial government has done and the federal government has done, could be up to \$1,200, \$1,300, \$1,500. Just the provincial portion alone of the tax reduction on a family income of \$50,000 is \$907. Add to that \$500 or \$600 that the feds are putting through, and it's something like \$1,500.

I'm congratulating the federal government. I'm congratulating Albertans for telling us to reduce ours. I don't think a \$1,500 or even a \$1,000 tax reduction for a middle-income family is something to be angry about. We're quite excited about it, Mr. Speaker.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been some concerns raised by senior citizens that the government's policy statement on the delivery of surgical services signals a return to the days before public health care, when patients had to pay their own bills or buy expensive private insurance. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: can the minister assure Alberta seniors that they will not have to buy private insurance to pay for necessary health care?

MR. JONSON: Yes, certainly, Mr. Speaker.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the minister say what effects, if any, the proposed policy will have on seniors?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we're going to take great pains in our preparation of the legislation to ensure that seniors do not have to pay for their medically required services. That is a firm commitment. In addition to that, I would just like to point out that beyond the area of medically insured services as they relate to hospitals and to doctors and all the other people that work in the health care system in the acute care area, this government is firmly committed to providing for a continuum of care, to working through the recommendations of the Broda report in terms of healthy aging, and to giving a priority to having the best possible health care system in place for our seniors and pioneers in this province.

2:40

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: does the government's policy mean that medically necessary services may be deinsured, forcing patients to pay for their own medical bills?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the policy statement is very clear and the legislation will be even more precise in that all medically required insured services through the requirements of the Canada Health Act – in Alberta, of course, we go way beyond the specific

requirements for coverage under the Canada Health Act – will continue to be there for seniors, for middle-aged people, for children, for the population of this province. Yes, because the aging population are, of necessity, sometimes major users of the health care system, it is most important that those services be there for them. As shown by our recent budget commitments and also our firm commitment under the proposed legislation, we will make sure that the service is there for our seniors.

Child Welfare

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, the regionalization of child welfare, like health care, has created unnecessary layers of bureaucracy, gaps, and inefficiency. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Can the minister tell the Assembly how file management is co-ordinated for child welfare files at the district, regional, and provincial levels of the department?

Thank you.

MS EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member is aware, some of the most recent signings for child and family service authorities in the local area are even within this last year, and we are working very hard with those authorities to be sure that they're up and running, that their procedures are in order, that standards are in place, focusing primarily on the welfare of the child. A number of the things we have been doing over the past several months: working to alleviate problems affected by workload standards and making sure that the case and the review teams are managing properly.

On the very specific instance of files, I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that we are working with our partnering ministries in making sure that our record-keeping is in order, that we have a plan for the hundred-year retention of files for children. I'm very satisfied on our review prior to Y2K that the CWIS system and the backup to the CWIS system will guarantee that we have security of the files and that the files for children are fully protected.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is it department policy that duplicate files on all children receiving services from child welfare are held at district, regional, and provincial levels?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, for the precise detail of how the copies are held, I cannot account. However, I have met with a consultant that is doing a complete review of the files. I've identified some of the concerns I personally have relative not only to the protection of the files and the privacy and retention of the files, but I'd be very pleased to table any response relative to the file management within the department at the hon. member's pleasure.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. What departmental process occurs if it is established that files are missing or incomplete?

MS EVANS: Again, Mr. Speaker, if this Assembly would so indulge, I would be pleased to bring the detail of that forward. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Grizzly Bears

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Hundreds of students at the Lawrence Grassi school in Canmore have communicated to this government in

recent weeks their concerns regarding the future of grizzly bears. A well-known grizzly bear expert predicts a dangerous decline in grizzly populations in Kananaskis Country due to increased development and human activities. Would the minister please tell us what his department is doing to protect grizzly populations in Kananaskis Country from lethal contact between bears and humans?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I wish to say first of all that I share the concerns expressed by the students at Lawrence Grassi school, and I've read their letters. I'm also familiar with the work of Dr. Steven Herrero, the grizzly bear expert referred to by the hon. member in her question. I'd like to emphasize that the grizzly bear population is on the rise in the province of Alberta. A number of studies have been done throughout the province, including one in southwestern Alberta which dealt with DNA analysis, and it supports a population estimate of roughly 800 grizzly bears in the province, which is up from about 500 in 1987.

Mr. Speaker, my department is studying grizzly bear habitat in Kananaskis Country through support of the eastern slopes grizzly bear project, one of a number of different regional studies being done throughout the province. Our studies also show that human-induced mortality numbers of grizzly bears have been significantly reduced over the last 20 to 25 years.

In the Bow corridor, Mr. Speaker, we have taken a very proactive approach to managing human and bear conflicts. Our Bow region bear conflict prevention plan deals with the safety of people and the bears in Kananaskis Country. For example, when a grizzly bear is spotted on a public trail in Kananaskis Country, that trail is closed to the public. Our staff will then monitor the area to make sure that the bear has cleared off before the trail is reopened.

MRS. TARCHUK: Mr. Speaker, my second question is also to the Minister of Environment. Genesis Land Development Corp. currently has three development proposals in the Spray Lakes area of Kananaskis Country. These young constituents understand that this is prime grizzly bear habitat, and what they would like to know is: how does what we know about grizzly bears affect the proposed development in this area?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, before I proceed to an answer, I would refer hon. members to *Hansard*, issue 4 of this the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature, where I addressed on page 93 a bit of background on the Genesis project. I said and I repeat again that the overriding principle in Kananaskis Country is the protection of the environment. The environmental impact assessment that I ordered for the proposed development of Genesis must take into account grizzly populations and the movements of those bears as part of a very stringent environmental review process.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, my department is gathering public input with respect to the terms of reference for the environmental impact assessment that Genesis would have to prepare should they decide to proceed with this project. I would encourage any Albertan with interest in the area to certainly come forward and provide their input. That information will ensure that a very comprehensive EIA is prepared.

MRS. TARCHUK: My final question is also to the Minister of Environment. These students are aware that a male grizzly bear will roam up to 1,200 square kilometres. What action is your department taking to ensure that bears roaming between federal and provincial jurisdictions continue to be protected?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I would like to emphasize that while we do

co-operate with other jurisdictions, our efforts are primarily focused on looking after grizzly bears that are found on provincial lands. This includes some of the regional management initiatives that I referred to earlier: the southwestern Alberta grizzly bear strategy, the eastern slopes grizzly bear project, the grizzly bear relocation project, the Foothills model forest grizzly bear research, and the boreal grizzly bear project. My department is working with the federal government to address jurisdictional issues involving grizzly bears in Kananaskis Country and Banff national park through the Canadian Rocky Mountain Grizzly Bear Planning Committee.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that we do place a great deal of emphasis on the protection of grizzly bears in the province of Alberta, and perhaps I'll conclude with this one note with respect to the Foothills model forest grizzly bear research that's being done. It is considered very much leading-edge research, so much so that recent presentations have been made by the Foothills model forest research in China because the Chinese authorities are interested in using the type of work being done in that research for the protection of panda bears in China.

2:50

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of three members to participate in Members' Statements today.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Youth Connections Program

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past five years Alberta has consistently maintained one of the three lowest overall youth unemployment rates in Canada, but we want to do even better. We are succeeding thanks in great part to a valuable youth employment program called Youth Connections.

In 1997 Alberta launched Youth Connections as two pilot projects, Edmonton and Calgary, to help young people age 16 to 24 improve their employment prospects. From the very beginning the service has been a hit. Working in partnership with local business, educators, and community agencies, Youth Connections offers young people who are unemployed or underemployed a way to connect to a career planning service, labour market information, work experience training, and meaningful employment opportunities. At Youth Connections they can find one-on-one career counseling, group workshops on a variety of subjects, computers for resume development and Internet access, a resource library, an extensive employer network, and much more. When appropriate, youth are also encouraged and assisted to go back to school.

By the end of the second year of operation over 10,000 youth took advantage of services offered through Youth Connections. Following this initial success, the Alberta government doubled the funding for Youth Connections to \$5 million to expand this unique employment service throughout the province, and expand they did. From the 13 new locations initially planned for this fiscal year, Youth Connections now helps young people in 20 additional sites from Grande Prairie to Lethbridge. By this summer young people from 32 communities throughout Alberta will have new opportunities to reach their full potential and share in the province's prosperity.

Youth Connections is a true success story. I would like to invite members of the Assembly to visit a Youth Connections site in their constituency and see what a fine job they are doing to give young Albertans a step-up in their careers and their lives.

Thank you.

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

Calgary Herald Strike

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The strike at the *Herald*, Calgary's oldest and largest daily, is poised to enter its fifth month. I would like to believe that any strike in the province would be a concern for the government, but when questioned a few weeks ago about the role of the government in the *Herald* dispute, all the minister in charge of stable labour relations could say was that he hadn't heard much about it. What a sad commentary on the importance this government places on stable labour relations.

Long and divisive job action is too common under the watch of this government. Calgary just finished a long, divisive, and occasionally violent strike at Dynamic Furniture and now faces yet another one at the *Herald*. During the Dynamic Furniture strike many workers expressed their frustration over the lack of leadership provided by government MLAs in Calgary to help resolve the dispute. The workers made their opinion known about how poorly the government handled the situation at the recent PC nomination in Calgary-McCall. The sitting MLA had to take the fall for an uninterested member in a government that places a low priority on stable labour relations.

So what should the role of the government be in the *Calgary Herald* strike, Mr. Speaker? Firstly, it should be informed and concerned. Secondly, it should preside over a labour relations framework that leads to a resolution, not to further confrontation. A perfect example of this would be binding arbitration on first contracts, and this is a change that the government refuses to make. Finally, the government should know when to intervene and when not to based on common sense, not on preference for one side of a dispute over another. Sadly, our government fails on all three counts, and the people who pay for this lack of concern are the people of Calgary who rely on the newspaper to keep them informed.

On behalf of the Official Opposition I'm hoping that a resolution to this dispute can be found fairly and quickly. I'm sure the current minister responsible does not want to be known as the Neville Chamberlain of Alberta labour relations.

Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Before calling on the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, hon. members, when this Assembly agreed to participate in these two unique processes, one called Recognitions and the other Members' Statements, several sessions ago there was one hon. member who was giving a member's statement and another member rose on a point of order. At that point in time the chair said that he really believed that the whole purpose of members' statements was to allow a member a free expression and did not recognize a petition for a point of order.

Inherent in that understanding by this chairman would be that discussion and statements made in members' statements might deal with policy and not deal with individuals. If members are going to make comments about other individuals, then methinks that the chair must rethink his statement of several years ago and perhaps see the need for points of order or points of privilege to arise out of members' statements. I just give that as a statement today, and some time and thought will be spent on this subject in the future.

Spray Lake Sawmills Ltd.

MRS. TARCHUK: Mr. Speaker, it's a great privilege for me to rise before the House today and recognize a business in the constituency of Banff-Cochrane that serves as a great example of progressive environmental stewardship and financial success. On February 23

Spray Lake Sawmills Ltd. of Cochrane was awarded the Premier's award of distinction as well as the EPCOR triple bottom-line award at the ninth annual Alberta business awards presentation in Calgary, hosted by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce.

The Premier's award of distinction is given to the organization which best embodies the Alberta advantage, exhibits overall outstanding achievement and leadership in Alberta, and demonstrates ongoing and consistent involvement in community events and organizations. The triple bottom-line award is given to a business that best demonstrates excellence in the areas of financial success, environmental commitment and achievement, and community involvement.

Spray Lake Sawmills has been part of the Alberta economy for over 50 years. The family-owned business is the largest employer in Cochrane and has maintained steady growth over the years. The company's primary objective is to ensure high levels of environmental performance and high levels of sustainability while recognizing other forest values and users. As part of its commitment to the environment Spray Lake Sawmills has over the past several years voluntarily embarked upon an extensive public consultation process that involved numerous stakeholders in developing harvest plans for the McLean Creek area of Kananaskis Country. Additionally, they are developing a range of unique wood by-products and have achieved virtually 100 percent utilization of the harvested timber.

Spray Lake Sawmills is a homegrown Cochrane success story and a provincial leader in the area of corporate citizenship. Please join me in congratulating the Mjolsness family and all Spray Lake Sawmills' employees for a job well done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Decorum

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising under Standing Order 23(j), which prohibits the use of "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I'm mindful of the fact that you had to intercede twice today to remind members of the House about decorum, about the fact that the public is watching, about the fact that the reputation of members of the House is at stake not just as individual members but as leaders in our community, as politicians, and as people who are elected here to represent this House.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona in his remarks – and I say that advisedly. It was supposed to be a short, succinct, brief preamble to a question, but it was indeed remarks. If I caught it correctly, he used, among other things, language like: all kinds of tricks. I'm using that simple phrase. There were other phrases around his question today, and there were other phrases around his question on previous days that I mentioned. It is inappropriate, in my submission, Mr. Speaker, to put in preambles of questions connotations of that nature which suggest that leaders of this province are up to trickery and deceit and those sorts of things.

3:00

It is quite appropriate for members opposite, including the interim leader of the New Democrat opposition, to raise questions about policy, to attack policy, to attack what the government is doing, even on occasion perhaps to provide constructive criticism, but it is quite inappropriate and improper, in my humble submission, to draw down all members of this House, including members of the opposition, to be raising questions of deceit, raising questions of trickery,

using language of that nature which throws mud on us all and sticks to himself as well as to everybody else, when we're trying to raise the level of public confidence in their politicians and leaders both on the government side of the House and on the opposition side of the House.

I think that in the context of your admonition to the House today twice about decorum, there should be a further admonition with respect to the preamble to the hon. member's question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on this point of order.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission, I would like to just draw attention to what I said. The hon. Government House Leader talks about the reputation of members, the reputation of leaders of this province, and makes a reference to words like "deceit," which were never used by me and never used in reference to the leaders of this province or the leaders of this government or members of this House.

The words that I used – I just want to put them on record again. I'm talking about the government, and governments are accountable. Governments are motivated agencies, organizations, because they are to achieve certain goals. So I can't see how questioning a government, holding a government to account for what it does leads to or constitutes either insulting or putting in doubt the reputation of leaders or the members of this House. Never once did I refer to a person in my question, Mr. Speaker. I did use the word "tricks." Tricks are techniques or means. This is the sense in which I used the word "tricks." It could be techniques; it could be means.

I'm wondering where the point of order lies. I certainly am most respectful of the dignity of this House and of each member of this House and their right to be able to speak freely on behalf of their constituents and on behalf of Albertans without insulting each other. I don't see the point of order in the hon. House leader's submission today, so I think there's no point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, several points today. The chair did have to rise and remind hon. members about decorum. Quite frankly, of all the questions that were raised in the question period today – and the chair was taking some liberty with the calculation of them: 25, 28, 32. Thirty-two questions in all were raised today, and I do believe that of all the 32 questions, only four actually fell within all the rules of question period. I think 28 of the 32 could have been ruled out.

Methinks as well that it's amazing how many hypothetical questions we have about a bill that has not been introduced, and what will happen if no bill is introduced? Secondly, then, the second series of questions is: if we didn't have a federal budget yesterday, what would the other questions have been? Quite frankly, other than the Member for Peace River and the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I think that the other 28 questions out of 32 quite legitimately could have been ruled out at one time or another.

Part of what happened today has to do with tone, part of what happened today has to do with manner, and I suspect that part of what happened today has to do with decorum. There's absolutely no doubt whatsoever that if one takes a look at *Beauchesne*, the word "trickery" has been ruled unparliamentary for a great period of years, and that is not the best question that can be used. But it's also been ruled parliamentary as well, so it depends entirely on the kind of situation that you arrive at.

Now, in the question that was raised today, this was the question by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Speaker, why is the government using all manner of questionable tricks, which most Albertans are sure to find insulting and offensive, in a desperate, last-ditch effort to persuade Albertans that

contracting out of major surgeries requiring overnight patient stays should be legalized?

Well, one would suspect that if we applied all the rules with respect to the tone of questions and not being argumentative and not asking for opinion, that question would have been ruled out right at the start and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona couldn't have asked his question because it would have violated certainly certain things in 409 and 410.

A lot of this is in reference to, again, the tone and the intent. It's quite clear that most of the Standing Orders that we have have to deal with individuals, allegations against another member, and in this case one does not appreciate the language overall that was used today in the Assembly. On the other hand, one also has to accept the word of an hon. member, and if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona makes the point that it was not his intent to insult anyone, that he was simply going after policy, well, then one has to accept that. But one would also say again: this was not our best day.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a point of privilege.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd given notice before to preserve my right to make that argument. I've considered the matter further. I received some additional information and on reflection will not be proceeding with the question of privilege I'd given notice of before.

Thank you for the opportunity.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 204

Agricultural and Recreational Land Ownership Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate February 23: Mr. McFarland]

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

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. With respect to Bill 204, I might start off by saying this. If this bill was genuinely focused on a thoughtful proposal to deal with protecting the family farm in this province, we might well have had a useful, thoughtful debate about it, but this bill is not that kind of proposal. Make no mistake about it: this bill is focused almost exclusively on the Hutterian Brethren Church.

It was interesting that the sponsor of the bill started off by saying: you know, this is not an assault on freedom of religion, and this isn't focused on the Hutterite brethren. But the entire second reading speech by the sponsor is replete with references to Hutterite colonies and particularly to Hutterite colonies in southern Alberta. In fact, he said at page 72 in Hansard:

This is the only church, the only charitable, not-for-profit corporation in Alberta, that wants religious freedom but is also the single largest farming unit in Alberta, that is also approaching closer than any one of the other groups the 15 percent limitation.

The Member for Little Bow in his defence of this bill has made it crystal clear that this is specifically targeted to and against those Albertans living on a Hutterite colony.

You know, Mr. Speaker, one of the proudest moments, I think, for the Lougheed government when they were first elected was the repeal of the Communal Property Act in 1972. That act, of course, had provided formally that you couldn't increase the size of a colony without the consent of the Communal Property Board. Communal living was described in the words of Grant Notley on November 15,

1972, as

one of the two principal tenets of the Hutterian faith, and as a consequence the act . . .

He was referring here to the Communal Property Act.

. . . whether by design or otherwise – conflicts with the principle of freedom of religion . . . [and] also offends the principle of freedom of association.

Now, it was interesting in the debate around the repeal of the Communal Property Act that Mr. Notley also noted a need for some form of rural land use controls, so there is clearly a case that can be made for talking about land use controls. In fact, I'll quote again from Mr. Notley, who spoke to the bill in 1972, where he said:

In the long run, it is my submission that the family farm is far more challenged by the threat of corporate farming, alien ownership of land or absentee ownership of land, than it is by the expansion of Hutterite colonies.

Mr. Speaker, it's instructive, and I encourage all members to look at the work that was done in this province around studying the impact of communal property and the Communal Property Board. The Department of Municipal Affairs' special advisory office put out a report entitled Communal Property in Alberta. What they did in this analysis was go through and debunk a lot of the myths that surround Hutterite colonies, and they dealt with some of the myths like: Hutterite colonies are not an economic asset to the province or to local communities; false. They dealt with the myth that Hutterite colonies are causing the demise of rural communities. False. They dealt with the myth that Hutterite colonies are crowding out other farmers. False. They dealt with myths such as Hutterites don't pay taxes, that they don't comply with the law, that they're not good citizens, and on and on and on.

3:10

I encourage members to read this item – it's in the Leg. Library downstairs – because it helps to give us some history around this thing, and it also helps to understand why I think it's so poisonous to start a debate around control of lands in this province by spicing your debate with reference to Hutterite colonies instead of focusing on corporate farms or absentee ownership and those kinds of things.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's also instructive if we look to some of the things said by the hon. Dave Russell when he moved second reading – this would be November 15, 1972 – to repeal the old Communal Property Act. I'll just paraphrase. He said that at that point the provincial government was bringing in the Alberta Bill of Rights, and he said quite frankly that

if this government was serious about its legislation with respect to human rights and the rights of the individual, and the rights that we want to confirm in the legislation of Alberta affecting all Alberta citizens, that The Communal Properties Act, in its present form, had to be dealt with.

He goes on to say that the way it was to be dealt with was that it was to be eliminated.

He said further:

It became apparent that if a person believed in the Bill of Human Rights, then The Communal Properties Act had to be repealed and it was that simple.

The provincial Conservative government, the first Conservative government in Alberta, to its credit proceeded to do exactly that, to repeal the Communal Property Act, and it is a credit to each one of those men and women in the Legislative Assembly at that time that they did in fact repeal it.

What is frightening, I think, is that as we listen to the Member for Little Bow, it's as if that debate had never happened and he would take us right back to the days of communal property boards. So much for freedom of religion. So much for freedom of association.

Mr. Speaker, the other comments I might refer members to are

some comments made, again, by the hon. Dave Russell in closing debate at second reading, and these were effectively some of the last words spoken around the old Communal Property Act. He was quoting from some of the reports – the report I'd mentioned earlier, that's in the library downstairs, and another one – and he said this.

"In 1770 Catherine the Great of Russia encouraged the Hutterites to come in and improve unsettled areas. In 1873 in the United States both government and railway officials pressured the Hutterites to move into the United States." Turning the page we find that the former premier Mr. Brownlee's government, "sensitive to the views of rural municipal organizations, urged the federal government to allow the Hutterites to immigrate. Due to the depressed conditions, local residents of southern Alberta wished to sell their land to the Hutterites; and moreover the fact that the colonies were self-sufficient made them an asset to municipal organizations.

We can go back. I have a keen interest in history, but I think when we deal with the bill that's in front of us, everybody ought to spend some time looking at the history on communal properties. I think that what it comes down to is this, Mr. Speaker. If we're going to deal with large corporate farms, if we're going to deal with alien landownership, let's deal with it from a starting point of respecting freedom of religion, respecting freedom of association, and let's make sure that the mischief we're going to deal with is appropriate and that the bill is appropriately targeted.

So I just come back to what I started out saying. I think it's fair to have a discussion about land ownership, although sometimes when I hear some of the comments from the Member for Little Bow, I sort of close my eyes and imagine we're back in the British Museum in London in 1916 beside Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, later known as Lenin. He would have thought this would be an excellent idea, this kind of state control of private ownership and this whole notion of having a bureaucracy deciding how big or how small farms are going to be and who can own farms. He would have felt right at home in 1917 participating and probably supporting the bill. I'm just trying to imagine in my mind the Member for Little Bow and Mr. Lenin sitting around the table in the British Museum and the conversation they might have had. But enough of that, Mr. Speaker.

I think my point is that I cannot support the bill, not because I don't think that there's a legitimate issue around it, but I have to find a way to distance myself, to dissociate myself as completely as possible from the observations and the remarks that were made by the Member for Little Bow. I've read the lessons that I think Alberta's supposed to have learned from that sorry experience with communal property. I've read the debates and I've read the recognition of Mr. Russell and that first Conservative government when they repealed it, and I don't want to go there again, Mr. Speaker. I'd urge all members to avoid the temptation to get into running roughshod over freedom of association or freedom of religion disguised as something else.

The next thing one might talk about is: well, we pass this bill, and then we'd better put in a notwithstanding clause because there's certainly going to be . . . [interjection] Well, we have our friend from Red Deer here who has some expertise in that area too. That suggestion may come, and I want to distance myself from any suggestion of the notwithstanding clause too. I'm not sure, when I hear the sentiments of the bill sponsor and what he's really focused on, namely Hutterite colonies, that any resulting legislation is going to pass Charter muster.

Mr. Speaker, I support the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I support freedom of religion. I support freedom of association. I accept as a legislator that we have to design laws that respect those fundamental principles and work around them, and I'm fearful that this private member's bill is taking us in a direction which is more about abrogating rights than it is about trying to deal with some of

those legitimate questions in terms of land use planning.

Those are the comments that I wanted to make at this stage, Mr. Speaker. Thanks very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 204, the Agricultural and Recreational Land Ownership Amendment Act. The intent of this bill is to limit ownership of arable, cultivated land by any individual, corporation, or religious group to 15 percent of the total farmland in any municipality or county. The bill will help create a level playing field between Alberta farmers, corporations, and communal farming operations.

The Member for Little Bow has brought this bill forward because he and his constituents believe that all Albertans want to have fairness and a level playing field within the industry and a brighter future for their next generation. This issue is on the minds of many Albertans involved in some form of agriculture business.

This bill may well help solve some of the issues, but I believe that the issue is much bigger than landownership. This bill leads us into the discussion of monopolies, whether it be grain, machine agencies, chemicals, processing, Wheat Board control, as well as landownership. These all have a huge impact on the farmer and his ability to compete. His very viability is related to ownership of land.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, I believe that before we target limited landownership, we should certainly have some solutions to many of the problems that I mentioned that cause the increased landholdings. It's no secret that rural communities in Alberta are undergoing massive changes as we begin this new millennium. There are a variety of reasons for the rationalization, and many of them are out of this government's control. I'd like to mention just a few.

Elevators, that marked every village and town in the province, are disappearing and will nearly be all gone by the end of this year. They are being replaced by huge throughput facilities that are approximately 75 to 100 miles apart. Farmers are struggling against transportation issues involving marketing freedom and a bureaucratic federal government that seems unwilling to change. These items transfer \$200 million to \$300 million to \$400 million a year back to the individual farmer.

Mr. Speaker, the cards are stacked and are forcing expansion by the producers. The product of our work, the commodities that we export, have been cheapened by backward socialist policies in Europe, causing surpluses in many of the world markets that we sell into. The Europeans swore after the war that they would never be hungry and short of food again, and they're prepared to subsidize accordingly. We have absolutely no control over what other countries do, so we have to find other ways to compete.

Mr. Speaker, it appears that global warming has also taken its toll. Battling these abnormal weather conditions has been a very difficult challenge. But monopolies are another big piece to the puzzle. There are only two major machine manufacturers left. Large combines and tractors now are costing up towards \$300,000. Even small ones are up to \$100,000 or more. Farmers are trying to buy those machines with \$3 wheat. That's like three cups of coffee for a bushel of their wheat.

As the Member for Little Bow mentioned last week, total ownership from gate to plate leaves control in the hands of a few. The same is true for chemicals and fertilizers. Control of markets means control of prices. If the price of wheat were doubled, I wonder if there would be any more money left in the producer's

pocket. Or would the input costs go up accordingly? Certainly the history in Europe has shown that the input costs go up accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, just for a minute I want to tell you a little bit of a story about monopolies. It was a university professor that started this going. Now, I don't know whether that means anything or not. It was about a cheap food policy in North America. As we developed bigger and better equipment and the prices stayed low, farmers kept buying out other farmers. They kept buying them out and the bigger machinery allowed them to do that until there were only a few left. Then one day there was a big drought in the southern part of North America, and one farmer, one producer, bought out the whole U.S. He had all this big equipment to operate it. That was the end of the cheap food policy. It not only did that. Inefficiency sets in when there's no competition, and there wasn't enough food produced. Now, I know this is a what-if story, but it shows the direction that we are taking in this country, and it's worldwide.

What I want to say is that we need to take a bigger view of this picture. I think we need to sit down and think about what we want our province to look like in the next 50 or hundred years, and once we do that, we can establish the policy that sets a framework for land use in our province. We need to develop a policy that will take us where we want to go in terms of landownership. As agricultural resources and markets for products are gradually owned and operated by corporations, the small, individual farmer slowly loses his ability to determine his own destiny.

Mr. Speaker, this issue is extremely complex. It's something that countries around the world are struggling with. We need to take a good look at some of the things the U.S. and Europe are doing and if they apply to our situation in Alberta. As was mentioned last week, some states do limit landownership. We need to find out how this is working, and we need to explore all of those types of options before we jump in and limit landownership. We have to study this problem and perhaps look for solutions that we haven't even considered before. By establishing a policy that addresses the use of land, we are one step closer to addressing the issues that face the agriculture industry in this province.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 only attempts to address a small portion of this issue. Is there a level playing field in the province now? In some ways I suspect not, but if the playing field isn't level, it should be addressed either through the regulations or the specific acts that address that concern but not through the Agricultural and Recreational Land Ownership Amendment Act. I'm convinced that large corporations or the Hutterian Brethren Church would be willing to sit down with government and work out any differences, if there are any.

The good news is that the world's population is growing. The day will come when farmland is the most valuable commodity this province has to offer, long after the conventional oil has been tapped, and the best way for us to capitalize on that is to ensure that the agriculture industry is strong and diverse. My constituents believe that the independent farmer is still a part of this mix. This would be a great topic of discussion for the upcoming agriculture summit, where we will have some of the brightest minds offering their input. I look forward with anticipation to that input.

We know that the agriculture industry is changing. Technology and new challenges are changing the way we do business. New technology enables us to do more with less. Vertical integration in the industry has found new efficiencies, revolutionizing the food production industry. We find ourselves at an interesting point in our history. On the one hand, technology is showing us the limitless possibilities there are in the agriculture industry. On the other, corporate . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time

allocation for this subject has now expired.

3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Service Learning Program for High School Students

501. Mrs. Gordon moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to incorporate as part of the high school curriculum a service learning program encouraging students to become involved in activities that promote and demonstrate good citizenship, community service, and personal responsibility.

[Debate adjourned February 22: Ms Carlson speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and join in the debate on Motion 501 today. Service learning education has very positive goals and objectives. Its mandate to students is to aid in the development of young people into responsible citizens and contributing community members. By affording students the option of participating in meaningful service that is beneficial to themselves and to the greater community and reinforcing those lessons through academic preparation and structured reflection, students, parents, teachers, faculty, and the community can band together to provide young Albertans with tremendous opportunities to express themselves not just as members of society but as members of society who take ownership, responsibility, and pride in the contributions they offer.

Mr. Speaker, service learning is a new way to get back to basics. It is a learn-by-doing approach to the curriculum. Students enhance their education by getting real-life experiences in subjects they study while at the same time meeting community needs.

An effective service learning project is comprised of at least three components: preparation, action, and reflection. Preparing students with the knowledge and skills needed for service includes teaching students about their community and how to identify needs as well as providing them with the specific skills needed to perform the service activities. Preparation should include an explanation of why it is important to perform the service and what it means to be an active citizen.

Ideally, service learning should be used to teach curricular objectives, so preparation activities could be tied to classroom lessons. Some examples might include having a speaker come in to teach students about working with elderly residents in a nursing home before going to visit the site, having a representative from the United Way or a volunteer centre come and talk about the volunteer opportunities in the community, or performing a research assignment about the issue the service relates to.

Action is the second necessary component to service learning and is achieved by performing one or more of several activities. Some students are involved in direct-service activities, where students have face-to-face contact with the service recipient. Some examples might include tutoring, serving meals at a homeless shelter, or working with the elderly in a nursing home. Other students may perform indirect services without having face-to-face contact with recipients. This form of action usually channels resources to help alleviate a certain problem. Some examples include food and clothing drives, fund-raisers, and environmental projects.

Other students may choose to become involved in advocacy action by educating others about a particular issue, with the goal being to eliminate the cause of a particular problem. Letter campaigns, preparing and displaying posters, putting on plays, or developing

educational material for others are examples of advocacy measures.

Mr. Speaker, the final component to a successful service learning program is reflection. During this phase students consider the impact that their service had on themselves and the community as well as what worked well and what could be changed to make the project better. Reflection might include a journal, having classroom discussions, or videotaping the project and reviewing and discussing it after.

Service learning is not the same as volunteerism. Volunteers engage in service for a variety of personal reasons. They do not link their service to academic studies, nor do they receive academic credit for their efforts. Service learning also differs from community service in that people become engaged in that activity for yet another variety of reasons. Community service is a broad term that can encompass a court-ordered stipend or traditional voluntary services. It also does not link to academic studies, which is a basic tenet of service learning programs.

Work study internship is also different from service learning in that the student interns frequently work at a nonprofit business to benefit the financial standing of that business. Students are not necessarily working to improve their communities through their internship experiences. However, as my colleague from Wetaskiwin-Camrose pointed out, there can be potential for overlap between work study initiatives, special project courses, and service learning. Students could engage themselves in service learning if through their internship, experiences, or special projects they work to improve the health or welfare of their community while linking their services to academic studies.

Mr. Speaker, the concept of learning through service is gaining momentum among educational stakeholders. The advocates of service learning believe that this method facilitates school improvement. The combination of classroom work and community service produces significant improvement in student attitudes, motivation, and achievement.

Service learning represents an innovative approach to youth involvement and meaningful learning through community service activities. The relevance and power of the method lie in the capacity of service learning to connect classroom learning to real-life situations. Students involved in service learning benefit in numerous ways. Their experiences contribute to personal growth, knowledge, skills, and values, focusing on citizenship and civic responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, the recently rekindled discussion on service learning has been fueled by recognizing a need to positively influence our current youth culture. Through service learning teachers and students would become energized through a unique educational process that encourages action to improve or enhance a real-life situation.

Action should be placed on the potential of youth, their strengths, participation, and capacity for making positive contributions. The involvement of youth in service learning activities can make a lasting difference by providing them a sense of purpose and motivating them to remain in school and learn. With the best interests of students in mind it is important to seek collaboration among the stakeholders and reach an agreement on how service learning can positively influence student development and student achievement.

Mr. Speaker, service learning aims to connect the personal and the intellectual to help students acquire knowledge that is useful in understanding the world by building critical-thinking capacities and perhaps leading students to ask fundamental questions about learning and about society while committing themselves to improve both. Service learning aims to prepare students who are lifelong learners to participate in the world. Service combined with learning adds value to each and transforms both.

So I would urge all members of this Assembly to support Motion

501, to encourage the building of new bridges between our educational system, our community, and the youth of our province.

Thank you.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to rise to speak to Motion 501, the incorporation of a service learning program in the high school curriculum. This motion was sponsored by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, and I must say that I am generally in favour of this motion. It does require a close look at what this would do to our curriculum studies in schools. Before giving full support to this particular motion, I think that there are a number of questions and clarifications that are required.

In looking at clarification, I think that there are some terms that we have to look at very closely. What do we mean by "good citizenship, community service, and personal responsibility"? How would this course differ, for example, from what is happening in our CALM program now or in our social studies or even the component of our physical education 30 classes that requires most students in them to participate in some type of service learning? The Member for Lacombe-Stettler also spoke of the service ethic and the community involvement programs, and we would certainly want to have some more clarification on this particular point.

We do know right now that our education system, particularly education at the high school level, is quite restrictive, particularly on those students who are trying to graduate in the three-year program. If we put in another voluntary course, is this going to be another course that these students would not be able to fit into their schedules?

I think there are components of this course that are very, very beneficial, and it certainly would be a good balance to what is happening now in our schools, where we do have a tremendous amount of focus on math and science. I think this is proven by how well our students in Alberta do in these two disciplines, so I really do feel that this would be a great offset of those two programs and that if time permitted, it would not detract from the great strides that we've made in these two areas.

3:40

Edmonton-Glengarry, Mr. Speaker, is a constituency in northeast Edmonton, and Edmontonians will tell you that the northeast has long prided itself on the amount of community involvement by its citizens and the tremendous amount of volunteering that occurs in that community. By incorporating a course on service learning, we will put students in a situation where they will have quite a number of new experiences and, I'm certain, good experiences, but this will put pressure on our core programs.

When we look at schools, as well, we do realize that the schools themselves and the communities have a tremendous number of programs that our youth are currently involved in. I would hope to see some type of a situation here whereby these students could possibly get credit for the time that they do spend currently in the school programs, the community programs in place of volunteering. It might be that the number of hours required for volunteering in this course are written down to a certain degree because of this involvement. As well, those programs that do take place in the community and the school do not only involve participation by a student but also the volunteering of other students to serve as timekeepers, for example, during a basketball game or a statistician on a basketball team or whatever.

As well, we had a reference made in the last discussion on sports about how perhaps these students could get involved in increasing

their capabilities and abilities in coaching different sports. As part of my background I have been quite involved in sports here in the province, and I must say that all of the sports that we presently have in Alberta have a requirement that coaches who wish to participate in the sport must take coaching levels. Certainly in all sports the performance of coaches has increased tremendously as a result. I would think that if these students were to get involved in these particular types of programs, it would certainly be a great initial step in seeing them get involved as adults as they get older.

Now, all students do have the option of taking this course, Mr. Speaker, but one of the drawbacks is that if they do choose to take this course, in reality it is a type of involuntary volunteerism.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I hate once again to interrupt, but under Standing Order 8(4) the time allocation for this particular motion has now left us, and I must now put all questions, concluding the debate under consideration.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

Canada Health Act

502. Mr. Shariff moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to reaffirm its commitment to the five principles of the Canada Health Act and ensure that all provincial health care legislation continues to comply with these principles.

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

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move Motion 502.

Mr. Speaker, public health care is part of the fabric of Alberta's culture, something very dear to all Albertans. Since the concept of publicly funded universal health care was developed over 30 years ago, it has become part of our identity as Canadians. Countless surveys have shown that when Canadians are asked to identify things that make them proud to be Canadians, public health care often tops the list. There is a comfort, a peace of mind that comes from knowing that when that day comes when we are most in need, our public health care system will give us the treatment we need. And when the crisis is over, Canadians don't receive a massive bill. Our public health care system means that we don't have to choose between what is good for our health and what is good for our bank accounts.

In 1984 Parliament unanimously passed the Canada Health Act. The Canada Health Act was intended to establish criteria and conditions for insured health services and extended health care services provided under provincial law that must be met before a full cash contribution may be made by the federal government. The act stipulates that the health care system must be publicly administered and operated on a nonprofit basis by a public authority. It stipulates that insured services must be comprehensive. It also says that the system must be universal, that all individuals are covered under the system. The act says that people must be covered no matter where and when they move within the country and that there are no charges for insured services. It seeks to maintain a universal level of quality across the country. It means that all Canadian citizens are guaranteed a certain level of quality and accessibility.

Along with this legislative commitment come the challenges of having to administer a massive system like public health care. It has become our province's single biggest expenditure. Of the \$16.2 billion we spent in 1999, 30 percent went to health care. In the 2000-2001 fiscal year our government will spend \$5.6 billion on

health care. Mr. Speaker, health care spending has been difficult to control. A growing population and inflation have resulted in steadily increasing costs. It is not easy to meet the challenges of maintaining such an immense and valuable system.

Albertans expect a good public health system, and they deserve it. We are bombarded with stories about the latest misstep in our health system. Opposition members remind us constantly about people waiting too long for surgeries or MRIs, people getting sent from one hospital to another, people sitting too long waiting for treatment in emergency.

[Mr. Hlady in the chair]

What you don't hear often are the miracles that happen in the health system. Every day around 32 babies are born in Calgary hospitals, and that is just the beginning. There are immunizations and programs for young mothers. There's long-term and palliative care, and there are people, thousands of people – doctors, nurses, emergency workers, physiotherapists and rehab workers, administrators, technologists, home care workers – a variety of people working in community programs. It's business about people, and it works.

The challenges facing our health care system are growing. It is not unreasonable to imagine that one day more than half of our total spending will be dedicated to health care. That's why we need to continue to find new opportunities to maintain our commitment to the Canada Health Act. We should leave no stone unturned in our search for newer and better ways of doing things. We must explore new technologies and methodologies. We have to make the health care system flexible enough to change with the times and adapt to new circumstances.

The biggest challenge we face in helping to end the suffering of Albertans is our finite resources. Mr. Speaker, in a perfect world there would be no waiting lists for health care in this province. Every person in need would have their problem addressed immediately. If you tore a ligament in your knee, you'd have it fixed the next day. Unfortunately, this is not a perfect world. We don't have the resources to treat every problem immediately. We cannot ensure that revenues will always be as they are now. We cannot commit to building more hospitals and more clinics because we are not sure if our sons and daughters will have the resources to pay for them after we are gone.

3:50

So how do we address this problem? How do we reduce waiting lists and help people get on with their lives as fast as possible? Mr. Speaker, our government has developed a policy statement on the delivery of surgical services. This policy will give the health care system the flexibility to contract out certain surgical services to private medical practitioners. Under the system the RHAs will be able to grant contracts to Alberta entrepreneurs to complement the existing health system.

This proposal means that waiting lists can be reduced without the government having to build new buildings and infrastructure. It means the government does not bear the long-term cost of maintaining health care facilities. It gives health care operators the freedom to go out and find ways of treating those who need to be treated. This policy will help Alberta meet the commitments laid out in the Canada Health Act. The policy even adds another principle, excellence. That means that services offered in a private setting will be legally required to be of the highest quality.

We have asked Albertans how they feel about this policy, and 59 percent of respondents said that they supported this policy, which is surprising, considering the massive campaign of misinformation that

is going on. When asked why they support the policy, 38 percent said that it was because they wanted shorter waiting lists. Of the people polled, 72 percent believed that contracting out services would reduce waiting lists, and that is what this all comes down to: do we want to have long waiting periods for treatment, or shall we try something new and innovative?

It is clear that there is a great deal of misinformation out there around this government's policy on health care. This is a perfect opportunity to express to Albertans our commitment to universal health care. Passing this motion sends a crystal clear signal to Albertans, opposition members, and the special interest groups who question our commitment to the Canada Health Act.

Special interest groups have continually spread misinformation about the proposed health care legislation. Albertans have seen an endless parade of television ads, press conferences, and so-called expert opinions. And I mean it when I say that it is a campaign of fear. We've all seen and heard how the lobbyists are going to seniors' centres and long-term care centres to supposedly educate them about this government's intentions. It's perhaps the cruelest of all tactics to go to the people who rely so heavily on the health care system and fill them with fear.

Mr. Speaker, I have to be honest here and say that I'm feeling like I'm experiencing *deja vu*. I feel like I'm having a terrible nightmare, that we've returned to 1993. In 1993-94, as our government fought to do what Albertans told us to do and eliminate the deficit, those who opposed us launched a victim of the week campaign to frighten Albertans into rejecting our reforms. They paraded the poor and infirm for all to see and branded us as evil tyrants. Over and over we heard that the sky was falling. The sick and the aged were told that our government was trying to take their care away. Look at us now. The sky has not fallen. Our health care system is still in place and is stronger and more efficient than it ever was. The sick and aged were used as pawns in this elaborate propaganda campaign and ultimately became real victims, victims of a cowardly tactic. The good news is that Albertans didn't buy it last time, and they aren't going to buy it this time.

Mr. Speaker, it is painfully clear to me that the status quo is not going to be effective in the not-too-distant future. This government has gone above and beyond the call of duty when it comes to the Canada Health Act. Let's talk about some of the things the Alberta system covers that are over and above those stipulated in the Canada Health Act. In addition to meeting the requirements set out in the Canada Health Act, the Alberta government has chosen to provide full or partial coverage for many other services, such as long-term care, home care, immunization programs for children, diagnostic services like CAT scans and MRIs, mental health services, extended health benefits for seniors and widows, respite care, palliative care, air ambulance, podiatry, physical therapy, speech pathology, and occupational therapy. The list goes on and on and on.

The point is that our government has been a reliable and responsible steward of the public health care system for decades. We will continue the tradition into the distant future. I'm proud to stand before the House and sponsor this motion. I'm hopeful that Albertans will see this as another sign that we are totally committed to maintaining universal public health care in Alberta. That commitment is solid throughout the entire government.

I also hope Albertans see the lobbyists and the special interest groups for what they really are, shameless alarmists with their own hidden agendas. Mr. Speaker, these lobbyists and special interest groups are looking out for their own well-being, desperately struggling for self-preservation, and like the dinosaurs they will ultimately lose their struggle, because the Alberta way is not to bury our head in the sand. The Alberta way is to meet problems head-on and find answers.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, this campaign of fear is not a new tactic. No, not at all. We have seen it all before. Albertans didn't buy it in 1994, and they aren't going to buy it now. The status quo could mean the end of publicly funded health care in Alberta. I invite all members of this Legislature to join me in reaffirming for all Albertans our commitment to the five principles of the Canada Health Act. Standing together and supporting this motion would be a reassuring gesture to concerned Albertans that we are not planning to privatize health care and that we are all in this together.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of health care is one that is dear to most Albertans. I think Members of this Legislative Assembly should be mindful that we are dealing with people: children, their parents, and the elderly. We must ensure that the people of Alberta know the truth about our government's intentions. If you agree that health care is facing a serious challenge, we should work together to find solutions aimed at preserving health care for coming generations. I urge members of this Assembly to put fear mongering aside in this debate and join us at the table and work towards positive change.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to address the motion that's been put forward with regards to the principles in the Canada Health Act. It's interesting to note that when the Official Opposition put that forward in legislation, members of the government stood en masse to reject the principles of the Canada Health Act. Here we are three years later, and all of a sudden it seems they have found the light.

It is also interesting to note that while we have the words that indicate there is a commitment to the Canada Health Act – and they are fine words indeed – about it being part of the fabric of our country and that the five principles are important to ensure that individuals who require health care do in fact receive the care that is needed, we have watched on this side in the Legislative Assembly, the Official Opposition's side, for seven years this government pushing the envelope with regard to those principles in the Canada Health Act to ensure that privatization is the end result of that pushing of the envelope.

4:00

We see it right now with regards to the provision of service of MRIs. We have seen a recent study with regards to cataract surgery done in Calgary that indicates that we in fact have a two-tiered system in Alberta. Those who can afford to pay may get a better lens than those who can't afford to pay and may get to jump the queue. We have seen that with the MRIs as well. So though it is all fine and dandy, Mr. Speaker, to say that this government – because my guess is that they will stand in full force and support the member's motion. In fact, while they will do that, there are other things that are happening in this province that indicate that there is not that support of the Canada Health Act in actual action.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't think this is a time to be coy with Albertans, and it is definitely not a time to hoodwink Albertans. They know what the truth is. They know intuitively that by allowing private, for-profit hospitals in this province, no matter what you call that, whether you call them overnight surgical facilities, whatever word you want to call them, that transgresses not only the spirit but the intent of the Canada Health Act and, in fact, also opens up the doors to NAFTA.

When you talk about victims of the week, you know, let me tell you about some of the victims of this government's health care

plans, and these are just some of the victims that I've heard of within the last little while. This is a letter that I just got out of my mailbox today. It's from a gentleman in Granum, Alberta. He and his wife are retired seniors. He is 71 years of age. She needs cataract surgery on both of her eyes. She has been told that the earliest she can have that surgery is January 2001 and that it will then cost her \$350 per eye to have lens surgery, but she still must wait another year. Her alternative is to go to Mexico, Mr. Speaker. The cost will be \$1,400 per eye, which together with airfare and accommodation will total some \$6,000. The eye centre in Calgary where she was examined told her that they could reduce the waiting time considerably but are restricted by the provincial government in the number of surgeries they are allowed to perform.

It further goes on to say:

I was a supporter for many years of Ralph Klein and the Conservative Party but no more and have canceled my membership. When I needed critical heart surgery I had to have it done in Vancouver because of the unbelievable waiting list in Calgary.

There is so much misleading information put out by the government and there is an old saying about fooling some of the people some of the time.

That's just one example.

There's another example, a phone call I got from a gentleman from Canmore who six weeks ago had broken his leg. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that he was sent to Edmonton, that he is now in the Glenrose? He's had two operations, he's still waiting for further surgery, and he has been in pain for six weeks.

There's the issue of the young teenager in Lethbridge who has been waiting months – months – for her surgery to occur, and as a result she may be missing out on a college soccer scholarship.

I have had calls in my office from people who are waiting for cancer treatment. On Friday I had a call from a constituent of mine whose father-in-law was at one of the hospitals here in Edmonton and was let out of ICU. There is no step-down in our major hospitals at this point, and you know what? They took him off the machines on Sunday; he died because there was no 24-hour care for him. And that's not the first instance of an issue that has occurred.

So do you want to stand up and say that you support the principles of the Canada Health Act? Well, you know what? Go right ahead and do it. But you know what? It's meaningless unless you start to put some of the actual reforms in place that were promised in 1993, when we stood on this side in this Legislative Assembly and said to you that if you do what you intend to do, this is going to be the result. At that point, the members of the government and the Premier and the Minister of Health of the time said that we were the ones fear mongering, that we were the ones that were representing the special interest groups, that we didn't know what we were talking about. You know what? If you go back to the *Hansards* of '93, '94, and '95, I guarantee you that exactly what we said would happen is happening right now. So why don't you do some research?

Speaking of which, I think the research that has been put forward to date has been research that has been faulty, that has come to conclusions – we did look at those eight studies, and it's interesting to note that five of those eight were in the Kevin Taft report.

I had a quick look at the WHO study that was submitted this afternoon, and the reality is that what that WHO study talks about is that if you are capital poor as a country, then you might want to look at private investors. I don't think, Mr. Speaker, that any organization in the world would consider Alberta capital poor. So again we have indication of how the government is trying to contort the argument, to make the argument one that sounds as if it's special interest groups, that sounds as if it is not based on fact, that sounds as if there is a malicious intent by the Official Opposition against reforming and changing our public health care system. Well, the

only intent we have is to ensure that private, for-profit health care does not find a foothold in this province.

The letter that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona tabled this afternoon was from Shirley Stinson, and I believe that's gone to all Members of the Legislative Assembly. In it she expresses her grave concern and asks the question:

Do Alberta's Conservative MLAs realize that privatization is not only a non-solution but that if introduced, it would in practical terms be irreversible under the NAFTA agreement?

Premier Klein, I would urge you and your fellow MLAs to find solutions which uphold the principles and - the public good - of the Canada Health Act.

Now, it's easy for the members of the government to say that it's wrong. It's easy for the members of the government to say that we are fear mongering, but the reality is that I have had letters, very thoughtful letters, that have been copied to me, that have gone to the minister, that have gone to different members within this Legislative Assembly on the government side, and they have asked very thoughtful questions. The Gould's is one, a husband and wife who have written to various Members of the Legislative Assembly and the minister of health.

There is another gentleman – I just happen to have these here with me – a Mr. Doram, who has also written. You know, he keeps asking the same questions of the minister over and over again: show me your studies; tell me how for-profit hospitals can be more effective, can be more efficient.

DR. TAYLOR: Read *Code Blue*.

MS LEIBOVICI: I have read *Code Blue*.

One question that was asked by Mr. Gould just recently, on February 28, was: "Are you suggesting that the for-profit hospitals will only have contracts for the short term?"

MR. SMITH: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming on a point of order.

Point of Order Tabling a Cited Document

MR. SMITH: It's a point of order, Mr. Speaker, under *Beauchesne*.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: *Beauchesne* or Standing Orders?

MR. SMITH: The member in quite an eloquent debate makes wonderful comments but refuses to table any of the documentation. So I'm simply pointing to the appropriate citation that requires that when she reads from documents, Mr. Speaker, she would be tabling the same, in fact tabling for the information of all the House so action can be taken on it. Under Standing Order 21.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Standing Order 21 or 23?

MR. SMITH: It was 21 actually. I was thinking of 23, and then I thought it wouldn't be quite as appropriate as 21.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Well, hon. member, 21 happens to be about closure, so I don't think that's quite the particular one that you were looking for, and based on that particular point, I don't think you really have a point on this particular case.

However, referring to 23, was there a particular sub under 23 that you were referring to?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, there is a citation that talks about the importance of tabling information which the member refers to and reads verbatim from. So it is simply that citation. I would ask that the member oblige the House and conduct herself in full accordance with the rules of the House.

4:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Well, thank you for that insightful thought. Unfortunately, I'm not sure exactly which point it is, so if you could come back with the specifics for me, we would be able to go forward.

If you'd like to continue, hon. member.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just put the minister's mind at ease. I have no problem in tabling these, and we'll get the appropriate tablings for you tomorrow. The reality is that you've all been copied on these, so you should know what I'm talking about. Actually, just to correct myself, you haven't been copied on each and every one of them, but you have been copied on the majority of them.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: The one from Mr. Gould goes on to say:

As an investor I would be very reluctant to put my money into facilities, or sign a contract with an RHA, that would not provide for a reasonable guarantee of regular acceptable returns on my investment.

That to me doesn't sound as if we're protecting our Canada Health Act, if the government can't provide the answers to those questions.

[The Speaker in the chair]

That's just a sampling of some of the letters that I receive daily, and I know you receive them as well because most of them are on e-mail. What they are is they're pushed in somehow, and they go to everybody's e-mail. But I will, as I indicated, provide those copies for the minister and for the Assembly.

Now, I listened very carefully to the language from the member who put forward this particular motion. He talked about entrepreneurs in health care, and that, in fact, is one of the reasons that people do not trust the proposal that is put forward by this government. The majority of Albertans do not, I believe, think that health care is a commodity that's sold like a pair of shoes. They recognize and the member, having worked in the field of social services, should also recognize the fact that health care is a social good that cannot be measured in the same way as a pair of shoes. There are very distinct differences in what health care is, what the method is for measuring and for accounting for health care that is delivered in a province and in a country. In fact, that is what Albertans know and recognize.

Now, I've heard over and over again – and the member spoke about it today as well – that these special interest groups are just proliferating across the province and that in fact they are the ones that are indicating that the public health care system is under attack by this government, which is our position as the Official Opposition as well. What is interesting is that when you look at the magnitude and the number of people that are involved with regards to these so-called special interest groups and when you look at the magnitude of the government and the ability it has to spin-doctor, I don't think that's a fair comparison, and for the government to say "Poor me; pity me" I think is a real cry of desperation.

If, in fact, the argument that is being put forward here on a daily basis cannot be sustained by fact, cannot be supported by actual

cases of where this has worked in the world, then that's what we should be talking about in this Legislative Assembly, not how the government feels attacked and this member feels attacked by the so-called special interest groups, and I think it's very important for the Members in this Legislative Assembly to realize that. In fact, the Speaker always reminds us of that as well, that every individual in this province has a right and that as an Albertan every individual has the right to join with a group and to put forward their opinions on an issue. So why go around labeling Albertans, your constituents, people that may or may not vote for you – maybe some of them have – as a special interest group? That I think is rude, to say the least.

Now, when we talk about accessibility, portability, the five elements of the Canada Health Act, what's interesting is that in this province today we don't have those five elements. What we have set up through the system of the regional health authorities in this province right now are 17 regions, and there was a presentation recently that was provided to the standing committee by Donna Wilson to talk about the structure of the regional health authorities. We have barriers within our health care system right now, barriers with regards to access to long-term care; barriers with regards to physiotherapy services; barriers with regards to operations, orthopedics; barriers with regards to dialysis treatment. The list goes on and on and on.

So when we talk about supporting the five principles of the Canada Health Act, I would think that support would extend to within the province itself, and what that would be is a clear indication to the minister of health that what he has to ensure is that there will be seamless boundaries between the 17 regions and the Mental Health Board and the Cancer Board – so in a sense 19 regional health authorities have been set up – so that we can ensure within our own province that the principles of the Canada Health Act are being met, and right now they're not.

The reality is that we've heard a lot of spin from the government with regards to protecting the principles of the Canada Health Act. As long as the bill allows for overnight stays in a facility that is not a public facility but is a for-profit facility, the reality is that that legislation is meaningless, that in fact what the government has set up is a method by which it can contravene the intent and the spirit of the Canada Health Act.

So, as I said, while we will all stand and vote in favour of the Canada Health Act, there are realities in this province that must be looked at, realities that we hear from our constituents within our constituencies each and every day, realities we know exist with the inequities within the regional health authorities at this point in time, and the reality that the bottom line is that if there is a for-profit hospital open within this province, it opens the doors on NAFTA and kills medicare as we know it today not only in this province but across Canada.

I would direct the members to look at the WHO report that the minister put forward today in the Legislative Assembly. It talks glowingly of the Canadian system and the Canada Health Act, but what it says is that for poor countries, they may want to look at privatizing. So why don't we look at what we're doing right?

If members are looking for ways to deal with fixing the hospital situation, I would suggest that the minister of technology, who was waving *Code Blue* at me earlier, might want to look at the *Maclean's* article from January 17, 2000, by Michael Dexter, who has provided some solutions as to a plan to end the hospital crisis within the public health care system. It can be done, Mr. Speaker. What is required is a real will and commitment to not only support the principles of the Canada Health Act but also to enforce those principles and to ensure that our publicly funded health care system is sustained, maintained, and enhanced.

So thank you very much for this opportunity to shed some light on this discussion here and a perspective that I believe is one that provides a broader overview of what is happening in this government right now with regards to health care and the Canada Health Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

4:20

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me real pleasure to join in debate, particularly after I felt the hon. member who just spoke wanted to support, will probably support, is convinced that she should support but comes through in such a manner it's hard to tell when a Liberal is being positive. So I'm going to assume that there's support there.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to speak to the motion with respect to endorsing the principles of the Canada Health Act, and I also want to bring to the attention of the House that it's interesting that it would come forward from the Member for Calgary-McCall, one who's not afraid to put minorities over majorities, one who's not afraid to put compassion over conflict, and one who is not afraid to put community over partisan politics. Mahatma Gandhi once said: be the change you would see in the world. I believe the Member for Calgary-McCall displays those types of values and, not only that, underscores the importance of this act to Canadians as well as to Albertans, and thank you for the opportunity to discuss it in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I also immediately, without reading from it, will table something that we are talking about, that being the Canada Health Act. I think that it's often a good piece of information, once you're debating something, to actually look at that information. So I am tabling copies of the Canada Health Act, that has a couple of interesting portions to it that I think all members could value from in looking at.

In the preamble, Mr. Speaker, it says that
future improvements in health will require the cooperative partnership of governments, health professionals, voluntary organizations and individual Canadians.

In fact, if you were to take that one paragraph and undertake the discussion of the health care debate in the province of Alberta as it exists today, that's exactly what this government is doing. It's engaging the partnerships of governments, health professions, voluntary organizations, and individuals Canadians. It's quite interesting that it doesn't say anything about opposition parties in there, but – I don't know – maybe that was just an oversight in the drafting of the bill.

Also, the preamble of the Canada Health Act says that
continued access to quality health care without financial or other barriers will be critical to maintaining and improving the health and well-being of Canadians.

This is one of the very, very few references in the Canada Health Act that references finance or references cash. In fact, Mr. Speaker, as we all know, a lot of things are not attainable, are not possible unless there is financial wherewithal.

If you look at the attempt in the federal budget yesterday and the success of the provincial budget last week, which looks clearly at going through the rapids of debt, deficit, at a country going broke and being able to regather the strength and the forces at the other side of the rapids of debt and deficit and then move on and be able to put financial wherewithal to a social program that benefits not only all Albertans but all Canadians, I think that speaks very highly to the motives behind the plan of the government.

But continually – continually – we hear tabling of complaint after complaint, problem after problem. We've clearly identified that the

issue the government is looking at is one of access and reduced waiting lists. So rather than table the complaints, we would really expect the opposition to table solutions, to get on board the wagon to be able to start talking about how to build, how to construct, how to make \$5.3 billion of health care money work like \$6 billion of health care money or \$6.5 billion of health care money. There's nothing in the Canada Health Act that says that we shall waste money. I couldn't find that anywhere in there.

I think there is a government responsibility to ensure that moneys in the health care system are used wisely, are used prudently, are used competitively, and are used in such a fashion as to maximize the utility of the five principles of the Canada Health Act: to maximize accessibility, maximize portability, maximize comprehensiveness. This is where it works in concert with other groups, other parts of society, and this government to make a better health care system in what is inarguably now the best province in the dominion and a province where people continue to look for improvement, where people continue to feel comfortable living and working on the edge, and putting a health care system through that delivers real value to Albertans.

I love the catchphrases: private, for-profit, two-tier, American style. [interjections] Where's your what? Sorry; I missed that one.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Where's your plan?

MR. SMITH: Where's your plan? Whatever.

Mr. Speaker, it's great that there are wonderful catchphrases in the lexicon of politics that talk about a health care system that spends \$5.3 billion.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of doctors who work under private corporations. Private corporations are acceptable under the Income Tax Act, and it's a way people form a company in order to better distribute their profits and income, but there have to be profits. It would tell me, then, that if a doctor forms a private corporation, a professional corporation, a PC, he or she would in fact be in the health care system for the purposes of profit.

Not long ago I went over to the Royal Alexandra hospital. They had purchased through the lottery fund, the terrific fund that it is, I might add, an angiogram device that would allow them quick access to reading angiogram results as well as a less invasive procedure. This was sold to them by the Toshiba corporation of Canada, and because I had actually had some experience with Toshiba before, I asked the manager there for Toshiba: "Well, sir, is this the nonprofit arm of Toshiba corporation? Are you actually selling products to the medical system and making a profit?"

DR. OBERG: No. You're kidding.

MR. SMITH: It's true. There are actually purveyors of product, there are purveyors of services that are actually making profit in the medical system today as we see it; for example, people who vend X-ray machines, people who vend MRIs.

Let me just spend one more second on Toshiba. At one time Toshiba used to sell a VCR machine, a video recorder. It sold in the early '80s probably for \$1,300 or \$1,400. Now, when we go out today to buy those VCRs, we'll notice they're about \$150 to \$220. When there's been inflation and world financial changes and all the other events, why would that equipment now be worth \$200 today? Same with cellular phones: \$2,300 in the 1980s, \$150 today. Would it perhaps be that the invisible hand of competition has officially allocated scarce resources? In fact, in many places inside and outside the medical marketplace there are records of innovation taking place through competition. When people go to the Alberta

Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, do they just get a grant for research? No, Mr. Speaker. They compete for a grant and for research.

So, in fact, competition works. Competition is there in the health care system today. In fact, if we go just to the preamble of the Canada Health Act, all we are doing is looking at future improvements in health in partnerships, and that's why I'm moving the question today, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: May I ask a question?

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt everyone, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

MR. SMITH: Oh, I just moved the question, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: There's no question. I would have recognized her.

MR. SMITH: No. To the vote.

THE SPEAKER: You weren't recognized.
4:30

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

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

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Community Development

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I would call on the minister.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question. Question.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: I see we're off to a good start this afternoon, Madam Chairman.

My opening comments will be a little lengthier than what I would like. There's a reason for it. In the recent restructuring of the government, a few changes were made which I think are appropriate to address. I'll start off by saying that I am very pleased to be here to present our business plan and budget for the year 2000-2001. It's been nine months since the changes and since I was appointed as Minister of Community Development, and quite frankly it's been a very interesting time.

One of the challenges faced when I assumed this portfolio was learning about the diversity of Community Development's programs. We have seniors, sports, recreation, arts, libraries, volunteers, historic sites, museums, cultural facilities, human rights, citizenship, status of women, and all of these programs are interwoven within the ministry. As part of the government's consolidation of programs and one-window access to programs and services, special purpose and seniors' housing was later added to the ministry, and that was last November. In addition, there are some 10 agencies and funds that are administered through the department.

As we all know, communities are the heart of our great province, and people – and I stress people – are the heart of Alberta's commu-

nities. The Treasurer stated in his budget speech last Thursday:

Last year total employment rose by [some] 2.8 percent, with almost 43,000 new jobs created in 1999. Our [provincial] employment rate averaged 94.2 percent, the second best among . . . the provinces. Our population grew by two percent and that was almost double Ontario's population growth.

With such an influx of new citizens, young and old, supporting our communities is now more important than ever, and Community Development will provide the necessary leadership. The best way to strengthen Alberta's people and its vibrant communities is to continue to support them with strong financial management, people-friendly taxation, and policies that help our economy grow and diversify. Responsible fiscal management has been the hallmark of the current government. The new budget will continue the strategies that have served us well: the balanced budgets, debt repayment, prudent revenue forecasts, affordable spending plans, and open and accountable government. Community Development will help to put these strategies into action by building innovative partnerships with co-operating societies, private-sector corporations, and community organizations. We'll also share resources, working to reduce duplication and costs and garner broad support for community initiatives.

That, fellow elected members on all sides of the House, is the general theme of our new business plan. It is evident in the new business plan and budget of Community Development that the government's goals are supported. Alberta Community Development's first budget of the new century focuses on building stronger communities and working with Albertans of all ages. The ministry is participating in a number of cross-government initiatives and other partnerships in the achievement of ministry goals, and it should be recognized that a number of ministry actions have an important collaborative component.

In particular, Community Development is committed to working in co-operation with ministries across government to ensure the success of broader government priorities such as the Alberta Corporate Service Centre initiative, corporate human resource development strategy, economic development strategy, and aboriginal policy initiative. In addition, the ministry will provide leadership for a seniors' policy, a key cross-government initiative which will enlist the collective efforts of a number of government departments to meet seniors' needs for the future.

As I stated earlier, the effects of this department span all ages, but Budget 2000 does provide special attention to the needs of low-income seniors. Alberta's seniors helped build the province, and it was their hard work, leadership, and vision that helped us achieve the prosperity we enjoy today. In their youth and later as parents and community builders their dedication to family and a solid work ethic served as a backbone for the values we hold as so important today.

Albertans believe in healthy aging, allowing our seniors to live as independently as possible in a safe and supportive environment. Due to a lack of financial resources, Albertans recognize that some seniors need our support and assistance. This year the budget for the Alberta seniors' cash benefit program will rise to \$162 million, up from \$141 million. Of these funds \$146.3 million will provide financial assistance to approximately 130,000 low-income seniors through the Alberta seniors' benefit program. This program has been increased by \$13.3 million, or approximately 10 percent. I'd like to point out that this successful program is income tested, and benefits are given out on a sliding scale. We anticipate that recipients will see on the average a \$100 per year increase, and that could vary, obviously, depending upon the senior's income.

The other program offered is special-needs assistance for seniors, which provides financial assistance through lump sum cash pay-

ments to low-income seniors who are experiencing financial difficulties and are unable to meet basic needs, such as food, shelter, transportation, medical supplies, or personal hygiene. Approximately 6,000 low-income seniors who may experience financial difficulties will be assisted through the special-needs assistance for seniors program. The current average payment is some \$2,700, and there is a maximum payment of \$5,000 per year. Although the 1999-2000 budget was set at \$8 million, the forecast indicated that some \$15.6 million would be required. The 2000-2001 budget has been adjusted to \$15.7 million to ensure that the necessary funds are available to run the program.

One of the most effective ways to understand the needs and concerns of our seniors is through the daily contact that staff have with the callers to the department's 1-800 information line. The line has received some 723,000 calls since it was introduced in 1994. It's anticipated that the 750,000th call should come through during the spring of 2000, and quite frankly I'd like to be there to take that particular call personally.

I'm proud to say that we do have one of the best income support programs in Canada for low-income seniors, but as new and aging seniors are attracted to Alberta for its quality of life, we will have to develop long-term strategies to deal with the impact of the aging population. The governmentwide study of the impact of the aging population will be completing its report this spring and along with report A will provide the government with recommendations for action. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-West, who was the chair of the steering committee, and the Member for Leduc, the vice-chair, for their continuing commitment to this important project. As the population of our province grows and ages, the provincial government will continue to demonstrate its concern about the well-being of Alberta seniors, particularly those who are in need.

4:40

With respect to homelessness, I think this is where we can honestly say that this ministry is about communities. A community is a group of people who come together for a common cause and are ready to lend a helping hand to their neighbours. This government believes communities are the heart and soul of Alberta. We'll continue to work to ensure that those families and individuals who are most in need have access to temporary shelter and support services.

We are committing \$3 million in new funding this year for programs to help us work on homelessness issues with our partners. This is in addition to the approximately \$10 million in the Human Resources and Employment budget identified for operating emergency shelters. We understand that our strength lies in building partnerships with other levels of government, private and not-for-profit housing sectors, churches, and community-based organizations, and we certainly want to open the lines of communication there.

In addition, the Hon. Claudette Bradshaw, federal Minister of Labour, will be consulting with the province in regard to the federal government's recent announcement of new funding for homelessness programs. I would like to say that we're going to work with the federal government as best we can to ensure that the programs they come forward with are complementary and integrated with the efforts of the provincial government and our local communities and in support of our business plan goals. I've got the assurance from the minister that that will in fact happen as a result of a private meeting I held with her on her visit up here. Collectively I think we can work and we can make community-based decisions for the short term and find long-term solutions to address the underlying factors that contribute to homelessness.

With respect to historic sites, I've just mentioned three of the six new ongoing funding adjustments to our budgets. I'd like to briefly point out the remaining three along with onetime funding initiatives. Alberta has a rich natural and cultural heritage to preserve and appreciate, and the minister's network of 18 provincial historic sites, museums, and interpretive centres, as well as its cultural facilities in the Provincial Archives, are testimony to the value that Albertans place on this rich heritage.

This business plan includes steps to preserve the future of the ministry's heritage infrastructure, including a replacement facility for the Provincial Archives of Alberta. One million dollars has been added to the base budget to address the most urgent needs related to operating and maintaining the 18 historic sites, museums, and interpretive centres as well as the Provincial Archives. This is in addition to the \$300,000 increase approved in budget '99 for this particular year of 2000-2001. In addition, 1 and a half million dollars in onetime spending has been allocated to replace audiovisual equipment used in exhibits at the province's heritage sites.

Although protecting valuable historic and cultural resources is our primary role, Alberta's 18 provincially owned historic sites and museums provide significant tourism and economic benefits to our province. In 1998-99 these sites attracted more than a million visitors, an increase of some 8.3 percent over the previous year.

The largest feature exhibition in the Provincial Museum's history will be the Jesus through the Centuries exhibition, which runs from October 7, 2000, to January 7, 2001. This world premiere event we hope will attract thousands of visitors from across Alberta, western Canada, and indeed the rest of North America. Jesus through the Centuries is the third in a series of five international exhibitions celebrating the millennium and illuminating human achievements.

Although five years in the future, preparations for the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Alberta becoming a province have begun, and \$600,000 in onetime funding has been budgeted for planning the centennial celebrations.

With respect to human rights, the business plan will continue to focus on actions to foster equality and reduce discrimination, including educational initiatives to promote fairness and access and increased understanding of the growing diversity in the province. Strategies to ensure effective operation of the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission will continue to be implemented. In support of this, the base budget of the human rights and citizenship services branch will be increased by \$300,000 to provide adequate funding to manage the anticipated volume of complaints received. This is in addition to the \$100,000 increase approved in budget '99.

In support of the provincial active living strategy and the development of the country's Trans Canada Trail, Community Development has committed \$1.1 million in onetime lottery funding to Alberta Trailnet. These funds will assist with Alberta's portion of the Trans Canada Trail development.

I'm sure some of the members have heard from their constituents both in support of and with concerns about the trail development. Trail issues are complex and touch many pieces of legislation, six or seven in all I believe. As people and landowners voice concerns over loss of privacy, trespassing, and liability, this department and this government are exploring options and legislation to reduce the potential liability of landowners adjacent to public-use trails as well as other concerns. We'll be looking at some legislative changes there, and I certainly would appreciate any kind of input from any members.

The 2001 championships have brought the eyes of the world on Edmonton, starting now, I guess, and culminating in the summer of 2001, when the 2001 World Championships in Athletics makes a first appearance in North America. This project was granted a total

of \$40 million over four years by the province, to be matched equally by the government of Canada and by the 2001 World Championships in Athletics organization committee. As part of our commitment the provincial government will provide \$10 million in funding for this fiscal year, 2000-2001.

Volunteerism continues to play a significant role in contributing to the high quality of life Albertans value. By working together to achieve common goals, Alberta volunteers are creating stronger communities and a stronger province. According to a spring 1999 survey, 72 percent of all adult Albertans reported that they performed some volunteer work in the previous year. The ministry will continue its support of volunteers, including the co-ordination of provincial activities for the International Year of Volunteers in 2001.

Alberta volunteers are recognized for their valuable assistance in the delivery of important programs in the areas of health, arts, libraries, youth leadership, education, sport and recreation, the environment, seniors' services, children's services, and public safety. It will be our responsibility to bring government representatives and external partners together to work on the priority area of services for children and youth.

Grants and foundations. Albertans are proud of the diverse recreational, educational, social, cultural, and heritage programs and activities and recognize their contribution to the outstanding quality of life that we all enjoy. During this next fiscal year provincial, regional, and community-based organizations will have access to some \$46.9 million in grants through Community Development's lottery-funded foundations and agencies: the Alberta Foundation for the Arts; the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation; the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation; the Wild Rose Foundation; and the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund.

The Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. I'd like to bring your attention to changes in the funding for the foundation. At my request the chairman and the board of directors of the ASRPWF reviewed the foundation's quarterly grant program relative to other grant programs and made recommendations to eliminate duplication of funding to initiatives eligible for funding through other provincial government and lottery-funded agencies. As of April 1, 2000, projects eligible for and receiving funding through other provincial government funding agencies will no longer receive funding from the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation.

4:50

Capital projects I excluded from the grant program. The foundation, however, will still maintain a smaller grant program to meet the needs of applicants not covered by other funding agencies. A new grant program, a development initiatives program, was created with new criteria to fund projects that fall within the mandate of the ASRPWF Foundation. Updated guidelines are now available to the public. Applicants should be directed to look to other resources, such as a community lottery board or the CFEP, for capital projects that are no longer eligible under the grant program.

The new development initiatives program is a redistribution of the funds and eliminates funding duplication. In recent years communities have demonstrated their need for the program, and the reallocation of funds will allow the programs to continue. The elimination of duplicated funding frees up funds to maintain the municipal recreation/tourism areas program and to return a portion of the previous reduction to provincial sports and recreation associations. This will allow us to support the business plan efforts to provide financial . . . [Mr. Woloshyn's speaking time expired]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I hate to interrupt you, hon. minister, but you can get back up again. I'm sure you'll welcome the opportunity to hear the opposition, and then you can get back up again, hon. minister. [interjections] No, no. This is the call of the chair.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I will abide by your ruling, but I'd like to say that if there are questions that we can't or don't answer here, we'll take them down and respond to you in writing.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, that was 55 seconds. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I hope that the minister is enjoying his new ministry. It is all of our quality of life in Alberta, and I'm glad that he is inspired enough that he wants to continue on. I'll be looking forward to that.

Community development is quality of life in Alberta. It's as we attempt to achieve quality of life for some groups of people in Alberta, and it's also all of the activities and facilities that do offer us quality of life. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We do allow a lot of latitude and leeway at this stage in committee, but could I please ask people to take their seats. Please. Please. We have to be seated.

Go ahead, Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. So I'm pleased to start the debate on the estimates for the Department of Community Development. I do understand that there's an agreement to be able to continue this debate over past tonight. I think this is the first department that is debated, and that's not a long time to prepare for this since the budget was introduced last Thursday. So I look forward to continued debate on this, in particular because in the past the opposition has only been able to squeeze out 48 minutes in being able to comment on the department estimates. [interjection] That's correct. It was two people at 20 minutes apiece, and one person only got eight minutes.

This department covers seniors; women; multiculturalism; youth; volunteers; museums and archives; libraries; historical sites; amateur sports; games; recreation; arts and culture; the Francophone Secretariat; the Seniors Advisory Council; the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund; the Human Rights Commission; the Alberta Foundation for the Arts; the Alberta Sports, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation; the Historical Resources Foundation; and now also housing. So now we have 20 different areas. That's less than two and a half minutes per sector, so I'm pleased that there will be more debate on this area this time around.

Now, I note in the department summary – and for reference ease for the minister, that would be on page 86. I'm wondering about the accounting that's presented here. There have been at least two programs removed from underneath the auspices of the department between last year's budget presentation and this year's, that being AADAC and the community lottery boards, and at least one program added, the special purpose housing, but I do not see those changes reflected in here. I notice that under the special purpose housing there is a gross comparable figure from '98-99, when this wasn't even in the department. So I'd like the minister to give a reckoning that shows the total change in the department from last year to this, because there were the budget amounts for AADAC, which was about \$33 million and has been taken out. Community lottery

boards was about \$51 million. It was taken out. None of that is reflected in this summary, and we have a new program of 82 and a half million dollars coming in with the special purpose housing.

Now, one of the first things I'd like to talk about is funding for libraries, which appears in two places, vote 2.1.2 and of course under the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. I am aware that there have been a number of members of library boards from across the province contacting their MLAs with their concern that the libraries are still being funded on a per capita basis based on 1997 population figures. Well, as is so often brought forward in this Legislature, we've had some significant population growth in certain areas of the province. I'm thinking of Calgary, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, and I think even close to the minister's own home in Spruce Grove. I note that the province has gone to great measures to recognize that population growth in the areas of infrastructure and education taxes and other things but no increase in this per capita funding formula for libraries.

I'm asking the minister: when will the department create a policy to cope with the per capita funding needs of libraries and have it somehow attached to a more realistic or flexible figure rather than sticking it to a certain point in time? That doesn't seem to be working, and certainly libraries are hurting. I think that is connected to a question about the government's commitment to literacy if we are struggling so much with funding for libraries. So I've just touched briefly on that, and I hope we'll be able to come back to it later.

I'd like to talk a bit about women, which should be under vote 6, but that's hard to tell because the word never appears anywhere in the document nor is there any reference to women's policy and programs anymore. It's simply human rights and citizenship, and under the vote itself, the breakdown vote, once again it doesn't give any information about all of the sectors that have been captured under that. So specific to women, once again, exactly what programs does this government provide? In answer to that question, a few years ago I was told the Stepping Stones program, but please don't tell me that one again because that really isn't a program provision. It's an information kit. There's no staffing behind it. If you ask for that, they put it in the mail to you. You're on your own.

We no longer have an Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues, which was doing research and an analysis and gathering information on what was affecting women in the province. There doesn't seem to be any sign of the Women's Secretariat, which was doing policy and program work. I'm sure that the government is not trying to make women disappear. I wouldn't want to believe that of the minister, and I wouldn't want to believe the minister that the government doesn't believe in equality, so I am wondering what the rationale is here, seeing as there's no mention of it anywhere in this document. Is there a belief that women have somehow achieved parity of earnings or perhaps equal access to training dollars or entrepreneurial support or loans for small businesses?

5:00

I note in the excellent report, which has been tabled previously, called *Fractured Voices*: a report on the fairness business in Alberta, that over 50 percent of the 1993 human rights cases were based on gender-related issues. Those are all possible human rights issues that were brought before the Human Rights Commission. Over 50 percent of them were gender based. I am still looking for some kind of proof or tabling of reports or anything that the government could manage to bring forward that's showing that a gender analysis was being done of proposed legislation or changes in programs and services. I've seen nothing of that, but I'll ask again and see if anything can be brought forward. I'll raise a couple of examples that, without trying very hard, I found.

Sixty-four percent of the supports for independence recipients in southern Alberta are women, and a number of these are in rural centres outside of the major centres in that area. There are no transportation grants to travel to the mandatory training sessions in these larger centres, and there's no child care available either. A real catch-22 situation has been created here, which mostly affects women. Are they supposed to then leave their children unsupervised and somehow hitchhike or walk to get to these mandatory training sessions in order to achieve this? Why hasn't this been identified or dealt with? This first came to my attention, this whole situation, in the early '90s. It's come back to my attention. It's still existing. Why don't I see any comprehension of what's going on there?

I'm also wondering what the government is doing or what advice was given to the government. Or was there anyone in women's policy and programs that was giving advice regarding the termination of moneys by the Alberta Mental Health Board to the treatment group program for men who batter that was run by the central Alberta women's shelter? Was the effect of the cancellation of these moneys on women considered? I don't see anything that indicates that.

Once again I would ask for the rationale from the minister, seeing as women's policy and programs is supposed to be under this ministry, and despite the lack of proof I believe it's still there. Why are women's shelters located under Children's Services and not under women's policy and programs? I think it's much better suited to be under the division in Community Development rather than under Children's Services, so I'll ask that question again.

Once again, I hope to return to other questions on women's issues, but I will move on at this point to seniors, which is vote 4, services to seniors. I'll remind the minister of the programs that were cut or reduced since '92-93. The ones specifically that are gone included the Alberta assured income plan, the senior citizens' renters' assistance program, seniors' independent living, seniors' emergency medical alert program, the housing registry program, and the property tax reduction. Those are just a few of what was cut or reduced.

As the minister has alluded to, we have seen a doubling of demand on the special-needs assistance program in the current fiscal year; that is, '99-2000. The budget for next budget year 2000-2001 is indicating that volume increase and almost doubling of demand upon the programs. I don't think it's accurate to say that seniors are getting more money. In fact, the additional funds into this program are simply coping with the demand on it. I think there's a direct tie between those programs that I just talked about being cut and the fact that we have a doubling of demand by seniors on the special-needs benefit. It's certainly what I had been watching in the community but had not been able to find any proof, any statistical analysis on it that would indicate that seniors were suffering. They were saying to me: "I'm having a hard time. All of these cuts have cost me extra." And it varied between \$1,500 and \$6,000 a year. "I'm having to use my savings. I'm having to borrow money from friends and family. I've cut out a lot of things." But I wasn't seeing any sort of proof positive.

I think we've got the proof positive now. I think what's happened is that for a lot of lower middle-income seniors, the loss of those programs has really hurt them, and they're the ones that are sliding down the economic ladder towards, however you want to put it, disadvantaged, lower income, or poverty. The minister used another phrase, that I can't remember at the moment. Very, very interesting.

I am looking forward to what's going to come out of the government's response to the impact on aging study. As part of this, I've been thinking: well, what could the government be doing? I'm wondering why there is no funding of seniors' centres included

under the budget. To me, that is a penny of prevention that is worth millions of dollars of cure. If we know that it's important to have an active lifestyle, if we know it's important to battle isolation with seniors, to get people out of their homes, to get them in fitness classes, to get them exposed to nutrition counseling and all kinds of other beneficial programs like that, plus just plain fun, frankly, then that is what these seniors' centres are doing. I have to give credit for stealing this idea from my local seniors' centre, West Edmonton Seniors, but there is a suggestion that \$100 per senior participating in a seniors' centre per year would probably save us the \$1,000 or \$1,200 per day that we have to spend on acute care beds. I think it's worth considering that. I don't see it in the budget here, but perhaps the minister can elucidate.

I have just a couple of tablings here. I am sorry; they were in the middle of my notes. I should have tabled them earlier. One is a letter from constituents, a very thoughtful letter from Don Perdue, Velma Park, and Doreen Wood, just explaining how they are trying to live with dignity but finding it very difficult when their rent is increasing from \$145 to \$245 a month, a significant increase for them. They were inquiring about possible rent controls. But to me it's indicative of the problems that a number of seniors are having as they struggle with property taxes and rent increases, that in many cases have doubled. You're hard-pressed in downtown Edmonton to get a one-bedroom for under \$550.

The second tabling that I have here is around the special-needs assistance program, and this is a copy of a flyer that someone received when they asked for the paperwork to apply for the fund. It just notes that there are restrictions now being placed on the special-needs assistance for seniors program. The program will fund one appliance in a benefit year, and they will no longer fund freezers at all. "Freezers will no longer be considered for funding," which is really interesting.

So not only do we have an increase on the demand there, but there are restrictions being placed on that program, and I do question cutting off the freezers because I know that when I have been struggling to economize, a freezer was my best friend. It allows you to buy food on sale or buy bulk food. If you can eat meat, then perhaps you can get a friend or a son-in-law that's out hunting game or perhaps ice fishing that can help you out with a hind quarter, that should last you through the winter. You can store a lot of food in those freezers. What you get out of the top of a little fridge just doesn't cut it. There is not a lot you can get in there if you are trying to save on food. So I do question that.

Now, the increase, as the minister pointed out, in the Alberta seniors' benefit will on average be around \$100 a year, between \$9 and \$10 a month, 29 cents a day. That's the big increase that's being touted here. Finally, the minister is clarifying very properly that this is really only affecting the most disadvantaged seniors. I think some of the media that was out there previous to the budget release was indicating that all seniors in Alberta would get a 10 percent increase, and nothing could be further from the truth. Still, Mr. Minister, I have to say that 29 cents a day – I mean, telephone rents have gone up by \$3. I've already talked about property taxes, rent, food. I'm sure every senior really appreciates that \$9 or \$10 a month, but it's not going to alleviate their suffering by very much.

5:10

Now, specific to West Edmonton Seniors in my riding, I know that the minister had been asked for assistance around their rent. This is a centre that is renting space in the General hospital. Their rent has increased from \$342 plus their housekeeping costs in '98-99 to just over \$1,000 for most of '99. As of January 1, 2000, their rent is up to \$4,212 plus the housekeeping services. You know, here are

these centres. We know they're doing good work, we know they're keeping seniors healthy, we know everything they're doing is right, and here they're going from \$342 to \$4,200 in rent payments. I do put in a plea with the minister for any assistance that can be rendered there. That makes it very difficult for them to keep going and offering services at a reasonable price.

I'm wondering if the interim ministry committee that's dealing with implementing legislation affecting seniors and investigating the protection for persons in care will be developing standards of care. It is one of the things that we are sadly lacking here. I know that the organization FAIRE has been very vocal in trying to bring that lack of standardization and criteria to everyone's attention here in this Assembly. I'm very aware that the day homes and boarding type of homes that are taking in seniors now are not covered under the protection of persons in care, and that really just affects institutional care.

I will have to continue with my many questions later. Thank you very much.

MR. SAPERS: Just 40 more seconds.

MS BLAKEMAN: Just 40 more seconds? Yeah. He got 40 more. I should get 40 more. I'll contain myself.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Edmonton-Centre.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm happy to contribute my comments and questions this afternoon on the Community Development budget. Before I begin, I would just like to make a few comments about the budgetary process.

As usual, we find it a very unsatisfactory process. From the point of time when we get the budget and the budget information to the point of time when we start debating and then complete the debate on the budget, we don't have enough opportunity to get out to our constituents to review the budget with them and get their feedback. By the time we receive most of the feedback on the budget, these budgets have been voted on because of the tight time lines the government imposes on us.

Madam Chairman, I know there were some negotiations that started on this process this year only to be halted before any progress was made. Some of the ideas being brought forward in terms of why that was halted was that this is the last budget before an election, so there was no need to make any kinds of revisions. Well, Madam Chairman, that isn't good enough. Certainly people need to have a process in place whereby they can review the billions of dollars this government is spending and have adequate time to give their feedback and present it to all members in this Legislature so they can be properly debated before this massive budget is voted on.

My questions on Community Development today centre around the ministry core business plans. First of all, I would like to make the comment that I think the government doesn't do too bad a job in some areas of promoting community development and in some areas of preserving and protecting and presenting the unique natural, cultural, and historical resources. In some areas I think they do quite an appalling job. Certainly the dollars that are being spent don't support, I believe, the core business plans outlined here or the goals. Those particularly would be in terms of supporting the independence and well-being of seniors, which I will elaborate on; protecting human rights; and promoting fairness and access. I'm assuming that women's issues come in that area because it's . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Who can tell?

MS CARLSON: Yeah. Who can tell? There's no doubt about that. They seem to have been written out of the last couple of budgets of this government but are noticeably absent to any degree certainly in this budget. When I get to my comments on issues that are of particular importance to women, I will be addressing them under the human rights areas, because it seems that clearly fairness and access are not being supported for women at that level.

Then of course the huge topic in many parts of Alberta these days: supporting Alberta's special purpose housing needs. Whether we're talking about the homeless, the working poor who cannot find adequate housing, seniors who can't find adequate housing, or people with special needs, Madam Chairman, we have an appalling problem in this province, appalling not only because people can't find places to live but because this is supposed to be the richest province in this country and we cannot find places for our children and our seniors and those less advantaged than people who have got full-time, well-paying jobs. We can't provide housing for those people, and that's a real problem, as I see it.

Going to page 64 of the business plan, I'd like to talk about some of the achievements of the desired outcomes that the minister says his department will be measured by, and the first one there is "customer satisfaction with community development assistance provided." I want to know who it is they're asking in terms of satisfaction, and I'd like to see the questions, Madam Chairman, because the people that I talk to in the community certainly don't come in with a 98 percent satisfaction rating.

Some of the questions I'd like answered in this regard. Are those questionnaires going out in an anonymous fashion, or do the people answering them feel that their funding or their support from the ministry is somehow tied to how they answer the questions? Certainly if in fact the surveys are anonymous and there can be no clear tie between funding and their responses, then a 98 percent rate would be outstanding, but, Madam Chairman, I don't think that's the case here. It certainly isn't what I'm hearing from the community. So if the minister would be prepared to table not just the questions they ask in the satisfaction surveys but all of the conditions surrounding the asking of the questions, that would be very important, I think, for us to take a look at and to review. Then perhaps we'll have some suggestions on how that system can be improved.

The next item here is the "level of community volunteerism." It's interesting to think that the government can take credit for volunteerism in this province. I know that we have a very high participation in this province, particularly compared to other provinces, but I don't think it's because of any efforts made by this government, Madam Chairman. It seems to me that, particularly in education, parents and grandparents and relatives of schoolchildren have no choice in this particular climate but to volunteer in order to ensure that their children are getting the kind of support they need within the school system, and I would have to take a look at that in many other organizations. People volunteer for a number of reasons, but unfortunately as time goes on in this society, it seems that a lot of times they have to volunteer because they cannot afford the fees and the costs associated with having involvement in recreational, sports, or cultural activities or in basic education in this province.

So I am personally offended and I know that there are a number of my constituents who are also offended that this government should take credit for the level of volunteerism in this province. Once again, I'd like to know how they measure that particular target. I think it's a very nebulous kind of answer to be able to tie down.

5:20

Another question there is why, if they're saying that 72 percent of Albertans participate in volunteer activities, they only have a target

of 55 percent addressed? Was there such a huge jump from the previous year of '97-98? If so, why is that, Madam Chairman? Did they try to nail down the answer to why there would have been a significant increase? I would think that a lot of that had to do with the necessary nonvoluntary volunteerism that's required in the school systems at this particular time.

The next achievement outcome is the "percentage of population participating in sports and recreation activities." They've got this listed at 79 percent, and "the target is to increase participation in these activities to 90%." Once again, let's have some details on this. How is the minister measuring it, and how are they going to get to a 90 percent participation level? It would seem that by the time people put in a workday, by the time they put in their nonvoluntary hours supporting programming both in a recreational capacity and in an educational capacity, there isn't a lot of time left over to participate in sports and recreational activities. Let's get some details on how they expect they can get up to the 90 percent level and find out exactly what is happening there.

The next achievable desired outcome here is "equitable access to public library services for all Albertans." I understand the concept of equitable in terms of not all communities in Alberta having access to libraries, but I am quite offended by the minister's statement that came out earlier this month when he talked about the concerns of access being based on skin colour or creed. I don't know what generation he's living in or what country, but it doesn't seem to be Alberta.

The problem in Alberta of access to libraries is the access for the books to get into the libraries. That's the problem here, and that's where we see the discrimination coming in. I've never seen anybody turned away from a library door anywhere in Alberta, but we have seen many, many instances of cases where books have been turned away from library doors. For the minister's information, that's the essence, the reason why we need a freedom to read profile in this province and why it is still very appalling to see government members deny unanimous consent to recognize this week.

Definitely it's an issue for all of us to be very concerned about. Freedom to read what you choose when you choose to read is an issue of fundamental access to democracy. So I am hoping that he is going to clarify why it is that he doesn't address the real issue there, which is access to books, not access based on colour or race. If he could give us that information.

Now, the target is 60 percent in terms of access, and they say that they're achieving 53 percent of Albertans having used a public library. Once again I'd like to know how they're counting that. I'm assuming that what they're doing is counting the number of memberships that people have to libraries. If that's the case, how are they counting family memberships and children who may have children's memberships to the library? There could be some double counting there. I think it's a very important piece of information for us to know in terms of people who are accessing libraries.

With the lack of increase in dollars – I say that's a decrease in dollars really, because they're not keeping up with inflation or any other kind of monetary aspects – how does this minister expect libraries to compete in a market that is becoming increasingly cluttered with other types of information flow? If libraries have to keep up with inflation in terms of their operating costs and staffing, in fact they're seeing a real decrease in the purchasing power to put books on the shelves. Let's have some information on that. I'm sure the minister is gathering that information. How does he expect these libraries to compete in the information flow given all the other access that people now have to get information from?

I'm particularly thinking of the Internet. It's got to be a direct competitor to public libraries. So where does he see this going, not

just in the next 12 months, but surely they must be doing some studies in terms of the future viability of libraries in the next five to 10 years. If he's got any information on that, if he could table it and provide it to us, that would be very important.

Next on their list of achievements with desired outcomes is the "impact of support to arts and cultural industries." This is a very interesting one, Madam Chairman, and I continue to wonder why this is in Community Development and not in Economic Development, where it rightly belongs. We've seen . . .

MR. SMITH: What?

MS CARLSON: I'm sure the minister would like to address that.

There's no doubt that in the past arts and cultural industries, particularly film development at all levels, have been a major economic driver in this province. It should be recognized as such, and it should be then classified under Economic Development. If you want an industry to take off and be self-supporting, then you have to address it at all levels as a self-supporting industry, and that doesn't mean putting it into Community Development, where you expect to find not-for-profit kinds of ventures.

It's exactly that mind-set which I believe has led to the downfall of film development in this province. It wasn't that many years ago,

Madam Chairman – in fact it's certainly been in the years just preceding and since my having been elected – that the film industry in this province was a thriving industry. We were able to provide an industry that was, I think, second to none in Canada, and it looked like it was going to take off in a major way and provide serious employment for many people in this province.

Since that time, the government has mismanaged and bungled any kind of support they've given to this industry, and we've seen a number of other provinces move ahead of us by leaps and bounds in terms of the economic benefits they've received from this industry. I think particularly of B.C. when I speak to that, I think particularly of Manitoba, and I think particularly of Ontario. All those provinces, all those governments treated this industry as an industry, not as some little nonprofit venture that they would pat on the head and throw a little money at when they felt like it and pull the money and support back when they didn't feel like supporting it, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but under Standing Order 4(3) I must adjourn Committee of Supply until 8 this evening.

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, February 29, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/02/29

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I would call the committee to order.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Community Development

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I understand that at 5:30 we were still in discussion on the estimates for Community Development. I would move that we adjourn debate on those estimates.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: We are about to go into the two subcommittees, A and B, tonight, and A will go upstairs to room 512, where *Hansard* is awaiting you. So we invite those members of that committee to please go up there under the chairmanship of the Member for Lacombe-Stettler. We'll wait a moment and then we'll commence ourselves.

[The committee met as subcommittees A and B from 8:01 p.m. to 10 p.m.]

MR. SEVERTSON: Mr. Chairman, subcommittee A of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Gaming, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.

MRS. LAING: Mr. Chairman, subcommittee B of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report progress on the estimates of International and Intergovernmental Relations, Gaming, and Community Development.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Gaming, subcommittee A, and the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations, subcommittee B, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again. The Committee of Supply has also had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Community Development, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

I would also like to table copies of all documents tabled in the Committee of Supply for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 9

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer to move second reading of Bill 9, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, we're in the process now of considering the estimates under the budget for this new year commencing April 1. In order to ensure that there's appropriate time for due analysis and critique of budget and supply, it's necessary to bring in an interim supply act to ensure that the good programs of this government can be continued without interruption and with concern for any of the employees of government, who wish to and need to be paid, and in order to carry on in a seamless way the operations of government. Therefore, in the tradition of this Assembly when estimates are dealt with during the month of March with the possibility of us continuing into April before supply is finally voted, it is necessary to bring forward an interim supply bill.

In Bill 9 we're asking the Legislative Assembly to vote \$13,953,000 for the operation of the Legislative Assembly and \$2,750,403,000 for the operation of the government in addition to nonbudgetary disbursements and the lottery fund payments as noted and printed in the bill. I won't go into detail as to the sums set out for each department. It is sufficient to say, Mr. Speaker, that again in order to provide for the seamless operation of government while we continue the thorough debate of the estimates over the course of this next month, it would be in order for the House to vote interim supply.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 9 seeks the authority for granting interim supply. As the Government House Leader pointed out, it is because we're at that point in the budget process where if we don't give the government some money, it might not be able to pay its bills. It's probably destined that Bill 9 is going to pass, but it can't pass without some comment on the process.

We're talking about nearly \$3 billion in this bill, Mr. Speaker: \$14

million, give or take a few dollars, in operating expenses and capital investment for the Assembly; \$2.75 billion in operating and capital for government ministries; another \$28 million and change in nonbudgetary disbursements; and \$158 million in payments to be made through the lottery fund.

Now, all of this money, this some 3 billion dollars, we're being asked to give the authority to spend in the next perhaps 60 days. There are 28 days provided the Assembly to discuss and debate the main estimates, Mr. Speaker, and if the Gaming estimates debate is any indication of how the rest of estimates debates are going to go, it'll be 28 days of questions posed and concerns raised and 28 days without answers and 28 days of rather offhanded responses, certainly nothing that passes for debate in a democratic system.

In any case, it's difficult to support an interim supply request at this time because we don't really know how the money spent will match the performance measures in the current business plans or in the proposed business plans. Keep in mind that the new business plans, of course, haven't been passed yet. Mr. Speaker, we don't know, for example, what outcomes and performance criteria are expected for this money for such issues as reducing waiting lists in the public health care system, opening up new hospital beds, reducing the waiting time for long-term care beds, reducing the pupil/teacher ratio, reducing the reliance on parent and student fundraising in our public schools, reducing classroom size, and improving the lives of Alberta's vulnerable citizens, whether they be those with mental health concerns, seniors, or children who are living with hunger and poverty.

Mr. Speaker, there have been many examples of where this government has been called to account for its lack of budget management. One of the areas that I'd like to bring to the Assembly's attention is the amount of unbudgeted spending brought in through supplementary supply. Now, I know sometimes it's easy to mistake the players without a score card here, because you've got interim supply and you have supply. With the amount of supplementary supply bills that this Assembly has had to deal with under the current Provincial Treasurer's watch – I'm tempted to say that it's 33 months and counting, but that would be wrong. I think it's 33 months and ending. Anyway, under this current Provincial Treasurer's watch we've seen no fewer than seven supplementary supply bills and then of course interim supply bills in every budget cycle as well, and then we have all the appropriation bills.

MR. HANCOCK: It used to be done by special warrant.

MR. SAPERS: Now, Mr. Speaker, I know it's not appropriate for me to respond to interjections made from another member when they're not officially recognized, but I can't help but comment on the fact that the Government House Leader and Minister of Justice for all of Alberta just said: well, we used to do it by special warrant. I don't know whether he's proud of that and whether that was a plea to go back to the old ways or not. You know, it's certainly sort of like picking which torture you like best. Do you want the electric prod, or do you want to be beaten with a chain?

10:10

The fact is that Alberta taxpayers can't really rely on the budget process very much, because we see all this unbudgeted spending and all of these last-minute requests for new appropriation. In fact, the Treasurer has now presided over \$2.9 billion worth of unbudgeted spending in his 33 short months as Treasurer. So some may say that his reign of error is about to end.

Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Treasurer in previous times – and of course he's been much maligned. In this particular case let me say

that he brought in only six supplementary supply bills during his entire four-year tenure as Treasurer, for a paltry \$611 million. It pales in comparison to the nearly \$3 billion that we've been faced with by this Treasurer. The honourable but much lamented Dick Johnston during his seven years as Provincial Treasurer brought in \$2.1 billion in unbudgeted spending, but as I say, he took seven years to do that, more than twice as long as the current Treasurer.

Now, one of the problems with this government's performance has been their improper management of the budget and the budget process. I think it's clear to all Albertans now that the government wasn't able to manage the cuts properly, particularly in health care and education, and of course they're now scrambling to put money back into those programs. They want to be congratulated for that, but that's kind of like thanking somebody for cleaning up after they smash your windows.

They're not really effectively managing this reinvestment either, Mr. Speaker. I would have expected some more careful consideration of the budget cycle and timing so that we wouldn't be faced with such unbudgeted spending and such last-minute requests. Responsible fiscal management would require the establishment of several mechanisms within the budgeting process that not only protect the fiscal bottom line but also sustain investments in our society that contribute to health and to wellness and to a fiscal and social balance. It's too bad that in this regard the government's actions don't really match their words.

Let me for a minute just say, Mr. Speaker, that that's not just my sense of the way things are but in fact the Auditor General's sense of the way things are as well. I can quote from the Auditor General where he says in his last report:

In our review of the Ministry business plans in Budget 99, we found that over half the Ministries had at least one goal that did not have a performance measure associated with it. Overall, 24% of all the goals in Ministry business plans did not have a performance measure. In addition, in many business plans where performance measures were included, the linkage between the goals and the performance measures was not apparent.

Mr. Speaker, particularly troubling is that last phrase, that "the linkage between the goals and the performance measures was not apparent." So you have a government that's priding itself on being accountable, yet the mechanisms that they use to pin those claims on, these business plans and performance measures, seem to be not only inadequate but perhaps even misleading in that there isn't an apparent relationship between what they say, what they do, and what they've said that they've done.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General also said in his last report:

In Budget 99, core businesses are still defined variously in terms of goals, strategies, activities, or performance criteria. Strategies are sometimes defined as desired results rather than broad actions to achieve them. Goals are sometimes defined in terms of activities rather than end results.

So I say again that we'd like to get the story straight from this government before we can have any faith in their ability to both budget and be accountable for their budgetary decisions.

The Auditor General makes some other rather damning observations as well. He says, for example, that some performance measures are not measured on an annual basis. He comments that "few business plans discuss external factors that can effect performance." He also notes that

in Ministry business plans, output and outcome measures are not always well defined, measurable, and clearly related to core business goals.

You know, if this was a group of managers that you or I were employing in our business, Mr. Speaker, I think with this kind of an audit we'd have to fire them. We certainly wouldn't be able to trust

them, and if we allowed them back into the office and gave them the keys to the piggy bank again, I think we'd be watching them with every means of surveillance available.

It's quite clear that we need fundamental changes to the budget management process in Alberta in order to create certainty, predictability, stability, and sustainability for our local authorities, including municipalities, children's services authorities, school boards, and health authorities. Over the years Alberta Liberals have proposed a number of elements to improve the credibility and stability of the budget planning process, to sustain our core programs in health care, education, and other core services, and to ensure that there is a fiscal and human balance in both good times and bad. Some of these elements include amendments to require the government to table monthly budget updates so that all Albertans know where they stand on a regular basis, requiring an independent assessment of provincial revenues by an independent source, and comparing these forecasts with those of Alberta Treasury. These forecasts would then have to be tabled in the budget in subsequent monthly, not quarterly but monthly, budget updates.

On this point, Mr. Speaker, I'll say that I am flattered that the Provincial Treasurer now includes the Alberta Liberal caucus as one of those expert groups in his quarterly updates. I don't know whether you've had a chance to read the press releases, but when the Provincial Treasurer does his quarterly updates now, he actually indicates the Alberta Liberal forecasts and projections in terms of several fiscal and economic indicators to show where we stack up compared to all of the other experts that the province relies on. I know that the Provincial Treasurer has been relying on the advice that comes from this caucus, and it's just nice to see that publicly acknowledged in his press releases.

Mr. Speaker, establishing ministry performance measures and benchmarks for a variance between budgeted and actual revenues would certainly go a long way to quelling the suspicion I have that the government is not terribly serious about this kind of budget criteria, and it wouldn't even be new and uncharted territory if the government wanted to go down that path. All they have to do is look at the state of Minnesota's finance department. Of course I've given the Treasurer the references that he needs to see how other jurisdictions are able to accomplish this very important accountability measure.

In addition, Alberta Liberals have said that it should be required in the budget for the preparation of a fiscal strategy report with 10-year trends for major fiscal and economic indicators. Now, the federal government is currently using a five-year planning horizon, which still exceeds the province's three-year planning horizon. It was just recently that we saw this Provincial Treasurer wagging his finger and saying that the feds ought to follow Alberta's lead. Well, in this particular case I think it would be nice if the province of Alberta followed the leadership of the federal government and projected a planning forecast with a reasonably long horizon so that people could make their own determinations about whether the government is playing some kind of shell game with revenue and expenditure projections.

There are some other issues as well, Mr. Speaker. For example, the establishment of a fiscal stabilization fund, which would ensure that strategic investments undertaken in our health care and education systems are sustainable over the long term. This would help us deal with the volatility of our economy, and it would provide revenues to guide budgetary decisions or priorities, particularly on the program side of the ledger. The fiscal stabilization fund, which we've talked about at length in this Assembly, would introduce greater stability and certainty into the budget process in Alberta and allow us to sustain our core social programs, which are the backbone for our competitiveness.

Mr. Speaker, the fiscal stabilization fund would be a real entity. It wouldn't be this cushion that's built into the budget on this 3 percent or 3 and a half percent formula that they use now. It was said once in this Assembly that this Provincial Treasurer builds so many cushions into his budget it reminded him of a pool table in the St. Louis Hotel. I don't know whether all of those cushions being built in are a reasonable and prudent way of doing budgeting, but I do know this. In any business you want to try to accommodate downturns in revenue, and the way you can do that is by setting aside a protected fund with very strict guidelines around allocations. That's what a fiscal stabilization fund would be.

Now, on this issue of sustainability and stability, which I say are key to effective spending and tax reform, I'd like to say that Alberta Liberals have been calling for the establishment of a fund within the budget process itself. The stabilization fund would allow spending and revenue reduction commitments made, for example, under the Fiscal Responsibility Act to be sustained over the course of the entire fiscal plan and not just be changed by another act of the Legislature when it became politically expedient to do so. We already saw that when this government says we're going to respect the law, they mean only when it's convenient, Mr. Speaker. What this government does is variously either challenge something in the Supreme Court, try to bring in a bill with a notwithstanding clause, or just rewrite the law at whim. We've seen examples of all of that in recent times.

10:20

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that I'm not questioning the need for the expenditures that are enumerated in Bill 9. What we question is a Treasurer who doesn't have the budget management and planning systems in place to anticipate at the start of the budget year what will be needed at the end of the budget year. We would never want to accuse this Treasurer or this government of playing politics with revenues and expenditures. That would be an easy and cheap shot, that I won't take, but remember that this is a government that talks about outcomes, yet it has missed more than 200 of its own outcome measures. So words and deeds. [interjections] I hear the taunts: "Out of how many?" and "Aim high."

Well, my question rhetorically back to those members, Mr. Speaker, would be: which ones should Albertans take seriously? Which ones of the performance measures should we take seriously and which ones are we saying to Albertans: "Oh well, we're only putting that in place because we think it looks good. It's for the optics."? Remember, so many issues of this government are simply a matter of optics and a communications plan.

Actually, you know, it surprises me that they're still continuing to say as a government that the reason Albertans don't like their private health care initiative is because it's a communications problem. Of course, those of us who have been listening to our constituents know that's not the case at all. It's because Albertans know exactly what this government is trying to do, and they don't want any part of it.

Mr. Speaker, what I'll say about Bill 9 – I'll finish off where I started. This bill will no doubt pass and money will be spent and Albertans won't really be any the wiser for how it was spent. We'll have yet another example of this government's inability to properly manage within the budget cycle. That distresses me, because while it may be insignificant to this government that they're wanting us to commit nearly \$3 billion at this point in time, it's not insignificant to me. It's not insignificant to the neighbours and constituents of mine who just over this last weekend have filled out their tax forms and have been forced to submit to this government the .5 percent flat tax, for example, which was brought in as a deficit elimination tax. It's really quite galling to sit there and fill out on your form that you have to send in another \$100 or \$200 or \$300 to the provincial

government for deficit elimination when the government is bragging about its multibillion dollar surplus.

One specific question that I will ask and I would hope will be addressed at some point in the debate on Bill 9 is why it is that some government departments are asking for as little as 12 percent of their budget on an annual basis in this interim supply vote, but other departments are asking for as much as 46 percent. I note that the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations is with us in the Chamber, and her department in particular, Mr. Speaker, is asking for 46 percent of its budget allocation in this interim supply bill, nearly half a year's allocation, yet the Legislative Assembly request is only for 12 percent. While we're looking at that variance of between 12 and 46 percent, I'll note that the request period covers about 18 or 19 percent of the year on an annual basis. So you would expect that departments such as the Department of Community Development, which is only asking for 19 percent, would be really the benchmark, that it would make sense that you'd be looking for about 19 percent of your budget if you're looking at about 19 percent of the fiscal year.

So with those very few comments and concerns, Mr. Speaker, I'll pass the torch to another member of the Assembly.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Community Development *(continued)*

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I'll just take a few moments to address one topic at this time, the topic of seniors, and hopefully respond to some of the concerns raised. I understand the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre would like an opportunity to voice some more questions, which I'll be very pleased to give to her.

What I'd like to say, first of all, is that the accusations against my ministry of being somehow not compassionate with respect to its dealings with seniors I think are somewhat unfounded and unfair. As a matter of fact, I'd like to read a letter that I just happened to sign a few moments ago to a senior, whom I will through respect not name here, whose concern was brought to me via one of the member's colleagues. It goes on to say:

On January 24, 2000 . . . MLA for [such a place], contacted me on your behalf about your Alberta Seniors Benefit.

Each year, Alberta Seniors Benefit sends seniors a letter detailing the benefits they are eligible to receive and the information on which their eligibility is based. In these letters, seniors are asked to provide an update on any changes to this information. Changes to the benefits are then made retroactive to the date the most recent letter was sent out.

Due to the change in your address, it is possible you did not receive these letters since your move in April 1996. Therefore, you may not have known of the need to provide Alberta Seniors Benefit with updated information on your place of residence. On this basis, Alberta Seniors Benefit has agreed to provide you with benefits retroactive to May 1996.

You can expect to have these retroactive benefits included with your March 2000 payment from Alberta Seniors Benefit.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to help you.

And that's signed by myself as minister.

That, Mr. Chairman, is certainly not the actions of a department or a minister of a government who does not have compassion for seniors. To give retroactivity on a program for four years I think is the right thing to do and probably quite unheard of.

With respect to some of the concerns on the special-needs program, I think it should be pointed out that the special-needs program is intended for that very purpose, and that is to help with things like shelter. I went through that in my talks earlier. We found – and I was a part of this decision – that perhaps it would be more prudent and better not to get into a replacement policy, if you will. Hence we shortened up the desire or the request, shall we say, for appliances. However, I must point out that whether it be a freezer, a stove, a washing machine, or whatever, we treat each case on an individual basis. Therefore if, as the member pointed out, there were a need and a desire for a particular senior to have a freezer, for example, that would accommodate, say, a person living in the country who has a large garden – although we don't condone outright applications from everybody for a freezer, if there were a need shown that that freezer would in fact help the living standard of that particular senior, we would grant it. If you have any of those particular situations, hon. member, I'd be more than willing and pleased if you would have them identify that to the staff at the department, who are very good at looking into these things. We certainly want to do through the program whatever we can within reason to assist these people and make their lives a little easier.

10:30

Now, there's been much discussion with respect to the Alberta seniors' benefit program. I'd like to set the record straight on how we compare with other provinces, because I think this would put what we're trying to do into a bit of perspective. For example, in income level for eligibility Alberta is the highest in Canada, the highest by a significant margin. I'll just go through what it is on a per couple basis. For example, Alberta seniors benefit consideration starts for couples in Alberta at less than \$27,385 as income, B.C. is \$19,000, Saskatchewan \$19,000, Manitoba \$18,500, Ontario \$19,600. Northwest Territories, the closest one, is \$25,400. Yukon is roughly \$20,000. Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland: no program. Keep in mind that this is the situation that we have in a province that has the best tax regime in the country. So you have the best standard of living and the highest cutoff levels before the program is implemented.

If you look at the amount of support, Alberta also has – and I won't go through it all – the highest maximum monthly eligibility at \$292 per month for a couple compared to \$121 in B.C., \$145 in Saskatchewan, and so on. Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland all have no program.

We could go on to health care premium subsidies. Only British Columbia and Alberta charge premiums, and we both do subsidies there, so that's equal up.

Special needs, one that we were just talking about. We have up to \$5,000 a year for seniors who qualify. They would have to be on Alberta seniors' benefit to even be considered for qualification. Northwest Territories has additional assistance for seniors who are on social assistance, so it would be a similar kind of thing, and the Yukon has low-interest home repair loans. British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland: no program.

Dental, which is again one of the ones that we even help out under special needs. Again, Alberta, Northwest Territories, Yukon are the only ones that have some description of a program. All the other provinces have no program.

Optical. We have roughly \$93 every three years for eyeglasses,

similar to Manitoba. Northwest Territories, for example, has a pair of eyeglasses every two years, and in Yukon the lenses every two years with 50 bucks for frames. Again B.C., Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland: no program.

I'll leave it at that. There are a few others that I could go through, but I think I just made the point quite clearly – if the hon. member would like that information at some point, I'd be pleased to forward it – that in Alberta not only are we very generous in our interpretation of the rules to ensure that the seniors who are eligible receive retroactively even in some cases what they are entitled to, but we have the best seniors' benefit program for needy seniors in all of Canada. I think that is something that we can all on both side of the Assembly be very, very proud of.

As I indicate in my discussions with senior's groups, if you know of seniors who are in need, for heaven's sake, please put them in touch with people in the department, who I feel do a very, very fine job of dealing with this particular element of our society.

With that, I'll give up my place and let the member ask some more questions.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm keen to put more questions before the department. I'll just pick up where I left off. One of the strategies being put forward this year is around this interministry committee dealing with implementing the legislation affecting seniors and investigating protection for persons in care. I was asking about whether that would be including developing standards of care, and I mentioned the FAIRE group at the same time.

I was also asking about standards and criteria for care around the day homes and the boardinghouse type of homes and whether there'd be any legislation coming in this year to regulate the provision of services there. I hope there is, because that is an area where we really need to see some kind of regulation and standards of care.

I find the minister's point that the special-needs benefit program is flexible and that indeed if a senior were in need of one of these appliances that has now been restricted – I appreciate that. I certainly know that the staff in the department are excellent and work very hard, and it certainly wasn't me who was indicating that they don't have compassion. My question is: how are they supposed to know this? As much as I'd like to believe that every person duly reviews and scours the *Hansard* from every debate, I don't think it's true. So how are people supposed to know that these exceptions could be made or that it is still worth while asking for this if indeed they've gotten a slip of paper that says: you can't ask for it anymore?

I guess I have a problem with the idea that seniors need to be coming to their MLAs in order to be able to get full access to everything that's available in these programs. Of course, we're all here to serve our constituents, but I don't think it's appropriate that there's a situation where you have to know the tricks and be able to get through to the right people to access points. I certainly agree with the minister about the compassion and excellent work done by the people in the program.

I note that there's a transfer of moneys to Alberta Health for payment of health care premiums. I'm sorry I don't have the vote number for you. It's probably under vote 4. I'm wondering if there is an increase in this payment reflected in this budget and, if so, by how much. In other words, are there more people qualifying for this subsidy of full or partial payment of health care premiums? We certainly have seen the demand under the special-needs benefit

increasing. Are we also seeing this increase under the section of Alberta senior's benefit that allows for the full or partial payment of health care premiums?

The lodge assistance grant. I know that this is an issue that the minister is familiar with, but it's one that's causing some concern. I've heard about it particularly in relation to Edmonton. One figure that I've heard is that Edmonton is losing \$360,000 a year because the provincial funding for the senior citizens' lodges, I think it could be fairly said, discriminates against the larger cities. The funding formula that's in place right now is that the province will pay \$3.60 per resident per day for those in the larger centres. The exceptions there are Calgary and Lethbridge, but for all of the other larger centres in the province that holds.

10:40

Now, the smaller and usually the rural lodges get \$4.80 per person per day. I think this was developed with the idea that there were economies of scale for the larger lodges, and that may well be true, but we have larger organizations that are running these, and there is a definite discrimination factor here. I think it's affecting our ability certainly in Edmonton to be able to provide new facilities. I'm aware that the mayor from the city of Edmonton has contacted the minister asking for a correction in this inequity.

I think part of the issue around this is that we have more seniors in lodge-type care who are in fact older and more frail than perhaps the program originally envisioned, and therefore the lodges are having to provide care beyond what was originally expected of them. I'm asking whether there's been consideration in this budget year to increasing that allotment. If not, then is there any special consideration to be given to the Greater Edmonton Foundation: Housing for Seniors in the assistance they're looking for specific to a couple of the lodges that they're attempting to renovate or rebuild? There's quite a bit of material available on that. If the minister is in need of any of it or wants copies, I'm happy to help with that and provide it to him.

Moving on, I'm wondering if the minister can make a commitment as to when the government will be tabling their response to the impact of the aging population study. I know that he mentioned it in his opening remarks. I'm just looking for a specific date when we might expect a response from the government on that.

Before we leave seniors' issues, in a quick literature review of the issues that are being raised in the paper, in different reports and analyses that are being done, just a couple of things that I want to point out here. Alberta has had higher inflation than, I think, the rest of the country for a given period of time which was in the last year. That certainly affects seniors or anyone, in fact, on a fixed income. Things are costing more, and it's eating into their savings.

There are also a couple of times now when I've seen concerns raised around undernourishment of seniors. I'll very quickly refer back to the point I was making about funding for seniors' centres, in that often there is a hot lunch program or a once a week program that involves food and nutrition information or perhaps eating together, which at the very least is getting seniors out and getting at least one good meal into them, or perhaps teaching them better the skills and information they need on how to shop and cook for themselves. I'm really saddened to hear that there are seniors who have that kind of undernourishment if they can afford it. Then, of course, as we know, there are seniors who are struggling, particularly with the rent payments that we're looking at right now, and are using food money to pay for their rent and therefore are not eating properly.

We have some instances – and I have seen this in our office in Edmonton-Centre. Given the hot rental market, seniors are being asked to leave, with the appropriate notification I'm quick to add, to

vacate apartments that are currently under a subsidy program. So they're uprooted, have to leave where they're living, and the apartments are not offered again at the subsidized rate, and that's expensive. As anyone here that's ever moved knows, even if you're going to somewhere not that far away, you've still got moving costs for the furniture plus any days you may be in between places and a number of other costs that are incurred there.

We've had a natural gas hike here in the last year, and that has certainly affected seniors. I'm sure we've all heard about that. I notice that Telus phone rates have gone up I think by \$2 and then by another \$2, and I think they just went up another \$3 in January. Again, for someone on a fixed income that's significant money.

I do have a motion before the Assembly, Motion 519, which is asking that the costs of the telephone be included in the 30 percent of income that's paid by seniors for rent and utilities in subsidized apartments, because we've got basic phone rates that are now in the \$23 to \$25 range. When that's above and beyond what they're paying, this is getting to be a significant cost, and telephones are not an option for seniors. The medic alert help lines work through the phone lines, so you've got to have a phone to have one of those "I've fallen and I can't get up" medic alert systems. As well, it's an isolation-breaking factor. People keep in touch with their family and friends that way.

I have spoken before about the number of user fees which affect seniors. User fees are a regressive tax. Everybody pays for the service no matter what their income is, and I've had a number of seniors talk to me about that.

I also note that there was a Calgary regional health authority study on regional health in that area which turned up that one-quarter of their seniors, 25 percent, didn't have the money to eat properly, and I had referred to that earlier.

I also note that the cable TV rates have gone up. When I first heard this, you know, I viewed cable TV as an entertainment expense, and it was my choice as to whether I had it or not, and should we really be feeling sorry for people that couldn't have cable TV? But I have been educated in that. In fact, for anyone living in my constituency and I'm sure in a number of other ones, if you want to have any kind of television reception, you have to have cable. In downtown Edmonton you can't get any kind of reception, unless you're really fond of that sort of three-ghosting appearance on your television set, and you might get one station, but it's a pretty interesting thing to try and watch. It's been shown to me that really cable TV is pretty important to a lot of seniors. It's how they connect. It keeps their minds alert and active. It gives them some connection with the outside world when watching the news. Perhaps they even watch question period on Access television. That would be great. Nonetheless, there's another cost that's gone up by 6 percent.

Just very quickly there are a number of things that have gone up for seniors in the last year.

Just in closing on the seniors – although I do hope to get back to it – has the government considered the suggestion put forward by the Liberals of abolishing the health care premiums? As the minister pointed out, there are only two provinces that charge them. Certainly, if we were looking for a way to put money back in the pockets of seniors, there's a very effective way to do it, and it's certainly much needed when we look at all the other costs that have increased in their daily budgets.

[Mrs. Laing in the chair]

Now, moving on, tracking the FTEs in the department is an exercise in deciphering which, I will admit, is beyond me. They are

now appearing as a straight one line. I would ask the minister for a breakdown of FTEs by each vote number and subvote number. I think we've got a total of six votes, and in some of the categories I think there are up to another six subcategories. I'd like to see exactly how those FTEs break down and also ask if the minister can supply an accounting of the changes in staffing for each area from last year to this year. One of things I've noted is that staff have been transferred around, and again I have not been able to track this through the documentation that's provided in the budget process. Sometimes I can find it in the public accounts process, but mostly it's just knowing people in a department and knowing where they came from and where they went to. I'd like to be able to get something on paper with that, so if the minister could be so kind.

10:50

Thirdly in that category, if I can get a comparison – and I know this is difficult because the department has been changed and sort of folded into itself and folded into itself quite a bit – on the FTEs as close as you can get with the vote numbers, comparing from, say, '93-94 to the year that we're in, '99-2000, that would be helpful. I'm asking if pension liabilities are reflected anywhere in the budget. Any anticipation of retirements?

Now, I'd like to move on to a couple of other issues. The performing arts stabilization fund. The government's commitment to that fund was to have been completed in the current fiscal year, '99-2000. I'm looking for confirmation that that indeed did happen and asking if there is any additional moneys going into the fund in the budget year under consideration, 2000-2001. If there is a new commitment, could we please get a description of that and copies of the agreement that's been made to put further money into that fund?

The Western Heritage Centre, which appears under vote 3.0.4. or 3.0.6. It's not quite clear in there where it would come. Now, I notice in the public accounts that despite previous ministers being on record saying that the government would not be supplying any additional funding to this organization, in fact in '98-99 Treasury did grant an additional \$200,000 to the Western Heritage Centre. So I'm asking: what is the commitment to the Western Heritage Centre in this budget that we have under consideration? Was this figure included in the figures that I see before me? It keeps mentioning 18 of the historic sites, and the minister used the same 18 figure. Is the Western Heritage Centre now one of those 18? I don't think it is. So where is the money coming from to undertake the costs that have now been incurred by the government, and what, if any, other commitment has been reduced to offset that? If, indeed, there was an offset, what is it, and if not, does this mean that we can be expecting a supplementary supply request from the department before the end of the year? I'd also like a description of the operations of the restricted fund in the Western Heritage Centre fund. That would be helpful.

Oh, dear, I'm going to have to continue on once I take a little break here. I've got so much more to get through. No, I've got another minute. I'm going to use it.

Starting in on arts and culture then. I note that the goal and strategy is to achieve full participation in the cultural life of Alberta. As I have many times before, I'm of course advocating for government support and leadership for support of arts and culture in Alberta, and no matter how the numbers are presented, the truth is that the money in the arts and culture has remained stagnant since the late '80s. Certainly to anyone that's out there talking to the groups, the amount of money they're receiving has not increased. As I explained it last year, I think the pie is the same size and the pieces are getting cut smaller. Certainly, we've had professional staff that have been moved out of the branch, and I think that

expertise is lost to the organization and lost to the public generally. We've had new projects brought into the portfolio and a bit of money came with them, and then that gets touted as an increase in the budget, but it isn't. That was money that came tagged to a specific project.

I'll make the point again that I see tourism and economic development and in some cases games who love to use the photos of the thousands of happy people at the Folk Festival or the Fringe or the Calgary Children's Festival or the Blueberry Bluegrass Festival or whatever, but I don't see any accompanying money to support this fine programming and these exciting performances that draw people in and makes for the great photo op which is then used by these groups.

I think I've reached the end of my time. I know the minister wants to say a few words, and then I'll be happy to get up and continue with my questions. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSZYN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I again will keep my comments relatively brief with the obligation that we'll answer most, if not all, of your questions later.

A couple of points I want to make. You have to appreciate that with respect to seniors' premiums some 130,000 seniors either pay little or no premium because they're on the seniors' benefit program. So that's one chunk there. They don't pay it. [interjection] The others, you have an interesting point. I'm sure that at some point we will be looking at this option also, but I will not make a commitment one way or the other, because quite frankly I can't.

You raised the Western Heritage Centre the other day in question period, and I thought I had made it clear, but I'll explain it again. We now own the building. The people look after the programming, so there is no money allocated in this budget for the Western Heritage Centre, period. The operation, the maintenance of the building is in the infrastructure budget, as it is with all the other facilities. You are correct. This is not one of the 18 facilities I'm referring to. So there is no skimming off of any kind of dollars to facilitate this particular group, and the programming is totally on their own hook. I'm sure it's going to get better as we go on, and it is excellent at this point in time also.

As much as I would like to, I will not commit to giving you the breakdown that you requested for the full-time equivalents going back to '92 or '93. That would be such an exercise in futility and research, if you will, for people on my staff that I don't feel it's warranted. However, I will give you, if you want, current ones by department within reason.

Just to give you an idea of what's happened. For example, we are getting five more in the human rights and citizenship division, working at the ground level to try to bring down the backlog there, which we are doing, as I understand, in that area, probably, again, the best in Canada for a time frame for getting the complaints turned around, and we want to, hopefully within the next reasonable period of time, get that shorter yet. So those are five new ones in that area.

We've got two people in sport and recreation volunteer services to meet a demand there, four in the cultural facilities and historical resources division, one in the cultural facilities for planning, and one in the housing services communication staff. As you can appreciate, seniors' housing, which we inherited as a ministry, brought in some 34 new bodies and special purpose housing, another 62 bodies, for some 96 more. I believe those numbers are quite accurate there, for a total in the ministry of 700 and some odd full-time equivalents, so a little over 700. To go back and go to year-to-year changes, I'm not prepared to do that, not that we're hiding anything. It's just simply an exercise that I think isn't really warranted.

You had comments on the lodge assistance grant. When that was brought forward, it was accepted universally by all as a good way, with the idea being that the operators in the major centres such as Edmonton and Calgary – and I believe Lethbridge is the third one that is affected by the lower rate. The understanding at the time it was brought in was that the economies of scale, for example the Greater Edmonton Foundation – I don't know off the top of my head, but they've got a considerable number of units. The feeling was that they could operate at a much lower rate of support, if you will, than the smaller lodges outside. That's why it was done. Are we reviewing it? Yes. Will it be changed? I don't know.

One of the concerns that we have is that this is operating dollars, and they have gone into lodge expansion programs with support through Infrastructure and some additions on their own. Part of the problem is that they're carrying mortgages, and that's being a squeeze which we have to look at. But I will not commit to changing anything in terms of the differences. I don't feel it's discrimination. I don't feel it's unfair. However, I do feel it warrants a review, and that's all I'll commit to, is looking at it, and I think you would be quite satisfied with that.

With respect to impact on aging. When am I going to respond to it? That report hasn't come to me yet, so it will be at some time after, and that's part B of a bigger report. Part A came out earlier in the year, and we will be looking at that in conjunction with other reports. As you can appreciate, we've had a couple of social housing ones, homeless reports. The Broda report was a very good one. Looking at the policies as they pertain to any particular segment of society we're dealing with, we have to look at them in a total and complete context instead of just factoring out one or the other. What I can assure you, however, is that when that report is submitted, it will be made available very quickly so that people who are interested will certainly know the content of it, and then where it goes from there remains to be seen.

11:00

Your observations on seniors' centres, especially the one in the General hospital, I'm cognizant of and, quite frankly, sympathetic. We are trying to somehow get that rent problem addressed. I don't know if we'll be able to or not; it's outside my jurisdiction. But I do agree with you that the seniors' centres are a very good operation. How we could or whether we should get funding to them I don't know. You may or may not be aware that over the years across the province there have been considerable CFEP dollars going into funding a lot of these centres in terms of the capital, especially in smaller communities. Although I'd like to, I can't commit and say that there's going to be an operating dollar going in there, but I do agree with you that they do a very, very good service to the seniors of the province overall.

Some of them operate – I can give you an example. For example, the Seba Beach seniors' centre actually has an operation that turns a surplus, which they give to charity throughout the area, without any kind of financial assistance from any level of government, period. They run a very successful thrift store. At some point if you're interested I can put you in contact with the people there to just see how they do it, and you can ask for yourself firsthand. That is one situation. It is not necessarily something that can happen right across the province. They're doing a very good thing there, and they're quite unique. I happen to know them on a very, very personal level, and I have nothing but respect for that particular group from Seba Beach. Like I say, they don't take any kinds of rent, nothing, and they do help out in the community quite generously.

With respect to seniors you had some reference to: how do they

know what they're eligible for? I guess the best thing I can say to you is that obviously people on the staff are very, very, very good at dealing with them. In terms of conversations or whatever, in terms of dealing with their applications, they're pretty sharp at picking out if they may or may not need it. I would hope that the word spreads, and certainly we, through our program, if we find it necessary could go down the path of letting them know that in fact there are some variations. They're quite aware of it, quite frankly.

I don't really appreciate the comment made: how do they get to know if not through an MLA? I think that was a rather unfair, underhanded, and inappropriate comment because, quite simply, on special needs we get some 6,000 people, and the MLAs would be swamped overboard. All I'm saying to you is that there's a senior who went to one of your colleagues for assistance, and if a senior can't go to an MLA for assistance – and this was from across, if you will, one of your colleagues, not one of mine. I read you the letter of what we did for him just to give you an example that we're very open to access. I don't care where it comes from. If we see a senior in need who qualifies, we help, period.

That's something I want to encourage more, and it's not a political process in any way, shape, or form. I have a lot of confidence in all my colleagues in the House on both sides that when it comes to issues such as seniors, those are brought forward in good faith and not with political brownie points in mind, and I treat them accordingly. I think MLAs on a lot of issues, as you well know, being a seasoned veteran, are quite familiar that you can in fact do a lot of good for a lot of people in a lot of areas by helping them out through the system.

With respect to seniors who are malnourished, that is I hope – I very sincerely hope – a very small number. I would hope it is, and they're out there. This is where some of the special needs goes, for getting that kind of thing if they qualify. Also, some of it is management, some of it is home care, some of it is Meals on Wheels. Those are individual situations that hopefully as people who are involved identify, they help them through the process.

The other thing that was mentioned this afternoon was the whole area of women's issues. I'd like to point out that women's issues are a concern across government. Although I'm the minister responsible, many of the ministries have programs. You identified some of them yourself in the House and the various services, legislation that are of direct benefit to women as such. Within my own ministry we've not identified specifically dollars for policy analysis and support respecting women's issues per se, but these are done through the human rights and citizenship branch as a part of their overall responsibilities.

It is good enough, and the ministry staff do a good job in supporting me in my role as the minister responsible for women's issues. They provide consultation services to other ministries; for example, participating in interdepartmental committees dealing with matters of concern to women such as the People and Prosperity initiatives, the interdepartmental committee on family violence. Further community groups wishing to develop education programs that reduce discrimination against women and foster equality for women can apply for grants from the human rights, citizenship, and multicultural education fund.

Just to give you some examples of applications and funding provided in the last fiscal year, there is something called Changing Together: A Centre for Immigrant Women, which received \$6,000 for a provincial conference to identify critical issues for immigrant women and planning strategies to address these issues. The Women's Economic and Business Solutions Society, or WEBSS, received \$14,850 for a provincial conference entitled Rebuilding Strength, Dismantling Barriers. This conference will be held at

Grant MacEwan College coming up on September 29 through October 1, 2000, and will focus on issues of community inclusion and equality for women with disabilities. Women in Scholarship, Engineering, Science and Technology, or WISEST, received \$25,000 for a project entitled: if women ruled the Earth with men, what then? This project involves the production of a video and written guide based on the stories of the successes and challenges of 17 women in leadership roles.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

The human rights and citizenship branch distributes education materials that are of particular interest to women; for example, an audiovisual resource on preventing gender discrimination, something that's of concern to all of us. In 2000-2001 the branch will also update and redistribute the women's organizations of Alberta directory, which has proven to be a very popular resource. A new initiative on women's history will be developed in 2000 as a millennium project. It's a booklet that will be produced and includes a time line of significant events and profiles of women important to Alberta's history. This project is part of a joint initiative by the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for the status of women. In addition, the ministry will continue to distribute resources such as a Stepping Stones role model, materials produced by the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for the status of women.

I should also mention the seniors' benefit program in my department. It's the best income support program for seniors in Canada, most of whom are women.

So, hon. member, when you say that this minister does not take that particular section of his portfolio seriously, you're absolutely wrong.

Thank you, and I'll yield the floor to you for some more.

MS BLAKEMAN: I think I would ask the minister to perhaps review the questions and the points I was raising by reviewing the *Hansard*. I think he'll see that the questions and points I wanted have not quite been answered by his lengthy and thorough response to me. I encourage him to review the *Hansard*.

I'd like to continue talking about arts and culture. I found an interesting quote here that I'd like to read into the record from Shirley L. Thomson, who is a former director of the National Gallery of Canada and currently a director on the Canada Council for the Arts. She's talking about why there's a need to provide public funding, and although she's talking about Canadian public funding, I think the argument serves just as well for Alberta. She says:

A major argument for public funding is one of scale. To support Canadian culture across a country as diverse as ours, and to take risks in fostering art at the leading and less-understood edge, you need funding agencies large enough to perform effectively and to distribute resources widely and wisely. They must be able both to spot talent and to do something about it. Their communication tools must reach the artists and the public who are the potential users, and they need a varied pool of staff and advisors on whose judgment and expertise they can call.

I think that's a nicely encapsulated view of what I would be looking to the minister's department and the AFA to be doing. I think I've already brought up some points that show that this vision is being eroded with the staff reductions we've had in that area. The understanding of the whole concept of development of arts and culture I think has fallen by the wayside in the last seven or eight years, and I'd encourage the minister to perhaps go back and look at some of the policy documents that existed in the late '80s and early '90s for inspiration there.

11:10

I note a government news release dated February 18, 2000 – oh, goodness, we're right up to speed here – that speaks in glowing terms of how much money the arts organizations are putting back into Alberta communities. Indeed, that is an important and valued part of what artistic organizations and artists bring to Alberta, an economic impact, but I think what they bring goes much further than that. One of the points that is raised is that arts organizations spend \$127 million in their communities on materials, supplies, services, and salaries. I want to point out that that's money that stays in the community, and in many cases that's money that's brought either from outside the local community or from outside Alberta. So, in fact, it's new money coming into the Alberta economy, and it stays here. The supplies are purchased by the organizations, but the individual artists are also paying rent, buying food. That money stays in circulation here.

There is a significant volunteer role in the arts organizations, and I don't think we value that enough yet. What I'd like to ask the minister is: can he show me if there are any specific increases that are going directly to the organizations in this vote? I notice that the budget amount has gone up, it's gone down. Still, when I'm visiting the organizations themselves, they're not seeing an increase. I'm looking for the minister to show me specific increases where the money is ending up in the pockets or in the accounts of the organizations.

One small thing I came across that the minister might find interesting and I hope inspiring is the support for the Alberta film development program. We're in year two now and going into year three. I'm expecting that the minister is doing an evaluation. In fact I think I saw that in one of the strategies, that there would be an evaluation of that program. I just found it really interesting that in a document called the Practical Guide to Canada's Film, Television and Multi-Media Industry we have one paragraph about two inches long on the Alberta film development program, but when I look at the assistance that's given from other provinces to the film industry, we've got things like over a page of different programs that B.C. offers their film industry. We've got half a page from Manitoba. Ontario: almost two pages of programs and incentives that are offered. Even P.E.I., valiant little P.E.I., has more than half a page of programs that are offered. So perhaps that would be an inspiration to the minister to take a look at this.

I think the government learned its lesson and learned it the hard way on support of the film industry. Certainly we lost an awful lot of money out of this province, and we also dealt a fairly serious blow to the industry itself. I'm sure the minister is well aware of how many of our trained technicians – and I know that the minister for science, research, and information technology would join me in recognizing how important it is to keep the people that are trained in this knowledge-based business in our province. The estimates are that we lost I think about 75 percent of our technicians. In many cases these people also had highly specialized equipment that they took with them because they owned it, and now anyone trying to do that kind of business here has to woo these people back.

So, as I say, I think the government learned their lesson on that one. I encourage a very thorough review of the program, and I encourage them to seek out other ways to give support to this industry. It's a moneymaker, it's a tourism draw, and it's a renewable resource because it is knowledge-based.

I'll also note the number of letters that I've received CCed copies of from individuals. I think all of them but one or two were from individuals living in Calgary who were writing to their MLA asking for additional money – I think \$8 million was the figure that was mentioned – from the government to funding into arts and cultural

programming. I've been impressed by the number of people that felt they needed to write. As we know, lots of people think it, but they don't actually follow through with the impetus to send the letter, and to me that's a fairly strong indicator that, particularly in Calgary, people are looking to the government to give better support in funding for arts and culture.

Now, a number of miscellaneous points. The changes in funding to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. I'm a little concerned here that this is going to come at a very difficult time for the groups that are currently receiving operating funds through this foundation, and I'm wondering if the minister has planned a phase-in of the cuts. I suppose that's not strictly speaking an accurate description, but if they're being told they can no longer qualify under the program if they receive funding from any other source, it certainly would be a tremendous loss of revenue for those organizations. Was there a phase-in considered? If there wasn't, boy, I'll be asking you for one.

Part of my question is: have you included the Wild Rose Foundation in your list of other lottery-based granting agencies that are the exclusion criteria here. The Wild Rose Foundation is doing something totally different. They are funding the volunteer component. As you've heard me say on a number of occasions now, we have a huge sector under what could be called the voluntary or nonprofit or charitable sector here. It's one thing to be funding a recreation group like the naturalists' society or the orienteering club of Alberta or whomever with operating funds, but they may well have received moneys through the Wild Rose Foundation, which I know the minister is aware one can only apply for every couple of years, and there is a maximum amount to the grant, but it's specific to volunteer development.

I'll remind the minister again of the excellent report produced by the federal government in which they talk about the need for provincial and municipal governments coming in on capacity building. So I'm very concerned, and I'm looking for reassurance from the minister that the Wild Rose Foundation has not been included on the list, which would mean a group would get cut off from funding from Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife. Has there been a discussion or any criteria put in place for organizations that may face having to close their doors if they're not receiving this funding?

11:20

Certainly if there was a group that was getting operating funding through Alberta Sports, Recreation and Wildlife, to lose their operating funding grant and run their organization on the \$20,000 from Wild Rose, which is for a very specific reason – and that is volunteer development. We will end up with organizations closing down. Has the department just said: "Yes, we have a criteria, and that's tough luck. Good-bye." Or are there any other provisions being put in place there?

I've asked the minister before; I'll ask him officially as part of this budget process. I'd like to know what the department's policy response is to the recommendations that have been made through the voluntary-sector report from the federal government: a number of recommendations in there about capacity building, about training for staff, training on information technology, purchase of equipment, training for volunteers, and the need to develop good recruitment, screening, and training programs there for volunteers.

The minister mentioned Trailnet, and I'm pleased to see there's support for that project. I know that one of the sticking points that would make everybody feel much happier about this, for those that do have a problem with it, is occupiers' liability legislation, which I have now seen come forward twice in this Legislature. What is the

problem? What is holding this legislation up? I mean, certainly there's strong support for it from this side. Can we get on with this? Perhaps if there was some detail here about what the problem is, we could all work on this, because certainly that occupiers' liability legislation would be very helpful to get this wonderful program in line. I do understand there are people that have concerns about it, and I'd like to see those concerns addressed and people feeling comfortable with the project.

I note in the Auditor General's recommendation in the public accounts that there are recommendations on governance principles for appointments of individuals to agencies, boards, and commissions, and I'm wondering if the minister has developed criteria or is following the recommendation from the PAO staffing directive on proper recruitment of people to agencies, boards, and commissions.

A couple of other questions here. Historical sites. I'm wondering what the minister has planned for protection of the Rossdale site that's underneath the EPCOR Rossdale power plant. We know now that that was the site of Fort Augustus, one of the two Fort Edmontons, and also was a burial ground for the Blackfoot tribe. We look to the provincial government to be providing protection for this site. What exactly is the government doing? What protection will be forthcoming? How is the province working with the city on this? What is being put in place?

I note the planning money that's being put in for the 2005 Alberta anniversary celebration. I hope in this case that history repeats itself. In 1980, at the 75th anniversary, a fund was created, and from that fund was development of a number of projects which we value enormously today, such as the Street Performers Festival, the Fringe Festival, the Works visual arts festival, the jazz festival, Folk Festival, et cetera. So I do hope that will be coming.

There are a number of other sectors that I have not yet covered, and I understand there are other issues that we're trying to get through tonight. Other things that have not yet been covered include youth, volunteers, amateur sports, the Francophone Secretariat. By the way, earlier I had mentioned that there were some new programs moved into the department and some moved out, and the Francophone Secretariat is one of the new ones that's been moved in. I had been asking the minister for an accounting that showed moneys leaving and moneys coming back, and the Francophone Secretariat is one of the ones that's come in.

I know there are more issues that are coming on seniors. Additionally, we haven't talked about the human rights, citizenship and multiculturalism education fund or the Human Rights Commission. I think there's more that needs to be raised on the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and I haven't even touched on the special housing that's now under the portfolio. Those are just a few of the things that have yet to be addressed in this portfolio. I point out once again that one evening or one go at this department is not enough, and anyone that has to be debating Human Resources and Employment now, given all that's in that superministry, has my condolences.

I'd like to go on now, and in the few minutes I have left I'd like to look at some of the concerns that have been raised about the Human Rights Commission. There have been a couple of literature reviews done recently or done within the last couple of years on the Human Rights Commission. We've certainly had it in existence long enough now to be able to be taking a good look at it, and there are a few things I want to raise there.

Some of the things I'm reading are saying that there's a need for increased public education about human rights complaints procedures. This is particularly true in rural areas. I think we also need to include aboriginal communities in that and other peoples or areas that have accessibility concerns. I think there also needs to be

increased financial and personal support for complainants. Staff such as accessibility co-ordinators may be necessary. [an electronic device beeped]

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aw.

MS BLAKEMAN: No, no, no. It's just mine. It's just my little reminder. Joy and happiness everyone. It's just a little reminder to help me come to a form of . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Conclusion.

MS BLAKEMAN: No. There's no way I can conclude. I still have a number of other things to do.

I guess what I'll do now is ask that the debate be adjourned at this point so that we can resume on a different day to complete all the other questions I have around this department. Mr. Chairman, I would ask that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the Committee of Supply now rise and report progress and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

11:30

MRS. LAING: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Community Development, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 9 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000 (continued)

[Adjourned debate February 29: Ms Calahasen]

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to have this opportunity to speak to Bill 9. Earlier this evening when the Government House Leader opened the discussions on Bill 9, he talked about it being necessary for us to have an appropriation bill at this particular stage so that the government could carry on the seamless operations of government in the event of debate carrying on into April. Well, it's laughable at the very least to think that when this government has only designated 15 days of discussion on the budget, we could somehow stretch that into more than a month of debate into April, which would somehow then impact the government operations in terms of dollars. It really is a joke and is something that is beyond the comprehension of any logical kind of review of the dollars we're talking about here.

Mr. Speaker, there is no way I can see that we could reasonably support this interim supply bill without some kind of explanation on

how this new spending is going to contribute to meeting any of the defined outcomes and performance criteria in the government business plans. We have lots of outstanding issues in this province, things like waiting lists in the public health care system, opening up hospital beds in this public health care system. The Grey Nuns hospital, in my riding, is a relatively new hospital, and two complete floors of that hospital have never been opened up regardless of the number of red alerts we face in this city, regardless of the kinds of waiting lists we have in the health care system.

Reducing pupil/teacher ratio is very important, yet we don't see how that's addressed in this interim supply bill. I have a letter waiting to be tabled in my desk now from one of the local PACs in my riding that are very concerned about the pupil/teacher ratio and whether it is going to be addressed at all in this interim supply bill.

We have concerns with the auditing certification process of annual performance reports from this government, and they're not addressed in this interim supply bill. There's a lack of disclosure when we talk about supply votes. No doubt we've heard from both the Auditor General in this province and the Alberta Financial Review Commission, that recommends the separation of operating expenses and capital investments as a means of strengthening managerial accountability and evaluation of effectiveness of programs. This doesn't happen in supply bills, much to the detriment of disclosure for the government.

This government keeps telling Albertans that they have a plan to link expenditures to outcomes, but we see in this interim supply bill a request for 18.6 percent of the total expenses appropriated for the fiscal year. So how does that link expenditures to outcomes in any fashion at all?

We see really sporadic and disjointed requests for dollars in the departments here. With one month left of operations, we have a range of 12 percent to 40 percent funding requests of total budgets of the year. We had International and Intergovernmental Relations up for debate earlier this evening in terms of the next year's budget, yet in this interim supply bill they're asking for 46 percent of the total expenditures of the last year's budget. Where do these figures come from? How can they possibly reasonably match any of the performance measures with this kind of budgeting expenditure? It's hard to believe that they think this is justifiable.

Were these three-year business plans they talk about and the performance measurements to be really useful, to give any real indication of where the government is going, to see any kind of planning in place and any results-driven kinds of program and funding results, we wouldn't see an interim supply bill like this. We would see properly adjusted budgets on a regular and consistent basis coming forward from the Provincial Treasurer's department, but that isn't what happens, Mr. Speaker.

Any business and industry who operated on this kind of basis would have their CEOs and all their managerial staff turfed the very first time they came back and asked for money on this kind of basis. It's a complete lack of strategic planning at any level.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's a trust-me budget.

MS CARLSON: It's a trust-me budget. That's exactly right. The problem is that now Albertans aren't trusting this government anymore because they've just done this one too many times in all areas.

There is no matching of dollars with performance measures, with outcomes. It just doesn't happen here. Albertans expect to receive value for their tax dollars, and they're not seeing it when you see this kind of budgeting happening. It's budgets done by pulling numbers out of a hat. It's budgets done without being responsible in terms of

the budget forecasts on the revenue side. There's no doubt that budget forecasting is a little tricky in the province when you've got oil and gas revenues and when we see the volatility in the market, but there is also no doubt that this government can do exactly what industry does at all times, and that's adjust their forecasts as appropriate.

At least it could be done quarterly, and sometimes the requirement would be for it to be done more often. But what does this government do? It doesn't do it at all. It makes lots of promises, comes back for interim supply budgets whenever they need to rather than being responsible in terms of how they do their forecasting or rather than being accountable to Albertans on how the money is spent.

There's no ability to scrutinize the dollars they're asking for now when we get less than an hour's debate on this particular bill before it passes second reading. There's no opportunity for me to go back through the departments that I'm responsible for, which would be Environment, where they're asking for a 28 percent increase, and International and Intergovernmental Relations, where they're asking for a 46 percent increase.

What are they going to do with those dollars in one month, Mr. Speaker? It looks to me like they're going on a spending spree. Why? Just to get rid of money that's in the department at that level? [interjection] Well, then answer the questions. Have the ministers stand up here and tell us what they're going to do with those dollars. That would be responsible. The irresponsible thing to do is to just come in and ask for this kind of money with 30 days left in the year. That is not good planning. It isn't good management. It isn't being accountable. It doesn't make any progress in meeting any of the identified goals. We don't see any clear and measurable terms coming forward here. There are no clear, set objectives. There are no effective strategies set. This is a complete lack of planning and is an act of irresponsible behaviour on behalf of a government that is talking about billion-dollar budgets.

So why is it, Mr. Speaker, that they aren't prepared to stand up and defend what they're asking for at this point in time? Why do we have to go through this process so many times every year with this government? Why can't they come through with requests that are detailed? Well, I hear lots of grumbling, Mr. Speaker, but I don't see too many people standing up here prepared to speak to this particular budget, and so they could do that. Let's see some accountability in terms of how the money is spent. That's what we're asking for. That's what Albertans are asking for. It's lots of money. They're happy to stand up here and talk about tax cuts that are going to be delivered over the next three years, but they're not prepared to stand up and be accountable for the moneys they're asking for at this time, which are literally millions of dollars and which reflect a huge percentage of this year's budget.

11:40

How are we going to see identified goals being met here or measure any of the progress? There is no mandate, no ability to do that, and we don't see the benchmarks or the targets attached to these dollars. Why is that? What is this government afraid of and what are they hiding from in terms of bringing in an interim supply budget asking for so many dollars at this particular point in time?

Mr. Speaker, these are issues that we have to address every single time they bring in one of these budgets like this, and it's a real problem. We recognize that funding is required in areas of public health and education and infrastructure, but when you have to address the serious issues that are outstanding around the lack of planning within the government's budgetary process, it is our responsibility as the Official Opposition in this province to stand up and criticize the technique by which this government gets to their

end goal. We expect governments to be accountable. Certainly this one is not.

A main problem here is the improper management of the budget. Like we talked about, in industry this Treasurer would have been out a long time ago, because you need to be able to properly forecast the revenues and, just as necessary, match the expenses not only with the revenues but with whatever benchmarks have been set, whatever objectives have been set, and this is a government that cannot do it for one quarter, never mind for one year or three years or five years.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I hear lots of grumbling, but I don't see anybody on their feet prepared to defend this and prepared to tell us why we do not see prudent financial management and why we do not see fiscal responsibility from a government that talks about it all the time. Talk is cheap. What we need is action from this government. We need action from this government in terms of being fiscally responsible for their projecting and for their forecasting and for their budgeting, and they are not prepared to do it. They are prepared to try and spin master their way out of these issues, but they are not prepared to be accountable.

We've talked for a long time, Mr. Speaker, about lots of options

they could be taking a look at in terms of balancing out the revenues and the expenses on the budgetary side. One of those is a fiscal stabilization fund which would take some of the surplus and ensure that strategic investments are undertaken to be able to flatten out the valleys and mountains.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's called the heritage fund.

MS CARLSON: Well, the minister likes to talk about the heritage savings trust fund, but in fact it's not used for that purpose at all. It wouldn't be a bad idea if they considered using it for that purpose.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, but in accordance with Standing Order 61(3) the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

[At 11:46 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Internat. & Intergovern. Relations, February 29, 2000

Date: 00/02/29

Time: 8:01 p.m.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Subcommittee B – International and Intergovernmental Relations

Tannas, Don, Chairman
Laing, Bonnie, Deputy Chairman
Blakeman, Laurie
Calahasen, Pearl
Doerksen, Victor
Forsyth, Heather
Fritz, Yvonne
Graham, Marlene

Hancock, Dave
Kryczka, Karen
Leibovici, Karen
Massey, Don
McClellan, Shirley
Melchin, Greg
Olsen, Sue

Sloan, Linda
Soetaert, Colleen
Stelmach, Ed
Stevens, Ron
Tarchuk, Janis
Woloshyn, Stan
Zwozdesky, Gene

THE CHAIRMAN: I now call subcommittee B to order. The item we have before us is the estimates of the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations. I call upon the hon. minister to make a few comments.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be here this evening to present the estimates of International and Intergovernmental Relations. My intention is to give a brief overview and leave as much time as possible for debate.

The business plan and the budget for the department I think are clearly laid out in the documents that have been provided. I know that my colleagues are certainly familiar with them, and I'm sure the members of the opposition have had time to review them, so I'm not going to spend a lot of time on those.

I will mention briefly our three goals. Goal 1 is "to secure benefits for Alberta from strengthened international relations," goal 2 is "to secure benefits for Alberta as an equal partner in a revitalized, united Canada," and goal 3 is "to support Aboriginal people and governments in achieving self-reliance and enhanced well-being."

The key initiatives for the year ahead. Certainly our ministry will aggressively defend and promote Alberta's interests in our dealings with the federal government. We'll also focus on implementing our framework for international strategies, expanding trade, and strengthening relations between government and aboriginal people.

One of the things I wanted to take a minute to talk about tonight was managing federal/provincial relations, an area we have been discussing over the last few days in one way or another. One of the very important roles of this ministry is to manage and co-ordinate the relationships and relations between Alberta and the government of Canada to ensure that Alberta's provincial interests are addressed. Our responsibilities flow directly from the very federal nature of Canada. The Constitution assigns certain responsibilities to the federal government and certain responsibilities to the provinces. In my view, we need to pay a little attention to this because the federal system is not working or functioning as well as it should.

At a very recent conference on federalism, where I think 600 delegates from many countries in the world were attending, the Prime Minister referred to the diversity and the complexity of Canada, and he stated that within our federal system the idea of partnership is central to the federal government's approach to governing. However, recent actions by the federal government were inconsistent with this principle, and I'll just give you a couple of examples.

One was the unilateral announcement of a major initiative on homelessness. While the initiative is welcomed in this province because it is a serious concern, the concern is in the lack of provin-

cial consultation even though the provinces are basically responsible for the delivery of programs. Even today, nearly three months later, we have no idea how this program will work. We don't know if the money is going to flow to municipalities or to individuals or how we can best integrate the federal initiative with Alberta's existing social policies and programs. This is not partnership nor is it an effective way to meet the needs of the homeless. All members in this Assembly know that there are a number of groups, particularly in our two major centres of Edmonton and Calgary, that are working very hard to address this issue, and I think we need a more effective way to partner with our federal government.

The latest example was just a few days ago when Ottawa struck a special deal with Manitoba and Saskatchewan, giving those two provinces an additional \$240 million in federal aid. Ottawa did not provide support for Alberta farmers or other Canadian farmers. Despite Alberta's ongoing participation in multilateral discussions, we ended up with a bilateral deal. This clearly is not acceptable. All this time Alberta has been at the table working co-operatively for a national farm income assistance solution, and this was disregarded.

Federal agricultural policy must begin to meet the needs of Alberta producers. We need to change some federal policies to encourage value-added exports that will maximize producer returns in a global, competitive market. I'll be working with the minister of agriculture and my cabinet colleagues to promote longer term solutions to the problems faced by Alberta farmers.

More recently and maybe more of a disappointment, the federal government in yesterday's budget did not respond to the Premiers' unanimous call to restore funding to the Canada health and social transfer. Over the past six years the federal government has cut more than \$20 billion from health and social programs. Every year Albertans and other Canadians send more money to Ottawa than it needs to run its own programs. That's why the federal government is able to project surpluses in excess of a hundred billion dollars, yet the federal government has ignored a unanimous call to place health and social funding on a sustainable basis. Instead, it has added \$500 million a year to funding for the CHST in each of the next four years. Alberta's share will be about \$50 million a year, enough to operate our health system for about three days. [interjection]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, there's going to be lots of opportunity for you to ask all the questions you want rather than asking them now, when we then can't hear the minister speak.

MRS. McCLELLAN: We need co-operation and we need partnership in this important area. It's important to all Albertans, to all Canadians. This is not a partisan issue, and we must work together to look for solutions. Solutions are not comments that are attributed to a federal aide in saying that Alberta was wrong to provide extra support to health care in Calgary. This is not a positive action. What it really displays is how little they know about the growth in

the city of Calgary over the past years and the stresses that have been put on the system there. It's really not up to federal government aides some 2,000 miles away to pass judgment on Alberta and Calgary's health policy. This is not partnership.

Asking the federal government for more money every year to address our increasing costs is also not the answer. We need to address the fundamental problem, the imbalance between provincial program responsibilities and federal financial resources. Provinces must have sustainable, long-term funding to meet their social responsibility. There is a need for sharing, co-operation, and fair play to meet the needs of Canadians. Over the next year my ministry will work with other ministries and I hope with all members in this Assembly to address these and other important federal/provincial issues.

We'll ensure that Alberta employs a consistent and co-ordinated approach to federal relations, including Alberta's participation in key intergovernmental forums like the annual Premiers' Conference and the Western Premiers' Conference.

I want to mention one other initiative, and that is the framework for Alberta's international strategies. The renaming of this ministry to International and Intergovernmental Relations reflects the government's intention to place a higher and greater emphasis on Alberta's international activities. We've just completed the development of a new framework for international strategies, which was tabled in the House I believe a week ago yesterday. It identifies three core businesses for Alberta and the international sphere. One is "building international relations," two is "removing trade and investment barriers", and three is "marketing trade, tourism, and investment."

This framework was developed to help guide the Alberta government's international policies and activities and to act as a foundation for new international strategies like the international marketing strategy, the twinning review, and the international education strategies. It's important for us as a province to think internationally when we're developing our policies and our business practices. This applies as much to government departments and businesses as it does to schools, organizations, and citizens.

We have been a very active international player for three decades. International missions strengthen Alberta's relations with other countries and help Alberta businesses profile their goods and services. Our consulting advice to foreign governments ranging from Russia and China to South Africa and Mexico helps improve their systems of government.

Twinning or special relationships between Alberta and other jurisdictions help the province to move beyond cultural and business barriers. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the twinning with Hokkaido in Japan. Our involvement in various international exchanges and initiatives, from the World Petroleum Congress to the 2001 World Championships in Athletics, are incredibly important to this province.

8:11

We will be working hard over the next year to expand trade. We'll work very closely with the federal government to ensure that Alberta's positions are reflected in trade policy negotiations. Trade and investment are very important to Alberta's economy. It's something we don't think about a lot, but one-third of our economic activity is linked to international markets, and one in three Albertans earns a living from international trade.

Since the introduction of the free trade agreement the value of Alberta's exports to the United States has more than tripled, growing from \$9 billion to over \$29 billion. Total Alberta exports to the world have almost tripled, from \$13 billion to more than \$34.5

billion. We are currently Canada's third largest exporter, only behind Ontario and Quebec and ahead of British Columbia. I think that is very significant for a province that is virtually landlocked, and you would consider that export might have just a bit more challenge from this position.

In international trade missions we're seeking increased access for our manufactured goods and services, particularly in the agricultural sector. International trade rules like those being discussed right now at the World Trade Organization are key to securing better conditions for our agricultural producers. I want to tell the members that even though the world trade talks in Seattle didn't result in a new round of negotiations, negotiations on agriculture and trade started again this month. Countries will be submitting proposals by September.

This year I take on the role of co-chair of the committee on internal trade. This is Canada's national body of ministers responsible for internal trade, and as provincial co-chair I will certainly press for new negotiations to remove additional interprovincial barriers to trade.

The other priority we have is with the aboriginal people, and at this time I would ask my colleague the hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs if she would like to make a few comments.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Madam Minister. As Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs one of my primary responsibilities is to be able to do one very important initiative within International and Intergovernmental Relations, and that's to do with the document that I have taken out on the road called Strengthening Relationships: The Government of Alberta's Proposed Aboriginal Policy Framework. Last fall we released a draft of the proposed aboriginal policy framework, and of course this was followed by a public consultation process around our framework document, which concluded at the end of January. We held over 50 meetings on the framework, with over 1,200 aboriginal and nonaboriginal Albertans attending, from First Nations, Métis, industry, and other interested bodies. In addition, we received 42 written submissions on the framework. Based on the feedback and the input we've received, the framework is being revised, and we will then validate this revision with our stakeholders at which time we will compile all the information again to ensure that what we heard is correct and what we heard will be reflective of the changes that we will have written and submitted to cabinet.

I don't think I have to go through the three goals of the framework. I've said that many times here, and I know that my critic out there knows the goals of the policy framework, so I don't think I need to reiterate those. However, I think it's really important for us to be able to know what it is we're trying to do. It's an exciting opportunity to build stronger relationships between the Alberta government and the aboriginal people in Alberta.

Of course, we have to do a number of things, Mr. Chairman. We have to put in place the necessary staff to implement this framework, and that additional staff will be allocated to Aboriginal Affairs to ensure that we are able to follow through on the various commitments to have action within the framework, because this framework is a cross-government initiative. This cross-government initiative certainly takes on a lot of different areas that need to be addressed. Of course, we'll have to make sure, whenever we're finished the consultation or rewriting, that it'll be reflected in everything we do in all government departments. So, Mr. Chairman, it's really an important part in terms of making sure that whatever we do, we do the right thing with this framework.

Another area of responsibility that I have, of course, is the Métis settlements. The continuation of funding to the Métis settlements is

of primary concern and something that I think the Métis settlements want to see continue. We're certainly very pleased, along with the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, that we will continue to do that. I know that's something that needs to be continued in order for us to be able to ensure that the Métis settlements work on their legislation as well as continue their self-reliance perspective.

Another area, of course, is land claims. Land claims is an ongoing area where we want to ensure that whatever we do, we settle any of the outstanding land claims. We have people working on these, and as we complete the negotiations, we will then take them forward.

At this point I'd like to say that we are working on a lot of initiatives with aboriginal people. I'm very pleased to be a part of a government that has worked with aboriginal people in the way we have and to be able to ensure that whatever we do is going to continue to work towards self-reliance initiatives that will help the aboriginal community be able to get to their goals, which are self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to speak to the budget of International and Intergovernmental Relations this evening. First of all, I would like to congratulate the staff of the department for the work they do. Certainly having worked with them on PNWER, the Pacific Northwest Economic Region all-party committee that works to facilitate north/south trade, I have seen people within the department work very hard and very diligently over a number of years now, and I think they do an excellent job there. In fact, it's such a good example of how an all-party committee can work effectively that I'm very surprised that this government doesn't undertake to apply that same model in other areas within this department and in fact within all departments, because I think it definitely facilitates a better understanding of what's going on in the province for all the people of the province and is one of the most effective ways of governing. So I would like to give a bouquet to the staff within the department.

My concerns with the department really have nothing to do with them. It certainly has to do with the mandate that they are given by this government and the mandate that this government continues to operate under, of which we had an example this evening in the first 10 minutes of the minister speaking, about fed bashing. I know, Mr. Chairman, that it's much easier to bash the feds than it is to actually directly address the issues that are outstanding in the province that they are responsible for. So before I get to my specific questions that I came with this evening, let's address a few of those issues. [interjection] I don't see how the minister could be hurt by this, Mr. Chairman. For maybe 11 minutes, not 10 minutes, she stood up here and bashed the feds on their lack of performance as opposed to talking about what they were doing.

In fact, it was interesting that her opening comments talked about defending Alberta's interests instead of promoting the mandate that is written down in their business plan, which is "advancing Alberta's interests." Two completely different perspectives that bring us to two completely different results in terms of benefits for the people of Alberta. I would suggest that going to the table in an effort to work out issues in a co-operative fashion is much more effective than being defensive and confrontational, which is the position we have seen not just the minister but the Premier take on numerous occasions and at the end of the day coming away with very little as a result of that.

Let's talk about two of those issues that she talked about, and

those were health care and homelessness. In terms of the feds not anticipating the growth in the city of Calgary and they should have had a plan in place: well, whose problem is that first, Mr. Chairman? I would suggest that it is this department's problem first. They are closest to the issue. In fact, with so many members from the city of Calgary reporting to this ministry and to other ministries, certainly they should have been able to project the growth in the city of Calgary. They should have responsibly been putting a plan in place well ahead of the growth becoming a huge issue in health care and homelessness, as it has, and should have been lobbying the federal government many years ago in anticipation of the kind of growth rates if they felt that was where the money should come from. Not this after-the-fact kind of seat-of-the-pants planning that is effective for nobody, particularly those people requiring either health care or, in fact, homes to live in in a province where temperatures often fall below 30 below zero. So let's address the problem where it starts, and that's here in her backyard, not 2,000 kilometres away.

8:21

I know she also talked about agriculture. That's very interesting. We've seen that debate happen here in the Legislature so far this week, where now we hear the minister talking about unfair treatment by the federal government favouring Manitoba and Saskatchewan, when she knows very well that her own Premier refused to go to the table and talk to the Prime Minister about this very important issue for people in the agriculture sector in this province.

Then she goes on to talk about how value-added exports are the areas for growth in agriculture in this province. Yes, definitely, value-added exports are very important, but they are only one part of the total picture, the total problem we're facing in agriculture in this province right now, and this minister, who is responsible for overseeing the kind of development that happens in an integrated fashion across ministries, is refusing tonight to stand up and speak about what their government's role is going to be in ensuring that family farms are safe and secure in this province, that they have a viable future in this province. She talks about value-added exports only and about the lack of a federal response, when her own Premier will not go to the table and negotiate with the Prime Minister on essentially a very important issue.

He wasn't at the meetings, Mr. Chairman. That's well documented. It's not good enough to have the minister of agriculture there. We needed a contingency. We needed the Premier there. We needed this minister there.

MRS. SLOAN: He went to Spain.

MS CARLSON: He went to Spain. Well, we know where his priorities are, Mr. Chairman. They're not with the farmers of this province, and that's too bad.

Those farmers know this. They understand this. I have been at several meetings in the past couple of weeks talking to people from rural communities who are very upset at the lack of support they are getting from this government in this regard. It starts in this department and it starts with the Premier, and they're not doing their job.

Then the minister talked about the recent actions of the feds on their initiative on homelessness and why they don't feel like they're a partner in that process. Well, I would suggest to the minister that if she doesn't know how the program works, then she should be letting us know what she's doing to become a part of the process, and she should remember that she has a responsibility to the homeless in this province. Maybe the homeless don't vote, Mr. Chairman, but they are still people in this province who need to be represented and taken care of to the best of our abilities. This government will do well to remember that, because there are a lot of

people who do vote who are watching that and who are seeing their consistent underperformance in that particular area.

Mr. Chairman, in the fall session we heard this minister talk about some negative reactions she had and I assume her government had to the World Trade Organization. I didn't hear her say anything in her opening comments this evening on the government's position in terms of what they're going to do there, so I would like her to highlight that, if she could. It would be important, I think, for us to know what's happening in the future in that particular area.

We've seen a change here in this budget in the direction of this ministry. It went through massive downsizing in the years since 1993, and now we see some significant cost increases being projected for the next year. In the area of international relations it looks to me like the increase is 69 percent, nearly 70 percent. We would like some specifics in terms of how those dollars are going to be spent. And why such a drastic increase? Such a drastic increase to me indicates underperformance in other years or a complete revision of the kind of policy they've been bringing forward. We would like to know which one of those situations is accurate and why she feels there's such a change required there.

In part in that are the full-time equivalent employment positions. Now, we know there's been a bit of a reshuffling within the department in terms of staffing in the recent past and they are projecting to go from 89 full-time equivalents to 100. What we'd like to know: of those budgetary increases, how much of that is going to go to staffing and how much of that is going to go to other costs, particularly travel costs? So if she could break down those costs in as detailed a fashion as possible, we would appreciate it.

We're also seeing a significant cost increase in the areas of trade policy, a 41.3 percent increase there, and that follows of course the announcement this government has made that they're going to be opening some trade offices. We know from past scrutiny that those offices have been primarily staffed by political appointments.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Wrong portfolio. They're not in mine.

MS CARLSON: They're not? Trade offices aren't in your portfolio? Okay.

Then can you give us details? [interjection] However, this ministry is advising in that area. We do know that. And part of those dollars is in the trade policy, so they must have been advising in terms of reopening those trade offices, and we want those details, thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

There's a lot of information that this department is passing on to the other department about those offices that we think government should . . . [interjection] I'm not saying that that isn't the right way for the department to operate. I'm saying that we want the detail. That's what I've asked for. It's a policy decision to reopen those offices and to staff them, and we want to know that Albertans are going to be getting their money's worth, because in fact there is a firm belief not just by us but by many Albertans that the people did not get their money's worth in years past. So what's changed? If we could have that information, we'd like to know.

We would assume that as a part of that process, as a part of this ministry's advising the department in that regard, they've done some long-term follow-up in terms of what worked and what didn't work in the past and in terms of projections for the future. I'm talking more than three-year business plans. I'm talking about: what are the expected gains in the five- to ten-year forecast? Because certainly businesses doing strategic planning would be looking at least that far ahead in the future, we would expect that with the kind of dollars this government is dedicating, they would be doing the same thing, Mr. Chairman.

Also, what kind of analysis has been done of the past missions that this ministry has been involved in? They list here as one of their strategies to "promote the Alberta Advantage to foreign governmental decision-makers by planning missions abroad," et cetera, et cetera. There have been lots of missions in the past. What kind of continuous follow-up is done for the past one, two, three, four, five years to see the net impact of those missions in the past on our economics and on our trade development now in the future? Definitely you would expect that some deals are signed on the spot when they go on these missions but certainly not all of them, I'm sure, Mr. Chairman.

We would expect that that seeding done then would produce some tangible results in the future. Well, we expect that also to be tracked because that would be responsible. The results of that tracking is what we're asking for in as much detail as the department has so that we can also look to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of these past missions. Then based on that tracking, we can project whether or not the reasons this minister is giving for more dollars and more trade offices is going to be justified. What's the cost/benefit trade-off there? If she could address that for me, I would certainly appreciate it.

8:31

The minister talked a little bit about working to improve the regulations between provincial borders, and that's very important. Every year in this department the minister says they're going to do that. We haven't seen the results, Mr. Chairman. There may be lots of results. However, it is still the number one concern I hear from businesses doing business within the boundaries of Canadian borders that it is still easier for them to send their goods south, stateside, than it is to B.C., Saskatchewan, or the other provinces.

We would like some detail in terms of the past couple of years as to how effective they've been in reducing the regulations – you must have a list; we'd just like a copy of the list – and also your top priorities for the next budget year in trying to address those issues. Certainly it's as significant to people who have businesses in this province as international trade is, and I think it certainly should be given a high priority to try and resolve those issues. We'd like to know what it is they're doing there and what the key areas are that they will be addressing.

The funding for international relations is so significant, being at nearly 70 percent, there must be new initiatives being undertaken there. If we could have a list of what those are, that would be very important to us.

I have some questions on NAFTA. It's interesting that we don't see anything addressed here in terms of opening comments. I couldn't specifically find it in the business plans. If it's here, perhaps the minister could direct me to the page it is on. I think there are a number of huge concerns outstanding right now with regard to NAFTA and the potential for private clinics in health care in this province. I'm sure this ministry is advising the minister of health and the Premier in terms of the impact on that. We think there may be some legal opinions on that, Mr. Chairman, and we would like to know what opinions you've received, what are outstanding, and how much money you've paid in that regard, if this is the department that pays for those opinions. Who initiates that process? So if the minister could give us some information on the policy on privatization and on the NAFTA implications with regard to health care.

I'm sure this ministry has been advising the Premier and the health ministry on how allowing private clinics or private hospitals in this province will impact the delivery of public health care. The Premier seems to be so convinced it will have no impact that I'm sure they're

getting some very top-notch advice from this department. We would like to know what that advice is. If there are documents with regard to legal opinions, I would ask that they be listed and in fact tabled in the House.

I asked the minister for her opinion on what's happening with this government's relationship with the World Trade Organization. In addition to that, a complete update on what's happening there would be important for us, particularly as it's on the table for discussion again. If you could give us some information on that, that also would be important for us to have some information on.

When I look through these performance measures, we see that client satisfaction surveys are, as I understand it, interdepartmental surveys. If the information that I'm sure the minister will send to us in writing would include one of those surveys so we can see what the questions are and how they're filled out, that would be important to us.

The intermediate outcomes and the secondary indicators are the measures, but the way they're reported within the business plan seems a little vague. We would like some more information on these if possible and why they don't measure the long-term outcomes as well. Certainly there are projections that you can be doing there. I would have thought you'd have been running a long-term plan in addition to the three-year rolling plans. That would seem to make good strategic sense. Let's get some information on that.

Are you meeting your outcomes that you looked at more than five years ago? When I do a comparison between the years, it seems there is a bit of a deficiency there. Some of it may be due to the rejuggling we've seen over the years in terms of this department, but let's find out about it and put it on the table for dispute or discussion, as the case may be. It isn't just good enough to do the intermediary or the short-term outcomes. In fact, they're practically useless without fitting into a long-term strategic plan, and that's what we've seen has been the primary absence in planning by this government: the long-term strategic plan.

It's not good enough for this government just to think from election to election, Mr. Chairman, because the people of the province are going to be here regardless of whether we hold these seats or not. We have a commitment to the long-term viability of this province in all regards. This particular ministry plays an integral part in that delivery of long-term outcomes because they act as advisers to all the departments and are very close to the Premier on the issues of importance. So we particularly would like their core business services provided to be expanded to include that particular area that is now not apparent.

Thank you.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I'm going to try and give a few answers, because I am kind of shocked at some of the lack of understanding that this member, who has been in this Legislature for a while, has on some of the issues. I'm not being nasty. I am surprised, and it tells me that we're not doing a very good job of disseminating the information we have to that hon. member, particularly when a week ago yesterday Alberta's international strategic plan was tabled. The international marketing strategy from the Minister of Economic Development has been tabled. This is a long-term strategic plan. If you don't have a copy, I would be most pleased to ensure that you do have one.

MRS. SLOAN: Tell us why the Premier didn't hold a meeting.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Edmonton-Riverview, you know, I don't want to be rude, but you will get a turn. [interjections] Very annoying.

I'm kind of working backwards. Performance measures. One of

the difficulties with performance measures, Mr. Chairman, is that many of the initiatives of this department, particularly in international strategies and on interprovincial and intergovernmental work, are long term, so the measurements we have do recognize that. On the short term, one of the ways we do have of addressing these is by surveys and polling, and I would be happy to pass on to the hon. member any information we have on those.

I also was surprised that she missed the comments on NAFTA. I did raise it. I gave the figures on NAFTA as to the Alberta experience. I tabled in the House the NAFTA carve-out on health. It is the government of Canada that negotiated that position, and the government of Canada is confident that the protection we have in NAFTA for the health sector is there. If they have an issue with that and want to raise that, they should raise it, should absolutely raise it with the Minister of Health and the minister of international relations, who is Mr. Pettigrew. In my discussions with Mr. Pettigrew on this area when we were in Seattle, he is completely confident that the government of Canada has negotiated a position there that completely protects our health industry. [interjections]

Mr. Chairman, it is difficult to overcome not only the noise but some of the lack of knowledge. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview just should know that it is the government of Canada's responsibility to negotiate those agreements, and we participate, as do all other provinces, in the development of the position. We'll work on a little education.

8:41

THE CHAIRMAN: The chairman would like to apologize to the subcommittee in that he should have made certain that each side honoured the other side in that when a member is standing and speaking, we don't heckle, that we allow them to get out their questions or get out their answers. So if we could respect that on both sides of the House, I think it would be helpful for the rest of the evening.

In continuance, hon. minister.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, I know that some of these strike a chord, but some of them are pretty important.

International missions and the follow-up. I would be happy to pass on to the hon. member in writing some detail on how the follow-up is carried out. Certainly this department is involved in Team Canada missions, in the Premier's participation in those, and in co-ordination of all international travel done from this province.

On trade policy, our relationship with trade offices. Yes, in keeping with the framework for international strategies, we have consulted on where the best strategic placements of trade offices are in the world.

WTO. I mentioned that the position Alberta has on WTO is the position of the government of Canada. We do have a difficulty with the protection of the supply-managed industry and state trading agencies. It's difficult to ask others to open their doors when we close ours. However, we have said that we will work with the government of Canada on that position as long as it doesn't jeopardize the producers and manufacturers in this province in accessing markets. I did say on the WTO that although it was unsuccessful in Seattle, negotiations have begun again. Talks have resumed, and submissions are to be in by September in those areas. We will continue to advance Alberta's position.

We have a social union framework, and I think the hon. member knows that. The agreement for the social union framework was signed by the federal government and all provinces and territories with the exception of the province of Quebec. It is a matter of faith that social programs are dealt with within that framework, and that

is all we are asking for. The initiative on the homeless certainly is lacking in the spirit of the social union framework. I remind hon. members that this was signed by all levels of government, and in fact the Premier signed it with the Prime Minister at his invitation. These frameworks are serious. We take them seriously. We expect that any initiatives we have will be dealt with within that. They're not just something for when it suits you. It should be always. Then we all understand the rules, and that's all we're asking for.

Now, we could talk about agriculture. It does surprise me a little bit. If this hon. member or any other hon. member believes that the answer to the crisis in agriculture today is getting a few hundred million dollars from the feds for a bailout, I can tell you that is not going to solve the long-term problem. We have some things that will solve the long-term problem, and one is a change in domestic marketing. When we have to ship grain out of this province rather than value-added because we cannot sell it outside the Canadian Wheat Board, even on a domestic policy, it is a detriment to our producers in this province. That is one thing that we're asking.

The Canadian Wheat Board does an excellent job of international marketing of grain, and nobody is disputing that, but there is no reason a farmer in this province should have to go through an international marketing agency, which is what this should be, to, for example, value-add durum wheat to pasta. We ship tonnes of durum wheat to North Dakota, and periodically the North Dakota farmers get very upset because there's so much Alberta or western Canadian durum going down there. They forget how many millions and millions of dollars of processed pasta we're buying back. We're buying back a value-added product that should be value-added in this province, and unless we change some rules within Canada, it won't happen and can't happen.

The other thing that has to happen in agriculture is that we have got to change the transportation and marketing system. The Estey/Kroeger report, which was delivered to the federal government some months ago, has got to be implemented or we will continue to have difficulties.

The other side of it that's important is that, yes, we have to fight hard on international subsidies. Today the difference in subsidy level – and I'll just give you Canada, the U.S., and Europe on grain: approximately 9 percent in Canada, approximately 26 percent in the U.S., somewhere between 24 and 26 percent, and over 50 percent subsidy in Europe. I don't care how efficient the farmers are in this country, they cannot compete with that type of subsidy level, and until that is addressed, we are not going to have the answers. So there is no simple answer.

The immediate answer from the Saskatchewan farmers when the aid was delivered was: it isn't enough, and it isn't going to help. No, because it is not going to address the systemic problems that are causing the low commodity prices we face today.

I would challenge anyone in this country in this industry to tell me what the true value of a bushel of any type of grain that's sold on board is today. It is so distorted that I venture no one could tell us what the true value of a bushel of durum is or a bushel of red spring wheat. It is sad that when we are the top producer of red spring wheat in the country and the world, we're getting somewhere around \$2.11 a bushel. For goodness' sake, a loaf of bread costs that much, and six cents of that is the wheat in it. This is shocking.

Instead of playing politics, we should all in this Legislative Assembly be standing up for our farmers, not saying: how many times did your Premier go to Ottawa? Our Premier discussed this issue with the Prime Minister the day before the announcement was made, and he was not aware that Alberta was not involved in this. That's the difficulty we have.

Our minister of agriculture is there today talking about these

issues again. This is the fourth time. Are we making a mistake in dealing with the federal government in what I think is a fair way, in sitting down at the negotiating table and trying to deal with the real issues in agriculture, or should we just be saying: subsidize us further? We're saying that our farmers need some short-term help the same as everyone else. These difficulties don't end because of some imaginary line that is drawn between Saskatchewan and Alberta. In fact, as the minister pointed out, when you look at the transportation costs, there are some 44 points in Alberta that have higher transportation costs than Saskatchewan does.

You talk about transportation. When the first discussions on the Crow benefit were on the table, there was \$8 billion that was available. Saskatchewan and Manitoba refused to discuss it. When the Liberal government took out the Crow benefit, there was \$1.6 billion left. That's what it cost us.

It's time that we paid attention to some of these facts and we stood up for the farmers in this province and dealt with some of those very, very deep issues that are there. Until we do it, asking the federal government for money is not the answer. You can put your head in the sand and your hand out forever, but farmers will not survive on that type of policy. [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members. Hon. members. Hon. minister, we have a debate going on between the former minister of agriculture and the hon. critic. I wonder if we could contain that until the appropriate time, which is not now.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm going to end with this. We have, I think, a good working relationship with our federal intergovernmental minister, the Hon. Stéphane Dion. I have addressed my concerns with him. We have been advancing Alberta's interests in agriculture. They weren't listened to and now, yes, we are defending them, and I will not apologize to anyone for defending the interests of Alberta farmers.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

8:51

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess I just want to reiterate some comments my colleague made before I move into the aboriginal component of this debate. It's unfortunate that the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations isn't sure – I think she construes negotiating and being at the table with standing up here and bashing the feds in a deconstructive way. You have to be constructive. You have to be able to go to the table, and you have to be able to negotiate. If you choose not to do that, then you're not going to get to first base, and that's what happened. That's what happened with the agricultural dough. The government didn't go to the table.

They put all their marbles or all their eggs, if you wish, into the Estey/Kroeger report, but that only solves half the problem for half the farmers in this province. It doesn't solve the big picture, because this is a divide and conquer issue. You've got some farmers for whom that might work well, and you've got others for whom it doesn't. So where's the big-picture plan from this government? Where's the larger plan set out so farmers can say: yeah, the government is doing the right thing, and yeah, we're not all going to win, but, you know, we can agree to disagree and come to some form of compromise at some point. We don't see that happening here.

The government doesn't support the Canadian Wheat Board but wants a new transportation system. It's quite incredible how this government continually uses this whole divide and conquer mentality. It's north, south; seniors, the young people; rich, poor. It's

intellects versus those without an education. It's farmers in the north and farmers in the south.

I know that that Minister of Infrastructure over there thinks this is all very funny. I'm sure he does. He thinks this is all very funny by his laughter that he's putting out. But you know what? Albertans don't think it's funny, and they don't think it's the way to govern.

My understanding is that it's four cents the farmers are getting for that loaf of bread. Maybe the minister of laughing over there, the comedian, could help us out.

Anyway, we're going to move on to the aboriginal component of this discussion, and I know the hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs is going to be able to answer a number of my questions here. I'm going to start out and refer the minister to – she probably already knows these page numbers – page 204 in the apparent Bold Plans and certainly 292 and 293 in the lottery fund estimates. That's where I'll be drawing most of my questions from.

First of all, I'm wondering why the budget for the Métis Settlements Transition Commission is no longer funded through lotteries and the budget has been cut by 48.3 percent. I'm wondering if the minister could let us know whether or not this is a result of the phasing out of the transition commission. I noticed that one of the strategies is to phase out the transition commission as quickly as possible, so I'm wondering if that's what's happening there.

Also, we noticed that the budget for the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal isn't funded through general revenue, at least not in its entirety. So I'm just wondering if you can clarify where the rest of that money is coming from. Last year I think almost half of it was funded through lotteries, and I'm just wondering what kind of shift has occurred there.

Again, we see that the Métis settlements funding is no longer through lotteries and of course it's cut by 8.9 percent. I'm wondering why the cuts there, Madam Minister.

Maybe just to go back to the settlements transition commission, once this is phased out, what are the plans or are there plans to oversee what's going on with the settlements, or is that left to the general council? Maybe you could enlighten us as to what's going to happen there.

We were recently given the aboriginal policy framework, and that framework in my estimation did one thing. It looked like it was going to line up so that the government would be battling with the feds. I hope that's not the case. I hope this minister isn't going to get into that fed bashing, you know, like others. I can tell by the smile on her face that that's not going to happen, but I do need to know why there was such a huge emphasis in that policy framework on reserves when the responsibility that this government has on reserves is so limited. It's to do with the settlement claims and child welfare, if that's not contracted out.

That raised a lot of concern for me, because there are so many other issues that that framework should have encompassed. More focus on the Métis settlements would have been a much more acceptable framework and more focus on the Métis community in general in this province. Clearly that was brought up to me as an issue. I'm hoping that in the minister's reworking of that particular framework, we're going to see that change and we're going to see the focus where it should be, and that's on the issues the minister can deal with. We've talked long about those urban aboriginal issues, and that was not reflected in the original policy framework.

We saw a horrendous report come out from the Associate Minister of Forestry last year. He was tasked with bringing forward a report on aboriginal policing. We didn't see any of that addressed in the overall framework. Now, I understand there are tripartite agreements between Alberta Justice, federal Justice, and Aboriginal Affairs and, of course, the reserves, but we need to see some

movement on those particular issues and concerns. I'm wondering where that's going to be dealt with. I don't see that at all here.

I'm wondering also with the aboriginal policy framework what will guarantee that government policies will be followed or that the policies that are set up and agreed to by the aboriginal community are going to be followed. What monitoring accountability will occur between departments to ensure that the interests of the aboriginal people are met, not the interests of government, but that the interests of the aboriginal people are protected? We need to see that happen. I don't see any of that in the framework, and I hope there's going to be something that's going to be identified.

What methods will the minister and the government use to change policy when it doesn't adhere to the policy framework? What if there's something outside that framework that should be included in the framework? How are you going to negotiate that and build that in? What government measures are being considered to determine aboriginal well-being and self-reliance? In fact, what is this government's definition of self-reliance? That I think is critical to the framework. I see it in the document that I have and in the strategies, but I don't see self-reliance defined anywhere.

I'm wondering how you can expect the aboriginal community to achieve self-reliance if they don't know what the government's definition of that is. That's something that's very important when you're putting out measurements and you're asking people to meet certain criteria and outcomes. I think that's something you can't overlook, and I think it needs some consideration in the overall policy framework.

9:01

I guess I'm going to refer back to the federal government. We've seen over the past, since I was elected in 1997 anyway, a number of issues arise on reserves, and there has been a role for the provincial government. That role is in justice, the role is in education, but we see the government run from those responsibilities. We don't see the government take control and say: "You know what? Those are our responsibilities. They're part of a broader framework that we operate by. They're part of a larger policy discussion that we've had and we implement across the province." We see the government run away from some of these issues, and then jurisdiction becomes a problem and you have divisiveness created. I would like to see the government step up to the plate when it comes to some of these issues and just say: "You know what? The jurisdiction issue isn't going to be a problem here. We're going to take on our responsibility." I'm wondering how that's going to change in the future. I don't see that identified here.

What methodology and sources will be used to acquire, prepare, and distribute aboriginal-specific data, or is it collected? I know from my work in the research unit with the Edmonton Police Service that nobody collects aboriginal-specific data, so how do we measure outcomes? How do we know how much money we're going to need? How do you propose a budget for the Métis community in the settlements when you're looking at other issues that are not on the settlements and not on the reserves? The urban aboriginal issue: how do you determine that? What action plan is there to promote cross-cultural awareness and understanding? You talk about it, but what's the plan? You say you're going to do it. The government identifies it as a need, but we don't see the action plan. Who's going to be the beneficiary of the cross-cultural awareness?

Maybe you could provide some example of how aboriginal communities are being helped to participate in local economic development. What are they doing? What's your role in that particular area? I know there was a great initiative, an initiative that I thought was very worthwhile anyway, out of AI-Pac. It's called

ABCOR, and it's a project where the aboriginal community has developed more of a co-op program where they're going to be taking the lumber off one of the FMAs. They're going to take the trees down there, and that's a great initiative because it's going to bring revenue into some of the communities. That was an industry-generated initiative, and AI-Pac had to go through an awful lot of red tape in order to get the FMA that's going to be logged. In my view, I didn't see an overwhelming support for the initiative. They're going to a lot of work to try and work with some of these communities. What exactly is it that this government is doing that is helping to promote some of this economic development?

How is the success of programs measured within some of the companies you're dealing with? Let's talk about some of the larger industries, the oil and gas industry for instance. How do we know how successful some of their programs are? What is the involvement of the government in promoting aboriginal participation?

How has the department of aboriginal affairs assisted in the negotiation process between the department of family and social services and the First Nations for the provision of child welfare services? A very important issue. My colleague from Edmonton-Riverview will ask some more questions later and has just tremendous insight. It's something the government has not necessarily done a great job of. What measures are used to determine the success rate of these programs or any programs in the aboriginal communities?

What negotiations has the department undertaken to help alleviate the lack of approved adoptions of aboriginal children and of foster homes? I've had aboriginal foster parents in my office who have to fight red tape in order to be foster parents, who have to fight an awful uphill battle, with long investigations that have cost them personally a lot of money in order to clear their name from a specific allegation that the police weren't interested in at all, that was perceived to be a bogus complaint by the police. Child welfare and the police were never, ever interested in the issue that the children at risk response team were, yet the department put up so many roadblocks and very much soured these folks on their ability to foster parent or to want to be foster parents. How was that promoting the whole aboriginal foster parent program? I'm a little bit concerned about some of those initiatives.

What negotiations are being undertaken with the Métis Nation of Alberta to ensure the smooth transition for the next framework agreement? There was an awful lot of trouble signing that last agreement because this government decided they didn't want government-to-government negotiations. They don't see the Métis Nation as a government that oversees the 20,000 Métis people in this province, that delivers services to Métis people in this province, that has a role for Métis people in this province. I've had the discussion with this minister before on that particular issue, and I'm hoping that somewhere along the line this is not going to be a problem in the future and this government is very much going to recognize the role of the Métis Nation in this province.

I'm wondering if the minister can outline which aboriginal groups will be consulted to develop technical guidelines for traditional use studies. You talked about land claims in your opening comments, Madam Minister, but you just said that there were a lot of things happening. Well, a lot of things happening for the budget dollars here doesn't exactly enlighten Albertans as to really what's going on. So I'm hoping you can tell us how many claims are currently being negotiated and how close we are to closing off some of those. Which bands? Are the Lubicons going to be a forever issue, or are we going to get anywhere with that particular settlement?

What do you define as a timely manner? I think that's something this minister uses an awful lot, that things need to be done in a

timely manner. What is a timely manner? If we talk about settling land claims and we look at the Lubicon issue, there's nothing timely about that at all, and we've got some folks out there who want to see some of these claims concluded.

I'd like to know if, or what, MOU has been signed between the Department of International and Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice to ensure that the aboriginal land claims litigation is managed properly. What are the expectations of each department?

I'm wondering if the minister can enlighten us as to what this government is going to do about the whole issue of governance and conflict of interest on the Métis settlements. I can tell you that my office gets calls weekly, and this has not been resolved. It's an issue that's outstanding, I think it's an issue this government has neglected to act on, and I expect to see an end to that very soon.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9:11

MRS. McCLELLAN: I'm just going to deal with two points for the hon. member that fall within my responsibility.

The first thing I'll say, hon. member, is that protecting Alberta's interests is not fed bashing. We are interested in working in a partnership with our federal government. We have a framework to do it. All we ask is that everybody work within the framework.

The second one is on the Lubicon land claim, and I just wanted to bring you up to date on that. The land claim settlements are traditionally negotiated between the federal government and the particular Indian band in question. Alberta is usually invited to the table at some point in the negotiations and discussions over land and, in some cases, dollars.

In the case of the Lubicon claim, the Lubicon band has expressed interest that the negotiations be between them and the federal government. We were recently invited to the table, did begin to participate, and the Lubicon band themselves ceased those tripartite negotiations because they felt there were outstanding issues they had to deal with with the federal government.

So that's the status of that, and if people are calling your office about that, you might suggest they call the federal minister involved in that one. Certainly if you want to pass them on, we'd be happy to give you the updated information that we have on that land claim.

The other land claims I know the associate minister will discuss with you. I know she'll tell you that we have I think a commendable number, 11, that have been settled in the last 10 years, a record that I don't think is matched anywhere in Canada, and she'll probably talk with you about any outstanding ones that are on the table right now.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. There are a lot of questions, and I really appreciate the questions you're sending my way because I think it's really important for everybody to understand what Aboriginal Affairs is all about and what International and Intergovernmental Relations has been dealing with regarding aboriginal issues.

First of all, the questions you were asking regarding department programs in terms of the various dollars. You were talking about the lottery dollars. There is no lottery funding approved for this year; you are right in that sense. However, if you look at the operating expenses in program 1, there's been an increase, of course, of \$4 million. If you look at the difference – I think it's program 1, yes – \$1,983,200 for salary increases, \$1.8 million was reallocated from the Métis settlements program to be used. For the \$300,000 for

international governance, \$250,000 for international activities, \$600,000 for aboriginal relations, \$300,000 for Peigan negotiations, and of course the \$300,000 for trade policy activities – that's not within my area, but I think that sort of highlights what it is that you're requesting relative to the changes in the dollars.

Regarding the phasing out of the Métis Settlements Transition Commission, our plan is to ensure that as the transition commission is phased out by 2002, responsibilities presently held by the commission will be devolved to the Métis Settlements General Council and the eight settlements. This is all part of the 17-year transition plan outlined in 1990, when the Métis settlements legislation was passed. You weren't voted into the Legislature at the time, but it certainly was one of the greatest positives that had ever occurred regarding Métis settlements. That was something the Métis settlements negotiated. It was very, very important for us to be able to do that.

The funding to the Métis settlements in accordance with the Métis settlements accord is to decrease each year to the end of the agreement in 2007 as the settlements make the transition to self-reliance. The 48 percent decrease in the transition commission is part of this planned decrease.

The overall funding to settlements, including the commission, decreased by 8 percent this year; it's true. I think when you look at the context of where we came from to where we are and where we want to go, as we start to phase out, it's a very important step to make sure that whatever we do is going to be consistent with what we had intended to do.

There were a number of questions, and some of them I may not be able to answer, but I certainly will write to you relative to the questions. I'll get as many as I can, and whatever I don't get, I will ensure that we do answer them in some format to you.

There were questions relative to framework goal 3. You indicated: why are we looking at the federal responsibility? If you look at goal 3, Strengthening Relationships – and I know you have it – we are talking about clarifying roles and responsibilities. That goal actually is: "the Government of Alberta will . . . clarify its own roles and responsibilities with respect to Aboriginal people." Within that context we also have to realize it's not only the government of Alberta that has to do that. We have to make sure the federal government also clarifies its own roles and responsibilities relative to dealing with aboriginal communities, whether they're First Nations or Métis.

We have to be able to work with the federal government in order for us to be able to continue to do this, but we also have to work with the First Nations and the Métis people to be able to ensure that if we are moving in that direction, each group definitely knows which order of government is responsible for provision of programs and services. That's a very important part, a very, very important part. You've heard it; I've heard it. I think that no matter where we go, that's what the aboriginal community has been saying for many years, and it's time for us to be able to clarify that.

In terms of framework, why did we not focus on Métis settlements? What we were wanting to do was make sure that whatever we were doing in this, we would also deal with all the aboriginal community. You're correct. It deals basically with a lot of emphasis on First Nations. Of course, you and I have discussed this. We will need to make some revisions in this regard, and you have written to me about that. I appreciate that information because that's very important when we're revising this document.

I have also received some very wonderful recommendations from the Métis Nation general council relative to what they would like to see. As you know, this is out for discussion, for consultation. It is to be able to get all the information so that we can make the

necessary revisions in order for us to be able to ensure that whatever we're going to put out is going to be palatable to all Albertans. So it is very, very important to remember that this is a draft document, but I appreciate any input you can give me any time we have any of the documents that are out for discussion.

There were questions on aboriginal policing. You indicated: why was it in the framework? The Minister of Justice is responsible for policing. However, that does not necessarily mean that we cannot be involved in terms of working with the Minister of Justice so that we have our views being recognized and programs and services will have an aboriginal component. That means, then, that we are involved at that point to be able to ensure that whatever comes out is going to be reflective of the aboriginal component. It does not mean that we take on those services or those programs. Our job is to advise and to be able to consult with the various departments so we can ensure that there is an aboriginal component attached to that.

That's very, very important, because we don't have enough people to be able to take on services. We don't have enough people to take on any programs. What we have to do is be able to build a very strong network of aboriginal people. We can ensure that we provide the advice to the various ministries that are within our government, because those ministries are in a better position to be able to deliver those programs and services.

You also indicated: what guarantee will be followed in the accountability of government to the people? Well, when you look at the framework, in every one of the areas where we have the principles and commitments to action, we say: government business planning and reporting. We are making sure that whatever happens, the government of Alberta will recognize its responsibility to report to the public on progress made in achieving governmentwide goals on aboriginal well-being, self-reliance, or any of the goals we have in this document. Very, very important.

[Mrs. Laing in the chair]

When you're talking about a cross-government initiative, it means we now have to be able to report anything that comes through, and we're measured on that also. So it's a very key component of whatever we do if it becomes a cross-government ministry initiative.

9:21

You were asking about what will be used to adhere to building on what we call the aboriginal government definition of self-reliance. Well, self-reliance differs with various groups, and self-reliance in our view is to make sure that whatever happens, we look at the issue of what we have to do to help aboriginal communities be able to at least build on the economic opportunities this province has and that they are part and parcel of that. They have to be part and parcel of the Alberta advantage, and that's what we have to continue to ensure we can do. How we do that will be dependent on the aboriginal communities that are out there, to see how they can achieve that.

There are a variety of ways. You asked a number of questions relative to that, and those are really good questions. I have to give you credit for that, because I think those are exciting questions when you talk about what we can do. There are so many things we can do.

First of all, we have to look at capacity building. How do we build capacity within the aboriginal community so they can begin to take advantage of what we call the Alberta advantage? A number of ways. One is: what can we see in terms of skill development? What educational initiatives or training can we have in place to make sure that occurs? What can we look at within the community itself to be able to see what we need to help them build in their human resources and within the community and be able to access, whether it's jobs or

contracts or any kind of joint ventures they could see happening in the communities? We have a number of those.

Athabasca Tribal Council is one proposal that has worked very, very well. Of course, the federal government has been involved in that one. Industry has been involved, and the provincial government has been involved. As a province I believe we've put in something like \$350,000 already from four different departments who have been involved with ATC. Very exciting times when we're talking about the initiatives and the economic opportunities that are available in that northern part of the province.

The aboriginal community has come forward, taken advantage of that, looked at what the possibilities are, and looked at what they can do in terms of capacity building. I see some great things starting to happen that will continue to happen because they have taken it upon themselves and worked with the community, industry, as well as having the federal government involved in this.

That's partnerships. How do we build on those partnerships? We've got a few other initiatives that I think are really key. We've got one with the chief in northern Alberta regarding the Assumption area and the tribal council there. They have been working with a variety of initiatives, and in one of the areas they have asked industry to be a part as well as for the federal and the provincial governments to come in. We are working with them to see how we can begin to build that capacity so they can also take advantage of what's occurring in that northern part of the province.

We have some in southern Alberta which are really key and, I believe, very positive when we're talking about some of the things that many times we overlook. We have to give credit to the aboriginal community and the First Nations in this respect, to the First Nations Resource Council that has been involved in some of the initiatives that have occurred in the southern part of Alberta. I can get really excited about some of these things, because I see that starting to happen. I know that those are the kinds of areas we want to continue to nurture, some of the areas where we want to ensure that partnerships continue to occur.

How we do that is very, very important. The way we want to do it is by continuing to do it the way we have in the past. Our job is to co-ordinate, to facilitate, to bring it forward, and to be able to ensure that the First Nations and any Métis people can continue to take advantage of this. I get really excited – I know she doesn't want me to get too excited about it – because it is something that I see we can continue to build on.

There were other areas where there were questions. There was a really interesting piece of information, I thought, when we were talking about capacity building. For First Nations to succeed in the development of oil and gas resources on reserves or in any part of the province or anywhere in Canada, it is important that First Nation members possess a qualified knowledge base, whether it's something to do with industry or it's something to do with any of the other types of educational capabilities that are there. I believe that First Nations need to be able to gain that broad knowledge base, and that's where we as aboriginal affairs can certainly help as we're moving forward by ensuring that whatever happens, there can be greater participation by First Nations in a meaningful way in order for them to be able to take advantage of whatever is available on the industry side.

You wanted to talk about the Métis Nation of Alberta and government-to-government negotiations not taking place. Well, the province of Alberta has consistently indicated that for government-to-government negotiations to occur, a government is recognized as having a land base. To have a land base means that we will then deal with you on a government-to-government perspective. That is the way we have dealt with every single group that we are working

with, whether it's a First Nation or the Métis Settlements General Council. Métis settlements are land based. The First Nations are land based. We recognize them as government when we're dealing with them on a government-to-government basis. That's our policy, and it has not changed. We have to be able to work with something that is consistently related to something we have in the province, whether it's municipal districts or whether it's towns or whatever it is. But there has to be a land base attached to it.

Land claims. Another area of interest for me. We have had wonderful success in land claims, and I want to talk about that very, very briefly. Did you know that since 1986 we have had 11 treaty land entitlement claims settled in Alberta? That's an incredible amount. I think we deserve to get applause. Eleven are settled. Four are in negotiations. Five are under federal review. Six have been rejected, and eight are pending. So when you talk about that, my gosh, that is a lot.

Of course, this government of Alberta is committed to fulfilling its NRTA responsibilities through negotiation of settlements that are fair and equitable to all parties and in the best interests of all Albertans. I think we have a solid record for settling outstanding claims, and I'm very proud of the people who have taken control of that and our negotiators and especially the individual who has been responsible for treaty land claims. I'm very, very proud, because I'll tell you that without those guys, we wouldn't be where we are. I think we have a record across Canada when it comes to settling land claims.

In terms of aboriginal population and what information we're going to use, we have to be able to continue to use the census, based on anything to do with Canada's census. You wanted to know what we're going to use for numbers. Those are the kinds of numbers that we will use. Things to do with Canada's census, especially from 1996, are things we'll continue to use.

I know you have a lot of questions. I haven't been able to answer every single one of them, but I will sit down at this time to be able to allow you to ask more questions.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I have a number of issues to raise relative to this debate, so I will proceed. The first one relates to the matter of what the government's policy is relative to Métis settlements making political contributions when those contributions come from the settlement's bank account, not the individual's bank account. We'd appreciate a written response in regards to that question.

The second issue is federal system reform, and the minister of intergovernmental affairs talked at some length with respect to this and the need for what she perceives as the reform of the federal system. Well, I tend to have a little bit of a humorous and perhaps somewhat bent outlook on this process. I think that the government's plan for reform of the federal system includes the following three players. Firstly, we have Ralph running the provincial 2000 campaign. Alongside him we have the esteemed current Provincial Treasurer vying for the leadership of the CCRAP party, better known as the party that doesn't exist, and thirdly, late-breaking news, Steve West is going to vie for the vacant Senate seat. And reform will be achieved, Madam Chairman. It'll be done. We won't have . . .

9:31

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. member. We do not use individual names in this House. We use their titles, please.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

So we have the provincial scene tied up. We get Stockwell on the federal scene and Steve in the Senate . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me. I must remind you again. We do not use individual names. Thank you.

MRS. SLOAN: It would be the Provincial Treasurer, and the minister for energy and resources will be in the Senate, and it'll be achieved. There you go.

Let's actually talk about strengthening the federal system and our system of programs for Canadians and Albertans. I wonder, Madam Chairman, how we achieve that strength when we have a provincial government that claws back payments for programs like the children's benefit. We saw, when the federal government instituted that program for vulnerable children in this province, the department of family and social services claw the equal amount of money back from the provincial contributions to those same families. That, in my opinion, does not strengthen. It weakens our province and our families and our children.

Certainly that reality works against the philosophy that was espoused by the minister tonight. I don't know if there is a lot of communication between the ministers. Certainly the past minister of family and social services was the chair for the social unions negotiations, but somehow the right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing, because while they were taking the money from the federal government, the left hand was clawing an equal amount of money back.

I would like to talk about NAFTA, and perhaps for the minister's benefit I'd like to educate her a bit about the history relative to the signing of exemptions for NAFTA. There was a process for provincial governments to identify exemptions in NAFTA, that occurred in the '94-95 period. The Provincial Treasurer at the time, Mr. Jim Dinning – I need to verify that for the record – was in fact in a position to identify exemptions. He was lobbied, and in fact I wrote correspondence to him at that time seeking him to act on the province's behalf and identify exemptions. There was a December 31 deadline. The province abdicated any responsibility. They abdicated taking any initiative to do that.

In reality what happened was that the federal government came in and established the exemptions for social and health care areas. So let's be clear about NAFTA and about the exemptions and about the role this provincial government chose not to play in protecting our core public programs.

Which brings me to the whole component of the report that relates to the WTO and this government's involvement in the WTO negotiations. What is amazing to me – and this is perhaps the biggest deception of all – is that the government has been going along, attending these negotiations. Not only does the mass citizenry know virtually nothing about this. We as elected members in this Assembly know virtually nothing about it.

In the negotiations in Seattle the primary issue that was on the agenda was the expansion of the general agreement on trade and services, or GATS. There were a lot of interests obviously at play in that agenda. A significant player was the American Coalition of Service Industries, and particularly what they were targeting was the service sector, of which health care is a part. The service sector includes everything from telecommunications, transport, distribution, postal services, insurance, construction industry, environment, real estate, as well as tourism, entertainment industries of all sorts.

According to the World Trade Organization, services that fall within the scope of GATS cover no less than 160 separate sectors. Health care is included and in fact, Madam Chairman, is earmarked for commercialization and liberalization. Astonishingly, no public

debate or discussion is going on, nothing mentioned in this report this evening about that fact.

Again, just a bit of history. When the original GATS agreement was signed in 1994, a very similar event took place. It was hurriedly ratified by the member states at the time. Very few of the elected representatives had any idea at all what they were approving. They were not given a list of the sectors affected by GATS, and really probably to this day most of them don't know how significant that agreement was in impacting the core public programs of their country.

So back on point. All affiliated sectors are targeted: hospital care and other services, ambulance services, care for the aged, even social benefits. Let's keep in mind that in this whole trade negotiation it's not about human need or the provision of services that is the primary priority but demand and economies and profit. This is so relevant to the provincial government's fixation and push towards privatization of health care as we are on the eve, at some point perhaps this week, of receiving the legislation which will enable them to establish a private tier.

Further on the WTO. One of the benefits that corporations involved in these negotiations expect to derive from the revision of GATS: number one, they have an interest in not getting a lot of this information public because that torpedoed the MAI. For that reason I think there has been heightened security around the negotiations, and this government has played a willing part. This government is polling, and they make such a big point about it. Public polling data. Well, what are you polling Albertans on? You haven't sent them any material on what's been on the agenda at the WTO. You haven't shared with them what the implications of the social union framework is. How do you expect the public to have an opinion when you haven't educated them about what your positions were, going in, how they were modified, and what the end agreements were?

I, quite frankly, as an elected representative have sat in this Assembly throughout the negotiation of the social union, and there has been diddly shared in this Assembly about what that social union framework entails. So, Madam Chairman, why spend taxpayers' dollars to poll them about issues that the government has done nothing to educate them on. If in fact I have somehow missed receiving it in my mailbox or haven't seen the press release or there's a report out there that I haven't had access to, which may very well be the case, because really a lot of the devil of this is in the details, then I'm hopeful the minister of intergovernmental affairs will be completely transparent and table in her response to these questions all the positions – going in, negotiated, and final – for the social union and all those positions that are being taken at the WTO negotiations.

9:41

Back on WTO and health care. There is a bit of a rock and a hard place scenario that's at work in this whole negotiation process. Governments have placed restrictions on the liberalization of some activities, but this has meant opening them up for liberalization in the long term.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

In other words, by seemingly protecting hospitals from corporate encroachment, governments by the same token have in effect issued corporations with a licence to take them over later on.

The WTO Council on Trade in Services has already developed a method to achieve this. Thus, under Article 1.3(c) of GATS, for a service to be considered to be under "government authority" and hence exempt from "liberalization," it is now argued that it "should

be provided entirely free.” However, since most hospitals and clinics now charge patients or their insurance plans for certain treatments, “it seems unrealistic in such cases to argue for continued application of Article 13(c).” In other words, if a treatment is free for the patient, but paid for “by subsidies or other similar forms of financial advantages,” then not only must the sector be opened to competition, but the same “subsidies” should be offered to competing commercial suppliers.

That is the trap this government is leading us into with the privatization policy and impending legislation they’re about to propose.

Let me speak further about the horizontal approach that is also being proposed at the WTO. This means that if a particular measure is agreed to in one service sector, it is automatically applied as well to all others, including health. So, as in the agreement on telecommunications, if we have an agreement in that component of GATS to allow for basically wide open market involvement in telecommunications, the government is forced to apply the same principles in health care. That is absolutely true.

My reference this evening, Mr. Chairman, for citizens who are interested in this process: the article originally was written for *The Ecologist* magazine in Britain. The authors are Bertrand and Kalafatides, who are both quite renowned researchers.

I know it’s troublesome to have this kind of information coming forward, particularly when the government has not taken a leadership role in putting this out for public consumption in the first place. They certainly have had the opportunity.

Another issue in regards to WTO is the regulations.

“The WTO members are being asked to consider making reforms to their regulatory regimes.” National regulations . . . “should have four central attributes,” [they’re being told]: “adequacy, impartiality, least intrusiveness, and transparency.”

Needless to say, the agreement is not demanding that there be the same kind of transparency and openness with respect to corporate practices.

In any event, this government is being asked to modify regulations in this province that are adequate and impartial towards business interests, first and foremost. All the other issues relative to how they apply to the provision of health care, the adequacy of the services are secondary.

Let me conclude on the WTO and the social union by saying, Mr. Chairman, that there needs to be a great deal more information shared by the Alberta government as to what positions they’re taking, what the negotiations entail, and what the product of those negotiations is. I am completely confident that the minister will provide those to us in a written form at the conclusion of these debates.

I would like to also know, in that material, just exactly how much money we’ve spent on polling when it’s clear that the electorate, the citizens of this province have not had a great deal of information about these international negotiations.

When the minister spoke, again in the context of the international trade negotiations, about agriculture and the issues in agriculture, her passion and knowledge were clear to anyone that was listening. I respect her opinions, and I agree that we have huge, huge issues in agriculture to address if we want to preserve the rural way of life, the communities, and have some degree of control as legislators over the corporatization of agriculture. So in that respect, Mr. Chairman, I’m in agreement with the hon. minister, if she can take that bouquet.

I would like to see a greater degree of priority and emphasis placed on ensuring that the interests of Albertans are represented in the trade organizations and particularly as they relate to the service sectors. As well, if we’re preparing submissions for the WTO, the next round of negotiations – and they must be in by September of 2000 – I would ask the minister to make those ingoing positions

public and have them provided perhaps as an appendix to this budget debate response.

Let me move now briefly to aboriginal affairs, the Métis settlements. There has been, particularly in the Métis settlements – and the hon. member from Edmonton-Norwood spoke about that – a decrease relative to the governance of Métis settlements. Now, maybe I’m wrong, but I don’t think we’ve completely achieved a functional governance structure there yet, so I’m wondering why our funding is decreasing.

I want to focus for a few moments on the interests of aboriginal children, both First Nations and Métis, and I would like to know what role the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs has played with respect to planning in Alberta Health, Children’s Services, and Alberta Learning relative to the needs and interests of aboriginal children. We know that there is a higher percentage of disability in that population that has accompanying needs. We know the birthrate in those populations is also higher than the provincial average. We know infant mortality rates are higher in that population. We know teenage pregnancy rates are higher. So I would like to have the hon. minister provide what role she’s playing in addressing some of those health issues.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I’d just like to deal with a couple of issues. I don’t mean this in any meanspirited way, but when you talk about the discussions with WTO and you talk about not knowing what Canada’s position was or what Alberta’s position was, I’m really surprised, because the government of Canada, who is the negotiator – I want the hon. member to understand this. The government of Alberta does not negotiate at the table at the WTO or at GATT. The government of Alberta does not negotiate at the table. The government of Canada is the negotiator. Yes, we are a part of the team. Yes, we were there. Yes, we supported Canada’s position.

9:51

At the time, Minister Pettigrew sent out an extensive news release on Canada’s position going into the WTO in this round, which was primarily on agriculture because that was the agreement from the Uruguay round. That was the primary subject. The other area was discussion of implementation difficulties for developing countries and moving on into the next round. We were there, and we were full participants. I give Minister Pettigrew full marks. He assured us that we would be fully a part of the consultation, the discussion, and a part of the team. We were briefed in the morning, and we were briefed in the evening, and I did do an interview from there. Both Minister Pettigrew and Minister Vanclief and the government of Alberta did put out a news release talking about what was achieved and what wasn’t at the suspension of those talks.

Now, I have a lot of faith in the government of Canada’s ability to negotiate a position for us in health. The government of Canada has consistently said in NAFTA, in GATT, and in WTO that health and social programs would be protected. Protection is actually there in NAFTA in three parts. Probably the main part is the one that I tabled in the House last week or earlier this week – I don’t recall; I think it was last week – which is the carve-out section.

If the member takes the time to read that and looks at the supporting documentation, she will understand that ownership is not the issue. The issue that is the determinant is if it’s publicly funded and if it’s for the public good. That’s the determinant, and that’s the safeguard. So if it’s publicly funded and it’s for the public good, it doesn’t matter about the actual ownership. That’s proven in the various private clinics that we have today offering insured services, which are not being challenged by any other country coming in and

setting up clinics. We haven't had a challenge in NAFTA over the 10 years of the agreement. That tells me that something is working.

I was dismayed that the hon. member didn't have more confidence in the government of Canada as our negotiator and didn't have the faith that the government of Canada would be looking out for our best interests in those important social programs. I can tell the hon. member – to clarify this, I will be sending the minister tomorrow copies of this so that he can return some comment on it.

Mr. Chairman, this is an important issue for Canadians; it's an important issue for Albertans. It's important that the government of Canada's position on this is understood, that it's understood that Alberta is a part of that team and that we fully support the government of Canada's position on social programs.

The social union framework was signed a year ago this month, and if you haven't got the information yet, you're seriously behind. It's available from my office at any time should a request come in. I believe it's probably available on the Internet. To suggest that I should educate people, how patronizing. How patronizing, Mr. Chairman. The people in this province are intelligent, and when they want information, they ask and they get it. The social union framework is one year old in February.

Agriculture. Yes, Mr. Chairman, I am passionate about it, as are many people on this side of the House. We will continue to press hard in that area to ensure that the interests of Alberta's farmers and agricultural producers are protected and advanced. If we don't make those changes, the industry that has been so important, has really been the backbone of this province's economy, stands to lose a great deal.

Mr. Chairman, we have a number of very good people who are part of the WTO negotiations that are beginning again now. I know that Minister Pettigrew and the other ministers that will be working with him will be very open with the Canadian people on our position in those areas, and we will be very open with the people in this province that we represent as to our participation and as to whether we support all those positions. We have made a commitment to our federal counterparts that we would be a part of the team, that we would be prepared to be a part of the negotiations at all times, and we'll continue that participation.

Mr. Chairman, I believe we've had a lot of information discussed tonight. I've always made a commitment to follow up in writing to members with any detail and questions that we didn't have time to deal with tonight.

I want to just take this time to thank the members from International and Intergovernmental Relations who are in the gallery: our deputy, Ron Hicks, and his staff that are here, Paul Whittaker and Kathryn, and of course Maureen from my office. As was indicated by all members of this House, I think they are good, hardworking staff, always ready to help, and I thank them for being here tonight.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would adjourn debate on these estimates.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations has moved that we adjourn debate on the estimates of her department at this time. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I presume that was carried.

I would move that subcommittee B now report progress to the committee on the estimates of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that we report the estimates of the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations to the committee. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Gaming, Tuesday, February 29, 2000

Date: 00/02/29

8:06 p.m.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Subcommittee A – Gaming

Gordon, Judy, Chairman
Severtson, Gary, Deputy Chairman
Bonner, Bill
Boutilier, Guy
Burgener, Jocelyn
Cao, Wayne
Cardinal, Mike

Ducharme, Denis
Dunford, Clint
Friedel, Gary
Hierath, Ron
Jacques, Wayne
Johnson, LeRoy
Klapstein, Albert

Lougheed, Rob
Marz, Richard
Pannu, Raj
Sapers, Howard
Smith, Murray
Wickman, Percy

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'm going to call the committee to order.

Before we start, if we can possibly just establish a few ground rules. Basically we're here for, give or take, close to or a little bit over two hours. We can do it the same way that it's done in the Assembly and allow someone to speak for 20 minutes and then sort of back and forth. If you wish to make it less time so that more people can speak, that's all right with the chair. I'm at your discretion as to how you want to work this. Very quickly, is there any feedback at all? I don't want to take the time debating that.

I will have the minister lead off with his estimates.

MR. SMITH: Madam Chairman, alternate questions or you're going to call it as you see it?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I think we'll do it the same way we tend to do it in the Assembly, with alternate questions, if there are questions on both sides.

MR. SMITH: Great. Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It gives me great pleasure this evening to appear in Committee of Supply for the purpose of discussing for the first time in the history of Alberta and, I guess, for the first time in the history of Canada a business plan that covers gambling activities in Alberta as well as Alberta liquor revenues.

The real challenge of this department is being able to strike the right balance between choice and responsibility when it comes to gambling and when it comes to safe and responsible consumption of alcohol. I know that there may be the odd thrust into the Alberta lottery fund, but as members all know, there is an ample discussion time of two days, I believe, for those as well. However, if you do want to take time, we'll do the best we can with the tools we have. Of course, for anything that you need in terms of preparing for more information, you can visit our web site at www.gaming.gov.ab.ca.

So I look forward to an enjoyable two hours of listening to keen, incisive analysis of a business that generates \$1.3 billion in revenue and has a bottom line of about \$1.22 billion in net profit. Having said that, I will conclude my remarks, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who I believe is the Gaming critic.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just have a very,

very quick opening comment. Then I have a series of questions, and I would hope the minister can make note of the questions and sort of respond to them after I've had my opportunity to ask these questions. I understand that if I ask one question and wait for an answer, I would basically give up my turn, so I'm going to ask a series of questions. You might want to make note as I go through.

I just want to say that I recall one day the Premier saying that within five years Alberta could be a provincial tax-free province. I just hope that the reference wasn't being made that in five years from now we can be the northern Nevada, relying on gambling taxes rather than on any other form of personal income tax.

Now, I want to start off by looking at this review that the minister announced some time ago. The announcement was made, but those of us in opposition never got a copy of any terms of reference, so I'd like a copy of the terms of reference. I'd like to know what the terms of reference are all about and the time frame. I'm not certain about the time frame because it talked in terms of a review until next summer. Did it mean this coming summer or next summer, as per the next calendar year?

Furthermore, in the review my understanding is that there was no option provided for public hearings. I'd like to know why the minister doesn't pursue a similar process that we saw a number of years ago that you chaired, Madam Chairman, and that is sort of having a committee that went across the province, heard from organizations, heard from individuals, and as a result of that, a number of recommendations came forward that represented the feelings of Albertans and also represented the feelings of those groups that made presentations during those public hearings. I did have the opportunity to attend one or two of them.

My understanding of this particular review is that it's sort of in-house, that it doesn't allow for that, although there was reference made, according to one of the newspaper articles, that stakeholders would be consulted. Now, stakeholders I assume would refer to people like the hotel industry, nonprofit casinos, and so on and so forth but not the average, typical Albertan who goes there and gambles or the one that becomes addicted as a result of the accessibility of VLTs.

Some of the specifics when I look at the review. Will the review actually consider an option that seems to be very, very popular throughout the province, according to recent polls and polls that were even done during the plebiscite thing, the option of restricting gambling activities to the nonprofit casinos? That was not a question on the plebiscite. Now, the latest poll done in conjunction with a national poll indicated, if I recall correctly, that something like roughly 70 percent of Canadians in western Canada preferred that particular option of restricting gambling to nonprofit casinos. I think in Canada it was 67 percent, in western Canada 72 percent, and in Alberta something like 70 percent. That's always been my perception. If that question were asked of Albertans, 70 percent of Albertans would respond and say that as a compromise, as a viable option, as a viable alternative we would like to see the gambling

activities restricted to nonprofit casinos. I'd like to know if the review is going to look at that particular option.

In this very same room here a number of months ago a number of the members that are here now along with myself and the minister and you, Madam Chairman, heard a presentation by the Hotel Association – maybe not the Hotel Association, maybe an offspring of the Hotel Association – that advocated the concept of mini casinos in conjunction with the hotels, with at least some of the hotels. I want to know if that particular concept has been pursued, if that's going to be part of the review. I would hope myself that it's not part of the review, that that idea has been chucked.

Also, we heard a great deal of requests, demands, whatever, from bingos that would like to see gambling activities expanded within the bingo halls to include various forms of electronic gambling. In other words, if we open the playing field up totally, I don't think there would be any end to how far those with a vested interest would want to push the availability of gambling in this province. I think we would, in fact, become another Nevada of the north. I would hope that the review doesn't consider things that were rumoured at one time such as the possibility of a Vegas-type casino in Banff to accommodate the tourists that come from outside of the province. I wouldn't want to see that go ahead.

While the review is on, my understanding is that all further expansion of gambling activities has been frozen. I assume that refers to the slot machines in the nonprofit casinos with the exception of that thousand or so that were put in at the last minute. When I look at the budget, the numbers reflect that we're not going to see a massive increase in the amounts of revenue achieved from the slot machines in the casinos.

Now, on addiction. When I look at the figures here, I see the \$1.5 million designated to the research institute, and I'd like to know exactly where that is at right now. I do know one of the members on the board, Vic Justik. The former minister was accommodating enough to put him on at my request. Mr. Justik is himself an addicted gambler, who I'm sure Mr. Lougheed would be familiar with. He operated the Pots & Pans in Fort Saskatchewan before he became hooked on his own machine. He did make a presentation in conjunction with the Canadian foundation of gamblers here in this particular room as well.

Now, the \$1.5 million is there. I see a figure for the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, \$33,320,000. The way I read it, the '98-99 actual, which doesn't really make sense to me, is \$3,048,000. I'm not sure why we have a jump from \$3,048,000 to \$33,320,000 going to AADAC. There must be a rationale to that. What portion of that is actually earmarked toward the addiction caused by gambling versus the use of alcohol? I think it's a figure of roughly \$3.1 million, but I can't find it anywhere in the budget.

I wonder if the minister has ever looked at the concept that is used in Texas. In Texas they earmark 2 percent of all net gambling proceeds for addiction problems. As gambling expands, of course the availability of dollars expands for that particular problem, because the more that is gambled, traditionally the greater the addiction problem is going to be. In the dollars that go to AADAC or in the dollars that are earmarked specifically for gambling addiction, I'm not clear as to how that is split. I know the bulk of it goes to AADAC, but I believe some goes to the Canadian Foundation on Compulsive Gambling in Alberta and to a couple of other groups as well.

8:16

One more question on addiction. What types of steps is the ministry taking to try and discourage or prevent the growing gambling addiction that is occurring amongst young people? We see

that happening just like we see the increasing numbers of young people becoming addicted to the use of tobacco, which is very disheartening. I believe the same situation is occurring with gambling, particularly in activities like pro sports and that.

Now, on the distribution of dollars, the gaming summit made it very, very clear. Their recommendation was that gambling proceeds should be used for community purposes, not public community purposes but community purposes. When I look through the budget, I guess the one that really sticks out like a sore thumb is where we have, if I recall correctly, a distribution of half a million dollars going to the international and intergovernmental tariffs department. I'm not sure if that's to accommodate the two new facilities they're talking about in Britain. I believe the other one was in Mexico or somewhere in South America. International marketing: \$500,000.

We go through the whole budget and see the amounts of dollars that are transferred. I asked this question of the former minister, Steve West, last year. His own department had received \$5 million at that time from the lottery fund. Health receives a great bulk of it, of course, Infrastructure receives a great bulk of it, and it goes on and on. To me those aren't community-based organizations. The dollars that go to CFEP are community based, but the ones that go to the lottery boards – and I looked at the distribution of the Edmonton lottery funds, for example. A great portion of those dollars, possibly even more than half of them, were turned around and funneled to other civic departments like the library, parks and recreation, and so on, areas that would traditionally be covered by tax dollars.

There are many organizations out there that had applied, like the Edmonton Telephone Historical Information Centre Foundation. They were turned down, a very viable organization. I believe that the Crystal Kids, that the Premier's dad is involved in, haven't received any dollars, but I may be wrong on this one.

MR. SMITH: They got \$10,000.

MR. WICKMAN: They did receive some. Good that they received some. Those are the types of organizations that I see the gaming summit referring to when they talked in terms of dollars going to community-based organizations.

Now, the court actions. The Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo one has gone on now it must be almost three years. I think it will be three years this June, and those machines are still humming away. It's the same with the activities going on in Lacombe. There was an article in the Red Deer *Advocate* very recently where the advocates in Lacombe were questioning as to who is going to cover those legal costs that they incur as a result of the fight being put up by the hotel industry. The hotel industry, of course, has nothing to lose, because as they continue the court action, the dollars keep rolling in, more than sufficient dollars to cover the legal costs, but those that initiate the fight and the petitions and such don't have that. They can't dip into those VLT profits to cover their legal costs. Has the minister ever considered providing some of those lottery dollars to make for a more level playing field when it comes to the court actions?

The tendering process for the VLTs. I've always been not in the dark but not sure if all those machines are coming from Canada, from Alberta, or if the bulk of them still come from the United States, like they did originally.

My last point, which is also a part of the department but is overlooked, is the alcohol aspect of the ministry. Two questions come to mind here. One I call a threat to the small family liquor outlet that could be faced if the large stores – Superstore and IGA have been pushing for years for the right to sell liquor within their existing facilities, like we see in the United States. In Las Vegas it's

very common. If you go into Lucky's, there's an area sectioned off which is for the availability of liquor.

Now, the disadvantage to the small guy is that the small guy can't afford to run loss leaders. If you go to the small guy, you buy liquor. If you go to Superstore, you buy groceries as well. So if they can entice the shopper in there by advertising rum and whiskey, whatever, at a much lower price, getting them in there to buy their groceries at the same time, of course they're going to do it. So I'd like to know: is there any consideration being given to allow the sale of alcoholic products in existing facilities that cater to the grocery industry?

My last question on the sale of alcohol. I've heard some concern being expressed again by the small guy that there may be special provisions set up to allow the bigger guys that may own a chain – like there's one that owns about six different outlets – to buy on a volume basis. Buying on a volume basis would allow them to buy the minimum that would be allowed to purchase a particular product, meaning that the small guy couldn't buy that product because he couldn't buy in that same volume. So those that own more than one outlet or a number of outlets could buy some type of specialty brands that you'd have to go there for and that you couldn't just go to the corner liquor outlet for. Of course, if you're going to go down to one particular liquor store to pick up some specialty bottle, you're probably going to turn around and buy all the alcohol you're going to buy at that particular one.

So those are the questions I'm going to ask for now. I would hope that the minister could respond to at least some of them and those that he can't respond to tonight I understand, and I wouldn't mind, like I did last year with the former minister, receiving responses in writing as time went on.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

I will just remind members present that the lottery fund estimates will be discussed and voted on separately from the rest of the Department of Gaming. There is time set aside for that.

Hon. minister, do you wish to respond?

MR. SMITH: No. Go ahead. Let's continue, please.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. I would also remind people that there is coffee and juice at the back.

Who would like to go next? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: I don't want to be greedy. Aren't there any questions from the government side?

THE CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: All right. First of all, some questions about the performance measures in the business plan for your department, Mr. Minister. If I counted right, there are five, not a real ambitious start, I don't think. I'm just wondering whether you think you can capture all of the responsibilities of your department in the five measures that are proposed in the business plan.

Because of the change, I guess, in the organization of the department I note that many of the results and targets are to be announced. There are no comparative results because they weren't there in the past. That's fair enough. But a couple of them are specifically compliance measures with legislation and regulation, and that seems to me to be a little superficial or at least something that could be captured all in one performance measure. I guess Albertans would

expect that your department would comply with existing legislation and regulations.

Do you want me to wait?

8:26

MR. SMITH: No. Keep going. I'm multitasking.

MR. SAPERS: I guess I have some suggestions for performance measures for the \$1.3 billion in revenue and then all the expenses that are made as a result of what your department does, maybe some department measures around the net economic impact of gaming activity in Alberta. I've seen various estimates that range from 3 to 1 to 7 to 1 cost ratios in terms of social impacts of gaming activity in communities. I don't know which of that research is good or bad, but I'm certain that it would be of interest to you and the people in your department to figure out whether there's a real net benefit to communities for the billion dollars plus worth of gaming activity that takes place. I think developing a performance measure around that might be a prudent and responsible thing to do.

Also, what about volunteer involvement? There was a lot of controversy, you know, around some proposed changes to do with the utilization of volunteers in community-held bingos. Certainly there's lots of speculation. I don't know how many casinos you volunteer at, but every time I go to the ones that I volunteer at, people are telling me about all of the changes that are taking place. There's this sense that volunteers are being squeezed out of charitable casinos. I wouldn't mind seeing some performance measures or targets around volunteer utilization and involvement in gaming activities in the province.

My colleague mentioned the gaming research, and I do have some specific questions about the \$1.5 million, but I'm wondering why there aren't any performance measures specific to that. What is the research going to be looking at? Is there a schedule of research? Obviously, you can't do all the research you'd want to do with that amount of money in one given year, so how are you setting priorities for that, and what are your expectations in terms of outcomes?

I'm also wondering why there are no performance measures that would take a look at the impact on other charitable activities. I know lots of fund-raisers that work for lots of organizations, and they tell me that they're in a real competitive environment and that their biggest competitors are scratch tickets and casinos and bingos, that a lot of disposable income that people have is being used up in that way, and it's making their task of raising money for their charitable organizations, whether they be religious or sports or cultural, a lot more difficult. So perhaps some attention being paid to some performance measures and targets around government policy and initiatives and how they impact on those charitable activities would be useful. I would certainly appreciate your comments on that.

When I take a look at your estimates directly, the first question I have is the gaming research, which is program 2. It's the same amount of money this year as last year, yet there's growth in gaming. I seem to recall some relationship being drawn between the amount of gaming activity and revenue generated and the amount of money that would be made available for research. Now, I may just be daydreaming – maybe that was just wishful thinking – but I do seem to recall your predecessor making some comment to that regard and that the first year's funding was really just to get things started. So I'd like you to tell me a little bit about the decision-making process that led to a status quo item for gaming research this year, considering that we're reaching brand-new heights in terms of the take that the government receives.

Some other questions. I know that we're going to be dealing with the lottery fund separately, Mr. Minister, but maybe you could just

help me prepare for that debate by giving me your thoughts on these questions. Under other initiatives under Gaming I see that there's 11 and a half million dollars that's being allocated, and that's up from \$3.6 million. That's a huge miscellaneous category, and it's a huge increase. I'm just wondering, with that much additional money being funneled into other initiatives, why it isn't broken out. Or are there really that many other miscellaneous initiatives that are of relatively small individual amounts? If that's the explanation, fine, but I'd like to know because it's – what? – an \$8 million increase in the line item.

Perhaps this would be best in the lottery debates themselves, but I know that there's going to be a request coming for the 2005 Goodwill Games. Maybe the budget was printed too late to accommodate that. You had a hand in bringing that event to the city of Calgary. I'm wondering what your anticipation is for what budget year we may see whatever money that may be allocated, and I'm assuming it would come out of lotteries. If you could give us a hint as to what budget year you might expect that in.

Also, under Health and Wellness a number of questions, a number of concerns. I'll be brief, because again your answer may be to save that for the two days of lottery fund debates, but I hope not. In the Alberta wellness initiative we see a \$4.7 million allocation being budgeted. Would that be ongoing? Because the Alberta wellness initiative is. Is that going to be the total funding?

The other question I have to me is a much more troubling issue. I see the \$10.3 million being allocated for alternate compensation strategies. I take it that is money that will be used to pay professional fees to physicians for, you know, alternative remuneration situations, so those that are doing capitation or something else. So this is additional to the money that the Legislative Assembly will be asked to vote under Alberta Health and Wellness estimates for physician payments, which is going to be the better part of \$800 million all by itself. So I'm wondering about this. Again, is this onetime? How does this fit in with the Health and Wellness estimates, and on what basis can Albertans be assured that any of these strategies, which are being test-driven right now, will have a chance of being continued if their funding is dependent on gaming revenue? It seems to me this is probably not the best use for lottery fund payments.

I think I'll leave my questions there for now. I have some supplemental questions, particularly in the area of performance measures, but I would like an answer to some of those preliminary ones before we continue.

Thanks.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. There are some more points I want to go through in the business plan here. We look at Core Businesses.

The Ministry of Gaming carries out its responsibilities through four core businesses:

1. Administer the Alberta Lottery Fund with full public disclosure, and continue to support communities and charitable organizations.

Further on we see Goal:

To ensure lottery funds support charitable, non-profit, public and community-based initiatives through effective administration of the Alberta Lottery Fund.

Now, "public" somehow became part of that recommendation that came out of the gaming summit, as I mentioned earlier, but "public" was not part of the initial recommendation. I guess I'm still curious. It makes it difficult if the minister is going to hold off answering any

questions until the end. You know, I'm still curious as to when and why "public" was inserted into that recommendation.

We have as one of the key strategies, for example, "Use public consultation to obtain input on significant issues." Public consultation to me would involve going to more than the stakeholders, and as I pointed out earlier, in the existing review there was indication given that the public would in fact be consulted.

8:36

I'm also curious, Madam Chairman, about another aspect that has arisen over the last few months. There were discussions, as we're all aware, with the federal government about the possibility of providing financial assistance to hockey teams like the Edmonton Oilers and the Calgary Flames. I'm not sure, but I understand that there were even some discussions or some thought given to using lottery dollars as a bailout towards those teams. I'm not sure if those discussions ever went anyplace, because of course the federal minister kind of dropped that whole thing like a hot potato after two days of public outrage.

I don't blame the public, quite frankly, because the public has a difficult time trying to comprehend why players that are paid a million dollars a year, \$8 million a year, whatever, should be part of an industry or part of a team where in fact tax dollars or lottery dollars, whatever, are requested to be used to bail them out or to subsidize them. This is always the fear, that those proceeds would then go just to enhance further the salaries of hockey players or the profits of the owners of those particular teams.

We also have here under Key Strategies on page 116:

Gaming will review policies on the disposition of Alberta Lottery Fund proceeds, to ensure funds are being allocated according to policy and intended use.

Now, I'm not sure if that's supposed to mean that Gaming will review policies. I would have thought that Gaming would have set the policies, you know, finalized the policies rather than the other way around. For the Gaming ministry to review the policies and then leave it up to the Gaming and Liquor Commission to finalize is sort of backwards to me. I would think that it would be the other way around, that the recommendations should come from the Gaming and Liquor Commission and be approved by the ministry, approved by the Legislative Assembly, and so on.

On the same page under Key Strategies:

The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission . . . will administer the Alberta Lottery Fund, including the transfer of lottery fund disbursements to other government ministries.

Okay. "Will administer the Alberta Lottery Fund." Don't they do more than just administer it? Isn't it the ministry involved with the caucus or the cabinet that decides exactly how those dollars are being spent in terms of how much will go for Infrastructure, how much will go for Health and Wellness, and so on? Again, that leaves the impression that the commission is doing a great deal more than the ministry. If the commission has all that power, why is there even a ministry to oversee it?

Another area, too, Madam Chairman. And it was you yourself who brought forward a report not too long ago, a few months back, about the same time that – oh, what's that foundation called from out west there? Is it the Fraser?

MR. SAPERS: Canada West Foundation?

MR. WICKMAN: Canada West, yeah. Canada West came out with similar recommendations, and those recommendations talked in terms of further public consultation before any expansion, about the beefed-up security and that. Nothing ever seemed to happen from that report. If you notice, on the legislative Order Paper there is a

bill, Bill 208, that will advocate some of those recommendations, which I felt were quite frankly superb. I don't understand why they were ignored totally. At least from the public point of view it appears that they were ignored.

Then I go to the next page, 118, "Ensure the proceeds received from licensed gaming activities are only used for approved charitable or religious objectives or purposes." "Licensed gaming activities": I'm not sure if that's referring to the licensed gaming activities at the nonprofit casinos or if it's talking about any licensed gaming activity. If it's talking about any licensed gaming activity "only used for approved charitable or religious objectives or purposes," again there's no reference there to the dollars that are now being spent for public use. So there's a contradiction there, unless that applies just specifically to the nonprofit casinos. If that's the case, all the proceeds from those licensed gaming activities do not go to the nonprofit groups. My understanding is that 70 percent of the proceeds of the slot machines go into the government coffers, that they don't in fact go for these charitable or religious purposes. So either way you look at that particular one, there is a contradiction.

Also, on page 119, "Work with the Alberta Racing Corporation to determine the success of the racing renewal initiative." I have to admit that I do have one weakness when it comes to a sporting activity that is associated with gambling, and that's watching those horses run. I think that's one of the greatest sports going, whether you go out there to bet or not, just watching those horses come down that track towards the finish line. I recall I went out one afternoon to see Cam Allard's horse that was running in the United States. The only way I could see that race was to go out to the Northlands track and watch it on one of the big screens, because it was being brought in by pari-mutuel betting, or whatever it's called. Somebody phoned the *Sun* and accused me of being out there playing the slot machines, which I wasn't.

The racing industry has always been dear to my heart, and I recall the Premier even admitting at one time that he actually owned racehorses and that that was sort of one of his weaknesses, going out there and spending a bit too much money on the horses.

AN HON. MEMBER: That was Getty.

MR. WICKMAN: The current Premier also at one time owned a horse in Calgary, and he used to go out to the racetrack on a regular basis, according to one of his interviews he did with one of the newspapers. The former Premier too. In fact, I used to run across him quite often when I'd be out there watching the horse racing and watching some of his horses race.

The racing industry was in a great deal of trouble at one time, and I'm not sure now if it's a question of the racing industry still being somewhat in trouble and being subsidized by the slot machines that we see at Northlands, and I would imagine a similar amount at Stampede Park.

There have been some new initiatives taken that have helped the racing industry: the offtrack betting that we see at places like Billy Budd's. Again, another horse owned by Bob Giffin, Native Brass, I believe, was running in Toronto, and to see that horse race, I had to go to Billy Budd's to watch it on the screen. It was a joy to watch because that horse came charging in from the back of the pack and it just didn't quite make it. I didn't have any money on the horse. You didn't have to have any money on that horse just to watch it.

If the minister could sort of give an update as to what the state of the racing industry is, if the stakeholders are kind of satisfied that things are going well and if they've sort of gotten themselves out of the difficulties they had sometime ago. I'll stop for now and allow any other members that may have any comments or questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair was allowing you a little leeway and latitude there, hon. member. I'm really glad you like horse racing. Have you got any tips?

MR. WICKMAN: It's all in the business plan.

THE CHAIRMAN: Who would like to go next? Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I don't have quite the same passion when I talk about horse racing as my colleague, but I do have a question about the commission. I know that the Auditor General in the past has raised some concerns about the horse racing industry in this province. There's another question I was going to ask you about performance measures. I did note that one of your strategies is to work with the corporation to determine the success of the initiative, but I'm also wondering whether you'll have a moment to reflect on some of the concerns that have been raised in the past through audit.

I also wanted to look at the Gaming and Liquor Commission and ask, first of all, about the role of the commission when it comes to the enforcement of the Tobacco Tax Act. Again, there are no performance measures, and I'm just wondering what the relationship is with Alberta Justice and also the joint federal/provincial and the interprovincial initiatives in terms of smuggling and whether or not there is an updated working paper from Treasury that looks at the tax policy in terms of the illegal sale of tobacco products in this province, particularly those tobacco products that are brought here for resale in neighbouring provinces.

8:46

The other issue with the Gaming and Liquor Commission has to do with, I guess, its oversight role with private liquor stores and the stories I've been told by liquor store owners that have to do with large retailers being able to monopolize certain product lines and using the provincial warehouse, in fact, as their warehouse. They make a deal with the vendor to buy a huge quantity, it's shipped out to the warehouse, held there, and then the retailers are able to sort of draw off that inventory. I'm wondering whether or not you can tell me if that's just a fictional account from these small businesspeople or if in fact that's happening. If it is, does it concern you?

I've also been told by some of these same retailers that there's been some ongoing investigations to do with activities from some of the brewery agents that violate Alberta regulations in terms of providing incentives to retailers to hold certain products and sell certain products, not necessarily discount them but incentives in terms of product placement and ordering and those kinds of things. I'm wondering if you could update us there and also comment on why there are no specific performance measures that have to do with those regulatory and enforcement functions of the commission.

The next question I have has to do with – and this may give you an opportunity to quite rightly take some positive credit for things. I notice in the budget itself in terms of the minister's office and the deputy minister's office and business and management policies that all of the operating expenses under ministry support, in fact, are pretty much status quo. Now, is that because there's really been no change in terms of staffing and activities, or is it because of the leanness of the ministry? I guess I just would have expected to see some increases, considering the increased level of gaming activity in the province and the suggestion that there may even be more, whether it be the sports lottery that my colleague was referring to or some other activity. There aren't many government departments where we see year to year for support services that it's pretty much a maintenance budget, so I'm just curious as to how you got there.

MR. WICKMAN: Let me go specifically to the budget then. One of the questions that I'd really like to get answered tonight, that I'd asked earlier, even if the minister could tell me afterwards: the amount of money that is spent towards fighting addiction. I do have a media interview in the morning, and that would be very accommodating if you could give it to me, because it is absolutely nowhere in the budget other than that bulk figure.

In the Gaming budget on page 174, a few points. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission—Lottery Operations: \$54,639,000. On page 182, Ministry Income Statement, under the expense category Financial Assistance to Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission: \$72,442,000. Now, for some reason those two figures don't jibe. I'm not sure if they're meant to jibe, and I'm not sure which figure is the actual figure. They don't jibe right on. Maybe they're not meant to jibe.

Also on page 174, the 2001 World Championships in Athletics, which we all support. People like Jack Agrios and Bob Steadward have to really, really be commended for the efforts they went to to bring those games here to Edmonton. The \$10 million: I don't think anyone's going to begrudge that particular expenditure because of the legacy left behind. I was there for the Universiade Games. I was there for the Commonwealth Games. I was on city council. It did a great deal for the city, not only in terms of putting it in the international spotlight but in the legacy it left behind in sporting facilities.

Here we have the 2001 World Championships in Athletics, \$10 million, but the previous year showed \$19 million. I'm not sure what the \$19 million would have been earmarked for. If I remember right, at the time that particular budget would have been prepared, the decision for the games would not have been made. I don't think the province would have fronted \$19 million in terms of the bid that was made for the games and that the Premier went over, and rightfully so, to help advocate for. The thing he didn't do was adjourn the House for four days, which he should have, but that's beside the point. He did go over. He did do his job, just like you did when you went to Lake Placid, I believe, in promoting the Goodwill Games. That's expected of cabinet ministers and the Premier as long as those dollars are spent wisely. See we can be positive at times too.

Under Gaming on page 174 again, other initiatives, \$11,525,000, a jump from last year's \$3,671,000. Now, for a category as loose as other initiatives that's a great deal of money without some type of breakdown. What exactly is other initiatives referring to? Is it money that hasn't been earmarked, that's kind of a contingency fund?

Then I go to the next page, page 175, Health and Wellness, and I point out the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, \$33 million, again a dramatic increase from a few years back.

The alternate compensation strategies under Health and Wellness, \$10,350,000. I'm not familiar with that, and there's really no information on that. It sounds good: alternate compensation strategies. I don't know if that means to somehow compensate people for looking after themselves better thus preventing additional costs to the health care system.

We also see health care facilities under Infrastructure. There is no listing as to what facilities, unless that's going to come under the Infrastructure budget, which is quite possible. There is no listing as to what health care facilities that \$120 million involves.

The same with the school facilities. I recall reading an article in the paper where in Edmonton one school in particular that was rated as the third on the list of priorities by the school board received something like \$4 million for upgrades whereas the top one and the second one were overlooked. I know those are decisions made by

another ministry. Nevertheless, they are in this particular budget, and I would assume the minister would have some knowledge of them.

I saw under Learning, \$60 million, school technology upgrading. I would hope that we would see a good chunk of that \$60 million going to places like NAIT and of course SAIT as well. That's a form of postsecondary education that—it's a system I went through as an adult student. I also went to university, but I found that what I learned at NAIT could be a lot more practical in terms of going out into the working world. There'll always be an increasing demand for facilities like NAIT and SAIT. They broaden their base in that they are even an educational benefit to some of the Third World countries. They share their knowledge.

Under Municipal Affairs, Municipal 2000 sponsorship, \$12 million. Now, I should know what that one is, but I don't. I have no idea about \$12 million being spent on Municipal 2000 sponsorship.

I don't know again, Mr. Minister, exactly what your intended process is here this evening. I would have anticipated that we would have had answers to some of these questions in case they provoked other questions.

MR. SMITH: Is that it?

MR. WICKMAN: For now.

MR. SMITH: For now, of course.

Well, Madam Chairman, it's just been such a frenetic level of activity from the opposition that it's been difficult to butt in and actually provide answers. In going through the keen questioning and some of the drifting that has taken part in following what probably was a pretty exciting horse race and also knowing that the opposition would want to dwell even more keenly on the Alberta lottery fund estimates. The lottery fund was published in the *Edmonton Journal*, published here, and of course is totally available on www.gaming.gov.ab.ca. The usual full transparency and accountability is extant in those information sources.

8:56

I will try to pick off some of the more salient questions that came through, Madam Chairman, that the member can use for his media interview tomorrow morning.

The amount that will be spent for gaming addiction through AADAC for this fiscal year is \$3.4 million. The Alberta Gaming Research Council will spend \$1.5 million through a tripartite agreement with the University of Lethbridge, the University of Alberta, and of course the University of Calgary. That money is to be spent on research into gaming, the socioeconomic impacts and addiction impacts. There are a number of different topics.

One of the things about the council and secondarily the institute is that it was established in order to be at arm's length from government so that it can have its usual objectivity, its usual level of fairness, and its usual level of transparency.

We will respond to the many comments, the many questions, which we will of course go through with a very fine-tooth comb and go into real detail.

The gaming licensing policy review will really, as has been published in the media and as I've talked about in prior days, focus very much on licensing. As the member knows as the critic for this portfolio for a number of years, policy has evolved. There have been a number of VLT plebiscites held throughout Alberta. There are numerous surveys by the Canada West Foundation and others that have focused on what is occurring with gambling activities in Alberta as well as in the prairie provinces and throughout Canada.

The recommendations from the summit continue to be guidelines, and I think the press release that was issued shortly after clears up both the transparency of the lotto fund and its collection and its discharge of funds.

With respect to the question on court action, this is the second court action, as members know. The previous court action died with the passage of Bill 36. It would be my hope that that case would be expedited and put through the system with the usual alacrity and dispatch of the justice system.

The issue of liquor in grocery stores has been put forward by a group in Calgary and subsequently had follow-up media coverage. There is no specific proposal in front of the AGLC or the ministry at this time with respect to changing any regulations allowing food and liquor to be sold in large and major chain stores. As the keen critic knows from doing his homework, there are over 60 agency stores in Alberta that do already sell liquor and food in places like Lindbergh, Alberta, and Paradise Valley and all the dream stops in Alberta that really add to the fabric of Alberta. Beiseker comes to mind, Heisler, all the spots. So they're out there; they're working. There seems to be a modest increase in alcohol sales primarily due to population growth. Revenues, of course, still reflect the reduction in revenue given to the beer industry in years previous.

As anyone knows, in a competitive market regulations are always evolving. Circumstances are changing. A market by its own definition is one of dynamic action. So as the Member for Edmonton-Glenora brought up earlier, we are looking at ways of either taking a regulation that is unenforceable and unprosecutable and eliminating it or beefing up staff and inspection in order to sustain the regulatory capability of the commission but certainly not to have a regulation on the books that is neither enforceable nor able to have the commission discharge their normal course of duties.

I know there are more questions, Madam Chairman, and I just see by the precipitous leaning of the chairs that people are on the edge of those chairs waiting for those. We will continue to collect data and continue to be able to respond.

Of course, the member knows that the bingo review commissions are out. They're being consolidated at the commission, and they will be dealt with in due course.

Also, the terms of reference and time frame for the licensing policy review will be forthcoming. Stakeholders in the gaming industry include all those who do gamble, who do have a proprietary interest or have an ability to profit from the industry, so we will be as inclusive as possible. We don't visualize at this period the chartering of the Dash aircraft and moving throughout 50 or 60 places in Alberta.

A great deal of work has been done, ably chaired by the chair here tonight. The report has even been referred to as the old Gordon report, the tired old Gordon report, and perhaps the ever evolving, tired old Gordon report. It might be the revival of the tired old Gordon report.

What we have here is a business question that needs to be addressed. There are a number of issues that need to be reflected on. We are taking that business responsibility on. We want to ensure that there is a sense of business discipline in the industry, that there is a sense of regulatory discipline in the industry.

I think it's important to correct for the record the term nonprofit casino. The casinos do make a profit. There is no government money inside a casino in Alberta. The commissions from slot machines, casino gaming terminals are noted. They're published; they're open. The charities split their income with the casinos. The government is not involved.

This charitable model, which continues to be well received by Albertans, combined with bingo, raised well in excess of \$100

million for those charities over the past year. That charitable model is not intended to be changed. Volunteer participation continues to be welcome. Of course, because of the size and the growth in Alberta there continues to be growing amounts of charities as well.

Madam Chairman, in the interests of learning more about questions from the opposition and being able to respond to them as quickly as possible, I'll refrain from making further comments, and perhaps we can shed more light on even more introspective questions.

9:06

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I have had indication that Wetaskiwin-Camrose wishes to speak.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Amongst the many comments that you've made relative to pages 174 and 175, I didn't hear any comments made about the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Foundation. I notice there that apparently this is the first year of a contribution to this foundation, which I believe was set up some time ago. I wonder if you could clarify for me if this indeed is a first-time contribution and if it's the intent that there would be yearly contributions to that particular foundation.

Just a little below that I notice federal nursing stations. I wonder if you could just clarify that. Is that a shared program, or what does this have to do with the federal government, if anything?

On the previous page under Gaming, community facility enhancement program, I notice \$25 million there. I know that's part of the total CFEP program. I'm just wondering where the other I believe \$50 million is. Maybe you could clarify that for me.

A little higher there, under Community Development, the Trans Canada Trail project. I know that's a new project, and the opening will be this summer, I believe, or this fall, whenever it is. I'm wondering if you could provide some more detail in terms of what that contribution to the trail project actually is.

My last comment, or question, relates to the Core Businesses on page 178. The second bullet says, "License, regulate and monitor liquor and gaming activities, as well as certain aspects of tobacco sales." Maybe you could just clarify for me that last part, "certain aspects of tobacco sales," just what that might include.

Madam Chairman, those are the only comments I really have.

MR. SMITH: The member clearly has by his great work in the Chamber indicated to us his concern over the consumption of tobacco by adolescents under the age of 18, and we applaud his work in doing that. I would be really invited to respond by saying that hundreds of millions of dollars will go into the enforcement equation so that we can go out and ticket those that are caught and prosecute them for smoking under 18, but unfortunately, Madam Chairman, I can't say that at this stage. But I do want to certainly recognize the contribution that the member has made in bringing forward the evils of smoking at a young age, and I think the attention that's being focused on it has been beneficial to all.

Many of the other questions the member talks about are related to the lotto fund, and as members of the opposition have also asked questions about the lotto fund, I am eager, eager, eager to respond to those in detail and in completeness, but I am reluctant, reluctant, reluctant to take time out from the valuable study of the ministry business plan and the ministry estimates themselves. So again watching everybody on that precipice of their chair, I might ask again that we would delay the response to the Alberta lottery fund questions until such time as it's dealt with under lottery fund estimates in the House.

THE CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. Mr. Minister, I asked some specific questions about performance measures in your business plans. Do you intend on answering those questions tonight?

MR. SMITH: I'll let him finish, and then I'll respond to them.

MR. SAPERS: Well, my response depends on yours, Mr. Minister, so I just want to know: are you going to answer those questions?

MR. SMITH: But if I respond, then you lose your turn. Doesn't he? So I was just kind of working on his behalf by not responding until after he's finished.

MR. SAPERS: I'll deal with the chair, Mr. Minister, if you answer my question.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have debate back and forth, hon. members.

MR. SAPERS: Well, it's committee. We can do as you allow.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, why don't you ask some more questions? Then we will see if the hon. minister wishes to respond.

MR. SAPERS: I have to say that that's a bit unusual. Usually in committee that's exactly what we have, a to and fro. In fact, you've presided over many of those sessions, Madam Chairman.

MR. SMITH: Perhaps, Madam Chairman, I can help by responding to the hon. member's question, then going on to the next one. Perhaps.

THE CHAIRMAN: Probably that would be advisable.

MR. SAPERS: So "perhaps" is your answer.

MR. SMITH: Perhaps.

MR. SAPERS: I asked some specific questions about volunteers, research priorities, and economic impact of gaming on Alberta communities. Will you be answering those questions tonight?

MR. SMITH: Those are questions relating to the earlier question of performance measures with respect to specific activities in the community?

MR. SAPERS: Some of them were related to performance measures; some of them weren't.

MR. SMITH: Perhaps.

MR. SAPERS: How about the questions about the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission?

MR. SMITH: Many of those questions, Madam Chairman, we have already responded to as well. Of course, we also will be getting back in fuller and more complete detail in written form, as traditionally we have in estimates if I remember correctly. I would certainly indicate to the hon. member that absolutely no page will be left unturned, no question will be left unanswered. Every comment, no matter how minute, how detailed, how picayune, will be dealt with absolutely and fully in the spirit of disclosure and transparency, as have become the watchwords of this department.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Minister, I'm not sure whether it impresses your colleagues or your staff to be so nonchalant and dismissive, but it doesn't impress me and it doesn't impress the people that elected me to represent their interests here. My concern is that once a year – well, we'll just have it recorded in *Hansard*, and you can read it. Once a year the department is expected to come and defend its estimates, and I expect that defence. I also expect that we get answers to questions before we're asked to vote on your department's estimates.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to go next, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford?

MR. WICKMAN: Yes. There were some things that were raised as a result of the minister's remarks about trying to keep it within the Gaming ministry as opposed, say, to the lottery fund. When we look, it's under Gaming. Even in the index it's Gaming; it's all these different categories. I kind of hold that the ministry is ultimately responsible for any aspect of the Gaming and Liquor Commission, so anything that falls within any aspect of the lottery fund and the distribution of lotteries I think is fair game to be answered.

Now, we are into a new experience this year, because in the past, yes, we have had our two days of estimates for lotteries, and this is the first year, of course, that there's been a separate ministry for Gaming, so it becomes somewhat difficult to try and separate exactly what falls under Gaming versus what falls under the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission or lottery funds or however you want to call it. I think, Madam Chairman, you've been very, very fair in sort of allowing that discretion, because it is difficult to draw the line.

9:16

When I go through a budget like this, I do see some positives, and I want to just talk on a couple of the positives. One is the Wild Rose Foundation. I'm not sure how many of you have ever experienced the Wild Rose Foundation, but I've experienced it even in my former life involved with community groups. If we are going to have gambling proceeds in the province, that is one really, really good use. The current chairman, Krishan Joshee, has been chairman for some time, and most people around the table here I assume would know that he's done a very, very capable job. I've heard of many groups that have fallen between the cracks, that don't fall under any other program, which have gone to the Wild Rose Foundation and accessed dollars, and they've been appreciative of those dollars. So the Wild Rose Foundation works well, as do a number of the other foundations that may specialize in particular areas.

Another area that ended up being very, very satisfactory in the final outcome, although there were some real hurdles – of course, it was the former minister responsible – was the rigamarole with the bingo. The initial recommendation was made that a review committee was going to be established on bingo regulations. Meanwhile two weeks later it was announced that certain changes had already taken place even before that committee had met. We all heard the outcry from the various associations and individuals involved with bingos throughout the province, and there was a back flip done which should have been done at that particular time.

The committee, headed up by Sam Lieberman if I recall correctly, came out with I thought fantastic recommendations. We did have some difficulties with one or two of them: the one that allowed individuals under 18 to volunteer in certain types of bingo halls under certain limitations and such in terms of the amounts of revenue. I understand that in rural Alberta it's sort of a different situation than it is in urban Alberta. Nevertheless, that seems to have been accepted somewhat. There hasn't been a great deal of

controversy over it. So the way that bingo was handled and the end result was very, very good.

Now, when we talk in terms of this current review that's going on, I'm not certain I have the same confidence. The minister has said that stakeholders will include those that gamble, but then on the other hand he sort of indicated that we're not going to have public hearings in the 60-some communities where you may have held them in the last go-round. I wouldn't mind, quite frankly, seeing a Judy Gordon report sequel. I think it would be good. I think it would freshen up in today's environment, which has changed considerably.

Anyhow, Madam Chairman, the minister's got to tell us how these stakeholders who do gamble are going to participate. Is it going to be like the WCB review committee, where a questionnaire is being drafted up, where those interested respond to a questionnaire they find on the Internet or they pick up at their MLA constituency office or wherever? That may not be sufficient. That may not give ample opportunity. It may not be necessary to go to 60 communities to do it, but again I would think there would be wisdom in a Judy Gordon report sequel, as I call it, Mr. Minister, to head off in that same direction again.

Now, the court action you referred to. When that bill was introduced by the former minister, we were contacted by legal firms for municipalities like Wood Buffalo and that, and they told us in no uncertain terms that that piece of legislation isn't going to fly, that it's not going to be upheld in the courts. Now, that decision still, of course, has not been made, and we can't prejudge the courts. I really hope they are wrong. I am getting concerned with the amount of time it is taking. I don't see anything in the papers about it anymore. I followed the Wood Buffalo newspaper and the Internet hoping I'd see an article up there as to what is happening.

I don't know exactly if there's a strategy to deliberately stall things and allow the dollars to come or if the lawyers representing the hotel operators have some strategy that they're quite comfortable with and that in the end result they're going to win. If that is the case, if that is the outcome, then we're going to have to, I guess, again look at some legislation. We do have to respect the wishes of those municipalities and those individuals who voted in those particular plebiscites.

The last point I want to make at this particular time. This should be of concern to many of the members sitting here, particularly those that represent rural communities. We did a study a couple of years back looking at the amount of dollars that were contributed to specific municipalities – for example, Drayton Valley and so on – the amounts of dollars that were being given directly to those municipalities as a result of lottery grants like the CFEP and so forth and so on. We compared that to the amounts of dollars that were being taken out of those communities as a result of the VLTs, and the ratios were as high as 7 to 1. In other words, for every dollar they received, they were losing \$7 in the local economy.

I recall, Madam Chairman, one convention I went to. I believe it was the AUMA, or it may have been the AAMDC, but you were there. I recall quite a few of the delegates courting you and talking to you about VLTs and the concerns they had. I heard that in the hallways continuously, the drain that the VLTs were having in terms of the local economy and taking money out of the local economy, the money that was being shipped off to Edmonton that would otherwise be spent in that local economy. We know that in rural Alberta, particularly with the agriculture situation the way it is, just how difficult it is.

Again, Madam Chairman, I guess that reinforces to me the ultimate solution to this whole gambling situation we've gotten ourselves into over a number of years. I recognize that gambling isn't going to disappear. We have some form of gambling in

virtually every province in Canada right now. We do have some form of gambling in every province throughout the country. Ontario has approached it somewhat differently. Ontario is developing the model where they're going to have, again, the charitable-type concept, shared of course with the government, where there will be designated casinos. Thunder Bay will have one. It's being built right now. Windsor already has one. You're not going to see all these machines in all the hotels and in the bars. Again, I think the ultimate answer is to follow that lead. I believe B.C. has a similar situation where in fact the municipalities have the right to veto the casinos in their particular communities.

I think here in Alberta we moved very, very fast with gambling. I was first elected in 1989. It was shortly after that that the then minister, Ken Kowalski, the current Speaker, introduced VLTs as a test in southern Alberta. Three or four years later he proudly talked in terms of how \$25 million of gaming revenue, lottery revenues were going to go towards general revenue. This was after the CFEP program obligations and such. We look now at the amounts of dollars being transferred into general revenue that then is funneled to the various government departments. It has escalated. It is a big, big problem.

I commend the minister for having a review in place. I think that was the proper thing to do. Now it's a question of what comes out of that review: if it's just the status quo or a continuation of the expansion of gambling. It did frighten me somewhat when the Premier announced the Gaming ministry. That sort of sent the message to me that this was an industry unto itself, of more importance than elementary education, which was combined with advanced education.

9:26

Madam Chairman, those are some of the concerns I have. Alberta is very dear to me. I moved here from Ontario years and years ago, and I love Alberta. I don't want to see Alberta become a Las Vegas of the north. You know, there is a balance there that can be found, and that balance would take some boldness because it would turn off certain stakeholders. The hotel industry would not be happy at all about losing the VLTs. Many of them have argued that the VLTs are what keeps them going. Hotels were not originally built or purchased to become gambling centres. They were purchased for other reasons. As sympathetic as I may be to them, as I am to any business that struggles, I still don't see saying: okay; we're going to compensate by allowing you to have VLTs and have these hundreds of thousands of dollars a year rolling in. We don't do that for other industries, and I don't know why we should have to do it for the hotels.

Anyhow, I'll leave my comments at that point now because I know that other members are eager to speak on this.

THE CHAIRMAN: I certainly will allow for full involvement here or ample opportunity if anyone else wishes to ask some questions.

MR. SMITH: If I could just respond then, Madam Chairman, to a couple of the comments made by the member. Certainly we share common ground in our love for Alberta, whether you're from Ontario, as the member has pointed out, or were born and bred right here in Red Deer, Alberta. We do share this love for this province. We do share this feeling. Since 1993 there has been over \$30 billion more worth of economic activity occurring in this province. There are 3 million people here now. One-third of the product is exported, over \$33 billion. The GDP is fast approaching that of British Columbia's. We've generated enough economic activity to create another Saskatchewan, to create another Manitoba.

[Mr. Severtson in the chair]

This province is a success story. It's a success story because of what's happened in the private sector. It's a success story of people being able to work with a government that they're confident in. We'll continue to take those bold steps, as the member has pointed out, certainly the move to put a freeze on casino expansion until we were able to put ourselves in a better position to notice the evolution of gaming policy, that has changed over the years given the extra amount of research, given the extra amount of activity, given the growth of the province not only in this area but in other areas. In fact, the growth of the area has been so dramatic, Mr. Chairman, that the province's revenues from VLTs as a percentage of total revenues have actually decreased. There's growth in other areas of the market while there is not wild, unbridled growth in this particular market niche.

Of course, we work closely with the Hotel Association, which has always been a strong proponent of member interests, but also remembering that those hoteliers are resident in their own local communities. You would take a look at the progress reported by the group in Leduc, for example, that continue to recirculate some of their own revenues from their commissions in their community.

I think that loving this province is also committing to this province, and you find that citizens across this province will work hard. They work hard as volunteers. They work hard as individuals. We know that they put in more time per week than just about any other province in the dominion. We know that their average weekly earnings are exceeded only by that of Ontario, which is again a substantial move up from as low down as fourth in Canada over the last 10 years.

Of course, the department is very focused on ensuring compliance with a controlled substance such as alcohol, with ensuring that there's enforcement on serving intoxicated persons, serving minors, and the like. That's a very important part of our job. duties is one that I think the ministry does quite well.

So I'll continue on, Mr. Chairman, and look for more keen comments from those members who have pith and substance to add to the estimates discussion.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay.
Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a few questions. They relate to the gaming research. Earlier you went through the partners, which is the who. You spoke to some of the what, but I really didn't get a sense of what they're set up to study. If the past has been any indication of government policy, I don't recall reliance on any study whatsoever. At least it wasn't noted in any of the literature that has been published on the matter, and it certainly isn't noted on or close to gaming.gov.ab.ca.

I was wondering where one would find the results of this second year of operation now, some \$3 million later, where we might find those results and whether in fact the government will be looking to that well-expended money, I suspect, on basic research on the psychology of gambling and all that falls from that, the addiction and the prevention of addiction. Putting the best light on gambling as a recreational activity has been the object of some exercise, of some research in the past, a great deal of it coming out of Nevada, of course.

Most recently there has been some very good study elsewhere, and I'm wondering what the relationship of that study is to this group and what reporting mechanisms they might have. Do they report by way of annual report? Do they report by way of production of

material? All of those questions can be answered later, I suspect, because it's not the kind of information that I would expect the minister to happen to have at his fingertips.

On to another area that concerned me at the time: all the announcements of the community lottery board grants. Not the dissemination of those grants but the administration of those grants. I recall it was with a great deal of consternation that the communities had the grants. They were responsible for the administrative costs, and whether in fact they still are or are not is a question I'd like to have answered if I might.

9:36

In your remarks earlier, gambling by way of percentage in the overall income of the province of Alberta has in fact decreased. Well, you didn't cite the reasons for that, but judging from that which I see, the revenue has gone up. So all one can do is assume that the other revenues, which we know, have gone up considerably. So to use gambling revenue, to try to paint it in that light could be construed by some as being misleading. I would not do that at all though. This member would not do that at all.

Finally, this title of Other Initiatives. I, too, would like to see prior to the full debate of lottery funds some sort of answer, in that \$8 million is a lot of loose change to have kicking around without any public accountability thus far. I've heard the minister talk over and over and over about the accountability of this government and the openness and the respect for those that generate these funds. Albertans would like to see those numbers. It's their money that's being expended, and I'm sure it will be forthcoming.

The last question I have is in the Resource Development area. I would assume that that program is now full and complete for the Department of Resource Development, but it can't just sort of end from \$8 million expenditures down to nil. Are you expenditures now completed, and the department will have to carry on the maintenance of the software program? Is it totally and complete such that it was a failure? What's the story there?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your time, even though it might have been a little difficult to hear me over some of the din. The minister heard, I'm sure. He seemed to be listening as best I could tell.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Chairman, the minister always listens, and if he isn't available for quiet listening, he's certainly available for quiet reading afterwards.

The member's question with respect to the Gaming Research Council and the institute: they will be putting forth their own business plan at the institute level. They are a tripartite group of universities that will select the research projects and work in conjunction with the Gaming Research Council in quite an independent mode to be able to discharge the research undertakings.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, just my concluding comments, because we are getting on to a quarter to 10, and I assume we're going to go down to the general Assembly.

I appreciate the answers we have been given up to now, which are very, very limited. That doesn't concern me so much if the minister follows the same pattern as the former minister. The former minister provided me, within roughly two weeks, with written answers and, with the assistance of course of the officials of the ministry, provided a written response to every question I had asked and every question other members of this caucus had asked during the debate of the lottery estimates last year. This is the gaming estimates, but it's the same thing. I can understand that the minister is not in a position to answer every question that is asked tonight, but I would

certainly appreciate – and I would like some assurances from the minister – that all the questions we asked tonight will be considered and responded to to the best of his ability.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Chairman, I'm more than prepared to give those assurances.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: There's nobody else on my list of speakers, so if there's nobody else, would somebody make a motion that we adjourn committee A.

MR. MAR: I so move.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will adjourn and report to the Legislature. All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. We're adjourned.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 9:40 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 1, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/01

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, on this special day Alberta's Legislative Assembly will hear first reading of the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act.

I would ask that you now join me in the prayer. Creator, we humbly ask Your guidance as we turn our thoughts to the legacy of First Nations sacred ceremonial traditions. Grant us vision so that these sacred ceremonial objects can once again play their role in the living traditions of First Nations people today, and grant us understanding so that we make wise choices for the future. Amen.

I want to give thanks to Dr. Jack Ives, the manager of archeology and ethnology at the Provincial Museum of Alberta for assistance with the words of the prayer today.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I introduce our distinguished guests, I would like to point out that you are an honorary chief of the Alexis First Nation with the name White Man with a Kind Heart.

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a number of distinguished First Nations guests who have come to witness the introduction of a very significant piece of legislation entitled the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act.

Prior to entering the Legislature Chamber today, these guests were part of a First Nations ceremony in honour of this legislation. These distinguished guests are elders and chiefs representing three First Nations treaty areas in the aboriginal culture. Elders are highly respected as they provide their people with important counsel as to their traditional way of life.

Mr. Speaker, they are your special guests and are seated in your gallery. I would ask them to rise as I call out their names, and then once I've introduced them, I would ask all Members of this Legislative Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Frank Weaselhead, representing the Blood tribe; Martin Heavy Head, representing the Blood tribe; Leonard Bastien, representing the Peigan nation; Nelson Adams, representing the Paul band; Madge McCree, representing Swan River First Nation; Joe Willier, representing the Sucker Creek band; Harold Healy, representing the Blood tribe, and his wife, Joan; Mike Beaver, representing the Big Stone Cree nation; Kirby Bird, representing the Paul band; Allen Pard, representing the Peigan nation; Gabriel Meneen, representing the Tallcree band; Bennet Grey, representing the Whitefish Lake First Nation; Chief Wilson Bearhead, representing the Paul band; Chief Richard Davis, representing the Swan River First Nation. I would ask them to receive the warm welcome of this Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Forestry.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague Pearl and I, I'd like to say a few words in our own language today. [remarks in Cree]

I am honoured to be here along with our colleague Pearl Calahassen to participate in this most important ceremony. I thank our Premier and everyone that was involved in the development of this legislation. Thank you. [as submitted]

Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured also to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature Chief Harry GoodRunning, Sunchild reserve; Chief Darcy Dixon, Bearspaw band; Chief Gerry Ermineskin, Ermineskin band; Chief Paul Chiniquay, Chiniki band; and other special guests representing treaties 6, 7, and 8 who are seated in the members' gallery. I thank them for being here on this special occasion of witnessing the introduction of a very significant piece of legislation and for being part of a native ceremony in honour of this legislation. I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there are other members of First Nations here, and I would ask them to rise as well. Chief Alexis and others, please rise and receive the warm welcome.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table a petition today on behalf of the members for Lacombe-Stettler, Rocky Mountain House, Ponoka-Rimbey, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, Drumheller-Chinook, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Red Deer-North, and Red Deer-South. The petition has 5,287 signatures and reads as follows.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta reaffirm our support for the five basic principles upon which Medicare was built: accessibility, universality, portability, comprehensiveness and public administration. We urge the Government of Alberta to uphold the letter and spirit of these principles.

We also oppose two-tier health care and urge the government of Alberta to maintain an adequate system of public hospitals and to not permit the development of private hospitals in the province of Alberta.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition on behalf of the hon. Member for Stony Plain. Three hundred and fifty-one parents in his riding wish to urge the Legislative Assembly to intervene on behalf of the students at Meridian Heights school to "have the Parkland school division No. 70 review and reconsider the decision to amalgamate the French Immersion program."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege of mine today to table a petition with 821 names on behalf of citizens from Lethbridge, Coleman, Blairmore, Fort Macleod, Milk River, Raymond, Coutts, and Taber asking the government to stop promoting private health care and to ensure that the public health care system is kept strong.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 395 people in the Grande Prairie, Beaverlodge, Fort McMurray, Wembley, and Anzac areas. They are petitioning the

Legislative Assembly to “urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining the public health care system.”

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to table a petition signed by 242 Albertans. They are requesting that this Legislative Assembly pass a bill “banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.” This brings the total number today to 1,115 signatures on this petition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table a petition with over 1,000 signatures on it from the citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar:

We the undersigned citizens petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

This petition has been gathered by many energetic seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to ask that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask that the petition I presented yesterday be read and received now.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I ask that the petition I presented yesterday to the Legislative Assembly be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request that the petition I presented yesterday signed by a number of individuals from Cold Lake be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would ask that the petition I presented the other day regarding public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Bill 2

First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, otherwise known as the White Man with a Kind Heart, thank you very much. [remarks in Cree]

Mr. Speaker, I’m very proud and honoured to be asked by our Premier – I call him my chief – and supported by the elders of the aboriginal community and the leaders of the aboriginal community to rise today to move first reading of Bill 2, the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act.

I am very proud and thankful to the Creator for this opportunity to do the bidding requested of me. It’s up to us as aboriginal people that we do the right thing, from elders to leaders. This bill is giving back what is rightfully ours, but we need to ensure we have processes in place, for this is truly significant for our own survival. [as submitted]

Mr. Speaker, this act does three very important things. First, it establishes some basic principles that will enable Alberta to

repatriate sacred ceremonial objects from government collections to First Nations communities.

Second, the act sets in motion a consultative process in which Alberta Community Development and Aboriginal Affairs will work with First Nations communities to learn how they would like to proceed with the treatment, loan, or repatriation of sacred ceremonial objects.

Finally, this legislation will amend the Glenbow-Alberta Institute Act so that 251 Blackfoot sacred ceremonial objects cared for by the Glenbow Museum can be repatriated to the Blood tribe, the Peigan nation, and the Siksika nation as per the Blackfoot agreement which was signed on January 14, 2000, at the Glenbow Museum.

Mr. Speaker, in this millennium, in the year 2000 we see a real change. This legislation is groundbreaking, the first anywhere in this country. I thank the Premier, who has led this province in ensuring that whatever happens the aboriginal people will get what is rightfully theirs. I think he deserves a big hand, and I would like to ask you, all our colleagues, to give him that hand. [applause] Colleagues, we should be very proud today, because as one elder said in Blackfoot when the repatriation was happening: when the pages of our bible are returned to us, aboriginal people can continue their healing and complete that healing, because when we take control of our own destiny by getting those pages back, only then will aboriginal people truly take their place in society.

I thank this Legislature, my colleagues, and especially my colleagues the Hon. Ralph Klein and Stan Woloshyn for all the work they did to ensure that whatever happens, we as aboriginal people can get back our sacred objects.

This is the first reading of Bill 2.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

Bill 12
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 12, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

We have had occasion, Mr. Speaker, to discuss in Committee of Supply the details of the appropriation being requested. Suffice it to say for the purposes of introduction that it deals with supplementary supply to the departments of Community Development, Environment, Health and Wellness, and Justice.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill, but before I do, I want to congratulate the government on bringing forward Bill 2, the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act. We on the side of the Official Opposition look forward to working with the government to ensure a speedy passage.

Bill 207
Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing
Calculation Act

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill being the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act.

This bill will put forward an option for consideration to move to more of a revenue-sharing model in our province as opposed to a children-of-the-province model with municipalities as has been too often the case.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

1:50

Bill 208
Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2000

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a bill being the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, this bill was prepared with a good deal of help and reflects the valuable work done by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler in terms of embodying some of those recommendations into legislation.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

Bill 209
Employment Standards (Parental Leave)
Amendment Act, 2000

MR. CAO: I beg leave to introduce Bill 209, Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2000.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Bill 210
Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000.

The intent of Bill 210 is to give police officers increased legal authority in dealing with drivers whose blood alcohol content is within .05 to .08.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a first time]

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

Bill 211
Alberta Taxpayer Bill of Rights

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a bill being Bill 211, the Alberta Taxpayer Bill of Rights.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Taxpayer Bill of Rights will for the first time enshrine into law a set of principles for fair taxation and will prohibit the provincial government from raising the personal income tax, the flat tax as proposed, the fuel tax, the hotel room tax, the property tax, or any other prescribed tax of this government without first going to the people of this province and seeking specific permission. It's the first true taxpayer protection law that this province will enjoy, and I hope that colleagues on both sides of the Assembly will rush its passage.

[Motion carried; Bill 211 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Bill 212
Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism
Amendment Act, 2000

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If it's appropriate, I'd like to move on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview Bill 212, entitled the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2000.

[Motion carried; Bill 212 read a first time]

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

Bill 213
Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2000

MR. HLADY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills I'd like to introduce Bill 213, the Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2000.

[Motion carried; Bill 213 read a first time]

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

Bill 214
Police (Special Constable Safety)
Amendment Act, 2000

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a bill being Police (Special Constable Safety) Amendment Act, 2000.

This amendment act addresses specific safety issues relative to special constables.

[Motion carried; Bill 214 read a first time]

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

Bill 215
School (Early Childhood Education)
Amendment Act, 2000

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the School (Early Childhood Education) Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would make kindergarten part of the formal education system, would invite school boards to set K to 3 class size targets of 17 students, and would require screening of children to identify those at risk.

[Motion carried; Bill 215 read a first time]

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

Bill 216
Labour Statutes (Workers' Rights)
Amendment Act, 2000

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 216, known as Labour Statutes (Workers' Rights) Amendment Act, 2000.

Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of Bill 216 is to extend the scope of labour statutes to commercial farms and ranches, provide prorated benefits to some part-time workers, enable the Labour Relations Board to facilitate first collective agreements, and make

reinstatement provisions more meaningful for striking or locked-out workers.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 216 read a first time]

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take the opportunity to join with my colleagues in the Legislature to congratulate the First Nations peoples on the introduction of Bill 2. I think it's indeed a historic bill and a historic day for the introduction of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Bill 217
Public Highways Development Amendment Act, 2000

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Public Highways Development Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 217 will strengthen the ability of the Department of Infrastructure to deal expeditiously with nonconforming advertising along our provincial highways.

[Motion carried; Bill 217 read a first time]

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

Bill 218
Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity)
Amendment Act, 2000

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity) Amendment Act, 2000.

The intent of the bill is to ensure that no insurer provides automobile insurance with a premium that discriminates on the basis of gender.

[Motion carried; Bill 218 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

Bill 219
Blind Persons' Rights (Service Dogs)
Amendment Act, 2000

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Blind Persons' Rights (Service Dogs) Amendment Act, 2000.

It will amend the current Blind Persons' Rights Act to ensure that all persons with disabilities in Alberta will have the legal right to be accompanied by a service dog in public.

[Motion carried; Bill 219 read a first time]

2:00

Bill 220
Citizens' Initiative Act

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 220, being the Citizens' Initiative Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 220 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, today, in response to an hon. member's request yesterday, I provide five copies of the records management program which provides specific policies and procedures for the creation, handling, security and storage, and final disposition of child welfare records.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual reports for the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta for the period of April 1, 1998, to March 31, 1999; the Alberta Dental Association for the period of January 1, 1998, to December 31, 1998; the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association 1999 annual report; and the College of Chiropractors of Alberta annual report for the year ending March 31, 1999.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to be able to table this afternoon copies of the final report from the Calgary Multicultural Health Care Initiative entitled Building Bridges: Healthy Living for Calgary's Diverse Community.
Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the information of members of the Assembly the document Auxiliary Nurses are Worth It: Because We Care. I received this document today on the AUPE information picket line at the University hospital.
Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of two separate documents. One is the Capital health region Royal Alexandra/Glenrose site information sheet on LPNs. The other is a sheet prepared by the AUPE regional office for the information pickets held today at various health facilities around the province. It's information regarding the offer to the LPNs which would see that they would receive 62 cents over three years. I leave both copies for the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the Chinook region health restructuring update from this February.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table requisite copies of only two of the dozens of letters that my office is receiving every day on the health care issue. The first letter is from Mr. Terry Darbyson from Vegreville. He wants me to add his name to the list of Albertans who are opposed to the proposal of allowing regional health authorities to enter into contractual arrangements with private, for-profit hospitals.

The second letter is from Robert Lawrence from Calgary expressing the same sentiments as Mr. Darbyson.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of the environmental protection security fund annual report for the year ending 31 March 1999 in accordance with the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first group that I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly is 60 bright, young grade 6 students from St. Philip Catholic school. They're accompanied today by teachers Jerome Burghardt and Roger Millette as well as student teachers Carolyn Currie and Robert Hoppins and student helpers Mrs. Seigny and Mrs. DelMastro. They're seated in the public gallery. With your permission I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Also, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly Jimmy Ragsdale. Jimmy is seated in the public gallery, Mr. Speaker, and with your permission I would ask that he now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 29 hardworking, conscientious students in grade 6 at Waverley elementary school located in the Kenilworth neighbourhood of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Paula Tessaro, and by parent volunteers Mrs. Laurie Harnack, Mrs. Sherry Wesson, Mrs. Brenda Gaunt, and Mrs. Cindy Dwyer; and also student teacher Mrs. Jenni Rubuliak. They are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them now to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Jo Davis, Dorothy Corney, Elkmarr Schrag, Colleen Dennehy, Floyd Van Slyke, Shirley Thomas, Mary Nelson, Joan Hepburn, and Don Hepburn. They're here to witness the presentation of the petition and also to observe the proceedings of the House. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm greeting of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature 16 talented grades 5 and 6 students from the Amisk school in the Wainwright constituency. They are accompanied by teacher Hilary Gray and parents Mrs. Carol Anholt, Mrs. Bev. Holte, and Mrs. Shelley Drever. They are studying government. They are excited about their field trip, and they're excited to observe the proceedings of this House, especially this special day for the First Nations. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

MRS. FORSYTH: You save the best for last, Mr. Speaker. It's my

pleasure to introduce through you and to you two favourite constituents of mine, Heather and Neville Beck. Neville is celebrating his 60th birthday. I would ask Heather and Neville to rise and members to give them a warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: Well, then, hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you my dear friend who is visiting the Legislature, Mr. Harjit Rai. Mr. Rai is a very active member of the Sikh community, and he's also the recent past president of the southwest Sikh Society of Calgary. Mr. Rai is also a very strong Progressive Conservative, who I'm proud to say has been a hard-working member of my Calgary-Cross board for a number of years, on my executive. He's visiting today with his son-in-law Mr. Sekhon. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they both rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Members of the Assembly have often heard me speak of the exceptional people who live in Edmonton-Centre, and today I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly one of those constituents. Barry Bigelow has been very active in the community. I first met him when he was here as a volunteer judge for the CFB heritage fair, but he has also worked with me on a community strategy on youth crime. I would ask Mr. Bigelow to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the last person to introduce visitors today, it is my pleasure to welcome all gallery visitors here, specifically Ellen and Paul Laursen and their two children, Alicia and Brittany. They endured the tablings today and unfortunately have left, but for *Hansard* they are here today.

Thank you very much.

2:10

head: Oral Question Period

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the goal of this Premier and the special interests backing him is to bring in two-tiered, privatized health care into Alberta. The government is pulling out all the stops to bring in the Premier's privatization scheme: truth squads, newspaper ads, TV ads, radio spots, mail-outs, polls, focus groups, and, tomorrow, their Trojan horse bill to destroy health care. My question is to the Premier. Is the message of his propaganda campaign based on the focus groups, and is that why his government will not let Albertans see the truth in his doctored document?

MR. KLEIN: All the information that was asked for and all the information that was released was in accordance completely with the rules of the freedom of information legislation. Mr. Speaker, there is a process. If they're not satisfied with what they receive, there is a course of appeal.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition that they know how to use FOIP legislation. They use it more than anyone else.

MR. DICKSON: Point of order.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans deserve to see who and how much they are paying, will this Premier table with the bill tomorrow the costs, the contracts, and the agencies that he is using in promoting his private hospitals communications plan?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is a piece of legislation that needs to be communicated and communicated properly. The Liberals have been spending taxpayer dollars to spread a lot of malicious misinformation. Other groups and organizations have been spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to spread untruths related to this particular piece of legislation, so we want to make sure that we take sufficient steps to ensure that Albertans are well informed about this legislation, even to the point of taking the unprecedented step of mailing the bill out to every Alberta household.

MRS. MacBETH: No, Mr. Speaker, we haven't been trying to convince Albertans of anything. We've been listening to them.

Mr. Speaker, will this Premier tell Albertans just how many seniors will have to have their hip replacements or their cataract surgeries delayed because he's spending their health money on fancy advertising agencies instead of on our public hospital system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that's one of the problems: our delays that we're experiencing right now in the health care system, our waiting lists for certain elective surgery procedures.

Mr. Speaker, yes, we want to get the facts out there. We want to get the facts out in an orderly, reasonable fashion. We want to engage Albertans in unemotional, reasonable debate on this particular issue, and we want to hear what Albertans say. All the information that we will be releasing pertaining to this bill, all of that information, is the bill itself and an explanation of the various components of the bill and what it will mean to Albertans.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the real title – the real title – of tomorrow's bill is the private hospitals act, but the Premier and the special interests backing him just don't have the courage to tell Albertans the truth. Will this Premier admit that his Trojan horse bill tomorrow is a diversion and that his real agenda is contained in the communications plan hidden away in the Public Affairs Bureau?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we simply want to make sure that Albertans have the facts. The facts will be contained in the bill. That bill eventually and hopefully will become the law of this province. The title of the bill – and I can share this with the hon. member – is the health protection act. The health protection act. It is not a Trojan horse to shield anyone from anything. It is the health protection act, which has as its preamble absolute adherence to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act and spells out loud and clear that all you will need to access the publicly funded health care system in this province is your health care card.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, his wordsmiths have been working overtime.

Mr. Speaker, will this Premier admit that there's no plan to gather real public opinion or changes that Albertans may have in mind and that, once introduced, this bill is signed, sealed, and delivered for the special interests backing the Premier and his party?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to respond to that

question by asking a question, and I would like this hon. member to do the honourable thing and stand up and say who these so-called special interest people are. Who are they? I would like to know. You know, she's very vague on this particular issue just as she has been very vague on the bill itself. With one breath she says that there's a possibility she will support the bill. Now she's calling it the private hospitals bill when it is indeed the health protection act. She accuses this government of orchestrating a campaign. Yes, there is a campaign to get the facts out.

Mr. Speaker, I tabled in the Legislature an e-mail sent by one of the Liberal staffers to all Liberal MLAs encouraging them to get out there with their petitions and with this and that and to orchestrate a campaign. It has been a campaign, as I've said before, a campaign not of the truth but a campaign of malicious information. They're so good at it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that health is too important for the spin and the glitz and Albertans won't be bought with their own money, will this Premier simply stand up, look Albertans in the eye, cut the spin, and admit that his Trojan horse bill is filled with private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: I will look Albertans in the eye and say to all Albertans: you will have the opportunity to see the bill and to read it for yourselves unfettered, Mr. Speaker, not with a bunch of political rhetoric, the kind that comes from the Liberal opposition, not filled with malicious information, the kind of misinformation that is being spread by the Liberal Party, but the facts as contained in the bill. There is nothing more paramount, as I've said before, than a bill to be tabled in this Legislature that purports to become the law of this land. This is not about the kind of malicious information that they're spreading. This is about getting the facts out there in a true and truthful and straightforward manner.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, Albertans don't trust the Premier's private hospitals bill. And you know why? It's because no matter what his wordsmiths have crafted, no matter what that bill says, his private agenda is to open the door to private hospitals in this province so that they can make a profit at the taxpayers' expense. My questions are to the Premier. What happens when an operation in a private hospital goes wrong, when there are complications or infection? What happens when there are things that that private hospital can't deal with?

2:20

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, that is a good question. What happens now in an abortion clinic when something goes wrong? This hon. member knows all about therapeutic abortion clinics, because they were alive and well and actually a number of them were established under her watch. What happens? What I assume happens is that if something goes wrong, an ambulance is called, and the patient is then taken to a full-scale treatment hospital. That's what happens. [interjections] Well, I stand to be corrected. What happens now? Maybe the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness can respond. What happens now if something goes wrong in one of the 47 surgical clinics that are now operating? What happens? [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, would you carry on?

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows the answer. They go back to the public system.

My second question is: who pays when a person has to go back to a large public hospital because of the complications of major surgery that a private hospital can't handle?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, all procedures, minor, major – it doesn't matter what takes place in the health system today, all procedures, all treatments must conform with the standards and the guidelines and the very, very strict code of discipline set down by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. These are the people who know, not this hon. member. She is not a medical doctor and knows absolutely nothing about the health system as it pertains to the treatment of people, and I would add that she knows absolutely nothing about health policy.

MRS. MacBETH: As if.

Mr. Speaker, as this Premier may know, the state of California has just introduced legislation so that any complications in a private hospital are not allowed entrance to the public hospitals. Is that provision going to be in his private hospitals bill tomorrow?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the bill has yet to be tabled in this Legislature. I would advise the hon. members, as I advise everyone, to wait and see what the bill says. Surprise, surprise. She might even support it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night a CBC Calgary broadcast to a national audience revealed questionable practices taking place in existing Alberta day surgery clinics. The program suggested that some entrepreneurial doctors may be putting financial considerations ahead of the best interests of patients, yet the College of Physicians and Surgeons seems to be doing little or nothing about it. To the Premier: how can the government justify under its planned legislation going back to the dark ages by giving sole jurisdiction to the College of Physicians and Surgeons to accredit and monitor his proposed private, for-profit hospitals and excluding other health professions, such as nurses, from the process altogether?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I take exception to the use of the phrase "private, for-profit hospitals." Secondly, I take great exception to his assessment of the ability and the expertise of the medical experts who make up the college. He is saying that these people as medical experts are not qualified? Would they rather see Raj Pannu, you know, in charge of determining what is right medically than a team of well-qualified and highly respected doctors? I find that statement to be quite astounding, that he would presume that the College of Physicians and Surgeons, probably one of the most highly respected organizations of any jurisdiction in this country, is not capable of adjudicating what is right and what is wrong relative to the delivery of medical procedures. I think he should apologize.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the Premier stops focusing on Raj Pannu and starts answering questions.

As revealed last night by CBC, why is this government failing to properly monitor existing private clinics like the Gimbel Eye Centre before legalizing private, for-profit hospitals to do major surgeries?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't see all of the program. I saw part of the program. And I will have the hon. minister respond.

The CBC is one news outlet. The other day the hon. member

alluded to the *National Post* as being that awful right-wing newspaper. Do I take it from his question that the only news outlet that he abides by and believes in is the CBC? Is that where he gets all his information? I'm sure it's totally and absolutely unbiased. [interjections] Right.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the case in question I listened to the elderly gentleman, and he said: I've got no complaints; I was quite happy with the treatment I got.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Media Reports

THE SPEAKER: Well, first of all, hon. members, it seems to me that on several occasions now I've pointed out that the purpose of question period is not to verify something that was in some newspaper or some television program. I think I have access to something like 80 channels, and if the purpose of this question period in the province of Alberta is to verify everything that was said or not said on a particular program on a particular channel – the purpose of this is to deal with government policy, not to verify what was said on some TV program.

Private Health Services

(continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say that I do respect Sharon Basaraba, who is a noted Alberta journalist.

My last question, Mr. Speaker: how can the government justify letting the College of Physicians and Surgeons monitor wanna-be private, for-private hospitals when the college doesn't seem to have the resources or the will to properly monitor existing private day-surgery clinics like the Gimbel Eye Centre?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the college has the very grave responsibility of monitoring the quality of medical health care as it is delivered in this province and indeed as it is delivered in every jurisdiction across this country. All provinces have a College of Physicians and Surgeons. These are people who are experts in their field. They're medical practitioners. They know better than anyone else what is right and what is wrong with respect to the delivery of medical services.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: If I might, Mr. Speaker, the thing that's important to add to the Premier's answer is that we have contacted the College of Physicians and Surgeons with respect to this alleged situation. In terms of resources we have been working with the Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. They have been assembling information with respect to the ongoing evolution of the treatments of various eye conditions, and that information, which of course is out of a foundation supported by the government, will be provided to the college so that they will have the most up-to-date best scientific information available when they review this particular case. The college and the support of Alberta Health and Wellness is there to investigate, to follow-up on any alleged violations, if that's the proper term, of this type. There is a process in place handled by very credible people on the basis of very credible evidence.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

2:30 Housing for Victims of Family Violence

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While touring a number of

women's shelters and speaking to social service agencies across the province over the last four months, the number one issue that has been continually brought to my attention is the difficulties families leaving shelters face with regard to reasonably priced housing. Social service payments are not sufficient to cover the costs to start up a new home in a decent accommodation. These families are being set up for financial failure. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. What will the government do to address the financial crisis these families face upon leaving the shelters?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has taken a leading role in working with people who are looking for what one I believe would refer to as transitional housing. We have a concern that these families and individuals who are in need the most have access to what you might call basic shelter.

There's a whole variety of community service resources available to families and individuals who need assistance. Community Development doesn't necessarily run them all, and I would ask the Minister of Human Resources and Employment to address some of the financial assistance and support services that are available through his department.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We try to address the problem in two ways. We have direct services to families in shelters but also income assistance to families in need. Now, under the direct service, intake workers will regularly visit families in the shelters. Of course, we're dealing with these clients in our offices right across the province whether or not they are in a shelter. Through agencies, actually here in Edmonton, we also help women move from abusive situations or shelters into their new homes. We class this as one of the innovative programs that has come with the welfare reform of previous ministers, and we think it's a proper thing and a right thing to do.

Of course, the financial benefits: they may apply, then, for payments under supports for independence, or the SFI program. Also, we do provide assistance in housing. It is this situation, hon. member and other members here in the House, that you may find of interest. This is a time when we will actually provide a damage deposit, and that is to help the family that is being abused. If we can't get the perpetrator out of the house and the family then has to leave, we'll help them move into new accommodation.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really wasn't talking about the abuser being taken out of the household. I was talking about financial crisis.

As these families are often financially forced to reside in substandard housing run by unscrupulous landlords, what will the government do to eradicate that problem?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a few initiatives that are happening. I really hope that the unscrupulous landlord situation is not as widespread as some may think, but I don't really know.

What we've done to this point, we're again, if not the only province, one of the first provinces in Canada to come up with something called a government policy framework on homelessness, wherein we've defined the people. These would be the individuals who would come out of these situations, hon. member. We've put a definition on what we would consider to be folks who are homeless. These are basically individuals – children, youth, and families – who currently have no housing or are sheltered in emergency accommodations and will be out on the street at the end of the day,

if you will. We do recognize that in order to address this particularly complex problem, there are a wide range of needs that these families face in moving out of shelters.

There has to be a continuum of housing facilities which could address this particular instance, and there have to be support services. We need transitional housing; we need special-needs initiatives. There are programs that the hon. minister of human resources has referred to that are in place. What we are doing also: the federal government in December announced some initiatives, and we're trying to work co-operatively with them so that we could in fact end up addressing some of the problems that may be faced by these folks.

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

MS PAUL: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. My third question was going to deal with new initiatives that the government is going to implement to address affordable second-stage housing. I would emphasize the words "new initiatives," because what is in place now is not working.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say that the people who were paying attention to the estimates would have noted that we have \$3 million a year over the next three years committed to supporting community-based initiatives to assist the homeless. That's a new program in there. As well, although the hon. member may say simply new programs, I think it's important to note that the department that I represent currently funds over 9,000 family and special-purpose housing units and provides grant funding to qualified applicants with an annual budget of 82 and a half million dollars. That is significant.

I'd also ask the Minister of Children's Services, who is in this area, to supplement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's been said in here before, and I'll say it again: if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it is a duck. The Premier said this afternoon that it's time to look at the facts, and here's one fact that we'd like to look at. The Premier's own handpicked blue-ribbon panel on Bill 37 said that a private health care facility or nonhospital surgical facility was in fact a private hospital. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier explain what the difference is now between a private, for-profit overnight surgical facility and a private, for-profit hospital?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I would say to this hon. member: wait and see what the legislation says when it's tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to sound facetious on this particular matter, but if the hon. member wants to know what a hospital looks like, I would suggest that she go to the Royal Alex or University hospital or the Grey Nuns or Misericordia and see for herself what a hospital looks like. If she wants to know what a clinic looks like, I would suggest that maybe she go to the Morgentaler therapeutic abortion clinic or an eye surgery clinic, and she will see a clinic.

MS LEIBOVICI: Will the Premier's spin campaign be clear and honest with Albertans and say that this government's legislation is

going to allow contracting out with private, for-profit hospitals? It doesn't matter what you call them. An overnight clinic is a private, for-profit hospital.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, wait and see what the legislation says relative to this particular issue. They're so caught up in definitions that they tend to forget – well, maybe they don't tend to forget. Maybe they are deliberately ignoring what we want to achieve. What we want to achieve are very strict and stringent regulations relative to contracting out by regional health authorities and, at the same time, provide some options to alleviate pain and suffering. That's what it's all about.

MS LEIBOVICI: Will the Premier admit that the only thing he wants to achieve is the allowance of private, for-profit hospitals in this province, and that what he needs is the propaganda machine to ensure that that product is sold in this province right now?

2:40

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is absolute nonsense. We want to do what is right in terms of addressing what has become not a provincial crisis but a national crisis relative to the delivery of health care and finding new and effective ways of delivering medically necessary services and still doing it within the publicly funded health care system as we know it today. That's what it's all about. Nothing more, nothing less.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Federal Transfer Payments

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans and indeed all Canadians were given the news in the federal budget this week that the federal government will be restoring or returning to the provinces some more money previously cut from the health and social transfer payments. The federal government claims it is restoring significant amounts of money to the provinces for health care. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister explain to this Assembly exactly how much the federal government has actually increased health transfers to the provinces?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the federal government did provide some increase in the health and social transfer provision in the budget. It was announced as being, as I recall, \$2.5 billion over four years, and that will mean \$1 billion in the first year and then \$500 million in the next three years. Just to put it in context, that would be an amount of money that would provide for about six days of funding for the current Alberta health care system.

The point here though, Mr. Speaker, is that this is not by any means a restoration of the very, very significant reductions that were made by the federal government about the same time or shortly after they were endeavouring to balance their budget and took the pattern or example of Alberta. So while the money is welcome, it will amount to about \$100 million for Alberta in the coming year when we get the money, which I think is June, and we will certainly apply it as wisely as possible within our health care system, education system, and social programs. That is the situation with respect to the federal budget.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could you please explain how Alberta will spend this additional money allocated for health?

MR. JONSON: Well, as I've indicated, Mr. Speaker, we will give considerable thought to the best areas in which to apply the health care portion in the provincial budget to the Health and Wellness program. Certainly we've highlighted before this Assembly and for Albertans our six-point plan with respect to our priorities in health care. The area of reducing waiting lists, the area of providing for frontline staffing, and the area of healthy aging, long-term care, and associated services would be at least three, I think, of the top considerations that we would be looking at when we know exactly when the money is going to be available and under what terms.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

St. Michael's Long-term Care Centre

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Early last month the Chinook health region released an update for their business plan which would implement significant changes in the delivery of long-term care in Lethbridge. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Mr. Minister, why did you put a hold on the implementation of this long-term plan and create uncertainty for St. Mike's and the families who are expecting to move into that new facility in May?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member would recall and certainly people in southern Alberta and particularly in Lethbridge would recall that there was a major dialogue, to put it in its constructive sense, over the decision to build the St. Michael's long-term care centre. Alberta Health and Wellness – it was Alberta Health then – worked very diligently with the participants down there to bring that project into becoming an actual in-the-ground project and now a building about to be opened.

The point here, though, that I think has to be understood by folks in the south – and I'm sure they do – and by the Assembly is that the agreement that was arrived at at the time that project was approved was for a new 200-plus-bed long-term care centre with long-term care type services within it. Now, as we come into the new year and we're in the position of being able to open the actual physical structure, the regional health authority feels that they want to change the program for that particular building to assisted living and some other programs, Mr. Speaker.

This is quite a dramatic proposal. It's one that I've had my officials journey to Lethbridge to discuss. It was their advice to me that we should put it on hold and get more answers and look very carefully at the legislative requirements of making this rather dramatic change in the designation of a facility. Therefore, I did indicate to the regional health authority that any action of this particular type should be put on hold. We have asked them a number of questions. We've asked them for information. I and my officials will be visiting Lethbridge in the fairly near future to follow up on this.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is to the same minister. The families want to know: what are the standards for the level of registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, and personal care attendant staffing that are required in assisted-living situations? Will their loved ones have RN support 24 hours a day?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, without wishing to alarm anybody in answering this question . . .

MRS. SLOAN: Don't worry; they're already alarmed.

MR. JONSON: I know you're alarmed already, but that's okay. I meant the people in Lethbridge.

Mr. Speaker, the assisted-living model or policy does not by definition provide for 24-hour care. Certainly there's the possibility that with creative thinking and planning there could be an assisted-living service established that would provide 24-hour attention to the residents. That's one thing that has to be looked at and examined. Long-term care, of course, by definition does provide the 24-hour coverage.

Then we have other matters to discuss with respect to the necessary staffing models and staffing ratios, which, as reported to me by my officials on the first visit, really need to be discussed more and clarified. So once again I have the same conclusion, and that is that we are aware of the situation, that we do want the best for the elderly people of the Chinook region, and we are following up on it with the health authority.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental, again to the Minister of Health and Wellness, is: will it cost the families more because of user fees or different room charges under the assisted-living model?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there is in long-term care, because that is what we are making the comparison to, a standard formula, a standard rate, a maximum charge per day. In the assisted-living model services – health services, home care, Meals on Wheels, all those types of services – can vary depending upon the needs of the individual, in terms of the services required by the individual. Yes, there is the ability to vary the charges in assisted living according to the package of services being provided by the health system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

2:50

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been some claims made by some critics that the government's policy on delivery of surgical services will trigger certain clauses of the North American free trade agreement and will allow foreign corporations to take over the health care in this province. My question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Will the government proposal on the delivery of surgical services pose any difficulty under NAFTA?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I've spoken on this issue previously. I am confident that the government of Canada has negotiated under NAFTA a carve-out that protects public health in this province and in Canada. The policy statement does not provide American service providers with any automatic right to establish a clinic in Alberta. This is based strictly on a misreading of the NAFTA obligations. To try and clear that up and ensure that people had the information, I did table in the House about a week ago the actual reference with all of the sections referred to, and I invite hon. members to look at that.

It's interesting that NAFTA has been in place for 10 years, has proved to be a great benefit to this province, incidentally, and we have never had a challenge or a request under NAFTA, although private clinics have existed, funded by the public system, for many years. Mr. Speaker, I know that NAFTA does not challenge the government's sovereignty or ability to control who provides service in this province. I am confident, as I said, that the government of

Canada has negotiated a protection, a triple protection really, with the primary protection under the carve-out, that protects the health delivery system that we have in this province, that we will continue to have, and that we have in this country.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. If we're protected under NAFTA, are there any concerns that the policy may leave us open to action by the World Trade Organization?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, some critics have given up on the NAFTA agreement. They've recognized that there is a carve-out, and now they're talking WTO. Let me tell you that there is no threat to Alberta's publicly funded health system posed by the World Trade Organization. First of all, the government of Canada, who is our negotiator, as I tried to explain last night, has made no commitments in health under the WTO or in the health services sector. Alberta has absolutely no obligations in the WTO in this area.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Some people are suggesting that if the private sector gets a foothold in Alberta, it will just be a matter of time before it expands into a two-tier health system. Will the government policy on delivery of surgical services open the door for large American care companies to move into Alberta?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, Albertans and their government won't let that happen. It's not what anyone wants, and it is certainly not what the policy statement that this government released last November indicates in any way. Under the policy statement as it's laid out, surgical clinics in this province would only be able to provide services if they were contracted by the regional health authorities. There will be limits in the legislation, and as the Premier indicated earlier today, the legislation will be in the House soon. I hope that some hon. members who have made some rather widespread statements on this will admit or at least suggest that they may have been mistaken when this legislation is here. [interjection] Well, I doubt it too.

Mr. Speaker, the policy statement that was laid out on the delivery of surgical services sets out the criteria that would need to be considered. It is not who owns the building that is important under NAFTA or under WTO or to Albertans. It is the service that is provided. It is that it is an insured service and that it is funded by the public system. That is why there is no threat under trade obligations. Interestingly enough, although there have been some 40-odd private surgical clinics in this province for years, set up some time ago, there has never been a challenge by the Americans to the NAFTA obligations.

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

Health Services for Immigrants

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Each year 7,000 new immigrants move to the city of Calgary, but they're not likely to get access to our public health care system in a timely way if they can't speak English. An impressive coalition of health care providers, community agencies, ethnocultural groups in Calgary have now produced their final report on what's needed to improve access to health care services in the city of Calgary, and I tabled the report an hour ago. My question this afternoon is to the hon.

Premier. Why is it that access to health care by new Canadians is not even identified as an issue in the three-year business plan of the Department of Health and Wellness?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, our health care system in this country is universal, and it is accessible to all people who hold a health care card in Alberta. It's an Alberta health care card. I commend the organizations who are working with new Canadians to advise them as to how they access the health care system and to assist them in dealing with their difficulty with the English language, but again, I remind the hon. member that the Canada Health Act itself speaks to the fundamental principles of universality, accessibility, and comprehensiveness.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, why is it that access to health care by new Canadians in the city of Calgary has not been identified as an issue in the Calgary regional health authority three-year plan, in the People First 1999-2002 plan, in the highlights of health services delivery, or in that transition business plan? Why would that be?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the business plan for the Department of Health and Wellness I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I think it is well acknowledged that the government of Alberta has a more thorough business planning and reporting process on what the initiatives are in the health care system and other departments as compared to any other province. Nevertheless, in the Calgary health care system there is provision, particularly with respect to the acute care side of health care, for translation services, for supports when needed. I'm not saying, however, that they could not be improved, that they could not be expanded further.

The other thing of course, Mr. Speaker, is that we do have an education system in Calgary which recognizes the multicultural nature of the city and provides information, provides advice and knowledge to people on the operation of government generally but on the health care system in particular. Further to that, I think that in all locations, be it Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton, or a rural part of Alberta, you do have people who can speak the language of origin, and they are usually the first people that are looked to for a linkup with the health care system or the education system.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my final question. Since I'm going to respectfully suggest that neither the Premier nor the health minister understands the urgency of this – and I go to the Minister of Health and Wellness specifically – how much longer are these Calgarians going to have to be denied timely access to public health care? When can we expect appropriate, targeted action?

MR. JONSON: If I might take the question, Mr. Premier.

First of all, these individuals are not being denied timely health care in Calgary. We fully appreciate the difficulty, the challenge perhaps to understanding the details of the health care system and whom to go to and when and so forth. We acknowledge that that can be worked on and improved, Mr. Speaker, but new Calgarians who are new Canadians are being cared for in Calgary.

3:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm advised by one of my colleagues in government who is closely associated with this project that indeed it is offered at the Peter Lougheed hospital in Calgary. It raises multicultural awareness to eliminate the language and cultural

barriers that new Canadians face when accessing our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that funding for this program was provided by the Human Rights Commission and the multicultural education fund advisory committee, and I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Community Development for expressing his concern and having his department deal with this situation in a very, very human way.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we'll call upon the first of seven members today to participate.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Kevin Reid

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize Edson athlete Kevin Reid, a snowshoer who recently competed in the Canadian Special Olympics Winter Games in Ottawa. Kevin began snowshoeing three years ago and has been coached by an Edson and area Special Olympics club volunteer, Marlene Miller. His first competition was in Calgary last year at the Alberta Special Olympics Winter Games. As a member of Team Alberta, Kevin very successfully competed with approximately 100 athletes. He won gold in the 800-metre event and silver in the four by 100-metre relay and bronze in the 400-metre event. I would like all members of the Assembly to join me today in extending our congratulations and best wishes to this West Yellowhead Special Olympian, Kevin Reid.

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

Opponents of Private Hospitals

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize the thousands of individuals that this government has to date ignored, those who have written, e-mailed, phoned, attended forums, and signed petitions to tell this government not to proceed with its plan to allow private, for-profit hospitals. These citizens have spent considerable time and energy researching the government's proposal and have come to the conclusion that public health care must be protected from this government. These people are not part of any special-interest groups but are individual Albertans who cross political party lines to protect our public health care system.

As MLAs we have all taken an oath to represent to the best of our abilities the wishes of our constituents. It is not only this government's responsibility but also each MLA's responsibility to listen and care about what their constituents are saying. It's now time for this government to respect the wishes of Albertans to maintain and protect our health care system. We should thank all those Albertans who are fighting for our public health care system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

13th Alberta Winter Games

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to rise today to bring recognition to the 3,500 Albertans who came forward to share their time, energy, and ideas to make the 13th Alberta Winter Games another Alberta success story. The games, which were held in Strathcona county in February, saw an entire community unite in the spirit of volunteerism and help co-ordinate, plan, and implement the games from start to finish. Each volunteer played an important role in offering young, developing Alberta athletes an

experience of a lifetime. From preparing meals to chaperoning athletes, each volunteer was an integral part in making the Alberta Winter Games a reality.

Volunteers are the backbone of such events as these, and I offer my compliments to the people of Strathcona county for a strong volunteer spirit. You have set a standard for other communities to follow. In recognition of their contribution to the 2000 Alberta Winter Games, I invite all members of the Assembly to join me in acknowledging the volunteers that helped make this event a success.

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

Ukrainian Bilingual Program

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At city hall today I joined a number of Members of the Legislative Assembly in helping to celebrate the Ukrainian bilingual program's 25th anniversary. This is a remarkable program in several aspects, and after a quarter of a century it is very appropriate for us to celebrate its success and to reflect on the unique characteristics of the program.

To appreciate the success of this program, we need to look no further than to the over 4,000 graduates, many of whom have taken on leadership roles in virtually every walk of life. What is particularly remarkable about the Ukrainian bilingual program is the integration of language skills training into the broader context of culture. In doing so, the richness of language and the richness of culture are fused into an integral view of life. With this enriched experience early in life it is no wonder that so many graduates have gone on to lives of success and fulfillment. Today over 1,000 children follow in the footsteps of these graduates.

Congratulations to all those involved, and may the Ukrainian bilingual program continue to grow and enrich the lives of our children and our province. Thank you.

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

Sherran Dermott

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to recognize a member of the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency, Ms Sherran Dermott of Ohaton. Ms Dermott was presented with a national rescue award at the annual lifesaving investiture ceremony by Her Honour Lois Hole, the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, on Monday of this week.

Sherran acted with selfless heroism when she saved an eight-year-old boy from drowning in a swimming pool filled with melted snow. She crawled through a hole in the fence surrounding the pool and jumped in without consideration for her own safety. Young Stewart Kerr was very lucky someone like Sherran was close at hand, or the situation might have had a tragic end.

For Sherran Dermott's selfless and heroic deed I would like to honour her today. Thank you.

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

Roy Hassan Jamha

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the many tireless contributions of a great Albertan, the late Roy Hassan Jamha. Roy was born on April 15, 1923, and passed away on February 20, 2000, at the age of 76. Roy was a warm and compassionate person working for the betterment of the poor and disadvantaged until the day he died. He was a major force in the CCF, the New Democratic Party, and Alberta's labour movement. He was a

New Democrat candidate in provincial and federal elections.

Roy's personal integrity, his dedication to his fellow human beings, his commitment to social change grounded in the values of social justice and fairness, and his practical idealism earned him deep respect among Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I wish to salute Roy's life and work, his many contributions to Alberta and Canada, and wish to convey on behalf of everyone in this House our condolences and sympathies to Roy's wife, Alice, and to his son and daughter-in-law, Douglas and Bonnie.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

St. David's Day

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, March 1, is St. David's Day. St. David is the patron saint of Wales. People of Welsh ancestry around the world celebrate this special day. The Welsh people have a great gift in the field of music. Several special instruments come from the Welsh tradition, including the lyre, the harp, and a form of the bagpipes. Wales is noted for the beautiful music of their world-famous choirs.

St. David, or Dewi Sant, as he is known in the Welsh language, was a Celtic monk, abbot, and bishop who lived in the sixth century. He was the archbishop of Wales and one of the early saints who helped spread Christianity among the pagan Celtic tribes of western Britain. There are many stories regarding St. David's life. It's said that he once raised a youth from the dead. It's claimed that he lived for over a hundred years and died around 589 AD. His last words to his followers included: be joyful and keep your faith and your creed; do the little things that you've seen me do and have heard about. "Do the little things" is now a well-known and treasured phrase in Wales and has proven to be an inspiration to many.

I ask the Assembly to join me today in wishing the hon. Minister of Government Services and Mrs. Grace Ballard and all other Albertans of Welsh ancestry a very special St. David's Day.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a point of order.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd cite as my authority Standing Order 23(1). I've always understood in the time that I've been a member of the Assembly that it's been a clear practice that when somebody stands up to say something that's not true or accurate and has been corrected, then they don't persist in republishing the matter that's inaccurate. That's certainly been my experience.

Now, what I refer to here is that in the exchange of the first set of questions with the Premier, he persisted in suggesting that the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act prevents him from sharing the information that was blanked out on the document. He talked about it on February 23. On February 24 he said: we're protecting the anonymity of focus group participants. He said it again on February 28.

Most recently, on February 22, there was some material that was brought to his attention to show that in fact the only three exceptions claimed are sections 21, 23, 26. Sections 23 and 26 are discretionary exceptions, "advice from officials" and "privileged information," and were used some 56 times. The only mandatory exception was section 21(1), used only three times. So out of all of the more than 50 blanked-out pages, they were discretionary exceptions, which

meant that the minister or the head of the public body is perfectly able to share that information. His hands are not tied, as the Premier indicates.

I know that the Premier takes pride in his flagship bill. I know he would want to not persist in republishing something that is just plain wrong, so I wanted to raise that as gently as I could, Mr. Speaker, and ensure that this inaccuracy is not further republished.

Thanks very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. There is no point of order. The simple point the Premier is trying to make when he refers to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is that this government has complied with the provisions of the act, whether the government has exercised its discretion in disclosing information or not. We are bound by the terms of the act. We have acted in accordance with the terms of the act, and what the Premier is saying is entirely accurate. Therefore, there is no point of order.

In any event, this is a question of interpretation with respect to how the act applies to certain provisions. The Premier's perspective is consistent with this government's, and that is that we have complied with the provisions of the act.

THE SPEAKER: Well, this important debate on what the freedom of information act is all about is really quite timely at this point in the afternoon.

The Blues say the following. This is the response from the leader of the government.

Mr. Speaker, all the information that was asked for and all the information that was released was in accordance completely with the rules of the freedom of information legislation. Mr. Speaker, there is a process. If they're not satisfied with what they receive, there is a course of appeal. I would remind the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition that they know how to use FLIP legislation. They use it more than anyone else.

I've listened very attentively, and it seems to me that in essence it was a point of clarification. Much of this had to do with the discretionary versus the mandatory association with respect to it. I'll view this as another one of those many, many points of clarification that we seem to have.

Heaven forbid that one day there might even be an introduction of a piece of legislation in this House so that we'll actually have a reason for question period. We'll have something to talk about.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following appropriate notice having been given yesterday, I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper now stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Once again, Mr. Speaker, following the notice that was given yesterday, I rise to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper now stand and retain their places also.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 204
Agricultural and Recreational Land
Ownership Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned February 29: Mr. Fischer speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We find ourselves at an interesting point in our history. On one hand, technology is showing us the limited possibilities there are in the agriculture industry, and on the other, corporate amalgamation and global economics are a harsh reality of this new century. So we're at a crossroads where a direction and a plan for the agriculture industry must be chosen, and that direction and plan must include a competitive opportunity in the world marketplace. Until some of this puzzle is solved, I would hesitate to limit expansion and take away one of the main tools used for the survival of both big and small producers. I look forward to the wisdom of the ag summit in June.

I wish to compliment the Member for Little Bow for bringing Bill 204 forward, because it's a serious issue for every member in this House and for all Albertans.

Thank you.

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to talk about an issue that's important to Alberta's agricultural community. I would like to commend the Member for Little Bow for making many of the members of this House aware of the importance of this issue to Alberta farmers. I would also like to commend the sponsoring member for the intent of the bill: to help the small, independent farming operation in this province.

The objective is to preserve the family farm in Alberta, something I think we would all like to see. In the past few decades we have seen a decline across Canada in the number of family farm operations. The global economy and unpredictable weather conditions have taken their toll on the viability of independent family farms in this province. Adding to the condition, large corporate enterprise and communal farm operations have been able to outcompete the family farm by employing economies of scale in their own operation.

While in the global economy production efficiencies bred by competition are desirable, in rural Alberta this trend can lead to depopulation. What often results is a migration from rural areas to urban centres. This adds pressure to roads and infrastructure within the urban centres. In addition, Mr. Speaker, agricultural land is monopolized by a few multinationals and corporate farming enterprises to the exclusion of all others. Bill 204 attempts to address the issue by preventing this from happening.

The Alberta government recently released its economic development strategy, Get Ready Alberta. The strategy builds on the province's strength and sets bold targets for moving forward in science, research, education, and competing in the global marketplace, making Alberta the best place in the world to live and to work. We need to be ready to respond to trends in the global economy, where virtually anyone can market their products and expertise around the world and move quickly to get the best return for their investment and the dollars involved.

One of our goals is that Alberta internationally be recognized as a good place to invest and do business and that Alberta business

compete and succeed in the global marketplace. The Alberta government is continuing to maintain a competitive tax advantage in the province and to promote a positive business climate that attracts investment. This is the reason that Bill 204 raises such an important and timely issue.

Agriculture is a major sector of growth and employment in our economy, and we must maintain this sector as a viable and productive part of the Alberta advantage. We do this by making sure that our production techniques are the best in the world, that our producers are efficient, and that agriculture remains a viable and productive industry in the province. We need to thoroughly address the issue of landownership in this province and to continue the viability and sustainability of the family farm. This issue is ideally suited to the upcoming ag summit, and I'm hopeful that the organizers will make it a priority to ensure that landownership is on the agenda.

3:20

I'd like to commend the Member for Little Bow for being bold enough to bring up an issue that can be so easily misunderstood. Our family farms are important here in Alberta, and we need to address the issues surrounding their preservation. A healthy agriculture industry means a healthy province. In addition, Alberta's farm industry is important to the whole country. Farm production is Alberta's largest renewable resource-based industry.

In 1998, the primary sector generated \$6.4 billion in farm cash receipts. This represents 21.7 percent of Canada's primary agricultural output. Alberta averaged 20 percent of Canada's primary output between 1989 and 1993. Secondary agricultural processing, including the food and beverage processing industry, is Alberta's largest manufacturing sector. Shipments set a new record for output in 1998 at \$7.5 billion in sales. Alberta now accounts for over 12 percent of Canadian food and beverage shipments, up from the 10 percent in the previous period of '89 to '93. As outlined in the 2000 budget, agrifood business offers significant potential for expansion ahead. This industry could grow to \$20 billion in value-added shipments and to \$10 billion in farm cash receipts by the year 2010.

One of the expressed goals of the ministry of agriculture is the "increased diversity of commodities, products and services." I imagine that one way of achieving this goal is to create an environment where the small farms, the family farm operators can continue to survive and thrive in this province. That is the intention of Bill 204, to help level the playing field for small farm operators. Consolidation of landholdings in the hands of fewer farm operators diminishes the diversity of Alberta's agricultural production.

Limiting landownership to 15 percent of any municipality would prevent huge regional monopolies. The idea of having massive foreign ownership of our agricultural production is a big concern to myself and to my constituents. We live in an era of globalism, and as such we relinquish some of our sovereignty at the whims of the global market. As we develop policies that set our course in the future, globalism is an issue that we must be mindful of. We have to be there to capitalize on the opportunity it brings as well as defend against the threats to our rich farm traditions.

As others have mentioned in this House, we are at a unique point in our history in this province. The most recent budget set the stage for unprecedented growth and prosperity in this province. The people of Alberta are now seeing a tremendous reward that comes from sound fiscal policies and good government. Our debt is being paid off, and our tax burden is being reduced. We have a growing high-tech industry, the oil sands development is giving a boost to every aspect of our economy, and we're leading the provinces in overall employment. Our agriculture industry is not faring nearly as

well as other key industries. There are a number of reasons why some of our farmers are struggling, perhaps too many to discuss in this debate.

Mr. Speaker, the upcoming agriculture summit should prove to be a great forum to discuss the issue of landownership in the province of Alberta. I'm hopeful that we can get some good discussion going about the issue and try to build some consensus. At the very least, consolidation of landownership should be recognized as a major challenge facing the farming industry in this province, especially the family farm.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Assembly for the opportunity to rise today and speak to Bill 204, sponsored by the Member for Little Bow. It's no secret to anyone in the Legislature today that Alberta's rural communities are in crisis. Of course there are a variety of reasons: one of these reasons was identified by the minister this week as he headed to Ottawa; we've seen a decline in the family farm; we've seen a decline in their commodity prices; and a number of other reasons.

The cards are stacked today against the Alberta farmer. The product of their work, the quantities we export have been cheapened by government policies in Europe. Large multinational corporations are creating a vertically integrated system of agricultural production, that squeezes out the independent farmers. Corporate farms also use competitive advantages to acquire land and slowly form regional monopolies that, again, squeeze out the family farm. If anyone wants to take a look at this, just look in various states in the U.S.

Alberta farmers are struggling against transportation issues and a bureaucratic federal government that seems unwilling to change. Add to this the challenge of struggling against the whims of Mother Nature and the world's economic climate, and you get a pretty clear picture of the tremendous challenge facing Alberta farmers today.

Mr. Speaker, I realize we can't do a great deal about what other countries are doing or what Mother Nature does. However, we do have control over the laws regarding the land, and Bill 204 attempts to address some of these concerns. What is the cost of inaction? What will happen should this government decide to not do anything to help create an environment where the much-talked-about Alberta advantage is available to farmers in the farming community?

Thankfully, Mr. Speaker, our government is listening. Unlike other governments, we aren't asking the farmers to chase to Ottawa themselves to ask for support. We have acted, as identified by the minister being down there today. Members like the hon. Member for Little Bow are doing a good job of ensuring that this government remembers those who have helped build this province. This Member for Little Bow also helps remind the members of the Assembly of the importance of farming and family farms. It's taken a lot of courage for this member to come forward with this proposal and withstand the barrage of criticism and personal attacks that have been flung his way.

I have constituents that are supportive of the hon. member's bill, and as such I have an obligation to speak to their concerns. This is not an easy issue to address. It's not an easy issue to talk about. It's not an easy issue to go public with, but it is a concern to many farmers, especially in this day and age. I really appreciate the hon. member's attempt to bring his concerns, his constituents' concerns to the floor of this Assembly.

What I have learned from some of my constituents is that they have great concerns with multinationals buying up land and property in my community and in my constituency. Landownership is a very,

very important part of farming. That being said, limiting landownership may not be the best solution at this time, but it is something that we need to talk about. It is one of the problems facing the independent farmer in this province, although right now the independent farmer has many, many problems.

I think we need to take a good, long, hard look at this problem and try to flesh out a more comprehensive approach to solving the problems in rural communities. The trend today, Mr. Speaker, toward integrated farming is one that threatens our existing agricultural industry. Integrated American companies as well as European companies come to Alberta and have the ability to buy tracts of land and limitless cattle. When corporations come to this province and set up shop, it's very hard to say what the end result will be. One result that is of great concern to some of my constituents is that these corporations tend to control price. When a million dollar outfit comes in with all the buying power they have, someone is going to lose. As agricultural resources and the market for agricultural products are gradually owned and operated by corporations, the small independent slowly loses his ability to determine his own destiny. He is now at the mercy of the larger corporation.

3:30

This issue, Mr. Speaker, is very complex. It's something that many countries around the world have struggled with and are struggling with. We need to take a good look at some of the things done in the U.S. and Europe and see if they apply to our situation in Alberta. We need to have an open mind. We need to explore all options. Before we jump in and limit landownership, we have to study this problem, talk to those who have seen what has happened firsthand, and look for solutions.

By establishing a policy that addresses the issue of land use, we would be one step closer to addressing the issues that face the agricultural industry as a whole. It's clear that this issue and others facing the agriculture community must be explored. It's absolutely essential that we put our best minds together and try to come up with a comprehensive plan to help address the needs of rural Alberta before it's too late.

Mr. Speaker, the coming agriculture summit is an ideal place to explore options for a comprehensive land-use policy, if needed, in this province. It would be a great medium for exchanging information and collecting information from all the stakeholders in the agriculture community. We could see in what part of the province this is a problem. I strongly believe this issue should be on the agenda of the agriculture summit. I believe that those are the people in the know, the people in the business, and the ones that should be talking about it. The more people we get involved in this discussion, the better the outcome. That's why I'm glad that I've had the opportunity to speak on behalf of some of my constituents and bring this issue before the House today. Most of my constituents who have phoned and identified that this is a problem and asked me to speak up regarding the hon. member's bill have been hog producers.

I think we need to have the debate, and I think industry has got to be part of the debate. In the end we might see that we can make a difference with some co-operation and some collaboration among stakeholders, that being the farm community.

I believe that our province's farmland may be one of our most precious resources in years to come. That's why it's so very, very important that we be good stewards of the land to ensure that young Albertans, young farmers will have the opportunity to benefit from this great resource. If we invest time and effort into trying to formulate a policy that is fair, that is equitable, and that has involved consultation with key stakeholders, our farmland could be protected for future generations, and as a result we will enjoy a huge return on that investment.

The world's population is growing every day. The day will come

when farmland is the most valuable commodity this province has to offer. This being said, that is so very, very true in some countries around the world. Farmland is indeed at a premium, and very few anymore can farm. We want to ensure that farmland stays a valuable commodity. This province has to ensure that.

Our farmland needs to be here long after the conventional oil has been tapped and a number of other resources. The best way for us to capitalize on this, to ensure that the agriculture industry is strong and diverse, that the independent farmer is still part of the mix – we must have a discussion regarding land. We must ensure that the independent farm operation can remain viable in the future. The independent farm operation, farming families, and farm communities basically make up a large, large part of rural Alberta.

The agriculture industry is changing. New technologies and new challenges are changing the way we do things. New technology enables us to do more with less. Vertical integrations in the industry have found new efficiencies and are revolutionizing the food production industry. We find ourselves at an interesting point in our history on many fronts. On the one hand, technology is showing us the limitless possibilities that can be done and can be seen and can be considered in the agriculture industry. On the other hand, the very heart of agriculture, the land, could be up for grabs and for stakes. It's a huge reality that must be talked about as we enter this new century. I have no idea, Mr. Speaker and hon. members, what would be the outcome of these talks, but I think it's time we have them.

So we're at a point where we can make a stand and choose the direction that the agriculture industry in the province will take. I strongly believe we should make good on this opportunity because it well could affect everyone in this province for a long time to come.

I stand behind the hon. member but suggest that the principles involved in his bill go to the agriculture summit, where the agricultural community can discuss and debate the merits accordingly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to address Bill 204, the Agricultural and Recreational Land Ownership Amendment Act, in second reading. As an MLA for a rural community I would like to thank the hon. Member for Little Bow for bringing forward an interesting concept to try and address a very important issue today for all rural members, indeed for all members of this Assembly, as well as for our agricultural community and our rural communities' viability in general.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the agricultural communities of our province and of Canada are at a crossroads. Every day farmers, particularly grain farmers, face many real and severe problems, problems stemming from fluctuating commodity prices, inclement weather, high input costs, and regular commodity transportation. It's not easy to remain on a farm these days. With our cities booming as a result of unprecedented economic growth and new and exciting job opportunities for many Albertans, it is very tempting for many young people in smaller communities to leave their rural roots and uncertain futures behind them for new lives in the city. I have seen it happen in my constituency too many times. Although I applaud and encourage my friends to take advantage of the many opportunities that await them in the city, it is always sad to see families that have been your neighbours for generations leave.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Many of the farmers that have chosen to stay have had to take

drastic steps to continue to earn a living. Many have sold off their assets, including their land and their equipment, just to stay afloat. Others have had to diversify their farm operations to include ranching or other agriculture-related opportunities such as trucking, greenhouse operations, llama, elk, and buffalo ranching. Some others still go into country vacations and bed-and-breakfasts or tourism initiatives. Still, entire farm families have had to take second jobs in nearby towns and cities or contract out their services to other farmers in the area. Thankfully, this diversification has helped some, but it has hurt others as well. Many farmers have gone deeper into debt in an effort to get out of the red.

Mr. Speaker, people commonly refer to this phenomenon that rural communities are experiencing as the farm crisis. However, I'm not sure if that statement is entirely accurate, because one out of every three jobs in Alberta today is dependent on the agriculture sector. From the farmer in the field to the person working in the supermarket in downtown Calgary, Red Deer, or Edmonton, the so-called farm crisis affects everyone.

However, I'm not sure if the full extent of the problem is really appreciated by Canadians as a whole. While more than 1 million Canadians derive their living from fertile land, we have yet to be able to engage in a full-scale debate on the value of the food production in our province and the value of rural communities and farmers as they support their local service community.

So, Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. Member for Little Bow for raising this important issue. Bill 204 may be one way to solve the current problems farmers in Alberta face. The debate may involve the principles of Bill 204, but it may and should extend itself into something more positive, maybe right-to-farm legislation.

3:40

As a Conservative and, more importantly, as an Albertan I recognize the right that each and every Alberta resident has to own property. Mr. Speaker, the right to own property and to make a living at that property is a fundamental belief and guiding principle of our government. Any legislation that seeks to limit the right of an Albertan to own his or her own property might send the wrong message not only to entrepreneurs who see Alberta as a prime location to set up a business but to any Albertan who sees our government as a defender of the rights of individuals and property.

Limiting the ownership of land also poses other problems. As I mentioned earlier, in our current agricultural economic climate the only way to survive as a farmer is to increase the size of your operation. If we close off the only avenue farmers have to build a viable operation, what does that say about our government's commitment to farmers? I want to point out that our government has been a leader in our country for farmer-friendly policies for some time now. Programs like the farm income disaster program and the crop insurance program administered by the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation have supplemented the incomes of farmers suffering disastrous income declines as a result of low commodity prices or weather-related crop damage. But any farmer will tell you – and they have told me in my constituency – that the last thing he or she wants to do is earn their living through annual government handouts. Moreover these policies, while necessary, cannot begin to solve the real farming problem in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, farmers and ranchers as primary producers are price takers, not price makers. Farmers in my constituency continually raise the issue of commodity prices as the number one reason why they're having problems making ends meet. Many of them continually single out the Canadian Wheat Board as a major hindrance to their well-being. This out-of-date monopoly has put tremendous pressure on grain farmers of Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatche-

wan, and Manitoba by forcing them to sell at a price the Wheat Board sets. Oddly, while farmers in Ontario and Quebec are able to operate their own provincial marketing boards or don't participate in one at all, Ottawa maintains strict control over the marketing of wheat in western Canada. The farmers have said to me: give me the opportunity to market my product at a fair price, and things will get better; I will get out of your way.

Farmers also face problems dealing with the increased costs of running a farm. Every year new and better fertilizers, seed, fuel, feed for animals, parts and upkeep for machinery, and maintenance for buildings have to be covered by decreasing profits from the sale of goods. It is important to recognize, Mr. Speaker, that farmers really know how difficult it is to keep their input costs from rising.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure all the farmers in Alberta that their provincial government is very concerned about the real problems and the farm prices, and we're acting on their concerns. This spring our government is holding Ag Summit 2000. Ag summit is a broad-based consultation of all participants in the agriculture sector to address industry concerns and find ways to strengthen our agriculture sector. Many MLAs will be holding consultations and meetings in their constituencies and will be reporting their findings to an ag summit wrap-up in June. I have already solicited opinions from the many farmers in my constituency, and I certainly invite additional input from my constituents. Our government will also continue to lobby for the reduction and the elimination of trade barriers that hurt Alberta farmers; in other words, make the market available to them at lower costs.

As we enter the new millennium and near the centennial of our great province, it is important to recognize the important role that farming has played in Alberta's development. Farming is part of our history, but it is also a part of our future. I share with my colleague for Little Bow the desire to find a long-term solution for our agriculture industry. We must do it with the co-operation of the farming and ranching communities, and I hope that the farming and ranching community of Livingstone-Macleod will be part of that.

Bill 204 is one way to go, but there are others, and a greater discussion should take place. I hope we can work together on all and any solutions that will benefit Alberta farmers.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 204, the Agricultural and Recreational Land Ownership Amendment Act, sponsored by the Member for Little Bow. This statute actually falls under the responsibility of the ministry that I've been put in charge of in conjunction with the foreign ownership of land regulations.

Mr. Speaker, I'd first of all like to thank our members who have risen in this House to speak to this bill. They have done a tremendous job articulating some of the important issues that are there for rural Albertans. While they may be issues that directly affect rural Albertans, they actually directly affect all Albertans because agriculture and our rural communities are the lifeblood of this province and have been from day one.

The issue of landownership is a very important issue for all of us to review as Albertans, and I would like to agree with the Member for Wainwright when he suggested that we need to develop a long-term policy that sets the course for Alberta's agriculture industry for the next 50 to 100 years. The reality today is that the farm operations are getting bigger, and the traditional methods of transportation, distribution, and marketing of agricultural products are slowly fading away. Change is happening.

Bill 204 speaks for many Albertans who are worried that our farmlands are being monopolized, and the bill has served the very good purpose of bringing the dialogue and discussion into this Legislature. I believe it's long overdue.

However, I must say that the objective of the Agricultural and Recreational Land Ownership Act itself is to limit the acquisition of nonurban lands, both cultivated and noncultivated, by foreigners and foreign entities. I believe that the objective of Bill 204 appears to limit the taking, acquisition, or holding of cultivated land by both foreigners and Canadian citizens. So I think we have a bit of a conflict between the objectives of the two acts: one, the original act, and the other, the amendment of the act. Once we get into the area of foreign ownership, we have other statutes that must be brought into the arena of dialogue before we can move forward.

I agree with the hon. members who have spoken before me, Mr. Speaker. I think that dialogue must take place, and there's a tremendous opportunity with the upcoming agriculture summit to draw the players together and sit down and talk about this issue, talk about it as Albertans. Where do we want to go? What do we want to see happen with our very precious lands? How is it going to fit into the agriculture of the future? Keeping in mind that this is the lifeblood of our province, our agricultural community, I would ask the organizers of that summit to seriously look at making that dialogue and discussion a part of that summit process so that we can hear from the grass roots, so we can hear from the people of Alberta to find out what they truly believe is important for the future in agriculture.

Because of some of the concerns I've raised, because of the dialogue that I think is necessary, and because I believe there has to be more work done on the bill, Mr. Speaker, I would like to put forward an amendment to the bill. I gather the amendment is being circulated.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Let's just take a moment.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the amendment has been circulated to all hon. members, but I will read it into the record. I'd like to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 204, Agricultural and Recreational Land Ownership Amendment Act, 2000, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 204, Agricultural and Recreational Land Ownership Amendment Act, 2000, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

3:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: This is what's known as a hoist amendment, and it'll be called amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: On the amendment only, because I had spoken at second reading on the bill. I'd just like to say, Mr. Speaker, how disappointed I am to see this amendment brought in at this time. We heard all of these excellent speeches that have been spoken, at least on the face of it, with great passion and great conviction, and dollars to doughnuts when it comes time to vote, we're going to see each one of those speakers line up to support this.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that this amendment should be defeated. I think we should deal with this bill on its merits. I would expect that all of those people in rural Alberta that we've been hearing from about those concerns and those issues would want to see matters addressed and dealt with squarely in this Chamber. This is supposed to be a place for determination and decisions, not a place for waffling, indecision, and buck-passing. When I see this kind of amendment, that's exactly what it is.

I didn't share the view, for example, of the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, but I respected the conviction in her speech. When I heard the comments of the mover of the amendment, up to the point she moved it, I thought she obviously believes very strongly about what she says, but the reason proffered for the amendment is shamelessly transparent, Mr. Speaker. There's no good reason to do it other than political reasons that we can speculate about, but my suggestion to all members is that we defeat this and get on with the debate.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, on the amendment.

MRS. GORDON: On the amendment. I don't know, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Do you know what assumption does? I stood up in this Assembly talking on behalf of my constituents, many of whom are hog producers that are very, very concerned about landownership. However, they are the people in the know. They are the experts. They are the farming community. I think it is a wonderful, wonderful idea that we hoist this bill so that the Agriculture Summit 2000 with all of the stakeholders present can deal with this issue. They are the experts. They are the experts. I don't like it when someone assumes what my intentions are, because my intentions were good.

Those people that have talked to me want to have the debate take place. I don't think this is the best arena. The best arena is where the people in the know will be, and that's at the agriculture summit this year, the new millennium, where a number of issues will be discussed, one being exactly what happened with the federal government this week, to bypass Alberta but give dollars to Saskatchewan and Manitoba. This is one more thing that the farming community wants to talk about. They don't want me to talk about it without their input. I want their input looked at and talked about at the agriculture summit.

I support this amendment.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod on the amendment.

MR. COUTTS: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to speak to the amendment. We're getting a sense from the opposition that this is a delay for some obvious reasons. It's too bad that we didn't hear too much on this bill coming from the Official Opposition other than one speaker. A number of speakers from this side of the House have stood up for their rural communities and pointed out the problems that we do have in the farming industry today. Not only did they show their support for the hon. member and his concern for what's happening with land use today; they also gave a number of instances of solutions, solutions that came only from this side of the House and absolutely no solutions from the other side of the House.

Now, some of these solutions should be discussed, definitely discussed, at the agriculture summit – this hoist would allow that type of conversation to happen – by the industry players that are going to be at the agriculture summit. I'm hoping that those industry players take a look at the *Hansard* and take a look at some of the solutions and at some of the problems that were pointed out by members from our side of the House, members that are really, really concerned about rural Alberta, about the viability of our small communities in rural Alberta, and take a look at the people that stood up in the debate on this Bill 204 and made those kinds of suggestions happen. They didn't happen from the opposition's side. They only happened from the government's side.

So, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of the Assembly, particularly the Conservative members, to stand up for this bill and to stand up for rural Alberta and to stand up for farmers and the agricultural industry that has some difficulties but is so viable in this province today. Stand up for farmers.

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

MRS. SLOAN: I'll be pleased to stand up for farmers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several remarks to make with respect to the hoist motion this afternoon, and I will speak with some authority, having had a rural upbringing and being the daughter of a farmer. The problem this government finds itself in is that it has not got the political courage to confront the issues facing farmers and our rural communities today. I would ask you: how many agriculture summits, consultations, meetings has this government conducted in its term of office? How many times have we gone around this province?

Do you know what I would say this afternoon, Mr. Speaker? Farmers are sick and tired of telling their elected representatives about their problems. They want the leadership in their government to take on the issues that they are facing every day, whether they're facing it in the fields, in the bank manager's office, or at their kitchen table when they see their operations going down the drain.

The reality is that we don't have the leadership in this House, in this government to do it, and that is exhibited by the fact that we're going to hold another summit on the issue and that we're going to hoist a bill. I may not have agreed with its intent or the arguments made to support it, but at least it brought it to the floor of the Legislature to debate, and that is not something we've seen from the cabinet of this government. This is a bill that was sponsored by a private member.

The reality is that that issue about food production becoming corporately controlled or the majority of our rural land being held by corporations is not going to go away and it's not going to get smaller while we sit around a summit table. That issue has been growing for years, and regrettably we have not seen the initiative, the courage, the leadership in this province to take it on.

Now, there are all kinds of implications. We see monopolies, and it's not just monopolies in hog producing. Fertilizer, the additive companies, the companies that have an interest in modification and genetic manipulation – it is huge, and every day that we sit here or we sit in a summit somewhere else those companies have their act together and are strategizing about how they might further their market share in our agricultural communities.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, I don't agree with the hoist motion. I may not have agreed with the primary arguments made for the bill, and quite frankly I believe the type of framework we should have been looking at in this province for our rural communities needed to be much, much broader than what this bill proposed. But that would have taken government initiative, and this government has not had the ability, for whatever reason, to do that.

Now, this is the challenge that I put before the members of this Assembly. We have to answer the question: what do we value more? The future of our rural communities or our political future? It is the root of that question that's causing the immobility, if you will, the paralysis within this Legislature. We're too concerned about what? It doesn't matter what your partisan position is. This can apply to any member regardless of their political affiliation. If

you value your political affiliation more than you value the strength and spirit of our rural communities or our urban communities, we will find ourselves paralyzed to challenge it.

Now, we had a very lively discussion last night about WTO, NAFTA, and all the trade agreements. This government has been going to those negotiations along with the federal government, and agriculture is impacted by those agreements along with all of the big service sectors. Health care is impacted. Agriculture is impacted. Telecommunications is impacted. Resources is impacted. We don't see information being shared by this government on those negotiations and the commitments being made at those tables. There are proposals and submissions being prepared now by staff in intergovernmental affairs in an advisory capacity to the negotiations that are going to commence in September. We have not had a discussion about that in this Assembly.

To hoist a bill, in my opinion – I mean, you should call it a hot potato motion, because really what it is is just a mechanism to try and toss it somewhere else. Toss it out to the back. The reality is that we need to talk in this province and in this Legislature about the health implications of food production and landownership. That's why I'm speaking against the hoist. We need to speak about the health implications of food production becoming corporately controlled and landownership predominately being corporately owned. We need to talk about the municipal implications and the regulatory implications. We need to talk about community impacts and the impacts to the schools, businesses, and hospitals in those communities, the environmental impacts and, perhaps least of all, Mr. Speaker, the electoral and population impacts when you see rural communities dying because family-based or single-operator-based farms cannot compete.

So I oppose the motion, and I look forward to the day when there will be some political leadership in this province to actually bring forward a comprehensive plan for the future of our rural communities in Alberta.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the sponsor of the bill I have a couple of comments that I would like to make. The first is to thank those that stood up and spoke on behalf of their constituents in support of the bill.

The second thing that I would like to make reference to in speaking to the hoist motion is that as the sponsor I do endorse and support the whole idea of this discussion taking place in a forum that's more comfortable to the constituents who have the most interest, a vested interest, the most investment and who would feel far more comfortable making their views known in a surrounding that's more amenable to those kinds of discussions rather than here in a political forum, where there always seem to be reasons why you can't do something.

Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the comments that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview made. I do. I understand her background, and I, too, am in awe that people aren't more concerned about the future of small communities. I would like to remind her that the preface of the bill when I started wasn't about the immediate farm crisis, the immediate cash flow. I agree that that is an issue, but I was looking at the long-term solution. I think people have to be comfortable in a bigger forum, those that are involved, to be able to freely speak their comments, make their views known without having fears of repercussions from the media. Some of the negative comments that came back to me during interviews reflected basically the very same issue that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo brought up, and I don't

want this discussion to focus strictly around the one-issue item that Calgary-Buffalo referred to.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Government Services for making the suggestion that this be referred to the ag summit so that there's a bigger discussion undertaken by all parties involved. I would really like to take this opportunity to encourage every one of those constituents throughout Alberta, whether they have indicated to us that they're in support or not, to go to the ag summit if this is where it's going, make their views known. It can be a very fruitful debate, I'm sure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the amendment. I noticed that you gave great latitude to some of the members who were speaking to the amendment, and I was not going to until I heard the remarks from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I'm very concerned with regard to the comments that were made regarding the amendment on the basis – first of all, she made kind of a very distinct difference between the, quote, private members within this Legislature and, quote, the government and somehow was trying to make a connection between the reasoned amendment and the government action.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to note that she listed a long list of issues which should be debated concerning the whole issue around agriculture and our rural communities and said on the one hand that she was not prepared to support the amendment but on the other hand was calling for action to deal with some of the very litany of issues that she identified. Then she said that the summit in some way was not a forum for particularly the agricultural community to discuss those issues that she has identified pursuant to and including the very issue that the member brought up with regard to Bill 204. I mean, there's a complete contradiction in terms of the rationale that was put forward: on the one hand to say that an agricultural summit is not a place to deal with it and on the other hand to support a conclusion on her behalf that the bill should be defeated to begin with. It's a roundabout way. It would be interesting to see those notes in a rural community and the interpretation that might be applied to them.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I just want to offer my support to this excellent reasoned amendment. Thank you.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I too want to speak in support of this amendment. I quite frankly am a little shocked that anyone would suggest that solutions can be better developed within this particular building than they can be within the community itself. It seems to me that we as government have been very involved in the consultative process with any industry before we do any constructive changes, and in this particular case denying the agricultural community the opportunity for input, denying the opportunity that's coming forward as far as the development of this summit is concerned I think would be very, very tardy on behalf of our government and irresponsible.

I can reflect back to the year 1992, when there was the last agriculture summit. There was a statement made that this government has had a lot of agriculture summits. The last one was in 1992, and at that time it was evident that the whole structure of agriculture was going to have to change. The agricultural community met and came forward with some very dramatic recommendations, recommendations that had never been heard of before, as to process of agriculture, and indeed ultimately those changes were implemented.

4:10

Today in this very year, the year 2000, the Alberta agricultural industry has a growth factor of 4 percent, which in troubled times is a fairly significant number. When we look at our neighbour whose growth factor is something like minus 46 percent and another neighbour whose growth factor this coming year was minus 24 percent, it seems to me that the agricultural industry made some very good decisions back in 1992 that allowed this industry to continue to grow in Alberta in a very organized manner.

We can refer to the decision that was just made – and the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler just made that reference too – a decision that indeed was just made excluding Alberta Agriculture from the disaster program that supposedly is going to be funded by the federal government. There was no consultation. There was no discussion with the agricultural community. It was a decision that was made in a building such as this by elected officials such as this, and it's very, very unfortunate. The ultimate discussion has to go back to the agricultural community, and that's what the amendment is allowing for, and consequently we really want to respect this amendment and what it stands for.

I want to make reference also to the very recent discussions regarding the GMO products. When I was involved with the Canola Council back in the late '70s and early '80s, when indeed the discussion was taking place, there were concerns raised about the industry and the dangers of insecticides and pesticides. At that time, there was a decision made about how we were going to deal with the threats of insecticides and pesticides on our food. Ultimately, the decision was made to work with genetically modified product. In a meeting in Montreal about a month ago there was a decision made that each country can make their own decision regarding GMO products, a wonderful, wonderful trade barrier that we're now going to have to deal with, a trade barrier that's going to affect agriculture in a very negative way for the productive countries that we have, which include Canada, and it's very, very unfortunate.

I think that under the circumstances the agricultural community can make the right decisions. I have the fullest faith in our agricultural community that they will make the right decisions. I strongly believe that the agricultural community should have the right to participate and to make that decision. To deny that opportunity, as is suggested, is not the way that this government operates.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ready for the question.

I would just remind the hon. minister that it is a private member's public bill, not a government bill.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:14 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Broda	Gordon	Nelson
Burgener	Graham	Paszkowski
Cao	Hancock	Pham
Cardinal	Havelock	Renner
Clegg	Hierath	Severtson

Coutts	Hlady	Strang
Doerksen	Jacques	Tannas
Ducharme	Johnson	Tarchuk
Dunford	Jonson	Taylor
Fischer	Klapstein	Thurber
Forsyth	Laing	Woloshyn
Friedel	Langevin	Zwozdesky
Fritz	McFarland	

Against the motion:

Carlson	Leibovici	Wickman
Dickson	Sloan	

Totals:	For – 38	Against – 5
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[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

THE SPEAKER: Bill 204 now disappears from the Order Paper.

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 202

Marriage Amendment Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, amendments to be offered with regard to this bill? I'll call upon the hon. Member for Red Deer-South. No?

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to have this opportunity to discuss some of the issues related to Bill 202. I was somewhat disappointed that the rules of the House are such that I never had an opportunity to contribute my comments during second reading of this bill. As you well know, because it's a private member's bill there is a limited amount of time available for members to debate a bill, and the time had expired before I had an opportunity to voice my comments. So I'm going to take this opportunity in the committee stage of the bill to discuss, perhaps, some of which should have been brought up in second reading, but I ask the indulgence of the chair in that matter.

Mr. Chairman, I support the principle of this bill. As a matter of fact, it's a matter of record. One only needs to check *Hansard* to note that I voted in support of this bill at second reading because I do support the principle of this bill. The purpose, as I understand it, is to ensure that we protect the institution of marriage in the province of Alberta and that the institution of marriage, as it is now, continues well into the future to be a union between a man and a woman. To that, I doff my cap to the Member for Red Deer-South because I support him. I believe him to be an honourable member. I support the principle which he is trying to achieve by the introduction of this bill.

4:30

That being said, Mr. Chairman, I do now recognize that I see some deficiencies in the bill, because I don't think that this bill will in fact achieve what it is that the member is trying to achieve. The bill will, as I see it – and let me preface my remarks by saying that I am not a lawyer, so some of the legal intricacies, particularly when

it gets into the whole issue of constitutional law, are certainly beyond my expertise. But I do see myself to be a somewhat logical individual, so the argument that I would like to bring forward is based probably more on logic than it is on law.

I don't think the bill in its present form can achieve what the member is hoping to achieve. The reason I say that is that when you look at the bill – and I've spent a good deal of time thinking about this bill. The preamble that's added to the Alberta Marriage Act I have absolutely no objection to. I think it does in fact reinforce what the member is trying to accomplish through this bill, but the definition that is included in the act, adding a definition of marriage to the Alberta Marriage Act – the bill reads, in fact, that “‘marriage’ means a marriage between a man and a woman.” Well, to me that's akin to defining “horse” as a horse with four legs. How can you define something using the same word as you're trying to define?

Mr. Chairman, with the greatest respect to the member, I suspect that the reason the member has used this wording in the bill is because he himself recognized the constitutional difficulties that would come about if we in fact tried to define marriage in provincial legislation because, as has already been pointed out by the Minister of Justice, the institution of marriage falls under federal jurisdiction. The Alberta Marriage Act, which we are here to amend today, does not deal with the institution of marriage; it deals with the regulation of marriage. The reference to marriage that is contained repeatedly within the Marriage Act is using the definition that comes from federal legislation. So how can we in the Legislature of Alberta purport to be able to bring something about that is clearly under the jurisdiction of the federal government?

The other concern I have is that the member then goes on in this bill to introduce the notwithstanding clause. The member says that notwithstanding the provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution Act, this bill will operate. Well, again I applaud the member for bringing this forward. I certainly support what it is that he's trying to do, but, again with the greatest respect, my logic would indicate that it doesn't do us any good to pass legislation in this House that is notwithstanding the Charter of Rights. Presumably the member is trying to protect against a decision that might or might not happen at the court level, but to put pre-emptive action in place not knowing what that decision is doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me. If, for example, the federal government were to change their definition of marriage in the federal legislation, this bill would do absolutely nothing to protect the institution of marriage in Alberta because we would be using their changed definition.

Frankly, I don't think this bill accomplishes what it sets out to do. I think the bill is somewhat meaningless, and for that reason I have been giving a lot of thought to whether or not we should support this bill. The fact of the matter is that this is and ends up being very much a feel-good bill. Every one of us can go back to our constituents and say: I voted for a bill that is going to protect the institution of marriage and ensure that marriage is recognized in the province of Alberta as a union between a man and a woman, but the fact of the matter is that it doesn't do that. Logic would indicate that it doesn't do that. It certainly sends a signal that that is the intent of this Legislature, but frankly that has been a stated policy of the government for quite some time. The Premier as much as a year ago indicated that the government would protect the institution of marriage between a man and a woman and would do so if there were any threat to that basic principle, but until we know what the threat is, Mr. Chairman, I think it's impossible for us to deal with it pre-emptively.

So I have a dilemma on my hands. I can go back to my constituents and tell them I supported a bill that purports to do something

which I don't believe it actually does, or I can go back to my constituents and say that I voted against a bill that purports to protect the institution of marriage and ensure that it remains something between a man and a woman. That puts me in a very difficult position, because by voting against this bill, in no way does it mean that I do not support the principle of the bill.

In fact, I did vote for the principle of the bill, but I feel it necessary for me to vote against this bill not because I don't support the principle but because I truly don't believe that the bill will accomplish what it sets out to do. I don't think this is the right way to deal with this issue, and for that reason, Mr. Chairman, I am going to find myself voting against the bill at committee stage, not because I don't agree with the bill but because I don't believe the bill will accomplish what the member wants to accomplish.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 202 at committee. I think the intentions of the hon. member that sponsored the bill are respectful and supportable. It's an interesting proposal, if you will, for us in this Assembly to create some type of legislative framework around how marriages might be defined or applied in Alberta, and preparing for the debate on this bill got me to thinking about a whole variety of different ways that marriages are defined not only in Canada but in all the different cultures that are now part of our Canadian culture.

The institution of marriage can be enacted in a variety of different ways. In some cultures it's not arranged by the two parties that are to be married. It's arranged by elders or by parents. Considerations might be given to the father's social standing, political standing, the size of the dowry, the age of the bride, the ability of the bride to conceive, all of these different things. In our country the institution of marriage, as has been referenced in earlier debate on this bill at second reading, is a legalized institution between two people. But if we think about marriage strictly in a psychological or emotional context, Mr. Chairman, marriage is recognizing an emotion that exists between two people, that emotion predominately being the emotion of love.

4:40

I found it of interest in reading the debate offered by the sponsoring member and by previous members in the Assembly that the acknowledgment of the part that emotion plays in initiating marriage was never mentioned. Even the word, if I read the debates thoroughly, I don't believe was mentioned. Well, if the sponsor doesn't believe that love is an emotion, then maybe he can share with the Assembly what it actually is. In any event, I would suggest that love is the tie that binds marriages, and for the most part when you hear people talk about why their marriages didn't work, they will speak about the fact that they don't love one another anymore, that they haven't been able to resolve their differences, et cetera, et cetera.

We're faced with a reality in this country and in this province where approximately half of our traditional marriages are ending in divorce. That's not a statistic that any of us, I would suggest, is particularly happy about, but it's also not a statistic that we're in a position to do a great deal about.

I thought it might be of interest or of use to look to the Scriptures, particularly with respect to how they define love as being the underpinning or the initiating component of marriage. I'm going to cite from 1 Corinthians 13 this afternoon.

Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong.

This particular citation, Mr. Chairman, is often read at marriage ceremonies, and that is why I believe it's particularly relevant.

If you love someone, you will be loyal . . . no matter what the cost. You will always believe . . . always expect the best . . . and always stand your ground.

All the special gifts and powers from God will someday come to an end, but love goes on forever. Someday prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge – these gifts will disappear.

Now we know so little, even with our special gifts, and the preaching of those most gifted is still so poor.

That's a significant piece of the scriptures: "the preaching of those most gifted is still so poor."

But when we have been made perfect and complete, then the need for these inadequate special gifts will come to end, and they will disappear.

Now, one of the things that's interesting in this definition, Mr. Chairman, is that it doesn't restrict the application of love. It doesn't say that it can only be applied to a particular gender, and I think that's one of the roots of what we're attempting to debate in the context of Bill 202, that somehow the legal ability to have your love for someone recognized should only be accessible in certain circumstances. In referencing how love is defined and how it's enacted, the Scriptures don't place those restrictions on its applications.

I also took note of the statements made by the Minister of Justice, the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud, and wanted to reference them yet another time during our debate this afternoon. He basically had three issues or three problems with the bill. The first one was that in fact the bill was redundant because this is a matter of federal jurisdiction. He indicated that he'd always been a very strong believer that Legislatures and Parliaments should stick to their areas of jurisdiction, and I think that's relevant advice this afternoon.

He cited an additional concern relative to the use of the notwithstanding clause. That is something that we've had cause to debate in this Legislature previously, Mr. Chairman, the infatuation, if you will, of this government for using that clause to get them out of political binds. We saw the attempt made with the sterilization bill to do that, to use the notwithstanding clause to get them out of a political bind. The Minister of Justice reminded his caucus colleagues with the statement that

the notwithstanding clause should be used carefully and specifically because we're dealing with the concept of individual rights. I'm a firm believer that we are all as individuals born with rights. We have all the rights that might be accorded a person.

He cited it as a fundamental Conservative philosophy. Well, in a democratic society I would hope that it is the majority's philosophy in the elected House.

Mr. Chairman, we have a bill before us. As I said at the onset, I think the intent is well meaning, but as it's formulated, it is somewhat irrelevant and technically could not even be able to be applied legally.

I read the sponsoring member's remarks with respect to all of the social literature that exists relative to families. I don't think anyone this afternoon is disputing those findings, but the reality is that engaging the Legislature in this type of action is not feasible and doesn't accomplish the intent that the hon. member was seeking.

That is not just something that applies to the issue of how marriages are defined. There are many issues. We spoke about the complexity of the issues in agriculture and the fact that we have not been able to effectively engage the Legislature in acting on those matters, Mr. Chairman.

The other whole difficulty with this type of proposal is that I tend to be very action orientated, and I don't see that making this type of legislated definition, if you will, would really contribute to strengthening our families, whether they be, as we might traditionally define them, heterosexual relationships or those families that are comprised of a homosexual relationship. This bill is not going to technically offer any strength to the environment our families exist in.

We have problems of family dysfunction. There's no disputing that in this province. They're rooted in alcohol, rooted in divorce, rooted in violence, and much of that has to do with the parents encountering those same types of problems in their childhood and not having the mechanisms, the programs, the counseling, the supports to address it. So they go on to marry and to have children, and the same types of problems exhibit themselves in the next generation. I would like to see us debate a bill that would do something to address some of those root issues. With due respect to the sponsoring member, this type of proposal is just not going to do it.

4:50

I suppose it's one of those things where it can be said that it looks good on paper, but in terms of meaning it doesn't have a lot of application. Certainly, though, there are those who would feel some sense of additional security to know that the Legislature had in fact debated and potentially passed this type of bill, but do we exist as a Legislature to debate and enact bills of symbolism? Well, I suppose you could say that in effect we are, because later today or perhaps tomorrow we're going to be debating a bill about the emblems of Alberta, and there's no question that symbolism is important.

At this particular point in time, given the other issues that are on the legislative agenda – the private health care proposal, the impending legislation, the crisis in agriculture – these kinds of initiatives don't really offer a great deal in terms of resolution of those problems. Somehow, Mr. Chairman, while they may serve some isolated purposes, they're not going to change the face of public policy or public programs, and that's primarily where my opposition to Bill 202 rests. It's symbolic. It satisfies a certain desire or need within perhaps the sponsoring member's constituency and certainly other constituencies in the province, but it will not serve to act and address the issues that are eroding marriages in this province. That's really what I'm more orientated to look for in this Assembly and in future debates in this House.

With those remarks I will take my seat. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Peace-River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to first of all offer my support for Bill 202 and take a moment to express the importance of the institution of marriage to both individual Albertans and to our society as a whole.

First of all, I want to say that I believe it's a duty and a responsibility of legislators to be mindful of the values of our greater communities when we make decisions in here. If it does nothing else, Mr. Chairman, this bill reminds us of that responsibility. I think all too often we misinterpret the pressures of special interest groups as general public sentiment simply because they're vocal. In reality, I believe that decisions made this way often just water down meaningful community values. I think sometimes we have to look beyond political correctness and stand up for what we believe is right.

Mr. Chairman, this bill gives us the opportunity to do just that, to stand up for the values of the traditional family and to recognize that

the vast majority of our constituents feel the same way. It is one thing to be tolerant of those who have different values than we do – and we should be tolerant – but it is another to allow majority wishes to destroy long-accepted values.

Since the beginning of modern society a marriage describes the commitment of a man and a woman to each other. This doesn't mean that there cannot be other types of commitments or other kinds of arrangements, but I believe it's fair to say that if it is another kind of arrangement, then it should be called by another name. There's probably all kinds of evidence out there that proves that children benefit most from living in an environment with both a mother and a father. I believe this is as nature provided, and we don't even have to get into the religious or the community value thing there, but it doesn't mean that every situation involving a traditional family works out perfectly either. In fact, very few things do, and most people in here I'm sure can attest to that.

The perfection or the workability or the other alternatives are not what are in question. Again, I believe these may describe other situations, but they shouldn't have any bearing on the definition that we're talking about. There have also been some suggestions that this bill might have little effect if the federal government changes its legislation. Since the advent of the Charter, Canada has witnessed the confusion between political and moral liberties, with the Supreme Court frequently equating moral liberty with political liberty. Whether we risk federal legislation overriding our decision or not, I think this is a good opportunity for us to take a stand on what we believe, and also it's an opportunity for us to speak for our communities and their values.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to speak for and to vote for Bill 202, and I encourage others in this Assembly to do the same.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on Bill 202, which I find a rather offensive piece of legislation that passes the test of neither legality nor morality. First of all, Bill 202 represents an unacceptable intrusion in the jurisdiction of the federal government. Under the Constitution of Canada legislative power over marriage and divorce rests with the federal government, not the provinces. The Alberta government historically has insisted that the federal government respect the Constitution and not make intrusions into areas that are within the provincial jurisdiction. If Alberta's call for the federal government to respect provincial jurisdiction is to have any credibility, this Legislature should not be passing legislation that is within the purview of the federal government and federal government alone.

I note that the Minister of Justice has, albeit courageously, opposed Bill 202 because he, too, believes that it represents an unwarranted intrusion into matters properly within the jurisdiction of the federal government and federal Parliament. I wonder where the minister of intergovernmental relations stands on the issue of jurisdiction. Has she consulted with her federal counterpart? The likelihood that Bill 202 intrudes upon the jurisdiction of the federal government should be sufficient reason to defeat this bill at the committee stage.

The second reason that Bill 202 should be defeated is the provocative way in which it invokes the use of the notwithstanding clause to shield it from the challenges on human rights grounds. This overlooks the fact that the courts could strike down this bill on the grounds that it offends the division of powers under the Constitution Act. If this were to take place, the bill could not even be saved by the use of the notwithstanding clause. The fact that Bill 202 sailed through second reading in this Legislature last week shows that this

government and the government caucus have learned nothing from the public uproar following the introduction of Bill 26 two years ago.

Under Bill 26 the government attempted to use the notwithstanding clause to limit the lawsuits by victims of forced sterilization. Apparently the roar of Albertans did not help them to learn from the past as we are presented with Bill 202, the Marriage Amendment Act. There are those in the cabinet who have the Premier's ear who believe that this step will close the door forever to same-sex marriages. One would really hope that this very destructive and offensive bill is not being put forward to placate and pacify a few. Indeed, it would offend many, many Albertans to a terrible degree, and this time their roar will be definite.

5:00

This government on this issue of the equality of those in more than same-sex relationships likes to talk about doors and fences. Instead of shutting doors and building fences, this Assembly should be opening doors and building bridges.

On Wednesday, March 11, 1998, the Premier responded to questions in this House about the use of the notwithstanding clause by saying that "if the notwithstanding clause is ever contemplated, [again] indeed, there will be a tremendous amount of open and honest and public discussion" before it is invoked. He also said that the government would give the use of the notwithstanding provision much more serious thought because "the seriousness and the power of this particular clause became [crystal] clear" to his caucus. Where, then, does the Premier stand on the issue of the notwithstanding clause in section 1.1 of Bill 202? Where is the open and honest discussion on its use before this bill is allowed to become law?

To add insult to injury, this bill is being proposed at a time when the government has failed to address the need to bring provincial legislation into compliance with the May 1999 Supreme Court decision in *M. versus H.* The federal government, along with most Canadian provinces, are moving rapidly to ensure that those involved in same-sex relationships have equal legal status to opposite common couples. What is Alberta doing? Unfortunately we are moving in the opposite direction by making amendments to legislation like the Domestic Relations Act to entrench discrimination against same-sex couples. This is wrong.

The New Democrats have recommended the following in the past and remind the House of these yet again. Same-sex couples should be given the same legal status as opposite-sex couples living in a common-law relationship.

Discrimination against same-sex couples in Alberta statutes should be eliminated. The Employment Pension Plans Act should be amended to provide spouses in same-sex relationships with the same pension benefits as are currently available to heterosexual couples. The Alberta government should move immediately on the nondiscriminatory basis to make any necessary changes to extend employment benefits to the same-sex partners of its employees. Legislation, regulation, and policies governing the adoption and fostering of children should be changed to eliminate discrimination against same-sex couples.

Adding further insult to injury is the bill's preamble, that states that without marriage "there would be neither civilization nor progress." To me there is no civilization without all members of society being granted equal rights and obligations. Does this bill mean that same-sex couples seeking the legal recognition of marriage are not part of civilization and, further, are only second-class citizens? Does seeking the legal recognition of marriage disqualify them as Canadians? The denial of these rights to use such

words as natural, moral, normal, traditional, proper is an insult to Albertans. To use the notwithstanding clause on this issue is damaging to our democracy. Many gay and lesbian adults are in marriage-like relationships. Many, including many of my constituents and many who are my friends and colleagues, subscribe to a life-long commitment despite the lack of legal recognition of their relationships.

I just want to add, Mr. Chairman, that I myself have been married to my wife for the last 40 years. We just celebrated our 40th anniversary last week. I know where I stand on this issue, but I have no reason to take away the rights of other Albertans who want to make different choices. Beyond the usual discrimination of having to remain invisible, threats of violence, or lost jobs, they now have Bill 202 wishing to further strip them of their rights as Albertans, as Canadians, and as human beings.

To this point in time those involved in same-sex relationships have focused on ensuring that they have the same legal status as common-law couples of the opposite sex. As a society we have to face the question of public recognition of these relationships in the same way that the relationships of opposite-sex couples are publicly recognized through marriage. When that time comes, I hope we'll be able to address this with understanding, compassion, and generosity.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, New Democrats both federally and provincially have long opposed discrimination and affirmed the importance of basic human rights. New Democrats believe there is no justifiable reason to discriminate against persons with same-sex orientation and to exclude them from equal rights and obligations imposed by law. Everyone has the right to be judged on the integrity of their character and beliefs, not on the basis of personal characteristics, including their sexual orientation. Efforts to ensure the legal equality of persons with same-sex orientation are no different than earlier efforts to ensure the equality of women and to end discrimination based on race or other characteristics.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have listened with considerable interest to the variety of perspectives and commentary that we've heard with respect to the bill in front of us. I just wanted to start off by summing up the position that I had set out at second reading and then proceed to move an amendment, which I think is being distributed to members.

MR. DOERKSEN: You haven't moved it yet?

MR. DICKSON: No, I haven't moved it yet. The enthusiasm of the sponsor of the bill is remarkable, Mr. Chairman. I thought maybe he was seconding the comments I was making as I spoke, and I'd appreciate that as well.

Mr. Chairman, in any event, the concern that we have had – certainly I know from talking to members of my caucus that I think there's a very strong sense that we understand that marriage means one man and one woman, and we respect that. We don't think it's our job as legislators to start going around telling people that now "husband and wife" is going to mean something different or "spouse" is going to mean something different or that "marriage" should mean something different. What we have focused on always and consistently has been that it's about the nature of the legal relationship. It's about the equality in terms of rights and remedies.

That's what we've tried to establish, and that's why we developed the model we did that we put forward last spring, that we advanced to be used in Bill 12, the Domestic Relations Amendment Act. We

also proffered it to be used in terms of the Insurance Statutes Amendment Act, and we've talked about the employee benefits act as well. It's all been cases where you could take that model, so what we say is that you don't have to change the definition of "marriage." What you ought to do is be able to recognize that two adult Albertans should be able to enter into a relationship, a long-term, mutually supportive relationship. They should be able by a simple agreement to ensure that certain legal remedies and rights accrue to that relationship. That continues to be my position.

You know, I've sat here carefully, and I'm not sure I've heard anybody challenge the value of marriage as an institution or its historical roots and historical underpinnings in any way. I've heard a lot of concern around the notwithstanding clause, and that's section 5 in the bill.

I'd just go back and say that, you know, the notwithstanding clause, section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, is the big gun. It's the howitzer. Before you bring it out, you want to make sure you really see the enemy over the hill. In fact, this is in the bill for – it's a prophylactic use. I mean, this is to head something off that may or may not happen.

You'll remember, Mr. Chairman, that I and I think some others and I think the Minister of Justice pointed out that the definition of marriage is not currently – there's no court opinion anywhere in Canada that I'm aware of, no court opinion that says marriage should be anything other than what the Member for Red Deer-South and the Member for Calgary-Buffalo think it is. There's no imminent threat, and I am adamant in my conviction that you don't pull a howitzer out of the garage, that you don't bring out that extraordinary remedy to deprive men and women of rights unless it's absolutely essential. The threat can't be an apprehended, vague threat. It has to be an immediate, imminent threat. That does not exist now, and nothing that the Member for Red Deer-South has said suggests, in my view, that that threat is here.

5:10

Mr. Chairman, I think that while virtually everybody who has spoken to it agrees with section 2 and section 4, there's a lot of concern and discomfort around section 5. I disassociate myself with the comments of the Minister of Justice, with his concerns about the use of the notwithstanding clause.

So with that and not wanting to keep our colleague from Red Deer on tenterhooks any longer, I formally move the amendment that "Bill 202 be amended by striking out section 5." That's the section that deals with the notwithstanding clause, and that's the most offensive part of the bill. I know that there are other members who want to make comments on it. I've moved the amendment, and I may have some other commentary before we ultimately vote on my amendment.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: For the benefit of the committee, this will be called amendment A1.

We have a point of order. The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Point of Order Admissibility of Amendments

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Chairman, I wish to draw your attention to *Beauchesne* 689, where it states:

(1) A committee is bound by the decision of the House, given on second reading, in favour of the principle of the bill, and should not, therefore, amend the bill in a manner destructive of this principle.

Under 698 it says that "an amendment which is out of order on any of the following grounds cannot be put from the chair." I read subsection (5). It says:

An amendment which is equivalent to a negative of the bill, or which would reverse the principle of the bill as agreed to at second reading stage is not admissible.

I would further like to refer you to *Erskine May*. The best I can do there is page 491 where it talks about “inadmissible amendments.” It says that “the question on an amendment which is out of order on any of the following grounds cannot be proposed from the Chair.” Subsection (5) there says:

An amendment which is equivalent to a negative of the bill, or which would reverse the principle of the bill as agreed to on the second reading, is not admissible.

I want to read the next sentence because this is important with respect to the bill before us:

Where the scope of a bill is very restricted, the extent to which it may be amended at all may thus be severely limited.

Mr. Chairman, I guess the challenge I have to you is to argue that in fact this amendment strikes down the principle of the bill. I would like to make that case, because the bill itself is a very simple bill. It's very short. It was quite clear in second reading and even listening to the debate that we've just heard that the notwithstanding clause as a protection of the definition of marriage is an integral part of the bill before us today. Hence, the particular amendment before us would in effect change the entire principle of the bill.

In reviewing the speeches, in my opening I used the comment that “the use of the notwithstanding clause is deliberate in the drafting of this bill.” The Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* spent probably two-thirds of his time referencing the notwithstanding clause. The Minister of Government Services affirmed the agreement to the use of the notwithstanding clause in her speech. The Member for Edmonton-Centre also spoke to the notwithstanding clause. The Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations devoted almost her entire speech to the notwithstanding clause, and the Minister of Innovation and Science referenced it as well, as did the Minister of Justice. So, Mr. Chairman, in view of the mind of the Assembly at second reading, I don't think that you can put forth an argument that suggests that the House did not understand the concept of the bill, the definition, and the fact that it was being protected by the use of the notwithstanding clause in the Charter.

I can go on, Mr. Chairman, if you want, to continue to prove my case, because a lot of the comments that have come up have said that this isn't within the jurisdiction of the provincial government. So on the one hand they want to have their cake and eat it too. They want to argue both sides against the middle.

If you look at “Is marriage under attack,” I refer to the case that the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* referred to, the *Layland* case, where the applicants, who were both male and cohabiting in a sexual relationship, applied for a marriage licence. They argued that the limitation preventing the same sex from marrying violated their equality rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Now, the court held that the application should be dismissed, but the point I want to make is the dissenting opinion, because there were two judges in favour and a dissenting judge, which clearly pointed out that there is an accepted currency among individuals, judges in this case, that suggests in fact that restricting marriage to heterosexual couples infringes on the applicants' Charter rights.

I think that if you read that case and you read through those comments, it is my view that in fact the definition of marriage is subject to a Charter challenge. It's not before the courts right now, but we're putting it in as a pre-emptive kind of arrangement.

So, Mr. Chairman, I would ask that you rule the amendment out of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: On the point of order, Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: On the point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Perhaps the chair might do a little intervening. We're running out of time, not in terms of what's allowed at this stage but in time in view of the hour. Because this is private members' public bills committee stage, we might stop at 27 minutes past, regardless of where we're at, so that we can rise and report progress and get the report in. Is that agreeable?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

With that in mind, then, Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, a couple of observations. The first one is that this bill, in my respectful opinion, has two elements to it. It has a single substantive element, and it has a procedural element, but the two are actually quite separate.

The substantive amendment is one which defines marriage, and on the substantive amendment, as I suggested before, I think everybody agrees. I have heard no disagreement. I agree that marriage means a husband and a wife, a man and a woman. So if you had to say what the bill is about, I'd say that the substantive part is the definition of what constitutes a marriage.

Now, there's a procedural thing that is tagged on, which is section 5, but the use of the notwithstanding clause is a process issue. It's not a substantive issue. The whole purpose of the notwithstanding clause reference is to give effect and try and protect the substantive part. Now, I can't achieve . . . Mr. Chairman, I normally wouldn't worry about your attention so much, but because it's a point of order, I want to make sure you're with me.

I was saying that my point is that the substantive part of the bill is to define marriage and ensure that it is a man and a woman. Why would I want to vote against that part? I support that substantive part of the bill. What I have a problem with is the procedural element in the bill, and that's section 5.

You can take the procedural element out. If my amendment were to be successful, Mr. Chairman, we would still be left with what I wanted.

AN HON. MEMBER: Citation.

MR. DICKSON: I'm responding to a point of order. It's not typical for the responder to have to cite authority, hon. member.

Mr. Chairman, the proposition I'd make is this. I cannot achieve the same thing by voting against the bill, and the reason is this. I want to declare my support for marriage being one man and one woman. That's the substantive part of the bill. There are people who are confusing – the Member for Calgary-*Fish Creek* and perhaps the mover from Red Deer-South are running together the procedural element and the substantive element, but they're wholly collateral. The bill could stand quite nicely on its own if there were no section 5, and the argument, in fact, from the Minister of Justice, this member, some others is that section 5 isn't needed. It's not required. It's wholly severable.

5:20

This is described, Mr. Chairman, as the Marriage Amendment Act, not as the notwithstanding act. It's the Marriage Amendment Act, and that's the substantive part that I support. I don't want to be denied my chance to be able to support the substantive part just because I don't like the procedural part. I think they're wholly

collateral. I don't disagree with the authorities, but I'd just say that they're wholly inapplicable on the facts here.

The last thing I'd say is that the member raising the point of order has made much of what's been said. Well, the determination of whether an amendment is appropriate has nothing to do with what people say in debate. You have to determine whether the amendment is appropriate within the four corners of the bill in front of us, and looking at that, I think the analysis I've offered before is accurate and determinative.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any other comments on the point of order?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

THE CHAIRMAN: There's not a question. There's a point of order for the chair to rule on. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has moved an amendment today, amendment A-1, to Bill 202 which would strike out section 5 of this bill, the portion of the bill which is the notwithstanding clause. The sponsor of the bill, the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, who has raised the point of order, of course objects on the grounds that the amendment runs contrary to the principle of the bill. The chair would like to thank both hon. members who participated in this debate for their submissions.

There is not really any argument about the general principles that are to be applied, as has been pointed out. Reference can be found in *Erskine May* and in *Beauchesne*. In *Erskine May*—hon. member, one reason we had a little trouble finding it is that you have a different edition than we have. We have the more up to date and had to find it in other pages.

Anyway, on page 526 *Erskine May* states that an amendment which is the

negative of the bill, or which would reverse the principle of the bill as agreed to on the second reading, is not admissible.

The chair would further note a similar reference in Griffith and Ryle's book *Parliament: Functions, Practices and Procedures* at page 232, where they say of amendments that might conflict with the principles of the bill as agreed to on second reading: they "often pose thorny problems for the chairman of a committee on a controversial bill."

In this case, it seems clear to the chair that the proposed amendment does not constitute a negative to the bill. On the thorny issue of whether the proposed amendment runs contrary to the principle of the bill, it seems to the chair that the principle might be found in the previous sections of the bill about the definition of marriage. The notwithstanding clause, although a very significant and important clause, does not in any way affect the definition of marriage so far as the bill is concerned.

The notwithstanding clause serves to insulate the bill from certain constitutional challenges. If this section could not be amended, it might set an unfortunate precedent in limiting amendments. In cases like this, it would seem that the best option is to leave it to this committee whether or not to ultimately accept or reject the amendment.

As *Beauchesne* states in paragraph 688:

The function of a committee on a bill is to go through the text . . . with a view to making such amendments in it as may seem likely to render it more generally acceptable.

In this case the chair rules that the amendment proposed would not be destructive of the principle and may proceed. Whether it be adopted or not is up to this committee. The committee will decide the merits of this amendment.

MR. DICKSON: I'd like to adjourn debate at this time, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

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

[Motion to report progress on Bill 202 carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. HERARD: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on Bill 202. I wish to table all copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and that we reconvene this evening at 8 o'clock in Committee of Supply.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has moved that we now adjourn until 8 this evening and that when we meet this evening, we do so in Committee of Supply. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until 8 this evening in Committee of Supply.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:27 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 1, 2000**
Date: 00/03/01

8:00 p.m.

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order. This evening we're dividing into two committees, C and D. Committee D will be upstairs in room 512, and C will be here in the Assembly. So I'd invite all those members of committee D to proceed to 512, and we'll see you about 10 o'clock. The remainder will be here for a few minutes.

[The Committee of Supply met as subcommittees C and D from 8:01 p.m. to 10:12 p.m.]

MRS. GORDON: Subcommittee D reports progress on the Department of Economic Development.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Subcommittee C of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Government Services, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Again, does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.
Hon. Minister of Government Services, would you rise and report progress?

MRS. NELSON: Didn't I already do that?

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no. Okay. Hon. members, we were in subcommittees. We had a subcommittee upstairs and a subcommittee down here. When the other one arrived down here, then the two subcommittees separately reported to the whole committee. Now we must report to the Assembly.

MRS. NELSON: Oh. Well, in that case, Mr. Chairman, I move that we rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Government Services under subcommittee C and the Department of Economic Development under subcommittee D, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: So ordered.

head: Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Haley moved:

That an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mrs. McClellan]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a real privilege, as always, to stand and respond to the Speech from the Throne, particularly on this occasion, as it was read by our new Lieutenant Governor. As we opened the Fourth Session of this 24th Legislature, it was a pleasure to hear Her Honour Lois Hole read the Speech from the Throne. I offer my most sincere congratulations to Her Honour on her recent appointment as the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. She's an absolute delightful addition, I believe, to this Legislative Assembly. She's thoughtful, she has an understanding of the needs of this Assembly, and she brings those needs and the interests of Albertans to this Assembly. As she goes throughout communities in Alberta, I hope that when she reaches southern Alberta our constituents will experience those same kinds of vibrations from her and the positiveness with which she approaches everything she does not only for herself and Albertans but also for this great province.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Madam Speaker, with the express views of my constituents from Livingstone-Macleod in mind I am pleased to support this Speech from the Throne and the overall direction this government is giving to Albertans. My constituency has a large population of seniors, and as a result health care and particularly long-term care are really important issues to my constituents. I am pleased the Speech from the Throne also indicated that these are important areas to be talking about with Albertans. In particular my constituents are pleased that the government will implement an overall direction for enhancing continuing care, resulting from the long-term care review. The government's commitment to the continued security of home care and long-term care programs in the province is something that encourages my constituents and reaffirms their faith in the balanced approach to policy so characteristic of this government.

10:20

Along with that, Madam Speaker, my constituents recognize that many nurses in the health care profession work very, very hard, and more personnel coming into the workplace will be important to them and welcome to them and also the people they serve. The government's commitment to increasing access to essential services by increasing the number of frontline staff in the health system will work to alleviate the pressure on many of our valued nurses.

In addition, the recent budget speech also discussed this issue, outlining the government's specific commitment to hiring some 2,400 nurses in the province to assist in just this area. These are welcome initiatives to my constituents, particularly when we look at two of my hospitals that have occupancies of well over 100 percent. The pressure and the stress that is put on those acute care beds is certainly going to welcome some of this relief.

I would also like to acknowledge the progress this government has made in addressing the pressing issues surrounding the provision of public health care while at the same time maintaining a strong and vital commitment to the Canada Health Act. Madam Speaker, this government will be introducing legislation that will help to protect and preserve the publicly funded health care system by doing two things. First, it will legislate Alberta's commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act by reaffirming the priority of a universal health care system for all Albertans. Secondly, it will enable the regional health authorities in this province to look at new and innovative ways of delivering publicly funded health care services. This is a very progressive step and one that is vital to our continued standard of excellence in health care services. I believe the steps the government is taking to reduce waiting times and increasing access to essential services are fundamental to the continued viability of health care within every province in this country.

While there has been some opposition to the progressive and necessary nature of these ideas, I believe this opposition is only because change is a process and is more often than not a gradual process. Furthermore, opposition to free trade in the mid-1980s dissipated once the benefits of free trade began to be realized and the preoccupation of governments with deficit spending in the early 1990s also disappeared, even among those on the more socialist side of the political spectrum. So in the early part of the 21st century this government is taking the initiative to be innovative in the area of health care in order to ensure that the future viability and sustainability of our precious publicly funded health care system remains intact. As in so many other areas Alberta is again setting the pace of change in public policy, and I think this is a good thing.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We need only look at the Alberta government's track record on deficit reduction to see the benefits of forward-looking government policies to all Albertans. My constituents are very pleased at the deficit reduction that has occurred so far and continue to support the government's efforts in making sure our debt will be paid down so that our children and our grandchildren will not have this burden to pay off.

I was also pleased to see the initiative this government has taken with respect to education. The projected injection of funding into education will ultimately impact the lives of many Albertans and particularly the younger members of our population. Our young people are so important to this province, and no amount of funding could ever put a price on the value of our future generations. That said, this government has conscientiously and tenaciously shown diligence in ensuring that the future of Alberta is preserved for the next generation.

Mr. Speaker, this government has been a good steward of the fiscal resources of this province and has steadfastly maintained its course in reducing the debt and bringing spending under control while at the same time remaining committed to a good education system, a quality health care system, effective social programs, a clean environment, and safe, strong communities. The government has also shown a commitment to ensuring that Alberta's primary and secondary schools are not fund-raising to meet the basic education

needs of their schools. The fiscally conservative approach of this government is an example to school boards of the importance of diligently reviewing expenses and striving to remain within achievable budgetary limits.

Mr. Speaker, people want schools more effective and more responsive to the changing needs of society. I have already proposed a private member's bill this session that will respond to a need in our society by addressing violence in schools and stipulating a code of conduct for our students. The bill will provide a mechanism for dealing with dangerous activities in our schools in order to protect our students from things like physical violence, sexual assault, possession of narcotics, and possession of dangerous weapons.

This government has also indicated the importance of our young people by introducing a new \$3 million scholarship program that will benefit approximately 3,000 postsecondary students and by increasing student financial assistance levels. This is an issue that has come to me many times in my visits to high schools in my constituency. Young people are worried about their ability to make financial commitments, long-term financial commitments, to postsecondary education.

In addition, Bill 1, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act, creates a \$500 million endowment fund that will establish and support a balanced and long-term approach to science and engineering research in the province. The objective of this fund is to foster innovation and scientific research within the province and to support science and engineering research facilities in Alberta.

This endowment fund is something that is important to our smaller universities like the University of Lethbridge. It adds a new dimension to the small university by providing increased opportunities for research dollars to attract scientists and professors from various fields of expertise, by positively influencing our students and further enhancing their educational experience. This is something that young people in my constituency look forward to and something they have mentioned to me on many occasions: how they can benefit from research and get close to the brains that we can import into this province to help with our research.

10:30

Mr. Speaker, that's what this government is all about: innovation, progress, being willing to change when required to rather than being the last out of the gate. This government has consistently shown its tenacity and determination to be responsive rather than reactive to change; in other words, always being out front. This change includes the changing nature of the global economy and staying competitive, the changing fiscal realities of governments, and the presently evolving role of public policy. The Alberta government has sought to address these issues as the need arises rather than when the crisis hits years after the initial signs of needed change were indicated. This government has done this despite opposition and despite distortions of the truth spread by those with special interests. In the end, this government has consistently shown Albertans that it has chosen the right path and that they have chosen the right leadership.

Thank you.

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

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you. It's with great pleasure that I rise this evening to address the throne speech as well. I've had the great pleasure as the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark to address the Speech from the Throne seven times in the last seven years, so I

have the ability to look back at what has happened within this Legislative Assembly in providing for the needs of my constituents.

What I found interesting in this year's throne speech was that the Premier thanked seniors and the Premier seemed to indicate that history mattered to him, but in actual fact what we see happening is that history may well repeat itself when we look at moving from a publicly funded health care system to a privately funded one. That is the history that no one in this province wants to see repeated and that in actual fact the majority of individuals in my constituency have indicated they do not want to see. The calls to my constituency office have been from individuals who traditionally have not phoned their MLA, have not phoned the minister of health, have not phoned the Premier. That so-called silent majority are the individuals who are now picking up the phone and who are saying: no, we don't want this; we don't like the direction the government is taking, and in actual fact we don't trust what is being said to us.

These are the same constituents, Mr. Speaker, who know what language can do to an institution, to a health care institution in their own community. The Misericordia hospital is an integral part of Meadowlark. In the cutbacks in 1993 and 1994 and I believe up to '95 and '96, the Misericordia hospital became the Misericordia community health centre. In fact, some major parts of that hospital were taken out, so the community was not served and continues not to be served in the manner that they and the surrounding areas – Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, Westlock; the list goes on – deserve to be served. In actual fact, it now has become again a hospital. So it is strange, perhaps, how language dictates what happens, and we will see that tomorrow most likely, when even though we're going to be told that a surgical clinic is nothing to be fearful of, we know that that is a private hospital and Albertans know that it is a private hospital. So what we have seen in our constituency are some real effects on health care and some real diminishing service with regards to our health care needs, and constituents do not forget that easily.

I have also in the last three to four months taken the opportunity to visit with each and every school in my constituency to find out what the impact has been of the education cutbacks. I have had the opportunity to meet with the administrators, to meet with the teachers, to meet with the PACs. I have three schools left, Mr. Speaker, and then I plan to file a report in this Legislative Assembly on behalf of the schools.

I have one charter school, I have two high schools, I have two junior high schools, and I have a number of separate and public schools. What I have found has been enlightening, and I'm sure if other members took the time to do that as well – and perhaps they have – they will know and will have found out the same things I have found out with regards to the needs in our education system, and quite frankly the budget does not address those needs. Those needs are that parents have to stop fund-raising for essentials, for books. Those needs are with regards to the special-needs children in our schools, the ones that maybe don't merit the severe coding, where they do get some dollars for special aids but are expected to be integrated into full classrooms and are not having their needs met.

There's the reality of the infrastructure and the fact that the schools are aging and cannot accommodate the new technology this government expects the schools to have. I was at a school just the other night where the analogy was made that it's the same as plugging in your microwave and a toaster at the same time: the circuits just go bonkers. In actual fact, that is what happens in some of the schools where the infrastructure cannot accommodate the new technology.

The reality is that in our schools if there's a concern about violence, there is a lack of school counselors, there's a lack of access to social workers, psychologists, and other individuals who can help in dealing with those children who require help.

What in actual fact I see in my constituency is that the seniors have been carrying a larger and larger burden over the years as their out-of-pocket costs have increased with regards to providing their health care needs, with regards to providing their home care needs. This downloading of costs onto individuals has not been ignored by constituents in my riding, and in fact they know they are paying more out of pocket now than they did in 1993. As well, we are having more people falling through the cracks as a result of that.

What individuals in Edmonton-Meadowlark I believe would like to see from this government is a strong commitment to community and community spirit, a commitment to the concept of the health determinants, because in fact that is one of the key ways of ensuring that our health care costs will be diminished. That is, to look at the issues of poverty, to look at the issues of housing, to look at the issues of nutrition of our youth. These are some of the health determinants that must be considered and must be addressed with vision by a government, and what they would like to see is that their interests are considered.

10:40

I have heard in the last two and a half weeks since the session started a lot about the special interests. This government seems to think that anyone who disagrees with them is a special interest, and we have had those special interests named in the past by this government over the last seven years. Those special interests have been the unions. Those special interests have been the nurses. Those special interests have been the doctors. Those special interests have been the seniors. These are just some of the groups this government considers as special interests. Well, I'd like to put on the record that those are not special interests, that I would rather see the special interests of the majority in this province served and served in a way that shows they are respected and do not have the scorn of the government, as opposed to seeing the special interests of a minority, which is what this government at this point has come to represent, Mr. Speaker. As the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark I will, as long as my constituents decide to invest me with the honour of representing them, be sure that I will represent the majority of my constituents and not the special interests of a few.

Thank you, and I'd move to adjourn debate.

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member just adjourned debate, or she was attempting to.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Bill 9

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me once again great pleasure to pain at least one member across the way with my lightning-quick wit and his attentive manner.

Members, I rise to speak both in favour and agin this particular bill in that it doesn't show any new direction. It doesn't do anything one would expect of a minibudget, as it were, and it certainly leaves

a lot to be desired. I did in the last two days have cause to have some better feelings, perhaps, for a little more co-operative effort in this Chamber in that this morning I had the pleasure of chairing the Public Accounts Committee, where a great deal of co-operation and information sharing goes on all the time. I just had the experience of some two hours in Room 512 in a committee where a member of the Executive Council of this government served up a good informational session, a very, very good exchange of ideas. Whether they were government members' questions or backbenchers' questions, they certainly were forthcoming.

By comparison, the difficulty with this particular bill is that we don't see the same cordiality. We don't seem to have any kind of input whatsoever. It's presented as a *fait accompli*. There is no reasonable debate from the other side at all. There's no new direction.

With the assembled members here I'd like to touch first on some forestry policy that is not covered, some energy policy that should be covered in this debate, and then on to perhaps some decrying of the poor state of education and the lack of support of postsecondary students in this province. Then I'll perhaps have time left over to chastise the government for their method of finance or nonfinance of municipalities and seniors and, finally, tie it up with a little discussion on democracy.

First of all, let's deal with the forestry industry. We have with us tonight a member of Executive Council – and thank goodness for that – who has the promotion of the forest industry, and a former member of Executive Council who was formerly in charge of this particular portfolio. First, I'd like to say that there is a very good report published by the Senate of this great nation of ours that got very little coverage around about but certainly was read by this member and some other members. There are three critical points that it points out that are in error, particularly in Alberta. It centres around the longevity of a contract between the province and a harvester of fibre. It's called the forest management agreement, an FMA. Those forest management agreements have far too short a tenure. I hesitate to propose a longer tenure, because if that was the only change in the FMAs, it certainly wouldn't be adequate. What they could and should do is provide for exactly that, the forest management and one harvester, but it does it in such a short lump that all the forest manager can do is take the harvest and not replant to see it to completion and to be able to manage that forest. So you do want to extend that period that you have given a corporate entity the rights that fall from that contract and all the responsibilities.

Currently, with the relatively short period, a short period being sometimes 15 years – but in tree growth that is at best one-quarter of the growth and probably more like one-tenth of the period of time it takes to regrow that forest. So what you have emphasized here in a shorter agreement is the responsibility just to harvest, not the responsibility to replant and to tend and care for it until reharvesting again, and therein lies part of the difficulty.

Now, I said earlier that if that was the only thing you did on a change of agreement, that would not be adequate. Certainly what you have to do too, like this government says that they do with every policy, is have performance measures. They measure the performance, and then there's some renegotiation. Those measurements of performance have to be made public. It has to be done in public. The disclosure in this particular matter is absolutely necessary for that scrutiny, the same way that this democracy is supposed to run by having the members of the press be able to access that which we say and publicize it and having a record of *Hansard* so that those words of wisdom or fateful errors can be published. Those things must be done.

There's another area that creates some difficulty with a very short

tenure for a forest management agreement and/or a quota. What it does do is put all those firms, those harvesters of that fibre and therefore generators of sustained economic activity in our province, right under the thumb of the government. It may not be overt. It may not be seen easily, but it certainly is felt. Those companies cannot speak, and they don't speak to the press easily unless it's very, very well managed. They don't speak to the opposition unless it's managed.

10:50

MR. DICKSON: Are they muzzled?

MR. WHITE: In fact, yes, they are muzzled. They are muzzled simply because the economic clout the government has over these firms is so great that big firms like Al-Pac and Daishowa say very, very little about anything. They are by structure intimidated, and it simply is not good in the industry. It really is a negative, particularly for the owners of the resource, we who are here and the people of Alberta. It does nothing, nothing.

I'd like to move on. Time's awasting. Actually I didn't keep time of it.

AN HON. MEMBER: You've got lots of time, Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: I'd like to deal with the energy policy and particularly the lack of debate of energy policy, which could be really engaging in a province like this. There are so many people that know a great deal about the industry and have opinions on it, that are expressed now and again in this Chamber. But never does any debate occur.

I'll deal firstly with the depleting resources – the rate of depletion is rather rapid – and that's conventional crude. This resource is owned – by and large all the resources below the surface geology of this province are owned by the people in Alberta, yet there is no debate as to the rate of depletion, absolutely none. We draw off perhaps 600 million this year, and that's a good year economically because the price happens to draw right now, but that's depleting and diminishing. Yes, it's being replaced and ably replaced by another resource, but there isn't debate on whether we should be rushing out and depleting that or not. There isn't any debate in this Legislature as to how the oil industry is to be maintained in this province through this complete next century. Certainly the conventional oil cannot be done.

I'd like to move on to synthetic crude, another area of absolutely no debate. It was presented as a *fait accompli*. That was the new royalty rate negotiations, that in this member's view didn't turn out that badly. Around the margins I could and would have changed some, but I wasn't at the negotiating table. I didn't hear any debate in public on the rate of depletion of that asset versus any cost inputs that were required by the province of Alberta. Now, there were some pretty fundamental elements that you'd think we'd want to speak of. Do you want to overhear an economy? Do you want to grow one part of the economy in the province of Alberta over another? Then there are so many other things . . .

DR. WEST: You should ask the Parkland Institute to help you.

MR. WHITE: The minister of resource depletion wants to get into this debate rather badly. If he'll listen to the text of my debate, that's what I am trying to do, encourage debate, but debate off the record is of no assistance whatever. We've been admonished a number of times by this chairman to speak in turn and add to the debate if a minister wants, but this minister does not seem to be predisposed at all to add to the debate. He merely hurls comments across the way.

DR. WEST: It's to keep you on your toes, Lance.

MR. WHITE: I am that. Thank you, sir.

Continuing on here. Synthetic crude this year, partially because of a marked change in the royalty rate, without debate again, has gone from some \$43 million to \$384 million. To me that would indicate that the planning for this particular resource depletion is not reasonable. It is reasonable to expect that the reduction of the asset at this level would be reported in this manner, but certainly it would be wise for those that negotiate these arrangements to share a little more with the owners of the resource through the public forum, which is this forum. Now, no one would expect it to be completely open and transparent, but it would be nice to have the philosophical elements of it presented here and argued and discussed. Granted, the opposition would have little influence if the arguments were put well, but in this forum if the opportunity is there, then the arguments will rise to it, I'm sure.

Moving on to electricity. Electricity is probably the area that bothers this member the most. You'll remember that the bill of 1995 garnered, I think, about six hours of debate in total, and the bill of 1998 left this House under closure with less than an hour and a half of debate. Now, that is clearly not the way to pass policy in this province. You recognize that in 1994, before any of this deregulation experiment was spoken of, this province had a stable rate, a favourable rate of power. We had adequate reserves. We had a privatized system mostly. We had two major generators generating better than 80 percent of the total energy consumption in this province – they were completely privately run and held corporations in the province of Alberta – and at that time we had one quasi-clone corporation. It was owned by the city of Edmonton.

The system worked, and in my barber's terms, it weren't broke. It was working. What needed fixing? To date we haven't had that discussion. We haven't heard where the hue and cry came from to require moving from that system to another system. We don't know what that system will look like as yet because the power purchase arrangement auction has not been held, and we don't know what the outcome of that will be.

In that time we had virtually zero construction of conventional base load generation in this province, yet we've had substantial growth in virtually every other sector of the economy in this province. It's getting to the point now where it's going to be one of the limiting factors in infrastructure. You can hardly prevail upon a corporate entity in another part of the country or the world to come to Alberta to produce goods or any kind of product when electricity is lacking. That's getting close to being what the case is.

Now, you'll hear an argument that there has been a substantial addition of energy production in this province by way of cogeneration, and that's true, but in order to have cogeneration occur the cogenerator must have use of excess heat. Well, actually you can generate the heat for plant heat. You need plant heat, so you need some process heat in the plant, and then you can produce electricity for the plant and sell off the rest.

11:00

Well, those opportunities have been taken up mostly in this province now. They haven't been constructed or aren't in construction, and we're topping out rather rapidly. We're getting painfully close to a crisis here in a province that has untold energy resources. It's absurd that we're getting to this point.

Now, if one were to turn the clock back to '94, and the government were contemplating this move to a deregulated market, you'd look at the market and say: well, the market dominance of one entity is potentially a problem. So you'd go through, and due diligence would say that you really go through the steps to decide whether you can design some kind of system to have a much more open market, a free market if you will, and whether it can be defined. We have spent five years trying to define that to try to limit the market dominance of one player.

At that point it should have been decided whether an invited divestiture or an assisted divestiture of assets of TransAlta Utilities would have been contemplated and whether you would or wouldn't do that, but there was no debate on that subject, absolutely none. We heard none of it. We've heard none of it to date. Yet the experts will tell you that that would have been a guarantee that we would have had probably two, maybe three or four years ago a market that was operating almost totally and completely without the massive regulation we have now that has the system of designed PPAs and, failing that, some kind of forced market contract of some description. We would have had a decision that could have been put in place at that time.

Now, the current minister was not minister at that date, so he cannot be chastised for that. [Mr. White's speaking time expired] Twenty minutes?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, it is really 20 minutes.

[The clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 9.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 11:04 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Government Services, Wednesday, March 1, 2000

Date: 00/03/01

8:01 p.m.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Subcommittee C – Government Services

Tannas, Don, Chairman
Fischer, Butch, Deputy Chairman
Cao, Wayne
Evans, Iris
Gibbons, Ed
Jonson, Halvar
Lund, Ty

MacDonald, Hugh
McFarland, Barry
Nelson, Patricia
Nicol, Ken
Oberg, Lyle
O'Neill, Mary

Paszkowski, Walter
Soetaert, Colleen
Strang, Ivan
Thurber, Tom
Trynchy, Peter
Yankowsky, Julius

THE CHAIRMAN: In subcommittee C this evening for our consideration we have the estimates for the Department of Government Services, and I would invite the hon. minister to begin this evening's deliberations on Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present to you the first business plan and estimates for the Ministry of Government Services. As you know, Government Services is a new ministry formed during last May's government reorganization. At that time we were given a mandate to streamline and simplify Albertans' access to government.

The ministry assumed the responsibility for Alberta registries and consumer services, and we also took on the responsibility for the Regulatory Review Secretariat. In the past 10 months since the reorganization we have been busy mapping out where we want to take this new department and how we intend to get there. The three-year business plan and estimates before you tonight will serve as our guide.

The key focus of this business plan is on service excellence. This area holds significant challenges and opportunities to provide better, more streamlined, and more unified services to Albertans. To this end we have begun working with government, stakeholders, and businesses to "provide a secure, high-quality, and innovative gateway to a wide range of . . . services," including registry, licensing, consumer, and other related services.

As you can see from our mission statement, the ministry's government and program development roles will also remain important in ongoing activities throughout the business planning period. That means we will continue to "facilitate, support, and . . . regulate and strictly enforce high standards of consumer protection and business practice," as we have in the past. We will also "support the Regulatory Review Secretariat in its mandate to reduce regulatory red tape and complexity."

Shortly we will be implementing a new departmental structure that is in keeping with our mandate to provide a simple, streamlined point of access to service. As an example, we will combine our registry's call centre and our new consumer information call centre into one so that citizens wanting information on either of these two programs will only have to make one call. This new structure will ensure greater co-ordination within the ministry in how we provide services to Albertans, respond to issues, and plan for the future.

When he created the Ministry of Government Services, Premier Klein gave it a mandate to improve Albertans' access through one window to services of government. That has become our first goal, as identified in the ministry business plan: "a common portal ('gateway') so Albertans receive the services they [actually] deserve." Together with the Department of Innovation and Science

we have already set out to accomplish this goal. Over the past few months our two ministries have been working with seven other departments to examine how we can better serve Albertans by making it easier to access government information, services, and products.

The purpose of this exercise is to come up with a business plan for delivering all the various services of all these distinct departments through one entry point or window. That way, Mr. Chairman, Albertans will not have to know which department is responsible for which service in order to get access to that service. Instead, they will be able to go to one web site or to one service counter or to one call centre to get everything they need. You will be hearing more about this initiative as the project progresses over the next few months.

You will note in the estimates that the budget for Government Services has been increased over last year's budget by about \$2.2 million, to \$49.8 million. Approximately \$500,000 of this increase is for our operating expenditures dedicated to the one-window project. Another \$500,000 is for the capital investment to support the next phase in the development of the one-window project. The rest of the increase, about \$1.2 million, is to cover an increase in the salary component of the budget due to an increase in our employee compensation plan.

Mr. Chairman, our second goal, as identified in the business plan, is also related to service: "excellence in service development, delivery and accessibility." Registry services are perhaps the most familiar part of our ministry to all Albertans, as all Albertans at some time or another require them. Through our network of registry agents people can obtain drivers' licences and vehicle registrations, conduct land title searches, register births and deaths or security interests on personal property, or form corporations. Altogether Albertans conducted more than 12 million registry transactions last year, about half of them through the registry agent network. Generally speaking, they like the service they're getting, with more than 90 percent saying they're satisfied or very satisfied. That's a vote of confidence for this system.

Yet we want to build on that success in the years to come. One of the biggest challenges facing us in this regard is the need to redevelop three of our five registry systems. These three systems – the motor vehicle registry, the land titles registry, and the personal property registry – were developed using 1980s technology. Today they're tired and old and slow. They've served us well, but they're reaching full capacity. All three systems must be redeveloped if we are going to be able to continue to provide Albertans with the superior services they have come to expect, so we must start now.

We will plan and reinvest in our IT systems, pursuing partnerships with the public and private sectors to help defray what will be rather significant costs. We also want to continue to provide better and more accessible registry and consumer information services to our clients through our call centres. The strategy for this, as I mentioned earlier, will include combining the various call centres we operate in a single, more efficient call centre.

The budget required for service delivery is estimated to be about \$32 million. This is identified in the estimates as program 3, registries and services to consumers. From this budget we will provide support for the registry agent network and to our Alberta on-line customers. We will maintain our registry databases and equipment. We will provide land titles registration, the one service that is still delivered directly by the ministry, and we will respond to inquiries related to our registry services and inquiries and complaints respecting business and consumer issues.

Mr. Chairman, our third goal is "a fair and effective marketplace in Alberta with a high standard of business conduct." Over the next year we will build on the momentum of the Fair Trading Act, which came into effect last September 1. It's one of the toughest consumer protection laws in Canada, and I have given instructions that it will be strictly enforced. We will also continue to work and consult with stakeholders to develop new and amend existing legislation or regulations to respond to emerging issues.

One in particular I wish to focus on is the creation in the very near future of a regulation that will govern direct marketers of electricity. This will help ensure consumer protection and a level playing field for business when the electrical industry is deregulated next January 1. The estimates show a budget of \$11.3 million for this division. This is the estimated amount required to support not only our regulatory and enforcement activities but also our planning, strategic, and business support activities. These expenses are broken down in the estimates under program 2, regulatory and strategic services.

Our fourth goal, Mr. Chairman, as identified in the business plan, is "a streamlined, effective, and relevant regulatory environment." This goal speaks primarily to the work of the Regulatory Review Secretariat, which is chaired by Wayne Jacques, the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti. The secretariat will continue to work with government departments on the governmentwide initiative to reduce, simplify, and eliminate regulations.

Program 1 outlines our budget estimates for ministry supports, which includes our Regulatory Review Secretariat. In addition to the secretariat, the \$6.3 million budgeted for this area also supports my office and that of the deputy minister as well as our portion of the various support services we share with Municipal Affairs. These shared services include human resources, finance and administration, information technology, legal services, and communications.

8:11

You will notice under program 1 estimates that there has been an increase in the budgets of both the deputy minister's office and the Regulatory Review Secretariat. The original budget for the deputy minister's office, transferred from the former department of public works, supply, and services, was barely enough to cover the salaries of the three staff. So an additional \$32,000 has been made available to cover supplies and services and to support the operations of this office as well as anticipated increases in salaries to be paid to the public service employees. Likewise, the modest \$16,000 increase in the budget of the Regulatory Review Secretariat was added to allow for the payment for the staff and anticipated salary increases in that secretariat.

On the revenue side of the equation I'd like to draw your attention to one figure, the bottom line. We are estimating revenue to drop dramatically over last year's estimates, from \$283 million to \$236 million. Normally, Mr. Chairman, this might be considered bad news, but in this context it is not. This reduction is due to our government's decision to reduce fees so that they are more in line with the cost of delivering the service, and that's good news. It's good news for Albertans because they are the benefactors of the reduction.

As detailed in the budget documents tabled by the Treasurer, we have reduced and in some cases eliminated fees related to land titles, personal property, and corporate registry services. For example . . .

MS OLSEN: Don't forget to say why it happened, that it was because the Supreme Court said so. [interjections]

MRS. NELSON: Have you finished now?

Mr. Chairman, before I was so rudely interrupted by the members opposite, I was in the final stages of my deliberation here, so I will just complete it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Not only was there interruption on the one side; there was equal interruption on the other side. We would hope that both sides could refrain from adding comments until you're recognized and able to stand and speak.

Madam Minister, if you could continue.

MRS. NELSON: An example of the reduction of fees, Mr. Chairman, is that the filing of a corporate annual return now has no costs attached to it, and another example would be the reduction from \$365 to \$133 in the case of registering land title transactions in the purchase of a home.

These reductions were made in response to the recommendations of an interim report on fees and charges by the review committee chaired by Mary O'Neill, the MLA for St. Albert. This was a result of the Eurig case from Ontario that was tested in the courts. Alberta, I might say, is the only province in this country to have followed through on the review of fees and charges. All other jurisdictions . . . [interjections] If the hon. member opposite would just for five seconds button it, I could finish this off.

All other provinces have moved their own legislation to ratify the fees and the overcharging that they had. This government is the only one to make the reductions, and this is from the interim report.

The total cost of this reduction in revenue for my ministry alone is \$55 million, which will go back to Albertans. In fact, Mr. Chairman, most of these are fees that are collected through our registry system, and I'm able to report that as of the day after the budget most of our registries had already started the process of reducing the fee structure at the local level. We will be monitoring that to ensure that these dollars do go back to Albertans. So we are clearly giving back.

This next year, Mr. Chairman, will be a challenging year for this ministry. Not only will we continue to strive to provide Albertans with the services that they deserve and the protection that they need, but we will be looking at better ways to connect Albertans to government services using technology and any other tool that we can find. Our gateway project will be the first in this country to allow Albertans to actually phone one place and get answers to their questions. In fact, they'll actually have someone that will pick up the phone and say, "How may I help you?" instead of getting a number to push or voice mail that doesn't provide any service whatsoever. I'm looking forward to this project because I think it's long overdue, and I hope all hon. members in this Legislature will be supportive of it.

The revamping also, Mr. Chairman, of our systems that are quite old. I hope that hon. members will be supportive of our project to revamp our three systems that desperately need it. If we are going to continue to provide the service level that we have been providing to Albertans, we are going to have to revamp these systems because they have reached capacity. If we don't do something with them, we will not be able to offer that service, so we must do it. We must get started now so that we can prepare for the day when they no longer

can do the job and we will be able to say that we have a new system in place.

Those are my opening comments, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to questions from the members in the Assembly. I will make the commitment that if I don't have all of the answers tonight or don't get them to you, I will do as I have done in the past. I will make sure I have them back to the members of the Assembly, to the committee very quickly, and I think I've shown in the past that has been usually within a 10-day time frame to answer questions, depending on the volume. So I welcome questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's interesting going through the budget of the Ministry of Government Services, considering that this is the first budget out and the first ministry of its kind. I go through the goals. I'm going to start with a different number and read goal 3, "a fair and effective marketplace in Alberta with a high standard." Then I hear the minister say that it's one window, working with seven different departments to make things better for Alberta.

I'd just like to start off by saying that I remember my first bill in this House, an omnibus bill on registries, and that was back in the spring of 1997. Then there was Bill 16 and bills 9 and 10. Of the things that we pointed out at that particular time, a couple of cases have come back and haunted the department. One was an employee that wanted to find out about a Suburban car to buy, a few things like that. So we have to be careful. As you say, things have to be monitored.

The major announcement this year was the reduction in a number of service fees. This is really in response to a Supreme Court case in Ontario and a decision that required user fees to be in line with the cost of services being provided. As I started to go through all these different things and looked at \$60 million in reductions in the user fees and charges announced in the budget, it proves once and for all that the Premier and his government broke the promise. And it isn't just this Premier. That goes back to 1964. It is a broken promise not to increase the tax burden on Albertans, and it is about 73 times that it actually happened.

Now, for the minister's information, on one of the questions she can go back and check with the department. When we FOIPed to get some information on registries and so on, I got 12 pages of this: the figures on one side blanked out all the way through. This is another item. You know, we get slammed in here about FOIPing, but the fact is that this is the only way we can actually find out information. I believe that even with the study being done or being looked at by the Member for St. Albert, I probably would ask the question to the new minister: how many of these are taxes versus user fees? In one of your answers tonight you can state probably yes or no: will you give any information back to us except for what has been FOIPed and whited out on these particular sheets?

Looking at user fees and registries since 1964, under land titles in 1964 and 1965 – and I know that was a Socred government – they collected \$2,465,772 versus \$49,993,000 in 1997-98 under this present government, one heck of a big jump. Personal properties went from \$104,686 in '74-75 up to \$11,198,000 last year. Motor vehicles: same thing; \$36 million in 1974 versus almost \$185 million this past year. You know, these figures are astronomical.

8:21

As I read through, under goal 4 it states: "a streamlined, effective, and relevant regulatory environment." It also states, as I'm reading the mission statement, that there's going to be lots of follow-up,

yearly follow-up and so on. I wonder if people that would actually be going in to register for something are going to realize that there is going to be this follow-up. Are they going to give their permission? Are they going to be blindsided if they get a phone call two weeks later, a month later on this follow-up? What is the follow-up actually for? If it's for the ministry, if it's following up on whether there is any wrongdoing, I totally agree with it.

Regarding performance measures for customer satisfaction, how will the consumer be selected for contact? This is going back to what I'm asking. Are most people going to be called back after two weeks or a month, or is it going to be random? Will they be advised that they may be contacted at a later date for follow-up on this initial point of contact? If the survey is contracted out, how will the minister deal with a consumer who does not want a private contractor to know they have contacted the ministry with a particular question? What if many of the consumers do not give their names and numbers? How will these be followed up? Will the yearly survey only look at consumers who contact the minister's office? Will there be an information campaign encouraging people to contact the ministry for advice and information? Which point of contact will be included in this survey?

One that's really striking is: what would the minister consider an effective measure to replace the ineffective status reports and three-year achievement statistics? Will the minister consider establishing a new measure?

Going through the highlights for 2000-2001: "development of a 'one window to government services' initiative." That is fine and dandy, but how many people actually own electronic systems in Alberta? That is, how many are on the Net, and how many of those actually know how to do it? I'm noticing that there are lots of references here to electronics and electronic systems. Will more resources be added in areas if the 95 percent target is not reached?

Madam Minister, the only way user fees and charges have gone in Alberta over the past seven years is up. Between '92-93 and the present, 1999-2000, user fees and premiums and charges increased by \$290 million, or 28 percent. You say that you're reducing that by \$60 million. In referring to the \$290 million that it has gone up, I'm still wondering whether it's going down.

I look at some of the figures in here and how greatly they have fallen, and that's anywhere from 33 percent in some cases to 90 percent in other cases. There are some cases where you're having it for life. That hasn't changed, and I understand that totally. You take a look at this, and it's not hard to see where you can come up with savings all the way through. I'm wondering why it can't be higher than the \$60 million in just looking at the way these ratios have changed.

You get a lot of cases. You've got the certificate of incorporation and the certificate of continuance under section 181 of the Business Corporations Act. They have dropped from \$300 to \$100. Those are the old government fees and the new government fees. The certificate of revival: \$300 to \$100. The certificate of continuance under section 261 of the Business Corporations Act: \$300 to \$100. Under a search for each corporation, you have areas like \$10 plus \$1 per page down to \$5 for the whole file, if I understand the whole file by the word "file." A printed search for each corporation: \$10 to \$1. That's astronomical. We've got a 90 percent change in that particular item.

Will the minister please provide actual costs of services prior to the reduction in fees and since the reduction in fees for the following fees under the Alberta companies regulations: certificate of incorporation, certificate of amendment, certificate of restoration? In most cases there's a 50 percent difference, in other cases 60 percent. The printed search for each corporation: \$10 to \$1.

Will the minister please provide an actual cost of service prior to the reduction of fees and since reduction in fees for the following fee reductions under the Co-operative Associations Act? Here are cases where we're falling: certificate of amalgamation, from \$300 to \$100; certificate of revival, from \$300 to \$100; certificate of status, from \$25 to \$5. These are nice figure changes for Alberta's economy and for people's money to stay in their own pockets. When they are dealing with a provincial government, these should show Albertans that there is a major change in take-home money or money that has stayed in their pockets.

Will the minister please provide the actual costs of service prior to reduction in fees and since the reduction in fees for the following fee reductions under the Partnership Act? This particular one is a major case of dropping: filing a certificate of limited partnership, from \$150 down to \$50; filing a notice of amendment certificate, from \$50 to \$15. In most cases I can go on. As I went through and put this together, there was a considerable difference, and I'm appreciative of that.

Can the minister please provide an actual cost of service prior to the reduction of fees and since the reduction of fees for the following reductions under the Cemetery Companies Act: the certificate of incorporation, from \$50 in the old government fees down to \$10 in the new? This goes back to another bill that I believe we had last spring. This is very reasonable and timely to help people in the case of death and so on.

How many user fees in the Alberta registries are direct or indirect taxes? That is my number one question.

What about the DAOs? Where's the preliminary report from Treasury that the Treasurer promised? This goes back to the fact that if there is a study by the Member for St. Albert, we also hear rumours that it'll be buried in the Treasury Board and not actually see the light of day.

MRS. NELSON: Wrong.

MR. GIBBONS: Wrong? Good. I'll wait for the minister's answer on that one, but these are rumours that have been coming out from different sources we do have.

Mandatory preparation of impact analysis statements on all proposed new or increased user fees and charges. This is right around tax cuts.

[Mr. Fischer in the chair]

Mr. Chairman, I could be going on for quite a while, but I'll just sit down and let some of my other members jump up and ask a few questions. I know that one particular question wants to be asked around these particular fees.

8:31

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Madam Minister.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I thought I'd respond to the hon. member's questions as much as I can, and it may help some of the others. He talked about comparing costs of 1964 and 1965 to 1997 and 1998. A lot of us were still in early school, so things have changed dramatically in that time frame. In fact, some of us were really in early school. Earnings and costs were substantially different in 1964 and '65 compared to 1997-98, so there is an anticipation that costs would go up. I mean, I think that back then you could probably still buy a decent house for about \$30,000 in Calgary, a really nice house, and today you're looking at

\$150,000 or more. Things become relative, so the relationship between 30 some odd years or 40 years back is a little bit different, and things would anticipate it.

Now, insofar as the hon. member asking about customer satisfaction and surveying and trying to see if in fact the services that are being presented through the various outlets are meeting the satisfaction levels that are expected by the consumers, i.e. Albertans. There are a number of ways you can do that, through card surveying at the outlet site itself or through random telephone surveys, which are quite often used. But one thing that's kind of unique about registries is that almost every Albertan visits them at some time or another throughout the year for one type of application or another.

You get people who visit those on a regular basis – and one is shaking her head. You never get a driver's licence or a licence plate, ticket, or anything like that? You have no reason to go there? A lot of people do go in. So we can do surveying, and actually the surveying that we've had, quite frankly, has been extremely successful. It's important for us to know that there's customer satisfaction, because if changes have to be made through our agreement with the registry agents, we would move forward to do that.

The other thing is we keep track, and for the hon. member's own riding of Edmonton-Manning we have a log on all of the calls that come in, for everybody, so he gets an idea. Through our call centre we keep track of this so that we can see if there are trends and complaints, and from September 1 of 1999 we had people from the constituency of Edmonton-Manning phoning and talking to us about the natural gas direct marketers, concerns with that, and we dealt with those. We had a lot of people from that riding talk about how they can access courts and other agencies, so we were able to give direction and send people to the right places to get the right information. We had people that were having contractual disputes that phoned in and wanted to know how they could deal with those things. We had people that talked to us about time-shares. We had people that talked about evictions. We keep track of this, and we do this on a geographical basis.

This tracking system is fairly well perfected now. I think it's an interesting thing for members of this Assembly to be able to call and ask: what kind of calls are coming in from my constituency? Now, we probably won't do this more than once or twice a year because it's quite time consuming to run it off, but it's interesting. It gives you an idea of some of the different issues that are in different jurisdictions and different locations, and then we as an Assembly can deal with those issues. So the tracking system is working because we're able to identify some of the areas.

Housing inquiries were another concern that came out of that riding, along with residential tenancy issues. They all come through the information call centre, and we're able to deal with them with a real live person answering a question and giving information. They deserve to have that information, and they need to know it right now. These are issue-based calls that they want information on. Most of it is probably straight information, and they're not too sure where to go to get it.

I'd say to hon. members that if you ever want to have a frustration, go to the telephone book. In Calgary it's the blue pages and I think it's probably the blue pages in Edmonton as well that list government offices, the three levels of government. None of them are different.

We did a little test. We weren't picking on anybody. We truly were not. We went off-site, and we made 50 random phone calls to numbers that are listed there for various and sundry delivery points. Most of them had the voice-activated response. You phone in. You have a question; you want an answer. It says: if you want this, push 1; if you want that, push 2. You go all the way up to 9, and you

can't remember what 1 to 5 were, and you're frustrated. And then you get another one where actually you get voice mail: "I'm sorry; I'm not in the office right now," or "I'm on the phone. Please leave your number, and I'll get back to you," or "Push zero and somebody will come on," and you maybe then get their voice mail, "I'm sorry; I'm not at my desk now," and it goes on and on. We had calls that were transferred five times and no voice. No voice at all. Or it says, "Leave your name and number, and I'll get back to you." Well, when? In an hour? Four hours? Three days later? Are you supposed to stand by your phone and wait for that call to come? That to me is not service.

By having this call centre and the ability for Albertans to be able to phone and actually have someone pick up the phone and our being able to track that – I think Albertans deserve that. I think it's rude to have these voice mails on. I think it's inconsistent with offering a service. To me that's a disservice. I'd rather no one answer the phone than to have one of those things come on, quite frankly.

The hon. member also talked about the fees and the changes to them. I'm going to go back again. Alberta is the only province that reacted to the Supreme Court challenge from the Ontario Eurig case. We're the only one that did. I have to say, as much as the hon. member opposite is giggling her little head off over there, that my department worked like slaves last summer and fall to go through the fees that are attached. They went through 94 different fee structures, in fact more than that. But they found that 94 of the fees that were charged through to Albertans were beyond the cost recovery amount. That's what prompted the reduction. Alberta voluntarily agreed to follow the process. Nobody was forced to do that, but Alberta said: let's set the trend; let's do this. Other jurisdictions have swept it under the carpet and run it into their legislation. We did not. We chose to look at them, to look and see what was cost recovery, what in fact were the costs attached to charging those fees and those services, and that's what came out in this budget.

Now, when you're going to provide a service, naturally there's a cost attached to that, Mr. Chairman. While this was a budget document, I think it's important. This may be trivial to the members opposite, but in our office it is not. People worked to do this and to back up the costs that were justifiable for all of these different fees and charges. There are not very many governments that actually have a process or a service that they provide where there's no charge at all – no charge at all – not even a nickel.

8:41

When you look under the Business Corporations Act, filing an annual return prior to this review cost \$10. Today there is no charge. A certificate of dissolution was \$50. Today there is no charge. Appointment of a receiver was \$20. Today there is no charge. Printing and searching each corporation used to be \$10. Now it is \$1. We brought these costs down to the bare minimum to recover our costs, and that's what's in this report. If you go to the Alberta companies regulations, again filing an annual return was \$8. Now it's no charge.

I would challenge the members opposite to find another government that has come forward with a plan like this that has actually taken the cost out. Most governments will try to justify why they don't have to do it. They'll build some fictitious amount to put in there. We actually followed through on the commitment that the Premier and the Treasurer made last spring that we would do this job and we would go forward.

I think it's frivolous and unacceptable to myself after I know how hard this department worked with this committee chaired by the Member for St. Albert to do the job, and I think it's unfair for the members opposite to make fun of this and to belittle something that

is actually quite serious. I know that Albertans will receive the benefit of \$55 million going back to them. Most governments increase costs. This one is reducing them.

Those are my comments, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Manning, please.

MR. GIBBONS: I was already there.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry.
Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Well, there's an enthusiastic crowd waiting to respond to the minister. We're having to arm wrestle each other for the opportunity to get up.

You know, I have to admire this minister's absolutely rock-solid, unshakable belief in what she is doing. It is an admirable quality.

MRS. NELSON: I'm a believer.

MS BLAKEMAN: You are.

Now, the system of faith and belief is based on different things, and sometimes there's a factual variance in them. While I admire the minister's unshakable belief that this government has out of the goodness of their heart done something of great benefit to the population, the truth is that the Eurig decision said that you must reduce these fees or be able to justify that this is the cost of the service. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood is positively chafing at the bit to address that particular section of the minister's comments, so having stated that very briefly, I will go on to my questions.

This is an interesting portfolio, and despite the best efforts of the minister to explain it, I have a couple of questions about the goals and the setup for this. The first goal is "a common portal ('gateway') so Albertans receive the services they deserve." The minister was talking about best practices, and I notice that's part of one of the strategies that's in here. My questions are: can the minister provide examples of other systems like this, even close to this, even partly what they're trying to do, that exist in other places? I'm just wondering how well this idea in fact works and if there were any examples the government was able to look at to see what worked and what didn't.

One of my concerns about this system – and I have seen this sort of kick in in some other similar but also different systems – is the idea of homogenization. When you were able to phone, let's say, a government department in the old days, you got someone who worked in that department every day. They knew the ins and outs of what was going on. They knew the specifics of the problem. They may have even heard of a similar issue or problem that had been raised before. They knew how to work their way through the system and who to phone in their own department and go, "You know, I've got somebody on the phone, and they're asking about this thing," and it's not very common or perhaps there's a slightly different twist on it that isn't that usual.

One of my concerns about this one-stop shopping is that it gets so generic that you are unable to get the specifics of the information you're looking for. You've got a call centre; you've got a great big barn of a place with 100 or 200 or 300 people sitting in there with their little StarSet telephones on answering the questions, and they don't actually work in the department. They don't know all the ins and outs of this. They've been given a sort of manual that says: if they're asking about this, give them this information. That's why I'm asking you: has the minister been able to find examples of a

system like this that is working well or even parts of a system like this that is working well? That's my concern.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

I'll give you a related example, for instance. It's about phoning for pension information. They've now got a cross-Canada system federally, and the strangest things happen here because it's hooked up so that wherever you phone – and this works geographically. If you phone from a certain area of the country, you automatically get sent to a certain call centre in a given region. So if by some reason, and in this case bad luck, you initiated or had your pension or worked most of your life in Winnipeg and you're now retired to Vancouver or Victoria – that's more likely – when you phone Canada pension, you get directed or channeled to the B.C. version of it. Well, I'm sorry; they don't have your file, they don't know how to find your file, and in fact they cannot phone nor can you phone the Winnipeg version of things. So everything gets homogenized and put into this great big melting pot that comes down to some kind of brown goo. You don't get any specific information and any substance.

So I'm not criticizing the system. I'm asking here for what kind of research you did, and can you pull examples for me? Did they do it in New Zealand or India or anyplace else where they've been able to address some of these problems and conquer some of the problems we know happen already?

The minister spoke about testing, and I'm wondering. Many years ago I had a job as a 411 operator in Calgary, and our calls used to be monitored. They were automatically pulled out of the lineup, and someone would be listening in. Now I notice – I phoned something the other day, and as I waited, listening to the Muzak and tapping my foot, there was a little electronic voice that came on and said, "Your call may be monitored to ensure quality service," which I think is the same system. The calls get pulled out of the electronic lineup and drop into the monitoring cycle, and someone listens in, one presumes to make sure that the service provider is answering the problems accurately and has treated the customer with respect and that sort of thing.

So I'm just wondering: what's the testing system that you're looking at? Is it one of those electronic pull-offs that I'm describing here? I know that with the telephone company, they actually used to post the results. They would post a transcript of a telephone conversation once a week, I think, and you sort of had to pass by this bulletin board in the coffee room and look and see. It didn't identify who the operator was, but you could read the conversation and figure out if it was your call and you'd made the mistake. It was almost like the way they do baseball games. There's an error, and there's a mistake. No, I'm using the wrong terms. In baseball you can make a small mistake and a big mistake, and that's how they were doing it there. One of them's an error and the other's a . . . Okay; no baseball fans here. Right. Anyway, I'm wondering about that.

The second goal, "excellence in service development, delivery and accessibility." Now, the minister and I had worked together to address concerns that were raised by a small business operator in my constituency, and I'm looking at "consult with the survey community and other key stakeholders to identify improvements for the digital plan registration process." I'm hoping this is still going to be happy news for my small business operator.

8:51

MRS. NELSON: It's still going to be.

MS BLAKEMAN: Okay. Good. The minister can respond to me about that.

The minister had said something about this goal being "excellence," and then in describing it at a later point the minister had talked about, you know, number one here was the bottom line. I often find that there is in fact a conflict or there's a competition; you can end up with competing factors between excellence and the bottom line. Those two things don't always work hand in hand in partnership very well. So how is the minister planning on addressing this? Because if you're going to shoot for excellence, in many cases that's excellence at any cost. You deliver absolutely the best service, but that does cost money. On the other hand, if you're going for bottom line, you don't usually get excellence. You have competing factors here, and I'm wondering how the minister foresees overcoming that conflict, the almost polarities in those two objectives.

Once again I'm wondering about the privacy issues around the registries. I know that the minister is interested in doing surveys, and in our never ending struggle to protect the personal privacy of people, we know we've had issues around the registries. I'm assuming that the department has continued the work started when the registry section was under Municipal Affairs to try and address those privacy problems that showed up and where people's privacy was being contravened.

I guess the other question is how has that survey, you know, when people walk in – the minister was talking about how lots of people or most people go into the registries to renew their driver's licence or their registration. I try really hard not to, to renew my registration. They do send me a little notice in the mail, and if I get right on it, I can send my cheque and all it costs me is 46 cents. I never have to go anywhere. To me, if I end up in a registry, it means that I haven't done my bookkeeping or my bill paying very well, and I'm now behind and I'm late. The thought of running into a registry to get my snowmobiles and my car reregistered or renewed and then getting nailed for a survey by some helpful young person standing there . . . I don't know about the time allotment that's really been required there. So I'm wondering: what is the minister foreseeing around these surveys?

I get so excited when I make my notes, Madam Minister, that I have trouble later reading them. [interjection] No. It's just that my handwriting is so bad. Okay. On to the next one.

It's really interesting when I look at the number of ministries that have now been sort of torn apart and then put back together in different configurations in this government. I have noted a couple of times that in some instances we're now dealing with superministries. I don't know that that's appropriate to say about Government Services. I don't know that it's become a superministry, but it certainly has taken a number of very clear divisions or branches that were in other places and pulled them together here. I have to say, as a member of the Public Accounts Committee, that it's getting hard to follow an audit trail on this. I believe, from what I've seen in the way the numbers are presented in this ministry's budget, that there is a recognition that these entities existed before somewhere else and that that is reflecting itself.

I'm just underlining that, I guess, more than anything else because in some of the other departments that's not true. The way the statements are presented, it's as though everything was always there, but it wasn't. And if you're trying to follow an audit trail, if you're trying to follow comparisons on behalf of the public, that gets really difficult when things have come from other places and there's no reckoning of that. So as a general observation to government, I think that should be followed to be better reflecting that things have come from somewhere else or have gone to somewhere else and have been pulled out of a department.

Around the user fees, when does that kick in, Madam Minister? I just did the renewal on my two snowmobiles and my car. Once

again, how is the administrative fee different if it's an administrative fee on renewing registration on vehicles? Why is there a difference? I think I paid 40 bucks a snowmobile and 50-something dollars, \$58, for the car. If this is an administrative service, there should be no difference between the snowmobile and the car. Yeah, they're bigger vehicles, sure, but as far as administrative processing there shouldn't be a difference there. I just renewed this. My renewal date is the end of March, and like a good citizen I of course have already renewed and paid for that well in advance. So I'm just wondering when that is going to kick in, because it sure didn't affect me this year.

Under goal 3, "a fair and effective marketplace . . . with a high standard of business conduct," I notice there's a strategy to

- continue to work and consult with key stakeholders to review and amend current legislation [under the]
- Co-operative Associations Act
- Charitable Fund-Raising Act and Regulations
- Residential Tenancies Act and Regulations.

Now, the last two were of great interest to me, of course, because I come from the charitable sector and I still represent a number of them in my shadow portfolio of Community Development. So I'm asking what changes are anticipated by the minister to the Charitable Fund-raising Act and also what changes are anticipated to the regulations. Of course, being a representative of the downtown area, I have an extraordinary number of people that live in rental apartments, and the Residential Tenancies Act is an oft-used piece of legislation in my office. So I'm looking again for what sorts of changes are being contemplated there.

The person on the phone. You know, the minister spoke passionately of her belief in having a live person answer the phone. I just find it interesting that we've gone from always having a live person answering the phone to, in cost cutting and supposed efficiencies, electronic systems where almost everybody is on some sort of electronic voice mail. Now we're going back to having real people answer the phone again. I remember that Toffler, I think it was, in a futuristic book coined the phrase high tech, high touch, in which when the world got high tech enough, people would really crave the high touch, which is much more of the human contact and kind of warm, fuzzy feelings. So I'm interested that we've sort of come back to that again.

I don't think it's a bad thing in this particular department to have a human being answering the phone, but I loop back to the point I was making earlier. Is this person really going to know all the ins and outs and intricacies of everything that's happening in all the things they're covering? I suspect there's going to be a problem there, so how do you handle it? Do you end up with sort of experts that are there, and the intake worker can send them over to your expert on the Residential Tenancies Act that's sitting in the call centre and that person takes over the phone call? Or what's anticipated there?

Key performance measures. I've become a convert to these key performance measurements, and I'm really interested in the development of strong key performance measures and measuring the outcomes and the development of all that because I think if used well it can be a very valuable process. But I've seen a number of times in this government where I think I could fairly and rightly accuse them of tailoring the performance measurement to fit whatever the department was doing at the time.

9:01

I have some questions about what's being set out here. In the first performance measure/indicator "three separate groups of Registry customers are surveyed for customer satisfaction." Could we get a bit more specific on that? What are we measuring here: satisfaction

with the time in which they were served, or how long it took to answer the phone or someone to come to the counter? Are we measuring how long it took to process their application? What's the satisfaction? Is it with the efficiency of how it was handled? Because things can be handled instantly but they can be done wrong, you know. So are we balancing that? Are we looking for customer satisfaction in the cost? Now, those are three very different areas, so what is the key performance measurement here?

Then we've got the "percentage of investigations which are successful." Successful how? Successful in that they were accurate, or successful in that they were completed? Isn't what is of more interest in better service for the department dealing with the ones that weren't successful? Why weren't they as successful? What went wrong? If these are the key performance measures, I would ask the minister to review this again, because I don't think they're going to be very helpful in actually giving the ministry information on how to analyze and evaluate what they're doing. Because, again, investigation . . .

Oh, I can't be finished with my time.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre raised the gateway project, because this is my pet project right now. I'm really excited about the project, because I think it's long overdue. It came as a result of a number of frustrations, quite frankly, that I experienced and constituents experienced in getting information from government. You're quite right with some of the cautions that you brought forward as to not having it – you used the term homogenized, and you're quite right. People don't want to have the handoff. If they take the effort and they take the time to make the phone call, they want the answer to the question, and they want information that is usable. They don't want something they can pick up off a newsstand. They want accurate information, or why would they make the call in the first place? It's quite often, I've found, that when you phone not necessarily government offices but someone and ask for information, they treat you like an idiot for asking the question in the first place. That's not acceptable. That's not service. To me that is pushing someone off to the side as if they should never have made the call in the first place.

So when we started looking at this – and my deputy will know – when I was in my other ministry, I banned the use of voice mail during the day. I thought it was unacceptable for the shareholder, Albertans, to phone a government office and not get someone answering the phone. After hours that's fair game, but if you're going to work for the shareholder who is the voter, who pays the bills, pays the taxes, then you darn well work for them during office hours or you call forward to someone else, if you have to leave your office, to pick up the phone. But to phone an office and have someone say, "I'm sorry, I'm not at my desk right now" or "I'm on the phone," well, couldn't the phone just have been busy? Or don't answer it; do nothing. But to have something like that come on during office hours I think is inconsiderate, it's rude, and it's lack of service.

I find the same with the banking system. I get fed up with never getting any information. They treat you as if you're an idiot. If you don't deposit with them, they don't exist, but all of a sudden it's reversed.

So service to me has been something that has been lacking and we've let slip. In a number of areas we've let service slip and we've forgotten who the customer is or who the client is or who the

shareholder is or who's paying the bills. We've taken a different approach.

Now, you're right. We're back to recognizing what is important, what must be delivered. Naturally, you have a very valid point. The Department of Government Services cannot be the expert for all ministries. We would never expect to be nor do we want to be; (a) we don't have the background, and (b) we don't have the staff to do it. So the way you link this, the key to this, is that you have each department – it's like a spoke – provide the person who answers the questions that would have done it all along but on a direct basis.

My ministry cannot possibly answer questions in health or over in Infrastructure. We don't have the depth of the policy background for that ministry to give the answer to the call coming in. So instead of the call going to that department, they're linked into the central call centre and the person from their ministry will answer the call. The backup of the detail, if it's more personal, detailed, and long-term, if that person can't take the call, flips immediately to their policy person, not to my department person. We're not in a position to take those calls, but through the central call centre we have that link in. It's like a spoke of the person from that department and that department and that department is tied right in. I don't even have to physically move them into the department location. I can link them electronically into the call centre so that when the call comes in, if it's general information, it can be answered. If it's Infrastructure, boom, the person is on the phone. If it's detailed, on a personal basis, which needs long-term attention, then it goes to the policy person where it should go the first time, and that department person would say which one will handle it. You can't expect my department to be able to do that, but we can have that link with a voice right now, and it's fast.

Through CD disc with data information on: where do I get a health care card? A lot of the calls are general information: how do I get this form; where do I go for that? That can all be put on our CDs.

In fact, our call centre that we opened in the summertime to start this off – now, they'll never let me do this again. I went over and manned the phones one afternoon, and they pretty much fired me. Calls came in from all over, and I got to answer some of the calls. I know at one point I had a call come in that was from one of the northern communities and had to do with a rent-to-purchase situation. This young lady had gone into a rent-to-purchase situation in a mobile home park, and I took the call. I thought, well, that sounds great. But after three days she had been evicted. So, of course, I said: "Well, what did you do in three days? You can't do something that bad in three days," which wasn't what I was supposed to say. Anyway, she told me she'd moved the boyfriend in, and I said, "Oh, well, is there a rule that says he can't be there?" Well, apparently he'd been kicked out. I simply said, "Is he worth it?" She said no. I said: "Then you've answered your own question. Throw him out and stay in the park and that's it." I got accused of being Dr. Laura, so they don't let me answer the phones anymore, which is probably a wise choice. Anyway, she was delighted with the answer, because she came up with it herself. But it works. Now they don't let me on the phones anymore, and I was only allowed on for one day.

But it was the ability of these people to call from all over the province to one number and have somebody pick the phone up, somebody to help them with that information. Now, we had a couple of calls come in that required a lot of in-depth work with them because there was a legal consideration there, so they had to go to the next person behind me that had that kind of information.

9:11

You asked us: where did we dream this up? Well, we looked at

other systems, quite frankly. We looked at the centre link system from Australia that had some components that worked well, but it really didn't do the job that I thought we should be looking at. The whole job. I mean, the components are great. We looked at the Ontario system. We looked at the New Brunswick system and Manitoba's, and they had parts, but this new concept we are putting in in Alberta is a concept that's coming from here that is combining a whole lot of ideas into one component.

Now, we've had a research project going on for the last few months in co-operation with Innovation and Science to see – because one of the things you want to do is: you have to find out what you have already. What kind of hardware do we have, what do we have for availability of resources, et cetera, in departments. You don't want to run out and spend a gazillion dollars on a bunch of hardware on a system that may or may not work. We had to find out: what do we have? Where can we go? What's the cost factor? Can this link occur? Is there a willingness and a readiness within ministries to in fact do that? And sometimes the answer is no. Turf protection.

So you're breaking down barriers. You're breaking through tradition and trying to break those walls down. Some don't like it; others think it's great. You're going through those stages which are sometimes like running the bases and dragging a hairy to get it done, but it is coming together. I think we will have this project in place this next while, and our research project should be complete this month, my deputy says. It'd better, now you're committed, Roger. It'd better be done this month. That will give us the hard core on what the links are and the capabilities of doing that.

I think, quite frankly, that in talking to people, people don't like being treated as if they don't count. They want to have service. I know I do. I get fed up with the idea that I don't matter to these groups when you phone some place. I've phoned all three levels of government, and I think, quite frankly, that it's an abysmal effort. I don't know why people would bother because they don't get anywhere. I've phoned banks, stores – I get so fed up. I refuse to work with answering machines. I just think they're absolutely rude.

MR. DICKSON: Now you know how the opposition feels.

MRS. NELSON: Well, phone your own office. Actually take the time and phone your own office. Find out if anybody answers your constituency office. Find out. It's a rude awakening, folks. People deserve better than that, so hopefully this project will do it, and I think you'll be pleased with the results. I'm quite excited about it because it's something different, and it's not a copy. The others didn't quite do the job.

I wanted to say that the hon. member mentioned also some of the things . . . [interjection] You're right. This department is a linkage between a whole bunch of things that have come together, and we've tried to provide a tracking system as to where they came from. Sometimes it's a little overwhelming with the number of statutes that are in the ministry or under our jurisdiction. Some of them were a little difficult to understand.

I just thought very quickly, Mr. Chairman, that I'd just read these names in so people know what we have, because under Alberta Registries there's the Agricultural and Recreational Land Ownership Act. We've dealt with that today. There's the Business Corporations Act, the Cemeteries Act, the Change of Name Act, the Dower Act, the Companies Act, the Garagemen's Lien Act, the Land Titles Act, the Law of Property Act, the Marriage Act, the Partnership Act, the Personal Property Security Act, the Possessory Liens Act, the Religious Societies' Land Act, the Societies Act, the Vital Statistics Act, the Warehousemen's Lien Act, the Woodmen's Lien Act.

Under consumer services there's the Cemeteries Act, the Charita-

ble Fund-raising Act, the Condominium Property Act, the Co-operative Associations Act, the Debtors' Assistance Act, the Fair Trading Act, which is the new one that combines seven acts into one, the Franchises Act, the Funeral Services Act, the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act, the Real Estate Act, and the Residential Tenancies Act. So, Mr. Chairman, there's a lot. There are 29 statutes in this ministry, which is a lot of variety in one ministry. It is busy, and it has drawn things from all over.

The other thing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre commented on was the protection of privacy with registries. You're bang on. Under our Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation we are obligated as a government to ensure that certain elements of privacy protection are there for Albertans. Now, since being in this ministry, I've had people phone and say: oh, well, just print me everything you have. Yeah, in a pig's eye. Not is the answer; you're not going to get it. There is a law in this province that says no, so we have to make sure. That's why we're still involved with our registries and our vital statistics and our land titles information. There's information in there that is just not going to be made available, and there's no debate or discussion.

We often get people phoning saying: well, give it to us and we'll look after it for you. Well, that's great. Thanks for the offer, but it's not happening because it would be against the law. We are not allowed to give that information out, so it's not going to happen. In our arrangement with our registries it's very clear. It's very clear in the partnership agreement we have with registry agents what can or cannot occur.

So your comments are very well taken, and I appreciate them, because you're on the same path and agree with what it is we are doing, and . . .

MS BLAKEMAN: Careful. That's a bit of a leap.

MRS. NELSON: I beg your pardon. [interjection] Well, I think what you've said is actually the way we – I look at your riding with the calls that have come in, and you're right. You have some keen interest.

Residential tenancy acts are important to you, and hopefully as we track calls, we'll be able with this new system – we've been testing a lot of stuff on this – to say to you: "Member for Edmonton-Centre, here are some of the issues in your area. Let's compare them to the next riding, not to pick or choose or anything else, and see if there's a trend developing." Lets try and use that information effectively.

You know, when I looked at my own riding, I found that the people that had called in from Calgary-Foothills had different concerns, and that's probably because of the location of the riding and the demographics within that riding. So it's an interesting trend.

See, we try to track by postal code, and as we get more information, it will be, I think, something we can all use. My intention would be, then, to send these to everyone so you can have an idea of what's there, not just this side of the House or that side but everyone. We haven't quite got it down to a science yet, but I think this information could be valuable. If you want to use it, go ahead. If you don't, that's up to you. Our system is allowing us to do that, and we're tracking it.

Now, I have a note here from my deputy on the Charitable Fund-raising Act, but if I could read his writing I'd be absolutely dangerous. So could somebody else tell me what we're doing with that act right now, because I can't read his writing. I'll get back to you on that one.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks Mr. Chairman. I have a number of questions for the minister, and I'm going to be going back and forth between the business plan and the budget.

The first item I'd draw the minister's attention to is on page 132 in the business plan, bullet three: "Adapt and implement new information access standards for all services provided by AGS so that they reflect fair business practices." Mr. Chairman, I know what fair information practices are that have their genesis in the OECD privacy guidelines. I don't know what "fair business practices" have to do with information access standards. I don't know if that's a misnomer. What I'd like is an explanation. I don't know what this means. There is huge interest worldwide, Europe and Quebec and other Canadian provinces, about fair information practices that underlie Bill C-6 at the federal level and other things, so I'm really not clear where the minister is going.

9:21

It then leads me into the second question I have for the minister. Mr. Samoil may have moved on, but he ran a thing called the chief information council. This was a very high-powered group of men, some of the most senior men in the government of the province of Alberta, that looked at information management, at how to sell information, at how to be able to take advantage of technology and market information that was within the possession of the government of the province of Alberta.

To me there's a really puzzling thing, and maybe my question should be directed to Mr. Elzinga or whoever was responsible for the creation of the new departments. What I need from the minister is an understanding of what protocols, formal or informal, what understandings, formal or informal, exist to differentiate what the FOIP office in the Department of Municipal Affairs does, what the information management component of Government Services does, and what the chief information officer and the chief information council do. Madam Minister, through the chair, there are huge areas of overlap just looking at the plan here.

I've looked through the material from the chief information council, and I certainly study the material that comes through the FOIP section of the Department of Municipal Affairs, and I can tell you that there's lots of overlap. I know that you don't want duplication. So I'd like to see what the protocols are, what the boundaries, divisions, what those lines are to ensure that we don't have three different government offices falling over each other, all busying themselves dealing with government information. That would undermine the very thesis the minister is putting forward in terms of why her department exists and what its purpose is.

Related to that, I refer the minister to the budget, page 198. We have a number of things there. The first bullet under Mission: "Provide a secure, high-quality, and innovative gateway to a wide range of government services, including consumer information." Then if you look under Business Plan Goals and Major Strategies, page 198, second bullet: "Continue to streamline . . . access to government information through 'one-window access.'" I mean, one-window access always sounds great, but if we look at what's going on here, what's clear is that we're once again duplicating services.

You see, if I were designing department organization – and I'm not. But if I were in Mr. Elzinga's position or whoever came up with the plan, I would have moved FOIP. I would have moved FOIP into Government Services, because it's absolutely consistent with all these other things you're doing. The minister feigns cardiac arrest. She doesn't know how much fun FOIP is.

The point I'm making, Mr. Chairman, is that I would think we'd cluster activities where they appropriately fit together, and the

division, Madam Minister – well, you asked for it; you’ve got it. You want information management; you want one-stop shopping, Madam Minister through the chair, then take it all. Take it all. Don’t take components 1, 3, and 5 and leave 2 and 4 for somebody else to deal with. That undermines the whole thesis of your department’s mission.

I’m looking for some clarification in terms of why FOIP is orphaned. We’re doing all these other things with information management and government information and access and one-stop shopping. There’s a basic lack of logic in that. This minister can’t reorganize the departments, but she can certainly tell me how she’s worked out an efficient way to be able to ensure that there isn’t a gap between the different services and how that fits together.

Let me bridge to the next item. It’s one of privacy issues, an issue that’s a keen concern of mine. I refer the minister to her business plan. On page 128, the second bullet from the bottom, Madam Minister, you talk about one of your challenges being dealing with “consumer and privacy protection.” On page 129, the fourth bullet from the top, there’s “the need to respect both the right to access . . . records and the protection of privacy in the execution of the Ministry’s activities.” Then we go to the budget book, page 198, and lo and behold, there we see reference again in the last bullet to “current consumer issues.”

Well, one big consumer issue is privacy protection. The minister must have heard that. Everybody I know who’s worked at the consumer affairs department, in whatever incarnation it’s been, will tell you that one of the things people raise as a concern is privacy issues. So what I have to understand is what’s being done in that respect.

Then that takes me to a pet issue of mine, and that is: why is it, Madam Minister, that when it comes to Bill C-6 in the federal Parliament, which is going to regulate electronic commerce in this province for every business in this province, the government in this province hasn’t done what Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Ontario and, I think, Manitoba have all done? They’ve had public hearings to allow business people, to allow consumers to find out what the heck is going on in terms of legislation around protecting consumer information, privacy information, and what the impact is going to be of Bill C-6.

I remember telling her, although this minister may not, when she was doing, I think, Economic Development, about the European Union privacy code. You weren’t familiar with it, but to your credit you had checked up on it, and you got some information on it. Well, it surfaces again, Madam Minister, in your new portfolio.

I have to say that there’s been an abject lack of leadership on the part of your government in terms of informing and involving Albertans in this issue and in this debate. I want to challenge the minister. What is this minister going to do in terms of providing leadership, in terms of alerting Albertans and Alberta businesses and Alberta consumers about some of the trends and some of the issues and the impact of that federal legislation and what the Alberta response is going to be to that?

Madam Minister, you haven’t addressed that in your comments. You haven’t addressed it in your business plan or in the budget, but I’d sure like to know. I’ll challenge her to undertake those same public hearings that other provinces have so people find out what’s going on. We have legislation that only deals with the public sector, and that’s a gap that’s got to be remedied.

Now, the minister has teased us tonight by talking about what’s going on in the constituency of Edmonton-Manning. She’s talked about what’s going on in the constituency there. I hope she’s going to share with me the range of concerns in Calgary-Buffalo. My guess is that residential tenancies, safe, affordable housing, is the

number one issue in my constituency. That’s what I determine from my constituency office. I’d like to know if the minister has something different.

I’m going to ask you specifically. Madam Minister, you’ve told us that you’ve gone to a lot of trouble to prepare the information on a constituency basis. Would you tell me why you have done that? We’ve just finished watching Jane Stewart being grilled for two weeks in the House of Commons . . .

MS HALEY: A loss of millions.

MR. DICKSON: No, no. It’s not about the loss of money. [interjections] If you’d let me finish developing . . . [interjections] Okay. Well, don’t jump to conclusion, then, before you have all the information.

9:31

Madam Chairman, the issue is this. What the federal government has been asked is: why do you collect information on a constituency basis? I mean, why wouldn’t you do it on a city basis or on a region basis or northwest Calgary, northeast Calgary, southwest or southeast Calgary? Would the minister share with us on what basis she’s decided to collect information about calls on a constituency basis. I’d be interested in that.

I’d like to ask the minister not just what concerns have been raised in my constituency, but I’m interested in knowing about all 21 Calgary constituencies. I expect my colleagues would like to see what’s going on in terms of Edmonton. I would think, Madam Minister, that you would want to share that information, particularly because it’s been such a big project in your department. So I’ll speak for my colleagues; I can’t speak for the government members. I think my colleagues would like to see that information broken down on a constituency basis. I think we’d also like to see, Madam Minister, your protocols for how you respect sections 37 and 38 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. There are some strictures, some constraints in terms of the use of personal information, and perhaps the minister could just tell us what protocols have been developed to deal with that.

Moving on. The other item, page 133 in the business plan, has to do with residential tenancies, and I come back and say that the number one issue in Calgary-Buffalo is finding safe, affordable housing, a huge, huge issue. Even though there’s a little relaxation in terms of the vacancy situation, it’s still really tight. Now, I remember when the forerunner of your department, the Department of Municipal Affairs I think it was, had undertaken a review of the Residential Tenancies Act with a view to legislative change. There were public hearings, Madam Minister, in Calgary. I went to a couple of them. There were proposals to make some changes. And then it died. It absolutely died. Whether it’s the Calgary Apartment Association, whether it’s tenants in Calgary-Buffalo, whether it’s people in any other part of the province, I think they’d like to know what’s going on with residential tenancies.

We have, arguably, the weakest tenancy protection of any jurisdiction in Canada. I challenge you to tell me what province has a weaker piece of legislation. I’d like to know in terms of rent increases, in terms of condominiumization. Madam Minister, you know Calgary as well as I do. You know that conversions of apartments to condominiums is widespread. Nobody is building low-cost housing, multiple-family housing.

We’re talking about displaced seniors. We’re talking about displaced new Canadians. We’re talking about displaced low-income people. This issue of homelessness may not be your task and your agenda, but residential tenancies plays a huge part. We’re

doing a better job in Alberta looking after people who are absolutely on the street. We're not doing a very good job – in fact, I'd say that in the high-rent areas like Calgary, Brooks, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, we're doing a lousy job in terms of allowing people to stay in apartments. There are a lot of people in this province who are that one rent cheque or one rent increase away from the street. I've not seen very much leadership from the provincial government on this issue, Madam Minister.

You tease us by saying on page 199 of the budget book: "Continue to work and consult with key stakeholders to review and amend current legislation," and part of that is the "Residential Tenancies Act and Regulations." Madam Minister, I'm a key stakeholder. I represent the constituency that has the highest density of any of the 83 constituencies in Alberta. My colleague for Edmonton-Centre challenges me and talks about the number of renters she represents. Something like 92 percent of my constituents are renters. Nobody has asked me to be involved in changes to the Residential Tenancies Act. More importantly, nobody has asked my constituents. So maybe it's time. The key stakeholders here, Madam Minister, are those seniors' organizations, groups of tenants, consumer associations. It isn't just the apartment owners; it's not just the apartment managers.

So you might particularize for me: who are the key stakeholders that you're working with now? What changes are you contemplating to the Residential Tenancies Act? Are you going back to the proposal that had been proposed I think it was four years ago, and that was to abolish the Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board in the city of Calgary, its Edmonton counterpart, and replace it with an industry-run thing? Now, that was torpedoed. That was stillborn. But when I see this vague note here with no backup particulars, I wonder whether that issue has been resurrected and whether we're going to see some change there.

Madam Minister, there is lots of concern in terms of speedy access. The provision is now for people to go to the small claims division of Provincial Court when they want to sue their landlord or a landlord wants to sue their tenant. We've got some major delays here. It's not just the statute; it's the processes available to tenants and landlords. I'd like to know what initiative you're taking, what leadership you're providing in terms of trying to find solutions, how you're working with the Minister of Justice, maybe the Minister of Municipal Affairs to co-ordinate those things. I haven't heard you address any of those things, and I hope I'll get some response before it comes time to vote on this.

Finally, let me turn to my other favourite issue: regulations. You talk about the regulations secretariat. Lord knows, my friend from Peace River is a hardworking MLA, and he's been, you know, slaving away trying to reduce the number of regulations. Full kudos to him. But if you want to aggressively reduce those 700 to 800 regulations that each year are proclaimed in this province, you're never going to do it until you have a body strong enough to challenge ministers and deputy ministers who trot out all the regulations, all the laws that they'd like to make in their empires, until you embrace what virtually every other jurisdiction in North America does, which is some all-party oversight of subordinate lawmaking.

I'm going to challenge you, Madam Minister, because you're a minister with a reputation for not being intimidated by departments and bureaucrats and past precedent. I like to challenge any minister who's as bold as you have been and as fearless as you have been to have a look at . . . [interjections] Well, I'm quite genuine. I've watched this minister in the eight years I've been an MLA, and she's brought that approach to every department she's been responsible for.

I'm going to challenge her to take some of the good suggestions

she's heard from the opposition in terms of regulation management. We can do, you know, as good a job as the Member for Peace River has done. We have the evidence that we can do much better. You don't have to look any further than the FOIP regulation that came in in August, September of 1997 that took a whole bunch of statutes and just by regulation took them out of FOIP for a couple of years, and then another regulation came along. You know, there were weak claims. The Information and Privacy Commissioner was consulted about that. He was critical about some of the decisions that had been made. So we can do a lot better in that respect.

I look forward to working with the minister on those matters, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again I'll try and answer some of the questions. I was quite pleased with the inquiry from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo as to the co-ordination of the IT projects. His comments are quite valid. In the past you saw departments operating as silos, or in isolation, without co-ordinated planning on IT development. That's been a flaw, I think, of most large bureaucracies, that there isn't a co-ordinated planning process to make sure there isn't duplication, overlap, all the things we've all talked about. But when push comes to shove, it's how you eliminate that kind of duplication from continuing to occur and from actually being enhanced. Because when we talk about high tech, it's always easy to say, "We're off to the races, and we're going to replace everything" in isolation as a department instead of as the whole.

9:41

That's why the chief information officer's position becomes absolutely critical in the whole scheme of things. IT plans by department under this restructured program all have to be flowed through the IT chief information officer and through Innovation and Science as the co-ordinating department to make sure that in fact you don't have that duplication and overlap, so that you have co-ordination, so that actually equipment or programs that are purchased today might even be compatible between departments so that they can actually communicate with each other instead of being islands on their own, or in isolation or silos, or whatever the acronym may be for the various departments.

That's not easy, because you know that anytime you make a change, you cause stress and aggression within the system, but as a government we've said that that is the way it's going to be. I sit on the Treasury Board, as you know. I've been there since 1992. When a department comes forward with an IT plan, which everybody has – everybody has an IT plan – the first question that comes up is: what has the chief information officer's program done in review and approval and co-ordination on it? If you haven't hit that, go back to square one, start over, and come through the process, because as you've pointed out, these systems are expensive, and if they're not co-ordinated, you'll never accomplish your goal or your mission.

It's a difficult task, and it's quite amazing how they can go off and create almost lives of their own if left in isolation. A department of a government is no more than a division of a large corporation. There has to be the overall upper-level plan, but the divisions or departments have to fit into that schematic, and they have to be co-ordinated and all going forward.

That's a difficult task. It's a change of attitude, a change of thought, and quite frankly that's not always an easy sell. You talked about me being, I guess, bold in some ways, and that's right, but the expectation of justification is there, because – again, I'll go back to

the comments from Edmonton-Centre—the shareholder is paying the bill, so there has to be an accountability level back to that shareholder, whether it's through IT development, new schematics, regulatory review.

I was most impressed with your comments on regulations. Governments have a tendency to take the book and add, but they don't take anything out. When you put the new one in, you don't take the old one out, and it just goes on and on. That's why, through the regulatory review process that we have, for a new regulation to go into place, it must go through the secretariat, and there's a template that tells you whether it's acceptable or not.

But the key in there is that there has to be a sunset clause. On most regulations coming forward there has to be a sunset clause, which forces review of the existing regulation or it drops off the table and dies. That helps keep the regulation current so that the book doesn't keep building, as happens. I love all my department people and bureaucracy, but sometimes you think people stay up nights thinking of regulations to put in place for the sake of having regulations, and you don't want that. So you've got to put this in place so that that drop-dead date occurs for everything that you possibly can. It drops off the table; it's gone.

Review process is difficult, and it's been a bugbear of mine from the time I was elected that governments put regulation on regulation on regulation, which nobody half the time can understand or interpret anyway. It's costly, it's time-consuming, it's cumbersome, and it's frustrating. So the process of regulatory review through the secretariat is quite fierce, quite frankly, and I think you'll see this year that the hon. member will have more ability on that.

I was a little disappointed. I am not looking at logs for any purpose other than information. I don't have to do this. I mean, I can trash this tomorrow. If you guys don't want the information, say so, and that's the end of that, and it's an exercise we won't be doing. If you'd like the information and if you find it helpful, great; we'll produce it. If not, say so, and our people can do other things. They've got lots of things they can do with their time. They don't need to do this. This isn't an exercise that does anything politically other than provide information. It's data. That's all. [interjection] Well, I'll you what. We just trashed it. It won't be done again, so the instruction is now that we won't be providing that. It's all gone. You don't need that. But if you want it by northern, if you want it by southern, we can do that. We can provide that information. In Calgary we have different issues than in Edmonton, and it's reasonable to look at that. I like to see where information data is going.

MR. DICKSON: We would too.

MRS. NELSON: Well, I offered it, but if you don't want it, that's fine. You don't have to have it.

Now, you asked me what the best business practices and fair information practices are. I think that under the Fair Trading Act there are elements there that are pretty self-explanatory. I think that act is working well. I think that with the co-operation of the number of entities that feed into that Fair Trading Act that is giving us best practices within the province. Where needed there has to be disclosure of information. Sometimes it's voluntary; sometimes it's legislated. There has to be enough information so people know what they're getting into.

The hon. member talked about—what was the other thing? Just a minute. I was just looking for the last one that you asked me about. Oh, I know. I wanted to go back to Edmonton-Centre on performance measures, and I didn't get to you on those. This is a new ministry. We were trying to develop some base performance

measures. I believe in exact performance measures. I don't believe in taking the global or what I call external performance measures and saying that they're my ministry's performance measures, because they're not.

MS BLAKEMAN: It's not useful.

MRS. NELSON: Well, you can include that as an external indicator of successes and how we might fit into that, but we certainly don't create that, so I look at exact ones within our ministry. I call them internal performance measures, what we in fact can exactly do and perform to reach goals, not the external side. We've struggled with that somewhat. We haven't maybe got them as specific as we will, but I think next year's process will give us an ability as to how we can have more specific internal measures. So they aren't as specific as they might be in this business plan, but I think we need that year on the reorganization and on our system development to be able to provide you with more specifics on the performance measures. We're trying to come back with that, and we know there have to be some improvement areas there. I think, Mr. Chairman, one of the hon. members wants to speak.

We will keep you going on that. As we go through this next year in building our business plan and enhancing that, we should have more specific measures in there. It was a good comment, but I don't believe in fabricating performance measures and relying upon external factors as a measurement of performance of a government department. That to me is not reality, so we will be dealing with reality throughout this year's planning process and restructuring model. So I think next year you'll see a little tighter set of performance measures in our business plan.

MS BLAKEMAN: I'd rather see them now.

9:51

MRS. NELSON: I don't blame you. I would too, but because of the restructuring model we're going through, they are a little more general than any of us would probably really want, but they'll get tighter as we go on. Our main objective was to have customer satisfaction, and that was the one thing we would be able to measure through surveying, but we'll come up with some more key performance measures.

Oh, Bill C-6. That was another thing. That's an important bill, and you were right. You did mention that to me. When I chaired the ministers of consumer affairs meeting in the fall, in November I believe it was, in Banff, we raised the issue of Bill C-6 with Minister Manley from the federal government. Well, we all know electronic commerce is going to occur and going to be one of the key methods of doing business and trading in communications for the future. There are some concerns there from the consumer protection side and from the business protection side as to what safeguards are going to be coming into play prior to the full indoctrination of the e-commerce.

MR. DICKSON: We could do our own.

MRS. NELSON: You're quite right.

There was an example in the United States about three weeks ago where actually the FBI got involved with intrusion into the e-mail system, and that sends a signal and the signal is: people be careful. Be careful what you're doing until you know about the safeguards that are in place.

As ministers from across Canada—we compared notes from coast to coast with the other ministers—we said that the message is: what can we put in place to build in those safeguards now?

MR. DICKSON: Provincial legislation.

MRS. NELSON: Well, provincial legislation saying thou shalt be a good person and not do bad things on e-commerce doesn't quite frankly cut it. There has to be more than that. There has to be some concrete protection built in the system. I mean, I can send a message out and say: everybody be nice and friendly and good. Well, fine, but that isn't necessarily going to provide the concrete protection that needs to go into the system to make sure those safeguards are in place.

Some of the things I've found from this ministry quite frankly are shocking. Individuals will go on a system and put their Visa number on a system without any protection on it and then wonder when something goes wrong. Well, you go: "Hello. Wake up." You're putting your credit card number on a system that's going all over to a gazillion people, and you have no ability to know where it's going.

People buying off a system. I had a friend of mine who bought their truck off the Internet. Did he even see it? No. "Well, how do you know it's even going to run?" "I bought it off the Internet." Well, hello. Wake up. A little bit of common sense has to come into this as well.

But how do you put some of those connections in place or the consumer protection that we've had manually into now an automated system? There's been such a promotion of this, but where are the safeguards? Those concerns are very valid, and C-6 is an issue for us. I say that e-commerce is the way of the future, but what are the consumer protection issues? That's what we asked Mr. Manley to work with the provinces on so that we could have a coast-to-coast mechanism of doing consumer protection. We have an ability through the CanShare program to be able to compare bad actions or bad business practices coast to coast. Why would we not be able to put in place a consumer protection process so we could protect consumers coast to coast?

MR. DICKSON: You could do public hearings too.

MRS. NELSON: Well, public hearings might be one way of doing it, Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but I think we need to have something technologywise that we can present at that hearing to provide that kind of protection for the system. I heard people say that at one point you could block some of the information on the Internet, like pornographic information, from your children. Well, that lasts about 20 minutes. The kids are too smart today. They can go in and break the code, and they're into it like right now. We can't because our generation didn't learn how to do that, but the younger generation can sure do it, in about 20 minutes, because they're experts at it.

We have to be ahead of the game here and build some of those tools in place and make sure we also make consumers aware of some of the pitfalls of getting involved in this because it's the thing to do. Well, the thing to do can be a very costly venture, so we have to put warnings out, consumer alerts out, and make sure that when we move forward on this, we do it the right way.

I have to say that the response from the federal government to our suggestion on C-6 was not that warm. It was not that inviting for the provinces to have an ability to join together. In fact, they were a little annoyed that we shied on the side of caution, but I do think we have to stand firm, and we as Alberta were able to get the other provinces onside and alert them to the caution, and they agreed with our position. We didn't get the feds onside, but that's not unusual, so we will have to work in spite of it to come up with some kind of plan. It's a good caution, and I appreciate you being onside with the

concern that's there, because I do share that with you.

Again, on Bill C-6. We have worked actually with the other ministries – federal and intergovernmental affairs, Municipal Affairs, Treasury, Economic Development, and Justice – on the concept of Bill C-6, and we have all taken a message to our counterparts with the federal government and other provinces to say that we have to work on this. So there is cross-government support to err on the side of caution to make sure we don't go out in front on this bill and leave people in jeopardy, because it would be very easy to do. So we have to be careful as to what we do, but I think it's incumbent upon all of us, quite frankly, to also get the message out to people: please, don't just jump on there and give every bit of information you have. There has to be almost a consumer watch. You know, we can put all kinds of rules and regulations in place, but you can't protect people from themselves. You can only give the best advice and the best framework possible, but they have to exercise their own caution and their own restraint from getting involved in some of these things.

Again on the regulatory process. We need to review these regulations and make sure they're co-ordinated. Our secretariat is working. This is a full secretariat now, and they do a very good job looking at every regulation that comes forward. We will keep pushing that, because the objective is to reduce regulations, cut the cost of compliance for people coming to do business with government, and to streamline the process. Your points are well taken. I appreciate them, and if there's a better methodology or process, we're open to some suggestions and we can look at doing that.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I guess I've answered all the questions I can tonight.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to bring a couple of things to the attention of the minister. I wanted to just maybe make the comment that if she's got some people who are really good at regulations in her department, they're going to need those people when they bring in the health bill tomorrow. They're going to need lots of regulations, good regulations. So you keep those people working, Madam Minister, and I'm sure we'll come up with some good regulations for tomorrow.

I wanted to draw the minister back to this whole user fee argument. I'm glad user fees are down, but I guess I'm surprised at the minister and her comments. There's an awful lot of chest thumping in relation to this. I sit back and I want to, if I can, just remind the minister that although there is a reduction in these user fees, some 73 user fees I believe . . .

10:01

MRS. NELSON: Ninety-four.

MS OLSEN: Ninety-four. Let's just reflect back on some of the comments made by the Premier, and let's think about why we're here.

First of all, Madam Minister, you can pound your chest and say: yeah, we did it; Alberta was the first. But you know what? I have a factum here that's been tabled in the Legislature in fact a couple of times. It's the factum of the intervenor, the Attorney General of Alberta, and really what the Attorney General of Alberta was doing was intervening and supporting the position of the Ontario government that user fees should be allowed. Right?

What the questions were – and I'm doing this in relation to this user fee discussion, because I think it's an important part of it.

There were two points of issue, and one was:

Is the probate fee, which was imposed by Ontario Regulation 293/92, which was made under s.5 of the Administration of Justice Act, R.S.O. 1990 . . . invalid on the ground that it is an indirect tax that is outside the legislative authority of the province of Ontario under s.92(2) of the Constitution Act, 1867?

The second issue, Madam Minister, that this whole user fee notion was constructed on was:

Is the probate fee, which was imposed by Ontario Regulation 293/92, which was made under s.5 of the Administration of Justice Act . . . invalid on the ground that it was imposed by a body other than the Legislature of Ontario in contravention of s.90 (incorporating by reference ss.53 and 54) of the Constitution Act, 1867?

I want to draw the minister's attention to what the factum says and what it supports. So really what the government's position was:

On the first question, The Attorney General of Alberta, Intervenor, submits that the probate fee is not invalid as it is a charge in relation to a valid regulatory scheme and as such, is not an indirect tax. In the alternative, it is a fee for service and not an indirect tax.

That's the Alberta factum, Madam Minister.

On the second question the province of Alberta suggested that there has been no contravention of section 90 of the Constitution Act. So it's great to thump your chest, but let's not try to fool everybody and say that you guys were here and this government brought in and reduced these taxes for the sake of Albertans.

Let's talk about that tax reduction. It's somewhere in the area of a 6 cents per day tax cut for the average Albertan, so let's not cloud this issue. Yes, user fees had to go down. You guys put them up, and they had to go down, and you were forced to put them down. In fact, Madam Minister, on the user fee issue the Premier said in *Hansard* on February 14, 1995, that

quite simply these adjustments are to bring user fees in line with the cost of providing the services.

. . . I would say that user fees have been brought in line with the cost of providing the services.

That's from the Premier in 1995. So your government, Madam Minister, has said: hey, you know, this is the cost of service. Wrong, wrong, definitely wrong, and we see that in these charts that you've put out.

The Premier also said again in *Hansard*, on February 15, 1995, that "a fee for service . . . is not a tax. It is not a tax." Guess what the Supreme Court of Canada said? If you don't bring it down to cover cost of service, then you need to bring it to the floor of the Legislature and call it a tax. But this government couldn't do that because they've been telling Albertans that the user fees are not a tax, and in fact the courts ruled differently.

The Premier says again, on March 4, 1996, in *Hansard*, that "fees were adjusted . . . to reflect the cost of providing the services." So, Madam Minister, we're getting a lot of chest thumping, and maybe what the government should have done is put their tail between their legs and run the other way.

The other thing I find interesting, Madam Minister, is that between the time of the Eurig estate decision and February 24, 2000, the Klein government collected \$80 million in additional user fees and charges from Albertans. Instead of freezing those charges, you still collected \$80 million knowing – knowing – that they were taxes or that those fees exceeded the cost of service.

So, Madam Minister, don't pound that chest too hard, because it's just not the way it is. What you say, Madam Minister, and what has been done are two different things. I think that's very important to

bring to this debate, because there are a lot of things that aren't quite true.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to get in two more questions to the minister. Madam Minister, how is the phone system, the one phone call, one-stop shopping – I'm going to deal with the fact that people are human. You will have noticed this in your constituency office. When people phone up, they usually don't have the analysis to go: my problem is X, and I want to know Y. They phone up and start this story about how the cat ate their canary because the birdcage was on the windowsill, and it fell off because the window was open because the landlord had the heat up too high. It's a 20-minute story before you can dig out the fact that they didn't get their pension cheque that week and they're unhappy with their accommodations as a result. So how is the system set up to deal with human frailty? Question number one.

Question number two. As an MLA in this Assembly I would assume that I would be aware of the phone number, the wonderful, magical phone number that will get me access to your new system here, and I don't. Is there some sort of publicity campaign that's going to go around about this? Will the new number be coming out in bold print in the blue pages in the front of the major phone books? How are people supposed to know about this? I mean, I'm glad that I'm in the Assembly tonight and I heard of this. You know how often I have hoped that people would read the *Hansard*, and that way citizens in Alberta would be able to find out about this wonderful new program, but how else are they supposed to hear about that?

So that's the two questions I had. I understand that the minister doesn't have time to respond, and I'm happy to receive the response in writing. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question. Question.

10:11

THE CHAIRMAN: There is no question in subcommittee. What you can do is rise and report progress to the committee.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Chairman, I move that we rise and report progress.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. The hon. Minister of Government Services has moved that subcommittee C rise and report progress to the committee. All those in support of the motion to rise and report progress, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:12 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Economic Development, Wednesday, March 1, 2000

Date: 00/03/01

8:06 p.m.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Subcommittee D – Economic Development

Gordon, Judy, Chairman
Renner, Rob, Deputy Chairman
Amery, Moe
Broda, Dave
Carlson, Debby
Coutts, David
Havelock, Jon

Herard, Denis
Hlady, Mark
Langevin, Paul
Magnus, Richard
Pannu, Raj
Paul, Pamela

Pham, Hung
Sapers, Howard
Shariff, Shiraz
Taylor, Lorne
West, Steve
White, Lance

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the meeting to order again tonight. We're going over the main estimates for the Department of Economic Development. We have approximately two hours, give or take a little bit either side of 10 o'clock, so I think we'll start with the minister for an overview.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It is certainly my privilege to submit for your review and approval the 2000-2001 estimates for the Ministry of Economic Development, which include the department, the Alberta Economic Development Authority, the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council, and Travel Alberta. Today I will briefly report on the state of Alberta's economy and the ministry's plans to continue to foster a positive business climate that is conducive to job creation, growth, and investment in our province. In 1999 our real gross domestic product increased by an estimated 2.8 percent. For this year we are again forecasting strong economic growth with employment expected to increase by 47,000 private-sector jobs. We anticipate the sectors that will lead such growth are the resource-based industries including oil and gas, forestry, and agriculture, as well as further along the value chain into petrochemicals, food processing, and wood fibre. Expansion into new economy industries such as advanced technology and information and communication will also play a large role, Madam Chairman.

Turning to the ministry, our department facilitates economic growth in the province by assessing and monitoring Alberta's business climate to ensure that it remains positive and competitive. It's mission is to promote Alberta's continuing prosperity, and it achieves this through three core businesses: strategic leadership for economic development policy and planning, market development and investment attraction, and tourism marketing and development. The department has three key goals related to these core businesses, being "Alberta has a vibrant and versatile economy," "Alberta's businesses, communities and industry sectors are globally competitive," and "Alberta is a globally competitive tourism destination." But, Madam Chairman, we cannot achieve these goals in isolation; rather we will continue to facilitate economic growth in Alberta through our expanded partnerships with the Alberta Economic Development Authority, the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council, the Travel Alberta Secretariat, business and industry associations, and other provincial governments and departments.

A critical part of our direction, Madam Chairman, is the government of Alberta's new economic strategy released on February 8, which builds on Alberta's strong forecasts and includes a number of targets for our centennial year, 2005. It was developed in collaboration with my colleagues, a number of government departments, the Alberta Economic Development Authority, and the Alberta science and research authority. Entitled *Get Ready Alberta: Strengthening*

the Alberta Advantage, it focuses on our economy's strengths by setting targets to position our province as a leading competitor in the global marketplace.

As part of the strategy, Alberta Economic Development will play a significant role in creating an environment within the province that will by 2005 create 295,000 new private-sector jobs, an increase of almost 20 percent; expand manufactured, value-added products and services as a proportion of Alberta's overall economy; increase Alberta's value-added exports to \$26 billion, up from approximately \$15 billion today; increase tourism revenues to \$6 billion from the current level of \$4 billion and partner with Alberta's tourism industry to deliver marketing programs and support services; maintain a competitive tax advantage and promotion of a positive business climate that stimulates and attracts investment activity; and develop and promote international trade and market opportunities. In addition to the province's new economic strategy, Alberta Economic Development will implement two new initiatives aimed at refining Alberta's presence in the global marketplace. The Alberta international marketing strategy and the Alberta international representation review were based on collaboration with the Alberta Economic Development Authority, various industry stakeholders, and a number of government departments. These strategies recognize government's role as a facilitator and are based on two realities. One, government has an important role in developing and promoting provincial interests internationally, and two, government should identify opportunities for Alberta businesses by focusing on regions and sectors that promise the greatest return.

The first of these two strategies, the Alberta international marketing strategy, emphasizes that in order for Alberta to succeed in the global marketplace, investment in trade activities must be competitive, co-ordinated, and targeted on promoting economic growth and prosperity. That means activities must be directed to make the most of our province's strengths. This is accomplished by identifying key geographic markets and priority sectors and highlighting marketing strategies to ensure that Albertans receive the best return on their investment. In conjunction with this, Madam Chairman, our role is to provide a range of services including market intelligence, market assistance, and opportunity identification. We will also monitor and assess trends for Alberta businesses.

The Alberta international representation review is the second strategy aimed at refining Alberta's presence in the global marketplace. In early 1999 a review process to evaluate Alberta's international representation network concluded that we must be involved internationally and continue to seek global opportunities but that we require a more global presence. This new strategy responds to that report. It is based on significant industry consultation and reflects industry's needs and expectations as they relate to international marketing. It also reflects a different approach to international representation.

[Mr. Renner in the chair]

Alberta's international offices will continue to have a trade and investment focus, as opposed to a protocol function. The managing directors who lead the offices are qualified strategic trade and investment professionals, and we are constantly examining cost-effective ways of establishing our offices, including collocating where it makes sense, and any changes to those offices will be accommodated within existing budgets. More importantly, Mr. Chairman, we will develop performance measurement processes for Alberta's international offices and evaluate them to ensure all our international marketing efforts are functioning effectively. No new offices will be opened before these measures are in place and such evaluation concluded.

Concerning tourism, Mr. Chairman, this industry is critical to Alberta's economic prosperity, generating over \$4 billion annually. Through Travel Alberta we are aggressively positioning our province both at home and abroad to ensure that we remain a top-of-mind vacation destination. To do so, the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council is currently reviewing the performance of this year's strategic tourism marketing plan. Further, a new three-year plan, 2000-2003, should be approved soon.

With respect to the current plan, Mr. Chairman, it focuses on geomarketing in the Americas, proposing the largest campaign in 10 years: Alberta, a multimedia destination awareness campaign aimed at Albertans and Europe, Asia Pacific, where we collaborated with the Canadian Tourism Commission in the U.K. and German markets and launched a new initiative in Japan with two leading travel agencies. The initial results are encouraging, and we will be releasing information relating to such initiatives in the near future. Now I'd like to turn more specifically to the estimates we will be voting on. I'll be very brief. The budget for the department is \$51,236,000. That's gross expense. As you are aware, the revised role of this ministry is solely that of the lead sales and marketing arm for the government. That means the ministry is no longer responsible for the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, the Alberta Opportunity Company, and the Alberta lottery fund. The ministry does, however, as mentioned earlier, continue to work with the Alberta Economic Development Authority and the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council to carry out its role.

8:16

The first program, ministry support services, is responsible for the offices of the minister, whose budget, I might add, has been reduced by \$85,000, and the deputy minister, finance and administration, co-ordination and support for the Alberta Economic Development Authority and its subcommittees, and funding for the standing policy committee on economic sustainability. The total budget for that part of the department is \$5,112,000.

Our second program, marketing and business development, includes policy and knowledge management, investment and trade, and industry and regional development. Its total budget is \$29,189,000.

Our third program is Tourism, which includes marketing support services and development, and it has a total budget of \$16,935,000. Mr. Chairman, that concludes my opening remarks on the estimates of the Ministry of Economic Development. I am certainly now available to answer any questions the members of this committee may have, and I also undertake to review *Hansard* and respond promptly to any questions I may be unable to address this evening. Thank you for your attention.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Before I open the floor to members who wish to address this budget, let me just remind everyone that this room is somewhat more

informal than our normal location downstairs. It's not necessary to rise when you speak, but the rest of the decorum we would normally acknowledge in the Assembly downstairs should be shown in this room. So I would ask everyone to keep that in mind as we progress through the evening.

Hon. minister.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, Mr. Chairman. If I could for the members, I'd like to perhaps suggest a way we could proceed. When I was Minister of Justice and I went through this process, what quite often happened, in particular with members of the opposition, is that they would ask two or three questions, I would try and respond at that time, and then they would go back to more questions, as opposed to, for example, simply listing their questions for 20 minutes and then me trying to respond. I found that created a much less formal atmosphere. We were able to generate a good dialogue, and we were able to respond to questions.

Now, that's just a suggestion. I'll try my best, but of course if anyone here wishes to simply chat for 20 minutes and have me try and respond, that certainly is their option.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That certainly is possible, but as I said, the rules are the same as downstairs. Members are entitled to speak for 20 minutes, and there's nothing the chair can do if they choose to do so. You've made an offer, and I offer that option to any of the members who choose to participate in the discussion.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, it's good to be in and review your budget this evening. It's interesting to note some of the things you said in terms of how your economic development strategy and some of the other things you've talked about this evening pull together. The focus on the international and the expansion of our markets is a much better idea than a lot of the other aspects that have been involved.

I guess what I'd like to do is take you up on your offer of just dealing with one or two questions, get you to answer them, and after I've done three or four, we'll move to somebody else, if that fits fine.

You talked about the idea that you wanted a target of great growth, a very optimistic level of growth in the value-added production from Alberta, up, I think you said, from 15 to 26. As part of your strategy and as part of the way you've looked at how to achieve that, how are you working with some of the other departments like Infrastructure in terms of getting the impact that may be put on the infrastructure of our province in order to facilitate that?

In that same connection, you know, we've had a lot of debate this past year in terms of transportation: what's happening to the railways, rail line abandonment. Are you looking at those kinds of things, as well, as you look at the location and the potential in-province regional development pockets that could exist, the critical masses that could develop for regional development within the province?

MR. HAVELOCK: A good point, hon. member. We have established what's called the Council of Economic Development Ministers, and on that council are the ministers of Infrastructure, Resource Development, Agriculture, Innovation and Science, and a couple of others. We actually work closely together in trying to identify economic issues as they arise. You rightly point out that infrastructure is critical, because for us to be able to grow, we need to have the infrastructure in place. So we ensure that that minister has certainly a significant say in any initiatives we're undertaking.

In putting together the new economic strategy, the Get Ready

document, we worked with I believe nine other departments in trying to determine what their priorities were up to the centennial year of 2005. So we've tried to, again, reflect a cross-departmental approach.

As concerns regional economic development, I did speak to – I may not have the name correct – the association of regional development organizations some months ago and really encouraged them to work together with us. There are some regions in our province which, quite frankly, while the province is growing and the economy is growing, haven't benefited as strongly as other regions. So we are trying to work with some of those areas with respect to, for example, potential tourism development, industries that may well be better suited for those particular areas. Finally, when we're out there selling the Alberta advantage, hon. member, we're selling the province and we aren't selling a particular region. However, of course if a business identifies a particular area or location it may wish to move to, then we do all we can to facilitate that.

DR. NICOL: In that line, has your trade office . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I want to do everything I possibly can to facilitate the discussion, but we do have to have a record of speakers, so I would ask that you be recognized by the chairman so that at least we have a record for *Hansard* purposes if nothing else. It might make things just a little bit easier. The member indicated that he wanted to ask about three or four questions. Why don't you ask all three or four questions and let the minister answer. We'll do them in lots of about three or four, just so we're not back and forth. Is that okay?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, I don't know. I mean, unless it creates some confusion for you, you can interject when I'm finished.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: There is no difficulty, Mr. Minister, as long as it's okay with all members, but normally the chair would not recognize the same speaker three times in a row.

MR. HAVELOCK: Right. But the hon. member is kindly giving me, I guess, a portion of his 20 minutes in which to respond and create the dialogue. Perhaps I'd ask that when the hon. member started speaking, his 20 minutes started, and I happened to be chewing up part of it answering his questions.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, if that's acceptable to the member, that's fine with the chair. We were keeping stop time here.

DR. NICOL: I would suggest we run the full 20 minutes while we're having our dialogue and then somebody else can have it however they want to structure their 20 minutes.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is perfectly acceptable to the chair, and I would be more than pleased to accommodate. So I will advise when your 20 minutes have elapsed then. Is that okay?

DR. NICOL: If you would, please.

MR. HAVELOCK: Please deduct the 10 minutes we spent arguing about how we were going to do this.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That's fine. If we're going to go with that, you and the minister have the floor until your 20 minutes is up.

DR. NICOL: Okay.

When we talked about the structuring, you said that you didn't want to try and promote one part of the province at the expense of the other, that you were working on a full let's promote Alberta, yet the magnet of the critical mass that exists in some of our major cities now provides us the information and the infrastructure that's necessary for business. Some of the other areas that want to focus on something different, like some of our agricultural communities that want to diversify, need the information support, the product support, the contact support they don't have because of the critical mass that's in some of our larger cities. What are you doing to try and facilitate the opportunity for small communities to attract small to medium-sized businesses to their area rather than having them all kind of fall in around the big cities?

8:26

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, I can't give you, I guess, a specific list of strategies where I could say, "Here's what we do for the smaller communities as opposed to the larger communities." Our primary role is to try and educate companies about the overall advantages we offer in this province: the infrastructure, a highly qualified workforce, a competitive tax advantage, for example. Those are just three of the things we have.

We may well, if we feel there is a particular area – I'll use the West Yellowhead area as a good example. The coal industry is there. Now, it's been reported that the coal industry is facing some challenges. Well, what we are doing is we've taken it upon ourselves to study the long-term viability of the industry as it's presently structured. We are also working with that community regarding some other initiatives they could look at, in particular with respect to tourism, for example. We do not have a strategy or a list that states, "Here's stuff we can do for smaller communities, and here's stuff we can do for larger communities." Unless I haven't seen that yet, I don't believe we have something like that.

There are some very specific initiatives we have undertaken, for example e-commerce, where we are holding a number of seminars throughout the province and are trying to encourage all businesses, large or small, to become much more involved in that particular sector. The economic strategy also refers to putting a wide bandwidth capability throughout the province. That will allow all communities to basically tie in and allow, for example, a business in Okotoks to do business directly with someone in Japan. So there are some specific initiatives laid out in our economic strategy. Again, we take an approach of: let's try and help the entire province.

Tourism is a good example. Our national parks generate about 20 percent of our revenue. What we want to do is take advantage of the draw which the national parks provide from an international perspective and try and draw tourists to visit the rest of the province. That's why we established the tourism destination regions. That's why we have the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council in place, why we have the new plan. We're very aggressively working with operators throughout the province.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Just following up on that, one of the things we note quite often in talking with small companies, small businesses – new businesses, I guess, is a better term than small businesses – is that the shortage of venture capital seems to restrict a number of the companies. The minister of science and technology has talked about this on a couple of occasions as well. When an innovation is trying to be commercialized, there seem to be better opportunities in other areas where the venture capital is more accessible. Is there a strategy in the province to do something about venture capital access, supply? The establishment of the new Canadian Venture Exchange in Calgary is a good move in that

direction. It's going to give us a local contact point, but that only works for a certain kind of financing. Are there strategies, then, that deal with increasing the access to and supply of venture capital?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, let's chat briefly first about small business generally. I mentioned the e-commerce initiative. Also there is a review of business tax that's presently ongoing, and a number of small businesses, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, for example, have suggested that the corporate tax rate should be lowered and also that thresholds should be increased. I know that's being examined.

As concerns the issue of access to capital, I'm getting mixed messages from the industry. It depends on the sector you're speaking with at any given time. I've referred the issue of access to capital to the Alberta Economic Development Authority for them to do an overall review and come back to me and tell the government, one, whether there is a problem and, secondly, if there is a problem, what solutions they would suggest we move forward with.

You talk about the high-tech innovation sector. What's interesting right now when you're out there trying to raise dollars is that there's a great deal of activity with smaller high-tech companies generating equity. In fact, a number of the companies in the oil and gas sectors are pointing out right now that they aren't able to compete for those dollars because a 20 to 25 percent rate of return just isn't good enough based on what investors are getting from a number of the high-tech companies. I was in fact having dinner with a representative from Iran the other evening, and we were talking about this very issue, that it's very difficult not only on a national and local level but on an international level to generate investment in that area. But we're looking at access to capital.

With respect to the particular sector you mention, I do work very closely with my colleague the Minister of Innovation and Science. In fact, we have a rather unique structure between our two departments in that we actually share, I believe, 10 or 11 employees.

DR. TAYLOR: Do we share their salary?

MR. HAVELOCK: I do believe we share their salary, but if we don't – I guess your budget is bigger.

Yes, we're sharing the resources of those individuals. The Innovation and Science minister is primarily responsible for the initial research and development. Where we become involved is with the next step, with respect to commercialization. The recent fund that was announced, the \$500 million endowment, I think will help significantly in generating some additional research. We've set some targets in our economic strategy, creating I think 35,000 new jobs in the high-tech sector. I think it was last year that we created an additional 1,000 spaces in that particular industry in postsecondary education.

So we're trying to do some things. Part of our challenge – and the federal government did address it partially through their amendments to the stock options, for example, and the reducing of personal income taxes – is that it's very difficult for us to keep our young graduates. They're going south. While the federal government did make some moves in that area, I think they need to do more, because we'll continue to lose them because we just can't compete.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: One more question. There should be time for it.

DR. NICOL: I'll cede to someone else now if I can get a chance later.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You betcha. I'll put you on the list. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I only have one question. I'll take about a minute for it, and you can have the other 19 to respond to it. Your department spends \$51.236 million. I'm going to take the part of a taxpayer here, and I'm going to ask you to explain to me out of programs 1, 2, and 3 what makes you sure those dollars are well spent in your department. What kinds of measurements do you have on what good it does to spend these dollars in your programs? I'll be anxiously awaiting your response.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, you didn't take a minute, and I won't take 19.

What I'd like to do is direct your attention, hon. member, to our business plan, and that would be pages 84 through to 89. One of the challenges I discussed very early on with my deputy minister when I was first appointed. We reviewed the business plan, and we felt we had to look at the issue of performance measurement. We have tried to develop some new measures from, one, the macroperspective; in other words, outcome indicators which reflect performance of the economy. However, it's very difficult to track whatever we're doing directly to the impact that we're having on the economy. Nevertheless, we need to measure that. Secondly, we've also generated what are called output indicators, and those better measure what the department is doing and what impact we hope the department is having.

8:36

I have asked the department, though, to develop further performance measures. That was a question that was asked, I believe, when we went through the business planning process. In fact, it was asked by the Member for Calgary-Montrose, if I'm not mistaken. I appreciate the question in that sometimes it's difficult to say, "Well, here's what we did, and here's the impact it had," because it is difficult to link. A good example is the international offices which we've established. We are in the process of developing very specific performance measures to determine what impact, if any, those offices are having with respect to any international trade and/or investment which occurs in the province. We've tried to list some generally in the business plan. Obviously, it's easier to measure the macro ones, the economic ones, as we've outlined, as opposed to: if the department does this, what happens?

Another good example. In the strategic tourism marketing plan we are going to be coming forward with some of the initial results. For example, one measure is our success in leveraging dollars whether or not the private sector is participating with us in programs. I'm happy to see that it's been reasonably successful thus far, and I'll be coming forward with some numbers in the near future. Through that plan we will also be evaluating certain projects along the way to determine what, if any, impact they have had and also to determine the bottom line, whether the dollars have been appropriately spent.

So, hon. member, I'm very sensitive to the issue of performance measurement. We have a way to go in the business plan. The department is well aware that we have a way to go, and they are working hard on that. We did make some changes to the plan when we were first put into the ministry, but we recognize there is more to do.

MR. HERARD: This is, I guess, a second question. With respect to the international offices, my bias says that life is a series of relationships and that if you don't have those relationships, then you're not anywhere with respect to that marketplace. I'd like to hear from you

with respect to what you've learned from perhaps the eastern economies, whether or not relationships are even more important in those jurisdictions than they are in North America.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, in North America we do have an advantage in that, obviously, we are within North America and our largest trading partner happens to be directly across the border. So we are able to maintain good relationships and direct contact with that trading partner while not having to maintain a significant permanent presence within the United States. There are two ways in which you can generally establish and develop and promote investment and trade on an international basis. One is to have specific trade missions which are targeted to particular countries and/or sectors, which are generally led by the Premier and/or Team Canada missions.

The other way is to have direct contact through a permanent presence within a particular country. We do have some offices. In particular you mentioned the Far East and Asia. We have one in Korea, Hong Kong, Beijing, and Tokyo. We also have one in Taiwan, although during my recent swing through Asia I wasn't able to visit Taiwan because of the devastation caused by the earthquake at that time.

I can tell you unequivocally that when you're dealing with the Asian community, it has to be face to face. On numerous occasions those businesses presently actively involved in pursuing relationships and partnerships with Asian countries appreciate government involvement because so many of those markets and economies are presently regulated by government, and therefore face-to-face government contact is expected. Also, sometimes they need our assistance in getting around a bit of the red tape and meeting with the right people.

I'll use Korea as a good example. We are very aggressively pursuing some investment in the resource sector from that particular country. I spent time with a government representative, and that representative indicated that they had recommended to their private sector, their chaebols, that they should seriously consider an investment in the oil and gas sector. So there you have a government being very active, very proactive in suggesting to the private sector what industries and what sectors they should be looking at.

In China it's just as critical. Their market is just beginning to open up to western companies. It's a very bureaucratic process. It's a very lengthy process. You need to establish a level of trust prior to companies being able to do business there, or alternatively you need to have a highly specialized product and go after a particular niche market. Some of our businesses have been successful in that regard, but they still have used our support and needed our support in opening some of those doors. So it depends on the market you're looking at.

Europe is a market that we haven't focused on for a few years. We did have some international presence there, and we closed those offices down in '95, if I'm not mistaken, but the European Union is now, I believe, the world's second largest economy, just behind the United States. It is again a highly regulated market, and if we wish to make some inroads in that market, we will need to establish a presence there and start to work directly with those within the union and try and build those relationships in assisting companies.

I will say that while we can assist the big companies, the international companies, the majors, they aren't the ones that really need our assistance. While we can assist, for example, Nortel in establishing some relationships in China, they do have significant resources available to them, and they do a pretty good job on their

own, but they do tend to use us when they feel we can help. But it's the medium and smaller companies which need that assistance, and quite frankly for us it's the medium and smaller companies where we want to see some growth, and that's where we feel we have some significant upside. So it depends on the market, it depends on the sector you're going after, and it depends on how long we've actually been in the market or out of the market.

MR. HERARD: Thank you very much. Those are my questions.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Madam Chairman. I had a couple of questions, one about the performance indicators that you have. You classed them as outcome indicators and output indicators, and the output indicators are the ones that refer specifically to the actions within your department. I have some difficulty understanding how your department can be held responsible for the performance of, say, the manufacturing service industry investment and agri-food exports. It seems those are global things that are affected by either the actions of other provinces, the entire country, or international markets. I think the information is needed, and certainly your department would act on that information, but I'm not sure I understand why it's here as a performance indicator and how you can in any way be held accountable.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, hon. member, I believe you're looking at page 86, goal 2.

DR. MASSEY: Yes.

MR. HAVELOCK: The first and second indicators. Those actually relate to the economy as a whole. Those aren't the output indicators. The output indicators are the ones that we try and specifically measure what our department is doing, what it has done, and what impact it has had.

But being blunt, we are the primary sales and marketing arm for the government of Alberta, and if we aren't held accountable for economic performance, who in government should be held accountable? It is really our job to get out there and promote. It's our job to attract investment. It's our job to assist International and Intergovernmental Relations in removing trade barriers, for example, and to allow in the area of agriculture more value-added product. I'm quite comfortable being held accountable, but again the difficulty is that sometimes you can't directly link a department action or initiative to the actual performance measure. So you, hon. member, are underscoring the difficulty that the measures present, but I still think we should be held accountable for the overall economic performance.

8:46

DR. MASSEY: If you look at the new business increase and the drop of 10 percent in new businesses that's in chart 4 on page 87, again I go back and say: how can you hold your department responsible for that decrease in new business? What use is it here in a business plan? Again, I think it's extremely valuable information, but in terms of judging the performance of the department – and I know these are under development too, that you're still working on them.

MR. HAVELOCK: A lot of these also, hon. member, have been used for a number of years. Again, we did put in some that are specific. Perhaps one of the better ones is measure 5 on page 87. That's where we're evaluating how competitive we are with respect

to certain areas in comparison to other jurisdictions, and we do have a good deal of control over those; for example, payroll tax, capital tax, things of that nature. I appreciate what you're saying; nevertheless, I'm still comfortable as the lead sales and marketing arm for the province taking some responsibility as to whether or not we've assisted businesses in growing through our overall Alberta Advantage.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. If I can just continue with one of the output indicators on the top of page 86, "utilization of department's website and publications." There seems to be massive use of the web site. Is there any breakdown of who's using that, whether these are national or international, or are these kids firing into the department because they've got a report on economic development and they need information? Is there any analysis of that?

MR. HAVELOCK: I'm being told that, yes, we can give you that. We do have that type of information available, so we'll certainly provide that. I don't, hon. member, have that with me.

DR. MASSEY: Can I go to the opening of the offices? I remember when there was much fanfare about them being closed, and the argument put forth by the government at that time was that it was a waste of money, that it wasn't money well spent. What's changed?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, in my opening remarks I tried to indicate how we are approaching these offices a little differently than they have been in the past. They will not focus on protocol functions. We are staffing them with people who have training in the investment and trade areas, so we are making them much more business focused. We are collocating where we can. As I indicated, until we conduct an extensive performance measure of those offices, we won't open any new offices. I will use as a good example – I don't believe we've made it public yet, although we might be shortly. We've just completed hiring an individual for the China/Alberta petroleum initiative that's located in Beijing, and we went through a very rigorous process. In the past part of the reason I think these offices have attracted some criticism is because of the manner in which the appointments may have been made or who was appointed. We're certainly getting away from that.

We also need to understand and appreciate that, again, if we want to be a player in Europe, for example, the world's second largest economy, we do need some presence there, but we won't establish that presence unless and until I'm satisfied that where we're presently located is providing a net benefit to the Alberta taxpayer.

So hopefully, hon. member, based on what I've said, you'll feel some degree of comfort that it's a different way of doing business. It's not the way these offices used to be run. I have to give credit to hon. Minister Dr. West and also to ministers Nelson and Smith, who made a lot of the tough decisions regarding those offices. Now we're at a stage where we can go forward and evaluate and determine how they're operated.

DR. MASSEY: How are the appointments made?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, with respect to the CAPC appointment, I believe we advertised internally to government first, and then I think there was an open competition on a national basis.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

MR. HAVELOCK: So did we do the internal first?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

MR. HAVELOCK: Okay. So we went internally first, and then we advertised nationally. Unless there's a good reason to do otherwise, that's the way I certainly intend on making the other appointments.

DR. MASSEY: You touched on co-operating with other jurisdictions. Has there been any attempt to do this with other provinces, to co-operate in terms of those?

MR. HAVELOCK: You mean with respect to collocation, for example? Where we have the most success in collocation is in Canadian embassies, and quite often the sectors we want to focus on or the particular markets we want to go after do not coincide with British Columbia or Ontario or some of the other provinces. We do try and co-ordinate as best we can, but at this stage I will say we operate relatively independently. In Korea I believe we're the only province that has a presence in that country. In Japan I believe Quebec has an office. The Quebec offices are interesting. A lot of their focus is on political activity as opposed to investment and trade activity, and I won't go into the reasons why they go that way. But at this stage there's not a lot of co-ordination because the provinces quite often have differing needs.

What I will say, though, is that we do some co-ordination and working together. As a recent example, I was in Lethbridge, where we announced that Lethbridge would be hosting a particular conference regarding the tourism industry where we actually team up with British Columbia, and we have tourism operators from around the world – Europe in particular, Asia Pacific, and the United States – coming to visit. We've packaged a number of opportunities with British Columbia where tourists can come and see not only one province but two. So we do try and work together where it makes sense.

DR. MASSEY: Just related to that – and you've touched on it briefly – the money in the budget for the World's Fair.

MR. HAVELOCK: Which page are you on, hon. member?

DR. MASSEY: Hannover 2000 on page 123. It's under Highlights for 2000-2001. I'm in the budget, Jon.

MR. HAVELOCK: If I can find it here – well, ask your question.

DR. MASSEY: Having been to a couple of them, in Seville and Vancouver, is there information in terms of the payoff? I'm aware of what you said: face-to-face contact when you're in China, and when you're in the Far East, Middle East, certainly face to face. You could hold all the fairs you wanted on the street and you still wouldn't end up with a business deal. Is there information on how much payoff you get from that kind of . . .

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, you can't, unfortunately, measure the payoff until you've participated.

DR. MASSEY: But we've been in others.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, but this is our first – I guess generally speaking this will be the major initiative which re-establishes a presence for us in Europe. What we did recently was restructure the department to try and set up some pods or areas within the department that focused on certain sectors or countries. We have worked very closely with the private sector to ensure that there are private-

sector dollars being brought to the table. I think we're looking at about a million dollars that the private sector has brought in. If you'll give me a moment, I might be able to find it.

I believe the targeted budget is \$2 million: \$1.4 million from the public sector, \$600,000 from the private sector. We're contributing a million dollars. So we've tried to make this a bit of a unique approach, but what we are going to do after the fair is continue to evaluate what impact this particular initiative had as opposed to just saying: yes, we were there; it was great; we have a few contacts; let's follow up on them.

There's also a lot of work being done prior to Hanover. We've sent a number of individuals over to Germany to lay the groundwork to ensure that our experience there is useful, that we focus on the information and technology side and create some good contacts with European countries but primarily with Germany, which is one of the countries we are focusing on. But, hon. member, once our participation is complete and we've performed an evaluation, we'll certainly make the results of that evaluation public.

8:56

DR. MASSEY: Just one last comment. The tourism indicators from previous budgets. What's happened to those indicators? Are they all dropped?

MR. HAVELOCK: The best measure we have of what we're doing in tourism is found in the strategic tourism marketing plan which the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council – I sure wish they'd shorten the names of these things – is putting together. In fact, they're revising their plan as we speak. I will have some initial results being made public in the near future with respect to leveraging in some of the programs which we've initiated over the past year.

I just saw a couple of quarterly reports come forward, hon. member, and we're going to try and put that information in a format which is easily understood and communicable because right now it's quite technical. Our main measure is that relating to growing the industry, as we've pointed out in our economic strategy, from approximately \$4.2 billion to \$6 billion, but we have a number of specific measures, and we'll be looking at specific projects over the next year. Again, we'll be happy to provide that information as it becomes available, but I'd encourage you to take a look at the tourism marketing plan. Again, as we move forward, I'll get you further information on what we're doing.

In fact, I hope within about a month or so to be releasing some information regarding leveraging and some initial results.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Next I have Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's certainly an honour to be here today to be able to participate with the Minister of Economic Development. You know, there are many pieces to this economy, and I think it's wonderful that we can have an open and frank discussion at a table like this.

Innovation and Science is a department that you work closely with, and I've been fortunate to be able to work with the minister there as well. In regards to the technology industry, we're trying to make this become a bigger part of our economy. I know that both you and he have certainly spent a lot of time and have identified that this is certainly a future area of economic growth and an industry which really covers so many other industries in the opportunities of making it grow and be successful.

It also has the jobs that we've identified that our students coming

out of universities want to have the opportunities to get into. It has the high-paying jobs that are going to be there. It's also an area we've seen as a potential brain drain that has led to the loss of a lot of the people we've trained at our universities and postsecondary institutions who have then moved on to other places outside our country and outside our province.

I've been working with the minister as well in my role as chair of technology commercialization. We've been really working on how we attract the capital, and I know you addressed that in your remarks at the beginning. How do we make it happen, and how do we facilitate this happening without, obviously, us getting back into business? We don't want to do that. That's not the role of government. But what we do know is that the area of the type of capital that needs to come here is probably the precommercialization capital, and that's the hardest capital to attract.

Down in Silicon Valley as it was developing, it was really defence dollars, which was billions upon billions of dollars that were put in by the U.S. government, that created Silicon Valley in the early stages. What that did is it allowed for the catalyst ability for an industry to develop and grow and make a wonderful thing happen. You saw IBM down in North Carolina and the research triangle that developed down there, but lots of money came in to create and make that sort of thing happen.

We haven't had that same natural ability happen here in Alberta, and we've wanted it to happen. We've also had some other things working against us. We've had a very good market. Because of the oil and gas sector here in Alberta, we've had the financial markets very into and understanding the development and the need for the capital to develop oil and gas. But if you have a technology deal that you want to develop here in Alberta, with all the best people and everything here, those technology people have had to take their ideas to Toronto, take them to New York and go and sell their ideas there, because the capital here doesn't understand what it takes and means to develop inside the technology industry. They don't know what it means.

The financial analysts in Alberta understand oil and gas, but they don't understand technology. Because of that, to see deals like Wi-Lan, an Alberta company, a 10-year overnight success, be successful here, they had to go to Toronto to raise the money. This is a huge piece of what we need to do to be successful, and we haven't developed those kinds of concepts.

I think what I've been able to gather over the last couple of years working with the minister and the department is to see that it's really probably a combination of Economic Development, Innovation and Science, as well as Learning to be able to produce the people so that we have specialists here in Alberta who can say that this is good and this is a good investment, to be able to make it so that the people here understand this is a wise investment and they should invest in technology.

With regards to precommercialization capital, that is a huge piece of it. We have high-risk investors here in Alberta who've invested in oil and gas wells that have gone down 15,000-plus feet, and that's high-risk capital, you betcha. It's high-risk capital and it's wonderful, but they don't understand that maybe even safer investments might be opportunities in technology because they don't understand it. The precommercialization capital is often a longer term investment. It's not the time it takes to drill down, you know. So it's an understanding, it's an education process of our public.

Before I go on to the other areas, I was wondering if you wanted to expand on that and say how Economic Development . . . [interjection] I've got 20 minutes. I'm doing my best, okay? So if you'd like to expand on that and say how Economic Development makes that sort of thing work and work in with Innovation and Science and education.

MR. HAVELOCK: I don't know how I could expand on that, hon. member, because you said it all. We're working closely, though, with the Minister of Innovation and Science with respect to the precommercialization area, the investment area. I will make it clear, though, that I personally don't support the buying of jobs, much like a number of other provinces do where they try and attract investment through direct subsidies, and that's one of the reasons why we've been successful. We will continue to push for enhanced tax advantages, again the high quality of life.

What is also critical, though, is access to a highly educated workforce, and we need to ensure that there are sufficient inducements to keep that workforce in Alberta. I discussed that a little earlier regarding, for example, the personal tax situation.

Access to capital: I mentioned that we've referred that to AEDA to take a look at. Again what's interesting is that you're talking about most financial analysts in Alberta being familiar with the oil and gas sector yet not the high-tech sector. But I'm starting to hear quite the reverse, in that the oil and gas sector right now is having some difficulty in raising equity because the rate of return that I mentioned earlier, the 20 to 25 percent, is not sufficient compared to what people are generating in the knowledge-based industries.

What can we do? Well, I think we can learn from, for example, Colorado Springs, where I believe their population went from 65,000 to three-quarters of a million. It was primarily based on trying to attract and build a high-tech sector. I hope that's accurate. If not, I know the Minister of Innovation and Science will correct me on that. What I'd be quite prepared to do is provide to the committee a list of some of the specific initiatives that we are pursuing with respect to high tech. A lot of them will be coming out of the minister's office, Innovation and Science. I think we've demonstrated we're serious, though, in growing this because of the targets we've set out in our economic strategy and also, as I mentioned earlier, the \$500 million endowment, which hopefully will generate some activity.

Having said that, our industry is actually quite strong. We have one of the stronger sectors in the country. We have ARC, which is a leading research institute that assists in that regard. We have over 2,000 electronics and software companies in Alberta doing business at this point in time. We have some excellent technology with respect to biotechnology, environmental technology, oil and gas technology. What we tend to forget is that our oil and gas expertise is part of our knowledge-based industry and we're able to sell that. We have some excellent technology in the forestry products area and also in agriculture. We're out there pushing those particular technologies, and they should continue to grow. I would personally like to see us create, not a duplicate of Silicon Valley – I think we have a good start on how we can build that particular sector, the knowledge-based sector. It's a primary focus of our economic strategy. I'll get for the committee a list of specific initiatives, and I'll work with the Minister of Innovation and Science to provide that because a lot of them are generated out of his department.

9:06

MR. HLADY: Great. Thank you.

I think there's a lot happening. It's going to be interesting to watch the rollout over the next couple of years as we see all these things happening. There are those good stories happening. I think in the past maybe the department in parts had done some elephant hunting, looking for some big leverage points to make some things happen, but it's nice to see this level and getting to the grass roots and connecting the jobs that the people are looking for, making it happen at the precommercialization level. If we can do that, we're going to see so many new companies formed and so forth that it will become a major part of our economy.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, it is actually a reasonably major part of our economy at this point in time, but it has to grow because we want to ensure that we don't have such a heavy reliance on the commodity-based sector.

MR. HLADY: Good. Thank you.

I'd like to touch on the tourism industry a little bit. I know that there are strategies going on along that line. We've identified it, I believe, and it's sitting somewhere around the fourth largest industry in the province. It's a great industry, and we see so many things happening. There are so many dynamics going around as we hear them in dealing with everything from Kananaskis Country to the size of the national parks that sit here and the restrictions that have been put on the national parks that are inside Alberta from Ottawa. It's a very frustrating thing to have to deal with that, I would think, from the tourism industry's point of view and to try and say: how do we make it a bigger, better thing? Obviously they're in direct competition with other areas, be it Whistler in B.C. or whatever, that are able to grow and make things happen, yet they're not able to grow and compete at the levels that certainly are wanted.

Being able to keep the balance between the environmental strengths that are out there that are saying, "We don't want to see anything happen," and on the other side you see the industry saying, "We need this much to be able to be more competitive and make things happen." What are you doing, and how do you help to facilitate this?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, you've touched on an area that's critical with respect to tourism development in the province. The national parks, as I indicated earlier, account for about 20 percent of our total tourism revenues. Yes, the federal government has been looking at some initiatives which would severely restrict any further growth in the Banff area, and while Jasper would have some ability to grow, that will be curtailed in the future, as will the Waterton parks area.

For us, one, we have to get to the table first. In the past we have not been what I would call proactive in pursuing a national parks strategy. We need to keep in mind, too, that the national parks in Alberta comprise about 60 percent of the national parks in the country. So for us it's important to continue to use the national parks to attract tourists, but it's also important for Canada. Typically you'll have, for example, some tourists coming over from Asia. They will spend time in Vancouver. They will spend time in Banff and/or Jasper, and then they'll move on to Niagara Falls. Unless we ensure that we have the services available to satisfy the needs of those tourists, the industry will be significantly impacted, because there's so much spin-off.

The other thing we need to do – as you curtail development in, for example, Banff national park or Kananaskis, for that matter, there are some opportunities for the adjacent areas. Canmore, for example, will likely experience some pressure in the future, because as the services in Banff and/or Kananaskis are curtailed and yet people want to visit those particular area, they will have the opportunity to service those needs through accommodation, through restaurants, et cetera.

So we are presently working on a national parks strategy. I have discussed it with some of my colleagues through the departments that are impacted, obviously the Minister of Environment, because we certainly don't want to do anything to jeopardize why people visit the national parks. It's all well and good, for example, to want to see development, but if the development impacts the reason people are visiting the national park, then it's not good development. So it's a very fine balance that we have to ensure we maintain, but we're cognizant of the problem.

Just recently I wrote to the federal minister asking to allow us to see some of their initial work with respect to some of the initiatives they're pursuing. I haven't received a response yet, but hopefully they'll let us become involved, because we want to be involved in the process.

MR. HLADY: Thank you.

Staying with tourism, you know, there's been a bit of debate out in the industry around the concept of the hotel tax and how that plays into funding and so forth. I don't know if you have some concepts in regards to what you'd like to talk about around that.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, thank you so very, very much for that question.

DR. TAYLOR: Refer it to your officials.

MR. HAVELOCK: No. Actually, I'd like to answer this.

The hotel tax generates around \$45 million annually. I will say that it was a tax which was initially brought in because of the deficit that we were facing. It was specifically brought in to offset the deficit. The deficit has been eliminated, so the question becomes: should the tax remain or not?

This has been an issue that's been discussed widely within the industry. There are those – for example, the Alberta Hotel Association – advocating for the elimination of the tax. There are others within the tourism sector who want the tax to remain, but they would like us to dedicate the tax revenues directly to tourism marketing. There are still others who are suggesting: all right; get rid of the tax, but then allow municipalities to fill the void by being able to generate a tax locally to assist in promoting their particular jurisdiction and also to participate in some of the programs which we undertake through Travel Alberta, for example.

The issue has been referred to the business tax review. I won't disclose at this time what my preference is. I would like the process to work its way through. At some stage, though, I will likely indicate my bias, because eventually I would like to have some impact on the decision.

I would like to also point out that the decision on the level of funding that we provide to the tourism sector with respect to marketing has nothing to do with the hotel tax. We have a budget in tourism of approximately \$16 million a year. As I indicated, the tax generates about \$45 million a year. Since day one – and I think the hon. member for Fort Macleod would agree. Livingstone-Macleod. Sorry. But I know how to spell Macleod.

I think the member would agree that when I was first appointed, the one message I took out there consistently was: if you want to make the case for additional spending on tourism marketing, make it separate and apart from the tax, because the two are independent. I know that the industry is, as we speak, preparing a case to look at additional investment in tourism marketing. Again, as I indicated earlier, the initial results on leveraging are encouraging. Some of our initial results in our programs are encouraging, and if it makes sense to increase and enhance that spending, well, that's something we of course need to debate both around our caucus table and publicly through the budget process.

MR. HLADY: I won't expand on that at this time, but I appreciate your comments. I think they're very insightful.

I'd like to go back to the trade offices a little bit as well, if I could, Mr. Minister. You know, there were some good comments that you made in your opening comments and obviously some great questions from around the table. Everyone understands and knows the history

to a certain level. Accountability is obviously going to define whether this is successful or not. How do we show that these are successful? What are the defining points? How do we show that they have been successful in creating trade, business opportunities, and so forth for Alberta companies going out there? How do we create that connection in making that happen? I think that's crucial. I'm sure you're still in process, but if you have any comments in regards to that right now, I'd be interested in hearing a little bit more detail.

9:16

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, as I indicated earlier, we are in the process of developing performance measures for those offices. I can't tell you what form those performance measures will take, although I don't want to simply measure activity. We need to measure results. So we'll just unfortunately have to wait and see what the department comes forward with, although I would expect that we will have something for consideration at the standing policy committee within two to three months. Is that fair? If anyone around this table has any ideas as to how we should be measuring the performance, I invite you to submit those to us for consideration.

Part of the difficulty we're going to be faced with – and I'll use my trip to Korea as a good example. As I indicated earlier, we're aggressively pursuing, hopefully, some investment in the oil sands by some Korean companies. I did meet with some representatives from Korean companies. I would not be able to measure the impact that those visits had on those companies if they decide to invest. I couldn't sit there and say: yes, they came because I happened to spend time with this particular individual. So measuring performance is going to be a little difficult. Nevertheless, I need to be able to demonstrate and our government needs to be able to demonstrate to the taxpayer that they are receiving value for their money.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, if we are going to stick to the 20 minutes . . . [interjection] Well, I think he can finish. I'm just telling him maybe he can finish quickly.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, I must be tired, because I lost my train of thought again, Madam Chairman, so I'm finished.

THE CHAIRMAN: I didn't want to have that hold on you, hon. minister.

Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would like to turn your attention to program 3, tourism.

MR. HAVELOCK: What page are you on, hon. member?

MR. WHITE: Page 120 in the budget book. In-Alberta marketing programs I see was sustained at about \$2 million annually. As I recall, it's only the last couple of years that that has been going on, and it goes on for a number more.

Two questions come to mind. One, is it going to be sustaining such that there is a plan in place to market Alberta to Albertans as a tourist destination? In my personal view, it has been marketed in the past very poorly, particularly from sort of Airdrie south. That area of the province doesn't seem to know what this area of the province knows, particularly around St. Paul, Bonnyville, all of that northeast and right across the north and out west. It doesn't seem to know how beautiful the place is and what it has to offer. We've always missed this opportunity to market. I'm hoping that it's sustaining and it will be successful.

I should add that most of those I'm aware of who are in the north part of our province do know what the south has to offer. I'm talking south of Pincher and west of Pincher and out in the Cypress Hills. Up here it seems to have been marketed better, or it just happened. I don't know how it occurred, but it occurs to me that is the case. There are other areas in that same budget area of a sustained Alberta image promotion. I'm not sure how that relates to foreign representatives and an international marketing campaign of some \$6 million. I don't know what the difference is, quite frankly, and I guess I need a little definition of that.

The other question that does come to mind on all of these areas is that if they are well-thought-out plans, then they need to be sustained. You need that much longer term vision than, quite frankly, I've seen with the last two ministers, perhaps three, and I'm hoping that there will be that sustained plan to market Alberta both inside and outside Alberta.

The image bank and web site. It seems that funding has ceased in the current budget we're in now and is nonexistent in the subsequent year. That would mean to me that either it was declared a failure and all the activities were curtailed or it's determined successful. If that's the case, then it really should have some periodic reassessment and some maintenance. You don't go from some \$300,000 to nil in maintenance of an image bank and web site. They all require some sustenance now and then.

Perhaps I'll stop there. Those are all the questions and observations I have on this particular page.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, hon. member. Let me talk briefly about the in-Alberta/regional marketing campaign. I'd really recommend to you, again, getting ahold of this document and going through it if you haven't already. If you have, great. We can even get you the expanded version, which I think is about 140 pages or something.

MR. WHITE: Is it on the web site?

MR. HAVELOCK: I'm sure it's on the web site. Is it?

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MR. HAVELOCK: No. We'll give you a hard copy then.

Will this campaign be sustained? Well, the bottom line is, hon. member, that with any expenditure we make, if it can be demonstrated that it generates positive results and benefit, then my position would be, yes, it should be sustained. We need to keep in mind, I think, in fairness to the ministers who have preceded me with respect to this portfolio – you will recall that in '93, when we were all elected, we were faced with a very significant deficit and some financial issues, and I say "we" because of course there are 83 of us and we were all representing Albertans, albeit not necessarily in the same way. So the focus at that time was to really concentrate on getting the financial house in order, to evaluate departments to determine whether or not they were of the right size, whether we had the right people, et cetera.

This particular department has undergone significant change. I think we have about 200 FTEs now, whereas I think in '93 there were about 800. That's a significant reduction and re-evaluation, but I'm happy to say that we have excellent people left. We have a very good department, and we are going in the right direction.

One of the areas that we are focusing on and trying to build is tourism. I can't take credit for the strategic tourism marketing plan because much of the work was done by the previous minister prior to my moving over to this portfolio, but my commitment is certainly

to continue to evaluate the dollars as they're spent. We recognize that we should continue with an in-resident program. This past year, for example, we had a brochure produced outlining a lot of the activities in the Edmonton area, and we distributed that, I think, through northern Alberta, if I'm not mistaken. That was to try and attract people from that sector to Edmonton. I know the mountain parks and also Calgary did something similar, and that was with government support also.

I will take under advisement your comment: have we done as good a job in assisting northern Alberta to market themselves to southern Alberta? We'll take a look at that, although I hasten to add that the number one tourist attraction in the province is West Edmonton Mall. That seems to have a lot of positive spin-offs for Edmonton and region. Fort McMurray, for example, is becoming quite successful in marketing the aurora borealis to visitors from Asia. They have something called a midnight experience, although I won't go into a lot of the details as to what that might be, but I think it's looking at the lights during the evening.

9:26

You're making some good comments. Yes, Albertans travel a lot and they travel through this province a lot, but I don't believe we've done as effective a job in encouraging Albertans to see their own province. Certainly we're focusing on that.

Now you mention the Alberta image promotion. That's 3.0.5.

MR. WHITE: Is there a difference between 3.0.5 and 3.0.3? I didn't understand the significance.

MR. HAVELOCK: The international marketing campaign, again, is outlined in this document. That's the marketing strategy to get Alberta out there and in front of the international community. The brand image is really trying to develop a recognizable image that would be folded into the international and all of our marketing strategies. So it is separate and apart, but it is linked. So through the brand image hopefully we can come up with a logo or something that we can get out there and basically will be easily recognized as Alberta in trying to promote all the positive things that Alberta has to offer. So it was a budget separate and apart.

We don't have the brand image at this time, hon. member. It's quite difficult actually to come up with a brand image that captures all that Alberta is, because you have the mountain region, you have the northern region, you have the eastern region. They all have different experiences to offer. How do you come up with one brand that basically sells all of that? That's been part of our challenge. Once we come up with that, though, we'll roll it into the international marketing strategy. We will be announcing something having to do with our America strategy in the next week to 10 days, and we'll be more than happy to provide you with a lot of the marketing materials associated with that, but it doesn't have the specific brand associated with it yet because we haven't developed it. Does that explain the difference?

MR. WHITE: Image bank: failure, success, continuity.

MR. HAVELOCK: Vote 3.0.9?

MR. WHITE: Right.

MR. HAVELOCK: Now, my understanding is that we had a number of images out there and we needed the budget to actually acquire those images, so we do have a rather significant image bank at this time. But it is a good point that you raise. Any image bank needs

maintenance. It needs to be purged periodically and/or supplemented, so certainly we'll take into account the fact that we should evaluate this on an annual basis to determine whether or not our image bank really needs some updating. If it does, then of course we'll incorporate that in the budget.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you.

MR. WHITE: A personal area of interest that I see from the business plan in goal 2 is a geographic target, and that's Mexico. I understand there is an MOU that has been signed and executed by the state of Jalisco in Mexico. It would go from what was then FIGA to this department now. What is being done in the area? Is it an active area, or is it an area that needs some more work?

MR. HAVELOCK: It's an area that we want to focus on, not only Jalisco but Mexico generally. If you look at our international marketing strategy, we've tried to identify in here our priority markets with respect to both investment and trade. I'd refer you to page 4 of the summary document, the highlights, where we've listed Mexico as a group A, which is really a primary market that we want to get into and work closely with companies in trying to expand our presence and our trade. Now, if you managed to follow a little bit of the media on this particular issue a little while ago regarding the international marketing strategy, we were looking at the possibility of establishing a presence in Mexico, a mid-level presence, to facilitate developing the trade relations, because this is a priority market for us. But as I indicated earlier, before that's done, we need to develop performance measures and evaluate our existing offices to see whether it makes sense or not.

I also want to emphasize, though, for those of you who've known me for the past few years, that I don't simply sit around inventing ways to spend money. Rather, any moves that we make with respect to international marketing presence will be in response to what industry is telling us they need and want. When we looked at our international presence based on a KPMG study, it indicated, as I stated earlier, that we do need to have a presence but we need to have a more balanced presence. One of the areas that that study indicated we should look seriously at was the Mexican region.

So we are going to focus on that. We're just getting started on it. We've again been sending some department officials down there to lay some groundwork. We have had an individual down in the Jalisco region for some time, and they were funded through the department of agriculture because there's a lot of agricultural trade going on. Through the government reorganization we inherited or, rather, had all of those involved in those types of functions moved over to our department, so it now falls within our purview. We are maintaining that presence at this time, but it is focused on agriculture, and again, we're evaluating how we can expand that focus.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. Now, if you turn to page 88 in the Bold Plans budget book, the indicators about the business plans section. Being an engineer, I deal with a lot of numbers, and the numbers didn't quite jibe. I get totally different percentage growth numbers. I assume that the growth is total growth. I do one number to the other, and the first number that I have any data for, instead of 9.5 percent, I get 10.8.

Now, I recognize that the numbers are aggregate numbers at the bottom, the \$3.7 billion and the \$4.1 billion, but it occurs to me that if these numbers are to be used in any outcome measurement, then they really do have to be relatively accurate to track something. The

data has very little significance. If you use the common mathematical tool that says that the numbers are insignificant, you can't take 9.5. You know, it can't even be close. Then I look in the ministry document, page 125. The same numbers are repeated through there as though they're target and fact, and they are highly specific.

So I suggest that when you do this a number of times, you have either a mathematician or someone look at it a little closer for some numbers that are significant and accurate. I don't want to be that critical, but when you say you're highly sensitive to outcome and outcome indicators and then I see that the numbers that are produced have very little significance in comparison to one another, it concerns me somewhat.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, hon. member, I'm assuming you're looking – if you go from \$3.7 billion to \$4.1 billion, that would be a \$4 million increase, and that should equate to over a 10 percent rate of growth. Is that what you're suggesting?

9:36

MR. WHITE: Yes, \$0.4 billion, over \$3.7 million or \$3.8 million.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, over 10 percent. I'll be honest with you: I didn't crunch the percentages when I went through this. We'll certainly take a look at those, and if there are any wrong, I know that one of 200 people I have on staff will certainly make sure they're corrected.

MR. WHITE: That's all I have right at the moment. There are others who do wish to speak, I'm sure.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Edmonton-Calder.
Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Mr. Minister, ever since I was elected in 1993, I have always had the question: if the Department of Economic Development were shut down completely tomorrow, what would happen to the province? Not that I'm not valuing the great job your department is doing, that is the dilemma I have had for many years. The performance measure for your department is certainly very, very difficult to put in place, because our economy is doing extremely well. It has outperformed all the other provinces in the country. Definitely you are doing something right. I don't know to what extent your department can get credit for that.

In my mind I think that in a perfect world I would like to see the Department of Economic Development assume three major functions. The first one is that there should be a think tank to develop policy to help boost the economy. It can make recommendations to the government regarding taxation, human resource training, all the things the economy needs to perform well in the future. Of course, if you do that, then you almost become a superdepartment that will do the job for many other departments, because we are living in a world that is so complicated and everything is tied to the economy.

The second role is that I think the Economic Development Department should be able to forecast the global economy. If it can forecast that economy to a certain degree of accuracy, then we can be better prepared for the future. If the department can do that, that is worth all the money the taxpayers can spend on your department. Again, if you can predict the future of the economy, then maybe most of the staff can make millions of dollars overnight.

The last important role, which I have been thinking we have lately shied away from, is to open doors for Alberta business outside our province. That is the area where I think we can make a real impact

and we can measure the success of your department. On that topic, I want to venture into the area of foreign trade offices. For many Albertans the term "foreign trade office" is taboo because of the experience we had in the past when many of the foreign trade offices were perceived as patronage appointments, as not doing their jobs, and as not providing the kind of support a business community needs. The great expense associated with those offices created a bad taste for Albertans and many Canadians also.

There are many parts of the world today that still rely a lot on government when it comes to economic policy. China, for example: I don't think any company can go in there and make any important contacts and sign any meaningful contract without the support of the government. The government over there, whether it's provincial or federal, will not talk to a private company unless it has some kind of protection and some kind of association with a level of government, be it federal or provincial.

I have had the opportunity to travel quite a bit and visit quite a few Canadian embassies overseas. One thing I think we can learn from the province of Quebec is that compared to all the other provinces in Canada, Quebec is probably the most successful province in utilizing our embassy. I can bet you that if you walk into any Canadian embassy overseas, there's a good chance you will find a Quebec bureaucrat working with the Canadian embassy, trying to promote that province and trying to get as many business opportunities for our province as possible.

Of course, the relationship it has with the federal government plays an important role in that, too, because many of the diplomats who work overseas are bilingual by requirement and therefore many of them are Quebecers. That inheritance, that built-in relationship somehow helps the relationship between the embassy and the Quebec bureaucrats who work overseas. Somehow we have to build that kind of relationship. We have to pay attention to recruiting people who can be bilingual, locating them overseas. People have to have the mentality of getting things going rather than the bureaucrat who sits behind a table and doesn't take action when it is needed.

A good way to measure the success of a trade office or a foreign presence is that we should measure the percentage of market share in trading and investment in that particular jurisdiction. For example, if we put a trade office in Beijing this year, then we should look at what is the percentage of trade in that country that we are taking today and then compare that percentage a year from now. We have to look at this as a competition between us and the world, and if we can get the bigger market share, then we should be okay.

Mr. Minister, I think we should take more action. We shouldn't shy away from the idea that we have to spend money in order to make money. There is no doubt that in many parts of the world we have to have a presence. If you look at our growth and our production, our GDP, we are a significant player in the Canadian economy, but when you go overseas, we have a very humble presence. Many countries do not even know that Alberta exists within Canada. When they talk about Canada, they know Quebec, they know Toronto and maybe Vancouver, B.C. That's about it.

I think we have a lot to offer to the world if we can come out with the kind of performance measures I just mentioned earlier. We should put in place a pilot project. We shouldn't put in a trade office immediately. What we should do is put it in on a trial basis, just like a contract when you go and work for an employer. You don't get appointed for five years immediately; you get a trial period for about a year to see how you perform. If the performance exceeds the target we set out, then we can increase the presence or add additional resources to it. I think if we approach it that way, then Albertans will support us in this area.

Also, with the member of the opposition party here, I also would ask that they take this consideration seriously and try to work with us in that approach. I think it's very easy to score political points when you attack foreign trade offices. The reality is that as our economy grows and as the global market becomes more integrated, the choice to become a major player in the global economy requires the ability to be able to find trading partners with other countries outside Canada. If we cannot find trading partners, if we cannot find new markets for Alberta products, then sooner or later we will be left behind. This is not a matter of theory; it is a life-and-death issue for our economy.

9:46

I want to touch on another area that is equally important and that I mentioned earlier, and that is the process we put in place to develop economic policy, the policy that can impact the economy. We are different from many Third World countries in that the economy doesn't listen to the government to a certain degree and it goes its own way. However, for the last seven years I haven't seen a co-ordinated effort from the federal government to develop a national policy to deal with the economy.

Our philosophy is also very simple nowadays in that we just stay out of the business of doing business and let the economy take care of itself. I think it is a good policy. However, in some areas, for example the high-tech industry, we have taken some action to invest in that sector of the economy because we realized that that sector will be the future of Alberta and the future of the world. If we don't have the kind of proper investment, if we don't have the good policy, then we will miss out on the opportunities.

Today I think there are many other areas we can look at, too, because the baby boomers moving into retirement age could have a significant impact on our economy. It could have a huge impact on the entire network of social support that the government designed, and up to now I haven't seen a huge effort from any level of government in Canada to seriously think about how to deal with that issue in the future.

Another area we have not been very active in is the area of dealing with the new Canadians. Canada is a multicultural country. We receive and we welcome thousands of new immigrants every year to Canada, and we've welcomed thousands of them to Alberta. These people come with a wealth of experience and knowledge, and up to now I haven't seen a co-ordinated effort from the federal government and the provincial government to maximize the talents and the knowledge of these people. Many of them become underemployed in our economy, and I think that is a big waste of resources for us. I am looking forward to the day we have some kind of policy that can help them through the transition period, help them achieve the maximum potential they have. Some of that, you know, is related to other departments like the human resources department, but who will take the lead; right?

If you look at it from the economic point of view, that all these decisions we make today will impact the economy in the future, then, yes, it becomes your department that will have to initiate these actions.

MR. HAVELOCK: Do you want me to answer some? I'll go as quickly as I can. You reiterated a comment you made, I remember, when we first discussed the department during our initial business planning process, regarding: how do you evaluate the department? If you disappeared tomorrow, would there be a problem? That type of approach. I can't sit here and tell you: if we disappeared tomorrow, would the economy stop growing? No. However, I think in the long run it would have an impact, and that's what economic strategy

and development is all about. It's putting together a long-term strategy as to the direction we should be going. That's what the department is focusing on with, for example, the Get Ready Alberta process, the long-term strategic tourism marketing plan we've created, the new international marketing strategy. That's where I think we really have a role to play.

You indicated three areas that we should be primarily involved in, the think tank being the first. Well, we really do a lot of that at this stage, and the three documents I just outlined for you are a result of those within the department working with other departments and with the private sector to generate new ideas, a new direction and strategies as to how we can grow the province. So I completely agree with you. That's one of the things we try and do.

Forecasting and the global economy. That, again, falls into the think tank. We are constantly monitoring what's going on throughout the world. We do produce through our department our own forecasts. We work closely with Treasury as to what they're doing, and we are trying to follow the trends and determine where we should be putting our resources. So, again, I agree with you, but I think we do some of that right now.

The third thing you talked about, the foreign offices. You mentioned that in the past they've had a bad name. I agree, and part of our challenge is trying to ensure that we get the full story out. Now, it doesn't help getting the story out when documents within the department make their way to the public prior to us even having a reasonable discussion on what the documents contain. Then sometimes the issue gets away from you, and you're dealing, quite frankly, at a disadvantage in trying to explain what the documents are all about. Once we were able to come forward with what we were intending to do, the issue really disappeared, and the explanation was that we are going to develop performance measures, that we're going to measure how the offices are performing, and that we won't expand until we've completed that process.

Again, part of the challenge for us is in convincing people that we need to have an international presence. It is important, and I think we can win that discussion by, again, ensuring that those located in our international offices have trade and investment expertise, that they aren't performing a protocol function. I'll use Mr. Brad Klak in Tokyo, Japan, as an example. He's completely fluent in Japanese. We have our Beijing representative, Ms Choi. I believe she speaks Cantonese, if I'm not mistaken. The fellow we're appointing to CAPC also speaks a particular dialect of Chinese. So I agree with you that we need to get people who have some background, who understand the language, who can work with the local communities.

Why do we need to do that? Well, you yourself indicated how important exports are to this province. We spend about \$7 million a year on our international representation strategy, yet exports count for \$34 billion worth of activity in this province. It supports 500,000 jobs directly. So we're getting a reasonable rate of return on what we're doing.

We have not done a good job as a government, I think, in explaining to Albertans how important exports are to this province. I believe it was the president of Grant MacEwan who indicated to me the other day that he was discussing the very issue of exports with an audience which he considered to be reasonably well educated, and he asked them how much of our GDP they felt was dependent on exports. They said about less than 10 percent, yet it's about 35 percent. These were people who should know and who are professionals. So that's part of the challenge we need to take up.

You mentioned measuring a percentage of market share in trade and investment. That's a good suggestion, and I know my department officials are going to take that into consideration. Putting someone in place for a year, for example, pursuant to contract – my

personal and initial reaction, hon. member, is that probably a year isn't long enough because it sometimes takes a long time to develop a relationship, so you might not see any measurable results for quite some time. It's the same with tourism marketing. We could be out there spending dollars now, yet you probably won't see a return for a couple of years.

A co-ordinated effort with respect to development of economic policy on a national basis. I agree that there hasn't been a co-ordinated effort. I would suggest, though, that the present federal government and federal governments of the past actually have implemented policies which are not conducive to developing an overall national economic policy because of the way that grants and subsidies work, for example, with particular regions. So in a way we're actually working against ourselves, although I'm encouraged by some of the moves the federal government made with respect to its recent budget on the tax side and on the stock option side. I think that will be of some assistance.

You mentioned new Canadians. Well, interestingly enough, I think it was about 10 days ago I actually had something presented to me by the department regarding . . .

9:56

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt you, but that particular 20-minute segment is up, and we have had indication that there is one more question coming.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, I want to finish my answer. It'll take 30 seconds. Would you let me do that?

MR. PHAM: Please.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. Regarding new Canadians, I just had presented to me by the department some of the changes the federal government is suggesting with respect to immigration policy, and we will be responding to their suggestions in the very near future. You're right; we do in our department have an interest in immigration policy. We want to attract people to this province who actually can become contributing members of our society and contribute to the economy generally. So we are working in that area, although it's very preliminary, and at this stage I can't tell you what we're up to.

MR. PHAM: Not only that, but we have to have a plan to help them when they are here too. We can select the best people, but when we bring them here, they lack the network of support.

THE CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Montrose, we do have to sort of follow what we set out in the beginning here. Lethbridge-East has indicated that he does have one final question.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Mr. Minister, as we were looking through the performance indicators and that, in a lot of the new literature that's coming out now talking about economic growth, especially when you start talking about issues like the Alberta advantage attracting business to our area, they deal with issues that are not just monetary measures but issues of health care, education, income distribution, and the availability of appropriately trained labour forces. Are you at any point in time planning to put some of those kinds of indicators into your business plan so that we can have a little bit of an idea how you as the chair of the council of ministers are kind of bringing together some mechanism to measure the interrelationship and the joint activity between your department and the – what do you want to call them? – support departments that

are under you as the chairman of the Council of Economic Development Ministers?

I would just like to have you think about that and deal with it, and I hope that in the future at some point in time we can see some of those kinds of measures in the performance indicators for the department.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, I think that's a very good point. Again, we aren't simply concerned with the pure economic indicators, as you indicate. We are concerned also with the quality of life, with ensuring that we have a highly educated workforce, for example. So we will take a look at some of those. Now, some of those concepts may be captured in the measure where we're comparing ourselves to other jurisdictions on those 16 points that are listed in the document, but we'll certainly take that into consideration.

Also, Madam Chairman, just very briefly, I'd like to provide a little bit of additional information to the hon. member's questions regarding 3.0.9 and also the numbers that we were talking about regarding the percentages on page 88 of the business plan. I am advised that the image bank and web site were onetime development costs, and actually the maintenance of these is provided for in 3.0.5, Alberta image promotion. So I just learned something tonight, and you did too.

MR. WHITE: I was sure it was somewhere.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yeah.

The Member for Edmonton-Calder also raised the issue of the percentages on the bottom of page 88. I am advised that the numbers aren't in error. They're a function of rounding off large

numbers, but we can give you a detailed work-up on that. I'm glad to hear that they were reasonably accurate. They are because of rounding off, but we'll give you more information.

MR. WHITE: Terrific. Thank you kindly, sir.

DR. NICOL: Madam Chairman, with that, I'd like to move that we adjourn back to the Assembly.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. The committee must rise and report when we return to the Assembly.

Before we close, the chairman and the deputy chairman would both, I think, like to thank you very much for the decorum in here tonight. I think it was exceptional. I am very, very impressed with the dialogue back and forth, and we had a number of members on both sides able to ask questions.

Mr. Minister, thank you for your co-operation. I think it was a good session tonight.

DR. NICOL: Don't we have to vote?

THE CHAIRMAN: Oh, yes, we have to vote. All those in favour of rising and reporting?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:01 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, March 2, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/02

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

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

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand here with great pride today to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly two very special guests who are sitting in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon. They are Ray Martin, former MLA and former Leader of the Official Opposition in this House, and his wife, Cheryl Matheson. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my pleasure to present a petition signed by 108 individuals from Calgary who state:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Assembly that states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

That was signed by 135 Calgarians.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon on behalf of 117 citizens from Calgary to submit a petition asking the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining" the public health care system.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise on this sad day in the Legislature to table 131 petitions signed by Calgarians urging the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure this afternoon to rise and present a petition which requests the

Legislative Assembly "to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." They are from 127 Calgarians. That brings the total today, once all of the presenters have presented, to 1,141 individuals.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of 640 Albertans primarily from the constituency of Edmonton-Glengarry urging the government to "stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table today a petition signed by 235 Albertans, and this brings the total number of signatories to 1,350. The petitioners are calling on this Assembly "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to have the 1,000-signature petition that I presented to the Assembly yesterday read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would rise to request that the petition I presented yesterday now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday concerning public health care and the concern about it being undermined by this government be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I tabled yesterday be read and received now.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday on behalf of the hon. Member for Stony Plain be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, to urge the Government to intervene on the parents' behalf to have the Parkland School Division No. 70 review and reconsider the decision to amalgamate the French Immersion program.

head: Notices of Motions

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to give notice right now that I will be bringing an application for a declaration. There has been a contempt of this Legislative Assembly. This, sir, relates to what happened at noon today when the Leader of the Official Opposition was denied access to a private briefing with respect to a bill that had been given notice on the Order Paper and that had not yet received first reading. In fact, the Leader of the Official Opposition was physically restrained, physically assaulted . . .

THE SPEAKER: You're giving notice.

MR. DICKSON: Very well, sir. I'll deal with it later.
Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I am very pleased to be able to introduce a bill being the Health Care Protection Act, 2000.

This proposed legislation, which is a very important item, is designed to provide protection to the public health care system of this province by filling a legislative gap, to put into law our commitment as a government to the adherence to the principles of the Canada Health Act, and further, Mr. Speaker, to put in place the proper legislative structure to regulate and control and of course prohibit private hospitals. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members had better retain their places when the Speaker is in the chair and he's standing; otherwise, there will be a contempt.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

1:40

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to table with the Assembly the required number of copies of Alberta Infrastructure's three-year primary highway construction and

rehabilitation program, including the north/south trade corridor projects, covering the years 2000, 2001-02, and 2003.

Now, Mr. Speaker, also included are copies of the secondary highway construction and rehab program and construction of public roads and bridges for the years 2000-2001 to '01-02, and the proposed 2000-2001 estimates for seniors' lodges, health care facilities, and water management infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, each MLA will be receiving information related to the project listed that applies to their individual constituency with respect to the listing of primary and secondary highway projects. Those MLAs whose constituencies are within a city will receive information relating to the entire city.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today with the appropriate number of copies. First, from Andre and Myra Morin from the city of St. Albert, who are opposed to and disagree with the proposal to expand private health care, and, secondly, from Dorothy Barclay from Spruce Grove, who likewise is very, very much opposed to what the government is doing in allowing overnight stays.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have three tablings. The first is from Sakaw school, from the chairperson on behalf of the parent council in my riding, who is very concerned about the underfunding of education, in particular classroom sizes. I will be reading the contents of this letter into the record later on in budget debate.

The second tabling is a letter to the Premier from Roland Teape, who is very concerned about what's happening in Environment and makes some recommendations for the Premier with regard to the Minister of Environment.

The third tabling is copies of petitions signed by 102 people who live in the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, these people are very concerned about gas wells that are going into the area that they live in, and they are equally concerned that their MLA was not prepared to table this petition in the Legislature.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a letter of invitation from the minister of health to attend a briefing on Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, today over the noon hour, the same briefing that I was physically stopped from entering.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Point of order.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. members, it being Thursday, Thursday always seems to be that day before a weekend, and sometimes there's some youthful exuberance displayed by hon. members in the Assembly, but let's get on with the Routine.

The chair has recognized the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first one is entitled The Fifth National Court Technology Conference, September '97, the Technology-augmented Court Record.

The second one is entitled Making the Record: Court Reporting and Technology, An Analysis of the Issues, March 4, 1992.

The third one is Depositions and Accuracy: A Report of The Justice Research Institute.

The fourth one, Mr. Speaker, is also in relation to digital audio recording: information on suitability for use in courtrooms. It was compiled by LegalVoice, Inc. in New Jersey, again a report on digital court communication.

Thank you.

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

MR. BONNER: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of a letter from a concerned Albertan — and it's addressed to the Environment minister — stating her opposition to the Natural Heritage Act.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table five copies of *Clear Answers: The Economics and Politics of For-Profit Medicine* by Kevin Taft and Gillian Steward. The book holds the truth about this government's deceptive mismanagement of the public health care system.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. These are further to comments that I was making during the Community Development debates on Tuesday. The first set of tablings is copies of letters from Robert Bardston of Medicine Hat, Cheryl Cooney of Red Deer, and Laurie Leier and John Pauls, both of Calgary, who have written to their MLAs urging the government to increase funding to the arts by \$8 million.

The second set of tablings — and this is further to a discussion on women's policy and programs. I'm providing the front page and the masthead page of three publications by *Canadian Woman Studies*: Women and Education, Women in Science and Technology, and Immigrant and Refugee Women.

My final tabling is five copies of over 50 cards signed and collected by members of the Edmonton Raging Grannies. They are asking to save medicare and health care for people, not for profit.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table today. These people specifically phoned and asked me to table these in the Legislature. Though I have several more, these two phoned this week and said: please table it this week. They are from Valerie Braiden in St. Albert and Mrs. Cindy Milton in Spruce Grove. They are expressing their concerns about private, for-profit health care and the direction this government is taking.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got 11 different

tablings to make today, and with your permission I'd like to put the names of the writers of the letters on record. The first one is a letter from William and Cathy Reid and family of Cochrane.

The second one is from Jim Culver of Lethbridge. The third one is from C.H. Dyke, a retired person from Calgary. The fourth one is from Colleen and Lou Lindblad. The fifth one is from Doug and Janet Friebe of Edmonton. The sixth one is from Joan Bowes from Sherwood Park. The seventh one from Mary Trumpener from Edmonton. The next one is from Joanne Clelland from Edmonton as well. The next one, Mr. Speaker, is from Thea Paap from Edmonton. The second last one is from Peace River and is from Terry Dashcavich. The last one, Mr. Speaker, is from Evelyn Henderson from Edmonton. They are appalled at the decision of this government to bring in private, for-profit hospitals in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings with your permission, and I'll go as quickly as I can. I have, first of all, the appropriate number of copies of a letter from my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark to the Minister of Health and Wellness dated today requesting that the minister not just investigate the Gimbel Eye Centre for a potential breach of law concerning queue-jumping but that the investigation be expanded to other private eye clinics, not only in Calgary but in Edmonton, and also to initiate the investigation in regard to MRI clinics.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I have copies of correspondence, first addressed to the Premier from Mr. Floyd Haynes requesting that he do nothing to jeopardize Alberta's precious public health care system, and a similar letter to the Minister of Health and Wellness from Mr. Floyd Haynes, in my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, I have copies of the executive summary and of the entire text of a very informative report that was released to day by Dr. Richard Plain, a PhD in economics. The title is An Economic Overview from a Public Interest Perspective: The Privatization and the Commercialization of Public Hospital Based Medical Services Within the Province of Alberta. That's the title. Basically he finds a flaw with the notion that somehow the public good can be served by privatization of our health care system.

1:50

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. The first one is to the Hon. Halvar Jonson, Minister of Health and Wellness, dated February 29th: "On a daily basis my colleagues and I receive phone calls, faxes and e-mails regarding the Twelve Principles of the Alberta Approach to health care."

The second one, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent to the Hon. Allan Rock, Minister of Health for Canada: "On a daily basis, my colleagues and I receive phone calls, faxes and e-mails regarding the Twelve Principles of the Alberta Approach to health care." This is dated February 29 from our Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence I have here 2,500 cards signed by Albertans calling on the Premier to

stop the legalization of private, for-profit hospitals. There are too many cards to table five copies of each. I would like to send the 2,500 cards across the way to the Premier's desk.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I have three tablings today. The first is from a resident of Alberta from Red Deer-North, and he's concerned about the Genesis land development in the Spray Valley region. He calls the development a "monstrosity," and he urges "you," being the department, "to recommend that this area be added to the present Peter Lougheed Provincial Park."

The second tabling is from Dr. Peter Petrik of the city of Edmonton, and he wishes to express his profound concern regarding the Genesis proposal of development for major recreation facilities in Spray Valley.

The third is from a long-time resident, actually born and raised in Banff, and she now lives in Kanata, Ontario. She expresses concern about the proposal of Genesis Land Development for a four-season development complex and heli/cat ski operation at the head of Spray Lakes in Kananaskis valley. She's not categorically against the parks development per se but just very concerned about limiting the goal of this development and the scope of this development.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very, very pleased to introduce to you and to the Members of the Legislative Assembly some very excited young individuals. They're from my constituency of Lesser Slave Lake, from High Prairie, from St. Andrew's school. It's rare that we see schools come to the Legislature, because it's so far away, but I'm excited that they're here today, and I know they are. They are in the members' gallery. There are 47 visitors. The teachers that accompany these young people are Terry Smith and Leanne Kowalchuk and parent helpers Mary Lou McCue, Tina Kennedy, Cathy Hewko, Mary Wakaluk, Anna Belyan, Lucy Dufour, Verna Wittigo, Diane Perry, John Zahara, and Hanna Harasymchuk, from Ukraine. There are 35 students. I ask all of the people from High Prairie, St. Andrew's, to stand up and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

DR. WEST: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 50 individuals from the School of Hope. The School of Hope is a virtual and blended program and is also connected to the Vermilion home school program. They are part and parcel of 2,400 students across this province from all the constituencies in the province of Alberta. They have come here today with hope, I guess, that we would demonstrate to them good conduct in the demonstration of democracy, and I trust that we learn something from the name of their school.

I'd also like to introduce with the students some of their teachers: Mrs. Helen Prediger, Mrs. Lorraine Person, and Mrs. Monica Poland. With them also are parents and helpers Mrs. Laura Haerberle, Mrs. Irene Nichol, Mrs. Debbie Farkash, Mr. Brent Clark and Mrs. Camille Clark, Mrs. Bonnie Dyck, and Mr. and Mrs. Frans Feyter. They are also accompanied by Mr. Sylvestro Chiacchia and

Mrs. Harvena Chiacchia and Mr. Bruce Jackson. They're in the members' gallery. I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a visiting family from St. Paul. The family does home schooling. The parents are Mr. and Mrs. Ken and Paulette Ralstin, and they have with them their four children: Sara, Jeremy, Jason, and Natalie. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would like to ask them to stand and be welcomed by the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce a public school board trustee with the Fort McMurray school district, Mr. Glenn Doonanco. He's joined here today with his lovely wife, Louise, and their children, Danielle and Chantel. They're in the members' gallery. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all the legislators here today.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted and pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly seven Cub Scouts from the 97th Dunluce Cubs from the constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs. They are here today to witness what's happening and transpiring in the Legislative Assembly. They are here with their leader, Mrs. Tammy Kucy. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of Highwood, Andrea Fugeman Miller. She has served as the co-chair of Windsong regional child and family services authority. Andrea is located in the members' gallery. I ask her now to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several guests today. First of all, I'd like to introduce two gentlemen that I've only just recently met. I believe that they're seated in the members' gallery. Mr. Peter Labant from St. Paul, with Intercontinental Granite, is visiting us today, and Mr. David Wall from here in the city with Aircom Industries is also here. They've made it into the public gallery. They're already standing, so I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming them.

Mr. Speaker, also seated — and this time I know they're in the members' gallery because I can feel their look, and they're here on some serious business today. I'd like to introduce Bernice and Gerry Cassady. They're visiting from my constituency. They are keen observers of politics. They give me sage advice, and they're here to help hold the government accountable for its privatization of health care. I'd ask them to stand and be recognized.

Sitting with Mr. and Mrs. Cassady, Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce through you and to all members of the Assembly Mr.

Kevan Rhead, who from time to time will call me with some sharp reminders of what my obligations are in terms of serving the public interest. I'd ask him to stand and also receive the warm welcome from all members of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, one final set of guests that are here today: Des and Helen Achilles, who are no strangers to any member, I don't believe, of this Assembly. They make their views known on a whole variety of issues. They are here today as well to join with many Albertans in making sure that this government doesn't push ahead with its privatization of health care plans. I would ask Des and Helen to please rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Chamber.

2:00

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several guests to introduce today. I was going to introduce them all at once, but one person will be introduced after the first group is introduced, and you and my colleagues will know why that is the case in a moment.

All of these people that I'm going to introduce are opposed to the legalization of private, for-profit hospitals. They are Pritam Khullar; Shirley Edgar; Judith Golec; Irene Payne; Dr. Eugene Falkenberg; Margaret Falkenberg, both from Lethbridge; Brian Staples; Clare Botsford; Arlene Chapman, who is one of the six very high quality candidates running for the nomination in Edmonton-Highlands for the New Democrats; Lawrence Johnson, also a candidate for nomination in Highlands; Deanna Shorten and Regina Parker, with Poverty in Action; Doug Tomlinson; Evelyn Tomlinson; and Hana Razga, who is the constituency office manager for Edmonton-Highlands. I'll ask all of these individuals to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is of a person that has been my companion for the last 40 years. That happens to be my wife, Swinder Pannu. Swinder and I celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary on the 28th of February. I'll ask her to now stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a very special day for me. A number of guests have arrived and are in the gallery, so with your indulgence I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, first of all, Julie Lloyd. Julie is a constituent and a lawyer and has been heading up the very good work of Equal=Alberta. I'm proud to count Julie as a friend as well. If I could ask Julie to please rise and accept the welcome of the House.

Secondly, I am always pleased when members of the arts community join us in question period, and I am really delighted that Ron Jenkins has joined us in the public gallery today. Ron is an actor and a director in Edmonton, a very innovative fellow, known for his gritty pieces and realistic presentations, and some will no doubt remember the plays that he did in an autobody shop and a back alley. Ron is the newly appointed artistic director of Workshop West theatre. Congratulations, Ron. I'd ask you to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the House.

I just have two more sets. There are two constituents who have come today to express their concerns about private health care. Roger Wowk is a frequent caller and dispenser of advice to myself and the constituency staff, and we appreciate his interest and his guidance. Joan Dobek is a very active senior in the constituency and gathered a number of signatures on the health care petitions. Now, I'm not sure which gallery they're in or indeed if they're here now

or will be shortly, but if they are, would they please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

Finally, I'd like to introduce Dr. Phil Kreisel. Dr. Kreisel is an entrepreneur and the owner of Matrix Research, and I'm sure many remember his father, Henry Kreisel. With Dr. Kreisel is Joanne Janzen, and that's the marvelous Joanne who runs my office and makes it all happen. I'd ask them to both please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

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

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to this Assembly an ex-Edmontonian whom I know many in this House would know and who is now living in Calgary and is a constituent of mine in Calgary-West. Ron Liepert is in the members' gallery. Would Ron please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to introduce some parents from the l'ecole Meridian Heights school in Stony Plain. Their presence here indicates their support for their children and their children's education. I'd ask them to rise as I call their names and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly: Marian Kyle, Tim Summers, Ilona Jackson, Barb Girouard, Carol Harris, Trish Haryett, Joan Weitzel, Debbie Henwood, Shelly Novlesky, Kathy Colliou, Cheryl Pronovost, Catherine Yamada, Mark Nickel, Helga Medford, and Wayne Jackson. Give them a warm welcome, please.

Thank you very much.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a very active worker in the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek. We are joined today by Guy Ouellette, who is the president of the Liberal association there and who is currently organizing a very actively contested nomination, which will be very lively, and will present to us an excellent candidate at the end of the day. We would ask Mr. Ouellette to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly one of our caucus support staff. She organizes our petitions. She gets calls from all over Alberta and e-mails all of us, and will e-mail anyone else that would like. Her name is Joan Swain. Her e-mail address is jswain@assembly.ab.ca, and she welcomes all of you. She'll help you organize your petitions as well. So please stand, Joan, and receive our welcome.

THE SPEAKER: Well, I think that now everyone in the galleries has been introduced save one person, and that's a former member of this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Peter Sekulic.

head: Oral Question Period

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the choice is very clear. On the one

hand, you have the people of Alberta and the Official Opposition, and on the other side you have the Premier and his government, who are fronting for the special interests pushing for his whole privatization scheme. The Premier promised in his 90-day plan to fix public health care. That was over 1,614 days ago. Albertans trusted this Premier to do that. Today he has given up. He has bowed to the special interests, and he's betrayed the trust of Albertans by bringing in private hospitals legislation. A broken promise to fix public health care, a massive spin campaign, stonewalling Albertans with his secret private hospitals agenda and focus groups: Albertans just don't trust this Premier anymore. Why doesn't this Premier just level with Albertans and admit that this bill is a Trojan horse, that his real agenda – his real agenda – is to allow private hospitals right across Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no Trojan horse other than the one the Liberals tried to bring into the television room today.

Mr. Speaker, when the leader of the Liberal opposition alluded to the opposition Liberals and the Friends of Medicare and CUPE, she forgot the NDs. The NDs have been very aggressive in this too. I mean, let's be fair.

2:10

Quite simply, the message contained in the bill is quite clear. The legislation confirms Alberta's commitment to publicly funded health care and to the principles of the Canada Health Act. Mr. Speaker, if the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is opposed to that, stand up and say so now so that all Albertans will know where she stands. It will ban private hospitals. If the leader of the Liberal opposition is opposed to that, stand up and say so now. Say so now. Queue-jumping will be illegal. If the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is opposed to that, stand up and say so now.

To answer the question, this has absolutely nothing to do with special interest groups, and I don't know what she's talking about. Mr. Speaker, this hon. member has alluded to special interest groups, oh, four or five or six times in this Legislative Assembly. She has never stood up to say who these special interest groups are. She has never stood up to say who they might be connected with, what their professions might be, in what discipline of our health service they might be operating. She makes these very vague generalizations relative to special interest groups. She does not have the courage to stand up and say who they are. Perhaps if she won't in the Legislature, maybe she'll go outside and name them.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'm going to call on the Leader of the Official Opposition to continue . . .

[Disturbance in the gallery]

THE SERGEANT AT ARMS: Order. Order. Order in the gallery. You're not part of the proceedings. Order in the gallery. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members. Hon. members, this is a parliament, and the people who have arrived here have been elected in the province of Alberta. I have no difficulty whatsoever in reading from the book again, but I'm just going to give one precis: decorum is important. There are basic rules about questions, and there are basic rules about answers. We started this first question at 8 minutes after 2. That's nearly six minutes. That's way too long. Succinct questions, succinct answers, and decorum is all important. All important.

Private Health Services (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is this Premier saying that 5,000 citizens from Grande Prairie, 5,200 citizens from Red Deer, and over 10,000 other Albertans who have signed petitions are guilty of malicious misinformation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if they have been reading the information that has been sent out by the Liberals, they have indeed been reading malicious misinformation, because what they have been saying simply is not true.

Mr. Speaker, the truth is in the bill. The truth is in the bill. We will be sending that bill out on Monday to every household in the province. We will be sending this bill out to every household in the province.

I know that that doesn't sit well with the leader of the Liberal opposition. She doesn't believe in bills that purport to become the law of this province, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, she was saying on a radio program today: it's hard for an average citizen to read legislation. In other words, what she is saying to Albertans is: you're not smart enough, Albertans, to read legislation. That's what this hon. member is saying, and that's what she thinks of Albertans.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will this Premier explain why he is putting the well-being of special interests ahead of the well-being of the people of this province?

MR. KLEIN: Again, Mr. Speaker, that is not the case, but I would ask this hon. member to do the honourable thing and stand up and cite all of these special interest groups, to whom they are connected, what their particular interest is. If she won't do it in this House, maybe she will do the honourable thing and do it outside the House so that these special interest groups, whomever they might be, can learn for themselves who they might be.

MRS. MacBETH: First the truth squads, next a bombardment of Albertans' homes with a blitzkrieg of this Premier's propaganda and spin to promote his Trojan horse private hospitals bill, yet the Premier will not show Albertans the research that his whole spin campaign is based upon. Why doesn't the Premier admit that the real plan to bring in private hospitals is in these blanked-out pages?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I remember very well when the leader of the Liberal opposition was a member of Executive Council. During her tenure as minister of education and as minister of health I'm sure that she introduced a number of bills. Now she calls legislation propaganda. What was it when she was on Executive Council? We didn't call her legislation propaganda. Even the ND opposition at that time didn't call a bill of the House propaganda. They had the decency of understanding what a bill is.

A bill is absolutely paramount. It is the instrument for reasoned debate in this Legislative Assembly, and it is the instrument that purports to become law. That is not propaganda. What is propaganda is the kinds of ads that the Liberals have been running, the orchestrated campaign to gain signatures on a petition based on malicious misinformation. That's what propaganda is all about.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are seeing through this Premier.

Is the reason the Premier won't show Albertans their own documents because the focus groups told him that Albertans don't want his private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is the document of Albertans. This is the document that will go to all households in this province. This bill is the culmination of one of the most intensive public consultation processes ever undertaken by this government. This is the culmination of the involvement of Albertans: those in favour, those opposed, and those who simply want more information.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, if they weren't in trouble, they wouldn't need their propaganda campaign.

Is the reason the Premier won't show Albertans their own document because it tests the language and the spin that are most effective in fooling Albertans about private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, obviously the leader of the Liberal opposition, in her endeavour to out-stunt the stunt people even in Hollywood, has not taken time to read the bill. She has not taken time, obviously, to read the bill, because the bill quite clearly states that it will ban private hospitals. What could be clearer than that?

2:20

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this bill isn't worth the paper it was printed on. In fact, the best thing Albertans can do with it is to throw it in their recycle bin and have the propaganda package along with it and ship it off to the Premier's special waste treatment plant in Swan Hills. That is how toxic this plan is for public health care. This is the mechanism to set up American styled health care in this province. The bill says that insured hospital services can only be provided in "a public hospital" or in "an approved surgical facility." Will the Premier admit that "approved surgical facility" is the new code word for private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Two points, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the Liberal opposition should know what a surgical facility is all about. I mean, there were 37 of them operating under her watch and approved by the minister of that particular time.

Mr. Speaker, the other point: when I was in this Legislature as minister of the environment and this hon. member was minister of health, she had nothing but praise for the special waste treatment plant at Swan Hills.

MRS. MacBETH: Approved surgical facility: is that the language that his focus groups told him were the most acceptable in selling private hospitals in his spin campaign?

MR. KLEIN: No spin campaign here, Mr. Speaker. The only spin doctors sitting in this Legislative Assembly are right there in the Liberal caucus and to some degree in the ND caucus. Well, what's left of it.

Mr. Speaker, this is a bill. This is a very important document. This is the most important document that this Legislative Assembly can receive and consider, and to refer to this as propaganda is absolutely shameful. I point out again that this is the result of one of the most intensive public consultation exercises in the history of this province and certainly of this Legislative Assembly.

We're now waiting to hear even further from Albertans as to what they think about this legislation. Mr. Speaker, what 3 million Albertans think about this legislation is far more important to me than the biased, emotional, untruthful kind of rhetoric that is coming out of the mouths of the Liberal Party.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier get out from under the dome? Will he quit hiding behind his propaganda machine? Will he meet me face to face in front of Albertans to discuss health

care in this province? Why would he want to run away from that opportunity? I'll answer Albertans' questions. Will he?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hate to say it, but the last time I met the leader of the Liberal opposition face to face, she didn't like the outcome at all.

I have given an undertaking to debate the bill in front of live television in this Legislative Assembly when it reaches second reading stage. There is no better place, Mr. Speaker, with you, sir, as the referee to debate a bill. That's where a bill should be debated, not in Liberal orchestrated or ND orchestrated town hall meetings but in the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. interim leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After being subjected for months and months to tax-paid propaganda by this government, Albertans have learned today to their horror that Bill 11 is nothing but enabling legislation that will throw the door wide open to private, for-profit hospitals. The real agenda behind Bill 11 has not changed since this Premier took office. The agenda is to privatize our much-loved public health care system. This is the clear conclusion of the latest study on this issue released today by Dr. Richard Plain, a well-respected health care economist from the University of Alberta. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the government relying on a slick public relations campaign to sell the bill when in fact it should be heeding and respecting solid evidence which clearly shows that 37 hospital corporations like HRG will deliver surgical services at a much higher cost than large public hospitals such as the Foothills or the Rockyview?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, do I take it from that that this hon. member is also questioning the ability of Albertans to read a bill and understand a bill?

There are a multitude of reports on this particular issue. We have read those reports. We have received those reports. We have heard all sides of this issue. On the basis of what we've heard – and it's in a document, Mr. Speaker. Everyone has the document. On the basis of what we have heard, this bill was prepared, sir.

Albertans once again will have another opportunity to examine the bill. There is no rhetoric in this bill. There is no emotion in this bill. This bill is fact. This bill is an intention of what this government proposes to do in terms of enacting law. That is not public relations, Mr. Speaker. That is parliamentary procedure. That's all it is.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, there's certainly no emotion worth respecting in this bill. You're right.

How does the Premier expect Albertans to believe that Bill 11 won't allow queue-jumping when such queue-jumping is taking place as I speak at private MRI clinics in Edmonton and Calgary?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, the bill is here for the consideration of this Legislature because we want it to become law. Quite clearly in the bill it says that there will be no queue-jumping. Now, if the hon. member is opposed to the bill, then I would take it that he's in favour of queue-jumping, because the bill, once it becomes law, says that there will be no queue-jumping. We expect people in this province to obey the law.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Isn't Bill 11 just a blank cheque designed to bail out private business interests like those at HRG who aren't able to make a profit without dipping into the taxpayer's pocket?

MR. KLEIN: No, it's not a blank cheque, Mr. Speaker. There are all kinds of rules and regulations associated with this bill relative to the ability of regional health authorities to contract out. If the hon. member wants a little bit of a clinic on the bill, I'm sure the hon. minister will be glad to give him one.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

2:30

Federal Support for Agriculture

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Outrage is a mild word to describe the reaction of the farmers in my constituency and indeed throughout Alberta with regard to the financial penalty that the Liberal federal government is imposing on Alberta grain producers by unilaterally excluding Alberta farmers from the assistance program announced a week ago today. This Liberal decision is at its best the height of ignorance and at its worst an obscene form of political penalty. All of my questions are to the minister responsible for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Given your meeting yesterday with the federal Liberal minister of agriculture, would you please advise Alberta farmers of the rationale put forward by the Liberal government to exclude Alberta farmers from this program?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that there was ever any rational thinking that went into this decision I think would be a real stretch. Quite frankly, it looks to me like the whole thing was cooked up between the Prime Minister and one minister, Mr. Goodale. I believe that Mr. Goodale is trying to shovel some money into some farmer's pockets because his empire is crumbling, that empire being the Canadian Wheat Board. I believe he's very, very anxious to try to get some money into their pockets so that they will support the Wheat Board.

I mean, the Wheat Board is out there telling farmers now that the price of grain is going to go up. Well, they're the only people doing any analysis in the world that are suggesting that grain prices are going to go up much in the foreseeable future. The surpluses that are out there are high enough that you'd have to see a major catastrophe in one of the countries that produces grain in order for that to happen.

It's a very difficult one to figure out, and while we had reasonable meetings yesterday, I don't see any rationale behind it.

MR. JACQUES: Mr. Minister, how did the facts that are faced today by Alberta farmers compare with the so-called lack of rationale or reasons put forward by the government yesterday in your meeting?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, there were two ways they were trying to rationalize this thing. Quite frankly, I believe what's happened is that the sums of money arrived, they were dispersed, and now the minister of agriculture is left with a number of people with computers and calculators trying to figure out how can they rationalize that it goes to two provinces and not to a province like Alberta.

So they use things like the fact that the areas that were flooded last year weren't covered under the emergency disaster services because they were insured losses. They use rationale that the freight rates have gone up more in Saskatchewan and Manitoba since the buyout of the western grain transportation, and they're using a figure of \$18.

When you look at the facts, the fact is that we had as many acres that did not produce last year in Alberta as in Saskatchewan, and the farmers in our province that didn't get a crop had input costs. Many of those farmers in Manitoba did not have. The issue of the \$18:

well, the fact is that the average increase in Alberta since the buyout of the Crow is \$17.10. Through using their calculations, they tell me that only 4 percent of ours have gone up that much. How could it possibly be that only 4 percent are above \$18 when in fact the average is \$17.10? So the rationale just doesn't work.

MR. JACQUES: Mr. Minister, are you prepared to give serious consideration to an Alberta go-it-alone program which would represent the approximate 60 million to 70 million dollar cost to Alberta that we would otherwise have paid out had the federal program been applied to Alberta?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, back in October, before we announced the changes to the farm income disaster program and the disaster loan program, we praised the federal government on the fact that we were going to make these changes, and we expected that we would get our 60 percent in that program. We haven't got anything to this point. We're still working on it. We intend to keep on. Believe me, we will and we are looking at the disaster situations in this province, and we will be addressing those.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had a chance to read the bill, and quite frankly what I have to say to the Premier is: three strikes and you're out. The reality is that this Premier is playing Russian roulette with our public health care system by having the College of Physicians and Surgeons, whose role is to approve clinical standards, now through bylaw approve commercial enterprises, those approved surgical facilities that are really code for mini private, for-profit hospitals. My questions are to the Premier. When the Premier's bill talks about insured services and "enhanced medical goods or services," isn't he really talking about establishing a list of core services, minimum standards that will push Albertans to the private sector?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, quite the opposite. Quite the opposite. The bill quite specifically alludes to very stringent rules and regulations under which private surgical clinics must operate.

Relative to the involvement of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, this is absolutely necessary, and I will have the hon. minister explain why.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the hon. member does not see the College of Physicians and Surgeons in terms of its true importance in assessing the quality of services, the capability, for instance, of surgical services and authorizing, accrediting those parts of the health care system. I think they are by far the most expert and most credible group in the province to deal with that part of the approval of hospitals or surgical facilities in terms of standards and safety and the betterment of patient treatment. That I think is a very important part of the legislation. It is in there very clearly.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I would invite the hon. member to read the rest of the bill. There are other provisions there with respect to a process, the criteria involved, and the ultimate approval by the minister of the particular facility contract. So there are many protections in this piece of legislation.

MS LEIBOVICI: Asking the college to do your dirty work.

As the Premier has indicated a commitment to the Canada Health Act, can the Premier tell us today: if there's a conflict between this legislation, your Bill 11, and the Canada Health Act, which act prevails? Where is that clause in the act?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, quite simply the Canada Health Act prevails, and that's why, sir, we have taken the unprecedented move of sending this bill to the federal Minister of Health for his comments. If the Liberals have any influence whatsoever in Ottawa, I would urge them to ask Mr. Rock to get us his response as quickly as possible. We've kept the federal government involved in this process every step of the way.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if the Premier has nothing to hide from either the federal Minister of Health or the Members of this Legislative Assembly or the members of the public, where are the regulations that you have promised us for the last few weeks?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as many of the regulations as possible are contained in this bill. [interjections] If they don't want to hear the answer, I'll sit down. Okay? [interjections] Well, they don't want to hear the answer.

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

Gasoline Prices

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Representing Calgary-Fort constituents, I would like to bring forth their real daily concern. I believe this is also a concern across Alberta. It is the gasoline price. Many hardworking Albertans such as factory workers, office workers, farmers, taxicab drivers, truck drivers, and many Alberta companies depend on transportation to make their living. The rising cost of gasoline is getting to an intolerable level. My question is to the Minister of Resource Development. Could the minister explain why gasoline prices are so high?

2:40

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, this is probably one of the biggest questions I am asked right now. Every time a commodity price moves at the speed this one has in the last year, one that is used by so many people in their daily lives, it is shocking. Now, what happened was that a year ago in January the average price of oil was \$12 a barrel in the province of Alberta, about \$12.21. It fluctuated in and around the \$12 mark. Today it's \$30 and pushing \$31. Well, what happens is that the price does track the price of a barrel of oil, about a 1 cent per dollar rise.

If you looked at the price of gasoline a year ago – and our memories are very short – you would have seen in January '99 that Edmonton was at 42.9, Calgary was at 46.9, and the average for the province was 44.9 or 45 cents. Today we are looking at roughly 62.9 or 63 cents in the province of Alberta. The price of oil has gone up \$18 a barrel, from that \$12 to the \$30. It tracks 1 cent per dollar for a barrel of oil, which would be 18 cents, which added to 45 would make it 63 cents.

That doesn't help the people that have to pay this, and we would hope that as OPEC looks at world supply – and they've recently made a decision to increase production – they would produce another 2 million barrels a day. They have said that they're going to look at this. This will then put a downward pressure on the price per barrel of oil.

So, yes, the margins haven't changed a lot for the retailer. The

markups haven't changed, as the bureau just did an investigation, but the price of a barrel of oil has gone up. Remember that \$30 a barrel American is \$45 a barrel Canadian.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is also to the Minister of Resource Development. What role does government play in gasoline pricing?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, that is the other question that should be answered to the people of Alberta. Tax is 40 to 45 percent of a litre of gasoline. We have a fixed one, 9 cents a litre. It didn't move at all when the price of gas went up to 62 cents from 44 cents a year ago. It stays at 9 cents a litre. Now, the federal government, too, has a tax, that is 10 cents a litre, but they also have the GST. The GST on that gallon of gas at 45 cents a year ago was 2 and a half cents. Today, at 63 cents, 7 percent is put on the 63 cents, which brings the federal tax another nearly 4 and a half cents higher. So today the federal government is taking close to 14-plus cents a litre and gets an advantage as the price of gasoline goes up.

MR. CAO: My second supplementary question is also to the same minister. The provincial and the federal taxes make up a big chunk of the gasoline price, so do these added costs translate into any benefit to Alberta?

DR. WEST: The tragedy of the whole gasoline story is that we take the taxes from this litre of fuel to put into roads in the province of Alberta. We take the licence plates and we take this 9 cents a litre and we put it into the roads. It only covers about half of what we're spending on roads today. The federal government takes it, about \$5 billion – and it's mounting now. If you take the GST on gasoline plus their tax, they take over \$5 billion today, and last year, until this recent budget, they've only put about \$200 million back into roads.

When the truckers and the people of Canada say, "Why are we paying so much on this gasoline?" they should ask the federal government if they would move some of that money back into infrastructure in the province or, if they're not going to, to make a consideration to lower their tax or freeze the GST on a litre of fuel.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, this Premier calling private hospitals approved surgical facilities in this bill is just like the American military calling dead civilians collateral damage.

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Given that this Premier has said that it's all in the bill, when I look at the bill, I see that it says that the services that will be provided at these so-called approved surgical facilities depends on bylaws made under the Medical Profession Act. Well, isn't it true, Mr. Premier, that in fact today there are no bylaws that define major surgical services, so this bill is really nothing more than an illusion of protection?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't think he has read the bill. Really I don't think he has, because it says, "No person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." That is clear. Even this member can understand that. He should be able to.

Secondly, it says, "No person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta," whether it's a therapeutic abortion, a cataract surgery,

whatever. I'm reading from the bill, Mr. Speaker: "No person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta except in . . . a public hospital." If he wants to know what a public hospital looks like, I would suggest that he could be excused right now and go down and have a look at the Royal Alex or the University hospital, to go over to Grey Nuns or over to Misericordia. If he doesn't know what a hospital looks like, maybe he'll take the time now and go and see what one looks like. Or in "an approved surgical facility." It says – and here is the answer to the question – "No person shall provide a major surgical service, as described in the by-laws under the Medical Profession Act, in Alberta except in a public hospital."

If he needs further explanation I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think the House should be reminded, particularly the Liberal opposition, that some months ago when this issue was before the Assembly for discussion in question period, it was well noted at that time that there was a legislative gap or a weakness in the system in terms of our ability to regulate these surgical clinics.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons had done work. It had considerable discussion on the development of the bylaws that would govern the quality and standards and accreditation of surgical clinics. However, some members of the House may recall that the college was reluctant to move forward with that without there being the proper legislative framework in legislation on the other side, in terms of the government's responsibility. So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very much on record that the college is interested in this area. They are concerned about making sure that there are the standards, that there is the quality. They certainly are aware of the issue and have done some work on it.

MR. SAPERS: So the truth is that there are no bylaws. You know, Mr. Speaker, they say that we should read the bill. Maybe the Premier should read his own legislation.

Now, given that the Premier has said in this Chamber and elsewhere that this is just an experiment and that if it fails, somehow we can go back, if that's true, Mr. Premier, where in this bill is the mechanism to go back? Where's the sunset clause? Where's the ability to go back?

MR. KLEIN: Will the hon. member quote the *Hansard* where purportedly I made those comments? I did not make those comments. I would ask the hon. member because he used a quote. He said that I made those statements in this House, the statement that this is an experiment. Will he cite the authority? Will he cite the *Hansard* in which I said that, Mr. Speaker, or withdraw it?

2:50

MR. SAPERS: I'll find it, and I'll be happy to cite it, Mr. Speaker. I'll get it to you. Why don't you answer the question? Why don't you answer the question? Why don't you answer the question?

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Whoa. Sit down, please. Whoa. Thursday afternoon.

Well, we had a debate going on again, and we have certain rules about debating in the question period. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, you asked three times why he didn't answer the question. I presume that was the question? Well, then it was a preamble, which is outlawed.

MR. SAPERS: I withdraw the preamble.

THE SPEAKER: So we can move on now?

MR. SAPERS: To my next question.

THE SPEAKER: Well, what was all that filler in there, all of which violated every rule?

Please proceed with your third question, with no preamble, to the point.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier has said that he'll be open and transparent and given that the legislation is supposed to be the whole truth and nothing but the truth, perhaps the Premier will explain why there are 20 different elements in this bill that will require secret, behind-closed-door lawmaking. Why is it that so many elements of this bill require regulations?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there are several regulations that provide for the protection of the public health system as we know it today.

Relative to the specifics of the bill, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this very important bill has actually in overall terms very few regulatory sections. The very important parts of the bill are there in the text. I'm sure the opposition is somewhat concerned about that because it's not to their advantage, but it is certainly to the advantage of Albertans. You have it very clearly stated: there shall be no private hospitals. I could go through the rest of the text of the legislation pointing out where we have addressed the major issues in this whole area. I would invite them to continue to read the bill and understand it before they make judgments on how many regulations will be required.

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

Registry Fees

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the hon. Minister of Government Services. We've all heard that the fees that Alberta registries charge for certain services have been greatly reduced, by some \$55 million. These fees fall under land titles, personal property and corporate registries. Motor vehicle registry fees make up the lion's share of these fees that Alberta registries collect, yet none of the fees are being reduced. Can the minister explain why it is that motor vehicle registry fees are not included among the fee reductions?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond to this as this was an item that was in the budget that our Treasurer brought down just a few days ago.

I want to say at the beginning that based on the Ontario case where the court ordered the Ontario government to review its fees and charges, Alberta was the only province that proceeded voluntarily to go through an extensive review of its fees and charges. In the case of Government Services, we have put in the budget a reduction of 94 various fees and charges that are under our responsibility. The Department of Justice also had some fee reductions in that budget document. This came about as a complete review and cost analysis of every fee that was charged through this department, and that was headed up by the Member for St. Albert. She was in charge of the fees review committee.

In regard to the particular fee structure for motor vehicles, it was determined through this review process that those fees were appropriate. It's recognized that those fees benefit the people who are on the highways because those fees are dedicated to enforcement and to improvement of the provincial roads. So the fees were appropriate as they were being charged, and that is why there is not a reduction on those particular fees, albeit other fees in fact were reduced.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental to the same minister. I understand that private registry agents are responsible for delivering personal property and corporate registry services and are allowed to charge service fees over and above that fee set by government. What assurances do Albertans have that the reductions that have been announced will be passed on to them?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, when the province made the decision, led by our government, to make a change in how we deliver services insofar as registries and motor vehicle licensing, et cetera, and all those functions that were attached to the motor vehicle branches a number of years ago, we entered into a partnership arrangement to have that frontline delivery contracted out. Quite frankly, it's been extremely successful. People can now go in and get a driver's licence or a car licence plate without having to take a day off work and are treated very well in the registries.

We are under a partnership contract with the registry agents, and when we make a decision to reduce the government side of the fee structure, then we send an instruction out to the registry agents and instruct them to reduce that fee to Albertans. I'm able to report that in the first review we did immediately after the budget was filed, most of our registry agents had already put the reduced fees in place.

We did make the commitment that we would be monitoring our registry agents, some 228 in the province of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that they continue to pass on the savings of the almost 94 fee structures to Albertans so that they benefit from the \$54 million that was coming out of the revenue base for the Department of Government Services. This benefit is moving forward. We monitor these fees on a continual basis, and we will continue to do so.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That begs another question. Since we've heard about the total amount, about \$55 million, and even about how much these fees were reduced, my question is: how was each figure arrived at?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we have gone through extensive analysis of the fees that were in place to determine what costs were appropriate. We have a cost recovery mechanism on the delivery of these services through Government Services. Each fee was looked at as to what the cost of the program was. We took all of our costs and factored them in, and that was the fee that was charged. A number of those fees, I can say, have been eliminated entirely, and for some of them, people can access information with no charge whatsoever.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'm going to call on the first of three hon. members to participate in Members' Statements today, but before we do that, please join me in congratulating the hon. Member for Little Bow on an election anniversary in the next day or two.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

3:00

Medicine Hat Hospital MRI Unit

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to draw to your attention and to the attention of all members, in particular the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, an important decision that was recently announced by the Palliser regional health authority. That decision was to proceed with planning and preparation for the acquisition and operation of an MRI unit in the Medicine Hat regional hospital. The board has authorized local foundations within the Palliser health region to begin fund-raising. There will also be a subsequent request for appropriate capital funding from Alberta Health and Wellness. At the same time the board indicated that it will be in a position to incorporate annual operating costs into its budget in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, the medical staff within the region have been calling for an MRI for a number of years, and the general public in south-eastern Alberta have seen MRIs funded for Lethbridge, Red Deer, and Grande Prairie. The reasons stated by the minister that Medicine Hat was not included in last year's announcements was that the PRHA had not identified it as a priority. Over time the number of MRI scans required has increased, and the RHA budget has grown. The board has been monitoring the situation and has determined that circumstances are now such that they can give MRI acquisition the priority designation it requires.

MRI acquisition is not something that can be taken lightly. The board is to be commended for waiting until both demand and financial viability were reached before proceeding with plans to acquire an MRI.

Today I am pleased to rise in my place and indicate to you, Mr. Speaker, that this project has my full support. I want to assure the people of southeastern Alberta that I am committed to work with the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Minister of Infrastructure to ensure that MRI funding is provided to Medicine Hat in a timely and equitable manner. The people of Medicine Hat and southeastern Alberta deserve no less.

Thank you.

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

Defenders of Health Care System

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to speak about those Albertans that are attempting to preserve a high-quality, public health care system, the hundreds, the thousands. First, the unsung heroes. The unsung heroes are those who organize forums, those who organize petitions, those who go door to door, those who sign the petitions; in other words, the grass roots of Alberta, that are spread throughout the province.

Then of course there are those that felt the brunt of the health care cuts and the restructuring: the health caregivers, the overworked nurses, the overworked doctors, the other medical staff in the medical facilities, and of course paramedic drivers, who sometimes drive around with a patient in the back with no emergency room to take them to.

Then there are those high-profile individuals who tend to speak out more; Kevin Taft, for example. His recent book, *Clear Answers*, highly recommended reading, was co-written by another Albertan, Gillian Steward from Calgary, who has fought to preserve the health care system for years. We have Donna Wilson from the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Alberta. We have Wendy Armstrong from the Alberta chapter of the Consumers' Association. We have Christine Burdette, who gives of herself steadily, representing the Friends of Medicare; all those others associated with the Friends of Medicare; and Dr. Richard Plain, who presented another one of his

studies. These are the Albertans that are fighting to preserve a high-quality public health care system.

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

Public/Private Sector Health Partnerships

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to talk about the significance of health care partnerships and innovative approaches and the bottom-line benefit to receivers of service, to Albertans, for whom the partnerships were created in the first place. It seems to me that in recent weeks during the political debate around legislation to further improve delivery of our health care system, many have chosen to ignore why changes are even being considered. Recent media coverage has focused on the negative speculation loudly voiced by opposition colleagues rather than on covering wonderful new initiatives in the health system, which are only possible because of partnerships and which are designed to better serve the needs of citizens of the community.

Last Friday I attended the grand opening of the innovative Carewest Signal Pointe Alzheimer's centre in my constituency of Calgary-West. The pride of over 200 people was evident as our Health and Wellness minister congratulated Carewest on the unique centre, designed to better serve the needs of 48 full-time residents from the Calgary community who have moderate to severe Alzheimer's. Also, community support services include six respite care beds, a day program for dementia people living at home, and a resource centre for home caregivers as 60 percent of people with dementia are cared for at home. This wonderful centre, including equipment and furnishings, has been funded through a partnership between Carewest, the provincial government, and the private sector.

Monday I attended the opening of the Family Caregiver Centre in Calgary, which is a true partnership between Scotiabank and the Calgary Health Trust. Caregiving is gaining increasing recognition as one desirable way for society to cope with the impact of our aging population. I agreed to be honorary chair as I totally support living at one's home as long as possible with the help of necessary supports.

We are talking about the future, Mr. Speaker, our future, and the fact that Alberta's senior population of 300,000 will double to 600,000 by 2016. I'm very proud to say that innovative partnerships in health care are providing very positive encouragement to the challenges we face in the future.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's that wonderful time of the week when I'm entitled to ask the Government House Leader if he would preview the legislation and activity we might contemplate for next week.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, March 6, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, if not already dealt with: Bill 1, Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act; Bill 2, First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act; Bill 3, Statute Revision Act; Bill 4, Surveys Amendment Act; Bill 5, Land Titles Amendment Act; if there's time, government motions 5, 6, and 7, being the spring, Easter, and sessional adjournment motions; and as per the Order Paper.

Monday at 8 p.m. of course under Government Bills and Orders we will be convening in Committee of Supply to deal with the main

estimates of the Provincial Treasurer in subcommittee A and Justice and Attorney General in subcommittee B. Providing there's time, we will deal with the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, Bill 12, and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, March 7, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, government motions 5, 6, and 7, the spring, Easter, and sessional adjournment motions, if they haven't been previously disposed of; and as per the Order Paper. On Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply: in the Assembly, subcommittee C, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development main estimates; in room 512, subcommittee D, Innovation and Science main estimates. Thereafter, Committee of the Whole, Bill 12, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000; and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, March 8, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders: in the Assembly, committee A, Executive Council main estimates; in room 512, committee B, Infrastructure main estimates. Thereafter third reading of Bill 12, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000, and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, March 9, under Government Bills and Orders, such estimates as may be designated by the Official Opposition on Monday; and as per the Order Paper based on progress Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I have notice that today there will be an hon. member rising on a notice of contempt, which will require some explanation, and four notices of points of order, which we will now deal with.

Before we begin, I would just like to quote one line from *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, the sixth edition. The authors, Fraser, Dawson and Holtby, say: "Television has made a marked impact on Parliament and public perception thereof." How different it is at 10 minutes after 3 than it was a few minutes before. Amazing. It's too bad that 3 million citizens can't see the way we really do most of our work.

3:10

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a major point. Hon. member, before you begin, I'm not sure what a point of contempt is, so please quote from the Standing Orders, and if you're dealing with a point of privilege, it's Standing Order 15. This chairman would view contempt in the same regards as privilege, not a lightly taken matter.

Privilege

Contempt of the Assembly

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, let me say first that the last time I remember this Assembly dealing with a question of contempt was when I raised it – I think it was a year ago – in connection with the health summit, and there was some considerable discussion then in terms of process. I wanted to give the earliest possible notice, so that's why there's been no written notice to you.

The concern is this. The authority I'm relying on is principally *Erskine May*, page 108. I'd just cite the general authority.

Generally speaking, any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

The basis of the claim is this, Mr. Speaker. These are the facts as I understand them. This afternoon at 12:15 the Premier's office and the Minister of Health and Wellness arranged for a preview of Bill 11 in the media room downstairs in this building, and at 1 o'clock

the Premier was to join that group and preview and answer questions with respect to Bill 11. Now, those people entitled to attend or invited to attend were apparently members of the media gallery here in the Assembly. This happened after the bill had been put on notice and appeared on the Order Paper and we'd received confirmation of notice and before the bill had received first reading.

The Leader of the Official Opposition attended at the media room with this member. When she entered the doors of the media room, a young woman, an employee of the government – and I think it serves little purpose to embarrass the individual woman. I take it she was acting on instructions of the Premier, the Minister of Health and Wellness, or the chair of this meeting, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. This young woman came up, told Mrs. MacBeth that she could not enter the room. Physically, in terms of the Criminal Code, in my view, it would be an assault, because without the consent of Mrs. MacBeth she applied – it was a physical application of force. I witnessed it. Mrs. MacBeth was told to leave. The Member for Calgary-Glenmore, who was chairing the meeting, advised Mrs. MacBeth that she had to leave.

My concern is this, Mr. Speaker. We have seen with budgets that there are lockups where a member of the opposition or a researcher is entitled to go into the lockup to preview a budget before it's been entered. I am not aware, at least in my time in the Assembly, that a public bill ever has been exposed to a private group for review before the bill comes into this Assembly and is given first reading.

The thrust of my argument is that what you have is an affront to every single member in this Assembly. We are the only people who represent the 3 million people in this province. It is our job. It's not some selected group of reporters or media people. There clearly have been multiple briefings, technical briefings after a bill has been given first reading and MLAs have been exposed to it and had a chance to see it.

In terms of the remedy I'm looking for, the proposition is this. It is not to have my friend for Calgary-Glenmore or the Minister of Health and Wellness or the Premier carted off in handcuffs. What I want to resolve is whether it is permissible for a public bill to be shared with a select group of Albertans privately invited in designate by a member of Executive Council. That the Leader of the Opposition would be denied access to that briefing, that this member would be denied access to that briefing clearly, in my respectful view, obstructs and impedes us in doing our job.

More importantly, it draws enormous disrespect to the role that each of us plays. What's the point in attaching any significance to first reading of any public bill if the government has gone and previewed the darn thing and shared it with groups of Albertans beforehand? We then become nothing more than a rubber-stamping facility of minor importance. So much for all of the tradition and history of the British parliamentary system.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are the facts, as I understand them. As I say, I have the name of the woman that pushed the Leader of the Opposition, but as I say, the principal concern is that you had at least two elected members in this province denied access not to a private office but to a media room, that customarily all MLAs have access to and utilize on a regular basis.

I know of no precedent for this, Mr. Speaker. You've been here a lot longer than I have, and you may have seen this practice happen before. I've always been advised, as long as I've been here, that first reading of a bill is a very special occasion. I've had ministers of the Crown tell me multiple times that they could not share with me the text of the bill. They could tell me a little bit about what was in it, but they couldn't share the text because that had to wait for first reading of the bill. Now, if the rules have changed and all that tradition has gone out the window, Mr. Speaker, would you, please,

tell us that? I'd like to have that instruction and information.

You might also look at *Erskine May*, pages 108 and 117. I'm not going to take your time to cite that. There is some interesting reference that's somewhat collateral, but I found in *Beauchesne*, debates October 30, 1969, in the House of Commons, pages 269 and 270 – and it's been clear, Mr. Speaker, that for a minister to make a ministerial statement outside the House would not offend the practices of the House in making announcements, ministerial statements, communications to the public. That's perfectly in order. But this is something very special, very different. It's clearly different qualitatively than a Budget Address and details of the budget. We're talking about a bill.

I'd just conclude, Mr. Speaker, with this observation. I put forward this proposition, that once a bill is put on notice on the Order Paper, as this one was, in effect all of this Legislative Assembly has a proprietary interest in that bill, and it's no longer the playing of a particular bill sponsor. If it's going to be shared and there are going to be technical briefings, let them happen after it's been introduced in this Assembly and every single member has had a chance to see it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There seem to be two issues that have been raised by the hon. Opposition House Leader, and I think the two are essentially the same.

The first, relative to access by the Leader of the Opposition and the Opposition House Leader to a meeting which was being held with respect to a technical briefing relating to the bill. In particular, there was an allegation of an assault. My understanding of the situation, although I admit I was not there, is somewhat different than was reported. In fact, my understanding is that there was a door closed by one of the parties in question, and perhaps the assault could have gone the other way. However, that's extraneous.

What's important today is the question of whether or not the privileges of the members were breached. I would note – and I'll file with the House copies of letters, one addressed to Nancy MacBeth, Leader of the Official Opposition.

3:20

AN HON. MEMBER: It's already been tabled.

MR. HANCOCK: Has it been tabled this afternoon? Okay. I understand it was tabled.

There was a similar letter to the interim leader of the third party inviting them to an opportunity for a technical briefing on the details of the bill. It said:

Please contact my office if you or other members of your Caucus would be interested in such a briefing and we can arrange a mutually convenient time.

It's my understanding that they did not avail themselves of the opportunity for that briefing. They didn't call and ask for that briefing, instead showed up at a different meeting to which other people had been invited for a technical briefing on the details of the bill.

So I think it's quite inappropriate for them to raise the question on the basis of being denied the opportunity for a technical briefing on the bill. In fact they were invited to a briefing. They were not invited to the one they chose to attend. I understand that it was not the member in charge of that meeting who decided that in fact the two members in question could not attend that meeting but the media representatives that were there. The media representatives that were there were asked if they wanted those members to be allowed to sit

in the meeting. It was their meeting, and they indicated that they did not. So that was communicated to them.

Members of the opposition were not denied the opportunity to have the same technical briefing as the media in this particular situation.

Now, the second portion of that, the question of the preview of a bill. This government is renowned for its consultation with Albertans. It's renowned for asking Albertans. In fact, the content of this bill is no secret. The surgical services policy was put out in November. It was published. There was a television address. There's been continuous discussion about the policy, as there should be. Since that time the content has been discussed in this House since we opened the House. The Premier has answered questions on almost a daily basis, has indicated to the House that the bill would ban private hospitals, that the bill would ban queue-jumping, went through a litany of what was going to be in the bill. So there was no secret in the bill.

I can assure the House that no media was given a copy of the bill that was presented in this House. They may have had access to the content of that bill, but they were not provided a copy of Bill 11 in its published form. The interests of the House have been preserved; the interests of the members of the House have been preserved.

I might also say, Mr. Speaker, that today is an interesting day. Knowing that Bill 11 – no, I can't say that because I don't know if they knew that Bill 11 was coming. On Monday the Official Opposition designated this afternoon to hear and deal with the estimates of the Premier, and this thus necessitated his presence in the House this afternoon to deal with those estimates. So when they say that the technical briefing could happen after, they know full well that they've arranged for that not to be the case and that the Premier would have to be in the House this afternoon. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, please. Thank you.

Hon. members, the chair was quite happy to go along with life the way it was until he was given notice of an order of a motion of contempt. The chair's indicated that he views this as very, very serious, so the chair will hear the arguments, and if we're here until 5:30 hearing the arguments, so be it.

If an hon. member wants to raise this kind of question, then this chair will not deal with it until he has afforded himself every opportunity to get all the information with respect to it. At this point in time he's not sure what we're even talking about. We've got some discussions. Standing Order 15(4) says, "If the member whose conduct is called into question is not present" – well, I'm not sure who that is – "the matter shall be . . ." et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

So I'm listening very attentively. This was raised.

Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that I have much more to say in light of what you've said. Clearly the provisions of Standing Order 15 haven't been dealt with. No member's conduct has been called into question. I dealt with some of the substantive matters as to the issues raised in terms of what happened at a meeting earlier in the day, but I'm not sure I know exactly what contempt is being called into question here.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I invite you to come back to assist me with respect to this. I clearly am reading *Erskine May*. I've looked at *Erskine May*. If some member's conduct is being called into question, it is very important we deal with that. That member should be named, and one will have to get all the other information.

Now, I gather that the comments you made about, quote, assault are not pertinent. Please help me with that one as well.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I was in this fix. I wanted to raise it as quickly as possible so as not to prejudice the claim. I would be happy to prepare a detailed written submission in fact with affidavits from those who were present to be able to particularize precisely what happened. I can identify those government employees who were involved. I'd mentioned that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore was apparently chairing the meeting. That was my observation. I would like the opportunity to be able to put together the kind of detailed material that obviously I haven't been able to now.

I've given notice of it, and the province now understands the basis of the claim. I'd be happy to particularize it because it is a serious matter, and I'd like to be able to marshal the authorities and put the facts before you in a way that I think is indisputable. I'd appreciate that opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, this is a matter that we will return to in this Assembly at the conclusion of question period on Monday, and the arguments will be raised in this Assembly to be heard by all members. If in fact there is a point of privilege, it will in essence be all members who will judge.

The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Orders 23(h) and (i): making allegations against another member and imputing false or unavowed motives to another member. As you'll recall, during the tablings the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie tabled a document and made some comments prior to tabling it. The statement that I heard towards the end of her comments was something to the effect that I would not file on behalf of the residents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan the document that she was tabling at that time.

Mr. Speaker, I would expect more from an elected member, because I would expect it's an elected member's responsibility to verify and fully portray the truth of statements in this Legislature. Never did that member speak to me about the possibility of filing this and that she would have to do it on my behalf or on behalf of the residents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

It may be a true statement that some people in Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan thought I may not file that petition, but I think, rather, that it's an attempt to diminish the efforts of another member to represent their constituency. In fact, I met with concerned residents of the Brookville area last evening discussing this gas well issue.

This, Mr. Speaker, is similar to schoolyard behaviour that was exhibited during my former career, in which sometimes children would hope to spread rumours to somehow perhaps break up friendships and have some perceived personal gain. These allegations were perhaps just repeated by the member, but the member has the responsibility not to repeat unfounded, unsubstantiated, unvalidated, and untrue allegations.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, if you're reading the Blues, you'll notice that the Blues state: "102 people who live in the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan." I have before me the tabling; 102 signatures are on this tabling. The residents primarily are from Edmonton, Westlock, Devon, Morinville, St. Albert, Sangudo, Fort McMurray, and the adjacent constituency of Sherwood Park. In fact, five

residents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan have signed this petition. It clearly says that. The addresses are clearly here.

Mr. Speaker, in light of these allegations, I would ask for a retraction and an apology. This current situation is such that slanderous statements can be made on TV in full view of all the residents of Alberta who wish to view question period during the afternoon and have the opportunity to see a person make these allegations but not to see somebody defend them before this Legislature. In fact, 3 million people in the province had access to that viewing, and this afternoon a few colleagues and even fewer opposition members are here to hear my statement regarding this.

Mr. Speaker, in reference to your comments earlier about things being on TV, I would ask that you would consider that points of order be raised immediately upon them being voiced during question period and during tablings so that we can properly defend ourselves against false allegations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MR. DICKSON: On the point of order. The customs are clear in this Assembly that we take the word of an hon. member. I hear what he says, that in fact he had been prepared to table those petitions. Clearly, on behalf of my colleague I'm certainly prepared to accept his word.

The advice I had received from my colleague was that she'd met with some 70-odd people and had been advised that this member would not present the petition. So that we can be clear and so it's on the record, the member says that it's inaccurate, and I accept his word. I regret and would apologize for anything that may attach to the member that's contrary to what he's told us in the last few moments.

There's little else I can add, Mr. Speaker. Those are my comments.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, on this point. The chair did move his body when he heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie this afternoon make the following comment, and she addressed it to the Speaker:

Mr. Speaker, these people are very concerned about gas wells that are going into the area that they live in, and they are equally concerned that their MLA was not prepared to table this petition in the Legislature.

There was movement rather quickly with that. It was several minutes later, I believe because there was some activity and noise in the House, that the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan did rise and want to deal with the point of order. The administration that we've followed thus far is that hon. members are invited to rise on a point of order but not express what the point of order is, so the chair is in no position to really understand what the point might be at a given time. The chair certainly had anticipated that the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan would be rising on this.

The hon. members here have heard the explanation of the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and have also heard comments from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, including what the chair heard was an apology. I hope that the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan will accept that. I also hope that all members of this particular Assembly will garner something from this.

We deal with policy. Every time an hon. member decides to deal with personality, that hon. member gets into a deeper hole and a deeper hole and a deeper hole. One day soon some hon. member

will be so deep into the hole that that hon. member will not be able to extricate himself or herself and there will be a point of privilege and it will go to a special committee. The hon. member should read what the penalties associated with it are.

This is the highest court in the province of Alberta. The people of this province expect a great deal more from us, and we should not have to deal with stuff like this on a day-to-day basis.

We have another point of order from the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. DICKSON: I'd withdraw that further point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Then a further point of order from the Deputy Government House Leader.

Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Insulting Language

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On his behalf, I believe the point of order was raised under 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." The specific reference which he has given me was language used by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora where he used the words in comparing provisions of the bill to "calling dead civilians collateral damage."

Now, we're not talking here about prohibited words in the House, but we are talking again about what you've admonished the House on a number of times, the protocol and the respect with which people hold us in regard in terms of what we do in this House. We do have to be wary of inflammatory or insulting language, language that goes to an extreme, and in this case, I would suggest, an unacceptable extreme. That was the reference on which the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

I think it's appropriate and I think it would be appropriate again to admonish the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and all members of the House that we are here to discuss issues in a civilized manner and that it is inappropriate to take language to the extreme, as was done this afternoon in using that quotation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on this point.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to make three points initially. The first point is that what we do in this Chamber often can be summed up as a battle of words. I think I've heard you say that that's what we do here, that instead of shooting bullets back and forth, we use language and we use words.

Mr. Speaker, the second point that I'm going to make is that what's truly offensive to this member is reading a government bill that's trying to sell an idea which I think is so contrary to the public good that it should never see the light of day. So when I see a government that uses its entire weight and its entire treasury to try to market an idea, to try to call it something else than what it is, to be untruthful about what the intent is, then I will use strong language to draw the parallel. When this government tries to pull the wool over the eyes of Albertans by saying that a private hospital is an approved surgical facility, I will use very strong language at every opportunity to point out just how deceitful that is.

The third point that I'll make, Mr. Speaker, is that the reference is a reference that's not unique in terms of trying to draw to the attention of people an extreme contradiction, or oxymoron. When the government of the United States set about its plans to deal with the language of communicating to the American people its policies,

there are some well-documented examples, and “calling dead civilians collateral damage” is only one of several. Perhaps in debate I’ll have an opportunity to use some of the other comparisons and metaphors as we proceed with Bill 11.

MR. DICKSON: Briefly, on this point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was just going to make an observation. I remember after the budget speech I suggested, in adjourning debate, that we’d heard enough hyperbole for one afternoon. It’s fair to say that question period is very much about hyperbole, and I think you would be in an impossible situation to start policing one particular expression and ignore, then, the requirement in the Standing Orders and in *Beauchesne* that answers in question period should not provoke debate.

That’s what I wanted to say, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

3:40

THE SPEAKER: Any other hon. member on this important point of order? Well, we’re going to deal with it though.

The Blues clearly show that one hon. member used the expression referring to “dead civilians [as] collateral damage.” It’s true that there’s nothing in our legacy of expressions used in this House that would deem that this would be unparliamentary, but it’s also true that the rules basically say that we should not use language of a nature likely to cause disorder and not to use inflammatory arguments. It’s also true, as members have said so often this afternoon on these points of order, that there is no debate during question period. I’m going to say that again: there is no debate during question period. I’m going to say it once again: there is no debate during question period.

This book called *Beauchesne’s Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, and there are many others, clearly points out what question period is all about. In the excitement here of coming up to day 7 or day 8 of this session, virtually all questions that have been raised from day one should have been ruled out of order and could have been ruled out of order. Virtually all questions today should have been or could have been ruled out of order.

What are we going to do now that there’s a bill before us? What are you going to start doing Monday? Are you going to debate the bill, ask questions about the bill in question period? Everybody’s going to try and probably going to end up doing it, because that seems to be the mood.

I guess it’s something like a hockey game. If they both want to hit each other over the head and bash their skulls in and go ahead and do it, the referee will let it happen until members decide that there are no players left and only the referee is standing. In this case methinks there are 64 versus 17, so we think that there are more troops left over by the end of the battle than the 16 or 17.

The referee is sort of here to protect everybody and wants to protect everybody. But I would really, really ask. I don’t want to stand up here in these gowns like somebody in a pulpit with a book in his hand saying that this is what you’re doing on a day-to-day basis. This is the Assembly of members. The purpose is to seek information. I mean, I’ve already made the statement about television. Isn’t it amazing when there are no television cameras on? Isn’t this amazing? We could sing and whistle. In fact, some of you even like one another now. Amazing how different it was a couple of hours ago.

I know it’s a plea on my part, and I’m going to make it again and again and again. Could we use less inflammatory language in the questions and in the responses? Could we get personalities out of this? Could we deal with the substance, the issue? The place is called Alberta. It’s not America; it’s not the world, something, something. Alberta. The issue is very clear. That’s what we ask

questions on, and we’ll have ample opportunity for debate, by the way, in second reading, ample opportunity.

I’m not sure. Are there any more points of order for this afternoon?

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 9

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my honour to move for third reading Bill 9, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000.

We’ve had occasion to deal with this bill already in second reading, of course, and Committee of the Whole. I won’t take the time of the House to say any more to it as it is an interim supply bill, a bill which will afford the government the opportunity to continue in its good work over the course of the period of time after March 31 and until this House sees fit to vote supply under the normal bills of supply under the budget and the process that we’re currently under.

I would commend to the House Bill 9 and ask for support.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We’ve had an opportunity to discuss some of the faults with Bill 9 and this ongoing, repeated request for interim supply. I won’t repeat some of those arguments, but I will make some statements about our concerns that have to do with the lack of disclosure within supply votes.

I will note that both the Auditor General and the Alberta Financial Review Commission have recommended to the government the separation of operating expenses and capital investments as a means of strengthening managerial accountability. It would also strengthen the opportunities for evaluating the effectiveness of programs and program expenditures. However, despite that advice the government in Bill 9 has collapsed once again operating expenses and capital expenses into a single vote.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I’ll say that that troubles me deeply because we continually hear the government through its Executive Council members talking about transparency and openness and accountability. In fact, when the Minister of Gaming was presenting and defending his estimates just the other day – Madam Speaker, I believe you were presiding over that meeting – I didn’t count, I lost count, but several times during those debates he talked about: in keeping with this government’s openness, this and something else may happen. Well, here we have a situation where, contrary to any measures of openness and accountability, we see something collapsed together, that can only obscure clarity and can only hide transparency.

Now, a brief history lesson might be in order, Madam Speaker. Before the passage of the Deficit Elimination Act in May of 1993, the practice of appropriating supply and interim supply was to include a program-by-program breakdown of each supply vote. Now, what that means is that, for example, if you were to look at the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act of 1992, there would be separate listings for both capital and operating. This program-by-program

breakdown gave the Legislative Assembly and in fact all taxpayers some assurances that the proper amount of funding, as was set out in the estimates, was being allocated to each program within a department. It didn't allow for any sloppiness or slushiness in how those allocations, first, were going to be made and, secondly, accounted for.

Providing a global figure for each department under the interim supply vote, as requested under this bill, without a breakdown by program and subprogram I believe shows this government's utter contempt for accountability. I think it also shows that they have contempt for their very own words regarding fiscal responsibility. I would request that this government seriously consider going back to the earlier form of presenting interim supply and appropriation requests, that being breaking it down by capital and operating and by program and subprogram.

In the interests of ensuring openness, accountability, and transparency and imposing rigorous fiscal discipline, that the Premier and the Provincial Treasurer and other members of government claim and often refer to, it is necessary to ask all ministers during appropriation on interim supply to provide a breakdown of the interim supply by individual program within each department and then relate that appropriation by individual program to the performance and outcome targets established in the business plan.

Madam Speaker, I won't take the time of the Assembly at this point to go back over all of the difficulties we've had with business plans, the fact that there is very little agreement department by department, that there is little consistency in how outcome measures are presented. Some outcome measures don't seem to be related to some programs. Some programs don't seem to have outcome measures, and all of those other things. I won't repeat all of that. Suffice to say that yet again we see a missing link in this chain of accountability. As is so often the case with this government, you have words and you have deeds, and the legacy of the government of course is the growing gap between.

So with those concerns on the record about Bill 9, I will end my comments and will ask with all sincerity that the government, please, reconsider the presentation of interim supply votes so that Albertans can be given some real assurances about accountability.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

3:50

head: Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'll call the Committee of Supply to Order.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Executive Council

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I would call on the hon. Premier to lead off the debate.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman and hon. members. I'm pleased to appear before this committee in my capacity as minister responsible for Executive Council to discuss the three-year business plan and, of course, the estimates. Executive Council's main programs include the office of the Premier/general administration, which provides support to cabinet; the office of the deputy minister; and the office of the Lieutenant Governor. Executive Council also includes the protocol office, which formerly was with the department of international and intergovernmental

affairs; the Public Affairs Bureau, which is responsible for providing two-way communications with Albertans about government programs and services; and the Alberta Corporate Service Centre, which is a new program that will consolidate and provide administrative services to ministries so that they can focus on the delivery of programs and services to Albertans.

Members of the committee will note a new budget item for the new Alberta Corporate Service Centre. The centre will also generate revenue by charging back its costs to ministries, and this will result in no net spending increase.

Madam Chairman, I would like now to discuss some of the programs detailed in this year's business plan, beginning with Executive Council. The role of Executive Council is to co-ordinate the Alberta government's overall direction and to set a broad agenda for government ministries to follow. That overall direction is focused on achieving the vision statement at the front of the government of Alberta's business plan. It states that this government is committed to achieving "a vibrant and prosperous province where Albertans enjoy a superior quality of life and are confident about the future for themselves and their children," and I'm pleased to say that Alberta is well on its way to achieving that vision.

Notwithstanding the criticisms of the opposition Liberals and the NDs, this government has made remarkable strides over the past six years. This province is the envy of other jurisdictions in this country and is renowned worldwide for the steps it has taken to overcome a \$3.4 billion structural deficit, to turn that around, Madam Chairman, to something in the neighbourhood of a \$3 billion to \$4 billion surplus. Over the years we have done a \$30 billion turnaround in this province. Through that exercise, we have still managed to maintain the most competitive tax regime in the country. We have still been able to dedicate ourselves to the priority areas of Albertans, like health and education, and we have made remarkable progress in addressing the pay-down of the debt.

It has been the balanced approach, and it has been a very successful approach. Most importantly, most Albertans understand that. Most Albertans understand and respect that kind of record. I would suggest the only Albertans who don't understand it and can't accept it, because it is a success, are members of the opposition Liberals. So new and carefully targeted plans to ensure Albertans enjoy the best possible future were detailed in my recent televised address, in the new Lieutenant Governor's inaugural Speech from the Throne, and in the Provincial Treasurer's recent budget speech.

By the way, I would allude to the report from Nesbitt Burns. I'm sure there will be other reports from other financial analysts in this province, but the Nesbitt Burns report was particularly telling. It simply said, "Another Day in Paradise."

With overall direction from Executive Council this government is committing itself to creating bold plans for Alberta in this new century. Those plans include a continued commitment to careful fiscal management so that we can continue to pay down debt, so that we can continue to increase government efficiency and redirect more taxpayers' dollars back to programs and services for Albertans; forward-thinking and much-needed tax reforms which have been accelerated from their original schedule to give Albertans real tax relief sooner rather than later; carefully targeted spending on Albertans' priorities, including a 21 percent increase in health spending and a 19 percent increase in education spending over the next three years; and innovative new strategies to ensure that Albertans can continue to meet the challenges of the knowledge-driven global economy.

That, Madam Chairman, is a very brief summary of the overall agenda established by this government for the first years of the new century. It is an agenda that reflects this government's commitment

to providing Albertans with every possible advantage in the 21st century. It is an agenda that reflects the economic realities of the new global economy. Most importantly, it is an agenda that speaks to the priorities of the people we're here to serve.

Turning now to the portion of the business plan that deals with the Public Affairs Bureau, I would like to highlight a number of programs that are closely tied to the needs and priorities of Albertans. First, I'd like to mention a new program that is just completing its first year of operation. It's called Alberta Connects, and it's a program that provides Albertans with an opportunity for effective two-way communications with the government.

You know, Madam Chairman, the people of this province have consistently told us that the most important thing they want from their government is for us to listen and respond to their comments and questions, to reflect their priorities. In fact, when you ask Albertans what good government means, listening is at the very top of the list. Listening. Alberta Connects meets that need. It provides the people of this province with clear facts so that they can form their own opinions about how they want their government to handle various issues, and the best example of that exercise will start on Monday. That's when the bill, in an unprecedented step, will be mailed to every Albertan in this province, to every household in this province to see what they think about the legislation, to put aside all the political rhetoric and, as I have termed it, malicious misinformation that is being spread by the Liberals and the NDs, to let the people decide.

Madam Chairman, that is important. Albertans told us without a doubt that the one thing they want on this bill and on any other issue of importance or priority to them is information, and that's exactly what they're going to get: unemotional, unfettered information. Let's hear from Albertans. Let's hear from Albertans, and let's appeal to the Liberals to give Albertans a chance. Give Albertans a chance.

4:00

Alberta Connects meets the need. It is one of the vehicles, one of the tools to allow Albertans to communicate directly with their government. It provides the people of the province with clear facts so that they can form their own opinions about how they want their government to handle various issues. Alberta Connects offers Albertans fast, convenient, and direct access to the information they need through interactive Internet connections, newspaper and television information, and toll-free phone lines. These services provide Albertans with important information and updates on government programs, initiatives, and recent announcements as well as opportunities to provide government with their comments and questions.

So the government will continue to respond to the needs of the people we serve by continuing to expand on the variety of electronic-based communications operations, opportunities for Albertans. Examples of progress in this area include the virtual forum and moderated on-line discussion groups created as part of last year's Children's Forum. Another example can be found in the real-time Internet broadcast of my most recent televised address which was offered to Albertans in addition to the television format.

Finally under the Public Affairs Bureau, Queen's Printer bookstore staff are working together with Alberta Justice to create a new product called the *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000*, or *RSA*. This is a considerable undertaking as it involves producing the first full revision of the statutes since the 1980s.

AN HON. MEMBER: Whew.

MR. KLEIN: So in the spring of next year when the revision is complete, the legal and business communities will have access to a

much-needed and valuable legislative resource.

I heard a whew from the Liberals. I take that to mean big deal. Well, it is a big deal, Madam Chairman, to the legal and business communities of this province. If they do not think it is a big deal, then stand up at some point and say so.

Members of the committee will notice a spending increase under the Public Affairs Bureau to fund the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* project, and I would ask you to also note that the increases in spending are offset by corresponding increases in revenue due to projected sales of the revised statutes product.

Madam Chairman, I would now like to turn the committee's attention to the protocol office. This is a new addition to Executive Council since we last met, and I think it warrants an introduction. Except for the recent past the protocol office has been located within Executive Council for most of its 30 years of existence, and most recently it was, as I pointed out, with the Department of International and Intergovernmental Affairs.

The protocol office looks after four main areas on behalf of the government as a whole. First, it plans, conducts, and co-ordinates cross-government participation in the meetings, round tables, and various other events connected to the many visits our province receives each year from senior international government officials. Recent examples include visits from the Premier of the People's Republic of China last April, the Governor of Jalisco last year, which is a sister state of ours in Mexico, and Ukraine's minister of health last August.

The office is also responsible for planning and conducting domestic ceremonial events such as the recent installation ceremony for Alberta's new Lieutenant Governor, the recent opening of session, and other events such as the government's annual Remembrance Day ceremonies.

Thirdly, the office answers some 1,500 to 2,000 telephone and written inquiries it receives each year from community groups, individuals, and companies. These questions involve a wide range of protocol questions that come up when planning an official or ceremonial event involving the government or foreign officials.

Finally, the protocol staff are responsible for managing the operation of Government House here in Edmonton. These duties include co-ordinating the facility's use among all government departments, the Premier's office, the office of the Lieutenant Governor, and so on. In all, more than 200 events are held at Government House each year.

I would like to conclude my remarks with some information about another new program that has been added to Executive Council's business plan, and that is the Alberta Corporate Service Centre. This shared service centre is designed to increase government efficiency in areas like finance, human resources, information technology, and general administration while freeing up more resources for frontline services to Albertans. Services delivered by the centre will focus on cross-government transactional functions and services like accounts payable, payroll, and mail services. More strategic ministry-specific elements, such as budgeting and forecasting, will stay within individual government ministries.

It's important to note that the idea of shared services is not uncharted territory. Many public- and private-sector organizations both here in Canada and abroad use various shared services models. In fact, some 20 percent of Fortune 500 companies have moved to shared service delivery. Examples of organizations that have successfully made the move to shared services include the government of Ontario, the government of Manitoba, and right here the city of Edmonton. We've seen from these examples that a shared service approach can result in savings and increased efficiency as well as proven value for customers.

The government business plan states that the centre will work to establish key priorities by April 2000 and to consolidate 80 percent of transactional administrative services by the end of this year. The centre has also established goals to achieve a 5 percent savings in its first year and a 20 percent savings over three years. Those savings, Madam Chairman, will then be directed back toward providing frontline services for Albertans. It's expected that most of the 20 percent savings will be achieved by reducing duplication and overlap of services rather than by reducing numbers of employees.

However, even if you assume that moving to shared services will result in fewer government positions, the actual number of people affected would be about 95 per year over three years. The overall impact across government would be minimal, especially when you consider that government normally loses some 5 percent of staff to attrition every year and that staff in these areas will have ample opportunity to apply for positions that open up through attrition. We have been communicating with government staff as the process unfolds and will continue to ensure that any staff affected by the move to a shared services model receive timely information updates. Government has also committed to maximizing employment opportunities available to any staff affected by the move.

So, Madam Chairman, that concludes my introductory remarks on Executive Council's business plan for 2000 through 2003. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I want to start off by thanking the Premier for rearranging his schedule so he could join with us this afternoon, and I'm glad that the Premier was wide-ranging in his comments, because that'll give us an opportunity to explore the many themes and direction of government.

The Premier started off by saying that he was here to discuss the three-year business plan and estimates of Executive Council, of which he is the minister responsible, and then he went on to provide us with some other information. I want to focus on a couple of things initially and ask the Premier to comment on them, but first I want to talk about the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* project, *RSA 2000*.

4:10

When the Premier was introducing the project to the Assembly just now, he made reference that he heard a whew, I believe he said, coming from the benches of the Official Opposition. I can assure the Premier that that was a yelp of appreciation for the project. As a matter of fact, if he had looked up from his notes for a minute, he would have seen me giving a thumbs-up to the Minister of Justice, and I think the Minister of Justice, knowing him as I do, will attest to that. We think it's important – and of course that's a theme we explored today in question period – for all Albertans to be able to have access to all legislation and all regulations and all statutes so that they can reach their own conclusions.

The Premier talked as well about this unprecedented mail-out of Bill 11 to every Alberta household, saying that he wants all Albertans to read it for themselves. He made the usual rhetorical comments about malicious misinformation and the role of the opposition parties, and we'll come back to the theme of malicious misinformation and the role of the government in just a minute.

I do want to say that I am one hundred percent behind the Premier mailing out Bill 11 to every household in this province. While it's sort of like a Hail Mary pass in the dying seconds of a football game – and, you know, I think everybody sees that it's that sort of desperation that's driving the government to do this. I'm glad,

because the one thing I hear from Albertans, from my own constituents, from other men and women that I talk to from across this province, is that there is a lack of understanding about why the government wants to go down this crazy path of privatizing health care. They will get a chance to read the bill, and they'll see for themselves the loopholes that you could drive a private surgical facility through. That's exactly what they will discover. So I want to thank the Premier because as a member of the opposition, whose responsibility is to hold this government accountable for only pursuing the public good, it makes my job tremendously more easy that every Albertan will have access with their morning coffee to this ill-conceived legislation. It's destined to go the way of its brother legislation, Bill 37, and the son of Bill 37.

MR. KLEIN: Don't bet on it.

MR. SAPERS: The Premier is taunting, "Don't bet on it." Well, I do trust Albertans, unlike the Premier, and I will bet that they are going to rise up against this legislation and they're going to tell this government to put this legislation where it belongs, which is in the trash heap. So thank you for doing that, Mr. Premier. It makes my job easier.

Now, on to some other comments that the Premier made. I'd like to ask the Premier if he would comment on this. He mentioned the tax plan of the provincial government, I think under the category of bold new plans. I'm sure that's a phrase we're going to hear lots of leading up to the next election. I can see it now: bold new plans. Maybe we could just shorten it to BNP – and we'll all know what the Premier is talking about – so that he can just say: oh, well, it's BNP. Then, you know, it'll shorten the debate up a little bit. But in the realm of BNP he mentioned these bold plans for taxation.

Mr. Premier, I wonder if you will comment on why it is that the federal government in unveiling its tax plans for Canadians was able to dedicate 42 percent of its surplus, of its economic and fiscal dividend, to tax reduction and tax relief, yet the province of Alberta, which I would argue is in perhaps even better financial shape than the federal Treasury, was only able to dedicate 12 percent of its surplus to the same end. If you're going to talk about balance, maybe you will talk about why that seems to be so much out of balance, particularly given that in the spending estimates and the revenue projections for the government we still see a tremendous lowballing of the resource revenue which we expect to receive. In my calculations, Mr. Premier, it's a good \$600 million or \$700 million short just in terms of oil and gas. So if you simply used that reality-based forecasting for your revenue side, I think you and your government could in fact have been bold when it came to tax reduction.

We'll also of course, Mr. Premier, be looking forward to your comments on the 11 percent flat tax and how it is going to unfairly impact low-income earners and middle-income earners and in particular, because of the bold initiatives of the federal government, how it is that you're going to try to justify your flat tax, which will actually create higher levels of taxation for many Alberta taxpayers.

Now, Mr. Premier, you also mentioned the role of the protocol office, and I was particularly interested in your references to Government House. I very proudly represent the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, and of course, as you know, every time you visit Government House, you visit the heart of my constituency. Thanks for bringing all that business into my part of town.

You talk about the 200 events that happen at Government House. You know, it has always sort of surprised me that as the MLA for the area I have been denied, actually, using Government House for functions. I'd just like you to tell me what the policy coming out of

Executive Council is, seeing as it's responsible for the protocol office, for the utilization of Government House. How is it booked? What events are allowed in? What events are excluded, and what's the role of the local MLA, regardless of political affiliation, in terms of hosting events at Government House? I'd be curious to hear the policy articulated on that.

Now, Madam Chairman, through you to the Premier I have some specific questions regarding the business plan of Executive Council. As the Premier probably knows from earlier discussions that we've had and that I've had with members of his cabinet, I have a particular interest in performance measures, so I will direct the Premier's attention to the performance measures in Executive Council. If I count correctly, there are five, the fifth one being a brand-new one dealing with maintenance of revenue.

Let me start with this brand-new one, because I was kind of excited to see that. What it says is, "It compares authorized revenue projections with the results actually achieved." What we're going to see is that in every year that the measure accounts for, the actual and the target are different and – surprise, surprise, surprise – for every year the actual revenue achieved is higher.

Now, I may be missing something here, and I'll hope that the Premier will tell me what it is that I'm missing, because I know he's not shy of telling me what it is that I don't know. Maybe he will tell me why it is that there's now a performance measure that's going to measure the error of government forecasting. I mean, it's been the assertion of the Official Opposition for some time that this government purposely lowballs forecast revenue so that it can alternately argue either that the cupboard is bare and that's why we have to cut back and tighten the belt, or it can say: well, we've got a dividend, and we're going to put it into core programs and services. Of course, what that says to taxpayers is: we're going to pick your pocket for as much revenue as we can, we're going to hoard it for a while, and then as we get dangerously close to elections, we'll start talking about election plans. I'm amazed, frankly, that the government would actually create a performance measure that tries to somehow quantify this kind of shell game. I notice that the forecasts aren't included for the years 2000 through to 2003, just the targets.

Now, if we flip that around, the target is actually the forecast in the Treasury business plan. So when I say shell game, I use that phrase quite on purpose, because you have the Executive Council showing a target number for revenue which is in fact a forecast in a different business plan of a different part of government. I'm very curious about this new performance measure, and I hope the Premier will have a chance to tell us about it.

Now, if I look at the other performance measures, we have "Public Satisfaction with Government Information." The target is that 75 percent of people who ask for information will be satisfied. I'm glad to see that it's actually been set above the actual, but what worries me is that since 1995 the actual hasn't really gone up. It was 69 percent satisfaction in '95, went down to 66 percent in '96, stayed at 66 percent in '97, climbed back up to 69 percent for 1998-99, and now we're going to see that three-quarters of Albertans will actually be satisfied with information. Will the Premier tell us what specific strategies he is going to put in place to ensure that there is this growth in public satisfaction with government information, seeing as he has been singularly unsuccessful in getting it up to the target over the last four years?

4:20

I'd also like to question the public satisfaction with RITE and Queen's Printer bookstores measure. It relates to "the satisfaction levels of Albertans using the RITE Telephone System to access government and obtain information." What I'm wondering about is:

why isn't there also a measure here that has to do with other means of accessing government information? The Premier did go to some length to tell us about these new electronic means of contact as well as the consultations, and I think he made reference to this latest propaganda piece: we're going to tell you what we heard or what we think you said or whatever it is that this health document is going to be called that's going to be mailed out. Why aren't there satisfaction measures that also look at satisfaction with accessibility through the Internet, the feedback obtained through roundtable and consultation processes? I mean, this is after all the government that talks about and prides itself on consultation. You know, this government has never met an issue that it didn't think it could meet with a roundtable or a summit, so I would expect to see some measures of satisfaction on those things as well.

Specifically, Mr. Premier, what I'm talking about is satisfaction measures dealing with electronic access to government information and also feedback measures on satisfaction with things like the First Circle consultation on children or the health summit or the justice summit or so many of the other initiatives that you talk about but that we don't actually see honest, third-party, quantifiable, measurable results on.

The next performance measure is, of course, "Government Client Satisfaction," which is the measure of "satisfaction levels with the communications services provided by the Public Affairs Bureau." What I see there is that there's about a 90 percent, give or take a point or two, target and achieved result. This one has always amused me, because these are the people who I'm assuming your government leaks things to – those would be the clients – and then you're going to ask them if they're happy about I guess the relationship or the quality of information. So it's government client satisfaction levels with communications services. Unless, of course, it's the internal measure, which is: what kinds of services does PAB provide to other government departments?

Again, I wonder who it is that fills out the responses on these surveys. Maybe what the Premier could do is tell us how these client satisfaction measurements are achieved. Maybe he'd even be so bold, in keeping with his theme, as to bring the surveys into the Assembly and table them for us so we could see the actual instruments that are used to come up with these measurements, because of course the measurements are just sort of out there, like the claim that we're not going to try to destroy public health care. They're just sort of out there. They're not really attached to anything concrete.

The last, of course, is "Customer Satisfaction with Products," and I see that there's again a very high achievement here, 98 percent. Congratulations, but I just wish I understood what it meant. It says, again, that this is a new measure that's related to the

revised goal of delivering products and services that allow us to meet or exceed revenue projections and customer needs. It rates the satisfaction . . . of Queen's Printer Bookstore customers with the products available.

Well, is that simply a duplication of the public satisfaction measure that's up above? If it's different, how is it different? Again, Mr. Premier, it would sure be helpful to see who it is that you collect information from. I mean, if you only ask one person and they say, "Yeah, I'm about 98 percent satisfied," is that how the measure gets into the business plan? I think some more explanation would be in order.

Of course, it would be nice if all of the performance measures were consistent throughout all of the business plans and then the reporting on all the performance measures was consistent, because, you know, presentation is important in terms of understanding continuity of services across government, and it also helps us move year to year and see whether things are truly improving or not.

Perhaps of most interest when it comes to the business plans, Mr. Premier, are performance measures that aren't in the business plan,

and I'd like to give you some advice as to what I believe might be helpful performance measures for you to include.

One might be a measure of correspondence satisfaction with Executive Council or the Premier's office: volume of letters received, how they're responded to, what kind of feedback you're getting from those clients. I say this, Mr. Premier, not to create work or give the impression that you don't respond to letters and cards. I also am fully aware of the volume that must come through your office because I know what comes through my office, and I can only extrapolate from what I get to what you may receive.

Some of the feedback I get, Mr. Premier, is, "I never hear back, or when I do, they're rude," or "I get a form letter, and it wasn't even on the issue that I wrote about," those kinds of things. So if I'm getting that kind of feedback, I'm certain that you're getting that kind of feedback. I'm equally certain that you would want to know about it and do something about it so you may be able to report to Albertans that in fact you're serious about responding to the kinds of written inquiries they provide to you, and you may want to develop a performance measure to capture that.

The second thing that you may want to do, Mr. Premier, is to have a performance measure dealing with compliance with freedom of information and protection of privacy applications. After all, it wasn't that long ago that your office was found in breach of the law governing freedom of information.

You look puzzled, Mr. Premier. It had to do with the response from your office that you in fact had no documents relating to the West Edmonton Mall refinancing in the possession of Executive Council. Of course, we all know that that wasn't the case, and when the Privacy Commissioner was called in to investigate the lack of responsiveness from Executive Council, he wrote a report which in fact found that your office was in breach of the law but then suggested that there may be some reasons that had to do with lack of staff, lack of training, or perhaps even Christmas schedules. So that record has been made available to you in the past.

So my question is: why do you not have a performance measure here that would indicate your office's compliance with FOIP? How many requests come into your office? How many are dealt with within the allocated time frames? How many are appealed? How many appeals are upheld? How many are denied? How many in the first instance are responded to, et cetera?

Thirdly, you may want to have a performance measure on the government's defence of public institutions, maybe some measure of support for things like our justice system, our public health care system, our education system, et cetera, because of course many Albertans have expressed to me their concern that there seems to be an erosion of public institutions.

Now, most interestingly what I would like to see is a performance measure of a truth and accuracy scale on the work of the PAB. I'll tell you why that is, Madam Chairman. It's because I'm looking at a newspaper ad that was in the *Edmonton Examiner* on February 18, 2000, and it goes on to talk about many things that at one point may be law. It's a newspaper ad of the government of Alberta. It's a full page, and it talks about things like "the . . . Government is taking firm action on tax reform," and it talks about things that will be put into place. But, of course, all of this hasn't become law yet, Mr. Premier, so this is very misleading. You're telling Albertans in this ad that these are in fact the facts, that these are things that are happening, and it's all before the Assembly. It hasn't been voted on, and who knows, Mr. Premier? You might be convinced that some of your initiatives are wrong, just like Bill 26 was wrong and Bill 37 was wrong.

You know, the other thing is that there is some very malicious – what is the phrase you use? Malicious and misleading information? Well, there's some very malicious and misleading information right

here in this ad published by the government where the province of Alberta claims that the federal government only contributes 13 cents of every dollar for health care. Well, Mr. Premier, that's not true. You know very well that there are two components. One component is tax points; the other is cash. It doesn't make any distinction . . . [Mr. Saper's speaking time expired]

Oh, unanimous consent to continue.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Time has expired.

I would ask for unanimous consent of the committee to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

4:30

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. First, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It gives me a great deal of pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all Members in the Legislative Assembly visitors from the Thompson colony in Fort Macleod, which is in southern Alberta. They are Bill and Ruth Tschetter. They are seated in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask that they now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I understand the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has an introduction as well.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a teacher from McNally high school on the south side. He taught one of my sons. His name is Roger Bartsch. He's up in the public gallery. I'd like the chairman to allow that he stand and ask, with permission, that we warmly welcome him to the House.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: And one more. The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two people that were briefly introduced before with the delegation from the School of Hope, but I'd also like to introduce to the Assembly Frans and Steina Feyter and their sons who are accompanying them today. Frans is the owner of Frans Feyter Construction, structural truss systems, in Fort Macleod, and his wife, Steina, is involved in many groups and activities in Fort Macleod and district. They have with them today their youngest son, George, who is a student at Emmanuel Christian school in Monarch, a very impressionable young man, and of course their other son, Lorne, was introduced earlier today. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Executive Council (continued)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier, the chairman would ask for your direction. Do you wish to – yes, you do.

MR. KLEIN: I don't mind responding, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, relative to the reduction in transfer grants for the Canada health and social transfer to which the hon. member alludes, by suggesting that we're misleading the Alberta public, he is also suggesting that every Premier and every territorial leader in this country is also misleading their people, because we are all agreed on this particular issue. So he is placing in doubt the word of all the treasury departments of all the provinces in this country, including Liberal governments. [interjections] Well, maybe this hon. member will stand up and tell the Alberta public how good of a deal we're getting from the federal government.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier, the hon. member has risen on a point of order.

**Point of Order
Allegations against a Member**

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Standing Order 23(h),(i), and (j). I believe the Premier made allegations because he said "this hon. member" and he pointed at me. I think it's clear and let the record show that he was referring to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, that I was calling into question the veracity of the Premiers outside of Alberta, and I never used those words. I never said that the Premiers outside of Alberta were misleading the Alberta public. I only said that there was one government that was misleading the citizens of this province, and that's the government of Alberta under this Premier.

Now, if the Premier wants to put words in my mouth, I guess he can. That's his right. He can try to twist anything he wants. But the fact is that I'm talking about this government, and frankly what other governments tell their citizens is not my concern. I wasn't elected to represent anyone but the electors in Edmonton-Glenora.

So my point is simply this. The government of Alberta has used taxpayers' money to buy an ad that was in for at least one day in one local newspaper in Edmonton that says that only 13 cents of federal contributions – in fact, I'll read it. "For every dollar spent on health care in Alberta, the province contributes 87 cents while the federal government pays less than 13 cents."

Now, in fact there are two elements to the Canada health and social transfer, a cash element and a tax . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On the point of order. This is on the point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Yes, this is on the point. Absolutely. This Premier wants to try to twist my words. He can sit here and listen to the truth.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I think you actually have made your point, and now you are basically debating this. I mean, a point of order should be short, to the fact, succinct, and not a speech.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Chairman, you're absolutely right. I'll submit that there's no point of order, and I'll debate with the Premier any time this point when it's appropriate to debate it.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, it's a good thing that you withdrew the point of order because the chair . . .

MR. SAPERS: No, I didn't withdraw it. I said that there's no point of order. That was my submission.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The chair was going to say that what there is here is a difference of opinion.

MR. KLEIN: Do we still have a point of order?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, hon. Premier. Continue.

Debate Continued

MR. KLEIN: Madam Chairman, the facts speak for themselves. We are now paying 87 percent of the cost of health care in this province. What we have said is that while every other provincial jurisdiction in this country has restored money in a very significant manner to health care and to education and to advanced education, the only level of government that hasn't made a significant restoration to these priority areas is the federal government.

That is the point that we're trying to make, and I would think that if the hon. member wants to put his political skills to use, then he should be talking to his friends in Ottawa, his Liberal friends in Ottawa, to encourage them to do as Premier Bouchard has asked all the Premiers to do and has on our behalf written a letter to the Prime Minister saying that we need to sit down with the Prime Minister as Premiers to discuss this issue and to discuss the very insignificant amount that is now flowing through CHST to health care in particular and to a lesser degree to advanced education. Every single Premier in this country agrees that the funding is absolutely inadequate. It has gone down and down and down, and there has not been anywhere near full restoration of CHST funding for health and welfare. That is the point.

MR. SAPERS: Well, because it's wrong.

MR. KLEIN: It is not wrong, Madam Chairman.

There were a number of questions that were asked. One pertained to the use of Government House. Now, this is about my – what? – eighth or ninth time in estimates. First of all, I will have to remind the Liberals that they are not government, thank God. Government House is Government House, and there is a protocol, Madam Chairman. The use of this facility is allocated on the basis of seniority in terms of government business. Government business, not opposition business. They are not the government. Government House is for government business.

MR. SAPERS: What about elected representatives?

MR. KLEIN: Madam Chairman, they have never come to the realization that they are not government. They have been sitting in the opposition for so long that perhaps they're dreaming about being government, but they are not government.

There is an allocation on the basis of seniority. This begins with the Lieutenant Governor's office. The Premier's office follows. Ministers and their offices follow, then deputy ministers, government committees, and the caucus of government. Of government. Government decides how Government House is to be used, and it is not to be used by members of the opposition, although we put it out to charitable organizations and people who want to do good in the community. We think that's the right thing to do, and that's why we don't give it out to the Liberals.

Oh, I'm sorry. I have some other answers.

MR. SAPERS: No. You sat down.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, do you want to hear the answers to the questions?

4:40

MR. KLEIN: I do recognize and appreciate the comments that were made by the FOIP Commissioner relative to another question that was asked by the hon. member. The FOIP Commissioner also said that it was – and I have to paraphrase this – not a serious breach. It was not a serious breach. But in light of what the FOIP Commissioner reported to my office, I am pleased to inform the hon. member of the opposition that the office of Executive Council first of all attaches a great deal of importance to FOIP requests. We do get a lot in government, and I can tell you, Madam Chairman, that most of them come from the Liberal opposition.

You know, FOIP was set up to really accommodate the general public, and it was never set up to be used as a political tool by the opposition at their whim and at great expense, by the way, to the taxpayer. Nonetheless, the FOIP Commissioner examines every request. All the ministries examine every request. We do attach importance to FOIP requests, so much so, Madam Chairman, that we have now appointed a FOIP co-ordinator within Executive Council. We used to let all of the ministries look after the various FOIP requests, and it will be the task of that individual to handle any requests for government information as expediently as possible. So we have taken the FOIP Commissioner's advice and have appointed a FOIP co-ordinator within Executive Council, and hopefully in the future we can accommodate the hon. member and his colleagues in a much more expeditious manner.

The client satisfaction question, the target of 90 percent and the actual of 89 percent. Well, that's pretty darn close to me. If I'm trying to achieve 90 percent and I achieve 89 percent, I think that's pretty darn good.

How is it done? Basically, surveys were sent to more than 500 clients in government departments, and this measure relates to client satisfaction with communications services provided by the bureau staff to the various government departments. Eighty-nine percent out of a target of 90 I think is – well, it's more than a pass. It's about as close to perfect as you can get.

A question was why the federal government dedicated 42 percent to tax relief while Alberta only dedicates 12 percent to tax relief, that this appears to be out of balance. Madam Chairman, this province, first of all, has been hailed across the country – and I allude again to Nesbitt Burns – for its groundbreaking actions on taxes. There have been significant tax reductions in the past. We do now have the lowest overall taxes in Canada, and we intend to keep it that way.

You know, I would like to quote from an article, and it's from a person from Hythe, Alberta, just west of Grande Prairie. It says:

Quit whining, Albertans! Everyone is carping at the Klein government complaining about everything from health care to fault-finding in this realistic provincial budget.

Worst of all, no one seems to realize and be grateful to be living in the foremost province in Canada, resulting in good part from the planning of this government.

Now, this is the important part. This is the important part, and the hon. member may have read recently about people in Fort St. John and Dawson Creek petitioning the Alberta government to join this province because they want to get rid of the kind of socialism that has become so prevalent within the Liberal Party of Alberta. They want to get away from that kind of thing. [interjections] No. These people outsocialism the NDs for sure. You know, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona should be watching out for himself. These guys are really, really creeping in there.

Anyway, she says:

My husband and I recently moved to Alberta from British Columbia

to take advantage of the many benefits which Alberta offers and because the future is actually being planned for. This must be the only province which has a government that actually plans for the future; for example . . .

And I was going to mention that in my remarks.

. . . the \$500-million endowment fund for science and engineering research.

That is planning for the future. She goes on to say:

Even before this budget, Alberta offers: lower provincial taxes, no provincial sales tax, reasonable and competitive (private) insurance for vehicles and homes, good health care – yes, much better than in B.C., lots of jobs, plus strong and healthy conditions for businesses and investment. And there is more. Try living in any of the other provinces for one year, particularly your western neighbour, and you'll come back happily and humbly to Alberta.

Just as with children and their relationship with responsible parents, it's time for the "children" of Alberta to quite whining and start appreciating what you have.

I think what it exemplifies mostly is not the children – our children are very, very bright – but the whiners of Alberta, to start appreciating what you have. And that is from Diane Schuller from Hythe, Alberta, who just moved here from British Columbia to take in the Alberta advantage.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier, the table would request that you table that document. Would that be fine?

MR. KLEIN: Oh, fine.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: For real?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For real.

MR. SAPERS: Oh, good. I'm so happy that the Premier found one newspaper article that supports him, and I'm so happy that he found one letter to read out in the Assembly that supports him, because I was thinking he would be feeling very, very lonely and very, very under siege because of the thousands and thousands and thousands of letters that he's received, that I've received, that we've all received that don't share those sentiments. So good on the Premier for finding that one example. You know, that shows that he searched, that he worked really hard, so that's good.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, if the chair were to close her eyes here and really think about all of this, it sounds to me like it's question period. I thought that we were dealing with the estimates for Executive Council. Can we get back on track, please.

4:50

MR. SAPERS: Madam Chairman, you know I will always heel to your command, and I know that the Premier will too, but having allowed him to read that into the record, then obviously I have the right to respond.

Now, the Premier talked about the protocol for Government House, and I'd like to ask him a further question about that, because as he went through the list of priorities and took the opportunity to try to be clever and be dismissive and to say that the Liberals will be this and the Liberals won't be that – it's nice to know that we weigh so heavily on his mind.

The issue here, Madam Chairman, is this. Way down on that list of priorities of who may or who may not be allowed to book

Government House, he got to where he said members of the government caucus, and he made a big deal out of the fact that they were in the government caucus. Maybe all of the private members, like yourself, Madam Chairman, who are not in cabinet, would like to think of themselves as members of Executive Council, and maybe every one of those backbenchers there had those daydreams of being a cabinet minister. In fact, "government" is defined by those members of Executive Council.

So really what we have in the Assembly are two kinds of members: members of government – i.e. cabinet ministers, members of Executive Council – and the rest of us mere mortals are private members. Given that the protocol says that private members, as I take it, because that's what the Premier just said, can use Government House, then I would assume that's all private members. Now, I will take it, Madam Chairman, that those private members, particularly those who think they can park anywhere, would believe that they should come first on the list of who can use Government House, but certainly the policy would have to expand to include all private members. So I'll look forward to the opportunity of going to a reception, perhaps hosted by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, in Government House, and he'll get on that priority list because that's what the Premier just said. Unless, of course, he has now deputized everybody and made them all members of Executive Council, i.e. government. So he maybe ought to get his story straight.

Let me get back to the government's misrepresentation of the truth in paid advertisement, paid for with taxpayers' dollars, and his point about the Canada health and social transfer. Federal transfers to the province of Alberta are going to be \$2.7 billion, \$2.8 billion next year. The Premier would have us believe that it's only going to be about \$1.3 billion. It's \$2.7 billion or \$2.8 billion. [interjection] No. This year, Mr. Premier, actually, because you have to factor in, to be fair, tax points and cash. In fact, \$1.4 billion is coming in in tax points. So the real number is 25 cents of every health care dollar in Alberta comes from the federal government.

Now, this is where I will join in common cause with the Premier. Any time he wants to accompany me when I meet with members of the federal government, I'd be happy to have him come along so that he can join in common cause with members of the Official Opposition in appropriately lobbying the federal government, instead of taking cheap political shots at them, to increase its support for these priority areas such as postsecondary education and public health care. I'd be happy to do that because I'm not satisfied that a 25 percent contribution is enough from the federal government. I'd like to see more, and I'd like to see the Premier being helpful in pursuing that instead of playing politics with the health care of Albertans. But I do say that if we're going to spend taxpayer's money on advertisements, Madam Chairman, they at least ought to tell the truth.

The other thing that I'd like to know about these advertisements, Madam Chairman, is exactly what the point was of putting out these advertisements and spending all of this money if, in fact, they weren't going to be factual. There are several examples in this one ad where claims are made that cannot be supported in truth. In fact, many of these initiatives have not yet become the law of this province. So if he's not willing to stand and apologize for this abuse of taxpayer's money, maybe the least the Premier will do, with his tail tucked between his legs, is go back to the Public Affairs Bureau and tell them to only put out fact when they're advertising a report to Albertans.

MR. KLEIN: Madam Chairman, they are facts. They are facts, and they're facts that have been agreed upon by all the Premiers of all the provinces in this country. This hon. member will hopefully

never be in the position to attend a Premiers' Conference or to even be a representative of a government that attends a Premiers' Conference. But if he could sit in and hear the concerns being expressed about the lack of money that is now flowing through the Canada health and social transfer and the general agreement on the figure, that generally funding has decreased to the point where they, the feds, are now paying about 13 percent in real dollars toward health and advanced education in particular, then I think he might be more convinced that all the treasuries and all the treasurers and all the officials who work in the treasury departments of all the provinces in this country can't be wrong.

But, you know, this hon. member thinks that he's so right all the time and that everyone else is wrong. He must think that 70 percent of Albertans are wrong when they voted for this government, Madam Chairman. [interjections] No, they aren't. They are right. They know what they're doing. They know what they're doing.

MRS. McCLELLAN: You touched a raw spot.

MR. KLEIN: Oh, I touched a raw spot, I guess. Well, there were enough to elect 64 of us, Madam Chairman. Right. You know, there are a lot more of us than there are of them, and that was through the will of Albertans. That's because we have been open, we have been honest, we have been accessible, we listen to people, and we don't go out there with malicious misinformation.

MR. SAPERS: Yes, you do. You even pay for it out of the taxpayers' money.

MR. KLEIN: Madam Chairman, if this hon. member wants to talk about advertisements, I would like to get an advertisement that was put in the paper by the leader of the Liberal opposition, and that will be the proof of the pudding that indeed the misinformation out there is in fact malicious and at taxpayers' expense.

Of course, Madam Chairman, these people are not FOIPable. They do not have to be accountable. Here this hon. member asked for the use of Government House, and they aren't accountable for anything. They aren't FOIPable. They don't have to share anything. They have nothing to share, absolutely nothing to share other than misinformation. They are not FOIPable. They are not subject to the rules of government, yet they want to have all the privileges of government. They have never been elected to be the government, yet they want all the privileges of government. They are members of the opposition. They are not government.

MS OLSEN: What's your point?

MR. KLEIN: The point is that you are not government, thank God.

Madam Chairman, I'll put the question. If, God forbid, they ever became the government . . .

MRS. McCLELLAN: Oh, no. Don't even think it.

MR. KLEIN: No, no. I wouldn't even contemplate that.

. . . would they allow us to go over to Government House and hang around while they have their caucus and, you know, participate in the business of government? I think not. Not if they act like Liberal parties in any other jurisdiction in this country. I think not. So let's not try to bamboozle the people.

You see, Madam Chairman, they can make any statement they want and they don't have to be accountable. That is the difference between the opposition and government. We have to be accountable, and we are.

Madam Chairman, just to demonstrate and to illustrate how little

knowledge this hon. member has as to how government works and the volume of mail that I have to answer – lately there's been a lot of mail. There's been a lot of mail, and yes, it has been on the health care issue, and yes, I answer every letter. But clearly three-quarters of those letters are in response to cards, mail-in cards where people don't have to put down their thoughts and their ideas or think about it. These were cards that were sent out by CUPE. I would suspect they were form letters. Many, many, many of them were form letters that were taken right out of the ads of the Friends of Medicare.

5:00

MR. SAPERS: It does work. Advertising works.

MR. KLEIN: Advertising obviously does work, and I would imagine many of the letters were spurred on by the false and malicious advertising that was put in the papers by the Liberal Party at taxpayers' expense.

So, yes, I sit down, and I personally sign every one of those letters, and I don't use one of those machines, Madam Chairman. So questioned why we did not have a performance measure on correspondence satisfaction: the office of the Premier receives approximately 18,000 pieces of correspondence per year, and every piece of correspondence we receive receives a reply. The only time that we did not send out individual replies was during the week of the Vriend decision being read into the Alberta human rights act. We simply could not handle the volume of mail. It was absolutely horrendous, and I had to make a statement that there would be no reply, that we would do the right thing and we would accept that ruling.

MS OLSEN: You weren't quite sure what to say on that one.

MR. KLEIN: We did the right thing. Do you not think we did the right thing? Do you not think? [interjections] Well, then, thank you.

The office of the Premier receives approximately 18,000 pieces of correspondence per year, all of which receive a response either from myself, the director of operations, the director of scheduling. Some are detailed responses and some are general and some are redirected to ministers and MLAs for a more detailed response. But 18,000 pieces of correspondence.

Yes, we're getting a lot of letters on health care. I do pay attention to the letters, but I also pay attention to what generates the correspondence. Does a mail-out and an organized campaign by the Canadian Union of Public Employees? Is that one of the generators? Does an advertising campaign and an orchestrated petition campaign by the Liberals generate a lot of correspondence? Yes, it does. Does a very organized, orchestrated, and expensive campaign by the Friends of Medicare generate a lot of correspondence? Yes, it does, and that happens from time to time.

As a matter of fact, I'm starting to get a tremendous amount of correspondence on the Genesis development in Kananaskis Country, a matter of great concern. There was a tremendous amount of correspondence when the federal minister in charge of industrial development, I believe, Mr. Manley, announced that he was going to give \$20 million to the NHL, a tremendous amount of mail on that issue saying, "Don't you dare put in any taxpayers' dollars." So it depends, really, on what the issue is as to how much mail I will get on a particular issue, but certainly I'm getting a lot of mail on health care.

First of all, we asked for it. We asked for it when we put out the policy statement. We said for people to respond. Then we were getting some reasonable letters, pro and con and people who simply wanted more information. But as the Friends of Medicare and CUPE and the Liberals started to crank up their ad campaigns, now

I'm getting, you know, a lot of angry letters, but I would suggest that most of those letters are based on false information going out, and for that the Liberals should be ashamed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on a point of order.

Point of Order Clarification

MR. SAPERS: Yeah, I'm just wondering if the Premier would back that statement up, that most of these letters are based on false information. Is he saying that Albertans can't think for themselves and that when he gets a letter condemning a government initiative, it can't be because they honestly disagree with the government, but it's because they just can't figure it out? Is that what the Premier just said? Back it up.

MR. KLEIN: That is what this member is saying. He is saying that Albertans can't think for themselves, because he opposes and he has some awful words for the bill. We're saying let Albertans decide for themselves what the bill says.

Madam Chairman, when I talk about misleading and malicious advertising, I would suggest that this ad was put in at taxpayers' expense, obviously out of the Liberals' communications budget. I don't know. We can't FOIP them to find out. You know, we can't apply the freedom of information legislation to find out.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier . . .

MR. KLEIN: But Nancy MacBeth here, the Leader of the Official Opposition, says your public health care is at risk. [interjections] That simply is not true. That is false and . . . [interjections]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier, the chair has to deal with the point of order. [interjections] Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I am dealing with your point of order.

I think what we've seen here is very great differences of opinion. Also, what I see here is a great deal of debate, and we are sort of veering off from what is before us in Executive Council, so possibly we can get back into the mainstream. I know other members have indicated in this House they wish to speak, and maybe we can deal with the main estimates that are before us.

MR. KLEIN: Can I finish answering the question, Madam Chairman?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, we were just dealing with the point of order, so the hon. Premier does have time left in his allocation.

Debate Continued

MR. KLEIN: Well, Madam Chairman, we were talking about the correspondence that I receive and how some of that correspondence comes about. It covers a multitude of issues, literally hundreds of issues that we have to deal with as a government, but some are driven by campaigns. What I'm trying to point out is that the Liberals are part of a campaign.

When I say that the information is misinformation and it is malicious, I mean that. And, yes, that is the kind of thing that creates emotions amongst Albertans. That's the kind of thing that instills fear amongst Albertans, and naturally I get letters when the Leader of the Official Opposition says the Klein government wants to introduce two-tiered, American-style health care. That is false,

that is wrong, and that is simply untrue. That is false and that is malicious.

They say it's not orchestrated. It says: join in the fight to save our public health system; call the Premier; call your MLA. Right. You say that that isn't orchestrated? Who's telling fibs in this House? Who's telling the fibs in this House? It's not this Premier and it's not the members of this caucus, Madam Chairman. It's the Liberals. Their campaign is a malicious one of misinformation.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont. [interjections] Folks, we have had a member from here. It is the hon. Premier's estimates we are talking about. I'm allowing a member over here to ask questions.

MR. HERARD: Madam Chairman, I was enjoying this so much that I really don't know if I should be focusing us back on the estimates, but I certainly look forward to the debate that'll take place in this Chamber next week.

Madam Chairman, I remember back in 1993 when I was elected, a few days after the election coming to the Assembly and looking around and finding that there were no computers. There were no wires. There was no wiring. There was no net, and I was wondering, after working with computers for so long, how we could get along without them. But we've made an awful lot of progress over the last number of years.

I notice that initiatives under the bureau's goal 2 focus extensively on technology. So I'd like to ask the Premier: how specifically has the Public Affairs Bureau used new technology such as the Internet to communicate with Albertans?

5:10

MR. KLEIN: Well, Madam Chairman, I do appreciate the question because it actually pertains to my estimates.

Like all segments of society the government certainly recognizes the growing importance Albertans place on using new technology such as the Internet. We also recognize that the importance of technology and innovation will continue to grow, not just here in Alberta but throughout the world. Indeed, that's why we put I believe it was \$30 million — that's over and above the \$500 million endowment — into ICT research through our universities. The global economy we now face is one that will be increasingly dominated by knowledge, technology, and innovation-based industries, and that incidentally is why this government continues to encourage and promote innovation here in Alberta.

I think we're already making great progress in this area, including the recent initiative I announced earlier, the \$500 million endowment to create the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering, plus the \$30 million we put in exclusively for ICT research. We're doing everything we can to make sure that current and future generations of Albertans are ready for the challenges and opportunities of the new global economy, and Albertans are certainly proving an interest in taking up those challenges.

As a matter of fact, there was a story on one of the television stations — I believe it was last night — and really, this is one of the very interesting challenges we have to face, and that is the capital requirements at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology for ICT. There were people virtually lining up, as I understand it, since 3 o'clock the previous morning to register for courses in computer technology. That's an indication of the demand, but what's more encouraging is that officials from NAIT indicate that the take-up on graduates from ICT courses is about 94 percent. That is quite phenomenal. These are people who will have jobs perhaps even before they graduate.

So there's no doubt that Albertans are taking an interest, and as I'm sure hon. members are aware, our province already holds the distinction of being one of the most plugged-in provinces in the country. We have embraced new technologies like the Internet and now turn to them more and more for information and discussion. Our efforts to meet the demand for Internet-based communications continue to keep pace with Albertans' needs and interests.

For example, the Alberta Connects program has given Albertans more opportunities to ask questions or provide comments on a wide variety of topics, programs, and services through government of Alberta web sites. Albertans can also provide their comments through a web page as well as an e-mail address. A computer program routes each message to the appropriate ministry, and ministries work hard to reply to all comments within 72 hours. That's quite phenomenal. You know, it used to be about a 60- to 90-day turnaround for correspondence. Now we have the ability to make that turnaround, notwithstanding the literally thousands and thousands of pieces of correspondence we get, in 72 hours.

As I mentioned earlier, the Alberta Children's Forum is another area where communications technologies and the Internet were used extensively in our communication with Albertans. A web site was created to allow Albertans to participate in a virtual forum, essentially an on-line discussion group. This is not new. This is evolving technology. This is the way of the future. We now have head offices saying: we don't need to be in a single office; we can be anywhere in Canada, anywhere in North America, anywhere in the world and have a virtual head office.

Going back to the Children's Forum, this gave people who couldn't attend the forum in Edmonton a chance to participate in the discussion. Albertans also had the opportunity to register for the forum through the web site as well as submit comments or questions.

The Public Affairs Bureau also maintains the Alberta government web site and ensures that the most important government news is available on the home page as soon as it is released. The main Alberta government home page is merely the tip of the iceberg for Internet communications going across government. From the home page Albertans can access sites for every ministry, where they can find information, ask questions, or provide feedback about the programs and services that matter most to them. Madam Chairman, the one thing, as I pointed out earlier, that Albertans have told us they want their government to do is to keep in touch with them.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon. I've been waiting anxiously to discuss in detail the budget of Executive Council. I believe in regards to the hour and the importance that Albertans are placing on the Public Affairs Bureau — you know, in the world of Edmonton-Gold Bar the truth squads always bring up people's dander, the hair on the back of the neck. Whenever we think of the words Public Affairs Bureau, we almost think of a controlled message. The hon. Premier earlier said: "bamboozle the people." It's almost like the whole idea of the Public Affairs Bureau is to control the message: this is what we want you to hear.

The Public Affairs Bureau supports the government in its ongoing dialogue with Albertans by providing communication and consulting services to all government ministries. Now, with this whole mail-out that's going on, I'm sure someone on the other side is going to be very busy over the weekend licking stamps, because we're going to send Bill 11 to every household in the province. There's definitely going to be overtime involved.

Will the Premier explain why the budget for the Public Affairs Bureau is increasing by \$1.1 million, or almost 13 percent? That's from one year to the next. That's a significant increase, and if he could explain that in due time. If we run out of time today and he will do that by letter, well, that's fine.

Could the Premier also explain for the benefit of all Albertans, not just members of Executive Council or members of government but all Albertans, including opposition members, CUPE, everyone else that he mentioned before – vested interest groups I think were the words he used. What is the breakdown of the \$8.8 million budget for the Public Affairs Bureau? How much is in salary and wages, travel expenses, advertising – now that's a big one – telephone and communications, data processing services, hosting – hosting: who would have thought? – and contracts to outside vendors. I would understand from that that there's perhaps going to be a bit of privatization here.

5:20

Alberta Corporate Service Centre. What do we have here? Eleven full-time equivalents or employees in that department? I have a number of questions for the Premier. The computer program that's going to be utilized: is that the PeopleSoft program? I would be very keen to find that out. Also, exactly what duties are these 11 individuals going to have? I know there are a lot of people, not only in the city but across the province, very concerned about this concept of shared corporate services. There are a lot of people who are presently employed by the government who would be anxious to know whether they're going to have a job or not and whether these 11 individuals are going to be detailing the layoffs as they come, if there are any layoffs.

I certainly hope there are going to be no layoffs in Alberta's public service. We need to stabilize the public service just like we need to stabilize the health care system, and the way to do that is by having stable labour relations.

Now Madam Chairman, will the Premier also provide a breakdown of the gross operating expenses of the Public Affairs Bureau by subprogram for 2001-2002 and 2002-2003? Also, for the Premier: what is the breakdown of the 128 full-time equivalents of the Public Affairs Bureau by subprogram: administrative services, communications services, communications technologies, Queen's Printer bookstores, publishing services, and of course the RITE telephone system?

Now, I can only assume that communications services is where all the letters are crafted and drafted, and I note that the letters coming from the Premier's office to the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar – even though the questions asked by letter to the Premier's office are different, the responses that my constituents are receiving back from the Premier's office are all the same. One of the responses – and I've noted this – is: while I'm Premier, we'll have no two-tiered health care system in this province. But what worries me is that the Premier is someday going to retire or maybe he's going to be voted out of office – you never know – and what is going to come after? This is what perplexes not only me, but actually it was brought to my attention, Madam Chairman, by constituents.

I also have another question for the Premier: what are the projected number of full-time equivalents or employees in the Public Affairs Bureau next year and the following year?

Also for the Premier: what steps will be taken by the Public Affairs Bureau during the three-year planning period to respond better to Albertans' requests for information about health care, education, infrastructure, and the fiscal direction the province is going to go in?

Will the Premier elaborate for all hon. members of the House on the goal of the Public Affairs Bureau to expand the use of "Internet technology to open two-way dialogues with Albertans, including moderated on-line discussion groups"? Perhaps there's an opening here for the truth squad. They could practise a little bit before they go out and meet members of the public. I understand that some of them now are reluctant. It's going to be what is described as a controlled event.

Now, for the hon. Premier as well: what steps will the Public Affairs Bureau be taking over the next three years to "further develop the navigation and design elements of the Alberta Government Internet Home Page to give Albertans improved information access and feedback options"? If in due time the hon. Premier could answer that question, I will be most anxious to receive the response.

Will the Premier elaborate on the goal of the Public Affairs Bureau to "look for opportunities to deliver communications support through 'clustered' services or shared resources among ministries"?

What types of in-house training programs is the hon. Premier's government planning, Madam Chairman, for employees of the Public Affairs Bureau over the next three years? Are these training programs going to be expanded for this truth squad or any further truth squad that is going to be implemented to facilitate the government's communications message?

Will the Premier elaborate on the plan of the Public Affairs Bureau to create "a human resource intranet for Bureau staff"?

Now, Madam Chairman, I realize that in light of the hour the Premier is not going to have a chance to respond. I would be anxious to receive a letter, one of the 18,000 I believe he said that he signs every year. I'm going to get one too.

In light of the hour, Madam Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report progress.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of Executive Council for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 5:27 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Learning, Monday, March 6, 2000

Date: 00/03/06

8:03 a.m.

[Mr. Stevens in the chair]

Designated Supply Subcommittee – Learning

Stevens, Ron, Chairman
Burgener, Jocelyn
Dickson, Gary
Fischer, Butch

Graham, Marlene
Hlady, Mark
Johnson, LeRoy
Massey, Don

O'Neill, Mary
Pannu, Raj
Severtson, Gary
Soetaert, Colleen

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning. I'd like to call the meeting of the subcommittee to order. There is a motion that I would like to read into the record.

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Orders 56 and 57 the designated supply subcommittee on Learning allocate the time for its consideration and debate of the 2000-2001 estimates of the Department of Learning as follows:

- (1) The time allocated for the subcommittee will be a maximum of three hours.
- (2) The minister responsible first addresses the subcommittee for a maximum of 20 minutes.
- (3) Official Opposition subcommittee members then have a maximum of two hours for questions and answers. Those members may allocate the time for questions among themselves as they see fit.
- (4) The ND Member for Edmonton-Strathcona then has a maximum of 15 minutes for questions and answers.
- (5) Government subcommittee members have the remainder.

Be it further resolved that in the event government subcommittee members do not exercise their right to utilize the remaining time, the chair shall call for a motion to conclude discussion of the estimates and to rise and report.

Be it further resolved that in order to conclude prior to four hours, as allocated under Standing Order 56(7), unanimous consent of this motion will be required.

I would invite someone to move the motion as read.

MR. JOHNSON: I so move.

THE CHAIRMAN: All in favour? Opposed? Seeing none opposed, the motion is carried unanimously. Thank you very much.

Mr. Minister.

DR. OBERG: Thanks, Ron. I won't use the full 20 minutes on my opening comments because I believe we'll probably get the majority of it out in the questioning.

Good morning. I have a few opening comments, and then I will entertain questions from the committee members. The estimates for Learning begin on page 329 of the 2000-2001 government and lottery fund estimates. The business plan starts on page 227 of the government's Budget 2000 document. These estimates are a further step to a vibrant and seamless education system in Alberta. They provide support to all Albertans for the achievement of lifelong learning.

In 2000-2001 Alberta Learning plans to increase base spending by over \$371 million to \$4.4 billion, or a 9.2 percent increase. This increase will ensure we are meeting the needs of students, whether they are attending a school or a postsecondary institution. Add to that mix \$162 million of opted-out revenue, and you have a total of \$4.6 billion in funding for learning in the province.

We want a learner-centred system, so this is a learner-centred budget. This budget will provide funding for school authorities to hire more teachers and teachers' aides according to their needs and

increase the financial support for postsecondary students.

On page 334 of your estimates book operating support for basic education is increased by almost \$214 million. This increase will ensure school jurisdictions receive the funding they require to operate their schools and provide a quality education to their students. All operating grants will increase by 3 percent so that the school boards can direct more money to the classroom, including meeting the needs of their students with severe disabilities. One hundred and ninety-five million dollars has been added to fund a 3 percent operating grant increase and the anticipated enrollment increase of about 1.8 percent, or almost 10,000 students. These 10,000 will join our current student population of 556,000.

Spending on programs for English as a Second Language and students with severe disabilities will increase by more than \$18 million. This funding will accommodate the expected cost resulting from my announcement last year that lifted the caps on these programs. It will also accommodate enrollment increases expected in the 2000-2001 school year.

Funding to accommodate the new Alberta initiative for school improvement program, developed collaboratively among education stakeholders, will cost \$38 million this fiscal year, and for the 2000-2001 school year \$66 million will be available. This program allows school boards to implement initiatives like the stay-in-school program, early literacy or numeracy programs, or smaller class sizes for early grades.

Funding for early childhood services is increasing by \$12.5 million to \$114 million. This increase accommodates an expected increase of 15 percent in the number of children with severe disabilities served and also recognizes the higher operating expense experienced by ECS providers.

Private schools will receive \$42 million in 2000-2001, an increase of \$5 million. This continues the phase-in of the 1998 Private Schools Funding Task Force recommendations to increase per student funding to 60 percent of the public system's basic instruction grant. To ensure school boards can perform comprehensive planning to meet the technology needs of students, we have funded this planning for the next three years, \$20 million per year in 2000-2001, totaling \$60 million. This \$60 million is up fronted this year.

Last but not least under the public and separate school support is the student health initiative. The 2000-2001 fiscal year will be the first full year of operation for this initiative. The initiative may be accessed by up to 73,000 students who have special health needs such as speech, language, or occupational therapy. Improving student health is a priority of this government and mine.

Page 336 details how the \$858 million, an increase of \$34 million in 2000-2001, will be spent on postsecondary institutions. I have targeted \$95 million of funding, which includes an extra \$28 million, to expand postsecondary enrollments and to enhance access to apprenticeship training, which will result in an increase of over 1,200 new entry spaces in nursing and health technology and ICT. These 1,200 new spaces and the 1,200 spaces we created in '99-2000 will now double the number of graduates in ICT programs. Funding increases through the performance envelope for universities, colleges, and technical institutions will average 3 percent.

I would like to direct your attention to page 337, our assistance to learners. The core tenet of our assistance remains that the cost of

postsecondary education is a shared responsibility between students and their families and government. We have recognized the issues facing our students and have responded by increasing the financial assistance by \$23 million to \$125 million through loans, scholarships, bursaries, and maintaining, I believe, the most comprehensive remission program in the country. In fact, student assistance overall will enjoy the largest percentage increase in the entire budget of Learning: over \$50 million in new benefits over the next three years, with the largest increase occurring this year.

Alberta loan assistance will now be available to undergraduate students wishing to study in other provinces of Canada. Graduate students will continue to have this option available to them. Loan remission is our key measure, designed to limit the amount of Alberta loan debt a student must repay. Loan remission payments will increase by \$17 million to over \$50 million by the end of the three-year business plan. This includes partnering with the federal government on a program to reduce debt after all other repayment efforts have failed. To ease the transition between school and work, the interest relief program has increased the period allowing graduates to suspend payments from 30 to 54 months.

Students will be able to earn \$225 per month without affecting their level of provincial assistance. In addition, the scholarship exemption will be doubled to \$1,600, ensuring students retain a greater share of their rewards for academic excellence. The number of students assisted is expected to rise by 10 percent over the next three years to about 50 percent annually.

To ensure the students we assist can meet the health and dental costs of their children, postsecondary students will now be eligible for the Alberta child health benefit.

I also recently announced a new \$3 million scholarship program to recognize achievements of full-time postsecondary students who have completed their first year of studies. I expect 3,000 students will be rewarded \$1,000 each.

Overall, the 2000-2001 budget and business plan highlight my commitment and this government's commitment to lifelong learning, facilitated by a seamless system that continues to be affordable for all Albertans.

Thank you. I'll now take some questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Who would like to go first? Don.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks very much, and thank you, Mr. Minister, for the comments. Some good things have happened, I think, in special education. Allowing those students with severe disabilities, when they move, for the funding to be adjusted and not penalizing the boards that pick them up is a great move, and I think it's been recognized as such.

8:13

I want to start off with a couple of general questions and then maybe get your reaction to it. As I have visited school boards across the province and talked to parents, the issue of funding adequacy has been raised time and time again. If you look south of the border at the kind of lawsuits that are being put in place, where states are being sued by boards and boards are being sued by parents on the basis of providing inadequate funding, the search for a formula or a method of arriving at what is adequate funding goes on, all kinds of different resource-based models that they're exploring. I guess I'd like to know what the department is doing, if anything, in that area in terms of trying to come up with a base that we could – I mean, we talk each year about the percentage increases over the previous year and the millions that are going in, but it's never backed up since the cuts, that I can recall, with a rationale for why those dollars.

DR. OBERG: Sure, Don. First of all, I will not say to you that we

have a completely logical reason why the dollar amount is X number of dollars. We are grappling with the same thing that's happening in the States, which is to come up with a justification for the amount of dollars we spend one way or the other, in all fairness, because it may be that when it comes to funding adequacy, we may actually be spending more than we need to, or we may be spending less than we need to. Consequently, we do funding based on last year's results, based on last year's budget, which at this moment in time is the only thing we have.

What I would like to see, Don, and one thing that we will be doing very shortly is looking at the whole outcome effort. I believe that when we do that and when we tie funding to outcomes, we may well have a better example of exactly what is the adequacy of the funding.

You commented about the boards down in the States being sued. I would hope that that doesn't happen here. I have, first of all, absolutely no idea – I'm not a lawyer, obviously – how they would ever come up with that. Maybe what we can do – and I certainly have no problems – is if they come up with a solution as to what is funding adequacy and they can describe it, then we will certainly look at it.

DR. MASSEY: There's nothing right now in the works in terms of a review of the funding?

DR. OBERG: Yes. That's what I was commenting on, Don. What will be coming out is a whole review on the outcome indicators, on the performance indicators, what mechanism we can use to measure school boards, what measures can be used, and this will be done by the five partners of education, the ASBA, the ATA, et cetera, et cetera. Plus the department will be sitting down and attempting to change how we fund the school system to fund on the outcome as opposed to the input. Right now, as you know, we fund on the input side of things and don't fund on the outcome side of things. So we are looking at that, and that will probably be announced within the next couple of weeks.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. So it is going to be a sort of formal setup, a structure for dealing with the problem.

DR. OBERG: Right. Just if I can, Don, on that. What will be happening: the first phase will be on performance indicators and outcomes; the second phase will be tying funding back to that.

DR. MASSEY: One of the sources that I check every year is the Pugh Foundation and Education Week's ranking of American states, and they use a much wider range of performance measures than we do in terms of making judgments not just about school boards but making judgments about the government; for instance, the government's fiscal effort, the percentage of the budget that goes into education versus other spending. Will it include that kind of broad look at performance measures, or will it just focus on school boards?

DR. OBERG: No. Everything will be in the mix, Don, and we're hoping this will be a major review of the funding system of schools. I believe it's time. It's been probably about five or six years. A lot of things have changed in that last five or six years. We'll see what happens. I'm not guaranteeing the results, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't go after it and attempt to find a better funding system.

DR. MASSEY: Will there be an attempt to gather some information based on what actually happens in schools? I was at Kirkness the night the budget had been announced, and the calculation there was that it would make a difference of about \$32,000 if all the money flowed through right to their school and that they would still lose a

teacher come September. I guess it's that sort of microlevel information that I hope will be part of this review, that you actually take some schools and run the numbers through to see what they look like when they're translated to classroom practice.

DR. OBERG: We're certainly going to attempt to do that. One of the problems we have with that though, Don, is that we don't control the amount of dollars that actually go down to the school. We control the amount of dollars that go to the school board. How the school board then distributes to the schools is in their realm. Some of the issues we've seen are that some school boards have chosen not to put the increases down to the schools and instead have sort of carved off pieces for technology, carved off pieces for this, carved off pieces for that, and that quite frankly is one of the issues we need to get at, their ability to do that. What they're doing, in essence, is taking it out of the classroom.

DR. MASSEY: I was with Rob Lougheed out at Fort Saskatchewan at a meeting there, and we had the same litany of school after school with the parents standing up saying: "This is what the difference is in our school, and we're still going to be fund-raising, selling chocolate almonds. We're still going to be in a difficult position. Class sizes won't change." We had information from, I think, about six different schools out there. I think that any kind of information would really be valuable. Even if boards are handling it differently, then, I think that would have to be part of it somehow or other.

DR. OBERG: I agree, Don. I'll give you my position on that. I have problems, quite frankly, when I show on paper and quite literally show that it goes into the classroom, in the broader sense, an 8.8 percent increase. That's what we're doing this year, 8.8 percent. Yet when I talk to the schools, they're saying they're only going to see minimal increases. This isn't like the HRDC in the federal government. I can actually track where those dollars are going, what those dollars are going to be used for, and it does come out to 8.8 percent.

DR. MASSEY: Then I guess the rejoinder would be that they're still catching up from the cuts, that they never really recovered, that there's inflation, and that they're facing 3 percent teacher contract increases. I guess it just points out the need for really being able to look at the local level and see what's happening in a sampling maybe of schools across the province.

DR. OBERG: Yeah. Absolutely. I certainly think it does.

The one point that you made, though, about the inflation. We've run those figures. We've actually run it for enrollment, and we've run it for inflationary pressures. We're up 5 percent on enrollment and inflation over the past five years. So it is increasing at a faster rate than inflation and enrollment.

DR. MASSEY: Have you gone back to '93, when the cuts were done? Is that information you could share with us?

DR. OBERG: Sure. Certainly.

DR. MASSEY: I'd appreciate having a look at that.

Linked with this is the whole business of governance and school boards. As you know, I think that the firing of the Calgary board sent a chill through the province in terms of school boards and school governance. We heard recently of the board out in Parkland having a meeting and, I guess, having questioned the motion that they had passed. There had been one dissenter. The board found itself in your office having that decision questioned. I wonder if

you'd talk a little bit about your view of school boards and where you see them fitting in the future. It seems that in terms of their power, they've certainly had that curtailed. I haven't talked to a lot of them, maybe a dozen or so in the last couple of months, but certainly the feeling among some trustees is that they're very much under the gun and that their autonomy is certainly threatened. I guess I'd like to hear from you what you think.

8:23

DR. OBERG: Sure. I'll start with your last comment first, about the school board trustees being under the gun. I feel that they should be under the gun, because quite frankly we're giving these people a little over \$3 billion to handle. We're giving these people the lives of our children to look after when it comes to education, and it's an extremely important job. So I think they do need to have pressure. To take all pressure off them so they can shrug their shoulders and say, "Well, you know, it happened," I think that is wrong. I think they have to be accountable. They are elected by their electorate, and I think they have to be responsible to their electorate. I think they have to do a good job. I think it's way too important a task to just take it lightly and to not be accountable for it.

With regard to school boards in general, I think school boards are critical. Most people in this Assembly have heard me talk about local decision-making. It's something that I believe strongly in. Whether it's children's services, whether it's health boards, whether it's school boards, it's something that I believe very strongly in. Quite frankly, what happens in Brooks is a lot different than what happens in Edmonton as opposed to what happens in, you know, High River, High Level. They're all different, and you need that on-the-ground approach to find answers to the problems.

With regards to Parkland specifically, what is happening in Parkland is a very unfortunate incident where you have two communities, from what I understand and from the letters I get, that are in essence at each other's throat. On one hand, you have a community that is attempting to take their school out and make it a charter school. They've written letters to me about that. On the other hand, you have a different town that is saying, "Oh, everything's fine, and we want these people," et cetera, et cetera. So when I talked to Parkland – and again I think everyone in this room has seen examples of communities becoming entrenched. I've had it in my constituency, I've had it in my own community where you get two sides on an item, and rationale tends to be gone. It tends to be all emotion. That's what's happening presently in Parkland.

What I suggested to them is to bring in an objective third party and find out what the best way is that things can be done, what the best way is that it can be done for both sides. I said that there's no way that I know, because I'm not involved in that situation, nor would I want to be. But we do have experts, people who have dealt with this, and what I said to them is that we need to try to get a win/win scenario for everyone involved. I have no idea what that is. I get extremely disconcerted when I have two towns that are quite literally on opposite viewpoints or I have school boards that are, in essence, on opposite viewpoints, and I need to give them a way out, Don. That is what is needed right now.

DR. MASSEY: How does that square, then, with autonomy of a local board? It's going to happen all over the province. They're going to try to close schools, and you're going to have community against community. It already happens. Where does that leave local boards if every time the loser on one of those votes – and there's always going to be a loser; one community is going to come out not having their school – goes to the minister? What does that say about local autonomy?

DR. OBERG: Well, first of all, ultimately in the jurisdiction of

Learning in the province of Alberta I have the ultimate authority and the ultimate accountability. So to say that the Department of Learning and myself in particular are not a party to this is wrong.

DR. MASSEY: I didn't say that. I guess you can talk about local autonomy and say it's important, but if the actions don't follow that, does that not really undermine a local school board?

DR. OBERG: No, it doesn't, Don, because the issue becomes: I'm not going in on a whim saying that you must do this or you must do that. The only thing that I have said, in Parkland in particular, is in all essence exactly the same thing I said in my own constituency, that we need to bring someone in who is an objective third party to have a look at it. I gave my pledge to the school board that if that objective third party comes out and says exactly what they're going to do, I will back it one hundred percent. But when tempers run high – you know, from the letters that I read, there seemed to be some question about process. There seemed to be some question about the decision. Consequently, I have opted for an independent third party. As I say, if that independent third party agrees with the school board, fabulous. Then they have one hundred percent of my support behind them. I'm trying to get a win/win scenario for that school board.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. Are there plans afoot to look at the role of school boards in the province and to do any kind of adjusting in looking at their role?

DR. OBERG: There is no formal plan afoot at the moment. I think the school boards play a very important role, and I'm hoping they will continue to play that role. As you know, in this budget, Don, one of the key points is the flexibility that is given to school boards. I could have gone in and targeted exactly where all this money is going to go, but I didn't. I didn't put in new programs. I didn't start any new programs, apart from the AISI, which was actually started before. I felt that the flexibility given to the school boards is very important, and I hope to increase their flexibility that they have through this whole outcome measurement.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks very much.

MR. DICKSON: Good morning, Mr. Minister. I guess 1998-99 was the first year that we saw ESL funding extended to Canadian-born children who had some challenges in English. A great move. I was delighted to see that happen, but that still leaves, in my respectful view, one other major shortcoming with our ESL funding. It is, you know, manifest if you look at the dropout rate at a high school like Forest Lawn high school in Calgary, where you're looking at something over a 70 percent dropout rate for high school ESL students, something that I hope causes you as much concern as it does me. There have been numerous recommendations to you, Mr. Minister, or at least to your predecessor, to provide some flexibility with ESL funding. The three-year cap seems to be wholly arbitrary. It may be perfectly adequate for . . .

DR. OBERG: There is no cap on ESL.

MR. DICKSON: Okay. Well, that's very good news. My understanding had been – and I was even talking to school trustees – that there was still a three-year limit on ESL funding.

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: We asked them to look at the three-year limit, but there's no official cap on it.

MR. DICKSON: Oh, okay. Well, that's good news as well.

DR. OBERG: We did that last summer actually, Gary. We took that off.

MR. DICKSON: Okay.

The other thing I wanted to ask. Just one encouragement. There's an excellent program at St. Monica school. St. Monica school has a number of children that have come from the former Yugoslavia. They have an excellent partners in peace and education program that deals with children who actually come with some pretty disturbing experiences and memories. I hope that's a program your department is going to be able to support, because it meets a real and pressing need for children who come from war areas.

Another concern I've heard. I understand there's still a cap on administration, a 4 percent cap, and I'm thinking of the four larger boards, the public and separate boards in Edmonton and Calgary. An issue that's been raised with me is a concern that when you get to a board particularly the size of the CBE, the Calgary board of education, just because of the complexity, the size of their student population, the range of issues and needs that children present with, there may have to be some additional flexibility in that cap. I understand it's a 6 percent cap for some of the smaller boards. So I relay to you and would be interested in your thoughts in terms of whether we're ensuring that with those very large boards, with some different kinds of challenges qualitatively and quantitatively than some of the smaller boards, that's something there may be some flexibility on, Mr. Minister.

I have a number of questions in terms of what I observe in Calgary, and I'd be interested in any specific plans you've got to deal with them. There was the Calgary teachers' convention recently. I had a chance to spend a day there. I talked to lots of teachers, school principals. Some of the things that I heard: a lot of concern around teacher stress and low morale in the Calgary public system, and it may be true in the Catholic system too; you've got a high rate of absenteeism; you have a number of teachers choosing to leave the profession. I was told, for example, that we don't have enough teachers coming out. Right now the University of Calgary Faculty of Education has but two students graduating with a mathematics major. If in fact this information is accurate, I'd be interested in knowing what kinds of short-term plans your department has to address some of those needs around a shrinking experienced teacher base.

I'm just going to keep going, Mr. Minister, unless there's something you'd like to jump in and offer some observation on. I'd appreciate that.

8:33

DR. OBERG: Sure. You know, so far, Gary, you've asked me four questions that I can answer here. Do you want me to?

MR. DICKSON: Absolutely. Why don't we have a go at dealing with those, please?

DR. OBERG: Sure. First of all, the partners in peace program I think is an excellent program. One of the issues – when you ask about support, absolutely, we will certainly give support. We will not give monetary support, and the reason we aren't going to give monetary support is because this is the flexibility the school boards have wanted. This is the flexibility they will get to put in these different types of programs. What we will do is give them the basic grant and the programs that are needed.

This goes back to Don's question a little bit, too, about the flexibility and autonomy of the school boards. I believe they must have that autonomy to put in programs that are needed in specific situations, and this is a specific situation. I'm confident that the school boards will respond to those particular situations. When it

comes to any support administratively, clerically, et cetera, curriculum-based support, anything like that, we will certainly help them. Again, though, I think it sets a bad precedent when this department goes and funds specific individual programs around the province. There would be a lot of recourse, for example, for the Grasslands school division in Brooks to say, "Well, we have one Yugoslavian child; I want you to fund that program in Brooks," despite the fact that it may or may not be needed. Still, it's very difficult.

The cap on administration. The cap on administration is something that I hear a lot about as I go around the province, and I hear it diametrically opposed on two different sides. On the school board side they say that there is not enough money for administration, yet when I talk to the public, when I talk to Albertans, they say we absolutely have to keep that cap on. When I talk to MLAs as well, one of the issues has been that with a lot of these schools boards, especially the large ones, too much money gets put into administration and not enough into the classroom. By keeping the cap on, what we can do is ensure to parents, ensure to Albertans that the dollars are going into the classroom as opposed to administration.

I think, in talking to some of the larger school boards especially, that they're doing well when it comes to administration. The case I'll use is Edmonton public. Edmonton public tends to be doing quite well in how they distribute it out. The other thing we have to remember is that as we go to school-based funding, school-based budgeting, the amount of central office administration that is needed is actually decreasing, as more of the administrative functions are going out, so we hope there's a saving.

In all fairness, Gary, I don't see the cap changing at the moment. One thing I will say, though, is that there has been a 3 percent increase on that as well. As we increase the budget, their dollars go up as well.

Teacher stress and low morale. Absolutely that's a problem, and I think it's quite a serious problem. When I first became minister, within basically a week or 10 days of becoming minister, I sat down with the Alberta Teachers' Association and addressed this exact issue. One of the things I said was that I believe a lot of the issues about stress, about low morale, about the negativity surrounding the education system is because that's all everyone talks about. The commitment I gave them at that meeting was that they would never hear a negative word about a teacher out of my mouth. In talking to the ATA, hopefully you may have noticed that things have changed slightly over the last six or seven months as we try to elevate this profession.

I use the example – and it's exactly the same thing with me, being a medical doctor. I hear a lot of stories of doom and gloom. We say, we being physicians, what the medical system is like, et cetera, et cetera, and what that does is degrade the work atmosphere that we work in ourselves. I'm not saying, you know, that we wear rose-colored glasses for everything, but on the flip side I don't say that we look at everything in a negative sense. I think there are a lot of positives in our education system, and that certainly has something to do with teacher stress and low morale.

Time may prove me wrong on this, but specifically on the Calgary public I will say that I think the new school board is doing an absolutely excellent job. They are very cognizant of their teachers. They are attempting to increase the morale and lessen the stress in situations that are involved there, and I think they're slowly but surely doing it. I have been very impressed with the Calgary board.

Your fourth question, Gary, was about teachers graduating. This is going to be a critical issue. As we look four or five years down the road, the number of teachers we see – first of all, a lot of teachers in the 45- to 55-year-old age group obviously, as they move forward, are going to be retiring. There are not as many people that are

coming in. Plus, obviously our student population is increasing, so we're going to be needing more teachers there as well.

A couple of things. We've talked to the universities specifically about this. One of the issues I have personally with the universities is that Lethbridge, for example, is now at a five-year teaching degree, Calgary is at a six-year teaching degree, the U of A is still at a four-year teaching degree, and I've expressed my displeasure with this to them. I think objectively, as I look back, I understand the rationale, and the rationale in Calgary is that it's a four plus two. You do a degree, and then it's two years on top of that degree for your teaching certificate. This is great for people that don't know exactly what they're doing, that go in and take a science degree, an arts degree, et cetera, et cetera, and then go into teaching. I think it's great for that.

The University of Lethbridge has decided they have an excellent teaching program, which I think everyone acknowledges, and they feel they can get more excellence out of their teaching program if they go to five years. The University of Alberta has stayed at four years. What I'm recommending when I go around the province is that if you want a teaching degree, if you're completely confident that you want to be a teacher, then probably the University of Alberta is the best place to go rather than the University of Calgary, six years, and the University of Lethbridge, five years.

One other thing I've done is that I've served notice to the rest of the ministers of education in Canada that Alberta is going to be moving towards accepting their accreditation of teachers. What is happening right now as we look across Canada is that every province has various barriers up to teachers coming into their province. What I'm now saying – and I served notice a couple of weeks ago at the meeting I was at – is that Alberta will very soon move to accepting their accreditation carte blanche.

I had an example of a priest moving here from Manitoba who had been teaching for 22 years, had been doing an excellent job, and could not get a teaching certificate here to sub, and that just is not acceptable. We are looking at that, and again I've served notice that we are looking to attract teachers from the rest of the country as well, so we're hoping some of this will continue.

The second part of that is the whole idea of a math major, and I think that's an excellent point, Gary. I think we have to find a way to get more of these teachers into especially mathematics and science, where there seems to be a demand for it. One of the things that can be done is through the access funding in universities, where they can specify that these positions are held for teachers. Again, I see that as a problem upcoming in the future that we have to look at very seriously and deal with.

8:43

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, sir. I know my colleagues have questions too, but since you've sort of taken us to the universities, I spend lots of time talking to people at the University of Calgary, and I'm told, Mr. Minister, that if you look at the salaries paid to instructors, to professors across the country, the University of Calgary would rank about number 22 out of the 25 largest universities in Canada. That's information I haven't been able to check independently, but you know, I'm always struck with what seems to be a disconnect between our talk about all the high-skilled, high-paid jobs we want to develop in the high-tech sector in a knowledge-based economy and what seems to be some fairly significant pressures, strains. It looks to me like manifest underfunding, certainly at the University of Calgary, and I wonder, Mr. Minister, if you can address that. I mean, I was also at that meeting when you met with the board or maybe it was the senate of the university, and it was a raucous meeting. I wasn't quite sure what I'd stumbled into.

DR. OBERG: Neither was I, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: You know, there was lots of passion, there was a lot of concern, and it wasn't just on the part of students. We saw some of the leading businesspeople in the city of Calgary register concern with what's happening at the University of Calgary. I invite your comments on what we're doing to ensure that our universities – I'm talking about that one, but some of this applies to all our universities – are leading the way to take us where the government says it wants to take Alberta.

DR. OBERG: Sure. Absolutely, Gary. First of all, on the overall grants – not grants at specific institutions but overall – the funding went up 7.7 percent this year to postsecondary institutions. That's the money that goes directly to the institutions, so that's a fairly large whack of money. I will give you a proviso on that, and the proviso is that some of that money is tied to the access fund. So in essence what we're saying is that here's the money, but you also have to incur more expenses to get that money. There are 1,200 spaces, for example, that have been funded across the province, so there's a little bit of proviso in that.

The point about the professors' salaries is an absolutely excellent point. There is a recent study that came out a couple of weeks ago, and it basically said that Alberta professors were going down in real dollars as opposed to going up. I see that as a real challenge in my department. It's something I'm very seriously looking at and attempting to find ways to bring back up, because your point about the knowledge-based economy is absolutely correct. We can't have a knowledge-based economy if we don't fund our professors, so that is something I am very seriously looking at. I think my caucus colleagues around here know the kind of passion I display when it comes to postsecondary funding. I think we'll continue on, and I'm sure we'll get that one done.

On postsecondaries as well, though, interestingly on Thursday I was at a sod-turning ceremony in Calgary – this is a little bit of an aside here – and I came to the realization that since my short tenure as minister that's the fourth building I have taken part in turning the sod for, and that's in about eight or nine months.

So it is coming, but I won't say we're completely there yet.

MR. DICKSON: I think the CBE would say they'd like to see that same rate of sod-turning in their K to 12 area too, Mr. Minister.

Just a couple of other questions. Specifically now looking to program 1 of the budget, there are some questions in terms of element 1.0.4. What's the intent? There's an 8.5 percent increase.

DR. OBERG: Hang on. At what? At 1.0.4?

MR. DICKSON: Yes, 1.0.4. You've got an 8.5 percent increase for finance and administration. I'd like you to particularize what the intent of that is, and I've got a couple of similar questions. If you look at 1.0.5, similarly, what would be the intent of the 7.2 percent increase for human resource services? And at 1.0.7, what equipment will be purchased with the \$575,000 additional funding requested for IT? Then if you look at support for adult learning in program 3, 3.1.3, can you give us a justification for the increase in funding for learning television? What programs will this fund? Why is it being funded almost entirely by lotteries? Then just while we're in program 3, look at element 3.1.5. There's a 115.4 percent increase in the budget for other program support. I've given you probably enough questions to have a go at.

DR. OBERG: Okay. Let me start off with 1.0.4. That's finance and administrative; it has gone up 8.65 percent. There are several reasons for that. The first one is a salary increase in 2000-2001. There's also a provision to support the Imagis core team, plus there

are some funds reallocated from the administrative system support for unfunded but occupied positions between AECD and HR and E.

With regards to 1.0.5, which is human resources, we're seeing an 18 percent increase. This is one FTE for human resources. The account was introduced in '99-2000, and it was underutilized due to the reorganization in '99-2000. What we're saying is that it was artificially low because of the reorganization in '99-2000, so this is bringing it back up, plus there's one FTE that was added to it in the Learning account.

Okay; learning television, 3.1.3. The reason the operating expense was funded by lotteries is that we felt this would be a good position for lotteries to be in. We are entering into a service-based contract with learning television, which means they have to provide the service in order to get paid for the programming. I think we've all seen the Access programs that are on, where there are courses with Athabasca University and things like that. That's where those dollars have gone. The \$7.6 million again just purely comes from lotteries into our budget. It was allocated from lotteries into our budget, so it's included in our budget. Apparently lotteries felt that this was a good area to put the money into.

The other thing was 3.1.5, which is other program support. What this is is there are some dollars in there, in the support for adult learning, that have not been allocated yet. This is one of the potential areas where we are looking at allocating this for professorial salaries, and we are attempting to find a way to put some of these dollars into that. These dollars have not been fully allocated.

MR. DICKSON: Okay. Thank you.

MRS. SOETAERT: Actually I'd like to revisit your discussion with Don about the Parkland school division. With all due respect, I think the board has done a great deal of homework. It has documented it. In fact, it was a unanimous decision to amalgamate all three programs, not an easy decision. This is a very responsible group of people who care very much about the entire area. I think some local people have blown it out of proportion, which is very hurtful and divisive between two communities that have a history of working very well together.

Part of my concern. The reality is that funding won't accommodate three programs, so they've had to make this decision based on: we cannot support three programs in three different locations. But if the independent study goes through, my understanding of that is it will be based on not only finances but community impact and educational impact. Well, the board doesn't have that flexibility in making the decision. They only have the funding flexibility, so I think they feel like this is a setup to show they can't make a good decision. I feel badly about that. I also know there has been local interference by their local MLA, trying to barter something for something else. Two different issues entirely. So there is resentment on that board about the involvement of the heavy-duty government coming upon a board that has tried to make and has made very responsible decisions and in the past has not run a debt, has had to amalgamate programs, cram 33 kids in grade 2 French immersion into one classroom in a very old building. I have always given them respect due to their decisions.

I feel that because half of it is in a different political riding, if you like, as opposed to another, this has been part of the stirring of the pot. My fear is that you may be getting caught in the middle of it without all the cards on the table. I guess I caution you because this is a strong board that has made, I think, very sound decisions for their areas, and they're very upset. They're very upset with the lack of autonomy to even deal with program location, and I share their concern.

8:53

DR. OBERG: Okay. A couple of points on that. First of all, if it shows on the financial documents that they have to do this in an effort to save money, then I have absolutely no problems with this. What the people from – is it Stony Plain?

DR. MASSEY: Stony Plain.

DR. OBERG: What the people from Stony Plain have been saying, when questioned, is that they will not show them how they have saved money, how this is a money-saving procedure. That has not been done. I take full account of what you say, and the issue to me is that if there's any question, as there is – and I think you're absolutely right. It is tearing apart two communities, and from my way of thinking the only way to get a correct answer on that is to have an objective third party come in and take a look and see what is right based on finances – that would be first and foremost – based on the communities, based on perhaps busing, based on a lot of different issues. But I don't see any problems with having an independent body come in and either reaffirm their decision by saying, "Yes, this is the correct way to go" or saying, "No, we could do this better."

That is the type of thinking where we as politicians get into a situation where we can never relook a decision. Because we've made that decision despite the fact that further evidence comes forward I think is an extremely scary thought, and I think it's scary for both us as MLAs and for school boards. Those school boards and myself are in this to do what is right for the kids, and if we get an objective expert in who says that this is not right for the kids, then I think we have a problem. If he says yes, it is right for the kids, then . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: How do they fund it?

DR. OBERG: What's that?

MRS. SOETAERT: The reality is: how do they fund it? They have everything you've mentioned, busing and where students are located and the funding of it. I know that information is there, and I'm surprised you don't have it, because it's there.

DR. OBERG: I don't have it, and the people of Stony Plain don't have it. That is one of the things this person will be looking at, and if there's a huge financial argument, then the case in point is not there. It is a moot point.

MRS. SOETAERT: Because it's easy to say it's always nice to keep your child as close to home as possible. Even studying that is a moot point. You know, the reality is that it's nice to stay near home. For them I believe most of it was a practical funding reality, and the best way to offer a program was combining it.

DR. OBERG: Then it should not be a problem at all to bring in a third party and they show them the financial figures and say: for this reason and this reason and this reason we're doing this. That was not given out to the people of Stony Plain, and what I'm attempting to do is bring an objective opinion to a huge rift between two communities.

MRS. SOETAERT: I don't know if it's a huge rift, maybe between the 20 families who may have to move.

DR. OBERG: You know, I just received a petition with something like 350 or 360 names on it.

MRS. SOETAERT: Yeah, I'm aware of that, Lyle. I'm hoping you're not missing an element that is there. I caution you on that one. I think the board is really upset with the interference. This was not an easy decision, and it's not easy for them to make this decision.

DR. OBERG: Then, if I may, Colleen, it should be much better for them if they get the backing of an independent report that says that what they did was correct.

MRS. SOETAERT: The independent backing, they fear, is just a setup to make sure that local MLA is happy.

DR. OBERG: It's not a setup.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, then, that has to be made very clear, because when you talk about educational community and funding to that community, we just said that's a moot point. I caution you, because if we talk about the autonomy of boards, I think this will be seen as very offensive. I tell you this because I know it. What's happening I have real concerns about.

DR. OBERG: If I can just comment on that statement about the offensive part. My job is not to try and smooth everything over for the school boards. My job is to do what is correct for the kids of that community, and it's my job to ascertain what is correct for the kids of that community when I see a rift. There is a rift there now, and I am not going to go in and say I think you guys should go there or I think you guys should go there or I think you should do this. I'm not an expert in education, nor will I ever profess to be one. But I have experts that can go in there, and if they say, for example, that they're going to save this amount of dollars that can be shifted to somewhere else, they have 100 percent of my backing on this issue and I will go out to Stony Plain and talk to them and do whatever is needed. So I have no problem at all in doing that.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. They do feel there has been political pressure from other areas that have nothing to do with board decisions. That's for you to know. I seem to be in a hotbed of controversy in my riding.

Another issue that has Sturgeon, St. Albert Catholic, St. Albert Protestant all very concerned for all different reasons is . . .

DR. OBERG: What are you doing out there, Colleen?

MRS. SOETAERT: Just having so much fun.

Of course, you know the four-by-four issue. If you want to talk division in community, that has certainly happened in Sturgeon. I had a parent call me and say: now kids are picking on my son because he's going to the St. Albert Catholic, and they've lost his classroom somewhere else in Sturgeon. I am very concerned about what this does to the planning ability of school boards. They don't know if they're going to have X number of children at a certain point in the year. I also know that it's divisive in communities. I'm a Catholic. I went through a Catholic system. I live in the country. Realizing that, I knew my children would not get a Catholic education. So I sit in the middle of this with all kinds of feelings about it, but I am very worried that it is divisive in communities, that it may undermine one system because of this. I don't think there's an easy answer to this, because when I look at it, I say: okay; what would I do? I think this needs a great deal of work, and I think the way the four-by-fours were formed has people questioning the democratic procedure of that as well. Between three boards that truly get along very well with wonderful people on all of them, this is not good. So I guess my question is – good luck – now where are you headed on this one?

DR. OBERG: Well, if I can just back up a little bit to about 1902 or 1905. As everyone knows, in the Constitution it is the right of Catholics to form four-by-four votes. This goes back to a time and age which was a lot different than what it is now.

I would say to you, Colleen, that I am probably the most experienced person in Alberta when it comes to formation votes in that there was recently a vote, about four or five years ago, in Brooks which absolutely tore apart the community. Those scars are still healing, and whenever one little thing is done, the scars become that much deeper and that much worse. This last fall there was a vote in Strathmore and exactly the same thing happened in Strathmore.

This is a horrible situation, and you are absolutely correct. We have to come up with an answer. I will say to you that I am that far from coming up with an answer, and I'm actually meeting with the affected parties again tonight to deal with this issue. It's been something that we have been working on for about the past six or eight weeks with the affected associations. The one thing I will say is that one of the issues we have is this may need legislation, and we have to see what kind of legislation it may need. In all fairness, though, it may be very minimal legislation. I'm not attempting to prejudge this, but if we get to the point where the Public School Boards' Association and the Alberta School Boards Association and the Catholic School Trustees' Association and all their boards and the bishops agree with the process and everything we've done, I would ask for your support if we have to bring this through. Obviously, anything we bring through would be with the unanimous support of all these institutions, so I would ask for your support in that, because I think we all know the horrible situation this causes.

9:03

We'll see. We may not get it, but I'm hoping we will. As I say, if we do, I will ask for your support, and I will certainly come and talk to you before that time.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Minister, will we be able to talk about 215, creating a lot of support for 215?

DR. OBERG: About what, sir?

DR. MASSEY: Bill 215, class sizes?

DR. OBERG: Oh. That's right. Politics is the art of negotiation, Don.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. Thank you for that. I look forward to seeing that one percolate up.

The AISI funding. I expressed concerns over it in its original form. I realize this is a bit better form. You know that my background is in teaching, and at the end of the day I would rather have a meeting with my colleagues about how to help a certain student, about a program, about what our school should do to build morale, or a thousand things other than, "Okay; what can we put in here that will get us more money?" Maybe I'm wrong, but I'm just looking at it as a practical use of my time as a teacher.

I'm not against creativity and new ideas and the whole bit, but I don't know if that's the best way to get them, chasing a dollar. You know, if you're setting up a program so you can get a dollar, I guess I feel: just give me the money to run with a decent education program. Take three kids out of my class so I only have 27 instead of 30. Don't make me spend four meetings within two months with my entire staff trying to figure out how we can get more money. I know that wasn't the intent of it, but I think in some places that's what it's coming down to.

Of course, then we get situations where people who have more time to meet and plan figure out a good something to apply for. I

just see it as: in all my day of making sure that Johnny's parents know he missed second block, I've got to now meet to find out how we can get more money. You see my concern about it. Don't make me jump hoops to teach kids. Just let me teach the kids.

DR. OBERG: But if I can, though, I respectfully disagree with your statements. First of all, I believe that this program will be probably the most effective and best program we have seen in Alberta in the last 50 years. This will be a program that will allow us to use measurement, to actually measure some of the results we are getting, actually look at what are better ways to improve our schools. What we're drawing on is the creativity of teachers; we're drawing on the creativity of school boards. We're giving the school boards the autonomy and the flexibility that have been asked for already as to how to do that.

We're taking it actually one more step. We're saying to the school boards: what is it in your school system that you want to improve? For example, in Northland school district probably the biggest method of improvement is if they actually get kids to go to school. In the school that Gary was talking about, if they get ESL kids to finish high school, that's a huge improvement. What these dollars will allow the schools to do is put in different programs in order to look at them. Quite frankly, if they find programs that are effective, then I have no problem in putting them across the province.

The other thing that we're doing is setting up web sites so we can monitor as programs are going on, so we can monitor exactly what is happening in programs, what results are being seen. I have stressed to school boards that I don't care if these programs fail, and the reason I say that is that we learn just as much about the school system if a myth is broken down as opposed to actually finding something that works.

A good example is the early literacy program, where that went out and is absolutely working famously. What I'm hoping is that we get 20 or 30 or 60 more early literacy type programs with this. I think the day when we can say we'll just sit down and work with the student and do the best job is gone. We have to find ways to use technology. We have to find better ways to use technology optimal ways to teach these kids, and if it means changing what we do in universities, all these things, that's what this program is about.

The other thing I will say is that it's not about competing over dollars. These dollars are secure to the school boards. They are receiving \$120, I believe it is, per capita, per student, that they can use with this funding. So it is not about competing. It may be competing between schools for programs, but that money is guaranteed to the school boards.

MRS. SOETAERT: They don't have to come through you and say, "This is the program we're setting up"?

DR. OBERG: They do have to come for the program approval, but if that one program is not approved, then they still have the money that they can put towards another program.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. And that's the time-consuming part.

Could, then, a school say, "Listen; we want to hire a teacher to work with all our home schoolers and try to convince them to come back into the school"? Would that be approved?

DR. OBERG: Absolutely. If they have something there to measure that, if that's something they feel is an issue.

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes. Even if there are 140 kids in the area?

DR. OBERG: Absolutely.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay.

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: Excuse me. There needs to be a measurement around how the children coming back into the system would improve their performance or overall schooling. It can't be just . . .

DR. OBERG: Or improve the kids' performance too.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. Since I'm on this one, home schooling is growing in some areas of this province. I mentioned this, I think, last year at this time. As a parent, if you are educating your child in the way you see fit, I respect that, but I have real concerns about, I guess the word is, evaluating some of those children.

I have seen where children have not been learning. I don't think they have been evaluated. I also have some concerns with – dare I say it without being sued for something – the one school that I don't feel does any follow-up, yet courts students to come into their program at the bonus of a computer or whatever it is. I am really concerned that we have children at home who are not getting the best education. I'm not saying that you can't work with those parents. Actually, Parkland has set up a pretty good person who is working with those parents. It's a concern of mine that some of the home schooled kids – and I don't mean to insult any parents who are doing that, but I have real concerns over not evaluation but the . . .

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: Achievement tests.

MRS. SOETAERT: Yeah.

DR. OBERG: Achievement, period.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, yeah, and the evaluation of it, because I know some parents give the test right there and help them with it. I knew one man who was in a literacy program, and his children were being home schooled.

I just don't know the answer to it. I don't know if we need to evaluate those programs that are going out and what they do to follow up with evaluation and if those parents are getting the bang for the buck in those programs that they're in. So I guess I have concerns about it. I support the right to do that, but I also think there's a responsibility to show that your child is learning.

DR. OBERG: Colleen, if I can comment on that, I think you and I agree completely on this one. I certainly have concerns as well. One of the things we have tried to move towards is virtual schooling, which I believe is an improvement. It still has some issues when it comes to, for example, the parents helping out when the test is there. You're absolutely correct.

9:13

Parents do have the ability to make the choice to home school their kids in Alberta, and hopefully the majority of parents make that choice on a very sound basis and for sound reasons. But home schooling is a concern. My concern is not home schooling per se. It's for the students, ensuring that the students are getting a proper education. I will be completely frank with you. In some situations I know they're not. This has been brought to my attention by the Taber school board, where they have a very difficult group of people who believe that education is not important for their children, that their children should not be educated.

These are very difficult issues. We attempt to go in, but quite frankly in this society we cannot go in and seize the kids and put them in school. We're certainly working to improve our virtual schooling, our home school programs. We're working to improve it. We're working to have the school boards with more contact with

the children involved. Is the system perfect? No. The system isn't perfect, but we recognize that it's something we have to be diligent and vigilant about, and we'll hopefully continue to do that and continue to find better ways to do it.

MRS. SOETAERT: A couple more things before I give it over to our critic. I was pleased to see the money going into scholarships for advanced ed. I'm always concerned, though, about that average kid who isn't an honours kid. Often those who are very strong academically come from advantaged homes, not always but often from what I have seen. They come from a home that values education, that will make sure their children have the money somehow to go, or actually it isn't an issue that they have the money. So I'm thinking of the average kid from a home that isn't as financially advantaged as others. That child, I'd venture to say has a real grind to get through university when you're doing it totally on your own without parental support.

I think all of us here with kids in university have given parental support because it's a priority, and no matter what we're going to make sure they get through. The kids who don't have that who also aren't an honours type student, I just see them catching the biggest load of the debt and not having the financial support from behind.

I guess if I were to weigh out more scholarship money – and I'd hate to choose. I would say, then, don't increase tuition rates. Maybe that's just peanuts compared to not raising tuition rates. I see the student who walks away in high school with about \$5,000 to \$8,000 worth of scholarship money. That is wonderful. But the reality is that then she gets another \$1,000 or he gets another \$1,000 and this other 65, 70 percent kid is still without access to those dollars at all.

I don't know the balance, but I think I would choose trying not to increase tuition rates and hold off on new scholarship money for the very, very top, because some of them do get a good healthy chunk coming out of high school. Those are great. I support them. I support all the scholarships but, I've got to tell you, not at the cost of keeping tuition rates stable.

DR. OBERG: If I can comment on that. Your argument is a little bit on both sides of the coin, because when you freeze tuition fees, you actually freeze it for the people you just talked about, the people who can afford it, the people that have an interest in education, the people who will find the dollars to put their kids through school. You freeze it for both sides of things. You say that you shouldn't give a scholarship because the scholarships are going to people that don't necessarily need them. That's the rationale you just used.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's not quite how I would say it.

DR. OBERG: When you freeze tuition fees you do exactly the same thing. You're helping the people that don't necessarily need the help. Hence, that's why we put in all the money we were putting into the student loan side of things, so we can help the people that really need the help.

When it comes to tuition, we increased it \$300 this year, which more than matches the increase in tuition, and we increased that remission amount. We kept the amount that you would owe after a four-year education at \$20,000, and we increased the amount you could get. So we have increased the amount of remission. The whole idea behind that is so the kids who need the dollars can access the dollars.

With regards to the scholarship, we've had some successful programs, but I would say that one of the most successful programs we have ever had have been the Rutherford scholarships. This scholarship will be designed on exactly the same formula as the

Rutherford scholarship. This is also something that CAUS, the university students, and the college students actively lobbied me for: more scholarship money, more scholarships in the way of the Rutherford scholarships. They were the main ones that did this and said that that's what they wanted.

The other thing. If you noticed on the student loan side, we increased the amount of scholarship that each student can get before they have to declare it against their student loan, and for that exact reason: to promote the excellence. Again, I must say that this is the exact thing the university and college students asked me for.

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: And their earnings. We increased the level of earnings they can keep as well.

DR. MASSEY: I looked at the accessibility study put out by the students' union at the University of Calgary, and one of the questions they asked 12th graders was: when I think about the amount of debt I'll have when I finish and how long it's going to take to pay it off, do I have second thoughts about whether I continue my education? Then they looked at how students from different household incomes responded to that. Of those students from household incomes of less than \$30,000, 57 percent said that was a factor and they had reservations, while of those from families of \$50,000 or more income, it was 29 percent.

The large loans and the large tuition have a differential effect, depending on your family's income. If you come from a family that's low income, those big numbers scare you off. It's sticker-price shock. I think there's some pretty good evidence. The Harvard litigation journal or one of those journals did a study on the actual number of students that start making different choices at different levels. I guess it's been a concern, and I know the department has a study under way with the University of Calgary. What's the progress of that study?

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: We've just undertaken it, and we're doing it in conjunction with the student associations. We're concerned that there is that sticker shock and with some of the real issues there, about how you inform potential university students about the real costs and a number of other things. We're undertaking that. The terms of reference are being written, and we're in dialogue with the student associations to start that process.

DR. OBERG: If I may, Don. I think that process is absolutely critical. We don't want to deny access to anyone. I guess I have a little bit of an issue when we take a look at how after a four-year degree, if you qualify for the maximum in student loans, say, if you're at the lowest socioeconomic base, you're going to owe \$20,000, which is roughly the same as a new car loan.

DR. MASSEY: But what did you borrow before you ended up at the \$20,000?

DR. OBERG: Well, at \$20,000 you will have received about \$42,000.

DR. MASSEY: It's the \$42,000 that scares them off.

DR. OBERG: I know, but I guess what Maria was saying is that the issue is we have to put forward more about remission and ask: what is a better way to do that? You're absolutely right, Don. It is the \$42,000 that's the issue, but the \$42,000 is not what they have to pay back. I'll give you an interesting anecdote. Since the fall I've been talking a lot about student loans, a lot about remission. Our remission rates, because you have to apply for them, have gone up

dramatically. We are getting more money out to students through remission purely by communication. We're looking at changing our web site, changing our web page about student loans to get that information out to people that these remissions are available and that student loans are accessible. We haven't done a very good job of that up to date.

9:23

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: Dr. Massey, only 50 percent of the students who were eligible were making use of remissions.

DR. MASSEY: Some of them, when at the banks, couldn't find the remission forms.

MRS. SOETAERT: I don't even know about the remission forms, and I've got kids with that. You're saying that if they hit a certain debt load, they can get . . .

DR. OBERG: No. It's variable on each student loan. The maximum amount is \$5,000 per year that anyone will owe.

DR. MASSEY: It's not that students from low-income families are being denied access. It's that they're opting for cheap, short programs, something where they can get in and get out. You know, I don't think either one of us would ever want students making life career decisions based on how cheap the program is and how short it is.

DR. OBERG: Absolutely, Don. That's why we're entering into this study with the students' associations, to take a look at this and see what the actual effect of it is, and we'll see what happens.

DR. MASSEY: They're going to look at grade 10, 11, and 12 students from a variety of communities?

DR. OBERG: Yes.

DR. MASSEY: Great.

The other part. Colleen talked about it a little bit. You know, the scholarships are great. If you're a bright student, I don't think you can be denied an education in this province. There are all kinds of opportunities. But it's the 65s to 80s that I worry about in terms of their opportunity. I think there is a real struggle for some of them because they don't have access to the scholarship funds. They can't earn during the summer, like we could, enough money to pay tuition and board. Those kinds of jobs are not available for most of them. So it's that middle group that I have some concern about.

If I could, while we're on tuition, is there any thought of reviewing the 30 percent cap? We had a 20 percent cap as our proposal. I wonder if we aren't both wrong-minded in terms of trying to set caps. Once all the institutions get there, there'll be a period, I suspect, when they start playing around with: what does 30 percent mean? They've already done that. What does it include, and what does it exclude? It seems to me that 10 years down the road the long-term problem of financing postsecondary education won't be resolved unless we now start thinking about it and looking at some alternatives to tuition caps. The institutions are, I guess, going to be up against it once they hit that limit.

DR. OBERG: Yeah. Just two points. First of all, when it comes to the funding, we are again putting in a funding review, starting within the next week or so, about postsecondary education, looking at the different funding envelopes. One of the issues the universities and colleges came to me with was that they didn't like the funding envelopes. I said: "Okay I'll get rid of them. Give me the outcome

indicators, and I'll get rid of them." This is what we're in the process of doing: looking at ways to better fund, to more fairly fund.

I'll give you another example, Don. I have some institutions that are decreasing significantly, like a 20 percent decrease, in enrollment, yet they're still getting the same amount of grants. We have to take a look at how changing the funding system would affect these different universities. They don't have a whole lot of control over their enrollment, so we have to take a look at that.

The second point I wanted to make is the whole idea of the cap. I think the cap is a good idea. I think the individual cap on tuition fees is a good idea, where we say that it can be at most – \$243.50?

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: Yes.

DR. OBERG: That's the most it can go up on average within a year. Within an institution certainly there can be some programs that go up more than other programs, but the average can only be \$243.50. I think that's good.

I've talked to the people who put in the tuition cap at 30 percent, and I think they did not necessarily look beyond the 30 percent. We actually have our first institution that has reached the 30 percent cap, and they are still one of the lowest tuition fees. So what they have done is reached it through efficiencies, through cutting down their costs.

That leaves another school of thought: that we in effect are punishing them for their efficiency. This is something we have to deal with. I believe in the tuition cap. I believe it sends the right message. I believe in the individual cap. But when the universities get to that 30 percent, if they get to that 30 percent, we also have to take a look at that and find out the reason they got to that 30 percent. If it's because their expenses have come down, perhaps we need to take a look at something, because they're doing the right things.

DR. MASSEY: While we're on the universities, one of the figures in one of the staff bulletins was the loss of full-time professors and the very large increase in the number of sessionals now being used at universities to deliver instruction. Is that a concern to the department?

DR. OBERG: Well, first of all, when it comes to the loss of full-time or sessional, I will say to you that my concern is with the students' education. How the universities elect to do that is up to the universities. It's my job to look after the students' education and ensure that they're getting an education. If the universities find that they are better to use sessional instructors, then that's their decision. It's their autonomy on how to do that.

DR. MASSEY: You know, it sounds good, but what if they're forced into that because of finances? When you think of going to university, at least I would hope students would be exposed to some of the best thinking in the field that they've chosen. Sessionals are great, but the study I looked at showed there is a huge increase in sessionals, and a lot of those were part-time. I think the commitment to an institution is quite different than when they're there for a course or two courses a week.

DR. OBERG: Again, if I can, it is up to the university to make that distinction between full-time and sessional. Do I see a day when everyone is sessional? No. Do I see a day when everyone is full-time? No. It's a matter of getting that mix. I'm sure you know this, but I will say that the ICORE funding, which I believe is \$10 million a year – it's not in my department but through Dr. Lorne Taylor's department – is to recruit and retain professors. That's solely what that is for. There's the chairs program that was recently announced

by the federal government, which, again, I believe we're going to be receiving the lion's share of actually. Are we 50-some?

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: Oh, at least 60 in the University of Alberta alone.

DR. OBERG: I think that's the University of Alberta alone that will be receiving funding for those chairs. The other thing is the science and research endowment of \$500 million. All these things will certainly allow there to be more professors and more full-time professors.

Again, what I will say, Don, is that I'm not going to enter into that issue, because that is the university board of governors' decision, and it's their autonomy on how to do it. If the point is on the dollar side, then that is my issue, and that's why we increased roughly 7.7 percent overall. Some of the institutions got the lion's share of that or got more than that. The University of Calgary, for example, received about a 10 percent increase in funding over the last year. These are the types of things that are there.

DR. MASSEY: Do you have the same information on constant dollars for the secondary institutions as you do for the K to 12 system that you said was available, where you go back to '93? Do you have that information?

DR. OBERG: I don't have it with me, Don, but I can certainly get it for you.

DR. MASSEY: I'd be interested in seeing that.

DR. OBERG: If I can, though, on that. The one big difference between the postsecondary and the K to 12 is that the K to 12 only dropped the cumulative 4.77 percent over the two or three years of cutbacks whereas the postsecondary was at 21. So there is a difference in that. We are not as good in the inflation and enrollment figures in postsecondary as we are in the K to 12.

DR. MASSEY: You're still doing catch-up there.

Can I just bounce over to something? One nice thing about this format is you get to touch on some issues and come back to some of the questions.

First, on the Catholic boundaries. If you pull that one off, you can be assured of our support, if you can get that resolved. I'm saddened to see it come to this, having worked in the city with a Catholic board and a public board that just worked very well together. We just had things very, very easy between us.

9:33

DR. OBERG: I may hold you to that, Don.

DR. MASSEY: Yeah. Okay.

One of the complaints I hear from boards is on earmarked funding. It's the same complaint I hear from you and your colleagues about federal funding being earmarked.

DR. OBERG: You mean it doesn't just work one way?

DR. MASSEY: No, it doesn't just work one way.

The literacy. They're always quick to say: "Oh, yes, we think the money's great. AISI: it's good to have the money, but it's all earmarked." Is that a concern? I'm sure it's been raised by the associations.

DR. OBERG: Yeah. Absolutely. Do you want me to comment on these?

DR. MASSEY: Yes, please.

DR. OBERG: The literacy funding is being rolled into the general grant, and that will be after three years. The AISI funding I hope will do exactly the same thing, that it will be rolled in. What this is, first of all, is an attempt to get boards to do the initiatives and get the results, and then we will roll these into the overall dollars.

You're absolutely correct. We can't have it both ways, and in this budget especially I'm trying to give as much flexibility as possible to the school boards to what they can do with those dollars.

DR. MASSEY: The health initiative. When I looked in the budget – I haven't got the figures in front of me – it looked like the reporting was that there was \$25 million and about \$14 million of it had been spent. Is that . . .

DR. OBERG: That's purely on the school year issue.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. Twenty-five million will be spent.

DR. OBERG: Right. It's a school year versus a budget year.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. Good.

The fetal alcohol syndrome students. The old manual – and I haven't looked at the most recent one – wouldn't allow students to be coded. Is that still the case?

DR. OBERG: Two things, Don. First of all, they can be coded on fetal alcohol syndrome. Actually, I just talked to a school board on Friday. I spoke at a fetal alcohol syndrome conference, and they are being coded more. The other thing I will say is that I am extremely unhappy with all our special funding issues. We're in the process of looking at that, and we hope to have a resolution by September. I think there's a huge amount of problems with our special-needs funding, and we have to look and find a better way to do it. As I've talked to teachers all over the province, they've all said the same thing. So there has to be something wrong with it, and we have to find a better way to do it.

DR. MASSEY: They're spending too much money trying to access the funding, too much time and effort and paper.

DR. OBERG: And money, Don. An average assessment costs about \$1,000. Certainly from the school board's point of view, if they spend \$1,000 and get \$12,000, it's a good budgetary item, but from my point of view that's \$1,000 that isn't going into the classroom. These are the issues we'll be looking at, and hopefully we can find a better way to do it.

DR. MASSEY: You mentioned administration. I heard from the Lethbridge board that one of the things that's happened with the cutbacks and the envelope is that there was a whole group of experts across the province, mathematics supervisors and early childhood specialists, whom boards had employed. I talked to the Lethbridge board some time ago, and they were pulling a 10th grade math teacher and asking her to take on some responsibility for district leadership in terms of the changes in the math program and all that trouble that went around the applied and pure mathematics. Their lament was that they had lost that ability and they had lost those people that had provided leadership. Is there any thought of how that can be accommodated? It just isn't very efficient in terms of the way the money's being spent.

DR. OBERG: Yeah, there are two things. First of all, particularly in

the Lethbridge area they've hired two part-time people to go around and sort of be the mathematics experts. I've talked to them, and they're actually wonderful people that are doing it. Their contract unfortunately expires I believe this year or next year, and we have to look at that.

You know, for every cloud there's a silver lining. The cloud of course is the math curriculum. The silver lining is that we've learned an awful lot about the math curriculum. We did not do a good job when we put it in. We did not do good in-servicing. We have learned from that, and that won't happen again. We're still trying to catch up to the issues that were raised with the math curriculum, and we have to find a better way to in-service teachers.

We kept up the money to the consortia, which was \$900,000 we gave to the consortia. In talking to a lot of the school boards, though, there still seems to be a better way. One of the things I will be approaching the department with is whether or not there's a sort of regional team of experts that can be called upon or something along those lines, but I feel that those people are best employed by the department to go out and troubleshoot with the individual school boards on specific issues around curriculum. That's one of the things we will be discussing and will be looking at.

As I say, we do have to do a better job when it comes to getting the curriculum across to our teachers. The math experiment was a huge example of that, and we've learned a lot from it.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. We have to be careful about the enthusiasts that you have within the department, how much they have to say in terms of a new program.

DR. OBERG: No, no.

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: They have learned a lot as well, Dr. Massey. That's why it's a Learning department.

DR. OBERG: They've been forced to learn an awful lot.

DR. MASSEY: Looking at the university requirements for teaching, the four-year program versus five years versus six years, most American states now are at a five-year minimum before you're credentialed, but the pressure of course on those institutions has been more with content. The push, the demand by boards and just the general public is that those people going into classrooms have strong content backgrounds, and the only way they end up being able to accommodate that is to extend the program. I wondered if there was any thought in terms of making it a minimum of five years?

DR. OBERG: No. I'm leaving that up to the institutions. I think what we have right now is a very good mix between the four-, five-, and six-year programs. I think they each serve a purpose. The danger in moving everyone to a five-year program is that we would have one year where there in essence would be no teachers put out or very few teachers put out, and that would cause a lot of chaos within our system.

The University of Alberta is quite content that they can put out their students in four years, and I think that serves a very good purpose. I'm not sure, and I don't know when I say this, but I think perhaps what we need to look at is: what is a better teacher? Is the five-year teacher a better teacher than a four-year teacher, better than a six-year teacher? I think those are some of the evaluations that have to be done to find out exactly what is the optimum time.

DR. MASSEY: Those are the same arguments we had when we went from one year to two years to three years to four years.

DR. OBERG: Yes. Five years to six years.

DR. MASSEY: We survived it.
Just one last thing and then I'll let Colleen . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Just on that one . . . Sorry.

DR. MASSEY: You should never give her an entry.

MRS. SOETAERT: You can see I'm well loved.

Just on the concern that we most likely could have a shortage of teachers in this province in a while. There used to be an old bursary program where if you committed to teaching in the area you came from or committed to – I don't know if that was a school board or a government initiative, but it gave the opportunity for people to go back to their community or to a community and commit for two years and often end up staying there for a lifetime. So areas in this province that already have a hard time keeping teachers – I don't know. Does that make sense?

9:43

DR. OBERG: Some of the northern school districts still have that, but it is a school board type of bursary. I'm a little philosophically opposed to that. That's been stated in health care as well with physicians.

I think physicians and teachers should have the ability to move wherever they want within the province, and if they want to come back to their home community, then it should be done because they want to be there as opposed to the monetary issue. I have no problem giving bursaries to students to become teachers, but I think it's very difficult for us to keep a teacher against their will someplace where they don't want to be, and in effect we may be doing that.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, I mean, you could take the bursary on that condition, knowing that you are going back there. So I wouldn't see it as against their will. But that's splitting hairs, I guess. I'll let you finish.

DR. MASSEY: Go ahead. Start on your list.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. I had a few things. One of the things that concerns me, that has been an issue, for example, in St. Albert protestant, is the utilization rate. We have Bellerose comp at 10 percent, and then we have other older schools that are at 45 percent, which I know is a problem across the province. One of the suggestions they had was: could you have three levels of utilization rate; like, one for high school? Because you cannot – well, I guess you could if you had too, but splitting up a high school program to go to an elementary school isn't practical. Do you know what I'm saying? You can't have the grade 10s from Bellerose at Lorne Akins. It's not practical, and it wouldn't work. Well, I don't think it could be done. So they're wondering if that utilization rate could be based on high school, junior high, elementary.

DR. OBERG: I don't know on that, Colleen. That's under the Department of Infrastructure. They're the one's who look after that formula completely.

MRS. SOETAERT: I've had different comments about the split of the school buildings going to Infrastructure on both sides. One guy finally said: well, maybe they have somebody who understands buildings. I don't know. I've heard both. All right then. So utilization isn't within your department.

DR. OBERG: That's right.

MRS. SOETAERT: Transportation funding, however, is. I was at an Alberta school transportation advisory council convention, and one of the questions and concerns one of the major bus lines had was the reality of hiring good people for 9 bucks an hour. When we talk about the safety of our kids and the importance of getting to school safely and the responsibility of those bus drivers, this person was saying that in good economic times people have jobs that pay better than 8, 9 bucks an hour. She said that to keep regular drivers, when you consider they're paying 9 bucks an hour and they work two and a half hours in the morning and two and a half in the afternoon, it's really difficult to keep steady, good staff. Now, I realize that is an allotment from the school boards. But have you had that concern raised? [interjection] Well, that funding comes from the boards, I know. But have you had that concern expressed to you? Plus the rising fuel costs are an issue.

DR. OBERG: I haven't had the concern about the qualifications of the school bus driver. I haven't had that one raised. I've certainly had the issue raised about the cost of fuel. The bottom line on this is that the school boards have contracts, and they renegotiate their contracts each year. It's up to the school boards to take the contract which is best for them as opposed to cheapest for them. If they feel it is an issue with the amount that their bus drivers are paid, they have the ability to put that into the contract. This comes down to, you know, whatever system is providing the best service for that school board.

MRS. SOETAERT: This was the bus contractors paying their employees and being able to keep them at the money they got. That was just something I hadn't heard until then.

One of the things I was interested in – and maybe I haven't had a chance to totally read through all the plans – is the dropout rate. Where are we at with that? Are there incentives looking at that? I'm pleased to see somebody going yes, yes, because to me part of the dropout rate is being able to give those kids that need those different programs – I think of an example in one high school where they have somebody hired to phone home when somebody's not at school, and then funding cuts happen and that person's gone. I know in the big picture they think, "Oh well, that one can be gone," but they have no idea of the implications of phoning home and somebody following up on certain students. I think keeping them in school is just the wisest thing. I know everybody agrees on that. As far as saving dollars, I know we save dollars when we invest in them getting their education. So if there are any initiatives on that, I'd love to hear it.

DR. OBERG: Sure. One of the core performance measures – I'm just trying to find it here.

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: It's 235.

DR. OBERG: It's 235 they tell me.

Basically what we're looking at is increasing the rate of kids that finish high school, and I think that's absolutely critical. Obviously, we aren't going to increase postsecondary diplomas and the number that go through university unless we increase the number that graduate from high school. So this is something we measure, and it is something we are looking at increasing.

With regards to your question about phoning home, from what I understand the majority of schools actually do that now. They either phone home or many of them have an automated thing that calls after hours and says that their kid wasn't there, so most school boards recognize that as an issue and are doing something about it. I guess one of the problems is: should the principal be spending his time phoning home, as a high-paid person who has a lot of other responsibilities?

MRS. SOETAERT: What about teachers?

DR. OBERG: What's that?

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, if you're teaching four classes a day totaling 228 students, how do you do it?

DR. OBERG: Hence that's why a lot of school districts have gone to the automatic phoner after hours, when the parents are home.

MRS. SOETAERT: Yeah.

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: We're also undertaking a major study in trying to increase the number of completers of high school, and the target we want to hit is 75 percent completion rates. That's an improvement of 5 percent over our 70 percent right now.

DR. OBERG: The other thing on that is that I'm hoping some of the AISI money will be targeted towards that as well. As I said, the school boards have the ability to use that money there, and if one of their issues in a particular school is that their graduation rate is low, then what they have the ability to do is put in different programs or find different ways to increase the graduation rate from that school. If it means, you know, putting more programs in or talking to the students or guidance or anything like that, they have the ability to do that.

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: One other area that is of real concern for us is the completion rate of aboriginal children in school. If you take a look at the statistics, you'll see that's a much, much higher noncompletion rate. We right now have an aboriginal education funding policy review in the works, and those recommendations should be coming back to the minister in the fall. Hopefully that'll address some of those issues in terms of not only completion rates but getting aboriginal parents more involved in children's education and a few other things like that.

DR. OBERG: Potentially we could see – and it's still in negotiation – the opening of the first aboriginal high school in Edmonton in September.

MRS. SOETAERT: That is an issue for me; the Alexander band is within my riding. In the last couple of years they have had an administrator, and I would recommend you call him. I can't remember his last name. His first name is Art. He has a really tough attendance policy that the board has bought into, and they've hired a community liaison whose function is to keep kids in school. They truly celebrate those graduations with great ceremonies and recognition in the community. It's been quite significant the last few years at that school: the graduation rate is going up, and it's with a real commitment to learning from the community. So if you're looking for a school that's in the middle of doing it, I'll gladly recommend the one in my riding because they're just doing an amazing job.

MR. OBERG: Colleen, if I can, that in itself is one of the issues we have in education right now. We have school boards that are doing innovative and creative things, and they're not sharing it with other school boards. That's why under the AISI initiative we're having central data banks, so we can share it with all the different school boards and share their successes, because there are people that are doing this. People in southern Alberta, for example, aren't doing that, and they're having problems. We need to share that information around.

9:53

MRS. SOETAERT: Aren't they funded, though, through federal money?

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: Yes, they are.

MRS. SOETAERT: So then that communication probably isn't as free flowing as others. Do they qualify for AISI if they're funded? No, they don't. So that's probably why . . .

DR. OBERG: No. That may be why, but on the other hand they're more than welcome to use this system if they so wish, and I think it's essential that they do to find some of these things.

MRS. SOETAERT: Can you give me a reference? I know you have several, but certainly that school . . .

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: Treaties 6, 7, and 8 are involved in the research we're doing.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. So they'd be involved then?

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: Absolutely. Same with the Métis Nation; also involved.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. Anyway, good news out there.

I had a concern from a smaller school with low enrollment. It's in Parkland Village, which is a mobile-home area just outside Spruce Grove. However, I know I speak for several other communities with low enrollment, yet the reality of keeping that school in their community is very important, what it means to them. I know in isolated rural parts it's the same issue. Is there anything looking at those types of schools that now have low enrollments but are essential to the community? Have you looked at that, the special low-enrollment schools that are probably, but not in Parkland Village's instance, isolated but certainly a community unto itself, where it does a lot for the families as well as the whole keeping kids in school and involved in the community.

DR. OBERG: One of the components of the funding formula is a sparsity and distance component.

MRS. SOETAERT: This doesn't qualify for sparsity.

DR. OBERG: They may not, but the issue comes down to the priorities the school boards have. Many school boards will keep these small schools open despite decreased enrollment. For example, I've a school in my constituency that has an enrollment of probably about 25 people, but the reason it has 25 people is because quite literally it is 60 miles from anything. That's one of the issues. Do the rest of the school kids subsidize that school? Yes, they do, and we recognize that.

On the other hand, the school board has made a commitment to those parents and those students that those kids in K to 6 are not going to ride the bus for two hours, and I think that's an absolutely valid, valid issue. Where there's low enrollment and there's another school very close, then I think we have to take a look at that and see exactly: should these two schools be combined to get the economies of scale? Those are the tough decisions the school boards have to make.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's interesting, Lyle, that on one hand you support local autonomy when it's a difficult decision like, "Oh, they have to decide which school's gone," and on the other hand, "Well,

I'm going to interfere with where the program is." So I just caution you that you're playing both sides of the fence there, and you get a sore butt sitting on the fence.

DR. OBERG: On the flip side, Colleen, so are you, because you're asking us to get in and do these certain programs that are school boards' responsibilities. School boards have responsibilities.

MRS. SOETAERT: And funding is required for programs; right? I mean, there's no doubt.

DR. OBERG: Absolutely.

MRS. SOETAERT: So it's just an interesting relationship that I think elected officials at all levels have with each other. It's a fine line we walk because if it seems that it's hot, we can pass it to the school board, and if it's not, we can take the credit for it. I mean that collectively, so it's just interesting.

One other thing that one school in my riding was talking about is the funding for a blind child in their school. The funding they get is just not sufficient to cover the costs of providing for that student at a local school level, and the ethics of taking from other programs to support that one has administrators in a quandary. I mean, they do, they provide the education for that child, but it is at the cost of funding coming from other education programs. I guess the issue we are looking at as we educate high-need students in local schools is a funding issue, to be able to properly provide for it without affecting the other students.

DR. OBERG: Yeah. I guess until I see the exact circumstance, I can't really decide.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. Could I get that to you?

DR. OBERG: Absolutely.

So right now what they get is a little over 12 and a half thousand dollars. Again, that's expected to be an amount that is averaged over the school board, so there's nothing stopping the school board, if they want to, from putting more money into it. Actually, it's not \$12,000 they get; they get \$12,000 plus \$4,000. So they actually get very close to \$16,000, or a little better than \$16,000, per student. That's what the school board has to work with for that student.

Where there are problems – and this is one of the reasons we're looking at a review as well – is where there is only one student in a school that needs it. I will certainly admit that there are problems there, but that's what we need to look at. Perhaps we can free up funds somewhere else to provide for that kid where there's only one kid. If there were two kids, there probably wouldn't be a funding shortage. So these are some of the issues we have to look at.

MRS. SOETAERT: I see under 3.2 that there is an increase for private schools of 3.9 percent and public schools . . .

DR. OBERG: Just hang tough.

MRS. SOETAERT: Sorry; 3.2.

DR. OBERG: At 3.2?

MRS. SOETAERT: Grants to postsecondary institutions, 3.2. Then the private colleges got an increase of 3.9 percent and public colleges an increase of 3.2. I'm just wondering about the discrepancy there.

DR. OBERG: Basically what some of this issue is is to do with access and is to do with performance, and that's how it's given out.

There are no such things in postsecondary as you getting a standard grant. Perhaps what happened this year is that some of the private universities received a little bit more in access, or perhaps they received more in performance, but it's all formula driven as to how those dollars are given out. There is not a set "they get 3 percent increase." It's going to vary from year to year.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. Thank you for explaining that.

I'll let you go, Don.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. I couldn't leave without asking about class size. It was mentioned in the throne speech, yet there doesn't seem to be any one initiative in the budget that addresses it.

I've looked at class size legislation in some of the American states, and some of it is very, very prescriptive and has resulted in a number of problems. I guess I would like you to talk about class size, particularly K to 3. Again, I was talking to a kindergarten teacher at the convention on Friday with 28 students in her kindergarten in the morning, 29 in the afternoon. In the meeting we were at with Rob Lougheed, a kindergarten teacher there stood up and said she had 52 students in total, morning and afternoon. Very large. In that little survey we did, with about 80 percent of kindergarten children, from that sample anyhow, 17 or better in terms of class size. So I guess my question is: why was there not an initiative? I mean, there are other earmarked initiatives: early literacy, AISI, those things. Why was there not a specific, you know, program or target set?

In considering it, it seems to me that if you look at what happened south of the border, they ended up with some other problems. For instance, they didn't have enough school space. When they put in a class size reduction program, they had youngsters in all kinds of double shifting and all kinds of bad situations. I don't think it's a simple thing to deal with, and I can understand that. It has implications. They didn't end up with enough teachers to teach the classes, and in some cases the suspicion was that it caused more difficulty for children than it actually helped.

So I just wondered what your thinking is now on class size. If I could have predicted before the budget, I would have predicted that you would have had something that was earmarked.

DR. OBERG: Yeah. Again, though, this goes back to the point I was making about the earmarked funding. What I attempted to do in this budget was give the school boards as much flexibility as possible. With the AISI funds, that's where I see a lot of work being done on class size, especially in the K to 3. I'm sure you've heard that wherever I talk, I talk about K to 3 class size and getting that class size down. I really strongly believe in that. You know, I've read those issues as well, and there are a lot of issues that are out there. Perhaps the most confusing one for me is that in the study that was done in Tennessee, at 17 you saw improvement, but at 18 you didn't, and when you get specifically to that number, to me it seems like it's very dependent on the kids that are in the class. If you have, for example, two to three special-needs kids in a class, perhaps the class size should be 10 or perhaps it should be 12. If you have all upper socioeconomic kids who are very motivated, perhaps it should be 21 or 22. The other thing is that that study was done in Tennessee, which obviously is a different population than ours.

10:03

What I think we need to do is to get some studies out there. We need to see exactly what happens in different areas across the province, and we need to be able to validate this. If we can validate this, Don, I will be the first person out there pushing for legislation or pushing to have it earmarked in the budget that the class size must be down, and I'll give you my commitment on that. But I've looked at all the different things as well, and I'm just not a hundred percent

sure on the validation that is out there. I think there are still some issues that need to be looked at. For example, the class size project in Edmonton has actually dropped the classes down to between 13 and 14, somewhere in there – and we'll see what happens with that – in the high-needs types of schools.

MRS. SOETAERT: Sorry to interrupt, but I know one of the teachers that was hired there, a young second-year teacher, who said that it's just amazing what they can do with these kids and how they like to come to school because they get fed as part of it. Truly. We're talking kids that truly need a smaller class size, so I'm hoping the results of that – I mean, to me they're a given, but I'm sure it will be documented.

DR. OBERG: Yeah, absolutely. But if I were to mandate 17, what you would see is every school board aiming for that 17 figure. I prefer to give them a little bit of flexibility until it's proven, give them the flexibility to go down to 12 in some high-needs schools, you know, 18 or so in some schools that are not high need. Let's get the evidence in, and then let's do something about it.

DR. MASSEY: The Tennessee and the SAGE project are one of the first where they really had control and experimental groups so that you could have some confidence.

I guess one of the things that concerns me is – you know, achievement has to be what you look at, but there were so many other things that weren't factored in that teachers in those projects talked about, the number of youngsters who said: I don't get distracted as often when there are 17 as when there are 25. So a lot of other things are going on too, and I'm sure the Edmonton project will pick some of that up.

DR. OBERG: Absolutely.

DR. MASSEY: I've looked at the figures. School boards report numbers in grades. They don't report class sizes to the department. You can't tell how many grade 1 classes there are in a jurisdiction.

MRS. DAVID EVANS: PTR ratios is all we have.

DR. OBERG: But just on that, though, the PTR ratio I never use, because it's completely unreliable.

DR. MASSEY: I agree. I think it's been a false sort of comparison.

MRS. DAVID EVANS: Dr. Massey, if I could add, the pilot project that the minister has funded in the Edmonton area is also going to look at teacher methodology. One of the things we know is that if you maintain the same kinds of teaching techniques when you have 28 kids as you do for 17, it's not going to give you the maximum value for the 17. The other thing it's going to look at is what kinds of techniques need to be implemented with different class sizes, different populations. The other thing that I would just add is that under AISI, 60 percent of the measures are local measures, and if the measures in the local area feel that kids are coming to school and liking it more or whatever those measures are, they will be taken into consideration as well as the achievement tests.

DR. MASSEY: You talked for a minute about charter schools. Where do you see them going? It's certainly not been the kind of success story that we had hoped it might be when they were first introduced. I look at the Auditor General and his criticism of the boards. The department, I understood, took some measures to try to work with those boards in terms of what it means to be a trustee.

Where do you see the movement going? More charter schools for the province?

DR. OBERG: I'll sort of cross that bridge as we come to it. As you know, we're sitting at 10 right now, of which nine report directly to the department, directly to me, so there is no school board or school trustees that look after these.

DR. MASSEY: Parent groups.

DR. OBERG: Parent groups involved, absolutely. The other interesting point is that the parents are extremely satisfied with these charter schools.

Are charter schools going to be eliminated? No, I don't think they are. Are charter schools going to expand dramatically? No, I don't think they are. What I like and what I would prefer is the concept of magnet schools, which is what is taking place in Edmonton and hopefully will soon take place in Calgary, where parents have the choice as to where they send their kids, and I think that choice component is extremely important.

I think that if Calgary moves to that concept, the number of charter schools seen will go down. As you know, we're in the process of looking at all the regulations with regard to charter schools, and we'll be making some decisions about the issues that are out there. But when you talk to the parents in charter schools, they are extremely, extremely happy about what is happening to their kids, and I think that has to be something we take into consideration as well.

DR. MASSEY: How are we for time?

THE CHAIRMAN: We have one minute.

DR. MASSEY: Before it goes, I wanted to really thank the minister and his staff and our colleagues across the table. I'm sure some of this is old hat to you, because you discuss these issues in caucus, but this is our first chance to get that same kind of firsthand information from the minister. We really do appreciate being allowed this kind of a format, Mr. Chairman, and certainly the patience of the colleagues across the table.

MRS. SOETAERT: And I think we've been polite.

DR. MASSEY: Colleen has even been polite. Now, that's a first. That's progress.

I would like to ask about parent fund-raising and Campus Alberta and some other things, but there'll be some other opportunities.

Thank you again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Now that we're at the end of the Official Opposition section, we move on to the next, which is specifically allocated to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Hearing no questions from the member, we then move directly on to the last section, which is dedicated to government members. Could those who wish to ask some questions just give me an indication by raising your hand so that I can make a list, and we'll proceed to identify you.

Mary.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I wanted to ask you two questions. They are not related. The first one has to do with the allocation of funding for chairs, specifically at the universities and to be more specific at the University of Alberta.

DR. OBERG: The new chairs program?

MRS. O'NEILL: The new chairs program. Could you explain it a little bit further?

The second one was: could you articulate in layperson's terms how the formula for the remission of loans to the maximum of \$20,000 actually works – it used to be \$19,000 and something – and whether that amount of money is totally remitted or how it is factored in, et cetera. Those are things that I'm finding even when meeting with the members of the student governance particularly at the universities. They don't quite frankly understand it either. They aren't conveying it as I believe they should.

DR. OBERG: First of all, the new chairs program will result in between 50 and 60 chairs at the university. These are full-time, I assume tenured, positions that will be added to the university from the professors. This is funded out of the program from the federal government, and the money goes directly to the university to fund these. It is up to the university as to where these chairs go. They had to put in an application form to get the number, and again, as I said, the U of A and the U of C got by far the lion's share of the chairs from across Canada.

MRS. O'NEILL: May I interrupt you to just ask: is that a onetime allocation, or is it a trust?

DR. OBERG: It is a onetime allocation with continued funding. So, for example, they just don't pay the chairs for one year. The chair position is continued on, but there will not be 50 this year and another 50 on top of the 50, for a total of 100 next year.

10:13

MRS. O'NEILL: Is it an endowment process?

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: The federal government hasn't come out with all the regulations around this, and they're working with the universities across Canada to come up with the regulations, so we're not able to answer all your questions simply because the regulations around when and how much haven't been all identified yet.

DR. OBERG: With regards to the student loan remissions, perhaps I'll let Maria answer that one.

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: The remissions are based on financial need, and I think that's the critical key in terms of layperson's language. In other words, if you graduate from university with a \$40,000 debt, let's say, and you are a professional who is earning \$40,000 or \$60,000, you may not have the capacity to move your remission back. If you graduate from university and the income that you're making – because it's based on the income you're making – is half that amount, then you can look at remission. Remission is graduated, and it takes into account each individual person's circumstances.

The point that I think is really important to make here is that if you've borrowed fully and you've not had good marks and you've got a job that is paying you really well, you probably won't see much remission. If you've had an opportunity to make use of bursaries and grants, if you still had to borrow over \$5,000 a year to \$8,000 and you didn't have anything kick in in terms of scholarships and you're making a low salary when you graduate, then you have an opportunity to address the remissions, and that will be based on each individual person's income.

MRS. O'NEILL: So when you quote the amount \$20,000, you're not saying literally that that is remitted. For me, remitting something means you don't pay it.

DR. OBERG: Yes, we are. What Maria is not quite correct on is that if you borrowed \$40,000 and the reason you would have gotten the \$40,000 was because of financial need – at the \$40,000 level the most you will have to pay back is \$20,000. So the most that any student will have to pay back in Alberta is \$20,000. The rest is remission.

MRS. O'NEILL: The most for someone. So it's over and above the \$20,000.

Now, I'm sorry, but it's something I have to try to explain very frequently. If, for instance, an individual has accumulated a debt of, say, \$18,000 after four years and they're really struggling, is there any way that there's any remittance of a portion of the \$18,000?

DR. OBERG: I'm sorry. If they've already had the remission and they owe \$18,000?

MRS. O'NEILL: No. They have a debt of \$18,000 when they finish their four years. So no matter what their circumstances are – in other words, they're also going to have to work out a payment plan, but they don't get any of that remitted? Is that what you're saying?

DR. OBERG: No. If it's \$18,000, they will still get a partial remission, yes. We'll get back to you on that.

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: We'll get you a real good explanation.

MRS. O'NEILL: It's in order to give those entering the postsecondary institutions a bit of a heads-up, first of all. Also it's to eliminate those who are going in – because there is a little bit of a buzz around there that, yes, you can borrow up to \$20,000, but it's remitted in Alberta, so you won't have to pay it back.

DR. OBERG: It's not full remission.

MRS. O'NEILL: And that's what I'm trying to figure out.

DR. OBERG: The other thing I must say as well is that there is remission on the Alberta student loan, but there's no remission on the federal student loan.

MRS. O'NEILL: But we are the ones who administer it.

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: But there is no remission on the federal loans.

DR. OBERG: Yeah. The federal government does not remit their loans.

MRS. O'NEILL: But we administer the loans.

DR. OBERG: Yes.

MRS. O'NEILL: So that's where it always gets confusing.

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: Yes. They view it as ours.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you.

DR. OBERG: You're welcome.

MRS. O'NEILL: If you would get back to me, I'd really appreciate it.

DR. OBERG: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. LeRoy, then Jocelyn.

MR. JOHNSON: I found this to be a very informative session, Lyle, and a lot of positive things are coming out of your department which I'm very happy to hear. I want to follow up on a couple of things though. One is the teachers' certification. I was happy to hear you talk about certification of I guess the imports, those coming here from other provinces, without difficulties and without having to take extra courses necessarily. But is it working both ways? How about our students that complete their degrees going to other provinces? What's happening there?

DR. OBERG: No, it isn't, LeRoy; it isn't working both ways. But what I'm hoping is that on the federal scene, by us doing that and accepting their accreditation, it will put pressure on them to do the same for us. I'll speak very callously here, but realistically we need more teachers, so if they put barriers to our teachers going elsewhere, it helps our teachers to stay here. Again, I'm speaking very callously, but that's exactly the message I gave to the rest of the ministers of education of Canada, so it's up to them to respond to us as opposed to us responding to them.

MR. JOHNSON: I guess in that sense it might help if we were a little more consistent in our own province in terms of the number of years of training we require. You mentioned that the U of A has four years, Lethbridge five, and Calgary six. My daughter was caught in that, and then she took four years at the U of A and went to B.C., where they required five years.

DR. OBERG: Yeah, that's right.

MR. JOHNSON: Those are some problems, I guess, that have to be worked out.

Another question. I was happy to hear what you had to say about teacher morale. I think that is an issue, and I'm glad to hear it is being addressed, so I applaud you for that.

The last point I would like to make or question is about SHIP, the student health initiative program. I would like to tell you that in my area it's going very well, and I think that as we have decentralized to a large degree and established children's authorities for the first time, there has been a challenge out there to bring the fragments together. The SHIP has done that very well in that particular area, and the children's services, education, and the rest are working together very well in our area. I'm very happy to see that, but in that regard I understand that SHIP is just one part of the Alberta Children's Initiative. I guess the fetal alcohol syndrome program is another part, and of course AADAC is very much involved in that. I've seen the groups work together very well, but I'm a little confused on what we really mean by Alberta Children's Initiative. What does it really include? Is it to be an umbrella program over many other programs? Can you just clarify that for me?

DR. OBERG: Sure, ask me all the tough questions. First of all, the Alberta Children's Initiative is meant to provide a macrolevel approach to dealing with children's issues. One of the problems we have had in government in general is that we've had a lot of silos of service delivery, and often these people don't talk to each other; often they give duplicate programs. All these types of issues are there.

What we're attempting to do is break those silos down; hence the new Alberta Department of Children's Services. All these issues are intended to break those silos down. We are an important component of the Alberta Children's Initiative in that we look after student health. The reason we look after student health is because it's in the

school, and it seemed kind of ludicrous to have the health authority providing speech, to have social services providing community liaison, the Learning department doing something else and the school board doing something else. So we brought it together under the initiative in the schools. There are a lot of other children's initiatives going on. Preschool, for example, in many cases is through this. It's an attempt to break these down.

MR. JOHNSON: So who's actually in charge? Which department is in charge of the Alberta Children's Initiative? Is it Children's Services?

DR. OBERG: Children's Services is in charge. We are one component. It's a multilevel, multidepartment issue between I believe about five or six departments.

10:23

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: Six or seven now, actually.

I think the important point is that the Alberta Children's Initiative provides a cross-government direction for all departments that are involved with children. It provides for the same goals that all departments need to meet, and that's safe, healthy, successful-at-learning kinds of goals. Within those goals are a number of initiatives, and just in our business plan you'll see the same initiatives included in all the departments that are involved in this. They are everything from student health, the fetal alcohol that you mentioned, to the children's mental health program, which, I might add, is piggybacking on the student health program. The same partners are involved.

When the minister talks about the partnership on student health, the funds don't flow unless all the partners are jointly signatory in a co-ordinated plan for those particular areas. There's a new one, conception to age 6, that we're looking at as well because there are many issues around that, and our department is jointly co-chairing that with Health and Wellness. Certainly the Premier's Task Force on Children at Risk is another initiative under there. So there's a number of initiatives that all produce a measure of direction for all government departments involved with children.

MR. JOHNSON: Well, I certainly applaud the partnerships that are taking place. I think it makes for much more efficiency out in our areas.

DR. OBERG: Yeah. The other thing I'd like to say is that we're allowing the flexibility at the regional level for them to determine how that partnership will occur.

THE CHAIRMAN: Jocelyn, then Butch.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Lyle, I just have one question relative to St. Mary's College, which is a private Catholic college operating in Calgary now. They have contacted me with respect to degree granting in their future. When we met with the colleges and technical institutes the other night, I raised the question about what legislation might be coming forward with respect to private colleges, et cetera. You indicated at that time that there would be something coming forward in I think you said the next 18 months from a legislation point of view, a review of all their acts. I may have misunderstood you in that.

DR. OBERG: We're reviewing their funding, but we're not reviewing their acts.

MRS. BURGNER: I had asked them the question: did they require anything in legislation to meet their needs in the future? The answer

– I thought there was something you spoke to that said you'd be reviewing their legislation in the future, because Alberta College of Art and Design is certainly looking for a slightly different model. Maybe you could clarify (a) what you might be looking at from a legislative point of view, and (b) what is the plan for St. Mary's?

DR. OBERG: Sure. First of all, I'll do it in reverse. What the plan is for St. Mary's is that they have to go through the Private College Accreditation Board, and each independent degree they choose must be approved by the Private College Accreditation Board through significant criteria that they have to do.

With regards to the legislation, there will be a review. I believe it's by 2001.

MRS. BURGNER: That's good, referring to that.

Is there anything in the process of the accreditation regarding St. Mary's – I guess my concern is: are they having any difficulties, or is it moving forward? Are you aware of any?

DR. OBERG: I am not aware of any difficulties. It is not what I would call an easy approach, nor should it be. There are a lot of criteria they have to get, and it's the same criteria that's applied provincewide to degrees. We had our first degree granting probably about 3 or 4 months ago. I believe King's college was one.

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: Yeah. Some of them have actually had it for a while.

DR. OBERG: So they have to go through the private college . . .

MRS. BURGNER: They have to go through it, and they do it for each degree. The fact that one has been affiliated with another college outside the province, that speaks to what you were saying earlier. You want to make sure that there are some standards and that things are all acknowledged and at a certain level.

Okay; that's my question. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Butch.

MR. FISCHER: I think I'll just pass.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. Any other questions from government members? Seeing no further questions from government members, I'd call for a motion to conclude discussion of the estimates and to rise and report.

MR. FRIEDEL: I move that under Standing Order 56(8) the designated supply subcommittee on Learning conclude discussion on the 2000-2001 estimates of the Department of Learning and rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Gary. All in favour? Opposed? Carried. Thank you very much.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:28 a.m.]

Legislative Assembly of AlbertaTitle: **Monday, March 6, 2000****1:30 p.m.**

Date: 00/03/06

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we begin a new week, help us, O Almighty, to also begin with the principle of You as the giver of all things. Amen.

Hon. members, as it is Monday, I would now invite you to remain standing and to join with Mr. Paul Lorieau as he leads us in the singing of our national anthem.

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

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to present a petition signed by 604 individuals from Edmonton, Calgary, Leduc, St. Albert, Lethbridge, and Fort Macleod. This is an ACTISEC petition asking “the Legislative Assembly to freeze tuition and institutional fees and increase support in the foundation of post-secondary education.”

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to present a petition signed by 1,377 Calgaryans petitioning this Assembly “to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to table a petition signed by 644 people from Edmonton and area on Saturday morning at the market at the bus barns. The 644 people who signed want to urge the government “to stop promoting private health care and undermining [our] public health care [system].”

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to table a petition signed by 111 Albertans, many of them from Calgary and area, and they’re all petitioning this Legislative Assembly “to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented last Thursday be now read back.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented last week now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MS LEIBOVICI: I, too, request that the petitions I tabled the other day be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Legislative Assembly last Thursday now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition signed by 235 Albertans which I presented on Thursday last week be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Introduction of Bills

Bill 13

Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

MR. HLADY: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 13, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments will provide for the implementation of an expansion of the existing orphan well program. This proposed legislation will clarify and strengthen the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board's, the EUB's, authority to hold the oil and gas industry accountable for managing the abandonment and reclamation of oil wells and production facilities in a responsible manner that protects the environment and ensures public safety. Implementation of the expanded orphan program will protect the public purse by ensuring that industry funding is available to clean up orphan wells, production facilities, and pipelines.

Mr. Speaker, the bill is the result of a joint government/industry committee which developed the proposed amendments contained in the Energy Statutes Amendment Act. The bill has strong industry support – the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the Small Explorers and Producers Association of Canada – and the concurrence of the EUB, DRD, AENV, and the AFRD.

As well, Mr. Speaker, a number of interested landowners and surface rights groups have been provided with information regarding the expansion of the orphan well program and the proposed legislation and are supportive of the proposed changes being put forth.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 13 be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table the appropriate number of copies of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission for the year ended March 31, 1999.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table five copies of Scotiabank's regular economic market survey of February 25, which gives a very positive review of the Alberta budget. It highlights the fact that we will be increasing our lead in the economy, increasing our lead in responsible fiscal management and economic reforms, and highlights our increasing debt payment, our spending in priority areas, and our groundbreaking tax system.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of a letter dated December 10, 1999, to the federal Minister of Health, the Hon. Allan Rock, responding in detail to his questions regarding the Alberta government's policy statement on the delivery of surgical services, including an offer to a face-to-face meeting to discuss any further questions or concerns Mr. Rock might have.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to table five copies of a letter to Mr. Rock dated March 2 of 2000 providing a copy of Bill 11, the

Health Care Protection Act, and another offer to meet with Mr. Rock to answer any questions he might have.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today on behalf of 41 residents from Picture Butte and area to present a letter to the Premier of Alberta strongly objecting to a proposed conversion of emergency and acute care services in Picture Butte by the Chinook regional health authority, and 439 letters to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness saying no to closure of our emergency rooms, signed mainly by residents of Picture Butte in southern Alberta.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is a letter dated September 28, 1999, from the Hon. Stephen C. West. In it he confirms to me that he has "no intention to initiate such a provincial review of gasoline prices" that I advocated.

My second tabling is the official program from the Music of A Thousand Years, the 37th annual night of music put on by the Edmonton public school board at the Jubilee Auditorium.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a letter to the Premier which was copied to us from the Lamont health care centre noting, interestingly, that their total costs for cataract surgery were about \$200 per case, whereas a similar surgery performed in a private facility is at \$600 per case. Interesting data: Alberta solutions.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling five copies of information about the Edmonton composting facility, which had its grand opening this weekend.

MR. SAPERS: Do you have an extra copy for Ralph?

MS CARLSON: And an extra copy for the Premier, Mr. Speaker.

This facility, a project between the city of Edmonton and TransAlta, is the largest composting facility in North America and will account for 10 percent of all composting done on this continent.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I wanted to table at this time were copies of a written submission to you, sir, with respect to matters relating to alleged contempt and privilege discussed on Thursday, March 2 in this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table today. They're both addressed to the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General. The first letter is signed by Marie Gordon from McBean Becker, barristers and solicitors, asking him to reconsider

the decision to abolish the use of court reporters in Alberta courts.

The second letter is signed on behalf of the firm of Royal, McCrum, Duckett & Glancy, and it, too, asks the Justice minister to reconsider his decision on pulling court reporters from the courts.

Thank you.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, one being a copy of documents put out by the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health association of Alberta called Good People, Good Practice: No System, accompanied by information documents.

My second tabling is five copies of a news release named "Alberta returns to the 'dark ages' of mental health care," put out by the Canadian Mental Health Association.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 11 letters to table. These letters are written by Albertans who express their opposition and outrage with respect to this government's attempt to legalize private, for-profit hospitals.

The first one is from Reverend Don Mayne from Edmonton. The second one is from my constituents Margaret and Peter McKague. The third one is from Rosilda Girard and one from Emilie Girard, also of Edmonton. The next one is a letter from Allison Yarmoloy, again expressing her opposition. The next one is from Vicky and Roger Morin; three letters from Diane Poynter from Lethbridge, one to the Premier, one to the minister of health, and one to the *Lethbridge Herald*. The next one is from Terry Dashcovich from Peace River, one from Don MacNeil from Leduc, another one from Mr. Clay of Red Deer, and the last one from Hazel Corcoran of Calgary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of a report approved by the Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan Co-ordinating Committee. This deals with Rural Medical Education.

head: Introduction of Guests

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, today it is my pleasure to introduce two grade 6 classes from Our Lady of Perpetual Help school. They are in the French immersion program. Mrs. Castillo and Mr. Dupont accompany them as their teachers. I would ask that this Assembly give them the warm welcome they deserve as they rise and are acknowledged.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't often have constituents here for a visit, but I'm pleased today to have six individuals from the southeast Alberta water co-operative. They were up here today letting myself and some other ministers know about a severe water shortage that is in existence in southern Alberta today. The president is Ron Harty, and Len Mitzel is a director. I might say that both Ron and Len are from Etzikom, and if you have

the opportunity, there's an excellent windmill museum in Etzikom that Len Mitzel was largely responsible for, so I'd encourage you and any other colleagues to go down and see it. It would be great. Ben Hofer is a director of the water co-op as well, Harold Halvorson is a director of the water co-operative, Byron Haugan, a director of the water co-operative, and Ray Simanton, a director of the water co-operative. Would you all please stand for a warm welcome from the House.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. member, I've had many, many journeys from Etzikom to Manyberries. It's one of my more familiar parts of the province of Alberta. In a previous life I was involved in building the road from Bow Island to Etzikom.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly today some home schooled students from Drayton Valley. They're a very bright, polite group of young students, and they're accompanied here today by a Mrs. Teresa Kisser, Mrs. Esther Robson, Mr. Derald Kisser, and Mr. Stuart Robson. I'm not sure which gallery they're in at the moment, but I would ask them to rise, wherever they are, and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two constituents of mine, Pauline Zeschuk and Olga Mattis. They're here today to observe the proceedings of the Legislature. They're seated, I believe, in the members' gallery. I would ask that they stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a constituent from Edmonton-Gold Bar, Kathryn Buchanan. Kathryn Buchanan assists on fund-raising efforts in the community to provide food for the unfortunate, and we welcome her contribution. She's sitting in the public gallery, and I would now ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today and with great pleasure introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 28 students from grade 6 at McArthur elementary school. They are here to spend a whole week in the Legislature to learn firsthand by hands-on learning how the Legislature actually operates. If they can do that in a week, they're better than most of us, I'm sure. They're accompanied today by their teacher, Mrs. Carter, and the helpers are Mrs. Marshall and Mrs. Duval. If they would be so kind as to rise in the gallery and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to all members of this House three persons sitting in the public gallery. They were all present today at noon hour at the

citizens' vigil and rally outside the Legislature Building protesting Bill 11. They are Malcolm Smith, Bob Settle, and Kathryn Buchanan, who has already been introduced. I'll ask them to rise once again and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very well-known constituent of Edmonton-Centre. He's well known for a number of things, but today he is here in his role as a Big Brother, and with him is his little brother, Ian McLeod. I would ask Mel Hurtig and Ian McLeod, who are sitting in the members' gallery, to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question Albertans are asking about the Premier's private hospitals scheme is: why? Why is the Premier prepared and determined to ram his private hospitals legislation down the throats of Albertans with an approximately \$3 million propaganda campaign paid for by the taxpayers when he hasn't presented a shred of evidence that private hospitals won't be more expensive? All the facts presented in study after study show that private hospitals are more expensive and have lengthened waiting lists. My questions are to the Premier. Why is this Premier proceeding with his private hospitals scheme when the Lamont health care centre offers cataract surgery at \$400 less than the same service being provided at private clinics?

MR. KLEIN: That may or may not be the case, Mr. Speaker, but are all the people in the city of Edmonton who need cataract surgeries going to drive to Lamont? There have to be options, and regional considerations have to be taken into place.

As to why, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has explained why many, many times. It has something to do with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and I'll have the hon. minister explain one more time.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to comment directly on the example that was just being quoted. Certainly I would be interested in seeing how those figures were generated, but in terms of evidence — and I think that was the question — the Calgary regional health authority, which has a great deal of experience with cataract surgery, indicates that today, under the current arrangements that they have with contracts under our policy, which, by the way, needs the backing of legislation to really be firmly in place, in Calgary they are doing 500 more cataract operations annually than they did before. That is being done with exactly the same budget as was the case in years previous.

MRS. MacBETH: I sent the letter over to the minister, Mr. Speaker.

Why is the Premier proceeding with his private hospitals scheme when contracting out for cataract surgery has resulted in higher costs according to the Consumers' Association of Canada, right here in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is some doubt as to the validity of

that report and the information on which the report was based. Again, I'll have the hon. minister give the opposite side to that report.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, my information is that the statistics that the Consumers' Association are using are from about 1994-95. Members of this Assembly may recall that this was about the time we put into place a policy which we want to confirm in legislation with Bill 11. Nevertheless, we put in place the policy which required the contracting of cataract surgeries to the regional health authority under the regional health authorities' auspices, and there would be a clear assessment by the health authority with respect to the charges and costs being levied. So I think that is the background to that one.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, when they point their finger at someone else, they've got three pointing back at them.

Mr. Speaker, why is this Premier saying that private hospitals will be reducing waiting lists when the president of the 1,700-doctor medical staff in Calgary says that it will not reduce waiting lists?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand the head of the Calgary branch of the AMA, he said: the answer is more doctors. That may be part of the answer. It may be part of the solution. That's why we have put in our budget very significant dollars to hire more doctors and other frontline medical staff workers.

The Premiers from all across this country have said that the status quo is not an option. We have a situation now in Newfoundland and Quebec where they're actually sending people who need heart surgery and cancer operations down to the United States to for-profit hospitals, Mr. Speaker.

I quote from the Premier of Newfoundland, Brian Tobin, on a CBC program. He says:

In Newfoundland and Labrador today, we're sending people into the US for both cardiac surgery and for cancer treatments, that's happening all . . .

MR. SAPERS: Nobody in Newfoundland voted for you.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thought that they would like to hear from a Liberal.

He said:

That's happening all across this country, we already are supporting private health care in another country, its time to deliver the service here in Canada, to Canadians who want to be cared for at home in a quality, accessible, public health care system.

I couldn't agree with him more.

THE SPEAKER: And I gather that the document in question will be tabled.

Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past six months this Premier has been telling Albertans that his scheme to bring private hospitals to Alberta was based on reducing waiting lists for surgical procedures, especially hip replacements. However, on Friday the College of Physicians and Surgeons stated that hip replacements would not be approved procedures at the Premier's private hospitals. Albertans won't be fooled by this Premier's rhetoric and his manipulative \$3 million propaganda campaign paid for by the taxpayers of this province. The truth is that Bill 11 is a Trojan horse filled with private hospitals. My questions are to the Premier. Why did the Premier misinform Albertans when he said that his private hospital bill was designed to reduce the waiting lists for hip replacements?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it could very well do that by moving other procedures to contracted services. It could free up in public hospitals operating theatres and hospital beds for people who require more complex surgeries. I alluded to joint replacements generally. The college says "may." It doesn't say "won't." May.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, since the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alluded to propaganda, I'd like to read some of her own propaganda. This was a town hall meeting apparently that was attended by the hon. Associate Minister for Health and Wellness. This is a letter that was distributed to people attending that town hall meeting. A suggested letter that these people write to the Premier, and it says:

Dear Premier Klein.

You have said that your government will pass contracting out legislation. This legislation would allow regional health authorities to contract out the delivery of major surgery to for-profit firms. Currently some regional health authorities contract out day surgery to for-profit firms, but these for-profit clinics as well as physicians' offices are mediclinics and are limited to providing day surgery. Allowing for-profits to do major surgeries and secure public funding would expand for-profit health care.*

That is clearly misinformation. That is clearly propaganda. It says quite wrongly that Bill 11 would allow regional health authorities to contract out delivery of major surgery to for-profit firms. I'm going to read the bill. Bill 11, page 3, section 2(2) clearly states that "No person shall provide a [major] surgical service . . . except in a public hospital."

Mr. Speaker, that is misinformation. That is propaganda, and that's what we're faced with.

MRS. MACBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit that he was wrong when he promised that the pain and suffering would stop when his private hospitals legislation was introduced?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what we want to do is explore and examine ways within the publicly funded health care system and under the parameters of the Canada Health Act of alleviating pain and suffering, ways of alleviating waiting lists, the kinds of waiting lists to which Premier Tobin alludes, the kinds of waiting lists to which Premier Bouchard alludes and Premier Harris and Premier Lord and Premier Binns and Premier Hamm and Premier Romanow and Premier Doer, and the new Premier in British Columbia, the kind of waiting lists to which Mr. Rock from time to time alludes. We have to find those new and better and more efficient and more effective ways of doing things, and we still have to do it within the parameters of the Canada Health Act and obey both the spirit and the intent of that very important law.

MRS. MACBETH: Mr. Speaker, when Albertans are suffering from waiting for hip replacements, why won't this Premier spend the estimated \$3 million from his propaganda campaign on hip replacements in the public hospitals? It would significantly lower wait lists in this province.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we are putting now well over \$5 billion into the health care system. That is almost \$15 million per day. Really, all politicians in this country are saying that if we keep on spending the way we are and if we don't find those new and more effective ways of doing things, our health care system will be bankrupt. This hon. member knows all about it. She was the minister of health at one particular time. Unfortunately, she did absolutely nothing to address the problem.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: I had great difficulty hearing the last question addressed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. There seemed to be a lot of thundering or something. So I'm going to ask the opposition whip to take some direction and some authority in controlling the enthusiasm so that in fact the question can be heard, the question being addressed by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services (continued)

MRS. MACBETH: Mr. Speaker, rural Albertans are asking why this Premier is pushing ahead with his private hospitals scheme and a \$3 million spin campaign using their tax dollars. They know that the Premier's private hospitals will locate in the city, where there is money and concentrations of population, leaving rural Albertans with less access to health care services than they have today. My questions are to the Premier. What evidence can the Premier show that his scheme to subsidize private hospitals won't divert dollars away from public hospitals in rural Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, she talks about the private hospitals scheme. One of the first lines in the legislation after the preamble says that private hospitals will be banned in this province. [interjections] Well, what does it say then? It says, "No person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." That's pretty much the same thing.

You know, this speaks to the misinformation. In the last three sets of questions the leader of the Liberal opposition has been kicking around this figure of \$3 million. Where does she get that information? Would she like to table in this Legislature today that information? We have said that when the bill goes out tomorrow to all the households, we will be releasing the costs associated with the mail-out. She alludes to \$3 million. That is a figure I have never heard before.

MRS. MACBETH: Perhaps the Premier would like to say how much it is.

Mr. Speaker, how many rural public hospitals will this government be shutting down in order to promote private hospitals in Calgary and Edmonton?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there's no intention to close down any hospital to allow something else to happen. Regional health authorities consider the need for a hospital. It doesn't matter where that region might be. Certainly some hospitals have gone from active treatment centres to long-term care centres. Yes, in some cases some hospitals have been closed down so that the use of other larger and more sophisticated hospitals can be taken advantage of. These are the kinds of things that regional health authorities have to deal with virtually on a day-to-day basis.

If the hon. member wants more information, I'll have the minister reply.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think one of the things that should be kept in mind here – and this is very clearly spelled out in the legislation – is that there must be a contract with a surgical facility that is arrived at and recommended by a regional health authority. So the overall needs of the predominately rural regions of this province I'm sure will be one of their top priorities. They are not going to be weakening or harming their system by entering into any contracts that do not meet the needs of rural areas.

*This quote could not be verified at the time of publication.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to some of the highly specialized surgical services that are offered and potential for these contracts, they are centered in the cities, and they would be beneficial to rural people as well as to urban because the major urban centres are used by all.

2:10

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why doesn't this Premier just listen to Albertans and call an election right here, right now and let Albertans decide the future of our health care system? Or are you chicken?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we aren't even into year 3 of our mandate. We have some important legislation to consider in this Assembly, and I would hope that we engage the opposition Liberals in reasonable debate. She'll get her chance, you know. It won't be for a while yet, but she'll get her chance. As I said before, you know, we had a little contest a while back, and she didn't like the outcome. I know she won't like the outcome of the next election; that's for sure.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. interim leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 11 defines facility services that will be allowed in so-called approved surgical clinics as beds, meals, nursing services, diagnostic services, drugs, and operating rooms. The Canada Health Act defines hospital services as beds, meals, nursing services, diagnostic services, and operating rooms. The Alberta Hospitals Act, too, defines services that can be done in approved public hospitals as beds, meals, nursing services, diagnostic services, drugs, and operating rooms. Starting to notice a pattern here? To the Premier: how can the government, on the one hand, use the same definition for facility services in Bill 11 as the definition of hospital services in the Canada Health Act and, on the other hand, try to fool Albertans into believing that approved surgical facilities are anything other than private, for-profit hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure quite sure where the hon. member is coming from. It really doesn't make any difference as long as the procedure is applied under the very, very strict rules of medical conduct and as long as they're provided under the parameters of the Canada Health Act and within the publicly funded system. I mean, we have it happening right now. There are numerous surgical clinics now operating for cataracts, for plastic surgeries, for diagnostic surgeries, for therapeutic abortions, and they're all funded under the publicly funded health care system here. They're all funded under Alberta health care.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I'm willing to repeat the question. Maybe the Premier can get it now. How can the government, on the one hand, use the same definition for facility services in Bill 11 as the definition of hospitalization in Alberta's own Hospitals Act and, on the other hand, try to fool Albertans into believing that approved surgical facilities are anything other than private, for-profit hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond. The definition, to my understanding, is quite clear relative to what is a hospital and what a hospital provides as opposed to a surgical facility. I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, and the legislation lays out the range of costs that can occur in a health care system. I believe the hon. member is reading from the section which indicates what will be covered overall by the health care system, and I think he's particularly referring to the section where another of the controls in the legislation is being dealt with, and that is that there shall not be charges for the normal range of services that are covered by the Canada Health Act. Yes, when people are under hospital care, they do eat and they do need a place to sleep and so forth when they're in a public hospital, and that's the section that I think you're referring to.

The other thing is that in the Canada Health Act, the reference is to these particular services, Mr. Speaker, but the Canada Health Act in section 8 makes it clear that there is the flexibility for a number of agencies – that's the actual word that's used in the Canada Health Act – to deliver the services under a publicly governed, publicly financed system that complies with all five principles of the Canada Health Act. That is all being honoured in the legislation known as Bill 11.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, if Bill 11 were a business investment prospectus, it would be thrown out for making false and misleading claims. How can the government justify making a fraudulent claim about banning private hospitals when the facility services that will be done by approved surgical clinics are exactly the same as what are defined as hospital services in both the Canada Health Act and the provincial Alberta Hospitals Act?

MR. JONSON: I really do not follow the logic of his question unless he is trying to indicate that every single fork and knife and bedpan and whatever has to be in a publicly owned facility and owned by the public. Now, I realize that the NDP is consistent. They feel that there should be no private element or volunteer element at all in the health care system of this province, unlike the Liberals, of course, who would accept a system where the doctors would opt out and practise in the private system and also, Mr. Speaker, that you could evidently have facilities operating completely in the private system as well, which is a true two-tiered system. At least I have to admit that the leader of the third party is consistent. He's saying that nothing should be owned or operated by anything but a totally government-run entity.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Critics of the government's policy and proposed legislation to protect Alberta's publicly funded health care system continue to produce what appear to be instant studies designed to support their particular point of view in opposition to the proposals. An organization known as the Caledon Institute released a study last week claiming that Alberta's proposals could bring the North American free trade agreement into play and force all provinces to admit foreign, for-profit health companies. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what is the Caledon Institute, and hasn't this NAFTA claim already been shown several times?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the Caledon Institute is based in Ottawa, and they seem, at least in this case, to go back and pick and choose various statistics from various studies. Also, they pick and choose in terms of what they put into the reports.

The allegations or claims specifically with respect to NAFTA, Mr. Speaker, have been addressed in this House. There are clearly provisions in the North American free trade agreement, a section

known as the carve-out provision, and I would ask, if I could, the minister responsible for intergovernmental affairs to comment on that further.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would be frankly very surprised if anyone relies on this paper for any kind of detailed debate around the NAFTA provisions, because certainly it would appear that the institute has totally disregarded the actual text that's in NAFTA when they prepared this paper. I think the institute may be well positioned to make comment on general social programs or on health policy, but clearly, by virtue of the information in this paper, it doesn't have the background that's related to trade policy or the knowledge of the NAFTA agreement that's necessary to comment on that, so I would discount it entirely.

Speaker's Ruling Questions outside Government Responsibility

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, on more than one occasion today the questions have basically zeroed in on asking about something that has nothing to do with the administration of the province of Alberta. Some institute located in another part of this country does not fall within the administrative jurisprudence of this particular Assembly, so phrase the question in such a way that the real rules of question period are observed. Now, this is not the only member. Not the only member.

Private Health Services (continued)

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this study also claims that there is clear evidence of higher cost for cataract surgery in Calgary, where it is done at private clinics, compared to other jurisdictions where it is done in public hospitals, what clear evidence exists to support that conclusion, Mr. Minister?

2:20

MR. JONSON: It's my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that the data that the Caledon Institute is referencing is in the period 1996 to 1997, perhaps as early as 1995. I won't repeat the whole history of that particular period of time with respect to cataract clinics and clinics generally, but it was before we had our policy in place, and we did recognize we had a legislative gap. We used the policy as much as we could to deal with this area.

As I indicated, I think a good piece of evidence, Mr. Speaker, that comes from 1999 is that once we had the contract arranged and within place in Calgary with cataract clinics, the Calgary regional health authority indicates that they have kept their budget at a flat line. It has not increased for cataract surgery, and they are today contracting for 500 more cataract operations per year than before.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

Rural Physicians

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health has put a lot of stock in the Physician Resource Planning Committee process. In September the committee tabled a report to the minister which showed the need for 35 new positions in the rural physician training stream. It noted that the rural physician stream is most effective, with up to 50 percent of the graduates staying in rural practice. We need more doctors, not private health facilities. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the minister planning to do to meet the gap in rural physician needs identified in the rural physician action plan?

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, we have already done a number of things. The first thing, of course, was to establish a rural physician action plan physician committee to advise us on the needs as far as rural physicians were concerned.

Secondly, two and a half years ago now, Mr. Speaker, we put in place and funded an overall recruitment process and some assistance to isolated areas in the province to recruit more physicians. That was a very successful program, adding, as I recall, some 80 physicians to needy rural sites across the province.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, one of the major issues with rural physicians that was identified prior to the last round of AMA negotiations was that of there needing to be a payment system for on-call services of rural physicians. We put that payment program in place parallel to the discussions with the AMA on their agreement at that time. That has worked well, and I've had many compliments to government overall and to the people who have worked on that initiative.

Further, Mr. Speaker, we have been in discussions with the Alberta Medical Association rural physician action plan committee and working back and forth with universities to look at future recruitment needs and particularly the whole matter of where you locate people for their internship or practical experience. I just recently had a discussion with Dr. Tyrrell, dean of the faculty of medicine at the University of Alberta, and he indicates that they have a rural placement component in all of their internship programs now, which is proving to be quite helpful.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, my first follow-up question is: of these 35 positions that the report recognized as being needed in rural Alberta, how many of the 20 new positions announced for this year will be dedicated to meet that 35 need?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Member for Lethbridge-East is referring to the recent announcement with respect to funding an additional 20 internship positions this year and 40 next year, if that is the announcement, I would indicate that there is no specific announcement of any of those positions to rural areas, although with the overall additional internship positions and the fact that we are retaining more Alberta-trained physicians and in the overall internship program you have a definite rural experience or rural component, I think that particular area shows promise of retaining more physicians in this province.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, if he's not going to dedicate any of those to satisfy the needs of rural physicians, what is it that rural Alberta can look forward to in this new plan they're talking about that's supposed to solve all of our needs in health care? There's no dedication of these positions to rural Alberta. Will they please do something?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, I think there's been a great deal taking place in the province with respect to the recruitment and retention of physicians. For instance, it was indicated to me recently, verbally, mind you, but by people from the faculty, that we have a higher rate of retention of our medical school graduates here in Alberta than almost any other province in this land.

As I've indicated, we have recruited about 80 physicians for rural areas. We have had very few concerns lately with respect to general practitioners. We seem to have an adequate supply in rural areas, although not ideal, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, in some of our regional health authorities we do need additional specialists, Mr. Speaker, but we are making a considerable amount of progress in this regard. I think our overall increase

in the number of physicians last year, about 170 in this province, plus the overall rural recruitment program, which has focused many physicians on rural areas, indicates our very sincere commitment and action that we've taken in this regard.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Allan Rock, the federal Minister of Health, has been quoted as saying that he has some concerns about the government's proposal to protect the publicly funded and publicly administered health care system. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: has the federal minister conveyed any of the concerns expressed on a weekend radio program to the government, and has there been a reply?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as would be indicated if hon. members had an opportunity to peruse the tablings earlier in this afternoon's session, one would note that we have had an exchange of correspondence over the initial policy statement being released. When that was released, the hon. federal minister replied to me indicating that he had a number of questions. Those questions were answered in considerable detail, and I've heard nothing official since with respect to any difficulty that the federal government or the federal minister had with the policy statement.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have gone through the same process, which I think is a good one, and that is sending a copy of our legislation to the federal minister and asking for his comments and his reply. To date I have not received a formal reply, but I think the federal minister may need some time. I hope not too much time, because we do want to get on with the legislation and be moving along.

We are in contact; we are communicating back and forth. To date there have been no specific issues, violations of the Canada Health Act raised with this minister.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The federal minister seems to be particularly concerned about patients being pressured into buying services they don't need. Don't the government's proposals specifically deal with this situation in clear and unmistakable language?

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That may be one of the concerns of the federal authorities if one can go by the media coverage. I know it's usually reliable, but occasionally it is not. We feel that it is much better to deal directly with the federal authorities.

2:30

Yes, Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 has a very, very specific section designed to prevent the overcharging, the up-charging without medical necessity and without informed consent from patients, and if there is a violation of this section, there are penalties which are quite substantial. I've not looked at all the health legislation in the country, but I think we are probably the only province that has that kind of tough provision in a proposed piece of legislation for protection.

MR. BRODA: My final question, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: hasn't the federal minister himself asked the Alberta government to pass legislation containing the very principles included in its proposal?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, going back to the time during which Bill 37 was before the Legislature of the province, the federal minister at that time definitely agreed that we had a legislative need or a legislative gap, I think it was called, which Bill 37 was designed to close. That was verified by the blue-ribbon panel report that some of the members across the way may have read. Finally, in Bill 11 that particular issue is being definitively addressed.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is spending an estimated 3 millions of taxpayers' dollars on a massive propaganda campaign designed simply to manipulate public opinion. The Premier and his government are acting as public relations agents for private hospitals: HRG, Gimbel Eye Centre, Surgical Centres Inc., Enterprise Universal Inc. My questions today are to the Premier. Why, sir, are you as Premier pushing headlong ahead with this \$3 million spin campaign for something that Albertans (a) didn't ask for, and (b) simply don't want?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, I'm not so sure, Mr. Speaker. I think that Albertans want their government to find ways to shorten waiting lists, to ease pain and suffering, to find these ways to do them within the confines of the Canada Health Act and under the publicly funded system as we know it today. That's what Albertans are telling us they want. I would venture to guess that I get the bulk of the mail on health care, not so much on this bill but people complaining about waiting lists and having to be shipped out of their regions and so on. It's not acceptable, and every Premier in Canada agrees that it's not acceptable.

Relative to the \$3 million, obviously the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder wasn't listening. The leader of the Liberal opposition alluded to \$3 million about three times in her first three sets of questions. Well, the costs of this honest, open campaign, of a bill – what is dishonest about sending out a bill to the people of Alberta? The only person who has cast doubt on Albertan's ability to read and understand the bill is the leader of the Liberal opposition, and that is shameful. She has said to Albertans: you won't understand the bill; you can't understand the bill. I find that to be shameful, presumptuous, and an insult to the people of this province.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Premier, if you're not going to spend the \$3 million alleviating that suffering that you were saying you wished to do and you will not explain in this House precisely what is included in that \$3 million, when will you explain to the citizens of Alberta why and how much this campaign is going to cost?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I indicated to the member that the cost associated with mailing out the bill and some very minor advertising simply advising Albertans that the bill is available and where to call and so . . . [interjections] This is not the kind of propaganda that the Liberals have been sending out. This is propaganda. This is propaganda. This is a suggested letter. Again, you know, the Liberal opposition presumes that Albertans can't even write their own letters, actually prepares a letter based on misinformation for Albertans to send. They have insulted Albertans to the point of saying: you aren't even capable of writing your own letter; we'll write the letter for you and give you a copy so you know what to say to the Premier even if it is wrong. That is another insult to Albertans.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, how does the Premier answer my barber

when he says: if it costs \$3 million to sell that load of fish, then the fish must be rotten? [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, the Premier was unable to hear my question. I'm sure he's able to listen.

THE SPEAKER: Please sit down. The chair was not able to hear the question either, and it was this ear that was blocked. [interjections] No, no, no.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, how do I answer or you answer, for that matter, my barber when he says: "Why does it cost \$3 million to sell this barrel of fish? If that barrel of fish is so good, why does it need \$3 million to sell it? It must be rotten."

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, yes, some dollars have to be spent to mail the bill out – this is unprecedented – and let Albertans decide for themselves without all the political rhetoric and the propaganda and the misinformation that is being spread by the Liberals. This is an important piece of legislation, a very important piece of legislation, and there's been so much misinformation relative to this piece of legislation being spread by the Liberals, being spread by the NDs, being spread by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, being spread by the Friends of Medicare: you name it. The best way is to let Albertans decide for themselves. Let them see the bill.

The Liberals don't believe that Albertans can decide for themselves. The leader of the Liberal opposition has questioned the intelligence of Albertans to read and understand the bill. Last week she insulted Albertans. She insulted the intelligence of Albertans. We're not doing that, Mr. Speaker. We're saying to the people of this great province of ours: you read the bill and let us know what you think.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, when you addressed your question with reference to your barber and the question went to the hon. leader of the government, my greatest fear was that the hon. leader of the government was going to respond, "I sincerely hope that your barber is not the same as that who takes care of the hon. Provincial Treasurer."

The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

School Violence

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Violence in schools unfortunately knows no boundaries, and wherever it happens, it causes great concern and serious questions. To the Minister of Learning: do our teachers and school administrators receive training specifically to deal with violence or threats in our schools?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our department, together with the Alberta Teachers' Association, started a project called Safe and Caring Schools roughly three to four years ago. What this project was designed to do was to enable teachers to deal with the violence that we could see coming.

Obviously, in Alberta we had an absolutely horrific incident last year. It's something that we absolutely do not want to see happen again, and it's something that we will do our utmost to ensure will not happen again. More so, we will do our utmost to ensure that teachers are prepared for what to do if incidents of violence occur in the school. It is no longer just an American phenomenon, and it is no longer just a joke.

2:40

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are

there dollars in the funding formula for school boards so that they can appropriately prepare their teachers and administrators to deal with this potential problem?

DR. OBERG: There are dollars in the budget in a couple of places. First of all, we have contributed \$900,000 per year to what is called the regional consortium. This is a consortium between the Alberta Teachers' Association, the school boards, and Alberta Learning to provide professional development. I'm happy to tell the hon. member that there is a considerable amount of professional development that is taking place with regards to violence in schools.

Mr. Speaker, there is also the student health initiative, which, again, is to deal with the student, to deal with what happens when these members of society see it as a problem and see it as an issue where violence causes itself to come out. There are several places in the budget where we are looking at this very serious issue.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is there a compulsory policy or regulation that requires our school principals in all of our school districts to report occurrences of violence or threats?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, first of all, there is nothing specific that says that if there is an act of violence within a school, it is reported to a central agency. One of the things that we do pride ourselves on is that our school boards tend to talk to each other and, if violence occurs, certainly can take a look at making sure that other school boards know about this situation. It is not compulsory, for a lot of privacy concerns, for a lot of privacy issues. It is something, though, that we absolutely have to communicate better to our school boards and among school boards so that violence does not happen in Alberta schools.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll call upon the first of six members to participate in Recognitions.

I'd also ask that those members who feel that they have to make a contribution to the point of privilege, that we'll deal with in a few minutes from now, all remain in the House, and all those individuals who were named the other day who have something to add to this particular concern should be here.

While we have the 30-second break, I'll call on the hon. Minister of Gaming for an introduction, if that meets with approval. Agreed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me real pleasure today to introduce through you to the balance of the Assembly a councilman from my home city, Red Deer, Alberta. He is also an active, vibrant member of the business community and owns 67 Street Liquor Store. He is actually a good friend of mine from the '80s when we were in the oil patch together and both plied the free-enterprise placards together. I'd ask Bill Hull to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. STRANG: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you a hardworking constituent of West Yellowhead, the mayor of Grande Cache, Mr. Floyd McLennan. I'd ask him to kindly stand now and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

Women of Distinction Awards

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to recognize five remarkable women who will be honoured as recipients of this year's women of distinction award, given out each year by the St. Albert Baha'i community in conjunction with the United Nations International Women's Day.

These remarkable women are Ada Curial, who is an educator and a founder of the Lo-Se-Ca Foundation, which is dedicated to improving quality of life for disabled people and their families; Gillian Hansen, a grade 12 student at Paul Kane high school, for her community volunteer efforts; Fran Preston, also a volunteer at the Community Information & Volunteer Centre; Millie Seitz, a volunteer with the International Year of Older Persons Celebration Garden; and Wendy Stiver, who in 1989 began working with St. Albert Special Olympians and has continued her wonderful and indomitable effort in leading and organizing all Special Olympics meets and gatherings within St. Albert. I would ask the Assembly to recognize these five remarkable women.

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

CIAU Volleyball Championship

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my very great honour and privilege today to recognize the University of Alberta Pandas volleyball team, the CIAU national champions for the sixth consecutive year. The Pandas defeated the hometown University of Manitoba Bisons Saturday in a cliff-hanger five-set match. Panda centre Christy Torgerson was named tournament MVP, and another fifth-year Panda, Jenny Cartmell, was named to the all-tournament team. Special recognition should also go to interim head coach Lorne Sawula, who was named the 1999-2000 coach of the year, and to head coach Laurie Eisler, two individuals who have built Panda volleyball into the powerhouse program it is today.

The sixth straight national title puts the Pandas in the history books, tying the record for consecutive women's national volleyball titles. These hardworking and dedicated young women deserve tremendous respect and admiration for their accomplishments and for bringing the CIAU banner home yet again to the University of Alberta. Congratulations, Pandas.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Team Alberta North

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise as a volunteer member of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation to recognize Team Alberta North and its members participating in the 16th edition of the Arctic Winter Games. Team Alberta North consists of 232 individuals composed of athletes, coaches, cultural delegates, and staff. They are currently participating in the games that are running from March 5 to March 11 in Whitehorse, Yukon.

The goal of the Arctic Winter Games is to foster competitive opportunities for northern athletes, who due to lack of facilities and a limited pool of athletes are unable to successfully compete against their southern counterparts. Team Alberta North has participated in the games since 1986, and the town of Slave Lake hosted the international event in 1994. Now held every two years, the friendly games, as they are known, continue under the mission of athletic competition, cultural exhibition, and social interchange. I invite all members of this Assembly to join me in wishing the fine athletes from the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Yukon, northern Quebec,

Alaska, Greenland, and Russia well-deserved applause from this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

National Engineering Week

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The week of March 4 to 12 is National Engineering Week in Canada. The Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta has subtitled this week: Engineering – Anything's Possible. From the depths of the oceans to the edges of outer space, Alberta engineers, geologists, and geophysicists make anything possible. They turn novel ideas into practical, feasible solutions that address our basic needs, from harnessing new resources for fueling your car to designing more ergonomic work environments.

Engineers, geologists, and geophysicists are creative, innovative thinkers working behind the scenes of a \$9.3 billion industry helping Albertans meet the needs of a modern world. Their ingenuity and problem-solving skills contribute to local and international economies and play a role in influencing the careers of today's youth. In Alberta, sir, engineers believe that anything is possible.

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

RoseNet

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize the fine work of the University of Alberta legal studies program in partnership with Changing Together in establishing a web site called RoseNet.ca. This web site has much-needed, pertinent legal information for abused immigrant women.

RoseNet is a web site for immigrant women developed by immigrant women. The project has several objectives: to empower immigrant women by enabling them to develop skills in using the web for nonformal learning and to collectively develop a safe, virtual place for immigrant women to learn relevant legal information on spousal abuse. It is educational projects of this nature that will in the future help stem the tide of family violence, improve the quality of life for immigrant women, and make Alberta the society of choice.

Thank you.

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

2:50

Dr. Aleksandar Kostov

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 25, 2000, Dr. Aleksandar Kostov passed away at the age of 42 years. He was an accomplished scientist, researcher, and biomedical engineer at the University of Alberta who valiantly fought a rare form of cancer, only to be felled by a stroke. His daughter wrote this tribute:

To those who knew my father,
I was once told,
that a person never ceases to exist,
if one always remembers them.
I know that my father left more than a thought.
He left behind a rich legacy.

He lived twice too fast,
and died twice too early.
What he had done for this world,
was far too great already.
He was not given permission to do more.

He taught those close to him,
the passion of achieving,
and the desire to perfect every art.
Above all, though, he was just my dad.

He is survived by his wife, his two daughters, his sister, two nieces, and his parents.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, March is also Asthma and Allergies Awareness Month, Help Fight Liver Disease Month, National Kidney Month, Nutrition Month, Red Cross Month, Spay/Neuter Month. March 3 to March 26 is Easter Seal Mail Campaign. March 3 was the World Day of Prayer. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has correctly pointed out that March 4 to 12 is National Engineering Week. The hon. Member for Little Bow has correctly pointed out that the Arctic Winter Games are being held March 5 to 11. March 5 to 11 is also National Dental Assistants Recognition Week. March 5 to 11 is also Suicide Awareness Week. March 6 to 12 is Pharmacy Awareness Week. March 8 is International Women's Day. March 8 is also the launch of the World March of Women 2000, and March 8 to 15 is National Farm Safety Week.

Privilege

Contempt of the Assembly

THE SPEAKER: Now, hon. members, on Thursday last several hon. members participated in a point of contempt, a point of privilege, and I indicated, after hearing very, very preliminary statements from the Opposition House Leader and the Government House Leader, that we'd return to this matter at this time on Monday afternoon. For the purpose of what will take place in the next few minutes, I would like to advise all members that everything should be stated in the record. The fact that someone may want to table something, regardless of what is said in the tabling – it should be in the record of this parliament and this House so that it's here for future reference. I would invite all members who wish to participate to participate.

First of all, we'll recognize the hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that I'd given verbal notice on March 2, 2000. What I now want to do is particularize that notice, and I would just say that I had attempted to distribute a copy of some written material to your office, sir, to the Government House Leader, to the leader of the New Democrats, to the independent member, and also faxed copies to the three members who are specifically named.

The circumstances are this. I'm alleging, sir, that there's been either a contempt of the Assembly or, alternatively, a breach of the privileges of the members of the Assembly or at least of some of the members. I've cited as authority Standing Order 15, which is something you're very familiar with and that I think other members are as well.

Now, the facts that are the basis for the claim would be as follows, Mr. Speaker. Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, appeared on the Order Paper for Wednesday, March 1, on notice for first reading. Now, on March 2 at approximately 9:30 a.m. my colleague for Edmonton-Meadowlark and health critic for the opposition phoned the office of the Minister of Health and Wellness and asked for an opportunity to attend a technical briefing on Bill 11 prior to its introduction in the Assembly later that day. Neither the minister nor his executive assistant were available. She was advised by someone in the minister's office that her request would be considered. She'd received no response as of 1:30 p.m. on March 2, 2000.

Now, on Thursday, March 2, the same day, certain individuals, including members of the legislative media gallery, were invited to the media room in the basement of this building at approximately 12:15 p.m. for, quote, a technical briefing, close quote, on Bill 11. Those individuals were advised that the Premier would meet with them in the same room at 1 p.m. to discuss Bill 11.

At 12:28 p.m. the office of the Leader of the Official Opposition received by fax a letter from the Minister of Health and Wellness inviting her to a technical briefing on Bill 11 at some unspecified time and place. A copy of the letter I've attached to the materials I provided to you, sir, and the other House leader. It had also been tabled on Thursday, so it will be a sessional paper. I would note that it would have been physically impossible for that invited briefing to have occurred before Bill 11 had been presented for first reading in the Assembly, and in the circumstances submitted, there could have been no reasonable expectation that such a briefing would have occurred prior to 1:30 p.m. on March 2.

At approximately 12:58 p.m. the opposition leader attended at the media room in the basement of this building. There was no sign or particular notice on the door. She entered the room through the double doors. Once inside, a government employee, presumably working under the instructions of the Minister of Health and Wellness, told the opposition leader to leave. Mrs. MacBeth then asked the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, who was apparently chairing the meeting, whether she could stay. That member replied that she could not stay. She then exited the room.

Now, the media representatives and others in attendance in the media room were given materials including what's understood to be the final copy of Bill 11. Further, I'd note that in the *Edmonton Journal* on March 2 an article entitled "Health law debate starts new phase" references sections in the bill such as the following: "A section of the bill obtained by *The Journal* says . . ." I'd end the quote there. The substance of the quote is not germane. It certainly appears from that article that the daily newspaper had secured a copy of Bill 11 prior to its introduction in the Assembly. Bill 11 in fact received first reading on Thursday, March 2, 2000.

The issues, Mr. Speaker, I'd respectfully suggest, are these. Why is the government of Alberta releasing a public bill to the media before it is tabled in the Assembly and given first reading? Can the Member for Calgary-Glenmore and the Minister of Health and Wellness provide nonmembers with a copy of the bill after the bill appears on notice on the Order Paper but prior to its first reading by the Assembly? Is the answer to that question different if representatives of the opposition are also provided with the bill on the same or equivalent basis and at the same time? Further, can the Leader of the Official Opposition be denied access to a briefing on a public bill that is on notice to be introduced later that same day? Finally, the question of who controls the media room in the basement of this building: can the government and the media make private arrangements to deny other MLAs access to that facility without the Speaker's express approval?

Let me just very briefly highlight the authorities. I propose not to go through them word by word because all members have access to them. Standing Order 15 I've cited before. Just while I'm dealing with that, although you received no written notice the other day, I notice that Standing Order 15(5) makes provision for something to be raised verbally, and I'd suggest that's in fact what happened last Thursday.

On February 24, '99, you, sir, dealt with a claim that the Premier and the minister of health had committed a contempt of the Assembly by not allowing members to attend or participate in a health summit, and that was discussed in *Hansard*, February 24, page 163. You held, sir, that a question of contempt – this is as I understood

your ruling – should be raised in the same fashion as a question of privilege, and that's what brings us here.

I might make note of the fact that you ruled on those facts at that time, in 1999, that no contempt had been made out on the facts since the summit was a matter of government and not an act or event of the Legislative Assembly. *Beauchesne* in articles 123, 124, 125, I think, is germane. It talks about the privileges of parliament existing to be enjoyed by individual members and by each House for the protection of its members and – I'd emphasize this – for the vindication of its own authority and dignity.

Then you also have provisions which talk about control over documents in its possession. *Beauchesne* 174: "The Speaker has the control of the accommodation and services in that part of the Parliament Buildings and precincts occupied by, or on behalf of, the House." That's from *Beauchesne*, of course. It talks in article 221 about the Clerk being "responsible for the custody of all legislation during all its stages and proceedings."

3:00

My argument, Mr. Speaker, would be as follows. It's my respectful submission that the Premier, the minister of health, and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore took steps to introduce media to the contents of Bill 11 in advance of first reading with the sole purpose of influencing the public messages around this bill without any opposition perspective and commentary.

The tradition and parliamentary practice of not publishing or releasing bills before they are first introduced in the Assembly serves a couple of purposes. Firstly, sir, you would prevent any nonmember from taking advantage of, quote, insider knowledge, close quote, to further private interests. Secondly, it underscores the important role played by elected legislators. It invests both the Assembly and the work of members of the Assembly with the gravity and respect needed in a parliamentary democracy.

Now, I've made a quick survey of other Canadian provinces since last Thursday, and what I'm relating to you, sir, is what I've been able to unearth to this stage. A review of processes in other provinces supports the convention that public bills are not disclosed prior to first reading in the Assembly. I was unable to find any disclosure similar to the facts of this case in Nova Scotia. An official with the Clerk's office in Ontario, a legislator with some 11 years' experience, has told my office that they could remember no such prior disclosure in that jurisdiction. We received similar information from British Columbia. In Manitoba an official in the Clerk's office advised my researcher that in the last nine years there was no recollection of incident similar to what is an issue in Alberta. In Manitoba apparently the minister needs to, quote, sign off, close quote, by letter before a bill can be publicly released.

Now, in Saskatchewan – and once again, I'm just relating, Mr. Speaker, the best information I've been able to obtain. If somebody has more detailed information, I'd like to hear it. Apparently in the province of Saskatchewan the Speaker has dealt with a similar case. In attempting to obtain some particulars, the information I have to date suggests that the Speaker may have held that prior disclosure was not a breach of privilege since it occurred outside the Assembly, but in the case that I've been told of, the Speaker apparently cautioned the government about the unfairness of such actions and the need to respect the role of the Assembly. In any event, I suggest to you that I've mentioned the case because I want to make full disclosure, whether it's helpful to my case or not. I'd say that the Saskatchewan decision may be distinguishable, and I'll come back in a moment and talk about what's different about Bill 11. Hard to imagine a bill that would have achieved larger notoriety or public attention than what's accrued to Bill 11.

Now, I also understand there's been a similar objection raised in the House of Commons. I had received and I've passed on to the table just moments ago some material which wouldn't have been made available but half an hour ago. I just received it. In the House of Commons there was a question of privilege raised by the Member for Calgary Centre, and this had to do with the disclosure of Bill C-23. This is the bill colloquially known as the same-sex benefits bill, Mr. Speaker. The concern raised there was that a Mr. John Fisher, a member of a special interest group, had sent an e-mail via the Internet outlining in detail his analysis of Bill C-23 before it was actually introduced and read a first time in the House. The argument there was that he had to have had possession of the bill beforehand, and the argument was that the Minister of Justice, the Hon. Anne McLellan, had leaked information, and this is contrary to parliamentary practices.

Now, that was raised on February 15, 2000, and on Monday, February 21, 2000, the Speaker gave his ruling on the question of privilege. The note I have is as follows. The Speaker stated that although the members of the House should always be the first ones to examine legislation after it has been introduced and read the first time, this rule must be balanced against the need for the government to consult both experts and the public when developing its legislative proposals . . . The Chair must rule that the matter raised by the hon. member for Calgary Centre does not constitute a *prima facie* case of privilege nor a contempt of parliament.

That's in the *House of Commons Debates*, 3766-7.

I might say that I think there's a way of distinguishing that. In fact, in the situation that I've put in front of you, Mr. Speaker, one can scarcely say that this is about developing a legislative proposal. The bill had been printed, and that would have been the case when we had notice the day before. This has nothing to do with developing a legislative proposal; it's a question of putting it forward.

Now, I would distinguish this from the case you dealt with when I'd raised the contempt matter with respect to the health summit. We're now dealing with what I'd describe as the stock-in-trade of this Assembly, namely a public bill.

It's been held also – and I've cited some authorities, sir – that the Speaker's jurisdiction extends outside this particular Chamber we're speaking in now. I reference a letter dated July 2, 1992, from Speaker Dr. David Carter to a reporter. I've attached a copy of that letter where the Speaker there exercised jurisdiction with respect to the office of the Clerk Assistant. So it did extend outside this building. Further authority for that notion of extended jurisdiction can be found in the incident of April 29, 1992, when Speaker Dr. David Carter reportedly shoved a cameraman, not in this room but in the Legislature hallway outside. So I think there are authorities, sir, that you have jurisdiction outside this building.

Throughout the fall 1999 session of the Assembly the Premier repeatedly talked about his new private health care bill. He discussed at length the policy document upon which the bill was based. The Premier and the Minister of Health and Wellness continued to, I'd suggest, trumpet this anticipated private health care legislation. The Speaker, I suggest, can take notice of the enormous public interest in the issue.

Mr. Speaker, on March 2, 2000, the Premier described Bill 11 in these terms:

Mr. Speaker, this is a bill. This is a very important document. This is the most important document that this Legislative Assembly can receive and consider, and to refer to this as propaganda is absolutely shameful.

I'm skipping ahead:

I point out again that this is the result of one of the most intensive public consultation exercises in the history of this province and certainly of this Legislative Assembly.

I just mention, sir, in terms of context, that I had read something the other day and was reminded of the comment made by R.B. Bennett on May 30, 1938, when he was talking about the abuse and undue advantage of power which political fortune has temporarily placed in the hands of the majority. I'd ask you to in fact share some of this sentiment in the exercise of your considerable powers. R.B. Bennett said:

I occupy a position in which I am placed by statute, and one of my duties is to do exactly what I am doing, to try to safeguard the liberties of Parliament from encroachment by the government of the day. That is my duty. That is one of the difficulties of the position which I occupy, and I will discharge that duty whether it be on behalf of a member of the Opposition or of any other party when there is a tyrannical exercise of power on the part of the Government by reason of a great majority, enabling the administration to destroy the liberties of this Parliament, which have been secured in the manner we all know. When that happens it is my unfortunate duty to protest against such an encroachment upon the liberties of members of the House and I propose to do it so long as I am here.

Mr. Speaker, you have witnessed, as I and other members have, a host of things which have weakened the esteem and the stature of this Assembly, whether it's the throne speech, which has become anticlimactic because of the Premier's now annual televised speech, whether it's the budget speech, which amounts to a reiteration of previous spending announcements, whether it's Conservative caucus standing policy committees being passed off as committees of the Assembly, whether it's a host of summits which are all extralegis-lative exercises, whether it's a budget process and the A, B, C, D committees that dramatically reduce the opportunity for opposition MLAs to scrutinize estimates. One of the few things we're left with in this Assembly is the process dealing with public bills.

I suggest, sir, that you are in a position to take notice of the opportunities of the \$8 million budget of the Public Affairs Bureau, the advantages that that affords the government to communicate with and reinforce its message to the Alberta public. But when it comes to public bills, I think it's important that we respect the process.

The reason I've cited the three members. The Member for Calgary-Glenmore chaired the technical briefing provided March 2, 2000. Typically, technical briefings are provided by department officials. Is it appropriate for a member to provide a technical briefing which will likely be seen as a political message because it's coming from an elected member? The Minister of Health and Wellness I've named because he's the sponsor of Bill 11. He's responsible for all legislation to be administered by his department. The government workers who participated in the technical briefing which excluded the Leader of the Opposition were identified as employees of the Department of Health and Wellness.

3:10

The Premier is cited largely on the basis of his comment on February 22, 2000, in question period where he said:

You know, in my political career that spans almost 20 years now, I have never looked forward with more enthusiasm to the time when this bill will be tabled so I can debate in this House in front of the television cameras this Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, with an independent referee like yourself, sir, to make sure that it's absolutely not stacked, that's it's unbiased, that's it's done in the most revered Chamber of this province, right here in the Legislative Assembly.

It's inconceivable, given the importance of the bill to the government, that the treatment of this bill, including the technical briefing, would not have been completely within the knowledge of the Premier. Then the Premier did, I understand, meet with reporters at approximately 1 p.m., immediately after the technical briefing, to discuss the bill.

So the relief sought is a declaration that a *prima facie* case has been established that one or all of the Premier, the Minister of Health and Wellness, and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore have committed an act that constitutes a contempt of the Assembly or a breach of the privileges of the members; secondly, further or in the alternative, a referral to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections for a formal hearing and a recommendation as to penalty; further or in the alternative, a direction that Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, has been improperly introduced in this Assembly, a declaration that there be no further proceedings on that bill; and then further in the alternative, such other relief as may be appropriate upon the decision of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Finally, my last point. I'd also just received and shared with the Government House Leader a ruling of February 16, 1996, which I've just come into, which has to do with budget briefings. I've provided it to you and the Government House Leader. I'd respectfully suggest that other than talking about the importance of budget secrecy — I think it's something different from a bill. I think it's important to note that the opposition in fact is included in embargoed briefings on the budget. We weren't included in embargoed briefings on this bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for your patience. Those are the submissions I wanted to make.

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

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to deal with the statement of facts that's contained in the tabling from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and his statement of facts that was given orally here this afternoon. It seems to me that the hon. member referred to fairness when he was talking in terms of laying everything before you, sir, as it related to argument. The same should be true with respect to the statement of facts. When I look at this statement of facts, what I see is not only a statement of facts but a statement of facts omitted. So what I wish to do is to speak briefly to some of those material omissions of fact which should be on the record.

The briefing in question did take place over the noon hour on March 2. It was set up exclusively for the media. It was a technical briefing. I had some involvement in drafting the Health Care Protection Act, so I and others from Alberta Health and Wellness attended this technical briefing.

The technical briefing was embargoed. In other words, the information was provided under certain strict and specific conditions. One of those conditions was that a draft of the Health Care Protection Act was provided to the media. The draft legislation was marked "draft." It was provided to the media on the basis that it would be returned by the members of the media when leaving the briefing that afternoon. To my knowledge that was done. It was also clear that the purpose of the technical briefing was to provide an understanding of the legislation in question. That was the purpose for it.

I notice on page 2 of the tabling by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and I believe he repeated words to this effect in his presentation this afternoon:

Ms MacBeth then asked the Member for Calgary Glenmore, who was apparently chairing the meeting, whether she could stay. The Member for Glenmore replied she could not stay. She then exited the room.

Now, both of those statements are correct, but there was an intervening passage of time between my comment and the exit. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo was present at the time, and I must say that the absence of an explanation of that intervening period of time strikes me as being unfair.

Be that as it may, members of the media at the briefing had a

discussion regarding the request, and it appeared to me that the media assumed ownership of this particular issue. A discussion ensued. Comments were made among members of the media, and I observed that members of the media determined that it was not appropriate for the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition and those attending her to stay in the room. The hon. leader, to my knowledge, was privy to this discussion, as was the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and was specifically requested to leave by the media. From my vantage point the exit was following the direction of the media.

Now, my background, Mr. Speaker, is in law. There is in law a contempt application, and in law the rule is that it is a very serious application. In law it is incumbent upon the person who brings the application to be studious in putting forward accurately the facts upon which such an application is predicated. In this particular case I think it is material that the media had that discussion. It is material that they assumed ownership of it. It is material that they made a decision. It is material that they told the Leader of the Official Opposition that she could not remain. From my perspective, it is material that it is absent from this statement of fact that was tabled and it was absent from the hon. member's recitation of facts here today.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have before us a very serious allegation of breach of contempt and breach of privileges of the House, and I think it's important to be clear as to what's happened. I thank Calgary-Glenmore for adding his personal knowledge of the information.

In fact what he's indicated is that there was a technical briefing and a news conference on March 2 and a media notice went out to the media inviting them to it at 12:15 p.m. and it was "an embargoed technical briefing of the legislation, for members of the Legislature Press Gallery." The notice said:

The technical briefing will be immediately followed by an embargoed news conference with the Premier and the Minister of Health and Wellness at 1:00 PM.

The technical briefing is not for attribution. It is not an on-camera session and recordings are not permitted. Materials provided during the technical briefing cannot be removed from the TV Room and must be returned at the end of the session. Media are not allowed to discuss the contents of the material with anyone outside of the TV Room until the embargo is lifted.

The embargoed news conference is for attribution and recording is permitted.

The embargo is in effect until the Minister of Health and Wellness formally introduces Bill 11 in the Legislative Assembly.

This is scheduled for approximately 1:45 PM.

I'll table copies of the news release for the record. So what we've had, what the issue is here, is an embargoed technical briefing, an embargoed news conference with respect to Bill 11.

I think it's common knowledge now that a letter was sent to the Leader of the Official Opposition and to the interim leader of the New Democrat opposition inviting them, if they so desired, to have their own technical briefing on Bill 11. Instead of taking advantage of that opportunity and calling back, they chose to stage an entrance to a private, embargoed meeting. They had not asked if it was appropriate for them to attend it, and they had not agreed to the terms of the embargo.

The media present were asked for their determination, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has indicated, and the media decided that it was not appropriate. The president of the press gallery has advised me by note that he was the one who told the Leader of the

Official Opposition that she was excluded from the technical briefing and asked to leave. I can provide copies of that note for the records of the House.

3:20

The decision, first of all, as to whether she could stay after she had staged her entrance to a private, embargoed meeting was left to the media, and they made the decision and advised her to leave. It was clearly a private meeting, for which those present had agreed to terms of an embargo. The Leader of the Official Opposition was clearly not invited to the meeting but had been invited to her own briefing. She clearly staged the event, with cameras following her, with other members of her caucus, who then chose, I would submit to you, to use inappropriate and inflammatory language to try to create a media event.

The long and short of it, Mr. Speaker, is that an incident which happened outside of the Chamber, outside the purview of the Speaker, only exhibited bad form on the part of the Leader of the Opposition and is not a breach of privilege or contempt of the House.

Much more serious, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest, is the allegation of assault which was made in this House against a member of government staff relating to that, for which no evidence has been brought forward today. No apology has been made for that allegation, and I think that's a much more serious allegation, which should be dealt with.

With respect to Bill 11. At the technical briefing, as the Member for Calgary-Glenmore has indicated, a draft copy, stamped "draft," was distributed for the purposes of allowing the technical briefing to proceed and for people to go through the bill. It was distributed under the terms of an embargo: that it not be on camera, that recorders not be permitted, that materials not be removed from the room, and that people who'd agreed to the embargo would not discuss the contents of the material with anyone outside the TV room.

Draft bills have been circulated to the public in the past for discussion, for comment, for input. In fact, this government is known for its consultation process, its consultation with the public. Bill 40, or its predecessor, was circulated to the public. The health protection act was circulated to the public in draft form. In fact, Bill 202 in this Legislature session, it's my understanding, was distributed to the public in its final and printed version prior to its introduction in the House. No question of privilege was raised with respect to that matter.

Consultation, as I've said, has been the hallmark of this government. In fact, since I've been House leader and I know that my predecessor as House leader as well – we have encouraged all members of Executive Council to meet with their opposition critic prior to introducing legislation to discuss the contents of the legislation with them so that they would be well informed prior to it entering the House. I know that doesn't happen in all cases, but I know that it has happened in some cases, and the opposition has never complained about that particular practice.

Beauchesne 31(10) clearly allows such things as technical briefings.

"The question has often been raised whether parliamentary privilege imposes on ministers an obligation to deliver ministerial statements and to make announcements and communications to the public through the House of Commons or to make these announcements or statements in the House rather than outside the chamber. The question has been asked whether Hon. Members are entitled, as part of their parliamentary privilege, to receive such information ahead of the general public. I can find no precedent to justify this suggestion."

The Opposition House Leader had indicated in his comments, I believe, and certainly in his written argument which he filed that a bill on notice was the property of the Assembly. That's one of his contentions. In fact, Mr. Speaker, a bill on notice is not the property of the Assembly until it's introduced. Just because a bill or a motion has been put on notice does not mean that it has to be proceeded with. It does not mean that a member of Executive Council or any other member of the House has to bring that motion forward when called. In fact, bills don't come forward until they're actually put on the Order Paper by government. So just because it's on notice does not mean that it is the property of the House.

Clearly it's in all members' interest – and this goes to the root of the question of whether an embargoed discussion on a bill prior to its entry into the House is appropriate. As I understand, a breach of privilege is about whether somebody has been interfered with in their ability to carry out their duty as a member. Clearly, in order for members to do their job as members, what makes it easier for us to carry out our duty as members is if the public is well informed.

Was the bill released to the media prior to it being entered in the House? I would submit, Mr. Speaker, that it was not. There was certainly a review. There was certainly a technical briefing. But released? No, it was not released, because first of all they were not allowed to have it in their possession when leaving the embargoed conference. They agreed not to discuss it, not to interview on it, not to do anything with the information until it had been introduced in the House. That does not constitute a release.

The practice of this government has been to be open and forthright with the people of Alberta, to involve them in the discussion of public business in a meaningful way, and the hon. Opposition House Leader in his argument both in the written argument and his statements today has indicated quite clearly that that in fact is what has been going on. We have had a much more modern approach to discussion of the public agenda now than ever in the past. So, yes, the contents of the Speech from the Throne, for example, what is discussed in the Speech from the Throne, is not a surprise to the public and should not be a surprise to the public. The contents of a budget are not a surprise to the public and should not be a surprise to the public, and I would suggest that the contents of discussion of issues, bills that come before the House are not a surprise. In fact, Bill 11 and the contents of Bill 11 have been well known for a long time. In this House in question period the Premier, in response to questions, has been outlining exactly what is in Bill 11 for the members when they ask their questions.

What's happened is that a bill has come forward embodying exactly what the government has been saying, and for the purposes of better informing the public, a technical briefing was held. That briefing was embargoed until the actual bill was tabled in the House. No harm has been done to the privilege of members in this House. In fact, we've all been well served, because we serve the public, who should be well informed in order to give us their suggestions, ideas, and comments before we get into debate on a bill.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, this is not retraction time or debate time. Do you have something further to add to this point?

MR. DICKSON: I was going to add simply two very quick points, Mr. Speaker, if I might.

The first one is that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore talked at length about the media and what they decided and what they didn't decide. I didn't see an election when I was there; I didn't see a vote. The point is this. We are talking about the role of members and the

role of this Assembly, and it's surely for this Assembly to decide who gets access to bills and what the rules are going to be, not members of the media. They have their role, which is an important one, but it's wholly collateral to the role of the members.

The other point I'd just quickly make is this, sir. This is not a question of looking at a draft of a bill two months before the session starts. This is minutes before the bill is in fact passed out for first reading. To talk about the public consultation, that is over long before we get to that stage.

Those are the observations I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, on this point?

MR. SAPERS: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: Of privilege?

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Please, citation and everything else.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. I'd comment on the facts as I understand them, Mr. Speaker. First of all, judging by the invitation that came out to members of the press gallery, it was clear that this was a meeting that was set up by the government, not the media. So it's really irrelevant what the pleasure or displeasure of the media was during that meeting, since it was at the government's beck and call that they were there.

3:30

A second point I'd like to remind you of, Mr. Speaker, is that there was some mention made of the fact that this was an embargoed session, as though that would give it some particular meaning. I will remind the Chamber, of course, that there is precedent of having opposition members present during embargoed sessions. It happens with the budget.

Mr. Speaker, the third point I'd like to make is that this infamous invitation to the Leader of the Official Opposition to participate in a briefing came at 12:28, hardly time to respond in a formal way, and the government would have you and everyone else believe that there had been no response and that there was no response intended. In fact, I think the willingness of the Leader of the Official Opposition to participate in a technical briefing at the earliest opportunity is evidence of a response.

I will make a further comment with regard to the House of Commons ruling in a similar matter recently and will note that the Speaker in Parliament referred to the role of experts in the creation of legislation. I think that while it's true that the media have a role to play and they may be expert journalists, I don't believe that members of our press gallery are content experts in health care. So I think that there is an important distinction to be drawn between what happened in the House of Commons and what has happened here in Alberta.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you consider the possibility that a ruling that the members of the press gallery should be privy to public bills on any basis ahead of elected members of this Assembly – I'd ask you to reflect on whether or not that would be ascribing to members of the press gallery, who come and go at the whim of their employers and not of the electorate of this province, whether that would be giving them privileges well beyond the privileges in

certain cases of elected members of this Assembly, who represent the taxpayers and the electors who sent them here.

Thank you for allowing me to participate, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we're dealing with this matter under Standing Order 15, a case dealing with privilege. Standing Order 15(6) states:

The Speaker may allow such debate as he thinks appropriate in order to determine whether a *prima facie* case of breach of privilege has taken place.

I'm quite prepared to hear any and all arguments that the hon. members want to make with respect to this matter before resting.

Well, then, hon. members, I'll take all this information which has been provided to me here this afternoon under advisement and would hope to return to the House tomorrow at the conclusion of question period with some kind of assessment after consultation with the appropriate authorities and experts. It would probably not be of great benefit now, having given all hon. members an opportunity to make their comments known and to make their comments known through *Hansard*, for me to receive in the ensuing hours bits of paper and other annotations and anecdotes with respect to this matter. I've probably received enough, having given the House opportunity and warning last Thursday to come prepared today, so I need not receive a fax at midnight or 3 in the morning on this matter.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 12

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to move for second reading Bill 12, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000.

The act has had discussion in Committee of Supply, so it's of no surprise to the members of the House that the supplementary supply asked for under this bill serves Community Development, Environment, Health and Wellness, and Justice, for a total sum of \$31,103,000 plus nonbudgetary disbursements to be voted under section 2 of \$1,470,000. We've had good discussion in Committee of Supply on the rationale and the reasons behind the need for this supplementary supply, and I would commend it to the House for their approval.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you colleagues. We have had some debate in committee on this supplementary supply request, and unfortunately the debate didn't provide answers to a number of questions. This is a circumstance that members of the Official Opposition find themselves in all too often. We have asked that at the very least some explanation of how this new spending will contribute to meeting defined outcomes and performance criteria, such as reducing health care waiting lists or opening up hospital beds or reducing classroom size, be brought into the debate. We have asked the members of cabinet who will be spending this money to explain the relationship between these additional dollars and the outcomes that Albertans can expect for the expenditure. We haven't been given any answers. Now, that makes it very difficult to support Bill 12.

We recognize, of course, that funding is needed in these areas, particularly in health care, but we would like to make sure that new funding, particularly in health care, goes to meet the needs of Albertans and not the needs of the government.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

If it's not clear what that distinction is, Madam Speaker, I'll explain it like this. There are Albertans who are waiting in pain for access to surgical services in this province. Frankly, those Albertans don't really care, while they're waiting in pain, about this debate in the Legislature. What they want is quick access to the public health care system that they've helped to build and to pay for all of these years. So they would expect that their elected representative would stand in this Chamber and with alacrity and dispatch vote in favour of any supplementary supply request which would open up more access in the health care system.

I'd be happy to vote that way, Madam Speaker, but you see, I have this nagging suspicion that this money won't be used to relieve that pain and suffering, that that money is instead going to be used to further a propaganda campaign of the government when it comes to promoting its very narrow agenda. Earlier today in question period the question was put several times to government regarding the cost of their campaign to convince Albertans that they are wrong to question the government, and the government didn't answer the question. So while we're being asked to vote a supply of some tax dollars to government, how can we be certain and how can we provide certain answers to our constituents that this money won't be used for the wrong purposes?

In previous debates about interim and supplementary supply we've had government members stand up and try to intimidate the Official Opposition by saying: are you going to vote against spending on a long-term care centre here or there, and are you going to vote against a school renewal project here or there? While we're on the topic of school renewal projects, I can't tell you how happy I am to see the allocation go to Westminster junior high in my constituency. It will be money well spent. Maybe they'll be able to finally open the windows without the window frames crumbling. Anyway, I do digress, Madam Speaker.

The issue here is that of course no member of the Official Opposition would speak against or vote against appropriate accountable spending on identified priorities. But what we also won't vote in favour of is willy-nilly spending based on some political barometer of the provincial government without the appropriate accountability measures being put in place.

Now, in case anybody is concerned that maybe I'm overstating my case, Madam Speaker, let me just remind the Assembly of a couple of facts. First of all, this current Treasurer has brought in more supplementary supply requests than the previous two Treasurers combined, I believe, and if not exceeding it then certainly darned close to exceeding that total.

3:40

This is a particular problem because we have a government that likes to pride itself on its business acumen. This is a government that talks about its reliance on the private sector, even when it comes to dismantling the sacred trust of health care. This is a government that likes to pride itself on small government and on making sure that there's just no more government business being involved in business. Yet I can't imagine a business that would actually operate the way that this government does. I can't imagine a business that would be successful if they were so far out on their financial forecasts.

It's easy for this government to look like fiscal heroes when you have oil at two or three times the price it was a year ago. It's easy for this government to look like fiscal heroes when you have a federal government that has been passing along real tax relief to all Canadians for the last couple of years. It's easy for a government to look like fiscal heroes when the world economy is such that you will benefit if you are an exporting economy, such as Alberta is. While the government wants to bask in the glow of all of this good fortune, they can hardly claim to be responsible for it. What we do, however, ask the government to be responsible for is their own spending plans and the accountability measures that should be put in place.

Now, I won't bore the Assembly by reciting all of the concerns of the Auditor General over the past couple of years when it comes to government reporting, and I certainly won't retell the story in this Chamber about the need for a fiscal stability fund, but I will comment briefly that the government has made some moves recently that should give anybody pause for thought when it comes to whether or not this government is capable of keeping its word. What I'm referring to, of course, is the Fiscal Responsibility Act.

The Fiscal Responsibility Act would have seen a 75-25 percent split in how the surplus was used within a year, and that split of course was going to be: 75 percent of the surplus towards debt, 25 percent to within-year program spending. Well, what's happened, quite apparently, is that the government found that their law, which was, I guess, set up to try to convince some people that they were going to be tough and aggressive about the debt, became inconvenient politically. So at the very first opportunity what the government did is they scoffed at their own law, repealed it for the time being, and then – and they'll never say this in the Assembly – they followed the lead of the federal government, which said that it would be much more reasonable to look at a balance, more of a 50-50 approach, in terms of how the surplus was spent, some towards debts, some towards program spending. In fact, that's what this government has done. They've allocated spending much closer to that 50-50 formula.

So we can only look at the government's words and then their actions and then judge whether or not they say what they're going to do and they mean what they say when they say it. I'm not convinced, Madam Speaker, that this government does mean what they say when they say they're interested in being open and accountable. I'm not convinced that they mean what they say when they want to tie spending to performance measures and outcomes, and I'm certainly not convinced that they mean what they say when it comes to providing a balance to Albertans when it comes to the expenditure of their tax dollars. In fact, what we've seen is that this government wobbles back and forth between frenzied cutting and frenzied spending, and of course in between all that wobbling are the taxpayers of this province, who tend to get bounced off the walls as this wobbling government bounces them from pillar to post.

What we would much prefer is some stability, and that of course ties into earlier comments that I've made and my colleagues have made regarding the fiscal stabilization fund. After all, if you ask anybody in business in this province, anybody that provides a public service in this province, what they'll tell you is that stability is the key to their planning and their success. We can only expect that same stability from the provincial government.

Madam Speaker, I've talked before about economic and fiscal strategy reports, using long-term trends as far as 10 years. I've talked about annual performance reports that have meaningful measures. I've talked before about monthly budget updates instead of quarterly updates and of course about the fiscal stabilization fund. We have yet to see a satisfactory response from anyone in government to these matters, yet what we see time after time after time are

more and more requests for this out-of-budget, unplanned spending.

Will the money be put to good use? We can only cross our fingers and hope for the best. We know that there has been some identified spending in Community Development, in Environment, in Health and Wellness, and in Justice. We certainly hope that the money will be tracked. We hope that the government will break with its tradition of just trying to pretend that they've done the right thing with this money and actually report on it in ways that the Auditor General will be happy, and we will look forward, I suppose, to next year's report. Of course, it's a year late. We really won't have an opportunity until it's all over, but we'll look forward to next year's report and to seeing whether or not this government has the capacity to listen and learn and whether or not they will respond to these very responsible suggestions that come through the Official Opposition but, I'll emphasize, really on behalf of Albertans.

These ideas to improve the budgeting process and to improve performance measures and to ensure that tax dollars provide valued services are not inventions of the Official Opposition. They are the considered responses of Albertans when we have met with them and talked with them and listened to them about what it is they expect from their government.

So while the government may think that they're being clever in ignoring the Official Opposition, what they're really doing is snubbing the taxpayers of this province. They should not be so cocky as to think that they've got the monopoly on good ideas, and they should clean the wax out of both of their ears and not just listen to those Albertans whom they believe voted for them, but they should listen to all Albertans because, after all, it is each and every taxpayer's dollars that they are spending.

Madam Speaker, I've heard the Premier say in this Assembly just a few short days ago – I think he made reference to the 70 percent of Albertans who voted for the government, an unbelievable suggestion. Unbelievable for two reasons: one, because it's not true; secondly, because it is remarkable that a government would be so awash in its own bathwater that it would think that they have this huge majority support in everything they do.

I'm here to tell you, Madam Speaker, that that's simply not the case and that the government really should start listening. They've taken some really, really good ideas from the Official Opposition in the past, and while they still have their hand on the reins, it wouldn't hurt my feelings if they took these really good ideas too and tried to market them as their own, as long as they get on with doing the right thing.

I'm confident, Madam Speaker, that the Alberta Liberals will have their opportunity to put their own ideas to use in good time on behalf of the people of the province, but in this short interim period before we get that chance, I would ask the government to seriously consider these changes to the budgeting process and the financial accountability process. I'm convinced that if they do, we'll all be better served.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a couple of observations I wanted to make. I had appreciated the other night, when we were dealing with the estimates, that the Minister of Justice with his customary forthrightness assisted us in understanding the Justice operating expense and capital investment of \$5.7 million. But since we have the opportunity here in terms of dealing with the bill, I just wanted to remind the minister that notwithstanding his explanation the other day, I still have some concerns with what we're doing with the new court reporting system.

Madam Speaker, I just want to go back and say again that the

Minister of Justice and his department have chosen a new approach to court reporting, and they've done that without consultation with the Canadian Bar Association. They've done that without prior consultation with the Law Society of Alberta. They've done it without prior consultation with the men and women who make up the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, the level of court that most typically hears civil actions.

3:50

The minister has given us some information I didn't have before. I understand that now we're looking at the Halifax technology, but I continue to have the concern that when the requests for proposals go out, which I understand to be imminent or at least within a matter of months, the province isn't wedded to a particular technology. We know the problems that have existed – and we talked about this in estimates – in a number of U.S. jurisdictions, and there's no difficulty finding lawyers and court reporters and judges in the province of British Columbia that were not particularly impressed with the experiment there. The Minister of Justice says that we're going to use better technology, but I would have felt more comfortable if I'd felt that there had been a degree of support and buy-in from the men and women who are actually going to be directly affected, the men and women who practise in our civil courts in particular and the men and women who occupy positions on the bench.

The other observation I make is that unless we're able to be very, very lucky indeed and have an excellent type of technology, which maybe is going to be a little more expensive than some of the technologies other provinces have tried to get away with – short of that, we end up with that situation where the well-heeled litigants, the two resource companies in Calgary, will continue to go out and hire top-notch court reporters who will come in and make a very excellent transcript of every word and virtually every breath that's taken in the course of a civil trial, but people involved in that smaller matrimonial property action or personal injury claim or one of those things aren't going to be able to afford that.

I just register again the concern that we end up with a degraded quality of court reporting for litigants of modest means. It's a concern. We've raised it before. Hopefully the Minister of Justice will be reviewing that carefully, but I do think that we have sort of lurched into this process without adequate consultation, and one always gets a little nervous when we don't see the appropriate kind of consultation at the front part of the process. The minister has been certainly chided in this House, urged, prompted to do more of that. I'm always the optimist, Madam Speaker. I'm hopeful he's going to follow up and make sure that the technology is first-rate, but it has been very troublesome in terms of the way the idea was announced in the early stages. I'm going to be watching carefully and I think many other Albertans are going to be watching carefully to see what impact it's actually going to have on the quality of reporting.

I just make that observation, and this isn't, to be fair, something to dump in the Minister of Justice's lap, because he's relatively new to cabinet. I think in a government that could perhaps be characterized this way, a government where since 1993 virtually every single decision has been based on how cheaply any service can be provided, not what the impact is going to be, not the quality, and not what the outcomes are going to be, just how cheaply the service can be provided in the current budget year, there is huge, huge suspicion, and I don't think it's just shared by members of my caucus. I think it's shared by a lot of Albertans out there that we're sort of forgetting that government is also about providing quality service, and court

reporting is one of those things that warrants nothing less.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

Bill 2

First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, it is a great privilege today to rise to move second reading of the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act, Bill 2.

This is a brief act intended to accomplish three important things. First, the act establishes some very basic principles that will enable, or allow, Alberta to legally repatriate sacred ceremonial objects. This is very significant, Madam Speaker, because it sets out the very principles that will allow us to be able to do the right thing, which is what I think is needed to be done relative to this, the repatriation of sacred objects. I know that many times in talking to the elders as well as First Nations leaders in the past 10 years since I've been elected – and I'm sure previous to that – there has been a real need to be able to establish that and for them to be able to do this. I really appreciate the fact that we are at least moving in that direction, and I think it's a very important principle for us to be able to ensure that these things happen.

I really appreciate the fact that the Leader of the Official Opposition has indicated that there will be speedy passage to this. I think she also recognizes the fact that this is something that needs to be done and to really make sure that we continue to move in that direction.

Second, the act sets in motion a consultative process in which staff members from Alberta Community Development as well as Aboriginal Affairs will work with First Nation communities to learn how they would like to proceed with the treatment, loan, or repatriation of sacred ceremonial objects as communities themselves wish. This is a very important principle, Madam Speaker, from the perspective of the aboriginal community. First of all, they have indicated that, whatever happens, with anything that is going to be repatriated, it must be taken with great care, that they have to be ready within the communities to be able to accept these objects once they have identified them and be able to ensure that they're going to be kept in a safe place. It's very, very important that whatever we do, we work with those communities and we continue to work in that vein. They feel that it's a very important concept in order for us to be able to move in that direction, and they'd like to see this done in the right way. Coming from an aboriginal community, I appreciate that fact. Many communities in my constituency have felt that whatever we do, we have to put those processes in place.

Finally, on January 14 the Premier committed this government to amending the Glenbow-Alberta Institute Act so that 251 Blackfoot sacred ceremonial objects could be completely repatriated to the Blood tribe, the Peigan Nation, and the Siksika Nation. The act does this, Madam Speaker, and I believe that with what has happened in the Peigan Nation – my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod has had some hand in that respect, and I know he'll want to speak on some of these issues. I think it's a very significant act that we're doing and what needs to be done in order for us to be able to continue to work with the First Nations and to work with the communities that are going to be affected by this act.

The sacred ceremonial objects in these institutions have for some time been part of two worlds, Madam Speaker, one of museums and collections and one still reflecting First Nations' traditions. We've had such great working relationships with some of these groups, and

they've also worked very closely with many of the First Nations. Examples would be the Provincial Museum of Alberta and the Glenbow. They've really worked very well with First Nations, and I commend them for the way they've been able to do the work that they've done to date, and I'm sure they'll ensure that they continue to work with the First Nations in the repatriation of these sacred objects.

By returning the sacred ceremonial objects, which are vital to the practice of traditional ceremonial life today, I believe Bill 2 sets us on a new and even more promising course in the year 2000, this millennium, Madam Speaker. I believe that Bill 2 certainly sets a course for aboriginal people.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I, too, rise today to speak in support of Bill 2. I think one thing we have to understand is that for those who practise or have any religious base or spiritual practice, there are certain elements that come with that. I think it's very important for the aboriginal community to be able to have in their possession those elements that are critical to the practice of their tradition and their faith. I guess I think it's akin to Catholics having Easter without Lent – some do, I suppose – or Communion without the Host or saying the Rosary without the rosary. Those are all things that are part of the Catholic tradition, and you possess those items in order to carry on with your faith or your religious practice. I think this is important for that purpose.

4:00

It's also important because over the last few years we've seen the First Nations communities going back to their traditional practices and introducing their young people to some of those practices. I think that's an essential component of this. I certainly have talked to many, many young aboriginal people who have no idea what the traditions and practices of their band or tribe are. I think it's important to be able to increase that awareness for the youth, and I think this particular bill will help to do that.

I think it's important to note that in the preamble, under what I would state as the set of principles, the items desired for return are those "that are vital to the practice of . . . sacred ceremonial traditions." That's important because there are a number of artifacts in museums across this country and certainly in this province. Some of those artifacts are artifacts that have come from a time that speaks to the history of this province. They may be First Nations artifacts, but they may not be critical or vital to the practice of the sacred ceremonial traditions. I think that's an important delineation, because some of those artifacts will in fact remain with the current museums and those places. So it's not an attempt to take all of those items which have been in the possession of different museums and galleries and give them all back to the community.

I would like – and I think it's important – to talk about this as an educational process for the young people. I would be interested in seeing the regulations tabled in the House – I guess I'm as curious as many people to know what the artifacts are – so that we may all be enlightened by the regulations and the schedules just for our own knowledge, and certainly they're then accessible in an easy manner to all Albertans. I think that would be important.

I notice that the process that's laid out under section 2 is laid out with ministerial control. I think that's one of the reasons I'd like to see the regulations tabled. Also, of course, I may have to just for tradition itself put through our amendment on Law and Regulations. That's a standard tradition in the House. I would be remiss as a

legislator and a member of the Official Opposition if I failed to do that. We're talking tradition here, and this is a long-established tradition that we have in this House. We'd like to do that. [interjections] Well, it may be sacred to the Official Opposition. In fact, democracy is sacred to us, and that's why we want to put those regulations on the table.

Maybe the hon. minister can commit to tabling the schedules and list those artifacts for us and tabling the regulations so we all know what they are. If, of course, the hon. minister isn't going to carry on the tradition of the government side and, you know, would like to convene a meeting of the Law and Regulations Committee, maybe it's time to break that tradition, and we could all sit down and have a look at those regulations.

Madam Speaker, with that I am very pleased to see this legislation come through. I think it's an important and historic moment in the Legislature in recognizing the spiritual needs of the aboriginal community, the First Nations community in this province.

The other thing that I think is important to recognize, Madam Speaker, is that ceremonial objects are important to different groups within certainly different cultures. It must be noted that these are artifacts of the First Nations community and that there is a difference between First Nations and the Metis community. Some of those traditions that are just assumed to be the same in fact are not. So I think that's an important part of all of this as well. Hopefully, this will provide an education to all members in the House and to all Albertans. Some of those delineations will be marked, and we will be much wiser for that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and fully support Bill 2, the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act. I have had considerable involvement with First Nations ceremonies and some of their traditions over the years, having lived in Fort Macleod and having had the Peigan Nation to the west of me and enjoying many of those people from the great Peigan Nation and also my association with the Blood tribe. I was pleased to see that the Blackfoot confederacy came forward with this whole idea of repatriation, and it was called the Blackfoot agreement.

Now, as I'm a representative of that area, I have the Blood tribe and the Peigan Nation in my constituency, and it has brought home a lot of those things that I learned as a young boy working with and dealing with both of those great nations. The whole idea of giving back the sacred ceremonial bundles or, as they're referred to in the act, objects – and I will refer to them as bundles – to the First Nations has a special significance. I think it's very, very important to note that our museums, the Glenbow particularly and our Provincial Museum, kept these bundles for several years and held them because of their value, and now they are in a position to be returned back to their appropriate places under the condition that they be kept in a safe place. That is probably the most important part of this bill, because they will be referred to for generations to come.

Inasmuch as it means something to everyone on both reserves, particularly the Peigans and the Bloods, it has great significance for seniors. It has tremendous significance for the young people who have not grown up in, as our aboriginals say, the old ways. But, more importantly, it has a greater benefit to the young people who are growing up, and they will have a true education on where they came from. Each and every one of us likes to look at our ancestors and our lineage. We like to know where we came from, and these

bundles definitely provide some of the secrets to the past of our great aboriginal nations.

4:10

Why is repatriation important? As I said, the bundles have meaning. Ceremonial bundles might not apply to today and they might not be necessary for the way of life, but originally they had a tremendous influence on the way of life of a particular aboriginal tribe. The bundles held significance. They held significance as far as wealth, as far as justice, as far as how a particular village might maintain its health. A ceremonial bundle also meant food, clothing, and shelter as it paved the way to go out and find the buffalo and push them over the edge. It also meant a lot about their transportation.

For health the bundles would contain certain objects that would provide secrets into certain herbs and certain plants that they could use to correct diseases amongst their people. In the justice bundles there would be certain objects that would pave the way of life for the people, and in their ceremonies they would use those objects to show what was right and what was wrong. The objects that came in children's bundles and youths' bundles would show a pattern of how the society developed and maintained itself.

As I said, the biggest things, of course, for any aboriginal tribe originally were food, clothing, and shelter. The spirit rock would be part of a bundle, and that would show the young runners exactly where the buffalo were. All of those things – food, clothing, and shelter – came from one thing, and that was the buffalo, and the buffalo was sacred to the aboriginal people. Back in the dog days – and that was before the coming of the white man and before the coming of horses and other modes of transportation – they would have bundles that would guide them on their journeys around the prairies that would offer them the food and the water and that type of thing. All of these bundles were of a ceremonial nature, but they also planned how a tribe would go through its fiscal year.

These bundles were representative of a way of life. Each portrayed by ceremony a decision and an action, and accumulatively they formed the basic symbols of how aboriginal people governed themselves, sustained their way of life, and maintained and controlled themselves as a society. All societies have basic principles and fundamental guides that help them form a firm foundation on which they continue to serve, build, survive, and sustain themselves, and although they were highly traditional, they meant a tremendous amount to the people. It guided them through life's journey, very, very similar to what we do today on this front bench with our department of health, our Department of Justice, our department of social services, our department of transportation, et cetera. They mean exactly the same things to us today as our symbols as what they did to aboriginal people.

Giving these bundles back to our aboriginal people is a great step in reaffirming our commitment to one society working together so that they can maintain and teach where they came from. I think this is the very basis of a very sound partnership. This is the very first step in a very sound partnership with First Nations communities. In my own region I know what Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and the interpretive centre there has done for fostering understanding and getting rid of cross-cultural differences. It has gained a respect between the two cultures to work together.

I would like to thank the members of the Peigan Nation and all of the elders, particularly Joe Crowshoe Sr. and his son Reg Crowshoe, for bringing me into contact with the significance of what these bundles have meant, and the chief and the councils of both the Peigan Nation and the Blood Nation. It is my hope that with the passage of this bill – and this is why I'm so supportive of it – we can

promote the living traditions of First Nations communities not only in my constituency but across the province. I believe that Bill 2 holds that potential and merits our support, and I wish all nations, when the repatriation is done, all the very best in securing those bundles in the name of the people that they represent.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was looking forward to the opportunity to join debate on Bill 2, a bill that I certainly support. It strikes me that Bill 2 represents something of a maturation in our community, that we've come to the point of recognizing how appropriate it is that these sacred ceremonial objects be in fact returned to First Nations. I think it's a very positive thing. The fact that we have schedules dealing with the Blood, Peigan, and Siksika nations is a very significant step. I'd like to acknowledge the role played not only by aboriginal leaders in this province but also by the Glenbow Institute in Calgary. The Glenbow has probably one of the largest collections of artifacts in North America, particularly when we're dealing with the First Nations who lived in what was this great prairie region of western Canada.

I think the Glenbow has provided some really instructive leadership in terms of their recognition of the importance of dealing with repatriation. I'm not sure it's always an easy thing for an institution that has a reputation like the Glenbow does and this vast, vast collection. You're focused always in terms of acquisition and building the collection and showing the collection. This is something very different to talk about, in fact taking elements of your collection and turning them back. So I appreciate that leadership that's been provided by the Glenbow.

4:20

The one concern I'd register as I look at it is that the minister has to agree. We don't know who the minister is going to be. It will be the minister designated under the Government Organization Act. But when you look at section 2 – and I won't get into a really detailed analysis now of the bill – what one sees there is:

- (1) A First Nation may apply to the Minister . . .
- (2) The Minister must agree to the repatriation . . . unless, in the Minister's opinion, repatriation would not be appropriate.

Now, there are absolutely no criteria set forward on which that minister should base this, exercise his discretion. I think it's a pretty fundamental rule of administrative law that you typically don't give an individual, a minister or an administrative official, just discretionary power without giving some guidelines, some elements, some tests to use when and how that discretion should be utilized. I always find it offensive when I see it in a bill. I'm not sure that the First Nations people of this province would like to think that a minister – a minister – can say yes or no. "I exercise my discretion; I choose not to exercise my discretion, but I don't have to tell anybody on what criteria, on what basis, I've used that discretion." It seems to me that it's offensive, because it flies in the face of a spirit of generosity that animates all the rest of this bill. Madam Speaker, help me figure this out. How is it that a bill that is such a terrific idea and that is probably so widely supported would have this sort of retrogressive step with a minister having all this discretion?

Now, I'm reminded that maybe regulations may address it. I see the chairman of the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations is here, and whenever I see the Member for Banff-Cochrane, it gladdens my heart to know that there's always a prospect that Law and Regulations may be activated. I'm hopeful that the minister will give this member a chance to wrestle with some of the regulations. You know, the minister who spoke to the bill earlier on I think in jest

had said: why would you want the regulations under this bill to be subject to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations? What better bill to do it? A bill that not just the people in this province look at but people across the country and perhaps even beyond. This is the kind of bill that makes you proud to be an Albertan; doesn't it, Madam Speaker? You see this bill, and it makes you think: hey, this is a terrific thing that we do in this province.

You know, I've not been known to always be lavish in my praise of the government. I perhaps have been accused of being parsimonious in my praise of positive things that the government in this province has done, but I've got to tell you that this is something I'm very happy to support. I'd like to make it even a little stronger. The Minister of Community Development, you know, the man responsible for the Human Rights Commission, I'll bet he's probably a little offended by that section 2 as well and the fact that this discretion is given to a minister without any criteria set out there. Maybe the Minister of Community Development will work with me. The Minister of Justice understands the problem with having unfettered discretion. Maybe we can develop a small cross-party caucus here to work at fixing the problem in section 2. If we could do that, we could take a bill that's darn good and make it closer to being perfect.

So section 2 has got two problems with it. The first one is that repatriation has to be appropriate in the minister's opinion, whatever the heck that means, and then it also has to be "in accordance with the regulations." Now, what that suggests is that even if the regulations are satisfied, the minister has some discretion over and above that. I don't think that's what was intended. When we had all of the aboriginal leaders in here, if you said to those men and women that we're going to do this repatriation but only if it meets the regulations, we have no idea of what's going to be in regulations, and over and above that it has to be the thing consented to by the minister – in other words, in the minister's opinion it's got to be appropriate – I think some people would say, well, that sounds a little paternalistic. That sounds like the whole thing we're trying to get away from with a bill like Bill 2, and, you know, we don't need to go back to all the things that Harold Cardinal has written about so powerfully and persuasively in Alberta. I think the First Nations people deserve to know what the rules are going to be, and if there's going to be a refusal by a minister and some discretionary power exercised, I think they're entitled, like all Albertans are entitled, to know what the criteria are going to be.

So, Madam Speaker, it's a very good bill, it's a bill I support, but I just serve notice on the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs that I think we have to deal with that discretion thing. Either we take it out altogether and just leave it at regulations, or we say that discretion can only be exercised on the basis of four or five criteria, A, B, C, D, whatever, and then we just have a much stronger bill.

I look forward to further debate on the bill, but those are the observations I wanted to register at this time. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I, too, endorse Bill 2, the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act. Speaking mostly in my capacity as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council, I would echo the Premier and many others in noting the significance that elders hold for First Nations society. During my review as chair of the First Nation court proposal submitted by the Tsuu T'ina First Nation and noting that the report has been accepted and is being implemented by this government, I came to appreciate from firsthand experience the respect paid toward their elders. I think very important was the role of the elders, for instance, in the

community-based peacekeeper component and the pride with which I saw them complying to carry out and develop this component with the expectation that this report would be accepted.

Elders, who may be seniors, definitely possess the wisdom, experience, and leadership that is so important to their people in many ways. For instance, the cultural and spiritual heritage of our indigenous peoples should be valued by all of us as citizens of this great country. We encourage and allow all immigrant groups to Canada to remember and practise the beliefs of their country of origin, and the same respect and appreciation for indigenous, or First Nations, cultures should also be given.

Also, I feel that we cannot undermine the significance of our roots and the importance of preservation and possession of traditional objects which are vital to the essence of indigenous cultures and which are necessary in supporting traditional values and building strong, confident First Nations communities. That is whether the cultural objects are presently housed in a museum or whether they have been identified within an archeological site.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The right of ownership of objects which signify tradition is the crux of the matter in this bill, Mr. Speaker. Ownership will enable elders and all members of the First Nation community to learn more about their roots and be able to stand taller with pride in that knowledge.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this legislation will enhance the ability of elders in the First Nations communities, as I've said, to pass along to new generations the legacy of aboriginal traditions and very much deserves our support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today as well to offer my support for Bill 2, the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act. You know, it occurs to me that in my time in this Legislature one of the things I've been doing is trying to bring forward the concerns that we as Albertans and as Canadians have with some of our history, some of our traditions, and just the way that we look at certain things. As examples, thanks to your office we now have hanging in this Chamber the flags of all the provinces and the various territories of this country, and I believe we're the first Chamber in the country to in fact do that. We have recently begun to sing the song *O Canada* on Mondays or on the first day of session in this Legislature, and I'm aware that the federal government in fact does it on Mondays, once a week, in their Legislature.

I guess the point I'm trying to make, Mr. Speaker, is that while we consider our history and our symbols very, very important, I don't think the First Nations peoples would be any different. In point of fact, just the nature of the title of this bill, where it talks about the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act, to the First Nations people gives even more importance to these objects than in fact our customs and history. I shouldn't say more importance, but at least the same level of importance as our history has to us.

So with that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the government has a strong commitment to supporting the First Nations communities and their long-standing traditional values on this. I think all sides of the Legislature at this point in time would agree with that. The only bone of contention that I would have today is listening to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo talking about the

regulations. When I read clause 5 within the bill, on regulations, it's very straightforward. It talks about "respecting the process and procedures." It talks about "respecting who is to represent a First Nation for any purpose relating to the repatriation" of these objects. It talks about "respecting the consultations with a First Nation that must be completed for the purpose of section 2(3)."

Well, 2(3), Mr. Speaker, simply says that "repatriation may occur . . . only after consultations"; in other words, with agreement. I really don't have a problem with this. I think it shows a great deal of respect from both sides of the argument; as an example, the Glenbow Museum, which I understand is more than happy to give up these objects at this stage of the game to their rightful owners and to the people that it means the most to. When I look at the regulations, they certainly show that same kind of respect, and I'm hoping for co-operation down the road to ensure that all this happens.

Thank you very much for your time, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make a couple of points. As has been indicated, we're going to support fast passage, or quick passage, of the bill because we believe it's the right thing to do, but I think there are a couple of questions. On one I have to admit to some ignorance. I'm not quite sure how the Crown obtained title to a lot of the artifacts that are referred to in the bill. I have experience with a few. If they were acquired in a manner where they were items that were just taken by collectors and then donated to museums or were objects that were actively sought by museums in native communities and then incorporated into museum collections, I think somehow or other that title, that ownership should be made explicit.

I think the bill is a part of the evolution along the way to a huge change in perspective vis-a-vis other people and other cultures. I look back, for instance, at the treatment of aboriginals in the textbooks that have been used in this province for the last 50 years, where aboriginals and other cultures were really treated as museum pieces. If you look at the treatment of the Japanese, if you look at the treatment of the Inuit, if you look at the treatment of people from other lands – in fact, some of the books used to be entitled: children in other lands. They were presented as if they were museum pieces, and most of us, I would suspect, can remember having outlines of Dutch wooden shoes and natives in traditional garb being given to us for colouring or for pasting into social studies books. But there's been a huge shift in perspective away from the kind of paternalistic Eurocentric view of the world that was embodied in those textbooks and that reflected what I think the general view of those people was in society, and this is all to the good, of course.

I, too, looked at the bill and questioned not the regulations but section 2(2). I think that if I were in the native community, it's the section of the bill that I might like the Legislature to revisit and maybe amend, because section 2(2) says, "The Minister must agree to the repatriation of a sacred ceremonial object unless, in the Minister's opinion, repatriation would not be appropriate." So we still have that power residing in the Crown to decide whether or not it's appropriate for an object to be repatriated, and I wondered if that's the spirit of this legislation. I would be interested, before the bill passes out of committee and is finally passed, if someone from the government side would comment on that particular provision, because it does seem to be a throwback to the notion that somehow or other we are letting the native community, the aboriginal community, have objects, but we will be the ones that will make the determination under which conditions they can have their own possessions.

With those comments, I look forward to some clarification from the government side. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make a few supporting comments, obviously, with respect to Bill 2, the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act, as this particular area falls under the responsibility of my ministry. I'd like to point out a couple of things that happened, as the Premier pointed out, during a signing ceremony for the Blackfoot agreement, which becomes verified within this bill, back on January 14 of this year.

The museums work very hard to preserve these sacred ceremonial objects over time so that today, when the time is right, we can move forward in a positive, improving relationship with our First Nations peoples. Museums like the Provincial Museum and indeed the Glenbow help us to teach about the proud history and the traditions of the aboriginal peoples, all aboriginal peoples, and we must look at this repatriation in this overall context. In fact, I was very pleased to learn from the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake that she was able to join eight elders from treaties 6, 7, and 8 to take part in a pipe ceremony blessing this legislative initiative before first reading. But the important thing is that while this historic ceremony went on inside the learning circle of the Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture at the Provincial Museum, schoolchildren watched and visited surrounding exhibits. What better way to bring a melding of the two cultures and an understanding.

Working in partnership with First Nations communities, museums need real and historical artifacts to do just this kind of work, yet this government and this minister also believe that museums should not extend their role to the point of holding sacred ceremonial objects vitally important to the practice of First Nations ceremonial life.

As Minister of Community Development I was interested to learn about a story that goes back a few years, from the making of the Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture at the Provincial Museum. In a planning meeting for the gallery one member of the aboriginal advisory committee observed that perhaps the elders of a few decades ago had shown great foresight by putting sacred ceremonial objects in museums. He didn't mean this simply in the sense that it would preserve these objects. He meant this in the sense that the elders had created an enduring relationship between aboriginal peoples and museums. I think this in fact is the case and that we've gone one step further, to where we're going to be working to bring them back. Not many people know how far some of those efforts went. In fact, in what is perhaps the only such example in North America some medicine pipes and bundles were transferred to the Provincial Museum in accordance with Blackfoot ceremonial traditions.

4:40

Regardless how sacred ceremonial objects came into museums, though, they left communities at a difficult and trying time for First Nations peoples. Today, as First Nations regain their vitality in so many ways, we can honour the elders of an earlier generation and make that story come full circle. The First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act will bridge the gap between the educational and preservation roles of museums and what First Nations communities need today. With this act we can all work together to protect sacred ceremonial objects for generations to come, and we can ensure that they continue to play their role in the living traditions of First Nations people.

Some of the speakers went on, Mr. Speaker, about regulations and so on. I might point out that we hope to keep regulations minimal,

and they will be created in consultation with the First Nations people to whom they apply. The whole key to this repatriation is that we currently have these articles in our trust and will return them upon request of the appropriate representatives from the First Nations peoples.

There is also a desire to table schedules. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, other than the Blackfoot agreement, which has some 251 objects identified – we will table that schedule in the House; that's not a problem – we don't have them identified because they haven't been properly identified. That will take time, and that's where the consultation with the First Nations people is extremely important.

I would say that this is a bill that's entered into in good faith. I'm very pleased to see that there is support from both sides of the House for this particular bill, and I look forward to seeing us go ahead with the passing of it. As we go on with this bill, it will go a long way to meld an even stronger positive relationship between the First Nations people of Alberta, the people in general, and indeed the museums with whom they work so closely.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour this afternoon to stand and address the issues of Bill 2, the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act. I spent quite a number of years when I was at the University of Lethbridge working with the First Nation communities of western Canada and in fact all of Canada. We developed a number of curriculum- and issue-directed learning materials for the First Nation communities in co-operation with the First Nation communities. One of the things that came up in a number of discussions we were having over the development of tourism alternatives and tourism options for some of the First Nation communities was that very awareness, that a lot of the really important parts of their community, the sacred objects of their community, were not in their possession and not under their control. This act will now go a long way to addressing those issues.

I know that some of the materials, because of the practice that the First Nation community has, may not end up being on public display in the same way that they were in a public museum. Still, they'll be now returned to the First Nation community to deal with as is appropriate for the object they're dealing with. For some of them this will now mean that potentially they may not be as publicly available for the rest of us Canadians, but it's important in the end that these objects, which mean so much to these communities, be used, be handled, be exhibited, if necessary or if appropriate, under the guidance and under the wishes of those First Nation communities.

Mr. Speaker, there's only one comment I'd like to make with respect to the process. That is that in discussions with many of those First Nation communities we would talk about how the objects came into the possession of the nonnative community as we were dealing with them. In a lot of cases families or elders transferred those materials or those bundles to a member of the Canadian community through a process of trying to achieve a means of supporting themselves. In other words, they were sold because it was necessary for the well-being of the individual's family a lot of times.

Now, what I would like to suggest, as these items are repatriated by the First Nation community, is that we as the Alberta holders of those objects look in some way at recognizing the family or clan from which those objects originally came. What in effect is happening now is that an object that was under the control of an individual family or a clan may now be transferred to the control specifically of the band, the tribe, or the nation, and if some

mechanism is not there to recognize the history of it, I hope that that is taken into consideration.

It's also important to note the precedent that gets set with this kind of action. I think it goes a long ways now to increasing the ability that we as Canadians and non First Nation members have of understanding the significance that these items mean to them. These are the same kinds of things that we value in our culture and in our processes, like our Mace here, the things we do, the objects we have in our churches. This provides almost a sense of coming home to the First Nations community.

So, Mr. Speaker, just with those few comments I would like to congratulate the staff and members of our museum community and members of the government but most of all the members of the First Nation communities for taking the initiative to open negotiations and in effect get back in their community the items that belong to them.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

Bill 1

Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act

[Adjourned debate February 23: Dr. Massey]

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to add my endorsement and support to Bill 1 today. This is a bill that clearly sets Alberta apart. It stakes a claim for our province, and it makes a definitive statement about where we are headed.

Bill 1 is something that represents a major step forward for Alberta in our efforts to become a major force in the new knowledge-based economy and a recognized global leader in science, research, and technology. This bill reflects Albertans' pioneering spirit. I believe it was best summed up a few weeks ago as the Lieutenant Governor was reflecting on the very nature of Albertans, when she stated:

Albertans are confident, confident in their province, in their ability to succeed, and in the strength of their province. Albertans are entrepreneurial people who believe that citizens should have the freedom to pursue their goals. They also value innovation and are not afraid to take risks or try new ideas if the goal of these actions is worth while.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 is about innovation and confidence in our abilities now and in the future. The legacy which Bill 1 creates is one more way we are going to show that we are pioneers and to truly open new worlds of opportunity for our children and our grandchildren. The bill we have before us creates the new Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research, a \$500 million endowment, which is a substantial investment – and I stress investment – in the prosperous future of our province. If provincial finances permit, an additional \$100 million will be added to the fund each year for the next five years, meaning the endowment fund could possibly be worth \$1 billion by the province's centennial of 2005. There's no doubt this permanent endowment creates a legacy for our children and grandchildren, as it will enable Albertans to launch a whole new age of innovation.

4:50

The Premier and his government recognize that innovation will be the key to prosperity in the 21st century. This endowment will help us attract investment, recruit top researchers from around the world, and give our young people at universities and colleges the chance to train with some of the best minds in science using the latest technologies. Every industry in this province will benefit from this

endowment: from farming, which is so important in my constituency, to forestry, to energy, to information and communications technology, to the environment, to biotechnology, and of course health.

No other province has a fund quite like this. This endowment is an investment in Alberta's strong science and engineering base in our postsecondary institutions throughout our province and in the industrial sector. It is also a vital part of the province's strategy and commitment to build the province's emerging knowledge-based economy. It builds on the recommendations of the Alberta Science and Research Authority to grow the knowledge-based economy from 7 percent to 25 percent of our GDP and to grow the research and development currently occurring in Alberta to \$3 billion by the year 2010. The recommendations of the 1998 Growth Summit and the 1999 Roundtable on University Research both recognize the need and call for the creation of an endowment for science and engineering.

Through minisummits in my own constituency of Wetaskiwin-Camrose the need for research initiatives was frequently mentioned and encouraged. Many in my constituency concluded that stable, long-term funding for research and development is critical to long-term sustainable prosperity in the new century. Bill 1 is this government's response to that call.

This endowment fund will be modeled after the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, that was established in the year 1980. The government originally invested \$300 million in that endowment fund, which is estimated to be worth over \$1 billion today and has been an outstanding success and has made us a world-recognized leader in the field of medical research. In the year 2000 the fund will generate over \$39.5 million in direct funding for medical research here in our province. Experience with the medical research fund shows that every fund dollar invested can be expected to attract another \$2 to \$3 from other sources.

That's great news, Mr. Speaker, as I have every belief that the new science and engineering fund will be used to lever even more research and development dollars from the federal government and, of course, from the private sector. That kind of leverage of external dollars is a significant vote of confidence in the value of research.

Speaking of confidence, I'd like to share some comments from some well-known individuals in international circles. As you know, last November the Premier announced the appointment of the External Advisory Council on Information and Communications Technology. It consists of some very respected people in the world of research and technology, all ex-Albertans and alumni of the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. Two of them, Dr. James Gosling, the inventor of Java, and Dr. Richard Taylor, a Nobel laureate in physics from Stanford University, have made some interesting comments. I quote first of all from Dr. Taylor. He states:

Over the last 50 years, many new and profitable industries have grown up near universities where such excellence in the quest for new knowledge is common. I applaud the efforts of the Government of Alberta for this and other recent initiatives designed to move the province ahead in this technological world.

To quote Dr. Gosling, he says:

This is amazing. Much of the current prosperity in the United States can be traced back to visionary long term funding of research in the 70s and 80s that led to modern booms in materials, computers and the internet. In a similar way, by creating this new fund, the Government of Alberta is sowing the seeds of future discoveries that, based in Alberta, will bring prosperity for years to come. Bottom line – the creation of the Science and Engineering Fund by the Government of Alberta is a wonderful thing. Its encouragement of the development and commercialization of new technologies will add a new dimension to Alberta's economy. In the years to come it will leave a legacy of prosperity that will benefit all Albertans.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, this endowment will benefit all Albertans. These quotes illustrate the response that is coming from the international community, and I believe Albertans are expressing their full support as well.

Again I want to thank the Premier, the Minister of Innovation and Science, and all my colleagues for their support and vision in bringing this bill forward. This is a proud day for all Albertans, and I encourage every member of this Assembly to proudly support second reading of Bill 1.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's amazing that a government that could bring in Bill 11 could also bring in Bill 1. In Bill 1 we have an example of a government doing the right thing, and unfortunately I can't say that about Bill 11. I'd also say that with Bill 1 we have an example of truth in advertising. It's called the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act, and of course when you read the bill, what you find is that it will establish this foundation with an endowment of half a billion dollars and it will carry on some good works. Again if you contrast that with Bill 11, it's called the Health Care Protection Act, which is of course exactly the opposite of what Bill 11 really is.

Mr. Speaker, what I will say about Bill 1 is that when I heard the minister speaking to the press and when I heard the Premier introducing the legislation in this Assembly, I was reminded of other debates that we've had in the Chamber, including of course the science, research, and information technology budget estimates debate from February of 1998.

I think that if members go back and review the *Hansard* of those debates, they'll find an interesting dialogue that in part took place in an exchange between myself and the minister. Part of that dialogue had to do with this notion of the creation of a maximum wage economy as opposed to focusing on a minimum wage economy. I was flattered because after making those comments about the maximum wage economy, the minister pulled me aside. He said: you know, that's a really good line; I'm going to use it and I'm going to use it without attribution, so I hope you don't mind. But whenever you hear me talking from now on about how science and technology is going to be the leverage that Albertans will use to catapult themselves into the future and the creation of this maximum wage economy, he said, you can smile a little smile to yourself.

So, of course, Mr. Speaker, I have, and I've been watching the minister to see whether or not he's been pursuing that agenda, and I have to congratulate him, because there are some bold initiatives that are coming out of that minister's shop, including this target of increasing the role of science and technology in Alberta's economy. At present somewhere between 6 and 8 percent of our provincial GDP comes about as a direct result of science and information. The government's stated goal is to raise that to fully 25 percent. One dollar in every four that is created in this province will come out of that sector. I'd like to work in my capacity to help assist that goal to the best of my ability, and I think supporting Bill 1 is at least one positive step that I can take in that regard.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, the role of science and technology and engineering can't be overstated. For so very long in this province wealth has often been quantified as something that has happened as a result of either something that we've extracted from the land or something that we grow on top of it. Wealth has been seen as something that comes to us because of our natural resources. What has really

played second fiddle to that is a conception of wealth creation as something that comes about as a result of our people, something that happens because of some neural activity between the ears, or something that has happened because we recognize that funding things like university research is an investment in the truest sense.

So to see the government as part of its policy move towards creating this endowment that's in part modeled after the very, very successful Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research shows me that this government, in spite of some evidence to the contrary, can from time to time wander across a really good idea and implement it in a way that I think all Albertans can be proud of. Now, of course, the example of the medical foundation is a good one, because it talks about peer review and being international in focus and status and really being cutting edge, and I know that we can count on exactly the same kind of orientation for this new foundation.

Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of concerns about this foundation. First of all, it concerns me that the government may be looking at the creation of this foundation as something that they can point to and say: see, we're serious about supporting science and research. They may look at this foundation and say: look, here's an example; we've done what we can do in terms of supporting basic research. And that would be a shame. I mean, I hope that this foundation doesn't become in any way any kind of a political touchstone, other than to give credit to the government where credit is due.

The creation of this foundation does not address the tuition crisis that's affecting Alberta's postsecondary institutions. Just here in Edmonton this last week the University of Alberta had to raise tuition over 6 percent. Students are graduating with degrees from university with debts equivalent to a mortgage, Mr. Speaker. I don't think the government can be proud of its track record in addressing tuition pressures.

So I would say as a challenge to the government: you've done the right thing when you've made money available for science and research through this foundation and attracting world-class researchers, but let's remember that we want to attract these men and women to facilities that we can be equally proud of, to postsecondary institutions where the library resources and the laboratory resources are second to none, not second class. We want to make sure that when these scientists from all over the world come to Alberta to further innovate and to refine their science, they will be attracted to universities, for example, that will be competitive in their salary structures and able to retain these scholars beyond simply the terms of their foundation-funded research.

Mr. Speaker, the government is also challenged by its policies of the past; you know, when Alberta advanced education institutions were hit with those 20 percent across-the-board cuts. We see that we still haven't recovered, and there are lots of ways that you can measure that. We can look at library collections and periodical subscriptions, and we can look at retention of tenured faculty. We can look at innovations and patents and see that we have lost some ground. So while I'm very, very positive and want to be sincerely congratulatory to the government when it comes to the creation of the foundation, I do issue these challenges and these cautions to the government to please be as farsighted with the overall support of advanced education as they have demonstrated they can be with the creation of this foundation.

Mr. Speaker, I have another suggestion for the government when it comes to the foundation, and that is that I hope the minister will make sure that he does everything in his power to see to it that this foundation supports primary research first and foremost, that we don't look at this simply as another vault full of money that can be used to commercialize existing research or that can somehow be used as backdoor venture capital. Not that venture capital isn't an

important issue that needs to be addressed, but frankly, I think it's more of an issue for the Provincial Treasurer than it is for the Minister of Innovation and Science.

Some strategic changes to tax policy, some leveraging of government activities when it comes to managing government-controlled investment funds I think would go a long way towards making more venture capital available to Alberta-based companies and scientists. So I'm not diminishing the need for venture capital. I'm just saying that that should not be the use of this foundation.

I'm also hoping, of course, that when this government looks at that continuum of science from the idea finally through to application of the outcome of research, they make sure there is a weighting towards the discovery of new knowledge here in Alberta and then leave it to the private sector, because I believe it's really the private sector's role to figure out ways to commercially exploit this new knowledge. We have to get back to a position where we value learning for learning's sake, Mr. Speaker. We have to get back to a position where we understand that the value of knowledge is really in its discovery, and the wonder of knowledge is then in its sharing. The public good, of course, is best served when the government puts public money in at that very front end, at that primary level, and then creates policies that make it attractive for private capital to come into this process when it comes to, as I say, the application.

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of other comments that I'll share at this point in second reading. In reading the legislation, I was pleased to see that there's going to be a board selected. In fact, just today in the mail I received correspondence, as I believe all members may have received correspondence inviting them to submit names of potential board members. I'm hoping that, of course, this board selection and appointment process will be arm's length, that the government won't taint this foundation at the get-go by hand-picking individuals who may be friendly to the government.

The one thing that we know, Mr. Speaker, is that science in its truest form, of course, is apolitical, and there are many, many examples in history of when government tries to control, corral, and direct science for political purposes, and I think the dangers are well known to most members. So I'm hoping that the appointment process will stay arm's length. I'm hoping that it won't be seen as a political process, and I'm hoping that the government will see this as an opportunity to engage all Albertans in something that's very exciting and not simply those Albertans who may define themselves first and foremost by the party membership card they carry in their hip pocket.

Mr. Speaker, a couple of other concerns about the board. The number of people on the board may or may not be an appropriate number, and I think that there's a series of opinions that could be offered on that. The issue is not necessarily with the absolute number but in the complement of individuals that fill out those numbers. I note that agrologists and engineers are the only two named scientific groups that will be appointed. Well, I have nothing against agrologists or engineers, but you know, we have IT professionals and we have a number of other scientists who could be appointed. Perhaps in Alberta, considering our close history with natural resources, we would want to look at somebody with an environmental specialty being on the board. While I understand that that could also be an engineer, my reading of the legislation is that the engineer that will be selected on the board will be a member of the engineering profession that will be selected by the government, not by the profession. So maybe we'll have a chance, when we come to committee, to take a look at specifying some other individuals representing other specialties who may be named to be on the board.

5:10

I'm going to now argue the other side of the coin as well, Mr. Speaker, because not only would I be looking for some other

specialties being named to be on the board, but I take a look at the section that allows for up to six other men or women to be appointed to the board. I question: why isn't it specified that some of those six be members of the general public, be Albertans from any other walk of life perhaps than from a scientific walk of life, be a constituent of mine or yours who has an abiding interest in the future of this province and a willingness to contribute but who doesn't have a particular specialty? I think that perspective would be very valuable. I think a member or two of the lay public on this board would be exceedingly valuable. I always marvel at the sage advice that my constituents provide me in my day-to-day work. I know that whether or not they have a specialty or a specialized knowledge in the area that we may be chatting about, they have a clarity of vision about what it is that concerns them on the issue, and I think we can see that same clarity brought to bear when it comes to this newly formed foundation. I mean, after all, no matter how you cut it, this foundation is going to be backstopped with 500 million taxpayers' dollars. So why not have a couple of ordinary taxpayers sitting around the table when investment decisions are being made? I use the term investment decisions quite on purpose, because, first of all, there'll be the management of the endowment, and then there'll be the investment of the income from that endowment when it comes to making decisions on what projects or initiatives are funded and which ones are not.

Mr. Speaker, a couple of other general comments about the fund. While I note that the fund is going to be a new feature, I hope that there will be some formal relationship with the board and the activities of the foundation for medical research. Sometimes it's not a broad, well-defined line but a rather narrow and fuzzy line between what might be considered basic science research and what might be considered life signs or health research. So I think those two foundations are going to have to work together, and I would like to see some thinking going into how those relationships are going to be defined.

In addition, I would like to see a document perhaps coming out of the minister's department which will clearly outline the role and relationship of all of the players in Alberta's research and scientific community. We have private-sector research. We have public-sector research right now going on in many places. We have hospital-based research. We have the AHFMR program, and of course we have all of Alberta's postsecondary institutions. So I think that array of research-focused organizations demands that there be something on paper that talks about how they're going to work together, what their relationships will be, and how conflicts, if any should arise, will be resolved.

An additional point that I'd like to make is on the role of the Alberta Research Council. Of course, the Alberta Research Council has its own board, and it's going through its own transitions and has much more of a business orientation today than it had certainly just a year ago or a year before that.

While I'm, generally speaking, a fan of the Alberta Research Council, particularly in terms of its heritage in this province, I must say that I'm increasingly hearing voices raising concerns about the current and future role of the Alberta Research Council.

I've had comments from scientists in this province that tell me that the Research Council is somehow getting altogether too much attention to the detriment of other research-led organizations. I'm also hearing, Mr. Speaker, that there are scientists who are also businessmen and businesswomen in this province who believe that the Alberta Research Council stands as a competitor to them in both what they do in terms of research and also in terms of what they do when they are trying to add value to that research, when they go to commercialize what it is they've discovered at the laboratory bench.

So while we're creating this new player, this new foundation, I would hate to see this new foundation just sort of get thrown into the mix without some more clarity and some refining of the role of what already does exist. I've had an opportunity to speak with some of the men and women involved with ARC. I know they're aware of the concerns, and I know they're sensitive to them. I know they want to alleviate the concerns, but they also want a chance to make their case and make it crystal clear what it is they're up to and what it is they're trying to accomplish with their particular orientation in their business plan.

I in no way would purport to speak for the ARC, but I know that they are people of good intent and goodwill, and I want to make sure that they have the opportunity to make expressly clear what it is they're up to. I also know that they will listen to these voices of concern, and to the extent possible they will correct their way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HERARD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure indeed to stand and speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act. I can say that I've had more calls about this act than I have had on the health protection act, which is kind of interesting. The constituents of Calgary-Egmont believe, as does their government, that the future of Alberta will depend on the ability to innovate and improve on approaches to business, education, health care, and just about every other area that affects our daily lives. We must be alert to changes in the global economy and be quick to ensure that Alberta becomes and remains competitive within all of its changing and emerging industries. We must ensure that Alberta remains the best place in Canada, indeed in the world to do business and call home.

Now, remember that in the throne speech Albertans have always been confident, innovative, self-reliant, and entrepreneurial people. We've never been afraid of hard work or making changes to how we look at and interact with the world. I think it made it very clear that the world of new technology and the knowledge industry are part of the new economy and will receive the attention that this sector deserves. Albertans are leaders, Mr. Speaker, a fact which is both celebrated and relied upon in our bold new plans for the future of this province.

There's also been a report issued on the implementation of a new economic strategy for our province. Part of this strategy involves Alberta's maturation into a global leader in information and communications technology and in conducting leading-edge research. We have heard for many years about the brain drain that is happening across Canada, despite the denial of our federal government, a brain drain with a postal code and an address somewhere in the United States. Here in Alberta we're now well on our way to a brain gain strategy by taking steps to ensure that Alberta is competitive and attractive to both businesses and professionals

5:20

One of the most important strategies contained this year is the creation of the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research. Here, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the minister responsible for making this foundation a reality for Alberta. This action will surely be recognized by future Albertans as the initiative that put Alberta on the R and D map of success for the 21st century.

Created with an initial investment of \$500 million, this endowment fund recognizes the power and value of knowledge for Alberta's future. It will attract investors, researchers, and graduate

students to our universities. It will give Alberta students the ability to tap into some of the finest minds in the world and to be mentored by those specialists. It will assist in the expansion of Alberta's knowledge-based economic sector. It will assist in halting the brain drain and turning it into a brain gain for our province. Not only will we encourage more bright and talented Albertans to stay, but we'll also encourage talents from across the globe to come to our province as well.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, in light of the hour I would move

that the Assembly do adjourn until 8 this evening, at which time we will reconvene in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion put forward by the hon. Government House Leader, would all members in favour please say yes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of AlbertaTitle: **Monday, March 6, 2000****8:00 p.m.**

Date: 00/03/06

head: Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order. In the Assembly will be the Provincial Treasurer, and upstairs in 512 will be Justice and Attorney General. So if committee B could please find their way upstairs.

[The committee met as subcommittees A and B from 8:01 p.m. to 10:04 p.m.]

MR. TANNAS: Madam Chairman, subcommittee B of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Justice and Attorney General, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Having heard the report of subcommittee B, all those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Carried.

MR. SEVERTSON: Madam Chairman, subcommittee A of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the department of Treasury, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On the report, all those agreed, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. It's carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report progress on the estimates under consideration for the Provincial Treasurer and for Justice and Attorney General, and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. TANNAS: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the department of Treasury, subcommittee A, and the Department of Justice and Attorney General, subcommittee B, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the report, are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given the progress that's been made on government business today and the wonderful work that's been done on the estimates tonight, I would move that we do now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 10:07 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Provincial Treasurer, Monday, March 6, 2000

Date: 00/03/06

Time: 8:01 p.m.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Subcommittee A – Provincial Treasurer

Gordon, Judy, Chairman
Severtson, Gary, Deputy Chairman
Bonner, Bill
Boutilier, Guy
Burgener, Jocelyn
Cao, Wayne
Cardinal, Mike

Ducharme, Denis
Dunford, Clint
Friedel, Gary
Hierath, Ron
Jacques, Wayne
Johnson, LeRoy
Klapstein, Albert

Lougheed, Rob
Marz, Richard
Pannu, Raj
Sapers, Howard
Smith, Murray
Wickman, Percy

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. We'll proceed with the Provincial Treasurer and the department of Treasury. I just might mention something that one might consider. I did have the opportunity the other night to chair a meeting in 512, and it was the Minister of Economic Development. The way we worked it – and it worked very well; I think everyone would agree – the members that wished to ask questions took their time and the minister actually answered their questions within the 20 minutes and then they started again. It worked very, very well, and I thought a lot of the questions were answered. Those who were in attendance at that meeting, did you think it worked well? It's just an idea.

With that I will call upon the hon. Provincial Treasurer to lead off the debate.

MR. DAY: Thanks, Madam Chairman, especially for those who have packed the galleries tonight.

MR. MAR: The seat is jammed.

MR. DAY: My colleague the Minister of Environment said, "The seat is jammed" . . . with four people.

I would just like to advise members, though I don't think they need the advisement, that of course the estimates of the department are like the estimates done with every department. This is not a presentation of the entire government business plan. This is the estimates and the involvement of the Treasury Department. Its scope of activities is wide, covering everything from the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research endowment fund; the Alberta heritage savings trust fund investment practices and protocols; the Alberta heritage scholarship fund; the Alberta risk management fund; issues to do with the Alberta Insurance Council; the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation; the Alberta Pensions Administration Corporation; the Alberta Securities Commission; the Alberta Government Telephones Commission; the Alberta Treasury Branches, albeit arm's length from government; the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation; and on it goes.

The breadth is considerable, Madam Chairman, and the responsibility also that Treasury officials play in working with every department of the government in terms of helping them to monitor and account for the revenues and the expenditures; then the reporting that is involved with Treasury Board in terms of the ongoing workings of government on a month-to-month basis, day-to-day basis at times; the involvement in putting together the quarterly reports, which is really like minibudget preparation, every 90 days and is a vital part of the ongoing operation and reporting of the overall government business plan.

The ministry itself expects to bring in an increase in revenue

overall this year of about \$674 million over the '99-2000 budget, yet program expenses continue to decline, with decreases of \$36 million, or about 5.3 percent, for the '99-2000 budget and down \$17 million, or 2.5 percent, from the forecast. Debt-servicing costs are down by \$109 million, 10.1 percent, for the '99-2000 budget and \$59 million from the forecast.

Ministry capital investment is also decreasing by about 21.4 percent. So there's the ongoing maintenance and overview and the work that goes on with all the departments in terms of maintaining the government business plan and doing that in a way that I believe continues to be seen as fiscally responsible.

I can say that I don't mind at all just reflecting a sentence or two on those who at times probably feel like it's a sentence working in the department, with the demands that are put on the many employees in the department of Treasury, the reflection from outside. It's all fine and well to talk amongst yourselves about how well you think you're doing or performing, but the toughest criticism come from those outside, and I consistently and continually get reports from those outside of government who for whatever reason deal with the Treasury Department who report on their high level of commitment, of professionalism, of dedication, and excellence. I also hear that from other provinces when we work on, for instance, finance ministers' meetings with other provinces and with the federal government, and I'd just like to acknowledge that publicly.

Many of the officials that I work with in the department, it is as if they don't own clocks or watches. They work early in the morning and late at night. Whatever the task is that needs to be done gets accomplished and always with that high degree of excellence. I publicly commend the employees, the public servants, in the Treasury Department for the high level of commitment to task in serving Albertans.

I could go on at some length, Madam Chairman, and I know members would want me to, but I want to give time for Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition and of course my own colleagues who have, I'm sure, many things to add to the overview and advice. It's an important time in the Assembly to hear from our critics and from those who would also constructively support and give us advice on how better even to manage the estimates in the year ahead of this department of Treasury and that which we have spent over the past year.

So with that I would yield the floor to the official critic and to others who may feel so moved, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Chairman. Thanks to the Treasurer for being uncharacteristically brief. I appreciate that.

The department of Treasury does provide us with a rather interesting smorgasbord of issues in terms of the responsibilities of the Provincial Treasurer and the men and women who toil in his department. I'd like to echo some of the first remarks of the

Treasurer regarding the service of the public servants in Treasury. I know that they are called above and beyond the call of duty to do work, and I can only imagine what it would be like working with this particular minister.

You know, Mr. Minister, I actually had a very pointed comment to make about the experience during the 1997 election campaign when Treasury officials were called upon to do some work that was political. Having said all these nice things, though, about the staff there, I won't make the comment in the pointed way that I had originally intended, but I will ask this. I remind the Treasurer that a commitment was made in writing, I believe, that there would be some investigation and follow-up on that suggestion or that allegation, and I don't think that any report has come forward.

I also note at the same time that the number of full-time equivalent positions in Treasury is slated to increase to over 740 positions. I think it's an increase of some 50 or 60 FTEs this year. As we get closer to an election, certainly closer to one than we are to the last one, you can imagine how the imagination of an opposition member would run wild about the increase in FTEs, given the experience in the '97 election. So I wouldn't mind if the Treasurer did comment, in fact, on that increase in person power in his department.

I have some particular questions regarding growth in the Alberta Securities Commission. I know that it's going to be about a 16 or 20 percent increase in personnel in the commission, and while I understand that a fair bit of this activity may be because of the increased economic activity in Alberta, the number of individuals and corporations who are relying on the commission to bring offerings to the table, et cetera, I have to say to the Treasurer – and I would appreciate his reflections on this.

Increasingly over this last year I've been hearing from members of the Alberta business community about the frustrations they have in working with the commission. One gentleman in my office just the other day referred to it as the Bre-X chill. What he meant by that was that ever since Bre-X, it seems to be very difficult to carry on the legitimate work of bringing a company public, and he was talking about increased levels of bureaucracy and red tape and costs and compliance issues.

I'm not going to for a moment suggest that we shouldn't be vigilant, and I'm not going to for a moment suggest that we have to do everything possible to make sure that scandals do not rock particularly this new exchange that we've got going here in western Canada and going at some great pace as well, something for us all to be proud of, but I do want to hear the Treasurer's comment on these concerns that have been raised, and I wonder aloud whether he's heard the same concerns and if he has some suggestions on what he may do through his department and through whatever influence he does have with the Securities Commission in terms of resolving the concerns of excess bureaucracy, red tape, compliance conditions, et cetera.

8:11

Now, I will note that as we've mentioned last year and the year before that, there is some information lacking in the Treasury business plans. Once again there's no information in the plans for 2001 through to 2003 for the gross operating expenses and capital investments by program vote and by subprogram vote. The last time this was provided was actually the 1995 budget, and I believe every year since then the critic for the Liberal opposition has asked the Treasurer to explain that change in presentation and transparency and the subprogram votes. We're faced again with the same issue.

Now, to assist the Treasurer in answering the question, let me say that one of the issues is that there's no comparability year to year when you don't have it broken out by subprogram vote. Also, if you

don't have the estimates of the ministry with the consolidated income statement, you can't really hold the minister responsible for in-program spending variance.

Now, I will note that other ministries do provide a comparison of operating expense by program and subprogram over the three years of their business plan, and it occurs to me that Treasury really should be the trendsetter here. Let me say this. As often as I will criticize the government for what I see as failings in transparency, I will say that things have gotten better over the years and that I believe this Treasurer is sincere when he says he wants to be as open as possible. He and I may quibble about what the boundaries of "as possible" may be. While I will appreciate that efforts have been made, I will say that I would look to Treasury to set the example. If other departments can do these estimates, provide the comparisons by program and subprogram, I would expect Treasury could do the same.

In order to emphasize the government's commitment to three-year fiscal planning, it would certainly be advisable to present comparable three-year projections for Alberta Treasury in the main estimates and the three-year ministry income statement found under the business plan, as I say, as is the case in all other departments.

Now, in the Treasurer's comments to follow, I hope he'll explain why Alberta Treasury business plan still does not provide a three-year expense profile by program and subprogram. I'm also hoping the Treasurer will assist readers of the business plans and estimate books to compare gross operating expenses by program and subprogram within the ministry over a three-year time frame by providing a three-year spending profile of the department by program area for the years 2001 and 2002. Mr. Treasurer, what I mean by this is: operating expenses and capital investment, again, broken down by program and subprogram.

I'm also hoping the Treasurer will provide information on the plans for the full-time equivalents in the department of Treasury, the Alberta Pensions Administration Corporation, the Alberta Insurance Council, and the Securities Commission for the end of the planning cycle presented in his business plans.

Mr. Treasurer, I'm also hoping that you will be providing the Assembly with a breakdown of departmental expenses by object for 2000-2001 through to 2002-2003 in each of the following: salaries, wages, employee benefits, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, contract services, and hosting.

Mr. Treasurer, under the general headings of communications and contract services, something that I've been puzzled with is: where exactly is the government going to be recording the expenses in this latest communications campaign regarding the private health legislation? I note, in looking at Executive Council, that PAB has an overall budget of around \$8 million. Now, we don't need to get into the debate that took place in question period today of course, unless you want to, regarding the total expense for this communications campaign, but it's going to be a considerable chunk of change. It could be easily \$3 million or more. I doubt that it's all coming out of PAB. I doubt that it's all coming out of Alberta Health and Wellness. Maybe you can tell me what direction Treasury has given departments in terms of accounting for this expense. My information is that it was not anticipated during the budget planning process. Therefore, it must be in-year spending that's going to be taken from someplace that it wasn't originally designed to meet.

Madam Chairman, one of the issues that the Treasurer and I have had some discussion on has got to do with the collection of fees, licences, and premiums. I do note that the government has made a start in rolling back some of these premiums and in fact has made a \$60 million commitment in terms of the reduction of fees, and many of them are now in place. We still haven't seen the report that was

done I believe under the chairmanship of the Member for St. Albert. We still don't have cost-of-service data for any of the fees, so we really don't know which of the premiums, fees, and licences exceeded cost of service and how cost of service was defined and whether the same definition was used across government. I'm hoping that the Treasurer will provide us with that information as well as a breakdown of all the premiums, fees, and licences for the planning cycle by type of premium, fee, and licence.

I'll note that within his own department the amount of revenue generated by premiums, fees, and licences ranges from about 26 and a half million dollars through the end of the planning period to just shy of \$33 million. Again, that's a considerable amount of money. The Treasurer does talk about how the only way that taxes are going is down. I submit that many of these premiums, fees, and licences are things that in other jurisdictions are covered through people's tax contributions. Since this government tends to collect that revenue in the way of user fees instead, is this growth some evidence to the contrary of the Premier's assertion about taxes only going down, or is this based on increased business or population growth in the province? I'm certain that the Treasurer will answer that it is based on increased business and population growth and that in fact it's not an increase in the fees, but it does sort of look suspicious when you see an increase of some \$6 million or \$7 million over a three-year period on something that many would hold to be a regressive form of taxation.

Also, in the Treasurer's estimates he has other revenue listed for some 35 and a half million dollars. I'm wondering if he will provide us with a breakdown of exactly what that other revenue is by source and by amount. Most interesting to me would be some sense of history as well: is this up or down?

I would appreciate if the Treasurer will explain why program expenses under fiscal planning and accountability are increasing from just shy of \$9 million in last year's budget to just shy of \$11 million in the coming budget cycle. This is an increase of over 20 percent in three years. It seems to be a little out of keeping. In the ministry income statement, Mr. Treasurer, I reference you to page 281. You'll see that the program expenses under fiscal planning and accountability are slated there to increase over the planning cycle from \$8.8 million to \$10.614 million. Again we see that expenses under the tax and revenue collection line item are increasing by about 12 percent over three years. The same question. That's also in the income statement on page 281.

Furthermore, I would appreciate an explanation from the Treasurer as to why program expenses under investment management are increasing. This is a fairly dramatic increase, Mr. Treasurer. Unless I have the numbers wrong, it's about a 65 percent increase over three years. These are investment management expenses. Now, are some contracts up for renewal, or does it have to do with the dollar volume? How do we explain a two-thirds increase in that expense category over the three years?

8:21

Also, Mr. Treasurer, I'd appreciate an indication as to why program expenses under the government risk management and insurance line item are increasing from \$6.7 million in '99-2000 to \$7.8 million in 2002-2003. This is an increase of over a million dollars, or 15 percent, and I'm just wondering if you can shed some light on that projected increase.

Mr. Treasurer, I think I'm going to run out of time before I get through the majority of my questions. Maybe I'll have a chance to come back since this is committee.

I did want to ask you as well about the impact of the tax plan. I know you cautioned us in your opening comments that this is really

about your department's estimates and that we shouldn't be dwelling on the overall fiscal plan of the government, but I would be interested to know where in your department you will be doing the analysis to determine whether or not you've met the feedback targets on your tax plan. How quickly will that information be prepared? Have you calculated the flow-through impact of the latest federal budget? Are you looking at perhaps making some changes mid-stream now because of some surprising moves by the federal government in terms of their tax relief? I guess I would probably be on safest ground, Madam Chairman, if I limited my comments about the tax plan to those general questions. Maybe we'll get a chance in some other forum to discuss the relative merits or problems with the flat-tax proposal.

Looking at vote 3.0.2, finance, I'll note that this is where the government manages all of its financial assets and liabilities, including arranging the financing for the province and monitoring loans and loan guarantees. I have a number of specific questions to do with this rather staggering list of existing loans and loan guarantees, but I want to start off by asking the Treasurer to explain the 5 percent increase in operating expenses for this unit within his ministry. I understand that it's going to be going up by nearly a half million dollars in the coming fiscal year. Is that where we're going to see some of the increase in the FTEs, and if so, what new positions are being created to provide what valuable work?

I'll also note that under finance, capital investment is planned at about \$300,000 during the year. I'm wondering if the Treasurer will tell us what Albertans are going to receive in the way of assets for this \$300,000 and also of course the information on FTEs, that I referred to earlier, across the whole ministry.

Will the Treasurer table the latest interim and annual financial statement analyses prepared by the loans and guarantees division under sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the loans and guarantees manual as it relates to the province's financial involvement in Ridley Grain, Centennial Food, Vencap Acquisition Corporation, and the Centre for Frontier Engineering Research Institute? These questions should be familiar to the Treasurer as I believe I asked for them last year as well.

Will the Treasurer provide a breakdown of the \$22 million estimated liability for loan guarantees for 2000-2001 as contained on page 57 of Budget 2000? I would also like to know about the \$42 million provision for doubtful loans, advances, and implemented guarantees as of the end of the fiscal year contained on page 56 of Budget 2000. Together we're looking at about \$64 million, \$65 million just in those two categories.

I would appreciate the Treasurer providing a breakdown of the \$11 million forecast provision for loans, loan guarantees, and indemnities for 1999-2000 as contained on page 46 of Budget 2000. Along the same lines I would request that the Treasurer provide a breakdown of the \$2 million provision for loans, loan guarantees, and indemnities for 2000-2001 through to the end of the planning cycle, as of March 2003. A \$2 million provision is disclosed on page 46 of Budget 2000.

Hon. Treasurer, this is my opening round of questions. I hope that you'll have a chance to answer some during this debate this evening and will trust that those that you don't get to tonight, you'll provide written answers to in time that I can review them before we're called upon to vote your estimates in the Assembly.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you wish them to continue, hon. Provincial Treasurer?

MR. DAY: Well, I'm always anxious to get as much input as

possible from the members opposite, so I'll ask them the question: do you want me to respond after each speaker, or do you want me to cover what I can when you've depleted your speakers and then get the rest back to you in writing? I'll give you the choice on that.

MR. SAPERS: I'd certainly appreciate some preliminary responses now, Mr. Treasurer. It might save some questions from some of our colleagues during the course of the evening.

MR. DAY: Okay. Madam Chairman, I'll try and cover some of the ones I can immediately get to. The list as usual is a detailed list, which I appreciate, and I think I usually do a reasonable job of getting back on the details. On those details that we don't get back on, we like to hear about that.

There were some questions regarding the FTEs. I'm not sure where the 700 number came from that the member was using, but he is correct in saying that overall we report a full-time equivalent increase of 8.7 percent. That's 59 positions. The Alberta Pensions Administration will have an increase of 17 of those, and they're just in the business process right now of re-engineering. There's a whole process going on of a project and various special projects related to APA, the Alberta Pensions Administration. Of those 17, a certain number will be temporary in nature, so you will see them drop. Certainly it is indicated that there will be an increase of 17 there and a 16 FTE increase in the Alberta Securities Commission. Now, as you know, those are not direct employees, but we report on the consolidated picture in those areas which are under our responsibility, so it's included there.

That leaves, then, just 25 FTEs, and those are primarily going to the tax and revenue administration, to the audit and compliance areas. The economy, as you know, has expanded so incredibly over the last several years, with far more reporting going on, far more incorporations. As we have indicated, taxes are only going down in Alberta, and as I think the member knows, we have launched the business tax review to see how we can keep taxes going down even more. However, with a veritable explosion of corporate activity over the last several years we are hard-pressed to actually audit and monitor the compliance of taxes that are due, albeit at a lower rate. We're not sending out hordes of tax storm troopers, but just our ability to bring on new mainframe equipment and also to move in the area of audit and compliance has resulted in an increase of 25 FTEs on the tax administration side. The others, as I've indicated, are outside of the department.

The member asked if I'm hearing about the Bre-X chill effect, as he was saying. This is one of the constant challenges in terms of not just policy but a regulatory regime being established in any area: to monitor how policy is being followed. It's always a balance. How far do you go? Certainly after something that gets the sensational type of reporting that a Bre-X does – and there have been other incidents that will always happen as people either deliberately or accidentally fail to comply with regulations. The Securities Commission above all wants to maintain the integrity and the stability of what's going on in the province in terms of the investment community. I haven't myself been hearing to any degree of alarm concerns about it becoming burdensome or overregulatory.

8:31

I can think notably of one case several months ago where a certain company found themselves in that position and thought that was the case, and we made sure that there was follow-up done with the Securities Commission, an assessment done to see if indeed there wasn't some overzealousness on the part of the commission. But

other than that one case – and I will check with department officials and also pass the concern on to the Securities Commission in terms of: are we being too exuberant, and is it having a chilling effect? I'll follow up on that.

If the member has cases like that, by all means feel free to alert us to them so we can also do some follow-up. On issues like this, however they vote in the province is not a factor. We want to make sure that they can be part of the Alberta advantage, so if you have situations like that, I would say to the member: let us know so that we can do the follow-up.

I want to get back on the specifics. There was mention of the capital investment and operating costs and the types of breakdown. I will try to provide what dollars there are. I'm not aware of other ministries reporting on some things that we aren't ourselves reporting on in Treasury, but I will do some follow-up again with senior officials on that and see if there's some detail that we can provide that would be valuable. I would ask the member then to let us know if he thinks we're avoiding some areas or if there are some specifics that we should be getting into. I'll do some work on that.

I believe that last year we did provide further breakdowns on things like salaries, benefits, telephone charges, and things like that. I think we did that last year, and we can comply if the member will tell us specifically: is that right across the entire department you're looking at? Is it the deputy's office, minister's office, across the department you're talking about? All right. We'll see if we can provide some details there. It may not be available.

Without igniting a debate, because I know we don't want to do that, we have no expenses at all going into communication related to something that the member referred to as private health care legislation. We don't have any such legislation before the House. So if there's something like that that he'd like us to report on, I'd be happy to know, but we have no private health care legislation before the House.

In terms of the fees and charges, yes, the report will be coming soon to a theatre near you. I don't know exactly what date. I will check with the member who's been chairing that and doing a good job of it. Yes, there will be a breakdown of costs. It's very detailed; some of it may be seen to be exciting reading. We'll have a breakdown there, and I hope it will meet the demands of our critics, and if not, we will do some more work to get more detail.

I just was able to jot down quickly a couple of the questions, if the member will give me a minute to find the pages that he was referring to. There was a question about increases in the investment management section, and I'm referring to the \$19.3 million increase in 2000-2001 expenses over the 1999-2000 budget. That's primarily for increased transfers to the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research of \$11.6 million, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research of \$5.5 million, and Alberta Learning for heritage scholarships, \$1 million. So that makes up that \$19.3 million increase. That's reflecting those transfers.

Related to the tax situation, yes, we are tracking and we will begin to track what we will eventually – the reformed legislation that we're introducing has attracted a lot of interest both provincially and nationally. So we will certainly track revenue flows and revenue patterns, as will, I'm sure, the academic community and the business community. It'll be interesting to see what we can directly attribute to being a result of the income tax decrease.

The macrostudies certainly show that in other jurisdictions when taxes have gone down, there's been a corresponding invigorating of the economy. I know that the academics will argue whether that was because the taxes went down, but there is that amazing coincidence of activity. It happened with the follow-through on the 1961 tax reductions of John F. Kennedy in the United States. There's a

comparable upswing in revenues from the Reagan tax reductions in 1981, 20 years later. We see it in different jurisdictions. Certainly the experience in Ireland seems to reflect this coincidence, and whether you're talking about Ontario or Alberta, there is a coincidence. We think the two events are directly related, but we will track that and obviously try to make our case, as will others.

Will we do some changes midstream as a result of the federal budget? There's no question that with the federal reductions – and I've given credit to the federal government, limited credit, for some of the reductions that they're doing. We won't get into the tax debate here, because I know the chair would rule us out of order. Yes, we are prepared to make adjustments. You may call it midterm.

There have been some reports recently that once the federal deductions fully flow through in their four-year plan that they're talking about – there's some question of: would our 11 percent plan then mean that people would pay less provincial taxes in four years than they would be in our present system? We respond to that by saying that we're not going to wait four years for the federal deductions to flow through in entirety. Our entire plan comes through next year.

Now, we will track it, and if in four years the federal government – we don't really think they're going to be there in four years, but if they still are and those projections flow through and if it can be shown that our 11 percent single rate and the exemption levels are not returning more to Albertans than the present plan that we have, then obviously we will be prepared to either lower the single rate from 11 percent or raise the basic exemptions or do a combination of both. We've said that the only way taxes are going is down, and we will maintain the integrity of the single rate system and make those adjustments should the next federal government maintain the four-year commitment to tax reductions.

I'll get to the member the breakdowns of the loan arrangements that I can related to Ridley and Vencap and Centennial and Frontier research. We'll try and make that available to him and also the details that we can on the \$22 million of loan guarantees. I think it's exciting really to note when you do the comparisons on what was on the table and owing in 1993 in terms of loans and loan guarantees and then following the Klein commitment to get out of the business of being in business and bringing in the business limitation act, when you take the full list of what was there in 1993 and now look at what's there today, how greatly diminished that is. We're down to literally a handful of commitments, whereas before it was an arm and a legful, those of course being accounting terms which I know the member is familiar with. We'll get the full breakdown of that and show the very positive progress that's been made on those.

I'll listen now to more advice from across the way.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I want to make some general comments on the Treasury as the department of course relates to the budget, because we are talking budget. First of all, I have to compliment the Provincial Treasurer for standing up when he gave the budget. It appeared to me that he didn't have any notes. He didn't have the budget in front of him. He gave a 40-minute spiel from what must have been well instilled in his mind. You know, I think he deserves a compliment for that particular one.

I also want to take this opportunity to wish him well as he charts his course towards the chair of the federal Official Opposition. Some may compare it to a deckhand bailing ship when it starts springing some cracks, but I'll let Albertans make that judgment.

8:41

Getting on to the documentation we have in front of us, my first comment is to deal with the flat tax. Now, it's referred to as a flat tax, but in reality it is not a flat tax. A true flat tax is a flat tax that doesn't allow for exemptions and credits and such. This is what I call a single rate tax of 11 percent.

I analyzed the figures, and I had other people analyze them for me, and the federal minister, according to comments in the paper, appears to agree that the people that are going to feel the least benefit – maybe everybody will feel some benefit – are the middle class. Those that live below the poverty level will feel some benefit. No question about it. Those that are above the middle class, the really high-income earners are the ones that will really reap the rewards of the single rate tax.

Now, Madam Chairman, I'm really, really curious as to why the Treasurer is so gung ho on proceeding with this plan when it in fact is not going to really benefit those that have been asking for some consideration during the last few years. They're the ones that have been basically asked to pay the price. Like I say, they may feel some marginal benefit but not to the same degree as the high-income earners. Maybe it's to do with the brain drain, maybe to try to entice high-income Albertans to stay. Possibly the Treasurer will respond to that.

The employment tax credit. I've always had a bit of a problem with the way it's implemented. The concept of it is good, but it does overlook a segment of the population that is in a position where they cannot possibly benefit from the employment tax credit. That's because they're persons with disabilities to the degree that they're deemed to be unemployable. As much as they would like to get out there and work and benefit from the employment tax credit, they can't. The very nature of their limitations doesn't allow them to benefit. I wonder why the department of Treasury has never, never taken into consideration trying to revamp that program to realize that there are those that can't get the benefit of that particular program, which otherwise is not too bad of a program.

The gas tax has been talked about. The Treasurer has talked about it, but I've never seen anything come out in writing. I noticed today when I was watching the news and they had the world price of oil, over \$32 U.S. a barrel, if I remember right. The gas pumps went up again, I think another 2 cents a litre. I'm not advocating that there is a magical solution to this. I just wonder if the Treasurer has been serious when he's made these comments that possibly money could be funneled down to the motorist. There was some anticipation that possibly motorists would see some benefit.

Now, Alberta is in a very, very unique position when it comes to the gas tax. First of all, we're in that position where we can what I used to term double-dip: the increases in the royalties, which have increased at a tremendous rate over the last 12 months, a tremendous rate and, of course, continue to collect that gas tax. We're also in that position of not having the provincial sales tax. There isn't that tax on top of that tax. Now, there is the GST, I acknowledge that, but there isn't provincial tax that is taxed on the gas to even increase the flow to the government. So that part of it is unique.

I thought it was an opportunity for the Treasurer. Is he seriously considering a break at the pumps, I guess is the expression used, or is that just some talk to sort of appease the lineups as people probably buy less gas each time they buy gas because filling up a tank now can be quite costly?

Another area that I listened to the Treasurer talk about, not only the Treasurer but the Premier as well, is the criticism of the federal government for the reduction in the so-called transfer payments; in other words, the downloading. There was downloading that

occurred from the federal government to the provinces. We all acknowledge that. Some of it really concerns me. For example, the reductions in the health care transfers concern me, education and such. But at the same time as the government likes to be so critical of the federal government for downloading, they're doing the same thing to the municipalities. It has cost the city of Edmonton, for example, millions and millions and millions of dollars in terms of revenue. So, on the one hand, the Treasurer likes to be critical of the federal government for downloading, but at the same time – I guess the expression is: if you live in a glass house, one shouldn't throw rocks.

I'm not sure of the exact figure. Maybe the Provincial Treasurer could provide us with that figure, exactly how much has been downloaded by the provincial government onto the municipalities, who have no place to pass it on other than to the local taxpayer. They can't download it to another level of government. They have to pass it on to the taxpayer, and that's why when the two other levels of government, the feds and the provincial government, are under stress to reduce taxes, the municipal taxes by and large throughout the province are going up, at a fairly small rate but they're still going up. That's the reason why, because of the downloading and the fact that they can't turn around and transfer that downloading to another level of government.

We see a reference in the Treasury budget, as we do in most departments now, of lottery funds. In this particular case, if I recall correctly from reading the documentation, it's something like \$50 million of lottery funds that goes into the Treasury I guess through general revenue. My question to the Treasurer would be: is that \$50 million specifically earmarked to reduce debt? Is it just put into general revenue and becomes part of that overall revenue picture that is then divided between the various departments and such? Most departments already get some lottery funds. I'm not sure if it's lottery funds on top of lottery funds that are given to the various departments.

I thought it was quite interesting going through the documentation of references. I realize there are no estimates this particular year on areas like N.A. Properties and Gainers and such, but I guess it's a reminder of when this government – the Provincial Treasurer was part of the caucus, and the Premier was part of that cabinet – was in the business of compensating big business, providing concessions and such. For the government to get out of it was the right thing to do. Unfortunately, it took them a long time to come to that realization, probably after \$3 billion of taxpayers' dollars were spent.

The Member for Edmonton-Glenora talked in terms of user fees, and I echo his thoughts. User fees to me are another form of taxation. Our user fees, I would say, on a per capita basis probably rank amongst the highest in Canada, particularly when we take into consideration that there are only two provinces in Canada that impose a user fee on health care in addition to what they pay through taxation. Even for things like camping we see user fees. Registration now for a vehicle is \$53; \$48 of that goes to the Treasury; \$5 goes to the registry company. To dissolve a corporation – I had to dissolve a corporation a couple of weeks ago – \$186.75. The bulk of that of course goes to the Treasury, and the user fees go on and on and on. People don't realize in most cases that the user fees do go to the provincial government, the biggest portion of them, that they are in fact another form of taxation.

The Provincial Treasurer did say that that report will be coming down shortly. It will be interesting to see the impact of that report and how the Provincial Treasurer follows up on that report. There are some reductions in the budget that was tabled a few days ago. I'm not sure if we're going to see a continuation of those reductions when the report comes down, but it will be done with some interest.

The pension liability when I look in the documentation is of interest to me from the point of view that when the government talks in terms of its various forms of debt, its net debt, for example, which we no longer have, its overall debt – now, when they talk in terms of the overall debt being \$12.6 billion, if I recall correctly, does that include the pension liability, or is the pension liability on top of that \$12.6 billion? If so, then the true debt of the provincial government, the gross debt, whatever you want to call it, would be considerably higher than the \$12.6 billion.

8:51

The last point I'm going to make before I pass, because there are other members of the caucus here that want to speak. The one thing that really astounded me – and it's a simple little item, really, in terms of the big picture, but it's important to the hundreds, the thousands of people, former students, that got letters from a division of the Treasury Branch saying that they had obligations for student loans that occurred in some cases 10 years ago, 15 years ago, 20 years ago. A number of them, I think, were squared away. There was a great deal of confusion, because in a lot of cases the federal portion of the loan was squared away through a collection agency in terms of a settlement.

I was involved in one case, negotiated a deal on a student loan that was paid off. The fellow involved was facing financial hardships. The mother stepped in and said: look, I can afford so much. The collection agency settled for it, and as far as he was concerned, it was all paid. That was the end of his student loan. His mother had bailed him out, and that was in October of 1989. A couple of months ago he got a letter saying that his income tax refund is going to be withheld for the student loan. In that whole period of time he was never once sent a notice or a letter saying that he even owed this provincial student loan. He didn't know he owed this provincial student loan.

Now, the Treasury Branch must have felt somewhat guilty, because they didn't impose interest on that 11-year period that this loan was unknowingly outstanding, and when I contacted the division, they did agree that once that refund is held back, for the balance they would be prepared to work out a monthly plan so that it could be paid back over a period of time. But, still, it was a shock to that individual. It was a shock to hundreds of others that out of the blue, many, many years after they thought – in some cases I'm convinced that in fact the student loans were fully paid and they weren't accounted for. I notice the federal government sent out letters in error to thousands of students as well, which is just going to compound that fright, that concern that was held.

I don't understand how those types of things happen. You know, I can't just blame the provincial government because the federal government is guilty of the same thing. But how can it possibly be that that many years would go by and there's no acknowledgement of his student loan and suddenly at one point, with no notice, they're simply told, "Your income tax refund is going to be withheld"?

Madam Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to add my thoughts to the Treasury budget estimates, and I'll pass to the next speaker.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DAY: Yeah. Just some brief comments, Madam Chairman, if I may. The member is quite right, of course. In our tax reform this is not a flat tax. Sometimes in the vernacular of the day it is referred to as such, but it is in fact a single rate tax, and we do make that point. One of the significant reasons that it is – the member talked about certain credits and refunds being available, but with the very

significant increase in those basic exemption levels, low-income earners, of course, are spared from paying any tax at all. So their progressivity is very dramatic at the low end, and we don't make apologies for the fact that progressivity drops off after that.

That's to acknowledge the fact that people who are working hard and wanting to work harder should not be punished for that at an ever increasing rate. The nurse who wants to take that overtime shift should not be discouraged from doing that by the fact that she or he is sensing that they will be moved into, quote, a higher bracket, and then the incentive to work overtime, whether it's at a hospital or at the packinghouse or on the construction site, whatever it may be, that becomes diminished, and people are treated equitably and not punished at a higher rate because they want to work harder or stay on a particular job longer or, in fact, get more education or experience. Why should they be incrementally punished at a higher rate? We make no apologies for that.

I think it's important to recognize, and we can't go through the entire range of every person's income and are they single, married, how many deductions, but in general terms. For instance, if you were to take a family income, a single income-earning family, \$50,000, their saving under this plan is going to be \$907. To me \$900 is a lot of money, and the families that are earning \$50,000 tell me that \$907 is a lot of money to them.

Now, if you add the federal reduction on top of that – it's not as large as ours, but it's significant, and it goes up and down, again depending on income, et cetera – there's one family that is going to be saving approximately, next year, some \$1,500. That's a significant amount of money. Should it be even lower? Should taxes drop even lower? Well, it would be great if they could, but I don't think this is insignificant, and that's right to the middle income.

If you want to cut a broad swath through some different categories. If the family income range is approximately \$100,000 – and that would be two teachers, for instance; their family salary would be \$100,000 or more – they're going to experience an approximate decrease in income taxes at the provincial level of about 9 percent. In the middle income range it will be a decrease of about 18 percent. Of course, as the member has already acknowledged, at the low-income end they won't pay any income tax at all.

So is it perfect? No. Would it be nice if we could cut it even more? Yes. I still talk somewhat dreamily, I admit, about the day when possibly there's no provincial income tax being paid in this province. That's another day, but it is not so far out of reach that it's never-never land.

The other thing I want to say to the member. If year to year there are adjustments in the federal plan, which diminish the savings on the provincial plan, we can either drop that single rate, because it's very transparent, or in fact we can raise exemption levels or a combination of the two, resulting in a maximum number of Albertans benefiting by that.

When the member said the family tax credit, I believe he's referring to the employment tax credit. I am not making an apology for the fact that it is called an employment tax credit. It is meant to be an incentive to work and to move beyond a certain level. Now, for those who are persons with disabilities – though many persons with disabilities obviously do work. For those who are unable to do so, there are programs there for them to be able to sustain a quality of life that allows them to live with dignity. But we don't make apologies for the fact that this is an employment tax credit. You need to work to get it. That's the whole reason that it's in place.

There were reflections on the gas tax and the price of oil, of course. It is still definitely north of \$30, some \$32, in that range. Most leading analysts feel that it is not going to stay there. There is about a 76 percent compliance rate right now with OPEC nations,

and that is seen to be under some strain. The offsetting effect, of course, is that we are coming up to the summer drive season, and we know that's affecting contract and futures prices right now. But most analysts are saying that it is going to come down.

I would say that the member should stay tuned for some of the work that the minister of agriculture is involved in right now in terms of looking at costs to farmers, especially as they come up to spring seeding, and there may be something – I am underlining “may be something” – coming forward in an enhanced package, whether it's under the farm income disaster program or something similar to it, that reflects severe input increases like costs of fuel. So there may be something there that we can do on the agriculture side.

It's difficult to put in a per barrel sensitive policy that would say that if oil hits a certain amount per barrel, then the fuel tax would drop and that if the price of oil drops, then the fuel tax goes up again. If I can use that just as an example, let's say that we had a policy where if oil hit \$30 a barrel and stayed that way for a certain period of time, then we'd take, just for argument's sake, 3 cents off our 9 cents per litre. Then when it hit \$25 or \$20, pick a number, the 3 cents would go back on. Well, everybody would shout for joy when we took the tax off, and when it hit \$20, with the agreement that it goes back on, of course everybody would forget that it had been reduced, and we'd be in the position of being seen to raise people's taxes when we said that the only way taxes are going is down. I think the members opposite would be faithful to remind us of that at that point. It becomes difficult if you try to do a volume purchase situation, where all consumers maintain their receipts and their invoices. That becomes an administrative situation. What we would look to at this point is the longer term. If oil stays at this over a long term, obviously that improves our overall revenue picture, and maybe then we're able to do something on the tax side long term from that 11 percent rate as we see that we can sustain that out over two or three years. So that's where we are.

9:01

I would remind the member that our per litre tax is the lowest in the country and that when the price of oil per barrel goes up, the Treasury of the government does not take in more revenue. We only get 9 cents per litre. That doesn't increase, as you know, when the price of oil goes up. If anything, consumers purchase a little bit less gas when the price is going up. It is interesting – and maybe the member could join us in a communication to the federal government – that the federal government has a 10 cents per litre excise tax, and on top of all taxes and all other costs then they add the GST. So the federal government, in fact, does collect more percentage-wise when the price goes up. I'd think the member would be happy to communicate with us to the federal government and say: hey, could you put a lid on things there as far as that GST goes?

[Mr. Severtson in the chair]

MR. WICKMAN: I'll see Paul Martin tomorrow.

MR. DAY: Yeah, we'll see him at that fund-raising dinner tomorrow. I'm probably too late to get a ticket.

MS CARLSON: I'll give you one.

MR. DAY: You'll get me a ticket? Okay. The member says she would give me a ticket for the event that the federal Finance minister is coming to. If you want to send that over, I'd be happy to see if I could adjust my calendar.

N.A. Properties. I think I heard the member correctly. That

company was put together of course to dispose of mortgage and real estate that had been acquired from troubled financial institutions in the late '80s. As you know, the bill for doing that was very high. Most of that has been moved through the system now, and we have divested ourselves of those mortgages. Up until November 30, 1999, the company was actually managed by Canadian Western Bank. From that date onward, because the amount of property is so diminished now, Treasury employees assume responsibility for managing that particular portfolio.

The company itself may have to be retained for a period of time just for legal reasons related to commitments to the credit unions and to Canadian Western Bank indemnities and to deal with some of the remaining assets that are very difficult to dispose of. I think you'll see NAP in existence for some time, with what's left of it managed through the department of Treasury. I think it is an example of what happens over time when government becomes too heavily involved with business. There's a great area of caution there, and the member quite rightly reports on that.

The debt vis-à-vis pension liability. The debt that we report, that \$12.6 billion figure, is the result of accumulated deficits through the years from approximately '85 to '93, when there were deficits adding up to some \$22 billion. The Auditor General has quite correctly said that pension liabilities – if those pension funds are actuarially sound, we still record those. We show what those amounts are. As you know, with a number of the pension plans, because of the increased contributions which we put in and the employees put in in '93, this in fact resulted in a surplus a little over a year ago, which resulted in a decrease of the contribution rate. We were able to lower the contribution for employees. Those plans are actuarially sound and are fully listed in terms of the long-term actuarial requirements. That is a normal accounting procedure. You don't see at the federal level the CPP liability tacked onto the \$577 billion debt, for instance. We're fully aware of what those figures are, and they are both accounted for clearly and in separate columns.

I can't comment on the federal loan notifications. We've heard some interesting stories with the program now under the federal government jurisdiction of contacting people who had thought loans expired. I can't comment on that other than to say that there is a program going on for both provincial and federal loans in terms of getting in touch with those people and saying: the requirement is to pay; please get in touch with us so that we don't have to hold back any possible tax that may be coming to you. Some of them, I've heard, got contacted and in fact have taken care of that loan, and it's cause for some heartburn there. We hope that gets cleared up. I've also heard from people who have either paid off their student loans or are still paying them off, and they say that they feel it is appropriate that people who haven't need to do that. In the present budget, which I can't get into in detail because it's not my estimates, of course, there are some very significant increases in student loan assistance, but that's not my area, so I won't boast about that for too long.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to put a number of questions that I have about this department on the record, but first of all, I'd like to answer one of the Treasurer's concerns. He was stating that he was having some problems, as I heard, connecting with the federal minister. Certainly we're happy to arrange that on this side of the House. If he has time early in the morning, he can join the Member for Edmonton-Glenora at a breakfast. If that doesn't fit his schedule, I can arrange for him to be

at the reception in the evening, and if that doesn't fit his schedule, I'm sure that between those of us meeting with the minister tomorrow, we can arrange a meeting with this Provincial Treasurer so that he can get his questions asked and his points raised. Certainly there's no doubt that there's a great deal of accessibility available in that regard.

Now, my questions today with regard to the Treasury budget will all centre around financial management and planning, Mr. Chairman. That's program 3, as a reference, on page 390. This program talks about supporting programs and services of government by providing planning management and reporting of the government's financial affairs and by maintaining a sound financial services industry. This is the area of this department where I have the most concerns.

When we're talking about a budget of \$19.1 billion and spending \$17.7 billion and we have a department that cannot bring in quarterly budgets and adjust accordingly given the volatility of the incoming dollars in this province, then we have to wonder what it is that this department is doing. We always have some concerns that they are not operating in the same kind of responsible fashion that we're seeing from private industry in terms of making market adjustments and bringing updates to the people of the province, as they are required.

Instead, they bring in these huge surpluses. They're unaccountable in terms of both the revenue and spending side, and we think that's a real problem, Mr. Chairman, and we think that the people of the province also think that's a real problem. As a result of that, we've got a number of questions with regard to the various sectors of this particular program that we're hoping the Treasurer will answer for us, and we'll try to find out, since the Treasurer doesn't seem to be able to do it, where the problems are in that department.

Is it the department itself, or is it the mandate of this government now? I know some of those department staff, and I know they work very hard and they're very competent. So I tend to believe that the problem lies with the mandate of the government. They don't truly want to be accountable to the people in terms of what they spend and the dollars they take in, but perhaps with the additional information we will receive from these debates, we will be able to get a better handle on that.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, in general, I would like to get a breakdown of the projected gross operating expenses, capital investment, and dedicated revenues for the years 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 for the financial management and planning subprograms. If we could get that detail.

All my questions are somewhat detailed in nature, and perhaps the Treasurer could just undertake to provide those answers to us in writing in the very near future. I say in the near future because it's quite customary to get questions answered long after the budget has been voted on. I hope that won't happen in this particular instance.

9:11

We heard the Treasurer talk about the FTEs in general in the department, but if he could specifically break down what those projections are for the years I just mentioned, that would also be helpful.

Specifically on the office of budget and management I've got some questions. We see some situations here where budgets were exceeded. In the office of budget and management in the '99-2000 budget the costs were exceeded by 9.5 percent, and I'm wondering if the Treasurer could tell us in some specific detail, not just a general overview, what accounted for those increases. Perhaps he could even table a list of the variances by category so that we can see why it is that in this particular department, which should have a better handle on their expenses than any other department in this

government, they exceeded their budget by nearly 10 percent.

Then I'm sure there's a very easy answer to this question, and perhaps the Treasurer can respond to it immediately; that is, if he could tell us why dedicated revenues in this line item are expected to fall by almost 31 percent in the 2001 year. Perhaps there have been some changes in departments. I'm not sure. We don't have enough detail here. If he could address that, that would be helpful.

Speaking of detail, Mr. Chairman, that seems to be a problem throughout these departments. These days this government likes to squeeze us on the budget debates in terms of the amount of time that's committed to them and splits the committees up so that some people are in a different room debating a different department at the same time that we are here. That's a problem for us, because the way the budgets and the business plans are presented, there is a lack of detail in terms of finding out where the expenditures and revenues come from and those expenses are made. If we could get more detail prior to getting into these debates, that would be very helpful.

Some of the questions in terms of the lack of detail presented in these budgets are consistent from year to year, and certainly the very excellent staff in these departments can anticipate some of the kinds of questions and some of the kinds of detail that we're going to need to be able to make adequate judgments before we can vote on these budgets yearly. Perhaps they could provide that to us prior to our entering into debate, and then I wouldn't be as concerned that other budgetary debates were ongoing at the same time as I was committed to another room, in this case this evening the Assembly, to ask the questions that I have concerns about. So perhaps the Treasurer would be prepared to take that under advisement and give us some sort of a comment in terms of whether we can see greater detail in the future.

My next question is under the gross operating expenses. We're seeing an increase of 12.8 percent there for 2000-2001. Mr. Chairman, once again, my question very simply is: why is that increase there? We would like some details on that.

We'd also like to know some explanation on the dedicated revenue that will be generated by the office of budget and management in 2001 and the basis on which those projections were made. So some detail on that would be helpful.

I think the next question that I'd like to ask is: what standards and guidelines have we seen being established to allow the office of the controller and the office of budget and management to ensure that individual departments follow consistent internal audit financial reporting procedures? It is always a concern when we're talking about these large dollars. I'm sure that there is a process. We would like to know what it is, because to have consistent and ongoing reviews made on the reporting procedures and the financial procedures and ensuring that even outside – the Auditor General's office isn't enough when we're talking about this. There needs to be some internal checks and balances. I'm sure that the Treasurer has them, so it should be quite easy for him to provide that information.

Next I have some questions on benchmarks for the same line item, and the questions I have on the benchmarks are around performance indicators. With regard to the accuracy of recording the department's financial information, timeliness of reporting departmental financial information, adherence to legislative compliance, and department budgets, can we have some information on that? Specifically what benchmarks have been established, and why don't I see those in the business plans? Maybe I've missed them. If so, the Treasurer can point them out to me. It seems like those are pretty important benchmarks to talk about, and it would be helpful if we had some more information on those.

MR. DAY: Which area?

MS CARLSON: We've got a bunch of them: the recording the department's financial information, timeliness of reporting departmental financial information, and adherence to legislative compliance. That would be helpful.

Consulting projects, Mr. Treasurer. Do you have any undertaken in this area of budget management for the upcoming year and if so specifically what areas? This is a volatile market. There are lots of things happening out there. We'd like to know if you're using the services of outside consultants, the mandate of those projects, and the process by which consultants are chosen in this particular area. That would be helpful.

Also in this area, Mr. Chairman, what review criteria and guidelines have been established by Treasury in consultation with the Auditor General that will permit formal audits of ministry performance measures in annual reports? Once again, I don't see this information anywhere, and it would be very helpful for us when we're reviewing the performance measures. Along with those guidelines, there must be some time lines for implementation, so we'd like to know what they are too.

When we talk about guidelines, I think it's very important to remember that when we take a look at the business plans, the formatting and the numbers that are compared from year to year often change, and that does create a problem in terms of being able to monitor performance from year to year. I'm wondering if the Treasurer would comment on why they do that. We think they do it on purpose, Mr. Chairman. Perhaps there's a better reason than that, and the Treasurer perhaps can give us some information about that.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Budget and management. With regard to the Auditor General's recommendations to provide financial results for each of the four quarters of the fiscal year, what steps is this department taking to comply with that request? It's a very important recommendation, Mr. Chairman, and it's interesting to see that this Treasurer is not prepared at this point to comply with it. We hope that that's going to change. We hope that he can make that commitment to us this evening. We really would like to see financial results for each of the four quarters of the fiscal year within the consolidated budget.

You know, it's impossible to compare actual financial performance against any of the benchmarks for the quarterly budgets without this information, and I would suggest that it's also irresponsible of the department not to do it. So if we could get some comment on that, and if the Treasurer could tell us what the time frame is for including quarterly results in the annual budget. Critical information. Unbelievable that they don't provide it. Never get away with it in private industry, but a Treasurer who's in charge of over \$19 billion of revenue and the equivalent disbursements does get away with this. Madam Chairman, I suggest that this only happens in Alberta, that it could never happen in any other province in this country. A Treasurer who would operate in that kind of manner would likely be tarred and feathered elsewhere, but here he gets away with it. Well, isn't that true? It's a big concern. Unbelievable.

MR. SAPERS: I was just working on the image.

9:21

MS CARLSON: The image, yes. Well, that image goes with his new haircut, Madam Chairman, but I won't comment any further on that.

I think this comes within this budget item here. In terms of the capital assets, Madam Chairman, what steps is the Treasury contemplating as it relates to including capital assets in the consoli-

dated balance sheet? I know that this has been a discussion in terms of government financial statements, whether or not this should happen, but I think it's a good idea. We would like to see that debate happen inside the Legislature or anywhere we would have some ability to participate in it. I think it's important for people of the province to know the kinds of capital assets the province has on the balance sheets. So if he could give us some information about that, that would be really good.

Also, I have some questions with regard to issues that still have to be resolved that have prevented Alberta from including RHAs, school boards, and postsecondary institutions within the consolidated financial statements. We haven't heard a good argument on that one, Madam Chairman, and certainly we think it would be the responsible thing to do. Certainly we hope that it's under discussion at this point in time. We would like an update on that, particularly with regard to those issues that are still outstanding.

We'd like the question answered about why Treasury believes that consolidation would add to the complexity and confuse relationships between government and these organizations. I don't think anything could be further from the truth, Madam Chairman. They're an extension of the government in many respects. We see other organizations that are extensions included within the budgetary review process. So what's the rationale behind this? If we could get some information on that, it would be very helpful.

Also, with regard to that, what impact would consolidation of these entities have on the consolidated surplus and the net debt of the province? You know, you just can't say that the net debt is reduced or gone or whatever the latest catchphrase is for the Treasurer. I think to be responsible you have to give a full and complete information flow in terms of all of the areas. That information would be very helpful to us. We want to know why he doesn't do it, other than saying that it isn't convenient. That isn't a good enough answer.

To get a complete information flow and for people to be able to evaluate not only issues like what the real debt is or what the real surplus is in this province but what the performance of the government is – this information is essential. We are asking the Treasurer to tell us why he won't do it. By him telling us, we'll be able to tell Albertans.

This information is very important to be included within the consolidated financial statements particularly. I don't believe there is a school board or a postsecondary institution in this province that wouldn't think that the right thing to do is to have that included in there. They are extensions of what the government does by virtue of where the majority of the revenue funding comes from. We see that happen in many other foundations that receive the majority of their funding from government, so why don't we do it in this particular instance? We think that would be a responsible position to take.

Madam Chairman, I have quite a few other questions to ask. Maybe I'll just touch on a couple of them. Could the Treasurer tell us how much of the project management and transition budget will be allocated to fee-for-service consultants? This ties into my earlier question about asking about any consulting projects that they have ongoing. If we don't get the information, we'll pursue it through other avenues, but I am hoping that he'll be happy to tell us what's on the books for the next year, because it's important to us to know which direction this government is taking.

Particularly we would like them to take a look at the way they make the presentation of their financial statements and the way they calculate surpluses and contingency funds and economic cushions. We think the way they are doing it is not correct. I would say deceitful, but that wouldn't be a correct term to use, so I won't use that, Madam Chairman, but certainly what they're doing is not open

and accountable. It does not properly represent a government that wants to be open and accountable to the people, and for us that definitely is a problem.

Thank you.

MR. DAY: Just reporting on some specifics, and then I want to address some of the gross generalities that were entered into the debate here.

As far as office budget management, there has been a \$902,000 increase there in gross expense from '99-2000 to this budget. That consists of \$500,000 for the internal audit of all the investment and debt portfolios, the type of audit which the Auditor General looks for and which is necessary in making sure we're maximizing our investment opportunities there and also maximizing on the debt portfolio. All but the GRF debt portfolio component, which is \$50,000, is actually recoverable as dedicated revenue, so that should be noted there.

In '99-2000 the projected gross expense was \$672,000 over budget due to implementation of an internal audit function, and in August 1999 the Treasury Board approved a dedicated revenue initiative of \$750,000 just for that purpose there. There was also a \$300,000 capital investment for the entire replacement of the telephone and communications system to keep that up to date both for internal purposes and for communication purposes with our external partners outside of government.

A couple of areas I think need to be addressed. I was tempted just to let these areas go, but some of the statements the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie was making, in fairness, I think were unfounded and ill thought out. Even my critic from Edmonton-Glenora, though I think he would disagree with me on methods of forecasting, has never hinted or insinuated that anything deceitful has gone on. Certainly we probably disagree on process in how we should do the forecasting. So I really think it was improper to try and bring the debate to a lower level, especially when it's not based on fact.

Madam Chairman, the assessment of our books in Alberta is done not just by ourselves, not just by the Auditor General, but by national and international credit rating agencies, national and international investment companies on whose livelihood is based the soundness of their analysis. And one after another, whether we like it or not – and I tabled them here in the Assembly to the silent cheers of the opposition – comment about how we do things like forecasting and how we do our reporting.

So if the member is taking issue with how we report and how we forecast and how we reflect our prudent fiscal management, she is taking offence, then, and should be offended by every credit rating agency in North America who gives us the top credit ratings in the country. She is taking issue with the people who put their livelihood and their reputation on how they assess other governments. So if you're going to make remarks like that, then stand and say: I am making a remark that is based on nothing in fact; I'm just blowing steam off the top of my head, and I have nothing to base it on.

I say that obviously with some feeling and passion on this topic, because it is a painstaking task not just for myself but for every member of this government and for members of Treasury to account in such a way that we get that type of national and international recognition. So disagree on how we do it, but please don't suggest that there is a lack of accountability. There's full accountability.

To suggest that quarterly reports be included in the annual report, I wonder if the member has any idea of what would be involved. Contrary to what she just said, if you've ever attended the annual general meeting of any corporate entity, you will see their annual report. You will not see a compilation; in many cases, breakdowns of the quarters but not an assumption of the quarterly reports.

9:31

Now, we could do that. We could take those and print them. In fact, Madam Chairman, we report approximately every 90 days. It's a very detailed report, and each quarter it reports where we are in terms of the forecast from the last quarter and where we are in terms of the forecast when the budget was tabled. The member might not like the quarterly reports, but to say that they are not done in an accountable and transparent way is to simply be ignorant of the process that we have put in place, largely a process that is expected and respected by the private sector, the only differences being those cases where general accounting principles are changed or adapted for public service accounting. So I would ask her to consider her remarks and temper them when she is talking about accountability and transparency and the method in which we do our reporting. It is recognized as being second to none in the country.

The consolidated budgeting issue is one on which we have an ongoing disagreement, and we were quite open about that with the Auditor General. To include in our consolidated report the budgeting and the budgets of every school board and regional health authority would be for us to intrude unnecessarily in a micromanaged way into those particular entities.

Now, school boards have to have full audits, and they do have full audits, and those audits are reported. Every regional health authority has to be fully, completely, and totally audited by an external audit source, and those are reported. So we always know the state of affairs of our regional health authorities and school boards.

If we were to report them on a consolidated budget, then the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, quite rightly, could stand up, as he did, and say: why is there an increase, for instance, in the Alberta Securities Commission; why is there an increase in the Pensions Administration Corporation? Do you think school boards would want us giving an account of why they have a certain number of employees, why they hired some more, why they let some go? Do you think the regional health authorities would want us intruding in their particular areas saying: why did you have an increase in activity in this area, and why did you purchase certain equipment there? Those entities have boards which have responsible people and have a reporting chain of command in which they have to report all their activities.

Or universities? Can you imagine if we were here giving an account and I was coming into the Assembly tonight, my phoning the president of a university or a dean of a department and saying: "Why on earth did you teach that, and why did you have so many undergrads teaching this program? What are you doing for your purchasing here? What are you doing for your purchasing there?"

Those entities and the people that occupy the responsible positions in those entities would quite rightly say: what is the government doing micromanaging our affairs? That's one of the reasons we don't put them under the consolidated reporting picture. Do we know where they are at all times in terms of their own finances? Yes, we do. As a matter of fact, last year in recognizing the deficit positions of a number of school boards, we allocated \$151 million to deal with those deficits, as we did with the regional health authority deficits. We didn't come in telling them how to manage the intricacies of each of their departments. They're held accountable to do that.

Now, the discussion that's been going on with the Auditor General. We've actually taken that to the national level, and we have asked the public accounting associations to engage in this discussion with us to see if there are ways in which some kind of reconciliation can be had in terms of the debate. Let it be clear that these entities are fully audited, fully accountable, and fully mandated in terms of the protocols of all their auditing procedures.

To bring them into the government consolidated picture and treat

them like the Department of Environment or the Department of Justice or any other government department is simply untenable. They themselves would not stand for it. I would ask the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to go talk to the chancellor at the university and say, "Hey, how about it? Do you want to get dragged into the government consolidated picture? Do you want the Treasurer stomping through the hallways here and telling you what to do and how to spend the money?"

Now, when we send those grants out, we do have certain broad parameters, but in terms of the decisions that have to be made at those levels, I would ask the member to go talk to the board of governors at the U of A, talk to the U of C and say, "Hey, I've got a great idea for you folks. We're going to drag you into the government consolidated reporting picture, and we're going to have the MLA committees swarming through here and telling you when you're paying certain division heads too much or professors too much or whatever it might be or allocating certain programs to students." I ask the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, before she addresses this question: bring those folks in here. I want to hear them clamour to be a part of our consolidated reporting picture. I'd like to see that happen, and then maybe we'll give it some consideration.

I thank her for her remarks.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. I thought the Treasurer was just getting warmed up. He caught me by surprise.

A number of comments. One thing to preface this, my second round of participating tonight in estimates debate, is: after a particularly heated exchange in the Assembly about a year ago during budgets, the Treasurer and I bumped into each other in the rotunda by the fountain. He commented to me that he wasn't entirely satisfied with the way that the debate had gone, that it seemed to be personal. I think if you read *Hansard* from about a year ago, you'll see that there were some things that had gone on. You know, there's always the danger, when you're talking about something that you so are personally and emotionally committed to, as the Treasurer is in terms of his policies and priorities and as members of the opposition are to their policies and priorities, that debate can tend to get heated and personal. I wanted to compliment the Treasurer this time around for not adopting the tactic that he has used in the past, and I will acknowledge that the comments from this side tended to be very pointed.

But I can tell you, Mr. Treasurer, that it's not because there's a disagreement with those organizations that earn their livelihood by commenting on other people's forecasts. It's because there is a deeply held belief on this side of the House that government by policy does some things with the presentation of the forecasts and the projections that one may describe as prudent and another may describe as shading the truth. So please be advised that the measure of the forecast and of what the experts say about the forecasts is ultimately their accuracy and not really how people talk about them or what use they may make of them.

I'll also say on the issue of consolidated reporting that this is a long-standing argument. The Auditor General and the Treasurer have had the debate and the Treasurers that preceded this one have had the debate and this member and this Treasurer have had the debate. You know, there is a disagreement, and it's an honest disagreement, but I think it is far too easy to dismiss the substance of the argument by then saying: well, should we go micromanage and stomp down the halls of a university?

In fact, Mr. Treasurer, I think that you could say the same thing,

that the Alberta Treasury Branches' statements are consolidated with the government financial statements, yet you always argue that you don't micromanage ATB. So it seems to me that there's a way to reflect consolidated statements without treading down this path of micromanaging and telling other people what to do. You know, we consolidate the Alberta Securities Commission in your own department's reports, and I haven't heard anybody from the commission accusing the Treasurer of stomping down the hallways of the ASC and micromanaging. Of course, this would be a good opportunity to do so, because they're in the middle of an executive search right now. I mean, what better opportunity?

So, Mr. Treasurer, please don't overstate the case. I mean, it is an honest dispute in terms of where we can go with consolidated reporting, but it really doesn't advance the debate at all to go down that path of trying to strike terror and fear into the hearts of school board administrators everywhere.

9:41

Also, Mr. Treasurer, in my first round of questions I asked about the government's health privatization bill. I forgot that it's called the Health Care Protection Act. So for all of my questions replay the tapes: ditto, insert Health Care Protection Act where I said privatization, and the same questions. If you could provide some substantive answers, I'd sure appreciate it.

The other thing. You know, when the Treasurer is talking about accountability – and I even heard the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie say that there were some things that were positive in terms of the government's reporting – it often stops short of where it could be. When any member in the opposition talks about the shortcomings, including the suspicion that they're not accidental shortcomings, that they're purposeful – certainly I've said to the Treasurer that I suspect that revenue projections, for example, are low on purpose, and then I think the Treasurer said: well, would you want me to make them high on purpose? That's not really the point. We want them to be as accurate as they can be on purpose.

When we talk about whether or not the government is doing everything it can to live up to its own claims about accountability, let me quote the Provincial Treasurer himself in the document A Plan for a Debt-Free Alberta, dated March 1999, where the Treasurer says that "business plans are one of the cornerstones of Alberta's prudent fiscal management." Now, with that statement in mind regarding the business plans being the cornerstone of Alberta's fiscal management, let me quote what the Auditor General has said about the government's record with business plans.

In the Budget 99 cycle, information on Alberta's economic outlook for factors such as population, unemployment rate, exchange rate, and interest rates were not provided to Ministries until October 1998, several months after some Ministries began their business planning . . .

In Budget 99, core businesses are still defined variously in terms of goals, strategies, activities, or performance criteria. Strategies are sometimes defined as desired results rather than broad actions to achieve them. Goals are sometimes defined in terms of activities rather than end results . . .

In our review of the Ministry business plans in Budget 99, we found that over half the Ministries had at least one goal that did not have a performance measure associated with it. Overall, 24% of all the goals in Ministry business plans did not have a performance measure. In addition, in many business plans where performance measures were included, the linkage between the goals and the performance measures was not apparent.

I could go on. The Auditor General comments on how "some performance measures are not measured annually." He goes on to say that "82% of the performance measures had targets. However,

two thirds of Ministries had at least one performance measure that lacked a target." The Auditor General notes that "in Ministry business plans, output and outcome measures are not always well defined, measurable, and clearly related to core business goals." The list does go on.

I know the Treasurer is familiar with the Auditor General's report, but my point of repeating this in the Assembly now is to say that it is not a universal analysis that there is tremendous accountability in government reporting. In fact, there are some serious deficiencies in the business planning process, and while it may be better than other jurisdictions – and that in and of itself is very subjective – it is still not as good as it can be. So let's make sure that we don't get simply carried away with defending what it is that we do and, instead, pay some attention to how it can be improved, because that is, after all, what a large part of this process is supposed to be all about.

I do have a couple of other rather specific questions for the Treasurer. The Treasurer and I have had this conversation about Centennial Food in the past, and we've got quite a healthy correspondence file, but I'm going to ask some questions in the hope that Albertans can gain just a little bit more insight into what's happening with their money in this regard. Will the Treasurer provide further information on the terms and conditions of repayment of the \$13 million loan provided to Centennial Food Corp? Will the Treasurer indicate how much in cumulative interest payments have been made on the loan between August 1 of '97 and the end of February 2000?

I do note that interest rates ranged from 3 to 10 percent during this time period, with the actual interest paid dependent on the amount of cash flow generated by the company. Maybe the Treasurer can confirm my understanding on this payment schedule, which is that if cash flow was inadequate to permit payment of the minimum interest of 3 percent, then interest accrues at 3 percent and is due at maturity, which is 2003. How much of the unpaid accrued interest has accrued on the loan from March of '91 to the end of February 2000, and what are the terms and conditions of the cash flow thresholds required for the company to trigger the sliding scale of interest payments on the loan, the scale of between 3 and 10 percent?

In addition, I'm hoping the Treasurer will tell us how much of the \$13 million owing on Centennial Food's loan is contained within the \$42 million allowance for doubtful loans, advances, and implemented guarantees and indemnities which I referred to earlier, which are found on page 56 of Budget 2000.

I also know that the Treasurer had some discussions with Centennial Food back in June of '98 relative to the loan agreements. I don't think those discussions have ever been made public. Can the Treasurer help us in this regard? It is a considerable amount of money, and it's one of those chapters that I think we'd both like to see come to a close.

Now, the Treasurer also has in his department some 143 pages of documents that have been identified through freedom of information requests, et cetera, that pertain to valuation reports, fairness assessments, workout and exit options, term sheets, and letter agreements between March 25, '98, and April 6, '99, pertaining to the loan agreement between the government and Centennial Food. I've never received a satisfactory explanation as to why these 143 pages of documents are being withheld from taxpayers. I know which exclusions of the freedom of information act have been cited, but I'm not satisfied that the public interest wouldn't be better served with more complete disclosure.

Mr. Treasurer, there are a couple of questions I wanted to ask you about the investments of the provincial government. One question I have is: will some action be taken in terms of ensuring that the various investment portfolios managed by the government of Alberta or on behalf of the government of Alberta take into consideration

providing access to capital or investment to Alberta-based business, particularly emerging businesses? What can we do with our portfolio of tax-funded investments to help grow Alberta businesses, and is there room to be more aggressive in that regard?

What type of advice does the investment and debt accounting group provide on accounting treatment and reporting presentation? What role does the investment and debt accounting group play in reviewing internal policies and procedures and monthly performance measurement regarding investments and liability portfolios?

I'd be interested to know what criteria are used by the Alberta heritage fund Investment Operations Committee to determine whether various heritage fund investments should be outsourced and managed by external managers. Will the Treasurer agree to release the investment policy manual of the Alberta heritage fund Investment Operations Committee? Now, if it's true that Alberta Treasury uses external managers to invest in certain asset classes, such as small cap companies and U.S. equities or global equities, what is the role of the external advisors, and why would we not see this manual?

I note that at a press conference a couple of weeks ago the Treasurer was asked a question regarding the future of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, and it had to do with the announcement of the \$230 million, the inflation-proofing in essence, that went in this year. The Treasurer's response I found intriguing. What I heard him say – and this would be his chance certainly to clarify my understanding – is that, yes, the future of the Alberta heritage trust fund is being reviewed and that if there was going to be a major policy change, that policy change is something that Albertans would have to be consulted about and that it's possible that such a major policy change could be in the future of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

9:51

While I'm mentioning the decision to retain \$230 million of the trust fund income in the fund in the third quarter so that it would be inflation-proofed, I'm wondering if the Treasurer will consider amending the Fiscal Responsibility Act to ensure that there is a mandatory provision that the fund be inflation-proofed on an annual basis. I know we've had this discussion before, but I think the time is right to make that commitment. Certainly, as the Treasurer always says, while legislation can't necessarily bind one Legislature to another, it certainly sets a direction and a goal and a standard, and the government will at some risk circumvent or change its laws when it comes to matters of fiscal responsibility. I'd appreciate the Treasurer's updated comments in that regard.

The Treasurer hasn't talked for a while about the investment management mandate to be established for portions of the heritage fund that are externally managed, and I'd appreciate him providing us additional information on this mandate. If these mandates are going to vary by certain parts of the fund, will the Treasurer provide copies of the investment management mandates when they're compiled and completed? While I'm asking about those, will the Treasurer refresh my memory as to the process of how these mandates are being constructed and ultimately approved?

I have some other questions about the fund. Why is the policy weighting of the real estate holdings in the endowment portfolio being increased from 7 to 9 percent? What real estate holding acquisitions are planned for this fiscal year and for each of the fiscal years during the planning cycle? Will the Treasurer provide a breakdown of the \$357.1 million fair value of holdings in the private real estate pool and the ownership percentage as of the end of the calendar year last year?

What is the frequency of reporting of Alberta Treasury and external managers to the Alberta heritage savings trust fund

Investment Operations Committee, and what are the contents of these reports? For example, do they report on amounts invested in various classes of investment, on an amortized and unamortized basis, on unrealized gains and losses, and on the amount of each class of investment as a percentage of the portfolio, on the average life to maturity of securities, et cetera?

Will the Treasurer provide a breakdown of the investment management fees paid to the following heritage fund external managers in 2000-2001: Guardian Capital, Bissett & Associates, Standard Life, Mawer Investment Management, Van Berkom, Bolton Tremblay, AMI, JP Morgan, Morgan Stanley, Pyrford International, Baring Asset Management, Morgan Grenfell, ABN Amro, UBS/Philips & Drew, Fleming, Bankers Trust, Stein Roe & Farnham, and GE Investments? If I've missed some of the external managers, maybe the Treasurer could add those into the list as well. That's the list that I could compile, and I acknowledge that it may not be exhaustive. Also, while the Treasurer is providing that breakdown, maybe he can tell us what the custodial fee is that will be paid to State Street Company of Canada in the year 2000-2001.

Madam Chairman, I know that that's a number of very detailed questions, and we do have more. In fact, that only touches on about a quarter or a third of the questions that I have. That brings me to perhaps my closing comment, which is just some reflection on this process.

Tonight has gone better in examining this minister's department than other nights have in examining this minister's department, I believe. I think it's because there was, with exception but with rare exception, a willingness to listen and provide a reasonable response. One of the difficulties, however, is that tonight at this very same time there's a budget examination committee looking at the Department of Justice. Now, both the Treasurer and I have an abiding interest in Justice issues, and I'm sure that we both could have used our time well upstairs in room 512.

It was the Treasurer when he was Government House Leader, I believe, who created or at least implemented this process where we break into these subcommittees and we accelerate the budget review. I think time has now proven that this is an unsatisfactory way to do business. It may serve the government's interest in that you get through the 28 days more rapidly, but I don't think it fully serves Albertans' interests when it comes to disclosure and careful budget examination.

Thank you.

MR. DAY: I'll endeavour to reply in detail to the detailed questions, especially those related to the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

Just a couple of comments on, again, some of the broad reflections. I'd like to say that when we do the revenue projections, we do not project revenues – and I'll quote the Member for Edmonton-Glenora – we don't make those low on purpose. For instance, the present budget is projecting for the year ahead, till March 31, 2001, that for that budget year the price of oil will actually average \$19. Now, when it's floating around \$32, that seems a little bit out of whack. However, members will remember that a year ago when I tabled the budget, February 24, '99, we were projecting \$13.50. On that particular day oil was \$12.61, and we were saying \$13.50. In fact, it was \$12.61. Some people thought we were being optimistic. The Liberals in their estimation were slightly above the \$13.50.

In fact, when we make these projections, we consult with leading analysts provincially, nationally, and internationally, those investment houses and those industry experts who, again, propose and purport to have some sound fundamental principles in doing those estimates. We survey the waterfront, as it were, and then consult again with our own unique economic conditions. Then we make a

projection based on what we actually think that figure will be; for instance, \$19 this year, and last year it was \$13.50. We actually project that. We don't go low on purpose so that we can be guaranteed to have a so-called surplus or economic cushion.

The way we make sure there's an economic cushion just in case prices drop is that we do all our revenue projections as realistically as we can, whether we're talking about oil or gas, the different fees that are coming in, or transfers from the federal government. We take all that into consideration at the start of the budget year, and then we take 3.5 percent of that and set it aside as an economic cushion just in case things turn on us, global commodities or some other issue beyond our control. Then we can draw from that cushion of 3.5 percent of revenues. It's a savings account, as it were, if things crater and they start to move downwards. Then we don't have to reduce spending on health and education and other departments. So we don't use our revenue projections to deliberately lowball so that we've got a cushion or a surplus. The cushion is right up front, set aside in that 3.5 percent.

10:01

Now, we may miss it in terms of where our projection will go. If we miss it, we usually miss it with the rest of the world, as we did with oil. We were saying \$13.50 last year. Some people projected \$12.75, some were saying \$14.50 or \$14.75, but we were all kind of in that same band together.

When we tabled the budget, did our preparations, some of the investment houses and other analysts were saying that it was going to be a little bit below \$19, some were saying \$20. I think averaging out about \$20.35 is where people are. So we're just a little bit below that average, but we think it's going to come down to that. If it doesn't, then of course we will have more of an economic cushion, 75 percent of which goes to the debt. So I just wanted to make that point.

This will be a difference of opinion, but I'd like to say that over, I think, the three or four years since we have had this type of estimates process, where we break into different committee rooms and simultaneously can be considering different parts of the budget process, even as the federal government does – as a matter of fact, that's where we got the idea from. When they get into their committee process, especially on legislation, they break into any number of committees at the same time. I think it actually has resulted in a better process of questioning. There's a closer feeling that you can see now as members come in.

This is the way it used to be: a lot of members on this side, some members on the other side, a lot of background noise. In fact, I think it took away from the process.

So whether it's here in this particular Assembly room or in one of the meeting rooms or actually around the table, I think it raises the quality of questions and puts more pressure on the quality of response. Now, that's my view, and we will differ on that.

On the questions which we have not answered, I will get back to you, Madam Chairman, in writing to the members.

At this point in time I would move that we rise and report progress.

THE CHAIRMAN: Having heard the motion by the hon. Treasurer that we now rise and report progress of subcommittee A, all in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:04 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Justice and Attorney General, Monday, March 6, 2000
 00/03/06
 8:07 p.m.
 [Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Subcommittee B – Justice and Attorney General

Tannas, Don, Chairman
 Laing, Bonnie, Deputy Chairman
 Blakeman, Laurie
 Calahasen, Pearl
 Doerksen, Victor
 Forsyth, Heather
 Fritz, Yvonne
 Graham, Marlene

Hancock, Dave
 Kryczka, Karen
 Leibovici, Karen
 Massey, Don
 McClellan, Shirley
 Melchin, Greg
 Olsen, Sue

Sloan, Linda
 Soetaert, Colleen
 Stelmach, Ed
 Stevens, Ron
 Tarchuk, Janis
 Woloshyn, Stan
 Zwozdesky, Gene

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the subcommittee to order. Before we commence this evening's deliberations on the estimates of the Department of Justice, a couple of things. One, it might be suggested that we go 20 minutes and the questioner ask the questions and the minister have responses within the 20 minutes and then move on to the next questioner and so on. Is that item, first of all, agreeable to everyone concerned?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

The second is that we have had in the past a senior civil servant, a deputy minister or ADM, sit next to the minister so that they can better answer the questions or whatever. Is that agreeable to everyone, or does anyone have any objection to that? Agreeable?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Objections? Okay.

With that, then, I think we're ready for this evening. Mr. Minister, do you want to say anything at the outset and then go to questions?

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes. I'm pleased to present Alberta Justice's proposed business plan for the period 2000 to 2003. First of all, I'd like to introduce the people with us tonight: first, my deputy minister, Mr. Paul Bourque, who's joined us at the table; in the gallery Mr. Dan Mercer, who's executive director, strategic services; Mr. Shawkat Sabur, director of financial services; and Dr. Randy Petruk, director of corporate support services; as well as Jack Jannsen and Betty Ann Hicks from my office.

The 2000-2003 business plan is my first as Minister of Justice, and it's the result of a good deal of hard work by Alberta Justice staff, stakeholders, and the broader community. I'd like to acknowledge at the outset the work that was done by my predecessor in the department, the Member for Calgary-Shaw. This business plan is really derived from the results of the justice summit which was held in January of 1999. You'll see, if you've read through the business plan and pursued it at all, that we very much tried to track the results of that justice summit and the issues and the concerns that were identified by the people of Alberta through that summit process. The summit brought together a broad cross-section of Albertans and representatives from many different sectors of the system to discuss justice issues and concerns. The final report was published in March. In May government formally responded to the summit, and as I said, the business plan is based in large part on those responses.

In preparing the business plan, we attempted to re-examine all

aspects of our core businesses. As a result, we've restated our core businesses more succinctly this year, but I'd like to emphasize that these changes are really a clarification of where our key businesses are rather than a shift in business focus, with one possible exception. We believe that supporting victims of crime should be acknowledged as a core business of the ministry, so this has been emphasized in the plan. Otherwise, we continue to provide police services to Albertans and legal services to government. We continue to provide support for resolving disputes in the courts and other forums, and we continue to protect the public by prosecuting the accused and holding offenders accountable under the law.

We've also restated our goals and re-examined our performance measures. I won't go into detail, because I know that you've had the opportunity to review them, but I do want to mention a few highlights and talk about some significant changes from previous years. I know there'll be questions on this, so I want to hit it straight up. We've eliminated the goal of partnering with outside stakeholders to support the administration of justice from our business plan this year. That does not mean that we intend to stop partnering or stop collaborating. We continue to work in partnerships as we always have, but we've discontinued it as a specific goal, because it's standard practice and should permeate everything we do in the department.

We've removed public satisfaction with the justice system as a performance measure. From our surveys we've learned that over 90 percent of Albertans do not realize that crime in their communities is strongly decreasing. Almost 70 percent are unaware that the province is responsible for administering justice in Alberta, and because of these findings we're recommending a more effective measure of public satisfaction with the justice system. Instead of asking the public how satisfied they are with the job that Alberta Justice is doing, we plan to ask them what we believe are more important questions, and those are: how safe do they feel in their homes, and how safe do they feel in their neighbourhoods? We will also ask how satisfied they are with the level of policing their communities receive. These questions provide a truer picture, we believe, of how satisfied Albertans are with the administration of justice in the province. In other words, we're talking about the outcomes rather than about how they feel the job is being done.

The final change is that we've added a performance measure specifying the number of community service hours provided by offenders. One objective of our corrections program is to challenge offenders to give something back to their communities. As a result, we'll measure how many hours of service Alberta offenders provide to nonprofit organizations, community groups, municipalities, and other government ministries. Again, this may not be the most effective way of measuring in this area, but we think it's a better way of measuring than we previously had and are always open to suggestions that you might have as to how we can improve our measurement of that particular area.

I'd like to spend just a moment elaborating on key results we intend to achieve in the coming years. Many of our initiatives, as I said, respond to what we heard in the summit. Others recognize and respond to the ever changing social and economic climate in the province. All of these initiatives are broadly based and will result in a justice system that is more sensitive to the needs of Albertans.

Before I begin, I'd like to review the financial context of our business plan, which recognizes the recent decisions of Treasury Board. Members will note from our spending profile on the last page that our spending targets are approximately \$457 million, \$447 million, and \$452 million over the next three years. This represents an increase of about \$45.5 million for the year 2000-2001. Of this amount, \$30.5 million is committed to nondiscretionary expenditures such as judicial and general employee compensation and contracted services' increases. Approximately \$6.2 million will be cost recovered from either the federal government or through self-funded programming and directed to victims of crime and Youth Criminal Justice Act program implementation. The remaining \$8.8 million represents discretionary funding increases and will be used to implement recommendations of the summit on justice. This includes funding for provincial criminal and family and youth courts, additional Crown counsel, court mediation programs, First Nations policing, and restorative justice programs.

Family law reform was recommended by our MLA review on the maintenance enforcement program and child access, by the federal report of the Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access, and by the Justice summit. Family law reform is an ambitious undertaking that will require a great deal of sensitivity to deal with the legal community, the judiciary, and all stakeholders in the system. We intend to improve access to family law by consolidating and streamlining the appropriate legislation and improving how we do business in the courts. One million dollars per year in new funding will be directed towards establishing more family and youth courts to reduce the case backlogs. Family and youth mediation will be addressed with the transfer of the mediation program to Justice from Children's Services and the allocation of 2 million additional dollars for that program.

Youth justice initiatives. Recently the federal government proposed the new Youth Criminal Justice Act to reform Canada's youth justice system. Although our government still has concerns with the legislation, some of its elements offer greater flexibility and better prospects for rehabilitating young offenders. In the next three years we'll spend \$3.1 million, \$2.7 million, and \$2.9 million respectively to deal with youth justice initiatives. We'll partner with children's services authorities and the aboriginal communities to increase options available for diverting less serious young offenders from the formal court process, but for those individuals who are clearly predisposed to antisocial behaviour, we will also have better options and resources for dealing with them.

Some other youth justice initiatives that are planned: funding will be directed to the city of Calgary's existing probation program to assist them in delivering their services, a group home for female young offenders will be established through the reallocation of program funding, and funding to implement the new Youth Criminal Justice Act will occur by cost recovery from federal sources.

Our business plan contemplates spending about \$2.3 million a year for a major initiative to make the justice system less complex and eliminate court delays to provide victims with a more meaningful role in an attempt to resolve cases appropriately at the earliest possible time. We will do that by screening police charges better, using alternative measures more aggressively, and encouraging early guilty pleas.

In support of victims we will establish specialized public assis-

tance units to provide information, referrals, and assistance. We will expand our early alternative dispute resolution programs in the coming year, which will ensure that citizens have access to equitable and efficient reforms for resolving disputes.

The fines collection project for the collection of outstanding Criminal Code fines will be expanded, and moderate increases have also been added which will cover only the security needs in new courtrooms.

8:17

Restorative justice will be a key issue for us this year. It's a key message from the justice summit that the system must be flexible enough to deal with the different circumstances of different offenders. We clearly heard that restorative justice must be employed to rehabilitate offenders, involve victims and communities, and respond to diversity. We believe that healing for both victims and offenders and restoring the balance of society in a humane and fair way should be important priorities for the justice system.

In introducing restorative justice approaches, it's important to note that we're not going soft on crime. Serious and violent offenders will remain a key focus of the ministry through vigorous prosecution of crime. However, we are committed to using whatever approaches are best for the individuals and communities involved while keeping in mind our mandate to ensure public safety. So over the next three years we will be spending money to fund selected community-based restorative justice programs on a pilot basis and support selected aboriginal restorative justice programs in order to leverage further resources from the federal aboriginal justice strategy, should that program be renewed. Not all deserving community programs can be supported from our budget, so we will be seeking private-sector funding and partnerships to assist those programs so that we can lever our investment.

Alberta Justice is also committed to enabling First Nations police services to provide law and order in their communities. The First Nations should have the opportunity to provide services to their citizens in the same way other communities do in the province. This business plan proposes the use of native liaison prosecutors to provide culturally sensitive prosecutions for First Nations people. Alberta Justice also intends to improve staff training to increase awareness of aboriginal people and culture. These initiatives will cost \$1.2 million, \$1.3 million, and \$1.4 million per year over the next three years.

The business plan emphasizes that police officers should be recruited and trained so that they reflect the social and cultural diversity of the communities they serve. There will be more community involvement in reviewing complaints against police and in disciplinary decisions concerning police behaviour. We are also examining the feasibility of developing a single-source training curriculum for police recruits.

In addition, our ministry will remain focused on crime prevention. We'll support the federal DNA Identification Act, which will allow the use of DNA to help police link offenders to serious crimes. Funding for this will not be required next year, but we'll plan to assume the costs of \$1.1 million for the last two years of the plan.

Under the Public Trustee it should be noted that there are currently 6,300 private trustees appointed under the Dependent Adults Act. This act requires the Public Trustee to be served when a private trustee is appointed. It also requires private trustees to return to court to have their appointments reviewed. Approximately 2,500 persons out of those 6,300 private trustees have failed to do so. The ministry proposes to establish a system of informing private trustees that they must return to court to have their orders validated to follow up on that particular issue and also to include notification of next of kin to attempt to address that problem.

One of the key messages from the summit was that victims need more opportunities to become involved in all stages of resolving a criminal act. I talked about the number of ways in which victims will be more involved. In addition, we will be reviewing current legislation and evaluating the services provided under the Victims of Crime Act. A new funding model for grants to victims programs will be implemented, and guidelines for making offenders pay restitution will be developed. Over the next three years we will spend \$2.9 million, \$3.1 million, and \$3.2 million, all of which will come from the victims of crime fund and not the general revenue fund.

As well as the objectives that have already been outlined that are directly linked to the summit, there are a number of other initiatives that we'll undertake to improve support for our programs. Because of the demographics of the public service it's imperative that we focus on developing leaders to replace those managers who will be leaving our employ over the next three to five years. It's a high priority for us to ensure that we have people in place to run our programs effectively. This will not require additional funding, but it does place a focus on education and training within the department, and we're putting a high priority on that area. We'll also work, of course, with the shared services model and examine innovative approaches to partnering with the private sector through common-purpose procurement agreements to support our information technology needs.

Finally, we'll develop an improved communications strategy to ensure that Albertans understand how their justice system works. Public education is the key to giving Albertans a better understanding of their protection under the law and helping them sort out the various roles and responsibilities of justice partners. We'll be working on a variety of ways to educate the public about justice in Alberta. A total of \$615,000 per year will be allocated for communications initiatives. We will also be launching a new Justice web site this spring to help us better communicate with Albertans.

In addition to the spending items listed above, there are a number of funding allocations that will be directed to nonsummit spending pressures that the ministry must deal with. This amounts to about \$30.5 million in the year 2000-2001. The allocations include funding to deal with various lawsuits facing government, increases we had previously agreed to for corrections services contract providers, judicial compensation and pension increases, and general employees' salary increases.

I'd like to conclude my comments by pointing out that the administration of justice is so basic to our Alberta way of life that we sometimes run the risk of taking it for granted. Like any other asset of value it requires us to employ the effort and investment necessary to keep it working the way it was intended. This business plan, which springs directly from our dialogue with Albertans through the justice summit, is an approach that I believe is ambitious yet appropriate. So I'd urge you to support the business plan and the course it sets for us, and I'd be delighted to answer any questions you might have.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. The first person on our list is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think we probably will have lots, so just tell me when the minister wants to stop and answer a few questions along the way. Just let us know.

MR. HANCOCK: Anytime you wish. If you want to stop partway through, I'd be delighted. If you want to go for your 20 minutes, I'd be more delighted.

MS OLSEN: All right. Don't worry. Mr. Minister, don't go to sleep on us here.

I think what we'll start with are just some of the administrative things, and then we'll get into the meat of some of the subjects here. A 649 percent increase in the communications budget. You know, Bob Scott may be good, but can you maybe help us out as to why your budget has increased that dramatically? Where do you anticipate spending that dramatic increase over the next year? I'm just looking at all the areas of Justice needing funding, and here you have this huge increase. So to me that needs some explanation.

Management information services. You're going from \$50,000 to \$2.2 million. That would be under ministry support services. I'm wondering why another such huge increase in that particular area. What kind of new systems are you bringing on line that would require those kinds of changes? Is it in relation to any of the changes that are happening with the federal system? The Canadian police information centre is making some changes federally. Are you tying into that at all, or do you have a role in supporting that particular program?

If you move down to court services, again we see another dramatic increase in program support services, line 2.1.1, a change of about 473 percent. Again, what are you offering? Obviously it's not salary because it's program support services. So I need to know where that money is going.

Also, Fort Saskatchewan. Is this where some of the transition is going to occur with opening more courtrooms? You alluded to opening more family court and young offender courtrooms. We see a 66 percent increase in the regional court operations budget in Fort Saskatchewan, 2.4 of the program, and I'm just wondering if you can explain that increase, what that is for.

I guess what I could do while we're into court operations is talk about the issue of court reporters. I'm concerned. I've received a tremendous amount of material over the past little while, and none of it supports this radical move to remove court reporters from the courtroom. It seems to be a cost-saving project, and sometimes that's not exactly the aim of removing court reporters.

8:27

There's the issue of what happens. Hopefully the minister can help us out here, but to my knowledge there isn't any technology available to date that would allow for the digital recording to pick up accents, heavy accents, maybe those folks who stutter, who have speech impediments, speech problems, issues in relation to those people having even things as simple as colds so that those recordings aren't clear. What about simple things like people not speaking into the mike? How would you know that's not going to be a problem? Also, some very grave concerns I have about missing court testimony and readbacks in court. Who's going to do the readbacks if in fact that needs to be done? Unless you're going to go to real-time recording in the courtroom. So I'm concerned that we're going to miss the boat here.

I recognize that the government has done some study with Halifax, and I'm wondering what the long-term impact has been with that particular process. What has been measured in terms of the ability of that system to do the job? Is it just digital voice? Is there some consideration of going to real-time recording in the courtroom? If that's the case, you're still going to need somebody who's able to do the court reporting.

What's the process on the outside? Are you just going to hire transcribers to transcribe off a tape machine? I think that's an issue as well. There is a real role for court reporters in a courtroom. I think we see other governments moving back to bringing court reporters in because of some of these issues and concerns.

What technology are you using? Has it been put out to tender? Do we know what's the best? Does somebody have to configure this technology for the government, or has it been configured? What tests have been done on it, and what are the outcomes as a result of that? I think that before we jump and risk having some serious issues come up in the courtroom – and I would suggest that mistrials as a result of this issue are important.

How much is this transition going to cost beyond what's in the supplementary estimates, beyond what's been outlined already? What's the cost of upgrading the data technology, and what's the cost of keeping people up to date? As we know, right now court reporters supply their own equipment, and that equipment is supplied to the tune of \$11,000 to \$15,000 per court reporter, and then when it's upgraded, it's about \$8,000. That's not an output that you have to worry about right now. So I'm wondering how that's all going to be managed. Quite frankly, I wouldn't want to be the first cases in court with this new technology rolling and be the accused in the box or the victim, for that matter, who may have to come back if there's a mistrial declared because of the technology in the courtroom.

I think there's still a need to have people in a courtroom, and I think that for all the reasons the minister has seen outlined by many people, including the judiciary, including the Canadian Bar Association, including the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association, all of those folks – why are we dismissing their concerns? I hope there's a really good reason for that.

So leaving there, I'd like to move on to legal aid. We haven't seen an increase in the legal aid budget, I don't think, since I've been elected, and this is my third year coming up. I'm a little concerned. You know, last year there was the issue of tariffs and an increase in tariffs that the Law Society was looking at. What resolution has your ministry come to with the Law Society in relation to an increase in the tariffs? Are we certain that they won't withdraw their services from the legal aid program as a result of the ongoing problem?

I might make a note to the minister that about 1996, I think it was, or '95 I had arrested an individual for sexual assault, and that trial took place in Westlock. I happened to make more money on that trial than the legal aid lawyer who was defending the accused. That was something that shocked me dramatically. It didn't hurt my pocket, but when you recognize the role of a defence counsel and the important role they play for an accused, I think the whole issue of tariffs and the appropriate remuneration is something that needs to be discussed.

I'm wondering why, if we have an increase in the population across this province, we're not planning ahead for the potential increase in the number of users. Also, what has the minister done in relation to increasing the number of lawyers who will take on legal aid family law? I've had many lawyers say to me, "No, I won't touch it. I'll do one pro bono case a year, and that's it." But there are many, many people out there who in fact don't get the services of family legal aid because the services aren't there. So I'm concerned about that. What kind of undertaking has the minister made to increase that particular ratio of lawyers who will take on those cases?

I'd like to move through to the medical examiner's office and just ask about the capital investments. Now, we see a 69.2 percent increase here, and I'm wondering what that particular increase is required for. Are they going to increase the building space required by the medical examiner's office? Are you going to be bringing in new technology for the ME? What sorts of things are going to happen there with that increase? It is for capital, not operations, so I'm just wondering if you can clarify that.

I'm happy to see that over my time here the crime prevention

budget has increased from \$25,000 to \$1.5 million. I'm rather happy to see that. It was a little bit of a bug for me, but we now have an increase this year of 73.5 percent.

Now, the minister talked about some victim services programs. Are those programs going to come out of that crime prevention funding, or are those going to be funded through the 15 percent surcharge that was allocated, I believe it was last year, for fines? That is program 7.2.1. I'm just curious as to what would actually be construed as crime prevention programs under this government's mandate.

8:37

I'm wondering also, Mr. Minister, if you view projects such as Success by Six and some of the other early intervention programs as crime prevention programs, as I do. I think that if you're talking about just target-hardening programs, then I think we're missing the boat. If we're including some of those social elements that need to be included, then I think that's a move in the right direction. I'm a little concerned about \$1.5 million going into just target-hardening programs throughout the province. That would concern me.

I also see very little increase – and this is a bit of a problem, I think – only a 1.5 percent increase, in the provincial policing programs element. I have to say that after what we've seen in this province over the last year, I'm wondering if this is going to adequately cover the issues and concerns we have. We have policemen around this province who are working virtually for nothing, Mr. Minister. They're putting in volunteer time to get their reports done. These are the guys and women who, regardless of how many hours they work, are making it out to the schools to deliver the DARE program that has been so widely received in this province yet not funded. I'm just wondering at what point you think all of that volunteer policing service just might come to an end, the workload of, among other things, answering calls on a night-to-night basis. Especially when you look at the RCMP and the numbers out in the community, the population-to-police ratio is very high in some of those communities. I think in Strathmore it is 1 in 1,400. It's certainly much different out in the rural areas than it is in the cities and the large municipalities.

I think the testimony that's coming out of the current case before the courts – and I'm not asking the minister at all to comment on that, but I will make this statement. Last year when I found out that money was diverted through the south Peace crime prevention agency and I confronted the Minister of Justice of the day and I confronted the RCMP assistant commissioner, I was told flat out that only public money was going for public policing. This is a great way of laundering money. Have we learned from the organized crime syndicate in this province how to launder money? I'm very concerned about this particular undertaking. This is not public money going to public policing.

I recognize that there are times when corporations will donate money. If they want to donate money for crime prevention programs such as Block Parent or Neighbourhood Watch – and they have done that for years – or for programs such as the rural service, Crime Watch, that the oil and gas companies were all a part of over a number of years, that's fine, but when it comes to funding police officers, that is not fine. I'm wondering why this is happening in this province, and if it's happening here, what other actions are we going to find out about in the near future?

I'll be honest with you, Mr. Minister. I cannot blame Alberta Energy in this particular instance for wanting to put money forward for policing, given the shortage.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Chairman, just on a point of order, if I may.

I think it's entirely inappropriate to go on at length on something which is clearly a reference to something which is before the courts, not just in a general sense for decision but in terms of hearing evidence. The hon. member knows that I can't comment on that, that I can't respond in any way to the comments that she's making at this point in time, and it's inappropriate for those comments to be going on the record. I'd be more than happy to deal with this issue. It's unfortunate that it coincides with the hearing of our estimates tonight, but it really is inappropriate to deal with that when it's so blatantly before the courts.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think you've had your answer.

MS OLSEN: I'll take my guidance from the minister. Certainly when all things are done and past, I would like to hear from him on the issue.

I'm going to ask this question: are there any other Crime Prevention Society schemes to funnel third-party money into our police forces in this province? That is something that I think Albertans need to know about. How many new police officers, Mr. Minister, have in fact been hired in this province over the last year? I'm very concerned about that population ratio outside of the large urban centres, although there it causes me some concern as well. When will you increase funding to cover some of these more serious deficits that occur within policing organizations?

We also know that there was a problem in Fairview. Fairview is a small community. Again, Mr. Chairman, this matter is before the courts, so I won't prolong this as well, but there was an issue in terms of a small community having access to the appropriate police resources to conduct an investigation. Those issues have been brought forward as well, and I'm wondering what the government is going to do to help out communities like that in the future. Again, I see that as a result of municipal downloading.

With that, we'll come back.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, as hon. members can see, we haven't had within the 20 minutes the questions and the answers being given.

Hon. minister, in response.

MR. HANCOCK: Sure. I'd be happy to revert to that process at any time that members of the committee wish to.

Let me just deal with some of the questions that were raised. First of all, the increase in the communications budget. The member indicated, I think, a 649 percent increase. The bottom line was there was no communication budget in Justice previously. We had, I think, perhaps one person who was paid out of the Public Affairs Bureau, but essentially there was not a communications role in the Justice department of any magnitude. The justice summit identified very clearly concerns from the public in understanding the role of Justice, understanding what was happening in the court processes, so it's necessary to devote resources in that area just to have a better communication and understanding of what Justice does. If we're going to promote the concept of safe communities and promote the concept of partnerships and deal in areas with more involvement generally with the public through restorative justice processes, which involve very heavily and depend very heavily on the involvement of the public, there has to be a much better communication role.

There are also a number of initiatives that are being undertaken, including a review of the Police Act, which hasn't been reviewed since 1988. We're doing a review of family law, as I spoke to, and consolidation of family law. We're doing a review of the single-family law forum concept.

8:47

There are a lot of areas where we need to be in consultation with the public and have a good understanding and discussion of these areas, and a strong communications portion in the department is absolutely essential. I've talked publicly about justice as an acute care system and talked about the wellness side and how we go out into the community. That requires an ability for both communication of what we're talking about and hearing back from the public and involvement of them, a very essential part of the department in my perspective and one which was not adequately covered before. So that is the need for the relatively large increase.

Into the management information systems: \$2.2 million. The bottom line there is that we had asked, I think, for some considerable amount more. The technology systems in Justice are not where they need to be. We don't have appropriate technology to allow for an easy transfer of information between all stakeholders or all participants in the justice system. We need to upgrade our technology rather considerably. This is a modest start on that upgrade. It'll probably provide for some case management technology at the Court of Appeal and the Court of Queen's Bench levels and other technology upgrades of that nature, but you can look, hopefully, if I have anything to say about it, to continuing increases in this area until we get appropriate technology and appropriate ability to deal with information-sharing.

On the court services side of the budget there's a bit of an anomaly for this year only, and that's because we're in the process of trying to resolve outstanding issues relating to the Provincial Court and compensation in the Provincial Court. You may have read recently that we will be establishing a Judicial Compensation Commission soon for the period commencing April 1. We will be making a recommendation to that Judicial Compensation Commission for increased pay, but we will also as a corollary to that be making some changes which the judges have long sought on the pension side, and we'll be funding that out of excess moneys currently in the judges' pension program. Those surplus moneys in the judges' pension fund are in the approximate area of \$19 million to \$20 million. That's a onetime in, although it doesn't show in our revenue. It's brought in from the pension fund as a surplus, and it will be paid back out to deal with some of the outstanding pension issues and hopefully resolve some of the outstanding lawsuits and allow us to really get on with the real work that needs to be done in reforming the court processes. So that's a bit of an anomaly.

The increase with respect to the Fort Saskatchewan court. Basically, there's been a new judge appointed out there, and that's the costs surrounding the appointment of a new judge and filling that position.

You dealt with court reporters, and there's not anything specific really in this budget which deals with court reporters. They are in the supplementary estimates, as you're well aware. As I mentioned in discussion on the supplementary estimates, there's approximately \$3 million in those supplementary estimates for replacing the analog recording equipment that we now have with digital recording technology. This provides an opportunity for us, because we have to upgrade the recording technology that we have now in any event, and in looking at replacing that technology and going to the new digital technology, we made a determination that we would go to the higher level of recording systems.

I think, as I mentioned in the supplementary estimates, Justice personnel have gone to various locations including Halifax and, I believe, New Jersey and Tampa, Florida, to observe the digital court recording processes in action. They've attended conferences. This is not something where we woke up one day and said: you know, we

want to make a change here. This is something that has been considered. The technology is there. I'm assured from the research that the Justice officials have done and from their on-site observation of it that it works and works well.

We have, as might be expected, feedback from members of the bar and members of the bench. As is always the case when you take in new staff, there will be people who say: no, don't go there. They'll be concerned about whether it's going to work. People will say: well, I don't want to be the first one. But, quite frankly, somebody always has to be the first one. We are in fact the last jurisdiction to go to recording technology in place of court reporters. I'm constantly given the feedback from people who say that in other jurisdictions it hasn't worked, but I'm satisfied that the recording technology we're going to be implementing is state of the art, is ahead of what other jurisdictions have. The feedback we've got is that it has worked much to the satisfaction of the bar and the bench in those areas where it's been utilized.

I have spoken with a number of members of the bar just on a random basis to ask for their reaction. Quite frankly, I'm not getting the reaction from my random calls that I'm getting from the people who are writing letters from either the bench or the bar, so I think there's a bit of a mixed message there.

We had been moving toward real-time recording. In fact, I think in the court reporters' job descriptions there had been questions or it had been a requirement that they move towards the real-time recording. The reality is that most lawsuits don't require that level of service. Most lawsuits don't require a same-day transcript or even a next-day transcript, so we're providing a really fantastic service which is used at a rather modest level. We think we can provide the same level of service with the recording. Yes, those recordings will have to be transcribed by typists when they're needed, as opposed to on a real-time basis in every courtroom where there's a court reporter.

We're keeping 16 court reporters to ease the transition and to make sure that in those cases where there's anticipated to be significant problems, that type of service can be available. The one example that I can think of might be where you have a testimony from someone who is deaf, and you might want some real-time transcribing so they can see the words across the screen. That's I think anticipated to be transitional, and we believe that once people see the recording processes in action, a lot of their fears will be allayed.

It has gone out to a request for quotation. At this stage we're looking at purchasing equipment I believe on or before the end of March for start-up at the beginning of July.

As I expressed during the examination of supplementary estimates, the main concern I have is how we deal with the people who have provided exemplary service in this particular area. That's why we have \$2.7 million in the supplementary estimates. We want to make sure that they have the opportunity, if they so desire, either to continue on in the public service, albeit in another capacity, or to move to the private sector if they so desire. There was appropriate money available for retraining, for counseling, for severance, and those sorts of issues. We're very sensitive to the issue.

This isn't a downsizing question. This is a question of how we best utilize the resources that are available to us. We needed to upgrade the equipment, so we're going to upgrade it to the best equipment we can get, and then we're going to utilize the savings which come out of that. The payback period should be about two and a half years, and we'll have available to us then resources to do much more community-oriented justice projects.

The increase in legal aid. The last time it was increased was '96-97, I believe. We're dealing with issues relating to governance.

We're in mediation on the tariffs, and we're encouraging different plans for the provision of services; for example, a staff project on family law. Family law is an area where there's difficulty providing the number of services that are necessary. Funding on the same model as we've funded in the past might prove to be incredibly expensive, so we'd like to see the Legal Aid Society look at alternative service models and perhaps do a staff project in the family law area as an example.

8:57

Their budget does have built into it sufficient moneys to provide for certificate completion fees. Last year, as I recall, we released an additional \$3 million that they had for payments on completion. While this remains an issue of concern to the bar, there are contingencies for issues like a major organized crime case. There's a built-in fund. This is an area that definitely needs some work, and we're in the process of talking with the Law Society and the Legal Aid Society about how this can be better operated.

Medical examiner. I think you may have missed a number or something because we're talking about relatively modest sums there: a \$90,000 expenditure on a medic program, which is software technology for the medical examiner's office, and \$150,000 will cover the increase in fees that are being paid to medical examiners across the province. A lot of our medical examiners are not full-time employees of the government. In fact, most of them offer themselves in their community, and they were being paid – well, if you thought the police officers were volunteering. They were being paid quite an insufficient sum. We've increased that sum by \$150,000, a modest amount to cover that increase.

I might have missed the next one in terms of the direct questions that were there, but I think you were talking about victims of crime and crime prevention, perhaps more on the crime prevention side. I would certainly agree with you. In fact, I was hoping that somebody would ask the question in estimates as to why we hadn't increased the Justice budget for crime prevention more and I would be able to say that we have, because we've increased Health and Learning substantially. To me, those are crime prevention programs. If we have an educated population, if we have our kids well cared for – particularly you mentioned the Success by Six program. Programs like that do more for crime prevention than many other programs which we might have. I certainly am spending an awful lot of time talking about how we can improve our crime rate by dealing with kids early and dealing with the root causes of the problems in society that lead to the issue rather than, as I say, dealing with Justice as an acute care model and providing the equivalent of acute care hospital services once the problem is there.

A 1.5 percent increase in provincial policing programs. I think what's necessary to look at in that area is the fact that the federal government has not been meeting their commitment to provincial policing programs over the years. I'm hopeful; I haven't seen the final analysis, but in this year's federal budget it looks like they're finally stepping forward to top up their portion of the program to the extent it needs to be topped up. That will assist us I believe very substantially, together with the fact that they've now reopened their training centre in Regina and there will be more RCMP officers available.

That's of course the main area where we pay directly for policing, our provincial policing contract with the RCMP, and I'm delighted to see that it would appear, subject to further analysis, that the federal budget may have finally provided some of the funds that are necessary to meet their obligations with the provincial policing contract. That should go a long way to providing those extra police resources that are needed. We in turn, though, will be looking more

substantively at the First Nations policing and some of the contracts we have there and looking at how that could be done more effectively.

The question about volunteer time is always a difficult one, because those of us who are very interested and active in what we do tend to go above and beyond the call of duty. I certainly appreciate the amount of time and effort that our police officers and other members of the community put in on a volunteer basis with respect to various programs and things they can do in the community to just make the community a safer place. So I don't want in my comments to diminish at all that volunteer service that's provided, but I'd also point out that community policing and crime prevention is a fundamental core business of police.

The job of police is not just to catch criminals after the fact. In fact, one of our main goals is safe communities. I've often said that I don't consider us to have a safe community if the object is to catch the people who break into our houses. The object of having safe communities is to have communities where people don't break into our houses. You do that by crime prevention. You do that by having better partnerships with the community, more people taking more of an interest in what's going on in their community.

You've talked about some of the early intervention programs, some of the diversion programs where one of the interesting things is that we have people, as I understand it, who come into our provincial correction services for an average of 46 days. Well, in those 46 days I'm not sure we're able to deal with some of the root causes of crime. The addictions questions, the alcoholism questions, we have to deal with those more.

To get back to your question on community policing, crime prevention is a fundamental core business of police. Should they have to do it on a volunteer basis? No, that shouldn't be the way it's provided all the time. Do I understand that the people who are committed to what they do and would consider themselves to be professionals work more than an eight-hour day usually and volunteer their time? Absolutely they do, and the community is always the better for it.

I'm not going to comment further on your comments about laundering money, only to say in the strongest possible terms that those comments in my view were totally inappropriate. We're not part of a money laundering scheme, never would be part of a money laundering scheme. And you, as a former member of the justice process, should know better than anyone that raising issues of that nature during a sensitive trial that's going on now would be inappropriate.

In terms of new police officers, I think I've dealt with the provincial side, where hopefully there will be new police officers available now that Regina is open for training and the federal government has committed their dollars back into the process. You alluded to what happened in Fairview, saying that there was a lack of resources, and I would have to correct that. There was no problem with access to police resources. They had all the resources they could use from a policing perspective there. The problem was that under our provincial Police Act the funding for overtime is paid for by the community. The basic policing is done under the basic policing contract. The problem that Fairview had and that some other communities like Cold Lake have had is that funding for overtime services is expected to be paid out of the community.

I expect that's an issue we will be addressing on a substantive basis under the review of the Police Act that's being undertaken right now, and we'll have to look at levels of service. We're looking at police training and police standards as part of it, and the whole question of how we pay for those overtime services, how we pay for policing and at what level in what communities will be, I presume,

one of the things that's responded to in the Police Act review. There's also an AUMA task force which is dealing with that whole question. We'll be looking forward to it with interest.

I think that deals with all the questions I've had so far.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Next person, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Good evening, Mr. Minister. Alberta children right now don't have equal claims to support from their parents when they separate. As you will appreciate, under the Divorce Act parental obligations in terms of support will continue till 18, but if the child is unable to be self-supporting because of illness or for any other reason, that support obligation may continue. Under the Domestic Relations Act support ends at 16 years under part 4 but at age 18 under part 7. Under the Maintenance Enforcement Act support ends at 16. Under the Parentage and Maintenance Act support ends at 18. So my question, Mr. Minister, is: why have you not acted on the recommendations of the Alberta Law Reform Institute? There are at least two reports that have addressed this. It is not, with respect, a difficult matter to resolve. If you are as interested as I am in making our legislation Charter-proof, can I ask why that matter is still outstanding?

MR. HANCOCK: We're reviewing in total the family law legislation, doing a comprehensive review of it, with the anticipation of bringing in one or two comprehensive acts hopefully next year. We believe it is more appropriate to do a comprehensive review and reform rather than to deal with things on a piecemeal basis.

MR. DICKSON: Excellent. I invite you to look at a private member's bill that had come into the Assembly three years ago, the Family Law Reform Act, that was a modest amateur effort to consolidate a number of statutes, and I appreciated the advice I got from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek as I was drafting and putting that bill forward. That was very helpful to me.

Mr. Minister, will they also be actively considering then the unified family court, which is something else that the Liberal opposition has urged your department to address over the last five or six years?

9:07

MR. HANCOCK: The task force on the unified family court is in process. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed will be chairing it, and it will be formally announced in the next few days.

MR. DICKSON: Very encouraging.

Another recommendation I had made to your predecessor was to take advantage of the technology, afford the Alberta Court of Appeal a video record. You know, Mr. Minister, as somebody who's experienced with the way our civil system works, think of the amount of time that an appellate panel sits wrestling with books and books of transcripts trying to assess evidence and being stuck really with the trial judge's assessment, which is often skeletal and not all that helpful. The suggestion is: why wouldn't we look at providing a video record of viva voce evidence so that the Court of Appeal in appropriate cases would not be restricted to a transcript, whether an electronic format or hard copy, but be able to make full use of that kind of video technology? It's been suggested before. I won't characterize the responses I've received, but I'm still shopping for a minister who's interested. Could I have your response?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, I'm very interested in improving technol-

ogy in the justice system. I think we're way behind where we should be. Of course, as you've noted from my comments tonight, we're pleased to take the next step and get into digital recording at the highest level possible. We sense resistance to that, so I'm not sure what resistance there would be to taking it a step further to video recording. The only comment I could make is that the Court of Appeal, in all of the technology requests they have before us, hasn't included that one.

We are, though, very interested in using video technology in other ways with respect to the courts in terms of allowing video conferencing processes, which will be both more convenient for the public in terms of their access to the courts and more convenient for Justice in terms of eliminating or reducing the amount of resources that are needed to move incarcerated persons around and that sort of thing.

I guess the short answer is that we're moving as fast as we can to upgrade technology. We've got a lot of priority areas. We could spend a lot of money on technology. Our important priority areas are in getting proper information systems together first. Certainly your suggestion of videoconferencing is one which should be on the table for future consideration, but it can't be up there at a priority level in terms of the need we have for technology improvement.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, and I'll keep asking.

Mr. Minister, I compliment you. On page 218 of the business plan we've seen for the first time in my recollection an acknowledgment that public legal education is part of the responsibility of the provincial Department of Justice. I'm disappointed that it took the justice summit to highlight the need there, but I put to you one of the great ironies. In this province PLENA, the Public Legal Education Network of Alberta, probably provides the finest job of supporting, co-ordinating, and developing public legal education of any jurisdiction in Canada. I look at the kind of leadership provided with Alberta Law Foundation support. We're doing a terrific job, but I've always been struck - and this is the irony - that it's happened, frankly, in spite of our Department of Justice and despite what I regard as an abysmal lack of leadership on the part of your predecessor. So compliments to you and your deputy for identifying it on page 218.

Now, my question is: can you give me some concrete particulars? I mean other than simply studying it. This is not a new issue, Mr. Minister. I'd like to raise the threshold. Tell me: what concrete kinds of ways can you and your department provide some support and leadership to enhance, support, and leverage that very, very excellent public legal education program that already exists in the province?

MR. HANCOCK: Probably two key areas there in terms of initial action. The first will be the new Justice web site, which we hope will be comprehensive, interactive, and a valuable tool for public legal education, a valuable resource for teachers, for schools, and for everybody involved in the community in getting information on a timely and accurate basis. So the web site will be an important first step.

Secondly, as part of the increase in the communications budget we anticipate having a public education officer in Justice whose job will be to co-ordinate with the schools and community colleges to promote public education programs, to help co-ordinate the ways that we can be involved in public education. You might already be aware of the fact that the courts, particularly the Provincial Court, have engaged in a program of making judges more available to the schools to talk about the role of judges in the court system. We hope to dovetail with that, co-ordinate with that, so that programs can include understanding the role of Justice and the government.

The other thing which might be interesting to you is that the steering committee from the justice summit has agreed to stay on as a Justice Policy Advisory Committee. So with that group we have representatives from most, if not all, of the stakeholders in Justice and in the area of justice. We don't consider it the job solely of the Department of Justice to implement the recommendations from the justice summit. Quite frankly, neither do the stakeholders, and their advice to me is that this is something where we need to involve a broader cross section, a broader group of people, and each of the stakeholders has a role to play.

So that Justice Policy Advisory Committee will be playing an important role in identifying needed areas of public education, needed areas where we can partner with the community in providing a role for education. We and the dean of law serves on that committee have discussed at that committee, I believe - I'll have to check just to make sure, but I'll put this out anyway. We have checked on the question of having members of the education system other than the dean of the faculty of law involved in that Justice Policy Advisory Committee so we have better access to appropriate ways to do public education in the justice system.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Can you give me some assurance that public legal education is going to be framed more broadly than it's described on page 218 of the business plan? To me I read that as trying to give people information about how the system works, but you know, you're talking to an old '60s activist who was involved when student legal services started at U of A and who was involved in starting Calgary legal guidance. I'm interested in people being able to get substantive information on how to access remedies too. It's not simply a question of giving them a better understanding of how, for example, the court system works and sentencing works and conditional release works.

A big part of that, whether somebody wants to be able to do their own divorce, whether somebody wants to be able to incorporate their own corporation - you know, I think it's important that we empower citizens to be able to find their own remedies in simple cases. So that, you'll appreciate, goes further than just sort of giving them a sense of how the system works. It's designing legislation so it's easy to read and understand. It's making forms accessible, either electronically or in hard copy. It's constantly looking at challenges involved in terms of accessing remedies in the system. So, Mr. Minister, can I ask you to address that somewhat broader view of public legal education and your department's role in it.

[Mrs. Laing in the chair]

MR. HANCOCK: Well, we only have a 649 percent increase in the communications budget this year for that area, so I think it would be a bit of a stretch to expect us to go into almost the delivery or training for the delivery of legal services. I'm not suggesting that's not something that should be out there to be reached for, but I think it would be a stretch to suggest we'll get there this year or even in the next couple of years. I think what we really want to try and accomplish - and we see it, for example, through maintenance enforcement. It's very interactive in terms of assisting people with advice on where to go with the next steps.

9:17

We're going to be doing a lot more to simplify the court processes. We're hoping to be in a position where we can increase the limits, for example, on provincial small claims court so the average person can have access to those courts and use it themselves. I

guess the corollary of all that is that every time you do that, it's necessary to make sure that there's good information available to the public as to how to access those courts or how to access those programs. So we will be spending more time, effort, and money on appropriate manuals, for example, and access to that process.

Again, I go back to the web site. I think electronic technology will be a boon to us. It is a work in progress. I can't promise that it's going to be delivering forms in all areas, but I would anticipate that that's a direction we would be going.

So I think we're going in that direction, and it's a question of how far, how fast, how much can you do, and what, really, should you be doing. Obviously we can't be providing legal advice, but we should be providing more and better access and the necessary information so that the public can make good use of that access.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Minister, just moving on to page 223 of the business plan. The testament to my lack of persuasiveness is the fact that we still don't monitor the length of time it takes from the time a certificate of readiness is filed until the time a trial commences. We continue to track elapsed time from first to last appearance, but the biggest delays, where you don't have the advantage of Charter constraints to move things along, are on the civil side, and every year that I've come to query your predecessors, I've suggested that we should be monitoring delays and so on in terms of civil trials. I'm interested in your explanation in terms of why we don't do that.

Because I'm close to running out of time, I just wanted to get into another area quickly. You're obviously interested in technology. Mr. Minister, I've been watching with some interest in Ontario the integrated justice project which has e-filing capability. This is the thing with the SHL/Systemhouse consortium. This was in response to the 1996 CBA report of the System of Civil Justice Task Force. It's interesting. In Alberta we've had arguably the most technologically sophisticated Court of Appeal in the country for a long time. There have been lots of advances in different areas. You're interested in dealing with court reporting, but I'm interested in terms of why we haven't looked at something more comprehensive, as is evidenced in the Ontario jurisdiction, because there may well be some advantages that accrue to doing things in that fashion.

The other question, Mr. Minister, will be no surprise to you. We've seen the Ontario government deal with legislation dealing with same-sex partnerships. The federal government has now introduced legislation to deal with that. I always encourage the provincial government to make our legislation Charter-proof. My question is: when may we expect that the province is either going to accept what we'll call the Liberal model of domestic partnerships or come up with a Conservative government variation? The end is to make our legislation Charter-proof, be able to reduce those stiff fees we're paying out to the firms that we dispatch to the Supreme Court of Canada on a regular basis to do battle on behalf of the provincial government.

For those questions maybe I could look for a response from the minister, Madam Chairman, if I still have some time left.

MR. HANCOCK: With respect to the question of measuring the time to trial from certificate of readiness, I think you're probably as aware as I am, although I haven't practised in the civil litigation area for the last number of years in my practice, that that is not really a measure of the effectiveness of the system inasmuch as that's still very much in the control or partially in the control of the parties to the action as much as anything else.

What we are interested in doing, though, is providing for the freeing up of court resources by encouraging more pretrial processes of mediation, mediation earlier on files, looking at some of the

things that are happening, for example, in B.C. and Ontario with respect to whether there should be a compulsory aspect to the provision of mediation or whether there should be at least a procedure whereby one of the parties could trigger mediation prior to trial. Those are, I think, more effective ways of dealing with the issue of utilization of our court resources than perhaps measuring the time between certificate readiness and trial.

The median time used in goal 5 that you cited is the only national measure there is. Sometimes that's one of the problems you have when you're trying to find measures which can be appropriately utilized in this sort of a context, where you're trying to find something, where you don't have to invent a whole new method of collecting data and you have something to measure it against. Personally, I guess I would like to see us move over time to inclusion of some more qualitative analysis of results and those sorts of things. I'm always open to suggestions as to what better measures we can have and where you would find the benchmarks to measure them against.

In terms of technology, the integrated justice project in Ontario that you mentioned I understand has been some four years and \$200 million in the making and is still not up and running. We don't have those kinds of resources to put into that type of a long-term project. We are doing our own integrated justice review, and we are looking to get some information on that in the relatively near future as to what we might utilize. As I mentioned earlier, we are doing a technology plan for the department in terms of all of the issues, information sharing, a project which will bring together the information resources and the planning resources at all levels of the department and, in addition to the department, including the courts. So we're not sure that the Ontario model is a good one given the time and money that's gone to trying to develop it, but we are working in that area and are very interested in improving our own integrated information system.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you. It's 20 minutes.

The next member up is Drumheller-Chinook.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I just have a couple of rather quick questions. One I'm interested in is the youth justice committees and the process for those, if the Minister would like to give just a wee bit of information on that. Also, just an update on the transfer of the community corrections program to aboriginal communities. I'm interested in the amount of interest that the minister is finding here.

MR. HANCOCK: Sorry; I missed that.

MRS. McCLELLAN: The community corrections program that's available to aboriginal communities. I'm wondering what the take-up on that is.

The public perception of safety in the neighbourhood was of interest to me, and I wondered if you might have some information on that by region. I sense in my community that the policing is working out quite well. There was a period of time where we had a number of concerns on rural policing, but that seems to have leveled out, and if you had some regional information, it would give me an indication. I don't expect that now but when you would have an opportunity.

I'm interested in any progress that's being made or initiatives that are being taken to address some of the concerns with the Young Offenders Act, which seem to be ongoing.

9:27

A question was posed to me on Friday, and I don't know whether

you have the answer, but maybe you could just indicate by nodding your head if you're responsible for the highway traffic police. Is that the Minister of Infrastructure? The question was posed to me, just for the member's use, as to what role special constables have in policing on secondary roads and if there's going to be a duplication or an overlap. I'm sure I'll get an opportunity to pose that to the Minister of Infrastructure if and when his estimates come up. Certainly we don't need duplication, and I think it is important that we define what responsibility or jurisdiction special constables have. Many municipalities have put these in place. It's working very well. Obviously it's a big province, and we don't really want you to send out a bunch more people into an area where it is working. We might need them more in more heavily populated areas.

Those were really my questions. I didn't want to take a lot of the committee's time, Mr. Minister. Oh, I had one more. I apologize.

There were pilot projects in place working with young people in young offenders' institutions in Calgary and Edmonton. I believe in Calgary it was linked to sports, and in Edmonton it was linked to the arts. They were given some exposure and training, I suppose you might say, while in the institution and then linked to community people when they left the institution. The first indications I recall were that it was positive and that the principle of it, of not allowing the case where young offenders simply go back to the situation that sort of got them in there in the first place – I'd like to know if those projects are still going and, if they are, what indications there are as to their success.

Those are my questions, Mr. Minister.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, I'll try and answer them quickly. We have youth justice committees covering about 75 percent of the province now. There are 80 committees in place. They're formed under the auspices of federal legislation; that sets up the criteria. They basically are volunteer organizations coming forward from the community, and then we appoint them. We have some resources in our budget this year to provide some support for them. I feared in the past that we didn't have the resources to provide the support they needed, but we're moving in that direction because they do good work.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Any questions that you don't have the immediate answer for I'd be happy to have you just drop me a note.

MR. HANCOCK: Okay.

Community correctional services currently has some \$6 million in contracted aboriginal services, including the operation of camps and a correctional centre by and for aboriginal people. I'll get you additional information on that.

I don't have stats for you at hand about the safety by region. I think one of the things that's very clear is that – for example, I was down in Calgary recently assisting with the kickoff of the new Block Watch program – those types of programs where the community takes some responsibility for seeing what's going on in the neighbourhood are very important in the urban areas. Rural Crime Watch fits into that area, as well, for rural areas. But in terms of statistics by region, I'll have to get you those details later.

The Young Offenders Act. As you know, the federal government has introduced again its Youth Criminal Justice Act. We've had commentary on that. We've had concerns about how far it goes. The justice ministers met in B.C. in early December and again raised some concerns. Ontario has basically taken the position that the Youth Criminal Justice Act should be scrapped. Quebec has taken that position as well. They've taken it from opposite ends of the spectrum. We've taken a position that we should play a positive

role. We've encouraged the federal government to make changes to that act to deal with some of the issues and concerns we have, but we're also moving forward to implement some of the provisions of that act and some of the alternative-measures programs and those sorts of things which we think are effective for those young offenders who can be rehabilitated or otherwise dealt with outside the system.

We think there should be access, for example, for younger children, not because we want to throw kids under 12 in jail but because there needs to be some way of bringing them into the process so that they can be dealt with in the alternative processes. We think there should be an easier access for kids over 16, for example, to move them into the adult court system. By and large, we're saying that we want to work with it and do what we can to implement some of the positive things that are in it as well.

The role of special constables particularly on secondary highways. We're negotiating, working with Infrastructure as we speak and with other stakeholders to determine what the role will be, who will do the policing on secondary highways, and how that will be integrated with the overall system. One of the things I would want to mention is that we do not expect that special constables should do policing. Policing is something that should be done by persons who are trained in policing. Special constables have their place for bylaw enforcement processes, for other things, but they shouldn't be acting as police on our highways. That's an area of concern. If there's going to be a secondary level of policing, then there needs to be appropriate training and appropriate resourcing for that.

In terms of projects for young offenders, I don't have the data at hand specifically relating to the program. I remember the program you're talking about. I'll have to get you that information. We are working more in terms of those types of programs. For example, there's a transition program with the city of Edmonton whereby the city has agreed to provide work experience for young offenders so that they can build up their résumé, so to speak, and have a positive work program in place, because we want to make sure that young offenders coming out of a correctional facility or coming out of our system have an opportunity to stay out of the system.

The city of Edmonton, for example, has taken the initiative on a program which may well do that, where they'll hire a young offender. They don't have to be people that are in the correction system, but they'll hire a youth, give them work experience, and give them something on their résumé so they have something to take forward. I think those programs are very positive.

We've got to appreciate that everybody that comes into our system, into a provincial correction centre, whether they're seniors or youth or non youth, is going to come back out into the community. Unless we have a positive experience for them and we've somehow added to their ability to deal with their particular issues in the community, we haven't done anything for the safety of the community. So we need to deal with those.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a number of questions this evening, and my colleague for Edmonton-Norwood is anxious to get another chance to ask more questions. I see there is a substantial change in the budget of the medical examiner's office. I've been advocating for some time, and I'm wondering if it is not a plan of the government to conduct now – my question would be:

are you planning a fatality inquiry whenever there is the unfortunate circumstance of an Albertan losing his or her life on a work site? Is this something that your government is planning: a fatality inquiry every time there is someone fatally injured on a work site?

Now, I have a few questions also regarding the courts. What are the current backlog statistics for the province? What is the major hindrance? Are the prosecutors finally being paid enough, and are there enough of them?

9:37

MR. HANCOCK: Sorry. What was the first part of that question?

MR. MacDONALD: What is the major hindrance? Are the prosecutors finally being paid enough, and are there enough of them?

I'm quite agreeable if the hon. minister would like to respond at a later date by letter, as well, if he does not have the time or the resources, perhaps, to answer some of these questions this evening, Mr. Chairman.

Regarding the new supercourtroom that has been announced for Edmonton to be completed by September 1 of this year, out of what budget will this funding come?

What are the government's plans, also for the hon. minister, with respect to court reporters, and how are those plans reflected in this budget? Is there going to be a digital court recording system installed in every courthouse throughout the province, or is it going to be a system that's probably going to fit in the trunk of someone's car as they go from courthouse to courthouse in rural Alberta?

I have a number of questions concerning organized crime. Everyone of us around this table, I believe, would be concerned and would certainly be offering words of encouragement to the hon. minister if he can fight organized crime in this province. What is the extent of organized crime in the province now, and what is this government doing about it? The laundering of money in casinos has been an issue that has certainly been brought to my attention by worried constituents who have visited the constituency office on more than one occasion. How much money is laundered through casinos and other government gambling businesses?

Can the hon. minister say who controls the importation and distribution of illegal drugs in the province? I am sure there's monitoring going on regarding these activities and the gangs or organizations who control heroin, cocaine, marijuana, ecstasy. If he can divulge any information to me, I would be very curious and grateful as well.

Also for the minister: what is the global budget provincially to combat any further expansion of organized crimes? Given that new Canadians and new Albertans are often victimized by organized crime in their community, it is often important that there are community police officers able to communicate with and gain the trust of those citizens. Further, to move into gangs of a specific ethnicity, it is important that the composition of police forces reflects the ethnic composition of the communities they serve. To that end, will the minister advise the committee on the number of police officers of, for instance, Vietnamese ethnicity in the province, the number of police officers of Chinese ethnicity, of native Canadian ethnicity, of Sikh ethnicity? Is there any direction or incentive for municipal police services to ensure that their police forces are a reflection of the community that they serve?

I have another question for the hon. minister. We worry about language services for health authorities to ensure that non English speakers are able to communicate for their health services. What funding or programs are in place to ensure that police services in larger centres have the linguistic skills necessary to serve all citizens properly? Can the hon. minister indicate the number and in which

languages the RCMP, the Calgary Police Service, and the Edmonton Police Service offer services?

I also have a question for the hon. minister. Are there any more initiatives for creative sentencing in the provincial courts?

The issue of pine shakes of course. Many constituencies have been victimized by this scandal but some constituencies more than others. There are some constituencies in the province where it is stated that up to 3,000 homes are victims. Now, if there are legal opinions that the Department of Justice has received, legal opinions existing that free the government of any involvement in this, I believe it would be in the interests of the province, in the interests of courtroom time, and in the interests certainly of the homeowners if those legal opinions could be released to the public. I wonder when that will be done.

Now, we all know that this is very expensive, and homeowners in some cases have been victimized twice by the government. There's been mismanagement and misinformation, and there's also the issue of the treated pine shakes. Hopefully we're not going to go down the same road as the untreated pine shakes, down the road to the courthouse. This is certainly an issue that we cannot see repeated. If the minister can shed any light on those legal opinions for us, I would be grateful. Also, what is the liability insurance carried by the province? If there is going to be a settlement of this, will that insurance policy cover it, or are the taxpayers going to be on the hook?

Also, I have a question on community volunteer policing. In my constituency – and I'm proud to be associated with these individuals – there is the Ottewell community patrol. It's a volunteer patrol. There are many patrols of this nature, of course, across the city and across the province. What measures does the hon. minister have to support these volunteer patrols in the future? They provide vital information to the police, and I believe they are very effective in allowing for economical policing to occur. They're very necessary. If the hon. minister has any programs that are going to help these organizations in the future, I would be delighted to hear about them.

Also, the Auditor General has been making observations on each department, as we all know. The Auditor General's office has recommended "that the Department of Justice report the results and costs of its fines collection activities," and I would like to know when the hon. minister's department is going to make these necessary reports public.

I have one more question, Mr. Chairman, and that's related to massage centres. I note the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and her initiative last year, the protection of children in prostitution. Before I came here, I saw on the evening newscast an update on that whole issue. The police were patrolling the neighbourhoods of the city of Edmonton here, and they were remarking that there was a notable decrease in the number of child prostitutes on the streets. That is certainly something that is positive. Now, whether this will be upheld in the courts, this whole idea, is another matter. I certainly hope that these activities simply have not been moved indoors.

9:47

As I am aware and as I understand – correct me, hon. minister, if I've missed something here – at present there are no provincial regulations regarding the practice of massage therapy in the province of Alberta. I understand that there are many groups with an interest in developing standards on a provincial level. The various cities at the present time within Alberta may set their own bylaws regarding requirements. I understand that in the city of Edmonton – and it may be similar in Calgary – you need a business licence, and you need permission from the police chief or his or her designate. I believe this is inadequate.

There has to be some sort of public consultation process here, I think. These centres seem to spring up overnight. Police resources are limited in patrolling them to see if they are operating within the confines of the bylaws. I was shocked when I looked into this that there were no provincial regulations, and I think there is a need for provincial consultations, particularly consulting the immediate neighbourhood as to the establishment of such a business, particularly since one not too far away here on Jasper Avenue has recently been visited by the vice squad, and I believe charges have been laid. I forget the name of this establishment, but this has been an event that has happened here in the last couple of weeks.

I would be very anxious to hear from the hon. Minister regarding this issue. As I said earlier, if he does not have the answers available now, a letter at some time in the future is fine.

Those are my questions at this time, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Hon. minister, in the seven minutes remaining.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, with respect to the first comment relating to the medical examiner's office and the increase in that budget, I think I answered that question fairly definitively earlier on, but I would repeat for your benefit that the increase in that budget is dealing with providing for technology, particularly software, a MEDIC program for the medical examiner's office, and for the increase in the stipends paid to the non-union employee medical examiners who are utilized around the province.

It's not our intention to have an automatic fatality review inquiry with respect to every death on a work site. There is a Fatality Review Board in place. The Fatality Review Board reviews every fatality outside the hospitals, I believe, across the province and makes recommendations as to when that fatality review inquiry is necessary. I believe that's a fairly comprehensive program, one that works very well for Albertans and one that we would anticipate continuing to use. Typically when the Fatality Review Board indicates that they feel there should be an inquiry, an inquiry is held, but that doesn't impact the medical examiner officer's budget in any way that I'm aware of.

In terms of major hindrances there's money in the budget which will allow us, subject to correction, to hire additional prosecutors so that we can move ahead with some of the initiatives that we have, one of which is, for example, early review of files so that we can get to an early resolution of some matters and thus take some of the pressure off the court system. One of the problems we have is a very high collapse rate. In other words, we overbook the courts on a daily basis. It's sort of like an airline. You overbook it because you know that certain ones won't show up or will collapse on the steps of the courthouse, so to speak.

We still are not making efficient use of the judges and the courtrooms that we have available to us now because of that high collapse rate. So it's necessary to hire some prosecutors. We're working on a pilot basis now to see what we can do at the early stages of a file to resolve some of those things so we don't have as many getting to the courthouse and collapsing. That's one of the issues that we really have to deal with, and we're going to devote some resources to doing that.

In terms of the new courtroom there was an announcement made I think last week that a courtroom would be provided in the courthouse in Edmonton. We're renovating some space which is currently being used for other purposes, so there will be an additional court facility available. It's already accessible to the lockups and the other security provisions, so it's an appropriate way to deal with the issue.

I'm pleased to say that it's being paid out of Infrastructure's budget, not our budget, at a relatively modest cost in comparison to what other jurisdictions have done. I think the sum is about \$1.5 million. We'll end up with an appropriate court facility which can be utilized both for this particular set of charges that are coming forward in September as well as for ordinary court utilization. And yes, it will have digital recording equipment available to it.

You raised the question of court reporters, court reporting, and digital recording equipment. Yes, every courtroom in the province will be equipped with appropriate digital recording technology. We will not be having the court clerk or the judicial clerk or the judge carry around the tape recorder in the trunk of his car. We will have state-of-the-art technology, and it'll be available to Albertans in every courtroom in the province.

Organized crime. A very interesting question, and one which I'm sure I'd like to be able to provide the answers to and I'm sure the police would like to provide the answers to in terms of how much organized crime there is in Alberta, quantifying it, how much money is being laundered through casinos and that sort of thing. Those are very interesting questions but I'm not sure are ones which we would do anybody any service attempting to stab at answers for.

The bottom line is that we are working very hard with the police services both in the province and nationally to co-ordinate information sharing and to make best utilization of the resources we have available to us to counteract organized crime. At the ministers of justice and attorneys general conference that I alluded to earlier in B.C. at the beginning of December, we spent the better part of a day on presentations from various police forces, the RCMP and other police forces across the country, to give us a better concept of the magnitude of the problem they're dealing with, where it sits. It's a huge problem. It's one where, with the advent of technology and the Internet, the organized crime situation is moving with the speed of light or at least the speed of fibre optics. Some of the traditional tools which have been used to combat organized crime such as wiretap, for example, don't apply on the Internet. Encryption technology is a problem that police forces are having to deal with in terms of how they combat organized crime.

So suffice it to say that it's a serious problem. It's not limited to any one particular group of people. There are eastern European organized crime syndicates. There are Asian gangs, of course. There are now aboriginal gangs coming into play. There are a number of different sectors, and they don't stick to any one commodity anymore. They'll do anything which they can make money at, so police forces are reorganizing themselves. Instead of being commodity specific, they're now looking at overall global contacts relating to the crime syndicates themselves. Of course, it would be nice to be able to identify who exactly is behind these and get the information so they could be arrested. That's the job the police are conducting on an ongoing basis.

We have committed \$8 million over three years to CISA, Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, which is basically a program of . . . My 20 minutes aren't up already? My gosh.

MR. WOLOSZYN: Yes, they are. You're some talker.

MR. HANCOCK: I think that was the end of his 20 minutes, Mr. Chairman.

In any event, basically the global budget for combating organized crime – again, that's difficult to put a specific figure on. As I say, provincially we have specifically targeted \$8 million over three years to this information sharing process, but you'd find the organized crime-fighting budgets in each of the police budgets for both the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary, the RCMP

provincial policing contract, as well as the federal RCMP presence in the province. So it would be difficult to sort of pick one number, isolate that out, and say that that's how much is being spent fighting organized crime.

In fact, one could argue and I often do take the opportunity to point out to people that when their kids are buying drugs in the neighbourhood or in the school, they are contributing to the profits of organized crime. So we can't take lightly – I've heard people say and I know you've heard people say that, you know, it's just marijuana; why make such a big issue of it? But that is the source of funds for organized crime. That's the real attraction. Those are the issues we have to deal with. We have to deal with them right in our community. So fighting organized crime is dealing with the drug dealers, it's dealing with the people who buy drugs, right from that level all the way up to the sophisticated electronic monitoring that we have to do and that the police need to have the technology to do.

9:57

There's a number of other questions that have been asked, some of them very interesting but not necessarily getting to really the root of my business plan.

In terms of the planning issues surrounding the location of massage parlours, we don't deal with planning issues at the provincial government level. That clearly is a civic issue.

I'd like to express appreciation for what I heard was support for the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act and the need to make sure that that act stays in place. I think I heard you say that it's been very effective in keeping young prostitutes off the street or

getting them off the street. I share your concern about, you know, we haven't really solved the problem if we just get them off the street and they move indoors. I would hope that licensing criteria that cities use would prohibit anybody under the age of 18 from being involved in providing massage services, but that clearly is a matter for the municipalities, and it's not one that we contemplate getting into provincially.

With those comments, I'll leave the rest of your questions.

Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee now report progress.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. The hon. Minister of Justice has moved that the subcommittee do now rise and report progress to the committee. All those in support of this, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

The committee therefore will reassemble downstairs.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 9:59 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 7, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/07

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently and the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the concerned citizens in Fort Saskatchewan, Ardrossan, Cooking Lake, Uncas, Ministik, and the Bruderheim area I am presenting a petition on behalf of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan that states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

It is signed by 212 citizens from those areas.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to present petitions on behalf of 165 Albertans primarily from Calgary urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 160 people from the Calgary area urging the Alberta government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to present to the Assembly a petition signed by another 116 Albertans that hope that it's less than a 99.99 percent chance. In fact, they're petitioning "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to also table a petition. This petition is signed by 226 Calgarians from Dalhousie Drive, Capri Avenue. It's quite an interesting petition, but the citizens "urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table 11 pages of signatures of 241 Albertans calling on this Assembly to pass a real bill that will ban "private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta. On behalf of concerned citizens of Fort Saskatchewan, Ardrossan, Josephburg, Partridge Hill, Whitecroft in the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan I have 201 names to present.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission and on behalf of 194 concerned citizens in Fort Saskatchewan, Ardrossan, Brookville, Fultonvale, and Josephburg in the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan I present a petition urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of 208 concerned citizens in Fort Saskatchewan, Ardrossan, Whitecroft, Deville, Colchester, Partridge Hill, and Josephburg in the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan I'd like to present this petition which is urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." That brings to a total of 815 petitions presented from the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan just today.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on freezing tuition increases now be read and received. I believe I presented it yesterday.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, urge the Legislative Assembly to freeze tuition and institutional fees and increase support in the foundation of post-secondary education.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd ask at this time that the petition I tabled on March 6 registering opposition to private health care now be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday be now read and received by the Assembly.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative

Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I tabled yesterday signed by 111 Albertans opposed to the purpose of Bill 11 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 5, 6, 7, and 9.

Thank you.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of a letter of congratulations I sent yesterday to the acting head coach of the University of Alberta Pandas volleyball team. As you know, on Saturday the Pandas won their sixth straight national university women's volleyball championship. This is a fantastic achievement of which all Albertans can be extremely proud.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 1911 March 8 has been identified as the date to recognize the achievements of women. I'd like to table an information bulletin on International Women's Day, which as we all know happens tomorrow.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table five copies of the agreement between the Blood tribe, the Peigan Nation, and the Siksika Nation, the Glenbow-Alberta Institute, and the province of Alberta which was signed on January 14 in the year 2000. The repatriation of the 251 sacred ceremonial objects listed on the attached schedule will become entrenched in law following the proclamation of Bill 2.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to table five copies of a document that all Albertans will be receiving in their homes this week. It is Bill 11, printed with laymen's descriptions of the various clauses of the bill. It is accurate. [interjections] It is accurate, and I challenge anybody in this Assembly, since there is some interest across the way in not having accurate information out there. I'm sorry for them with respect to that, but this is the bill. This is the bill, and I wish to table those copies with the Assembly.

Further, Mr. Speaker, just so we are open with respect to what we're doing here, I'd also like to table with the Assembly five copies

of the accompanying press release, which is also accurate and . . . [interjection] Well, it doesn't seem to be of interest to those folks either. Nevertheless, I'm tabling it.

1:40

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

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings today. The first is a letter to Jake Kuiken, president of the Alberta Association of Registered Social Workers, regarding National Social Work Week, honouring the outstanding efforts of social workers in Alberta, who make a huge contribution to the children of Alberta.

The second, Mr. Speaker, are two documents relative to the steering committee membership and terms of reference for the independent caseload review. This is in response to issues raised in the Children's Advocate report last year. The membership and the terms of reference, I believe, will do a thorough job and are committed to studying thoroughly beneath the surface as well as the usual caseload contained.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a document called Private Highway, One-Way Street: The Deklein and Fall of Canadian Medicare? This is a study that's been released today by the five top health economists in Canada: Evans, Barer, Lewis, Rachlis, and Stoddart.

Stripped to the bone, the Alberta proposal appears to be little more than taking lousy odds on very small payoff, and gambling with the health of Canada's health care system, for the sake of a few . . . health care providers who would stand to gain considerably in the short term. It is troubling that the rest of Canada has been so slow to take notice of Alberta, and that the premier has taken so little notice of Albertans' vehement objections.

MR. HANCOCK: Point of order.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the requisite copies of 11 letters. They were written by residents of St. Albert, Stony Plain, and Edmonton, and all of them are expressing their strong opposition to Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of a report by an injured worker that outlines the serious contradictions between information provided by caseworkers to injured workers, the WCB Act, their policies and their procedures.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table this afternoon two packages: the first one a set of messages from 283 Calgarians opposed to the undermining of public health care and the second package made up of 499 messages from Albertans in Calgary, Edmonton, Vermilion, and St. Albert. With the petitions that makes 950 Albertans registering today they will not be bamboozled by this government's Bill 11 PR campaign.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a number

of letters from concerned Albertans which represent a tiny, tiny sample of the correspondence we're getting in the constituency office, a tiny sample. The first one is from Maureen Doucette. Then we have Karen Anderson. We have Baldwin Reichwein. We have Nabil Azar. We have John Zurawell. He's so concerned that he's twice written different letters. If I tabled them all, I'd be here for the whole afternoon.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a transcript of a confrontation between Andy Marshall, CEP local 115A, and Conrad Black, owner of the *Calgary Herald*. Mr. Black's threat to decertify the union after two years is both an indictment of Alberta's unfair labour laws and an indication that Mr. Black is engaged in union busting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five letters here from E. Palichuk, Maureen Huson, Mr. and Mrs. Frasch, Joan Ambruck, and Valerie Parks, all expressing that they do not want their tax dollars diverted into profits for shareholders for private, for-profit hospitals.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to be able to introduce a longtime and one of my best friends in the world. He's in our gallery today. He also happens to work for the Alberta government within Children's Services. I would ask that my friend Mark Kastner stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a good friend and one of the great entrepreneurs in this province. He's seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask Mr. Bruno Muller, president and CEO of Caron Transport, to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to the Assembly students from three classrooms in two different schools: from Win Ferguson community school accompanied by Mrs. Pat Sprague and Miss Joanne Hadley and also a group of students from Ministik elementary school accompanied by Mr. Arnie Duncan. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was even money whether you were going to recognize me or not. So now that we've won that bet, it gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Mr. Al Browne, chairman of the Alberta Gaming Industry Association, an organization that got together on

their own recognizance over a year ago, and they've all formed this Alberta Gaming Industry Association that works with government, with its stakeholders. With him is Mr. Don Waldorf, president and CEO of the association. I would ask that both take their chances and stand up and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview and introduce through you to the Assembly 27 visitors from the constituency of Edmonton-Riverview. They are a grade 6 class from St. Martin Catholic school, accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Natalie Harasymiw, and I would ask if they would now please rise and be welcomed by the Chamber.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, I have two introductions today. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Valerie Holowach, who is the past chairman of Lakeland community health council, presently a member of Lakeland regional mental health advisory committee, and currently a councillor of the city of Fort Saskatchewan. She's in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask that she now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of people from the Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan constituency: Bob Fischer, past president and charter member of the Fort Saskatchewan Lions Club; Stella Chorney, a registered nurse with 40 years' experience, presently working in the Fort Saskatchewan health centre; Klaus and Renate Harder – Klaus is retired from the construction business and domestic engineer – Peter and Nancy Dolhaniuk – Peter is retired from the Capital health authority, and Nancy is a stay-at-home grandma – Orest Holowach, retired, entrepreneur, and president of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan Liberal association. They're in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask that they now stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly three guests from Lipany, Slovakia, one from Sherbrooke, Quebec, as well as my wife Dianne, who is accompanying our guests today. Jana Majtnerová is an exchange student at the Camrose composite high school, and she's also staying with us for the year. She's accompanied by her parents from Slovakia, Anna and Jozef Majtner, who are also taking the time to visit our great province, and also Amelie Fauchon, a participant in the Katimavik youth program, who is staying in Camrose at the present time. As I mentioned, my wife Dianne is accompanying the group. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive your warm welcome.

1:50

head: Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The evidence against the Premier's private hospitals scheme in Alberta continues to mount daily. Doctors who know the health care system are telling Albertans that the Premier's scheme for private hospitals is wrong, that

it's a prescription without a diagnosis. My questions are to the Premier. Why should Albertans believe this Premier when the spokesperson for 1,700 physicians in Calgary has said that the private hospitals scheme of the Premier will increase waiting lists and reduce the number of health care professionals who are available for the public health care system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that this doctor take the time, read the bill, and understand that this is a protection of the public health system. As a matter of fact, that's what the bill is entitled: the health protection act. There are other doctors who have other opinions. I understand that Larry Ohlhauser of the Alberta Medical Association says that this is the route to go. So, you know, there are all kinds of opinions on all sides of this issue.

I would say: let Albertans decide for themselves what is right. The bill only went out today to all the households, and I look forward with a great deal of anticipation to the thoughts, the unfettered thoughts hopefully, of Albertans. Albertans don't need to be led by Liberals.

I know that the leader of the Liberal opposition is out there saying that Albertans cannot think for themselves. I know that she's out there insulting the intelligence of Albertans, Mr. Speaker, but let Albertans think for themselves. Let Albertans provide their honest opinions, and let them do it without the malicious untruths and misinformation that is being spread by the Liberals.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has just insulted 1,700 physicians in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, why should Albertans believe this Premier when a spokesperson for physicians in the Capital regional health authority says that the Premier's private hospitals will not lead to cost savings nor to improvements in the quality of care?

MR. KLEIN: I apologize. Dr. Ohlhauser is with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, but again this is the college that is deemed to be supreme in terms of determining medical discipline, medical expertise, the regulation of medical practices, Mr. Speaker. So if this hon. member over here is saying that Dr. Ohlhauser has no credibility, let her stand up and say so. I would like to hear that coming from her mouth.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, who did this Premier consult with other than vested interests and spin doctors to draft this legislation?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad she finally asked the question. We started the consultation process last November, when we put out the policy statement and asked Albertans to respond to the policy statement. We heard from medical professionals. We heard from health care economists. We received reports for; we received reports against. The Liberals certainly engaged themselves in a campaign. CUPE engaged themselves in a campaign. The MDs engaged themselves in a campaign. The Friends of Medicare engaged themselves in a campaign.

There have been almost four months now of public consultation. This follows a blue-ribbon panel report on this very, very issue that urged us to bring in legislation of this nature. So I would say that this bill has probably been the subject of more consultation than any other piece of legislation ever brought before this Assembly.

MRS. MacBETH: And he still can't get it right, Mr. Speaker.

We know the Premier's not listening to physicians in Alberta, so let's look a little bit further. Respected health care economists Robert Evans, Morris Barer, Steven Lewis, Michael Rachlis, and

Greg Stoddart, most notable health economists in Canada, say that this government has made a completely wrong diagnosis on this bill, saying it's a Trojan horse private hospitals bill that the Premier has put forward. Deklein Klein's medicine seems to be their message. My questions are to the Premier. Why should Albertans trust a Premier's private hospitals scheme when renowned health economists are saying that it is nothing more than a prescription to dismantle medicare?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know about the others, but I've heard the name Steven Lewis before. I don't know if it's the same Steven Lewis, but if it is, he is world renowned as being the socialist guru of Canada.

MRS. MacBETH: Actually, Mr. Speaker, this Steven Lewis is the head of the Saskatchewan hospital utilization commission, and this Premier would be smart to look at it.

Mr. Speaker, since these economists state that there is a great deal . . . [interjections] Settle down, you guys; just settle down. Since these economists state that there is a great deal of money to be made by wrecking medicare, will this Premier now admit that his private hospitals bill is a prescription for profit for his special-interest groups?

MR. KLEIN: The answer is no. But, again, I would repeat a statement I made in the Legislative Assembly a few days ago, Mr. Speaker. She alludes to special-interest groups, but she doesn't have the courage to stand up and name them either inside this Legislative Assembly or outside the Legislative Assembly.

As I indicated before, there are reports. There are some physicians who support the legislation. There are some physicians who oppose the legislation. There are some physicians, I would suggest most of them, who want to read the proposed legislation and understand what it says.

Relative to reports, as I said before, Mr. Speaker, there are reports and reports and reports. I recall last week the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness tabling a report from the World Health Organization. Is this hon. member suggesting that the World Health Organization is not a reputable organization? If she says the WHO is not a reputable organization, stand up and say so, because the WHO says that

services may be offered by providers of all types. Provided that health practices and health facilities meet certain quality standards, which they will have to in this legislation, and that they are subject to several levels of managerial flexibility, their ownership status should not matter.

This is coming from the World Health Organization, one of the most prestigious organizations in the world. Does she believe that this organization is wrong? If she does, stand up and say so.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is this Premier going to listen to our practising physicians, the ones that are right there on the front lines in Alberta? Is he going to listen to noted Canadian health economists? Is he going to listen to Albertans and withdraw this bill for the third time?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, you know, nothing in life is absolutely certain except taxes and death, as they say. But, yes, we will proceed with this bill. There may be amendments; maybe the Liberal would like to propose some amendments. But in this unprecedented exercise of consulting the public, all the people of this province, perhaps there will be some amendments as we move this bill through the Legislature. We want to make sure that it's absolutely right.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, part of this consultation process – certainly it's the medical community, certainly it's the federal Minister of Health: again, unprecedented to share our legislation with the federal government. But most importantly it will be the consensus and the thoughts and the wisdom, the wisdom of the people of this province, that will guide us and steer us as we work this legislation through this Assembly.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the key role of the Speaker is to preserve decorum in the House. Once again we are not getting off to a very good start, and I frankly do not believe that we are a good example to the citizens of Alberta nor to the children in this gallery. What is particularly disconcerting to the chair is if an hon. member is denied an opportunity to participate and to hear what is going on. This becomes a prime concern.

So the chair has just received this note from one hon. member, and the intent is to deal with the privilege of the hon. member: Mr. Speaker, I believe that you are aware that I incurred a significant and permanent hearing loss in both ears approximately 11 months ago. Accordingly, I try to manage my environment in order to offset the hearing loss as much as possible. For example, our whip arranged for me to sit in the middle of our seating in the Legislature, and the Sergeant-at-Arms kindly arranged for me to have an upgraded earpiece that ties into the Legislature sound system. Generally speaking, from a hearing prospective, I can function reasonably well in the Assembly. The exception to the rule is during question period. At the outset I acknowledge members on both sides are guilty of heckling. However, the volume by a number of members – and the member does go on to make mention of them – is very troublesome. In most question periods I have a very difficult time in hearing answers. Whatever you could do to lower the volume would be very much appreciated by this member.

It would also be very much appreciated by the chair, as I'm sure it would also be very much appreciated by the citizens of Alberta. I will stand again.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Third main question.

Private Health Services (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has told us that he would be mailing out his private hospitals bill for Albertans to read. In fact, what he is sending out is a doctored version that puts his own spin on his private hospitals bill. You know, students who haven't done their homework have long known that they could use *Cole's Notes* to fake their way through the exam. Well, now what we have in Alberta are Klein's notes, which are in fact full of malicious misinformation. My first question is: why is the Premier insulting the intelligence of Albertans by putting his doctored spin in the margins of his private hospitals bill?

MR. KLEIN: No spin, no doctoring, Mr. Speaker. The only spin doctoring being done around here is being done by the opposition Liberals. The bill is there in its entirety. Yes, there are explanation points. There are explanation points, but we trust the intelligence and we respect the intelligence of Albertans to read the bill, to read the explanation points, and if they have any further questions to contact the appropriate authorities in government so that they can get an even better explanation.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind the leader of the Liberal opposition

that she was the one who said that Albertans cannot understand legislation. She was the person who insulted the intelligence of Albertans. We're not doing that. We are saying to Albertans: "Provide us with your wisdom and provide us with your honest input and put all the political rhetoric aside. Put all the political rhetoric aside. We trust you to help us with this legislation. We trust you, Albertans, to help us with this legislation."

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do respect the intelligence of Albertans, and Albertans know that there is no difference between a hospital and a surgical facility which allows overnight stays. So how come the margin notes don't explain the significance of surgical facilities and surgical services?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the leader of the Liberal opposition would like to take advantage of the opportunity that was provided to her to have a technical briefing on this particular matter. [interjections] No, she doesn't want it, because she doesn't want to know the facts. She doesn't want to know the facts.

If she wants a short clinic on it right now, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the legislation is there verbatim from what was tabled in the Legislature in Bill 11. I know that is somewhat troubling to the opposition, but it is important that this be provided to the public of the province.

Secondly, because there is necessity to use certain legal language in a piece of legislation, we have provided accurate explanations of any of the more complex parts of the wording in the margins of the presentation. If the hon. member across the way feels that any of those notations are inaccurate, certainly raise the issue.

What really is bothering, I think, the folks across the way, Mr. Speaker, is that they do not really feel comfortable about not being able to criticize and vet legislation, because we're going directly to the people on this particular issue. So I think that is the important approach that's being taken here.

In terms of the wording in the legislation, Mr. Speaker, and the commentary, I think it accurately portrays and explains the context of the bill. I'm hoping that the opposition will be supportive of initiatives such as this rather than trying to pick it apart.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's quote another noted Alberta physician, this time Dr. Tom Noseworthy, who said last night, quote: let's call a spade a spade; an overnight stay for acute care service or intervention equals a hospital, end quote. Why does the Premier feel the need to try to fool Albertans on this legislation?

MR. KLEIN: I'll have the Minister of Health and Wellness respond, but again this is another example of misleading information. She talks about acute surgical care. We're not talking about the same thing. What she needs to do is read and understand and be honest about the bill.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the legislation is quite clear in defining a hospital as a facility which provides a broad range of service: emergency. It deals with the major surgeries which require a complex set of diagnostic procedures and backup procedures and may involve several days in hospital or not. That is, I think, a very well-accepted concept of a hospital. I would like to remind the folks across the way that the legislation is very clear. It's clearer than in any other part of this country in saying that there will be no private hospitals, no full-service private hospitals in this province.

Mr. Speaker, there is precedent all across this country with respect to there being specialized surgical clinics dealing with a particular area of treatment and expertise. We have in the province of British Columbia, for instance, the Cambie clinic, which is dealing with a whole set of surgical services. [interjections] I know that's not Liberals, but it's pretty close. British Columbia. Pretty close. [interjections]

I can go . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has indicated her intent to rise and to question today. I'm listening attentively to the responses because a gentleman has been recognized, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. I'd hate to conclude in my mind that the questions have now been raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. If they have been, then she will be ignored later.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, to conclude your response.

2:10

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. JONSON: Well, just to conclude quite quickly, Mr. Speaker, all across the country there are examples where you have surgical facilities which are providing service for insured services, and some are also providing services for uninsured people. If anybody across the way wants to be fair about this particular legislation, we are actually putting in more protection, more assurances around this particular approach than any other province in this country. For instance, there's an extensive section of the legislation which deals with making sure there is not extra billing for services which are optional to the patient, and I could go on through the legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. interim leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Klein government is spending about another million dollars in taxpayers' money to tell Albertans what to think about its private, for-profit hospital bill. The government has no interest in hearing what Albertans think. It has chosen rather to tell them what is good for them to think. To the Premier: how can the government justify sending Albertans misleading interpretations about what Bill 11 will do, such as telling them that section 23 will not affect their recourse to the courts, when in fact section 23 is designed to prevent legal challenges even when the minister can't show that contracting out to a for-profit hospital will save money or reduce waiting lists?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I would say to the leader of the opposition third party: let Albertans decide. Let Albertans decide, and then we will have the full debate. We will introduce second reading. It will then go to committee. At that time, the thoughts of Albertans can be incorporated into the legislation. If there are appropriate amendments to be made, they can be made at that particular time. If this hon. member has some thoughts about how the section to which he alludes can be improved, then send them over. Help us with this.

You know, it's not simply the role of the opposition to get out there and spread false and malicious information and to oppose just for the sake of opposing, Mr. Speaker.

It's also the role of the opposition to help to make legislation better.

This is fundamentally good legislation. It protects public health.

It provides options. It sets down very, very strict rules and regulations for the operation of surgical clinics, rules and regulations that didn't exist before but could have been put in years ago when the leader of the Liberal opposition was the minister of health. She could have done that years ago, Mr. Speaker.

We're having to deal with these issues now because it is absolutely necessary according to all medical experts to find new and better and more efficient and more effective ways of doing things and at the same time protect public health and abide by the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me try and help the Premier understand what's wrong with the whole bill, but before that let me ask him another question on this privative clause. Why does the privative clause in Bill 11 give greater immunity from legal challenges to the minister of health than the Disaster Services Act gives to the minister responsible in the case of a natural disaster even though Bill 11 will be the biggest disaster to hit Albertans in generations?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was interested in the hon. member's comment: let me tell you what is wrong with the whole bill. Those are his words. Is he opposed to the first whereas?

Whereas it is the responsibility of the Government of Alberta to provide leadership and support in the delivery of quality health services in order to maintain and improve the health of Albertans.

Is he opposed that?

Is he opposed to this? "Whereas Albertans cherish Alberta's publicly funded and publicly administered health system." This is all part of the bill.

I mean, I could go through page by page by page and ask him to stand up and say clause by clause what he is opposed to. Is he opposed to the third whereas? Is he opposed to the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, the seventh, the eighth, the ninth? Is he opposed to all those whereases? Is he opposed to this very important clause, that "no person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." Is he opposed to that? If he is, stand up and say so.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has shown no courage in calling private hospitals private hospitals in this bill. That's what's wrong with this bill.

Let me ask the Premier the last question. Why is the government spending a million dollars to bury Albertans in misleading and one-sided information about his private, for-profit hospitals bill while making it difficult for Albertans to provide feedback on Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad for one thing. At least this member is honest in the amount. In the amount. The Liberals yesterday were touting around, throwing around this figure, another example of misinformation, untruths, not telling the truth, throwing around \$3 million, here, there, at least five or six times. At least this hon. member is close to the figure.

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the release of the policy statement on the delivery of surgical services last November and now with the introduction of Bill 11, the Premier has consistently stated that he is looking for feedback from Albertans on the proposed policy and the legislation. From my constituency the accountability issue is the key concern identified. They are concerned about being charged for procedures they shouldn't be charged for. There are concerns that the restrictions imposed by the bill on

facility fees, enhanced services, and queue-jumping won't be enforced. My question is for the Premier. What mechanisms are in place to enforce the provisions of Bill 11 once it is passed?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of mechanisms, and if there need to be more mechanisms, we will depend on the wisdom and the guidance of Albertans. That's why we're sending out the bill.

It's indeed an important question, because, as the member points out, Albertans want to be confident that they will be protected from any illegal or unethical activity on the part of health professionals or the operators of health facilities, be they surgical facilities or conventional hospitals as we know them today. So there will be several mechanisms in place that will ensure full and complete compliance with the requirements of the legislation. You have to remember, Mr. Speaker – and I needn't remind you because you're one of the finest lawmakers around; at least you were when you sat as a minister in this Legislative Assembly. I need to remind all members that the law is the law, and you do not break the law.

First of all, the College of Physicians and Surgeons will assess and accredit any facility that is contracted by a health authority to ensure that the facility has the trained staff, equipment, and support services to allow that procedure to be safely done in that facility. Mr. Speaker, I would remind hon. members that the college is the body that has the expertise. It is probably one of the most revered bodies in the field of medicine of any jurisdiction in the world. All jurisdictions have colleges of physicians and surgeons.

2:20

The college also has an ongoing role to monitor and enforce the ethical behaviour of any physician licensed to practise in the province, including physicians working in a surgical facility or a public hospital. The college can impose fines or even remove a physician's licence to practise in Alberta if that physician is found guilty of unethical or unprofessional behaviour.

The minister of health will be able to monitor the actions of surgical facility operators, and Bill 11 gives him the power to request any information necessary from a surgical facility, including the 47 that are now operating, including the 38 that were approved by the Leader of the Opposition when she was minister of health. He has the authority to . . .

THE SPEAKER: I think we could ask for a tabling of the document, hon. member.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Knowing that monitoring and oversight are critical to my constituents, my second question is also to the Premier. How do we know that Bill 11 will work and do what it is intended to do?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we certainly want the bill to do as it hopefully is intended to do. As I pointed out before, ever since we released our policy statement in November, we have undertaken a very full and vigorous dialogue with Albertans on this legislation. We have consulted. We have asked questions. We have had discussions not only with health experts and health professionals but also with everyday Albertans. The mailing out of the bill today is just one more step in that very intensive consultation program.

We have revised our policy statement proposals in the legislation to reflect the views and the concerns that we have heard. I believe now that we have a better piece of legislation because of it.

Mr. Speaker, I need not remind you that we went through this exercise once before with Bill 37. Subsequent to that there was the

blue-ribbon panel, the consultation process, as I pointed out, and now the mail-out of the bill. I can't think of a more intensive public consultation program than that.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the Premier: in what way would the regional health authorities be held accountable for this legislation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I would remind this Legislative Assembly that as of the next civic elections two-thirds of those authorities will be elected.

Bill 11 clearly holds health authorities accountable for finding the best and most effective and most efficient way of delivering publicly funded health services to their residents, and it has to be done in accordance with the bill. Once the bill becomes law, they will have to do it in accordance with the law. It will be the health authorities that will have to clearly demonstrate to the minister that any proposed contract will be of benefit to the publicly funded system and to their patients. That is key.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, any more questions?

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Albertans take Bill 11 from their mailbox, they will find that the government has attached their own spin campaign, and contrary to what the Klein notes say, queue-jumping will remain alive and well in this province. Earlier access to diagnostic tests and uninsured services means earlier access to specialists. My questions are to the Premier. If the Premier is opposed to queue-jumping, why has he done nothing to stop queue-jumping in the public sector for people who can afford to pay for an MRI in the private sector?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you know, without sounding personal, you can perhaps ask your boss over there. She's probably closer, at least related to someone who's very, very involved in private-sector MRIs.

Mr. Speaker, as to . . .

MR. SAPERS: Talk about sleazy. Answer the question.

MR. KLEIN: You should know about sleaze. You should know about sleaze.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Actually this question period is due to adjourn today at 2:41. That's 16 minutes from now.

We do have options. We could declare a coffee break, take a recess. That's always an option. I could consult with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood on how to keep law and order in the Assembly. Her background says that she was a law enforcement agent. I'm sure she would provide me with good advice as to how to keep decorum in the House in light of her record of participation in the House. Those are two options. Or we could continue.

The hon. Premier has the floor.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the question, there are some differences relative to the rules that regulate MRIs relative to the operation of public hospitals and surgical clinics. I'll have him explain to the hon. member.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, very succinctly, first of all, this legislation provides very strong control and penalties actually for queue jumping, against any ability to pay for faster service in the system. I think that should be recognized by the opposition across the way because it is a very important control in legislation.

With respect to MRIs this is one of those anomalies, quite frankly, in the overall way the health care system in Canada has developed. Across this country the interpretation is that because the actual MRI service, the running of the equipment, is something that is conducted by technicians as opposed to doctors, this is a diagnostic service that is outside the parameters and requirements of the Canada Health Act. I think that is interpreted the same way across this country as I understand it in talking with my colleagues across Canada.

So what is happening in Alberta is consistent with practices across this nation. That is the situation with MRIs.

MS LEIBOVICI: If the Premier is opposed to queue-jumping, why has he done nothing to stop queue-jumping for an insured service if a person can afford to pay for an uninsured service at the same time, as is potentially happening in eye surgery in this province right now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, there is one case involving Dr. Gimbel that is now under investigation.

Relative to queue-jumping, in the publicly funded system, whether it's in a full scale hospital as we know it or in a surgical clinic, for a required medical service queue-jumping will clearly be prohibited in this legislation. It's as simple as that.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, if the Premier is opposed to queue-jumping, will you stop the current unfairness in diagnostic queue-jumping that's happening in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness did a good job of explaining the anomaly, as he put it, relative to diagnostic services, particularly MRIs.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the so-called issue of queue-jumping, we have provided in the legislation which is before the Legislature and the people of Alberta a process of being able to control and to police and to provide penalties if there is preference given to people on the basis of their ability to pay or to get some other type of special consideration, a control that is not there in other provinces, as I understand it. So this particular piece of legislation, I think, should be recognized as being very protective of the public health care system but, more importantly, very protective of the right of access on an equitable basis across this province of the citizens of Alberta to the insured services under our health care plan.

2:30

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my constituents have asked me about the timing of the proposed health policy regarding the contracting of surgical services within the administration of the public health care system. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister tell my constituents what it is in government policy that leads you to bring forth legislation at this time?

MR. JONSON: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the minister of the day, the government has been working and has brought before this Legislature this overall issue on two previous occasions, as I recall. Our desire, of course, has been to provide in this province a good,

publicly funded, publicly governed health care system to comply with the Canada Health Act, but as was identified in the debate on Bill 37 and subsequently by the report of the blue-ribbon panel, we do not have in existence in this province the legislative power, the legislative structure to deal with the whole issue of making sure that we have a system which complies with the Canada Health Act and is operating in the interests of all Albertans.

So, Mr. Speaker, in the fall of the previous year we initiated a policy paper to make sure that everybody was well aware of what our concerns and our plans were. We have followed that up, because there was very much interest expressed in us having the proper legislative structure in place, with the legislation which is currently before the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, in direct response to the hon. member's question, this legislation, Bill 11, addresses a number of issues. I won't list them all. It addresses the whole issue of surgical facilities. It bans private hospitals. It puts penalties in place with respect to charging for or in any way giving people preference in a queue or in a waiting list. That should only be done on a medically required basis. It is very protective. It also recognizes the fact that in this country we do need to look at other options, better options, more efficient options in providing services to the people of this country.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is to the same Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that many surgical procedures are already contracted out by health authorities, could the minister tell us what, if any, benefits have been seen from this contracting process?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of examples, but I will just at this particular point in time mention one, and that is that in Calgary – I choose Calgary with respect to cataract surgery because that is a very high-profile example. The regional health authority in Calgary reports that under the contract arrangement which is in place right now, which was in response to our policy statement being issued a couple of years ago, although it doesn't have the force of law which it does in the legislation, they have gone into arranging contracts with, as I understand it, three different providers. Today they are able to fund 500-plus additional operations at the same amount of money as was the case three years ago. As I understand it, the people that have received that service are quite pleased with the quality, the success of the operations. I think that's a good example.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Albertans take Bill 11 from their mailbox, they will find that the government has attached their own spin campaign, both with misinformation and missing information. My questions are to the Premier. Why do the margin notes in this handout contradict what the bill says with respect to appealing to the courts when the bill itself makes it clear that the minister's decision cannot be challenged? Why the contradiction, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that section of the bill speaks to ministerial authority, and I'll have the minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is correct that there is one section of the bill which provides for ministerial approval being given with respect to certain decisions that are not appealable to the court system. I think that in this province – we're probably a little low in Alberta actually – we have about 15 or 16 other statutes where when

it comes to administrative decisions that have to be made within a particular system or particular department, for the sheer practical need to get on with business and get things done, they are not appealable to the court.

For instance, one of the examples in here, Mr. Speaker, is that the minister shall through regulation approve the forms and format and the information that needs to be provided in the contracts that are devised and reported to the minister for approval. I think that's a very practical provision. We need to get on with business with respect to the health care system. It's very common to other legislation in this province and this country.

MS OLSEN: Well, hopefully the minister will read Mr. Klein's crib notes.

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

MS OLSEN: My second question: why doesn't the Premier tell Albertans that the College of Physicians and Surgeons has no bylaws to describe what a major surgical service is? I don't see that in the Klein margin notes, Mr. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: What was the question? Well, you can go ahead and answer it.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the hon. members across the way have – perhaps it is just something that happens with individuals. It could also be some selective loss of memory. When we were in this Assembly debating Bill 37, one of the concerns at that time from the opposition actually was that the College of Physicians and Surgeons were on the verge of approving a set of bylaws or regulations which would license and allow private surgical clinics to operate in this province.

At that time, our concern and their concern were somewhat similar, and that was that this Legislature, this government did not have in place the proper legislative power and provisions and protection to deal with that particular situation should it occur. It is quite clear that the College of Physicians and Surgeons sets standards. They deal with the issue of whether there is adequate medical expertise, whether a facility can deal with a particular procedure. There was considerable pressure on the college to proceed with that particular set of bylaws, Mr. Speaker.

At our urging and that of others they held off on this until we were able to put forward a comprehensive piece of legislation which addressed that legislative gap. That is a very important part of Bill 11.

MS OLSEN: Well, you can hurl all the insults you want at me, Mr. Minister, but that doesn't tell Albertans the contradiction.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please. I think we'll spend the remainder of question period going over some of the rules. The number one rule that everybody agreed to – and the three House leaders signed a document to this effect – is that a question will have a succinct preamble, and there will be no preamble to the second question or the third question. Now, virtually everybody today who participated violated that rule.

The question is, I guess: what's the sense of having the rule if, in fact, leaders from all three parties get together, write the document, sign it with their names, and then they don't enforce it with their own member? They give it to the Speaker. What's the Speaker

supposed to do with it if their own members themselves, who've signed it, don't want to enforce it? So, no preambles on the second question and on the third question. That's a given.

This chairman has accepted guidance from three House leaders with respect to a document. The Speaker does not have to do such a thing. The members in this Assembly may get together and amend the Standing Orders and change the Standing Orders. They have not done that. Pending such a decision, this chairman has said that he will abide by advice and recommendations provided by the three House leaders. But, in the end, decorum in the House will always take precedence over that.

Secondly, there are only hon. members in this House. There are no last names to be used in questions or answers, and once again a great variety of members in this House seem to just somehow violate this on almost a daily basis. There's no need to. There's no need to at all.

2:40

Thirdly, *Beauchesne* is very, very clear about what the questions are to be and how the responses are to be. One only knows by the experience in this House – this is only day 10, and today's a pretty good example of that – that if you ask an inflammatory or an argumentative question, well, you're going to get an argumentative response. It can't be both ways. This Speaker is not going to stand up and decry one member because of inflammatory words in one portion and then tell the other member to sit down when the other member wants to use a similar kind of language. You govern yourselves. As I indicated last week, it's like a hockey game, I guess. If you want to go around bashing yourselves in the head with hockey sticks, go ahead. Go ahead. The chairman will remain standing at the end of the match. He'll be the only one.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: In 30 seconds from now we'll recognize three hon. members for participation today.

Sandra Schmirler

MS GRAHAM: Mr. Speaker, today it is with the deepest sympathy that I rise to acknowledge the passing of Sandra Schmirler, one of Canada's greatest ever women curlers. Sandra Schmirler died at the young age of 36 last Thursday in hospital in Regina, Saskatchewan. To Sandra's husband, Shannon, and daughters Jenna and Sara I express my deepest sympathy in their loss of a wife and mother. Sandra fought a courageous battle against cancer and remained hopeful to the end that she would return to the ice.

In her lifetime Sandra balanced marriage, motherhood, and a working career together with a very, very successful curling career. Sandra, the skip, brought together her curling team in 1990, and together they dominated women's curling throughout the 1990s both at home and abroad. Sandra led her team to win the Canadian and the world championship titles in 1993, 1994, and 1997, and then in 1998 her team brought home the first-ever Olympic gold medal awarded in the sport of curling at the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan. All of us were brimming with pride. I know I was. Sandra was a true champion in all respects, which won her the admiration of her peers and fans alike. Her Olympic foursome was voted the team of the year for 1998 by sports editors and broadcasters across Canada. Then in 1999 Sandra was inducted into the Curling Hall of Fame.

Mr. Speaker, not only is Saskatchewan proud of Sandra Schmirler, but all of Canada is proud of Sandra for her long list of accomplishments and the distinction that she brought to the sport of curling.

She always carried herself with grace, optimism, and that fierce determination until the very end. Through the media coverage of her curling matches and her interviews it was as if we all knew Sandra. Her legacy will forever remain in the hearts of Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this Assembly I ask all Albertans to join me in expressing our heartfelt condolences to family, friends, and teammates of Sandra Schmirler.

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

Jackie Parker Park

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Mill Woods Presidents' Council, a group made up of the presidents of the community leagues in Mill Woods, continues to be a powerful force in community affairs. One of the council's original committees, MCARFA, the Mill Woods Cultural and Recreational Facility Association, has been instrumental in bringing facilities to Mill Woods. This afternoon I would bring the attention of the Legislature to their latest project in the development of Jackie Parker park.

Jackie Parker park centres on a lake used this time of year as a skating oval. Trails wind off into Mill Creek Ravine. The thousands of trees planted in the past now shape a woodland landscape. Under the leadership of Mike Middlestadt, chair of the Jackie Parker Project Committee, enhancement to the park, one of the few parkland sites in Mill Woods, is being undertaken. A copper-roofed pavilion overlooking the lake and the park will become the centre for community and cultural events. Featuring a great room and huge indoor and outdoor fireplaces, the pavilion will be used year-round. A terrace down to the lake surrounded by picnic sites, fire pits, benches, and trails will provide residents a place to walk, skate, picnic, and relax.

MCARFA has raised most of the million and a half dollars needed for the pavilion through casinos and golf tournaments. The city and the community lottery board along with community leagues have also helped. Still, about \$175,000 is required to complete the financing. An invitation has been extended to the corporate community to join the project as sponsors.

On behalf of our constituents the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and myself say thank you to the presidents' council, thank you to MCARFA, thank you to the Jackie Parker Project Committee and to your chair, Mike Middlestadt. You make Mill Woods a better place to live.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

Allegations against a Member

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday of last week I rose and was recognized on a point of order during the tablings prior to question period. However, as is the current custom, the point of order was heard long after question period, and few of the viewers would have access to *Hansard* and read the comments or the subsequent apology offered by the Opposition House Leader.

Contrary to the allegations made by the opposition Environment critic, the record shows that I have acted on behalf of the constituents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan with respect to their concern about gas exploration and continue to do so. In fact, I met with a group the previous evening, and I understand that they will soon be having a meeting with the EUB. I expect and I believe Albertans expect that it's an elected member's responsibility to verify and fully portray the truth of statements made in this Legislature.

A second failure of this responsibility occurred when the Liberal

Environment critic stated that she was filing a petition signed by 102 concerned residents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. However, the addresses clearly show that most of these residents were from Edmonton and other areas of northern Alberta and that only five reside in the constituency I represent. I believe it's the responsibility of elected members not to repeat unfounded, unsubstantiated, unvalidated, or untrue allegations, and in light of the apology offered by the Opposition House Leader, I trust that such false allegations will not be repeated.

THE SPEAKER: We have notification today of four points of order prior to the chair dealing with a ruling on a purported case of privilege.

We'll go in this order for the four points of order. First, the hon. Government House Leader. I've also recognized the Deputy Government House Leader. So this is the first point of order?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'm handling the points of order today. I've actually discussed the first point of order with my colleague the House leader, and we will be withdrawing it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

MR. DICKSON: On behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition. Sir, with respect to the exchange between the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, there was reference to a report by the World Health Organization. My authority would be *Beauchesne* 417: "Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised" – and this is the important part – "and should not provoke debate."

2:50

The hon. Premier referred to a report that had been tabled in fact in this Assembly by the Minister of Health and Wellness, and that had been done on February 29. In fact, reference was made to it by that same Minister of Health and Wellness. It appears at page 152 in *Hansard*, where he says:

I think, a very credible, documented, supported set of arguments pointing out that a health care system, provided it is publicly financed and publicly governed, can benefit from a degree of competition from new ideas, from innovation that could be provided by the private sector.

Those of us who hadn't read the report took the minister at his word. It was later that we had the opportunity to read the report and found out that contrary to the authority that was represented by the Premier this afternoon, the report deals with developing nations, where public capital is short and governments have very limited options. The report in fact went on to praise Canada's medicare system as unique and serving Canada well. So the reference to private/public partnerships was restricted to Third World countries, impoverished countries.

The concern is that by the Premier looping back to cite a report that had been given a distorted kind of importance by the Minister of Health and Wellness on February 29, it could do nothing other than provoke debate and high feelings in the Assembly, which you've remarked on in another context, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems that every answer that was given today, no matter how innocuous, seemed to

provoke debate, and it depends on the manner and the tone in which the question was asked.

With respect to the document which the Premier referred to, it is a question of interpretation. Often reports are used to support a particular position. I will also point out that while the report dealt with Third World and developing countries, one of the points that it made was that where there is a lack of capital, you need to look at options with respect to developing a health system.

We have a very good health system, Mr. Speaker, but it has been recognized nationally and by most if not all Premiers that we cannot continue to fund and operate this system as we have in the past. We need to look at new and better ways in which to fund health care and ensure that we alleviate pain and suffering and meet the needs of those who need to access the system.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is a question of interpretation, albeit there were some lessons to be learned from the report, and that's why the report was referred to. Again, it's a question of interpretation, and there is no point of order.

THE SPEAKER: It would appear to the chair that what we've just heard was a clarification of two positions with respect to this particular matter. There's absolutely no doubt at all that *Beauchesne* 417 says that the answer "should not provoke debate," but 409(1) says that "it must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate," and on several occasions today the chair interjected with respect to this matter.

Now, we're going to have these comments with respect to these points of order very, very narrow, and the reason the chair says this is that today is Tuesday and today is the day and an opportunity for private members to advance work and business of their own. It should not go unnoticed that private members' business may not be dealt with if we spend the whole time frame discussing points of order and the like. The chair would be quite concerned if in fact that was a strategy. I'm not suggesting for a moment that it is but if in fact it was a strategy.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Every time I come to question period, my hope is that there's no need to raise points of order.

Point of Order Clarification

MR. DICKSON: The item I'm raising, Mr. Speaker, would have to do with when the Premier said in response to the Leader of the Opposition that she should have taken advantage of a technical briefing on Bill 11. You're going to be dealing with that in a moment with respect to the alleged question of contempt, of privilege, but it's clear from all of the material and evidence that you have heard in the last two days that the Leader of the Opposition received notice at 12:28 p.m. inviting her to a technical briefing at an unspecified place at an unspecified time. I made the submission yesterday that it was clear that there was no genuine intention of informing the Leader of the Opposition on the technical aspects of the bill before it received first reading. So for the Premier to come back, to loop back and throw it out, there may be some watching, listening who didn't understand that there had been no genuine invitation to the Leader of the Opposition to participate before the bill had received first reading.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. There

certainly was a genuine invitation open to the Leader of the Official Opposition. In fact, that invitation still stands, and to date she has not exercised that invitation. I'm advised that on Monday, I believe, the interim leader of the third party took advantage of the invitation and was provided a briefing. The invitation still stands.

As concerns your dealing with the matter later on, I'm well aware of that. However, Mr. Speaker, again there is really no point of order with respect to this. What the Premier indicated was that the offer was made. The offer is still open. The Leader of the Opposition has not yet taken advantage of it.

THE SPEAKER: I gather, hon. members, that again we're dealing with another point of clarification, not a point of order.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, you will consider this to be a legitimate point of order. I refer to a comment made by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert where, when referring to the notes in the Bill 11 householder, which was the subject of some discussion today during question period, she stated: these notes are a blatant lie. I would refer you to *Beauchesne* 489, where it states very clearly that the use of the term "lie" is unparliamentary. Typically, as you have indicated to the House in the past, we are to take members at their word, and I would respectfully request that you ask the hon. member to apologize for that remark.

MR. DICKSON: I think the short answer to that is this. I don't think the Premier or the Minister of Health and Wellness individually authored that document. The lie refers to a document that was produced by a corporate entity, the government of the province of Alberta. There's no authority I'm aware of, Mr. Speaker, until you advise me otherwise, that says that saying that a government publication is a lie is in any way actionable within the context of Standing Orders or the rules of *Beauchesne*. This is referring to a corporate representation from the government of the province of Alberta, not with respect to an individual member, and I think that it can be dealt with on that basis.

Thank you.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, I can't let those comments go unchallenged. Everything this opposition member and everything her colleagues have done over the past few days that we've been in this Legislature has been to try to make the question of what is being put out on Bill 11 inextricably linked to the Premier and the minister of health. That's been their clear intention. It's been demonstrated time and time again. They're trying to put those words and trying to associate them personally with ministers. We've raised points of order in the past about dealing with issues rather than dealing with personalities, and now they're attempting to say: oh, no, we were just dealing with the words on paper that somebody else wrote, and we didn't have that intention at all. Mr. Speaker, you've got to call them to order on this sort of thing.

THE SPEAKER: The point of order has to do with something apparently that may or may not have been said. The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert was not recognized today at all by the chair. It's also true that on frequent occasions during this session there's a great deal of discussion going across the way. The chair has stood on numerous occasions – numerous occasions – and said that that's not to be permitted or tolerated in this Assembly. Yet

members continue to want to pursue and have their private discussions when some hon. member has been recognized and another then would follow and be recognized.

3:00

The chair did hear some very atrocious language. The chair did not hear – did not hear – this particular phrase. The chair will check the *Hansard* to see whether or not it has been picked up in the Blues and if it is recorded in the *Hansard*, and the chair would be prepared to revisit this should it be recorded. But if it is not recorded, it's very difficult for the chair to deal with the matter. There has been no opportunity recognized to the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

The chair did rise on several occasions today and point out that there was an absurd amount of heckling going on. The chair will be more aggressive tomorrow with respect to this and will name names. The chair will also provide to any citizen who has contacted his office in the last hour and a half wanting to know who appears to be the loudest of the hecklers the name of that particular Member of the Legislative Assembly. It will not be a badge of honour to wear.

Privilege

Contempt of the Assembly

THE SPEAKER: The chair is now prepared to deal with the question of privilege as raised by the Opposition House Leader and is now prepared to rule on the purported question of privilege raised by the hon. Opposition House Leader last Thursday, March 2, and argued yesterday, March 6.

As the chair understands the matter, the Opposition House Leader's purported question of privilege is twofold: one, that Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, was released to the public or at least the media before it was presented in the House, and two, that the Leader of the Opposition was not allowed to remain in a meeting with the media, referred to as a technical briefing session, which was held very early in the afternoon of March 2 and just prior to the introduction of Bill 11 in the House. This briefing session took place in the, quote, press conference room, end quote, which is found on the first floor of the Legislature Building next to the press gallery offices.

Last Thursday there was a third point about a possible assault on the Leader of the Opposition, but it is the chair's impression from what was said yesterday that the Opposition House Leader is not pursuing this matter any further, at least in this forum.

At the outset the chair notes that the Opposition House Leader provided notice of his question of privilege during the daily Routine on March 2. He did not provide written notice two hours before the start of the sitting, as required under Standing Order 15(2), but the events giving rise to the purported question of privilege did not occur until an hour or so before the House commenced that day. Accordingly, the chair finds that the notice was provided at the earliest opportunity.

On the issue of the purported release of Bill 11 prior to its introduction in the Assembly, presumably the Opposition House Leader is alleging that there is a contempt of the House. To refresh members' memories, breaches of privilege and contempts of the Assembly are treated in the same manner. Both are referred to in section 10 of the Legislative Assembly Act. These similarities were discussed in the chair's February 24, 1999, ruling found at page 161 of *Hansard* on another purported contempt brought forward by the Opposition House Leader.

A contempt is defined in *Erskine May*, the 22nd edition, at page 108.

Any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of

Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

In this case there was no supporting precedent referred to by the Opposition House Leader or anyone else who entered the debate.

The chair has reviewed a ruling by Speaker Francis in the Canadian House of Commons on January 19, 1984, with facts very similar to those now before this House. The 1984 incident involved some members of the opposition being excluded from a media lockup where it was alleged that a copy of a bill was released prior to first reading. In ruling against the purported question of privilege – and I quote from *Hansard* for January 19, 1984, at page 563 – Speaker Francis said:

There are any number of situations where drafts of Bills have been circulated and no further action has been taken with regard to them. Surely the Chair cannot be placed in a position of determining whether a document or a piece of paper, or whatever it is – it is certainly not a document of the House – can or cannot be circulated, or that the Speaker in some way should regulate the persons to whom such a document could be circulated.

In this case the Government House Leader and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore both indicated yesterday in the House that the media were provided with copies marked "draft," so it could not have been the bill introduced in the House.

The chair has scoured the authorities and has not found any instance where the purported release of a bill has constituted a valid question of privilege. As pointed out by the Opposition House Leader, the issue of the early release of a bill was raised as recently as a few weeks ago in the Canadian House of Commons. On February 21, 2000, at pages 3666 and 3667 of *Hansard* Speaker Parent found that there was no question of privilege with respect to the purported early release of Bill C-23. The chair would specifically note that he found four instances of this question arising in the Saskatchewan Legislature – in 1993, 1991, 1988, and 1975 – and in each case the Speaker has found that there was no breach of privilege.

Although there is no prima facie question of privilege on this point, the chair echoes the comments of various Speakers that it is in keeping with the role of the Assembly and the respect that it should be accorded that bills in their final form should first be reviewed by the Assembly after first reading. In the chair's experience this is the accepted practice in Alberta, and the chair would expect it to continue.

On the second issue raised by the Opposition House Leader, that the Leader of the Opposition was denied access to the technical briefing session, the chair notes that he does not have control over the press conference room. It is not booked through the Speaker's office, nor does the Speaker exercise any control over its use. It is not part of the precincts. This would be distinguishable from the office of the Clerk Assistant, which the Opposition House Leader alluded to yesterday, who is in her own right an officer of the Assembly.

Even in the federal Parliament, where the Speakers of the Commons and the Senate exercise control over the entire building, it has been held that restricting attendance at a media lockup does not constitute a question of privilege. To quote Speaker Francis' 1984 ruling at page 593:

The Chair obviously recognizes that the parties represented in this House may from time to time request rooms. They may or may not choose to invite members of the press. They may choose to invite their own supporters or include or exclude their own supporters. They may on occasion include members of other Parties or not include them. That is not a matter for the Speaker to decide.

Allowing or not allowing a member to attend a media briefing does

not constitute an impediment or an obstruction to the member performing his or her parliamentary duties, which presumably is the privilege that the Opposition House Leader alleges was breached.

Accordingly, the chair finds that there is no *prima facie* question of privilege on this point either. The chair wishes to thank all members who participated in this debate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. On a point of order with respect to the third matter, the question of assault, which the Opposition House Leader did not address in his point of order. I would ask that you consider in your ruling additionally asking for an apology. He referred to a person who is well known in the building, who has no opportunity to come here to defend herself, and I think not proceeding on that allegation leaves her in an unfortunate position. I would ask the hon. Opposition House Leader to withdraw that allegation.

THE SPEAKER: If the hon. Government House Leader chooses to rise on a point, as he did, and cite certain things, then we can have such a point of order debated and argued. At this point in time the chair did indicate that in terms of what was discussed yesterday, no matter was pursued. There was no matter pursued either, if the chair's memory is correct, by the Government House Leader at the time. But if the Government House Leader chooses to rise, as he just did, and pursue a point here today, I trust that he's made his argument. So we'll give opportunity to the hon. House leader of the Official Opposition.

3:10

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity. I'm not sure how to respond. I had framed the issue as clearly as I could. I told you the matters that we were pursuing. There's nothing that has been said in the Assembly by this member that I believe to be inaccurate.

I'd made it very clear yesterday the issues that we were seeking a ruling on. What the Government House Leader is asking for, I don't know what authority he has for that. I didn't hear any authority cited. He may be unhappy with the extent to which I had narrowed my argument yesterday, but, with respect, I'm the author of that. He had his opportunity, I suppose, yesterday. If he felt that the issues in front of you weren't expansive enough, weren't comprehensive enough, he had some options available to him, and he chose not to avail himself of them. So I would respectfully suggest that he's estopped now from being concerned that you didn't pursue in your ruling matters that would have been wholly irrelevant to the issues that were before you.

I'm not sure how else to respond to it, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader. I'd like some citations to deal with here in what we're talking about.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, you allowed the initial discussion, so I'm simply responding to the response of the hon. member across the way. If you're suggesting that at this stage I need to provide a citation . . . [interjection] Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that yesterday, during the time when this matter was debated, the hon. House leader did raise the issue of the assault and did make it something which he wanted you to consider. It's a fine technical argument to suggest, as the Opposition House Leader has done, that it wasn't officially raised. However, I am looking at *Hansard* from March 2, page 229. This is the hon.

Opposition House Leader, and here's the quote:

The Leader of the Official Opposition attended at the media room with this member. When she entered the doors of the media room, a young woman, an employee of the government – and I think it serves little purpose to embarrass the individual woman.

Too late, Mr. Speaker.

I take it she was acting on instructions of the Premier, the Minister of Health and Wellness, or the chair of this meeting, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. This young woman came up, told Mrs. MacBeth that she could not enter the room. Physically, in terms of the Criminal Code, in my view, it would be an assault, because without the consent of Mrs. MacBeth she applied – it was a physical application of force.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way did raise the issue, and the hon. member should do the honourable thing and simply withdraw the remark and apologize.

THE SPEAKER: The matter in question is, again, one that should remind all members that they are responsible for what they say in this House. If an hon. member wants to take liberty with the English language, any language for that matter, and make statements in the House which he/she feels they may not be accountable for either that day or sometime in the future, then others will judge other than the members of this House.

This matter is one that is perplexing. An accusation is made about an hon. member saying something, and one hon. member in fact quotes from *Hansard* that the hon. member said something. Then the hon. member, in this case the Deputy Government House Leader, is demanding an apology from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I think that the chair will take all of this under advisement and review completely what has been said in the *Hansard* with respect to the matter. It was certainly not a matter that was raised and pursued by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo yesterday in his remarks with respect to the request for a ruling.

The bottom line is that all hon. members should be very clear about what they say in this House. The fact of the matter is that others have written in a more public forum than this Assembly about the incident in question.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 202

Marriage Amendment Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: When we last met to consider this matter, an amendment was proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and we are proceeding from there. This amendment has been circulated and is known as amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South wishes to speak to the amendment.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do in fact wish to address the amendment before us because the amendment strikes out section 5, which is the use of the notwithstanding clause.

There's been a number of members in the Assembly who have raised the question of jurisdiction. The Member for Edmonton-

Strathcona, the Member for Medicine Hat, the hon. Justice minister have posed the point of view that this particular bill is not within the jurisdiction of the province of Alberta and hence inappropriate. I want to make the record quite clear, Mr. Chairman. If you look at section 91 of the Charter where it talks about the distribution of legislative powers, it does say in there that the House of Commons has jurisdiction over marriage and divorce, but under section 92, where it outlines the provincial jurisdiction, you'll note under section 92(12) that the provinces have jurisdiction over the solemnization of marriage in the province.

Further, I would also refer hon. members to the Alberta Law Reform Institute's recent Family Law Project, which was released in October of 1998, where they note in a footnote that

the federal power embraces the substantive law. By way of qualification of the above jurisdiction, s. 92(12),

which I referred to earlier,

grants exclusive legislative power to the provincial legislatures to enact laws relating to the "solemnization of marriage."

Again, the Law Reform Institute confirms that particular jurisdictional issue.

We've made several references to the Layland case, and when it comes to jurisdiction, I think it's important or useful to refer to that particular judgment as well. It is a court case called Layland versus Ontario, March 15, 1993, and I'm going to quote from the document.

The applicants, who were both male and who were cohabiting in a sexual relationship, applied under s. 8(4) of the Marriage Act . . .

And of course this is in Ontario, Mr. Chairman.

. . . for judicial review of the refusal to issue a marriage licence to them. They argued that the limitation which prevents persons of the same sex from marrying violated their equality rights under s. 15(1) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Here's a case where in fact two individuals applied for a marriage licence and it was clearly within the provincial jurisdiction.

3:20

I'm laying out the case that in fact the bill, as we have it, with respect to the powers of the province of Alberta does have jurisdiction over the solemnization of marriage, and in fact it would thus make it appropriate for us to be able to use the notwithstanding clause to make that particular case.

Moving now to the question of the use of the notwithstanding clause – and I might repeat some of the things I argued earlier on the point of order. I would point out to all members that this is a private member's bill; it was drafted by myself. It is a very simple bill. It lays out a definition of marriage in a preamble talking about the importance of marriage, and so far I haven't heard anybody really disagree with that particular notion. But it was also very clear and it was clear in all the debates of everybody in the Assembly in second reading that the notwithstanding clause was a deliberate insertion into the bill, a very important part of the bill and one that everybody understood when they voted on it.

In second reading, Mr. Chairman, there were a number of good arguments made about why we use the notwithstanding clause and in what circumstances. I want to refer you to another number of quotations from a research paper, a background paper on the notwithstanding clause. In this particular paper the Attorney General of Manitoba at the time made these comments. He said:

The rights of Canadians will be protected, not only by the constitution but more importantly by a continuation of the basic political right our people have always enjoyed – the right to use the authority of Parliament and the elected Legislatures to identify, define, protect, enhance and extend the rights and freedoms Canadians enjoy.

Allan Blakeney, who was the Premier of Saskatchewan at that time, also made these comments. He said:

It contains a Charter of Rights which protects the interests of individual Canadians, yet in several vital areas allows Parliament and Legislatures to override a court decision which might affect the basic social institutions of a province or region and this is fully consistent with the sort of argument we have put forward that we need to balance the protection of rights with the existence of our institutions which have served us so well for so many centuries.

Mr. Chairman, I would say that marriage is one of those institutions that deserves our protection.

The use of the notwithstanding clause in the bill. If this amendment is passed, it's akin – and I'll use the marriage analogy – to going down the aisle with your spouse-to-be, going in front of the minister and saying, "Yes, I believe in the importance of marriage and its use for society and the benefit, but I really don't want to make my vows today because I want to keep my options open." If we do not use the notwithstanding clause, we have left the door open for challenges. That's clearly why the notwithstanding clause was inserted into the bill to begin with.

Several members have said: well, that's never going to happen; that's unlikely. Mr. Chairman, I would just refer you to an article in the *Ottawa Citizen* of Saturday, October 23, 1999. This is written out of Kingston. It says:

Gays and lesbians should go for broke and fight in the courts for marriage rights instead of accepting any compromises offered by governments, a legal conference was told yesterday.

In the same article it talks about a Supreme Court Justice and the comments that were made, and I'm quoting again:

Conference participants were bolstered by a keynote speech Thursday evening from Supreme Court Justice Claire l'Heureux-Dube, who asserted court fights for non-traditional couples are "full of promise" considering their legal gains over the last decade.

Going back to the Layland case, the dissenting opinion clearly indicated that there is a thought out there, there are people who hold the view that they want to push this matter further, and I think that for anybody to suggest otherwise would be naive.

One thing I haven't heard, Mr. Chairman, from the people who are opposed to the notwithstanding clause at the conclusion of this bill. While they are firm in the value of marriage, while they're saying that they don't want to change the definition of marriage, I've not heard one of them yet say in opposition that in the event there was a court challenge, they would use that mechanism. So what they say and what I hear don't seem to match.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. member is reminded that under Standing Order 8(2)(b) we're going to have to move to the next item of business, so the chair would invite the hon. member to consider moving at this point, so that we can get the committee to report to the Assembly, that we adjourn debate on Bill 202 at this time.

MR. DOERKSEN: I'd be willing to do that, but I'd also be willing to call the question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. DOERKSEN: Okay. In that case, then, Mr. Chairman, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to move that we rise and report progress.

MR. HAVELOCK: I'd be happy to do that. Thank you. I'd move that we rise and report progress, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion to report progress on Bill 202 carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on Bill 202.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Canada Health Act

502. Mr. Shariff moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to reaffirm its commitment to the five principles of the Canada Health Act and ensure that all provincial health care legislation continues to comply with these principles.

[Debate adjourned February 29: Mr. Smith speaking]

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to discuss Motion 502. Public health care is very important for our country, our province. Perhaps every one of us should know that our first greeting to one another is about our health. Good health is the foundation of everything else in life. It is no wonder that health matters touch us at our core. If our health is vital to us, we need to have a clear understanding of the issues surrounding it.

3:30

The Canada Health Act with its five principles stipulates that the health care system must be publicly administered and operated on a nonprofit basis by a public authority. It also stipulates that insured services must be comprehensive. It also says that the system must be universal, that all individuals are covered under the system. The act says that people must be covered no matter where and when they move within the country and that there are no charges for insured services. It seeks to maintain a universal level of quality across the country. It means that all Canadian citizens are guaranteed a certain level of quality and accessibility.

The principles of the Canada Health Act are followed closely by Alberta laws, and Albertans have a high regard for these principles. This is one of the foundations or treasures of Canada. As I travel outside Canada, I'm very proud that we have a public health system that covers my worries, my concerns, for myself and for my relatives. It's also something that I feel assured that when I need it, I have it.

We should look at the health care system in total. The economy of our society today is heavily based on a service economy. Among the service delivery there are few options. Publicly owned and publicly operated, publicly owned and privately operated, privately owned and publicly operated, or privately owned and privately operated: those are the options in the general context of service delivery in our society nowadays. Each one has its pros and cons.

We are faced with a fast-changing and progressive world. We need to be adaptive and innovative. The health care system has been serving us very, very well, but it is under great pressure from utilization. The growing demands for services, the growing number

of services, the long waiting lists, the cost rising faster than normal growth, the lack of staffing, constraints by organizational behaviours, new and costly technologies, and limited tax dollars all have been plaguing our system.

We have seen more tax dollars put into the health care system across Canada, but the problem still exists. A key government function is to get the most public good out of our limited tax dollars. We need to be pragmatic, trying new and innovative approaches in order to do so. Imagine that Alberta becomes well known for our excellence in medical services, that people from other parts of the world come here to be treated, bringing reputation and revenue to our locality. On the other hand, imagine Albertans having to go outside the country to find better treatment and paying for it.

I believe that our health care system should remain publicly managed and publicly funded with universal accessibility for every Albertan with high quality at an affordable public cost. In order to protect our treasured public health care system, the ways of service delivery should be pragmatic and flexible. It is common sense that there is more than one way of doing anything. When we talk about the Canada Health Act, again, this is core to our heart. The universal health care system was developed, as I recall, about 30 years ago, and it became the identity of Canadians. There is a comfort, a peace of mind that when the day comes that we need it, we'll have it. It's an insured program covered by public dollars.

I recall that in 1984 Parliament unanimously passed the Canada Health Act, and this act stipulated the five principles of the Canadian health program. It also established criteria and conditions for insured health services and extended health care services provided under the provincial jurisdiction. When we look at the system itself nowadays, we see that it has grown because of the technology, the number of people, the different professions involved, and the clients, or patients.

We need to look at it and see ways to keep it from bankruptcy, from going into ruin. The health care system with its five principles is highly regarded in Alberta and across the country. It's the envy of the world. In order to keep that, we need to look at ways and means of keeping it, improving it, making it better as the world changes, as our society changes.

When I look at the debate on health care across Canada, I'm encouraged because it has become a debate. There's a need to debate the public issues so that we can have input from our citizens, so that we can have the formulation of a policy based on public input. There are definitely different ideas of how to do things, but if you look at why we do things, we believe that we need the public health care system as, again, it is the identity of Canadians.

We need to keep it. But now what to do with it? What we do now is look at different aspects so we can improve it. Mostly what is different, while we have differences of opinions, is the how to do it. We should not forget that the whole objective is to uphold the Canada Health Act with its five principles. We need to have programs that uphold that principle to get to that objective. We also need to consider different ways of doing that, and the debate is more on ways of doing things. I think that in the general context in our society usually we get the blame for not doing or upholding certain things, not because we don't have the same objective but because we are doing it in a different way, the accuser usually using the way of doing things to destroy our common objective.

So when I look at the health care system in Alberta with the mandate saying that the government of Alberta is committed to the preservation of the principle . . .

3:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member

for Calgary-Fort, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on the motion under consideration.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:41 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Hlady	Olsen
Broda	Jacques	Paul
Burgener	Johnson	Pham
Cao	Jonson	Renner
Cardinal	Klapstein	Sapers
Day	Klein	Severtson
Dickson	Kryczka	Shariff
Doerksen	Laing	Smith
Ducharme	Langevin	Soetaert
Dunford	Leibovici	Stelmach
Fischer	Lougheed	Strang
Forsyth	Lund	Tannas
Friedel	MacBeth	Tarchuk
Fritz	MacDonald	Taylor
Gibbons	Mar	Trynchy
Gordon	McFarland	West
Graham	Melchin	White
Haley	Nelson	Woloshyn
Havelock	Nicol	Yankowsky
Herard	Oberg	

Totals: For – 59 Against – 0

[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 carried]

School Uniforms

503. Mrs. Forsyth moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce a pilot project to examine the feasibility of a school uniform policy in Alberta schools as current research gathered from other jurisdictions shows a correlation between the requirement to wear school uniforms and a decrease in school violence.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and begin debate on Motion 503. This motion really started for me over two years ago when I received a call from a constituent asking me what I knew about school uniforms and the decrease in violence, the increase in attendance, and so on and so on and so on. So I started reading and researching the Internet and receiving correspondence from people across North America on school uniforms. In fact, I just received an e-mail from Barbados.

I will admit that in the beginning I was skeptical about the whole issue. I thought, like most others, that uniforms were an old idea brought back from the past to solve educational problems of today, yet as I read more and gathered more research, I began to realize that uniforms do have a place in our educational system. I think the motion I am proposing today takes into account the last two years,

and I also think it's the right way to proceed in Alberta.

Motion 503 proposes a voluntary pilot project in a few selected Alberta schools to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of a school uniform policy in improving the school environment and decreasing school violence. Mr. Speaker, my purpose in bringing forth this motion is really twofold. First, I believe that school uniforms can positively influence the school environment. They are not a cure-all solution to school violence or other problems in our schools; however, there is data from across North America that seems to link uniforms to stability in schools.

Second, Mr. Speaker, I realize that in Alberta's public school system uniforms are not commonplace. This is why I'm proposing a voluntary pilot project. I want to get the debate on this topic going. One common concern that I've heard from my constituents and from people across Alberta is that there are not enough Alberta-based examples of data on public schools adopting uniform policies. If we can get a few schools to engage in this pilot project, I believe this will show that uniforms are a good idea for our schools.

I know that when people think of school uniforms, the first image that pops into their head is the old-fashioned Ivy League look of girls in pressed skirts and boys in a suit and tie. In fact, school uniforms of today are much different and much more casual. Take for example the Quinte secondary school in Belleville, Ontario, where the students wear khakis and a white T-shirt with the school crest, or the Sacred Heart elementary school in Calgary, where the students wear black trousers and a white shirt, or simply a school in the States where the students wear jeans and a T-shirt. The key to the effectiveness of school uniforms is not making the kids look formal and fancy. It is certainly a sense of community when all kids dress equally.

In the sense of community, students and schools can gain many benefits. I want to discuss these benefits, but I also want to supplement the discussion with examples of actual schools from across North America that have implemented uniforms. Mr. Speaker, one of the most important benefits of a uniform policy lies in the fact that all students wear them. This makes it much easier for principals and teachers to identify and act quickly when there are outsiders or intruders in our schools. Principals can point out and respond to who belongs and who doesn't. This can actually lead to unwanted outsiders not going into schools and creating conflicts within the school building. Also, in urban centres, where the student population can be in the thousands, uniforms can be an important tool to identify in the mass of teenagers those who are its students. Without uniforms there is the potential for teenage gang members or drug dealers to anonymously walk amongst students. Uniforms can make a real difference in fighting to keep unwanted elements out of our schools. Threats to students must be responded to quickly, and when intruders are easily identified, school staff can act quickly to either stop the situation or prevent it from occurring in the first place.

The Scarborough Academy for technological and environmental computer studies exemplifies this. Before a school uniform policy was implemented, it was on the Toronto school board's list of possible closures because the school had lost control of some of its students. Fights, drugs, and lack of respect were common. But, Mr. Speaker, when uniforms and a code of conduct were introduced, the school underwent a vast improvement in the school environment and culture. It is now off the closure list, and the students and teachers actually enjoy showing up for school. As well, in New York City, the largest urban centre in North America, half a million elementary students started wearing uniforms in 1999. A recent poll by the New York City board of education showed that over 80 percent of parents supported all students wearing uniforms.

Mr. Speaker, uniforms themselves cannot solve all the problems

of school discipline and safety, but they are one positive contributing factor. Working with all stakeholders in a community – students, parents, teachers, principals – uniforms can be part of a strong overall safety program.

Another benefit of school uniforms is the curtailing of peer pressure. When all kids are in uniform, there is less focus on clothing and less competition relating to clothing among students. Mr. Speaker, when everyone is in a school uniform, students and their parents don't have to worry about keeping up with the latest fashions and spending hundreds of dollars during the process. Designer fashions are very expensive and can eat up the budget of a family, especially if a few kids are in school at the same time. Take for example if a child likes Tommy Hilfiger, a popular brand of clothes amongst teens. Well, a Hilfiger jacket will cost you, oh, maybe \$150; a pair of jeans, around \$100; and a shirt, maybe \$65. That's well over \$300 for one outfit. There are many parents who just can't afford this. I'm sure that all of those in the Assembly who have had kids in school know the economic pressures put on parents. Besides being expensive, when students are caught up with trying to wear the latest fashions, it diverts a lot of time that could be spent more productively on learning.

4:00

Since a uniform policy was instituted in 1998 at Nellie McClung junior high school in Edmonton to combat fashion-related pressures, many students have said that the school environment has become more stable and there has been less distraction caused by what students are wearing. Mr. Speaker, the students at Nellie McClung are being taught self-assurance, confidence, and how to be a responsible citizen in a team environment, and that sounds pretty good to me.

Mr. Speaker, conversely, when students focus on fashion, this can lead to some kids being ostracized, because their families simply can't keep up. Everyone knows how hard it is for students, especially teenage students, to feel that they fit in. Adolescence is a precocious development stage for kids, and many teenagers have limited reserves of self-esteem. What school uniforms do is eliminate one of the factors or reasons why a child would feel left out. It creates a level playing field for children at school.

In fact, in Calgary two students took the initiative to organize a petition to promote school uniforms. They felt too many of their peers, including themselves, were being made outcasts because of what they wore. These students felt that there was too much focus on clothing and economic differences. Mr. Speaker, this is exactly why I am fighting for this motion today. When kids are standing up and starting petitions trying to get us to fix problems they see as important, I am happy to stand up for them. I agree with these students. Uniforms are a great way to make students feel more included and to create a sense of community in the schools.

Uniforms do lower peer pressure. In fact, a 1998 study by the National Association of Elementary School Principals showed that three-quarters of the schools with uniform policies noted a reduction in peer pressure amongst their students after adopting a uniform policy. Three-quarters is a significant number. What it signifies is a lot of children not being picked on or pressured that otherwise would have been without the uniform policy. In my mind that is yet another positive effect of uniforms.

Peer pressure and isolation are such negative experiences for children in school. A student's emotional state can be really affected if they feel alone. Mr. Speaker, we as parents can try as hard as we can to help them and give them support, but sometimes that is not enough. It is their fellow students, their peers, that kids really want to associate with and feel welcomed by. I know that uniforms will

not solve all the problems of school isolation, but they will help. Uniforms remove one aspect why a student may be picked on or singled out. The evidence is there. School uniforms promote stability in schools and contribute to students feeling safer and more included in their schools. I think it is a very positive thing.

Mr. Speaker, I have illustrated today the positive impact that school uniforms have on a myriad of school issues. I think Motion 503 is a fair proposal for Alberta schools because it is voluntary and seeks the co-operation of schools and information can be gathered.

I will close by again urging everyone in the Assembly to support this motion as a positive step towards an improved school environment. Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respect the intent of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek with this motion. I'm not sure if it is – in fact, I'm quite sure that it's not – the answer we need for violence in schools. I respect the fact that you think it might be one of the things that may help, but I'm not sure it would.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I think back to my teaching days, and I think of some children that may have been ostracized or picked on. If it wasn't clothes, it was something else. The answer to that isn't everyone in a uniform. The answer to that is programs. It's intervention with families. It's school morale, school programs. It's a thousand and one other things that we can do in a school.

If we want to have a study that shows that it definitely decreases school violence and what you're saying is that you want to ask that provincially we set it up so that studies are done, that's quite a chunk of coin. If you really are serious about implementing this, why are we mandating it at this level? Shouldn't we be asking for volunteers? Shouldn't we be asking school boards to ask school councils and local communities? [interjection] I know that it's done in some private schools. The Nellie McClung school is one example. That's an all-girl school right here in the city.

AN HON. MEMBER: A great school.

MRS. SOETAERT: It is a great school. A great school.

This is something that starts at the local level, and a school board says: "You know what? Let's talk to this parent group, let's talk to these students and see if they would like it."

MR. DICKSON: A good example is Sacred Heart.

MRS. SOETAERT: A good example would be Sacred Heart in Calgary-Buffalo, where they did that. That was instigated by that community, by parents, and I would bet you that would have successful outcomes because it came from them.

Now, if we say, okay, Sturgeon comp, you're all going to wear uniforms – and you said that it could be just jeans and a T-shirt with no symbol on it, as I understand it – then you're going to walk in and a kid is going to have some emblem on the T-shirt. What are you going to do? Make him turn it inside out? I have done that in the past with some disgusting T-shirts, asked them to turn it inside out. Quite honestly, with jeans and T-shirts they say: well, that's not a dress code; we wear that all the time. So I don't think you've addressed that issue. It still may be the Nike runner comparison to the regular runners that I may buy somewhere for myself.

MS OLSEN: Loser.

MRS. SOETAERT: I know. I am.

What we should do is let it come from the local levels. Let it come from the schools who want to do it.

MRS. FORSYTH: That's what it's about.

MRS. SOETAERT: It isn't. This says that we're going to mandate it. At a time when this government is chronically underfunding public education . . . [interjections] I woke them up, Mr. Speaker. The truth hurts. The truth hurts. Maybe there are some truth squad members who'd like to hear this. Chronically underfunded. Kids are crowded into classrooms. Do you want to stop violence in classrooms? Let's present the rats in a cage comparison here. You don't put a bunch of kids in one small hallway at the bell during room-changing time. That's how you prevent violence. Give them some space. You don't put 43 kids in one classroom if you want kids to get along. If you want to talk about issues in violence, try funding education properly, and you'd see what kinds of programs would happen out there. Now I'm awake. Here we go.

You know, I think it's a pat on the head to say: "Oh, let's put them all in uniforms. I'm sure they'd really like that, and then all the violence will stop." What a bunch of baloney. The issue is funding in this province. The issue is not crowding kids in classrooms. The reality is that when schools need extra rooms added on, they need them not yesterday but two weeks ago, two months ago, six months ago. Let's take Bellerose comp, for example, a wonderful school. Absolutely crowded in there; 110 percent capacity. You know what? What those kids need is more space. They don't need uniforms. They need more space. When we're talking about inner-city schools, what do they need? Lunch programs more than uniforms, that's what they need. They need food.

You know, if a community wants to, if local councils want to do this, it should come from them. It should not be forced upon them by the government saying: "You're going to try this out. Oh, this is a school where we've got a high violence rate. We're going to put you all in uniforms." That's certainly not the answer. If we want to fund for enough counseling time, for smaller class sizes, for less crowded buildings, I think that would be a step in the right direction. You don't force people to wear a certain outfit and think that that will stop violence. So, Mr. Speaker, if this comes from the community and from the kids and it's their idea and they want to do it at the school, you bet it will work, or at least it has a chance of working. If we mandate this on some community, it certainly won't.

4:10

MRS. FORSYTH: It's not mandated.

MRS. SOETAERT: The member says, "It's not mandated," but somebody is going to be a pilot project, so I guess somebody would offer to do that. I would hope that that comes from the school.

They have it already. Vimy Ridge school has it already. So I'm just saying that the information is there, and if it's from a community that wants it, it may work. Otherwise, if this government were really serious about violence in schools, you would look at more counseling time, something that has been drastically cut, smaller class sizes, proper funding for inner-city schools that need lunch programs. That's what you would look at. That would be a sincere effort.

So just those few comments. I can't support it because I want to see it come from communities. If the students at one of my high schools or one of my schools support it, that would be fine. But as it is right now, no.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Livingstone-Macleod.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It does get a little confusing from time to time, knowing what last names and first names of constituencies are. That's the wonder of rural Alberta.

I'm really pleased today to rise and speak in support of Motion 503. I think it's a wonderful initiative anytime someone comes forward with an idea of how to help schools cope with the ever increasing problem of peer pressure and that type of thing, to bring forward a voluntary project that they themselves designed and that could be part of a research program.

I think that my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek is definitely on the right track trying to urge our government to establish this voluntary pilot project by examining the effectiveness of school uniforms, and I stress "voluntarily." It's got to come from the grass roots. It's got to come not only from the students, but it's also got to come from the people that work within the school to make it an entirely complete school project.

There's a lot of pride that comes from being involved in a pilot project, a pilot project that can help maintain school decorum, and I think each and every individual school that would volunteer to be part of a pilot program would see the benefits of it and then institute that pilot project into school policy. It's a lot better to have it come from the individual. It's a lot better to come from the individual students, the grass roots, because that pride is instilled.

Motion 503 is a reflection of our commitment to engaging Albertans and guiding our policy through input from our communities. What I mean by this is that we are a Conservative government who listens to what Albertans have to say. This leads to better representation of the interests of Albertans, because instead of a policy being driven, as I said earlier, from the top down, it's based on stakeholder-driven consultation and, more importantly, community-based delivery.

I'd like to illustrate a few key educational initiatives that we have undertaken to improve our children's development and prosperity. The first is the Alberta initiative for school improvement. This is a new approach to support the improvement of student learning by encouraging teachers, administrators, trustees, parents, and the community to work together to introduce innovative and creative initiatives. What this means is that individual school boards will have the autonomy – I want to repeat that. Individual school boards will have the autonomy and the flexibility in deciding what areas of improvement they would like to focus on. For one jurisdiction it might be smaller class sizes. For another it might be early reading programs. The key to all of this is creating the right initiatives for each community and hence finding the most effective way to improve the learning environment.

Mr. Speaker, this \$104 million investment in this program over the next two years will ensure that schools have the capital for the program to work and be effective. An example of our government's commitment to ensure safe and caring schools is reflected in First Things First: Our Children, the government of Alberta's three-year plan for education. An education system that helps Alberta's young people become self-reliant, responsible, caring and contributing members of society is a top priority of our government, and the well-informed, collaborative effort of all educational partners ensures that schools can prevent violence and become safe and caring communities.

Another example of our government's commitment to

community-based initiatives was the Children's Forum held last fall. The forum was not an end but rather a starting point, a starting point for government and for all Albertans concerned about children. The forum involved stakeholders from across Alberta from various backgrounds and professions, all with a vested interest in the well-being of our children. The participants at the forum came up with several key recommendations which were delivered to the government by the chair of the event, Mrs. Colleen Klein. These recommendations will be taken and used to examine our government's existing children's services, and what will happen is that these services will be improved upon, strengthened, or in some cases refocused to better serve Alberta's children.

The initiatives that I've described lead to the key point that I'm just about to illustrate. We as a government are always striving to improve the prosperity and chances for success of all Albertans, especially for our young people. We recognize this can best be accomplished with the hard work and input of fellow Albertans. Listening to what Albertans say runs this government.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things Albertans are saying, especially in my constituency, is that we want our schools to be safe and to promote the best learning environment possible. That's why I'm standing here today in support of my colleague's motion, because it will make our schools safer and will promote a stable learning environment.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I understand that school uniforms are not a panacea in solving issues like school violence or peer pressure, but, Mr. Speaker, the data from across North America shows that the majority of schools who have implemented a uniform policy have seen a general improvement in the school environment. This includes schools like the Nellie McClung academy here in Edmonton or the Sacred Heart elementary school in Calgary. These are examples in Alberta, but there are not enough public schools undertaking uniform policies to make a reasoned estimate of their effectiveness. This is another reason why I support my colleague's motion. Motion 503 proposes a voluntary – a voluntary – pilot project in a few schools to gather the needed data, not done on a provincewide basis or as a province-wide endeavour.

The pilot project that the hon. member is proposing is the most logical and effective way to proceed. Rather than trying to force schools in Alberta to comply with some heavy-handed approach without any community consultation or any local school involvement, my colleague is only asking for a fair and balanced plan. The voluntary pilot project which a few schools may undertake will get the Alberta-based data needed to make a reasoned decision on uniforms. Motion 503 is an illustration of both the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and our entire government's commitment to community-based initiatives and constituent input into policy.

The school uniform policy my colleague is proposing will create other benefits for both students and parents. One such benefit is that more focus is given to learning and less to clothing. This happens perhaps because everyone is wearing the same thing. In essence, Mr. Speaker, the uniforms become the students' work clothes. Instead of worrying about fashions and hype, kids can focus on the reality of getting an education. Uniforms can promote good behaviour and an orderly learning environment. This means teachers can spend less time on discipline and hence more time on teaching.

4:20

School uniforms are a concrete and visible means of restoring order and discipline to the classroom, yet the uniforms of today are

not overly stifling to a student's ability to express himself or herself. Uniforms today strike the right balance between instilling equality and order and keeping the school environment casual and fun. When implemented, school uniforms seem to make schools safer, decrease peer pressure, and stabilize the school environment. These are, of course, laudable and positive outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, I think we should support this motion as a positive step for school safety and remember our larger commitment to the prosperity and the development of Alberta students. This means getting enough teachers in our schools, having those schools equipped with modern technology, ensuring that the infrastructure of our schools is maintained, and of course keeping our schools safe.

I am happy to say that we have kept our commitment. This is illustrated in some of the initiatives I have mentioned today and especially in our recent budget. We have laid the foundation for future successes and ensured that our students will have access to a great system. Along with our investment in education we continue to use innovation as our compass.

Our government is always looking for a new and creative way of doing things to serve Albertans effectively. This is where community-based initiatives and stakeholder consultations are most important. This ensures that we listen to Albertans and develop good policy. Mr. Speaker, I think that Motion 503, if passed, will continue this commitment, and I therefore hope that all of my colleagues in this Assembly will support it.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood. [some applause]

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to my cheering fans here. I rise today to speak against this motion. Part of the reason I'm doing that is because this government allows for charter schools, and some of those schools have already decided that their students will wear uniforms. That's a criterion to get into the school. We have schools that have maybe no uniform codes, but you can't have coloured hair. I believe Austin O'Brien might be one of those schools. There are all sorts of limitations already put on kids. You can cite the Nellie McClung school, which actually from its inception has had uniforms. I mean, it's great. If people choose to send their kids there, that's great. That's their choice to do that.

However, to suggest that this should be the standard I think is wrong. I would suggest that violence in schools – and first of all let's not forget that peer pressure has been around for years and will exist. It exists in different forms at different times throughout changes in society, and we're not going to see that disappear. There's a lot of peer pressure now to not smoke, to not drink, those kinds of things, and those are things that impact violence in schools.

However, I become very concerned when we talk about the notion of suggesting that a standard be set voluntarily or not. If that's the issue the hon. member is bringing forward, then the motion is moot because that happens now. It happens now. There's a voluntary process that exists, so I'm wondering why studies can't occur with those specific schools that you've already talked about: private, public, charter, whatever. I'm wondering, you know, if the member has thought about undertaking some studies with those particular schools: Vimy Ridge, Nellie McClung, the Sacred Heart school in Calgary, and any of those other schools that have a traditional-type uniform.

I look back to the tradition in the U.K., where every school has kids in uniforms. I can tell you that a lot of those schools have a lot of similar problems that exist here. They all may wear the same uniform, but it doesn't mean that it's going to deal with the issues of

poverty, the issues that a kid has coming from a home where alcohol and substance abuse exist or those kinds of things. With that comes some different issues for some of these children. It doesn't help kids with fetal alcohol syndrome if you're going to put him in a uniform. We have to address these issues in a different way. If you really want to address violence, let's look at poverty, let's look at putting programs in place. That's crime prevention, but uniforms are not crime prevention.

The whole idea of the safe and caring school program. My son was in a school, in fact, that was part of that program. Some great things were happening, and there were some great changes, but you know what? The kids didn't have to wear uniforms for those things to happen, for the changes to occur.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that many of the kids already have uniforms in school, and I think my colleague from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert alluded to that, all those places in and around that area. I would not want to see money diverted away, especially with the schools in my neighbourhood, from breakfast programs, lunch programs, snack programs, peer leadership programs, mentoring programs and have that funding diverted into school uniforms, because many of the kids in my constituency need much more than that. I don't think it matters. You know, for some of those kids getting to school is a huge chore. What they come dressed in isn't an issue for them. Getting there is a huge challenge. So I can think of many more ways to address these issues than necessarily putting a child or a youth in a uniform.

I would suggest to you that if you're looking at where the violence starts, it's at the junior high school level, where you would find much resistance from those kids. And why should a kid have to travel outside of their school area because the school has decided to have uniforms?

There are all sorts of other issues, and I have yet to see anything tabled by the hon. member that suggests that all of these concerns would be addressed by the adoption of a pair of jeans and a T-shirt or a kilt and a pair of kneesocks and those kinds of things. Those are choices that people should make on their own. Those schools are there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, very much.

THE SPEAKER: I hate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, but under Standing Order 8(2)(c) the time allocation for consideration of this type of business today is now concluded.

4:30

head: Government Motions

Adjournment of Session

5. Mr. Havelock moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the current sitting of the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is primarily administrative. This side of the House expects that we will have a lengthy and interesting session. However, to give members opposite the opportunity to have full and complete debate on this, we feel it's necessary to move the motion at this time. Again I reiterate that it's mostly administrative so we can adjourn in the future, which I expect will be quite some time down the road.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to take a few moments to talk about this motion to adjourn already, so early in such a fun-filled session. Though it is administrative, in the words of the Deputy Government House Leader, I actually believe him. I really do, but I just want to express a few questions or concerns that maybe will be considered in the future; for example, actually set times for sitting in this Legislature. I know it's been something we've talked about for the seven years I've been here.

MR. HAVELOCK: I've been here 10.

MRS. SOETAERT: You've been here 10? No. You came in the same time I did.

MR. HAVELOCK: One-thirty to 10.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's a possibility, 1:30 to 10. From 1:30 to 10 could be a possibility.

However, one of the things I would appreciate and I think Albertans would appreciate and maybe those of us with a family life would appreciate is knowing the actual dates that we will sit in this Legislature. That's not uncommon across this country, to actually have set dates for when they start and finish. And you know what? Some places have a fall session every year. Yes, they really do.

MS OLSEN: Really?

MRS. SOETAERT: They really do. So, you know, that's a concept that maybe this government could think about. I'd be interested to know: are we going to have a fall session this year?

DR. TAYLOR: We had one.

MRS. SOETAERT: We've had one in seven years. I'm really glad that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is going to leap into debate any moment now, or he could point of order me if he's really upset.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be neat to actually know when or if we're going to have a fall session and actually set that date every year. I think that would be quite a concept, which isn't known in Alberta, but certainly I think we could do that because there are other strides we have made in this Assembly, so I bet this one wouldn't be too hard for this government to leap to. I think certainly this year will be a hot year, that we will need a fall session, so it would be nice if I could see that motion put forward at some time, that a fall session will start on such a date.

This is an adjournment, so if we adjourn early in the spring session – heaven knows, it's on the table now. It could be done in what? How many days does this take to go through? Two? One? It could be done Thursday. Then certainly everything's been left on the table, unless of course they bring closure to a great many things. It could be an awfully short session, so the reality is that we should all be concerned. Will this go into the fall? Will there be a fall session in Alberta in the year 2000?

Ah, Cypress-Medicine Hat says no, but he's not the Deputy Government House Leader, so I'm not going to put my eggs in that basket. I am going to hope that the Deputy Government House Leader will bring that issue forward to his caucus and say: you know, guys, it's about time we really were democratic in this Assembly and set dates that we actually sit in this Legislature, start

dates in the spring and start dates in the fall and really go from there. I think it would be a real concept. A real concept. And you know these parliamentary trips that each one of us is trying to get an opportunity to be a part of, which I think are very informative and very good? Well, then you'd actually be able to say, "No, I can't go in November," or "Yes, I can," but right now things are up in the air with all those kinds of things.

I think the people of Alberta would appreciate it. There are issues that they know could be tabled in the Legislature, talked about in the Legislature, but they say: "Oh, are you going to have a fall session this year? Maybe you'll present my stuff in the fall." Well, we're never sure in Alberta if there's going to be a fall session.

So I just wanted to express the concern that, number one, we've already got an adjournment motion and we're just starting. We're just starting, unless of course Bill 11 is scrapped, maybe Bill 3 is really fixed, and maybe we are out of here in a week or two. Sad, because there are a great many issues that people in Alberta want us to talk about. I'm sure that would be an exaggeration, and I don't think they have any intention of really using that adjournment motion right away.

In the meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, I'm very concerned that this motion is already on the table but with the hope that maybe next time we will actually have set sitting days in the Legislature. Some things have improved. I'm trying to think of one, and I will in a little while, I think. The election of the Speaker: there's one. Even though our side is outnumbered on that, the process is still there, and sometimes it's a pretty interesting election.

I just have to say that I'm disappointed this motion is already on the table. We've barely been here – what would you say? – 10 days. Those are a short 10 days. [interjection] I'm sure Calgary-Fish Creek is going to hop into debate pretty soon.

Mr. Speaker, with those few concerns I will take my seat. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have some concerns about Government Motion 5, the adjournment motion. Like the hon. member for the area of Riviere Qui Barre – that would be one of her areas in the constituency of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert – we can only become alarmed at the haste with which the government introduces this adjournment motion. I myself have not even had the opportunity yet to respond to the throne speech, yet hon. members are anxious to get the adjournment motion on the Order Paper, and we have so much to do. We look at page 3 of the Order Paper, and we see there have been scarcely 13 government bills introduced.

I don't know what they're thinking. The only thing I can surmise is that they're afraid of something. And when this government is afraid of something, Mr. Speaker, I can only see Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act – or, as some people say, the privatization act – and this is the reason for this hasty motion, this adjournment motion. When we look at the concern that has been expressed by Albertans, the government with this adjournment motion can fold their political tent, so to speak, and get away from the intense political pressure they are experiencing over Bill 11. Many Albertans, it doesn't matter where they're from, whether they're from Grande Prairie, Red Deer-South, Calgary, Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan – all over the province, including Fort McMurray, people are very, very concerned about not only the direction of health care. Suddenly people are just coming up in the streets and they're saying: "Mr. MacDonald, we can't trust this government anymore to deliver a good, sound public health care system. They cannot be trusted."

I'm sure all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly must be hearing this, so this has to be the reason for skittering away and having this motion so soon on the Order Paper. Ten days into the session and here we are talking about adjournment. We have issues to deal with. We have issues, of course, relating to health care, Mr. Speaker. We have issues relating to education, whether it's in the elementary system or the high school system. We have the universities. Students are gathering, and they're protesting in a very sensible Canadian way about the high cost of university. We have a skilled-labour shortage in the province. We have industries that are very, very anxious to provide jobs for Albertans. They can and they will, but there are no skilled people to come forward and take these jobs. We have issues that are brought forward all the time by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning regarding municipal governments. We have issues relating to senior citizens of this province. We have seniors who feel that this government is making them feel guilty because they may require at some time in the future health care.

4:40

We have a very young population in this province. It is the youngest population in the country. There is less than 10 percent of the entire population that is over 65. It is not going to be for another generation yet, Mr. Speaker, the year 2016, before this province reaches the average age of retirement or, shall I say, 65, which is currently going on record in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. So whenever seniors are gathering – and they're gathering in large groups these days, particularly in this city, the city of Edmonton – regarding health care and Bill 11 . . .

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, before the Assembly right now is a motion dealing with adjournment, and relevancy is always a consideration. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is very eloquent, and if the fear is that should this motion go forward – the Speaker has to be very careful about intervening in the debate, but assurances should be given to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that should this motion be approved, this House would not be adjourned until the year 2016.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Goodness.

Mr. Speaker, all these issues, including the issues that are very important to seniors, issues on agriculture, environment, electricity deregulation, issues relating to user fees, have to be discussed at length before we should entertain an adjournment motion. This concept that 10 days into the session we should put forward our adjournment motion to me is almost a reflection of paranoia by the government. This is a snapshot. It's a snapshot in time. It's really a polaroid of what this government thinks. Do they want to have debate? Do they want to have debate on these issues? I think not.

We're always conscious that in the fall of 1997 there was no fall session of the Legislative Assembly. Before we go to the citizens of Alberta to determine who should form the next government, this may be the last opportunity to discuss this issue. It is very important that everyone from all sides of the Assembly gets to discuss these issues. With this motion, which I would describe mildly as a legislative guillotine, I'm surprised. I'm surprised that it would be brought forward, and I would be surprised that hon. members of this Assembly would support it at this time. Of course, if we don't have our adjournment motion now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, our House leader, in May or maybe in June is going to spot on the Order Paper some day the adjournment motion. He's going to be

able to come to our caucus meeting and say: I believe we have a week or two left in this session.

Now, this could just be a parliamentary ploy, but I think it is an affront to all Albertans, Mr. Speaker. When we think of Albertans, when we think of the discussions we're going to have here this spring, we must think of the long term, not of schemes for re-election but think of the long term. We think perhaps to the year 2016, when 14 percent of the population will be over 65, or perhaps to the years in the future when we're not going to have enormous reserves of natural gas and oil from which to get royalties as we sell this gas and oil. The province is changing quite quickly. Last week, for instance, we talked about our land, particularly our land base and our land that's reserved for agricultural purposes. There are many long-term planning issues, and it is just not proper for those issues to be discussed after the legislative guillotine that Motion 5 really is introduced.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the floor to any other hon. member of the Assembly, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo seems keen to engage in the debate. Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I can't help but think as I look across at the Member for Calgary-Varsity that there was a time when the member for that constituency would have had probably a very different view of the Legislature and when we'd shut things down and when we wouldn't. Actually, I'm thinking of the Member for Calgary-Varsity, the current minister of gambling, when he was involved in the Tuxis and older boys' parliament.

You know, I can't help but think that that member would have looked forward with great excitement to the prospect of another Tuxis and older boys' parliament resuming in Red Deer. He would have gotten in the car or on the bus to travel up, representing his area in Calgary, to participate in debate. I can only imagine the kind of excitement he brought to participating in that process and how disappointing he would have found it if the minute he got off the bus to roll into the Tuxis and older boys' parliament in Red Deer or wherever it was held that particular year, somebody told him, "Well, great to see you here, Calgary-Varsity, but get your calendar out, because we're deciding when we're sending you home." He would say to himself: "But, gosh, it's only a few days I get this little excursion away from home. I've got all kinds of new friends to meet in the parliament. I've got all kinds of new experiences to have. Surely you wouldn't deny me that by bringing down the curtain before we barely get out on the stage."

Mr. Speaker, that same frustration that I can imagine the Member for Calgary-Varsity would have brought to his first Tuxis and older boys' parliament may be akin to what some of us feel when we see this motion on there. I'm going to speak against it for a couple of reasons.

The first one would be the provision that the House stands adjourned "until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council." Now, Mr. Speaker, I've certainly got no lack of confidence in either your office or in the Lieutenant Governor, and I know you do a fine job in terms of deciding when the Legislature should resume sitting. But how much better it would be if we went back to the plan that had been engineered by you, Mr. Speaker, and the gentleman who went on to become leader of the Liberal opposition for a time, when the two of you were House leaders and you negotiated a pact that had at least a fixed date when the spring session would commence and a fixed date when the legislative session would commence in the fall. We knew in advance that it might start a few days early, a week

early, but we could intelligently plan our time and our business.

You know, what it is, Mr. Speaker? It's simply a measure of respect for individual members. It respects the ability of individual members to design their plans and their calendars in a way that most people do in the regular world. It makes sense that we take away this little bit of gamesmanship, this little bit of surprise that now is vested in Executive Council and the Premier in terms of determining when the Legislature should commence. I look forward eagerly to the day when we see one of these motions and it says, "You shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker, which date shall be no later than October 15" or whatever.

4:50

I think we lost a lot when that agreement came to the end of its term. We've been able to continue some elements of that in terms of private members' business. We see some vestiges of the leadership provided in that initial agreement from 1993, but I must say, Mr. Speaker, that what we have now is but a shadow of the much bolder scheme that had been negotiated, agreed to, and implemented in that period from 1993 to 1997. So I just have that concern.

What possible reason, other than some narrow partisan advantage, would the government have for not committing to, if you will, a drop-dead date when the spring session would commence and a drop-dead date when the fall session would commence? It doesn't preclude the Premier from reconvening the session earlier. It just seems to me like such an intelligent way of proceeding. I'm disappointed we've lost that, and this is perhaps an opportunity to raise that.

Now, the other reason why I stand to register some concern is the notion of recessing the current sitting of the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature. We discovered a couple of years ago that the government, Mr. Speaker, doesn't read their parliamentary authorities, because when they canceled the fall session in 1997, I think it was, we heard the Premier defend that by saying: well, ladies and gentlemen of the province of Alberta, we don't have any more legislation; we don't need a fall session because we don't have more legislation. That ignored completely the other huge reason why we sit as a Legislative Assembly. It's not always to pass legislation. Sometimes it's to hold government accountable.

You know, as frustrating as it is for you, Mr. Speaker, in terms of question period, in terms of riding herd on this bunch of cats, and as frustrating as it is for members here who sometimes would like a higher level of decorum and respect for each other and for other members in the Assembly . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aw.

MR. DICKSON: Well, there may be some who don't share that sentiment.

But, you know, it is the one time, it is the one place, it is the sole forum where Albertans can hold their government accountable. They hold it accountable through questions in question period, they hold the government accountable through written questions and motions for returns, when we're allowed to debate them, and they hold this government accountable through vigorous scrutiny of estimates and tough questions to ministers, who have to justify some \$17 billion in taxpayer spending.

Mr. Speaker, those are also compelling and important reasons why the Legislature must sit. Yes, it's a light legislative program the government puts in front of us. Yes, it's disappointing in the sense that it misses so many of the issues that Albertans want to see addressed. I talked before about the gaps. We have yet to see the details of a vigorous public legal education program, the notion of

how we're going to make our Alberta Human Rights Commission independent of government. There are so many issues, the issue of homelessness in Calgary, much of it in Calgary-Buffalo. Those are things that we should be discussing in here.

What we find is a government that rather is fixated on figuratively turning off the lights – oh, I know the lights aren't turned off here – locking the doors, and dispersing MLAs to their areas. We should have been tipped off to this when we saw when the throne speech was scheduled. Imagine the lunacy of bringing together 82 MLAs from all over the province, with all of the attendant costs associated with that, to sit for one hour, plus or minus, and hear a throne speech and have some cookies and some punch downstairs, and then we dispersed to our 82 constituencies again. What lunacy is that, Mr. Speaker? If you wanted to economize on time, why wouldn't you have the throne speech on a Monday so we stay the next day to start debate on that throne speech?

Mr. Speaker, the essence of this motion is that it reaffirms the monopolistic control that Executive Council has over the time of this Assembly, the management of this Assembly.

DR. TAYLOR: That's because there are 64 of us and 16 of you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, our minister responsible for innovation . . . [interjection] Science and innovation. It's hard to get the titles right, Mr. Speaker. He can't wait for the interesting questions we've got for him at 8 o'clock tonight. He wants to get involved early. He wants to know what some of those questions are. He wants to be tipped off, but he's not going to be. He's going to have to come back at 8 o'clock. We have so darn many good questions for that minister that we're going to keep him busy from 8 until 10 o'clock.

Mr. Speaker, the point I'm making is simply this. In this Assembly, as rough as it may be around the edges, as tumultuous as it may be for 50 minutes four days a week, as unsatisfactory as it may be to those of us looking for concrete answers to specific questions, it's still the very best forum Albertans have. It's the only forum Albertans have to try and ferret out how their tax dollars are being spent or misspent, how their resources are being managed or mismanaged, whether their needs are being addressed, and, if so, whether they're being addressed adequately. I wish government would put as much time, energy, and resources into representing the citizens of this province. You know, you may have 64 seats. The issue is whether this legislative agenda that we see here reflects the priorities of those Albertans.

DR. TAYLOR: We'll have 74 after the next election.

MR. DICKSON: You know, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat already wants to make predictions in terms of the next election. Maybe, Mr. Speaker, that's really what this is all about. This little legislative session is but a very, very short hiccup on the way to the next election.

That's not what Albertans put us here for. That's not what they pay us for. That's not why they give us staff. They expect us to be wrestling with the issues like wait lists in Calgary. They expect us to be talking about long-term care facilities in Medicine Hat. They expect us to be talking about the access to mental health services in Airdrie, Alberta, and there's a whole bunch of other issues in Airdrie that citizens want to see addressed. Those people send me notes. People in Airdrie, Alberta, are sending notes to Liberal MLAs expressing their concern that they don't feel they're being represented on the private versus public health care issue.

MS HALEY: I don't think so.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, because I know the member for the Airdrie area has got lots to say, I would think that she would have a lot to say about the issue of public health care. If she doesn't, that's for her and her constituents to resolve.

The point, Mr. Speaker, is that this is the forum for the rest of us who do want to take advantage of that opportunity to challenge the government to talk and to act and to commit resources to deal with those things like how we reduce wait lists in this province. Has there yet been a single opportunity in this House to address that? Has there been a question to talk about how we're going to reform primary health care in this province? No. But the government wants to lock the doors, bar the doors, get MLAs back out where it's safe, protect the ministers.

You know, the front bench in this House have what I call the armadillo complex. Mr. Speaker, it's all about protection. It's all about hunkering down. It's all about, you know, digging a little hole in the sand and hoping that all the pesky questions go away.

5:00

But they don't go away, Mr. Speaker. The only difference is that there isn't a forum outside of this place for the questions to be asked and for ministers to have to respond. I might say that the squeamishness we see on the part of the front bench, the Executive Council of this province, may be directly related to the intensity of the issues that Albertans are feeling and the strength of Albertans' sentiment. That's okay. I understand it's not comfortable for the front bench, but that just goes with the territory.

If you're chairman of the Calgary caucus, you know, there are responsibilities, too, and maybe in this place the chair of the Calgary government caucus doesn't get a chance to answer questions. It's too bad, Mr. Speaker. Maybe he should. Maybe he should. When we do that rewrite of the rules, maybe we should make sure that the representative of the 20 government MLAs in this place should have to answer some questions about those key issues in the city of Calgary.

The member for Three Hills has offered so much advice. I'm sure she's going to be taking her place in the debate in a moment, so I want to afford her every opportunity. It's only a couple of minutes after 5. She'll have until 5:30, and that should be enough to accommodate her 20 minutes' worth of comments.

Mr. Speaker, we've talked about the concern with respect to the process of scheduling sittings. I've outlined some of the concerns the opposition has. The focus of the government on adjournment is something that I lament, and we've talked about that each year when this particular motion comes in. I'd just like to challenge the government to maybe take this motion – why don't we just put this on a shelf? Why don't we just suspend this motion? Why don't we just leave this aside? Let's see if first we can earn the confidence of Albertans by talking about those issues that are important to them, by demonstrating our responsiveness to their needs and their issues and see this as a bit of a prize. This will be the treat at the end. If we do a good job on behalf of Albertans, maybe we take this thing off the shelf sometime in June, and if we've done a good job and we can justify to our constituents what we've done here, maybe it's time to revisit this question, and we could vote it then. It seems awfully premature to be dealing with it at this stage.

So I think those are the comments I wanted to make. I'd just finish by saying: before the guillotine comes down pursuant to Motion 6, will there be an opportunity to see in detail what the government's response is to the challenge from Claudette Bradshaw, the federal Labour minister, who's told us what the federal government would do for the homeless in our province? We haven't heard what the province is going to do. Is there going to be time to hear

about whether we establish that independent Human Rights Commission? Are we going to be able to resolve that?

Are we going to be able to resolve the problems with Calgary schools? We're one of the biggest provinces; we've got a space utilization formula that doesn't work, and all members I think know that. We have too many communities in Calgary that don't have schools. We have other communities that are going to lose schools because of an absolutely arbitrary, capricious, school utilization formula. Are we going to fix that problem before we take our summer break?

Mr. Speaker, those are all concerns. I'd sooner see us debating this motion about Calgary Stampede time in July instead of doing it now, so I'm hoping that others will pick up that sentiment and suggest we hold the vote off on this until maybe early July, because then we will have determined whether we've earned the right to be able to leave here and go back to our constituencies.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to join into this debate on Motion 5:

When the Assembly adjourns to recess the current sitting of the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Mr. Speaker, this is my fourth spring session since first being elected and the fourth time I have seen this motion or one very similar to it brought in before we've been in session for even a few weeks. This is the 10th day, day 10, that we have been in session, and we have this motion brought in. I am still trying to determine whether this motion is brought in by the government to make mischief or if it is demonstrative of its disdain for this Assembly and what we are to be accomplishing here.

I know that the mover of the motion said that it was purely administrative, but that kind of administration that far in advance I think perhaps could be calling into question an organizational deficiency if the end has to be put so close to the beginning. So I question that, but I think it's more perhaps mischief making in that they want to give the members of the opposition a chance to stand up and go through all the things, as my colleagues have done here earlier, that we see lacking in this process or that we would like to see agreed upon in advance. So perhaps they are doing us a favour by giving us this opportunity to speak to it, or perhaps it's mischief in having this motion hang over our heads like the sword of Damocles, because there it does hang.

This motion is now on the Order Paper, and it will stay on the Order Paper until the day they pop up and go: well, it's tomorrow. So I think there is an intention there that it stands as a bit of a threat to us that if all does not go the way the government had hoped, that's it. The guillotine would come down, as Calgary-Buffalo puts it, or the sword that's hanging over their head, the scimitar, as Edmonton-Gold Bar put it.

If it's not that sword of Damocles or the mischief making, then, unfortunately, I would see it as the disdain that the government has for . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Democracy.

MS BLAKEMAN: For democracy, for what we're trying to do in this Assembly.

The first year that I was elected there was no fall session. There simply wasn't a fall session, and there was certainly a lot of business

of interest to the people in Alberta that could have been discussed in a fall session.

So there's no element of trust involved, certainly on my part, with this government when I see a motion like this and I hear some reassurances: no problem; there'll be a fall session. Well, sorry, but for 25 percent of the time I've been in the House there wasn't a fall session. So that element of trust is not upheld here.

AN HON. MEMBER: It would have been a summit. Do you think a summit is going to be . . .

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, well, yes. Summits can be called, but they do not replace the business that goes on in this Assembly with all members present.

So I would like to see some assurance, more than an assurance that there will be a fall session in this year of 2000. I think that would be a good example, a good way to start the millennium, that we do in fact have a spring and a fall sitting. This motion doesn't give me any indication of that.

I agree with some of the speakers earlier about fixed dates for when the session indeed sits. I for one make a point of going out and booking to go in and speak with all of the seniors' residences in my riding. They would prefer that I come in before July and August, but I have no way of knowing whether I can go ahead and book those visits at this point because I don't know when we'll be starting, when we'll be finishing, nothing. So I have to leave it to the last moment, and certainly I've had the request from the seniors' residences that they would prefer to have a better idea of when I might be coming or a bit more advance notice.

The work of this Assembly and this disdain for democracy or for the work of this Assembly I see coming through more and more often. There is the use of the standing policy committees, which are not available to members of the opposition. There's the entire budget process that we see, which I am shocked about, where we have a prescribed 20 days of debate, but the 20 days are really two-hour time slots, and they manage to run two of them at the same time so that counts as two days' worth of debate.

5:10

Well, we had a member in this Chamber earlier today who admitted that the public didn't access *Hansard* very much. So how is the public supposed to be keeping up with this budget debate? We have it brought forward on a Thursday. We're debating it the next sitting day. How is the public supposed to be getting their point of view through to their members to have it brought forward and included in the debate on the budget?

We have a throne speech now that has basically been televised and released through media releases and one-on-one media interviews long before the Lieutenant Governor gets a chance to read it out. Where is the respect for this Chamber in that process? We've got a budget speech that is for the most part released prior to our actually hearing it read out in here through all kinds of announcements and reannouncements and heavy hints and media releases and one-on-one interviews again.

So where is the respect for this Chamber? In my opinion, putting forward this adjournment motion on day 10 of the spring session is just another indication of the disdain held by this government for this Assembly.

MRS. SOETAERT: Good point.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you.

I'll conclude my remarks.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to conclude the debate.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you. To simply close briefly, Mr. Speaker. It is customary – and this side of the House is certainly used to the opposition members railing against this motion. It's part of the gamesmanship which the Opposition House Leader so eloquently argued against, yet he's one of the masters at practising it within the House, and we do appreciate that.

It is political, because the members opposite know full well that we are facing a lengthy session. The members opposite know full well that we will be dealing with many of the issues which they have raised, and we'll be dealing with them seriously. But, of course, the opposition members have to commit to also dealing with them seriously so that we can get on with the business as opposed to simply being involved in the gamesmanship which I referred to earlier.

As concerns previous fall sessions, Mr. Speaker, I could be mistaken, but it's my recollection that since my election in '93 we have always had a fall session with the exception, I believe, of one year. Now, if I'm not mistaken, I think that was the unity debate, and it still gave the opposition the opportunity to call the government to account with respect to issues at that time.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition also knows full well in advance when session is going to start. That's well publicized.

As concerns what our constituents expect of us, they expect us to represent them effectively whether we are in session or out of session. Simply being in session does not guarantee effective representation, Mr. Speaker. In fact, quite often I find it much more effective to be dealing with my constituents directly on issues of concern.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that I've tried to address very briefly the issues raised by the opposition, but to reiterate, I understand and they understand that a little bit of this debate is politics; it's gamesmanship. We have come to expect that. In fact, I quite enjoy the debate that often takes place around this motion, and I will enjoy raising with the Opposition House Leader probably in May or June when we're still here that they really had nothing to fear with respect to the passage of this motion.

Thank you.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

Spring Recess

6. Mr. Havelock moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday,

March 23, 2000, at the regular hour of 5:30 p.m., it shall stand adjourned until Monday, April 3, 2000, at 1:30 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is one of the breaks. I believe this coincides with the spring break taking place in both Calgary and Edmonton during that time. I don't believe this is a controversial motion in any way, and I would hope all members would support it.

Thank you.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

Easter Recess

7. Mr. Havelock moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday, April 20, 2000, at the regular hour of 5:30 p.m., it shall stand adjourned for three sitting days, until Monday, May 1, 2000, at 1:30 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion is for the purposes of allowing members to take advantage of the Easter festivities and the Easter break.

Thank you.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move that we call it 5:30 p.m. and that when we reconvene this evening at 8, we do so in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion put forward by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader that we now do rise until 8 o'clock, when we reconvene in Committee of Supply, all those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.
The motion is carried. The House is adjourned.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:17 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 7, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/03.07

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I wonder if we might call the committee to order. Hon. members of the committee are reminded that we divide immediately into two parts. Subcommittee C will meet here and consider Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, and subcommittee D will meet in room 512 for Innovation and Science estimates.

Would those members who are part of subcommittee D please depart for room 512, and we'll see you at about 10 o'clock in the evening.

[The committee met as subcommittees C and D from 8:01 p.m. to 10:06 p.m.]

THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

First of all, I'd like to call upon the hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Subcommittee C of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Chairman, subcommittee D of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Innovation and Science for the fiscal year 2000-2001, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Chairman, thank you. I move that the committee do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and the Department of Innovation and Science for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I would call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 12

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll call on the hon. Provincial Treasurer to begin this evening's deliberations. Hon. Provincial Treasurer, are you prepared to say anything? No? Okay.

MR. SAPERS: This is likely to be the last opportunity that I'll have a chance to speak to the Treasurer in Committee of the Whole. I was expecting him to stand up and have a bit of a speech. I mean, if it's a maiden speech when you start, is it an old-maid speech when you leave? I don't know.

Anyway, Committee of the Whole on Bill 12. We've had a chance to look at the history of this government when it comes to supplementary and interim supply, and there have been some comments made about the degree to which the government has been relying on supplementary and interim supply and the displeasure of the opposition on behalf of Albertans when it comes to the reliance of the government on interim and supplementary supply. Of course, Mr. Chairman, those comments are on the record, and I won't bother to repeat them.

What I would ask is that the Treasurer pay particular attention to three elements of budget planning that I think would help prevent us from being at this particular point again. I'm going to take some time to go over these three elements of what I think would improve the government's budget planning process so that we cease this reliance on interim, out-of-scope, out-of-budget spending. I don't think that that's the best way to be accountable to the taxpayers, whom I hear the Treasurer speak of so often.

10:10

The first point that I want to raise is the creation of an economic and fiscal strategy report. This would be a report that would look at 10 years. A 10-year economic and fiscal strategy report would build a greater element of strategic, long-range planning into the budget process and provide Albertans with an indication of the level of expenses and revenue required to sustain a structural balance over the entire planning period.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

The economic and fiscal strategy report should meet the following objectives: one, specify the government's long-term objectives or principles for fiscal policy, program expenses, budgeted revenues, the consolidated surplus, total accumulated debt, total net debt, assets, et cetera; two, specify the broad strategic priorities for the upcoming budget and the short-term intentions of each of the long-term objectives or principles; three, specify any reasons for departure from the long-term objectives or principles, justification for that departure, or the approach that'll then be taken to become consistent with the time frame for implementation of the approach specified.

MR. DICKSON: Excellent idea.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much. I was just beginning, Madam Chairman, to feel like one of those characters that's just sort of speaking to a vacuum and that I could begin to say almost anything and nobody would notice. But I do note that my colleagues are noting the importance of these points, and I know they'll be in *Hansard*, so those members that are present that choose to talk amongst themselves will have a chance to review *Hansard*. Maybe we'll give them an exam in the morning.

MR. DICKSON: We'll take them to their constituents' doorsteps.

MR. SAPERS: That's right. And ask them about them.

The next issue that I want to recommend that the Treasurer take a look at that would help tighten up the budget process so that we don't find ourselves dealing with such a large volume of supplementary and interim supply requests is to implement monthly budget updates and quarterly performance updates. Now, this is not a new recommendation. In fact, I think it's at least the third time I've made this recommendation to this Treasurer. He has this one last opportunity, I guess, to heed the advice.

In order to ensure that the government is able to respond prudently to revenue shocks and to sustain program spending initiatives in strategic areas, a budget update similar to the quarterly budget update would be prepared and released to the public on a monthly basis. This will hold the government more accountable to taxpayers and reduce public cynicism about the size of the actual surplus. Now, I know it tends to suit government's purpose when they can at the end of the fiscal year go abracadabra and look at the size of the surplus, but I don't think it really suits the taxpayers so well to do that, particularly if somewhere along the way the government has been saying: the cupboard is bare, and that's why we have to cut back on spending.

Now, this monthly budget update process would also provide an early-warning signal that the level of program spending may not be sustainable in a particular year and allow for adjustments as required through allocations from the fiscal stabilization fund. Of course, the fiscal stabilization fund is the very first recommendation that this Liberal opposition has for the government, that we get away from these cushions that we build into the budget, call it what it really is, and then use it appropriately, that being the fiscal stabilization fund.

Along with the monthly budget update there should also be quarterly performance reports. Of course, quarterly performance reports would be dependent upon performance measures being real measures that are identifiable and tied to outputs. This would allow Albertans to hold the government accountable for achieving results for the expenditures of their tax dollars.

Now, for an example, Madam Chairman, what I can refer the attention of members of the Assembly to is this current PR campaign surrounding the government's private hospitals initiative. There have been reports published in the media that the government is going to be spending anywhere between \$300,000 and \$3 million on its PR campaign. The government won't tell us what the total bill is, although they did release some figures today that it hovers somewhere around \$900,000 for a component of the campaign. So we know that it's about a million and may be more.

What we don't know is exactly who is paying for it, and when I say "who," of course we know the taxpayer is paying for it, but we don't know which department is spending those dollars on behalf of the taxpayer. Is the million dollars more or less that the government is admitting to all coming out of Health and Wellness? If that's the case, that's great. Then how much of it is coming out of the Public

Affairs Bureau, which is administered by Executive Council, and how much is coming out of perhaps other government offices or even ministers' offices in terms of postage allowances and things like that?

It seems to me that if we tightened up the government reporting process and we looked at monthly updates with real performance measures, Albertans would be able to know the answers to these questions even before the Official Opposition asked them on their behalf. There would be this degree of transparency. Then when the government says, "Look; it's right there; it's in the published audited statements; it's in the monthly updates; we're not hiding anything," we could actually believe them, Madam Chairman.

The Premier promised Albertans on February 4, 1999, that his government would provide more detailed reporting on deeds, not just dollars, yet the list of so-called accomplishments released by the government three days after the 1999-2000 first-quarter budget update was nothing more than a distillation of government news releases since April 1999. I'll add that that list didn't even come out until the Official Opposition asked the government to match its words with deeds and in fact produce some results. I think the government had actually forgotten about the promise the Premier made, and not wanting to make the Premier appear to have been telling an untruth, the press release was rushed into production and we got this list on government's so-called accomplishments.

I'll further note that after the second-quarter budget update there was a presentation of what is called an activity report, but there was nothing relating those activities to outcomes and outputs. So, Madam Chairman, what we have is once again an example of the government saying one thing and doing something else. I think I've made note that it's a very poor legacy for a government to be known for the gap between its words and deeds.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Now, the third major recommendation I have to the Provincial Treasurer in regard to tightening up his budgeting process is the utilization of independent projections of revenues. The Treasurer talked over the last couple of days about his reliance on experts. He mentioned the Liberals and our projections and how different analysts peg things like the price of a barrel of oil or where interest rates or exchange rates would be. Of course, we believe that the government should rely heavily on the advice of experts, and we are somewhat taken aback when they get the advice and then they ignore it.

One of the major weaknesses of the current budget planning process is the large differential between estimated budget revenues and actual revenues achieved at the end of the fiscal year. Some of the differential can be explained by the variability of the province's revenue base in such areas as Crown leases, corporate income taxes, and crude oil royalties. However, there is an increase in criticism that the government is deliberately underestimating revenues in order to reduce expectations for increased spending.

Now, I will note again that even if we look at Budget 2000, this Bold Plans document, it's more of the same old stuff when it comes to lowballing projections for expected revenues, and the lowballing isn't just in the commodity prices. I submit it's also in the areas of income taxes, fees from premiums and licences, and also when it comes to gaming revenue. If it's not a purposeful strategy to lowball, then I guess I would ask the Treasurer to get new batteries for his calculator or something, because the degree of error seems to be growing year by year. Again I would say that it does a disservice to taxpayers.

In order to ensure that revenue forecasting is not conducted on the

basis of political considerations, it's proposed that a firm such as the WEFA Group or perhaps DRI/McGraw-Hill provide an independent assessment of revenues. The independent assessments would appear in the annual budget and in the monthly budget updates. This would ensure that the sustainability of program spending could be reevaluated on a continual basis.

10:20

Now, Mr. Chairman, those are the major areas of advice that I have for the Treasurer. When we were speaking about Bill 12 in second reading, I concluded my comments by suggesting that perhaps one of the issues we need to take a look at as well is this whole budget review process. I would submit that the more time we spend on budget review with an honest exchange of questions and answers, where members of Executive Council take seriously their responsibility to account to Albertans through the Official Opposition in terms of the questions we ask on the budget, this too would minimize the amount of supplementary requests. I think every member of Executive Council if they were being honest and fair would say that they have been assisted in the discharge of their duties by a critic who does their job well. When questions are raised about priorities, about performance measures, about spending targets, even when errors are identified that departmental staff have missed – and there have been several examples of those – I believe that it has been helpful, I believe that it has been in the best interests of Albertans, that it has served the public good.

What we are faced with instead – and we had another example of it just tonight, Mr. Chairman – is a budget process that does not allow for an open exchange. In fact, it's a budget process that is very stifling. It's a budget examination process that splits members of this Assembly into committees and then subcommittees that would require that people be in two places at the same time. Even when you get to those two places at the same time, what happens is an imposition of rules that really don't exist: arbitrary time limits, sort of make-it-up-as-you-go rules of debate, and in fact an ad hockery that does not serve us well as legislators at all.

So when we're faced with this inability to fulfill our duties in terms of examining the budget in a detailed way and in a responsible way, I think one of the outcomes is more bills like Bill 12, interim or in this case supplementary supply. I would argue, on top of everything else I've said about Bill 12 and with the advice I've already provided the Treasurer, that I think we have to seriously re-

examine this budget review process so that it can truly serve the public interest and not just simply the expedient needs of some members who really don't see much value in the process. I could speculate which side of the House those members sit on, Mr. Chairman, but that would perhaps be unfair, because we've agreed that we're not going to have a lengthy and a prolonged debate at committee on Bill 12, and I don't want to provoke that at this time.

But this budget review process has to be changed. It has to be reviewed, and it has to be made to work better. Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: I move the committee do now rise and report, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 12.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:27 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Agric., Food & Rural Dev., Tuesday, March 7, 2000

00/03/07

8:01 p.m.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Subcommittee C – Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

Tannas, Don, Chairman
Fischer, Butch, Deputy Chairman
Cao, Wayne
Evans, Iris
Gibbons, Ed
Jonson, Halvar
Lund, Ty

MacDonald, Hugh
McFarland, Barry
Nelson, Patricia
Nicol, Ken
Oberg, Lyle
O'Neill, Mary

Paszkowski, Walter
Soetaert, Colleen
Strang, Ivan
Thurber, Tom
Trynchy, Peter
Yankowsky, Julius

THE CHAIRMAN: In subcommittee C this evening we're going to be considering the estimates for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. To begin this evening, do we want any difference of procedure? Do we want to go with a period of time and have questions and answers within that period of time, or would you like to just go 20, 20? The chair is here to serve. What would be the understanding of the committee?

Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, do you have a thought on that?

DR. NICOL: How I wanted to proceed tonight, first of all, was maybe start with 10 or 15 minutes, kind of an address on the business plan. It will be built around a whole series of questions, and if the minister wants to answer them at the time, that's fine. Otherwise, we can just go at it. When my 20 minutes are up, then we can go on to somebody else, and then if there's time left I can come back and finish on another 20 minutes.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. Thank you, hon. member.

So we'll begin this evening, then, with an overview by the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I get started, I'd like to introduce some of the staff that are here with us tonight. Starting on my left: Les Lyster, ADM of sustainable agriculture; deputy, Jim Nichols; our financial guru and manager, Mike Mylod; then David Schurman, and his complete title is vice-president of finance and administration for the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation; Brian Manning, and of course he's the chair of that auspicious organization; and then my executive assistant, Michael Lohner.

In his televised address in January the Premier made a commitment to farmers that bears repeating, I think, tonight. Mr. Klein said:

Some family farms are going through a tough time because of low world commodity prices and rising input costs. But I want our farmers to know that we haven't forgotten you or the importance of your industry . . . We will be there with safety-net programs for farmers in trouble. We will help you develop new products and find new markets. We will promote your interests in world trade talks.

That commitment is reflected in our ministry's business estimates and plans that we are here to discuss tonight.

The farm income situation in many parts of the province has become a major concern. In general, crop receipts in 1999 are estimated to be down nearly 13 percent as compared to the five-year average. At the same time, overall farm operating expenses in 1999 are up more than 5 percent over the five-year average.

Many farmers, particularly those in the northern parts of the province, are experiencing significant income problems as a result of the multiyears of low grain prices, low hog prices, high costs, and

continuous years of adverse weather. In the fall of 1999 we responded to the disastrous drops in income to farmers by increasing the assistance provided through the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation under the farm income disaster program and through a new Alberta farm income disaster loan program.

The farm income disaster program was enhanced retroactive to the 1998 claim year to enable farmers to (a) use the best three of the previous five years for their reference period rather than just the prior three years, (b) obtain a higher level of support when they expanded their production capacity or diversified during the claim year and during the reference period, (c) adjust negative margins in the reference period to zero, and then (d) deduct eligibility for government contributions to NISA for only the claim year rather than deducting contributions back to 1995. These changes are providing substantially higher payments to many farmers.

The 5 percent loans made under the Alberta farm income disaster loan program are helping many farmers with cash flow problems to weather the current low commodity price cycle in grains and oilseeds. They are also providing further help to hog producers on top of what was provided last year.

The estimates and business plan before us tonight extend our long-term commitment to provide a comprehensive and responsive safety-net package for farmers facing disaster. The amount, \$449,553,000, to be voted on, on page 25 of the estimates, includes the funding necessary to do this. It includes an additional \$96 million in funding for farm income support. You'll find that additional funding on page 35 of the estimates. In total, the budgets for lending assistance and farm income disaster programs have been increased by the \$96 million. The budget for farm income disaster of \$163,612,000 in reference 6.0.2 is more than double the 1999-2000 budget. The budget for lending assistance has been increased from \$18,601,000 to \$25,774,000 for 2000-2001.

For several years the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation has seen increased demands for its loan programs. Much of the increase has been in the beginning farmer loan program. However, producers experiencing a combination of weather-related problems and low prices, particularly in the northern part of the province, have been assisted by disaster loans and financial counseling services. The Agriculture Financial Services Corporation lending staff through financial counseling services has helped many farmers in the northern part of the province work through their financial problems over the past couple of years. AFSC provides this service to any farmer, not just those with loans with the corporation.

As well as the increase in the farm income disaster and lending assistance budgets three other items account for almost all the change in the department's total budget from \$371,186,000 for 1999-2000 to \$449,553,000 for 2000-2001. I'm referencing figures for the total vote on page 26 of the estimates.

First we are continuing to fund the municipal industrial wastewater infrastructure program for agricultural processing. Funding for this program is included in program 3, industry development. You'll find the details on page 30 of the estimates. Funding of \$11.5

million appears there for infrastructure assistance for municipal wastewater for the next fiscal year, reference 3.4.5. That's an increase of \$5.5 million over the 1999-2000 budget. Fiscal 2000-2001 will be the third year of the three-year pilot program announced by our Premier, Ralph Klein, in July of 1998 to assist municipalities . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, the Speaker has spoken to us today about making mention of our names. Here we either have positions or constituencies. I'd ask that if we're going to complain about one side of the House using names instead of their positions or their constituencies, perhaps we should do the same.

MR. LUND: Thanks for that very, very important message. So I'll talk about the esteemed Premier. Is that okay?

By the end of the 1999-2000 fiscal year program expenditures will have totaled \$15.6 million. Second, the total 2000-2001 budget has been increased by \$2.5 million to cover increased salary costs.

The third and final major change is the decrease in the 2000-2001 budget, shown on page 29, for planning and competitiveness, program 2. The 2000-2001 budget is lower than the 1999-2000 budget primarily because the 1999-2000 budget included \$25.6 million for onetime industry reinvestment funding. As you can see from page 26, no major funding changes are planned for the department's other three programs: ministry support services, sustainable agriculture, and financial assistance to the Alberta Opportunity Company.

8:11

In addition to the items I have already mentioned, the ministry's expenditure budget appearing on page 42 includes \$66.5 million for the following major grant funding programs: \$33.5 million for farm fuel distribution allowance; \$17.2 million for the irrigation rehabilitation program; \$8.7 million for agricultural societies; \$2.9 million for agricultural initiatives; \$2.2 million for surface rights and land compensation; and \$2 million for Alberta environmentally sustainable agriculture grants.

Turning to the revenue side of the estimates, you'll see on page 42 that ministry revenues show a decrease of \$52.9 million from the 1999-2000 budget. Decreases in two items account for most of this change. First, the budget for funding from the federal government for farm income disaster assistance has been decreased by \$44.4 million. Recently the federal government announced that it is extending its agricultural income disaster assistance for 2000-2001 but has not yet finalized the details of the cost-sharing arrangement with the provinces. The only arrangement in place at this time is for the federal cost sharing of 1998-1999 farm income disaster program claims. For that reason it was felt that it would not be prudent to budget for federal cost sharing.

Second, funding from the lottery fund has decreased by \$31.2 million. Grants for irrigation rehabilitation and municipal industrial wastewater and rural development, which were funded from the lottery fund in 1999-2000, will be funded from the general revenue in the 2000-2001 fiscal year. These revenue decreases are offset by a couple of revenue increases. They are an \$11.4 million increase in the Alberta Dairy Control Board revenue for the milk price equalization pool, which is offset by a corresponding expense and a \$9.3 million increase in the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation's investment income.

Now I would like to take a few minutes to touch on the business plan for 2000-2003. If you look in the document on government and ministry business plans, on pages 29 to 43 you'll find the plan for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. The plan builds on key

directions from previous plans, although the structure of the ministry has changed with the government reorganization. The ministry no longer includes the Agricultural Research Institute. It was transferred to Innovation and Science, and the marketing function was transferred to Economic Development. It includes the Alberta Opportunity Company, transferred from Economic Development. The plan is tied to the government's overall direction and goals and is closely linked to the government's three core businesses: people, prosperity, and preservation.

The ministry's main purpose is to help the agriculture and food industry prosper. The mission explains that its core business is to enable the growth of a globally competitive, sustainable agriculture and food industry through essential policy, legislation, information and services.

To achieve its mission, the ministry works with its primary clients, those people and organizations interested and capable of contributing to a competitive and sustainable agriculture and food industry.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development has set eight goals for itself. You'll find these goals on page 31 of the plan. I would like to bring your attention to a few of the major strategies my ministry proposes to pursue to achieve these goals: one, unbiased technology and knowledge will be transferred to our clients to help them remain competitive and responsive to growth opportunities; two, input to trade negotiations will be provided to support industry's needs; three, Alberta farmers will have an effective and efficient crop insurance program; four, Alberta farmers will also be offered effective and efficient whole-farm safety-net programs; five, public lands will be managed for agricultural, industrial, environmental, and public benefit; six, we will encourage investment in Alberta's agriculture and food industry; seven, the beginning farmer loan program will be strengthened to improve long-term farm viability. Beginning farmer loans have been on the increase for a couple of years at Agriculture Financial Services Corporation since the loan rate was dropped to 7.5 percent, and I must add that it is certainly good to see that we are attracting new young farmers into the industry.

We will support farmers in their stewardship of Alberta's soil, water, and air.

The food safety knowledge and skills of people working in Alberta's agriculture and food industry will be strengthened, and we will also support the agriculture and food industry in the development of protocols for safe food production.

The plan also outlines some key initiatives that will be undertaken. For example, the agriculture summit will be held in the spring to lay the groundwork for ensuring the long-term viability of our agriculture and food industries. A major review of Alberta's crop insurance program will be carried out, and it will include examining insurance coverage concepts that allow greater flexibility to customize insurance protection to business needs.

We will continue to advocate improved Canadian Wheat Board policies to allow more market choices, including dual marketing.

The Alberta Opportunity Company will approve loans to Alberta businesses that have viable business proposals when support is not available from conventional lenders. A more accountable and less costly grain handling and transportation system is something we will be striving for. Agriculture Financial Services will be providing or arranging financing for the agriculture and food industry for the development and expansion of value-added businesses in rural areas.

We'll be working with irrigation districts to develop an irrigation infrastructure management system to improve the assessment of rehabilitation requirements and plans.

Agriculture Financial Services will monitor the results of private-sector crop insurance over the next three years. In 2000-2001

Agriculture Financial Services Corporation will be entering into the third year of a three-year agreement to reinsure its crop insurance risk with private-sector reinsurance companies. This private reinsurance will minimize the financial exposure to the province if there are significantly higher than average crop insurance claims in the 2000 crop year.

Our education and extension programs will help producers adhere to the regulations and standards for livestock operations. We'll also initiate a peer review process to assist nonconforming operations. Client feedback will continue to be incorporated into the preparation of the plans and policies of the ministry, and we will be working with the Alberta Corporate Service Centre to implement governmentwide sharing of corporate services.

Those are a few examples of the initiatives the ministry will be undertaking during the period covered by the business plan. You will find more details about proposed initiatives under each of the ministry's eight goals on pages 32 through 39 of the plan.

Pages 40, 41, and 42 show the ministry's macro performance measures. Ministry measures are also shown for each key result under the goal section. The macro performance measures reflect changes at the industry and ministry levels. They record the direct and indirect effect the ministry has on the agriculture and food industry in Alberta. Of course, there are significant influences on the industry that are outside the scope of the ministry's programs and staff. The weather, federal government policies, and government policies of other countries are examples of outside factors that have a major influence on the industry. Perhaps most importantly, the demands of consumers in the northern Pacific Rim will have a fundamental influence on the industry.

The first measure shows how well Alberta farmers and ranchers are doing relative to other Canadian farmers and ranchers that they have to compete against. The ministry is forecasting that farm cash receipts will increase during the period 2000 to 2003. The target is \$7.05 billion by 2003. Continued strong livestock prices and potential upside strength in grain prices are expected to push farm cash receipts higher over the next several years.

The second measure is "net cash income of Alberta farmers and ranchers." Net cash income is forecast to remain near the \$1 billion level during the period 2000-2003. The forecast is lower than in the past three years because of higher input costs without a corresponding increase in receipts.

8:21

The third measure relates to Alberta's food and beverage industry. We remain confident that the industry will continue to grow during the period 2000-2003. The target is for shipments of \$9.9 billion by 2003. While this target is ambitious, it is certainly achievable, and the ministry and industry will work hard together to meet or exceed that target. A growing processing industry is important because our traditional commodity markets are shrinking. Without a strong, vibrant processing industry, we won't have markets for our farm products. We anticipate that over the longer term Alberta's agriculture and food and beverage industries will continue to contribute to the Alberta economy.

The target for the fourth measure is for a contribution of 5.4 percent of Alberta's total gross domestic product by the year 2000. Although the agriculture and food and beverage industries only represent about 5 percent of Alberta's economy, their indirect effect on the economy is large when the contribution of business and industries that serve and support the agriculture and food and beverage industries are taken into account. Service industries in rural Alberta are particularly dependent on how well these industries perform. Employment in agriculture and food and beverage

industries is forecasted to continue to grow over the long term.

The target for the fifth measure is for 112,000 Albertans to be employed in agriculture and food industries by 2003. However, employment in these industries is very sensitive to variations in profit levels, and annual changes can be dramatic, particularly at the farm level.

The sixth and final measure is the "Alberta land productivity indicator." The forecast is for Alberta farmers to continue to improve land productivity in the long term through sound business and farming techniques. The target is for output of .98 tonnes per acre by the year 2000.

That concludes my remarks, Mr. Chairman, and I would be interested in answering any questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Good.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, and thank you for your indulgence in the timing matter.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all I'd like to say good evening to the staff up top and tell them that they're doing a good job in the department. It's quite exciting to watch some of the things that are going on in the agriculture community right now, and we appreciate the work that you do on behalf of the sector.

Mr. Minister, thank you for your introductory comments. It was a good review of the direction that Alberta agriculture is taking and that our industry is going in.

One of the things that we hear about as we travel – and I'm sure you hear the same thing as you go across the province – is the transition, the change that's going on in the sector. A lot of the farmers are wondering how they're going to fit into it and where their future is. Some of them are very excited about that future. Others are less excited. I took from your comments the idea that the major mandate that you're undertaking right now is to put together this ag summit process, that will bring the farmers into some type of agreement about the future direction and where agriculture should be going. I guess that started off with one of your comments about your primary target or your primary clients.

One of the things that a lot of the farmers ask me I will now pass on to you in the context of their comments and their questions. I basically can't answer it for them. What they want to know is: is the department prepared to give a vision of agriculture over the next 10 or 15 years in the sense of what the relationship is to this concept of, as you quoted, "those people and organizations interested and capable of contributing to a competitive and sustainable agriculture and food industry"? A lot of them are saying: "Where do we fit into that? We're small. We're family. We're in the latter part of our personal farm life." They want to turn the farm over to their next generation, whether it's a son or a daughter. They say: what kind of changes are they going to have to undertake or be prepared for as they think about taking over the family farm?

That kind of vision I hope will be part of the output of this ag summit so that people can get a sense of where both the government and the sector see themselves going. A lot of where it goes is up to the producers and the participants in the sector. It's not up to us as legislators, because we are the facilitators much more than we are the drivers of the machine that's going to take us into the future.

As they talk about the transition – and you mentioned it in terms of Ag Financial Services, the beginning farmer loan process – I would ask the minister in that context: are you looking at any kind of a change in the structure of that beginning farm loan program? Some of the comments I've been hearing now from the industry leaders in terms of size and technology adoption and that are that they're now getting to thinking about retiring and passing the farm over to their next generation.

I met one individual in southern Alberta who was saying: "We now have a big operation. I want out, but now nobody will finance the transition for us." Effectively what this farmer was saying was that he's going to have to personally finance the transition of that farm for his children or go outside the family and find somebody who can buy it and who has another source of capital so that they can buy it. This in essence is going to shut his family out of the continuation of one of southern Alberta's more successful farming operations. You know, they're at the point now where the transition to a new generation has to occur. So I would ask the minister if there are plans to review this whole concept of how Ag Financial Services, the beginning farm loan program, and some of these other transition options are in place so that the next generation can get a successful start in the agriculture area.

While I'm talking about Ag Financial Services right now, I'll just kind of stay there for a minute. In your business plan under goal 1, page 32, you talk about Ag Financial Services. One of your actions there is to "promote the crop insurance policy and administration expertise of [AFS] in Canada and internationally." I take it from that that this is in effect the amendment we made to the Agriculture Financial Services Act a year ago, where we allowed them to administer the B.C. FDIP equivalent program. They were going down to I think it was one of the countries in South America to help them put in place or to do the background work for crop insurance and that. I guess I'd like to ask the minister how that is going and how he sees that affecting the opportunity for some of the private business sector that's also involved in advising on structure for programs and for insurance, especially in the agriculture area.

While we're on the insurance area, you talked about the review of crop insurance that's coming up. I guess I would ask: are you thinking of looking at the whole package of – what shall we call it? – disaster assistance, disaster relief for the farm sector? You've got the crop insurance programs, which we have some public dollars in. You've got the FDIP program, which is right now provincial, but there are occasions when the federal government does give us some money on a cost-shared basis for that. Is there some process where this can be all tied together and maybe we can have, you know, one program instead of a whole combination of programs?

You talked about the changes you made last October to what would have effectively been I guess the 1998 FDIP year. I've had some calls from farmers in the last little while saying that the deadline for the application was the end of February, which was just last week, and they have to go in, they have to put down their \$50 deposit to get their application on record, yet the criteria for the program haven't been fully defined. At least this is what they're saying. So they don't really know if they're going to qualify for this negative margin discussion that the federal government's been having, and if they do have negative margins, they've been encouraged to apply just on the chance that under this negotiation with the federal government they may be getting some. I guess what I would ask is: if through the negotiations with the federal government it turns out that these individuals are not going to be eligible, can they get their \$50 back?

8:31

Mr. Minister, I'm not challenging that deadline. We have to have some mechanism of keeping an orderly process, because we're going to be dealing with next year's, the '99 year, probably on the first of March, and with the deadline being the 29th of February for the other one, we have to have an orderly process to keep our applications moving. But to have people make an application on an expectation that is still under negotiation and if we can't deliver on those negotiations – I guess a couple of them have asked for their

\$50 back. So I'm passing on to you that it would probably be appropriate, because we've been leading them to believe one thing, and if we find out that's not true, then that should work.

The other thing I wanted to talk about. You're talking about improving the competitiveness of the industry, and as I was again reading page 33 in the business plans – I should have looked back last year to see if the same discussion was in there – under Strategies at the fourth point you've got "transfer integrated and unbiased technology and knowledge to industry." I was just intrigued by the "unbiased" word in there in the sense that I guess somebody from an industry could come along and say: gee, are they trying to say that a company out there trying to promote their product is not necessarily providing unbiased technology or information? So it was just kind of a word that caught my interest there as I was going through it, and I noticed that it was down again in the section where you're talking about actions. On the fifth or sixth action down there you use that "unbiased" adjective again, and I was wondering about it.

I guess the issues that come up on your Actions there – and I kind of put goal 1 and goal 2 together when I talk about them, because it's hard to talk about growth in the industry without dealing with competitiveness and the adoption of technology, the use of knowledge, and the new focus of agriculture. The issue comes up there when you're talking about this "accountable and less costly grain handling and transportation system," and I know the government is quite fascinated with the Estey/Kroeger end result, the recommendations that are in there. At what level is the government working to get those things – how many public dollars are being put in there to promote that kind of solution?

I've had a number of farmers, especially from the side of the ag community that's not supportive of that Estey/Kroeger recommendation process, say: "How can we challenge those recommendations when the government is using public dollars to fight against us? We have to come up with our own money." So they've been asking to find out how many public dollars are going into that process of support for the transportation reform that's kind of in front of the federal government right now, but I know the provincial government is active in dealing with it.

At the bottom of page 33 you've got \$2 million that's being put into the farm lending budget for innovative business opportunities. The last line on page 33: "Allocate \$2 million of the farm lending budget to innovative business opportunities". I was just wondering how successful that's been and kind of the criteria for what business opportunities you're looking at, or is it just something that's in the planning stages yet? Is this in the value-added area of primary commodities? Is it also in support of businesses, say, that are coming along with a new input technology from the service side as well? Or is it just in the value-added promotion? That's under goal 2 at the bottom there on page 33.

Under the third goal there you're talking about the "increased amount of value added to industry commodities, products and services." Under Actions, the second point, where you're assisting "municipalities to develop water and wastewater treatment," in your introductory comments you made reference to how this was a successful program that the Premier had introduced about two years ago. I guess what I was wondering is: what sectors are being influenced by that? I know the potato plants in southern Alberta got some of those dollars. Where are the dollars going? What industries, what value added, and what municipalities are being involved in that or getting some of the dollars?

I guess the next point you talked about there was advocating "changes to the federal policies that discourage value adding," and I would encourage you to work on the issues that are associated with the way the Wheat Board backs prices, commodities. You know,

you have to buy back from the Wheat Board, and it creates a real bias in favour of export as opposed to local use of our products. I've had a number of farmers discuss that with me in terms of how that can be changed and wanting to know what your ministry is doing in connection with that. It's kind of something they're interested in finding out, where the provincial government is going in that direction.

The next item there. There's a term in there, and maybe I'm just out of date, but I don't know what it means. You're talking about "Agriculture Financial Services Commercial Financial Services." Is this a new division of Ag Financial Services? I probably have not been keeping up with the structural changes and the divisions that have been created in Ag Financial Services of late, but this was a new title for Ag Financial Services that I wasn't familiar with. So if you wouldn't mind explaining where that came from.

Down farther you talk about "develop and deliver needed capital and financial services through strategic alliances and partnering." I would appreciate some kind of a reporting on how that's going, some of the partners that are being developed, some of the general dollar amounts. I know specific contracts are hard to disclose, but how successful has it been? What directions is it going? What kind of effort and resources are being put into it from the provincial government side?

When we look at goal 4, a question has come up on a number of occasions when I have been visiting some of the drought areas. Your second action here was to "support expansion of irrigation to increase opportunities for diversification and value-added processing." I've had a number of questions from some of the farmers, especially in the northeast area, in terms of whether or not there might ever be an opportunity for them to have some options for irrigation and water supplementation, given the fact that they've had a number of years of less than what they considered adequate rainfall. On that as well, you talked in here about developing some new products, new technologies. I was wondering what you're doing in that area to help with crop development, commodity development for those farmers in diversification so that maybe they can have more drought-tolerant agricultural enterprises being supported or put in place in those areas.

8:41

Mr. Chairman, I think I must have about one minute left in my time period. Two minutes? All right. I'll get a couple more questions in.

The next section there, on goal 5. I think I've talked a little bit about what we wanted to do there in terms of what was going on with crop insurance and the farm income disaster program. In the last point in your actions there, you're going to "develop a federal/provincial framework agreement on safety nets post-2000." Is that something that's coming up as a Canada-wide negotiation? Or is this an initiative that you are undertaking hoping to bring the federal government and some of the other provinces into a real open public debate on what are the needs and support for risk management in the agriculture community?

I think that kind of covers the comments that I had on the business plan. If I can have some time at the end when everybody else has had their chance, I may have some more questions for you, Mr. Minister. Thank you for your patience in listening to me.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks very much, Lethbridge-East, for those comments, particularly the complimen-

tary comments relative to the summit. I hope you participate because I know you have a lot of very good ideas.

I'll try to answer some of the questions. I can't answer some of them very detailed, but I'll try to get in as many as we can.

You started off by asking whether we have a vision for the next 10 years, 15 years. Right today we're trying not to drive the summit, and I think it's really important that we don't drive it. We're going to set out suggestions. We're saying what we want out of it. Certainly we want a direction, a road map for the government, for industry, for the other partners that are participants in agriculture. I'm saying: look out 10, 15, 20 years; where do you want to be, and how do we get there? The government has a real role, I believe, in creating the environment. We don't drive it, but I think we have to be there to create the environment.

You talked about the intergenerational transfer of land, and you specifically mentioned the beginning farmer program. One of the things we did just not very long ago was increase the lending from \$200,000 to \$500,000. That was partly to address this issue, because with the size of farms, particularly when you get down in the Lethbridge area where there's a lot of irrigation, it doesn't take very much land and you're up to the \$500,000. So it is a start, but you will see that out of the leaders' workshop in Red Deer that was one of the issues which was identified that has to be dealt with, along with the other financial issues there.

You asked about AFSC expanding into operating the crop insurance program in B.C., and yes, they are. As a matter of fact, they got the contract again and they're operating in Chile. This is, I think, a real feather in their hat, that they can compete in the world in setting these things up. Actually, it's providing a bit of funds to Alberta. We're making a little bit on it. We're not trying to make a lot of money, but we are making sure that it's all covered.

You asked about the crop insurance review and then the concept of putting together a package of safety nets. On the crop insurance review what we are saying – and I'm concerned by the take-up we have. There's something wrong. Something's not working here, and actually the numbers are not increasing.

What we've been saying and what we're hearing from a lot of folks as I travel around the province – people are talking about somehow tying the amount that you can insure to the input costs so that you are covered. We're telling people: bring those kinds of ideas forward; let's see what we can do. Right now in the negotiations – and actually it was part of the last comments that you talked about – with the federal government currently they've got them split out, the \$1.1 billion that we're trying to work with. Up until today or yesterday those pots of money were split \$600 million and \$500 million. The \$600 million was to cover things like the risk, like under crop insurance – and NISA would be under there – and then \$500 million for disaster, where you get the farm income disaster program and AIDA. So they've got the two still split, but certainly it's something we've been looking at, and you'll see that's a topic for the summit as well. What kind of safety net do farmers need, what do they want, and what would it cost? We'd have to work that out.

FDIP and AIDA. Brian Manning is here this evening. He's not a member of the Legislature. I'm not exactly sure of it, but you talked about AIDA and the negative margin. It's my understanding – and Brian will correct me if I'm wrong – that the negative margin is only for the '99 crop year. It's not for '98. I get an affirmative nod, so that's right. So check with them whether in fact they . . . But the way the system works, they apply through us, and we send it over to Winnipeg to the AIDA people. But in 1999 Alberta farmers are eligible for 60 percent of those changes.

Now, I think the bigger change deals with the valuation of inventory. I think you're aware of that one. That's huge. If you're a fairly large farmer, that could be massive.

I'm biased. One of the things that we're trying to be very careful and cautious about – with this discussion of GMOs we don't want to be seen as discarding it or promoting it. We want to try to get the facts out and leave it at that. I think that's where most of that terminology comes from.

Estey/Kroeger, the dollars involved. We'll have to get back to you. I'm not aware, since I became minister, of us spending any amount of dollars. During the one trip that I made to Ottawa I met with eight ministers, the Prime Minister's office, the Privy Council, and Treasury, but it has been more on that lobby side, and I know there were some studies done on the effects. Now, what those numbers are, we can get you more of that information.

The \$2 million that you referred to is a new program that we just started, and it's innovative opportunities.

Wastewater plants. Which plants are receiving it? We'll have to get that information back to you. As you know, the one potato plant in particular got it, but I don't have the complete list off the top of my head.

This whole issue about the Wheat Board buyback and what are we doing. We have been of course suggesting to the Canadian Wheat Board that they need to change their policies, and one of the things that we're suggesting – although we certainly don't have agreement among all of the grain companies – is that the Wheat Board should be considering getting out of the domestic market. That would solve the problem for the pasta, and it would really help the breweries or the maltsters. Once again, that's something we're pushing for.

AFSC commercial lending and the partnering thing. There is a section in AFSC that deals with commercial, but what they are doing is going out and getting the banks to cofund. Actually, in some cases AFSC does not put up the money. They simply back the loan. It's an arrangement, and it's working well. They seem to be doing very well with it.

8:51

Water in the northeast. We hadn't even considered it as far as irrigation is concerned, but we will be coming forward. Infrastructure, Environment, and our department are working to come up with a new water plan, and of course we'll be trying to work with PFRA, but their amount of money is so piddly now. It's my understanding that it's even all used for next year.

Oh, then the last one is the federal/provincial safety net, and I touched on that one earlier.

So the next round.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. I just have a couple of questions that I'd like to bring forward, mostly around your stated goals and a bit of discussion around risk and stewardship. I'm ever aware that the Member for Lethbridge-East wants to get in a few more minutes, so I'll try and make this as quick as possible.

I have some questions around your goal 1, "Improved capacity to respond to opportunities." A couple of issues there. I know that when Bill 31 was introduced, there were some government press releases suggesting that the leaseholders might be getting \$40 million a year in compensation from the energy companies, and later when there was a countervail charge brought in by some group in the U.S., the figure was then changed to \$16 million. I'm wondering how the government arrived at the \$16 million figure, and particularly I'm wondering if there are any other repercussions around this issue that we can expect to still come at us.

Further in that goal 1 there is a statement around opportunities in biotechnology. I'm wondering what the government is doing around

assisting farmers who do not want to be involved in this or who want to be promoting products that are not involved in the new biotechnology. They're not GMOs and all of that. Is the government doing anything to offer advice or marketing strategies as to whether or not it's a genetically modified crop that they have? Do we know if this is going to have markets in different geographical locations? What is being done by way of advice or promotion or assistance to promote the independent certification, labeling, and marketing of these nongenetic crops? I think the federal government is doing something on this. Is the province working with the federal government on this?

I know there are a number of other issues around the cross-pollination that's come up, and I don't know enough about that, but I'm wondering what the government is doing there to investigate what this is going to do in the future. So that's goal 1.

Now I'd like to go to risk, which appears as goal 5. I'll note also, connected to this issue of risk, that in the most recent Auditor General's report, '98-99 – and I'll just quote from this because I think it's really good. The Auditor General notes that

the development of a competitive agricultural industry presents certain risks to the Ministry. The increase in volume and diversity of agriculture products may have an adverse effect on the environment. Loans and grants provided to farmers and others may not be cost-effective. The Ministry may encourage farmers to grow certain crops based on expected markets which may never materialize. The move by the Ministry to outsourcing certain services may result in a loss in the effectiveness of these services. To be successful, the Ministry needs to manage these and other risks.

I note that in that same Auditor General's report there was a recommendation, recommendation 20, in which it recommended that the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development evaluate the performance of the Farm Income Disaster Program on a regular basis, and at least annually.

Now I know the minister has spoken about this a number of times, but I have some more specific questions about that.

I'll also note that the Auditor General said that his staff had been informed by the department that "the Department intends to set targets and compare results against [these] targets annually." Specifically, was this done?

On to some of the specific questions around these. Goal 5, "Increased capability of industry to manage risk." That is again where the crop insurance program turns up. There is a review, but specifically what process is being used to conduct that review? Is any thought being given to the scope being wide enough to look at the crop insurance with FDIP? In other words, is there an integrated approach to this? What other risk management tools are being promoted, such as the use of a futures market? Are there any courses or assistance being offered to help farmers in this type of activity?

Goal 6, "Improved environmental stewardship." I've spoken a number of times in the Assembly about the importance of our role as legislators and as stewards of the environment, and one of the things I notice is that in the previous year there was a discussion that Alberta Agriculture work with Environment and other departments, and that discussion has disappeared out of the goals and strategies and actions from this year. What is happening around stewardship of public land and its use for agricultural, industrial, et cetera? So I guess I'm interested in a sustainable resource management plan and how that is being arrived at.

Also under this stewardship would follow the greenhouse gas emissions question. Again, last year the action that was listed was to increase efforts to understand the potential impacts of the Kyoto agreement. Now, can we then assume that the outcome of that action was to decide that there should be something done to reduce greenhouse gases? What's being done by Alberta Agriculture towards this goal, and what specifically are the targets?

That's something else I'm noticing from reading the goals, the key results, and the measures. I question sometimes the measurability of the measurers, if you'll allow me to destroy the English language in that way. I'm on a bit of a tangent here. I notice, back to goal 1, that one of the measures is "desirable changes in policy and legislation." I'm struggling to understand how that is an accurate measurement of improving the ability of Alberta's agriculture and food industry to respond to changing opportunities and challenges. It would strike me that "desirable changes in policy and legislation" mostly is desirable to the government, but I don't know how that is an accurate measurement tool. I'm getting more and more interested in exactly how we try to measure the outcomes we are seeking. I don't understand how you're using that as a measurement. So perhaps you can elucidate that point.

9:01

I'm going back again to stewardship, under goal 6. What is being done around intensive livestock operations and standards? That should fall under this stewardship goal, and it's not leaping out at me. I'm not seeing anything specific here, and certainly from my reading of the news, how these intensive livestock operations are being handled and where the government is going to take a leadership role strikes me as being critical, especially around stewardship of land and resources.

I suspect that the government really needs to show leadership in this area, because it's the only one that can bring together all the players in this. We have municipalities, we have commercial livestock, intensive livestock operations, we have local farmers, we have environmental groups, and we have the rest of the citizens of Alberta who are concerned about this issue. So I'm looking to the government as to where is the leadership that's being provided on this particular issue? I don't see it in this, so does that mean that we have to wait another year? Where does it show up in your three-year plan?

Oh, I took longer than I thought. Sorry about that. I will give way to my colleague for Lethbridge-East, because I know he has more issues that he wants to raise with you.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. The first issue you raised was the controversy that arose when the department printed some information that came from groups like CAPP, where they said that there was about \$40 million that had been paid to Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. That is what CAPP stands for? Okay. Well, I thought that you were really asking the question, but I guess it was your researcher.

MS BLAKEMAN: No. I'm asking the question. I want to hear it.

MR. LUND: Okay. Okay. You must be really interested in the answer.

When the submission was made to the Department of Commerce in the U.S., the number that was used was the \$16 million or \$15.9 million – I've forgotten exactly – around \$16 million, and that comes from multiplying the number of well sites by \$1,100.

As far as other action, today we got word that our CAPP is dropping the charge, so that one hopefully is finished, and this issue won't resurface.

You talked about GMOs, and what is being done. We are trying to stay neutral on this one, and the reason for that is that government in the long run, particularly the federal government, is the regulator.

It's extremely difficult to be showing any bias if in fact you're going to end up being the regulator at the end of the day. So while we're trying to get accurate information out, we are not getting too closely involved in it.

However, having said that, we do have people in the department that are working on it. As a matter of fact, there's a committee the federal government has set up that is working on this whole issue. We have at the ministers' meeting said that we believe what should happen is labeling – quite frankly, it would be easier to label the products that are not affected rather than those that are – and let the consumer decide. Now, it looks like at the meeting the U.N. sponsored in Montreal that's the way they're leaning, and we would support that. That was our submission to the federal government as well.

You asked something about FIDP, and I didn't write down enough to make me remember what it was.

MS BLAKEMAN: It was under the section where we're talking about risk, and I was asking if what you were looking at was going to be more comprehensive so that it was a coupling of the crop insurance and the FDIP programs. It was in the context of the risk points that I'd raised from the Auditor General's report and under your goal 5.

MR. LUND: Okay. Now I remember it. I partially answered that question to Lethbridge-East, and I'll have to get back to you on what kind of issues we've dealt with on the Auditor General.

Lethbridge-East, that negative margin the feds are going to pay under AIDA does apply to '98, so the farmers you talk to should be getting the information.

Greenhouse gases. Currently we have a committee within government that is working on this issue, and we have a person on from our department. We are doing some things through the AESA Council. There are a number of groups out there: the Conservation Tillage Society, those kinds of people. They're all doing work, and we're supporting that work. But we are still saying: do what makes sense. Through Climate Change Central there will be some more research and things being done on this whole issue.

Then you talked about the stewardship issue. I just mentioned the AESA Council.

You talked about the intensive livestock issue. As you know, in 1998 there was a committee of stakeholders set up. It was to report to the minister. I was supposed to get it back in the early part of November. They've been around the province three times. I still haven't got the report.

There are some real difficulties. When they went around the province the last time, they found out that there was a lot of disagreement. It's not an easy issue. We're looking forward to the report. We should have it any day, and once we get it, we're not going to leave it sit. We will not be using legislation and regulation, but we will be putting forward probably some best practices. I'm not sure just exactly how we'll handle it, but we will be getting something out there to try to move this agenda forward.

I don't think it's going to be all lost. In fact, what'll happen is that we'll have an opportunity to try some things. Quite frankly, I have a little trouble with the regulatory approach, because what happens is that you have to make the regulations tough enough to make sure that the worst possible condition is met. That is not necessary. What you need to do is look at the outcome, what it is you're trying to achieve. Well, quite clearly, when it comes to groundwater, the thing we're trying to achieve is that groundwater would not be polluted, but that doesn't mean to say that if you are putting a lagoon on land that is impermeable clay, you need the same kind of liner as you do if you're setting it on gravel.

That's the problem with regulation; we're not looking at outcome. I think that'll be the way we'll be looking at it.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

9:11

MR. GIBBONS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few questions to the minister around municipal. Traveling the province and talking to a lot of different municipalities and it's actually very close to home: the amount of thistles in the ditches throughout the province. I've got a major problem in my constituency where it's government land around the tree nursery, the old Oliver site, and so on. I get a lot of complaints. On my own farm I spend the amount of money on thistle control, but it's blowing in from the ditches, whatever. The lack of funding to the municipalities, the downloading that has actually happened. That's their excuse to me and their concerns on that.

Then when I get talking with people, as well as my own farm, you've got canola resistance. You know, when you're trying to get rotation of crops and so on and you get the amount of costs and everything for pesticides and the fertilizer runoff, what's happening to the rivers? I have the Sturgeon River running through my farm and can see what's happened over the years, and I guess I'm just as guilty because we fertilize also. With that, just around infrastructure assistance on municipal wastewater, I asked the previous minister this question in the same kind of a committee that we've had before.

I do know from people that I know who actually work for the government that over the years they've actually had studies on rerouting water into different areas. Where the Sturgeon goes through my land, unless there's a lot of moisture or rain, that river goes right down to almost nothing, but at the same time there are more and more people being able to draw irrigation permits on that river. So the ones at the far end that have actually had them 20 years – the other ones are being able to draw them up river and get them in the last years, which seems to be unfair. I do know that there was a study back in the '70s and '80s on rerouting water from the Pembina. So there is movement.

The thing is that if we're going to be going more and more into market gardening – and what's been happening, especially when you look at the type of soil that's in my constituency, where you've got a lot of market gardens and so on, they do need water. Fortunately, there they can draw on the city water. They have the pump situation right at Evergreen Mobile Home Park. But if you're closer to Fort Saskatchewan, you're paying the heavy price through the county of Strathcona. If you're getting a little bit further out, you have to draw water from somewhere. Irrigation seems to be the trend, and a lot of people are asking about that because of the type of weather we've been having the last few years.

As I'm traveling throughout the province – this past year I spent quite a bit of time up in the north Peace country and to the northeast. I'm wondering whether or not it's a fair analysis, but their concern is that just like when we look at market value and education tax, the province is so large – I mean, we have a fantastic province, but it's so diverse. Down in your country we got the amount of rain last spring and floods, but then in the north you've got absolutely no rain. Where you've got cow/calf operations, they not only sold the calves, but they had to sell the cows because they can't even keep them through the winter because of the amount of hay and so on.

Maybe I'll get it on record. I'm wondering why it took so long to get a disaster policy in place. Why are we waiting until we try to make everybody in the province happy? Why aren't we working on areas where we do know – this is not the first year. The lack of rain has actually contributed to a few years. I do know from going to a

parliamentary conference in Quebec this past summer and talking to a few of the elected members from Saskatchewan that they almost had a program ready to kick off. In some cases they didn't kick it off fast enough, because they didn't get re-elected in the rural area. Is there a program that they were working on with the farmers that actually had lack of moisture, and do we know anything in that particular case?

I know there are lots of questions to be asked, and I'm going to sit down and listen to those and leave our Member for Lethbridge-East to ask the last few questions.

MR. LUND: Okay. Well, just briefly, the thistle issue: I'm not sure if you're talking about municipal right-of-way or provincial.

MR. GIBBONS: It's the highways.

MR. LUND: Highways. Okay. Well, in most cases the municipality would have a contract with Infrastructure to take care of those, so we'll have to see what the situation is, why they would not be spraying and/or mowing. If it's thistles, they should be doing some spraying. On Crown land, of course, if it's under disposition, that's the responsibility of the lessee. Now, I don't know what the situation is that you're talking about. In environmental protection we started a program to make sure there were chemicals available so that we could contract with a municipality to take care of the problems on unoccupied Crown land.

The irrigation from the river: that's disturbing. If in fact people are drawing from the river, they should be getting a licence to do this. One of the things under the act is that we require so much water left in the stream, so it's disturbing if in fact the water level is getting so low that the minimum in-stream flow has not been attained. Now, one of the things Environment will be doing is that under the new Water Act we have to do a water management plan within three years of proclamation of the act, so for some of those rivers, like the Sturgeon, they would have to be doing a fairly detailed study to see what the minimum in-stream flow is and needs to be to protect it. We can't have them drying up. As far as a diversion, I'm not aware of anything there. I haven't heard of it, but that doesn't mean to say there hasn't been some work done. I just simply am not aware of it.

It's disturbing when you mention why it took so long for a disaster program, because in fact back in '95 is when FIDP was first instituted, so that program has been there. Now, one of the problems we've got in some of the area you may have been into is that on a lot of that land they grow hay and pasture. One of the things that's happened is that over the dry period their coverage has gone down so low that a lot of those people dropped the hay crop insurance.

When we did the tour in that area, we were looking for what the problem is and why FIDP isn't kicking in. One of the things that we discovered was that a lot of that area has had three years of very poor conditions. That's one of the reasons we changed to allow them to go back to the fourth and fifth year. Now, granted, there could be a problem even with some of those. It may not amount to a lot of money, because their margin, even going back four and five years, may not be that great.

Quite frankly, October 14 was the day that we announced the changes to FIDP. When we were looking at it in September, there still hadn't been a frost. Things still could change somewhat. It was a little early to jump out of the box, but we got working on it fairly early, and I thought coming out with the program on October 14 was really not that bad. It was fairly quick action to the problem.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks. There was just one question, which I was trying to clarify with one of my colleagues when you thought I wasn't listening to you with the absolute attention that of course I was, being able to multitask as we are in the opposition. Specifically I had asked you about what Alberta agriculture was doing about the greenhouse gas emissions and what were the targets. Part of what I was trying to clarify and got clarified was: is this government doing anything about the carbon sinks in trying to promote or get credit for the carbon sinks that are available in agriculture? That's an easy measurement. What is Alberta agriculture doing to get credit for this on our behalf?

9:21

THE CHAIRMAN: The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, you now clarified your question. It's a question that I've got a bit of experience in, having come from environmental protection, because of course that was the department that was doing a lot of work on it. You're right.

MS BLAKEMAN: Of course I'm right.

MR. LUND: Of course. Why would I question it?

In any case, through proper farming practices and different things that you can do, you can sequester carbon in the soil. There are a number of problems. One, carbon sinks in soils has not been accepted internationally, so no matter what you do, as far as getting credit for it, unless it's accepted internationally, you won't get credit. That's one of the reasons we've been very cautious in what we say relative to this whole issue. As you know, some utilities in Alberta have bought options for carbon credits from U.S. farmers. I don't know if any money has changed hands, but they've got those options.

The fact is that carbon sinks have not been accepted. As a matter of fact, the Minister of Environment told me, after being in Bonn last fall at COP 5, that forest sinks look like they might be accepted but that there still was great resistance to soil sinks. When I was in Kyoto at COP 3, the Japanese particularly were very opposed to either soil or forest sinks. We met with the Prime Minister and some of his cabinet, and they just wouldn't hear of it. Apparently they've moved off the forest a bit, but a number of countries are still very opposed. You can understand why. If they don't have any agricultural land to speak of, they're not going to support it. So that is a big problem.

There's another problem. This whole concept of purchasing credits hasn't been accepted yet either. So we have two problems there. It's creating some difficulty for us because farmers are wondering: why can't we get in on this? So we've got that problem.

There's another, bigger problem. The federal government has been doing quite a bit of work studying this whole issue, and agriculture accounts for about 13 percent of the greenhouse gas admissions. In that component, if you take the whole agricultural industry as a total industry and do all the proper things for carbon sequestering in soils, you may come to just about a wash. The problem we have is that even if this whole idea of sale of credits is accepted and we allow the sale to go outside of the agricultural industry, then the livestock industry could be hit really hard. In a province like Alberta if this whole concept of buying credits were to go ahead, you can imagine what the livestock industry would face relative to the oil and gas, because they're going to be needing to buy credits and so is the livestock industry. When you get into CO₂ versus methane, methane is four times as bad. If you get over and

talk about nitrogen oxide, you have 16 times as bad. When fertilizer escapes, or even with the growing of forages or legumes, you'll get a certain amount of nitrogen oxide. So if you take the whole picture, it's not pretty.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. You know, this is one of my favourite estimates, agriculture estimates, because the finest farmland in Alberta is in my riding. There's just no doubt about that, and I have the floor, so no one can argue that.

MR. STRANG: It's all paved.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's all paved? No, no. That's the neighbouring constituencies.

Anyway, to agriculture. Mr. Minister, I appreciate the work your staff does for us. I know when we've had calls and stuff, they are appreciated, so I thank you for that. Working for this minister I'm sure some days is a real challenge but always a pleasurable one, I'm sure. Of course, they're being polite up there.

Mr. Chairman, to the minister. I was pleased and honoured to be part of the farm family awards this year. As you know, one of my big concerns about what we may be losing in Alberta is that farm family. I don't know the answers to that. I don't know what we can do as far as legislating issues like that, but as the number of farmers drops, I worry about what that means to our communities. It's one thing if a business goes down. I mean, it's tough, but people will usually stay in the city and find more work. If a farm goes down, those people are gone, and then the community is gone eventually. So I have concerns about the viability of the farm family, and I'm sure you do too, because the reality of what they give to our community I don't think can be measured in dollars.

If I may brag for a minute, the farm family from my riding was Joe and Thelma Sheehan, who just happen to be my aunt and uncle. I was quite proud of that. I didn't even nominate them, you know, so that says something. So that was good.

I want to comment on the 4-H program. I'm very supportive of that. I see that the budget for that is a bit up. I'm wondering what that entails. We have so many leaders that come out of that 4-H program. It's an absolutely wonderful program that many of us on this side . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Six of us.

MRS. SOETAERT: Six of us have gone through that 4-H program on this side. That's almost half, and there are a few over there. So we're very supportive of that program and know the good things that can come from it.

You know, every time I think of rural development – I don't know; maybe it's something we can't do here – one of the things that bugs people in my area is that they're long-distance to the town that's 10 miles away. If we're thinking rural development and small businesses in rural communities, what a saving it would be in dollars.

Now, I realize that phone companies are privatized and we don't have AGT anymore, but I'm wondering if the minister has ever looked into the reality of – I don't even know how we'd go about it. If you live in Morinville, to phone Calahoo is long distance. From Calahoo it's long-distance to Spruce Grove. If you're in St. Albert, none of them are long-distance, and if you're in Bon Accord, all four of those places are long-distance. So in the reality of rural develop-

ment if we're thinking practicality, then believe it or not, I think long-distance telephone calls are very expensive for some businesses out there. So I just leave that with the minister. I don't know if we can address that at all, but I think many rural communities would appreciate not having such a high long-distance phone bill for business matters.

I know that one of the issues coming up, though it may be under Infrastructure, is the reality that I have had several calls about licence plates in the front and back. It's been a real push from rural Alberta more than the cities. I realize that it's under Infrastructure, but I'm hoping your department will support that motion that is coming up or that you can have some part in promoting that one.

Just today I had a call from one of my hog farmers, who said: you know, in the Speech from the Throne was there anything for farmers? There was a commitment to revamp FDIP, but for them, right now, it's too late to help them. It's kind of hard to phone them back and say: you know, it won't change what happened for you last year. The reality of it is that they had added onto their barn the year before hog prices fell out of the market. For whatever reasons, they didn't qualify for FDIP and are in jeopardy of losing their farm.

9:31

So I'm hoping that the revision of FDIP will change and maybe help some of these people. I mean, in his case it was just bad luck, bad timing. I know people say: well, that's the luck of the draw in a business. I think we have to weigh: is farming just a business, or is it a way of life that we want to preserve in this province? I think that's a question that's worthy of debate in this Legislature at some point in time, because there are more elements to farming than just a straight business, as I see it.

I wanted to talk for a moment about game farming. I have a few in my riding. One person phoned me and asked: where is the whole process of hunting on game farms? [interjection] I see people are going, "Not a chance." I'm just asking her question. [interjection] Oh, we have another one there going, "Yes." So it'll be interesting to hear what the minister has to say.

I think I brought up some of my constituents' concerns. Oh, I must mention something else. I was at an agriculture forum sponsored by the Reform MP in our area. I heard many concerns about commodity prices and input prices and the loss of the family farm. One of the suggestions that came up in that was the reality that we have a generation of people in cities who don't know anything about farms or rural Alberta. I would say that a generation ago people would still go out to grandma's on the farm or to Uncle Joe's farm, but now in the cities, because they are so big and because we have so fewer farms, the reality is that people don't have the same opportunities to get out there. One person suggested a city/rural exchange. I know we go: oh, that's ridiculous. Kids come here to see the Legislature, but we forget that kids from the city don't go out to the country.

I know there was one – it was on a different level – set up by many volunteers in the Stony Plain-Spruce Grove area for kids from the inner city who had never had the chance to be out in rural Alberta. They arranged it. They'd just come out for the day. One group even saw a calf being born. These kids went back with just an amazing view of the world. They had never gotten out of the city. These kids were 10, 11, 12 and had never gotten out of the city.

Now, that wasn't the type of exchange that that farmer mentioned, but something on that basis, where we can get people to appreciate where food comes from and the work that goes into it. It's just an idea that your department can play around with. I think people from the city who just walk up and down the aisles of IGA and Safeway haven't got a clue what it took to get that loaf of bread there or that

great T-bone steak. It was an interesting idea that I heard at that meeting, and I thought: you know, I think there's some potential in that. So I relay that to you from that meeting.

To be specific for a few moments, if I may, I've got some specific questions about the administration expenses from the Ag Financial Services Corporation income statement. Transfers from the government of Canada were budgeted at \$50 million for the year '99-2000, but the forecast figure is \$133 million. So if the administration expenses were \$33 million in '98-99 and then it increased by \$7 million – I should give you the exact number, if I can find it; anyway, I'll keep going and find it – and they're expected to increase by another \$3 million in 2000-2001, really that's an increase of 30 percent in three years.

Now, last year we asked what these increases were due to, and the reply was that the additional costs were mainly for getting the corporation's computer system operational for the year 2000 and a forecasted higher volume of business both in lending and insurance operations. So that explained last year's increase, but I'd love an explanation for this year's increase, if I may.

One of the things I asked in this Legislature – in the heat of the moment I don't think I got the answer I wanted, so we'll try it again in this calmer environment. I think the Member for Wainwright was probably heckling so loud I couldn't hear you. He usually does that when I'm on agriculture estimates. He just doesn't appreciate my part of rural Alberta like he should, but one of these days I'll just show him the fine farms in my area.

The reality is, I think, that our farmers were shortchanged by about \$25 million from this federal government transfer that we were not a part of. I'm wondering: is there a plan for this government to make that money up to farmers? Are we going to go to the table again, to the feds? Maybe we'll send Lethbridge-East to the feds. He might have more luck. I still find it disappointing that we were not at that table with those Premiers. So I ask: are you going to provide that money that they were shortchanged because you didn't sit down at the federal table?

I've gotten some of my concerns out here. I realize there may be others who have a few more questions, and I thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Chairman.

MR. LUND: I'm glad to hear you express concern about the family farm because that's one of our big concerns as well, and it's one of the issues that is going to be on the summit table, the whole issue. I was surprised you didn't have the answer for it.

Anyway, the 4-H program. Of course, we're extremely supportive. It's a great program; it's an outstanding one, as a matter of fact. The Alberta program is one of the best in the country, and it's expanding, which is great to see.

The long-distance calling rates. I don't know your situation. I don't know whether the people there had a vote at one time. It's not in our ministry, but I can tell you that it won't happen. The fact is that once the CRTC took control, you couldn't cross-subsidize, and that was the end of this flat-rate calling, the expansion of it. When they took over, everything stayed.

Licence plates: that's not in our bailiwick.

The issue about the hog farmer. I don't know when he applied, but we found that some folks had expanded. Yes, it was a problem, but that was one of the changes that we made on October 14 to deal with that expanding and/or diversifying of a farm.

MRS. SOETAERT: Should he reapply?

MR. LUND: Well, I guess it would be important to know when he applied, what the circumstances were. He should phone the AFSC,

because I can't answer your question. I don't know how much he expanded; I don't know when he expanded; I don't know when he applied: all of those kinds of things. But one of the big changes that we made on October 14 was to deal with those expanding farms, because that hadn't been dealt with, particularly in the hog industry. That hit them. A combination of that change coupled with the ability to go back four and five years and build what it would have meant at that price makes a big difference.

9:41

Game farming. When I was minister of environmental protection, the folks were coming. At that time I said: when you get the Alberta Fish and Game Association members to agree, I'll agree. I still say that.

Urban education. Of course we support the farm in the classroom program. In some areas there are individuals that are taking some of this on, and I think it's important. But you've also got to remember that with education, as soon as you start adding, they feel that they're already jammed, that they don't have enough time. So it is a big problem, but we will be focusing more.

You asked a question about AFSC's administration, and we'll have to get that answer back to you. You lost me in all of the numbers. You were jumping around, so I didn't get what exactly you were talking about.

So you feel that we were shortchanged \$25 million by the feds? Okay. That's good. I just wanted to make sure that was on the record. What are we going to do, and why wasn't I with . . . [interjection] Okay. Let's look at all the things that happened.

Prior to those Premiers going down, our Premier talked to the Prime Minister. I was in Ottawa lobbying for our farmers. Actually I met with the federal minister before Romanow and Doer did. So I was there lobbying for our farmers. We went to Ottawa on three other occasions, lobbying for our farmers. We were at – well, actually it started in Prince Albert – three ministers' meetings where we were talking about this crisis. So we've done a lot, I think, to try to get the federal people onside. But I would question: what has your leader done? Has she picked up the phone and phoned her kissin' cousins in Ottawa? I would love to have an answer to that. You know, it's easy to throw darts. We've been trying very hard, and I'm sure that the Member for Lethbridge-East has talked to the Senator down there. I'm sure that has happened. I meant to ask him about that earlier. I'm sure that he did. I'm sure that he did, and I mean that.

Anyway, I guess that covers those questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. [interjection] Sorry, I didn't realize you were standing. Hon. Member for West Yellowhead, if you wish to ask a question, please do so. Otherwise, the Member for Lethbridge-East.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess what I'd like to ask the minister is: on your farm income support, I notice on your first line item the comparable for 1998-99 is \$104,049,000, but then when you go to the comparable for 1999-2000 on your budget – I guess the big concern I have is that when you go to your comparable forecast, you're at \$299,004,000. With the way the family farm is and what's continuing to transpire, in this coming fiscal year why are we estimating such a low figure of \$201,576,000 in our budget? I just wondered why we're looking at that. That's on page 43.

Thank you.

MR. LUND: Well, I'm sorry. I wasn't able to find exactly where the hon. member was reading from. I'll just have to get back to you.

Not knowing exactly where you're reading from – I've lost on that page what it was you were asking.

MR. STRANG: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good evening again, Mr. Minister. Just a few final questions that I wanted to kind of wrap up on some of the issues that we were talking about. In reviewing through my page of scribbles while I was sitting here after our first go, I'd overlooked a couple of questions on the business plan and the goals. One that stands out is under goal 7, excellence in food safety. That's on page 38 in the business plan. You're talking about the Alberta food safety emergency response plan. Could you just comment on where that's going, what input you're getting to it, the approach, and on some of the issues that people are asking about now with GMOs: what's there, how this is being dealt with, and a little bit of an idea of how broadly based the scope of that program might be? Is it just contamination and this kind of thing that you're dealing with in food safety as opposed to some of the concerns that might arise with the GMOs?

The other one that I wanted to just kind of touch on a little bit is under your management of the ministry's resources, goal 8. You talked about the functional review that you were going to undertake, and I was wondering if you had any targets or any projections on the impact that this might have on staff or on the relationship between administrative dollars versus frontline delivery dollars in terms of the overall budget. Do you have targets that you're trying to reach?

As you're doing that, do you make interministry comparisons to see how your ministry resources relative to the frontline delivery of service compares to some of the other ministries that deal with the same kind of community contact? You know, delivering services to the ag community is really the mandate of the ministry, and you have to see how effective it is in terms of getting that delivery out there relative to the staff and the cost at the administrative level rather than the frontline delivery component.

I guess the only questions, then, that I would have might be on some of your performance measures. First of all, just a little further part to a question that was raised by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. In the context of each of your goals you talk about the results and the measures. You made reference to those in your opening remarks when you talked about having these measures that are associated with each of the goals. Some of them are very, very interesting. It would be very appropriate if we could see the data that you were collecting associated with some of those measures. The only data that I find here are the macro performance measures. You don't see some of the measures that are associated with some of the goal-specific measures. I know this is a really good step in terms of getting, on some of these new measures that you're dealing with there, some indication of the progress you're making in terms of getting some of that information available for the public to look at.

In your macro performance measures I was looking at the net cash income projections. As I look at some of your targets, as far as the year 2003 you're seeing quite a change, a continued climb in the net cash income in Alberta as a percentage of Canada. What is it that's going on in Alberta that we may not be able to keep our relative position in Canada in the net farm income? Is this because we are a more crop-based agriculture economy as opposed to, say, Ontario or Quebec, where they've got a lot of livestock or some of the specialty crops? We've been up to 23.6 in '97, 22.5 in '98, down to 19.2 this year, but you continue to see a decline in the relative farm income as a percentage of Canada. That kind of surprised me. I

thought that with the complete growth that we're seeing in the livestock sector, the growth we're seeing in some of the specialty crops in southern Alberta, we would not be seeing quite as much of a trend there. So some comment on why you see that decline.

9:51

I was also interested in your measure 4, the importance of Alberta agriculture as a percentage of the total gross domestic product of Alberta's economy. This is on page 41, Mr. Minister. I was noticing that that is projected to go up as a percent of the total gross domestic product in 1999. I would have expected, with the unbelievable prices we were getting in the latter part of '99 in the oil and gas industry and when you look at the low prices in especially the grain sector of Alberta, that we would have seen a drop in that percentage of the gross domestic product that's associated with agriculture just because of those. So some comment on that. Help me to understand where I'm missing something.

The next one, where you're talking about the employment of Albertans. We're looking at the basic trend in the total food and beverage sector. From 1989 to 1999 it's gone from 104.3 down to 103.0, yet now you see a turnaround, especially a big jump by 2000. What changes do you see in the industry that would reflect that bottoming out in our employment cycle in agriculture and the agrifood industry? With the low prices right now you look at what's going on and you'd expect to see either a stability in employment or even an exit of some of the farmers as we see amalgamation. I know that the auctioneers I've been talking to are basically telling me that their farm sales are booked for this winter and that there are enough people selling out that they're filled up. If those people are exiting the industry, the bigger farmers picking them up usually are more labour effective than the smaller farms, so you would expect some kind of a decline.

Mr. Minister, the last couple of comments, then, on the last macroindicator that you report there, land productivity. This is quite indicative of the success we've had in agriculture in Alberta reflecting our increased yields, increased productivity. I was wondering how much of that also is influenced by trends in summer fallow acreage or where we're actually cropping or getting more output off land that used to be fallow. I guess it would be interesting to see if those kinds of trends really are there. I know this is an indicator of productivity of land, and as you use land differently, that effectively increases its productivity. So a mechanism to help understand and see in what direction those are going.

That's the conclusion to my comments, Mr. Minister. I just want to congratulate you. I've really appreciated the way you've responded to the questions so far this evening, and I look forward to working with you the rest of the year.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thank you very much. And thanks for those comments.

Food safety. This is one of the big issues coming up. When we talk to foreign buyers, food safety is extremely important to them. I think that in agriculture we're going to find that there are a number of forces out there in the marketplace that dictate what we do back on the farm, and this is one of them. So we have a choice: we either resist some of the changes that are coming and get ourselves out of the market or we stay in. My answer is that we've got to stay in because that's our future.

Now, dealing with a couple of things. The cattle identification: that's coming down the rail really fast. I guess you've probably seen what happened with Danish beef just recently and how that was

pulled off the market. That's a prime example of how important it is that we are able to track right back really quick and isolate where the problem came from. That's the attempt that the Canadian cattle identification group is trying to implement. There are other diseases. I know that some of our folks are concerned about the dangers of some of the imports and what that might bring, and that just exemplifies how important it is that we have this track back.

The HACCP back on the farms. That's coming. The hog industry is out leading it right now. The poultry industry is getting into it. That's just another one of those things that the consumers are demanding, and it's critical that we be there.

The functional review. We did this in environmental protection, but one of the focuses was different. Here we're not talking about a reduction of expenditures. What we're talking about is assessing to make sure that everything we're doing is necessary. If the answer to that is yes, then can it be done in a different way? As you know, with the way technology is changing, we have to keep changing too. So while the exercise we're going through is a snapshot in time, what we're suggesting to staff is that a number of the things we're doing are the kinds of things that you need to be doing on an ongoing basis. As far as going into it with any kind of target that we're going to have a certain number of things happen, no. We're going in assessing everything, and hopefully coming out of it we'll have a streamlined system that is effective.

When you talk about comparing with other departments, we're not really comparing with other departments, but we continually do customer surveys to see if in fact we are doing what the customer wants and needs. That's how we're trying to measure what we're doing.

I lost you on the measures and goals question. I'll have to get back to you.

The net farm income. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, one of the problems we've got of course is that ever increasing input cost, and that's squeezing the margin. While the gross is going up, the margin is still getting squeezed, and it's a big concern that we have. Even with the high livestock prices, when you look at the purchasing power even at this so-called high market, it's very narrow.

The gross domestic product. That's a tough one. You're absolutely right about the increased price of oil. Of course, back when we were doing this, the price wasn't as high, so it'll be a challenge to meet that if in fact we're able to with the ever increasing price of our other natural resources.

The change in employment. You're right. There are people exiting the primary production, but there is a fairly healthy growth in the food and beverage industry, and that's where that growth in employment will occur.

I'm very pleased that you happened to mention the measure of production, whether that's a good measure of the soil. My staff will enjoy this, because that's the one measure that I've questioned all along. As a matter of fact, before I was this minister, I questioned it for the very reasons that you identified. I don't think it's a good measure of soil quality and whether we're preserving the soil. There are too many other things you can do. So this is one we're wrestling with: how do we really get good measure for this output? We're working on that one.

With that, I would move that the subcommittee adjourn debate.

10:01

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development has moved that the subcommittee do now adjourn debate on the estimates of his department. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to move that when the committee reassembles, the subcommittee report progress on Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar has moved that the subcommittee report progress when the committee reassembles. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no. Carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:02 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Innovation and Science, Tuesday, March 7, 2000
 00/03/07
 8:09 p.m.
 [Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Subcommittee D – Innovation and Science

Gordon, Judy, Chairman
 Renner, Rob, Deputy Chairman
 Amery, Moe
 Broda, Dave
 Carlson, Debby
 Coutts, David
 Havelock, Jon

Herard, Denis
 Hlady, Mark
 Langevin, Paul
 Magnus, Richard
 Pannu, Raj
 Paul, Pamela

Pham, Hung
 Sapers, Howard
 Shariff, Shiraz
 Taylor, Lorne
 West, Steve
 White, Lance

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to welcome the committee to room 512. We will be dealing with the estimates of the Innovation and Science ministry. I would just mention that the other night we had a very good discussion with a lot of input the way Mr. Havelock, the Minister of Economic Development, did it. What happened, and you might wish to consider it, hon. minister . . .

DR. TAYLOR: I've already considered it, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

DR. TAYLOR: Certainly if the opposition wants to be co-operative and work in exactly the same fashion that Mr. Havelock worked, I am more than prepared to do that. I'm more than prepared to speak for 20 minutes at a time, too, and would take great pleasure in doing so and not answering any of their questions. But I certainly am prepared as well to go in the interactive fashion, which I personally found very successful and which Mr. Havelock utilized the other night, so it's entirely up to the members.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Well, I guess we'll leave it with the members.

DR. TAYLOR: Can we use names here, Madam Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: No. This is the same as the Assembly.

DR. TAYLOR: Okay. Well, then, I apologize for using the hon. member's name.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think I did, too, so I apologize as well.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, you started me on that actually. I was just following your example.

THE CHAIRMAN: I don't know whether it was necessary that you stood up and took a bow.

Anyway, we will start. Go ahead, hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, are we going to go in an interactive fashion?

THE CHAIRMAN: You have to start with introductory comments, and then I'll ask the hon. members if they will.

DR. TAYLOR: Okay. I'll just keep my introductory comments very brief then, assuming that we're going to go in an interactive fashion. It says "Mr. Chairman" here, but I'm going to actually change my speaking notes and say Madam Chairman.

MR. HAVELOCK: That's good research by your department.

DR. TAYLOR: It's very good research by my department, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw points out.

Anyway, I'm pleased to be here to talk tonight about my 2000-2003 business plan and in particular the estimates for 2000-2001. All of us know we have a rapid pace of change in our society, and it does make it more difficult to plan ahead. If I could just give you a little bit of a story, John Roth, who's the president and CEO of Nortel, talks in web years. In John's scheme of things there are eight web years in one year. He only plans three web years ahead because that's all he feels that a big company like Nortel can plan ahead, about three web years. So I guess the point is that with the rapid pace of change in society it does make it difficult to plan ahead, but I think the activities and investments that we outline in here this evening will help create a framework for sustainable prosperity for Albertans.

I believe one of the great keys to economic success in the future is innovation. I believe we have to embrace new ideas, we have to embrace new technology, and if Alberta is not going to be a perpetual hewer of wood and drawer of water, if we want to be leaders in the global knowledge-based economy, then we have to embrace innovation. I think a good example of how our government and my government is embracing innovation is the fact that we have just set aside \$500 million in Budget 2000 for the creation of the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research. You're all familiar with AHFMR, which is kind of a nice acronym. We're going to have to get a good acronym for this, so it will probably be called AHFSEER. You know, we can have before and 'afser'. [interjection] Thank you, Denis.

So what we have is a foundation that is going to create a stable investment in science and engineering for research. This endowment fund will help Alberta universities attract top scientists, and we know this from our experience with AHFMR. Also, we know this from the brief experience that we have had with ICORE, the informatics circle of research excellence that we just created last fall. We committed to put \$10 million a year into that information and communications technology research excellence centre. They went out and started advertising. As you know, these people are very difficult to attract because of high salaries and so on. It was very interesting the way they did some initial advertising, because one of the personality profiles of these people indicates that they like extreme sports. They like the mountain climbing. They like the skiing. They like the mountain biking, hiking, and so on. So ICORE went out with some advertising with a big picture of mountains on it and then extreme computing over the top of the mountains. I thought it was a really creative way. That was just, as I say, created last fall.

I can tell you that as of today we're negotiating with two leaders in the world to come to Alberta to be part of ICORE. One is from Europe, and one is from the northeastern United States. Now, they've approached us after seeing what we're doing. Whether we'll

ultimately sign a contract I can't say, but it looks very, very hopeful that we have these two leading individuals already taking notice of what's happening in Alberta with appropriate government funding for research and development.

So I believe that's what we can do with this, and that's only \$10 million a year. You can imagine what we can do with a fund that starts at \$500 million, and they tell us that you can spend approximately 5 percent of an endowment fund every year. So it will start this year with a \$25 million investment, and then as that fund grows at a minimum of \$100 million a year for the next five years, it will reach a billion by 2005, or it might even reach it before then, depending on budget conditions. Perhaps we might even be able to put \$500 million in next year and reach the billion dollars next year. Certainly that's something that we will investigate, depending on budget conditions. I mean, this is all predisposed on a solid and healthy economy and a solid and healthy budget.

So I think, you know, we can create the right environment in Alberta for the top science to be here. Once you have the top science and the top scientists, the top graduate students, you get business here as well. The high-tech business will locate where the top science is, where the science they need is. Also, business will spin out of the science.

Just one quick example and then I'll conclude so I don't use too much time here and we can get into questions. One quick example is Silicon Graphics. They spun out of Stanford University in 1982 or 1983, and they have between 30,000 and 40,000 employees today. That is in a period of 17 years. That's the kind of business that can spin out of top science, and we can look at any number of businesses in the high-tech area. I mean, you can go back to the early one that everyone is familiar with, which is Hewlett Packard, which spun out of Stanford University. You've probably seen their commercials with the old garage and they're going back to the skunk works type of projects, or at least that's what their commercials say.

There are a number of huge businesses that have spun out of top science, so the goal is to create the top science. The goal is to get the best scientists here, and then the rest will follow. There's good evidence for that all over Europe and all over North America. You can look at North Carolina. You can look at Boston. You can look, as I said, at the Palo Alto area, and you can look around Oxford. You can look at any number of those areas. Where you have the top science, you get all kinds of business opportunities.

So that's what we're about. We're in the business of trying to get the best science we can here in Alberta, and from there the rest will happen.

I'll stop there rather than taking my full 20 minutes so that we can go on in an interactive fashion.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Madam Chairman. Good evening, Mr. Minister. It's always fun to ask questions of a minister who is so obviously enthusiastic about his portfolio. What I propose to do is ask some specific questions and afford you an opportunity to respond. Perhaps we can see how that goes in terms of time. As I say, I recognize your enthusiasm for your portfolio, and there's lots of information, so let's just see how it goes in terms of the back and forth.

Let me start off. I'll mention to you that I've got a number of questions that arise from responses you'd given on March 29 last year. So maybe while we're chatting before I get to that, you may have somebody here from your staff who will have that handy, because we'll loop back and discuss some of your expectations from a year ago.

Before we do that, just the one administrative thing I want to be clear on. Dan Bader, your ICT fellow, had been reporting to two ministers: health and public works, supply and services. Has that sorted itself out in the intervening time?

DR. TAYLOR: Actually, Dan is no longer with us. He's a deputy at Municipal Affairs, so it has sorted itself out.

MR. DICKSON: Okay.

The further question I wanted to take you to is in goal 6, specifically the whole information . . .

DR. TAYLOR: If you've got a page number, it would be helpful.

MR. DICKSON: Page 195 of the business plan book.

DR. TAYLOR: Okay. Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: What I wanted to ask you about, Mr. Minister, is what strikes me as some of that silo building that I thought we were trying to move away from. I'm referring to sort of the whole business of information management, information technology. We have Municipal Affairs in one corner, which is responsible for the administration of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. They have officials that they co-ordinate in every single public body, not just government departments. They have been building up some expertise, some experience in that area. Then we have Government Services, and we heard from the Minister of Government Services the other night. They're busy doing a bunch of planning in that area. Then we have the Chief Information Officers' Council, which is yet a third entity which is scurrying around looking at ways of marketing information, managing information, exploiting technology. Then we come to your department. So I wonder if you could just take a moment and help me understand how we're able to fully exploit the technology, the commercial opportunities of the technology when we've done such a great job of fragmenting responsibility in so many different areas.

8:19

DR. TAYLOR: When we started, as you know, we did undergo major restructuring, and the restructuring is continuing. What we are doing in my department is that we are going to be policy and strategy; all right? So we are moving out of the department anything that is transactional because, quite frankly, that is not where we are. So the transactional things we are moving out. The Imagis is in the process of being moved out, we have some data centres that we will move out, and all the transactional pieces, if I can call them that, are going to be handled in Government Services.

We will be the group that sets strategy, sets government policy through our chief information officer, who is part of us. Next year you will see that my staff complement will be substantially smaller than it is this year because we will have moved out a number of positions to either the private sector or to Government Services.

So we're trying to focus Government Services. The focus will be transactional bits, the paying of cheques and all the different transactional things. The focus of our department will be policy and strategy. If I can give you an example of that, one of the things we have in government, as we sit here and speak, is four different e-mail systems. Well, does that make a lot of sense? Not really. So what we are doing, the policy we have established is that we will go to a common e-mail system. Our policy is to move to common platforms across government. That's the policy and strategy bit. Then it will be up to the departments to implement that policy and strategy, and

we of course will help them implement the policy and strategy.

Another example I might give you is desktops. I mean, we've got desktops all through government that don't talk to each other. So the question is: does that make sense? Well, not a lot. So we are through my department the policy and strategy is to go to a common desktop, go to common software throughout government. Now, that will take some time. Obviously we're not going to go out and buy everybody new desktops tomorrow, but as you know, the renewal period on these things is two to three years. So over a period of three years we'll move to common desktops, common software, and common platforms. Although we won't be in the business of operating all of those computers in each individual department, we will set the policy and strategy.

MR. DICKSON: Okay. If we had an archivist sitting here, they'd probably make the observation that optimal planning involves dealing with every single file from the point of inception to destruction, treating that as a continuous stream instead of sort of pods of information in different areas of government. What you haven't had a chance to address for me yet is an understanding of how you conceptually ensure that your information management is focused, co-ordinated, tight. I'm talking about systems. When you have the balkanization and the tension I see there, I don't see it being resolved just by focusing your department's energies on policy and somebody else doing information management.

DR. TAYLOR: The files that would exist in Municipal Affairs will stay in Municipal Affairs; okay? My department is not interested in taking over the files from Municipal Affairs or Health or anywhere else. All we're interested in is creating the common policy, the common strategy so that if somebody from, say, Health needs something from Municipal Affairs, they can easily access that information from Municipal Affairs.

MR. DICKSON: The challenge I see though, Mr. Minister, is that if you look at your business plan – it's the final bullet under goal 6.

Continue to streamline and simplify access to government information through the 'One-Window Access to Services' project, jointly with Government Services.

Well, surely that's driven by the kinds of information each one of those departments collects, the way they record it, the way they store it. This has been the problem, frankly, we've had in Alberta, with respect. There's not been enough integrated thinking that encompasses all government departments. The thing about FOIP, love it or hate it, is that it sure exposes the weaknesses in an information management system.

DR. TAYLOR: But you cannot have one-window access until you have common systems throughout government. So Government Services and my department and several other departments – we had a meeting just about two weeks ago; I can't remember the various departments that were there – are working on one-window access, but you can't have that until you've got a common platform. Once you have a common platform, you can access any department, anything you absolutely want from one window, but that won't exist until there's a common platform.

MR. DICKSON: Okay. Let me shift to a related but collateral area. We see what's going on in other provinces around Bill C-6, the fact that provinces like Ontario, Saskatchewan, and B.C. have developed, co-ordinated pangovernment positions on Bill C-6, the way they involve their electors in that discussion: public hearings and so on. It's not clear to me in this province. Is it your department that's responsible for co-ordinating the response to Bill C-6?

DR. TAYLOR: Actually, it's Municipal Affairs. I don't know if Municipal Affairs has had its time at the table yet, but you might want to talk to Municipal Affairs about that. We are advising Municipal Affairs, but it's their responsibility.

MR. DICKSON: Is there some plan for some operational integration of the information branch in Municipal Affairs with what you're doing in the current budget year?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, as we move to one-window access and common platforms, you will have that operational consistency throughout government, but you can't do it without.

MR. DICKSON: Okay.

The other question then. This is one that came up during the three-year FOIP review last year. How do we ensure that the chief information council and the chief information officer are able to take full advantage of what the information branch in the Municipal Affairs department has developed in terms of inventorying, cataloguing the kinds of records and data that the provincial government has, and so on?

DR. TAYLOR: Once the inventory, the data, is electronic, anybody can access it. We can't access it now because it's too darn much work if it's just in files, but once it's electronic, anybody with the appropriate clearances will be able to access the data inside government. So the chief information officer will be able to access data in Municipal Affairs. He'll be able to access data in Energy. That's what the chief information officer will be able to do with a common system. He can't do it now, and it will take, as I said, two to three years, maybe quicker. The CIO says that he can do it in 18 months, but he's perhaps being a little optimistic. We can do it, but it will take some time.

MR. DICKSON: Just before I leave this area, let me ask you this. In terms, then, of that whole business of the protection of privacy in the nongovernmental sector, the policy leadership is coming from Municipal Affairs and not from the chief information officer and the chief information council in your department?

DR. TAYLOR: That's correct.

THE CHAIRMAN: No. I'm sorry; we can't do that here.

DR. TAYLOR: Okay. The management of FOIP is Municipal Affairs, but we will work with Municipal Affairs in helping them to develop effective systems of management of information.

MR. DICKSON: Right. I'm trying to just identify where the locus is of decision-making.

DR. TAYLOR: Municipal Affairs.

MR. DICKSON: Not in terms of the existing policy. I've been listening to you carefully, and your future focus is contagious. I'm trying to look to 2000 and 2001 and 2002, and I want to be real clear in terms of where the leadership is coming from in terms of that issue of privacy protection in the nongovernmental sector.

8:29

DR. TAYLOR: Municipal Affairs.

MR. DICKSON: Then let me come back and ask you a couple of

follow-up questions from last year. There had been an expectation – and this was the *Hansard* . . .

DR. TAYLOR: Make sure you read them clearly, because I can't remember that long ago.

MR. DICKSON: Well, Mr. Minister, that's why we expect you've got all of your capable staff here at your elbow practically.

If you look at page D36 in *Hansard* from March 29 of '99, the reference was the number of requests that you were expecting to get for funding. You were talking about the \$60 million to \$70 million, Mr. Minister, that you would see advanced in the current fiscal year, and I'm wondering if your projection was realized.

DR. TAYLOR: I'm going to have to answer that through a written response. I don't have last year's figures in front of me. I can tell you that we will spend between \$90 million and \$100 million strictly out of my budget this year on research and development in this province. That will be this fiscal year because we have that in our budget as we speak, so that's what we will spend this year. But as to the exact total dollars that we spent last year, I don't have that at my fingertips. We can provide you a written response for that.

I think it would be fairly close to that. We would have spent about \$22 million or \$23 million out of the science and research fund, and then we would have spent probably about the same amount out of the I2P2 fund, so there's \$45 million. I'm just going by memory. Then we would have had the research excellence envelope, which would be about \$4 million, and we would have had one other pile of money too – I've forgotten the official name of it right now – which would have been another \$4 million or \$5 million. So we would have been close to there, but for the exact figures I'll have to get you that information.

MR. DICKSON: Another item just following up from last year, page D36 and continued on page D37. You were musing that the government might commit \$3 million to \$5 million a year from the science and research strategic initiative fund. You were expecting substantial dollars to be raised in the private sector. How much money has in fact been raised from the private sector?

DR. TAYLOR: If I can say non Alberta government sector, for every dollar we invested our average last year was 3.88 to 1. So for every dollar we invested out of the science and research fund, other sources – and some of them are private sector, some of them are other government agencies, some outside Alberta, some are federal government, some are the national institutes of health, and some are companies. So it's \$3.88 to \$1.

If I could just give you one quick example of what's going to happen with the private-sector investment, we've been working on a deal with the major research-based pharmaceutical companies, and we announced last fall that they are committing a minimum of \$150 million over the next three years to Alberta to sponsor and support research in Alberta. That's the kind of partnerships you can obtain if the government steps up to the plate first and says: yes, this is important for us; we will invest. So, as I say, that's just one example that I can recall offhand.

MR. DICKSON: Just reverting to goal 6 for a moment. The item I didn't raise was the whole business with health information, Wellnet. In fact, I remember last year that you talked about the importance of having Mr. Bader reporting to the minister of then health, and that was specifically to tie in the Wellnet project. Given the size of Wellnet, the minister of health in 1997 was projecting

\$300 million to be involved in health information technology. How are you making those links? How are you co-ordinating? What's happening within your goal 6 area with the many projects that are going on through Health and Wellness and through Wellnet?

DR. TAYLOR: Specifically in regards to Wellnet, Health and Wellness determines the strategies, the policies, the priorities. We are the technology suppliers. So Health says: "Can you do this? Is there technology to do this?" We say yes or no, and that is the relationship between us and Health. Of course, Mr. Bader responds now, I would assume, to Municipal Affairs and to Health.

It would be ideal from my perspective – and it's not necessarily a government position; this is my own personal opinion – that Wellnet have its own chief executive officer, because obviously Mr. Bader is very busy as the Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs. I personally will encourage the appropriate people, and have done so, to establish a chief executive officer for Wellnet that is separate from a deputy minister in this department. That person could then interact both with my department and with Health.

MR. DICKSON: I know there are others who have questions, Madam Chairman. How much time would I have left?

THE CHAIRMAN: You have a minute and 35.

MR. DICKSON: A minute and 35?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. DICKSON: That's fine. I'll forgo the minute and 35. Thanks. Thanks, Mr. Minister.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next person who has indicated that they wish to speak is the Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Minister. Your department certainly is a very important department because of what you do, and the policy that you create today will not only impact us but will also impact future generations of Albertans.

Since the creation of your department under the former minister, the hon. Dianne Mirosh, things certainly have changed a lot in some areas, and in some areas things haven't changed that much. One of the areas that has not changed that much is the question of how you would get co-operation from different government agencies. You can certainly create the policy, but having the best policy doesn't mean that you will get the best result. It is the first step, but certainly it is not sufficient to get there.

Your goal 6, trying to get access to all government programming and data through one window. Certainly you have to get co-operation from different government departments to make sure they are on the same platform and using more or less the same technology so that somehow they can hook up and talk to each other. One area I have been following and have a keen interest in and haven't seen much progress on is the area of how government data is being stored, if we have been successful in creating a common database for all the information that is needed by different government agencies.

One important thing that we should always remember is that the way we do business may change. Twenty years ago we did things most of the time by hand. Most of the time we did it manually. Now we do most of our stuff on a computer. So the way we do things can change, but the one core thing that has not changed since the dawn of history is the data. Whether you store your data on paper or whether you store your data in the computer, you still store more

or less the same data. That's critical if we can have a strategy of how to get all these data under one roof and have a master dictionary defining which field to be stored and which environment they will be stored under and who will be the custodian of this information. Having that, we will make a significant advance in achieving goal 6 for the department.

8:39

Another area I want to touch on is the partnership with the companies and the nongovernment agencies out there. Certainly your department cannot influence all the success in science and technology by yourself. You have to look for partnership. The creation of the endowment fund is a very, very positive step, and you have worked very hard to create that. I commend you for that. However, as we move further and further into the 21st century, information technology becomes increasingly important not only for companies but for the average Albertan as well. I am still not a hundred percent sure that we have all the right stuff to create and foster these partnerships, especially in the education field. I think your department already has a close relationship with the Learning department, but I think your department should have a very important role in shaping what kind of education system we should have in Alberta to take advantage of these opportunities and also to explore all the potential for our youngsters in Alberta.

I know that you care very much about knowledge-based industry. For the last few years you have fought tirelessly for the benefit of this industry. We have to compete with many other players not only in Canada but internationally as well, and Alberta is a relatively small player. How do you feel about our advantage compared to the other jurisdictions in terms of attracting and retaining these top-notch players in the knowledge-based industry? I know the endowment fund was created to move in that direction, but is that enough? Do you have any wish-list items that you would like to achieve in terms of tax breaks, for example?

One of the other areas I wanted to touch on as well . . .

DR. TAYLOR: If I could just perhaps respond.

MR. PHAM: Okay. You can go ahead.

DR. TAYLOR: I've got four major points here. I'll respond quickly to them. Thank you for your comments.

Let me just start. The initial question you asked was about co-operation between internal government agencies. Certainly this whole department that we have been built on co-operation and a working co-operative relationship with other departments. For instance, Economic Development: we share staff. We've got 10 staff, I believe it is, that we share with Economic Development. The Minister of Economic Development kindly pays fundamentally a third of their wages, and we pay two-thirds of their wages. So we have co-operative relationships. Our relationship with Health and Wellness, you know, where they do strategy and policy, and we provide technology. So there are a number of co-operative working relationships.

There are also official kinds of relationships that exist. For instance, today if departments are going to purchase new software, new hardware, new information and communications technology systems, they have to be cleared through the chief information officer. That's not to say that we're going to stop things, but there is a clearinghouse new purchases have to go through so that we can move. If there were no clearinghouse, you know, we would not be able to move to common systems, common platforms. So there is that clearinghouse. There's the co-operative effort that's voluntary,

and then there's the kind of official relationship. Each department has its own information officer. They have regular meetings with the chief information officer. Ultimately purchases of new information technology materials – software, hardware – go through there. Those are a couple of the ways we get interdepartmental co-operation.

With regard to data storage, it's very interesting. We have masses and masses of data out there on paper right now that would take years to convert electronically. But as we move forward, it is my goal to have more and more of our data stored electronically. There is some resistance to this, because we have to be very careful. A member earlier talked about FOIP. We have to be very, very cautious of FOIP requirements. There is some resistance by – I was going to say the Ethics Commissioner – the FOIP commissioner, same guy, and his office.

MR. PHAM: The Privacy Commissioner.

DR. TAYLOR: The Privacy Commissioner. Fair enough.

MR. HAVELOCK: You should know him on a first-name basis.

DR. TAYLOR: I know him as the Ethics Commissioner, not the Privacy Commissioner. Thank you for your comment, hon. member.

The Privacy Commissioner has some concerns. We have to work through all of those concerns as we move into electronic data storage. So it is a huge issue. Of course, it needs a culture change too. We've been storing data on paper for so long, and you know how significant it is to change cultures in a major business, a major government. In any big organization culture changes are slow, but we are working on it.

With regards to education, the importance of our being involved. Certainly at the universities, SAITs, and NAITs we're heavily involved because we have the control of the research dollars. We work very closely with Learning on this in terms of the direction research goes, so we are very closely involved with Learning on that.

Where we are not so involved is in K to 12. One of the things we are presently working on with Learning is what I would call a science awareness program. One of the difficulties we have right now in Alberta is that we don't have enough kids coming out of grade 12 that are skilled and that have the right sciences as they come out, especially females. We lose our females mostly, it seems, between grades 7 and 9, when they lose their interest in science. So we've got a whole population out there of females – and I know from my own personal experience of having a wife and four daughters that girls are smarter than boys – and we're missing a huge talent base.

What we're doing right now with Learning is developing a science awareness program that we will hopefully start this fall in the schools to bring the awareness particularly to young females and the opportunities in science to all people, but in particular young females, as they progress through the system. How will it work? I don't know. We won't know for a few years how it works until we see if there are more people, male and female, coming out of grade 12 with a stronger emphasis on science. In regards to our relevance to K to 12, yeah, we're relevant, and that's the way we're moving.

In regards to knowledge-based industries, you mentioned a number of issues there. From my meeting with several hundred of these over the last several years, the things they require most are not tax breaks. What they require are two things: venture capital and people. Okay? That's what they all tell me. We have today as we sit here about 1,500 vacant spots in the information and communications technology business in Alberta. In fact, last fall Nortel put out an advertisement, I think for 30 computer engineers, and got zero

response. I mean, these are jobs that start at \$45,000 to \$50,000. These are not \$20,000 jobs.

8:49

The problem is that we're not graduating enough people out of high school; we're not graduating enough people out of university. The big companies like Nortel will tell you very openly that unless we have a critical mass here, they can't expand any further. The small companies need the people as well. Now, really, I don't suspect that Nortel needs venture capital, but the small companies need venture capital.

We have a significant problem in Alberta. Depending on who you read, we have between 13 and 15 percent of the economy, we have 9 percent of the population, and we have 3 percent of the venture capital in this country. So we need to create an environment that will cause venture capital to locate here. What we know about venture capital and venture capitalists is that they will only invest their dollars in about a 50-mile radius of where they exist. In fact, in Silicon Valley that is even shrinking. Right now some venture capitalists are putting up their own buildings. If you want their money, you've got to be in their building, so that radius may even shrink. The radius used to be that, on the whole, venture capitalists would invest in a radius of 100 to 120 miles. Research is showing us now that, on the whole, venture capitalists only invest in a radius of 50 miles of where they presently live and work. So that's a big issue for Alberta.

There is venture capital in Alberta, but it tends to be oil related. People who have dollars, the angel investors, tend to invest in what they know. Since most of the angel investors are oil related, they tend to invest in the oil patch as opposed to some of the high-tech areas.

Another thing that I believe is going to help companies in Alberta is the Canadian Venture Exchange, that's been created in Calgary. That is very clearly talking about high-tech companies, but you have to be at a certain level before you can go public, so we still need that intermediate investment from the small company when they're supporting it on their own, out of their own pocket, mortgaging their houses and so on, to the venture capitalists. We need that stage in there, and right now we don't have it to the level we should.

MR. PHAM: Thank you. I will continue with my line of questions. One of the things you mentioned in your answer is the fact that the high-tech companies cannot find qualified employees to fill the vacant positions they have. I think many young graduates are facing today the cycle of not finding a job because they don't have the experience and not having the experience because they can't find a job. I encourage your department and the human resources department to come up with some kind of special program geared to help graduating students, especially in the high-tech area, to find the first job they can after they graduate.

Another area your department certainly paid attention to in the past – and I don't know how successful it has become since then – is the idea of marketing technology that we have in Alberta to the outside world. I think my colleague sitting right next to me, the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View, is chairing the committee. I certainly am interested in hearing any successes you have had in that area and what plans you have to further sell this technology outside of Alberta, because certainly you can market them and you can have more resources to do further development.

The area you talked about earlier that deals with the amount of information and the sensitivity of changing it from paper to electronic: certainly your answer is bang on. I hope the members of the opposition parties take notice of this. I remember last year, when we

tried to pass Bill 40 in the House, and the amount of opposition and the amount of public outcry that we heard. It seemed like civilization would have ended at that time, but several months after here we are. We still haven't heard of any major screwups yet. The people are happy, and the system is turning very smoothly.

THE CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Montrose, I'd just mention to you that there are fewer than two minutes left in this segment if you want the minister to answer.

MR. PHAM: Okay. Thank you. Mr. Minister, if you didn't have time to answer, you can certainly ask for unanimous consent to extend your time.

DR. TAYLOR: Just in terms of marketing technology we have a team effort there. Certainly Economic Development is very, very helpful with marketing technology. The member you mentioned is chairing a committee on technology commercialization and marketing, and of course the Alberta Research Council is very active and actually selling marketing technology. For instance, they're just in the process of doing a joint venture with Singapore, and the Singapore Technology Corporation is interested in Alberta technology, because they apparently have access into Chinese markets. There are a number of ways that this is happening, and we will get better at this. We've got a long way to go just in terms of technology commercialization.

Another thing that is happening is that the technology commercialization wings of UTI and ILO – those are the two university tech commercialization groups – ARC and AHFMR are meeting. They're going to bring in Olds College. They're going to bring in some private-sector technology commercialization folks and develop a real strategic plan to do that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Shall we move on? There are only 24 seconds left.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Madam Chairman. I think the enthusiasm for the activities of your department have been pretty well documented in *Hansard*.

DR. TAYLOR: I've got enthusiastic staff too.

[Mr. Renner in the chair]

DR. MASSEY: Even the opposition has been enthusiastic. The AHFSER project, the bill before the House, I think, has been very well received.

I had today – and I suspect that you may have too – an article sent over to me by Ken Norrie, the dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta, on the invisible partner in Alberta's knowledge-based economy. He goes through and raises some questions. While he applauds the investment in science and technology, he makes a plea and makes the case in terms of the humanities and social sciences and indicates that technology is not enough.

You have objectives throughout your documents talking about creating a science and technology culture, trying to get more students interested in science, trying to make this a centre for people to come to, and his proposition is that the chances of that being successful are less and in fact in the past have not been successful unless it's accompanied by an equal emphasis and thrust in the social sciences and humanities. He talks about the importance, for

instance, of languages. If you're going to operate in the world economy, then you have to go to them on their terms, and that includes languages as one part of that and understanding of cultures. He talks about the lag in our knowledge of social institutions, and you see it with the health care system, knowing where the aging population is going, accommodating for that, things we haven't done in the past.

He also talks about not being able to establish that community that you would have unless we have the Winspear Centres and the MacLab Theatres and the art galleries, because that is an important factor in the quality of life and, in fact, what helps draw . . .

DR. TAYLOR: And the football stadiums.

DR. MASSEY: Well, that too. Those are very important factors, yet as you look at the funding for advanced education, postsecondary institutions, and you look at the creation of Innovation and Science, your department, and the folding of postsecondary in with K to 12 and the underfunding of postsecondary – I think the minister in estimates the other day . . .

DR. TAYLOR: Well, I think if you want to talk about funding postsecondary, you're in the wrong place. That is the Department of Learning. I mean, I'll debate with you right here and now if you wish, if you want to make political statements about education being underfunded, postsecondary education being underfunded. I can be as political as you want, but I didn't think that was the purpose of this. I thought we were here to have some honest exchange and honest ideas. If you want to get into the political BS, I'll do it.

8:59

DR. MASSEY: If you'd let me finish, I have the question.

So my concern is the balance and to create the kind of culture and subculture that you talk about in the business plans. How much concern is there about the other part of that, the balance in those two kinds of investments?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, first of all, I haven't seen the article, but I will start by disagreeing with him when he says that you can't create a successful science culture without some of the things he's talking about. I would say that the AHFMR has created a very successful science culture in this province. We have attracted the top scientists. We have the best science in the world. We are recognized as a leader in medical research. If you are prepared to spend your money on research and science, you will do it.

That is not to say that those other things are not valuable. For instance, we have the Department of Community Development, that spends millions of dollars on these other issues. Now, I'm not familiar with the budget there, the exact dollars. We have the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the millions of dollars that it spends yearly on some of these issues you're talking about. We have other kinds of foundations like various theatre societies that are funded by Community Development. As I say, I don't know what Community Development's budget is, but it is a huge budget. I don't know if anybody here knows what it would be.

MR. HAVELOCK: It's bigger than mine.

DR. TAYLOR: It's bigger than the Economic Development budget.

So what I would say is that we are already doing that. We are already creating the balance. We are already funding the arts; we are already funding culture.

I would point out that we fund professional arts, and we have no problem funding professional arts, but for some reason we have a

problem funding professional sports teams. It seems to me to be a little bit of hypocrisy here.

You know, what I'm saying is that we are creating the environment through Community Development, the millions and millions of dollars that Community Development spends. So we do recognize it as a balance, and this government recognizes it as a balance and are spending appropriately. In fact, some of us might argue that we're spending too much.

DR. MASSEY: It's good to have that on the record.

When you look at the performance measures that you have, are you really responsible for these measures?

DR. TAYLOR: For some of them we are, and we're working on developing better performance measures. For example, the number of dollars that universities bring into the province in terms of research dollars: we encourage that by stepping up to the plate first and creating the right environment. Ultimately, you know, we don't control it. So there are a number of performance measures that are measures of the general science culture in our province that we don't control, but I think they're important measures to have, because if we don't report them, then where do they get reported, even though they are not performance measures that we definitely have absolute control over.

We are working towards other measures that you will see in our business plan this coming year that are more directly relevant to us, but these other things are important to know. If you look at some of the measures, some of them are StatsCan data. I don't know what page it's on right now. For instance, 1997-1998 is the last data that we can get from Statistics Canada. So how appropriate is that? On page 279, Total Sponsored Research Funding: it's all Stats Canada data. The last data we can get from Stats Canada is 1997, but we do know, for instance, what the government of Alberta is doing over this time period.

So one of the things we are working on with Stats Canada is to get them to have more appropriate data. In fact, there was an article in the *Globe and Mail* this past week, and it talked about StatsCan now looking at new ways to measure the new economy. We've certainly been instrumental in encouraging Stats Canada to do that. So as they improve their data collection, we will have better information, and in the future you will see provincial numbers in here. They'll have to be in a separate chart, but they will be provincial numbers based on our provincial dollars and the data that we collect, but for the rest of the country we've got to go with StatsCan.

So we need to do a better job of collecting data. We need to do a better job of developing performance measures, but these are still important measures to notice, even if we don't control them.

DR. MASSEY: It's encouraging to hear that you are going to have some other performance indicators in some of the other objectives. Really, if you look at these, if any one of these were to sour, I would wonder if you could rightly blame your department.

DR. TAYLOR: No. That's what I say. Most of these are rather the measures of what I would call the innovation system in Alberta, if I can call it that in that kind of broad term. Measures of the innovation system. We need to have that information, but as a department we need to develop measures that are specific to us as well.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. You talked about silos. In the creation of the department, with science and technology being hived off into the department, and postsecondary education, universities and institutes – are you concerned at all about having those activities located in two centres?

DR. TAYLOR: Right now I'm not, but it's something that we have to be constantly aware of. We do that through our business planning process. I'm familiar and my staff is familiar with Learning's business plan and business planning process, and they're familiar with ours. There's very good staff communication, a very good working relationship from the deputy minister on down. So although there's no formal process, there is a very close working relationship, a very informal process so that you don't see duplication in government.

Then, of course, we have the Government Reorganization Secretariat, which examines all the organizations inside the departments to make sure there's no duplication. We have the Member for Medicine Hat chairing a committee on agencies, boards, and commissions, looking at all the agencies, boards, and commissions of this government to make sure there's no duplication and, where there is duplication, suggesting that they be merged or something disappear.

So we have, I believe, not only the informal controls, but I believe we have the formal controls through the Member for Medicine Hat's committee on agencies, boards, commissions and also through the Government Reorganization Secretariat.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That's it? Okay.

Then we will move to the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, this morning I flew up from Calgary on the same flight as Sherry Cooper, the chief economist for Nesbitt Burns. I think it's quite well known out here in western Canada of late. I know she's a big proponent of fiscal policies that would support a high-tech economy. She points to countries such as Finland and Ireland, which have achieved a great deal of success in developing their high-tech economies. I'm wondering if your department has analyzed what those countries have done in both their fiscal policies and other policies to promote this and if we are looking at doing some of the same sorts of things to achieve the big successes that those countries have achieved.

DR. TAYLOR: We've looked at successes all over the world, in France, Palo Alto, and looked at different methodologies of achieving success. As I said earlier, the big things that companies need is money and people and a competitive tax environment. When we move to the 11 percent flat tax – and the Treasurer might be able to tell this more accurately than I can – I believe that for individual taxes we will be comparable with the lowest taxed jurisdictions in North America. There may be one or two states that might be lower than us, but overall we will be comparable. So I think that individually we're moving in the right direction.

One of the things that these people look at individually of course, because they make big dollars – these are not poorly paid people. They look at individual tax rates and where they do well economically. In fact, if you take the fact that we only have to pay – I don't even know what it is. Say that it's \$800 a year for a family for health care. Dave Buffet from Nortel, who just moved up from Dallas, told me that he'll be as well off here once we move to the 11 percent as he would have been in Texas when you start looking at the health care premiums and so on that he would have had to pay in Texas. So we will create the right environment for individuals.

9:09

Then in terms of corporations, you said that we need to have a competitive tax environment, and I personally believe, personal

opinion now, that we need to lower our corporate tax rates. If we do that and have the people and the venture capital here, the industry will be here. There's no doubt in my mind, and all kinds of big companies have told me that. John Roth, the president of Nortel, has told me that. Small companies have told me that. We need capital in Alberta. We need people in Alberta, and if we can do that, they will be here. But we're not there yet.

MS GRAHAM: What do you suggest we should do with our corporate tax rates then? What is the magic number?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, the Treasurer would know more what the magic number is than I would, but I think we need to move them down. I can't tell you exactly what the right rate is because we haven't got into that detail on research. But we do need to move them in that direction.

MR. DAY: Agreed.

DR. TAYLOR: Oh, good. The Treasurer is agreeing. Can I ask the Treasurer a question? Where do we need to be?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, it's certainly up to the member who has the floor right now. There's a 20-minute allocation, and when the 20 minutes are up, we'll be moving to another speaker.

DR. TAYLOR: Oh, okay. Well, perhaps at some future date.

MS GRAHAM: Lorne, I'm happy to use my time to hear the Treasurer on this topic.

DR. TAYLOR: Okay.

MR. DAY: I'll leave it up to the members of the opposition. I don't want to do anything upsetting.

DR. MASSEY: If we can't talk about advanced ed, you certainly can't talk about Treasury.

MS GRAHAM: Fair enough.

All right. I'll move on to another area. I know that there's legislation that, if it hasn't already been introduced, will be introduced to amalgamate AOSTRA and a number of other agencies under your ministry's jurisdiction, and I understand that the new agency that will be created will be to promote and research and develop various sources of energy. I'm wondering if wind power will be one of those sources of energy.

DR. TAYLOR: Yeah, legislation has been introduced. What we're doing is changing the structure so that AOSTRA, AERI, and the Forest Research Advisory Council will be responsible through ASRA, because the Alberta Science and Research Authority is the science policy-setting body for this province legislatively. So it's necessary that these other agencies understand what the overall science policy is for the province.

Now, in regard to AOSTRA, of course that is the oil sands group. In the legislation we are drastically changing its mandate. It will disappear as AOSTRA and become the energy research council, because under their mandate AOSTRA could only work in the oil sands area. It will be the energy research council. They will have their own board, and that board will determine where the dollars are spent in terms of energy research. They will determine it on the basis of excellence of science. So if there's a wind research project

that displays excellence of science, I'm sure that board will very seriously consider funding it, because we want to really expand the mandate beyond just traditional energy sources such as oil and gas.

We might look at fuel cells. I mean, the board might get an excellence-in-science project on fuel cells. That would be something that would be within the mandate of that board. So the energy research council will have a very broad mandate. The projects they fund will be based on excellence of science, and the board will make those recommendations.

MS GRAHAM: All right. Thank you for that.

Would it be fair to say, then, that under the current proposed budget there aren't any specific dollars allocated to the development of wind power energy per se?

DR. TAYLOR: It would be illegal today for AOSTRA to have dollars specified for wind power because it's outside the AOSTRA mandate. As soon as we get the act through and their mandate changes, then it will be up to AOSTRA to determine how their budget will be spent, and if they wish to allocate some of that budget for wind power research, it will be up to the board to do that.

MS GRAHAM: But as things stand now, there's no other venue or agency that could . . .

DR. TAYLOR: No. Theoretically, a good research project could come to the science and research fund very easily. There's nothing to preclude a wind power project from coming to the science and research fund, and it would be handled as any other project that we see: go through peer review, and then a decision would be made based on the peer review.

MS GRAHAM: But it would be something that would have to be proposed from outside. It's not something that government is promoting.

DR. TAYLOR: Oh, yes. The only group that really generates research in that way would be the Alberta Research Council, which is sometimes more directive in their research.

Now, this is a very interesting issue actually. It's one of the issues that we're dealing with now with the creation of the new science and engineering fund. It's going to have, say, 5 percent this year, so that's approximately \$25 million this year, but obviously by the time it gets up and running, it probably won't spend that. That's going to create some freedom in my budget, because some of the projects that were coming to the science and research budget will now be going to the science and research fund.

Now, do we as a department and as the Alberta Science and Research Authority become more proactive with the freeing up of funds in the direction of the research that we want done? That's an interesting discussion that we haven't had yet but that we will be having as we move down this road. How proactive do we want to become in suggesting that a scientist or a group of scientists submit a project in wind power, for instance, or fuel cells or some kind of biomedical area? How proactive will we become? That's a very good question that I recognize as a question and don't have an answer for but recognize that we will be discussing it as we move down the road on this.

MS GRAHAM: A positive problem to have.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Those are all my questions.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The next member who has indicated he wishes to have some questions is Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. Thanks, Mr. Minister. I have lots of comments and questions for you this evening, and as usual I'm sure we'll have a good discussion.

I want to start, though, by talking about the scope of what it is that your department is up against. I read a statistic the other day that claimed that eight years ago there were only 50 pages on the Internet. There were 50 pages posted on the Internet eight years ago, and the estimation is that today there are 50 million. If that's not a bit of a wake-up call to anybody that's wondering about why it is that government has to pay attention to innovation and science technology and to IT in particular, I don't know what would be. Even the Prime Minister – I was reading notes from a speech by the Prime Minister, and he said that when he first became Prime Minister seven years ago, e-commerce was a typo. Of course, now we're looking at multibillions of dollars being exchanged in that way. [interjection] I didn't mean to provoke the Treasurer with that comment.

I mention these things because as we've talked over the last couple of years in debates on legislation sponsored by your department or in budget debates, I've talked about the absence and what I will claim to be a continuing absence of a comprehensive, pangovernment policy on science. I will say that you're getting closer. I think that the initiatives that will be bringing energy and agriculture and other research functions under one umbrella take us closer.

9:19

What I was really looking for in your business plans – and I have to comment just briefly on the exchange between yourself and my colleague from Mill Woods. Budgets themselves are very political documents, so of course there are politics involved in this discussion, but I think the essential point was: where are the linkages? Nothing in asking that diminishes the importance that our caucus attaches to appropriate science policy, including our celebration of the newly announced foundation. But building on that exchange, what I was looking for, to see evidence of real movement towards this across government co-ordination, would be some performance measures or even some strategy statements that said: these are the linkages.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

We understand what our relationship is with Learning or with Justice or with Treasury, for example, and here are some strategies that we're going to put into place, and here are some performance measures so we'll know whether or not these strategies are appropriate. For example, I'm thinking of things in Learning, some joint performance measures. Same measure, same strategy, both departments looking at research inputs and outputs. We don't see that.

We don't see joint planning in terms of student retention. The goals and the strategy statements that I read – for example, under goal 1, "Increase the number of K-12 students who consider technology as a viable career opportunity." That's a great objective. Linking it to some of the strategies – unfortunately, the only performance measure that I can find in your business plan that links to it is the one that says:

Develop a measure showing the number of grade 12 students who have completed course requirements for entry into science and technology programs at the post-secondary level.

Now, that's a surrogate measure. I don't think it's a very strong one, and it's different again from those in Learning in terms of student retention and technology and career streams.

There could be some joint plans with Treasury. There is a brief discussion about tax policy. You know, certainly there are some things that this province could do that could be more aggressive when it comes to tax policy. So, again, to give evidence of that linkage and that sensitivity across government and that awareness that it has to be strategic and across government, I would have liked to have seen some things that say: yes, these are the tax-based initiatives.

In the last federal budget, for example, we saw a reduction in capital gains taxes. We saw a reduction in corporate taxes. There's been talk here in Alberta about perhaps reducing the small business tax or raising the threshold which defines what a small business is. Maybe we could look at some performance measures and initiate some things out of this department that would truly leverage the federal initiatives and build on what's possible, what's in the control of the provincial government, and put those right in the business plan in terms of targets.

We could also turn to Justice, which may not immediately come to mind as a department that you should be doing some joint planning with, but I would argue that with e-commerce comes e-crime with the challenges in terms of policing. We've just seen internationally some of the largest e-commerce sites in the world threatened and challenged by, we're told, a 15-year-old kid from Montreal, if we are to believe the FBI reports. Certainly electronic security, electronic signatures, fingerprinting, strategies in terms of enforcement, perhaps even definitions of crimes or interjurisdictional co-operation statements are all things that I would expect to see again that would give evidence of this awareness that it has to be right across the government. So when I offer the criticism that I'm still not seeing this, those are the kinds of things that I'd be looking for.

Let me ask you a question about goal 6.

DR. TAYLOR: What page are you on?

MR. SAPERS: Actually, before I get to goal 6, let me try to do this in some kind of order. I kind of mentioned goal 1 when I talked about the qualified workforce and some of the student initiatives, the K to 12 initiatives.

I look at goal 2, one phrase, one sentence. It's on page 192 of the big budget book. If you go down to the third bullet under Strategies, it says, "Leverage investment in the Alberta Research Council." That's a strategy tied to the objective of Alberta having "a quality science, research, and information and communications technology infrastructure." You've heard me talk about being a fan of ARC in the past, and that position hasn't changed, but I didn't quite understand what this meant. So if in your comments you could tell me what exactly you mean by leveraging investment in ARC. I know that ARC has its own business plan and its own set of strategic goals and objectives, but this wasn't really clear to me, and it didn't become clear as I read through the rest of your business plan.

Goal 6. I heard some of the previous discussion, and there was a good line of questioning from at least two other members of this committee in looking at goal 6, but what I heard I'm sure is not your intent. If it is, then it's new to me. My understanding has been that Innovation and Science is not simply the supplier of bits and pieces, that it's not a matter of just sort of being the public-sector CompuSmart. I could have picked Future Shop or any of the other suppliers, so I'm not putting in a plug here for one vendor or another. You're not simply a hardware or software consultant to

government. You know, it's much more than that. It's really presenting a leadership capacity. In fact, I think those words are used in your strategy statements. The question about the role of the department when it comes to providing technology to other government initiatives is, I think, much more than simply responding to requests for hardware or software advice. So if I misunderstood your comments, maybe you could elaborate on them a little bit and talk a little bit more about that leadership role that I believe is really behind goal 6.

Goal 7, "Albertans recognize the benefits of innovation and science." One of the key performance measures there is to "continue to develop measure on public perception of the benefits of innovation and science." The first thing I thought of was Tang. You know, when NASA was challenged years ago as to what the space program has contributed to everyday life in America, I think the answer from one of the administrators at the time was Tang, that they developed a powdered orange juice. You know, it seems to me we've come a long way since then, so when I see that one of your key performance measures under such an important goal is to "continue to develop measure on public perception" – I guess what I'm asking for is a progress report.

If I can jump from there to some of the other performance measures. Because so many of your performance measures in the business plan are really under construction, maybe you could give us performance report updates as these measures are being developed and as they're being field-tested. You know, I haven't counted them up – and we could do that exercise – but I believe that a majority of the performance measures are under development, and I understand that. I understand that it's new and it's new to this government. Maybe you could let us know what ideas you're testing, how they're being tested, where you're getting feedback on performance measures, and what you're using as baselines for comparison. At some point you're going to have to present the data, so you're going to have to say: here's where we started, here's where we hope to go, and this is the measurement of difference and how we know we got there.

I could make the same comments, you know, as I said, for so many of the other goals. I would hope that next year we're going to get to the discussion of performance measures and will be able to actually look back and say: "Okay. Here's where we met or didn't meet or exceeded the goal, and this is how we know. This is how we're going to change it."

Also, Mr. Minister, I have some questions for you based on the consolidated income statement for your ministry.

9:29

DR. TAYLOR: What page is that?

MR. SAPERS: I'm looking at page 197, again in the budget book. It's the consolidated statement. It's not in the budget detail. I have some questions that I'm sure are easily explained, but the answers weren't that obvious to me at first reading.

If you look in terms of transfers, the internal government transfers . . .

DR. TAYLOR: Is it page 297 or 197?

MR. SAPERS: Well, it's 197 in the spiral-bound book. I think it's called *New Century: Bold Plans*. It couldn't say "maintaining the balance" anymore because that was too close to the Liberal plan, I think; wasn't it?

DR. TAYLOR: I've got it. Okay.

MR. SAPERS: Okay. If you look at internal government transfers, I think I understand the difference there. There's a pretty big variance between last year and this year, but what I don't understand is the variance in transfers from the government of Canada. Budget 2000 is showing zero expected transfers in that line item. The forecast is \$150,000, and it's predicted to go up to \$1.6 million in 2000-2001. So I'm just wondering why that big swing and if there's some assistance that we can offer in terms of letting the feds know that maybe they've ignored Alberta in one regard or another. When I see a million dollar swing in transfers, I want to know why.

Also, the investment income. I'm wondering why there's about a million dollar difference there as well. When we look at the energy, research, and development expense, it seems to be a pretty huge variation as well, and then it continues to go down. I would have thought that with the consolidation that line item actually might go up.

So those are some general questions I have. I don't know how much time I have.

THE CHAIRMAN: We're down to about four minutes.

MR. SAPERS: We're down to about four minutes? Well, the minister could always take 20 minutes now. He could be the next person recognized, because we don't really have a global agreement on this within 20 minutes stuff. I would hope that he'd have a chance to respond to some of those questions, and since I only have a couple of minutes left, I'll leave it at those initial ones.

Thanks.

DR. TAYLOR: Great. I made some notes here as you were going through, so I will follow through with them. If there are things that I miss, if you would provide us some written questions after, we will get you answers for them.

Let me respond. First of all, you talked about goal 2 on page 192, "Leverage investment in the Alberta Research Council." You asked a question about that. From my department to the Alberta Research Council goes approximately, roughly, \$26 million a year. The question is: what is the leverage that we get out of those dollars to the Alberta Research Council? Unfortunately, Red Deer-South was supposed to be here this evening, but he got a stomach flu and was unable to attend. So I will comment on this a bit and then refer the question onward to him.

Last year the Alberta Research Council better than doubled the dollars that we gave them from private sources. That's one form of leverage. Also, there is the necessity for what I would call public-good research that the private sector will not support. I see that fundamentally right now in Alberta that is one of the roles of the Alberta Research Council. They have to have some funding to do that public-good research. There are a number of areas one might want to look at, maybe some environmental types of research that are so far away from commercialization but are necessary to be done and that a private-sector group will not sponsor, will not be a partner in it. So there is a necessity for public-good research.

With the science and research fund we average, as I said, \$3.89 for every \$1 that we invested last year, but that does not mean we're necessarily looking for that kind of leverage from the Alberta Research Council, because of the nature of the council and because of the fact that there needs to be this what I call public-good research being done.

I'll pass this on to the Member for Red Deer-South, who's the chair of the Alberta Research Council, and we will get him to provide a further response to you.

Goal 6. I think you mentioned us just being suppliers of technol-

ogy. I was referring to that in the sense of Wellnet only. For Wellnet we are only the supplier of technology. Health and Wellness determines policy and priorities for Wellnet. They come to us and say: can it be done? Okay? So we are the suppliers of technology only for Wellnet.

On the broader government perspective we are the group that provides the strategic direction and the policy, through the chief information officer, to all of government. The chief information officer is the leader in that area in providing policy, providing strategy, providing direction. He's the ultimate the buck stops with him guy when it comes to this particular area. As I said earlier, there is the Chief Information Officers' Council. Each department has a chief information officer, and they meet regularly to solve and deal with the issues. So it's not just him arbitrarily saying: this is going to be the policy; this is the way we're going to go.

THE CHAIRMAN: Excuse me just a minute. I'm at the will of the committee here. We did make some decisions at the beginning of this. Is it the wish of the committee to let the minister continue before I recognize the next speaker? We were sort of going back and forth, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HERARD: Yeah. Let him go.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. We'll start the clock again, and you finish off, hon. minister. Then I'll recognize Calgary-Egmont.

DR. TAYLOR: Okay. Thank you.

Goal 6. I think I've answered your question there.

The issue dealing with transfer of funds between the federal government and the government of Alberta. I would say that the federal government has not had a major presence in Alberta, for instance, with the National Research Council. They virtually have zero presence. In fact, I met with Art Carty several months ago, and on the advice of and after meetings with the university we had a very, very tough conversation with him. Art is the head of the NRC. Just this very evening, earlier – I think you were at the same function as I was at over at the Shaw Conference Centre – I had the opportunity to sit with Anne McLellan, who has been a good supporter of the science and research initiatives. The federal government is putting out a huge initiative in what they're calling genomics, what we're calling proteomics. They're going to establish five centres across Canada. After Toronto, we are recognized across Canada as the second leading centre in genomics in this country. Will we get one of the five NRC centres? I don't know.

9:39

I had the meeting with Ms McLellan tonight, and that was the topic of our conversation: how can you help us work with John Manley, work with Art Carty, to get one of these five centres here in Alberta. Now, she is very co-operative, recognizes the value, and has said that she will do that. But up to now, up to today, the federal government for whatever reason has been very slack in supporting science and research initiatives in Alberta.

I give you the example of the cyclotron which is going into Saskatchewan. I believe the federal government is putting \$60 million – I think it's \$63 million – into the cyclotron or synchrotron in Saskatchewan. I mean, it doesn't make sense for it to be in Saskatchewan because the science isn't there; okay? Maybe it should be in Toronto, maybe it should be in Vancouver, maybe it should be in Alberta, but it doesn't make scientific sense for it to be there. But that's where it's going. So there are political decisions made at the federal level on science policy and science investment.

What we need is some real action on behalf of the feds to see that we get one of these five centres, and I would encourage you, I would encourage Ms McLellan, I would encourage all of your colleagues to talk to your federal colleagues and say: "The science is here. We're recognized as the second in Canada. The science is here. This is where probably the second major centre should be." Because the centres apparently, from what we understand, are going to be funded at different levels. Now, if they give us the fifth centre, the fifth-funded centre, the lowest funded centre, it will be totally inappropriate to do that to us. Now, will they do it? I don't know. They funded Saskatchewan and Manitoba farmers. They didn't give us a cent for our farmers. So who knows where the federal government will go.

MR. SAPERS: But you don't want to make any political statements.

DR. TAYLOR: No. But I will encourage you to by all means encourage your federal counterparts to be sure that we get either the first or second funded centre in the country. That has to be in Alberta, because I can tell you that the synchrotron in Saskatchewan cannot exist without Alberta money. Saskatchewan has made it very clear to us that unless Alberta comes in and buys several light beams in that centre, they can't exist. They'll go broke. There will not be operating costs. The question is: how do we co-operate with Saskatchewan on the synchrotron? How does Saskatchewan co-operate with us on the genome project? I hope Saskatchewan recognizes the value of co-operation, and I hope the federal government recognizes the value of co-operation as well.

So those are a number of issues that we are dealing with. In regard to performance measures, there are a number of measures that I think are important simply because, as I stated earlier, they indicate the state of the innovation system in Alberta. We do not control those. For instance, the number of scientists and engineers in the province is very important. We actually have a chart on that someplace in here. I can't remember where it is offhand, but it is in here. We have more per capita engineers than any other province, more per thousand, I believe it is, than any other province in Canada, and that's an important measure of the innovation economy, because the innovation economy needs engineers. If you don't have the engineers, in particular – and that's computer engineers, electrical engineers, all kinds of engineers in various specialties – you will not have the science and the jobs in Alberta. So certainly there are some general measures in the innovation system that are important to note, although we do not control them.

I mean, we do not control in this department the number of engineers that come out of the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary. Hopefully we can provide young people with information so that they become more interested in science. But even as we go into the science awareness project which will start next fall – I mean, you did ask about that. We are presently drawing together, as we speak, the various organizations in Alberta having to do with science awareness, so that will include the Science Alberta Foundation, it will include the Alberta science hot lines. I don't know if you're familiar with those or not, perhaps if you have younger children; I don't have them anymore. The hot lines are where kids can phone up . . .

MR. SAPERS: Headquartered in Glenora.

DR. TAYLOR: Oh, perfect. You know all about it then, so I won't have to describe it.

There are private-sector groups – for instance, APEGGA has a science awareness program. So we're just in the process of identify-

ing all of the science awareness groups in the province. We will pull them together over the period of the next several months and develop a science awareness program.

Now, does that mean that more kids will actually take engineering at university? I can't say. Maybe they will. Obviously we cannot force kids, as much as we want science awareness. Even if kids are very aware of science, we cannot force them and say, well, you're going to do engineering, or you're going to do a BSc in biotechnology, or you're going to do an MBA in technology management. All we can do is make young people aware of the opportunities, make them aware of the excitement around science. For instance, this summer there's a science camp down in the Drumheller region at Dinosaur park. I think it's called Dinosaur park science camp or something along that line. We are funding that science camp this summer because it brings young kids in from Alberta and theoretically it gets them excited about science and what science can do for them.

Does that mean more of those young people will do engineering or a bachelor of science? I don't know. Even if they don't, it doesn't make it a nonvaluable program. Simply because they don't go into it from a professional perspective does not mean to say that it's not valuable. It's like being aware of the arts. Because I'm not a professional artist doesn't mean that I can't go off to the Citadel Theatre and enjoy the Aberhart play, that has just concluded.

MR. SAPERS: Did you see it?

DR. TAYLOR: Yeah, I did see it and very much enjoyed it. I must say that I did buy the tickets at the ticket wicket there on the very day of the play, so I bought them perhaps a little cheaper than I should have. Always being a fiscal conservative, you see, I try and do things as cheaply as possible.

Just because I'm not a professional artist doesn't mean that I can't go and enjoy the arts. Just because a young person isn't a professional scientist or doesn't go into science and engineering doesn't mean he can't be made aware of and understand and enjoy the benefits of science. I guess that's what I'm saying, but we still need to have measures of the innovation system, even if we do not control those measures, even if we do not control those outputs.

Now, cross-government. In fact, we are working with other departments. We have a management committee that meets with Learning's management committee as we speak, just starting to meet with them to develop measures to develop cross-government initiatives. Now, that's the first one that we're starting. We will start and obviously are going to work with the departments that are closest to us initially, so Learning is the obvious one to start with and get it up and running, see how it works, experiment with it, and see what we can do with it.

Certainly Justice is a very important department, as you pointed out correctly, as we move into security issues. I know that the Justice minister – I've had a number of conversations with him about security, and one of the issues we're dealing with that Justice will be closely involved with is electronic signatures. How do we use electronic signatures in this province and make sure they're secure, make sure you can access information through your electronic signature and that only you can do that and not me? We're going to need legislation on electronic signatures eventually. So it's a very, very important concept, and certainly Justice needs to be involved with that.

9:49

In the various areas where different departments are involved, we will certainly be working with the various departments. In terms of

Economic Development, we work very, very closely with Economic Development. As I said earlier – I'm not sure if you were here then – we have 10 staff that we share who work for both departments. It's a very unique relationship inside government, where you have staff who are co-operatively working for two departments and two deputy ministers. I'm not sure of the official title. It's a technology commercialization group headed by Mel Wong, and Mel Wong and his 10 staff members work for both departments. When the Minister of Economic Development needs to move forward with technology commercialization, that staff is there to help. So we have a very close working relationship with Economic Development as well.

So there are a number of cross-government initiatives already happening, and more will happen as we work through this.

You must remember that this department was just created in May of 1999. At that stage the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute was brought into this department. We are in the process of developing very close working relationships with the department of agriculture because some of the staff is still housed in the department of agriculture. Agriculture still has the research stations, so the question arises: what is the relationship between the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, which is a research funder, and a research station, which is a research doer? It becomes a bit like the relationship with ASRA and the Alberta Research Council. The Alberta Research Council is a research performer. The Alberta Science and Research Authority is the group that determines science policy. That relationship has worked out, and it works very effectively.

As soon as we get a new organization like this AARI, then we're working on a new relationship. You know, what is the relationship of AARI to ASRA? What is the relationship of ASRA to the department of agriculture, of AARI to the department of agriculture? We can say the same thing about the Energy Research Council. What is the relationship of it to ASRA and to the department of energy? Just two weeks ago we had another group added to us, the forestry research council. We haven't even started, in a sense, thinking how the forestry group is necessarily going to fit in. Those are the questions we're dealing with. What is the relationship between the forestry research council and ASRA? What is our relationship to the department of forestry and the forestry research council? How does that relationship fit together so we have a system that is seamless and a system that works?

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, do you have a couple of questions?

MR. HERARD: I have a couple of observations.

DR. TAYLOR: Could I just ask a question? What is the time frame we're working on, Madam Chairman?

MR. SAPERS: We've got all night.

DR. TAYLOR: Oh, no.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's, give or take, around 10 o'clock. When those that want to ask questions have finished.

DR. TAYLOR: Okay. Well, if anyone wants to submit written questions, we will provide written answers.

THE CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I remember when

the department was first started and there was no budget, there was no staff, there were people seconded from the research council, I believe, and here we are today. In sort of political/government terms not very much time has elapsed, because there are things that take forever to change and this is not one of them. So I want to congratulate you, I think, for being able to pull this off and to have brought some initiatives to this province that I think will pay tremendous dividends in the future. When we're in our rocking chairs, we can think back upon these years, and perhaps it'll be one of the more important things that have got done. I'm talking about the \$500 million endowment fund as well as the ICORE initiative and so on.

I want to go a bit further on what you brought up – I didn't realize you were involved in this – with respect to trying to attract our youth to consider careers in innovation and science and information technology, in particular the girls. Your deputy minister will have heard this speech about six times now, and I hope that one of these times he'll take it upon himself to get it done. I really believe that you can attract kids by using the technology that you are trying to be a proponent of, and I'm talking about, you know, a web site that would turn kids on to careers in information technology and science and math and so on. I don't know how many times, like I said – the deputy minister says that it's 10 times. I really believe that it's important to do that, because most of our students don't know what is available in this province. If we could celebrate the tremendous opportunities that are available in this province, showcase them on a site and turn kids on, as you said, in junior high or even earlier, then I think we could attract more kids to those sorts of careers.

I think there's even a more important aspect to all of this, and that's the mentorships that we could establish via the web with professionals in those particular careers who are willing to take on the mentorship of our youth all the way to the postsecondary system. What you've done, then, is you've established a relationship with those young people who are probably then going to have some loyalty to you and in fact perhaps even produce a brain gain instead of a brain drain. So I think it's extremely important to use the tools that are there and to start using the web. Because let's face it; we have to be able to reach every single student in this province, and you're not going to do that with a little program here and a little program there. So I'm just appealing to you and your deputy to think about this one again. I know that there are corporations out there who have made overtures to me that they're prepared to mentor in this area and establish relationships, so I just want to encourage you to maybe look at that.

DR. TAYLOR: Could I just quickly respond to that? I have just in the last month – it'll be quick, Madam Chairman – challenged my communications director, Val Mellesmoen, with this task. So that's how recent this is. Certainly, as I said, we are going to pull together everybody, all the different organizations, and we have started to develop a kids' web site. It's just in its initial stages. It started during Science and Technology Week, and it is focused on careers, but as I say, it's just in its initial stages. So we need to flesh it out and keep going. As well, we have an ASRA web site that is quite creative. But this whole awareness issue that you're talking about we are just starting to discuss now, and we need to move forward with it, which we will do.

MR. HERARD: Good. That's exciting. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: I was going to move that the committee rise and report.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I have a couple more questions.

MR. RENNER: Well, my understanding was that we agreed that we would rise and report at 10 o'clock. It is 10 o'clock.

MR. SAPERS: There's no standing agreement on that.

MR. RENNER: Well, I moved that we rise and report.

MR. SAPERS: I think you're being recognized out of order if we go back and forth.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, we have for the last two hours worked very well going back and forth. I think everybody that indicated to the chair or the vice-chair that they wished to speak has done so. The minister did say that he'd put it in writing, that he would get back to you. You will have the opportunity in the House. The minister I think spent considerable time answering everyone's questions, and I think it's been good dialogue and good back and forth tonight. Let's leave it on a high note.

9:59

MR. SAPERS: It's not a matter of it being a high note or a low note. The fact is that it has been a useful discussion, and there's no particular . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: The point is two things. Everyone that identified they wanted to speak has done so and has had the appropriate time.

MR. SAPERS: I raised my hand and you didn't recognize me.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm recognizing the Member for Medicine Hat. He is the one that is recognized, and I'm going to go with that.

Hon. member, do you want to repeat what you just said?

MR. RENNER: I move that the committee rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in favour that the committee now rise and report?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 8, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/08

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, we give thanks for the bounty of our province: our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The visitors I was to introduce have not arrived yet, so I beg your indulgence to have the opportunity to introduce them under Introduction of Guests.

Thank you.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I beg leave this afternoon to present the following petitions that have been received for private bills under Standing Order 93(2):

- (1) the petition of the Grand Lodge of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the Dominion of Canada for the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the Province of Alberta Repeal Act;
- (2) the petition of William Roper Hull Child and Family Services for the William Roper Hull Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 2000;
- (3) the petition of the town of Pincher Creek and the municipal district of Pincher Creek No. 9 for the Westcastle Development Authority Repeal Act;
- (4) the petition of Larry Gilchrist on behalf of the Calgary Municipal Heritage Properties Authority for the Calgary Municipal Heritage Properties Authority Amendment Act, 2000;
- (5) the petition of the Calgary Foundation for the repeal and replacement of the Calgary Foundation Act.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to present a petition to the Assembly today signed by 238 residents of Edmonton, Spruce Grove, and Legal, all of whom "urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]." This is on behalf of 227 people from Alberta from the Edmonton area, Leduc, Sherwood Park, Plamondon, Jarvie, Westlock, Drayton Valley, Edson, St. Albert, Cold Lake, Beaumont, and the town of Gibbons.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 220 people from the Edmonton, Spruce Grove, and Stony Plain area. These people are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to present to the Assembly on behalf of 234 residents of Edmonton, Gibbons, and Sherwood Park, citizens who will not be manipulated by government propaganda, who have signed a petition urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd present a petition signed by 219 citizens from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and Beaumont urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition signed by 595 Albertans; 354 of these are University of Alberta students. Their signatures were collected by Melissa Johnson, whom I'll be introducing to the House a little later on. She collected these signatures within a week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition I presented to the House yesterday be now read back.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday to the Legislative Assembly be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would ask that the petition I presented the other day regarding the privatization of health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition which I presented to this Assembly yesterday urging the government to stop the move towards privatizing health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to have the petition that I presented to the Legislative Assembly on March 7 concerning privatization of health care now read and received. Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition I introduced yesterday with respect to support for public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I request that the petition I presented on March 7 now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on March 7 regarding private health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition

I presented yesterday signed by 241 Albertans calling on this Assembly to ban private, for-profit hospitals be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today six copies of the following four documents: under the Brand Act, the annual report of the delegated authority for 1998-99; under the Stray Animals Act, the annual report of the delegated authority for 1998-99; under the Livestock Identification and Brand Inspection Act, the annual report for the delegated authority for 1998-99; and under the Livestock and Livestock Products Act, the annual report of the delegated authority for 1998-99.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table today a letter that I've written to Mr. Murdoch Davis, the editor-in-chief of the *Edmonton Journal*. This letter is to correct some misinformation generated by a recent Caledon Institute of Social Policy paper that was in an article: "For-profit hospitals raise health costs, think tank says." This will cover NAFTA, WTO, and provincial jurisdiction and responsibility.

1:40

MR. LOUGHEED: I'm pleased to table five copies of the quarterly newsletter for the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. A copy can be obtained by any Albertan by calling 1-800-272-8841.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings today. I've got a set of 11 letters all written by Edmontonians to this government asking it to drop Bill 11 and ban private, for-profit hospitals under any name.

The second tabling is the appropriate copies and relevant attachments of a letter that I've written this morning to Robert Clark, Ethics Commissioner, asking him to investigate the possible breach of the Conflicts of Interest Act by the Member for Calgary-Currie. Your office has also been delivered a copy of it, Mr. Speaker, as I speak.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. They are from Diane Casimir and Sandy Schultz of Calgary and Gillian Cardwell of Cochrane. All three people are adamantly opposed to the proposed development in the Spray Valley.

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

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a letter that I've written to the Premier wherein I request that he clarify the contradiction by his caucus with regard to the five principles of the Canada Health Act.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of letters from Michael Geis, Ruth Arkless, Dennis Faust, and Randy Laing, all expressing their concerns that they do not want their tax dollars to go to profits for shareholders of private, for-profit hospitals.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a document in which the Premier promises to continue his support of all seniors in Alberta, that promise made May 1, 1993.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is a letter that I wrote in August of 1999 to the Hon. Stockwell Day requesting that the provincial government consider a reduction in the 9 cent per litre provincial fuel tax as a means of offering Albertans tax relief from rising gasoline prices.

The second tabling is a very interesting document for all members of the House. It is dated September 16, 1991. It is from Alberta consumer and corporate affairs, and it indicates that both the Alberta Research Council and the department of labour were looking at the durability of pine shakes in that year.

Thank you.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of a letter from Mr. Peter Lown, chair of the Alberta Law Reform Institute. This letter points out the very great similarity between Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, and the legislation passed in 1996 in Saskatchewan. The letter goes on to highlight additional protections in Alberta's legislation.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of the Health Facilities Licensing Act. The Saskatchewan legislation was passed in 1996 and proclaimed in 1998 and gives the Saskatchewan government the authority and process to license private health and surgical facilities in the province.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'd like to table an agreement by the House leader of the government of Alberta and the House Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition and the interim leader and House leader of the third party in the House and the independent member for Edmonton-Castle Downs dated March 6, 2000, and entitled Designated Supply Subcommittee Agreement. The chair would remind all members that this agreement is to be read in conjunction with the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta, which of course take precedence.

To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, the hon. member was in the House yesterday when the chair indicated very, very directly that henceforth in this Assembly individual names will not be used, and we will refer to the proper title and/or the constituency of the hon. member. I will interject and rise immediately when an hon. member says somebody's personal name. You know what the rules are.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the Hon. Marc Racicot,

governor of the state of Montana. The governor is visiting our province today to sign a memorandum of understanding between Alberta and Montana that commits our two jurisdictions to work together on common issues. Accompanying him today are Dr. Peter Blouke, state director of Montana's Department of Commerce; Mr. Ralph Peck, state director of Montana's Department of Agriculture; Mr. Mark Bisom, director of the office of trade and international relations within the Montana Department of Commerce; Mr. Stephen Maly, research analyst in Montana's legislative services division; and Ms Lisa Bobbie Schreiber Hughes, who has served for some time as Alberta's consul general of the United States of America.

Today's signing builds on a close and productive relationship between Alberta and Montana, and I'm pleased that Governor Racicot and his party are here today to mark the occasion. I would ask our honoured guests, seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a constituent of mine, Kunal Kaliandasani, who is job shadowing me today. Kunal is a grade 12 student enrolled in the international baccalaureate program at Harry Ainlay high school. He's seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you 66 outstanding grade 6 students from St. Matthews Catholic elementary school. They're accompanied today by their teachers, Ms Rena Hanchuk, Mr. Ihor Karpa, and Mr. Luigi Cuglietta. I also would like to introduce parent and teacher aides Mrs. Debbie Caputo, Ms Marian Remenda, and Mr. Steven Yeo. They're seated in both the public and the members' galleries. With your permission I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

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

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you. On your behalf, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon 23 grade 6 students from the Neerlandia public Christian school. They're accompanied by teachers and group leaders Mr. Jim Bosma, Mrs. Shirley Blum, Mrs. Sheryl Krikke, Mr. Albert Mast, Mrs. Wilma Slomp, Mrs. Jeannette Bosma, and Mrs. Johanne Leonard with her preschooler daughter Stephanie Leonard. They're seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through to Members of the Legislative Assembly two grade 6 classes from Swanavon school in my constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti. They are accompanied today by principal Lance Therrien, teacher Jay Smith, student teachers Christine Watson and Kerry Spicer, parents Mrs. Cunningham and Mr. Stretch, and teacher Marlyss Paszkowski, and yes, her husband is our colleague the MLA for Grande Prairie-Smoky and the

Minister of Municipal Affairs. They are seated in the members' gallery, I believe. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the House Maya Fujii, a 17-year-old Japanese exchange student who is spending a year in Edmonton as a guest of the Rotary Club of Edmonton Gateway. Maya is attending grade 10 at Louis St. Laurent high school, and in the true spirit of Rotary she is volunteering as a ski instructor with the Alberta Disabled Skiers Association and working with the children at the Garneau after school care program. I would ask that she now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me today to introduce through you to the Assembly a person I have a great amount of pride in, actually another elected official of the Smith family. She is a school trustee with the Foothills school division just south of Calgary. I would ask Kimberly to stand – she is accompanied by her mother – and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a hardworking individual, a businessman in the city who holds the distinction of being the current president of the Alberta Liberal Party. If Rick Miller would stand and receive the warm welcome of the House, all sides of the House.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce two young Albertans, both of whom are sitting in the public gallery. One of them, Melissa Johnson, is my constituent and a graduate student at the University of Alberta. Between her classes she was able to collect 354 signatures on a petition to this Assembly calling on it to ban private, for-profit hospitals. She is accompanied by Brent Tychy. I'm pleased to introduce him to the Assembly as someone who went to elementary school with one of my nephews. With your permission I'll ask the guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, let's please try and pay very careful attention to the rules of decorum.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier claimed that he had consulted with health care economists about his private hospitals bill. Well-respected, impartial health care economists from across Canada are giving the Premier's private hospitals scheme the thumbs-down, just like Albertans right across this province. The only person deluded by this government's propa-

ganda campaign of spreading malicious misinformation is the Premier himself. My questions are to the Premier. Why should Albertans believe the Premier when even these economists are questioning what his motivation is for putting the entire Canadian health care system at risk?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, there is no private hospital scheme. There is the protection of health care in this province, the publicly funded system as we know it.

Relative to the consultation I alluded to widespread consultation. There have been reports on both sides of this issue. There have been studies. There have been opinions. I would remind the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition that we initiated that consultation. We initiated first with the blue-ribbon panel report, then with the policy statement that was sent out for the comments of all Albertans and all Canadians for that matter. Indeed, there has been tremendous consultation on this particular bill.

I would remind the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition that this has nothing to do with private hospitals or private, for-profit hospitals as she so falsely proclaims, Mr. Speaker. It has something to do with the bill called the Health Care Protection Act.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why should Albertans believe this Premier when these economists are saying that the only people who will benefit are a few health care providers who stand to make windfall profits off the taxpayer?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if these economists have read the bill, but the bill is quite clear. Quite clear. Anything, everything that is done in the context of delivering health care services has to be done within the parameters of the Canada Health Act and within the parameters of the very, very stringent rules of the College of the Physicians and Surgeons and the very strict and stringent rules and regulations related to Alberta health care.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's deluding himself.

Given that doctors, economists, and Albertans all see through his private hospitals scheme, why would anyone believe this Premier?

MR. KLEIN: No. The only person deluding herself is the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, Mr. Speaker. The proof of her delusions is in the statements that she and members of her party, aided and abetted by the Friends of Medicare and the NDs and the Canadian Union of Public Employees – the proof is in this statement. Two days ago she said that the government is spending \$3 million to promote Bill 11. That's not true. That is not true. She must have gone to bed the night before and woke up and said: well, \$3 million is a good number; you know, I can pick it out of my dreams and bring it to the Legislative Assembly the next day.

She said that Albertans want answers and the government is afraid to give them. Well, that flies in the face of our phone-line ads, our web site, and the what we've heard document that answers most of the frequently asked questions.

She says: it looks like private operators bleeding red ink are pressuring the government to ram this legislation through. Nobody is pressuring us. This legislation comes about as a result of a request of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. She has alluded to special interest groups, but she hasn't had the courage to name any of them.

She said that the Alberta government has reduced health care services and funding for health care. That simply is not true. We have increased health care spending by 40 percent.

Mr. Speaker, here's the greatest delusion of all. She says that the

Premier is waging a propaganda campaign with public money on a scale never before seen in this province. Not true. The Getty government, of which she was a member, a member who spent over a million dollars promoting free trade – and, by the way, it's the same people opposing the bill that opposed free trade – and well over a million dollars promoting the Charlottetown accord.

Speaker's Ruling

Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: A plea again. A plea again to the question of decorum and the rules that everyone knows are there: rules about not naming individuals; rules about no preambles to supplementary questions; shouting, I guess; heckling; short answers; long questions; nonconfrontational questions; no debate in the questions; no debate in the answers. Boy, we can go through this time and time again, but let's proceed and do the honour that we should do to the citizens of Alberta, who have placed their trust in us by electing us to come here and conduct their affairs.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, it's not only economists and physicians who are saying that this plan is fatally flawed. It's members of the Premier's own caucus. The Member for Calgary-Glenmore, a member of the truth squads, has admitted that the Premier's private hospitals bill will result in a whole new layer of bureaucracy and administration. My first question is: when will this Premier stop deluding himself and admit that his private hospitals scheme is going to cost the taxpayers more?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: I'm not deluding myself, Mr. Speaker, because there is no private hospitals scheme. There is the Health Care Protection Act.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, how much will the new layer of bureaucracy cost the taxpayers of this province to administer these private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: No private hospitals, Mr. Speaker, so I assume there will be no new layers of bureaucracy.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why should Albertans be forced to pay these extra costs just so the Premier can use tax dollars to subsidize a few private operators?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would read the bill, she will find out that no one under the publicly funded system will be denied health care services. The only card that they will need is their health care insurance card. So I don't know what she's talking about in terms of extra costs.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know that their tax dollars are going to be going to these operators and it's going to cost them more.

Let's talk about special interests. Who's pulling the Premier's strings? Is it private hospital owners? Is it health care insurance providers? Is it the providers of private health care services? Who's pulling the Premier's strings?

MR. KLEIN: Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, nobody is pulling my strings or the strings of anyone else in this caucus. This bill is

predicated on what is the right thing to do. I guess if anyone is pulling strings, it would be the College of Physicians and Surgeons, a very esteemed organization that encouraged us to go ahead with this legislation.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit that these companies stand to make a windfall profit right out of the pockets of taxpayers?

MR. KLEIN: No, I don't think anyone's going to make windfall profits, Mr. Speaker. The legislation certainly isn't set up to allow that to happen. Windfall profits are reaped by those that have private hospitals, American style private hospitals, where people with a lot of money can jump the queue and get better treatment. That's what it's all about. We're trying to protect against that. The whole intent of this bill is to protect against that, but she doesn't like the bill, so she must be in support of private, for-profit hospitals.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will this Premier call an election so that Albertans can decide between us, the party that wants to protect and innovate within medicare, and this Premier, who is setting out to destroy it?

MR. KLEIN: We're not setting out to destroy it at all. That's why we had the courage and that's why we had the openness to send this bill out to every household in the province, Mr. Speaker. If we had something to hide, if we had something to be afraid of, we would have kept this from the public. It would have been strictly limited to the legislative Chamber. We wouldn't have warned people that this was coming out. We wouldn't have engaged the people in the debate through the policy statement.

As to the election, Mr. Speaker, there will be an election soon enough. The last time I faced the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition was during the leadership campaign. She didn't like the outcome, and if we have an election, she won't like the outcome there either.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. interim leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The chief physician of the Calgary regional health authority, that is CRHA, has an ownership interest in a private, for-profit clinic that has a CRHA contract, as do the chiefs of ophthalmology and radiology. The head of orthopedic surgery at Foothills hospital has an ownership interest in HRG, and HRG is aggressively lobbying for CRHA contracts and for the approval of Bill 11. My questions are to the Premier. Mr. Premier, why does Bill 11 do nothing to put a stop to these blatant conflicts of interest?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there are conflict rules that I believe apply to the RHAs relative to the specific instances to which the hon. member alludes. I'll have the Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, when the chief of staff – I believe that's the title – for the medical profession in the Calgary regional health authority was appointed or even considered for appointment, he made it quite clear that he had interests in I believe it was a diagnostic clinic or radiology lab. That was made public in Calgary. It was well known. It was noted when the Calgary regional health authority deliberated over the various candidates for the job.

Mr. Speaker, the second thing is that the Calgary regional health authority has adopted a clear procedure or protocol whereby when

it comes to any consideration of contracts, not particularly the doctors' but all contracts, he is absent from those particular discussions. He concentrates his work on co-ordinating and leading and being the chief of staff for the professional doctors in Calgary.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, the answer isn't given to my question. I'm saying: why is there no such provision in Bill 11?

Let me ask another question of the Premier. If the government wouldn't allow senior officials in the Department of Infrastructure to own companies bidding on paving contracts, then why is a comparable situation tolerated in the Calgary regional health authority?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness pointed out, they have some rules within the Calgary regional health authority that deal with these issues of conflict or perceived conflict.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the Premier: how can the Premier justify letting the Member for Calgary-Currie pose questions designed to promote public acceptance of Bill 11 when the member's spouse stands to financially benefit from the approval of Bill 11?

Speaker's Ruling Matters Referred to Ethics Commissioner

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, sit down. The hon. member tabled a document in the House, and I would refer the hon. member to the Conflicts of Interest Act of the province of Alberta, section 22(6)

Where a matter has been referred to the Ethics Commissioner under subsection (1), (3) or (4), neither the Legislative Assembly nor a committee of the Assembly shall inquire into the matter.

I understand that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has referred a matter to the Ethics Commissioner, and in listening to the words of the question addressed by the hon. member, he would be in violation of section 22(6) of the Conflicts of Interest Act in this House.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

2:10 Gasoline Prices

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Oil prices continue to rise even though we hear that OPEC will continue action to try and stabilize it. Yesterday the price of oil closed at \$33.98 U.S. per barrel. Because of that high price of oil, gasoline prices are skyrocketing. For instance, in the town of Hinton today we're at 67.9. That causes a lot of concern for my citizens and I'm sure for the rest of Alberta. To the Minister of Resource Development: why is the price of oil continuing to rise?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, this question is . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development has the floor.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, we have answered questions in this House regarding the price of a barrel of oil and a litre of gasoline, but I think the simple answer will be that it's supply and demand at the present time. On March 2 Venezuela and Mexico and the OPEC nations met and projected that they would increase production by 1.2 million barrels a day. It looks now as if this will not catch up in time to the undersupply that is in the world today. I think that the economists and those working on the volumes of oil that are present

in the world have probably underestimated the demand that's going on, not only in North America but throughout the world. Some other measure is going to have to be taken in the future to curb the undersupply and therefore bring the price of a barrel of oil probably more in line with what consumers can afford, to say the short form of it.

The other thing is that – perhaps the Treasurer doesn't agree with me – these prices probably are not healthy for the industry either. We'd be better off with a stabilized rate of anywhere from \$21 to \$25 a barrel. I know that sounds like blasphemy coming from the minister of energy.

The world is going to address this, and I'll be interested to hear what the supplemental question is.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, there may not be a supplemental question if we're seeking another opinion, which violates 409.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the hon. Treasurer. We know that there is a large component of final tax on gasoline. What are we going to do to try and reduce the tax on a litre of gasoline?

Thank you.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite correct. Tax makes up, depending on which province you're looking at, about 45 percent of the cost of a litre. You know, in Alberta we have the lowest tax per litre of any other government, but that still doesn't take the sting out of things at the pump when consumers are there. When we're filling our tank, you still feel the very clear pinch of those high prices.

We have in the province 9 cents per litre as a provincial tax. The federal government has about 10 cents for an excise tax, and then what is particularly odious is the fact that the GST federally is applied to all of the taxes and to all of the costs. So as the price of oil goes up, the federal government takes a greater share of that increase. In Alberta, as far as the gas tax, we don't take in more because the price goes up. We still only take 9 cents per litre. So there's a real difficulty there.

I'm hoping the federal government may be interested in a discussion. You know, they are often quick to come out with a matching program where they say: we'll spend this much; you provinces spend this much. Would they be willing to get into a discussion saying: "We'll reduce federal taxes this much. Will provinces reduce taxes with us?" It might be a good discussion.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is also to the same minister. What has the Provincial Treasurer done to communicate this message to the federal government?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, especially in this area of GST it's really irritating to think that the federal government would capitalize in an increasing way as the price per barrel of oil goes up and therefore gasoline goes up. By tacking on that 7 percent GST, they're just raking it in at an increased level, and we've got some problems with that.

I have recently communicated to Mr. Martin in writing on this to see if we can engage in the discussion. I understand that he's in his offices in Ottawa on Tuesday. He's been right here in Alberta yesterday and today, I think, and he's touring the country. I want to see what he thinks of some initial thoughts and proposals that I have already sent to him on that particular question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Doctors don't want this private hospitals scheme. Economists don't want it. Albertans don't want it. The only conclusion is that the Premier's strings are being pulled by those special interest backers who stand to benefit from this policy. Albertans just don't trust this Premier anymore. To the Premier: given that all the evidence shows that waiting lists won't go down, why is this Premier doing it?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no private hospital scheme. There is the Alberta Health Care Protection Act, a bill that has received first reading in this Legislature and a bill that will proceed to protect public health as we know it today, to make sure that all medical practices are within the parameters of the Canada Health Act, to make sure that there are strict rules and regulations relative to surgical clinics, including the 47 that exist today.

That's what it's all about. There is no private hospital scheme. As a matter of fact, the very first sentence following the preamble says: "No person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." There is no private hospital scheme. Mr. Speaker, I will repeat it. There is no private hospital scheme.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier used hip replacements to justify private hospitals and now we learn that these won't be allowed, why does the Premier still insist on putting his approved surgical facilities, also known as private hospitals, in place?

MR. KLEIN: They are not also known as private hospitals. They are known as surgical facilities. Mr. Speaker, this is simply another untruth. This is part of the malicious misinformation campaign being conducted by the Liberal opposition. When they use "private hospitals," they are saying something that is absolutely contradictory to what is in this act, which specifically states that "no person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta."

Relative to hip replacements or any other procedure the bill quite clearly states that whatever is allowed in a private surgical facility, including the 47 that exist today, including the 38 that were approved by the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition when she was minister of health — it will be up to the college to determine what can be done in a surgical clinic.

This hon. member who asked the question is not a medical doctor; he doesn't know. I am not a medical doctor; I don't know. I can't offer a medical opinion as to what will be allowed or what will not be allowed. That's why the bill leaves these questions of a medical nature up to the people who are best able to answer them, and those people are on the board and are members of the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, given that the only people who will benefit are private hospital owners, will the Premier admit that this is why he is doing it? For their benefit?

2:20

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again the question is absolutely irrelevant because it alludes to private hospitals, and the bill before this Legislature now says quite simply that "no person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." So the question is irrelevant.

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

Federal Taxation of Resource Industries

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again the oil and gas industry is under attack from the federal Liberal government. The federal government brought down its budget last week, and it appears that there are some changes with regard to corporate taxes that help other industries but not the resource industries. My first question is to the Minister of Resource Development. Could the minister please explain what changes the federal government has made in its budget that affect the resource sector?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the federal government on February 28 brought out a very covered up change to the corporate tax structure in Canada, moving it from 28 percent to 21 percent for all corporate entities but not including that in the nonrenewable natural resource industries. In doing so, they failed to realize a hard-fought battle that we had in June of 1975 in which the federal government acknowledged a resource allowance that put in place a 25 percent discount for resource industries for the risk and cost of production that also recognized the provincial government's room to impose Crown royalties and mining taxes and also recognized in Canada once and for all the provincial ownership and management of nonrenewable resources. Putting this in this budget was a sham.

MR. HLADY: Mr. Speaker, my second question is also to the Resource Development minister. Could the minister please advise the Assembly about the effect of this change on Alberta's oil and gas industry?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, last night I talked to the Finance minister of Canada, the Hon. Paul Martin, and I indicated to him that if there isn't a reconsideration of this, this is going to cost hundreds of millions of dollars to this industry. The equity markets that are out there that invest in the stocks in these companies do not understand that we wouldn't recognize the risk of the cyclical nature of resource industries as far as the product price as well as the basin that they work in.

Mr. Martin said that they would reconsider this and talk with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers tomorrow and on Friday. As well, I am sure the Provincial Treasurer will be having a severe talk with Mr. Martin.

MR. HLADY: My final question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Provincial Treasurer. Could the hon. Treasurer advise the Assembly what action he has taken in response to this action by the federal government and the federal Finance minister, who was in Edmonton yesterday?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I have had communication with the federal Finance minister on this in a couple of different ways. I have expressed a concern about how the whole problem has developed, the fact that we came across this problem literally in the late hours of the day on which the federal budget was tabled in going through the federal budget. We'd already given the federal minister credit for some of the positive things that the Liberal federal government did. In literally going through the appendix, here there was a footnote relating to the very problem that the minister of resources just talked about.

So I've communicated our concerns to the federal minister about how we found out about it, the lack of communication, and as recently as yesterday was on the phone with the federal minister while he was here in town. I'm going to take him at his word. He appeared to be very sincere in saying that a problem has developed

and that he would like to sit down and work this problem out in all sincerity. So I'm going to hold him to that commitment.

I've also sent correspondence to him, which I can't quote here today in fairness to him, because I'd have to table it, until he has a chance to get back to his office. I want him to take a look at it. So we've got a clear commitment from the federal minister that we will sit down with officials and with industry experts to make sure we can get this problem resolved. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry: I'll recognize either one of you if you want to get involved in the question period.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, after six years of attacks on their programs the Premier is now threatening the single issue that means the most to seniors and their families: access to public health care, not higher costs and longer waiting lists. The effects of Bill 11 will hit senior citizens the soonest because the push is to have surgeries that affect seniors the most privatized first, surgeries like cataracts. My questions are to the Premier. Given that seniors who failed to anticipate and negotiate health care premium coverage in retirement packages six years ago are now paying over \$800 per year in health premiums, what sort of private health care insurance premiums should current and soon-to-be seniors budget for in planning for their retirement?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that health care premiums for seniors are geared to income. By and large the minority of seniors pay full premium for health care services, and those are seniors who are deemed to be very well-off.

MS BLAKEMAN: My next question is also to the Premier. Given that in '93 the Premier promised to support seniors and then within one year had shredded the seniors' report, delisted over-the-counter drugs from Blue Cross, and slashed rent and property tax assistance, can the Premier give seniors a single reason why they should not expect to be double-crossed yet again?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if this hon. member would take the time to travel the country, she'd find out that our seniors' benefits programs are the best in all of Canada. There's been an additional 10 percent in this year's budget for seniors' benefits programs. If she doesn't believe me, travel the country. I mean, they've been using money for malicious propaganda. Use it for something useful. I would challenge her to do her own study, and she will come back with the determination that we have without doubt the best seniors' programs in the country.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to add to that to some degree. Fully 180,000 seniors have their health care premiums looked after to some degree. That was brought forward early this morning in Public Accounts. We are the only province that addresses lower income seniors through our special-needs program.

AN HON. MEMBER: Broken promises.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Those are not broken promises.

These are programs which were put together where the moneys

were directed at the more needy seniors, and I can state unequivocally in this House – and I'll be pleased to share comparisons – that Alberta's seniors' benefit program is the best in the country by far.

MS BLAKEMAN: This question is also to the Premier. Since the Premier's Bill 11 mail-out does not include a return address and few seniors have Internet access, does this mean that the Premier does not want written responses back from them, or is it a case of: only the rich need reply?

2:30

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again here is another blatant example of the Liberals questioning the intelligence of Albertans, another example of Liberals insulting Albertans by questioning their intelligence.

Mr. Speaker, the addresses and phone numbers of all MLAs are in the phone book. There is a toll-free telephone number that costs absolutely nothing. The number is 310-4455. Pick up the telephone. It's free. Or write a letter to your MLA: the Liberal MLA, the ND MLA, any of the Conservative MLAs. We're all in the phone book. Most people know how to reach our constituency offices. My gosh, they know how reach the Premier's office; that's for sure. They know how to reach all the ministers' offices, because we get tons and tons of mail.

What a ridiculous statement to make. Again she insults the intelligence of Albertans. I think it's shameful, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Forest Management

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is to the Minister of Environment. A number of my constituents rely heavily on the forestry industry for their livelihood. For that reason, they want to see our forested areas managed in a sustainable manner, not only for the protection of an essential industry but for our future generations. This is an ongoing concern. I wonder if the minister can tell us what he's doing in some of the new initiatives that ensure that the existing operations will stay viable and sustainable.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this province recognizes the economic importance of the forestry industry to Albertans. At the same time, Albertans are also recognizing that this resource must be managed in a manner that is sustainable.

In the province of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, our forest resources are abundant, but we have to manage them in such a way as to ensure that they'll always be abundant. To do that, the management of our forests is based on the best available science. We have to make sure that we have practices that allow for commercially viable forests in the province without sacrificing other nontimber values like recreation, like tourism, and, of course, like wildlife.

The science that we rely upon is based on a number of sources. The province of Alberta is a partner with the centres of excellence in sustainable forest management based out of the University of Alberta. We've also established the Alberta Forest Management Science Council, and we of course participate in other activities with forestry ministers from across Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the most important guiding principle – and I'll conclude with this – is that our forest management practices do not and will not allow the harvesting of forests beyond a forest's ability to grow timber.

MR. FRIEDEL: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: I wonder if he can tell us what the ratio of Alberta's forested cover is compared to the rate of harvest.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is referring to the green area of the province. It comprises 53 percent of the province, and it is primarily unsettled forested lands that are not available for agricultural development. I'd like to point out that within this provincially managed area we do set aside areas that are not harvested; for example, to recognize that there should be buffers streamside, wildlife habitat, and, of course, recreation areas. Those areas are withdrawn from harvesting. Also withdrawn from harvesting are our provincial and national parks, natural areas, and ecological reserves.

As a result of all of those areas that are taken out from harvesting, only about 2 in 5 hectares within the green area are actually made available by the government for timber harvesting. Of these commercially available forest lands, only 1 percent of the net area can be harvested annually, and we are a long way from that target. The last full year available figures that I've seen show that in 1997 only .59 percent of these areas were harvested, well within the sustainable level that has been set by the government.

MR. FRIEDEL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to direct my last question to the Associate Minister of Forestry. I'm wondering if he can tell us if he would see that any future forest industry projects could threaten the sustainability of Alberta's forests and the forest industry.

MR. CARDINAL: Good question, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Environment, of course, touched on that subject a bit earlier. The department has a policy of sustained yield management, which means that we will not be harvesting beyond what the forest would grow. That is why we work very, very closely with the Department of Environment. There has to be a balance between economic development and environmental management. I think we are doing very well.

Mr. Speaker, I would point out that in Canada the boreal forest covers over 500 million hectares, and of this area only .01 percent is harvested. [interjections] We are doing very well. The Liberals now are asking how many jobs and stuff are created. It is very . . .

THE SPEAKER: Please, hon. minister. It was the hon. Member for Peace River who had the floor, and it's to him via the Speaker that one will communicate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mental Health Services

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Plans to revamp the psychiatric hospitals in Alberta have been described by the Canadian Mental Health Association as a return to the dark ages solution. A report entitled Best Practices in mental health reform, which was partially funded and endorsed by Alberta Health and Wellness, calls for community services inpatient beds at a local level and eventual downsizing of institutions. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: has the minister read the recommendations of the report that his own department is distributing?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I am quite aware of it, if it is the report I think it is from the mental health alliance. I am quite aware of the report, and in total I do not think it portrays or gives credit at all to the changes that have been made over the past few years.

First of all, I think it's important to note that when reductions were made of necessity across government back in the 1993-94 period, the overall budget for mental health was not reduced in this province.

Secondly, it misses I think a very, very important fact, and that is that the amount of money in our budget in mental health for community services has been doubled over the last number of years

to this year's budget, and, Mr. Speaker, the amount of money committed to hospital care has remained almost constant. So there's definitely been a shift in the resources to community care.

In addition to that, it fails to acknowledge that there has been a reduction of beds in mental health hospitals across the province. I believe the number, if I recall correctly, is 94 that it's been reduced, and in some of the capital projects that are planned, there's a further reduction of beds, although I would not say that that is a large further reduction of beds because the need is clearly there for institutional care, Mr. Speaker.

That is the direction in terms of the financing of mental health that we have been taking in the province, Mr. Speaker. I still firmly maintain that there is a need for hospital care for those people who unfortunately suffer from mental illness, but the shift and the direction is just not acknowledged in this report, and I think it should be.

MR. GIBBONS: My second question to the same minister: will the minister make a commitment and adopt a mental health system based on the recommendations of the Best Practices report?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I've outlined some of the overall directions in terms of the budget. I think we are taking the right direction. I do not commit to taking all of the recommendations of that particular report, because I disagree with some of the basic premises on which it is based.

If the hon. member wants some more specific examples, I can provide a number of examples in terms of just what is actually being accomplished with the shift to community care. Perhaps the time available to us will not permit me to go over all the different initiatives, but right here in Edmonton there's been an increase in crisis services and psychiatric services available at our hospitals on an emergency basis. We have a crisis line that operates 24 hours a day. I could go on, but I will just cease at that point.

2:40

MR. GIBBONS: To the same minister. My concern is that there is no new money in the community for mental health. Why is the minister investing \$95 million to rebuild a psychiatric institution in his own constituency when the community aspect is where it's needed?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, there is a considerable increase in the overall spending for community care in this province. We've been very active through the Alberta Mental Health Board in linking up with the children's health initiative or the school health initiative. We've had compliments, quite frankly, on the engagement and the activities of the mental health system in working in conjunction with the school system on that initiative. So the direction and the innovation are there in the system.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I would not apologize for the fact that there needs to be a capital project in Ponoka. There is good care being provided there. It was the centre of starting telepsychiatry. The work it does in terms of brain injury is recognized across this province and across this country in terms of its quality. It provides good care, as I said, to a goodly number of people who unfortunately do need hospitalization. As far as the condition of the building, it needs to be rebuilt.

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

School Building Utilization

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Minister of

Infrastructure visited the Clarence Sansom school in Pineridge to consult with parents as to how the utilization rate formula was affecting their school. During the meeting Barb Hadford, Jo-Anne Teed, Enid Webster, and others expressed their concern that the Calgary board of education is closing classrooms and schools based on an archaic 25-year-old formula, where areas such as stages, labs, computer rooms, and even showers are calculated as classroom space. My question today is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Given that the minister is reviewing the utilization rate formula for school use, when will the review be completed?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is referring to the recommendations that the government accepted coming out of the School Facilities Task Force, which was very capably chaired by the MLA for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. In the report there were 41 recommendations, 39 of which we have accepted, and one of them is to review the utilization rates and the policy around utilization in all of their schools. The completion of that review will be done as soon as possible, but we're certainly looking at it for early summer so that we can put that into the next phase of the plan.

I wish to point out to the hon. member and to all members of the House that we've now started a school facility newsletter, and that newsletter has gone out to all school boards. I hope all MLAs have a copy of it. It also lists the membership of the committee that will be doing all of the reviews.

MRS. FRITZ: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister has said that options for revisions to the formula will be ready for the summer, will the new utilization rate formula be effective for September of 2000?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, my own personal goal is that we reach conclusion and have it ready for the school year beginning in the year 2000.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. In circumstances where a school board rents out space to a charter school or a children's services authority, how is that space included in the utilization formula?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, school boards are encouraged to make full use of their facilities. When a school board leases surplus school space to a charter school, the school is considered to be 100 percent utilized, and the board receives all of the regular support grants. If the school board leases surplus space to a public agency, for example a children's services authority, then the student capacity of the leased portion is removed from the school board's total student capacity, and the board's overall utilization of the schools in their jurisdiction increases.

MR. DICKSON: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of five members to participate.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Joe Crowshoe

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Joe Crowshoe Sr. was a ceremonialist and spiritual leader from the great Peigan Nation. He passed away on October 28, 1999, at the age of 93 years. He and his wife, Josephine, had 11 children and loved their 40 grandchildren,

85 great-grandchildren, and four great-great-grandchildren.

Joe was raised in the Peigan traditional culture and participated at official ceremonies throughout Alberta and the United States. He served for 28 years on the Peigan band council. He was a founding member for the farmers' association for Peigan Nation, the Indian Affairs education department, and he advised the universities of Calgary and Lethbridge on native studies that promoted cross-cultural initiatives. In 1981 he was a spiritual and cultural adviser for the UNESCO world heritage site at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump.

Because of his humanitarianism work the Old Man, as he was known, was the recipient of a Canadian citation for citizenship, the Alberta achievement award, an honorary doctorate of humanities from the University of Montana, the Order of Canada, an honorary doctorate of laws from the University of Calgary, and the national aboriginal achievement award for heritage and spirituality.

The Old Man was born in a teepee on the Oldman River and lived to use a cell phone. He would have welcomed the return of the ceremonial bundles to his people.

International Women's Day

MS BLAKEMAN: Mr. Speaker, today is March 8, International Women's Day, and the launch of the World March of Women 2000. Born from the movement to win the vote for women and the early trade unionists struggling for better working conditions and wages for women, International Women's Day came about after a series of events in different countries. Large women's rallies in the U.S. in 1908, the female garment workers' strike in 1909, an international women's congress in 1910 in Copenhagen, and advocacy from Russian, Swedish, Danish, American, Swiss, and German women all contributed to International Women's Day being held and recognized on March 8.

This year women from over 3,500 groups in 146 countries will be participating in celebrations, marches, art displays, parades, festivals, and forums to educate and advocate for improvements in women's rights, particularly as it affects poverty and violence against women. A signature campaign will run worldwide from March 8 until the 17th of October, when an expected 10 million signatures will be delivered to the United Nations. I urge everyone to support this and other International Women's Day 2000 initiatives.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

2:50

Edmonton Burns Society

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On January 25, 2000, I joined some 500 men of Scottish descent and supporters at an 80th anniversary dinner of the Edmonton Burns club. The club is one of many groups around the world that celebrate the life of Robert Burns, a Scottish poet, perhaps best known for writing the words of *Auld Lang Syne*. At noon that day the club unveiled a statue of Robert Burns in Oliver park, directly opposite the main entrance of the Macdonald Hotel. This is the first statue of Burns to be raised in Alberta and will serve as a permanent tribute to the Scottish pioneers in this part of the world.

I'd also like to recognize the sculptor, Mr. John Weaver, for his fine work. John's work can be seen throughout Edmonton, most notably the Wayne Gretzky statue. On behalf of all Albertans thank you and congratulations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Chris Spearman

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Individuals can make a difference. Lethbridge had the distinction last fall and winter of having to pay 4 or 5 cents extra for our gas compared to the rest of the province. Chris Spearman got together a group of people in Lethbridge. They undertook a public relations campaign. They communicated with the oil companies. They communicated with oil industry associations. Over a period of weeks they managed to bring the price of gas in Lethbridge down to or almost equivalent to the price in the rest of Alberta. This shows the power that when one person decides they want to start something, they can do it.

So all the people of Lethbridge I think want to say thank you to Chris Spearman and the group that he eventually put together to bring the price of gas down. Now, I know that some people are complaining that essentially what he did was bring the price in the rest of the province up to the level we're paying in Lethbridge, but we like to think he did bring our price down. Thanks, Chris.

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

International Women's Day

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is International Women's Day. The origins of International Women's Day can be traced back to labour strikes by women working in the textile industry in New York City in 1857 and 1908. After the 1908 strike women's rights became issues of societal concern. Popular history tends to focus more on the opinions, actions, and accomplishments of men than on those of women. Women in historical accounts seem invisible, and this invisibility is not because there is an absence of women in public affairs. What I note is the absence of their stories being told. For generations women have been knocking over walls and negotiating barriers wherever they have found them, and they will continue to do so, even though their efforts are often not acknowledged.

Today a march that is an action that reflects women's determination to shake up the powers-that-be will take place. The World March of Women 2000, with more than 145 countries represented and over 2,000 groups signed up to participate, is itself born out of the experience of the Women's March against Poverty, which took place in Quebec City in 1995. Many events this week are planned around our province. I encourage all Albertans to take part in as many of these events as possible and reaffirm to us that women are not invisible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Two hon. members on points of order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Point of Order

Oral Question Period Rules

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise firstly to point out to you that I raised the point of order as soon as possible under the rule outlined in *Beauchesne* 321. This member rises on three main questions, and they centre around ministerial competence and the administrative competence of the answerer, preambles, and urgency.

Sir, I bring to your attention a first main question. Under *Beauchesne* 409(3) "the question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise." The question centred around the world price of oil. Now, in the answer to that very important question, in another forum perhaps but not this one, contrary to our rules the answerer went on to say that it is not in his area of compe-

tence, that in fact if he had his druthers, he would have a lower price, and even went on to say that it would be heresy for this minister to say such things. It was in his opinion, clearly in his opinion. This is out of order and could have been called out of order immediately, but as I observed, the chair was trying to allow a full and complete answer and made mention of that fact shortly thereafter.

Then to compound things, the Member for West Yellowhead rose in his place for his first supplementary and proceeded with a preamble to his supplementary, contrary to the rules as set out and agreed upon by the House leaders. Now, this side of the House takes great care not to offend the rules of order in the preparation of these questions.

The answer to the question had something to do with tying oil price to the price of fuel in the province of Alberta. We're not sure how the question was interpreted, but the minister then proceeded to answer way outside of his area of administrative competence. Presumably, sir, when the rules say that the questioner must ask a question being within ministerial competence, then it should follow that the answer should be within that area. It clearly was not. We heard a diatribe – maybe it was opinion; we're not sure – about the effects of the federal tax, which was clearly not in the realm of competence of anyone in this House. This House does not and cannot pass federal law, whether it be excise or GST or anything else. Then to compound that again, the supplementary question came back to the same minister, and we were treated to more of the same.

Sir, the entire exchange offended *Beauchesne* 409(3), 409(5) under urgency, and 409(6) under administrative competence. It is difficult. I know you do the best you can to maintain order and to maintain some semblance of adherence to the rules, but today was not a banner day for that. I shall await your ruling.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by first saying that I actually do like and respect the hon. member across the way. However, I have never heard a weaker argument with respect to a point of order in this House since I've been elected.

On the first question which was asked that he's referring to, yes, Mr. Speaker, you intervened and pointed out that perhaps there was a response of an opinion in that answer and that perhaps it may have offended *Beauchesne*.

When we talk about the second supplemental question, the world price of oil, the Minister of Resource Development indicated that if he had his druthers, he would prefer to see a lower price, but it's not outside of his competence to make that statement. Clearly it's outside of his competence to fix the price of oil. He was simply making a comment. But the price of oil impacts very significantly his department, the revenues that are generated for this government, and of course the programs we can support through those revenues.

Mention of the preamble in supplementals. Mr. Speaker, every day the opposition has a preamble or a response to an answer mixed in with what they're doing. The comments you made the other day regarding the House leader agreement needing to be respected: yes, we try and do that on this side. But of course for someone to stand up, as the hon. member has done, and suggest in this House that they pay very close attention to the House leader agreement when they're asking their questions is not accurate. Just today they didn't follow the rules. In some instances, I will admit, our own members didn't follow the rules. So perhaps everyone in this House needs to read the agreement and stick with it.

The third question. I think this is the one relating to the federal tax, Mr. Speaker, and the fact that the oil sector was excluded from

the reduction in corporate taxes. From what I understand, the hon. member is suggesting again that we aren't competent to respond – unless I'm getting the questions mixed up.

MR. WHITE: It's a different question.

MR. HAVELOCK: If I am getting the questions mixed up, then I apologize, but I thought it was part of the same line of questioning. If it was the same line of questioning relating to the tax, then we certainly are very competent, anyone in this House is competent to comment on federal taxation levels. Otherwise, for example, we couldn't stand up in this House and talk about personal income taxes, payroll tax, or whatever that may be imposed by the federal government and impact our industry in this province.

3:00

The issue of urgency. Again, I don't know where the hon. member has been, but the issue of gasoline prices is very urgent. It's raised every day on the front page of the papers. While oil prices are going up, gasoline prices are significantly increasing also. Now, for the hon. member to suggest that it's not urgent, I would like him to go out today and be interviewed by the media and say: "No one in Alberta cares about this issue. Albertans, we don't care." If that's what you're saying, that it's not an urgent issue for Albertans, then I suggest that you go organize a town hall, and I'm sure a few Albertans will come forward and tell you, hon. member, that it is a matter of urgency.

Mr. Speaker, there's no point of order with respect to this line of questioning. Had there been a point of order, I'm sure you would have intervened, as you did on the first question.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, the chair would suggest that you've had an opportunity to exercise your parliamentary skills this afternoon. Whether or not they have been successful, though, awaits a few more comments.

It would certainly appear that the chair did rise when the original question was raised by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead as the chair viewed that there was a searching for an opinion with respect to a certain question and certainly provided caution. I think that anyone in this Assembly and anyone in the province of Alberta would be very, very hard-pressed to believe that a question with respect to the price of gasoline would be anything else but of great importance to the people of Alberta, particularly a question which has to do with taxation of a certain industry in this province. The chair would be in a very, very difficult position trying to explain to anyone in the province of Alberta that a question on such a subject would be anything else but in order in the province of Alberta.

With respect to the competency. As the chair understands the questions, the second and a third question, his two supplementary questions basically dealt with: what would in fact the government be doing about this particular matter? The chair listened very attentively and heard two different ministers respond that basically petitions had been made. After an assessment of the impact in the province of Alberta, petitions had been made, will continue to be made, and this is a matter of some degree of importance and urgency to the people of this province, including this Assembly.

I'm reminded at this point in time of a phrase which I think was written by one William Shakespeare. I hope I'm not giving credit to someone else but the great scribe. If I recall correctly, he once wrote: methinks thou doth protest too much. There is no point of order.

Point of Order Anticipation

MR. DICKSON: Standing Order 23(e) enjoins us from anticipating a matter that's going to be dealt with on the Order Paper later the same day. Now, like all members, I have lots of time for the conscientious Member for Calgary-Cross. She asked a very important question about an arbitrary school utilization formula that causes huge grief to parents and people in the school community in the city of Calgary. Mr. Speaker, I need your help. I cautioned my colleagues this morning to not ask questions about Infrastructure because it's on the Order Paper and it's coming up tonight. We're going to have the minister there for at least two hours answering questions. I told my colleagues, reminded them of the rule. I sat here while we went through an initial question and two supplementaries – good questions, every one of them – but those matters ought to be raised tonight. So that's the concern I have with respect to 23(e) and the exchange between the Minister of Infrastructure and the Member for Calgary-Cross.

THE SPEAKER: This question that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo raises is an interesting one in light of earlier questions that were raised this afternoon during the question period. Not only are the estimates of the hon. Minister of Infrastructure up tonight, but if one looks at the Routine for the day, for days 10 and 11, at 8 p.m. in subcommittee A, in the Assembly, are the estimates of Executive Council. The leader of Executive Council was the individual in this Assembly to whom most of the questions were directed during the question period. It would strike me from the position of the chair that if I were to follow the advice I'm being provided now or the clarification requested now by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo with respect to the questions raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, then the chair might have taken the same kind of liberty in terms of ruling out all questions to the leader of Executive Council. Now, a number of those questions had to do with costs, information that's being issued by the Public Affairs Bureau and other agencies, and clearly, quite clearly, the leader and the minister responsible is the Premier of the province of Alberta.

So once again I wish to requote myself, "Methinks thou doth protest too much," and give credit to William Shakespeare. There's no point of order.

Speaker's Ruling Privilege

THE SPEAKER: There is one additional point today. Yesterday at the conclusion of question period and after the chair provided his ruling to the House regarding the Official Opposition House Leader's purported point of privilege, the hon. Government House Leader raised a point of order about the propriety of certain comments made by the Opposition House Leader in giving notice of and arguing a question of privilege. Frankly, the chair is of the opinion that the ruling given yesterday ended the matter, but the chair undertook to review *Hansard* and address the issue.

Essentially, the Government House Leader and the Deputy Government House Leader rose to demand an apology from the Official Opposition House Leader for comments that the Official Opposition House Leader made last Thursday, March 2, 2000, in giving notice about the purported question of privilege, concerning an assault that allegedly occurred in the press conference room at the technical briefing session for the media. At page 229 of *Hansard* for that day the Opposition House Leader stated: "a young woman, an employee of the government – and I think it serves little purpose to embarrass the individual woman." The Opposition House Leader

did not identify the person in question by name and did not pursue the alleged assault when he made his submissions on the question of privilege on Monday. He never retracted them either. So in one sense it appears that we have a dispute about facts between members, in which the chair is not going to intervene.

To reiterate, the chair's view is that this matter was concluded yesterday when the ruling was given. The chair would remind members of the principles in *Beauchesne* at paragraph 493(4) and to exercise great care in making statements in the House about persons outside of the Assembly who are not able to respond. In the chair's view this matter is now concluded.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

[Motion carried]

Highway Maintenance Costs

Q1. Dr. Nicol moved on behalf of Mrs. Soetaert that the following question be accepted.

How much did the former department of transportation and utilities spend in fiscal years 1990-91, 1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94, and 1998-99 for work conducted by the department on primary highway maintenance with respect to direct operating and contract costs and supervision, inspection, and audit in the summer months, April to October, and winter months, November to March?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to accept Written Question 1.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to close the debate.

DR. NICOL: On behalf of the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert I'd like to thank the minister. This concurs with her discussion with me that the minister was quite open and willing to provide the information that she needed.

[Written Question 1 carried]

3:10

Forest Fire Fighters

Q2. Mr. White moved that the following question be accepted.

How many Alberta Environment staff and how many individuals on contract were available to fight forest fires on April 1, July 1, and October 1, 1999, and what were the equivalent numbers for the same dates in 1998?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I accept Written Question 2.

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

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I will close debate on this matter. Thank you, sir.

[Written Question 2 carried]

Forest Fire Base Resources

Q3. Mr. White moved that the following question be accepted.

What base resources were available to fight forest fires in Alberta at the beginning of the 1992, 1993, 1998, and 1999 fire seasons, including the number and type of air tankers, the number and type of helicopters, and the number and size of wildland firefighting units?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I accept Written Question 3.

[Written Question 3 carried]

Conservation Officers

Q4. Mr. Gibbons moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that the following question be accepted.

How many fish and wildlife officers and how many park rangers were employed by Alberta Environment on April 1 in 1992 and 1998, and how many conservation officers were employed on April 1, 1999, to carry out the duties previously performed by fish and wildlife officers and park rangers?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to accept Written Question 4.

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

MR. GIBBONS: I rise to close the debate.

[Written Question 4 carried]

Forest Management Staffing Levels

Q5. Mr. White moved that the following question be accepted.

During the calendar year 1999 how many full-time equivalent staff were employed in the entire land and forest service and specifically how many were employed in the forest management division and in the forestry regional and area offices, what was the total area of allocated Crown land held under forest management agreements and other forms of tenure on which forest management operations had to be supervised, and how many full-time equivalent staff were involved in monitoring in the field?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I accept Written Question 5.

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

MR. WHITE: Yes, sir. This is the third in a series of questions that I put to the minister with regards to forest management of the fires in 1998 and 1999. I'm pleased with the response. These are the same questions that were asked numerous times of the previous minister, without response. This minister has seen fit to answer these simple and direct questions, that at least in part fall from many hours of debate here. We thank you, sir.

[Written Question 5 carried]

Forestry Staffing Levels

Q6. Mr. White moved that the following question be accepted.

How many forest officers with the working title or classification of forest officer, forester, agrologist, or manager in land and forest service were employed by then Alberta environmental protection on April 1, 1999?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to accept Written Question 6.

[Written Question 6 carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it is my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 5, 6, 7, and 9.

[Motion carried]

Lloydminster Biprovincial Upgrader

M5. Mr. White moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies and reports prepared by or for the Department of Resource Development between May 25, 1999, and February 17, 2000, providing the yearly projection of upside interest accruing to the province from the operations of the Lloydminster biprovincial upgrader for the period 2000-2014 as specified under the upside interest agreement of February 7, 1995, between the government and CIC (Crown Investment Corporation) Industrial Interests Inc.

DR. WEST: I'm pleased to accept that motion, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WHITE: Yes, sir. It's a pleasure to receive this kind of information. We haven't asked for this information before, although it is an investment in the province of Alberta. We thank you for the filing, sir.

[Motion carried]

Energy and Utilities Board

M6. Mr. White moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies and reports prepared by or for the Department of Resource Development between May 25, 1999, and February 17, 2000, evaluating the human resources requirements and funding framework for the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, AEUB.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm afraid I have to reject this motion for a return. Some of the recommendations from the phase 1 report are being implemented while others are still being considered, so it's impossible to give the complete answer for this motion. The other is on the human resources requirements. Currently they are being developed for the 2000-2003 business plan, and they are not complete as of this date. It would be redundant to try to file a partial answer to this motion. All I can suggest is that if the member wants to try to speculate on partial answers, he would have to submit a motion.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I rise to close debate and to make

comments on the lack of forthcoming information. Some time ago this minister, when he became the minister of then energy, chose to restrict and actually move down the number of FTEs in the EUB, to the detriment of the management of that organization and to the management of the human resources there. The esprit de corps that the organization had was at least in part hurt. This information, if it were forthcoming even on a partial basis, would have proved this member's allegation that the slash-and-burn attitude at the time was so detrimental in all areas of government, particularly this area of government. If you refer to the members of the public that happened to be employed in this particular area of oil and gas, they found that it was exceedingly difficult to deal with an organization that was under such stress to turn out the approvals and the applications that they had to do at the time. It's a shame that the minister won't come clean and admit the error through this filing, sir.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 6 lost]

Gasoline Fuel Consumption Reports

M7. Mr. Gibbons moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of reports prepared by Kent Marketing for the Department of Infrastructure on gasoline fuel consumption in Alberta for the period January 1, 1999, to February 17, 2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recommend that this Assembly reject Motion for a Return 7 as presented. I'm recommending that this motion be rejected because Alberta Infrastructure has never contracted with Kent Marketing to undertake an analysis of gasoline fuel consumption. Further, we have checked the records of both the former ministries of transportation and utilities and also public works, and we still have no such reports being prepared by Kent Marketing. No reports actually exist.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to conclude the debate.

MR. GIBBONS: I asked this question at a previous time, and there was no such answer given back to us, that there was no such item. I did ask the question: why isn't this government using fuel tax consumption numbers contained in the Kent survey? The answers I got back before never alluded to that.

Seeing that this is a form of a grant and only to Edmonton and Calgary but not the Edmonton capital region, is the minister willing to expand this particular grant to other areas of the province like Airdrie, Camrose, Drayton Valley, Drumheller, Edson, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Hinton, Leduc, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Wetaskiwin, Bonnyville, Brooks, Canmore, Claresholm, Cold Lake, Coleman, Fort Saskatchewan, Ponoka, Stony Plain, Taber, Vegreville, Wainwright, and Cochrane? You know, I could stand here all day. Why is it this particular area? Why aren't they looking at these other parts of the province? Expansion to these other areas would probably show a little more what has actually happened in the last few months based on the level of funding: about \$60 per capita to the rest of the province and \$25 per capita based on other funding.

You know, I question the negative on this particular item, and maybe we'll carry it on tonight in Infrastructure. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 7 lost]

3:20

Electricity Supply Task Force

M9. Mr. White moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies and reports prepared by or for the Electricity Supply Task Force or submitted to the Electricity Supply Task Force between June 2, 1999, and February 17, 2000.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to accept this motion for a return.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to conclude the debate.

MR. WHITE: Yes, sir. It's with great pleasure and shock, I might say, that I receive – this member has been asking for reports on electrical energy supply and generation. Gee, I'm almost speechless but not quite. I'll be pleased to study the information and return with further questions at the appropriate time.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 9 carried]

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

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the committee to order. This afternoon we deal with private members' public bills.

Bill 202
Marriage Amendment Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: We are debating an amendment to this bill, amendment A1, as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. The hon. Member for Red Deer-South on the amendment.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To continue from where I left off yesterday on the amendment, I wanted to just remind the House of the points I made in those comments yesterday. One was to do with the question of jurisdiction. Yesterday I pointed out that under section 92(12) of the Charter solemnization of marriage is in fact clearly a provincial jurisdiction, and I would note that in my review of the legislation in the various provinces like Quebec and British Columbia, they all have acts pertaining to the solemnization of marriage. They all have rules with respect to ages at which people can get married and the kinds of consent and who can solemnize marriage. So, again, the act before us is clearly within the provincial jurisdiction and quite appropriate. I wanted to just make sure that I spoke to that point, that that question was clear, the question of jurisdiction.

The second point I raised yesterday was the question on the use of the notwithstanding clause and whether it's appropriate in a form such as that. In that debate yesterday I'd referred to a quotation by Allan Blakeney, who was the Premier of Saskatchewan at the time the notwithstanding clause was introduced and accepted, and I'll truncate the quote today:

This is fully consistent with the sort of argument we have put forward that we need to balance the protection of rights with the existence of our institutions which have served us so well for so many centuries.

I made the point yesterday and again today that the institution of marriage is one of those that I think is fundamentally important to

our society. We have made that clear in the preamble to the bill, that it deserves the protection, the commitment by the use of the notwithstanding clause to ensure that we declare today and when this bill is passed at third reading that in fact in Alberta we intend for that to be so.

In closing my debate on the amendment, Mr. Chairman, I also want to remind the Legislature again that the act as we have presented it in the Legislature today is in fact consistent with government policy with respect to this issue. I know that doesn't bind the members of the opposition. The government had indicated that this was their policy, so I'd just remind them of that, because I raised that issue in my debate at second reading.

Also, just as of note, Mr. Chairman, yesterday in the state of California they had a proposition called Proposition 22, which put out very similar comments to the people of California. Their proposition was only 14 words long. It says: "Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California." That proposition was affirmed by a little better than a 61 percent margin. Over 4 million people voted in favour of that, and 2 million and such did not.

So, again, Mr. Chairman, the institution of marriage is something that is very important in our society, very important to the religious traditions, very important in our legal history and philosophical traditions. I think, with respect to our Legislatures, that we need to assert, by declaring ourselves with the use of the notwithstanding clause, that that is not something we are going to play with in the future.

For that reason, Mr. Chairman, I would encourage all members of the Assembly to defeat the amendment.

[Two members rose]

THE CHAIRMAN: I did have an indication, hon. member, that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo had wished to speak next. It's usually back and forth, hon. minister.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, since I've already had one kick at it, I wonder if I might decline in favour of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre.

THE CHAIRMAN: Regardless of whoever it is, should there be someone on the opposition side who wishes to speak to it, then it would go to them.

Member for Edmonton-Centre, would you like to begin?

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to speak in support of the amendment put forward by my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo. Specifically, the amendment is to delete section 5 of the bill; in other words, to remove the provision to use the notwithstanding clause.

I am certainly willing and supportive of recognizing the importance to many of the solemnity of marriage. A number of my colleagues have spoken to this before. I've spoken to it before. I don't think anyone disputes that, but I absolutely cannot accept using the notwithstanding clause against a specific group of people in this country. It is totally unacceptable to me.

We have a jurisdictional question, and I recognize that the Member for Red Deer-South just tried to speak to that, but I think there is a jurisdictional question here. The issue of marriage and certainly dissolution of marriage is federal. The provincial jurisdiction is for the civil ceremonies and licensing; in other words, the solemnization. For many, many people the sanctity of marriage is involved in their faith communities and the importance of their union being recognized by family and friends.

3:30

Nobody is disputing that, but to use the notwithstanding clause against a specific group of people is really wrong, in my opinion. The amount that the state should intervene in people's lives and the choices in their lives, intruding on their individual rights, should only happen in the most extreme of circumstances. Many of those, I think, are already set out and recognized in the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. For instance, a limitation upon freedom: if in fact you have been accused and found guilty in a court of law of some crime against society, then there is a reason that there's a limitation put on your freedom. But only in the most extreme circumstances in order to uphold peace, order, and good government. As important as marriage is to many, to most in this province, in this country, it is not something that needs to be protected in this manner.

I think the notwithstanding clause should only be used in very specific circumstances, not as a sort of blanket, global: if anything anywhere close to this issue comes up, then we'll snap it into place. I think I could even say that in sovereignty-threatening circumstances would the notwithstanding clause be reasonable to use. As I've said before, many here in Alberta felt very strongly that the province of Quebec was totally out of order to use the notwithstanding clause to entrench French language rights on their signs in Bill 101. When they put that in place, people in Alberta disagreed dramatically with that. So why would we now turn around and say that it's okay to throw this wide blanket of using the notwithstanding clause on a very specific group of people in Alberta? It is unacceptable to me.

So speaking certainly on my behalf and on behalf of many of those who live in Edmonton-Centre who have corresponded with me on this issue, I am very much in favour of the amendment put forward by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and very much against having the notwithstanding clause included in this Bill 202. It's far beyond the powers that the state should be levying or restricting on individuals.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favour of the amendment.

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the opportunity to speak to Bill 202 this afternoon. I'd like to commend the hon. Member for Red Deer-South for bringing this bill forward, and I'm speaking on the amendment to the bill.

The intent of Bill 202 is to ensure that the institution of marriage is maintained in Alberta as a foundation of families, society, long-lasting legal and religious traditions, and as reflecting biological and social realities of heterosexual couples' unique ability to procreate. The bill also protects the institution of marriage from challenge under the Charter.

The conventional marriage of man and woman has proven the best model for society's advancement and the raising of children in a loving family. Marriage is unique in that it expresses a lifelong commitment to mutual care and the raising of children. There has to be a distinction between marriage and other kinds of relationships. Wherever possible, children are best off when raised by their natural parents. A father and a mother need to have an equivalent role. However, recognizing equivalent parenting does not mean that they play the same role. Men and women are biologically different, and children are best served by having the benefit of both male and female parents.

A survey, Mr. Chairman, held in 1998, undertaken by Feedback Research Corporation, found that 92 percent of Canadians surveyed

rated the family as being very important in their lives; 78 percent agreed that children need both a father and a mother in the home in order to grow up happily, and that's up from 66 percent in 1991. Correspondingly, only 12 percent – and I repeat: only 12 percent – feel that the institution of marriage is outdated. This is proof that there is great support for the traditional family in Canada.

Studies show the negative effects of the dissolution of marriage and the family. Three-quarters of all women applying for welfare benefits do so because of a disruptive marriage or live-in relationship. Divorce reduces the income of families with children by an average of 42 percent. Married couples in their mid-50s amass four times the wealth of divorced individuals, and children in step-families and single-parent families are almost three times more likely to drop out of school than children in intact families.

Scientific research shows that there is a strong correlation between marriage and the well-being of both the adults and the children. In general, married people experience better physical and mental health. It is believed that this is because marriage provides a genuine emotional and physical protection from the vast number of pressures associated with day-to-day living.

Social science also shows the benefit of marriage on children: having both a mother and a father. Canada faces no social problem more urgent and important than the strengthening of the family, reducing the number of births outside marriage, and cutting the rate of divorce. In a society that fully values and celebrates marriage, claims that equal respect should be granted to marriage as to nonmarried relationships would appear almost incomprehensible. How could anyone compare the social importance of a lifelong commitment to mutual care and the raising of children to an impermanent, or temporary, sexual attachment?

Our laws used to insist that marriage is the only basis of legal couplehood. In 1999 MPs in the House of Commons voted on a motion brought by the Reform Party declaring that the only legal marriage involved a man and a woman. Justice Minister Anne McLellan was quoted in the *Edmonton Journal* as saying that marriage is a union between one man and one woman and that her party agreed that the institution of marriage is central, an important institution to the lives of many Canadians. Indeed, worldwide it plays an important part in all societies. The Reform motion was urging the House to state that marriage is and should remain the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. The Liberals amended the motion to specifically say that it referred only to the areas of marriage covered by Parliament and not those under provincial control. The motion was passed.

In Alberta in a government news release in 1999 the government outlined its policy with respect to the use of the notwithstanding clause. This was a policy established following the Supreme Court decision of the *Vriend* case. With respect to marriage it said: the federal law presently allows for marriage only between man and woman; the Alberta government supports the status quo and would oppose any legal challenge to the law including, if available, the use of the notwithstanding clause.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Among enormous literature devoted to research on the benefit of marriage, one of the most consistent findings is that, compared to their unmarried counterparts, men and women do markedly better in all measures of specific and general well-being when they are married. In general, married couples are happier physically and mentally. They live longer and enjoy a more fulfilling life and have a tendency to take better care of themselves and others. Research shows that these tendencies are consistent over the decades.

Madam Chairman, marriage not only benefits the married couple

but also the children that are created. Also, there is a great influence that reaches children living nearby as young people seek out role models. The best chance for having a successful, strong marriage is to grow up in a family with a strong marriage as its foundation. This does not mean that people in divorced families or single homes are unable to achieve their own strong family, simply that it is more difficult, since their role models do not reflect a two-parent, father and mother, family on a daily basis. I think that it's very important, to protect that family unit, that we defeat this motion.

3:40

I have elaborated on the value of marriage both for the married couple and, very importantly, for the children. I believe that we have to protect that institution of marriage, and it is very important that we use the tools to do so. One of the tools is the notwithstanding clause. Bill 202 invokes the notwithstanding clause of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in order to protect the institution of marriage from court challenges under the Charter. The notwithstanding clause of the Charter can be invoked to allow an act or provision within an act to remain valid even though it would otherwise be a breach of the rights and freedoms guaranteed under section 2 of the Charter. The notwithstanding clause of the Constitution, clause 33, can be used in relation to an act or a provision within an act.

The intent behind including section 33 of the Charter, as indicated by our former Premier of this province, Peter Lougheed, was to ensure the supremacy of the Legislature over the courts and ensure that public policy was being dictated by elected officials and not by nonelected judges. In *Alberta Hansard* of November 21, 1983, Peter Lougheed stated that the notwithstanding clause would be used when major matters of public policy were being determined by the courts as a result of an interpretation of the Charter. It was the view of those of us who expressed that position, which ultimately prevailed in the constitutional negotiations, that it should be the legislators and not the courts that should determine these matters.

Bill 202 is a correct application of section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms because it fulfills the original intent of the inclusion of the notwithstanding clause within our Charter. Again, this intent was to ensure that when major matters of public policy are being interpreted by the courts as a result of the Charter, the legislative supremacy of elected representatives would determine that these matters are not judicial reviews.

The argument that marriage is solely a federal jurisdiction is weak at best. Federal statutes govern divorce proceedings far more than marriage. The Marriage Act simply prohibits marriage on the basis of the parties being related by blood or adoptive family relations. Provincial statutes govern the solemnization of marriage, are considerably more comprehensive, including provisions for obtaining a licence to marry, a licence to perform a marriage, age restriction, and more importantly, provisions for declaring a marriage unlawful, and penalties for unlawfully performing a marriage or making false statements in order to marry. Provincial statutes governing the solemnization of marriage are therefore more appropriate amendments to include the provision outlined in Bill 202.

Bill 202 provides a definition of marriage identical to that already contained in the Quebec provincial statutes. In addition, given that the licensing of marriage is under the jurisdiction of the provincial government, restrictions regarding eligibility to marry are a provincial jurisdiction also, based on the Layland case, that went before the Ontario Provincial Court. This is not a breach of individual rights, because no one is restricted from marrying. The restriction is that an individual must marry someone of the opposite sex. Invoking the notwithstanding clause on this basis sends a clear message to the court system that while legislators respect the individual rights and freedoms to the highest degree, any move to change the definition

of marriage would be a mistaken interpretation of the intent of the Legislature and the Charter. There is no breach of right when marriage is universally available within the context of a defined term.

Madam Chairman, I urge all members of this House to defeat this motion so that we can include the use of the notwithstanding clause in Bill 202 and we can go for the protection of marriage.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, just a couple of observations I wanted to make before we get to a vote on the amendment. I expect that our friend for Cypress-Medicine Hat has some observations to make too.

You know, I want to start off by complimenting Red Deer-South, the sponsor of the bill, because in reviewing the *Hansard*, you know, I think he's tried very hard in terms of addressing the kinds of questions, issues, objections that have come up. I respect the amount of effort on his part to address in a meaningful, thoughtful way the concerns that have been raised. Now, I haven't been persuaded, but it's not for lack of effort or trying on the part of our friend from Red Deer-South.

The observation I'd want to make, Madam Chairman, is this. Why would we want to start using section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in a prophylactic way? I mean, where do we stop putting this in bills? Why wouldn't we start tucking section 33, a little notwithstanding clause, in a host of legislation in all kinds of different areas? We could stick it in Bill 11. We could just put it right in there. It might require a little longer editorial comment by the Minister of Health and Wellness, but we could put in a little notwithstanding clause in Bill 11.

You know, there are lots of places we could put it in, but it would be wholly inappropriate. If there's one thing that I expect Allan Blakeney would agree with if he were here – the former Premier of Saskatchewan would say: "Hey, this is a howitzer; this is a big piece of equipment. You don't bring it out and use it unless and until you see the whites of their eyes. You don't bring it out until you absolutely have to." You don't simply go and tuck it in the back of a statute because it's kind of a nice thing and it establishes a little symmetry.

So, Madam Chairman, I've got a concern. I've got a concern with the way the thing is being brought forward. You know, the sponsor from Red Deer-South has suggested that this is a little bit like going down the aisle with your spouse-to-be, going in front of the minister and saying, "Yes, I believe in the importance of marriage and its use for society and the benefit, but I really don't want to make my vows today because I want to keep my options open."

What this member would do is have the mother-in-law with the shotgun walking down the aisle with the groom-to-be and the bride-to-be because he doesn't have enough confidence in the two people making their marriage vows. He wants that protection in the back. He wants that little measure of security. Well, Madam Chairman, I don't think we need the shotgun and the mother-in-law walking the bride down the aisle. I think we can trust in the bride and the groom. I think we can trust the groom to get down the aisle without being prodded by the 12-gauge in the ribs.

So, Madam Chairman, I love the imagery invoked by our friend for Red Deer-South in sponsoring the bill, but to me it demonstrates why we don't need section 5. I'd just ask members to consider for a moment that if we take out section 5, we've still achieved what the Member for Red Deer-South wants to achieve, which every member that I've heard in the Liberal caucus says: we support the sanctity of marriage; we don't want to redefine spouse. If and when a court of competent jurisdiction does what the Member for Red Deer-South

seems to apprehend is just over the horizon, then it's perfectly appropriate for a sovereign Legislature to consider bringing the howitzer out of the armory, rolling it out onto the battlefield, and seeing whether we have to use it then.

In the meantime, let's just keep it sheathed. Let's just keep it tucked away in the back. If we bring it out for this bill, then somebody's going to say: well, we're going to do it for this; we've got some kind of a new language bill or we've got some wrinkle in public education or we've got some change over here in a different area. Let's leave section 33 for that extraordinary case where there's absolutely no alternative but to use that, where there's an absolute, clear, unambiguous collision between the interests of a Legislature and the interpretation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the equality provision by a court of competent jurisdiction. If and when we get to that impasse, that conflict, that is an appropriate time – I may still not agree with the use of it – to bring it out.

3:50

Madam Chairman, I just wanted to make one other point, and very quickly it is this. This is not the only way to make Alberta legislation Charter-proof. This is the lousiest way. This is the easiest and simplest, but it's the most unfair way of making our legislation Charter-proof. The Liberal opposition in government bills, even though we're dealing with private members' business, can surely reference the model – we'll call it the Liberal model – to recognize a domestic partnership. When we put that forward on Bill 12 last spring and when we put it forward last fall on the Insurance Act, we said that this is a model that with minimal adaptation can make Alberta legislation Charter-proof. The response was a resounding, a thundering silence. It was a deafening no. The government didn't want to go down that road. So we gave government a way to make our legislation Charter-proof. Even Ian McClelland, a Reform Member of Parliament in Edmonton, has got a notion which is not unlike this, not as good a model as I think we've got, with respect to Mr. McClelland, but it shows that there are lots of people right across the political spectrum who are looking for ways to make legislation Charter-proof.

Madam Chairman, I'll just wind up by saying that it's not that section 33 is the sole means of avoiding a court challenge. The other way is to craft your legislation so you provide equality of rights, benefits, privileges, and opportunities. If you do that, there is no reason under the sun why a court has to go and challenge the view of many of us in terms of what spouse should be or what marriage should be. It takes a little more work, I grant you that. You can't tuck it into a few words like section 5, which is at issue here. But we're doing a heck of a lot better job, with respect, because we succeed in protecting spouse, we protect the word marriage, and we provide equal treatment.

What this amendment would do is allow the government to protect spouse and marriage but not provide equal treatment, because that's the effect of this bill as it currently stands. I haven't heard members saying that there shouldn't be equal treatment. If you believe that, if you believe there should be equal treatment for everybody in the province and you want to protect spouse and marriage, there is really no alternative but to support this amendment. The second thing is let's talk about taking that Liberal model for recognizing domestic partnerships. If we do that, we've solved everybody's problem, Madam Chairman. We've solved everybody's problem. There may be some members not persuaded.

Those are the observations I wanted to make. I respect the sincerity of the sponsor of the bill, and I respect his sincerity in attempting to respond to some of the issues that have been raised. We may agree to disagree, but it's not fair to turn the debate into a

labeling kind of exercise because I think that does a disservice to everybody involved in the debate.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I wish to rise to speak against the amendment. When we look at what's happening in our society right now with judges constantly overruling legislation and legislators and Legislatures, then I think we have to protect something that is fundamental to our society. In fact, even former Premier Lougheed indicated that the purpose of section 33 was very clearly to ensure that public policy was dictated by elected officials, not by unelected judges. This is what seems to happen consistently in our society today, that nonelected judges overrule provincial Legislatures and the policies that those provincial Legislatures establish. So it is absolutely necessary that we have the notwithstanding clause as part of this bill.

In fact, when we look at what's happening with this bill and what's happening in the general judicial process, it is very clear why we should have some public participation in the selection of judges. The provinces need to be involved in the selection of the Supreme Court. The federal government should be pulling the provinces to the table and saying: you become involved with us in the selection of Supreme Court justices.

In fact, we can look to Alberta as a fine example of that. We have a very open and public process that the former Minister of Justice brought forward and was approved to select judges in Alberta. It's a process in which we have a public committee made up of good-thinking, sensible Albertans to review the judicial applications and then make recommendations to the Justice minister and to the cabinet as a whole.

I think that if we can urge the federal government to start taking a look at involving the public in the process, then we may at some future date not need this notwithstanding part of our legislation, but as long as we have nonelected judges overruling laws made by elected officials, then we need the notwithstanding.

In fact, in my constituency many of my constituents are just kind of discouraged, disgusted with this whole judicial process. A number of my constituents are coming forward and saying: "We should be electing our judges. If we don't like what you do as our member, we can fire you at the next election. You are responsible to us." Many of my constituents, including some who are lawyers, some from the legal profession, will say to me, "If we have a situation, as happens, when we do not agree or approve of a decision made by a nonelected judge, what comeback do we have?" Quite frankly, there is no comeback. The public of Alberta and the public of Canada have no comeback on a decision made by a nonelected judge. So many of my constituents are arguing and will continue to argue for elected judges because in that sense there is responsibility to the population.

So I just want to encourage all members to reject this amendment and support the total concept of the bill, which includes notwithstanding.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:58 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Committee of the Whole divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Graham	Olsen
Boutilier	Magnus	Paul
Dickson	Nicol	Soetaert
Gibbons		

4:10

Against the motion:

Amery	Hlady	Renner
Broda	Jacques	Severtson
Burgener	Jonson	Smith
Cao	Klapstein	Stelmach
Cardinal	Kryczka	Stevens
Clegg	Laing	Strang
Doerksen	Langevin	Tarchuk
Ducharme	Mar	Taylor
Fischer	Marz	Thurber
Fritz	Nelson	West
Haley	Oberg	Woloshyn
Havelock	Paszowski	Yankowsky
Herard	Pham	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 10	Against – 39
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

[The clauses of Bill 202 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I move that the committee do now rise and report progress.

[Motion to report progress on Bill 202 carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. TANNAS: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following, Bill 202. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 205
Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan)
Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's truly with great pleasure that I rise this afternoon to open debate on Bill 205, the Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000. If passed, Alberta will adopt a dress tartan that would complement the existing Alberta tartan as one of Alberta's official provincial symbols.

At this time, Madam Speaker, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of both the existing Alberta tartan and the proposed Alberta dress tartan. I believe that the pages have previously provided to all members copies of the tablings.

I know members would agree with me that symbols are important in both our public as well as our private lives. Symbols represent our identity and how we understand each other and each other's values now and in history. As such, they are not simply reminders of the past. They are dynamic ideas that can inspire our imaginations with pride and guide us in how we continue to face the challenges of the present and the future.

Some may ask: why another tartan as a symbol for Alberta? How may a tartan, which is usually recognized as an expression of Scottish culture, be representative for all Albertans given the reality of our multicultural society? The answer to these questions is that an official tartan pays tribute to the many and varied contributions of Canadians of Scottish ancestry to Alberta and to Canada. Given the dynamic nature of the tartan itself, it can also form part of a meaningful heritage to those of us, myself included, who are not of Scottish ancestry. I might add, however, that my understanding of my lineage is incomplete, and I do note that my maternal grandfather was born near Carlisle, England, which is just south of the Scottish border, long after Hadrian's Wall proved ineffective.

Tartans are an ancient form of dress used by the Scottish Highlanders and were likely first recorded in history by Julius Caesar in France, where he first observed Celtic tribes. Consisting of a repeated checkered pattern of threads, a tartan was and is worn by members of Scottish clans for purposes of identification with both the clan and the clan's territory.

The tartan kilt, a pun or play on the word Celt, while looking like a type of skirt is actually a descendant of the earlier battle garb that was worn by Roman soldiers. The tartan can also be worn in the form of a dress, a sash, a scarf, or a tie, like the Alberta tartan I'm wearing. It's interesting to note that at one time the tie was simply a large bandage that crusaders wore around their necks to be prepared for any eventuality of being wounded.

There are different types of tartans that are used for different purposes. Dull-coloured hunting tartans were developed by clans to make them look less conspicuous. Mourning tartans are predominantly dark in colour and worn at all sad occasions. In contrast, dress tartans are designed by altering one of the background colours of the formal set to white. Kilts made of this pattern are usually worn for dancing, special celebrations, or as formal attire.

Apart from the familiar clan tartans, there are district tartans which identify a person's residence in a certain district, whether that person belongs to the dominant clan or not. There are many precedents in Scottish history and culture that show how people who are not related to clans by blood or ancestry can be identified with

either clan or territory and may, as a result, wear the tartans associated with them quite meaningfully. Smaller clans which did not have their own tartans often sought refuge and protection under greater clans and were adopted by them.

Scots who came from the Lowlands or who were otherwise not entitled to a tartan of their own could always wear one of the universal tartans, including the Black Watch, the Jacobite, or the Caledonia tartan. It's perfectly legitimate for a subject of the Queen, for example, to wear the Royal Stuart tartan regardless of his or her cultural background. Since this is the Queen's own tartan, the wearing of such is a demonstration of loyalty to the Crown or to the royal Stuart line.

Both the Alberta tartan and the proposed Alberta dress tartan are distinct tartans. They represent not the cultural or other ancestry of the people but the district or territory itself and those who reside within it, regardless of their background. Since the Alberta tartan reflects territorial loyalties, it is as legitimate for an Albertan of Scottish background to wear the tartan as it would be for an Albertan of French, Ukrainian, German, or Italian background to wear it as well.

The Alberta tartan pays tribute to Canada's Scottish heritage and the impact of Scottish culture on our history and development as a nation. In fact, the tartan has always been numbered among Canada's official symbols, beginning with Nova Scotia, which received its armorial bearings from King Charles I. Canada's coats of arms have always contained Scottish symbols like the unicorn, the thistle, and others. The tartan is there for an historic 350-year-old Canadian symbol that belongs by right to the common heritage of all citizens of Canada.

4:20

The direct impact of Scottish culture on Canada has been and continues to be significant. Sir John A. Macdonald and other Fathers of Canadian Confederation, who laid down the legal and legislative basis for the new nation of Canada, were Scots. Our history, culture, laws, and government have all benefited positively by the impact of Scottish people. This is a heritage of which all Albertans of all cultural backgrounds can be justifiably proud. It's a heritage that contributed greatly to the development of Canada's modern multicultural society, defined by the values of tolerance, understanding, and mutual appreciation for our cultural distinctiveness.

It was this heritage that helped lay the foundations for our province's growth and stability, foundations upon which we are all privileged to continue to build upon. In paying tribute to our Scottish heritage, we are thereby also paying tribute to all others who likewise have made and continue to make significant contributions to the life of our province.

The structure of the proposed Alberta dress tartan, as you can see in the samples provided, is loosely based on the original Alberta tartan. By using the existing pattern and colours found in the Alberta tartan, the Alberta dress tartan adds a field of white-coloured stripes representing Alberta's clean, bright snowy days. The Alberta dress tartan remains true to the original colour scheme that represents the green of our forests, the gold of our wheat fields, the blue of our clear skies and sparkling lakes, the pink of our wild rose, and the black of our coal and petroleum.

The Alberta dress tartan was designed by two of my constituents, Gail Danysk and Ashley Stowkowy, in conjunction with Fiona Hall, a tartan designer with Locharron of Scotland at the Waverley Mill in London. I thank them very much for their beautiful and unique design. I'd also like to thank at this time Jeremy Chorney, researcher, who has provided crucial assistance and many hours to move this idea into bill form.

In fact, the design of the Alberta dress tartan has a lot to do with

why this proposal was brought forward to me in the first place. On special occasions Highland dancers often wear an Alberta tartan sash and carry an Alberta tartan banner to represent their province. However, few of them chose the Alberta tartan as the fabric of their kilt or costume as it is an ancient tartan and therefore very dark in colour. Dress tartans on the other hand, which have brighter colours and a white thread block as part of the sett, are popular choices among Highland dancers due to their vibrant aesthetic qualities and formal dress appearance.

As a special project for the new millennium Ms Danysk and Ms Stowkowy came forward with the Alberta dress tartan proposal as representatives of Highland dancers in Alberta. They are seeking the adoption of the Alberta dress tartan, a tartan for a new century, which will give Alberta Highland dancers the opportunity to wear an officially recognized tartan pattern that is suitable to use in their dance costumes. Their request comes at an opportune time since the city of Edmonton is hosting the Canadian interprovincial Highland dancing championships on July 5 to 9, 2000. Should Bill 205 be proclaimed, representatives of Alberta Highland dancers have made a commitment to unveil the Alberta dress tartan during this major event by presenting the Alberta dress tartan to over 700 dancers from across Canada, the United States, and overseas.

It should also be noted that Tartan Day is celebrated annually on April 6 to commemorate the anniversary of Scottish independence in 1320. This Declaration of Arbroath, as it is known, is recognized as one of the earliest expressions of the rights of humanity to a peaceful and productive life free of oppression. The Federation of Scottish Clans encourages the wearing of tartans on this day as a reminder of what can be accomplished by hard work and loyalty, a proud tradition here in Alberta. I'm certain the Alberta dress tartan would be worn proudly next to the Alberta tartan on this occasion as well.

Madam Speaker, allow me to close by saying the fact that one need not be Scottish to meaningfully wear a tartan, that the Alberta dress tartan would in fact belong to all Albertans regardless of their background, is for me the most significant aspect of this symbol. Adopting the Alberta dress tartan would honour, once again, the contributions of one great community in Alberta and in Canada while at the same time allowing all Albertans to adopt it as their own.

Madam Speaker, I would ask that all members of the Assembly support this bill for all Albertans to show pride in their province. Thank you very much.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 205, Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000. It was interesting that when I first talked to people about this bill and that I was going to be debating it, the question was: well, why would you be spending time on this when there are so many other things that people are so interested in in Alberta right now? But the truth is that we have the process of private members' bills exactly so a private member, that being anyone who's not in the cabinet, can bring forward bills that are of interest to people in their constituency or people involved in groups they're affiliated with. So it's entirely appropriate that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore bring forward this bill, and I note that he was approached by a group in his constituency who were interested in having the brighter dress tartan added as an official emblem in Alberta.

I am a person of Scottish heritage. No surprise to anyone who looks at me. A stout, red-headed woman. Yup, got to be Scottish.

Seven of the eight of my great-grandparents are in fact Scottish, and I took a trip there in the early '90s to explore and find out something about my heritage.

Although we do have a substantial number of Scots who settled in Alberta and certainly contributed to the building of this province, I still felt a little odd, a little out of sorts. There's this Scottish dourness, as people call it, that I think sometimes makes us a little less hearty than we're used to in this province.

It was a wonderful trip for me, and I did go to each of the places where my great-grandparents came from. Of course when you're there, you get interested in the tartans. There are tartans all over the place. Sooner or later you wander in and you start to go through and find out which are your tartans and what your connection is. I'm lucky, I would say, that I was able to go through and actually find affiliations with family or clan tartans.

As the Member for Calgary-Glenmore said, there are a number of variations on the tartans and there are ways for anyone to be able to claim a tartan or to wear a tartan. I find it really interesting that tartans seem to have such a pull on people that those from many different backgrounds and faiths and other countries and cultures want to be able to access a tartan and wear it. It's an interesting anomaly that we see here, that sharing of the culture.

As I say, I did go and look up the various tartans, and because of my ancestors I actually had a couple of different family tartans to choose from. I found it really interesting that there is the formal tartan, which for us is the one we see on the guides here in the Legislature, and I think the member had a tie done in that Alberta tartan. You can have the dress tartan of that formal tartan, and they are meant to be related – they're based on the same concept in the way the blocks are built and the thread counts – also the hunting tartan.

Now, when these first came into existence, obviously your ability to access dyes was less than it is today in the modern age. We're able to have much brighter tartan colours come through – you can even get further away from the idea of a formal dress and a hunting tartan, and a mourning tartan as well was mentioned – when you start looking at whether you're going to have an ancient version of it or a modern version of it, because that of course is going back to what dye colours were available at that time.

4:30

I really like the Alberta tartan. I'm very proud of it, and I'm very comfortable with it. There's so much literally woven into tartans about what it all means and the symbolism for everything. The Alberta tartan has green for forests, gold for wheat fields, blue for lakes, pink for the wild roses, and black for coal and petroleum. It pretty much does capture our province, both in what we can see above it and below it, and I think it's a good emblem for us.

So how do we go from those tartans that are individual family tartans to something that's an official tartan for the province of Alberta? Well, it's back to what I was saying earlier, that people are really interested in this and want to be able to find a way to have their own version of it. In fact, we are seeing now that there are things like corporate tartans, where an institution or a company adopts a particular tartan designed for what used to be livery – I don't think we'd see very much of that now – but certainly for use in merchandising.

We also have things like universal tartans, and some of those were mentioned earlier. The Black Watch, for instance, is considered a universal tartan. Again, I have the right, if you want to put it that way – a number of my great- and great-great-uncles were in the Black Watch. It was a family occupation. Another example is the royal tartan, or the Royal Stuart tartan. There are modern ones we

see, such as the Scottish National, the Braveheart- Warrior, the Flower of Scotland, and the Pride of Scotland.

We in Alberta in 1961 did choose to have an Alberta tartan, and now in the year 2000 we're looking at adding the dress tartan to that. Earlier I talked about what the colours and the pattern in our tartan symbolize. What we're really adding to the dress tartan is the white, which is entirely appropriate, I think, for this province. Certainly members in the House won't be surprised to know that I am supportive of this because of the snow. If you're going to live in Alberta, you'd better find something to do with the snow or you're going to be a miserable person. I'm a big proponent of winter sports, for example, and I'm sure many others are. So it's nice to see the white colour symbolizing the snow turn up in a dress tartan. As the Member for Calgary-Glenmore did say, the white background does make it a showier tartan to be using when, for instance, we have Highland dance groups in competitions. I think to a certain extent an analogy I could make is that it's the same thing as the home and away jerseys for sports teams.

Tartans can and I think should be registered. I'm assuming that the original Alberta tartan was registered, and I certainly encourage the member to make sure the process is followed to register our dress tartan. You can, in fact, have them copyrighted or patented, but I'm most interested in having it registered. With the advent of the Internet and those people that can get access to it, once again it allows people to find a little piece of Alberta on that worldwide web if they're going to be searching out tartans.

I'll go back to where I started, and that is the Member for Calgary-Glenmore sponsoring this Bill 205 in support of Alberta adopting the dress tartan as an official emblem. I think it's a nice idea, and I'm sure that many people in Alberta, both people living here now and people that will come here in the future, will be proud and pleased to be able to call this tartan their tartan, because anyone in Alberta could indeed do that. I think these two tartans would come under the heading of universal tartans, and I hope it's going to be registered, as I mentioned.

With those few words I am obviously in support of Bill 205 and of the member bringing forward this idea. I think it will benefit all of those in Alberta today and in years to come, and I congratulate him for doing that. It's another nice way for us to celebrate our pride in our province and to develop our own symbols, our own stories if you will, of what we value so much in the province.

So with those few words, Madam Speaker, I will take my seat if any of my colleagues have other comments. Thank you.

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

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to speak in support of Bill 205 this afternoon. Creation of a dress tartan for Alberta is an important step for participants in the art of Highland dancing and will allow them to proudly represent their province when competing across Canada or internationally. Actually, the sort of Olympics for Highland dancing are in England and also in Ireland, and many times young people from our area go there to compete. To have a particular tartan that represents their province is very special to them, to be able to have their own tartan on as they participate with other dancers from around the world. I think this is a very unique and a very interesting idea, and I congratulate the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing it forward.

We do have, as several members ahead of me have said, an existing tartan in place, and this is one of Alberta's many emblems. We're all aware of the wild rose as the national flower and, of course, the Alberta flag. Lesser known emblems are petrified wood as our provincial stone and the great horned owl as the official bird.

Each of these emblems is chosen for their ability to represent our province. Like most tartans the Alberta tartan is very representative of the unique characteristics of the people and the place that it represents. My hon. colleague across the way has certainly explained what all the colours are, so we won't have to do that again.

The dress tartan proposed by Bill 205 keeps with the original colour scheme of the Alberta tartan as well as the significance of these colours while adding a white stripe to make the design more suitable for a dress tartan. Appropriately, the white stripe has a significance as well as representing the bright snow which is so common in our province's winters.

Madam Speaker, tartans have long been synonymous with Scotland and its families and its clans. Given the importance of the Scottish culture in the people shaping Alberta's history, the tartan is an appropriate inclusion among Alberta's provincial emblems. In Calgary, for instance, other than the aboriginal people, the first settlers were Scottish, and today they are still the leading ethnic group in the city of Calgary. So it's very significant, I think, for this province. You've also mentioned Rutherford and other people from this area who represented the Scottish influence on our province. So it's very appropriate, I think, that the tartan is an inclusion among Alberta's provincial emblems.

Historically the tartans were intended to be a decorative style of cloth. They had patterns that were locally popular and relied on a limited range of colour dyes and were made of a local coarser type of wool. This led to the idea of district tartans as an association between the land, the community, and its cloth. Where there was a strong clan within the district, as was often the case in the Highlands, the tartan worn would be of the same pattern. In fact, a man might well be recognized as being of a certain clan from the sight of his tartan. It is this concept of clan tartans that today predominates, but the use of the tartan is yet richer.

We can see this association in the five colours of Alberta's existing tartan, which highlight the province's natural beauty and resources. Donning the Alberta tartan identifies the wearer as being an Albertan, at least among those aware of tartans and especially, for instance, in the Highland dance community. Also, there are today in Calgary and in Canmore, I know, Highland games at the end of summer, and you often see people wearing a sash or a shawl kind of affair around their shoulders as they participate in the different events. I had the pleasure of being at the Braemar Highland games this last September, and it was really exciting to see all the dancers and the pipers and everyone, all of them with different tartans. It was very colourful and certainly very exciting to see.

4:40

Madam Speaker, tartans were once forbidden by law, with the exception of the government's Black Watch pattern. This pattern was used by the regiments raised within Scotland and formed the basis of the regimental tartans. By the early 1800s many Scots realized the knowledge of the tartan's importance was being lost, and simultaneously there was a nostalgic movement concerning Scotland's past. This led to institutional and individual efforts to preserve the tartan designs. Tartans were reconstructed from portraits collected on pilgrimages, demanded from clan chiefs, and recovered from the weavers' notes, so they were able to reconstruct them.

The significance of tartans as national dress worn under various circumstances created clan tartans for every name, even those that previously had none, and these were often supplemented by hunting tartans of subdued character and dress tartan, which was brighter. Further variety was added by fashion, fancy, or trade tartans, including various colours of a single pattern and especially the more

universal designs used for dancing. It's interesting to note that there were even some mourning tartans developed. So when a person has a death in the family, they put on a particular style of their tartan.

In recent years, Madam Speaker, corporate tartans have become popular, where an institution or a company adopts a tartan designed for livery and use in merchandising. Where no clan tartans exist, new family tartans have been designed. In fact, today it's big business in Scotland. You can go in and have your own family tartan designed, and you can be just like everyone else. So there's a real new wave of tartans over in Britain and of course the export that takes place to places like North America, where there are descendants of early Scottish settlers.

The ownership of a particular tartan is historically a matter of convention. However, in modern times disputes as to its use and production rely on the civil laws of copyright and in rare cases patents or trademarks. Manufacturers often offer a given tartan design in a variety of colour effects called modern, reproduction, ancient, and the like. An ancient and a modern tartan are often the same pattern and should not be confused with the design being considered.

Madam Speaker, Bill 205 recognizes that Alberta's current tartan has served well as a formal symbol of our province, just as the wild rose has represented Alberta as our provincial flower, but it isn't appropriate as a dress tartan. Such a tartan is worn by the members of Alberta's Highland dance community when competing abroad, so often a darker pattern isn't suitable. A dress tartan of another design with brighter colours and a white background is usually chosen instead.

Many of the members of this House may wonder what the difference is between dress and other tartans. Essentially, the brighter designs would be referred to as a dress tartan to distinguish them from the darker tartans of the same name. For example, the Royal Stuart will have a plain red undercheck changed to white in the Stuart dress tartan. This is similar to what Bill 205 proposes, as it changes the forest green undercheck of the Alberta tartan to a white undercheck in the dress pattern.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

The result of this alteration is similar to the evening dress worn by both men and women, which were known as arisaid setts. The combination of a clan tartan with an arisaid type of design is essentially modern. In fact, some clan chiefs would not formally recognize the dress form of their tartan. Since tartans were originally a functional outdoor cloth, the dress tartans are a product of emerging social patterns, and we see quite a growth in the tartan industry.

Creating an official dress tartan for Alberta would allow Highland dancers from Alberta to demonstrate their pride in our province when competing outside our borders, internationally especially, and the hon. member has spoken about the upcoming world gathering of Highland dancing here in Edmonton this summer. It should be quite an exciting time. Indeed, the brightness of the design may be appealing to other Albertans who are not even aware of or attracted by the existing Alberta tartan. Increased knowledge and use of our provincial emblems will serve to increase Alberta's pride in our province's history and beauty.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 signifies a recognition of the importance of the Scottish heritage to our province's history and the importance of Highland dancing in the Scottish tradition. It provides a further

source of pride and connection between Albertans of Scottish heritage with our province and its traditions. Bill 205 is a valuable proposal that offers an opportunity to highlight Alberta's official emblem while providing a means for Albertans to celebrate their pride in our province. I urge all members to support Bill 205.

Thank you.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to stand today to talk about Bill 205. Our Canadian and Alberta histories have benefited from the heritage of people from Scottish backgrounds. For the sake of my wife's family, which is named Benwood, I think it's exciting that Bill 205 is being brought forward.

In showing support to my province and in listening to the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, I think everyone should support this bill. Creating a provincial tartan is something to be proud of. I am not of Scottish background but of Irish, and I believe that the Irish also had tartan colours. Considering that the Romans wore different sashes, it has a long, long history.

Tartans are a tradition of clans, different symbols of identity to these clans of the past. These versions of the tartan that have been presented to us, one being the dress colours and one being the regular colours, are a nice way of actually illustrating this. Hopefully, like it was mentioned earlier, our Scottish dancers as they compete provincially or abroad will dress in our Alberta colours. This would be a fantastic way of actually standing out.

I must make a call to a past member of this Assembly, a member that represented Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, my dentist when I was much younger, and see whether or not he will actually follow these colours when he golfs on his own golf course out at Fort-in-View.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I am totally in support of this, and I think it's a good bill to bring forward. Thank you very much.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to be able to speak to Bill 205 and to congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on bringing forward this bill. It's indeed an important occasion for us to celebrate the design of this wonderful dress tartan, and the fact that we are discussing it in this Legislature today further signifies the importance. This symbol brings us together, and it's important for people of Scottish descent.

The wearing of the tartan is one of the ways in which people express a sense of loyalty, pride, history, and culture as a people who have worked hard to make a living, raise families, and build communities. In recent years as we have become more and more aware of the necessity of including cultural celebrations in Alberta society, symbols of many other cultures have joined those tartans.

When we think about the kinds of traditions we have, it helps us to remember the history out of which they arose. Indeed, the wearing of the tartan goes back to Roman times at least. Of course, if you talk to people who have done studies of the settlement of Britain, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, they talk about the various ways in which the tartan has significance. The whole way in which it's worn has significance, depending on what your function is at that particular time.

Other members here today have talked about the various tartans. The meaningfulness of the different threads, the way they are woven together, and the way in which they join are all part of the symbolic meaning of the various colours found in tartans, and this can go back to the existing Alberta tartan today, as was mentioned by the last two

to three speakers. It brought in everything that is relevant and important to Alberta.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta tartan, the one that was identified on the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore's tie, came to be because of the hard work and due diligence and commitment of a gentleman who happened to be my constituent. His name was Marwood Swain, and he was the owner/operator of Juniper Emblems and also, along highway 2, what used to be the Juniper restaurant and hotel. Mr. Swain was very, very active in tourism and promoting Alberta and saw the need many, many years ago to incorporate an Alberta tartan and register it. So it was thanks to him that we've enjoyed this tartan all these years.

4:50

A tartan pattern emerges out of a single list of coloured threads called a thread count. Reading a tartan requires a little practice and involves finding two unique points within the pattern called the pivots. Tartans consist of broader bands of colour called the undercheck which are often decorated or embellished with narrower lines of colour called the overcheck. Once the basic possibilities are understood, one can better appreciate designs that combine and extend the simple ideas.

The largest group of tartan uses the three-colour design of Black Watch as their basis, and we've heard a lot about Black Watch this afternoon as well as the Royal Stuart group. The Stuart family records its traditional descent from Banquo, thane of Lochaber, who makes an appearance as a character in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Historically, however, the family appears to be descended from an ancient family in Brittany. They acquired lands in England after the Norman conquest and moved to Scotland when David I ascended to the throne of Scotland. The family were granted extensive estates, and the office of high steward was made hereditary in the family.

With a name like Gordon you can tell that that, too, is Scottish, and the clan Gordon also has a well-recognized tartan. In fact, it is one of my favourites, even if I am a little prejudiced. Our clan's Gaelic name is Gordan, and our motto is "remaining." We also have our own pipe music, the Gordon march. The Gordon clan is a territorial name, and the family who took the name are believed to have been of Anglo-Norman descent, moving from the Borders to Aberdeenshire. The wild boar's head appears on the Gordon arms because, legend says, the first Gordon saved a Scottish king from an attacking boar.

Mr. Speaker, it's very important for people to understand that the creation of a dress tartan which all the citizens of Alberta over time will learn to enjoy is something that will preserve this tradition of Scottish culture while encouraging a more inclusive celebration of its meaning to all Albertans more than before. I certainly hope that now Albertans will have a choice. They can basically decide either to continue using the existing tartan or look to the new dress tartan.

Because the British Empire spread far and wide across the world, it is not unusual in former colonies to see people who do not in their physical appearance resemble Scottish people, showing that their heritage has been adopted right across the world. I found it interesting when Edmonton-Centre said that you could tell that she was of Scottish descent. I didn't know we could – she'll have to explain it to me later – but that was very interesting, hon. member.

It's exciting to think that when we have special occasions in Alberta, it will be possible for us to choose, as I said, from the two different official provincial tartans. And, yes, hon. member, tartans definitely are registered, and these ones I'm sure will be as well.

One thing I would like to mention is that I think it is very important for us to realize how popular tartans are. If you travel to

many tourist destination areas, you will often find a Scottish shop, and a number of people go in to look at the various tartans. I know, for instance, that for the clan Gordon there are six registered tartans. Some of them of course are ancient tartans that started with the beginning of time, and some have been updated over the years.

The Scottish tartan and looking at Scottish heritage is very big business across North America as well as Europe. I envy you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, that you've had the opportunity to go to Scotland. That is certainly on my list of things I want to do, to visit Scotland, England, and Wales and take a look for myself at where my husband's family were from, the ancestors. I think that would be a wonderful trip, if each of us could enjoy that.

So I want to thank the hon. member and the people he represents for bringing this bill forward. I think it's always delightful when we can stand in this House and together vote for something that's going to improve the quality of life and expand the multiculturalism side, when we can all agree that something here is important and should happen for Albertans. I, too, want to thank Mr. Chorney for his work involved in looking at these tartans.

If people want to see a very, very extensive display of tartans in this province, I suggest that you stop sometime at the Highlander Hotel on 16th Avenue in Calgary. The food is delicious there, and they have a very extensive wall display of all of the registered tartans. It's very, very interesting to see how varied and how different they are.

I will be supporting this bill and look forward to seeing a number of people wearing this tartan as early as July of this year. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Now with great anticipation I invite the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to participate in this debate.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a lot of discussion in the Legislature today about Scottish culture and celebrating by having Alberta adopt another official provincial tartan, the Alberta dress tartan, as a new tartan for a new century. I'm pleased to support Bill 205 since I'm always pleased to hear about having opportunities to embrace multiculturalism and pride in the province of Alberta.

From a cultural standpoint, especially, the Scottish people and their traditions and customs are as proud as they are colourful. For centuries a woolen cloth called a tartan formed part of the dress of Highland Scots. Tartans were worn in other parts of Scotland as well. However, it was in the Highlands that the patterns developed to the point where they identified the wearer as a member of a particular clan. The tartans that were worn several hundred years ago consisted of simple checks of two or three colours. The shades were obtained from dye-producing plants, roots, berries, and trees in the district where the cloth was woven.

The early form of the Highland dress was the great kilt, a piece of tartan about two metres in width and approximately four to six metres in length. This kilt could be used as a cloak by day or a blanket by night by wrapping it around yourself and fastening it at the waist with a leather belt. After the Scots were defeated in battle by the English in 1746, the British Parliament forbade them to wear tartan. The great revival in the use of tartan came 100 years later and was encouraged by Queen Victoria's interest in Scottish dress.

The chemical dyes which were coming into use by this time allowed weavers to enlarge the range of colors and to introduce more elaborate patterns. The design of the kilt had changed as well with the introduction of the little kilt, consisting of the lower part of the earlier belted version. Today it is universally accepted as the correct form of modern Highland dress.

Although the kilt has been traditionally regarded as male dress,

one often sees young girls wearing kilts, especially in Highland dance competitions. However, a pleated skirt is the traditional female attire or for evening wear a tartan skirt of silk or other material with a sash of silk tartan.

Mr. Speaker, in any case, those who wear the tartan and the Highland dress take great pride in the fact that they are helping to preserve traditional Scottish customs, and by the looks of it, the Alberta dress tartan design in front of us would make for an elegant pattern for any dress occasion.

In Scotland since ancient times the tartan has had a strong connection with the clan system. A clan consisted of a group of families who believed they were descended from a common ancestor. They generally lived together in a particular region of Scotland, such as a small valley or an island. Scots liked to think of a clan as a family. The responsibility for raising children was sometimes shared, and arranged marriages within the clan were common. The clan served as a military organization as well as a social organization. Each clan had its own slogan and war cry and carried its own standard and colours. It also had its own military pipe music as well as a distinctive tartan. The chief was responsible for the welfare of his followers. On their part, the clansmen owed their loyalty to the chief. The linking together of all the members of a clan guaranteed their protection from enemies. However, it also meant that they were drawn into the many quarrels that involved their kinsmen.

5:00

Although the ancient clan system was breaking down by the 18th century, the Highlanders who immigrated to Canada took elements of it with them. The clan tradition generally assisted the Scots into their new land. Although some of the old quarrels were brought to Canada, they were usually soon forgotten. The clan system served Highlanders well as associations that gave them comfort in a strange new land and helped them to survive.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to touch on Scottish Canadians for a moment, with respect to how they have become a part of our multicultural tradition. In recent decades the percentage of Scottish Canadians has declined in comparison to Canada's total population. Despite this, Scottish Canadians continue to exert a powerful influence on the nation's affairs. Scots continue to immigrate to Canada, and once here they usually adjust to their home away from home.

Although most people of Scottish descent no longer live in purely Scottish communities, their presence is still highly visible. St. Andrew's, Burns, and Caledonian societies are common from coast to coast. Such groups encourage traditional cultural activities and celebrate Scottish holidays. There also numerous clan societies which sponsor social gatherings and which work to maintain the Scots' pride in their origins.

Scottish traditions in Canada continued throughout the years in various forms. Universities with Scottish ties have pipe bands. Civilian volunteer groups such as the Fraser Highlanders and the Royal Highland Emigrants keep alive the old military traditions. Many Canadian armed forces militia regiments are proud of their Scottish backgrounds. Activities such as Highland Games competitions, golf, curling, Scottish music, and folk dancing are enjoyed by many Canadians, whether or not they are of Scottish ancestry. Many Albertans, indeed, many Canadians enjoy sharing in the festive holidays observed by Scottish tradition, whether it is a part of their family background or not.

St. Andrew's Day, which is celebrated on November 30, honours St. Andrew, Scotland's patron saint. Formerly, it was a religious holiday. Today Scots, particularly those living abroad in Canada and other countries, celebrate it as a patriotic festival. The main

feature of the day is the St. Andrew's dinner at which traditional dishes are served, including a singed sheep's head. In addition, toasts are drunk to the glory of Scotland and the honoured memory of their patron saint.

Hogmanay, or Scottish new year, has been celebrated by the Scots since the 16th century. Its name is derived from a French phrase meaning "to the mistletoe, the new year." It was originally celebrated on January 11. Today it takes place on January 1. In the traditional Scottish household the new year is an important date. It was the time for housecleaning, the payment of debts, the returning of borrowed items, the mending of cloths, and the tuning of musical instruments. Most important, it was time for preparation for the coming year and of new hope for the future.

The Scots have carried many of their traditional new year's practices abroad to all the places they have settled. One of these is the practice of first-footing. According to the custom the first person to cross the threshold after midnight is regarded as an omen of the coming year. To ensure good luck, the caller should be a black-haired man, and he should bring a sprig of mistletoe with him. Additional Scottish new year's customs require that whiskey or a special blend of whiskey, ale, and nutmeg be drunk, and that visitors bring bread, salt, and coal to a home. These symbolize, respectively, life, hospitality, and warmth. There is often a noisemaking ceremony at the stroke of midnight, when guests bang on pots and pans, trays and irons, and shout chants in order to stave off evil forces.

Finally, all the guests grasp hands and sing *Auld Lang Syne*, a practice that has become commonplace throughout North America.

Perhaps the most recognizable celebration to those of us who are not Scottish is Burns night, celebrated with pride on January 25, the anniversary of the poet Robert Burns' birth in 1759. Hundreds of Burns clubs, Scottish societies, and Caledonian societies in Canada and around the world gather to honour Robbie.

A Burns night has certain traditional features whenever it is staged. First is the ceremony in which the haggis is paraded into the hall. This is a traditional Scottish dish made of heart, liver, and other organs of a calf or sheep minced and diced with suet, oatmeal, and seasonings and boiled in the stomach of the animal. The haggis is accompanied by a piper and kilted escort party.

Before he cuts the haggis, the chairman for the evening delivers a special poetic tribute, Burns' *Ode to Haggis*, as he holds knife in hand. He then thrusts the knife into the haggis as he recites the *Selkirk Grace*. The haggis is then served along with turnips and potatoes; chicken and leek soup and bannock are often part of this menu, too. Such foods represent typical Scottish dishes of Burns' time.

The evening's highlight is the immortal memory. This is a speech delivered by a local dignitary or an authority on Burns. In the speech the speaker talks about the poet, his work, the Scottish society of the period. The annual Burns' festival concludes with the singing of the traditional Scottish songs and ballads. The special evening serves as the major occasion on which Scots honour their distinctive culture.

Mr. Speaker, in sharing some of the very many aspects of Scottish culture with members of the Assembly, I was hoping to show that the tartan tradition is part of a much deeper set of customs. I think any of these occasions that I just mentioned would be heightened and brightened by the appearance of the Alberta dress tartan. It would be even more significant if people could take great pride in saying that this beautiful dress tartan pattern is an official provincial emblem of Alberta.

I am therefore asking all members to join me in support of Bill 205 and celebrating our multicultural Alberta. Thank you.

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to take a few moments to say a few words in support of this bill. I am Scottish, and I was raised in the Scottish traditions all of my life. I've worn a variety of tartans, and I thought I knew a lot about kilts and tartans and Scottish traditions, but I've learned a lot here this afternoon by listening to the very extensive speeches by members, and I thank them for their contributions in this regard.

I did want to say that one of the purposes of the introduction of this dress tartan is to allow our Scottish dancers who are competing at home and abroad to wear a dress tartan. Having danced competitively and been a Highland dancing instructor myself, I can tell you why it is important to have a beautiful, showy tartan, which this new Alberta dress tartan is, and that is that you get the attention of the judges if you have a showy tartan. So I'm sure our Scottish dancers will wear this with pride and they will catch the attention of the judges, and provided that their footwork and their style is up to snuff, they will do well.

I intend, myself, to have a kilt and a sash made in this new Alberta tartan. I would urge all members to do the same, female members to have a sash and men to have a kilt, because as we have heard, this is a district tartan; you don't have to be Scottish to wear the tartan. It's just very smart attire, especially for evening wear.

Without anything further, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to urge all members to support this bill, which I'm sure they will.

5:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to bring a little bit of personal life into it. Thirty nine years ago I married a lassie from Scotland, who was born and raised there and trained and came over here. [interjection] Thirty nine years ago, yes. Some few years later we went to Uganda, in east Africa, where I was teaching in a teacher training college, and the principal, who had been there before I arrived, was a Scot. He had taught the Africans how to do Scottish country dances. That was unique, seeing all of these people, who, naturally, were black, do Scottish country dances.

While I was there I had the unique experience of seeing Colonel Amin overthrow the government. We all know that Field Marshal Idi Amin Dada overthrew the government and brought in a very repressive regime. What I wanted to explain here in the context of what we're talking about today is that he had great pride in the Scottish regiment. Here you had all these blacks with their tartans, kilts, and even with bagpipes as an honour guard.

Mr. Martin, writing some 297 years ago, in 1703, made mention that every isle differs from each other in their fancy of making plaids, as to the stripes and breadth and colours; this humour is as different through the mainland of the Highlands insofar that they who have seen those places are able at the first view of a man's plaid to guess the place of his residence. The spirit of the idea has grown to the extent that Scots have come to believe that the pattern of woven coloured stripes has become an important part of their cultural identity.

I wish to offer a little historical comment which might add to the understanding of the structure of the Scottish society. Today it is generally accepted that clan tartans were well established some time at least during the 18th century. Prior to that time, while clan, district, and tartan were often closely associated, the idea of a single, uniform clan tartan had not yet emerged.

The natural development of the art of tartan manufacture in the Highlands was completely curtailed for many years following the

battle of Culloden in the uprising of 1745, although the battle occurred in 1746, when Bonnie Prince Charlie and many clans were severely beaten at the battle by English forces. So angered were the British at this rebellion that they scourged the Highlands, burning many homes. Of course, with thatch for a roof it was quite easy to do that.

Many children and men and women were killed, and it was forbidden to wear the plaid. The proscription, ban, of the Highland dress could bring 100 lashes, which is enough to kill many people that may have received it. This was not repealed until 1782. The warlike reputation of the tartan, which was so ruthlessly crushed following Culloden, was put to great military advantage by the Highland regiments in their exploits abroad under the Union Jack.

By 1882, the year of the first royal visit to Scotland since the rebellion of '45, all the ingredients for a spectacular tartan revival were in place. So you got the royal tartan. In the capable hands of Sir Walter Scott the royal seal of approval was added to the now highly fashionable Highland Guard. This was worn by King George IV, whom you all know preceded Queen Victoria.

Hunting tartans, as their name implies, were designed in subdued colours, often greens or blues, to blend with the natural environment. Wearing of the tartans is not restricted to grouse moors but is intended for everyday use as well as formal and informal occasions.

Dress tartans, like the Alberta dress tartan, are designed by altering the background colours of the formal set to a white thread. Kilts made of this material are worn for dancing and other festive occasions. The Highland Society of London has a collection of

tartans. Each sample is certified by the chief and bears their name and signature.

I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing this forward so that the Alberta tartan and now the Alberta dress tartan can be worn by our competitors in Scottish events wherever they may occur in this province, this country, or indeed around the world.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a second time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I move that we call it 5:30 and that we reconvene this evening at 8 in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion put forward by hon. Deputy Government House Leader that the Assembly do now adjourn and reconvene tonight at 8 o'clock in committee, would all those in favour, please say aye?

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:17 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 8, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/03/08

head: Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'll call the committee to order. We will be dealing with Executive Council in the Assembly, and upstairs will be Infrastructure. That's committee B. So I'd ask those members of committee B to please make their way upstairs.

[The committee met as subcommittees A and B from 8:01 p.m. to 10 p.m.]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake for subcommittee A, please.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Subcommittee A of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Executive Council for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: All those that agree with the report, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

MRS. LAING: Madam Chairman, subcommittee B of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Infrastructure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the report, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I move that the Committee of Supply rise and report progress and request leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. TANNAS: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Executive Council and the Department of Infrastructure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 12

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure, honour, and privilege to move third reading of Bill 12, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000.

I have made my comments with respect to the efficacy of the bill on earlier occasions and would ask the House to support early passage.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We do have some comments on Bill 12 at this stage. While ultimately we will be supporting it because we really have no choice in terms of seeing the need for additional spending in a variety of departments that this government, in our opinion, has not adequately planned for in terms of their resource allocation, we still have concerns about this process and how it moves along every time we see these interim budgets in here.

10:10

While this bill has been up for debate a number of times, we have asked many questions, Madam Speaker, and we have yet to see answers being provided to those questions. So it's once again a sad day in this Assembly when we are asked to vote on the spending of millions of dollars and we can't even get a few simple questions answered. We've certainly asked that we at least have some explanation of the new spending that's going to contribute to meeting the defined outcomes and performance measures that we've seen in the budgets and how this will address our specific concerns in this province at this stage, particularly with regard to health care funding, to education funding, to infrastructure funding, to environment funding, and to taking care of those in our society who are less able to take care of themselves than others. Those would be seniors, children, people living below the poverty line: all people for whom we have some responsibility that we don't see being addressed in an adequate fashion.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

With the addition of the spending of these moneys, we don't see the outcomes that are going to result from them, because we haven't had answers to our questions and because this spending is not done in the standard kind of manner that we would expect from a government. Certainly we see industry being responsible in terms of how they report to their shareholders. We would expect nothing less from a government. Instead, Mr. Speaker, what do we get? We get the current Treasurer, who has brought in more supplementary supply requests than the previous two Treasurers combined. That is, we think, definitely an appalling state of affairs and something that we hope will be rectified with the possible appointment of a new Treasurer, given the new career plans of the existing Treasurer.

Mr. Speaker, every time we speak to the interim supply bills when they come in, we bring forward a number of excellent recommendations, good ideas that we'd be very happy if this government scooped and implemented. It isn't that they don't know how to do that.

They've done it many times in the past with some of the good ideas we've brought forward as the Official Opposition in this province. It wouldn't hurt our feelings if they did it again.

We've talked many times in this Assembly and outside of the Assembly about economic and fiscal strategy reports, about using long-term trends, as far as 10 years. I know that this government's mandate is election to election, and we see these rolling three-year budgets, but any long-term strategic development certainly has a long-term component to it which is longer than three years. Hopefully they will be able to take that into account at some time.

We've talked many times about annual performance reports that have meaningful measures in them. We get reports that are sometimes questionable in nature in terms of the kinds of measures that are used and whether they give us specific reference points that are useful from one year to another. So we would like to see that.

My particular favourite recommendation, which we have brought forward many times, is monthly budget updates instead of quarterly updates, Mr. Speaker, a very responsible thing to do. If industry can do it, government can do it. Certainly there are adequate staff, well-skilled staff who have the ability to do it, but we don't seem to see that coming forward from this government. It would be a far more

responsible way to address the kinds of fluctuations that we see in revenue than what happens now.

If we could pair monthly statements with a stabilization fund, Mr. Speaker, we would be well on our way to providing a kind of revenue monitoring and allocation system that would be world-class in nature instead of running the province like some rinky-dink operation that doesn't have enough resources to give us any kind of useful information. We wouldn't be seeing all these requests for out-of-budget, unplanned spending.

These are really good ideas that we've brought forward. Like I said, we'd be very happy if the government implemented them instead of having to come back in here time after time and having to vote on spending that really does not come into any kind of parameters of well-thought-out action. So in complete frustration, Mr. Speaker, once again I will have to support this bill, but it is an inappropriate way for the government to conduct the business of this province.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

[At 10:15 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Executive Council, Wednesday, March 8, 2000
 00/03/08
 8:01 p.m.
 [Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Subcommittee A – Executive Council

Gordon, Judy, Chairman
 Severtson, Gary, Deputy Chairman
 Bonner, Bill
 Boutilier, Guy
 Burgener, Jocelyn
 Cao, Wayne
 Cardinal, Mike

Ducharme, Denis
 Dunford, Clint
 Friedel, Gary
 Hierath, Ron
 Jacques, Wayne
 Johnson, LeRoy
 Klapstein, Albert

Lougheed, Rob
 Marz, Richard
 Pannu, Raj
 Sapers, Howard
 Smith, Murray
 Wickman, Percy

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll ask the Premier to lead off the debate on Executive Council.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Madam Chairman and hon. members. I am pleased to appear again before this committee in my capacity as minister responsible for Executive Council to resume our discussion of Executive Council's 2000-03 business plan.

At our last session questions from members of the committee began with a request from one member for more information about Alberta's tax plan, particularly in comparison to the federal government's plan. This was followed later on with a request for additional information about this government's plans to introduce a flat tax. I offered some initial information about the plan during our last meeting, and I believe the hon. Provincial Treasurer provided a more complete response during his time with the committee on Monday of this week.

Another question from the same member dealt with a new performance measure added this year to track revenue levels achieved by the Queen's Printer bookstore. The member suggested that the targets used are too low and that higher targets should be considered. Madam Chairman, I believe that members of the committee need to take into consideration the nature of the Queen's Printer bookstore and its business. The bookstore sells a very specific and limited range of products, primarily government legislation. That is the bookstore's mandate. There are a number of very legitimate reasons why revenues for the bookstore are estimated in a very prudent fashion.

Firstly, the number of new bookstore products available for sale in any given year is directly related to the amount of new legislation created here in the Legislature. The government staff responsible for determining bookstore revenues can't reasonably be expected to come up with exact sales projections for the coming year if they don't know how much new legislation they can expect to have on the shelf. This year the legislative list will be very light, so I would imagine the demand, if anyone really wants to read that stuff, is going to be very light as well. However, bookstore revenue projections do reflect any additional sales that can be predicted, such as the expected sales for the upcoming *Revised Statutes of Alberta* product. Revenue projections for 2001 will show a fair increase because it's reasonable to expect that the sales will be there.

Another question dealt with the bureau's goal of ensuring public satisfaction with information received from the government. I would like to first point out that this year's results for that question are up over last year's level, reaching 69 percent satisfaction. The goal was actually 70 percent, so 1 percent off isn't all that bad. Oh, I'm sorry; it's 75 percent, which is fairly high given the broad and far-reaching nature of the goal. It was set high to reflect this

government's unwavering commitment to communicating with Albertans. I don't know that it's fair to say that achieving almost 70 percent satisfaction could fairly be described as being singularly unsuccessful, as one member of the committee suggested.

This government has been extremely successful in its efforts to deliver open and honest two-way communications with Albertans. In fact, Albertans have attended a wide variety and number of public consultations where they received information and shared their opinions. New programs like Alberta Connects, combined with communications resources like the Internet, have only served to increase the amount and variety of information available to Albertans. I believe that Albertans have come to expect immediate and comprehensive information from their government as soon as a new initiative or issue appears, and our efforts to meet and exceed those expectations will continue, the most current example being Bill 11, Madam Chairman.

Another question asked about collecting public feedback and performance measurements from other sources, such as the Internet or public consultations. As for consultations, any performance measures would fall under the responsibility of the ministry holding the consultation. As far as Internet goes, the bureau has already begun to post user satisfaction surveys on the government home page to ensure that the resource meets the needs of its users.

Another question from a member dealt with what government is doing to communicate with Albertans about priority areas like education, health care, infrastructure, and economic strategies over the upcoming three-year planning period. As I just mentioned, Albertans have come to expect comprehensive communications from their government, and we plan to meet those expectations. Communications branches across government continually develop and deliver communications as new initiatives and key programs are announced. This, of course, will continue in coming years. In addition to regular and ongoing communications within specific ministries, the bureau will also continue to use the Alberta Connects program to keep Albertans informed about the programs and services that matter most to them.

Another question about the bureau's performance measures dealt with customer satisfaction with the Queen's Printer bookstore products. A member asked if this was the same as the results shown for goal 2, which measures public satisfaction with access to government information through the Queen's Printer bookstore and the RITE telephone system. The measure for goal 2 deals with overall public satisfaction with both RITE and the Queen's Printer bookstore. The results show an average satisfaction level of 97 percent, which I would suggest is about as close to perfect as you can get.

It's possible the hon. member who asked the question confused the two different measures, since they both show the same very high satisfaction level. In fact, the measure under goal 4 relates specifically to customer satisfaction with the quality and range of products available through the Queen's Printer bookstore. That measure also happens to show a 97 percent satisfaction rating.

I should add, Madam Chairman, that all aspects of the bureau's measures, like all the government's performance measures, are fully reviewed by the Auditor General and are checked to ensure that they follow recognized standards for performance measurement.

A member of the committee also asked for an explanation of the \$1.1 million increase to the budget for the Public Affairs Bureau in 2001. I did talk about the increase in my opening comments when we last met. I mentioned that there would be an increase in spending due to the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* project. If I recall, members of the opposition were quite pleased that that project was being undertaken. The *Revised Statutes* will require approximately \$1 million in additional spending to complete. Revenues for the product are expected to fully offset the additional spending. I believe that members of this committee have already gone on record to express their support for the project. The balance of the budget increase for the bureau, which works out to approximately \$100,000, is to allow for salary increases for staff. Members of the committee will note salary increases in every ministry budget this year.

Another question asked for a breakdown of the budget in full-time equivalent staffing in the bureau and also asked if there would be an increase in full-time employees. The bureau is currently staffed with 128 full-time equivalents, and that number is not expected to increase in the coming years. A breakdown of FTEs and budget by subprogram is as follows. Communications services, \$4.7 million and 71 FTEs, and this includes professional staff seconded to government ministries. The Queen's Printer bookstores in Edmonton and Calgary, \$1.3 million and 12 FTEs; the bookstores also account for \$1.5 million in revenue. Approximately \$900,000 and 11 FTEs are for administrative services, which includes overall bureau management and human resource and administrative services. Approximately three-quarters of a million dollars and 17 FTEs are for the RITE centres in Edmonton and Calgary. More than half a million dollars and 11 FTEs are for publishing services, which includes the Internet site, print and graphic design consultation, electronic publishing, news releases distribution, the *Alberta Gazette*, and so on. And \$521,000 and 6 FTEs are for communications technologies.

8:11

Yet another question asked about the bureau dealt with plans to look for opportunities to deliver communications support through clustered services or shared resources amongst ministries. This initiative is simply looking at making the best and most efficient use of available resources. For example, communications branches that are housed in the same building are looking for opportunities to share administrative and public affairs officers' positions. Shared arrangements are already in place between communications branches in the ministries of Government Services and Municipal Affairs as well as between the ministries of Children's Services and Human Resources and Employment.

One member of the committee also wanted to know what kinds of courses are included in the bureau's in-house training program. Well, the bureau offers a variety of courses to ensure that staff are continually upgrading their skills. For example, staff are offered ongoing courses to keep up to date with the latest developments in computer software and other technologies. Other sessions are designed to upgrade specialized skills such as writing and editing and to develop general professional skills such as consulting and leadership.

One member of the committee wanted to know more about the bureau's use of new technologies in its communications with Albertans. I can tell you, Madam Chairman, that the bureau will continue to look at the latest and best uses of technology as they

appear in both the private and public sectors and will continue to adopt those best practices for use within the Alberta government. This applies to the government Internet home page and to other new developments like the on-line discussion groups created as part of the recent Alberta Children's Forum. The bureau will also work to create more opportunities for Internet users to provide feedback about the government's home page and suggest new features and options they would like to see made available.

A final question about the bureau dealt with human resources' Intranet, currently under development. This initiative is quite simply an effort to improve the way human resource information is communicated to staff. I think members of the committee would agree that a paperless system that can simultaneously reach staff in some 20 different locations is preferable and more efficient than an endless stream of memos and mail-outs. The Intranet will include various types of information of interest and use to staff, such as pay and benefit details, training course announcements and registration, and internal phone lists.

Turning now, Madam Chairman, to the Alberta Corporate Service Centre. A member of the committee asked a question about the 11 FTEs included in this budget for the centre. At this time only the CEO and the administrative co-ordinator are permanent positions, all other staff are seconded to complete the design framework and proposed implementation strategy.

The design team has started sketching out the centre's organizational structures and identifying core human resources. Once that work is complete, approximately 11 full-time equivalents will be needed in the 2000-01 fiscal year to create a small corporate service core team and service delivery team.

A member also asked whether the PeopleSoft system was being recommended for the shared services initiative. I can tell you that the government continues to use the computer software provided by PeopleSoft for its financial and human resource functions. The program is used by all government ministries, and it will be used by the Alberta Corporate Service Centre.

I would like to conclude my remarks with some additional comments about the centre. As I mentioned to this committee last week, this is a new operating entity under Executive Council. In my remarks I outlined some of the administrative efficiencies and the related cost savings that would be reallocated within departments to frontline programs. But, Madam Chairman, it's much more than that, which is why I would like to elaborate more on our shared services initiative.

Shared services is really about changing the way we do business so that we are indeed more responsive to client needs and ultimately the needs of Albertans. It's about capitalizing and building on the professional skill base we have in our public service while partnering effectively with local businesses. The initiative means new employment and business opportunities, new investment in our technology infrastructure, more effective service delivery in regions throughout Alberta, and more money into programs for Albertans. It will also give us the ability to appropriately identify cross-government issues, expectations, and priorities and will create an effective climate for future change and innovation. We are committed to achieving those benefits with no net increase in funding, and we will not achieve those results on the backs of our employees. The public service has been essential to our past successes, and I am confident our employees will once again rise to this challenge and make the Alberta Corporate Service Centre a centre of excellence. In my view, this initiative is a win/win for government and for the people we serve.

Madam Chairman, that concludes my opening remarks to the committee, and I hope I've been able to answer many of the questions that were asked. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I have some additional questions for the hon. Premier, but first I'd like to thank him for answering my questions from last Thursday afternoon. This evening I'm going to centre my questioning to the hon. Premier on some of the initiatives and some of the observations and recommendations that were outlined by the Auditor General.

My first series of questions for the Premier would be this. What steps are being taken by the Executive Council in the year 2000-2001 in conjunction with government departments to address the concerns and observations and recommendations of the Auditor General relating to capital asset management, particularly managing risks and costs, planning issues, reporting, and performance reporting as outlined on pages 6 through to 13 in the 1998-99 report? What steps also are being taken by the Executive Council in the year 2000-2001 in conjunction with other government departments to articulate best practices in business planning, including guidance on the definition of business plan components, more constructive feedback to improve the quality of business plans, and providing economic and fiscal assumptions at the start of the business planning cycle? For the convenience of the hon. Premier, this is in the Auditor General's report 1998-99, pages 21 through to 23.

What steps, Madam Chairman, are also being taken by Executive Council in the year 2000-2001 in conjunction with other government departments to develop a strategy to improve the quality of performance measures in the business plans? For the hon. Premier's convenience, this is in the 1998-99 Auditor General's annual report on pages 27 through to 31.

Now, on page 33 of the same annual report. My next question for the Premier is: what steps are being taken by the Executive Council in 2000-2001 in conjunction with other government departments to provide guidance to accountable organizations on best practices for annual report presentation?

8:21

Now, the Auditor General identifies a lack of consistent governance principles for appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions. A lot of hon. members of this House have discussed this in the past, and I'm sure it will be an item of discussion well into the future. In fact, I was at a public forum last night, and this whole issue was discussed by the panel members. But to ensure that there is effective governance, there must be performance expectations established for everyone and everyone must be held accountable, I believe. All government departments should be held accountable, and we should have a recognized method for analyzing and looking at results. The government needs to provide guidance to assist ministries in establishing and agreeing on governance practices.

Now, will the Premier indicate to members of this committee how many government ministries continue to use the directive introduced by the Premier in 1993 on appointment of members to these boards? The Auditor General on pages 49 through to 52 in his report from 1998-1999 is concerned about this.

Another question for the hon. Premier: why do government departments no longer establish review panels to select members of these boards, to establish selection criteria, and to screen candidates for board positions against established selection criteria? Now, the Auditor General is puzzled by this, and his auditors bring this up on pages 49 through to 52 of the '98-99 report.

Another question regarding the Auditor General's report to the hon. Premier: why is there failure to provide direction in establishing a process to ensure regular reporting on the governance practices and

assessments whenever we're talking about effectiveness for any internal control system?

Now, we need to also continue here and ask about what steps are being taken by the Executive Council in 2000-2001 in conjunction with other government departments to ensure that employee performance management systems clearly support the achievement of government and department objectives. For the Premier's convenience, for reference, this is discussed on pages 43 through 49 in the Auditor General's '98-99 report.

Will the Premier also indicate to this committee how much, if any, money was spent on polling, market research, focus group research, and consulting fees from vote 1.0.1? I would be very interested to find that out, because we are of course in the process of debating in Bill 11 focus group research and how much of it there was and what exactly was done and by whom on these what are now becoming perhaps the most famous blank pages in the history of this province.

Also, could the hon. Premier provide copies of any reports, studies, and cost-benefit analyses prepared for Executive Council with respect to the government reorganization announced on May 25, 1999? Now, I understand there is a 28-page summary document which unfortunately Executive Council will not release under FOIP. I heard the Premier, and I was listening with keen interest whenever he was talking about FOIP and how members of the opposition are not FOIPable, I believe was the word he used. The only thing I can say to the hon. Premier is that I know he's very busy, but if one of his staff would like to come over to my constituency office and see how I deal with the money that the Legislative Assembly gives to me to run my constituency office, all my budget is entirely open for constituents.

AN HON. MEMBER: Is it filed?

MR. MacDONALD: It was filed, but constituents of mine can walk in any time and see what this hon. member does with every cent of that tax money that is acquired through the budget.

Now, FOIP is a very useful manner for me to do my job, and I'm glad it exists. I have FOIPed countless government departments, and I have been disappointed sometimes, but on many occasions I have received information that's very vital and of great interest to the taxpayers of this province.

I have a few more questions for the Premier. Will the Premier provide further information on any top-level planning document, any document or documents that were prepared for Executive Council by deputy ministers which discussed the government's long-term planning framework? Also, will the hon. Premier commit to providing a copy of this document to all members of this Assembly?

Madam Chairman, what steps were taken by the office of the Premier in 1999-2000 and in 2000-2001 to improve its handling and processing of freedom of information requests, as recommended by the FOIP commissioner?

Now, we're all aware of the Executive Council's handling of West Edmonton Mall FOIP requests, but earlier this evening in his response the hon. Premier was talking about a paperless trail and electronic filings, I believe he was discussing. I can't imagine anything more difficult to FOIP, and if I can go back to his words, not mine, I don't think that would be very FOIPable.

At this time, Madam Chairman, that is the extent of my questions, and I look forward to the hon. Premier's response. If he does not have time this evening, well, I can look forward to a letter. Maybe I'll be the 18,002nd letter that the Premier's office is going to deal with this fiscal year.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Madam Chairman, very few of those questions dealt with my estimates. As a matter of fact, most of them alluded to the Auditor General's report. There have been numerous reports of the Auditor General during my tenure as Premier. We get one every year, and I can tell you we do not sweep those recommendations under the table. I think this government has a record that exceeds the record of virtually every other government in Canada in terms of abiding by and accepting the recommendations of the Auditor General. I believe that in the case of the Auditor General's reports generally, we stand at about a 95 to 97 percent acceptance of all recommendations. So for all of the questions that the hon. member asked as they allude to the Auditor General's report, he can rest assured that we have either taken action on those recommendations, that action is now under way, or that plans are being made to take action to abide by the recommendations of the Auditor General.

We put a lot of stock into the Auditor General's examination of government operations and the use of government finances and, yes, how we select people to serve on the various agencies, committees, boards, and commissions. I don't have the Auditor General's reports in front of me, nor do I have the summary of all the recommendations that have been accepted, the recommendations that were acted on even before the Auditor General made a recommendation, or plans that are in the works now to comply with the Auditor General's recommendations, but I can assure the hon. member that we don't take his recommendations lightly, and all those we can reasonably act upon we do.

8:31

I would be pleased to provide down the road – it's going to take a bit of time to compile – all our responses to Auditor General's reports since I became Premier. I'm sure that over the fullness of time we can compile that information and provide that information to the hon. member.

Madam Chairman, I did allude to the opposition parties not being FOIPable. I wasn't referring to constituency offices. All of us make all the information available. We have to make that information available relative to the operation of our constituencies. What isn't FOIPable within the Liberal Party and the Liberal caucus is the expenditure of taxpayers' dollars outside of constituency activities, for Liberal activities for political purposes. How much do they use out of their communications budgets as a caucus for advertising? Who in the Liberal caucus takes whom for lunch? To whom is this highly-paid spin doctor from Toronto accountable? The list goes on and on and on, and we can't get that information. They won't supply that information because they don't have to be accountable. There's nothing in legislation that says the opposition has to be accountable.

Government has to be accountable, and we recognize that. That's why it was this government that brought in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. It was this government. We brought that act in so that the public could have access to certain government documents, government documents that might otherwise be kept secret, so that the general public could have access to this information. It was never set up to be used as a political tool, you know.

When we talk about FOIP, what is the cost? What cost have the Liberals put the taxpayers to in terms of some legitimate FOIP requests but many that have been nothing more than vindictive and vexatious, just fishing trips? We can't get that information from the Liberals because they don't have to be accountable and they aren't FOIPable. That's what I was alluding to. It wasn't the constituency

allowance. We all get the same amount to run our constituency offices. The Sergeant-at-Arms has full control as to how each and every MLA in this Legislative Assembly spends those dollars. No, it has nothing to do with the expenditure of dollars within the constituency and in constituency offices. It has something to do with the expenditure of taxpayers' dollars by the Liberal caucus and whether the taxpayers of this province are getting value for the opposition they receive.

Madam Chairman, I'm just looking at my notes here. The hon. member alluded to top-level documents and whether I have any knowledge of top-level documents that pertain to all ministries relative to their plans. Well, yes, I do. They're called three-year business plans, and they're all made public. They're all made public. It's part of this government's policy of being open and being accountable and demonstrating to the people of this province that we are indeed planning not just year by year but three years down the road. So, yes, there are top-level documents that pertain to the planning processes related to all ministries, and they're called three-year business plans.

The hon. member asked a number of questions. Most of those questions, as I mentioned earlier, Madam Chairman, alluded to recommendations contained in various Auditor General reports. I will attempt to get him the answers to those questions, and I will go the extra length to provide him overall with a summary of all the recommendations we have responded to. I think he'll be pleasantly surprised and pleased to find that year after year after year we have a record of complying with about, as I said, 95 to 97 percent of all Auditor General recommendations.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's certainly a pleasure to join in this evening's debate on the estimates. After reviewing the estimates for Executive Council, I have the following question to ask of the hon. Premier. Mr. Premier, the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* appear to be one of the most sizable projects under way for the Public Affairs Bureau. What does the project entail, and what costs, if any, are associated with it?

MR. KLEIN: Denis, what was the question again?

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Premier, the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* appear to be one of the most sizable projects under way for the Public Affairs Bureau. What does the project entail, and what costs, if any, are associated with it?

MR. KLEIN: Thank you. Madam Chairman, as I mentioned in my earlier remarks, this marks the first time the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* have been consolidated since 1980. Literally there were volumes and volumes and volumes of statutes, so at some point or another they had to be condensed, had to be updated, and they had to be made to become relevant once again. This is a much-needed project that will greatly benefit Alberta's legal community as well as other industries affected by provincial government legislation and regulations.

To give you an idea of the scope of the project, consider that every year the Members of this Legislative Assembly debate and pass a number of pieces of new legislation as well as a wide variety of amendments to existing legislation. For example, last year the Legislative Assembly passed a total of, I think it was, 37 bills and enacted those bills into law. That translated into some 1,700 pages of legislation for publication in the annual volume. Now, consider that similar volumes and numbers of pages have been published by

the Queen's Printer each year since 1980 in one or more annual volumes. That is a lot of reading. That is a lot of print, and a lot of it is very, very dry, to tell you the truth.

AN HON. MEMBER: Unless you're a lawyer.

8:41

MR. KLEIN: Well, only lawyers would appreciate it.

If you're someone doing research on a specific act, for example the Municipal Government Act, you would currently have to consult the original eight volumes published in 1980 as well as every annual volume published since 1980 to see every amendment related to that act. As it stands now, that would mean researching through more than 29 separate annual volumes that span an estimated 20,000 pages.

I know that when I was the mayor I had to become somewhat familiar with the Municipal Government Act, but I usually concentrated on I believe at that time it was section 3, the duties of the mayor. I don't know where it stands right now. But for anyone involved in municipal law, can you imagine the reams and reams of material one would have to read to fully understand it? Twenty thousand pages. I think it's fair to say that we're talking about a task that would consume a considerable if not an unreasonable amount of time, resources, patience, and money. Someone is paying for all this, whether it's a municipal legislator, a municipality, or whether it's just an individual hiring a lawyer to research a particular component of the law.

Over the past year the Queen's Printer bookstore staff has been working closely with Alberta Justice to consolidate all those 29 annual volumes into one comprehensive product, and that will be the *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000*. When the project is complete, the current 20,000 pages in 29 volumes will be reduced to a single set of 10 volumes with approximately 12,000 pages. The effect: the current volume will be cut in half.

Now, Madam Chairman, there are two steps to the process. First, staff at Alberta Justice must do the revision portion, which deals with consolidating all the individual changes to laws into one comprehensive piece. This will certainly make the statutes more user friendly. The second part of the process is also aimed at making the product more user friendly. The second phase, which is being completed by the Queen's Printer bookstore staff, deals with converting the documents to a more user-friendly and readable software. Some examples of the types of things they're doing include changing the way columns are formatted in order to make the statutes easier to read and making it easier to move between different electronic formats. Staff have completed the initial steps of the project and are now on track to have it completed by the spring of 2001. Work to update related items such as the Alberta regulations, the *Alberta Gazette*, and specialty products will continue through to the winter of 2001.

Of course, Madam Chairman, a project of this magnitude does require some additional spending. However, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, with any spending increases in this business planning cycle you can also expect to see corresponding increases in revenue. In fact, we anticipate that due to high customer demand for the *Revised Statutes 2000* and related products, sales will fully offset the approximately \$1 million in increased spending for the projects.

I thank the hon. member for his question.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Let me say first of all that I wasn't here last Thursday afternoon, so if I repeat some

of the questions or some of the information that's already been discussed, I pass on my apologies right off the bat. Secondly, I can understand that the Premier may not be able to answer all my questions tonight, and for those that can't be answered, I would hope he'd be able to provide written responses further down the road.

The Premier made reference to the Liberal caucus budget. I've always viewed our expenditures in the caucus budget as being very, very astute from the point of view that we try to ensure that those dollars are for the benefit of the Alberta Liberal caucus, not the Alberta Liberal Party.

As far as the spin doctor that the Premier referred to is concerned, I thought that all the spin doctors had already been hired by the government. I didn't realize there was still one floating around in Toronto.

MR. KLEIN: Who's the fellow who sits down there with Nancy and says: stay around, members of the media; Mrs. MacBeth will now . . .

MR. WICKMAN: Listen; this gentleman that the Premier refers to is a really good person. He's a good person, and he's doing his job extremely well. I'll bet your government would love to get their hands on him, but we're not letting him go, and he has no desire to go.

Madam Chairman, as I look through the documentation, the budget of the Executive Council, the business plans, the ministry statements, and such, I see a great number of references made to information being accessible and so on and so forth. At the same time, to get the information out is good. We see information going out right now on Bill 11, for example. One assumes that when information goes out, it's to provide Albertans with the opportunity to respond and that their response is going to be taken into consideration.

I found it very, very disheartening when I listened over the weekend in this particular instance, for example, and the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness had something like 21 media hits, and I heard him just blatantly say on TV that despite the opposition Bill 11 is going to go through. Now, to send out the information and make information more accessible is great, but is it benefitting Albertans if it's used to that purpose? Even the Premier himself now has readjusted his odds of Bill 11 going through.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, with due respect, we are dealing with Executive Council.

MR. WICKMAN: Yes, and I'm going to concentrate on the communications services aspect of Public Affairs. When we're talking about communications, it's difficult to sort of separate, because the public affairs division, of course, works with all the various departments. But if I get out of line, you just tell me, and I'll step back in line, Madam Chairman.

I'm just concerned about information being accessible, because that is referred to. When we talk about information being accessible, there's more and more of a dependency on the Internet, which is good. We use the Internet to a great extent in the constituency office. Amazingly, when I was first elected in 1989, the same year the Premier was elected, we didn't have access to Internet in the constituency offices for communications purposes to access the government web site, for example. We've had that now for — what? — three or four years.

It's a marvel. It's of great assistance to constituency offices and staff. It's of great assistance to Albertans in terms of seeking out information. When I go through there, I can pull up *Hansard*. I can

pull up minutes of meetings. I can pull up the bills. I can pull up the various government departments. I can go to those government departments and break down consumer affairs. I can go to workers' compensation, for example, and pull out the questionnaire that's just been developed for injured workers. So I find that a really, really good method of information becoming more accessible. As time goes on, Madam Chairman to the Premier, there is more and more of a dependency on the Internet and computer technology when it comes to communicating not only through governments but through business, through the private sector: the whole shot.

Before I get specifically involved with my questions on Public Affairs, just some general sort of questions and comments. In the initial stages, when I was first elected, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities of course was created by the former Premier. Under his umbrella, under his arm it became a direct function of the Premier's office, and it was initially when this particular Premier took over. From there, it was downgraded – I'll use that expression – to a ministry. My understanding now, when I look at the new structure, is that it's been sort of downgraded to an associate ministry. I just wonder why something that held such status at one particular time seems to be falling down in terms of priorities, in terms of other departments and such.

8:51

At the same time I see that happening, I also see happening – and, again, if I'm getting into an area that's outside Executive Council, correct me, but I believe Executive Council would advise the Premier or consult with the Premier or the Premier would consult with them when there's discussion about how these cabinet departments, the various government departments are going to function and which ones should be expanded or added to or which ones should be decreased in significance like you see Learning now combining two former departments. That brings me to the question of the former intergovernmental affairs division, whatever it was called, which again was under the Premier's direction, within his area, and now has been transferred to a full-blown ministry. I wonder why the Premier would have taken that from the Premier's office and actually created it eventually as a full-blown department. The same situation occurred with Gaming, which has grown into a full-blown department.

I wonder if I can get into some specific questions here. When I look at the business plan for Public Affairs, on page 213, between the fiscal periods 2000 to 2001 and 2001 to 2002 we see a projected increase in Public Affairs spending of \$1.140 million, or a 12.9 percent increase. Now, that's projecting a tremendous increase in a future year, and I'm not sure why those amounts of dollars are going to be anticipated to be required. These are the types of questions that I expect the Premier may have to respond to in writing further down the road. Of the \$8.837 million we see in the current budget for the Public Affairs Bureau, I'd like to see a breakdown as to what portions of that go to salaries and wages, travel expenses, the advertising, communications, data processing, hosting, and outside contracts, consultants, dollars that are spent outside. The budget is very, very skimpy when we talk in terms of the actual details.

Likewise, the full-time employees show as a total of 128. We don't have the breakdown as to how many of that 128 are involved in the administrative services, how many in the communications services, how many in communications technology, in the Queen's Printer bookstore, the publishing, and for the RITE telephone system. I wouldn't mind that as well. If we look towards the next fiscal period after the one we're dealing with now, what projected number of full-time employees is there to correspond with the projected increase of 12.9 percent, or \$1.14 million, in that particular budget?

In the Internet, which I referred to earlier, one of the things I look at – and maybe this is being a little too idealistic, but I'll read it in here. Of course, there are the two pages. There's the provincial government page, and there's the Alberta Progressive Conservative page. I don't want to mix the two up. If I recall correctly from looking at them, I'll see copies of the throne speech, for example, but I don't see any response to the throne speech that the taxpayer or citizen can access through that site that I assume is paid for by taxpayers' dollars and not the Progressive Conservative Party. It would be nice if the Leader of the Official Opposition was also given the benefit of having her remarks included when we talk in terms of the response to the throne speech or the response to the budget. I do say that that may be a bit idealistic, but I just say that it would be nice to do. We don't always have the opportunities to communicate on the same basis as government does, because of course they have certain advantages.

Again correct me if I'm wrong here, but even when we look at the amounts of dollars that are spent on the Premier's sort of fireside talk in January, do they come under the public affairs department? Do they come out of the Premier's office expenditures? I'd be curious as to how those dollars are achieved, because my understanding, of course, is that they are in fact taxpayers' dollars.

Now, one of the events that is coming up – I'm sure the Premier is looking forward to it just like the rest of us, and whether the Premier intends to be here at that particular time or if the taxpayers or Albertans choose to have him here at that particular time I guess is a question we can't address right now – is the year 2005, which is the 100th celebration of the province of Alberta. That's going to be a significant event, a tremendous event. A hundred years since the province was legally formulated is some good period of time, and it's got to be recognized in some fashion.

I recall – what was it? – the 75th anniversary, when the two auditoria were built, the one in Edmonton and the one in Calgary.

MR. MAR: It was the 50th anniversary.

MR. WICKMAN: I was just a young pup then, and I don't really remember it too clearly.

I haven't seen really any initiatives being taken, and I've had service clubs that have actually approached me and said: is the government making dollars available yet through lottery funding for projects, say, by the Rotary Club, which is already looking at the year 2005? I wonder if the Premier's office in conjunction with the Public Affairs Bureau is looking at ways of celebrating that very, very significant year and what they're looking at in terms of a legacy when that year comes to a conclusion. It is an ideal opportunity to leave a legacy behind for future Albertans which symbolizes the century that the province of Alberta has been legally in existence.

Again with Public Affairs. A great deal of the Public Affairs Bureau expenditures, I assume – correct me if I'm wrong – are spent outside the bureau itself. In fact, our dollars are sent out to various advertising agencies and that. Now, when we talk in terms of these dollars being awarded to various outside agencies – public relations agencies, advertising agencies, communications agencies, whatever – is there a tendering process? How does the Public Affairs Bureau determine which particular agency is going to get a particular contract or a communication that is occurring at the present time?

I wonder what role the Public Affairs Bureau plays in terms of communicating when it comes to assisting the Ministry of Health and Wellness, for example, on communicating the government's policy statement and legislation on the health care issue? I'm sure Public Affairs has to be involved somewhat. My understanding of Public Affairs is that it basically co-ordinates the activities in terms

of communications, advertising, and such of the various government departments, although most government departments of course have their own small communications branch or communications spokesmen as well. How much of that \$4.76 million that is under communications in the upcoming fiscal period has been allocated to assisting the Department of Health and Wellness, the Premier's office, whatever, in communicating the information pertaining to the changes in health care?

The communications services budget – of course I asked that question: how much of it goes to outside consultants, and how is it determined as to who gets it? The other group I didn't mention in there that I should have is the focus groups, because I assume the government uses focus groups, and also the polling. They do use polling, because I've been called myself as a citizen, as an Albertan just at random. It's nice to be called, because it gives one the insight as to what type of questioning the government is concerned about and what their priorities are. Now, who pays for the polling? Does that come under the public affairs division? What percentage of that is spent in polling?

For some reason I'm being asked to stop now.

MR. WHITE: Finish your sentence.

MR. WICKMAN: I'll finish my sentence but not my 20 minutes.

AN HON. MEMBER: You've only got another three or four minutes, Percy.

MR. WICKMAN: Okay. A few more questions here. I can always come back later too.

The Queen's Printer bookstore. That's an interesting one because with the amount of activity we see on the Internet now and the access to information on the Internet through the government web site in terms of bills and all that, I would have thought that would have meant a significant decrease in the demands on the Queen's Printer bookstores, yet when we look at the total expenditures for the year 2000-2001, we see an increase of 12.5 percent. I would have thought that figure would have gone down. With the Internet being as accessible and as used as it is now, I would think the demand would lessen considerably on that printed material, which, of course, you pay for. On the Internet it comes for free. I'm surprised we still have that kind of action.

9:01

This is my last line of questioning in this area. The RITE telephone system, of course, falls under the program too. We saw the consolidation of the former six regional RITE centres to the two centres in Edmonton and Calgary. My question here is: has it expanded the caller service options and, at the same time, improved the level of service efficiency?

Lastly, what is the total number of calls that occurred in the previous year and the current year or are projected to occur next year through the RITE system? It would be nice to have that three-year pattern to see just the increase in calls being made as a result of the supposedly more accessible RITE service. The RITE service, of course, just like the Internet, is a must. It's a means of taxpayers – we've got to remember that they're taxpayers – being able to access government departments, elected representatives, and such so that they can voice their concerns and so on and so forth.

As my 20 minutes is slowly coming to an end and the Member for Edmonton-Calder is anxious to do something, I'm going to conclude my remarks for now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, that's the first time I've seen one of your own try to shut down the debate.

MR. MAR: Madam Chairman, I seek unanimous consent of the committee for a 10-minute adjournment.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's fine. We can seek the consent of the committee. We don't need it to be unanimous, however. A simple majority will do.

Having heard the motion by the hon. member that the committee recess for 10 minutes, all those in favour say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? We will recess for 10 minutes.

[The subcommittee adjourned from 9:04 p.m. to 9:13 p.m.]

MR. KLEIN: Madam Chairman, a number of questions were asked. I'll attempt to deal with the questions asked by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

The last question was: has the RITE system improved since it was consolidated from six centres to two centres? Well, yes, it has improved. Consolidation has allowed the RITE system to extend its operating hours from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. That's an hour on each end, as I understand it. It's made it possible to introduce one toll-free provincewide number, which is 310-0000. About 6 million calls go through the RITE system every year, and as I alluded to earlier in my remarks, the satisfaction rate by Albertans with RITE is 97 percent. So that's a good indication that that service is well received.

Another question posed was: with the Internet why has the demand not gone down relative to written material from the Queen's Printer? Most of that material is legal material. It is law. It's not the normal kind of library material that one would reasonably access through a library system. It is very specific to the legal profession, and the legal profession wants and demands the original and written copy of all legislation.

The hon. member also asked the question: why has the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities been downgraded to an associate ministry from the Executive Council? Well, of course, what the hon. member is alluding to is: why is it not now under the Premier's jurisdiction, and why is it not under Executive Council?

We wanted to give this committee as much latitude as possible. As a matter of fact, the chairman of that committee, the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, is in the Chamber tonight. He's done a fantastic job with the committee. The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities reports to an associate minister as well as the Minister of Health and Wellness, and I believe both ministers are capable of dealing with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, as indeed is the chairman himself.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford also asked for a breakdown of budget and full-time equivalents for the Public Affairs Bureau. Madam Chairman, I thought I included those in my opening remarks, but I can reiterate what I said ostensibly in my opening remarks and probably add a little bit to it.

First of all, the estimates for Executive Council for 2000-2001 total \$15.3 million. He can see that in his own estimates book. The increases are related to two items: salary increases that apply to staff across government and funding for the new shared services centre. As I indicated, that funding over a period of time will probably save

the government about \$20 million, and these costs will be fully recovered from ministries, resulting in no net increase to government but over a period time, as I said, savings hopefully of up to \$20 million.

With respect to the Public Affairs Bureau's estimate breakdown, \$7.5 million goes to salaries, wages, and benefits; \$1.3 million in supplies and services. There are 128 full-time equivalents. So the bureau's spending will total \$8.8 million but will be partly offset by \$1.5 million in revenue from the Queen's Printer bookstore.

Madam Chairman, relative to the Public Affairs Bureau a question was also posed related to polling. Well, it's my understanding that an agreement was reached with the Liberal opposition that the results of all polling by the Public Affairs Bureau would be made available to the Liberal opposition within a specified period of time. I'm not sure whether it was eight weeks or eight months, but it was a specified period of time anyway. The fact is that the agreement was reached, and it was signed off by the Liberal opposition as being fair that within a certain time limit all polling information would be made available to the Liberal opposition. So that information either has been made available or at some future date will be made available.

Earlier the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked a question related to the Auditor General's recommendations to Executive Council. Now, he asked a number of questions related to the Auditor General, but one related specifically to Executive Council, and that was the Auditor General's recommendation regarding cross-ministry co-ordination. I can assure the remaining members of the Liberal caucus that that is being dealt with by the deputy minister's committee and the various ministries involved, and I'm sure there will be a report on that in the fullness of time.

There was another question by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. The question was: who has been working with the government on the Premier's Advisory Council on Health and the Alberta foundation for science and engineering research, and how much did this cost? Well, Madam Chairman, the government of Alberta has engaged the services of Davies, Park, which is a human resources consulting firm, to solicit, interview, and help make a final selection of candidates applying for positions on both the board of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health and the Alberta foundation for science and engineering research. These are very important committees and authorities, and we want to make sure that the people responsible for making decisions and/or recommendations to government are, indeed, the right people and have the proper expertise.

I can't tell this Assembly at this time what the costs of the services will be. It will depend on the number of qualified candidates that are found and the number of board members each chair determines is appropriate for his or her board. Again, there will be an accounting. That is the law of this province. Everything eventually has to go through public accounts.

Another question from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was regarding FOIP requests. I have alluded to it. The question specifically would be: would a more paperless trail not mean that it would be more difficult to launch FOIP requests? I would remind all members of this Assembly that every document, communication, both written and by e-mail, pertaining to government business is FOIPable unless under the rules of FOIP it is exempt. Therefore, a paperless trail would pose no difficulties in responding to a FOIP request.

9:23

The question relative to polling was raised not only by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford but also by the hon. Member for

Edmonton-Gold Bar. As I mentioned, all research done by the Public Affairs Bureau will be released according to our agreement with the Liberal Party. I would like to add that all research done by the Public Affairs Bureau relates to current issues, relates to business plans or performance measurements, and I can assure all members of this House that the bureau does not do blatant partisan political research. The bureau does not do research for other departments. Communications staff may advise departmental clients on research from time to time, but the information remains the property of the department.

How does the bureau collect its research? It does it through subscriptions, through reports like Focus Canada and the Angus Reid report. Like any subscription client we are required by law to respect the nondisclosure elements of the subscription content. We have, as I mentioned earlier, responded to the opposition's requests for information by obtaining special permission from research companies to share some of the requested materials. The research companies agreed that the opposition could examine requested material six months after publication. However, no copying is permitted, and this is required by law. We will continue to work with the opposition and research companies to find solutions that honour this government's commitment to open communication.

Madam Chairman, I'd like to point out that governments across the country use research to give the public a voice in planning programs and services and to measure whether or not those programs and services meet their expectations. Yes, part of the polling process and part of the process of gaining public consensus on issues is the use of focus groups, but again there is a confidentiality matter that has to be considered. When people are asked to participate in focus groups, their confidentiality is assured. It is guaranteed. Yes, we do publish the comments in various publications, saying that a person in the focus group said this, or a man in the focus group said this, or a woman in the focus group said this, or a child in the focus group said this. But we have to respect the anonymity of those people who participate in focus groups because they have for the most part asked for and have been guaranteed anonymity.

So basically our use of polling, research methodology, focus groups, and so on is no different than a private-sector business or a media outlet, for instance, using research to get feedback from its customers.

I think that just about answers all the questions that were put to me.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, I did indicate that I would recognize Edmonton-Calder, and then I will call on you. He had asked quite some time ago to speak.

Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you, Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

The Premier is all refreshed from answering the questions, and I haven't started in on the hard part. I'll start in on the gentle part here.

First of all, the Premier's tie, looking from this side, is particularly attractive. I must say that I haven't seen one like that for a long time. Let's hang it out over the edge here. It's one of those days. It's probably the same tie he wore this morning, but I was looking at it with different eyes, I guess. I don't know. It looks better tonight.

Now, I do have to carry on here with a little story. There's a Tory and a Liberal talking, and it happens that in Alberta they actually do talk. The Tory says, "You know, that Ralph is going to go down in history as one of the best damn Premiers there ever was." The Liberal says, "How do you figure that?" He says: "Well, he's a real

nice guy. He's a roly-poly kind of guy. He's one of those kinds of guys you can meet anywhere." He says: "Yeah, that's probably so, and you know what? He's going to go down in history as running the best damn Premier's bar in the history of Alberta." The Liberal says: "Yeah, that's probably so. You know, I wouldn't mind cracking a sack of beer with that guy and having a chat." He thinks about it for a minute. This is the Liberal still speaking; he says, "But I wouldn't want to have him run my bar." That's a little for both people, you see. [interjections] No, it's the way it is for a Liberal in Alberta, you see, because a Liberal in Alberta would like to have him as a friend, but I would sooner take care of my own money. [interjection] We shall do that. We shall do that. [interjection] It's about as good as you can get.

Mr. Premier, in answer to some of the questions earlier from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you referred to the Auditor General's report. It's with pleasure that I speak of the Auditor General's report because, as you well know, I happen to be the chairman of the committee that reviews those reports. Without being able to question yourself—I gather your time is called upon so heavily that you're unable to come and report to the committee. If that would be the case, if you're just unable to come, it's accepted, we don't complain about it, but it does bring up a question.

Earlier I believe you said something to the effect that across Canada your office is the most compliant or close to the most compliant with the Auditor General's recommendations. Well, page 333 of the 1998-99 report reads as follows, and this is the status of numbered recommendations. There are numbered recommendations, and there were 38 of them in '94-95. Of that, the number that have yet to be implemented is 26 percent, a pretty good rate. In '95-96 that number went up to 34 percent; these are yet to be implemented. In 1996-97 that same number, those that have yet to be implemented, went up to 46 percent. Because '97-98 is the last year of reporting the unimplemented numbers, last year this went up to 82 percent.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, if the chair heard correctly, the Premier has already answered a number of questions to do with the Auditor General's report and talked about that. I think it was Edmonton-Gold Bar that brought it up, and he has answered the question.

MR. WHITE: Well, it seemed that there was an error in the page number or something that the Premier was reading from. So we'll leave that. The Premier will be able to answer that in his time if he so wishes.

Another area that the Premier spoke of in answer to some other questions was FOIP applications. Well, it's true that Liberal caucus documents are not FOIPable, but that occurs in virtually any FOIP legislation, and so it should. We would not expect nor should we expect to have your caucus documents FOIPable. Those are working documents in a caucus. In any caucus it's expected that ideas will come forward and they'll be kicked about. Sometimes they'll be implemented and sometimes they will not be, but those certainly aren't for public consumption nor should they be, I would think.

It interests me that this particular forum, this Legislature, has SPCs, which are a hybrid of a caucus and a legislative function. It doesn't fit well in either. It's sort of one of those critters designed by a committee. It just doesn't fit, and when telling other members of other Legislatures of this kind of function, it doesn't work. They can't understand how a committee can be only government members and then can exclude opposition members from meetings. It just doesn't compute. The ministries pay for these committees, but it's structured such that I assume it's at the Premier's behest.

9:33

The other question that comes to mind. The Premier spent a great deal of time talking about the \$4.7 million in the Public Affairs Bureau and how all the findings were then reported to the Liberal caucus six months afterwards, after disclosure to the government, to Executive Council, I suspect. It may or may not be exposed to or allowed to be viewed by the government caucus. But six months is an awfully long time in the history of polls in that polls are always described as a snapshot in time, and of course snapshots fade rather rapidly, particularly in the polling industry. They're almost useless in six months. Quite frankly, I don't remember ever seeing one in my history here. So the value to the opposition would be next to useless.

In speaking of focus groups, the Premier went on at some length saying that he would not want to identify, even by generic description, 30 or 40 mail-ins from rural Alberta that may identify that person. Well, I would be satisfied and the members of this caucus would be satisfied to not even attribute those comments to any kind of descriptor but just the comments that came from the focus group and the summation by the monitor or the adjudicator of what came out of those meetings. We'd be satisfied with that, but that certainly won't be forthcoming, as evidenced by some 31 pages that came back totally and completely blank, which were less than useless except as a political battering ram, if you will, which is not a pleasant tool to use in this Legislature. But when you have no other information to deal with, that's the way it occurs.

There are advertising budgets, and the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford asked a number of questions about the Public Affairs Bureau with regard to the 2005 Alberta centennial. I should like to ask a similar sort of question, as to what the Public Affairs Bureau is doing in conjunction with the Friendly Games in Calgary or the 2001 games in Edmonton, what surrounds that with the visiting dignitaries and the like and when those budgets will be published. Surely there'll be some money spent this year in preparation for both those two wonderful events in our province.

The Public Affairs Bureau hires a number of agencies, and I think the member asked about what criteria were used. If he did, I'd like that answered at some point or other and whether in fact there are political overtones tied to these selections, as I'm told there are. If an organization has some political ties with either a government party or an opposition party, would that help or hinder their opportunity to bid for work and to lay their talents bare before the Public Affairs Bureau.

In relation to advertising budgets, why would the figures not be published as to how these budgets are allocated. I'm thinking of Highwood Communications, Calder Bateman, Hill & Knowlton, Palmer Jarvis, and like firms. Why would those numbers not be published such that one can discern whether in fact there is any political connection or not? It would be clean and open and accountable to do so, this member believes. The allocation of the advertising budget for those firms: it would be nice to have it be laid out in just one simple little table.

Further to the communications services, I assume there's an allocation for the polling between the various firms that do polling. It would be good to have a breakdown of that also to be open and accountable and completely above-board, with those numbers laid bare before the public. I would think that would be a reasonable position to take.

It would also be nice to know the status report on the specialized communication training program that, I gather, the departmental staff were put through. I gather the training programs for those staff, particularly in the regional offices, contained general communica-

tions, planning, writing, editing, and printing of graphic design and advertising. That's something that I'm sure the staff will know. That's not something the Premier would be expected to know.

A further question, sir. How has the consolidation of the six regional RITE centres into two centres, Edmonton and Calgary, improved the efficiency . . .

MR. KLEIN: I answered that, or similar.

MR. WHITE: Oh, did you, sir? I'm sorry. It must have been earlier in the evening. I recall your answering a number of RITE questions. [interjection] Hugh asked them. I'm sorry.

Well, the FTEs were asked and answered, as I recall.

Mr. Premier, for the moment those are all the questions I have for you. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier, did you wish to . . .

MR. KLEIN: It's hard to answer questions that haven't really been asked. There was one question that was asked that's not specifically related to my estimates, but it could be. I think it's a legitimate question down the road. That is: what preparations are we making vis-à-vis protocol and so on relative to major events that will be coming? The protocol office is within Executive Council. As I explained earlier, it used to be in the department of international and intergovernmental affairs, but it's directly responsible now to my department.

Yes, there will be a protocol function for the Premier and I would assume for the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, and we plan to have as many Members of the Legislative Assembly from both sides of the House participate in these events as possible. Without doubt, the resources of the protocol department within Executive Council will be used to co-ordinate some of these events, luncheons and so on.

9:43

I can't give the hon. member a breakdown right now as to how much of that budget will be allocated out of Executive Council. Basically, the use of the protocol resource will be spread around all departments and will come out of the general allocation that has been agreed to by government to host the world track and field games in Edmonton in the year 2001. We have committed \$40 million to those games. That funding was contingent on an equal contribution from the federal government and, I believe, an equal contribution from the city in kind, and certainly matching dollars from the private sector. Within that budget I'm sure we'll be able to accommodate whatever protocol functions will be associated with those games.

The second major sporting event will be in the year 2005 in the city of Calgary. The city of Calgary has been awarded the right to host the Winter Goodwill Games. The expenditure there is not going to be nearly as much because most of the facilities are in place and the funding that has been requested of government is mostly for upgrading. The latest figure I've heard is \$5 million, and again this will go to offset some of the protocol costs and costs associated with government activities as they relate to those games.

There was a previous question asked by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and that was a question relative to the centennial. Without doubt, that is going to be the most significant year in the history of, well, this government, because I'm sure we'll be around in 2005. It is going to be very significant indeed.

As you know, there was a report prepared, and I'm pleased to say that my wife was also part of that report. A number of good-thinking Albertans were members of the committee, and they

brainstormed a number of ideas for projects and reasonable expenditures to help celebrate Alberta's 100th birthday. That report was submitted some time ago to the Minister of Community Development, and he is in the process now of preparing business plans and identifying projects that will come to light and will be clearly identified as centennial projects, I would assume, starting next year, in budget year 2001-2002. They'll clearly be identified as centennial projects.

Just to give the hon. member an idea of some of the kinds of things we're looking at, certainly one of the major 50th anniversary projects was the Jubilee auditoriums in Calgary and Edmonton, so one of the projects is the refurbishing of those auditoria. Because, you know, it hasn't really been done in a major way for 50 years. [interjections] It will be 50 years. Another project that is being seriously considered is the Archives. As you know, that building needs upgrading. [interjection] Well, it's in rough shape. So there are projects of this nature that really will be reasonable and responsible expenditures, but we'll make sure the legacies that were created in the past are restored and maintained and are there for future generations.

That's about all I have in terms of answers to questions. If there are any I haven't answered, my staff are sitting in the gallery, I'm sure they've made notes, and we'll be happy to provide hon. members with answers to the questions in due course.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I listened with interest to some of the comments earlier, and it seems that many of the questions relate to communication, which is certainly part of what I wish to address this evening as well.

I was pleased to hear the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford regarding the Premier's council and the recognition that was granted to the work of the council by the Premier as well. I had the opportunity today to rise in the Assembly and table *Status Report*, the quarterly newsletter of the Premier's council, which certainly is an attempt on the part of the Premier's council to get information out and receive communication back from the disability community.

This particular quarterly report talks at length about the disability strategy discussions throughout the province that are taking place, and communication is a major part of that as well. The council has been out and around the community, the province, talking with the disability community in six different locations during the past few months, seeking input and trying to determine what kind of direction the disability community wants the Premier's council to move in. We have some feedback from them, and we're seeking to carry on and come about with a disability strategy that includes that input.

In this particular issue members would be interested to know that there's a good article by an architect by the name of Ron Wickman, the son of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. This article talks about barrier-free building design, and it talks about parking spaces in parking lots for the disability community members and how best to design those. It's an interesting article, a mechanism for communication that the Premier's council seeks to utilize to give information out and receive information back from the community.

Anybody reading *Hansard* that may wish to get a copy of the Premier's council quarterly news report called *Status Report* can contact the Premier's council by phone at 422-1095 and order a copy. There is also a 1-800 number. The number is 1-800-272-8841, and they can request to be put on the mailing list. Currently the mailing list has about 6,000 addresses to which they're sent out, and that information is received by members of the community.

9:53

The other questions that were asked related in large measure to the use of the Internet and some of the mechanisms whereby people in Alberta are able to access that information. We know that many members even in the Assembly utilize the Internet during the times when we're able to listen and work at the same time and find out information that way. So the Internet certainly has become a very valuable tool. Like one of the members opposite mentioned, certainly in our constituency office for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan it's utilized to a great extent, and we find it to be a very useful tool. Of course, e-mails are another mechanism for quick communication, and we can even do that from within the Assembly, which we really appreciate being able to do.

Web pages, getting those constructed and set up, are a great expense if you hire a professional, but often we can get somebody we know in the community, a volunteer, to set those up, and we can have some really good information accessible, a web page and the linkages that we have to other pages, and then we can work away with community members in getting information from them and delivering information back to them.

The questions that I would have for the Premier regarding the Executive Council business plans, which like the government business plans make references to the needs and priorities of Albertans. I'd like the Premier to comment on how those needs and priorities of Albertans are determined from his perspective, and what he'd like to comment on and let us know about the determination of those needs and priorities. As well, if the Premier could identify

how the government knows that those plans and initiatives are addressing the priorities of Albertans. Those are questions that are important to Albertans, and we know they have a keen interest in hearing what the government has heard from them and how they would see their communication being received. Of course, as I mentioned, the Internet had been talked about by some of the members opposite as being really important. I'd also like to hear to what extent Albertans actually make use of those different types of communication opportunities.

Those questions may take some time to answer, and in fact I would be willing to have those answers in writing if there is not time left. I see that we're near the end of the opportunity to ask and receive questions here today. So in light of that, Madam Chairman, if there is too little time for the Premier's response, I would go along with receiving the answers in writing.

I would ask that the committee rise and report progress, and then we can adjourn debate on the Executive Council estimates.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member. Having heard the motion, does the subcommittee agree that we now rise and report progress?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? It's carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 9:57 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Infrastructure, Wednesday, March 8, 2000
 00/03/08
 8:06 p.m.
 [Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Subcommittee B – Infrastructure

Tannas, Don, Chairman
 Laing, Bonnie, Deputy Chairman
 Blakeman, Laurie
 Calahasen, Pearl
 Doerksen, Victor
 Forsyth, Heather
 Fritz, Yvonne
 Graham, Marlene

Hancock, Dave
 Kryczka, Karen
 Leibovici, Karen
 Massey, Don
 McClellan, Shirley
 Melchin, Greg
 Olsen, Sue

Sloan, Linda
 Soetaert, Colleen
 Stelmach, Ed
 Stevens, Ron
 Tarchuk, Janis
 Woloshyn, Stan
 Zwozdesky, Gene

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, a couple of things. One, as is our custom frequently in room 512, we've invited the deputy minister to come be at the table. Is there any objection to that? Please register that now, and you just know that you've lost a road in your constituency. No one? Okay.

Secondly, these signs are not for each other's benefit. These are for *Hansard*. So if you've got it in some way that they may be able to see it, that helps them.

We'll begin this evening's deliberations on the estimates of the Department of Infrastructure and call upon the hon. minister to begin this evening, and we'll go from there.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good evening to all. Before I begin, I would like to introduce the ministry staff that has joined us this evening. I would really sincerely like to take this opportunity to thank them for the excellent work they've done this year and in the past year as well.

Seated to my right, the most important position, is Mr. Ed McLellan, who needs no introduction to many of the people around the table. Seated in the audience are Mr. Ray Reshke, who is the ADM, corporate services; Gary Boddez, ADM property development. We have Mr. Bob Smith, ADM of property and supply management. Bob is right against the wall there. We have Gregg Hook, chair of the Transportation Safety Board and responsible for transportation safety services, and Brian Marcotte, executive director, infrastructure policy and planning. We have also Leanne Strangeland, director of communications. With us today we have Mr. Tom Hawnt, who is acting for Mr. Jay Ramotar, ADM, transportation and civil engineering. Welcome to everyone.

The business plan and the 2000-2001 estimates indicate how we plan to contribute to Alberta's economic prosperity. We're going to contribute to the prosperity by ensuring the provision of safe and effective transportation systems; managing the development of seniors' lodges and learning, health care, and water management facilities; and planning, operating, and maintaining government facilities. The government's prudent fiscal planning and management allows us to continue directing funds to a number of different programs and initiatives throughout the province.

Alberta Infrastructure continues to work with a number of ministries to address priority issues and ongoing initiatives and to increase our effectiveness and efficiency. Some of these initiatives include continuing to lead the cross-government Alberta capital planning initiative by working with other ministries on the development of a cross-government approach to infrastructure planning, information management, and project prioritization. This will ensure the most cost-effective and efficient use of infrastructure dollars.

We are working with Alberta Learning to plan and develop capital plans, programs, policies, and legislation for all learning facilities; with Alberta Health and Wellness to ensure that long-term regional capital plans are developed in partnership with the regional health authorities by March 31, 2001; with Community Development on the provincewide upgrading of seniors' lodges; and of course with Alberta Environment in protecting the integrity and effectiveness of water management infrastructure.

We support the provincial government's ongoing theme of strong financial management. In order to position the ministry to address infrastructure funding and management matters, we continue to seek more functional and accountable ways to accomplish our mandate. This is evident in the internal restructuring we did after the government reorganization last spring. We have reduced our FTE count by nearly 100, and we have also been able to reduce the administrative budget by approximately \$4 million.

In fiscal year 2000-2001 in direct response to the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure's recommendations several initiatives, including the north/south trade corridor, will receive accelerated funding. In fact, the task force recommendations have resulted in significant changes to the funding and management of our highway systems. The changes will also have a major impact on the engineering and construction sectors in this province. An additional \$900 million is required over a three-year period to address these recommendations. The Alberta government is providing most of this additional money through the '99-2000 supplementary estimates and in the 2000-2001 fiscal year for several initiatives.

The Alberta cities transportation partnership program will receive a \$256.3 million investment. The cities of Calgary and Edmonton will receive funding based on the equivalent of 5 cents per litre off on-road fuel sold within each city. In total this represents an increase of about \$30 million per year for each city. Other cities will continue to receive basic funding of approximately \$60 per capita per year and will also be eligible for a \$50 million supplemental funding on a project-specific basis.

Rural municipalities will benefit from a \$160 million investment, and the new resource roads program introduced last April will receive \$34 million. Under the streets improvement program, towns and villages will receive \$60 million. This program has now been expanded to include hamlets.

In our ongoing commitment to the development of the north/south trade corridor, \$130 million will be invested in the rural portions of the corridor, \$10 million in upgrades to Calgary's Deerfoot Trail, and \$15 million to Edmonton's southwest ring road, for a total of \$155 million. This continues the government's commitment to accelerate funding to the north/south trade corridor until four-laning is substantially completed in 2007.

Primary highway construction will receive \$147 million. The province begins assuming responsibility for the construction, maintenance, and rehab of secondary highways as of April 1, 2000.

The 2000-2001 estimates show an increase of \$70 million from '99-2000 to \$160 million to cover the cost of all maintenance and construction for secondary highways. That results in significant savings to municipalities as they will no longer have to fund maintenance or their previous 25 percent of secondary highway construction.

As a point of interest, over the next three years the \$900 million in transportation infrastructure funding resulting from the Premier's task force recommendations will create up to 13,500 person-years of work for Albertans.

There are some other aspects of this year's estimates that I would like to highlight. Pressures on other municipal infrastructures such as water and wastewater treatment facilities continue to be recognized in the 2000-2001 estimates with increased program funding of \$29 million, which is \$10 million more than last year.

Compared to the '99-2000 budget, spending on health facilities has increased by \$53 million to \$168 million to address health infrastructure upgrading needs.

School facilities funding allocations include \$160 million for preservation and high-priority expansion to accommodate increased enrollments. As a part of this allocation \$40 million includes block funding to school boards for minor preservation needs – that would be the BQRP – \$40 million for new facilities, \$10 million for innovation, and \$70 million for preservation and modernization of existing facilities.

The 2000-2001 estimate for postsecondary institutions is \$47.4 million. The funding provides institutions with the flexibility to address present and future renovation and replacement needs as well as program expansions.

The seniors' lodges will be provided with \$17.1 million to be used for the upgrading of 15 lodges and the start of designs for 12 additional lodges.

In 2000-2001 we have an ongoing commitment of \$95.6 million for the operation and maintenance of all of our government-owned facilities in the province. Approximately \$76 million has been allocated to the leasing and operation of private-sector facilities for government program use. The government is targeting revenues of \$100 million from the sale of surplus properties over the next three years. It is expected that about \$35 million in property sales will be achieved this year, and the 2000-2001 estimates reflect the use of this revenue.

I would also like to mention some of the ministry's other major initiatives before concluding. Transportation safety services in consultation with stakeholders continues to focus on generating a stronger awareness of the role Albertans play in traffic safety. Work on the regulations under the new Traffic Safety Act will be completed. We will continue with extensive public consultation as these regulations are developed.

In 2000-2001, consultations will include discussions on graduated licensing, commercial vehicle equipment standards, and also off-highway vehicles.

Regulations will be developed in consultation with the railway industry and user groups prior to proclamation of the Railway Act. The objective of the new act and regulations is to provide for the safe operation of railways under provincial jurisdiction.

8:16

In collaboration with school facilities stakeholder groups, many of the recommendations from the School Facilities Task Force will be implemented this year in order to fulfill the government's commitment to improve capital funding practices. Using teams of private-sector consultants, we have completed phase 1 of a complete facility audit of all schools in Alberta. Phase 1 completed 433

schools out of the 1,460, and the audit looked at structural, mechanical, electrical, and of course the building envelope. When the audit is finished in the summer of 2000, we will have a complete condition inventory of all Alberta schools. We'll be bringing forward a funding strategy to address the backlog of modernization and upgrading while addressing the requirements for new student places in the form of new schools.

Alberta Infrastructure recognizes that we need to continue being innovative and forward-looking. Using a value-based focus, we're planning to look at new technologies and to review the ministry's processes as they affect our stakeholders and partners. We're reviewing roles and responsibilities in our relationship with these stakeholders, specifically with our consulting and contracting partners.

As you have heard this evening, Alberta Infrastructure is committed to the economic prosperity and development of the province and Albertans and to keeping up with the rapidly changing world around us. We will continue to face challenges as a result of economic and population growth pressures and the problems presented by an aging infrastructure.

I believe that the estimates for this year indicate that we have a renewed focus on infrastructure in this province. With the collaborative efforts of ministry staff, our partners, and our stakeholders we are addressing these challenges with creative and effective solutions that will lead us successfully through the 21st century.

I would be happy now to take any questions you may have. If, of course, I'm unable to provide any of the answers today, I assure you that you will receive written answers promptly.

I'd just like to add that the detail in the budget is considerable, and as we answer questions over the rest of the evening, I think we'll give you further examples of some of the reasons why we had to put the budget and our estimates in a format like that because of some of the restrictions we work with with respect to consolidated budgeting.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to the minister's staff, and I am hoping that we'll be able to get some answers. We were wondering, Mr. Minister, if you could define "promptly" for us before we get under way here.

MR. STELMACH: It will be as prompt as I've always returned responses.

MS OLSEN: We just needed to clarify that, because, you know, we're not the Infrastructure critic, and we wanted that on the record for her. [interjections] We're really interested, and I'm glad I have reinforcements.

You know, I have so many questions here. In my first questions today I'll take the minister to the program operating expenses category. Under vote 1.0.1 the minister's office has received an incredible increase, about 76.4 percent. Of course, the big question is: why would the minister's office need that kind of increase? What are you anticipating for changes in your office over the next year?

The deputy minister's office also has a significant increase of 19 percent. Again, what's going on that we see such a dramatic increase in those two areas?

Could we move down to the highway system and the north/south trade corridor. If we go to this year's expenditures, we're looking at doing a comparison between 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, a 969 percent increase. Now, I realize that there was a commitment to the north/south trade corridor, and you spoke about the rehab of secondary highways. Are you anticipating this work to be done on

the north/south corridor next year? Is that why this over 900 percent increase in the budget in the capital investment? I think that obviously is very significant. I'll draw your attention to that. It's 2.2.1, Mr. Minister.

The rehab of the secondary highways. How many secondary highways are targeted, and how did you determine the priority for those highways? I guess I'm kind of curious. We see lots of lobbying going on for roads. I hate to say this, Mr. Minister. You're in the unfortunate position of having highways and roads, and you know how people feel about their highways and roads, especially in an election year. Overall, when we look at the transportation aspect of your department, there's a 126 percent increase, so that I think is important to explain.

I also have some other concerns, and they arose out of Justice the other night. Actually the hon. minister for intergovernmental affairs, I think, raised the issue in relation to the secondary highways and the policing of those highways. I'm just wondering if you could maybe try and inform us as to who is going to be policing those highways. There's been some discussion about having special constables police those highways and that kind of thing. Is there a move afoot to do that as opposed to having the RCMP contracted to do that? I have some concerns around that if that's the route you're anticipating going, and I think we should have a fuller discussion on that.

I want to talk a little bit about 2.4.2 under facilities infrastructure, the school facilities. A number of issues have come up. I think the most recent one is where the principal of the soon-to-be or hoped-to-be aboriginal school in the city of Edmonton is struggling with the lack of a facility. They've got 600 to 800 students that would like to register at the high school level in that school. I don't know if you're aware, Mr. Minister, but Edmonton also has the Awasis program at Prince Charles, I believe it is, and Ben Calf Robe under the Catholic system. Both of those programs are operating very well. One is an elementary, and one is an elementary/junior high. Ben Calf Robe is in the old St. Clare's elementary/junior high.

8:26

In the past students would go to Ben Calf Robe simply because they were expelled from both systems. Now the school is operating because parents choose to send their children there because they learn Cree; they learn about their culture and their heritage. You walk into that school now and you can feel really good about the fact that the students are there learning. They're not there because they have to be there or there isn't an alternative for them. They're there because their parents want them to be there, and their parents want them to carry on to the high school level being able to enter into an aboriginal program.

I have to look back and say, well, the government decided charter schools were going to be all right. The government has allowed for other schools such as Talmud Torah, that teaches Hebrew in the afternoon and English in the morning or vice versa, the French immersion schools, the Ukrainian bilingual schools, the German bilingual schools. So there are a number of programs going on. We've got Old Scona academic, and we've got athletic schools, and we've got Vimy Ridge, which is a military school to some degree.

So I'm wondering how the aboriginal community's problem will be solved. Their issue, of course, is the need for a facility, and they have apparently been turned down. I'm hoping you're going to give us some news that's going to change that. The notion of being able to house high school students all over the city in unused space isn't going to work for that program. There needs to be that cohesiveness in the school. They need the facility. I'm hoping you're going to give us some really good news and say: look; we're going to deal with that issue, and there will be high school for the aboriginal

community. They've worked long and hard for this. They put this together, and I think it will be a highly effective program. Having the aboriginal community come forward is something we as legislators can be very proud of. It's their baby. So hopefully, as I say, we can get some good information on that.

The other problem that I'm getting phone calls on, and certainly I know some of the Calgary MLAs are as well, is that the Calgary board of education is at about 75 percent utilization rate – that's in the old formula – and they have been told that they need 85 percent in order to get new schools. Well, with the growth in that particular city, we understand a growth and density study has been done. It offers somewhat of a band-aid solution, and I'm wondering if there's going to be any fast-tracking for new schools down there.

Again, this whole utilization issue is a problem. You don't have space in a concentrated area, where you've got all of these new citizens into the province. Kids need a place to go to school. I'm just wondering what the long-term plan is that's going to provide for future growth and the existing growth now. There seems to be a need for somewhere in the area of 25 to 30 new elementary schools. That's a huge cost, but I'm wondering where you are going to start and how you are going to start without offering up just a band-aid solution, going now with some long-term solutions.

I want to go to the business plan now, if I could, Mr. Minister, and maybe page 171, traffic safety. Last year the government had a traffic safety performance measure. It was casualty collisions: the number of injuries and fatal collisions per 100,000 licensed drivers in the province. It doesn't exist anymore. I'm wondering if you could enlighten us as to why this particular performance measure was dropped. We know that the targets weren't met, but that's not a reason to drop the performance measure. I'm just wondering what's going to happen.

It doesn't seem that there was a need to change that particular measure. I'm just wondering about the new measure you're going to try and develop to gauge the effectiveness of the education programs and if that's going to replace this measure. I think they're certainly two different measures. I do think there's an advantage to try and capture that information on the educational programs, but there's no one variable that's going to have the answer for us in that. I think that specific measure is going to prove to have a multi-variable answer. I think it's also something that needs to be looked at long term, so a three-year business plan isn't going to capture that necessarily.

You need to look at driver attitudes or the education over 10 years. Are the kids now responding on a long-term basis, or is it just those 16 year olds, 17 or 18 year olds abiding by those rules because of the parental pressure expressed to them? Are those attitudes going to be a part of their driving pattern for the rest of their lives? I think there are other things, and I don't think it can be captured over one, two, or three years.

When we look at traffic safety, we also can look at the injury rate in this province and the fatality rate. The fatality rate in '98 for this province was the highest in Canada, and the injury rate was also the highest in Canada. I'm wondering what's been done to try and reduce that over the years. The last year we have the information for is '98. I don't know if you have last year's information available yet. Why has the injury rate remained so high? The accident rate has increased as well. What are other provinces doing that we're not? We know that Ontario and British Columbia have as much traffic as we do, or more in some of the concentrated areas. I'm wondering what initiatives they are undertaking that we're not or what we can learn from them. What are you going to do to try and reduce those rates?

Truck safety: you know the hon. Member from Spruce Grove-

Sturgeon-St. Albert will deal with this as well. We know that last year and the year before, the Edmonton city police had undertaken a very aggressive enforcement program, which proved to be very beneficial, I thought, in talking to the member from that particular traffic safety unit. They were feeling that this was an absolutely necessary undertaking. I'm wondering now what the regulations are. Are the regulations going to change in relation to truck safety? We seem to have, along with our neighbouring province Saskatchewan, the most lax truck safety regulations in North America. So I'm wondering what you anticipate doing about that.

8:36

There's also a pilot project, I believe, that's been undertaken in relation to fatigue management for truck drivers. I'm wondering what progress is being made with that particular pilot project and study. How long are you going to collect the data, what do you anticipate doing with the findings, and are you potentially going to change the number of hours that truck drivers can drive? I believe pilots have that specific type of safety code where they can only fly a certain number of hours during a week or a day. I was just wondering if that type of thing is going to happen as well.

The other concern I have. I think this is a good question. With the increase in fuel costs, are truck drivers going to be on the road longer just to get the job done, just to put more money in their pockets? This is hurting their bottom line. What are you doing in terms of, I guess, the whole enforcement aspect in relation to maintenance? I think there may be a correlation there between trying to cut some dollars. We know prior to fuel costs going up what the school bus situation was in this province. Are we now going to see truck safety compromised as a result of the fuel costs and less maintenance done on the vehicles as a result of that? The bottom line is an issue here, so maybe you could let us know if you have a plan for that.

The north/south trade corridor is going to be an interesting task. As I traveled in the northeast U.S. this past fall, I was just amazed at the number of trucks on the road. In fact, I didn't enjoy that drive at all. You could drive through the New England states and see all the colours you want providing you didn't take your eyes off the road at any given minute because of just the tremendous number of trucks. I understand the reason for that is that the transportation of goods by truck is much faster than rail. We have that same problem here. We're going to develop this north/south corridor. After driving on those roads, I really wonder how that's going to impact on general traffic north and south. It's actually quite a scary notion the way that whole business works. So increased truck traffic is not necessarily going to be good. It needs to happen, but what are you going to undertake to ensure the safety of everybody else on the road? I guess that would be my big concern.

Okay. I guess I'll stop now, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, would you like to reply?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me find all of the votes here first.

I think we were doing 1.0.1, the minister's office expenses. Although the minister's office is now handling all of the requests coming from the former department of T and U – all of the issues centred around public works, seniors' lodges, all of the environmental projects, including school facilities and postsecondary – our office is working with the same full-time equivalents. So even though the budget was put together here reflecting the anticipation of a larger office, you will see at the conclusion that the proof will be in the pudding in terms of what is spent, and it won't be the kind of increase that you see here.

So far we have been monitoring the calls, the requests not only from MLAs from both sides of the House but also from Albertans, and we try to get back to them as promptly as possible either by phone call or by letter. The last few months' experience I've been very satisfied with, and I don't see a need for increasing the staff. I suppose that if need be, there would be room for expansion, but to date I think we've been through the amalgamation, the restructuring, and this is the very same staff we brought forward from Agriculture. You know, Agriculture was a large department, but we didn't have the same kind of mix and varying degrees of interests collected in one office. I don't foresee a problem there, and if we save a little bit of money, maybe we'll pave another square foot of road someplace.

The same thing with the deputy minister's office. It's a stab in the dark. We're going to make do with the kinds of dollars that we have available to us and do it as effectively as possible.

Remember in my opening remarks that I referred to the complexity of the budget, the estimate presentation. As you know, in consolidated base budgeting we must expend the revenue in the same year that we collect it, and as a result of that, most of the money that will be going into projects with health facilities and school boards will be given to the school boards and health authorities by way of contract and the same thing with the municipalities.

Vote 2.2.1, the north/south trade corridor. I knew this question was going to come up. With respect to 2.2.1, the north/south trade corridor, the operating expense shows a \$16 million decrease; the capital investment, a \$140,500,000 increase; and the capital investment funded by lotteries is a \$65 million decrease. This north/south trade corridor is a long-range provincial initiative that will provide a continuous divided highway route that will go from the border at Coutts to the B.C. border west of Grande Prairie. The key objective – and I may be covering some of the other items that you raised here with respect to safety on the north/south trade corridor – is to provide the safest and most efficient highway corridor to accommodate increased international trade and tourism flowing to the United States and Mexico. Without doubt, our markets are going to grow in the United States and Mexico.

8:46

Just as an aside, the issue with roads and moving product to market. We can do all of the manufacturing we want in the province of Alberta, but if you don't get the gadget to market, you don't create a sale. If you don't create a sale, you don't create wealth. If you don't create wealth, you have nothing to tax to pay for education and health. So the creation of wealth is paramount. You can't create that without getting to the market, and increasingly it is going to be more just-in-time delivery. That's not to bring something very, very new and innovative to you, but it's paramount that we get the product to market. Okay?

The highway is within our control. The ports are not within our control, and quite frankly that's where we're losing the highest percentage of sales. We're the most inefficient country when it comes to transporting our goods as compared to the other G-7 countries, and it's getting worse. So that's where part of the problem is. If you've been following some of the statistics coming out of the States, you'll see that they'll be generating a surplus of about \$200 billion by the year 2010. So they're going to be in the market for more value-added products, and we will have an ability to deliver just in time many of our products.

In Mexico, a huge investment in education, and if you watch, many of the communications companies in the high tech are building their manufacturing facilities in Mexico. We're going to have to partner and do business with that country as well.

Now, in the operating expense the project costs for the sections of

the north/south trade corridor that were constructed within the cities were budgeted as operating expenses as opposed to a capital investment since we as a government did not own the highways in those cities. But now we will be taking over the highway. We'll be maintaining it. We'll be building it. As a result, we're showing it as a capital expense in our budget.

The policy on priority setting and secondary highways. What we're committed to do and have done with rural municipalities is we've partnered with them and consulted with them on their planning and also on the kind of priority-setting they did in terms of what they found to be the most important secondary highways they would like to have paved in their county or municipality. We do have a rule that before a secondary road is paved, they must have at least 200 vehicles per day.

MS OLSEN: To be a secondary road?

MR. STELMACH: No; to be paved. A lot of these secondaries were designated back in the late '70s, early '80s. If I remember correctly, some municipalities, depending on the density of the population, designated secondaries at just about – what? – seven-mile intervals. Some municipalities have all of their secondaries paved, but others don't, depending on the sparsity of the population.

There will be some secondary roads, I'm sure, that will receive a final pavement that may have less than 200, but these will be roads that conduct a whole bunch of seasonal truck traffic especially. I can't pick one right off the top of my head. We look at the necessity of moving goods and services, so there may be some changes here and there, but generally speaking, we look at that target. The other is to tie regions of the province together. We look at that as well in terms of developing a good trade route.

The other thing – and we don't have much say in it – is that many of the companies have set up large grain handling facilities outside of the traditional small villages and towns. They've just plunked them out in rural Alberta. Yes, next to a railway but not necessarily in a village. Unfortunately in some of those situations there was very little consultation with the province, but we're now obligated to look at what secondaries have been designated and see if those secondaries that lead to these facilities require pavement.

Given the fact that we will be taking over secondary roads officially, both maintenance and construction, we're still committed to the municipalities, to listen to their priorities. So if the municipality prioritizes the secondary for either rehab or new construction or paving, we certainly will take that into consideration, because the local municipality is the one that I feel really knows best the kind of needs that they have to deliver on.

The secondary highway takeover is going to generate about \$85 million for municipalities. They're going to save 25 percent off the paving, plus we will be doing all of the maintaining. So that is why there are some differences in the budgets here: they won't have their responsibility. We feel for a couple of reasons that really the secondaries should form part of the provincial highway network in the future. The reason we say that is because a secondary highway is the same colour as a primary highway. It's got the same lines. It has a different number. It pretty well has a three-digit number as opposed to a primary, with a single or double-digit number.

As well, we have had different regulatory regimes applied on secondaries. I used this example a number of times. If you take secondary 831 from Lamont north to Fort McMurray and if you are a trucker, you phone Lamont and say: "Well, what's your road ban?" "Oh, 90 percent." So you load pipe to 90 percent and drive through the county of Lamont. You cross the river and into the county of Smoky Lake. Their road ban may be 85 percent. Do you stop,

unload pipe, throw it in the ditch? Do you turn around? There's basically no difference in weather conditions. It's just an imaginary line on a map, a different municipality, and many times no really significant scientific reason for the change in the road ban, only that it's our municipality and this is how we set our road ban. There were four municipalities that had secondary 831 going through them. So this is going to lead to a much better regulatory regime and a smoother transport of those goods.

As well, at the moment we're working with the municipalities and working out the kind of standards for grass-cutting, weed control, snow removal, crack-filling, et cetera. I think that probably in a couple of months we'll bring most of the negotiations to a close. The outstanding portion, though, is still centred around the policing, and we're working very closely with the RCMP. The RCMP is the provincial policing authority on all highways, and this will continue, but we will also be consulting with them in terms of how we're going to work with them in terms of enforcing some of the weights, dimensions, and many of the moving violations on those roads.

The authority of special constables on secondary highways will be phased out no later than perhaps September of 2001, but we'll be continuing to negotiate with Justice and Infrastructure and the municipalities.

8:56

I want to jump ahead to the areas of traffic safety and policing. I have to admire the RCMP for doing the traffic collision study done from Wetaskiwin south to the American border and to the B.C. and Saskatchewan borders. Clearly that study indicated that given the limited resources we have, we can't put police everywhere at any moment. It's impossible. Where do we focus those resources? The study indicated that the number one reason for fatalities and collisions in the province of Alberta is failing to stop at stop signs or going through red lights. The second is the whole issue of not paying attention to the road. I'm repeating myself for Colleen; I was at the same convention she was at.

The issue of not paying attention of course has many areas of concern, and there are many reasons for not paying attention. The first things that come to the minds of people could be cell phones, applying makeup, shaving. You know, hitting trucks parked on the side of the road tells me that somebody is not paying attention.

As well, in rural Alberta the higher ratio of fatalities and injuries is also related to the fact that fewer rural Albertans wear seat belts, and minor rollovers have resulted in fatalities and also serious injury. When I say minor, you know, at a slow speed a vehicle rolls over and it happens to roll over the occupant as they fly out of the vehicle because they don't wear a seat belt.

The other issue is centred around drunk driving. I heard some very good news today – maybe some lawyers don't like it – a little note from British Columbia that the Supreme Court did not wish to hear a case that was brought forward from B.C. in terms of the administrative licence suspension. They said that they don't have time for it, that it's not really a significant national issue, I guess. That, I hope, is going to reduce the number of drunk drivers and give the police another instrument to use on the road. They have also told us, this being the RCMP, that it takes quite a while to process a drunk-driving charge because many times they have to haul in the driver. It takes a number of hours, and in the meantime something else could be happening. So this administrative licence suspension is something that they really supported. We'll monitor it, and I hope that it reflects the same kind of reduction in drunk driving as we've seen in the provinces that adopted that policy a number of years ago.

The issue of speeding was way down the list in the study. Now, there are some people that will be looking at that information that

they've compiled and, as I said before, starting to focus the resources. In the cities, as you know, with all of the cameras that we have at stop lights, the red-light cameras, there's hardly a complaint. There are nice big signs saying: camera up ahead. There's a tremendous reduction. You know, people actually stop. They've been forewarned, and if you go through, somebody is going to take a picture of you. So that has worked very well for us.

The other question was with respect to the aboriginal school in Edmonton. [Mr. Stelmach's speaking time expired]

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Once again, I hate being in this room, but I'm happy to be in the Infrastructure estimates, so take one and leave the other.

I would like to start, Mr. Minister, by thanking your staff. I certainly appreciate the fact that we can call and get answers. They're very pleasant. I've had two constituents call me and sing the praises of Mr. Boddez, so you'll get that in a letter. Anyway, I would like to thank your staff, not only your staff here in the Legislature but out in Stony Plain and Barrhead as well. When we call, they're most accommodating to my constituents and to me as well, so kudos to them. It truly makes my job easier when we can get information. I don't think we've ever abused that either. So I thank you for that.

I have quite a few questions to ask tonight. I'd like to ask: if we don't have time, can I possibly give them to you at the end?

MR. STELMACH: Yes.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. I appreciate that.

I'd like to start with Milk River. As you know – and you and I have talked about this before – I am very concerned. I think the wrong decision has been made to go on the west side. It's going on the west side now; isn't it? I'd really like to see a definite reason why you changed the plan from going on the east side. I've heard all kinds of things from the community. It has split this community. We have people saying that it was political influence rather than what was practical, that many farms are being disrupted, will be lost, whereas going on the other side, there would have been a hill and a graveyard that would have been affected. I know that those people are very distraught. They're now looking at legal action.

About the executive summary that I got. I think that's all you got. If there's a more complete study of Milk River done, I haven't seen a cost analysis that includes the price of the farms, buying them out, moving the railroad, all the things that it is going to take to change the route of that highway to the west side over the east side. So I urge you to rethink it, because this has split this community, and that's sad. It's a wonderful little community. I was down there this summer.

With the information I've received from you, just looking at it like that, I think the wrong decision has been made. Now, maybe there's a piece of this I haven't seen, that I can't get. I'd really like to see the real cost-benefit analysis that includes the part about buying out those farms. I'd like to weigh out the reality of uprooting generations of people from a farm as opposed to maybe interfering with somebody's vision of a dinosaur at a travel information station. I urge you to rethink that one.

I want to speak for a moment about highway 794. The first third of that was done: through Sturgeon county. My understanding of it is that the next third will be done and then the final third. As you're probably aware, there was a bus accident on it last week – it was a

bit foggy – interestingly enough, at the very spot where a woman has been asking the county to put up a sign that there are children there, that it's a bus area. The county isn't moving on it, but I think that as of April 1 your department will be taking that over. I know there are criteria for signs, that it has to be a curve or a hill or where trees block the vision. This spot doesn't qualify for it. When we're widening highway 794, we might look at a different access to that farmer's home and the three mobile homes that are near it.

I'm hoping that when the design for 794 is done – I know that for the first third the community had input into it. The engineer said to me that this was the most agreeable community they've ever had to work with to build a highway. That tells you the demand there was for fixing that highway. That is nothing that should surprise anyone in this room who has heard me for seven years.

That one spot just north of Rivière Qui Barre was the scene of an accident this past week. Some of my family members were involved in it. Not that that makes a difference. No matter who gets hurt, it affects all of us. I'm looking forward to the completion of 794.

I want to speak for a moment about Queen Street school. You and I have spoken about that before. It's a tremendously old and inefficient building, and from my understanding it is slated for modernization, but the reality is that that wouldn't be practical. I know that the school board is asking for Grove Meadow school. They could sell the location at Queen Street school. They have a buyer for it; it's in the downtown area of Spruce Grove. Grove Meadow could be built. I know that is their request. That's their number one priority this year.

9:06

Interestingly enough, there was to be a sod-turning about four years ago, and political powers that be – it was stopped, which I don't think is very fair, but the reality is that it happened. Now, whether it's true or not, I have had a few different people come to me from the community and say that the Member for Stony Plain has said that over his dead body would that school be built. Now, I would like to know what influence any MLA, much less a member of the Crown, would have on the building of a new school. So I am asking you: how does a building get built? What are the priorities? I would like to know . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Point of order, and that would be what?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Standing Order 23(i) or (j), imputing motives. The school that she is referring to – and she has never been so far off base in her whole life as she is today.

MRS. SOETAERT: Are you saying that you never said it, Stan?

MR. WOLOSHYN: That is correct.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. I'll get somebody in here.

MR. WOLOSHYN: You get anybody you want in here. The school was not built because it didn't have the numbers to warrant it. [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, you obviously have a difference of opinion. I don't know, hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, whether bringing other people into the issues that you're attempting to deal with is getting you very far, but I would suggest that probably for decorum and efficiency purposes, it would be better to deal with your own issues without bringing other members into it.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The reality is that I'm wondering how priorities are set in the building of schools and what influence people have on those, so I'm asking. There must be a procedure through the department.

AN HON. MEMBER: There is a procedure.

MRS. SOETAERT: I realize that, and you can talk after me if you like. It's a very close room, and I usually create some heat in here.

The reality is that that buzz is out in the community, so I'd like a real commitment from the minister that school building construction is based on the priorities that Parkland school division has set and not political influence at the upper level. So that's the commitment I would like from you. [interjections]

I would like to continue on with the issue of licence plates. I know that motion is coming up. I'm hoping your department has talked about it. I'm hoping that your government will support that motion. I've had a lot of . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members. Hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, we have a great debate going on down here, and some people have forgotten their manners as well as decorum. I wonder if the hon. members for Lesser Slave Lake, Edmonton-Norwood, and Stony Plain could resume their conversations outside the Chamber. It's a difficult room to work in, as the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert reminded us in the first place, but it's even more difficult when we talk. This is not family dinner.

I wonder if Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert could continue, without the aid and assistance of other members.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was asking about licence plates front and back. [interjection] Either way you want it. Here we go. That's what people have been asking for. [interjections] I just bet *Hansard* has a hoot reading it when I'm in here.

However, I want to speak about the overpass at Campsite Road. That's been a priority of the city of Spruce Grove for a long time. However, the one at Stony Plain went up before the one at Campsite, though the original switch was planned. So you can tell that I could start to feel just a little frustrated despite all the little manipulations of the powers that be. You know, I got elected despite no school and no overpass, so maybe this time that wouldn't be a factor in it. I'd appreciate that.

The other thing. The overpass at Century Road. It's interesting. Coming off the Yellowhead, to turn left to go into Spruce Grove, you have to be out on the road before you can see if anyone is coming. So I don't know how they'd fix that. I hate to criticize an engineer with years of experience behind him. But try entering Spruce Grove from that way and it's actually quite dangerous. You have to get your nose right out there before you can turn.

Utilization rate of schools. I had a meeting with the St. Albert Protestant school board, and their question and concern was that overall the school division has a low utilization rate, that doesn't necessarily reflect the needs of the community. For example, Bellerose comp is at about 110 percent capacity, and some of the other ones are at, like, 44 percent. So they've got this dilemma of needing to upgrade Lorne Akins desperately – it's in bad shape – and they've got the reality of crowded high school kids. They're very crowded at Bellerose comp. Now, I know, thanks to the work of your department and the help they gave and the school/parent council out there, they will be adding on a portable and a wing that hopefully will address their needs by this fall. So that's good. That resolved the Bellerose comp issue, but they still have older build-

ings, and their question to me was: how does government pick a school in St. Albert and a school here? Do they take one from each school division? How do you prioritize which schools get addressed in which year, and how do you divide that amongst the different school boards? So that would be my question to you about that.

One of the things that you said the MDs would be doing now that they're not doing: the maintenance. You're doing all the maintenance of secondary and primary highways across them. [interjection] You will be? Well, now, what about those MDs who have their own equipment and want to do their own? I believe there are a few, and I'm wondering how you resolve that, because I don't think it's fair to send them with their equipment and their employees, et cetera. So I would ask you how you are addressing that.

I am pleased to see that they're finally not allowing people to ride in the back of pickup trucks. I know you caught a bit of flak over it, but that's one thing you didn't catch flak on from me or any of my colleagues. So thank you for having the courage to go through with that.

Also, while I was at the Alberta Safety Council, one of the bigger owner/operators of the buses said that the reality of finding good staff at 9 bucks an hour is pretty tough, because when the economy is good, lots of people have work. They can't get qualified people to drive for 9 bucks an hour, and they can't afford to pay them any more; I mean, the realities of running a bus. I realize the budget of bus transportation is not yours, but I know you're also responsible for the safety. That's pretty precious cargo that these people are carrying every day, and I would venture to say that we want people keen for the job. I would think consistency on the job would be important in that one because of the reality of the safety of the kids and the disciplining of kids on the bus. That was my part of the speech, I guess, that day. So I'd appreciate your input on that.

One of the concerns that I think I wrote you a letter on was that in one of the MDs they were paid to go down a road and then had to lift their blade through a Métis settlement and then put their blade down again. Is there an agreement with . . .

MR. STELMACH: You wrote to me?

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes, I'm sure I did. You know what? I'll look it up, because I'm sure I sent it – about the reality of those agreements, because it was foolish to have separate equipment go out for the Métis settlement in the Lesser Slave area, I think.

9:16

MR. STELMACH: Where?

MRS. SOETAERT: In the Lesser Slave area, I think. But you know what? I'll find the letter, and I'll send it to you.

I do appreciate, Mr. Minister, your prompt reply with your letters, the information that we get from your department, and the very amicable working relationship that we have.

I've raised some of the concerns about the reality of how Spruce Grove's feelings about things are very, very sincere and very worrisome for me. I would appreciate your assurances, particularly on those issues. So I thank you for that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, do you wish to reply?

MR. STELMACH: Yeah. I'd like to get to the questions from the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Maybe I'll cover some of the questions as we move along.

I just want to thank the hon. member for the recognition of our staff. I'm very proud of our staff. Many times they hear only the

negative, and it's very refreshing to hear someone give them a nice pat on the back and praise, so I thank you. It makes my evening.

I'm going to get to the questions that you had, but I just want to deal with some of the issues raised by the Member for Edmonton-Norwood. It was one about fatigue management, the compromise in terms of are the truck drivers going to be longer on the road and the comparison to the New England state and whether we're going to have additional problems with the north/south trade corridor.

With respect to truck safety. With the volume of truck traffic, that has increased in the province of Alberta, I would submit that our fatality and collision statistics certainly can be improved upon, but given that huge increase, I think the stats at least are trending the right way, and that is down. We met recently with the partners in compliance people. This is a group of truckers who are members of the trucking industry working in partnership with government, trying to establish an authority that will get more truck companies to participate in their group, setting out very clear goals and strategies and helping them to accomplish them in terms of truck safety. It means training in simple things like how you check your load before leaving, wheels, dealing with fatigue. Those are very important.

We are going to be providing some resources for them in partnership. We'll be putting some on the table, and so will the companies. I think we realize that reputation is at stake here. Also, numerous times the companies do their own audits in terms of safety. Those suppliers that are using those carriers are very careful, and they look at those audits very carefully to ensure that they're using the trucking company that's providing the safest service, because it's key in terms of their reputation as well.

The compromise in terms of higher fuel costs: are they going to be on the road longer? If they're on the road longer, they just burn more fuel, so I would think they're probably more apt to be hauling more weight. You know, that's where we would have to be more diligent in terms of the measurement of the weights.

I did not drive through New England myself, but there's a significant difference in the load factor. I can't remember the statistic quite correctly from when I was in agriculture, but I believe the load factor in California at that time was maxed at 80,000, and we were at 120,000. As a result, yes, less load on the truck but more trucks on the road. That's the debate we're having through the Ministry of Justice and also intergovernmental affairs . . .

MRS. McCLELLAN: Relations.

MR. STELMACH: Oh, relations. I have rural affairs; you have relations.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Sad but true.

MR. STELMACH: . . . in terms of working out an agreement on what would be the common load factor in Alberta and the States. In talking to the Californians, they said that they wanted to keep the weight down as much as possible to restrict the amount of goods coming to California because the lighter the load, the more cost for volume of what's hauled. So it's more of a trade restriction than a safety issue. I think we will be able to resolve those issues. The heavier load does not necessarily mean that there's some safety issue attached to that.

The hours of service: the number of hours of service a driver can work is limited by federal regulation. Drivers are required to keep logbooks. Hours of service are enforced by the department. There is a proposal to clarify and to simplify the hours of service rules. There is a committee that's been meeting on that, but we are supporting the change in the rules.

With respect to fatigue management, a fatigue management program should be available as a pilot project by late summer. The purpose of implementing fatigue management is to ensure that drivers pull over and rest when they are tired, not just when they're obligated to do it by regulation. This will add greatly to highway safety, because I do believe some of the accidents are a result of fatigue.

I will deal with the question with respect to the aboriginal school in Edmonton. Presently in the Edmonton public system 57 out of approximately 200 schools are operating at less than 50 percent capacity. So more than a quarter of the schools: less than 50 percent capacity. The students for the proposed aboriginal school would all come from the Edmonton public region, which means that those schools that would be feeding students would be emptier as a result of those students coming to one central school.

The requests received for new school construction are in the area of \$500 million to \$550 million, and in this particular area it wasn't a request for a new school in terms of building a new school; they were looking at leasing a facility. The cost, if I remember correctly, would be about a million a year for 20 years, so that's \$20 million. I think if you were to invest \$20 million over 20 years in a building, you'd probably get more value out of it than in this particular case.

9:26

Now, there are some good examples of leased space like we have downtown in Centre high: 2,000 students, with approximately 1,600 students completing their courses. These are fourth and fifth year high school students. There are some very strict rules that are put in place for those students to attend. The performance and the achievement is quite good for those students in fourth and fifth year. Centre high really adapts to the needs of the students. Many of them are working. Some of them are alone in this city. They are here from as far away as the province of Manitoba, Ontario. We toured that school, and we did talk to some of those students. Being able to complete their high school program in a setting which allows them not only to work some hours a day but also to complete their studies helps them not only to complete grade 12, but it enables them then to proceed further in any other postsecondary institution of their choice.

There's about \$40 million this year in the new school construction. Getting to the priorities, utilization is of course a key factor. I know that we are revisiting the whole utilization formula. That was one of the key recommendations coming out of the School Facilities Task Force. I'm certainly not going to prejudge what the decision will be. All I know is that we have to look at what the issues are in urban Alberta and also in rural Alberta. In rural Alberta attaining some of the high utilization we're asking for means closure of schools and in many cases transporting students great distances, and that's not, I believe, appropriate. What is considered an appropriate length of school bus ride? I don't know. I know I spent many hours on a school bus, and, I mean, I'm here.

MRS. SOETAERT: It was the bus driver. Didn't you say that you learned most of what you needed in the bus? I heard that in a speech.

MS OLSEN: What did you learn, Mr. Minister?

MR. STELMACH: I don't know whether it was academic or not. [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, I think you're going to drive either the chairman or the *Hansard* staff crazy. There are about five

people entering into a conversation, and we are still in committee. I wonder if the minister could continue without all the help he's receiving.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to the Calgary board of education, I do have to say that the Calgary board is looking at rationalization of their underutilized schools. Seven of their schools that are underutilized are being closed. There are some issues. You know, to close an inner-city school, what happens to the land? It's considered almost to be park area, et cetera. How do you deal with the ever increasing expansion in outlying areas and the needs? So the Calgary board and the city of Calgary are working together.

We as the Department of Learning have representation with ASBA, ASBOA, which is the Alberta School Business Officials Association. We have CASS, which is the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and facility planners. I might have missed somebody else: ACSTA. Those particular groups. I know they've had one meeting for sure, if not two, and they will be proceeding on utilization. That's key.

By the time we get the utilization recommendations forwarded to us, we'll have most of the audit complete on the 1,460 school buildings. Then we'll be able to collate all of that information and start rolling out a long-term plan both in preservation and new school construction, with the goal of being as equitable as possible across the province, because that's important.

Okay. In terms of safety, I'm very high on walking the talk. That has been very positive. Really what that is is allowing parents to walk the route to school with the students and just highlighting what dangers there may be on that route. I'm also proud to say that at this time we are trending down in terms of the vehicles rendered out of service in the school bus inspections. In the PIC program the last inspection done, last quarter, was zero. Okay? If we can maintain close to zero, that I think is an excellent goal. It can't get any better than that.

I do realize the issue you had put on the table with respect to dependable drivers: who can you hire? The easy thing for me to say is: well, we fund school boards. I know there are some pressures there today because those bus drivers have to compete for qualified people, trained staff, and also they are paying considerably higher fuel prices now. We'll keep working with the school boards. We promised the contractors that we'll look at some options as to how to deal with this situation.

There are other things that came up. One is centred around the training of drivers and also the S3 endorsement. Most of the school boards do enforce the S endorsement, but there are some that don't. We want to work with those to see if we can get a common standard right across the province of Alberta.

With respect to fatality rates and injury: what are we doing? The province of Alberta is probably a bit unique. I don't know if I can give you any real scientific evidence on some of the reasons our fatality rates are unacceptable, but we do travel greater distances from community to community compared to some of the other provinces. I would say we are more affluent, with faster vehicles. We want to get there faster than what may be legal. We are also looking at the number of inexperienced drivers, no matter what age – we're just talking about inexperienced drivers – and looking at the graduated licence program and introducing that into the province of Alberta. Again, if it's anything like the administrative licence program, if we can get those same results: a 30-some percent reduction, as Ontario has seen, in collisions; I don't know about fatalities, but certainly collisions. Their insurance rates have really dropped considerably in Ontario as a result. That would go a long way in reducing some of those fatalities.

In terms of seat belts and the use of seat belts, you know, we'll just have to monitor that and enforce it. When I think of my own constituency this last year, we had a young lady who left four kids behind. In her case it wasn't a seat belt; it was just driving out of the yard early in the morning with her husband, not thinking anybody would be out that early in the morning on a country road, and not stopping at a stop sign. Boom. The same thing with another lady crossing highway 16. These were all stop sign violations. Now, whether they stopped and didn't see, I don't know. But stopping violations are the most serious, and we'll have to really concentrate on that.

9:36

With respect to Milk River, I will give you a response to Milk River only because it's part of the budget, not Milk River itself but the north/south trade corridor. As I said before, that was a very difficult decision for our department and for me personally, but we had to bring the decision to a close. We had to make it.

It didn't matter which side of the highway we went on, we would be uprooting families. As you mentioned, on one side there was a graveyard, and there is also a secondary highway on the other side. There is a sewage lagoon. The community was worried about another interruption on the secondary highway leading into Milk River. But I made a commitment to the families there that we will be working with them and be fair and equitable in how we acquire those purchases. We personally visited the landowners ourselves just to get a feel for the land and for the homestead.

The reason it was difficult is that I know people have lived there many years, and you can put yourself in the same shoes. In my particular case, I'd probably be feeling the same way. I'd hate to be uprooted from the same yard where we've lived for a hundred years.

We'll continue to listen. There were more areas where we'd be intersecting land on the opposite side, considerably more.

MRS. SOETAERT: But not farmsteads. Just land.

MR. STELMACH: I don't remember farmsteads, but a lot of partitions of land and stuff like that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do we have unanimous consent to allow the minister to finish this particular series of questions?

No? It's okay. Unanimous consent means that we have to have everybody.

Thank you, hon. minister.

Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I'm not sure I feel comfortable that you've answered the question around the aboriginal school. What I heard you say – and please correct me if my interpretation is wrong – is that you would have preferred to put the money into building a school but that it's not a priority and because 25 percent of Edmonton schools have a utilization rate less than 57 percent, then this just isn't a viable alternative at this time.

I'm quite concerned. You talk about equity, and sometimes initiatives that are undertaken by communities and are community-driven are going to fare much better than initiatives undertaken by government.

I'm going to give you an example. There are schools up in the northeast part of this province that haven't graduated an aboriginal high school student for 20 years; some, if ever. We're looking at the ability right now of having a very well-renowned PhD from the aboriginal community come in as principal of an aboriginal high school, and we don't have a building for that.

We talk about commitment to crime prevention. We talk about being willing to give back religious and sacred artifacts. The Premier is willing to wear his headdress into the Legislature. There is a huge problem here, quite frankly, in terms of priorities. I'm concerned that if we as legislators really mean what we say and if we really believe in what's coming out of our mouths, this is one of those times when biting the bullet isn't such a bad idea.

If we're looking at mentorship programs, if we want to see more young people in the aboriginal community, which is the fastest growing population in this country – those kids will be in line to be leaders 20 years from now. They'll be sitting around this table; they'll be sitting around other tables. They will be part of the leadership in this country.

What we're looking at is the potential for 600 kids to complete high school, 600 kids from the aboriginal community. To me \$20 million over 20 years is a drop in the bucket to what you're going to pay for each one of those kids if they end up on the other side of the system. I'm not quite sure how you're weighing the cost of that: \$20 million worth of capital versus the cost of many of those kids not making it in society.

I'm just wondering where the priorities are. If we really believe that education is a key component, if we believe in crime prevention, if we believe in addressing the issues of poverty, if we believe in all that – and I'm talking the global “we”, the 83 of us that sit in that Legislature – we're going to miss the boat here if we say \$20 million is just too much money over 20 years. So I really have a problem with that.

I'm hoping that the hon. member for Slave Lake, who is also . . .

MS CALAHASEN: Lesser Slave Lake.

MS OLSEN: Lesser. No, not Lesser.

MS CALAHASEN: Lesser Slave Lake.

MS OLSEN: I'm hoping that the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake will in fact come to bat for the community and stand up and say that a building is a building and in this particular case will do a whole lot more good than it would damage.

I think the total cost overall of having an uneducated population is far more excessive. You just have to go over and look at EYOC, and that's the cost. Add the cost of every kid in there. Forty percent of those kids are aboriginal kids. I have difficulty with this whole process. It's not a lot of money when you look at the long term. Maybe we should figure out what the cost of 40 percent of that population in EYOC is right now.

My next issue is that when you look at what's happened in the northeast United States in terms of the truck traffic and their trade corridors, part of the problem is the large distribution centres that have emerged everywhere. They're off those main truck routes; they're in small towns. It's been great in creating employment. Huge companies will create large distribution centres. I could not believe the truck bays in some of these places; they're phenomenal. There's no reliable rail transportation around there.

As we diversify in this province – you talked already about, you know, the large grain distribution centres going into the small towns near the railway – I'm wondering if there's an overall plan to look at the potential for this kind of thing to crop up down the road and what the government's, I guess, response to that would be. If you have large distribution centres emerging along the trade corridor, you're going to have a tremendous amount of truck traffic that you might not have anticipated. So just a thought. We're looking at our future in terms of growth and density.

A couple more questions. The issue about having one highway to and from Fort McMurray has come up, and I'm not sure what the secondary highway – well, I don't think that's a secondary highway, because it's not paved. It's the highway that goes from Lac La Biche to Fort McMurray, and I can't for the life of me . . .

MR. STELMACH: Eight eighty-one?

MS OLSEN: Is that it? Yeah, 881. Okay. That's the alternative route. Is that targeted for rehab, or is that going to be paved?

MR. STELMACH: We're paving, yeah.

MS OLSEN: Okay. That was just a concern I had. There were a lot of issues brought up about the closure of the other road between Fort McMurray and Lac La Biche.

9:46

The traffic safety review. Did the fines go up with the new Traffic Safety Act, the overall fines for traffic violations and that kind of thing?

MR. STELMACH: Some did.

MS OLSEN: I can get the specified penalties list; I just couldn't remember whether or not that happened.

In the old Highway Traffic Act, sections 123(a) and (b), which are driving without due care and attention or driving without due consideration for others on the highway, I think it was a \$150 fine or compulsory court appearance. You talked about the review that the RCMP did, and one issue was driving without due care and attention. I'm just wondering if that might necessitate a compulsory court appearance as opposed to just the ability to levy a \$150 fine, if that might be another option in terms of looking at dealing with some of those.

I'm not necessarily certain that you need to come up with another section to prohibit using cellular phones. I think that's covered. I think that fine is absolutely satisfactory in that area. I'm just wondering if the increase in fine may have occurred or just a straight compulsory court appearance might be an option to go to.

British Columbia has an incredible Check Stop program. What happens is that the RCMP are paid by the province for that special duty work. Wherever you go on a Friday or Saturday night in Vancouver, Victoria, everywhere I went anyway – I was glad that I wasn't somebody imbibing alcohol. They're sure to get caught, absolutely sure to get caught. It seems to me they have a huge program there. In fact, one of the RCMP officers did say that this was a provincial program where the province paid for the officers' Check Stops. I don't know what the cost of that program is, but in terms of reducing drinking and driving, impaired driving, I think that's an effective tool.

I understand that my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar has some questions. One more prior to that. You talked about red-light cameras. You've seen reductions with the red-light cameras. Well, the red-light cameras are static, so people are always going to know they're there. They're not moving around like photoradar. I'm a huge believer in photoradar, as are most police officers that I know. [interjection] Well, I used to belong to a gang of 1,100.

I would encourage this government to use photoradar. I do believe it is a safety instrument. I do believe that it does work. I don't believe it's a cash cow. I believe . . .

MR. STELMACH: On provincial highways?

MS OLSEN: Yes. I believe the cash is a by-product of a traffic safety program. Not that I spent a lot of time giving out radar tickets, because I didn't, but I do believe there's huge, huge merit in the program. It does work.

With that I'll leave it. Mr. Minister, I've taken a few moments of my colleague's time, and I'm just wondering if maybe you could answer me in writing or something.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, do you wish to respond either orally or in writing?

MR. STELMACH: Most of the response will be written, but I just want to clarify. I think the hon. member said that a quarter of the schools I talked about are 57 percent. It's less than 50 percent utilization.

I'm not arguing about the merit of the program. I think there's some opportunity there. On the other hand, we've got the empty space, so why not use some of that space? There may be a possibility of looking at it. We'll look at it. If it's a program similar to how Centre high works, it's got good achievement levels. But we'll be looking at it.

MS OLSEN: I'll be bothering you about it.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. . . . I'm sorry, Mr. Minister. Did you complete your . . .

MR. STELMACH: Well, they asked more questions, so we'll give them the opportunity.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay, but we do have other people who have indicated that they were interested in asking questions.

Was that what your hand was?

MR. STELMACH: I will say that we're supposed to bring this to a close in about five minutes, so if there are any outstanding questions that have not been asked, if they could be given to us in writing, we're more than happy to respond to them. I know some of our members didn't have much of a chance to ask, so we'd like to give everyone an opportunity.

I'd then just like to move that we rise and report.

MRS. SOETAERT: No, it's not 10 o'clock yet. If I may, Mr. Chairman . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Actually, if you have a motion – did I hear the motion or did I not?

MRS. SOETAERT: Could the minister at least answer some of our questions for five minutes before we adjourn? I'd like to hear an answer about Queen Street school.

MR. STELMACH: Oh, sure. You will hear it in four minutes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, if you wish to answer the questions, yes, you have time and you may do so. If you wish to listen to more questions, fine.

MR. STELMACH: Given that we have an agreement to bring this to a close after I answer the issue raised, questions with respect to Queen Street school in Spruce Grove.

I had the pleasure of visiting Spruce Grove with the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Incidentally, thank you for

supporting us on riding in the back of pickup trucks. I thought the lunch was worth while for that.

The criteria as exist today on new school construction – and I say as exist today, because we are reviewing the utilization rates and how that will apply in terms of the decision-making. But there are enrollment pressures in the system, looking at the required changes for new technology in the existing school and also the need for ancillary space like gymnasiums, et cetera.

I didn't visit Queen Street school personally, but I think one of the things we'll be looking at is just seeing – after we get this inventory, we'll have all the ages of the schools and also the kind of modernization, et cetera, that will be required. Sometimes there will be a saw-off in terms of if it costs X amount to modernize, what is the cost of replacement?

In this particular area I know that the school is situated in a place, in a community where the town looks at the space as being valuable for a seniors' centre. That's one of the positive advantages of this department because, quite frankly, when Spruce Grove as a municipality came to see us, after a few minutes of discussion – well, at first they came to us talking about a seniors' drop-in centre, not knowing that we were talking to the school board. We asked them to go see the school board. The school board now has talked to the municipality, and I think there's some pressure there in terms of: okay, now let's work with each other to see how we both might meet the needs. I don't recall Parkland's priority list though. [interjection] Okay, but they would have to have it on their priority list.

9:56

MRS. SOETAERT: It's their top priority.

MR. STELMACH: As replacement or what?

MRS. SOETAERT: Replacement.

MR. STELMACH: Okay. That's where we're at today.

MRS. SOETAERT: So does a school board have that priority then? Like, you listen to their priority lists?

MR. STELMACH: Yes. You know, we look at their priority lists, of course again looking at some of the other criteria in terms of the utilization factor, some of their space requirements, enrollment pressures. In this particular case, the school audit will also tell us the condition of the building, all of the buildings. We rated them from – I don't know what point we started at, but they go as high as 1,100. So we did the schools. The first 33 schools were the worst, at let's say 900 to 1,000.

MRS. SOETAERT: These were across the province?

MR. STELMACH: Across the province. Across school boards. Yes.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. So you decide which ones are done. The school boards all put them in, and you decide.

MR. STELMACH: For modernization, according to the audit, unless the school board wants to close a particular school. They may want to close one because of low enrollment, and of course we wouldn't be proceeding with the modernization. Okay? Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I believe we'd like to rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure

has moved that the subcommittee do now rise and report. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

We'll reconvene in the Assembly in committee stage.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, March 9, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/09

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Lord, renew us with your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service of the people of this great province. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Aart Verdegaal, consul general of the Kingdom of Netherlands based in Vancouver. Accompanying him is Honorary Consul General Mr. Rikke Dootjes, based here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and the Netherlands have a longstanding relationship. Two-way trade between Alberta and the Netherlands totaled over \$242 million in 1998, and the Netherlands is Alberta's 11th largest export market. Many companies from our province conduct business in the Netherlands, and we have many Dutch companies active in Alberta as well.

Mr. Speaker, members would know that Dutch settlers came to Alberta in the early 1900s, and today we have over 140,000 Albertans of Dutch descent. Next year Alberta will be sending between 20 and 25 delegates, leaders from the volunteer sector, to the World Volunteer Conference in Amsterdam.

On behalf of all Albertans I want to wish our honoured guests a very productive and enjoyable stay in our province. Mr. Speaker, they are seated in your gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the customary warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table a petition signed by 290 Albertans from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert. They are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

MS LEIBOVICI: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to present a petition signed by 238 citizens of Alberta petitioning "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta with 151 signatures from Edmonton, Ardrossan, Fort Saskatchewan, and Lamont urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care" in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition that states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

It's signed by 250 Edmontonians.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table in the Assembly a petition signed by 142 Edmontonians. They are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." This brings the total signatures that have been tabled in the House to over 20,200.

Thank you.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table a petition containing 134 signatures of Edmontonians who are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." I wish to note that this brings the total to 20,224.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 138 citizens of Alberta from Edmonton and Edson. The petition reads: "urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here signed by 384 people from Ranfurly, Holden, Innisfree, Lavoy, Two Hills, Lamont, Hilliard, Bruce, Mundare, Vegreville, Willingdon, Andrew, Viking, and Thorhild. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." I believe some of these people are in the galleries today.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition signed by another 224 Albertans, for a total of 2,168 to date. They are petitioning this Assembly "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday opposing private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to support of public health care that I introduced yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday regarding the opposition to private health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would request that the petition I presented on March 8 now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition which I presented to this Assembly yesterday urging the government to stop promoting private health care and instead properly support our public health care system now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday signed by 595 Albertans asking this Assembly to pass legislation banning private, for-profit hospitals be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Bill 17

Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 17 being the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I would move that Bill 17 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table this afternoon a response to Written Question 1 from the MLA for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Thank you.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

DR. WEST: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table copies of motions for returns 5 and 9. These are the answers.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the MLA committee which is doing a service review of the Workers' Compensation Board, I wish to table copies of questionnaires that have been distributed to all members of the Legislature. We're asking them to help us in the distribution of these to injured workers. They will be receiving a covering letter in the next day or two which indicates that we'd like the questionnaires back by April 30, and an address is attached with that covering letter.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the result of a FOIP request I would like to table this letter from the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View. It's a letter to a constituent regarding the government's role in the pine shakes issue.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to table this afternoon written summaries from a number of meetings held by the Calgary regional health authority in the city of Calgary. These include a town hall meeting at Glamorgan Community Association, February 19, a town hall meeting at Annie Gale junior high school on February 12, and a meeting with educational partners on February 16.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of three separate reports prepared by the Liberal opposition, and I'd like to table them with the Assembly. The first

is a report which shows the analysis of the 11 percent flat tax and its unfair distribution and how it is really a windfall for the wealthy in this province.

The second report, Mr. Speaker, is an analysis of the impact of the federal government tax measures in Alberta. What it demonstrates is that fully 52.3 percent of tax savings under the Alberta tax plan are attributed to actions taken by the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, the final report that I have today is an analysis showing the utilization of the fiscal dividend for the years 2000-2001 through 2002-2003. What this report demonstrates is that while the provincial government has spent 12 percent of the fiscal dividend on tax cuts, in fact the federal government has spent 42 percent of its fiscal dividend on tax cuts.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first tabling is from Lauderdale Community League, a letter to the Minister of Justice. In this letter they outline their frustrations over the number of adjournments that have occurred in a case that they are having with a former member of their executive board.

My second tabling, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, is an evidence package compiled by an Alberta injured worker. What he is mainly concerned with in this particular paper is discussion notes created by the CSRC, why these written notes are destroyed once the decision document is finalized.

Thank you very much.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to table an information package from the Canadian Union of Public Employees which indicates that there's a deadly virus on the loose, and that is for-profit health care.

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two tablings. The first are letters from Nobby Sato and Carol Hechtenthal, who are very concerned about the provincial government allowing Genesis Land Development to develop a large resort in the Spray Lakes area of Kananaskis.

The second is a copy of a petition signed by 14 people from Calgary, Water Valley, and surrounding area. The petition says that they are "against commercial development, including the Genesis/Spray Lakes project in Kananaskis Country."

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Charles Davison of the law firm Abbey Davies Greaves Hunter Davison reporting his concerns about the loss of court reporters in Alberta courtrooms.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a letter that I sent to the hon. Minister of Resource Development outlining a potential policy change in the area of fuel tax that shows how the fuel tax could be reduced while still maintaining the treasury as it is presently.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table 11 letters from Albertans who are residents of the great city of Calgary, all opposing this government's policy on health care and Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I am pleased today to table five copies of a memo to all Members of the Legislative Assembly dated March 9, 2000, from myself regarding proclamation of amendments to the Conflicts of Interest Act.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you a gentleman from the constituency of Strathmore-Brooks. This gentleman goes to the University of Alberta, and he is the founding member of the first PC youth club in the high school which is in Brooks. I'd ask Kyle Franz to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Joining Kyle today is a constituent of Fort McMurray, Blake Robert. Blake is also in PC youth here in Alberta and also is heading up the leadership at the national level for communications. He attends Grant MacEwan College. I'd like to ask Blake to rise and receive the warm welcome of all legislators.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a wonderful group of students from Brookwood elementary school in Spruce Grove. There are actually 79 visitors today. They're here with their teachers, Ray Shapka, Debbie McFarlane, Molly Benfield, Micheline Spencer, Bobbie Wandler, a student teacher; and also parent helpers Barb Kasper, Barb Baylis, Gaylene Gander, Daryl Cole, and Cathy Schoepp. They've had a wonderful tour today, and they told me that they're looking forward to coming back in the summertime. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two groups that with your permission I'd like to introduce through you to all members of the Assembly today. The first is a group of senior citizens who have joined us today through the Canterbury Foundation. I believe they're residents of Canterbury Court and Canterbury Manor. I'm introducing them on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview. I believe they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask our guests from the Canterbury Foundation to rise and be warmly received by this Assembly.

Also, Mr. Speaker, just over the noon hour I met with a group of, I believe, 34 visitors from Vegreville, who are all here as Friends of Medicare as well as friends of the public health care system. I believe they found themselves seats in the public gallery, and I would ask all of our guests from Vegreville who are here to help

support public health care to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some students from NorQuest College in my constituency. That's formerly Alberta Vocational College. We have four students in all, Ellie Gray, Famia Streefkerk, Shannon Hopper, and Brenda Lands borough, and they're accompanied today by their instructor, Bruce Huebener. I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the House.

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

1:50

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions to make, with your permission. The first one is two persons, Jetta Badre and Colleen Taylor, who are parents of diabetic children and are here today to express their opposition to Bill 11 in various forms. I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The second group of guests that I have the pleasure of introducing today is a large group of seniors from Vegreville. I would like to put their names on record, and once I've called their names, I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly: Harry Babchuk; Irvin Bablitz; Joan Bablitz; John, Bill, and Lil Czar; Lil Darling; Rosanna Decore; Pearl Decore; Ross Demkiw; Marie Dmytriw; Hilda Feschuk; John Garred; Mike Kavich; Caroline Knowles; Linda Haresevich; Albin Lukawiecki; Lil Lukawiecki; Olga Furkalo; and Alan Yaniv. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly once more.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, it's totally unnecessary to introduce the same person twice.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are receiving their Bill 11 propaganda packages in the mail, even as we speak. The bill with the doctored notes in the margins and the accompanying public relations spin are all paid for with Albertans' own tax dollars. It is this Premier who is in fact sending out malicious information. So to the people who are watching on television, I'd ask them to turn to page 3 on the propaganda piece. My first question will be to the Premier. He says that he's going to ban private hospitals in section 1, but in section 2 he creates them. Does he actually think Albertans won't see through the trick in these two sections?

MR. KLEIN: Well, when you want to talk about untruths and misinformation, first of all, it is not a propaganda piece. There is no PR spin. It's very straightforward, Mr. Speaker. There is no malicious information contained in the report whatsoever. Again, those are just three points of the kind of misinformation that is being spewed out by the Liberals.

There is no contradiction, by the way, between part 1, section 1, "no person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta," and anything in section 2.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So why does the Premier fail to explain truthfully that section two tier – sorry; that's a Freudian slip – section 2 will create a second tier of hospitals in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the bill clearly states that "no person shall operate a private hospital." So having said that and the bill having said that quite clearly, there can be nothing else in the bill that would ever purport to having a private hospital.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why wouldn't the Premier just tell Albertans that "an approved surgical facility" is really a private hospital? Wouldn't that be being more honest with Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Well, the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition should know all about private surgical facilities. Mr. Speaker, 37 surgical facilities were opened and operated when she was the minister of health. Thirty-seven. So if she didn't know what a surgical clinic was then, she had no business being the minister.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not talking about surgical clinics; we're talking about private hospitals.

Last night at a town hall meeting in Calgary people wanted to know what Bill 11 will lead to. They don't trust the empty words and the vague assurances from the Premier nor from the chairman of the truth squads. So let's go to the bill itself again. I'd ask the people that are watching to turn to page 17 and the definition of private hospital in the bill. If a private hospital or a privately owned acute care facility, rather, were to deliver medical, diagnostic, and surgical facilities but not the emergency, wouldn't that be a private hospital in most people's minds?

MR. KLEIN: I go to section (q). It says a surgical facility "means a facility whose primary function is to provide a limited range of surgical services." That is happening right now in 47 surgical clinics, 37 of which were approved by the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition when she was the minister of health.

The kinds of services – I don't have the full range. I understand there are 140 different surgical procedures now being performed in surgical clinics. They range from varicose vein stripping to various ear operations, cataract surgery, therapeutic abortions. The list goes on and on. One hundred and forty different procedures are now performed in surgical clinics.

I repeat, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition was the minister of health. She was the minister of health, and under her watch some 37 surgical clinics were opened and operated.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: I'm sure that all those wonderful people who are watching would appreciate that when one hon. member is recognized to raise a question, there are no interruptions during the question. I'm sure that all those people who are watching will also appreciate that when one hon. member chooses to respond to the question, there should be no interruptions of that hon. member. All those wonderful people watching should also know that in fact is the rule of this Assembly.

Private Health Services (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, getting back to the Premier's own

definition of private hospital in his own bill on page 17, under the Premier's definition if only three of these four services are delivered, that would not be a private hospital, and therefore that kind of facility would be allowed where there were medical, surgical, and diagnostic services delivered. Isn't that true?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I don't fully understand the question, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the Minister of Health and Wellness does, and I'll ask him to respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier has focused on it very well. The fact of the matter is that a surgical facility is described in the act as dealing with a limited, targeted, defined in a contract area of service in surgery. The references that are being thrown in for diagnosis and so forth: obviously there has to be a diagnosis before a surgery takes place. It is part of the process, and the hon. Leader of the Opposition, I'm sure, can gather that in.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, you know, the visitors here from Vegreville who've done an awful lot of work to take petitions around their community understand it. Does this Premier actually believe Albertans are so gullible that they won't see the loophole in this section that allows the door to be thrown open to private hospitals?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Well, I find it very interesting that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is finally admitting that Albertans are intelligent enough to read the bill. A week ago she said Albertans were not intelligent enough to read the bill and understand it.

Mr. Speaker, if anyone has any questions relative to the interpretation of any section, they're welcome to phone. That's why we have taken the unprecedented step of mailing the bill out to every household, so that Albertans, if they're not clear on any section of this particular bill, can phone the toll-free number or write to their MLA, government or opposition, and get the clarification or phone the department of health and get the clarification. That's why we mailed the bill out.

You know, the Liberals have their spin on this particular bill, and their spin is that they don't like the fact that we have asked Albertans for their input. Right. They would rather . . . [interjections] Well, no. As I understand it, what he said: the only people who are to be believed are the Liberals. Well, that is dangerous, and that is very, very scary, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to selling this bill, it's not only the information that is missing; it's also this Premier who is missing in action. Is the real reason that the truth squad commanders are out there spinning this bill instead of the Premier because he's afraid of failing for the third time?

MR. KLEIN: The answer to that is no, Mr. Speaker. This bill is a government bill, and every member of this caucus is part of the bill. I'm doing my share every day in this Legislature. Well, today I got a note from, I guess, the question co-ordinator over there, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, saying, "Will you stay around? We have seven sets of questions for you." Right. Yesterday it was five sets. The day before that it was seven sets. The day before that it was seven sets of questions. I think I'm doing more than my job in speaking to this bill, because all of those questions are related to health care.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier couldn't be bothered to show up at two town hall meetings in Calgary and Edmonton this week, if this bill is going to supposedly protect public health care, why isn't he out there leading the charge instead of his truth squad commanders?

MR. KLEIN: Well, it's not a matter of leading the charge. The people who will lead the charge, Mr. Speaker, are the 3 million people of this province. They will lead the charge. They will be the final adjudicators of what is right and what is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals can't stand the thought of Albertans, in an unprecedented move, having meaningful and wise input into a very important piece of legislation. They can't stand the thought, even to the point where the leader of the Liberal opposition said that Albertans aren't intelligent enough to understand the bill. I find that an insult.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are tired of this Premier's doublespeak, and they're tired of him missing in action on this bill. Will he come out to a town hall meeting with me in Calgary? He can pick the place. He can pick the time. Will he call an election or will he just keep hiding behind the people he promised to represent in this province?

MR. KLEIN: To answer the last question first: yes, I will call an election in the fullness of time, Mr. Speaker.

Relative to a debate, Mr. Speaker, I have said that when second reading of this bill is introduced, I will stand up in this Chamber – we have arranged to have the debate televised – and debate the bill in this Chamber.

I read back from *Hansard* the words spoken by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. It says:

Mr. Speaker, the point I'm making is simply this. In this Assembly, as rough as it may be around the edges, as tumultuous as it may be for 50 minutes four days a week, as unsatisfactory as it may be to those of us looking for concrete answers to specific questions, it's still the . . . best forum Albertans have.

And this is the forum I choose to use.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. interim leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Next to the definition of enhanced services on page 15 of the government's million dollar householder is a liner note which says, "People could not be charged extra for them." This liner note is either a deliberate attempt to mislead Albertans or a big time typo. In either case, it's a million dollar boondoggle. My questions are to the Premier. Is the government deliberately trying to mislead Albertans into believing that they won't pay extra for so-called enhanced services, or is this a big time typo that nevertheless misleads Albertans?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the member is quite correct in that the line, not the text of the bill or the explanation, should be pointing to section (g) in the legislation. This, Mr. Speaker – and I think it's important to point this out – is one of the many very strong protections that there are in this legislation. The statement says, "These services would be part of delivering an insured service and people could not be charged extra for them," and that is correct when we talk about facility fees.

The facility fee section is another of the very important protections in this legislation, because it goes on to make very clear that in addition to the actual surgical services that people would be provided, they would not be charged for standard ward

accommodation; they would not be charged for meals; they would not be charged for nursing services, laboratory, radiology services. The list goes on for another eight items, Mr. Speaker. So that is a very specific clause which outlines in black and white in the legislation what people will not have to pay extra for but will be provided with as part of the insured services.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, my next question is again to the Premier. I hope he will answer this one. Since this is not the only piece of misinformation in this householder – section 23, again, has a similar and even more misleading part to it – I ask the Premier: why doesn't the government recall this inaccurate householder, apologize to Albertans for the misinformation contained in it, and just withdraw it? What's wrong with that, Mr. Premier? Why won't you go ahead and do it?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader of the third party shows a total and absolute disrespect for this Assembly. A bill is the most important document that can ever be introduced in the Assembly. A bill. I remind the hon. member that a bill purports to become law, and there is nothing more paramount than the law. We have taken the unprecedented step of not only tabling the bill in this Legislature but mailing it out to every household to seek the guidance, the wisdom, the talent, and the education of Albertans to help us with this particular bill. To construe the most important document that can be tabled in this Legislature as a piece of propaganda is nothing more than an insult to this Assembly, and he should apologize.

2:10

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, this is a rare occasion on which I will agree with the Premier: this bill is one of the most important pieces of legislation. But misinformation about it is also the most important precedent being set here. My question to the Premier: if the government can't be trusted to send out an accurate householder, how can Albertans trust the Premier and this government on anything he says about Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the question that really wasn't asked in the second supplementary dealt with section 23, and I will ask the hon. Justice minister and Attorney General to respond.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, the householder is entirely accurate. Section 23, which the hon. member refers to, is colloquially known as a privative clause, and that's what the liner note says. The comment that he disputes in the margin note says that "recourse to the courts continues to be available." That is entirely accurate. You can always challenge a decision that's made by any member of government if the decision is made outside the law, if it's not constitutional, if it breaks the rules of natural justice, if it's based on irrelevant considerations, if it fails to consider relevant considerations, or if it's done on the basis of bias.

What this section, the privative clause, does is make sure that a decision of the minister not to grant a licence to a private operator cannot be overturned by that private operator just because they didn't like the decision.

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

Advanced Education Tuition Fees

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency work I have met with student leaders given that higher education is a key investment for society. The issue for them is tuition fees. According to their numbers Alberta students pay higher rising tuition

fees than other provinces. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Can the minister explain to Albertans government policy on student fees?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the tuition fees are set by the individual postsecondary institution. A couple of years ago we passed a law that stated that tuition fees could not rise higher than 30 percent of the expense level of that institution. As well, there is a maximum amount that tuition fees can be raised each year. This year that amount is \$243.50. I must stress that that is an average among the different faculties of the institution. So one faculty could go up \$300; another faculty could only go up \$220. So the \$243.50 is an average.

Mr. Speaker, the average tuition around the province varies considerably. In universities it's roughly \$3,600, \$3,700. At the numerous colleges and technical institutes the average is actually around \$2,100.

I must remind people that when we talk about a tuition cap of up to a maximum of 30 percent, it still means that 70 percent is paid by the taxpayers of this province.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tuition fees are just one aspect of postsecondary education costs. The cost of study materials and the cost of living, especially for married students, are rising and heavy on students. Could the minister explain what government programs help students in this regard?

DR. OBERG: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. member has hit upon the absolute key point to this whole discussion, and that is that net debt is the issue. Tuition fees are not the issue; net debt is the issue.

When we put forward the tuition fee program, what we are aiming at is decreasing the net debt of the student as he comes out of university. Mr. Speaker, last year the net debt dropped from \$12,500 to \$11,500, making tuition and university one of the cheapest in Canada.

We just saw a 22 percent increase in the student loan program in this budget. Mr. Speaker, over the next three years the student loan program will be increased 50 percent. Last night I had the opportunity of talking to some student leaders, and they were absolutely ecstatic about the changes that we've done to the student loan program.

MR. CAO: Thank you. My last supplementary question is to the same minister. Can the minister explain to Alberta's students: what is the Alberta government involvement with the federal student assistance program?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta administers the millennium scholarship. I must say again that I find myself in the rather uncomfortable position of praising the federal government. The millennium scholarship has been great for students in Alberta. There have been problems in other areas of the country, but there have not been any problems in Alberta. That millennium scholarship goes directly to the student.

We work very well together. We are currently looking at harmonizing the two student loan programs.

One thing that I will say, though, Mr. Speaker, is that today we had a little bit of a blow to that with the decision by the banks of Canada not to take over the Canada student loan portfolio. So the federal government will still be continuing to operate that program. I believe that is unfortunate. However, we will certainly persevere and make sure that the students don't suffer.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, this Bill 11 brochure is nothing more than a thinly veiled attempt to convince Albertans to support private hospitals. Well, Albertans are smarter than that, and when they see through this Premier's propaganda, they'll uncover the truth about Bill 11. And you know what? They're not going to like it. So my question – and it's very simply put – is to the Premier. Can you tell us the difference between a hospital and an approved surgical facility?

MR. KLEIN: Yes. Absolutely. Yes, I can. You know, what I would do is challenge the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert that if she wants to know the difference, Mr. Speaker . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: So you don't have an answer; is that it?

MR. KLEIN: Well, yes, I do have an answer. The answer is this. I would challenge the hon. member to go down to the Royal Alex hospital and have a good look at the Royal Alex hospital. That is a hospital. Then I would ask her to go to the Morgentaler abortion clinic. That is a surgical clinic.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, he never answers a question, but I'll try another one. Mr. Premier, how many rural hospitals are going to become approved surgical facilities under your definition of surgical facilities?

MR. KLEIN: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. If a rural hospital has an operating theatre, then it will be a surgical facility, or if it has an emergency. Most acute care hospitals, whether they're in rural areas or urban areas, have emergencies and have backup systems. Some rural hospitals do not have systems as exotic and as sophisticated as, say, the University hospital in Edmonton or the Foothills hospital in Calgary. There are different levels of hospitals, but all of them have the basics.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: if Bill 11 is supposed to protect public health care, why does it not include a requirement for a detailed cost-benefit analysis for every one of those new private facilities, not just some vague requirements for the minister's approval?

MR. KLEIN: Obviously, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has not read the bill. If she has, she cannot understand it. Most Albertans can understand it.

I will have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

2:20

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's another of those cases where actually the legislation is much stronger than the member across the way is interpreting it to be. If you look at the legislation, it indicates that the information on the contracts, when they are arrived at, will be made public. That is the whole ball of wax, far beyond the specific item they are focusing on. The whole contract would be available.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Income Tax

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal Minister of Finance has been critical of Alberta's new tax plan, claiming that it will hurt middle-income earners. Can the Provincial Treasurer tell us what kind of tax breaks Alberta's middle-income earners will receive under the new plan?

MR. DAY: Yes, I certainly can, Mr. Speaker. We've done comparisons to, if people are interested, the federal tax reduction, which we give some credit to the federal Liberals for bringing into play even though it's much more reduced than ours is. If you take a look at a family income of \$55,000, two-income family, two dependants – now, it could vary with the type of other credits or refunds they may have coming. That particular family will receive next year when our plan is fully in place a reduction of about 18 percent on their tax bill. We think that's fairly significant.

It's something that people have been asking for, something that they've been expecting. We would have liked to move it along even more rapidly than we have. We have to give the federal government a year of notice as we are becoming the first province to unhook from the federal structure. We think it's pretty exciting and the people talking to us are pretty excited about it too.

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, my next question is also to the Treasurer. Given that the federal government has announced a five-year plan for reducing taxes, would Albertans have seen lower taxes if we had remained hooked to the federal tax system with these federal reductions flowing through to them as it was in the past?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, some of the work we've done in analyzing that shows some interesting things. First of all, it should be clear that we are not going to wait for four years, as the federal government is, to flow these tax benefits through. These benefits flow through to Albertans next year.

We remind people that low-income Albertans already enjoy the family tax credit, and they've been doing that for over two years now. A hundred and sixty thousand families in this province have been receiving a direct credit, directly into their bank account, depending on what their income level is, of up to \$1,000 per year, 160,000 families receiving that. That's along with a tax deduction that went to all families in 1997, when we moved our provincial rate downwards.

Now that we're moving the full package into play, next year Albertans will receive the full benefit of that plan. We are not going to wait four years for the federal government to flow their reductions through.

If we do the analysis – there are a couple of assumptions that have to be made here. The first one is that the same federal government is still going to be there in four years. We're not convinced of that. The second assumption, Mr. Speaker, is that they will maintain a commitment to flow those through. If, however, the tax structure commitment, regardless of which federal government is in place, is still in place in four years and if you run the numbers from ours, you would see that by year 4 or year 5 in some income tax ranges some Albertans would be paying slightly more in provincial income tax than if we have left the old plan in place. Some would be paying slightly more.

But it is not our intention in this government to maintain our structure even where it is. We will be entering it at 11 percent, but our plan, of course, as the Premier says, is to continue to see taxes going down. You will see over time the 11 percent rate move perhaps to 10 and a half, perhaps to 10 percent, and you'll see the

basic exemption rates rise. It's good news for Albertans. I don't know why the opposition doesn't like good news. This is great news for Albertans.

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, my final question is also to the Provincial Treasurer. As both the Premier and the Treasurer have praised Ottawa for its tax-cutting proposals in last week's federal budget, am I and are the people of Alberta led to understand that Alberta is satisfied that Ottawa has gone far enough with tax cuts?

MR. DAY: Well the word "praise" is a strong word, Mr. Speaker. The Premier gave credit, as members of our caucus have given some credit, some small credit, to the federal Liberal government for following our example. We acknowledge that it is possible for other governments to do good things. We're not just blindly critical, as members opposite are, as the Liberals provincially, so we have acknowledged that there will be a reduction on personal income taxes because of what the federal government has done. We acknowledge that, and we say: good for you on those narrow points.

But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we would have preferred to see a more rapid reduction; we would have preferred to see deeper reductions. We're not going to be overly critical. We'll continue to remind the federal government that they have a way to go to catch up to us. Next year we will take from Albertans as a result of our tax reduction plan \$852 million less than we are taking now. The federal government will take approximately \$450 million less. They take from Albertans a bigger portion; they're giving back a smaller portion. We take a smaller portion; we're giving back a much bigger portion.

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

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 6 of 1996 Alberta's then deputy minister of health told an Edmonton meeting of the Canadian Bar Association, health law subsection, that the principles of the Canada Health Act should be replaced with five new principles: efficiency, effectiveness, choice, consumerism, and pragmatism. Well, here we are four years later, and what is this Premier using to flog his Trojan horse bill but the very same buzz words that the failed deputy used in her sales pitch. Dr. Fulton has gone missing, but the Premier and the special interests behind him remain, using new spin doctors and advertising agencies to sell what has been their agenda all along: commercialization of public health care and the establishment of private hospitals. My questions are to the Premier. Isn't it true that his plan is to introduce private hospitals, that this has been the plan all along from the start, and that his crippling cuts to our precious public health care system were necessary to create the impression, the illusion that the public health system couldn't deliver the service to Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there was a restructuring that took place, much of it, by the way, in accordance and based on the recommendations of The Rainbow Report, which was commissioned by the then minister of health, who now happens to be the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Relative to the comments of Ms Fulton, those comments are irrelevant. What is relevant is what is in the bill and the bill . . .

MR. SAPERS: What is in it?

MR. KLEIN: Fine. The hon. member asked. It says:

Whereas it is the responsibility of the Government of Alberta to provide leadership and support the delivery of quality health services in order to maintain and improve the health of Albertans;

Whereas Albertans cherish Alberta's publicly funded and publicly administered health system;

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to the preservation of the principles of universality, comprehensiveness, accessibility, portability and public administration, as described in the Canada Health Act (Canada), as the foundation of the health system in Alberta . . .

Mr. Speaker, if this hon. member is opposed to those principles – I don't know if he was here or not for the vote on the motion upholding the principles of the Canada Health Act, but if he is saying today that he wants to change his vote, then stand up and say so.

2:30

MR. MacDONALD: My second question is also to the Premier. Exactly how do the choice, efficiency, and effectiveness of Dr. Fulton's private health scheme differ from the choice, efficiency, and effectiveness in the Premier's private hospital plan or scam?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again the question is absolutely irrelevant because there is no private hospital scheme. The question is irrelevant. All we have before us is a bill called the Health Care Protection Act. Any question relative to private hospitals is irrelevant.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is also to the Premier. Will the Premier finally come clean and admit that his private hospital bill, Bill 11, the Trojan horse bill, only pays lip service to the principles of the Canada Health Act and that what's missing in this propaganda package are his real principles of privatization and commercialism so clearly laid out by Dr. Fulton four years ago?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat that there is no bill by the name of the private hospital bill. There is no bill by the name of the Trojan horse bill. There is the Alberta health protection act, the bill before this House. So any bill that is imagined by the hon. member – a Trojan horse bill? I don't know of any Trojan horse bills. Are there any Trojan horse bills? I don't know. Could the hon. member cite the number of that bill? The Trojan horse bill? He alluded to it, and I want to know the number of the bill, the private hospitals bill. They might be considering such a bill, but there is no consideration of any such bill by the government or by this caucus. The only bill under consideration is Bill 11 – that's the number – and the name is the Alberta health protection act, now in its bill stage.

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

Aboriginal Policy Framework

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. On September 17, 1999, you released Alberta's proposed aboriginal policy framework for consultation with stakeholders. This is of interest to many constituents of Calgary-West and to Calgarians because the Paskapoo Slopes area in Calgary contains approximately 50 archeological sites with historical aboriginal artifacts. I would appreciate the minister providing an update on the status of this proposed aboriginal policy framework.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, since it has been released, I've sort of taken an Alberta break and toured Alberta, and I've gone to places

where most people wouldn't go. In fact, I've had a little bit of bannock, a little bit of deer venison. I've had a little bit of moose stew. In fact, I've had a little bit of moose nose soup. We've had 52 public meetings with over 1,200 attendees, and we've sent out more than 2,000 copies of the proposed policy framework. Since that time, we've received more than 40 written responses. We've also logged about 120 Internet requests a month since that time.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is to the same minister. What was the content, generally speaking, in your preliminary responses to date?

MS OLSEN: She doesn't know.

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, despite what my critic says over there, I have an idea in terms of what we've been doing. In fact, not everybody agrees with what we've got in the proposed policy framework. However, generally what we're hearing is that there is a great deal of support to establish partnerships and relationships with aboriginal people. People are telling us that it's time to do something concrete. Words have to be turned into action and into results. We also need to build on successes. There is general agreement among aboriginal people, industry, and government groups that this is a worthwhile cross-government initiative.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is to the same minister. When can we expect to see this framework rolled out; that is, publicly released?

MS CALAHASEN: We are presently incorporating all the responses that we are receiving, Mr. Speaker. It's very, very important when we look at what it is that we want to put forward. We have, in fact, just recently sent out the information on what we heard from people so that they can respond to us and indicate whether all the information we've received is basically what they've told us. They will respond within the next few weeks or within a month. By then, we'll have a draft that we'll be taking forward through the regular processes, which are SPC, cabinet, and of course caucus.

Private Health Services (continued)

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, we've seen this government pull some fast ones before, but this one is over the top. They've become so arrogant that they believe they can bring in private hospitals simply by changing the name. This Trojan horse tactic will simply not work. Albertans will not be fooled. Can the Premier tell us: what is the exact mechanism for removing private hospitals from the public trough once they prove to be inefficient and costly?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again the question is absolutely irrelevant. There is no question, no hint, nothing in this bill that is related to private hospitals. As a matter of fact, section 1 clearly says, "No person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." So the question is irrelevant.

MS CARLSON: Maybe he can answer this one. Given that the CEO of the Calgary regional health authority has called contracting out an experiment, why is there no sunset clause in Bill 11 to limit this experiment?

MR. KLEIN: I don't recall the chief executive officer of the Calgary regional health authority making that statement, Mr. Speaker.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier make a commitment to repeal Bill 11, also known as the private hospitals act, when it becomes clear that it is eroding medicare?

MR. HANCOCK: Point of order.

MR. KLEIN: Sir, the hon. member alluded to Bill 11. The proper name for Bill 11 is the Health Care Protection Act, Mr. Speaker. Again, I would remind the hon. member that unless she knows of a bill called the private hospitals act – if they have a number for that act, please stand up and introduce the bill.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals keep talking about a private hospitals bill. We're not talking about a private hospitals bill. If they are contemplating such a bill, if they have a number for such a bill, then stand up and say so.

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

Liquor Sales

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Gaming. The privatization of the liquor industry in Alberta is often referred to as the crown jewel of privatization, creating a thousand new independent businesses, 500-plus jobs, longer hours of operation, better customer selection, lower prices. Regulations under the act currently prohibit liquor licensees from accepting inducements favouring the sale of one particular brand or product. Those in noncompliance are fined. Now my independents feel threatened, and they are worried. They say that these rules could change and want to know why. Why are you considering different regulations for different classes of licences? Shouldn't all classes, A, B, C, D, and E, be governed by one set of rules?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to answer the three questions that are put in the first question. Indeed, this jurisdiction is the only administration in Canada that retails beverages and spirits in a private, competitive, free enterprise environment, something I think all of us Conservatives are proud of: to be Conservatives, free enterprise, regulation-oriented, to make sure that we deregulate when we can, that we have malice for none and charity for all.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, we have through regulation created an exceedingly competitive environment. Just as Allan Rock has said: the status quo is not acceptable. The status quo is never acceptable in a market where there are changing dynamic conditions. So what we've done is clearly gone out to those involved in the industry. We've had a good process of consultation, of public presentations in Calgary and Edmonton inviting people from throughout this fine land to talk about what happens when a marketplace changes.

2:40

Right now I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, there are no plans in progress to change regulations with respect to placement of a liquor store or the retailing of spirits inside a liquor store. What is being discussed is a competitive environment that allows for the marketplace to function in an efficient fashion and also for this government to be able to detect when regulations are violated and then be able to enforce those regulations as they pertain to the specific violation.

MRS. GORDON: Why, Mr. Minister, would the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission not want to retain its mandate and authority for ensuring total compliance with the regulations by strengthening the severity of penalties for infractions and making public the full extent of the said violation and subsequent fine imposed?

MR. SMITH: Well, those are another batch of good questions, Mr. Speaker, that I'm pleased to address.

In fact, one thing that you do in a marketplace is ensure compliance as it pertains to the regulations. I know that members here check www.AGLC.gov.ab.ca daily. There is a complete list of all activities of the Department of Gaming, what they do with respect to alcohol and to gaming. In fact, in many places the market has a wonderful way of taking care of itself in a competitive environment. However, what we want to ensure is that we have a mechanism to detect when a regulation is violated, when enforcement can take place, and to in fact see that the enforcement is of a sufficient level to discourage that activity from continuing, because when people from a private-sector marketplace disobey or break regulations, they are tilting the level playing field of competition.

MRS. GORDON: My independents ask: why is the enforcement of this regulation deemed so extremely difficult when realistically fines collected from contravention could be applied exclusively to costs related to ongoing compliance? They say that is a good business decision.

MR. SMITH: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the financial statements of the AGLC are very clear and they're very open. In fact, what we are assessing are clear ways to determine when these regulations have been violated and then take the enforcement measures. What we can report to you is that even if there may or may not be a rule or a policy change, when there are infractions at the time that these rules are in place and they're found out, there will be enforcement and there will be prosecution.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the member's constituents who are in this business are responding to her with information that is inaccurate and is creating unwarranted fears. In fact, we see it not only in the business of alcohol and the business of alcohol distribution. We see it in the matter of health, in the misinformation campaign that's occurring on the other side. If I can just wrap up by saying that it's important that we have a marketplace that functions, because it is truly competition that allocates scarce resources in the most optimum fashion.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of three members. Before doing that and sitting down, I'd also like to acknowledge that this Saturday, March 11, will be the election anniversary of 25 of our Members of this Legislative Assembly, who were elected in the general election of March 11, 1997. Twenty-five members.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Radio France Isere/Radio-Canada Alberta

MR. DUCHARME: Merci, M. le President. Je suis heureux d'annoncer que le Secretariat francophone de l'Alberta était l'hôte d'une signature d'un protocole d'entente entre Radio France Isere et CHFA Radio-Canada Alberta, Mercredi, le 8 Mars.

Cette entente vise a etablir des liens entre les deux services regionaux de radio publique afin de porter un regard approfondi sur l'Alberta et la region de Grenoble, leurs habitants, ce qui les rapproche et ce qui les distingue. Les partenaires esperent egalement que cette entente servira de catalyseur a d'autres partenariats entre nos deux regions, qu'ils soient economiques, scientifiques, ou culturels.

Le protocole d'entente entre Radio France Isere et Radio-Canada Alberta s'etaye sur quatre axes principaux: information, animation,

jeu-concours, et multimedia. Ces axes serviront a couvrir trois champs d'interet: la culture de montagne, la recherche scientifique, et l'actualite, autant politique que culturelle. Ce protocole d'entente entre Radio France Isere et Radio-Canada Alberta entre en vigueur Lundi, le 20 Mars, et s'acheve le 24 Juin, 2002.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce that on Wednesday, March 8, the Alberta Francophone Secretariat hosted the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Radio France Isere and Radio-Canada Alberta, the French radio station.

The purpose of this memorandum is to establish a relationship between two public radio regional services in order to create a deeper understanding of Alberta and the Grenoble region: their inhabitants, their similarities, and their distinctive characters. The two partners also hope this memorandum will be a catalyst to other partnerships between the two regions, whether economically, scientifically, or culturally.

The memorandum of understanding between Radio France Isere and Radio-Canada Alberta targets four main areas: information, animation, radio quiz game, and multimedia. These areas will cover three fields of interest: mountain culture, scientific research, and current events, political as well as cultural. This memorandum of understanding between Radio France Isere and Radio-Canada Alberta comes into effect on Monday, March 20, 2000, and ends on June 24, 2002.

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

Private Health Services

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon I tabled copies of written summaries from a number of meetings held by the Calgary regional health authority in the city of Calgary, and these included a town hall meeting at Glamorgan Community Association on February 19, a town hall meeting at Annie Gale junior high school on February 12, and a meeting with educational partners such as the U of C on February 16.

At Glamorgan most of the questions dealt with the \$250 million paid in contracted services, particulars of which are totally, completely a big secret, unavailable to Calgarians. The concerns and suggestions to the CRHA included a question about why health care is moving to for-profit care; a question in terms of since public care can deliver cheaper health care than private care, why are we pursuing the new option; questions about why details of CRHA contracts are not made public; questions about conflicts of interest.

Now, those Calgarians who participated in the exercises had lots of good advice for the CRHA, but most of the answers required must come not from the appointed CRHA board but from the elected Minister of Health and Wellness. We heard many similar concerns last night when some 800 concerned Calgarians showed up at the Red & White Club at McMahon Stadium to find out more about Bill 11 and questionable decisions by this government, including broken promises like the election of regional health authority boards.

The question, though, Mr. Speaker, is whether anyone is listening. The Premier says that he's 99.9 percent sure his Bill 11 will be passed. What is that but disdain for all of the Albertans who are raising questions and issues with the content of Bill 11 and, more significantly, what is not in Bill 11? Why won't the Premier host a town hall meeting in Calgary? Why won't he debate the Leader of the Opposition at public forums? Why won't the Premier come and answer the legitimate, serious questions that people in the city of Calgary have with the dismantling of their public health care system? Those are questions that deserve an answer.

Thank you.

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

2:50

Support for Seniors

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to speak today in support of Alberta seniors. During the past three years as MLA for Calgary-West, as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, and as chair of the aging population study for one and a half years, I've constantly met with seniors in small to large-size groups or organizations and individually, and the total would be in the tens of thousands. Met with means talked to, as in giving information, and listened to means as in acquiring information.

I met all kinds of seniors, from rural/urban, very active and aware, to those with Alzheimer's and from those with very high incomes and assets to those with very low incomes. All these meetings have been accurately documented to government, to the Minister of Community Development, to the Seniors Advisory Council quarterly reports, the annual year-in-review reports, and the forthcoming aging population study report. These reports say what is important to seniors, and I list them.

Housing: appropriate choices; aging in place as long as possible with the help of community supports and caregivers. Home may be of necessity a long-term care facility, but they prefer to not be there.

Health: if they have to be in an acute care hospital, seniors want short stays and caring staff trained in geriatrics.

Transportation: being mobile means being independent.

Income: lower income seniors want to be reassured of government assistance when they need it.

Abuse of seniors: seniors want to be treated, as we all wish, with due dignity and respect by all those they come in contact with.

My point, Mr. Speaker, is that these things are most important to today's seniors, and the government is aware of them and is addressing them. Seniors deserve the right to live in peace and dignity, not to be used as pawns being told misinformation in this philosophical debate on how to deliver health care in Alberta more effectively and efficiently. This playing around with seniors' mental health is unacceptable, and it should end today.

Thank you.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask the government to outline now the course of business we might anticipate next week.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, March 13, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders we would anticipate dealing with second reading of Bill 6, the Special Payment Act; Bill 4, the Surveys Amendment Act; Bill 5, the Land Titles Amendment Act; Bill 1, Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act; and Bill 3, the Statute Revision Act. If time permits, Committee of the Whole on Bill 2, First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act.

Monday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders of course we'll be in Committee of Supply: in subcommittee C, in the Assembly, dealing with the main estimates of Municipal Affairs; and in subcommittee D, in room 512, dealing with Resource Development's main estimates. Time permitting, we may deal with Committee of the Whole on Bill 2, First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act, and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, March 14, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders we anticipate the attendance of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor to give royal assent to bills 9 and 12; then second reading on Bill 7, the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act, and Bill 1, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act.

On Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply we anticipate the reporting of the estimates for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Community Development; under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 1, Bill 6, Bill 3, Bill 4, Bill 5, Bill 7, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, March 15, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply: reporting the estimates of the departments of Innovation and Science, Economic Development, Government Services, Resource Development; and if time permits, second reading of bills 1, 6, 3, 4, 5, 7, and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, March 16, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders: estimates as may be designated by the Official Opposition on Monday and as per the Order Paper based on progress Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, prior to dealing with the first of our six points of order, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the House's indulgence. This is a rare opportunity to introduce in particular three little guests that will not, I know, have an opportunity to attend our Legislature often. I want you to know that I'm very proud of these little guests. I'd like to first introduce Stevie Cox, sitting on my husband, Lloyd McClellan's, knee. Next to her is Tami Cox holding Maverick James, and next to her is Shelby T Cox. I'm very proud of this little family, and we're looking forward to going to the Shrine Circus in Edmonton and seeing zebras.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope you'll give them a warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, one of the unique matters of our Routine that we have in this Assembly is an opportunity for the Official Opposition to designate estimates for consideration on Thursday afternoon. The Official Opposition has that right to choose which estimates it wants to deal with. The chair has indicated on previous occasions, particularly on private members' day, that he did not want to see the Assembly get into a situation whereby many points of order might in fact have the tendency of reducing a private member's opportunity to participate. Today we have six points of order that we will deal with. The chair's hesitation is much the same. However, in this case four of the points of order are being raised by members of the Official Opposition. If we go on with points of order for an hour, an hour and a half, it will not be the chair's dilemma in terms of inability, then, for the Assembly to deal with one of the designated estimates for this week.

Just prior to sitting down, one other item. It also seems that we are coming to a situation where an hon. member will rise on a point of order and then not be here to participate on that point of order. While we have accepted the fact that one of the House leaders might undertake that point of order, the difficulty the chair has is in actually knowing if that argument put forward by one of the House leaders is in fact the point of order that the hon. member would have

wanted to address. While the chair will accept the honoured tradition that an hon. member in fact is to be completely truthful in everything one does say and in dealing with the actual issue, it is a concern. It is a concern. It would seem to me that if an hon. member wants to deal with a point of order, really the best, the highest form of parliamentary practice would be for the hon. member to address it. However, I just raise that as a consideration and a concern today. We're still going to proceed with the points of order that we do have.

The hon. Opposition House Leader on the first point of order, I believe now on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Point of Order Provoking Debate

MR. DICKSON: It is indeed, Mr. Speaker, and I want to assure you that it's my understanding that I have the full authority to make representations on behalf of those colleagues. They're going to be stuck with my limited efforts on their behalf. Actually, it sounds like more fun going to watch the zebras at the Shrine Circus also, but I'll go through this as quickly as I can.

The authority I'd cite would be *Beauchesne* 417, that answers ought not to provoke debate. What I reference is in the second set of questions from the Leader of the Opposition to the Premier. The Premier came back and said words to the effect – I don't have *Hansard* in front of me – that the leader of the Liberal opposition has said that Albertans couldn't understand or aren't smart enough to understand what's in Bill 11. Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that is that it's not the Leader of the Opposition who put the marginal notes and the little editorial comments on the copy of the bill that was sent out. It's not the Leader of the Opposition who has refused or failed to appear at major, major public events to hear Albertans' concerns, to discuss the bill with them.

Mr. Speaker, I may be one of the few Albertans that enjoys reading back issues of *Hansard*. Most importantly, I've gone through it with reasonable care, and you know, as hard as I've looked, I can't find the Leader of the Opposition ever saying words to the effect that Albertans weren't smart enough to be able to understand and read Bill 11. For the Premier to make that kind of assertion, more than once – we've also seen this on March 7 of 2000, and it's an attempt to raise the same message – it does nothing other than provoke debate, and I wish you'd caution the Premier against ever doing that again in this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, where to start? First, the hon. member admits that he reads back issues of *Hansard*, and therefore anything he says must be suspect. Nobody could possibly enjoy reading back issues of *Hansard*.

However, Mr. Speaker, I believe there was – and I stand to be corrected – a tabling on the first day that the hon. Premier referred to the remarks made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition relating to her comments from, I think, the transcript of a radio show in which she did in fact say – I'm not quoting her, and I'm not pretending to quote her – something to the effect that legislation was complex and couldn't be understood by average Albertans. I think there is no point of order, simply on the basis that the transcript was tabled and the remark was said.

The hon. member, however, goes on to talk about provoking debate. You've commented on this extensively in the last few days, but again we witnessed in the House today that every single question that was raised by the opposition had a preamble that was far too long and provoked debate and was argumentative. There were

questions specifically relating to sections of a bill that will be debated before the House, and the questions themselves provoked debate because they asked questions about the sections of the bill and the interpretation of the sections and the interpretation which they were suggesting the government was putting on the sections and the interpretation which they believed should be on the sections. I heard references on innumerable occasions today to the term "private hospital bill." There is no private hospital bill, and that in itself provokes debate.

Mr. Speaker, I could say worse things about what was said in the House today than that it provoked debate, although I think the rules of the House might call me out of order if I did. But if I did say them, they would be true statements. There is no point of order here.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, good temper and moderation in the usage of the words of the language are always expected. That hasn't been the case in the last number of days. This is not a point of order. I've said before that if someone wants to throw it out, then one has to expect to get it back.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, your second point of order.

Point of Order Provoking Debate

MR. DICKSON: I'd repeat and incorporate everything I said with respect to the first point of order. It's virtually the same issue. It simply occurred in the third set of questions of the Leader of the Official Opposition. The same comments would apply and, presumably, the same direction from the Speaker.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I would give the same response except to commend the hon. member for not using the opportunity of standing on the point of order, as he did on the first one, to engage in debate again on the subject.

THE SPEAKER: Ditto.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Point of Order Provocative Language

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The sections in *Beauchesne* I'm referring to are 289(3) and 489. I'm very concerned. The Leader of the Official Opposition made reference to the fact that the hon. Premier wasn't out last evening at health forums but in fact decided to send the "truth squad commanders" I think were her words. I really believe that possibly these points should be done in public, because I think there is a terrible public perception that comes from that. The hon. Premier was in this Legislature last night as he was giving the main estimates for Executive Council and the Public Affairs Bureau. I guess the hon. Leader of the Opposition should be quite thankful that the Premier didn't stand up here and ask where the hon. member was last night while the Premier was in this Assembly.

I really think that we have stooped to an all-time low when it is necessary to stand up here – if she had talked to her caucus members, to her people in the opposition, she would have known that he was in here last night trying to answer their questions and do his duty in the Assembly as the Premier of the province. I don't know how in good conscience, regardless of what political party you're with, you can lead Albertans astray to that extent.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to this point of order. The authorities cited refer to commenting about the absence of a member from this Assembly, which has absolutely nothing to do

with the issue that I think the member has raised and is talking about. I think what she's talking about is the concern that's been expressed in this House that when large numbers of Albertans gather in a public forum to get information on the single most important issue for them and their neighbours, they expect to see leadership, they expect to see responsiveness from the men and women who've been elected to represent them.

It is the Premier of this province and his powerful 64-member majority that decides but for a short time on Thursday afternoon what's coming up, when it's coming up, and what sequence it's coming up in. So it's bogus, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that somehow the Premier's hands are tied. He can determine when any particular issue is going to come up in this House, and I assume he does it in close conjunction with his very competent House leader.

The point is this. The authorities cited have absolutely no application, and the Member for Lacombe-Stettler I think completely misapprehends what has been said. There has clearly been criticism that the Premier of this province hasn't been out listening to Albertans when they gather to talk about an important issue, and that criticism will continue to be made again and again until in fact it's addressed by the Premier getting out and not just managing his little phone-in campaign, where he can screen the calls that come in on a Saturday afternoon. He's got to be able to take the heat that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore bravely did last night and the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness did on Tuesday night. When he's prepared to take the heat that he's sending out his emissaries to take, then the Member for Lacombe-Stettler is entitled to stand and say, "We're being unfair to the Premier," but not until.

Thank you.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing that the hon. Opposition House Leader didn't take your admonition not to use up the time of estimates this afternoon in – I'm sorry; did I say obnoxious arguments?

Last night the Premier was in the House defending his estimates. That's a matter of record. The schedule for the record, as the Opposition House Leader well knows, is set well in advance. They've had the schedule of those estimates for a long period of time. They took a slippery, obnoxious, inappropriate attempt to besmirch the reputation of the Premier and to say that he wasn't out defending Bill 11 and talking to the people of Alberta about Bill 11 and hearing from the people of Alberta about Bill 11, when they full well knew he was scheduled to be here. They used that today at a most inappropriate time. It probably was a slip on their part. The Leader of the Opposition probably didn't know that the Premier was up defending his estimates last night. But it's totally inappropriate – totally inappropriate, Mr. Speaker – regardless of the citation in *Beauchesne*.

It's even more obnoxious that he's trying to get off this point of order on a technicality by saying that the wrong citation was made. It's totally inappropriate for these people . . .

MR. SAPERS: You've said that four times now.

MR. HANCOCK: And I'm going to say it again. It's totally inappropriate and obnoxious and misrepresenting to the people of Alberta what this government caucus is doing and what this Premier of Alberta is doing.

Bill 11 was put on the Order Paper. Bill 11 was introduced. They didn't want the public to hear about Bill 11. They don't like the fact that Bill 11 was mailed out to all Albertans. They don't like the fact that we on this side of the House and on that side of the House over there, where the other members of government caucus sit, are out

listening to Albertans, talking with Albertans about the bill but not inflaming Albertans, not bringing empty rhetoric to Albertans, not trying to scare Albertans but listening to good input from Albertans.

Because he doesn't find that we attend the types of forums that they like to set up and manage, he thinks we're not listening to Albertans. Well, he's absolutely wrong. The opposition leader is absolutely wrong. All of their minions are absolutely wrong. Under Standing Orders they should be called to order for the fact that they have made a malicious statement about the Premier today.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: Do you want to be involved in this point of order?

MS LEIBOVICI: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker. Just for a little bit of clarification. I heard the House leader indicate that the schedule was set far in advance for the estimates, and that's true, but the other reality is that the schedule for the CBC town halls was also set far in advance. The reality is also that there was a town hall meeting on Tuesday night in Edmonton at which the Premier, I'm sure, had he decided he would want to attend, could have attended as well. There were no Executive Council estimates on Tuesday night either.

The reality is that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has said and has reiterated even today that a town hall could be arranged by the Premier on his home ground of Calgary, at his choosing, whenever he wishes, at whatever time, and she will be there. She has asked for an open debate, where the people of Alberta could participate in that debate as well, and the Premier has consistently refused. So the reality is, as I heard the House leader for the Official Opposition indicate, that in accordance with *Beauchesne* there is no point of order. We need to get the facts out on the table, and those are the facts.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Quite frankly, hon. members, if one wants to read *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, the sixth edition, and wants to go to point 289, which I believe was raised, there is at least one parliament which has a Standing Order which states: "Every Member is bound to attend the service of the House unless leave of absence has been given him or her by the House". This is another one of those fascinating discussions that we've just heard. Quite frankly, everyone in this Chamber is bound to be here. Bound to be here. When the chair looks out, the chair even right at this moment sees a variety of empty seats.

In section 289 of *Beauchesne* it also goes on to say:

(3) The duties of Members have become extremely varied and Members must travel frequently. The discharge of those responsibilities will sometimes take a Member away from the House. This absence from the chamber should not be the subject of comment.

Interestingly enough, there's nothing in the Standing Orders that says that presence of the hon. member in the Chamber should be a subject of comment, but the chair will make it. When did it ever evolve to the fact that people should not be discharging their duties in this Assembly? We're hon. members elected to serve in this Assembly. It would seem to me that we sit from 1:30 in the afternoon to 5:30 in the afternoon, and then oftentimes we sit in the evening again from 8 o'clock to heaven knows what time. The prime responsibility is to in fact be in this Assembly.

Now, we'll just reiterate all that again. I gather that the feeling of this Assembly is that from time to time an hon. member must be away, and the Speaker in fact has been quite open with respect to even attendance. Under the Legislative Assembly Act any hon. member who in fact absents himself or herself from this Assembly for more than 10 days is subject to severe penalties. I guess that was a point of clarification.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on a point of order.

Point of Order

Oral Question Period Rules

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will start off by referring you to *Beauchesne* 408(1)(e) and (f). Of course, 408 generally speaks about oral questions, and sub (1) begins:

Such questions should . . .

- (e) not be of a nature requiring a lengthy and detailed answer.
- (f) not raise a matter of policy too large to be dealt with as an answer to a question.

I'm referring to the exchange between the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake and the Provincial Treasurer.

Mr. Speaker, I'll also draw your attention to 408(2), which says that "answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised, and should not provoke debate," and then *Beauchesne* 409(11), "a question which seeks an opinion about government policy is probably out of order," et cetera, et cetera. I won't take the time to read the rest of that lengthy paragraph into the record. I could also go on to quote other authorities that have to do with providing factual information in the Assembly and not doing anything that would be misleading the Assembly.

Now, the exchange of questions I refer to, Mr. Speaker, had to do with the impact of federal tax policy on Albertans. The Treasurer made the representation that Albertans would be receiving an 18 percent tax cut. What he failed to mention is that that only relates to the top 1 percent of Alberta tax filers with an income of over \$150,000 per year. In fact, the middle 39 percent of Alberta tax filers, those with an income between \$30,000 and \$70,000 per year, will only receive an average of 9 percent on their provincial taxes.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the question, as I understood it, related to: what would be the impact? Would taxpayers in this province be better off if we had the existing tax-on-tax regime instead of moving to this so-called flat tax? Of course, there has been an analysis that shows that at income levels of \$35,000, \$50,000, and \$65,000, in fact there is a net cost to taxpayers in every one of those categories of between \$322 and \$436.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would say that in the first instance the member should have been called to order because his question violated sections 408 and 409 of *Beauchesne*. In the second instance the Treasurer should have been called to order because his answers were neither complete nor factual.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is probably the most spurious point of order I've heard in this House yet, and I want to be clear on the word "spurious" because the last time I used it, *Hansard* recorded it as "serious." It was quite appropriate to record it as serious on that occasion, but on this occasion I mean spurious.

The reason I say that it's a spurious point of order is because clearly the hon. member opposite has used the occasion of a point of order, has raised a point of order so that he could try and put on the record the answer he would like to have received rather than the actual, factual answer that the Provincial Treasurer gave.

I would like to point out, first of all, that points of order should not, in my humble opinion, be allowed to go on at length so that members can add their own interpretation of the facts. They should be dealing actually with the issue in the point of order, which is whether the question and answer were appropriate or whether there was inappropriate usage.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora put some inappropriate comments on the record, and I'm sure that when he clearly reads the tax policy, he'll understand what the truth is, or he can go back, as

his seatmate suggested, and read back issues of *Hansard* from time to time and read the hon. Member for Red Deer-North's answers so that he can get it clear.

However, on the points of order which were in fact points of order, the question that was raised was *Beauchesne* 408, "not be of a nature requiring a lengthy and detailed answer." In fact, I would suggest that the question did not require "a lengthy and detailed answer" and did "not raise a matter of policy too large to be dealt with as an answer to a question." The fact that the Provincial Treasurer, in giving his answer, elected to give a very detailed and complete answer so that the members opposite could really understand what tax policy is was at the election of the Provincial Treasurer and, I think, also dealt with the concept that answers should be of a sufficient length to give the detail that's required. In this case the Provincial Treasurer, in giving the answer, obviously anticipated from the tablings earlier in the House that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, not the person asking the questions, needed to have some factual responses.

THE SPEAKER: Sometimes I really wonder why hon. members deal with some of these points of order. If the chair used the logic of the argument put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, the chair would have ruled out the tabling that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora gave today when he in fact violated the rule by giving an interpretation with respect to a report that he gave and provided a comment with respect to it, which violated tabling policy.

Secondly, the length of time utilized by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake in the raising of his three questions was just a few seconds less than six minutes, which was a few seconds less than the time that was allocated in the second set of questions between the Leader of the Official Opposition and the leader of the government and the amount of time taken up by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in his several questions.

The chair has indicated before that the chair attempts to try and find a balance, and one can never be sure, in terms of the length of a question or the length of the answer, what they will be. In terms of the time taken for it, it certainly sat with the tone that was set today. There were 11 sets of questions, and that essentially is the target the chair tries to arrive at.

Thirdly, the argument provided to rule out the question would simply have ruled out virtually every other question in the last 12 days in this session. So once again another point of something.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

3:20

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I think we're almost at the end.

THE SPEAKER: Not quite.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

MR. DICKSON: In the exchange between the Premier and my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar I heard the Premier say that the government is simply following The Rainbow Report, that had been prepared under the direction of the then minister of health, who is the current leader of the Liberal opposition. I cite again *Beauchesne* 417.

Mr. Speaker, this is so preposterous, it needs to be corrected. It was not the Leader of the Opposition who recommended slashing \$700 million from the budget of the department of health. It was not the Leader of the Opposition who recommended chopping the jobs of 10,000 highly skilled registered nurses and health care workers. It was not the Leader of the Opposition and The Rainbow Report

that recommended blowing up the General hospital and selling the Holy Cross hospital for a song after spending \$32 million on renovations. It was not the recommendation of the Leader of the Opposition to do anything other than look at innovative health reform in terms of primary care delivery but doing it on the basis of stable funding, doing it within the context of the public health care system.

So the absolutely provocative and baseless allegation perpetuated and republished again and again by this Premier shows contempt for the facts as well as it shows contempt for the Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I think I'm going to have to do some research. There's got to be something in this book which suggests that you can raise points of order on points of order.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo has again used a point of order to engage in debate. If anything it may be a point of clarification in his mind, although what the Premier said needed no clarification. What he did was take the opportunity of a point of order under our Standing Orders, rather than raising an appropriate point of order, to bring forth some sort of spurious health care debate that was not appropriate in the context of the point of order and was not an accurate reflection of anything that happened in the last seven years and was inappropriate in referring to the comments that were raised by the Premier during question period.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, those sections of *Beauchesne* dealing with points of order are from 317 on, if that will help the interpretation of the reading of all of this.

The chair will do this last intervention and rejection by the two hon. House leaders as simply a point of clarification having been done and now dealt with.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Oral Question Period Rules

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My point of order is under Standing Order 23(c) and Standing Order 23(j) as well as *Beauchesne* 409(7) and 410(12). Standing Order 23(c) refers to a member being called to order if he "persists in needless repetition"; 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder"; 409(7), "a question must adhere to the proprieties of the House, in terms of inferences, imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House or out of it"; and 410(12), "questions should not be hypothetical."

It's my contention that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie referred in one of her questions to "Bill 11, also known as the private hospitals act." It was a reference that was made on a number of occasions today, but on that particular occasion the hon. member specifically referred to a bill in this House, which has a proper name, by a name which is totally improper, inappropriate, misleading, and wrong and used it for the purpose of misleading not only the House but members of the public who might have been watching during question period. The reference was used repetitively throughout the question period today, but it was used in this specific instance quite inappropriately in addressing and specifically talking about the title of a bill which is before the House, and I believe the hon. member should be admonished.

No matter in what way they wish to characterize the government's proposed legislation with respect to the protection of public health care, the strongest piece of health care protection legislation in this

country today being proposed or in place, which puts the principles of the Canada Health Act clearly into our law in this province, if it's passed, which clearly outlaws private hospitals, which clearly puts strict regulation on the use of private surgical facilities, which clearly protects public health care – if they want to characterize that in some other way, it may be to them to do so, but they shouldn't, in referring to the title of the bill, use the title of the bill in an inappropriate manner to mislead Albertans.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm tempted to read back to the Government House Leader the comments he made a few moments ago when he was trying to instruct all members on how to conduct themselves in raising points of order. If he chooses not to heed his own admonishment, let me make this observation. This government has taken a bill title, and they've elevated it to a pre-election campaign slogan. This has nothing to do with the title of a bill. This is a means by which a government, with their \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau budget, is trying to pull the wool over Albertans. As my colleague just said a moment ago, there is not a single person, I daresay, in the 3 million people that live in this province who, upon opening their mailbox and receiving this bill, have any question that when questions are asked by elected members in this House, they all know what bill we're talking about. If it would help the Government House Leader, we'll also refer to it as Bill 11 so that there's absolutely no uncertainty.

There have been references on both sides of the House to private hospitals in discussion around Bill 11, and indeed I'm one who thinks Albertans are smart enough to be able to understand what bill we're talking about. I don't think that they're going to be misled in any fashion by what has been suggested.

Those are my observations, Mr. Speaker, with respect to this last point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you to both hon. gentlemen, who are well practised in the law and who are now in a parliament. There is only a bill, Bill 11. It has a proper title, and it has a proper name. Okay. Thank you very much for that clarification as well.

Now, it may very well be that we have overlooked another point of order. I just want to make sure.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: We did, Mr. Speaker, but now withdraw it.

THE SPEAKER: Just for clarification to the hon. Government House Leader. In fact, a point of order cannot be raised on a point of order.

Secondly, several members alluded to the fact that it may very well be that it is unfortunate that we are not on television. Well, the fact of the matter is that we are.

3:30

head: Orders of the Day

head: Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Community Development

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll start by having the hon. Minister of Community Development give us an overview.

Hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I'm very, very pleased to be here to follow up on the previous estimates that we had back on February 29.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's exciting; isn't it?

MR. WOLOSHYN: It's extremely exciting.

I'd like to start by addressing a number of questions regarding the EPCOR Rosedale power plant and the associated site, which has attracted some degree of public and media attention. The member raised some questions about this in regards to the government's actions in protecting the site and what is underneath it and how the province is working with the city on the issue.

I'd like to point out that the Historical Resources Act has already been used several times to protect the heritage resources of the Rosedale power plant site. Last fall EPCOR was asked to provide historical resource impact assessments, known as HRIAs, for both the archaeological aspects of the site and an early building on the property. I'm pleased to say that EPCOR has and continues to provide full co-operation with the department on this particular site.

Next I'd like to address comments on the changes in funding to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. First of all, I'd like to make it very, very clear that adjustments in funding for the foundation will have no adverse effect on the annual operating funds provided to provincial sport and recreation associations. In fact, as a result of the reallocation of funds from the quarterly grant program, additional funding has been provided to provincial – and I stress provincial – sport and recreation associations to assist them in carrying out the delivery of programs and services to Albertans.

It's important to note that the funding provided under the quarterly grant program was directed to specific projects. Funding was provided through an application process on a project-by-project basis. Associations did not rely on this program as a source for continuous funding. The ASRPW Foundation reviewed the quarterly grant program to determine the possibility of duplication relative to other grant programs offered by the provincial government such as the community lottery boards program.

Recommendations from this review have resulted in the implementation of the new development initiatives program. This program is designed to meet the needs of applicants not eligible for funding from other funding agencies and programs. Consideration will be given to projects not accepted through other funding agencies yet within the parameters of the program. An applicant may not apply to more than one granting agency and/or program for the same identified project. However, different aspects of the same program may be funded by different agencies, organizations, or foundations provided that total funds do not equal or exceed the total cost of the project. Good examples of projects which were eligible for funding through the quarterly grant program as well as the CLB program are playgrounds and climbing walls and so on.

The elimination of possible duplicated funding has also allowed the ASRPW Foundation to maintain the municipal recreation/tourism areas program at its current level.

I'd like to add that I agree that the Wild Rose Foundation does great work with and for volunteers, and their grant program will continue to serve this important sector. It is important to note that they are also a part of the new criteria.

I'll conclude my remarks by addressing a number of questions that were raised about the department's support for seniors when asked about why there is no funding of seniors' centres included under the budget. While there are no direct operating funds for seniors' centres, there are a number of sources of financial support available,

and it varies in each community depending upon local needs, interests, and resources. Project funding may be available to seniors' centres for recreation activities through the Wild Rose Foundation and resources such as family and community support services, community lottery boards, and Health Canada's population health fund may also offer support.

Now I'll address the question about seniors qualifying for a subsidy of full or partial payment of health care premiums and any increase in seniors qualifying for these benefits. Further to the answer I provided in the Committee of Supply, the Alberta seniors' benefit program determines whether seniors are eligible for Alberta health care premium subsidies. There are about 130,000 seniors in Alberta who receive full-premium subsidies and a further 50,000 who receive partial subsidies. The transfer of funds from Community Development to Health and Wellness for these subsidies no longer takes place. It should be noted, though, that it does not alter the actual benefits received by seniors.

In response to concerns raised by the office of the Auditor General, significant change has been made to the Alberta seniors' benefit budget during the third-quarter budget review process, which will become effective on April 1, 2000. This is a change to the budgeting and reporting process of the ministries of Community Development and Health and Wellness only. Also, this change has no financial impact on the government's bottom line.

The net number of additional seniors that qualify for the ASB program, including the Alberta health care insurance premium subsidies, will vary each year. This is influenced by a number of factors: the number of Albertans who turn 65 years of age in a given year, the number of seniors who pass away, and the income of those who have applied to the program. In general, the number has been increasing. In the last fiscal year it increased from 178,289 seniors in March of 1998 to 180,553 seniors in March of 1999.

I now turn to the question raised about increasing funds for lodges and special consideration for assistance to the Greater Edmonton Foundation and its lodges to be renovated or rebuilt. The lodge assistance program grant was not increased in this budget year. Community Development is currently reviewing existing funding formulas to determine if changes to the lodge assistance program are required to provide a more equitable distribution of the funding. This, I must stress, is simply a review. I'm not implying that any changes will in fact be made. [A cell phone rang] Should we answer the phone, or should I continue?

The current lodge assistance program grant formula, which came into effect in 1995, was developed by a joint committee of provincial government officials and members of the Alberta Senior Citizens Housing Association. The committee determined that there were economies of scale for larger management bodies. Therefore, it was decided to pay \$3.60 per resident-day for management bodies with 350 or more lodge units – these were all located in Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge – and \$4.80 per day for those with less than 350 lodge units. Consequently, this new grant formula resulted in some management bodies experiencing a reduction in their grant funding while others received an increase. The Greater Edmonton Foundation's grant was increased from \$789,643 in 1994 to \$1,209,192 in 1995, using the \$3.60 per resident-day formula.

AN HON. MEMBER: They got more because of inflation.

MR. WOLOSHYN: The only thing that's inflating is the inappropriate comments from across the floor, I would point out.

In regards to the timing for the tabling of the government's response to the impact of the aging population study, I'd like to indicate that the steering committee will complete its report

sometime this spring. Along with report A, it will provide the government with recommendations for action. That report I obviously haven't received yet, so it'll be some time after that before I'll be able to respond, and that's part B of a bigger report. Part A came out earlier this year, and we'll be looking at that in conjunction with all the other reports we have on this whole area.

As I stated at the beginning of my remarks, there were questions raised about the department's performance measures, including those to do with customer satisfaction and whatnot, and we'll get you some of those in writing.

I'd like to thank you for your time, and I would be pleased to listen to your questions and comments and either give you some answers today or hopefully get you answers to questions that are appropriate to be answered in writing.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

3:40

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. Good afternoon, Mr. Minister. I've got a number of questions to put to you. Let me start with some statistical requests. I'm going to focus most of my questions on the work of the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. I know that that's an area in your department that you take a great deal of personal interest and pride in, and I know it's something you're familiar with.

Perhaps you could give me some information relative to the number of cases opened in the last fiscal year, at least up to this point. We're not quite at the end of March, but I'd like to know at this stage the number of cases opened in terms of the type of discrimination. So if you could go through and identify the number of complaints for gender, race, colour, physical disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, religious beliefs, mental disability, family status, source of income, and sexual orientation. The analysis was interesting before, when it had been broken out from '95-96 through '97-98. I would like updated statistics, Mr. Minister, on that.

Would you tell me how many human rights panels we've had in the 1999-2000 fiscal year? How many of those were referred by the director of the Human Rights Secretariat? How many were referred after an appeal to the chief commissioner? I'm always interested in terms of the body of decisions and orders from the commission in that area.

If you go back and look at my correspondence with you, on March 29, 1999, if this assists you, you wrote me a letter giving me some response to questions I'd asked a year ago, so if you could have somebody in your office pull that letter, I'm going to go through and refer to some of the same items. I'm looking for updates.

One of the responsibilities that the Human Rights Commission has is to provide advice to the minister. I know that you had consulted the commission last year on a number of issues – that was 1998-1999 – on things like the UN declaration on the rights of the child, the compatibility of government caucus decisions on same-sex legislation with human rights legislation, federal/provincial initiatives, gender equity, family violence. I note that the commission director worked closely with government, communicating to Albertans the ramifications of the Vriend decision. Perhaps you can outline for me the areas in which the commission has been providing advice and recommendations to you, Mr. Minister.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Let me be more specific in one area. We saw earlier in 1999 Bill 12, the Domestic Relations Act. You've certainly seen now the

benefit of the so-called fences committee, chaired, I think, by the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. I think she chaired the fences committee. You know the committee I'm talking about. It was set up after the Vriend decision. You saw the recommendations. You've seen the Liberal alternative, if you'll recall, on Bill 12 in terms of recognizing people who enter into long-term, mutually supportive relationships. I'd like to know what advice you've received from the commission relative to this issue. This is really an extension of what the commission's been advising you on in 1998 and 1999 around the Vriend decision.

We've now progressed, I think, to a different level of sophistication, and in terms of how we make Alberta legislation Charter-proof, I'm assuming that our Human Rights Commission is instrumental in providing advice to the government around those issues. So I'd like to know, Mr. Minister, what concrete proposals have been put forward by the commission to deal with making Alberta legislation Charter-proof, to ensure that we have equal protection for all Albertans, whether it's a question of looking at the Alberta Liberal model for domestic partnerships or what other models are being put forward by the commission.

Mr. Minister, through the chair, you and your predecessor have always told me that the commission is independent. Well, if it's genuinely independent of government, I'd expect that the good advice that they're providing would be shared with all members of the Assembly and not with the political section of the government of the province of Alberta. They haven't sent that to me directly, but I'm sure they'd be happy that you would share that with those MLAs who happen not to be part of the government caucus. So we'd sure look forward to that.

Mr. Minister, I'd be interested in what specific recommendations have been made by the commission in the last year, in the 1999-2000 year, in terms of legislative change. This is broader than what I asked a moment ago, because I'm not now talking about the sort of same-sex partner situation. I'm interested in what other kinds of recommendations for legislative change across the board of provincial government activity within the areas provided to the province, sort of the division of powers.

Mr. Minister, I had an interesting chat with the executive director of the Cultural Diversity Institute. I've been following that closely, I guess, for a couple of reasons, not just because it's headquartered in the city of Calgary, but it seemed to me that last year they got about \$250,000 of public money to assist them in their work, so there are substantial dollars going in there. There were proposals to create a board of directors for the Cultural Diversity Institute, and the director of the institute was telling me about some different models that they're looking at. Can you give me an up-to-date status report on the governance of the Cultural Diversity Institute? That information would be important. As well, because of the size of the money that your department is giving the Cultural Diversity Institute, I'd be interested in some of the detailed plans.

You told me last March, Mr. Minister – and I appreciated your candour then – that there would be a research agenda for the institute in place by September 1999. Please provide me with a copy of that. The summer institute was planned for August 1999. I'd like the most current plan on that summer institute being run under the Cultural Diversity Institute.

The resource centre at the University of Calgary run by the Cultural Diversity Institute: can you give me information that I can share with my colleagues, who I think would like to be able to share the information through their . . . [interjections] Oh, no, Mr. Minister, I didn't want you to apprehend that I was close to the end. I've got lots more questions. I just thought my colleagues would like an update on what that Cultural Diversity Institute is doing, so

I'm hoping we can get information that can be provided by constituency offices to constituents.

Mr. Minister, something you can help me with. We're going back and forth. On the one hand, I see that you're doing some work – Mr. Minister, I see from your smile that you're going to have responses for me probably before the end of the afternoon, and I'm delighted to have that sort of quick response.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: You haven't asked a direct question yet.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Minister, you haven't heard any questions in what I've been asking? If you wish, I'd be happy to review them. I was looking for specific recommendations that you've offered to the government of the province of Alberta on legislative reform. I was asking for specific areas in which the Human Rights Commission has provided advice to the government of the province of Alberta on policy matters independent of legislative reform. I had asked you for information in terms of the current status of the summer institute under the auspices of the Cultural Diversity Institute, an up-to-date status report on the resource centre at the Cultural Diversity Institute and the other items I've identified. Then, Mr. Minister, I'm disappointed you didn't hear me ask for how many human rights panels in the 1999-2000 year to date. How many were referred by the director of the Human Rights Secretariat? How many were referred after an appeal to the chief commissioner? Those are the questions that I was asking.

3:50

Now, I said a moment ago, Mr. Minister, through the chair, that we'd been moving to a different level of public debate around same-sex benefits, but there's one holdover that I'd like you to address, and it's the fact that our Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act still does not explicitly include the words sexual orientation. If you take that statute and you shake it and you look upside down and you look between the lines and you look in the footnotes and you look in the margin notes, nowhere do the words sexual orientation appear. I know that you wouldn't agree that Albertans would have to pick up a 100-plus page Supreme Court of Canada decision from *Vriend and King's college* and have to go through all of that dense legal text to find out what their rights are.

So I'm wondering what your plans are for bringing forward an amendment so that every one of the 3 million people in this province who happen to pick up that statute will know that sexual orientation is covered. And if they're discriminated against in the areas of accommodation, in the areas of employment, in the areas of access to services customarily available to the public or advertising in one of those areas covered by the act, they want to be able to know, Mr. Minister, that that's a prescribed area of discrimination. Will you make that change? Will you make that change in the spring session? [interjection] Mr. Minister, *Hansard* has to record your voice, so would you please respond to that when you take to your feet after I'm finished.

Now, Mr. Minister, there have been three interesting studies done which have done some analysis and assessment on the work of the commission. I'm referring to the Human Rights Commission, and what I'm talking about, of course, is the communications, research, and assessment project. I had written you on this matter on February 3, 2000 – your office will have my correspondence – and you responded on March 2. I appreciate the response before we got to this stage. You said, and I quote: I do not involve myself in the operations of the commission; however, I know the commission is very interested in improving its business practices; the commission will be finalizing its business planning activities by April 1, 2000;

we'll be able to respond to your questions soon after that date. Well, I don't want to wait until after we've voted the estimates for the Department of Community Development to find out what changes are being made by the commission.

Now, the commission has been advised of needs in a number of different areas, and I'm just going to locate my notes in terms of what those changes are. But, Mr. Minister, there were a number of things that represented some problems. I'll just find that report here momentarily. Aah, here it is.

Mr. Minister, here are some of the concerns that were identified in that report. These are the people who did the communications assessment of your commission. They discovered that

members of complainant groups identified on the basis of race . . . gender, disability, age, marital status, source of income, family status, and sexual orientation, are not aware of, nor accessing the Commission in a way which is appropriately representative of the discrimination faced by these groups.

In other words, we're doing a lousy job in this province of being able to provide people who've experienced discrimination, particularly on the basis of colour or racial origin, with access to remedies. This is a serious problem.

Mr. Minister, I know you saw the same CBC investigative report that I did that identified problems with shortcomings in the work of the Alberta Human Rights Commission. When you saw this report, the communications needs assessment project, I would have thought you would have cleared that great big desk of yours off, taken that arm of yours and swept those things off the desk, put this foursquare in the middle of the desk and said: "There are vulnerable people in this province that are being denied access to the remedies under our human rights legislation. That's my first priority. There's nothing more important than making sure that people who are being denied access to accommodation or a job or access to a place customarily available to the public are able to get that access." I know you're sending me some signals that you don't want me to take literally, but I want you to tell me that you're assigning the kind of importance to it that I think Albertans would want to see assigned to it.

Mr. Minister, through the chair, the commission was found to have "some qualities and practices that appear to deter access, at the levels of service provision and information delivery." How can we have a Human Rights Commission that's deterring access? [interjection] Well, that was the assessment that was done.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: I don't accept it.

MR. DICKSON: Well, Mr. Minister, you told me in your letter of March 2 that you don't involve yourself in the commission, that you're waiting for the report of the Human Rights Commission sometime after April 1, 2000. Now you tell me you don't agree with the submissions in the communications needs assessment. I'd like you to go through the three reports that make up the communications needs assessment and tell me which recommendations you do not accept and which recommendations you do accept. For those recommendations you accept, tell me in concrete terms what remedial action you'll take in the year 2000-2001. Will you do that before we have to vote on your budget estimates?

There were other recommendations that were brought forward. There's a need to

raise the profile of the Commission, with the intent of supporting the message that discrimination is wrong and that human rights are important to all Albertans, by:

- a) improving the Commission's . . . well-received publications . . .
- b) better promoting the Commission, and
- c) disseminating information.

Now, there were findings by that communications needs assessment that many of the interviewees and focus group participants were "not aware of the Commission." They didn't know what the jurisdiction of the commission was, if they were aware of it, and if they were aware of it and they had some idea of jurisdiction, they didn't know what the complaints process was. Once again, Mr. Minister, I would have thought that if I'd seen this report, I'd be hopping to some remedial action.

4:00

You've been advised by the communications needs assessment that a lot of the people who were asked about the commission thought

many people interviewed and focus group participants would like the Commission to be more proactive in addressing and dealing with discrimination, particularly systemic discrimination, and human rights issues.

Where was the Human Rights Commission while this Legislature was debating Bill 12? Where was our Human Rights Commission when we were debating changes to the Insurance Act? I didn't hear the commission on the issue of foster parents, adoptions to same-sex couples. [Mr. Dickson's speaking time expired]

Mr. Chairman, so many more questions, but I'll be back. Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thought I'd start off with a couple of questions about the key performance measures. I was comparing the charts that appeared in last year's budget estimates with the charts that appear in this year's. The first chart on page 98 of the government and lottery fund estimates has a performance indicator that asks about "customer satisfaction with community development assistance provided." In last year's estimates the figures for 1996-97 indicated a satisfaction level of 97.5 percent, yet in this year's budget it says that the information is "not available." [interjection] Pardon me? Page 98: the top chart, the key performance measures, the client satisfaction. Similarly, for 1997-98 last year's book says that the satisfaction level was 95 percent and this year's budget book says that the information is "not available."

I wonder, Mr. Minister, if all of the figures are suspect in those performance measures, because in the next chart, Support to Sport and Recreation Activities and Impact of Support to Arts and Cultural Industries, the first measure, "percentage of the population participating in sport, recreation and physical activity" – and again there's 1996. I'm sorry; I've got the wrong one. It's the third one down, the second diamond, where you're looking at "the economic impact of the arts and cultural industries" in millions of dollars. In last year's it's indicated at \$300 million, and in this year's report for the same year it's indicated as \$285 million.

My question, Mr. Minister, would be: has there been some difficulty in transcribing the entries from one year to the other? Should we be checking them all to make sure that they have been appropriately entered? I suspect it's just a table that's been updated and the slip has occurred that way. Those are technical matters.

What I really wanted to dwell on this afternoon are the budget lines and the estimates that are concerned with seniors. The Alberta Council on Aging in their news for March and April of 2000, this month, reports on the recommendations that they brought forward through consultation that involved Community Development, members of your department, and there are a number of recommendations there. If my memory serves me correctly, some of these recommendations have been put forward in the past.

I would ask about the notion of what is a senior and how you define a senior. The suggestion from the Seniors' Shelter Cost Study was that a senior-specific market basket of basic needs, which reflects differences in rural and urban settings in terms of shelter costs and services and which would be reviewed regularly, would include things like yard maintenance and security and home insurance and transportation and other support services that seniors need, that that market basket be established and then used as a measure in determining income levels for seniors in terms of their access to the Alberta seniors' benefit and special-needs assistance for seniors.

So what they're asking for is a flexible measure that reflects the actual conditions that seniors are experiencing, and I think they would understand and we'd all understand that determining that market basket would be a useful exercise and, again, would probably result in seniors more likely getting the kinds of assistance they need and reflect the situations in which they live.

As you go through the performance objectives, I wonder if there are really performance objectives that you can hold your department responsible for. How realistic is it to hold the department responsible for the "economic impact of the arts and cultural industries" and the "cultural and economic impact of the new Alberta Film Development Program"? It seems to me that there are so many factors other than the action of your department that actually go into the success of those ventures. Is it really a true performance measure that should appear in budget documents?

Maybe we could consider some other measures that might be more meaningful to seniors. For instance, measures in the budget, the third chart on the bottom of page 98, talk about the

satisfaction of seniors with information provided by:

- Seniors Information Line
- Seniors Services Centres
- Programs for Seniors booklets.

The numbers there are very high. For 1998-99 they're all very high. They're 90-plus percent. Some of them approach the 100 percent level, and the 2000-01 targets are even higher.

Yet if you look at the recommendations that appear from the Seniors' Shelter Cost Study, seniors indicate that they're not getting "the right information at the right time." The recommendation they put forward is to

explore ways of simplifying programs and informing seniors about the services and benefits available, including ways to address language and cultural barriers and alternatives to written materials.

In order to ensure that seniors get the right information at the right time . . .

As I said, these glowing performances here, up in the 90s, don't seem to match what seniors are saying about the kinds of information they're receiving.

Now, maybe these specific items, when they are questioned about them, are reflected in these measures, but it would seem to me that a more important measure is the one that the seniors are carrying forward in their recommendation, and that's asking broad ranges of seniors: are you receiving the right information at the right time? Because evidently this study indicates there's grave concern that that's not happening.

With respect to that, I wonder if the minister might comment on the provision of materials that help remove cultural and language barriers. For those seniors in Mill Woods this is a particular problem. We have, for instance, cultural groups where the females have not been outside the home, something happens to the male member of the family, and these females are faced with not knowing the language, often not really having any idea of where to turn for assistance, and it's a very large problem for some families. I know that a number of cultural groups have put in place programs of their

own to try to alleviate the problem, but again the material has to be in a format and in a language that is available to groups that are living in these situations.

4:10

One other recommendation is that there be increased support to “community-based programs such as Family and Community Support Services and non-profit groups that supply Meals on Wheels” and the need by a number of seniors in lower income groups for handyman and housework services and the need for home care services to be expanded to include personal care and home support. Again, the notion is trying to keep seniors in their own apartments or their own homes as long as possible and not forcing them out to centres where it certainly costs more to keep them and where they’re certainly, and most importantly, not as happy as they are living independently. So I would ask: how do you determine that what you are providing is appropriate for those seniors?

One of the most disturbing parts of the report is one that was referenced earlier this afternoon by the Member for Calgary-West. In the Member for Calgary-West’s statement she made reference to fear among seniors in particular. I don’t have a copy of the statement in front of me, Mr. Chairman, but if I recall what she said, there was a great deal of fear among seniors about health care and the concern that the debate over the private hospitals act was raising that fear.

If you look at the recommendations brought forward from the study group, they specifically talk about fear among seniors, and they indicated that it’s “a significant theme.” Emerging from the study was that there’s fear among seniors about the future. They were fearful that although they were coping today, increasing utility rates – that is, the cost of telephones, gas, water, and electricity – increasing taxes, having to pay more and more user fees and increasing health care services “would erode their savings and place them in a vulnerable position.”

So the Member for Calgary-West was right, according to this study. Seniors are living in fear. They’re concerned about what’s happening to them. They feel powerless in many cases to control what’s happening to the revenues they have and the expenses they must pay.

I know it would be very difficult, but if it’s a significant theme among seniors, I wonder if that’s not something the department should address and that somehow or other it should be reflected in either a performance measure or some indication in these materials that seniors are worried. That’s not all a result of the work of the opposition in the Legislature. This reflects the kinds of conditions under which they live.

I didn’t want to conclude my remarks without talking about seniors’ centres and their need for operational funding. I’ve had some experience with this with my mother-in-law and the centre in Wetaskiwin and how valuable that centre is and how difficult it is, not particularly in that centre but in all of the centres, to have operational funding or raise operational funds. So the suggestion that the ministry supply \$100 per senior per year or some specific financing plan so that seniors can stay in their home . . .

I know that my mother-in-law looked forward to going down to the centre, talking to the people there. The services out of the centre were those that she drew upon, and she stayed in her own home until she was in her early 90s, 92 before she was moved out. That was in part because there were those support services, and certainly the seniors’ centre was part of those services that she could draw upon. It’s much more expensive, we know as a family, to pay for her now that she’s no longer in her home, to house her in a facility that is paid for by the government. I think that’s a serious concern that has to be addressed.

The study brings forward a lot of good ideas, and there are going

to be further recommendations in the future. You get quite a different picture of seniors from the study and the things they recommend than from the kinds of glowing performance measures that we see in the ministry’s budget estimates. I wouldn’t mind the minister being able to comment on that.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I’ll address some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods first off. I would say that all of us in this House, on both sides, have an obligation to seniors to ensure that they do not live in fear, because quite frankly they need not live in fear. What the Member for Calgary-West I think was referring to in a way was the fear mongering that comes out of this place for the crass purpose of political points that are extremely inappropriate. I would say to the hon. member that his observations I would have to agree more or less with.

Now, one of the first questions was: what is a senior? Well, I guess we’ll have variable things depending upon who defines it. If you have a private seniors’ condominium complex, they will have one age level, and if you have people who give discounts, if you will, they will have maybe another age level. For the purposes of the seniors’ benefit program a senior that is eligible for the program per se is somebody who has turned 65 and the income level is such that they qualify. So that’s one definition that we have to use for this.

The market basket of needs concept I quite frankly do have a lot of empathy for. If you take the cost of living, let’s say, in Fort McMurray and compare it to Edmonton or compare it to another community, it varies. The problem that we have is: how do you take and start administering the number of variables? Currently we’re working on streamlining a number of variables within the existing program to get it forward first.

4:20

However, having said that, I think we should be very, very aware that the special-needs program is just what it says. The intent, like you have indicated and that we certainly on this side and I as minister subscribe to, is the aging-in-place concept. That program covers a host of items. It’s been, if you will, virtually anything that could be identified that is essential for that senior’s well-being. I’m very pleased with the program, and I get a continued positive response on it. It’s one that I’m sure you would support.

If you look in the budget, we’ve virtually doubled it from one year to the next. That doesn’t indicate anything other than the fact that our communication with seniors has improved to the point where people are becoming more and more aware. That’s where the demand is. It’s not a sudden decline in their economic status. It is an awareness of the program being there and their accessing it more and more. Quite frankly, that’s there to help the people on the bottom line. We aren’t totally impervious to the fact that there are different ethnic groups and seniors out there, and because of an inability to communicate for whatever reason, we certainly wouldn’t want those kinds of folks to drop through the cracks.

One of the things that we’ve found – and you alluded to this in your own personal situation – is that the best advocates for seniors are usually their family members. If they don’t have any, then usually it goes to the seniors’ groups. I’ll point out a letter I received from – I don’t know if you are familiar with the Seniors Outreach Network Society in Edmonton. Their mandate goes on to say:

The Seniors Outreach Network Society provides in-home services to isolated seniors residing within the City of Edmonton. These services include information, referral and advocacy, together with

crisis intervention. In addition, when appropriate and available, volunteers visit isolated seniors on a weekly basis to socialize and provide support.

This is a very good organization. They go one step further. I'll leave the name out. "On behalf of . . . please accept our grateful thanks for the funding received under the Seniors Special Needs Benefit."

Now, this wasn't an MLA. This wasn't a family member. This was this group that guided this senior forward to the department to get support. I obviously wasn't even aware of it until such time as this letter came. It goes on to state how wonderful the support was in terms of improving the particular individual's quality of life. Those are good things, and those are the kinds of organizations that we want to work with.

The Alberta Council on Aging has been a rather vocal advocacy group over the years, and quite frankly I've met with them on quite a few occasions and will continue to do so. They do have some good observations, but you know as well as anybody that we can't just automatically implement every recommendation that comes. There are some that we may want to but are not able to.

The bottom line quite simply is that we have taken the initiative to address the seniors on the lower end of the scale. We are doing that very, very well, not just through the programs. We keep referring to the special needs and the seniors' benefit. We have a lot of other programs. I'll just refer to, for example, the senior citizens' lodge program. That one in its own right is fairly pricey in terms of cost to the government, but then it's there for the people who, if you will, can't afford accommodation at an acceptable level, so we somehow or other try to provide it. I don't think that's being irresponsible. These are low-end seniors in these lodges.

We have another program called the unique homes assistance program, which we are going to be looking at to see if we can expand that somehow to ensure that aging in place remains or, if it can, expands, if you will. We work with a good number of housing authorities that have the social housing. A good number of these people are independent seniors who are subsidized through that category. So when people come and they just finger a particular aspect and say, "Bingo; you're all terrible," I really have difficulty accepting that.

With respect to access to the health care system, I think you know as well as I that there is unimpeded access for everybody to the health care system, period. I will repeat that. There is unimpeded access to the health care system, period. That is a fact of life. Maybe when we get into elective surgeries and whatnot, there may in fact be waiting lists. There are waiting lists; I am personally aware of that. However, to sit and say that any person, let alone a senior, in this province won't get medical care when they need it is an absolute falsehood and unacceptable, period. [interjections]

You can wave whatever book you want, but you bring to me one person who's a citizen of this province, whether or not they have a health care card, who can't get health care service and you and I will be very, very surprised. [interjections] Bring them in here. To my office, anywhere. I would like some of this nonsense to stop. Let's get on the same wavelength and start working together to promote the programs we have.

MS LEIBOVICI: A point of order.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MS LEIBOVICI: Will the member answer a question, please?

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: There's no citation.

MS LEIBOVICI: What is a question under? *Beauchesne* something or other.

MR. WOLOSHYN: No. When your turn comes, which we have lots of time for, I'm sure you'll have not one but many for me.

Debate Continued

MR. WOLOSHYN: But I really mean that, and as I indicated in previous estimates, we have an obligation in this House as MLAs and as individuals to help

DR. MASSEY: You have an obligation to listen.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I am listening and I am doing, and if you look at the track record in the last few months that I've been minister, the ASB has gone up, the special-needs have gone up, the housing has gone up. [interjections] Hey. And I trust you'll support us.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, could we please go through the chair. Will you please go through the chair.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. I had my fixation over there for some strange reason.

For the edification of all members, Mr. Chairman, we will in due course circulate an accurate, factual comparison of the benefits that seniors receive in this province compared to the rest of the country. I hope they will read and respect that also, and if there's any way that we can improve it, we will.

Mr. Chairman, I trust I've addressed some of the concerns of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Getting on to a few of the comments from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I rather enjoyed your dissertation and your floating all over the place. It was rather neat, and I expect some more floating around.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

However, I will say this to you, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Alberta has equal protection for all Albertans, period, and it's accessible, period. [interjections] You want me to write it on the wall? Give me a piece of chalk. If you need that to understand it, I'll even do that for you.

MS BLAKEMAN: Do it in the legislation. If you want to write it on the wall, put it on paper.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Heaven help me. What more can we do? On one hand you say: go at arm's length. On the other hand you say: do this. Well, what do you want me to do? We have good legislation. It's appropriate. It's used. It's accessed. It's supported. I don't know what you're beefing about.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was going on about advice to the minister and my advice to the government on the legislation and so on and so forth. There's a process wherein these things come out in due course if and when it's needed.

I'll answer one question that was very specific to this – and I'll go on to a couple more – with reference to a \$250,000 five-year program grant, I think it was, to the University of Calgary. Quite frankly, we don't get into the governance of that, so you'd have to talk to them about it.

With respect to the summer institute, we'll get back to you when we get details on that, because quite frankly I don't know.

Going on a little bit more with the human rights per se, if you look at some of the documents you have in your possession, you will see that the percentage of Albertans who believe human rights are fairly well or very well protected in Alberta is up around the 80-plus percentage mark, and that's pretty darn good.

MS BLAKEMAN: That's a telephone poll. What about people who went there?

MR. WOLOSHYN: The people that went there are happier than ever, because most of them got their concerns addressed.

4:30

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister and Edmonton-Centre, please, through the chair.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Well, tell her to move over there. Madam Chairman, my apologies again.

I would say that we are very conscious of the human rights issue. We're very supportive of fairness for all. We're going to continue on that route, and I think you will find that as time goes on, the view of the commission by Albertans and the acceptability of the level of their performance will continue to rise. We're hoping to get that as close to the 90 to 100 percent category as possible.

As you pointed out in the budget, we do support the Cultural Diversity Institute in Calgary, and we're doing that through meaningful dollars and no interference. We will be working on it to see if there are kinds of things, strategies, we can do with the commission, and in due course, if and when it's appropriate, that will be brought forward. We do want to continue with the education component on the human rights end of things. Quite frankly, we want to collaborate with other jurisdictions to support the initiatives by the various ministers there. So we're working on it, and I think that if you stepped back and weren't looking for questions to the ministry, you would be quite proud of the way the Human Rights Commission in Alberta functions and operates.

With that, I'll take my place and let the members have some more shots – I mean questions.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, Mr. Minister, thank you for your comments, but there are a couple of things I'd just say. Let me start off by saying . . . [interjections]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has the floor.

MR. DICKSON: I'm sorry, Madam Chairman. I have a lot of colleagues who are anxious to make some comment.

As the critic for the Human Rights Commission there are just a couple of points I wanted to make. Firstly, the key performance measure on page 99, "Satisfaction of Albertans with Human Rights Protection," is next to worthless. It is absolutely next to worthless. Most of the 3 million people that live in this province will never have occasion to require redress and a remedy through the human rights machinery.

The more important thing, Mr. Minister, is if you will look at what's been done with your own focus groups. If you look at the focus groups when they have done surveys – and that's been done as part of the communications needs assessment – the people who routinely experience discrimination are telling you that they don't know about the commission, they don't know how to access the

commission, they don't know what the jurisdiction is of the commission. So that tells me there's a problem. That tells me there's a problem, and this nonsense on page 99, "Percentage of Albertans who believe human rights are fairly well . . . protected," probably for the most part are part of a comfortable majority that may never have experienced firsthand discrimination. So that doesn't cut it.

Mr. Minister, would you tell us this. Every time Canada is a signatory to an international convention – for example, the U.N. convention on the rights of the child – there is a requirement that states: have to file compliance documentation. I'd like to know what the province of Alberta has done in the last 12-month period in terms of what advice, input, reports you've given the government of Canada for them to be able to file their compliance documentation. Whether it's the U.N. convention against racial discrimination, the U.N. convention on the rights of the child, or the U.N. convention on gender equality, those things, I'd like to know what input has come from the province to deal with those.

Now, Mr. Minister, I had asked you last year about what happened to that study that had been done, a survey of children in grade 8 and grade 11 to assess tolerance in this province. You had said to me last March:

This is an excellent suggestion. I have reviewed the original 1993 survey, which was undertaken by Alberta Education. I am quite interested in possibly pursuing an update, as you suggest. I will explore the idea further with the Minister of Education.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I wasn't in there in March.

MR. DICKSON: I'm sorry. It was the then minister. I'm sorry, Mr. Minister.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Right. Don't even listen to him. I didn't do it.

MR. DICKSON: I've taken the position that this is successor rights, Madam Chairman.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Oh, okay. Fair enough.

MR. DICKSON: When I get a representation from the minister . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. member. Through the chair, please.

MR. DICKSON: Yes. Madam Chairman, to the minister through the chair, I assume that when a representation is made by a previous minister, that indication is going to be followed up by the successor minister unless there's some good reason. So, Mr. Minister, when you look at that letter, tell me if you agree with your predecessor that there's some merit in looking at that survey. It's important that we know what we're dealing with, and that would be far, far more useful than doing this kind of a vacuous survey of people generally in the province. If you can tell us about that, I'd be grateful.

The other item, sir, is just if you would go through each of the recommendations in the communications needs assessment and advise me now, as I said, which ones you accept, which ones you reject, and for the ones you accept, what you're going to do about it and when you're going to do it.

Mr. Minister, the other observation I wanted to make had to do with the housing. You're talking about putting \$3 million into homelessness. You're the lead ministry in terms of dealing with homelessness. I haven't heard what your concrete plans are. You're going to provide \$3 million for community-based homeless initiatives. Well, when I talk to people with the Calgary housing

authority, the Calgary homeless authority, there's still some considerable degree of frustration. You provided the digs at McDougall Centre for use of the Calgary Homeless Foundation; thank you. You've provided some nonpecuniary kinds of supports, but I'd like for you to outline the terms of reference. What's the matrix you're going to use when you receive those applications for funding from Calgary groups dealing with an acute homeless and affordable housing problem?

Mr. Minister, I might just ask this. I think we have another \$1.2 million going into the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund. I think that's the number. Before we have to vote on these estimates, will you provide me with a list of those groups that have received funding in the last 12 months under that fund? Would you also provide me with the list that have formally applied for funding and been declined funding?

I know there are many other colleagues that wish to speak, so I look forward to your responses. Thank you very much.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Just a couple of comments that I want to make in return. I think in fairness all surveys have merit. Very few surveys can be accepted in total. Certainly I don't care who the author is of reports, surveys, whatever you have. If you present them, we do have a look at them, because very frequently we get some very good ideas. Even from time to time from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo we get some good ideas.

You made some references to tolerance and understanding and human rights, and I think you should know my background a little bit better before you take that shot at me, hon. member. Because when the Ghitter commission, the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding, was going around with your former colleague in the House, I was the principal of a school called Kitaskinaw on the Enoch Indian reserve that was written up in that report as an exemplary example of tolerance and understanding. So when you come at me personally on that bent, boy, you're heading down the wrong rail, so I'd switch real quick.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, you can understand then.

MR. WOLOSHYN: You bet I understand. Been there, done that, and will continue doing it, and it's not a problem for me to address it. There are a lot of ways, in schools, outside of schools, and that is a very fundamental thing. We should have more of that in here, and we'd have more fruitful debates.

With respect to your request for the groups that have received money from that fund, the answer I can tell you is that, yes, I'll give you that list. The ones who were declined, I may not give you that one. I'll have to give some thought to that, but I think you want an honest answer as opposed to an empty promise. So part A you will get; part B I'll have to think about.

With respect to the homeless issue, I know that's one that has a very high priority. I think one of the things you missed on that is that I believe this is the first budget since you've been in this House and since I've been in this House where there is an actual budget line directed at homelessness. That was by no accident. That was done through the hard work of the people that we have in the department now, and I'll let you know there was some rearranging. We came through with a policy on it regarding that. We feel that figure is a good starting point.

4:40

Your question as to how it is going to be spent I think is a very good one. We're working on some mechanisms where it will hopefully be easy to access and administer and the money will go

straight to where it's needed. Our hope is to work in collaboration with people like the Calgary Homeless Foundation, because they're the ones who have had the hands-on and they would be the ones who would be making the decisions on how and where this money would be going, with an accountability back to us that in fact it was used for the intended purpose. We'll do that in Edmonton, we'll do that in Calgary, and we'll look at the rest of the province. That question I think is a very good one, and whether the \$3 million will be adequate or not I have no idea, but certainly if we can get something going there.

The other part that I think we should really identify here is the Hon. Claudette Bradshaw, federal Minister of Labour. I did have a very, very good meeting with her. I think you're going to find as time goes on that there is going to be a very positive and close working relationship between the federal government, the local folks involved with the issue, and the provincial government. We've got our officials on the two governments levels. They have been communicating for quite some time now. I've got assurances from the minister that she is going to work with us in terms of the communication. We decided on this in the meeting I had, and I certainly have no reason to doubt her.

The programs that we are going to work on are going to be complementary. They may or may not be hitting at the same groups, but they're going to be complementary, and we're not going to get intertwined into these trigger programs where you give 50 cents, I give 50 cents, and we try and figure out what to do with it. So I'm quite enthused over what can be coming out of there. As you well know, there were figures announced, and we'll see what happens when they come out. I certainly won't make any negative comments about it because I'm quite hopeful – and I believe in her sincerity – that when some time passes and we're able to address the problem properly, there will be hopefully a good, significant amount of money coming out of the federal coffers to complement what we're doing here.

As you are well aware, the definition of the homeless – most people look at homeless folk as just the so-called mat people, the overnights. Well, that problem goes far beyond that. What we're trying to do within Community Development is get involved with other ministries who are involved with these folks also. Our goal is not only to provide appropriate shelter on an interim basis but to provide them with the tools to become, if you will, self-sufficient and able to provide for themselves. So it's a broader program than just a roof over their head. That doesn't happen like that. We've just got some good starts on it, and if you are interested, I could forward the policy to you at some point, and if you have some observations on how to improve it, I certainly would be more than willing to look at that. Those are the kinds of things that we're trying to get going there, and as you can appreciate, there's also a lot of other stuff.

With respect to your comments on the performance measures, you know, it's very difficult. You have to be careful that you don't spend more time measuring a program than you do delivering it. With the comments that you're making here today, my staff will be going through *Hansard* and picking out – and if there are areas where we can look to adjust how we do this performance measure, certainly we're going to. But again I stress to you that I would rather be a little bit off on my measure, if you will, than exhaust so much time doing it that you forget about what you're there for in the first place. It's trying to do the balancing act of having the accountability, and certainly as minister I'm extremely concerned that the lines we have in the budget are accounted for properly.

As you and some of your colleagues indicated, it is extremely difficult. How much of an impact does the budget of the Foundation for the Arts have? The best we can have is a pretty good guess, largely derived from a lot of those folks.

We implemented, as you know, the support program for the motion picture industry, putting it partially back in. That industry tells me that it's levered out fantastic numbers of dollars. I quite frankly don't know how accurate that is, but I would say: okay; fair enough; I'll accept your word on it. I'm certainly not going to expend resources to try and verify it, because you know how long that would take and what we'd have out of it.

So with that, I'll take my place again and let some of your colleagues or my colleagues who have questions to pursue.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I want to take a few minutes and leave some time for the Member for Edmonton-Centre to add some remarks on the Community Development budget. First of all, I want to go to the document and ask some specific questions. If the minister can't answer me today, that's fine. I'm sure he'll send me the response in writing, because they are specific questions. If they've been asked before, I apologize ahead of time. I may have missed certain aspects because this is a carryover from a previous evening.

Now, when I look at page 87, under ministry support services I see an increase from \$7,515,000 last year to \$8,669,000. That's a vast, vast increase. In community services I see a decrease from \$39,376,000 to \$32,731,000, which is a decrease of \$7 million. When I look at cultural facilities and historical resources, I see a bump there of close to \$4 million. Those are the types of questions that I'm asking for specific answers to at an appropriate time.

What I find very, very distressing is when I go to down to program 5. Special purpose housing previously, in the prior year, spent \$83,140,000. There's a decline in this fiscal period to \$82,557,000 – a decline – in the area of special purpose housing, which is so dramatically needed at this particular time, a view shared by other levels of government.

I flip the page. I look at program 1.0.3, finance and administration, operating expense. An increase from a little over \$6 million to over \$7 million. An increase of over \$1 million, which represents – what? – an 18 percent increase in operating expense for finance and administration.

I flip over to the next page: program 2.1.2, arts and libraries. Again, a very, very valued service throughout the communities in Alberta. I've always maintained myself that if one utilizes the libraries properly, from a family point of view you can almost get your municipal tax dollars back. Yet we see a decrease, a decrease in that very, very valued category of programs within the budget.

Then I flip the page, and I see in program 3.0.1, program support – now, there has to be some rationale to this one – from \$449,000 to \$2,195,000 in program support. Does that mean direct support for the programs, or is that the administrative costs involved in directing programs? Possibly that one is legitimate in that those dollars may be all going to community programs. If so, then that's a different story.

Again I look at the next page, and I see 4.1.1, program support, operating expenses: from \$807,000 to \$1,084,000, an increase of over \$200,000, which would reflect roughly a 26, 27 percent increase. That to me appears to be an administrative cost, when we talk in terms of operating expense for program support.

I go to the next page, program 5, special purpose housing, where some of these areas are broken down. Special purpose housing operations: a decrease from \$4.5 million to \$3.8 million. I go down further. The special purpose housing registries grants: frozen, no increase. Home adaptation, the HAP: no increase. Possibly the

demand isn't there to justify an increase, but I hope there are sufficient dollars there to keep up with the demand because that's a program that is needed. Rent supplement: down from \$13 million to a little over \$11 million, a decrease of \$2 million. I look at assistance to the Alberta Social Housing Corporation: again an instance of a decrease of a million dollars. So it appears to me that it's fairly consistent.

When I look through the budget, we see increases, vast increases in programs that seem to identify with administrative costs, the ministry administration and so on and so forth, yet those valued programs like arts, libraries, and special housing are being decreased, and that I have a very, very difficult time with. I myself have been involved in some affordable housing, flex-housing, barrier-free and such projects with my son, who's an architect, and I kind of realize from a firsthand point of view just how desperately that type of housing is needed out there.

4:50

I want to now make some general comments, Madam Chairman. Last night you were in the chair when we were quizzing the budget of the Premier's office, Executive Council to be exact. One of the areas I brought up was that in less than five years we will initiate the beginning of the celebrations of the year 2005, the centennial of the province of Alberta, recognizing the century since the province was legitimized from a legal point of view. I quizzed the Premier, reminded him that 50 years ago we built two auditoriums as a legacy to the 50 years. Now this is a hundred years. The Premier at that time indicated that you were involved in this and you would be coming forward with recommendations in the next short period of time outlining what areas of legacies would be left behind.

I could maybe suggest the extension of the LRT to Heritage Mall. That would serve my constituency, but I'm not sure that's an appropriate use. It has to be something that benefits the province as a whole, and it has to be something that is a legacy, that people will remember, just like I'm making reference to something that happened 50 years ago. Even though I was a fairly young pup back then, I can recall when I came to Alberta that facility in Edmonton in particular and numbers of people telling me why it was built. It was remembered for years and years why that auditorium and the one in Calgary were built, because of the 50 years, so I would hope the minister would come up with something really, really appropriate.

Under seniors the budget made reference, of course, to the 10 percent increase in the seniors' benefit cash benefit. The average amount per month is \$100, so the increase works out to a very, very insignificant amount of dollars in terms of the expenditures that seniors face in terms of increased utilities, transportation costs, gas costs for those that are fortunate enough to drive their own vehicles, food, et cetera, et cetera.

Special-needs benefits, emergency funding. Now, the former minister stood here in the House one day and she told us this story about some person in one of the rural communities needing a new furnace because the furnace had gone out. And within two hours – I found this difficult to comprehend, but I have a lot of respect for the former minister, and I'm sure she would not intentionally mislead the House. This must have been an exceptional case, but a new furnace was installed within two hours. It was all functional, the senior was happy, and it was done in the middle of winter. If that's the case, if that's the way we're responding with this emergency funding, I think that is absolutely great, but that's not what I'm hearing from my constituents in terms of their applications, at least some of them. I'm hearing that a good portion of them are denied and that it doesn't happen in a matter of two hours that you're approved or disapproved.

So I'd like the minister to explain exactly how that emergency funding program is now working, what percentage of applicants are being approved, how long the process is from the time of initiation or receipt of the application to resolving the concern, fixing the problem in other words, and how that one could have taken place in two hours. Again, I don't know if a phone call was made and then somebody there made another phone call and just accepted the person's word on the phone. Again, I just have some problems with that. I know the intent is good, and it sounds marvelous. If that's the case, I applaud the ministry for conducting affairs in that manner.

Multiculturalism. I'm not going to dwell on multiculturalism. I just recognize it as one of the most important functions of the province of Alberta and throughout Canada. It's a symbol of the diversity of the country, a recognition of the contributions made by multiculturalism in terms of immigrants coming to this country and building Canada, building Alberta, and we can never lose sight of that.

Last fall when we debated Bill 38, that would have allowed for the – what's it called in the Constitution? That to me was a negative reflection on multiculturalism as well as on other minorities. Anything like that I find extremely distasteful, and I am really, really glad to see that that bill died on the Order Paper. So I don't want to see the government getting into areas where they're casting a negative light on multiculturalism. It's too important an aspect in the way of life in Alberta and Canada.

I've spoken for libraries, so I'm not going to stress any more requirements for libraries except reinforce what I said earlier. Libraries are greatly valued throughout the province.

The 2001 games is referred to under the minister's portfolio. Events like the 2001 games and the same with the Universiade games, which I participated in as a spectator, being involved and being a councillor at the time, and also the Commonwealth Games – the two were held during my terms of office at city hall. They left behind legacies in terms of the Commonwealth Stadium, in terms of other facilities throughout the city, the improvement to the Kinsmen field house, and so on and so forth. That's the benefit of major events, international events like the 2001 track and field, and the fact that the three levels of government are participating in terms of funding and such is great.

Arts and culture. The former speakers have touched on it. The Member for Edmonton-Centre has spoken many times and filed countless letters from those involved in the arts community requesting additional funding. We always have to bear in mind – I learned this at city hall – that arts is not an expenditure. Arts is an investment when we look at the major arts events, the Fringe and the various festivals that are held during the summer in particular, at what they do to the economy, the benefits they bring in terms of increased capacity in the hotels, visitors to the city, the international reputation that Edmonton has now gotten as the cultural centre of Canada. The base funding for these arts and cultural groups unfortunately has been frozen since the late '80s, and that is very, very unfortunate.

Now, just one more area and then I'm going to turn it over to my colleague from Edmonton-Centre. Just one more area, and that's the reference to lottery funds being used for programs like the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Wild Rose Foundation, and the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. Let me just say that the lottery dollars that are there – and even prior to the dreaded VLTs we always had sufficient lottery dollars to support those types of programs, and that's a good expenditure of those types of lottery dollars from the scratch-and-win, the 6/49, and such. Even with the VLTs we could continue to financially support those programs. They are beneficial to the community because they do comply with

the recommendation from the gaming summit to put that money directly into the community in terms of community services and community support groups.

The Wild Rose Foundation, for example, is one that I have repeatedly heard good comments about. Under the chairmanship of Krishan Joshee it fills an opportunity where groups fall between the cracks. They can't get funding here, they can't get funding there, but they can go to the Wild Rose Foundation. So that's great.

So, Mr. Minister, on that note I'm going to conclude. I would ask that for those questions he doesn't respond to today, he would respond to in writing. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you. I will follow your suggestion, hon. member, and try and get you written answers to a lot of the specific budget lines. That would probably be a better way of doing it.

You made reference to the centennial coming up in 2005. Your information is correct. This minister and ministry is responsible for putting that activity together. You'll notice, I believe, that we have some \$600,000 in the budget to get started on it. We will be coming forward fairly soon with guidelines and criteria and our views of how the event should be going. I think that when you see that, hopefully you will be quite pleased with what you have there.

5:00

You identified the concern of time with respect to having special-needs applications processed. Your observations are correct. They were taking too long. I believe by April or May we will be properly caught up. We're working on that, have more staff in place. There are a variety of reasons why that happened, which I won't go into. One of the major ones was a sudden surge of applications. However, they're not all the same, as you observe, too. If there is an emergency, as you indicated, yes, a phone call could get it done. We're talking about your furnace going down; that is an emergency. There is no other way around it.

The other aspect. For example, when people apply for various things, sometimes you want, if you will, estimates on work; for example, dental work and things of that sort. That could take some time. Very frequently there is insufficient information. There is turnaround, and the staff in that particular end do a very, very good job. But I hope that by April, May, in there somewhere, we will have a quicker turnaround time. That's our goal, in any event. So that one I do have to say that you've observed that quite accurately.

The reference to the 2001 games. Yes, as I represent the government on that particular committee and our department does dispense the funds with it, you'll see a \$9 million variation on one of the programs because of the way it's being paid out. It's not flying out the window or a big windfall. It's the payment schedule on it. As you know or may not know, there is \$40 million that the province contributed to the process. The federal government has contributed \$35 million plus \$5 million to make a total of \$80 million. The rest: a large amount of that is goods in kind from the city and then whatever the games committee feels they can take in revenues, for some, let's say, \$115 to \$120 million overall budget.

I think you're very right: the spin-off of that to the city and the area and to the province and to the country indeed is going to be quite remarkable. There are I don't know exactly how many countries involved, but it's probably around the 150 mark. It'll be worldwide. It's a class event. Edmonton will be put on the map in a very, very positive light, and something that I think not enough people in this area appreciate is that there's a \$40 million grant to do

it. That has a real good spin-off, and hopefully when we get past some of the little disagreements, nuances – whether the track should be here, there, or elsewhere – there will be some form of legacy that we can be proud of at the end of the day that's left there. Those, as I understand it, are coming along well.

The library funding. There are variations there why it went up and down, whatnot. One of the areas that we will be addressing this coming year is the method of calculating the basis of the funding on a per capita, and we're going to be taking that through the process.

With respect to your comments on the lottery funding and more money for the foundations, I appreciate that support. We want that, I think, as you do. We know that all the four foundations we have do rather an exemplary job within their guidelines, and I'm very pleased with the outcomes of them. You're absolutely right: the comments coming back from all of those foundations are very, very positive. Would I like more money in them? Yes. Could we use more money in them? Yes. Will we get more money in them? I don't know. On that and the rest we'll sort of pick up and try and give you the specific answers to your questions, hon. member.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to make a few comments. I heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talk about the importance of the arts, and I just want to share with you an experience. In fact, I think the Minister of Community Development and perhaps even the Minister of Economic Development might have an interest in this.

I had the honour of spending six days at our jewel in the Rockies, the Banff school of fine arts, which is truly a United Nations of culture and art. The conference that I attended there was on multimedia, the development of multimedia content for education and for games and for all of the computer multimedia things.

There were people there from all over the world: people from Australia, from Europe, from the United States, and from Canada. One of the things I discovered is that there were people there that manufacture games, you know, that kids play on their computers. They discovered that if they had nothing but programmers building these games, the kids were not all that interested, but if they had artists, musicians, graphic artists, painters, and so on involved in the development of this thing, then the kids really enjoyed the games and played them, and it involved their soul.

So I think the importance that the hon. member has spoken of with respect to the arts is going much beyond what we have expected it to be, because now we're finding that in the area of the knowledge industry, the content industry the role of artists is becoming much, much larger.

I just wanted to share that with you and support what the hon. member was saying about the arts. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I hope I don't run out of time. I've certainly got a number of other things I'd like to bring up. The first, actually, is following on the comments raised by the members for Edmonton-Rutherford and Calgary-Egmont about funding for the arts. I'd actually received an e-mail asking me to enquire whether the minister had received any request or advice from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts board requesting more money on behalf of grants for arts organizations.

I guess I would also ask if the minister had seen the numbers of letters that I have tabled here in the House from citizens in both Edmonton and Calgary writing to their local members urging the government to increase the funding to the arts.

As well, I'm aware that the Edmonton Arts Council, a very respected group here, has met with both the capital regional caucus and with the minister himself, I think, asking for an increase in that funding. So there's lots of support for the increase in funding. I'm encouraging the minister to please follow through on this. We have not seen any substantive increase in funding to the arts for a considerably long time, and there's been a lot of moving money around back and forth between different departments. There's been FTEs lost through the arts sector to other areas in Community Development.

As I've pointed out before, there's been programs added into that and money brought in with it, but that was not an increase to the rest of that sector. Essentially, those groups are operating on the funding from the late '80s, and it's been frozen more or less at that amount. When you take into account inflation, they are very far behind.

In conjunction with that and around the conversations around funding for the games, once again I encourage the minister that if the government is putting in money for the games and there is a significant cultural component, there should also be money going in to support that cultural component and not just sort of chipping off a couple of grand off of what's going into the games themselves, but there should be support for the cultural component of those games. As the Member for Calgary-Egmont has pointed out, that's a big draw for people, and being involved with the way arts and culture and festivals are presented, it's a big draw for people coming to those games. It's a big draw on educational components now, and they need the support.

I note that in a document produced by the government itself – and I don't think it needs tabling; I'm sure it's been tabled – Alberta Economic Development: Highlights of the Alberta Economy, there's an entire page devoted to arts and culture, in which the wonderfulness of the sector is being extolled to all. So the government is aware of the value of the arts and cultural sector not only in its economic rejuvenation but the vibrancy it creates in a community, the reduction that we've seen in vandalism and crime in areas that have high cultural components. There's a lot to be said there.

5:10

On to a couple of other things. The key performance indicators. I'll refer you to page 98. One of my colleagues, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, has already raised some inconsistencies between numbers that were presented for past years in last year's budget estimates and those numbers not appearing or being different when they are brought forward into this year's estimate books. I won't go over all of that again, but I will question the minister about the usefulness of the key performance measures. Once again I encourage the minister, as I have before, to work with the staff from the Auditor General's department to develop key performance measurements that are more useful in actually measuring what we're trying to achieve here.

I look at things like: "Percentage of funding to arts and cultural groups provided by the private sector." That's a key performance measurement for arts and cultural development in Alberta. How much money they raise through the private sector doesn't tell us a darned thing about whether we're being successful in supporting the arts. It says how good they are at raising private funds but nothing about the government's involvement and support for the arts.

In a couple of other areas I think the same sort of questions can be raised. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo raised questions about

the KPI for human rights. I look at the KPI about Alberta's diverse natural, historical, and cultural resources, and we've got "visitation at provincial historic sites" and whether they're satisfied.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt you, but under Standing Order 19(1)(c) I must ask that we now adjourn debate and rise and report so that we can deal with the Speech from the Throne.

MS BLAKEMAN: I understand, Madam Chairman, and I shall submit the rest of my remarks to the minister in writing.

Thank you.

I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. I'd like to move that the committee do now rise and report progress, Madam Chairman.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Community Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Under Standing Order 19(1)(c) I must now put the question on the following motion relative to consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech on the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View and seconded by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

Ms Haley moved:

That an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 1: Ms Leibovici]

[Motion carried]

head: Government Motions

Address in Reply to Throne Speech

16. Mr. Havelock moved on behalf of Mr. Klein:

Be it resolved that the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

[Government Motion 16 carried]

[At 5:16 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Human Resources and Employment, Monday, March 13, 2000

Date: 00/03/13

8:13 a.m.

[Mr. Friedel in the chair]

Designated Supply Subcommittee – Human Resources and Employment

Friedel, Gary, Chairman
Bonner, Bill
Ducharme, Denis
Gibbons, Ed

Klapstein, Albert
MacDonald, Hugh
Marz, Richard
McFarland, Barry

Paul, Pamela
Renner, Rob
Thurber, Tom
Yankowsky, Julius

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. We may as well call the meeting to order then. Welcome to the designated supply subcommittee for Human Resources and Employment. I spoke to all the members before the meeting and explained that there is an all-party agreement to allocate the time for this meeting if there is no other agreement. There was a suggestion earlier that the model that was used last Monday was preferable. In this case, the minister is allowed up to 20 minutes to make opening remarks and comments. The Official Opposition would then have a full two hours for questions and answers. I understand the format that they would like is almost like a debate with the minister, so it will tend to be a little bit more informal. Following that, if the independent member, Ms Paul, is here, she would be allowed 15 minutes, and the government members would have the remainder of the time. At any point when there are no further questions from the government members during that remaining time, the meeting would adjourn.

We would require a motion to this effect to make that the process for this meeting, and if I could be so bold as to ask someone to make that motion. Moved by Mr. Klapstein. All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any opposed? That's carried unanimously and that is what was required to make this motion stand.

Then we might as well get right into it. Minister Dunford, would you care to address this committee and tell us everything that we need to know about your ministry?

MR. DUNFORD: Okay. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll be glad to open the discussion, and I do certainly approve of the format and look forward to questions. I should note for the record, though, that government members through the standing policy committee and through caucus have already grilled me at length, but certainly if they have further questions, I'd be glad to attempt to answer them.

The situation this morning is that I plan to go over in general terms some of the aspects of Human Resources and Employment. I have people here that I would like to introduce that are going to assist me as required, and certainly any question that's not dealt with here verbally this morning will of course be dealt with in written form at some time, and we make a commitment that we would do it in an expeditious manner.

We have Shelley Ewart-Johnson, who is our deputy minister. She's here in the audience. Jim Dixon is our public commissioner. Mark Asbell is chairman of the Labour Relations Board. Duncan Campbell and Dan Thompson help us with our finances. Shirley Howe and Debra Tiffen help Jim Dixon in the personnel administration office. Shelby MacLeod, I think you know, is my executive assistant. It looks like I've been able to introduce everyone. I want to of course thank them for putting together the 2000 and 2001 budgets, and the effort they extended is appreciated certainly by myself and I would hope by all members of this committee as we go through it.

A little bit about Human Resources and Employment. Our department supports the government goal of enhancing Alberta's new knowledge-based economy and, of course, our competitive edge. We also support another major priority of this government, and that's to build strong and caring communities.

Now, our department and the P AO, personnel administration office – I'll be referring to it continually this morning as PAO – are clearly focused on maximizing the potential of our citizens and the public sector. We also share another goal, and that's nurturing a workplace climate in the private sector and the public service that focuses on innovation, productivity, and excellence. We also want to enhance the health, safety, and wellness of private- and public-sector employees.

To talk about the Human Resources and Employment portion first, we consider ourselves to be the newly created people-and-workplace department, and it is our job to assist Albertans toward greater opportunities. We have 2,400 staff members that help Albertans try to navigate through the various programs that we can offer them as they move through the various transitions in their lives.

We assist Albertans who want to work by providing short-term financial assistance, support, or training, really with the goal for them to achieve greater financial independence. We provide Albertans with career planning information through our career development centres, and at those centres Albertans can expect counseling and services to help them make choices and hopefully land not only the right job for them but something that provides them with the esteem and the financial resources to then look after their families and themselves. By actively working with employers and employees, we believe we can create a fair and level playing field in our workplaces and ensure that our workers are safe and help nurture a positive labour relations climate. As a result, we have one of the highest productivity rates and one of the most impressive workplace health and safety records in Canada.

Finally, we want to make sure that no one is left behind. As we look to the future of Alberta – and by the way it is so bright that we need welder's goggles as we look off into the future. We just cannot afford to leave anyone behind. Everybody's potential has to be realized, because we see day after day the need and the opportunity for Albertans to create a place for themselves and their families in this economy, in this culture, and in this society.

Now, as far as the budget estimates, our budget information begins on page 235 of the 2000-01 Government and Lottery Fund Estimates. Our operating expense and capital investment are projected to be just over a billion dollars. This is a \$43 million increase over our forecast for this past year. This increase provides Albertans with the quality programs and services they need to help lead more productive and fulfilling lives.

Our training programs and initiatives are just some of the ways we help Albertans achieve their goals. By providing supports for independence and clients with basic foundation skills programs and other work experience programs, more Albertans are working. Alberta has the lowest proportion of citizens who receive income support in all of Canada. Overall 70 percent of people who complete our programs are not on welfare a year later. Our average monthly caseload is down from 33,000 clients to 31,275. That's to date, as we speak. For the 2000-2001 budget we're anticipating a caseload

of 31,400 clients, and this has remained relatively constant from last year.

The supports for independence budget, however, is increasing by \$20 million. This is because of a significant increase in costs related to generally increasing costs for dental, drugs, and other related medical services. Last fall's increase of \$58 per month to the assured support benefit rate has been annualized now in the 2000-2001 budget, and there's a slight increase in the number of people who face multiple barriers and need more intensive assistance to move them into the workforce. Overall our employment and training initiatives are showing a great return on dollars invested. That's why our training and employment support budget will receive an overall \$8 million increase this year.

8:23

Now some highlights. Our department's direct spending under the labour market development agreement with the federal government will spend an additional \$5 million over this year's forecast of \$93.9 million. This will cover an increased demand for training, and you can find that on page 240. This program reduces the dependence on employment insurance and other government programs by increasing the overall skill level of our workforce.

An additional \$1.2 million on top of the \$5 million spent this year will help us expand our Youth Connections program across the province. This worthwhile program connects young people to resources such as learning and career information and jobs.

Today there are greater opportunities for Albertans to find employment because of our growing and booming economy, yet there are still some people who are not fully participating in our economy. There are nearly 250,000 Albertans with disabilities, and slightly more than half are working. We know that we can do better. So, chaired by Richard Marz, the Employability Council brings people with disabilities and the groups that represent them and employers together. This initiative will explore ways we can increase their participation in the workforce.

Now, we've invested \$55,000 in the council's work. This is a small item in our budget but a great initiative that will help persons with disabilities to reach their potential. While we're encouraging greater participation in our economy, we're also committed to supporting others who may not be able to reach this goal. A good example of this is our assured income for the severely handicapped, or our AISH program. This program places greater emphasis on a person's ability rather than disability. We're encouraging recipients who have the skills and desire to work to train to the extent of their capacity, but we're also reassuring them that they're not jeopardizing their eligibility or chances of returning to the program if they don't succeed. We think this has been a tremendous reform to our AISH program in the sense that we now can provide them with the opportunity to go out and seek a challenge, seek work in the workplace without having to cross that bridge with no safety net beneath them. We think this will show tremendous increases in part-time employment amongst our AISH recipients.

Now, the budget for the program will increase to \$295.8 million, which is up \$27 million, or 10 percent, over this year's forecast. The additional funding provides for an increasing caseload of about 5 percent, so we're talking 24,000 cases up to about 26,000 cases and, of course, the anticipated increases in medical and dental costs.

Now, our caseloads have been increasing for various reasons. The primary reason is that more baby boomers are starting to reach that age, and we're experiencing new severely disabling conditions such as respiratory and cardiovascular problems. Other factors include an increasing number of mentally ill people, a continuing emphasis on community care as more clients live in the community rather than in institutions and require the benefits, and more people are surviving

brain injuries because of the advances made in medical care. The increase to this budget shows our continuing commitment to provide one of the most generous programs of its kind to Albertans.

Alberta's child health benefits program achieves two important goals: keeping our children strong and healthy and supporting low-income working families. Under this program children of low-income families have full coverage for dental, optical, drug prescription, emergency ambulance bills, and diabetic supplies. The program has a budget of \$14.7 million, which is a \$4.8 million increase over this year. This additional funding will accommodate the costs of families who need this program. We anticipate that next year approximately 83,400 children will be receiving health benefits under this program. Together with Learning we will be offering health benefits to 6,500 children of postsecondary students as well. For working families we also want to ensure they are healthy and safe and are being treated fairly in the workplace.

Now, as far as the workplace and its stability is concerned, the last couple of years have been pretty good to Albertans and to our province. Our approach to labour relations is working well. From 1995 to 1999 our rate of workplace stoppage has been consistently below Canada's overall average. By the way, Canada's average is 8.77 person-days lost per 10,000 person-days, and Alberta's is 3.94, so we're actually less than half. Based on this five-year average, Alberta ranks third lowest, and we're behind P.E.I. and Nova Scotia. In 1999 we ranked second, behind only Prince Edward Island. For the same year, just for comparison purposes, Ontario ranked fourth and British Columbia ranked fifth.

Our labour relations framework attempts to strike a balance between the interests of all parties and support the collective bargaining process. Through mediation and facilitation services we're continuing to encourage workplace practices and solutions that are designed by the stakeholders themselves. We believe that this results in more enduring settlements and that these are better settlements than those types of settlements that are imposed. Our facilitators play a key role working behind the scenes to help parties problem-solve and reduce the number of grievances and disputes and the need for third-party intervention. Ninety-three percent of those cases that are assigned the assistance of a mediator are resolved without a workplace disruption.

The increase to the workplace services budget by \$1.2 million over the forecast \$13.7 million will help us to continue to provide Albertans with quality workplace programs and services. Some of the increases will provide support for frontline staff and support for the newly formed Workers' Compensation Board Appeals Commission and a council on workplace safety. The Workers' Compensation Board Appeals Commission is examining the entire appeal system to review the services provided to employers and workers, and I look forward to the recommendations of the chair, Sam Friedman, my colleague Denis Herard, and other members that will present that report to me, hopefully later this summer or early fall.

Now, my colleague Julius Yankowsky is chair of the Council on Workplace Safety, that was formed last year. This council is overseeing the regulatory review process for seven of our regulations; for example, the chemical hazards regulation and of course the recently OCed first aid regulation. This will ensure that our regulatory framework is effective in reducing workplace injuries and issues.

Can I ask how much time I've taken?

THE CHAIRMAN: You have four minutes left.

MR. DUNFORD: Four minutes left; okay.

Workplace injuries and fatalities. There have been a number of them in the last month, and these tragic events have brought home

the absolute necessity of maintaining workplace health and safety. There are people that are looking for immediate answers and solutions that would prevent this from happening, and we are exploring different options, but we want to make sure that we find solutions that will have a real impact and will be enforceable. Now, having said all of this, I want to assure all of you on the committee and all Albertans that our workplaces really have never been safer. In 1998 Alberta's workplace injury rate was the lowest in the province's history. Our partnership program, regulatory enforcement, and regulatory review contribute to our success. In the partnership program over 3,000 companies have built health and safety programs that have been certified.

By way of comparison, construction companies that are certified have a lost-time claim rate of 3.1 in comparison to lost-time claim rates of 5.3 for construction companies that aren't certified. Our enforcement efforts continue to target companies with poor health and safety performance. In the past two years we have doubled the number of our inspections to 2,769 inspections and our compliance orders to 975.

In the area of homelessness, the shelters for homeless adults program budget will be increased by \$500,000 to \$10 million to ensure adequate spaces are available.

8:33

The Labour Relations Board has a budget of \$2 million. The budget provides renewed focus for the board finding and delivering simpler and clearer processes for their clients. Now, we're also in that area placing greater emphasis on disputes resolution training to enhance settlement efforts.

In the area of the personnel administration office, the PAO is the government's central human resource agency. Its budget is \$7.8 million, and the PAO ensures that a capable, skilled, and versatile workforce is available to meet the needs of the people of Alberta.

Our public service has been recognized for its innovative management practices in such areas as business planning, performance management, and compensation strategies. The PAO's goals focus on enabling departments to fulfill their business plans through strategic leadership, human resource strategies, and consulting services in the areas of compensation, a safe work environment, and attracting, selecting, and developing employees.

We again are dedicating \$750,000 to the cross-government projects under the corporate human resources plan, and our PAO continues to take a leadership role in the implementation of this cross-government priority, now in its third year. Under the strategy we will strengthen the performance management and accountability frameworks for human resources, promote integration for human resources processes and strategies, and continue to implement strategies that will build a strong public service of the future. The PAO is the certifying partner for government under the partnerships and safety program.

That concludes my remarks, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: And very good remarks they were.

Folks, I was just checking the rules with Diane, and I gather from the information that we looked up, this designated supply subcommittee has slightly different rules for staff than other committees. In this case if the minister wishes, his staff can join him at the table, and he can even ask them to supplement questions with technical information if he wishes. So if you want any of your staff to join you...

MR. DUNFORD: No. This will be fine.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Then we will just move right on. The

official clock here says 8:36 a.m. The members of the opposition now have two hours, and what I'm going to do is allow this part of the meeting to take place in a more informal debate setting. As long as it stays somewhat orderly, I think that'll work well. I won't recognize each member as you wish to speak but will reserve the right, if it tends to get out of hand, to revert to the other process. So with that, whoever of you gentlemen wishes to go first, feel free.

DR. MASSEY: I think Hugh's going to start. Last Monday worked well because it wasn't as much a debate as it was a conversation.

MR. DUNFORD: So we'll have a chat; will we?

DR. MASSEY: We will have a chat.

MR. DUNFORD: A fireside chat.

MR. MacDONALD: Good morning. I have actually quite a number of questions this morning, but we'll start with the detailed budget analysis in ministry support services. On line 1.0.5 why is there a 16.2 percent increase in the budget for strategic services? How many additional staff will be hired with the funds, and what's the purpose of the increase?

Farther down, at line 1.0.7, what is the purpose of the 17.1 percent increase in the operating expense for information technology management? Given that the Y2K problem is resolved, what would justify this increase while there's no increase for capital investment?

Farther down, on the next line, given that the increase in full-time equivalents has been less than a 1 percent net increase, why would the human resources budget require a 29 percent increase?

On the next line, what is the purpose for the 19 percent increase in the operating expense for the finance division?

Would you like to answer those?

MR. DUNFORD: Oh, sure.

MR. MacDONALD: Also, hon. minister, if there are any questions that you would like to respond to by writing, I have no problem waiting for a letter a week or two or three down the road.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Chairman, I don't remember if I made it clear or not at the outset, but certainly for any question I don't answer directly here at the table or if I only partly answer it here at the table, certainly a full and complete answer would be provided in writing.

So for the sake of the committee, we're on page 238, program 1, ministry support services. The question has been regarding reference 1.0.5, strategic services, showing the increase there. Two reasons basically: first of all, of course salary cost increases; then also we provided for additional funds for contracts.

On item 1.0.7, information technology management, the increase there is because we're increasing our IBM desktop support. There still are some Y2K compliance issues for the major systems, and of course we're also upgrading workplace program systems. So that represents the cost in that area, Hugh.

Under human resources, 1.0.8, this are additional manpower costs, and then we also have an occupational health and safety project cost. Does anyone want to comment on that occupational health and safety project? [interjection] Okay. That's fine. We'll further explain the occupational health and safety project in our written answers.

Sorry, Mr. Chairman. I guess I was getting too informal, thinking that *Hansard* would be able to pick up sideline comments. So we'll deal with that, then, in writing later.

In the finance division, 1.0.9., again this is an increased cost to support additional regional services that we put into place under our new organization of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Thank you.

Now we'll go on to the next page. I have some questions on program 2, page 239, line 2.1.1. Why is there a forecasted increase of 17 percent in the operating expense for program support? Are there any new divisions or areas that have been or are being created to justify such an increase?

Would you prefer to go through the whole page with my questions and then answer?

MR. DUNFORD: Yeah, I think so.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. In the next line, 2.2.3., why is there a forecasted decrease of 13.9 percent in supplement to earnings?

MR. DUNFORD: I'm sorry. For what?

MR. MacDONALD: In 2.2.3, supplement to earnings, why is there a forecasted decrease?

MR. DUNFORD: Okay.

MR. MacDONALD: How many clients are expected to be taken off the caseload to justify the decrease in funding, and how many staff will be moved or laid off with this decrease in caseload?

Line 2.2.4, temporary support. Why is there a forecasted decrease of 3.2 percent in the area of temporary support? How many clients are expected to be taken off the caseload to justify this decrease in funding? How many staff will be moved or laid off with this decrease in the caseload?

Shelters for homeless adults, line 2.2.7. Which agencies will be receiving funding for shelters for homeless adults? What method was used to determine the increase of \$3.5 million to this area?

Line 2.3.1, benefits for people not expected to work, program delivery. What accounts for the anticipated increase of 36 percent or more in the budget for program delivery for benefits for people not expected to work? I'm curious: are there additional staff that are to be hired here?

Line 2.3.2, widows' pensions. What is the reason for the 9.7 percent decrease in funding for the area of widows' pensions? Is there an anticipated decrease in this caseload? If there is, why? What are the forecasts for this caseload?

That's all the questions I have regarding page 239.

8:43

MR. DUNFORD: Okay. Taking them in order, 2.1.1, program support, showing an increase. The increased costs would be to support our personal computers and our systems. When we put together the different departments, we of course found, like many other departments did, that in the past maybe there hadn't been the co-ordination with hardware, as we might have hoped. I think you could see the necessity, in fact maybe even the urgency for our computers between the adult social services portion of our department and our career development to be able to talk to each other. This is one of the unsung benefits, I believe, of the new configuration of our department in the sense that we now have full responsibility for people involved in temporary support, and we don't have to cross any more departmental boundaries.

Previously, of course, career development was responsible for the training, and the department of family and social services was responsible for the temporary support. I believe there were barriers

then that might have been put into place because the objectives of the two departments would have been different. Social services would want to reduce caseloads; career development would want to bring people in who would be successful in completing training programs. Now that barrier, if it was there, has been removed. We are now fully responsible for that person. So it is important, then, that we have the technology to be able to deal with that.

Also, in that number we're anticipating an increased Imagis operating cost and new systems development, again in our technology area, and of course salary increases.

Supports for independence, 2.2. Actually, hon. member, we are budgeting for a caseload decrease, and the numbers we are using are a decrease from 33,000 to 31,400. We believe that this is a responsible view of the future given the economy that currently exists in Alberta. Of course, you're aware of the recent labour stats that were released last Friday. I think it's fair to say that anyone in Alberta these days who wants to work and can work is there, so we don't anticipate the temporary support being as fully utilized as it might have been in the past.

Also, you might remember from my remarks that we increased the assured support monthly payments by \$58. I believe we did that October 1. Now, what you have in this new budget, of course – you know, we only had a part year in '99-2000. We now have a full year at that increased cost, which we have to account for, so that partially offsets, then, the decrease in the caseload.

I guess the other area in there, too, is that we have a welfare payment savings from the national child benefit. I'm sure you know how it works, but just in case, for people here on the committee and also perhaps people that would be reading *Hansard*, to put it on the record, Alberta has an agreement with the federal government under the child health benefit program that when they increase income to needy families, what we do is lower initially the income support. So the family is getting the same amount of cash into the home, but we are under contract committed to immediately take the money that we theoretically have saved and move it into the purchase of benefit programs for the children of these families.

The federal government and Alberta are fully in favour of that approach, because we are, I think, then directing resources at working families and families that are probably just on the border line. We want to make sure we keep them and do whatever we can to support them in their place of employment rather than having them slide back into our welfare system.

Now, the next one was 2.2.4, and that's temporary support. If I remember your remarks correctly, you talked about a decrease, but that was when you looked at the comparable budget. When you look at the actual forecast now for what we've been experiencing, you'll actually see that that is in fact an increase in our temporary support. We talked about that earlier, again some increase in costs and a little bump up in caseload. We think we'll go from an actual 31,270 to 31,400, if I've got those numbers correct in my head.

Vote 2.2.7, shelters for homeless adults. We are experiencing – and you know this – an increased demand for emergency shelters in Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge, and we're forecasting 600 spaces. Also, you're aware that through collective bargaining between PAO and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees we've had a salary increase of 4 percent. So we're forecasting and budgeting for a contracted agency wage increase of 4 percent as well – we think that's fair – and, of course, our own staff salary costs.

I don't mean to skirt over your comments about staff, but as you, I think, noted in your comments, in one of these areas we're actually not predicting a decrease in staff. I think we're adding one person. So what you're finding as we move forward with this new configured department is that people are remaining in employment. Most of them of course are remaining in their particular areas of expertise,

but there is some movement around. There are no layoffs that are being forecast in this budget.

Vote 2.3.1, program delivery. I don't recall off the top of my head just now why we are forecasting that decrease in numbers. I'll have to get that to you, or perhaps somebody can slide me a quick note.

8:53

Vote 2.3.2, widows' pension. We are anticipating a decrease in caseload from the current 2,800 to 2,530. As you know, there is a means test for the widows' pension. It started in 1982 or 1984, somewhere in that area. We're finding over time that the women coming into the program have now had perhaps better jobs than women of 20 and 25 years ago. It's a stereotype, I know but any of us that have wives know that generally they're better financial planners than the male side of the equation. Well, I'll speak for myself. If I could put aside my male pride and give all my money to my wife, I'd be a rich man. She is a much better planner than I am.

MR. MacDONALD: Well, are we going to have female treasurers?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I wouldn't be opposed to that, by the way.

In any event, the point I'm trying to make is that the widows now, as they become 55, are in better financial shape than women in the past, so because of that means test that applies to it, we are anticipating a decrease in that caseload.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. The next series of questions will come on program 3, training and employment support. Now, before I go any further – we talked earlier about the unemployment levels in the province. It is something that I've just noticed – many Albertans I think would agree with me that modesty is a wonderful virtue to have. Mr. Chairman, I would say that this hon. minister is displaying that. I can't say that about his predecessors. Certainly, after these labour statistics keep coming out relating to unemployment, he could call his ministry the human resources and full employment department, because the province is doing pretty good, and you should be congratulated. I hope this continues. There are problems centred around that that I hope can be resolved as well, but human resources and full employment would be at the present time a good title for your department.

Anyway, training and employment support on page 240, line 3.1.1, program delivery support. Given that the first two major budget areas are showing an increase in funding for program delivery, why is there an anticipated decrease of 31 percent for the program delivery area of training and employment support? Given the focus of this government on employment of persons receiving living assistance, why is there this anticipated decrease? Is this related to the subject we've just talked about? I'm curious.

Now, on line . . .

MR. DUNFORD: Just a second. I don't mean to – well, I do mean to interrupt you.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Sure. Go ahead.

MR. DUNFORD: You're talking about a decrease. Where?

MR. MacDONALD: At program delivery support in the area of training and employment support.

MR. DUNFORD: So what line are you on? Line 3.1.1?

MR. MacDONALD: Yes.

MR. DUNFORD: Under operating expense; right?

MR. MacDONALD: Yeah.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, my page 240 shows an increase. Where are you getting the decrease?

MR. MacDONALD: Oh, pardon me. Yeah, and that's about 31 percent of the program, too. Okay. I'm sorry.

Line 3.2.1, employment preparation programs. Given the focus of this government on employing those receiving supports for independence funding, why is there a decrease anticipated in employment preparation programs? Will the government be changing the focus on skills development training grants?

Line 3.2.7 now. Could you justify, please . . .

MR. DUNFORD: Just a minute. I don't have a 3.2.7.

MR. MacDONALD: No, nor do I. It should be 3.2.4. What is the justification for a 24 percent decrease in the funding for operating support for employment initiatives?

Under Youth Connections, 3.2.5, how many additional clients will be served to justify the 24 percent increase in funding for Youth Connections?

That's all the questions I have relating to program 3, training and employment support.

MR. DUNFORD: All right. Under 3.2.1, again, I would want to indicate to readers of *Hansard* that when you look at the '99-2000 budget, which has a number of \$26,600,000, and you look at our estimates for the upcoming year at \$25,434,000, yes, indeed it does look like a decrease, but our forecast, what we're actually going to spend this year, is \$23,695,000. So once again I would want to point out that in the area of employment preparation programs we are actually forecasting an increase in expenditure.

Employment initiatives, 3.2.4, is showing a decrease in operating expenses. Again, as I think you pointed out in your earlier remarks – and I do appreciate the compliment about full employment – we actually are in a position now to reduce the number of employment initiative projects that we have in place. We just simply don't have the clients that would be able to go into these employment initiatives.

The 4.9 percent. I don't know whether those are full employment levels, but certainly, as I'd said earlier, anybody that can work is just about at the point now where they probably are working in Alberta. What it's showing us, then, hon. member, is the fact that those who are still outside of the workforce in many, many cases have multiple barriers. It's simply not good enough just to try to provide them with a few employment skills that would be perhaps marketable out there in the economy. There are all kinds of lifestyle issues that are causing barriers, and of course then there's the whole issue of addiction providing a barrier as well.

With the demand for labour that we have in front of us, we would like nothing better than to be able to remove as many of these barriers as we possibly can, because while you're complimenting us for our full employment levels, I think you might want to withhold some of your compliments when we look at vacancy rates. I'm very very concerned about the level of participation in some industries. I've been told that this winter drilling programs were curtailed in some cases because of the lack of skilled people in the drilling industry. Now, can you imagine? Have you ever heard of it happening before in Alberta where you couldn't find enough people to put on drilling rigs? It's certainly new in my experience. We're ready with employment initiatives whenever we can find the people

to put into those particular areas, but we're here today to talk about estimates and what we think is going to happen next year, so we're in fact showing a reduction.

9:03

Youth Connections, 3.2.5. You may be aware from the press releases that Youth Connections is spreading rapidly throughout the province. Probably as we speak, Youth Connections programs are being unveiled in Strathmore, perhaps in Banff. I've attended many of the openings: Medicine Hat, Lethbridge. The Youth Connections program proved so successful in Calgary and Edmonton that we just felt an urgency to spread it throughout the province. In terms of the additional numbers to justify that increased experience, we'll have to provide that to you in writing because I don't have that in front of me.

Of the many things that we've done, most of which are good – perhaps all are good, but again I want to maintain my modest profile – the Youth Connections program is one that I think will be historical in value.

Those are my comments on that page.

DR. MASSEY: If I could, Mr. Minister. You talked about the high employment. Do you keep track of the shape of that in terms of the wage categories? I was reminded, you know, of our push to have a high knowledge-based economy. There was a clip on television the other night on Silicon Valley and homes selling there for – you couldn't buy a two-bedroom home for less than \$600,000. The clerks in the offices were riding the bus all night or they were going to shelters because they couldn't afford housing. I don't think we're anywhere close to that, even in places like Fort McMurray, where housing is very, very expensive. I was talking to a group of teachers up there and talking about how difficult it was, given the wage scales there, to enter that kind of housing market. I guess my question is: do you monitor the shape or the profile of that labour force and what happens? Are there efforts made to make sure there's a balance of well-paying jobs versus entry-level kinds of jobs?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, we don't have the labour statistics sophisticated to the point that you're asking about, but there's some general information that we do know. First of all, let me say that the reason we are involving ourselves in the shelter situation is that in some cases what you have is people who are employed but are simply unable to pay the rents that they're finding. This is a particular problem in Calgary, as I've come to understand it. Now, with current gas prices we have exacerbated the situation still further, in my view, because some people, to escape the high rents in Calgary, have not only moved to the outskirts but have gone to the so-called bedroom communities in and around Calgary and then of course are commuting. To do that, you generally have to do it by car. With pump prices now at 64.9 and that sort of thing, there's a real concern.

Of course, the concern that we have, then, is: are we topping up those wages enough so that these people can get by and remain in the workforce? One of the main focuses that we have in Human Resources and Employment is on the working poor. We know that if we can get them into the workforce, then careers start to develop and wages start to increase and they move up in those particular areas.

On the whole area of vacancy rates, whenever I have an opportunity and the context is appropriate when I'm speaking publicly, I've been challenging industry associations, I've been challenging unions, I've been challenging employers throughout this province to start to do better at human resource planning. We in government do have resources that our department has that we put into training

initiatives, and certainly the Department of Learning has huge resources that they use to try to meet the particular needs, but if we don't as government get the proper information from industry, then it would seem to me that it is only by accident that we're able to fill the demands.

Obviously I'm using this opportunity now to stand up on that little soapbox and say again to this committee and the influences that you have and to people, again, that are readers of *Hansard* that this is a serious, serious matter. If we're going to achieve that future that many of us see for Alberta, we just have to have better human resource planning. The government is trying to do it. We talked earlier under the personnel administration office about our human resource strategy, but every industry needs to be as involved as we are in forecasting skill-set needs.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks.

So right now, if I understood what you said, there's not a sort of monitoring or any kind of an attempt to look at that profile.

MR. DUNFORD: I wouldn't say that there are no attempts, hon. member, but there's no sophisticated report that I receive every month that tells me the vacancy rate for drilling people, that there were a thousand positions open, that there's a thousand openings for truck drivers, or that there's just a huge need for software industry people.

DR. MASSEY: I'd shift, then, in terms of the employment standards – and maybe this isn't the place – to the recent incident, the tragedy in Calgary in the sub shop. There was a suggestion that there should be a requirement that they work in pairs in those kinds of situations. Have you done anything? Is that where this would be addressed?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, we don't have anything in our budget particularly dealing with that matter, because the financial pressures of multistaffing would of course have to be borne by the employer. Would you like me to make a few comments on the situation?

DR. MASSEY: I would appreciate your thinking on what the solution might be.

MR. DUNFORD: Okay. Well, currently our staff has provided me with a document that lists a number of options that we have. Now, I'm not going to consider, though, that this is the exclusive list. We will be talking to police services. We will be talking to employer/employee union groups in order to get some of their thoughts, but thus far there seem to be at least two avenues to approach the situation that happened to Tara Anne McDonald.

9:13

The first one, that seems obvious, as you have mentioned – and I'm not listing them in priority – is under the Employment Standards Code. Right now we have legislation and a regulation that restricts the ability of anyone under 18 to work alone. They can't work alone, as a matter of fact. If I have the exact hours right, between 9 p.m. and midnight there has to be another person with them who is over the age of 18, and if they are going to work after midnight, they not only have to have another person over 18 with them, but they also have to have written consent from a parent or a guardian. So we have that situation.

The suggestion has been made that an option would be to simply remove the age restriction. People would not work alone, then, after 9 p.m. or pick another hour of the day or night. It has some attractiveness in the sense that people see it as a quick and easy solution, perhaps. I've learned over the years to be cautious about

quick and easy solutions, because one size generally doesn't fit all. So we're going to have to have a look at it, but the point would still be that under the Employment Standards Code there could be a change, then, to deal with that particular matter.

The other option that's open to us would be through workplace health and safety in terms of the designation of a hazardous site, thus forcing an employer to do a hazard assessment and then come up with some sort of risk management plan that would then be acceptable to our officials. That seems on the surface of it to provide a little more flexibility, but again I think it needs broader consultation than just within our own department.

I know it's difficult to deal with the emotional issue of it, and it would seem that if somebody had been with Tara, perhaps she would be alive today. What I wake up in the middle of the night and wonder, though, is if this punk might have had the power to overcome both of them and there would be two dead in that Subway. I worry about things like that.

Getting back to previous member's comments on full employment, I also wake up and worry about eliminating employment. If the margins are so tight on, say, a convenience store in a particular area and they're forced to go to multistaffing and feel they can't afford it and then simply shut down their operation at 9 at night or whatever it is, then I've just put somebody on the unemployment roll. So I do worry about limiting employment as we try to provide a safer work environment.

Now, there might be other options that are available, and certainly we are open to hear them. Our mind is not made up, but our mind is made up in the sense that we're not going to leave this alone. Something will be done.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks.

Could I move to the AISH program for just a minute? You talked about the increase – and I think that was really welcomed – and the flexibility of AISH recipients. I guess my first question is: how do you determine the level? There was \$58 added. Is there a basket of costs that is examined on an annual basis for AISH and those living on social assistance? How do you determine what is the right level of support?

MR. DUNFORD: I don't know that there is a formula. Can somebody nod? No, there's no particular formula. So what would be looked at, then, of course is: what is the relationship to other support programs? What is the relationship to, you know, if one were able to work and to create an income, what that would likely be, and then try to relate that to a support level. Then I suppose at the end of the day there's also the consideration of the fact that as the minister I am responsible for – and I take it with a huge amount of concern – and have to be steward of the taxpayers' money. So we have to be seen, then, to be fair to both parties in the sense of something that provides a livable wage and also is something that's acceptable. I don't need a taxpayers' group getting on me about the AISH program, and so far they haven't. I think they see it as a fair level.

We update it periodically, as you know, although there's nothing I can announce in this session this morning, but certainly as we see some of the costs escalating, we constantly monitor it.

DR. MASSEY: I appreciate that balance between making sure that they're well cared for and have the resources that they need yet not offending the taxpayers. There's not a lot of sympathy for people on social assistance, unfortunately. I deal with quite a few of them in my constituency office, and I should say that the department is just excellent in terms of working with clients when we run into difficulties, but it's still a huge problem.

We started an antipoverty roundtable in Mill Woods to try to bring together all the resources. We didn't know we had five food banks of one shape or another, churches that were working, and we've got a garden project going, trying to encourage gardening in public housing. So there are a number of things, but it's really a trap for some of them. Some of them don't have telephones, and even just communicating with people living in poverty is a problem just in a small area like that. I really am interested in how those support levels are determined and that they are regularly reviewed because of things like increased costs for fuel now and other costs.

MR. DUNFORD: Can I just ask a question? On that antipoverty committee that you formed in Mill Woods, have you invited a member of our staff to be part of that?

DR. MASSEY: We've had various members of community agencies, but I'm not sure that we've had anyone specifically from your department.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, we have great people.

DR. MASSEY: Good. It's a good suggestion.

MR. DUNFORD: I guess you want it on a volunteer basis. That's fine, but I'm sure that if you approached us, somebody would. I think it would be a good resource for your committee.

DR. MASSEY: I appreciate that.

On the AISH program, can I give you a bit of a case and then pose my problem? I have an AISH recipient who has a diploma from NAIT in business. He's written a number of business proposals. The last time he wrote a business proposal it was turned down, and he was not given any reasons why the proposal was turned down. It was a contract group that was handling the proposal. I wrote a letter asking if there was an appeal process, and if there wasn't an appeal, if the applicant could at least have a list of reasons why the business plan was turned down. I think he eventually got an oral report from them, but there was nothing that I ever saw in writing. I only get the one side of the story, you understand.

9:23

MR. DUNFORD: Did he submit it to us, though?

DR. MASSEY: No, it was to a contract group in the city.

I guess my question is: is there a troubleshooter or someone in your department that someone can go to? This has gone on over a couple of years. I forget how many hundred employment applications he's filled out. His disability is such that he can't rely on his health. He's up one day and down the next, and it makes it very difficult for him. I wondered: is there a troubleshooter? Someone that's been trying to work the system in the best way but just seems to end up in a dead end and terribly frustrated: is there someone he appeals to in your department?

MR. DUNFORD: I would suggest in this particular instance that the two of you work together to get something in writing that he can feel comfortable in signing basically stating the case, submit it to our office, and then we'll have a look at it. I would also then propose to send a copy to the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and his Employability Council. Although they're not there to look into specifics, at least it might give more information to the Employability Council as to some of the barriers our people are faced with.

DR. MASSEY: I don't think he's as much interested in complaining as he is in getting something in terms of a bit of a small business going, a home-based business, but I'll follow that up.

I've asked the question about the support levels.

I guess the last one I had was on the Alberta child health benefit. How do people find out about that? Again, we seem to have people come into the office who don't know what's available.

MR. DUNFORD: I liked your comment earlier about people that are living on the edge not having telephones. They probably sure as hell don't have computers. So while we congratulate ourselves on just tremendous web sites, for certain specific individuals, I mean, we might as well be talking into outer space because we're not going to reach those people. Our caseworkers are particularly cognizant of these particular programs and the difficulty we have in communicating them.

We are forecasting, of course, an increase in our child health benefit costs because we are dedicated to providing better information and better communication so that we find those children. We think we can really help some working families with this particular program. We think it's just an excellent, excellent program, because it gets a lot of the health and dental costs off the parents' backs. So however we have to do it, we will make sure that we try to get that program communicated, because it's just too helpful. How do I say this? You know, this is a program where we want the cost to increase.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Chairman, I happen to have some more questions for the hon. minister of human resources and full employment, but before that, I have to remind him of a study that I read. It was presented, I believe, to Alberta Treasury officials. It was researched by an economics professor at the University of Calgary, Robert Mansell, and interestingly enough he and, I believe, some of his students compared Alberta with three American states that have basically the same sort of economy, agriculture, and industry. I think the states were Texas, Oklahoma, and Colorado. In the last decade there has been a significant increase in economic activity not only in Alberta but in those three states as well, and remarkably the disposable income of the workers in the three American states was significantly higher than here in Alberta. Here in Alberta, as I recall reading the report, the disposable income had stagnated. I believe it had gone down marginally for the Alberta workers, and I have some concern about this. I wonder if the hon. minister or any of his department officials have looked at this study and if they have any comment on it.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, first of all, I think you're on to an excellent point. The way that we do our income tax in this country has I think created the very situation that you're talking about. The ability of both the federal government and the provincial government to benefit from the so-called bracket creep I think has contributed a great extent to the leveling off of disposable income and in some cases maybe even the decrease. I personally, but I think we can speak on behalf of the government, am extremely pleased, then, with the recent move by the federal government to involve themselves with indexing a number of the funds, and of course it's now the responsibility of the Alberta government to respond in kind. We have in some cases, but we still have a little ways to go in my view.

The thing, though, that I want to point out to you is the employment tax credit as it relates to families with children. I have heard from the executive director of the Edmonton Social Planning Council that this has been something good that this government has done. Now, many of you will know that we don't often hear from that particular individual about anything positive, but in that case he made the comment to me verbally that it was having a clearly

positive impact on the ability of people of lower incomes to look after their families.

I know there's current discussion around the flat tax and what that might do to middle-income families. That'll be sorted out by accountants, not by me. Increasing the personal exemptions for both spouses I think is going to have a huge impact, and of course the Treasurer talked in the Budget Address about actually removing 132,000 Albertans from paying any provincial tax at all. Now, when we lay on top of that the recent announcements by the federal government, I don't know if it'll be 132,000 that won't pay any federal tax either, but I imagine the numbers are going to be actually pretty significant. What we need to find is reform in our tax system in Canada so that the incentive is still to go out there and go to work and work as hard as you want to but as hard as you can and then be properly rewarded for it so that, again, you can increase disposable income and thus increase your quality of life.

9:33

We know there's a direct relationship between education and income and health, and while I don't necessarily want to bring a health debate into this particular area, there has been too much attention, in my view, spent on what happens after a person is injured or ill and not enough attention on how we keep people from injuring themselves and how we keep people from getting sick. There needs to be a lot more concentration on the preventative side of it, because not only will it start showing dividends in terms of health budgets, but I believe it will carry on into the economic well-being in the workplace. I think people will then be more productive because they'll be at work. People will be happier because they're productive and because they're at work, and there's just a huge payoff to be made there. We want to see substantial increases in disposable income in Alberta.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay.

Mr. Chairman, I also have some questions for the hon. minister regarding occupational health and safety. Earlier I believe you said something to the effect that workplaces in Alberta have never been safer. I would object to that statement. Two Albertans per week are fatally injured on the job, and that is two too many. How many field inspectors doing workplace inspections to ensure that all OH and S regulations are being followed are employed in your department, and are they informing the sites that they are to inspect that they're coming, or are these inspections done on a random basis? How does the number of inspectors that you're employing now compare to, say, 1996, 1997, 1998?

Also, I have questions regarding the partnerships that you mentioned, particularly those in the construction industry. You were talking last time, I believe, about claim rates of 3.1 versus 5.3 for those who are not certified partners. What are you doing about this 5.3 statistic, and are those contractors reluctant to get involved with your program? How are you making them comply, or is it just a penalty with WCB? They just pay higher rates and that's it?

Also, the issue of light duty comes up in my constituency office frequently. Employees are told, after they're injured, to go on light duty. They follow this program for five or six weeks, and then they're laid off. I think these statistics are inaccurate because of the number of cases of light duty that are showing up at the constituency door. If this is the case – and I suspect it is – it's wrong. It's a bad practice, because once those people are out of work, physically they're incapable of finding another job. An employer maybe has a lower WCB rate, but these folks have no means of supporting themselves. It is a trend that I would like to see certainly stopped and hopefully reversed. Light duty in the workplace I don't think is the answer for our problems with workplace safety.

Now, I also have some more questions, if I could go on here for another minute, regarding fatality inquiries whenever someone unfortunately does lose their life in a workplace accident. I have a lot of problems with how OH and S investigates and reports on these fatalities. I have read many of the OH and S investigative reports. I have compared them to the OH and S regulations. Oddly enough some of the regulations are not even mentioned, and the violations of these regulations directly affected the outcome, the fatality. Who determines which violations are pursued in court in an OH and S investigation? What are the criteria for this?

The statute of limitations, I understand, is one year. Charges must be laid within a one-year period or it cannot be done. Now, I'm very concerned about this, because in the past I have had some OH and S reports that have come, oddly enough, the 50th week after the accident occurred, and there have been many violations of the regulations, some of which are outlined in that report, but no charges are laid.

One particular case would come to mind, and that would be in Calgary. The details I don't have before me, but there was one worker killed west of Calgary – I believe it was last summer – while he was installing the metal framework for a tent. He was unfortunately electrocuted. Now, charges were laid in that case, but two summers ago, I believe at the start of Stampede week, there were two workers killed at a site where they were erecting a metal building. No charges were ever laid, but there were violations of OH and S regulations. If you could share with us as to why this has occurred, I would be grateful.

Those are my questions at the moment. Thank you.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, some pretty serious allegations. They of course will be recorded in *Hansard*, and I'll have to get some information for you in response because I'm not familiar with the specifics.

My understanding of occupational health and safety – I'm kind of working backwards on your list – how it arises in court. I believe it would be a similar situation to where occupational health and safety would have to submit their documentation, their view to Justice, and then they would make the determination.

Fatality inquiries: you know, I take your point. I don't want anyone to think that when I talk about low hazards or a good safety record of 3.1 or 5.3 or whatever numbers that we're using, we are satisfied with that. I agree with you completely that any fatality is one too many. The reality, though, is that in many of the industries in Alberta there are hazards that exist, and it would be unrealistic for me to think that there wouldn't be a fatality during my watch in this particular ministry. So then what do you do about it?

I think that for the first time this morning we probably have revealed to ourselves the differences in ideology and philosophy between you as an hon. member and me as an hon. member. I fervently believe that education is more successful in the long term than enforcement, and our philosophy and our policy to go with that philosophy are based on that principle.

9:43

I don't know off the top of my head how many field inspectors we have. We'll certainly get that information to you. I know that I've been around occupational health and safety for many, many years. There are still people within our department who see themselves as enforcers, and that's fair enough. We need that aspect of it as well. But most of our people, I believe, see themselves as educators and as facilitators toward safer workplaces. I'm comfortable with that, and I will be viewed as being successful or not in this portfolio based on that particular philosophy.

When we use the numbers, I believe it's a truism that what gets

measured gets done. We have to have a way to measure the relative safety of our workplaces, and the way that that's done is to look at lost-time accidents as some sort of ratio over man-hours worked. I can remember in the late '60s filing with the employer that I had. The employer at that time wanted plant by plant by plant workplace health and safety statistics. The industry has evolved to the point where there now is a meaningful statistic that is used, and I think, then, it's legitimate for Alberta to compare itself against other jurisdictions. There's nothing particularly unique in the sense of a jurisdiction wanting to have safe workplaces. Alberta doesn't want a safer workplace any more than Ontario, B.C., Prince Edward Island, or any of the other jurisdictions, but how do we measure what the performance is, then, of these particular jurisdictions? You have the workplace statistics.

When I talk to this group about the relationship of Alberta to P.E.I. and to Nova Scotia and other jurisdictions, I'm doing it in that context. It does not mean that we're complacent. It does not mean that we don't care. In fact, I would use what has become a theme, I believe, for this government, and that is: just because we're doing good doesn't mean that we can't do better. We will strive to do that. On the national scene and in any street and community in this province there is not a member of this government that needs to hang their head because of the safety record within this province.

The partnerships program, which is a voluntary program, has proved itself. The numbers are there to show that. We are strong advocates of the partnership program. We are constantly recruiting new companies and, more importantly perhaps, new industry associations into that particular program. Three thousand companies today. I don't know what that number is in terms of employees. I wish I did, and we'll provide that to you in an answer. Until we have 100 percent coverage, then we are leaving ourselves open and we're leaving ourselves susceptible to an overly hazardous work site. We are working continually on that. I don't know how many partnership certificates I sign. I don't sign them daily perhaps not even weekly, but I certainly do monthly. More and more of the companies are coming into that particular program. I believe it's been recognized by the union movement in this province as a way to go.

I can tell the hon. member that I have personal experience because I sat at the table of the Occupational Health and Safety Council when the partnerships program was first conceptualized and then as it moved forward and became implemented. On the Occupational Health and Safety Council at that time there were representatives of the public, representatives of employees, and I was there as a representative of the employers. While it wasn't unanimous, we had a majority and we had support from some of the more progressive unions within this province as we brought forward that program. It is successful, it is proving itself successful, and it'll be even more successful in the future. If I haven't been clear, I think it's a great program.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. I also have some questions, Mr. Chairman, for the hon. minister regarding labour relations in this province and the rate of work stoppages. It seems to me that we have a double standard. Sometimes the department is very anxious to get involved and, to their credit, successfully resolves situations. One that comes to mind certainly is the Calgary public school board. Whenever there was a mechanism within the Labour Relations Code, the disputes inquiry board specifically was used to resolve a dispute.

Now, in the same city we have the *Calgary Herald* workers. They've been on strike since November 8, and this is well past four months. We have a little bit of history that I think we have to go through now, Mr. Chairman, and that's that in 1935 the sister paper of the *Calgary Herald*, the *Edmonton Journal*, received a Pulitzer prize. They're very proud of this award. They have a recognition of

it in the lobby. In 1935 the government of this province, as I understand the history, passed a bill to limit freedom of the press.

MR. DUNFORD: It wasn't this government.

MR. MacDONALD: No, certainly not, but in 1935 the government of the day passed a bill, and I believe that the Lieutenant Governor at the time questioned this. However, you look at this situation and you look at the fact that one newspaper at one time stood up in defence of freedom. It was an internationally recognized award that they received.

Now we have, unfortunately, in Calgary a very divisive situation. I think it's evident that our labour laws are inadequate when this dispute cannot be resolved, and we have to change the way we're doing things. You can talk about having stable labour relations, but as I understand from the statistics that you quoted earlier in your opening remarks about time lost due to work stoppages in this province, the Safeway strike of three years ago would have been removed from those statistics, and I don't believe it is right if that has occurred. I know that in past years that was the situation.

Now, maybe under your direction it is different, but whenever you look at the percentage of the workforce in this province that's unionized, it is wrong to compare it to, say, Ontario or British Columbia, because they have higher rates of union participation in the workforce.

MR. DUNFORD: So what are you saying? That unions lead to labour disruption? Is that what you're saying?

MR. MacDONALD: No. What I'm saying is that whenever you have inadequate labour laws and labour laws that are not enforced, you do not have the stability in the workforce that you should have.

Specifically with the *Calgary Herald* strike, what initiatives has your department taken and what initiatives do they plan to take to resolve this dispute? It's a blight on the entire province, in my view. Thank you.

9:53

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I think you probably set the stage, anyway, for my answer in your last comment about it being your view. I respect that, and I respect that view. Committee members will know that you and I both come from different sides of the labour relations table, but both of us have been there. I think both of us understand that the incredible success that Alberta has had when you look at stable labour relations is from the fact that we have a system in place and we have a chairman and we have members and staff at the Labour Relations Board. We have a Ministry of Human Resources and Employment that tries to remain as unbiased as it possibly can in a situation. The law is there to assist both sides of a particular dispute to arrive at some sort of settlement.

People are free in this province to bargain collectively, and once they do, once they turn over that individual responsibility to the responsibility of another party, they then bear whatever fruits come with such a decision. I find it remarkable that a strike at the *Calgary Herald* garners as much interest as it does. Perhaps it's because it's a media outlet. There are other strikes in this province that of course have gone on longer that we don't hear quite so much about.

I personally have been misquoted about comments that I made at a public meeting. As a matter of fact, the hon. member in question period misquoted me in the sense of trying to relay to the public that this minister was unconcerned about the particular situation that is happening at the *Calgary Herald*. It certainly isn't the case. When we have a dispute, it is our intention and it's our mandate to do what we can to find the resolution to that particular dispute, and to that

end we have had mediation that has been involved. They're at the basic beck and call of either party or both parties. I don't know the actual experience, but I don't believe that you could cite one instance when both parties agreed to mediation where we have not been able to meet that request.

So you have a situation. I mean, the *Calgary Herald* continues to publish, but it is a dispute. It is impacting on our work-loss statistics. Once again I would refer to a comment that I made earlier and that is that in the area of labour relations when it comes to disruptions in the workplace, one has to have some measure. Again, the industry, which consists of both employers and organized groups such as unions, has developed over time a way in which to measure that. Based on that measurement, again, unless you are personally involved on one side of a particular situation, a reasonable and objective observer in looking at the labour scene in Alberta would say: ah, there is a stable labour relations jurisdiction.

The organized groups around the *Calgary Herald* situation are certainly welcome to continue to make their views known, but when I get a specific request that asks me to impose a first agreement, we will not do that. That would be in violation of the current act, and the current act is not now up for amendment in this session of the Legislature.

DR. MASSEY: If I could just change the subject from the *Herald*. I may need your help, Mr. Minister, with this. There was a concern about the wages between government workers and contract and community group workers. I believe the previous minister of family and social services was involved in a project or there was a group that was put together to look at those to make sure that when services were contracted out, those workers weren't working up to 45 percent less, I think was the figure I saw, than government workers. It was causing all kinds of difficulties with community groups and with service providers because there was a huge turnover, a 25 percent turnover, in their staff and competition for staff, and it was particularly acute in programs where they're working with aboriginal communities. I wondered what's happened since there's been the change in the responsibilities of the departments. Has that been picked up with your piece of those workers? What's the state of that project?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, it's a real concern. I agree with what you were saying in the sense that it caused a huge turnover amongst those community agencies, and they're not able to attract and retain adequate and skilled staff. We have to find ways in which to address that, and unless I'm missing something, we haven't addressed that specifically in this budget other than to provide the 4 percent increase. But as you have already indicated, all that does is exacerbate the spread, because the government classification schedule is higher and we're putting 4 percent against that, and the community agencies tend to be lower and we're putting 4 percent against that. So clearly what is happening is that we have a further increase in that spread. It would be our plan over the business plan cycle to try to deal with that situation, but we've not addressed it directly in the estimates that are in front of you. I do appreciate your bringing it forward because now we have it in *Hansard* as a concern and agreement, then, between you and I that it is and should be a concern. We have to find a way to address it.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks.

Can I jump back to persons unable to make personal care decisions and ask just for some information? How are their assets treated? The AISH individuals have a limit on assets. I'm not sure what the numbers are, but I wondered how the assets of those individuals are treated.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, you're talking about the public guardian here; are you not?

DR. MASSEY: Yes.

MR. DUNFORD: So it's the public guardian's responsibility then to administer support and service to that individual as programs would dictate. If the client has assets and if they are severely disabled and applying for AISH, then of course whatever assets they have would come into play, and if they're applying for some other type of program, then whatever the rules are that would govern that particular program. As I understand it, the public guardian itself doesn't provide them directly with a particular income as they look after them. It's their job to be responsible for that person and in a responsible way to go out and gain whatever is available to them through the various programs.

DR. MASSEY: Is there any obligation on the part of families, any financial obligation, as those people mature and become adults?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, we're into the technical details of that. We'll have to answer that in writing to you. I'm interpreting your question as being if the family has assets, what their responsibilities might be if they are not the guardian. We'll have to answer that in writing for you.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Minister, I come from both sides, actually running, managing companies with unions as well as those that I've had on my own and didn't have to have unions because we treated them well. I have a few concerns in my end of town. I've got a pocket which has, supposedly, the seventh highest unemployment in Canada, and that pocket copes with mental patients that are discharged into the community from Alberta Hospital as well as families where the husbands are in the maximum penitentiary, coming mostly right now from Winnipeg, being relocated from Stony Mountain and whatever. I do have a major concern about the amount of work we have in our office on a lot of these cases, mostly mental patients, so you know how my questions go in the House on that.

Our apprenticeship system in the province really needs a revamping and a look at the trades industry, that includes sheet metal, welding, and machinists that have run companies over a number of years. This is a place where we're really running short, looking at the manpower we need up in Fort McMurray. If we had been coping with it for the last six or seven years, maybe we wouldn't be sending as many job finders to Europe. I'm not knocking European workers coming over, because a number of the companies I worked with for years were 90 percent German immigrants who came over in the '50s and really developed the steel industry. We do need to really look at that.

10:03

The other one. I have a number of people calling the office who would like to get into some programs around computers that are one-year programs. Is there a funding program to help them out? There was at one time.

Given that we have our little sheets faxed out to us, as well as if you read *The Armet* or whatever, it always seems to be around the unemployment in Alberta. It's nice to see on paper what we look like, but in actual fact we have a number of people in the larger urban areas like Calgary that are homeless. Thirty-three percent are actually working joes that are making \$7 an hour. They can't make

enough money to pay the rents that are down there. Is that being looked at, given that the government has resolved that the unemployment rate is an important issue? It doesn't matter where you go. I was in Grande Prairie and Fairview in the last couple of days, and that was a concern up there too. With the shutting down of the alfalfa plant just outside and the receivership of the fibreboard plant, these people are not working anymore. It's an area that really needs something looked at.

I might have two more afterwards, but I'll stop here.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I think you touched on some excellent areas. I would refer back, of course, to my earlier comments when I talked about some of the vacancy rates that we have and where employers are unable to find the types of skills that they need.

We don't have direct responsibility for the apprenticeship program in Human Resources and Employment, but we certainly are supportive of the Department of Learning in the areas that they are trying to move forward in. I do have some experience in that particular area, and of course we had moved forward in a streamlining situation for apprenticeships in Alberta that, I believe, if it hasn't already, certainly will soon start to show some results. By way of interest for people looking at our budget estimates, we're actually sending over to Alberta Learning \$13.1 million for their budget to help them in that particular area.

I believe that our ministry and certainly in my responsibilities as the minister we've been very supportive of people moving into the skill trades. Here is another example of Alberta doing a good job but needing to do better: 9 percent of the population, yet we're indenturing, I believe, 19 percent of all of the apprentices in Canada. So we're certainly doing more than our share, but we're not altruistic about it. The fact is that we need those skills, so we're doing it for ourselves. I mean, we have a vested interest in a high-performance, streamlined apprenticeship program, so we're certainly going to be supportive in that particular area.

You raised a point about computer training. Again, while I don't have the specifics, we can answer that question for you in the written answers. Certainly we can see the change even in the so-called old economy, how they're developing computer technology. So I can't imagine that in any employment initiative these days we would not want to focus on some computer literacy. But we'll answer that question in more detail.

I want to make a comment though. I hadn't been involved in sort of constituency profiles of areas of concern, but a previous member did raise a point about how they had an antipoverty committee in their particular constituency, and my question was whether or not we could be of any assistance to that committee. It would seem from your comments that you have some unique situations in your constituency, as well, and I'd like to offer you the opportunity to perhaps come and talk to the deputy and myself about some specifics. Maybe there's some way in which we can help out.

MR. GIBBONS: One quick one just to get it on the record. With the lack of trades that we have in this province, I mean, it looks great to somebody from down east coming in and looking for a job. It's better than not having a job. The fact is that we need skilled people. The longer we wait – it's just no different than nursing or any other field. The average age is up there, whereas we should be building at the bottom. The average age for some of these programs, in sheet metal and in shop welding and that, should be 30 years old.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, for millwrights I understand that perhaps the average age there is something like 49, something like that. It really is a problem.

Again, you know, the success of the apprenticeship program over

the years has been in the involvement, then, at local levels. They've had local apprenticeship committees, they've got provincial apprenticeship committees, and then of course you have the full board.

As you know, as a government, as we've tried to move forward with some reform in other areas, you run into a fair amount of resistance. Frankly, in our attempt to streamline some of the apprenticeship programs, we're running into the same kinds of resistance at particular levels. I don't want to go too deeply into this because I'm getting anecdotal and I'm not the Minister of Learning, who is responsible. I would just ask people to recognize that when you have a problem in front of you and you know that reform has to happen, help us make some moves forward to see if we can address the situation. Don't simply stand in front of us as advocates and proponents of the status quo. Is it Einstein that said that true insanity is to keep doing the same things and expect different results?

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Chairman, at this time I have some more questions for the hon. minister regarding the Alberta Labour Relations Board. Earlier the hon. minister said that the labour board is as unbiased as it can be. I find this unusual. Has your department considered – I understand there's a modest increase in the budget for the Labour Relations Board – having a completely independent body make all appointments to the Labour Relations Board? There are many people who have complained to me, not just unions or their organizers but also management, about what they feel is unfairness with the labour board. In order to address this problem, I'm very interested to know if at any time there has been a study done to have the appointments made completely independent of your ministry, and by that I mean having an independent body do it.

MR. DUNFORD: Who would appoint the independent body? Would I as minister appoint the independent body? I mean, who? Somebody has to have final authority and, more importantly, responsibility. It would seem that has to rest with the minister.

MR. MacDONALD: We could quickly set up a mechanism so that these appointments could be made. As I said earlier, I think this is important, because there is a view – and it's not just a view by unions but by management as well, by employers – that this is not working in a timely fashion. We have to look at the issue of what they call unfairness.

MR. DUNFORD: What?

MR. MacDONALD: Unfair bargaining. Both parties would refer to it just simply as unfairness.

You have key performance measures here. You're talking about everything being done in a timely fashion regarding the certifications and whatnot, but unfair bargaining is not mentioned in there. There's a great deal of frustration in this. The previous minister of the day talked about this at length, but I don't see it mentioned in here. My question would be: why? Perhaps I'm not making myself clear.

MR. DUNFORD: No, I'm not clear.

MR. MacDONALD: The type of application. If, for instance, I were to go to the board with unfair bargaining, a complaint – okay? – you don't have in your key performance measures an indication as to how long you would like to see that before the board before it's resolved one way or the other. Why is that not in there?

10:13

MR. DUNFORD: I think that's an excellent question. We'll have to review your question, then, and respond in writing. I know that we work very hard in terms of trying to find a process that ensures the rights and obligations of both parties but also would deal with matters in a more expeditious way. The fact that you're pointing out that maybe we haven't put a performance measure to that I think is just an excellent comment.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay.

I also have another question, Mr. Chairman. This question is regarding the statistics that your department puts out on a monthly basis. In those statistics there's one category that I find particularly interesting now, and that is the category of health occupations. Is that full-time health occupations? The number of people who are working in the province in health occupations I believe at the end of January would have been 65,000 Albertans actively working. Are they working full-time? In that definition of health occupations, does that include physicians, registered nurses, LPNs, caregivers? If you could share that definition with us and how many of those individuals are working full-time or part-time, I would be very grateful.

MR. DUNFORD: We'll supply that. I would just think, off the top of my head, that it likely includes both full-time and part-time, because if it is only full-time, if we were to throw part-time in, then you can just imagine what a huge number that would be.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Would you have any idea, hon. minister, why there would be such a spike in this?

MR. DUNFORD: Such a which?

MR. MacDONALD: I guess I'm reading too many graphs. Why would there be such a spike in this? Two years ago there were 69,000 people employed in the health occupations, last year it went up to 71,000, and now – these are your statistics – it has gone down to 65,000, and that's a considerable spike. Do you have any idea why this would be occurring?

MR. DUNFORD: No, I don't. We'll answer in writing.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Thank you.

MR. GIBBONS: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman; maybe I'm going to duplicate a question that's already been asked, but what are the parameters for the review of the widows' pension program, what time lines and so on? Has that been asked so far?

MR. DUNFORD: It hasn't been asked, no. Are you aware that there's a human rights submission against the widows' pension? We are waiting to hear what that decision is, and until that time we are not reviewing the widows' pension.

MR. GIBBONS: You don't know the time lines and so on?

MR. DUNFORD: No. Human rights is under Community Development. I think it would be hazardous for me to try to influence one way or the other their particular programs, so I have not made any contact with human rights as to when they're going to hear that particular case.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Chairman, I have some questions now for

the hon. minister regarding employment standards and practices. Earlier the hon. minister said that education is better than enforcement. Well, I don't think that applies to the Employment Standards Code. We've had some horrible, horrible examples brought forward of how that system of voluntary compliance is not working, in particular in the service industry, the restaurant industry.

Many young Albertans are entering the workforce for the first time, and this is not a positive experience for them. They're not being paid their wages, their benefits, whether it's holiday pay or vacation pay, overtime if they're entitled to it. It is my view and it is a view that is held by many people across the province, particularly parents of these individuals, that in effect, by not enforcing the law, this is a subsidy to these businesses.

It is very difficult, for instance, if we have two restaurants on the same street, and one is abiding by the Employment Standards Code and one is not. If the one that is not knows that it can get around the law, how is the individual restaurateur that is abiding by the law to compete? It is very very difficult, because of course his or her costs are going to be so much greater. That's an issue from a small businessperson's point of view, but from the parent's point of view this is just a poor example for their children as they enter the workforce whenever they're getting ripped off by these unscrupulous employers, and it has to stop.

There is a case that's going through the courts I believe at the moment, but every month I uncover other examples, and this is because people are coming to the constituency office and openly complaining. This system of voluntary compliance is not working, and I want to know from the minister what the department is doing to ensure that this is cleaned up.

10:23

MR. DUNFORD: We are going to continue with voluntary compliance. We are educators, not enforcers. I think I talked about that in terms of occupational health and safety. Having said that, we're perhaps the most enforcement-related jurisdiction in western Canada in the sense that we take more cases to court than your socialist brethren in B.C. and Saskatchewan.

You mentioned particularly the restaurant industry. I believe you're aware – and if you're not, this is a great opportunity for me to make you aware. We currently have seconded one of the members of our staff with the Restaurant and Foodservices Association. They recognize that they have members in their industry that, just for the same reasons you talked about – and I agree with you one hundred percent. We should not have two restaurants on the same street, one that is abiding by the law and another one that is violating the law, and do nothing about it. I categorically reject your assertion that we do nothing about it.

I would invite you at some point to join me over in Sterling Place and have a look at our phone setup there and the number of calls – you know, we're a hell of a lot busier than you are at your constituency office, believe me. I don't know what the calls per day are, but we receive perhaps 300 or maybe more than that. We are providing information. Our law requires that information be posted at the work site, and young people can read. Also, their parents know when they're not being treated fairly, and they can come forward. We take anonymous calls in this particular area. Normally we don't like anonymous calls creating some response on our part, but in this case it is my understanding that we do. We will check into this area.

We have targeted specific businesses that have had problems in the past. We know who they are – perhaps you do too – and we are monitoring them. We've even gone so far as auditing them, and when they comply and show that they have changed, then we're willing to back off, because they obviously have been educated. When they don't, we take them to court. I don't know what more we

would do other than be more of a police state, and again I say that the philosophy of this minister and thus this ministry is one of education as far as possible but enforcement when necessary.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Mr. Chairman, if I could get the hon. minister to clarify one statement. Are you telling me that occupational health and safety rules and regulations are posted in work sites across this province?

MR. DUNFORD: I thought your question was dealing with employment standards.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. Pardon me. Employment standards rules and regulations.

MR. DUNFORD: I believe that it's the responsibility of the employer to post them. There are selected groupings, but that's to be posted in a manner that can be seen and can be read by their employees. If I am misleading you and other members of this committee and readers of *Hansard* on that point, we will then make it clearer, and I'll make a public statement in the House. But it is my belief as I sit here that the employer is obligated under the Employment Standards Code to post specific regulations in the workplace.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. And if that's incorrect, you will make a statement?

MR. DUNFORD: I will.

MR. MacDONALD: That's fair enough. Okay. Thank you.

Now, I also have a question regarding the Auditor General's report from last September. There were three recommendations in there regarding the department of family and social services. I'm pleased to see that two of the recommendations, specifically 31 and 33, have been accepted, but recommendation 32 in the report by the Auditor General . . .

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Chairman, I don't have that document in front of me.

MR. MacDONALD: I can provide you with the document if you would like.

MR. DUNFORD: That's fine. If he provides it, then I'll answer the question. Otherwise, I believed this to be estimates, and I didn't come with it.

MR. MacDONALD: Well, that's okay. That's in the business plan. I'll just read this into the record, Mr. Chairman. Recommendation 32:

It is recommended that the Department of Health and Wellness ensure that services to children with developmental disabilities continue to be provided in accordance with existing legislative authority and that such services should not be provided under the Persons With Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act unless and until the Act is amended to extend its provisions to children.

Now, it was accepted in principle by the government, but could the minister elaborate – and we can do this by letter if he so chooses – on what discussions are going on between family and social services and other ministries in the government regarding this?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, the hon. member is bringing forward a recommendation that applies to the Department of Health and Wellness, and also to some extent, I suppose, there is a spillover into

our area in the sense that many of these people are likely to be on AISH. The responsibility for the so-called PDD boards, the persons with developmental disabilities boards, belongs in that jurisdiction. I suppose I could give a personal comment, if they wish, but I believe that it's more appropriate that that question be directed to the minister responsible.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm going to suggest that if you do wish to make a comment, feel free, but I don't believe that this is specifically addressed to the estimates that we're supposed to be dealing with at this committee anyway. If you want to comment, if there is any reflection from your department, go ahead since the question has been asked.

MR. DUNFORD: No. I think that would just chew up time that the members might need for questions on our ministry, so I'll ask for the next question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. I'm going to remind members that there are seven minutes left in the opposition's time period.

MR. MacDONALD: I had more questions on WCB, but I'd better get my Auditor General's book back, please.

DR. MASSEY: Could I ask about the tracking of social service recipients after they're off the program? Can you give us an update?

MR. DUNFORD: We read into the record earlier in my comments that 70 percent of the people who complete our programs are not on welfare a year later, so we would want people to understand that we consider our social services as temporary support and that this would indicate to us, then, that we have a 70 percent success rate. Now, on how they're monitored, we'll have to respond in writing, because I don't know all of the criteria that they would use in order to develop this number.

DR. MASSEY: It would be interesting to know where they are and what they're doing.

Related to that, a number of social service recipients were put into loans programs and into postsecondary or vocational programs. Has there been any tracking of the success of those recipients?

10:33

MR. DUNFORD: I don't know if that's in the Minister of Learning's business plan, but we can also respond, then, to that question.

DR. MASSEY: It's quite a heavily used program, I think, in terms of accessing student loans.

MR. DUNFORD: I think we both agree that that was a good thing to do.

DR. MASSEY: It was?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes.

DR. MASSEY: I guess any success is success in that.

We're down to the last few minutes, so go ahead, Hugh.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Chairman, I have some questions for the hon. minister regarding the Workers' Compensation Board. I cannot find it in here, but am I still to understand that the WCB submits \$6 million to occupational health and safety?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. I think it's six; is it not? I'm getting the nod. It's \$6 million.

MR. MacDONALD: That's still occurring? Okay.

Another question. I'm curious as to whether the department is monitoring the payments that the WCB is making to private contractors who are being utilized to rehabilitate injured workers. The Auditor General has made some comments on this. I guess, from what I can understand, there are some billing practices that are not up to code, if I could use that word. What are the minister and the officials in the department doing to correct this?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I'm aware that that is a matter of some concern with the board of directors of WCB and that they have been investigating that particular issue. They have not made a direct request for me as the minister to be involved. On whether or not we have taken an active role in that, I'll have to respond in writing, because I'm not aware of any direct involvement on our part.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay.

Now, I have another question related to the Workers' Compensation Board. That has to do, of course, with 85 percent of people being very satisfied, I'm told, with the compensation board and how their claim is adjudicated, but there are 15 percent who are not. I understand there are hon. members of the Assembly in the process of setting up a consultation process, and I wish them success, but why in the minister's view are these 15 percent of injured Albertans having such difficulty? If this system is as good as everyone tells me it is, why is this happening?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I think you've hit on an excellent point, and we have to find out. To that end what I've been able to do – I'm going to use the word "I" here perhaps a little more than I have in other answers. I have taken this matter very, very seriously, and to that end I would like to talk about some of the things that have been done, because the committee members might not be aware of the enormity of the review that is currently under way of workers' compensation. If they are generally aware, they might be interested in some of the details.

First of all, the Workers' Compensation Board has had a consultation process that's been going on for a couple of years. They were looking at some specifics, and it came to my attention as I worked with injured workers, with some of their associations – and of course "worked" might not be the proper use of wordage either. In many cases they were clearly and quite overtly and, in some cases, raucously presenting their issues, so I determined that with this much smoke we better find out whether there's any fire. I've maintained a position, I believe, where I have been unbiased. I have not been an apologist for the WCB, and I've not been an advocate for an injured worker. They have their own advocacy groups, and many of them, as the hon. member probably knows, are quite capable of advocating their situation very articulately.

What I was able to do, then, really boils down to three main initiatives. The first one was to work with the board of directors of the WCB to actually add a service review to the consultation that they already had. The idea there is to make sure that the philosophy and the policy of WCB are actually being carried out in the procedures as cases are dealt with, then, within the Workers' Compensation Board. Now, also to that end, because I believe that MLAs are in an excellent position to have some understanding of the suffering that has taken place amongst individual Albertans, they are in an excellent position to provide input to that service committee.

Then I got to thinking: well, you know, there are 83 of us, and if 83 try to go individually – you know, maybe there is a better way. So to that end I put together a government input committee, that is being chaired by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, and there are other members from the government side that are on that committee.

It's their job to receive information, to distill it as best they can, and then to make recommendations not only to me but to the Workers' Compensation Board on how the service to injured workers in Alberta might be improved.

Now, I believe that I've acted on your behalf and I believe that I've acted on behalf of all of the Alberta MLAs, because I was able to get agreement from the board of directors of the Workers' Compensation Board that MLAs are stakeholders. So as an individual member and as an opposition member you have two avenues now open to you that might not have been as open to you six months ago, and that is that you can go directly to the board with your thoughts and your observations and your recommendations, or you can also make a presentation to the input committee.

The third and last initiative, which is as important as the other two, is the Appeals Commission, that has been set up to look into how the appeal situation operates, into whether or not natural justice is being served – we believe it is, but it should be checked – and perhaps more importantly whether or not the Appeals Commission is acting as independently as it can, given the current structure, or whether there is a better reporting mechanism to some other minister. That is all up for review as we sit today. The committee is in place. Sam Friedman is a retired justice and has an impeccable reputation throughout this province. We've been able to convince Bob Blakely, who is a respected labour leader in this province, to be part of that committee. We have the president of the Alberta Construction Association. We have a public member from Calgary and we have an MLA liaison, and they will be reporting to me – I believe we have it in the terms of reference – sometime in September.

I believe that through the operation of these three reviews, for something that might not be broken but looks like it is broken, then the perception will be enhanced, or if something is broken, then it will be fixed. I'm very, very optimistic, as we move now into this next century, about the Workers' Compensation Board in Alberta.

10:43

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm reluctant to interrupt at this point. The two

hours that we had originally approved at the beginning of the meeting have now elapsed. As a matter of fact, we're a few minutes past that. Since the minister was actually speaking when the time flipped over the two-hour time frame, we won't name anyone else.

I would really like to commend the members who did the questioning up to this point and the minister for the way that this was handled. It was a little bit informal. Nevertheless, I think it was a good method of communicating, and it also made it very easy for the chair not to have to be a referee.

The remainder of the time we have now is available to the government members. As the minister said at the beginning of the meeting, government members do have opportunity to question or grill or by whatever form they wish to use on many of these issues either through the standing policy committee process or some of our discussions in our caucus. I expect that the number, if any, and the intensity of the questions for the remainder of the time necessary will be somewhat less than it was for the first half of this meeting.

With that, I will ask if there are any questions from government members. If not, then we require a motion to conclude the discussion and to rise and report.

DR. MASSEY: Could I just thank the minister and the committee for the format and the answers? It went very, very well, and we really do appreciate that kind of help.

THE CHAIRMAN: I appreciate you indicating that on the record.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you. I appreciate it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Could we have a motion to conclude discussions and to rise and report? Moved by Tom Thurber. All in favour? The motion is carried. We stand adjourned.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:45 a.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 13, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/13

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Welcome back.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask You, Father, to renew and strengthen in us the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of this Legislature. We ask You also in Your divine providence to bless and protect the Assembly and the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members, would you please remain standing so that we might now all participate in the singing of our national anthem. I'll call on Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us.

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

Thank you. Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

MR. WHITE: Sir, I rise on behalf of 209 citizens of Edmonton, St. Albert, and Stony Plain to present a petition that in part reads that they urge "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted this afternoon to present a petition signed by 292 fellow Calgarians. This petitions "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to present to the Assembly a petition signed by 178 residents of Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert. They are urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to present a petition to the Assembly signed by 142 residents of Alberta from Edmonton, St. Albert, Leduc, Fort Saskatchewan, Devon, and Mayerthorpe. All of these citizens are urging "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to present a petition signed by 111 Edmontoni-

ans which urges "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition today signed by 302 people from the Edmonton, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, and Fort Saskatchewan areas. That brings just today's total to over 1,200. This petition is urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition calling on this Assembly "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained." This petition is signed by 1,111 Albertans and includes 841 signatures collected by Melissa Johnson, a graduate student in health promotion at the University of Alberta. Of these 841, 244 are residents of Lac La Biche and area. In five days Ms Johnson has collected 1,176 signatures.

THE SPEAKER: Okay, hon. member.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MR. BONNER: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would ask that the petition I presented to the Legislature last week be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, request that the petition I put forward the other day now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition in respect to support for public health care that I introduced on March 9, 2000, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would request that the petition I presented on March 9 regarding private health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition I presented on March 9 urging the government to stop promoting private health care be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the petition I tabled last Thursday now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I tabled last Thursday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully request that the petition I tabled Thursday last regarding the support of public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Introduction of Bills

Bill 14

Alberta Treasury Branches Amendment Act, 2000

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce Bill 14, the Alberta Treasury Branches Amendment Act, 2000.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, will streamline the operations of the Alberta Treasury Branches, and it'll bring the financial institution more in line with the processes and standards for other banks and financial institutions. Basically, it will transfer responsibility for appointment and recruitment of the CEO to the board of directors. It will change the year-end to October 31 and provides for the

treatment of unclaimed balances as recommended by the Auditor General.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

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

1:40

Bill 15

Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave today to introduce Bill 15, being the Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000.

The Business Corporations Amendment Act will strike a better balance between protecting the rights of shareholders and creditors and also at the same time supporting legitimate business transactions and lending transactions of corporations.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 15 be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. First of all, I wish to table five copies of a letter from me to the Prime Minister of Canada indicating to him that the conduct of his Health minister in Calgary last week was a disgrace to him and his government.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I wish to table two copies of two letters dated September 30, 1999, from the Hon. Allan Rock, one to our minister of health and the other to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, both urging the Alberta government to hurry up and pass legislation similar to Bill 37.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of a CBC radio transcript from December 1999 in which the same minister, Allan Rock, says that he has no problem with the sale of enhanced services to patients at the private King's centre clinic in Ontario.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of an October 18, 1990, *Edmonton Journal* story headlined "Federal cuts undermine health system - minister: Betkowski slams 'backing out'."

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got 11 letters to table today. Five of these are from Hinton, six are from Edmonton, and all of them are opposed to Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two sets of tablings. The first are letters from Gary Buxton and Eva Zidek of Canmore and Wendy Ehlers and Lorraine Cooper of Calgary. They are letters to the Premier, and they are opposing the Spray Lakes development in Kananaskis Country.

My second tabling is copies of over 60 signatures from people throughout Edmonton who are opposed to the development in Kananaskis Country. This petition has been previously tabled with the minister.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a report compiled by Mr. Brad Severin, who is the senior tax manager for BDO Dunwoody. This report compares taxes paid under the existing tax-on-tax policy versus the Treasurer's proposed 11 percent flat tax. What it shows is that there is an Alberta disadvantage at the \$35,000, \$50,000, and \$65,000 income levels.

Mr. Speaker, the second is a report that is titled Business Losses under Stockwell Day. That's the title of the report. What it does is chronicle that there are \$409.9 million worth of business losses that have been racked up under this Treasurer, or equal to the amount of \$378,000 per day that has been lost.

Thank you.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling a report by Steven Shrybman, solicitor, with regards to a legal opinion concerning NAFTA investment and services: disciplines and proposals by Alberta to privatize the delivery of certain insured health care services. This report was requested by the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Thank you.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today. I'd like to table appropriate copies of three different letters from citizens objecting to Bill 11: Gordon Inglis, Dr. Ede, and Ms Karen Schuster.

My second tabling here is five copies of an article on barrier-free building design and handicapped parking that was contained in the last status report on persons with disabilities. The article, in my opinion, written by a very bright, young architect specializing in barrier-free design, solves the dilemma with handicapped parking.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table this afternoon copies of a letter to the hon. Minister of Learning dated January 27, 2000, from the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta with respect to the future of the Sainte Marguerite Bourgeoys school and the Francophone program in that school.

Thank you.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of brochures to table today on the Trans Canada Trail Relay 2000. This is an exciting millennium event that the Leader of the Official Opposition and I attended in Fairview yesterday, March 12, 2000. The brochure says: "Come out and be a part of the Trans Canada Trail Relay 2000 as it makes its way through your community." This is a 16,100 kilometre trail that connects Canada from the Arctic Ocean to the Pacific and to the Atlantic Ocean with the longest multi-use pathway of its kind in the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table five copies of a report that was prepared by an Alberta injured worker in which he requests clarification on questions and concerns from the chairman of the board. This would be involving the Workers' Compensation Act, its policies and its procedures.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair has three tablings today. The first is five copies of a message for Commonwealth Day, March 13, 2000, The Communications Challenge, from Her Majesty the Queen, Head of the Commonwealth.

As well, the appropriate number of copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Red Deer-South requesting that Bill 202, the Marriage Amendment Act, 2000, be brought to third reading on Tuesday, March 14, 2000, and the appropriate copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore requesting that Bill 205, Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000, be brought to Committee of the Whole on Tuesday, March 14, 2000.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Dr. Anne Marie Decore, wife of the late Laurence Decore, and their son Michael. These two guests and other members of the Decore family including Laurence's brother Leighton and his wife, Bev, and Michael's fiancée, Gill, are with us this afternoon following the announcement of the Laurence Decore awards for student leadership. This is a \$50,000 scholarship named in memory of Laurence. I know I speak for all members when I welcome these honoured guests and thank them for being here today. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Forestry.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 23 bright students from the Boyle school in my constituency. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Corrine Sachko and Mrs. Emily Thomson, by Mr. Carl Parson, the bus driver, and by parents Mr. Dave Madoche, Mrs. Fran Anderson, Mrs. Doris Splane, Mrs. Suzanne Berube, Mrs. Linda Kuraitis, and Mrs. Karen Turner. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislative Assembly 43 energetic students from John Barnett school in northeast Edmonton. I had the pleasure of attending their DARE program graduation last month. They are accompanied by two teachers, Mr. Tony Kimble, grade 6; Mr. Barry French, grade 5/6 split, and by helpers Mrs. Shirley Zubick and Mrs. Wanda DeWolfe. They're in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd like that they now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to introduce 25 students and a teacher, Mrs. Lorraine Williamson, from St. Gerard school in the constituency of Edmonton-Norwood. The grade 6 class is here to spend a week at school at the Legislature. They are off to a good start, and we hope to see lots of them during the week. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My guests will be coming in at 2 o'clock and leaving before the end of question period. So if I may let everyone know that the seniors from Spruce Grove are here today on a tour that they are very much enjoying, and they will be in the gallery later. I will relay that the Assembly has given them warm greetings.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of guests to introduce today. The first one is Ms Kathaleen Quinn. She is seated in your gallery, I understand, and her students who are in social work at Grant MacEwan Community College are seated in the public gallery. I'll ask Ms Quinn and her students to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second set of guests are Ms Tena Wiebe, who is my constituent, and Melissa Johnson, a graduate student at the University of Alberta, who has been collecting a huge number of signatures opposing Bill 11. I think they are seated in the public gallery. I'll again ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a longtime friend who is here today as an Edmontonian, not in his role as a newspaper columnist. I would ask Mr. Hicks on Six, Graham Hicks, to stand, but he's on crutches due to a broken bone. Apparently he was trying to stomp on frozen grapes. Anyhow, if you would wave, Mr. Hicks, and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives from three very distinguished groups. They are here today in the public gallery for the introduction of the Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000. They represent stakeholders from their professions, as well as many other business interests that depend on their services. I am pleased through their diligence, hard work, and professionalism that we found unanimous consent with respect to dealing with the amendments in this Business Corporations Amendment Act. With us today are Peter Lown, director of the Alberta Law Reform Institute; Janice Henderson-Lypkie, counsel from the Alberta Law Reform Institute; Andy Hladyshevsky from the Alberta Law Society, who serves as chair of the business corporations act committee; and Wayne Kauffman, associate

executive director of Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta. Accompanying them in the gallery is Bob Foord, director of policy and planning with Alberta Government Services. I request that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. First, it is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Jim Salahub and his granddaughters Kimberly, Courtney, and Ashley, who are visiting the Assembly and the Legislature today. They are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

It is my extreme pleasure to introduce another national championship team from the University of Alberta. With us today seated in the members' gallery are seven members of the University of Alberta Panda women's hockey team. This year they won their third – I repeat, third – Canada West championship and their first national championship in only their third year of existence. We can be proud of these students for their athletic prowess, but we can also be proud of them for their academic achievements. Last year the U of A led the country with 79 academic all-Canadians and has done so for seven of the last eight years. I would ask Shelley Reynolds, Danielle Nystrom, Frances Castle, Lori Shupak, Stacey McCullough, Trish Dubyk, and Erin Kuzyk to stand, and through you, Mr. Speaker, I invite members to join me in recognizing these fine athletes by giving them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

It is also my pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to introduce on behalf of the Member for Calgary-West some of her constituents who were visiting in Edmonton and St. Albert this weekend and who are here this afternoon at the Legislature. Mr. Chuck Fowler and his son Bryan Fowler from Calgary-West, and Gloria Allen, who lives in St. Albert, and her daughters Kari and Katie Allen are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask these friends of government to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, it gives me tremendous pleasure today to introduce to you a guest visiting from the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. I would ask that Karen Sevcik please rise and be acknowledged by the Assembly. Amongst her many other responsibilities Karen is the president of the Edmonton-Glenora Liberal Constituency Association.

head: Ministerial Statements

Laurence Decore Awards for Student Leadership

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta's Alberta heritage scholarship fund finances and administers a number of awards that are named after great Albertans. Recently Premier Klein expressed his desire to include the late Laurence Decore in their prestigious ranks. Earlier this afternoon, with the support of Dr. Anne Marie Decore, we saw that idea come to fruition.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure all of the members of this Assembly will agree that Mr. Decore was a passionate and dedicated leader and a true champion of our province. That's why the Laurence Decore awards for student leadership are such a fitting tribute to him.

Throughout his career Laurence Decore served as an alderman, a mayor, an MLA, a well-known proponent of multiculturalism, a party leader, and a Leader of the Opposition. He was well respected and admired by people across this province. He was a good leader and a strong leader. His contribution to Alberta and his spirit will not be forgotten.

The Laurence Decore awards for student leadership will distribute

\$50,000 worth of scholarships each year, and every year it will be shared by 100 Alberta postsecondary students. I'm very proud that this government is honouring Mr. Decore by recognizing our student leaders. These awards will recognize postsecondary students who have demonstrated their leadership skills through participation in student government or other school- or community-based organizations.

As seems only fitting for a leadership award, Mr. Speaker, the recipients must be nominated by their peers, the people who respect their abilities, like we as his political opponents or political compatriots have respected Laurence Decore's notable skill and drive.

Mr. Speaker, our current student leaders are our future leaders. I am pleased that we are able to offer them this support while honouring Laurence Decore, a man whose energy and political prowess gave Alberta so much.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the creation of the Laurence Decore awards for student leadership. I welcome the presence of Mrs. Laurence Decore, Anne Marie, their son Michael, and his fiancée, Gill, and Leighton and Bev Decore, the brother and sister-in-law of the late Laurence Decore.

Laurence was a very respected man in this province. Some of his major accomplishments have been noted by the minister of education, including his work as a successful lawyer, mayor, Leader of the Official Opposition, leader of the Alberta Liberal Party, and valued member of the community. Laurence was proud to say he was a Liberal, and his leadership attracted many supporters. He was a true Liberal, believing in justice and equality for all. He fought for public health care and public education, and it is right to honour his memory.

The creation of this award recognizes these values and Laurence's accomplishments. Laurence Decore loved Alberta. It was his home, and it was one of his passions to see the province strong. Laurence loved Canada, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms bears his mark in protecting the multicultural strength of our nation. It is fitting that these awards be bestowed on those students who show the same kind of leadership for which Laurence was renowned.

It is my hope that some of the students who are awarded these scholarships will go on to provide this province and our country with the valued legacy and public leadership that Laurence was able to do in his lifetime.

On behalf of the Official Opposition I thank the government for the honouring of this award upon Mr. Decore and his family.

head: Oral Question Period

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are learning the truth about the Premier and about this government through the reckless experiment with private health care. Albertans just don't trust this Premier any more when it comes to health care. Right here on March 7 through the *Hansard* record the Premier told us: "We heard from medical professionals". Well, he may have heard, but he certainly didn't listen, because the Alberta Medical Association came out last week and said that Bill 11 won't work. Which medical professionals did the Premier consult with?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we will continue to consult with the AMA, and we appreciate their comments. As a matter of fact, that's

what the whole exercise is about. That's why the bill is out there to about 3 million Albertans, including the medical profession, to get their comments. Hopefully, in the not too distant future, I'll have the opportunity with the Minister of Health and Wellness to sit down with the executive of the AMA to determine exactly what they want in terms of amendment.

I would point out that the AMA didn't reject Bill 11. They want amendments, but they haven't said which ones. As I mentioned earlier, we put the bill out to receive input and look forward to receiving the suggestions of the AMA relative to the amendments they want. I've said all along that we are open to amendments, and I would also like to point out that the AMA position statement supports our view that "contracting is, and will continue to be, an integral component of the publicly-funded health care system." That is a direct quote.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, earlier the College of Physicians and Surgeons said that hip replacements would not be allowed in the Premier's private hospitals. So, again, which medical professionals did the Premier consult?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the College of Physicians and Surgeons said quite clearly that there is a need to put clear rules in place to govern and control surgical facilities. I would remind the leader of the Liberal opposition that Allan Rock used to say this, too, before he reversed his position. As a matter of fact, in September, as I pointed out in my tabling of 1999, he wrote to the college and to our health minister urging us to pass a law similar to Bill 37. Well, this Bill 11 is a bill that is similar to Bill 37, but it goes a lot further in terms of protecting the public health care system as we know it today.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, doctors don't like it, economists don't like it, and Albertans don't like it, so are only the people that the Premier consulted on his private hospitals bill the troika of Dinning, Davis, and Love in Calgary?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of people who don't like what other people seem to like as a proposal or proposition to fix the health care system, the AMA does not like what the leader of the Liberal opposition says. This is a quote from a newspaper article: Alberta Liberals said Wednesday they would prevent doctors from working in both the public and private health care systems, but the idea has been described by the Alberta Medical Association as a disaster for Albertans. I think that that quote is attributable to the leader of the Liberal opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is clearly experimenting with the health care system and pushing ahead with private health care despite the objections of physicians, economists, small business, religious leaders, students, seniors, and citizens living in rural Alberta, people from all over our province and from all walks of life. He thinks he knows what's best for Alberta no matter what the evidence, but Albertans don't trust this Premier. Why should Albertans believe the Premier's health care scheme when students in our province are taking time from their studies to protest this legislation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, protest is a fundamental part of democracy. If we were afraid of this bill, we wouldn't send it out to every household in this province to receive comment, whether it's through protest or whether it's through reasonable discussion and reasonable debate of the issue, whether it's coffee shop talk or

protests outside the Legislature or the comments of the AMA, the comments of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, or the comments of anyone for that matter, even the comments of the Liberal party. It's out there for everyone to see and for everyone to comment on.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the bill is true. The bill is absolutely true. There was one error in the bill. That was an honest error. It's being corrected.

Mr. Speaker, if you want to talk about propaganda, this is propaganda, again I presume at taxpayers' expense. This is propaganda where it says that the Klein government wants to introduce two-tiered, American style health care into Alberta. That is fear mongering. That is propaganda. That is simply not true. What is fueling the emotions of Alberta is this kind of malicious information, this kind of Liberal propaganda.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, students and others have actually read the bill, and they think, along with other Albertans, that the Premier should withdraw it. When will the Premier consider withdrawing the bill?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the bill won't be withdrawn, but if there are reasonable amendments that can be introduced to address concerns that could come about as a result of a consensus, then certainly we will consider that, just as we will consider the concerns of the Alberta Medical Association. They have said that the bill in its present form is not acceptable to them. They would like to see some amendments. We would like to see the amendments that they propose. I understand that the deputy minister of health has been in touch with the executive of the AMA. We have said to them in a very reasonable way: tell us what you want in terms of amendments, and we'll sit down and discuss it.

2:10

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the question I received last night in Fairview at a town meeting was: why is the Premier experimenting with our public health care system? Can the Premier answer that for the people of Fairview?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no experimenting going on here.

AN HON. MEMBER: Final answer?

MR. KLEIN: Final answer. You know, this is not how to be a millionaire, Mr. Speaker. This is serious business. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, there are no private hospitals. I just heard some of the chippering and yittering over there talking about private hospitals. The bill says that "no person shall operate a private hospital" in this province.

Getting back to the question, there is no experimenting. I remind the leader of the Liberal opposition that when she was the health minister, there were 37 private surgical clinics opened and operating under her watch, Mr. Speaker. Was that experimenting at that particular time? Since then, about 10 more have opened up. All this legislation does is set down rules and regulations for the conduct and the operation of surgical clinics, something the Leader of the Opposition failed to do when she was the health minister.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, one of Alberta's leading moral leaders, Bishop Henry of Calgary, spoke out against Bill 11. He said amongst other things, and I quote, that private hospitals promise only an array of new problems, end quote. No solutions, just more

problems. My questions are to the Premier. What is the Premier's answer to Bishop Henry's objections to Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I'm sure that if Bishop Henry wants to phone either myself or the Minister of Health and Wellness, he will find out, and we will reiterate to him that there is no proposal whatsoever in Bill 11 that would allow a person or corporation to operate a private hospital.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is the Premier saying that Bishop Henry and physicians and economists and students and seniors and Albertans are all wrong?

MR. KLEIN: No, they are not all wrong, Mr. Speaker. That's why we sent out the bill. That's why we sent Bill 11 to 1 million households in this province, to get their comments, to get the comments, the wisdom, the guidance of good-thinking Albertans relative to this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, people throughout this country, including the federal Minister of Health, including all the Premiers, including all the provincial ministers of health talk about change. They talk about change. This government is the only government actually doing something to bring about change and to bring it about within the parameters and the confines of the Canada Health Act and to do it within the parameters of Alberta health care and the publicly funded system as we know it today. We are the only government with the courage to actually bring about change.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier deal with the real problems which he's created in health care and stop this reckless experiment before he destroys the public health care system?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, this leader of the Liberal opposition, this hon. member should know more than anyone else what has brought about change. She commissioned, when she was minister of health, The Rainbow Report, which talked about meeting the challenges of an aging population, which talked about the need for the regionalization of the health care system. We did that, and we're doing that right now. And we did it politically. We didn't send our bureaucrats out into the field to do the work for us. We did it ourselves as MLAs.

MRS. MacBETH: Point of order.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition talks about churches. Well, this brochure, this piece of propaganda was found in a church pew. It was found in a church pew. I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of these pamphlets are out there at taxpayers' expense. We can't FOIP the Liberal opposition, so we can't find out, you know, what prompted it. But I can tell you that what's in this brochure is absolutely false.

It says that seven years of cutbacks, layoffs of health care professionals, and widespread closures of beds, operating rooms, entire hospitals set the stage for private health care. That is an absolute untruth. That is false. That is misleading. That is the malicious kind of misinformation that I'm talking about. That is pure propaganda, because the Liberals know as well as anyone else that we have increased funding to health care by almost 40 percent, and we have included in budgets and our business planning over the next three years money to hire some 2,400 new frontline workers, including physicians.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. interim leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has lost the trust of Albertans when it comes to its private, for-profit hospitals scheme. A 42-page legal opinion released earlier today on the NAFTA implications of Bill 11 strikes another blow to the credibility of this government. Canada's medical system is being threatened by this government's reckless scheme to privatize health care. My questions are to the Premier. Why does the government keep claiming that Bill 11 is NAFTA-proof when the just-published legal opinion by a well-known trade expert as well as studies released by economists, doctors, and other public interest groups over the last few weeks indicate that the NAFTA exposure will be the most serious threat posed if this Bill 11 is passed by this government?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity of meeting with two representatives of the Canadian Union of Public Employees in Calgary about two and a half, three weeks ago, one of whom was Mr. Mutton, who's the head of the Alberta branch of CUPE. They told me that they had hired a lawyer and some economists to prepare this document, so I would consider this as being a paid political opinion by CUPE and by a CUPE-commissioned lawyer. I indicated at that time – and they have expressed a willingness to co-operate – that we would be delighted to have our lawyers sit down with their lawyers and discuss the finer points of the NAFTA agreement.

We have our own NAFTA experts, including officials who were involved in the original NAFTA discussions, and I can tell you that there is nothing in Bill 11 that exposes us under NAFTA.

I will have the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations explain further.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Shrybman is the executive director of the Vancouver-based West Coast Environmental Law association, and he has done a number of papers on environmental law and international agreements. I have a copy of this document as well. Obviously it was released this morning, so I have had a first look at it. Mr. Speaker, there is nothing in this document that suggests that there is any danger to us under NAFTA in Bill 11. In fact, the carve-out, which is discussed in here, was negotiated by the government of Canada, and it does protect the health and social services sector. I tabled in this House about 10 days ago an actual copy of the carve-out.

2:20

As the Premier indicated, Mr. Speaker, we have experts here who were involved in the actual negotiations, who were at the table, and who were ensuring that the province of Alberta's interests were protected. We are confident today that our experts are right and that there is no threat under NAFTA in Bill 11. There is no basis for that.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the government is so sure that Bill 11 will not threaten the future of Canada health care, will this government make its own legal opinion public in full and without any further delay? If the Premier is so sure that Bill 11 won't have negative implications under NAFTA, I challenge him to release that information to the public.

MR. KLEIN: Fine, Mr. Speaker. I have no problem doing that whatsoever. If the hon. member would please extend the courtesy of giving us a reasonable amount of time to look at the opinion of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, we'll be glad to provide an opinion relative to our position on NAFTA as it affects the

delivery of health care in this province. We'd be glad to make that public, absolutely.

Speaker's Ruling Legal Opinions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, *Beauchesne* 408(1)(c) reads, "Such questions should . . . not require an answer involving a legal opinion." Section 410 reads, "Questions should not seek a legal opinion or inquire as to what legal advice a Minister has received."

Carry on, hon. member.

Private Health Services (continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In that case I'll ask another question of the Premier. How can a government that can't even put out an accurate householder be trusted to accurately assess the NAFTA implications of its private, for-profit hospital scheme?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there was the mistake of one line on one sidebar. I know that this hon. member was a university professor. I know that he is a very learned individual, but will he stand up and say that he is absolutely exempt from making a mistake, that he has never made a mistake in his life? Will you stand up and say that, that you're absolutely perfect?

Mr. Speaker, one line. It was a printer's mistake. We apologized for that. It was an honest mistake, unlike the deliberate, vicious, misleading, malicious misinformation that's in this brochure. That is deliberate.

The mistake in the bill was an honest mistake. It was one line leading to the wrong section.

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

Family Violence

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Victims of family violence need to have trust in the legal system. They need to know that their complaints will be investigated in a fair and impartial manner. As a survivor of domestic violence I like many others was shocked to read in the *Edmonton Journal* on March 11 the two articles concerning the promotion of an RCMP officer who was convicted of assault causing bodily harm to his wife. That officer is now responsible to supervise investigations into family violence issues. My questions are to the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General. What kind of treatment would a victim of domestic assault receive within an RCMP section led by an officer who choked his own wife until she was rendered unconscious?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess the initial answer to that is that that question calls for speculation on my part as to what type of treatment they would receive, but I would like to say a couple of things in response to the question. First of all, the government of Alberta has taken a very, very strong stance on domestic violence. I use as an example the new domestic violence intake court which is being set up in Calgary as we speak and hopefully will be operational within the next month. We take the whole question of domestic violence very, very seriously.

With respect to the specific instance that is being commented upon, I understand that incident happened in 1991. A conviction was entered. I guess one of the questions that needs to be answered, perhaps needs to be discussed publicly is: can a person, having been convicted of an offence of that nature, ever purge themselves of that offence and go on to lead a productive life?

MS PAUL: My first supplementary is to the same minister. Will you make a commitment to this Assembly and to all Albertans that you will implement and fund mandatory professional counseling and treatment for all convicted offenders of family violence as part of their sentence, as addressed in my Motion 539?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's one of the issues that's currently being addressed, for example, in the pilot project on the domestic violence intake court in Calgary, the question of bringing together a partnership between prosecutors, the courts, community groups to identify family violence offenders, to fast-track them through the court process, to have them dealt with in an appropriate manner by the court process, and, yes, to make sure that there's appropriate treatment available so that those offenders can be treated and can be returned to the community and the community can be safer and particularly their domestic partners can be safer because of the treatment.

MS PAUL: My second supplementary to the same minister: will the government under the jurisdiction of the Justice department immediately set up a task force to look at finding solutions to eradicate violence in our homes, in our schools, and in our communities?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of different initiatives under way in that area as we speak: the safe and caring schools initiative, the task force on children at risk. There's a task force looking at violence in schools. In fact, I've had some discussions with the Minister of Children's Services with respect to the whole question of domestic violence and what we might do to highlight the issue of domestic violence.

Whether or not we'll proceed to a task force on that is still a subject of discussion, but certainly I think I can say that we would agree on the fact that there needs to be a stronger understanding in the public of the harm that's caused by domestic violence, not just within the family but in teaching our children that violence is an appropriate method to solve problems. Therefore, we do need to key in on that essential question, and we do need to find results. I'm open to any suggestions that might come forward from the member opposite or otherwise as to how we might deal with that important issue.

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

Seniors' Health Care

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As if it wasn't enough to double-cross seniors by shredding the seniors' report and slashing their programs, now we have the Premier and his cabinet blaming current and soon to be seniors as justification for bringing in private, for-profit hospitals. But only 10 percent of Alberta's population is over 65 currently. Manitoba and Saskatchewan are already at 14 percent seniors, but they aren't bringing in private, for-profit hospitals. My questions are all to the Premier. Mr. Premier, where are the studies, where is the concrete proof to back up the government's claims that seniors are somehow a burden on this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the exact opposite is true. Seniors are not a burden on society. As a matter of fact, we owe it to our seniors to provide the best possible health care available, and we provide it to seniors, who are probably more active than ever before, to make sure that the health care system is there for them when they need it.

We want to be able to address in a meaningful fashion the afflictions and some of the anomalies that are associated with the aging population.

2:30

Mr. Speaker, one of the most telling studies was done under a former minister of health who happens to now be the leader of the Liberal opposition. I alluded to it earlier. It's called The Rainbow Report. This was a very significant report and was the basis for a lot of the health care restructuring that we did. This hon. member should know more than anyone – and I'm talking about the leader of the Liberal opposition. The Rainbow commission on health care said: let us look at the biggest problem which health care administrators believe they face, and that is the anticipated cost of caring for an aging population. Mr. Speaker, that is true.

Mr. Speaker, here is a document. I don't have five copies. I'd be glad to table it. It's from the Calgary regional health authority, and it's a chart that shows relative health care expenditures by age. The lowest ages are on the left-hand side, my right, of this page. The highest expenditures are when you go from 70 to 75 to 80 to 85 to 90. The chart just shoots right up.

So this is not picking on seniors by any stretch of the imagination. This is making sure that the care is there for them when they need it.

MS BLAKEMAN: Why are this Premier and his ministers attacking the very people who built medicare and who depend upon it the most? Blaming seniors. For shame.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, we are doing precisely the opposite. What we want to do under the Health Care Protection Act is to make sure that health care is there for seniors when they need it.

The opposition members obviously don't understand what is going on. I don't know the kind of mail they get relative to waiting lists. It is heartrending to hear of people who are waiting 12, 13, 18 months for joint replacements. If we could move some of the minor surgery, such as we have done in the case of 140 different surgeries, very minor surgeries, out of those huge bricks and mortar hospitals, full-scale hospitals, then we could free up much more space in those public hospitals for the kinds of things that our seniors want and need, the kinds of things that they want and need to maintain a quality of life. That's what it's all about. We want to make sure that our seniors have the quality of life that they deserve.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, it should not have gone unnoticed that decorum was at an absolute high point when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs was addressing questions. It seemed that no hon. members had interjections. It continues to amaze me why that changes depending on who asks the question and who is answering the question.

So let's try it again, and let's try and remember that the milieu and the decorum in the House when the question was asked by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and then responded to was really the model.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Seniors' Health Care (continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Why, Mr. Speaker, are this Premier and his ministers using seniors as scapegoats to justify Bill 11. Why?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that question and the suggestions contained in that so-called question – there is only one word to describe it, and that's nonsense. There is an adjective, and it's "absolute" nonsense.

Mr. Speaker, I would challenge the hon. member to research some of the facts relative to the number of seniors moving to this province from places like socialist Saskatchewan – the Liberals would know all about that; they've moved a long way toward what it's like to be an ND in Saskatchewan – or socialist British Columbia. They're moving back here in droves, and the reason they're moving back here is that they know we offer quality health care for our seniors. We offer the best seniors' benefits program of any jurisdiction in the country, and we intend to keep on doing that because our seniors deserve nothing less.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Medical Association held a meeting last week at which delegates held considerable discussion on the government's Bill 11, the proposed Health Care Protection Act. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister advise members of the position taken by the AMA delegates as a result of these discussions?

MR. DICKSON: Point of order.

MR. JONSON: It's my understanding that at the representative forum of the Alberta Medical Association held on Friday and Saturday, there were essentially two motions that were carried. First of all, the Alberta Medical Association had prepared a position paper with respect to the matter of contracting with private surgical facilities.

Just to summarize very quickly, Mr. Speaker, I think the key part of their position paper is that they indicate that

lost in the debate is a discussion regarding contracting in general.

Contracting is, and will continue to be, an integral component of the publicly-funded health care system. More can be done, however, to ensure that these contracts serve the public interest. Albertans deserve assurances that the following rules will be protected or enhanced:

- Physicians are the agents and advocates of patients in the provision of medical services.
- RHAs are the agents of the public in contractual discussions with privately-owned health facilities.
- The Provincial Government is responsible for ensuring a sustainable public health care system that provides reasonable access to all Albertans with no direct, out-of-pocket, costs for insured services.

With respect to the overall direction herein, Mr. Speaker, we in government certainly have no issue with that particular statement. This overall position statement was passed.

The second item that was important in this meeting is that the Alberta Medical Association representative forum passed a motion indicating that they did not support Bill 11 in this current form. That seemed to be, Mr. Speaker, connected to a concern that the Alberta Medical Association has over not enough being done with respect to expanding the number of doctors in the province; that is, the whole area of physician supply. With respect to that particular point, I would just like to indicate that we have worked with the Alberta Medical Association, put several millions of dollars into our rural physician action plan, which was a collaborative effort between government and the AMA.

We have recently announced the expansion of the overall internship component over the next two years at our universities or training institutions, and, Mr. Speaker, most important of all – and the AMA's been quite complimentary about our joint efforts here – we have been working and are nearing completion on developing an overall report which projects into the future the physician needs for this province for several years to come.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the meeting of the AMA delegates also supported increased funding for the public health system, could the minister tell members if government plans to add any additional funding for health?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the budget recently tabled with the Assembly and conveyed to all Albertans clearly indicates, we have made and we are making a substantial additional commitment to the health and wellness sector in the coming three years. We are adding over a billion dollars in funding. I believe it works out to about 21 percent. I think it compares favourably with any other province in terms of projected increases. We are somewhat disappointed at this point in the corresponding commitment that we'd hoped would be there from the federal Liberal government. Nevertheless, there is a substantial commitment clearly indicated by the government to health care funding.

2:40

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister once more. Delegates at the AMA meeting also expressed the need to recruit more physicians for Alberta. Given that sentiment, could the minister tell the members if the government is taking any action to increase physician numbers in this province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I have referenced that point previously in my remarks, but I would also like to indicate that we are right now, and we can point to various statistics indicating that there are physicians coming to this province from other locations in Canada and elsewhere to practise in Alberta because it's regarded in this nation as a pretty attractive place to practise. Further – and I think this is particularly significant and a favourable indication – we are finding that a higher percentage of graduates from our medical facilities than was the case a few years ago are choosing to stay in this province and practise here and make their careers here.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's too bad there are not more positions for rural doctors.

The one thing about this experiment with private, for-profit health care that the Premier can't control is how the NAFTA tribunal and the World Trade Organization will interpret Bill 11 if this government continues to proceed with a plan that will endanger Alberta's health care sovereignty. In a recent legal opinion received by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, one that the minister alluded to but forgot to mention, it was stated that "Alberta's plans to privatize the delivery of surgical health . . . services threaten the integrity of Canada's public health care system." My first question is to the Premier. Given that respected lawyers and economists across this country are warning that Bill 11 will have major NAFTA implications, why does the Premier continue to roll the dice with our health care sovereignty?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, nobody is rolling the dice. This bill is simply to put in rules and regulations relative to the operation of surgical clinics. Those rules and regulations did not exist before.

I find it very curious that for the past number of years, certainly when the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition was minister of health, there were private, contracted-out surgical clinics operating and I didn't hear a peep. I didn't hear a boo from the Canadian Union of Public Employees. I didn't hear anything from the Canadian Union of Public Employees. I'm curious to know why now. Why now? When we want to tighten up the rules and regulations relative to the operation of surgical clinics, why would they be concerned?

As to the intricacies of NAFTA, again I'll have the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations explain.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, in fairness, we received this document at about 11 o'clock. I received it about noon today. I've gone through it. Again there is a lot of conjecture. What if? Well, it doesn't matter about what if because government procurement by provincial governments is excluded from that agreement. So take the what if away. I would prefer that we deal with facts, and I would prefer that we look at this under the context of what is. By the own admission of the author of this document there has been and will continue to be likely – I'll just quote one little line:

Canada's health care system is a mixture of public and private sector service delivery. Most physicians providing insured medical services operate private for-profit businesses subject to certain regulatory controls, e.g. licensing and extra billing.

That is what Bill 11 is about, putting some rules around clinics.

So the study itself admits that Canada's system is that mixture and has been for some time. It's interesting that NAFTA has been in place since 1986 and it's interesting that there were 30-some clinics under the care of the former health minister and there has never been a NAFTA challenge. Isn't that interesting, Mr. Speaker?

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister of intergovernmental affairs had earlier talked about the carve-out provisions and has enough time to read selective parts of the report, when the report indicates that Canada's sectoral reservation for health care is qualified and ambiguous because it only applies to health services to the extent that they are social services established for a public purpose, can the minister indicate how she can continue to claim that the carve-out provisions will protect our public health care system?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, I can. The carve-out sections, if you read them very carefully, do apply. If you go through this document that was tabled, I'm having a hard time finding a place where the author of this document actually refers to the carve-out. So I suggest that the hon. member pay some close attention to the carve-out.

I repeat again that the procurement of government services, public services in health, are not under NAFTA. We can procure those services with no NAFTA challenge. So, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that we deal in fact, not in what if the sky should fall. Let's deal with what the government of Canada negotiated on behalf of the Canadian people for protection of the health and social service sector.

The opposition may not have any faith in the government of Canada's negotiating powers, but I do have a lot of faith in that, and I suggest that they have protected it very well. I also further suggest, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, that we have had some 40-odd private clinics in this province for almost as many years as the life of NAFTA. To date there has not been one challenge under NAFTA,

not one in its entire lifetime. I doubt that there will be a challenge in the future either.

MS LEBOVICI: Given that this is new territory that we are treading into, can the minister of intergovernmental affairs provide any instances when the carve-out provisions have been challenged?

MRS. McCLELLAN: If I understood the question – could I find an instance where it had been challenged? – no, Mr. Speaker, I could not.

The other thing that I would just like to relate to the hon. member is that probably one reason that it hasn't been challenged is because the people who would look at this suggest that it is strong protection and is not worthy of attempting a challenge.

We have in International and Intergovernmental Relations one of the most respected trade experts in this country. He has reviewed this at length many times. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this person doesn't sit in an office and read studies and reports. He actually was at the negotiating table with the government of Canada.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, if I have to look for expert opinion on NAFTA, on trade policy, on protection, I'll put my faith in the government of Canada's negotiators and, most explicitly, in the government of Alberta's chief negotiator at those. I suggest that they have served us well and have an agreement that will protect the health and social service sector in this country.

Speaker's Ruling

Questions outside Government Responsibility

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair has great concern over the expenditure of valuable House time for the last six or seven minutes with respect to this series of questions. Earlier in the day the chair did rise and point out *Beauchesne* 408(c), dealing with legal opinion, also 410(13), and also section 409(3), asking for opinions and the like.

More importantly than all of that, there are approximately 6 billion people living in the world, and I'm sure that on any given day there are hundreds of thousands of reports that are being published and written. The report in question, that was the premise of this question, is not the property of the government of Alberta nor any member of Executive Council. One has to take great liberty in dealing with some of these questions, because where are you going to end up in a question period and where are you going to begin?

Seniors' Health Care

(continued)

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, on Friday I had an excellent discussion on Bill 11 with a group of seniors at Canyon View, located, of course, in that beautiful city of Red Deer. They had smart questions not only about Bill 11 but about all aspects of health care. My questions are to the minister of health. In view that the population of seniors will double over the next 20 years, will that affect our ability to provide necessary health services?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, one of the most positive, I feel, characteristics of demographics in Alberta currently is that we do have an increasing seniors population. We have a population which is living longer at a better level of health than ever before. I think that is a very, very positive feature of the province of Alberta. As was alluded to earlier in question period, we do have a trend in western Canada if not across Canada of seniors moving to Alberta to become part of this province's population, part of the economy, part of the culture of the province.

As has been the case in offering whether it's education or health care services over the years, we have to plan for the healthy aging and the aging in place of our seniors. It will require a commitment of resources. It will require working with the seniors population to provide the best possible services, as has been done through the development of the Broda report, the long-term care report. Overall, Mr. Speaker, I regard it as a very positive development, one that, yes, we have to plan for and devote resources to as far as our health care system is concerned and as a government, but we are certainly committed to doing that.

MR. DOERKSEN: Can the minister assure Alberta seniors that they will not have to buy private insurance to pay for necessary health services?

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We fully comply with the Canada Health Act as we sit in the Assembly here today as government. Our ability to further regulate and enforce the provisions of the Canada Health Act would be enhanced should the Assembly choose to pass Bill 11.

I also want to point out that right now we have put in place a direction, in keeping with the Canada Health Act, to make sure that people are not going to be charged for medically necessary services, nor will there be any queue- jumping in terms of access to those services. In Alberta we also offer a range of services that are not under the auspices of the Canada Health Act in terms of being insured but do cover a number of the other needs that Albertans, particularly seniors, benefit from coverage of.

MR. DOERKSEN: Will the minister also advise what action he along with the Treasurer will take to eliminate the health care premiums?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, at this particular point in time there are no specific plans to eliminate health care premiums. However, it is something that the minister – I can only speak for myself on this – would be interested in exploring, but there is no immediate plan to eliminate the health care premiums.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we'll call upon the first of five members to participate in Recognitions today, but in the interim would all hon. members kindly voice their enthusiasm for the arrival of the visiting group of seniors that was introduced earlier today by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Writing Home Project

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday evening past I attended an event at our Musee Heritage de St. Albert celebrating the Writing Home project. This project provided an opportunity for teacher Judy Weber's grade 5 class at Ronald Harvey school to meet and work with seniors from St. Albert's Ironwood Estates and the Westlock care centre to discuss museum artifacts and their uses. The students then wrote stories after meeting with Gail de Vos, who is an author of children's literature, and they painted delightful pictorial renderings after meeting with Lewis Lavoie, an outstanding mural artist.

Mr. Speaker, this project was funded by Museums Alberta and presented by Musee Heritage. I wish to commend Giselle Roy, who co-ordinated the Writing Home project; Tracey Stefanyk, its

education co-ordinator; and our Musee Heritage exhibition co-ordinator, Jean Leebody. It was a marvelous project both in its participation and in its display.

Thank you.

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

Public Debate on Bill 11

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to recognize two Members of this Legislative Assembly, one on each side of the House. The first one is the Member for St. Albert, and the next one is the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I want to recognize them because they have agreed to debate Bill 11 tomorrow night at King's college starting at 7, a two-hour debate carried live by CHED radio. I commend them for facing the public and allowing Edmontonians to participate. I hope others will follow their lead, the Minister of Health and Wellness or his associate up against the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark or the Premier of the province up against the Leader of the Official Opposition. This could lead to recognizing a great deal more members in this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

Women's CIAU Hockey Championship

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the University of Alberta Pandas hockey team, who were introduced earlier today and who recently captured their first Canadian Interuniversity Athletic Union women's hockey championship. Women's hockey was introduced to the U of A three years ago, and since then the Pandas have won the Canada West Universities Athletic Association championship each year, and this was their third consecutive appearance at the CIAU tournament.

Along with the honour of winning the CIAU championships, the Pandas' head coach, Howie Draper, was named Canada West coach of the year. Draper, a U of A alumnus, has coached the Pandas hockey team since its inception in '97 and has been a key element in establishing such a strong women's hockey program.

Part of the Pandas' success can be attributed to their participation of team members in other amateur athletic competition. Some team members have participated in the Arctic Winter Games and the Canada Games. The opportunity these athletes receive at these events and the skills and leadership experience they are given is invaluable. I commend the University of Alberta Pandas for their hard work and determination and would ask that all members congratulate them.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

3:00

Health Care Workers

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to recognize all the health care workers in the province who have held our system together in the midst of radical cuts and the recent assault on public health care in the form of Bill 11. Alberta's nurses, doctors, and other health professionals and workers are just like the rest of us in the province who expected a period of calm and rededication to medicare when the government began generating multimillion, billion dollar surpluses. What a shock to realize that instead of entering a time of healing, we are being forced into a new period of stress and uncertainty. The only reason our system is still

able to function effectively is because of the commitment and dedication of health care workers across the province. The Official Opposition joins with every Albertan in saying thank you to all these wonderful, dedicated, and much-appreciated people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: A couple of points of order here today. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition

Point of Order Provoking Debate

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been authorized on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition to speak to a point of order she had raised. This had to do with her third set of questions to the Premier. The Premier again referenced The Rainbow Report and said to the effect that his government was doing what The Rainbow Report recommended. The authority I would cite would be *Beauchesne* 417, the enjoiner that answers "should not provoke debate."

I can save a lot of time, Mr. Speaker, by referring you to page 346 of *Hansard*, when virtually the identical issue was raised on March 9, 2000. Let me simply say that it wasn't The Rainbow Report, authored under the current Leader of the Opposition, that recommended blowing up the General hospital, selling the Holy Cross hospital for a song, terminating the employment of 10,000 qualified registered nurses and health workers, and doing all of the other things that have resulted in longer waiting lists in the province.

Thank you.

MR. HAVELOCK: I'll be very brief, Mr. Speaker. There's absolutely no point of order. The hon. member across the way simply used a point of order as a means to once again expound on a particular health care perspective. In fact, quite frankly, the Premier's response may generate debate. It seems any response the Premier gives in this Legislature generates debate, but he is responding to questions asked by the Leader of the Opposition and other members of the opposition caucus. This again seemed to have been an exercise in clarifying a particular position. There is no legitimate point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Agreed, and thank you both for making this matter as brief as it really was.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Point of Order Oral Question Period Rules

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second item relates to the question raised by the Member for Redwater when he went to the Minister of Health and Wellness. My authorities here would be *Beauchesne* 409(8), "A question that has previously been answered ought not to be asked again" and 410(9), "Questions should not repeat questions already asked." Further, in the alternative, the other basis would be under *Beauchesne* 409(6) and numerous other authorities' past rulings, that the minister has to be asked a question within his competence.

I didn't know that the Minister of Health and Wellness is now a spokesman for the Alberta Medical Association. The first question was – and this is a paraphrase; I don't have the transcript in front of me – what were the recommendations or the decisions made by the Alberta Medical Association at a meeting held over the weekend? It was compounded because we'd already had a discussion in the first three sets of questions about the recommendations coming from the AMA meeting.

The second two supplementary questions I can take no issue with because I think they were perfectly appropriate, but the first question can do nothing other than flagrantly offend. I understand here that ministers are to be accountable, not to be offering commentary. I mean, we could be asking ministers about anything any organization decided anywhere in the province because it might happen to coincide with their ministerial responsibility. That's not the purpose of question period.

Thank you very much.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, if I get the gist of the argument, one, he's suggesting that you should not raise an issue through question period that has been previously asked and/or answered. Mr. Speaker, every day in this House the opposition members raise the issue of health care. They raise it legitimately, because it is an important issue, but the manner in which they raise it is not legitimate. They continue to harp away on the fact that we're promoting private hospitals when in fact we aren't. In fact, they are legislated against in the legislation very specifically. They continue to distort and they continue to provide misinformation regarding the issue. So for them to rely on repetition is quite frankly simply amazing.

But to get also to the point regarding the AMA position, the opposition raised the AMA position through its questioning. They misrepresented that position, and then they tend to squirm when the health minister gives the straight goods on what the position actually is.

So again there's no point of order here, Mr. Speaker. It's simply another attempt to use a point of order to clarify what in essence was a weak line of questioning from the Official Opposition for probably the 12th or 13th day in a row.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members and the two gentlemen who just participated, I wonder in my mind if either one of you is really serious about this business. Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who also serves as the Opposition House Leader, if I take it that you want the chair to enforce 409(8), "A question that has previously been answered ought not to be asked again," methinks you have violated question period repeatedly every day, virtually every question in the last 10 days. So I'm going to take that under advisement.

Now, to the Government House Leader. There's absolutely no doubt in the chair's mind that the hon. Member for Redwater did violate. It was a very, very poorly written question. When the hon. Member for Redwater says, "Could the minister advise members of the position taken by the AMA delegates as a result of these discussions," it's not the purpose of ministers of Executive Council or members of this House to explain what an outside body or an outside group is saying or doing. But, then, that's absolutely no different than the intervention that the chair made when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark asked the question just a few minutes later.

So I'm telling you that if you want to stand up every day after question period and go through this stuff, you're going to find a much more aggressive chairman who will in fact imply and invoke all of the rules, and this question period is going to become a very, very interesting arrangement.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 6 Special Payment Act

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

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of pleasure and pride that I rise to introduce second reading of Bill 6, the Special Payment Act.

The principles of this bill I think are relatively straightforward. We've had in Alberta for some time the issue of the disenfranchised widows, a group that banded together because they felt they had a particular issue with the Workers' Compensation Board and were seeking relief. They felt that a law that had been changed in the past, 1984 I believe, 1982 perhaps, where they had some entitlements and then had those entitlements removed, was not a just decision and were seeking some sort of recompense for that.

Now, a bit of the background for the members, Mr. Speaker. All through the process of arriving to today, I believe it's fair to say that we've had a fair amount of co-operation between the disenfranchised widows group and the board of directors and administration of the Workers' Compensation Board. It was unique in the sense that they both wanted to find a resolution, but they were looking for a vehicle in which that could happen.

3:10

Originally they had made a proposal to the government of Alberta that a board of reference be used. This is a manner in which the government can bring before a court an item for a decision and some direction. The government of Alberta and the minister of the day had agreed to look at that as a possible means for resolution. When the Executive Council had a reorganization and I came to the ministry, I was then approached by representatives of the board of WCB to consider further this board of reference. I expressed initially some hesitation but agreed that we would at least proceed to see whether or not it would be a means to the end that both parties were looking for.

Unfortunately, based on representations from our Department of Justice, it seemed that there were some barriers that would get in the road of that. I think in fairness to the parties one of the barriers that I was most concerned about seemed to be the time line in which to receive a resolution to this situation. I was advised, although somewhat informally, that we might be looking at up to three years before there would be a particular decision.

Well, I don't know the particular ages of all the people involved with this, but that did not seem to me to be an expeditious way in which to handle it. The answer, then, that the government of Alberta indicated to both parties was that, no, we would not seek a board of reference but we would do whatever we could to assist in a manner for the parties to arrive at a negotiated settlement. Upon further discussion between the two parties they realized that under the current Workers' Compensation Act there was no real provision for them, should they arrive at a negotiated settlement, to be able to make a payment under that act. So they asked us for legislative relief to that structural barrier that was then in front of them.

What we have here today, Mr. Speaker, in Bill 6 is a means to allow the Workers' Compensation Board and the disenfranchised widows group, actually for any widow or widower that qualifies under this particular bill — it provides them now the opportunity to arrive at a settlement and for a special payment to be made. So it's on that basis that it is here in front of us today, and I would seek the co-operation and the support of all members of this House in the expeditious approval of Bill 6.

Thank you.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure and an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 6, the Special Payment

Act, at second reading. This bill will enable a onetime payment from the Workers' Compensation Board for remarried widows and widowers whose spouses died from pre-1982 work-related incidents.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the minister responsible for the WCB, the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, in the development and sponsorship of Bill 6. With the successful passage of Bill 6 a five and a half year battle by the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group will come to a close. The struggle by this group for a settlement to this issue has been long and strenuous and at times bitter. It is an issue that has spanned the terms of three different ministers who were responsible for the WCB, but to this minister's credit, his quick and timely intervention has paved the way for Bill 6 to be debated in this Legislature today.

Prior to changes to the WCB act in 1982 widows and widowers were entitled to a lifetime pension, except if they remarried or entered into a common-law arrangement. Many of the widows had young families and were not only hit with the tragedy of losing a spouse but also the secondary tragedy of trying to raise a young family on a small widow's pension. At that time it was not uncommon that many of these widows did not have a career or some type of postsecondary education to rely on in this time of need. Two members of this group told me that in 1966 one of their pensions was \$80 a month and the other member's pension in 1975 was \$210 per month.

Changes to the Workers' Compensation Act in 1982 removed the provision for lifetime pensions in favour of term pensions and services to encourage long-term self-sufficiency and financial independence through additional job or vocational training. Benefits are now based on 90 percent of the deceased worker's net income at the time of the accident, subject to maximum insurable earnings.

If the spouse is employed, they receive a five-year term benefit which is reduced 20 percent each year after the first year. If the spouse is not employed, they are entitled to vocational rehabilitation to achieve gainful employment defined at a net income level that equals or exceeds 75 percent, which is what the deceased worker would have been entitled to had their accident resulted in permanent injury. These new benefits were provided to surviving spouses regardless of whether they remarried, lived common law, or stayed single.

An all-party committee presented this new legislation to the Assembly in 1982. It was well-meaning legislation but unfortunately treated one group of widows differently from another based on an arbitrary date. The lump sum payment worked out to be considerably less than what a long-term pension could be worth. It became an issue of fairness.

Approximately five and a half years ago the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group was formed and proceeded with the goal of getting their pensions reinstated and a lump sum payment for the years they had been denied pensions. They have been buoyed along the way by results obtained by other groups with similar causes.

In 1987 the government of Canada recognized and corrected a similar discriminatory error by reinstating Canada pension plan surviving spousal benefits. In 1996 disenfranchised widows in British Columbia won a court case against the WCB and had their pensions reinstated retroactive to 1985.

In 1997 Ontario made similar changes to its legislation to reinstate WCB benefits to widows. The hon. Cam Jackson, minister responsible for seniors at that time, spoke these words in Ontario's Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to join my colleague, the Minister of Labour, in proposing an initiative worth over \$135 million to some of the most vulnerable members of Ontario society.

These same words, I think, could be said here in Alberta for our Disenfranchised Widows Action Group.

Mr. Speaker, in a number of provinces varying degrees of reinstatement of pensions have occurred in some areas or just financial settlements in lieu of restoration of pensions. The province of Ontario, from my understanding, has gone even further than this proposed legislation will. I'm sure it is no secret to the members of this Assembly that the Ontario compensation system is in serious financial trouble, but they have put in place a plan that will restore the widows' pensions in addition to a cash settlement.

3:20

In December of 1998 Motion 518, WCB disenfranchised widows, was introduced in the Assembly by this member. The purpose of this motion was to address the unequal treatment in pension benefits for widows and widowers of WCB claimants. Unfortunately, this motion was defeated at that time. The principles that this motion was introduced on were those of fairness and the protection of the vulnerable. However, the manner in which these widows have been treated since 1982 meets neither test.

The timely passage of Bill 6, Mr. Speaker, will go a long way in helping to correct the issues of fairness and the protection of the vulnerable widows and widowers who were affected by changes in legislation. I applaud this minister for listening to their plight and recognizing that there is an injustice in this province with respect to the widows' pensions. You have taken steps to correct at least in part the injustices that have gone on for a number of years.

I've had the honour and the privilege of working with these widows since early 1997. It has taken many years to bring their issue to this position. If there is one thing that I can point to with some degree of honour and privilege, it is being able to work with the widows. For all of the attempts that we make in this Legislative Assembly to effect some change that affects people in a positive way, this is one of those issues.

Shortly after I was elected in 1997, our former leader, Grant Mitchell, spoke with me on representing various groups or issues in the Legislature. At that time the light at the end of the tunnel was quite dim for a resolution to this issue, but Grant had great optimism that fairness would eventually prevail for these widows. Through their efforts and the efforts of many others we are now on the verge of bringing about changes to restore some sense of justice and fairness with widows' pensions.

Now, it is interesting to note that the other part of that financial and emotional hardship that the widows had to undergo was that if a second marriage dissolved, there was no basis for the restoration of that particular pension for those widows. In other words, once you remarried, your pension was forever gone as a result of that remarriage.

I've talked to a number of the widows for several years now, Mr. Speaker. They have told me of their extreme emotional stress at the loss of a spouse. I can only reference the cases that came to my attention. The widows would tell me that they would wake up in the morning with their families, all cheerful to start the day. They would see their spouses off to work, out the door of their house. Several hours later they would have a police officer, a coworker, or a friend knocking at the door, indicating that perhaps they should come to the hospital because there had been a serious accident. The widows have indicated to me that their lives were forever unalterably changed as a result of those events that were beyond their control.

To add insult to injury, many of them, unfortunately, after the loss of their first spouse were involved in marriages that subsequently went bad and ended up in divorce or separation. The widows had no recourse to any reinstatement of their pensions after a remarriage.

They wound up financially worse off than when their spouses had died.

The unfortunate part is that WCB has opted, I am told, for an \$80,000 lump sum payment. If you did even a rough calculation, that money would have been considerably higher for a number of the widows that have been cut off for a great number of years. This \$80,000 figure was arrived at without any negotiations with the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group on a take it or go to court if you're not satisfied with the offer.

Many members of the widows' group are seniors. They have struggled without pensions for so many years. The WCB in Alberta is perhaps the only WCB in Canada that has a huge surplus. They have so much money that they can even afford to buy ads on television when they have a total monopoly for providing compensation to injured workers in this province. So how did they arrive at this figure of \$80,000? You know, with the settlements I have looked at, the figure of \$80,000 appears to be the lowest. This is perhaps not the right time to ask this question, but I think it is important for the public, the widows, and the members of this Assembly to know how that figure was arrived at. We would like to know how this settlement compares with those across Canada.

I'm not sure if the minister has heard this or not, but not all the widows are satisfied that they will be receiving full justice as a result of Bill 6. Some of them are dissatisfied with the level of compensation that has been offered. Others are upset that the pensions were not reinstated. There are many that feel they have been short-changed on both counts. It is unfortunate that these vulnerable members of our society have been placed in a take it or leave it position or take your chances in court. This action would only result in more delays and costly legal proceedings, that they cannot afford.

Now, as well, when I was looking over Bill 6, Mr. Speaker, I did have some concerns on section 9 regarding regulations. These regulations are simply too wide open. They're too vague, and they allow the minister to effectively write the bill without recourse to this Assembly. I do note that there are others that think this matter is long past its time to be resolved. They have fought the good fight, but they are tired of fighting for what is rightfully theirs. Many of these people are seniors who want to get on with their lives. Time is of the essence to them. They would like to have this matter dealt with. This legislation for them will bring an end, or a closure, to this matter after a number of years.

We would hope for them a speedy passage of this legislation. If we find that there is consensus on this particular piece of legislation, I would like to have royal assent given to this matter as soon as possible. This would allow the WCB to put the money in the hands of those widows and widowers who deserve timely closure of this chapter of their lives. Even as we debate this issue here in the Legislative Assembly, time is of the essence for some very sick members of this group. I look forward to this bill going through second reading and on through committee and third reading as quickly as possible.

In closing I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group for your resolve, your determination, and the opportunity to work with you. If we do meet on any other issues in the future, I want to be on your side.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity for me to add my comments to this bill.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak to Bill 6 at second reading and to congratulate the minister for his work

on this bill and also to congratulate my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. He spent a great deal of time and effort ensuring that the needs of this group of people were met in the best possible way.

There is occasion sometimes in this Assembly for us to be able to address grave wrongdoings that have been done in the past, and this bill is certainly representative of an instance like this. I know that the minister has had legal opinions saying that they were not legally bound to do what we see before us with this legislation, but I and many members of this Assembly and of this province and all of those women and their families affected in this circumstance believe that this government was morally bound to do something about this grave wrong that was done to these women back in the early 1980s. Certainly, while the formal battle to receive payment has been going on for about five and a half years, the informal battle that these women have been waging has been happening for them, for the most part, since the day their husbands were killed in work-related accidents.

If we take a look back at that time period in our history of the province, in the '50s and the '60s, when most of these accidents occurred that we're addressing now, women had a very different kind of placement in our society than they have today. They were expected to marry and stay home and take care of their families and support their husband in their husband's work role in society. When something happened to change that relationship, particularly when the husband died, the husband and the wife expected the employer to provide for the wife and the children of the family in some sort of regard.

Let's remember that back in that period of time very few women worked, and those who did work were in very poor-paying jobs. It was hard for women to find employment outside the home, and it was hard for them to be single parents, quite different from how it is today, where there are a lot of opportunities for women in the workforce.

3:30

Then when these women were faced with the unexpected death of their loved one and the unexpected challenge of trying to decide how to provide for their families, they were also given the unexpected challenge of having to fight with their employers, particularly with WCB, to get any kind of monetary coverage for their families. For many of these women it was a battle they fought for years, trying to find financial support and any kind of adequate redress from the WCB. Many of those women have told me over the past few years that they were literally told by government officials that they talked to and by members of the WCB at that time that they should just be quiet, go home, take care of their kids, and find a husband, that that would solve their problems.

Well, society has changed a lot since then, I'm happy to say, Mr. Speaker, but during that time period it was very, very difficult for these women to take the next step in their lives. It became the ultimate problem in these women's lives and shadowed their experience for the remainder of their lives up until this point. It is the single biggest outstanding issue that they had to work around and resolve while still doing the very important task of trying to raise their children and provide for their families.

When we look back and when historians look back at this time period, we should be and they will be appalled at how these women were treated over time. It has been a huge struggle for them. It's interesting to see that in 1982 when the legislation was changed, it wasn't addressed as has happened in many other instances, where we see clauses like this grandfathered. If a commitment was made to pay people for their lifetime in terms of a benefit and then legislation

changed, generally speaking, for those people addressed during that time period there's a grandfathering clause so that the rules remain the same for them, or at that point in time some form of compensation is made to those people. Not in this case, Mr. Speaker, and I have to wonder if it didn't happen in this case because we're talking about women. We're talking about women who did not have positions of power where they could negotiate adequately on their own behalf. That's a question that I have for the minister, and I'm hoping that he'll be able to answer that.

The minister in his remarks made a statement where he said that it is his belief that there was a fair amount of co-operation between the group and WCB. Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that to be true at all. That is certainly not what I have heard from these women. To be quite blunt, these old women were bullied. They were bullied into accepting a lump sum payment, with no interest accruing, that is far below, in fact way less than one-third, what most of them would have been entitled to.

The wording of the letter that came from WCB was coercive in nature. It told them: this is it; this is the only offer you're ever going to get; you're not going to do any better; opt in or forever opt out and as individuals then take WCB to court. Well, we know the struggle that these women have faced for literally decades. As individuals fighting the system they got absolutely nowhere, Mr. Speaker. They know that this is an all-or-nothing, onetime offer that is substandard. That I also find appalling.

These women feel the pressure not just for themselves but for other members of their group, many of whom, as my colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry has said, have died recently or are very infirm and may not make it through another round of negotiations. They feel tremendous pressure to take the settlement as it stands and not to continue the fight for more fair and equitable treatment. It's too bad that that's the position they are in, Mr. Speaker, but it's certainly a corner that they have been backed into.

Having said that, these women have struggled for a long time, and they're tired, Mr. Speaker. Certainly we saw that when they were here for the introduction of this bill a little while past, for first reading. After the bill was introduced and we met with them outside in the rotunda, you could see how drained they were physically and emotionally, how relieved they were that finally there was some closure, yet at the same time how bitter they were, how upset they were, how unfairly they felt they had been treated in terms of the settlement. A settlement of \$80,000 in terms of a lump sum payment is the lowest settlement that has been made across this country so far and from the richest province in the country, so I think that speaks for itself.

These women will be very happy to have closure to this issue, but once again, as has been the case for them over the decades that they have struggled in this fight, they will not have been treated fairly, Mr. Speaker, by this government or by WCB. So because of that I will not be supporting this bill in principle at second reading. I will be supporting the bill when it comes for a final vote because I understand the constraints that the women are under in terms of age and health. I will be happy to see that there has been recognition of their concerns and their situation when the final vote is taken, but certainly in principle it is impossible for me to support this bill.

MR. DICKSON: Just to speak very briefly, Mr. Speaker. I very much support Bill 6 and the purpose of Bill 6. You know, we have a responsibility. I feel I have a responsibility as a legislator when I see a section like section 9 – and I know my colleague for Edmonton-Glengarry touched on it – to be consistent with the concern that at least I've tried to always raise with subordinate lawmaking whenever I see a section that allows a minister to "make

regulations respecting any matter that the Minister considers necessary or advisable to carry out the intent of this Act.”

I know that this minister may be a reasonable, practical man, anxious to respond to the need while we have the statute. I understand he may well say with all sincerity: I would never abuse this; it's just the little details, to fill in the things that aren't done in the act. But given the fact that in this province subordinate legislation – in other words, regulations are not vetted, are not screened, are not reviewed by any kind of an all-party committee such as the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: They're not going to be.

MR. DICKSON: Well, to be consistent, the concern has to be raised again, Mr. Speaker.

As much as it pains me even to raise it on a bill – I mean, I listened to the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, and he talked about the importance of moving the bill through quickly. I want to respond to that. I genuinely do, but I'm also torn because at some point is democracy – it's always the death of a thousand cuts. It's not somebody putting up a banner across the front of the Legislative Assembly saying: closed for the next five years.

MR. SAPERS: No longer an approved legislative facility.

MR. DICKSON: No longer an approved legislative facility, end of quote.

What happens is that it's these little ways. We talked about it and will talk about it in Bill 3. We see it again here. So, Mr. Speaker, it's again to highlight the concern. I'm concerned that somewhere down the road people who study whatever happened when we started losing democracy in Alberta and when they start charting the course, they're going to point to something like section 9 and say: you know, here it was. I don't want anybody to say that the MLAs were asleep at the switch, that they didn't understand the significance of it and didn't understand the consequences and the ramifications. Just because it's tucked in an important bill, a positive bill, a good bill doesn't make that section right.

3:40

You know, the most impressive kind of leadership I can think of, Mr. Speaker, the most impressive kind of leadership I could ever imagine would be for the minister of human resources to say: we would never abuse the trust this Legislature has given us, and that's why I'm going to make some commitment that the regulations would be vetted by somebody other than the Member for Peace River and his regulatory or deregulatory task force, whatever it's called.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's a good bill and a good initiative, and it's certainly one that I'm going to vote for, but I just register in the strongest possible terms the disquiet I feel, how uncomfortable I feel with section 9. Just because it's easy and it simplifies things doesn't make it right.

I'm reminded of the Railway Act we saw not so long ago and talking about the armadillo complex that sometimes we see, and I remember my concern there. We raise these things in bill after bill after bill, yet government continues to bring in things like section 9. Why would that be, Mr. Speaker? Is it that they don't think we're serious? They don't think anybody cares? They think that they just never make bad decisions? I don't know what it is. I can only speculate. But I do register that very strong concern.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to stand up in support of Bill 6. I certainly want to congratulate the Minister of Human Resources and Employment for bringing this bill forward and for initiating the actions that caused the WCB to reconsider their position with respect to the disenfranchised widows. I want to thank all the other hon. members on both sides of the House who over the years have spent considerable time in discussions with the widows who were affected. I know that there's been a lot of effort made by a lot of people over a lot of years to bring this forward.

Now, the bill may not be seen by all parties as adequate, but I think one has to recognize that there is really no need to defend or prove anything with respect to this bill, and therefore it applies to everyone equally. So I think, in respect of that, that certainly is going to speed the remedy and make the compensation that perhaps should have been paid to some of these people along the way a lot easier.

I also want to thank this minister for doing the right thing with respect to . . . [interjections] I'm not sure if I'm missing something here. With respect to the reviews that he's currently ordered with respect to the service review committee, that I'm honoured to be on, as well as the committee that is currently looking at all of the appeal mechanisms, I believe this minister does the right thing, and in the end there will be some major opportunities to improve the operations of the WCB with respect to those injured workers who are severely injured.

We also know, though, that the WCB indeed does a very good job of a large part of their work, with respect to 85 percent of the injured workers who are not seriously injured. I think these reviews are going to allow visibility to come into the system and certain actions to be recommended by these committees. I certainly commend the minister once more for allowing those things to happen, because it's been a long time coming.

We'll be able to learn, I think, through the questionnaires that are currently now available, as I understand it, in all MLAs' offices across the province, not just government MLAs but every MLA office across the province. I would certainly encourage injured workers who feel that perhaps their case was not given due process to help us to pinpoint exactly what the problems were that they encountered and to give us enough detail so that we can in fact make appropriate conclusions with respect to what they're telling us and make appropriate recommendations to the minister.

So I certainly again want to thank the minister for everything that he's done so far. I know that this bill may not be the last bill of this kind in this particular minister's history. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 6 has certainly been a long time coming. I can remember back in 1995 probably, maybe even as early as 1994, there was a resident in my constituency, actually a woman that lives in the apartment tower right next to my constituency office, that came to see me. She sat down with me and my constituency manager, Kim Cassidy, and told us her story about the loss of pension and what it meant in her life and the struggles that it meant for her personally. Then she told me about this group of mostly women who were in the same situation. She started talking to me about growing court decisions and court challenges in other jurisdictions, wondering whether or not they would have to do the same thing in Alberta that was being done elsewhere to get some justice and some satisfaction.

I said that I thought their case made perfect sense, that their issue was a good issue, that their arguments were well founded, and that

even though obviously there were some policy disagreements between myself and my caucus colleagues in the provincial government, even though that was the case, the logic and the weight of their argument would be impressive and they would be able to make common cause with the government and come to a speedy resolution. As I say, that was back in 1994, 1995.

Well, I will say that the minister that has inherited this file, the current minister responsible for the WCB, I think can distinguish himself from his predecessors at least in this regard. He has sincerely listened to the plight of these disadvantaged Albertans, and he has seen to it that under his watch something appropriate has been done about their concerns. I thank him for that.

Mr. Speaker, I have shared in the anger and the frustration of these men and mostly women over these past five or six years, and for the life of me I can't figure out why it took us so long to get here. I also can't figure out for the life of me why, when the settlement is finally offered, it's at the bottom end of the scale. You know, it's always a difficult judgment, and the government in the past has fallen into the situation where they wanted to make sure that the most amount of money went to the claimants.

We saw the ill-considered Bill 26, where some limitations were going to be put in in terms of legal rights. The government backtracked on that, but I do accept that somewhere in the thinking around that bill there was a sincere belief that the maximum amount of whatever settlement dollars would be offered would go to the claimants. That's the only justification that I can think of when it came to the attempt to use the notwithstanding clause in Bill 26.

In Bill 6, you know, the disadvantaged women do have the right to say no to the \$80,000, and they could go to court. Some of them I'm certain will do that. For some it's already too late, Mr. Speaker. This is not a youthful group of men and women, and for some it's simply too late. I understand that the money won't be paid to estates, and I think that's an issue. Others just simply may run out of time. If they did choose to go to court to try to get what in their minds, in their beliefs would be a more fair amount, they simply may run out of time. There are a few members of this group that I know who are gravely ill.

3:50

I think it's important to encourage the government to look for areas of injustice that they can correct legislatively. I am glad that this minister has seen to it that his responsibility is being discharged by closing this file. On behalf of the women that I've had the privilege of getting to know over these past half-dozen years, I think a certain amount of closure will be celebrated, but I would really appreciate it if the government would look carefully into the delay over these last number of years, would look carefully at the reasons why any settlement is on the table and ask themselves collectively whether or not this is really a fair amount, the \$80,000, whether or not it represents a real measure of justice.

Mr. Speaker, I guess for some of the recipients of this special payment, they'll say: yeah, it's terrific; it's all we could have ever hoped for. For some of them that may be true, but for others – and these are the men and women I'm particularly thinking of – it won't be any measure of justice. It will be seen as an insignificant amount compared to the loss of pension benefits over many, many years and the loss of future benefits, which of course will be forgone.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Madam Speaker, I don't want to delay debate on this bill. We'll get into committee. There may be some discussion around section 9, there may be some discussion around the dollar amount, but, you

know, it wouldn't be entirely unique for the government to bring an amendment to its own bill. We have time between now and third reading to take a look at the dollar amount and to rethink it. I would encourage the minister to do just that and have that discussion with his cabinet colleagues.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment to close debate.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just some comments, I suppose in reaction to the members that have spoken previously.

First of all, I want to say that I do appreciate the support that we're finding here today from both sides of the House. I certainly appreciate that, and I am sure the widows and widowers involved will appreciate that as well.

I think it's important to make sure that people understand that with the Special Payment Act we're not taking anything away from any of the widows in the sense that they still have a pathway through the courts if they determine that the negotiated settlement is not to their liking.

The settlement itself is an issue for the WCB and for the widows. My role here today is simply to try to do the best that I can in providing, then, an opportunity or a pathway for the parties to arrive at a conclusion, to arrive at some closure without the use of the courts, if that's what they determine.

I hesitate to get into the numbers, because again that is not the business of the government of Alberta but the business of the Workers' Compensation Board. The briefings that I've had to do with on this particular file have indicated that Manitoba and Saskatchewan in arriving at lump sum payments – I'm told the amounts were \$72,000 and \$75,000. For the record, perhaps that information might be useful.

I did appreciate and took as a compliment the comments from Calgary-Buffalo, but I would just want to indicate to the hon. member and to all members of the House that however reasonable or however practical he might see me, the act goes above and beyond that, because any minister, any person that is accepted into Executive Council has to take an oath of office, and certainly within that oath it then is our responsibility to govern ourselves in accordance with the good of the people.

I don't know, when it comes to regulations, that section 9 is that sort of a section to be feared, and I would want to assure the member that whoever comes behind me, as surely they will, in this portfolio, that minister will be duty bound and honour bound to do the same that I have.

So with those comments, I'd like to move second reading of Bill 6.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

Bill 4 Surveys Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to bring the Surveys Amendment Act, 2000, for second reading. The amendment is a straightforward change. I can help explain that change by giving members of the Assembly some brief background.

Alberta's municipalities, land developers, utility and resource development companies, and government rely heavily on accurate

and up-to-date maps called cadastral maps. For the reference of the House a cadastral map shows the boundaries of the subdivisions of land for purposes of describing, recording, ownership, and taxation. To provide cadastral maps as efficiently as possible, my department has made two changes to mapping services in Alberta.

First, we took advantage of new technology and worked with Alberta's two land titles offices. Descriptive plans and plans of surveys are now in a digitized format. This data is integrated into our base maps, which then can be distributed electronically. Alberta is leading the country in electronic cadastral mapping services, with the support and participation of Alberta's land surveyors and their association.

The second thing we did was privatize mapping services to a not-for-profit agency. Spatial Data Warehouse Ltd. is now responsible for updating and distributing digitized mapping data.

Technological advancements are beneficial and inevitable, but they have a cost, and no matter who provides the services, they still need to be paid for. Last spring, consistent with our government's user-pay policy, this House amended the Surveys Act to provide ministerial authority to collect a cadastral mapping fee. Land titles offices in Edmonton and Calgary collect on behalf of my department and forward those fees to Spatial Data Warehouse. However, the wording of the earlier amendment refers only to fees for mapping plans of survey. Section 89 of the Land Titles Act states that descriptive plans are not plans of survey, but Spatial Data Warehouse maps both kinds of plans and is entitled to fees for both services.

The Surveys Amendment Act, before us for second reading today, adds the phrase "or a descriptive plan" to the Surveys Act. This will allow us to ensure that Spatial Data Warehouse receives fees for all the plans that it maps on our behalf, and I ask members of this Assembly for support for this amendment to the Surveys Act.

4:00

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We have some questions about this bill, although in general it's a very small amendment that's being brought in here. We can see that the problem that could have presented itself, had this amendment not been brought in, would have been that the cadastral surveys have to be registered with the Land Titles Act and there's a payment or a fee when a plan of survey is submitted to update this mapping, but no fee is currently required when a descriptive plan is submitted. So this is an oversight, as we understand from the industry, that is being corrected by this process, particularly when you take into consideration that the descriptive plan is not actually surveyed but is a plan drawn on the basis of a verbal description.

What might have happened, then, is that we could have seen people trying to submit descriptive plans to save money when a plan of survey was required, a potential loophole in the legislation and something that was apparently overlooked by everyone involved in preparing the legislation when it came before us in the House last spring. We can see where this bill meets the requirement.

Madam Speaker, there are a few questions in terms of the privatization that the minister has undertaken to put this fee collection process into a not-for-profit agency. When we did a search on Spatial Data Warehouse Ltd., it was very interesting to see the people who are going to be in charge of this not-for-profit agency. First and foremost is the assistant deputy minister for the department in the land and forest service. So who we see listed here on the corporate search is Cliff Henderson, who currently, as I

understand it, is still the assistant deputy minister, land and forest service. I'm wondering why it is that he's involved at this level in this not-for-profit agency. In addition to that, the other names listed here are primarily people in a senior position in a local large company here in Edmonton.

I'm sure, Madam Speaker, that there's some easy explanation for this. I'm sure that these positions were in effect tendered to some extent to find out that we have the right kind of representation on this board, and if not, then these positions clearly must be transitional positions. I'm hoping the minister will clear that up for us and tell us exactly what the process was in terms of establishing this not-for-profit agency, what the intent is in terms of those people who are holding key positions in this organization at this time, and exactly what it is that all of these people are doing in these positions.

Also, of course, the big issue here always is remuneration. I understand that this is a not-for-profit agency, but I also understand that fees of \$100 are being charged for each plan that is being registered. Now, it's a couple of computer clicks to enter these into the system and perhaps some other work. We want to ensure, Madam Speaker, that any remuneration paid out to people involved in this process is done on a fair and reasonable basis and that any jobs that were the outcomes of this were advertised for in a fair and reasonable process.

Those are my questions at this stage, and I'm sure that the minister will be happy to answer them, not just for me but on behalf of all of those people out there in the province right now who want to ensure that there is openness and transparency in every action that this government undertakes.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The minister and my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie have covered a great deal of the area that I wish to cover. I won't repeat those items again, although the nonprofit firm set up to carry on this business raised a number of questions on this side of the House that have never really been explained. My colleague has covered most of the areas that I wish to in that regard, but I've saved this question.

As we understand, the fees and charges of the province of Alberta are held in abeyance currently in order to restructure those and find out whether in fact those can be applied as fees and not as taxes. Is this organization set up to impose these fees, on a willing public presumably, in an attempt to get around that provision that came about by a challenge in the courts in Ontario, I understand? That's a question to be answered some other time, I suspect, unless the minister has the answers here now.

The other area that concerns this member is that it appears that this is a relatively minor and innocuous change in the act and would not in the normal case warrant a full bill, particularly if the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations in this Legislature was utilized in this House for the purpose it was intended, to review law and regulations. Certainly to have an all-party committee review these matters that would arise now and again from the imposition of an act and get it down to an administrative level, you'd find that the act simply does not fill the bill, as it were, and there are some errors of either commission or omission. The committee would be able to deal with that. An all-party committee would receive the tacit consent and knowledge of the opposition parties, and then it would make miscellaneous statutes much more inclusive, such that this side of the House would not have any reason to debate those matters as is tradition in a miscellaneous statutes act.

With the absence of the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, how does the government expect the Legislature to

work in the manner it was designed, which is having the opposition question and call to question both the government's motive and mode of operation? How could it work? It's a question that should be put and should be debated in government caucus a great deal more than it apparently is.

Madam Speaker, with that, this member has no further remarks on this bill, as it was adequately covered by the minister and the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, thank you very much. Just a couple of quick comments. We've received an explanation, I think, in terms of what the purpose of the amendment is. My query would be this. I'm not intimately familiar with the *Surveys Act*, but when I look at section 46, which is the section being amended, what I see is that "the minister may make orders," and really what we're doing is we're amending the (b) part to expand what one of those orders may cover.

Now, perhaps the minister can advise us. There are some orders that in fact are treated effectively as a regulation. They're subject to the *Regulations Act* of the province of Alberta. As my colleague a moment ago said, although we don't have all-party oversight of regulation, at least there's some procedure for publication of regulations, and they're accessible. We also have a beast called ministerial orders. Most ministerial orders aren't subject to the *Regulations Act*, and they're just darn tough to find, Madam Speaker. The courthouse in downtown Edmonton has an excellent library, but normally you can't go in there and find those orders. I can go to the courthouse in Calgary. It's got lots of laws and regulations for this province, but I typically can't find ministerial orders there. So my question to the minister is: what kinds of orders are these in section 46? Are these the orders that are subject to the *Regulations Act*? If they're not, how do Albertans access them?

I'm a believer, I think along with my caucus colleagues, in plain language and that whole movement to make laws accessible to Albertans, and I'm always a bit uncomfortable when we're dealing with orders that may be well known within a department. But, you know, laws are not for the people in the department; they're for the rest of us to manage our affairs.

4:10

I'm mindful of the fact that the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association – I mean, there's a finite number of members, and they may customarily deal with these. Maybe they have ready access to ministerial orders. I don't know; I'd need the minister's help with that. This seems like a fairly innocuous bill, but I'm hopeful the minister can tell us what kinds of orders these are and what process is utilized to make sure that regular Albertans like me or you, Madam Speaker, or any of my constituents can go and find out what these things are and what's in them and so on.

The other observation I'd make. Since we're dealing with section 46, this is somewhat collateral to the bill but certainly relevant. This is one of those things that the Supreme Court of Canada in the *Eurig* decision was focused on. They were looking at probate fees in the *Eurig* decision, but, you know, I expect the fees here may be a significant cost, and perhaps the minister could just offer us some assurance that the *Eurig* decision from the Supreme Court of Canada has been reflected in these orders. They may not be, and I'll await confirmation from the minister. These ministerial orders may not even be subject to the *Regulations Act* of the province of Alberta. It may be that they have not been assessed under the *Eurig* decision. Perhaps we could just have the minister sort of sign off on that,

Madam Speaker, and tell us that he is as usual way ahead of this member, that he anticipated this concern and it's no problem, that it has been looked after. I'd just like to have that assurance myself.

I daresay my constituency, Calgary-*Buffalo*, being in the heart of the oil patch, has lots of land surveyors' offices. I'd hate for some of them to think that some of these questions weren't being asked. Otherwise, it seems like a pretty straightforward piece of legislation.

I've learned about a new kind of map I knew nothing about before. It just goes to show you that you can plunk away for 22 years in the practice of law and think you've dealt with lots of land and survey instruments, and then something like this comes along to show you how inadequate your knowledge is, Madam Speaker. So thanks for the education, Mr. Minister, but hopefully you can educate me further on some of the items I've raised this afternoon.

Thanks very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. minister to close debate.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be happy to review all of the comments made by members of the Assembly and respond to them accordingly.

At this point I wish to move second reading of the *Surveys Amendment Act, 2000*.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Bill 5

Land Titles Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-*Wapiti*.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 5, being the *Land Titles Amendment Act, 2000*.

Madam Speaker, in general terms the intent of Bill 5 is to place certain land title practices in legislation and to ensure that the *Land Titles Act* is in sync with certain federal legislation. In 1996 amendments to the *Land Titles Act* consolidated the north and south Alberta land registration districts into a single Alberta land registration district and provided the statutory authority to establish a land titles office at one or more locations. An amendment to the act is now required in order to provide for the appointment of a single registrar of titles to be responsible for the land titles office. In conjunction with the foregoing, an amendment is also proposed to establish the use of only one seal for the Alberta land titles offices which are located in both Edmonton and Calgary.

An amendment is also required to allow the registrar to accept for registration copies of leases and other registrable instruments which are certified by the chief executive officer under the *Parks Canada Agency Act* or a person duly authorized by the chief executive officer. This amendment is required to ensure the act accommodates the recent amendments to the *Parks Canada Agency Act* by the federal government.

On April 18, 1998, the general register was abolished. All writs of enforcement and other registrable instruments as defined must now be registered on a certificate of title. Commencing in 1995, there was a three-year transition period associated with the abolishment of the general register which required that certain legislative provisions be maintained during that three-year period. As this transition period has now expired, some sections of the *Land Titles Act* require minor changes to reflect current legislative procedures. As well, Madam Speaker, the proposed amendments ensure that all

sections dealing with writs, which are now in different locations throughout the act, will be in one location, allowing for both clarity and ease of reference.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, there is a section in the Land Titles Act which enables a person to bring an action against the registrar of the district in which the land exists for the recovery of damages. An amendment is required to reflect that there is only one land registration district and one registrar for the land titles offices in Alberta.

In closing, I would like to note that formal discussions have taken place with the Law Society of Alberta and with Parks Canada of the federal government as well as informal discussions with many institutions and that these amendments reflect those discussions.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I'd suggest that there are probably few single statutes in this province that are more important than the Land Titles Act. We have an amazing system of land registration, one of the best in the world. It has been recognized as one of the best in the world for many, many decades, and I know my colleagues in the Alberta Liberal caucus are anxious to ensure that the integrity of the land titles system is assured and protected.

I guess it appears fairly straightforward as I look at Bill 5. I would have felt a little more comfortable if the sponsor of the bill had said that he'd reviewed this not just with the Law Society of Alberta, which is the formal regulatory body for Alberta lawyers, but that he had also discussed it with the real estate section of the Canadian Bar Association, north, and the real estate section of the Canadian Bar Association, south. It's the Canadian Bar Association that in fact does advocacy on behalf of lawyers around legislative change, around issues that lawyers deal with all the time. The real estate sections, particularly in Edmonton and Calgary, Madam Speaker, are very strong. They're well attended. These are people, men and women, who deal every day with the minutia of the Land Titles Act and the land titles system. Now, I know my colleagues, people like Calgary-Glenmore and Calgary-Lougheed, if asked would have made that suggestion to the bill sponsor. By the fact that he didn't mention it, I don't know whether he has talked to them and they had problems with this.

Madam Speaker, as I look at it, this seems fairly straightforward, but I think given the importance of the Land Titles Act and the rules to those people who are charged every day with the implementation, the processing of it, I would have felt and would feel more comfortable if I knew that those real estate sections in Edmonton and Calgary had reviewed this and were comfortable with it. They may well confirm that they have no issues or whatever. It's not to say that they make legislation; they don't. Just because one of those groups might have issues, it wouldn't be necessarily a reason to vote against the bill, but it would seem foolish of me not to solicit advice, take that advice and share it with members here in the Assembly.

4:20

I know that I've asked a similar question to some of our Conservative colleagues about the significance, the impact of this, and I haven't to date heard that assurance with respect to the Canadian Bar Association, so I'll do that on my own. I'll be happy, Madam Speaker, to make those inquiries. If the bill sponsor, our friend from Grande Prairie-Wapiti, has got that information, maybe he could just send me a note saying that the real estate sections didn't have any issues with it.

I think it's very dangerous for us to go in and open up a bill as

important as this one and do some tinkering with it without making sure all of the major groups that are going to be directly affected (a) know what the contemplated change consists of and (b) are supportive of it. If they're not supportive, then it just seems to me that the sponsor of the bill has an obligation to come in and, with a view to putting all the information in front of us, to say: the Canadian Bar Association, northern real estate section, has got some problems with section 7; these are the problems, and this is why I as bill sponsor and why the government aren't dissuaded after hearing those concerns.

We haven't heard that. Far be it from me to be, you know, trying to shine my flashlight in dark closets and trying to find out what else is there, but I just think, given the importance of the bill, we want to know that information. There may be others who share that concern. Perhaps not, but it's just too darn important to rubber-stamp this bill. You've heard my comments many times before that I don't think my job here ever is to be a rubber stamp. There may be people who wish to use a great big rubber stamp over my skull, but that's not my job here, to rubber-stamp . . . [interjection] Battered by both sides, Madam Speaker, battered by both sides.

I don't want to be a rubber stamp, and that's why I asked that question. I look forward to some clarification, and if I don't get the clarification, Madam Speaker, I want to make you a promise. I want to make you a promise right now that if this bill gets to committee stage – and I'm sure it will – I'm going to again ask these questions. You're going to be sitting there in the chair saying: "Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I remember you asking those questions. Have you not got answers yet?" I want to have answers by the time we deal with this again at committee stage. You probably are wondering what the answers are to those questions that have been asked, so I promise I'll send you a note if you're in the chair when we get to the committee stage on this important bill.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, do you wish to close debate?

MR. JACQUES: I would ask for the question, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

Bill 1

Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act

[Adjourned debate March 6: Mr. Herard]

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Of course, I'm more than pleased to take the opportunity to speak to Bill 1. You know, often things in this Legislature are a bit like a hockey game. The only things that are reported are the fights and the goals, but there's a lot of play in between that never gets reported. Here we go with a bill that has support on both sides of the House, so I want to speak to that for a little while and maybe tie in some other issues that I think will relate to this bill eventually or that should be addressed by further work.

Virtually, the objects of this bill, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act, are to support a balanced long-term program of science and engineering research based in Alberta directed to the discovery of new knowledge and the application of that knowledge to improve the quality of Alberta's economy, communities and environment. We're putting quite a chunk of coin into that, \$500 million if I'm

correct, to be used by the foundation, and in that we're going to establish an advisory council. In that advisory council, as I understand it, there will be a few different people of different backgrounds. I guess, though, my question is: who will make up the members of the board? Will there be an opportunity to have members of the public? I think the more inclusive we are of different walks of life, different interests, then the better we are served. So that will maybe be an interesting issue that the minister can address at some point: the designated trustees that section 2 will have and if it's only science professionals that will be in the legislation. Surely there might be other science professionals that may be also included in that. I would be interested in hearing about that at a later time as we discuss this bill.

You know, I sometimes think that people don't realize how very significant research in general is. No doubt that in this fast-paced world that we live in, the big focus on engineering . . . Somebody is beeping, but what's new in here? [interjection] No, it's really not me. It's really not me beeping. I'm usually much louder than just a beep.

MR. DICKSON: Somebody has come unplugged.

MRS. SOETAERT: Somebody has come unplugged.

DR. MASSEY: Undone.

MRS. SOETAERT: Undone. It's a machine, we hope.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I think everything is under control.

MRS. SOETAERT: The Member for St. Albert escorted her machine out. Maybe that's part of the research.

To the bill, Madam Speaker. There's a whole realm of research and technology out there that we have to deal with, but my point about research is that it's more important than we ever think. There are scientists that spend countless hours doing research, and the general public says: well, what does a research scientist do anyway? Little do we realize the far-reaching benefits of some of the work they have done. I am pleased that this is for science and engineering, but I guess within that we should always look at the other disciplines that deserve the same amount of research respect and finance that comes with that.

You know, when we convince people to come to our province and we say, "Listen; we have some great research money, and you would be a great person to do research in our province," we also have to be more encompassing in what we offer here. People move here for all kinds of reasons, and as we entice people to come to Alberta to do research, I think we also have to entice them with quality of life. You know, as people make decisions about lifestyles, one of the things they look at before moving to a place is the quality of education. Is there a school nearby where my child can go to school? Is there adequate health care? As people are enticed to do research in our province, this kind of money and commitment and encouragement is only part of what will bring them here.

4:30

I've often said here in the Legislature before that we have to value all disciplines: the humanities, the arts. I'm not saying that this bill doesn't recognize them, but I'm saying that as we start this, let's also encompass the other things. I often think of the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus*, an excellent, excellent movie. It talks about: if we take away the fine arts, what will our students have to write about? I often encourage members of this Assembly and wherever I go about

the real value of a comprehensive education, a comprehensive research plan. I guess that in those other disciplines within the colleges, NAIT and SAIT, the universities, we also must look at the humanities, because I don't want those forgotten as the old pendulum swings towards technology and science and research and all those things that we all rely on more than we know. There's the other side of the pendulum, too, that I don't think we have focused on enough as well.

I know this is based on the medical research foundation, and to my knowledge that works very well. I support this legislation, but I also within it question the things that may be missing. As we do research and as universities and secondary institutions can access this, I express concerns that while we're doing that, we're also not realizing the restrictions that we sometimes put on people to go, to access those secondary institutions because of funding issues, because of the expense of it. I guess if we value research and if we value knowledge, then we should value the availability of those secondary institutions, which I think are becoming more and more inaccessible every year.

When we look at the U of A tuition rising 6 percent, that's a chunk of coin for summer students who make 6 to 7 bucks an hour and for their parents. Obviously many of these young people have to be supported or at least helped along or have loans cosigned by their parents. I think when we're looking at a knowledge-based society and something that's really important like this research, we can't be just narrow. We have to be more comprehensive and look at the whole picture of knowledge in this province, and what we really, really value is the accessibility of secondary education for young people.

You know, it's interesting. In this province many years ago only up to grade 8 was public education. The rest was all private and expensive. Maybe some people can even remember when parents paid for their children to go into the convent or off to the city so they could get an education. Now, of course, we have public education to grade 12, except for some exceptions when we have to fund-raise for books, et cetera. That's veering a bit, but it applies. It applies to a society that values knowledge. I hope that someday I see – and I mean, heaven knows, this government would never approach it. If we truly value knowledge, why aren't we making secondary education far more accessible? In a society that truly values secondary education, would we have such tuition costs? Would that become public education? Imagine an Alberta that valued education so much that secondary education was part of the public program. Maybe not possible in this year's budget but certainly a goal we should all at least look at and say: would it ever be a possibility within our realm to make secondary education public?

Well, we have a government that now is supporting engineering research, and that's a good move. That's a good move. But I think that if we apply knowledge right across the board, it can't just come in a little flagship bill. It can't just come as a one-shot announcement where we pound our chest: "Look at us. Aren't we wonderful? We're the heroes of knowledge." The reality is that, as in so many others, this government has failed.

So I do support Bill 1, but with it I express my concerns that just because we now have a foundation set up for science and research, that doesn't mean, then, that we can just toss away the rest of all the education issues and failings, shortcomings that this government has created. We now have students fund-raising just to get books and photocopying and essentials for the classrooms. We have bake sales. We have sub sales. We have all those kinds of things. In a society that really values education, why are we not acknowledging that we have shortcomings all the way through the system? Instead of addressing all those issues, we do come up with one foundation.

That is good. But you can't say in your little platform speech or out in your communities, "Aren't we wonderful for supporting research in this area?" and then forget that you have underfunded education, taken money away from kindergarten, and raised tuition costs prohibitively.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, the chair has listened intently here. I'm a firm believer that one can always bridge, but you're bridging awfully, awfully far away from what is before me in Bill 1. Let's get back to the overall principles within the bill.

MRS. SOETAERT: It is actually university based, and bridging is an engineering topic.

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The scholars need research assistants who are university students. If tuition is too high, they can't go. It's like a circle. You see, it's a vicious circle. We've got the research, but if you can't get there to access it, you can't go. It's a vicious circle. So there's a lot of bridging going on around here on this Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act.

MR. SMITH: It's a good bill.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's a good bill. Absolutely it's a good bill, but it's just one piece of a huge puzzle with a government that doesn't value education in other areas but touts the \$500 million, half a billion dollars. That is wonderful, but the reality is that it's only part. It's one part of a puzzle that these guys won't put together.

Regretfully, there's still fund-raising. Students work full-time all summer and part-time during the year, and they still don't have enough money for tuition. Those very researchers who will be accessing this foundation – we don't want them to be unable to access it because of prohibitive costs just to get to university. Really, it is all part and parcel of it.

I'm supporting it, but I don't want people to ignore the fact that that's just one step. We have to get there in order to access that research. I would bet you that some of the very people who may say, "You know, I can't afford secondary education," are the very ones that may have accessed this and done something very notable for Alberta, maybe for the entire world. We could have been on the map because of that one researcher who maybe couldn't access university because of prohibitive tuition costs.

4:40

I think I've touched on some of this. The advisory council will be an interesting one. I know it only mentions the engineers and agronomists, if I understand this correctly, so I'm hoping that maybe there will be other members from the public that will be on this foundation, that it won't be just political appointees. Of course they're going to be appointed, but the reality is that we hope their focus is on research and what things are going to be valuable for Alberta. I'm sure, just quite sure, almost sure that that will happen.

I hope I made a few points and woke up a few people on a Monday afternoon and made new friends, Madam Speaker. The reality is that I'm glad we're supporting research. We should support it in the humanities as well. Maybe that will be the next opportunity. We can't just be narrowly focused on engineering and science. As much as I support those, there are other disciplines that should be acknowledged as well, and research is just as important in

those areas. Let's look at the whole picture of knowledge and education and research in this province, because it can't just be one single little flagship. It goes together with the whole package. I will support this little piece of the puzzle in hopes that other pieces will come forward. Mind you, we'll have to provide the pieces. I know they'll never be able to put the puzzle together without us.

Madam Speaker, with those few words of support and encouragement from me on Bill 1, I'm pleased to be able to speak to it, and I thank you for that opportunity.

MR. DOERKSEN: Madam Speaker, I too want to speak for a few minutes at second reading of Bill 1. Bill 1, of course, is the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act.

I want to make a couple of compliments, first of all to the Minister of Innovation and Science, who has brought this bill and this concept forward to our government. He should be commended for his foresight. Secondly and just as important is the Alberta Science and Research Authority, which is a group of individuals who are not all politically alike in their beliefs, who gather around the table on a regular basis to provide objective policy advice to the government with respect to research, science, and a whole range of how we can be more effective in this area. So I wanted to make sure, Madam Speaker, that they were acknowledged in the development of this particular fund.

The science and engineering research act, or this fund, is set up similar to the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. Like that fund, Madam Speaker, the beauty of an endowment fund is the fact that it's a fund that keeps on giving; you know, like that rabbit we see on TV, the Duracell battery rabbit, that just keeps on going. These are funds that keep on giving.

MR. SMITH: Eveready.

MR. DOERKSEN: Is it Eveready? Okay. Well, you know what I'm talking about. I don't watch TV that much, Madam Speaker, so I don't always get these names right, but the concept about giving on a continual basis for a long time in the future as an endowment for the benefit of our children and our grandchildren is what's important.

I think of another fund that does the same thing. It's the heritage foundation for scholarships. I don't think that's the correct name. One of those scholarships is the Alexander Rutherford scholarship, whereby high school students can earn up to \$2,500 over the period of their high school studies to help further their education. The reason I'm bringing this up, Madam Speaker, is I'm pointing out to you the benefits of an endowment, which is what we are talking about here. In the case of the science and engineering fund it's a \$500 million endowment, which will keep on giving for science and engineering research well into the future. That's exactly the same concept that we had in the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research as well as the one where we provide scholarships.

The objects of the foundation, of course, are set out in section 3, where it talks about:

- (a) stimulate research in science and engineering,
- (b) promote effective means of using in Alberta the science and engineering resources available in Alberta,
- (c) support science and engineering research laboratories and related facilities in Alberta,
- (d) promote co-operation in research in science and engineering . . .
- (e) encourage young Albertans to pursue careers in research in science and engineering.

Madam Speaker, the fund is going to be governed by trustees, and the makeup of that group of trustees is set out in section 2. Again,

what you have here is similar to the Alberta Science and Research Authority. You're going to have good-thinking Albertans who are going to sit on this council to provide the expertise, because frankly those of us in this room cannot possibly provide all the necessary expertise and guidance to invest in something of this nature. We need their advice. We need their opinions.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, I want to point out that had it not been for the fiscal policy of this government, this \$500 million fund would never have been possible. By getting our budget under control, our spending under control, by reducing the debt, by putting ourselves in this fiscal position, it made it possible for us to even entertain this fund at this moment, at this time, and it's good for all generations of Albertans into the future. More than that, because of the fiscal policy of this government, I expect we're going to see another \$100 million added to this fund every year for the next five years to increase it to a billion dollars.

So with that, Madam Speaker, I do want to stand and vote my support for Bill 1. Thank you.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I had intended to compliment the minister – and I will do – for bringing this forward at this time, because it's long, long overdue that some moneys be spent in this manner in this province.

I will have to pick up from where my hon. colleague from Red Deer-South left off and beg to differ in some small manner. This government continually believes that they saved this province single-handedly from this destruction of overspending. In fact, if those that are old enough to remember 1989 will recall, there was an election that year. It was one Laurence Decore, who was honoured today by some expenditure of some funds to further the education of young people in leadership. That man was the one that held the wallet and said: this should not be the way. The current government of the day was overexpending. This government takes this great pleasure in saying how wonderful that they chopped the budget and were able to be fiscally responsible, as though they were the only people in the entire world that would consider doing that. My kids would say: get out of here.

MR. DOERKSEN: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: A point of order from the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. DOERKSEN: Under citation 23(i), imputing motives. Madam Speaker, in my address, if it was not clear to the member of the opposition, I was not giving credit to the government solely. It was the fiscal policies of this government, which were accepted by the people. In fact, they rose to the occasion. They were the ones who helped us through and were the ones that were responsible for us to be able to achieve for all of Alberta what we have been able to achieve in this province. It's not due to the people in this room. It's due to the people of Alberta. I want to make sure that that's clear.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order, hon. member.

MR. WHITE: Madam Speaker, I presume that the Speaker and the Clerk are taking note of my valuable time being used for this non point of order. Quite frankly, this wasn't even a clarification. This would be called an interruption. That's all. In fact, he agreed with

what I said. He in fact said that all he did was say that the government provided the opportunity for the government's largesse to put this fund into place, and I was taking umbrage with that. That's all. In fact, I was just using his very words and taking the same position that he was. I presume that the time that has been allotted for this pointless point of order, this disorderly order would be taken off.

4:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: There is no point of order. What happened is exactly what I said a few minutes ago. This particular stage of the bill is to go over the principle of the bill. If you veer off too much from the actual bill and what is in the bill, then this type of thing results.

So let us move on with the contents of Bill 1, hon. member.

Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: Thank you. Speaking to the principle of the bill, that which brought this bill to this point was that the government in their largesse thought: yes, it's a good time to put some money into this. Personally, I think it is a bad time to take money out of science and technology at any point in this province of Alberta that relies on that and that alone.

Think of the industries that we rely on. The oil and gas industry has in fact financed this government to be able to come to this point. In '93 it wasn't a major expenditure problem. The problem was that the price of oil was down to the extent that we could not continue to spend as we had spent. In fact, to get to this point, this is the area in this part of the world that requires a continual and a continuity of expenditure. You don't just sort of add water and stir in the science and technology area and crank it up and turn out people and have them research in any one area without a sustained effort. Cutting the universities down in the interim – what do they call the number of members that sat in the back row there, Mr. Minister? I can't recall the name.

MR. SMITH: The good guys.

MR. WHITE: They were the ones. It was the good guys in the back row. That's what it was. At the time it seemed their single purpose was to chop and cut and chop and cut and chop and cut. Now, of course, we've moved. [interjection] Yes. Only the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has remained true to the principle. He still is a chop-and-cut guy.

Now we have the current minister, who says: whoa; turn around here. A major turnaround. Personally, I'm really happy he has seen the light. I am more than happy. I'm ecstatic that he has seen the light to pour money into this area of this society that so sorely needs it. In fact, I've heard him speak on the subject, and he speaks quite eloquently and quite knowledgeably about this particular area of endeavour that is truly a place for government to be. Private enterprise simply cannot fund nor should it be expected to be able to fund fundamental research. Not the applied research, not that which we generally see the products of, but the fundamental research.

Being an engineer myself, I have a little difficulty with the title being: science and engineering. My view of engineering is the application of those elements of science that come together in a creative fashion that can be put to some practical use economically. That is one version of a definition of engineering. In fact, engineering in this province has done very, very well. Engineering in fact can do and does do a great deal of research on their own. I speak of the oil industry, which does it exceedingly well. But what they don't do well is that fundamental research, that research that goes right to the heart of matter and its relationship to other matter and the

movement of that matter and the discovery of what makes the substance react to various temperatures and other conditions.

The policy I would think would have been better applied to the universities. I have a number of questions that relate to that. Why would a foundation be necessary when we have two universities that in so many areas are pushing the envelope of knowledge in all areas of research and are grossly underfunded and have been grossly underfunded for a number of years in the undergrad area as well as the graduate area? This financing would speak to fundamentally the graduate area, I would think, but with a graduate area that has a substantial expenditure of public funds in the acquisition of that fundamental knowledge, what it does do, speaking to the questions raised by the Member for Red Deer-South, is it inspires those minds. It inspires those minds when you have that kind of research going on close at hand and you're a young university student that has arrived at a place where the world opens up. All of a sudden you find that there are some areas of science that are just blossoming right before your eyes, right there where the knowledge of three or four people in a particular area of science are world renowned.

All through my career and up to the mid-70s and right into the '80s that was occurring in both our major universities to a great extent. Then we had the '92 plunge. We collectively – I was part of that too – packed off a great deal of those that had pushed out the envelope of human knowledge. Yes, you don't see an immediate action and reaction from any of that knowledge, but a great deal of the development and assembling of that knowledge in an order that can be functionally used comes from that.

Now, you'll note that one of the first and best computer science labs in all of Canada and all of northwest United States – I believe California was leading the charge at the time. In Canada this university here, a mile and a half from where we stand, had in the '60s, in '63-64, a fabulous school. It grew, and it turned out some very, very good scientists that have gone all over the world. In fact, today we have right in this city a development of software that is being marketed the world over. I can think of two pieces of software right now that are delivering service to the world in the way of software development. That comes from expenditure – when? – not last week, not last year, but it's a sustained application of a principle that says that a government is responsible for developing that fundamental of science because business simply is unable to do it.

They cannot sustain it. They'd love to. They would love to be able to sustain a push in an area for 20 years, to have it to fruition, but a board of directors simply is not going to put up with that, nor should they be expected to put up with that. Pushing out that envelope in engineering requires studying a finite element. Now, how can you study the finite elements in the telecommunication industry, say, of pushing that envelope of fibre optics, the capacity of fibre optics? No firm can manage that. Bell Canada cannot manage it. It manages a great deal but cannot manage it all. In fact, it takes an AT&T, Bell Canada, Bell international to fund some of that research in one or two centres in the world.

Now, if you have that breadth of knowledge, as we did have in this centre in Edmonton, then this university would have received a great deal of those funds. As it was, in that particular area we did not. This particular university as well as the University of Calgary receives a good deal of funds from the oil business and rightly so, because they're pushing the envelope in the areas of downhole drilling, directional drilling, and directional recovery. All of that has just blossomed, because we have the experimental areas and deep-hole drilling here in the province of Alberta, and we discovered that. There were, in large measure, some exceptionally good science and research people at both universities. In fact there are areas of

marketing and agricultural marketing and those related areas in Lethbridge that are just ablossom.

5:00

This government seemed to be in the game a little late but strongly in the game with this bill, putting up half a billion dollars, soon, I hear, could be adding more. An endowment fund to turn off, say, 10 percent of \$50 million a year, is a very, very good fund. The application of that fund leads to a number of questions, fundamental questions, and a policy statement. In what areas of science and technology, if you will, and applied engineering does this government see the potential expansion? You can't just sort of throw the money out and say: well, we're going to throw it out there and decide that we're going to be all things to all people. It has to be targeted, and it's very, very fine targeting to target those areas that (a) we have some strength in currently, because you can't build on nothing, and (b) that there's going to be a long-term need.

I've heard this province talk about the smart society. I've heard so many eloquent speeches from politicians and academics alike on all of the these areas, but I have yet to see an itemized list that says these are the areas that precisely we should be spending substantial dollars on. Now, it may be early for that discussion with the bill at its current stage, but it is very, very late in the discussion as it relates to all the universities and the furtherance of knowledge-based industry in this province.

I have to wonder: what is AOSTRA's or any of the current government/industry-supported agencies' relationship to this fund? ARC: how does the Research Council relate to it? As I understood it, the Research Council at one time was supposed to be pushing the envelope. But in recent years, as I understand it, they have been more on the application side, the side to take some science that comes out of the university or comes out of the industry to commercialize, as it were, that science. Well, that is a very, very narrow area, and it is an area that is easily supported – no, not easily. It is much easier to support from a business perspective than the fundamental research. I would like to know what areas this application of perhaps in the order of \$50 million a year will go to.

I would like to know why we would set up an International Board of Review before knowing what areas one would be targeting specifically, because, quite frankly, the peer review is standard practice in a publication from any noted university. This act would appear to reinvent the wheel, as it were, or develop another similar wheel to do the same thing as all universities do as a matter of course. I have little difficulty understanding why it's needed under this plan, but I'm at a loss to understand why this Legislature wouldn't say that we need and have to direct the universities through the Department of Learning – it's called now – and advanced education to fund universities globally. It seems to me that this ministry wishes to have a micromanagement control on how the moneys are spent in these areas.

Well, politicians come and go. Policies come and go. This member would assume that if you do believe in long-term, sustained funding at a reasonable level in these areas, after you've chosen these areas, this is a long-term plan, and you can't move in and out at the whim of the government of the day. This member would much prefer that the magnitude of these moneys be spent and invested in a university as a whole with perhaps some assistance and some direction through appealing to the board of governors or the senate, as it were, of the university to apply these extra funds to these areas of expanding that envelope. Obviously this argument has not won out, if it was ever made in caucus. Quite frankly, it's disappointing. Looking around at the makeup of this House and the number of graduates that did come from the two universities in the

province of Alberta, you would have thought that the arguments would have been made to have this funding be brought along as the budget allowed, following this government's principle.

MR. SMITH: Did you say two universities, Lance?

MR. WHITE: I'm sorry. The two universities that house engineering and science research. There are a number of other universities, of course, in other areas that are growing rapidly and are doing a fantastic job but not in the areas of the applied sciences and the expanding of that envelope that I spoke about earlier.

Madam Speaker, I'd again reaffirm this member's commitment and a compliment to the minister for bringing this forward at this time and wish him well in the application of this. If this member can be of some assistance in the establishment of the advisory council of which he speaks or the International Board of Review, not directly, of course, but certainly with some further assistance in that regard, this member would certainly not be adverse to adding that assistance anywhere it can be put, because this is a very, very important part of the expansion of this wonderful province where we live.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act. I compliment the Member for Edmonton-Calder for his communication skills. I know as a trained engineer and practising professional that he's certainly one of the most eloquent engineers I've ever had the pleasure to hear from. I know he views his skills humbly and only his work in progress, but he continues to add interesting thoughts to the debate. Even though a point of order would bring him back to cause on this bill, it's a good job.

If I can speak briefly, Madam Speaker, to the bill, the principles and the buildup behind it. In 1993 the economy of Alberta was characterized at about \$73 billion in gross domestic product. It had roughly 8.3 percent unemployment. Investment was declining. There was a concern that the overwhelming engine of government spending was going to further curtail growth in the private sector and that there needed to be a time when there was a much better and a more favourable balancing of both investment and, actually, the partnerships that exist between the private sector and government.

5:10

From that period, Madam Speaker, the private sector took the bit between their teeth. They were able to react, as the Member for Red Deer-South correctly has pointed out, through a consensus procedure and an ability to move into a growth mode to capitalize on the great strengths that are in this province and actually move the gross domestic product up to this year where it is forecast to be somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$100 billion to \$103 billion. That's enough additional economic activity, production of goods and services, to equal another Saskatchewan, to equal another Manitoba. In fact, we are three and a half to four times larger than the other two prairie provinces. At that time, of course, we have seen some really interesting examples of job creation, knowledge enhancement, and some liberal descriptions of how to stimulate the knowledge industry.

One that comes to mind that was in vogue earlier, Madam Speaker, was the scientific research and tax credit program. That basically led to a tremendous amount of money wasted in the

system, in the private sector throughout Canada. In fact, it did more to turn lawyers and accountants into scientists and engineers as opposed to bright young minds and keen students.

Also, most recently we have seen the billion dollar boondoggle of the Human Resources Development department in Ottawa, that seems to be a direct reflection of some Liberal policy from the Alberta Liberals, where in fact they deal with over 70,000 accounts across Canada. Poor accounting, poor audit, direct job infusion. Basically, money wasted. It did nothing to promote the overall growth in the body of knowledge.

As we went through this, Madam Speaker, there was a tremendous interest in the government of Alberta to continue and to build on already strong spending in the science and research area but also to build the spending on an appropriate infrastructure and to put it into a place where in fact it had concrete and substantial results. If one were to view the first pass of the Tax Review Committee of two years ago and the standing policy committee of this government, we did also look at tax credits. We realized that in today's world, tax credits were not the way to go. In fact, there was a tremendous amount of work being done by an economist out of Stanford by the name of Paul Romer, who has flipped the theory of diminishing marginal returns over and said: now in today's value-creation world, once you spend a hundred million dollars on developing software, the next copy is 10 cents and the next copy after that is 9 cents. In fact, the principle is working absolutely in reverse of traditional industries.

We know how important the sector is just when we look at the activity of the stock markets over the last four months. The Dow-Jones, which is basically an amalgam of stocks in a broad economic array, has actually lost about 10 percent in value, Madam Speaker. If you look at the NASDAQ, the stock market where it is a reflection of Internet technology stocks, the very market where the principles of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act applies, you can see that it has held its own. It's down, I think, 140 points today, but it still holds close to around 5,000.

What we've seen is a government's attention to a private-sector need. For example, Madam Speaker, you will see Nortel Networks, that generally employs probably in the neighbourhood of 75 to 80 percent of all electrical engineers graduating in this province, at one time 100 percent of all the electrical engineers at the masters level and 100 percent of all of the ones at the PhD level. So we needed that infrastructure. Being fortunate enough to represent the University of Calgary, we were at an opening of the communication and technology building. There was a tremendous amount of excitement around that university, not only for this bill, of course, but for a terrific move that was supported by the minister of technology and led by the former minister of what was known as advanced education doubling the amount of engineering and computer science grads out of that facility.

So there's a tremendous amount of interest, a tremendous amount of attention, and a tremendous amount of resources being deployed by this government, these active, thinking members of this government, toward that knowledge sector and the development of jobs, jobs that can take place in Rocky Mountain House or Lacombe or Stettler. In fact, in the area I'm responsible for, Madam Speaker, there are a number of technically trained individuals working right out of your constituency today, and we know that that process will continue and that they'll continue to add not only value but jobs and a level of disposable income to that community.

So, Madam Speaker, from that genesis emerged the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act. A farsighted minister who knew that he would rather have events last for a long time rather than himself and have the legacy speak rather

than the re-election took a chance and went to caucus, went through a long process that engendered consensus amongst members of the academic faculty in Alberta, the chancellors of universities, Eric Newell of the University of Alberta and Ted Newell of the University of Calgary, the presidents, Howard Tennant, Terry White, Rod Fraser, of the university community, all great supporters of this bill.

I have a wonderful note from the president of the University of Calgary saying what an important legacy this is to the University of Calgary and more particularly to its students, whom it serves well. It serves in a process of education where we can put money forward to the infrastructure that has been constructed over the last number of years and where science and engineering research should actually take place, and, Madam Speaker, that's right in the universities.

So in fact this government is celebrating its infrastructure. It's celebrating its university infrastructure. It realizes the good work they have done to promote good, solid education and to promote an ability for Albertans to leap into the new economy proficiently, well trained, and with a great deal of expertise.

So it's certainly not hard to support this bill. It's certainly a clear recognition why this government values education, values growth in research and infrastructure, in fact can take a lot of research and knowledge from this and apply it directly to farms in the agriculture sector and to the petrochemical sector, the sectors that are not just in Calgary and Edmonton but are in fact located throughout rural Alberta, throughout Alberta in various places. I think it's a terrific, farsighted move that is not only going to be held as a legacy for the leader of this government but for each and every member in this government as they've participated in its development and emergence over the past two years.

I know that the minister will continue to do good work to ensure the success of this, to be able to shed some of the old-time thinking, some of the cloisters that exist in research and development inside government today. For example, I hear there is great action being planned for the Alberta Research Council. Being able to put it in a

more private-sector setting, Madam Speaker, would allow it to capitalize on new innovations quickly and effectively and to be able to move into the forefront of the marketplace.

So, Madam Speaker, I really want to commend the people who put together this bill, who look at the importance of balancing a long-term program of research and science and engineering and directing it to the discovery of new knowledge. I think that's a great testimony to everybody, opposition, government members, all who have been involved in this bill, and knowing that members will want to be as prolific in their praise as I have been, in view of the hour, Madam Speaker, I would suggest that we adjourn debate for the balance of this afternoon.

5:20

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and that we reconvene this evening at 8 in Committee of Supply.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. The Assembly stands adjourned until 8 this evening, when it will reconvene in subcommittee.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:21 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of AlbertaTitle: **Monday, March 13, 2000****8:00 p.m.**

Date: 00/03/13

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. Committee members are reminded that we're subdividing into two subcommittees, C and D. Subcommittee C will deal with the estimates of the Department of Municipal Affairs in the Assembly, and subcommittee D is invited now to proceed upstairs to room 512 for the Resource Development department's estimates. So if you'd care to go.

[The committee met as subcommittees C and D from 8:01 p.m. to 10:07 p.m.]

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Chairman, subcommittee C of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Municipal Affairs for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Subcommittee D of the

Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Resource Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. RENNER: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Resource Development and the Department of Municipal Affairs for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:10 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Municipal Affairs, Monday, March 13, 2000
 00/03/13
 8:01 p.m.
 [Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Subcommittee C – Municipal Affairs

Tannas, Don, Chairman
 Fischer, Butch, Deputy Chairman
 Cao, Wayne
 Evans, Iris
 Gibbons, Ed
 Jonson, Halvar
 Lund, Ty

MacDonald, Hugh
 McFarland, Barry
 Nelson, Patricia
 Nicol, Ken
 Oberg, Lyle
 O'Neill, Mary

Paszkowski, Walter
 Soetaert, Colleen
 Strang, Ivan
 Thurber, Tom
 Trynchy, Peter
 Yankowsky, Julius

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call the subcommittee to order. First of all, I'd like to call upon the subcommittee to grant us leave to introduce guests. Agreeable?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Cubs from both Empire Park and Clareview 66. They're here tonight with leaders Mrs. Gail Idenouye and Mr. Chris Idenouye – Chris is the architect in charge of the new addition onto the University hospital; I've known both Chris and Gail for years – and Mr. Reg McIvor from Empire Park. They're in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd like them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member. Before we call upon the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I would just like to explain to the people that are in the gallery that committee is the informal stage, and people can move around. We're even in a less formal part of that, which is a subcommittee. So three-quarters of the members are not here. There's subcommittee A and B and C and D. You've seen C and D, and D has just departed. So we're down to one-quarter of our strength, but we make up for that in quality.

With those words then I think we'll call upon the Minister of Municipal Affairs to begin this evening's deliberations on his estimates. Hon. minister.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly I'm pleased to present the budget and the three-year business plan for Alberta Municipal Affairs and to answer any questions from both sides of the House as they may come forward. If I'm not able to answer them today, we'll provide written submissions to answer all of those questions. I commit to that.

Before I begin, I'd like to introduce some of the staff from my department that are seated up in the members' gallery. They include my deputy minister, Dan Bader; Brad Pickering, assistant deputy minister in charge of local government services; Dennis Gartner, assistant deputy minister responsible for public safety and information management; Bryan Huygen, acting director of finance and administration; Joyce Ingram, executive director, business planning and corporate support; Brian Quickfall, executive director, municipal services; Ken Fenning, executive director, safety services; Marjorie Morris, director of communications; John Beke, manager, business

planning; Mina Montroy, manager of legislative planning; Jim Leitch, executive assistant to the deputy; and Maria Pohl, administrative assistant, business planning, corporate support; and, of course, the world famous Dwight Dibben should be up there somewhere as well.

With that I want to thank staff for showing the interest and really providing guidance throughout the year. I think that under the circumstances the staff has provided excellent direction in working very closely with municipal officials and developing a strategy and working with municipalities that makes this province such a wonderful place to live. Each level of government provides different levels of service, and certainly working with the municipal level is very key. I've mentioned this to municipalities time and time again, that they're really the foundation of this province, and ultimately the strength of the province relies on the foundation.

As we begin the new century, our outlook really couldn't be brighter. The province is strong, it's resilient, and it's ready to take on the 21st century. Albertans have told us that they expect us to keep Alberta strong as well. Albertans want their government to ensure that our province has a strong agricultural sector, economic policies that keep good jobs in Alberta, an education system that ensures that our children can remain competitive, tax policies that respect taxpayers' hard-earned dollars, and a strong and vital health system. These are the components that will keep Alberta strong.

I've long been a believer that a strong province also is built from strong municipalities and communities. With strong and vibrant communities we can ensure that we are positioned to take on the challenges of this new century and to achieve this vision for the future of our province.

Alberta Municipal Affairs is entering a new millennium with a new and more integrated focus. This department is now responsible for local government services, disaster services, safety services, information and privacy, the fire commissioner's office, and the Municipal Government Board. Considering these areas of responsibility, we now have a department that truly reflects the municipal affairs in this province. All of the areas have strong linkages with the municipalities they serve. Equally important, they also have strong linkages with each other.

Our strategy for the next three years is to provide a more focused and co-ordinated approach to the delivery of municipally oriented programs. This new focus is important to the overall direction and goal setting of the ministry, but it's even more important to our clients, who will see a single organization working as a team to address the challenges faced by municipalities.

Mr. Chairman, this budget and business plan were not developed in isolation. To ensure that these documents reflected the views, issues, and challenges being faced by our municipalities, I went on a provincewide tour with our Agriculture, Food and Rural Development minister as well as the Community Development minister and an official from Alberta Infrastructure, visiting 12 regions. We heard presentations from elected officials representing almost half

of the municipalities of this province. The tour provided a good understanding of current municipal concerns as we entered into the business planning and budgeting process. The documents before us today reflect the views that we had heard.

For 2000-2001 the operating expenditure estimates for the ministry total \$141,900,000. This funding is distributed amongst four key areas: local government services, public safety and information management, the Municipal Government Board, and the ministry support areas.

For 2000-2001 our income statement identifies that our revenue is close to \$14.2 million. Of this total, \$12 million is funding that we'll receive from lottery revenues to support financial assistance provided under our Municipal 2000 sponsorship program. The remaining \$2 million comes partially from the licences and fees associated with the issuance of safety certificates from our safety services area. A portion also comes from the cost-sharing arrangements with the federal government for some of our disaster preparation programs.

The local government services area is by far the largest component of our ministry's budget. From this program area we aim to provide support services, policies, and legislation that enhance the development of a sustainable, accountable, responsive, and effective local government sector. The operating budget for this area for 2000-2001 is \$112.6 million, of which \$96.7 million is budgeted for various programs.

The nongrant portion of the budget would allow the ministry to carry out a number of key initiatives next year. For instance, we will complete the capital regional governance review, an exciting initiative involving 22 municipalities to build upon the existing framework of regional co-operation. An interim report is expected by the end of this March.

We will continue to offer the highly successful intermunicipal dispute resolution initiative. This innovative program allows municipalities to resolve disputes at their local level. I'm very pleased to advise that 100 percent of the municipalities that have participated in the program to date have resolved their disputes.

We will continue with two MLA committees to ensure that we deliver a fair taxation system for Alberta. The education property tax MLA committee will continue to investigate issues and develop alternative tax structure options. The MLA farm property tax assessment review committee will continue to study the economic impact of changes being considered on how farm and property operations are assessed and taxed. We'll also look to improve the assessment audit, assessment equalization process, and the linear assessment process.

It's also in our business plan to ensure a co-ordinated provincial government approach towards municipalities. The review of the partnership between the province and the municipalities will help us in more clearly defining roles and responsibilities, thereby improving accountability, service quality, and efficiency.

8:11

Shifting the focus for a moment to the financial component of the municipal programs budget, I'd like to note that our budget for the Municipal 2000 sponsorship program will be \$12 million for the year 2000-2001. This is up \$2 million from the previous year. This program has proven to be very valuable for municipalities. Last year 286 out of 307 eligible municipalities received funding for projects aimed at intermunicipal co-operation and innovation.

Our estimates show that we have reduced the budget in two grant programs: the municipal debenture interest rebate program and the grants-in-place-of-taxes program. These reductions will not impact municipalities. The municipal debenture interest rebate program is

an historical program that was introduced when interest rates were high to subsidize the interest on certain debenture borrowings from the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation. As the interest component on debentures held by municipalities decreases over time or the debentures are paid by municipalities, the amount that we need to budget decreases.

With regard to the grants-in-lieu-of-taxes program we've adjusted our estimates downward to reflect the current needs of the program. Reasons for the reduction include a continuing reduction in the amount of property owned by the province and the fact that the switch to market value assessment in Alberta did not have as significant an impact on the program as originally thought. The \$32 million that we budgeted for 2000-2001 is much closer to our recent experience, and no municipality will receive less than they were entitled to under this program.

The public safety and information management division, while new to the department, makes a significant contribution to the mission of Municipal Affairs. There are strong linkages with services offered by this area to the municipalities that we serve. Through this area we promote and apply appropriate safety standards throughout the province. We manage provincial disaster planning and recovery programs and provide support to municipalities to ensure that they're prepared to deal with emergencies and, after disasters, to assist in the recovery, and we provide a legislative and policy framework and support to public bodies to enhance access to information and protection of privacy for Albertans.

The expenditure budget for 2000-2001 under this program is approximately \$19.4 million. The increase in this budget for this area is primarily due to a new \$10 million initiative identified in the estimates as petroleum storage tanks. The petroleum storage tank remediation program is a joint initiative with other government departments and the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta. With a \$10 million funding level identified for 2000-2001, we'll focus on completing site assessments to determine the most environmentally sensitive sites, and for high-risk sites we will initiate some of the highest priority remediations.

Another new budget item is a support area for the newly created public safety and information management division. As earlier noted, the division brings three areas together for the first time under one program. We'll continue to improve our assistance to municipalities to help ensure that safety codes are met. To help us meet this objective, we will improve our ability to communicate and co-operate through the better use of information technology, simplify the system so that it's more user friendly and provides greater value to communities, and continue to ensure that our safety codes and standards are appropriate and meet Albertans' expectations of quality.

The pressure vessel inspection backlog reduction program will continue in the 2000-2001 fiscal year. Through this program significant progress was made in improving boiler and pressure vessel safety as the program exceeded its targets to reduce the inspection backlog. The Auditor General has acknowledged the positive progress that we're making in this area in his annual report.

Mr. Chairman, we will continue to work to ensure that public bodies continue to protect the personal information of Albertans and provide appropriate access to information. We'll also conduct a review of the issue of privacy protection in Alberta's private sector.

This issue has been brought to the forefront by the emergence of the electronic commerce industry and one-window approach to service delivery. Privacy concerns have recently been highlighted by the efforts of the European Union to force its trading partners to legislate privacy protection in the private sector. The federal government has responded with the introduction of Bill C-6, with

which we have some specific concerns. Alberta's new review will include a thorough consultation process to ensure that Alberta businesses and consumers have every opportunity to express their views on private-sector privacy protection.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, through this division's area we will continue to provide assistance to local fire departments through the fire commissioner's office. This will be done through fire prevention and education initiatives.

In addition to our two major program areas, we'll also rely on the services of our ministry support services area to keep the ministry running smoothly. It's worth while to note that the majority of our support areas, such as human resources, legal services, information technology, and finance and administration, as well as some communication and corporate support functions, have provided services to Alberta Government Services on a shared services basis since last May. The nature of our sharing will change as the Alberta Corporate Service Centre assumes responsibility for the delivery of a number of common services that all ministries in the government of Alberta use, but the underlying concepts of doing things more efficiently will continue. The ministry's support services area is showing an overall budget increase of approximately \$367,000 compared to last year. This increase is due to changes that have taken place in the ministry since the government reorganization this past May.

I look forward to working with our partners and my staff to carry out the exciting initiatives outlined in the ministry's plan. In the end, I know that we'll continue to provide good service to Albertans and find new ways to keep moving the standard of good service to a higher level, to a higher benchmark.

Mr. Chairman, I'll welcome any questions from my colleagues, and indeed we'll provide as many answers as we have time for. If we're not able to provide those in oral form, we'll provide them in written form. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

MR. GIBBONS: I'd like to welcome and thank the department heads that were introduced, and different than last year, I won't ask 286 questions. From a lot of the information we went over the last week or so – and some of it's still on the agenda; some of it isn't – it's interesting how the ministry has changed over the last year. I do believe that there has been some good in the change, and I hope we see results from that.

I'm going to start with an area that has been in contention for the last while, and that's the education property tax. We're looking at a committee that was set up a year ago, probably a year on the 26th of March, I believe it is, and we are reading and seeing that what's coming out of that is that they're just going to do public consultation this year. I did point out a number of times last year that we've been tinkering, tinkering with the actual education tax when the market value that has been coming in has been a point of contention throughout the province. There has been a point of tinkering in areas where market value and the way the assessment actually is going – because the Bow corridor, anywhere from Brooks right through to Banff, Grande Prairie, and Fort McMurray are really booming.

I do realize and try to emphasize to the city councillors, people in our city, the city of Edmonton, that within two years we'll be moving along with our economy quite well, and there might be things that we have to do then. The fact is that they're pointing out in different letters that have been sent to you, Mr. Minister, the dollars and cents that actually have been saved in different areas. I'm looking at a letter you sent to myself on January 27 of this year. You're illustrating in here information with \$162,707,805 for the 5

percent capping. Then I look at a letter that was sent from yourself to the mayor of Edmonton on February 29, and looking at some figures, it's \$167,466,317. So there is a difference in one month of how figures have been passed back and forth. What structured alternatives to the current provincial education property tax system is the MLA education tax committee examining rather than just capping increases in the residential and nonresidential equalized assessment? That is one of my first questions, Mr. Minister.

8:21

What other jurisdictions in the United States have been examined by the MLA education tax committee as a model for funding public education in Alberta in the future? Will the MLA committee on education property taxes be examining the following alternatives to education property taxes outlined in the 1998 education tax review committee report, one being the trade-off between the provincial funding and education tax on residential property – for example, municipalities might be willing to take responsibility for building new schools – two, based on the education tax per capita or per student amount. The third one is to phase out the education property tax over a 25-year period and tie it into the debt interest savings achieved from paying down the provincial accumulated debt. This is a case of arguing one way or the other. In our past policies in 1997 we were pushing for 80-20, 80 percent out of the general revenue, but it is still a circulated item that actually should be looked at.

My fourth question, Mr. Minister, is circuit breaker tax. The fifth is to use live assessment rather than equalized assessment for requisition purposes. Sixth, trade off a portion of the residential education tax by eliminating provincial grants for other programs. The seventh is a trade-off between the provincial funding for school construction and a portion of the residential education tax.

How does the minister respond to the city of Edmonton, which estimates its residents will pay nearly \$8 million more in education property tax in 2000 despite the 5 percent cap on the residential equalized assessment announced by the government last fall?

We also are looking at how we had 10 percent on nonresidential moved down to 5 percent. Is that some of the political push that's coming out of Calgary for reducing property tax altogether? I know that in the last week or so – March 11 was the latest article on the city of Edmonton: "No break for city on education tax." It's a hard one to explain, but we look throughout the province and it's interesting that the chairman of the education tax review committee, who actually hasn't even consulted publicwise at a town hall within her own constituency, has actually brought down every major municipality – that's cities and towns within her constituency – by 22 to 24 and in some cases 33 percent from what it was. It would have been normal if it would have gone through with the market value and the assessment on education tax reform.

The city of Edmonton's complaint is that when compared to the municipality of Rocky View, being minus 28 percent, Edmonton is minus 9 percent. That's actually why the complaint is coming out of Edmonton. I know I have had a few letters from a few councillors in Edmonton, and that's a major factor.

Around the education property tax I've been saying and have hinted in my questions in the House that maybe we should be doing nothing more than freezing it now and trying to work something out. What I mean by that is freeze the current unfairness in the amount of education property tax paid by Albertans across the province. When the province is doing as well as it is, I would almost think we'd be moving along on this one a little bit faster to explain to Albertans where we're going from here. It's really overdue. It's been a year now, and we're just now reading within the business

plan and reading in your letter to the mayor that you're going to start doing consultation this year.

The next one that's probably contentious in and around the municipal department is capital region governance. What have been the total costs incurred by Municipal Affairs up to this point in time for the capital region governance review? What are the total anticipated costs of the capital region governance review once it has been completed this fall? Has the minister examined any of the recommendations contained within the reports prepared by special advisers appointed by Ontario municipal affairs – that's around the Haldimand-Norfolk area, Hamilton-Wentworth, Ottawa-Carleton, and Sudbury – as models for more effective regional co-operation here in the capital region? Will the minister make a firm commitment today that the Alberta capital region governance will not be used as an instrument to force amalgamation of communities surrounding the city of Edmonton?

It was interesting what I was trying to pull off the Net, Mr. Minister. Can the minister indicate whether he actually went forward with his mission to examine regional governance in Toronto, New York, Chicago, Minneapolis, and San Diego between January 26 and February 8? If so, is there a report on that? If you didn't go, why not? If you did, was the mission worth it? I do know that when it did come across, the media called me. I was actually just reading everything I could off the Net at that particular date, so instead of being negative, I did say that I was saving Albertans money by pulling it off the Net myself.

We do look at a few areas of the ministry that were removed this past year. I really believe that the ministry in its entirety has been a very large ministry for the last few years. I don't think a lot of people realize how important Municipal Affairs is to our province. You are the lifeline of the municipalities. You should be the sounding block. You should also be the guiding factor for helping people through their expenditures, their budgets, their whatever. I often say that maybe this department could almost be the major planner and help build a plan for throughout this province of how to help a particular municipality.

With the downloading that's actually been created over the last few years, not only from the federal government down to you but from yourselves down to the municipalities, I find it hard to believe that many MLAs, whether they're ministers or backbenchers, have actually come from the rural, local, town, and city municipalities and still let the downloading go on. I often wonder whether or not most people in here actually came from the have times of the '80s. They just look and think what the bank accounts were back then and not realize that the municipalities – there's the odd one that is lucrative, but in general they are trying their best.

We have the secondary roads this past year. A few years ago the province decided they didn't want that particular part of it, so they downloaded it, and now they're taking it back. I hope that the municipalities are going to be able to do some bidding on that type of work so they won't have to sell their equipment off to whoever will take it.

8:31

Now, Mr. Minister, concerning the Ministry of Municipal Affairs 2000-2001 gross operating expenses and capital investment of \$142,890,000, that's an increase of \$2,114,000 from the 1999-2000 comparable forecast of \$140,776,000 and \$10,764,000 from the 1999-2000 budget, which is an 8.14 increase from 1999-2000. The number of full-time equivalents is expected to increase from 342 to 367. As I go through and mention things tonight, for full-time equivalents I'll be saying FTEs, just for the record.

There's no information provided in the estimates or the business

plan of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs regarding plans for capital investment or the change in the numbers of FTEs for 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, and I wonder if I can get an answer on that one. Will the minister provide information on any plans for capital investment by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs for 2001-2002 and 2002-2003? On capital investment I really believe that the study done by the Member for Calgary-North West is a very good study and a direction that I hope the province follows regarding some of these guidelines that are actually put in there.

Will the minister provide information on FTE levels in the ministry for 2001-2002 and 2002-2003? What initiatives will be undertaken by municipal resource services between 2000-2001, 2001-2002, and 2002-2003 to develop a corporate human resource strategy as it pertains to corporate learning, leadership development, recruitment, and community planning?

Will the minister provide an update on the award of excellence program for 1999-2000?

Going to the ministry, will the minister provide a breakdown of the ministry's gross operating expenses of \$141,935,000 for 2000-2001 by subject for the following components: salaries for permanent positions, salaries for nonpermanent positions, salaries for contract employees, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communication, hosting expenses.

Under program 1, ministry support services, how many FTEs are employed in 2000-2001? What is the breakdown of the three programs: the minister's office, the deputy minister's office, and support services? Can the minister explain why the total program gross expenses are expected to rise to \$8,211,000 from a gross budget amount of \$7,839,000 in 1999-2000? Mr. Minister, what is the breakdown of the \$270,000 for the minister's office budget for 2000-2001 by the following components: salaries for permanent positions, salaries for nonpermanent positions, salaries for contract employees, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communication, and hosting expenses?

Will the minister explain the \$5,000 increase in the budget for the deputy minister's office for this upcoming 2000-2001 budget? There again, what is the breakdown of the \$302,000 budget for the deputy minister's office in the same year, 2000-2001, for the salaries for permanent positions, for nonpermanent positions, salaries for contract employees, travel, advertising, telephone and communication, and hosting expenses?

Support services. Will the minister provide details of why the gross forecast for capital investment is \$876,000, or 800 percent, over the gross comparable budget for 1999-2000? Will the minister provide a breakdown of the \$7,514,000 in the operating expenses for support services in 2000-2001 by the following components: finance and administration, communications, corporate services, human resource services, internal audit and program evaluation, legal services?

Program 2, municipal programs. How many FTEs are employed under program 2, municipal programs, 2000-2001? What is the breakdown of the four subprograms: division support, municipal services, assessment services, and financial assistance programs? Where does the minister see a need for the relationship between the municipalities and the ministry to be clarified and redefined? How does the minister plan to clarify and redefine these roles?

Vote 2.1.1, division support. We're looking at a few questions here. We see an increase over the forecast and over the comparable budgets of the last couple of years. Will the minister explain why the operating expenses for division support are expected to rise from the '99-2000 budget amount of \$2,975,000 to \$3,113,000 in 2000-01? Will the minister provide details as to why the capital investment budget in division support for '99-2000 was \$150,000 and the

forecast for this fiscal period is 260 percent over the \$401,000? What did the department invest in? Why is the capital investment budget for 2000-2001 receiving over a 500 percent increase from the \$150,000 in 1999-2000 to \$830,000 for the upcoming fiscal year?

Jumping to 2.2.1, municipal services. In this case we're seeing an increase over the budget. Why is the municipal services program receiving an 18 percent, or \$1,057,000, increase in the budget this year? What new services are being offered for this money? How will this improve the services to the municipalities? Who will benefit from the increase?

Assessment services. Will the minister explain why the dedicated revenue for assessment services is expected to rise from \$1,285,000 to \$1,475,000? Also, why are the net expenses expected to rise by \$92,000, from \$4,344,000 to \$4,436,000 in 2000-2001? The percentage of municipal assessment rolls which meet provincial standards for procedures, uniformity, and equity has gone up over the last few years from 66 percent to 93 percent with a target of 95. Will the minister provide . . . [Mr. Gibbons' speaking time expired] Okay. I'm out of time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, would you like to answer some of the questions now, before we have the next question?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yeah, I'll try. I'm sorry; I wasn't able to keep up, so I'm not going to answer all your questions. I did try, but you were pretty fast with those questions, my friend. Nevertheless, your questions were good questions, and I appreciate those. Certainly between oral and written form we'll try and respond to any and all that we possibly can.

Your question regarding education property taxes. You know, that's one that is under review. It is a challenge, because virtually every jurisdiction in Canada at the present time uses property tax for their education funding, as does almost every part of North America. Obviously, if there is another way – there is a cost to education, and there's a process that we have to understand and recognize. Alberta has made education their number one priority, and we're quite prepared to meet that commitment, but there is a cost to doing that. To date the property tax assessment has been a part of the overall funding, and I should share that in 1995 property tax was 50 percent of the cost of education. Today it's somewhere in the area of 38 percent of the education budget. So there is a recognition of the importance of working with the property tax people. More and more of the education costing is being shared by the provincial Treasury and general revenue.

8:41

You asked some questions as to what the MLA tax review committee are reviewing. It's chaired by the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore and the hon. Member for Calgary-North West are on the committee. They're looking at every possible avenue. They've looked at every possible area. As a matter of fact, they've already shared the information that if we were to put in a sales tax, it would be somewhere in the area of 4 percent. They've looked at the area of income tax, and it would almost mean doubling, a 38 percent increase in income tax, if indeed that were to absorb what property taxes are paying for now, in order to take it right off the property tax venue. So they are looking at all possible areas. There are trade-offs, and as we go through the process, of course, we'll have to weigh and assess the pros and cons.

The whole key in all of this process, at least from our perspective, is to find the fairest possible way, and I think Albertans have pretty well recognized that that's so critical and important too. Education,

in the minds of Albertans, is front and foremost, and they've made it very, very clear that they want the best education system that money can buy. That's what we plan on delivering, and certainly through our minister of education I think we can be very, very proud of the results of our education system in this province. If not the best in Canada, we're right there at the very top, and I'm sure, if anything, we're actually improving our overall position.

The question of Edmonton tax. Yes, they'll be paying about an additional \$7.7 million in taxes this year, but we also have to realize that last year they benefited from this very same process by well over \$5 million. The years are variable, and you can't just pick one year and say as a result of that that they're being picked on, because indeed this process does have variability. Next year, if indeed the growth projections come about, if Edmonton does as well as the country seems to feel they will as far as growth, they may indeed become beneficiaries again. So it's hardly fair to base the whole assessment on one year. Indeed, as I pointed out, last year Edmonton was a big winner in this overall process to the tune of well over \$5 million.

I think it's important to note that property taxes now generate about \$2 for the education budget, and the GRF, or the Treasury, generates about \$9, so indeed we are generating the majority of the revenue for our education system from general revenue, and that's increasing, as I pointed out: 38 percent from 50 percent just five years ago.

The cost of education is increasing, and obviously there has to be money found to be able to deal with that. Do nothing more than freezing? That's a suggestion, and I'm sure that's something the committee is looking at and considering and will be considering in the overall process of making that final decision.

As far as governance is concerned, there's a focus on the Edmonton governance review, but actually there is a review that's going to take place throughout the province. In our travels we did do the mission, and we did meet with people from Ontario as well as several American cities who did some creative things as far as delivery of regional services are concerned. Where we're going to be going and what we're going to be exploring more clearly will be the whole issue of regional services, the delivery of regionalized services more than the particular role of governance.

What we have to be aware of is that 20 to 25 years ago in every jurisdiction that we met with, they did what we're looking at now. They did regionalization of services 20 to 25 years ago. Ontario, for example, just now moved to dealing with governance. When we met with some of the other groups, they pointed out that really it's regional services that provide the efficiency, and that's really where you want to be going. Governance is very low as far as the economics are concerned, so that's something that we have to take into consideration. Really the key, though, is to be able to provide regional services.

I think the group that really brought that home to us was when we met with the site selectors, which are now the headhunters for industry. In North America the majority of industrial sites are now selected by site selectors who make recommendations. They explore various sites that may be attractive for that particular industry. They make a recommendation. The site selectors told us that really they don't look at a community; what they look at is a region. When you stop and think about it, it just makes sense that when you're setting up an industry, it draws from the entire region; it doesn't just draw from that one community. So why would you want to select on the basis of one particular municipality? And that's important.

So, ultimately, what we're going to have to do as far as attracting industry is see that the province delivers its best possible sell with the benefits that a region can provide. We're behind. We're behind

the rest of North America, as a matter of fact. As I said, in Ontario they did this 20, 25 years ago. In the states they did it 20, 25 years ago. It was rather interesting because virtually everywhere we went they all did it at the same time. Somehow we've fallen behind in that particular area, so we're going to have to try and catch up so that indeed we can be on the map as far as site selectors are concerned, so that we can be competitive on the same benchmark or the same basis that the other communities are selling themselves on.

The mission was what I consider an overall success. As a matter of fact, it was a very good experience to basically plan the future, to hear from industry what it is that they are wanting as far as development is concerned, to talk to groups such as the site selectors, for example. We spent a very interesting part of the time meeting with Mayor Daly, who is the guru of North American regionalization, and he was very helpful in the direction that he provided and indicated that he's open for any ongoing discussions that may be required as well, and we will be taking him up on that.

We certainly agree that municipal experience is helpful, but we also agree that municipalities are doing their very best and certainly working very hard to make this a great province that we are in. As far as the growth of municipalities, how municipalities come together, what they really have to concentrate on is providing the most effective, cost-effective service that can possibly come forward, and they understand that. Certainly, as we work together, it is becoming increasingly more evident that that's our future as far as being globally competitive.

As far as FTE mediation, it's difficult to measure some of the FTE categories because of the government reorg. So we've got some different configurations as far as FTEs are concerned, but certainly we'll be providing those where it's possible in the certain areas that are consistent. With government reorg there's been quite a change in this particular department.

As far as capital investment is concerned, those are questions that will have to go to Infrastructure because they're really the ones that are involved in major capital development.

The breakdown of the ministry and the deputy minister, I don't have that information with me tonight to give you an accurate assessment of that breakdown. Certainly we'll have to work on that particular element.

As far as 1.0.2 is concerned, that's the area of salaries and benefits, the deputy minister. The \$5,000 increase is due to increased compensation for provincial government employees.

As far as 2.1.1 is concerned, divisional support, the increase in the 2000-2001 budget is to accommodate the additional staff member to work on the web site and the Internet development, to accommodate a salary increase for public-sector employees, and to cover increased amortization costs that'll occur owing to capital projects that are being undertaken by the division. So that is where that particular area is concerned.

8:51

As well, the 2000-2001 capital investment budget is increasing to accommodate systems projects. Projects that are under consideration include the database centralized initiative, the municipal excellence and the web strategy, and the rewrite of the grants management system. The division forecasts spending additional capital investment funding in the '99-2000 fiscal year to begin work on the database centralized initiative and to work on web-enabling strategies to link divisional databases and build an Extranet interface to allow for secured data exchanges.

Program 2.2.1. The budget shows an increase owing to the addition of seven FTEs and the move forward on a municipal excellence initiative, which will develop a comprehensive manage-

ment framework designed to help municipalities increase their capacities to improve performance, to address increased workloads and the demand for advisory services from municipalities and the public – that's 1.5 FTEs. Dealing with the roles and responsibilities framework project and the climate change initiative and the aboriginal initiatives is another 1.5 FTEs. Handling the increased volumes of preparatory work in the administration and processing of grants in place of taxes owing to the addition of grazing lease lands as eligible properties to receive grants in place of taxes is an additional FTE, and hiring an individual to provide administrative support is an additional FTE.

Funding has also been added to cover the increase in salaries of public service staff, to obtain additional consulting services to assist with the municipal excellence project, to undertake a project to research data relating to municipal governance and administrative practices, and to cover increased printing costs that occur for the production of pamphlets, brochures, and other material related to the *Municipal Administrators Handbook* and the Alberta capital regional governance review, as well as other initiatives.

Program 2.3.1 is assessment services. In that one, the 2000-2001 budget shows an increase owing to the additional four FTEs. They are there to address the concerns raised by the Equalized Assessment Review Panel with respect to the frequency of municipal assessment audits. That's three FTEs there. Increased staff on assessment standards are to qualify and regulate rates for linear properties – they're not currently regulated – as recommended by the linear process audit conducted in '99, and that's one FTE.

In addition to the above, additional funding has been provided to cover pay increases to be received by Alberta government employees, accommodate the attendance for assessment staff at the International Association of Assessing Officers, and to obtain consulting assistance to develop customized client target help plans, and to work with the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to replace industry's self-reporting system and implement an assessment internship in the summer student program. As you know, there's been a change in the linear assessment process, and the self-reporting process is now going through a more comprehensive auditing system. That, of course, really is making it more effective, and ultimately the municipalities were concerned that indeed there seemed to be some discrepancy between what they felt was the actual lineage or footage of pipelines that were out there and what actually was.

With that, I'll sit down.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do want to make some comments on Municipal Affairs. Let me say, first of all, that the budget process does get a bit more frustrating each year. We're pretty well halfway through our time on a \$143 million budget, and we've had one speaker.

Mr. Chairman, Municipal Affairs, it's . . .

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Percy, do you not want me to answer the questions?

MR. WICKMAN: No, no. It's not that at all, that you shouldn't be answering. I'm just saying that to give us a total of two hours to deal with this type of budget isn't sufficient. Understand that I'm not blaming you; I'm blaming the process. We appreciate the questions being answered, and those that can't be answered here, we appreciate getting the response in writing.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: So would you rather have it in writing? What I'm after is clarification.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, if the minister keeps it up, I won't even have 20 minutes.

THE CHAIRMAN: There are two ways that we can do this, hon. members, and it's up to the subcommittee. In some sections of the subcommittee the member asks to have the minister respond, so you get question and response, question and response, question and response, or you can do it by straight speech or listing of questions, such as we've already had demonstrated. It really is up to the hon. members, so if Edmonton-Rutherford wishes to do it that way, that's fine. If you wish to just get your questions out and then let the minister endeavour to answer them, that's fine. That's up to you.

MR. WICKMAN: I think the preference, Mr. Chairman, would be to have those questions answered that can be answered orally in response, such as he did with the Member for Edmonton-Manning, and those that can't be answered because the information may not be at hand, we would receive in writing a few days later. That's normally the process that has been followed, and that's a good process. I'm just saying that two hours is not sufficient time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you for that clarification. With that, Mr. Minister, we'll let the gentleman continue.

Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Let me continue, if I could. When we talk about government – and we have for some reason wrongfully referred to the provincial government and the federal government as the senior levels of government, implying that the municipality or the municipal governments are a junior form of government, and they're not. They're equal. In fact, in a lot of instances I would argue that the municipally elected representatives perform a more appreciated function to the electorate in that they're dealing with day-to-day issues.

Myself having spent nine years as a councillor, 11 years here as an MLA, I had much more contact with the people that elected me. I dealt with various problems, dealing with snow removal, dealing with garbage pickup, dealing with stop signs, things that may not seem that significant in the big picture, but to that individual they were very, very important. So when people are asked about what level of government they feel the closest to, it's the municipal government. Mr. Chairman, it's very, very rare for me now as a provincial politician to even get phone calls in the evening at home. When I was a councillor, I would get them at 2 o'clock in the morning. People do not hesitate to call their municipal politician, because they identify with them much more.

So we should, first of all, recognize that all levels of government are equal and that there's no such thing as a senior level of government. The provincial government is not a big brother to the municipalities. It shouldn't be viewed that way.

There are many members in this House who have had the experience, including the Premier of the province, of participating in municipal politics, and I've been asked on many occasions which I prefer. Quite frankly, I've always preferred municipal politics over provincial politics for a number of reasons. However, after nine years I felt it was my time to sort of move on. Now, possibly if I would have had the opportunity during my three terms here to be part of a government, I may view provincial politics a bit differently than I do, and had I made the decision to run another term, which of course I've indicated I'm not, then I could look forward to being part of a new Liberal government, which the other members here will in all likelihood be part of. That's an experience I'll miss out on, because I've chosen not to go beyond 12 years.

[Mr. Fischer in the chair]

Now, when we talk in terms of a partnership between the municipalities and the provincial government, this goes back, way, way, way back. We talked about partnerships. We talked about some form of revenue sharing. I can recall attending my first Alberta Urban Municipalities Association convention held in Calgary, and it was long enough ago that Grant Notley, who was the New Democrat member in the House here at the time, was one of the observers at that particular convention. So you can imagine how many years I'm going back. I proposed a motion then, and I was quite surprised that it was endorsed by the vast majority of the delegates at that conference. The motion that I managed to have passed was that we urge the provincial government to allocate a specific percentage of revenues from the resources to the municipalities unconditionally so that the province wouldn't be acting like Big Brother and saying: you've got to spend so much on police, you've got to spend so much on libraries, and you've got to spend so much on roadways and such.

9:01

That partnership and that respect for the independence of municipalities and the recognition that they are elected to do a job, just as provincial representatives and federal representatives are, are very, very, important. Now, there are instances where the municipalities have to go beyond the normal funding they receive from the provincial government, whether it be conditional or nonconditional. I'm talking in terms of those types of projects that a municipality can't possibly be expected to afford out of their own budgets or to tax local taxpayers for to that extent; for example, the very, very severe, difficult problems that Calgary is facing now because of the massive growth, the unanticipated growth a number of years ago. That has now suddenly skyrocketed, creating all types of unique problems for Calgary that other municipalities don't share, so that's a special consideration.

When we talk in terms of projects like the light rail transit running to the Heritage Mall, when we talk in terms of the ring road system, the municipalities on their own cannot be expected to fund those types of projects. That's why it's so important to have this partnership so that the municipal government can sit down with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and other members of the cabinet to work out sufficient funding for these particular types of special projects. I know that there is funding going on at the present time. Don't get me wrong; it's not like I'm not aware of that.

I've often heard in this House the criticism by the Treasurer, the criticism by the Premier towards the federal government when we talk in terms of the downloading and how they've reduced the transfer payments to the provinces. We hear quite often the Premier demanding more money for the provincial government or the restoring of some of those dollars from the federal government to the provincial government in areas like health care and such. Now, the very, very same thing of course has happened to the municipalities in terms of downloading by the provincial government. We've seen significant cuts in municipal grants in areas like preventive social services, policing, libraries, and the list goes on and on and on.

The municipal government doesn't have anyone they can download onto other than the taxpayer. Even this year we see the Edmonton council and I believe the Calgary council being forced to raise municipal property taxes, sitting back envying the other two levels of government, not counting the school boards of course, the other two levels of government that have been in a position to advocate tax cuts, to pay down deficits and pay down debt. Citizens at times will ask: why do municipal governments always have to

raise taxes when other governments aren't doing it? Well, the reason why, Mr. Chairman, is because they have nobody that they can download to. They've got to go to the taxpayers. They can't even deficit budget, because the Municipal Government Act does not allow a municipality to operate at a deficit. They have to operate on a balanced budget, many times on a surplus.

Now, municipalities have managed because they've been forced to manage. The late former leader of the Liberal caucus, for example, when he was mayor of Edmonton put into place many, many fiscal policies with the city of Edmonton that allowed the city to sort of keep its books in order and to manage its finances, I thought, at that particular time a lot better than the city of Calgary was doing. That's no knock to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but that was a fact of life. Calgary was just going ahead and spending, spending, spending on the LRT, counting on the provincial government to bail them out, and it didn't happen.

There was one time when I was on city council that the province was rolling in so much money, they gave the municipalities a billion dollars. What happened? Some of the municipalities just went right back into debt. They said, "Well, we can count on the provincial government to drop another billion dollars sometime down the road," but that never happened. Edmonton was wise enough, under the leadership of that former member, to not get itself caught up in that situation.

I look at some of the other areas that the minister is responsible for in his ministry. He has lost housing. I always thought that housing was a very, very key component of the municipal ministry. Of course, that's been transferred over to Community Development, if I recall correctly. The registries still fall under Municipal Affairs. [interjection] I'm sorry; the registries have also been transferred out. They also have been transferred out.

Now, one of the things that the minister is responsible for, though, is the building code. In the building code, which relates of course to the municipalities, one of the things that is being addressed right now – and I tabled an article in the House earlier on dealing with the solution to the handicapped parking problem. Of course, the handicapped parking specifications are part of the Alberta building code, and that's why I raise this point. I would hope that the Minister of Municipal Affairs, along with the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness and the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, can find a solution to the handicapped parking dilemma that has occurred.

It's time to have the building code revamped, to change a system that worked at one time, but since we privatized registrations, for some reason we now have three and a half times as many placards being handed out as before. Sometimes I'm of the opinion that one with an ingrown toenail can go to a doctor, get a form signed, and get themselves a handicapped placard. Maybe it's not that bad, but when I drive around looking for a parking space, at times it seems that way.

Now, one of the areas, too, that I see when I look in the budget is the reference to the lottery dollars. When we talk in terms of references to lottery dollars, it seems to pop up now in every department. There is a greater and greater dependency of departments to bank on that gambling money, which is not really a stable basis of funding. It's not something that one can count on year after year, because we don't know just how Albertans are going to gamble next year or the year after, though the pattern so far has been a continuous increase. Even when I look at the infrastructure, why is such a great deal of infrastructure being funded with lottery dollars?

The other area that we see lottery dollars used for is the community lottery boards. The city of Edmonton, I believe, gets something like \$11 million, \$12 million a year right now, and then those dollars

are disbursed to in some cases nonprofit groups, in other cases, possibly in too many cases, to city departments that would normally be funded by the local tax dollar. I'd like the minister to talk a bit about those community lottery boards.

I'd like to have the minister also address the question as to why such a dependency on lottery dollars for infrastructure, which is such a basic program that Albertans expect out of their tax dollars. Also, when we talk in terms of infrastructure and the federal government, I can't recall – possibly somebody can sort of nod. When the federal Treasurer brought down this last budget, what were the references in there? Was there a commitment made in there to a trigovernment proposal for infrastructure, a \$5 billion expenditure? I don't recall if the federal Treasurer actually spelled that out in the budget he just announced some short time ago.

9:11

Now, Mr. Chairman, freedom of information falls under the ministry. I'm not going to really get into that, because I know that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is much more knowledgeable in that particular area than I am, so I'll leave that for him. He is quite anxious to speak on it. I don't want to keep my comments going too long, because there are others here, of course, that want to speak as well. They'd like to speak and then go upstairs to participate in the other committee. The budget process does present some problems.

I've talked in terms of generalities, and I would hope that the minister could respond to some degree on the views that I have made. There is one specific question that I do have, and possibly the Member for Edmonton-Manning has already asked it. If so, I don't intentionally mean to repeat a question. When I go through and I look at the various increases, the one that really strikes me, as far as I can see, is under municipal services, reference 2.2.1, where we see an increase in municipal services from \$5,830,000 to \$6,867,000, which is an increase of roughly 18 percent, or over a million dollars. That seems to be a very, very significant amount of dollars. Of course, if those dollars are going to the municipalities directly, that's one thing, but when we talk in terms of municipal services, I'm not sure if that implies that it's administrative costs that may be related to municipal services.

The very, very last question I would have, Mr. Chairman. The whole planning process in terms of the regional planning commissions that we used to have in place at one time – and we had the Alberta appeal board, where individual municipalities or individual applicants could appeal decisions made by the regional planning commissions to a higher body. I recall former councillor Ken Newman being part of that. My question is: how is the current system of planning under the new process working out? Are municipalities by and large happy with it, or are there problems?

I must say that I'd like to have the minister comment on his views of the Lou Hyndman report and on what he feels is the solution for areas like Edmonton, where you have a number of bedroom communities and the problems that some of the councillors have pointed out in terms of persons from outside of Edmonton utilizing a lot of the services here, on that regional co-operation and such. If the minister could make some comments as to what direction he intends to head that process in. Of course, he was not the minister when that whole thing was initially developed. It was the Member for Sherwood Park, the current Minister of Children's Services.

On that note I'm going to conclude, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Now the minister gets a chance to give us some words of wisdom.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-

Rutherford asked for a response, so I will provide that response. I'll try and be brief though. I'm sure the hon. member was a very, very capable municipal councillor.

There is no senior level of government. What we have is three levels of government that provide three different services. Each level of government is responsible for a completely different line of services, and at least from my perspective and from our department's perspective there is no one level of government that's better than the other. They all are critical, they're all important, and they all are the strength of this province and this country. At no time have I ever thought of it as a senior level or a junior level of government, because indeed the municipal level is every bit as important as the provincial level, every bit as important as the federal level. An improper municipal level would create failure at any other level as well.

These all play very critical roles. They all play a very important role in the delivery of services to the constituents in the region that they serve, and my hat goes off to municipal councillors, mayors. I was one for a period of four terms, and certainly I understand the local connection that you have.

To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford: perhaps if you left your phone number, you'd get some calls at 2 o'clock in the morning even now. So if you want to share your phone number and if you really feel lonesome, we can probably get you some calls at 2 o'clock if you like.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford indicated that there may be a Liberal government sometime in the future and that he'd like to be a part of it. I assure the hon. member that he would be the first great-great-great-great-grandfather that ever sat in this Legislature if he were to be part of it.

The indication was that the municipal government doesn't have ways of generating revenue. Well, they do. They have property tax, so there is that opportunity for the municipal government to raise revenue.

Certainly from the province's perspective, the province tries to assist in things like roads, water, sewer, library, policing, social programming. Just to give an indicator of what the municipal government has indeed done this past year: \$425 million in infrastructure funding to address municipal transportation needs, \$90 million in health facilities and other health projects, \$38 million in capital renewal of postsecondary institutions, \$16 million for water/wastewater facilities, \$10 million for reservoir projects, \$7 million for construction and upgrading of government buildings in at least 19 communities across the province, \$3 million for seniors' lodges, \$11 million for environment and agriculture capital infrastructure needs, \$232 million for disaster relief for farmers, \$1.2 million for new grant initiatives for improved disaster and fire training, \$2 million to assist rural municipalities to conduct road infrastructure studies. Those are all working together whereby the province is working with municipalities to build on what should be a better province and will be a better province.

Federal downloading. The new program that will be coming onstream. For the total length of the new infrastructure program, which is a six-year program, the federal government has indicated that they'll be providing roughly \$200 million over this six-year period to Albertans. Assuming it's on a per capita funding basis, as we have 10 percent of the population, we assume that Alberta will be entitled to 10 percent of the overall funding. Whether that will be the basis, we don't know, because the details have not been worked out and, I understand, probably won't be finalized until the end of the year. But it's interesting. Alberta will be getting approximately \$200 million back over six years, but with the revenue from fuel tax alone the federal government captures over \$600 million for each

year, over \$600 million, and returns \$200 million over six years. Somewhere something isn't exactly running true to form.

There was a question about cutting back on library funding. The last stats that I had – and they may not be totally accurate. In '89-90 library funding in Alberta was roughly 10 and a half million dollars. This year's budget is roughly \$14.2 million. So libraries indeed aren't cut back. They've increased fairly significantly, as a matter of fact, as far as library funding is concerned in this province.

As far as operating off taxes, municipalities aren't the only ones that work off taxes. The provinces, the federal government: their basic revenue is generated through taxes. So all forms of government operate off taxes. That's their major source of revenue. It's not just the municipalities that work off taxes. The provincial government generates the majority of its revenue through taxation. So they're not unique. There's nothing different about municipalities, there's nothing different about the provinces, and there's nothing different about the federal government. That's the basic form of funding governments.

9:21

The building codes. It's very important that we accommodate those who have to deal with handicaps, those that are less fortunate. Certainly the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has generated my sympathy in a situation where there are parking stalls and they're filled continuously. It must be very frustrating, and certainly you have my sympathy there. But it's doctors that allocate those tags. You know that. It's doctors that allocate those tags. Obviously it's a challenge to try and see that there is a significant amount of parking for those who are in need, but I do share your frustration and your concern.

Lottery dollars are used primarily in Municipal Affairs to fund the Municipal 2000 program. I think it's interesting to note that last year, as I pointed out, 286 out of 307 municipalities benefited from this particular program. They're asked to be creative, and this is a program that is extremely successful in dealing with processes that will allow them to interlink with various municipalities in dealing with new creative programming, in designing something innovative and creative. As was pointed out, 286 out of 307 is a pretty good statistic really.

Lottery boards basically distribute local funds. They're local people who are in charge of distributing to their local community. They're designed to basically have their own local people who can identify with the local needs, and I think that's probably as good a way as any. Rather than having someone from Edmonton distributing it to the entire province, it's far better to have that local participation and that local opportunity. Certainly it seems to be a very successful program and one that frankly I support, because it's the local people making local decisions to allocate the money locally. I don't know how one can be critical of that process.

The tripartite infrastructure program. Yes, the federal government has announced it. We don't know what the details are. It appears that it'll probably be December before there's too much in the works as far as details are concerned, but in the first year it's a \$100 million program. In this process of this first year all of Canada will be receiving \$100 million, all of Canada in that first year. You can probably build 100 miles of road with \$100 million if you dedicate it all to roads, but we have to realize that this is dedicated to roads, to infrastructure, to the climate change discussions, to greening Canada, to water, sewer, to homeless, to a whole gamut. So \$100 million to all of Canada when over \$600 million is captured just from fuel tax alone from Alberta – that doesn't quite ring a true bell. Ultimately, sure, it'll be nice to have that program, but it's not a very significant number, really, when it comes down to it.

Program 2.2.1. The ministry has to increase the budget for the restructuring component from \$5 million to \$8 million to address regional co-operation or significant infrastructure issues with the restructuring of municipalities. So that's the reason for the increase in 2.2.1.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, before you begin, I would ask that you proceed on the basis that you follow the hon. Member for Dunvegan's father's advice that you learn a lot more by listening than speaking.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, thanks so much for your kind and generous introduction. I welcome Mr. Bader here, a former resident of Calgary-Buffalo, as I recall.

Mr. Chairman, I'd make the observation that I'm glad the FOIP unit has finally found a home. My sense is that Ms Sue Kessler and her intrepid band have been wandering around in the desert, and every time they think they've found a home and oasis – first, it was public works, supply and services, but, no, that department doesn't want them any longer. Then it was over to the department of labour, and they're there for a bit. Then we reshuffle the departments, and now they're over in Municipal Affairs. Hopefully that group has found a home that they're going to be able to occupy for a period of time.

I take the minister directly to page 250 of the business plan book. Under goal 3 we find the item Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy, and we've got two performance indicators. The first one is:

Timeliness of compliance to the access provisions . . . as measured by the percentage of FOIP requests completed by government public bodies within Legislative guidelines.

Mr. Minister, what is a legislative guideline? I know what a legislative requirement is. I have no idea what a guideline is.

If you look at section 10, that's not a guideline. It's a mandatory requirement that access requests be responded to within 30 days barring an extension under section 13 or a transfer to another public body under section 14. I find the wording curious. That's hardly a guideline.

It's clear, Mr. Minister, that the FOIP unit in your department is tracking requests through each one of the provincial public bodies. Understand that I'm not talking about the municipal level; I'm talking about provincial public bodies now. These are the people that have been under the act since it came into force on October 1, 1995. So would you tell us how many general information requests have come in to provincial public bodies by public body in the last fiscal year of this province. How many personal information requests have come in for provincial public bodies by individual public body?

How many times has section 28 been cited? Section 28 is one of the problematic parts of the existing FOIP act, because it's where the profit motives of the provincial government conflict with its fiduciary duty to share information with Albertans. I'm interested in knowing how many times section 28 has been cited as an exception to access requests.

I'd like to know how many times section 15 has been asserted by a provincial public body to deny information in whole or in part. How many times has section 23, being the advice from officials exception? Section 21: I'd like to know how many times it's been cited for any provincial body by public body in the last fiscal year. Section 21 is Treasury Board and cabinet confidences. Then let's go to section 26 and then to section 19, the personal information exception. How many times has that been cited, once again, by

public body? Tell us, Mr. Minister, please, how many times section 31 has been used to disclose information. My recollection is that it's typically been used by police forces releasing information about people with significant sex offence records, but it would be good to have that information, once again identified by public body.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

I might say, parenthetically, Mr. Minister, through the chair, that I ask these questions because the annual report that's been prepared by your information unit has been very, very unhelpful. By contrast, the annual report now in its revised form by the IPC, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, gives this member, other members, gives the public some sense of which departments are complying with the spirit of the act and the letter of the law as well as which departments are not. We can never tell with the annual report we get from your public information unit who the information misers are and who the information compliers are. I know that you would want to be able to share that information, and it's obvious from page 250 of the book that in fact you track that information.

I'd like to know how many times section 13 has been invoked to extend the time to comply with a request. That clearly is part of your performance indicator, but, with respect, the performance indicators you've mentioned are so low it reminds me of, you know, the stout kid in the gym class that can't get over the high jump bar so asked the coach to put it lower and lower so he can just sort of fall over the bar.

9:31

Well, Mr. Minister, I think we're looking for a little more than that. Your two performance indicators are not very impressive, and there's a lot more information you could and ought to share so we can determine which public bodies are compliant and effective and which aren't. If you'd tell me then: how many times has section 13 been invoked to extend time for an additional 30 days to comply with an access request? Then, since there's the power to go to the IPC and request a further extension, how many times has that section been invoked? How many requests have been transferred under section 14? That's where I make an access request and I get a letter back after two weeks saying: we don't have the request; the request is with another public body. How many times has that been invoked?

You spoke, Mr. Minister, about co-ordination, and you talked about centralizing data. Well, Mr. Minister, help me reconcile that talk of co-ordination with what I see to be an abysmal lack of leadership when it comes to information practices. Let me give you an example. You have a group of highly trained, highly competent FOIP co-ordinators in every public body, including every one of the provincial government departments. They're trained. They're oriented. They're co-ordinated through your department. If we look at your business plan on page 248, goal 3, the third bullet under the access and privacy part says:

Consult and coordinate with other government departments and local public bodies in matters related to the legislation, and participate in agreed federal-provincial initiatives related to proposed federal privacy legislation for the private sector.

Well, a couple of observations, Mr. Minister. You told us about the EU directive. Curious; your colleagues have been denying the importance of the EU directive for at least the last four years. This has been in force for more than a year, and we put at risk a considerable body of trade with western Europe. I remember the now Minister of Government Services when she was a minister of trade and economic development busy pooh-poohing the whole idea: "What? The EU directive? Big deal. No problem." Well, it is a big

deal, and it has continued to put at risk Alberta international trade. So now you've acknowledged that as being an issue. You talk about – I think you mentioned Bill C-6 in the House of Commons – did you not? – in your initial comments. It looks like that's going to become law.

One might ask, Mr. Minister, why it is that we sit back and we see Ontario, we see Manitoba, we see Saskatchewan and British Columbia undertaking public hearings, public hearings to allow the citizens in those provinces to find out – this is provinces holding public hearings about a federal statute. Why? Because they understand that on the third anniversary, the three-year time after that bill goes into force, the federal rules apply unless the province has its own rules. So what do we see in Alberta? No public hearings. I understand there may be some consultation going on with Ottawa. But is that something the Alberta Chambers of Commerce know about, have been involved in, consulted with? Is it something the Calgary Chamber of Commerce knows anything about? It's certainly nothing that has ever been discussed in this Assembly.

So, Mr. Minister, that's disappointing, and I think it's a blot, frankly, on what I think is the pretty strong record you've always had in whatever ministerial portfolio you've held. On this one, Mr. Minister, this may not be all your responsibility because you're a successor to others before you, but you're wearing the goat horns now, I suggest, in terms of not involving Albertans in this important exercise.

What I started out saying, though, was the lack of co-ordination. I quoted a moment ago from page 248 of Municipal Affairs' business plan. Then, Mr. Minister, if you go to page 132 and we look at Government Services, what you will find there is a whole section where the minister responsible for Government Services is talking about many of the same items.

Then we've got the chief information officer and the chief information council. Now, this, Mr. Chairman, is made up of some of the most senior bureaucrats in the government of the province of Alberta, part of the chief information council. They're busy doing all kinds of plotting and scheming and organizing around information management. Then we've got the Minister of Government Services telling us the other day that she was at a meeting in Banff last November with the ministers of consumer affairs from across the country meeting with John Manley, talking about Bill C-6. Well, who's got the brief on this? Is it you? Is it the Minister of Government Services?

Then we also heard from the Minister of Innovation and Science, and he's busy worrying about how we're going to make use of information technology. I mean, I'm not as cynical as Alvin Toffler, who had said at one point:

We are increasing the sophistication of deception faster than the technology of verification.

The consequence of that is the end of truth. The dark side of the information technology explosion is that it will breed a population that believes [in] nothing.

As I say, I'm not that cynical, but I look at a province that is touted to be on the front edge of information technology – this is going to be our economic future – and I see confusion, I see disharmony between the chief information council, between the Department of Government Services, between the Department of Municipal Affairs, and I see, frankly, not a high degree of co-ordination. So, Mr. Minister, tell me who's got the brief, who's in charge, who is the minister responsible for liaison on Bill C-6. If it's you, are we going to hold public hearings? That was one of the important things that's been discussed.

Mr. Minister, in terms of FOIP fees we continue to have the most

expensive freedom of information and protection of privacy fees anywhere in Canada. Our \$25 application fee I think demonstrably reduces the number of access requests. Are there some current plans to reduce the application fee? Will you do what the former federal access commissioner had recommended and change the way we charge for access requests? Instead of rewarding inefficient ministries by simply charging for search time, will we move past that and simply charge for the number of pages, the number of copies provided? What you do then is you reward efficient government departments that are able to run a tight ship, have good information management practices. The current system rewards those that do not, and I know, Mr. Minister, you wouldn't want to be complicit in that.

I'm interested in knowing, Mr. Minister, particulars of what we're going to do around the response to proposed federal privacy legislation for the private sector. If there are not going to be public hearings, tell us how Albertans are going to find out about this, tell us how Albertans are going to be able to make their views known, because I say that this province, unlike at least five other provinces in Canada, has not shared the secret with their constituents. You talk to people about it and they're amazed. They've never heard of Bill C-6. They don't know the impact it's going to have, and I think frankly, Mr. Minister, we've got some responsibility, you've got some responsibility to address it.

I know my colleagues have lots of other questions, and I want to give them a chance.

Mr. Minister, I don't expect you to have responses to all these things now. I don't require a verbal response now unless you have the statistical information. I'd be happy to receive it later in written form.

Thank you.

9:41

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I do have some statistical information on the questions that were asked, and I don't mind sharing those at the present time. I don't have the intimate breakdowns that were asked for, but I do have the total requests for FOIP, for example. The total requests were 5,481. Of that, 3,550 were personal, 1,905 were general, and 26 were correctional.

Interestingly enough, the point was raised about the expensiveness of FOIP in Alberta. I'd just like to share with the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo that the total fees that have been collected to June 1999 are \$128,477. I'll repeat: \$128,477. Total administrative costs to March of '99 are \$10,861,269.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: They're \$10,861,269. That means that the fees as a percentage of cost are 1.2 percent of the total cost. How we could be critical of a cost of 1.2 percent and suggest that we're being exorbitant is something I would really dearly like to hear an explanation for. I very much would, because on that basis I would really like to hear how we can justify the fact that we're being exorbitant in our costing.

There's been a fair amount of concern voiced about Bill C-6, and we certainly have concerns about Bill C-6. Interestingly, the question was asked: why aren't we consulting? This, Mr. Chairman, is a federal government bill. Why is the federal government not consulting? I've met, since my appointment to the ministry, with the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, and they were totally unaware that this bill existed. There had been absolutely no communication. I want to put this on record, that the Alberta chamber was totally unaware that Bill C-6 was moving along. I met with AEDA. They

were totally unaware that there was such a thing as Bill C-6. I met with the economic development authorities for the major cities in this province. They were totally unaware of this federal piece of legislation.

Why should we as a province be out consulting on a federal bill that today has not even been passed? Why should we be out there when they haven't got the bill passed? What is it that you're going to be consulting with, as far as a province? What would you be telling those people? That the federal government is going to be doing these things, but we're not sure what the final legislation is going to be? Is that what we should be doing?

To start with, Mr. Chairman, why is the federal government intruding in something that is provincial jurisdiction? That's a question I'd like answered as well. What role should the federal government be playing, and why are they intruding in this particular area? To date we haven't been able to get that answer, and we've asked the federal government on numerous occasions. The hon. member has asked what I've been doing. I've been asking the federal government why and what it is that's going to be the final.

The third reading passed. It went to the Senate. Now the Senate's made some adjustments. It appears that there are changes in the making, but we don't know what they are. We've asked whether there are going to be. There's no communication back. If you're going to communicate, there has to be communication two ways. To date it's all been one way, and that is the provincial government asking for advice as to what's going to come forward. The answers to date have been zero, zero, zero. There's been no communication whatsoever, and with that it's very difficult to go out and communicate with people.

Yes, I make a point of communicating with people before we make any decision on any issue. We spent two weeks last summer – we met with 12 regions, we met with over half of the municipalities, and from that we came forward with the programs that came forward. I would challenge the federal government to do the same thing, and I wonder: has there ever been a cost-benefit analysis done on what this is going to be costing the small business in Alberta and in Canada? Has there been any thought given to what it's going to cost small business?

Yes, there is a need for this legislation in e-commerce, and we acknowledge that. However, there is more than e-commerce in this at stake here. Small communities, small businesses are going to have to pay the burden of this particular piece of legislation. Where is it at? We'd love to know, and perhaps the hon. member could provide us with some guidance and some information. We'd be very much appreciative, because this is serious. This is something that's going to affect all small businesses in this province in a far more dramatic way.

Remember what I said: the total administrative costs of FOIP that deal with just government agencies is 10,861,000-plus dollars. Can you imagine what that's going to do to small business in this province? Can you imagine how every small business is going to have to respond and react?

This is something that is very, very serious, and to suggest that we should be out consulting when it's not our legislation, when the federal government hasn't even talked to the Chamber, hasn't talked to any of the players in this province, what do I say? Really, how do you respond to something like that? It's not our legislation. It's something the federal government has chosen to go out and do on its own. We don't feel it's their jurisdiction. [interjection] Privacy's important, absolutely, but there is a proper way of doing it, and before it is instituted, the people of this province should know what it's about. And as soon as we know the legislation – by the way, why are they there in the first place? I'd like that answer. I really

have to ask those questions because they are important questions and Alberta businesses are going to be affected.

The plans to reduce the fees. No, we don't have any plans to reduce the fees. We don't feel that 1.2 percent of the total cost is exorbitant. We don't think the taxpayers of this province would feel that is right. We don't think taxpayers should pay more of that particular percentage. There is a balance, and ultimately we think we've got as close to the right balance as can be struck.

So with that I'll entertain additional questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to stand up tonight and ask a couple of questions. I sort of regret that I have to start off with my first question talking about the freedom of information. The only thing I want to sort of stress and get an understanding from this minister on is the aspect of being able to get names of graduating kids coming up this spring when they graduate. I hope we're not going to have trouble this year with the different interpretations that different school boards would have, since it's been in place for a year or so now. So that's one question, and that's basically your goal 1 on page 246, bullet 6.

The next item is on page 247, goal 3, bullet 3. I would like the minister to give me a bit of an explanation how we're going to improve the equalized linear assessment process because we have a problem in our area, and I'm just wondering if it's going to be rectified in that respect, too.

9:51

If you would turn to page 251 and I guess one line item there under expenses, the public safety and information management, what I really look at is that your comparable 1998-99 actual was only \$9,867,000, but then when you had a comparable budget for '99-2000, you're only at \$8,831,000. Then in your comparable forecast for 1999-2000 you're at \$18,708,000, and looking at estimates for 2000-2001, you jump up to \$19,373,000. Then if we progress to the three-year budget program, we're dropping it down again by about \$10 million. So I guess what I'm really questioning is why, with our budget that we had for 1999-2000, we jumped \$10 million. I'm just wondering what the reason was there. So I'll take my seat and let you answer those questions.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister has indicated that he'll take both sets of questions at the same time.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, just in response to the exchange you heard a moment ago. Firstly, people in your department have told me and told many that only a portion of the costs of the administration of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act go to managing access requests, either general information access requests or personal information requests. The bulk of that money goes to developing good information management systems, finding out what kind of information exists in the department and how to be able to retrieve it.

We've had in this province some abysmal information management practices. It's been decentralized. It's been inefficient. We've had some departments that have been, yes, excellent. We've had other departments that wouldn't know where to find a file if it were under the desk. So a good part of that money you keep citing – and I'll ask you now because I know people in your department know this and they haven't obviously shared the information with you. Of the total budget, that you keep citing is specifically attributable to

the processing of general information access requests, how much is specifically attributable to personal information requests and how much of it goes to training employees in a department on good information management practices? How much of it goes to designing systems? How much of it goes to advising the ministers and advising managers and advising department staff? Those are different functions, and it serves a huge disservice to Albertans and certainly to people interested in this issue for you, Mr. Minister, to lump all those things together indiscriminately, come up with a number, and toss it out as if that's the cost to manage information access requests.

Mr. Minister, you ask why you should hold public hearings about Bill C-6. You shouldn't be holding hearings about Bill C-6. You should be doing what the select special committee of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta recommended in 1970, the dying days of Social Credit. They had the foresight to say that privacy is important to Albertans and that this government ought to undertake a consultation. Now, this was before anybody invented a fax machine, a modem. I guess we had photocopiers then, but we didn't have a lot of the information management tools we have now. What the other provinces are doing – this isn't tell us what you think about Bill C-6; it's tell us what you think the rules ought to be around respecting, protecting, managing the privacy of individual Albertans when they do business with a private-sector entity. That's the issue.

Mr. Minister, once again, you do a huge disservice to the issue by wrapping yourself in your Alberta flag and saying that we're under siege from Ottawa. That's nonsense. That's utter nonsense. Albertans deserve to know. Not just the chamber of commerce and not just a handful of selected stakeholders but every single Albertan deserves to be involved in a discussion of what sort of privacy protection they're going to have in the future.

You raised, Mr. Minister, the European Union privacy directive. That's quite distinct from Bill C-6, and even if there were no Bill C-6, we should still be consulting with Albertans around the issue of privacy protection. The government majority shot down every effort to try and do that with the Select Special Committee on the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act three-year review. It's now in your court. You have the chance, Mr. Minister, to consult with those Albertans, and this has nothing to do with the division of powers and everything to do with respecting the right of privacy of individual Albertans.

Those are my comments, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Well, this can almost turn into a bit of a debate. I'm surprised to hear that the hon. member doesn't think the cost of providing freedom of information isn't a cost, in that when you break it up it actually provides a different source of information, and it doesn't all reflect the cost of providing that freedom of information. I don't understand the logic and the rationale, because it seems to me that in the process it's the total cost that really matters. Training people to deliver the service is a cost of doing business, and under normal conditions that is always considered a cost of doing business. I don't quite understand the creativity of the hon. member in suggesting that perhaps it's really a cost but not a real cost. So obviously we don't agree on that process. The overall cost to government is in excess of \$10 million, well in excess of \$10 million, and administrative fees have only picked up 128,000-plus dollars of that, so I guess we tend to disagree on that particular element.

It was this government that introduced freedom of information and privacy. I want to remind the hon. member that it was this government that introduced this legislation. It's this government that introduced this legislation that we have here, and we're not denying

the importance of freedom of information, and certainly we are working with all the players and we continue to work with the players. But when it comes down to providing for Bill C-6, it still remains very, very strange that we can't even get the federal intentions. We can't get a response. And to me that's a very interesting way – the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford indicated that it's critical that various levels of government co-operate and work together. What a wonderful way to work together. I think that is a true demonstration of what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was illustrating. It's sad. It's important that we work together on a process such as this.

The hon. member had mentioned earlier that the process of measurements on freedom of information and privacy weren't – I can't remember the exact wording – really very successful. Our target is 95 percent, and we've moved from 90 percent being able to deliver the information in a timely and compliant manner. We moved from 90 percent in '97-98 to 91 percent in '98-99. Sure, we're not achieving the overall targets, but we're working towards them, and this is based on a 60-day turnaround. Now, a 60-day turnaround on the average – and when you see some of the information that's been asked for, in one particular case there are over 6,000 pieces of paper that were released. Yet our average time is 60 days' turnaround. I think that's pretty good. We're working to be better. Obviously we've set our target at 95 percent. We're at 91 percent. We've set our target higher with the idea of achieving a higher level, and we will continue to do that.

"Satisfaction with the FOIP program as measured by the percentage of FOIP requests completed by government public bodies that are handled without complaint to the office." In '98-99, 94 percent; our target is 95 percent. In '97-98 it was 92 percent, so we are improving and we are moving and we've set our standards and we've set our objectives higher than what we have and we will continue to work towards that.

10:01

So I don't think we're that far out in this process. In delivery of service it's 60 days. Considering the scope of some of these requests, I think under the circumstances we've achieved a pretty good level. In fairness to the employees of this department, in fairness to the employees that work with freedom of information, I really think that they have done the best they possibly could. They've worked extremely hard to be able to provide this information, and to be critical of those people, who've worked so hard to achieve this, I don't think is totally fair.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few general questions. In the last Auditor General's report in referring to the Department of Municipal Affairs the Auditor General made comment about performance measurements. The part I underlined was that "management and stakeholders will thus gain a better view of the Ministry's performance and management will become more accountable for results." He was asking that the department set targets as a basis for determining whether goals had been achieved. I wonder if the minister might comment on what's been going on in the setting of those performance objectives, because it seems to me that we have fewer now than we've had in the past.

I also wonder about the care, Mr. Minister, in terms of the setting of those objectives. I refer you to page 246. Under goal 1 the fifth bullet down talks about ensuring

that municipalities and businesses are adequately prepared for emergencies by working with them to develop and test their emergency plans and assisting them,

et cetera. I wondered if that is the same goal or strategy that is referred to on page 250 under goal 3, Disaster and Emergency Preparedness. Am I wrong in thinking that those are really the same programs, only that one is listed under goal 1 and the target is under goal 3?

After the number of years that we've been doing business plans, there are still a number of targets that have to be determined, and I wondered about the nature of the targets. For instance, has the department considered a performance objective related to the grants programs and how the receivers of those grants feel about the fairness of the grants? On the delivery of services has there been consideration of going to the recipients of those services and getting some indication from them in terms of how satisfactory the service is? I guess what I was looking for, Mr. Minister – and I'd appreciate maybe some comment – are the measures you're considering that would really be more a reflection on the department and its success so that it meets the kind of comment that the Auditor General was making.

I would like to make a comment about the taxes and the continual battle that we get with one year Calgary saying that they're putting too much money in and that Edmonton is taking too much money out and the next year Edmonton saying that they're putting money in and Calgary is taking money out. It seems to me that sometime, someplace some minister is going to have to remind all of us that we're all in this together, that tax money is pooled for the common interest, that we can't continually attack each other if the system is going to work, and that it's built on trust and sharing and trying to do the best we can for each other. I really think sometimes that we

have to remind ourselves and our municipal and school board counterparts that that's the case.

I had a specific question from a constituent who wanted to know about the emergency warning system and if that emergency warning system, the siren system that was installed in urban areas, is still operational. I didn't have the answer to that.

I have a number of other questions, Mr. Minister, but given the hour . . . [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry. I wasn't able to hear you say that the subcommittee should rise and report to the committee.

DR. MASSEY: That's exactly what I was saying, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has moved that subcommittee C rise and report to the committee. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:07 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Resource Development, Monday, March 13, 2000

Date: 00/03/13

8:06 p.m.

[Mr. Renner in the chair]

Subcommittee D – Resource Development

Gordon, Judy, Chairman
 Renner, Rob, Deputy Chairman
 Amery, Moe
 Broda, Dave
 Carlson, Debby
 Coutts, David
 Havelock, Jon

Herard, Denis
 Hlady, Mark
 Langevin, Paul
 Magnus, Richard
 Pannu, Raj
 Paul, Pamela

Pham, Hung
 Sapers, Howard
 Shariff, Shiraz
 Taylor, Lorne
 West, Steve
 White, Lance

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Can I call the meeting to order.

We are in subcommittee D, and we are considering the estimates of the Department of Resource Development.

For those of you who haven't had the opportunity to have a meeting in this room – and I suspect that's none, but just in case – we've had a good experience in dealing with estimates in this room whereby rather than having the full 20 minutes allocated to an individual member followed by 20 minutes of answers from a minister, we've had the unanimous consent of those around the table to change the rules so the order would be 20 minutes in opening comments for the minister, and in this case that would include both ministers for a total of 20 minutes. Then the members around the table would have an opportunity to ask questions and the minister would answer and the total period would be 20 minutes. Then we would move on to the next person. It just gives a little bit more back and forth. But it would require the agreement of everyone concerned. So are we agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? I take that to be unanimous.

Then, minister and associate minister, you will have up to 20 minutes for opening comments, and that will be for both of you.

DR. WEST: All right. We'll get started, then, Mr. Chairman. We're going to be looking at Resource Development tonight. As well, the Associate Minister of Forestry will be addressing his side of the forestry development area when he gets to his talk.

Now I'd like to also introduce some staff members that are with me tonight. We have Deputy Minister Ken Smith; Neil McCrank, chairman of the Energy and Utilities Board; Earle Shirley, the chief operating officer of the EUB; Don Keech, assistant deputy minister of corporate services and acting ADM of mineral operations – maybe he can keep both those positions – Harvey Walker, the executive director of financial services; Douglas Borland, director of financial services; Linda White, the department issues manager; and Joanne Rosnau, the director of communications. So we're well represented there.

Now I'd like to start by saying that we've been through many changes in all departments with the reorganization of government back in May of 1999. This ministry has also done some notable changes in that period of time. The department still holds many of the same responsibilities and still works with the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to ensure that resource development in this province is safe, sustainable, and fair to industry, which develops the resource, and to Albertans, who own the resource, lest we ever forget.

The department received some new responsibilities in the last year for the forest industry development and the Northern Alberta Development Council, which the Hon. Mike Cardinal will discuss later. Some of the other responsibilities were transferred from Resource Development to other departments, including climate change, which is now with Environment, and John Donner the ADM of mineral resources and 11 staff went over to Environment when that took place.

The 2000-2001 business plan lists three core businesses for the department: revenue management, industry development, and resource stewardship. The Energy and Utilities Board core businesses are adjudication and regulation of applications, surveillance and enforcement, and information and knowledge. Before moving to the meat of the budget and the business plan for Resource Development, I would like to begin by putting today's energy sector in context.

Last week oil prices reached a new post Gulf war high of \$34 a barrel. On the consumer side we saw a corresponding increase in gasoline prices, which hit 64.9 cents. If you compare natural gas prices from last month with prices a year ago, you can see a substantial increase there too. Therefore, the socioeconomics of these commodities, the impact of those is quite tremendous. Remember that in January 1999 the average price per barrel of oil was \$12.38, and the average price of a litre of gas was 44.9 cents. If you track a penny per dollar per gallon, it's right bang on from \$12.38 to \$32.38, plus or minus, which it is today, and the price of gasoline went up 20 cents from 44 cents to 64.9 cents. It is a marketplace-driven issue.

Given these high commodity prices, we're forecasting a significant increase in exploration and drilling this year with a corresponding increase in royalties to be collected. It's important to note, however, that we don't expect prices to stay as high as they are now, and with the OPEC meeting at the end of this month we would like to see increased productions there in the world market, which might bring supply and demand more in line with our forecast. Our prediction is that oil prices will average \$19 U.S. a barrel in 2000-2001 and that natural gas will average about \$2.50 Canadian per thousand cubic feet. These forecasts are lower than prices are now, but they reflect the best economic analysis we have, and those change every quarter.

Our estimates are that resource royalties in 2000-2001 will total \$4 billion, up from the \$2.4 billion we collected in '98-99 and down from the \$4.3 billion we expect to collect this fiscal year. This is predicted to include \$2.3 billion in natural gas and gas by-products and royalties, \$632 million in crude oil royalties, and \$469 million in synthetic crude oil in bitumen royalties from Alberta oil sands. That's \$469 million from oil sands, \$14 million from coal, and \$650 million from bonuses and sale of Crown leases.

I would like to move now to the highlights of the Resource Development business plan. In terms of the bottom line, I'm requesting a total of \$87 million. That's \$5 million more than was voted in the '99-2000 estimates. Aside from general provisions and

manpower cost pressures from Budget 2000 and Budget '99, there are three main items that contribute to this increase.

The human and animal health study, the first item, is a multiprovincial research program to study the effects of solution gas flaring on animal and human health. The study will involve active monitoring of cattle herd health and ambient air quality by the Western College of Veterinary Medicine at sites ranging from southern Manitoba to northeast British Columbia. This also includes other fugitive emissions from all sources. We are still developing a formula for allocating the costs of the research across departments and jurisdictions, which is estimated at a total of \$17 million.

The bulk of these costs, around \$11 million, will come in the first stage of the research, which is expected to take up to five years. I expect that Alberta will fund a substantial portion of the cost. I am proposing that Resource Development make an initial contribution of \$948,000 towards the study, with further contributions coming from Alberta Environment, Alberta Health and Wellness, and several other provinces. I anticipate making a request for additional funding in the next several budget years or reallocating existing budgets to maintain research funding through to the completion of the project.

The second area is coal-bed methane. I'm requesting additional funding in the order of \$1 million for the development of coal-bed methane and other initiatives to use this untapped resource in Alberta, estimated to be around 2,400 trillion cubic feet. Coal-bed methane has the potential to become a major new source of natural gas in this province. We have little information and knowledge about the geological characteristics of Alberta's coal-bed methane. By allocating resources to develop a knowledge base about this resource, we can determine the viability of developing coal-bed methane, establish long-range economic policy, develop exploration and developmental strategies, and support coal-bed methane as an alternative to meet our targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The third area: increase in EUB grants. I'm requesting a \$3.3 million increase to address spending pressures at the EUB. Most of these pressures are related to an increase in landowner concern about the oil and gas industry. This has many causes, including high levels of industrial activity, animal health concerns, an increased focus on sour gas drilling and development, and closer proximity of such activity to populated areas.

Some of the activities the board will be implementing to address this issue are the development of alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms for resolving application and operational issues early in the energy development process. The board is also seeking to improve landowner/industry relations by expanding its field staff's facilitative role and focusing its surveillance efforts on higher risk operations, problem operators, and areas of intense development. An expanded field surveillance role will improve the public's confidence in the EUB's inspection strategy and increase public comfort with resource development. It also will be looking at the great development applications that are coming forth; example, the \$33 billion that's being invested in the oil sands, \$25 billion to \$26 billion of which is already in application.

These initiatives call for the EUB to build a greater staff presence in the community, so much of the additional funding I'm seeking here will be used to increase the board's staff complement from 650 in 1999-2000 to 715 in the year 2000-2001, an increase of 65 full-time equivalent positions. The core frontline people, the inspectors, are going up 13 this year, 12 next year, and we hope to look at a component of 18 new geologists, engineers, and technologists in the field.

8:16

Another area which I'll touch on quickly is the PPA option and electrical deregulation. Another major initiative this year will be continuing work to restructure the electrical industry, and this will be done through existing allocations. No new money is being requested. The electrical restructuring began several years ago and will largely be completed by January 1, 2001. That's when Albertans will have a choice about who supplies their electricity.

One of the most significant steps will be an auction held in July of power purchase agreements. Power purchase arrangements, or PPAs, are long-term contracts that convey the right to sell the output of the power plants built in Alberta under regulation. The proceeds from the sale of the PPAs will be used to ensure that Albertans receive the gains created by deregulation residual value. The sale of the PPAs also eliminates the need for future regulatory hearings on plant costs and ensures that the deregulation will result in a competitive market.

These are the highlights. I'll now turn it over to the Associate Minister of Forestry.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Steve. I'm also pleased to present the 2000-2001 budget estimates for the forest industry development branch and also the Northern Alberta Development Council. Before I get into that, I'd like to introduce Howard Gray, the executive director of the forest industry development branch, and Donna Ballard, my executive assistant.

The forest industry development branch of Alberta Resource Development is responsible for advocating on behalf of the forest industry and for formulating policy relating to forest industry development, forest product exports, and forestry revenues. In the near future we will present a long-term strategy to government to provide a direction on forest industry development policies for the next decade or so. That's something to look forward to.

The responsibility for timber allocation and tenure moved to Resource Development from Environment, and we now lead the negotiations and development of new forest management agreements. The Minister of Environment continues to have - and this is a very important area - responsibility for overall land management and protection of Alberta forests, including fire suppression. Alberta Environment ensures compliance with legislation and collects Crown timber revenues.

The Resource Development forest industry development branch promotes the value-adding, upgrading, of commodities. The branch is working with Economic Development and the industry advisory committee to undertake a major review that will ensure that Alberta's secondary wood products continue to benefit from the Alberta advantage.

Government and industry are working collaboratively together to deal with the expiry of the softwood lumber agreement, which is on March 31, 2001. The Canadian government has initiated a consultative strategy to the development of a process with the provinces in the forest industry. The intergovernmental and aboriginal affairs department is leading this process in Alberta, and it's a very, very important process.

Another important part of my mandate as minister is communicating the socioeconomic impact of the forest industry. One of my first activities was requesting an overview and an update on the economic impact of forestry on Alberta communities. Using the most recent statistics that were available from industry, we developed a document outlining these statistics. No doubt you've seen this document. It is very impressive. The figures were used from 1997-98. The total industry revenues were over \$8.4 billion. Direct expenditures

were \$3.4 billion. Taxes, stumpage, protection charges totaled \$564 million a year. The value of exported shipments totaled \$2.44 billion. The forest industry provided direct employment for over 25,000 employees and indirect employment of another 27,700. So it's a major, major economic producer. Many people are not aware of the contribution the forest industry makes in our economy, but we are working very hard to ensure that the public out there has in their hands the information outlining this project, and that is why we developed this pamphlet.

The forest industry development budget itself for 2000-2001 is \$1,347,000, which reflects a 9 percent increase over last year's budget. This will cover off employee salary increases and increases in the contracting budget to undertake studies related to the branch's mandate.

Northern development is another area I'm responsible for. As you are aware, the area of the northern development boundary has a lot of the resource development taking place. One hundred percent of all the heavy oil production, 90 percent of the forests, 40 percent of conventional oil and gas, and about 20 percent of agriculture is within the northern development area. Yet only 250,000 people live more or less in the area, which is less than 10 percent of the population.

Billions of dollars of economic investments have taken place in northern Alberta, but because of geography and sometimes lack of training and lack of proper education a lot of northerners are prevented from taking advantage of the job opportunities that are there. We are working hard to change that. Family incomes, in fact, and educational attainment are well below the provincial average. For aboriginal communities the old way of living off the land is ending. Many northern aboriginal people want to participate in resource development opportunities but lack the training and expertise and sometimes the financial backing to be able to do that. People are definitely ready to move forward. The old traditional lifestyle is gone. Everybody up north realizes that, and it's time to participate in the economic activity that takes place. We're doing everything as a government to make sure that happens.

The Northern Alberta Development Council carries out the important work of advancing its business plan's objectives for 2000-2001. They are, one, receiving input into priority northern development opportunities and issues; secondly, promoting emerging opportunities and addressing barriers to northern development; and thirdly, increasing northern skills. It is requesting \$1,843,000 for 2000-2001, a 2 percent increase over last year, to cover off employee salary increases. It will look for ways to enhance the consultative processes with northern stakeholders, including the hosting of community leadership roundtable meetings. In the past year we implemented the Northern Links program, which will help northern high school students access postsecondary education, including technical institutions.

The northern development council will continue to focus on infrastructure development by reviewing the future of northern airports, continuing discussions on rail transportation, and implementing the integrated road network plans for northwestern Canada, which was part of the western Premiers' economic action plan.

Finally, I invite you to mark your calendars for the Challenge North conference which is happening from March 29 to 31 in Grande Prairie. It will provide an opportunity for northern community industry, education, and government leaders to discuss key northern development challenges and opportunities. I would like to invite all of you to that conference.

That is my presentation. I guess we are ready now for questions.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, associate minister.

Traditionally it's the opposition critic that would go first. Is that Edmonton-Calder? All right; Edmonton-Calder, the floor is yours for 20 minutes. Just a caution. It works best if we have short questions. They usually lead to short answers. We'll just keep the clock running.

8:26

MR. WHITE: Mr. Minister, first of all, it's good to see the estimates in full and complete form, although we'd always like to have them much more in depth than they are. But such as they are, they're here.

There's one particular area I'd like to highlight, and it deals with the regulatory agency the EUB. You'll recall that this member was quite vocal the last two times we gathered with regards to the cutting of the budget and going through phase 1 of the implementation of the recommendations that were brought forward with the framework and the human resources plan of the EUB. I'd like you to comment on then and now. What has changed in the business scene and/or what has changed in the need for the many more field workers required and, in conjunction with that, the turnaround time from completion of hearings to publication of report?

DR. WEST: Well, you're quite right. The restructuring of the EUB didn't start until probably a little over a year ago. Although there was much said about it in the early running, we pulled back from it because it was under such stress because of the high pressures that were put on by the private sector to take many of its staff out to work in the private sector. So we have started now with a program where we will be adding, like I said in the statement, 65 full-time equivalents on the front lines for inspection, for landowner grievances, and for other hearings that go on plus public forums. We'll be putting 13 and 12 next year – that's 25 – and as I said, we'll also be looking at 18 new geologists, technical people in that. To get them, we're going to go – and people will think it's not enough, but we will be looking at 90 percent of the median of industry as paying in salaries. Some of the new moneys that are going in there are 80 percent funded by the industry. We'll put 3.3 in and they'll put 10. It will allow us to add to the structure of the EUB.

On top of that, the EUB has been going through removing the silos that are in there with the new chief operating officer that we have in place and the new chairman. They are looking at getting a more flexible operation. We've also brought on many temporary board members that can take certain files and speed up the application timing and have put in a minimum of 90 days, after the initial hearing, for the results to come out. We also added to the bench strength of the board and continue to look at the cross section of people on that board, whether they be in environmental issues or whether they be with industry background or general background as it relates to municipalities.

MR. WHITE: The hearing to report time, the turnaround time?

DR. WEST: It has been picking up. There are certainly some hearings that take a long time. We've had some sour gas well hearings that have been up to a year. We're going to tighten that up considerably and try to work on that. I mean, a year ago we had 22,000 applications and 22 went to appeal. I think the turnaround time is getting better. It's one that industry constantly hammers us on.

MR. WHITE: Good. Thank you, sir. That's all in that area. Perhaps you want to go back and forth.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No. Keep going.

MR. WHITE: Keep on going? You want me to go completely for 20 minutes?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. WHITE: Okay. The EUB's alternative service delivery plan. Can you expand a little on that plan?

DR. WEST: The disputes resolution mechanism?

MR. WHITE: Yes. In the Corporate Service Centre I gather they're going to do something different in dealing with quick turnaround times for applications. It's a new model of some description, I understand.

DR. WEST: Well, I think I would have to get that answer, all the nuts and bolts of those changes, directly to you. But the idea of it is to put enough manpower in place at the various levels and with the research of the materials that are needed to make those decisions to have it speeded up to the best ability that we can. One of the challenges, of course, is on a timely basis and having the information and the parties meeting at the same time. But I'm going to leave that, and I'll get back to you with that answer from the EUB itself.

MR. WHITE: Okay. Could you elaborate on the streamlining of the applications required in reservoir development and minable oil sands? Traditionally it was an awfully long process, and I gather that what you're trying to do is collapse that process.

DR. WEST: Well, we have worked with Environment and some of the other areas and the municipalities to speed up the process. If it's oil sands you're talking about, we have a much better template now to put against any applications. We've done all the groundwork as it relates to the aboriginal issues, the land use issues, the environmental issues, and the municipal issues as they relate to Fort McMurray. I would say that having more people that we can call in on a temporary basis to look at the new applications, a larger size for the board, will speed up that application process. There's one thing about it that I've always said. Once you've taken a site and mitigated all the application issues, then for the next site that comes in the same area, you should be able to cover off a lot of the technical aspects of it faster. I think that certainly will be there. Of course, the city of Fort McMurray has agreed not to be an intervenor in these because they have agreed with the process. It speeds it up considerably if the municipality involved has mitigated the process.

MR. WHITE: You mentioned in your opening remarks coal-bed methane and the research that had to go on to estimate its recovery value and all that sort of thing. Is there any regulatory process that has been worked upon thus far in recognition of it being a different . . .

DR. WEST: I won't be able to answer that, hon. member. I'll get an answer to that. I am not a geologist, and I haven't been involved in the coal-bed methane evolution.

Just to give you an idea. In the States they've done some work on coal-bed methane development. This million dollars to go in is to research that, and I'm sure that as that comes forward, the EUB would then look at whatever regulations have to be put in place. But if there are any, I'll get those to you. I don't think there are any applications before the EUB at the present time.

MR. WHITE: I wouldn't think so.

DR. WEST: No.

MR. WHITE: You said a million dollars in research funds. Are those research funds going to a special project with AOSTRA?

DR. WEST: It will be work with industry players, consultants, and probably through ARC, Alberta Research Council. All those projects are vetted through there now and the AOSTRA component that we send over.

MR. WHITE: The anticipated level of applications this year over last. I didn't see it, but I suspect it would be in about the same range. The sour wells will be up, I suspect. Has anything developed in the way of a hearing procedure to run more of them at the same time so that they can run concurrently?

DR. WEST: Well, with the increased staff components and the way the committee structures are set up, I'm sure they'll be able to facilitate that, but that's again the internal workings of the EUB on each and every application. These answers will be brought forward to you by the chairman. You have to understand that this is an arm's-length regulatory body, and I do not get involved in the day-to-day workings of the EUB.

MR. WHITE: Agreed.

DR. WEST: And you wouldn't want me to.

MR. WHITE: Well, heck no.

DR. WEST: That's the right answer.

MR. WHITE: It's the right answer. That's true. Not involved. But there's a difference between being involved and being aware, but we won't go there. There's no reason to do that.

It seems to us that the environmental reviews are increasing in number and complexity. Is there any provision for the increase in complexity of the reviews?

8:36

DR. WEST: Well, as I said, we are working on hiring 65 people. At the present time 18 of those are technical people that will be dealing with certain aspects of those applications. As well, 650 people in the restructuring will be directed in I hope the most professional of manners to deal with the complexities of the new applications. That's as good an answer as I can give to you, because many of them are very professional people that have been dealing a long time with this industry and have set the best standards that I know of in the world, actually, here in Alberta.

MR. WHITE: One of the complexities is the proximity to developed residential areas. The output of the \$17 million study that you were talking about with flared and solution gas – and part of that would be sour gas. You will be having all these hearings without having the results of this study. How are you going to . . .

DR. WEST: The study is an ongoing challenge that we have. We put it at arm's length to us, with the other provinces involved to ensure its authenticity. That is an ongoing study that will be reporting back at certain periods of time. I think some of it will come back in 18 months, some in two or three years. That does not

mean that the EUB doesn't function with the standards they have set in place using present day scientific values.

They have certain policies and structures that enforce distances from urban centres or residences, and they constantly monitor the safety of these areas. They have one gas well that was outside Calgary. There were some 18 special requirements on that well alone that didn't apply to other wells when it was approved. So I have no concerns whatsoever that the EUB won't continue while this study goes on and that if there are any findings from these studies, they'll be implemented by the EUB into their standards.

MR. WHITE: As you are aware, it has been a long-standing criticism of this side of the House with regards to the number of monitoring staff, field staff. I see you are addressing that situation at least in part, but it would still be our contention that there simply is not enough staff to adequately monitor a great deal of the situations the oil and gas business find themselves in. While monitoring themselves does have its upside, that it cuts down the cost of the EUB through the ministry, the downside is that it's darn difficult for any firm to say they are and have been totally compliant. Would it not be reasonable to rely on a local municipality to assist those people by bylaw to do at least part of the monitoring, the initial monitoring, to be able to verify or audit the veracity of the reports coming out of the companies?

DR. WEST: I would think you would have to enlarge the staffing components at all levels. It would be duplicating an overlap that you wouldn't need. The EUB does an excellent job, and with the new funding formulas and the increase in staff they are hiring – plus that will be an ongoing analysis – I think they will address these concerns up front. I would take issue with you insinuating at all that the EUB to a stress point isn't inspecting or keeping a good enough hand on industry and on these developments. I find that a bit of an insult to the EUB and to this province's record. I don't know why you would spend a massive amount of money on duplication where we're already having a stress on professionals that should be in one centre, not spread throughout 398 municipalities.

MR. WHITE: Turning to older pipelines, it's agreed pretty well in the industry that . . . [interjection] Oh, my colleague wants to cover pipelines, so let's move from gas and oil to electricity. Well, no. Before we do that . . . Sorry, sir.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, just so you know, you've got four minutes left.

MR. WHITE: Four minutes. I don't have to move very far then, do I?

To move to an area that is prevalent and that you touched on in your chat, could you give the committee some rationale as to why you'd maintain your position on fuel tax? You know, last week I wrote you a letter that suggested that with the estimated crude price in the budget being \$19, anything above that is a net bonus to your department and then through to the general revenue. From some albeit relatively simple calculations I did through pulling quarterly reports and annual reports of your department and the previous budgets of '98, '99, and 2000, it's clear that if the fuel tax is reduced a penny at the pump for every dollar that the world price of crude, the WTI, is up, it's still a net benefit. If you drop it, at \$19 the Treasury would be entitled to and receive the full 9 cents tax applied, and anything above \$28, on a graduated scale of course, would be free.

AN HON. MEMBER: What about when it hits \$12?

MR. WHITE: It's still 9 cents. Anything below that it's flat, absolutely flat. They can't go beyond the bottom limit. The Treasury does need some of it. I haven't heard a reply from your note, and quite frankly I expected one earlier than this actually.

DR. WEST: Well, you sent me your philosophy as it relates to what you think should be done. When OPEC and the rest of the world has an undersupply, that may not be agreed across Canada, and we have to deal with the social economics of all provinces, some, such as Newfoundland, that have 85 cents a litre gas. We have asked the federal government to look at one of the taxes. It does move. Ours is a fixed 9 percent, but their GST of 7 percent moves with the price of gasoline. If you were in an 85 cents per litre area, it would be nearly 6 cents, the price of the GST on that gasoline, or part of the 15 cents that they have.

MR. WHITE: I wouldn't ask you to do something to axe the feds. I've already communicated to the feds what I think of their . . .

DR. WEST: What I'm trying to answer to you is that you can't sit in isolation on an issue like this.

AN HON. MEMBER: What did they say to you last?

MR. WHITE: They're as bad as him. They haven't got back to me yet.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: One member at a time.

DR. WEST: I mean, your federal Liberal counterparts are mad enough at us as it is for having high oil prices once in about a quarter and a half, but they didn't come here when it was \$12.38 a year ago. Of course, because we have this, they don't transfer the agricultural grants to us; they don't transfer any health wealth to us.

MR. WHITE: I'm talking about the relationship, sir, between the custodians of the resource and the owners of the resource. The owners of the resource are the people of Alberta.

DR. WEST: We can't in isolation, without the country, do that.

MR. WHITE: Sure you can. It's your tax.

DR. WEST: You mean to say that we could just throw in the face of Saskatchewan residents and B.C. residents an island of cutback? In agriculture that's what the federal Liberals did. They drew the line at the Saskatchewan border and they gave us zero, and you know the emotion that we have here.

8:46

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, on that positive note we'll move on to the next person. The next member who has indicated a wish to participate is Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I would like to thank both of the ministers this evening and all their staff. It would be my wish that this budget process were a little less formal so that staff could participate in answers, because I think it would be beneficial to everyone involved if that were the process.

DR. WEST: I'd like that, actually, if you'd make the announcements.

MS CARLSON: I'd need a little help here, Steve.

My first set of questions are questions that are very important to me and to my constituents. They have to do with the Gulf gas processing plant at Rimbey and the butane/ethylene pipeline to Edmonton through Mill Woods. I have a series of questions here that I will ask and then ask you to respond. I'm hoping you can give some responses today and perhaps some more detail in writing at a future date within a quick time line, because those answers I will be distributing throughout the constituency as this is quite a serious issue in Mill Woods at this time.

First of all, to do with the processing plant itself, it has requested an upgrade in its sulphur recovery system from 92 to 99 percent. We fully support this application they have made, and we're hoping it will be approved soon. In fact, this evening I just finished meeting with one of the environmentalists that was a key partner in pursuing the upgrade for this plant. We're hoping a public hearing won't be required in that regard, but there are some serious repercussions that are going to fall out of the plant upgrade as it continues its operation. With the upgrade the plant hopes to increase its throughput. We've had some discussion with the plant on this. It's currently underutilized, and in fact we would support an increase in throughput there if they are increasing their recovery of sulphur. That would be an excellent objective.

But if we take a look at this plant back in history, it was originally thought that this plant would cease to operate by this time, and this raises some concerns for us in terms of the pipeline that's carrying the propane and butane condensate from Rimbey to Edmonton. That pipeline is nearly 40 years old, and as we know, the older pipelines are more liable to corrosion and failure.

Now, I understand that this company is checking this pipeline yearly, but if we take a look at the EUB field surveillance reports, the '98-99 report shows 65 percent of pipeline failures caused by corrosion as compared to 51 percent for the period of '80 to '98. So as their age increases, regardless of what they do, there are more failures. In terms of this pipeline that runs through my constituency, which passes a Sikh temple, two junior high/elementary schools, a Mormon church, a strip mall, and many residences, the people are very concerned that a 40-year-old pipeline is liable to see some sort of failure problems in the future.

So our first question is: what is being done to ensure the safety of old pipelines in general and this one specifically? Another question we would like to ask is: what is the EUB requirement for reviewing pipelines when circumstances change? This pipeline had an explosion in 1979, and at that time as part of the review process it was indicated that the pipeline was expected to close down by the year 2000. Now it's going to continue in operation and will be carrying an increased load if there is an increased volume from the Rimbey plant. Are there any requirements to review the findings of that report? Would the board consider moving the pipeline to the pipeline corridor, where there are adequate setbacks? This pipeline was grandfathered when the new regulations came in, so in some cases it's only 7.5 metres away from buildings. Our understanding is that the setback requirements are more in the 100 to 200 metre range. So that's an issue for us.

Another question is: are there any requirements that setbacks have to be met on old lines if there's an increased throughput? We would request that both the board and the department review the findings of the 1979 explosion report to determine what actions are needed at this time in terms of that very old pipeline.

Also we're requesting that a review of the pipeline be done in accordance with I believe it's section 42, where you can request an inquiry in existing operations. We would like a review of the integrity of the lines, a review of the setbacks in terms of their

proximity to residences and other buildings in the area. For us this is a very serious issue. We believe that a review of this pipeline is required as a starting point. There are many pipelines in the province that are facing the same problem. This will be a serious issue that is currently building in the constituency that I don't think will be solved until some sort of review process is put in place.

I'm hoping you could address some of those questions now and get back to me as soon as possible on the rest of them.

DR. WEST: What I heard from you is a concern on behalf of your constituents, and in there was a group of questions and queries as it relates to this pipeline. I can assure you that the EUB has an ongoing provincial interest in older pipelines and will continue to regulate them in the strongest of manners to ensure the safety of the public.

I'll take all the other parts of your concerns as a matter of notice and have the EUB, which is present here tonight, respond to you. I just know that as we go throughout the province, with the level of pipelines we have, 270,000 kilometres in the NOVA system and pipe gathering systems, our track record is excellent, but that does not deny the fact that we must look at the older pipelines to ensure safety. If they are safe pipelines – some of them are grandfathered. The setback rules, you know, are considered.

As I said, I'll take your concerns. I know that as you go throughout your constituency those people who bring these concerns to you are very serious about the impact they have on the social structure of their communities. I understand that.

MS CARLSON: Thank you. I appreciate that, and I look forward to circulating those answers within the community.

Next I would like to talk about the alternative disputes resolution mechanisms, which you briefly touched on with my colleague. You know, we have a real contradiction here in my opinion in terms of what was said by the Premier back in February of '99 in the Legislature and then in the letter from the EUB that says that the alternative disputes resolution mechanisms are working on what the Premier said. It doesn't look to me like there's a direct correlation there. As I see it, the EUB's focus is on the application dispute problems, but they are not addressing the disputes that arise after approval has been granted.

What we hear is that the EUB is saying they don't have any jurisdiction in that area, that there's no process in place for them to put an alternative disputes resolution in place at that stage, and we get a whole raft of answers in terms of whose responsibility it is: your department, Environment, and so on. So my question is: who is going to solve this problem? We think that if the EUB has jurisdiction before, at the application stage, then they should also have jurisdiction after there is approval and there are problems. We're not satisfied that they're only focusing on the application process and, in a very minor role, the issues skirting around the edges of that.

8:56

I thank you for the letter that you sent to me on this issue. We know about the terms of reference for the process. It's going to be a good tool where there's an application for development or where problems arise, but we really want them to broaden the issues addressed in there. So if you could address that.

DR. WEST: Well, we don't disagree with you. I think we will be broadening this to look at the postapproval situations that you talk about. There's no doubt that with the growing population in the province of Alberta and the impact this industry has on the urban

fringes, as well as those areas where people live, we will have to be looking at many tools, not just this one, in mitigating some of the conflicts.

I know that the EUB will be traveling around. They will be going to Wainwright and other places. They're going to try public hearings and meetings to expand upon the information people should have as it relates to these areas of disputes as well as a better understanding of the role of the EUB, both in the initial phase as well as postapproval time.

They also want to bring forth a better understanding of the responsibility of industry and the public's rights as far as the first phase of any oil and gas development that takes place. So I think that you're on a good area. I'm not criticizing the question. We have to do a better job in the postapproval process as well as getting out there, and we're going to use many of these frontline people to get there with information and a better understanding before a dispute grows in a fashion where it might cause larger confrontations such as we may have seen in the past in the province.

MS CARLSON: Good. Thanks.

Next, I would like to address the field staff concerns that we have had for a long time with EUB. It's nice to see that there are going to be more people in the field, as you've said. I don't believe that my colleague had any intent to insult the EUB, as you indicated. He was addressing a very real concern that we hear time and time again, in fact every time we're out in the country. The majority of the phone calls I get certainly have to do with understaffing in the field. So it's good to see that you're going to be doing that.

[Mr. Coutts in the chair]

One of the issues that we think needs to be addressed in that regard is improving the landowner public relations through the field staff's facilitative role. It's more than, we think, just a public relations job. It is part of industry doing a good job. There hasn't been enough monitoring going in the past few years. Even in the short term with the new numbers of staff you're going to have, we would like to see a significant increase in the number of unannounced spot checks and audits, if for nothing else than to increase the security of people in the community. They feel that this has not been done adequately in the last few years.

We also think it would be a good idea to require that the oil and gas companies notify the municipality so that their operations can be monitored. This was proposed with a county of Strathcona bylaw. Here I'm specifically talking about seismic crews. More than just the county of Strathcona have introduced this bylaw. It's come forward from a number of other counties. We understand that there's been some pressure from yourself to rescind this bylaw, so we're wondering why. Now, I understand that the ownership of roads and road allowances belongs to you, but the maintenance of them and the monitoring of them belongs to the counties.

It would seem to me that in that instance it would be well within the county's mandate to be able to pass a bylaw that would require oil and gas companies to notify the municipalities when they are in the area and when they are drilling. So when you are such a proponent of—I'd say downloading; sharing responsibility maybe is a term you would prefer. I'm wondering why you're not encouraging local supervision in this regard, given the list of duties that you've given for the additional staff. The EUB, no matter what, is not going to have enough staff to adequately monitor this kind of situation.

I'll stop there. I've got some more questions in terms of drilling, but if you could address that part of it.

DR. WEST: Well, I think the issue with the municipalities is that they should work with the province and the EUB if they have access problems. Rather than setting up punitive fees and regulations within the municipalities, they should work with the province. After all, the orderly development of the oil and gas reserves in this province is a benefit not only to the municipalities but to the province and to all people of the province of Alberta.

I know that frustration drives some municipalities to set up these seismic fees or access fees, but we have said: just wait a minute. You don't want to send a message to this industry, that's under a lot of stress from federal legislation, endangered species, the Canadian environmental act, as well as access problems as it relates to traditional lands, natural areas, special places, and on and on and on. So work with us on this to mitigate these areas rather than bringing in punitive fees that in many cases generate a minuscule amount of money for the effort put into them but are there because of a frustration in the municipality.

We just put a billion dollars into infrastructure, and municipalities will share in those moneys in everything from roads to bridges. They should know that those moneys come from a very healthy resource industry and that we shouldn't be penalizing them unfairly. So, yes, there's frustration, but my point is: work with us on solutions rather than on a knee-jerk, ad hoc basis throughout the province, where one municipality versus another puts up barriers. I think we've had agreement with some of them. Using my name in vain with certain local landowners and that sort of thing isn't the solution to good communication, and I've heard that said by some frustrated landowners. I would hope that you the loyal opposition don't just fan that for political reasons. We're all here to work in a collaborative position for the benefit of Albertans.

MS CARLSON: We're very well behaved, I think, in terms of our questions here this evening and the approach we're taking.

DR. WEST: I'm talking about the activities outside this room.

MS CARLSON: We will pursue the issues where they present themselves.

Are you saying, then, Mr. Minister, that you would entertain the notion of counties bringing in a bylaw that requires notification for the oil and gas companies when they come onto those lands as opposed to them putting in a bylaw that would require a fee? If they scrap the fee and just ask for notification, would you support that?

DR. WEST: Well, we have a task force in place at the present time that's ongoing, and I want to look at all those issues. We're not saying that we aren't open to any suggestions. Each municipality is different. We have not just the county of Strathcona but northern municipalities as well as those in the corridor area. So the answer to your question is yes. We're going to continue to communicate. To find the proper answer to notification will be left to those discussions.

MS CARLSON: If you could tell me who is on that task force, if there are any counties that have withdrawn their participation in that task force, and at what points in time you expect reports, be they interim or final reports.

DR. WEST: Well, it's an ongoing task force. I suppose you could say that it will report and continue to report. I don't know of any that have withdrawn, but the counties and the AAMDC are part of that and the AUMA. As well, directly we invited five or six of them—in the beginning I can remember having meetings with them at the

Coast Terrace Inn, the Edmonton Inn, and a few other places, discussions with specifically five or six that were charging those fees to start with. We asked the general body to also assess input as it relates to their members.

9:06

Who's on the task force? Those people as well as the Minister of Environment, the minister of agriculture, the Minister of Resource Development, and, before that, forestry. Now the Hon. Mike Cardinal will be on that task force as well as the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Again, we will have ongoing discussions as it relates to these issues.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thank you. The time is up for that series of questions.

The next person on the list is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I want to ask you some questions flowing from your business plan and the consolidated statement.

What I'd like to start off with is a general question about the performance measures first for your department, then for the EUB, and then for the Northern Alberta Development Council. The general question is this. When I look at the three areas that you're responsible for under this Ministry of Resource Development, I see three very different forms of performance measure. For example, the performance measures attached to your Resource Development business plan give us figures for either 1998 or 1999 and in one case, I believe, a projection for the year 2001 but no targets or very few targets for the year 2000 set out in the performance measure.

Then if we look at the performance measures for the NADC, we see 1998-1999 actual measures, 1999-2000 targets, and then targets throughout the business planning cycle to the end of 2000-2003. Again, if you take a look at the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, their performance measures are in a third, very different form. What they do is give us what I believe are all targets for the years 1999-2000 to the end of the business cycle.

[Mr. Renner in the chair]

Now, I understand that the cross-government reference is to have performance measures set out to the end of the planning cycle. I'm wondering if you can explain the difference and why it is that in what I'll call the departmental business plan we don't see them extrapolated out to the end of the business cycle at all. Why are there three different forms of performance measures within your department when we're trying to get some consistency across government, at least according to the documents supplied by Treasury and the Executive Council?

The other question I have is specific to goal 1 under the performance measures: "sharing the profits from resource development." First of all, the target range is between 20 to 30 percent, which is fairly broad. I'm just curious as to why we go from about a fifth to a third in terms of expected range. More particularly, I note that in 1993 it was 25 percent. It troubles me if we don't have an estimate for 1999, but the 1998 estimate is down 4 percent to 21 percent. In fact, it's been going down steadily since '93, and I'm wondering if being at the bottom end of that target range is acceptable. If you set such a broad range, 20 to 30 percent, and you're going down, is that acceptable? If it's really what you're trying to do, then why isn't the target range a little bit more narrow and focused?

Also, I have a question when it comes to the Northern Alberta

Development Council performance measures. First of all, when I look at the performance measures, I see that there are really just three of them. I'm particularly interested in the goal 3 performance measure, which is "to increase northern skill levels." I'm curious as to why there are no performance measures that would look at the percentage of those northern Alberta residents who are in need versus those who qualify for bursary or other support. Also, why isn't there a measure that looks at the percentage of those who apply for support versus those who are approved? Finally, why is there no measure of course completion or graduation rate or at least of years involved in programing that's supported through the council? It seems to me that those would all be measures that would be more helpful in understanding the success of the strategies that are outlined in the business plan.

I'm going to use my 10 minutes and then leave the minister 10 minutes, because I think this process is – anyway, it doesn't matter what I think about this process. So I'll use my time, and then you can respond.

Back to the business plans for energy. I'm wondering if the minister can tell me if he's planning anything that's different in how we handle ethylene in this province and whether or not we're going to be allowing more export to the United States, if there's going to be any relaxation in terms of what we do. If so, what is the rationale? If a change in policy is being contemplated, have you looked at what impact that may have on lost opportunities for employment and value-added processing here in Alberta?

I guess the final question for now – and then I'll allow the two ministers a chance to respond – is a general question about the income statement. I'm just wondering whether it's folks who crunch numbers in the Department of Resource Development or folks who crunch numbers in Treasury who set the expected revenue figures for natural gas and by-products royalty, crude oil royalty, and synthetic crude and bitumen royalty? Who is primarily responsible for producing those numbers?

That's my opening round of questions.

DR. WEST: The answer to your last question is they both do work there, plus they also work on forecasting. They also work using different forecasters, banks, and what have you throughout the world. Internally, of course, they go by the information that's produced on an ongoing basis by the oil sands, whether it's gas or whether it's land sales, and they do it from year to year on certain evaluations. It's both that work together on that.

I don't see any great change in policy from the export point of view. We know that right now we're about 15 percent of the United States' consumption of natural gas. We don't see any effect except the fact that our pipeline capacities are probably not – we can't achieve filling some of the gas pipelines at the present time, but that's not a great disconnect. It's probably helpful to us. Exploration will have to continue, and I think that as we see the companies move into the Mackenzie Delta north, you'll see lots of jobs and that here. I trust that was your question as to whether there was a change in policy coming on exports. No, not that we know of, not unless the federal Liberals decide to step in.

MR. SAPERS: They would only do the right thing.

DR. WEST: Like they did under the national energy policy. I'll just have to mention that once again.

Of course, what might affect export here and jobs here is a change to the oil and gas industry's tax position which just came out in the last budget. If you want to open up the door on the economics of this . . .

MR. SAPERS: Maybe you can just answer my questions.

9:16

DR. WEST: Well, when you kick the door open, you allow me to expand on the answer.

We just noticed that in an appendix to the budget – and the Treasurer is here – they kind of snuck in. A little bit of an agreement that they made in 1975 was on the resource allowances as it related to the oil and gas industry, and I would think you'd be writing your counterparts along with us with the strongest of objections. That will change the capital markets. Two years down the road we'll see quite a struggle for companies that are already struggling in competition with the high-tech markets at the present time. So those are the policies that will affect our export, not the ones that we're doing here.

At any rate, the other one on key performance measurements. If there's an answer to all your queries because they went back and forth – I didn't understand why you would ask questions like that when you know that performance measurements in certain areas for certain departments are two- to three-year moving targets. Therefore, to have them all indicated in one year, 2000, and some of them in 2003 would be redundant as far as the practicability of it.

I also might say, with the Treasurer sitting here, that performance measurements sometimes are questionable in certain areas because they're not as clear a measurement as it might be in the number of births or the number of deaths or the statistics that may be analyzed in certain other departments. Maybe the minister of forestry development could certainly answer in the areas of the Northern Alberta Development Council.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay. Thanks, Steve. Just briefly, because he only touched on the way the performance measures are set up. The main reason for that inconsistency at the time was that the transfer of the Northern Alberta Development Council took place after the budgets were set up for each department, and there was a split that took place in the Northern Alberta Development Council. It was under Executive Council, reporting to the Premier, and was transferred to Resource Development along with the performance measures that were set up. So for this year they have to show up the way they were originally laid out, and it may not be exactly consistent with the way Resource Development has done their performance measures. As we move forward in the next budget year, you will no doubt see a change, and they'll be consistent with the department.

The other area I believe you inquired about is the percentage of applications and percentage approved. I'll give you an example. In 1999 out of 359 applications, 126 were awarded, and this continues to be improved. Our targets are high, and they're being achieved as far as commitment, which is another important issue. You didn't really directly ask about that, but it's part of the process of providing bursaries for our northern students. Seventy-two percent of all the applicants that received bursaries through the Northern Alberta Development Council fulfilled their obligations in return. Our target was 75 percent, so it has gone very well.

For the other couple of questions you've asked, we will do that in writing. I see the staff taking notes, and we will get that to you in writing. They are quite important issues, and it needs more information beyond what I can provide today.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you for that. I appreciate it.

I'd like to go back to a couple of the answers. First of all, one of the specific questions I asked in my first round was the performance measure for goal 1, which is the target range of 20 to 30 percent for "sharing the profits from resource development." I note that it's

gone down from 25 percent in '93 to the '98 estimate of 21 percent. I'm wondering why, and I'm wondering why the range is so big. I'm wondering if you're satisfied that it has gone down by 4 percent. Is that the direction that is supported by government policy? The response, as I understood you to say it, is that you don't have a lot of faith in performance measures and don't think they accurately reflect government business. That may be, but as I understand it, it is the policy of this government to produce performance measures as part of the three-year business plans. So unless there's been some special order in council, which of course we wouldn't know about, that has exempted Resource Development from getting on board with the government policy, I guess I would expect that your performance measures would have to get into line.

MR. HAVELOCK: Orders in council are published.

MR. SAPERS: And I won't be distracted by the Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: By the truth.

MR. SAPERS: Oh, I'll be distracted by the truth. It would be nice to hear that actually.

MR. HAVELOCK: I hope that got into the *Hansard*.

MR. SAPERS: We can make sure it gets into *Hansard*. The Minister of Economic Development reminded me that OCs are published. Of course, we wouldn't know about the discussion, because that happens in secret, and that was really my reference. Of course, we can always FOIP it and get blank pages back too, but that's another question.

For example, Mr. Minister, I would note that under goal 5 for forest industry development, the target is to "reduce the gap between the harvest and the annual allowable cut cap." I notice there that you've got historical data going over 10 years, from 1990 to 1999. It shows what the gap and harvest is of course. Now, that seems to me to be exactly the kind of performance measure you could extrapolate over the business cycle, and you haven't. I could pick other examples in your business plan as well.

I was wondering if you could provide me with perhaps a little more complete response to the question about the business plans and specifically the question I have about the performance measure for goal 1.

DR. WEST: Mr. Chairman, I will take his question as a matter of notice so we can get a complete answer for the hon. member rather than having him retort like he did.

MR. SAPERS: It's called debate. I know you're not used to it, but it is called debate. It's not a retort.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, you have four minutes left. Do you want an answer?

MR. CARDINAL: In the forestry section I could just give some information on that as far as the gap between the annual allowable cut and the cap. We have a sustained yield policy, which means that the government does not and will not allow harvesting to occur beyond the ability of the forests to grow the timber, and it's very well managed. In fact, Alberta Environment at this time estimates that the annual growth of all inventoried forested public lands in the province is approximately 44,500,000 cubic metres. We at this time

are harvesting annually approximately half, 23.3 million cubic metres. We'll have to keep working on that process, but one thing we have to watch is external forces that we have no control over in relation to the inventory out there; that is, forest fires as an example.

We have to always keep in mind that we could have a major forest fire that changes what is out there in relation to the gap between what's available annually and what is being cut. It is critical. We need to maintain our industries operating, and we don't dare overallocate what is available. So it is a touchy area, but you can be assured that we'll try to manage it.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks.

I'll pass the torch, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: All right. Edmonton-Calder, do you have more questions?

MR. WHITE: I do, sir.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Be my guest.

MR. WHITE: Thank you. I would like to direct these questions to the associate minister if you don't mind.

MR. CARDINAL: Sure.

MR. WHITE: Goal 5: "Sustain growth opportunities in the forest sector through maximization of the wood fibre opportunity, secondary processing and export of forest products." The goal, while admirable unto itself, deals only with the forest as a business opportunity in the way of harvest. The difficulty I have is that a great deal of forest is of value to other industries, and this goal doesn't seem to take into account any value for the other industries. The goal may have just been stated in brief and left those things out. I would like to think that the evaluation of forests is not just for harvest and harvest alone, and with your heritage, I'm sure you'd agree.

9:26

MR. CARDINAL: The only areas that we are allowing harvesting to take place for that particular resource are areas where – for example, there are thousands of square miles of muskeg which is generally forested. It's in place. We don't harvest it. It's there. There are special places. There are other areas that are set aside now: parks, Indian reserves. Traditional land areas at this time are not totally developed. So there are a lot of forested areas that we do not develop as part of the overall forest management. But areas where timber can be harvested, is the right size and so on, of course become part of the plan.

We can get the staff to put some of that in writing if you want.

MR. WHITE: No, no. That part of it is okay. Just so long as there's an understanding that aside from all the lands that are set aside for all those other purposes, not forest related – I'm talking about the harvestable forest that is out there. There are a lot of other uses. Recreational is one, and there's lots of trapping and hunting that are of economic value to society. So long as the adherence to this goal is not so strong that it overrides all those others.

MR. CARDINAL: No. The inventoried portion from Environment is estimated at 44.5 million cubic metres of harvestable timber, but we're only harvesting 23.3 million, which is about 50 percent of what can actually be harvested.

MR. WHITE: That 44.5 million cubic metres includes the tree in my front yard. That covers all the trees in the province of Alberta.

MR. CARDINAL: That are harvestable.

MR. WHITE: Right. Sure.

MR. CARDINAL: The green area.

MR. WHITE: But let's not get dissuaded and believe that we're only harvesting half of that which is harvestable. Truly harvestable is not harvesting the city of Edmonton's trees out in the lot here.

MR. CARDINAL: The other thing that's not mentioned too often is that a percentage of the annual allowable cut of both coniferous and deciduous comes from private woodlot operations. I think it could even be 20 percent.

MR. WHITE: I wouldn't think it would ever be that high.

MR. CARDINAL: I didn't think so either, but that seems to be the indication.

MR. WHITE: I can leave that for now.

Can you enlighten me as to the long-term sustainable needs of the forestry industry, the compensation for major losses in the way of fire or infestation – I don't recall anything that has devastated a forest, but it has set it back some – and in particular the nonallocation of forest lands that are taken out of any kind of harvestable production by reason of oil and gas operations and lost to the land base, cut lines and the like? There's no calculation I'm aware of that nets that out of the annual allowable cut. Can you enlighten me in some of those areas, sir?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, we tried to. If an FMA holder has a certain amount of land that they manage – for an example, if an oil and gas development takes place – a lot of the FMA holders now are starting to jointly plan between the oil and gas developments and other developments of that nature to make sure that when they do want to build some roads and drill their wells, they try and co-ordinate with the logging activities of the FMA holder. That seems to be working very well. The plans have just been initiated a number of years ago, and it seems like it's something that will no doubt go across the board in the future.

MR. WHITE: Is there anything in the works in the way of a change in revenue strategy, anything that is being worked upon to return a fair share of revenue to the industry as well as to the owner of the resource? I know there is a varying rate in stumpage.

MR. CARDINAL: In the last number of years there have been changes made along with the industry and also the government in relation to stumpage. They are now market driven. We can get you a copy of those rates. In fact, I think it would be good for you to have. It shows that, you know, if the market goes up, then the companies can afford to pay more, but when the market goes down, then they can pay less stumpage. So it's a good package. It's fully supported by the industry at this time.

MR. WHITE: It's stable. You're not working on any other . . . [interjection] No, no. The plan is market driven; I know that. There aren't any changes in the works? There aren't any modifications?

MR. CARDINAL: In fact, there has been a timber quota review committee in place. They've been working in the last three years reviewing all the phases of the forest industry and the quota system. We'll be coming forward both to environmental protection and also our department in the very near future with a report and some major recommendations. No doubt, as time moves on, in the next two years they could become part of the 10-year forest strategy we're going to announce.

There are some proposed changes. They haven't been adopted. They haven't gone through the process yet, but there are some good ones coming forward.

MR. WHITE: Could you perhaps in some return communication explain what is meant by balancing a fair share of revenue with sector competitiveness? I don't really understand that term.

MR. CARDINAL: Well, you always have to look at the economic viability of the industry. One of the problems with the forest industry is that a lot of times we have no control over commodity prices to the point where it could cost more for the person to manufacture the timber or the wood than they could get if they sold it even in the States. So we have to always have that flexibility to deal with these situations as they change. So it's there. It's well protected.

MR. WHITE: What does the department intend to do in the next fiscal period to foster value-added development or facilitate market access? Do you have any plans in that area that you can share with us?

MR. CARDINAL: Part of our strategy, part of our economic diversification plan in Alberta, of course, you know, is concentrating on some of the major areas like the oil and gas industry, agriculture, tourism, forestry, and science and technology. Specifically in forestry itself we are definitely promoting not only diversification in that sector but also diversification in the value adding of that particular area. A good example is the recent allocation of timber through the north-central timber allocation process, which approved a project adjacent to the Al-Pac site, the abcore project.

One part of the project is situated in one of the northern native communities of Wabasca, and the other one will be situated in Janvier-Conklin, which is another native community with very, very high unemployment.

9:36

What they will be doing there, actually, is something that's never really been done before: taking the best-quality aspen – that's the white aspen – and making dimensional lumber out of the aspen and chipping the balance of the wood into chips which will be sold to Alberta-Pacific to be turned into pulp. The bark will also be sold to Alberta-Pacific to be used for electrical generation.

After creating 100 jobs in each of these isolated communities with very high unemployment, the dimensional lumber will then be shipped to the Al-Pac site and dried using steam, which is the only way you can really afford to dry aspen, because it is very heavy and wet. What that will produce after it's dried is dimensional lumber, and it'll be remanufactured at the site and then delivered from there to Calgary. In Calgary the product will be finished for door framing, window trimming, and furniture components.

That is the type of value adding we are looking at at this time, and it's working very well. It is a complicated area, and it needs a lot of work to make sure that we can be competitive, economically viable for the companies, yet move toward that area rather than shipping raw product out of the province.

MR. WHITE: The last area we are interested in is the Senate forestry report chaired by a former colleague here, the Hon. Nicholas W. Taylor. Two of the recommendations that have some interest and application in Alberta are extending the tenure of an FMA holder from 25 years. The public may think it is an awfully long time, but when the regeneration of growth is a minimum 65 years to 100 years, it is a relatively short time. The recommendation is to extend those periods for that length of time but to review them every five years in a very, very open and public process that speaks to sustainability of their next five-year cut and the plan they have for sustaining and regrowth and replanting of their areas and the tending of those stands so that it's beyond merely plant and forget. It's plant. Three to five years hence it's brush. In seven to 10 years it's cull. The rest grows to harvest. That's one area of recommendation.

The second recommendation is to encourage the federal government and municipal governments to modify the tax structures on marginal farmland to encourage reforestation into woodlot operations to sustain the industry for longer periods of time. Those are the two comments and remarks.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay. The tenure you mentioned is a critical area. It's part of our long-term management of the forestry. It's critical that it be there. Presently under the quotas we have a five-year quadrant already in place, which is a public process in relation to business operating plans for the forestry sector. The public is definitely involved in FMAs and also the quotas in that particular area. The tenure from 20 to 80 years is also one that's been recommended by the timber quota review committee. Similar reasons are given in that it takes 130 years to grow a spruce or pine and maybe 60 to 70 years for an aspen. There's strong support from the industry to try and look at increasing the tenure.

The last issue you mentioned is modifying the tax structure. There is some activity already in northern Alberta where private woodlot operators are buying some land in areas where there's marginal farmland and planting spruce and pine trees. I think it's a good process, but there is some conflict because the agriculture industry in some of the areas feel that they cannot compete with large industries in relation to maintaining the farmland that comes up for sale, that they can't compete when it comes to purchasing. So it's a very touchy issue.

What we'll have to do, no doubt, is that each municipality may have to in the future identify what land is suitable for farming in relation to agriculture and what can be used for woodlot operation and other uses. There is some potential conflict, but I think it's workable as long as we can manage it.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

If I might turn the questions now to the ministry responsible for management of the supply of electrical energy in the province. Here you're quoted as saying that the residual value of payback to Albertans for their regulated payment in the system – by that I assume that you mean the residual value in the existing power plants that have been supported by the regulated utility rates today. You further said, a rhetorical question I guess: well, say, how much is that? Your answer to your own question there is: hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars. Do you have an approximate value for that coming out of the PPAs in the balancing pool? Do you have a number where you'd say, well, that's a successful bid price or successful balancing pool?

DR. WEST: Unfortunately, due to the process, which is a public auction that will take place in July, it would be irresponsible for the Crown in the public interest to state any specific expectations of that.

We do have a position in the public interest as it relates to the auction, but nobody would go to an auction where they expected buyers to come into town and be presumptuous enough to tell the buyers what the value of this is before the auction took place. So I did say that there would be hundreds of millions, and I think that's because we have done certain prorated estimates of what these auctions should bring. But that's as far as I would go or else I would jeopardize the people of Alberta's position in this public auction.

MR. WHITE: You pose another question. What happens if they don't bid and it doesn't sell? That's the power purchase arrangements. Your answer then is: then we will take a third party and create a financial instrument and bid it into the pool ourselves. Would that not be just another form of government-regulated rate then?

DR. WEST: No, because we already have the evaluation of the PPAs, which by the independent assessment team have evaluated the individual output of each plant and have placed a value on that plant, so we have that fact to work with as well as the expectation of the market value of these plants as related to other sales throughout the known world. There's been a lot of electrical deregulation going on. So putting those two together, we could come up with a value of these plants that would return a good portion back to the people of Alberta.

It's a fallback position, but with the interest that we've had, Charles River Associates, which are going to run the public auction, have been out and had bidder sessions in Calgary and New York and London, England, and Toronto. This hon. member was at one of the bidder information sessions and asked a lot of questions, but you know that there are a considerable number of very good companies interested in that. We have 30 to 40 at the present time, and they will be asked at a certain point in time to meet certain specifications as far as bonding and interest and intent before we go to the auction in July.

I see the chairman has given me the end of this, and that's a good time to quit.

9:46

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister. We do have a little bit of time left.

Edmonton-Ellerslie, you had a couple more questions you wanted to ask?

MS CARLSON: I do, sir. I would appreciate the opportunity.

Mr. Minister, earlier in your comments you talked about the EUB staff additions, where you said that 80 percent of them would be paid by industry. Now, I don't want you to flip out on this, but tell us why you think there'll be no conflict of interest in terms of their independence when 80 percent of their salaries are paid by industry.

DR. WEST: All right. In arm's-length legislated regulatory bodies the payment of the moneys has not been a conflict of interest. I'll give you one example. The National Energy Board, which you wouldn't question because they have been instrumental in many tough regulatory decisions, is 100 percent funded by industry, 100 percent. Therefore at the time that we set this up, we funded more of it as the Crown but have gone to an 80 percent level at the present time. We believe that most of that money that the industry puts forward is the day-to-day operations of the EUB in their vested position as far as licensing requirements, and therefore they should pay it, not the individual citizens of the province of Alberta. We are in the process of evaluating what is in the Crown's interest and what

is in the public interest as far as the various operations on a day-to-day basis of the EUB.

Let me put it this way. They have put forth a proposal to fund it 50-50 rather than 80-20, but that would be on the side of the operation that's involved in protection of the public interest, such as inspections, the dispute mechanisms, and other areas that we put in to ensure that their standards are met and that certain requirements are met as stated by policy and by legislation.

Now, on a day-to-day application of 22,000 licences, like we had a year ago, many of those are for wells, for routine gas plants, batteries, routine connecting pipelines and that. The industry would still be required to pay that portion. I think that in the new formula we're looking at one portion would be almost 100 percent; the other portion might be met by 50-50. I've asked the EUB to bring forth a proposal that would address that. Once again, understand that the National Energy Board is 100 percent funded by industry.

MS CARLSON: Good. Thank you.

I would like to go back to the sour gas well issue in Calgary for a moment. You made some reference to the task force that was put together there in terms of decisions to review the safety regulations with respect to sour gas. That's excellent. We're very happy to see that happening. Can you tell us when that task force will report and what opportunities there will be for public input?

In addition to that, you talked about the 18 special requirements that were put in place around that gas well that is in close proximity to acreages, and we think that's very good, but once again the concern for those in the community is the monitoring process. Is there anything being put in place whereby the EUB will come up with a report card or something of a similar nature on an annual basis telling the residents that are in close proximity how well the company has done in terms of meeting the special requirements?

DR. WEST: Well, the task force should report in October, for the answer to that.

Now, all I can say on your second question is that I have before me and I had stated that there are conditions set out by the EUB as it relates to certain wells, and some of them are very intense conditions. In those it states that in this case

Cdn 88 shall develop a casing bowl welding procedure by a qualified professional engineer to be included in the detailed drilling plan [and submit that to the EUB].

Cdn 88 shall submit a report respecting the review of steel mill heat certificates for the casing and drill pipe to be used in the construction of the 10-35 well.

Cdn 88 shall satisfy the Board that ARP 1.2.5 New Grade E Specifications and/or ARP 1.2.6 SS-95 Drill Pipe Specifications or better will be used for the drilling of the 10-35 well.

There are 18 of these, and each well that's proposed in these areas carries a condition set out by the EUB, and in this case it's 18, and, yes, there are reporting procedures and, as well, inspection procedures by the EUB that must be met. This one is the most intensified set of conditions that I have ever seen in the province of Alberta. It goes on:

Cdn 88 shall commit to detailed EUB drilling rig inspections prior to spud, and drill out of intermediate casing, including blowout prevention drills.

Drilling and testing in the critical zone shall not take place other than during the summer months, in particular, not before April nor after October.

Cdn 88 shall demonstrate and implement immediate ignition within one minute of the ignition criteria being met.

Cdn 88 shall test all key components of its ERP, including the computerized telephone call out system, communications equip-

ment, communication linkages including outside services, evacuation procedures, and ignition procedures and satisfy the Board that the systems are in order for immediate implementation, prior to drilling into the critical sour zone.

Mr. Chairman, I need not go on, but these are excellent conditions. Would you like to hear a few more of them?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I would suggest that you just table the document.

MS CARLSON: Thank you.

I wasn't questioning how excellent those conditions were, because we think the special requirements are excellent. My question was with regard to the monitoring of those requirements and then the reporting back to the people who live in that area. So I'm hoping that you'll address that.

DR. WEST: Well, I was reading this because these are the conditions, and the EUB will be monitoring this.

MS CARLSON: No, no. I do not see in that document the reporting-back process to constituents, which is the essence of my question.

DR. WEST: Well, I'll have to read on if she didn't get it.

MS CARLSON: If you table the document, we will see if that is specifically in there, but if it is not, then I would specifically hope that you will answer that question.

Now the review of standards for sweet gas wells. I must receive 15 or 20 letters a week in my office in terms of the problems around standards. People do not feel that the setback of only 200 metres is sufficient. They think there should be a much wider area of notification. There are water quality and air pollution issues, soil contamination. I'm hoping that the task force that you talked about with the county of Strathcona is going to address these issues. If not, can you tell me what process will?

These questions are: will the government review standards for drilling sweet gas wells and oil wells and setbacks? Will the government consider a policy be put forward that no drilling be allowed above a certain population density? Will you require that existing operators in an area be required to provide evidence about the standards on their existing wells, specifically things like supply reports on cement casings? People are very worried that their water supplies will be contaminated and that problems will remain long after the gas or oil is extracted. Over the past year I've listened to several scientific reviews where there is some scientific evidence that in fact water supplies can be contaminated as a result of drilling and blasting. So those are issues that I would like addressed.

I'll just carry on with some more questions. I've a couple of other issues, and perhaps you can get back in writing, Mr. Minister. My final questions are with regard to forestry. When I've been out taking a look at the landscape over the past year, I saw some areas that I've been told are test areas where they've applied chemical treatment to retard aspen growth in some of the FMAs, and it literally looks like chemicals have been poured on the ground and disintegrated everything within sight. It doesn't look like a very

good practice to me, and I am hoping that you can comment on that.

My other question is with regard to oxidation levels in the water downstream of pulp and paper mills. Now, I know you've got standards and the standards are pretty good, but it seems to me that as the water flows down the stream, it doesn't completely recuperate naturally in terms of oxidization, so some pulp and paper mills closer to the headwaters have an advantage in terms of the amount of work and costs they have to incur in order to ensure that the oxidation output for their pulp and paper plant meets the standards as compared to those downstream. So if you could give me some answers to any of those questions, preferably in writing, at some point, I would appreciate that.

I think my colleague has just a couple of questions. Did you want to run through those quickly?

9:56

DR. WEST: Just in the format here I'd like to answer the questions. I think that if I understood four of the questions, the answer is yes, yes, yes, and yes. On the water quality and that: absolutely, we will ensure the utmost security of water quality in the drilling in this province. We do ongoing hydrology tests, and the EUB is very stringent in their policies as it relates to that.

MR. CARDINAL: On the forestry side, both of those questions – and this is what makes it tough, because the split between environmental protection and the forestry development side took place, you know, less than a year ago. It's taking time for the public to generally understand who's responsible for what, and both of those questions would be under the jurisdiction of Gary Mar, the Minister of Environment. Either we could pass those on to Gary, or when you do his estimates, you could ask those same questions. No doubt he can answer them. Both of them are definitely under Environment.

MS CARLSON: If you could pass them on, I would appreciate it, because we won't have much time on those. I'm hoping that I'll get a little more detail in terms of those other questions I asked. Yeses are nice but a little detail would be preferred.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry. In fairness to the committee, we did have agreement around the table about what the process was going to be, and I have a request from Calgary-Egmont. Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I had a couple of questions for the minister, but I've decided to spare him tonight. So I'm just going to move that we rise and report.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It is actually an appropriate motion, so the motion is on the floor. All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It's carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 9:59 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 14, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/14

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, keep us mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work give us strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition signed by 54 people, mostly women, urging the Alberta Government to take an enlightened preventative approach and add the newer and more effective medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present that says:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system].

It's signed by 221 residents from Hinton, Alberta.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would present a petition signed by 200 residents of Hinton urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to present a petition signed by 200 residents of the Hinton and Jasper area who are petitioning the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government to stop the promotion of private health care and the undermining of our public health care system.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table today a petition signed by 236 residents of the city of Lethbridge, and they're calling on

the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the two petitions I presented previously be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition signed by 292 Calgarians that I presented yesterday be now read and received, please.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd rise to respectfully request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would now request that the petition which I tabled earlier this week in the Assembly regarding the government's undermining of public health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Legislative Assembly be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 94 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that I presented Wednesday, March 8 of this year, and I can advise the House that all of those petitions comply with Standing Orders 85 through 89.

Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and replace their places with the exception of motions for returns 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, and 17.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

Bill 16
Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000

MRS. LAING: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 16, being the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000.

This act fine-tunes and clarifies existing condominium law and allows for greater flexibility without eroding the consumer protection it affords.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 16 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association 1998 radiation protection program annual report.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I request leave to table with the Assembly five copies of a letter sent by myself to the Hon. Allan Rock. The letter outlines rather thoroughly our opposition to some of the remarks made in a recent speech in Calgary.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 11 letters and e-mails that I've received. They are from Calgary, Medicine Hat, Vegreville, Red Deer, Westeros, and Edmonton. All of the writers of these letters are opposed to Bill 11 and other forms of privatization of the public health care system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to table this afternoon the requisite number of copies of a report that confirms that private MRI clinics were not in operation prior to May 1993.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the appropriate number of copies of a report that is titled Klein Praises Block Funding. In responding to the reduction of federal transfer payments, the Premier said that this allows us to be more flexible; remove the strings; give us the money; we can manage it.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a report I'd like to table that states that Premier Klein says that he's considering letting investors buy hospitals in the province and run them as money-making private facilities: give us a proposal; we're willing to consider anything.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to table the requisite number of copies of a report. What's considered a nonessential health service may vary from one region to another, says Premier Ralph Klein.

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

1:40

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to table a report with regards to some comments made by the former Treasurer of Alberta and current chair of the Calgary regional health authority, Mr. Dinning, wherein he said that hospitals should be built, owned, and operated by private businesses.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table five copies of a report called Health Care Up For Sale? in which the Premier indicates that profit-making health care would not exclude foreigners that wanted to pay full price.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to table a report in which the Premier is advising day cares, hospitals, and universities to look at having bingos and raffles to offset provincial budget cuts.

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table five copies of a report in which the Premier indicated that Alberta hospitals might be allowed to market their services inside and outside the province as a way to raise cash.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings here. One is the growth of private, nonhospital surgical facilities in Alberta under this Premier. It's up by 49 percent.

The other one is five copies of this nonhospital surgical facilities listing, copies of that as well.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies where it indicates that the Premier wants to market health care and also where he says that there's an opportunity for some entrepreneurship in the health care business.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I rise to present the requisite number of copies of a report that outlines the concerns raised by Calgarians and the millions of dollars of taxpayers' money that was spent on hospital construction and equipment just prior to the demolition and/or sale of those hospitals. It contains a quote by the MP from Calgary, Jason Kenney, then the head of the Association of Alberta Taxpayers: it was stupid planning and bad planning not to have frozen projects at the time.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of a report from the Premier in which he says that private hospitals should be allowed to expand in Alberta.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I also would like this afternoon to table a report. In it the Premier states: Jane Fulton is calling a spade a spade, and I don't think that's reason to cause fear in the minds of the Alberta public.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislative Assembly some very distinguished representatives from the condominium industry. These people represent both owners and developers of condominiums, and they were a part of a working committee established last summer to help develop the legislation that was tabled moments ago as Bill 16, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000. This piece of legislation, that has had its fair share of controversy over the past four years, has been instrumental in bringing forward a group of people to resolve these difficulties, and I believe quite frankly that if they hadn't come together, we wouldn't be able to introduce the amendments that we introduced today.

So I'd like to thank them and introduce them to this Assembly. Seated in the members' gallery are Greg Christenson, the chair of the Alberta Home Builders' Association Condominium Act Task Force; Grant Ainsley, the executive director of the Alberta Home Builders' Association; Marc Bateman, the president of the south Alberta chapter of the Canadian Condominium Institute and a national board member; Deborah Howes, the director of the north Alberta chapter of the Condominium Institute; Dennis Little, president and chief executive officer of the Alberta home warranty program; Victoria Archer, member of the north Alberta chapter of the Canadian Condominium Institute; Sky Wensel, Q.C., counsel for the Alberta home warranty program. Also joining us are Diane Bush, president of the Alberta Home Builders' Association and marketing director of First National Properties. And last but definitely not least I'd like to introduce the person whose task it was to actually put Bill 16 together: Frances Cruden, legislative adviser

with consumer and corporate services division in my department. I'd like all these people to please rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, today it is a distinct honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 17 visitors who are seated in the members' gallery from Sherwood Park United Church. They are with their leaders today George and Norma Campbell and also Sheila McLachlin. I would ask all of us to give them our warm appreciation for their visit, in some cases their first visit here.

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly eight students from the Dr. Swift middle school in Lac La Biche. The students are accompanied today by teacher Mrs. Linda Johnson and also two teacher aides, Ms Shauna Hannin and Ms Andrea Fries. I would like to ask our visitors to please rise and be recognized by the Assembly.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this afternoon 44 students, two teachers, and seven parents from Hardisty junior high. The group is led by Mrs. Lougheed. It is noteworthy to all hon. members of this Assembly that she has a very soft spot in her heart for one of our members, the very distinguished hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. The other teacher is Mr. Foo. Parents helping out today are Mrs. Diane Franke, Mrs. Judy Ekkelenkamp, Mrs. Joy Johnston, Mrs. Farrant, Mrs. Foerger, Mrs. Gaudin, and Mrs. Milton. These students I believe are in both galleries, and if they would now rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly, I would be grateful.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Today I have the distinct pleasure of introducing to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly a group that I think is very interested in what's happening. However, they won't be coming in until 2 o'clock, and they will be leaving before question period is over. I'd like to have it on the record that they were warmly welcomed by the Legislative Assembly. They're a group of students from Little Buffalo school from Little Buffalo, Alberta, and they are accompanied by three staff: Mr. Darsh Ramrattan, Mr. Wayne Fabing, and teacher assistant Arleyne Noskey. There are 12 junior high and senior high school students. I'd ask that the Assembly please just give them a warm welcome for the record.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to today to introduce three visitors to our Legislature. They are from Oakville, Ontario. They are Catherine Niles and her two sons, Steven and Philip. They are also visiting our Legislature and are here for some time. Their father and husband happens to be a very important worker with our caucus in the Official Opposition. He certainly helps us a lot, and I would like to invite the Niles family to please rise and receive a very warm welcome from the Alberta Legislature.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two visitors to Alberta. Laara Ong from Vancouver and Patrick Gallagher from Toronto are here while they are performing in local playwright Marty Chan's show, *Mom, Dad, I'm Living With a White Girl*. The show is on at the bus barns. They are with us until this Sunday. They are accompanied by the show's director, Ben Henderson, and I would ask all three of them to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the House.

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

1:50

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my distinct privilege today to introduce Reverend Dr. Charles Garbovitsky, a resident of Edmonton-Highlands, who is vehemently opposed to Bill 11. Dr. Garbovitsky is seated in the public gallery. I'll ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In order to assist Albertans who may be watching question period on the television, we wanted to assist them in getting more information on the government's rather weak case for privatizing health care. This government has in fact referenced eight studies on private hospitals in support of its private hospitals legislation. Interestingly, three of these studies are from the '70s, and one even uses data from the 1950s and '60s. This is no doubt because, as *The New England Journal of Medicine* reported in August, "for decades . . . no peer-reviewed study has found that for-profit hospitals are less expensive." My questions are to the Premier. Why is the Premier using data on private hospitals to support Bill 11 when he keeps telling Albertans that he is not interested in private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, it is again misinformation and simply not true that the legislation refers to private hospitals. It does exactly the opposite. It says "no person shall operate a private hospital." And relative to any reference to private hospital legislation, that question is absolutely irrelevant.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the opposition and their Friends of Medicare and CUPE and all the other unions want Albertans to believe that private providers are evil and have no place in the publicly funded system. The leader of the Liberal opposition wants to force private providers to opt out of the publicly funded system. The AMA said it best when it called that policy a disaster for health care in Alberta and, indeed, across the country.

Mr. Speaker, private providers are and always have been an important part of the public health care system. How do these people over there think health care works? You know, it absolutely astounds me that the leader of the Liberal opposition, the former minister of health, has no idea how the health care system works. Perhaps if she asks me the next question, I'll explain it to her.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the Premier didn't answer the question. These are his own studies that he referenced.

If Bill 11 has nothing to do with private hospitals, then why again

is this government's evidence for why they need this legislation based largely on private hospital data?

MR. KLEIN: It isn't. It's based on what is already taking place in the system. Virtually the whole system is based on the government through its health authorities paying private providers to provide medical services and supplies. There are now nearly 4,500 doctors in Alberta, most of them with for-profit professional corporations, that bill health care for services and supplies and charge fees that have overhead costs built into them.

Mr. Speaker, if all the private doctors were to opt out, who would be left? Well, CUPE would be left. Right. We could have Dr. Judy Darcy and Dr. Terry Mutton doing hip replacements. The Friends of Medicare would be left. We could have Dr. Christine Burdette doing heart surgeries. Of course, Dr. Harold Swanson, who's the only legitimate doctor, could join her, provided he was now willing to work for free. You know, he could do that. The federal government would be left. We could have Dr. Allan Rock and his assistant, Diane Marleau, to do brain surgery. That would be something.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that private providers are and always have been the backbone of the public health care system. The issue isn't private providers. The issue isn't who will pay. The only issue is: where will private providers be allowed to do procedures and under what conditions? That's what Bill 11 is all about.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, as usual the Premier didn't answer the question.

The answer is one of two things: either they have no evidence, so they're using data from the '50s and '60s to support their case, or their actual intention is to bring in a private hospitals bill. Which is it: no evidence or private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there's lots of evidence, and I'll go on. There are no private hospitals. Right now there are 588 chiropractors, 233 opticians, 278 optometrists, 1,414 dentists, 188 denturists, 38 podiatrists, 769 pharmacies, 375 ground ambulances, 14 air ambulances, 52 surgical facilities, 38 of which were commissioned by the leader of the Liberal opposition, many physiotherapy clinics, rehab clinics, child physiologists, walk-in clinics, medicentres: all privately owned and operated and paid to do work for the public health care system. Who would do the work if we banned them from the private sector in health? Who would do the work? The Liberals? Dr. MacBeth would do the work?

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, one of the studies that's been referenced by this government is almost 30 years old and in fact, as I say, uses data from the 1950s. It reaches no conclusion about the effectiveness of private hospitals, let alone their suitability in Alberta in the 21st century. It's really a stretch even for this government to suggest that this study and others like it have any relevance to the debate on Bill 11. What it does show is a government scrambling for anything, no matter how remote or irrelevant, to back up their ill-conceived scheme. My questions again are to the Premier with his script. This study on private hospitals in the 1950s and '60s: what relevance does it have for Alberta in the 21st century?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do indeed have a script, and the script is in anticipation of the questions which are so predictable. Right.

You know, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alluded to a private hospitals bill. There is no private hospitals bill. Until she alludes to the proper bill, the question is irrelevant, and I won't answer it.

Thank you.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, getting back to the question, by using these outdated studies on private hospitals, is the Premier telling Albertans that there are no current studies or evidence that exists to back him up in his support for private hospitals through Bill 11?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, Bill 11 does not allude to private hospitals. As a matter of fact, Bill 11 talks about "No person shall operate a private hospital." The leader of the Liberal opposition refers and alludes to the bill as the private hospitals bill. Again, I would suggest that the question is irrelevant.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why is this Premier relying on outdated studies and outdated information when there are current studies done here in Canada and right here in Alberta that are far more relevant to this issue? Is it because their own studies have said that Bill 11 is wrong for Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is not wrong for Alberta. It sets in place very clear and very precise rules for the operation of surgical clinics, something, by the way, the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition failed to do or ignored or didn't want to do when she was the minister of health.

Mr. Speaker, when the leader of the Liberal opposition was minister of health, she made a claim in a speech, and I'm going to table copies of the speech. This was after she was the health minister and sort of between jobs, not that she has a real one now. "Until 1993 private sector initiatives were limited to specialized, niche markets where a profit could be made without subsidy." The fact is that there were 38 surgical facilities doing day surgeries for the public system and charging patient facility fees when she was the minister of health, and she did nothing about it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, just to help Albertans understand the lack of studies, interestingly the only current study tabled by this government to justify its private hospitals bill is the World Health Organization's report entitled *Making a Difference*. However, the government released only a portion of this report and in fact misrepresented the intent of this report. In fact, the report points to the Canadian public system as a model for other countries and does nothing, not a thing, to suggest that introducing private hospitals or clinics or surgical facilities or whatever they want to call them will improve the Canadian system. My questions are to the Premier. Why did the Premier only table one portion of the report, which misleads Albertans to understand what the report really says?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, if there was another portion of the report that alluded to the health system in Canada being fundamentally right and the right system, she's absolutely correct. The leader of the Liberal opposition is absolutely correct. That's why we have put in as our preamble absolute adherence to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. If they're opposed to that section of the bill, then stand up and say so.

Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alluded to private hospitals and the private hospitals bill. There is no such bill on the table. There is a bill that alludes to surgical clinics. There are now 52 surgical facilities in Alberta, none of them charging patients facility fees, unlike the clinics that were operating when the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition was minister of health. They were all charging facility fees. So far the public health system is still standing, despite facilities being able to do surgeries that require up to 12 hours.

The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is asking us to believe

that anything over 12 hours will destroy medicare. That's what she's saying: anything over 12 hours will destroy medicare. Mr. Speaker, will this hon. member stand up and say at what hour the destructive mechanism kicks in? Is it 13 hours or 14 hours or 15 or 23 or 27 hours? Will she stand up and say at what hour the so-called destructive, her suggestion, mechanism kicks in? Stand up and answer the question. She doesn't have the courage.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier will get plenty of chances to ask questions from the opposition benches after the next election.

Mr. Speaker, my question, going back to the studies, is: why does this Premier continue to misrepresent the World Health Organization 1999 report when in fact that report holds Canada out as a shining example of how to provide universal, single-tier, single-payer health care in an industrialized country? Why does this Premier want to privatize it and wreck it?

MR. KLEIN: We want to maintain it, and we want to protect it. That's why the bill is called the health protection act.

You know, again I go back to the report to which the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alludes. The 1999 World Health Organization report made the following conclusions about the role of the private sector in health. And, yes, I will accept that they also said that Canada has fundamentally the best system. That's why we have put in the preamble, Mr. Speaker, absolute adherence to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. If they're opposed to it, then stand up and say that they're opposed to at least the preamble of the bill. Are you opposed . . . [interjections]

You know, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is yap, yap, yap. No substance. You know, a lot of mouth, no substance.

Mr. Speaker, I'll read it. This is from the World Health Organization report.

- Services may be offered by providers of all types.

Provided that health practices and health facilities meet certain quality standards and that they are subject to similar levels of managerial flexibility, their ownership status should not matter.

Now, if the report goes on to say that Canada has the best health care system in the world, then fine; I would find that very flattering. That's why we have put in the preamble, as I say, absolute adherence and compliance with the Canada Health Act, both the spirit and the intent of the law. If they're opposed to it, stand up and say so.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, instead of relying on outdated studies from the '50s and '60s and instead of misrepresenting what in fact is in the World Health Organization report, will this Premier commit to overseeing an independent study of our current system done here in Alberta by some of the excellent researchers that we have in our universities before he plunges headlong into his demise in the private hospital system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I just received the tablings. These are not reports. This is another blatant example of malicious misinformation. They table newspaper articles as a report; as a report. This is entitled a report: "Health care may vary by region - Klein." It's a newspaper article. Another one, they table it as a report. You want to talk about misleading. It's a newspaper article. This one here was tabled as a report. Again, it's another newspaper article. This is the closest to a report that they've come. It's actually the answer to a written question. This one here, another one: they tabled it as a report. How misleading. How deceptive. And there's more and more. How intellectually poor. How intellectually drained they

are to take newspaper articles and table them as reports. How intellectually poor they are.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. interim leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has claimed on many occasions that the government's scheme to legalize private, for-profit hospitals does not violate the Canada Health Act. A detailed legal opinion prepared by two senior lawyers who are experts in constitutional and regulatory law – and this report was just released today – concludes that the Premier is wrong. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the Premier pressing ahead with legislation that two prominent constitutional lawyers have concluded violates the comprehensiveness, universality, and accessibility principles of the Canada Health Act?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. leader of the third party that the preamble to the bill – you know, he is a very intelligent man. Read the preamble to the bill. The preamble, which sets the tone and lays out the framework for the bill, says absolutely without question that we will adhere to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the Premier justify proceeding with legislation that purports to ban private, for-profit hospitals when two constitutional lawyers have concluded that this so-called prohibition is simply an attempt to mislead Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. leader is asking me to comment on a legal opinion, and you know, there are as many legal opinions as there are fish in the sea. So I won't comment.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why won't the Premier admit the obvious, that there is no public support or expert backing for legalizing private, for-profit hospitals, and withdraw Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. member alludes to private, for-profit hospitals. There is nothing in Bill 11 that alludes in any way, shape, or form to the privatization of hospitals. As a matter of fact, section 1 says that "no person shall operate a private hospital." The question is irrelevant.

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

Support for Agriculture

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just over two weeks ago the Prime Minister announced a farm aid package designed specifically to exclude Alberta producers. Today . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Shame. Shame.

MR. MARZ: That's right.

Today the Premier of Alberta and the minister of agriculture announced a onetime agricultural assistance package for Alberta farmers. This announcement contains no federal money even though agricultural safety net programs are traditionally funded by provinces and the federal government. Last week the members of the opposition across the way were recorded in this House as saying that Alberta farmers were out \$25 million as a result of the Prime Minister's announcements. My questions are to the Minister of

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. What did the province contribute today, and what does the minister expect the federal government to contribute to the program in the future?

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today's announcement totaled \$145 million. We have taken the numbers – we still don't know how the federal government arrived at the numbers for Saskatchewan and Manitoba – and applied them to a tonnage basis, which seems to be the way they are going. If you extrapolate that over into Alberta and use the 60-40 formula, that would mean that the federal government would owe us about \$103 million.

Incidentally, we today sent them an invoice for the \$103 million. We're not going to charge any GST. If we get the money, we're going to send it directly out to farmers, and we won't charge any handling fee.

If you look at the amount of money that the province of Alberta put in today, we in fact have just about doubled what would be required under a 60-40 arrangement based on the other calculations. I think that the government of Alberta has stepped up to the plate big time and is going to try to make sure that Alberta farmers are treated equitably in Canada.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: could the minister tell me how farmers will receive the provincial assistance and the federal assistance, if and when it arrives?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, under the announcement today it will be distributed on a per acre basis, the bulk of the money, some \$121 million based on \$4.29 per acre. A very simple application form – as a matter of fact, it's just a one-pager. If you have a Wheat Board permit book, the one page out of the Wheat Board permit book will suffice to verify the acres. If you don't have a permit book, then in fact it will require the application form to be filled out and notarized.

If we are successful in getting the money from the feds, any amount, we in fact will be distributing it to the farmers immediately based on the application that they've submitted under this particular program.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: why has the government chosen to distribute aid by an acreage payment when it has been promoting targeted assistance for so long?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, there is a real cash flow crunch in the agricultural community, and it's very important that this money be distributed before seeding. So we're trying to get the money distributed as quickly as possible and without complicated forms. When you look at the ability to do that through an acreage payment, that's why we went this route.

Now, we have to remember that the farm income disaster program is a very targeted program. It targets the areas that are having a disaster. We've also got the hail and crop insurance program. Once again, it targets a disaster. So I think we've got a combination of the two. We've got targeted programs that will go toward disaster areas, and we now are coming out with a broad program that will get the money out fast. It will assist with the input costs that are continually going up. We have a great cost to get grain from the elevator to the port, so we'll be assisting in those kinds of costs that the farmer is bearing.

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

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Misrepresenting to Albertans outdated studies on private hospitals is all this government can find to justify the ramming of Bill 11 through the Legislature. My questions are to the Premier. Is the Premier telling Albertans that Bill 11 is based on a 1972 study that he tabled by Kenneth Clarkson about U.S. private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there was too much noise, and I didn't hear all of the question. The only things I heard were "misleading" and "reports." The only people who are misleading anyone are the Liberals across the way by tabling in such a deceptive way newspaper clippings as reports. That is the only thing that is misleading.

2:20

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question will also be for the Premier. Is the Premier telling Albertans that Bill 11 is based on a 1972 study that he tabled by Kenneth Clarkson about U.S. private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: In 1972, Mr. Speaker, I was working for CFCN television. I don't recall tabling any such study, but if it's there, then send it over. Nineteen seventy-two. That was a long time ago. The only thing similar in 1972 and today is the price of oil. Right. That's about it.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, then why did you table it as support for your bill?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have no idea.

MR. MacDONALD: Now, Mr. Speaker, that's leadership.

Can the Premier explain to Albertans why an American psychiatric hospital study that goes back to 1970 and was tabled in this Legislative Assembly has relevance in the discussion? Your government brought it forward right now in the discussion about Bill 11. Where does this study talk about surgical facilities and contracting out? Albertans want to know.

MR. KLEIN: I don't recall tabling any such report. Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness can shed some light on this particular situation. But going back to 1972. I mean, this is digging deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper. That just goes to show how intellectually bankrupt they really are.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I recall a number of tablings. One was a set of studies that had undergone peer review – that is, review by physicians and scholars – and had been given approval for general publication in medical journals and so forth. Today they're firing quite a few blanks across the way, and you never know what they're saying or what they're alluding to.

Mr. Speaker, in a couple of those research studies – one of the things that is done in one that I remember particularly is that they do reference the beginning of studies, period, in terms of the operation of hospitals, and then they trace the different studies that have been done up until the present, where we've had a public health care system in this country. They emphasize in those research papers very clearly the current situation in North America. But the fact that they start out with a preface or an introduction which references studies in the area of health care is quite common to research papers.

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

Education Funding

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past few weeks I've been discussing the issue of K to 12 education funding with both parents and teachers in my constituency. At the outset of the provincial budget there was a good deal of optimism when the announcement regarding a 9 percent increase in education funding was put on the table. That was somewhat moderated when further investigation indicated that there is, in fact, a 3 percent increase in the base funding grant. My question is to the Minister of Learning. With a 3 percent increase in the base funding grant, where is the other 6 percent going?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's an absolutely excellent question. One of the issues that I have heard as I go out and talk to school boards as well is the total issue of being on core funding. Quite simply, I will outline to the hon. member where the dollars are, the amount of dollars, and what is being spent.

Mr. Speaker, there is a \$143 million increase in the basic instructional grant. I must point out that that includes a 3 percent increase on the base budget plus a 2 percent increase on enrollment. The budget is adjusted for enrollment. So if you're in a school jurisdiction, for example, that had a 5 percent increase, you would see a 5 percent plus a 3 percent increase.

There's also a \$17 million increase in special needs. This represents a 16 percent increase in that budget. There's also \$38 million in the Alberta initiative for school improvement. There's another \$31 million in support grants, which are the administration, the transportation, the operation and maintenance grants. The direct dollar amount to the classroom comes out to 8.8 percent, and those are actual dollars that are realized in the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, what we then did is we separated out other aspects of the budget. When we say 8.8 percent, that is the direct amount into the classroom.

On top of that, there are also things like \$22 million for the teachers' pension plan. There's \$13 million for early childhood services. There's \$5 million for private schools. There's \$4 million for other types of programs, and, Mr. Speaker, there is \$11 million included in that for student health.

That's the long answer. The short answer to the hon. member is that there's actually a 9.5 percent increase of which 8.8 percent goes directly into the classroom.

MR. RENNER: My supplemental question, Mr. Speaker, is to the same minister. Given that wages and other related costs are increasing at or perhaps more than 3 percent, how will the minister ensure that this 8.8 percent that he talks about actually gets to the classroom and addresses the issue of increasing class sizes?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, there are two ways this can occur. First of all, the Alberta initiative for school improvement: we anticipate that a lot of the \$66 million that will be put into it over the next two fiscal years or one school calendar year will be used to address class size.

Mr. Speaker, the school boards also have room in their 3 percent, plus their enrollment growth. Again, I must emphasize that that can be in the area of 4 to 5 percent. The school boards have the flexibility to use those moneys to address class size.

MR. RENNER: My final question to the same minister: given that the budget also discusses addressing the needs of special-needs students, can the minister outline exactly how those needs will be addressed?

DR. OBERG: Sure, Mr. Speaker. That's an excellent question. Over the last six or seven months there have been numerous examples of the importance that this government places on special-needs education. In the last budget, as I already mentioned, there is a 16 percent increase. You can put on top of that a \$2 million increase that was announced past the budget. What this \$2 million does is allow school boards that receive children with special needs to receive money. As well, the school that had transferred the student can keep their money. The reason behind this is that the school that has transferred the student has put in place the program and therefore has contracted that out and must continue to supply that service.

Mr. Speaker, I would just go back to what has happened over the past year. Probably the most significant thing to the hon. member was the lifting of the special-needs cap. Again, we are funding today on the actual number of students that are there. This is a huge step forward. But I must stress with special needs that it's up somewhere in the 16 to 17 percent area.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is expecting Albertans to go down the Bill 11 private health care road based on out-of-date studies and the misrepresentation of other studies. All the current, pertinent data clearly shows that Bill 11 simply will not work. To the Premier: is the Premier telling Albertans that Bill 11 is supported by an 1982 study that his government tabled about private U.S. nuclear medicine hospitals? What does this have to do with the 21st century in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the study to which the hon. member alludes is one of literally dozens of studies that have been tabled in this Legislature on the question. I'm sure the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness is more familiar with the specifics of that study. Perhaps he is; perhaps he's not. I'll have him respond anyway.

2:30

MR. JONSON: There seems to be in the hon. member's question a reference to nuclear medicine not being relevant to today's overall health care situation, but I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that nuclear medicine is very much part of the forward-thinking and evidence-based health care that's being provided.

The tabling that is probably being referred to – I would just like to draw the attention of hon. members to a 1997 study that was tabled in this Assembly: *Should We Worry About Hospitals' High Administrative Costs?* by Stuart H. Altman, with his doctorate, and David Shactman. It's in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, which is a highly reputable publication that I'm sure would not publish anything that was not accurate, Mr. Speaker.

Secondly, we tabled with the Assembly an article from the *Journal of Economic Behaviour & Organization*, with Jerilyn Coles and William Hesterly being the authors. This was in 1998, not too long ago, Mr. Speaker.

We also tabled from the *Journal of Productivity Analysis*, authors Gary Ferrier and Vivian Valdmanis: this was from 1996. They determined that in a rural setting public hospitals were inefficient compared to private hospitals. That was the basis for their research.

I could work my way down the line, Mr. Speaker.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, if he is relying on an '82 study, let me try this one. My second question: is the Premier telling Albertans that Bill 11 is based on a 1976 study by Cotton Lindsay on

administration in U.S. private hospitals? I thought this wasn't about private hospitals.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there have been dozens and dozens of studies tabled in this Legislature on the issue of health care and health care delivery. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness is much more familiar than I am with these studies. He has them all in hand.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's go to 1976, a good year. Lindsay, the author of this particular journal article, again as I've said, from a credible medical publication, says that public hospitals keep patients longer and skimp on activities such as bedside manner and cleaning floors. That is still as relevant today as it was then, and this is the basis for this research.

MR. WICKMAN: My last question, Mr. Speaker: why does the Premier choose to ignore the conclusion of one of the studies his government tabled called *Rural Hospital Performance and Its Correlates*, which shows that for-profit medicine will focus on urban areas and create further disadvantages for rural areas?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I repeat that there have been dozens and dozens of studies tabled in this Legislature by both sides of the Assembly. This all adds to the public debate on Bill 11, and that's what we encourage. For a change I actually commend the Liberal Party for bringing up these studies, because they all contribute to the debate. I think that once the bill comes up for second reading those studies that have been tabled by the government, by the way, will be quite germane to the debate that will ensue.

Relative to the specific study, I'll have the hon. minister reply.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated previously, these are very credible pieces of research or studies that have been done in this area. They are well worth reading and well worth considering as part of this debate. They also acknowledge in the reports certain downsides to private provision as well as some of the positives. I think that's the mark of credible writing, credible publications, quite different from newspaper articles and blank-page reports, which seem to be the vehicle for the Liberals entering this debate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Enhanced Health Services

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a lot of publicity about charges for enhanced goods and services, both in public hospitals and in private clinics. Some of my constituents have expressed their concern to me about the fact that Albertans may be paying unfair prices for enhanced products. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What action is government going to take to address this matter?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we have reviewed and been aware for some time that there is a concern about the variability in terms of the provision of enhanced goods and services and also the pricing thereof. These of course are – and I would like to emphasize this; it's very important – devices or services that are not essential. They are not medically required. They are not covered by the Canada Health Act with respect to our system. Of course, our system covers all those insured services for the public of this province.

Mr. Speaker, we have recently issued a directive to the regional health authorities of this province whereby we will work with them

towards establishing, first of all, a uniform criteria for what constitutes enhanced goods and services. Secondly, we will establish standard pricing for those additions which a patient, if properly informed and allowed to make the choice properly, may want to utilize. We will approach it that way so that it is fair across the province for everyone and that patients and individuals will have the proper information.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is again to the minister of health. Why would regional health authorities be allowed to charge 12 percent on top of the cost of enhanced goods and services?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think it has to be recognized that in terms of, first of all, doing the accounting and administering these transactions, should people want to avail themselves of these enhanced goods and services, will cost money. Secondly, they have to factor in such things as shipping and handling costs. They, in some cases, will have to make provision for the storage of these facilities, not just the space, but often refrigeration and various other backup facilities have to be available. So in looking at a reasonable amount to have as an administrative charge, we chose 12 percent. It seemed to be agreed upon as being a reasonable rate.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you. What action will the minister take to ensure that these limits apply to surgical facilities?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we can initiate this through a policy and directive to regional health authorities, and we have done so. Regional health authorities come under current legislation. One of the provisions in the overall governing of regional health authorities is that the minister of health has the power to approve or not approve their business plans and everything in them.

Mr. Speaker, we would want to look at extending this particular approach, this particular provision to any private surgical service or other service that might be contracted to a regional health authority. To do so in an effective manner, we need to have the legislation which is before the Assembly.

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

Confidentiality of Medical Records

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not only does this government ignore or misinterpret studies; it also ignores experience. It was in 1998 that we found that records of mental health patients had been left untended, discovered in the demolition of the General hospital. In 1999 it was personal health records blowing around a south Calgary neighbourhood. Now we have confidential laboratory reports from the Calgary Laboratory Services which had been sent by fax to wrong numbers. It turns out that this had been happening for at least a month. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why has this minister and his government carved out and given special protection so that private hospitals are not going to have to respect and protect the privacy of Alberta patients?

2:40

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I recall a very important piece of legislation that was before this Legislature dealing with the protection of health information. The hon. member across the way, although I think he contributed very positively to the development of the legislation, then seemed to turn completely around and oppose pretty well everything in it. We are currently working to implement Bill 40, and this I think is an important overarching matter. We are

working towards the proper regulations in consultation with the stakeholders. So that will be an overall improvement that we are planning to make to the system.

I think we have a good record in this province in terms of protecting the confidentiality of health information. We have living in this province around 3 million people, Mr. Speaker. There will be human errors made. The electronic network poses challenges to everybody working in the health care system, but to make the mistake – and I agree it's a serious mistake, but nevertheless it can be made by an individual – to dial up the wrong fax number, is something that will happen in modern life.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, given that these assurances sound remarkably like the assurances we got in 1998 and after the incident in 1999, I want to ask this minister: what disciplinary action is going to be taken with respect to the improper abuse of privacy of Calgaryans in terms of their lab reports being sent to unauthorized persons?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, on the three occasions which the member has referred to in the Calgary regional health authority over the last number of years the Calgary regional health authority has followed up and investigated the situation and taken corrective action where it was possible. The case of the General hospital, of course, was a very unique situation. I'm sure they will do the same thing if the statements of the individual across the way are correct. Normally he is very honourable in these matters, but today it's really a little bit hard to believe that they are that way across the way. Anyway, it will be followed up and disciplinary action taken if deemed to be fair in the circumstances.

MR. DICKSON: My final question, Mr. Speaker, would be this: given that this government rejected the Canadian Medical Association privacy code as a model for the health information law, is this minister prepared to review the law, since it's not yet been proclaimed, and make the changes required to adequately protect the privacy of patients in this province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, Bill 40 contains some of the most comprehensive and protective legislation in any province in this country.

The other thing. You know, Mr. Speaker, the question is important to the individual case, but the only way that you can absolutely, one hundred percent protect against that kind of situation occurring is to ban people from using fax machines, and I don't think that's something that even the Liberals are backward enough to advocate.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds I'll call upon the first of the hon. members to participate. In the interim would you all join me in wishing the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake a happy birthday?

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Eid Al-Adha

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday, the 16th day of March, the day after tomorrow, approximately 2 billion Muslims from around the world will be celebrating a very important event in the Islamic calendar and the Islamic religion. That event is Eid Al-Adha, or the celebration of sacrifice. The Eid Al-Adha festival commemorates God's test of the prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail for God, a story common to both the Old Testament and the Holy Koran.

Mr. Speaker, during this time every year about 3.5 million Muslims from every corner of the globe visit the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia to perform the pilgrimage, or hajj. Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam. It also symbolizes on a larger scale the unity of all humanity. Millions of pilgrims all dressed in a similar way and completing the same rituals discard the division of race, wealth, and social status and instead unite in brotherhood and sisterhood in service to one God. It is incumbent upon every Muslim man and woman to perform the hajj at least once in their lifetime, if and when they are able to do so.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Assembly and in particular my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall I would like to express my sincere best wishes and congratulations to the Canadian Muslim community and in particular to the 75,000 Muslims who make Alberta their home. I would like to say to all of them, to each and every one of them, Eid Mubarak.

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

Gasoline Tax

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government talks about tax cuts, but when it comes down to taking the load off Albertans, they prefer to wait for the next election. Albertans own the oil and gas underneath this province, yet when the world price goes up, the people pay more for their own gasoline at the pump and their own natural gas at home. What does this government do about it? Absolutely nothing. Oh, they do something. They take the big fat royalty cheques to the Treasury just to buy votes for the next election.

Last week I suggested a painless method of giving back some taxpayers' money to the taxpayers. I suggested that after each quarter they set a fuel rate for the next quarter. I suggested that the tax rate be reduced by 1 cent for every dollar that the world price went above \$19 a barrel. Painless. Absolutely right; it's painless. Because the Treasury, even with that tax break, a temporary tax break, I might add, goes up. Every time I mention the tax break, this government goes on and on and on about the federal government, which they do absolutely nothing about. Or they say that a tax reduction is too complicated. Now, Mr. Speaker, how complicated is it to reduce the tax by 1 cent for every dollar? Not very tough.

I say to the Premier: even though it's not an election year, do the right thing and give taxpayers in this province a break. Reduce that tax. And, Mr. Premier, jump to the pump on this one.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Arctic Winter Games

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a volunteer member of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation I'm delighted to rise today to bring recognition to the 232 Team Alberta North athletes who participated in the 16th Arctic Winter Games from March 5 to 11. Since 1970 the Arctic Winter Games have provided a cultural and athletic experience for athletes and cultural delegates north of the 55th parallel. The games, which promote competitive opportunities for young athletes, attract participants from Alaska, Greenland, northern Quebec, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Russia, and Yukon Territory.

The Arctic Winter Games have a strong cultural and athletic component. From incorporating artistic competitions to traditional Arctic sports of the Inuit, the entire culture of the games provides participants with a uniquely northern experience. The games also

foster friendships among the participants while allowing them to develop their personal and athletic skills.

2:50

Held in Whitehorse, Yukon, our own Team Alberta North displayed exceptional gold ulu performances in hockey, volleyball, and curling from the men's and women's teams, while the women's indoor soccer team scored silver. Finishing fourth overall, Team Alberta North brought home a total of 86 ulus, including 37 gold, 25 silver, and 24 bronze, a near sweep of team sports and a strong performance in individual sports.

The ulu, Mr. Speaker, is a symbol of athletic achievement at the Arctic Winter Games and is styled after the traditional Inuit knife used as an all-purpose tool in the Arctic for centuries. The Arctic Winter Games, also known as the Friendly Games, continue under the mission of athletic competition, cultural exhibition, and social interchange.

The next Winter Games will be held in Nuuk, Greenland, and Iqaluit, Nunavut, in 2002, and we'll look forward to seeing our athletes and cultural delegates displaying their talents and representing Alberta's pride.

Please join me in recognizing our fine athletes who took part in the 16th Arctic Winter Games.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Privilege Tabling Documents

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on what I presume to be a point of order but could possibly be a point of privilege, and I would ask your direction on that matter. I'm rising under Standing Order 2, which provides that the Speaker may make rulings in those areas that are unprovided for, and under Standing Order 15(1), the privilege sections of the Standing Orders.

In short, Mr. Speaker, I think the House witnessed today one of the most intellectually dishonest exercises that I've seen in a long time. Members of the opposition stood in their places and purported to table reports, described them as reports, insinuated to the House and to members of the public who might have been watching through the provisions of television that they had reports when in fact what they had were essentially blank pages with one line on it, report heading, and one line on it, some excerpt from a newspaper article, and in most cases a newspaper article attached to that page. The members one after the other got up in an intellectually dishonest manner, portrayed to this House and to members of the public through this House and through the televised access that members of the public have to this house that they actually had reports which purported to say what they described to the House.

Mr. Speaker, I've looked briefly and quickly through the rules.

MRS. SOETAERT: Shame on you.

MR. HANCOCK: No. Shame on you, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Shame on you.

The rules relating to tablings and the practice of the House have been very broad. *Beauchesne* 347, at page 107, under tabling of documents indicates that with respect to the practice in the federal House tablings can be done in two different ways and talks about government members, members of Executive Council essentially, tabling government documents. We've had a much broader practice in this House with respect to tablings, and in fact the process of

tabling, in my humble submission, has been stretched and abused to an extreme.

However, Mr. Speaker, it has never been stretched and abused in the manner that it was stretched and abused today, where members get up and say, "I'm tabling a dog," and then they table a cat, or perhaps "I'm tabling a cat," and then they table a dog. The items that were tabled by various members of the opposition this afternoon were in no way, shape, or form reports. They could not be considered reports. They were not reports other than newspaper reports. Newspaper reports. But did they say they were newspaper reports? No, they did not.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest it could go almost to a breach of privilege of members of the House in terms of that type of misrepresentation, which brings all members of the House into disrepute and really raises questions, I would suggest in both this House and in the public, as to whether we are really in an honourable place.

Mr. Speaker, I ask for your direction as to how we might proceed properly with this type of a point of order, because as I've said, the rules are not directly on point. The process of tabling documents in this House I believe started, without having done a great deal of research in the last half hour, from the concept that documents of public importance were to be laid before the House and become official records of the House. That was the origin, as I understand it, of the process of tabling. Today we've seen the most ultimate abuse of that privilege of members of this House that we've ever seen.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, strip away the hyperbole – and we heard lots of that – and this is what we've got. The Government House Leader says that he thinks this may be a question of privilege because of a number of documents that were tabled today.

Let me just deal with the privilege thing first, because I think it has little merit. Privilege is one of the most important issues that can be raised in this Assembly. We have occasion to do this maybe three or four times in the course of a session. It typically revolves around a member or the Assembly being impeded – I'm paraphrasing the authorities, Mr. Speaker, because I don't think it warrants more – from being able to speak on issues, to speak to questions. That's not at issue here. In fact, one can argue that if we were to be deprived of the chance to be able to table documents that are relevant to Albertans on relevant issues, that may invite a question of privilege.

Now, the member talks about authority. He talks about general authority, but I look right at Standing Order 37, Mr. Speaker. That's the one that I understand deals with tablings in this Assembly. First, 37(1) appears to deal with what we'd call statutory tablings, that are defined by statute and there's a statutory requirement to file them. I look at sub (3), which says:

Documents presented voluntarily to the Assembly for placement in the records of the Assembly and the Legislature Library may be tabled in quintuplicate by a member.

Now, I don't see anything in the Standing Orders that says that you can only table this and you can't table that. You have given direction, sir. You've talked about not tabling documents that have already been tabled, and you've offered many points of commentary in terms of what ought to be said when documents are tabled, usually to a point of encouraging brevity. We talked about this on April 15, 1999, in *Hansard*, pages 1039 and 1048. You addressed tabling draft amendments on April 29, 1998, page 1813 in *Hansard*. You've talked about members should police themselves to avoid duplicate tablings of copies of the same document, November 25, '98. Page 2089 said that *Hansard* excerpts shouldn't be routinely tabled. You've addressed those, but there is nothing that defines a report anywhere in the Standing Orders.

I can't give you a specific example, but I've sat here and watched many times the Provincial Treasurer, other members of the Executive Council, and the Premier table things that I could quibble about, whether it adds anything to the debate, whether it's useful information. But a report, in my respectful submission, until a Standing Order says something different, is whatever a member considers to be a report. There's no statutory definition that binds this Assembly.

DR. TAYLOR: How about the truth? You guys wouldn't know that.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, this may be a stimulating debate if we have people speak from the floor as well as from their seats.

My observation is this. Firstly, it's nonsense to speak of this as a question of privilege. In terms of a point of order, the one relevant Standing Order in no way precludes what members did this afternoon. As you always enjoin us, what's good for one side must be good for the other, and that calls into question a host of tablings that I wasn't very happy with and I didn't approve of, for whatever that's worth, when I saw them come in. But I didn't take the time at the time, because I respect the right of each member in this Assembly to table the document that he or she thinks is appropriate.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, the final comment I would make is this. I have not viewed every document that was tabled this afternoon, but I have been advised by my colleagues that the documents tabled this afternoon in fact reflect statements made at different times by members of Executive Council or others on issues that are relevant to matters before this Assembly and issues relevant to Albertans.

Those are the comments I wanted to make. Clearly, at most a point of order, and I think not a sustainable one at that, and clearly not a question of privilege. I look forward to the vigorous arguments that hopefully we're going to hear from the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on this point.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If we were to accept the argument of the Opposition House Leader, then we should only really be concerned with those breaches of privilege which may be related to impeding the ability of a member of this Legislature to discharge his or her duties. We have to respect the rights of individual members, but *Beauchesne* makes it also very clear that we have to respect the privileges of this House.

I'm going to refer you to section 33 of *Beauchesne* and quote briefly from it. "The most fundamental privilege of the House as a whole is to establish rules of procedure for itself and to enforce them." That, I think, is the critical line in that particular section. It's clear. The House has its own privilege to maintain, and by maintaining that privilege, it maintains its respect and its dignity.

With respect to what has happened today, I would argue that respect and dignity has been undermined. It's been undermined because members of the opposition used the very rules for their own benefit entirely and in an abusive way and in a misleading way. What has happened, Mr. Speaker, is that I feel this House has an obligation to raise this issue, which has been done, and to suggest to the opposition members that their abuse of the very rules which are in place to protect all members of this House is unacceptable, and we shouldn't be accepting that. So I would argue very strongly that there has been a breach of the privileges of this House, and I would rely on section 33 of *Beauchesne*.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't respond to the assertion that privilege is at issue here, because quite frankly I think the government in their overreaction is grasping at straws.

But what I will respond to are the statements made by the Government House Leader. By incorporation, when he said the opposition and those members opposite, he referred to myself, that I did something that would deliberately mislead this House. He was also uttering the phrase – I'm not sure whether *Hansard* picked it up – intellectual dishonesty.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk for a minute about intellectual dishonesty in this point of order. What I tabled for this Assembly is a document entitled Report, subtitled "Klein praises block funding." It's a two-sentence report. Attached to it is the source document.

Mr. Speaker, there is nothing that I could find that would prohibit me from doing this, and there is nothing that would suggest that I have deliberately or unintentionally misled this House. I would expect at some point in this ruling that that Government House Leader will stand and withdraw those remarks, because if you want to talk about intellectual dishonesty, that sums it up.

I will reference *Beauchesne* 495, under the title of Documents Cited, where it reads in part:

- (2) It has been admitted that a document which has been cited ought to be laid upon the Table of the House.

Mr. Speaker, 495 goes on to say:

- (5) To be cited, a document must be quoted or specifically used to influence debate. The admission that a document exists or the reading of the salutation or address of a letter does not constitute citing.

Mr. Speaker, the government recently issued a press release criticizing calculations having to do with the Canada health and social transfer. It is the government that continually goes down this path. It seems that they like to dish it out, but they can't take it. When they introduce matters into debate that are misleading, they do not like to have their own words fed back to them. I guess they find that to be cruel gruel, indeed.

So I would say that not only is there no point of privilege, there is no point of order. Furthermore, I would ask that you remind the Government House Leader of his obligation to pay attention to the fullness of the rules of this House, including debate, and the role of each and every private member and caution him about his words when he would suggest that a member of this opposition is doing anything to purposely mislead this Assembly when it seems, Mr. Speaker, that that was his intent in raising this erroneous point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, caution was expressed by the chair several weeks ago when he sent a letter to all hon. members dealing with this whole subject matter of tabling returns and reports and on various occasions has also exercised an opportunity to provide some thoughts with respect to this whole matter.

Our Standing Orders – and I want to repeat them again, because I think they are very important. Standing Order 37(1):

Any return, report or other paper required to be laid before the Assembly in accordance with an Act or with any resolution or Standing Order of the Assembly shall be tabled in quintuplicate, one copy of which shall be placed in the records of the Assembly and two in the Legislature Library, one to the Official Opposition, and one to *Hansard*.

Now, that deals with "in accordance with an Act or with any resolution or Standing Order of the Assembly."

Standing Order 37(2) says:

Responses to written questions and returns ordered by the Assembly shall be tabled in duplicate and the respondent shall also give one copy each to the member who asked the question or moved the motion for a return, the Government House Leader, the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of any other party or group in opposition.

And 37(3):

Documents presented voluntarily to the Assembly for placement in the records of the Assembly and the Legislature Library may be tabled in quintuplicate by a member.

Of course, one can take the broadest interpretation possible with respect to (3), and it seems that some members are in fact taking the broadest interpretation possible with respect to this matter. This allows private members in this parliament to table and participate in tablings, which is really quite unique and quite distinct and quite different than the procedure found in other places and other parliaments.

I would like to refer hon. members to a very interesting book that has just been published in the last weeks called the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, probably the most definitive book that the chair has had an opportunity to run across, recently published by the hon. Monsieur Parent, who is the current Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons, and edited by the Clerk of the Canadian House of Commons, who has been the Clerk in the Canadian House of Commons for a number of years.

I would like to read the section called Tabling of Documents by Private Members, page 373 of the *Canadian House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

There has been a long-standing practice in the House that private Members may not table documents, official or otherwise, even with the unanimous consent of the House. Unlike Ministers who must table documents required by statute or in respect to their administrative responsibilities, the Standing Orders contain no provisions for private Members to table documents. Another reason against the tabling of documents by private Members relates to the availability of the document in both official languages as required by the rules. However, since the 1980s, Members have been allowed on occasion to table documents with the unanimous consent of the House; the documents have typically been tabled in only one language.

There are many, many citations where this matter has been dealt with, in the *Journals*, including reviews by Speaker Lamoureux, who I believe is probably viewed as one of the most distinguished Speakers in all of the Commonwealth.

3:10

I repeat what I said at the beginning. In this Chamber we have this very unique provision that allows private members to table, but there always was an intent with respect to what that tabling meant. Of course, time comes and time goes. New members come and other members leave, and somehow hon. members don't recall the reasons why there are certain provisions in our Assembly. I daresay and must reiterate that in terms of the last major review of Standing Orders that we had in this House, which was 1992 and 1993, this person was involved very directly in it. There was always an intent and understanding of what our Standing Orders meant.

I really believe that great liberties have been taken in this Assembly during this parliament with respect to some of these items. This is not a matter that can be dealt with unless our Standing Orders are changed and modified. Undoubtedly, there will be an opportunity in the future to review all of the Standing Orders, and undoubtedly when the review is done by the various people who are involved in the review of the Standing Orders, those individuals will want to consult with other parliaments not only in this country but throughout the Commonwealth in respect to some of these matters. I think we have a special privilege in Alberta with respect to tablings, a

very, very special privilege, that hon. members, private members, should consider to be rather unique, and it should be dealt with the highest degree of integrity at all times.

It is not for the chair to respond to the Government House Leader to advise him whether or not it should be a point of privilege or a point of order. The chair will view this as a major point of clarification and give all members an opportunity to discuss this. Hon. members must discipline themselves with respect to these matters and must have the highest degree of integrity with respect to all of this.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Audio of Proceedings on Assembly Web Site

THE SPEAKER: Before concluding this matter, I'd just like to advise all members, as well, that we have started testing today, and the tests seem to have been working quite well for the last two hours. The proceedings of this particular Assembly are now available over the Internet broadcast. It will be our intent to have all matters of this Assembly available over the Internet broadcast beginning at 1:30 p.m. on a daily basis and going through to the very conclusion, to the end of a late evening. It can be accessed on the Legislative Assembly of Alberta web site.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 202 Marriage Amendment Act, 2000

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I'm presenting my final arguments on Bill 202, the Marriage Amendment Act. I begin by posing a very simple question: is the institution of marriage worth defending? It is a very simple question, but it is at the heart of the bill before us.

Some of you suppose that this was an easy bill for me to bring forward because I have been an outspoken advocate for the natural family, yet many of my friends and people I know and have worked with over the years have not had a happy experience with marriage. Others have made choices to remain single. In some of the those marriages it would impossible to suggest that the marriage should be preserved. So why, Mr. Speaker, would I want to possibly offend any of these friends and acquaintances by defending marriage? Why would I risk being categorized as mean-spirited or judgmental or any of the other labels that have been fixed to those who take a principled stance on matters of social consequence?

The pressure to conform, to be silent, to resist issues of consequence is enormous, but when I sit back and think through all of the angles, all of the different rationales, all of the research, the history and the traditions, I cannot be drawn to any other conclusion except to affirm that the institution of marriage is worth defending. Today you will also have to answer that question, or perhaps tomorrow, when you vote at third reading.

Does the fact that many marriages are problematic and many fail mean that we should shelve the institution which has proven to be the best model for the advancement of society? At second reading I made the case based on social science research that marriage has a tremendous amount of value. As governments we spend great amounts of energy dedicated to making divorce better. We create task forces and legislation that deal with issues around maintenance

enforcement and access issues. It is my contention that we need to spend some energy on how to make marriage better.

Mr. Speaker, I'm turning now to the notwithstanding clause. At committee we had a point of order that was raised. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo argued very well that there were two elements to this bill. He referenced the fact that there was a substantive element, which was the definition of marriage, and a procedural one. I argued the opposite, but the chairman ruled in his favour. So using that argument, I would present before them today, those who voted or spoke against the notwithstanding clause – and I understand their reluctance to use the notwithstanding clause, but it is a procedural mechanism that, I argue, is available to governments in order to exercise their legislative authority with respect to matters of urgent importance. Surely where the substantive matter, to use their argument, is in fact the definition of marriage, I would expect at third reading that they would overlook their discomfort with the procedural element and protect the substantive part, which is in fact the definition of marriage. I present them with that challenge.

Again, going back to the very simple question before us, the question that has to be asked when voting at third reading: is the institution of marriage worth defending?

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, the institution of marriage is absolutely worth protecting. That's why we want to ensure that mediation is freely available to couples having difficulty. That's why we want to make sure that young people in this province are provided with information and access to information to be able to understand the amazing asset that the institution of marriage is.

What our friend from Red Deer-South sort of glosses over as a "procedural mechanism" is, once again, the most powerful kind of tool you could ever imagine. This is the thing that suspends the rights of Canadians. It suspends the Charter, which is in many respects the only bulwark between an individual citizen and the power of the state.

You know, I was never very comfortable with section 33 of the Charter. I have trouble imagining when I'd countenance readily the use of that, but to suggest that we use it in a prophylactic way, which is the part of this Bill 202, smacks of exactly what we went through with Bill 26 – was it two years ago? – when the government decided to suspend the rights of sexual sterilization victims. The comment from the then Minister of Justice – maybe he didn't use the words – was something like: this is a procedural mechanism. When the Premier later tried to defend it, before he did his 180-degree reversal, the Premier said: well, this is just one of those procedural things. Well, this is not just . . .

MR. HAVELOCK: A point of order.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I hate to raise the whole question of privilege again, but the hon. member knows I did not make any such statement.

AN HON. MEMBER: Are you leaving now?

MR. HAVELOCK: I'll be back.

THE SPEAKER: Hold on, hon. member.

MR. HAVELOCK: I'm holding.

3:20

THE SPEAKER: Would you kindly return, please?

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, would you kindly help the chair? You said you were rising on a point of privilege. Now, again, rising on a point of privilege will be taken very, very seriously in this Chamber and will offer you the opportunity to make your argument with respect to this privilege matter.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I simply wanted to point out the fact that I made no such statement. Perhaps it wasn't a point of privilege, and I withdraw it as a point of privilege.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: I was going to carry on with my debate at third reading, Mr. Speaker, and make this point. I would have hoped that we would have learned from the experience with attempting to beat up on sexual sterilization victims that Albertans don't take the use of section 33 readily. Albertans don't countenance readily the use of section 33 to suspend the rights, and to do it in advance of any kind of a Charter challenge is the most dangerous thing of all.

I think I made it as clear as I could in second reading and committee that I support marriage. I've been married 22 years. It's a wonderful institution. I recommend it to anybody, and I'd be happy to do what I can as an elected person to support the notion of marriage, but to see a piece of legislation in this province get to third reading that has a section 5 in it that contemplates the use of section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms just on the off chance that somewhere down the road some superior court is going to rule that marriage means something other than the definition set out in section 4 is completely inappropriate. It's a dangerous, dangerous course, and I can't overlook that. I can't ignore that. I have to vote against this bill because I feel so strongly against the use of the notwithstanding clause.

I say again that I respect the sincerity of the sponsor of the bill. He and I have obviously just very different views on when and how section 33 should be used. We have very different views of how significant the notwithstanding clause is, although I agree on the importance of marriage.

I make the observation one more time, Mr. Speaker, that we had provided this government with a way of protecting the word spouse, protecting the word marriage. We had come up with a way of Charter-proofing Alberta legislation, and we put that forward in good faith. We kicked it around and road tested it on Bill 12, and we brought it back when we talked about the Insurance Amendment Act. I'm not sure what else we can do. The government chose not to accept that offering, and what's curious is that the government never came up with a better alternative. My colleagues and I, I think, have been looking forward to seeing what the government's answer is to make our legislation Charter-proof without denying equal treatment for every man and woman in this province.

This bill just doesn't worry about equal treatment. It sort of glosses over that. It worries about doing one part, which is protecting the word marriage, protecting the word spouse indirectly. It doesn't define spouse. It attempts to do that, and the bill in effect says — and I hope I'm not being unfair to the Member for Red Deer-South. The people who have spoken in favour of it seem to be throwing up their hands and saying: well, we're just not very concerned about the equality issue; that just isn't sort of a big issue. That's disappointing, Mr. Speaker, because we always have to be concerned about equality.

Mr. Speaker, the thing that I hoped we would be able to do in this

Assembly in 1999 was to recognize that if two adult Albertans should choose to enter into a simple contract, certain rights and obligations and so on would accrue to that relationship, a mutually supportive, long-term relationship. We had hoped that this Legislature would find a way to accommodate that and respect the will of those two adult Albertans.

The proposal we put forward is not unique. If you look at Scandinavian countries, they found a way, without having to redefine marriage, to respect the word marriage and respect the importance that people attach to it. In Norway, I think in Sweden, I think in Denmark, and in a number of other nations they've also addressed the other part, the part that's missing from this bill. They managed to address that business of equality and fairness.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that as the debate has gone on, it's been instructive. As strongly as I feel against the use of the notwithstanding clause, it would be very unfair to be dismissive of the genuineness and the sincerity of the people who have spoken on both sides of the debate. Frankly, I've been very impressed that the debate has managed to avoid rancour and name-calling. I think that for the most part it has been a respectful discussion of different points of view.

What I've been struck with is how resonant the theme is about respecting the institution of marriage. I went back through all of the *Hansard* debate, and I'm not sure I found anybody who took a view that it's not important to protect marriage so that it means a man and a woman. I'm not sure anybody said that. Maybe there are others with keener eyes than this member who observed that or heard that, but I didn't.

As I reflect on the debate that took place, maybe this is what should happen on a Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon, where people unfettered by party discipline should be able to speak in a way that they can be directly accountable to their constituents. None of us can use the excuse of party discipline in terms of how we vote on a bill like this. Each of us has to be able to defend how we vote as well as how we speak and what we say to this particular bill.

At the end of the day let us recognize that Bill 202 is a dangerous, dangerous, dangerous piece of legislation. It's scary that it's so close to becoming something that's passed by this Legislative Assembly. Can we not say at third reading, as we reflect back on the debate, that we require the sponsor of the bill to address the equality issue? It's not enough just to protect the word marriage. Is there not sort of a threshold test that has to be met on every piece of legislation where we talk about being fair to every man and woman in this province? This bill is demonstrably not fair, and I think that's a glaring defect. I think it's a huge gap in the bill. Maybe there are others who see that somehow we've addressed the equality. I can't find it in Bill 202. It doesn't pass the threshold test that I'd suggest has to be met.

Mr. Speaker, the other concern I'd have with the bill is that there may be members who go away thinking, if this becomes law, that we've sort of addressed the issue of marriage, that we don't have to do anything . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time allocation for this matter today has now left us.

3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

School Uniforms

503. Mrs. Forsyth moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce a pilot project to examine the feasibility of a school uniform policy in Alberta schools as current research gathered from other jurisdictions shows a correlation between

the requirement to wear school uniforms and a decrease in school violence.

[Debate adjourned March 7: Ms Olsen speaking]

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

MR. HERARD: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand and speak this afternoon to Motion 503, which encourages pilot projects on school uniforms. A pilot project for school uniforms in Alberta, as my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek proposes, is worth exploring.

Mr. Speaker, it's worth noting that my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek has been overwhelmed by the public support that has arisen since she introduced this motion. She has concerned parents calling from across Alberta and in fact from across Canada seeking more information on uniforms and asking her how they can organize to get uniforms implemented in their children's schools. In fact, my colleague has had trouble just trying to keep up with all the public interest in this idea.

AN HON. MEMBER: Hundreds of calls.

MR. HERARD: Yes, hundreds and hundreds of calls.

Mr. Speaker, this shows the grassroots support that is out there for this idea, and we in this Legislature should perhaps pay close attention to this in making our decision on this motion.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Hon. colleagues, this is a motion, not a bill. The information and debate brought forward by my colleague in sponsoring Motion 503 and the results that may emerge from running a school uniform pilot project may well change the popular view of school uniform policies. Motion 503 proposes the adoption of school uniforms in a sensible manner by proposing a small-scale pilot project to assess the feasibility of such a policy for Alberta students before looking at adopting school uniforms across the province. Madam Speaker, motions seek to encourage action, not to mandate it.

In Alberta we have a few public schools with uniform policies, schools already mentioned in this debate, like the Nellie McClung school in Edmonton and the Sacred Heart elementary school in Calgary. Madam Speaker, I find it interesting that in one breath the opposition denounces the voluntary pilot project my colleague is proposing yet in the next breath say how good these schools with uniform policies are. I understand that constituents in the constituency of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert have been calling and asking for information on this concept.

My hon. colleague is proposing an initiative at the community level with consultation from parents, teachers, and students. She's trying to get a few schools to try this out and see if the successful outcomes that the members for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and Calgary-Buffalo mentioned occurring at the Sacred Heart school can be duplicated elsewhere. That's what a voluntary project is.

In fact, Madam Speaker, a recent poll taken in Edmonton showed that 62 percent of Edmontonians polled support this idea of school uniforms in the city's schools, yet another example of the grassroots support for this motion. If you're looking for other examples of the good that school uniforms is providing, take the United States. There have been a number of positive effects in the American districts with school uniform policies. These include reductions in fights between students, reductions in sexual offences, weapons offences, vandalism, and assaults, and they are not insignificant numbers. On the contrary, school uniforms have been linked to an

up to 36 percent decrease in overall school crime in those jurisdictions. They also reduce distractions in the classroom, identify individuals who should not be at that school, such as gang members or drug dealers, and reduce the visibility of economic differences between students.

The Cherry Hill elementary school in Baltimore was the first American school to reinstate school uniforms after the United States Supreme Court found in a 1969 decision that school dress codes violated children's right to free expression. Long Beach, California, was the first school district to put a uniform policy in place in 1994. These schools realized that the positive effects of a school uniform policy, like the substantial decrease in violence that I've just mentioned, is worth doing. In order to prevent challenges that the policy violates free expression, the district provided an opt-out clause for students as long as they obtained consent from their parents. I would like to note, Madam Speaker, that less than 1 percent of the students opted out of this policy. Since the Long Island school system took this first step, they've been followed by school districts in New York City, Seattle, Washington, Richmond, Kansas City, and Phoenix. In all, 12 American states have initiated school uniform policies.

Let's look again at Nellie McClung junior high school, which has an all-girls program. The inclusion of a school uniform policy has resulted in a more level playing field between its students and a more stable classroom environment. This has allowed a greater focus on the real reason students are there, and that is to learn, to grow, to better themselves as individuals, to recognize others as individuals, and to focus on what is within each person and not merely on the external appearances.

The image of neckties, crested wool blazers, and starched white shirts need no longer apply to school uniforms in the year 2000, as my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek has mentioned. This is an image that existed earlier in the last century. It is simply not relevant for today's proposal. Indeed, Madam Speaker, a school uniform could be as simple as a T-shirt and a pair of khaki pants to achieve the objectives of the policy.

In some cases students recognize that school uniforms are a good thing and are asking for them all by themselves. Last year in Calgary a number of students organized a petition to support a school uniform policy. Why did they do this? Because they're aware of the social status and economic distinctions that exist in schools and the pressures that arise from this. Differences in clothing may not be the only thing kids are ostracized or picked on for, but it's definitely one of them, and I think that students like the ones from Calgary who organized the petition wanted others to know the pressures put on them and the negative outcomes that so frequently result from such behaviour.

Madam Speaker, I'm aware of the arguments that school uniform policies stifle students' freedom of expression. I would respond to these arguments in two ways. First, how one dresses is an important part of self-expression, but there are also other ways to express oneself as a student, by participating in drama, sports, music, debate, community groups, Scouts, 4-H, but more importantly in self-expression from within and the growth in confidence that results. Instituting school uniforms may even encourage other forms of self-expression as students begin to worry less about their clothes and more about developing their talents and expressing themselves as equals in their environment. Second, the uniform policy may only apply during school hours and would be determined by each school. Students can dress however they like after school and on weekends. This is no more a denial of free expression than the uniforms that nurses, bus drivers, and police officers wear when they are at work.

Madam Speaker, where school uniforms have been put in place,

they have been very beneficial to the students, the parents, and the community. Motion 503 will allow those who wish to learn whether or not the benefits of reduced class distinctions, lower rates of violence, fewer distractions in the classroom, and a more down-to-work attitude amongst students occur. The potential for the positive consequences of this motion is immense.

Before I close, I want to make a few comments on the quality of our education system. In Alberta, I am very proud to say, we have one of the best education systems in Canada and in the world, and that's a fact. Alberta students annually place at the top of Canada in student achievement, and we produce some of the great young minds of this country. These are just a few of the many initiatives that we've undertaken, and I think for the debate they needed to be mentioned.

So I will close by urging everyone here to look at the reasonable approach my colleague for Calgary-Fish Creek has taken in presenting this motion and to support it for the many benefits it will present to Albertans. Remember, what the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is proposing is not mandatory but an encouragement to find ways of helping our young people to overcome the external pressures and listen to the voice from within.

Thank you.

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

MR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I, too, would like to make some comments about the proposal in Motion 503, that a pilot project be conducted. In speaking to the motion, I was looking at a summary of the research by Keith King on school uniforms. King looked at the research that had been done and concluded that even though there was a lot of intuitive appeal and conventional wisdom that seemed to reinforce the belief that uniforms would bring more structure and would change behaviour, there was very little or "not much," I think are the words he used, "empirical data to support a cause-and-effect relationship between school uniforms and violence." I think that's important, an important research conclusion that the evidence is not out there, evidence that's strong enough to take the kind of action that's contemplated.

3:40

I would suggest, rather than a project with the kind of volunteer approach that that might include, that the government undertake a research project. I don't think it has to be costly. At this time of the year there are all kinds of graduate students in the universities of this province looking for research projects that they can conduct. In fact, probably with a small investment of funds a rather extensive project could be conducted. So rather than the project being described in Motion 503, there should be a research project.

King goes on to indicate the elements of that research project. First, he suggests that there should be some trend analysis, that in a particular school or in a particular school district you look at violence and what has been the long-term trend in violence. Is it at a peak? Is it waning? Just what are the conditions in schools vis-à-vis student violence. That trend analysis, as I indicated, might be at the school level or at the school district level.

He indicates that there should be a controlled experiment, that there should be some experiments with "those required to wear uniforms" and a control group, "those not required to wear uniforms," and that that kind of an experiment would yield additional data that could be put with the trend analysis in terms of making some decision.

Third – and I think this is the most important, Madam Speaker –

is that there should be a hard look at the "intervening variables." Just because there isn't empirical evidence right now supporting school uniforms doesn't mean that it's not there or that school uniforms aren't helpful in preventing violence and reducing school conflicts, but they should be looking at the relationships between parents and teachers and their perceptions regarding school uniforms. If parents overwhelmingly believe that it does that job, that's going to affect the outcome of any project.

The study should look at factors such as schools that have mandated school uniforms and those that haven't mandated them and how violence interacted in those situations, and they need to look at the conditions in the community. I think it would be quite a different policy were it enacted in the southern part of our province or in the communities north of this city, in terms of school violence, as opposed to some other places in the province, say the far north or the western school districts. So I think the kinds of community climates, those variables that would impact such a study, are also the kinds of information that King has argued should be brought to bear on any decision in terms of school uniforms.

So as much as I applaud having the project brought forward and the kind of enthusiasm that there is on the other side of the House for the project, I'm going to vote against it and urge the kind of careful approach that Keith King has suggested in terms of trend analysis and experimental research and a close look at the intervening variables.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried]

Citizens' Commission on the Future of Education

504. Mrs. MacBeth moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to create an Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education which would set goals and direction for education, acknowledging its fundamental importance to the prosperity and well-being of all Albertans and defining a clear vision for its future.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MACBETH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to address Motion 504 standing in my name on the Order Paper. I think there is no more important priority nor a more important focus for a provincial government in Canada than the improvement of public education. I think at a time when we perhaps as Canadians seem to be looking at ways to change some of the very fundamental characteristics of our country – certainly private health care is one of those that will change a very characteristic role of Canadians, but so is the issue of education.

I like to think and hearken back to our Constitution and what our Constitution speaks about. I would say that the three words that encapsulate the Canadian Constitution are "Peace, Order, and good Government." I've always thought that those three words give us the groundwork and the ground formation by which our public health care system is designed and our public education system is designed, unlike our neighbours to the south, in the United States, who for their own reasons and with every right to them have created a Constitution and a framework nationally which is very, very different from what we have in Canada. The three words that I think encapsulate the American Constitution are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. There's no discussion about good government, about the issues of peace, about the issues of order, that we accept

as a society, as a community of Canadians rather than a more individualistic or perhaps libertarian point of view and point of substance.

We have come up with this resolution having spoken with many, many people across the province about the importance that they attach to public education, people who, for example, started the Save Our Schools petition, people who have watched an apparent priority of government move towards supporting private schools over a greater degree of dollar increase or percentage increase than public schools. People have said to us: we want to see public education valued, and we don't know what the direction of this government is when it comes to the future of public education.

So as a result of those conversations with Albertans, with those parents who are so involved in public education in our province, with the teachers, with agencies who look at the linkages between education and health care status – all of them have said: what is the purpose? Where is education going in this province? Where is the manifestation of the priority that certainly we in the Official Opposition place on public education and the improvement of public education as part of what is the most fundamental purpose of a provincial government?

3:50

We came up with the idea of an Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education and hearkened back to the end of the Socred reign in Alberta in the late '60s, when the Social Credit government had put forward what was called the Worth commission with Dr. Wally Worth. I recall well that when the government changed in 1971, the Premier of the day then, Peter Lougheed, talked about when he created a department of advanced education for the first time in the province's history. He talked about looking at what had come out of that report by Dr. Worth in his consultations with Alberta and Albertans and wanted to embody those changes, that new direction into our education framework. As a result, he had a minister of education and a minister of advanced education, and together I think we saw public education grow in prominence, grow in building prosperity for our province, and grow in terms of a provincial priority above all else throughout those years.

Unfortunately, that sense of direction, Madam Speaker, has been in large part lost or at least changed towards much more one of enhanced support for private education in terms of what's coming, what's new. We see the same effect with charter schools. Many would say that charter schools are de facto private schools within the public system but getting full public funding.

As a result, we believe it is time to create an Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education. Not only would the commission look at the goals and the focus for public education in our province and the priority and the pre-eminence that it takes as a focus for a provincial government, but as well it would say: these are the goals, and this is the way we are going to work in order to achieve those goals.

You know, there's been much discussion and inaccurate reflection in this Legislature in recent days on what was The Rainbow Report. The Rainbow Report was from a Premier's commission on the future of health care in this province, and it in fact did design a system of looking ahead, at that time to about 2005, looking ahead to what our health care system would look like or should look like as we reflected on times ahead. It then fell upon me, as the minister of health at the time, to put in place the action plan in order to achieve those goals.

The same process, we think, can be embodied in an Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education, defining what those goals need to be, defining what are the goals of not just our school system and our postsecondary system but the goals leading up to

that, the goals for our children in this province from birth to age six, when they enter school, the goals for them when they are in the public education system by law, the goals for postsecondary education for those students who then avail themselves of that opportunity and the goals beyond.

You know, as we live in a much more and increasingly highly technological, information-based province and world, we have to have ways by which people can access information and learn how to access that information. So when we talk about goals for education, let's not be so small-minded as to think that those goals are only for the schooling ages of our young people. They are the goals of education which a provincial government must deliver on. Otherwise, it's not doing its job, Madam Speaker.

So who would make up this Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education? We believe there are many people who need to be a part of this commission. Certainly it would be to listen to Albertans to try and identify what are those goals, but I think one of the models that we might use is to take the initiative of the school superintendents, parents, teachers, and school trustees that came together, taking the provincial government's rather disastrous student achievement program they had come in with a year ago and recrafting that initiative to become a school improvement program. That was done by those groups coming together – the superintendents' association, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and the Home and School Councils' Association – all of them coming together to look at a different way to take those dollars and get better value out of them.

[The Speaker in the chair]

MR. DICKSON: An excellent initiative.

MRS. MacBETH: That really was an excellent initiative, and we think that all of those groups need to be represented on an Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education. As well, I think it's important that we add onto that some of the academic, research-oriented, and excellent people that we have in this province who are leaders in education theory and who could be part of this citizens' commission. Finally and as importantly, probably most importantly, are representatives of government, who would be very much a part of bringing this new vision and a sense of where it was heading together. So that the goals would be identified, the membership of the commission I think is very important.

You know, this government has used the mechanism of summits to address issues. On our side of the House we would say that in some cases those summits have been rather belittling of the size and scope of the issues at hand. Certainly we saw the impact of that with the health summit with Albertans from all over the province: very, very well intentioned; very well involved; some of them brand-new to the whole notion of health care. That was an important part of the discussion, but to simply lock those people in a room for two days and come up with a framework for education is not respectful of the importance that Albertans attach to an issue like health care.

I guess a further blow to those people and a discrediting that needs to be done of the summit as a mechanism in that instance is that when that group came forward and said that they didn't want to see more privatization of our health care system, the government then comes at its earliest opportunity to in fact enhance privatization of the system. Then the so-called consultation mechanism is flawed and fatally flawed and is frankly an insult to those who participated in it when they see that their own recommendations are not even accepted or embodied in the government's plans.

From the point of view of a consultation, our sense is that this

commission, the Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education, needs to be a longer term look at education and where it's heading and what kinds of things we can do, whether it's in an apprenticeship program, whether it is in postsecondary learning, whether it's in postgraduate learning, whether it is in early intervention, wherever. On the scale of all Albertans needing access to education, it would be a sense and a blueprint of where we want education to go in this province, because right now that blueprint does not exist. It may well have some flowery words from the wordsmiths of the government, but in terms of an action plan we need only look at some of the decisions that are described in the provincial budget of this past month and see where private schools are increasing at a rate of about 13 and a half percent in their funding, whereas the public system is rising between 8 and 9 percent in its funding.

We've got goals, we've got membership, and we've got methods of consultation. I think as well that once these goals have been defined, we need to look at: how will schools, how will teachers, how will postsecondary institutions, how will Albertans work to ensure that those goals are achieved? One of the key mechanisms in that is to put in place a method to measure achievement in terms of this plan that could be very tangible evidence if we were heading in the wrong direction. It would soon become evident because the monitoring of those goals would clearly show them to not be achieving what they intended to do. So as well as the goals, as well as a method by which the goals are going to be achieved, there must be a mechanism to measure and evaluate those goals.

4:00

I guess the fourth ingredient that we think is important is obviously to then look at the goals of education, look at how we're going to achieve them, how we're going to monitor them, and then look at what level of resources are we willing to commit as a province to the improvement of public education in our province. Once that decision is made, which is really a decision largely based on this Legislature, then each step, each program must in some way be enhancing or leading towards those goals. It doesn't mean you can do everything. We don't have limitless dollars, but the dollars that we are spending on public education and on education generally are to be used to improve the quality of education, improve the achievement of those goals in education so that at the end of our term as legislators the legacy will be that we could see and measure the improvement in our education rather than simply being rather empty in our praise by talking about the dollars that were spent or the marks that were achieved.

Achievement in education goes far beyond marks, Mr. Speaker. The model that I would think would be a very much more constructive model to follow, one that I had thought the government might pick up on in its Children's Forum report, is a model that looks at Albertans from the point of birth right through their learning years and beyond and assesses whether we're doing what we can do for them. If the government would only look at the work being done by the Calgary United Way, the work they have done to target young people and target resources so that not everybody gets the same resources but that those with the greatest need are helped the most to bring them up to a level where they may then be ready to enter school – that's what our Canadian Constitution talks about. It talks about peace, order, and good government, and good government is about taking those who are more frail or who are perhaps born into poverty and helping them get that leg up so that by the time they enter school, they are able to participate and learn as the other children who haven't had those difficulties are able to do.

The model the Calgary United Way has built, from zero to three

years, is a time of assessment, understanding what deficits may exist in that young person, and then taking the period from three to six to do early intervention. You know, if you talk to anybody in the health care system or anybody with any early education experience, they will tell you that they can sight and spot problems with young people and predict that those young people are going to have problems by the time they reach school age or by the time they reach leaving-school age, say at about 18. You can sight a lot of those problems right at the very beginning, at their birth often. In view of that, let's take that information and let's identify those young people. Whether it's an economic disadvantage, a health disadvantage, a social disadvantage of some kind, let's identify it and then use from ages three to six, as the Calgary United Way suggests, to do early intervention to try and alleviate the greatest amount of impact of that.

Then from ages six to 10 basic learning has to take place. Under the education model we have educators in this province who can certainly talk about that, and there are in fact some things going on that try to identify that but not with the focus that needs to occur.

Then from about nine to 13, the preteen years, are very important years with young people in picking up some of the skills they are going to need, some of the social skills and the prediction of the social skills that they will need before they enter teenagerhood. Then from 13 to 18, the mandatory term of our School Act, ensure that our young people are improving in their education, are learning the things they will need to be productive citizens in our community, are learning not just academic skills but very much the social skills in order to become good citizens.

That sets up a whole continuum, Mr. Speaker, and our proposal doesn't talk about ending there. Our proposal then talks about postsecondary and beyond, as we've said. We think it's a great model. It's one that the government apparently looked past as they were considering the Children's Forum, and it was a great opportunity to do that.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise today to respond to the private member's motion, Motion 504, brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. Motion 504 would seek to establish a citizens' commission on the future of education.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to emphasize my conviction on the importance of education in our society and my unwavering support for learners and educators in Alberta. I also would like to take this opportunity to speak on some of the recent initiatives of the Department of Learning, especially our current public participation processes.

This government consults extensively with Albertans to set goals and direction for education. Through collaboration with our learning partners in this province, we have recently established a new vision for lifelong learning for Albertans. This vision is part of Alberta Learning's 2000-2003 business plan, which also identifies strategies toward achieving the vision.

Mr. Speaker, this motion is about involving Albertans – parents, teachers, educators, superintendents – in determining the future of education. This is already being done. Alberta Learning worked with partners to develop the 2000-2003 business plan and will continue to work with partners in the implementation of the plan. This government is committed to building partnerships that will contribute to quality of learning in Alberta.

To address the diverse needs of learners, Alberta Learning already partners with government, industry, professional and community

associations, and committees and councils associated with learning. For example, there is a commitment to work with school boards, the Alberta Home and School Councils' Association, and the Alberta Teachers' Association to address the recommendations of the school councils' Next Steps report.

The Department of Learning is committed to working with the Council of Ministers of Education to implement a national agenda to support continued improvement of quality, accessible learning and performance measures. The department will also work with the federal government to improve the delivery and administration of financial assistance by harmonizing Alberta and federal student loan programs.

The Learning department's 2000-2003 business plan focuses on creating a flexible, responsive, and accessible education system for all Albertans. This government believes that a good education and a healthy start in life are the most important tools we can give our children to prepare them for a successful future.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, the Learning department's business plan also recognizes Alberta's postsecondary learning system. It must continue to expand the high-quality learning opportunity it provides to Albertans. The postsecondary sector will benefit from research funding from the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research. This government is also committed to expanding student assistance dramatically.

Mr. Speaker, the 2000-2003 business plan is only one evidence of this government's commitment to education and to Alberta's participation in its future. This year's budget also reflects that dedication. Education is one of Alberta's biggest priorities. That's why this government has dramatically increased its investment in our education system. Total education spending in Alberta will reach \$4.6 billion in 2000-2001 and will grow to more than \$4.9 billion by 2002-2003.

MR. AMERY: How much?

MR. CAO: To \$4.9 billion.

The base program funding for Alberta Learning will climb by \$766 million, or about 19 percent, over the next three years. One of the fundamental objectives of this year's Learning budget is enhanced flexibility of funding. Alberta Learning has a plan to review school board funding to increase flexibility, recognize local needs, and enhance accountability for the outcomes.

This budget thoroughly addressed concerns raised by Alberta's postsecondary students. Student assistance made up the largest percentage increase, 22 percent or \$23 million, in 2000-2001, with almost 50 percent, or more than \$50 million, over the next three years. So the total financial assistance available to postsecondary students will be \$390 million this year.

By 2002-2003, scholarships, bursaries, and grants will be increased to \$56 million.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. CAO: To \$56 million.

The budget also contains capital funding from Alberta Infrastructure to support schools and postsecondary institutions in this province. For the coming year \$160 million has been allocated to address priority projects to accommodate increased enrollments. This money will be used for repair, new facilities, innovation funding, and the preservation and modernization of existing facilities.

This budget reflects this government's willingness to work together with school boards, teachers, parents, students, postsecondary institutions, and industry to determine where investment is needed and how that investment should be made to ensure the best possible result. Spending more money will not improve the quality of our education system. We know that taxpayers' dollars must be directed to where they make a real difference.

This year's budget also clearly reflects this government's commitment to ensuring Albertans are prepared to meet the challenges in the new century head-on. It reflects this government's priority of lifelong learning and having an education system that continues to be responsive, accessible, and affordable for all Albertans. It reflects Albertans' priorities, the priorities that Albertans have disclosed at this government's many public consultations.

Mr. Speaker, we're listening to Albertans. There are a number of interdepartmental and cross-government initiatives to recognize education's fundamental importance to the prosperity and well-being of all Albertans, most of which have involved significant public consultation. These include Get Ready Alberta, People and Prosperity, the Alberta youth employment strategy, and the Alberta children's initiative. There are also many programs and reviews currently being implemented by the Department of Learning that involve education professionals and the public in determining the direction of education.

The Minister's Forum on Learning is a great example. It was held November 19 and 20, 1999, and 200 Albertans provided input on ways to foster lifelong learning in Alberta. The conference participants were high school, college, and university students, educators, continuing education providers, parents, industry and community representatives. The Minister's Forum on Learning featured internationally recognized speakers, who spoke on the future of education, and brainstorming sessions for participants. A report of the findings has just recently been issued. The forum provided an opportunity for community and learning stakeholders to advise the minister on priority issues. This forum demonstrated this government's willingness to consult Albertans on the future of learning in this province.

I would also like to speak about this government's committee on lifelong learning. I was asked, along with two colleagues, by the Minister of Learning to make recommendations on lifelong learning strategies. Our committee is presently consulting with people and organizations across the province on ways to encourage Albertans to keep learning throughout their lives. We are consulting with key stakeholders to review the current situation, identify gaps, and make recommendations on ways to help adults returning to learning improve their employment potential and realize their career goals. Based on what we hear, we will release a discussion paper in the spring and ask for public feedback. A final report will be developed by late summer.

Another important consultation was a school council review. This was a three-member MLA committee that worked with parents, teachers, principals, and other Albertans in a series of public forums held around the province last spring. These forums obtained input on school councils and where improvement could be made. Over 2,000 completed workbooks were returned to the Department of Learning. Overall, the committee found that school councils were working well and that there is a place for school councils in our education system. One important recommendation in the report was that the use of school fund-raising for core education programs be prohibited.

Mr. Speaker, there was also the Private Schools Funding Task Force. This task force conducted a provincewide public consultation process to provide Albertans with the opportunity to express their

views on how private schools should be funded. Throughout the review process the task force members met with hundreds of Albertans, listened to their views, and carefully considered their representations.

Another vehicle to gather Albertans' opinions on the learning issue was the 1997 School Facilities Task Force. This task force gathered Albertans' views on the provision of school facilities for Alberta students. Over 400 Albertans and educational partners participated in consultation meetings, and more than 100 written submissions were received. Information gathered from those public meetings was used to complete the task force's recommendations on the new school facility capital plan. All of their recommendations were accepted by the government. A new strategic direction for providing school facilities was adopted based on this consultation with Albertans, school boards, and education stakeholders.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, review committees and task forces are just two of many strategies that the government is pursuing to address increased demands in the classroom. The Department of Learning has also implemented a variety of programs and pilot projects to examine issues of significance to Albertans. To me the most exciting of these endeavours is AISI, the Alberta initiative for school improvement program. AISI is a new approach to supporting the improvement of student learning by encouraging teachers, administrators, trustees, parents, and the community to work together to introduce innovative and creative initiatives. School boards will have the autonomy and flexibility to propose a range of improvement strategies such as early reading or numeracy intervention, smaller class sizes, and stay-in-school programs. To support this initiative, \$66 million will be available from Alberta Learning's base funding this year for participating school jurisdictions.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. CAO: It's \$66 million.

In one of the first AISI initiatives, the Edmonton public school board will pilot a class size reduction program. Along with Alberta Learning the board will look at the impact of teaching techniques and strategies that maximize student learning. Research and findings from this study and pilot project will help school boards across the province pursue class size reduction and other innovative projects eligible under AISI funding.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Learning has consistently worked with students, parents, educators, and administrators to ensure that the necessary policies are in place to achieve excellence in our learning system. Class size reduction, curriculum changes, increased funding, a commitment to lifelong learning: all of these initiatives were results of consultation with Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, this government has recognized that there are many challenges ahead and that meeting them depends on our ability to work with partners to anticipate, adapt, and develop a lifelong learning system. We have a long history of effective public consultation. I think our government and the Department of Learning have done an exemplary job of bringing stakeholders into the decision-making process, and the results have been positive. The Department of Learning is meeting challenges head-on in trying to make improvements that will ultimately help people learn. Without input and advice from stakeholders, this government wouldn't have been able to develop the progressive initiatives I've just discussed.

The intention of this motion is worthy. I'm glad that it was brought here today because we all know that education is of critical importance to the future of this province, and this government has

consistently shown in the past that we are willing to look at initiatives that will bring benefit to the people of this province and improve our existing system.

Mr. Speaker, I do not support Motion 504. A new commission would be duplicative and expensive. We can work from within the existing strengths of our learning system and still incorporate the spirit of the hon. member's motion. For that, thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak today in favour of Motion 504, the Alberta citizens' commission.

As the Member for Edmonton-McClung and Leader of the Official Opposition noted in her remarks, the last time the province had a commission on education was the one that was tabled in 1972. That was entitled *Choice of Futures: a Future of Choices*. It's interesting, as you look at that document 30 years later, that some of the recommendations in that document are just now being implemented. Thirty years ago that document outlined the advantages of year-round schooling. Lo and behold, right now in this city there are some experiments with year-round schooling being undertaken. There was a rather careful look and some caution in *Choice of Futures* vis-a-vis the funding of schools, and the kinds of problems we faced with equity in the past number of years were foreshadowed in that document.

One of the things that was in that document and was rather interesting was the conception it had of possible ways of governing the system. There was a defining of the school system that would be a top-down system, a system that would be primarily micromanaged by the provincial government versus a system that would place a premium on local control. I think we know where we've gone these last few years. That top-down system has been the one that's taken over. I had an opportunity to talk to the author of that document and ask how he felt about the implementation of the recommendations, and he indicated that he thought that about 60 percent of the recommendations that were made had been acted upon.

I think it's time to look again at education in the province and to do it in a much different way, in a novel way, and that's what's proposed in the Alberta citizens' commission. Instead of as we had with the Worth commission, with the experts driving the study, determining the information that would be gathered, visiting around the province and interpreting what people were saying, this one turns it upside down and would make citizens paramount. They would have experts on tap that would help them provide the kind of academic and research advice that they needed while they were trying to make their deliberations. It's quite, I think, a different way of looking at a commission that would examine something as important as our public and separate school systems.

I think I would like to spend a couple of minutes looking at some of the things that have happened since Worth made that report in the province. The commission would be an opportunity not just to look ahead – and that's very important, trying to come up with a vision for the future – but it would also be an opportunity to look back, to look at the changes that have been undertaken, and to assess the worthiness of some of those changes. There have been many. If you look at governance alone, the role of school boards has been greatly modified in the last seven years by this government. Those boards that once had taxing authority, those boards that at one time could even hire their own chief superintendent without the government's blessing can no longer do so.

If you look at the Department of Learning, the Department of Learning has become much more controlling of the behaviour of

school boards and the behaviour of school principals. A lot of what is done now is in response to tests that are administered provincially, and judgments about the success of our schools are made by the Department of Learning in many instances based on those results.

There's been a move to school-based budgeting. They've been mandated across the province. They've had a great influence, I think, in parents coming to better understand how money is being spent, but they've also been introduced at a time of declining resources, so what looks like an opportunity for parent decision-making on the surface – in reality that freedom is not there.

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, but the time consideration for this item of business has now left us today.

4:30

head: Royal Assent

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[The Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in the past we indicated that there would be several opportunities and several occasions on which we might not want to use our laptop computers. One of those occasions is the presence of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor. So I would ask you to just turn them down.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

THE SPEAKER: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Lois E. Hole, CM, and the Premier entered the Chamber. Her Honour took her place upon the throne]

HER HONOUR: Please be seated.

THE SPEAKER: May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly has, at its present sittings, passed certain bills to which, and in the name of the Legislative Assembly, I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

THE CLERK: Your Honour, the following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

- 9 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000
- 12 Appropriation (Supplementary) Act, 2000

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated her assent]

THE CLERK: In Her Majesty's name Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and the Premier left the Chamber]

[The Mace was uncovered]

THE SPEAKER: Please sit.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 7

Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading today.

I'll make a few brief comments about it. As members know, there was a reorganization of government last spring, and as part of that reorganization a number of agencies were added to the ministry. What this is, essentially, is an amendment to the act to allow the agencies to be added to the ministry and report through the Alberta Science and Research Authority. As you know, the Alberta Science and Research Authority is a provincial agency which is really involved as the senior science policy body in the province. It makes sure that the science policy corresponds to the business plans of the Ministry of Innovation and Science.

We have a number of board members in this agency. Just some of the names I would mention, that some of you may know, would be Bob Church, Ruth Collins-Nakai, Howard Tennant, Elizabeth Cannon, and Len Bolger, all high-level people, high-level Albertans. These are people who are recognized as leading Albertans in their field right across the province. This group works at arm's length from government to assist us with policy advice and helps the government to contribute to the Alberta advantage.

One of the groups that we added in the new bill is the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority, AOSTRA. What we're doing through the amendment is expanding the mandate of that group. Certainly oil sands will be included, but we are going to call it the energy research council as we work through this. We think there are probably other areas of energy where we can spend money on research as well rather than just on the oil sands.

The other group that was added was the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute. I'm just mentioning the main bodies. The Alberta Agricultural Research Institute will be part of the ministry. It will retain its name but become part of a larger life-science strategy. We believe it's important to move into the whole life-science area for several reasons. There's some good opportunity with the federal government, and they're looking at their genome project and the expansion of the genome project. Alberta is the second leading light in this whole area of gene research after Toronto. We want to move into the area of proteomics. As you know, there's a protein in each gene that controls the gene, and that's where the research is going. It's like Wayne Gretzky said: I go to where the puck will be, not where the puck is. That's what we want with our life-science strategy.

The forestry research institute we will include in this group as well, and it will be part of this whole ASRA mandate.

I think these changes and others that we are making will address the efficiency and effectiveness of requesting, of reviewing, and of funding science and research within this province. I believe we have

some exciting times in this province. We've got some good science. We've got exciting things happening as we go forward, Mr. Speaker, and I encourage the members to support this bill.

4:40

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the minister and his staff for keeping me up to date on initiatives in the Department of Innovation and Science. Bill 7 is the embodiment of a commitment that the government made to more closely integrate and consolidate research initiatives, science policy development, and the co-ordination of research funding in the province. Towards those ends I can support Bill 7. It seems that this government is able to identify correctly that the innovation system in this province will be strengthened by a co-ordination of effort when it comes to the government.

Now, the Alberta Science and Research Authority, which has now become the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority, seems to have an ever growing role. I have heard in general a fair degree of support for the government direction, particularly bringing the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute and the former AOSTRA, soon to be the Alberta Energy Research Institute, together under this central umbrella.

I've also heard some concerns raised, and I think they're worth noting on the record. From the agricultural side I've heard that perhaps there'll be a lack of sensitivity to agricultural issues, particularly as they vary across various regions of this province. I've also heard that people in the oil patch, particularly those that are recovering oil from the oil sands, are saying: well, there was a reason why AOSTRA was set up, and that was because of the particular needs and the particular dependency on research in being able to extract oil under very difficult conditions. Alberta for decades has really been a leader, in fact the world centre for the development of this kind of technology. Those criticisms have been voiced, and I think that the government in this regard should not be defensive about these criticisms but instead should look at them as a challenge to be met. I for one am confident that the voices raised or the concerns raised from the agricultural sector can be well dealt with, and I think the benefits of co-ordination will far outstrip the concerns about the lack of sensitivity.

When it comes to the oil sands, you know, we're talking about huge corporations with fairly deep pockets, with international partners and commitments. They're definitely big boys and girls who know how to look after their own interests. Now, that's not to say that we should abandon them, but I think it is to say that they've certainly benefited from a good partnership with government over the years in this province, and maybe it's time to lend some of that same support to some other partners and generate some new partnerships in the energy sector. Whether we're talking about fostering research when it comes to solar or wind or other kinds of energy, it seems to me that that's our future at some point. There's only a limited amount of oil in the ground or gas to be pumped or oil sands to be refined. Certainly moving towards the development of new technologies and exploiting new energy sources is a goal that's worth pursuing.

This bill is interesting for a couple of reasons, though, not just simply that it is bringing together the research funding of the government under this one umbrella and that the decision-making will be streamlined. I look forward to that, but it's also interesting for a couple of other reasons. The government for a long time has been talking about accountability in terms of board appointments, and what we have here is an interesting model. I'm still wondering

how this model will pan out, but it is an interesting model. It's one that if it works well and if it serves the people of this province well, we may want to try to apply it to some other areas of government activity.

As I understand the intent behind Bill 7, the new authority will create these three research institutes, and the members of the three institutes will be selected by the minister. There's nothing particularly unique about that. I mean, this government appoints hundreds and hundreds of Albertans to jobs by ministerial appointment every year. What is interesting is that the board chairs of these three institutes will be elected by members of the Assembly. I think that is fairly unique. I'm anxious to see how that works. We'll have a list of appointees that'll be put forward by ministerial order.

Now, how this list in itself is generated doesn't necessarily have to be a partisan activity. I talked to the minister about this, and I know that they're open to names. I hope they will use the same model that they've talked about using for the foundation to be established under Bill 1, and that is to have a broad search outside of government managed by a recruiting or a head-hunting firm, by a consulting company in any case, so that the appointments won't be tainted by any arguments of partisanship or patronage.

These names will be brought forward, they'll be appointed by the minister, and then from that group a chair will be nominated and then ultimately elected by members of the Assembly. That's an interesting model, and I'm anxious to see how it works and to see whether or not the people who are outside of government, the men and women who are working in Alberta's innovation system, the scientists and the researchers out there in our universities and in our corporations and in private business, will feel satisfied by this process and well served by it.

The government has also talked about the need for consistency, efficiency, and effectiveness when it comes to the co-ordination of science and technology policy. Bill 7, once it's passed, should aid in this regard, but again there's been some criticism raised, and I'd like to put it on record at second reading. Hopefully the minister will have a chance, as this bill proceeds, to reflect on these comments and perhaps address some of these concerns.

What I've heard from the business sector in this province that's involved in science and technology, particularly in the life sciences, biosciences, and communications technology, is that they're beginning to see this superstructure developing, what used to be ASRA. Although most of this criticism is usually leveled at the ARC, it spills over into ASRA as well. The criticism is simply this. The business sector is telling me that instead of simply facilitating research, instead of simply being a funding agent, instead of co-ordinating government policy, they're beginning to see government, through ARC and ASRA, as a competitor, that it looks as though they are more focused on commercial operations than they are on policy and as such have actually become an impediment to some business initiatives.

Now, there is no doubt a fine line that has to be walked here, because particularly ARC does some things that are very entrepreneurial and very commercial by design. We have to make sure that none of their business in fact gets in the way of Alberta business. While this government has said that they want to be more consistent and efficient and effective when it comes to science and technology policy, they've also said that they want to be out of the business of being in business.

Of course, being out of the business of being in business would be a good thing. We've just seen this week, Mr. Speaker, how the government has lost a few more million taxpayer dollars through the sale of the Centennial Food loan. I understand that this represents a loss of over \$11 million. When you add that up, it makes any of

the concerns raised about what's gone on in Ottawa sort of pale in comparison. I mean, you talk about billion-dollar boondoggles, and we certainly have had our experience right here in Alberta. The bad news is that there's about another \$1,800,000,000 worth of outstanding loans at risk in this province that are going to come home to roost one of these days. So if the government is really serious about being out of the business of being in business, let's just make sure that we're not going down some other path of getting into business through some back door or some side door through what's going on in the ASRA or the ARC.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, the other issue that's been raised to me has come from academic circles. What some members of university research consortia are telling me is that they're very concerned about what they see as the overt politicization of science and science policy. It's one thing for the government to have an agenda, to articulate its agenda and to pursue it, but it's something else entirely to tie funding and research to these political agendas at the expense of academic freedom and independence. The concern they raise is one that I take to heart. I've spoken in this House before about the dangers of politics and science and the dangers, particularly, of a dominant ideology ignoring the pursuit of knowledge and instead replacing it with the abuse of science.

Science and the discovery of new knowledge is a social good in and of itself, and I think we have to do everything in this Assembly to make sure that we have an innovation system in this province that respects fundamental research and the creation of new knowledge. Then as times goes on, of course things will be put into place where we can take that knowledge, take that discovery, innovate from it, apply it, and even eventually, as the case may be, commercialize it.

Mr. Speaker, when I'm speaking of commercialization, I suppose that's another general query that I have about Bill 7. It does talk about some changes in terms of who owns intellectual property. It makes some changes in terms of the application of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act in this province. I think it frees up the ability of other partners who are involved in research initiatives to claim ownership over the products of the scientific work. In other words, if a new process, a new product, or simply new knowledge is created that is funded through one of these government institutes, these partners now have a clearer path to claim some ownership or some share of ownership in what otherwise would be really a Crown asset, that being the intellectual property.

I'm hoping to spend some time in the research and science community over the next little while seeing whether or not Bill 7 has satisfied any of the concerns that have been raised. I want to be having my ears open to the concerns raised particularly from the academic community about the loss, the potential loss in any case, of academic freedom. I also want to pay attention to what I'm hearing from Alberta business regarding their sense that they're increasingly having to compete with big government when it comes to science and research.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be listening to those concerns and to see what the response is to Bill 7, but on balance I will say that the government taking control over the research agenda, at least from the standpoint of making sure that there's reduced duplication and increased co-ordination, makes some sense.

I think that if these other issues I've raised can be put to rest or can be satisfied, then Alberta taxpayers will be well served by this legislation, but I don't want to be in a particular rush to pass Bill 7. I don't feel the same urgency, let's say, here as I do in terms of supporting, for example, Bill 1, the government's initiative to create the new science and engineering foundation. I think that Bill 7 will

no doubt gain majority support in this Assembly during this session. I see no reason to unduly impede it, but I do want to take some time, as I said, meeting with some members of the community that have a stake in science and research and making sure that their concerns are (a) well understood and (b) addressed.

As this bill proceeds through the Assembly, I look forward to the minister responding to some of these concerns. I have faith that he will, because that has been his track record since he became the minister of this department.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that other members do the same: set up a meeting or two with the scientists and the businesspeople who are involved in research in their own constituencies and get some feedback on Bill 7 so that we can make sure we get this one right the first time.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise this afternoon and speak to the contents of Bill 7 and to the principles of Bill 7 and how it applies to the initiative that's under way to basically broaden the approach of scientific research in our province. The combination of this change that's going to draw together an administrative group to look over and to deal with the dollars that are being put into the heritage foundation money is a really good approach.

The thing that we have to watch in the creation of these bodies is the fact that they are representative and that they do contain within their membership the broad-based understanding of and appreciation for the different sectors that are going to be dealt with in the co-ordination and the evaluation of research projects that come to them and have to be looked at. They're going to be responsible as well for setting direction and that. If we can look at it from the perspective of how the makeup of that board will deal with the broad perspective of research and development and the advancement of that primary research component in Alberta, that would be really good. We need to have some criteria included in here in the development of the board membership that would allow us to look at that.

The other thing I would like to suggest is that we have to have a clear representation within the presentation and within the understanding and the mandate of the authority to look at the balance that comes between a kind of frontier-expanding primary research and the research, then, that goes into developing and taking new-concept research results and making and developing applications for those research-based activities. This has to be put in there. We have to have that mix that comes in there.

I think the model that we want to look at is the work that's being done through the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research authority, because they've been able to really pull together some very active co-operative programs between funding at the provincial level, at the federal level, from some of the private sources as well, and really have developed a viable medical research program here. As this group works and takes the earnings that are going to come out of our Alberta heritage fund endowment, this would be a really good model that this authority could look at in terms of developing a viable science and technology research component within our province.

One of the things that we look at in here is the inclusion of the agriculture research component under this. The Agricultural Research Institute has had a very good relationship with the agricultural community, with the commissions and support groups in agriculture. They've been very open and very willing to work with these groups in developing research agendas and direction for

research. I could think that if they get involved here and they can take that philosophy and make sure that it works in this new environment as well, it would be worth making sure that opportunity is provided to them, because as we look at their successes, we want to make sure that being put under this new body doesn't in any way hinder or restrict their ability to continue to work at the forefront of both our conceptual agricultural research area and at the applications areas of our research as well.

5:00

So with those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I think we're going to have to look at this in the context of how it will improve the co-ordination and management of our research program across the province as well as across the disciplines that are going to be involved in this. If you look at it from the perspective of how it can be brought in and implemented in that context, they'll now have the dollars that come out of the new heritage fund endowment as well as the dollars that I assume were originally and have continuously been put into the other organizations, that are now going to be included in the umbrella under this. So what we'll have is those efforts that have to be looked at: how the dollars get directed and whether or not they are continued to be focused in the areas of the amalgamated authorities that are being brought together.

So, Mr. Speaker, again I say that this is the kind of bill that puts in place a structure. It doesn't talk a lot about the philosophy that's behind it, and that philosophy is going to be determined by the members that get appointed to the board. Then what we have to do is look at it from the perspective of getting a balance there that'll give us the direction for our research in the science and technology area that will continue to promote that growth and the advancement of these areas in Alberta.

Now, we've got a good reputation in our universities. We've got a good reputation in some of our research centres, and we've got good co-operative efforts being provided by a lot of our industries, that are essentially giving us an opportunity to really move Alberta into the forefront of a science and technology research component. It's a matter of getting that critical mass in place. As we put Bill 7 and Bill 1 together, we'll be able to see a real opportunity develop for Alberta to generate that critical mass, that's necessary to be a world player in the area of research in science and technology. So I hope, as we go through this, that almost all members in the Legislature get support from their communities and we can then move this into an active growth component of our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take this opportunity to speak to Bill 7 from my understanding of it. I've always supported research, and I think that's been a focus of this Legislature in this session with, actually, the bill I spoke on yesterday, Bill 1. Here we have Bill 7, which talks about the combining, actually, the co-ordination of some other research departments – agriculture, energy and forestry, to my knowledge.

You know, at first glance one would consider that it's good to co-ordinate those sections. Are these all going to be located in the same building? How is this going to come about? Is this going to be a major kerfuffle within the department? Do we have people moving buildings, offices, et cetera? I'm interested in the practical aspect of co-ordinating these three.

One of the things that may come from this that I hope will be good – because I don't want agriculture lost in the shuffle. I'm quite sure

it won't be, but when we look at research for agriculture, I think it has a bit of a different focus than energy and forestry. With energy having so many big companies involved and big corporations and with forestry involved with so many corporations, et cetera, I have to be concerned about agriculture because those are several individuals.

The average farmer doesn't have the time or the inclination of course – well, maybe the inclination, but certainly not the time – to do good research. They do depend on the government to that well, and different industries maybe from the value-added sector that would promote a certain product. Generally speaking, when you are speaking of research for agriculture and things that will improve the life of the farmer, the quality of the product they can put out, the versatility of that product, that has to come from, I would hope, the research that will be encompassed in Bill 7.

When the minister listed some of the people that will be on that authority, a couple of the names I recognized. That's impressive work. Certainly the work of Dr. Ruth Collins-Nakai I am familiar with. I guess I want to ask, though – I don't want agriculture lost within this, and my hope is that in fact the research for agriculture will be improved because maybe it will be more focused.

I guess one of the things that certainly has come up in my constituency and people have been asking me about – and I'm wondering if the minister knows if this is going to be one of the focuses of this authority – will be the issue of genetically modified organisms. I'm glad the minister of energy is paying attention because he's wondering about those genetically modified organisms.

AN HON. MEMBER: They're called Liberals.

MRS. SOETAERT: We're throwing insults, but that's okay, Mr. Speaker; we have broad shoulders in here.

I was actually trying to support the minister's bill while I questioned some of the things about agriculture.

I also want to ask about the forestry within that. I also wonder about the research of that, the allocations of it, the abilities for different people to clear cut without any research done. In fact, one of the interesting things that has come to my attention is the different sectors and their impact on the environment. I am wondering: that's something that certainly should be researched and worked co-operatively with those areas.

As we look at the combining of these three areas, I am hoping that there will be a balance. I don't want the agriculture industry to be forgotten. There are new products, new knowledge, and I think everyone here – I'm hoping everyone here – has an appreciation of new knowledge that may come out of this. Within that, one of the parts I read is the reality that – maybe this needs explanation, but if as a government we are paying for the research, do we not own the product then? Or is this going to be negotiable under this authority? Maybe I'm not reading it as clearly as I should, but there is a section in here which says that those kinds of resources or any money from it, that it will be the authority's decision as to how to spend or use that money. My question is: would it not be part of the Crown's benefit since it has been sponsored by this government?

5:10

I had a few other things to point out about this bill. You know, Mr. Speaker, on this board there will be an MLA, which is common for many of these authorities. My question, and I'm sure the hon. minister is really going to consider this: there's never been an MLA from the opposition benches on one of those boards.

AN HON. MEMBER: Correct.

MRS. SOETAERT: And he says I'm correct in that. I'm correct in a lot of things.

You know what? If he goes looking for well-qualified, willing, intelligent people, well, there are a good 16 sitting over here you can pick from. And you know what? They'd work hard. We know how to put in the hours. We'd be vocal. [interjection] No, those guys didn't even wake up when I said that. So no, I'm for folks sitting over here.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've made a few good suggestions to the minister. I've expressed my concern about the loss of agriculture. I don't want it lost in this combining because it doesn't have one big industry focused on just that, as the others do.

So with those concerns and a good suggestion for an MLA that could sit on that authority, an excellent suggestion: the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, the Member for Lethbridge-East, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the Member for Edmonton-Manning. I mean, we've got them.

With those few comments I will adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 1

Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act

[Adjourned debate March 13: Mr. Smith]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest that now may be an appropriate time to move the question on Bill 1.

MRS. SOETAERT: There's no question. There are more speakers.

MR. SMITH: Isn't it if the Assembly is prepared to accept the question that we vote on it and then move on?

MRS. SOETAERT: No, we're not prepared. You were speaking last.

MR. SMITH: Okay. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to get in a few minutes of comments on the philosophy, I guess, in the approach of Bill 1. We've seen that with the focus that we have on research in the province and with our university system, we have the opportunity to really be participants in a very valid and very active program to contribute to the scientific and technological knowledge of the world, of our country.

Bill 1 is going to make a statement on behalf of all Albertans that this is a direction that we condone and that we really support in the context of how it's going to bring about an increase in diversification in our province and that it will be able to allow us to move into some of the other areas that are contributing to the advance of both our province and the science- and research-based activities that are in it.

Mr. Speaker, we had a chance to discuss this bill the other night with the Minister of Learning, and we were talking about how it would work in with the universities in our province. We were talking, also, in that context about how successful our universities have been in attracting the chairs of the federal program that was going to expand the focus on our researchers and our universities and the direction that those universities take in their research.

We've been able to create a number of centres of excellence now through that program here in Alberta, and the dollars that will come out of this foundation and the endowment that's created as its basis will really now provide an opportunity for those centres to look for, to search out funding that will come from Alberta but also on a matching level from other places in Canada or around the world. This will contribute to the fact that the lead scientists that are here will then be able to attract graduate students and encourage undergraduate students in our universities now to look at the opportunities that are there for them as they move into graduate work, into research work.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's any question that, you know, the more scientists we can train in our province, the more likely we are that they'll stay here and conduct their research activities here. The dollars that will be provided through this endowment will give them that opportunity to really flourish here in Alberta and stay in our province and contribute to the advancement of our research, commercialization, and academic environments.

Mr. Speaker, as we go through and look at this, the thing that's going to be important – as a former faculty member at the university I can tell you that when we could draw our undergraduate students into our research programs, get them involved either as part-time students during the academic year or through summer employment opportunities, they really began to shine as students. They began to take an interest in the direction that what they were learning in the classroom could take. I think it effectively made them much better students and in the end much better graduates so that when they did go out into the workplace, they had a little bit of an understanding and appreciation for how concepts that they learned in the classroom could actually be made into a workable practice when they went out into the work world. So they were always there and they were always available to help to improve and create better employees for the companies and the businesses, the agencies that were looking for them to come out and make a contribution.

So these are the kinds of ideas that are really exciting about this bill and the fact that it will give us a chance to see our academic community, our research community, really begin to move out into the forefront, as we've seen with our medical facilities with the support of the Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. That's basically given us that core size, that takeoff size that was needed to really create those good research initiatives. Let's hope that over the next four or five years this program and the moneys that are coming out of the heritage foundation for science and engineering will be able to create that same core level of expertise and that same mass that gives them a critical takeoff into a very stable and ongoing research program in our province.

I think that we'll see everybody at the universities in this province looking at this and saying: you know, the government is making quite a commitment now to improve and sustain and maintain the research efforts that have been undertaken at our universities. They'll be looking at this as a signal to try and expand their programs, to look at new concepts, to explore some of the ideas that have now been languishing in the back of their mind because they're funded to do other things. They'll now be able to pursue those ideas with funding through this.

5:20

We should be able to see the graduate programs and the research programs at our universities really grow in response to this, especially with what we're hearing in terms of some of the discussions, that this actual endowment is potentially going to grow over the next few years from the \$500 million that's set aside here. We'll be able

to then have a growing amount of allocatable dollars on a yearly basis. Potentially at the start this could give us \$20 million, \$30 million to \$40 million on an annual basis. Depending upon interest rates and earnings, that could grow, and if the endowment itself grows, I think this is just one of the most exciting things that we can talk about in terms of the mandate of this session of the Legislature.

I hope that everybody supports this bill as we move it through the process and that we do it in a way that our researchers can feel that we made that commitment, that we were willing to move it through so that the dollars can be set aside and we can then have it effective at an earlier date rather than a delayed date because of the activities here.

So with that, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Just before I ask that the question be put, I'd like to thank my colleagues on both sides of the House and the last colleague in particular. I appreciated your good comments.

I think that this is an historic bill. Just as in 1982 the HFMR was an historic bill, so this year, 2000, is the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research. I want to say that it couldn't have been done without the Premier's support and his insistence and his vision that this is a positive issue.

I thank everybody, and I'd like to call for the question on second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. I move that the House now stand adjourned and reconvene this evening at 8 in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion put forward by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, will all hon. members in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: Carried. The Assembly stands adjourned until 8 o'clock this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 14, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/03/14

head: Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The chair is going to call the meeting to order. Thank you.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I would ask the hon. minister to start off the discussion and debate.

MR. LUND: Well, thank you, Madam Chairman. To start off with this evening, I thought I would respond to the questions that I didn't get answered in the first round of our estimates.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East had asked what we were doing regarding the transportation system, specifically as related to the Estey/Kroeger recommendations. I can report that I was in Ottawa around the first week of February and met with eight federal ministers, the Prime Minister's office, the Privy Council, and people from Treasury to talk about how important it was that we move forward with an approval of the Estey/Kroeger report. Also, the next week, the week of the 14th, two of my department staff were in Ottawa as a follow-up to that. In terms of the resources, we don't have any specific number allocated to this particular file, but of course staff continue to work on it and I continue to raise the issue when I'm in Ottawa and talking to the federal people.

As a matter of fact, when I was there just two weeks ago dealing with the farm income crisis, we raised the issue again and how important it is that the federal government move forward on this report, because the fact is that there are studies that indicate there are anywhere from 50 million to 300 million of producer dollars that are on the table if in fact the system is changed and becomes more efficient. Now, I don't care if it's only the \$50 million. The point is that there's a major amount of money sitting there, and it would be an annual injection into the farm economy if in fact we could move forward on it.

The hon. member also asked what sectors are being influenced by the industrial wastewater infrastructure program for agricultural process and what municipalities are involved. This program was announced in 1998 by the Premier. There was \$35 million allocated to it over a three-year period, and of course we've now completed the second year. In 1998-99 there were the two major projects, and they amounted to some \$12.6 million. Both of these were related to the potato industry. There was a grant of \$6.5 million approved to the county of Lethbridge and \$6.1 million to the MD of Taber. It's interesting how those all multiply. In fact, the development that occurred from this injection amounted to about \$40 million for new water and wastewater infrastructure, and that led to \$200 million in new investment in value-added agrifood processing. Now in '99-2000 there are two applications currently before us, and these relate to some investment in the grain processing and meat processing sectors.

He also asked how the ministry is progressing with the development of measures that provide more specific information on the achievement of goals and key results. As you know, we've got the seven industry macromeasures in the department, and there are also five goal measures listed with the eight ministry goals which appear

in the 2000-2003 ministry's plan. The purpose of the goal measures is to provide data and information to show progress in achieving these eight goals. Now, since these goal measures were first selected, progress in developing the necessary data and information for the measures has actually been a slower process than we thought it would be. The 1999-2000 annual report will be the next step in reporting on the ministry's accomplishments toward meeting these goals. Where possible, data shown for each of the measures will be in a format similar to that shown in the 2000-2003 business plan.

As you know, we are having the ag summit, a major project that will give the ministry direction, and out of that we will be looking at all our goals and measures and seeing if they're appropriate to meet the expectations coming up in the summit.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre asked: what action has the minister taken in response to the Auditor General's recommendations that the ministry set quantifiable measures and targets to evaluate the performance of the farm income disaster program? I can inform you that there was a ministry steering committee assigned responsibility for developing performance measures for this very program, and they've met with the Auditor General's staff. The committee is now finalizing the measures and will be meeting once again with the Auditor General's staff before the performance measures are implemented. We expect to have the plan in place by June of this year. [interjection] Yeah. Well, that answers your question.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre also asked: how do changes in policy and legislation help the ministry measure its progress in achieving the goals to improve the industry's capacity to respond to opportunities for growth? Well, the changes to policy and legislation I believe improve the industry's capacity to respond to opportunities when the policy or legislation restricts the ability of producers and processors to respond to market opportunities. An example of such a restriction is the monopoly control exercised by the Canadian Wheat Board. Of course that's out of our jurisdiction but is one of the reasons we're trying to move that file forward. The regulatory regime imposed on transportation and handling of grains: that's where the difficulty is with the involvement of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Further, the ability of producers and processors to respond to growth opportunities is enhanced by the removal of trade barriers and the implementation of a transparent, effective, and timely dispute settlement regime. There are several desirable changes to Canada, Alberta, and international policies in the legislation that the department is working towards. Our success in bringing about these changes is the measure of our success in achieving the goal to improve the industry's capacity to respond to the opportunities for growth.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert was asking: why is the administration expense budget for Agriculture Financial Services Corporation showing an increase over last year's budget? The answer to that is that the selling commissions were reduced in last year's administrative budget. In this year's budget they are shown as a separate line item. Taking this change into account, the 2000-2001 budget for administrative expenses is showing an increase of \$4.9 million over the 1999-2000 budget. This increase is primarily a result of extra costs associated with the processing of the higher volume of farm income disaster program claims due to the introduction of the retroactivity of the program that we announced back on October 14. Higher lending and insurance claim volumes and a provision for salary increases also are contributing to those increases.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead asked about the budget for farm income support. His question was: why is the 2000-2001

budget for farm income support lower than the 1999-2000 forecast?

The budget is \$201.6 million, and the forecast is \$299 million. Now, the forecast is higher than the budget for two reasons. First, the 1999-2000 costs of the farm income disaster program are \$71.8 million higher than next year's budget because enhancements to the program that were announced back in October 1999 were retroactive to the 1998 tax year. Therefore, the forecast includes the retroactive costs for 1998 as well as the costs for 1999, whereas the budget for 2000-2001 is for the 2000 tax year only. The 2000-2001 budget is \$165 million compared to last year's budget of \$74 million.

The second reason for this year's forecast expenses being higher than next year's budget is that the forecast includes \$25.6 million for industrial development grants. These are onetime grants, and therefore there is no budget for industrial development grants in the year 2000-2001.

Madam Chairman, this completes I think all of the questions that weren't answered when we were first before the committee.

8:10

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Just a few final comments before we move on with the vote on the Agriculture, Food and Rural Development allocations for the year.

The minister spoke a little while ago about the role the ag summit was going to have in reviewing goals and measures. I guess the question that still remained when he finished that explanation was the role that that's going to play in redirecting potential activities within the department and how department programs get delivered to the front line, to the agriculture community, and what the objectives are or the vision is for the agriculture community as much as for the minister's department in itself.

I think when we reviewed the comments that were made by all of the members the other day, we covered a lot of the issues that were relevant to the budget of the agriculture department. I guess the question that arises now, with the announcement today, was where that fits into the budget. Should we now possibly be looking at an amendment to this budget before we vote on it? This budget now is going to have some new allocations. I know the minister has the authority to move money within the line items and within the programs of the budget; that's permitted now with the new Financial Administration Act. But I was under the impression from the discussion during the news conference that there will be about 40 million or 45 million new dollars actually added to Alberta Agriculture's budget. We need to find out where those dollars are going to be coming from. Is it out of the potential surplus that the government showed, or is it going to be out of some other program in connection with that? So on that basis, Madam Chairman, I think we should be looking at how that fits in as we move to finalize our vote on Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

The issue that I'd like to see the minister really address as well, through the ag summit process, I guess, more than as a direct request here, is that when we start to look at the department summary, now we're spending about \$250 million to \$251 million according to the data here. If we add the extra \$40 million or \$45 million onto that, we're going to be almost pushing the very high . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, would it be all right with the Assembly if we revert to the Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. We're absolutely honoured this evening to have visitors that have come from across Canada, actually from Sudbury, Ontario, to witness the proceedings of our committee work in this Legislature. They are seated in the members' gallery. We have 66 members from the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps, Admiral Mountbatten's area, and they are accompanied by their commanding officer, Lieutenant Roger Szydziak. They're all from Sudbury, Ontario. We welcome you to Alberta and to our Legislature this evening, and we'd ask you to all rise and receive a warm welcome from our Assembly.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's a real honour to give my space on the floor to introduce the next generation of leaders in Canada.

Main Estimates 2000-2001

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (*continued*)

DR. NICOL: As I was saying, there's an issue that comes out in the context of how the agriculture budget is now becoming prioritized, and I was saying that we are getting now to where well over half of the almost \$500 million is going into agriculture insurance and lending assistance programs: the crop insurance, the interest programs, the farm income disaster program, the new program announced today. I guess what we need to do is come out of that ag summit with a concept of when and how it's best to provide public support to the agriculture community. How do we target those dollars so that they get directed to the individuals in the agriculture community that truly have a short-term income shortfall?

Madam Chairman, I don't mean here that we should be putting money into supporting agriculture enterprises, farmers that are effectively on their way out of the agricultural community, but if we have a farm enterprise that has been effectively supporting the family, supporting the community, building the community over a period of years and has gone into a two- or three-year drought-price-caused cash flow problem, that's the kind of decision we need to be making here. How do we step in and provide assistance to those kinds of farmers rather than to the farmers that are either not in real need or who effectively would become dependant on the public dollar? What we need to do is look at that kind of an issue to be addressed by the ag summit.

I guess maybe I'm stepping a little bit out of bounds in the context of debate on the budget when I'm asking for input to the ag summit as opposed to input to the determination of the budget, but so much of what we're dealing with right now in the business plan, in the budget is going to be almost a builder into how we approach the ag community out of the recommendations that come from that ag summit. So it's reasonable, I think, to tie the two of them together in a way that we try to make sure that what comes out of that summit is a strong recommendation back to us in the government, back to us as representatives of our communities on how to provide the support that is necessary for agriculture.

This is especially critical when we deal with the kinds of changes and transitions that have gone on in so much of our society. You know, people are now being asked to deal with and look after their

own interests, and the agriculture community needs to develop that kind of relationship with the public purse as well in the sense that they come forward and they're given dollars only when it's critical to the survival of that enterprise and not in terms of a supplement when it's not necessarily needed by each of those enterprise operators.

I think the thing that we want to also look at is how the mix of different programs that we put out under program 6 fit together. Our new program today saw us giving a credit to the farmers who are going to be buying crop insurance. How does that work out? How effective is the crop insurance program in terms of its relationship to our farm income disaster programs? Is it important maybe that we should be tying the two together? If a farmer is not willing to begin the year by making a commitment to risk management, should we be stepping in at the end of the year when the elements have turned against him?

8:20

You know, these are the kinds of questions that I hope the minister takes to that ag summit and comes back with real input from the agriculture community on how they see us tying together these programs and making sure that we do have a set of programs that are fair, that are equitable to those farmers, to the farm community and fair and equitable also, Madam Chairman, to the other members of the Alberta community that are sharing in the burden and the costs and in the benefits of having a strong rural community. That balance has to be developed.

You know, the relationship between some of our programs now is reasonably open. Regarding the new program, I think one of the first things that was asked after the minister finished his press conference today was: well, Ken, is this going to be neutral under the WTO? And I said: as long as it's a one-year, onetime payment that can't be built into farmer expectations, I would assume that it probably is going to be neutral, that it wouldn't be a countervailable action.

I would ask the minister, when he's discussing these kinds of programs in the future, that maybe some reference to that would help, a kind of reference to an argument that has been given already before the WTO or in the context of countervail neutrality. He could bring that out as he talks about it. It's important that we make sure that the agriculture community realizes and senses that when we step in as a public to help them in a time when they're having trouble, we're not going to be creating problems for a different sector in the agriculture community or for Canada as a whole in the context of challenges under the WTO.

I hope that my interpretation was correct on this one and that it won't be challengeable. It is a onetime program. It's not commodity specific. It won't influence export potential. I think we get to look at those kinds of things and say: this program probably would stand a challenge. It's a question that comes up, and it would be nice if when these programs are announced, some reference to that is made as it goes.

I guess on that basis, Madam Chairman, I'd suggest that my comments on the budget now are finished, but I would also ask the minister to consider bringing forward the amendments to allow us to look at how today's announcement fits into this before we do put a final vote on this budget so that we can see how it fits into the overall aspects of our financial planning for the next year.

So on that basis, I hope that we vote to delay the movement of this until we see those amendments.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Chairman. To the hon. member regarding the goals and measures and the vision of the community: after the summit we're going to be looking at all of these goals and

measures. You're absolutely right. It's very important that they tie into the agricultural community and then back so that we make sure that what we are doing is serving the whole agricultural industry. But, of course, the primary producer is the main building block in that whole industry.

Now, you've asked a number of questions about the financing of today's announcement, so I'll try once again to run through the explanation. It gets a little bit complicated because of the retroactivity of the program, going back into 1998, and we had to account for it in 1999.

What happened is that when we made those changes back on October 14, we weren't able with any certainty to predict within a very narrow range what exactly the cost was going to be. We could do it for the applications that had been approved, but it was very difficult to know how many new applications we were going to pick up and what that cost was going to be. So we went forward to Treasury with a range of what the cost would be, and really what it amounted to was getting approval for an additional \$232 million, because we went up to the \$200 million for both 1998 and '99.

As it turns out, if you look in the third-quarter report, you will see that in fact we are estimating that we will be lapsing about \$68 million. It's been approved, but I must point out that we weren't at the bottom of our range. We weren't at the top. We were pretty much in the middle there.

So we had that \$68 million that has already been approved in this year's budget. We also have coming out of the all-risk crop insurance some \$40 million that was not used. Actually the late frost caused the yield to go up, and the quality was good, so the indemnities for the all-risk were lower than actually averaged. So we had the \$40 million there. That takes us up to the \$108.5.

In the hail and crop reinsurance we have an investment. There's actually about \$300 million in that account. That investment money can be used for a number of things. Actually it's interesting when you read the agreement with the federal government and actually the legislation that the federal government works under under hail and crop insurance. It's pretty silent on what that money can be used for. So that's where the \$20 million for the reduction in premiums for the hail and crop insurance will come from.

Now, if you add those all up, you still see a bit of an overage. If you look in the budget, the one we're discussing, you will see that we did not include any money from the federal government. We did include some for the hail and crop insurance but not out of the disaster area. We know that we will be getting something. As a matter of fact, it will likely be even more than we got this year. If there is an overage in the acreage payment, that's where those extra dollars will come from. It will be that money that comes from the federal government. It doesn't show in this budget, but that's where the dollars will come from.

If you've got any more questions on it, I would be happy to try and answer those.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. LUND: Real quick. I'll just answer a couple more questions.

You talked about risk management and how we target dollars. We really are looking at it in two categories. We have risk management, which includes crop insurance and NISA, and then the disaster, which includes FIDP and the companion programs over there.

Yes, one of the things that we will be doing is continuing with the crop insurance review. Could these be joined? Should they be joined? Is that the way we should be moving forward? That whole thing will be looked at. One of the questions that's in the whole summit review is this whole issue about risk management. What

does the producer think he needs? It will tie in with the crop review. I think that covered them all.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Just two follow-ups. I thank the minister for explaining that there are actually no new dollars in this program announced today. It's all rearrangement within the budget. That's the way I understood it.

Now, you also spoke about the review that's going on for crop insurance. There's a committee in the communities of farm organizations that is dealing with a review of crop insurance. How are you tying in there? Is there any opportunity or any place in the budget where they would be getting some financial support to finish their review in the context of alternative programs, alternative ways of funding, alternative ways of structuring crop insurance so that it might be more reasonable? With that I'll end my conversation.

8:30

MR. LUND: Actually, do you remember in this year's budget the \$25.6 million that was for reinvestment? We kept \$500,000 out to run the hail and crop review. If there are additional dollars that need to be found to complete that review, then we'll find it within the department, but there will not be a line targeted just for that specific exercise.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating and capital expenditure \$449,553,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Carried.
Hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report the estimates of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. COUTTS: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports the approval of the following estimates and requests leave to sit again: operating expenses and capital investments, \$449,553,000.

Madam Speaker, I wish to table copies of a resolution agreed to in Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

Bill 3 Statute Revision Act

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise tonight to introduce and move for second reading Bill 3, Statute Revision Act.

The Statute Revision Act has been introduced to simplify and streamline the process of revising and consolidating our public statutes. Provincial statutes are revised periodically to consolidate amendments made since the previous revision, make editorial changes that do not alter the meaning, and generally to clean up a statute following years of amendment. For example, a revision allows statutes to be renumbered, and obsolete cross-references can be updated and spent provisions removed.

In past years these kinds of changes were made under the *Revised Statutes of Alberta 1980*, *Revised Statutes of Alberta 1970*, *Revised Statutes of Alberta 1955*, *Revised Statutes of Alberta 1942*, *Revised Statutes of Alberta 1922*. Currently, *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000* are being prepared. *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000* will revise all Alberta public statutes as of December 31, 2000, provided that Bill 3 is endorsed by this Legislature.

As in past years, *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000* will encompass every public statute of Alberta, and all of them will be revised at the same time. However, in the past every revision to public statutes was authorized by its own statute. Once the revision was completed, the authority of the statute was spent. For example, the previous two revisions were authorized by the Revised Statutes 1980 Act and the Revised Statutes 1970 Act. Bill 3 differs from the past in that it is designed to be an ongoing source of authority not only for the *Revised Statutes 2000* but for all subsequent revisions in the years ahead. Moreover, it will not only authorize the preparation of revisions for all public statutes in a given year, such as *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000*, but it will also authorize the preparation of a more limited revision of one or more statutes at any given time when appropriate. This will allow frequently amended statutes to be periodically consolidated and revised, making them easier to use. Some other provinces, such as British Columbia and Ontario, have also adopted this more flexible method of preparing revisions.

Bill 3 continues Alberta's traditional procedure for preparing revisions by authorizing Alberta's Chief Legislative Counsel to prepare a revision under the general supervision of the minister. In addition, Bill 3 provides comprehensive powers necessary for an effective revision. These powers, Madam Speaker, while comprehensive, are similar to those in past Alberta statute revision legislation and revision legislation in other provinces.

It's important to note that none of these powers authorizes making changes to the law. They are all editorial or cosmetic in nature. They include the power to consolidate amendments; to renumber and rearrange statute sections, parts of a statute, et cetera; to revise and alter language for gender neutrality; to alter language and punctuation to achieve a uniform mode of expression; to make minor amendments to clarify the intention of the Legislature, an example of which would be the updating of obsolete cross-references; to

correct clerical, grammatical, or typographical errors; and finally, to include information in schedules that the Chief Legislative Counsel considers appropriate to show the changes made by revision.

Madam Speaker, it's important to go through those powers and assure the public of Alberta and assure members of the Assembly that the Statute Revision Act has absolutely no intention of changing the law of the province. It's a consolidation and a revision of the law in order to provide an up-to-date, consolidated reference act for the public to use in understanding and dealing with the laws of the province.

For example, section 3(a) provides the power to "consolidate in the revision all amendments made to an enactment since the date of its enactment or last revision, as the case may be." That provision was also in *RSA 1970*. It was in the 1955 version. It was in the 1942 version. It was implicit in the 1922 version. It's implicit but not explicitly included in Ontario's and B.C.'s revised statutes acts. It is explicit in the federal revision act. The reason I point that out, Madam Speaker, is because there has been some suggestion publicly that by bringing in Bill 3, this government is in some way attempting to bring lawmaking powers under executive authority, and that is simply not the case.

This is an ordinary revision in the same context as the revisions made in 1980, 1970, 1955, 1942, and 1922. There is no suggestion that the law of Alberta will be revised in any substantive manner by this act. It's important for the public to understand that that's the case and that we're operating in the same manner with the exception of the provision of an ongoing power to revise individual statutes, which is a modernization of the process but not a change in the substantive ability to make law.

Section 3(b), again, has been included in every act prior to this in Alberta with the exception of 1922. Similar provisions are found in Ontario's and B.C.'s acts.

Section 3(c) has been brought forward from each of the earlier revision acts in Alberta and is also a similar provision to those in Ontario's, B.C.'s, and the federal government's acts.

Section 3(d), again, was included in 1980, 1970, and 1955 and is included in the B.C. act.

8:40

The one new provision to the Alberta act is 3(e), which allows to "revise and alter language to achieve gender-neutral terminology." That's a new provision in this act, that hasn't been in previous Alberta acts, but I think all members of the House would agree that it's an appropriate revision power for the Chief Legislative Counsel to have.

Section 3(f) provides that the people doing the revision can "revise and alter language so as to give better expression to the meaning of the law but not so as to change the sense of any enactment." That provision was also in the statute in 1980. It was in the statute in 1955. It was in the statute in 1942.

Section 3(g), "make any alterations in language and punctuation that are desirable." Again, those are provisions, powers that were brought forward from earlier acts.

Section 3(h), "make minor amendments to clarify what is considered to be the intention of the Legislature." Madam Speaker, that's not a new power. That's not an excessive power that's being given to Legislative Counsel. That's exactly the same power as was provided in 1980, 1970, 1955, and 1942, the same power as was provided in Ontario and in B.C., the same power as provided in the federal act, although the federal act takes the additional precaution of adding: without changing the substance of any enactment. That is, I think, implicit in the issue.

The point that I'm making, Madam Speaker, at some length –

some would say ad nauseam – is that while there are broad general revision powers incorporated into section 3 of this bill, there is no intention or ability for Legislative Counsel to change the law of Alberta in any substantive manner. This is simply providing them with the tools to make an appropriate update and revision of the law. I dwell on that because there has been some discussion in the public media about this bill, which I quite frankly thought was housekeeping and not one that would provide any controversy whatsoever.

Bill 3 also specifies the procedure for bringing a revision into force. First, the Lieutenant Governor in Council will direct that a completed revision is to be deposited with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly as the official copy of the revision. The official copy will be signed by the Lieutenant Governor and countersigned by the minister.

Secondly, the Lieutenant Governor in Council will specify by proclamation when the deposited revision is to come into force. This procedure, again, continues Alberta's traditional procedure in this area.

Thirdly, the bill obliges the Queen's Printer to print each revision in a printed form. For a limited revision of one act or just a few acts, the Queen's Printer has the option of publishing the revision in the appropriate annual volume of the *Statutes of Alberta*.

Fourthly, Bill 3 sets out the legal effects of a revision and provisions designed to provide a smooth transition from one revision to the next. These provisions cover the following: repeal of the replaced revision or enactment, how the revision is to be interpreted, and technical rules governing its legal effectiveness. A revision does not operate as a new law but simply as a consolidation of the law that it replaced.

Madam Speaker, Bill 3 is essentially housekeeping that will enable this Legislature to ensure that our public statutes are up to date, consistent, and easier to interpret than many of them have been after years of updating and amendment without consolidation. Consequently, this bill will also improve public access to the laws of this province. It's a bill whose time has come. In fact, I'm only surprised that we haven't had an earlier statute revision.

The coming into force provisions of this bill have also been questioned in the public media because we have followed the tradition that has been outlined, that has happened in Alberta and happens in quite a number of other jurisdictions across this country, in that the revisions are prepared by the senior bureaucrat, in this case the Chief Legislative Counsel, are deposited with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, and countersigned by the Lieutenant Governor and the minister. In some jurisdictions, including the federal jurisdiction, the revisions are brought into a committee of the Legislature for review, and some would suggest that that's the appropriate process in our Legislature.

However, what we've proposed in this bill is exactly the same process as has been used in the province of Alberta in each of the earlier revisions of our statutes and has served Albertans extremely well. In fact, I don't know of any challenges to the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* or their legal efficacy. I don't know of any question that's been raised in the past about the quality of the revisions. In fact, the process has worked extremely well for Albertans, and I believe that when we pass this bill, if this Legislature does as I urge them to do and passes it quickly, we'll be able to get on with providing Albertans with better access to their public laws.

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

MS OLSEN: I have some questions, Madam Speaker. You know, I understand what the minister is trying to do, and I understand that

this is a process that has occurred over time, from 1922 up to 1980, which was the last time there was a revision. In that 20 years, however, from 1980 to now we have seen a tremendous amount of – I guess I heard the word “tradition” used by the hon. Justice minister. Well, there has been an erosion of that tradition of passing law and this law being scrutinized by members of the Legislature.

We now are into an era where we have lawmaking by regulations. You know, we have delegated it to administrative organizations. We have all sorts of different functions where the actual role of the Legislature has been diminished. So when we talk about tradition, I have some difficulty with that, because we don’t operate in the same way we did in 1980, and we don’t operate in the same way that parliamentarians or legislators did in 1922. So we have seen a dramatic change, and that, of course, then brings some skepticism, skepticism certainly from myself and others. Obviously I notice some editorial comments in the paper, and I think some questions need to be asked, you know. Is it right to continue with the same process?

As I see the bill, I see that this bill gives the Chief Legislative Counsel sweeping power to revise the *Statutes of Alberta* under the direction of the Minister of Justice. Is it another power grab? You know, the hon. minister says: no, this is not. We have some very contentious issues in other pieces of legislation where we are giving ministerial discretion for a lot of things we ought not to be giving ministers discretion for. It does continue the trend of this government to have the Legislative Assembly pass, you know, shells of bills. The real bills, according to the government, are made in regulations. Well, this is where it ought to happen. We don’t need to see the regulations set by the minister coming out in an order in council.

I guess when we talk about language, we have to accept that language is the building blocks of thought. At least I would accept that. In legislation the entire effect of a provision or enactment can be radically altered with the addition, subtraction, or substitution of a single word. My concern, and I think it’s a real concern, is that in the past we’ve seen a lot of changes. In the act the minister outlined them here under section 3. “Alterations in language” can be made under this act.

What he is saying is that this is not different than anything else in the past. That may be so, Madam Speaker. That may be so. But you know what’s different? It’s the erosion of the role of the Legislature that’s different. That has occurred since 1992, and that is what raises concerns about this little piece of paper, this bill, that may not have been a concern in 1980. I think it’s tremendously important to draw that analogy and bring that to the attention of other members in the Legislature.

I’m very concerned, and I’ll give a little bit of background here. Right now we see the Government Organization Act allow for whole departments to appear and disappear at the whim of the executive. Previously the creation and dissolution of departments were the responsibility of the people, and that’s all those people out there, elected representatives. That’s us in this Assembly.

We don’t see that anymore. The scrutiny of estimates has become a travesty, with the elected representatives of the people unable to scrutinize each department’s budget, with a complicated and inflexible committee structure, which again strips the legislative branch of its oversight functions with respect to its traditional power of the purse.

8:50

Madam Speaker, we have unprecedented and what I believe is reckless and undemocratic use of closure to ram controversial legislation through this Assembly. I am waiting to see what happens

on Bill 11, because I believe that’ll be another one of those opportunities for this government to use that very undemocratic legislative hammer.

The other issue that concerns me is the use of public funds, Madam Speaker, for one-party standing policy committees, for which those chairs get an extra \$15,000 or \$20,000. All elected members are not allowed to go and speak at those meetings. Not every single elected member in this Legislature can do that. So that’s some concern for me as well.

I want to also draw the attention of the Assembly to the House of Commons and what the House of Commons does in relation to this particular issue. They have a Statute Revision Commission. They lay out what that commission is to do. They have parliamentary examination, and if I can, Madam Speaker, I’ll just outline some of what the examination is.

During the progress of the preparation of a revision or on the conclusion thereof, or both during the progress and on the conclusion thereof, the Minister shall cause drafts of the statutes so revised to be laid for examination and approval before such Committee of the House of Commons and such Committee of the Senate, or such Committee of both Houses of Parliament, as may be designated for the purpose of the examination and approval.

That’s of the revised statutes.

There’s absolutely nothing wrong with that, and that’s what we should be doing. We should be having an all-party – hey, I know; the Law and Regulations Committee comes to mind here. The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane is the chairman, and we have yet to see her chair this committee. If I have ever seen an opportunity for the minister to sway his caucus on the use of that committee, it would be with this document, with this bill.

MS BLAKEMAN: You mean show leadership?

MS OLSEN: Show leadership is really what I mean.

I do have a great deal of respect for the Minister of Justice, and that’s why I urge him to do the right thing and use that process.

I also want to draw the attention of the House to the British Columbia process, and the minister has alluded to that process here in his document. What I might say is that the Chief Legislative Counsel in British Columbia must give a revision to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly for presentation to a select standing committee of the Legislative Assembly designated by the Legislative Assembly to examine the revision. What, pray tell, might that committee be in this Legislature? That would be the Law and Regulations Committee, and that would be a very useful committee, I believe. I sit on that committee, and I would love to see how it operates. I think it would be outstanding.

We do have, Madam Speaker, examples of where, yes, the revisions are made; yes, we have the revisions brought forward, and they’re brought forward to us like a standing committee; and then they are ratified somewhere. They are ratified in the Assembly, and that’s where that should happen, Mr. Minister.

Let’s wake up to what’s happened in the world of politics, in this Assembly especially. I can’t speak for every other Assembly, but I can darn well speak for this one, and what I have seen over the years, the erosion of the role of the legislators in this particular building, is significant. It’s significant when you bring a bill like this forward, which shouldn’t be a controversial bill, but because of the process that exists now in the Legislature, it is a controversial bill.

MRS. SOETAERT: It’s an issue of trust.

MS OLSEN: Well, my colleague says it’s an issue of trust.

You know what? That's exactly what it is. I think the sweeping powers are given to Legislative Counsel and then from that day forward – and that's the change in this bill – they will be forever allowed to be the ongoing source of authority. I have a lot of difficulty with that, because that means that we would never see another one of these. It would just happen. We would never know if the rules were changed. We would never know what particular pieces of legislation were being changed.

What comes to mind, Madam Speaker, is Bill 1 from last year, Bill 1 in the spring session. That was the Premier's bill, the financial responsibility act; "Boy, oh boy, you know, I'm going to stand up and bring this bill in." Not six months later that bill was brought back for an amendment. There wasn't a great deal of change to that particular bill, and I'm just wondering, Madam Speaker, if that's the kind of change that we are going to see cropping up.

I know the Minister of Justice would say: no, that's not what I want, and that's not what I meant when I brought forward this bill. But he doesn't have the final say in his caucus, so somebody could slip things by him. I know he's very smart, but some people still could slip things by him without even talking to him. I mean, you know, other things have been slipped by him, unfortunately, and sometimes you pay the price for that. But you know what? It's a matter of trust, Madam Speaker, and that concerns me. Was that such a minor amendment to Bill 1, the Premier's flagship bill from last year? It was amended not four months later, in the fall session, because he broke his own law.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. HANCOCK: I rise under the appropriate rule of *Beauchesne's* to ask whether the hon. member would entertain a question.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Would the hon. member entertain a question?

MS OLSEN: No. No. I can't. I'm sorry. I've got to get my debate finished, but I will meet the hon. minister outside for a cup of coffee, and we can maybe have a chat.

Debate Continued

MS OLSEN: That's one of the issues I have.

We also saw, if you would think about it, Madam Speaker, last year in the fall the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act come forward. The Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act in fact had a lot of changes in it that should have been and are now being brought through the bill process. There was an effort to use miscellaneous statutes as a vehicle to make some significant changes to some bills. They weren't just inconsequential amendments and changes. They were significant. When we see those kinds of things, we again say: why is that happening?

We only want to see minor corrections come through miscellaneous statutes, that we can agree on, and that's also another process that we've been able to work out. Bring in miscellaneous statutes, and if it's an issue of language or grammar, renumbering, adding or changing or omitting a heading, bringing things in line with how the document or the act speaks, that's done in miscellaneous statutes. You know, add that process to the already limited ability now for us to really see and debate what's going on in the Legislature, then it does raise some real concerns.

9:00

You know, I'm cognizant of what the minister is trying to achieve. I understand, but I guess I don't feel comfortable that this bill bestows a fair amount of discretionary power on the Chief Legislative Counsel. Fine; I think they do a good job. I think: do the document, bring it forward to a committee, and let us look at it. Let's deal with it, and then let us ratify it here. It doesn't have to be a big, klutzy process. But, certainly, giving that power to the Legislative Counsel on an ongoing basis is not something that I feel is going to serve the best interests of this province.

I do want to bring up one issue that I'm very happy the minister dealt with, and that's the issue of gender-neutral language. You know, even from 1980 we've come a long way, because there has not been an accommodation ever, ever in the history of the Statute Revision Act to put statutes into gender-neutral language. But you know what? It's not just this that it should come through. There should be a critical analysis, a gender analysis applied to each and every piece of legislation that comes through. For every policy the government decides they're going to adopt, there should be a gender lens applied to that. Sometimes we miss things going through the process, and if we don't ask the question, "Is this good for everybody, all Albertans," then sometimes we miss the boat, Madam Speaker.

I do want to commend the minister for seeing to it. That particular section I think in this bill is 3(e). I really think he's done this piece of legislation justice by saying: yeah, we're going to revise all those statutes and put them into gender-neutral language. That's a big step for the other side.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, it was at least from the Paleolithic era to today.

MS OLSEN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has got some really fine things to say about that gender-neutral language.

With that, Madam Speaker, I think my time is closing here. I could run my time out. However, I would like to hear the rest of the debate on this particular piece of legislation. Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I certainly would never be able to match my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood for either the breadth of her debate or for the colour of her debate, but I'd like to offer a couple of additional observations. The cynics among us, when they hear my observations, may be inclined to share their perspectives.

The definition of opposition at least to one Canadian was as follows:

A viewing gallery from which to ridicule the party in power for mistakes similar if not identical to those that the opposition can be relied upon to commit should it take power.

Madam Speaker, when you're part of a party that's been in opposition for 76 years, you develop an amazing facility to be able to study legislation and to turn it upside down and to look through the minutiae of the legislation. There may be many who say: goodness; how can MLAs get exercised over Bill 3? We heard a wonderful presentation from the Minister of Justice that should allow all of us to sleep better at night. I meant after we leave this Chamber, Madam Speaker. I didn't want to accuse the Minister of Justice and Government House Leader of putting any of his colleagues to sleep in the course of the debate on Bill 3.

My observation, Madam Speaker, is simply this. Our job – and we take it seriously, and certainly my colleague from Edmonton-

Norwood spoke well to this – is not necessarily to take government at its word when it says: we only intend to do this, this, and this with a bill. Our job is to look at the bill, to scrutinize the bill, and see if in fact it would allow other things to be done, other powers to be exercised, powers to be exercised in a different way and in a different fashion from that outlined by the Minister of Justice as the chief proponent of Bill 3.

I'm going to offer a broader analysis to the bill, but first, Madam Speaker, if everybody would take their bill out of their briefing file, I'd refer all members to page 2, section 3. In committee stage we're going to be able to do a subsection review, but I simply wanted to draw the attention of all members, the Minister of Justice and other members, to three provisions that cause me to ask questions about whether this is a measured and appropriate response to deal with the need to have *Revised Statutes*.

Let me say this and just get it off the table right now. Madam Speaker, I love *Revised Statutes*. It's a great invention. It's a wonderful, wonderful device. It simplifies things for the pages in the Assembly in terms of being able to bring statutes to the attention of MLAs in debate. It makes it easier for lawyers in the course of doing their work to be able to access a statute law of their province. It makes it easier for Albertans that want to find out what the law of the land is, to be able to access a revised statute. I agree completely with the Minister of Justice. I'm disappointed also that we haven't had one since 1980.

In any event, Madam Speaker, now that members have got their bills out and are looking at page 2, I refer members to section 3 and three provisions that I think are problematic, using whatever sort of criteria you might want to apply, especially 3(h). This is what the Chief Legislative Counsel may do, section 3(h), "make minor amendments to clarify what is considered to be the intention of the Legislature."

Now, is there a definition of what is minor? No. There is not a definition of what is minor. Is there a definition that tells us what would be the intention of the Legislature in any given bill? Well, Madam Speaker, I sit in this Chamber probably just about as much as any other one of the 82 MLAs. I may be a much slower student than other members in the Assembly, but sometimes I'm a bit puzzled and a bit confused in terms of precisely what is the intention of the Legislature.

You see, I hear the Minister of Justice make one of his typically compelling and persuasive arguments. I hear an equally persuasive and compelling argument from my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood, and I may hear the Member for Rocky Mountain House, that esteemed minister of agriculture, make an observation, and I may think that that is persuasive too. We have a vote, and then if you were to ask me: so what's the intention of the Legislature? I know what we've passed, but the Chief Legislative Counsel also has access to the text of the bill, but the question is: does he know what was intended?

9:10

Well, Madam Speaker, on some bills I think I get it, and then there are some other bills where there's always a sense I have to stand up for the next one, because it's just gone right over me. Sometimes I don't quite get what the purpose of the bill was, what the intention was. Now, the Chief Legislative Counsel is clearly much more astute than this member, and I have every confidence in the current Chief Legislative Counsel, but we're talking about a forum and a model and a system that isn't dependent on a particular personality or a particular individual. It's the office. So I'm a bit troubled with the breadth of section 3(h).

Next I'd ask members to look at section 3(i). This is page 2,

Member for Calgary-Bow. "Make changes to reconcile apparently inconsistent provisions." Now, Madam Speaker, this is one of my favorites. I had never realized before I came to this Assembly the extent to which elected people can deal in the areas of contradiction, inconsistency, and confusion. It's becoming almost a stock-in-trade. We find statutes that are contradictory. We find sometimes provisions within the same bill that seem contradictory. Nonetheless, some of these things get passed. There's no definition that says what's an apparently inconsistent provision. Is this only in terms of form? Is this not treading, however timidly, on that bigger issue of substantive law? So I ask that question. It seems to me a power that is capable of abuse, and I think that's part of what our job as an opposition is, to query whether there's potential here for these sections to be used in a way that's perhaps not intended by the Minister of Justice tonight but could be misused by others for different purposes.

The third provision that troubles me and that I'd encourage members to look at is section 3(n):

Make minor amendments to other enactments not being revised that are required to reconcile them with a revised enactment as if the minor amendments were amendments consequential to the revised enactment.

Now, once again there's no definition of what a minor amendment is. We have seen numerous statutes before brought into this Assembly, and they're presented solemnly, I'm sure sincerely, by the sponsoring proponent with the comment: this is housekeeping. Madam Speaker, how many times have you heard those words? This is a housekeeping bill. When those bills get first reading, often that's the comment.

Then when we get to second reading, Madam Speaker, if the opposition is on their toes or maybe a government private member, somebody stands up and asks a question – and sometimes those questions are penetrating, and sometimes those questions are incisive – about: is this really housekeeping, could this be used for other purposes, and so on?

Well, we're not going to have the chance here, because there's a direct line between the Chief Legislative Counsel over here and the Lieutenant Governor over there, and these things go like one of those Japanese bullet trains. The decision is made, and it shoots down the line and out the other side before Albertans know what's hit them.

I make this respectful suggestion, that I'm most interested in working with the Minister of Justice or anybody in his department to take 3(h), (i), and (n) and see if there isn't a way that reasonable men and women could agree to modify (h), (i), and (n) to remove the ambiguity, to make it clear that in fact the bill does exactly what the Minister of Justice had said he wants it do.

There's another way of trying to remedy this bill, Madam Speaker, and it is to do what the federal government does and some other provinces do, which is to have some kind of an oversight mechanism of this Assembly. That would typically be a standing committee of the Legislative Assembly with representation from the government party, the Official Opposition, the third party, and maybe we'd have an independent member on there. What this allows us to do is that the Chief Legislative Counsel comes and makes a bit of a report. He plunks down on the table and he says: Madam Speaker, I've reviewed these statutes, and here are the changes that I'm proposing to do this modification. You would find that the committee would quickly zero in on those items that are contentious, discount and move over those that are not, and in jig time what you'd have is attention drawn to those things that require some amplification, some qualification, some additional provisos to make sure that it simply does what the Legislature thinks it should do.

In fact, Madam Speaker, there's a bit of a process that purports to

do that now. We have the Member for Peace River and his never-ending regulatory review committee. I don't remember the appropriate name of the task force, but I think all members know what I'm talking about.

MR. CLEGG: Gone.

MR. DICKSON: Has that been sunsetted?

MR. CLEGG: Yes. Well, no. It's changed.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, I don't want the Member for Peace River to come in and on a point of order say tomorrow that I've somehow tarred his good name by suggesting that he's still involved with dealing regulations and he's responsible for the 700 or 800 regulations that are whipped through this provincial government on an annual basis.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, it's Grande Prairie-Wapiti that does it now.

MR. DICKSON: I understand that a new member now has the responsibility, so I want to correct myself on that. Grande Prairie-Wapiti. I understand that there's another process, too, that the government has. It's the government's legislative review committee. I'm not sure I've got the right name.

There are very capable people on both of those processes. But do you know something, Madam Speaker? They're invisible to the rest of us. It's an internal caucus function. It's not a function of this Legislative Assembly. So unless our friend from Calgary-Glenmore is going to come in and sort of table the minutes and the workings of his legislative review committee or the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti is prepared to come in and report and answer questions about his regulatory review responsibility, you know, the rest of us are sort of left in the dark once again. I don't think that's good lawmaking, and I don't think that's the best that the very intelligent men and women in this Assembly can come up with in terms of dealing with that.

It seems to me we do one of two things with this bill. If we want as eagerly as I do to get that new 2000 set of *Revised Statutes* – it's sort of like when the national mint issues a new set of coins and you run out to get one for your grandkids, or when Canada Post brings out a new stamp. I mean, some of us stand in line. Pick me for that first copy of the *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000*. I can see there will probably be a stampede to the Queen's Printer when that happens. In the meantime, Madam Speaker, I think we can either improve on the oversight process and/or we can deal with some of the problematic parts in section 3. So my intention was simply to highlight those concerns. The Official Opposition understands the importance of revised statutes, but let us recognize that there's a context.

I thought the Member for Edmonton-Norwood spoke eloquently to the undermining of the supremacy of the Legislature as we see more and more delegated lawmaking, subordinate legislation it's called, whether it's regulations, ministerial orders, other kinds of departmental orders. So much of that stuff is the things that affect the men and women of this province, affect their families and affect their businesses, but it's not done in this place, and it's not done by these folks. It's done outside this room in some dark, cloistered corner somewhere by who knows who.

9:20

Maybe we get let in on the secret of the distillate after the process, but that's not good enough, Madam Speaker. I know it's not good

enough for the people in Lacombe. I know it's not good enough for you, it's not good enough for me, and I think we can find a better way of doing it. I think we can do that without having to scrap the entire bill, and we'll make sure that those *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000* are there in their mint, pristine condition waiting for the first eager batch of purchasers lining up now, probably, at Queen's Printer. It'll be like going to a rock concert. You know, you've got to get down and stand in line first to get your ticket to be able to then go and stand in line for the main event.

Thanks very much, Madam Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to be able to comment on this Bill 3, Statute Revision Act.

I listened very carefully to what the Minister of Justice was saying in introducing this bill, and I agree with much of what's been said previously in that I think we do need something that is going to allow us a comprehensive update of the laws of the province. My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo has spoken on the need. I mean, it's been 20 years since the last time we had one of these revised statutes acts, and I think we do need it. I've had people point out to me the number of inconsistencies that we have in language even over the 20 years. For instance, in some cases I know we're referring to a spouse; in others places in the acts we refer to a wife or a husband. There's a whole variety of different names that are put upon essentially the same people, and that kind of thing needs to be made more consistent, for example.

But I think despite the best intentions – and I know this is an honourable member that has proposed this – what I see is an erosion of the powers of this Chamber. Essentially we're being asked: well, trust us; just trust us. And I am not willing to trust this government or to relinquish my responsibility in the preparation and supervision of legislation that's created in this Chamber. I'm not willing to relinquish that with a "just trust me." I think there are a number of examples, even in my short time in this Chamber, where I have – and it's sad to see one so young become so cynical so quickly. It is a sad thing, but truly . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: So young. So very young.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you.

. . . in my short experience here I've had good reason to become cynical, and the "just trust me" doesn't work for me.

Miscellaneous statutes bill: there's a perfect example. When I first started in this Chamber, miscellaneous statutes was, you know, four or five pages long. We're now getting the 10-volume set. It's coming out and it's like 30, 40 pages long. It's amending dozens of acts. This is not minor administrative housekeeping. I mean, for heaven's sake, the great controversy of last year around riding in the back of pickup trucks and laws to either prohibit or allow that ended up coming through under miscellaneous statutes. That's not small stuff. That affected and was of great interest to a number of Albertans. It wasn't administrative in any way.

MRS. SOETAERT: No, it wasn't. That would be a good example.

MS BLAKEMAN: When I look at the crafting of bills . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member. I just was wondering whether Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert really wanted to go on the speaking list, because she seems to be in tandem with you.

MRS. SOETAERT: She's inspired me. Absolutely.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Well, hon. member, may I remind you that there's only one person who has the floor at a time. Edmonton-Centre has the floor.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much for your wise assistance. Always appreciated, Madam Speaker.

MRS. SOETAERT: Don't you appreciate me?

MS BLAKEMAN: Not at the moment, no.

So when we talk about the crafting of bills in this Legislature – and I've spoken about this before – we can make mistakes and we have made mistakes, but generally we're relying on the skills of the legislators, aided by staff experts. I look at what I think is one of the best pieces of legislation, and that's our Constitution. When you look at how long ago that was created and how well it has stood up, how carefully it was crafted, even they made mistakes. For instance, they couldn't at the time have anticipated the advent of television or the use of satellites for communication, but it was crafted in a well enough way that you could look at it and figure out where to put it, where it was logical.

There's always interpretation that goes on, but I think that interpretation which goes on around legislation needs to be done by the legislators, not by staff. You need to be able to go back and look at the remarks in the debate when the bill was first coming up. It even helps if you're able to talk to the people that are here, and I know my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo spoke about this. What is the intention? How are we supposed to find that intention?

I think there's something else that's being called into play here with this Bill 3, and that's the concept of ministerial responsibility. We have operated under that process for some time, and that is that as the legislators, we do the deed and we take the heat. The government has staff advisers who prepare the ministers. They give them good advice and background material, and the minister accepts the responsibility for what's going on and protects the staff from the scrutiny of the public or exposure to the public; the media, for instance. What happens to that when the Chief Legislative Counsel is now the person that's responsible for this? I think that opens up and skews that whole concept of ministerial responsibility, and I don't think we want to go there, because in the end, who is responsible for the mistakes, then, if there are any mistakes? I think as legislators we're willing to accept the responsibility for that, but can we be putting that on a staff person? I don't know.

So I think there's a great possibility for erosion of powers here, and we're back to the trust idea. I think, well, you know, where else have I seen examples of this that have caused me to not trust what the government's doing? Well, there are things like the standing policy committee. Now, those are committees which are chosen by the government, funded out of the taxpayer dollars, funded out of the budget that we pass, but the information that goes on there and the decisions that are made there are not open to all of the legislators in this Chamber. It's very specific to government. We don't have entry to that, those of us on this side.

The Law and Regulations Committee. Never been called. I don't think it has been called in a dozen years. It's certainly never been called during my time here, and the whole purpose of that committee has been to review that legislation and those recommendations that support that legislation. Is it given an opportunity to act here with the all-party participation? No, it is not. It's never called, and that, I think, is an erosion of democracy.

Let me give you an example. We've heard the talk about how the

Queen's Printer will be printing these changes. The Minister of Justice said that if it isn't a very big change, well, they can just publish something in the *Statutes of Alberta*. Well, I've spoken before about how difficult it is for a member of the public to actually find out exactly what it is that's gone on in this Chamber or that's happened with the government. I mean, has anybody here ever really tried to understand and glean information from an order in council. It's a few words long, you know, regarding some sale of land. That's all you get from it. To be able to plow backwards and know the right people to call and be able to find out exactly what that meant is very difficult. So for the public the idea of being able to follow what's been changed here – and it can be a substantial change as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo pointed out. Very difficult.

9:30

The whole idea of what I've seen here with this government essentially creating shell legislation is the way I heard another member refer to it, in which the legislation is really just the shell, and then all the regulations are where the meat of the thing is. Well, I had a friend that was working on a committee for a city, something to do with reviewing the regulations under the MGA. It was about the property tax, and they were on some kind of appeals committee. They had a case come before them. I don't know what the case was. They reported back to me and said: we were totally confused about why this case would come before us; it seemed to fit all the criteria. Then they found out that the regulations had been changed.

Well, here was a group of people volunteering for the city, under the auspices of the city, who weren't even aware that there had been a change in regulations. That backs up my point. It's very difficult for the public to find out what's going on. So to have even more done, not even under regulations but under some sort of Chief Legislative Counsel and then put out through the *Statutes of Alberta* – impossible, almost impossible for people to find out what's going on.

The Public Accounts Committee, which I am very pleased to sit on, is another one that's meant to be an all-party committee, but the members of the committee that have the majority on it, which of course is the government side, consistently refuses to adopt the Canadian public accounts committees' rules and processes. So that committee is very narrow in its focus and what it's able to do.

Let's look at another thing: the whole budget process. Now, that to me is truly an erosion of what has happened here. We have supposedly 20 days of debate that are now split in two, and we're debating two a night and sometimes even three departments a night. That's an erosion of the powers of this Legislative Assembly. Do we see more of that under this bill?

Increasing use of closure. Increasing use of the privative clause. There's another one. I had a lawyer friend chatting to me the other day. He reviews legislation for his company. He said: you know, it's really interesting; in the last seven years or so we increasingly see the use of the privative clause in new legislation that's coming out. That is part of what is creating these pieces of shell legislation. The privative clause is the one that says that, you know, the minister is God, that nobody can challenge him in court or anything, any decisions that are made. I mean, to me it's an extreme example of hubris. Nonetheless, we've got more and more and more of these showing up in the last seven years. Very interesting. [interjections] There has been increasing use of the privative clause in legislation here in the last seven years. Go back and look. I went downstairs to the library, and I asked and looked. I did.

We know that regulations are difficult enough to get hold of, certainly to be aware of any changes that are happening. I've talked

about how difficult it is to decipher or find out what the real information is behind orders in council. This bill is talking about taking what this Chamber does a step further beyond all the things I've just detailed that already pull away from the powers of this Chamber and this Assembly, all those things I listed. The standing policy committees, not calling the all-party committees to sit at all, like Law and Regulations has never been called, the budget process, the use of closure, the increasing use of the privative clause: all those things are taking away from what this Chamber does. This legislation can take us one step further away again.

Now, happily I notice something in here I like besides the concept of being able to update the legislation. It is to "revise and alter language to achieve gender-neutral terminology." Well, you know, Madam Speaker, it's a heck of a long way from the paleolithic age to today, but I'm very pleased to see that some members of this government have made that giant leap across that chasm of time. They have moved into the 21st century. I am proud of you for that, and I thank you for that. We should be able to achieve gender-neutral language in our legislation in this day and age.

MRS. SOETAERT: Oh, that would be something.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yeah. So I do congratulate the minister and the government for being able to put that forward in the legislation. I'm very pleased to see that. It doesn't counteract fully all my other hesitations about what's possible if this bill gets passed.

One of the other things that leapt out at me was the thing about "making minor amendments to other enactments" that are revised in order to reconcile everything. Now, that's really interesting. There's been a bill introduced, Bill 16, the condo amendment act, and that's a good example, because we have a previous condo amendment act from 1996 which has never been proclaimed. We're now amending the condo act again, I guess the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000. If this goes through, do we end up with amendments or with – how are they putting it? "Minor amendments to other enactments" which haven't been enacted yet? Can the original bill from 1996 be changed when it hasn't ever been proclaimed? Again, what kind of scrutiny is available there? What kind of information is available to the public there?

So I have great hesitation with what is in this bill, and I think that in the worst case scenario it is a huge step towards further erosion of the powers of this Assembly, which I think is wrong, very wrong. But, as I've said, there are a few good things in there.

I am going to ask that we adjourn debate on Bill 3, because I am looking forward to being able to return later at another time to be able to further debate this bill. I know there's disappointment from others who didn't get to speak, but I would ask that we adjourn, Madam Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

9:40

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd call the Committee of the Whole to order, please.

Bill 6 Special Payment Act

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It's an honour and a pleasure this evening to rise to speak to Bill 6, the Special Payment Act, in Committee of the Whole. I just have a few comments and questions that I'll pose to the minister tonight in hopes that he will be able to alleviate some of the fears the widows expressed to me when they had an opportunity to read this bill.

The first thing they noticed in the bill was that there was no provision for the WCB to identify or notify individuals whose spouses were killed in a job-related accident. They did note, however, that a web site has been set up and that if they contact that web site, they will be able to have a kit sent out to them which will inform them how they go about applying for this special payment. They are very concerned that some of the people who should be receiving this special payment will not.

Now, they made a concerted effort as well earlier on in this process where they made a freedom of information request to the WCB so they could get a list of the names of those widows or widowers who were or would be affected by this, but they were denied. So they went at it from a little different angle, and they made another request that the WCB contact on their behalf those people who would be surviving spouses, but again this request was denied. So they do have some concerns in this regard, Mr. Minister.

Their next major concern with this particular bill is how the WCB arrived at the figure of \$80,000. In talking with a number of the surviving spouses, they indicated that if indeed this figure is \$80,000, this would be less than a three-year payment by today's rates that widows would receive if their spouses were killed in a job-related accident or how their pensions would have been increased over the years.

The actuaries on one of these widow's pensions at today's rates indicate that this pension would be in the neighbourhood of \$1,100 per month. When she had actuaries done looking at retroactive pay with the increments that would have occurred over the time since her husband died, with interest and retroactive to 1985 \$80,000 is \$120,00 shy of what she should be getting. So she certainly is concerned that she isn't receiving the amount of money that she feels she's entitled to.

As well, in the bill itself in section 2(3): "No interest is payable on the special payment." So that was another question: why would there not be any interest payable to them?

They were quite concerned that the only input their group had with the WCB occurred at a meeting when they were asked what they wanted as a settlement. Now, they indicated at that time that they would like a settlement very similar to those that occurred in British Columbia and Ontario. In both of those, pensions were reinstated with interest back to 1985 when section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into force. Looking at this, again this is one of the major reasons that widows in other provinces were successful and why these widows felt they were entitled to their pensions. Under section 15(1) in the Charter, and this is under the section entitled Equality Rights,

every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

So in this particular case they definitely felt they had been discriminated against because some widows post 1982 were treated differently than they were.

As well, it is interesting to note that in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick widows are awaiting pending decisions from the courts in regards to their settlement. In Nova Scotia, Madam Chairman, I do have a copy of the summary of Bill 90 benefits, which was An

Act to Amend the Workers' Compensation Act. This was passed in the Nova Scotia Legislature on April 13, 1999. It received royal assent on April 16, 1999, and was fully proclaimed on April 28, 1999.

I would like to point out highlights of two particular sections in here. These are under the new benefits sections 4 and 6. Under section 4: "Reinstatement of pensions retroactively to January 1, 1999 to survivors who remarried and had their benefits terminated before April 17, 1985." As well, section 3: "Pensions become payable for life (instead of age 65) to survivors where the worker was injured pre-February 1, 1996 and died on or after February 1, 1996." This benefit will be proclaimed on April 28, 1999. Again, a very different type of settlement than what we have here. I look under section 5: "Reinstatement of pensions retroactively to the date benefits ended to survivors who remarried on or after April 17, 1985 and before October 1, 1992." Madam Chairman, with your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of this article that I was referring to.

Another major concern that a number of these widows have – and these are people that today are living on provincial assistance, whether it be AISH or whether it be social services or whatever – is how this lump sum payment, this special payment will affect those people that are now receiving those benefits. So they did have some concerns about how these members' assistance would be affected by a lump sum payment.

Another thing they saw in the bill but were not in favour of is why there are no death benefits to the surviving family members. I was pleased today, Madam Chairman, to see in the announcement regarding the farmers in need that they will receive a speedy payment. Has the minister any time lines on how quickly after they have applied the surviving spouses will be paid the moneys which are due?

I guess one last point I would like to make for the minister is that I don't see any provision in this particular bill as to when it will come into force. Would the minister be able to tell me if an amendment is required to have this bill put into force upon royal assent or not?

9:50

With those comments, Madam Chairman, I will conclude my comments on Bill 6 in the Committee of the Whole, and I thank you for this opportunity.

[Mrs. Laing in the chair]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Nice to see you in the chair. Just a couple of points that I want to make on this bill before us, that being Bill 6, the Special Payment Act. First of all, congratulations to the government for listening and for doing something. It's not often that I see that happen with this government, and I have to put it on the record and say "congratulations" when I do see it happen.

I think the history behind the creation of this particular piece of legislation is a really good example of advocacy from individuals. I often hear people say: "Well, you know, what's the point? What difference could I possibly make to influence legislation or to advocate for myself to make a change? There's no use. They never listen. You can't fight city hall." All that sort of attitude. I always say: "No, you have to make your voice heard. Use every avenue that's open to you. Whatever form of advocacy or ways to raise the issue that you feel comfortable with, use them. If that's being in a

march and carrying a placard, do it. If it's writing letters or phoning someone's office, do it."

This group, the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group, did exactly that. They did all those things. They contacted members of the government. Each member of the group contacted their own MLAs. They contacted a number of us in the opposition, and I had an opportunity to work with the group for some time as well. I first met them when they came to us in the spring of '97, shortly after I was elected. They laid out what their concerns were, and I could agree that there was an injustice here. There was an unfairness; there's no question. I commend the Member for Edmonton-Glenarry for following through with this group and staying with them and advising them, coaching them, and following through on giving advice and guidance to this group. I know there are others out there who deserve credit for assisting them.

I think the credit really goes to the women themselves, who did follow through. They did keep at it. You know, they phoned one MLA and didn't get enough action, so they phoned two and three and four. At one point I think they had about four of us in the opposition all arranging different meetings for them and doing research for them and giving advice. That's fine. That's good. That's exactly what they should be doing. That's exactly how you do advocate for yourself to influence policy and to get legislation changed to get inequities addressed.

I'm going to be able to talk about this bill for a long time and use it as an example for other people, because the truth is that there was no legislation. There was no sort of legal avenue this group could use to force the government to deal with them. They kept at it, and they have been able to advocate for themselves and end up with a piece of legislation before this Assembly.

Now, having said all of that, there are just a couple of points I want to raise. Time is of the essence with this bill. Others have spoken to that, so I won't go on at length, but time is of the essence with this bill. Sometimes at the end of a bill you'll get instructions on when it's proclaimed. Sometimes it's a specific date, or sometimes it's proclaimed on royal assent or when something else happens. I'm not seeing that in this bill. When time is of the essence, as it is here – we have some elderly and some very frail and some very ill members of this group, terminally ill even – it is critical that this legislation be proclaimed as soon as possible. So if an amendment were going to happen here, that's the amendment I would like to see, that there be a specific date put in here, ASAP, to be able to process the claims and to be able to get the money into the hands of these women as quickly as possible. That's what I'd like to see.

Secondly, how was the figure that was quoted in the bill, I believe . . .

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. BONNER: It's not quoted.

MS BLAKEMAN: It's not quoted in the bill.

MR. BONNER: It's by WCB.

MS BLAKEMAN: Okay. We know that the amount that's under consideration as a settlement for each individual as a result of the passage of this bill is a figure set, I believe, at \$80,000. I haven't heard how that was arrived at. I know that some of the women feel: "Well, why that amount? It should have been more for various and sundry other reasons." So I'm wondering what the criteria were to calculate that particular figure. How was it arrived at? I think if we

went back and looked at the amounts of money these individuals would have had had the program stayed as it was, it would amount to a heck of a lot more than \$80,000. But I'm interested in how it was arrived at.

The third point is the take-it-or-leave-it sort of proviso that's in the legislation. There's no further room for discussion about this. They either take the whole thing and everything that goes with it or they're completely out in the cold. That's a bit draconian, given the circumstances these women have come through to get to this point. This government often tends to the draconian in legislation, so I'm not surprised; I'm just wondering why it happened in this particular piece of legislation, which I would have to say falls under the kinder, gentler pieces of legislation I've seen come forward here.

The last point is: what happened to these women and what is unfair about what happened to these women is that WCB widows in this province were treated differently. In the same circumstances they were treated differently based on an arbitrary date. That's what's unfair about it, and that's what has allowed other provinces to do a Charter challenge. It was the same group of people with exactly the same circumstances that got them into a particular place, and they are being treated differently. But this legislation does address that wrong. I'm very pleased to see that.

I would hope this newfound understanding of equity carries through into other pieces of legislation and into other regulations and into the budget process and a number of other processes that are available to this government. We certainly need to see more of that, particularly from my point of view as the opposition critic for women's issues. I see a lot of this inequity. This is a first step along what I hope is going to be a long road of better understanding about how inequity is created and how it should be dealt with and treated fairly to address the wrong that was caused.

With those few points, I'm very pleased to be supporting this bill, wholeheartedly I might add. I don't want to delay passage of this bill by any means. As I say, there is a need here for a very quick passage and a quick settlement. I wish I could see a date in here. Perhaps I can get the minister to do a government amendment to it or to enable very fast passage of the bill.

With those few remarks, Madam Chairman, I will give the floor to someone else.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

10:00

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Just for the purpose of clarification for all the members of the Legislature. When a bill comes before us without a date for proclamation, such as Bill 6, it's then inferred that the date will be at royal assent. I use as my authority the Interpretation Act, under section 4(1):

The date of the commencement of an Act or of any portion of an Act for which no other date of commencement is provided in the Act is the date of assent to the Act.

I think, then, that the request for expediency will be handled, because upon final reading and upon royal assent the act is in place.

In conclusion to my remarks here at the committee level, I want to again just make it clear that the role of the government in bringing this bill forward is simply to provide an avenue for settlement to be reached. The government is not responsible to nor does it have the authority to in fact effect what that settlement would be. Certainly I have compassion and sensitivity toward the widows and their plight, but I think we also have to think for a moment of current-day employers, who after all are going to be the ones to have to pay for whatever settlements are made.

Once again, I would remind all members of the House that Bill 6 provides an avenue. If someone feels that the settlement that's offered is not appropriate, is not the proper amount, they still have of course, as they should have, access through the court.

So with those comments, Madam Chairman, I would like to move that this bill be reported when we rise and report.

[The clauses of Bill 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 6.

[Motion to report progress on Bill 6 carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. COUTTS: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports the following: Bill 6. I would also like to table copies of the documents tabled during Committee of the Whole this day for the official records of the Assembly.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:06 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 15, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O God, grant that we the members of our province's Legislature may fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all our people. Guide our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition on public health care to present today. It's 120 names from Edmonton, St. Albert, Leduc, Sherwood Park. They urge that the government of Alberta "stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care" in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to present a petition to the Legislature. There are 117 Albertans that have signed this petition, and they are from Sherwood Park, Ardrossan, and Edmonton. They are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I would like to present this petition of 144 individuals from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 140 people from Edmonton, Warburg, Fort Saskatchewan, Leduc, and Beaumont urging the government "to protect, support, and enhance public health care in Alberta and to ban for-profit, private hospitals from receiving public dollars."

MS LEIBOVICI: It's my great pleasure this afternoon to present a petition by 120 Albertans from Bon Accord, Spruce Grove, Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, and St. Albert indicating that they, too, want the government to protect and support our public health care system and to "ban for-profit, private hospitals."

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition

signed by 635 Albertans from Valleyview, Fort McMurray, Lacombe, Rimbey, Bluffton, Eckville, Blackfalds, Leslieville, Winfield, Millet, Pearce, Falher, and Calgary for a total of 4,150 petition signatures to date. The petitioners are asking the Legislative Assembly of Alberta "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to my report of the Standing Committee on Private Bills, which I gave Tuesday, March 14, 2000, I move that the five petitions for private bills presented in the Assembly on Wednesday, March 8, 2000, now be deemed to be read and received.

[Motion carried]

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I would ask that the petition I presented on March 14 on listing of drugs for osteoporosis now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Alberta Government to take an enlightened preventative approach and add the newer and more effective medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, wish to have the petition I presented on March 14 regarding private health care now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd ask that the petition I presented on March 14 now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the petition which I presented to this Assembly on March 14 urging the government to stop its promotion of private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Notices of Motions

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 40 I'll be asking for the unanimous consent of the Legislative Assembly to debate the following matter of pressing urgency.

Be it resolved that the Assembly, recognizing that the ongoing *Calgary Herald* strike and Mr. Conrad Black's refusal to engage in fair collective bargaining is an indictment of Alberta's unfair laws, urges the government to appoint a disputes inquiry board to facilitate the settlement of this dispute.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. Both are letters. One is from the Bonavista Eye Clinic, in which the writer says that "the idea of contracting out services is a sound and wise move."

The other is from the Kensington Clinic, which performs therapeutic abortions, and it points out that this clinic now charges the Calgary regional health authority "less than what was charged to patients privately between 1991 and 1996."

I would like to table these two letters, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, today I have two tablings. First of all, I wish to table with the Assembly five copies of the report *Building Better Bridges*, prepared by the Hon. Gene Zwozdesky, Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. This is a very comprehensive report. [interjections] I regret that the members across the way think it's laughable; it certainly isn't. It's a serious report dealing with a very, very important topic. Along with it is a consultation form that would be sent asking the people involved in the review to comment on the recommendations. I wish to table that with the Assembly.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of a news release I issued today along with an independent legal opinion which highlights the very significant similarity between Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, and Saskatchewan's Health Facilities Licensing Act, which was passed in 1996 by a New Democratic government, now a New Democratic/Liberal coalition.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the six copies of the responses to the members' questions from Committee of Supply on Tuesday, March 7. These responses were given orally in the Assembly last night as well.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Point of order.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five letters and e-mails opposing Bill 11, which include an e-mail from a doctor in the Premier's riding, an e-mail from Rimbey in the health minister's riding, and the others from Edmonton and Calgary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

1:40

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings that I'll run through very quickly this afternoon with your permission. The first is an excerpt of a document entitled *An Opportunity to Develop a New Fiscal Partnership for Canada's Social Programs*, the 1999 Western Finance Ministers' Report dated May 20, 1999, in which our Treasurer was a participant. In part, the report concludes:

Western Canada, along with other provinces and territories, will receive an equitable share of the health supplement and the increased cash floor, as these will be paid on an equal per capita basis. This is a constructive response to the 1996 Western Finance Ministers' call for a more equitable allocation of the [Canada health and social transfer].

Mr. Speaker, the second tabling is *Current Analysis*, a document from the Royal Bank of Canada dated September 1999, and in part it concludes that "we project that by 2004/5 Ottawa will have a fiscal surplus amounting to \$25.9 billion, or 2.2% of gross domestic product." That of course is important in the calculation of tax room.

The third tabling is an analysis done on the province's flat tax. It's updated figures showing that unless there is a significant change in the personal exemptions, at the \$35,000 taxable income level, the \$50,000 taxable income level, and \$65,000 taxable income level the rate at 10.5 percent is still an Alberta disadvantage to taxpayers in this province.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, a report titled *Projected Reduction in Alberta's 11% Flat Tax Rate to Flow Through Federal Government Tax Measures affecting Alberta, 2004/05-2007/08*. The major conclusion is a required reduction in the Alberta 11 percent flat tax to fully capture Alberta tax relief would be 7.82 percent.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the information of the House this afternoon a letter I received from Harold S. Millican of Calgary. He is one of "130 Calgarians from all walks of life concerned about the quality of print journalism" in the city of Calgary and "the negative impact that the current labour dispute at the *Calgary Herald* is having."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 109 I am pleased to table with the Assembly the 11th annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office for the calendar year ended December 31, 1999. This report includes the third annual report of the Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. A copy of the report is being distributed to all members.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to the Assembly today on your behalf four prominent Alberta business leaders. They are Kenneth Stankievech, president of Canspec; Adrian Met, general manager of RTD Quality Services Inc.; Robert L. Duke, QC, Miller Thomson, barristers and solicitors; and Val

Lopatka, Lopatka & Company, barristers and solicitors. I had the opportunity to have lunch with them today as a result of an auction luncheon that they purchased at the Aaron Moser fund-raiser. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 61 students from the Gibbons school. I must say that the tour guides indicated to me that it was one of the best classes they've had as far as attentiveness. They're seated in the members' gallery. They're also accompanied by teachers Mrs. Cindy Hamilton, Mrs. Rhonda Hruschak, Mrs. Sheligne Connolly; parents Mrs. Donna McDonnell, Mr. Don Butler, Mrs. Becky Stoddard. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you a very familiar face to many legislators and staff of the Legislature Building, and that is Mr. Oscar Lacombe, who is seated in your gallery this afternoon. Mr. Lacombe was the first Metis Sergeant-at-Arms appointed in the province of Alberta and in Canada, if I may add, and held this position at the Legislative Assembly from 1980 to 1993.

Oscar was renowned throughout the Legislature Building for his wit, sense of humour, and friendly disposition. However, when it was time to carry the Mace and lead the procession into the Assembly, Oscar was extremely professional and delivered his responsibilities for MLA security and the Assembly with great pride and dignity. On behalf of all members in the House, past and present, we thank you, Oscar, for your commitment and years of service.

Oscar currently resides in the town of Two Hills in the beautiful constituency of Vegreville-Viking. Mr. Speaker, I would ask that Mr. Lacombe rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to rise and introduce through you to members of this Assembly 52 students who are likewise very attentive during their visit here today. They are from Robert Rundle elementary school. They are seated in the members' gallery. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Katherine Cornelius, Ms. Angela Bizon, Mr. Brad Shillington, and by parents Ms. Valerie Panchen, Ms. Shannon Wakefield, and Mr. Darrell Wakefield. Other persons accompanying them are Mrs. Kelly Kump and Mrs. Norine Seath. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to all of my colleagues in this Assembly two youthful Albertans who are working as volunteers to collect signatures on the petition that I've been tabling in this House over the last few weeks. They are Elgar Schmidt and Leif Langvand. Both of them are seated in the public gallery. I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly someone who I think is well known to members on both sides of the House. He's a former MP, former school principal, present golfer, and always a friend. I would like you to please welcome Mr. Norval Horner.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today a group of individuals who are deeply committed to assisting members of our disabled community. This group has also been very keen to participate in and provide input to the Building Better Bridges report, which was tabled earlier today in support of programs and services for persons with developmental disabilities.

They are Bev Matthiessen, the executive director for the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities; Mr. Bryan Sandilands, co-ordinator of research and evaluation for the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities; Mr. Tom Fowler, the manager of community relations and policy analysis, also from the Premier's council; and Mr. Gerald Gordey, who is a council member as well and who also closely follows activities of the Alberta Association for Community Living. With them is Mr. David Steeves, the special adviser to the Deputy Minister of Alberta Health and Wellness, who was instrumental in assisting me with the preparation of this final report. Gail Davis, who is the executive director of the Alberta Association of Rehabilitation Centres, was here earlier, but I understand she had to leave for a commitment elsewhere. I would ask these very dedicated, committed individuals to please stand and take the warm applause and the warm reception of all members of this Assembly.

1:50

head: Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "Viewing their doctor as an entrepreneur and health care as a commodity is an American invention that few Canadians are willing to support." That quote is taken from this March 2000 study by Dr. Richard Plain, a noted health care economist from the University of Alberta and a former mayor of St. Albert. Well, instead of using the current studies, the Premier has tried to pass off studies from the 1970s as proof for his private hospitals plan. That's why it was so astounding yesterday to hear the Premier accuse anyone using reports from the '70s as being "intellectually bankrupt." My question is: why is the Premier using these same studies to justify his government's attempt to force Bill 11 on Albertans, or is the Premier saying that the minister of health, who tabled the reports, is intellectually bankrupt?

MR. KLEIN: Well, certainly the Minister of Health and Wellness is not intellectually bankrupt. He is a very bright and dedicated individual and an asset to this government, Mr. Speaker.

The tabling of those reports by the Minister of Health and Wellness – I believe it was about a month ago – was simply to show that there are reports on both sides of this issue. It was not used in the preparation of Bill 11 in any way, shape, or form. It was simply a tabling to show that there are opinions on both sides of this issue.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why would the Premier not listen to experts right here in Alberta, like Dr. Plain, who are saying that "surgical facilities with overnight stays," that is, private hospitals, should "not be permitted to operate within Alberta"?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, Richard Plain is entitled to his opinion, and the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is entitled to her opinion, and we're all entitled to our own opinions. That's why we have sent the bill out to about a million households, to get the opinions of Albertans on this particular issue. This is an unprecedented move to seek the wisdom and the guidance and the intelligence of Albertans in making sure this legislation is the right legislation.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why doesn't the Premier withdraw his intellectually bankrupt Bill 11 and listen to the experts in this province who are committed to public health care, rather than telling them that it won't work.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are opinions, as I said, on both sides of this issue. I did a tabling earlier today, one from the Bonavista Eye Clinic, in which the writer, a medical doctor, says:

The idea of contracting out services is a sound and wise move. Everyone seems to know competition reduces cost while increasing service. I realize the media spin of a two-tier system and the other groups "American Health Care" make for good copy but is nowhere near the truth. Actually almost all doctors now practice in their private clinics and public hospitals.

I continually tell my patients how this new and innovative system will benefit them and all Albertans. I applaud your courage to take an issue and stay with it when the easy road would be to let future generations worry about an inefficient health care system. Continue the good work.

Another letter, a final . . .

THE SPEAKER: And I understand that document has been tabled.

MR. KLEIN: It has been tabled, sir.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that recommendation 4 from Dr. Plain's study calls for guidelines to identify "private costs and benefits," why has the Premier excluded that from Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it hasn't been excluded. As a matter of fact, one of the main components of Bill 11 is that the RHAs must demonstrate to the minister and to the college that contracting out will reduce costs and it will produce efficiencies and it will shorten waiting lists. The bill is quite specific on that particular issue.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that recommendation 5 of Dr. Plain's study calls on the government to set out guidelines for the tendering of medical service contracts, why has the Premier excluded that from his bill?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's quite obvious now that the hon. member has not read the bill, because the bill alludes quite specifically to that particular point. Again, if she has read the bill, obviously she can't understand it. I will have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness give her another clinic.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, actually, the legislation with the explanatory notes should be something the hon. leader can understand. The legislation has a fairly comprehensive section which

outlines the factors that have to be considered in terms of deciding on awarding a contract.

The other thing that I think is very important here is that there's also the openness in the legislation dealing with the contracts being made public, Mr. Speaker. There are quite a number of sections of the legislation which follow that theme.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that recommendation 8 from Dr. Plain's study calls for the public to have access to all information and reports, not just an agreement on the spin but all the information and the reports regarding regional health authorities and private clinics, why has that been excluded from this Premier's private hospitals bill?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness supplement, but I would point out that Dr. Plain's report, to the best of my knowledge, was prepared before the bill was tabled in this House.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, there is a section of the bill which provides for the disclosure of contracts. There's a section of the bill which outlines in some detail the circumstances that have to be taken into consideration when the actual proposal is considered. The legislation is basically about that particular set of requirements as it applies to surgical clinics. I think this is really a rather fortuitous criticism of the bill, because the bill has right within its clauses the very things that the leader is asking for.

MRS. MacBETH: No, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are seeing through this net that's been created by the government.

Clearly this government's health care policy is to go backwards to the 1970s model of the U.S. two-tiered private health care that's gotten them in so much trouble. What Albertans are looking for is a strong public health care system that will serve us in the 21st century. This question is to the Premier. Rather than relying on outdated, irrelevant U.S. studies, why not commission a made-in-Alberta solution based on current and relevant data from Alberta?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, that's what Bill 11 is all about.

Mr. Speaker, since the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alluded to going backwards, I would like to read a letter that was sent to the leader of the Liberal opposition. It was sent by the Kensington Clinic, which performs therapeutic abortions. I tabled five copies of that letter today. It is talking about going ahead, and it's talking about what it used to be like. It says:

We now charge the CRHA less than what was charged to patients privately between 1991 and 1996. Our current offer to the CRHA, if accepted, would further reduce our fees by 15%. We pay the equivalent of union wages as well as benefits to our staff, but need fewer staff to provide the same level of care. The clinic also uses fewer physician services resulting in a minimum \$100 savings per patient. Our outcomes are compiled quarterly by the CRHA and remain consistently better than the hospital site. We have not sent our most difficult cases to the hospital because prior to funding we were seeing all the difficult cases. After funding, the hospital agreed to share the load with us, resulting in more timely care for these women. Furthermore, in the last 8 years there have been at least 5 renovations to the hospital-based abortion clinics. If this clinic were to engage in that kind of haphazard planning, the funds at least would come out of our contracted operating funds. We would not be demanding more each time . . .

THE SPEAKER: Okay. I gather the letter has been tabled as well. Is that correct?

MR. KLEIN: It has been tabled.

MRS. MacBETH: Getting back to the question, Mr. Speaker, rather than letting cataract surgery clinics, as an example, continue to mushroom at taxpayers' expense, why doesn't the Premier commission someone like the Medicare Economics Group here at the University of Alberta to do a cost-benefit analysis of private health care delivery? Isn't that just common sense?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, since the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alluded to cataract operations, I tabled a letter earlier from the Bonavista Eye Clinic, where the writer, a doctor, says that "the idea of contracting out services is a sound and wise move."

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, getting back to the question, rather than letting the chairman of the Calgary regional health authority embark on yet another of his expensive health care experiments, why doesn't the Premier ask the University of Calgary or the institute of health economics to conduct a cost-benefit analysis on, say, MRI services? Wouldn't that just be common sense?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the only expensive experiments that were ever undertaken with a great deal of failure were under the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition's watch when she was minister of health. That's when health care costs started to skyrocket, and she did nothing about it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. interim leader of the third party.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chairman Jim Dinning of the Calgary regional health authority had another innovative idea today on how to waste taxpayers' dollars while messing up the public health care system, and that is to bail out the two private MRI clinics in Calgary. But, then, again, Chairman Jim is also busy working on putting privately owned MRI machines into public hospitals. This will give Calgarians the dubious privilege of waiting in line for public MRI during regular office hours or, if they prefer, paying privately and thereby jumping the queue after regular office hours. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier please explain how this bailout of private Calgary MRI clinics will accomplish anything other than bleeding personnel and resources away from MRIs located in public hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is not a bailout of MRI clinics; this is providing options. This is a measure to reduce waiting lists for MRI procedures. Certainly, there can't conceivably be anything wrong with that; that is, to reduce waiting lines for MRI procedures.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier confirm that despite the CRHA bailout of private MRI clinics, Calgarians will still be allowed to buy their way to the front of the line at private MRI clinics and that the government plans to do nothing to put a stop to this queue-jumping?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the Calgary RHA is looking for ways to reduce waiting lists for insured MRI scans, and I think it's a good idea to see if there are services out there who can provide these scans safely and efficiently and allowing the RHA to get more services

done and reduce waiting lists. That's what it's all about. For insured MRI scans and to reduce waiting lists: that's what it's all about.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the Premier: how can the Premier justify the appointment of Dr. Bill Anderson as a so-called impartial consultant to review bids from the two private Calgary MRI clinics when Dr. Anderson is part owner of a private MRI clinic in Edmonton and thus has an interest in expanding this form of private, for-profit health care delivery?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know the business arrangement that Dr. Anderson has with the Calgary regional health authority. Perhaps the Minister of Health and Wellness can shed some light on this situation.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, Dr. Anderson is a former president of the Alberta Medical Association. He has, I think, a reputation for neutrality, and he's a man of integrity. He's highly regarded in the medical profession, I think, in the city in which he works.

It is my understanding that the regional health authority has engaged Dr. Anderson to be an outside observer and reviewer of the whole process of putting in these MRI clinics in Calgary. He will be called upon to provide both his expertise and advice as far as the actual installations and the services to be provided and also to make sure that the selection process dealing with companies such as Western Imaging Systems Inc. and so forth is fair and the contracts are awarded appropriately.

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

Public Health Labour Negotiations

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today's media states that the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees are seeking a range of 30 to 45 percent increase in wages for health care employees. The Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta, who are bargaining with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, have requested a mediator to assist in negotiations. How will the government assist the parties? My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I think it would be important for all of us to understand that collective bargaining has begun between the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and the public health authorities, so I suspect that what we're seeing today is, of course, first positions. My understanding is that, yes, a request has gone in for a mediator by the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta. With any mediation request we first look at it and then try to determine as best we can whether or not it is an appropriate request and, if so, then we look for a qualified and experienced mediator to get into the situation as soon as possible. We're in the situation of doing that as we speak.

I would hope that all members here in the Legislative Assembly would be aware that we have a very good track record in the area of issue management and particularly as it comes to mediation. We have a success rate of something over 90 percent. So we'll work as best we can. We'll do what we have to do to see that a settlement is ultimately reached.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. My first supplemental question is to

the same minister. What is the process that occurs in selecting a mediator?

2:10

MR. DUNFORD: Well, with the reorganization that has taken place, Mr. Speaker, we actually maintain a roster of skilled mediators that we turn to whenever we need to put someone into a situation. The mediators that we have access to have a proven track record, and in the past they've dealt both with employers and unions in working together to reach settlements. But we must make it clear that the process and the negotiations themselves are the responsibility of the parties involved, and the mediator is there to assist however they can.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Also to the same minister: what will happen once a mediator has been appointed?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, again, the process, Mr. Speaker, would be that meetings would be set up with the parties. The mediator would then work with the parties to try to constructively address whatever the particular issues are that are in dispute. We want our mediator to be a catalyst and, of course, a catalyst toward productive areas. But I want to repeat in this answer once again that the mediator does not absolve the parties themselves of the responsibility to come to a negotiated agreement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday and today we established that the studies the Premier has used to support his private hospitals plan, or as he'd like to call them, approved surgical facilities, were outdated and irrelevant. The question on Albertans' minds is: why isn't he using more current studies, and where are the department studies to support his plan? My questions are to the Premier. Given that the 1999 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* concluded that the "decade-old experiment with market medicine is a failure" and that "the drive for profit is compromising the quality of care," why did the government draft Bill 11 in order to promote private hospitals in this province, otherwise known as overnight approved surgical facilities? Why are you doing it?

MR. KLEIN: Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is to protect the health care system as we know it today in Calgary and to set very stringent rules and regulations for the operation of surgical clinics. The bill, as stated in the householder, is about "a stronger health system for the future." That's what the bill is all about.

Mr. Speaker, what is frustrating, though, is the kind of orchestrated campaign of fear and misinformation being conducted by the opposition Liberals and their Friends of Medicare. There is an organized campaign to tell Albertans what they should think about Bill 11, but it's not coming from the government.

One of our MLAs received an e-mail, and I'm about to entitle this. It's entitled *More Hints from Margaret*, and it's all about Friends of Medicare and how to organize protests. It talks about groups deliberately jamming government phone and fax lines. There is a well-orchestrated phone and letter-writing campaign going on by groups opposed to change, and this campaign of misinformation and fear is being led by the opposition Liberals.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Premier, I'd ask that you table that document as well, please.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As there are, as the Premier so often points out, surgical facilities now operating in this province, such as the Kensington Clinic, can the Premier tell us: what are the standards that are over those clinics right now? Are you saying that there are no standards in this province right now and that that's why you need Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Relative to the delivery of medical services, yes, there are standards. There have always been standards set down relative to the delivery of medical services by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, but we have not had sufficient rules and regulations relative to the conditions for contracting out, Mr. Speaker, and that's what Bill 11 is all about.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, given that the studies that we've put forward in the Legislative Assembly show that private, for-profit hospitals, or overnight surgical facilities, cost more and provide less care and that there is no need for standards for the current facilities that are operating in this province, why does this Premier want to contract out overnight services?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there may or may not be. It depends on the requirements and need of a particular regional health authority as to whether there are certain surgeries, minor surgeries that can be done in a surgical clinic that would require overnight stays.

Mr. Speaker, this is being done now, as I understand it, in Toronto in a riding next to Mr. Rock's own constituency. It's called the Shouldice clinic. This clinic specializes in hernia operations. It doesn't contravene the Canada Health Act. It's done under the publicly funded system within Ontario. If it can be done there, why can't it be done here?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Workers' Compensation Board

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Workers' Compensation Board of Alberta has a long history of working co-operatively with health care providers to ensure that injured workers receive appropriate, timely treatment. This has been a very successful partnership, and it is vital to small rural communities to continue that partnership. The WCB is now requiring physical therapy and chiropractic clinics to undertake accreditation by an external agency if they want to continue doing business with the WCB. My question to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment is: why is the WCB Alberta imposing this requirement on those clinics?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I think it's incumbent upon the board of directors of the Workers' Compensation Board to do whatever they can to assist delivery of services to injured workers. It's my understanding that they are working on what's called the Commission for Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, which has the acronym CARF, and that they're working on this initiative with both the College of Chiropractors and the Alberta physical therapists association.

Now, it's true, Mr. Speaker, that I have been hearing from some individual clinics that are unhappy about the requirement for the accreditation, but I think something will have to be worked out, because again I don't think we can hardly blame a board for

requiring a level of standard on an institution that it's going to contract with.

I believe it's being done on behalf of the injured workers. I believe the majority of the physical therapy clinics in Alberta are supportive of the initiative, and it's my understanding that currently there are over 20 physical therapy clinics in Alberta that have gone through the accreditation process.

MR. COUTTS: First supplemental to the same minister. Many of these clinics are small independent businesses. Is it fair that WCB Alberta impose the cost of this accreditation onto these businesses?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I agree that the cost is a situation that has to be dealt with. My understanding is that if a physical therapy clinic bills less than \$10,000 a year of WCB work, they are not required to go through the full accreditation process and of course they are not required to pay the accreditation fee. If, of course, you are billing more than \$10,000, then this will be a requirement.

Now, WCB apparently has committed up to half a million dollars to assist those clinics that have to go through the accreditation in terms of trying to defray some of the costs. I don't know if it's necessarily a yearly cost, but my understanding is that the accreditation is either for a year, two years, or three years. Certainly once that accreditation lapses, of course the process would have to be gone through again. I believe that WCB is trying to assist.

2:20

MR. COUTTS: Final supplemental to the same minister. In many smaller Alberta communities there may be only one clinic. Can the minister assure this House that accreditation will not affect the delivery of health care services to injured workers in smaller communities?

MR. DUNFORD: I can't make that guarantee Mr. Speaker, but I am asking for direction from the board of directors of the WCB as to how they are going to deal with injured workers that might be in some of the more remote areas of our province. My understanding is that as a policy they are trying to have a service where an injured worker would not be required to travel any more than 20 miles in order to receive the kind of support they would need.

I believe that we're going to have to watch very, very closely what happens not only in the urban areas but in the rural areas as well. Through this question today and through the means that we have of both *Hansard* and the Internet now, should there be any physical therapy clinic in this province that feels they're going to be impacted and not be able to provide the kind of the service that they have become accustomed to and that injured workers have become accustomed to, then I invite them, of course, to contact my office.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the Premier. Would the Premier name one private clinic anywhere in Canada that admits patients overnight for services that are paid for under medicare? Just name one.

MR. KLEIN: The Shouldice clinic in Toronto, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SAPERS: So we are talking about hernias, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about hernias. All right. [interjections]

Now, Mr. Premier, if you could you get your backbenchers to tone it down for a minute, name one of the 170 surgical procedures currently done in Alberta private clinics that will require an overnight stay?

MR. KLEIN: None right now, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SAPERS: None, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Premier can you explain why, then, you believe that Alberta needs a law to allow publicly funded overnight private facilities when no evidence, not one shred of evidence exists to support them or to support that need?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness supplement, but I would remind the hon. member that cataract surgeries, for instance, were done only in hospitals at one time. Whether or not they were overnight stays, I don't know. There have been tremendous advances in the medicine relative to this procedure, and now they can be done very effectively in surgical clinics.

Mr. Speaker, I alluded to the point of overnight stays I think it was yesterday in answer to a question. Now, when is the cutoff? Is it after 12 hours, or is it 13 hours, or is it 15 hours, or is it 23 hours? You know, that is a medical decision, a medical adjudication. The bill quite clearly states that it doesn't matter whether it's overnight or day surgery as long as it is a minor surgery. There is a very clear definition that defines what a full-scale hospital is and what a surgical clinic is.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Day Care Standards

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a media story focused on an incident in an Edmonton day care that raised questions about day care standards. To the Minister of Children's Services: how are day cares monitored to ensure that children are being well cared for?

MS EVANS: I think that's a good and very timely question. To the hon. member through you, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to high-quality standards for day cares. Throughout Alberta every child and family service authority in all 18 regions has licensing officers that provide at least two inspections per year to day cares and more frequent inspections dependant upon the number of complaints or the concerns that have been raised by parents or members of the community. Further to that, we have educational programs for day care operators and for their staff, and we persist in working with them to ensure that the standards are maintained.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, my first and final supplemental question is also to the same minister. If a day care is not in compliance with provincial standards, what steps are taken by the ministry?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, problematic day cares are inspected at least once a month, and through the compliance management system – in other words, the reports that we get – they are carefully tracked, and unannounced visits are made to day cares that we suspect may have problems. If, in fact, we are discovering that those problems and those complaints are valid, we can respectfully request due consideration and improvements within that day care on an immediate basis. We can revoke or suspend their licence.

Mr. Speaker, all the day cares that we inspect have to comply. If in fact they don't comply, we can close their doors, and child and family service authorities will find ways and means of accommodating the children on an interim basis until other solutions can be found.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Regional Health Authority Contracts

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the most troubling aspects of the Calgary regional health authority has been its historic failure to police apparent conflicts of interest. That region hands over \$250 million to private contractors without any adequate oversight and without provincewide rules for conflicts of interest, and now that the Calgary region proposes to offer 5,000 cases to private MRI clinics, we're assured that Dr. Anderson has been retained to, quote, make sure contracts are fair and awarded appropriately, close quote. My questions are to the Premier this afternoon. Given the very sorry record of the CRHA on apparent conflicts of interest, wouldn't it make more sense to hire someone who's completely independent of the CRHA board to police conflicts rather than a consultant hired by the board itself?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I take exception to the hon. member's comments relative to the way the RHA is being operated. It's being operated very effectively and very efficiently. Yes, there are about 5,000 people on waiting lists for MRI scans, and what the RHA wants to do is find a way under the publicly funded system to reduce those waiting lists.

The Liberal opposition doesn't want to see that happen. They would rather have people wait six, seven, eight, 10, 12, 18 months for a medically required MRI scan than have the RHA explore more efficient and more effective ways of reducing the waiting list. That's what they would want; that's what they are advocating. The Liberals are advocating longer waiting lists for a medically required procedure as it relates to an MRI scan.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, if this government and this Premier were genuinely interested in policing these kinds of private contracts, why wouldn't they simply adopt strong, clear guidelines that apply provincewide to all 17 CRHAs rather than seeing this kind of nonsense perpetuated?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, all RHAs have their own set of guidelines relative to conflict, and I do believe – and I stand to be corrected – that the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness tabled the guidelines as they relate to the RHA. If he hasn't, I would encourage him to do so, because there are guidelines relative to the RHA.

Now, if this is a genuine concern relative to the whole issue of conflict and having standardized rules, perhaps we can look at that when the bill enters second reading. Maybe it could be a reasonable amendment. So help us with it.

2:30

MR. DICKSON: Let me offer this little bit of help to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier commit today, right now, that any new or renegotiated MRI contract in the city of Calgary and in that region will be fully disclosed to the public on the Internet?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if the Liberals would help us with the legislation, the legislation compels all contracts to be open and transparent. If they would be constructive instead of organizing orchestrated meetings such as that attended by the hon. Member for St. Albert last night, where she was shouted down and was treated with great rudeness but nonetheless held her head high and did a tremendous job . . . [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, if they would be helpful, then they would indeed be

performing a service to their constituents. As it is right now, the Liberals are being destructive. They are part of a campaign of vicious misinformation. If they want to be helpful, then bring forward some reasonable amendments when the bill is introduced for second reading. They could be much more useful than they're being right now by being constructive rather than destructive.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Scientific and Technological Innovation

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, technology is a key driver to the success of our new economy. A report was released today by Ernst & Young along with Silicon Valley North, TD Bank, and CompCanada. This report, entitled Alberta Technology Report, recommends that the government of Alberta take action in several areas including increasing R and D funding and initiatives to attract and retain high-tech workers. My question is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. What is the government doing to address these recommendations?

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. It is a timely question, Mr. Speaker, because I happened to be at a launch of the report at noontime today. I'd like to congratulate the four organizations that were involved in presenting the report, because it does look at high tech across this province and does present baseline data for the province. I think it's very worth while, and I encourage all members on both sides to get a copy of the report. It is a good report. To facilitate that, if they'd like to call my office, I'll make sure they get a copy.

In response to the member's questions the report did identify several areas. Two in particular were R and D funding for what I call the knowledge-based industries, as well as the necessity of having the critical mass of people. The question is: what is this government doing in these two particular areas?

Well, certainly in addressing R and D funding, we've taken some major steps just in the last few months. We created the informatics circle of research excellence, announced that last fall. That's a commitment of \$10 million a year to find some of the best scientists in the world to work in this whole area of information and communications technology.

They have put out some advertising. The advertisement they put out was really neat. It had a picture of the mountains, and then it had "extreme computing" across the mountains.

We actually are negotiating right now with two world leaders that are interested in moving to Alberta to work in this ICORE, as we're calling it, this centre of research excellence for information and communications technology. So that's one step we've taken.

Another step we've taken, of course, through Bill 1, that's proceeding through this Legislature, is the creation of a \$500 million fund, Mr. Speaker, with the possibility of \$100 million a year being added. So it will be a total of \$1 billion by our centennial in 2005.

Then, of course, there is the budget that is part of my department, Mr. Speaker. Initially we had about \$15 million a year in there for research, and it is now up to almost \$100 million a year.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: the report also identifies the need for a high-tech infrastructure. How is the government of Alberta addressing this recommendation? [interjections]

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps if the intellectually challenged members across the way could keep quiet, they could hear my response.

We have to recognize, Mr. Speaker, that the infrastructure for

high-tech, knowledge-based business is in fact as important as highways; it's as important as railroads in this province. So we have just recently released an RFP that is requesting proposals to really provide a fibre-optic network from Manyberries to Fort Vermilion, from Vermilion to Edson, right across this whole province. There's only one other jurisdiction in North America that's attempting this, and that's Massachusetts. They're doing it with copper, which is old technology. As we work through this and have this fibre-optic network blanketing the province, it won't be any more expensive in Manyberries than it is in Calgary, postage-stamp rates. We will develop that infrastructure and make it available to all Albertans.

As part of this infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, I'm recommending a community kiosk in all of these communities so that if people don't have access to a computer at home, they'll be able to walk into the community kiosk and access this high-speed Internet.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. The report once again raises the issue of brain drain. Can the minister explain specific initiatives aimed directly at the issue of attracting and retaining our best minds in Alberta?

DR. TAYLOR: Certainly the initiatives that I've already described: the ICORE initiative; the AHFSER initiative, Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research. As you know, we have the HFMR, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. That is a very good model, and we know it works. It's been working since 1982, and Alberta is recognized as one of the key places in the world to do medical research. If we do the same thing with the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research – we need to get a good acronym for that, Mr. Speaker, perhaps AHFSER. We can have before and 'afser.' If we can get that up and running, which we've already committed money to, \$500 million, as I said, we will be able to attract the best science in the world.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Mental Health Services

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mental illness has been identified as one of the highest users of our health care system and is predicted to grow even more in the future. The most effective way of treating mental health is through community-based programs, yet this government insists on committing 80 percent of the entire Mental Health Board budget to institutional care. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the rationale for closing the community-based clinics in Red Deer to bolster the institutional care out of Ponoka?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the community-based clinic services are being continued in Red Deer. There has been a review by a community advisory group which has recommended certain changes. Those changes have been made, but the services are still being provided and I think improved in terms of their co-ordination with the regional health authority.

MR. GIBBONS: Six months isn't very long.

Why did the acting, now new CEO of the Alberta Mental Health Board receive a \$4,000 increase? Is it the reward for increasing funding to the Ponoka hospital? [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, the next question: as the suicide rate in this province continues to increase, when will the minister admit that the focus needs to be on community-based care, not on institutionalizing people?

2:40

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we are expanding community-based care across the province. I indicated in response to a very similar set of questions from another member across the way that we have more than doubled our overall monetary commitment to community mental health. I can go through an extensive list of initiatives that are under way. Most recently I was in the Chinook region visiting Lethbridge, and one of the specific proposals there, which is going to go ahead, is the expansion of a number of beds – I think it was 14 beds – in a group home in Lethbridge along with the addition of a six-bed acute care or psychiatric service for children, which would be in the hospital. So we still have to have that balance of beds and intensive care for our mentally ill, but as well we have to have continuum into the community. We're making a lot of progress in that regard contrary to the implications of that question.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before stopping for a brief recess and the recognition of hon. members with respect to Recognitions, I'd like to remind hon. members that today, March 15, is the 94th anniversary of the first sitting of the first Legislative Assembly in the province of Alberta. It was held on March 15, 1906.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, were you attempting to catch my attention in just the last minute or two?

MRS. FORSYTH: A point of order on the question.

THE SPEAKER: You want to raise a point of order?

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: Well, we'll deal with it at the appropriate time.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: We'll now proceed first of all with the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Martyn Godfrey

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to take this opportunity to recognize the late Martyn Godfrey. Mr. Godfrey was born in Birmingham, England, and after immigrating to Canada as a young boy, Martyn attended school in Toronto, received his arts and education degrees at my alma mater, the University of Toronto, and has taught and inspired students in Ontario and Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Martyn Godfrey was best known for his authorship of stories in a variety of genre for children and young adults. Martyn lived in St. Albert and spent many hours with the children in our local schools. Our own children along with hundreds of other fortunate children were touched by Martyn's infectious love of the written word, his own creative fun and sensitive expression with both imaginary and real-life stories, and his incredible ability to encourage young writers and readers to pursue their interests.

I would ask all Members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in extending our condolences to the members of Martyn Godfrey's immediate and extended families.

Marco and Carlos Rivera

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, we recently heard of the case of a woman who had collapsed and expired at a bus stop while a stream of motorists passed her by. This incident should not be taken as a measure of the community's compassion.

Recently, in the early hours of the morning, Marco and Carlos Rivera,* while driving home, encountered an elderly woman. She was crying, clad only in a housecoat, wandering aimlessly in the winter cold. Marco and Carlos stopped, picked her up, and took her to the local police station, which they discovered was closed. They then proceeded to the Grey Nuns hospital to make sure she was cared for. The woman, who suffers from Alzheimer's, had somehow been able to leave the house and place herself at extreme risk.

Marco and Carlos are like many other Edmontonians quietly going about thousands of acts of kindness. On behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Ellerslie I say thank you to Marco and Carlos Rivera. Thank you for caring for your neighbours. Thank you for taking action that makes Mill Woods and this city the caring place we know it to be.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverley-Clareview.

Ukrainian Bilingual Education

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A huge celebration recognizing the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Ukrainian bilingual program in Alberta was held at Edmonton city hall on March 1, 2000. The capacity crowd heard congratulatory tributes paid to the visionary founders who 25 years ago sensed the need to promote the continuation of the Ukrainian language and culture. The founding committee went to work finding funding, resources, and volunteers, allowing the vision to become reality.

Now, 25 years later a celebration recognizing 25 years of success was discussed, and three ladies – Barbara Hlus, Carol Evans, and Maryanne Bazuik – agreed to take on this monumental task. The success of the celebration is a tribute to the hard work of these three dedicated individuals. The city hall celebration, consisting of tributes from government, clergy, and others and enhanced by dancers and school performances, was superb. Thank you, Barbara, Carol, and Maryanne, for a job well done. You did Ukrainians proud.

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

Connaught Community Outlook

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize the efforts of all the volunteers at the Connaught Community Association who have worked so hard to produce an excellent community newspaper, the *Outlook*. The *Outlook* provides Connaught residents in the downtown constituency of Calgary-Buffalo with an excellent opportunity to stay informed and voice their concerns on issues such as development, business, and community resources. I might add that there is no more active or vital part of the city of Calgary than the Connaught community.

In particular, I'd like to recognize the association executive for their excellent work and single out Stan Turner, president; Rob van Wegen; and Cindy Graham, who have all been instrumental in producing this excellent newspaper for the Connaught community in downtown Calgary.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

Fraud Awareness

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, March 13, I hosted an information seminar for my constituents of Calgary-West

on the ABCs of fraud at the Westgate community centre. Abuse of seniors occurs in many forms, and this seminar focused on the fraud scam and telemarketing artists and operations who disrespectfully target the seniors population because of their vulnerability, their trustworthiness, and the perception that many seniors have money. Fact: for every 1,000 incidents of abuse, only 100 are reported.

Recognition is due to the Scotiabank fraud awareness program, the ABCs of Fraud, which Scotiabank proudly sponsors, and the volunteer presenters on Monday, Margo and Juergen Jahn, who are members of the Calgary Seniors' Resource Society, and to the print and television media for further dispersing very important information to the public at large. Thank you. Thank you. It is very important that all of us learn about and support very worthy nonprofit societies who exist through private-sector sponsorships and community volunteers.

Thank you.

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

Calgary Herald Strikers

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the striking *Calgary Herald* workers, who have been out on strike since early November '99. These workers have been subjected to insults from the paper's owner, who declared recently about the *Calgary Herald*: it's better without you and that the paper was amputating gangrenous limbs, referring to employees engaged in the legal strike. The owner, Mr. Black, also told workers: this strike is going to be resolved either by coming to an end after two years, by decertification, or by you people coming back to work.

These workers have endured the fear and uncertainty that occurs to workers on strike who see owners and management not bargaining in good faith. They have persevered in the face of name-calling and antidemocratic behaviour by this organization. I applaud these striking workers' continuing defence of journalistic independence and integrity, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

2:50

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on a Standing Order 40 application.

Calgary Herald Strike

Dr. Pannu:

Be it resolved that the Assembly, recognizing that the ongoing *Calgary Herald* strike and Mr. Conrad Black's refusal to engage in fair collective bargaining is an indictment of Alberta's unfair laws, urges the government to appoint a disputes inquiry board to facilitate the settlement of this dispute.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will speak to the urgency of the matter, but I'll just take a moment to outline the issue. It will take me less than a minute. The issue in this strike is that the employees asked for a basic seniority clause which would come into effect only during layoffs. Such a provision is vital to ensure employees are not arbitrarily terminated. Seniority clauses are standard in collective agreements in newspaper rooms across Canada. This company said no.

Now to the urgency, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to this question of urgency then, today is the 128th day of the *Calgary Herald* dispute.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

About 100 employees of the *Calgary Herald* have been on strike for over four months, as have 67 employees belonging to the Graphic Communications International Union. These union members have tried their best to negotiate a fair first collective agreement.

Mr. Speaker, the ongoing *Calgary Herald* strike and Mr. Conrad Black's refusal to engage in fair collective bargaining is an indictment of Alberta's unfair laws. The recent statements by Mr. Conrad Black violate both the spirit and letter of the law regarding collective bargaining. To quote Mr. Black: this strike is going to be resolved either by coming to an end after two years, by decertification, or by you people coming back to work. In referring to these striking employees, Conrad Black said: we are amputating gangrenous limbs. These statements are incredibly offensive.

Mr. Speaker, long strikes divide communities. The right of employees to join unions should be respected in all workplaces, including newsrooms. When a legal strike occurs and the management side shows by its actions an unwillingness to reach a fair first collective agreement, the minister responsible for labour relations must act. This motion calls on the minister to appoint a disputes inquiry board to facilitate a resolution of this unfortunate dispute. I urge all members to allow the debate on this motion to proceed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, as per Standing Order 40 the mover of the motion is provided an opportunity to briefly provide for an urgent and pressing necessity, and then the question is immediately called, and it requires unanimous consent in order to proceed.

[Unanimous consent denied]

THE SPEAKER: I do believe we now have a couple of points of order to deal with. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Point of Order

Offending the Practices of the Assembly

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to rise pursuant to Standing Order 23(l), which reads:

A member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member . . . introduces any matter in debate which offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to refer specifically to the exchange that transpired when my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo was questioning the Premier regarding conflicts of interest in Calgary and the provision of MRI facilities. The Premier in his response mentioned in part – and I don't have the Blues in front of me, so I'm paraphrasing from my hearing of the Premier's response – that that's why we need the bill, referring to Bill 11, and that we should be able to count on Albertans understanding that this is why this kind of legislation is necessary.

Well, the Premier also has said many times that we should read the bill. Maybe the Premier should read the bill. Bill 11 does not deal with diagnostic imaging or any diagnostic services. Bill 11 deals with surgical services. I submit that the Premier either is not aware of the contents of his bill or he is deliberately distorting the contents of Bill 11 and confusing its purpose in the minds of Albertans. Mr. Speaker, that is clearly offensive and a violation of Standing Orders.

The Premier has spent millions of tax dollars to try, in his words, to inform Albertans. He invites response, yet in this very Chamber he misrepresents the intent and the contents of the proposed legislation. I can think of nothing greater than that which would offend the practices and precedents of this Assembly, and I would request that you call the Premier to order.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no point of order, but I do feel compelled to express my admiration for the opposition member's courage in raising this matter, especially under section 23(l), especially so after yesterday's, what I would consider to be, dishonest, false, fraudulent, indecent, insincere, misleading, obscene, scandalous, unscrupulous, and untruthful actions on the part of not only himself but 11 other members of his party regarding the tabling of newspaper articles under the guise of reports.

Mr. Speaker, we often discuss in this Legislature the need to respect each other, the need to respect the rules and procedures of this House, yet those words ring hollow when we continue in this House to refuse to call to account those who continue to abuse the procedures of this Legislature. There is no point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, on two occasions this week rather interesting arguments have been put forward by certain members, and they've been dealt with. The other matters have been dealt with.

There have now been two occasions this week where either the House leader of the Official Opposition or the former House leader of the Official Opposition have asked for the Speaker to intervene. On one occasion the current House leader of the Official Opposition had asked to rule out any questions which may be repetitious, in essence, or questions that have been raised before, and the chair said that he would consider that. Now there's an appeal to the chair to invoke section 23(l), which is really rather interesting, because the chair's view is that if the chair were to in fact invoke these things and in light of most of the questions in the question period thus far in this session, this being day 15, virtually all questions would have been ruled out. So I think it is extremely important – extremely important – that hon. members begin to start reading the rules and understanding the rules.

Now, hon. members can't have it both ways. They can't one day say something on a point of order and the next day come in 180 degrees opposite on another point of order. The chair has absolutely no difficulty – no difficulty – intervening, and all question period will become is the chairman of this particular Assembly standing up for virtually the whole question period and giving his thoughts or rulings.

Now, hon. Deputy Government House Leader, the matter that you refer to today was dealt with yesterday, so the chair does not view that there was a point of order in here and really, really, really would like to ask hon. members to understand the rules.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be the first to admit in this House that I don't stand up on a lot of points of order. In fact, I got elected in 1993, and I think this is the second one since 1993.

THE SPEAKER: Good. Then you've got the experience to know that you have to give a citation.

MRS. FORSYTH: I am referring to 23(h), (i), and (j).

THE SPEAKER: Good.

MRS. FORSYTH: It's in regards to the question from the Member for Edmonton-Manning. Mr. Speaker, I know you don't know this, but I've known the Member for Edmonton-Manning for, oh, many years, before we were even elected, probably the last 15 years. When I knew this member, it was in regards to community leagues and our involvement as community league presidents. I admired him. He had a great deal of integrity.

The questions he was asking the minister of health from Ponoka-Rimbey in regards to the construction at Ponoka I think were absolutely awful and deplorable. I want to remind the member that myself, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek; the Member for Livingstone-Macleod; and the Member for Little Bow did a mental health review. I'm trying to think. It was probably in 1996. At that point in time the Member for Drumheller-Chinook was the minister of health, and the Member for Ponoka-Rimbey was not even the minister of health. It was at that time, in those recommendations that we decided that Ponoka should stay where it is and that the mental health funding should stay in Ponoka.

3:00

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please. You have to help me with the point of order.

MRS. FORSYTH: I did.

THE SPEAKER: No. You're giving a speech. Please. What's the point of order?

MRS. FORSYTH: Okay, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief, and like I said, I'm not good. I believe the questions were insulting, they were making allegations against another member, they were making false motives to another member, and I would like your ruling on that.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, briefly. Standing Order 23:

- (h) makes allegations against another member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

It is very clear that there may be acute sensitivities on members on the government side with the nature and topics and subject matter, but none of the questions that have been asked, in my respectful view, deal with anything other than a questionable policy and a form of business dealings on the part of the government of the province of Alberta.

Now, if a member chooses to take that personally, then I suppose she can take it any way she wishes, but your job, with respect, Mr. Speaker, is hopefully one of protecting the integrity and the reputation of members in this Assembly in terms of what's said, not to deny any member, certainly a member of the opposition, to attempt to hold the government accountable for practices that run contrary to what many Albertans would like to see.

So I think, with respect, the citations aren't appropriate. I understand she's concerned, but let's hear that in a forum of debate. This is not an appropriate point of order, in my respectful submission.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I believe the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has raised a legitimate point of order. If I recall the offensive part of the language used by the hon. member across the way, it was that he was alleging something along the lines of whether or not the minister of health influenced a particular individual's decision with respect to the construction of a hospital facility or a health facility by giving or directly influencing the giving of a raise to that particular individual. Now, I hope I've captured the essence of what was said.

Very clearly, if that's what the hon. member was saying, then it does offend 23(i), and it does offend 23(h). Clearly, an allegation has been made against another member, and 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives" – well, very clearly, again, the inference is that

there was an exchange of favours, the granting of a salary in exchange for a decision with respect to the construction of a facility.

So very clearly to me, Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member has raised an appropriate point of order, and I hope that you would direct the hon. member to withdraw the remark. If you do not do so, however, I hope the hon. member would reconsider the statement he has made.

MR. GIBBONS: The question was asked around the now CEO of the Alberta Mental Health Board receiving a \$4,000 increase. Maybe the emphasis was pointed, and the concern is: is that a reward, increasing funding to the Ponoka hospital? The thing is I also had a question last week, and it was pointed around quite a few different studies around mental health in Canada and Alberta. It's been emphasized that Alberta has been pointed to by Canadian mental health across Canada as being in the dark ages. We have studied mental health to death. We have had a study . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, we have a point of order here. It's on the point of order. [interjection] Please retire to your chair. We're on a point of order. That's what we're dealing with here, not a speech. Please proceed.

MR. GIBBONS: I don't believe there's any point of order, because I don't think there were any allegations against the minister over there outside of asking a question around the CEO.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, what is unique about this point of order is that the hon. member who might be rising on the point of order has not made an argument with respect to this. The chair will however review the Blues and, if required, make a comment on this tomorrow.

Speaker's Ruling Reflections on Nonmembers

THE SPEAKER: In the interim the chair would like to draw all members' attention once again to *Beauchesne* 409. Again, this is constant repetition about reading the rules, and 409(7) is a very, very powerful statement.

A question must adhere to the proprieties of the House, in terms of inferences, imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House or out of it.

Increasingly there's some kind of creep going on in here in the sense that more and more frequently comments are made either in questions or responses about individuals who are not within this House. They are not in a position to defend themselves. Those individuals are not here.

Oftentimes statements are made ascribing certain things to certain individuals. The veracity, the truthfulness, of the statement may or may not be as acute as it might be. If the individual who's quoted as being responsible or standing for something disagrees, that individual has no way of counteracting that assumption, and the same holds true on the other side, when in a response someone ascribes to an individual outside of this House and gives something about that individual.

Now, again, that individual might call my office and say: "You know, I'm really angry. I'm hurt. My public reputation has been hurt." That individual has no way – no way – of having that view corrected, and I want all hon. members to know that that does occur. That does occur, and it's not a matter to be taken lightly. The chair does not want to stand up in here three or four or five times a week with a sworn affidavit from a citizen at large and then proceed to read the affidavit, because then I'm participating in the debate.

This is a system and a policy forum. It's not a personality forum. It's a policy forum, and it should be ideas that the war should be waged over, not individuals. Might is not right; knowledge is right.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness and Deputy Government House Leader.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, I will now move that written questions which appear on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

3:10

head: Motions for Returns

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it is my pleasure to move that motions for returns which appear on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, and 17.

[Motion carried]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M1. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the October 19, 1993, document from a third party to the Executive Council/office of the Premier relating to the refinancing of the West Edmonton Mall.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I note that it's day 15, and this best before date is day 18, so I want to thank the government for rushing headlong into the debate on this motion for a return only three days before it was due.

Mr. Speaker, in order to support this motion, I want to retrace quickly just a couple steps of history here with the West Edmonton Mall saga, because I know that in the minds of some this trail has got a little bit cold. Of course, it's being actively pursued in several courtrooms across this province, so it's not that cold at all. I guess it's that old adage about out of sight out of mind, and I guess the government was hoping that if it was out of sight here in the Legislative Assembly, maybe it was out of mind as well, but that's not the case.

Mr. Speaker, the first bit of history I want to retell in support of this motion is that, of course, when the Official Opposition used the freedom of information legislation to request that Executive Council/office of the Premier release to us all of the documents it held regarding the Premier's office and the government's office involvement in the West Edmonton Mall refinancing, I recall that the first response was that the Premier could not be responsive to the request, not because he chose not to but because in fact there were no documents held in Executive Council relating to the West Edmonton Mall refinancing.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that was an unbelievable claim, and it was proven not only to be unbelievable but untruthful. In fact, an appeal

was made to the Privacy Commissioner, and a subsequent investigation revealed that the Premier's office violated the access to information law in this province. That was shocking, because of course the freedom of information law was the Premier's own flagship bill. He seemed to take great joy in claiming that a whole new era of openness was about to begin in Alberta. What's really damning, I think, in the report of the Privacy Commissioner is that the reason why the Premier's office didn't comply is because they had not set up procedures to deal with records management. They hadn't trained their staff properly. I think thrown in somewhat gratuitously was the observation that staffing might have been at an all-time low because of Christmas holidays or some other kind of vacation. What we have then is the Premier being called to account for his office breaking the law. Of course, there wasn't much of a consequence, but what we do know is that subsequently many, many documents were found not just in Executive Council but throughout government.

Now, the reason why we are bringing this motion for a return forward is because in spite of the Treasurer saying – and I'm paraphrasing – that there will be no closed door or no closed drawer when it comes to West Edmonton Mall disclosure and the Premier saying that everything will be made public in due time and to wait for the courts and to wait for the Auditor General's report, et cetera, the truth is that Albertans are still being kept in the dark. There is still this stony silence when it comes to requests for documents.

Now, I can almost anticipate that whoever the hired gun is on the government side, who I'm anticipating will reject this motion for a return – I can almost anticipate what they're going to say. They're going to say: well, you know, the Auditor General looked at all of this and exonerated the government. Well, that's not the case. What the Auditor General did is the Auditor General was able to review some documents and talk to some people, not everyone and not all documents, and based on that limited evidence, the Auditor General said: I cannot find evidence of government wrongdoing. He did find lots of evidence of government involvement. Of course, it then becomes a matter of judgment whether it was appropriate or inappropriate involvement. I would submit it was inappropriate, particularly because this was a government that denied any involvement whatsoever.

I think Albertans get really tired when a government starts shaving the truth. I mean, look at the reaction to Bill 11, Mr. Speaker, if you want to see how angry the taxpayers of this province will become when it comes to shaving the truth. Just look at the anger in the streets over this government's plans to privatize surgical services in this province.

In fact, there are a lot of parallels between West Edmonton Mall and Bill 11. Here's a pop quiz, Mr. Speaker. What do you think exactly these two initiatives have in common? Well, one is the government did something that they denied they were going to do, and the second thing is that both arguments are absolutely papered in blank pages. That's what we've received in requests about the government's foundations for privatizing hospitals. It's also, of course, what we've received in response to freedom of information requests in regards to West Edmonton Mall.

Mr. Speaker, let's take a look. The motion for a return specifically asks for a document that originated on October 19, 1993. A couple of things to put that request into context, some other things that were happening back in 1993 in the fall. In September of 1993, in fact September 7, there was a letter from Gentra, who was one of the mortgage holders on West Edmonton Mall, to the Ghermezian family, of course the owners of Triple Five, and Triple Five are the owners of the mall. Now, Gentra, the private lender, insisted that all funds generated from the mall be used for the purposes of operating

expenses or payment to the first mortgage bonds and payment of tax arrears. No payment was to be made to the nonsenior bondholders, including, most interestingly, the Alberta Treasury Branches.

Later on that month there was a series of discussions between Gentra and West Edmonton Mall which resulted in the development of the so-called plan A refinancing proposal. Under plan A the maturity of the loans was to be extended for five years, and subordinate lenders such as the Alberta Treasury Branches would be repaid over a much more extended period of time. Later on in the fall the owners of West Edmonton Mall engaged another private lender, in this case one from the United States, First Boston, to assist them in pursuing other alternatives for refinancing the total indebtedness of West Edmonton Mall.

Now we get into October of '93, when West Edmonton Mall defaulted on a \$50 million second-level mortgage held by the Bank of Montreal, Alberta Treasury Branches, and other financial institutions. This is where it gets really interesting, because the document that we're requesting is one which came from a third party to the Executive Council office regarding the West Edmonton Mall refinancing.

In October of '93 there was a \$50 million default. On October 29, 1993, there was a memorandum from the Premier to the then Minister of Economic Development, and it reads as follows, quote: I would like you to be the minister that deals with all aspects of the government of Alberta's interactions with Triple Five Corporation; it would be costly and harmful to Alberta if bankruptcy, foreclosure, or enforcement procedures commenced against Triple Five Corporation at this time without a full and comprehensive review and a determined attempt to solve their refinancing difficulties, end quote. So this is what was going on in Executive Council in the fall of 1993 at about the time we were asking for this document.

Now, there were some other things going on in the fall of 1993. You may recall the steely-eyed Premier saying that he wasn't going to blink and his favourite right-hand man, the Treasurer, Mr. Dinning, who is now presiding over the privatization of surgical services in Calgary, saying that he'd rather just cut than plan. So this refrain of his about his predilection, wanting to do experiments rather than planning, goes back to his days as Treasurer as well.

At the same time that the government was becoming intricately involved in the private business dealings of a shopping mall and its lenders, of course this government was going about its 20 percent cuts in health care and in education. Thousands of frontline health care workers were losing their jobs. Classrooms were becoming overcrowded. Municipalities were being downloaded. Albertans were being told that the cupboard was bare. It seemed the cupboard was bare except when it came to half a billion dollars that was going to be made available to a private mall without telling taxpayers that they were footing the bill.

3:20

So I would argue that in order for this government to live up to its claims of full disclosure, openness, and transparency, to try to make amends for clearly what was the error of their ways back in the fall of 1993, they have a responsibility to produce this document. It is clearly in the public interest. I would hope that they don't hide behind some third-party rules. I would hope that they don't argue that there is too much of a proprietary or commercial interest. I would hope that they don't argue that there is Executive Council privilege. I mean, the fact is, Mr. Speaker, this story is being dragged out in the courts, and I think that does a disservice to taxpayers.

This government can demonstrate that it's true to its word when it says that it wants to disclose, and it can produce this document,

right here, right now, today. What a surprise it would be, Mr. Speaker, if in fact that happened, if we actually had a member of government, Executive Council, saying: "You're right. We want to keep our word. We don't want there to be a growing gap between what we do and what we say. We want Albertans to be able to have trust and faith in their government, so we're going to produce this document. We're going to live up to the commitment we made." What a treat that would be. So I hope those are the words that we hear today.

With those few short remarks I will leave it to the government to respond to the motion for a return, and we'll see where that leaves us.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Premier I will respond that government is rejecting Motion for a Return 1. The document in question actually relates to a letter from a third party to the Executive Council/office of the Premier in relation to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, as noted. The record will not be disclosed because it involves a third party's personal and/or commercial information, which, as we all know, requires third-party consent for release to be made.

Also, the particular issue of the refinancing in question has been before the Ethics Commissioner, the Auditor General, and there are now several cases in this regard which are before the courts. As we all know, the courts are an open and transparent process, and most people have great respect for the court system in this province and in this country. This issue will be dealt with in a fair and impartial manner there.

So I will respond officially that the government is rejecting Motion for a Return 1.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to conclude debate.

MR. SAPERS: No surprise, the rejection. A little bit of a surprise in the rejecter but no surprise in the rejection. I guess they're becoming too predictable, because I clearly anticipated the arguments. You know, they just don't hold any water.

There is a public interest involved here, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that while this government was telling Albertans that they couldn't afford classrooms and teachers and hospital beds and diagnostic services, while they were telling municipalities that they couldn't afford to continue to pay as much as they were for policing costs and road paving and other infrastructure, while all of that was going on, this government was in secret, behind-closed-door meetings with some of the wealthiest financial institutions and businesspeople not just in this province but in this country, and they were negotiating a half billion, 500 with lots of zeros behind it, a half billion dollar bailout.

You know, if this government wants to continue to hide behind the work of the Ethics Commissioner or the good work of the Auditor General and say, "Oh, look; the work has been done; the disclosure is there," then not only are they doing a disservice to Albertans, but in fact they are diminishing the offices of both the Ethics Commissioner and the Auditor General, because those gentlemen who occupy those offices did what they could with what the government allowed.

It is really a shame and quite disappointing to me that any member of Executive Council would stand up and put a cloud over the offices of the Ethics Commissioner or the Auditor General. Their

work does not excuse what this government did, and their work does not excuse the subsequent cover-up of what's happened, and their work does not excuse the government from escaping its responsibility to act always in the public interest and not in the selfish private interests of a few members of Executive Council.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is consistent. I'll give them that. They're consistent. They seem to have their song sheet set on this one, and you know, they're beginning to do it even without teleprompters. It is still about time that they put into action the words that they have uttered about openness and transparency and disclosure.

This story will come out, and I hope that I am still a Member of this Legislative Assembly when this story comes out. I'm hoping, when that opportunity arises, that those individuals who have distorted the facts, who have misled taxpayers, who have created suspicion, and who have denied responsibility will finally be called to account. They will be called to account not just in this Chamber but elsewhere, and every taxpayer of this province will have an opportunity to see them for what they are and to call them to be accountable for what it is they have done and then denied it.

So, Mr. Speaker, when the Deputy Government House Leader says that he's going to have to reject it, I'm certain that the whips are on and the government will use its majority to once again stifle the public interest and we won't see the disclosure of this document. I would hope that just one or two of the Conservative members of this Assembly will have it in their heart to vote along with us. It won't be a standing vote, you know. It will just be a voice vote. I'm going to be listening carefully because I know that there are some hon. members on that side who also want to see this issue put to rest.

[Motion for a Return 1 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M2. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the December 3, 1993, letter from one MLA, Member of the Legislative Assembly, to a second MLA in the possession of the Executive Council/office of the Premier relating to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I didn't hear that chorus of voices that I was calling for, so that saddens me. I'll try again.

Now, let me say that we wouldn't even need this motion for a return if the Premier's office had done its job, respected the law, and responded appropriately to the freedom of information request that the Official Opposition put in. So for any member that is sitting there thinking, "Why are we spending time again on this issue?" well, that's why. Because the Premier's office didn't respect the law and didn't do the job that the people of this province would expect it to do. What I will say, Mr. Speaker, is that this again is an interesting exchange of correspondence at a particular point in time.

Now, earlier in my comments on Motion for a Return 1 I brought the Legislative Assembly through to the early part of the fall of 1993. Well, let's look at what began happening in November of 1993. Remember I mentioned that plan A about the refinancing? Well, interestingly, in November of 1993 Gentra, that private financier, withdrew its support for plan A and presented West Edmonton Mall with plan B.

Now, plan B called for a consensual foreclosure in which all nonsenior debt, including ATB's, would be purchased at a discount.

You know what that sounds like? You know what plan B sounds like? It sounds like a private-sector financing solution. It sounds like a way for ATB to be off the hook and for taxpayers to be off the hook.

3:30

This is what was going on in the late fall and the early winter of 1993. On November 1, 1993, a \$150 million government loan guarantee proposal from the Ghermezian family was sent by the office of the Premier to the Alberta Treasury Branches. Now, isn't that interesting? Obviously the owners of West Edmonton Mall contacted the Premier's office. Who knows? Maybe that was the document from October 19. We can only guess. They contacted the Premier's office. What did the Premier's office do? The Premier's office sent it to the Alberta Treasury Branches.

Now, let's remember that the Alberta Treasury Branches did not have an independent board of directors, in fact was operating in 1993 very much as an arm of the government, of the Provincial Treasury, very much considered to be a department of government. When the Premier's office sends something over to the Alberta Treasury Branches, it's like getting a little wake-up call from your boss. The boss sends a note along to the ATB, and we can only assume that the intent was that they wanted the ATB to be aware of this \$150 million loan request and to consider it. So this is what was happening on November 1, 1993.

To his credit the then superintendent of the Alberta Treasury Branches, Mr. Al Bray, appears to have ignored this little missile from the Premier's office because Mr. Bray believed, I believe, in the independence of financial decisions, that they should not become political decisions.

Now, the very next day, on November 2, 1993, a letter from the Bank of Montreal to West Edmonton Mall citing the default of \$50 million on the syndicated loan went on to say that the syndicate demands payment by the borrowers, that all indebtedness is due and payable by the borrower to the lenders. So West Edmonton Mall was in some kind of financial trouble. That's never been in dispute. What we know is that there were private-sector deals being worked out.

Now, when these private-sector deals were being worked out, it appears that the response from the government was to ignore what was going on in the private sector, to ignore what was going on in the business world, in the market. While at the very same time in public saying, "We have to slash and burn public services," they were saying in private: we've got to figure a way to support and maintain and enhance private businesses. This is an irony, Mr. Speaker, that I don't think we've spent quite enough time talking about.

November 26. We understand that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark sends a letter to the Premier urging the government to ensure that the positive worldwide awareness of the mall and the tax benefits and the influx of millions of tourists are protected and that negative publicity is curtailed. Now, the Premier has used this correspondence from the MLA who happens to represent the area in which the mall is located as the excuse for government interference in the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall.

You know, people have said that the Official Opposition doesn't always have enough influence on this government. Isn't it remarkable that on one of the most sensitive political issues that this government has faced, dealing with almost half a billion tax dollars, the government would say in its defence: it was that member of the Official Opposition that made us do it; she wrote a letter, and the power of that letter convinced us to put half a billion dollars of taxpayers' money at risk. Well, of course that is an absurdity.

What the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was doing was of course representing the interests of her constituents in asking the government to do what was within their power to do, which would be not politically expedient, not just politically acceptable but would be in the public interest. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark puts the public interest first, and it's about time that members of Executive Council followed her lead and put the public interest first when it comes to disclosing the truth about their involvement in West Edmonton Mall.

Now, according to Michael Walrath by affidavit, on November 30, 1993, there was a meeting between the Ghermeziens, the Premier, the then Minister of Economic Development, the then superintendent of Alberta Treasury Branches, Mr. Leahy, and a gentleman by the name of Rod Love. During this meeting, according to the affidavit, the following transpired.

Now, this is going to be a quote from the affidavit, Mr. Speaker, so you'll forgive, please, the use of proper names. Quote: upon the instructions of Premier Klein to Deputy Premier Kowalski, Mr. Tadman invited Elmer Leahy to join the meeting at which Rod Love was also in attendance. I am further advised by Nader Ghermezi and verily believe that at the meeting the government ministers directed and encouraged Elmer Leahy to assist the Ghermeziens with the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall. Thereafter, further meetings and correspondence ensued. End of quote.

Now, this is despite the protestations to the contrary by the Premier. This sworn affidavit – and this is on file – says that government ministers directed ATB with the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall. That's what this says. This affidavit is on file.

We have heard rumour of a statutory declaration from the Premier. It has been referred to in the Auditor General's special audit, but we have not seen it. We don't know what questions were asked of the Premier. We don't know what responses he provided, and we don't know what responses he didn't provide. We don't know what list of documents was provided to the Auditor General because the government won't tell the public what it is they provided and what it is they continue to keep secret.

All I can argue, Mr. Speaker, is that we have one affidavit here. If this affidavit is false, then there is recourse through the courts because of that. If this affidavit is not false, then it is quite an indictment of the government. If it is false, I would expect the government to offer a robust defence of their behaviour and quite a spirited attack on Mr. Walrath, but we haven't seen that. So I would guess that as all of these things were happening in the fall, one piece of the puzzle that we need is this letter from one MLA to another regarding the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall.

Now, later on in 1993, towards the end of the year, West Edmonton Mall experienced operating losses to the tune of nearly \$6 million. West Edmonton Mall's annual municipal tax bill was hiked up about \$2 million. They then failed to pay the \$10 million property tax bill and were penalized at a rate of \$100,000 per month. So there was some urgency in resolving the financial woes of the mall.

Now, keep in mind that in the background were these private-sector deals that were being arranged. But lo and behold on January 5, 1994, which takes us just beyond the period of time in which this earlier exchange of correspondence occurred, there was a letter that was sent from the Premier to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, which read in part, quote: accordingly, the present difficulties brought on by various mall lenders carry serious consequences to the province of Alberta and the city of Edmonton, close quote. So the Premier was absolutely aware.

There were a series of discussions within the Premier's office and Executive Council. We know that there were meetings of agenda

and priorities. We know that there were discussions in cabinet. So we now have a pattern, Mr. Speaker, that would convince even a casual observer that the government was intimately involved and following very closely the fortunes and misfortunes of West Edmonton Mall and its potential for refinancing and for economic viability.

So again I will say that to make that record more complete, to ensure that there is full disclosure, to make sure the government lives up to its commitments, I would request that Motion for a Return 2 be quickly complied with so we can get this one more little piece of the puzzle on the table so we can begin to fill in the frame.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Premier I will indicate that government is rejecting Motion for a Return 2. The opposition is aware of these records as a result of a FOIP request to Executive Council. The Information and Privacy Commissioner did issue order 99-017 on the request, and under his order he upheld Executive Council's refusal to disclose these records. Again, similar to the FOIP request Executive Council will not be releasing them today.

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

MR. WHITE: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I had not intended to rise on this matter because this matter has a long, long, long history and will have a much longer history. There will be books written about this, and there will be books written about each and every part of it except the part that says that this government has a member of their caucus denying this information to an opposition who asked for this information. When that member was a member of the opposition, he was the one that was asking for the information. It is simply not fair for that caucus to have this member do its dirty work in this particular matter.

3:40

He is on record asking and demanding this information from that chair right in front of this member. It's not fair to put this member through that embarrassment. Quite frankly, this information – I cannot put words into his mouth. He did that already, and I will not go to the record to throw those questions back at him, but you'd think there would be a little sensitivity to half a billion dollars, \$500 million. That's enough to keep Regis Philbin busy for at least three lifetimes when trying to give away money. This government signed it off faster than "Jack be little." Not only did they sign it off, but then they deny that they ever did it: it weren't me; it weren't me. It is unbelievable that this could happen.

AN HON. MEMBER: The sky is falling.

MR. WHITE: Someone says, "The sky is falling." I think it's the member opposite. Well, maybe the sky is not falling, but I'll tell you that this government certainly would try to buy it to bring it down.

I mean, they can cover up so much. It's hard to believe that the citizens of Alberta can stand by and watch this occur, particularly with one member opposite being on both sides of the issue: demanding this information and now denying it. It is hypocrisy at its best, sir.

Thank you for the time.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to conclude debate.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again no surprise, but there is a terrible irony here. April 1, 1998: now, I know that that was April Fool's Day. Let's hope, though, that that didn't have anything to do with what the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek was thinking and doing that day.

On April 1, 1998, on page 1295 of *Hansard*, there was Motion for a Return 62, which read

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence exchanged between the ministries of Treasury, economic development and tourism, and Executive Council for the period January 1, 1994, to January 26, 1998, relating to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall and the involvement of the Alberta Treasury Branches in that refinancing.

Now, as events would transpire, of course, the Treasurer rejected that motion for a return. I had an opportunity to make some comments on it, but so did the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek. I just want to quote from page 1296 of *Hansard* of April 1, 1998, where he said in part in defence of his motion for a return:

Here is yet another opportunity, I think, for the government to climb out from whatever rock it may be under with respect to the refinancing package, and I would have hoped they would have taken the opportunity through this motion to do that.

You know, it is most disturbing to me that in a couple of years we've seen this transformation from a suggestion that the government needs to crawl out from under a rock to hiding behind some procedure to protect the government instead of the public. That is a very disturbing transformation.

Mr. Speaker, none of this is to make an argument about the merits of West Edmonton Mall or the value that the mall has provided to the people of this province. This is all about government accountability and government responsibility and truthfulness, and that's the purpose that we are pursuing this matter.

[Motion for a Return 2 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M3. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the December 3, 1993, memo from one MLA, Member of the Legislative Assembly, to another MLA in the possession of the Executive Council/office of the Premier relating to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You have no idea how much I look forward to these Wednesday afternoons and the opportunity to ask the government time and time and time again to do the right thing and then live with the disappointment time and time and time and time again of the government doing the wrong thing. I guess if that's my destiny, to spend my Wednesday afternoons defending the public interest against an overwhelming government indifference to the public interest, then I'm quite willing to live up to that responsibility, as are my colleagues in the Official Opposition.

It was nice that the member for — I get it wrong. Is it just Airdrie now?

AN HON. MEMBER: Airdrie-Rocky View.

MR. SAPERS: Whoever that person is. The hon. member was applauding, so I take it that she won't be — well, she is the whip, so I can't say she can't be whipped into just doing the government line.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to prolong debate this afternoon. Motion for a Return 3 is remarkably similar in form to the previous motion for a return. I will incorporate by reference my earlier comments, but I will note that on that day back in April of 1998 not only was Motion for a Return 62 put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, then a member of the Official Opposition, but so was Motion for a Return 63, that asked that the Assembly

do issue for a return showing copies of all loan guarantee agreements for the period January 1, 1994, to January 28, 1997, between the Alberta Treasury Branches, TD Trust Company, West Edmonton Mall Property Inc., WEM Holdings, and 626110 Alberta Ltd. relating to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall.

So clearly that member at that time, a couple of short years ago, had an abiding interest in getting to the truth in this matter. I would hope he still has that abiding interest, and I would hope that he will recommend to his colleagues that this motion for a return be supported.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Premier I will respond and let it be noted that government is rejecting Motion for a Return 3.

I'd like to make a few comments here in light of some comments that have been made on the other side. It's true that when you're in opposition you do bring forward motions for returns and you do bring in written questions and you're looking for answers. That's part of what the role of opposition is, and it's certainly one that I took seriously and did put forward those specific requests.

However, it's also true that I had then and I have now great respect for the rules and procedures of this House and for the laws and guidelines that exist under the freedom of information and protection of privacy laws, as I also have great respect for the Auditor General's office and for any other offices, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, for example. When these bodies respond and explain what reasons are given for particular decisions, I think they should be respected as well. You may not like them, but the fact is that you have to respect them. I respected them in whatever role I played, and I will continue to respect them because I believe in the integrity of the process.

Having said that, I will again state that the Information and Privacy Commissioner, one of the individuals and one of the individual's offices that I referred to earlier and one for which I have great respect, did issue an order on the request, and under his order he did uphold Executive Council's refusal to disclose the records in question. So again, similar to that request, Mr. Speaker, they will not be released today.

3:50

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to believe that the member opposite can stand in his place and make those arguments. Yes, he has a point on motions for returns 1, 3, and 4. There is a possibility — and this member will admit there is a possibility — that there is an obligation at some point to deny the public knowledge from a third-party communication. There is a possibility. This government has ignored that many times and in this particular issue ignored it a great many times in publishing information. But when it comes to trying to hide behind that ruling, for one of the items that was asked for today — the member generalized about all of those — it's an MLA to MLA communication. There is no such third party.

Now, I have to ask what service this member thinks he's delivering to his constituents in denial of information from one MLA to

another MLA when previously he sat in one chair, the chair immediately in front of this member, and demanded that information. This, sir, is nothing short of the worst kind of hypocrisy, and it is sad to see it from this member, who was formerly, in my view, highly respected.

Thank you, sir.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to conclude debate.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess my disappointment has grown, and now I have a brand-new reason. It seems to be the failure on the part of the Deputy Government House Leader to understand that I wasn't asking the Ethics Commissioner, the Privacy Commissioner, the Auditor General, the Ombudsman, or any other legislative office to do anything. I'm glad that he respects those offices, and you know, that's between him and the people he confesses to.

My request in this motion for a return is to ask the government to produce a document. You see, the government can always do that regardless of what any other legislative office found. This Chamber has the authority to direct the government to do something, and they could. They could ask the government to do the honourable thing, to live up to its commitments about openness and truthfulness and produce these documents in the public interest. Even the freedom of information legislation in this province contemplated that there may be times that the exclusions would be overridden by the public interest. It is simply referred to as the public interest override.

The Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek and Deputy Government House Leader can claim untold allegiance and respect to the legislative officers, and that is totally relevant to the issue at hand, because the issue at hand is the government living up to its word and producing the documents that it's hiding from Albertans, bringing them out into the public. That's what this motion for a return calls for.

[Motion for a Return 3 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M4. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the February 18, 1993, letter from a third party to the Executive Council/office of the Premier relating to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again a very interesting point in time in the whole legacy regarding West Edmonton Mall refinancing. In late 1992 West Edmonton Mall experienced a net loss of \$4.3 million. In early 1993 the same mall renovated the existing phase 1 at a cost of about \$20 million. In June of 1993 West Edmonton Mall withheld almost \$12 million in taxes due to the city of Edmonton.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in February of 1993 again, third-party correspondence to the Executive Council has now come to light, correspondence we can only surmise was being held by Executive Council at the same time that office denied they had any records on West Edmonton Mall refinancing. In other words, we know the correspondence exists. It's been documented elsewhere – in the Auditor General's report, and it's been documented, I believe, in one of the court proceedings – but we still don't know what it is. Now, isn't that curious? The government, which claims openness and

transparency, after denying that anything existed only grudgingly admits that it does exist, only because it's referred to in another place, whether that be the Auditor General's report or a court of law. So we get the truth sort of through some kind of torture, and this government seems to make a habit of this.

Whether it has to do with Opron Construction and the Paddle River dam, whether it's got to do with Bovar, whether it's got to do with Millar Western, or whether it's got to do with any of the issues that have gone up before the courts, what happens is that when the government is caught, it finally says: oh, yeah, we meant to tell you about it all the time. That seems to be what's happening now in these court proceedings with West Edmonton Mall.

Well, I'm going to give the government an opportunity to get out ahead of the game. I'm going to give this government yet another opportunity to be honourable; to put the documents forward, all the documents; to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about its involvement in West Edmonton Mall; and to be heroes. You know, they could actually be heroes. They could say: "Look, Sapers; you have nothing else to complain about, because here we are. Here's the box of documents. Read 'em and weep. It's all good stuff. We didn't do anything wrong. We've nothing to be ashamed of." That would be great. I don't think we're going to see that, but wouldn't that be just great?

Now, this date of February 18, 1993, is curious for another reason as well, because it was almost a year later to the day that the agenda and priorities committee met on February 14, on Saint Valentine's Day of 1994, and we had the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre of the Alberta taxpayers, which was the meeting of agenda and priorities that decided to scuttle all the private-sector financing, put a hold on it, and then put into place a series of decisions which led to taxpayers backstopping the West Edmonton Mall.

The irony of ironies there, Mr. Speaker, just in case you've forgotten, is that one of the arguments put forward was that we can't allow the financing of this mall to go to some eastern lenders, and that's why we need a made-in-Alberta solution. That was really the essence of the Premier's February 1994 memo. The ultimate funder of the loan was the Toronto-Dominion Bank, or TD Trust. I believe the Toronto-Dominion Bank is headquartered in Ontario. Now, I don't admit this to many people, but I was actually born in Toronto. I've been to the main office of the Toronto-Dominion Bank, and unless they've moved it, they're an eastern lender. Isn't it an irony that we have the excuse that we can't allow an eastern lender to be responsible for the financing of West Edmonton Mall, but we're going to organize a bailout, backstopped by taxpayers of Alberta, ultimately through an eastern lender? That engineering began pretty much a year to the day after this February 18, 1993, letter was received by Executive Council.

So I would ask once again that this government take this opportunity that the Official Opposition is providing them to stand up and do the right thing: accept this motion for a return quickly and produce the document.

4:00

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Premier I will indicate that government is rejecting Motion for a Return 4. I think perhaps the member needs to know that the reasons stated earlier for some of these responses apply equally here as well in this case.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I don't know which reasons those would be.

Would that be the reason that the government is hiding behind some exclusions, or is the reason that that hon. member likes the Auditor General? I mean, which reasons for rejection was he referring to? The readers of *Hansard*, as few as they may be, I'm sure would want to know what exactly the government is relying on to justify its abdication of responsibility in truthfully and quickly producing these documents. That being said, I can't put words in that member's mouth, and I won't pretend to know why on behalf of his friends in government he is rejecting this very legitimate request, particularly because it is so similar in form to requests for information that he made just a couple of years ago.

So, Mr. Speaker, we'll only be left to wonder, and in spite of the hon. gentleman's recommendation to the contrary, I hope the motion will pass.

[Motion for a Return 4 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M8. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of excerpts of cabinet agenda, with attachments, dated March 12, 1996, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 34 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, this is very curious, and again I'm going to have to walk the Assembly through some of the history.

What we find is that the troubles for West Edmonton Mall continued. The refinancing package was put into place, but there were some legal actions with some numbered companies, a company called Mansfield Tek. We have the Treasurer in January of 1996 talking about how ATB had adopted a whole new policy for loans after he was appointed the Provincial Treasurer. We suppose that was because of briefings he had about questionable lending procedures beforehand. We know that in February of '96 Mansfield Tek, in that lawsuit I was referring to, was awarded \$1.7 million in a court judgment against Triple Five. On February 23, '96, we know that there was a lease agreement between West Edmonton Mall and an enterprise called Sunningdale. This was signed by the then superintendent, Elmer Leahy.

The agreement grants exclusive management rights to the mall to the Ghermezian families for 99 years, plus limited occupancy and utility costs on the hotel for 99 years. This lease also provided for the construction of a second hotel at the mall through Sunningdale Investments, which is in fact a Ghermezian-held company. The Alberta Treasury Branch claimed that they did not find out about the Sunningdale lease agreement until April 3, 1998, and they did not receive a copy until April 21, '98. Furthermore, the ATB claims that each of the side agreements, if given effect to, would disadvantage the Alberta Treasury Branch, would be highly detrimental to the ATB's position with respect to the mall, and would jeopardize the recovery of the guaranteed funds.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we have is that a whole series of things transpired even after the government-engineered refinancing package took place. It seems we have some side agreements, and it seems we have some evidence of some other legal and financial trouble that the mall was getting itself into. Most interestingly, we know that there was further discussion in cabinet, so it wasn't simply a onetime deal.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that the government yet again has an opportunity to let Albertans know what was going on behind closed doors in 1996, while people were still suffering the effects of provincial government cuts in core services such as education and health care, what was going on in those Executive Council meetings to deal with the West Edmonton Mall.

Mr. Speaker, I could continue in my history. In March a couple of other interesting things happened in regard to the government's involvement in West Edmonton Mall. The Alberta Liberals, as the Official Opposition, asked the then Provincial Treasurer, Jim Dinning, about changes in lending practices at the Alberta Treasury Branch. The Provincial Treasurer responded, and I'm now quoting from *Hansard*, March 4, 1996, page 352.

Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows, I sat down with the acting superintendent . . . when he took on the job, and I asked him to carry out a study with a local consulting firm to look at the lending practices of Treasury Branches.

What exactly was it that led the Treasurer to do that as one of his first items of business? On March 26, 1996, Alberta Treasury Branch and West Edmonton Mall Property Inc. concluded a right of first refusal agreement. Alberta Treasury Branch granted West Edmonton Mall Property a right of first refusal to purchase any outstanding mortgages that the ATB was a beneficial owner of or guarantor for. This agreement also entitled West Edmonton Mall Property to receive a copy of the offer made to the Alberta Treasury Branch by a third party to purchase any outstanding mortgage or mortgages. Alberta Treasury Branch claims they had no knowledge of the right of first refusal agreement until a letter was received from McLennan Ross, a law firm, on June 8, 1998.

If this document has any effect, it would be to restrict the Alberta Treasury Branch's flexibility with respect to a sale of its position and would potentially diminish its recovery. That means diminish its ability to protect taxpayers' interests in this regard. A very interesting development that took place at about the same time that we are asking for copies of the cabinet agenda where we know this matter was dealt with.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would ask once again that the government do the right thing and produce the materials requested in Motion for a Return 8.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, as with the previous requests, I'm responding on behalf of the Premier to indicate that government will be rejecting Motion for a Return 8.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to conclude debate.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, this is perhaps the most curious refusal of the bunch, and let me explain why. Not only do we have this whole legacy now of government involvement stemming back to the early 1990s, not only do we have meeting after meeting of Executive Council, of agenda and priorities committee, the most powerful committee of government, not only do we have an exchange of correspondence between the Premier and his most powerful lieutenants, not only do we have handwritten notes emerging from the Premier's office, not only do we have direction to scuttle private-sector financing, but we have, in fact, a continued series of events that bring us right through the period of time that the refinancing was negotiated.

We begin to uncover evidence of side deals, and of course those circumstances which have led us to the legal battles which are now raging in the courts happened at about this point in time. But with all of that, as interesting as it is, all of that history, that whole legacy and that whole sordid involvement of the government in this affair, it may be that it's not as interesting as what happened more recently.

Now, I have a document that I believe should be available to the

government because it's a court record, a public document. It's an affidavit dated November 30, 1999. It's signed by a commissioner for oaths by the name of Kari Becker. It's an affidavit of Robert Bhatia, and what it says is that the Crown doesn't have any problem disclosing the material that I'm requesting.

4:10

So we have the government through Executive Council saying that we're not going to tell you the answer to that question, we're not going to produce the records and the documents, we're not going to respect the procedures of this Assembly, we're not going to respect the legitimate requests of the Official Opposition on behalf of the public, but if you happen to be one of the privileged few who can be in court, then it's okay. On the one hand, you have the government saying: "No closed drawer; no closed door. We're going to be open and accountable. It'll all come out." On the other hand, you have the government saying, "But we're not going to tell you here in this Chamber," in the one place in this whole province where free speech is supposed to always prevail, where truth is always supposed to be the watchword, where we're supposed to take each other at our word at all times, even when some of the utterances are most unbelievable.

Now, this document, which references Action No. 9903-18469, is an action in the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta in the judicial district of Edmonton between Alberta Treasury Branches as plaintiff and Nader Ghermezian, Raphael Ghermezian, Bahman Ghermezian, Eskander Ghermezian, 273905 Alberta Ltd., Howard Anson, Mavis Halliday, 218703 Alberta Ltd., 579511 Alberta Ltd., 298936 Alberta Ltd., Triple Five Properties Inc., West Edmonton Mall Property Inc., WEM Holdings Inc., WEM Management Inc., Avista Financial Corporation, 298926 Alberta Ltd., ABNR Equities Corp., Devcor Investment Corporation, Elmer Leahy, Ventana Investments Inc., and Adirondack Investments Ltd. as defendants. I will read from it. The Crown says:

The Crown has in its possession or power records, as set forth in the First and Second parts of the First Schedule hereto, that are relevant and material to one or more of the issues in this action.

Simply put, they have records.

In "The First Part" the Crown goes on to say, "does not object to produce." Now let me read to you the form of the affidavit. It says:

The First Part: showing records in the possession of the Crown which it does not object to produce.

See attached list hereto marked "The First Part" and which list forms part of this Affidavit of Records.

The Second Part: showing records in the possession of the Crown which it does object to produce, being:

See paragraph 2 and the attached list hereto marked "The Second Part", which list forms part of this Affidavit of Records.

So if you read the first schedule, Mr. Speaker, it says that here's a whole list of records, including "excerpts of cabinet agendas with attachment(s)" from 08/13/96, which the Crown does not object to produce.

Now, I am very puzzled by this. I'm also deeply concerned, because it seems a little bit duplicitous to me. It seems as though we have the government saying one thing when it's convenient and saying something else when it's convenient. It seems that we have a growing gap once again between words and deeds. Why is it that the Crown would have no objection to producing these cabinet agendas and attachments in court, in that public forum, but will reject them and refuse to produce them in this public forum? Are they hoping that nobody will notice when they're produced in that public forum? Is it because one hand doesn't know what the other hand is doing? Is it because they're just trying to be difficult? Is it because it's the Official Opposition that's asking?

Mr. Speaker, what legitimate reason could there possibly be for

the government to say, "It's okay; we'll produce these records in one forum but not another"? I don't think there is a legitimate excuse. I think this government is clearly trying to confuse, mislead, and otherwise obscure its role in putting nearly a half billion dollars' worth of taxpayers' money at risk. It is clearly a touchy, sore point for this government. It's an embarrassment to them, as it should be. You know, it must be an embarrassment, because it is their newest Deputy Government House Leader who has been given the task of standing up and saying: we won't comply with your requests.

You know, Mr. Speaker, that hon. member and I were once colleagues on this side of the House, and I still have a soft spot in my heart for those days. I know that that member doesn't take his responsibilities lightly, but I can't help but observe that he must be feeling awfully abused right about now. First of all, he gets put up to be a member of the truth squads; not just a member of a truth squad but in fact one of the capo de capos of the truth squads. Then of course when that initiative seems to fail to capture the public imagination in a positive way, the government says: "Okay; we'll go soft on the truth squads. Maybe that was a mistake, but I know what we can do. Wouldn't it be fun . . ." And I can just imagine the sort of boyish glee in the Premier's office when he was talking to his advisers about how they're going to obscure the truth and how they're going to deny these requests. I can just imagine the boyish glee as they said: "Oh, I know what we can do. We can get Edmonton-Mill Creek to stand up and deny the request. Won't that be an irony?"

So of course here we are today, where we have this situation which must be awfully uncomfortable and embarrassing for that member. I want to say to him that I feel his pain, and I want to say that it truly saddens me to see him abused like this when, after all, all he was trying to do was serve his constituents.

What we have, Mr. Speaker, to try to quickly summarize, is an affidavit of record put forward by a representative of the Crown, in fact an assistant deputy Provincial Treasurer, saying that they don't have any problem in releasing these documents, yet we have the Deputy Government House Leader saying just the opposite, just the contrary: we're not going to release the documents. I think Albertans will want an explanation as to why we have this to and fro, why we have these totally opposite and opposing responses to similar requests. I don't think Albertans are going to be satisfied if the answer is "I don't know," which seems to be about all we've heard from this government; that is, either "I don't know," or "I don't want to know," or "I might know, but I'm not going to tell you." That does not bring this House into a positive light either.

So we have a rejection from the government. We also have an acceptance from the government, but it's in a different forum. Maybe those members here will be compelled to help save the face of the government and will vote to release the document so the government at least can be made to look consistent on this one little point. I mean, rife with inconsistencies throughout this whole saga, but at least on this one little point we can give the government an opportunity to look like it's doing the things it says it's going to do and it can be consistent in all forums.

I think the minds of the public would be put at ease if they could see that their government was being consistent. Of course, if the government chooses to continue to be inconsistent, then one couldn't blame any taxpayer of this province for thinking that the government has something to hide. Because you know, Mr. Speaker, when you have something to hide, you forget what you've said and what you've done and you're scrambling to figure out what really is the truth and how you can shave it, and you often just get tied up in your own words. Maybe that's what we're facing with this government on this matter now.

So I would once again ask that this Motion for a Return 8 on the Order Paper in my name be accepted.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: All those in favour of Motion for a Return 8 as moved . . . [Mr. Jacques rose] Hon. member, the call was from one side to the other, and there being no speakers at the time, then the chair invited the hon. member to conclude debate, so that's why we're holding the vote. Perhaps the next one.

[Motion for a Return 8 lost]

Government Fees and Charges

M10. Mr. Gibbons moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all fees and charges and copies of expense and revenue analyses prepared by the Department of Government Services and Alberta Registries between May 1, 1999, and February 17, 2000, for Alberta Treasury and the Fees and Charges Committee.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the hon. Minister of Government Services and indicate that the government will be accepting Motion For a Return 10.

4:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: To conclude debate, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: I rise to close, and I'm pleased to receive this information. I had tried to get it earlier on last year, and all I got was 23 pages of FOIPed items. Some of these items that we're needing lead up to Bill 5 and Bill 16, items that are on the table right now, and I appreciate getting that information.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 10 carried]

Agriculture Financial Services Corporation/ Alberta Opportunity Company

M17. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies and reports prepared by or for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development between May 25, 1999, and February 17, 2000, relating to the integration of the Alberta Agriculture Financial Services Corporation and the Alberta Opportunity Company.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the members in this Chamber was appointed to oversee and study the whole issue to see what could be done as far as the integration of AOC with AFSC. It's an ongoing procedure. The hon. member has, I know, met with the various boards that are involved, has asked for a number of reports, and has done that kind of work. But it's a work in progress, and to our knowledge there have been absolutely no studies or reports completed at this time. Because of the nature of the work, it's ongoing, so we would have to reject this particular motion.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to conclude debate.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, to conclude debate, the statements made by the minister really surprise me. They're a contradiction. On the one hand, what the minister is saying is that there are no reports, that there are no studies, that there is nothing to table or to report. On the other hand, the motion for a return clearly says, "copies of all studies and reports prepared by or for." Why he doesn't accept it, I don't know. If there aren't any there to submit, then there's no reason why he shouldn't accept it. The fact that he's rejected it indicates to me that there may possibly be some studies or reports there that he's not prepared to release for whatever reason.

The Member for Lethbridge-East, Mr. Speaker, I would think is going to be quite surprised. He anticipated that the minister would have no hesitation accepting this particular motion for a return. I don't really understand why on the one hand the minister would say that there's nothing to report and on the other hand he rejects it. If there's nothing to report, why not accept it and submit whatever's there? If there's nothing there to submit, there's nothing there to submit. At least he would then have accepted the motion for a return rather than have rejected it.

On that note I'll conclude, but let me say that I'm very disappointed that the minister has rejected it.

[Motion for a Return 17 lost]

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 202

Marriage Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned March 14: Mr. Dickson speaking]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to take this opportunity to outline the reasons why I'm unable to support Bill 202, the Marriage Amendment Act, 2000, a private member's bill sponsored by the Member for Red Deer-South. In my view, this bill does not and cannot do what I believe the sponsor has suggested that it does do; in other words, protect the institution of marriage in Alberta from challenge under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms by way of restricting solemnization of marriage to only opposite-sex couples.

Mr. Speaker, for the reasons that I will describe, in my view Bill 202 is largely meaningless and ineffective to achieve the purposes stated by the sponsor, and unfortunately I believe that it sends a message to Albertans which is misleading and suggests to them that we are doing something that we really can't do as a provincial Legislature.

During the debate on this bill the sponsor and other hon. members of this Legislature, in their speeches both at second reading and at committee, spoke of the very positive benefits to society that the institution of marriage has contributed and the importance that marriage has for many people in Alberta and elsewhere in this country, and in all of this I concur. However, Mr. Speaker, to express these sentiments at length does not ensure the legal and constitutional validity of the contents of Bill 202. It does not ensure that, nor can these sentiments cure the weaknesses in Bill 202.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, it is my belief that the content of a private member's

bill should be held to the same standard as the content of a government bill in terms of the scrutiny it receives and the debate it receives. I don't believe this has happened here, and I think that is unfortunate. I do believe that private members' bills, or any bill for that matter, should be more than a form of public relations for the consumption of the public, who often have neither the time nor the resources to check out the validity of the legislation which is being passed in a Legislature. For me as a member of this Assembly to support a bill which I believe is beyond our jurisdiction as a provincial Legislature, that I believe to be at the worst or at the best a somewhat meaningless piece of legislation – for me it is not responsible to support it, for of course once this legislation is passed, it has the same effect as any other piece of government legislation.

I'm proud to be a member of this Legislature, and I would like to think that the bills we pass here are ones that we are entitled to pass and that give us credibility in this country. I want to be proud of what we do here. I'm by no means saying that I'm not a big supporter of marriage. I've been married, and I believe in marriage as much as anyone else here, but that doesn't mean, in my view, that we pass bills that we're not entitled to pass.

Yesterday, in moving third reading of his bill, the sponsor, in a very genuine attempt, I'm sure, to garner support for his bill, stated that all members of the Legislature had to ask themselves whether the institution of marriage is worth protecting and said that that is at the heart of this bill. Well, I do not believe that that is the right question that members of this Legislature should ask themselves at all. In fact, I would suggest that the right question is: does this provincial Legislature have the jurisdiction to legislate on the subject of who can marry? The answer, in my view, is: no, we do not. In my view, this bill attempts to do something by the back door that can't be done through the front door.

4:30

The Constitution of this country defines for us the generally clear and exclusive jurisdiction of the federal government versus the provincial government. I think it is essential that each level of government legislate within its own area, especially where it's clearly stated, and I think it's important that we as a provincial Legislature have respect for the division of powers and that we adhere to our own areas of authority, for this is the very foundation of how our Canadian system of government works. We certainly don't like it when we think the federal government is intruding into our areas of authority, so by the same token I think we have to respect those areas that belong to the federal government.

To be specific, Mr. Speaker, it is section 91 of the Constitution of Canada which defines the areas of exclusive federal jurisdiction, one of which is marriage and divorce. This has always meant that the federal government has the jurisdiction to decide on those issues relating to the capacity to marry or, in other words, who can marry. Now, section 92, which outlines the provincial exclusive jurisdiction, gives the province the right to legislate in the area of the solemnization of marriage, which is very simply the form and the process of how a marriage is conducted, registered, and the like. In other words, the province says how you can get married, but it is the federal government who says who can marry.

In fact, there is no federal statute, I believe, that defines what marriage is. The federal Marriage Act doesn't define it. The legal definition of marriage in this country is found in the common law or case law or jurisprudence that has developed over time. It's very clear: marriage means the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. This is the law in Canada.

In the final analysis, Mr. Speaker, I guess my point is this. The province doesn't have the jurisdiction to legislate on who can marry.

Even if it did, I don't believe that this bill even accomplishes the objective of the sponsor, which was to prohibit unions of same-sex couples, because it doesn't go far enough. It doesn't prohibit them. It just includes a definition of marriage by using the word "marriage." It doesn't include a prohibition. I don't think it could do this legally, but it doesn't in any event. In my view, the bill – that is, the preamble and the definition of marriage as drafted in this bill – at the very best adds nothing to the law, and at the worst it is an intrusion into federal jurisdiction.

I would now like to talk briefly about section 5 of the bill, which is an attempt to use the notwithstanding clause relative to our provincial Marriage Act, which is a licensing act in the main. I would start by saying that the notwithstanding clause of the Constitution can be invoked to allow a statute or a provision of a statute to remain valid when it would otherwise be in violation of a right or freedom guaranteed by section 2 and sections 7 through 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, there is no statutory provision to be protected, and therefore in my view the notwithstanding clause has no effect here. The law on marriage, as I mentioned, is in the common law, and the notwithstanding clause cannot affect the common law. It has no effect. Including the notwithstanding clause in this provincial Marriage Act does not, in my view, Mr. Speaker, cure the fact that the province has no jurisdiction over the authority to legislate capacity.

I would just go on to say – and I find this is why I most strenuously disagree with the inclusion of the notwithstanding clause in this bill, which I think is quite ill-conceived and somewhat clumsily done – that if the bill is passed, this will be the first time in Alberta that we have ever included the notwithstanding clause in our legislation. I think we should be very, very clear that when we start invoking the notwithstanding clause, which is very significant and in my view a provision that should be used sparingly, we should know exactly what we're doing when we use it and know what we're protecting against. There's nothing there to protect against. There's no statute. The federal government hasn't done anything. They've had the opportunity; they've done the opposite. There's nothing on the horizon. So we don't even know what we're protecting against, but we're throwing it in, and I think it's not responsible of us as legislators to use the notwithstanding clause in that way. That isn't to say that in the proper case it wouldn't be justified, but I think it doesn't exist yet, so that is why I cannot support the inclusion of the notwithstanding clause in this bill.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting this bill.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to concur with the position that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed has taken on Bill 202. Bill 202 is indeed a bad piece of legislation from a constitutional as well as a legal standpoint. In fact, its legality and constitutionality stand in serious question. I'm surprised that it passed committee stage and now is at third reading stage. At the very least I would have hoped that at committee stage there would have been more members like the Member for Calgary-Lougheed and the Member for Medicine Hat who, while supporting the principles of the bill, voted against it because it's simply a bad law. I ask the government members to consider carefully the arguments put forward by the Member for Medicine Hat, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, and the Minister of Justice before voting this very ill-advised bill into law.

Bill 202 deserves to be defeated because it represents an unacceptable intrusion into the jurisdiction of the federal government. The attempt by the Member for Red Deer-South to rationalize this

intrusion lacks credibility. Mr. Speaker, the comments made by the Member for Medicine Hat on March 1 bear repeating. The member said:

As has already been pointed out by the Minister of Justice, the institution of marriage falls under federal jurisdiction. The Alberta Marriage Act, which we are here to amend today, does not deal with the institution of marriage; it deals with the regulation of marriage. The reference to marriage that is contained repeatedly within the Marriage Act is using the definition that comes from federal legislation. So how can we in the Legislature of Alberta purport to be able to bring something about that is clearly under the jurisdiction of the federal government?

This is wise counsel by the Member for Medicine Hat.

4:40

The Alberta government historically has insisted that the federal government respect the Constitution and not make intrusions into areas that are within provincial jurisdiction. If Alberta's call for the federal government to respect provincial jurisdiction is to have any credibility, this Legislature should not be passing Bill 202, which intrudes on the federal government's constitutional responsibilities. I note that the Minister of Justice has, I believe courageously, opposed Bill 202 because he, too, believes that it represents an unwarranted intrusion into matters properly within the jurisdiction of the federal government. Has the Minister of Justice consulted with his federal counterpart on the question of jurisdiction? I wonder where the minister of intergovernmental relations stands on the question of jurisdiction. Has she consulted with her federal counterpart?

I'm concerned that the fast-tracking of Bill 202 through the Legislature will mean that no answers to the above questions will be provided. There's no good reason to fast-track this bill through other than the hope that by doing it this way, the government can save itself political embarrassment that would no doubt come from a detailed public scrutiny of the bill.

Clearly, the use of the notwithstanding clause to shield Bill 202 from court challenges under the Charter is offensive. I note that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo attempted to address this by introducing an amendment that would have removed this provision from the bill. While this may have made the bill less offensive, it remains the case that the courts could rule that the bill is unconstitutional because it violates the division of powers under the Constitution Act. If a legal challenge was made on these grounds, the bill could not even be saved by the use of the notwithstanding clause.

The fact that Bill 202 is being fast-tracked through this Legislature shows that this government has learned nothing from the public uproar following the introduction of Bill 26 two years ago. Bill 202, which obliges the government of Alberta . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, we have a point of order.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Point of Order

Private Members' Business

MR. JACQUES: Thank you. I noted with regard to the speaker's comments that he was referring to, quote, government. I know that you, Mr. Speaker, have cautioned us in the past that this is a private member's motion. Hon. member, you have very eloquently identified members individually who were speaking to the motion, and I fully concur with that, but when you now in the last two references referred to the government, I have to take exception to that. This is a private member's bill.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, without even hearing any further comments, I think the reminder has to be made again. This is private members' business, and the points made by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti are absolutely correct. This is private members' business.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I erred in this regard, I am prepared to correct myself. I mentioned that only in that we need to learn from our past. That was essentially the point of my observation.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: Let me resume then, Mr. Speaker, with your permission. This is the point I was making. Bill 202, which obliges the government of Alberta to invoke the notwithstanding clause, could be law in this province within days, despite the assurances that we received from this government that it will be much more cautious in the future before it considers invoking the clause. I'm in fact here restating the government's own position and reaffirming it.

Again, Mr. Speaker, tell me if I'm erring, but I would like to go on record as saying that I'd like to remind Albertans once again of the Premier's undertaking made two years ago. On March 11, 1998, the Premier said that the government would give the use of the notwithstanding provision much more serious thought in the future because "the seriousness and the power of this particular clause" became crystal clear to his caucus. Furthermore, the Premier responded to questions in this House about the use of the notwithstanding clause by saying that "if the notwithstanding clause is ever contemplated, indeed, there will be a tremendous amount of open and honest and public discussion" before it's invoked.

As I said at committee stage and I repeat: where, then, do the Premier and the government stand on the use of the notwithstanding clause as referenced in section 1.1 of Bill 202? Where is the open and honest discussion promised before approving another bill that contains a notwithstanding clause? I again point out that this bill is being proposed at a time when the government has failed to address the need to bring provincial legislation into compliance with the May '99 Supreme Court decision in *M versus H*. The federal government and most other Canadian provinces are moving rapidly to ensure that those involved in same-sex relationships have legal status equal to opposite-sex common-law couples. Even the Conservative government in Ontario has amended its statutes to remove this discrimination.

What are we doing in this province? Unfortunately, Alberta is moving in the wrong direction. Last spring and fall this Legislature approved amendments to such acts as the Domestic Relations Act, the Employment Pension Plans Act, and the Insurance Act. These amendments entrenched discrimination against same-sex couples by excluding them from the definition of spouse even when that term is clearly understood to include those couples living in common-law relationships. This is wrong, just as Bill 202 is wrong.

I'm not questioning the sincerity of the Member for Red Deer-South or the sincerity of other government members who are supporting Bill 202. I mentioned at committee stage that my wife and I recently celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary. I do value the institution of marriage and the lifelong commitment that marriage entails. At the same time, I'm realistic enough to recognize, Mr. Speaker, that when we talk about marriage, we need to participate in this discussion with some humility. It's a fact that 1 in 2 marriages today ends in divorce. It's also a fact that we no longer as a society require someone who lives in a psychologically

or physically abusive relationship to stay in that relationship under the pretext of preserving the sanctity of marriage.

Finally, it's a fact that many couples choose to live in mutually supportive relationships even though they are not legally married. The preamble to Bill 202 says that marriage between a man and a woman is firmly rooted in our philosophical and religious traditions. It is important to note that in a modern state such as Canada or Alberta marriage is a civil matter which sets out the legal rights and obligations of those who participate in it. The state should not be involved in promoting particular religious traditions or understandings of marriage. It is the responsibility of the state to ensure that those living in mutually supportive relationships fulfill their obligations to each other and to any dependent children.

Many gay and lesbian adults live in marriagelike relationships. Many same-sex couples subscribe to a lifelong commitment despite the lack of legal recognition of their relationships. I have been privileged to know many individuals with the same-sex orientation who take their responsibilities to their partners every bit as seriously as those of us involved in opposite-sex relationships. These are realities that will not be changed by this Legislature's approval of Bill 202. Whether we give recognition to the reality of the relationship by allowing same-sex couples to legally marry or whether we do so through some type of separate legal recognition, one thing is certain. If it is beneficial to society for opposite-sex couples to make a lifelong commitment to each other, the same should apply to the relationships of same-sex marriages. As J. Edwards said many years ago: what we wish for ourselves we desire for all.

As a society we will have to in the future face the question of public recognition of same-sex relationships in the same way that societies in the past had to struggle with questions of women's equality or racial equality. There were those in the 19th century who argued that slavery was deeply rooted in philosophical and religious traditions. There were those in the 20th century who argued that the subservience of women was deeply rooted in philosophical and religious traditions. Just because something is rooted in tradition doesn't automatically make it right. Societies evolve and change. As legislators we also have the responsibility to challenge our own assumptions and prejudices and be prepared to change.

The fact that the judiciary has on a few occasions ruled that the decisions of parliaments and legislatures are unconstitutional does not necessarily mean that the politicians are right and the judges are wrong. Just as politicians have a responsibility for making laws, judges have a responsibility for interpreting the law. In that context I make the following request of the Minister of Justice. Should Bill 202 regrettably be passed into law by this Assembly, the Minister of Justice should, prior to proclamation, commit to referring the bill to the courts for judicial review to ensure that it does not violate the division of powers in the Canadian Constitution.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I respectfully urge all members to vote against Bill 202 at third reading. Whatever our views are on the institution of marriage itself, Bill 202 is an ill-conceived piece of legislation and does not deserve the support of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to private member's Bill 202, Marriage Amendment Act, 2000. Before I do speak to the specifics of it, I would like to read into the record and I would wish to declare that I truly respect the institution and the sanctity of marriage. I also believe that we as legislators have the responsibility to not only acknowledge the legal

and religious values of marriage but indeed to pass laws that even assume those values.

However, Mr. Speaker, with reference to clause 2 as proposed in the bill, I find that while I believe that "marriage is the foundation of family and society," as is stated in the second whereas section, I cannot assent to read into the law of this province the ending of the second whereas clause, which reads, "without which there would be neither civilization nor progress." As I understand this whereas clause, it implies that marriage is the sole determinant of civilization and progress. While I agree that marriage contributes to civilization and progress, I do not believe it is the only factor that defines them.

The second point that I want to make is in reference to section 5, which does suggest that we write into law, again, this bill which suggests the use of the notwithstanding clause. My understanding of that clause contained within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is that it is only to be used when it is a situation that truly merits it in reference to another statutory situation, and I do not believe that there is a statutory provision to be protected under this whereas clause. Section 5, I believe, is beyond the scope of provincial legislative jurisdiction. I am not a lawyer, but I do believe that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed expressed it very well in saying that we cannot suggest the invocation of that against another government's jurisdictional powers, as I understand it.

So, Mr. Speaker, I stand here today to identify that I will be voting against this private member's bill, and the reason for it is not because I do not believe, again, in the sanctity and in the legality of marriage. It is truly to be respected. However, I do feel that this particular private member's bill is beyond the scope of our legislative approval.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief, but I'd like to respond to a couple of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and some others here today.

For me the issue is not whether the government can or cannot pass this legislation. It's not whether it should or should not include the notwithstanding clause. Having had a rather vivid experience myself with respect to that particular clause . . .

MR. DICKSON: Tell us about that.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, I don't think I have time to tell you about my experience with respect to that particular clause.

MR. DICKSON: Show us the scars.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, I can show you the scars.

I will make a couple of points, Mr. Speaker. I consider myself, in light of that experience that I had, to be somewhat of an expert on the notwithstanding clause. For one thing, when the government responded to the Vriend decision, which the Supreme Court rendered and indicated some changes that had to be made to or rather read into our human rights legislation, it was made very clear that with respect to the institution of marriage we would not take that particular issue to Albertans with respect to a full referendum or full discussion. In fact, I do recall the point being made very explicitly by the Premier and by other members of our caucus that the institution of marriage is so important and should be protected that we felt we would try and implement the notwithstanding clause in the event some changes occurred which we did not agree with.

So I have to take issue with the argument of the hon. member across the way, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, that it was

our intention to consult with respect to this particular type of change. It wasn't. What the hon. member across the way who is sponsoring the bill has done is simply incorporate that philosophical position in a private member's bill.

As concerns the role of the provincial government, we do play a role with respect to the institution of marriage. We are involved in the solemnization of marriage. We are involved in the licensing. I myself had the honour of actually marrying a couple last year and very much enjoyed the experience.

MR. DICKSON: Did it work better than the Premier's experience?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, I don't know if it was better than the Premier's experience. I can tell you that this particular experience was a lot smaller than the Premier's experience. There were about 50 people there as opposed to the hon. Minister of Environment, who I think filled the Jack Singer hall with all of his supporters. In fact, I think it was a combined nomination meeting and wedding.

MRS. McCLELLAN: It was very successful.

MR. HAVELOCK: He was successful. He not only won the nomination; he also has a lovely new bride. I'm sure he's very happy with her.

So we do play a role. Sometimes we bring forward legislation in this House and/or take positions where we feel so strongly about them that we're prepared to take the risk as to whether or not they could be challenged by the federal government. We took a very strong position with respect to federal gun control. While I appreciate that it's important for us to respect the jurisdiction of the federal government, again this is not a black and white issue. There is some overlap with respect to the role that the provincial government plays regarding the institution of marriage.

I will be voting for this particular private member's bill, and one of the reasons is this. After the Vriend decision we quite openly discussed whether or not there was another way to recognize a relationship which may be entered into by same-sex couples. Now, since having moved on from being Minister of Justice and Attorney General to my new post, I haven't been following that issue with a great deal of closeness or scrutiny myself personally. Nevertheless, there are some ways in which same-sex couples could, if they wanted to pursue it, have their particular relationship recognized. I know there are some European countries where they have done that, and if those individuals wish to pursue that, perhaps that's an option they should seriously consider.

I do support the intent of what the hon. member is trying to accomplish, and it's not for me a negative statement or passing judgment in any way on those who wish to pursue an alternate lifestyle. My position is simply that I feel the institution of marriage as presented by the hon. member reflects quite accurately what I believe in.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that I have this opportunity to rise just before the debate closes on this particular bill that was brought forward by my colleague from Red Deer-South. I've listened carefully to a lot of people discuss the merits of this bill, both the pros and the cons, and not being a lawyer, perhaps I don't appreciate the finer points of some of the comments that are being made. I do, however, want to say that the spirit of the bill and

the intent of the bill I'm absolutely one hundred percent in accord with. I don't believe there's another way to do this type of bill other than what the hon. Member for Red Deer-South has brought forward.

Our whole society has been inundated with change, and I think the one thing that has remained rock solid and stable throughout our creation as a civilization is the fact that we've had the bedrock foundation of family. A family was inherently a man and a woman and children, and I don't think that this government or the people in this caucus have any desire to see that change.

Mr. Speaker, by supporting this bill, I want to send a strong message to my constituents as well who feel very strongly that marriage is sacrosanct in this province and that it needs to be respected by not only all of the people in this province but particularly by its legislators. I will in fact be supporting Red Deer-South's Bill 202.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, under our rules we afford an opportunity for the hon. mover of the bill to conclude.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to review briefly some of the debate that we've had and then have my closing comments.

The Marriage Amendment Act, 2000, is of course focused on the recognition and value of marriage by adding to the Marriage Act a preamble and a definition. There has been some suggestion that the scope of the bill isn't large enough, but I would remind members that for a private member's bill to have success, you have to keep it as narrowly focused and precise as possible. In that sense, Mr. Speaker, this bill is very specific to the value and importance of the institution of marriage.

5:00

In the debate I want to remind members that evidence was produced to show that the social science research supports those principles. To date in the debate I haven't heard anybody argue against that research or present something to the contrary. In the debate the principles that we have outlined in the bill in the preamble have been affirmed by most speakers. The bill also uses the mechanism of the notwithstanding clause primarily to indicate the commitment to stand by those principles.

There has been some debate around jurisdiction. We've been able to show by reference to section 92(12) that the provinces indeed do have jurisdiction on the matter of solemnization of marriage. I also refer to the Alberta Law Reform Institute in their presentation on family law and reference case law, which also confirms that position.

The main point of contention in the debate has centred on the use of the notwithstanding clause, not necessarily so much as to whether it would be effective but whether this would be an appropriate time to use this. The question was raised: why would you use the notwithstanding clause at a time when there's no challenge before us?

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that that is precisely the right time to do it, when we can make a reasoned and determined debate in this Legislature to affirm a position ahead of the time when that controversy may arise. So we are making a commitment to the people of Alberta, a firm and clear commitment that we are prepared to defend the definition of marriage. The principle is certainly more important than the mechanism. Mr. Speaker, the institution of marriage is worth defending and is worth preserving.

Up to this point I have confined my comments to research, to the

principles, to the argument for using the notwithstanding clause. I want to close with a few personal comments. I want to dedicate the efforts on this bill that I have taken forward to those who have exemplified to me what marriage and commitment are all about. I want to reference my two sets of grandparents: John P. and Katharina Doerksen, who were married for 54 years; Heinrich and Helena Harder, who were married for 40 years. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I'm wearing today the ring from Heinrich Harder that he wore when he was married and still with us. Both of those couples lived through a time of inconvenience, a time of poverty when they were forced to leave their homeland of Russia to come to Canada. It was a time of war, a time of resettlement, a time of new language, and the commitment that they had to each other continued throughout that period.

To my own parents, Peter and Tina Doerksen, who will be married for 53 years on June 28: this is dedicated to them as well. Those people have shown to me the value of passing down commitment, commitment to each other in marriage.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I want to dedicate this bill to my wife, Doris. We will be married for 25 years on June 28.

MR. TRYNCHY: You're only halfway there.

MR. DOERKSEN: You're right. There's still a lot of work to be done, Mr. Speaker, before I get to that magic 50 years and above. She has stood by my side for all those years, been the mother to our four children, and I can't say enough about her. She's a woman and she's a lady.

Lastly, to my children, who are not yet married but one who will be married this coming June. I would also want to pass on to them the importance and value that they would see from us, the importance of being married and the importance that would be for future generations.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:05 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Burgener

Jonson

Pham

Cao
Coutts
Doerksen
Ducharme
Forsyth
Friedel
Haley
Havelock
Hlady
Johnson

Klapstein
Kryczka
Langevin
Lougheed
Lund
Marz
McClellan
McFarland
Melchin
Paszowski

Shariff
Stelmach
Strang
Tannas
Tarchuk
West
Woloshyn
Yankowsky
Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Bonner
Boutilier
Dickson
Graham
Hancock

Jacques
MacDonald
Magnus
O'Neill
Pannu

Renner
Sapers
Severtson
White
Wickman

Totals:

For - 32

Against - 15

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a third time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I move that we call it 5:30 and that the House do now stand adjourned and reconvene this evening at 8 in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion put forward by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, would all members in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: This House is adjourned until 8 o'clock this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:18 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 15, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/03/15

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

THE CHAIRMAN: This evening we have Committee of Supply dealing with the estimates of the Department of Resource Development. Are we agreed that it's 20 minutes, 20 minutes, and then a vote? Is that agreeable?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

DR. TAYLOR: How about five minutes, five minutes, then a vote?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah, right. The third party has five minutes.

We'll begin this evening, then, with the hon. Minister of Resource Development.

Resource Development

DR. WEST: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the estimates of Resource Development tonight I'd like to bring a few highlights of today's energy sector and a few comments. I don't know that I need to go into full details of what we did in room 512, but I certainly will give a bit of an overview of where we are today.

Last week oil prices reached a new post Gulf war high of \$34 a barrel. Last March they averaged at \$14.68. If you compare natural gas prices from last month with prices a year ago, you can see an increase there too. It was \$2.80 today, and a year ago it was \$1.80 Canadian per gigajoule.

On the consumer side we saw an increase in the price of gasoline. Today it's 64.9 cents and last year at this time it was 45 cents a litre. Given these high commodity prices, we're forecasting significant increases in exploration and drilling this year with a corresponding increase in royalties to be collected, but it is also important to note that we don't expect prices to stay as high as they are now. In fact, from last week to today they've dropped two and a half dollars a barrel. Our prediction is that oil prices will average \$19 U.S. a barrel in 2000-2001 and that natural gas will average about \$2.50 Canadian for a thousand cubic feet. That is the Alberta reference price. These forecasts are lower than prices are now, but they reflect the best economic analysis we have going into the future.

Our estimates are that resource royalties in 2000-2001 will total \$4 billion, up from the \$2.4 billion we collected in '98-99 and down from the \$4.3 billion we expect to collect this fiscal year. This is predicted to include \$2.3 billion in natural gas and gas by-product royalties, \$632 million in crude oil royalties, \$469 million in synthetic crude oil and bitumen royalties from Alberta's oil sands, \$14 million from coal, and \$650 million from bonuses and the sale of Crown leases.

I would like to point out that the Crown takes royalties on conventional crude oil in kind. The Crown's share is sold by the private-sector marketing agents, Tidal oil company, PanCanadian, and CanPet. Tidal was previously Gulf. We assess the marketing agents' performance based on what prices they receive for the Crown volume and how the price compares to market benchmark prices. From January to July 1999 the average Crown price for light

sweet crude was 69 percent above the Edmonton posting. For light sour crude it was 95 cents above the Hardisty posting, and for heavy crude oil it was 60 cents above the Hardisty posting. That demonstrates that the private sector is selling our share on behalf of the people of Alberta and reaching a good price for it.

Resource development in Alberta is increasing across all sectors, and here's a snapshot of what's going on. The natural gas pipeline capacity has increased from 10.4 billion cubic feet per day in '95 to 11.9 billion cubic feet today. The volume of synthetic crude oil manufactured from bitumen has continued to rise from 278,000 barrels per day in '95 to 320,000 per day and rising as it today. Alberta's demand for ethane continues to rise from an average demand of 131,000 barrels per day to over 140,000 barrels per day today.

Industry is also taking on improved environmental performances especially in the area of flaring reduction. The target was set to reduce flares by 25 percent from the '96 levels by the end of 2001, and as of year-end '98 we were at 15 percent below '96, and we're on our way to beating that 25 percent target today.

According to the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors, the industry is expected to drill 14,300 wells in western Canada in 2000 compared to 10,200 in 1999, and 10,500 are expected to be drilled in Alberta.

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

DR. WEST: The hon. member from the oil sands seems impatient.

The number of rigs drilling in February of 2000 was 403, and that's up from 275 in February of '99.

Industry has announced \$33 billion in oil sands investment. Over \$23 billion is already in application.

Natural gas was the top commodity export in '98, increasing \$8 billion. At a 1.2 percent increase, that is up today in the year 2000.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I have gone over much of the department's budget in estimates in subcommittee. Again, we're asking this year for \$87 million from the Assembly to run Alberta's business as it relates to oil and gas, electric deregulation, and issues that deal with the EUB. Also, we're asking for an extra \$5 million to do due progress in certain areas such as animal health studies that will be done in conjunction with the other western provinces and industry. We're putting about \$980 million into this animal health study this year, and it will be doing flare gas emissions as well as fugitive emissions from all other sources.

We are also looking in this budget to continuing electrical deregulation, and we're well on our way to giving full customer choice by January 1, 2001. We're also looking at finishing the extension of rural utility service to the Metis settlements, and that will be done this year. We have put money towards a new volumetric and infrastructure petroleum information registry, which will be completed somewhere in the year 2003.

We're doing research: another million dollars into coal bed methane. Remember that there's about 2,400 trillion cubic feet of coal bed methane estimated in the province. If we could develop the technology to use that, you can imagine what the supply would be for generations to come.

We have been instrumental throughout the last year in looking at the pipeline regulatory review and also reducing public liability for oil and gas facilities. We will be bringing in an act this spring I think to look at the orphan fund so that we can increase the rehabilitation of those facilities and pipelines, gas plants, batteries, and wells that have been abandoned or are orphaned in the province.

Again the Energy and Utilities Board continued to do magnificent work last year. They processed over 43,500 corporate transactions

and 20,500 applications. Remember that they went to hearings on less than .1 percent of those. They had 45 and they expect this year to get that down to 30 appeals – can you imagine that? – that had to go to hearings out of some 60,000 transactions.

Mr. Chairman, I will finish there because many of the other facts and that we went through in subcommittee, and I will await other hon. members if they have some follow-up questions.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. [some applause]

MR. WHITE: Thank you members from both sides of the House for the hand. That's awfully good.

Tonight we'll do the best we can to keep it within a reasonable time limit, certainly under the 20 minutes, Mr. Chairman.

Now, this is a case of the good, the bad, and the ugly. The good is that there are some great oil and gas markets. They're really doing well. The province of Alberta is doing exceedingly well in that area. The minister has just outlined all the numbers that are current. I'll deal with that in a moment.

8:10

The bad, of course, is where we are in the generation of power and the uncertainty of the market. The ugly is the coal market at the moment. It's a bit sad.

First of all, there are some other parts of the good. It's good to see that the minister has seen the light and put more money into the EUB. The EUB, the regulatory agency of the Crown, does a good job; I agree with the minister on that. They have been working very hard at reducing a great deal of the turnaround times. They're reducing as best they can. They're doing a number of things, new and different ways of doing things such as problem solving and disputes mechanisms. For those of you that are interested in hearing a little bit about it, this morning in Public Accounts Mr. McCrank, the full-time chairman of the board, outlined some of that to great effect.

We'd also like to applaud the minister, along with the Minister of Environment I suspect, for agreeing to be in a consortium of governments with private enterprise involvement also, putting together this consortium with \$17 million in order to study flare gas and all fugitive gases, their effect on humans and animals. Mr. Chairman, you'll recall that in this province it's caused a great deal of consternation. There are a number of terrible situations that have arisen supposedly from flare gas, citizens that believe there's great harm being done to them, and they have taken the law into their own hands. Hopefully this study will answer a good number of these questions so we will not have that kind of breaking of the law in the future. It'll be good solid negotiation and discussion about these potential dangers.

The good news, of course, for Alberta and for the current government is that both natural gas and the price of oil are very high. That fuels the surpluses in this province. I don't think enough can be said about the natural resources in this province making all of us much better off and providing opportunities for ourselves, our neighbours, and our children. The difficulty I have is not giving credit where credit is due. This government continually takes credit for balancing the books and balancing the budget and being able to pay for so many things when, in fact, this government should be thanking, if you're religious, the Lord I suspect for putting the natural resources here. There doesn't seem to be much credence ever given to that.

That's the good news. The ugly is being really tough in the coal market right now. There are difficulties in the world price of coal,

not only for anthracite, the very, very tough coal that gives off exceptional heat per pound, but even the high- to medium-grade coals that we mine here in Alberta and the lower grade coals we just can't afford to mine and ship, nor would we consider even using them, because we have reasonably stringent laws as they relate to emissions.

The other area that is a concern in the coal business, recognizing that I believe in the order of about 60 or 70-odd percent of the electricity generated in this province currently is generated from that source, and a difficulty that the industry could face relates to emissions. We recognize that Alberta always has had very good players in the business. We haven't had the ugly coal burning and emission production of some other countries in the world. Whether they had restrictions on them or not in the days when they were built, these operators have been doing a good job. The difficulty is with the climate change in the world today. With those concerns there could be some impingement put on these operators. In fact, this member believes that the public is not particularly enamoured with any new coal generation plants, and we could see some civil disobedience from the environmental sector if we did plan on some. So that makes it difficult for the coal business.

I recognize that the extraction of natural resources in this province is and should be managed for two purposes, although we never hear debate on that. One, of course, is to generate revenues for the provincial coffers, the provincial coffers being the stewards of we the citizenry. The other reason is to sustain some communities, sustain the companies that employ those persons in the extraction and the production areas. To have those businesses healthy is advantageous to the people of this province, and it certainly wouldn't do to allow these businesses to fold or to go into terribly difficult times and have to cut back in the area of employment, nor would it be wise to design the systems that are in place to remunerate the owners of the resource, the people of Alberta, to an extent that would hinder the well-being of those industries.

Now, I said the good, the bad, and the ugly. I left the ugly for last, because quite frankly the management of the deregulation of power in this province is absolutely atrocious. This is entirely and completely driven by an ideology that says that government regulation in any case is bad and market driven is good without examining the facts, without even bothering to look to find out if in fact the system that's currently in place is better than the others.

Quite frankly, all my lifetime up until about 1993 or 1994, when this government decided deregulation was the be-all and end-all in the electricity business, this member always thought that we had some of the lowest prices on the entire continent for electricity delivered. We had an abundance of supply. In fact, among the energy companies the big competition was to be the next generator, to be allowed to invest capital at a guaranteed rate of return.

This government decided that deregulation was absolutely the right way to go and then didn't even bother to fully examine the ramifications. They didn't look at divestiture of the assets of at least one and perhaps even more of the major players. Recognize that the major player in this province is TransAlta Utilities. Quite frankly, since 1994 this government has been trying their darndest to design a system that would put the production of new generation and existing generation on a market base, driven on a market base. To date this member had hoped it could be done, but hope is fading and fading fast. This government has not produced to date, and quite frankly it's worrisome.

Most recently there have been a number of reports of economists that say we could be in very, very dire straits here if this system does fail. This member hopes it doesn't because, quite frankly, this province needs new generation, needs in the order of about 3 percent

a year. We're probably looking at about 500 megs a year to bring on the market, and it doesn't appear under pure market conditions that the PPA sale will produce that. I would like to be proven wrong on this one, but it appears it's coming to that state.

8:20

Quite frankly, there is absolutely no evidence filed in this Legislature or with the people of Alberta, and the people of Alberta, both industry and residential, are the ones that are at risk. There's not one shred of evidence that has ever been filed in this Legislature to say: we have studied this, we understand the concerns of the citizenry, and this is what we propose. Not once. Nor did they bother asking the citizens honest questions.

They surveyed the citizens and asked a very, very simple and philosophical question: do you agree with the statement that electrical energy can be produced under a market system cheaper than the current regulatory system? They had a 75 percent reply. What they didn't bother to say was how you provide a market-driven system where you have one player that controls the market. In the business they call that market power. That is precisely what the problem is today.

This member happened to be invited and did attend a meeting of potential purchasers of the power purchase arrangements and found that the potential purchasers were just as much at a loss as I was as to how this system could actually work, how you can have players bidding for the production of assets of a number of plants over 20 years with the confidence that the market power will not play a major force. They're taking a substantive risk there. They know the risks more than I certainly, and they really, really haven't come to the table. [interjection] This minister seems to yak a lot except in debate. He does absolutely no debate on the subject at all. He yaks about lots of other things, and he does not tell the citizenry, nor does he tell the major players . . .

DR. WEST: That's not true. You know it's not true.

THE CHAIRMAN: Through the chair.

MR. WHITE: Through the chair.

The minister does none of the above. Absolutely none. Mr. Chairman, there is no debate, never has been in this House either in the time I've been here or in the research I did before I arrived in this place as to whether in fact this should be deregulated. It was good for booze, it was good for registries, and it was done. That's the way it works.

The province of Alberta has been very, very good to this government by not questioning and making them agree to debate or at least have an understanding of these things. When the proverbial hits the fan come January of this next year, it is where the tire meets the road, and it could be a disaster. I'm hoping it will not be, but it would have been a whole lot easier if all of us, the economists at the university and those that are in the business, could have understood what the government's intent was.

DR. WEST: We're not Liberals. We don't sit back and let it go forever, never fix it, just keep throwing rocks through the windows. You never pick up the pane and fix it.

MR. WHITE: Yada, yada, yada.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, you had an opportunity, and I

wonder if we could spend the time . . . [interjection] Actually, hon. minister, are you calling a point of order on the chair? The chairman was the one that was addressing you at the time and so has that concern there. Hon. minister, if we could hear this gentleman out, then an opportunity will present itself for you to refute that in every way.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, if you'd address the chairman and not the other members of the committee.

MR. WHITE: It doesn't take anything to have this minister rise. Calling into question his decisions on behalf of all the citizenry is not inciting, sir. That's debate. That's supposedly what we're here for.

Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: We'll leave power for the moment, because there isn't going to be any definitive answer until July of this year. We can't even get this minister to say what is success or failure on behalf of the citizens. What amount is going to be left in the power pool to say that this is success, that we will have some returned? It doesn't say it at all.

Now, the other area that this minister has had absolutely no debate on is the rate of extraction of our natural resources. Is it the will of the people that we extract as fast as we possibly can?

MRS. NELSON: Absolutely.

MR. WHITE: There it is. Now, I would like to have had some debate on the matter.

MRS. NELSON: Why?

MR. WHITE: We continually get these interruptions that don't make it into *Hansard*. We had a former minister of energy ask why.

Why? Because it's a matter of public policy. The reason you have debate is so the citizens understand what the government is doing. See, these people don't seem to understand what democracy is about, which means not only for the people but by the people. The folks are supposed to know what you're doing on their behalf. It doesn't seem to matter to these folks that they go holus-bolus off in one direction. In this particular area, extraction at what cost and at what rate? Well, there's something to be said for extraction at a rate to meet demand. I can understand that. There's something about the extraction being at a rate that at least sustains the industry. Beyond that there has to be some reasonable debate with the people.

Now, the minister doesn't enter that debate. Perhaps the government caucus does that. This member wouldn't be aware of that. It certainly isn't exposed to the people. You don't see it in the *Herald*. You certainly don't see it in any of the journals. There isn't any debate where the folks can have some input.

Mr. Chairman, this member does not have a great deal of difficulty with the bulk of the expenditures in that department. As a matter of fact, it's good to see that the minister has decided there are at least three areas that warrant more expense and that his well-earned reputation for cutting and slashing has been laid to rest, that he's in a spending mode or an investing mode, as he would say. Quite frankly, investing in the EUB to the extent that has been done is a good move as well as some other moves that they have done too.

Mr. Chairman, I think we've covered the matter, and if the members on this side of the House haven't anything further – I don't believe so – we will look forward to the vote.

Thank you, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Resource Development, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$88,429,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

MR. HAVELOCK: Is it me now?

8:30

THE CHAIRMAN: Actually, hon. Deputy Government House Leader, we used to need that, but with this process we just ask the question.

Economic Development

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin this evening's deliberations, we'll call upon the hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I actually was standing up to discuss the estimates and not to move a motion. In any event, I am pleased to continue our discussion pertaining to the 2000-2001 estimates for Alberta Economic Development.

First, I would like to introduce the members of the ministry who are here with me today. Along with my executive assistant, Ms Hazel Cail, we have Dr. Bob Fessenden, who is the deputy minister, who is waving up there, and we have Mr. Jim Bauer, director of finance and performance accountability. I appreciate the fact that they've taken time out from their busy schedule to be with us this evening.

MR. DICKSON: Maybe they don't trust the minister to do it right.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Chairman, during our previous meeting on March 1, I feel we had a very productive and useful discussion regarding the ministry's role in continuing to further the prosperity of our province. As noted during those discussions, our department, the lead sales and marketing arm for the government, assesses and monitors Alberta's business climate to ensure it remains positive and competitive. The estimates and business plan before you represent a broad outline of how we intend to proceed to facilitate economic development in the province.

At the last session I was pleased with the evident interest hon. members expressed towards the goals, objectives, and performance measures of Alberta Economic Development. As concerns the latter, I'd like to point out that we are committed to performance measures. We believe these are powerful tools that can contribute to the further enhancement of the ministry. Again, Mr. Chairman, I encourage all members of this Assembly to forward to my attention any suggestions they may have regarding such measures.

At the meeting on March 1, Mr. Chairman, I endeavoured to answer the questions of the members of the Committee of Supply. I also undertook to review *Hansard*. At this time I wish to table responses to three questions that I was unable to address during the

March 1 deliberations. How's that for service? There you go.

In response to the question raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder concerning the accuracy of the percentage change in actual tourism industry revenue between 1997 and 1998, I am tabling the detailed revenue figures to show that the increase between those two years is in fact 9.5 percent.

In response to the request made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View for a list of initiatives supporting the knowledge-based industry, I am tabling a list of the initiatives Alberta Economic Development and Alberta Innovation and Science are undertaking to advance the knowledge-based, high-tech sector.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, in response to a question raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods regarding the use of the department's web site, I'm tabling information that shows the number of requests and user sessions from Canada, the United States, and around the globe since the department's web site was redesigned and launched last October.

Finally, in response to a question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, earlier today I provided a copy of the detailed strategic tourism marketing plan.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to emphasize that these estimates are concluded as part of the ministry's plans to continue to foster a positive business climate, one that is conducive to private-sector job creation, growth, and investment in Alberta, and as was the case with respect to the March 1 discussion, I certainly undertake to provide written responses to any questions that may be raised this evening.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, too, to the minister. I think the last session that we had in committee was most productive, and the minister helped us better understand what the department does. It was, I thought, a very useful use of our time, and that's in large part thanks to the minister. We were able to range over a lot of topics in that last session. I thank the minister for tabling the responses to the question about the web site this evening.

Because the time is limited, I thought that I might spend some time looking at a very narrow range of activity in the department, and that's the Alberta Economic Development Authority support. It's really embodied in item 1.0.4, on page 118 of the estimates, and my understanding is that the purpose of the authority is to serve as the link between the public and private sectors as it relates to the province's economic activities and to identify the future directions for the government and for the province and planning for the future through a series of task force committees. AEDA has 10 of those committees that do the work for them, and it's in focusing on those 10 committees that I'd like to spend the next few minutes, Mr. Chairman.

I guess, first, a general overall question is: what savings have been achieved by having the functions of AEDA centralized in Calgary? There obviously were some savings when that move was made. Along with that, what is being done to ensure that AEDA still has a northern Alberta presence? The centralizing of the service in Calgary was one move, but along with that is the concern whether northern Alberta is still being served. So I'd appreciate some comment on that move and the north.

A second sort of general question is: does the AEDA produce a three-year business plan, and who reviews that business plan? Is it reviewed by the department? Just how is the work of AEDA monitored by the minister and his department?

I wanted to start with the AEDA Taxation and Finance Committee. It works with the department to try to attract new investment and to keep business competitive as it relates to a number of issues, and I would like to know what kind of work the committee does in terms of ensuring a globally competitive tax regime to stimulate economic activity in the province.

A third question. What are they doing in terms of the ability of start-up and early-stage companies to access capital and to keep them up and running as they get started? I think all of us in our constituency offices have been approached by those people interested in getting into business and looking for support for new business. I wonder what this committee has in terms of plans for helping those entrepreneurs and, once they get going, to help them to keep running?

A fourth question. It relates to a review of regulations that was being done by a member of the government and a committee. What have they had to do with streamlining regulations and helping by that streamlining to make Alberta companies more competitive, getting some of the paperwork out of their way? In terms of the same committee, were they involved in the analysis of Alberta's business tax or the review that's going to be conducted by the department to support the Alberta Business Tax Review Committee? Are they involved in that committee in any way, and if so, how are they involved?

Those are some questions about the Taxation and Finance Committee, Mr. Chairman.

8:40

I'm also interested in the Jobs for the Future Committee. We touched on this a little bit in the session we've had previously. I would like to know what kind of work is being undertaken in conjunction with Human Resources and Employment in preparing for future workplace needs. We talked briefly the last time about establishing databases of up-to-date information about workplace trends, skills development, and training opportunities. It would seem to me that this would be a natural domain for this particular committee of AEDA. Are they involved, and what kind of impact do they have in expanding co-operative work programs, apprenticeship and mentoring programs? Are they involved in establishing career education foundations such as Next Generation, the one that was established by the Alberta Chamber of Commerce?

They must have close linkages with postsecondary institutions in the province. Are they actually involved in helping adjust curriculum and work in business skills programs? Are they directly involved in consultations with those institutions and with those companies that are offering training to postsecondary institutions to make sure that there's a good match between where the marketplace is and where it's going and the kinds of people that will be entering it? I'd be interested in knowing what those links are. The same would apply to continuing education efforts. How deeply are they involved in determining the kinds of curriculum, the kinds of programs that continuing education institutes and groups are involved in? How closely do they work with them?

In terms of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, I would assume they were involved in the establishment of a comprehensive transportation strategy for the province. I wonder if we could have some information in terms of how that planning is proceeding. Another area where I assume they have some input is in dealing with telecommunications networks. There are some changes afoot in the province, and I wonder what kind of input, what kind of action the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has undertaken in terms of those changes and, of course, looking to the future.

A sensitive area for this city, of course, is the International Airport. Has the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee worked with them in terms of improving international service, which is really a sore point with many residents of this city and in northern Alberta, and working to improve domestic service? It's still impossible to fly from the capital of this province to the capital of the province to the west directly, in many cases. There are some flights, but it's rather limited in terms of what it used to be, so I'd be interested in terms of what kind of activities they have in this regard.

I wondered what steps have been taken by the department to respond to the recommendations of the AEDA Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. They made a number of recommendations to the department in terms of removing trade barriers to ensure that Alberta shippers had access to a competitive rail industry in terms of pricing and service. What were those recommendations, and has the department or the government responded to them?

Because the time is moving on, I'd like to move to the Technology and Technology Products Committee. This is a huge area for the government. I'd like to know the kind of priority that's being placed on initiatives in energy production and products, in wireless technology, in telecommunications and new media, the kind of value-added activity they're involved in in a number of industries, in agriculture and in forestry. It's a huge area. I know there are activities that spread into a number of departments, and I'd appreciate some information on that activity.

They obviously have had some input in terms of the province's research and development capabilities. We have before us this session of the Legislature a couple of very good initiatives in this area. I think it's Bill 1 that is a particularly good bill and one that will greatly enhance the research and development capability of the province. I wonder what other activities the authority has been involved in and in particular the Technology and Technology Products Committee. I'm wondering about the Energy and Energy Products Committee. The need for proper funding, for adequate funding for environmental education: have they made any moves in this area? Have they been involved in the property tax assessment impacts and the shortage of trained professionals for the trades?

Energy and energy products is a growing area for the province, and again it would be interesting to know what kind of activity is planned by this committee for the coming years. The Export and Trade Committee in conjunction with the department is, I understand, responsible for expanding trade and export as it relates to national and international market opportunities for value-added industries and services. Again, I would be interested in knowing: what kinds of activities are they involved in? What kinds of activities are they planning for the future? They are part of an effort that is put forward to combine the efforts of the private sector and the government to provide what I guess you could call market intelligence and to create more flexible business networks to assist smaller organizations to capitalize on opportunities in new markets. Again, I'd be interested in what kinds of projects are being undertaken or planned in this year's budget.

They also work with the federal government and the other provinces to remove trade barriers and to encourage colleges and universities and schools to target their language training.

This has been an issue that's been raised in not only Economic Development but in the Department of Innovation and Science and in the Department of Learning budget estimates. That is the need to make sure that the technology and the science thrust that is so much of the government's effort is complemented by a similar thrust in the humanities and the social sciences so that those people who are seeking to do business in international markets can draw upon good language education in this province and, if not here, at least in a

neighbouring province, so that there's the kind of social science research that's needed to make sure that our institutions are up to a global economy and able to adapt to the coming future, and so that the investment in those areas is maintained at a level so we really can say that the moves in the technology area are matched by moves in the humanities and social sciences.

8:50

With regard to the Forestry and Forestry Products Committee, what kinds of recommendations have they made to extend the period of the land use policies? Those policies were debated in at least one bill in the last session of this Legislature, and I wonder what they are doing in terms of those policies.

The AEDA works with the department, and one of their focuses, of course, is self-reliant communities. Again, if we could have some information on their success or the kinds of work they are undertaking in working with business, municipal governments, and labour, education, and community groups to eliminate barriers, to identify some local opportunities for Economic Development, and to identify opportunities and some fiscal strategies for those communities to maintain and enhance the infrastructure they have in place and will need if they are going to grow in the ways in which the government in its plans would have them do.

Those are a number of very detailed questions about 1.0.4 and the AEDA in particular, and I would greatly appreciate any information that the minister is able to provide.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Economic Development for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Okay.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$51,236,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Government Services

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call upon the hon. minister to begin.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Two weeks ago I presented this committee with the first business plan and estimates of the new Ministry of Government Services. I talked about the ministry's goals, the actions that we intend to achieve, and how we intend to achieve these goals. I talked about the recent reduction in our registry fees, some \$55 million a year in savings that will go directly to Albertans. I talked about some of the things that we'll be doing to improve services to Albertans within the ministry. I gave examples of how Albertans deserve better service than what they've been getting, and we're on that track. I also talked about how we hope to attain delivering that service by going through our gateway to government project, which will be a one-window approach to providing services to Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, I think we had a very good dialogue during that

presentation, and I appreciated the questions that came forward from the members opposite. I must say that I was very pleased to see their interest in some of the things we're doing within this ministry. I did answer a number of the questions that evening, and I made the commitment that I would get the rest of the questions from *Hansard* and get back with answers to those questions as quickly as possible. I am able tonight to table the answers to those questions as I committed, so I'd like to table five copies of the questions that were raised during the Committee of Supply. Again, I would like to thank subcommittee C for their work on the evening that I presented the estimates for this department.

At this time, Mr Chairman, I would like to say that if there are any further questions this evening, I will undertake to get answers back to hon. members as quickly as possible, but I would ask that the committee approve the estimates of the Department of Government Services.

THE CHAIRMAN: As I understand it, hon. member, we've got the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning and then, within the period of time, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

So if you would commence, hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the minister. Just a couple of question that we didn't get on the floor the other day, and that was actually around registries, motor vehicle registries. As we were reading in the paper in the last couple of weeks about the fake drivers' licences that are being produced and so on, I'd like to see if we can get something on the record on that particular item.

I really believe, as I read through the business plan and everything, that registries is one of the biggest items in here, and we sure have to make sure that the 21 recommendations from the Auditor General and everything else are in place.

I'm a believer in the private system, but I want to make sure that we keep the right monitoring systems in place, that we are checking up on them. I do know from traveling around the province – I do stop in at registries, and I talk to the owners and so on – that they're relatively happy.

MRS. NELSON: Very happy.

MR. GIBBONS: Yes, they're very happy. [interjection] I'm going to stay at the "very."

Even when they start talking about the ones that actually took on the fishing licence machines and all that, they now are happy, subject to some of the ones that were really taking my head off originally. [interjections] Mr. Chairman, I don't really mind stuff like this, but I'll continue.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair would observe that the hon. member should speak through the chair.

MR. GIBBONS: I'm going to sit right now, Mr. Chairman, but I'm hoping to get some answers back on this, because we don't want fake licences getting out onto the street. That was the major thing I wanted to ask since last time.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister is rising on a point of order?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Chairman, can I not just respond to that?

THE CHAIRMAN: If that's what the hon. member wants. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, do you want responses now?

MR. GIBBONS: You can get back to me after.

MRS. NELSON: Oh, okay. Okay; I'll get back to him.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am very anxious to ask the hon. minister some questions this evening regarding the new Ministry of Government Services that was established in May of last year.

Now, it is an interesting ministry. It's taking over responsibility for registries and consumer services from Alberta Municipal Affairs and for the Regulatory Review Secretariat from Alberta Treasury. I'm sure the minister is going to do an outstanding job with her new portfolio, particularly if some of the staff that she had with her in her previous portfolio of Gaming come with her, because some of her staff, at least the ones that I had direct contact with, were excellent. I'm sure she was astute enough to take them with her when she moved.

There are some major goals and strategies discussed here. I'm going to review them, and I have some corresponding questions, Mr. Chairman. The first goal I notice is a declaration to provide a gateway or a "common portal . . . so Albertans receive the services they deserve." My questions for the hon. minister regarding this goal are: what services has it been determined Albertans deserve, and why are they not receiving these services right now? What types of redevelopment does the minister see for Alberta land titles, motor vehicle registration, and personal property registration systems? What are the current concerns with these systems, and how will redevelopment address those concerns?

Another goal of the department, Mr. Chairman, is "excellence in service development, delivery and accessibility." This seems like an odd goal for the minister to have to state. Would it not be taken for granted that excellence would be standard for everything? Is this not the standard currently being attained? How will excellence be measured? How does the minister plan to enhance marketplace surveillance monitoring capabilities so that the ministry can better anticipate and respond to changing marketplace requirements? Which new information and access standards will be implemented for services provided by AGS so that these services reflect fair business practices? Why are these practices currently not being reflected? The last question concerning goal 2: with what regularity is the ministry currently publishing enforcement bulletins? Will this time frame continue, or will a new time frame be adopted? Will it be weekly, semimonthly, or monthly?

9:00

Now, another interesting goal, Mr. Chairman, is "a fair and effective marketplace in Alberta with a high standard of business conduct." My questions to the minister regarding this are these. What resources are currently available for investigating major marketplace issues? Will there be any increases or decreases in these resources? In light of the minister wanting to develop and implement a policy to ensure that resources for marketplace practice investigations are appropriately prioritized, could the minister explain how these investigations are currently prioritized? Could the minister detail how order in council exemption requests from foreign companies for intensive livestock operations and agroforest operations are currently reviewed and assessed? What part do municipalities and various government ministries currently contrib-

ute to this process? How does the minister see these groups fitting into a new framework? Another question: what is the status of the implementation of the national information sharing database to support investigation enforcement activities? Regarding the Regulatory Review Secretariat, I have two questions. What goals and objectives did the government set in 1996 regarding the review of government regulations? What quantity of staff time has been dedicated to reviewing the 616 regulations left to review?

Now, the fourth goal is "a streamlined, effective, and relevant regulatory environment." Regarding performance measures for customer satisfaction, Mr. Chairman, how will consumers be selected for contact? Will they be advised that they may be contacted at a later date for follow-up on their initial call or point of contact? If the survey is contracted out, how will the minister deal with a consumer who does not want a private contractor to know that they have contacted the ministry with a particular question? What if many of the consumers do not give their names and numbers? How will these be followed up? Will the yearly survey only look at consumers who contact the minister's office? Will there be any information campaign encouraging people to contact the ministry for advice or other information? What points of contact will be included in this survey?

I have at this time, Mr. Chairman, five more questions regarding goal 4 pursued by the department. What will determine if a consumer investigation is successful? Will more resources be added to this area if the 95 percent target is not reached? Regarding the Regulatory Review Secretariat, what would the minister consider effective measures to replace the ineffective status reports in three-year achievement statistics? Will new measures be established, or will the minister only consider establishing new measures?

Now, Mr. Chairman, it's very interesting whenever we talk about user fees in this province, and I have some questions regarding the outline of fee reductions. For the land titles department will the minister please provide the actual cost of service prior to the reduction in fees and since the reduction in fees for the following fee reductions under land titles? Notification, transfer, vesting order, leasehold certificate of title, correction, and reversal, application for: the old government fee was \$35 plus \$1 per \$1,000; the new government fee is \$35 plus \$1 per \$5,000. Mortgage, encumbrance and amendments: here we have the old government fee of \$15 plus \$1 for every \$1,000, and we have the new government fee of \$15 plus \$1 per \$5,000. A writ of enforcement: the old government fee was \$15 plus \$1 per \$1,000; the new government fee is \$15 plus \$1 per \$5,000.

Now, will the minister please provide the actual cost of service prior to the reduction in fees and since the reduction in fees for the following fee reductions under corporate registry? Certificate of incorporation: the old government fee was \$300; the new government fee is \$100. Certificate of amendment, articles of amendment: \$75 was the old government fee; the new government fee is \$25. Certificate of amalgamation: the old government fee was \$300; the new government fee is \$100. For certificate of registration of an extraprovincial corporation, \$300 was the old government fee; the new government fee is \$100. Certificate of registration of an interprovincial nonprofit with exemption: the old government fee was \$150; the new government fee is \$75. Reinstatement of an extraprovincial corporation: \$300 was the old government fee; the new government fee is \$100. Certificate of amendment of registration of an extraprovincial corporation: \$75 was the old government fee; the new government fee is \$25. Certificate of registration of amalgamated corporation: the old government fee was \$300; the new government fee is \$100. Certificate of restated articles: old government fee, \$75; the new government fee is \$25. Incorporation,

section (g), certificate of continuance under section 181 of the Business Corporations Act: the old government fee was \$300; the new government fee is \$100. Certificate of amendment, articles of reorganization: \$75 was the old government fee; the new government fee is \$25. Certificate of revival: \$300 was the old government fee; the new government fee is \$100. Certificate of English or French equivalency: the old government fee, \$50; the new government fee, \$25. A certificate of continuance under section 261 of the Business Corporations Act: the old government fee, \$300; the new government fee, \$100. Certificate of status: the old government fee, \$25; the new government fee is \$5. A search for each corporation, microfiche only: old government fee, \$10 plus \$1 per page, and the new government fee is \$5 per file. Certification of each file: the old government fee was \$25 plus \$1 per page; the new government fee is \$5 for the entire file. Issuing a corrected certificate: the old government fee was \$75; the new government fee is \$50. A printed search, each corporation: the old government fee was \$10; the new government fee is \$1.

9:10

Also, Mr. Chairman, will the minister provide, please, the actual cost of service prior to the reduction in fees and since the reduction in fees for the following fee reductions under Alberta companies regulation? Certificate of incorporation: the old government fee was \$125; the new government fee is \$75. Certificate of amendment: the old government fee was \$50; the new government fee is \$25. Certificate of restoration: the old government fee was \$125; the new government fee is \$75. A certificate of status: the old government fee was \$25; the new fee is \$5. Certificate of change of corporate name: the old government fee was \$50; the new government fee is \$25. Search for each corporation, microfiche only: \$10 plus \$1 per page was the old government fee, and the new government fee is \$5 per file. Certification of each file: the old government fee was \$25 plus \$1 per page; the new government fee is \$5 per file. A printed search for each corporation: the old government fee was \$10; the new government fee is \$1.

Will the minister please provide the actual cost of service prior to the reduction in fees and since the reduction in fees for the following fee reductions under the Co-operative Associations Act? For a certificate of incorporation the old government fee was \$300; the new government fee is \$100. Certificate of amendment: the old government fee was \$75, and the new government fee is \$25. Certificate of amalgamation: the old government fee was \$300; the new government fee is \$100. Certificate of revival: the old government fee was \$300, and the new government fee is \$100.

Now, I'm sure many hon. members of the Assembly are wondering about the comparisons in these old fees and the new fees. This is information that is vital to the consumers of this province.

Will the minister please provide the actual cost of service prior to the reduction in fees and since the reduction in fees for the following fee reductions under the Partnership Act? Filing a certificate of limited partnership: the old government fee was \$150; the new government fee is \$50. Filing a notice to amend a certificate: the old government fee was \$50; the new government fee is \$15.

Will the minister please provide the actual cost of service prior to the reduction in fees and since the reduction in fees for the following fee reductions under the Societies Act? A certificate of amendment under the old schedule was \$50; the new government fee is \$25. A certificate of status was \$25 in the old government fee; \$5 in the new. A certificate of amending objects: \$50 for the old government fee; the new government fee is \$25.

Now, will the minister please provide the actual cost of service prior to the reduction in fees and since the reduction in fees for the

following fee reductions under personal property registrations and renewals? Registration or security agreement under the Personal Property Security Act: per year for optional registration, between one and 25 years, the old government fee was \$4, and the new government fee is \$2; for infinity registration the old government fee was \$400, and the new government fee is \$400. Okay?

Now, there are other acts here. There's the garageman's lien, the railway rolling stock, and if the minister in due time would perhaps agree to answer all my questions regarding old government fees and new government fees, I think that would be the extent of my questions. [interjection] Okay. So if the minister would be gracious enough to provide those answers in due time by letter at a later date, I would be grateful.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Government Services for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$49,810,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Community Development

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll call upon the minister to begin this part of the deliberation.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is, I believe, about the fourth time I've had the privilege of addressing the members here with respect to the estimates, and I'd be willing to do it again. As I've indicated to you previously, I will be getting back in writing to a good number of the questions very, very shortly. As a matter of fact, it's already been prepared for some of the members but hasn't gone out. I'll use the mail unless you want me to table it in the House. It doesn't really matter.

The discussion around the ministry, I think, has generated a significant amount of interest. I was pleased to hear a lot about the seniors' programs, the grant funding, support we get for historical resources, the foundations, and so on. I appreciated the questions we had over time on citizenship, on the Human Rights Commission, and on women's issues.

I'd like to say that it's the intent of the ministry to keep focused on our core business plans and basically concentrate on improving the quality of life for Albertans at every level of the ministry. The staff work with cross-government initiatives. We develop new relationships, partnerships, and so on.

We will continue to make access easier for Albertans with respect to seniors, working on some of the suggestions – and certainly they weren't new and novel – in terms of getting information out somehow in a better fashion. I'm certainly willing to listen to any suggestions you may have there.

[Dr. Massey in the chair]

As you know, we've got a couple of studies going on. The impact of aging study will be brought forward hopefully sometime in the spring. We'll be looking at that along with other studies that are going on, and what we'll be trying to do is end up making long-term plans that can aid the seniors in their transition, shall we say, to a more comfortable life. We're going to ensure that we can address the needs of seniors, whether it be transportation, housing, health, or whatever, as well as possible.

There was some discussion with respect to the Western Heritage Centre, and I want to reiterate that Alberta Community Development has extended its partnership arrangement with the Western Heritage Centre Society. The centre will remain open and continue to be programmed by the society, which will devote its efforts to developing new programming and marketing strategies. Revenue will go towards programming and retiring debt. At this time, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to table five copies of the agreement between the department and the Western Heritage Centre so interested members may have access to them. That is a complete package that I believe includes the agreement which it supercedes so those who might be interested will have the total picture.

9:20

We all know that the arts, as some of the members have mentioned, have a very, very positive economic impact on the province. There are various estimates, I suppose, but we do know it's significant. We do know, for example, that there's well over \$120 million spent on materials, supplies, services, salaries, whatever you want to throw out. In the nearest figures we can get, there have been some attendance figures of over 11 million people, which is roughly four times the population of Alberta, that have attended arts organization events over the past year.

We'll be doing more work with the Alberta library card project. As I indicated, we'll be looking at the method of funding libraries, hopefully getting a more up-to-date process in with respect to the census figures used.

As we know, with respect to homelessness and our social housing we have a provincial economy that's very, very strong, and the growing population has put extreme pressures on housing. In some communities rental rates have fallen very, very dramatically. At the same time, rents have gone out of the reach of a lot of low-income Albertans. We're committed to working in partnership with the municipalities, with community-based organizations, with not-for-profit housing sectors, and whomever to try to develop a continuum of affordable housing solutions, and we'll be looking at making them basically tailor-made, if you will, to the communities in question.

We all know that this is a broad spectrum. It's not just one little band-aid that'll fix it. We're looking for any innovative ways, whether it be the private sector or municipalities or the not-for-profits, any of those that have any innovative ways of approaching this.

With respect to human rights, I do support the work of the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission; it goes without saying. I believe we have to instill tolerance and understanding at home, at work, at school, and throughout our society. So I'm very, very supportive of any kind of education programs, if you will, that would address these kinds of issues. Hopefully the goal would be to have the workload of the commission diminished through better behaviour and lack of demand.

I'd also like to add that ministry staff do a very, very good job, a tremendous job in fact, of supporting myself in my role as minister responsible for the area of women's issues, as well as providing support in all the other areas I deal with, but that one I wanted to underline more specifically. We also do a lot of work with other ministries across government.

I'm not going to go into too much detail with the foundations. You're all familiar with what we do. We're trying to get them more focused, and I do believe I made reference to the development initiatives program through the ASRPWF which will meet the needs hopefully of clients that are not covered by other ones.

Just to wrap up very briefly, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank colleagues on both sides, primarily the opposition side, for their comments. I appreciate your efforts in this process. As I stated earlier, we will be responding to all the questions I didn't have the opportunity to give you earlier.

On that, Mr. Chairman, I would move that we call the question.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to start off by acknowledging the efforts of the staff from the Department of Community Development. I have tremendous respect for the job they are attempting to do and the spirit and hard work they put into trying to realize the objectives and policies of the department. I think they deserve that acknowledgment, and I am certainly willing to give it to them.

The minister, however, I am disappointed in. The minister says that he's supportive of a number of things but no action will be taken. Frankly, I think a person could starve on the minister's kind of support.

We raised heritage sites. Well, no, nothing to happen there. We raised the problem with libraries and funding, being funded at a 1997 level, which is creating extreme situations, I think, for those libraries that are existing in locations where populations have grown dramatically. No, says the minister, I'm not going to do anything there or at least not this year. So if it actually does kick in next year, in 2001-2002, they will have gone four years at essentially a frozen funding level. Frankly, the funding level was no great shakes to begin with. No, says the minister to libraries.

I suggested that as a preventative measure in working in partnership with the Department of Health and Wellness the minister look at operating funds for seniors' centres or some sort of assistance there. No, no funding of seniors' centres. I talked about the issues that have arisen around the lodge granting program and the fact that larger lodges run by larger organizations are funded at a disadvantage now. No, says the minister, nothing happening there.

Now, I know that the minister and members opposite have received information from groups and individuals. They've received letters, e-mails, phone calls, faxes, and visits from constituents, all of them pointing out these different issues that exist under the Department of Community Development and many of them asking for increased funding. I know that because I've been CCed. I know there are people out there bringing this to the minister's and other members' attention and asking for this department to give some real support instead of this sort of benign neglect. I hope it's benign, but it's certainly neglect for the areas under this department.

One of the things I've talked about before – and I'll keep raising it – is how many times the elements in this department have been collapsed onto one another so that they don't exist any more. Of course, the one I am most disappointed about – more than that, I'm angry about it – is the women's policy and programs, which from the early '90s was actually a branch or a division. There were a number of staff. I think there could have been 15 to 20 staff in there working on different programs, developing policy, advising the minister. I think we're down to one official staff person in that program. If you look through the documents in these budget estimates, there's no recognition of women's policy and program advice at all, because

that's been rolled up inside something rolled up inside something rolled up inside something now called citizenship. So I think there's an ideology behind that beyond what is apparent.

We used to have a ministry of culture. Now, if I look at it, the best that I can find out of this is something called community services, unless you get far enough down in the vote levels and sublevels of the votes to actually find what's under that. I think that's a very sad comment on the support of quality of life in Alberta.

We have the public asking this department for more support, especially when they know that \$800 million went into the lottery fund in this year. Actually, they're expecting \$837.5 million in this fiscal year. Now, right from the beginning this money that was brought in from lotteries was not to be used for core services, but when I look at the lottery fund and what this money is being used for, so-called onetime projects, I think they're really core services.

9:30

I look at things like agricultural initiatives at \$11.6 million, advanced medical equipment at \$10 million, Alberta Wellnet at \$15 million, Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission – now, that was definitely funded under government programs and services; it's now funded under the lottery – at \$33.3 million. A couple of other examples are health care facilities funded at \$120 million, water management infrastructure at \$20 million.

I think that these are areas the government is responsible for: road paving, school building, medical equipment, agricultural initiatives. Is this government saying that it's out of all these businesses and that they're willing to abandon this to the uncertainties of lottery funding? The point was that the gambling summit said: spend more money on those charitable groups that are offering quality-of-life programs for Albertans. What do we get? We get two pages full of things that are being funded out of this that I think are very clearly core services. If you want to call them onetime projects, fine. Go ahead. But anybody can look at that.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Let's have a look at this situation with the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation, in which the quarterly grant program was reduced or cut or terminated. I don't know what terminology the department is using. Essentially they lost more than 50 percent of their budget, and there's now a program called development initiatives. Now, according to what I read that was put out by the department, this is now supposed to be for the little guy, what's left of this grant program. I really wonder if the little guy is going to be able to get access to any of these funds, and there are a couple of reasons for that.

The decisions are now centralized in Edmonton, Calgary, and in a few cases Red Deer, so any of these sports and recreation initiatives which are taking place in High Level or Crowsnest Pass or Slave Lake don't have representatives on the board. There's nobody there explaining what exactly the grant is for or that knows the group that's applying for the money or the individual applying for the money. It's all centralized decision-making in Edmonton or Calgary, Edmonton for the northern region, Calgary for the southern region. So how is the little guy supposed to get any sort of advocacy out of this?

I think there's a situation that perhaps exists less in southern Alberta but definitely in northern Alberta and on this same issue of representation in centralized decision-making for these grant programs. In the north we have barriers of distance and barriers of climate. I mean, what is the team supposed to do? They're all supposed to come to Edmonton for a workshop? No. You need to

be able to bring the experts, the team leaders, the safety advisers, or whatever you need. They need to be traveling up there. How are these people supposed to be getting that message through when we have the centralized decision-making happening there?

I look at the northern regions. Under the quarterly grant program they used to get \$720,000 a year. That's for all the activities that went on in the northern region. Now under this new program they're going to get \$300,000. That's more than a 50 percent cut. Where did the rest of that money go?

How come this came about? Well, I checked around a bit, and what I heard was that people felt there was double-dipping between the old program, the quarterly grant program, and the community lottery boards. That's really interesting, because I'm sure that when the community lottery board money was introduced, it was about augmenting what was already there. It was supposed to be about recognizing that there needed to be additional support into the community, and these community lottery boards were set up to be offering additional money, not replacement money, not to have the community lottery board money in place and therefore we'll reduce the old grant. That's not what this was about.

These groups are not double-dipping. If they've got a \$50,000 project, yes, they're applying to a couple of different places, but they're still not getting their whole \$50,000 covered, and they're certainly not getting it covered twice, which would be the definition of double-dipping. No. They're still putting in their own money and trying to get support for different facets of the project that they're doing.

That whole idea that we'd be losing money out of grant programs because the community lottery boards are now somehow replacing them or where there's some accusation of double-dipping really burns me. How that's being operated and how the community lottery board money going out into the regions is being handled – there was to be really strong criteria in place, criteria that I felt should have protected all the different areas that were applying for money so that the local board would know that they should be looking for projects for seniors, they should be looking for projects for youth, they should be looking for projects for artists in that region.

What I think in some cases has happened is that your group has to have an advocate at the table. If that voice isn't there to be represented, well, there's a certain amount of negotiation that goes on and you may just not get any money for whatever that particular sector is if you don't have an advocate at the table. That's why there was supposed to be the strong criteria for it.

The criteria have changed. I know some groups were in the media because some school projects were being funded through community lottery boards. Now, I'm not going to criticize that school for applying for money. I know that that school needs the money, and they're looking for it anywhere they can get it. But this grant program was supposed to be augmenting what was going on in the community for quality of life, sports and recreation, arts and culture, that sort of thing, and that's not what's happening here today. It's even worse if we're losing grant programs because this community lottery board program is now in place.

I think it's important here to compliment and recognize the volunteers, the many volunteers that support the minister and the department, those volunteers that do sit on the community lottery board or on the boards of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation or the Alberta Foundation for the Arts or the Wild Rose Foundation. These are citizens from the community, from Alberta who are giving up their time and doing their best to try and do this, and I think in some cases the minister does them no favours by not giving them strong criteria to work with.

Now, I'd like to move on to the performance measurements again. I question almost all the performance measurements that are in this department. I don't think the minister is doing himself much of a service with the performance measurements that are there, because I don't think it's looking forward to what improvements need to be made and what programs need to be in place to support where we could be going. In other words, the whole concept of development, of moving forward is not in this.

So it's not about how many people went to an exhibit and were satisfied, which is what's being measured here. It's about: why didn't other people go to the museum or the exhibit at all? That's what we're trying to find out. If we're trying to get more people in there, why didn't other people go? I mean, isn't that it? Isn't the goal to increase the participation? Then why aren't we trying to find out why people don't come rather than measuring the satisfaction level of those people that are there? I think there's something very much missing in those performance measurements.

I'll note once again the mysterious change in statistics shown in last year's estimates book, the same year's figures brought forward into this year's estimates book, and they're different. The numbers have changed. They've transmogrified somewhere in the translation, and I'd like to see that clarified, please.

I didn't get much time to talk about the Francophone Secretariat, which is new under this department this year. I am interested: what are the key performance indicators for the Francophone Secretariat? It's now under this department. What are we looking for it to do? What are the goals? What is it trying to achieve? What's in place to measure whether or not that's successful? I didn't see anything in there about that.

Library funding and support. I've already said, you know, that we're finding out: no, not this year. They're based on '97 levels. We're now looking at 2001-2002 as the earliest time they'd be given some relief and some reality in their funding.

Another topic. I'm interested in what advice or what policy was given by the women's policy and programs. I acknowledge there is one person working on this. My heart and support goes out to this person. What advice, what policy direction was given by women's policy and programs to the minister that he can then pass on to the Minister of Health and Wellness, particularly on the issues of osteoporosis and midwifery, two key issues for women in this province? What kind of advice did this minister get that he then worked in partnership on with the Minister of Health and Wellness? I'd be very interested in that one, two very important subjects for women in his province.

9:40

I've talked quite a bit about the non-increase in funding to seniors in that the only increase there is to deal with an increase in volume demand. We didn't see any changes in the thresholds. We didn't see any changes in the benefit amounts. Nothing changed. There's just a whole bunch more seniors in Alberta that are poor enough that they can qualify for this program. I'll point out that the criteria for qualifying for the program is that you have to be a really destitute senior. It tells us there's a lot of destitute seniors in Alberta. This is a problem I don't see being addressed. I don't see where the new ideas are going to be coming from, so I guess, like the minister, I'm waiting for the part B report on the impact of aging.

I've addressed some of the issues where I felt there needed to be literally more cash into this department, which has been more or less at the level of 1988-89 for some time. There was money that has been taken away or ignored.

Now let's talk about taking away staff. I'm wondering why the minister in all the comments he's brought forward in the time we've

had together on this didn't talk about shared services, in which we evidently are now going to outsource all the administrative positions in this department. If I may quote my good mother, I think the minister is cruising for a bruising here. I think maybe he wants to be a Jane Stewart wanna-be. He's running a department that dispenses grants out into the community. Who are the people that do the input, that collect the data and do the evaluation on these grants? By terminating or laying off or outsourcing all these jobs, you're getting rid of the very people that know what's going on. You're getting rid of the very people that are going to save this minister's hide.

We're saying goodbye to them now because we're going to outsource it to KPMG or, you know, Hire-a-Worker Inc. That's not to disparage those people that are running private companies. Good for them if they have the initiative to do it, but I really question why this minister is now going to outsource these staff. I'd be interested in knowing why that didn't come up in the budget estimates of this department. That's a fairly major change in things. I guess he was hoping I wouldn't notice. What I think we're going to have left in there are a few program officers rattling around in the Standard Life building.

I'm wondering how the minister envisions being able to track the work that is being done by these outsourced groups. Will the contracts that are going to be signed with the outsourced companies be open and available to scrutiny, open and transparent, or am I going to be sitting in Public Accounts a year or two from now with the Auditor General having a reserved opinion on this department because he can't get details of what was in the contract for outsourcing all the administrative support staff in this department? I think it's a recipe for disaster, and it's an immense disservice to Albertans.

How are these outsourced companies going to make money? The profit margin has to be built in. What have we seen in other examples? We end up with them hiring the same people at less money or even trying to de-skill the job. If you used to have to have a degree to do this job, well, we'll pay you minimum wage and a high school certificate is good enough. I don't think so.

I'm asking again for the full-time employee counts because I think that's part of what's happened in this department. There's one line giving FTEs in here, and there are far fewer employees in each department. So I would like to see the FTEs for each subvote and, let's say, for April of '93, '95, '97, and '99. That's not too much work for the minister. Your resources are certainly larger than mine. You have the backup of an entire department to do this.

A few comments on the Banff Centre for the Arts. This was our jewel in the Rockies, and once again benign neglect, or at least I hope it's benign. The funding and the support for this has been so minimal that I'm wondering if the government just hopes they'll go away, just quietly die. This was a world-class facility attracting world-class artists and national artists. It gave our artists an opportunity to work with them. What happened? No support for it.

Once again I've run out of time, Mr. Chairman. I do wish I had another good hour; I could certainly use it. I think that it's mismanagement in this department and poor stewardship.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Community Development for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$334,491,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, for the following departments.

Department of Resource Development: operating expense and capital investment, \$88,429,000.

Department of Economic Development: operating expense, \$51,236,000.

Department of Government Services: operating expense and capital investment, \$49,810,000.

Department of Community Development: operating expense and capital investment, \$334,491,000.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to file copies of the documents tabled during Committee of Supply this day for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Third Reading

Bill 6 Special Payment Act

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to move Bill 6 for third reading and look for the support of all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up this evening and speak to Bill 6, the Special Payment Act, in third reading. It's been quite a journey for a number of widows

and widowers, and I think what I would like to do is look at the three important parts of this journey: where these people have been, where they are presently, and where they're going to be hopefully in a few short weeks if all goes well.

9:50

When we look at where they've been, Mr. Speaker, prior to 1982 dependent spouses were paid a pension for life unless they remarried or entered into a common-law relationship. Now, in 1982 that legislation was changed. It was well-meaning legislation and certainly looked at pensions. It also looked at a retraining program. In 1985 we had the introduction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and in particular section 15(1), which dealt with discrimination, had an influence on pensions. In 1987 we saw the government of Canada recognize and correct a similar discriminatory error by reinstating Canada pension cheques to surviving spousal benefits. In 1996 we saw the disenfranchised widows in British Columbia win a court challenge. At that point their benefits were reinstated, and they received a lump sum payment for the retroactive payments they hadn't got. Since that time we've also seen settlements in other provinces, Mr. Speaker, and these were in various forms of reinstatement of pensions.

In 1994 in the province of Alberta we had the formation of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group. At that time they started a process to get their pensions reinstated, to get their pensions reinstated with a lump sum payment, or in this particular case they were looking at a lump sum payment. That all came about because of the introduction of Bill 6 in the spring sitting of the Legislature.

What this Bill 6 will do is allow the two groups, the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group and the Workers' Compensation Board, to get together to settle this issue, and it will allow for payments of moneys from the WCB to the disenfranchised widows. This will certainly go a long way in correcting the issues of fairness and the issues of protection of the vulnerable surviving spouses.

At this stage of the game many of them are widows, they are seniors, and they've encountered financial hardships since the time of the death of their spouses in work-related injuries. Some of these people today still continue to have financial hardships. They are living on some type of provincial assistance, whether it happens to be AISH or family and social services benefits. So for them financial support is welcome. This will also certainly add to the quality of their lives from now until such time as they retire.

They have been offered, I am told, a lump sum payment of \$80,000. Some of the widows are quite willing to accept this figure. It's been a long and hard struggle for them. Even though they're not totally happy with the \$80,000, they are quite prepared to take that. Others may not be satisfied with this amount, and of course there are provisions in Bill 6 for them to go to the courts to see if there's any possibility of increasing this amount. Others are simply tired of the struggle. It's been a David versus Goliath battle for them, and of course the little person has come out victorious again.

Tonight we are on the verge of passing Bill 6 in third reading, and I hope that in the Assembly here tonight we have support from all members and this settlement will be speedy.

With that, we must also look, then, at the question of where disenfranchised widows are going from here. At this time I would like to thank the minister for listening to their concerns. How different this is from what we saw when Bill 26 was introduced here on the floor of the Legislature. We see a government that has decided that a worthy settlement, a deserving settlement is much better than going to court and having these people go to court in a lengthy and costly battle.

As I say, the widows, quite a number of them, are looking for a

speedy settlement to their issue. They are hoping the WCB will process and approve their applications and that the payment of \$80,000 will be made in very short order after that. I must say that I would like to take this opportunity to challenge the WCB to get the payments to these needy people as quickly as our government is getting the payments to those farmers who are in serious trouble here in this province. I think it's only fair that these widows, who have been fighting the good fight and who have been without their pensions since 1982, should be able to look forward to getting this lump sum payment in exactly as quick a time as our farmers are going to get their well-deserved money.

As well, I would like to see the WCB make an effort to notify all those widows and widowers who are eligible for their pensions. I really want to see this happen rather than the onus being put on those people to apply. I know a number of them are very well aware of this, but there are also others that I'm sure don't know that this bill is on the verge of being passed here this evening.

I would like to congratulate the widows. I hope they all have many more years of good health. I certainly hope this settlement will enhance their quality of life. I want to thank them for the lessons they've provided to all of us with their perseverance, their dedication, their determination, and their sense of fairness. It was a pleasure to work with these people, and I certainly do hope they enjoy many, many more years.

I'm very pleased to support Bill 6 at third reading, and I urge all members of this Assembly to vote for it. Thank you very much.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm all too mindful of the condition of sweet harmony that prevails in the Legislature while we've

discussed Bill 6 at each stage, but I make this observation again that was raised at an earlier stage. It has to do with section 9 of the bill, the provision that allows the minister to make "regulations respecting any matter that the Minister considers necessary or advisable to carry out the intent of this Act." Certainly in the opposition we've been prepared to support the bill and vote for it at each stage because of the important remedial effect of the bill, but we do so, I suppose, at least insofar as section 9 is concerned, without prejudice to the opportunity, when we see this kind of provision again in another bill, to argue as strenuously as we can manage that this is excessive in terms of regulatory authority. So I just wanted to make that observation that section 9 is in effect as a model much too wide, too vague. It allows the minister to effectively rewrite the bill without recourse to this Assembly.

10:00

I make that observation. It's not a reason for any member to vote against the bill, but it's a caution that hopefully the legislative draftspeople and the Chief Legislative Counsel will take to heart. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment to conclude debate.

MR. DUNFORD: Question.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 6 read a third time]

[At 10:01 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, March 16, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/16

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, although he actually needs no introduction, Dr. Allan Warrack, a former member of our Legislative Assembly for the Three Hills constituency from 1971 to 1979, who I am proud to say now resides in the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Allan Warrack is a constituent in one of the best constituencies, in the best city, in the best province, and the best country in the world. Mr. Warrack is a professor of managerial economics at the University of Alberta. He is accompanied by three of his MBA students: Kathryn Wood, Patti McIntosh, and Richard Dixon. They're seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I ask them to rise now and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a distinct honour for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a distinguished Canadian whom I have admired and respected for many years. Alexa McDonough is the Member of Parliament for Halifax and the leader of Canada's NDP. She's an articulate and passionate voice in the Parliament of Canada for many issues. Most impressive, however, is her strong and principled defence of public health care. She is in Edmonton today as part of a national campaign to listen to the concerns of all Canadians regarding the state of our health care system. Ms McDonough is in your gallery along with her assistant, Gary Evans, and I would ask them both to rise and receive the warm Alberta welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a petition to be presented to the Legislature today which a number of students and young people across the province have signed in support of Bill 11.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta urging the government of Alberta to stop promoting private hospitals and "undermining public health care." This is signed by 220 residents of Alberta from Edson, Jasper, Vegreville, and Cold Lake.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly. This petition urges the government to "stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]." This petition has 224 signatures on it, and the individuals come from Fort McMurray, St. Paul, Cold Lake, Ponoka, and Lacombe.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present a petition signed by 209 individuals, most of them from the Cold Lake area, and they are urging the government of Alberta to "stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition that reads:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

It contains 218 names, which brings our total to – what? – 80,000, 90,000.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table before the Assembly a petition comprised of page after page after page of signatures from the residents of Edson who are urging the Legislative Assembly to have the government "stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care" in Alberta. This brings today's total to over 1,000 more ordinary, everyday Albertans who are opposed to this government's private health care initiative.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition with 1,111 names on it. All of these 1,111 Albertans are opposed to Bill 11, and they petition this Assembly to "pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and ask that the petition I tabled last week be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon as well to request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to protect, support, and enhance public health care in Alberta and to ban for-profit, private hospitals from receiving public dollars.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on public health care and the undermining of it and what's happening with it be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to protect, support, and enhance public health care in Alberta and to ban for-profit, private hospitals from receiving public dollars.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday in proper form regarding the public health care system be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to support for public health care that I read yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday to the Assembly regarding the protection of our public health care system be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative

Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

Bill 18

Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will do a number of things. It's being seen as the most significant tax reform in the country, and in the process of the bill itself we will be looking at significantly increasing basic exemption levels and also spousal exemption levels up to 90 percent. We will be the first province to kill bracket creep. We will also be introducing a single rate of tax. Albertans will be the first Canadians who will be able to work overtime or become upwardly mobile or work harder without being punished at a greater tax rate.

Mr. Speaker, the other element on the bill will allow at the first quarter for the government to adjust the single rate, which will be presented at 11 percent, to either adjust that downwards or move basic exemptions upwards or a combination of the two.

Those are the exciting elements of this particular bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

1:40

Bill 19

Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I also beg leave to introduce Bill 19, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

This is another milestone, as it clears the way for the axing of the 8 percent deficit elimination surtax that was brought in in 1987. That will be gone this year, accelerating that commitment by one year.

Both of these bills represent the ongoing commitment of our Premier and this government in that in Alberta the only way taxes are continuing to go is down.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, this bill makes a number of changes to the Provincial Court Act, as well as amending the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, the Court of Queen's Bench Act, and repeals the Surrogate Court Act.

One of the key recommendations arising out of last year's justice summit dealt with simplifying the justice system. This bill will assist us in doing that by making courts more accessible and court cases less costly for Albertans.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

DR. PANNU: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table 11 letters and appropriate copies. These letters oppose Bill 11. They come from Rimbey, Eckville, Ponoka, Calgary, and Edmonton. One of the letters is in fact from the Canadian Federation of University Women.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first are letters from Shannon O'Donoghue of Banff and Dr. Millard of the Canmore medical clinic. Both are opposed to the Spray Lakes development in Kananaskis.

The second tabling I have is a petition signed by 27 people from the Slave Lake area who are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to end the policy "permitting hazardous wastes to be transported into Alberta from outside Canada and delivered to Swan Hills Waste Treatment Plant."

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In trying to keep up with all the correspondence opposing Bill 11, I'll table nine in one shot here and just simply read the names of those objecting to Bill 11 and the health care changes: Ruth Elliott, Karen Effa, Ron Clarkson, Allan Effa, Laurel Ambrose, Eldred Stamp, Robert Lawrence, Meaghan Reid, Warren Bard.

Thank you.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is from Mr. Harold Moore from Fairview, Alberta, who wants to know why "the PC party is inviting defeat in the next election over Bill 11."

My second tabling is the approved surgical procedures that can currently be done within this province without Bill 11 that are in the bylaws of the College of Physicians and Surgeons right now, and those were part of the Bill 37 review and the more recent update of those procedures. There are about 170 that can now be done, minor surgical procedures in nonhospital surgical facilities within this province right now.

Thank you.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I have two tablings. The first tabling is the annual report of Economic Development Edmonton as well as a summary of their plans for the future. Unfortunately, I only have three copies of this report, but I understand that other copies can be obtained directly from EDE or via their new web site which was launched. In particular, they refer to the growth in Edmonton in terms of housing starts and retail sales in preparation for the 2001 World Championships in Athletics.

The second tabling I have is yet another analysis done by Mr. Brad Severin of BDO Dunwoody showing the lack of fairness in the government's flat tax proposal as well as the lack of planning with the imposition of this supposed simple single rate. It shows that the distribution of benefits is very unfair and that for the middle-income earners in Alberta to receive a benefit, we would have been much better served if we'd stayed with the existing tax system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table appropriate copies of a special issue of the Capital health *Connections* staff newspaper, Meningococcal Immunization: An Enormous Task, An Outstanding Achievement. By the time the campaign ended on February 28, it closed out at 80 percent of that target group, over 168,000 individuals had received the vaccination. It was one of the largest public vaccination campaigns ever undertaken in Canada.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 35 students from Dr. Elliott school in Linden, Alberta. They're accompanied today by teachers Mrs. Mary Hughes, Mrs. Linda Wiens, Mrs. Alison Ibbotson, as well as a host of parents that include Chuck Tomlinson, James Klassen, Darin Esau, Katie Peters, Laurie Klassen, Jackie Koot, Ernie and Connie Neufeld, Shelley Griesbach, Lynn Regehr, Kerry Eitzen, Robbie Fyn, Norma-Jean Swain, Kevin Christiansen, Sandy Courtney, and Chris McDougall. I'd like to ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly teachers and students from the Rosedale Christian school. The school is located in Crooked Creek, which is in the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency. Along with teacher Roger Klassen, we have parents and helpers Mr. Stephen Friesen, Mrs. Ethel Eidse, Mrs. Marilyn Friesen, Mr. Louis Eidse, and nine students from the school group. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask the students, teachers, and parents to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two distinguished gentlemen from my constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti, each of whom has a lengthy record of community service and community involvement. I would like to introduce John Simpson, who is a businessman in the city of Grande Prairie and currently is also serving as chair of the Mistahia regional health authority, and also Mr. Dennis Grant, who is now retired but was superintendent of the Grande Prairie and district Catholic school board. He also serves on the Mistahia Regional Health Authority Board. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you a friend and a constituent from Calgary-Fish Creek, Harvey Cenaiko. Harvey works for Calgary's finest police department and is a member of the Calgary regional health authority. I'd ask Harvey to stand and receive a warm welcome from all of the members.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three university and college students who are in the gallery today. They are Blake Robert, Kyle Franz, and Erin King. These three people have been working diligently in the name of clarity and honesty to make sure that Albertans understand the intent and purpose of Bill 11. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you and to the Members of this Legislative Assembly 27 members of the Rotary Club of north Edmonton. Today was quite an exciting day. Usually we bring guests to speak to us at our meetings and luncheons, and today we brought the club to the Legislative Assembly to listen to the Speaker of this Assembly at our meeting.

I'd like to inform some of the members here of some of the community services that our club is involved with. Once a week we donate a luncheon to a school which is in need in our end of town. We also donated \$55,000 for the furnishing of the north Edmonton health centre. We're involved weekly in different things with the Boys and Girls Club, northeast patrol, Crime Stoppers, and Remembrance Day in the Beverly site in northeast Edmonton. At Christmastime we decorated some of the trees at the north Edmonton health centre, which we'll keep doing for the next few years. We're involved in very many things in a lot of schools.

Mr. Speaker, members of my club are in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, one of the members of that particular Rotary Club is a former member of the Canadian House of Commons and a distinguished veteran of Canada's participation in the second war, Mr. Bill Lesick.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and introduce two individuals from the political science faculty at the University of Alberta. They are currently studying the representation of women in elected office and specifically focusing on women in the Alberta Legislature. They're here today to see that representation in action. I would ask Linda Trimble and Ruby Hussein to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I've just been informed that in the gallery today are representatives from River Glen school. We have teachers and group leaders Ms Janice Dempsey, Miss Shelly Klotz, and Mrs. Gwen Pozzolo, and we have also parents and helpers Mrs. Mary Resta and Mrs. Shauna Shanks. They are accompanied by, I believe, 54 students from River Glen school. We're delighted to have them here today.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly several guests who are seated both in the public gallery and in the members' gallery today. They are Morag Rempel, chairperson of AUPE local 6, as well as six members of the AUPE Committee on Political Action, and they are

Tom Fuller, Bill Pollard, Roberta Allen, Ron Whan, Don Westman, and Robin Filmer.

As well, seated in the galleries today are Irene Payne, Jean Rogers, Jean Elchuk, Tina Wiebe, Chris Wiebe, Augustina Joyce, Merrill Stewart, Linda Stewart, and Reverend Dr. Charles Garbovitsky. They were all present outside at the citizens' vigil.

I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Premier met with representatives from the Alberta Medical Association in a desperate attempt to save Bill 11. It's clear that physicians in this province aren't buying into this government's propaganda campaign on this legislation. In fact, there appears to be nobody in Alberta buying into the government's spin, except perhaps their own spin doctors. My questions are to the minister of health, who also attended the meeting, I understand. Can the minister indicate what four points of progress were made that he reported upon leaving the meeting this morning?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we certainly did meet with representatives of the Alberta Medical Association, and they raised a number of issues with us. First of all, they are concerned with respect to funding. They want more funding of the health care system and the additional access to doctors' services that would come with that. We indicated to them that we have made a major commitment to increase funding some 21 percent over the next three years. We are funding at the top level in Canada on an age adjusted basis, but certainly we recognize that they want more funding for the system.

Secondly, they indicated and they have on other occasions indicated that they're very concerned about increasing the physician supply, and I would note that we have worked co-operatively with the AMA – and I think they have been at other meetings appreciative of this – in developing an overall physician resource plan so that when we do plan for additional medical positions in universities, we will be doing so on a rational basis, Mr. Speaker. Further to the doctor supply, we indicated that we had made a significant move this year in adding funds for internships, which has gone over, I think, very well.

They also talked about their desire or their feeling that they did not have enough status or a big enough role within the regional health authority system at present. So we did discuss those topics, Mr. Speaker.

In addition, we did actually talk about some of the clauses in Bill 11 and what the potential was for considering amendments.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the minister be addressing the concern that I also understand was raised regarding the disclosure of all private contracts, including labs, including food services, including communications consultants hired for spin doctoring, all of those contracts that are raised by the regional health authorities?

MR. JONSON: Well, if I heard the hon. leader correctly, Mr. Speaker, I don't recall any concerns about the communication methods of regional health authorities being raised at this particular meeting.

With respect to the items in the bill that were discussed, certainly

one of the proposed amendments that we discussed and we agreed to consider is that they suggested the legislation should require that a contract spell out what enhanced goods and services will be part of any contract and the terms and conditions around that. Quite frankly, we have to look at that more carefully, Mr. Speaker, but I think that is doable, and I indicated that to the AMA this morning.

2:00

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is the minister willing to table the amendments which the Alberta Medical Association proposed at the meeting?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, this was a quiet, sedate, and formal meeting, but it wasn't so formal that we got down to dotting the i's and crossing the t's of draft amendments. If and when there are amendments to Bill 11 – and I would like to also go on and talk about some more – they will certainly be tabled with the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before we even get on to amendments in the question period, we better first of all move to second reading stage.

Regional Health Authority Contracts

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the minister raised the issue of enhanced services, because the majority of contracts for nonhospital surgical facilities in Edmonton and Calgary are up for renegotiation by the end of this month. Both the Premier and the minister of health have stated previously that the contracts should be fully disclosed. So my questions are for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is the minister directing the regional health authorities to make public disclosure of the contracts one of the conditions of each new contract being renegotiated?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I know it's Thursday afternoon, but the chair did recognize one hon. member for a question and has proceeded to recognize another hon. member for a response, so let's listen.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I respect what you said earlier, but this refers to a particular need to reference the bill, and I think that if I could refer the hon. member to clause 12 of Bill 11, she would find that there is a transitional provision there with respect to contract renewals, which is there to address this eventuality.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about current contracts in the absence of Bill 11, and there is a provision in the regulations for the minister to direct the policies of the regional health authorities. Will this minister require full public disclosure as a condition of the contracts that are under negotiation right now?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the legislation, Bill 11, requires disclosure of contracts.

Secondly, there is a provision in the bill that talks about the transition in terms of any contracts that come open within the next number of months, and that is provided for.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the question this minister is refusing to answer is the disclosure of those contracts that exist right now. Will he require public disclosure as a condition of the contracts that are under negotiation right now?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Minister of Health and Wellness does have the floor.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. leader is emphasizing that the need, of course, is to get on with it and pass Bill 11, because that would ensconce in legislation the proper provision, but in the legislation, which we do need to have – as I said, it is protective legislation in this particular respect – there is in section 12 the whole area of reporting on contracts, disclosing contracts.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we do recognize that with respect to the whole contracting matter there is a need for a transition, and there are certain dates referred to, I believe the end of October, whereby we want people who are entering into new contracts to adhere to the legislation and of course not make any changes contrary to the legislation until we have the bill fully implemented.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I'll send over a copy of section 7 of the Regional Health Authorities Act for the hon. member.

Health System Accountability

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this government claims that Bill 11 will result in reduced waiting lists and reduced costs, yet the Minister of Health and Wellness hasn't presented Albertans with a shred of evidence to back up these claims or explained why after eight years under this government the system is in such a mess in the first place. This government won't even listen to the evidence given by the Auditor General, because it is so intent, of course, on subsidizing private hospitals with taxpayer dollars. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What does Bill 11 do to address the Auditor General's concern that this government isn't able to link new dollars going into health with patient outcomes in the system?

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, as federal and provincial governments go in this country, I think that overall as a government we have introduced more measures and a better system of accountability all across our departments than any other place in Canada.

Secondly, with respect to the health care system we have a policy in terms of who is accountable for what within the health care system, which is a public document.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we have in our business plan and regional health authorities have in their business plans accountability and measurement provisions. Also, as I think is known to the Assembly, we are working on the establishment of a utilization commission which would be arm's length from the system and would look at the efficiency and effectiveness with which resources are being utilized.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, what have they been doing for eight years?

What does Bill 11 do to address the Auditor General's concern that this government lacks information on existing bed space in the hospitals?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are, both through the utilization commission initiative and through our own information gathering efforts in health, improving overall information systems across the health care system, and that is certainly an identified priority, one that has been identified already. The hon. leader, if she cared to, could see those efforts reflected in our overall business plan.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Auditor General has pointed out that occupancy rates for some of the regions in this province are as low as 22 percent, why doesn't the minister simply do what Albertans are asking; that is, open up the existing beds?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it should be very clear in the Assembly that Alberta Health and Wellness has accepted all of the recommendations in the Auditor General's report and is following up on them.

The other thing is that in terms of bed utilization certainly if there is capacity within a system where there is also the demand for services, regional health authorities would look at their own bed capacity, and if they were looking at considering a contract, they would consider first of all I would think whether they can effectively and efficiently offer the service themselves. But there is an option provided for in Bill 11 in terms of contracting.

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

Private Health Services (continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today federal NDP leader Alexa McDonough and I held a news conference in front of a billboard along Whyte Avenue in the beautiful Edmonton-Strathcona riding. The billboard, which advertises MRI scans, screams out "affordable" and "accessible," lifting these words from the Canada Health Act in its sales pitch. For \$499 per scan you can buy your way to the front of the line, ahead of the Albertans who may be more seriously ill or injured but cannot afford to pay. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why does Bill 11 fail to stop the blatant queue-jumping that takes place morning, noon, and night at private MRI clinics in Edmonton and Calgary?

2:10

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I recognize the importance to the hon. member of the occasion of the visit of the federal leader of the ND Party, and I welcome her to Alberta, but this is about the third time the question has been asked. The point is that the MRI scanning process is one that through an interpretation which involved the federal government some time ago was deemed to be an uninsured service. The rationale for it is that, as I've indicated in this House, the actual operating of the MRI device was a process which was handled by technicians, highly skilled ones, mind you, and was deemed to be a process outside the provisions of the Canada Health Act, and therefore you could have the private MRIs operate.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question, to the minister as well: if \$500 MRI scans are considered accessible and affordable, will \$5,000 gold-plated hip replacements in private, for-profit hospitals just ready to be legalized by Bill 11 also be considered accessible and affordable by this government?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member and the members of the Assembly that the Alberta government through Alberta Health and Wellness and Infrastructure is making major additions to the MRI capacity of this province. We have a new MRI going into the Red Deer region, into the Chinook region. I was just meeting this morning with the chair of the Mistahia region, and they are getting started with their plans there. There have been additional MRIs in Edmonton and Calgary added to the system, and there are plans for more. These are designed to offer public services, and they will be covered in terms of their costs for

the patients that use them within the public system for the insured services. We are recognizing that need and providing for it.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the minister. Are \$500 accessible and affordable MRI scans the way of the future in the Hips R U hospitals that will be legalized by Bill 11?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is quite clear in that there will be no private hospitals.

I would really like to add a point here since it would appear that we're doing something unusual in Bill 11, which certainly is not the case. Recently I was apprised that, for instance, in Manitoba, just another example, they have a contract with four private clinics, as I understand it. One of them is in downtown Winnipeg, and, Mr. Speaker, that contract has operated for some time. It provides for a wide range of surgical procedures. The quotes from that part of the country indicate that it is helping to relieve the pressures on their crowded public hospitals, and it has not been challenged by the federal government as being contrary to the Canada Health Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton Meadowlark.

Health Care System

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have many good friends and acquaintances who are medical doctors that I've discussed Bill 11 with. However, I'm hearing a different story when the AMA is talking privately to government and a different story when they are talking to the press. Recently the representative forum of the Alberta Medical Association passed a resolution indicating its opposition to Bill 11 in its current form and that it would like to see some amendments to the legislation. I understand that this morning the Premier and the Minister of Health and Wellness met with officials from the AMA to discuss their concerns. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: could the minister advise what the nature and the outcome of the meetings this morning was?

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, there were a number of matters discussed pertaining to the overall health care system in general. They concern the need for increasing the physician supply and the need to put more money into the system to expand the amount of services that could be offered. It concerned, as I indicated, the feelings that doctors have about their role in the system, as to whether they are regarded as key to the health care system as they should be.

Then, Mr. Speaker, we did go over five or six possible points of amendment with respect to Bill 11. I certainly indicated that we would consider their amendments. I indicated that there were two or three areas that we did not agree with but that we would look further at the ones that there seemed to be mutual agreement upon.

MR. HLADY: Well, Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental to the same minister: was the same message being delivered from the AMA outside after your meeting as it was inside the meeting?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I was not present at the press conference that followed between the members of the media and the AMA. Reports – and I don't think one should completely go by them – would indicate that the actual progress that we made, areas of understanding that we reached with respect to the legislation itself, although they did not in any way indicate that they were completely in agreement with it, were not featured in the response of the

president of the AMA. Rather, he was emphasizing the area that we didn't get anywhere because we didn't get more funding tied down, that sort of thing.

MR. HLADY: My final supplemental to the same minister: since the issue of physician supply has been one of the publicly stated concerns of the Alberta Medical Association, could the minister tell us what action is being taken to ensure that we have an adequate supply of doctors in this province in the years to come.

MR. JONSON: Well, as I've indicated previously, Mr. Speaker, we have – we can demonstrate, and we've reported on the fact – been working collaboratively with the Alberta Medical Association in terms of planning for increased physician capacity in this province. We have done a physician resource study that was publicized not too long ago in terms of its initial results. We have taken major measures to address the attraction of physicians to rural areas. We have established the rural physician action plan. We have increased the internships in this coming year that are provided through our two medical schools.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I think we have some good results in this province in that I believe it was 220 additional physicians practised in Alberta this year. They fell into two categories: the fact that we are retaining more of our graduates to practise in Alberta and, secondly, that we have attracted some from outside the province.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting to note that twice in this last week the minister of health has tabled the same legal opinion from Mr. Peter Lown with regard to supposed similarities between the Saskatchewan facilities act and Bill 11. Yet what's most interesting to note is that the minister has ignored the recommendations of a major report that Mr. Lown prepared when he was chair of the Bill 37 blue-ribbon panel. My questions are to the minister of health. Can he explain why he has ignored recommendation 5, which says that all surgical procedures exceeding 12 hours of completion, otherwise known as overnight surgical facilities in Bill 11, otherwise known as private hospitals, must be performed in a hospital? That was Mr. Peter Lown's recommendation to you, Mr. Minister.

2:20

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way of course ignores going on to the other part of the report which indicated that we should proceed ahead to providing legislation for the licensing and inclusion of private hospitals into the system. I assume that by raising this, she is supporting that, which Bill 11 of course does not advocate.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister, then, explain why he's ignored recommendation 6 in the blue-ribbon panel, which indicated that Bill 37, which was replaced by Bill 11, should actually have been replaced by amending the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, the Hospitals Act, and the Medical Professions Act? The recommendation was not to put forward stand-alone legislation again. Can you explain that please?

MR. JONSON: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker. On such an important topic it is better to have stand-alone legislation which is focused

upon the particular objectives that we have for Bill 11, our statement of adherence to the principles of the Canada Health Act, and I can go down the whole list of features of the bill.

We are addressing those issues raised in Mr. Lown's report. The point here, Mr. Speaker, is that we are consolidating it into one piece of legislation which is even more protective of the public system than what the blue-ribbon panel report contained.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister, then, explain why he again ignored the part of recommendation 5 which stated that approved surgical facilities which have overnight stays, private hospitals, Bill 11, should in fact meet the requirements of Alberta's Hospitals Act? That's why amendments to the Hospitals Act are required and not a stand-alone piece of legislation that does not have the same standard as hospitals require in this province. Can you explain that?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 has a number of provisos that go far beyond Bill 37 or the blue-ribbon panel report in terms of disclosure, in terms of contracting requirements, and of course it has definite reference to the need for the approval of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, which is something that is also linked in with the current Hospitals Act.

Mr. Speaker, I find the question quite ironic or hypocritical or something. If we had brought in a piece of legislation that took a piece out of one piece of legislation and another and involved three acts, we would have been criticized for making it too complicated and not easy to follow. We've consolidated all of our changes into one very important piece of legislation, Bill 11.

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

Income Tax

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently there has been a lot of talk about Alberta's new personal income tax system. This new system was designed to cut taxes for all Albertans and to also make the provincial income tax system fair. Recent reports and analysis suggest that single middle-income Albertans will actually lose out under the new plan, that their taxes may actually increase, and that they would be better off under the current system. Today my questions are all to the Provincial Treasurer. With respect to single middle-income Albertans I'd like to know: will they really be worse off under the new single-rate tax system than they would have been under the old system?

MR. DAY: Well, a couple of points to make, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the federal plan, depending on which part of it you're looking at, is up to a four-year plan. So there's a presumption – and the jury is still out on this issue – whether the federal government as presently constituted will even be in place four years from now. That's a presumption. I know that certainly there are some, not the least of which would be the leader of the federal ND Party, who will be working hard to make sure that that isn't the reality four years from now.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, is: will the federal government stick to its commitment to pass these phased-in tax cuts along? The Alberta plan moves all of the savings into next year at a tremendous rate. We will be taking \$852 million less out of Albertans' pockets than we will this year.

Now, Mr. Speaker, on the issue of changes the federal government has made for next year, we give them some small credit for follow-

ing our example. We were first out in terms of our tax plan, a very aggressive, exciting plan, and now with the federal government beginning to lower some taxes and that affecting certain laneways of taxation, the member's correct that if we do nothing, if we do not make any changes to our plan, even though all Albertans are going to be paying less next year – let me make that clear: all Albertans will be paying less – there are some who would be paying more if we hadn't changed the plan. That is a correct identification that the member has made.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you. My supplemental again, Mr. Speaker, is to the Treasurer. If our new system does not automatically pass on savings that the federal government handles with respect to their adjustments, are we prepared to do something about it?

MR. DAY: Yes, we certainly are, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's commitment, this government's commitment has been very clear on that. The federal reductions will flow through to the benefit of Albertans.

Now, the beauty of a simpler tax plan that everybody can understand is that you can adjust those levels fairly easily. We are introducing the plan. The starting point is an 11 percent rate on all incomes after they've taken all their refunds and after they've taken all their deductions, but we can move that rate downwards, we can also take those basic exemption levels and move them upwards, or we can do a combination of the two. So our commitment, as we look at our revenues at the first quarter, is to announce how we are going to do that and make sure that the full benefit of our plan and the full benefit of what the federal government has done will indeed flow through to all Albertans.

MR. MELCHIN: Well, I'm pleased, Mr. Speaker, to hear of his concern not only for just the province but for the federal system as well.

To the Treasurer: what policy recommendations would you make to give all those who would seek the leadership of the new federal Canadian Alliance?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'll address directly what is germane to the tax repercussions to the province. We will narrow and confine it to that, Mr. Speaker, to not cause you any angst on that particular item.

The very clear issue with our tax plan related to family income is both profound and exciting at the same time. We are able to and we have moved basic exemption levels up. Basic exemption levels have moved up 70 percent, and the spousal exemption is moving up to equal the basic exemption by 90 percent. That's going to do a number of things for all Alberta families. Those families and individuals will be able to earn more income before they are punished by the tax man for wanting to earn more income. So there are savings there.

For low-income families this is very important. Approximately 132,000 families in Alberta will not be paying any provincial income tax at all. That's tremendously relieving.

For those Albertans on minimum wage, those Albertans and their families will not be paying any income tax at all, and should that family configuration be a single-parent family, that single parent can take the full basic exemption up to \$11,620 and then take the spousal exemption, which is increased to \$11,620, and apply that to the first child thereby being tremendously relieving on a single-parent family.

The last quick comment, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta, with the Alberta plan, Alberta minimum-wage earners will pay no income tax, but they will still have to fork over \$640 to the federal tax man next year, and that's a disadvantage.

MR. SAPERS: What a load of united alternative that was, Mr. Speaker.

Private Health Service (continued)

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Health and Wellness tabled a legal opinion which compared Alberta's Bill 11 to Saskatchewan's Health Facilities Licensing Act. Now, he didn't point out that the difference between Saskatchewan and Alberta is that in Saskatchewan the government brought in legislation to clamp down on private clinics, not to build a framework for the creation of private hospitals. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Since this government likes to refer to Saskatchewan as an example, will the minister explain why that province maintains that MRIs are medically necessary required procedures and should be covered by medicare while this government in Alberta does not?

2:30

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I indicated prior to session yesterday in an interview that certainly we acknowledge that there was not provision in the legislation in Saskatchewan, as shown by the report by Dr. Lown, for overnight surgical clinics, and we also acknowledge the coverage with respect to MRIs. But I think you would find – and we would certainly need to verify this – that by far the majority of provinces in this country are following the same interpretation of MRI services and what is covered as Alberta is, and that is that it is and can be offered on a private basis without violating the Canada Health Act.

MR. SAPERS: Will the minister agree that the Saskatchewan Health Facilities Licensing Act, unlike Alberta's Bill 11, requires that any services normally provided in a hospital operate 100 percent, fully – that means entirely – within the public health care system?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, our approach, as is the case between Saskatchewan and Alberta, is the same, and that is that we will provide medically necessary insured services at no cost to the consumer or the potential patient and without any preference with respect to waiting lists within our publicly funded, publicly administered system, and that guarantee is the same in both pieces of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan does have private clinics. They developed this legislation to deal with them, and it is in terms of its principles in that regard very similar to what we are proposing to this Legislature.

MR. SAPERS: Given that Saskatchewan's law protects medicare and Alberta's Bill 11 would undermine it, will the minister confirm that Alberta's Bill 11 allows for surgeries requiring overnight stays in approved facilities – read: private hospitals – but Saskatchewan law specifically prohibits this from happening?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, our proposed legislation and Saskatchewan's legislation are the same in terms of the basic principles, and that is that both are designed to comply with the Canada Health Act. Both of them are designed to provide coverage of insured services. In fact, in our health care system in Alberta we cover, although it goes way beyond the provisions of the Canada Health Act, a much wider area of payment for services for Albertans than Saskatchewan is able to provide. There will not be preference given in terms of queue-jumping, and as I said, it will be publicly funded, publicly administered. They're very similar in terms of their principles and intent, and Mr. Lown's review says that.

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

Fort McMurray Education Needs

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Northeastern Alberta is experiencing unprecedented growth due to oil sands development, and many Alberta cities are benefiting from the almost \$40 billion being spent in private-sector investment. My question today is, no, not to the Minister of Resource Development but to the Minister of Learning. The city of Fort McMurray and Wood Buffalo are experiencing a superheated economy because of the billions being spent. Both the public and Catholic school boards are trying to cope with escalating costs in this superinflated economy. What can the minister do to help relieve the pressures being faced by these school boards?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In talking to the Fort McMurray school boards and talking to the Calgary school boards as well, it became extremely evident that we needed to add something to the funding formula, that we needed to add something to the growth and density component of this. As the hon. Member for Fort McMurray has said, there are rents up there that are 30 to 40 percent higher than anywhere in the province, and that's if you can get a place to rent. The kids up there still deserve an education. They still deserve funds for their education.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we did back in December of last year is start a committee called the growth and density committee, and that is led by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. What he is in the process of doing and will eventually give a report to me on is going around to these types of communities and talking to them and finding out exactly what kind of factor we should put in the funding formula for growth and density. We already have one for sparsity and distance, and many people would argue – and I think it's a very good argument – that equally there should be one for growth and density. I hope to have this report back within a month or so, and hopefully we can get something into the funding formula as early as September.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental to the same minister: due to the distance, where Fort McMurray is located, and the sparsity, of course, in a superinflated economy, I have to ask the minister how he intends to work in attracting new teachers to this strong Alberta economy in light of the escalating costs in northeastern Alberta.

DR. OBERG: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question, because quite frankly in much the same way as downtown Toronto has a higher standard of living and a higher cost of living than downtown Edmonton does, Fort McMurray has a higher cost of living than downtown Edmonton does. So the Fort McMurray school boards have an incredibly difficult time in getting teachers to go up there. It's a very challenging time, but again we hope that by putting a growth and density factor into the formula, we'll be able to adjust that and give them the funding that will enable them to get the high-quality teachers up there.

Mr. Speaker, what's happening right now, quite frankly, is that the teachers that are up there are ones that are married to executives from Syncrude or executives from Suncor or people working at Suncor. That's a real problem when it comes to new teachers going up there. We're experiencing unprecedented growth in Fort McMurray, and we have to adjust to that.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you. My final question. We have lots of engineers in Fort McMurray, in fact 3,000 or 4,000, probably a few too many, but we really need some re-engineering of the funding formulas dealing with these special situations. My final question to the minister today: in light of the costs being 20 to 30 percent higher, in light of trying to attract new teachers, how do we go about in the short-term dealing with these tremendous pressures that are taking money out of the classroom just to deal with keeping schools open?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I'd already stated, I hope to have some changes to the funding formula by September.

Mr. Speaker, with your concurrence I'd like the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, as the person leading the committee, to supplement me on this answer.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier said that private hospitals would be more cost-effective. Everyone knows, however, the need for profit and massive administration in private hospitals means that they are less cost-effective. The Premier said that private hospitals were needed because they would be more efficient and alleviate suffering. That's not so. Finally, the Premier said that private hospitals reduce waiting lists. My first question is to the minister of health. Will the hon. minister finally admit that waiting lists for public health care will in fact get longer as trained doctors and nurses abandon the public system to practise in the Premier's parallel private system because of Bill 11?

2:40

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier has not contended that. The second thing is that Bill 11 is very explicit in stating very clearly that there will be no full-service, private hospitals in this province. That's prohibited in the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of evidence or reference points let's consider this particular example. In Manitoba they happen to have the Pan Am Sports Medicine Centre in Winnipeg, and there they provide for a wide range of surgeries. They recorded having done 1,418 surgeries last year, and they're provided block funding for these costs; that is, these surgeries for the public system. The Pan Am does everything from orthoscopic surgery on knees and shoulders to plastic surgery and cataract operations. There are also three other surgical facilities in Manitoba. The positive side to the Pan Am facility is that it takes the pressure off overburdened hospitals. "In an era of rapidly growing health-care costs, private clinics may be one solution to . . . ease the burden of medicare on taxpayers," says Mr. Hildahl, the commentator in Manitoba.

We could go on to talk about the Shouldice clinic. That's already been referenced in this Assembly. We could reflect upon, as I understand it, that at least one of the maritime provinces, which has, I believe, a Liberal government, is sending patients under contract arrangements down to the United States for surgical services.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would say that there is quite a bit of evidence around.

MR. MacDONALD: Very interesting, Mr. Speaker.

This is to the minister of health. Is the hon. minister saying now that the president of the Calgary Regional Medical Staff Association and the president of the Edmonton medical staff association are totally wrong?

Speaker's Ruling Improper Questions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, you're referring to two individuals who I'm sure over a period of a week may have said virtually anything and everything. It's totally incomprehensible to me how this question can be responded to unless you're a lot more specific about suggesting that somebody said a particular thing. Please proceed.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll try this then. This is also to the minister of health. Will the minister finally confirm that the real reason hundreds of public hospital beds and tens of operating rooms are closed is to artificially increase demand for private hospitals by creating a false illusion that the public health care system can't cope? Isn't that what this government's slashing of health care is all about, to cripple the public health care system so now we can have wealth care, not health care?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's quite clear – and for the member across the way I'd just like to say this one more time – that, first of all, there is no provision in this bill for private, full-service hospitals. Secondly, the proposed legislation does not force any regional health authority into having a contract with anybody. Further, there is a set of criteria in the legislation in terms of what requirements have to be met in terms of entering into any contract, and certainly the overall net benefit to the system of moving in this direction has to be paramount.

I would just like to conclude, but I could go on to some other examples here. Other places in this country have found it viable to contract with surgical facilities. That has not been challenged by the Liberal Party, as far as I know, in any part of this country, whether they're opposition or in some other role as government, Mr. Speaker, so that is the point that I'm making.

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

Kananaskis Development

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our unique treasures of natural heritage need preservation for Albertans now and generations to come, a constituent of Calgary-Fort, a well-known person among our communities, expressed to me his public objection to development in Kananaskis Country. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What is the government policy on Kananaskis Country?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I first of all want to say that I appreciated the letters that were tabled by the opposition Environment critic indicating a couple of people who copied her with letters indicating their feelings about Kananaskis Country. In response to those two letters that were tabled earlier today as well as to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, I'd like to say that the overriding principle in Kananaskis Country is the protection of the environment. This government will not, has not, and does not allow development that threatens this area's environmental integrity or its wilderness character.

Mr. Speaker, Kananaskis Country is governed as a multiple use area, and one of those uses is to provide recreational opportunities to Albertans and people who come from outside the province of Alberta, thousands and thousands of visitors every year. In May of

1999 after an extensive amount of public consultation the government announced that any new large-scale development proposals in Kananaskis would not be permitted. However, that decision exempted six proposals that were already under review. Of those six proposals I can advise members of the Assembly that one has been withdrawn by the proponent, and that was for a golf course in the area. The second one, one that was put forward, did not meet any financial criteria that were established. So of the original six that were grandfathered, four now are continuing through an extensive process of review.

MR. CAO: Well, thank you. My second question is to the same minister. What is the status of the proposal of an alpine resort development in the Spray Lakes area?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, December last I ordered the Genesis Land Development Corp., which is the proponent of the proposal referred to by the hon. member, to carry out an environmental impact assessment for their proposed four-season resort, but I also ordered that the impact assessment would have to include the downhill ski area that they were proposing at Tent Ridge and a proposed heli/cat skiing operation on Mount Sparrowhawk as well as a boat tour operation on Spray Lakes. From an environmental standpoint looking at the cumulative impact of all of these proposals makes the most sense with respect to the environmental integrity of Spray Valley. At this time government officials are preparing the final terms of reference for the impact assessment. This will act as an environmental checklist of all the concerns that Genesis must address in Spray Valley.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie tabled a letter that indicated that in looking at the development company's terms of reference, it did not take into account a number of issues. Those issues have been raised, however, by members of the public who have put forward their concerns. In all, Mr. Speaker, over 800 Albertans participated in submitting terms of reference. That is now in the process of being reviewed, and there will be a more comprehensive set of terms of reference established as a result.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us what the process is for the no development views to be taken into account?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this is really similar to many of the concerns that people have already expressed. As I said in this House before, many people have expressed their opposition to any further development in the Kananaskis Country area, and as a result of that very good input by a number of people, I think that is what precipitated the policy we have, that I referred to earlier in my answer to the main question, a policy of no new large-scale development and a policy that environmental integrity and wilderness character are the most important principles governing how we will deal with Kananaskis country.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members in a few seconds from now we will call upon the first of three hon. members today to participate in Members' Statements, but prior to that, might we have unanimous consent to revert to introductions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests
(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and honour this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly teachers and students from the Sexmith and La Glace junior high band. The band is located in both the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency and the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency. These are the forerunner of probably one of the most successful bands in this province. The junior high band has led to a senior band that has actually won recognition across all of Canada, across all of North America.

It's with a great deal of pride, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to introduce the bandleader, Mr. Paulson, teacher Mr. Scratch; parents and helpers Mrs. Van Dyk, Mrs. Hall, Mrs. Craibley, and Mrs. Hutchinson. The band was participating in the Alberta International Band Festival this morning and, I understand, performed very well. The group is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask the students, teachers, and parents attending to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

head: Members' Statements

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

Alberta Film Industry

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise this afternoon and announce some information about the Alberta Film Commission, which represented about a \$98 million industry in the year of 1998. It's an environmentally friendly industry. It's got diversified business opportunities for the province of Alberta.

With the provincial government's recent support by design and implementation of the Alberta film development program and its continued support with the Alberta Film Commission, this province is growing a film infrastructure for our province that is one of the many tangible and beneficial ways which our provincial economy is going to grow and move forward. As I said, it was a \$98 million industry in 1998, and that moved ahead by 50 percent in the first six months of 1999. This creates an economic multiplier estimated in various industry studies at 2.8 to nearly three times. The economic spin-offs include a multitude of business opportunities for our hotels, tourism, car rentals, catering industries, to speak of just a few. It brings an international focus to our province, and the film industry, as I said, is an environmentally friendly one.

Mr. Speaker, I was recently appointed a member of the Alberta Film Commission and serve on their board. The offices for the Alberta Film Commission are located in the constituency of Calgary-Currie. The mission statement of the Alberta Film Commission is: in the business to bring film production to the province, nurturing relationships with indigenous, national, and international producers, production executives, and production companies.

We're going to work together to strengthen our relationships with municipal representatives, union guilds, key members of Alberta business, and the public in order to nurture one-on-one relationships and to create a better understanding of this dynamic economic industry in our community. We have also got links with the Alberta Economic Development Authority, the Economic Development Authority of Edmonton, private-sector works, including financial institutions, and key leaders in our community who are taking this initiative very seriously.

I'm pleased to be able to act as a liaison for our colleagues, and I would like to share my information with them and look forward to hearing from anyone who has questions about the Alberta film industry or the commission. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Marriage Amendment Act

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 202 could soon be proclaimed into law in this province. I want to take this opportunity to return to it, because I believe the spirit of this bill is not pro marriage but pro intolerance and pro discrimination and anti human rights. Yesterday I made mention of the fact that I had questions about this bill that were never likely to be answered due to the speed at which this bill was fast-tracked to the Legislature. I'm sure that Albertans as well have questions but have scarcely had time to read the bill, never mind responding thoughtfully and clearly to its intent.

The government has forgotten the outrage that Albertans expressed two years ago when they found the threat of the use of the notwithstanding clause ensconced in Bill 26. The government may say to me, "That was then; this is now," and I would respond by paraphrasing Julie Lloyd of Equal=Alberta who said: you can't continue to load the gun and brandish a deadly weapon then, now, or ever; discrimination is discrimination.

To say that this bill is not anti gay but pro marriage cannot detract from the fact that this legislation legalizes discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. It's an affront to Canadian values of decency and tolerance. It's an arrogant affront to the Canadian Human Rights Act. I quote the Canadian Human Rights Act, Mr. Speaker:

All individuals should have an opportunity . . . to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have . . . consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society.

I've always maintained that this bill is offensive to Albertans who see same-sex couples seeking equal opportunity to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to make. I despair that they do not have the support of their government in attempting to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Tourism Promotion Video

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday ITV News reported that the government has produced at taxpayer expense a new promotional video encouraging visitors from abroad to visit Alberta, but it would appear from the video that the current government only wants tourists to visit certain regions of the province, because the video they produced features nothing north of Red Deer.

Well, on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we agree that the Banff/Calgary corridor is certainly worth a visit, as are Lethbridge, Drumheller, and Waterton, but unlike the current government Alberta Liberal MLAs believe that Jasper, West Edmonton Mall, Vegreville, Lac La Biche, Fort McMurray, the Peace country, and the Reynolds museum are all worthy of promotion and are all part of the true Alberta experience.

For this government to earmark \$4 million for an international tourism promotion with public tax dollars collected from across the province and leave out two-thirds of the province is just plain wrong. Even the Alberta Chambers of Commerce have noted the government's failure to properly support and develop Alberta's fourth largest industry in a competent and equitable manner.

The repeated bungling by this government of tourism promotion for two-thirds of this province must end. The government's own commissioned studies show that Alberta's tourism industry has already lost international market share because of this government's incompetence and failed attempts at privatization through the now defunct Alberta Tourism Partnership. This government's latest insult to attractions and hospitality interests in central and northern Alberta is inexcusable. This latest snub of tourism in central and

northern Alberta is just one more indicator of how arrogant and detached this government has become.

On behalf of the two-thirds of the province left out in the latest tourism campaign we request that the government change its marketing plan so that all Albertans share in the promotion and the benefits from tourism.

Thank you.

3:00

head: Projected Government Business

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(5) I would request that the information of what's happening next week we now share. Thanks.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm more than delighted to advise the House that next week will continue to be as productive as the last two weeks have been.

On Monday, March 20, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading we will be proceeding with Bill 17, Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000; Bill 10, Securities Amendment Act, 2000; Bill 13, Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2000; Bill 14, Alberta Treasury Branches Amendment Act, 2000; Bill 15, Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000; and time permitting, Committee of the Whole, bills 17 and 2.

On Monday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply reporting designated supply subcommittees, two of five, Health and Wellness and Learning; reporting Justice and Attorney General and Municipal Affairs, main estimates; Committee of the Whole, if there's time permitting, in bills 1, 2, 4, and 5 and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, March 21, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply reporting main estimates of Innovation and Science; for second reading, time permitting, bills 20, 14, 15; and as per the Order Paper.

Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply reporting designated supply subcommittees, three of five, Human Resources and Employment, Children's Services, and Environment; reporting main estimates of Treasury, Infrastructure, Gaming, and Innovation and Science; thereafter in Committee of the Whole as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, March 22, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply day 1 of lottery fund and reporting of International and Intergovernmental Relations main estimates; thereafter as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, March 23, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply day 2 of lottery fund estimates and introduction of the Appropriation Act, main estimates, and as per the Order Paper.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there was one point of order provided to the chair today, but there is also a point of order arising out of business in the House yesterday, and I have this statement that I want to make.

Yesterday, March 15, the chair undertook to review *Hansard* and if necessary comment further on the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek which focused on statements made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning in question period about the chief executive officer of the Alberta Mental Health Board.

As the chair indicated yesterday, on pages 440 and 441 of *Hansard*, questions should be on policy matters, not on personality. All hon. members must be reminded that the protection they enjoy for anything said in this Chamber also requires members to act responsibly. To make allegations against someone who is unable to defend themselves can have serious repercussions for the individual and his or her reputation. This point has been made several times by this chair. The same point is found in *Beauchesne*, sixth edition, at paragraph 493(4).

The current practice in the Canadian House of Commons is reflected in a new book, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which the chair referred to on Tuesday. On page 524 it states:

Members are discouraged from referring by name to persons who are not Members of Parliament and who do not enjoy parliamentary immunity, except in extraordinary circumstances when the national interest calls for the naming of an individual. The Speaker has ruled that Members have a responsibility to protect the innocent, not only from outright slander but from any slur directly or indirectly implied, and has stressed that Members should avoid as much as possible mentioning by name people from outside the House who are unable to reply and defend themselves against innuendo.

The chair encourages members to reflect on these considerations before commenting on persons outside the House.

Now, I do believe that the Member for Edmonton-Manning would like to supplement my statements.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, I regret that the comments I made may have been heard as offensive. The intent of my questions was to determine the provincial Minister of Health and Wellness' policy re mental health issues. It was never my intention to violate the rules of this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising under *Beauchesne* 409 and 23(j) of our Standing Orders with respect to the preamble in the question from Edmonton-Gold Bar this afternoon. In Edmonton-Gold Bar's preamble he first of all offended the rules entirely by exceeding "one carefully drawn sentence," by getting "an unfair share of time," by provoking "the same sort of reply," and in all the other areas of which you've admonished the House from time to time.

But the part about the preamble which was most offensive to the rules and the dignity of the House and the dignity of the members of the House was the fact that he chose to attempt to put words into the Premier's mouth by trying to characterize from his perspective what the Premier has been saying. What Bill 11 and this government have said is that we will be banning private hospitals in Alberta. The bill states that.

Now, they might dispute the definition of hospitals, they might dispute the definition of designated surgical facilities, but for the hon. member to come out in his preamble and attempt to tell the public of Alberta that the Premier supports private hospitals, when the bill that the government tabled clearly bans private hospitals, is wrong. It's characteristic of the type of misleading statements that have been utilized in preambles to questions, which can only provoke long answers, can only provoke members on this side of the House, members of Executive Council, in responding to the questions to spend an excessive amount of time trying to correct the misapprehensions that are being created by the preambles, and this is a classic example of that.

I would ask you to admonish the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on his specific question today and all members opposite to cut down their preambles, to use accurate descriptions when they table documents, to use accurate descriptions in their preambles, and not to encourage and provoke debate by mischaracterizing what is being said. In fact, it's not up to them to tell the people of Alberta what government members or cabinet ministers or the Premier has said. That is on the record, and this hon. member should not be twisting our words.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on this point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I've been asked by my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar to initiate the response to this point of order, and I have to say that I think the Government House Leader doth protest too much. First of all, the preamble – and I listened carefully to it – was perfectly in keeping with the House leaders' agreements that are in place regarding the structure of questions for question period. Secondly, for this Government House Leader to complain about anybody on the opposition side attempting to put words in the mouth of the government – well, first of all, that's ridiculous. Second of all, we don't have to. They can be condemned by their own words and their own actions. They don't need our help. Thirdly, of course, the Premier is the past master of putting words in the mouth of the opposition. In fact, I think what he has said is that people who oppose this government must be left-wing nuts. It's malicious misinformation, and whenever anybody disagrees with this government, he attempts to put words in their mouth. Obviously, I understand their sensitivity to this, but clearly it doesn't constitute a point of order. Maybe it constitutes a point of their own guilt.

Now, I understand that it's very hurtful to the government's position when their own words are reflected back to them, but there hasn't been one or two or three, there have been several times over this government's entire campaign to privatize health care in Alberta when they have said that they are in favour of private health care, that they are in favour of private hospitals, that they are in favour of private fund-raising for hospitals. So, Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar was speaking every word the truth. It was factual, it was to the point, and it was the Premier's own language. I suggest that that's the hurtful part. They just don't like hearing the truth.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: Well, the beauty of this system that we do have is we do have *Hansard* and we do have the Blues. That really allows for definition with respect to the issue.

As I understand the issue raised by the hon. Government House Leader, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar made a series of statements saying that somebody said this, and the point being made is that, no, that individual quoted did not say that. Here's what the Blues say. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar: "Thank you, Mr. Speaker." So far so good.

The Premier said private hospitals would be more cost-effective. Everyone knows, however, the need for profit and massive administration in private hospitals means they are less cost-effective. The Premier said private hospitals were needed because they would be more efficient and alleviate suffering. That's not so. Finally, the Premier said private hospitals reduce waiting lists. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the hon. minister finally admit that waiting lists for public health care will in fact get longer as trained doctors and nurses abandon the public system to practise in the Premier's parallel private system because of Bill 11?

Great danger when hon. members start saying what other people are suggesting or talking about. It clearly violates everything. If the hon. member would ask the question, "Did the Premier say this?" that would be appropriate, but to put words in somebody else's mouth certainly gets away from what we're doing.

Now, I've said this before time and time and time again about this personality thing. So I'm going to give all hon. members an example. I'm going to look at all hon. members, and I'm going to demand that you answer this question yes or no. I'm going to demand that you answer this question yes or no. I will let you know, however, that regardless of the way you answer the question, you will be found guilty. I would never allow this type of question to be in this Assembly, yet the skill of the utilization of the English language is such that I guess everyone would try.

So here's the imaginary test. I challenge you to answer this question either yes or no, knowing full well that there's no explanation allowed. I'm forcing you to answer this. You can't debate it; you can't think about it. You have to answer yes or no. Do you still beat your wife? You're guilty either way with that response, and we're going to be careful with the language we use in this Assembly to make sure we deal with policy and not with anything else.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. For the benefit of those people who are in the various galleries I would explain, as you can plainly see, that this is the less formal part of the Assembly called Committee of Supply. Members may move about, may even have coffee or juice with them, may remove their jackets and sit at various places. They must speak, though, standing in their place, and we have a convention that only one member standing speaks at a time. It allows for give and take back and forth between hon. members and the minister.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Infrastructure

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin this afternoon's deliberations we'll call upon the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like, just before I begin my remarks, to thank the staff of Infrastructure for all of their support over the past few months. I know that I would be extending on behalf of all of our members a sincere thank you for their excellent work.

Infrastructure's business plan and 2000-2001 estimates indicate how we in Infrastructure plan to contribute to Alberta's economic prosperity. We're going to do it by ensuring the provision of safe and effective transportation systems; by managing the development of seniors' lodges and learning, health care, and water management facilities; and by planning, operating, and maintaining government facilities.

The government's prudent fiscal planning and management allow us to continue directing funds to a number of different programs and initiatives throughout the province. Alberta Infrastructure continues to work with a number of ministries to address priority issues and ongoing initiatives and to increase our effectiveness and efficiency. Some of these initiatives include continuing to lead the cross-government Alberta capital planning initiative by working with other ministries on the development of a cross-government approach to

infrastructure planning, information management, and project prioritization. This will ensure the most cost-effective and efficient use of Infrastructure dollars.

We're working with Alberta Learning to plan and develop capital plans, programs, policies, and legislation for all learning facilities; with Alberta Health and Wellness to ensure that long-term regional capital plans are developed in partnership with regional health authorities by March 31, 2001; with Alberta Community Development on the provincewide upgrading of seniors' lodges; and with Alberta Environment on protecting the integrity and effectiveness of water management infrastructure.

We support the provincial government's ongoing theme of strong financial management. In order to position the ministry to address infrastructure funding and management matters, we continue to seek more functional and accountable ways to accomplish our mandate. Now, this is evident in the internal restructuring we did after the government reorganization last spring. We have reduced our full-time equivalent count by nearly 100, and we have also been able to reduce the administrative budget by approximately \$4 million.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

In the fiscal year 2000-2001 in direct response to the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure recommendations, several initiatives, including the north/south trade corridor, will receive accelerated funding. In fact, the task force recommendations have resulted in significant changes to the funding and management of highway systems. The changes will also have a major impact on the engineering and construction sectors in this province.

An additional \$900 million is required over a three-year period to address these recommendations. The Alberta government is providing most of this additional money through the '99-2000 supplementary estimates and in the 2000-2001 fiscal year for several initiatives. The Alberta cities transportation partnership program will receive a \$256.3 million investment. The cities of Calgary and Edmonton will receive funding based on the equivalent of 5 cents per litre of on-road fuel sold within each city. In fact, we just did a news release today on the signing of the agreement between the city of Calgary and Alberta Infrastructure. In total this represents an increase of \$30 million per year for each city.

3:20

Other cities will continue to receive basic funding of approximately \$60 per capita per year and will also be eligible for \$50 million in supplemental funding on a project-specific basis. Rural municipalities will benefit from a \$160 million investment and the new resource roads program introduced last April, and that will receive \$34 million. Under the streets improvement program towns and villages will receive \$60 million. This program has now been expanded to include hamlets.

In our ongoing commitment to develop the north/south trade corridor, \$130 million will be invested in rural portions of the corridor, \$10 million in upgrades to Calgary's Deerfoot, \$15 million in Edmonton's southwest ring road, for a total of \$155 million. This continues the government's commitment to accelerate funding of the north/south trade corridor until four-laning is substantially completed in the year 2007.

Now, primary highway construction will receive \$147 million. The province will begin assuming responsibility for the construction, maintenance, and rehab of secondary highways as of April 1, 2000. The 2000-2001 estimates show an increase of \$70 million from '99-2000, to \$160 million, to cover the cost of all maintenance and construction for secondary highways. This results in significant

savings to municipalities as they will no longer have to fund maintenance or their previous 25 percent share of secondary highway construction projects. As a point of interest, over the next three years the \$900 million in transportation infrastructure funding resulting from the Premier's task force recommendation will create up to 13,500 person-years of work for Albertans.

Now, there are some other aspects of this year's estimates I would like to highlight. Pressure on other municipal infrastructure, such as waste and water treatment facilities, continues to be recognized in the 2000-2001 estimates with increased program funding of \$29 million, which is \$10 million more than last year. Compared to the '99-2000 budget, spending on health facilities has increased by \$53 million, to \$168 million, to address health infrastructure upgrading needs.

School funding allocations include \$160 million for preservation and high-priority expansion to accommodate increased enrollments. Part of this allocation includes \$40 million in block funding to school boards for minor preservation needs, \$40 million for new facilities, \$10 million for innovation funding, and \$70 million for preservation and modernization.

The 2000-2001 estimate for postsecondary institutions is \$47.4 million. This funding provides institutions with the flexibility to address present and future renovations and replacement needs as well as program expansions.

Seniors' lodges will be provided with \$17.1 million to be used for the upgrading of 15 lodges and the start of designs for 12 additional lodges.

In 2000-2001 we have an ongoing commitment of \$95.6 million for the operation and maintenance of government-owned facilities. Approximately \$76 million has been allocated to the leasing and operation of private-sector facilities for government program use. We're also targeting revenues of \$100 million from the sale of surplus properties over the next three years. It is expected that up to \$35 million in property sales will be achieved this year. The 2000-2001 estimates reflect the use of this revenue.

Now, some of our ministry's other major initiatives, Mr. Chairman, are in transportation safety services. In consultation with stakeholders we continue to focus on generating a stronger awareness of the role Albertans play in traffic safety. Work on the regulations under the Traffic Safety Act will be completed. We'll continue with extensive public consultation as these regulations are developed. In 2000-2001 consultations will include discussions on graduated licensing, commercial vehicle equipment standards, and off-highway vehicles. We'll also be developing regulations in consultation with the railway industry and user groups prior to the proclamation of the Railway Act. The objective of this new act and regulations of course is to provide for the safe operation of railways under provincial jurisdiction.

In collaboration with school facilities stakeholder groups many of the recommendations of the School Facilities Task Force will be implemented this year in order to fulfill the government's commitment to improve capital funding practices.

Now, using teams of private-sector consultants, we have completed phase 1 of a complete facility audit of all schools in Alberta. Phase 1 completed 433 of 1,460 schools. We looked at the structural, mechanical, electrical, and building envelope, and when this audit is finished in the summer of 2000, we will have a condition inventory of all Alberta schools. We'll also be bringing forward a funding strategy to address the backlog of modernization and upgrading while addressing the requirement for new student spaces in the form of new schools.

We're recognizing that we need to continue being innovative and forward looking. Using a value-based focus, we're planning to look

at new technologies and to review the ministry's processes as they affect our stakeholders and partners. We're reviewing roles and responsibilities in our relationship with these stakeholders, specifically with our consulting and contracting partners.

Alberta Infrastructure is committed to the economic prosperity and development of the province and Albertans, keeping up with the rapidly changing world around us. We continue to face many challenges as a result of economic and population growth pressures and the problems presented, of course, by an aging infrastructure. I believe the estimates for this year indicate that we have a renewed focus on infrastructure in this province. With the collaborative efforts of ministry staff, our partners, and our stakeholders we are addressing these challenges with creative and effective solutions that'll lead us successfully through the 21st century.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Now, certainly I'll be happy to answer any questions that may arise this afternoon. I'll try to answer them all, and those that I can't, I will respond to the members asking those questions as quickly as possible.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to focus on one part of the department's budget, and that of course is the money for new school construction. One of the fears with the creation of the department was that it would be divorced from the education needs of youngsters. I don't think it's been in operation long enough for any kind of a judgment to be made about that. One of the good things about moving school buildings to the Department of Infrastructure is that there is an opportunity to focus on communities and to look at the total infrastructure of a community, not just the school buildings in isolation. I hope it will be to the advantage of communities in this province when things settle down.

In the Speech from the Throne one of the sections was titled The Government Plan – Caring and Strong Communities. It's a theme that's carried throughout the throne speech, the notion that we all want to work for strong communities in this province, yet one of the regulations, one of this government's policies that is very, very destructive of communities is the utilization formula, the formula that's used to determine whether or not a school district or a community can build new schools. From one end of the province to the other the utilization formula, which has been used as an instrument to control school building costs, is tearing communities apart. Whether they be rural communities like Fairview and the Whitelaw school in the Peace River district or whether it be in the city of Calgary, it's having a very destructive impact on those communities. I think that if the Department of Infrastructure does nothing else this year, addressing that problem and sorting out the kinds of difficulties that it's imposing on citizens, it would have done a wonderful job.

3:30

I had a communication from parents in Calgary who are and have been for a number of years arguing that they need new schools, and they make a number of arguments in their request that their school board's plan for building \$61 million worth of new schools next year be supported. One of the points that they make is that schools in urban areas, like rural areas, neighbourhood schools in particular, have a great deal to do with the strength of neighbourhoods. When you bus youngsters across a city, the opportunity for a neighbourhood to build some identity, to keep track of youngsters within that community is very, very much lessened and weakened. That is the

place that Calgarians find themselves. Like Edmonton they have excess school space in a doughnut ring around the centre of the city and a very critical need for new space in the outlying areas.

One of the arguments they make is that school is more than a building, bricks and mortar, that it's an integral part of a community and community-building. When you apply the utilization rate to those cities, you dismiss all of those concerns. It becomes a formula that is very dictatorial and has nothing to do with the needs of a particular community.

The saddest part of the use of the formula is that it pits community against community, neighbour against neighbour. Certainly that cannot help in any way achieve the government's stated aims of building strong and caring communities. The utilization formula forces school boards to say, "Our utilization rate isn't at 85 percent," or whatever the magic number is at the moment, "and to get to 85 percent, we have to close a school in an older neighbourhood that has some vacant space if we want to build or open in a new area." So you have neighbours at each other's throats. "These neighbours who have a school that's half empty, why should they have a school? Here we are a new neighbourhood and we have enough children to fill two buildings and we don't have a school within walking distance." So the battles go back and forth.

The same thing in rural Alberta. You have schools in small communities, and it literally means the death of the community if that school dies. In the southern part of the province I've talked to school boards, and they admit that the enrollments are low, but again the impact of that building on the community is such that moves to close those small units are very, very destructive. I think the department has to come up with another way of looking at the problem, that it's much more comprehensive than what the utilization formula does.

The parents in Calgary made the point that there are many disadvantages of living in an urban area, but one of the advantages is having young children within walking distance of the school from their homes. As soon as you start busing children across the city, they lose that kind of intimacy that they value. I know that the argument's made: well, rural Albertans bus their children. But there's another set of values that rural Albertans have that many of them deem more important than having a neighbourhood school. Proximity of young children to their parents and to their homes is destroyed under the present application of the utilization formula.

The minister in his remarks mentioned the School Facilities Task Force in January 1998. That's two years old now. A couple of the recommendations in that report talked about looking at schools within a community context: the opportunity to have public health centres, youth drop-in centres, seniors' centres; that school buildings could be used for much more than housing a school program for a few hours in the day; that that would make a tremendous difference to their communities.

To their credit a number of years ago the government had a community school program. That was a program where schools could hire a community school co-ordinator who actively encouraged community groups to come into the school and use that facility. In their wisdom they discontinued that program, and I think it was an unwise decision, because everyone agreed that the community school program was successful. Why it was discontinued I'm still not sure I understand. I heard the argument that every school should be a community school, but that really doesn't wash.

Ontario's last royal commission report, *For the Love of Learning*, went even further than we did in Alberta and asked that there be a community co-ordinator appointed for each school and that that co-ordinator be charged with making sure that the school space was used by attracting into the building services for children like health

and social assistance and really making those schools the heart of the community, that they can be.

The Calgary parents went on to make a number of other points. One of them is that there are no studies in terms of the costs. What does it cost to bus youngsters for 10 or 15 or 20 years out of a neighbourhood to a school in the inner city? It may be an operational cost that can be borne in a budget a year at a time. But over the long term, what are those costs? Do we have information showing that it would be wiser to bus for 20 years than to build a building?

One of the other questions that the utilization formula raises is: how long should a building be expected to pay for itself? How many thousands of graduates have to go through a building before it can be deemed to have done the task for which it was originally built? The whole notion of that utilization formula and the kinds of implications it has for community, for children, and for their school programs is one that I think really needs to be looked at very, very hard.

The Calgary public situation is classic. They have indicated that they need \$61 million for new schools next year, and I think the minister said that his total budget was \$40 million for new school construction. That's just Calgary. The same situation, as I said, prevails in Edmonton and in other parts of the province.

The parents end their note with the statement that Calgary children and the communities have been in the past number of years acting in good faith and trying to make things work, and now they feel they are justified in having the problem addressed and that the core of that problem is the utilization formula.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'd conclude. I know that the minister has made a number of comments about the audit that's under way. I'm not sure that the minister knows that of all the resources the province provides to school boards, the only resource they monitor to the extent that they do is buildings. They never go to a school board and say: look; you've got 3,000 teachers; show us that every one of those 3,000 teachers is working the five and a half or required number of hours each day. They don't monitor the activity of every teacher, but it seems that with buildings somehow or other a different mentality takes over, and that is that every inch of space should be counted.

I used to regret the amount of time I used to spend as a school trustee worrying about school buildings and where they were going to be built and where they weren't going to be built and how much better off youngsters in this province might be if all of that energy could be directed towards their programs and trying to make our schools better places academically and intellectually.

I really, really would urge and plead with the minister to take that utilization formula and replace it with something that makes sense, something that doesn't disrupt our communities and doesn't set citizen against citizen, because it does none of us a good service.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

3:40

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for recognizing the fact that there is real merit in concentrating all of infrastructure in one department. In fact, without a doubt the education ministry at that time had to not only concentrate on programming but also had to find dollars within the same budget for facilities. Now we will be able to focus directly on infrastructure in this department, on a good infrastructure management system, and the Minister of Learning will be responsible for the programming.

With respect to the comments on the focus of communities: exactly correct. We're trying to be as innovative as possible and to bring not only the municipality to the table but also the regional health authority, any of the seniors' groups, recreation authorities, and the school board. I know for a fact that because all of the responsibility is vested in one Ministry of Infrastructure, we have already on occasion heard from different groups from the same area coming to talk to me, but they have forgotten to talk to their neighbour, which could be the school board or the regional health authority. So this gives us an excellent opportunity to send them right back to the community and say: maybe you should talk to the mayor about your plans. It has worked to the advantage where now the stakeholders are back at the table sharing their plans of what they would like to do in the future. I know it will result in much better planned facilities.

I may be repeating myself, but I am very proud of the fact that in my own hometown of Andrew we have a multi-use facility, that was put together in the very late '80s, which includes not only the municipal town office but also the school. The library now is not only the school library, but it's also the public library. You can bring in volunteers in the evening. We have a good recreation facility attached to that. Not only do students use it, but so do members of the community, including seniors. There's one good example of that.

The hon. member was talking about the utilization formula. We definitely have accepted one of the 41 recommendations of the School Facilities Task Force to revisit that formula. At the present time there is a subcommittee of the School Facilities Task Force. The very distinguished Mr. George Nicholson is a member of that committee, and I know that he has many years of experience not only as a former educator/principal but also as a board member, presently serving as chair of the Edmonton public. We have ASBA and CASS represented. There's another group on the committee plus Alberta Infrastructure and Alberta Learning. I think we'll give them a little time. We said that we'd like to get the report back as soon as we can, hopefully early this spring but certainly June, so that we can start implementing some of their recommendations.

They will have a challenge, because they're going to have to find a balance between rural and urban school systems. They are different. I agree: when you're talking about closing a school in a community, many times it does take much of the life out of that community. We have to find that balance, then, as to when the public, the parents of those students, look at programming in terms of what programs are offered in the school or what is better for the student in terms of maybe a better program delivered a few miles down the road. They are very difficult questions to answer. As a former school trustee we went through some of those, and they're not very easy debates.

Now, I've met with members of the Calgary board of education. I've also met with many of the MLAs. We're encouraged by the renewed focus of the Calgary board of education to tackle this issue of underutilized schools, and I think that in conjunction with the lead project in Calgary plus the fact that the utilization subcommittee is meeting, we should have some good direction coming from that committee and see how we can settle the differences.

Underutilized schools in downtown Calgary, for instance. We're hearing a number of things: that property is valuable but it's also recognized as part of a green area, that there may be some historical significance to some of the schools. So there are things being played here other than just looking at a building and saying: well, you know, it's underutilized; it should vanish. I think this is the time for the municipality and maybe the private sector to step up to the plate and say: this building may be modified for another use; it might have

some students, but part of that building may be used for another purpose.

I'm encouraged by the kind of dialogue we've had lately with the separate school system and the public school system and also encouraged by municipalities looking at their planning schedule and looking where they need recreation facilities and the realization: you know, perhaps we should share a mechanical room; we don't necessarily have to do our own thing; we can share. We certainly have the technology today to meter the water and the power in all of these facilities and attach the costs of those utilities to the user.

In Calgary, as well, we are working on a project where we have hired a former school superintendent to work with the municipality and also the private sector and to come forward with a few recommendations over and above what will be coming from the utilization committee. So I think we'll have a vast amount of information to then bring forward to this Assembly.

On the issue of buildings. A comment was made about the time we spent monitoring buildings. Perhaps in your opinion, hon. member, you may feel that we spend too much time monitoring buildings. On the other hand, there's huge room for improvement. School boards have used their own criteria to evaluate the condition of their buildings, using a whole myriad of consultants. This particular audit now will have very specific criteria applied to all buildings. We'll have the most extensive audit of school facilities, which will now allow us to plan further into the future in terms of, you know, the age of the school, what the condition is of much of the mechanical of the building envelope, and try and anticipate when dollars would have to go into that school and at what point. The preliminary estimates, of course, are not that inconsistent with the School Facilities Task Force, but once we complete all the schools, we will have a much better picture. That audit should be complete – you know, I'm anticipating this summer, but it should be in our hands by September. Then we will work with the ASBA and the ASTA to try and work out a plan.

I know from traveling to many of the schools in the short time that I've been in this ministry that there is room for improvement. There's room for improvement on our side as the infrastructure management. There's also room for improvement on behalf of the school boards, as well, for maintaining the buildings. One of the questions we'll be asking is: how do we get the best value for the taxpayer's dollar in terms of the building preservation? I know that there are some that have come to me and said: you know, there is room for improvement, and we want to work with you to try and find a way of ensuring, in terms of building quality restoration, some of the other preservation, and even the new construction, that what dollars we get go to the best use.

So I'm greatly encouraged by the support and the comments of Edmonton-Mill Woods and will review the *Hansard* to make sure that I haven't missed something in your earlier comments.

Thank you.

3:50

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to start off with some questions on this education item in Infrastructure just to try to bring out some other answers. It's interesting now, the blend of different programs that Infrastructure has in it. I know I'm going to probably be duplicating Learning questions and Municipal Affairs questions and whatever. But what I didn't hear from you, Mr. Minister, you not necessarily knowing because of not living in a big city, is if you believe that inner-city schools are very important to the connection. What I mean by that is that you can take a map –

and I've gone to two different lectures on what is called “no new schools.” I even brought the chairman of the Catholic school board, whom I'll introduce today, to my Rotary Club. The whole title was: no new schools in Edmonton since 1994.

If you take a map of Edmonton and you take the geography of it, I do not have a school north of 153rd Avenue in my end of town. That means that children are traveling. You have parents that have a \$300,000, \$400,000 house on a lake site in one of my better areas, and they're being bused down to what are considered inner-city schools. That is a major, major phone call that I get through my door, and I don't blame them one iota, because there's an 80 percent turnover in those two schools that they're being bused to, and where the parents . . .

DR. WEST: You get hundreds of phone calls from those \$300,000 houses.

MR. GIBBONS: If the hon. minister over there would ever like to have a talk on it, I'd like to talk to him and educate him about what happens in the city.

Talking about the geographical rings of the city, the inner-city schools are really meant for kids that do not necessarily have parents that even wake up with them in the morning to walk them two blocks to school. These children do not have parents or even any sibling that can get them there. But if they had to get out and ride an ETS bus to that school, chances are that they probably would never go to school. I look at the facts. If you take a look at the rings and you go to inner-city schools: keep them open wherever you can as a walk-to school. You get into the next area, and maybe the utilization of downtown might be 65 percent. The next area, the next ring out, might be a 70 percent utilization. You get out one more ring, and then you have the 100 percent utilization.

I'm looking at a hundred percent utilization; it just isn't cutting the mustard anymore. We have to build some schools. We look at the Minister of Justice's area. I do know that they've been trying hard to make the two school boards come together, but infrastructurewise they're not, and it's a major, major concern.

Getting on to the rest of the Infrastructure questions and what I was really going to relate to. Today our communities face a number of serious challenges, and we need leadership in this province so Alberta can move towards solutions in partnering with Alberta municipalities, whether they're urban or rural. There has been a complete lack of leadership. Today what I found on my desk just when I went back was the municipal 2000 program, which is a good program. I wasn't surprised at any of the communities that actually are noted in that municipal release, because each one of the issues I'm quite familiar with. A complete lack of leadership is absent in this province, and we'll not reach anywhere near our full potential until we do build partnerships with our local governments.

This government has been talking about a three-year plan in last year's budget but have actually only been handing out one-year dollars. I kind of wonder whether or not the minister or any other members here could operate one of their businesses, if they still have it, not knowing if any constant dollars are coming to them. AUMA and AAMDC were very happy to hear the three-year talk last year, but they also realized that a five-year is actually a better business plan, so I hope we do work toward that principle of five years and also some substantial funding. Stable funding is the major, major item that we should be asking for.

Instead of pointing our finger and fighting with another level of government – and this is the east against the west – the province needs to engage Albertans in a search for a new solution. As a province it is time to acknowledge our local governments as full,

mature partners in building Alberta. The old view of municipalities as being the children of the province is totally out of touch with today's reality.

These are the challenges. How do we go forward? In my view, we need a new partnership between the province and the local governments based upon respect, fairness, and farsighted views of our future. To accomplish this, Mr. Minister – and that is actually related to both you and the Minister of Municipal Affairs – develop a comprehensive provincial/municipal agreement or charter that sets out each player's role, responsibility, and resources. Find the means of providing municipalities with primary access to the property tax base and other long-term, stable, progressive sources of revenue.

This is why a bill is coming forward – and I will have to monitor what I say on it – called the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act. Typically, because it's coming from our side and because it's the Leader of the Opposition's bill, it won't go very far. But I'm marketing that out there, and if nothing else, I hope the ministers will take it and build it into a future plan, a future bill, a future concept. Finding means so that our local municipalities can actually look and plan for the future instead of looking at the carrot wagging in front of their nose: that seems to have gone out with the old farmer attitude with their sons and so on.

The next one is to create an environment in which municipalities are totally accountable to their taxpayers for all sources of revenue and expenses to meet their core responsibility and engage in a long-range plan. That might take one or two years, but I believe that, with the size of this government, in building toward planning with each municipality you only have to do it once every few years, sitting down and actually playing a little bit of tough love but actually working out plans so these municipalities can actually plan, and patting them on the back when they are doing a good job, because throughout this province they are.

The government needs to move forward as a leader in developing a framework to design and treat local governments equally, to improve lines of accountability, to respect local autonomy in decision-making, to increase co-operation, and most importantly to provide, as I mentioned before, stable and predictable funding to local governments. The time for planning properly – and I've said this a number of times to a lot of people. It's no different than if your business is working well, and when the province is doing as well as they are now, I would suggest that it is time now to plan properly. It's the same old item. In the 1997 election it was quite easy to point out that there was no plan by this government, and from my end of town people really bought into that. You could have taken it at that particular time and really built a plan.

Some of the concerns that I've heard throughout the province – and these are just highlights of the typical meeting I go to. The number one concern is downloading. The second one is being treated like a child of the province. Lack of respect is the third item, from the government MLAs who come from a local government background. Fourth, which is actually probably moving right up after number one now, is infrastructure concerns, and where are they going to be planning? Education tax: well, if we keep tinkering for the next few years, we might come up with the right tinker.

Secondary roads were mentioned before. When they got dumped back out there a few years ago, everybody had to recoup and figure out how they were going to do it all of a sudden. Now, I do know you took the pressures, and this is your reaction to the pressures that were actually there. For those that did do a good job out there, I hope you are going out and letting them be part of the tendering factor, and hopefully they can be part of the overall managing of the roads that they know so much better.

4:00

I look at how you contract highway 1 and I look at grading. When you don't grade down the side of a ditch, then the wind starts blowing and you've got all that snow coming over top, so it just lands on the other side. That's the same type of thing: if the local person knows how to grade the road. It's no different than the ridiculous job the city of Edmonton does in the land given to them in northeast Edmonton by the province in the early '80s. The city of Edmonton absolutely do not have a clue how to grade a road outside of grading something inside the city. That's the major complaint I have in my own constituency, the rural side of it anyway.

Loss of tax base to the towns; that is, losing the grain elevators. I continually talk out in the rural area – you know, there was this pointing of fingers out there before when the elevators' tax base went to the town and not to the municipality. Now it's the opposite way around. I hope you teach co-operation and working together.

Seniors' housing: insufficient; backlogs; talking about mega-centres. My brain thinks of saving dollars all the time; I believe in 62 units versus the 20 units. Hopefully we move very slowly as we strip our small towns of these different things, different seniors' lodgings and so on, because it's one of the last of the threads that are actually holding them together.

Community housing. What department is in charge? Well, we know that it has been put over into the community now, but it's still under Infrastructure. In your department, Mr. Minister, I do hope that we are looking at the homeless throughout the province. This is a case where I do know we were part of a study conducted under Minister Bradshaw of the federal government. I was happy when finally there was some communication that happened a number of months later, but it's not far enough. I hope we do build a partnership between the province and the federal government and that this doesn't get lost.

I guess under Infrastructure fall a lot of different things. By pushing amalgamations in certain areas, it might work; it might not work. We look throughout the province, where we've got the Edmonton capital region. We have the MD of Mackenzie and the problems we had up there last year. We have Lacombe, Rainbow Lake, Fort Vermilion, the MD of Peace River, a combination of Nampa, Peace River, and Grimshaw. I hope we handled that one to everybody's liking.

I'll move along to talking about other items. When faced with pressures of growth, can cities like Calgary and other municipalities across the province continue to rely on a system of provincial grants that have been proven to be unstable and uncertain? We need to build more consistently, more stably, more looking into the future. Hopefully, once we get past the next election, when we quit buying the next vote, we can actually maybe sit down and look at that. Is there a better funding approach that would allow our municipalities to meet their roles and responsibilities more responsibly? That's why I am very proud that our Leader of the Official Opposition, my leader, is actually carrying a bill forward that I am very passionate about, and when you give up a spot to a leader, that means a lot on this side.

We believe the time has come to seriously consider revenue sharing, and this bill hopefully will enlighten some people, because provinces like Manitoba have gone to a system playing with this. I didn't totally take to their system, but I did read it, and I kind of feel there's a bit of this happening around the Vancouver area, around the amalgamation of the larger centres, a kind of sharing, looking at how they can use the revenue sharing. Tying the transfer to specific sources of revenue such as personal income tax could reduce the fiscal vulnerability arising from uncertainty over the future grant

levels, particularly in the onetime grant program in Infrastructure. Revenue sharing would also give local governments access to sources of revenue that have grown in proportion with the economy.

We had a question from the Member for Fort McMurray today about growth, and we can see that in other areas. Tremendous growth like that really goes back to your department, of how you plan your schools, how you help them cope with that. I do know Edmonton can complain about the education tax. In the next couple of years they're going to see the same kind of growth that other areas have been witnessing, and I hope by that time we have a plan for that.

The Official Opposition believes that the revenue sharing will improve financial planning capabilities for municipalities, giving them enhanced ability to meet their priorities in accordance with their roles and responsibilities.

I can actually go on and talk about a lot of things, but I do believe that I did ask questions and I did get partial answers, not a lot of answers, when I asked questions around the fuel tax. I do know that we were asking questions a year ago at this time, and there was no real answer from your department, Mr. Minister, but then it went ahead. You know, the politicians in Calgary at the civic level were very passionate about this, and I do believe that it's a step.

The biggest complaint I have in and around Edmonton is that one minute you talk capital region, the next minute you talk co-operation, alliance, whatever, but the whole area didn't benefit from the fuel tax in that. So I do hope there are some plans being placed. I do know that I appreciate the capital investment study that was put on, that I FOIPed last year and questioned, and I surprised the Premier of the province that there was such a study. But this is the way we move forward. We keep planning, we keep investigating, and hopefully this particular government will take some of these suggestions out of the capital investment plan.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I'm going to sit down and listen to the minister's answers or wait for his answers – it doesn't have to come right now – and let some other members speak.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

MR. STELMACH: Considering that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning would like to have some answers, I'll take this opportunity. He began by talking about schools and how important schools are, and I think I've covered most of that in my comments earlier to Edmonton-Mill Woods. However, when we start talking about parents and who takes care of the children, I will say that that's out of my responsibility. Maybe bring those questions to either Human Resources or to the Minister of Learning. If what I hear is true, then we would have to look at what kind of transportation system is in the city of Edmonton to transport students from their homes over to the school.

You also put on the table the very same question we've been asking. The development plans were put in place years ahead, and the people buying those expensive homes or building those expensive homes know full well where those students are going to be going to school. Now, we're trying to take the pressure off by at least looking at K to 3, a starter school, being as close as possible to the community, but for junior high and high school they may have to travel farther because of the intensity of the program. I believe that over the next few months we'll find some balance on that.

I just wanted to make one comment with the busing. There are many school districts in the province of Alberta and certainly in this country of Canada where the students are busing two hours one way to school. That's in rural Alberta, but you know, it's a fact of life.

So people do make that choice as to where they decide to live, and I know we won't be able to provide the infrastructure for a 20-minute walk to school in all cases.

4:10

It's very interesting, because when I was in Calgary, there was also a difference of opinion. It seems some parents would like to see their child step on the bus right in front of their house and know that they'll be safe going right to the school. The school board takes over the responsibility right as soon as that student gets onto the bus and has that responsibility until they step off the bus in front of their own house. Again, I think the only thing we're looking at is the time spent on the bus, but just because they ride the bus is not necessarily wrong. Some parents actually take great comfort in the fact that their children are safe as soon as they leave the house.

I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning commended us, because he said that there's an absence of complete lack of leadership. So there must be considerable leadership there, because you can't have an absence of complete lack of leadership. Maybe it's just a play on words, but let me give examples of some of the leadership.

In terms of stable funding, I recall in this House, when the business plans were first brought forward, the issue of three-year rollout. Well, there was some disagreement especially from members on the other side, because, boy, that's sure a new policy, and how can you predict some of the changes in the growth of the economy? How are municipalities going to predict, et cetera? Well, you're right. I can give you one very quick example of how quickly the growth is occurring in the province. In the city of Calgary they were predicting one and a half million people by the year 2020. Now, at this rate of growth and if it continues, there will be a million people by 2007. So that's how quickly we have to adapt in Infrastructure to provide and ensure that there are dollars available to cover some of the infrastructure needs.

With respect to the comments made on the role of municipalities and revenue sharing, I'll leave that to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, but at the end of the day there's only one taxpayer. There's only one taxpayer, so we have to ensure, for every dollar that's invested in whatever program, that we get the most value for it. We believe that municipalities are making good decisions with respect to the funding they receive, and that's why they're getting the kind of cash injections that they are. I mean, we're front-ending three years of dollars for the municipalities, so I think we have great confidence in their abilities. It will enable them to do a thorough plan, to review and decide what these dollars will go into: LRT, some of the improvements to the various road projects within the municipalities. In addition, the fact that we are going to be taking over the Deerfoot and the ring road around Edmonton enhances their financial position as well, because we'll be assuming full responsibility.

With respect to secondaries, yes, in the beginning of the early '90s we had to find ways of maintaining the kind of road infrastructure that was necessary to move goods and services. Municipalities at that time agreed to cost share 25 percent for the maintenance and the preservation of those roads. Now, in saying that we dumped that responsibility on them and then took it back and we're leaving the municipalities, it's interesting to note that some municipalities did not want to give up their secondaries. They actually wanted to pay the 25 percent.

So the bottom line here is that it's very difficult to satisfy every municipality in terms of the kind of policy, but the reason we're looking at assuming the responsibility for secondaries is much greater than the relationship with municipalities. It's to have a provincial highway network system that is consistently maintained and also consistently regulated so we don't have a mixture of road

bans across this province, because the truck traffic will increase. I've used this comment before, but I'll use it again: if someone is leaving the city of Edmonton with a load of pipe and they get on 831 – just one road I'm very familiar with, at Lamont – their road ban could be 90 percent. They get into Smoky Lake and it could be 85 percent. Thorhild could be a different level, and so could the county of Athabasca. This way it'll be monitored and it will be consistent.

Grain elevators. There has been a large growth of high-output grain elevators throughout the province. Many of these were built on sites where neither the municipality nor the provincial government had any idea they would be placed. Some of them, quite frankly, are placed on secondary roads or primary highways. However, many are not, and we have to also monitor now the kinds of traffic flows that will be going to those elevators.

Now, the closure of the small elevators. We cannot hope to remain competitive, more in a global marketplace, moving raw product to market and looking at including small elevators where in a day they might load three cars when on a good day in a high throughput elevator in an eight-hour period they'd load 100, 102, and some are loading as many as 116 cars. So in terms of the kind of infrastructure commitment made by the private-sector grain companies, I commend them for that, because they're certainly stretching their neck out. Where the system falls apart is that we can't get the railcar to port and back, because that's where the highest cost, the most inefficiency occurs in any system, compared to those countries that we compete against for the market.

There's no reason why, when you load cars in Alberta, it takes as many as 21 days to get them back. It's another very good example of where the federal government has deregulated the Crow rate – and at one time, I'd like to remind everyone here, there was \$8 billion on the table, and a couple of the provinces, not Alberta, couldn't agree on who should receive the payment, the railway or the producer. As a result, when that money was on the table as \$8 billion, there was a change in the federal government, and all of a sudden they came up with a paltry payment of \$1.6 billion: here; take it.

Now, even further to that – I can even go on – the federal government has rewarded those very same provinces that were sitting and not coming to an agreement by a further payment in compensation for the Crow rate and forgetting Alberta again. I really don't know how that particular policy is going to lead to greater efficiency, but I do know for a fact that we will be miles ahead – pardon the pun – of the other provinces in terms of the road infrastructure, and we will be able to move those goods to market.

Where we're going to have to create change is to ensure that the responsibility of the Canadian Wheat Board goes to the port. Their main responsibility is to sell the product, to create the sale and then put out a tender for the quantity of grain they have sold to the grain companies. Then those grain companies will put pressure on the railway companies to get that grain to port and loaded on a ship.

I don't know how many members in this Legislature realize that in the country of Canada today 82 percent of the ships that come to load grain load at multiple berths. Do you know of any other country where that happens? No. This is year 2000. We have computers, we've got all kinds of information equipment, but nobody wants to change the status quo, and at the end of the day it's the farmer that pays the cost. He has no way of influencing efficiency and no way of pointing fingers at those individuals, whether it be grain companies, the railway, or the Canadian Wheat Board, that are not accountable and efficient.

4:20

So that's where we are in the province of Alberta in terms of grain transportation, and that's why the north/south trade corridor is so important. Now we will be peeling apart that kernel of wheat. We'll be taking out the wheat gluten, the bran, the flour, and also the

ethanol, and that will be going south, because those countries that are waiting for or want to buy the grain can't afford to pay the price that we need to sustain the farm, and the traditional marketplaces, like China, now have a surplus of wheat, so why would we be sending them more wheat? If we did send them the wheat germ or the wheat gluten, I'm quite sure they could add that high-protein product to their low-protein wheat and create a better product. Plus you're shipping a high-value product at less tonnage, so you're getting more dollars for it.

Currently the policy doesn't support that, and we're looking for some leadership from the federal government and from the Canadian Wheat Board, because our position is very clear and it's on the table. I hope that we do resolve it, because there isn't enough money in the Treasury, not in Alberta's Treasury and certainly not in the federal government Treasury, to compensate farmers every year for the kind of violation of efficiencies that we could reach in this country.

Now, there was a comment made with respect to Infrastructure and working with the federal government. We'll be glad to work with them. The main thing is that our position is that it's got to be hard infrastructure. It's got to be either roads or what's under those roads, and that's sewers and water lines. No more Zambonis. That's got to be very clear.

Further to that, we will be watching the negotiations very carefully, because this first hundred million dollars is supposed to go to planning. We know where we need the roads and where we need infrastructure. We don't have to spend a hundred million to do the planning; we can put that hundred million directly into the ground. But watch very carefully. What might be coming out of Ottawa is taking the \$2.65 billion less the hundred million for planning and block funding every province instead of doing it on a population base. With 10 percent of the population, our fair share out of that should be \$265 million. We will wait till 2006, when this plan actually does take effect, to see how much of that \$2.65 billion will actually come to Alberta.

With respect to the increased commitment of dollars for roads, those roads are very important to move goods and services. Those goods and services that we transport and convey on roads create wealth, and we tax that wealth to pay for social programs like health and education. So you've got to get your product to market. If you don't get it to market, you don't create a sale. If you don't create a sale, you don't create any wealth. I would hope that the Assembly agrees that the investment in road infrastructure is very important and will lead to further growth in the wealth of this province.

Questions on fuel tax. Well, we collect about \$550 million in the province. It all goes back into road infrastructure. We've actually just about doubled what's going into road infrastructure. Our position is that if we're taxing fuel, you're burning that fuel on the road and that money should go back into roads, because you don't wear out a road idling your car in the garage. You've got to use a road; okay?

Now, with respect to the fuel tax, we send roughly \$600 million to Ottawa. It'll be more this year because of the 7 percent GST. We won't talk about that particular program, but there's a considerable difference in the GST paid on 40 cents a litre fuel than on 68 cents. It would be interesting how much of that new growth in revenue is going to go into some sort of an infrastructure plan but should go directly into highways. What we're hearing now from the federal government – and it's not to point fingers. I had a very good working relationship with the federal minister of agriculture when I was in the ministry of agriculture, and I'm quite sure we'll have a good working relationship here. Except that if it's fuel tax, it should be going to roads. If you're not going to put it into roads, I suggest: just don't tax it. Give us that room, or just don't tax it. That in itself will create more room for the consumer to invest in whatever goods

and services they want, which will again lead to further growth in the economy.

I believe I've answered most, but once again we'll review the *Hansard*, and if there's anything that I've missed from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, we'll certainly get back to him.

The 5 cents a litre equivalency to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. I think it's an example of a visionary plan, of thinking out of the box in terms of taking some of the fuel tax that we collect in this province. Yes, there is risk. There's risk to those two cities, and they have certainly recognized that. On the other hand, we've also recognized the risk on our side. I think it will now lead to better co-operation between the cities of Edmonton and Calgary and the government, and I'm looking for really positive things to happen.

I know that in Edmonton and in Calgary and in every corner of this province over the next three years you're going to be passing construction sites on every corner. In fact, we're going to see more construction in this province than ever before; as I mentioned before, 13,500 man-hours of work. We're now going to benefit because of the stability in the funding from other contractors in other provinces looking to move their equipment to the province of Alberta because they now have an opportunity to tender on some of the projects that'll be ongoing. As a result, that in itself will lead to lower tender prices, which again will convert into more projects in the province of Alberta.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Chairman. Well, interesting discussion so far. A couple of things I want to make note of, and I have some questions for the minister. I'll preface my comments by saying that I've always appreciated this minister's candour and willingness to answer questions, and I think he has distinguished himself from some of his colleagues, in fact, except when it comes to the federal government, in which case there seems to be a consistent theme on the government front bench.

You know, we look at the last comments about the fuel tax, for example, and how much is going to Ottawa and how much is going into the roads and the advice to the federal government about what they ought to do with that revenue. I'm looking at the minister's consolidated income statement, and I don't see any revenue line item that says: here's the dedicated revenue from the provincial fuel tax collected that's going into infrastructure or roads. In fact, the truth is that it's a policy decision of the government. They collect it all, it goes into general revenue, and then cabinet gets together and decides where the money is going to be spent.

Now, I'm not going to diminish the commitment that this government has made to road paving. In fact, some would say that some governments in the past in this province have made a big political deal out of road paving and have made promises about how many roads they're going to pave and build and construct. But I do think it's kind of disingenuous to say, "Well, the feds ought to dedicate all this revenue to one thing, and we're going to make sure that they do," when in fact we don't see that advice being taken here.

While I'm looking at the minister's consolidated income statement, I'd also like to make reference to the line item that is calling for over 13 and a half million dollars' worth of revenue coming from premiums, fees, and licences. I would appreciate the minister's commentary on what impact the review of premiums, fees, and licences will have on these projections and whether or not he's satisfied that he has cost-of-service data. It's on the consolidated income statement under revenue. It's a stand-alone line item. It's on page 182, Mr. Minister, of the Alberta budget book and business plans. It's the consolidated statement. I can find you the reference

in your budget plan if you want, but it's pretty straightforward. It's \$13,588,000 as projected income from premiums, fees, and licences.

4:30

My questions are: have you done the analysis, and in looking at the province's own reviews, are you satisfied that you have supportable cost-of-service data on every one of those premiums, fees, and licences so that we know, particularly when it comes to the fees and premiums that are extracted from Albertans when it comes to sliding scales, there is a relationship between the cost and the fee or the licence or the premium? It seems to me that's still a pretty high watermark. Just for information, before Eurig, before the analysis, before we were officially concerned that there has to be a relationship between the cost of the service and the fee, last year's comparable forecast was \$14.4 million. So it's come down about \$900,000, and I guess the more specific question now is: is that because of decreased activity, or is it because of a rollback in fees, or is it a combination of the two? Is the rollback related to the cost-of-service issue?

The minister also made some reference to when the three-year business plans were first rolled out – I guess it would have been back in '93 – and was suggesting that he remembers the opposition saying: oh, well, that's kind of dangerous, and how can you forecast? I'm paraphrasing, but I think his point was that there was criticism coming from the opposition about three-year business plans. I'm not sure that I heard that same criticism. I mean, what I remember hearing about three-year business plans was a demand from the Official Opposition. In fact, a big part of the 1993 general election campaign, from both the Conservative and the Liberal parties, had to do with accountability and value for money spent. I seem to recall not only a demand for value-for-money auditing but also for careful business planning and projecting.

In fact, if there were any criticisms that I recall coming from the Official Opposition when it came to the three-year business plans, it was that they didn't go far enough, that we didn't have good performance measures, that we didn't have good criteria for the business plans, that we didn't have appropriate approval measures, that we didn't have targets and goals set to expenditure levels. More recently of course, Mr. Minister, as you know because you've heard me say it in this House so many times, the Official Opposition is now calling on the government to roll out 10-year forecasts when it comes to budgeting issues. So we're certainly not critical of the three-year business plans per se. What we're critical of is their presentation and how they're being used or not used by the government as real planning tools.

Now, along those lines I'd like to focus my questions on the minister's business plan as presented to the Chamber. Let me say another nice thing, because sometimes we get criticized for only complaining. I happen to be probably one of the few Albertans that have read this particular budget plan book cover to cover. I did that for many reasons, but one of the major reasons why I did that is that I'm always curious to see whether or not there is agreement across all the government departments in the presentation of the performance measures and the goals in the business plans. There isn't. In fact, some departments – and it doesn't matter which ones they are now, because I referred to them specifically in their own estimates – are abysmally poor when it comes to presenting particularly the performance measures, the accountability structures in their business plan.

That is not the case with Infrastructure. In fact, your performance measures are well presented. They are for the most part clear measures, although I have some quibbles with some that I'll get to in a minute. They appropriately give us both a little bit of history

and project into the future across the business planning cycle, which is what they're supposed to do. So I want to thank the minister – I think it's consistent with his character of being as forthright as he can – for having performance measures in his business plan presented in this way. It makes it easy to read and to understand and then to appropriately query or provide some suggestions where they could be improved.

When I look at goal 1, improving transportation safety, there is no traffic safety measure yet, and I'll give the minister the benefit of the doubt in terms of developing this new measure. Over the course of the year, though, what I would ask the minister to do as this measure is being developed is to share with the Assembly, perhaps through correspondence or tablings in the House, what the trial balloons are. I don't mean that in any kind of a negative way. You know, as you're developing that measure, it would be very interesting to see the evidence and the thinking as it progresses, who you're testing it out against, what other measures from other jurisdictions are being considered.

Now, the mechanical safety of commercial vehicles measure is also kind of interesting. "This measure is defined as the percentage of commercial vehicles that are rendered out-of-service." It's based on roadside checks. If I take a look at this, at first blush it is a remarkably stable measure. Between 1998 and the end of the planning period, by the end of fiscal year 2003, there will have been hardly any measurable variation in the results or the target when it comes to either the percentage of vehicles rendered out-of-service requiring minor adjustments or the percentage out-of-service requiring mechanics' attention.

The difficulty I have with this measure is that I have no idea whether it's a good or a bad thing. Is 25 percent of vehicles inspected and taken out of service a good or a bad thing? How does it compare to other jurisdictions? What it means is that 25 percent of vehicles require minor repairs when they're inspected and 5 percent require mechanical service. That's nearly fully a third of commercial vehicles that in some measure aren't safe on the streets and the highways of Alberta. I guess I would just feel better if the measure was comparative against other jurisdictions and gave us some sense of whether or not this was an acceptable level of faulty commercial vehicles. It's one thing to say that the target is consistent, but is that okay? I guess I would argue that having nearly a third of commercial vehicles unsafe on the roads in Alberta is not okay, and I would be very anxious to hear the minister's remarks as to what he proposes should be done about it, unless the minister is going to make the argument that it's an acceptable level.

The next performance measure under goal 2 has to do with the integrated infrastructure planning. The performance measure is "progress on the collection of facility condition information." What it says is that the ministry will collect condition information on all ministry-owned buildings over 1,000 square metres. Well, okay. The target for 2000-2001 is that 89 percent of data will be collected. The target last year was 77 percent. I don't know how close we came to achieving it, because it doesn't tell us, but the target for 2001-2002 is 100 percent. So I'm assuming that there is a backlog or that this is a new process and that there is an inventory of buildings and a roster and a list. I'm just curious. You know, we went from 60 percent in '98-99 to 77 percent, so we managed to audit 17 percent of buildings, and then we're going to go up by 12 percent in 2000-2001. Well, we can do 17 percent, apparently, between '98 and '99-2000. Why couldn't we do the same, 17 percent, again? How was the 89 percent target arrived at? I guess that's the essential question.

4:40

Now, the performance measure under goal 3, which is to "work with partners to provide quality infrastructure," has to do with

"progress on completion of major water management construction project." I am aware that some of these, like the St. Mary dam spillway replacement, will be completed over the next fiscal year, but one that I wanted to ask about is the South Heart River dam project. I see that the completion rate is 50 percent for this fiscal year and another 50 percent for the subsequent fiscal year. I may be wrong, but I thought that was a three-year construction project. So please correct my understanding. I thought when that was announced, it was announced as a three-year initiative, but we only have, apparently, construction goals over two years. I'd appreciate some comment on that.

The next one has to do with seniors' lodges, and there has already been some discussion on seniors' lodges. Now, the performance measure has to do with all 121 seniors' lodges, and it's "seniors' lodge upgrading projects completed." The target is another one of these targets that I guess is okay as far as it goes, but the concern I have is that I don't believe it actually gives a very worthwhile measure. I'll explain to you what I mean. The business plan target for 2000-2001 calls for 90 of the upgrading projects – 90 out of the 120, I'm assuming – to have been completed. Well, that's fine, but wouldn't a more reasonable measure be: what percentage of lodges have been upgraded to meet a set of independent standards?

In other words, will a lodge get a check mark as being a completed upgrading project if it gets a new roof but also needed a new kitchen and also needed new electrical services and also needed new flooring in the common areas? I mean, is the upgrading project simply seen as achieved and a mission accomplished when it's upgraded on one of the deficiencies? My understanding is that the seniors' lodges across the province have a laundry list as long as the floor in this room of the things that they need. Given that priorities have to be managed, not all of their deficiencies are going to be addressed at the same time, but this performance measure doesn't capture any of that. It would lead a casual observer to conclude that because it got a check mark as a completed project, all of the issues in that lodge have been taken care of.

The next performance measure that I want to talk about is one under goal 4, "improve the management of provincial transportation infrastructure." In particular, I want to look at the highway pavement condition. Now, this is a measure that apparently will be "an indicator of riding comfort for the traveling public on highways under provincial jurisdiction," and it uses a measure referred to as the IRI, the international roughness index. First of all, I'd like to know whether or not they've set the standards for the IRI in the springtime in northern Alberta. I have a feeling that if they did, with the potholes it would blow their scale right off the meter. I'm talking about the IRI and whether or not they take the measure in the springtime.

The measure also makes note that "by sustaining pavement quality through regular rehabilitation, the total life cycle cost of the highway system will be reduced." Now, the minister got into a little bit of hot water with the press, I think, by making some comments about how highway pavement life could be extended. I don't want to go back there, but I am a little curious about this particular measure. The national highway system average under the IRI measure for highways is described here as a numerical expression, and then it says: other highways' average IRI. Now, when I take a look at this and I compare it to the table that explains the chart, what it says is that if you have a roughness rating of 1.50 to 1.89 on a national highway, it's only "fair." If you take a look at all of the ratings from '98 through to 2000-2003, they're all in the "fair" category. Now, the other highways' average IRI says that if you have a rating of between 1.5 and 2.69, you're also just fair. All of the other highways are also in that just fair portion. So what this tells me, again, is that we don't really have a measure that tells us about targets for

planning for the future. What it tells me is that we're satisfied that our highway system in this province, according to this international measure, will just be fair.

In fact, there's been very little movement. Unfortunately, the only movement that there appears to be is downward movement on the IRI scale. It doesn't look as though there's been any tremendous improvement, in other words, when it comes to the riding comfort. Again, this is a measure that gives us a picture of what exists, but it doesn't give us any value around that reality. Are we comfortable, no pun intended, with this level on the IRI scale, or should we be doing more about it to improve the conditions of our highways?

Now, the other question that I have has to do with the lack of performance measures under goal 7, which is to "create a value-added organization." The performance measure is a client satisfaction measure. What it says is:

This measure is under development. Data will be collected and reported once a consolidated strategy for measuring client satisfaction is developed.

Well, I guess my concern here, Mr. Minister, is that this is where I would have thought you would have started. With a goal that says that we're going to "create a value-added organization," it seems to me that that's exactly where you would start and that's how you would sort of decide what it is the rest of your business plan is going to look like.

While I was willing certainly to give you the benefit of the doubt on these other new areas, these new initiatives that require performance measures, I'm a little more reluctant to provide that same benefit when it comes to this area. I would like to encourage you quickly to develop an array of performance measures so that we can gain a better picture of what is meant in your department when it comes to creating a value-added organization.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I'm aware of the great interest of my colleagues in getting an opportunity to get up and ask questions, and I thank the minister for his willingness to allow a tag team to happen here and for him to respond to the two inquiries at the same time.

There are really just three categories that I want to talk about here today. The first one. I'm reminded of the Premier talking about Alberta as a house and the mortgage and all of that kind of stuff. What keeps coming back to me is that as any homeowner knows, you have ongoing maintenance costs, and you have to take care of those ongoing maintenance costs on a regular basis. In some cases for the big-ticket items you've got to save money or put money aside or plan for it in some way, so it's a planning function and it's a saving function.

I've been looking through my Auditor General's report for the exact reference. I'm sorry that I haven't been able to find it, but I know that the Auditor General had pointed out that we have to be able to have a reasonable planning process and a reasonable injection of money or money available to follow that planning process to maintain the infrastructure in the province. To sort of cut everything back and perhaps even not put money in for a year or two costs us eventually and may in fact cost us more than if we had done the regular, ongoing maintenance. In many cases we know that these buildings exist, we know the highways exist, and we know there has to be maintenance going into it. There's no surprise here. So I have questions about management and planning skills and getting enough money to actually look after the maintenance requirements.

4:50

I'm going to talk specifically about the schools in Edmonton-Centre. Now, those are classed as inner-city schools, and there are a couple of issues going on there. One is around this utilization formula. I think that with one exception all of my schools are very old schools. They're definitely older than 35 years old. These are great old three-storey brick or stone buildings, much larger than we would ever build today. I have to say: at what point do you stop adding these into this utilization formula? I think it's creating an inequity and not through their fault. Yet when we look at the utilization formula, there is always a call for: well, let's get rid of the inner-city schools.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

When we look at other important things in Alberta like communities, like quality of life – and certainly we in Edmonton learned that lesson very well when everyone shrugged and said: it doesn't matter if nobody goes downtown; who cares? We did find out that it matters very much if people go downtown, because it cost a lot of business, affected the vandalism rate, crime, all kinds of things. So eventually we learned that you want a vital downtown with people in it, with people living there, people moving about in their daily lives, not just this place that vacates at 4:30 and the sidewalks get rolled up.

I do question including older schools in the utilization formula. A specific question for the minister. There used to be a regulation or a proviso or something that said that if the school was more than 35 years old, then it wouldn't be included in the utilization formula. I'm wondering if that is still in place. I suspect that it's not in place, and I would like to know if the minister would consider reinstating that.

As well, I think we have to be careful that in the rush to economize in the short term, we don't take away possibilities and flexibilities that in fact have a big payoff for us in the long term. A couple of examples of that. I know that the school boards were being pressured to sell off some of the school buildings they had where the schools weren't being used anymore, where they'd stopped running classrooms in the schools. The Edmonton school board, to give them credit, had been pretty adamant in hanging onto those schools and finding other things to do with them. In the long term we ended up with places like the Bennett environmental centre, which is a great asset to schoolchildren and educational endeavours all across the province, and McKay Avenue school, with the city of Edmonton school board archives in it. The Edmonton school board was exactly right to have resisted the pressure from the government to sell off those buildings.

Another example is Victoria school. You know, it was an inner-city school. Enrollment was declining, with pressure to dump the school, sell it off, get rid of it. The school board was able to maintain it partly by locating the Centre for Education, the head office essentially, next door to it and committing to keeping that school viable. Well, look what happened. Because it was available and there was commitment to it, we ended up with the special fine arts school operating out of that high school, and now in fact it is K to 12. It's become a very vital part of that community and has revitalized the area around it and, because of the uniqueness of the program, draws students from all across the city and in some cases, I think, the province.

Those are sort of the two points I wanted to raise about the infrastructure and planning and maintenance.

The last thing. A couple of these old schools in my constituency have acquired, through diligence, very hard work, creativity, and

even ingenuity on behalf of the staff, the money to do the much-needed renovations. But we still have schools in which – I mean, I am shocked at the state that some of these schools are in. Victoria school is an example. I was there for an event I think it was in the fall, about six months ago, and as I left the school, I was looking at the side of the building. Great big hunks of concrete or plaster or whatever it was made of were just falling off the building. I wondered to myself: isn't this a safety problem? I'm sure it is. I've heard other stories about windows coming out, falling out of the building, happily, rather than falling in on the class.

I really look to the minister to be able to plan in a way that has regular, ongoing maintenance for our schools and not to let them get to the point where we either have to abandon them because they're in such crappy shape or where they could be causing some harm to the students. The point is that it's about good planning. It's about constant maintenance. Maybe that's drilled into my head because I'm the daughter of a man who was involved in the trades for so much of his life and his insistence that you treat your car and the equipment you work with properly, that you always maintain it on a regular schedule, not just when you think it might need it. Maybe that's why I think that way about this, but I think it's important.

Now, I'm going to go on to something else, and that's seniors. One of the issues that I am really concerned about in my constituency is around West Edmonton Seniors and what has happened with their location in the General hospital. This is an organization that provides invaluable service in my constituency and in fact beyond the constituency. It gets seniors out of their homes, gets them out into a different location and active. They have all kinds of classes, physical classes. I cohost a Christmas celebration with them, and we have tap-dancing displays and clogging and ballroom dancing. The activity level is tremendous. Those seniors are in far better shape than I am. This is a good thing. This is preventative health care. This is saving us money, a lot of it. They also offer nutrition, and they have guest speakers in. They have an outreach program.

Now, they do get some funding through Alberta Health for the outreach program but nothing for the rest of it. They're trying to raise the money to keep themselves going here. They started out in 1998 paying about \$341 for their rent, plus housekeeping charges and the telephone, that sort of thing. Then it went up to just over a thousand bucks in 1999. As of the first of January, because of the negotiations and the changes in the Capital regional health authority being responsible for the General hospital site, these guys are now being asked to pay 4,200 and some odd dollars a month. Where are they supposed to come up with that money? They don't get any assistance from the government. As many times as I sweet-talked the Minister of Community Development, I cannot get him to agree to put funding in for seniors' centres.

You know, the idea of a user fee that could come up with that kind of money every month is simply beyond the means of the seniors that live in that area and the seniors that use that facility. So I'm asking the minister to please, please work immediately on resolving this situation. As I understand it, I think it's because the Capital regional health authority is needing to make income from the space that they are responsible for there. If it's possible for the minister to be perhaps taking back responsibility for the section of the building that West Edmonton Seniors is in and being able to work out a more reasonable rent, that is the kind of partnership and leadership that I'm looking for from this government.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

We're already into this year. West Edmonton Seniors has been on the hook for a long time. It's been writing to the government for a

long time. I shouldn't have to get up here and hassle you guys about this, but I am. The ball is in your court now. I'm going to look to you for a very fast resolution of this. [interjection] Well, you know, it shouldn't have to happen, but it's happening.

The second thing is an encouragement to the minister to look for those partnership opportunities in other government-owned public works, supply, and services locations. You guys have got a lot of empty space out there. I would encourage the minister to be looking for opportunities to partner with groups in the community, seniors' associations, but even perhaps youth groups. You're having to keep the lights on and the power and the heat in these buildings anyway. Look for those partnerships that would really be benefiting the community. It's not going to cost you cash out of pocket. It means you don't have to be giving a grant perhaps of so much money to the groups, or they can use their grant money to actually provide the programs instead of scrounging for their rent money.

5:00

That's the kind of leadership I know this minister is capable of. I know he can do this. I believe he is capable and has the leadership skills to do this. If there are staff in the gallery, fun-seekers all joining us, they're good staff. They can help the minister do this. Thank you.

Now, a couple more things. [interjections] I know that my colleague for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert has lots of things she wants to say, so I will give way to her, despite the fact that I have many more questions that I could raise with the minister.

As always, I will complain about this budget process which limits us to a very little bit of time to talk about huge departments, which are now superministries in many cases, such as the Ministry of Infrastructure. Well, I may give him the title of superminister if he can resolve our problem with West Edmonton Seniors and other seniors' lodges. Until then, there is not enough time to debate these budgets. This is not serving Albertans well where we have to be rushing through things and cutting off questions and cutting off issues. [interjection] No, she's going to get up.

Thank you, very much, Mr. Minister. I look forward to your written responses to my questions.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would move the committee rise and report progress on the estimates of Infrastructure and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Infrastructure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001. They report progress thereon and request leave to sit again.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 5:04 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Title: Estimates of Health and Wellness, Friday, March 17, 2000

Date: 00/03/17

8:02 a.m.

[Mrs. Tarchuk in the chair]

Designated Supply Subcommittee – Health and Wellness

Tarchuk, Janis, Chairman
Broda, Dave
Dickson, Gary
Doerksen, Victor

Forsyth, Heather
Fritz, Yvonne
Herard, Denis
Jacques, Wayne

Leibovici, Karen
Pannu, Raj
Pham, Hung
Sloan, Linda

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting of the subcommittee to order. There is a motion that I'd to read into the record.

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Orders 56 and 57 the designated supply subcommittee on Health and Wellness allocate the time for its consideration and debate of the 2000-2001 estimates of the Department of Health and Wellness as follows:

- (1) The time allocated for the subcommittee will be a maximum of three hours.
- (2) The minister responsible first addresses the subcommittee for a maximum of 20 minutes.
- (3) Official Opposition subcommittee members then have a maximum of two hours for questions and answers. Those members may allocate the time for questions among themselves as they see fit.
- (4) The ND Member for Edmonton-Strathcona then has a maximum of 15 minutes for questions and answers.
- (5) Government subcommittee members have the remainder.

Be it further resolved that in the event government subcommittee members do not exercise their right to utilize the remaining time, the chair shall call for a motion to conclude discussion of the estimates and to rise and report.

Be it further resolved that in order to conclude prior to four hours, as allocated under Standing Order 56(7), unanimous consent of this motion will be required.

I would like to invite someone to move the motion as read.

MR. BRODA: So moved.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Broda. All in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

MS LEIBOVICI: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: What's that?

MS LEIBOVICI: We don't have to be unanimous, and I'll never be on record as supporting the process.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. The motion is carried. Thank you very much.

Mr. Minister.

MR. JONSON: Good morning everyone, and thank you, Madam Chairman. Before I get started, I'd like to introduce to you Alberta Health and Wellness staff members who I've asked to join me here this morning: Lynne Duncan, seated on my right, Deputy Minister of Alberta Health and Wellness; seated on my left, Aslam Bhatti, chief financial officer; seated in the gallery, Terry Chugg, assistant deputy minister of the health workforce services division; Chris

Powell, who's with our finance planning department; and Jim McCutcheon, comptroller of AADAC. Also, I would like to note that of course very important to this overall presentation is the role of our Associate Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness, Gene Zwodzdesky.

Madam Chairman, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Ministry of Health and Wellness estimates for 2000-2001. Prior to considering the questions the hon. members will raise, I'd like to comment on where we are in the health system today, what we are accomplishing, and how spending for the coming fiscal year will tie to current and new initiatives.

Madam Chairman, we all know that Albertans expect high standards for the Alberta health system. They expect to be able to obtain the health services they need when they need them. Toward that end, one of the core businesses of the Ministry of Health and Wellness is to "lead and support a system for the delivery of quality health services." Through systematic monitoring and action the ministry ensures that health services provided by health authorities to Albertans meet high standards, achieve positive health outcomes, and address the needs of Albertans.

One of the ways we measure progress towards this core business is through the annual health survey. In 1999 Albertans continued to be positive about the services they received in our health system. Seventy-four percent of the people surveyed rated the availability of services in their community as excellent or good, and 73 percent of responses rated the ease of access to the health system as excellent or good.

While access to health services is important, it is also important that the services are appropriate or that the right care is provided in the right place at the right time. Again, as with the measures regarding access, the most recent survey shows that Albertans are also positive about the quality of the health care services they receive. Seventy-five percent of respondents rated the quality of health services in the community as excellent or good, while 78 percent of the respondents rated the quality of health care personally received as excellent or good, and 83 percent of respondents reported that the result of the care they received was excellent or good. As in years past, there's still room for improvement in some areas, but I am confident that the significant increase in health spending for the 2000-2001 fiscal year will address many of these pressure points in the system.

Our government made a commitment to increasing resources when they were needed, and we have lived up to that commitment. Health spending over the past five years has increased from \$3.9 billion in 1995-96 to over \$5.6 billion in 2000-2001, an increase of \$1.7 billion, or 43.5 percent, in 2000-2001. In comparison, the federal government's cash contribution via established program financing and the Canada health and social transfer over that same period of time decreased from 19.5 percent of health spending to 12.7 percent. In simpler terms, their cash contributions are still \$66 million less than they were in 1995-96. Despite that fact, Madam Chairman, health spending is higher than it has ever been in the history of the province and is this government's single largest expenditure.

This year on an age-adjusted per capita basis Alberta is spending more on health than any other province in the country. By the year

2002-2003 spending will total \$6.26 billion, or fully one-third of total government spending, compared to one-quarter in 1992-93. That means that health spending will rise from the current \$15.5 million each day to more than \$17 million each and every day.

Madam Chairman, as you know, in January Premier Klein announced a new plan for health in Alberta. It is a plan that has been built on what Albertans and key stakeholders in Alberta's health system have told us they need. Because our government sees the future of a health system as being built on decisions made in partnership with those who fund the system, those who work within the system, and those who use the system, our government made a commitment to such a future when we hosted last year's health summit. As you will remember, Madam Chairman, at the health summit key health stakeholders and randomly selected members of the public came together to take a serious look at our province's health system and to recommend where it should be directed in the future.

The new plan for the new century announced by Premier Klein has taken its lead from what health summit participants told us. Guided by their recommendations, our six-point plan was developed to protect and improve the publicly funded and publicly administered health system in this province, and the budget from the Ministry of Health and Wellness for 2000-2001 reflects the priorities identified in the six-point plan.

Madam Chairman, what I'd like to do is to go through each of these six directions and highlight the strategies that appear in the 2000-2001 budget for the Ministry of Health and Wellness. In doing so, I will also be sharing news on key strategies that helped form the foundation on which our future health system will be built. The six key directions of the plan demonstrate Alberta's commitment to Canada's single-payer, publicly funded style of health. They reveal a common thread, one of co-operation and partnership in decision-making among the health authorities, physicians, nurses, and other key health stakeholders and our government. They reveal hard evidences of our commitment to making Alberta's health system better able to meet the challenges of the new century.

The six key directions in our plan are to improve access to publicly funded services, to improve the management of the health system, to enhance the quality of health services, to increase our emphasis on health promotion and disease and injury prevention, to continue to foster new ideas to improve our health system, and to take the necessary steps to protect the publicly funded system from any potential negative external factors.

I'll begin with the first key direction, which is to improve the quality of the publicly funded health services in Alberta. Certainly one way to do that is to ensure adequate funding for the health system. Madam Chairman, I think it's important to note that health funding in Alberta has, as I've indicated, increased substantially: \$1.7 billion, or 43.5 percent, over the past five years. It is also important to note that health funding will increase by more than \$1 billion, or 21 percent, over the next three years to more than \$6.25 billion a year. Spending in 2000-2001 will total \$5.653 billion, an increase of 9.3 percent over the 1999-2000 base budget. Funding for health authorities will increase by \$218 million, an increase of 7.7 percent, and by \$497 million over three years, which is a 17.6 percent increase.

As the population continues to grow and age, there is an increased need for key lifesaving surgeries. To improve access to these publicly funded services, an increase of \$47 million, or 18.2 percent, is being provided for provincewide services, for those key procedures that are provided in Calgary and Edmonton to all Albertans.

The number of major surgeries such as angioplasties, coronary bypasses, bone marrow transplants, and kidney dialysis treatments will increase. It is important to note that the number of these

procedures being done has rapidly increased over the past few years, and these increases will continue in this coming year. For example, in this year there are now more than 1,600 major heart surgeries and procedures done every year, there are 160 more major cancer surgeries done every year, there are 300 more major neurosurgeries being done every year than there were before, and there are more than 700 kidney dialysis treatments being provided every year.

8:12

The new funding provided in Budget 2000 will see these numbers continue to increase. Some of the specific increases in services that we'll see will be that the number of angioplasties will be boosted from 2,935 performed in the current year to 3,235 next year, a 10 percent increase. The number of people provided kidney dialysis services will be raised from 1,300 this year to more than 1,430 in the coming year. The number of low birth weight neonatal procedures is projected to increase from 189 to 985, and increased numbers of bone marrow, liver, kidney/heart, and kidney/pancreas transplants will be done. As the numbers of these procedures significantly increase, waiting times will decrease, thereby ensuring timely access to surgery. As the demand for health services increases and the population grows, it is essential to ensure that the province has adequate numbers of health professionals with the necessary skills located in the right parts of the province.

Madam Chairman, funding increases in the 2000-2001 budget will enable regional health authorities to hire up to 2,400 more nurses and other frontline staff, especially in the areas of emergency wards, long-term care, home care, and acute care, over the next three years. And, Madam Chairman, I'd like to note that it is in addition to the extra funding provided to RHAs last year to hire almost 1,200 new full-time equivalent positions, including more than 600 nurses.

This government recognizes the need to train additional health care workers. Alberta Learning has announced an additional 195 spaces in postsecondary institutions to train new nurses in 2000-2001. We will continue to work closely with health authorities, the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, and Alberta Learning to identify requirements and to create learning opportunities. Madam Chairman, the nursing community has been a great asset as we've changed and reorganized the health system, and change is never easy. Our health authorities are working with nurses and Alberta Health and Wellness to improve working conditions for nurses. We want to retain and attract the best.

Our focus on providing for more health professionals also concentrates on more physicians, both family doctors and specialists, which will be supported through an increased medical services budget. The number of physicians practising in Alberta has been steadily increasing over the past few years, including an increase of 255 doctors from September 1998 to September 1999. A further increase is expected this year. The budget provides for an additional 90 physicians in 2000-2001, but we will be working with the Alberta Medical Association and with the medical faculties to attract even more. In co-operation with the Alberta Medical Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Alberta medical schools, and the health authorities the government has completed a comprehensive physician resource plan for Alberta. This plan will provide further advice and direction to help ensure that Albertans have appropriate access to physicians' services in the years to come.

As a first step, Budget 2000 provides for the addition of 20 postgraduate residency positions to Alberta's medical schools in 2000-2001 and another 20 positions in 2001-2002. In the near term we will concentrate on retaining more medical school graduates and retraining specialists and immigrant doctors. For the longer run we will need to increase medical school enrollment. An action plan is being developed with key stakeholders as we speak.

Madam Chairman, Budget 2000 also targets home care and long-

term care, reflecting our government's ongoing priority in this area for the past number of years. Albertans generally prefer to remain as long as possible in their own homes and communities. Given the province's rising and aging population, there will be a need for a greater capacity in communities in the years to come. Therefore, Alberta is taking a leadership role in support for home care and assisted living; however, care will continue to be there for those who need it.

I think it's important to note that the number of Albertans receiving home care in Alberta has increased from 53,000 in '92-93 to over 70,000 this year. The total number of hours of home care has increased from 2.3 million to almost 6 million. This year \$15 million was provided to the regional health authorities to address the increasing need, including expanded home care services, of continuing care services for Alberta's seniors. A further \$5 million will be made available in the coming year.

Recognizing that there will also be some Albertans who will require a higher level of care than can be provided in their homes in 1999-2000, we provided \$150 million to fund 1,090 new and upgraded continuing care beds over the next three years. This includes the replacement of 720 existing beds in older facilities and 370 additional new beds.

When combined with other projects currently under way, nearly 2,000 new or upgraded beds, including 650 additional beds, will be available to aging Albertans. As a result, waiting lists for continuing care will decrease. Fewer acute care beds will be occupied by patients who could be cared for more appropriately in continuing care facilities, and more Albertans will be able to remain in their own homes and communities with the support and assistance of home care.

High-cost medical equipment and new technology are also addressed in Budget 2000. Increased funding for health authorities includes an additional \$58 million over three years to help replace essential medical equipment, starting with \$38 million in 2000-2001. That, Madam Chairman, is in addition to the \$10 million allocated for high-tech medical equipment that will serve a broad population base and be used in direct patient care areas.

Budget 2000 also provides \$90 million for the growing need and cost of blood and blood products. As well, \$270 million is being provided in the Blue Cross benefit program to assist lower income Albertans and seniors when purchasing prescription drugs.

Budget 2000 also provides for an increase of \$5 million for community mental health. This is in direct response to the Laing report which recommended improved integration of community services and funding for mental health throughout the province. Funding for services for persons with developmental disabilities will increase by \$68 million over three years, including \$29 million in 2000-2001 to address projected growth in costs and caseloads and in response to the report provided to me recently by the associate minister. This is in addition to the \$10 million that was provided in 1999-2000 for increased caseloads.

Madam Chairman, each of these targeted funding allocations support clearly identified strategies in our six-point plan. Before going on any further, I think it is important to emphasize that the plan is about more than increased funding for more health professionals and more procedures and services, because while significant new funding is being provided over the next three years, we know that money alone will not solve all of the pressures on health.

As we proceed with planning and implementing each of the initiatives I have shared with you this morning – and, Madam Chairman, there are many, many more that I could speak to this morning – an important point needs to be made, and if the hon. members take home with them only one point today, I hope it is this. The foundation of our future health system will be built on strength-

ening the working relationships among all players within the health system, including government, health authorities, health providers, professional associations, voluntary associations, consumer associations, and the list goes on. Our future is something that can be achieved only with everyone's contribution. The future health system is not something that our government alone can achieve nor is it something that the regional health authorities alone can bring about nor is it the sole role of the community organizations and associations.

Certainly the health authorities and the physicians and nurses and other key stakeholders have consistently striven to meet patient needs even during challenging times, and for that we thank them for their continuing commitments. In fact, in this complex world of ours success depends on more than co-operation within the health service. In fact, all sectors must work together if we're going to promote health and well-being, prevent illness, and ensure access to needed health services.

8:22

To influence the social, economic, and environmental conditions that affect the health and well-being of Canadians, action must occur within and between sectors at the local, regional, provincial, and national levels. Therefore, it's important to work not only with those in the health system but also with people outside the system – in education, social services, children's services, the police, and a whole host of community agencies – to build the commitment of continuous improvement of health. Only by taking a multidisciplinary approach and by involving a broader range of departments, professionals, and community agencies will we be able to begin to adequately address the range of health determinants and the improvement of the health system on a steady and sustainable basis.

Madam Chairman, as we move forward into the 21st century, we will be required to continue to change and adapt if our success is to continue. We need to be able to adapt to new situations as they arise and address them effectively. In other words, we need to see the process of reforming the health system in Alberta as a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Madam Chairman, we are ready to meet that challenge. We are committed to meeting the challenges of a growing and aging population. The opportunity is arising through improved technology and drug therapy. Albertans' expectations of quality health service are there, and this government is very much committed to a single payer, publicly funded health system which will serve the population of Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just so you know, that was perfect timing. You had two more seconds. Anyway, thank you very much.

Karen.

MS LEIBOVICI: Okay. Thank you. Good morning, everyone. Thank you to the representatives from the department of health for joining us at this early stage and also to *Hansard*. We haven't been getting a lot of sleep lately; have we?

It's always interesting to listen to the overview provided by the minister. My questions will be more detailed, because I believe the purpose of this budget overview is to find out exactly where the dollars are being spent. Unfortunately, when we look at the budget documents, there's not a lot of information with regards to line by line and the reasons for certain expenditures being made.

At the outset I would like to also make the request that I made last year, which was very helpful, Mr. Minister, to provide the answers and the responses in a booklet as opposed to each individual, and then we can get a complete recording of what was asked and responded to by not only the Official Opposition but also by the members of the government.

My first comment relates to the initial introduction the minister made with regards to the increase in health care spending that has in fact been quite dramatic over the last seven years, as the minister indicated. Health care spending now has increased from one-quarter of the provincial budget to one-third of the budget. I'm going to put forward a hypothesis that I would put out to the department of health to prove that hypothesis wrong.

The hypothesis is that the reason for the increase in expenditures is because of the increased privatization and contracting out that is occurring not only on the surgical services side but also with other issues. In order to answer that hypothesis, I believe you are going to have to be able to respond to these questions. One, what was the cost of labs prior to regionalization and for each year since? The projected cost savings that were to be provided as a result of the integration and contracting out of the lab services and the current cost of those labs by RHA would be helpful. The cost of laundry services: again the categories will be the same. Prior to regionalization for each year since, what were the projected cost savings and what in fact are we saving right now? The cost of food services and any other services, of which there are a number, that are currently being contracted out with regards to hard services that are being provided. I would also like to know, especially with regard to the food services, what the results have been with regards to . . .

MR. HERARD: Point of order, Madam Chairman. I don't know if I'm confused or not, but it seems to me that if we want to know these kinds of things, we can go to public accounts and get those things. We're here to debate the budget and not the past, and I'm wondering if these questions are really appropriate for this kind of a session.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, if I can quote, it's under vote 1.0.5, policy and planning services; vote 1.0.6, health information and accountability; 1.0.8, health strategies. I can go on as to where in fact those would be direct links to the budget. It's also in the Health and Wellness business plan and in the regional and provincial health authorities document as well. So there are a number of areas where in fact these issues do crop up, as well as under the expenditure item of regional health authorities.

What I would also like to get further information on is the tracking of admissions to hospitals as a result of procedures completed or performed within the private health care sector. What are the admission rates, if any, that occur as a result of procedures happening in the private health care system? Are there any standards and performance levels, expectations for private, for-profit hospitals that are providing care based on public dollars? Also, with respect to the long-term care private operators is there any breakdown of what the profits of those long-term private operators are? What are the salaries of the individuals who are providing care as caregivers and as rehab professionals within the private long-term care sector, and how do those salaries compare to those in the nonprofit sector?

In past responses from the minister the minister indicated that the contracts are the responsibility of the health authority and are therefore not monitored by Alberta Health. Given the current promise that the minister and the Premier have made with regards to contracts being open, I would like to know when in fact those particular contracts are going to be viewed by the public.

I would also like to know what policies the department has in place with regards to the directions to the regional health authorities where there are implicit or explicit policies to encourage, promote privatization and/or contracting out of services. An example I can provide is that when a facility, a hospital is being planned, the regional health authorities are informed that laundry services are not to be considered as part of the facility. The expectation is to contract out the laundry services whether in fact there are available contrac-

tors in that region or not. That's what I mean by implicit policies to promote privatization.

Another issue that has been brought forward by the Auditor General in actual fact with regards to planning is the whole issue of business plans and the timely implementation of business plans. I must admit that I was quite surprised when I saw that it took until April of 1999 for there to be a basic definition of a balanced budget that could be agreed to across this province by regional health authorities. Well, is there any question as to perhaps why we keep spending money in health and not knowing exactly where that money is going?

The other issue around the strategic work plan with regards to health facility planning. Given the push again for privatization, what is happening with regards to the development of a publicly funded health facility planning process to ensure that there is an overall strategic work plan for public institutions, or have you already factored it in? If you have, it would be good for the public to see what portion of the facility planning process is now allocated to the private sector.

A question that I have is: do you now finally have an up-to-date inventory of the provincial health facilities that shows the bed capacity that is now available and in service? Later on I have some specific questions with regards to that. It's my understanding, again in the recent Auditor General's report, that there is a "lack of benchmarks or standards to understand what should be in place."

Having goals and information to assess the costs and benefit of changing the allocation of facility resources in relation to service requirements would be an important feature of a planning system.

Seven years into restructuring and there is no information as to how our facilities are being allocated. Also, 40 percent of the designed capacity is not used for its original purpose. In other words, those empty beds, operating rooms, wards are not being used. What, in fact, are 40 percent of our hospital facilities now being used for, and can those not be utilized as opposed to private surgical facilities?

8:32

The other questions that I have around this particular theme are more general questions that would be useful in determining the direction of the policy that is being put forward. They could be under, actually, the regional health authority budget vote, but I'll put them here, if that's okay. If not, I can do that in a few minutes. Actually, one that I'd like to know is: what is the definition of profit that the department of health is using when it talks about profit in health care?

These are more general questions. With regards to the MRIs that are being done in the province right now, what is the cost of the scan in the public system and in the private system? What is the cost of the dye, and what is the cost of the anesthetic, public and private? What is the cost of performing hip surgery, the cost of the hips themselves, the different kinds of hips that are available, and the length of stay? Just to back up to the MRIs, what is the exact number of private and public facilities, and where are they located?

Ontario had a recent study that showed that 186 of 1,000 inspected private facilities needed to have their licences suspended or restricted, that in fact 10 percent were not up to standard. I'd like to know what inspections are currently being done by the department of health to ensure that the private facilities that are in operation right now in this province are up to standard. When were those inspections done, and how frequently are they done? Are the facilities informed beforehand that they are going to be inspected? I'd like to also know what kind of monitoring systems the minister has in place right now either through the department of health or through the College of Physicians and Surgeons with regards to monitoring the standard of work and the quality that is occurring within the private clinics, clinics such as the private MRIs.

Performance targets. This is always a favourite. There are at least 14 performance measures that have been dropped by the department of health. Those were performance measures like the hospital beds per thousand population, continuing care beds per thousand population, medical practitioners per thousand population, total health expenditure per capita. The list goes on. I think you know what they are. My question is: how do you determine what your outcomes are if your performance measures keep shifting, and what are the performance measures that you have right now, Mr. Minister? Will they be the same next year? What in fact are they with regards to the private clinics? You indicate in the bill that you will have performance measures. You don't have them for the public sector. They keep shifting. Do we have any guarantees that they will be of any use for the private sector? How in fact do you conduct any longitudinal studies if your performance measures keep shifting? Again, if you had standard measurements, in fact would you not then know why the budget keeps increasing?

The list of visits and review of health facilities. How are those inspections – and by those I mean the hospitals – actually conducted? How often have they been conducted between 1993 and 1999? Can the minister also tell us how many private medical diagnostic and testing services, if there are any, are using public facilities at this point in time? How many leases with the private services were in place prior to 1993 and are in place now? What was the revenue generated for the public health care system as opposed to these leases?

The minister, I believe, has also indicated that there is a cost-benefit analysis that exists to compare the cost of services offered by the public and the voluntary private sector in long-term care. I would like to see what that cost-benefit analysis is.

Basically that moves me into the regional health authorities and some questions that I have around there. What's my time like? Does anyone know? [interjection]

THE CHAIRMAN: You've got two hours.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, 20 minutes. Ten?

AN HON. MEMBER: Ten.

MS LEIBOVICI: Okay.

There's a health costing in Alberta document, 1999 annual report, and the purpose of that document, my understanding is, was to do a review of the costs and groups utilizing statistical measures. What I'd like to know is: what is the cost comparison of procedures and facility costs done in public facilities and contracted surgical facilities, specifically with regards to cataracts, ophthalmology, restorative dentistry, oral surgery, podiatry, and some other services that are currently contracted out mostly in the Calgary and the capital area.

Now, I know that the minister in the past has referred me to the RHAs. I must admit, Mr. Minister, that it's difficult to obtain information from the regional health authorities, and I would assume that you as the minister must have that information. That's why I am asking you to provide that information to the Legislative Assembly through this request.

What is the minister doing as the minister of health? What are the recommendations to ensure that in fact we have a seamless delivery of service between one regional health authority and another? Our regional health authorities have become balkanized. There are many difficulties with regards to a seamless delivery of service, and it would be useful to know what recommendations the minister's department has to ensure that that does not occur.

As we are one year away from an election with regards to the

regional health authorities, I will ask this question again: is there any intention on the part of the minister to change the boundaries of those regional health authorities? As the minister realizes, there are some difficulties with some of the boundaries, but the reality is that if there is an election in the offing, then the changes, if they're going to made, need to be made now. There has been much disruption within the regional health authorities as their different policies seem to emanate on a year-by-year basis, and I think that in order to try to ensure some stability within our regional health authorities, it would be useful if they had that information as quickly as possible.

When I was looking through the regulations, it was interesting to note that there is a regulation that deals with health services utilization and that each regional health authority must have a committee with regards to health services utilization. My question is: what are those particular committees doing? Why do we need a provincially mandated committee led by government MLAs when in fact each regional health authority has a utilization committee? What in fact have they been doing?

The hiring policy for CEOs. Once in a while I get calls as to what is happening. What are the standards with regards to the hiring policy for CEOs? It is interesting to note, I believe it was in the Auditor General's report, that he indicated that there should be some consistency and standards from the department of health with regards to the hiring of CEOs. We saw a recent example in regional health authority No. 5 where not all of the board was informed as to the CEO that was hired.

8:42

The equipment needs for the regional health authorities. The Auditor General indicated that in fact they were lax with regards to the equipment needs, that there had to be the development and implementation of "an information system to report on the condition of facilities and the cost to keep them functional." So to date, unless that's happened since last year, we don't have that. Also, the equipment that is currently within our regional health authorities on average will be, well, as it's put: the average useful life of capital equipment this month will be 2.8 years. That's what's left in our regional health authorities for capital equipment. The department has provided \$10 million, but that's spread over three years, I believe.

So what plans does the minister actually have in place to ensure that the capital equipment in our regional health authorities is functional and safe? What is your replacement policy in the next two years to address all of the equipment needs of the regional health authorities? This is a huge, huge issue, and quite frankly I don't think \$10 million over three years will address that particular issue. You have to have some kind of a strategic plan with regards to renewing the equipment that is in our RHAs right now.

What is the role of the community health councils? These councils are mandated through legislation. We rarely hear about them. I don't know if all regions have them, so I'd like to know which ones are active. Where in fact are there community health councils? What is their purpose? What is the cost to a regional health authority for those particular community health councils? They are supposed to have business plans and an annual report as well. Can we get copies of the community health councils' business reports and business plans and annual reports? That is, I believe, a requirement.

The funding formula. I've brought that up before. The minister insists that the funding formula in actual fact addresses what the needs are of all the regions. The Auditor General in fact had a comment about it, and if I can't find it right now, then I will provide it to you later. It indicated that the funding formula needed to be reviewed. We know that in the northern regions – Mistahia,

Northern Lights, Peace – a report was presented to the minister two to three years ago indicating that the funding formula was not functional. It was a report that one of the major accounting firms in this country produced.

We have seen the turmoil in the Mistahia region, particularly with regards to the Queen Elizabeth II and the troubles that they are having in meeting the needs of the residents in that particular area. Still we have no movement on that particular formula. So I guess my question to the minister is: what is the holdup? When can the people in the northern regions of this province expect to see that their needs will be met? They're having difficulty being met because of the formula, that the minister refuses to address.

The performance measures for the individual regional health authorities. In particular, what are the mechanisms that the regional health authorities have now with regards to private providers meeting performance measures? Is there any policy in place right now either through the department of health or with each of the regional health authorities that he can gather that indicates what the system is for monitoring those private providers? What happens when there is a complaint with a private provider? What is the appeal mechanism? How are those complaints tracked, and what is the outcome of those particular complaints? Also, as an adjunct to that question and broader as well, can the minister outline how many lawsuits have been filed against either a regional health authority or a public hospital within the regional health authority or a combined lawsuit that involves a private operator and a regional health authority? I know that specifics cannot be provided in terms of names, but the circumstances probably can be provided without violating confidentiality, as well as the amounts of what those lawsuits would be.

The whole issue of contracting out with regional health authorities. There seem to be individual processes for contracting out. Unless I'm mistaken, the contracting-out guidelines for surgical services are actually contracting-out guidelines for construction. Now, we know that when we're bidding on construction projects, it's a lot different than when we're bidding on surgical services. So does in fact the minister have for nonsurgical services a policy that he provides to the regional health authorities with regards to contracting out right now surgical and nonsurgical services? Not for the building of those facilities but the provision of. And what are the conflict of interest guidelines that are provincially mandated to ensure that there is no conflict for an individual who is in a position of authority in a regional health authority and has an interest in a private facility as well?

This goes back to my earlier comments about having contracts with private providers and not knowing where the money is going and maybe that's why we have an increase. That was the hypothesis I put forward. This will be my last, since I'm past my 20 minutes. The Auditor General's report of '98-99 indicated that 10 regional health authorities did not disclose expense categories "associated with \$517 million" – this is not small change – "of payments to voluntary and private sector operators." Can the minister tell us if in fact those regional health authorities have now disclosed what those payments were for? And how do you track the money that's flowing out of the public pockets to the private-sector operators in this province?

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: If I could just make a comment at this point on the point of order that Denis had made. If it is in the business plan, a member is free to comment or ask questions, and you did rightfully tie your questions to the business plan.

Mr. Minister, would you like to respond at this point?

MR. JONSON: No. I expect that the opposition will want to use their time fully, so I would not want to interfere right now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Great. Thank you.
Linda.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. Good morning, everyone. There were a number of questions raised in the '98 estimates that the department did not respond to. I'd like to just touch briefly on those particular areas, and primarily they related to the demographics of illness and the lack of research being conducted in this province relative to that.

We're aware that there has been some work done over the course of the last couple of years on the social problem index. There is apparently a report that has been under way. No mention is made in the business plan of this undertaking. I'm wondering where the social problem index report is, why it's not incorporated in the business plan, and why there is not a greater reflection of the social and environmental and income demographics of illness in the provincial business plan report.

We talked about those issues last year with respect to mortality and morbidity relative to occupational class, age, and cause of death. We continue to have in this province a high rate of infant mortality, yet there does not appear to be any studies being conducted as to what gives rise to that high statistic and what can be done.

Now, in last year's estimates the government actually said that they were leading a children's health study which would examine factors in infant mortality. No report was provided on that last year and I see nothing in the business plan this year, so I'm seeking some tangible information and the report for the public in that regard.

8:52

Further, the province last year said that they were exploring the development of a strategy to address low birth weights in the province, and again this is an area where we have continued to have an increasingly high incidence despite our economic growth and wealth. While that was referenced and the government committed that they were undertaking a strategy, again we see very little in terms of tangible progress in that area.

A further issue is teenage pregnancies. I noted last year that there were no provincial initiatives identified. In fact, the province said that for the most part that was a responsibility that was rooted in the family or perhaps the community. We continue to have a high incidence of teenage pregnancies in this province. I would suggest that is also related to the high incidence of low birth weight and infant mortality that we continue to have, yet the government is not taking action in this regard, and I would ask why.

Further, there were questions raised last year about breast cancer and cervical cancer. Your focus continues to be on screening. I would respectfully submit that that is not good enough. Our incidence of death relative to these two diseases continues to rise. The province must take a greater leadership role in these two areas.

We had the privilege last year of receiving the health surveillance branch Health Trends report, and there have been no updates provided in regards to the indicators in that report this year. Our contact with the health surveillance branch office has indicated that updates won't be available until May, and I would ask why in fact that is the case. The updates relative to health trends in child and infant health, health-related behaviours, chronic disease, communicable diseases, mental health environment, health status: why are all of those indicators for the '98-99 fiscal year and for '99-2000 not available, Mr. Minister? Could we see those updates attached as an appendage to the response to this budget process?

I'd like to turn now to questions relative to the general provision of service in our system, which the minister focused on in his comments at the onset. A key theme you talked about was spending,

and I would note that age-adjusted spending is somewhat of a new twist. It's of interest that the province doesn't continue to track or publish their spending as a percentage of GDP, which is a standard indicator of spending in the country.

There was a large degree of focus on high-tech medical procedures – angioplasties, transplants, bone marrows, et cetera – yet we do not see in the business plan and I don't believe have ever seen any statistics on the survival rate or quality of life for the recipients of those procedures.

It was of interest to me that there was no mention made at all in your preliminary remarks relative to mental health of either the adult or child population in this province, and again I would ask why. Similarly, minimal mention was made of home care, no mention made of palliative care. These are areas, with due respect, that our population has as much need for as glitzy transplant-type procedures. In fact, I would indicate that there is a much higher degree of our population that has either relied or will in the future rely on those particular services, and they do not garner sufficient attention from this government.

I will come back to the area of mental health. I'm extremely troubled by the lack of priority that mental health receives in this province despite the continued identification of high waiting lists in the area of children's mental health. I believe in Edmonton alone we have 400 children at high risk of injuring themselves or others, and they are waiting somewhere in excess of four to six months for initial assessment. That is an appalling statistic, yet the budget didn't provide any degree of priority to the addressment of mental health issues. Your preliminary remarks this morning, sir, completely omitted reference to that area. If we want to in a meaningful way understand and perhaps better prioritize our spending in health care, then we are going to have to look at and examine in more detail these areas.

I'd like to move now to some general questions. I would like to request that the minister provide some response with respect to the current inaccessibility of our public health care system, and I would ask whether the provincial government has by conscious decision or through omission chosen to underfund the provision of services in the public health care system. Was this decision or omission in any way intended to create such delays and thereby justify the introduction of private health care policy in legislation?

Has the provincial government made a conscious decision to allow waiting lists to grow despite what personal pain, suffering, or hardship this may cause to citizens and their families? Is it reasonable for the government to withhold the necessary funding that could alleviate waiting lists in all surgical areas, particularly in the face of documented human suffering, when the province is in a position of holding a huge fiscal surplus? Is it fair to make arbitrary funding allocations to address waiting lists rather than budgeting such allocations annually on the basis of need? Does the arbitrary approach not prolong patient suffering and compound system backlog? How has the government determined that a fiscal surplus takes precedence over the alleviation of surgical waiting lists and the accompanying human suffering they cause? And where, Mr. Minister, does an Albertan appeal when they are unable to access surgery they require and neither the province nor the appointed authorities are willing to offer any relief or support?

I had a meeting recently with the government affairs officer of an urban authority, and I asked him questions about specifically what his role entailed. Despite the fact that the majority of letters he receives are relative to the inability to access the public health care system and he deals with all of the MLAs in that particular region when they have concerns or their constituents have concerns, it was perhaps of no surprise that his office did not have any input or any formal process of providing to that regional health authority board

any statistics nor did they have any formal mechanism to make any concerted decision or difference to that constituent's or MLA's concerns.

It's a complete facade. It's window dressing. If this is the type of commitment our government is prepared to make to people when they are waiting six months, 12 months for procedures and the quality of their lives is deteriorating by the day, we're in a sad state of affairs. I'm quite happy to provide further details to that, but this is an area where I believe the provincial government has abdicated its responsibility. We see things put in place that really are misleading to the public, particularly when people are in a state of suffering and have very little energy to live, let alone to lobby. We can do better in this particular area.

In conjunction with those questions, I would like to know what exactly is the total number of Albertans waiting for surgical consult and/or surgery in Alberta. In addition, I would like to know what the specific number of Albertans waiting for surgery is by type. I'm sure most are aware that there are in fact two levels to our waiting lists now. There is an extensive wait to see a specialist, and you are not even put on the list for surgery until you have had that specialist consult. So people are waiting now up to six months, 10 months to see a specialist, and they have no hope of getting on a surgical waiting list until that consult occurs. These are questions and statistics which the government chooses not to publish on a consistent basis in their business plans or in their performance measures. I think it would be particularly important for you to assess the change in these areas and the waits over time, particularly for the fiscal years 1993 to current, when the funding cuts and underfunding have primarily occurred.

9:02

Relative to the same particular area, I would like to ask questions about the provincial Ombudsman's role in the health care system and particularly his role with respect to the implementation of Bill 11. There is no mention made that if a private facility does not offer safe or standard-compliant services, Albertans will have the right to appeal to either the Health Facilities Review Committee or the provincial Ombudsman. How are we going to be in a position to reassure Albertans or to monitor or enforce that it is safe to use such facilities when the legislation, sir, makes absolutely no mechanisms available to them when problems arise? It is, in my opinion, a huge inequity that the public health care system must comply with and be responsive to those mechanisms, both the Health Facilities Review Committee and the provincial Ombudsman, when the private health care facilities will not.

Relative to the debates again last year, it was indicated that there were some undertakings or work being done with the ministry of health and the Ministry of Justice, and we're wondering if we could have an update on those discussions.

Continuing on Bill 11, I would like to ask the minister: is it not true that findings of your own department and studies initiated and conducted by your own department have indicated to you that there is no published study of the efficiency, cost, or quality of the purchase of surgical services from private facilities by public funders, i.e. RHAs? Is it not true that your studies have also told you that within the current system the only way extra revenue-raising activities could be undertaken by private facilities would be to offer enhanced services? Is it not true that your studies have also told you that if such outcomes are interpreted as forms of two-tierism, a policy dilemma would arise if the only way private facilities can survive financially is to act against the stated government policy to avoid a two-tiered system or queue-jumping?

Is it not true that your own research has told you that the provision of private-sector beds seems to be associated with longer waits for care? Is it not true that your studies have told you that there are very few studies of the public purchase of private services for nonsurgical

procedures? Is it not true, Mr Minister, that you have been told that the for-profit versus not-for-profit literature is largely inconclusive? The broad conclusion is that for-profit hospitals are not more cost-effective than not-for-profit and that the costs to purchasers are higher. That is also substantiated by the report conducted by the Consumers' Association of Alberta that has been released publicly.

I would also just like to emphasize – and this has been an issue of debate and discrepancy in question period – that in examining particular studies by Yates and Armstrong, your research has told you that orthopedic waiting times are up to 10 times longer in private hospitals, that regions with the most private beds are those with the longest waiting lists, that specialties with the longest waiting times are those with the highest earnings from private practice, that patients experience longer waiting lists for surgery in public hospitals only if their doctors are offering both a public and private surgical practice. I believe that all of those things have been made clear to you, sir, yet your business plan seems to be hinged, your agenda and priorities seem to be hinged on steamrolling Bill 11 through when there is no validity and no empirical evidence to suggest that it will make our system more efficient or cost-effective.

I would like to also just make mention of the lack of any comprehensive or long-term health workforce focus or plan within your business plan. In your preliminary remarks you made mention about specific strategies being undertaken to increase the practising physician population in the province. I would respectfully submit, sir, that there is a huge component of our health workforce that is comprised of disciplines other than physicians. One of the most critical at this particular point in time and that will continue to be is the profession of registered nurses. You did not offer any report on the progress made by the AARN's nursing workforce planning group. There are really no commitments made within your business plan this year to not only the shortage that exists in nursing now but the growing shortage that will occur over the next five to 10 years as registered nurses retire.

You made no mention of the increased incidence of patient safety concerns that the AARN has reported to you, an approximately 400 percent increase since 1994. I question why that is. Those statistics are being made available to you, are being conducted by a legislated body, a statutory body, and there is no reply. So I would like to respectfully request some type of formal response relative to the area of the health workforce: what the department's long-term plan is and what progress is being made at both the AARN level and the nursing workforce level.

You did not indicate or have not indicated that there will be substantial increases in program seats for registered nurses, despite the fact that your department has committed to do that very thing for physicians. Having had I guess the misfortune, to a degree, to have spent some time in the last month at the very heart of the health care system, this system has always been and will always be about the people that work in it.

You concluded your remarks by indicating that really our future rests in the working relationships of people in our health care system. That's always been the case. It is a huge about-face for the department to acknowledge that that relationship is a primary underpinning of the proper functioning of the health care system when in the '93 to '96 period, sir, when I was a frontline member of the nursing workforce, we made consecutive presentations, provided statistics, and there was not a working respect in place at that particular time to ensure that the safety and the quality of the system was preserved.

Just a couple of brief questions, to conclude, on NAFTA and the WTO. I'd like to ask the minister to provide to us what submissions or input he has provided to the WTO negotiations. We are aware that a primary focus in that particular area is the harmonization of

the service providers or the service workforce. We know that those submissions are being prepared by intergovernmental affairs at this point in time, and we would like to know what the input of Health and Wellness has been to that.

There's no mention of the progress made relative to the implementation of the social union in your report. Consecutive meetings continue to occur with ministers across the country. That is not an area that's been provided for in the business report, and I would ask for a comprehensive update on the progress of those meetings.

Finally, I would point out a discrepancy to you, sir, with respect to the interpretation of NAFTA. The minister of intergovernmental affairs has stood in the House on a couple of occasions now and talked about NAFTA's lack of application to Bill 11. Minister McClellan is quite correct in quoting the federal government's position relative to the exemptions for public services. However she neglects to point out that the U.S. trade representative's office has a completely different interpretation.

9:12

I think you are aware that there has been correspondence between the U.S. trade representative's office and Oregon relative to these very areas. They specifically point out in that communication that they do not believe – and I can read to you excerpts of the letter that was sent to Oregon by the U.S. trade representative's office. This specifically says: your draft guidelines dated September 27 indicate this reservation does not include government services if the state allows private providers to offer similar services on a commercial basis. Exactly what Bill 11 will do. If those services are supplied by a private firm on a profit or not-for-profit basis, chapter 11 and chapter 12 of NAFTA apply. If social services are supplied by a private firm on a profit or not-for-profit basis, chapter 11 and chapter 12 apply.

Repeatedly, different sections are cited. I believe that your office is completely apprised and aware of that discrepancy between the federal government and the U.S. trade representative's office, and you are also acutely aware that this legislation will in fact allow for the application of chapter 11 and chapter 12 of NAFTA, thereby allowing American firms to establish themselves in this province with the same entitlements that are being provided by this government to facilities like HRG.

With those comments, Mr. Minister, I look forward to receiving your responses and will pass the floor over to my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. JONSON: Madam Chairman, if it's possible, I'd just like to respond on three points to the members that have spoken. In following the time rules of the committee, I was not able to complete my extensive opening remarks. I'm just acknowledging that.

I would just like to bring forth three points. First of all, we have an overall policy framework with respect to dealing with concerns, complaints that arise in the regional health authority system. It's based on a study and policy document provided by the Alberta Provincial Health Council, and it's entitled: conflict resolution policy and process. That policy clearly outlines the steps and the avenues of appeal and resolution in the system, and it does reference those complaints and how they can be brought to the attention of the Ombudsman.

Also, there is another avenue, depending on the type of complaint, that can go forward to the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the other appeal bodies that we have. We have of course the Health Facilities Review Committee, and I can go on. It maps out quite clearly the routes for the different types of concerns that people want to appeal and have dealt with.

Secondly, Madam Chairman, with respect to the overall matter of health workforce planning, we do have an overall health workforce

planning initiative. It has a large number of stakeholder participants. Because they were referenced, I would like to indicate that the AARN and the UNA, the major nursing organizations, are part of this overall workforce planning initiative. Further, our budget does provide for additional funds for the hiring of frontline staff, of which the major component of course is nurses.

This is parallel to what has been the case with physicians; that is, we have an overall supply planning initiative there. The recent money that was announced was for the AMA physician pool and was simply to recognize additional doctors being attracted to this system just as we have for other members of the workforce recognized their cost and their addition to the system in our overall budget.

Finally, Madam Chairman, I'd like to just reference children's mental health. First of all, overall mental health spending in this budget is increased \$16 million, or 9.5 percent. We have also added another \$5 million particularly in the area of children's mental health in addition to the \$5 million previously announced. We have a number of very significant initiatives across the province dealing with children's health, and I will speak specifically about mental health. We have just recently announced a \$4 million program – and this is in addition to the mental health budget that is there – for an expanded program in the area of treating anorexia and bulimia, a very, very severe condition that affects certainly young people, particularly young ladies.

We have also added services in Edmonton and Calgary with respect to children's mental health. We have instituted crisis lines for mental health overall, including children's mental health. We have a number of expansions of children's mental health services in other parts of the province, such as Lethbridge, planned for and covered in this budget. We have worked on the children's health initiative with Alberta Learning and other partners to provide additional services in the mental health field to schools. So it is certainly an area which is receiving significant attention in this budget, Madam Chairman, and it is certainly a priority area in this business plan.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Hugh.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, and good morning, everyone. I have a number of questions for the minister this morning regarding the health workforce. I note with interest that there is money being provided to hire health care professionals. Unfortunately, before Christmas, particularly in the Calgary regional health authority, there was money made available but the personnel just weren't there. I'm very concerned about this. I would urge the minister to get together with his counterparts across this country, the provincial health ministers. I would strongly urge him to do this. I think we need a national strategy to deal with the shortages of health care professionals not only in this province but across the country. If we wind up working one province against another to attract health care professionals, I don't think it's in the best interests of the medical system across the country. I think a co-ordinated strategy is the best way to deal with this problem.

It is not, as has been reported, a problem of the federal government. Manpower training is a provincial responsibility. I would just like to say that I would strongly encourage and urge the hon. minister, if he could. I think this is an issue that is almost a stand-alone reason, if I could use that term, for a meeting between him and his provincial colleagues to iron out how they're going to deal with this, because from what I can see, it's a national problem.

9:22

Now, what is the current situation regarding approval of regula-

tions for the health professions? How many will be approved each year in this province, and how many have been submitted to date? The minister spoke with us earlier on the number of nurses each regional health authority will hire. How does the department make these decisions? Last year the department said that there was no standard of nursing care per patient population.

For the hon. minister: how many nurses took the 14-week advanced critical care nursing program at Mount Royal College in 1999? What has been implemented as a result of the action plan developed by the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses nursing resource planning group? They, along with their counterparts in other provinces, have done a very comprehensive study on the shortage of nursing professionals across this country. I would urge all hon. members, if they have not seen this report – it's from December '99 – if they have the time, to have a look at it. It's a good report. Could the minister or his officials also provide the baseline count for positions of each regional health authority?

The hours of direct care given patients. This is an issue that always comes up for discussion. Is there a way of comparing this before and after the cutbacks? Why can we not take data that was provided before 1992-93 and compare it? I'm sure the regional health authorities have data. Why couldn't this be compared?

Also, if I could have an answer to this in due time: the breakdown of the \$15 million transition fund that was part of the health workforce restructuring between 1995 and 1998. Everyone's concerned about the shortage of registered nurses and LPNs and other health occupations. I find it odd that we're putting 35 percent back into the health care budget, yet the number of health occupations in the province – we're spending this money, and I understand it's going to frontline staff, but according to the government's own statistics, there are 4,000 less people working in health occupations than there were two years ago. If the minister could answer that for me in due time, I would be very grateful. This is something I've been following. I don't know where this money is going. Other people say that it's going to administration, but surely there is an answer for this.

Now, the physician workforce. I understand that the Physician Resource Planning Committee is working very hard and has presented options. What is the department doing to make more of this information available? We realize that there is training and that there has to be expansion of programs. What were the recommendations of the psychiatric working group and the Rural Physician Action Plan Co-ordinating Committee? There could be a solution here to our shortage of doctors. There are initiatives that have taken place in other provinces, and I'm wondering if the department has compared the situation here in Alberta to, say, what the Ontario government has done.

Could the minister or his officials answer: how many foreign doctors are currently delivering pizzas instead of babies? How long will it take to accurately determine the equivalencies and competencies of these foreign doctors? Could we get an explanation of what the Physician Resource Planning Committee means when it states that "in rural Alberta, recruitment is already directed more toward skill sets than formal certification"?

Now, as there is a shortage of psychiatrists and one of the leading costs to the health care system is emergencies in illness such as depression, what is happening, for instance, with re-entry positions in this specialty and others? What's being done to make psychiatry more attractive to graduating medical students?

What studies are occurring to find out why certain specialties are not attractive? I was almost horrified to read last year in the Alberta Health report, quite an extensive report on nurses and health occupation shortages across the province – this was in the Legislature Library – that so many people see a career in the health

professions as not attractive. This was something that was identified by the minister's own study. I'm wondering how we can make this profession more attractive to young people. I don't know whether it's because there's just part-time or casual work. It's something that we really have to address.

Why will only 18 percent of graduates in radiology practise in this province? Why are there no resources identified by the psychiatry section of the AMA?

The cost savings of increased usage of residents versus doctors. This is not the time to get into a debate on Bill 11, but I have some concern about who is going to train the doctors. Are they going to be trained in the public sector and wind up in private clinics/hospitals?

Now, with the doctors, some have complained about the billing process. Why not process billings for Christmas over the Christmas and New Year period?

That takes care of that series of questions, but I have a few more regarding the business plan, one in particular, Madam Chairman, before I forget. I've been watching with interest – and I think it's a very good idea – the CHOICE program, which has been developed in the last four years by the Capital health authority. Is this going to become, if it has not already, a provincewide initiative? One of the solutions to an effective delivery system for health care is an increase in adequate home care, and this CHOICE program is certainly going to allow seniors who have some difficulty to remain independently in their own homes. It's a day program. I would like to know from the department exactly how much money this CHOICE program costs. There are three sites set up in the region that I'm aware of and one more that is in the planning stages, and if the minister could share that with me, I would be very grateful.

The goals and objectives of the business plan. One here that I note with interest is a goal "to sustain and improve the delivery of accessible, effective, quality health services to Albertans who need them." The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was talking earlier of the wait list for MRI, joint replacements, heart surgery, and long-term care. I understand that \$10 million will be allocated for specialized high-tech equipment. What measures are in place to ensure that this funding will go towards improving access to MRIs in public facilities?

9:32

A key objective is "to ensure sustainability of health services," and the first strategy to meet this objective is to "prohibit two-tiered health care, while permitting health authorities to contract for surgical services." This statement, I think, is a clear contradiction to the proposed Bill 11. Why is this government intent on contracting out surgical services in a manner that will clearly contradict its own stated goals and objectives in the business plan?

Another goal is "to improve the health and well-being of Albertans through provincial strategies for protection, promotion and prevention." The 2000-2003 business plan lists mortality rates for injury and suicide as a key performance measure, but of a total funding increase for the Alberta Mental Health Board of \$16 million, I believe, over the previous fiscal year, only \$5 million will be earmarked for community mental health programs. Now, my question would be this: does the government believe that this is a sufficient measure for addressing the problem of suicide?

The business plan also lists child and immunization rates as another key performance measure. What immunization strategies has the Department of Health and Wellness developed? I noted somewhere in the estimates that there is, I believe, a \$5 million increase in money being set aside for vaccines. Is this as a result of the immunization campaign that was just conducted here successfully by the regional health authority? Also, the chicken pox vaccine: is there planning going on? I would commend the minister

and his officials if there is long-term planning going on. Do they know about any other outbreaks that perhaps the public should be aware of? I did notice that, and I'm not sure if it's a \$5 million increase from last year, but I think it was close. Will the immunization strategy address recent concerns from aboriginal communities for access to immunization against meningitis?

Now, in the business plan another goal is "to support and promote a system for health." The business plan cites "public ratings of the quality of the health system" as a key performance measure. It sets a target rate for the year 2003 of 70 percent of Albertans who rate the system as excellent or good. I don't know what the current target would be, but a recent poll said that 36 percent of Albertans were satisfied with the health care delivery system. Why is this target rate so low? The Premier has recently labeled Albertans who wish to contribute to the current debate on private surgical facilities as left-wing nuts. What are the ministry's plans for full and meaningful consultation with the public on current and proposed health care plans and actions? If he could share that with us, I would be delighted, because the recent public debate on the proposed Bill 11 reveals that this government has, I believe, not properly consulted with the key health care system stakeholders such as doctors, nurses, and the other health care professionals.

This leads to another question for the hon. minister. How does his ministry intend to involve key health care industry stakeholders in its present and future health care plans and actions? Is this advisory committee or council, as it's referred to in Bill 11, part of that?

Another goal from the business plan is "to optimize the effectiveness of the Ministry." The business plan states that one of its objectives is "to effectively manage available resources, including information and technology." How will the hon. minister ensure that the public's confidential medical records remain confidential?

Now, I have a few general questions before I wrap up. Many Health and Wellness programs will now be funded exclusively through lottery revenues. Is this the trend for health care financing? Is this method of financing sustainable? A key concern of this government is the affordability and sustainability of the health care system. My next question is: how does this province compare to other provinces or countries in terms of percentage of GDP versus health status indicators? What progress has the government made in convincing physicians to adopt alternative payment mechanisms which would offer the potential for cost savings and quality of care?

In this year's budget I notice that it provides for the Premier's Advisory Council on Health and the health service utilization commission. Can I get an explanation of what the rationale is for establishing these bodies? Do not regional health authorities already monitor their health services utilization? Does the creation of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health anticipate the acceptance of Bill 11?

In closing, what plans does the ministry have for health advisory and appeals services?

Thank you. I will cede the microphone to my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark.

THE CHAIRMAN: Did you want to say something first, Mr. Minister?

MR. JONSON: If I might, Madam Chairman, I would like to respond to a few of the issues raised by the previous questioner.

First of all, there was the first question, about overall national health workforce planning. There is at the national level a committee that involves the national stakeholders, involves the provincial governments, and that overall activity is expected to provide an overall report in May of this year. I just want to emphasize that there is such an activity that's been recognized by health ministers nationally. It is under way, and there will be the report.

A second item that I would like to respond to, Madam Chairman, is in terms of the number of physicians in the province. I can give you the actual number of doctors, but the important thing is that we have today almost exactly the same number of doctors per capita as we had in 1992-93. There has been a slight increase, of course, because our overall population has been increasing.

With respect to the health workforce as well, there has been over that same period of time, '92-93 to the present, an 11 percent increase in the total health workforce in the province. Right here I have 33,680 in 1995-96, and today, from the most recent statistics at least, 1998-99, I have 37,290. There are those stats that I just wanted to refer to.

9:42

I've referenced the physician resource planning activities. There was a reference to foreign doctors resident in Alberta. Although it's been a modest shift, we have for the first time in the province specifically recognized in a funding initiative for internships that a certain number of spaces should be reserved for those doctors who are resident here to qualify for practice.

The other two areas I'd like to touch on very quickly are the areas of mental health and particularly children's mental health. I've answered this question in the House, and that is that the overall proportion of the mental health budget for community mental health has doubled in the past period of time from 1992-93 to the present. The portion of the budget for hospital care and acute care has remained constant, I think, gone up about 2 or 3 percent, so there certainly has been a shift of resources there.

We are, as I've indicated, increasing our commitment to children's mental health. The amount of money that we're spending on children's mental health is not confined to the \$5 million last year and \$10 million this year recommended by the Bonnie Laing committee. Those funds are in addition to money that is internal to the mental health care budget that goes to children's mental health, and I've mentioned some of the initiatives there.

Finally, there was a question in reference to immunization. Alberta Health and Wellness has an overall five-year immunization plan. We are putting resources into that, and that is reflected in this budget. It's in the "protection, promotion and prevention" area of the budget, and that overall section is increasing significantly next year from \$143.5 million to \$168.6 million, approximately an 18 percent increase.

Finally, Madam Chairman, there was a reference earlier in the discussion this morning questioning rising administrative costs as a proportion of overall expenditure. I just want to indicate that with our health authorities, administration expenses have come down from, I think, running about 6 percent when they were established to an average across the system of 4.1 percent of their total expenditures.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Hugh, you had another question?

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. Thank you. If you don't mind, I have one question for the hon. minister at this time, and that is regarding the teaching hospitals. We have to ensure, of course, that we educate future health care professionals and conduct research and provide clinical services. I was curious what initiatives have been taken – now, with all due respect, the Auditor General mentions this under advanced education and career development – regarding the teaching hospitals and the maintaining and recruitment of doctors for the medical schools, the teaching doctors to teach the next generation. There was some concern about compensation levels for these individuals, and I was wondering if the minister had any initiatives

to ensure that there is a stable and satisfied staff at our teaching hospitals. The Auditor General had some concern about this.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. JONSON: I'll just answer that. We have in this budget, as I recall, completed the implementation of the Bonnie Laing funding report recommendations with respect to teaching hospitals. We will add in this business plan the \$12 million, which was phased in in steps, but we'll have raised our contribution by \$12 million in terms of our support for the faculties. Specifically we're not supporting the academic side, but we're supporting the practicum side and the expenses the faculty incurs there.

Also, if you're referring to the agreement for reimbursement for residents, we have, as I understand it, reached an agreement there with them in terms of their salaries or reimbursement. There are also funds in the budget for that. So we certainly have a commitment here to our teaching hospitals.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, Linda.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Just for the record I would like to make note of the significant change in the reporting format and the fact that this business plan means less and less in terms of relevant actual statistical measures. The fact that the ministry is now putting in key performance measures but only identifying targets and omitting to provide past years' statistics and current year statistics is significant. I have been a critic of the performance measures utilized by this government since my election in '97, but this is a further reduction in accountable reporting, and I think it's of merit to report that on the public record.

[Mr. Broda in the chair]

There are numerous omissions in this report that are not mentioned. One of the huge areas relates to the issue of poverty and we have had consecutive initiatives and organizations, including the government's own children's summit, raise the increasing impact that poverty has on the health of Albertans, particularly our younger populations. I do not see mention made in your report, sir, of that particular issue. It's also surprising given the fact that the municipalities in this province recently formally published their own report on the concentration of poverty levels in our communities. I would like to ask just who might be the leader in this province in addressing that particular issue if not the department of health.

Further, we have seen on a national level Alberta cited in the report by Armine Yalnizyan, Canada's Great Divide: The Politics of the Growing Gap between Rich and Poor in the 1990s. Specifically, this report says:

In Alberta, income disparities spiked up in 1991 . . .

In 1993, policy changes started to exclude some people's eligibility for financial help . . . significantly reducing outlays for social assistance. . . . In less than three years [as we're all aware] welfare caseloads were cut in half . . .

After 1993, market incomes of the poorest 10 percent of families raising children rose more rapidly in Alberta than anywhere else . . . Yet after-tax incomes of this group, which includes families without market incomes and receiving social assistance, eroded throughout the period.

Between 1993 and 1996, Alberta saw the sharpest sustained rise in income disparities in this country. But in 1997, an election year the province introduced a tax credit for working-poor families.

That single contribution aside, Alberta has remained in the top three provinces with the largest income gap between rich and poor, and it is an enormous omission, sir, that your report does not acknowledge those types of realities that are in existence in this province.

I would like to also just briefly comment on the recent PDD report that was released this week and the fact that in my opinion this report did nothing more than regurgitate, recycle, and review the issues. There are no hard and fast commitments in this document relative to the critical issues that exist: the fact that the sector of disabilities has been consecutively underfunded by this province, that we have huge issues about the recruitment of professionals to work in this area and have huge issues about disparities in working conditions and in wages.

While the government talked at length about reviewing those particular areas, we really see no hard-and-fast commitments that would come into play before the next provincial election. I think that the tactic of announcing funding commitments for three years – it's not lost on us that there's going to be a provincial election in the next year. So to make a funding commitment over a three-year period is completely bogus, and the public realizes that. The next government is under absolutely no commitment to uphold the funding commitments that you made, sir. In fact, you may not be in this post six months from now. That reality is not lost, and regrettably, despite the criticalness of that particular area and the need for focus and priority, we do not see much in the Building Better Bridges report that is going to make a substantive difference on the frontline level in the disability sector or on the front line for the population living with disabilities.

9:52

I would like to also briefly raise issues relative to aboriginal health and the lack of specific data in the report relative to the health status of our aboriginal population, both in terms of physical, mental, and income-related issues. We intend to bring more specific questions relative to that issue at a later time, but if the government is undertaking initiatives in any of those areas that I've spoken about – poverty, PDD, aboriginal health – then I would be most interested in receiving them.

In the 1998 estimates both in Environment and in Health there was discussion about partnerships and projects relative to the departments' working. One particular citation related to correlating data on oil and gas wells and solution gas flaring and venting with data for pollutants, environmental receptors, and human and animal health. Further, Alberta Health committed that they would improve the collection of human health data respecting the impacts of solution gas flaring. They also committed that they would increase their collection of data relative to intensive livestock operations. Those, again, are not things that we see mentioned substantively, if at all, in this budgetary process or report.

My thanks. I'll pass the microphone over to my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I wonder, just before we go there, Mr. Chairman, if I could just comment briefly on the PDD aspect.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Is that all right? Any objections?

MS LEIBOVICI: It's just that there's 25, 27 minutes left. If the associate minister can promise me he'd do it two minutes, then that would be a yes, okay, but the reality is that he can put it in writing as well.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, I think it might take a couple of minutes more.

MS LEIBOVICI: Okay. That's what I thought.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Could we proceed, and then could you maybe answer that later?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Yes.

MR. JACQUES: Does it make any difference? I mean, aren't we just tracking their time in total?

MS LEIBOVICI: No, it's not. It's two hours from the onset.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Yes, it's two hours. So if he answers, then it'll be just added on.

MS LEIBOVICI: It takes off our time.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Is it taken off? It's taken off. Okay.

MS LEIBOVICI: If it were added on, it would be a different story.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: In fairness to the Official Opposition, I will make my comments later.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Just to continue on, I have a long list of questions. I doubt that I'll get through them, and what I will commit to do is to put them in writing this year and to table them as well. I know that we have one more opportunity to address the health budget, but that opportunity will be limited, and I believe these are questions that are important in determining how the \$5 billion budget of Health and Wellness is being spent in this province.

Just to backtrack, though, to vaccines and the chicken pox vaccine, which wasn't answered by the minister, it's my understanding that the number of deaths of children from chicken pox is higher than from meningitis in this province. That is why I'm asking whether or not the chicken pox vaccine will be a vaccine that's available without cost to children in the province. Also, as part of the \$5 million – it's under one of the votes; I don't have it in front of me right now – in terms of vaccines, does that \$5 million provide dollars back to the regional health authorities for the cost of actually administering that vaccine through the workforce that's utilized in the administration of that vaccine, as well as for the supplies?

To go back to the votes that have to do with the regional health authorities at the point where I left off, one of the issues the minister keeps announcing is that there will be more major surgeries done within the regional health authorities, and what I find interesting is that there's an actual figure put on the number of people that will be able to access these procedures. I'm wondering how those numbers are derived and whether in fact those are hard-and-fast caps. If you happen to be number 3,452 and the number of heart operations that are done is 3,451, do you then not get your heart operation? I would doubt that very much, but I just find it interesting that there is an actual figure put on the number of operations for major surgeries that are provided on a yearly basis within this province. I'd like to know how that happens.

[Mrs. Tarchuk in the chair]

The minister may not be able to tell us this, but I would hope that with the contracts being up for negotiations I believe this year, there has been a percentage put into the budget to address those contracts and the increases within those contracts. I would hope that that is a realistic figure that has been put into the regional health authority budgets, because if not, we know that the budgets will therefore be

diminished and less dollars be available for care. It would be interesting to know what, in fact, the minister did provide. In the past that has been available in the budgets as a workforce adjustment; I think that's what the line item was called. I'd like to know if that's available this year as well.

There are some other questions that I have with regards to the direction of the minister of health to the regional health authorities. A working group that the minister of health is part of, that all provincial ministers are part of as well as the federal minister of health, came to some decisions and recommendations around how to identify and how to ensure that services would be delivered in a timely manner to citizens. One of those requirements or requests was that hospitals be able to "identify provision of inappropriate care, and work to reduce inappropriateness by implementing tools of utilization review and utilization management." I'm wondering where we are in this province with regards to implementing that particular recommendation.

Another recommendation was that

every hospital implement concurrent review of admission, continued stay and discharge processes using well validated protocols and criteria, and that this be implemented with a sense of immediacy.

I'm wondering where we are in this province in implementing that.

Also, "that hospitals encourage physicians in the implementation of evidence-based clinical practice guidelines." I know that actually a member of the government, I believe it was, asked a question with regards to why it is taking so long to implement and to come to conclusions on clinical practice guidelines. I'd like to know where we are in that process right now and what the implications are of not having CPGs in this province.

Another recommendation:

That hospitals apply utilization review and utilization management principles and protocols to all service departments, not just patient care areas, and that laboratory and diagnostic imaging services be specifically identified as high priority areas.

Again I refer back to my comments that in the regs it indicates that every hospital or every regional health authority has to have a utilization committee. What in fact has been occurring? Are those utilization committees the vehicle for ensuring that each hospital within an RHA does have the ability to implement these recommendations?

Another recommendation was that "timely access to services in either the hospital or the community must be guaranteed, and information about waiting times be made public," and that "waiting lists, where they exist, be prioritized by [CPGs] based on clinical need."

Now, I thought that one was interesting in that we have all this information about waiting lists, yet there doesn't seem to be any standardization with regards to how waiting lists are addressed in this province and across the country.

10:02

I know that we're all anxiously awaiting Tom Noseworthy's study, but the reality is that we seem to be heading down a path of privatization based on waiting lists that are not standardized. I guess the question is: are those figures accurate? What are the figures the department is using when they talk about waiting lists? Can those waiting lists be made public, and when will those waiting lists be made public?

Regionalization is a whole issue in and of itself. I understand there was a presentation made by Donna Wilson to the standing policy committee with regards to regionalization, and I would like to know what the recommendations were of that standing policy committee with regards to the analysis she brought up. One of the interesting shifts in our health care system over the last seven years has been a shift of responsibility, it seems, from the department of

health to the regional health authorities, yet the department of health is footing the bill. It's quite a large bill as well.

The question is: how effective has this regionalization process been? Does the department have the answers as they're sending over the dollars to the RHAs? I'm going to provide a list of questions that I'm sure the department has answers to quite readily with regards to the costs of regionalization. They are as follows: what were the costs of setting up corporate offices and related corporate support services in each of the 19 health regions, including the Cancer Board and the Mental Health Board, for each year since 1993? What was the total cost of layoffs and other personnel changes resulting from merger, downsizing, and other changes as well? What happened to all the equipment that used to be in the hospitals, and what was the amount realized back to the department of health if that particular equipment was sold? Hospital beds, X-ray machines: the list goes on.

What was the cost of capital construction to develop offices, administrative offices and others, for the regional health authorities and their staff and the administration of the regional health authorities as well as the consolidation that occurred within the regional health authorities? What was the cost of hospital and health facility renovations for each year since 1993 as a direct result of regionalization? What was the total cost of Alberta Health and regional health authority personnel time to plan, host, attend, and develop reports for health roundtables, workshops, and summits since 1993, including rentals, travel, communications, personnel, and consulting fees? What was the cost of the government committees to address issues in health system redevelopment such as the Provincial Health Council of Alberta, the long-term care advisory committee, the MLA committee on the review of health boundaries, and the Health System Funding Review Committee, just to name a few?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I think there should be a point of order raised here. I appreciate where the hon. member is going with these questions, but they seem much more of an historical nature, of things in the past. My impression is that we're here today dealing with Budget 2000-2001. While those are very valid questions, hon. member, I would submit to you, Madam Chairman, that those are the types of questions that frequently come up in another forum called Public Accounts, where we are reviewing historical actions and accounting for historical expenditures. I would ask the chair to please make a ruling on this point of order at this time.

MS LEBOVICI: In actual fact, Madam Chairman, the reality is that in order to know what the costs are of this current budget and whether the dollars within this current budget are being allocated appropriately, you need to have the historical facts. There has to be an analysis that the department of health has at its fingertips in order to ascertain what the costs are that are being provided to each RHA at this point in time – it only makes sense – in order to be able to evaluate what the department's budget is, which is what this process is about. We're not rubber-stamping a budget. We're asking questions in order to be able to evaluate whether taxpayers' dollars are being appropriately allocated. It's as simple as that. In order to do that, we need the historical background. I hope this isn't eating into my time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hung, on this point.

MR. PHAM: On this point of order I agree with the hon. member about the need to know statistical and historical data, but that is part of the research process you do before you come to this committee meeting. I hope you are not doing the research on the spot. If you want to look for this information, you should have asked for the public accounts before you came here. That's what I'm suggesting.

MS LEIBOVICI: The reality is that I have tried to obtain this information, and it's not in the public accounts, so I assume it is within the department of health under a number of areas where they have research analysis capabilities. We are voting millions of dollars to deal with those particular areas. In particular, if you want to look at what they are, those services are under ministry support services. They are probably within the associate minister's office. It has to do with vote 1.0.5, policy and planning services. It has to do with vote 1.0.6, health information and accountability. The list goes on. So this is information that these branches of the department are providing and should provide. It should be available to the public in determining whether or not we should be paying \$3,838,000 for the policy and planning services of the department of health.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Could I get some clarification, maybe some confirmation here? There are other mechanisms by which this information could be requested. Is that right?

MS LEIBOVICI: No. The reality is that in determining this budget which is in front of us, the only mechanism is the process we have right now. Public accounts is historical and is a year behind in terms of over-viewing what the expenses were of the department.

I'm not asking for an auditing of the expenses of the department. I'm asking: what is the research and the information that has led the department this year to spend \$5.3 billion on health? As part of that \$5.3 billion expenditure a huge amount goes to the regional health authorities which were established by this province. There has to be an analysis somewhere as to the efficiency of the regional health authorities.

MR. JACQUES: Well, it's an interesting take, but if you go back to the substance of the hon. member's questions, they're specifically asking for information relative to regional health authorities and, more particularly, financial information. I would submit, Madam Chairman, that if you look at the regional health authority audited financial statements, which are indeed a public document . . .

MS LEIBOVICI: And I have looked at them.

MR. JACQUES: . . . and if the member or the researcher spent a little time on that, they can provide the answer. I think the point of the point of order is very valid. Either we're here for the public accounts or we're here for the business plan, but we can't be here for both.

MR. MacDONALD: Madam Chairman, 63 percent of the total budget of the department of health goes to the regional health authorities.

MS LEIBOVICI: The reality is that the business plan talks about improving the continuity of health services. It talks about improving the quality of health services. It talks about ensuring the accessibility to quality health services. My questions directly relate to those particular issues that are outlined in the business plan to see whether in fact we are improving the quality of health services in this province by the expenditure of dollars under the regional health authority vote, whether we are improving the continuity of health services. How do you judge that unless in fact you know what the expenditures, what the effectiveness has been over the years? It is a logical question to put forward: where have we gone in the last while with regard to expenditures in the regional health authority budgets?

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. I wonder if I could ask the minister if

he'd like to comment on this matter. Is this information that's readily available?

MR. JONSON: In my view the information is available. There are the annual reports of the regional health authorities. There is the avenue of the public accounts. There's also the avenue of motions for returns with respect to addressing this information. But I'm not the one to rule on a point of order. I would suggest, Madam Chairman, that we just proceed.

10:12

THE CHAIRMAN: And leave the questions as is. Okay. Let's just do that. Continue on.

MS LEIBOVICI: Okay. Thank you. I will then continue.

The other questions in terms of the analysis of the effectiveness of regionalization deal with the costs of duplication of services in health regions, for instance with regard to data analysis, computer systems, and communications; an analysis of why there's a threefold increase in medical procedures in the last three years given that the population has not increased by that amount; the total annual contracted-out services by for-profit and not-for-profit and the percentage of funding per regional health authority by classification; the contracts and the costs of all consultants who have been hired by the government to research, promote, and otherwise provide advice to the government relative to the contracting-out proposal; the number of empty beds and closed facilities by regional health authority; the cost of inpatient stay procedures by regional health authority, and – and I did touch on this earlier, as did the Member for Edmonton-Riverview – reports on the analysis of the capacity of the regional health authority relative to surgery, wait lists, and in-and-out patient services.

Another question that I have with regards to out-of-province costs is: how many people within this province are sent out of province, if any, to the United States or to other provinces for treatment? What was the cost, and what kind of treatments are being provided? That basically is the list of questions there.

Another question with regards to the regional health authorities is not an analysis of their efficiency but is with regards to their medical bylaws. Do all regional health authorities have staff medical bylaws approved, and if not, why not? Who determines what those standards are?

There are reports that are supposed to be available to the minister with regards to the number of people waiting for long-term care beds in acute hospitals. I believe the first report was due on August 31, 1999. Can the minister indicate what is the current number of people who are occupying acute care beds that should really be in long-term care facilities? Can the minister explain the rising costs of administration? You could do it over the last three years, or you could do it for this year, with regards to the administration within the regional health authority structures.

What is the percentage of admissions to hospital emergency departments that requires non-surgical intervention? We know that the minister has often said that the hospital structure is perhaps not the most efficient structure for dealing with procedures. It would be interesting to know what is the actual percentage of admissions to emergency departments that require non-surgical interventions.

Now, I have some specific questions with regards to some of the regional health authorities. There are questions with regards to the Calgary regional health authority to start with. Can the minister indicate what the situation is with regards to the hospital inventory system in the Calgary region at this point in time? Last year I was told by the minister that the Calgary regional health authority property management group would be able to identify the properties, the individual lease agreements, that the Calgary regional health

authority has with providers. However I was also told that there was difficulty in providing this information regarding ownership, cost of services, and number of contractors. Given the new willingness to open contracts that are provided with private companies, I am again asking this year regarding who owns these buildings – there were 22 leased facilities last year in the Calgary region – which real estate companies were utilized, what the lease dates are, and that the access to the contracts be maintained.

Also, with regards to the inventory of contracted clinical services, last year there were 169. It would be good in this spirit of openness that we would have not only the names but also the cost of the contracts and the ownership of the clinics.

The minister has indicated recently that the Consumers' Association study with regards to cataracts in Calgary is not accurate. It would be helpful if the department of health study that indicates that that is not accurate was released to the public and an explanation as to why younger individuals in Calgary are now requiring more cataract surgery to be done. Studies indicate that cataracts do not occur, on average, unless you are older. So the question is: why in Calgary are there so many younger individuals who require cataract surgery? [interjection] It might be all that sunshine. It would be nice to know.

The department of health has been involved with the Crowfoot Village Family Practice pilot project. Can the minister provide information as to the quote, unquote, rigorous monitoring and auditing system that's in place with regards to that pilot project? Can you provide a copy of the funding agreement? Who actually provides the funding for the evening nursing staff? It is my information that it's the regional health authority that provides the funding for the Crowfoot clinic and that it comes out of the 8th and 8th clinic. I'm asking for confirmation whether it's the family practice group that is paying for that or the regional health authority.

How does the Crowfoot Village Family Practice group interrelate with the Calgary regional health authority home care unit? As the program is now at least six months old, what analysis has been completed with regards to that particular program? The pilot project is, I think, a worthwhile one. I would just like to know what the monitoring and auditing one is, because I do agree that we have to look at different formats of providing care.

There has been a lot of discrepancy from the Calgary regional health authority with regards to the active beds that are available in the Calgary region, and I'm sure the department of health can clear up those discrepancies as to what the number of acute care beds was prior to restructuring, both active and inactive, what the numbers are now, and the ratio of active beds per population prior to restructuring in 1993 and now. We seem to be getting differing figures from the regional health authority itself with regards to that.

The Calgary regional health authority recently undertook to have a physician task force. I have asked them for the information as to who specifically was on that. I have not to date received that information, and I'm wondering if the minister can provide that information, because it was that task force that, it seems, has now led to the contracting out of the MRI services in the Calgary region, the recommendations of that task force.

The satellite emergency departments that are being planned in the Calgary regional health authority: is there money allocated in this year's budget for those satellite departments? The community health centres that the Calgary regional health authority was planning at a cost of \$47 million: are those actually line items – which we don't get – that are in the regional health authority budget? Those were community health centres in the south, north, west, and northeast, and they were part of the primary care initiative.

10:22

Another issue that I've had brought up to me, that is a cross-

provincial issue, is: what happens when provincial land is utilized in a public/private partnership? What are the tax laws that actually operate for those partnerships? Are they considered to be operating under public tax laws, the tax laws that would govern public health facilities, or are they tax laws that are for private health facilities?

The Palliser regional health authority. Can you explain the decision that was made, unless it's been reversed fairly recently, about South Country Village with regards to their capital funding request? If they have not received any, why not? It's a nonprofit, voluntary organization, to my understanding, and it's a model for aging in place.

There are some issues around the Northern Lights region, whether or not they are able to provide adequate coverage because of a lack of physicians. Does the minister of health see that there is any role for his involvement when there are citizens in this province who are unable to access health because of decisions made by regional health authorities?

The Lakeland regional health authority. I don't know that there was anything in the budget specifically, though the Minister of Infrastructure had indicated that there would be, with regards to retrofitting the Fort Saskatchewan health centre to bring it up to code because it is not up to code. Where does Fort Saskatchewan rank in terms of priority for a new facility? If the minister could also provide where the majority of Lakeland surgeries are performed and what the percentage is of surgeries performed at Fort Saskatchewan.

THE CHAIRMAN: If I could just interrupt for a second. The time is up, but we are adding another four minutes for the time I took for that point of order. So you have another four minutes left.

MS LEIBOVICI: I appreciate that. Great. Thank you.

Congratulations on finally appointing a board to the Lakeland region. It's been a long haul. I have had one request as to finding out what the recommendations actually were from the committee that was chaired by Terry Cavanagh, with a footnote that there was no representation on the board from the county of Two Hills.

Health region No. 5. We did talk about that. I know that the Didsbury hospital is a thorny issue, that I will be watching with interest as to what the minister will do in that particular area.

Mistahia, with regards to the funding formulas, we have talked about as well. As I indicated earlier it has been recommended in the past to the department of health that the quality and time lines of the information used in the population-based funding formula be improved and that the consistency and predictability within that funding formula be improved as well. There were recommendations that were provided by the AG's department.

I've had some disturbing calls – and I think this is a provincial function to oversee – from areas throughout the region that some of the hospitals do not have adequate supplies on hand, that they run out of basics like syringes, saline, dressings. I'm wondering whether in fact that has ever been brought to the minister's attention, because it would appear that with the amounts being provided to each regional health authority, that should not be occurring, that the health professionals cannot perform their duties because of a lack of basic supplies within the hospitals.

The Chinook regional health authority: another interesting area to look at in this province as to the status of the plan. Can the minister explain – and this would be in conjunction with the long-term care review that was provided as well – how seniors will be guaranteed better care if they are moved from the nursing home environment to an assisted-living environment, if that is the case? We know that there are certain services that are not provided, that in fact the standards of care are less because of the different requirements for a nursing home versus an assisted-living environment, and that the

out-of-pocket costs are increased to individuals who move into assisted-living environments. So can the minister explain some of those conditions that are made?

In particular, I have had a complaint with regards to the post acute rehab program being closed down, combined with the geriatrics assessment rehab unit. The facility that these individuals are being placed into, the auxiliary building, has inadequate heating, plumbing, and air conditioning. If the minister, as he's reviewing that whole area, could explain the decisions that have been made.

Also, there is an increasing concern that I'm hearing from across the province with regards to long-term care, home care, and other areas, that I won't be able to address but will send to the minister, with regards to the ratio of staff to residents, that those are unacceptable.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. We are at the end of the Official Opposition portion of the meeting. We can move forward to the next, which is specifically allocated to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Hearing no questions from that member, we can move on to government members.

We'll start with Dave, please.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Are we going to go for two hours or an hour just questioning, or can we go question by question with an answer back?

THE CHAIRMAN: You can go question by question. Whatever you want.

MR. BRODA: Okay. I have several questions, and I would like them addressed. I guess my first question would be to . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Can I just interrupt for a second?

MR. BRODA: Sure.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister, what is your preference with regards to his question?

MR. JONSON: I would suggest that government members perhaps give me their particular questions, and I'll try to respond. Madam Chairman, I wonder if I could request – and this is the government side's time for questioning. I think it is important to have, if it's acceptable, the associate minister respond on the questions that were raised with respect to the PDD area and also AADAC, if he wishes to comment.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think that would be fine.
Gene.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. I want to respond to questions that were posed by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview with respect to the recently released PDD report, Building Better Bridges, the final report regarding programs and services in support of persons with developmental disabilities. She made some comments this morning that are not factual, and I would like to correct those for the record.

I believe she started by saying that there were no commitments made in the report or no commitments made by the government to this important area. In fact, that's not true. Commitments have been made, and I want to start by apprising that member of a couple of them. For example, in the area of current deficit forecasts, which is issue 1 under official recommendations, there was a recommendation that I made in the report that says that the province of Alberta should "eliminate the current PDD deficit by providing a further \$5

million" for the PDD program. That commitment was made and demonstrated by the government of Alberta, and that \$5 million deficit will be accounted for and eliminated in the new budget. So that's already been done.

Another important aspect and commitment that has been made and is also reflected and recommended in the report is with regard to issue 2, which is the future funding forecasts, wherein the recommendation states

that the 2000/2001 Provincial budget for the PDD system incorporate:

- the \$10 million infused in July, 1999; and,
- the additional \$5 million recommended [for deficit elimination]

as part of the base budget for PDD.

Surely she must know what base budgets are. That, too, has been done, and it's reflected in the report.

In fact, there are additional items within issue 2 on future funding that take into account issues like PDD recipient growth and the need for additional funds to deal with that as well as getting on with improving information gathering, information tracking, and accounting systems for PDD, all of which have been provided for, hon. member, in the budget. In fact, the total budget over this past year or so has gone from \$283 million to this important area up to \$293 million in July of 1999, and now a further \$5 million is being added to eradicate the remainder of the deficit. On top of that we have a grand total expenditure over the next year projected at \$321 million approximately, which is a very significant increase.

10:32

I might point out to that particular hon. member that that is one of the largest increases to any government program. The government of Alberta seriously, seriously recognizes how important this area is and how vulnerable many of the recipients of this program funding are. Therefore, we are committed to assisting them in a way that will arrive at what everyone wants: a more stable, a more predictable but also a sustainable level of program support and service support for persons with developmental disabilities.

I want to just mention a couple of other areas. Before I do, I would just say that in a general sense the recommendations that are presented in this particular report have come about as a result of a very extensive and a very thorough review process that involved literally hundreds and hundreds of PDD recipients, parents and guardians of PDD recipients, service providers, community agencies, board members who serve at the community level, and board members who serve at other levels within the PDD structure in their local areas. A couple of things were extremely extremely, emphatically, clearly pointed out to me and others who were listening to those various inputs.

One of them, Madam Chairman, was the fact that because of the extremely sensitive issues that affect persons with development disabilities the community, broadly speaking, wanted government to move cautiously and to move carefully with respect to any changes that might be made to this important PDD program. Equally important, that same constituent community also said: please, involve us in the process. That is why the balance of the recommendations are out there for additional feedback from the constituent community that we are helping and have traditionally done a very good job helping. Having said that, I would direct you, for example, to the issue with respect to support for acquired brain injury individuals, which is issue 5 on page 35 of the report.

I'll just end here by saying that there are various partnerships spelled out, Madam Chairman, and there are dates within which those particular recommendations have to be acted upon if the recommendations are absorbed. Suffice it to say that one of our more interested groups in this whole process, the Alberta Associa-

tion for Community Living, for example, gave the report a very resounding two thumbs up by stating that they commend the government on ending the PDD funding crisis.

Now, I could go on with a lot of other stuff, but I just wanted to correct some of misimpressions the Member for Edmonton-River-view read into the record.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.

I've got Dave, Hung, Yvonne, and then Denis.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Over the past few months considerable public concern has been expressed across the province about the future of the publicly funded health care system. There have been a lot of innuendoes out there and some misinformation provided by the opposition and the Friends of Medicare and whoever else.

MRS. SLOAN: Would those be left-wing nuts?

MR. BRODA: They could very well be, yes.

My question is: what can I point to in this business plan that will assure Albertans about its sustainability with all of its founding principles intact? That is one question. The minister can respond, or he can give it to me in writing.

The next question that I have is: what are some of the strategies that the department hopes to investigate to ensure that the public system can be sustained within current levels of expenditure without compromising quality of service or people's health in the long run?

The next question. The allocation to Health and Wellness of 33 percent of the provincial expenditure I believe is the highest it's ever been. Is there enough to do what we need to do in the future, especially in light of all the CUPE demands right now for salary increases?

The next question that I would have. There's been mention of immunization, and I'd like to know what this government is doing to improve the prevention and control of influenza in long-term care facilities and similar institutions. Will the government make immunization of health care workers mandatory, as has been recommended in Ontario?

The next question: will Alberta Health and Wellness provide the drugs needed for long-term care to manage an outbreak should there ever be one?

I know that we had also brought up in the business plan here as well – there were some questions or comments on AADAC in there. What is AADAC really doing to maintain the priority of youth? We're finding a lot of problems with youth right now, whether it be alcohol or drugs. What plan is there on that? Again, maybe the associate minister could respond either orally or in writing. What are AADAC's long-term plans for the prevention that we're talking about? I know that there have been a lot of good things, positive things that have happened in AADAC, and I certainly encourage what's been happening, but there's more to be done. Maybe you could address the long-term plan we're looking at for prevention.

What partnering activities are established or planned to focus on this prevention? Are there public/private partnerships even within the communities themselves, within industry? Is there anything that we can see happening there?

Again to the minister. We've looked at the initiative for a \$2.2 million increase in the budget for physicians in rural Alberta, the on-call physician program. I'd like to know how that is working. How successful is the physician plan regarding the recruitment and retention of physicians in rural and remote Alberta? We find that we've brought in some new physicians from South Africa or

wherever. Once they've been established in rural Alberta for two or three years, do we see a migration into urban centres from rural Alberta? If that could be answered.

Also, does the minister foresee the need to continue recruitment of physicians from countries outside Canada in light of the comment made from the report that there were 255 physicians between September '98 and '99? I think that's very positive, and we do have to compliment the physicians that are out there. I know in my own constituency the physicians that have come from South Africa are well received within the community, and I don't see them moving into larger centres. I think they have some very viable businesses in the communities. I just wanted to see what's happening in general throughout the province.

Thank you, Mr. Minister.

THE CHAIRMAN: Did you want to make any comments on those questions at this point, Mr. Minister?

MR. JONSON: No, Madam Chairman. I think there are other government members that would like to pose their questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sure.

Okay. Hung.

MR. JONSON: We will, of course, respond as we will to the opposition.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would like to thank the minister and the associate minister and his staff for an excellent presentation. Before I begin, I would like to pass on my congratulations and special thanks to the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness on behalf of the PDD people. I have received many phone calls and letters in the last few weeks expressing their great satisfaction with the work you have done to address their concerns. So on behalf of those people I would like to thank you for an outstanding job.

10:42

I would like to focus my questions today on one particular area that I briefly raised in last year's budget debate. That is goal 1 of the department: "to sustain and improve the delivery of accessible, effective, quality health services to Albertans who need them." There is one area that is very troubling for me, and I have seen this happening and getting worse for the last year. That is the problem of access for new Canadians. I hope that the deputy minister and the staff that are here today take note of this, because I am going to follow up and ask for a detailed answer to this question.

We have in Alberta an average ratio of patient to doctor of about 580 patients per doctor. In some of the new-Canadian communities, some of the ethnic communities, that ratio is sometimes as high as 5,000 patients per doctor, and that poses tremendous problems for many of these new Canadians when they go and see their physician, because of the language barriers they have. Sometimes they have to wait two to three hours to get in to see a doctor.

Because of the high patient to doctor ratio, these ethnic doctors end up with a higher billing rate than average. Alberta Health has an investigation unit that goes after these people who have higher than average billing rates, and it gets to a point where these doctors are upset and they don't want to have the trouble, so they cut down on hours of operation. That compounds the problem. When they reduce operating hours, the number of patients does not get reduced; they just have to wait longer and longer.

Many of those doctors don't even bother to take appointments any more. They cannot afford to keep an appointment. So people just have to walk into the office and wait, two to three hours sometimes,

to get in to see a physician, especially during flu season. Last year I had the flu and had to wait four hours, and I saw many people in that room. It was very, very unacceptable. I think that, you know, it gets to a point where they feel that they're being treated as second-class citizens and that we have two classes of treatment.

My colleague talked earlier about the program we have to recruit physicians from other countries, South Africa for example. We have many qualified physicians here in Canada, but because of the way we do things, those people are being barred from practising medicine. For every person who received medical training overseas, when they come to Canada, if they want to become doctors again, they have to take a qualifying examination. That examination will prove that they have the qualifications to practise medicine in Alberta, and most of the physicians pass that exam easily.

But a second requirement is that they take a two-year internship program, and these internship positions are created in exactly the same number as the number of people who graduate from our undergraduate medical programs. Because of that, these people have no chance at all of practising medicine again. We have many, many people whose talents are being wasted. When we spend money going outside Canada trying to recruit other people, that situation is unacceptable and is not logically making sense. I don't know how long it will take for the department to realize that and find solutions to address that issue.

Last week I had a meeting with many stakeholders from my Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund Advisory Committee. There were people at that meeting raising that issue. They are thinking of taking this to the Human Rights Commission, their challenge being on employment and discrimination on their country of origin. When they have all this training and all those qualifications and the system systematically locks them out by not providing the opportunity for them to take internship positions, it's not fair to those people or to the taxpayers of Alberta.

We have all this wealth of knowledge and experience that we can tap into. We don't have to spend a lot of money. All we have to do is look at the system and try to change it. I hope that the department staff and the deputy minister and the minister take these concerns into account and try to address them. This problem is not going to go away. It is getting worse and worse. I know that there are doctors who actually moved to B.C. because they could not stand the workload. They could not stand the demand. There are many things that are going right with our health care system, and I would like to have some attention paid to this area.

Thank you.

MRS. FRITZ: I am going to be very brief because I know Denis has a question as well. I wasn't going to make a comment, Mr. Minister, but I'm going to simply because the Member for Edmonton-Riverview commented that she believed that you are spending far too much on the area of prevention and screening programs in particular. I quite frankly was very pleased to see on page 217 that you have allocated \$2.3 million for the breast cancer screening program. I happen to think that far too often it's treatment that gets our attention.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yvonne, just one second. I think Linda has a point of order, a clarification maybe.

MRS. SLOAN: I think the hon. member didn't clearly hear what I said. I didn't condemn the province for screening. I said that the incidence of breast cancer and cervical cancer is on the increase and that all they appear to be focused on doing is screening, not looking at the root causes or perhaps the contributing causes of those diseases. So to suggest that I was condemning them for screening is incorrect.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you for that clarification. Yvonne.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I can look at *Hansard* later, but I was quite surprised at what was said, so I wrote it down verbatim.

I'll just make my comments. I really think it's important to have screening programs, and I think that far too often it's treatment that gets our attention. I know that there are those who believe that a disease care system is really what keeps us healthy, and I think that needs to be balanced with promotion and prevention.

My question to the minister once again – and I've asked it previously for a number of years. I really believe that this is the way in which you are going with this when I see it here in the budget. I know that you're a strong advocate for screening, especially in the area of women's issues, but I'm wondering whether or not this funding is going to be utilized for a desperately needed provincewide breast cancer screening program, which I think should have a holistic women's centered approach and should be targeted at the 50- to 69-year-old age group.

Having said that, as well I notice that just above that you've allocated \$4.7 million to the implementation of the cervical cancer screening program. I was really pleased to see that in the budget as well, because I happen to believe it's long overdue. We know that the pap smear is the single most cost-effective screening test that there is in modern medicine. I will be following it closely, because this approach to cervical screening is fairly new this year in that it will be an organized approach. What I would ask in that regard is: how are Alberta women going to be accessing the program? I'm really pleased to see it in place.

Also, just a brief question – I asked you about it in the last estimates – about anorexia and bulimia, you know, the whole area of eating disorders, especially for our young women. I'll write you my questions in that regard, because I wanted to be brief here today.

Also, I did want to ask the associate minister about an area in AADAC, and I know that you are familiar with this issue. It's about the Oxford House Foundation proposal for AADAC funding. I really think it's important that you ask your officials to relook at their mandate for AADAC funding. It's behind the times. They should be looking at community-based, cost-effective approaches such as Oxford House, and they've neglected to do that and should be just far more sensitive to that type of programming. I know that you are as a minister, because we've had that discussion, and I appreciate it very much.

Also, as the previous member said as well, I really, really appreciate what you've done with the whole area of the PDD issue. You've worked very hard on that issue and have been very passionate about it, and your recommendations are outstanding. They are really going to help the community. So thank you and thank you, Mr. Minister.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Yvonne. Denis.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I, too, believe that this was a very good presentation. In fact, I've asked for copies of your notes, because it'll certainly help me with questions that I'm having with respect to constituents.

I just want to briefly touch on Bill 11 because it was brought up here so much this morning. I think one of the things that needs to be done is that we need to have some specific examples of the potential benefit, because there is so much falsehood. I won't call it lies because that attacks the people, but it's false information being distributed out there by those who don't want to see the health care system improve with time, improve with the technology changes that

are occurring daily, all of those things. I think we need some very specific examples of potentials. Part of it, as I see it – and correct me if I'm wrong – is that there are roughly 130,000 WCB cases a year. I know that there are also other groups of people who are exempt from the Canada Health Act. I think RCMP, military . . .

10:52

MRS. SLOAN: It's a minority.

MR. HERARD: Pardon me?

MRS. SLOAN: It's a minority of people.

MR. HERARD: Excuse me. I'm asking the questions. You had your chance.

MR. JACQUES: A point of order. I thought the Member for Calgary-Egmont had the floor.

THE CHAIRMAN: He did.

MR. JACQUES: Would you please interject then?

We had the courtesy of extending to you in your deliberations . . .

MRS. SLOAN: There were several points of order.

MR. JACQUES: Okay. Here we go again. Can you not extend the simple courtesy to our members that we extended to each of yours? It would be most appreciated.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. You've made your point.

Denis, can you continue, please?

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. You see, I don't know and I don't have the information to be able to determine just what potential there might be. Out of, say, the tens of thousands of cases, hundreds of thousands of cases perhaps, I don't know how many of those actually require surgery. I don't know how many of those could be safely done in an approved facility, given that the College of Physicians and Surgeons would provide an accreditation to a particular facility to do certain surgeries. I don't know what potential is there, but I think we need to know those kinds of potentials.

If you really look at the situation and see that currently our system provides services for people that are not covered under the Canada Health Act, you know, for reasons of having been exempted at the time that it was created, surely any clear-thinking Albertan would realize that if there are a number of these procedures that can be safely done, not because politicians say so but because the college says so in terms of accreditation and so on, then for every one of those that is done in one of those facilities, that opens up a spot in the public health care system. I think we need to know more details about the potentials that in fact exist in reality with respect to that. So those were a few comments with respect to Bill 11.

My first question deals with parents of graduate nurses and dietitians and so on that ask me why there are no full-time nursing positions available when we seem to have literally hundreds of postings and we can't seem to hire nurses. These people are telling me that they can't get jobs. I need to have a detailed explanation of how this whole thing works to provide to my constituents. It seems to me that we've got a number of nurses and other qualified practitioners that are graduating from our facilities, yet they don't seem to be able to find full-time jobs. We're crying for them. We need them. So I need to know what's wrong with this picture. What's the process? Are these perhaps contractual things that are

preventing the hiring of these nurses on a full-time basis? I mean, do you have to bump up the whole line of nurses? Just how does this work? I can't explain to my constituents why that is, and I'd really like to hear a detailed explanation on that.

My second question deals with, again, constituents who ask me why it is that virtually any time of the day or night in the city of Calgary when you go to an emergency room you have a room full of people sitting there in various stages of discomfort and pain waiting to get in. I'm just wondering what's happened to this system when about 50 percent of our family physicians in the city of Calgary operate out of walk-in clinics. They no longer take any kind of hospital work whatsoever. They don't admit sick patients. They send them to emergency. So here we are duplicating the work, plus we have to hire doctors now to look after the cases that they won't look after but inside the hospital at a tremendously higher cost again. We have all these people waiting to get in, yet nobody points to where the problem is.

Why can't we get doctors to be doctors anymore? I just don't understand why we can't call a spade a spade. We have to find a solution to this. You know, if a doctor decides that they don't want to do any kind of hospital work, well, maybe there should be a different fee schedule for those folks because they're not doing the whole job. They're only doing part of the job. So if they want to be an up-front screener rather than a doctor, then maybe we should recognize that and pay them differently.

The bottom line is that it really upsets me, as you can probably tell, that we hear all these words from associations like the AMA, yet they've known of this problem for years. I know, because I brought it up many times when they used to sit at the SPCs here, yet nothing gets done. So, excuse me, you can't speak out of both sides of your mouth. We have to hold them accountable. They're professionals. We revere them – we look up to them; we trust them – yet they're the cause of the major problem here in this case, in my view. So when are we going to deal with that?

The last question, which is not going to be so emotionally charged, deals with Wellnet and where we're at with respect to that. You know, we've been working on this, I know, going all the way back to '94-95 and probably longer than that. Some of the people in this room have probably worked on it longer than that. So I'd sort of like to know: what has Wellnet achieved so far, and in the next budget year can we look forward to the potential, the possibility that we can improve the delivery of health care in this province at a lower cost without cutting another thing?

I've believed for all these years that if you put visibility into the system plus the potential of clinical practice guidelines affecting care throughout the province so that everybody solves the problem in the most cost-efficient way and the way that is best for the patient, then misuse, abuse, all of those kinds of factors – you can in fact do more with less without cutting another thing. Of course, we haven't been cutting since 1995. It's gone up by – I can't remember the number; I'm making it up – \$1.8 billion or something. I mean, that's a huge, huge increase in spending. I'd like to know if Wellnet is going to in my lifetime produce the kinds of benefits that I know it could produce if we got on with respect to being able to put visibility into the system, because if you can't measure it, you can't control it.

Those are my questions. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. Thank you.

Are there any other questions from government members?

Mr. Minister, would you like to have any final comments?

11:02

MR. JONSON: First of all, I thank members for their questions. They're, of course, fairly large in number and will require work to answer them in detail. We will provide our written booklet, although

I will not promise it immediately. It will take some time.

With respect to questions from government members – and I'm working backwards here very quickly – we can provide an overall update on Wellnet, but I think it's worth noting that we do have an actual on the ground and running program under what's titled the seniors' drug profile. It is possible in 22 hospital sites, which include the Misericordia and the University of Alberta hospitals, to access the drug profile of a patient who, for instance, in an emergency situation comes into one of those hospitals. This is particularly important with seniors so that you don't have to redo all the testing and so forth to decide what drug therapies they're getting before you decide on their treatment. It's often a very big problem with emergency situations.

The physician office systems are in the northeast part of Edmonton. They're working on a pilot project there to link up their information. We have a pharmaceutical information network under development. We're using Alberta Wellnet to develop our records and tracking for the Alberta breast cancer screening program. We're using the vehicle of Wellnet to look at the exchange of information on lab test results, pharmaceutical, telehealth, and telepsychiatry. Those are programs, particularly telehealth and telepsychiatry, that are actually up and running, serving patients on a daily basis. There's more to the program there. Metabolic screening for infants is another one where the information is being improved upon, and certainly efficiency is being improved there.

The other comment I'd just like to respond to – and I will respond to the Member for Redwater's questions, which were quite detailed. With respect to foreign-trained doctors, one of our initiatives this year is the expansion of the internship program. In that expansion there are places reserved for foreign-trained doctors: four in the coming year and then eight in the following year. It's perhaps modest, but it's in proportion to, say, what Ontario is doing. In Manitoba I think they've got two spaces. We do hope to expand that.

I think we also have to be sensitive to the long history of this area. It's being recognized and is something that I think is fair and needs to be done, but we have a long history here of the position of the physicians, particularly when there's been the domination of the College of Physicians and Surgeons and all the standards that they seem to feel had to be exactly the same as those of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons. It had a connection to the Commonwealth and so on as far as Canada is concerned. We're evolving and changing from that now, and I think that's good. That's a bit of the history of it. We are doing something there.

Finally, Madam Chairman, I thank members for their questions and attention. We are in Alberta Health and Wellness certainly committed to moving forward to strengthen our publicly administered, publicly funded health care system, to adhere to the principles of the Canada Health Act, and also I think it's very important to look at new and better ways of doing things. Whether we are referring to the utilization of technology through Alberta Wellnet or looking at new models of physician deployment or new models for workforce utilization, whether we're looking at new concepts in terms of caring for and providing housing for the aged, as outlined in the Broda report, I think we are in our business plan being responsible.

We're responding in a major way on the fiscal side in terms of actual resources, and we are not accepting the status quo in terms of our effort to change and to look for improvements and to be I think in some areas quite innovative. Some people in other provinces think we're kind of courageous in some of the very new things that we are piloting and looking to provide the basis for improvement on in the future.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

If there are no other questions from government members, I'd like to call for a motion to conclude discussion of the estimates and to rise and report.

Dave.

MR. BRODA: Yes. I move that

pursuant to Standing Orders 56 and 57 the designated supply subcommittee on Health and Wellness now conclude its consideration and debate on the 2000-2001 estimates of the Department of Health and Wellness prior to the conclusion of the four-hour period allocated and rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Dave. All in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried. Thank you very much.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 11:09 a.m.]

Title: Estimates of Children's Services, Monday, March 20, 2000

Date: 00/03/20

8:01 a.m.

[Mr. Melchin in the chair]

Designated Supply Subcommittee – Children's Services

Melchin, Greg, Chairman
Cao, Wayne
Cardinal, Mike
Johnson, LeRoy

Kryczka, Karen
Laing, Bonnie
Lougheed, Rob
MacDonald, Hugh

Massey, Don
Paul, Pamela
Shariff, Shiraz
Sloan, Linda

THE CHAIRMAN: Our time appointed is here. I'd like to welcome committee members. As far as procedure, we're here this morning for the designated supply subcommittee on Children's Services. We welcome the minister here with us and the members who were asked to be part of this committee.

I'd like to first put forward a motion for each of the members. We've actually discussed this amongst the various parties, and we will require, certainly, at some stage consent of the parties to approve this motion for the rules and procedures for this meeting this morning. I'd like to read it into the record to begin with. It says:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Orders 56 and 57 the designated supply subcommittee on Children's Services allocate the time for its consideration and debate of the 2000-2001 estimates of the Department of Children's Services as follows:

- (1) The time allocated for the subcommittee will be a maximum of three hours.
- (2) The minister responsible first addresses the subcommittee for a maximum of 20 minutes.
- (3) Official Opposition subcommittee members then have a maximum of two hours for questions and answers. Those members may allocate the time for questions among themselves as they see fit.
- (4) The independent Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs then has a maximum of 15 minutes for questions and answers.
- (5) Government subcommittee members have the remainder.

Be it further resolved that in the event government subcommittee members do not exercise their right to utilize the remaining time, the chair shall call for a motion to conclude discussion of the estimates and to rise and report.

Do we have any questions? I'd like to entertain, then, a motion to accept this resolution, if someone would like to so move. Okay; the Member for Calgary-West. Are we all agreed? Any opposed? Thank you.

Then pursuant to that resolution, we will turn the time over to the Minister of Children's Services for a maximum of 20 minutes for her opening comments.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to begin by introducing the staff that are with me today, asking and begging your indulgence that although we have a lot of staff present here this morning, this is a new ministry, in fact, carved out of the previous family and social services, and this becomes an opportunity for staff to hear what other people have to say about the ministry and to reflect on what they have provided you in earlier packages relative to the ministry itself. We supplemented – and I hope you found it useful – the supplementary sheets that explain and express the programs that are delivered in the ministry beyond what is in the business plan.

I'm accompanied by the deputy minister, Paula Tyler; Keray Henke, who is assistant deputy minister in charge of strategic planning and administrative support, and if I could direct your attention, I'll just introduce them as they sit: Darren Hedley, working in finance; Murray Finnerty, assistant deputy minister who is

working in terms of accountability performance measures and the executive director with the partnerships and linkages that are part of the ministry; my assistant, Elan Gough. Bill Meade is here, very kindly, as the CEO from Calgary, who will be able to assist with any of the questions you might have about what is actually going on in the street in terms of the actual CFSAs; and Bill Rice from communications. Right behind Darren is Tim Moorhouse, who is better known as Mr. FCSS in the province, and Lynn Groves-Hautmann, who handles the things with handicapped children's service, and Bryan Kelly, who is assisting in the very important work of the caseload review. I think that's all my staff, and I welcome Lynn to the proceedings as well today.

If I may, coming to the speaking notes, I'll welcome every member here. I am going to attempt to be brief in order to maximize the opportunity for everybody to ask questions. We will also do our very best to get those answers back within one week, and what we can get back within one week, we will certainly so do. If it isn't to your satisfaction a proper response, then we'll follow through.

The department in the business plan is highlighted. The child and family service authorities who essentially deliver our businesses. FCSS, that's \$38 million worth of our \$532 million, delivers, as you know, in a partnership with municipalities and First Nations and with us – of course, at least in the most part funded by the federal government of Canada.

The three divisions I highlighted in the introduction. Partnership and innovation: through that we're looking not only at the research but at the integration that we have with other ministries, with health, with education, with intergovernmental relations, also with housing and community development and other ministries that are very important partners to us. That's the whole ACI initiative that's contained therein. Our accountability in provincial services: the best practices performance management, which is something for us to not only evolve and develop but to improve upon; our provincial programs; and of course family and community support programs. Then in our strategy and support services we have really our essential administrative arm: our finance, legal, human resources, and the responsibility for strategic planning.

Provincial programs that are delivered predominately by the department include adoption services. Many of you will be familiar with the fact that we keep records of children that have been under our care in the government for a hundred years, and that's part of the postadoption registry. The day care staff qualifications and a lot of the training arm. The Alberta children's initiative, again, is part of the linkages with other ministries and family and community support services. A lot of the programs there that are generated at the local level are supplemented. I'll use the illustration of the after school child care last year in Edmonton. When we have other pressing needs, then we try and involve ourselves to supplement those resources, and in that particular case, we did so in partnership with Human Resources and Employment. Our role in the department is allocating funding and resources, establishing policies for and with the authorities, and monitoring the authorities themselves and their performance. Our budget, as I've said already, is \$537 million this year, and it includes \$485 million for children and families and \$38 million for family and community support services.

Through the 18 authorities we assess local needs, establish priorities, and plan for the region, ensuring that family and children have reasonable access to quality services, that they follow provincial standards, and we monitor and assess those services. Those services are delivered by staff. You'll note in your briefings that there are over 2,000 staff that are direct employees through the child and family service authorities, and there are also contract workers that work through contract to the authorities. There are over 3,000 of those people. You'll note further in information that you may have received either in the business plan of Human Resources or in the manner in which we have delivered information to you that there were increased dollars for contract staff to permit at least a 5 percent flexibility in funding of those staff.

We have a significant provision of services at the local level. Handicapped children's services is one of the biggest ones. You've read an awful lot recently about how Albertans, North Americans, and people all over the world are concerned about the incidence of handicapped children. In Alberta we have 70 children who cost between \$45,000 and \$70,000. In fact, speaking to one authority we have spent over \$200,000 transferring this child back and forth to get programs that are very individually tailored in Colorado. So there are some very huge costs attributable to some of our caseload.

If I can reflect back, some of you will be very well aware that we had to go for supplementary estimates for two reasons. Number one, we had not forecast the number of children that we would actually serve. We served 12,922 children at the end of December of '99, and that's well over what we had ever anticipated.

8:11

The second thing is that much of the income for child welfare cases had rested within the income supports for families, and defining and reorganizing to have that income available has taken some work not only in adjusting our forecast but making sure there's enough to look after at least 200 more cases than we had in October, when I was first talking to Treasury about what we had. If you look at the children that are in care in their homes, about 61 children are receiving care in their homes, which was something that many of the government members had cited to me was an important thing to do. We also have children that are taken care of in group homes and foster homes, and we have an important responsibility in supplementing, on average, \$323 per day care family that has assistance so that they can work with their budget and also have proper support for children. We also supplement families through family day homes, and those are through contracts. I believe there are 80 contracts with the child and family service authorities in the province, predominantly in the major urban settings. So there are a number of ways we are augmenting services that children receive at the local level, and those are part of the driving cost.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I think it's astonishing that this year there are no predictions for increasing the child population in Alberta. In fact, our rate of growth in caseload isn't as rapid as it was three years ago. Nonetheless, the cases are becoming increasingly more complex.

When you look at cases that are cited therein, they're almost too horrible to speak of, multiple partners, some absolutely ghastly things about children. About a third of those that we have in care have some alcohol-related defect who don't even learn from bad past experiences, like the child who was raped after getting into a white van who said: well, I guess I've learned my lesson; I shouldn't go into white vans. That was a very serious thing for her. We have to start earlier, start now, and build those bridges for children and families in the very first stages of development, from zero to six. That is increasingly what was discussed at the forum and in the task force for children at risk. That is increasingly our emphasis because of our overwhelming awareness of the gaps that exist when parents

don't know how to parent or when 25 year olds that are going on mentally 15 have increasing numbers of children because they want somebody to love and to love them back. So that is, in fact, the very real challenge that we have.

Totally CFSAs received \$370.8 million for managing their own caseloads. The authority budget is a very complex formula that was worked out in consultation with all the authorities, with all the providers coming together at a table and looking at the things that really impact the rising costs of dealing with children. They determined that the right factors were the number of children in the region, the number of children in single-parent families, the number of children in low-income families, the number of children in very low-income families, and the number of aboriginal children.

I've talked about First Nations, an important element, of course, with the CFSA boards, with representation equaling the number of both aboriginal and nonaboriginal. Thirty-seven of those First Nations groups deliver their own child welfare services, and eight use the local authorities and exclusively contract there. I'm very sensitive to the fact that by putting our executive director, Nancy Reynolds, in charge of these contracts, as we review and negotiate contracts with First Nations groups, we are increasingly being prompted by them to allow them to be total masters of their own destiny in the delivery of children's services within their boundaries and sometimes beyond. Many of them want to have relationships with other large urban CFSAs in order to take care of children that are off site so that those children never lose the cultural and spiritual influence of the original First Nations body.

Looking at our child welfare caseload, it is difficult and more complex to manage. The critical issues have seen us rise from 8,000 to 11,000 cases between '93-94 and '98-99. I've talked about the number of children that we have within our ministry. Many of these children with multiple needs have fetal alcohol syndrome, mental health concerns, behavioural issues, and physical disabilities, and naturally we don't do all of the service to children ourselves. We have at least 1,000 children that have been part of the PDD board's mission in the past that will be managed through the child and family services authorities. The Mental Health Board received \$5 million last fall to work on the crisis management for children with mental health concerns. So a great part of what we do, not only with the FCSS and CFSAs, is managing programs for children and families with other partners.

We have needs for highly specialized treatment and a vast array of services from professionals. If I may, when you have noticed that you have clinical psychologists and other professionals who want a 50 percent upwards adjustment of their fees, it becomes very hard for local authorities to manage, and they are really challenged on those contracts. But I'm very confident that with the work we have by Bill Meade and other CEOs in this province, they will be extremely accountable and they will be much better monitored in the future than we've ever been able to do it in the past.

We have provided, in our review of caseload growth, terms of reference and other information and recent press releases to you. I just draw your attention to the fact that on March 16, Youth Connections links young Albertans to greater employment opportunities as part of our partnership with Clint Dunford, and the task force that was announced by the Minister of Justice on the 17th related to ways that we can work better with family court. These are all things that will impact our community-based delivery, and hopefully we'll get a lot of information from that.

One of the things I mentioned earlier was early support and prevention. Two years ago for programs for early intervention we provided about \$2 million. Last year it was \$18.5 million, and this year, in this coming year's budget, it is \$21.5 million. So it is a re-emphasis of what we see as significant to do in our funding of local authorities.

Some may ask me about the Youth Secretariat. Gary Severtson,

simply put, is in charge of reviewing all the youth needs throughout Alberta, and he's doing an excellent job of going about Alberta and talking with adolescents about ways and means by which we can serve their mental health issues and their transition to adulthood in a better fashion. Mr. Chairman, just like we do not kick out our 18 year olds and say good-bye, farewell, you cannot expect foster families and children who are still in need of family support to part, so we have significant numbers of extensions, which are actually increasing the costs as our child welfare caseload ages. I think that's an important element to remember when you're looking at our business plan.

Our task force will be reporting very soon; that's the Task Force for Children at Risk. Taber released some preliminary results from this past year, as you saw just last week. About \$750,000 is identified in this budget, and it is not what our MLA task force is spending. It has been spent on other initiatives to support the community of Taber in their request to learn more about aftermath protocol and to provide programs and counseling and special services for those children.

I've commented about the Alberta children's initiative. I would ask every one of you later to become a crusader to get people to stop drinking. Our fetal alcohol initiative is delivered through the 18 committees at the local level, committees that partner various providers, but I'm not convinced that we're going far enough yet in actually telling people what the impact of alcohol is on pregnant women.

The Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, family violence, and protection of the victims by removing the perpetrator, which was done in our legislation last year, is also administered here. We looked after last year about 4,900 women in shelters and over 6,000 children.

8:21

In conclusion – and I hope I'm still within my time frame – why invest in our children in Alberta? I'd say this: quite simply because somebody else isn't. I look at the fact that on Saturday night, attending a concert with singer Michael Burgess, I'm the only one there with a grandchild. It's because I can't bear the thought of him leaving; he's moving. But I looked around the audience, and people were surprised to see a child. We don't do what your parents and mine did. We don't go places as families the way we did. We don't do those kinds of things in society. It is not this government's fault. It's nobody's fault here, but it is a societal change that has seen us lever to babysitters and to other providers the kinds of things our parents used to do.

As long as society tolerates that type of approach, then we must do something, because if one of those children happened to grow up and lead a very at-risk existence and end up in the court system – and many of those who do end up in courts have a background of FAS or FAE or some other horrible negligent or sexual risk – if they happen to harm one of our children that have grown up in a different environment, then we'll only have ourselves to blame.

I'm here to answer your questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Minister Evans. We'll turn the time over to the Official Opposition subcommittee members for two hours. You'll have the time as you see fit, be it to rotate amongst yourselves as to how much time you want to take for questions. You could also have the opportunity for more of an open dialogue with the minister or for written questions, purely at your discretion.

From Edmonton-Riverview, Linda Sloan.

MRS. SLOAN: Good morning, everyone. My thanks to the minister and the members of the ministry for being here this morning.

To begin, I'd like to provide some positive statements with respect

to the activities of the ministry over the last year. We have certainly seen an increase in the willingness of the minister and the ministry to provide information to us on critical issues relative to Children's Services and the provision of supports and programs for vulnerable children in this province, and we'd like to acknowledge that on the record. I think it's also important to indicate that with respect to vulnerable children and the developmental needs of children in this province in the critical period from birth to six years of age, personally I view those particular initiatives as nonpartisan initiatives and have endeavoured, with the receptivity of the minister, to provide support for those children for whom we have not succeeded in making interventions in those critical years and now have to cope with the aftermath, through providing services in child welfare and in the programs for disabilities.

I would also like to indicate on the record that the Official Opposition would like to see the government succeed in their efforts to review child welfare and the Children's Advocate's office, and we would also like to see this province have the lowest child welfare caseload in the country, not through initiatives that callously reduce the caseload but through meaningful initiatives that actually make the development of children and our family environments more healthy. So that is the philosophy Mr. Chairman, with which we are approaching these estimates this morning.

We recognize, though, that there is, as there always is, a political ideology that takes precedence, runs the machine if you will, and we recognize those challenges as they exist for this ministry. We see the increased degree of funding that is in this year's budget from lottery estimates. We see the increased allocation from the federal government.

As I sat in the Health and Wellness estimates last Friday and reviewed the increasing millions of dollars that we put into high-tech procedures in this province with no accompanying statistics about the survival rate or quality of life for those particular recipients, I think we would be well served if we put an equal amount of money into the development of children. That is a goal that I think we could commit ourselves to working together to achieve.

My questions this morning are going to be provided under some particular theme areas, and it's our intention, Mr. Chairman, to approach our two hours in 20-minute intervals. I will not be taking my full 20. I'd like to have the minister respond to the first two theme areas of questions, and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods will proceed from there.

My first category of questions relates to the Social Care Facilities Review Committee, and I would like to ask the following questions. I could not find – and perhaps it was my own omission – where the funding allocation for this committee is in the budget. I'm wondering if it has been transferred or encompassed under another budget area. The minister is familiar, as am I, with some of the occurrences relative to this committee and its function in the last year, and I would like to ask the minister or deputy minister to explain how this committee was not fully apprized of its statutory mandate relative to investigations.

That reality came clear in the last – well, it actually arose through a complaint submitted in 1998 relative to the death of Mr. Wayne Oles. The committee was not informed of the complaint with regards to the death of this man or the subsequent request that it be investigated, and it is my understanding they were not fully aware that they had a statutory responsibility to investigate complaints. In the midst of that complaint being filed and that death occurring, a mandate change for this committee was instituted by the ministry which in essence breached the statute. It said that the mandate of the committee would now be to conduct reviews of the facilities, and that was the theme that was encompassed in the annual report tabled in the Legislature in November last year.

I would cite specifically from that report, and this is the report that's circulated to the public. The committee visits funded social care facilities in Alberta at least once every two years. These include group homes, vocational rehab centres, foster homes, day cares, family day homes, children's social care facilities, and women's shelters. The committee receives complaints and conducts investigations about the standards of care, treatment, and accommodations.

The reality is, however, Mr. Minister, that there are no regulations about how these investigations will occur, and I don't believe that they should be occurring or conducted on the basis of one case, but rather there should be a formalized process that is in regulations to guide it.

There is no incorporation in the performance measures of the ministry anything relative to the Social Care Facilities Review Committee: how many investigations they have conducted, how many complaints they've received, how many investigations were conducted by the ministry itself that perhaps in fact should have been conducted by this committee. I would ask whether or not there was any conscious or by omission directing of incidents requiring investigations away from this committee into the perhaps more controlled environment of the ministry itself. Accompanying that, how many investigations relative to incidents in social care facilities were done internally by the ministry in the last three years? I would also ask: what initiatives will be undertaken and what budget allocated to train and educate the committee re its investigative function and to put the necessary human resources in place to allow those investigations to occur? I would also ask if the ministry is prepared to make publicly available a policy and procedure manual for this committee like is accessible for the Citizens' Appeal Panel decision processes.

8:31

My second category of questions this morning is relative to deaths in care. Consecutively since assuming the responsibilities as critic for family and social services and now the Children's Services ministry, I have asked this government: how many children have died in care during the past fiscal year? These are not statistics that are annually published. If they are tracked, they are not publicly available. We also acknowledge and are aware that the medical examiner's report has not been published or available since 1994, and the reasons given when that was initially asked was because the funding allocations had not been there to permit them to publish an annual report on an annual basis.

In 1997 Minister Oberg released after a number of questions in the House an informal statement relative to deaths of children either known or in the care of child welfare up to 1997, and it was 52. We've had nothing, really, since that time to indicate what the number is today. This remains an issue that is not a performance measure. In fact the performance measure, as it's cited, is the "percentage of children who stay free from abuse or neglect while receiving child protection services." That, again, is a further step away from accountability, in my mind. Previously what the ministry tracked, at least had made available in '97, were deaths while a child was known or in the care of child welfare. So if they had received services in the last fiscal year and then had subsequently died, that death was included in those numbers. According to this measure, you're looking at only tracking those "who stay free from abuse or neglect" – no mention of deaths – "while receiving child protection services."

I would raise in this category of questions that we have seen for those children that have died an extensive delay in public inquiries in this province relative to their deaths, and I've raised Jordan Quinney as an example. Acknowledging the importance of the justice proceedings, is it not also equally important that there be

some public investigation and accountability relative to the government's role and responsibility for these children while in care?

We've had one further reported death just in the early part of this year in Red Deer in a foster home. We've also been made aware that perhaps there was at least one other death that occurred in the latter part of last year that was not publicly reported. We would urge the government to make those statistics available. I think they are a measure. While not a positive measure they do assist in determining whether or not our interventions are being successful and to a great degree can guide the ministry and their authorities in the development of programs and interventions in the future.

I've raised in previous estimates the Grove inquiry, which was undertaken in B.C. in 1995 after the death of a child that was receiving care from child welfare. We've not seen that kind of substantive investigation. In that child's death they looked at every contact that had been made by the department with that child and family throughout the last, I believe it was, year or two years of his life. I would like to urge the government to try and make that something that is incorporated in the coming year's business plan and budget.

With those two groups of questions, Mr. Chairman, I would be most interested in hearing the minister's reply.

MS EVANS: Thank you for your opening statements and the acknowledgment of the work the staff are doing in the ministry to be open and accountable and as transparent as possible in the delivery of services to children.

I think, as usual, the member of Her Majesty's opposition has highlighted two areas of interest which are of deep concern to this government. First of all, I fully acknowledge the issues that have been brought before the government through her intervention of providing a notice and laying some question and complaint, and the endorsement of the Ombudsman that in fact the complaint was a valid complaint, I believe, was a letter that highlighted that there should be some review of this in the procedural sense.

I'm not going to be able to give full detail of that except to say that the Social Care Facilities Review Committee, although not highlighted within this – at the very first stages, while we were building the business plan, we were not sure what the final home would be for the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. Noting that the dollars for the committee rest with us – there's a reference to the review process on page 47 in the business plan, but the dollars for it come under our corporate administration. I believe that overall it's about \$100,000 – is that correct? – to manage the whole committee, for the work that they do. That committee is still returning to me some response to the questions that have been raised and the concerns that have been identified by the Ombudsman.

I'd like to supplement that by just another acknowledgment, and perhaps it's illuminating to people here. You would be aware from reading recent newspaper articles that the present residence for group home inspections is also with this ministry. So the deputies from the various departments have been meeting to review those standards as well. I think that the points that have been made about having a proper manual, about having it as publicly accountable and transparent as the child welfare review panel are well made. I think that's the ultimate goal with the group home review, and some of those things that have been highlighted with it are not unlike some of the issues that may well have been raised with the Social Care Facilities Review Committee.

I was very satisfied when I released their report earlier in this present year, the year 2000, that the committee itself believed that there was much to be done both in the review of how staff are trained and how facilities are attended to, but I would ask the chair's

indulgence and that of others here to provide more detailed information to that perhaps in response.

The second point I wanted to comment on is about deaths in care. I've actually looked at what our neighbours to the west have been doing, as has been highlighted here by the hon. member's question, what they do in British Columbia in very detailed investigations. They investigate in British Columbia not simply the death of children that are in care but the death of every child. There may well be merit because there could well be questions about the deaths of children that occur in this province. So through our review process, not only the review of the Children's Advocate but through the other work that the review committees are doing and even in our caseload review, I think it behooves us to take a look at whether we are doing this as prudently and learning as much as we can from that type of review.

I know there's no mention of deaths in the plan. To the hon. member I would highlight that one of the chief tasks of our assistant deputy minister on performance measures will be in fact to make sure that the performance measures more meaningfully focus on those things that can be primary indicators. I respect what you've said on performance measures on two counts: reviewing and reducing the child welfare caseload not because of poor practices but because the need simply no longer exists for some children. In terms of deaths of children in care, where we can learn from and do this better and abbreviate the process yet still have it thoroughly done, I think we would serve everyone well. I have spoken to families of children who have died while in care, and I know they would concur with that particular perspective. It leaves a shadow hanging for too long.

On the public accountability aspect I do agree, Mr. Chairman, with my officials. Later we will talk about an update on the release of those figures of deaths of children in care and provide what we can about our intent of when the next release will be relative to those.

8:41

One final point I would make on that. I have spoken directly with social workers who have been attending to families where a child has died in care. It is a most painful circumstance for them as well, so when we release those figures, we will try and be sure that we are releasing them with the thought that we will learn from that rather than affixing blame or attempting to punish anybody. I know that that would be the member's intent.

So further information to come, and the department is making note.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Dr. Massey.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, Madam Minister. We all, at least most of us, come to the department through experiences in our constituency offices. I suspect that most often we don't hear from the people when things are going well, and we end up with those cases where things aren't going that well, but we've been well served in the office when we've called your department for help, and I appreciate that very much.

I wanted to ask some general questions, if I could. The Children's Forum. I went through and looked at a number of recommendations in the Children's Forum that would affect Learning; for instance, the recommendations on class size and the recommendations for early programs for young children. Who in the ministry is responsible for making sure that those things happen when they are really the responsibility of another ministry in terms of financing? [interjection] I'd rather have a conversation, if that's all right.

MS EVANS: If I may. The forum report in its entirety has gone to the deputies and the other ministers, and they will be responding in kind. Our package responding to the forum report will highlight what the Minister of Learning will bring back relative to class size, relative to things like school lunches, et cetera. That's how it will be done.

DR. MASSEY: So they won't fall through the cracks?

MS EVANS: No. In fact, that commitment has been made by Mrs. Klein and the volunteer committee as well as by our Premier that we would not allow them to fall through the cracks. Our ministry plays a co-ordinating role there.

If I may respond to something you might be asking. We have expended \$244,000 on the forum, and the amount I believe I gave you earlier, hon. member, was about a \$300,000, maybe \$309,000 expenditure for the forum. I'm just responding to you now that so far \$244,000 has been expended, and more bills are still coming in. It's relative to the printing and dissemination of the reports too. So you will hear both on the forum and on the task force hopefully later in the month of April, not that much later either. I'm hoping to have both of those reports out with at least our intent, what we would be doing with programs like the class size.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. It's going to be interesting to see what is actually done, because as you know from your previous life, it's very expensive when you start reducing those class sizes.

MS EVANS: Well, if they went to the extent that they implied within the report, hon. member, our building branch would be very busy. It would be 24-hours-a-day school.

DR. MASSEY: That's right. We wouldn't have to worry about the utilization formula. It would no longer be a problem for schools.

May I ask about staff? There's a reference on page 57 where it looks at the "percentage of front-line staff with greater than one year of experience." Can you talk a little bit about staff and how easy it is or not to secure qualified staff? Associated with that, are there problems with government salaries and agency salaries, a difference in those that there was when we were talking to Clint Dunford about social services.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member has asked an excellent question. Absolutely there are problems. There are problems even with the student health initiative grabbing staff from our child and family services authorities, because school boards and regional health authorities pay more than our department currently does, or they seem to be able to afford to pay more.

Now, with our most recent settlement we will be coming up there, but there are also differences between staff that make it more attractive for staff to work with other parts of government even though their grid placement – and I've checked this very carefully – can seemingly describe similar duties. The contract agencies have been spending less. That's a bit of a blanket statement, acknowledging that there are various contracts, but there's about a 5 percent adjustment in the budget this year to hopefully help those contractors pay more.

I think we still have some work to do with day care situations, because since we removed that operational grant to day care, day cares have not been paying their staff as much. Now, by putting the benefits from the national child benefit directly to the low-income family, we have removed that situation. So when you're talking about staff with one year of experience, up in the north we have a hard time because people want to attract staff, that we train so very

well, from other areas, even other provinces. I think it's part of the supply and demand.

To that end I will be meeting with members of the board of governors and the presidents of universities and colleges about the middle of April and talking about two things. First, about the staff training itself, so that we teach staff to train others, for trainers to train others, to recognize that the most important thing a child who's robbed of hope needs is to get some hope back and to build some of that hope within themselves. Counselors' training, social workers' training is an important element so that they feel capable of coping. The second thing is to make sure that in the articulation of the two- and four-year program we're recognizing that the two-year program was always intended to serve those far reaches of the province where we couldn't get four-year qualified staff. Members of the association of registered workers did accept that there could be a qualification differential yet still exist on the same grid, recognizing that there was a need for somebody with some degree of qualification.

So there are a number of issues in short, Mr. Chairman, that surround the overall staffing issue. At the very outset, when I first took over this ministry, my thought was that I had to find placements for children who needed care. My first mission, I believe, is to find ways of giving people the tools so that they can find placements for children in care, and this whole performance area is one of the parts that we will be intensely focusing on in the caseload review. That will be able to tell us just exactly what burdens are borne by staff, and it will tell us other things, how we can help those staff workers work better.

If I may just add to that point. I'm very satisfied that this government provided computers and some of the software and hardware that would go along with making the jobs of people in the field much easier, but the training that has to still be done to help – even the use of transcribers would often help social workers to do their work and have the flexibility in the management of their own caseload. I just wanted to point out that we're well aware of some of those issues that surround the staffing element, and when I do meet with child and family service authorities, they kindly arrange for me to meet with staff so that I can understand from the front lines what they're actually facing.

I may have gone on too long. I'm sorry.

DR. MASSEY: It just seems that stability for those workers who are working with families that are in such distress is really crucial, that they stay with them for a long period of time to get to know them and to help them solve their problems.

I have to confess that I'm not quite clear on the sorting out with the department of human resources. Has separating out the support for families caused any difficulty in trying to serve children, having the money in that human resources budget? It goes to a question I was able to ask in the human resources estimates, and that was on the support level for families: how was it determined how much families would receive each month? That seems to be so crucial and related to what happens to children.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member has highlighted and profiled something I intend to take to agenda and priorities and to Treasury, and that is: how are we through the various ministries supporting those that are very low income or low income? We have through Community Development a housing rent supplement, for example. We have a number of programs for children in need. We have foster care programs. We have support for single-income families. But overall I don't think we have as clear a picture as I think would be useful for this government in defining the levels of support.

8:51

On the separation of the two ministries I'm not believing that we reduced or missed a beat in terms of the actual care that's provided for families. I haven't received that type of complaint, although it is true that people have profiled poverty. Where we're doing a lot of work with the Youth Secretariat and Gary Severtson's work is focusing on children in need and the support they get when they are over 18 and making that transition to adulthood. That's one area where we're working very hard with Human Resources and Employment.

I have to tell you that even when I was Minister of Municipal Affairs, it astounded me that when you met with some of the single-income families and very low-income families in Calgary, for example, they may not even be aware that their rent is supplemented through rent supplement to their landlord. In the articulation of any of these programs I think it's not to try and illustrate that we're spending more but to illustrate where the needs are greatest and where we could actually fill the gap with a more positive result. So I don't think it's exclusive to our ministry that we're looking at some of these potentials for dropping the ball.

DR. MASSEY: It's not your ministry but the support for those families that need assistance. I was surprised – and I guess I should have followed it up – that there is no real rationale for setting those levels of support, that there isn't a basket of costs that are looked at. At least, the minister seemed to indicate that it was sort of a political balancing act in terms of how much you could give without having people become upset, and I guess that upset me too.

MS EVANS: I heard last year several times, as we did in the House here, about LICO versus the MBM system of measuring the support that's required for a family. I don't know who will ever resolve the scale, but I think the important thing in Alberta is to make sure that we have the dollar support so that families don't go hungry. The bottom line for me is that if the family has the children fed but the mother not, that's not a successful program either. So we will work on that, and in responding more in-depth to your question, I will ask the Minister of Human Resources and Employment to help me in my written response to you.

DR. MASSEY: My question is more of a general question, and you may not even want to answer it. Does it in any way concern you where the money comes from for this department for education, for instance from lotteries, and the growing dependence upon that source of funding?

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, it is a philosophical question that I have asked myself a number of times. I know the revenue source is \$1.4 million within this budget, and I suppose that I'd have to say that as politicians we kid ourselves if we gather revenue in and pretend that it's not going into one pot. It is all going into one pot. I think the most important thing is: are we assuring that needs should always be provided for with that \$1.4 million? I believe they should be. I actually believe there might be some way that in the future we could work with the Ministry of Gaming to see if any of the programs that relate to addictions, to FAS/FAE could be very targeted with the dollars from that, because there is an element of education of people at the local level in the community-based programs. Just like the credit counseling services provided through the Minister of Government Services, it seems like there is a direct cause and effect or underlying tenets.

So, yes, if it was going to be threatened by it being pulled away, I think it would be tragic, but I can assure you that the dollars there would not be threatened. It would have to come from yet another

revenue source. Mr. Chairman, I am saying that to some degree when we do gather revenues, when we do use them for provincial programs, they do become part of the general revenue fund no matter how we might want to describe it to ourselves.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. That's fine for now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Gold Bar, I guess. You can actually allocate the time amongst yourselves back and forth as you wish.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, hon. minister and everyone.

I have a number of questions at this time and specifically in regards to the regions or authorities. I see we have roughly the same number of authorities as we do regional health authorities in this province. I'm curious, as to whenever the department was set up, how these authorities were also determined. For the hon. minister's convenience, on page 83 of estimates is the list of course.

My first question would be: why is there consistently a decrease in the funding within 12 of the 18 child and family services authorities for day cares? How much of this can be attributed to the decrease in the operating allowance?

My next question would be: to what does the department attribute the variance of increased funding in the areas of child welfare for the different regions? Why is the Sun Country child and family services authority forecast to receive a 20 percent or better increase in funding for child welfare? This would lead one to question how many additional children this is anticipated to assist?

Then we go down to southeast Alberta. Why is Southeast Alberta child and family services authority forecast to receive an over 28 percent increase in funding for child welfare? Why does this region require a 17 percent increase in funding for other program costs, and what are these other costs?

Calgary Rocky View now. Why is Calgary Rocky View forecast to receive over a 30 percent increase, a large increase, in funding for child welfare? How many additional clients will be served by this money, and how many additional staff will be hired and in what positions? Why does Calgary Rocky View require an additional close to 20 percent, I believe, for other program costs, and what are these additional program costs?

Why is the Diamond Willow authority forecast to receive a 20 percent increase in funding for child welfare. Again, how many additional children is this anticipated to assist?

The Ribstone authority. Why is it now forecast to receive an over 27 percent increase in funding for child welfare? How many additional children is this anticipated to assist? Why is this region needing an additional 15 percent for other program costs, and what are these additional costs?

Now, over to West Yellowhead. Why is the West Yellowhead authority also receiving close to 12 percent less funding for day care?

The Keystone authority. Why is the Keystone authority receiving also close to 14 percent less for day care?

Now, the Ma'Mōwe Capital region is forecast to receive close to a 30 percent increase in funding for child welfare. I'm curious. How many additional children here are to be assisted with this increase? Why does this region need an additional over 17 percent in other program costs?

Now the next one. Why is the Sakaw authority forecasted to receive a 20 percent increase in funding for child welfare? How many additional children is this anticipated to assist?

I see the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca here. I'm glad he is here.

9:01

MR. CARDINAL: Your Cree's not too bad.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay.

Now, the next authority down the list for me is the Sakaigun. They are forecasted to receive 12 percent less funding for their day care, as well.

Why is region 13 forecasted to receive a 30 percent increase in funding for child welfare, and how many additional children is this anticipated to assist? Why does this region receive an additional 18 percent in other program costs, and what are these additional costs?

Now region 14. Why is region 14 forecasted to receive a 14 percent increase in funding for child welfare? Again, how many additional children is this anticipated to assist? Why does this region receive 7 percent less for day care?

Why is the Awasak authority forecasted to receive a 14 percent increase in funding for child welfare, and how many additional children are going to be helped with this initiative? Why does this region receive 8 percent less for day care?

The Silver Birch authority. Why is the Silver Birch authority forecasted to receive a 16 percent increase in funding for child welfare? How many additional children is this anticipated to assist? Why does this region receive 6 percent less for day care?

There's one more authority here. Why is the Neegan authority forecasted to receive 11 percent less funding for day care? Where is the difference going to be made up there?

The last one on the list is the Métis settlements. Why is the Métis settlements authority forecasted to receive a 43 percent increase in funding for child welfare? Again, how much of this money that will be provided will result in frontline assistance? How many additional children is this anticipated to assist? Why does this region receive that amount of funds?

I'm also curious about the ministry income statement that has been provided. We look at the revenue, and in one section it is mentioned – I find it ironic that in internal government transfers so much of this money is funded through lotteries. I'd think there would be problems in some families certainly with the income earners having difficulty with gambling. The transfers from the federal government are a significant portion of the total funding. However, I see that in one income statement it's just mentioned as internal government transfers, and then in another one, which I do not have before me, lottery money is mentioned. Is that just an oversight, or is that part of the communications plan? I would be curious to know that.

I'm going to have some more questions, I believe, later on, but I would be very interested in the measure of low-income cutoff. Now, other people dismiss this as an entirely inappropriate measure of poverty or poverty-related conditions. How does this new department feel about the use of the low-income cutoff as an accurate measure to determine what is needed for people who have very little or very modest incomes? Is it a family of four? Is the benchmark going to be a \$35,000 income or what? Now with this new department, what exactly can we expect with LICO, or low-income cutoff?

The increased incidence of low birth weight children in the province. I can see from the performance measures, which have yet to be expanded – and that's understandable. What are we going to do about this problem?

The money that is being allocated. I see at the back we're looking at full-time equivalents. There's a significant number of new employees that are going to be in the department. Is the ministry concerned about recruiting staff, particularly about recruiting staff to areas of the province where traditionally it's been difficult to get people to work, in the far north and in some of the rural areas? I think the staff and the professional services that they will provide are

needed. What is the department at this time doing to ensure that they can recruit people to remote locations if they're needed?

At this time I will end my questioning and turn it over to one of my hon. colleagues. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Would you like a response first from the minister?

MR. MacDONALD: If she would like to, sure, but I can certainly wait until after my colleagues are done questioning.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's your choice.

MS EVANS: It's at the pleasure of the opposition. What's your preference? I could give some preliminary responses, and some more detail would be provided later. But I'd certainly have some responses.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. That's good.

MS EVANS: I'll make it very brief. Many of the questions the hon. member has asked are questions I had myself. In fact, if I could just reflect back to last year, the 18 authorities got together and from estimates calculated budgetary funds assigned to each of the 18 authorities. All 18 agreed to vote on where the placement of those funds would be. So in actual fact Calgary and Edmonton received less in that adjustment and in that work that was done by the 18 authorities. The predictions, quite simply put, had not forecast as accurately as they could have the placement need for all the children. We overestimated some of the aboriginal needs, and we have not targeted them as well as they might be in some areas. We have also seen an adjustment based on the formula I talked about earlier, with the single parent, the low income, and the very low income adjusted to the actual needs.

We've also had huge growth in caseload in some particular areas. Sometimes children are fostered outside an authority, and this is one of the new wrinkles, Mr. Chairman, that's giving a lot of angst not only to the authorities but to our staff as they try to sort out the interauthority protocol of dealing with those children that are fostered somewhere else.

If I could just make one observation in response to the day care issue, Medicine Hat found to its astonishment that it had many more children who needed day care subsidy than they actually had subsidies assigned for. It is a policy of government to provide those subsidies, so we provide them. We just make those adjustments. We've tried to work the adjustments this year so that it's more clear who gets what within the context of the programs they are delivering to each.

9:11

If I may on the staff recruitment thank you for your comment and observation. It's something that we have to work on, that we are working on. My earlier remarks about the work we're doing with the training institutions hopefully will help us in making sure that we cover some of the circumstances.

I wanted to just comment on your low-income cutoff acknowledgment. As you know even our hon. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, has questioned the use of this measure across Canada. It is a measure that has been challenged both for the elements it contains and the lack of recognition of some. There's no regional variance allowed in there, so it becomes problematic. It does reflect a judgment, too, of what it takes to live in our society, and it's different within some parts of Canada. So in a sense what we try to do with the authorities is balance those costs. We have a modest contingency. For example, if a far northern group needs additional

support, they can get that by appealing to the ministry for additional dollars to be transferred for something like transportation for sparsity and distance and so on. So we have some modest capacity to help with that.

The other thing we have to always be very cognizant of – and the authorities themselves at the community base agreed with this formula because they recognize that while they may have a distance problem there, some of the children that are resident predominantly are fetal alcohol children and are probably in this community. Although I'm not saying they're not elsewhere, there's a good congregation of them here that it costs more to deliver the service to. You've probably heard me speak about estimates for a million dollars for a lifetime and some as high as \$1.5 million if they're affected by FAS/FAE.

Mr. Chairman, can I assure you that on the very specifics of the adjustments both in child population and why we have done certain things to adjust those funding formulas as well as other references that have been made by the hon. member, we will get that detailed information back to you right away, but as you leave, just know that most of the time the general answer is adjustments in real population as opposed to projected population.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. The next categories of my questions will relate to the goals and performance measures, children's authorities, and liability contingencies. With due respect to the minister, the goals and key performance measures contained within the business plan this year are simply not good enough. They really provide us with no information. The majority of them talk about targets, projections but give no actual statistics. The other reality is that these performance measures have changed from last year's budget, so there is no consistent tracking relative to the performance of the ministry or the welfare of our children.

I highlighted the performance measure around children who stay free from abuse and neglect earlier. I would just point out a couple of others that strike me. Again, percentage of aboriginal children receiving services from aboriginal service providers: there are no statistics there under Estimated, Projected, or Target.

We see as another example: proportion of children under guardianship who are adopted or in long-term family arrangements. Again, no statistics. Estimated, Projected, and Target are either not available or to be announced, if my copy is correct.

We're not looking for political ammunition in this, but we have to have some consistent ruler, if you will, to guide our priorities, our allocations, our programs, not only from the ministry's perspective but from the frontline perspective. Perhaps, Mr. Chairman, it's not so much a question as just a magnification that this particular area in the business plan, I believe, is one of the weakest, and I know that the staff are capable of providing more transparent, accountable measures and statistics, and I would encourage them to do so.

MS EVANS: Briefly, I am encouraged by your comment rather than dismayed, because I, too, believe that the support from all parties needs to reinforce the performance measures, and that's the capacity that we've built in now. Reverend Lang perhaps said it best when he said that Albertans like to sweep their child care problems under the carpet somewhere and not illuminate them, and the blessing of this ministry is that we will be illuminating them. If you noticed, we have structured the goals of the ministry to be very carefully child, family, community so that we can start building our core businesses, and the performance measures will adjust to reflect that. So your points are well made about the statistics.

When I have searched for longitudinal analysis of what we have for statistics, certainly it's not as easy to track as vital statistics, but on our Task Force on Children at Risk we have recognized that need, and without revealing much of what will come out in the publishing of that task force, that is one thing we have recommended. We really believe through all the partnering ministries that we have to have clearer data as a baseline but not so abstract, random as just suggesting something but giving more concrete examples of both what the need is and how we can target improving on that need.

If I look at the aboriginal one, it's our hope that by building the capacity within the aboriginal community either on the Métis settlements or within the 18 authorities and the various agreements – as I noted, we have eight that still contract services – we'll have much happier children in the First Nations communities. We will be working on those, and that is a very strong target of our performance measures and accountability section of the department. So thank you.

MRS. SLOAN: As a further example, perhaps, of a measure that the government might wish to explore, I'd just like to reference the indicators that were utilized in *No Safeguards: A Profile of Urban Poverty in Alberta*, that was prepared by Community Services Consulting Ltd. for the Inter City Forum on Social Policy, an extremely detailed and useful report. I would cite page 7 of that report. What they found was that there were approximately 96,000 children aged zero to 14 years living in poverty in selected communities.

In Calgary, almost one in four children this age lives in poverty. In Edmonton, the number is closer to one in three, or 40,400 children. Despite their smaller populations, the percentages of poor children in Lethbridge, Red Deer and Medicine Hat are comparable to Calgary's. There are 3,200 poor children [alone] under age 15 in Red Deer. Wetaskiwin stands out among the smallest municipalities with a child poverty rate of 29%.

And they show the distribution on that particular page.

What analysis has the department done on these statistics relative to the accompanying caseload statistics for that children's authority? I'm pointing it out not really for a response this morning but as an area, Mr. Chairman, where clearly there is some correlation between the two.

I would also reference in that same report the analysis of poor families. They talk about the distribution of poor families, both where there's one earner and two earners, and cite again some of the highest areas as being Lethbridge, Red Deer, et cetera.

Relative to performance measures and goals it would seem to me in the future that what we might want to try and do is look at some of these social indicators, if you will, accompanied by the indicators of infant mortality rate, infant low birth weight, teenage pregnancies, which regions have the highest incidence of those. Clearly we know that some of the northern regions do have that and subsequently have a need for an increased reliance on child welfare.

9:21

Now, we can continue to expend the dollars that are required to provide the services at the back end, if you will, for support for child welfare, but what are we doing about the addressing the root causes of those indicators? There is no mention of poverty or low birth weight or teenage pregnancies in the key performance measures and goals. These were questions and areas that were touched on in last year's estimates, and if I recall correctly, the minister actually committed at that time that there would be some investigation into looking at those particular areas. That was Minister Oberg at that point in time. I won't take the time to actually reference that, but that commitment was made in the estimates last year.

I'd like to move now to further questions relative to the children's

authorities, and one particular area that we have noted with a high degree of scrutiny is the discrepancy between allocations for board governance between these authorities. Just to cite some examples, Sun Country receives \$597,000 for board governance and core administration. We see that Windsong, in contrast, receives \$360,000. Calgary Rocky View, up in the high end, receives \$850,000. Why does that large discrepancy exist? I can see to some degree that administration costs would be greater because the population being served is greater, but for strictly board governance why is there such a discrepancy in that particular area?

There is not an overt mention of funding identified for standards, evaluation, and monitoring in the authority budgets or in the general ministry budget, and that is an area that is of the utmost importance as these authorities begin their existence. I would cite from the Auditor General's 1998-99 report, page 175, recommendation 34:

It is recommended that the Department of Children's Services require the business plans of Child and Family Services Authorities . . . to incorporate relevant measures and strategies to improve the overall accountability and effectiveness of the CFSAs.

He further cites that "some business plans lack the elements that are critical to accountability and effectiveness."

Some of the submitted plans were lacking in areas that are critical to the overall accountability and effectiveness of [the authorities]. Handbook III had required the identification of significant trends and issues in each region, as well as proposed solutions to deal with these issues. This requirement was not adequately covered by six of the regions. By not adequately identifying trends and issues, there is a risk that the strategies these regions developed were not based on the specific needs of the region. Eight regions had not completed the process of defining measurable indicators.

Again, it's the same point. We don't have leadership at the provincial level, and subsequently at the authority level the appointed authorities are not providing true or measurable indicators to guide them.

In order for the CFSAs to measure their progress, relevant performance measures are needed that, in the future, can be compared to previous years' statistics and targets.

Again, my exact point. He goes on to say that "the foundations of the redesign of services for children and families ("the four pillars") were not reflected adequately in the performance measures."

I would cite, then, on pages 176, 177, and 178, the specific mention made by the Auditor General to the Calgary Rocky View authority and the deficit accounting systems and recommendations.

The Calgary Rocky View Child and Family Services Authority and the Department of Children's Services maintain accounting systems that can be relied upon for the preparation of accurate financial control information.

Simply, Madam Minister, what I am asking for this morning is an update on the initiatives that the ministry has undertaken to address those recommendations from the Auditor General.

My third area of questions relates to liabilities. There is no information in the business plan about legal suits brought forward against the ministry. They have never been encompassed in the business plan, and I believe the public has an entitlement to know that information. So I would ask how many legal suits have in fact been filed against the previous ministry of family and social services or the current Ministry of Children's Services in the past year or in previous years, if that information is available.

Where does the ministry account for the funding both for legal representation costs and damages in these particular suits? Again, that's not a specific item in the budget itself.

I would ask what the annual expenditure for legal representation and damages has been from 1993 to current. Again, because of the restructuring of this particular department area, I believe this is relevant information. It's also an indication of the measure of success or failure of the department to fulfill their responsibilities.

Respecting confidentiality, of course, I would also ask for the nature of the legal suits brought against, as I've referenced previously, family and social services or Children's Services with the identifiable information removed.

Those conclude my questions in this category, Mr. Chairman, and I would invite the minister, if she's willing, to respond.

MS EVANS: With more detail later I'd just indicate that in the caseload review and in our review in the department of performance measures and the poverty issues and the root causes and the circumstances around certain critical issues raised by the intercity forum group, we will be doing that analysis and providing the hon. member information for what we have to date.

I'd like to just comment on the category budgets for board governance. They were defined as small, medium, and large. The nine small boards were given \$360,000; the medium, \$597,000; and the two large ones were given \$850,000. It was an early estimate of budgeting requirements for those bodies.

If I may, in addressing the Auditor General's particular recommendations, we have not only started as a department to reorganize, to structure ourselves so that the business planning of Children's Services is on more solid ground and built on solid rationale, but I have met with department officials and the Auditor General to ensure that the issues that have been raised by the CEOs and CFSAs in the moneys that are assigned to them have been addressed. As we noted earlier by other hon. members' questions, why certain groups got certain amounts was raised but also: was it addressing the priorities of needs that were given? In the formation of the CFSAs some of the manner in which the budgets were given money and the tracking systems may have not properly accounted for those costs during the period of the annual review, but we have sorted that out. We have outcomes expected this year in the way we've developed procedures that will be more rigorous and appropriate management information to the authorities from government.

9:31

Mr. Chairman, most of you may be aware that we've had six shared-service modules providing financial and other information support to the authorities, to the PDD boards, and supporting Human Resources as well as Children's Services and also Health through the PDD boards. These six modules provide communication officers that they share and financial people that they've shared. The authorities, in fact I think Calgary Rocky View initially at the first meeting, raised the fact that they required a much more focused attention than that, and through the assistant deputy minister here in charge of strategic planning and financial management I am assured that they will be getting that and more timely information. Over the next year I'm quite confident that the Auditor General will be happier than he was in the past about the outcomes and the accountability, and it's something that I, too, am concerned about.

On the liabilities and the question about where they are disclosed. They are in the annual report and become notes in the financial statements. If I may focus for a moment – and I'll have to provide more information later of a detailed nature or at least generic detail to the hon. member. We have \$61 million outstanding in our present lawsuits. To tell you what they address, it would be better for me to just refer to getting some type of disclosure that is appropriate, as you've described, not disclosing detail that could not be revealed. Many of these relate to some cases that have been outstanding for some considerable period of time and to residential lodging for foster children in the past. I have provided direction to the department right from the outset on coming to the department that we must manage and deal with these in as human and financially responsible a way as possible.

There is considerable work going on with the Minister of Justice on these cases and some considerable review taken. I think his view like mine, is to accelerate the resolution so that long-standing issues that have been held between government and these families and particularly those individuals won't continue to be a sore in their situation. We will be providing more detail on that. That liability, as I said, currently exists in the annual reports, and perhaps later we could provide you the explanation of where it's been in the last two annual reports, if we could, just so you're able to see. I don't think there's been significant growth in that. It has been historic.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. I wonder if I could ask a couple of questions about day cares. The information you gave us in the little blue binder was really very useful. Thank you. It was very easy to access and readable. It indicates that there's a 32 percent vacancy rate in day cares, and I wondered why that is so. That seems like an awfully high vacancy rate for a service that I thought was in high demand.

MS EVANS: In part I think the answer comes to the 80 contracts that are held with family day homes, where families prefer to place their children into day cares rather than to place them into a family day home so that they can be looked after in a different measure. The contracts are held by the authorities with the providers, and the day homes are inspected and monitored in much the same way as the day cares would be. Also, I think that from my more recent months of experience on day cares, families have wanted other choices, and when we moved to provide the dollars to the people with low income wanting the subsidy, they wanted to have other choices provided to them.

Did you have some more specific things?

DR. MASSEY: I didn't understand that from what you had provided here. It said that there were 559 day care centres, and it goes on to say: with a 32 percent vacancy rate. Then it talks about day care homes, 2000 family day homes.

MS EVANS: I'm sorry. My deputy has drawn to my attention that I should have said family day homes as opposed to family day care homes. Okay? It's a different program.

DR. MASSEY: So that isn't the vacancy rate?

MS EVANS: No.

DR. MASSEY: So the question still remains: why would there be such a high vacancy rate in the day care centres?

MS EVANS: May I make that to my deputy, Mr. Chairman? Would that be all right?

THE CHAIRMAN: It would have to be a short one.

MS TYLER: As you know, the day care system in Alberta is largely run by for-profit organizations who will set up shop and be licensed by us and then provide the spaces. When we gather the statistics, we ask them what their capacity is versus who they currently have, with regard to children, and that's where we get our information. We have historically in Alberta had a fairly robust day care situation as compared to other parts of the country because, I think, we do have the private-sector involvement in it. What we can do is provide a little more information about what day cares are telling us about their rates and also over time, but consistently there has been a day care vacancy rate of approximately that amount in the province as

operators set up shop and then adjust their capacity based on demand.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. If I might follow up on the day care homes, it indicates that they're inspected twice a year.

MS EVANS: As a minimum. Usually day cares receive four inspections annually. The response I gave to an hon. colleague in the House last week was relative to the computerized compliance management system. If a day care gets more frequent questions, they get more frequent, even monthly inspections that are not announced inspections but where the licensing officers go out from the authorities and inspect them. We keep a close eye on those that have shown previous problems, and that is a strong part of the due diligence expected of the CFSAs.

DR. MASSEY: I'm more interested in the family day homes. The day cares are really quite public in many ways. There's a lot of traffic in and out, but it seems to me that the family day homes are much more closed in terms of perhaps the youngsters. Twice a year seems to be – you know, I go back to my experience in ethnography and how long it takes to really find out what's going on inside a social setting. I wonder how secure you feel about those inspections.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, I have asked this question of other authorities. There is a monthly inspection of those types of homes, and often in the community, for example in Mill Woods, there is the supplement of people who have been providing, in what I would call nonprofit organizations, other kinds of partnerships with parents and with providers to make sure that they go in and provide children extra training and provide the parents some assistance.

Mr. Chairman, I think that we are reasonably satisfied that we're doing well, but again, in the review of performance measures we will discuss this one with child and family service authorities. I intended to raise that at this next meeting of the authorities, given the nature of the recent incident that was here. I am not saying that all day care homes and authorities are experiencing problems, but I think the public has questions about inspections in family day homes, and it will come under that scrutiny and discussion as well.

DR. MASSEY: Just a technical question. Is there a requirement that day cares have an outdoor space?

MS EVANS: Yes. I'm told yes. All that I've visited have had it, so I guess they've met that.

DR. MASSEY: May I ask about the health initiative and your involvement? What has been the ministry's involvement in that health initiative?

MS EVANS: In the student health initiative?

DR. MASSEY: Yes.

9:41

MS EVANS: Predominantly, Mr. Chairman, the \$26.5 million spent at the local level is voted between the partners at the local level. It is interesting that sometimes the partners don't always agree what the process should be or whose vote should matter most, especially as the student health initiative has been in the schools.

As I go back to the ones that have had the greatest difficulty adjusting to this more democratic form of assigning funds, I think it has generally been felt that the positive is that it's building some networks and relationships between the partnering providers. If we look at the placement of local CFSA providers, like a social worker

or somebody who is providing service in a neighbourhood of a larger community like Edmonton, for example, it enables the school to have the social worker in there and sometimes in places where the hon. member would be familiar with vacancy rates. The Minister of Infrastructure has assured that we can use those without penalty to the school board to place a local social worker to work with the counselors and the administration in the school and with the health authority to make sure that there's a network that secures the provision of service to the student. It is that intent.

In its first year or so it has not been without some growing pains as people develop those relationships, but I have noted that sometimes it has been easier in smaller communities where they've actually known those providers and have already begun to work quite well and have not allowed themselves to be run by some rule and regulation of confidentiality but have learned of the practicality of dealing with the student.

I hope this initiative actually builds in a stronger partnership with the mental health providers and the mental health support teams in Alberta, because I think then we could help avoid some of the crises that I've seen where there are health needs that aren't always recognized because the child is walking and talking.

DR. MASSEY: I'm still trying to get a handle on what's happening with that money. Can you give me an example of a project? I looked, for instance, at the agreement between the school districts and the regional health authority in the city in terms of speech therapy, where it was very limited in the amount of resources. In fact, they give speech therapy up to third grade, and then there's nothing beyond that. I know some parents have an interest in that initiative in terms of preschool funding. Have you examples of projects that have actually been undertaken through the initiative?

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, I would be pleased to ask the Ministry of Learning to help me with that, because what the member has highlighted is an actual one that in this district and in the capital region has not worked to its advantage because of the lack of speech therapists. We are in a grave shortage situation in having the speech pathologists here, and that has mitigated against the most desired results in the student health initiative.

More specific examples or other examples of where it's working well. I couldn't give you a really good one. I know of some, but I don't know how successfully they're operating, and I'd hesitate to mention one for the record and not do it appropriately. I think that ultimately the crisis in speech pathology and the lack of speech pathologists is separate and distinct from some of the successes that relate to the student health initiative. I will try and respond in written form to both: how we're managing the speech pathology needs of students in those situations, particularly in this region, and also where some of those student health initiatives are working particularly well.

DR. MASSEY: I'm being a little slow this morning, Madam Minister. I'm still not quite sure how your department is involved in the initiatives.

MS EVANS: We vote. They actually sit there and vote in some communities. They agree with their own process, and sometimes my own authorities come back to me and say that they lost the vote, that health and education voted together at the local level. At the local level the children's authority is almost the new boy on the street.

If I may mention it, I think ultimately children's authorities on the community basis will get increasing respect, but still they are new when you look at health and education and municipal councils. It is not that children's services haven't been at local authority levels, but

they have not been recognized at the local level as decision-makers or priority-setters, because they have been delivered by the province. With the local community-based organizations it's our hope that they will come up in profile, will be recognized, and will be seen as a valued member.

In two places, both Calgary and Edmonton, you can see that work with the justice system through the community centres, work done by the police, both Chief Silverberg and Acting Chief Bob Wasylyshen, there are plans that are very much inclusive and, I think, will net really desired results. Today in most of them they vote, and some of them just make contributions. If the hon. member has some citing of where it's not working well, particularly I'd like to follow up on those because we do want to see the partnerships and the integration work.

DR. MASSEY: No. I think it was just from the perspective of trying to understand how the health initiative is working and the input.

Could I return to the question I asked before? I don't think the minister understood the perspective about the reliance on the use of lottery funding. A group of parents in Calgary indicated that they would not, for instance, work casinos or run bingos for school funding. Their objection was that it makes a difference where the money comes from, and the bishop of Calgary admonished parents in that city in terms of fund-raising through those kinds of activities. That was the root of my question: does it make a difference where the money comes from?

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, the member has highlighted something that I was unaware of and had not acknowledged in the manner in which we receive funds and disperse funds in this budget. So I will do some checking on that, but I have not yet had that raised by the authorities. I would assume that part of it would be a policy from the financial perspective. I believe the hon. member would be familiar with the fact that lottery funds in the past were just acknowledged in a different fashion in revenue, and now that they're being ascribed to each ministry, it raises some question about philosophy, that had not been previously discussed. So perhaps I can talk with you later about what my most appropriate response might have been.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: You may do that at your leisure.
Mr. MacDonald.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few additional questions at this time for the hon. minister. The first one deals with a difficult situation. I find some of the most difficult files I have doing constituency work are regarding this issue, and that's PGO status. I do not see an indication here of the proportion of children who move from PGO status to adoption, but many people, far too many, come to the office and have a great deal of difficulty with this process. I'm wondering how the department is dealing with this. It's an emotional issue on all sides, and since we have had this restructuring, I wonder what's going to be done to improve this.

That's also important whenever we talk about the child welfare caseload review that's going on. I understand this will be completed and it's a review of factors that lead to the rising child welfare caseloads. When will this be completed?

MS EVANS: August. The report should be to me hopefully before August, but it's pretty detailed, so at least by August.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Fair enough.

Now, in the ministry goals and measures and strategies on page 52

of the business plan, there is a strategy on line 1.2.2:

Work in partnership to educate and increase awareness of service providers and public on the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution legislation at the local level.

My question here would be: in partnership with whom? There has been noted success, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton, of course. There's been a decrease in the number of child prostitutes on the streets, but there are people who are telling me that they have now moved indoors. Out of sight, out of mind. I would strongly object to that, if it's true.

The massage centres are now places of operation, and I don't believe they are being effectively policed. You have to be 18 years or older to be employed there. My next question would be: are there plans to work with police forces across the province to monitor these establishments on a regular basis to ensure that this is not going on? If these places are turning into what is termed in the Calgary media as the mattress centres, then this is not a step in the right direction. It has just been passing this horrible practice from one level to another.

9:51

The performance measure here: I understand the baseline is to be established. But the percentage of children leaving prostitution: when will that be set up, and will there be any indication in there of what I spoke about here? You know, the child prostitutes are off the street, but they've just sort of moved behind closed doors.

I have at this time also a few more questions, if I could direct them to the minister. The incidence of teenage mothers applying for assistance. I see in part of your document on estimates that the rate of teenage pregnancies has gone down slightly. What is the number of teenage mothers applying for assistance?

Children in need, particularly teenagers, and suicide rates. What studies and what numbers can you provide to us on that horrible statistic?

When women enter a shelter, is there an accurate tracking made of the number of children who are admitted at the same time with the mother?

My next question would be: how many children suffering from mental illness are awaiting treatment? Is there a backlog here? I understand there is, but correct me, please, if I'm wrong.

I think those are all the questions I have at the moment, Mr. Chairman.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, I have spoken to police in both Calgary and Edmonton. I have met with the Street Teams and also with police that are working on community services. They tell me that it is really a myth that they don't know where the trick pads are. They say you only have to look at the needles and syringes and the condoms outside the doors and you can find them, wherever they are, whether they're massage parlours or not. They even track traffic statistics in this city to know where the cars circle the block. The police here said that although some prostitutes and pimps would like to say that it's just moved it off the street and got it somewhere that's less obvious, they tell me: don't kid yourself; we know exactly where they are.

They have also been very satisfied that the legislation is working. Although it does not satisfy many children who feel, when apprehended, that they don't want their parents to know what they're doing, in actual fact most of the parents do know what they're doing. I've had a little bit of experience talking with them. Also, Street Teams in Calgary feel that our biggest need is transition housing or places to take them out of the cities or away from what I would describe as the near occasion of sin, if I may, so that they don't fall back into old habits, that their pimps aren't available to pick them up again, that they haven't tracked that.

Catholic Social Services is one of our best partners in this city and also, obviously, the local police through Justice and other social agencies that provide us counseling and support. We try to match the needs of the child with the strengths of the counselor. We're doing a lot with AADAC on the substance abuse part of it, because that becomes part of where we provide the child more service and they can be protected and removed from their addiction, most being addicted. In fact, Mr Chairman, apparently the record of addictions is very high among these children.

The question about PGO status and the questions the hon. member asked. One of the problems we have in improving the rate of adoptions is that many of these children are older, they have behavioural problems, or they are over 12 years of age and do not give legal consent to being adopted.

I might just say, too, that in terms of your questions on teenage moms, that would usually be under Human Resources and Employment. As it affects the child, we will try and follow up with that question, responding as well with some information on suicide rate.

Children in need are children that receive a supplement to other income or other financial support, and they are not like foster children, who receive a graduating scale. There is some discretion to provide them support through the child-in-need program, and we do work with HR and E on that.

We have over 4,900 women and over 6,000 children that have been in shelters this year, and we are tracking that. What we have not in the past tracked and does not show up on the statistics we gather is whether or not, when they have found the shelter to be full, they have taken advantage of the other placement that has been provided for them. I am assured by the Minister of Human Resources and Employment and by our department officials that we never, ever turn a mother or a mother and children away from providing them some type of facility with our partnerships. So there is some work to be done on those stats.

There has to be work done on the stats on PCHIP, because both Calgary and Edmonton, where the programs predominate, track those statistics differently through the police. The Calgary police chief told me recently: just tell us how you want us to track them, and we'll do that.

How many children are awaiting treatment and what the backlog is in terms of mental health? I couldn't provide that for you, but I will consult with the other ministry to see if we can provide more detail on that. Perhaps through our own department we have some statistics.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Chairman, I have one more question at this time, please. I believe it would be on line 2.2.4, corporate adoption services. I see a 25 percent decrease in the budget from one year to the next. The first question I have related to that: is this because of a reduction in user fees?

MS EVANS: It's co-ordination and matching of the adoption services as well as the rate paid the agency. It reflects the child welfare support. Perhaps Keray Henke could complete that one. I know from program 2 on page 54 that that's your reference point. Keray.

MR. HENKE: Yes. That's not in fact a decrease year over year; that's a reallocation. We've moved the actual budgeting responsibility for that from line 2.2.4 up to 2.1.1. So it's part of program support services now under the reorganized ministry.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Now, specifically I have some questions for the hon. minister related to international adoptions. It certainly

is recognized that we are a signatory to international agreements, but the fees I have encountered are extremely high. When you consider that with the international agreements we have signed, we have agreed to do a case study of the homes where children who are to be adopted from foreign countries – that's understandable, but the majority of the people we are studying are new Canadians. Their disposable income I think is better used getting set up in this country, whether it's improving their education or purchasing their home or furniture or whatever. These fees are simply prohibitive. I think it would be an excellent idea to recognize that these fees are high and could be adjusted.

10:01

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, if I may. The overall intake of immigration and the federal policies on this have had ministers from all across Canada talking. There is proper placement of children but also things like making sure that their health needs have been respected, and of course we have involvement with the other agencies exclusive of government.

Rather than have you go through too much detail, I'd rather provide for you some more detailed information that relates both to the carving out of federal responsibility and to what this province does with international adoptions. I think you'll see that we are not the ones that are making it prohibitive for the families. Could we provide that for the member?

MR. MacDONALD: Well, I'm certainly quite willing to hear what the department has to say, but I have looked at this. I realize the federal government has a role in it, but the department has a role in it as well, and the department sets these fees. Where the family goes to have these assessments done – it could be Catholic Social Services; it could be any number of organizations. If we are interested in the reunification of families, whether it be extended family or not, this cost is quite high. I believe it can be in excess of \$900 for a home assessment.

MS EVANS: But, Mr. Chairman, we do not set the fees. We will approve the adoption, but the role for our department is not to establish the fees.

MR. MacDONALD: So the private assessment agencies set the fees.

MS EVANS: They do the assessment and set the fees accordingly. That's what I'm given to understand. Would somebody else like to add to that?

MR. MacDONALD: Okay.

MS EVANS: If you'd like to provide us with some case specific to something that you are worried about with the high cost or some inordinately high costs, perhaps we could review that. This would be the first notice I've had of anybody being concerned about the high cost of fees, although we have certainly discussed among the ministers the concerns about the protocol and the costs associated with international adoptions. We'd follow up with that, hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Before the privatization became stylish in this province, I'm told that the fees were very, very modest whenever they were provided by the government.

MS EVANS: They were done by the department, and now they are levered out.

MR. MacDONALD: With respect to the department, this may have

come before your watch – I can't recall – but department officials have been very gracious and have been very timely with the responses to my constituency of five when I have requested information from them.

MS EVANS: Thank you.

MR. MacDONALD: Yeah. You bet.

The length of time for these assessments is another question that I have because some people are very anxious to reunite their families in this country.

Thank you for that. I won't take up any more of the committee's time with that issue.

MS EVANS: Thank you.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Chairman, we have another block of questions, and we're wondering if the minister would refrain from responding for the remaining 15 minutes just so we may get these on the record?

MS EVANS: Agreed.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: There are 15 minutes remaining.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. The next set of questions arises from the children's summit proceedings and report. You provided to us this morning an outline of expenses received to date and the estimate of total expenditures for that process. While we applauded the government in the release of this report and its comprehensiveness, we have not seen any written commitments or publicized commitments as to where the government is going with respect to the implementation of the report. I think that was certainly a weakness that was identified when the report was released. We're wondering when the action plan or implementation plan might be released by the department.

We would ask that question in the context that if we're planning to have such a proceeding on an annual basis, it would only seem appropriate that we'd be able to demonstrate that we've moved somewhere towards implementing the last year's report before we conduct the next summit. So it's a concern of ours, and we'd like to encourage the ministry to put something forward in terms of commitments relative to the implementation of these recommendations as soon as possible.

There were many areas that were aptly highlighted in the summit report and in the recommendations made by participants, but one particular area that I would like to highlight this morning is the area of aboriginal children and their needs. There were a number of specific recommendations that were highlighted in the children's summit report that spoke about placing "the focus on the Aboriginal pillar" and that

government and community work together to promote greater education and awareness toward . . . building on the strengths and relationships of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities . . .

and the desire to have a "cross-ministry approach to address issues faced by Aboriginal children and youth."

Again, the performance measures don't give us much to go on with respect to the services provided or the needs of aboriginal children, but it was in the supplemental information that you provided to us prior to this morning's estimates. You did outline as of December '99 the child welfare caseload by racial origin. It would appear from the statistics you've provided that the aboriginal need component has decreased somewhat. I believe we were over 50 percent of the caseload at one time that required child welfare

services. I would ask what you attribute the decrease to. Are you convinced that in fact this decrease has been a true decrease in need, or is it that through regionalization or through other causes these children are just not able to access the services they require in the same manner?

We also know that there is a high degree of disability in the aboriginal population that has placed accompanying needs on the child welfare system and on disability programs. We would ask for a breakdown or a cross-referencing of those figures for the last fiscal year at least. If they're available for other years, that would also be preferable.

We would like to have more details relative to where the ministry is currently at with respect to their negotiations with the bands in terms of the delivery of services, staffing, and the adoption process. We believe – and we haven't received any information to the contrary – that there still remains a very large list of children who are waiting for adoption in the aboriginal sector that have been approved for adoption but have not been able to achieve the consent of the bands to have those adoptions occur. Is the fact that that adoption list continues to grow and the wait for those children continues to grow truly in the best interests of those children? I would suggest that it is not.

I recognize the political difficulties in the area and the desire the government has to correspondingly strengthen relationships with the aboriginal sectors; however, these children will not wait. They are going to grow and develop whatever dysfunctions result from their having to wait for a strong and nurturing environment. They're not something that can be delayed because of government inaction or band inaction. So we would ask for more specific information relative to the status of those waiting lists and where the government is going in addressing that in short order.

10:11

Children's mental health. This was an area as well that was mentioned last year. It's been mentioned correspondingly in the ministry of health's estimates. I was highly critical of the minister not providing more priority to the area of children's mental health needs. Again, it's an area where waiting lists in this province continue to grow even for those children with the most critical mental health needs, where they are at risk of injuring themselves or others because of their mental state.

We recognize that we have the joint children's initiative. We recognize that we have the students' health initiative. That is not making an impact for these children or the families of these children at the frontline level. So we are asking for more detailed responses to this ministry's commitment to lobby for challenge and work towards a greater commitment and allocation for those particular children in the children's services area.

I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods has some further questions that he would like to ask. Just in conclusion, I'd like to acknowledge Line Porfon's assistance in the preparation of questions for the estimates debates this year and give my thanks to her for her support and also thank my colleagues from Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-Mill Woods for assisting me in preparing for the debates this morning.

Thank you.

DR. MASSEY: I'm not sure how we are for time, but I just have a couple of questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: You still have nine minutes.

DR. MASSEY: Great.

I wanted to ask, if I could, Madam Minister, about the women's shelters. What kind of research capability is there within the

ministry? For instance, if a woman has been in a shelter and moves to second-stage housing, is there tracking of those people to see what happens to them, to see if things are done that will help them not be in the same situation again?

MS EVANS: Just briefly, Mr. Chairman. I could consult with my colleague the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, who would be part of that, I believe. There is some work done, but I can't tell you whether it's definitive or whether it's consistent across Alberta.

Would you provide, Paula?

MS TYLER: Just a comment to that, and that would be that one of the challenges we have is that unless women want to be tracked, it's difficult to track them. Indeed, these services are voluntary. We do have a tracking in place. Follow-up women's shelters do provide follow-up for people who leave, but sometimes even they lose track of them as well as they move into other lives and sometimes other parts of the province. Any woman that is in significant danger as she is in our system is tracked very, very closely for sure. We can get some more for you.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks. It seems like such a hard problem to deal with, and I just wonder what we're learning in terms of trying to help.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, I think one of the ways we are learning is through the removal of perpetrators of violence so that women don't have to leave home with their children. I think that will start showing some positive effect, but it is a problem.

It's also a problem for the women that leave home and never approach a shelter but find some other alternative accommodations. I think we have recognized that, and I believe we have a modest increase to the funding for shelters this year of about a million plus dollars to that section, so we are trying to recognize our partnership with the local level. But some of the nonprofits and even some of the communities like Slave Lake are looking for options for managing the issue. The visibility at the local level is significant, and that's one place that some of the First Nations people have certainly offered their shelters, saying that there's absolutely nobody that's going to get into them and try and challenge them relative to the placement of women in need.

So we are looking at this. I think we have more work this year, though, on that one.

DR. MASSEY: If I can just follow up in terms of the rural centres. There are only eight of them?

MS EVANS: Yes, that's correct.

DR. MASSEY: How well do they work in a rural area? It seems that visibility is . . .

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, people do tell me about that, the difficulty in the rural area, not only because of visibility but because they know that even the staff are very recognizable in the community. So they have talked about other things; for example, having homes where they would just take moms on an individual basis, harbour them in shelter, sort of safe houses that are refuges for just one or two.

I think the police there will tell you that in some communities they are incarcerated in sort of separate parts of their facility that would normally be held for incarceration purposes; in other words, not a jail, but it certainly is a safe part of the jail. I've heard people talk

about that as an option, but at present we have not too many statistics of people going there.

Some of the First Nations placements are actually very solid and well-established placements, but I think here is part of where our partnership can work to help with those that need the help in that capacity.

DR. MASSEY: A final question is on the funding and the negotiations for funding the shelters. We hear: shelter under threat of closure. How is that negotiation handled?

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, where I've had those questions before, it has been somebody who has felt that comments by a CEO may have been intended to threaten their long-term funding. When we've investigated, that has never been proven to be the case or found to be the case. Some have absolutely ideal circumstances, but when you see a headline, you think there's something there that has been done. We haven't found anything to substantiate that. We have been aware, though, that CEOs who've gone out and who've worked on behalf of their board to evaluate programming have encountered programs that they'd like to improve, not specifically in shelters but some of the other counseling programs in communities, and then sometimes this question evolves. But I've been personally assured on every one I've inquired about, and I've had no evidence that any shelter funding has been cut back. Quite the contrary.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks.

MRS. SLOAN: Just a couple of quick questions in our remaining time. We saw a number of the children's authorities this year run deficits, and we're wondering if it's the ministry's plan in the next fiscal year to fund the deficits or to start to establish the budgetary process so we fund on the basis of what resources are required rather than underfunding and then covering the deficits at some later time.

Specifically in the program 1 area the increases relative to the ministers, 1.0.1 and 1.0.2, are perhaps close to the largest increases with a 39.5 percent and 52 percent increase in those two areas for this fiscal year. If it's possible, would the minister provide a breakdown of the additional costs relative to staff positions, responsibilities, and the justifications for those allocations being made?

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, the ministry was compared to the previous minister without portfolio, who had a budget of just over a million dollars. This is more like the human resources ministry. It is agreeing that the weight goes with the full ministry. We'd be pleased to provide more on both that and the establishment of the deputy's office. Previously the position was called the David Steeves position. He was not identified as either an ADM or DM or director of the Children's Secretariat.

I think it's somewhat unfortunate that we had to base our new ministry on the assumption that it was patterned after the secretariat rather than the ministry of social services. That reference point has caught us in this budget situation of looking like we have been spending with gay abandon. It's not that case at all. We will provide that in our summary to you.

10:21

MRS. SLOAN: One further area I would just identify in contrast. The Children's Advocate's office budget is only increasing by 1 percent, and this has been an area where I have voiced long-standing concerns about the ability of that office to truly be able to fully fulfill its advocacy role. I'm cognizant of the minister's review in progress for that office and am supportive, as you know, of expanding that role, not only with respect to children's needs in the area of child

welfare but across a number of ministries, I think, as I referenced earlier.

We see as one example children's mental health needs being largely unrepresented and not a priority. I think it is something where an independent office or a well-funded office of the Children's Advocate could be able to identify some of those critical areas and perhaps conduct research to help us further understand some of the correlation between issues like poverty and the need for child welfare, the utilization of women's shelters, the accompanying relationship between low birth weights, teenage pregnancies, family poverty, and the reliance on government programs.

So that budget and the 1 percent increase in the budget, given the increase in the caseload, is not respectful of the additional demands and requirements that office must fulfill.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to thank the Official Opposition and subcommittee members and the minister for their questions through this period of time. Pursuant to our resolution at the beginning of the meeting, we'd turn the time to any government members for questions, and I believe Mr. Cardinal, that you have a question.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, I just have a quick comment and a question for the minister in relation to aboriginal children in care. As most of you are aware, I was involved in the original restructuring of family and social services, which included child welfare and persons with disabilities. Of course, one of the phases I was involved in was the original design of children's services, but as a lot of you are aware, I was not involved in the implementation of the process. It is, I would have to say, a bit different from what the original plan was, not to say that it doesn't work. You know, it's a bit different.

The area that I want to mention is in relation to aboriginal children. Earlier today there was mention of poverty on reserves, poverty and the number of children in care in Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Lethbridge, in the major centres across Alberta.

I've always said that children are not the problem. It's the families that have problems at home that create problems for children, and I want to make sure that's on the record, that we don't forget that. When it comes to aboriginal children, because close to 40 percent of children in care are aboriginal children, until we deal with the issue of poverty on the reserves and some of the remote communities in northern Alberta, we have a long road ahead of us, a major challenge in getting children in stable homes and families being self-sufficient and independent.

The issue of federal responsibility. I don't know if colleagues would want to hear that, but I'm sure you will. It will be in the record of *Hansard* anyway. Originally, when the program was designed, one of the first phases that was supposed to happen was to have the First Nations – and there were 45 First Nations bands who wanted to take over child welfare on and off the reserve and wanted federal legislation and federal dollars. They felt at the time – and they still feel the same way – that they are under federal jurisdiction and federal responsibility. Therefore, the legislation should be provided by the federal government, including dollars to administer child welfare programs on and off the reserve.

When you look at the caseload, you know, a high percentage of the caseload are First Nations, so that is where I'm leaning my question. I believe 37 of the 46 bands now have delegated authority. I know that the bands want to go the next step, and that's to take over fully the administration of their children on and off the reserve with, again, federal funding. I just wonder, Madam Minister, what steps are being taken to review this again and ensure that the federal government is brought in and takes the responsibility of federal legislation and federal dollars on and off the reserve? That is what the First Nations want.

Now, if that were to happen, what you would have to do, then, is look at some restructuring of the existing system we've developed. The original plan was to do that first, which would have taken close to half the caseload right off the bat within the first two or three years with the federal system. Now you have this design in place that looks after all – you know, they haven't taken over fully. I just wondered what steps are being taken to pursue that further with the federal government and the First Nations? It's a major one.

MS EVANS: Thank you for the question. Many of the First Nations groups, as the hon. member is no doubt aware, are taking their issues directly. Even through the month of April I think there are about three dates set for them to meet in Ottawa on behalf of this issue and other issues.

In the appointment of Nancy Reynolds as executive director and working with the aboriginal agreements, she has contacted the various chiefs and tribal councils and has been engaged in meeting with them, trying to determine exactly what our status is with those particular First Nations bodies in the delivery of services and where the agreements cannot be fulfilled.

One of the challenges – yet I think it's an opportunity that's being worked on – is the agreements between the CFSAs and the arrangements that they're working on with the First Nations groups so those children that are off reserve aren't lost to the reserve forever. When you hear the First Nations people speak with such passion about having their children continue to be a part of their culture and a part of their spiritual community in a very meaningful sense, you recognize that we don't do justice to those children if we don't provide some of that type of approach. The hon. member has done a considerable amount as an MLA to bring these issues forward to me.

The other thing that we have had is a review of our staffing. As the hon. members have noted from the briefing sheets, there are 200 additional staff applied in this year's budget not only to relieve caseload, review circumstances, and assist the CFSAs but in part at least to address some of the needs aboriginal people have in terms of making sure we have people in the department, through the Children's Advocate, and at the local level who can deal and who are familiar with the issues of aboriginal people. I think that sensitivity is something where we're building some capacity in consultation with the associate minister in charge of Aboriginal Affairs, and as we get through the aboriginal policy and as we reflect on what we were told in our meeting recently with the Métis Nation as well, who are people that want us to be sensitive to their needs beyond the scope of the First Nations agreements – I think that's a very definite thrust of what Nancy Reynolds and her staff working under her direction there are providing. I'm very satisfied with the relationships beginning to build.

One more point to the hon. member. As he is so well aware, it is important to build the relationship first before you are actually able to effect some agreement, but I think we're moving closer to that. We have not been an intervenor, but we've provided support to those First Nations bodies that are speaking to the federal government about their concerns relative to the manner in which they receive funding and the funding levels that they receive from the federal government. It is different through different agreements.

10:31

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MS KR YCZKA: I have two points, and I'm glad to have the opportunity to express them this morning. On page 9, family violence prevention, my question was whether this is related to a particular act or legislation and the year on which that occurred. I notice that obviously it's for women and children and to provide

safety from abuse. My question – and it is related to a motion of mine that's coming up – would be: what about seniors? Was there ever any intent to address seniors? I guess I have a few concerns if there was.

You know, abused seniors could be male or female. This looks like it's mothers and children. There is a model that exists. It's a really new model in Calgary for seniors. It is the Rotary house for abused seniors through Kerby Centre. My premise, after doing some work in social housing, is that at this point in time anyway it's not really seen necessarily as a good step. Seniors don't really want to be integrated with younger families, although certainly I think that in the future social housing is something we certainly need to look at just in general but also perhaps in this area. So I'd just throw that out.

On page 7, early intervention programs. I guess this is something that just came out as we were going through this this morning. I just want to make a point that there is a citywide program in Calgary that's housed out of Ernest Manning high school, and it's for very high-risk teens and their babies. From the age range you talk about, from zero to 18 years, I think you have it at both ends of the spectrum. It's an excellent program. It's accepted within the school. It's run basically by Catholic Social Services, but it certainly is an interagency program. They have, like I say, an ongoing funding problem. I guess I have two questions related to that. How do you identify future EIP programs you might fund, for instance? To me this is a program that exists now, that doesn't have to be created. It seems to me it satisfies the goal of the department. I'd just ask whether the minister would review the mandate of this program for consideration of funding support.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just on the first issue, family violence prevention. As the hon. member would be aware, the Member for Calgary-Currie last year in June in Calgary announced the government's legislation for removing the perpetrator in the circumstance of family violence, and that has been one of the initiatives that I identified, in commenting to the member of the opposition, as something that we hope will begin to benefit our shelter statistics.

If I may reflect on what is happening in many communities, the FCSS, which is responsible for many of the local priorities and needs of communities, has worked on a lot of programs, not only in support of the counseling services for people with family violence but in support of programs like FLIP in Wetaskiwin, where people who perpetrate violence are given extra support and understanding and opportunities to learn and listen together in sharing circles. They are predominantly native men. There are programs similar to this that receive funding through family and community support services throughout Alberta. So I think that both through the child and family service authority and through its municipal partner, funded in part by our government, there are programs that are evolving to help families that have problems with family violence and the need for protection both of children and families.

The member has also brought my attention to the fact that in the Ministry of Children's Services there is a bit of an anomaly in that we are more than children's services. We are the families and the seniors and also the moms and children, and we are any range of family programs that are delivered through the FCSS boards with the \$38 million that's expended in Alberta. Many of those programs are directed to children, but many of them are, quite appropriately, directed to other things, everything from support for after-school child care to specific training programs that help people who want to work on local volunteer boards.

Not being familiar with the program from Ernest Manning high school but looking at the Calgary Learning Centre, that I have

personally visited, and the information that is disseminated from them, what we've asked the child and family service authorities and their boards to do, in co-operation with the Ministry of Learning or the ministry of health, is to review those programs and find out where those program dollars can best be expended, what the need is and where the programs are demonstrating the best performance results and outcomes. As much as the department in establishing the ministry is trying to get those things in order, so too are the local board members and the local CEOs attempting to do their best with that. We don't attempt to judge those from the department's perspective except to monitor, evaluating their business plans and also, with the agencies, providing support to the child and family service authority in the delivery of the programs that are working well.

Many of the Head Start programs in this city are supported through dollars that are gained from local groups that are given priority from the child and family service authority. In terms of certain early interventionist strategies I believe that we could provide our intent through the CFSA to you relative to where the dollars may be coming from next year, if they will be coming there at all.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Cao.

MR. CAO: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few comments. The first one is in my involvement with the United Nations club in Calgary. They have the culture of peace proclamation for the year 2000, and it's sort of with regard to violence resolution, resolving that in the community, and talking about moving and starting school, you know, through that. So my comment or question: do we have any participation in or sort of knowledge about that?

Number two is regarding the school system. The school system to me is where most of our children sort of go through. Do you have any programs besides the health initiatives? Do you have any programs or ideas where Children's Services could dovetail somehow and work closely with the school system?

The next question. I work in my constituency. There are a lot of community associations in my riding, and I found that they could be very good places. First of all, they know the neighbourhood and they know the families in need, with problems. So is there any focus on, say, utilizing that structure somehow? In fact, there is something there already called family resource centres in some communities, and they're doing work. I know that they have some city involvement, but I sense that the province has not tapped into their strength to be of service there.

10:41

Probably my last question here is regarding the demography in Calgary, to be specific. I know there are a lot of new Canadians. When new Canadians come to live here, they may have some cultural and language difficulties. I attended some citizenship ceremonies, and I realize that if we can promote the information about family and social services, about prevention, that the rules about living here are like this, then probably it's helpful to get that population to understand about living here. So that's my comment and a few ideas.

MS EVANS: Just a few brief comments. In terms of the first program you mentioned – I think it was a program of the United Nations against violence – we don't believe that our department has any affiliation with that particular one, at least not that we're aware of.

If I may, you asked about any other programs that we could be involved in. One of the other programs that you might know has

been a big struggle for us in Calgary is the conductive education provided in Renfrew school, which is unproven in terms of both the assessment of the Canadian Physiotherapists' Association and some of the health strategy groups. The evaluation of that program will start to set a platform for policy development that I think would help the department frame where it will explore additional kinds of alternative strategies with parent support so that we can do things in the proper fashion but make sure that we limit any further risk to the child. You couldn't visit that school, like I have – and I'm sure you have too – and see those children with cerebral palsy getting that special attention and not believe that that must at least be a good program.

Through handicapped children's services, respite care, through interventionist strategies with some programs, through all of those and through our local delivery system of the child and family service authority there are other programs. Essentially, when the ministry was set up, the first intent was to make this more of a co-ordinating role when they looked at the Department of Children's Services in the past and that the services would be provided as community-based services really, to some degree autonomous from government. When the issues arose with the court challenge on successor rights with our staff, it was deemed that that was not going to happen. There are very strong ties. The ministry is tied to each child and family service authority just like a parent is tied to a child, with the accountability built within that.

To a large degree those authorities have felt that we have done a bit of a U-turn on them. They were originally going to be able to hire all their own staff, but today the way that it is structured, it is still a partnership arrangement, with the parent, being the department, having more the role of CFSA monitoring and the local groups having more the role of determining priorities and needs and doing the monitoring on that basis.

The family resource centres and the clusters that are being explored by the Calgary and Rocky View family service authority please me a great deal. I think there's a lot of work being done to try and get the action on the street where people live that need it. There are community centres like the McCauley centre in Calgary, that I visited, where a number of community programs similar to the Norwood centre here are attempting and endeavouring to support families and children.

If I could have one wish, it would be that every sweatshop environment in Alberta that houses employers who in fact may push too strongly on their employees or keep them away from families for extended periods of time would come forward and provide more support for those families and those children in the work that they do. Many of these families travel outside the city limits for long, extended trips away from the children every day. The care of the child in the new immigrant families that are being affected by that has left them without some of the tools that they really desperately need.

So I have been hoping to talk with the Minister of Economic Development about how we can prompt programs so the employers will feel a need to come in and support those new immigrants who are giving such strong support to Canada and their families through an entirely different workforce environment.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr. Johnson.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a comment I'd like to make regarding the Alberta children's initiative. I want to say that you're doing wonderful things there, that the department is doing great things. In my constituency particularly the student health initiative is going very well. The partners are working together very

well, and I really do like this concept of partners getting together and working in a community for greater efficiency. When people work together, when groups work together, I think a lot more can be accomplished. So that program is going very well in my constituency. Also the FAS program: I think wonderful things have been done in that area.

I'm very happy, then, to see the different departments working together, but I noticed that in your briefing you mentioned that Municipal Affairs and Infrastructure are the latest partners in this initiative, and that was news to me. What are they doing in this initiative? How are they involved?

MS EVANS: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, if I can look at when we first started doing our business plan, Municipal Affairs housed housing, so that was one part of it. But currently municipalities still receive some of their funding for transportation needs through the unconditional funding that is assigned to each municipality and supports, in part, transportation for disabled and others. It's a bit of an anomaly in the funding. Community Development now, of course, have taken the housing. You mentioned another one. Which other ministry?

MR. JOHNSON: Infrastructure.

MS EVANS: Infrastructure now is our very important partner – how could I forget? – that helps us with facilities for the local CFSAs. Many of them have chosen to provide their own, either through certain nonprofit or even church basement arrangements, which may not be ideal in the future but at least gives them a starting point in very small communities by practically offering space without large expenditure. For others vacated stores are accessed, but the Infrastructure ministry does go out and try and inspect and determine what places would be safest and what accesses would be most appropriate for the child and family services authority. As the redeployment of provincial buildings has taken place, some have found different assignments there as well, but we are not facility rich. If anything, we are facility stretched right now to try and make ends meet with those.

My hope is that while we're seeing a leveling off or even a modest decline – I believe Red Deer will have a 1 percent decline of children's population this year as an example. Maybe those schools could become places for additional cluster involvement.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I'd like, on behalf of all the subcommittee members, to express my appreciation to the Hon. Iris Evans, Minister of Children's Services, and to all of those in her department for the tremendous work they've done and for the assistance in answering the questions today.

Pursuant to our motion passed at the beginning of the meeting, I'd like to entertain a motion to adjourn from Shiraz.

MR. SHARIFF: I move that pursuant to Standing Orders 56 and 57 the designated supply subcommittee on Children's Services now conclude its considerations and debate on the 2000-2001 estimates of the Department of Children's Services prior to the conclusion of the four-hour period allocated and rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: All agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any opposed?

MRS. SLOAN: Opposed.

THE CHAIRMAN: We need unanimous consent to actually adjourn prior to that.

MRS. SLOAN: I wasn't aware of that, but I would say, Mr. Chairman, that because of the needs in this particular area it causes me some discomfort to not exhaust our time relative to the questions this morning. I understood that the government members were going to be asking questions until the time had expired. In fact, I can also say for the record that this process did occur at Health and Wellness estimates on Friday. There was not unanimous consent, but the committee still adjourned.

10:51

THE CHAIRMAN: I would say, actually, that we have had a motion

placed forward for which we did have unanimous consent at the beginning of the meeting which set the established rules for today. In that respect, I would say that we are able to adjourn because we did have unanimous consent earlier on the motion that we would allocate two hours to the Official Opposition subcommittee members and the remainder to government subcommittee members. On that basis, are we agreed to adjourn?

Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:52 a.m.]

Title: Estimates of Environment, Monday, March 20, 2000

Date: 00/03/20

8:05 a.m.

[Mr. Hierath in the chair]

Designated Supply Subcommittee – Environment

Hierath, Ron, Chairman
Amery, Moe
Boutilier, Guy
Carlson, Debby

Coutts, David
Ducharme, Denis
Langevin, Paul
Magnus, Richard

Pannu, Raj
Sloan, Linda
Strang, Ivan
White, Lance

THE CHAIRMAN: We may as well call the meeting to order this morning and welcome the members of the designated supply subcommittee on Environment. I spoke to most of the members before the meeting this morning to explain that there is an all-party agreement to allocate the time for the meeting. If there is no other agreement, there is a suggestion that an earlier model that has worked with other designated supply subcommittees would maybe work here. In this case, the minister would be allowed up to 20 minutes for making opening remarks and comments. The Official Opposition would then have a full two hours for questions and answers. I understand that the format would allow for debate with the minister to keep it on an informal basis during those two hours. Following the two hours the leader of the ND, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona – he'll probably show up a little bit later here – will be allowed 15 minutes for questions and answers from the minister, and if there are no other questions, then we would have a motion to adjourn. If all committee members agree to this process, then I would like to have a motion in that regard.

MR. LANGEVIN: I'll make that motion.

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried. Thank you.

Okay. I'll turn it over to the Minister of Environment to make some opening comments.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, colleagues. It's my pleasure to present the budget for Alberta Environment to support our business plan for 2000 through 2003. This budget shows how we're going to allocate and build our internal resources to protect, preserve, and sustain our environmental resources.

I'm going to start by looking at the total budget and what the numbers mean. Then I want to highlight the specific areas where we're increasing spending, and then I also want to take a few moments to talk about where we did not increase spending and indicate why. Finally, in the interests of getting as much information out as possible, I'll be looking forward to taking your questions.

In many departments you can look at the current year forecast and get a context for the proposed budget because spending increases during the current fiscal year often continue into the new budget. However, that is seldom true for Environment mainly because of forest fires. Every year we start with a base amount of \$50 million to fight forest fires. This total amount is found on page 134, line 3.0.1, \$38 million, and on page 151, \$12 million under the enhancement fund listed as forest fires.

Actual spending depends on the severity of the fire season, and 1999 was the second-worst fire year on record. At the time we

prepared the budget, we expected the total cost to be around \$184 million, which is the total in front of you. Current weather conditions have reduced that estimate by about \$10 million to \$174 million. Other increases and decreases in the forecast almost balance each other out, but fire suppression costs still leave us with a \$118.5 million difference between the adjusted forecast and my proposed budget.

If we cannot easily compare the proposed budget to the forecast, how does it stack up against the last budget? This year that comparison is just as difficult to make. It looks like my budget for 2000-2001 is about \$22 million less than in 1999-2000, when in fact I actually have \$26 million more.

Now, the difference will require some explanation. Most of it, \$35 million, is a change in accounting. Alberta Environment grants capital assets like Crown land to municipalities or nonprofit organizations or businesses. For example, land may be granted for locally administered parks that enrich the quality of life in the area by offering outdoor recreation or preserving habitat. A caveat ensures that the land is used for park purposes only. The land is granted for a nominal sum, often a dollar. We record the difference between this nominal sum and the estimated fair market value as a noncash grant under the nominal sum disposals.

In our budget we estimate the value of land we expect to grant in that year. We call it a nominal sum provision. In 1999 we estimated the provision at \$45 million. However, attaching a park use caveat has an impact on land value. First of all, the market value is based on potential land use. Restricting the use to parks lowered the market value even though the intrinsic value remains unchanged. Secondly, not everyone wanted to accept land with a park use caveat attached, and therefore we were unable to grant the land. This reduced demand also affected the size of the nominal sum provision. Recognizing these two factors in Budget 2000, we reduced the nominal sum provision to \$10 million, for a \$35 million reduction from Budget 1999.

My budget also includes a reduction of \$13 million in the fire reclamation program. Last year we had \$17 million in lottery funds for replanting seedling trees destroyed by fire in the spring of 1998. In Budget 2000 we will extend the program to include seedlings destroyed in the summer and fall of 1998 at a much smaller cost of only \$4 million plus another \$4 million in Budget 2001, when the program ends.

That \$13 million net reduction in the fire reclamation program plus the \$35 million loss under the nominal sum disposals fully accounts for the difference between the \$22 million reduction we see and the very real \$26 million budget increase.

The bottom line is that for fiscal 2000-2001 the total voted department spending on operating and capital will be \$332.5 million, an increase of \$26 million targeted to specific environmental priorities. Almost half the increase, \$12.9 million, is for our important internal resource, our staff: \$8.9 million is for staffing costs and for training and staff development, \$2.6 million will hire more enforcement officers as our frontline defence against environmental harm, and \$1.4 million will help to staff the new bureau of climate change that will support Climate Change Central. Opera-

tional funding for Climate Change Central is coming out of the current fiscal year.

We're also making a strong commitment to enhanced forest protection. The department will spend \$5 million to buy and operate the VHF FireNet radio system. This will bring our fire-fighting communications up to the North American standard for greater firefighter safety, greater tactical efficiency, and more effective fire-fighting operations.

My department will spend \$3.1 million of its increase on infrastructure support, equipment operating costs, and site reclamation. I am increasing endangered species monitoring by \$2.2 million to build our knowledge and understanding so that we can act to better preserve our wildlife. I am committing \$1.6 million for emerging issues. This will help leverage support for new priorities like gas flaring research. Finally, there is \$1.2 million for changes to dedicated revenues, amortization, and valuation adjustments.

Just as important as the money we spend are the dollars we're not spending and why. My department had responsibility for the petroleum storage tank remediation program, which is aimed at cleaning up petroleum storage sites like abandoned service stations. While the program has moved from Environment to Municipal Affairs, I will assist the Minister of Municipal Affairs with monitoring, advice, and other services. We both want the same result.

This budget also shows no increase in my \$50 million base budget for fire suppression. With another dry winter our forests are suffering the accumulative impact of three low snow winters. I've already moved up the official start of the forest fire season by a month, to March 1, because we could have another very early and very hot start to the fire season. However, if we get another spring snowfall like we had on the 6th of March and if we get it in the north and north-central part of the province, where the trees are, it could drastically reduce our need for fire fighting, and so could a wet spring or summer. We will continue to address fire suppression costs throughout the year and if the need arises.

To conclude, this budget continues our essential regulatory monitoring, enforcement, and resource management work. The new dollars help to relieve cost pressures and address priorities in key areas, most notably in human resources, fire fighting, endangered species, and other priorities where additional investment will lay the groundwork for future long-term benefit. This budget sends the message that Alberta's environment in all its diversity remains a priority that this government has committed to meet. I ask your support for my 2000-2001 budget.

Mr. Chairman, for the record I'll read in and introduce the three people who are sitting with me at the table: the deputy minister, Doug Radke; assistant deputy minister, Cliff Henderson; and chief financial officer, Bruce Perry.

Thank you.

8:15

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thanks, Gary.

Would you like to start, Debby?

MS CARLSON: Sure. Thanks. Thank you, Mr. Minister and all of your staff. It's nice to see you once a year. I know this isn't your favourite part of the year, but it certainly is mine.

It's been very helpful to get the answers to the questions in past years. Certainly last year we got more comprehensive answers than we've ever had before, and I really appreciate that. They didn't come until mid-February, which is better than not coming at all, but certainly the comprehensiveness of the answers was greatly appreciated and helps in the understanding of how the ministry

operates and forestalls some issues that could otherwise be brought up that really aren't necessary to be handled in that manner.

My first question, Mr. Minister, is in regard to some comments you made in terms of endangered species. I'm very happy to see that there are some additional dollars there. Can you give us some explanation in terms of what you're doing in terms of expanding corridors? As you and I both know, that's a part of ensuring that species stay viable in this province.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you going to continue?

MS CARLSON: No. That's all I'll ask him.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we'll keep this kind of informal, Gary, with questions back and forth and maybe not even through the chair.

MR. MAR: With respect to endangered species, we've had a very good program in the province of Alberta. We have made some changes to our legislation that have been necessary in order to meet Alberta's commitment under the accord for species protection, which is a national accord that Alberta was one of the first signatories to. We do have a committee headed up by Ivan Strang that is providing us with recommendations on the kinds of species that are in need of protection and programs for their recovery.

With respect to corridors, we're conscious of corridors, but with respect to any specifics, I might refer to the deputy minister.

MR. RADKE: Are you referring to wildlife corridors in the Bow Valley?

MS CARLSON: Throughout the province. My particular focus would be the Bow Valley.

MR. RADKE: As you know, we have a study under way with respect to the one corridor by Three Sisters, which has another year or year and a half to go. We have been examining the Y2Y proposal to see how our existing designations fit in along the eastern slopes, and we have a series of management plans under development and monitoring under the province and so on. Does that cover your question? We could get Morley to provide you with some more detail.

MS CARLSON: I wouldn't mind a little more detail. When those management plans are in place, will they be public?

MR. RADKE: Yes.

MS CARLSON: A little more detail in terms of what is happening in the rest of the province I would appreciate, if that's possible.

MR. MAR: Well, perhaps we'll have Morley Barrett answer that then.

MR. BARRETT: Good morning. There are a number of activities going on with respect to the wildlife corridors, and it is really the continuing broad-based habitat availability for the movements. I would bring your attention to, for example, the grizzly bears. A big part of the study in the northwest foothills around the Cheviot mine is related to the cumulative effects and the impact and the movement corridors appropriate for grizzly bears. A lot of the land management, the special places nominations, the forest land use zones established are made with that as an important element. There's a reason for establishing those sites.

I would also point out – and these are activities still under

consideration – that some of the proposals under consideration as special places have as a basic element to the evaluation process they're undergoing right now the need to maintain continuity of corridor systems for the movements, particularly in the foothills, in the alpine range.

We want to have no loss or no dead ends for critical wildlife species, and I would say that part of the approach is looking at the requirements for the large carnivores in some of the sites, as I mentioned, because if we look after those, the same as in the Bow Valley and the Wind Valley, we will effectively look after many of the smaller species. The thinking is very much embodied in the decision process, much of which is still under way in some 40 different sites.

MS CARLSON: Just one more question while you're still here. Are you doing anything specific to address the increased pressure on caribou throughout the province?

MR. BARRETT: Yes, we are. In fact, through some of the new enrichment funding that the hon. Mr. Mar talked about earlier for endangered species, we'll support increased work with caribou in both the northwest and the northeast boreal. We're working closer with industry. We're bringing in industry, forestry, all the companies active in the area and having them at the table as we look at the special needs of caribou.

We look at both the seasonal and obviously the key wintering habitats, making sure we have access to them, and we're making joint decisions to minimize the cumulative impact as well as doing some studies to look for future ways to minimize the cumulative impacts of competing industries, if you will, on the same landscape with caribou. Industry is clearly at the table with us as a part of it, and we'll be doing some new specialized surveys and focusing staff on this with this new supportive funding. So that's very much a challenge but very much one in which we're actively engaged and will even be increasing our efforts.

MS CARLSON: Great. Mr. Minister, as those studies are available, could you send a copy to us?

MR. MAR: Yes.

MS CARLSON: That would be great.

Okay. My next questions are on climate change. Last year \$6 million was spent. Could you give us some review of what happened in that regard, a little more detail in terms of what you're doing on climate change?

MR. MAR: The \$6 million that has been set aside for climate change is based on the operational costs for climate change for each of the next three years. The \$6 million was put in the budget in 1999-2000 but will be spent in the upcoming three years.

The first step for Climate Change Central will be for constating documents to create the legal entity of Climate Change Central. The second step will be to have a funding agreement between the department and the entity of Climate Change Central, where that \$6 million can be moved into, and it is through the business plan of Climate Change Central that that \$6 million will be allocated in the various operational aspects of the entity.

MS CARLSON: So the agreement between Climate Change Central and your department: does that extend to other departments that have been doing work in this area as well, as far as you know?

MR. MAR: No.

MS CARLSON: Will they be independently negotiating, or are all the dollars coming out of your budget?

MR. MAR: The \$6 million is coming entirely out of our budget. However, that is just for the operations of Climate Change Central. Any dollars that may be levered up for projects, as an example, under the administration of Climate Change Central may come from other departments. Of course, we expect a great deal of leverage coming from the private sector and the not-for-profit organizations.

8:25

MS CARLSON: Okay. Thanks. I would have to say that what I know about the department's knowledge in climate change is that they've done an excellent job in that regard, and I think they're to be highly commended for the work they've done in that area. Certainly I look forward to seeing some of the outcomes in this next year.

What specific plans do you have dealing with both the federal government on this issue and also starting to negotiate some basis for trade credits so that industry has a road map in terms of where they need to be going?

MR. MAR: First of all, I thank you for your comments about the work that's been done in climate change to this point.

With respect to the federal government, I think there's a recognition also by the federal government that Alberta has been a leader among provinces in this regard. It's not only been the province as a government; the province as an industry has also been a leader in this particular area. It's of critical interest to the province that we maintain a leadership role in this with the federal government and with our counterparts across Canada because the stakes are so high for Albertans.

I think it'll be important for Canada to have a national strategy going into the next round of discussions at the Conference of the Parties at The Hague. There should not only be provincial strategy, but there should also be a national strategy. Many other provinces are engaged in this, although not nearly to the same extent as Alberta. We will continue to work with our federal government counterparts to ensure that the commitments that we make under climate change are realistic ones for Canada and realistic ones for Alberta.

There has been some recognition over the last few weeks that perhaps our commitments under Kyoto are not workable. In my discussions with federal Minister Goodale he indicated that the minus 6 percent reduction of greenhouse gases from 1990 levels was predicated on one of the things that you mentioned, and that is credit trading. The other one was a recognition for Canada's forest sinks, be they agricultural or forest sinks. I think Alberta's role must be, clearly, to move the yardsticks on both those issues. It is my opinion that the minus 6 percent is not achievable without a recognition of those two things.

Perhaps I'll have John Donner come to the table as well and give some of his insights into this particular matter, particularly as it relates to your question on credit trading.

MS CARLSON: Sure. I'd appreciate that.

MR. DONNER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Good morning. The subject of credit trading within Canada has been a large part of the national process for the last year. It is difficult because it does require some framework of certainty around what the future context is of obligations for companies, what the baseline is of emissions

from which they would achieve reductions and for which they would get credit. There's a considerable interest among the provinces to move ahead on credit trading within the country to make sure there's a parallel incentive to engage in investments for reductions in Canada as well as outside Canada. That's an active issue that would likely be on the agenda for the next series of ministers' meetings to try to figure out a national approach to credit trading.

MS CARLSON: As industry is looking at this issue, Mr. Minister, what would be your advice to them in terms of ensuring that dealing with climate change issues becomes a growth issue for them and not a handicap?

MR. MAR: Actually, I think Mr. Donner would be well equipped to answer that for you.

MS CARLSON: Great.

MR. DONNER: We found a number of industries that are very much on the leading edge of dealing with climate change and, as the minister said, many of them within Alberta. Those are companies that are seeking out new technologies which have markedly reduced emissions or in some cases even zero emissions associated with new technologies for achieving the same energy yield. They see themselves as positioned to make those investments within Canada over time but also to take those and export the technology and to do a business of reducing emissions throughout the world on a commercial basis. So technology opportunities positioning themselves to be competitive in a new emissions-constrained environment is one of the areas.

The other is exploring offsets and developing, as the minister said, forest sinks but also agricultural sinks, which are not yet recognized internationally. In Canada we've been at the forefront of developing the science to prove up the ability to restore carbon to soils and therefore take it out of the atmosphere. Many of these companies are exploring those kinds of activities. Many are also finding associated activities in terms of landfill gas, for example, or new synergies where they're working with the municipalities or other sectors for investment opportunities that complement their core business activities.

MS CARLSON: Does Alberta have a position on what a framework for a credit would consist of?

MR. DONNER: We've been working to put forward that framework with the other governments. We haven't put forward a position saying, "Here is an Alberta position," because we're trying to work in collaboration with other governments and with industry to make sure that we come up with a framework.

The first step, a fairly modest step, was taken with the announcement of baseline protection, which ensured that if a company achieves reductions on site and thereafter it becomes critical in terms of an allocation what their emissions are, they would have that reduction restored for their baseline. It addressed only one possible future. There's been ongoing work, and we've been well served with people on the management team trying to develop a common, national approach to the credit framework.

MS CARLSON: Have you got anything that you can share at this time in terms of the progress on that specifically?

MR. DONNER: After March, after the end of this month we would likely have something that we could share on that.

MS CARLSON: That'd be excellent, if you wouldn't mind doing that at that time.

What are you looking at as a date for the baseline for companies that have achieved reductions?

MR. DONNER: Most of the baseline material goes back to 1990, but one of the issues in terms of moving forward with credit is that one is looking at what is the cost-benefit return. So there has been some discussion about piloting on a go-forward basis as opposed to going back to 1990, but for most purposes we've been baselining 1990 because that is the standard for international. So everything tends to be reflective back to 1990.

MS CARLSON: Okay, good. Thank you. That's the end of my questions on climate change.

I would like to address just human resources in general for a moment. There's been a significant increase, 84 percent. We're happy to see that there are some more staff coming inside and, particularly, some staff on the ground. Could you give us an explanation in terms of why such a significant increase?

Also, if you could talk a bit about the morale in the department. I know that this past year more than any other year I've had a number of phone calls about people who were really concerned about their ability to do frontline work in the regions because of the staff reductions and just their basic inability to handle the volume of work out there. If you could address that, I would appreciate it.

MR. MAR: One of the areas that I view as being very important in the operations of the Department of Environment is with respect to the area of enforcement, and enforcement cannot be done without manpower. I think it would be fair to say on the issue of morale that with the changes that were made in bringing park rangers and wildlife officers into being conservation officers, it could be expected that there would be some effect on the morale of staff people. However, I believe that the conservation officers now are extremely proud of the work that they are able to do.

8:35

The issue of training is a significant one, and that's the reason why money was put towards training, so these people are well equipped to do their jobs. There's no doubt, though, that when you change your job description, if you've been doing something in a certain way historically and it's being changed without appropriate training, that can have an impact on morale. I believe we've addressed that: firstly, by putting in a more appropriate number of resources in terms of our field staff that are out there, whether it be in enforcement or in other areas and, secondly, by dealing with the area of training to ensure that these people are equipped with the right skills in order to do their jobs.

I'll have the deputy minister detail more if he wishes.

MR. RADKE: In terms of the actual additions in manpower, we're showing a 47.7 increase in FTEs. Eleven of those are from the transfer into the department from Alberta Resource Development of the climate change function. Twenty-one of those positions are going to new conservation officers across the province, allocated according to where the need is for more resources on the ground. The remainder of the increases are scattered throughout the regions.

In terms of the department's morale, I think the minister said it well when he talked about the change with respect to amalgamation of parks officers and fish and wildlife officers. There's been a great deal of change of that nature in the department over the last five or six years, and a department that's constantly under change – I prefer

to call it continuous improvement – takes awhile to adjust and move forward.

During the staff survey that was taken last year, it was apparent that there was a need for concerted action on the part of management in respect of adding additional resources to help out with the hard work in terms of developing a better communication plan for internal use in the department so that staff felt involved and informed on what was going on and a heavy emphasis on training and development. We've added in this year's budget 1 and a half million dollars dedicated to training and development, 1 million of which is to be allocated for technical training and half a million of which is to be allocated to what we call corporate competencies. That would be things like communication, business planning, management development: those kinds of things which have an impact on how the field staff and management relate to each other.

We have just completed the second annual staff survey, and while the results are still very preliminary, it appears as if we have achieved in those four areas that we use to measure morale a fairly significant improvement in morale. Four questions that we asked last year and again this year – overall satisfaction with the department, I'm being kept informed of changes in the department, being kept informed about people issues, and I can talk openly and honestly – were all showing in the preliminary analysis significant improvement this year, and we're quite proud of that. The executive has made quite a concerted effort to work on morale, and all of us are under self-imposed instructions to get out to the field more and talk to staff, find out exactly what's happening, and see how we can address some of these moral issues. We think it's working.

MS CARLSON: That's good. I'm happy to see that progress being made there. One of the concerns that continually resurfaced to me was that supervisors and management didn't have the direct experience in terms of who they were supervising in the field, so I'm hoping that gets addressed at some point in the review.

My major concern in terms of staffing at this point is that with the drastic staff reductions we saw over the past few years, a great deal of the knowledge and history of what has happened in the province has been lost. How are you addressing that?

MR. MAR: Well, I would say that it is a fair statement that we have lost experienced people, but I don't think it would be fair to suggest that there is an overall loss of corporate knowledge within the department, because we have some exceptionally experienced and outstanding staff that remain with the department. It is true that we've lost good staff, but it is equally true that we retain people who are very dedicated to their jobs. I have to say that I'm very proud to be associated with such a department.

The people who work with the Department of Environment are an extremely dedicated group of people. They are knowledgeable. They do the work they do because they believe that there is intrinsic value in it, that there's something important about what they're doing. I don't think that should be discounted. While I regret the loss of experienced people who have gone on to other careers, I believe that we have the right staff that we want for the Department of Environment and that they're a dedicated staff. Whatever may be missing in terms of training is exactly the type of opportunities we're looking for in order to devote our resources with respect to training our existing staff.

MS CARLSON: Well, I'd certainly agree that the staff within the department are devoted and committed to their work and to the province, and that's certainly nice to see when I'm out in the province and having the opportunity to meet with these people.

My last question on this topic would be with regard to contracting out. How much contracting out are you doing? Could you give me some background on that first?

MR. RADKE: I'll let Bruce fill in the details, but we contract out quite a bit of our information technology, for example. We have three major contracts, one with IBM, one with . . . Help me here, guys.

MR. PERRY: ISM and LGS.

MR. RADKE: ISM, LGS, and the other one is Stewart & Stewart. Those are fairly significant contracts for the major part of our systems. For example, the system that sells fishing licences is contracted out to ISM. We have quite a number of delegated administrative organizations, and we have two agencies.

Do you want to provide some more detail, Bruce?

MR. PERRY: Yes. As the deputy mentioned, information technology is outsourced because of the requirement for the technical expertise. The other major area that wasn't mentioned is in the area of the fire suppression activities, whether it's water bombers or aircraft delivery systems where there's a person bringing in the gas to fill the planes with the fuel. Some of the resources are contracted out. Primarily it's in the areas of the emergency preparedness that we see the largest contracting dollars in the year, and as mentioned, that is variable depending upon whether you have a busy fire season or whether there's a flood or other natural disaster. Other than that, I think it's those two primary areas that are contracted out.

I think the other item would be that throughout the summer you do use wage staff in various capacities, so I don't know if you'd consider that to be contracted. It is seasonal work, whether it's in the park for a park ranger or for staff in Edmonton.

MS CARLSON: What about anything in specific projects, research and development kinds of issues?

MR. PERRY: Traditionally in the contracted-out nature if it's research, whether it's through the university or through a national affiliate that has that expertise or whether it's through, again, work on particular fire activities, those are usually not ongoing contracts; those are specific to the task at hand. I think what usually happens is that you assess whether we have the expertise, whether we have resources and who has that best expertise and best practices, and you go to the marketplace when you need that. Those are not normally ongoing; those are specific to projects. I think the goal of the ministry would be to retain. This is all part of the training initiative to have people who are familiar with that, because the part of the work that they like is the excitement part of the job. So it's very specific to tasks, and that could be either through a grant to the university or through a contract with an organization.

MS CARLSON: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll yield the floor to my colleague at this time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Lance.

8:45

MR. WHITE: And that would be me. The questions will primarily, at least, start out with forest management and the like, recognizing that my caucus assignments are energy and forest management.

The first questions relate, not on this minister's watch but on the former minister's watch, to a series of occurrences that I would like

some assurance will not be ongoing through the redesign of the ministry's culture, I suspect. In the late spring of '98 you'll recall that there was a known need for early fire suppression. I don't know about the department, but I certainly know about north-central Alberta. It was a drier winter and drier spring than we had for eons.

In early May, in the House, on record I asked some pointed questions, not to embarrass, to seek information, as to preparedness. You'll recall at the time that the budget was around \$50 million, and to my knowledge and the knowledge of those that were on the ground at the time out in the area, particularly around the north and south of Slave Lake and Swan Hills, there was virtually no activity in preparedness at the time. This is proven by a KPMG report of this year. I was given the impression that my questions were less than reasonable, almost embarrassing. The information that came back was a virtual denial of any lack of preparedness. I asked the questions again in the spring session of '99 and received a similar sort of response.

Now, at this point I guess I would like the minister's assurance that that kind of occurrence would not be the design or the culture of the organization of this minister.

MR. MAR: Having regard for the fact that we're dealing with the department estimates for 2000-2001, I will say that 1998 was the worst fire year on record, followed by 1999, which was the second worst. Many of the recommendations that were made by both the Auditor General as well as in the KPMG report following the 1998 year have been implemented. You may recall that in my opening comments this morning I indicated that we were updating our capital with respect to the VHF FireNet system, that we were starting the fire season one month earlier than usual, that we are prepared for a potentially dry year. Of course that can all change with a good rainfall or a good amount of winter precipitation, so lessons have been learned from our experience in 1998.

Cliff Henderson would like to supplement on that.

MR. HENDERSON: Not other than the fact that we have, as the minister has indicated, advanced the fire season, and we have resources at hand and ready should fire season become dangerous this spring. As a matter of fact, we had a 2,000-hectare fire last week in northern Alberta, and we had resources on it and were able to contain it.

MR. WHITE: In a related area, it was through the middle '90s a concern of the staff, the lack of ongoing and continuing of training in the area. This member could understand at least in part why, because the history from the early to middle '80s was that fire suppression was a lesser priority. I don't have at hand anything other than the business plan, and it doesn't really outline what changes will occur in the training area of the entire fire suppression area.

MR. MAR: Well, again having regard for our review today of the 2000-2001 budget, I will say that if you look historically at the number of hectares burned versus the number of dollars spent on forest fire suppression in the last three years, you'll see that we've been very effective and very efficient. As an example – now you're testing my memory because these numbers aren't in front of me at this moment – if memory serves me correctly, in 1998 roughly three-quarters of a million hectares of land were burned. In 1999, a year with very similar conditions with respect to dryness, only about 130,000 hectares were burned. Is that roughly correct, Cliff? Therefore, even though we faced two fire years that were relatively similar with respect to dryness conditions, we were much more

effective in the 1999 year, having learned some things about the importance of immediate action, early suppression of fires. It's costly to do, but it has proven itself to be a much more effective way of dealing with forest fires.

Perhaps the last thing I'll mention is with respect to the 1999 fire year, that over three-quarters of the fires were contained to being less than five hectares in size if I recall correctly. I might have to rely on Cliff again to provide me with the correct figures, but the point being that the overwhelming majority of fires were contained to being very, very small fires because of quick action that was taken. That can only be the consequence of learning from past practice and from training.

MR. WHITE: The question is really related to this budget year and the expected changes. It's not noted in the allocation for training of staff.

Now, I heard Mr. Perry earlier say that a number of the staff are contracted, so that would not be the department's responsibility, but there was a time when field staff training in these areas was required, and it was virtually eliminated at one point. I'd like to know whether it's back on now, or what's the status?

MR. HENDERSON: Yes. We have a very aggressive training program at Hinton with the Environmental Training Centre, and we're continuing to do significant amounts of training for our forest officers and for our firefighters. We also have the school at Hinton co-ordinating training standards that provide standards for training to the outlying colleges such as Grande Prairie or Grouard, where we have other field training carried out. Our contract wildland and firefighter crews do most of their training through the college at Grande Prairie, and these standards are set by our school at Hinton, so there is a significant amount of training that is occurring this year. The last couple of years, of course, with the very high fire frequencies that we've had, we had to put our staff on fighting fires rather than training. So many of our staff received hands-on experience, and we've had a significant upgrading in their certification levels.

MR. WHITE: Thank you.

Another area that was curtailed down to almost zero in this particular area of fire suppression and management of lands throughout the entire year was the travel budget, not the training but the travel. I suppose I'll back up a second and say, in recognition of the fact that there are other places in the world that do intense forest management by design, fire suppression being part of that, that there always is a great deal to be learned. For about seven or eight years, I gather, there was no budget and no real input from the outside. Has that been taken care of in this year's budget, or at least a portion of it?

8:55

MR. MAR: The province is a partner in a number of different forest management initiatives; as an example, the foothills model forest, which has precipitated a great deal of research: very positive, very beneficial, and very highly regarded throughout Canada and around the world. As a matter of interest, for example they have a grizzly bear research project that goes on in the foothills model forest that has been presented to the Chinese government as being a model of how they may wish to look after giant pandas in their bamboo forests in China. So it's very highly regarded, again not only in Canada but in other parts of the world as well.

The province has also been a partner with respect to the model training forest in partnership with Grande Prairie College in the city of Grande Prairie. That, I think, will provide an extremely valuable

training ground for young foresters in the area of silviculture. Also, the province has participated with a forestry science management council in collaboration with the University of Alberta. Again that has provided outstanding research, as an example in answer to your specific question, on the subject of fire suppression.

I'll have Cliff supplement on any of those areas or add to it if he so wishes.

MR. HENDERSON: Thank you. We have continued quite an aggressive program to stay involved with national and international fire programs, and we are very involved with the Canadian forest fire centre out of Winnipeg. We attend all the meetings, and this spring there's a national fire equipment show in Nova Scotia, I believe, and we will have representatives there. So in North America our fire agency and program is regarded as one of the top programs.

MR. WHITE: To move to another and related area, of course, the minister said earlier that both the recommendations from the Auditor General in the years '97-98 and '98-99 and from the KPMG report on fire suppression and preparedness in '98 and '99 have been implemented. I don't expect the minister, but perhaps the associate deputy could outline what those areas were and the implementation of those.

MR. HENDERSON: I'm just seeing which specific area you'd like within his recommendations. We have prepared for and announced an early fire season. We have defined or reviewed our cost accounting for our fire programs. Are there other areas that you'd like detail on?

MR. WHITE: Unfortunately, I don't have the report at hand, but the minister said that all had been implemented. Perhaps it's not the time, sir. Perhaps, if you do have a moment afterwards, it would be advantageous to do a two-column recommendation. This member wouldn't expect an exhaustive study, of course. I mean, I'm not looking for that, but that would be handy to respond to in writing.

The other area I'd like to move on to is the question of forest resource allocation. It not only is confusing to the outside world, the business world or the environmental world – the relationship of this department to the Associate Minister of Forestry I suppose is the first question, recognizing that forest allocation is, I believe, still with this department and the final say. Some comment on those two areas, sir.

MR. MAR: If you look at a forest management agreement, or FMA as it is often referred to as, what you will find is that probably 75 or 80 percent of such an agreement relates to environmental practice and standards, 15 percent of it relates to the business case for the management of the area, and the environmental standards that are established and negotiated under FMAs remain the responsibility of this department. There is, of course, a cosign-off on such agreements with the Associate Minister of Forestry. But in simple terms the environmental standards remain the responsibility of the Department of Environment, and the business case and the promotion of the forestry business is the responsibility of the Associate Minister of Forestry.

With respect to allocation, the critical principle for the Department of Environment is that while recognizing that we have an abundant resource, we must treat it in such a way that it will always be abundant as a renewable resource. Our principle precipitates rules that say that we cannot cut more timber than the forest can regrow over a period of time, so we have plans in place that recognize that we have to look 80 to 100 years out to determine what our allowable annual cut is for a particular year. We are very conservative with

respect to establishing what the annual allowable cut would be, recognizing that we always want to preserve this particular important resource.

I'll have Cliff Henderson talk about the calculations of allowable annual cuts and what percentage of our forests are cut and harvested each year.

MR. HENDERSON: Our ministry has the responsibility and the mandate to approve the annual allowable cuts for the province. Alberta is about 98 percent committed to our approved annual allowable cut, which is around 22.3 million cubic metres of wood.

The role of FID, or forest industry development, is to allocate any unallocated or unowned allowable cut through whichever process they use to enhance Alberta's development opportunities for the industry. To set the annual allowable cuts, we do it through a process of first obtaining a current and accurate inventory of the landscape – trees, other resources – and then it's about a three-year process to arrive at an approved annual allowable cut. Within that process there are stakeholder reviews and public reviews, which are the responsibilities of the various FMA holders to carry out.

MR. WHITE: There have been two substantive publications on the allocation of forest resources in this province. Two of them cited oil and gas activity as taking a great deal of the resource and it not being calculated because it's a whole different department and is reported after the fact to your department as to what actually has transpired. With 98 percent of the forest allocated, isn't there a better way of managing the allocations, with the inclusion of the advancement of oil and gas, cutlines, and the like?

9:05

MR. MAR: Without knowing what reports you're referring to – and I don't, I'm afraid – it would be hard for me to comment, but keep in mind that the allocation of forests is, again, based on a very conservative set of assumptions. If memory serves me correctly, the last year full statistics were available for was 1997. In 1997 .59 percent of the total of Alberta's forests was harvested, less than 1 percent. I think in that particular year we may have even lost more to forest fires than to harvesting. I'd be happy to see the reports that you're referring to. I don't have them now. I'm not sure which ones you're referring to.

To come to what is the annual allowable cut requires a number of assumptions with respect to what can be allocated. When you take into account national parks, provincial parks, protected areas, and wilderness areas and you start reducing all of those, then you get to a figure where you can say: that area can be harvested. Only a small percentage of that which can be harvested is actually harvested. I'll be happy to review your question on the record and provide you with some of the statistics with respect to how we actually get to the actual amount that is harvested in a particular year.

MR. WHITE: First of all, I'll endeavor to have those reports delivered to your attention.

The .59 percent in the calculation, as I understand it, includes all of the forests of the province, which would include all the parks and all that is included. Some augmentation of that particular statistic is required. That is not of harvestable – well, it's harvestable in the true sense.

MR. MAR: That is correct. It is .59 percent of the entire inventory of forests throughout the entire province. As I indicated, we take out that portion that's in national parks. We take out that which is in wilderness areas. We take out provincial parks and so on and so

forth. It's correct that less than 1 percent of the total forest in the province is harvested. I can find for you – and I'll undertake to do so – the actual percentage that is harvested in a given year of the portion that is permitted for harvesting.

MR. WHITE: Just by way of illustration, 98 percent is allocatable.

MR. MAR: That's right, and that's not of the total number. As long as you understand that.

MR. WHITE: That's not of the parks and the wild reserves and urban areas and the like. You're not about to include the 40-year-old or 50-year-old mountain ash in front of my house, I'm sure.

In any event, the question still remains. As the oil and gas activity in the province is substantial and is increasing in the areas where the yield is considerably less, the utilization of a property can be fairly devastating to an FMA holder or a quarter holder and with very little compensation or, it appears, little planning and co-ordination between your department and those that allow the activity to occur. It begs the question: how conservative are the AAC calculations if this encroachment on the resource is not managed by your department?

MR. MAR: Again, I'll be happy to look at the report that you refer to and review it and provide you with my response accordingly. As an example of the conservative nature of calculating the annual allowable cut, we have, to my knowledge, timber quotas or FMAs that contemplate an annual allowable cut that is actually much lower than that which could actually be taken because of the uplift in the number of trees; that is to say, the amount of fibre that is within a particular area. That uplift may be in some cases 30 to 40 percent higher than was contemplated in the calculation of the allowable cut in a particular area. So there is some conservatism with respect to those calculations.

MR. WHITE: The question was on the management of the resource without having control of the oil and gas, that which is taken out for the exploration of same and its not being in the control of this department. That concerns ourselves, of course, and it concerns parts of the industry.

MR. HENDERSON: Maybe I could just add a bit more information to the minister's remarks. First, our allowable cuts are conservative. We use a 200-year cut projection, even flow for 200 years, so it's a very long, forward-looking annual allowable cut that is in place in the province. We don't only provide for unexpected land uses through the conservative nature of our allowable cut. We also carry out a process of integrated resource management on our landscape, and we do program the activities. We are improving on how we do this so that there is a lighter footprint in general on the landscape from both the timber industry and the oil industry.

The oil industry has also improved how they do business to reduce the timber losses and the impact. One example is limited-impact seismic lines, where the lines now instead of being dozer cut are hand cut and are very narrow, in fact nearly undetectable when you go through the forest. So there's been some very significant progress made.

The other aspect is that when any land disposition is approved, the FMA holder signs a consent for that disposition, and they also double-check to make sure that it's within the scheme or the plan for the detailed forest management plan. We do maintain projected losses from the oil industry in our allowable cuts, and these are updated once every 10 years. So we're very honest to that process.

MR. WHITE: The last question in this area relates to this long-term planning, the 200-year planning. I think it's generally agreed that in the last 10 years science in the nation and around the globe said that there's some global warming occurring here and that the significance of that change is incalculable. If 98 percent of the current resource is allocated and the annual allowable cut is based on a 200-year projection of growth, then without the complete knowledge of what actually is occurring and could occur in climate change, how can the citizens of Alberta be assured that the desired results and, as the minister quite rightly pointed out, the desire to maintain this resource in perpetuity can be rationalized, if you will?

MR. MAR: I listened carefully, but I'm not sure if I understand your question.

MR. WHITE: I shall try it again then. The resource is allocated to 98 percent on a 200-year basis. Science tells us that incalculable and major changes in climate are occurring. Climate does affect in a very direct way the growth pattern of a forest, and you say that you're calculating on a conservative basis. How can you rationalize the two statements?

9:15

MR. MAR: I'm not sure if I'm competent to answer that question from a scientific basis, because the impact of global warming is not exactly clear. I mean, there are those who would suggest that global warming may in fact improve our climate and allow trees to grow even better than they are now.

I might have to defer to Mr. Tupper to sort of give us some science on the area of climate change. He thought he was getting off easy today.

MR. TUPPER: I was hopeful.

In fact, the minister's answer is correct. The models that the federal government has run so far to try and show the regional impact of global warming suggest that Alberta would be considerably warmer than it is now and that the growing season, including for agriculture, could extend as far north as Yellowknife. Of course, there have to be the proper soil conditions for that kind of thing to happen.

The other aspect of global warming in any case is that the globe has been warming for a very long time. The issue here that we're really facing as a nation and as a world is the speed at which that is now occurring. Man's impact is certainly clear in much of the science, but there is still room for dispute, and that's going on internationally. The reality is that it's the speed of the change, so adapting to it has to happen quicker. It may even be within lifetimes as opposed to several hundred years. So with respect to the question you had, the minister I believe is quite correct given the models that are current at the moment, which show Alberta experiencing considerable warming in its climate and the growing season moving quite a bit north.

MR. WHITE: A supplementary question. Is the water management not a concern? I recognize that a minor change in water table elevation or a change in surface water will dramatically affect the growing conditions of the current species. Therefore, even though the growing season could be extended and all of the other factors and the soil conditions certainly wouldn't change, there could be a net and a dramatic lessening of the harvest. It could be. I mean, this is purely speculative, but the nature of the question is: how can it be conservative if this is still a substantive unknown in the hinterland, of course, in the areas we're talking about?

MR. MAR: It's conservative because in all of our policy decisions, whether we're talking about trees or whether we're talking about species, we use the best available science possible. There are all kinds of what ifs and could's, but we use the best knowledge that we have available.

Just on the broader issue of water, that is an area of concern that I think ought not to be understated. The chairman would certainly be familiar with the Milk River aquifer, down around his part of the province. There are some 1,800 wells that draw water from that aquifer. Roughly 1,200 of them are decommissioned wells that are unregulated, so the Department of Environment in collaboration with the people that work in that community and the agricultural community and the town of Foremost and others have been working on an education program to decommission those wells and cap them and to put in valves to regulate those wells that are pumping water out of that aquifer, because the levels have dropped over the last 20 or 30 years.

Water is an absolutely critical resource. There is a great deal of it out there, but that doesn't mean that we should treat it as if it were an unlimited resource. It is not. Programs like the one on the Milk River aquifer are important ones and are the types of models that we would use and like to see used in other parts of the province and other parts of Canada.

MR. WHITE: Those are all the questions I have at the moment. Thank you, sir.

MS CARLSON: Okay. I have some more questions. First of all, I'd just like to talk about forests for a moment as well. I'd like an update in terms of where you're going with the integrated management plans for forests where FMAs or quota holders share responsibility for both softwood and hardwood. I know that most of the FMAs are not managed in that regard right now, and I'm wondering how that's going and what your plans are.

MR. HENDERSON: Well, in fact we do manage our land bases for both species, and the detailed forest management plan that is submitted by a forest management holder – for example, if he's a coniferous operator – has to reflect a management strategy approved by the minister to provide for the sustainability of the deciduous disposition holder in his area. So we do require both sides of the sector, the coniferous and the deciduous, to submit compatible plans.

MS CARLSON: We don't seem to get such a favourable response from operators who are on the land now. They seem to think that the department is some ways away, in most cases, from adequately managing that, and in some instances it's because, as I understand it, the FMAs have older plans in place. Could you comment on that?

MR. HENDERSON: All the FMA holders are required to submit a new detailed forest management plan once every 10 years, so our plans are in various stages of currentness up to that 10 years. Some plans are only two or three years old. In all of these plans we do provide for the sustainability of either. A coniferous holder or a deciduous holder has a different authority to harvest timber than a forest management holder.

Certainly there are some discussions regarding opportunities between the two disposition holders, but the minister's mandate and authority is to provide direction to the FMA holder to develop and provide a sustainable plan for the other operator in his area, and we are doing that. I guess some of our operators vie for opportunistic solutions rather than the best solution.

MS CARLSON: In terms of this are you taking a look at the

mandate being trying to replicate as much as possible a natural forest environment?

MR. HENDERSON: Our regeneration standards provide for the return to the land base of a forest that is similar to the one that was grown there. We are in the process of developing a broader and more scientific approach to how our harvesting should occur in a landscape by, I think, a more natural way, with larger regeneration areas and more structure on where we harvest so that it's more in tune with nature rather than the older system of small square blocks.

MS CARLSON: And how much of your budget is spent on the science of that process?

MR. HENDERSON: I don't quite understand.

MS CARLSON: As I understand it, there are a lot of studies being undertaken to determine what the best management practices are. Does the department contribute to that investigation, to the research and development side of that, or is that solely picked up by industry?

MR. HENDERSON: Well, I would have to have Bruce provide the exact dollars. We participate in three primary ways. We have provided funding to NCE and the model forest, and we provide annual funding to the Alberta Research Council for studies directed at forestry landscape type research. We also have requirements and participation with industry through their research programs, whether it's research carried out by FRIAA or company-specific research.

MS CARLSON: Okay. That's excellent. I wouldn't mind having those figures, but if you could provide them in the future, that would be all right. Also, I would like them, if it's possible, compared to what your expectations are in terms of what industry provides for dollars in that regard. That would be helpful.

MR. HENDERSON: We can do that.

MS CARLSON: I'd like to say that what I see happening out there in the last few years is certainly encouraging. I think that industry is working very hard to be responsible keepers of the landscape.

9:25

MR. MAR: If I could make one observation in that regard, I think that industry, whether it's the oil and gas industry or the forestry business, has been much more conscious of their environmental stewardship role, and I think it's because of a large public demand for the same. We only need to look at examples of what happened to the forest industry at a place like Clayoquot Sound in British Columbia. I think other stewards of the land, forestry or oil and gas, have looked at those examples seriously and realized that the last place they want to be is in a situation like that, where their products may be boycotted in places like Europe or somehow their practices associated with not being environmentally sound. So I think part of the reason is that the overall public consciousness for environmental stewardship has compelled industries to be much more proactive in their practices, and I applaud them for it.

MS CARLSON: One last forest question. In the event of a large forest fire that significantly impacts an FMA or a quota holder, what happens?

MR. HENDERSON: Well, if we have a forest fire that exceeds the annual allowable cut of that specific unit by more than 2 percent

cumulative for the five-year control period, we require the company to complete a new inventory assessment of the burn area which considers the effectiveness of the salvage operations, and immediately after, if it's a large fire, we reduce the annual allowable cut based on what is supplied and verified by our foresters.

MR. WHITE: We understand that the Bighorn wildland recreation area may be harvested now. I'd rather have the assurance that that will not occur, but if it is to occur, could we understand the philosophy of it in light of the conservative nature of the allocations and the extent of that harvest?

MR. HENDERSON: Okay. There is no intent to provide large commercial harvesting within the Bighorn wildland area. As you know, the Sunpine forest management area stops shy of the Bighorn area. There are some areas that have a higher fire risk, timber around communities such as Nordegg and the Bighorn Indian reserve settlement area, and we are in the process of discussing with the local residents some programs that will reduce the fire hazard to the communities and as well incorporate into it some wildlife or biological improvements which could be as a result of timber harvesting.

So there is no foreseen goal to have commercial harvesting, but we realize that the age class of the timber there is becoming very high risk to fire, and there is some responsibility to provide preventative suppression programs to deal with trying to suppress a fire before it hits the communities. That's what we're reviewing now.

MR. WHITE: Would it be safe to say that that which is harvested in the wildlands area will be specifically to protect the habitable areas and some of the wildlife areas in the way of fire suppression or pre strike? Is that the philosophy behind the taking of the timber in the wildland area?

MR. HENDERSON: Yes.

MR. WHITE: Terrific. Thank you, sir.

The last area I'd like to address today is a report published by the Senate which dealt with forest management in North America particularly, not specifically in Alberta of course. One of the recommendations was that the commercial tenure for harvesting in a particular area be extended. This particular province has forest management agreements, FMAs if you will. With a 200-year horizon for planning of forestry and a growth pattern, depending on where you are in the province and where your FMA is from, in the area of a minimum of 60 years and sort of a maximum of 120 or so, how is it that FMAs are so short that it would put a company's planning in intensive forest management at jeopardy if their FMA is a 25-year when the payback period, if you will, on an intensive forest management could be 40 to 60?

MR. HENDERSON: Alberta, as you know, has a 20-year tenure for our FMA agreements, but through a review of the FMA tenures headed up by MLA Wayne Jacques, we did provide for interim reviews and extensions. Now after 10 years from date of signing, an FMA can be renewed and another 10 added on to the 20-year term. As long as the FMAs meet our obligations and requirements, they are essentially an evergreen document or tenure, so every 10 years there's a rolling 10 added on if they meet our obligations.

MR. WHITE: Coupled with that recommendation for much longer tenure and inseparable from it was a recommendation for a citizen review, a five-year. Not totally citizen of course; there would be

expert evidence and public hearings would be held to test the efficacy of the five-year plan that had just been completed and therefore extend the period and design the environmental inhibitors, I guess, in the FMA for the next 10 years. Is that the effect of your new plan, that the company can actually look out and say: I can invest long term here, because all I have to really do is hit these targets. Is the effect of your change in plan of FMA review the same on a company and their harvesting as this Taylor report?

MR. HENDERSON: From the feedback I've received from most of the companies, they are comfortable with this rolling renewal process. They see that if they meet their obligations they will receive a renewal, and Alberta has always been very good in honouring our contracts. So they are reviewing these long-term opportunities.

MR. WHITE: Good. Thank you, sir.

9:35

MS CARLSON: Thanks. I have a number of other questions.

First of all I'd like to make a general comment about the number of letters I've written to you, Mr. Minister, over the past year. I know they must sometimes drive your staff crazy. They're certainly not make-work projects. They're almost entirely as a response to questions asked when I'm out around the province or those that come directly into our office, so I do appreciate your timely responses to them. The information provided is generally very informative, and if not, we ask some follow-up questions. I prefer to continue in that fashion rather than a more confrontational mode in terms of some of the other options open to us. So thanks to your staff for their response in that regard.

My next set of questions are in the fisheries and wildlife management area. We see that there's a little more than a doubling of the budget in this coming year. Could you give us an overview of where those additional dollars are going to be spent?

MR. MAR: Bruce.

MR. PERRY: I'll probably have to ask Mr. Barrett to help us, as well. Did you have a specific section? The budget is broken down between headquarters and a region, many of the activities specific to a region. Do you have a period?

MS CARLSON: I wouldn't mind a general overview in all regards there.

MR. PERRY: Well, perhaps on the program side, because you can get into real depth with the numbers, Mr. Barrett would just start with the activities.

MR. BARRETT: You want an overview of the fisheries and wildlife program activities and the enrichments particularly?

MS CARLSON: Yes.

MR. BARRETT: The enrichments are primarily related to the endangered species, just about exclusively, with minor increases elsewhere, whether we have co-operative programs for resourcing in wildlife populations in parks and some fisheries inventories in the parks, but the biggest single increase, much bigger than all others, is in the endangered species program.

Now, I can take you through some of the typical activities in both fisheries and wildlife management divisions, if that is your wish. With our fish culture program, I could take you into an inventory

program, the season-setting process, our working relationship with endangered species, whatever you wish.

MS CARLSON: Well, let's talk about fish first of all. We still have a problem in the province in terms of maintaining fish stocks. So if you could tell me what you've discovered in terms of what you've been doing that hasn't been working and what you think is working and how long it looks like we're going to be having a problem in that regard.

MR. MAR: Let me start by saying that the pressures on our fisheries in the province of Alberta are serious. If you look at the number of lakes that have fish in them in the province of Alberta, it would number less than a thousand, and if you look at the number of fishers who get licences each year, it would result in numbers in the hundreds of thousands. I think something like 300,000 licences are issued each year.

The simplistic calculation I think is revealing, because when you look at the number of anglers per lake in Alberta, it would be perhaps 300 or 400 to 1. Compare that to the province of Saskatchewan or the province of Ontario. In Saskatchewan there are roughly 100,000 lakes with fish in them, and in the province of Ontario I believe there are about 200,000 lakes with fish in them. The number of anglers per lake in those provinces is in the single digits, two or three fishers per lake on average, compared to hundreds per lake here in the province of Alberta. So it is a serious issue, and we have a management program that reflects that, which is very different from what you'll find in Saskatchewan or Ontario. I think that's a good thing to do, because it's a very different set of conditions that we have in this province.

MR. BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Minister. That backdrop is why we have to be perhaps more aggressive and why some things are changing here. Let me just take you back a few years. I don't think there's any doubt, with the increasing pressure and mobility of our increasing population, that the impact on our fisheries was found to be ongoing, and that would extend back through the '70s and the '80s.

We've had some of these conversations earlier, but let me just start with what would typically have been done. We'd do an intensive population investigation on a lake or two or three or on a river or two or three. To do a detailed population assessment might take one to two to three years, depending on the complexity, and we would bring in new regulations for that body of water. Meanwhile, all kinds of other lakes and rivers were undergoing similar pressures. So it became clear that for a piecemeal, one-off water basin, while those studies were continuing, it was not acting and giving us responsive enough information to deal with the broader picture, the broader issue.

So we started some years ago – and I'll bring you right up to the present in a moment – with the first one, the bull trout. We looked at and introduced a provincewide zero harvest limit on bull trout. I'm happy to report that we are seeing rather substantive increases in some bodies of water in the river systems where we have that, most notably in some of the Kananaskis Country and some of the other rivers in central Alberta, and we continue to monitor those and are evaluating the options of reintroducing them to key bodies of water where there's not a substantial population for effective recovery. By and large, the response has been good.

The next issue that we dealt with provincewide was the one of walleye, where we had a rather large-scale decline, by and large, over a lot of our lakes over a prolonged period of time with the increased targeting of these species by anglers and more mobility of

boats, fish finders, tournaments, all manner of things. In that one we've introduced the provincewide system of classifying lakes into trophy, stable, vulnerable, or collapsed. We did this so that we could bring in some protection for all water bodies while individual studies reveal a change from one category to the next as we get the detailed information. But that brought in major changes with, I believe, major impacts.

The thing to remember here in terms of the timing – that was only four, five years ago – is the time it takes for maturity. We will not expect to see a change in the status until the fish that are in the lake have been allowed to mature, to spawn, to produce new recruitment; on average, eight to nine years for a female walleye to reach maturity. So we're looking, quite frankly, at a 10-year plus period to turn it around for walleye.

We are monitoring lakes. We're monitoring community effort over a wide amount of lakes. We're doing some specific studies on a few of them, and we have continued our introduction where we're trying to recover populations, like in Lac La Biche, like Pigeon Lake in the Wetaskiwin area. Those programs continue. I think we have to be more patient. I believe we have a very aggressive approach to management of fisheries, and we're picking them all up, so we have very few that aren't being caught in the gillnet of improved management. We still allow the fishing to occur, but we're reducing the killing or the harvesting of fish and allowing them to mature.

The next – and it happened last year – was the implementation of the new harvest regime for pike. Indeed, that system, generally speaking, put a 63-centimetre minimum size for pike, allowing them to mature essentially before they are harvested. Now, the one benefit that pike will have – I expect to see a quicker response here. Walleye tend to get to a size where they make good pan fish before they're mature, which is, as I said, eight to 10 years of age, whereas pike tend to mature in good conditions at three to four years of age, and they're still quite small. So I expect with favourable water conditions a quicker response with pike.

9:45

Also, we've got to think that over the last two or three years, as mentioned, fires brought a drought, and it's the spring-flooded grassland/marshland habitat which is primarily the spawning beds of pike. A drought with little runoff does not do us a lot of good in terms of recovering populations in the whole northeast, which has been the heart of our pike. The walleye situation, because they spawn in running water, in streams primarily, has not been helped by the drought in the last few years.

This year we're implementing a spring closure, essentially, for the pike and perch lakes from essentially April 1 to about May 19, just before the long weekend, in most of our water bodies. I think that's going to have the added benefit of protecting the spawning areas.

The one I didn't mention to date was that two years ago we introduced the new east slope regulations for cold water species, primarily the trout, Rocky Mountain whitefish, and grayling. I think that has been overwhelmingly successful. Again, it's not very long in terms of its implementation phase, but we hear nothing but very positive feedback from folks that are highly engaged and interested in those east slope populations.

I think we're going to see some fairly immediate benefits there, not unlike what we saw with the bull trout, but it's going to be quicker, as well, because the base population was in place for many of those species. We have something like 27 or 28 catch-and-release waters in Alberta now, and I think we're leading North America in that regard. The feedback, as I say, is extremely positive.

Now, that's kind of an overview of fish. We can provide more detail if you'd like.

MS CARLSON: Like we have in other budget years.

Just one question there, and that's in terms of compliance on the catch-and-release side of things. I hear increasingly from people who fish that they are concerned that there isn't a high level of compliance always. I particularly hear those concerns about Slave Lake. If you could comment on that.

MR. BARRETT: We are, likewise, concerned with compliance. Slave Lake has the potential to be impacted in four different ways, most principally from the recreation angler who may or may not be willing in some cases to stay within the limits. The second way is, of course, the commercial fishing. A third way is the domestic licences by native fishermen, and the fourth way is the illegal setting of nets and marketing of fish.

We have in the last three years paid special attention to Slave Lake and will continue to do so from all levels, both the visible and uniformed officers and some other folks who are not quite as visible, in some of our covert operations. Those things continue at a number of sites around the province. I can't go into any specifics there for obvious reasons. We have put new officers and will be putting two new officers at Slave Lake this April to increase the permanent complement of staff in that area.

One other thing that we're doing. We're looking at compliance on a broader basis as it relates to fisheries, and we are setting up the elements of what would be a graduate research program to actually investigate and provide more science to the issue of compliance. We will relate and analyze not only how well people are complying with the regulations but the impact of that noncompliance on the populations. This would give us a science basis to decide and target our enforcement efforts, the likes of which we really haven't had in the past, nor is that specific data available in the literature to the same extent. So it would be somewhat of a first in some of the lakes that we're talking about, particularly in the north-central and northeast. They would be the ones where we have a lot of background information that we would use in this study.

We'll also be putting one compliance enforcement officer in each of our six regions this year to support, analyze, and direct efforts related to the enforcement and to see in a more focused sense of how in fact we can be more strategic and more quantitative in assessing the impact of our efforts and how we can work more collaboratively with all environmental resources – like, in forestry it's the biologists and everybody in there – bringing those various interests and activities together. So we're doing quite a few things in the area of compliance, and those will be kicked off in April of this year.

MS CARLSON: That's good. That reminds me of an area where I think the government doesn't comply with its own regulations, and that's with regard to fish screens on irrigation ditches. Could you comment on that, please?

MR. BARRETT: The issue of screens in irrigation facilities obviously is a complex and ongoing issue, as you're well aware. Many of those facilities were in fact built decades and decades ago by the federal government and turned over to us without those, when no one was thinking along those lines at that time. A lot of the older facilities and the major facilities we acquired in that regard.

Now, at the new ones that we're doing – and I'll come back to some of the problem ones – such as Pine Coulee, we are building, at some considerable cost, a fish screen device and evaluating the effectiveness and the design parameters. For two years, though, for all the major ones like the Carson diversion and others we have had a federal/provincial group looking at it with the specialized committee whose primary interest is fishways, fish passages and diversions,

again in a focused fashion to try and evaluate what it is that can be done on such a major waterway that would have the effectiveness of diverting fish without killing large numbers of small fish because of the volume of water and the currents created in those areas.

That work is ongoing. We will be looking at efforts and results from the Pine Coulee one and others, ongoing investigations to see what is possible. It's not small money that we're talking about here for a potential retrofit, and it's unlikely to be anything as close as a simple screen because of the volumes and flow of water and the debris in them, which would quickly clog and completely disrupt the whole system. It's likely got to be some other subtle deflectors in terms of creating different current approaches that would tend to move fish by their natural tendency away from being entrapped in the water flow.

We also have had the leading hydrologist in Canada, from the University of Waterloo, engaged in this on a contract basis to help us design these things. The experience he's bringing is that he's worked with intake flows to some of the nuclear power facilities in Lake Ontario and others, where they've looked at sound barriers, thermal screens, flow mechanisms.

So it is complex. The problem persists in a lot of areas. It's not that we're not working on it, but we have a lot of work yet to do. I agree with you there.

MS CARLSON: We'd certainly like to be kept apprised of what's happening in that regard. I have steered away from that particular issue in the Legislature at this time, but I'm getting increasing pressure to ensure that the issue is addressed, so if you have studies, we sure wouldn't mind having copies of those. As you make some progress, if we could be kept informed, that would help us inform people throughout the province so that this is an issue we can deal with outside of question period.

My biggest concern about the fisheries and wildlife management – and you've seen some written questions from me on it – is that the total budget for fish and wildlife is now combined. It would be a lot more beneficial for us if we could see the moneys that are spent on fisheries and the moneys that are spent on wildlife independently, not only because I think fisheries management is a huge issue in the province right now and we'd like to be able to monitor that on an ongoing fashion, but also because we get a lot of concerns from the general public, from people who believe that a disproportionate amount of money is spent on wildlife as compared to fisheries. Now, I can't even comment on that because we can't see how those respective budgets are changing over time when they're combined. Any comments on that?

MR. MAR: No.

MS CARLSON: No? Okay.

So a couple more on the endangered species. You talked about a large amount of the increased dollars being allocated to that, and I understand that \$25,000 of that is the Endangered Species Conservation Committee scientific advisory. I'd like a little better breakdown in terms of what's happening with the money. There are going to be status reports for the main committee to evaluate, I expect, and as a result of that there will be some recommendations implemented. Have you targeted any dollars to implementing recommendations, or have we not got that far? Could you just elaborate on that for me?

9:55

MR. BARRETT: I think you're quite correct, as in most cases and perhaps in all cases we haven't got that far. What the main focus is on is that we'll be looking at the status of species that are thought to

be vulnerable or endangered. Essentially the activity in the next period of time – in the next broad-scale activity we'll be doing the detailed assessments of the status of those and, more importantly, developing a recovery plan, the essence of a recovery plan. That will obviously have to be developed, of course, in conjunction not only with the scientific advisory committee to the Endangered Species Conservation Committee but with the local landowners or land base, whichever is involved with what species we're talking about.

The major effort is that we'll be determining the status, we'll be developing detailed recovery plans, and we will then be identifying other species that perhaps need to have the focus of similar activities over the next number of months in the next year. So the recovery plans will be brought forward and implemented; that is obviously the intent, clearly. Those will be implemented as soon as we have an acceptable recovery plan. But I want to make the point very clear that there will be a lot of consultation, as these recovery plans go forward, with affected parties, because we believe that without their active knowledge, participation, and support, these programs don't have a lot of chance to be successful. But with that, we believe they will be successful or have a high probability.

There's the human side of it as well as the science side of it, and both are critical. There are a number of species that currently are already in this process I've talked about for this coming summer.

MS CARLSON: Great. I see that our time is drawing to a close. I'd just like to make a few closing comments.

MR. WHITE: The chairman says we have till 10:15.

MS CARLSON: Oh, 10:15. Okay. Good, because I've only had a page and a half of my questions. I have a few more pages to go.

The regions. We certainly appreciate the breakdown of the regional budgets as they're coming through now. That's helpful, and thank you for that.

Enforcement services you talked about, Mr. Minister, in your opening comments. In terms of increased budgetary dollars there, can you give us the rationale? It looked to us like there was a big experiment happening out there in terms of the decrease in enforcement services, and now there's an increase again. I wouldn't mind some explanation in terms of that rationale. Also, if you could tell us specifically the aspects of enforcement that are being expanded. We just heard the comment: a couple more officers on Slave Lake. What else is happening out there?

MR. MAR: I can't comment knowledgeably on what the rationale was for the earlier reduction in the number of enforcement officers, so I won't be able to address that. With respect to trying to find the right size and the right number of enforcement staff out there, it has struck me during my tenure as Minister of Environment that we did need more people out in the field dealing with compliance issues. As a general observation, following up on your comment that the forestry industry is doing a better job of being proactive in terms of its environmental practices, I would say that I think that is generally true of other industries as well. As a consequence, I believe there is a need to shift away from the Department of Environment prescribing the ways in which industries can meet with environmental standards. I believe the Department of Environment's core mandate is to establish tough environmental standards that are stringent and enforce them but that we not tell industries how to satisfy those standards.

So my general tack in this area is to establish tough standards and not prescribe how those standards are met but enforce stringently whenever those standards are breached. It's for that reason that

there's a greater emphasis on enforcement when it comes to our FTEs, which are going up in number. As the deputy minister already outlined in answering an earlier question, some of the FTEs that are coming over are transfers from another department, dealing with the issue of climate change, but there are quite a number of new conservation officers that are going in – I believe the number is 21 – throughout the province. That is by far and away the largest area that we're increasing in terms of our FTEs, of the 47 in total that we're going up this particular year.

MS CARLSON: Okay.

Special places: when can we expect the puzzle to be completed there?

MR. MAR: Special places has roughly 50 candidate sites that have been nominated and approved. There still remain another 45 to 55 sites that have reached some stage of approval or recommendation, but the expectation is that Special Places 2000 will be completed in the year 2000.

MS CARLSON: You're saying by December 31 of this year you expect it to be . . .

MR. MAR: Yes.

MS CARLSON: Okay. That's great. We're looking forward to some announcements.

Chinchaga. I just want to talk about that for a short while. Certainly we and many people feel that the area that was protected is not sufficiently large, that there is a missed opportunity there, particularly with regard to caribou habitat. The area that's been protected is primarily bog, not the treed area which is also essential in terms of habitat protection. Are there any plans for extending that area, and could you comment generally on it?

MR. MAR: No. But the area is a sizable one; it is roughly the same size as the Whaleback region to the southwest of Calgary. It is an area that has been nominated by a local committee. It has taken into account a number of different values, not just environmental ones but other local values as well. I think the Chinchaga region is an area that is important habitat for more than just caribou. I think it is an exceptionally good candidate site that will be protected.

MS CARLSON: Then in terms of the caribou, what do you expect to do to compensate for their lost habitat?

MR. MAR: With respect to the caribou, I can't comment specifically on that. I don't think I'm able to do that, but perhaps I'll ask Morley Barrett to do so.

MR. BARRETT: Thank you. Perhaps a point that needs to be made here – and I think it's an important one – is that the survival and the success of some of these large ungulates is not primarily linked at all to the special places. The success and the future of them is linked to broad-scale, good forest management in a general sense, and clearly that's why we as a department look at all aspects of improving operating plans and other aspects as it relates to forest management. So it would be short selling a species if we were to focus only on the special places that are in the protected areas as the ecological unit that they require, and I wouldn't want to reinforce that concept. While they're very vital, very important, the ecological complexities are things that need to be preserved, and benchmarks and others factors are only one of the elements needed for the species, espe-

cially those with migratory patterns. Clearly we will continue to work as a department with other industries and be involved to address the needs of caribou on a seasonal basis.

10:05

MS CARLSON: Well, certainly I agree with what you're saying, which only increases my concern in terms of the Chinchaga area. We know that one of the main problems for caribou is not only habitat but close exposure to people and industry. Now they're losing some of their habitat, and they're being increasingly exposed to industry in that area. Could you comment on that?

MR. BARRETT: I don't know that my answer would change substantially, other than the fact that we do deal with the industry and with approvals of the type of seismic activities, the sharing of roads, and as mentioned previously, there have been studies to look at reducing the impact, both short-term and long-term, of industry on the environment. I think that is an issue and a general direction we're trying to adopt broadly, not only with caribou, but it gives it special focus when there are caribou involved because of the sensitivity of the species. That is going on, and we'll be doing some additional inventory work, some additional consultation, and working closely with our forestry brethren and industry to make sure that as we understand more and more of the requirements and the movement patterns, we reflect that in the types of management plans we allow and approve in that area.

MS CARLSON: Thank you. If you could share any of that inventory work and the progress in the area of changes in populations in that region, that would be helpful to us in terms of eliminating some of our concerns.

MR. BARRETT: And perhaps we have some others that would be of interest.

MS CARLSON: Okay. Sure. That's excellent.

Spray Lakes, Mr. Minister. I'm getting more calls and letters of concern on that than I did on the Natural Heritage Act, which was considerable. It all has to do with the Genesis development, as you're well aware. We've seen one of the companies withdraw. What does the future look like in terms of that area?

MR. MAR: I think that the Kananaskis region and Spray Lakes in particular is a jewel of the province, and the main principle from the perspective of the Department of Environment is that we will not allow anything which will dramatically change the environmental values or the wilderness character of this particular area. Albertans have spoken out strongly with respect to their views on Kananaskis Country, and that is what precipitated in early 1999 the release of the provincial government's policy on development in Kananaskis Country, which is: no new development in that area.

At that time there were six projects that had received some previous review, and they had been grandfathered. Of those six projects, one, which was for a golf course, has been withdrawn by Kan-Alta Golf Management. A second one, by the Buffalo Nations Cultural Society, has not demonstrated sufficient clarity in terms of their project or any viability or any financial planning and accordingly has been rejected. One which remains on the books is to build condominiums on what is currently a parking lot at Fortress Mountain ski lodge. That will go through the appropriate process of review.

The remaining three are a Spray Lakes boat tour, a large four-season resort, and a heli-skiing operation. All of those are being

proposed by the Genesis development company. I have ordered that a cumulative environmental impact assessment be done on all three, which from an environmental standpoint only makes sense. At this point the terms of reference have been out for submissions by the public and other interested stakeholders. The review of the three projects by Genesis has now closed, and they are being reviewed by department officials. I can say that I've received a great deal of comment on Genesis projects. I've not seen any positive comments with respect to the particular project, but there is a process which Genesis will have to go through. My expectation is that they will have a great deal of difficulty satisfying all of the public concern in this regard.

MS CARLSON: Well, we're very happy to see that there's a cumulative impact study under way there, and we're looking forward to seeing the results. Your comments in that regard are encouraging.

When do we see the Natural Heritage Act back in the Legislature? I understand that it would be helpful to your department to see that act come back in some sort of a revised way taking into account the public input.

MR. MAR: There's been a great deal of public input into what was then Bill 15, the Natural Heritage Act. Many of the comments that have been made have been very constructive. In particular, I note the comments made by the Environmental Law Centre here in the city of Edmonton. I believe that a number of changes can be made to that iteration of the act that can make it very beneficial. It will be tabled at such time as it can be appropriately drafted, because it is a devilishly difficult piece of legislation in many regards. We want to make sure, as best we can, that we table it in a format that recognizes the public input which has been put forward on that particular bill.

MS CARLSON: It's good news to see that you're still looking at that in a comprehensive fashion. Any chance of seeing it this spring?

MR. MAR: It'll be tabled when it's complete. I cannot comment on whether it would be spring or some other time.

MS CARLSON: Okay. Thank you.

I'd like to move to the performance measures for a moment. I was quite surprised to see that the surface water quality index is just gone. I understand that the new index is being prepared and I expect that the new index will be better, but wouldn't it have been good to at least have had the old index in place until the new one was ready so that we could compare them? Do you have any comments on that?

MR. RADKE: I'm trying to find the reference.

MS CARLSON: Page 99, performance measures.

THE CHAIRMAN: While you're looking for that, we're down to a couple of minutes.

MS CARLSON: Okay. Well, maybe we could get that response in writing. We have a number of other questions that we will provide to you in writing and expect the same excellent answers from you as in the past.

I'd like to put my plug in for this format of budget review process. It's very helpful to us. It's nice to be able to ask questions where we get detailed and comprehensive answers on-site, and I would hope that we could continue this process at least in this department if not in others.

So with that, then we'll conclude our questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. This ends the Official Opposition section of the committee. We now move on to the time specifically allocated for the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Hearing no question from that member, we'll move to the last section of the committee, which is time allocated to government members.

Are there any questions of the Minister of Environment from government members? Ivan.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the hon. minister. First and foremost I'd like to congratulate you and your department for your forethought and understanding of endangered species, for the simple reason that I think it's great you are looking into that, and also for your consideration of allocating some dollars and cents to it. I know you haven't ignored it in the past under the Wildlife Act and I know there has been a lot of work going on, but if we're going to look at recovery and get things going along in that line, we certainly need to show our commitment. You certainly have done that in this budget. I know that will certainly please the Endangered Species Conservation Committee as well as the scientific subcommittee, so I really appreciate that.

10:15

The other thing I wanted to sort of mention. When you were talking about corridors, could you maybe give us a little better insight on the aspect of wildlife corridors? Are you stating, then, that we're looking at the different corridors within the province and also sort of supporting the Y2Y, or are we just looking at the aspect of wildlife corridors within the province of Alberta?

The other question I have is on page 133, under water management. I notice that we've got almost a \$6 million increase there, and I'm just wondering: is that, in effect, because of our incorporation of the Water Act starting January 1, 1999? Do you feel that's the reason we've got more pressure in that?

The other item that I have is on page 137, under forest protection. It might be a little self-centred on my part on this, but on the northeastern slopes I notice that we have had a dry year for the last two years, and this year it looks like we're going to have another one. That area has been really fortunate not to have any fires. We're only looking at a \$76,000 increase, and I'm just wondering why. Maybe in one of my other questions we can clarify that.

Another question. On page 147 we're talking about areas of parks and natural reserves in Alberta. I also have to take my hat off to your department on that. If you look at from 1950 to 1998, we have about 18,153 square kilometres more, and I think that's an awfully giant step. I think we've got to sort of publicize that more. I think we are in the area of conserving.

The one thing that sort of concerns me is the aspect of parks visitation, on the same page, page 147. As you'll see, in 1993-94 we were up to 9,043, and we've progressively dropped since then. I know in some areas there have been a lot of aspects of the implication of costs moving in, the conditions of them. Also, I would strongly suggest that we sort of look at the aspect, especially in the green area, of making the forest companies come to the table in partnership with us on these. I think that displays also to the public that it's multi-use, and I think we should look at that in a stronger light.

I guess the other one I'd like to talk about is on page 148. I realize that in your opening remarks you talked about the aspect of fire. I don't know. I just feel we have to budget more. If you take a look at your line for fire suppression, from this year to last year's budget we're \$2,706,000 down. If you look at forest protection from this year to last year, we're up \$1,340,000, and then under forest management we're also up \$1,759,000. In the total picture, especially with the budgets we have and the conditions we have, I

just think it makes more budget sense to have more out. I realize what you're up against, but I just feel it's important that we do that so people understand the importance of the forest.

I guess the other one on the same page, 148, is the NRCB. I was quite curious on the aspect that you went with \$1,355,000 for 2000-2001, yet we're only looking at \$943,000 being spent. Then in the budget of 1999-2000 we're looking at \$1,249,000, but for 2000-2001 we have an increase.

Then my last question is on codes of practice in the forestry industry. We're getting a lot of pressure – and I'm sure the rest are having the same as what I'm having in my area – as a lot of national companies like Revy are coming out to see the code of practice because of the public pressure that's put on. I'm just wondering: where are we sitting on that as the Department of Environment to co-ordinate this message on the forest practices that we have?

MR. MAR: With respect to codes of practice I'll have Cliff address that.

With respect to forest fires I will say: whatever amount is the appropriate amount for fighting forest fires. We have adopted a very aggressive forest fire fighting policy, and we will continue to do that. I won't say that whatever is budgeted is irrelevant, but whatever is necessary. I would never hesitate to come back in a supplementary estimate and ask for the appropriate amount to fight forest fires and return whatever money may be left over after that. We do have a policy of aggressive fire fighting, which has been confirmed by this government, not just by the department, and we'll continue to do that.

With respect to wildlife corridors, it's an area that we study carefully. As already outlined by Morley Barrett, we are looking at the Y2Y initiative, and we are paying particularly close attention to the whole area in the Bow Valley corridor, which appears to be a real bottleneck in that particular wildlife corridor. We know from our research that grizzly bears range incredibly wide areas. We know from our research that there are in my recollection at least 10 or 12 different grizzly bear studies that are being done in this province. Cougars range even wider areas than do grizzly bears. So wildlife corridors are critical to the well-being of those species.

With respect to the dollar questions that you had asked, I'll turn those over to the deputy minister.

With respect to your questions on page 147 and the numbers of visitors to our parks it's clear that people do get a great deal of value in visiting our parks. I'll certainly be interested to see how that trend continues. It goes currently up to '97-98, and I'd be interested to see what the subsequent years turn out.

With those comments, I'll turn them over to the respective individuals: Morley to talk about wildlife corridors, Doug to talk about the dollars, and Cliff to talk about the codes of practice in the forestry area.

MR. RADKE: Okay. Dealing with the water management question and an apparent increase of \$6 million, you'll notice on page 133 that it shows a decrease in expenses funded by lotteries. The net number is \$5.447 million. What that essentially means is that money from lotteries last year is now part of the general revenue funding. You will, however, see an increase of nearly \$7.9 million in capital investments, and that's additional funding that we're putting into small water infrastructure projects, money that is very welcome because our ability to maintain and rehabilitate some of our small water infrastructure has started to cause us some concern, but we are making some progress on that now.

In terms of the NRCB's budget, traditionally the NRCB has spent as follows.

We look at protected areas. We look at zone 1s. We look at

forest land use zones and other methods to see how they all fit into the puzzle, and that's part of the conscious decision-making and evaluation process. I should also mention that in this province we have marked and continue to study a substantial number of the large carnivores, particularly, and caribou and other species that have special problems in this type of situation, as I mentioned, with the connectivity as it relates to road construction, to mining, to forestry activity.

We're very actively looking at the response of animals to specific land use aspects and planning those activities and understanding better the response to specific activities. It's a very active approach that we have ongoing in a number of sites, even responses to haul roads or major access roads to large gas and oil fields or intensive seismic. We have ongoing studies which will help us understand the impact and the response of wildlife species to these and have marked animals to be able to give not only an anecdotal but very much a scientific, defensible response and understanding to those events.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions from government members? Seeing no further questions, I'd like to call for a motion to conclude the discussion of the estimates of the Minister of Environment. Is there anyone who'd like to make a motion?

MR. STRANG: Mr. Chairman, I'll move that under Standing Order 56(8) the designated supply subcommittee on Environment conclude discussion on the 2000-2001 estimates for the Department of Environment and rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:31 a.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 20, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. From our forests and parkland to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. God grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Hon. members, would you please remain standing now for the singing of our national anthem. We'll call on Mr. Paul Lorieau, who's in the Speaker's gallery, to lead us.

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

Please be seated.

Hon. members, before the Clerk calls the first order of business on the Routine today, I am also pleased to acknowledge that today marks the anniversary of 12 of our members who were first elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in the general election of March 20, 1989.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here that was organized by a student by the name of Steven Beasley in St. Albert. He took it around Paul Kane high school, and he got 661 names signed to this petition that urges "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta which is urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care" signed by 220 Albertans from Rocky Mountain House, Alhambra, Leslieville, Wetaskiwin, and Rimbey.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, today it's my pleasure to present to the Assembly a petition that has been signed by 294 Albertans from Red Deer, Lacombe, Hinton, Edson, Rimbey, Calmar, Drayton Valley, Hines Creek, Eckville, and Rocky Mountain House. All of these Albertans are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MACBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table

a petition supporting public health care in Alberta. The undersigned citizens from Red Deer, Sylvan Lake, Olds, Didsbury, Eckville, Blackfalds, Bowden, Sundre, Innisfail, and Carstairs are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [our] public health care [system]." Today's total will be 2,227, and our total to date just from this petition alone will be 25,801 Albertans.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Now the hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition signed by 1,145 Albertans who are residents of Athabasca, Fort McMurray, Island Lake, Boyle, Caslan, Calahoo, Smith, Calling Lake, Grassland, and other communities in the Athabasca area. These names are collected by the Athabasca Citizens for Public Healthcare, who are all opposed to Bill 11. Today this tabling brings the total number of signatures to 6,406. The petition reads as follows:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to also present a petition which requests "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [our] public health care [system]." There are 404 individuals who signed this petition from Red Deer, Penhold, Caroline, Rocky Mountain House, Leslieville, Innisfail, Eckville, Tofield, Castor, Killam, Stettler, Camrose, Wainwright, Sedgewick, Devon, Bashaw, and Jasper.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege today to stand and present a petition on behalf of 323 residents of Lethbridge, Raymond, Cardston, Magrath, Monarch, Coutts, Pincher Creek, Lundbreck, Cayley, Brooks, and Medicine Hat. This petitions "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition with respect to public health care that I introduced on March 16 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented to the Legislative Assembly on Thursday, March 16, requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be read and received. Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled last Thursday in this Legislative Assembly now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I request that the petition which I presented to this Assembly on March 16 urging the government to stop promoting private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition I tabled on Thursday, March 16 in favour of Bill 11 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to provide respective Regional Health Authorities with the flexibility necessary to provide the delivery of publicly funded, publicly administered overnight surgical services cost-effectively and efficiently through the contracting-out of such services if deemed necessary.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I tabled on March 16, Thursday of last week, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Bill Pr. 1

Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the Province of Alberta Repeal Act

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill Pr. 1, being the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the Province of Alberta Repeal Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

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

Bill Pr. 2

William Roper Hull Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 2000

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill Pr. 2, being the William Roper Hull Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 2000.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

Bill Pr. 3

Westcastle Development Authority Repeal Act

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce Bill Pr. 3, being the Westcastle Development Authority Repeal Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a first time]

Bill Pr. 4

Calgary Municipal Heritage Properties Authority Amendment Act, 2000

MRS. LAING: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 4, the Calgary Municipal Heritage Properties Authority Amendment Act, 2000.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 4 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Bill Pr. 5

Calgary Foundation Act

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie I beg leave to introduce Bill Pr. 5, being the Calgary Foundation Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 5 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of a letter that was sent to Dr. Robert Burns, the executive director of the Alberta Medical Association. The letter states in part that

it is clear that the Alberta Medical Association does not represent the views or interests of the Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgeons in the Province of Alberta on a number of important matters.

Therefore this organization withdraws from the AMA.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one: for members who had been interested in the March 14 tabling of correspondence from the Minister of Health and Wellness to the Hon. Allan Rock, this is the response from the Hon. Allan Rock dated March 16, 2000.

The second item, Mr. Speaker, is an e-mail received from Mr. Joe Nagy dated March 15, 2000.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings here. The first one is a set of four letters from individuals in St. Paul, Okotoks, Sherwood Park, and Edmonton all opposing Bill 11.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from Premier Romanow to Heather Smith, president of United Nurses of Alberta. It's dated March 7, and in part the Premier says:

In my view, a well managed, non-profit publicly funded system can provide a continuum of insured hospital and physician services more effectively and efficiently than for-profit private clinics or private hospitals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Do you have another one?

DR. PANNU: I have two more, a couple of more.

THE SPEAKER: Please.

DR. PANNU: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I table a recent news article which shows that private, for-profit hospitals in Australia have not relieved the strain on the public system and have actually caused waiting lists to grow.

One more tabling, Mr. Speaker, with your permission. This is a copy of a motion that was passed at the Athabasca Citizens for Public Healthcare forum on March 16, and the motion says:

Be it resolved that all provincial government costs incurred in promoting Bill 11 . . . including the cost of circulating a copy of this bill, be levied against the salaries of those members of the Alberta Legislative Assembly who vote in favour of passage of this bill beyond the date of this Forum, March 16th, 2000.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five programs of this weekend's Edmonton/Calgary provincial hockey tournament, which was held in northeast Edmonton at the Clareview arena.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of a petition signed by 29 residents of Alberta who are protesting the proposed Cheviot coal mine, that it's "in an area identified by the Provincial Government as a critical wildlife area."

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a decision from the Labour Relations Board dated March 19, 1998, and in it the board indicates that it "does not

have the jurisdiction to initially determine which facilities are approved hospitals" in this province.

My second tabling this afternoon is a leaflet that was distributed to the public today, and it is from the Alberta pensions administration employees group urging the government to negotiate in good faith.

Thank you.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies from a number of Albertans who are expressing their opposition to Bill 11. For the sake of time I'll read their names into the record: William Stuart, Lee Melnychuk, R. Colborne, and Neil Bleakney.

Thank you.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, two tablings this afternoon with your permission. The first is a letter from Elisabeth deWynter from my constituency. It is a multiple-page letter which is her very sound analysis of Bill 11 and her reasons for not supporting this bill, and I would ask that the Premier pay particular attention to this letter and perhaps respond to Mrs. deWynter.

The second tabling I have is an exchange of correspondence between the office of the Auditor General and the then acting superintendent of the Alberta Treasury Branches, Mr. Elmer Leahy, as well as management letters exchanged between the former Provincial Treasurer, Jim Dinning, and Allister McPherson, all regarding connected accounts and loan practices of the Alberta Treasury Branch. It makes very interesting reading in regards to the West Edmonton Mall financing.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a press release from the board of directors of the Canadian Nurses Association, which recently condemned Bill 11 and indicated that private facilities are not the answers to solving the concerns within our health care system.

The second tabling that I have is a letter from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees to the minister of health wherein they indicate that they are still awaiting a response with regards to their request as to what the criteria and process is for declaring approved hospitals in this province.

1:50

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 32 guests from Archbishop Jordan high school and their teacher, Mr. Jim Ryan. This class is from grade 10. They are energetic and bright. I'd ask that they rise and that we join in our appreciation of their attendance here today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature 57 guests from the beautiful community of Vegreville. They're from the Vegreville composite high school. They're accompanied by teachers Mr. Bill Smolak and Mr. Greg Kurulok, parent helpers Mr. Marvin Topilko

and Mrs. Carol Maskowitz, and of course their very famous bus driver, Mr. Terry Baydala. I would ask them to all rise in the public gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud this afternoon to introduce two constituents of mine that are seated in your gallery, Marlene and Walter Chykerda, proud parents of one of our pages, Myles. Myles is a grade 12 student and attends Central Alberta Christian high school in Lacombe. He plays the saxophone in the Lacombe community band, and he's studying grade 8 piano. Myles' future plans include a degree in archeology. I'm very pleased that Myles is able to work in this Assembly, and I would ask his mom and dad to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the ever lovely, friendly, and always smiling, Mrs. Shariff. Mrs. Shariff is the wife of our colleague, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. Mina is here today in Edmonton along with her two lovely daughters, Fatima and Alysha, to join in the Eid al-Adha celebration which will be hosted by you, sir, this afternoon. The three lovely young ladies are seated in your gallery. I would like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and to the Members of the Legislative Assembly three wonderful people who are seated in the members' gallery. Today Loretta Burden is seated there. She actually hails from near Las Vegas, Nevada, and is a proud Paiute. Loretta is a renowned artist, well known for her unique basket-making abilities and was recognized for these artistic skills in the book *Distinguished Women of Southern Nevada*. She moved here three years ago on an invite from her lucky husband, Mr. Harold Burden, who many people know in this Assembly. He is the sports director of White Buffalo athletic society, well known for his commitment to aboriginal youth and sports. In fact, included with them is my beautiful sister, Helen Calahasen. As the name indicates, she is related, but I'm related to most of northern Alberta. These three are all avid supporters and volunteers with Dreamspeakers Festival, and they're seated in the members' gallery, as I indicated. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

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

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe my guests are due to come in here in just a few moments, but they may be able to hear us from outside the door up there. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 49 distinguished guests from the Eldorado elementary school. Six of these are three teachers and three parents and helpers. I just wanted to get it on the record that they are coming in here, and I'll be sending them a copy of *Hansard* so they can see that they were properly introduced. Could we give them the warm welcome of this House, please.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a great group of students from St. Thomas Aquinas school in Spruce Grove. They are here with their teacher, Mr. Nereo Bolzon. They are in law 10. There are 14 students seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. First, I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, Mr. Dan MacLennan. Mr. MacLennan, I think, is seated in the public gallery. I'll ask him to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, to you and to my colleagues in the Assembly: it's my pleasure to introduce two visitors from Lacombe who were at the citizens' vigil outside the Legislative Assembly today. They are Marylynn Stumpf and her mother, Myrt Nicholson. They're both from Lacombe and are opposed to Bill 11. I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier branded Albertans concerned with public health care as left-wing nuts. You know, the Premier is wrong, for if he would simply listen to Albertans, he would find out and he would know that they're not left-wing nuts. These are concerned parents and families and retired Albertans and teachers, business owners, and health care professionals who are worried about what this government is doing to dismantle our public health care system. My questions are to the Premier. Are the 5,000 people from Red Deer, Stettler, Lacombe, Innisfail, Rocky Mountain House, Blackfalds, Sylvan Lake who signed the petition tabled by the Member for Red Deer-South left-wing nuts in the eyes of the Premier?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker, they aren't. As a matter of fact, if the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition would send over her petition, I'll sign it too.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the 25,801 Albertans to date who have signed the petition across Alberta: are they left-wing nuts in the eyes of the Premier too?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker, and I'll repeat. If the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition will send over her petition, we'll sign it too.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the registered nurses, the doctors, the clergy, the teachers, the Consumers' Association, and the economists, all of whom have spoken out against this government's private hospitals legislation: are they left-wing nuts, too, in the eyes of the Premier?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. Again, if the leader of the Liberal opposition will send over the petition that's being circulated, we'll be happy to sign it.

Speaker's Ruling Seeking Opinions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before we move to the next question, I might just make the comment that one of the violations in question period is to seek opinions. It may very well be that all of the last three questions were asking for an opinion.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier has met with the doctors of this province, will he get out from under the dome now and meet with the nurses and the teachers and the clergy and the Consumers' Association about their concerns about Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this householder was sent to about a million households in Alberta. That's what I consider to be complete and full consultation, especially when we're asking all Albertans to provide their responses to the proposed bill.

MRS. MacBETH: It's interesting that he'll meet with doctors but not with nurses, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, given that when a town hall is organized by us on this side of the House, it's open to all Albertans, why is it that when the Treasurer and the minister of energy hold their so-called town hall meetings, they handpick who can come, and then they screen the questions that are asked?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that statement is not the truth.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, can the Premier, then, explain an e-mail which we received from one Ann Lockwood of Vermilion, Alberta, sent about a week ago in which she describes a government sponsored meeting by the Treasurer and the minister of energy in Lloydminster?

The event was by registration only . . . when I tried to book for a number of people, I was told that they needed the names of every person . . . no verbal questions would be accepted, only written ones.

To top it off, Bill 11 questions were "studied . . . sorted and screened" by the organizers. I'd be happy to table the e-mail referred to.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know anything about the meeting, but I am advised that the meeting to which the leader of the Liberal opposition alludes was organized by the Chamber of Commerce. It was not organized in any way, shape, or form by the two ministers mentioned.

DR. WEST: That whole meeting was put on by the Lloydminster Chamber of Commerce on Budget 2000, and they invited the Provincial Treasurer to come there. I mean, these people came to the meeting. It was an open meeting, and they took their questions in written form and put them through a moderator. This is a complete falsehood, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, you know what? There are many different definitions floating around this province right now as to what constitutes a hospital. Many Albertans have heard this Premier say, a hospital is a hospital. Well, the Alberta Hospitals Act talks about general, about approved hospitals, and it talks about non-regional hospitals. As if that weren't enough, Bill 11 defines public hospitals and sets up new categories of hospitals in the province

called "accredited" hospital surgical facilities, "designated surgical" facilities, and "approved surgical" facilities. Well, even though most Albertans know what a hospital is, it's obvious that this government doesn't know. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us: what are the criteria for determining what an approved hospital is in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, without wanting to sound facetious, if the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition wants to know what a hospital is, I would suggest that she go to University hospital or to the Royal Alex hospital or to the Grey Nuns hospital.

But this leader of the Liberal opposition knows what surgical clinics are all about. She likes to say that there was no publicly funded, privately delivered surgery happening when she was the minister of health, but there was. And don't just take my word for it. This 1991 *Calgary Herald* story talks about the 35 private surgical centres that existed in Alberta then doing everything from cataract surgery to plastic surgery to ear surgery. The headline says: Patients choose private treatment. "Growing ranks are bypassing hospitals for surgical clinics." Well, maybe we should call them Nancy's clinics.

Patients who are willing to pay a facility fee can have surgery at the time of their choosing rather than face the all-too-frequent waiting lists, and cancellations in hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, private facilities were doing insured services and charging patients facility fees, and this leader of the Liberal opposition when she was health minister did absolutely nothing about it. It was this government that banned facility fees, not her. Now the leader of the Liberal opposition is saying she wants to slam the door shut on the private sector, but when she had the chance, when she was the minister, she did absolutely nothing.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, that's the Premier that got fined, not me.

Mr. Speaker, can the Premier tell us why the freedom of information officer for Alberta Health indicated that there were no records available regarding the guidelines used by the minister of health to determine the standards of service necessary for a facility to be an approved hospital?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond. He's more familiar with the situation than I am.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, a list of approved hospitals is maintained in the province pursuant to section 44(2) of Hospitals Act, and it is updated periodically as new facilities come on stream or the role of an existing facility changes. The last list in which there were significant changes was the 4th of March 1997.

Mr. Speaker, these are facilities which provide overall general hospital services. They are located, of course, across the province and vary considerably in size. They are subject to an accreditation process to make sure that they have the standards in place, the ability to offer the services that are part of their overall plan.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why has the minister, then, failed for over two months to answer a very simple question regarding the criteria used by the minister to determine what is an approved hospital?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, to have a very detailed list of criteria which apply to all hospitals – all of the hospitals, of course, are not uniform in their ability to offer services. As I've said, the overall role of hospitals in this province is established through the overall

planning process of Alberta Health and Wellness and the regional health authorities. They are designed to provide in combination the wide range of services that is needed across this province. The list can be provided, and I will do so when I have sufficient copies so that that is available to all members. Of course, I think the important thing here – and perhaps this is the thing that the member is pursuing – is that there is a process for reviewing and accrediting the quality of services offered in this system.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the fact that an overwhelming majority of Albertans oppose Bill 11, the federal Liberals won't try to stop this government from legalizing private, for-profit hospitals. The federal Liberals are wimping out despite the fact that two constitutional lawyers concluded last week that Bill 11 violated at least three of the five principles of the Canada Health Act. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the Premier engaged in a phony fight with Ottawa when Jean Chretien and Allan Rock lack the political will to stand up for medicare?

MR. KLEIN: Well, that's a switch. All we're trying to get from Mr. Rock in particular are his comments on the bill as to whether he thinks the bill in its present form violates the Canada Health Act, and if it does, could he offer some suggestions as to how the bill could be made absolutely pure. That's all we're seeking from Mr. Rock.

I don't know of federal government constitutional lawyers who have commented on the bill, Mr. Speaker, because we have received no official response from the federal government relative to whether this bill, in fact, does violate the Canada Health Act. From our point of view it doesn't, because clearly in the preamble to the bill it purports to enshrine in law absolute adherence to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act.

2:10

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then why is the Premier using this smokescreen of a phony war with Ottawa to obscure the fact that Alberta doctors, nurses, health care workers, teachers, clergy, churches, and ordinary citizens all oppose Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: That's not quite true. Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. leader of the third party likes to table letters. I guess I could table letters as well. I tabled one today from a section of the Alberta Medical Association not supporting the position of the Alberta Medical Association on this particular bill.

We've had conversations with representatives of the archdiocese in the city of Edmonton, and it's the attitude of Archbishop Collins that the church will remain neutral. Yes, one bishop has spoken out on this issue, Mr. Speaker, but I've received letters from other Catholics who say that the opinions of Bishop Henry do not necessarily represent their opinions. I've received letters from nurses and other doctors who have the opposite opinions to those expressed by the hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier might want to know that not only Catholic clergy but United Church of Canada clergy also oppose Bill 11.

My last question to the Premier: why won't the Premier admit that the real opponents of his scheme to legalize private, for-profit hospitals are everyday, normal Albertans, not the federal Liberals, who seem willing to stand idly by and do nothing?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there was no question; therefore there can be no answer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister of Canada appears to be giving Alberta permission – permission – for this Legislature to proceed with Bill 11 apparently now without the federal ruling on whether the bill meets the terms of the Canada Health Act. Given his reported comments on the weekend, my questions are to the Premier. Has the federal government provided any official response to the province's repeated requests for them to express their concerns with Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: I have received no response from the Prime Minister. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo tabled a letter that was sent to our Minister of Health and Wellness dated March 16, where, first of all, he tries to vindicate himself from his disgraceful behaviour in Calgary. He goes on to say that he will not comment on the bill because perhaps there might be some amendments, Mr. Speaker. That's the only response to my knowledge that we have received from the federal government. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness can shed some further light on this matter.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, just to add, the federal minister and I have had two exchanges of correspondence since the bill was introduced, and we talked about its overall principles prior to that as well. In addition to what the Premier has indicated was the message of the letter, there were a number of other points raised. For instance, the federal minister feels that we should be fostering innovation, that we should be looking at new ways of doing things within our health care system, and we have certainly replied and indicated a number of the primary care projects that we have under way, a number of the other forward-looking and forward-thinking initiatives that we have going on in the province. He has also talked about having a ministers' meeting in the near future to talk about the best future directions for Alberta's and all provinces' health care systems as they work with the federal government.

So there has been certainly an exchange of correspondence, Mr. Speaker, but it's very important to note that in none of that correspondence is there any indication in any way at all that our bill is contrary to the Canada Health Act.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the minister of health. Would the minister tell Albertans how the government views the Prime Minister's remarks this weekend?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, comments have already been made earlier in question period about the seeking of opinions.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was asking for the position of the government on their comments.

Nonetheless, my third question is to the Premier. Since the federal government is ignoring the serious plight of our farmers and is proposing to tax our oil industry at higher levels than other industries and is now refusing to comment on Bill 11, is the Alberta government still seeking comment from the federal government on Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: We are still seeking comment on Bill 11 ostensibly as it relates to the section for which the federal government is responsible, and that is the Canada Health Act. Mr. Speaker, we want to

receive from the Prime Minister or the federal Minister of Health a clear and very definitive answer as to whether this bill in any way, shape, or form violates the Canada Health Act. That is a very simple question. It's a very simple question. That's all we want to know. All he has to do is provide an answer saying yes or no and, if the answer is yes, spell out where it violates the Canada Health Act.

I mean, Mr. Rock is a very intelligent individual, and he has a staff of about 6,000 people. Surely he has sufficient help in Ottawa to help him answer the question: does it violate the Canada Health Act? Mr. Rock, does it violate it or doesn't it violate it? Never mind getting into political rhetoric relative to his moral thoughts relative to the legislation. Does it violate the act? If it does, then tell us where it violates the act, and we'll fix it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Joe Nagy from Calgary took time to correspond with our caucus. In his March 15, 2000, e-mail Mr. Nagy says, "Her choices are as follows." He's referring to his wife who requires an MRI. Either "wait 9 months under health care," or "pay \$600 and get it in one day." My questions this afternoon are to the Premier on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Nagy. Will the Premier explain to this young couple and to this Assembly exactly how their predicament is not an example of a two-tier system of health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, just recently the Calgary regional health authority announced that it was contracting out for the services of privately operated MRIs. They're doing this to reduce waiting lists and to make it easier and more accessible for people who need MRIs under insured services to get there much quicker, and hopefully that will work out for this family as well as for hundreds of others who are on the waiting list.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my follow-up question to the Premier would be as follows: given that the specialist for this particular Calgary couple cannot proceed until Mr. Nagy's wife receives an MRI, will the Premier admit this afternoon that people right now with money are able to jump to the head of the queue to see specialists without delay?

MR. KLEIN: Yes, relative to MRIs, Mr. Speaker, that indeed is the case, but MRIs are not covered under the Canada Health Act. If this hon. member wants to fix that problem, I would suggest that he ask Mr. Rock. He might get an answer. We have been unable to get an answer on a number of questions.

MR. DICKSON: Finally, Mr. Speaker, a question as to the intentions of the Premier: despite Mr. Nagy's comment that "we have been loyal . . . Tory supporters," will they now be labeled left-wing nuts because they had the courage to show their concern about what this government is doing to undermine public health care?

2:20

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you know, this hon. member was at the Liberal convention in Ottawa this week, and he has expressed concern about MRIs, which is something that is not addressed in the Canada Health Act. Did he approach Mr. Rock on behalf of his constituents? I think not. I think not. And you know what? I would ask him to stand up and answer why he didn't approach Mr. Rock on this very important matter.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Private Health Services (continued)

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health care is an issue that touches all Albertans. Unlike changes to other government programs, changes to health care concern Albertans because people are afraid of change. Some of my constituents are calling concerned that we are seeing only the tip of the iceberg with respect to lengthy waiting lists, overcrowded emergency rooms, what it will be like in the future, and how Bill 11 will address these concerns. They have requested me to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness the following questions. Why would doctors want to work for a public hospital when they could earn much more working for a private clinic?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, in the legislation that we are proposing to the Assembly, the mode or method of payment via the AMA agreement, which would be the same for all doctors, is paramount in terms of contracts that would be arrived at or of course, as it is, payment within the public system. So there would not be any major direct financial incentive to physicians in these cases.

Mr. Speaker, we have had the exchange of information in terms of studies with respect to the clinics. However, I think there is a case that has been made by some physicians that they would prefer to concentrate on one very specific or narrow area of applying their expertise. They can see the potential of a specialized surgical clinic to be an area where their very concentrated specialization would be fully utilized, and it would work out to be a very efficient arrangement as far as the overall health care system is concerned.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government claims that private clinics will reduce waiting lists. How? [interjections] I'll ask again, then. The government . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, you're on your third one now. The question's been asked. The minister may choose to answer or not respond.

Question number 3, please.

DR. TAYLOR: He didn't hear it.

THE SPEAKER: Well, I'm sorry. The Speaker has mentioned decorum time and time again. The hon. members are here to listen. The hon. member.

MRS. FORSYTH: The government claims that private clinics will reduce waiting lists. How?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are always looking at the health care system to innovate and improve the overall delivery of services. I think there are a number of illustrations in many walks of life, whether it be education or health care – we're talking about health care here. Specialization in a particular service, being able to move a particular service out of the hospitals, where they have a wide variety of varying needs on an ongoing basis through their emergency departments, through their outpatient clinics, through the general needs that are referred to a full-service hospital – there is a case to be made for a very specialized surgical facility to concentrate in a particular area of work where, as I've indicated before, the doctors concentrate on that area due to their speciality. They have a nursing team. They have a support staff team.

There is, of course, a debate in terms of the different items of

research that have been published as to the record of this type of approach, but, Mr. Speaker, there are quite a few on the positive side, and I think it's an innovation that should be looked at here in the province.

Mr. Speaker, finally, I would just like to emphasize that the legislation makes this a possibility. It provides an opportunity. It is not something that is being forced on a regional health authority if they do not feel they have the evidence to go forward.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 11 is all about trust. When it comes to health care in this province, Albertans trust their doctors. My questions are to the Premier. Mr. Premier, why doesn't the Premier trust the AMA when they say that Bill 11 is the wrong prescription for health care in this province?

MR. KLEIN: They haven't quite said that. The AMA has said that they have some concerns. I'll tell you that the response to the media was a lot different than the response was to me in the meeting. It seemed that the AMA was quite conciliatory, the four members that I met. They had four concerns. We said that we would sit down with the AMA and address those concerns.

They are somewhat minor amendments, Mr. Speaker. They deal with the whole question of transparency. We've alluded to transparency and openness relative to the contracts as it relates to the possibility of RHAs contracting out. They talked about the privative clause, and they want some clarification on that particular issue. They talked also about the issue of conflict of interest, and I will give the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo some credit, because he raised that too. If there's a reasonable amendment relative to the standardization of conflict rules, we'll deal with that too.

So there hasn't been a rejection of the bill by the AMA, notwithstanding the way it was reported by the media. They want some clarification on a number of points and some possible amendments, and we're willing to consider those.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: is it the AMA and the doctors in this province who are standing up for public health care when they say no to Bill 11, or is it your government when they're trying to push it through against public reaction?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed in this hon. member, that he would allude to his scripted questions rather than address some of the points that were raised in my answer.

MR. SAPERS: Your scripted answer.

MR. KLEIN: It's not a scripted answer. I'm not reading from any notes, Mr. Speaker. I'm recounting the details of a meeting that we had with the AMA.

I assume through his question that this member assumes that all doctors are in agreement with the AMA. Well, I tabled a letter earlier addressed to Dr. Burns, the executive director of the Alberta Medical Association. It says:

I have received a letter from every member of the Alberta Medical Association 'Section for Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery' recommending that the Section resign its affiliation with the Alberta Medical Association.

It is clear that the Alberta Medical Association does not represent the views or interests of the Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgeons in the Province of Alberta on a number of important matters.

Please be informed, therefore, that the Alberta Medical Association will no longer represent the Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgeons in the Province of Alberta effective immediately.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is again to the Premier. Since the AMA has said that Bill 11 is essentially beyond repair, why doesn't the Premier just do the right thing and withdraw it?

MR. KLEIN: No, the AMA has not said that at all. You know, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness was in that meeting as well, and perhaps he would like to comment on the tone and the nature of that meeting and what exactly we agreed to do relative to the AMA's concerns.

2:30

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there were six points that were raised with respect to the legislation, and I would request your ruling, if you see fit, as to whether we should go through the specifics of these amendments. I would just like to illustrate with a couple of examples at least.

With respect to 25(1)(a) they were concerned about the concept in that particular clause whereby in their view the Lieutenant Governor in Council would define what happens, quote, in doctors' offices. The way the bill actually works out when you go to the regulation-making responsibility is that the intention there of course is that it be done by the College of Physicians and Surgeons in terms of accrediting these clinics. We indicated to the AMA that we would certainly be willing to clarify that in the legislation.

Another of their concerns, Mr. Speaker, was that they wanted to make sure that payment arrangements for physicians would be consistent with the AMA agreement as to principles, and we indicated that we would be prepared to work with them to fix that.

I would conclude at that point. I would just like to add, though, that there were three other points on which we agreed and, yes, Mr. Speaker, there were two on which we did not agree with respect to the legislation.

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

Health Care Facilities

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The costs of providing excellent health care are increasing dramatically, and although the government has reinvested billions of provincial dollars into program delivery, we still have waiting lists for many types of elective surgeries. Many people feel that the government has not reinvested in the hospital buildings themselves. Impressions of tearing down old hospitals and not opening closed operating theatres are on my constituents' minds. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. What has the government done to reinvest in health facilities?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province has spent nearly a billion dollars reinvesting in health facilities since '92-93. That close to a billion dollars is broken up into a number of either major projects or minor renovation and upgrading projects. Now, there are 52 major projects, meaning redeveloping, repairing, et cetera, in acute care, long-term care, and also in health units. As well, over that period of time, there have been 224 projects, what we call not major projects but minor projects, where we've been adapting the facilities and reconfiguring to changing technology and also new program delivery in those facilities.

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Minister, what will happen to the infrastructure of our public system if Bill 11 passes? Will the province stop investing in health care buildings?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we'll obviously continue to reinvest in health facilities in all corners of this province. It's very crucial. Small communities across this province, of course, are just as important as the major communities, and we have to take into consideration not only acute care services but also long-term care. Over the next three years, of course, the budget that we've tabled in the House calls for a further investment in all of these facilities of \$324 million. So that's adding almost a third of a billion more to the billion that we've already put in.

MR. COUTTS: My last question to the Minister of Infrastructure: with the focus on investing in the service and not into bricks and mortar, how can Albertans be guaranteed that they will still have a world-class, publicly funded health care facilities infrastructure?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the government and certainly the RHAs are doing an excellent job of working together to ensure the best care possible. To ensure the best care possible requires the best facilities possible in order to bring this programming to Albertans. I can certainly point to a number of exciting projects that have been completed in the province of Alberta. We have the very modern ICU at Foothills hospital. We have the burn unit at the University of Alberta, one of only three or four in the whole world, and it's right here in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

We have a number of redeveloping projects in every corner of the province. We have the new hospital in Drumheller. There's High Level. There's Stony Plain. We have long-term care facilities, an increase in beds in Camrose, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Edmonton, Calgary, and we will also be looking at those facilities in smaller communities that can be converted from acute care to long-term care to ensure that the seniors that live in those communities stay in those communities that they've built. That's what they want to see.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, if I can just take a very quick moment of the Assembly to supplement that, when members go through the estimates of the Alberta lottery fund down the road, they'll find that over 60 percent of the lottery fund is directed towards infrastructure, health expenditures, and education expenditures. So this government is very clearly committed to reinvesting not only lotto funds but of course a large portion of general revenue funds directly into communities throughout Alberta for the purposes of infrastructure and capital restoration.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The chair of the Calgary regional health authority recently said that he agreed with critics that private surgical clinics face extra costs, but he trusts that private clinics will make their money back and more through efficiencies and economies of scale and save taxpayer dollars. My questions are to the Premier. Has the chair of the Calgary health authority shared this evidence with the Premier showing that private hospitals won't cost more?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the chair of the Calgary regional health authority wasn't talking about private

hospitals. If he was talking about private hospitals, he's talking about something that is specifically banned in Bill 11. He's talking about surgical clinics, and indeed there are surgical clinics operating today. There were 35, as I pointed out earlier, operating and charging facility fees under the watch of the then health minister, who's now the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Mr. Speaker, basically there are 47 clinics operating right now, and, yes, there has been some evidence – I think if the hon. member were to sit down and have a little chat with the chair of the Calgary regional authority, he will find out that there has been a demonstrable increase in the number of cataract surgeries done from when they were done solely in hospitals. Now that they're done almost solely in surgical clinics, it has reduced tremendously the pressure on full-scale hospitals.

That's what this bill is all about. It's about allowing regional health authorities to explore some options within the publicly funded system, Mr. Speaker, and it also puts some clear rules and regulations in place relative to contracting out. Those rules and regulations were never in place before. That's what it's all about. It's as simple as that.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is to the Premier. If the evidence exists, then why isn't cost-effectiveness a mandatory requirement in Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it is. Again, if the hon. member needs another clinic – and I know he's an educated man. If he hasn't read the bill, I would encourage him to do so. If he has read the bill, then obviously he doesn't understand it, and I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness explain it to him.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that we're not supposed to quote directly from the legislation, which is now before the Assembly. There is a rather extensive section in Bill 11 which outlines the procedure that has to be gone through with respect to contracting. It refers to the overall responsibilities of the regional health authority to look at the overall cost benefit of the particular project to make sure that it meets standards with respect to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, approves the qualifications of physicians involved, and makes sure they are organized in a way that will provide good, safe care.

2:40

There is reference to a second level of approval, and that is, quote, the office of the minister, where there would have to be an indication of the contracts approved. This would be a second protection as far as the legislation is concerned. That's in the legislation, I think the hon. members across the way know, and that will be pointed out in more detail when we get to the legislation if they have to have it then.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: does the Premier agree with that chair of the Calgary health authority that the delivery of health care through private hospitals is nothing more than an experiment and the fact is that there's no real evidence that it's going to work?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again the question is somewhat irrelevant because there is no mention anywhere of private hospitals or the promotion of private hospitals. As a matter of fact, the bill specifically, section 1, bans private hospitals. So what is he talking about?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, if I might. I think in the question and

also the extra remarks made by the hon. opposition there is the inference that there is not a section in the legislation on this particular topic. I would like to reference for the hon. members – evidently they have not read it. Go to page 6, section 8(1), and then go through the subsections (1), (2), (3)(a) and (b), and then over on the next part, (c), (d), (e), and (f). That would get you along the road to understanding the coverage of this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Home Care

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent of Calgary-Fort raised a personal concern about a situation that I think would apply to many Albertans. There is a concern about reliable and continuous home care services to their severely disabled adult son who is deaf and quadriplegic. While both parents have full-time work, too many times, due to the unavailability of timely services, the father has to take time off work without pay to help the son. The employer could not keep employment for the father. My question is to the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. How do the home care services work through the government funding?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, home care services are available to our disabled population in the province, as they are to anyone who needs that type of service. In a general sense let me just say that the local regional health authorities are responsible for providing that service and for ensuring that it's there when it's needed by those who require it. Here in the province we have 17 of these regional health authorities who are working on this issue every day. The issue has also been addressed in the long-term care review report that was done by our colleague from Redwater, and there are some ongoing discussions with regard to the types of services being provided, the level of services being provided, and how some of those issues can be improved to provide even better services under home care. We're also going to be adding an additional \$15 million to this program, which will benefit many of our disabled community members as well as others.

I should just point out that the number of hours that we now provide in terms of home care services has climbed about threefold, to the point where we're now providing approximately 6 million hours as compared to 2.3 million or so just a short while ago. There are a number of very valuable services that come under this area, Mr. Speaker, that the public should be even more aware of. That includes everything from nursing care to physical therapy care to occupational therapy and so on.

I'm hoping that if there is a specific constituent here that is being referred to, perhaps the member will let me know who that constituent is, and if I can be of some assistance or if the minister of health can be of assistance, then we'd be happy to look into the details for the member.

MR. CAO: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the same minister. Is there any consideration to encourage relatives to provide home care services for their loved ones?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, the home care policy under the department of Alberta Health and Wellness does not as such allow for the provision of payment to family members to become paid caregivers for specifically home care services. However, it is entirely possible that there might be some exceptional circumstances that warrant a review. I'm thinking in terms of locations in the

province where perhaps a home care provider is not available and therefore could not be contracted for that service through a regional health authority. Certain areas that are what we call remote areas might possibly be considered under that particular issue.

However, on the other hand, I would just reiterate that this entire issue of home care services, which are extremely important to all Albertans, is being studied further as a result of some of the recommendations that came out of the long-term care review report that was recently authored by our colleague from Redwater. It is a valid question, an important one, and I want to assure the Member for Calgary-Fort and particularly the constituents for whom he's raising this issue that we are taking that issue under advisement and we are reviewing it further in the next few months.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds I will call upon the first of three members today to participate in Recognitions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Provincial Minor Hockey Tournament

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend the Edmonton Minor Hockey Association hosted the Edmonton/Calgary provincial hockey tournament 2000. Parents, fans, and participants had an opportunity to see a number of exciting and entertaining hockey games. As Albertans and hockey fans we should commend this group of young athletes who represented their cities in a sportsmanlike fashion. The games held at Clareview arena in northeast Edmonton featured games at the recreational federation level and were a tremendous success.

I'd like to thank the Edmonton Minor Hockey Association, the Minor Hockey Association of Calgary, and individual category directors who were instrumental in co-ordinating the games. These category directors and their volunteers were tremendous in planning and hosting the tournament: from Edmonton Jeannie Feader, peewee director; Betsy Turner, bantam director; George Pheasey, midget director; and from Calgary Perry Cavanagh, peewee director; Wayne Hansen, bantam director; and Paul Whitelaw, midget director. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the coaches and managers of the teams involved as well as the thousands of volunteers.

In a three-team sweep the peewees from St. Albert won, the midgets from Edmonton won, and the bantams from Edmonton won.

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

2:50 Protection for Persons in Care Act

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to spend but a moment to recognize an excellent workshop that took place in Calgary on Wednesday, March 15, on the Protection for Persons in Care Act. An agent of mine attended that workshop, which was co-sponsored by the Alberta Association for Community Living, the Developmental Disabilities Resource Center of Calgary, and FAIRE, which is an acronym for Families Allied to Influence Responsible Eldercare.

Some of the key points raised in the course of that very important and interesting workshop were that the act really protects no one, that it is not much more than a reporting mechanism, and that the act is simply too narrow in scope to be effective. Those who attended found that there was no evidence that the act worked to safeguard vulnerable persons when they became institutionalized. There was a concern that the act didn't address substantive issues of abuse and that proving intent under the act is very difficult. Safeguards for

vulnerable persons need to be multiple, not singular, in approach. Those are some of the concerns raised at that important conference. Thank you.

Provincial Minor Soccer Tournament

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton hosted the provincial minor soccer playoffs over this past weekend. Teams of young men and women from throughout Alberta came to the capital city and played like the champions they are. Thanks to the Edmonton Minor Soccer Association, officials, coaches, and corporate sponsor, Telus, for putting on a great tournament. Special recognition to the boys under-11 teams, particularly the gold medal winners from Sherwood Park; the silver medal team, Edmonton Kenilworth; and the team on which my son plays keeper, the bronze medal winning team, the Edmonton West Belmead Raiders.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a point of order.

Point of Order Ministerial Responsibilities

MR. DICKSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker, as an agent for the Official Opposition leader. This relates to the first set of questions asked . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agent?

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I wanted to make the point I had authority to raise this.

The authority is *Beauchesne* 409(6), 410(10), and 412. This had to do with a question from the Official Opposition leader to the Premier with respect to a meeting and with respect to government policy. The question related to two ministers who allegedly participated in a meeting, and we were read parts of an e-mail message.

The authorities are clear that ministers are here to answer questions, not as witnesses to an event they've attended or participated in but to answer with respect to departments they have responsibilities for. The Minister of Resource Development got up to supplement the answer of the Premier. You, sir, dealt with this on April 28, 1999, or at least a similar situation. It can be referenced in *Hansard*, page 1317, where you made it abundantly clear at that time that questions and answers must focus on ministerial responsibilities.

Now, it may be that the Minister of Resource Development has much to say about a meeting he attended, as many of us have much to say about different meetings we attend. The issue was one of policy of the government with respect to inclusiveness or exclusiveness of consultations on the most important bill many of us have ever seen in this Legislative Assembly. I'd suggest, sir, that for the Minister of Resource Development to have attempted to supplement was as a witness, not as a responsible minister.

THE SPEAKER: On this point of order the hon. Minister of Resource Development.

DR. WEST: On this point of order. Mr. Speaker, if I had not risen at the time I did to retort to what had been alleged here in the Assembly, it would have damaged my ability to serve my constituents at home. There has been a very damaging statement made here of mistruth, misleading this Assembly.

If *Hansard* were taken from this Assembly and sent out to my constituents after what was said by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, then I think we don't have a point of order here, that it's close

to a point of privilege. The hon. Leader of the Opposition insinuated that on March 9 we called a private, by invitation only meeting in the constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster. Indeed, the Lloydminster Chamber of Commerce advertised in the *Lloyd Times* and the *Meridian Booster* a night with the Treasurer, Budget 2000. It was advertised openly and was put on by the Lloyd Chamber of Commerce. It was moderated by a Mr. Rob Saunders, and the chamber president chaired the meeting, Mrs. Glenda Elkow. All questions that night were in written form and through the moderator.

Now, I just don't understand how an individual can stand in this House and level frivolous and vexatious comments that are untrue without another member being able to stand and defend themselves in this Assembly. I know that you could say that I should have stood at the time and put a point of privilege in place, but this hon. member has put a point of order in here, and I have the right to stand up and address that point of order and defend my position in this House.

I would say that I deserve an apology as well as the hon. Provincial Treasurer for an abuse of this Assembly when people are trying to score political points on a sensitive issue in this province. I'm ashamed today, because over the years I in this Assembly have had lots of things said and alleged about me over periods of time, but this one here is an insult to my constituency and does – does – damage my ability to serve them unless this stands corrected.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer on this point of order.

MR. DAY: Yes, Mr. Speaker, further to the point of order. The apologies, in my view, should also go out to the people who were organizing this meeting and the people who were there. It was organized, as I understand it, by the Chamber of Commerce. It was advertised. It was a very good turnout, I might add, and people from all walks of life were there. The commentator and the person who chaired the meeting are to be commended for their neutrality. There were a number of questions related to a variety of issues, and the moderator actually took the time to read out almost every health question that was sent in. There was no censoring of any question. There was no sparing of any of the concerns that were brought from the floor.

There were people there who identified themselves as the so-called Friends of Medicare, which we actually all are a part of – we are all friends of medicare – from that actual group. There were people there wearing T-shirts which did not seem to be certainly complimentary of the government. Those people had questions sent in, read out, and answered. I had the opportunity to meet with them after the meeting and hear their concerns in detail, concerns which I took to the minister of health.

So this type of shabby, absolutely unconscionable approach – we heard the expression last week about a drive-by smear. The good people of this community of Lloydminster have been drive-by smeared, if that's a technical term, by the Leader of the Official Opposition, who has taken no conscience whatsoever to the hard work that they put in, to the very neutral way in which they handled this. I would hope that these members who are here would convey to their particular leader that they have insulted the good citizens of this particular community who did a fine job of putting on a public meeting.

[Mr. Dickson rose]

THE SPEAKER: You've already spoken on this point of order.

MR. DICKSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thought we had a question of privilege.

THE SPEAKER: No. There's no question of privilege raised that I'm aware of, but if there are any additional members who would like to participate on this point of order, we'll recognize them. [interjection] I'm sorry, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. I'll recognize you.

MR. WHITE: Sir, obviously the member opposite was quite upset, but being quite upset in this House . . .

THE SPEAKER: On the point of order that was raised.

MR. WHITE: Sir, I contend that it is not a point of order. There are many people who get upset, but a point of order is really quite specific. The objection from the other side was with no citations whatsoever. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has the floor.

MR. WHITE: Sir, it's no point of privilege, up to the alleged . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, please. There was no point of privilege raised, but you should know that I do agree with you. There was no point of order. I say that specifically, because in essence the point of order being raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo – it certainly was not outside the competence of a minister of the government to answer the question. Surely if it has to do with the meeting, it had nothing to do with the administrative competence of anybody in the government, and the question itself was outside the same argument he used for ruling it out that had to be used for ruling out the first of the questions. So, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, your arguments have certainly swayed the chair in upholding your thoughts.

Point of Order Provoking Debate

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, with trepidation I raise the second point of order, and I'm not sure whether I'm going to have more support from colleagues on my second point of order similar to the support I had on the first one. This one will be very brief. It has to do with the second set of questions from the Leader of the Official Opposition. The authority would again be the old favourite, *Beauchesne* 408(2), about answers not provoking debate.

3:00

The Premier has yet again suggested that the Leader of the Official Opposition allowed private facilities doing overnight services in reference to 47 clinics. This has been raised before. It's abundantly clear that the Leader of the Opposition had never at any time during her term as a minister of the Crown of this province sanctioned private hospitals or clinics doing overnight stays, which is very different from surgical one-day stays. The Premier's repetition and a republication time and time again of this inaccuracy I think is something that requires an admonition or some intervention from the chair.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on this point of order.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At best it's an attempt to clarify the misinformation that comes out day after day in the preambles to questions. There's no point of order here. The Premier

is quite validly responding to questions in this House dealing with the whole question of surgical facilities and what surgical facilities have been operational in this province and when they became operational. The opposition on a daily basis tries to indicate that the government supports private hospitals, which is, of course, absolutely false. The bill says no private hospitals. So the characterization that has been made in preambles and throughout questions and in the petitions that are tabled about the support for private hospitals or being opposed to public health care is absolutely wrong.

Coming to the specifics of this question, the member opposite should well be aware that many surgical facilities, many clinics have been opened in this province, and many of them were opened during the tenure of the now Leader of the Opposition when she was health minister, and it's not inappropriate for the Premier of this province to refer to that in response to some of the questions relating to private clinics being opened in this province. I fail to understand what he's even trying to clarify, but at most it's a point of clarification rather than a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there is the benefit of *Hansard* with respect to this, and I would like to quote. It's the response from the Premier with respect to the text that gave rise to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo rising.

Mr. Speaker, without wanting to sound facetious, if the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition wants to know what a hospital is, I would suggest that she go to the University hospital, or to the Royal Alexandra hospital, or to the Grey Nuns hospital, but this leader of the Liberal opposition knows what surgical clinics are all about. She likes to say that there were no publicly funded, privately delivered surgery happening when she was the minister of health. But there was and just don't take my word for it.

This 1991 *Calgary Herald* story talks about the 35 private surgical centres that existed in Alberta then doing everything from cataract surgery to plastic surgery to ear surgery. The headline says: Patients choose private treatment; growing ranks are bypassing hospitals for surgical clinics. Well, maybe we should call them Nancy's clinics.

There's absolutely nothing in the quotation in here that basically says that one individual did certain things. There's a reference to an article in the paper, and that article was tabled, as I recall. I would like to caution that the referring to individuals' names and personalities, such as Nancy's clinics, is really not appropriate.

There's really no point of order, and I'm not even sure it was a point of clarification other than that which was given by the chair.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 17

Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 17 contains three proposed amendments to the Fair Trading Act, which came into effect on September 1, 1999. These amendments will fix a couple of drafting errors to this act and rectify a problem that occurred after the act was passed by the Legislature.

Section 43(e) as it is now written means that a regulation has to be amended every time a new reporting agency sets up business. By changing "and" to "or" in this section we are ensuring that reporting agencies are covered by the act as soon as they are established.

Section 109 of the act currently refers to a collector as being a person. Legally "person" includes corporate bodies, which is not

what was originally intended. We are amending the act to make it clear that we only license individuals in this area.

Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, creditors don't pursue debtors who don't repay their debts because the debtors can't be found or the debt is too small to be worth pursuing. It was always intended that credit-reporting agencies could keep this information on a debtor's record for six years, as is the case in all other provinces. An amendment to the Alberta limitations act will come into force on March 1, 2001, that affects section 45(3)(b), so this type of information will have to be purged from the records of Alberta debtors after two years. If we don't make the change proposed here, the credit industry will have to treat Albertans differently from all other Canadians and charge them more for credit.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members to vote in favour of Bill 17, the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I stand to speak to Bill 17, the Fair Trading Amendment Act, I understand by looking at it that it is only around changing and clarifying three different sections in this. It was brought forward on September 1, 1999. As far as can be determined, the amendments are minor.

Looking at the "and" and the "or," I can only see that it must have been a mistake at the particular time. Under section 43(e) it's part of the credit and personal reports section of the act. As the legislation currently stands, the "reporting agency"

- (i) furnishes reports for gain or profit or on a reciprocal non-profit basis, and
- (ii) is designated by the regulations.

The amendment would change this "and" to an "or." It means that a reporting agency that fulfills the first set of criteria, set out in subclause (i), can be considered as an official reporting agency without being designated by the regulations. It also means that the minister can designate a person as a reporting agency without having to meet the said criteria in subclause (i).

Now, as we look at the next one, section 45, it's also the credit and personal reports section of the act. It deals with the information that cannot be included in a report. Subsection (b) deals with reporting debt. As it currently stands, actions, accounts, or debts cannot be reported if they "cannot be pursued because of the expiration of limitation periods." The amendment clarifies the term "limitation period," and as I'm listening to the hon. member that presented Bill 17, it's a drive towards being consistent with other provinces and making it consistent throughout Canada. I can commend what's being done there.

Then going to the six years, the amendment clarifies the term "limitation period" by stating that unfavourable information about a debt cannot be reported if it has been more than six years since the last payment on the debt or more than six years since the debt was incurred. The amendment section only amends "debt" and deletes "actions" and "accounts." So with that one it's quite obvious. I agree with it, and I understand by making some inquiries into that one that this seems to be the proposed and proper way of doing it.

Under section 109(b) the amendment changes "a person" to the term "an individual" in the definition of "collector" in the collection practices section of the act. It's interesting, though, that the previous subsection (a) defining "collection agency," in which the term "a person" is also used, is not similarly changed. So maybe that can be clarified to our side before proceeding.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will sit.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just take this opportunity to rise and talk about some of the items that are being changed in the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000, under the title Bill 17. The main thing that is important about this is that as bills get put into place and they get passed through the Legislature and the implementation of those bills starts to be worked through the system, we see in a lot of cases that the wording that was put into the legislation doesn't ring true in application. We see here now basically three different amendments to the Fair Trading Act of 1999 that will help to make that bill work more clearly and work more in line with the kinds of initiatives that were intended when the Fair Trading Act was passed.

Mr. Speaker, what we see is that the basic sections go through and talk about clarity and making sure that the intention is true. The inclusion is not there in the first part as we look at how we identify reporting agencies and base that on the types of reports that they must furnish. It's very clear as you read it and look at the intent that this correction has to be made and has to be more clearly stipulated, and the appropriate changes are being made under the amendment through section 43.

As we get into looking at the others, I think the member has talked about the need for clarifying the consistency across Canada. As we look at these issues of reporting, I know that I've had a number of cases come to my constituency office where people are trying to get clarification on how their data are reported under different credit acts. They're talking about situations that exist as they've traveled across Canada and lived in different provinces, and they're concerned that some of the things that are happening here in Alberta or, in some cases, in other provinces are not consistent with kind of the standard or the norm that everybody expects. So I think that as the government goes through and makes its changes in section 45, that brings about the kind of consistency that'll make understanding and acceptance of these kinds of reporting procedures much more common across Canada and to have our province now essentially take the initiative to come in line with the rest of the provinces. By changing to the six years, this is the kind of thing that will make that consistency and will provide for the general acceptance and the general ease of understanding for all Albertans or all Canadians as they travel from one province to the other.

The last part of it then deals again with another clarification that looks at how we're going to separate actions or reports that are effectively being reported on individuals as opposed to the more inclusive generic term "person," which would include corporate and individual data holders. I think the effect that we see here now is to really clarify and separate out the individual from the all-inclusive persons type of approach to this. It essentially gives a different standard of expectation than for private individuals as opposed to the all-inclusive corporate entity. So I think this is basically making our legislation much more consistent and much easier to understand and probably much more usable in the end.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be appropriate for us all to accept this legislation, and with those few comments I'll take my seat. Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of observations with Bill 17, the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000. Part of what's happening, particularly with section 3, is the notion of wrestling with the fact that when we march bravely down the road of creating a new limitation-of-actions regime in Alberta, in some respects we're out of step with some other jurisdictions that may not have moved as quickly or as progressively as Alberta has. I suppose

one of the concerns had been – and we see it now in hindsight. You know, it's interesting how one's perspective gets even sharper reflecting back in time, but remember that our limitation-of-actions regime in Alberta changed not in the usual way through a government bill but through a private member's bill.

Now, the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake may say: so what's this got to do with me; I can't be responsible for the fact that the government of the day made a very fundamental change to the law of the land without letting people know by bringing in a private member's bill, that then was sort of partway along the process adopted by government and went on to become law. Then after the fact we discovered that one of the most basic rights, the right to be able to bring an action, may be affected perhaps to the prejudice of a number of Alberta individuals without adequate notice.

You know, I suspect that if perhaps the government had been more up front with the limitation act by bringing it in as a government bill, properly signaling its intention, we would have been able then to deal with some of the consequential changes like the one that we're doing here with section 3.

That isn't, when all is said and done, an argument necessarily against the change that's proposed. The proposal would be in terms of what kind of information is going to be proscribed, the kinds of things that will not be part of a reporting agency report. We've changed this from simply saying that those matters that are stale dated couldn't be the subject of a current action – the substitution is to simply say: if “more than 6 years has elapsed.” That used to be our limitation-of-actions provision for debt of course, six years from the time that the debt arose, unlike the two-year provision for most tort claims.

The other observation I'd just make is that when I see a bill like this come forward, even one that you know there's no good reason we shouldn't accept it on its merits – I think it does point out that we can still do a better job in terms of passing bills the first time through. I think this reminds us that if it takes a little more time to make sure we've got it right, it's vastly fairer to Albertans. It's vastly more efficient, and I think it's just a far superior way of making legislation to try and make sure we identify these things the first time round.

I recognize that no government achieves perfection. This is in no way to diminish the hard work that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake has done around the issue. I give him full credit for that. I think sometimes in our – and I say “our” generously, because as a member of the opposition I'm not part of the internal bill review process the government goes through. I wish I were. I'm still waiting for that invitation. You know, we have these little mailbox cubbyholes in the caucus office.

MS CALAHASEN: Would you join us?

MR. DICKSON: Do you want me?

Mr. Speaker, I was making the point that as a Calgary MLA sometimes I don't get a lot of mail up here, and it's always quite exciting to go through it. I rush to my little mail cubbyhole to see if there's an invitation there to join my friend from Calgary-Glenmore on the government bill review process, but I haven't received that invitation yet. Because I haven't been invited to that very exciting, stimulating, energizing process, I'm stuck here at second reading having to try and make some of these observations when maybe I'd sooner be talking about another bill.

I've made those comments about the process. I'm going to run back and check my box again to see if I've got an invitation. I think that committee is still meeting on bills. We may be close to the end of the bills – I don't know – but I'm still waiting for that invitation.

It doesn't have to be gilt edged. It doesn't even have to be in an envelope, Mr. Speaker. I'd take a handwritten note just passed across the aisle here. In any event, while I'm waiting for it, I make that observation.

3:20

I compliment the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for his persistence and hard work, but I say that I think we can always encourage government to do better. I think we've got to try and reduce the number of errors that we see in government legislation, the number of things that haven't been adequately addressed. The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake has done a darn good job. We see ministers coming in with 30-page remedial bills a year or two after they're passed. He probably has a better record than many on his front bench. I wanted to make those observations, Mr. Speaker.

Despite all of that, I will be voting in support of Bill 17, but I hope that someone back there in the Annex or someone in the legislative bureau takes note and maybe puts a little note above their desk: this time we're going to try to get whatever bill I'm working on right the first time.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10 Securities Amendment Act, 2000

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

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today at second reading of Bill 10, the Securities Amendment Act, 2000.

The amendments that are before the Legislative Assembly today represent another important initiative of this government to ensure that our capital market continues to attract and encourage investment in Alberta by providing for a regulatory framework that is responsive to the needs of both industry and investors.

Last March the Alberta, Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal stock exchanges announced a restructuring proposal under which the senior equity market would be relocated to the Toronto Stock Exchange, all derivative trading would move to the Montreal exchange, and the Alberta and Vancouver stock exchanges would merge to form a Canadian junior exchange. The first step of this restructuring came to fruition on November 29, 1999, when the Canadian Venture Exchange, or CDNx, commenced operation as the Canadian junior exchange.

The Canadian Venture Exchange has quickly established itself as the Canadian market for junior equities. In its first three months of operation the Canadian Venture Exchange has significantly exceeded the trading volumes of both its predecessors. In February alone the Canadian Venture Exchange set and surpassed record levels for both the volume of shares traded and the number of transactions conducted through the facilities of the exchange on four separate occasions.

Under the merger process the CDNx lost most of the powers granted to the Alberta and Vancouver stock exchanges under their special acts. One of the primary purposes of these amendments is to restore these powers to the Canadian Venture Exchange to give it the statutory authority to regulate the operations and business conduct of its member shareholders and their representatives. These powers

will also be extended to recognize self-regulatory organizations such as the Investment Dealers Association, or IDA. The Canadian Venture Exchange and IDA have recently agreed to consolidate all member regulation responsibilities under the IDA, while the CDNx concentrates on market regulation.

These amendments will give the Canadian Venture Exchange and the IDA and any other recognized self-regulatory organization the power to regulate the operations of current and former members, regulate the business conduct of current and former members and their representatives under member regulations, issue subpoenas to enforce attendance at hearings, seek the appointment of a receiver manager over members' business affairs, enforce decisions by registering them with the court, as well as give both the right to appear and make representations at any appeal of a decision of CDNx or the IDA to the commission or the Court of Appeal. These amendments will establish a flexible regulatory framework under which members of the CDNx and the IDA can conduct their business activities while safeguarding the interests of the investing public inside and outside of Alberta.

The establishment of the Canadian Venture Exchange as a national junior equity market illustrates the increasing globalization of capital markets and the proliferation of cross-border relationships between buyers, sellers, and exchanges. Trading in securities and exchange contracts is no longer confined to traditional exchanges on the trading floor but is now completed electronically through remote-access computer terminals accessing an electronic trading platform.

Traditional exchanges are having to reorganize their operations in order to compete with the proliferation of alternative trading systems. This has also required a fundamental rethinking by securities regulators as to effectively regulate the activities and operations of all market participants in their jurisdictions whether traditional exchanges or new alternative trading systems.

The commission is seeking additional powers under part 4 of the Securities Amendment Act to require that anyone wishing to operate a quotation or trade-reporting system in Alberta be recognized and to deem an alternative trading system to be an exchange in appropriate circumstances. These additional powers will ensure that the commission is positioned to respond to changing needs of the capital markets arising out of the activities of alternative trading systems.

The commission is also working with other members of the Canadian Securities Administrators to develop a regulatory framework under which traditional markets such as exchanges and new markets such as alternative trading systems can operate. In July 1999 the members of the CSA published for comment a discussion paper and draft rules regulating marketplace operations and establishing trading rules for market participants.

The remainder of the amendments before us today are intended to update, clarify, and harmonize provisions of the Securities Act with securities legislation in other jurisdictions. This is particularly important as joint regulatory oversight of the Canadian Venture Exchange lies both with the Alberta and the British Columbia securities commissions, and appeals from a decision of the exchange could be made to one or both of the commissions at different times.

I wish to highlight several amendments, beginning with one that will significantly enhance investor protection. The first is the introduction of a requirement to "file a personal information form," or PIF, with the commission. Issuers seeking a listing on CDNx must ensure that each senior officer, director, promoter, and significant shareholder of the issuer files a personal information form with the exchange. Any new officer or director is also required to submit a personal information form to the exchange. CDNx uses this information to determine whether these individuals are acceptable management candidates under the continued listing process.

The only recourse available to the exchange if the individual fails to accurately complete the personal information form is to find that individual to be unacceptable and to disqualify them from acting as an officer or a director. This new requirement will permit the commission to take enforcement action against the individual for failing to provide full and accurate disclosure in the personal information form, just as the B.C. Securities Commission is able to do under section 90 of the B.C. Securities Act today.

Introducing the concept of "Alberta securities laws," which includes the Securities Act, the regulations and rules made under the act and any decision of the commission or executive director to replace arcane references to the act and the regulations.

Changing all references of "salesman" to "salespersons."

Replacing the requirement in the seed capital exemptions in sections 65 and 107 of the act to provide a "statutory declaration," changing it to a "written acknowledgment" to reflect a long-standing commission practice already today.

Finally an amendment to section 110.2 to fix a drafting glitch by requiring that an offerer be a reporting issuer at the time a bid circular is filed in order to have free trading shares issued to the target shareholders.

Mr. Speaker, I ask for the support of the members in second reading of Bill 10, the Securities Amendment Act, 2000.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The object of Bill 10, as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has put forward, is to restore powers previously available to the Alberta Stock Exchange to the new Canadian Venture Exchange. There have been some little premerger, postmerger glitches along the way, but, you know, what's really remarkable is the success that the new Canadian junior exchange has achieved. I think it's worth while commenting for just a moment on that success.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, the initial roster of the Canadian Venture Exchange is made up of some 2,500 venture companies previously listed on both the Alberta and Vancouver stock exchanges. Upon completion of the Canadian capital market restructuring process it's expected that this number will grow considerably and that there will be regional service centres in at least four cities: Calgary, Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Toronto. Currently, only two of these four centres, Calgary and Vancouver, are operational.

By the end of the first quarter of the year 2000 the junior listings on the over-the-counter Canadian dealing system, which is now part of the Toronto exchange, are also going to be brought into the Canadian Venture Exchange. Now, that's going to bring, I think, remarkable growth to what's already proven to be a rapidly expanding stock exchange.

Mr. Speaker, on March 2 of this year the Canadian Venture Exchange reported a record-setting day, reaching a new high on the index of 4,026.61, the value of trades of \$258 million, and the number of trading transactions exceeding 52,200. The very next day, on March 3, 2000, the Canadian Venture Exchange broke its own record for the number of trading transactions with 52,281.

So this has really been quite a success in spite of some of the problems that you might expect when a venture of this magnitude is being undertaken. I think it speaks volumes to the foresight of the men and women who've been involved in planning the transition, who about a year and a half ago brought the idea to conclusion that there should be this restructuring, particularly, Mr. Speaker, when you think that it was only just a year ago almost to the day that the restructuring plan was formalized.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So we're happy to see that success and glad to be looking at legislation that's going to further that success. I think we do have to keep in mind that Alberta still has some problems in terms of attracting capital. We can't understate the importance of a healthy and effective capital market here in Alberta. This would help stimulate job growth and economic development. We need continuing growth in investment, and I think a healthy junior exchange will be a big part of that.

The last fiscal year, 1998-99, capital in the amount of \$8.6 billion was raised through various offerings, mutual funds and private placements. This represents about 9.4 percent of the total capital raised in Canada. This in and of itself provided a strong foundation for the Canadian Venture Exchange to build upon, but I'm afraid that it's not enough. We still need greater access to venture capital for junior companies and start-up firms here in Alberta. Business and industry report to the government of Alberta through the growth summit that the formation and expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises have limited access to appropriate sources of capital. There are continuing gaps in the availability of equity capital seed in early stage situations where capital of less than half a million dollars is required and commercialization or growth situations requiring amounts from, let's say, \$500,000 to \$5 million.

Only 5 percent of the total investment of venture capital occurs here in Alberta. This is according to Alberta Innovation and Science in their annual report, 1998-99. Only 2 percent of the risk capital under management in Canada as of 1998 is managed here in Alberta, according to the same government department. We have to do something to get these numbers up, and I believe that a strong junior exchange headquartered in Calgary will help accomplish the goal of increasing access to capital and moving up the amount of capital that is under management by Alberta firms.

Now, Bill 10 does leave a number of issues regarding the operation of the exchange to regulation and to rule-making by subordinate organizations particularly concerned about the breadth and scope of section 196 in Bill 10, in the amended section. Of course we'll be talking more about this in committee.

Now, while the Official Opposition recognizes that the use of rule making and regulation making have resulted in an Alberta Securities Commission that is more flexible and accommodating to changing market conditions and the move towards harmonization and integration of capital markets across Canada, we need to ensure that the use of regulation and rule making is conducive to a climate of ensuring that the public and stakeholders are informed and are provided with an opportunity to provide input. We recognize that the Alberta Securities Commission has been very accommodating in seeking input from stakeholders, and we are hopeful that this open and accountable approach will continue.

Previously in the Assembly I've had an opportunity to talk about the success. I think I would be doing a disservice to some businessmen and women in this province if I didn't mention some of the warning signs that are also out there. Just recently I was approached by two businessmen who came to me with their story, their experience with the Alberta Securities Commission, which really, from their perspective, was one of overregulation, lots of red tape, lots of interference in the marketplace, which resulted personally to them and to their colleague investors in a loss of a considerable amount of money and, more importantly, a loss of what has proven to be a viable business to Alberta owners. The particular business that they're in isn't really important, and the circumstances don't need to be put on record here in the Assembly because there is an ongoing judicial matter, as well, regarding this firm and their experience. So I don't really want to interfere in that process.

I do think it's fair to say that not everything is sunshine and roses in the equity and capital business in this province. As strong as the economy is and as successful as the CDNx has become, the reality is that there are some businesses that still don't get access to the capital that they need and some businesses which get access to the capital or who depend on being listed in the stock exchange for access to capital who run into what they see as a brick wall. We are supportive of the new junior exchange. We're supportive of this bill, but there are a few issues that need to be resolved.

Now, I did say that I'll spend some more time talking about regulation when we get to the committee stage on this bill. At this point in time suffice to say that a lot of the bill talks about disclosure and openness and transparency in the system, and I think what we could use in this Assembly is a little dose of that ourselves when it comes to the regulations sections of not just Bill 10 but so many bills that we have before the Assembly.

Now, most of Bill 10 and in fact most of the Securities Act in Alberta does not stand alone. It is in part modeled after the experience of other jurisdictions, and other jurisdictions in part model their legislation after what's going on here in Alberta. There is a good degree of sharing across the country, and there are amendments similar to Bill 10 being debated in British Columbia. There is already similar legislation which governs Ontario and I believe Manitoba and Quebec. So what we have is a growing confluence of thinking about how we should organize capital markets in this country and how we should regulate them. I think this is important because we often talk about the global nature of business, and we forget, while we're talking about the global nature of business, that we have to pay a lot of attention to make sure that we don't have interprovincial barriers and inconsistencies which get in the way of business doing what it does best; that is, innovating and creating wealth, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to see that there is some integration going on across the country, and I'm pleased to see Bill 10 come so quickly into the House after we dealt with the enabling legislation a short while ago. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his efforts to keep me informed. Also, I'd like to thank the people that work in both the commission and the exchange who are also working hard to make sure that members on both sides of the Assembly are informed about the hopes and aspirations of the exchange but, more importantly, about the details of this legislation as it was being developed.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.
3:40

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise this afternoon and make a couple of comments about Bill 10. We've heard both the Member for Calgary-Mountain View and the Member for Edmonton-Glenora talk about how this has been such a successful move, trying to combine the venture exchanges across Canada into one in Calgary. I think it has been really a tribute to the business community and the investment community across Canada that they saw this as an opportunity to bring to Canada some kind of a co-ordination and a geographic focus but also a momentum and a critical mass focus so that we can get the kind of financing for the businesses that are going to start.

Mr. Speaker, this act is going to change some of the issues that are in the original bill and provide us with some more clarification and some operational ease in how the community does operate. We hear that it's going to bring in a lot of definition and effective guidelines for some of the agencies that are there in terms of how they operate,

how they report, how they get enforcement. These are the kinds of things that have to be clearly defined for Canadian investment to get the takeoff that we need if we're going to help to diversify our economy here in Alberta and also participate more fully and more equally in the international financial markets and the international business markets that result from the investments that are developed through those security ventures.

The interesting thing, Mr. Speaker, is that we always hear a lot of people talk about this new Canadian Venture Exchange being the, quote, junior market. I think it's more appropriate to make sure we always use the term Venture Exchange. This is where new companies get started, where new companies get the takeoff that allows them to get established in a public corporate environment and get the financing that is necessary to move into a stable, long-term functioning either local business, national business, or in a lot of cases international business.

We hear a lot of cases of entrepreneurs now seeking out new ways to finance their ideas to get them put in place. If they're going to be able to approach some of these investment opportunities, a stock offering through the Canadian Venture Exchange, they're going to have to have that confidence that exists, that shows that our Venture Exchange does operate fairly, does operate openly, and does provide them with a degree of predictability and openness in how they deal with getting their finances and getting their company developed into a going concern.

So I think it's quite appropriate that we look on this as the true Venture Exchange in Canada. I don't think there's anything junior about the venture. It's the whole idea of a different type of capital. It's a different type of business environment. The risk levels are different than in the more stable kind of environment. In a lot of cases this is where the U.S. stock market, the Dow-Jones, and the Nasdaq worked for a long time, although the Nasdaq now has developed to where it has a lot of long-term, fully financed, very stable companies on it as well, but it's still in many ways the venture capital exchange in the U.S., if we take out some of the more regional exchanges that exist down there as well. I think this is the kind of approach that we're now going to have to provide this financing.

I want to encourage the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to keep this moving and to make sure that we do get these issues clearly defined and put in place so that that degree of confidence and fair play can be recognized by the businesses in Canada that are going to float their offerings through the Canadian Venture Exchange. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View: this is a good bill, keep up the good work, and let's keep our Venture Exchange moving.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HLADY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just say to the people who spoke: thank you very much; I appreciate the questions and the concerns raised. If they're rather minor, that's great. I'll address them during committee.

Thank you.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 10 read a second time]

Bill 13 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

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

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 13, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2000.

Before I outline the purpose of the bill, Mr. Speaker, I would like to provide some historical background for the proposed legislative framework contained in the Energy Statutes Amendment Act. I'd also like to thank the opposition for their continued work with the EUB in regards to making sure that they're feeling comfortable with what's going forward here.

The background, Mr. Speaker. Starting in 1994 with the passage of Bill 5, the orphan well program as it exists today was first implemented. The legislative regulatory framework which this created was considered a positive first step to improving the management of energy industry abandonment liabilities. The orphan well program at that time was developed in response to concerns raised about the growing number of ownerless, or orphan, wells. However, it was recognized by all as being the initial step towards a comprehensive orphan well program and was subsequently passed unanimously by this Legislature. The one concern which was raised by the House at that time was that the program did not go far enough and that in particular it did not address pipelines, facilities, or matters respecting reclamation.

Mr. Speaker, the House is aware that the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board administers a unique Alberta program, referred to as the orphan well program, which sees the petroleum industry pay for the abandonment of orphan wells, that have no financially viable, responsible owner. As the Alberta petroleum industry matures, increasing numbers of oil and gas facilities, not only wells but also pipelines, gas plants, batteries, satellites, and compressor stations are reaching the end of their operational lives. It is critical to the public interest that these facilities are properly abandoned and the sites reclaimed. Unless the owners of these facilities are known and held responsible and industry funding is in place for orphan facilities, the costs could be passed on to the public purse.

With this in mind and building on the success of the orphan well program, in 1996 industry stakeholders, namely CAPP, SEPAC, the EUB, and other government departments endorsed the expansion of the orphan well program. The stakeholders agreed that the next logical step with regard to the development of the program would be to extend the scope of the industry-funded program to include the reclamation of well sites and the abandonment and reclamation of pipelines and upstream production facilities. This will be known as the orphan well program.

A joint industry/government committee has developed the proposed legislative changes contained in Bill 13. Mr. Speaker, these amendments have been reviewed in detail with oil and gas industry associations and have been endorsed by the board of governors of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the Small Explorers and Producers Association of Canada. As well, a number of interested landowner and surface rights groups have been provided with information regarding the expansion of the orphan well program and the proposed legislation and are supportive of the proposed changes being put forth here today.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the bill is to expand the orphan well program to the broader orphan program supported by the strong industry orphan fund and to protect the Alberta public from bearing the financial burden for the abandonment and site reclamation of orphan wells, pipelines, and upstream facilities. The objective is to minimize the potential number of orphan wells, pipelines, and facilities and to effectively manage and minimize their liability.

Mr. Speaker, this is to be accomplished by either clarifying or

providing the EUB with the authority to expand the orphan fund to cover abandonment and reclamation of wells, pipelines, and most production facilities; provide for licensing of new and existing upstream oil and gas production facilities; impose responsibilities for abandonment on parties responsible for facilities and pipelines; regulate the transfer of licences for facilities and pipelines to prevent the transfer of high-liability properties to financially nonviable parties; expand the annual orphan fund levy to include inactive facilities and abandonment and reclamation of well sites and unreclaimed well sites; collect and administer abandonment and reclamation deposits for wells, facilities, and pipelines. The authority of the EUB is not being expanded to include regulation of reclamation but only to provide a one-window service to industry for the collection of security deposits, which is supported by AEUB.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments contained in the Energy Statutes Amendment Act can be categorized as follows: operational; matters pertaining to cost recovery and deposits; licensing and responsibility; fund administration and enforcement. A significant change is to be found . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

MR. HLADY: This is very important, hon. member.

. . . in terms of regulatory enforcement against parties that avoid their abandonment responsibilities. The current legislative provisions allow the EUB to assign personal liability for well abandonment costs to persons in control of a corporation. This, in effect, has meant a piercing of the corporate veil. The actual administration of this provision has proven both ineffective and inefficient. The requirement to pursue personal liability has resulted in limited success but has contributed greatly to the time required to actually abandon wells where the licensee no longer has the means. In some instances landowners have been faced with significant delays in the abandonment of wells and the reclamation of their land.

The piercing of the corporate veil is to be replaced with provisions that will enable the EUB to hold accountable individuals with corporate authority for actions that result in serious noncompliance or outstanding debt. The companies in which these individuals occupy a position of control will face serious restrictions on activities regulated by the EUB. The objective, Mr. Speaker, is responsible resource development by responsible corporations in Alberta. As well, the EUB will have enhanced authority to garnish revenue from a licensee that chooses to disregard an outstanding debt to the EUB or to the orphan fund.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is a good-news story for government, industry, and private landowners as it will minimize the risk to the public purse; strike a balance between future growth and the need to manage the liabilities; protect landowners from inheriting ownerless, unused, and unreclaimed oil and gas sites; provide a level playing field so that compliant companies do not bear the costs associated with liability left by noncompliant companies; expedite the abandonment and reclamation of orphan sites; increase public safety and environmental protection.

Mr. Speaker, the oil and gas industry will be assuming additional financial responsibility for the abandonment and reclamation of wells, pipelines, and upstream oil and gas facilities that would otherwise be left for the public purse. I think we should commend the oil and gas industry for coming forward and acting responsibly on behalf of their industry.

Mr. Speaker, I now welcome comments from the members on this bill and look forward to their subsequent support of the changes to the Energy Statutes Amendment Act.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It really, truly is a pleasure to rise and to be able to address this bill. This is precisely the kind of bill and the method of getting to a bill that should stand as a model in this Legislature. Not only did the member opposite consult the opposition prior to bringing the bill forward but sought on a number of occasions to have any difficulties that the bill would bring brought to the opposition so the opposition could see that there may be some problems with it. He certainly extended the open invitation to modify the bill or at least to speak of modification of the bill prior to introduction to save that difficulty that does often happen and is a major consternation: hurrying and scurrying around to find what could be done to rectify a drafting error, perhaps, or an error of intent.

This particular piece of legislation was a long time coming, in that it had a great deal of consultation with the industry. In fact, the industry is to a great deal responsible for drafting and redrafting the sections of the act in order to get to what we have today. The short history of this kind of legislation should be reviewed in the province of Alberta, too, in that if it's not unique, then it must be close to unique, if you can be close to unique I suppose. But in this member's view, it is unique that the joint industry and government initiative has been improved upon.

Certainly the original position of the government of Alberta, and rightly so, was that the government and therefore the people of the province of Alberta are the owners of the resource that is extracted. The people of Alberta are not those that do the extraction and therefore cause the owners of the surface rights some difficulty with unclean sites, sites that are contaminated, sites that for various reasons are left in a state that they really should not be. This government quite some time ago decided that it would be in the best interest of all if the industry took some responsibility as a whole for wells and oil sands projects and all the facilities from production, through all private lands and public lands, to deliverance of crude oil and gas in various forms to a refinery.

The interest was in the interests of all of us citizens, including the companies that are good operators that would never consider abandonment of a well unless they had done a proper cleanup, or if they suspended the operations of a well that required being temporarily shut in for whatever reason, they would always leave that site in very, very good condition. There are of course those operators, as occurs in any free market, where whether by design or by error or by financial difficulty, a site is left in a state that simply is below standard.

The fundamentals of this bill are that the industry would in effect finance the policing of itself. Of course, the policeman would still be that independent body, the AEUB, but aided and abetted by the industry. The bill is a modification and a strengthening of the Oil and Gas Conservation Act. This bill, being the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2000, goes a long ways to satisfying the needs of all citizens about all of the facilities, including not just wells but all of the facilities – pipelines, batteries, and the like – that go along from initial extraction to final production of oil and gas in this province.

I'm told that there are some 5 million dollars in the orphan fund account at the moment, which is very healthy. In fact, there is some regulation, I believe – if it isn't enacted now, it shortly will be – to reduce the cost per well, because the project is working very well, working as envisaged and working to the extent that a reduction so as not to get the fund too great is in order for the payees or the industry applicants.

The final agreement in this matter was achieved, I believe, in the act. In 1992 there was an agreement in the industry for down hole abandonment and then subsequent amendments to the Oil and Gas

Conservation Act in 1994. In 1996 there was a further agreement to expand the program because the philosophy obviously had worked well, in the management it had worked well, and it was brought forward to this point.

4:00

The bill is specifically designed, the best this member can tell, having been allowed the opportunity to review a three-column study of the changes in the act, specifically to limit the potential liability for expanding the orphan well program and by giving the AEUB enhanced and new authority in the following key areas.

First, in licensing facilities: the cost of new licensing and restricting those new licences to those that have in fact performed in the past, not just corporations but those individuals and major players in those facilities that did not meet the standard.

Secondly, in the assignment of responsibilities for abandoned facilities and pipelines. As the chair will know, many times there are questions of ownership and responsibility. The board has enhanced opportunities and facilities to determine who in fact is responsible, corporations and individuals.

Finally, new and what appears to be well-drafted enforcement facilities to effect the act. These new enforcement facilities are garnishees of revenue, which is a fairly substantive piece of legislation, to have an industry agree to that on the determination of a third body, the AEUB. It also attaches responsibility for failing to comply with a high level of enforcement to one or more of the officers or directors of the company, which is a marked departure from most other legislation in this province and in others, too, I'm told.

This goes a long ways to effecting change surely. It also adds some enforcement provisions for the actions against a company controlled by those persons or person, and that presumably is a third entity. You'll recall that moments ago I made a comment on the AEUB's option of refusing new licences or suspending existing licences or even requiring abandonment and reclamation deposits on other related sites. It does give the AEUB a great deal of latitude, with the concurrence of those that are regulated by this act.

I would also like to congratulate CAPP, and I believe there are three or four of the contractors in the oil business that certainly deserve credit because they spent a great deal of time dealing with this and setting up regulations so as to effect this change.

The proposer, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, has said that this is a good-news story. He is absolutely correct, sir. This is a good-news story, and it is a government at its best, taking responsibility for its actions and the actions of its industries.

Thank you, sir.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 14

Alberta Treasury Branches Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to move on behalf of the hon. the Provincial Treasurer the Treasury Branches Amendment Act, 2000. As the Provincial Treasurer mentioned during his introduction for first reading, this bill will put

in place some mechanisms which will allow the Treasury Branches to take control of their own destiny. It will allow the board to make the decisions with respect to the appointment of the chief executive officer. It will amend the fiscal year-end of the Alberta Treasury Branches to conform more with the fiscal year-ends which are in line with the rest of the financial industry, and it will put in place a number of other mechanisms which deal with issues outstanding such as unclaimed deposits and how to deal with unclaimed deposits. It's a piece of legislation which will assist the Alberta Treasury Branch in modernizing their operations, and I commend it to the members of the Legislature for their support.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The future of the Alberta Treasury Branches is, I'm sure, going to be an interesting one, and one of these days the government of Alberta will reveal exactly what they have in mind and when.

As we progress towards the next election, I know there's going to be lots of other political issues on the landscape. There's going to be the protection of our health care system. There's going to be flat tax. There's going to be sound funding for our public education system. There are going to be issues to do with children's services and social welfare. My fear is that with all of those important, significant issues on the minds of Albertans and weighing heavy upon their hearts, they may lose track momentarily about the future of the Alberta Treasury Branches. That would really be a shame, because Alberta Treasury Branches have been a very important part of Alberta's history for so many decades now, and they're finally actually turning a profit. It's interesting that as soon as the government sort of took their hands off the rudder, the Treasury Branches actually began to operate more like a business and began to turn a profit.

I love talking to the people in my constituency and elsewhere in this province about that experience, about how the only nationalized bank in this country, the only bank that's owned by a province, the Alberta Treasury Branch, was, you know, a money loser for so many years while it was being run by this supposedly business-minded, dollar and bottom-line sense government, and then as soon as they made the moves towards freeing it up, it began to operate on a much more sound basis.

Of course, the history of the Treasury Branch is interwoven with the history of this province in modern times. It's the history of interference in the marketplace on the negative side, and on the positive side it's the history of providing financing and capital to Albertans when they couldn't get it anywhere else to help grow Alberta businesses and help maintain strength in Alberta communities. Again it seems to be a bit of a metaphor for this government, because like so many other things about this government, you have the dark side just looming whenever you're looking at a positive or a bright side.

Alberta Treasury Branches a couple of years ago changed in a major way the manner in which they were structured. The board, however, was appointed by the Treasurer, and that is a bit of a concern to us. Even more importantly, the chief executive officer continued to be appointed by the government, which of course could lead to confusion in the minds of the public whether or not Treasury Branches was still a unit of the Alberta Treasury or whether it was in fact a stand-alone economic entity.

Now, Bill 14 would have the board of directors fully responsible for the recruitment and appointment of the chief executive officer of the Alberta Treasury Branch. You know, I've had a chance to talk

with some of the chief executives of the ATB, and they're in favour of this. I'm sure that Mr. Haggis would like to know who his boss is and whether it's the Provincial Treasurer or it's his own board of directors. While there may be some confusion in the minds of some people about who's calling the shots at Treasury Branch, I think the men and women and the businesses that depend on the ATB as their financial institution of choice should have it clear that the buck stops with the board of directors. Now, if we could only get the government's hands off the appointment process of the board, I think we'd be much better served.

4:10

The future of the Alberta Treasury Branches I think also has to do with the future of many small communities throughout Alberta. As major banks consolidate, it's increasingly true that Alberta Treasury Branch or Treasury Branch agents continue to be the only financial institution that's available to some Alberta residents in a very timely way for quick access to banking services.

Before there's going to be any major change with the status of Treasury Branch, whether it goes it entirely alone and tries to establish itself as a regional bank, whether it amalgamates with other smaller regional banks, whether it is absorbed into the credit union system, or whether it is just sold off lock, stock, and barrel to a larger financial organization, I think there is a responsibility that the government would have to go to the people of Alberta and have a consultation. Once upon a time we had some grudging interest on the part of the government in having an all-party committee look at the future of the Alberta Treasury Branch, and I guess I regret that we didn't have the opportunity in a nonpartisan way to meet with Albertans and to discuss with them the future of their Alberta Treasury Branch.

It is clear that changes will be coming. It's also clear that the current government has no intention of making those changes manifest until after the election, and you know, there's going to be an election sooner than later. I understand that the Prime Minister as recently as this weekend suggested there will be a federal election within 15 months. I know that's of particular interest to the Provincial Treasurer; he's marking his calendar as I speak. What we have to do, of course, is make a decision here in Alberta whether or not the provincial election will come before or after the 15 months, so we have a couple of calculations we have to make. I'm not a betting man, Mr. Speaker, and of course that's another thing that distinguishes members of the Liberal opposition from the Conservative members in this House; that is, that we tend not to support gambling, particularly on matters of public importance. [interjection] Well, as the Treasurer points out, there are exceptions on both sides of the House.

While I'm not a betting man, I guess I would say that I expect that there will be a provincial election inside that 15-month window, so maybe Albertans don't have much more than a year, maybe even 10 months, maybe even eight months before they find out what's in store for the Treasury Branches. That's assuming that the current government has a chance to put their Treasury Branch policy into action. The electorate of this province will decide that, and I won't make any predictions right now because of course the outcome of that contest would be nothing but a partisan prediction on my part.

While the men and women in the businesses in Alberta that depend on Treasury Branches are pondering the future of their financial institution of choice, I think the men and women of this Legislature should also be thinking about what's the best way we can be giving assurances to them about the soundness of their wisdom when it came to choosing Alberta Treasury Branch. Now, I've stood in this Chamber on many occasions and raised questions

and issues surrounding Treasury Branch practices when it comes to extending loans and credit. I've quizzed the government time after time after time on things like loan agreements and interference with the decision-making and guarantees offered by Treasury Branch.

Of course, unfortunately there are more than just a handful of examples where there have been criminal proceedings brought against former Treasury Branch employees to do with fraud and kickbacks and those kinds of things. Of course, we have the whole West Edmonton Mall scandal still relatively unresolved, at least when it comes to the several court proceedings exploring that part of Alberta Treasury Branch's legacy to Alberta. So all of those questions have been raised, and I know that that also raises a cloud of suspicion.

I've had depositors of Treasury Branch or businesspeople who use Treasury Branch come to me and say, "Well, look; should we stop doing business with the ATB if there are all of these problems?" I've said: "No, you shouldn't. You should choose to do business with the ATB on the same basis that you would choose to do business with any other financial institution. Are you getting the service that you were promised at a fair price? Are they giving you the kind of advice that you require from a banker, from a financial institution? Do you feel comfortable with the service you're receiving? Are you getting access in a timely way to money, to reports, and all of the other things a financial institution can provide? If you can answer yes to all those questions and you have a good relationship with the advisers, then you should stay doing business with the ATB."

That's about the extent of any business advice I've given any of my constituents or others who have asked me about the Alberta Treasury Branch. But inside this Chamber and in my role as the finance critic for the Official Opposition and therefore the person who has the responsibility to be keeping a weather watch on the Alberta Treasury Branch, what I'll say is: the more uncertainty there is about the future of the Alberta Treasury Branch, the harder it is for that institution to grow and to flourish.

That uncertainty comes about as a result of not the accusations about improper government interference or not the reality of some criminal charges brought against some former employees, but it comes about because there has been a bit of a game of ping-pong being played. The government has moved from commissioning reports on the future of the ATB to find out when would be a good time to spin it off or to move it on, then not talking about the reports, then talking about the reports, then saying, "Well, we'll protect the status quo," but then giving some hints that maybe things will change a little bit faster. Of course, it's all geared around the political necessity to tie these kinds of decisions around an election.

So I would suggest that the best thing we can do to secure the future of the Alberta Treasury Branch is for the government to as quickly as possible just paint the clearest picture it can regarding their plans. If in fact there's going to be some kind of major change, I think that in fairness to taxpayers they should know that before they're asked to pass this in the House. If there's going to be a move towards the Treasury Branches disappearing and that's the policy of the government, I think they should tell us now and not later.

Mr. Speaker, I know that's just going to be seen and heard and read as a partisan statement, but you know, there have been many examples of government policy changing abruptly after an election. Whether it has to do with the cross-border importation of hazardous waste, whether it has to do with the manner in which health care decisions are made, or whether it has to do with decisions about gaming, it seems to me that it's kind of like policy-making by stealth. Present a package of ideas before an election, go to the electorate, and then implement an entirely different agenda after the

election. I don't think that that kind of governance by stealth is appropriate, I think it does a disservice to taxpayers, and obviously I think it speaks to a certain understanding of why the electorate becomes so cynical about politicians and the political process.

We have here an opportunity with the Alberta Treasury Branches at least together in this Legislature to say: "No. This is what we think the future holds. Make it clear, and then voters will know before they go to the ballot box."

All that being said, Mr. Speaker, there are three major changes that are contemplated in Bill 14. One, it would require the chief executive officer of the ATB to be appointed by the board. Second, it changes the fiscal year-end for the Alberta Treasury Branch from March 31 to October 31. Then it establishes, through regulation, policy and procedures for the treatment of unclaimed balances and the disclosure of personal information respecting both unclaimed balances and unclaimed accounts, as recommended by the Auditor General. I must say that I'm very happy that at least in this regard we see some quick resolution to problems identified by the Auditor General and that some recommendations are being put into place. I could only hope that the recommendations of the Auditor General as they pertain to health care management information would be acted on so quickly.

4:20

You know, according to the Auditor General's report the accounting for contracted-out services is so poor that there's nearly \$600 million worth of contracts that were inadequately accounted for last year. The Auditor General has made some recommendations in that regard. The Auditor General has also observed that we don't even have a bed census for all of the health care facilities in this province. They don't have a complete census, so the government can't even say exactly how many beds are open in what facilities for what kind of purpose because the information hasn't been collected.

The good news is that the government seems to be paying attention to the Auditor General when it comes to the future of the Alberta Treasury Branches, at least in one part. I would only hope that they would see that as an example, learn from that example, and quickly pay as much attention to the Auditor General in an area that certainly has captured the attention of Albertans, and it has to do with how we operate our health care system in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the change in the fiscal year is one that I can fully support. It would be seen, I guess, as a relatively minor issue, but we believe that the change in the fiscal year-end of the ATB from its current March 31 to October 31 is a positive step that will permit more effective benchmarking of performance against other financial institutions both in Canada and the United States. The Alberta Treasury Branch does provide some good benchmarking information in its annual reports, and we should recognize that all of Canada's chartered banks use the October 31 fiscal year-end. Currently the March 31 year-end makes it difficult to compare ATB's performance versus other comparable financial institutions which operate on an October 31 year-end basis.

This benchmarking becomes important, of course, because any potential buyers that are out there in the wings are going to want to be able to make an apples-to-apples comparison when it comes to the value of the Alberta Treasury Branch. Currently the ATB uses the following performance measures to benchmark itself against comparable financial institutions. They look at operating revenue growth, net interest margin, net interest spread on average earning assets, other income to operating revenue, return on assets, operating expense growth, net impaired loans to total gross loans, credit losses to total loans, loan growth, deposit growth, and asset growth. But all of this is done in this situation that is out of sync with comparable

financial institutions. Establishing policies and procedures relating to benchmarking and making it consistent will only make it easier both for taxpayers to get an idea of the true value and the true strength of the Alberta Treasury Branch and also for potential suitors who may be waiting in the wings to either become owners or partners in the future of the Alberta Treasury Branch.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are just a few of my opening comments. We could talk a little bit about unclaimed customer balances. The current ATB act does not provide for disposition of unclaimed balances. It's noted in the Bank Act, Alberta Loan and Trust Corporations Act and regulations, and the Credit Union Act. They include detailed rules regarding unclaimed balances. Unclaimed balances in Alberta Treasury Branch, according to the last Auditor General's report, have accrued to the amount of some \$6 million. They are recorded as a liability, and a record of customer details is maintained, but we don't have any clear rules in terms of disposition or other public reporting. So \$6 million worth of unclaimed balances probably represents a goodly number of Alberta depositors and businesses, and it would be nice if we got that all clarified. I think Bill 14 does achieve that goal.

Mr. Speaker, I'll have some more to say about the details of the amendments when we get to committee. I understand that some of my colleagues have some general comments to make, both about Bill 14 and the future of the Alberta Treasury Branches and the role they play in Alberta communities, at this stage of the bill while we're talking about the principle. I look forward to those comments and also to the response from the provincial government regarding some of the concerns that I've raised.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point I'd like to adjourn debate on Bill 14, the Alberta Treasury Branches Amendment Act, 2000.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 15

Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000

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

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 15, being the Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000.

The intent of this act is to amend one specific section, section 42, of the existing Business Corporations Act. The amendment in particular will rectify a number of problems existing with the sections that are unworkable and cause Alberta businesses unnecessary expenses and delays in certain transactions.

I'd like to first give thanks to many who have taken a substantial amount of time in the review of this and to look at the options – those on a committee that has had unanimous agreement, stakeholders representing small businesses, creditors, shareholders, banks, large corporations, and certainly the legal and accounting professions – and for their coming together with a solution that will be workable for businesses.

In the present act section 42 actually is written in a format that restricts a corporation from giving financial assistance in certain circumstances, such as to shareholders, directors, or affiliated

corporations; to associates of directors, shareholders, or affiliated corporations; or to any person for the purpose of a purchase of shares of the corporation. Now, they have these restrictions unless there are reasonable grounds to believe that a solvency test consisting of two items could be met. That solvency test in the existing act requires that

- (d) the corporation is, or after giving the financial assistance would be, unable to pay its liabilities as they become due, or
- (e) the realizable value of the corporation's assets, excluding the amount of any financial assistance in the form of a loan or in the form of assets pledged or encumbered to secure a guarantee . . . would be less than the aggregate of the corporation's liabilities.

This was put in certainly as a protection for minority shareholders in particular and for creditors so that their interests would be protected from giving away or lending or guaranteeing beyond the ability of a corporation and potentially not in its best interests. However, it has become really unworkable for that solvency test to be met in practice.

This has been under considerable review over the last decade. I go back and quote a little bit from the Alberta Law Reform Institute. It says:

Section 42 was intended to protect shareholders and creditors by preventing the directors of corporations from using corporate funds for personal profit. To accomplish this, Section 42 prohibits a corporation from giving financial assistance to its shareholders or directors or those of its affiliates, or to the associates of such persons, when the corporation cannot satisfy the two-part solvency test.

It further went on and said:

Major complaints arose from the unusual two-part solvency test and the failure of Section 42 to differentiate between distributing and non-distributing corporations. Directors and their advisers had difficulty determining whether the corporation could satisfy the two-part solvency test. In addition, while most of the financial assistance prohibited in Section 42 harms the corporation granting it, there are some situations where giving financial assistance is of benefit to the corporation and in its interest. Section 42 prevented corporations in these instances from using proper financing arrangements necessary for their survival.

So we have those in the law profession, both knowing and working with their clients, saying that their clients were unable to come forward even in the best interest of the corporation and substantially meet this solvency test that was required.

4:30

Further, when businesses would then be asked in what fashion they could meet it, in going to financial advisers, being the accounting professions, and asking if they could at least render an opinion in that regard, the accounting professions under an assurance and related services guideline in the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants' handbook stated a number of things that actually prevent those in the accounting professions from rendering such an opinion. One is because of terms such as "directly or indirectly," "loan, guarantee or otherwise." Such terms are a legal interpretation and not so much accounting within the definition of professional expertise of public accountants.

In addition,

- (b) the public accountant is asked to provide assurance on the corporation's ability to pay its liabilities as they become due. No timeframe is provided for this assurance and it is unclear whether "liabilities" would include contingent liabilities as may be the case in the giving of a guarantee.
- (c) The public accountant is asked to provide assurance on the "realizable value" of the corporation's assets. The term "realizable value" is not defined and the value of assets could be determined in a number of different ways.

- (d) The public accountant is being requested to provide either positive or negative assurance on matters relating to solvency. Since these matters are not clearly defined in an accounting sense, there are no appropriate criteria to establish the framework within which the public accountant can form an opinion.

As a result of the factors set out in the preceding paragraph, it is the opinion of the Auditing Standards Steering Committee that practitioners should not provide an opinion (i.e., positive or negative assurance) on matters relating to solvency.

So here you see that both the legal and accounting professions, when asked under circumstances by their clients to provide that assurance required in the existing act, are unable and actually prevented from doing such. The request has been, not just here but certainly in legislation in other provinces of Canada that have similar clauses in their business corporations acts, that all of them look to either one of two approaches. One was the solvency approach, which in practice has not been working in many instances. The second would be, then, a disclosure approach.

It really comes to the second methodology that is being recommended. The act, rather than sticking with an unworkable solvency test, now proposes under section 42(2) that "a corporation may give financial assistance to any person for any purpose if it is in the best interest of the corporation." So now the test, which should always be the test, that directors should follow is "in the best interest of the corporation."

If it's given to those parties to which it was previously prohibited, subsection (3) now outlines that those same parties – shareholders, directors, associates of such parties – will now have to meet a disclosure requirement in accordance with the regulation. Such disclosure will actually enhance the ability of minority shareholders and creditors to act in a more timely fashion. The regulation will require that within 90 days disclosure of the type and nature of the financial assistance or guarantee certainly will have to be disclosed in the financial statements of a private corporation. There are already many disclosure requirements for those, being distributing or public corporations.

Now, with disclosure and best interest being the test, there are already many remedies available to shareholders and creditors provided in the Business Corporations Act. There are three specific remedies to protect all shareholders, and now if shareholders are made aware in a more timely fashion, they could probably take corrective actions if, in their opinion, it would not be in the best interest of the corporation. Shareholders have options such as derivative actions, oppressive remedies, and appraisal remedies already outlined in various sections of the Business Corporations Act.

Creditors have always had the ability to protect themselves by requiring security or guarantees before extending credit to corporations. Also, the oppression remedy is available to shareholders. One addition to this act will be in section 4(b)(iii), where "a creditor" will be added under "complainant," so they will now also have an ability to proceed towards the courts to ask them to step in for derivative actions.

In this fashion, by giving the shareholders and creditors disclosure, by giving them timely notice, by ensuring that the act continues to enshrine the remedies available to them, they will now have an opportunity to provide loans or assistance and guarantees in all instances when it's in the best interests of their corporation. This certainly is going to be a lot more workable for all parties. It will reduce the fees both to the lending institutions and to the borrowers in consulting their lawyers and accountants and will in a much more timely fashion facilitate securing, lending, or their natural and normal business transactions.

I am pleased at this stage to conclude my remarks and would ask

all members to support Bill 15 in second reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand in this Assembly today to speak at second reading on Bill 15, the Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-North West, the sponsor of this bill, for the availability to be briefed. We were able to follow up immediately after that with the stakeholders – the Alberta Law Reform Institute, the Law Society of Alberta, the chartered accountants, and the Canadian Bar Association in both Edmonton and Calgary – and that helped, because of the timing on this actual bill, in bringing it forward.

Getting to the point of this bill brought forward, one might think that we in the opposition must be against business-proposed amendments, but it's not so in my case on this particular one. Mr. Speaker, this particular bill removes the requirement to meet solvency before giving financial assistance under loan guarantees to stakeholders, directors, and associated parties while adding the requirement that any financial assistance must be in the best interests of the corporation.

The object of Bill 15, the Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000, is to remove the requirement for corporations to meet solvency tests before giving financial assistance, loans, guarantees to shareholders, directors, and other associated parties while adding the requirement that any financial assistance must be in the best interest of the corporation. The current section in the Business Corporations Act outlines the solvency tests that must be met for the corporation to give financial assistance to stakeholders, directors, and other associated parties.

Financial assistance to stakeholders, directors, and associated parties could not be given if the corporation would be "unable to pay its liabilities as they become due, or . . . the realizable value of the corporation's assets, [less] the amount of any financial assistance . . . would be less than the aggregate of the corporation's liabilities and stated capital of all classes." Section 42 has become an obstacle in legalized transactions and prevents corporations from lending to related entities or securing loans made to the entities by a third party. This makes it difficult to obtain loans from the third party and to restructure corporations even if it is in the best interest of the corporation to do so.

There are also requirements of full written disclosure to shareholders and creditors within 90 days of the financial assistance provided by the corporations to shareholders, directors, or other associated parties. This will allow shareholders and creditors to seek existing remedies available under the act should it be determined that the corporation's shareholders and directors have entered into a transaction that is inappropriate and not in the best interests of the corporation.

4:40

You know, we look at the solvency and asset test under section 42, another source of difficulty. There is no acceptable definition of "realizable value" of assets. There is also uncertainty as to what should be included in the liabilities. As a result of this, chartered accountants were often unwilling to give an opinion as to the value of the corporation. This required companies to hire legal counsel at a cost anywhere from \$3,000 to \$50,000 per transaction to ensure that this transaction was in accordance with the requirements of the

BCA. The uncertainty created by section 42 raised transaction costs for business and prevented them from undertaking beneficial transactions for the shareholders and creditors.

Under the amendment to the Business Corporations Act contained in this bill, the solvency test for financial assistance to shareholders, directors, and associated parties is to be eliminated and replaced with a provision that "a corporation may give financial assistance . . . if it is in the best interest of the corporation to do so." The corporation is required to disclose within 90 days to all the shareholders the terms and the conditions of the financial assistance given to shareholders and directors of a corporation. This replaces the current provision of the act and requires disclosure within the notes of the financial statement at year-end. The enhanced disclosure requirement permits shareholders and creditors to take actions through the courts in the event that the transaction is deemed to be inappropriate or not in the best interests of the corporation. Now, that is under section 231(b).

Currently section 42 of the Business Corporations Act seeks to protect creditors and shareholders by prohibiting corporations from making loans and giving guarantees to shareholders and related parties subject to solvency tests. The prohibition applies to loans and guarantees made in relationship with the related parties and share-purchase transactions. This could include loans to directors or guarantees to an affiliated corporation. This could also have a negative impact on the claims of creditors and minor shareholders, who have no effective voice as to how the corporation should be managed.

As we look at the overview and whether or not there should be major support of this bill from our side, we've looked at a few different things. These amendments are designed to enhance legitimate business activity and are deemed to be in the best interests of the shareholder, director, and creditor. We feel that in this particular case it's following within that.

The current solvency tests under section 42 are unworkable and increase the transaction costs for businesses in order to approve beneficial transactions designed to improve the financial viability of the corporation. There are already remedies under the act available to shareholders and creditors if they feel that a financial transaction approved by directors or some shareholders is not in the best interests of the corporation. The elimination of the solvency test does not weaken the remedy available to the shareholders and creditors. In fact, it reduces the transaction costs for businesses. I think that's what we should be actually looking at in most cases: how are we going to reduce certain costs so that it does make it easier for a businessperson to be solvent?

Bill 15 improves disclosure requirements by requiring that the terms and conditions of the financial assistance be provided to all shareholders within 90 days. This is a major improvement over the previous requirement that only discloses at year-end in the annual financial statement. Similar legislation, which I've followed up on from the briefing, has been enforced in Saskatchewan since the early 1990s. Ontario has recently introduced amendments to its Business Corporations Act, and the federal government is contemplating changes to the Canadian business act as well.

I'd like to ask the sponsor of the bill at this time about the status of the negotiations with the Alberta Securities Commission to extend these provisions to public companies and reporting issuers.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take my leave and sit down.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd now call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 1
Alberta Heritage Foundation for
Science and Engineering Research Act

THE CHAIRMAN: Any comments, questions, or amendments that may be offered with respect to this act? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 1. I have just a few comments, because I know that we are eager to pass this bill on both sides of the House in the Legislature. My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora has an amendment that he's looking forward to bringing forward in the House this afternoon.

I agree with what's been said here in the Assembly in terms of this bill being a very positive step for science and research in Alberta. Certainly it's the type of initiative that we have supported for years, and it's nice to see it being given such a high focus at this particular time. There is no doubt that we have said on this side of the House for many years – and in fact we have heard it said in the province for literally decades – that in order for us to be able to maximize the kinds of benefits that we have gained from oil and gas and other primary industries in this province, a focus on science and research is necessary and in fact should be a mandatory focus for us to see the business community and therefore the province thrive and grow.

It's been long a concern of mine that we do not put enough focus on value-added products in this province and that we never have given them the kind of importance they need. Ultimately we run out of those primary products, and it's in the value-added that the real gains for the people of this province lie, Mr. Chairman.

4:50

Having spoken to a number of people from the business community over the past couple of weeks, I know that this is an increasing focus for the business community, particularly in Edmonton. I say particularly there because those are the people that I've been speaking to. They think that the Premier is not giving enough attention to value-added products and a value-added focus in terms of economic development in this province at this time. They are hoping that he will increase that focus, and I am sure that with this minister's push and the focus on this bill, we can look forward to some announcements in the near future in terms of the leadership that this Premier and this government will be taking on value-added commodities, taking existing commodities and looking at their relative value-added components.

Certainly as we put a focus on science and research, that will help in that regard. No doubt if we do not see focus on value-added products and development within this industry, those people that I was talking to in business may decide to take their focus elsewhere, Mr. Chairman, so it's something that I think the Premier should be taking under direct consideration. It's leadership that's required at

this particular time. We are in a boom market in this province. It is the ideal time to take a look at what we can do to maximize benefits not just now during boom times but to level out the valleys that we have seen occur in the very cyclical nature that we have in this economy.

Mr. Chairman, I am hoping that this bill will be a first step that we will see in terms of leveling out those economic valleys we have seen, that we will see a sincere push on behalf of the government to value-added products so that all Albertans can continue to share in the growth that we see in this economy not just during this particular business cycle but in business cycles to come. Now, when there are lots of dollars in the economy, is the time to do it. We can't start to worry about these kinds of problems when we start to see the economy fall.

There wasn't a focus on this from '93 to '97 within this government that I could see at all. They were strictly looking at cost reductions. Well, now the story is different. There is a lot of money in the Treasury. There is an opportunity for the Premier to lift his head up and take some vision in terms of where he can take economic development in this province. Truly there are a number of people who are looking at his performance in this regard, who are looking for leadership on this issue, and who if they don't find the leadership will be looking elsewhere when it comes time to vote.

So with those few comments, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to my colleague for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I think it's worth noting once again on the record that Bill 1 has received the quick approval of the Official Opposition, and that has in fact come about as a result of this bill being a good idea. The minister is to be thanked not just for the efforts that he and his staff have made in meeting with the Official Opposition, in meeting with other stakeholders in the process, but also for what would have been, I think, quite a challenge in cabinet. He's probably got scars that can attest to some of those fights, but good on him for doing it.

You know, we've had some general discussion about the strengths of Bill 1 and the establishment of the foundation. We've had a couple of cautionary tales. I won't bother repeating those. I will note that there are three opportunities at least for members of the public or stakeholder groups to become involved in what will become the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research. One is on the corporation board itself, which is established under section 2, and I'll come back to that in just a minute. There is also of course the science and engineering advisory council, which is established under section 19, and then the international board of review. Now, I hope that the same care and attention will go into establishing the advisory council and the board of review as we've seen with the Heritage Foundation for Medical Research.

I'm also hopeful that the nonpartisan, arm's length from government approach to collecting names for candidates to the appointment of these bodies will be handled in the same way as the search is being conducted right now for members to the foundation board. I did receive the letter from the search firm asking for input into the foundation board, and I'm happy to tell the minister, through the good graces of *Hansard*, that I will be providing names. I hope that they'll be fairly considered. You know, I don't know whether I should just quietly provide the names or formally provide the names. I don't want my endorsement to be seen as a disincentive to the minister, because the men and women that I'm going to suggest to him are more than capable of the public service they'll be called upon to do. I hope they'll have a chance. [interjection] The

minister says, through the chair, that maybe I should just encourage them to provide their own names straight through.

The advisory council intrigues me because the foundation will develop all of the terms and conditions about the appointment of its members, the terms of office, remuneration if any is called for, whatever. They'll also make all of the rules for procedure governing the calling of the meetings. I'm a little concerned that we're a little shy on guidelines here in the bill. What I would ask the minister to do, because I don't want to prolong debate, is when this rule-making is done, if that can be brought forward in the form of a report to the Assembly. I'm assuming that the minister is going to be looking for many opportunities to keep his colleagues informed as to the progress of the foundation. This would be one of those opportunities. Let us know about how we've filled out the details on the rules around the advisory council.

I'll make the same comments about the international board of review. However, I understand that this international board of review is going to be made up of some of the top minds and brains in science and engineering from around the globe. I think we'll be lucky to have their services and will be, obviously, well served. Still, we're enshrining into legislation a process that allows for a certain loss of accountability, and to overcome that loss of accountability, I would just ask the minister to keep us posted and to perhaps, when it comes to some of the decision-making, present members of this Assembly with an opportunity to provide input. We'd be happy to do that. It doesn't have to happen necessarily in the formality of a debate, but certainly we can take the opportunity to provide the input and provide a little bit more direction on what is, after all, not a partisan exercise at all but something that is going to benefit Albertans for generations to come.

Now, back to section 2, the section which establishes the foundation itself. I note that the foundation board will be established by Executive Council through the Lieutenant Governor appointing a number of trustees for five-year terms. As I read the act, the terms are renewable and cannot exceed five years, but it's not clear that they will all be five-year appointments. So that is a question I have for the minister.

I would also like to say that while I'm happy to see that a member of the board of the University of Alberta, a member of the board of the University of Calgary, and a member of the board of the University of Lethbridge will be appointed, I'm not sure that we have all of the representation we need from the technical institutes and colleges. I recognize this also shows some movement on the part of the minister, because my understanding is that originally there wasn't going to be a designated position for the council of board chairs of the public colleges and technical institutes. I'm glad to see that that's been included, but I'd like to keep my eye on this, because as colleges and technical postsecondary institutions around the province begin to have program expansion and growth in the science and engineering fields and while there's increasing specialization, we may find that we want to specify a particular board member from a particular institution in the future, so I'm hoping that this is going to be open for second thought.

5:00

There already has been some discussion in second reading on the inclusion of professional engineers and agrologists and the suggestion that perhaps other scientific specialties should have been named, and I appreciate the difficulty in doing that. Again, I would say: let's keep our eyes open and our ears open and get the feedback to see whether or not we have weakened the foundation by excluding somebody from a named position.

Most importantly, what I would like to focus on is subsection (g),

which mentions that "not more than 6 other individuals" will be named to the board. It may go without saying that the intent behind the "not more than 6 other individuals" is that we would be able to capture some of these other scientific specialties and subspecialties, that we would be able to capture any oversights from other technical institutions or organizations, and of course we may be able then to bring in some members of the general public, those taxpaying Albertans that are, after all, in one way or another footing the bill for all of us here. While it may go without saying, I'm not happy leaving it without saying. While this section does give the flexibility to appoint up to six others, I guess I would like to be more specific to ensure that two members at least of the general public – so two members of the board should be comprised of men and/or women who don't have a particular vested interest, don't represent any other organization or group of professionals, and in fact are there for no other reason than their willingness to provide public service for the public good to the people of Alberta and support an initiative that is one hundred percent worthy of support.

With that in mind, I'd like to move an amendment to section 2(1) by striking out the existing clause (g) and adding a new clause (g), and I'll just pause for a moment to make sure that all members of the Chamber have a copy of the amendment before them, and then I'll continue my remarks.

THE CHAIRMAN: The amendment that is being circulated to all members is that which is moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora and will be called A1. I believe we've nearly caught everyone. I say "nearly." I guess we'll wait a moment.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I believe that all members have a copy of the amendment now, and as you can see, it's a very straightforward amendment. I don't recall whether I formally moved it or not, so if I didn't, I will. The amendment is as it's printed before you, that section 2(1) is amended (a) by striking out clause (g) and substituting the following, "(g) two members of the general public;" and (b) by adding the following after clause (g), "(h) not more than 4 other individuals."

The purpose is, as I stated in my earlier comments, just to ensure that there is a public voice heard that is not identified with any particular stakeholder group, still allowing the inclusion of up to four other individuals, which may be drawn from those other groups or organizations that I earlier alluded to. I believe that this will strengthen the public support of the foundation. I think it's definitely within the public interest. I hope that all members of the House will agree that it's important to leave in the legislation to demonstrate the leadership that we place in Albertans and to recognize the importance of having a public voice on all of these government-created entities.

Mr. Chairman, I'll see whether or not there's any response from other members of the Chamber, and then we'll carry on with committee stage of the bill.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. I've seen this amendment, and I think it makes good sense because it guarantees in perpetuity that there will always be two members of the public on the board. I would thank the member for this amendment. I think it's a good amendment. It makes sense. I would encourage all my members that are paying attention to please vote in favour of this amendment, particularly the ones that don't seem to be paying attention on the other side of the House. Please support the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

MR. SAPERS: Well, I want to thank the minister and I want to thank members from both sides of the House. Mr. Chairman, it's an unusual experience that I'm having right now, so I won't let it go to my head. I do have some suggestions for some other bills, and hopefully we'll have the same level of co-operation and support. [interjection] Yeah, I was going to say – well, I won't say it.

Anyway, that was an amendment from a member of the wing nut club, you could say, Mr. Chairman. The bill as amended, I believe, will set the stage for a foundation that will bring Alberta the same international reputation and the same standing in science and engineering research as the Alberta foundation for medical research has brought us when it comes to the life sciences. I would hope that the minister continues his efforts to press his colleagues into understanding the importance of fostering science and engineering research. I hope that that awareness and acceptance will spill over into a new understanding of the importance of supporting basic research and our postsecondary institutions. I hope that we are truly looking at the beginning of a new level of political support for advanced education in this province and that we are going to be able to quickly recover from the days in the mid '90s when we saw funding erode library collections and funding erode laboratories and funding diminish to the point that our salary levels were no longer competitive and we were losing bright young men and women to other jurisdictions.

So I'm hoping that this government's support of this bill does signal in fact a new era and that we'll be able to stand on both sides in this Assembly in support and in recognition of a government that truly understands the importance of not just lifelong learning and education but specifically the need to invest and foster and encourage primary research. Again, I will say that it is my hope that the research is not just being sought for its commercial value, that we're not just going to be encouraging research that can be quickly commercialized but that in fact we're going to encourage scientific exploration because that in itself is the promise of our future, the application of the scientific method to understanding the world around us and all of the potentials and possibilities that it has to offer.

So with those few comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat.

5:10

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A couple of observations I wanted to make with respect to a bill which I think is going to potentially have an enormous impact on my constituents and indeed, I think, on all of Alberta.

A couple of observations I wanted to make, Mr. Chairman: firstly, a concern with respect to patience. Patience is something that I think we don't see a lot of from our provincial government, patience in terms of recognizing that the most enduring rewards and achievements are things that don't often happen overnight. It takes a clear vision, a lot of discipline, and a lot of focus. Those, in my view, are prerequisites to achieving a measure of success in terms of important areas like education and other government services. It seems to me that there's a glimmer of hope with Bill 1 to take and build on the Alberta heritage medical research program, which has been so outstanding. That, in fact, is one of the most positive achievements of the Lougheed era and something I think all Albertans can take pride in.

We have a different government now. This is not the government that brought in and created the Alberta heritage medical research

organization. This is a government that's been characterized too often by short-term decisions, a focus on how you can deliver a service as cheaply as possible. I mean, those are the hallmarks of the government we see now. I may not have persuaded the Member for Calgary-Foothills, Mr. Chairman, but, you know, I think there are a lot of Albertans that from their own experience see and understand what I'm talking about.

Mr. Chairman, I want to make the observation that when I hear the responsible minister speak, there are times it's clear that he's sort of, to speak colloquially, got religion. He's animated and he's excited and he talks about the bill. I've heard him speak at McDougall Centre when he's spoken at news conferences. I've heard him speak in the House, and he's very, very excited about the future that this kind of research can provide for the province of Alberta. But every now and again I hear that minister lapse into sort of government speak, which is all about short-term measurements to the extent there are measurements at all. It's about: what difference is it going to make in the current budget year?

I don't think you can talk in those terms, and my concern is that this government has created a bit of a paradigm, that's been manifest since they've been in power, going back to 1993, a paradigm that values things that may show an illusion of energy and progress and action and discount almost completely long-term investments, where the rewards are not going to be seen for some time.

Now, Mr. Chairman, you wonder why I'm rambling on like this. What's the point, and how is this relevant to the bill we're dealing with? Well, let me try and come to the point as crisply as I'm able.

The observation would be this, Mr. Chairman: I'm very apprehensive that this government is going to be focused on applied research, on applied engineering. I'm sure it's been said before that all of the great advances in science, virtually all of those great advances, have come from not applied science but from pure science, from more academic research, where things have been developed and applications have been discovered after the fact, after a process has been discovered and identified and catalogued.

I'm hopeful that in the application and the rolling out of Bill 1 we're going to see that sort of disciplined commitment and focus on pure research, because it's very tempting to turn this into simply a vehicle to meet the short-term interests of large corporations that do some research work in the province that will offer to give some money or a secondment or some gifts in kind to create some short-term research. But that's not going to ultimately provide as many high-skill, high-pay jobs, which is what I want and my constituents want for their children, as a very long-term commitment that may not show immediate economic results.

I mean, it may be a long time before some new processes, some new inventions, some new industrial designs, some new applications are found. I want to make sure, Mr. Chairman, that government will find the patience to see those kinds of things nurtured, and for once I want to see this government say: we're prepared to invest beyond the current fiscal year, the current budget year. So that's a concern I've got.

Now, the other one: as a graduate of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta I was very struck by the value of the commentary provided by Kenneth Norrie, who's dean of the Faculty of Arts at my alma mater, the University of Alberta. I think that Dean Norrie makes a compelling argument. [interjections] Mr. Chairman, I know people are excited with the commentary they're hearing now, and they want to chat vigorously about it with their neighbours in their seats, and that's okay too.

The point I wanted to make is that I think this is a bit narrow. I've called in the past for Alberta at the postsecondary education level to

use the model for health research and expand it, but I'd hoped it would be expanded more broadly than what we see in Bill 1.

We've done some amazing work, and we've had some amazing projects, and we've provided some huge progress and innovation through the University of Alberta, not in that wonderful engineering faculty they've got or their biosciences section or necessarily in their medical faculty but through other faculties. There's a very strong arts program here, whether we're talking classics or history or political science or English. You know, the English department at the University of Alberta has produced probably more award-winning and best-selling authors – some of the best writers this nation has ever seen have been produced here and have worked through the University of Alberta. I want to see those concerns also addressed.

Mr. Chairman, is that abstract? Well, you know, that is no more abstract – in some respects it's more concrete – than some kinds of research that will be done in the area of science and engineering. I know that this is a matter that's been spoken of I think in compelling terms by my colleague who's responsible as the opposition critic for advanced education and for Learning, but I just wanted to reiterate some of those comments.

I might just finish with the commentary from Dr. Norrie in *Folio* magazine, produced by the University of Alberta. This will be the February 18, 2000, edition, where he said:

This is what we need to guarantee our society remains flourishing, economically productive and socially beneficial to the vast majority of its citizens.

What he's talking about is research that goes beyond technology and technical know-how to deal with the humanities, the social sciences, the fine arts. Those are also areas where we have been leaders in the past. We can be even more dominant leaders in the future, but it takes a much broader sort of mandate than anyone will have with Bill 1.

5:20

I support Bill 1. You know, we have here the Member for Calgary-Varsity, and I'm thinking to myself that if there's any member that should appreciate the value of an expanded role for education, it would be that Member for Calgary-Varsity. He has that outstanding University of Calgary campus smack in the middle of his constituency. I'm not sure, Mr. Chairman, whether he's had an opportunity to talk about the importance of taking the Bill 1 model and expanding it further. I didn't hear that in the throne speech. I haven't seen it in the budget. I'm waiting to hear his comments before we vote on this bill. I know the Member for Calgary-Varsity, the Minister of Gaming, is not so shallow as to be focused only on gambling and gaming. I know he's interested in making sure the University of Calgary is a much stronger institution. So I'm looking to see some leadership from him and many other members in the Assembly as well.

Those are the comments I wanted to make before we get to vote this bill out of committee. I will be voting in support, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much.

[The clauses of Bill 1 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 1.

[Motion to report progress on Bill 1 carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 1 with some amendments. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I move that we adjourn until 8 this evening, at which time we will reconvene in Committee of Supply.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that we now adjourn until 8 this evening and that when we reconvene, we do so in Committee of Supply. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no. Carried. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until Committee of Supply this evening at 8 o'clock.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 20, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/03/20

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. I would say for the benefit of those in the audience that this is the informal part of the Legislature. In this part hon. members are allowed to kind of wander around to hopefully . . .

MR. TAYLOR: Talk out loud?

THE CHAIRMAN: Not to talk out loud, hon. minister, but to take off their jackets and have juice or coffee, that kind of thing. It permits a kind of back and forth detail type of analysis with regard to the debate between opposition and other members and the ministers whose estimates are up. So it'll be a little less formal than the regular part.

To begin this evening, I'd like to receive permission from hon. members of the committee to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

head: Introduction of Guests

MS EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is my distinct pleasure and honour tonight to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly assembled here this evening 18 Girl Guides and 22 Brownies from Sherwood Park. Their teachers and group leaders are Kristyn Schopf, Cheryl Stone, Kelly Meters, Francine Jans, Barbara Mostat, Corinne Johnson, Susan Jensen, Kaye Potter, Karen Laine, Monique MacDonald, Robert Ross, Evelyn Weger, Marie Gamroth. They are the 15th Mills Haven Brownies and 12th Girl Guides of Sherwood Park. We also have one little Spark. Would you please join me in welcoming them warmly to the Legislative Assembly this evening.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll begin this evening's deliberations with the report on the designated subcommittee that was dealing with Health and Wellness. Just to check again to see whether or not we are in agreement as to the procedure, we have the chairman for 20 minutes, the opposition critic for 20 minutes, and, if necessary, five minutes for the other two members should they be here. If that's agreed, then we can begin.

Health and Wellness

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the chairperson of the committee I would like to report that we had a productive designated supply subcommittee on Friday morning, March 17. During that period of time, some three hours plus, members of the committee asked a number of questions to which I was able to reply but only with respect to some of the key issues raised. An undertaking was given that we will have Alberta Health and Wellness provide written or printed replies to the host of questions that were put forward.

Mr. Chairman, during the committee meeting I outlined fiscal

allocations as they relate to this government's six-point health plan to protect and improve publicly funded and publicly administered health care in this province. At this point I would just like to briefly elaborate on the six-point plan, because the application of the very significant budget, some \$5.2 billion, revolves around this overall plan.

While significant new funding is being provided over the next three years, we know that money alone will not solve all the pressures involved in the health system. The six-point plan for health focuses on doing things better. It focuses on working with stakeholders in the health system to use innovation, imagination, and strong management skills and to work at making our health system accessible and sustainable both now and into the future.

On Friday I spoke about the first key direction, improved access to publicly funded health services in this province. Budget 2000 also supports strategies to improve the management of the health system, our second key direction. It is increasingly important to be able to illustrate how the health system is effectively meeting Alberta's health needs. An analysis of the use and delivery of health services provides accurate information to help make the decisions that continuously improve health outcomes in the management of the overall system.

Mr. Chairman, in the coming months a new health services utilization commission will be launched in Alberta to enhance the public accountability of the health system and to do the kind of research and analysis that will support and improve management and delivery of health services.

Mr. Chairman, another strategy to improve the management of the health system is the health innovation fund. Through the fund our government is supporting the health authorities and other health care providers as they look for innovations; that is, better ways of delivering health care services and managing them. In the coming weeks our government will be announcing the launch of over 30 of the most innovative and promising of these projects.

The third key direction identified in the six-point plan is to enhance the quality of health services. Our work with regional health authorities and health professionals is going on to improve primary health care in the province, and this falls under this overall key direction as another very innovative focal point. The idea of primary health care is to help Albertans get the care they need from the person who can best provide it while minimizing the need to use acute care hospitals and emergency wards. In each case there are multidisciplinary teams that include medical, pharmaceutical, public health, mental health, and other professionals, all either located in the same building or traveling together as a team throughout a rural part of Alberta, making it easier for patients to access and receive the care they need.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, I emphasize this because this has been a focus of comments from the federal government, yes, but also has been a focus and a recommendation for the health care system from many sources: from the academic community, from other provinces. I think Alberta is leading in this particular area.

There are 26 projects under way in Alberta currently that focus on this particular primary care initiative. For instance, Alberta Health and Wellness and the Alberta Medical Association are co-operating on another seven pilot projects focusing on alternative compensation strategies and the integration of physician services with non-physician health services. We are examining new methods of physician service delivery and funding. Several of these projects are directly in support of primary health care reform.

Our government is also encouraging greater partnerships and teamwork among health professionals to make the best use of our overall health workforce. This includes looking at new ways to use

nurse practitioners and implementing the new Health Professions Act.

Another strategy to enhance the quality of health services in our province is our continuing work with Alberta Wellnet. This provincewide health information network will allow health professionals to share necessary information and best practices while ensuring that patient health information remains private and confidential. Mr. Chairman, overall management of the health system will improve as a result, because it will enable us to provide better, more comprehensive, more knowledge-based health care to all parts of the province.

The fourth key direction under the six-point plan is to increase the emphasis on wellness promotion and on disease and injury prevention. Mr. Chairman, I don't mind mentioning that it is a priority of our department to shift more resources to the whole area of promotion of wellness, but of course it is always a challenge when there are many needs in the acute and long-term care treatment areas.

Budget 2000 will enable Alberta Health and Wellness and the health authorities to launch a new five-year immunization strategy aimed primarily at children. Immunization programs are among the most cost-effective health interventions available and result in substantial savings to the health care system as well as improved quality of life.

I would like to just mention, Mr. Chairman, and give recognition at this point in time to the tremendous team work, the tremendous dedication that was shown by the hundreds and hundreds of health care providers and other people that were involved in the recent meningitis vaccination campaign. It was a great effort and showed how regions could come together, professions and occupations could come together. We had a great deal of support from outside the health community. The armed forces were involved; they helped with their medical resources. We had people doing work as security guards. A whole host of people just rallied to that particular need, and I want to say a thank you to all of them.

8:10

Budget 2000, Mr. Chairman, will also enable health authorities to implement a new early detection breast cancer screening plan for all women in their high-risk years. A major initiative under this fourth key direction is to increase the emphasis on wellness, wellness promotion, and injury and disease prevention. This strategy also builds on the final report of the long-term care review, which deals with the prevention and promotion of various conditions that affect our aging population.

Further with respect to the long-term care report, or the Broda report as it's sometimes called, our government's aging-in-place strategy includes two components. The first involves the healthy aging initiatives that Alberta Health and Wellness will work with health authorities on. Professional associations will be involved as well as volunteer community agencies. We're also working, Mr. Chairman, on the whole area of providing suitable housing and suitable transition for the people who are in their senior years. We're looking right now in this budget at providing support funding for a number of innovative housing projects and continuing care initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, we also reflect in this budget that the Alberta children's initiative has set an agenda for action. Work is under way in children's mental health, children with special health needs in schools, children involved in prostitution, children with fetal alcohol syndrome, and prenatal and early childhood development. This whole range of areas is something that Alberta Health and Wellness is very much involved in.

Further, Mr. Chairman, a provincewide initiative is under way to

ensure that all newborns are screened for metabolic disorders at birth to avoid future health problems. Also there are several long-term studies under way looking at maternal risk factors and low birth weight babies and congenital abnormalities. All children are being vaccinated for hepatitis B, and that's been referred to before.

New curriculum programs are being prepared in health, life skills, and physical education for kindergarten to grade 12 students, and these programs emphasize the importance of a healthy, active lifestyle. As well, job safety skills are being incorporated into several new courses that prepare students for the workforce.

So we have here, I think, a balanced overall business plan, Mr. Chairman, one which has emphasis on our seniors population, the founders of this province. We need to have a very sound health care system for them. Also, at the other end of the spectrum there are a number of initiatives here, particularly in the area of health promotion and wellness, that focus on the youngest component of our population.

Moving on to our fifth point under the six-point plan, Mr. Chairman, Budget 2000 provides for the new Premier's Advisory Council on Health. The council will help ensure the continued exploration of new ideas to protect and improve Alberta's health system, and it will provide arm's-length advice to government on health system reform. As has been previously announced, the council will be chaired by Don Mazankowski, a former Member of Parliament for 25 years and the former Deputy Prime Minister of Canada, former federal Finance minister. Of course he has quite an impressive resume. On behalf of all Albertans the chair will lead the dialogue nationally with recognized experts to identify significant emerging health system issues that face our system in this province.

Mr. Chairman, it is in this same spirit that our government has introduced the sixth direction in our business plan, and that is to protect publicly funded and publicly administered health care in this health system in this province. The government has introduced Bill 11 to put in place those legislative protections. Since the bill is before the House and will be debated in the fullness of time, I will move on to my closing remarks, but I think it is very important that that particular piece of legislation be mentioned as a very important protection of the overall health care system and also a piece of legislation which provides the opportunity for some innovation in the health care system as well.

Finally, looking toward to the future, Mr. Chairman, Albertans are in very good health generally and have access to a health system that is admired for its quality and adaptability and innovation. Our government is deeply committed to effectively planning for the future to ensure that the quality and adaptability is sustainable within our health care system.

So in conclusion, Mr. Chairman, over the next three years we will further empower Albertans to manage their health by providing them with information that enables them to protect and improve their health. We will evaluate the performance of the health system, and to play a key role in making improvements, we will call upon all stakeholders and Albertans to provide us the needed advice and the direction on which we will act.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll just go through the list of questions that I have. I have quite a few and very limited time. I'll start where I left off in the committee on Friday morning, and that was going through the different votes with regards to the different regional health authorities.

When we look at the David Thompson region, I have questions

with regards to how the department will help that region address the large number of problems that currently exist with regards to the recruitment of nurses and licensed practical nurses. Where are the dollars allocated to the Red Deer assisted living for seniors partnership pilot project, which is a project for low-income seniors, which appeared to make economic sense the way the community put it together? Have there in fact been any recommendations from the department to approve that particular project? How will this budget help the specialists deal with the concerns in that particular regional health authority and expand the third floor of the Red Deer regional hospital? Also, what are the plans for the hospital renovations that are required to be undertaken in the David Thompson region?

I also will go back to a question that I didn't ask with regards to the Chinook regional health authority, and that is: what is the department's position on the report regarding the concerns of citizens in Chinook on the effects of the feedlots? It's my understanding that the regulatory review of the livestock operations, which was tabled earlier and was subsequently changed by the steering committee in order to achieve consensus with the livestock industry, has now been put on hold for at least a two-year period. Can the minister explain that?

With regards to the Premier's Advisory Council on Health I have a number of questions, starting with: why is that needed when we have a whole department of health? Is it not the role of Alberta Health to advise not only the minister but the Premier? How are we going to measure the effectiveness of the committee? Will there be an annual report that accounts for how the dollars are going to be spent by this particular committee? If the Premier needed an advisory board, why in fact was the Provincial Health Council disbanded, and what was wrong, if we can call it that, with the way that particular health council operated that we now need another advisory board? Will this particular committee be directed to deal with the population health issues that have a huge impact on health such as the number of children on welfare rolls, poverty, housing, homelessness, and education? Last but not least, how does a chair of an advisory committee get appointed when that committee does not exist? Bill 11 hasn't been passed, and in fact there is no advisory committee, yet we have a chair and no regulations for how that chair would operate. So those are a number of questions with regards to the Premier's council.

With regards to physicians, just to finish the questions that we had on that. The regional physician action plan: we hear that the plan was successful. Can we know what the retention rate was for the 85 doctors that were recruited in the particular rural communities? Can the minister explain the inaction at this point in time in terms of addressing the recommendations in the RPAP? How many of the 20 new positions that the minister announced recently in the budget statement are announced for the rural stream?

With regards to the emergency designation under section 5 of the special register of the college, how often has that been used to recruit physicians in the rural areas? These are physicians who are not eligible for full licensure. How many physicians have practised under section 5? How many, subsequent to their term being over, have actually passed the exam, and what is the retention rate of those particular physicians? Which specialists were approved, from which countries, and where eventually did they go in Alberta?

With regards to the foreign-trained doctors – actually I'm glad that the minister of human resources can potentially hear this question – it's my understanding that some of the foreign doctors who are in the accelerated RN program at Grant MacEwan do not have adequate funding to continue in that particular program. It would be helpful if the minister of human resources could look into that particular area.

8:20

I have some questions with regards to other health professions besides the physicians. The minister has recently put out news releases that are very positive regarding the hiring of frontline workers and how in fact we have exceeded the goals with regards to that hiring. On further analysis within each region, it appears that the majority of RHAs have actually not met their goals in hiring registered nurses. In fact, the reality is that Edmonton and Calgary have overshot their allocation, and that is why we are hiring more frontline workers. There is a slim majority, I believe, of RHAs who have not met the goals for hiring RNs.

I believe that in the postsecondary expansions, from what I remember, over the next four years there are only 48 new positions for medical lab and diagnostic imaging. With the shortages that we have currently in those particular professions, I would be interested in knowing what the actual workforce analysis says that the requirements are and why in fact there are not more positions available.

Alternative medicine is always an interesting one. Has the minister or the minister's department looked at any of the alternative medicines in terms of recommendations, whether it's naturopathy, homeopathic medicine. I believe that in B.C. naturopathy is covered.

Also, a question with regards to acupuncturists. It's interesting that if a physio performs acupuncture – I don't know if that's the verb – then in fact it is covered, but if it's performed under Alberta health care by an acupuncturist, it is not. I'd like to know why there is that difference if there is that kind of difference.

I was reading recently about an interesting concept. It's called parish nursing, and I believe that the department does provide some funding. How much does the department provide for that, how many are enrolled in that program, and what are the outcomes?

With regards to mental health, it would be interesting to know – and we have tried to get this breakdown from the Mental Health Board – the breakdown of all the grants and funds that are distributed by the Alberta Mental Health Board to community-based agencies. What are the criteria for providing those breakdowns? I also understand that in '97-98 there was a surplus of \$26.3 million in the Alberta Mental Health Board, and I'm wondering whether there was any surplus in last year's budget or a carryover. I had asked some questions about the clubhouse project last year and would like to find out more information with regard to the clubhouse approach: how long is the demonstration, and what have the results been to this point in time?

It is my understanding as well that the crisis lines throughout this province are not funded through the Alberta Mental Health Board or the regional health authorities. I would think that that is a very crucial service as a frontline service, as an intake service for individuals who are having difficulties within their communities. It's my understanding that the crisis lines have to depend on funding that they access through fund-raising as opposed to having a stable source of funding through either Alberta Mental Health or the regional health authorities.

A further breakdown on the \$95 million that is being allocated to Ponoka. Will this be for inpatient beds? How many inpatient beds will result as a result of that \$95 million? How much is allocated for materials, management, support services, and administration?

The community mental health recommendations that have come forward to the minister and that the minister's department itself has been part of putting together seem to be languishing, and I guess the question is: why is the department not enacting recommendations that in fact the department has agreed to? In fact, there is no real increase in the budget for community mental health services or for

satellite inpatient services such as are required up in Grande Prairie.

The minister announced just the other day that there was an eating disorders program and that dollars were allocated to that program. Where in the budget has that allocation occurred? Actually the program will be community based, and it is positive that that is the direction of that particular program.

I have some questions around the mental health community indicators. Are those particular indicators integrated with the health indicators? I think they're being tracked differently by each RHA and also by public health. Has there been a more recent report than the September 24, 1998, report regarding the community mental health indicators? Are these measures used by Alberta Health and the regional health authorities to ascertain the effectiveness of mental health services? If not, why not? If yes, how?

Is there information on the Red Deer community clinics, whose funding was going to be suspended? Now there's a bit of an extension on that. That should be part of the community mental health information system. If so, how do these particular community agencies rank as compared to other facilities?

If you look at the social problem index – and unfortunately 1992 was the most recent that I could find – the far northern region as per that social problem index ranks in the top five. So the question is: why are there no psychiatric beds planned for hospitals in the northern region and more of a concentration on how to deal with the problems that occur there?

The other question that I have. It appears that in the health department's performance measures and in its plan the issues like poverty and homelessness, the real population health indicators that affect a population's health, are not addressed in any concrete fashion.

With regard to some public health issues, there was some discussion, it appeared, regarding establishment of a protocol to immunize health care workers working in nursing homes, long-term care facilities, and home care with regards to the flu vaccination. Who is the minister consulting on this particular policy, and will it in fact be a policy that will be enacted this coming winter? If it will be, are there any costs allocated in the budget right now for the costs of the vaccines and also costs that will have to be provided to the employees who will have to take time off, perhaps, in order to be vaccinated, especially if those employees are in the private sector? How in fact does that occur?

The cost of the meningitis immunization program. How are those dollars allocated? Are they in the budget right now, or will that be through a supplementary estimate? As the rates for E coli, salmonella, and TB are increasing by the department's records, what concrete action is the government taking with regards to that?

There was also, I noticed, an item – I think it was in one of the budget documents – that the department is involved in the national food retail and food services code and regulations. What was the input? Was there any discussion around genetically modified foods?

There was some indication that the minister was interested in an agency or centre to do research on chemical sensitivity. I did not notice that anywhere in the budget or in any of the budget documents, and I'm wondering whether the department is still going to be looking at setting up a centre for research along those particular lines.

Could the minister also indicate what the role of the Sustainable Development Co-ordinating Council is and some examples of the initiatives undertaken by the health department – it indicates in the budget that the health department has undertaken some initiatives – pertaining to sustainable resource management of diseases? I believe that's what was referred to. Also, given the fact that the population health determinants are extremely important, why hasn't there been a larger increase in the role of public health?

8:30

Injury prevention. The department has taken a very important step in setting up the centre for injury prevention. I have a number of questions with regards to possible policy direction that the government may take. One, there was a new study from the United States with regards to banning contact in hockey for children under the age of 15. Has the department ever looked at enacting something like that or looking at whether or not that is a direction the government would want to go to? I'm not sure; I'm asking. There appear to be a fair number of accidents due to contact in hockey.

Another question that I have is with regards to snowmobile usage for children. Is the government looking at any initiatives with regards to that? Also, where is the whole issue around bike helmets? What support is going to be provided particularly to neurotrauma programs? Some of the other provinces are looking at proposals where a portion of the relevant traffic violations go to a neurotrauma fund. What other funding mechanisms is the government looking at?

Ambulances I believe are an integral part of our health care delivery system, yet I keep hearing from paramedics that there are concerns especially in some of the rural areas with regards to the safety of the vehicle. Some of the vehicles are very old, have lots of mileage, and the frequency of inspection is not very often and inadequate. One person indicated to me that the cardiac monitors in the ambulances in some of the rural areas are so old that the company who provides those monitors refuses to service them anymore. So there may be a requirement to look at the regulations with regards to ambulances in this province. I also have a question as to what the minister is going to do about the AAMD and C resolution on ambulance service and funding, and how many recommendations of the Judy Gordon report, which is about four years old now, have been enacted and which ones? Is the province looking at standardizing the usage of paramedics across the province at all?

Home care, long-term care, and lodges are a whole huge area that almost requires a session to deal with in terms of the questions that I would like to ask, as are issues around laboratory services, telemedicine, Wellnet, women's health, primary health care, and pharmacare, whether the government is considering a program, if not national, like Quebec's program. Have there been any studies or recommendations made with regards to pharmacare? Has the department given any thoughts to a pharmacy audit program at all to determine how the dollars are being spent?

There is an issue around the approval of drugs, in particular drugs with regards to helping individuals who are suffering from MS and diabetes – I will provide some information to the minister on that – whether or not it will be possible to cover those drugs. I had one letter from an individual who indicated that their daughter-in-law almost died because of the fact that she could not afford the insulin that was required. That is a huge, huge area.

The waiting lists with regards to cancer and some other areas I will probably not be able to cover in full detail.

With regards to home care my questions centre around what percentage of the market in home care provision in this province right now do large corporations and their subsidiaries have, corporations such as Olsten and Comcare. Does the Auditor General or the minister's office overview the number of beds, the contracts, and quality of care with regards to home care that's being provided throughout this province? If not, why not? Is this something that the Health Services Utilization Commission will or can monitor? If so, how will they monitor that? What systems are currently in place to ensure that private companies spending public funds are being monitored and that the dollars are being used wisely?

I will forward the rest of my questions to the minister, and I will table them in the Legislative Assembly so that he can answer them as well. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business at hand and the proposed estimates for the Department of Health and Wellness, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$5,623,442,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Learning

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin the 20, 20 period we have the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to give a report of the meeting of the designated supply subcommittee on Learning which was held on Monday, March 6, at 8 a.m. In my view we had a very good meeting, indeed. By unanimous agreement of our subcommittee members we met for about two and a half of the usual four hours. The minister and members engaged in what amounted to a relaxed yet very informative dialogue. Each member appeared to have plenty of opportunity to ask the questions they wanted to ask of the minister. With that, I thought it was important that everybody had an appropriate opportunity to address Alberta Learning's estimates. Most of the questions that were asked during the meeting were most ably answered by the Minister of Learning, and he will be tabling the answers to the remaining questions in the coming weeks. There were no recommendations that came out of this designated supply subcommittee.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I conclude my summary. Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I have a few questions for the minister that I didn't have an opportunity to raise during our previous session. A lot of these questions arise out of the review of the framework for funding school boards that was conducted for the previous minister of education in May of 1999. I know that the ministry has acted on some of these recommendations, but there are a number of others that I would be interested in knowing the progress the department has made and whether or not the recommendations are going to eventually be accepted or rejected.

8:40

The context for this year's budget estimates is rather unusual. There are a large number of parents across the province that firmly believe that the education system is underfunded, and the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and myself heard from those parents at a meeting in Fort Saskatchewan where six of the schools

chronicled the effect of underfunding on their particular schools. We heard the same message at a forum in northeast Edmonton where a series of schools went through the same exercise and listed the impact of underfunding on their schools. That underfunding has resulted in larger-than-acceptable classes. It's resulted in youngsters not getting the individual attention that they require, and it's placed a strain on schools and school parent support groups in terms of fund-raising.

A second piece of information that applies to this year's estimates is a question that has been raised by the Premier himself when he asks the question: how much is enough? We've heard that question raised by the Premier in this Legislature a number of times, and that's the very question that a number of parents are beginning to address themselves to. It's a question, I think, that they have decided is very important to be answered.

A third factor in these estimates is that as you examine the business plans – and that's not peculiar to this business plan but the previous business plans – there's never been set forth a rationale for the funds that are provided to schools. Other than taking the number of students and the number of dollars the government wants to spend on learning and doing some quick division, there's never been a rationale for why money is allocated, for instance on a per pupil basis, the way that it is from the ministry. So there are those factors working on this set of estimates.

I'd like to ask the questions from the review of the funding framework within that kind of a context. If you look at recommendation 1, you will see that the recommendation is that the ministry "initiate a review to ensure that all socio-economic and other demographic factors that may have an impact on instruction costs are being addressed equitably for all [schools]." So recommendation 1 of the review focuses on equity and socioeconomic status of students' parents.

Recommendation 2 reads: "Initiate a study to identify an alternative funding approach that will not unduly limit boards' capacity to meet the needs of [their] students." Then it says that "the scope of the study should be broad enough to identify causes and to develop recommendations and strategies that may reduce incidence rates." They're talking about severe and emotional behavioural disabilities. So again a call for an alternative funding approach.

Now, recommendations 4 and 5 are in the same vein. Recommendation 4 asks that the ministry "implement an equity adjustment for above average teacher grid placement costs on a three-year trial . . . effective September 1, 1999." If I could maybe just continue with number 5: the ministry

undertake a complete analysis of the cost of utilities, services and trades, the impact of travel within a school jurisdiction and space utilization. Use this information to determine cost variances across the province that are beyond a board's control.

So all of those recommendations are aimed at trying to either improve or replace the funding formula that the department is currently using. I guess my question to the minister is: what is the ministry doing in terms of looking into alternate funding formulas, and how are they approaching determining how much is enough?

There are some computer models that I know have been developed elsewhere that address that very problem. There's a model called a resource cost model that's being used south of the border. It's a model that claims to address both equity and adequacy of funding. It is the equity the government has claimed has been addressed, but the question that the Premier and those parents are raising is the question of adequacy. How much is enough? How much is needed to fund youngsters adequately in schools?

The resource cost model that's being used elsewhere is one that takes units that school boards have to deal with. For instance, the

unit might be a 6th grade class, and to cost out that resource, to provide the resources for that class, what that actually cost - for instance, for a full-time teacher it might cost part of a teacher aide. There's obviously capital equipment in terms of desks, tables, and chairs in the classroom, and there are supplies and materials that the youngsters need. They go through a list. They have a rather lengthy inventory they use to sort out what those costs are for a particular classroom. One of the claims they make for their model is that it is able to accommodate differences in school sizes. It doesn't make any difference whether the school is a large high school like Harry Ainlay or a small rural school with 32 students; this formula will identify the costs.

It can also accommodate school location, whether that location is in a remote part of the province, whether it's in an inner-city location or it's in a suburb. The model will also accommodate for a mix of students. So if you have a number of special-needs students or if you have a program like the international baccalaureate program, this cost resource model claims that it can accommodate those differences and come up with costing that makes sense, and it allows administrators and school boards and parents to look at a school situation and say: what is it costing right now, and how much more would it cost to do the kinds of things we think should be done in our school? So they argue. I have to admit that I have no personal experience with the model, Mr. Chairman, but I put it forth as one proposal that the ministry might look at.

I think it's that more global looking at the funding formula that all of these recommendations are addressing, at least these first five recommendations from the framework for funding school boards review, and in one way or another they're picking away at parts of the current formula and trying to suggest improvements. I would submit that the task is larger than that, that there needs to be an overall look at the funding.

I think we shouldn't go without noting that the ministry has acted on one of the recommendations, recommendation 8, which dealt with the cash flow to school boards. Making monthly payments to school boards from the general revenue fund and the Alberta school foundation fund has made a huge difference to boards in terms of the interest they've had to pay and again is making sure that the money that is allocated goes to educational use and not to support interest payments at the bank.

8:50

One of the other items in the review that causes great concern among school board members and teachers and principals is the use of earmarked funding, and we made reference to this in the previous session on estimates. Earmarked funding is rejected as much by school boards as it is by the provincial government when the federal government earmarks funds. No one likes them. They take the money and say, "Yes, we can use it," but they don't like the restrictions that are placed on them.

My question to the minister in terms of earmarked funding would be: how much has been done to meet the recommendations in the review? They asked for a number of things; for instance, that when there are earmarked funds, there be a set of specific objectives laid out for those funds. They asked that measures be in place in terms of: how will they determine whether or not the earmarked funds have been successful in achieving the goals for which they were originally intended? They also asked that there be sunset clauses, where applicable, at the very beginning of the initiatives, so that if it's the early literacy initiative, those people that put in place those programs will know that the program has a definitive end and can plan accordingly; that when an earmarked fund is proven successful, it be added to the basic instructional grant. So my question to the

minister would be: just what kind of progress have they made in terms of meeting the recommendations of the review panel in terms of earmarked funds?

There was a great deal of attention paid in the review to differences in costs among boards. In the highway 2 corridor teacher costs are much higher than they are in other parts of the province, and there have been a number of reasons put forth for that. One was the proximity of universities and colleges, that teachers want access to those facilities. There are additional costs, for instance, in Lethbridge if they have a policy where they would like to hire graduates of their own university. Their program requires a minimum of five years of teacher education before you can practise, so they are faced immediately with additional costs. So I would ask the minister: what has been done in terms of trying to in some way make some adjustments for costs that are often out of the control of school boards and which put those who have costs above the average at a disadvantage in trying to serve youngsters? That was what recommendation 21 was getting at, that they look at some of the variances among school jurisdictions and try to adjust the formulas for that.

One of the major criticisms of those people who were interviewed was the almost commonly held view that the funding framework does not provide the kind of flexibility that school boards need to meet local decisions. Again my question would be: what moves has the ministry made? Are there moves in these estimates that will add to the flexibility of school boards and allow them to better address local needs?

I've talked about earmarked grants and just would like to raise a number of other issues that I think I would appreciate some comment on from the ministry. There's been talk about fund-raising, and I'd like to know the kind of progress and what the budget intends in terms of parent fund-raising and the source of funds. Does this source of funds make a difference to the ministry? I know that there's a court case right now. Again, in the interests of making school boards more accountable to local ratepayers and allowing them to tailor-make programs for the particular student population they serve, has there been consideration to giving them some access to the tax base?

Has any work been done on addressing the inequities resulting from the accumulated reserves before regionalization and the joining together of a number of boards? Some of those boards had reserve funds set aside, others had deficits, and that has resulted in some inequities. Has any work been done on addressing those inequities?

The last one, of course, is a perennial for us, and that's early childhood services. Has there been any move or is there going to be any move to fund them at .5 of the rates of all the funding categories for grades 1 to 12?

Before I come to the end of my time, Mr. Chairman, I would like to propose an amendment. I believe you have a copy of the amendment. If I might read the amendment?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, hon. member. This will be known as amendment A1. Go ahead.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you.

Be it resolved that the estimates for the standing policy committee on Learning under reference 1.0.11 of the 2000-2001 estimates of the Department of Learning be reduced by \$96,000 so that the operating expense and capital investment to be voted is \$3,105,307,000.

Mr. Chairman, this is the perennial motion that we put forward. The effect would be to eliminate the money for the standing policy committee on learning. Our arguments are the arguments that we have made in the past, that those are committees that all elected

members of the Legislature should have an opportunity to speak to and to take part in, and if it's being paid for out of tax dollars, as legislators we all should have access to those committees.

So that's my amendment. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering, then, the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Learning, are you ready for the vote?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$3,105,403,000
Non-budgetary Disbursements	\$65,800,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Hon. members, just some guidance from you. It looks like in the past we have been doing a similar 20, 20, and five.

9:00

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Satisfactory.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's satisfactory? That's agreeable?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Justice and Attorney General

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin this evening's deliberations, we'll call upon the Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be here to continue our discussion pertaining to the main estimates and business plan for Alberta Justice, that we started discussion on on March 6 in subcommittee B. Again I'd like to draw the members' attention to Deputy Minister and Deputy Attorney General Mr. Paul Bourque; Mr. Dan Mercer, executive director of strategic services; Mr. Shawkat Sabur, director of financial services; and Jack Jannsen from my office, all of whom continue to prevail with us this evening, having had the opportunity to persevere through the earlier reports. I'd like to ask members of the House to give them a warm welcome.

At the last meeting on March 6 I reviewed with the subcommittee the environment in which we operate, the relevant aspects of the Summit on Justice, our budget estimates, and what's new and improved with respect to goals and strategic initiatives. Since I went over that material in some detail and I know my hon. colleagues would like to hear more, I'll go through it in detail. No, I won't, but I will mention a few highlights and talk about some of the significant changes from the previous year.

We've eliminated the goal of partnering with outside stakeholders to support the administration of justice from this year's business plans, but I want to emphasize again, as I did in committee on March

6, that that does not mean we intend to stop collaborating with our stakeholders, nor does it mean we intend to stop partnering. Rather, it means quite the opposite. We have integrated and included partnering as part of our operation in a significant manner, and it's now a standard practice in the department.

DR. TAYLOR: You're finally going to get tough on crime.

MR. HANCOCK: We're going to be tough on crime.

More significantly, we've removed public satisfaction with the justice system as a performance measure. From our surveys we've learned that over 90 percent of Albertans do not realize that crime in their communities is going down.

DR. TAYLOR: No. I can't believe it.

MR. HANCOCK: Even in your community it's going down.

Almost 70 percent are unaware that the province is responsible for administering justice in Alberta. Because of these findings we're recommending a more effective measure of public satisfaction with the justice system. Instead of asking the public how satisfied they are with the job Alberta Justice is doing, we plan to ask them how safe they feel in their homes and neighbourhoods, and we plan to ask them how satisfied they are with the level of policing in their communities. These questions will provide a truer picture of how satisfied Albertans are with the administration of justice in the province.

A final change is that we've added a performance measure specifying the number of community service hours provided by offenders. While this may not be the best way of measuring community involvement and contribution to the community, one of the objectives of our corrections program is to challenge offenders to give something back to their communities, challenge offenders to learn in many ways the benefit of making a contribution to communities. As a result, we'll measure how many hours of service Alberta offenders provide to nonprofit organizations, community groups, municipalities, and other government ministries.

Many of our initiatives, Mr. Chairman, respond to what we heard from the summit. Others recognize and respond to the ever changing social and economic climate of the province. All these initiatives are broadly based and will result in a justice system which is more sensitive to the needs of citizens.

I'd like to briefly review the financial context of the business plan. Our spending targets are approximately \$457 million, \$447 million, and \$452 million over the next three years. This represents an increase of about \$45.5 million for the year 2000-2001. Of this, \$30.5 million is committed to nondiscretionary expenditures such as judicial and general employee compensation and contracted services. Approximately \$6.2 million will be cost recovered either from the federal government or through self-funded programs and directed to victims of crime and youth criminal justice program implementation. The remaining \$8.8 million represents discretionary funding increases and will be used to implement the recommendations of the Summit on Justice. This includes funding for provincial and criminal and family and youth courts, additional Crown counsel, court mediation programs, First Nations policing, and restorative justice programs.

As I reviewed with the subcommittee in detail on March 6, our major initiatives this year are in the areas of family law reform, and in that context I'd like to once again thank the Member for Calgary-Lougheed for taking on the job as the chair of the unified family court task force. I think this is a very important initiative, one that's long overdue in Alberta, and I believe that under the capable

guidance of the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, which she's shown in a number of other justice reviews in the past, this initiative will be one whose time has come.

[Mrs. Laing in the chair]

We have, of course, the review of the Police Act happening. We have initiatives in the area of youth justice, improving our courts, restorative justice approaches, First Nations policing and prosecution, policing and crime prevention, private trustee monitoring, and victim services. As well as these objectives related to the summit, we'll be undertaking corporate development objectives to build support for our programs, and we will undertake a communications plan to better inform Albertans about how the justice system works and, more importantly, how they can get access to it.

In our previous subcommittee meetings I heard many comments from members relating to the administration of justice, which is, Madam Chairman, as it should be. The administration of justice touches every Albertan. I know that we're all interested in ensuring that it continues to work in the public interest. We have a major focus on community justice, and we'll be discussing a community justice policy over the course of the next year. I continue to maintain that justice begins in the community, that we all have an important stake and an important role to play in making sure we have safe communities. So with this in mind I've taken careful note of the comments made by subcommittee members in the past. I will listen carefully to comments made this evening.

I'd like to take this opportunity to table responses to those questions that I was unable to answer before the House at the time of the subcommittee meeting, and I'd be more than happy to deal with any other issues that might come up.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Madam Chairman. Good evening, Mr. Minister. A couple of observations I want to make straight off. Sometimes the members on this side have been accused of being too miserly with praise when government does things properly. I'm not sure I'd ever agree with that assessment.

I do want to make the observation that there should be some recognition that it's extremely encouraging to have as our top justice official in the province, the Minister of Justice, somebody who understands that in fact our communities are very safe, that Albertans are exceedingly fortunate in terms of the level of public safety they're able to enjoy in their communities, and also and perhaps most importantly, a Minister of Justice who understands that he has a huge, an enormous responsibility to explain the justice system to the people of this province instead of playing on their prejudices and fears, torquing issues, which has the effect of doing such a huge disservice to the importance of the issues of the people who work in the field, the people who work in the system, the excellent men and women who make up the judiciary in this province whether at the Court of Appeal or Queen's Bench or Provincial Court. So I make that observation just to say that it's recognized and certainly noted by members of the opposition.

Also, some of the steps in terms of dealing with performance measures are heartening, because I think it suggests a more thoughtful, analytical, rational approach to trying to measure whether the dollars that are spent by the Department of Justice are well spent.

9:10

Now, we don't want to go on with praise too long, because time is short and there are lots of things that haven't done as well as we'd

like. Let me start with aboriginal justice. Madam Chairman, the Cawsey commission – it was a number of years ago, but it's still very fresh in this member's mind – made a number of recommendations. I mean, they looked at the absolutely miserable job we do in this province, as many of the other prairie provinces do as well, in terms of dealing with issues unique to aboriginal offenders and aboriginal communities. That resulted in a host of recommendations that the Cawsey commission made.

You know, to the government's credit – and even this minister can't claim credit for some of the things his predecessors did – there was a move to try and adopt some of the Cawsey recommendations, but one of the chief recommendations was nixed by the government, and that was the recommendation to create an aboriginal justice commission. The purpose of that was to create a body that would be able to provide a degree of high-profile leadership, a body that would be able to challenge the Justice minister and the provincial government to move in areas where progress and reform were proceeding at a glacial pace. What was identified by the Cawsey commission was the need for somebody to audit, supervise, manage, assess progress in terms of the aboriginal community justice reform.

Now, what happened is that the provincial government said no to an aboriginal justice commission. The reasons have never been satisfactorily explained to me, but I've deduced it comes down to this. The provincial government is fearful, absolutely fearful of having an independent body of some considerable stature that would be able to blow the whistle on aboriginal justice reforms that are either not meeting the test, not proceeding adequately, or not having satisfactory results.

This is what the Justice department did, and this was a number of years ago, before the current minister, before the current deputy minister assumed their offices. They created a sort of aboriginal justice secretariat. A very capable woman was appointed to co-ordinate some different initiatives, to report to the minister, but that was the rub, Madam Chairman. It was reporting to the minister. You don't have anybody keeping the Minister of Justice on his toes, challenging the minister.

If we accept that the one area where probably our Justice department has been least effective is dealing with the aboriginal justice issues in this province, this is the thing that really needed to be kick started. What the province did was look at the Cawsey report, which called for a very bold initiative, and didn't want to go there. Instead, they decided they wanted to fiddle with incremental progress. Well, Mr. Minister, the incremental progress is too slow. We're not making the headway that the Cawsey report had called for, had envisioned with an aboriginal justice commission. I want to ask the minister whether he's reconsidered that position, whether he now is prepared to do what the Cawsey commission recommended, which is to create an aboriginal justice commission.

This is a little bit like putting a bus on the road and talking about how nicely outfitted it is but not putting a driver behind the wheel. I suppose if you take the brakes off and put it into neutral, the bus, if you've got a bit of a slope, can roll down the hill a little bit, but it can't go uphill and it can't negotiate turns and the rest of those things. That's sort of where we're at in terms of aboriginal justice.

It's not to denigrate or deny that some positive developments have happened. From my perspective, Madam Chairman, it's too little; it's too slow. I think we can do more, and having an aboriginal justice commission doing an annual report, which the minister would have to bring in – his deputy minister and his assistants would not want to have to deal with the embarrassment of a bad report card. You know, I'm not sure they pay much attention when they get bad report cards from us in the opposition. Maybe they'd pay more attention if we had a high-powered commission doing that kind of

assessment. That continues to be a problem, and I don't know what the minister's current position on that is.

The other question I raise with the minister. When I look at *Hansard*, the minister talked about the federal Youth Criminal Justice Act. In fact, I've highlighted the note here because I was interested. This is at page B24. He said: "We've had commentary on that. We've had concerns about how far it goes." Then he goes on to say, "We've encouraged the federal government to make changes to that act to deal with some of the issues and concerns we have." That would be the end of the quote.

The point is this. This Minister of Justice is obviously putting forward a set of recommendations for legislative change to the Parliament of Canada. But do you know what, Madam Chairman? The elected members of this Assembly don't know what the government of Alberta is putting forward. What's scary is that the one example used by the Minister of Justice is one that caused me great concern, and that's reducing the age to throw out a great big dragnet and bring in more of those children – we're talking about people under the current age caught by the Young Offender Act – under this misguided notion, in my view, that these children are somehow going to benefit by being ensnared by the criminal justice system.

Madam Chairman, the evidence is absolutely overwhelming that younger children may well need help if they're in homes where they're at risk of abuse, if they're not being properly supervised, guided, supported, but the answer is not to make criminals of them, to bring them into the criminal justice system. The answer is for this minister to talk to the minister responsible for Children's Services and to talk to the Minister of Learning and the Minister of Health and Wellness and identify what kinds of programs have to be put in place to catch those children at risk and deal with them.

If this is an example, if this minister's idea of making recommendations to the federal government on this act is to reduce the age and drop more kids into this hole, then I'm scared stiff about what other recommendations he's making on our behalf. Will the Minister of Justice provide us with a list of all the recommendations, provide us with the submission he's made to federal Justice minister Anne McLellan or to whomever else in the federal government he's making that submission to? [interjection] Well, we'll see who ignores anything. We just gave you an example of a strong recommendation to this government that they ignored, that they choose not to accept.

I'm less worried, frankly, about what the federal government is doing than what recommendations our provincial government is making allegedly on our behalf. Will the Minister of Justice commit to provide us in detail the submissions that are being made to the federal government in terms of what changes they want in the Youth Criminal Justice Act? As I say, if I look at B24, I only see the one example.

Speaking of young offenders, there was some good information given by the minister last time on youth justice committees. If the minister would give us a list, perhaps, of the alternative measures committees that exist under section 4 of the Young Offenders Act, give us a list of the youth justice committees that currently exist under section 69 of the Young Offenders Act.

Just to go back in history a little bit, Madam Chairman, in terms of youth justice committees we lag badly behind. We had Wabasca-Desmarais, and we had Slave Lake, and there was a third aboriginal-based youth justice committee years ago. But that was it. Beyond that, we weren't spreading out. Then a couple of years ago, perhaps three years ago, finally a bit of a fire under our former Minister of Justice, and we started seeing a big push in terms of implementing and establishing a lot of youth justice committees. I know we have

a considerable number. I'd like the minister to tell us what evaluation is being done on the effectiveness of those. When we looked back to the early days in New Zealand, where they'd done a lot of work with youth justice committees, and Maryland, Massachusetts, and I think some other states like that that had a lot of experience with them, we saw that there were some pretty exciting developments.

9:20

This is a government that says they believe in performance measures, in evaluation, so I'm asking the Minister of Justice to tell us what evaluation is being undertaken to determine what kind of success those alternative justice committees under section 4, the youth justice committees under section 6(9) are having, what kind of difference they're making in those communities. If we can have that update from the minister, we'd sure appreciate it.

Now, if the minister looks at his business plan summary on page 322 of the budget book, we have the number of eligible persons receiving legal aid services. We see that in 1999-2000 the target was 93,190, and in 2000-2001 the target is 94,177. Does this minister not recognize the rate at which this province is growing? I don't know where this projection comes from unless you start off by accepting that a whole lot of people are going to be denied access to their own court system because they're not going to get legal aid certificates.

On what possible basis would this minister think that it's realistic to increase the number of legal aid certificates – I take it these are certificates, not clients, because some clients may have multiple certificates. Firstly, the minister might indicate whether that chart on the bottom of page 322 represents 93,190 clients or 93,190 certificates and the same for 2000-01. Then can he particularize what specific criteria he's using to project such a modest increase?

I can tell you just from my own experience in Calgary that not everybody coming to the city of Calgary – Madam Chairman, you know better than anybody how quickly this city is growing, and they're not all people with PhDs and marketable job skills. They're not all journeyman carpenters or electricians. A lot of those people are young people from P.E.I. or Newfoundland or Quebec that couldn't find a job in their home province. They've come out here looking for work. Those people don't have a lot of job skills. That may be an area where some of those people are going to be involved in activity that requires legal aid certificates. That's part of the reality of that population growth. So I don't know why the government is projecting such a modest increase when we know the way this province is growing.

Perhaps the minister can particularize what the basis of that projected target is. How many people are going to be denied legal aid certificates?

I'm also a bit concerned – despite what the Minister of Resource Development suggests, it's been a long time since I've done very much legal aid work. I'm not as much of an expert in it as he tries to suggest, Madam Chairman. But I do know this, that we have difficulty . . . [interjection]

You know, somebody suggests that it's almost 9:30, and they'd like me to sit down. Well, the short answer to that is that we have too little time to challenge your colleagues and your cabinet to make sure we're providing the kind of access to legal services that Albertans should be entitled to, and I don't feel badly at all, Madam Minister, through the chair.

MRS. NELSON: Calgary-Foothills.

MR. DICKSON: Calgary-Foothills. I have relatives living in that

constituency. I'm constantly reminded of the work being done that . . .

MRS. NELSON: They all voted for me, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, now the Member for Calgary-Foothills is just being outright provocative. So I'm not even going to look her in the eye, because I know she's going to get me going, talking about the next election campaign in Calgary-Foothills and who is taking a campaign sign for her and who isn't. I'm not going to be baited so easily.

Madam Chairman, I was very disappointed in the response I got when we were talking on March 6. That was the time when I pointed out to the minister that we have this inequality, and while the Member for Calgary-Lougheed is on the premises, I want to remind her that we have a problem with ages in terms of support obligations. I'm not going to go through it all. I'll just refer the minister to page B21. The minister said in answer, "We're reviewing in total the family law legislation, doing a comprehensive review of it." Now, when I read *Hansard*, I was frightened for a moment, because my response was, "Excellent." I hasten to add that I'm delighted to see movement on it, but I've learned there's no prospect that we're going to see legislation in this respect for the balance of 2000. Since many of us expect there's going to be an election, there's a real concern.

MR. HANCOCK: That won't stop us from bringing it back after the election, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: Well, we will bring it back after the election, Madam Minister.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Madam Chairman.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman. I'm sorry. Nobody more richly deserves than you a seat at the cabinet table, and every time I see you, I cannot believe that the Premier overlooks your talents and your hard work in Calgary-Bow. In fact, it makes me wonder. If the Premier of this province overlooks the good talent he has available languishing on the backbenches of this Legislature, you wonder what other kinds of errors of judgment he's making when it comes to ensuring good access to the legal system in this province.

Finally, just changing the subject completely, the Justice department of this province did a terrific thing in terms of making those renovations to the youth and family court, Provincial Court in the city of Calgary in the John J. Bowlen Building. But I come back and ask again – and the minister may say that this is Infrastructure, but you know, Madam Chairman, he's got a responsibility too. When are we going to see that new courthouse in Calgary?

Thanks very much, Madam Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Any other speakers?

After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Justice, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$419,916,000
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THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Municipal Affairs

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister. [interjections]

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Is it okay for me to talk too?

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Yes. Go ahead.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Madam Chairman, I'm pleased to . . . [interjections]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, would you like to begin, please?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to provide responses for the vast majority of the questions that were not answered in detail last Monday evening. There are a few that were raised last week that remain outstanding, and I'll forward the responses to those in writing as soon as they are completed. In the meantime I'd like to table the questions that we have answers for.

9:30

Madam Chairman, I would only offer a few comments in addition to the discussion of last week. I want to thank the members for Edmonton-Manning, Edmonton-Rutherford, Calgary-Buffalo, West Yellowhead, and Edmonton-Mill Woods for their questions and their comments.

On the subject of education property taxes I'd reiterate my comments of last week to the members opposite to bring forward any ideas and thoughts they may have to the MLA committee, headed by our hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane. I remember the words of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods when he said that

we're all in this together, that tax money is pooled for the common interest, that we can't continually attack each other if the system is going to work, and that it's built on trust and sharing and trying to do the best we can for each other.

Those were wise words and certainly should be repeated and quoted. I'm encouraged by those words, Madam Chairman, and look forward to his and Edmonton-Manning's participation in phase 2 of the MLA committee's work.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

In reflecting on the question raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo last Monday evening, I was very interested to hear from a constituent on the weekend who in an obvious moment of boredom while flipping through channels happened to catch some of the coverage of the federal Liberal convention in Ottawa this past week. It appears that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was questioning the Prime Minister on the federal freedom of information legislation. He told the Prime Minister and the entire federal cabinet that the federal act was outdated. He said, and I quote: the existing federal legislation has been eclipsed by much stronger laws in Ontario, in British Columbia, and in Alberta. I find it very interesting that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo repeatedly criticizes our legislation, adopts one point of view in this House in nothing more than a very vocal attempt to score political points and then contradicts himself with a completely different assessment of our freedom

of information legislation in front of the federal counterparts in Ottawa.

In addition, Mr. Chairman, the members of the subcommittee will recall the comments of the hon. Member for Calgary-Bufferford regarding federal Bill C-6. He pointed out to this Assembly that Albertans were not being involved in consultation on this very important legislation. He questioned the awareness of Albertans on this matter. As I pointed out last Monday, this is a federal government bill, and the federal government's complete failure to consult with Canadians on this matter is shocking. Given the Member for Calgary-Bufferford's interest in this matter and his strong words just seven days ago, I'm at a loss to understand why the hon. member opposite while at a national forum – in fact, it was on a national stage with an opportunity to be heard on national television and make the point directly to the Prime Minister, the entire federal cabinet, and other provincial Liberal leaders from across the country – chose to ignore the very real concerns of Albertans and Bill C-6.

Mr. Chairman, I find it very interesting that he had the opportunity to raise these concerns about the lack of consultation and to indeed communicate on this, quote, important matter at the highest possible level, but he chose not to. This hon. member chose not to raise the concerns he raised in this House just last week on Bill C-6 and the need for more and more meaningful consultation by the federal government. Once again, we have a situation where the hon. member opposite seems to have one critical point of view in this House and is completely silent on the matter when he is in front of his federal counterparts.

Those are a few of the comments that I have for tonight, Mr. Chairman. I conclude my remarks, and I will listen with great interest to the comments from the other side.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on the estimates.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Chairman, I think you know what kind of a temper I have.

It was interesting listening to the minister, and actually I hope there are lots of answers in what he's tabled tonight, because we had to go to the Blues, to *Hansard*, to get any answers on this particular item.

Over the last week we actually got an information news release, Municipal Grant Program Offers Bonus for Intermunicipal Cooperation. This is a very good program – and I don't want to sit here knocking it – to the point of emphasizing that some of the items in here are actually very good, that I hope all municipalities actually go forward on. Last weekend at the home show I was talking to quite a few towns and municipalities that were actually displaying their wares, and the town of Viking and the town of Wetaskiwin said that they are going to participate and submit something to the Municipal 2000 sponsorship program.

I'm going to ask a few more questions so that we can get it on record. I'm going to start with the Municipal Government Board. The gross budget for the MGB was \$1.805 million, and the forecast expenses are \$2.157 million. The 2000-2001 gross expenses are estimated at \$1.847 million. The forecast is \$352,000, which is 19 percent over budget, and the estimate gives the MGB an increase of \$42,000. Will the minister explain why the MGB overspent its budget by \$352,000? Why is the MGB receiving an increase of \$42,000 for its 2000-2001 budget? What is the backlog of appeals currently facing the MGB, and how many appeals were heard in 1999-2000? How many of these would be considered major appeals requiring a significant amount of the board's resources? Has the minister plans for increased mediation to relieve some of the

caseload with which the board was previously backlogged? How is the minister evaluating the success of mediation in municipal disputes?

We have quite a few different items under disaster recovery. Will the minister provide details of where the \$10.283 million for disaster recovery was spent? Why, despite the forecast being over 800 percent over the previous budget, has the minister reduced the 2000-2001 budget in disaster recovery by 45 percent?

We're reading in the paper and following a few items on fire commissioners. Will the minister explain what expenses are included under program 3.3.4, fire commissioners, and why the forecast is 235 percent over budget? Why is the budget for the fire commissioners receiving an increase of 16 percent in 2000-2001? Is that because it is proposed to be a very dry year?

There are a number of items, like petroleum storage tanks. What expenses are going to be covered by the \$10 million budget for the petroleum storage tanks in 2000-2001, and how many tanks does the province have to deal with under this program? Are the taxpayers having to pay to support errors made by the private sector?

Regional services, 3.3.3. Will the minister provide details of the type of services included under regional services and explain why, even though the forecast is under budget, the program is still receiving an increase in 2000-2001?

Branch management and programs. Will the minister detail what types of spending are covered under branch management and programs for disaster services and explain why the program is receiving a budget increase of \$85,000 for 2001? That relays into some of the other questions I asked around disaster recovery.

9:40

It was interesting to listen in the committee to the questions to the members presented from AUMA. We're talking about grants. We're talking about dollars and cents. They're looking for stable, predictable funding. When we're still relying on grants, I think this is the biggest problem we do have. If they were treated like true partners and as a true government that could govern themselves, maybe they wouldn't need a grant. Maybe we have to look at the three-year plan that is proposed. Don't wag the carrot. Don't put the one-year dollars out there. Don't base all your budgeting on the difference between \$12 and \$32 a barrel for oil. Actually sit down and do an overall view of what's happening. They came with some good lobbying factors and very good deliberations to the people in room 512. I hope that everything I've said in Municipal Affairs, everything I've said in my deliveries is that we have to look at our local governments, treat them as true partners.

To put things on record that they presented, municipal governments must have a fiscal capacity to fulfill their mandate through primary access to the property tax base. Now, it would be better to sit down and look at how tax base dollars are going back to them instead of throwing back the question: "Well, what do you want? What's your answer?" I believe they should not be pressed into a corner. Don't give them grants. Treat it like their own tax base so that they can go out there and look after a stable, long-term, and progressive source of revenue.

You know, we've looked in the last five, six years actually at the downloading from the federal government to the provincial, from the provincial down to the local governments. The time for playing that one-string guitar from both levels of government should be over and long gone. There is probably a better ruling factor, and that is that the municipalities throughout this province try their best. I believe, from everybody that I have gone to, that they're doing a very good job.

I put some questions out on the table last week on what is actually

being said to me out in local Alberta and some of the items that they're actually stressing. This is what I put into Infrastructure on Thursday. Their number one item is downloading. That's their biggest concern. The fourth one is infrastructure, fast moving up into second, and the second, in my tabulation, is being treated as a child of the provincial government and the lack of respect from those MLAs that actually did sit in local government in their background.

Education tax. Here we are. We are tinkering. I brought this up before. I know that the people from AUMA didn't come forward with a direct answer on what should be happening with education tax. I believe that what was mentioned today is that the 60-40 is actually 62-38 on the overall average. In some areas of this province it's 70-30, and in some areas it's 75-25. I hope that we are looking at that. I'm tired of looking at the tinkering, listening to the tinkering. We have to look at, hopefully, what was mentioned by the minister, that the committee is working long and hard on it, consulting maybe for the first time on this particular item. That's major.

I could talk throughout this whole thing on what was brought forward. I'm glad, like you said yourself, Mr. Minister, about what was coming forward on the MGA changes. I brought my thoughts to the AUMA at the end of January, saying that there were too many submissions to the MGA each year and that it seems to be coming from the two cities with all the legal beagles that are actually pushing all these different items forward. But I do believe that there were some good thoughts being brought forward at the AUMA in the fall when they worked on their policies and their submissions to the MGA. I do know that there is a committee headed up by the mayor of Claresholm, and I've had a number of communications with him on this particular item.

I'm looking at another item in here – it's actually under the budget system – that hadn't been put on the table; that is, 2.4.3, grants in place of taxes. The grants in place of taxes program was budgeted at \$37.392 million for 1999-2000. The comparable forecast is 29 percent less, at \$28.98 million. The gross estimate for 2000-2001 is \$32 million. This represents a 15 percent decrease from the gross comparable budget of 1999-2000. Will the minister provide a list of where the \$28.98 million for grants in place of taxes was distributed? Why is there a 15 percent decrease in the budget for grants in place of taxes programs in 2000-2001? This might seem kind of weird, me asking questions like that, but until we come to a plan where we can have a stable financing system without wagging the carrot of grants, we're never going anywhere.

Under financial support to local authorities, will the minister provide the criteria for distribution of funds under the financial support to local authorities program as well as a list of which municipalities received money under this program in '99-2000? Why did this program have spending that was 186 percent over budget in '99-2000?

Like I mentioned before, with your announcement last week on the Municipal 2000 sponsorship program, will the minister provide a list, a complete list instead of just what I got in the release, of which municipalities received funding throughout this '99-2000 program? We actually got a good list from you last year, but if there is more to it, we're asking just to keep our own records in place.

The municipal debenture interest rebates under 2.4.2. Will the minister provide a breakdown of where the \$14.368 million for the municipal debenture interest rebates program was distributed? Why is the minister budgeting for a 13 percent decrease in the spending for municipal debenture interest programs for 2000-2001?

Working a little bit backwards in our book here is 2.4.1, unconditional municipal grants. The unconditional municipal grants are estimated at \$39.619 million in 2000-2001. This is an increase of \$2.999 million, or 8.18 percent, from the \$36.62 million in 1999-

2000. Will the minister provide a list of how \$36.62 million was distributed among Alberta's municipalities in forms of unconditional grants in '99-2000? How does the minister anticipate the \$39.619 million will be distributed in 2000-2001? Why is the extra \$2.999 million required for municipalities?

9:50

It's interesting, as I peruse the AUMA *Urban Perspective* and as different ministers have actually gone and talked to the AUMA and their board, that it seems like both sides of the House here are talking the same language. I'm asking questions and pursuing different things under infrastructure, pursuing things under property tax, pursuing things under a lot of cases. On January 27 and 28, when ministers met with them, when the Leader of the Official Opposition and myself met with the AUMA, I believe they were talking about how good a conversation they had with the ministers. Yet when the budget came out, the number one thing I'm seeing in this mailing to me was that

absent from Budget 2000 were any clear steps in confronting the problems of seniors and affordable housing, and homelessness. The province has shown a disappointing lack of leadership in addressing these difficult issues.

That is so true, and it hasn't been something just brought up over the last few months. It's actually been brought up, studied to death from both the federal and the provincial, yet we're seeing no movement on this particular item.

I can read other things.

Unfortunately, the Province has been less than bold in its treatment of Alberta's property owners. In spite of huge surpluses and planned reductions in other tax sources, they failed to reduce the \$1.3 billion Provincial tax demand on property owners. I sympathize with members' concerns over their restricted ability to provide basic local services . . .

This is really what was emphasized today in our meeting at 6 o'clock, and it's continuing on here.

. . . and their frustration in accessing a long-term, stable funding source. Provincial property taxes are too high, and tangible tax relief to property owners is long overdue. It is clear that a significant reduction of Provincial property tax is needed to help municipalities properly fund local services.

So paying lip service isn't answering the questions. They're stressing the fact that they want to get involved with the provincial government and the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure – which relays, really, back onto municipal, because you can divide up the ministries and try to make them sound as if they're working, but the actual fact is that the only thing I could see was that you took all the deputy ministers out of their silos and just confused the populace of Alberta a bit more. It took most municipalities six months to recover, but now they're back on track, and they're asking where we are going from here, Mr. Minister.

I do know that I could continue on for a long time, but I know that I have a member on our side who would like to ask a few questions. I'm looking forward to looking at your answers, Mr. Minister, and I'm going to sit down and have somebody else stand up.

THE CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Buffalo, in the three minutes remaining.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, I don't know what's more distressing, the fact that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has nothing else to do on a Saturday afternoon than watch a Liberal convention in Ottawa or the fact that he doesn't recognize the difference between the statute and the regime surrounding it.

You know, I've always said that this minister is new to the FOIP responsibility, but the Liberal opposition has consistently said that we have one of the strongest FOIP laws anywhere in Canada. It was

modeled on Ontario and British Columbia, and we went a couple better. But what we hadn't counted on when we passed that law and when we supported that law was that just before October 1, 1995, this government was going to bring in a set of fees that would make these the highest application fees for a FOIP access request anywhere in Canada.

That \$25 fee was way higher than anybody else was charging. The only place that had an application fee was the federal government, and it was a \$5 fee. I'd expect that the Minister of Municipal Affairs would be delighted that the Liberal opposition would be working as hard to hold the federal government accountable in the interests of Albertans as we work to hold this provincial government accountable.

The other comment I would make, Mr. Chairman, is that with respect to Bill C-6 we had tried to suggest to this minister that he could take a leadership role like other provinces had, like the select special committee.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: You could've last weekend.

MR. DICKSON: Well, for the minister's benefit, I spent an hour and a half with Mr. John Reid, the access to information commissioner, and I want that minister to know that I think I'm working at least as hard as the government of the province of Alberta is to protect those interests of Albertans when it comes to protecting their privacy. I don't know whether he spent any time talking to the national access commissioner.

The final point I wanted to make with respect to Bill C-6 is simply this. In about 1970 a select special committee of this Legislature made up mainly of Social Credit government members was concerned enough about privacy of Albertans to flag the concern to urge the government to build legislative safeguards to protect the privacy of Albertans when it came to information held by private corporations. You know, that was about 1970, and here we are in 2000, 30 years later, and we have not had a government that's had the courage, the foresight, the initiative, the resourcefulness, or the imagination to start addressing that. This government ought to know better. They've been told better. They've got bureaucrats that have told them better, but they haven't seen the light.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Municipal Affairs for the fiscal year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$142,890,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report the estimates of Health and Wellness, Learning, Justice and Attorney General, and Municipal Affairs.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MRS. LAING: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, for the following departments:

Department of Health and Wellness: operating expense and capital investment, \$5,623,442,000.

Department of Learning: operating expense and capital investment, \$3,105,403,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$65,800,000.

Department of Justice and Attorney General: operating expense and capital investment, \$419,916,000.

Department of Municipal Affairs: operating expense and capital investment, \$142,890,000.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to table copies of the documents tabled during Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

10:00

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If that's all the reporting we can do tonight, I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[At 10:01 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 21, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/21

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here signed by 206 people from the Blackfalds, Bowden, Bashaw, Red Deer, Olds, Rocky Mountain House, Lacombe, Mirror, Delburne, Innisfail, and Torrington areas, and they are petitioning the government of Alberta “to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system].”

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present to the Assembly this afternoon. It is signed by over 200 residents. They’re from Red Deer, Vegreville, Mundare, Innisfree, Willingdon, Two Hills, Didsbury, Carstairs, Eckville, Innisfail, and Peers. These citizens of Alberta “petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 302 Albertans from Slave Lake, Grande Prairie, Widewater, Canyon Creek, Woking, and Fairview that states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system].

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta, urging “the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.” This is on behalf of 252 Alberta residents from Lac La Biche, St. Paul, Ashmont, Myrmam, Fort Saskatchewan, Redwater, Bruderheim, and the town of Gibbons.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I have the pleasure today to present a petition on behalf of 238 people, all from Edson and area. They “urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am presenting a petition signed by 200 people from Rocky Mountain House who are urging “the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to present a petition signed by 200 Albertans primarily from Edmonton-Glengarry constituency. This was a petition they drew up for themselves where they state:

We believe, after careful assessment of all the information available on this matter, that this legislation will have far reaching, destructive consequences for all of us and all of our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition signed by 170 residents of Red Deer, Innisfail, Jasper, Stettler, Rimbey, Bluffton, Calmar, and Bowden urging the government “to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system].”

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a petition into the Assembly today. It’s been signed by 248 residents coming from Red Deer, Lacombe, Sylvan Lake, Bowden, Didsbury, Carstairs, Peers, Mundare, Vegreville, and Innisfail. These Albertans are joining with other Albertans and petitioning the Assembly “to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of 307 Albertans from Lethbridge, Coaldale, Water Valley, Cochrane, Black Diamond, Claresholm, Stavely, and Taber to submit a petition. They “petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system].”

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition with 175 signatures on it. Residents from Rimbey, Red Deer, Innisfail, Huxley, Luzan, Gibbons, Hinton, Edson, Cold Lake, St. Paul, and Lac La Biche are all urging the government “to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system].”

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table this petition signed by 396 Albertans from Hinton, Edmonton, Donnelly, Falher, Girouxville, McLennan, Blackfalds, Westlock, Lethbridge, Canmore, and Leduc. The petitioners request this Assembly “to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on March 16 against private health care be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would ask that the petition I presented regarding the undermining of public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition with respect to support of public health care that I introduced yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I request that the petition which I presented to the Assembly yesterday urging the government to stop destroying our public health care system now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to ask that the petition I tabled the other day be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 9.

I am also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 11, 12, and 23.

Thank you.

1:40

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to table the Treasury ministry business plan, 2000-2003. It shows that the goals are very clear, maintaining Alberta's healthy position at a level that's sustainable and continuing to ensure that the people of this province enjoy the strongest fiscal advantage of any province in the country and also maintains very clearly that we'll continue our award-winning tradition of being open and accountable by making sure Albertans have all the accounting fully available to them of our financial goals and performance.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to table today five copies of a recent Fraser Institute study. This compares all provinces and federal budgets from '95 to '99. It shows very clearly that Alberta received top marks, leading all provinces and the federal government in overall fiscal performance. It points very clearly to Alberta's prudent approach to budgeting and that it's working. It says that Alberta scored top marks: 77.9, top rank on the classification of tax rates and revenue. When it comes to debt management, under debt and deficit marks – as I've said, we scored overall top marks in everything, and in this particular category we scored a perfect 100.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two tablings. The first one: in recognition of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, I'm pleased to table five copies of a letter addressed to Ms Charlene Hay, who is co-ordinator of the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, congratulating NAARR for its commitment to addressing issues of discrimination.

Secondly, I'm also pleased to table an information bulletin from Alberta Community Development encouraging all Albertans to speak out against discrimination. As I'm sure all members are aware, today, March 21, is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and it's the 11th anniversary of that day in Canada.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I will be tabling five copies of a document entitled Supporting Safe, Secure & Caring Schools in Alberta. This will provide administrators and educators with a comprehensive framework to deal with and prevent violence in schools.

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

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a letter I sent to A-Channel today, pointing out some concerns with respect to the nature of the recent poll on Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the March 14 editorial of the *High River Times*. The editorial lead is Bill 11 Is Far from the Devil in Disguise. The editor advises, "Before High Riverites buy into the hysteria mounting around this legislation, we suggest they read it themselves" and see what it really means.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, all of my cautions with respect to tablings and reports today will apply the same opportunity for others to editorialize.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This information speaks for itself, so it really doesn't require editorial comment. I'm going to table with the Assembly five copies of a meeting with representatives of the Auditor General's office on March 23, 1995. It was a presentation between the Auditor General and representatives of the Alberta Treasury Branch regarding West Edmonton Mall financing, and curiously this particular presentation was not discussed in the Auditor General's special audit report on West Edmonton Mall.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling this afternoon as well. It's from Mr. Keith Purdy, who is the president of CUPE local 8 and a concerned citizen, who indicates that he is requesting that the government "stop Bill 11 now and protect universal medicare. Listen to the public and perform your public duty to speak for the people."

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In honour of this day to eliminate racism I'd like to table two different documents, which I have found helpful and I hope others do. The first is an article, White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack, by Peggy McIntosh.

The second is an article from the multicultural community project called Working With People With Differences.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a newspaper from the Edmonton Police Service.

It's called *Community Connections*, and it outlines a number of things that can really happen in a great way when there's real consultation with community.

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling a letter to Genesis Land Development that outlines concerns around the Spray Lakes proposed development in Kananaskis Country. This letter is written by Laureen Wright of Calgary, but in addition to that it is signed by 17 other concerned citizens in Calgary who would also like to express their concern about the proposed development in Kananaskis Country and share that concern with the government.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter from Mr. Keith Purdy, president of CUPE local 8, and he is expressing his concern about health care and the direction it is going in this province.

The second letter is a letter I received through freedom of information, and it is entitled Rotting Government Approved Pine Shakes. I was delighted to receive this last year.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, if a tabling has been made once, it need not be repeated.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two tablings, if you will. The first is from Peter Nettleton of Calgary, and he is a fellow graduate engineer of long standing, 47 years in the oil and gas business. He starts off a letter to the Premier: "As my M.L.A.," so this is directed primarily at the Premier. He is most adamant in his letter that he is categorically against any further development in the Spray Lakes resort in Kananaskis Pathways Corporation and the Mount Sparrowhawk heli/cat skiing operation. He strongly objects to both developments there.

The other one is also directed to the Premier. It is from Nancy Hansen of the city of Calgary. She also strongly objects to the Spray Lakes development as it concerns our "endangered species," "wildlife movement," "the impact on the ecology" in the region, and particularly "Canmore's drinking water."

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings here. The first one is a letter from Dr. William Olsen, professor emeritus of nuclear physics at the University of Alberta. He's expressing his opposition to Bill 11 and calls on the Premier to call a plebiscite on the bill before proceeding with it.

The second letter, Mr. Speaker, is from Fairview, signed by 10 residents of Fairview also opposed to Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a program from the celebration of the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha by the Legislative Assembly yesterday. The constituency of Edmonton-Glengarry is the home of two very active mosques, and

we would like to thank them for their participation in yesterday's celebration and congratulate them on the feast of Eid al-Adha.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'm tabling today two letters, one dated March 15, 2000, and one dated March 20, 2000, received from the Ethics Commissioner indicating that he will not be investigating the matter referred to him by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 29 enthusiastic grade 7 students from the H.A. Kostash school from Smoky Lake. Accompanying them are teachers Mr. Denis Harris and Mrs. Phyllis Sadoway and parent helper Mrs. Delores Jarema. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Merci, M. le President. C'est un honneur et un plaisir pour moi cet apres-midi de vous presenter 15 etudiants de la province de Quebec, de la ville de Pohenegamook. Ils sont ici en echange a l'ecole F.G. Miller de Elk Point. Ils sont accompagnes aujourd'hui par un professeur et sa dame, M. et Mme Guy Genest.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 30 students and seven adults. Of these 30 students, 15 are from the F.G. Miller junior and senior high school in Elk Point. They are accompanied today by two teachers, Mrs. Lily Pentek and Mrs. Cheri Lindquist, also by bus driver Mr. Laverne Wilson, and by two parent supervisors, Mrs. Doris Wilson and Mrs. Zapesocki. The other 15 students are visitors from Quebec from the community of Pohenegamook. They are accompanied today by one teacher and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Guy Genest. The students are exchange students with the F.G. Miller high school in Elk Point. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome from all the Assembly.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 31 members of a tour that has been organized by the professional businessmen's club called the Probus Club of Edmonton. Their tour leader is Mr. Holmes. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly four students that are with us today from Wye school. Their names are Sharnell O'Donnell, Brett Keith, Amanda Malowski, and a grade 2 student Daniel O'Donnell. All students are stars at Wye school and are accompanied today by the father of two of the students, a man who distributes the famous Hygaard Fine Foods across the world, Mr. Rick O'Donnell. If they would please rise, then we could show our appreciation for their attendance.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal Party of Canada is the only political party that has an Aboriginal People's Commission within its party framework. Last Thursday at the national convention in Ottawa a new executive for the Aboriginal People's Commission was elected. Aboriginal convention delegates elected four prominent aboriginal Albertans, and it gives me great pleasure to introduce them to you and through you and to members of the Assembly today.

The new national co-president is Mrs. Irene Morin. The new national vice-president of finance is Mr. Garry Parenteau. The national vice-president of women is Ms Martha Campiou. The new national vice-president for communications is Robert Coulter. Also joining the new executive is Phillip Campiou, a photographer from Cree First Nations, and Brad Enge, president of the Alberta Aboriginal People's Commission for the Liberal Party of Canada. Mr. Enge is also the director of the indigenous law program at the University of Alberta. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce a good friend of mine and a good friend to many of my colleagues. She is a senior member of the Edmonton women's Liberal policy association, an active member in the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods, an active member in the federal constituency of Edmonton Southeast, and just recently back from a fun-filled weekend at the federal convention. I would ask that Heather Rempel please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm please to introduce 37 very special visitors from Edmonton-Highlands, all of them seated in the public gallery. They are members of Club 55 and are accompanied by their president, Roy Matvie; by their group leader, Edward Sharun; and helper Joseph Wasylchuk. This seniors' club was established in 1979 and is involved in community building projects and seniors' recreational activities. They have donated thousands of hours of their time and their dollars in support of many charitable organizations. They've all participated in the Alberta Seniors Games since 1980 and have won many medals. I'll request that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Regional Health Authorities

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1997 the Premier promised Albertans that the boards for regional health authorities would be elected, but they were reappointed instead, one of this Premier's broken promises. More proof is reported in a number of recent polls, which show that Albertans just don't trust this Premier anymore on health care. My question today is to the Premier. Given that the Premier broke his promise to elect regional health boards, why should Albertans believe you on Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it wasn't a broken promise. It was a

postponement based on requests from various regional health authorities who were simply in the midst of restructuring. The election of two-thirds of the board will take place in conjunction with the next municipal elections.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: was this postponement in the election of regional health authorities so that the appointed boards could follow through with the initiation of contracts for private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: No. It was done so that they could complete their work mapping out pathways to health in the various authorities in the various regions, Mr. Speaker. Most of them have completed their work and are now prepared to face the challenge of elections in conjunction with the next municipal elections.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier admit that the appointment of the RHA boards was necessary to implement this hidden agenda of privatization of the public health system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you know, I'm very disappointed with the tone and the language of the particular question.

I will take the hon. member back to The Rainbow Report. One of the very specific recommendations in The Rainbow Report was that there be the regionalization of health authorities. Mr. Speaker, there were something like 200 various health boards and health authorities in this province. Very few of them were elected. As a matter of fact, about 99 percent of them were appointed boards.

We have said that there will be elected boards. Two-thirds of the members will be elected for each of the 17 authorities in conjunction with the next municipal elections. Most of the authorities, if not all, have completed their pathways to health, and now it's time to get on with the elections.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Private Health Services

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans learned that they couldn't trust this Premier on his promises on the expansion of the Alberta special waste treatment plant, and they know they can't trust him on his promises about Bill 11 either. The Premier promised that he would never bring in hazardous waste without consulting with Albertans, but he did. My questions are all to the Premier. How can Albertans trust the Premier on Bill 11, when he broke his promise and did not consult Albertans before importing foreign hazardous waste?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the importation of waste from other jurisdictions, there were in fact hearings before the Natural Resources Conservation Board, and I made sure that those hearings took place.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, on this issue I quote the Premier on September 3, 1994, when he said: if there was something to hide, we'd do it.

Will he answer this question? Will the Premier admit that he has no more intention of keeping foreign private hospitals out of Alberta than he did about keeping foreign hazardous waste out of Alberta? Another broken promise.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, when this bill is passed, the Alberta Health Care Protection Act, when it becomes law, I will obey the

law. I have a sworn oath and a duty to obey the law. I would hope that they will too.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, when the Premier broke his word on the waste treatment plant, why should Albertans believe that he is ever going to keep his word on Bill 11 or that they should believe anything he says on this bill?

MR. KLEIN: I never broke my word on that particular issue, Mr. Speaker. There were hearings before the Natural Resources Conservation Board.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans learned that they couldn't trust the Premier on Swan Hills, and they know that they can't trust him on Bill 11 either. On Swan Hills the Premier prepared a secret communication plan in January 1993 to keep the \$100 million loan guarantee to Bovar under wraps until after the election. On Bill 11 the Premier's secret communications plan consists of these blank pages that he is withholding from Albertans. My questions are to the Premier. Why should Albertans trust this Premier on Bill 11 when they couldn't trust him on Swan Hills?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have any letter from any Albertans relative to any decisions vis-a-vis Swan Hills in 1993 saying that they didn't trust me on this issue. Relative to the importation of waste from jurisdictions other than Alberta, there were hearings before the Natural Resources Conservation Board, a board, by the way, that was set up under my ministry when I was minister of the environment.

Now, if you want talk about honesty in the distribution of a publication, this publication, this bill has been sent to every household in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. That is open and honest, and as I've said before in this House, a bill that purports to become law is the most important document that one can consider in this Legislative Assembly. That's being open and honest.

MS LEIBOVICI: Why doesn't the Premier just admit that Bill 11 is a front being used to hide private hospitals, just like this secret communications plan was to hide the truth behind the Swan Hills loan guarantee?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is hardly a secret plan. I mean, this is hardly a secret plan. It's only gone out to 3 million people in the province. There is nothing secret about this. This is open. It's honest. It's straightforward. The only thing secretive and sinister is the malicious and vicious campaign of misinformation being conducted by the Liberals.

MS LEIBOVICI: Will the Premier stop hiding behind Bill 11 and table the true action plan, the one that was developed by his Public Affairs Bureau that sets up private hospitals in this province that you will not release the details on? You have the authority to release those details, you and the minister of health do. Why don't you just do it, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is the plan. There is nothing more; there is nothing less. This is the plan. Read it. Understand it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More evidence of Alber-

tans' overwhelming opposition to Bill 11 came out last night when a poll was released showing that Albertans opposed the bill by a margin of 3 to 1. Meanwhile, despite massive public opposition to the bill and despite the fact that two constitutional lawyers have shown that Bill 11 violates the Canada Health Act, the federal Liberals sit idly by allowing this government to push arrogantly forward. My questions are to the Premier. If the opposition of churches, seniors, nurses, doctors, labour groups, and now a new poll which shows overwhelming popular opposition to Bill 11 won't make this Premier blink, then Albertans are asking today: what will it take for the Premier to blink?

MR. KLEIN: Certainly I'm not going to blink on a poll that was faulty in its questions, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has tabled a letter sent to Chris Duncan, the news director of A-Channel, whereby he complains, quite rightfully so, about the questions that were posed.

A specific example:

Question #4 in your news release with respect to Albertans having an option to pay extra for faster service implies that such an option would be available under Bill 11. This is absolutely [false and] inaccurate. Bill 11 [specifically] prohibits anyone from paying to get faster service and prohibits anyone from receiving payment to provide faster service. The Bill contains harsh penalties for anyone contravening this provision of the legislation.

Again, that shows how faulty the question was. I mean, I would be concerned if it were implied that that was in the bill. It's not in the bill. Quite the opposite is true, Mr. Speaker.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, as usual the Premier blames the Albertan for asking the question.

Rather than withdrawing Bill 11 now, why is the Premier waiting for the federal Liberals to get a spine transplant before they respond to his request when two constitutional lawyers have already convincingly argued that Bill 11 violates the Canada Health Act?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, when you get more than one lawyer on a case, there are going to be some differences of opinion. The person whose opinion really matters is the federal Minister of Health, who is responsible for the administration of the Canada Health Act. As it pertains to the Canada Health Act, the federal minister is responsible for the administration of that act, and we have asked him. I'll be speaking to the Prime Minister in Calgary later this week to ask the same question, to see if we can get clarification relative to the bill, which has been sent to the minister, as to whether or not it contravenes the Canada Health Act.

That's all we want to know: yes or no. If the answer is yes, then what do we need to do to fix it? That's all.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, why is the Premier using the federal Liberals, then, as an excuse when citizens here in Alberta are demanding that this bill be withdrawn now?

MR. KLEIN: No, that isn't quite true, Mr. Speaker. When you pose a question to Albertans that implies that you can get faster service by paying extra, yes, that creates concerns. That is wrong, because the bill prohibits that, quite specifically prohibits that. The bill prohibits and proposes to levy very harsh penalties for people who charge extra.

Mr. Speaker, the truth is in the bill that purports to become law. The law is the truth.

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

2:10

Diabetes Treatment

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been asked by constituents to investigate the need for broader coverage of diabetic supplies. Since these supplies are important in the management of the disease and in avoiding the costly complications associated with diabetes and since our government is placing an emphasis on wellness and the prevention of illness, it seems appropriate to consider expanding coverage to 100 percent of diabetes medication and supplies to diabetes patients. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: is Alberta Health and Wellness considering extending Alberta's coverage as part of the provincial strategy regarding diabetes?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes.

That's too short an answer for the tradition of the Assembly, so I would like to elaborate just a little bit. We are working with the Alberta Medical Association and the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research to develop an expanded program and make sure the proper clinical practice guidelines and other protections are in place. Yes, we are expanding the program.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you for that good news.

To the same minister: how does the level of coverage Alberta provides compare to that of other provinces?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think our overall coverage for kidney dialysis is very important. Of course, one of our emphases is on trying to prevent diabetic conditions from being developed in individuals across the province through health promotion activities related to diabetes.

In direct answer to the question, Mr. Speaker, I think we can indicate on behalf of the Alberta health system that they rank in the top third of the provinces in this nation. We want to be number one, but certainly in the number of people that we serve and the costs that are associated with being diabetic in terms of monitoring devices and so forth, our coverage goes far beyond what is deemed to be medically required under the Canada Health Act. As I said, the coverage compares favourably with the rest of Canada.

MR. JOHNSON: My final question to the same minister: what is the response of Alberta Health and Wellness to the October 1999 position papers of the Canadian Diabetes Association, Alberta and Northwest Territories division?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, I do not have committed to memory the provisions of that particular study. However, related to this, through the funding provided under provincewide services in Alberta Health and Wellness's budget, there is additional money for the expansion of kidney dialysis sites across the province.

As I've said before, we have more emphasis on the prevention of diabetes. We have committed some additional \$2.4 million in that area in the budget, so we are certainly making this a priority within our overall program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have the plan. It's now clear that Bill 11 is all about kicking the doors open to private hospitals in this province. Yesterday the Premier confirmed as much

for Albertans when he tabled a letter from Dr. Dennis Modry. It seems that the only people supporting Bill 11 are the Premier's special interest backers, those who want to build their own private thoracic park in Alberta. My questions are to the Premier. Why should Albertans trust the Premier on Bill 11 when the real blueprint for private hospitals is right here in Dr. Modry's 1996 report? Why should they trust you, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I consider that question and the comments contained in the preamble to be an absolute insult to one of the most renowned heart transplant surgeons in the world, and this member should apologize.

MS OLSEN: I'll table this document for the Premier.

Will the Premier admit that Bill 11 is all about private hospitals when Dr. Modry's report on Building Partnerships in Health Care Restructuring leaves the door open for the deinsurance of services in this province? Why should they trust you, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: This bill in no way, shape, or form speaks to the deinsuring of services. It does speak to the issue, however, of private hospitals. As a matter of fact, section 1, part 1: "No person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." That will become the law.

MS OLSEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I never thought I'd see it. When will the Premier stop being a puppet for special interests like Dr. Modry and listen to the AMA, the nurses, teachers, seniors, and the majority of Albertans who want this bill pulled?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that the majority of Albertans, having read the bill and understanding the bill, want it pulled. The bill protects public health care as we know it today.

In response to this question I have two *Toronto Star* articles and one *Globe and Mail* article that I would like to table and read a couple of sentences from, because they allude to the so-called opposition that the Liberals say is out there against Bill 11. In the first, a public service union employee is quoted. She says, "We are opposed to [the] Bill . . . because it will place health care at the mercy of profit-hungry operators." And the hon. member alluded to that.

The second says:

For better or worse, the health system itself is being fundamentally altered. For most of this century, the trend . . . has been toward more public ownership of the means of health, more public control. [This new law] will permit something quite different to flourish.

Finally – and this in agreement with what the hon. member said – the third is headlined Health Bill May Flout Free Trade Pact, referring to NAFTA and the Canada/U.S. free trade agreement.

Mr. Speaker, they are not talking about Bill 11, quite surprisingly. Oh, no. These articles are from 1988 and 1989, and they are talking about Bill 147, the Independent Health Facilities Act, which was passed in Ontario over 10 years ago. According to the *Globe and Mail* the act gave Ontario the power to regulate, license, and finance private clinics and pay for surgery that was otherwise performed in public hospitals.

Guess who brought in that legislation, Mr. Speaker? Was it some evil Progressive Conservative Party? No. It was a Liberal government, and the health minister who championed this bill was none other than Elinor Caplan, who just happens to be a minister today in the Chretien cabinet along with Allan Rock.

So, Mr. Speaker, all the fears being raised by the Liberals in Alberta and Ottawa today were raised against the Liberals in Ontario

10 years ago. In Ontario the fears have not been borne out. There has been no trouble with NAFTA. So why today are the Liberals in Alberta and in Ottawa attacking Alberta for something the Liberals in Ontario did over 10 years ago?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Child Poverty

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent report by the Inter City Forum on Social Policy stated that there are over 90,000 children living in poverty in urban areas throughout Alberta. In addition, the report stated that in Calgary 1 in 4 children lives in poverty while in Edmonton the number is closer to 1 in 3 children. My question is to the hon. Minister of Children's Services. What is the minister doing to improve the lives of children living in poverty throughout this province?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today in answer to the hon. member's question. We have received the intercity forum report, and we are studying it very carefully, but beyond that the government in the last three years, four years at the most, has implemented the family tax credit, endeavoured to reduce taxes for families, worked with the national agenda on the national child benefit, and provided free health care benefits through the Alberta child health benefit for low-income families. In terms of expanding the early intervention programs, we've moved from \$2 million two years ago to \$21.5 million in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, we are concerned if any child is hungry at night or if any child lives in poverty, and we are looking very carefully at how we measure poverty and how we improve the lives of families and children, particularly in Alberta.

2:20

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: since this report contained a number of recommendations related to support for low-income families, how will this minister and this government respond to these recommendations, and when will we see some action?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, last October Mrs. Klein chaired the Children's Forum, which also addressed the issues of poverty, and it was Mrs. Klein herself who insisted that poverty come on the agenda as one of the five themes, recognizing that poverty does exist in Alberta.

From that, we saw on February 9 the release of the forum report, which similarly talks about several recommendations. These recommendations, Mr. Speaker, are being taken by all of the partners in the Alberta children's initiative. Every minister is reviewing those recommendations and will no doubt review them in the context as well of the intercity forum report and determine and release later this spring some of the action statements that will be implicit this year and also follow through on our Premier's recommendation and commitment that within the three years following the release of the forum report, we would respond in action or in kind to each one of those recommendations.

So, Mr. Speaker, simply put, we have in fact got an agenda addressing the poverty issue. We've got a plan for it, and that plan will be released later this spring.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Since that same report contained a number of strategies for addressing the

factors common to poverty, what is the minister doing to promote and address these strategies?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, the first comment I would make is that we are ensuring that those Albertans who need support are in fact getting it. I think it's important to advise the member that we're also trying to ensure that other Albertans, then, are given the tools they need to work their way out of poverty.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've said in question period previously that I do have some difficulty with various groups at times in defining poverty. Nevertheless, referring to this report, they do allude to some of the underlying reasons for poverty, and let me address those. One of the characteristics addressed was disability. All of the members here in the House know that assured income for the severely handicapped benefits were increased last fall. We've announced just recently a minister's Employability Council. That council will be providing advice to this government as to how we can work more of the disabled into the workplace.

Another characteristic was lack of education. Again, we're taking action, Mr. Speaker. Training is being provided to welfare clients to enhance their employability. Youth Connections has now spread right across the province. It started here in Edmonton and in Calgary and has now gone throughout the province to help youth make connections to the workplace.

Another characteristic was income support. All of us know and recognize the great strides that the government of Alberta has made with low provincial tax rates, and also the Alberta family employment tax credit has just done wonders for many of these families in providing for their children. The minimum wage was increased. The maintenance enforcement program works to make sure that both parents are providing for the children, and then, of course, we have the shelter allowance.

So the changes that we are making, Mr. Speaker, are based on one simple philosophy: you don't help families get out of poverty by keeping them on welfare.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. SAPERS: When it comes to Bill 11, Mr. Speaker, this Premier has quite a track record of talking about the truth yet still managing to avoid it. Now, the Premier thinks he can trick Albertans with a propaganda campaign on health care just like he thinks he fooled Albertans about his role in orchestrating the West Edmonton Mall refinancing. Handwritten notes on a February 15, 1994, memo from the Premier to a certain Jim and a certain Ken provide ample evidence of his personal involvement. My questions are to the Premier. How can Albertans believe the Premier about Bill 11 when he didn't come clean about the February 15, 1994, memo, which reveals that he was orchestrating the West Edmonton Mall refinancing right out of his own office?

MR. KLEIN: Everything that was asked for by the Auditor General was provided to the Auditor General in his investigation of this affair, Mr. Speaker. To say that we were trying to hide something or that something was done secretly is absolutely false. It is wrong. It's a mistruth. I know I can't say that it's a lie, but it's close to it if it's not.

If it's about a matter of trust, well, I recall an election in 1993, and the people elected this government because they trusted us. I remember an election in 1997. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? There are now 64 of us in this Legislature, and there are only a few of them. That speaks to the issue of trust. When people elect us to

govern them, they're saying to this party, they're saying to this government that they trust us.

MR. SAPERS: Hang on to those past glories, Mr. Premier. Hang on.

Isn't the real reason that Bill 11 puts the government above the law that the Premier knows that his private hospital scheme, or what he likes to call approved surgical facilities, is destined to end up in court just like the West Edmonton Mall refinancing deal that pumped public money into a private venture? Isn't that what Bill 11 is all about?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the legislation, as I pointed out before and I'll point out again, says that "no person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." So any reference to private hospitals and the promotion of private hospitals is irrelevant, because the bill proposes to do absolutely the opposite.

I just find that those questions are irrelevant, and I'm going to answer them in that fashion in the future.

MR. SAPERS: How much longer, Mr. Speaker, is the Premier going to continue to deny the truth, shave words, twist language about his private hospital scheme? Are Albertans going to have to drag the truth out of him just like they had to do with West Edmonton Mall?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again the truth is in the bill. Part 1, section 1: "No person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." Nothing could be clearer than that. The truth again is in the bill, the bill that purports to become law. The law is supreme. If they don't believe in the law, then stand up and say so. When it comes to information, nothing can be clearer – nothing can be clearer – than the bill that has been sent to every household in Alberta. The only misinformation that is being spread is being spread by the Liberals and their cohorts, Mr. Speaker. It's vicious, it's malicious, and it's wrong. It's wrong for them to do it, and they know it. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: With your permission, hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, we'll proceed.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay.

THE SPEAKER: I'll check with you again later too.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my understanding that a year or two ago a group wishing to establish a private, for-profit hospital asked the College of Physicians and Surgeons to accredit their proposed hospital. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness clarify: what is the role, legislated or otherwise, of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in respect of their powers to accredit or reject proposals for private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta?

2:30

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the role of the College of Physicians and Surgeons is one of looking at the proposed services to be offered by a clinic or a surgical clinic or a full-scale hospital and determining whether certain criteria are met with respect to, first of all, the qualification of staff that will be providing those services, with respect to the suitability of the facility to some extent – at least the assurance must be there that the equipment and the resources are available to provide these services – and of course they look at the

whole area of patient safety and the viability of the particular services that are to be offered in that particular facility.

Mr. Speaker, yes, there was a request that went to the College of Physicians and Surgeons from a group known as the Health Resource Group, or HRG. The College of Physicians and Surgeons did consider that particular request.

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: since the College of Physicians and Surgeons has the authority to have said no to the possibility of private, for-profit hospitals, why did the college not make that determination?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, correspondence from the college would indicate, first of all, that initially they were positive towards the application of HRG but purely from the point of view, as I said, of the qualifications of their staff, their capability to offer the services they were proposing to offer. I would like to say that the College of Physicians and Surgeons in this respect were fulfilling their mandate. Their initial determination was that HRG was able to fulfill the requirements of the college with respect to quality controls, et cetera, and qualifications of staff.

However, Mr. Speaker, the college did not proceed with the accreditation of HRG because they were concerned about its place within the public health care system, and they again in their correspondence indicate that this is a responsibility of government to determine. However, as all members of the Assembly know and most acknowledge, we did not anticipate this particular type of proposal in legislation that was passed many years ago. There is a legislative gap or a legislative vacuum in current health care legislation, and we need to fill that gap. We need to have the proper legislation in place so that we can say yes or no through our health care system and through our regional health authorities to proposals of this particular type that come forward. That is, I think, one of the really very, very important reasons for Bill 11 being before the Assembly and its necessity of being passed.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This Premier is spending millions of taxpayer dollars on a propaganda campaign designed to sell the unsellable in this province: private hospitals or approved surgical facilities, if you prefer. Over 60 percent of Albertans polled firmly rejected private hospitals in this province. Phase 1 of the propaganda plan was an absolute failure. It shows that Albertans just don't trust this Premier anymore. My questions are to the Premier. How much more taxpayer money is this Premier going to inject to try to stop Albertans from rejecting Bill 11: \$3 million, \$4 million? How much more money?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is the major campaign, sending out the bill. Nothing could be more open or more honest, more straight-forward than that. We're waiting for the comments of Albertans, and we seek the wisdom and the guidance and the intelligence of Albertans relative to the drafting of this bill.

One thing that is highlighted in the bill is that "no person shall operate a private hospital." "No person shall operate a private hospital."

Mr. Speaker, just to make sure that there's absolute clarification on this matter, there are already – and the Liberals know it, because a number of these clinics were established under the watch of the then health minister, who is now leader of the Liberal Party. There are 47 private surgical clinics now operating in the province of

Alberta. What this bill does is put some fences around them and provide some rules and regulations.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, my next question is also to the Premier. Given that phase 1 and the truth squads have failed, what's the next step in the propaganda campaign? The ads didn't work. The TV commercials didn't work. What's next? Please share it with us.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no propaganda campaign. The truth is in the bill. The only propaganda campaign being conducted is being conducted by the Liberal Party. It's a campaign of vicious misinformation, malicious and vicious misinformation, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

MS BLAKEMAN: Okay, Mr. Premier. What other special interest groups does this government have lined up to join in his propaganda campaign for Bill 11? Insurance companies? Private clinic operators? Private home care companies? Who else is lined up, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, hopefully who is lined up are the 3 million good-thinking Albertans, the people we've asked to provide us with their guidance and their intelligence and their wisdom to make sure that the bill is right. The truth is in the bill. The truth will be in the law.

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

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many rural people come to urban centres for surgery in private clinics. Given that fact, my question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister explain where these patients go when they have adverse effects to anesthetics?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in clinics across the province the staff, whether it be a dentist or a physician, of course has basic training in first aid and in resuscitation. All the clinics, doctors offices across the province have a protocol or a procedure whereby if there is a difficulty with a surgical procedure of some type, they would be immediately transferred to the nearest emergency facility. That is standard procedure, and such professionals in these clinics, I think, take their responsibility in that regard very seriously and would act accordingly.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Some rural Albertans have told me that the 12-hour rule for private surgical clinics discriminates against rural patients who must spend money to stay in a motel if they are required to stay away from home. Could the minister tell me if this is true?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not in any way think the existence of surgical clinics discriminates against rural Albertans. It is a fact of life in this province that there is only the economy of scale to have certain highly specialized procedures, whether we're talking about certain types of dental surgery or certain types of cosmetic surgery or if we are talking about major operations – it's only practical to have them centred in cities. I as a rural MLA would like to see urban people come out to centres we can establish in Fairview and Ponoka and other parts of the province, but that is not the current reality.

So with respect to specialized hospital and medical services generally, there are going to be times, particularly when people

travel long distances in this province, when, yes, they do incur an extra cost of having to stay in the urban centres overnight or maybe for several nights.

2:40

MR. MARZ: Again to the same minister: could the minister explain if Bill 11 would change what some people see as a problem for rural Albertans?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would not want to predict where specialized surgical clinics would locate, but I think it has the potential of benefiting rural and urban Albertans by providing for more effective and efficient delivery of specialized surgical facilities and therefore taking the load off our full-service hospitals and utilizing the expertise or the advantage of highly specialized, repetitive, efficient provision of surgical services. So in a general sense I think it would benefit all Albertans, rural and urban.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Private, for-profit health has been proven conclusively to be a bad idea for almost everyone except health care managers and their investors. Nonetheless, this government has made a clear public policy decision, choosing private profit over public interest. To the minister of health: will the minister explain why the overwhelming evidence condemning private health care was rejected out of hand?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the assertion of the member. He does not refer to who has rejected our proposal out of hand. We certainly are offering an alternative through this legislation under very controlled circumstances.

The hon. member says that types of private health care have failed. Well, Mr. Speaker, it was pointed out earlier this afternoon that in Ontario a Liberal government established an independent hospitals act under which, as I understand it, there are four independent surgical centres or hospitals in operation in Ontario. They seem to be providing good service. In fact, the Shouldice clinic is internationally recognized for their expertise in their particular area of surgery.

So, Mr. Speaker, the premise on which the member's question is based is, in my view, faulty as usual, and I do not think he has a point.

MR. WHITE: Perhaps I could rephrase the question for the minister. Would the minister table any reports other than the ones from 1988 that were cited today or any evidence from any source that private, for-profit health care is of net benefit to the citizens of Alberta?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's move across the country then. It has been pointed out in this Assembly before – but in view of the question it bears repeating – that in the province of Manitoba the government of that province continues to contract with four different surgical services. The one in downtown Winnipeg offers quite a comprehensive list of surgical procedures, and the people involved are quoted as saying that this particular surgical centre, the one in Winnipeg, provides good service, that it takes a load off their busy hospitals. They at the moment at least have certainly no plans of changing its role or disbanding it. It's evidently serving the people of Manitoba rather well, and I could work my way across the country. Maybe that's the next question.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, that is not the next question. The question is the same as the first question. Will you as minister of health in the province of Alberta table reports, studies, findings, whether it be from Manitoba or from Ontario or from any province, anywhere in the world, that say conclusively that privately owned hospitals aren't profitable? Would you table something, sir?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do wish to commend the hon. member for getting one of his comments correct, and that is that, yes, we do have private enterprise. We do have private operators operating within our publicly funded, publicly administered health care system across Canada, so that is certainly correct.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that we have tabled with this Assembly studies from reputable sources which indicate the potential advantages of certain types of private surgical services being provided in the health care system. Certainly we acknowledge, for instance, that on other issues, such as compliance with NAFTA, where I understand the Canadian Union of Public Employees has hired lawyers to interpret NAFTA, they come up in a negative fashion, so the debate is going on. But I think there is demonstrable evidence across Canada that Canadians and the governments of the various provinces, even the federal government, seem to have found acceptable and viable and worth having, many, many examples of private surgical facilities in the country right now.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there will be three members' statements today, and we'll begin them a few seconds from now.

Francophone Secretariat

MR. DUCHARME: M. le Président, l'an dernier à ce même temps je me levais devant cette Assemblée pour annoncer l'établissement par notre province du Secrétariat Francophone. C'était le début de l'Année Canadienne de la Francophonie, et pour démontrer son appui à la communauté Francophone, notre gouvernement avait décidé de donner à la communauté Franco-Albertaine un porte-parole à l'intérieur du gouvernement par la création du Secrétariat Francophone.

A cause de ce développement majeur l'année 1999 s'inscrit comme une année importante dans les annales de l'histoire des Francophones de l'Alberta. Au cours de l'année les représentants de la communauté m'ont souvent répété combien ce geste a été apprécié et continue d'être apprécié par la communauté. Aussi, je dois faire remarquer que notre gouvernement a reçu des éloges et des félicitations de plusieurs ministres du gouvernement fédéral et de presque tous les gouvernements provinciaux et territoriaux pour ce geste important.

Depuis quelques années nous marquons partout au Canada la Semaine des Rendez-vous de la Francophonie. C'est une initiative pan-Canadienne qui vise à mettre l'accent sur la contribution des Francophones à notre beau pays, le Canada.

Aujourd'hui, à l'invitation du Président de cette Assemblée, nous avons accueilli la communauté Francophone et étions heureux de célébrer avec eux, à la ronde, les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie et le premier anniversaire de l'établissement du Secrétariat Francophone.

Je voudrais terminer en remerciant les deux ministres qui ont été responsables du Secrétariat Francophone au cours de la première année de son existence, le Ministre de Justice, qui a établi le secrétariat, et le Ministre du Développement Communautaire, présentement responsable pour ce secrétariat, de leur appui et de leur support dans mon travail comme président du secrétariat.

[Translation] A year ago at this time I was happy to stand before this Assembly to speak on the occasion of the establishment of the Francophone Secretariat. It was the beginning of the Canadian Year of the Francophonie, a year dedicated to the celebration of our French-Canadian heritage, and our government had agreed to give our Franco-Albertan community a voice within government through the creation of a Francophone Secretariat.

Due to this major development 1999 will be remembered as an important year in the history of our Francophone community. During the course of the year Francophone leaders have often expressed their appreciation for this important government action. Also, it is of importance to note that numerous congratulatory letters were received from many federal ministers as well as from almost all the provincial and territorial governments.

In the last few years, at this time in March celebrations are held to mark the contribution of French-Canadians to our great country, Canada. To mark the week's celebration and on the Speaker of the House's invitation, we hosted today in the rotunda the leaders of the Francophone community and celebrated with them the first anniversary of the establishment of the Francophone Secretariat.

To conclude, I would like to thank the two ministers responsible for the Francophone Secretariat in its first year of existence, the hon. Minister of Justice, who was responsible for the establishment of the secretariat, and the present minister responsible for the secretariat, the hon. Minister of Community Development, for their support in my work as chair of the Francophone Secretariat. [as submitted]

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

2:50 **International Day for the Elimination
of Racial Discrimination**

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Today, March 21, is the UN day to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination. In the community a number of events have taken place: a team of teenagers from Canmore traveled across the country with their message on racism and met up with other national and international teams, a kickoff at city hall in Edmonton with guest speaker Stephen Lewis, the annual Harmony breakfast sponsored by the Canadian Multiculturalism Educational Foundation that I and my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie attended on Sunday, and a wonderful citizenship court presided over by Judge Bhatia, which featured Mehreen Rashid from Holy Trinity school reading her award-winning essay on discrimination and tolerance.

But this morning for me was the most inspiring event. I attended a special racism event at McDougall school sponsored by the Edmonton Viets Association, the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, and the Department of Canadian Heritage. It was the most inspiring because it set the best example for us to follow.

Racism is not genetic. It is learned behaviour. The kids from McDougall supported by students from neighbouring St. Catherines did some wonderful skits on racism and, more than that, on how to break that learned behaviour and turn it into tolerance. Students also presented essays and posters.

All of these events are worthy and needed to bring people together and to acknowledge the continuation of racism in Alberta and how to eliminate it. We don't have an Alberta advantage on this issue. The government has seen fit to offer to screen legislation for gender-neutral language. But what can we as legislators, as leaders be doing to eliminate all forms of discrimination in Alberta and not just on this day but on all days? We could learn a lot from the kids, from Mehreen, and from the kids at McDougall and St. Catherines. That in my opinion would be an Alberta advantage.

Thank you.

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

**International Day for the Elimination
of Racial Discrimination**

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This day serves to remind us that racism continues to exist in the year 2000. It remains as real as life itself. Today it is up to each one of us to do our best to ensure that it is eliminated. For most of us racism is something we only read about or see on the television news. For many others it is something they experience daily in their own lives.

I know we remember the racial ideology that led to the massive destruction during the Second World War. More recently we can also remember the apartheid of the government of South Africa. This was a way of life supported by that government. Not long ago in our own country many citizens' rights that we take for granted today were denied to many Canadian pioneers because they belonged to a certain race. When a person cannot achieve his full potential simply because of the colour of his skin, we as a society suffer a tremendous loss as well.

As chair of the Alberta Advisory Committee on the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund I am encouraged to see that the number of racism complaints filed with the Human Rights Commission has declined steadily over the past few years. This proves that our proactive approach to combat this problem is working. We need to emphasize the importance of educating our society in order to reduce the need for disciplinary action by the Human Rights Commission. I am confident that with all your support we can achieve a prosperous Alberta that is free of discrimination not only during our time but for all generations to come as well.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Government House Leader on a point of order.

**Point of Order
Offensive Language**

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rose during question period today during a preamble to a question by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. I rose under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) and under *Beauchesne* 485 and 487 as well as the provisions of the memorandum which you sent to Members of the Legislative Assembly on February 11. In a general sense the preambles to questions are becoming more and more offensive to our parliamentary tradition, and the preamble to this particular question was particularly offensive to our parliamentary tradition.

One of the general rules, which I didn't quote, from *Beauchesne's* indicates – I think it's 409 – that questions should not provoke debate, and when you lace a preamble to a question with such coloured language, with the clear intent to impugn the integrity of a member, that cannot but provoke debate. So in a general sense those preambles, Mr. Speaker, and this preamble in particular should be ruled out of order, and the member should be asked to apologize.

I would take it a little bit further, and I don't have the benefit of the Blues, so I would look to your guidance in this. I believe the word dishonest was used, and in your memorandum on page D of the schedule it particularly indicates that the words dishonest and dishonesty are unparliamentary.

In addition, the member referred to hiding information with respect to West Edmonton Mall and an Auditor General's report. The Auditor General is an officer of this Legislature and did look into the West Edmonton Mall matter and made a report, and in that

report he clearly indicated that the Premier had not done anything wrong. So the member should be asked to withdraw his remarks from that perspective.

The member also, however, I believe, made allegations against another member and imputed false and unavowed motives to another member under 23(h) and (i) and did so by asking a question – I’m paraphrasing because I don’t have the Blues – of the nature of: is it your intention to hide or be dishonest to members of the public with respect to Bill 11, as you were with West Edmonton Mall?

Now, first of all, clearly that question is out of order because it provokes debate, because it requires a response, and I think a lengthy response should have been given indicating that the member is absolutely wrong about the question of dishonesty entirely. So it provokes debate from that perspective, but it also makes an allegation of dishonesty, which is not correct and is totally improper to levy against an hon. member in this House, and it also imputes false or unavowed motives, suggesting that the Premier was trying to hide something or be dishonest to Albertans when nothing could be more honest than to send out the exact wording of a bill that’s going to be discussed in the House and ask Albertans for their response to it. Nothing dishonest about that.

But, Mr. Speaker, we’ve come to expect that kind of slugging in debate in this House. It’s inappropriate, but we’ve come to expect it. We really should be listening to your advice in this House to deal with the issues above and beyond the personalities and take that emotional rhetoric out of it. I think it’s time to call a halt to this. I think it’s time to ask the member to rise and apologize. I think it’s time to bring us back to parliamentary tradition, talking about issues in this House in an appropriate and respectful manner and not bringing in false and unavowed allegations, not slanging people’s personal characters, not denigrating hon. members of this House, not trying to denigrate the Premier, who’s doing an honest and wonderful job for this province. If they have a problem with issues that we’re discussing, that’s what this Legislature is about. But it’s inappropriate for that hon. member and for any of those hon. members opposite to raise in preambles to questions or at any other time such inappropriate descriptions of the personalities of members or the intentions or integrity of members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I must confess I got a little lost in terms of following my friend’s submission in terms of understanding precisely what he is focusing on. I took his general observation that he’s unhappy with the overall demeanor of question period and the questions asked, but this is a matter that you have addressed on past occasions. Specifically, let me try and deal with the things that I think have been raised that would appropriately warrant a response.

Firstly, I didn’t hear my colleague use the word dishonest. Now, I don’t have *Hansard* in front of me. I’ve had the benefit of reading some notes that my colleague used in asking the question. The word dishonest is not there. Hopefully with the benefit of *Hansard* we can resolve that. I’m further advised by my colleague that his recollection is that he did not use the word dishonest.

3:00

Now, the Government House Leader spoke of the Auditor General’s report, and this takes us in a field we’ve already plowed, Mr. Speaker. I think it’s well known and it’s certainly in the *Hansard* record of this Assembly that the Auditor General found, and I paraphrase, no evidence of any inappropriate government involvement, but that is circumscribed by all of the limitations of the

study. He didn’t talk to Elmer Leahy, I understand. He didn’t take sworn evidence from Elmer Leahy. There’s a list of areas that were not reviewed by the Auditor General, so this Government House Leader . . .

THE SPEAKER: Get to your point.

MR. DICKSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I tried to preface my comments by saying that the Government House Leader in my view wandered a circuitous route, and I’m trying to address the points that I took from it. So I don’t know where you’re going to go with it.

Let me sum up by saying that I didn’t hear the word dishonest being used. The Auditor General’s report did not sanitize everything that happened, as the Government House Leader wished it might have and the Premier wished it might have. It is bound and circumscribed by the limitations in the terms of reference and the limitations in the scope of the investigation, and that record speaks for itself.

The one other item I would say is this. I note there was reference to a document that wasn’t tabled, and I have from my colleague the memorandum he referred to. That quite properly should have been tabled, and I think in the excitement of the question-and-answer exchange it was not. I have the requisite number of copies of the document that was referred to, so I’d table that now, Mr. Speaker.

Those are the comments I’d make. We could spend a long time talking generally about what happens in question period and about answers that are provocative and provoke debate, but I’m not sure this is the appropriate forum to do that.

Thank you, sir.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I’m not going to go through a whole series of readings from *Beauchesne* with respect to this matter but simply draw to hon. members’ attention those sections of *Beauchesne*. There are many, many sections, but there certainly are some sections dealing with unparliamentary language. There’s certainly 485 in *Beauchesne*, and 486(1) indicates that “much depends upon the tone and manner, and intention, of the person speaking.” *Beauchesne* 487 has got a really interesting series of clauses.

(1) Threatening language is unparliamentary.

(2) Words may not be used hypothetically or conditionally, if they are plainly intended to convey a direct imputation. Putting a hypothetical case is not the way to evade what would be in itself disorderly.

Now, what we’ve got here today is a situation – and I will quote from the Blues, because we do have the Blues. This is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

When it comes to Bill 11, Mr. Speaker, this Premier has quite a track record of talking about the truth yet still managing to avoid it. Now, the Premier thinks that he can trick Albertans with a propaganda campaign on health care just like he thinks he fooled Albertans about his role in orchestrating the West Edmonton Mall refinancing. Handwritten notes on a February 15, 1994, memo from the Premier to a certain Jim and a certain Ken provide ample evidence of his personal involvement. My questions are to the Premier. How can Albertans believe the Premier about Bill 11 when he didn’t come clean about the February 15, 1994, memo, which reveals that he was orchestrating the West Edmonton Mall refinancing right out of his . . . office?

Perhaps I could go back to 487(2) again. “Words may not be used hypothetically or conditionally, if they are plainly intended to convey a direct imputation.”

Now, I’ve got a series of scribbled notes from my table officers, who are very good and listen very attentively, just as attentively as

me. Their comments with respect to this question in particular ranged from: the question potentially is out of order and not really seeking factual information but really tied to how can we trust, the preamble and the question really weren't proper, a chance to make a statement about something not really linked, and on and on it goes with respect to other questions in terms of preambles not linked to actual questions.

We've had quite a series of these kinds of discussions lately with respect to these points of order, and I do not like the demeanour, and I do not like the tone. It seems to me that there's one way to solve all of this, and I'm going to suggest this to all members of the House, and it's something that the House itself might want to consider. The basic rules that we have in this Assembly call for brevity, brevity in terms of question and brevity in terms of answer. As each day comes and each day goes, there is a rather long list of members who haven't had an opportunity to raise a question or to seek the information that's so important. The purpose of question period is to seek, basically, urgent information with respect to pressing public matters.

Because we cannot define what the term brevity means in terms of a question and because we cannot define what brevity means in terms of an answer and because we tend to come and go on a daily basis, perhaps it might be better, hand in hand with what we want to do, if we carefully look to see what the rule is in the Canadian House of Commons. The Canadian House of Commons has struggled with this matter for years and years and years and has come to this conclusion. They've now adopted time limits for the question and time limits for the answer. The time limit is 35 seconds for the question and 35 seconds for the answer.

Now, that is a wonderful conclusion to a lot of problems. It seems that many of the points of order that are raised have to deal with the types of questions, and many of the points of order raised on another side have to deal with the types of answers. Well, the longer we have to participate, I guess, and with the dialogue that we have, the greater the chances and the greater the opportunities are for us to find the hole and just simply dig deeper into the hole. So perhaps brevity might best be dealt with in terms of a time factor.

It works very simply: 35 seconds to ask the question and 35 seconds to give the response, and your mike is immediately turned off. It seems to have done a great deal of service in terms of eliminating a lot of points of order on a daily basis. But, secondly, it has one other great objective and service that it provides. It allows for a greater number of questions, and it allows for a greater number of members to participate in doing the job that they were elected to do, to seek information.

I've got notes flying around here, and I sent a whole series of notes advising certain members that they might want to read *Hansard*, page 480, when I ruled on a point of order, allegations against a member and using names of outside people, dealt with that. Other notes here with respect to violations and probably *Beauchesne* 409(8), exactly the same question as another member had already asked, and again constant numbers of notes about not tying preambles with the ultimate question.

I think the comments are made. All hon. members can stand up and ask the question that they feel they are entitled to ask, and I will do everything possible to make sure that they have the benefit of all doubt with respect to it, because I believe very, very strongly that private members must have an opportunity to ask questions that they have. But it seems to me that if the bottom line of the question is, and I quote, we do not trust that person, why doesn't the question just come out and say, you know, "How can we trust you" or something else? There's a lot of unrelated preamble which has nothing to do with the question and violates the fundamental rules of the House and doesn't appear to be in the best interests of any

hon. member unless the major theme of the day is a certain thing, and it's not my right to know what that theme is, nor am I desiring to know what that theme is.

I just really believe fundamentally that decorum is very, very, very important. Decorum is important. There's a way of seeking the information one wants, and there's a way of making a political point. This question period is not supposed to be histrionics and not supposed to be theatrics. It's actually supposed to be serving the people of Alberta in ascertaining an answer for a pressing public matter. If it's Stampede Wrestling, well, so be it. It's entertainment for some, but the citizens of Alberta know what's going on. They know. They call my office. They give all kinds of comments. Not one of our best days. The point is made.

3:10

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 205

Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'd like to make a few comments about this very good bill, Bill 205, Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000, at this Committee of the Whole stage. I would remind members that this bill will provide yet another way in which Albertans may express their pride in the province of Alberta and that the Alberta dress tartan was an idea that came forward from two Calgarians, Gail Danysek and Ashley Stowkowy, who designed the Alberta dress tartan in conjunction with Fiona Hall, who is a tartan designer in England with Locharron of Scotland.

There was one point that was raised with me by a colleague that I would like to address. They sent me a note during a debate that said that in reading the bill, they noticed that the weave of the Alberta dress tartan, in particular the first block of the weave, is dominated by white and that clearly discriminates against green. It was their concern that this discrimination was clearly at a most basic level.

I must say that I would like to congratulate this hon. member, to start with, because they clearly read the bill carefully, and in fact they're very correct. The first block has 96 threads, and all but 12 of those threads are white. The other 12 are green. I would point out to the hon. member that that type of differential does however explain why this first block is known as the white block rather than the green block. I would also point out to this hon. member that there is a second block of weave as part of the Alberta dress tartan and that it contains 136 threads, 16 of which are green. So this hon. member should take some comfort in the fact that there is green reflected not only in the first block but also in the second block.

The other point I would like to make. I would refer all members to the explanatory notes that form part of Bill 205, which refer to the weave of the existing Alberta tartan, and in particular I would point out that it, too, has two blocks. In this particular case the first block of the Alberta tartan consists of 48 threads, all of which are green,

none of which are white, and accordingly there is clear discrimination in favour of the green thread. All in all, I think that if one takes into account the fact that there is green thread both in the first and second block of the Alberta dress tartan and a clear discrimination in the first block of the Alberta tartan in favour of green, there is a certain balance here.

It's also important to remember what these colours represent in the Alberta dress tartan. The addition of the field of white coloured stripes represents something that is not reflected currently in the Alberta tartan, and that of course is Alberta's clean, bright, snowy days, which are something that is known throughout the province, including, I believe, down in the Medicine Hat/Cypress area.

The dress tartan remains true to the original colour scheme that we have in our Alberta tartan, with the green of our forests being represented, the gold of our wheat fields, the blue of our clear skies and sparkling lakes, the pink of our wild rose, and the black of our coal and petroleum.

Once again, Madam Chairman, I would recommend to all members that they support this particular bill and the weave as currently outlined. I would particularly ask for the support of the hon. member who sent me that note, because I believe that I have clearly indicated that greens are well represented in the Alberta dress tartan.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I rise today to enter into the debate on Bill 205, the Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000. I think it's important for the Assembly to understand the origins of tartans.

Every isle differs from each other in their fancy making plads, as to the stripes and Breadth and Colours. This Humour is as different thro the . . . land of the Highlands in-so-far that they who have seen those places, are able, at the first view of a man's plad, to guess the place of his residence.

So said Martin Martin, writing in 1703, making the first documented reference to tartan as a means of identification. Since that time, the spirit of the idea has grown to the extent that we have come to believe that the pattern of woven coloured stripe has become an important part of our cultural identity.

Now, it is generally accepted that clan tartans were established and named towards the end of the 18th century. Prior to that time, while clan, district, and tartan were often closely associated, the idea of a single uniform clan tartan had not yet emerged. It would be wrong, however, to assume that the tartan patterns were created at that time. William Wilson, the foremost weaving manufacturer, took a great interest in reproducing perfectly genuine patterns and engaged in extensive correspondence with his Highland agent to gather information and actual samples of the cloth woven in the clan districts.

The natural development and the art of tartan manufacturing in the Highlands had been completely curtailed for over 50 years. The battle of Culloden in 1746 was still within living memory, and the disarming acts which followed included the ban of Highland dress, which was repealed in 1782. Tartan manufacture survived only in the hands of the military and their Lowlands suppliers.

3:20

Madam Chairman, I think it's important to understand where tartans come from and why we're bringing this forward. References to tartans occur in various historical documents, paintings, illustrations. A charter granted to Hector MacLean of Duart in 1587 for the

lands in Islay details cloth of white, black, and green colours, the colours of the Hunting MacLean of Duart tartan, and an eyewitness account of the battle. Many references support the role of tartans within the country and with different sectors. New tartans accredited by the Scottish Tartans Society must have the approval of the chief.

Dress tartans are designed by altering one of the background colours of the formal sett to white. Originally, tartans had two main colours. Madam Chairman, today we have before us Bill 205, Albertans' own tartan, and we are looking at seven colours of thread.

Bill 205 joins nine other official emblems in this province, and I am proud to be part of the debate.

Madam Chairman, some 27 short years ago I was married in a full Scottish wedding; yes, bagpipes, kilts, the full works. My family's history also shows that we have our own tartan.

I congratulate the Member for Calgary-Glenmore and encourage all members of the Assembly to support Bill 205.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to say a couple of words in support of Bill 205 with respect to Alberta emblems and the symbols that we hold dear in the name of and in the symbol of our province. Of course, I can't imagine that anyone would speak against this bill, but I'd like to note a couple of things that perhaps people do not know about the weave of the tartan, and we can think about it when we do look at this symbol in the future.

It's understood that when we think of the tartan now, most of us think of a very colourful pattern of the cloth of the Scottish Highlands. It's evident in the tartan that we currently use to symbolize the province of Alberta and certainly in the tartan that is being proposed through this bill to symbolize the tartan of Alberta for the future. Originally, the word tartan described the way a thread was woven to make the cloth. Each thread passed over two threads, then under two threads, and so on. Hence we have the name tartan.

It's also interesting to know that the oldest known piece of tartan is one that was found buried in the ground near Falkirk. It was found in a pot filled with over 1,900 silver Roman coins and was thought to be about 1,700 years old. It's quite different from many of the colourful tartans that we all know today. Again, that's why I would like to commend the tartan that is proposed here in Bill 205, because it is lighter and it is brighter in colour and it certainly speaks to what we see as our role and what we want to have as our symbol for this new century.

As I say, the oldest piece of tartan was found in a pot with the Roman coins. It's quite different from many of the tartans that we know today, and it's believed that it was made from the undyed wool, dark brown and light brownish green, of the Soay sheep, which once inhabited Scotland and which still can be found on the island of St. Kilda.

Just a little bit of history of how the Scottish people found the original tartan and hence have carried that symbol forward.

So in recognition of what we are signifying and symbolizing today and in the year 2000 in the province of Alberta, I think it's very fitting that we endorse and unanimously support Bill 205, as we look, I would say, to a brighter, a lighter, a more colourful symbol for our province so that it can be displayed, it can be worn, and it can show forth the colours of our province.

With those remarks, Madam Chairman, I would like to call the question in support of this bill and ask everyone in this Assembly now present to vote in support of Bill 205.

[The clauses of Bill 205 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The chair would have you note that most of the speakers on this particular bill happen to be of Scottish heritage.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I am not of Scottish ancestry, but I have a keen affinity for the game of golf, which is of Scottish origin, and on behalf of my constituent Jim McLean I want to just officially say that I support the official tartan bill that we just discussed.

However, on other matters I would now move that this committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports Bill 205.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The chair is going to call a one-minute recess.

[The Assembly adjourned from 3:29 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.]

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Citizens' Commission on the Future of Education

504. Mrs. MacBeth moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to create an Alberta citizens' commission on the future of education which would set goals and direction for education, acknowledging its fundamental importance to the prosperity and well-being of all Albertans and defining a clear vision for its future.

[Debate adjourned March 14: Dr. Massey speaking]

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

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Madam Speaker. When I left off talking about Motion 504 last time, I had spent a few minutes talking about the need for the commission and how this commission differed from previous commissions in the way it was going to be operating in terms of having citizens in control of the agenda. I'd also spent a little time looking at some of the changes that have occurred in the province and in education since the last commission, the Worth commission, deliberated in the late '60s and the early '70s. I thought I would take the few remaining minutes that I have to look

at some of the other changes that I think a commission would want to look at and evaluate.

There have been some tremendous changes, particularly in the role of technology. We've seen, since that last commission was reported, the advent of computers, and none of us, I think, at that time ever dreamed they would take over our schools, our classrooms, and in fact our lives. So I think a commission would want to spend some time looking at those developments, again assessing where we may be going in the future and setting out maybe a vision for technology and the role that technology might play in learning in the future.

The role of schools has changed dramatically. Community use is now taken for granted. I remember running for school trustee in 1974, running at that time on a platform of more community use of our schools, and being labeled by the opposition to that motion as the booze and bingo candidate. Some of the people running at that time thought that opening up schools for community use would invite all kinds of vices and that community life would certainly be hurt if those school gymnasiums were opened any time after 4 o'clock for community use. We've changed a great deal on how we view our community buildings, our school buildings.

The role of school boards has changed, and many of us think that that role has changed for the worse. There is a court case now that's going to adjudicate that. School boards, in terms of their ability to respond to local issues, I think have been weakened. Is that really what we want in the province? What kind of value do we place on local control?

The Department of Learning has changed. It's being collapsed into two departments: basic education and advanced education. Is that a good thing? Is that what Albertans want? Are they being well served by this new configuration?

There are changes in terms of our funding. Many of us in this province who come from humble beginnings have been blessed with being able to access the best education in the world. We were able to do that even though our parents had rather limited or no means that would have helped us had that public education not been there and not been tax supported so that there was no charge to the family.

That's gradually changed over the last 10 years. Instructional fees and parents out funding-raising for a lot of the things that happen in our schools have gradually taken over. If you walk into the gymnasiums of our local high schools, you'll see the signs of local contractors and electrical firms adorning gymnasium walls. The whole role of paying, parents' role, and who should support public education – should it be supported totally from the public purse? Are these other incursions the wave of the future? I think those are some of the questions, some of the issues that the Alberta citizens' commission would examine.

If you look at school programs, there have been dramatic changes in the kinds of school programs that are being offered in the province. I look at the number of alternative programs that now accommodate a much wider range of student interests and capabilities and parent interest than were available previously: the heritage language programs in this city where Ukrainian, Cree, and a variety of languages have been made available to students. I look at the international baccalaureate program, a program for talented high school students where they can have their talents tested and their intellectual capabilities challenged. I look at the incorporation under the umbrella of the local school board of the first Christian school, the Logos school. I look at the involvement of business as huge changes in the public school system. I think it's timely that a commission sit down and look at those changes and say: is this the way we want to go in public education? Are these the kinds of changes that strengthen the system and further the kind of vision that many have for a truly public school system?

If you look at postsecondary education, there's a tremendous worry about the balance at postsecondary institutions between the sciences and the technical fields and the humanities and the social sciences. Is that balance the correct one? Are we supporting social sciences and humanities in a way that will benefit the community? What about the role that the universities play in social criticism? What's happened to that role?

We've seen huge changes in tuition and tuition policy. I'm one of those fortunate few who on entering university had my tuition paid, and I was the recipient of a bursary of a small amount but a very important amount of money at the time to help me further my education. We've moved a long way from that kind of public support of students to an almost unending debate in our institutions about tuition. It's one of the things that I think a commission could look at and help make some judgments about, could talk to Albertans to find out how they feel about access to our postsecondary institutions and how that access should be either furthered or curtailed.

The role of research has again changed, a great deal of focus recently on what's been called gizmo research, research that pays off in the marketplace at some fairly near time frame. Again, questions have been raised about what that does in terms of research, more basic research, research where ideas are explored without any thought of the implications of that for commercialization.

We've seen a growing role for private schools in the province. Does that meet with the general approval of the citizens? The Alberta citizens' commission could examine that and maybe plot out for us a future and some guidelines in terms of the development of private schools and their role in the education system of the province.

There have been some vast changes in teacher education. When the Worth report was tabled in the province, most of the elementary teachers in the province had one or two years of teacher education in the early '70s, and the Lougheed government in a rather brave move said that we were going to increase the amount of education that teachers had until we got to the point where they all had at least one university degree.

3:40

I remember the kind of public debate at the time, the gloom and doom warnings that if they moved to that kind of a system, where teachers had to have at least one university degree to teach, first of all the system wouldn't be able to afford all of those teachers with degrees. It would bankrupt the government. There were cries about not having enough teachers, that there would be a teacher shortage if they tried to move to everyone having at least a university degree. Lo and behold here we are 30 years later and the system is in place. All teachers in the province have at least one university degree, many of them two, and some three or more university degrees, something that would have been unheard of 30 years ago. It took some visionaries to make it happen.

We also have seen some changing patterns in terms of the teacher education that's offered. We have the University of Lethbridge where you have to have a minimum of 5 years before you're credentialed to go into the classroom, the University of Alberta where you can still take a four-year pattern, and then the differences at the University of Calgary. So across the province the degree-granting institutions have changed their requirements and, again, at a rate and with content that we wouldn't have expected a number of years ago. I think this is an area that the citizens' commission would be most interested in looking at. The previous commission and the Cameron commission before that had some solid statements about teacher education at that time.

So with those comments, Madam Speaker, I would urge passage of the Alberta citizens' commission . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. member. The time for this particular item has now expired, and I must put the question to you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 lost]

Advisory Council on Women's Health

505. Mrs. Fritz moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish an advisory council on women's health to support education and research promoting women's health and to address issues relating to the prevention and treatment of diseases including osteoporosis, eating disorders, heart disease, and breast cancer as well as diseases to which women are becoming increasingly susceptible such as lung cancer and autoimmune diseases.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This has been a long time coming. As you know, it was before the Legislature previously as a bill, and I'm just pleased that it's back here as a motion and that it is before the Assembly today.

I'd like to note that this important proposal would not have been brought before the House without the support, guidance, and influence of many people. I'm thankful to all that it was created, revised, and completed with the ideas and assistance of Alberta Health, Community Development, our caucus research, my office, regional health authorities, women's groups, organizations, and associations, and the public at large. The wise counsel of my colleagues and friends, many of whom are here today, added to the insight that resulted in this proposal, which I believe will ultimately lead to Alberta women living their lives more fully because they'll have a deeper understanding of the health of their bodies.

Madam Speaker, Motion 505 will assist in creating new models for women's wellness. It will offer support in the areas of education and research that will help women to gain, regain, and maintain their health. The motion will also assist our government and its affiliates as well as health care practitioners with necessary constant learning processes.

An advisory council would provide a forum for promoting awareness of women's health issues, and it would enable health organizations to submit information and recommendations to the government. It would also gather research and synthesize the information and ensure that it is ultimately made available to those that would benefit from it. Women, health care professionals, and government officials must work together to make women's health a top priority.

Madam Speaker, I wish to acknowledge that the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has demonstrated in Budget 2000 a commitment to health initiatives and programs, and I thank you, hon. minister, for this being in Budget 2000 this year. It's very welcome. You've added \$4.7 million for the implementation of a cervical cancer screening program, and that would include the Pap smear, which is the most effective screening test known to modern medicine. Also, \$2.3 million has been added for the breast cancer screening program, which will assist in diagnosing breast cancer in its earliest stages. Hopefully, Mr. Minister, these funds will be used for a provincewide program to target those in the 50- to 69-year-old age group through a holistic woman-centred approach. Knowing your commitment to women's health issues, I'm sure that that's what will be happening in that area.

These welcome funds will add to vital preventative screening

programs that I believe will ultimately save lives. The outcome would also lead to good, solid, up-to-date information that an advisory council could use to assist women in improving their health. Madam Speaker, it is no small task to address the vast issues of women's health and wellness, which is why this motion advocates an advisory council.

The council is anticipated to have 10 appointed board members, with a Member of the Legislative Assembly to act as chairman, and at least one member would be appointed from the following: the Members of the Legislative Assembly, the Alberta health care association, the Alberta Medical Association, a university as defined in the Universities Act, the Alberta Cancer Board, and the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses. The four remaining members hopefully would be from the public at large. I realize that there are those here who will ask why half the council is comprised of members with an explicit medical focus. I happen to believe that the importance of their expertise and guidance should not be underestimated and, in fact, should be highly valued. The medical advice and dynamics that this group will offer to the committee is essential to the discussion which will ultimately point us in the direction that we need to go.

Women need to be able to make informed, responsible decisions regarding their health and lifestyles, and to do this they must have access to accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive, and user-friendly information. The council would assist in the management of women's health services and lead to a coherent long-term health strategy. It would also assist in the promotion of awareness and understanding of women's health issues, the risks they face and the treatments that are available. Madam Speaker, over the past decade we have seen some of these diseases increase at an alarming rate. I'm thinking of HIV and the AIDS virus, which is on the increase for women. As well, the statistics relating to eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, and other addictive disorders speak for themselves.

When you consider the purposes of the advisory council, you will notice that concepts such as advise, foster, report, encourage public discussion, review, analyze, consult, and make recommendations will all offer a wide range of processes to access and distribute information. I know that for some here today it will be a leap of faith to accept that these concepts are necessary for the health and wellness of women. Well, Madam Speaker, in order to explore the discomforts, diseases, and dysfunctions of female organs and systems and to give medical suggestions and advice on how to heal them, it is a must to buy into the very purposes of this motion.

I have had the question asked, "How do women's health needs differ from those of others?" which is, of course, addressing the fundamental question of why we need a women's health advisory council. In acknowledging this question and providing answers, it is necessary to provide you with a list of a few – and I stress "a few," although it will seem long to you – physical, psychological, and emotional illnesses that predominantly affect women. Autoimmune disease, which, simply stated, occurs when an organ attacks itself, affects women far more frequently than it does men. These diseases include systemic lupus erythematosus; 90 percent of those affected are women. Myasthenia gravis: 85 percent affected are women. Autoimmune thyroid disease: 80 percent are women. Rheumatoid arthritis: 75 percent are women. And 70 percent of those afflicted with multiple sclerosis are women.

3:50

Menses is a basic cycle for females, and during this cycle as many as 60 percent of those affected suffer from abdominal discomfort which is known as dysmenorrhea. As well, at least 60 percent of

females suffer from premenstrual syndrome. PMS is most likely to occur in the 30-year-old age group and, sadly, often occurs at the same time as dysmenorrhea. Complications that relate to the ovaries, fallopian tubes, and uterus are far too vast to mention here today, and each organ is intimately connected to the next.

Endometriosis is a disease experienced by women in which the tissue normally growing inside the uterus actually grows in other parts of the body and causes a great deal of pain. Uterine fibroid tumors, ovarian cysts, and cancer are all devastating and can lead to chronic pelvic pain, infertility, and even death. Madam Speaker, the list continues and includes disorders such as urinary tract infections, incontinence, fibrocystic breast disease, childbirth complications, and symptoms related to menopause.

I'd like to take a moment to highlight other significant health issues and point out the potential impact that each one may have on Alberta women and on Albertans as a whole. Osteoporosis, or porous bone, is a disease that is characterized by low bone mass and structural deterioration of bone tissue, leading to bone fragility and an increased susceptibility to fractures of the hip, the spine, and the wrist. This is a disease that can be prevented and treated. Chances of developing osteoporosis are greater if you are a woman. They have less bone tissue and lose bone more rapidly than men because of the changes involved in menopause. One in four Canadian women over the age of 50 has osteo. It is often called the silent disease because bone loss occurs without any symptoms. They may not know they have this disease until their bones become so weak that a sudden strain, bump, or fall causes a hip fracture or a vertebra to collapse.

Females may be surprised to discover that there is a 20 percent mortality rate within the first six months following a hip fracture, and about 50 percent of those who suffer one will need help walking the rest of their lives. In fact, the lifetime risk of death due to hip fracture is comparable to the risk of death from breast cancer. The rate of hip fractures related to osteoporosis is two to three times higher in women than men. A woman's risk of hip fracture is equal to her combined risk of breast, uterine, and ovarian cancer, and, Madam Speaker, 75 percent of women aged 45 to 75 have never even talked to a doctor about osteo.

Heart disease and stroke are the leading causes of death in women over the age of 50 in Canada. Heart disease is also the second leading medical condition that limits the activities and independence of females. Although it is often characterized as a man's disease, Madam Speaker, shockingly, more women than men die from cardiovascular disease. Yet virtually all randomized controlled trials, risk, and treatment have focused on men, and the majority of cardiovascular procedures are conducted on men. Heart disease in women often goes undetected and untreated until the disease has become severe. Regrettably, 44 percent of those who have heart attacks die within one year as compared to 27 percent of men.

Madam Speaker, there's an obvious male bias in medical research and treatment related to heart disease in Canada. Once we recognize the need for a more balanced approach, we can work toward addressing the health issues that have previously been ignored or underappreciated, especially those that affect women.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in women, after heart disease and stroke, and approximately 11 percent will develop breast cancer in their lifetime. Each day in our own province at least four women are diagnosed with or die from this disease; that's each day. The risk of breast cancer increases with age, with approximately 75 percent of breast cancer diagnosed found in those over the age of 50. Today lung cancer is the most common cause of cancer death in females. There are no screening tests for lung cancer, and it can be very difficult to diagnose. Nearly 90 percent of patients diagnosed

with lung cancer do not receive care until it is too late to be cured.

Increased education and communication about these diseases, their risk factors, and their treatment will save women's lives. I said that I would name only a few, which is why I will stop here. The point is, Madam Speaker, these conditions predominantly affect women, which is why this advisory council is so necessary. Women make three-quarters of the health care decisions in households, and more than 61 percent of physician visits are made by females. Fifty-nine percent of prescription drugs are purchased by them, and 75 percent of nursing home residents over the age of 75 are women. Their health has been ignored for far too long, and they are uniquely affected and, I believe, should be uniquely addressed.

Madam Speaker, implementing Motion 505 will allow us to keep our finger on the pulse of women's health care in a much broader and more diverse way than ever before. The intent of the council will be to assist in providing information and research data on how nutrients, hormonal supplements, herbs, exercise, drugs, prescribed medications, surgery, acupuncture, emotional support, and many, many other ways of delivering health care will optimally create healthier conditions for women.

Madam Speaker, the benefits to be derived from implementing Motion 505 could be achieved for approximately 1 percent of what our province spends in one day on health care. That is so minimal. Think about it. It's 1 percent of what we spend in one day on health care.

To conclude, I'm urging the Assembly to recognize the unique nature of women's bodies, their symptoms, and the issues that surround their overall health. An advisory council on women's health will allow us to promote and address these issues in a proactive, accountable, and cost-effective manner.

Madam Speaker, I ask that the members of the Assembly make a commitment to the health and wellness of all women in the province by voting to support Motion 505. Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to commend the Member for Calgary-Cross for her tenacity in following through on this idea, in that it was presented as Bill 213 in the 1999 spring session but died on the Order Paper. So the same idea but coming back as a motion.

Secondly, I have to admit that I am really torn about this motion. I think a large part of that is my frustration with a sort of piecemeal approach that's being taken. Many of the members here were in this same Chamber, including the Member for Calgary-Cross I think, when the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues was disbanded. The budget was taken away, and that was the end of it. That was a very useful organization and from my point of view had a more holistic approach to women's health because it dealt with all aspects of women's lives: the economic factors, the legal factors, the social health factors.

So I'm very frustrated when I look at what's being proposed in this motion and see that it's a very tiny piece of what women's lives are all about. We cannot continue to take a chunk, a piece of a person's life and say, "Well, if we deal with this, then all things will be cared for," because we know that that is not the truth. You cannot deal with women's health without looking at issues of poverty, of stress – the list is very long. I'll try and come back and address some of that, but the economic and legal factors that affect women's lives in this day and age obviously affect their health.

4:00

I listened carefully to the Member for Calgary-Cross and what she

was proposing, and it sounds very similar to what was in Bill 213. So it is based on the advisory council on women's health act but, again, is only taking a little section of it out.

I think one of the things that is most important to me about a council – if I have to accept a council that is restricted to women's health, I will do so, begrudgingly. I will do so, because I think anything that the women in Alberta can get out of this government is a great thing, because it's been pretty tough in the past.

One of the most important things is the representation of the people who are appointed to the council. Where the Advisory Council on Women's Issues was really successful was in bringing together a great diversity of representation. They were women from all different geographic areas in the province. They covered different kinds of work. Some were in the workforce. Some were at home or students, with different kinds of family backgrounds, different kinds of educational attainments. It was a real diversity of representation, and I had the privilege of working with that council for five years, so I know of what I speak. I think I go down in history now as the only executive director for that organization in its 10 years, and I was there for almost five.

MRS. SOETAERT: And a good job you did.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you.

That diversity of representation also gave that council a real close connection to the women in the community. For example, at one point we were approached about mobile breast screening units. The idea was presented to the council members, who then fanned out back into their communities, held coffee parties, talked to people in supermarket lineups, whatever they did to connect with the women in their communities, and together brought all that information back. They really picked up some good stuff from approaching women in a very realistic way and just listening to what their genuine response was to the proposal. I think we have a better mobile breast screening program now as a result of that.

The council also had a very strong research component. Frankly, a lot of the budget money was put into that research, and it was very good value for the money. As I mentioned before, we did research under three areas: legal, economic, and social health. The drawback for that advisory council – and perhaps this is a warning for possible barriers to overcome with the suggestion of this council – was the appointment of people. I think it has to be done in a way where people are coming to serve the best interests of the council, and it shouldn't be about the best interests of any given political ideology.

One of our constant struggles with the old advisory council was budget. It was a way for government to control the activities of the council. There needs to be a reasonable budget. It's not a lot. I mean, I think the member has already pointed out that all things considered, it's a minuscule amount. But the budget should not be used as a way of controlling the council. It's very good value for money.

The last thing was the will of the government to implement the recommendations that were brought forward from the council. Recommendations in my time were brought forward on a very wide variety of issues affecting women in Alberta, and the government did not have the will to implement them. I think today we can look back on some of them and dearly wish that the government had.

The Member for Calgary-Cross had listed off the organizations that she was suggesting representatives be sought from to sit on this council. She anticipated me saying that those are all representatives of the medical/clinical model, and indeed that is my point. Once again we're taking a little slice, a little organ out of women and saying: okay, this is all we're going to deal with; this is the one little

piece. I think it's really important, if you are going to have a council on women's health, that you have wider representation than just the medical/clinical model. I really feel strongly about that.

To the member's credit, she has now included that there would be representatives from the public on the council, and that was a flaw identified in the bill that was presented last year, in that it listed all of the medical organizations from whom representatives would be pulled and said that there could be 10 members in total but didn't sort of fill in the blanks and say that the rest of those members will be from the public. She's now said that, which I think is a good thing.

When the member talks about, you know, women needing good factual medical information, yes, they do, but they also need other information that's about what happens in their lives. We're more than a walking component of body organs. We exist in society. We exist in families. We have stresses on our lives. We have religious faiths we follow. There are a lot of other things that are affecting women and that affect their health.

As a small example of only getting information from medical personnel, let's look at the hormone therapy debate. You can line up as many doctors on one side of the room as you want that are pro hormone replacement therapy and line up just as many on the other side of the room. Well, if women can't get access to some other information, all we have is a battle of medical information that's not moving the issue forward.

The member talked about it being holistic. I think she and I are going to have to agree to disagree on our definition of what holistic is, because I'm looking for other factors besides a medical/clinical model of women's health. I would like to see spots set aside for representatives from alternative health, public health, mental health, social services, and other organizations that are dealing specifically with women. There's a wonderful osteoporosis mature women's health clinic at the Grey Nuns.

Another issue is that there is primarily a research function for this council, but there seems to only be one representative from a research institution, and I think that needs to be looked at as well. You probably want more academic research that's available there.

Now let me talk about some of the things I'd referred to earlier. Where will the issues of poverty be discussed as they impact on women's health? Or employment issues? For instance, if you're a part-time person or a seasonal worker, whether you get benefits or don't get benefits, whether you have a pension or don't have a pension, that affects you very much.

Where are the legal/judicial issues about access? I mean, if you want to see women in stress, look at some of the family courts and the people going in and out of those doors. That's one of the most stressful things in their lives. You think that doesn't impact their health and the health of their families?

What about the social issues? Drug and alcohol abuse, gambling issues, what kind of housing they have available. Can they afford to live in a safe neighbourhood? All of those issues, once again, really affect women's health.

What are the other issues affecting women? Well, what about availability of home care and the range of home care services that are actually available, or even the expectation that women will be the home care, the one and only home care? If you don't think that affects every woman sitting in this Chamber and elsewhere, you've got another thing coming. We've got a sandwiched generation of women who have elderly parents they're caring for and still have children that may be at home or very near to home. They are the primary caregivers for both sets of people, and they're sandwiched. I think that affects women's health.

Where have we gotten with midwifery? That was a recommenda-

tion that was brought forward, a very concrete one, with three points to the recommendation. The government has only accomplished two of those points. They still have not covered midwifery services under health care. Oh, get a move on.

4:10

We have issues like respite care, palliative care. You see, I think there's an assumption still that women will step in and take over all these caregiving duties, particularly around the issues of health. I don't think people are looking around at women and the age that they are today. You know, all the women in this House are working. It's not as though we could drop everything and run to provide that kind of specialized care for somebody. Most of the women are working because they have to work and because they want to work, and there's nothing wrong with that.

MRS. SOETAERT: For pay. Every woman works.

MS BLAKEMAN: For pay, yeah. I mean, every woman works, but many of them are working outside of the home for money, and that's because they have to.

You know, this is all about treatment that I'm hearing, and the list the member sort of ran off at the end of her remarks were all treatments, acupuncture and a number of other things. Again I react by saying: where's the prevention? A dollar in prevention is worth a million bucks in cure, and when do I get this government to understand that? It's true, and it's always after the fact. It's always money going in after the fact. We have the knowledge, we have the research to understand these issues from the beginning.

Another question: how would this council fit within the Alberta health care population health strategies? I think there are a lot of issues to be raised there.

The member didn't talk about adequate funding for the council. I spoke of it a bit, but I also think the other thing that needs to be considered here is remuneration of the directors that are appointed to the council. I think there's been an assumption here for the representatives that the medical agencies they would be pulled from would be paying their salary for the day they're at the meeting. But that really makes it difficult to get the public representatives, if they have to be giving up a day's work. Why isn't this a concern? Why am I not seeing some effort being put into acknowledging this fact? Not all women have jobs where they can take a day off without having their pay taken away. Most women work on a wage basis, on an hourly basis. If they don't work, they don't get paid. So that issue of not remunerating the directors for a council is one that I think you have to look at very carefully. I would encourage the member to pursue it, because I think you're going to preclude having representatives of the public on the council because they simply cannot afford to give up the earnings. It would cost them too much.

The other thing I would like to see and have not heard the member mention is: will there be gender parity on this council? From everything I saw in the previous bill that was introduced and in anything the member has said now, this could be a council of 10 men. I'm reminded of that little cartoon that you see resurface every now and then where there's an entire, great, huge board table full of men all the way around it. The chairperson calls the committee of women's issues to order, and there isn't a woman at the table. So I would like to see something worked into this that actually acknowledged . . . [interjections]

Oh, I see people are a little sensitive about the thought of gender parity. You cannot be serious that you would want a women's health council with all men on it. No, no. You're not serious. I know you're not.

I think the member should look to incorporating something like that. I would suggest a 60-40 amendment that says: no more than 60 or less than 40 of either gender. Of course, for this purpose I would prefer to see that 60 percent of the representatives were women. That only makes sense to me.

I'm glad the member brought forward the bill and now the motion. It does show some sensitivity to how women's lives are different than men's, but I think there are a lot of other things that could have been done with this. I think the whole idea of narrowing women to just that collection of organs and bone and skin walking around is a very narrow view of women, and I would really like to see it expanded to a better understanding of women's lives. There are a lot of ways that the suggestion in the motion brought forward by Calgary-Cross could be improved so we could have a much stronger idea here. I do commend her for the work that she's done. I can tell by the remarks she made today that she's done more work, a lot of work, on research into some of the identified medical problems that women have, but I urge her to cast the net a little wider so that we can start understanding the social impact of the world that women really live in and how that affects their health.

I appreciate having the time to speak to the motion. As I said, I will support it, but you know, with the resources this government has, it could have been so much better. It really could have.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. STEVENS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to say a few words regarding Motion 505, the very excellent motion from the Member for Calgary-Cross to establish an Alberta advisory council on women's health.

Madam Speaker, women's health is a growing concern for all Albertans. There are few of us in this Assembly today who have not been affected in some way by this issue. We all know sisters or daughters or mothers or aunts or nieces or wives that have at some point been affected by the health issues outlined by the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross. Currently I have the good fortune to serve as chair of the standing policy committee on learning, and I would like to focus my comments this afternoon on the educational and informational advantages that an advisory committee on women's health would have for Alberta women and indeed for all Albertans.

I believe that phenomenal strides can be made in educating and informing all Albertans on the health issues that affect women within our province. We can and should do more to improve the health prospects of Alberta women. Madam Speaker, the creation of an advisory council would provide women with current and up-to-date information on new treatment regimes that are coming on-line in Alberta, experimental initiatives that are in the planning process, and contact information for locally based expert or support organizations. An advisory council would act as the conduit through which the government could consult with women's groups on the overall health planning process within Alberta.

In these many ways the creation of a council would give women's organizations the opportunity to assess essential information in a timely manner with a relative amount of ease. A good example of how this council could play this valuable role is in the area of drug and alcohol abuse. More and more women in Alberta are being affected either directly or indirectly by drug and alcohol abuse. As things stand right now, Madam Speaker, I believe that there is far too little knowledge shared on the part of health professionals both on the role they can play in treating this disease and also on the effect it has on women themselves and their bodies. An advisory council on women's health could assist in educating Alberta women

in this critical area and help decrease the number of women suffering from the effects of drug and alcohol abuse.

Madam Speaker, the effects of alcohol and other drug abuse on women's health is considerable. Statistically, each year Canadian hospitals treat women for an average of 11,000 alcohol-related problems. The physiological consequences of alcohol and drug abuse common in women include increased risk of tuberculosis, hypertension, and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV infection and infertility. There can also be effects to unborn children, namely fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effect, two completely preventable afflictions that have a permanent impact on the lives of Albertans. Moreover, health experts and scientists are beginning to find that women with alcohol and other drug problems are more likely to have mental disorders than men. Clinical research reveals that depressive and anxiety disorders as well as low self-esteem are more frequently found in female addicts.

4:20

Another special problem for women is the effect of tobacco use. The mortality rate of lung cancer in women has surpassed that of breast cancer as the most common cause of death from cancer in North America. Women are not only susceptible to the smoking-related diseases commonly seen in males; women are also vulnerable to special risks related to the female reproductive system and pregnancy. Despite these risks, the prevalence of smoking among women has remained steady since the 1960s, whereas smoking rates for men have been continually dropping.

Madam Speaker, today there are more female new smokers than male new smokers, a phenomenon that certainly has significant implications. According to the 1996 statistics 48 percent of Alberta females aged 15 to 24 are smokers. In fact, teenage girls are now more likely to smoke than their male counterparts. The Alberta Tobacco Reduction Alliance recently estimated that in 1992 the cost to Alberta's economy of tobacco use was approximately \$728 million. Of this total, approximately \$215 million can be directly attributed to costs on the health care system, while the remaining \$508 million can be attributed to productivity losses due to illness or premature death.

This new wave of smokers bodes poorly for the health of Alberta's women in the future. Greater knowledge and effort are required to successfully reach women about the negative health impacts of smoking and to lower the numbers of female smokers. In spite of all the warnings on cigarette packages, many young women may not realize that the risks to their own health may not be that far down the road. Pregnant women who smoke increase the risk of complications to their baby such as miscarriage, premature delivery, low birth weight, stillbirth, eye defects, and sudden infant death syndrome. Women and adolescent girls who smoke and use birth control pills are 10 to 20 times more likely to have heart attacks or strokes than women who do not smoke. Smokers are also at increased risk of cervical cancer.

Substance abuse and addiction is a field in which research that is specifically oriented on the impact it has on women's health is sorely lacking. Clearly this research gap and lack of baseline data is something that needs to be urgently addressed and corrected because it is absolutely crucial to our future and to maintaining a healthy population. The most critical research needed in this area is the examination of what can be termed as women at risk. These women are generally described as young, involved in pressure to drink and smoke from peer groups, having a heavy-drinking spouse, depressed, experiencing a life crisis or loss, and frequently drinking or using substances to escape daily problems.

Research of this group is critical because women are no more

homogeneous a group than men. Women with substance problems differ in terms of age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, occupational and marital status, and other demographic factors, just as men do. Identifying groups of women at high risk may lead to early intervention strategies targeted specifically at these groups of women. These strategies could range from substance-specific programs aimed at women at high risk to nonspecific programs aimed towards improving women's mental health. Consciousness-raising groups, awareness workshops, sports and exercise, job counseling, and parenting skill training are just a few examples of such programs.

Physical activity by women has also been identified as a problem. Women of all ages do not engage sufficiently in physical activity despite its many positive effects on health. The health system must learn how to encourage healthy behaviour in women in developing approaches that take into account their values, lifestyles, and roles.

Madam Speaker, it's all too clear that many women are not adequately aware of current prevention strategies that can dramatically improve their health. We must educate these women if we hope to help them, and the establishment of an advisory council on women's health can help co-ordinate this effort. Women's health is also impacted by life circumstances, and often these circumstances contribute to the amount of motivation a woman has to take preventative measures to safeguard her health. A good example of this fact is invasive cervical cancer. Invasive cervical cancer is commonly found in those women who have never been screened or who are not screened regularly. Aboriginal women fall into this category, and statistically they are overrepresented in cervical cancer statistics.

An advisory council on women's health could help develop programs for aboriginal women, a group for which special measures must be taken to improve the use of known preventative measures. It could also play a valuable role in raising awareness about cervical cancer and the fact that early detection makes all the difference in the treatment of the disease. An advisory council on women's health, that would provide information and education on women's health issues, is crucial because of the disturbing phenomenon of women continuing to die from preventable diseases.

Madam Speaker, women continue to die from largely preventable conditions such as cervical cancer. Unprecedented numbers are now dying from lung cancer, which is, again, another largely preventable disease. As mentioned previously, in 1994 for the first time lung cancer surpassed breast cancer as the leading cancer killer of women. Women themselves, when asked what illness puts them at greatest risk of death, will usually identify breast cancer without realizing that cardiovascular disease carries greater risks.

To make smart, responsible decisions regarding their health and lifestyles, women must have access to accurate, comprehensive, and intelligent information. It's for this reason that I support Motion 505 and the creation of an advisory council on women's health.

To conclude, I urge the Assembly to recognize the unique nature of women's health and the issues that surround it. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I realize I only have a short moment before we change the business of the day.

It's interesting. I remember a few years ago when the women's advisory council was scrapped by this government a year before it should have been, before the sunset clause that was stated for it. That advisory council did some really good work, and there were

good people on that from all over the province. I'm really glad this is before us, and I will be supporting it, but it goes to show that there's just no vision on that side of the House about where we need to be with women's issues, certainly one of the weaker points of this government.

When we talk about the need for a women's health advisory committee, the reality is that women's health is different. So often tests are done on male subjects rather than . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the time limit for consideration of this item today has now expired.

4:30

head: Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will call the committee to order.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Executive Council

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Treasurer.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's an honour to appear before the committee on behalf of the Premier to conclude discussion on Executive Council's 2000-2003 business plan and estimates. I hope to be able to answer a number of the questions that were asked by the members at the committee's last session. That would have been the evening of Wednesday, March 8.

There was a question from one of the members asking for an explanation on the increase to the Executive Council budget. This was actually discussed in previous sessions. Just to do a recap for the member, the bureau's budget actually shows an increase of approximately \$1 million in 2001-2002 to complete the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* project, an exciting project. I know there's probably not a lineup at the theatres to see it, but it is an important work that was done. Revenue from the new project is projected to offset that additional spending. The balance of that budget increase for the bureau works out to approximately \$100,000 to allow for salary increases for staff, and there are also the same increases that will be seen across government in this year's estimates.

An increase of approximately \$1.8 million is also showing under Executive Council for the Alberta Corporate Service Centre. I'm sure the member is familiar with some of the projected work to be done there. Members of the committee should note that the centre is also going to generate revenue because it will charge back its costs to ministries, and that will result in actually no net spending increase. Members also may be aware that the Alberta Corporate Service Centre is a new program that will be consolidating and providing administrative services to ministries so that they can focus on the delivery of programs and services to Albertans. So you'll see the effect of some of that in a positive way.

[Mr. Renner in the chair]

There was also a question, Mr. Chairman, from one member of the committee who wanted to know what kind of courses are included in the bureau's in-house training program. There are actually a variety of courses that are offered to help staff improve their specialized and general professional skills. Some of those would include courses about the latest developments in computer software and other technologies, sessions to help staff upgrade their writing

and editing skills, and other general topics such as consulting and leadership. So a variety of skills upgrading and courses being offered there.

Then there was a question related to improving access to the RITE telephone system. Due to the consolidation of these centres, the result of that has actually been a higher volume in calls, which would make sense. The call volumes through the RITE telephone system have increased every year over the last three years, with more people moving into the province and provincial programs being of higher interest. So there has been that increase.

Just to give members some idea of the increase, the system logged a total of some 4.8 million calls in '97-98. A year later that number rose to a total of 5.9 million calls. That was an increase of 21 percent, an increase of more than a million calls from the previous year, from '97-98 to '98-99. As far as we can tell from the projections, the total volume for '99-2000 will probably reach some 6.2 million calls. That would be an estimated increase of approximately 6 percent, so very significant business being generated there. We are trying to make information easily available to our citizens and to broadcast that out to them, and we're certainly seeing that in the response.

Members of the committee should also note that consolidating to two RITE centres from six centres has resulted in improved service levels. The extended hours are something that we're getting positive feedback on in terms of the hours of service that are available to Albertans. Albertans can use that toll-free provincewide service to reach Alberta government offices weekdays from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. That's better than bankers' hours. The new system also allows callers to reach government offices after hours by the direct-dialing option and the voice messaging service. Certainly this may be unparalleled in the country. I'm not sure what other provinces offer, but I understand that the level of service that's being offered is very significant.

The '98-99 performance measures for the RITE system showed a 97 percent satisfaction rating among the surveyed RITE system callers. They were called back and surveys done. A 97 percent satisfaction rate with that service is phenomenal, and to all of the operators and the people involved in delivering that service our congratulations should go out.

Another question dealt with the cost of the Premier's annual TV address to Albertans. This year's broadcast was on January 31. I know the members can remember that because I'm sure they were glued to their TV sets, as were we. The cost was approximately \$75,000. That works out to less than 3 cents per Albertan. If there is any difficulty with that from any of the members across, I've got a nickel for each one of you. That would give you 2 cents change, and it wouldn't have cost you a thing. Three cents. What price communication, Mr. Chairman? What price truth? Three cents per Albertan. Actually, it's interesting to note that this year's address cost the same as the Premier's address last year.

One member also asked about the process that's used to tender and award government advertising contracts. I can tell you that the Public Affairs Bureau has a very comprehensive policy in place, and that's to ensure that advertising agencies are dealt with and contracts are awarded in a fair and open manner. This particular process was actually created hand in hand with advice from the advertising community in conjunction with the Advertising Agency Association of Alberta. It was a very open process, not just in the contracting itself but in the process of developing the process. So there was open process on the process. It has resulted in a very satisfactory ability for agencies to get those bids in on those contracts. This whole process continues to be replicated, either in whole or in part, by other jurisdictions, so clearly this is a system that not only works

well but is seen as working well, and that's very important.

Basically, it goes like this. Anyone who's listed on the Alberta government's registry of qualified advertising agencies gets notified of competitions as these competitions come forward, and the agencies then compete for the various advertising jobs. Submissions are received from agencies. They're evaluated by a cross-departmental committee that's created for each particular competition. It's important to note also that all through this process the Public Affairs Bureau serves in a consultative role. It does not vote on the agency choice, and any contracts are negotiated between the client department and the selected agency. The service is very direct there.

Members of the committee also should note that each of the 26 agencies included in the government's registry of eligible agencies was required to demonstrate that they had financial solvency and had to have professional credentials before being added to the list. There is a sense of comfort there that the agencies that are on that list have the capability to handle the contract should they indeed receive the award of the contract. By keeping this registry of qualified agencies, combined with a competitive tendering process, that all works to ensure that quality work will be delivered and at the same time offers that open and fair competition process for everyone involved.

Also, a member of the committee asked for information on what steps government takes to ensure that Albertans' priorities are reflected in its plans. Well, I can tell you that we have always maintained a very firm commitment in this particular approach to ensure that Albertans not only have the ability but know that they have the ability for full and meaningful input into the plans and priorities of the government. We realize totally that when all is said and done, we work for the Alberta taxpayer. The taxpayers are our bosses. Albertans have every right to see their needs and priorities reflected in the work that we do on their behalf. The most important thing we can do, I believe, Mr. Chairman, is to ensure that Albertans' priorities are reflected in government programs. That means we need to provide the people we serve with a variety of opportunities to voice their opinions.

4:40

Just to give some examples of major public involvement initiatives in the past year, they include the Children's Forum, the health summit, the justice summit, and the aging summit. I know that members opposite, many of whom attended any number of these summits, know full well the degree of openness and inclusiveness that went into the preparation of these particular summits, the incredible amount of input that was received and validated before reports were made. So extreme care is taken to make sure that a good and healthy cross-section of Albertans' views are involved in all of our policy development. Also, the information and the feedback options are there for everybody to see, as you know, when the reports are printed. All the attendees, who had input, and what was done and what was said are all reported to Albertans.

Last year's summary of government public involvement initiatives is very significant, and I know that members opposite would want to congratulate the government on just how widespread these were. The report shows that more than 800,000 Albertans participated in at least one of these consultation events with the government. Eight hundred thousand Albertans. I'll just say that one more time, because I don't know if the full impact of that was significantly noted by members opposite. That was 800,000 Albertans who participated in any number of these events. I don't think there's another province that could match that in terms of participatory democracy and citizen initiative in terms of policymaking.

That would break down into some 30,000 Albertans who attended nearly 1,200 meetings, hearings, and workshops and another 116,000

oral and written submissions that were provided at public hearings and meetings. Last year some 770,000 Albertans also used government information lines to express their opinions. Think of that.

AN HON. MEMBER: How many?

MR. DAY: I'm glad you asked how many. Hon. member, 770,000 Albertans used government information lines to express their opinions. That is almost three-quarters of a million people using the access to those lines.

Of course, there are other ways in which public consultation happens. That's listed in the report, including public meetings held around the province to hear what Albertans had to say about a variety of issues, including taxes. We listened to what they had to say and acted on that feedback. The result, of course, is the new tax plan, backed by a firm commitment to keeping Alberta's taxes low, something that's near and dear to my heart and, I know, to the hearts of all my colleagues.

If you look at last year's public consultation report, you can see that these opportunities offered to Albertans dealt with a wide range of topics from several ministries across government. You can see that those public consultation opportunities spanned the province geographically, from one end of the province to the other, east to west, north to south, with roundtables and consultations in every corner of this province.

The stats for '99 will be available around the coming fiscal year-end, and I'm sure members of the committee will see continued opportunities for public consultation as well as the continued high levels of participation across the province. Albertans know what they want, they know how to get their views across, they know how to speak to their government, and those opportunities are made available. I think that's why we continue to be seen as having one of the most open processes of policy development in government, as one of the most responsive governments if not the most responsive government in the country. That's all a trademark of how the Premier listens and involves Albertans in these processes and insists that these processes be open.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I hope that I've been able to answer many of the members' questions.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. At this time in the Committee of Supply on Executive Council I have just a few questions. I have three specifically.

Mr. Chairman, I have, like others, very grave concerns regarding the government's plan to outsource many of the jobs in the public service, whether it be in technology, finance, human resources. I'm talking about the Alberta Corporate Service Centre and what's going to happen here. I've been given assurances that there are going to be no layoffs, but at this present time I'm not buying that.

I have specifically these questions. The first one is: what is the current cost to the Alberta government of providing the transactions that have occurred to date for the Alberta Corporate Service Centre? The cost savings target, I understand, is 20 percent over three years, but what exactly is the amount of money that is determined to be saved here? What amount of taxpayers' money is being saved?

Mr. Chairman, my second question is: will outsourced contracts with service providers be publicly tendered to ensure that they will be awarded in a selection process that is independent? If that question could be addressed, I would be grateful.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

My third question is: how much public money was spent on the Pricewaterhouse consulting fee for the Alberta Corporate Service Centre, and what recommendations will be implemented as a result of the funds spent?

At this time, Madam Chairman, that is the extent of my questioning, but I believe they're very important questions for not only the stability but also the future of Alberta's public service.

I shall cede the floor to my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, who has many questions to ask. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. First of all, I want to thank the Treasurer for being with us, because I know that he has some other things on his mind. It's good of him to be here when the Premier couldn't be. I also want to thank him for reading those notes.

A couple of comments, first of all, on the Treasurer's response to the earlier part of this budget examination process. He talked about the million dollar increase in the budget, most of it going to the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* project, and we did talk about that before. Some of that is for salary increases. I'm curious to know how much of that is for out-of-scope positions versus union positions. I've had some comments from some folks in the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees who tell me that they're being treated relatively unfairly compared to their non-union bosses and managers, so I'd just be curious to know what's going on in the department of Executive Council.

Before I go much further, Madam Chairman, I'd like to acknowledge as well the presence in the gallery of so many of the staff of Executive Council, from the deputy minister on down. They were here with us the other night as well, and we appreciated their presence there. It's nice to know that at least somebody is listening in the galleries, taking the notes so that we can get some responses to some of our questions.

The point made about the 3 cents per Albertan for the television broadcast is a curious one. I'm aware of a public broadcaster that reaches just about every home in Alberta and would have provided that broadcast for zero cents per Albertan. While the Treasurer was making the point about what democracy costs and isn't that an affordable rate, I know this Treasurer's penchant for squeezing a penny. I know that what he would want to do is not spend any more of Alberta taxpayers' money than they've already contributed through their federal taxes to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

If we were really looking at the most cost-efficient way for Albertans to hear from their Premier through the medium of television, of course it would have been using that public broadcaster. I can only suggest that the reason why the government would choose to spend tax money as opposed to taking advantage of the money that Albertans have already contributed to the CBC is, of course, because of the CBC's policy of giving equal time to other political parties. That's really a shame, particularly in context of the Treasurer's comments that this was all in the name of democracy. It seems to me that the most democratic thing to do would have been to go for these equal-time broadcasts. But, Madam Chairman, water under the bridge. These arguments have been raised before, and of course the government, despite its protestations that it's open and listens, absolutely turns a blind eye and a deaf ear to these matters.

4:50

Now, the access to the RITE system. I have to say that I've used the RITE system many times. I find it to be a pretty reliable system. I think some good-quality decisions have been made in terms of the technology that's in place and the way it's being managed. It is an impressive track record that they have in terms of call volume. The projection of dealing with over 6 million calls in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2000, is staggering when you think about the number of calls per day that that would boil down to. My question, though, to the Premier through the Treasurer is: how many of the volume of calls have to do with people calling in to express a particular concern about a government initiative versus how many are calls that are simply trying to get the telephone number to a registry agent in their community or something to that effect? It seems to me that to make those numbers more meaningful, we'd have to make a distinction between those calls which are coming in commenting on government policy versus those calls which are seeking information about access to a government service.

While we're talking about government policy, I do note that the Treasurer spent some portion of his comments talking about the consultation process which involved Albertans in summits and talked about that being a hallmark of how open and accountable this government is and how it's willing to receive input. My concern about that is that many of these events are highly controlled, highly orchestrated. In many of the events panelists are handpicked. The presentations are choreographed down to the last minute. Even the guest list and who it's open to is often highly massaged, and then the opportunities for discussion and debate around ideas that aren't scripted are curtailed. So I would like to know if this is in fact something that's happening out of Executive Council or if it's happening through Community Development.

I'm a little bit confused. I know that in this latest round of meetings dealing with Bill 11, the meetings held by what the Premier dubbed truth squads, it seems that there are professional facilitators who have been engaged to run these meetings. My understanding is that these facilitators come from the Department of Community Development. I would like to know whether or not Executive Council is a client of Community Development or the other way around and exactly who it is that's paying for these professional meeting managers at these so-called truth squad sessions. My report back from the latest one in St. Albert is chilling to me because it really talked about a meeting that was so tightly orchestrated that people apparently weren't even allowed to hold the microphone on their own, that there was some facilitator who would hold the microphone up to somebody. I guess if they said the wrong word, the microphone would just be yanked away. Of course, that's a really chilling experience.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, the chair would like to ask what this has to do with the reporting of Executive Council.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I think you could check the Blues to understand the connection with the question I raised, which is: is Community Development a client of Executive Council or the other way around? With these facilitators that go to these meetings – I was using that one as an example. So I think it's a pretty clear direction.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Let's move on.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you for your advice.

Now, these facilitators of course do a very good job, and I'm not for a minute suggesting that they don't. In fact, I'm so impressed by

the job that these paid public employees do, I would like to ask the Treasurer to ask the Premier on my behalf whether or not Executive Council would be willing to make a budget available to any Member of the Legislative Assembly so that they could use the same services of the same government employees doing facilitation at public meetings.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Use your own budget.

MR. SAPERS: The Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations just said – and I'm sure she meant to say it through the chair – to use your own budget.

Well, the point is, of course, that this is a departmental budget, which is the budget of a government department which is supposed to act on behalf of all Albertans, all taxpayers, versus caucus or party budgets, which do caucus or party business. So if the government of Alberta is paying for private members such as the Member for St. Albert to have these paid facilitators organize their meetings, then of course they should make the same budget and the same paid facilitators available to any private member if they need them to organize their meetings. I would like to know whether or not those dollars are built into this budget.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair would think that that type of discussion is for Public Accounts. You're now talking about current. Right now we are dealing with what is in this document here as far as reporting.

Now, let's move on.

MR. SAPERS: Do these interruptions come off my time? I would hope they don't.

Another number that the Treasurer used had to do with 770,000 Albertans, over three-quarters of a million, who provided input to the government on, I believe he said, policy matters or matters of public concern. Now, I don't know whether in fact it's 770,000 different Albertans or 77,000 calling in a thousand times or what it was in terms of his numbers. What I'd like is some clarification from the Treasurer as to the breakdown of that number of 770,000. On what matters did Albertans contact Executive Council or the Premier's office? Were they providing advice, and if they were, was the advice tabulated in some way? Is there a record or a logbook someplace that the government has which says that this many Albertans phoned in and provided us this advice? For example, on Bill 11 or on any other matter of public policy we've had 770,000 telephone calls, and this is how many said that they liked it and this is how many said that they don't.

If the Treasurer is going to use numbers like 770,000 Albertans calling in and providing advice, I think he has a responsibility to tell us what that number means, to put it into context. Otherwise it becomes very much an irrelevancy, and I know that the Treasurer does not want to be irrelevant to the provincial Legislature. Well, then again, Madam Chairman, maybe he does.

Now, during the earlier discussion on Executive Council I raised a number of questions to the Premier that had to do with performance measures, and not one of those questions was answered. I asked some questions about the form of the performance measures in his business plan. Not one of those questions was answered. I asked some questions about some new performance measures on satisfaction to do with correspondence, and his response was: well, that hon. member doesn't understand the volume of correspondence that we receive. Well, I would argue with the Premier. I think that I do. Not only would my comments from the last time we were dealing with this department reflect that understanding, but also

most Albertans of course tend to copy members of the opposition when they're writing letters of concern to the Premier. I think we have a pretty fair idea of the volume, but the measure wasn't one to describe volume. The measure was one to describe satisfaction. Albertans really don't like getting back those rather limited form letters that say: thank you for your letter; I'll advise the Premier. When Albertans sit down and take the time to provide their analysis to the government, they expect a little fairer treatment than that.

The second measure that I asked about was compliance with freedom of information requests. Not a peep from the government in terms of a response in terms of developing a performance measure from Executive Council along those lines.

I had also asked about a measure that would determine the degree to which the government has been successful in defending public institutions such as our advanced education system, our K to 12 public education system, our public health care system, our judicial system, our criminal justice process, and in fact this Legislative Assembly, specific performance measures that would look at what the government has done or not done to protect these public institutions. Of course, no response to that measure whatsoever. This is particularly troubling, because today we heard that the Premier said the truth about Bill 11 is in the law, yet we know that when laws become inconvenient, this government simply changes them. We had the example most recently with the Fiscal Responsibility Act, where the government recognized that they had made a huge error, so they simply rewrote the law to suit them at the time.

5:00

Now it also asks for the Executive Council to develop a performance measure dealing with truth and accuracy or a truth and accuracy scale in terms of their advertising. I had used the example of a newspaper ad, and I think it was at that point, Madam Chairman, that I got cut off. I had run out of time. You know, this was an ad in the *Edmonton Examiner* from the middle of February, and it talked about a number of issues including health care and taxation, and it would lead Albertans to believe that many things had in fact become law that hadn't been, whether it had to do with the \$500 million endowment for the science and engineering foundation or it had to do with Bill 11 or it had to do with the flat tax strategy. So I'm very concerned when the government pays for advertising using tax dollars and the ads are misleading and false, because the ads are to bring you to a conclusion that something has happened that hasn't.

The word for that kind of advertising is propaganda, and I don't think the taxpayers should be forced to pay for what would be clearly seen as political partisan propaganda. If the Progressive Conservative Party wants to put out their propaganda, let them, and let them pay for it with their own funds. I don't think taxpayers should have to pay for that propaganda.

Another issue that the Treasurer did mention. He talked about the planning and priorities of government and the good track record they have. I guess I won't reread into the record all of the comments that I have made at other times about the Auditor General's concern about the mismatch in the business plans between performance measures and outcomes or tying outcomes to dollars spent, et cetera, but I will note that this government does not have a great track record when it comes to meeting its own performance measures. Remember, I'm not talking about performance measures that were imposed by any outside authority. I'm talking about performance measures developed by government departments, many of the performance measures very superficial, and even at that, I believe that last year this government missed over 120 of their own performance measures. So I don't think that's anything to brag about, and I was kind of surprised to hear the Treasurer raise it.

A couple of other thoughts that I have that I wish the Treasurer

would reflect on. Where exactly in this Executive Council budget, particularly when it relates to the Public Affairs Bureau, or perhaps it's in the Corporate Service Centre, are we going to find the money for the continuing campaign around Bill 11? For example, we know that Learning has given up some of its time so that a debate can be televised on Bill 11, and the Premier announced today that that debate was going to be on April 4. So I'm assuming that's going to be Tuesday night, April 4, and I understand it's a three-hour chunk of time. Now, since that time was already paid for by Learning, does that mean it's never going to show up in the accounting of all the money that was spent on the government's campaign to try to sell Bill 11? I would like to know, for example, where the continuing newspaper ad campaign is going to be paid from, out of what budget.

The Premier has also said that he's anticipating many amendments, and in fact I believe some of these amendments are going to be introduced by the government right off the bat, probably when second reading commences. So this means the government has already come to the conclusion that the bill is deeply flawed and must be rescued by some amendments. I'd be curious to know which sections of the bill the government has already found are flawed. I think Albertans would like to know that as well.

More importantly, you know, this householder that went out even with the typo to a million households apparently – at least that's what the government has claimed – are they going to send out another million with the corrections, with the amendments? [Mr. Sapers' speaking time expired.] I'll come back and finish my thoughts later, Madam Chairman.

MR. DAY: I'll be brief, Madam Chairman. There were a number of questions that were asked, and we will follow up on those, as is the habit of this government to respond to the questions. To the member for way out there in Edmonton-Gold Bar, just a comment you made in terms of the shared services and our corporate services. The goal and the aim there is to achieve the administrative efficiencies, and as the member quite rightly noted, there hasn't been a stated goal to reduce jobs.

But I do want to say something. The member reflects a view which, of course, is not necessarily shared by those who understand the principles of limited government. When you stand up and demand that all jobs be preserved, it shows a line of thinking actually from another century. If you want to see jobs preserved, you create opportunities. You don't blindly stand and say: jobs will be preserved in this one particular area. Now, I'm saying and I'm making it very clear: the goal of the corporate registries and shared services is not to reduce personnel; it's to achieve and maximize efficiencies.

I would remind the member that since 1993 the goal of this government has been to create opportunities for all citizens, and here we are with record-low unemployment rates, the lowest ever seen. I can't remember in Edmonton-Gold Bar where the member has ever seen unemployment rates as low as they are right now. That's because we pursue a policy of creating opportunities outside of government, opportunities to which the rest of the country is responding by moving here. Even the opportunities that have been created are so incredible that the huge migration from other provinces is in fact being absorbed. I'd like the member to keep that in mind when he just blindly is ideologically spouting forth a 19th century view. We've left the 20th century. We're into the 21st, and we're showing how we care for people: by creating opportunities. People respond, and we will continue to have the lowest unemployment rate if we continue to follow those very valid policies.

On the issue related to the consultations. Again, it must be difficult for the members across to absorb good news, because the

huge level of involvement by Albertans in the consultation process that has been set up and guided by the Public Affairs Bureau and others – I just have to take issue with the comments that these meetings are somehow scripted and there are certain registered lists. I'm sure the member has attended. I have attended and watched the development in the health summits, certainly the Children's Forum, and the reports around the province and consultation on issues related to seniors and the aging. I have attended those, and I have seen citizens walk up, register, and take part in very significant discussion, and they do not leave those meetings saying these were scripted. So I want to congratulate the different areas of government, the Public Affairs Bureau and others, who have organized these meetings and made sure that everybody has input. They are not scripted. I can tell you there's a good diversity of views, and I want to make that very clear.

I would also like clarification from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, because I was listening very carefully, and I heard him reflect that caucus budgets are used for caucus business and party business. I would ask him just to check *Hansard* because that, of course, would be quite a violation of fiscal policy, and that should just be included.

So, again, to the members opposite, we always value their input. Certainly their response is not scripted, and we do take it into account very carefully. The criticisms that we get we are open to because good criticism makes for even better processes. Our commitment through the Public Affairs Bureau and the other groups and organizations within government that seek the opinion of Albertans is to continue to maintain the highest standards in this nation for policy development and public involvement, and we will do so, taking in the valid criticisms that we have heard from members opposite.

That concludes my remarks today, Madam Chairman.

5:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: According to practice and precedent, I will now call the question. [interjection] Excuse me, hon. member. Please sit down. [interjection] Edmonton-Glenora and Edmonton-Norwood, please sit down. [interjections] I said: according to practice. [interjection] Sit down. Sit down.

According to what has been done to date in dealing with Committee of Supply and reporting, this is what we are doing. We have a letter, that we have been using for the last several reporting sessions, that was signed by House leaders, and this is what the chair . . .

MR. SAPERS: Not on reporting.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, hon. member, it is on reporting.

MR. DICKSON: Point of order, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Point of Order

Explanation of Chairman's Ruling

MR. DICKSON: This would be in the nature of an item under Standing Order 13(2) probably. So that we're sure we're talking about the same agreement, I've got copies of House leader agreements here. Perhaps you'd be good enough to reference the particular one you're referring to dealing with the report back and the time limits.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The one I am referring to: the subject

is Committee of Supply reporting. The date is May 6, 1997. It was between the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, the then leader of the New Democrats, and the Government House Leader was the hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, if I might. If you'd indulge me on this one, I don't have a copy of the agreement. Would it be possible just to briefly read the reference that refers to the report back? I don't have that copy with me.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'll tell you what, hon. member. Since I am in the chair, I'm going to call the question. I will make a copy of this and then you can look at it after and you can deal with the appropriate House leaders. All right?

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair has made a decision here. [interjections] Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, this is what we have been following to date, and this is what this chair as well as the Chairman of Committees has been following to date without incident.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, just further to 13(2) then. I want to be clear whether this is stipulated in the agreement you cited or whether we're referring to what you understand to be the practice.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It is the practice, hon. member.

MR. DICKSON: It's not, I take it then, pursuant to the terms of an agreement which is subsisting and in effect right now. Is that accurate, Madam Chairman?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It is basically the agreement that the people of the day, not the time, agreed to. We have nothing else except what is in Standing Orders, but we have been using this.

MR. SAPERS: But three years ago – it doesn't carry through.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, we used this last year. [interjections]

It is the chair's understanding that Standing Orders still prevail. The chair and the Chairman of Committees have been following this particular letter, but in essence Standing Orders do prevail. According to the practice we've been using last year and have been using recently, this is what we have been going on. You can ignore this under Standing Orders, and you continue to speak if you so desire.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. I appreciate that. The questions that I have are actually just a couple. I wanted to finish off with the point I was making before I ran out of time during my first round. With the government now moving the debate ahead – as I was saying, we're going to be looking at April 4 – what are the government's plans for communicating with Albertans about the amendments? Will that be found in the Public Affairs Bureau budget, or where else are we going to be seeing the expenses recorded for that, if at all?

What's going to happen in terms of the feedback that the provincial government has been receiving? Will there be a report that will be prepared for all Albertans that will reflect the number of those pamphlets that have been returned with the return to sender message on them or the number of e-mails or other messages? I'm assuming that's all work that's going to come in the coming fiscal year. Where are we going to see that expenditure listed? How will we know whether in fact the government has made adequate plans to accommodate this volume of correspondence and feedback they're receiving from Albertans?

I think we should get some answers to these questions, Madam Chairman, prior to any request that we vote on the estimates for Executive Council. Again, I would have to say that this whole process, as evidenced from this last little go-round that we just went through, is a flawed process in terms of examining the government's budget estimates.

I don't think we can rely on agreements that were particular to a point in time in the life of this Assembly without ensuring that they are revisited at every opportunity. The way this process works is that it's based on the fact that the opposition has every opportunity to ask every question it has regarding government's plans to spend taxpayers' dollars. I don't think that's asking too much, to use our time in this Assembly so that we can all together, all 83 of us, account to the taxpayers who sent us here to represent their best interests.

I'm looking forward to responses from the government before we are asked to provide our final approval for these spending estimates, and I will now yield the floor to any other member that has some questions on Executive Council.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just have a couple of questions in relation to this. I note that the hon. Treasurer spoke about the outsourcing of some 400 or 500 administrative service folks for the shared services program and that he is looking for efficiencies.

You know, we've discussed the Public Affairs Bureau a lot during this particular session, and it comes to mind, Mr. Treasurer, that you have millions of dollars going into that. The Public Affairs Bureau is not playing the role they should be playing. In fact, I'm wondering when it is that you're going to go to outsourcing in the Public Affairs Bureau and maybe come back with some nonpartisan type contracts for those people in higher levels within the Premier's office and those kinds of things.

You know, for the most part the folks I know do a very good job, but to talk about the Public Affairs Bureau as being a nonpartisan or unbiased group of people – they're doing a job where as far as I'm concerned they should be focusing on government issues, not political issues. Often they're told exactly the opposite, and we know that from folks we know who work in the Public Affairs Bureau.

5:20

I'm just interested, Mr. Treasurer, if there is a plan to outsource all of those folks too. Or are you going to keep them? And what about the Community Development people who do all these functions? You know, they were at the function that the hon. Member for St. Albert had last night. There they were doing their job at what essentially is a political function. So my question is: why are those people there? Why are they being drawn into the politics? If you're looking at outsourcing, are you going to get rid of those folks? They're at every summit you have.

When are you going to stop, Mr. Treasurer? When are you going to decide that – you get rid of all your employees, and you've reached your efficiencies, and nobody can do the job. You know, people are already overworked within this organization. Outsourcing more people is not the answer. It's not the answer, Mr. Treasurer. It's looking for efficiencies within, being cost-effective within. It's not getting rid of a bunch of folks that know the jobs they're doing. How is that going to impact – I guess that's my question. By outsourcing all these folks, how is that going to impact your new images boondoggle, the program that's cost this government way more money than it should have?

Those are the very folks that do the inputting on that program. Those are the very folks that you have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars training, Mr. Treasurer. How are you going to recoup those costs? Who's going to do the work required under that program? If you're looking for efficiencies, explain that to me if you could. Explain to me why it's okay for one area to be outsourced, but it isn't okay to outsource the other that seems to serve the purpose of the government. Where's the equality in that?

Those are my questions. I'd be interested in hearing back from the Treasurer.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Seeing no speakers, the chair will now call the question. We are dealing with Executive Council. After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Executive Council, are you ready for the vote.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$15,298,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$250,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Opposed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Carried.

MR. DAY: I move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, for the following department.

Executive Council: operating expense, \$15,298,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$250,000.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In view of the hour I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn and then reconvene this evening at 8 in Committee of Supply.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, does the Assembly agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Opposed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Carried. We stand adjourned until 8 o'clock tonight, when we'll reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:27 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 21, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/03/21

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the committee to order. This evening in Committee of Supply we have designated subcommittees to report, and I presume we will continue with the traditional 20, 20, and 5.

HON. MEMBER: Agreed.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Peace River will start off this evening's deliberations, followed Calgary-Buffalo.

Human Resources and Employment

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You caught me a little unawares. I wasn't aware that I was first up to bat.

I'm pleased to report that the designated supply subcommittee on human resources met on the morning of March 13 to review the business plan and the budget estimates of the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment. The minister started out the meeting with an overview of the new people-and-workplace department and provided a summary of the 1999-2000 estimates. The ministry's 2000-2001 budget is increasing by \$43 million, or 4.3 percent, over the 1999-2000 forecast of \$992 million. This increase provides Albertans with the quality programs and services they need to help them lead more productive and fulfilling lives.

Our training programs and initiatives are just some of the ways we can help Albertans achieve their goals. By providing supports for independence clients with basic foundation skills programs and other work experience programs, more Albertans are working.

The ministry's budget review covered each of the major program areas of the ministry, and in particular the minister highlighted various program increases including a significant increase in funding for the AISH program, our training and employment support programs, child health benefit programs, workplace service programs, and shelters for homeless adults. The minister also gave a brief overview of the Labour Relations Board and the personnel administration office.

The opposition subcommittee members were provided with two hours to ask questions and receive answers from the minister, and the government subcommittee members were allocated the remaining time. There were numerous questions asked by opposition members. A significant number of these questions related to the ministry's programs as well as specific questions covering the budget estimates.

The minister did a commendable job answering the questions given the very large number and the long list of questions that were asked by the opposition. The minister also provided explanations of the ministry's programs and plans to meet the various needs and expectations of Albertans. The minister committed to review the numerous questions and to provide written answers to any of the budget and business plan related questions that were not answered during the meeting.

I'd like to thank all the members of the subcommittee of supply for their contributions to the review. I particularly want to commend the members of the opposition for agreeing to a format that made the dialogue, although a little bit informal, more beneficial – it tended

to be more of a discussion debate, allowing, I think, a maximum number of questions – and the minister for also participating in this format. I think it was a pleasant alternative to some of the confrontational types of questions and answers that we have seen from time to time. I think it certainly did provide the maximum amount of opportunity for questions. The members of the government obviously have opportunities at other times, such as through standing policy committee discussions and caucus, so allocating a little extra time to the opposition I think was beneficial.

I believe that should pretty much cover it, Mr. Chairman. With that, I'll take my place and let those others who are designated to speak take their turn.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Just so you know, what the opposition proposes to do tonight: I have a few comments, and then we're bringing in our colleague from Edmonton-Manning, who is going to finish up the time we've got.

A couple of things I want to raise straight off. Mr. Chairman, when you look at the ministry business plan summary on page 248, we see the highlight that "the Supports for Independence budget reflects the continued success of welfare reforms and reduced caseloads." Calgary-Buffalo has over 30,000 residents, but 18,000 of them live in low-income households, which is a huge number. Many of these are seniors. Many of them are single mothers. A significant number of these people at one time or another require supports for independence. Calgary also happens to be the tightest rental market in the entire province.

I see that there's provision for additional money for medical and dental in terms of people on supports for independence. What I have not seen is something that's been talked about certainly in the last two years as the population pressures have brought so much difficulty to the business of finding safe, affordable accommodation. I want to know what concrete plans this government has in the forthcoming budget year to address the fact that it makes no sense to give the same supports for independence cheque to that mother with two young children in downtown Calgary as it does to somebody in Drumheller.

This is not a new issue by any means, but I recall that at least in perhaps the last two years opposition members have challenged the government to recognize that needs are different in different parts of the province, and what that requires is some flexibility in terms of the supports for independence program. I'm extremely disappointed and I know that many of my constituents will be even more disappointed to see that there's no provision for that, at least that I can see, in the budget. Now, I wasn't a member of the panel for the designated subcommittee of supply. Maybe that was addressed. I've reviewed the *Hansard* from that, and frankly I can't see it having been raised and answered.

MR. DOERKSEN: *Hansard* must have missed it.

MR. DICKSON: The suggestion of my colleague from Red Deer-South is that *Hansard* must have missed it. *Hansard* misses nothing, Mr. Chairman. I know how scrupulous those people are. Would that the provincial cabinet were as thorough as the men and women responsible for churning out *Hansard* on a daily basis. We'd all be further ahead. But that's another matter. I'm not trying to curry favour just so my name is spelled correctly in this evening's proceedings.

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, that's a particular concern.

We have an increase of "\$500,000 to \$10 million to accommodate

an increased demand for beds” in the homeless adults budget. There’s some excellent work being done by the Calgary Homeless Foundation, certainly supported by the Member for Calgary-Bow and Art Smith and John Currie, all of that group of that foundation, and they’re looking at a multiple initiative strategy in terms of dealing with people who are presently homeless and a much larger population who are at risk of being homeless.

8:10

What I need to hear from this minister is how he’s tying in his work around homeless adult shelters with the excellent work that’s being done by the Calgary Homeless Foundation. You see, I’ve had the opportunity to go McDougall Centre. Yes, Mr. Chairman, occasionally I manage to sneak in the door. I put on my nose and fake glasses and moustache, and they think I’m a government MLA. I run by the security people, and I get access to Government House South.

I remember going there when Claudette Bradshaw, the federal Minister of Labour and the minister responsible for homelessness, came and made a presentation. What struck me – and there may be members here who may have a contrary view – is that the federal government has finally got the message in terms of the homeless crisis in Canada. We’re starting to see some creativity, some flexibility in terms of their approach.

I think I’ve asked this question before, maybe of other ministers. I need to see how this is knitting together, because we have some opportunity. I’d like to see government match the Calgary Homeless Foundation in terms of creativity, in terms of energy, in terms of resourcefulness. If that could be done, we’d come as close to solving the homeless and those at risk of being homeless crisis as probably I could ever imagine. So I’m interested in finding out about that.

The other issue I’m interested in finding out about – I get real confused in terms of how we are dealing with persons with developmental disabilities. This is an area I’ve been particularly interested in. The responsibility for developmental disabilities has been split in at least three different directions. The Minister of Health and Wellness and his associate minister have got a chunk of that. The associate minister just finished producing, incidentally, a very useful report, and I congratulate him on actually getting the message. I went to some of those meetings. So that’s good. But we have sort of taken responsibility and parceled it out.

One of the ironies I find, Mr. Chairman, is that there’s so much talk about co-ordination, consolidation, efficiency, yet as we saw the other day with the whole area of information technology and access to information, we then sort of bifurcate. What’s the counterpart of bifurcate if you’ve got three splits? Trifurcate? Well, whatever the word is, we’ve got responsibility split off in too many areas.

I see support to dependent adult agencies, line 7.0.2. Is this when the VRRRI or some of those agencies in Calgary or Edmonton receive funding to be able to provide certain kinds of school services, job linkup things? I assume that’s coming through program 7, supports to dependent adults. I’m assuming that’s where that is going.

There have been lots of problems, Mr. Chairman, in this area. We’ve got the report from the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. I have to understand how this is being organized. You’ve got three different departments with some responsibility. You’ve got the Department of Children’s Services dealing with children with developmental disabilities, you’ve got the Minister of Health and Wellness dealing with some PDD clients over 18, and then we’ve got the agencies. If I understand it correctly, the agencies, the PDD agencies, fall under the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. If I’ve got that wrong . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: You’re not wrong.

MR. DICKSON: Okay.

What I have to understand then is – and it’s a basic question, but as I say, if the minister will bear with me, I wasn’t part of that subcommittee. Program 7.0.2, support to dependent adult agencies, I take it is dealing with agencies that provide services to PDD adult clients.

MR. DUNFORD: We don’t have a program 7. Are you on health? You need to be on human resources.

MR. DICKSON: Human Resources and Employment. I’m looking at page 244 of the 2000-2001 budget book, line 7.0.2.

MR. DUNFORD: That’s the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

MR. DICKSON: Okay. I understand, Mr. Chairman, that this isn’t PDD clients at all. Okay. So all of that then is between the Department of Children’s Services and the Department of Health and Wellness. Okay. Well, that’s helpful. I appreciate the clarification.

Now, the other item I wanted to ask appears in *Hansard* when the DSS committee was under way. This would be page 23 from March 13, 2000. There’s a reference there that “our partnership program, regulatory enforcement, and regulatory review contribute to our success.” Well, I wonder, Mr. Chairman, if the minister will provide us with a detailed schedule of the regulations reviewed in the last fiscal year by the regulatory enforcement mechanism and the regulatory review committee or task force, whatever it’s called, and provide us with advice as to the number of regulations that have been put forward by a department and not accepted by this regulatory review process. I know initially it was focused on that body of regulations. We make about 700 to 800 regulations a year in this province, and I’m not even talking ministerial orders. I know that the Member for Peace River chaired that committee. I had been dealing with past regulations, but I assume that also part of what they do is deal with ongoing regulations.

It’s a big mystery to me, Mr. Chairman – and that may be just because I’m not real swift – just what regulations are being reviewed. One of my concerns is how rigorous the scrutiny has been of regulations. I need some measure to know how many times this regulatory review scheme rejects regulations, finds regulations to be excessive, unreasonable, unnecessary, inefficient. Without that, how do we have any way of knowing whether this process is achieving anything useful at all? It’s an exercise up there in the ether world. I think what Albertans want to see is less inappropriate red tape, but I think they’re anxious to get that done.

I have some other questions, Mr. Chairman, but I know I have a colleague that wants some time, and time is short. Thanks for the opportunity to ask these questions and raise these concerns.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning in these almost seven minutes remaining.

MR. GIBBONS: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I did sit in for a brief while in your committee, and I appreciate a lot of the answers you did give us and what I’ve been reading in *Hansard*, but a few things I wanted to point out and ask about. I do understand it’s a newly created department, and you emphasized it as a newly created people-and-workplace department. Around the outlook for Alberta looking bright for the next few years – you put

it in terms of having to wear welding goggles – I hope to see a business plan. I would like to see something like I've been emphasizing in Infrastructure and Municipal Affairs, which is three to five years so we can actually build on something over the next few years. With this new department and everything coming together within your new department and listening to you and reading what you put in *Hansard*, I think it might be going somewhere.

8:20

One of the questions I do have on this particular one is referring to the performance measure on the "percentage of participants employed post-intervention." What does the department consider to be "employed"? What is considered to be appropriate contact to determine the employment status? How did the department determine that the projected caseload for all four main areas – supports for independence, AISH, widows' pension, and the Alberta child benefit – come together?

Now, looking under the training program, I did emphasize a few things that I would like to see around apprenticeship. Hopefully it will be brought up under Learning. But training programs, from what you're saying in *Hansard*, are a big part of what your department is about. So I do hope there is some cohesion between the silos of your deputy ministers and working together on this particular item and emphasizing that if we're going to proceed into this new millennium, with the booms that we had in the 1970s that I worked through – we didn't think there was ever going to be an end to it, that the streets were paved with gold. Most people didn't learn how to budget for the next 10 years afterwards. But it's a fact that we have to train our young people and get them into the trade programs that I came out of, anywhere from welding, machinists, sheet metal, electrical. We're interested in actually how fast we're going to be producing some of our own tradespeople, our own young Albertans that are coming out of our schools.

Another comment you made was that "Overall our employment and training initiatives are showing a great return on dollars invested." This is very interesting, to the point that I'm going to put a couple of points on record on this one. What accounts for the anticipated increase of 36.9 percent in the budget for program delivery of benefits for people not expected to work? Are there additional staff that are going to be hired on this particular item?

Another item. "Today there are greater opportunities for Albertans to find employment because of our growing and booming economy" is what the minister has said. On this particular one I have a question. Given that the first two major budget areas are showing an increase in the funding for program delivery, why is there an anticipated decrease of 31.3 percent in the program delivery area for training and employment support? Given the focus of this government on the employment of persons receiving living assistance, why is there an anticipated decrease?

The AISH program. This is one that through our constituency office we deal with quite a bit, just due to the makeup of portions of our constituency and also the fact that Alberta Hospital is within the boundaries and it's the closest residential area to the Alberta hospital. One thing you mentioned was that "We think this will show tremendous increases in part-time employment." Well, I do see that. A see a lot of our restaurants hiring people, but I do hope that in terms of employment initiatives, between the AISH funding and the dollars and cents that are coming from working part-time, it isn't a detriment to some of the people there. That's a big concern that I do get in phone calls.

I'm very supportive of people on AISH. I'm very supportive as they call in stressing that it's better for them to be out there working part-time instead of sitting around wondering where the rest of their

lives is going to be going. I'd like to ask the question: what percentage of the amount of funding is being allocated for employment initiatives for Albertans with disabilities?

Now, the mentally ill. You can tell by the questions I do ask in the House around the fact that a full moon – I never did understand it until after getting elected, but it is a very big part of life in our office. With the very little bit of funding that we have for a constituency office for people having offices in big cities and the costs of operating, two people would be very essential in an office like my own when it came time for the full moon to come around.

Now we have a new ministry out there around children's services. This is a ministry that is way overdue. It was timely considering what has happened in the world, in North America, and as close to us as southern Alberta last year.

It is so important that I do hope that there's another case where your deputy ministers take their two silos and work together there too. On this particular one I have a question that I'd like to pose right now and see if we can get an answer later. How many additional clients will be served to justify the 24 percent increase in funding of Youth Connections?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Human Resources and Employment for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$1,034,970,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall this vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Children's Services

THE CHAIRMAN: The place of the chair will be taken by the Minister of Children's Services. Hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the interest of brevity, we have had a full accounting for the Department of Children's Services and met on Monday, March 20, and agreed to report here that the designated subcommittee has agreed to affirm what was presented and provide it for you here this evening.

Just briefly, we have three divisions in the newly restructured Children's Services, with provincial programs ranging from adoption services, day care staff qualifications, and the children's initiative, ever expanding, to family and community support services.

Predominately, Mr. Chairman, we address children's issues through the child and family services authorities, who, though newly set up, are established to set and monitor standards at the local level. The budget for 2000-2001 is \$537 million, including \$485 million for direct services for children and families. The role of the authorities had been discussed at the presentation, and the role of the First Nations delivery system was also highlighted.

We have 2,082 staff in Children's Services in direct delivery, along with approximately 3,000 contract workers and other ancillary contracts dealing with support systems. Our most predominate concern this year is our review of the child welfare caseload. As of December 31, 1999, we have 12,922 children receiving protective services.

Mr. Chairman, sometime in the next couple of months we will respond to the Children's Forum and the Task Force on Children at Risk, which has been highlighted as a dominant public theme in the last year. We will also hear ongoing reports from the Youth Secretariat, a newly established part of our ministry which is providing a great strategy in building relationships with needy adolescents.

We would be prepared to answer any questions and will be responding to questions that were raised on staff experience and training, the legal suits and liabilities against the ministry, and vacancy rates in day care, among others.

From my point of view as minister, I thank everyone for their participation on the committee and, with that, would await any further responses that may be required. Thank you.

8:30

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and good evening, Madam Minister. The difficulty here is that the designated supply subcommittee dealing with Children's Services met only yesterday morning, Monday morning. The reality is that we have no *Hansard*. I regret that because I'd like to not waste the minister's time or the House's time by not knowing exactly what's been covered and what's been responded to. Mr. Chairman, you will appreciate that not having been there on Monday and not having the benefit of *Hansard*, I've got to ask the questions that are important from my perspective, so I'll apologize to the House if in fact I'm treading on some ground that's already been covered.

My first question to the minister. Madam Minister, in the event that the Court of Queen's Bench determines that the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act is ultra vires or in fact offends the Charter – I understand that the government is going to vigorously assert the position of the province – in the event that the act is struck down, I'd like to know what contingency plans the provincial government has. Typically, if the court were to find that the Charter was offended by that particular bill, Mr. Chairman, then what normally would happen is that there would be like a suspensive veto. The court would give the provincial Legislature a period of time, six months, a year, whatever, to recast the bill, to make appropriate amendments, whatever.

Now, you know, the last time I looked, we've got about 250 lawyers in this giant law department called the Department of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. DICKSON: Well, other members have questions. That's great to see. It's great to see Calgary MLAs are getting impatient already. It's only 8:34, Mr. Chairman, and we've got a lot more questions to ask yet tonight.

The point, Mr. Chairman, is simply this. I'd like to know what arrangements have been made. To me it would be inexcusable to have the act struck down, if that should happen, and then for the province to have to spend six months or a year deciding what they're going to do. Specifically, since there are a number of young women who are already in the program, if you will, where the jurisdiction has been invoked under the act, it would seem to me that the most important thing would be to make sure that the safety programs and the support for those young women aren't compromised because the government was caught flat footed in the event of that kind of court ruling. So I'm interested in knowing what the contingency plans are.

Now, one of the things that concerned me is in terms of what

happens with child welfare caseloads. There's some core information we need. Would the minister tell us how many children are currently the subject of a support agreement under part 2 of the Child Welfare Act, how many children are subject to a custody agreement under part 2 of the Child Welfare Act, and how many permanent guardianship agreements were entered into in the last fiscal year? For each of these items I'd like to know what's projected by the Department of Children's Services for the 2000-2001 budget year.

I'd like to know how many supervision orders were sought in the last year, how many were granted, and what the expectation is for the next year. I'd like to know how many temporary guardianship orders were sought in the last budget year, how many were granted, and what the expectation is for the next year. In terms of permanent guardianship orders, I'd like to know how many permanent guardianship orders were sought in the last budget year, how many were granted, and what the projection is for next year.

Now, one of the reasons for asking this. The minister, who's writing furiously as I pose the questions, may be muttering under her breath: why would she be asked for this information? Well, part of the thing we can do from this is determine how effectively and efficiently those child and family service authorities are operating. We get to determine whether we're intervening appropriately. It gives us a chance to sort of measure the effectiveness of the system and so on.

I'd like to know how many apprehension orders were sought in the last year, how many were granted, and what the projection is for the next year. I assume that all this stuff has been pulled together, presumably, for the children's summit, and I assume it's there. Some departments produce an annual report. It might be in there. I haven't had the benefit of seeing any of those things, so I don't know if that information exists.

I'd like to know how many restraining orders were granted pursuant to section 28 of the Child Welfare Act, how many were applied for, and what the projection is for the next year. I'd like to know how many secure treatment certificates were sought in the last year, how many were granted, and what's projected for the ensuing budget year.

There is provision in section 46 for search and apprehension orders. How many search and apprehension orders were applied for in the last year, how many were granted, what's the projection, and what's anticipated for 2000-2001?

Under part 5, private guardianships, for the last budget year how many private guardianships were sought, how many were granted, and what's projected for the next budget year?

Now, adoptions. How many adoptions by stepparents were sought in the last year, how many were granted, and what's projected for 2000-2001? We're not talking about stepparent adoptions, so what I'd look for, then, broken out separately would be stepparent adoptions. They may be treated through the adoption bureau, but it's typically a different file and a somewhat different process.

When I first got elected, Mr. Chairman, and came rushing in here to change the world, I remember that one of my pet issues had to do with a baby-adoption pipeline that was going on where children in various U.S. states were born and where the birth mother didn't want the father to be involved. You had people being sent up here, referred by a Los Angeles lawyer to counsel in Calgary, and we were doing adoptions. I mean, it was a really smarmy, distasteful, prejudicial kind of process that we were running in this province, not that the provincial government was doing it. Justice Blair Mason I think had tried to send the strongest possible message to the Legislature. This was about 1993 when that happened.

Now, there were some modifications made, but I guess I'd like to know if that is still a problem. Maybe it's not even a blip on the

horizon. This isn't something I've been following recently, but I'm interested in terms of knowing whether that continues to be an issue, whether the minister is satisfied that we currently have adequate safeguards to make sure that we don't have children being brought up here for adoption purposes, basically to frustrate requirements in a number of U.S. states that natural fathers be given notice of birth. That's of interest to me, and I'd be interested in what the minister has to say about that.

The minister may not have been here earlier, when I was asking some questions about PDD, persons with developmental disabilities. I'm interested in currently how many children there are in this province with identified developmental disabilities.

8:40

The other thing. The minister has been to the Renfrew school in Calgary, and I've had quite a bit to do with a group of parents there. There are a group of children in the province who benefit from a particular educational program that's run at that Renfrew school, and there's been a real issue with fairness in funding. There was a legal challenge. Now, I haven't checked in with this group for a while, and I'm close to running out of time, but my recollection is that there had been some undertakings by this minister. I know the minister, and she gets full marks for working hard and trying to respond to issues as they come to her attention. I remember she came to Calgary and toured the school, I think, and probably met with some of the parents. There was some talk of some additional funding, and I haven't heard what the last chapter on that is. I hope it's positive news. The fact that I haven't heard from any of the parents recently suggests that maybe we made some progress there, and maybe the minister has been able to ameliorate what's been a pretty tough situation for families with those children with some pretty severe disabilities.

I know I've got a colleague who wants to share some of the time, Madam Minister, but I'd just make the observation that the reporting back doesn't work so well when it's less than 48 hours after the designated subcommittee of supply. I think when we originally set this rule up, the notion was that there would be time to ask the questions, time for the department to respond, and then we'd sort of come in and wrap things up.

Those are the comments I wanted to make. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, Madam Minister.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before I call upon the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, would the committee give consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. It's a pleasure to introduce two guests this evening, Cameron and Kyle Gudmundson from west Edmonton. They have come along to be educated in the ways and the processes of this House, and we'd like to extend them a warm welcome and hope they enjoy and learn a little at the same time. Would you please rise.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood to finish off. You have a little over eight and a half minutes.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. It makes me feel good when I see a young

person wearing a DARE T-shirt. It's a program that I support a hundred percent. That young man up there gets an A.

Children's Services (continued)

MS OLSEN: I have a few questions for the minister. Some very serious concerns have come my way recently about the applications to bring a child into the custody of the government. What appears to be happening – and there are matters before the court right now and matters that in fact have been dismissed – is that if there's been an apprehension under section 17 of the Child Welfare Act, if that's occurred, then "an application under subsection (1) shall be heard not more than 10 days after the child is apprehended". Now, what's happening is that it's become 30 days or 40 days, so what judges are doing is dismissing that because the government is breaking their own law. They're saying: look; you were supposed to come before me a maximum of 10 days after the child was apprehended, and you've chosen not to do that for whatever reasons.

My understanding is that many social workers have caseloads so big now because of this increase in child welfare apprehensions that they can't possibly get to court in those days. Now we have kids, vulnerable children, if the issue of guardianship is dismissed, who will go back to the home they are apprehended from. In fact, the government doesn't even think they should be going back there. So you've got a big problem here. There are appeals before the courts. There are all sorts of things happening. Quite frankly, there's going to be a high price to pay when we have another one of those kids who's seriously injured or suffers death at the hands of either a parent or stepparent or whoever it is that they're being apprehended from.

I would urge the minister to look into this right away. This is not something that can wait. This is absolutely urgent. You know, for judges to say "You're breaking your own law" is sending a message to me that there aren't enough people doing the work and that they cannot handle the caseloads they have. It's not the fault of the social worker; it's the fault of the system. It's the issue of not having enough people to deal with those cases. So if they can get those ones flagged, if they're TGOs or if they're going for permanent guardianship orders, then they must come to the top of the line. They must be in that court before 10 days. I urge the minister please to deal with that.

In terms of child welfare cases, I brought this up at the Justice budget debates; however, I think it's something the hon. minister should be aware of as well. When looking at some of the child welfare court cases for days and dates for two- and three-day trials, you're looking at waiting eight to 10 months. That's the backlog in the system. That's unacceptable, because what you have are children who are left hanging within the child welfare system, and nobody is attending to the needs of that child. That is unfair, and it's absolutely astounding to me that this government, who has all these programs and that says "We care about children," is leaving these kids hanging. I'm getting more disillusioned by the day, hon. minister. I know you're working hard and I know you're looking at changes, but these are critical areas of change. We measure time to trial for criminal or civil trials, criminal trials for sure, but we don't measure time to trial dates for these civil applications under the Child Welfare Act. I honestly believe there's got to be some change there, and it has to come quickly.

I'm interested, hon. minister, in knowing how many cases the children at risk response team is dealing with on any given night or any given week. The children at risk response team is that social worker/police officer pair, and I know social workers and police officers who are involved in that. In fact, I was a sub when I worked

downtown and worked on those teams as well. I know where we took those kids. That's the other question I have. Where are you putting these kids? Foster homes are often filled up, so where are these kids going? Are they still going to hotels? I know we used to take them to hotels. I know that they would have one-on-ones in some homes that were quite abusive, and they should never put a social worker into a home situation like that to do a one-on-one. I'm wondering where these things are at.

Back to the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. I'm a little bit concerned about the lag. The young kids that were on the street have said: look, we need more than 72 hours. To be quite honest, I told you that a long time ago. I told this Assembly, when this act was being brought in: 72 hours is not going to be sufficient for kids. I don't like to see kids incarcerated for not committing a crime. However, we talked about a voluntary long-term program. Where is that at? I sent you a letter on that, Madam Minister. What more have you done? The kids were asking for a place out of town so that they could become detached from the environment they're in. They've got drug problems. They've got all sorts of issues they need to deal with. I'm just wondering where you went with that.

I'm wondering what your position is once this file goes to the Supreme Court of Canada. The likelihood of it getting struck down is probably quite high. Where do you go from there? Are you going to go back to the Child Welfare Act, where the powers belong? What's going to happen? There's obviously a need for something like this out there. I'm not sure it's apprehending kids against their will. It doesn't seem to be doing anything. We've got a high recidivism rate in that program, almost 50 percent or more in fact. We've got a small number of kids responsible for a huge number of arrests, so that to me says that maybe it's not working as well as we had anticipated. It doesn't mean it's not working, because some kids have been taken off the street, and some things have worked out really well. But what about those kids that aren't making it? Where are you going with that, Madam Minister?

I think my time is just about up. When the minister can respond to those, I would appreciate it. I'm especially concerned about this court issue, Madam Minister, if we can look into that as soon as possible. I can speak to you about the courtrooms you might want to be looking at.

8:50

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Children's Services for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$535,540,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Environment

THE CHAIRMAN: For a report on this department I'll call on the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

MR. HIERATH: Mr. Chairman, I would like to report on the

meeting of the designated supply subcommittee for the budget estimates for the Department of Environment. The subcommittee met yesterday morning at 8. The meeting was approximately two and a half hours in length, which allowed members an opportunity to address their questions and comments to the minister. The questions provided a frank discussion on many key issues faced by Environment and were comprehensively answered by the minister. The minister also committed to respond in writing to any questions which required further information and research and that these responses would be also tabled in the House for the record.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I was taken by surprise by the brevity of the report from the chairman of the committee.

A couple of observations I want to make. The first one is that once again we have a designated subcommittee of supply. I've got a complete set of *Hansard*. I looked through it. I can't find *Hansard* for the designated subcommittee of supply dealing with Environment. So once again some of the questions I'm asking may be because I was not one of the three opposition members on that particular panel. We may be going over some territory we dealt with before.

Let me start off by asking this. It has to do with the Natural Heritage Act. Members will remember that last year we spent a lot of time talking about the Natural Heritage Act, not as much time as we wanted because we got cut off at second reading. There had been lots of concern. There were to be some public consultations. Then the government said that they had done that. We thought that at least there would be some broader consultation. We thought we'd see legislation. Well, here we are almost at the end of the budget process – I'm starting to feel nostalgic already, Mr. Chairman, that we're going to be looking at the nasty old appropriation bill any day; that makes me think we're sort of well past the halfway point of the spring session – and I haven't seen the natural heritage legislation. I don't know whether it slipped in while I wasn't paying adequate attention. Maybe it's been passed out. Maybe everybody knows about it but me, but I'd like to know.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

There's been some kind of an MLA committee reviewing it. Well, I haven't seen a report. Has there been a report tabled in the Assembly with respect to that MLA consultation? This reminds me, Mr. Chairman, of sort of secret societies, where right in this very room there may be members who have participated in an MLA consultation on the Natural Heritage Act and I don't know. If anybody is, would you put your hand up, please, so we know who you are? You see, I suspect that right in this room there are people that were part of that so-called MLA consultation. Well, it was no MLA consultation; it was a government caucus consultation. It wasn't a consultation of this Legislative Assembly. My colleague who's the critic in this area certainly wasn't part of that MLA consultation.

My questions would be along this line: where's the report from the MLA review committee? Mr. Chairman, I'd like to know: where is the committee, and when are we going to see that report? When will it be tabled in this Assembly? I'd like to know what the recommendations are from that MLA review committee. This is something that's far too important to be done as some kind of an internal, quiet secret. My constituents in Calgary-Buffalo have a huge interest in

the environment. They would like to be let in on the secret. So maybe we could just sort of lift up that great big blanket of secrecy and have a peek at what the government proposes to do with the Natural Heritage Act.

You know, what's interesting, Mr. Chairman, is that if you look at page 145, Highlights for 2000-2001 – this is the highlight, members – it says, “Respond to the MLA Committee’s review of the draft Natural Heritage legislation.” What does that mean? A thank you letter to the people that made submissions? Does it mean that one Conservative caucus meeting is going to have that as item 1(a)? Most unsatisfactory. I think what we want is not a response. What we want to know is if there’s going to be legislation. Is there going to be adequate, proper legislation to protect those special places? We don’t know. Most unsatisfactory information in the ministry business plan.

Now, one of the things that I note was the issue of park visitation. I’d like a progress report from the minister. There had been that area – I’ll think of the name in a moment. It’s west of Cochrane. If you start driving from Cochrane . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Waiparous.

MR. DICKSON: Yes, Waiparous. It’s a recreational area where there had been huge problems, Mr. Chairman. For anybody who heard a Calgary media outlet, I think it was last summer, there was a huge problem, and there were some additional people hired by the department to go in there and try and police that area. There was actually a major problem, and you know, the minister, to his credit, said that he was going to deal with it. I understand there were some additional patrols and supervision. Some of the volunteer groups that were in there were helping out.

Mr. Chairman, I’m not sure, but it looks like Mr. Don MacDonald is up in the public gallery. Mr. MacDonald at one point was a member of this Assembly, a member for the Three Hills constituency. In fact, could I invite Mr. MacDonald to stand and receive the customary warm welcome of members of the Assembly?

In any event, Mr. Chairman, I’d like an update in terms of whether that problem has been fixed not just for last summer but whether we’re going to see any recurrences of that in the next summer. So I’d like some information with respect to that.

It may seem odd that in the most urban constituency in the province the concern I hear a lot of in Calgary-Buffalo, usually about the number two issue in my constituency office, is the concern around Kananaskis and the Banff-Canmore corridor and that entire area. I’ve got some questions in terms of whether the province is now prepared to take an excellent idea that was put forward by the Liberal opposition in late 1996, early 1997, which was to make all of Kananaskis a provincial park, to outlaw forestry and mining and drilling.

9:00

Frankly, Mr. Chairman, I think the government would earn huge rave reviews from Calgarians certainly and probably from Albertans everywhere if they had the fortitude to do that. It seems to me that month after month we see this to-ing and fro-ing in terms of what’s going to be allowed, what development is going to be permitted, and what’s going to be curtailed in the Kananaskis area. It just seems to me that it’s long past time when our provincial government should go in and say: we’re not just going to make Peter Lougheed park at the far end of Kananaskis Country a protected area; we’re going to take the whole Kananaskis Country. There may be a requirement for grandfathering. We’ve got two downhill ski facilities. There are some existing uses of the park, and there may be grandfathering issues.

If you look at the population of Calgary, Mr. Chairman, you know like I that we’re soon going to hit a million people, the largest unicity in Canada. What that’s going to mean is that that highway to Kananaskis is going to get busier and busier and busier. That’s going to mean more people who are going to start saying: well, let’s build a few more motels; let’s put in a couple more golf courses; let’s put in bowling alleys and movie theatres. We don’t want to see that, so the best way of not getting incrementally taken to that place is just to take a firm stand and say: we’re not going to allow development. It was a Liberal idea, but like so many good Liberal ideas we’d be prepared to have the government take it and use it.

MS OLSEN: They don’t even have to ask.

MR. DICKSON: That’s true. My colleagues are urging the government to take this gift. We make it as a gift to them, that suggestion.

Now, I had some other questions in terms of the major strategies. I’d like to know specifically in this year the details of what the performance measures are going to be around implementation of the Commitment to Sustainable Resource and Environmental Management. There’s an issue of revising and implementing forest fire management policy to incorporate more meaningful and attainable goals. When is that going to happen? Is that the last week of February in 2001? We’ll probably be in an election by then, Mr. Chairman. Can we see some detail in terms of specifically what’s planned?

The forest fire management policy. I think it’s now been a couple of years that there have been deficiencies and shortcomings identified in that. It seems a bit lame, a bit limp for the minister to say that we’re going to revise and implement the management policy. I would have thought that we’d be much further along than that.

“Contribute to the development and implementation of government’s [strategic] direction on climate change and greenhouse gases.” Well, can we particularize? How is that going to be done? Who’s going to do it? How are we going to know whether it’s been successful? When are we going to know when a measurement can be taken in terms of the extent to which government has achieved any measure of success at all in those things? I mean, those are pretty obvious issues that I think we’d like to see.

Now, I’m not sure – I may have some colleagues that wish to speak to this thing, but in the meantime I’m going to take advantage of this chance.

With respect to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, there’s a five-year review under way, and the province has said: look, we’re going to make some submissions to that. Has anybody considered that it might be a good idea to share with Albertans what you’re going to take to the table federally? Before our provincial government, before the Member for Calgary-Nose Creek goes off to a meeting in Ottawa to sort of lay down the law with his colleagues and say, “This is what the province of Alberta wants in terms of changes to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act,” why wouldn’t the minister sort of test that on Canadians?

You know, Mr. Chairman, I have a great location for my constituency office right on 11th Avenue. I’d be happy to put a big poster there and invite Calgarians. When the Minister of Gaming drives by 11th Avenue, he’d be able to drive right up beside my constituency office. He’d drop off some petitions in the mailbox: stop private hospitals. He could also review this. When the Minister of Health and Wellness is at McDougall Centre, he could pop over to the Calgary-Buffalo constituency office. We would have this thing there so Canadians could stop by, take a look, and say: okay, this is what our government proposes to do in terms of making a submission to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. But we don’t do that.

This is like my other pet beef. That has to do with the Bill C-5, the whole business of privacy protection. Other provinces hold public hearings so citizens have a chance. [interjection] You know, Mr. Chairman, if I could digress for a moment.

I remember going into Calgary-Varsity because there were seniors that called me. They had a big concern. There are three or four big apartment buildings right across from Market Mall, a large number of seniors there. They had a real concern with what was happening in terms of rent increases, and they wanted to be able to talk to somebody in the provincial Legislature, so I had a chance to attend that meeting. What those constituents wanted – and I undertook to communicate to their MLA, to remind their MLA of some of their concerns, because he's probably too darn busy in Edmonton to be able to come at the drop of a hat. I understand that.

The minister is very busy. There are gaming machines to check out from lounges in Fort McMurray to Milk River.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I was prepared for a little digression, but this is getting to be quite a long, long story, so we could maybe get back to the budget.

MR. DICKSON: It's the story of my life, Mr. Chairman. You get sort of caught up in the flight of the moment. Thank you very much for bringing me back and keeping me on task.

Just as a fundamental rule, if the government of the province of Alberta on a major issue like the federal environmental legislation is going to make representations on our behalf, let us in on the secret. You know, take out a little ad in the paper; highlight it. Even if they sent out some material to my constituency office, I could share. I would like to be able to do that. When constituents come in and go through the budget book – and I do have constituents who are interested, say, in Environment – I just give them the budget book and tell them to go through and identify things, questions they've got, and I'll see if I can find answers for them.

If they ask about this, I don't know a darn thing about that. There may be other MLAs that are better versed than I am in it, but I don't like not being able to assist and be responsive when I hear those kind of concerns.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Those are matters that I think are particularly important. I have a couple of colleagues that wanted to make some observations too. The last one, though, that I did want to make – and this is interesting. If you look at element 2.0.6, freedom of information and privacy, we're forecasting an increase from \$582,000 to \$603,000. This is one of the few departments where I've seen them forecasting an increase in FOIP costs. [interjections] I saved the best to the last, Mr. Chairman.

What I want to know is: why is the department contemplating an increase in fees instead of a more aggressive strategy in terms of making publicly available the information that the people want? You know, any MLA in Calgary worth his or her salt should be able to tell you right now the kinds of environmental information that . . .

9:10

MR. SMITH: You sound like Allan Rock, telling people what's good for you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, I'm trying to stay on task. I'm being baited mightily by the Minister of Gaming, but I'm not going to gamble with him.

You know, there are times that you wish you had ministers here

provincially with the courage to be able to stand up and fight for public health care. I'm proud that the federal minister of health was able to come to the city of Calgary, be respectful by coming to the city of Calgary rather than issuing statements from Ottawa, and have a chance to listen to the Minister of Gaming. The Minister of Gaming was there. I had no idea he had so much interest in health care, but he was there and was taking notes. He looked very solemn. He looked quite hurt. He looked quite offended that the . . . [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: Order. He only has one minute left. Let him speak.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, maybe he would answer this question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Order, hon. minister.

MR. DICKSON: In any event, Mr. Chairman, what I would like is answers in terms of the basis for the projected increase in element 2.0.6 over last year and why the provincial government chooses not to adopt a more aggressive strategy in terms of getting information out to constituents.

Mr. Chairman, after the buzzer rings, I'm going to go over and sit beside my friend from Cypress-Medicine Hat, and I'm going to share with him . . . [interjections] I think those are the observations that I wanted to make at this time. I can't concentrate on the subject at hand any further.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

MR. WHITE: Sir, a couple of questions for the minister very quickly, because my hon. colleague was baited into taking much more time than he actually really wanted to take. I'd like to ask the minister a number of questions surrounding: in his business plan under strategy 4 it says "cooperate with Municipal Affairs in the delivery of the Petroleum Storage Tank Remediation [plan]." How, in fact, is this going to be done? We haven't heard about this plan for quite some time. Is the fund established, and will those current owners who are not responsible for the contamination be actually compensated?

Thank you kindly, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Environment for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$332,506,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Treasury

THE CHAIRMAN: Now, are we agreed on the adjudication of time that we've had in the past: 20, 20, and five? Is that agreeable?

MR. SAPERS: As long as it doesn't set a precedent for any other meeting of this committee.

THE CHAIRMAN: No. It's for this evening. The committee makes . . . [interjection] Right.

All right, with that in mind we'll call upon the hon. Provincial Treasurer to give his report.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The previous evening which we spent in estimates of Treasury was very helpful for me both to share a message that I think is an important one and also to receive input from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, which I did. We are still working on the huge volume of questions which we were given, but it is our intention of course, as in the past, to complete that list. I would be pleased to take any other input from my colleagues or those across the floor at this time.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me start off by saying that I'm pleased that the minister was able to be here tonight and give that brief response and join in the discussion. I must say that I find it a little disconcerting that here we are at the culmination of the budget process, and we've heard not from other ministers tonight but from some committee chairmen, and that leaves me with a very hollow feeling on behalf of the taxpayers of this province. The least I think they would expect is that the ministers would defend their own budgets through to the end of the process.

I would certainly take the Treasurer at his word that he will be providing written responses to the many, many questions. He has a good track record actually in his department of doing that, but the bad news is that they come months and months and months and months after we have voted on the estimates. We're in that position again where we're being asked to approve business plans of this department, which of course are core to the overall business of government as they talk about the tax strategies of the government, et cetera, not to mention this minister's own budget estimates of some 9 and a half billion dollars or so when he talks about the revenue. So when we look at the consolidated statement, we're talking about a considerable amount of money, and I just wish that we had answers to the very good questions from the Official Opposition – and I'll stress that they're questions from the Official Opposition – before we're asked to vote on these estimates.

I want to focus my comments tonight to the Provincial Treasurer on his business plan and performance measures. I note under goal 1, "a healthy and sustainable financial position," that one of the performance measures is "a measure that tracks Alberta's wealth creation, achievement of fiscal sustainability and reduction in dependence on resource revenues," and the measure is to be developed. Now, as I recall, this is a measure that in one form or another has been under construction for quite a time, and I'm a little disappointed to see that at this point in the province's evolution it is still to be developed.

We've had the government take a rather bold step in creating a \$500 million endowment for science and engineering research. We've seen some other commitments that will bring us into a new economy. Yet we see Treasury lagging behind with a performance measure in terms of "fiscal sustainability and reduction in dependence on resource revenues." Obviously one of the key goals of this government since it came to power has been economic diversification, and it's a little surprising that this performance measure is still not fully developed.

Going on with goal 1, another performance measure has to do with

the pension plan. I must say that I join with many other Albertans who are confused about what is the real goal of the provincial government when it comes to reforming the Canada pension plan. We see joint communiques from finance ministers talking about the future of the pension plan and talking about working with the federal government, and we've seen, of course, reports that a made-in-Alberta pension plan doesn't seem to be really sustainable, that there's too much debt to be assumed, that there are too many administrative problems, that there's too much risk and uncertainty. Yet right in the government's business plan under Strategies/Outputs it talks about this two-track approach. One is working with the federal government, but the other is to "investigate the advantages and disadvantages of establishing an Alberta Pension Plan."

Now, the performance measure attached to this is even more surprising. It is the "agreement by Finance Ministers on legislative amendments to the Canada Pension Plan Act at the end of the current renewal period December 2002." This is either very clever by design, which is to hold out some little carrot to those Albertans who are convinced that we should move to a made-in-Alberta pension plan, and it makes it look as though this government is ready to opt out at the first opportunity, which would be 2002, or what it says is that because of all the contrary evidence and all the advice from finance ministers in other jurisdictions, in fact the agreement will be to renew involvement in the federal plan, in the Canada pension plan.

9:20

I guess I'm asking the Treasurer to be clear: which is it? Are we actively investigating the possibility of a made-in-Alberta pension plan and therefore opting out of the Canada pension plan? If so, could we see the work in progress? Could we see how we're going to deal with the assumed debt obligations, et cetera. Or is this just written this way so that it can be all things to all people, so it can appeal to people on both sides of the argument?

Mr. Chairman, the next performance measure also has to do with pension plans; in this case, the local authorities and university academic pension plans, which are not without their own controversies. I don't want to dwell on all the issues associated with those pension plans and pension plan reform in this province, but I specifically want to look at the performance measure that says that there will be "less day-to-day involvement of the government in pension plan decisions."

Now, the way that performance measure is worded, of course, it would give me ample opportunity to have fun at the Treasurer's expense in terms of there being less day-to-day involvement and the fact that he may be moving on to bigger and better things. So I suppose I could say that this performance measure may be accomplished simply because of the ambition of the Treasurer, but that would be a cheap and hollow attempt at humour. What I will ask is if the Treasurer would please ensure that his performance measures have a little bit more substance than this.

I don't know, Mr. Treasurer, what "less day-to-day involvement" means. Compared to what? One less phone call? I mean, what's less day-to-day involvement? What is the issue that is being addressed in this performance measure, and how are you going to tell that you dealt with it? This is an example of a very poorly worded performance measure, very unsatisfactory, and it really doesn't give a reader any information about what it is that's going to be accomplished through this strategy and by this performance measure.

The next performance measure I want to look at is under goal 2: "Appropriate financial and performance information available to allow Albertans to hold government accountable." The first performance measure is the "portion of Albertans aware of govern-

ment's financial performance in the past year; target: 80% of Albertans aware." It's not a satisfaction measure. It doesn't say that they're satisfied with it. It says that they're aware of it. I'm wondering exactly how that performance measure is measured. Is there a survey? Is there a poll? Is it a mail-out? Is it part of those 770,000 phone calls that the Treasurer was talking about today when he was reporting for Executive Council? How do they get to that number? The target is 80 percent. Where are we in actuality, Mr. Chairman?

The next is one of my favourite performance measures in this minister's business plan, because it is so self-congratulatory that I find it hard to believe it would be here. The performance measure has to do with the relationship between Treasury and other ministries, and it's the "satisfaction of deputy heads with the government's accountability system; target: all satisfied or very satisfied." All of the deputy ministers are satisfied or very satisfied.

I'd like a show of hands here in the Assembly, Mr. Chairman, if you'd permit me, to see who would be surprised if not all the deputy heads were satisfied or very satisfied in terms of the accountability and financial management relationship they have with Treasury. And if they weren't, another show of hands, how many think that they would officially report it? Just curious, Mr. Chairman. It seems to me that this is another one of those performance measures that is there simply to take up space on the page, because it really doesn't mean a darn thing.

Now we get to goal 3: "a fair, competitive and simple provincial tax system managed efficiently and effectively," and we get to this performance measure under the first set of strategies, which again is one under construction. It says, "A measure to compare Alberta's tax competitiveness to major international competitors," and it's to be developed. Mr. Chairman, how can this be? We have a Treasurer who's going across the country coast-to-coast-to-coast talking about Alberta's tax competitiveness and holding it out as a model for the rest of the country and hoping he'll even have a chance to impose it on the rest of the country, and they haven't even developed a core performance measure to determine the benefit of Alberta's tax strategy right here at home.

Now, I would like to give the Treasurer some advice that I found in the 20th report of the Standing Committee on Finance, which was issued by the federal Parliament in June of 1999. The title is *Productivity with a Purpose: Improving the Standard of Living of Canadians*. It's referring to the work of Jonathan Kesselman, a noted professor from the University of British Columbia, who has reported on the role of tax and tax reform as it relates to productivity. One of the conclusions of the report is:

The more appropriate way to link taxation to the standard of living is the manner in which it affects the incentives faced by individuals and corporations. What is important is not just the level of taxation but the composition of those taxes and the way in which they are imposed on the economy. For example, a variety of European countries face higher tax burdens than Canada, yet they have been able to achieve better productivity and faster growth than we have.

I hope the Treasurer is paying attention to that because I think he'll find that it's constructive. Taxation is a complex problem and requires much more than a simple flat solution.

While we're on the topic of flat simple solutions, let me say that the much-touted flat tax is beginning to go the same way as those people who believe in a flat earth, and that is that it just doesn't make sense and it's not true that it'll be helpful, Mr. Chairman.

The fact is that if you look at what it would take to flow through tax savings to Albertans, it would take into the fiscal year 2008, including a reduction of the 11 percent rate to a 7.8 percent rate

before Albertans achieve the full benefit of the federal tax cuts. In fact, if we don't do anything, if we don't move that rate down and raise the personal exemption, Albertans are going to be hosed by this Treasurer's tax plan. We're going to see Albertans losing a tax advantage, and we're going to see Albertans, for example, in the \$35,000 tax range having to pay well over \$200 more under the flat tax system.

Even if it were moved down to 10.5 percent, Mr. Chairman, at \$50,000 Alberta taxpayers will have to pay over \$190 more under the Treasurer's proposed plan. For those Albertans earning \$65,000 a year, even if we move the flat tax rate down from 11 to 10.5 percent, Albertans again are going to come out on the losing end and will have to pay nearly \$200 more in income tax to this Treasurer than they would if we stayed at the tax-on-tax rate. So I would ask that the Treasurer take a close look at his tax plans and these performance measures.

The next goal I want to look at is "an efficient, fair and competitive capital market and an efficient and fair regulatory environment for financial institutions and private pension plans." One of the performance measures is that Alberta's market share of investment capital be maintained. Mr. Chairman, Alberta's share of investment capital is not sufficient. I think the Minister of Innovation and Science will back me on this. We don't have enough access to capital in this province, and there are things that have to happen in terms of tax policy and investment policy and management issues that will raise that. We have to attract more venture capital. It is simply not good enough for this Treasurer to say that the performance measure target will be achieved if our share of investment capital is maintained. It has to grow. I am looking toward this Treasurer and this government to demonstrate some leadership in that regard and not be satisfied with the status quo.

Mr. Chairman, the last one I want to deal with is also in goal 5, and it's the development of "a risk assessment system to help identify pension plans needing special attention and assistance to maintain registered status." Now, the performance measure here is another one of those that's under construction. It is: "compliance problems in 'at risk' pension plans resolved within an acceptable period of time," and the measure again is to be developed. This is another example not just of a performance measure that should already be on the books and that we should already be measuring progress towards, but the language here is incredibly soft and mushy, and it doesn't make much sense. What is this acceptable period of time, and acceptable to whom? I would say that for those men and women who are waiting for their pension issues to be resolved, a day is too much of a delay.

I would ask that this Treasurer pay some attention to these performance measures. His department is supposed to be setting the standard across government, and these performance measures in many cases just simply don't add up.

Mr. Chairman, I have one other general comment that I want to make about the business plans of Treasury, and that has to do with the effort that these business plans go to to try and convince Albertans that this government is being aggressive about tax cuts. Now, let me say that if we compare the Alberta tax cut plan to the federal tax cut plan and we take a look at how much effort is truly being made in this province compared to the federal government, what we find is that under the leadership of the federal government, the Prime Minister and the Finance minister federally, there is a total effort of 42 percent of the fiscal dividend being used right now for tax cuts, and 23 percent is going into program spending.

Let's look at Alberta this fiscal year. What we find is that program spending is going up by 61 percent, throwing money at problems, often in an untargeted way. Debt repayment is good, at

20 percent, although the feds outstrip them there as well, with 35 percent of the federal surplus going towards debt repayment.

9:30

On this issue of tax cuts, where we see this government pounding its chest and trying to claim some primacy and some leadership, what we see is the most striking comparison, and that is that while the federal government is able to contribute 42 percent of its surplus to tax cuts this year, the provincial government has only allocated 12 percent. I think that in itself takes away the bragging rights from this Treasurer and this provincial government.

Mr. Chairman, the last comment I want to make has to do with this government's use of taxpayers' money to run what are in essence caucus committees of the PC Party. It's the issue that we've raised in this Assembly many, many times, and that is that the standing policy committees are really nothing more than caucus committees and in fact are extensions of the PC Party's policy development process. In that regard they should not be paid for out of the departmental budgets. Taxpayers' money should not be going towards these committees. These committees are not an extension of democracy. In fact, they are exactly the opposite.

I would like to propose an amendment to the motion which would approve the estimates of Treasury. I believe the amendment has been circulated, so I will move it now and read it into the record.

Be it resolved that the estimates for the standing policy committee on financial planning and human resources under reference 1.0.8 of the 2000-2001 estimates of the department of Treasury be reduced by \$95,000 so that the operating expense and capital investment to be voted is \$139,343,000.

Mr. Chairman, obviously the purpose of this is to protect the taxpayers . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: This amendment, hon. members, will be known as amendment A1.

Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. As I was saying, Mr. Chairman, obviously the purpose of this amendment is to protect the taxpayers from an expenditure of their money that would be inappropriate and contrary to the stated intention of this Treasurer: to make sure he gets value out of every loonie that he collects from Albertans. I would hope that the committee tonight will approve this motion. I think it will send a message to government.

Some people may say that it's not a significant amount of money, that it's only \$95,000. I say two things to that, Mr. Chairman. Number one, \$95,000 is a lot of money in my household. Number two, \$95,000 may pale in comparison to the budget surplus of this government, but it's \$95,000 that could be spent to hire a couple of nurses or \$95,000 that could be used to provide a couple more teachers or \$95,000 that could be used to provide some more funding for school hot lunch programs or \$95,000 that could be put to use in any of a number of the priorities of the people of Alberta.

Not in one survey, not in one public opinion poll, and not in one conversation I've had with any constituent has anybody ever said to me: "It's a priority. I want to see my tax money go to buy sandwiches and cookies for Conservative MLAs so that they can get together behind closed doors, in secret, in camera, and have their policy committee meetings. That's how I want to see my tax money spent." That conversation has never taken place, Mr. Chairman, and I don't think that conversation ever would take place. I think taxpayers deserve a break, and I would suggest that one way to start giving them that break is to support this motion and send a message to this government that they can't be wasteful with taxpayers' money.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the department of Treasury for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$139,438,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$98,941,000

Gaming

THE CHAIRMAN: First of all, we'll call upon the minister to start off the deliberations on this department.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a welcome opportunity both to thank the Minister of Infrastructure for being able to move us up with some dispatch to discuss the Gaming ministry budget estimates and also to table responses to questions from February 29, 2000. I'm happy to be able to do that. Considering that we were fighting a considerable bout of the flu that night, we have worked diligently on the answers to the key questions put forward by the opposition. We are tabling that tonight, and we look forward to comments from the critic.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have in front of me a copy of the annual report for the year ended March 31, 1999, for the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. Now, I'm not going to refer to the document tonight, because tomorrow night and Thursday afternoon, of course, we deal with lotteries specifically. Tonight we're dealing with the wrap-up for Gaming, but I have lots of questions from this booklet that over the next two days I'm going to be touching on, so the minister should be prepared for those.

Let me say first of all that I had anticipated that by now I would have gotten the written responses to the questions that were raised in the committee stage upstairs, and that's one of the disadvantages of this process we're into where we're split into two different areas on one particular night. There are many of you that didn't have the opportunity, of course, to hear the questions that were raised, and the minister had assured that the answers we didn't get that night we would get in writing. As I say, up to now we haven't gotten them. Had we gotten them by now, it would have made my job a whole lot easier tonight because then I wouldn't have to repeat myself. All of you would have copies of the responses, so you'd know exactly what I'm talking about.

So I'm going to be forced to kind of go over the issues that were raised to sort of educate or inform the rest of the Members of the Legislative Assembly, that I know would be so interested in what's happening in the area of Gaming. I don't want to take too much time doing it, Mr. Chairman, because there are other members of this caucus that want to speak within that allocated period of time. I will keep my comments relatively short, knowing at the same time that we also have two days coming, tomorrow and the day after, dealing specifically with lotteries, which will give us ample opportunity to raise additional concerns and such.

One of the first things I talked about at the committee stage when

we dealt with the budget for Gaming was the freeze that was put in place by the minister, the freeze that was announced. We read about it in the paper. I was never sent any type of formal or written report or memo or letter as the critic for Gaming, for lotteries, saying: I've proposed a freeze, and this is what the freeze is going to entail. That never was done, so I'm not familiar with the terms of reference, for example, for the freeze. I'm not sure if the freeze is going to be wrapped up by this summer or if we were talking in terms of it wrapping up next summer.

I'm not sure how many slot machines were kind of jammed into the casinos at the last minute that had apparently been approved prior to the freeze being announced, not installed but that had been committed. I understand it's something like an additional thousand machines that are either in already or else working their way in. I understand that the Palace Casino, for example, in West Edmonton Mall is once again expanding. We have another new nonprofit casino coming on board on the Yellowhead Trail.

9:40

Let's make it very, very clear that from this caucus's point of view, we've never taken the position that we would expect Alberta would be what we would call a totally gambling-free zone. I don't think that's realistic. I don't think in any province you would see that type of thing. We've grown accustomed to the 6/49s, to the scratch and wins, to the bingos, to the horse races and such, and I've participated as a spectator and wagered the odd 2 dollar bill at the racetrack myself in the past. We've all had the opportunity to gamble to some extent, some to a very, very limited degree.

The position of our caucus really is – and had the plebiscites that were held addressed that particular option – to restrict gambling activities to the nonprofit casino centres, where the bulk of the proceeds from the gambling activities goes to nonprofit groups, the very, very many nonprofit groups that we see now being benefited to some extent by foundations like the Wild Rose Foundation and such. Poring through this report, there are hundreds and hundreds of worthwhile organizations throughout the province that do benefit from lottery proceeds, not necessarily VLT proceeds but lottery proceeds. If in fact Albertans had been given the option of restricting gambling activities to the many nonprofit casinos, I think Albertans by a majority of 70 percent would have opted for that particular alternative. That would have put to an end the controversy surrounding the question of the VLTs in the bars, the drain on the local communities and such, but that option wasn't there. Possibly some day we'll see that option being provided to Albertans.

I think that most of the anti VLT groups or those groups that headed up the plebiscite – I shouldn't call them anti VLT groups. I think by and large they would have accepted the fact if the gambling activities were restricted to the nonprofit or charitable type casinos. That would have been acceptable all around.

Questions were raised at the committee stage. Would this freeze, for example, look at the presentation that was made by the offspring of the Hotel Association that proposed turning a number of the hotels throughout the province into minicasinios, not charitable minicasinios but minicasinios where the hotel operators or the operators of that gambling centre would receive a chunk of the action? If I recall correctly, something like 15 percent. Then they were allocating another 15 percent, whatever, to be given to . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you rising on a point of order, hon. Minister of Gaming?

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. SMITH: A point of order, Mr. Chairman. Would the good member entertain a question under *Beauchesne* 333?

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I would love to. The difficulty is that I've agreed to a relatively narrow time frame to make my comments, and because these questions weren't addressed by the minister during the earlier budget process, first I'd like to see him answer our questions before he starts tossing us questions. Now, had he answered all our questions, then I'd have been glad to answer his question.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. member just has to say yes or no.

MR. WICKMAN: I'll just continue, because I know this member is anxious to get going.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: Is that freeze going to involve a review of the possibilities of larger-type casinos in areas like Banff, for example? Is it going to see an expansion of electronic gambling into the bingo halls?

Now, I want to talk just a bit about addiction. I commend the decision made by the government, the previous minister, to spend \$1.5 million in terms of setting up a research institute in terms of addiction and for appointing as a board member a reformed addict to VLTs, who lost, by his own admission, something close to a million dollars, who lost his business in Fort Saskatchewan as a result of his addiction to those machines. Coupled with the \$3.4 million to fight addiction, that brings a total expenditure there of \$4.9 million, and that's getting to be a more respectable figure than we've seen in the past. However, I'd like to see it just tied to a percentage, that 1 percent of all gambling proceeds be set aside that would be used to try and fight the addiction problems and the other social problems that result from those that can't control their gambling urges.

We also talked in terms of the distribution of the lottery dollars. The gaming summit, of course, that was held in Medicine Hat talked in terms specifically of gambling proceeds not going to general revenue, and we do see a portion of it going to general revenue to be used for nonprofit community charitable type organizations. We see the biggest portion of gambling profits now going to various government departments. Virtually every government department now gets a chunk of the action. We even see the lottery boards turn around and funnel some of their millions of dollars that they receive to branches within their jurisdiction; in other words, bypassing the true nonprofit organizations and turning some of it over to parks and recreation and so on and so forth that they may call a nonprofit activity.

We also talked about the court actions. What ever happened to this? During question period today questions were asked of the Premier about trust, promises that are made. One of the promises made by this Premier was that within seven days of a successful plebiscite or resolution by a municipality, the machines would be removed. The VLTs would be gone. Up in the Fort McMurray area – and the member could nod his head – I believe we're now talking in terms of 24 months and the machines are still humming away, still spitting out the big bucks for the hotel operator but a bigger share of the proceeds, a much bigger share of the proceeds, going towards the government coffers, of course.

Some of the questions talked in terms of the distribution of liquor and the possibilities of rule changes that would allow certain advantages to some of the larger retailers. A question was raised by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, and I often wonder whatever happened to her recommendations that were made in one of her reports, why they were never acted on. She asked some questions in

a session here one day that sounded to me like she was questioning whether some of these representatives of the distillers are – I think the term that was used was bribing – bribing the retailers by giving them freebies, kickbacks, giving them gifts.

A N HON. MEMBER: They call them incentives.

MR. WICKMAN: Incentives, yes. That, according to legislation, is supposed to be outlawed. It's supposed to be banned. It's not supposed to be allowed. But it is going on. I know it's going on. It's going on in the form of sweatshirts, advertising, various little things like that to allow a retailer to display.

Now, I've used up a portion of the time we're allocated, and I know the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is anxious to go. I'll have more opportunities in the next two days, so I'll let him take it away from here.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Could you give me a time count?

THE CHAIRMAN: Eight minutes and 45 seconds.

MR. SAPERS: Oh, that's terrific. Thank you very much, Edmonton-Rutherford. That's terrific.

I just had a chance to read the responses to questions that the minister tabled at the beginning of his remarks, and he goes through I believe 10 questions that he answers in this document that was tabled. What I note is that while the minister in his comments said, "I'm going to table responses to the unanswered questions," it would leave one with the impression that all the unanswered questions were in this document, and in fact that's not the case. There are many questions that were put to the minister regarding his performance measures, regarding the issue of the so-called incentives from breweries and distillers and their agents to Alberta retailers, regarding the operation of the gaming commission. Many, many questions are left unanswered.

9:50

I find it a real shame – when we're talking about almost a billion dollars of lottery funds coming into the provincial coffers, when we're dealing with significant issues that touch on addiction, that touch on fraud, that have been so controversial that there have been plebiscites in several Alberta communities about things like VLTs, that they have been the discussion of sermons in places of worship – that an issue as important as this does not deserve or does not get the complete attention of the minister and that for the men and women of this Assembly who come here to ask the minister appropriate questions about his responsibilities and about his government, he doesn't take his responsibilities seriously enough and doesn't feel any sense of obligation to answer those questions.

Of course, this is an extension of the rather dismissive way in which he handled himself during the subcommittee debate in which he even at one point, in the middle of questioning, got up and left the room and then made the observation that maybe he would answer some questions but not some others, because those others perhaps weren't deserving in his opinion.

You know what? His opinion isn't really what counts, Mr. Chairman. What counts is that the people of this province get answers to questions about (a) how their money is being spent and, even more importantly, (b) how it is that this government is scheming and conniving to find new ways to pick their pockets

through gaming and lottery schemes. So I would ask that this minister rethink his approach to his responsibilities as a member of Executive Council and start answering questions that are put to him by members of the opposition. After all, the questions we bring forward during this process are questions that are raised to us by the taxpayers of this province.

Whether the minister wants to acknowledge that or not, that is in fact the case. It is our role at this point in time as members of the Official Opposition to, amongst other things, hold the government accountable. You see, their responsibility is to reciprocate and to be accountable. I think Albertans are going to not feel positively inclined towards this minister and the government he's part of if they tend to continue to dismiss the questions that are raised and they don't feel any sense of responsibility to be accountable.

Mr. Chairman, I must say, though, that this minister's attitude doesn't surprise me in terms of the overall budget examination process as it's evolved in the province of Alberta. It seems to me that this examination process has become an inconvenience to the government. While they can no longer govern by special warrant, they still have to bring in supplementary supplies, and we've had lots of those, but this government seems to have been doing everything it can to dismiss and diminish the role of the Legislative Assembly when it comes to examining the budget and the business plans of the government.

While they would like to think that what happens during this process is not relevant, I can tell you that the three million citizens of this province don't think it's irrelevant at all. They certainly don't think it's irrelevant when it comes to the money that's been taken out of their pockets to contribute to the areas of priority that they believe in as opposed to the areas of priority that the government has told them they should simply trust them on. Mr. Chairman, it's insufficient, it's inadequate, and it's contentious. It simply is disservice.

I have a list of perhaps another two dozen questions for this minister regarding his business plans and his budget estimates. I could read them into the record now. I could write them like I've done in the past. I could table them in the Assembly, which I've also done in the past for other departments. I guess I'm a slow learner, but I finally caught on. This government just doesn't care enough to answer those kinds of questions. They don't want to take the tough questions. They don't want to address them, and they certainly don't want to account to the taxpayers of this province when it comes to anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or would indicate that maybe they haven't done all their homework.

In spite of the waste of time that it has often become asking certain members of Executive Council questions about their budget estimates, I guess I'll continue to do so because that's certainly what my constituents would expect of me, but I would just hope that one day soon these members of Executive Council will reciprocate in kind and will provide full, complete answers to legitimate questions. Until that day comes, Mr. Chairman, I'll be reminding them of that obligation, and of course I look forward to the day when my colleagues and I will have an opportunity to answer their questions, although I can't imagine for the life of me that their questions will be very difficult. I'll undertake right now that when given the opportunity, I'll respond more than in kind. I'll be accountable to the taxpayers.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Gaming for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense \$183,191,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Lottery fund payments, \$837,500,000. Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.*

Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Infrastructure

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin this evening's deliberations on this department, we'll call upon the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Last Thursday, the week before, we had the opportunity to answer a number of questions with respect to our budget presentation. Earlier today I dispatched the last answers to questions that were raised by hon. members in the House.

Over the next three years in the province we'll see tremendous growth attributed to infrastructure development in all areas: roads, health facilities, and schools. On the road side approximately 13,500 person-years of work, about another 500 miles of road, four-lanes, including numerous other improvements.

I think we've answered conclusively any of the questions that were raised, and I'll just leave it at that this evening and ask for the vote.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few questions for the minister. When we debated the budget over a week ago, I asked the minister about infrastructure in relation to the new aboriginal school that is trying to come onstream. At that time the government had said: no, we are not going to build a new school; we've only got a 70 percent utilization rate in the city of Edmonton, and 85 percent is what we're looking for. So what they offered to this particular school was separate classrooms around the city, an environment where all the kids going to the new schools wouldn't be able to go to one school at one time. It was somewhat segmented in the way that the space was going to be used. The reality was that there wasn't one facility that could house 600 to 800 students, and that's what the school was looking for, the actual school board and the principal-in-waiting, if you will, Phyllis Cardinal.

Now, as of yet I'm not sure, Mr. Minister, how far those negotiations have gone, but I understand we still don't have any funding for the needed building. What we have is a school board having to negotiate another facility with a private enterprise. I'm not impressed. I'm absolutely not impressed.

10:00

We are going to have the largest growth in aboriginal young people in front of us in the next 10 to 15 years. These kids are faring better in schools like Ben Calf Robe, in the Awasis program. As I mentioned before, their parents are putting them in the program because the kids are learning. They're not just hard-to-handle kids any more. They're not kids that are going there because no other school will take them. These are kids who want to learn Cree, who want to learn, who want to be in a school environment where they're actually learning, and that is the thing that has been brought forward to me.

I also alluded at that time, Mr. Minister, to some of the feel-good stuff like the bill before us, Bill 2. It's great for the Premier to come in here and put on his feathers and sit in his chair, but he still won't fund a school. That has far more weight, in my view, and has a real, real potential to start graduating some kids from high school. When we're looking at the costs associated, at one point I was told that up in Lac La Biche and St. Paul \$6,000 per student is going into some of these schools. That's what they're getting. That's what the school is getting per student because it's federal funding. Okay? They're not graduating one kid. Not one aboriginal kid is graduating from those schools.

Mr. Minister, I am going to urge you at this point to drop the arbitrary 85 percent utilization rate. I'm going to urge you to drop that, and I'm going to suggest to you that for this particular program you ought to not worry about that rate. You need to focus on the program, the school program as it is, and the needs of the school.

So while the education minister is over there, you should be talking. The two of you should be talking, and he should be saying to you, "Look; we need that school in Edmonton." You should be saying: "You know what? I'm a responsible member of this government. I want aboriginal kids in this province to pass. I want them to carry on and become leaders in the community and become members of the Legislature or wherever they choose to go." But you know what? It isn't going to happen if you don't play your part. So I'm just asking, Mr. Minister, where you are on that. Have you gotten any further than our last discussion? I'll let you ponder on that while I ask a couple of other questions.

I wanted to know, Mr. Minister, if the government has a clear statement showing the cost per unit length of highway per region for maintaining primary highways. We received some information in response to our written questions but not enough, and it's difficult to determine cost-effectiveness from the information supplied. So I'm wondering if the minister could provide additional information, if he could do a cost comparison showing costs before and after privatization, the cost now associated to municipalities as a result of that. Mr. Minister, will you table any studies, reports, cost-benefit analyses that were done by this government to support the argument for privatization in transportation? I'm wondering if the minister would undertake to do that for us.

The reason I'm asking that, Mr. Minister, is that I was in Public Accounts last week, when the minister of energy was asked to table reports, cost-benefit analyses, and studies in relation to his electrical deregulation plan. The end result of that was that he didn't have any studies; he didn't have any reports. He didn't have to provide them, you see, because this was based on ideology, and ideology, I'm afraid, Mr. Minister, doesn't necessarily realize the savings you think you might be endeavouring to end up with. So I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if you could possibly do that for us. I think that would be really helpful so that all Albertans, not just us but all Albertans, will have an understanding of how the Department of Infrastructure and the then department of transportation came to believe that they should privatize the transportation department. Was it just ideology, so you didn't have to provide those things?

*see page 578, left col., para. 10

You know, I'm glad the Minister of Health and Wellness is here today, because I'm a little worried that his health bill is just ideology. We've seen it in electrical deregulation, I think it exists in Infrastructure, and now I'm almost a hundred percent sure that this ideology has expanded into that private health care bill. It would be really helpful, Mr. Minister, if you could do that for us.

The other issue that I wanted to speak to specifically was not the notion of the national infrastructure program, Mr. Minister, but if this government has had any discussions with the federal government or other provincial governments in relation to a national highways program. I'm just wondering, if that has come to your attention, what your perspective is on that. Are you going to invest any time and energy into something like that? Maybe you can help us out with that too.

I know other members of my caucus have some questions they would like to ask, so I'll take my seat.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I had a chance to watch tonight on TV the Francophone program which was held here today. I watched as you toured some students through your office, and it was reported that you were lobbied for Infrastructure money to build new schools. The students interviewed mentioned that many students were riding buses in the urban areas for one to two hours. What my question is leading up to is that when I was questioning you last week, I think there was a misunderstanding of my question to you, and you came back only with the answer that rural students ride buses from one to two hours. When I brought up the fact of questioning the hundred percent utilization, I suppose my question to yourself, Mr. Minister, around new schools, construction in communities or areas like large cities where rapid growth is happening, wasn't too clear.

When this government is fixated on a hundred percent utilization and I read that some people are proposing that inner-city schools aren't needed, well, the fact that they have 100 students now, and when they were built 40 years ago, there were 180 students there, doesn't mean that the school isn't required. I tried to emphasize that students in the inner-city settings need a school within walking distance. These students, if made to ride Edmonton Transit, in most cases wouldn't even attend school due to the lack of parental support in taking them to school, lack of money and food, lack of bus fare. I also brought up the fact that I've attended two different seminars that highlighted no new schools since 1994.

A hundred percent utilization is what I'm really concerned with. There's no problem with hundred percent utilization in, say, my end of town from 127th Avenue north to 149th Avenue, because I don't have any schools past 149th Avenue, and they are filled to one hundred percent capacity. But I am talking about inner-city schools, maybe from the river north to 127th Avenue, varying between 60, 70, or 75 percent, whatever you want to play the game with. Then anything farther north of 127th Avenue must have a hundred percent utilization to trigger anything.

I do know that if you went into this type of thing, you would have to build new schools. I don't care if it's on 153rd Avenue or it's on 167th Avenue, but with this method it would also help south of the river, where we're seeing the same case in the last few years in the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek or the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They would benefit from the same kind of solution that I'm suggesting to you.

10:10

We have looked at existing schools and when they were built.

Schools built from the early 1970s, when the Conservatives did come in, until the late 1970s were constructed with reasonably good structure, but any school within my constituency that was built in the 1980s, within a few blocks of these schools, are totally inept, if that's the right word for it. They're infrastructurally in bad shape because they weren't built with any money. It was a time when everybody started to cut back on money. We are going to see with schools even from 1980 to 1994, when they quit building in Edmonton or quit building throughout the province, that these schools aren't built to the standard of the last number of years.

I traveled the province and talked to different areas in the province; for example, Exshaw school. Last year we brought up a lot of questions on this particular school. It's overcrowded, it's old, and it's got health problems because of its age. It's also in an area of the province that is paying the highest education tax into the province's kitty. Mr. Minister, when you were traveling in the area last August, your only answer to the people then was to wait until next spring, that you have lots of demands on your budget and they'd just have to put up with it and wait. Well, my concern is that we have to start spending some of this money and start planning properly and start to build schools in areas where they are required. We shouldn't be forced into a hundred percent utilization throughout the whole school, which is a cop-out by this government and playing the one-string guitar instead of actually going out and building a plan around it.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Well, thank you, sir. Just two very, very quick points, Mr. Minister. They're centred about a bit of a home request. I happen to represent an area that Edmonton-Calder has within its boundaries, a school called Prince Charles. It has a great history of educating a great deal of the native population in the city of Edmonton, the urban natives. They are doing very well. The Awasis program is doing exceedingly well in this province, but it needs a little of your help, along with the Minister of Learning, in order to extend into a high school program.

It seems that there are some difficulties with funding it in that currently there's an 85 percent occupancy requirement. I don't understand all of the ins and outs of this issue. All I do know is that the school board, Edmonton public, hopes to open this September with this very worthwhile program, and there is some concern that they may not be able to. If you would be so kind as to look into that for this year's budgeting, this member would certainly be appreciative.

I must explain that this particular program has had a great deal of success, and it plays a great deal upon the self-confidence of the children within the program. They learn a lot about native culture and begin to feel much more proud of it. It appears that in the general population of society they feel themselves being put down a lot of times, and these particular programs have been nothing but of great benefit to the students that are going there. So it would be a great service, sir, if you could spend a little time looking into that program.

Another area that, again, is a homegrown constituency concern centres around the 149th Street intersection with Yellowhead Trail. It is a very accident-prone area, the highest in the city. The entire length of the Yellowhead needs upgrading. You yourself would know from traveling the route a great number of times that it does have stop-and-go traffic; it's certainly not a freeway. This particular intersection needs some support badly. I know you don't directly tell the cities where to put their money, because it's a co-operative

effort. This particular area needs either more money from the department to say, "Look; this just has to be done to save Albertans' lives," or some other safety program. It needs to be worked on. There are just too many people dying. There's too much loss of productive time for the companies that have to use that intersection. It's dangerous, it's slow to get through, and it really bottles the traffic up.

That's the extent of my questions tonight, sir. I thank you for the time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Infrastructure for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$2,152,558,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The chair would like to note that an error was made in the estimates for Gaming. Inadvertently we had called for a vote on the lottery fund payments, and of course we have not yet debated those. Those are due tomorrow and presumably the next day, so that vote would be invalid. So it will not be reflected in the report nor on the official records of the Assembly.*

Innovation and Science

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin this part of our deliberations we will call on the minister.

DR. TAYLOR: On the evening of March 7 I presented my estimates to subcommittee D, and we had a very fruitful discussion. We had a lot of good questions and a lot of interaction. There were some questions from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora that I didn't feel I answered quite with enough information, so I have five copies of some additions to the responses that I would like to file with the House to the questions that were asked of me at the subcommittee D. As I said, it was a fruitful discussion and good questions from both sides.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Thanks to the minister. I look forward to getting these responses and reading them over. I'll incorporate some of my earlier comments, but the timing of the responses – it would have been helpful to get them a little sooner. I recognize that it's a busy time, but we're talking about a lot of money, and they were important questions.

You know, the ministry is, generally speaking, moving in the right path. A couple of points that I would like to make, though. One, I would like to see this minister continue being as aggressive as he has been in putting technology issues forward and in helping the government understand the importance of moving Alberta into the new economy. Just today, I think, Nortel Networks announced that

there was another billion dollar plus acquisition, another Canadian company leading the way, buying a U.S. based switching company with now, I believe, the fastest Internet switches made on the planet. You know, we have a big role to play here in Alberta in taking advantage of this technology and also in developing and fostering it. I'm not sure that these business plans are ambitious enough, if I can put it that way.

The report of the Canadian E-Business Opportunities Roundtable, prepared by The Boston Consulting Group, a document titled, *Fast Forward: Accelerating Canada's Leadership in the Internet Economy*, makes very interesting reading. I know the minister is familiar with it, but I'm not sure that all members of the Assembly are. This document I think lays out pretty clearly what some of the challenges are when it comes to fully leveraging a commercial advantage out of the Internet. I believe that there is a role for some government policy and leadership in this regard.

10:20

One of the conclusions that The Boston Consulting Group reached in their report on the roundtable was that "Canada's business-to-business e-commerce [is] estimated to be only 7.7% of U.S. levels by 2003." So even though we are growing at a steady pace here in Canada, we won't even reach 10 percent of the market that the United States will have achieved over the next three years. I don't think this is good enough. I think Alberta could establish itself as a leader. I guess I'd like to see a performance measure in this minister's plan that says that Alberta will lead the charge in Canada when it comes to business-to-business e-commerce.

I recently had an opportunity to meet with a purchasing agent for Syncrude, who tells me that they're going to be dealing with all of their vendors in a paperless way, that they want to make sure they are linked electronically to all of their suppliers even if it comes down to where they have to send people and technology into the businesses that provide goods and services to Syncrude and get them online and up and operating. So there are some good business partners out there, and I guess I'd just like to see, as I say, just a little bit more ambition on the part of this government, particularly through this ministry.

The report that I refer to, compiled by The Boston Consulting Group, also said that "Canadian businesses also trail their U.S. counterparts in e-commerce with fewer companies offering their products or services online." I've been talking to several retailers about their e-business plans, and what they tell me is that they were absolutely surprised, overwhelmed by the response over this last Christmas season to their e-commerce offerings. Whether it be the com that Sam built, when we're talking about buying your music and videotapes et cetera online, or whether it be any of the other vendors that are out there, whether they be clothing vendors such as Eddie Bauer or some of the others that have very sophisticated electronic sites, they report to me that they were just taken aback with how successful those initiatives were over this last Christmas period.

So I think we need to sit down with some of these companies that have had success, and to the extent that they're willing, find out what their secrets of success are so we can develop some appropriate policy that can assist Alberta businesses in taking advantage of this coming boom in e-commerce. That would be something I could wholeheartedly support and endorse.

Also, Mr. Minister, for your interest. I don't know whether you've had a chance to read it or not, but I had a chance to mention it earlier in debate. There is the 20th report of the Standing Committee on Finance, entitled *Productivity with a Purpose: Improving the Standard of Living of Canadians*. It was tabled in June of 1999. They go through a rather interesting exercise of talking about where

*See page 576, left col., para. 7

we stand in Canada, what the forces are behind productivity trends, what drives productivity and economic growth. Interesting reading. But I found one paragraph in here that I thought would be relevant to tonight's discussion. What it really talks about is that governments and others have been slow to recognize the importance of technology as a driver.

I want to quote from page 22 of the report under the heading Evidence of Benefits from High Technology. The quote is this:

In the United States, some economists are now accepting the fact that high-technology does indeed have the potential to enhance productivity. They cite the fact that productivity has been picking up in recent years, well into the current business cycle. Typically, the big productivity gains tend to occur early in the business cycle, when output is growing but firms are not yet rehiring.

The reason for this, as some economists at the U.S. Federal Reserve Board are now suggesting, is that computers had little positive impact on productivity early in this decade but that they are now contributing significantly to growth.

I cite this quote not just for the earlier reason, that I think it speaks to this growing awareness of governments about the role of technology as a driver, but also to say that there is this theory of lag time, and the investments that we make now may not pay off for a decade or more. Whether it comes to the plans to have high-speed, wideband Internet access throughout rural Alberta or whether it comes to investing in high-speed computers themselves, the hardware, or whether it comes to investing in software or whether it comes to putting money into advanced education so that we are graduating more technologists and more engineers, what we're really looking at is a generational thing. We're really looking at something that this government will be able to look back on with pride as opposed to something that this government is going to be able to take credit for in the short term.

I know that doesn't make it a very political issue. We can't look at government policy and leadership in this regard as something to take to the voters in the next 18 months or whenever the next election call is going to be. This is something where this government has a chance to really demonstrate some leadership in a nonpolitical way, in a nonpartisan way, and say: we are going to build a foundation here that is going to serve our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren, and we're going to do this in a way that is going to bring stability and some predictability into the area, and we're going to recognize that it's a legacy that we're creating, not just some opportunism.

The way that governments used to deal with this would be to build hospitals and provincial buildings and pave roads. It was something you could turn to and say: "Look what I delivered to my constituency. You know, that hospital wouldn't be there if I wasn't your MLA. That road wouldn't be paved if I wasn't your guy." This is entirely different. I daresay that when every man and woman in this Chamber is well retired and beyond their political productivity years themselves, this is something that they would be able to look back on and say: "You know, I was part of something that was good and proper. I was part of something that had wide acceptance from all political quarters in this province. It was the good and right thing to do, and we're proud of it."

Mr. Minister, as long as you keep on encouraging your government to move down this path, we'd be pleased to be there providing input and advice and ensuring some accountability. We have raised some concerns. We've addressed them in the earlier questions. I have had an opportunity to talk with the minister and some of his staff about those concerns. We will continue to probe when it comes to some of the gaps that we've identified, but all in all this is a bright pinhole of light in an otherwise dark set of government business plans. I'm pleased to talk about this for the Official Opposition

when it comes to this government stating its importance in terms of getting behind science and innovation in the province.

I will conclude my comments by asking one question that was asked of me just the other day, believe it or not, by a taxi driver who was dispatched to deliver a package to Coronation Plaza. I still think of it as the old Woodward's warehouse. Then it was a Costco. Then it was a flea market. Basically it's 149 Street. I think it's called Coronation Plaza. It's a big warehouse. It's leased property, I think, from Infrastructure, leased in part to Innovation and Science. The taxi driver said that he was asked to deliver a small box to the Innovation and Science offices in this Innovation and Science building. He said, and I quote: do you know what the hell's going on in there? I said: I really don't. He said: "Well, I had to bring this little box in, and there were all these guys running around. It looked like they were busy, but I couldn't really figure out what they were busy doing, and they wouldn't tell me what was in the box, and it's really driving me crazy."

So I guess on behalf of this taxi driver that gave me a ride to the airport about 10 days ago, I just want to ask the minister: could you find out for us what's going on in that space, and could you report back so I can put this gentleman's mind at ease that his tax dollars are being put to good use in that facility and so the next time somebody asks me just what's going on in that building, I'll be able to explain to him with certainty what purpose we're putting those public servants to in that leased space?

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and the proposed estimates for the Department of Innovation and Science for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$184,867,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

10:30

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. RENNER: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, for the following departments.

Department of Human Resources and Employment: operating expense and capital investment, \$1,034,970,000.

Department of Children's Services: operating expense, \$535,540,000.

Department of Environment: operating expense and capital investment, \$332,506,000.

Treasury Department: operating expense and capital investment, \$139,438,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$98,941,000.

Department of Gaming: operating expense, \$183,191,000.

Department of Infrastructure: operating expense and capital investment, \$2,152,558,000.

Department of Innovation and Science: operating expense, \$184,867,000.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly. I would also like to table copies of documents tabled during Committee of Supply this day for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 1

Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I think this is one of the most excellent, most progressive bills that we've had discussed in this Assembly. I'm fully in favour of it, as I'm sure most other colleagues here are. With that, I would move that we proceed further with the vote.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I was hoping to hear again from the Minister of Innovation and Science on this bill. I know that at third reading I can't yield the floor and then have an opportunity to get back up. I don't know if he's going to say anything about this bill or not. I think it's a real shame if he isn't.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the Official Opposition is pleased to support Bill 1, particularly as amended. I again want to thank the House for its co-operation on the amendment during the committee stage. I think Albertans are going to be well served by this foundation.

Mr. Speaker, think for a minute about an Alberta that is as rich in high-technology activity as it has been in agriculture and the exportation of natural resources. Think about an Alberta where boys and girls in schools have access to the Internet no matter where they live, no matter what grade level they're in. Think about an Alberta where there are community kiosks that provide high-speed access to information and communications technology. Think about an Alberta where we have reduced the barriers to postsecondary

education to such an extent that there's not one qualified student that's unable to access postsecondary education and training should they so desire it. Think about an Alberta where we have been able to take full advantage of the growth in communications technology and information technology. Think about an Alberta that is truly geared towards a maximum-wage mentality instead of one that until recently has been at the bottom of the minimum-wage list in this country.

Think about an Alberta, Mr. Speaker, where we provide leadership to the entire world when it comes to models of co-operation in the pursuit of science and in the pursuit of knowledge and, through that, in the creation of a high, high standard of living and quality of life. If you think about all that, what you will find in part is that you are thinking about what the intent is behind Bill 1, the establishment of this foundation for science and engineering research. That is in fact at least half of what will bring Alberta to that kind of future. This kind of legislation is at least half, and that's why I'm here to support it.

Now, of course, the other half that's necessary, Mr. Speaker, to bring Alberta that kind of future is a Liberal government. I am very happy to support Bill 1 because it's the first step in that two-step process we have to take to get to that kind of Alberta. So we'll support this bill now, and then we'll be well poised, when there's a Liberal government in this province, to take full advantage of it so we can achieve that vision of that kind of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science to close debate.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that we have managed to pass this bill as quickly as it's being passed. It is Bill 1. It is a momentous bill. I think it's something that everybody in this House will be able to look at in the future, when we're all out of politics, at some stage in our lives . . .

DR. OBERG: Duck; there's lightning coming.

DR. TAYLOR: Duck; there's lightning coming. Thank you, Minister of Learning.

We'll all be able to look back and say that this was a good thing that we've done. It started a new millennium, and it created a real future for our children and grandchildren.

Thank you, everybody.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've made excellent progress tonight, and in view of that, I would move that we adjourn until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[At 10:40 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 22, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, we confidently ask for Your strength and encouragement in our service of You through our service of others. We ask for Your gift of wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen. Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to present to the Assembly a petition signed by 219 Albertans from Edmonton, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, Devon, and Bon Accord. These petitions are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition. It is signed by 233 citizens of Alberta from the communities of Leduc, St. Albert, Fort Saskatchewan, Bon Accord, and of course Edmonton. These citizens are petitioning the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the distinct pleasure to table with the Assembly today the hard work of two seniors in the Edmonton-Calder constituency. This is just part of their work. There are some 234 signatures from their friends, acquaintances, and new acquaintances in and around the city, some of them from as far away as St. Albert and Sherwood Park. They do collectively urge "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I, too, would like to present a petition signed by 186 individuals from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, and Gibbons. They are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would present a petition signed by 238 citizens of Edmonton and Sherwood Park urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining the public health care system."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition with another 500 signatures on it; close to 6,000 signatures have already been tabled. The individuals whose signatures are on today's petition are from Edmonton, St. Albert, St. Vincent, St. Paul, Hilda, Pincher Creek, Calgary, and Hinton. The petitioners are requesting this Assembly "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to request that the petition standing in my name from March 20, 2000, regarding the nonsupport for private health care be read and received by the Assembly.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday denouncing private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name now be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would now ask that the petition which I presented to this Assembly yesterday urging the government to stop its pursuit of privatizing our health care system now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I do ask that the petition I tabled yesterday in this House urging the government to stop privatizing health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday urging this government to stop privatizing health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented regarding the undermining of public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I request that the petition I presented on March 21 regarding government promotion of private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition from 225 Albertans that I presented to the Assembly on Tuesday, March 21 requesting that the promotion of private health care be stopped be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, request that the petition I presented yesterday to the Assembly signed by 302 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to support for public health care that I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today five copies of an article by Joel Christie, who has a PhD in health care planning from the University of Alberta. The article appears in the current issue of the publication entitled *Profile*, Alberta's knowledge-based business magazine. The article titled Health Care Crossroads examines the growth of the publicly funded system and its constant need for change and concludes that:

Carefully extending private delivery beyond the private practices of physicians will enable us to build our health care to the next level without losing what we have gained and learned over the last 30 years of publicly funded health care delivery . . . Private delivery of appropriate health services would help alleviate the current line-ups, improve access to treatment within clinically appropriate timeframes and improve accountability. All at no extra cost to the person receiving medically necessary services.

1:40

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I have four tablings this afternoon. First of all, a letter to the registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons from the Hon. Allan Rock. This is in response to his concern about the college getting on with providing guidelines for the operation of private surgical clinics. In one paragraph that I would just like to quote he indicates:

I am writing separately to Health Minister Jonson to encourage him to fill the legislative vacuum which currently exists and which could have been addressed by Bill 37.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Mental Health Patient Advocate for the year ended December 31, 1999.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Alberta Health Facilities Review Committee for the period ended March 31, 1999.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Public Health Appeal Board for the year ended December 31, 1999.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today the responses to questions raised during International and Intergovernmental Relations estimates on Tuesday, February 29. They're directed to Edmonton-Riverview, Edmonton-Norwood, and Edmonton-Ellerslie. I note that in case they haven't received them in their office.

Thank you.

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

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today on behalf of the Minister of Environment I'd like to table a letter from the minister to Duncan Ellison of the Canadian Water and Wastewater Association in recognition of World Day for Water, which is today. The Canadian wastewater association represents the municipal and wastewater sectors in Canada, which work to protect and preserve our water resources through safe water treatment and efficient use.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the appropriate number of copies of four letters today. These are letters to the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, the Member for Dunvegan, the Member for Peace River, and the Member for Rocky Mountain House. In these letters I am providing an opportunity to all of them to debate the merits of Bill 11 with me at a mutually agreeable time. I am looking forward to them accepting the offer.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I have the appropriate number of copies to the hon. Associate Minister of Forestry, the hon. Minister of Economic Development, the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, and the hon. Member for Red Deer-South asking them to debate Bill 11 publicly.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a resolution passed at the national convention of the Liberal Party of Canada. It states:

Be it resolved that the Liberal Party of Canada urge the federal government to express its opposition to any provincial legislation (including Alberta's Bill 11) extending private-for-profit health care delivery.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, with your permission. The first are excerpts from Bovar Inc.'s 1999 annual report, which shows that revenue-sharing from the net income of the Premier's special waste management facility in the year 1999 was zero. This is a rate of return of .00535 percent, I'm sure not as high as the profit expected from these private hospitals.

The second tabling that I have is an analysis by Brad Severin of BDO Dunwoody of the dividend tax credit as set out under section 21 of the Provincial Treasurer's 11 percent flat tax bill. What this shows is that Albertans who have dividend income of approximately \$24,000 will now have to pay over \$100 in income tax under the Treasurer's scheme, but if he'd just left things alone, if he'd just left well enough alone, that income would be tax free.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, what I have are the appropriate number of copies from myself to the Member for Calgary-Currie, the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and the Member for Red Deer-North inviting them to meet with me at a mutually agreeable time and place to discuss the merits of Bill 11.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I wish to table five copies of letters that are going out to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, the Member for Calgary-Fort, the Member for Calgary-North Hill, and of course my favourite and longtime friend and acquaintance, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. They are in fact invitations to debate the merits of Bill 11 in their constituency at a mutually agreed upon time.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of an invitation letter to four members on the government benches: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, the hon. Member for Leduc, the hon. Member for Little Bow, and the hon. Member for Wainwright. It's an opportunity to debate the merits of Bill 11 with me at mutually agreed time at a place of their choosing.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have three tablings today. The first is a letter I sent to the MLAs for the constituencies of Calgary-Egmont, Cardston-Taber-Warner, Lesser Slave Lake, and West Yellowhead. This letter provides an opportunity for them to debate the merits of Bill 11 with me at a mutually agreed time and at a place of their choosing.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter to the minister responsible for tourism from the general manager and chief operating officer of Alberta's number one tourist attraction. In this letter he outlines that

Alberta Tourism has undergone a major reorganization in the past three years to establish a fair and balanced approach to provincial tourism marketing . . . Sadly, this Destination Awareness Campaign for the Americas achieves precisely the opposite.

My third tabling today, Mr. Speaker, is a media release from the Spiritus group, a grassroots Catholic organization in Alberta advocating and mobilizing on issues that impact faith and life.

Thank you very much.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings this afternoon. They are letters to the Minister of Health and Wellness, the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness, and the members for Calgary-Cross and Calgary-Montrose requesting that they agree to a debate to talk about the merits of Bill 11. As the government and its members always say that there is not enough information out there for people to be able to make a decision, this provides ample opportunity to do it in your ridings.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five letters to table this afternoon. They are letters providing the following members an opportunity to debate the merits of Bill 11 with me at a mutually agreeable time and a place of their choosing. The hon. members are the hon. Member for Calgary-North West, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray, and the hon. Member for Highwood.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have copies of four letters that I'm sending to the members for Calgary-Foothills, Stony Plain, Redwater, and Lac La Biche-St. Paul asking them to take the opportunity to publicly debate in their ridings the merits of Bill 11.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, with permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters to the hon. members for Calgary-Nose Creek, Strathmore-Brooks, Calgary-McCall, and Calgary-East asking them to debate the merits of Bill 11 in their constituencies at a mutually agreeable and convenient time.

1:50

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies when I get them of a note to the Liberal caucus House leader, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer, inviting all members of the Liberal caucus to debate Bill 11 in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, it appears that they are very reluctant. We offered them three hours of television debate; now they only want one hour. What have they got to fear?

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the Premier, but we'd also like to get out from under the dome. Therefore, I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of an invitation to the hon. members for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, Banff-Cochrane, Airdrie-Rocky View, and Grande Prairie-Wapiti inviting them to debate the merits of Bill 11 with me in their constituency at a mutually agreed upon time and place.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got four tablings today. The first one is a set of some letters representing correspondence between John Newton, who's my constituent, and he introduces himself as an average Albertan, nonpartisan infoseeker, professional musician, award-winning teacher, City of Edmonton Salute to Excellence '98-99, BA honours sociology, and new father. The letters express frustration and are a clear example of how this government manipulates statistics regarding health care and the difficulties inherent in being an informed member of what is supposedly a democracy.

Mr. Speaker, the second tabling is the position paper on health care privatization in Alberta, and this is the position paper of the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses.

The third tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter that I wrote today to the hon. Official Opposition House Leader, a letter in which I express serious concerns with his refusal to agree to "amend the House Leader's Agreement, which sets out the structure for the televised portion of the Second Reading of Bill 11."

MR. KLEIN: Way to go, Raj. They're afraid.

DR. PANNU: I think you're right, Mr. Premier, this time around.

The last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a copy of a letter that I wrote to Robert Clark, the Ethics Commissioner, in which I express with respect my profound disagreement with his decision not to conduct an investigation into my complaint regarding the Member for Calgary-Currie.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I have the distinct honour of inviting two hon. members to debate Bill 11: the Member for Sherwood Park, and I'm particularly looking forward to debating the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud,

getting back to my old stomping grounds. I'm sure both of them would be willing to discuss Bill 11 in a public forum, any time, any place.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I have appropriate copies of letters from four Albertans very, very concerned about Bill 11: Ailwin Boulet, Keith Purdy, Cecelia Hund-Reid, and Norman Matthew.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to table copies of five letters. These letters are addressed to the members for Grande Prairie-Smoky, Livingstone-Macleod, Medicine Hat, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and Vegreville-Viking asking them to arrange a mutually agreeable time to debate the merits of Bill 11.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to recognize the Member for Lethbridge-West. We've already had our debate in Lethbridge.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I have two tablings. Firstly, a copy of my letter to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona of even a date.

Secondly, given that the Premier has now discovered that this place is a refuge instead of a disease, the dome of course, I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of an invitation to the members for Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-Fish Creek, Calgary-West, and the minister of intergovernmental affairs to participate in a discussion so people in Calgary and Drumheller will also be able to find out what Bill 11 is all about.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And finally, my letter to the Premier challenging him to a debate on Bill 11 out from under the dome.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, that was exciting. We're now at 3 minutes to 2, and I'd like to point out to all hon. members that everyone who participated in Tabling Returns and Reports today, other than the hon. Minister of Intergovernmental and International Relations and the hon. Minister of Children's Services, violated the rules of this House.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports (continued)

THE SPEAKER: If the hon. members would like to know the model for tabling, I will now read one to you. Hon. members, I would like to table an agreement made by the House leader of the government of Alberta, the House leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the Leader of the Alberta New Democratic opposition, and the independent Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs dated March 20, 2000, relating to the debate on second reading of Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly 92 students from Neil M. Ross community school in St. Albert. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Bagdan, Mr. Sharun, Mrs. Crockett, Miss Lafranchise, Miss Siobhan Whelehan, and Mrs. Hazelwood, and also some parents and assistants who have come with them: Mrs. Komarnicki, Mr. Gamble, and Mr. Stasynec. They are seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have another introduction too, a person who is in the members' gallery. His name is Roger MacKinnon. He is a University of Alberta student who is here today doing some research and interviews for his bioethics class. He came with his fellow student Luke Miller, who had to return to class. I would ask Roger to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

DR. TAYLOR: I'm pleased to rise today, Mr. Speaker, and introduce two people from my constituency. I don't often get them up from Medicine Hat, so I'm pleased they are here. They are here for the Alberta chamber meetings. One is Kent Smith, who's president of the local chamber, and Dana Cooper, who's the CEO of the chamber. They publish this excellent magazine, *Profile*, and I'd encourage all members to read it, particularly the comments on health care. I'd ask those guests to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

2:00

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly individuals that are seated in the members' gallery and who represent the beginning today of the return of *Wednesday's Child*, an exciting series that has assisted in adoption of children in Alberta. With us today are Marg Pullishy, the producer; Anne Scully, manager of adoption services; and Nadia Zubach, the *Wednesday's Child* matching and media recruitment co-ordinator. As they rise, please join me and give them a warm welcome today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure today that I introduce a very special group of young students from the Vanier community school. They're accompanied by teachers Mr. Fogarty, Mrs. Sorensen, and Mrs. Wittig. They're also with another great group of parents. I would have them rise now, please, and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a constituent of mine that's visiting the Legislature today who resides in Stettler, Alberta. This gentleman is one of my favourite ministers of the cloth. I would ask the Reverend Don Axford, seated in the members' gallery, to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce a former colleague from Keyano College in my city of Fort McMurray. She presently is the program chair at the NAIT school of business. Shirley Carroll is truly a dynamic and energetic young lady who lives up to our city slogan, *Nous Avons l'Énergie*.

I'd like to ask Shirley to rise and receive the warm welcome of our legislators here today.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a bright young man from Edmonton-McClung, Fraser Betkowski. Fraser is a downhill skier, he's a golfer, and most importantly he's the son of the Leader of the Official Opposition. With your permission I would ask Fraser to stand and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a student from St. Thomas Aquinas high school in Spruce Grove. Her name is Patricia Schirmacher. She is doing a job shadow project today. I would ask you all to please give her a warm welcome.

Thanks.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly today a very well-known constituent of mine, Charlene Hay, who is the co-ordinator for Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations. I have known Charlene for at least 15 years. She is seated in the public gallery. I will now request her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Ministerial Statements

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

Wednesday's Child

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All children want and need and deserve a family. In fact, loving, stable relationships are essential to a child's healthy development.

Since 1981 Children's Services has been finding adoptive homes for children through the *Wednesday's Child* television series. The series consists of one-minute video profiles of special-needs children in government's care, children who are seeking adoptive families. It's the only program of its kind in Canada, and its success rate is remarkable. Since its inception 70 percent of the children featured have found adoptive homes.

Another season of the *Wednesday's Child* series begins today, and I encourage all Albertans to watch. The one-minute profiles air on CFRN TV in Edmonton, CFCN TV in Calgary three times each Wednesday: during 11 a.m. and noon, at about 12:58 p.m., and during 3 to 4 p.m. This series is an outstanding example of the benefits to children when government, the private sector, the community, and most importantly, Mr. Speaker, the parents who choose to give of themselves work on behalf of the children.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our partners: CTV, which provides free air time on CFRN TV in Edmonton and CFCN TV in Calgary; the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, which provides the funds required for filming and promotes special-needs adoption by displaying posters in Wendy's restaurants in Alberta; and the Adoption Council of Canada, which provides a toll-free response

line for prospective families. To all of you my sincere thanks and appreciation. Together we are ensuring that more children in Alberta are provided with loving and caring families.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Wednesday's Child* is certainly one useful and commendable mechanism to provide for the adoption of Alberta's children. This is but one initiative, however, required to address the thousands of children in our child welfare system who are awaiting a permanent home.

High-profile campaigns like *Wednesday's Child* help to inform the public of the plight of these children. It is, however, the frontline staff who struggle on a day-to-day basis to seek out safe and nurturing environments for children that must also be recognized. Their efforts must be recognized, respected, and valued to a greater degree than has been this government's practice.

The developmental needs of such children must also not be ignored, like their literacy rates, academic achievement, and social interaction. Opportunities must also be created for these children to experience hope and love until in fact they find a permanent home.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Members, a few minutes ago during Tabling Returns and Reports I tabled a document which is a House leader's agreement. I wish to advise the House that at the conclusion of question period today it would be my intent to rise and read into the record the contents of this agreement and recognize the Government House Leader, who will then proceed to ask for unanimous consent of the Assembly for the implementation of this agreement.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's only when you get out from under the dome amongst your constituents that you understand that there is another reality. Not my words but those of the Premier. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier now get out from under the dome, follow his own advice, come out and debate with me in front of Albertans and answer their questions on Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank God that we're all going to get out from under the dome on Thursday and have a break. I don't know about the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition. She seems to be suffering from dome disease. I know that I am. But I'll be refreshed and rejuvenated and ready to come back and ready to engage her in a debate in the Legislature on Bill 11.

I would throw the leader of the Liberal opposition's words back at her. A press release dated November 15, 1999, says, "MacBeth has challenged the Premier to a debate in the Legislature on contracting out public health care to the private sector". You know, Mr. Speaker, they raised the question yesterday. How can you trust the leader of the Liberal opposition when she says one thing a few months ago and is saying another thing today? How can they trust her when last week she challenged me to a TV debate, but in 1992 she refused to debate me during the leadership campaign for the Progressive Conservatives, saying: I'm not going to participate; a debate merely polarizes two sides? My goodness.

2:10

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, there've been a lot of changes.

He's now over there, and I'm now over here, and he's afraid to debate me on Bill 11. Why won't he do it?

MR. KLEIN: I'm not afraid to debate at all. As a matter of fact, the Liberals now appear to be afraid to debate. I understand from the hon. Government House Leader, Mr. Speaker, that they were offered nine hours of debate. No. They only want three. What are they afraid of?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: What are you talking about?

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, nobody knows what the Premier is talking about.

Why is he so afraid to get out and talk to Albertans and hear their questions on Bill 11? Is it because he's afraid they're going to tell him to withdraw his legislation?

MR. KLEIN: I'm not afraid at all. I'm out and about all the time. I like to talk to Albertans about all issues. I like to talk to Albertans about agriculture issues. I like to talk to Albertans about energy issues. I like to talk to Albertans about the environment, about justice, about the federal government, about elected Senators. I like to talk to Albertans about their attitude toward Ottawa and Mr. Rock and the hypocrisy of Mr. Rock. So I get out and about.

As a matter of fact, I was in Calgary last week, where I spoke to – what? – about 1,250 Albertans about health care, went on and on . . . [interjections] No. There were a lot of Liberals there. And thank God. They paid about \$375 to come and hear me speak, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that Bill 11 is nothing more than a scheme to use taxpayers' dollars to subsidize private hospitals and to force Albertans on the waiting lists to pay for enhanced services, creating a huge windfall for private hospital owners. Now we're learning just how huge that windfall is going to be. A price comparison of surgical procedures – this is real data. A price comparison of surgical procedures in the U.S. and Canadian hospitals was published in the April '98 edition of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and it shows that the median cost of a total knee replacement in a U.S. hospital is nearly \$27,000 compared to \$11,000 for a similar procedure in a Canadian hospital. Interesting data. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier admit that enhanced services within Bill 11 really means that private hospitals will be performing knee replacements at more than twice the cost of the service in the public sector?

MR. KLEIN: No, it doesn't mean that at all, Mr. Speaker. I think it's absolutely and totally – well, I don't think; I know – irrelevant to even be talking about the American system in any comparisons, because we aren't talking about that at all. We're talking about protecting the publicly funded health care system as we know it today and abiding by the principles of the Canada Health Act. That's what we're talking about.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that knee replacements are more than twice the cost in private hospitals, what profit margins has the Premier promised private hospital operators in Alberta when this bill goes through? Is it 20 percent, 30 percent, 40 percent? What's the private option that's going to be paid for by the taxpayers?

MR. KLEIN: The only promise that is guaranteed in the bill relative to payment, Mr. Speaker, is that all any Albertan will need is their Alberta health care card. Nothing more. Nothing less.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why would the Premier be pushing a bill that opens the door to \$27,000 private knee replacements subsidized by Alberta taxpayers when he could simply increase the capacity in the public hospitals and pay a mere \$11,000 for the same procedure?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member should know all about private clinics. I would ask Albertans: how can they trust this hon. member when she allowed 35 or more private clinics to operate under her watch when she was minister of health and allowed some of them to illegally charge facility fees? Right. How can they trust an hon. member who allowed that to happen?

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 11 is all about bringing in two-tiered medicine and promoting private hospitals or, as the Premier likes to call them, approved surgical facilities. This is a second study the Premier might want to look at. A 1998 study by DeCoster and others entitled *Waiting Times for Surgery in Manitoba* demonstrated that patients in the public health care system had to wait 14 to 23 weeks for cataract surgeries if they went to a surgeon who practiced in both the public and the private hospital sector. On the other hand, patients who went to surgeons operating solely in the public system in Manitoba had waits of only 7 to 10 weeks, half the wait. To quote the summary of the report, "Patients awaiting public sector surgery would wait up to 13 weeks longer if their surgeon also operated privately." My question is to the Premier. Why is the Premier so desperately trying to push Bill 11 and establish a two-tiered system that will see waiting times for surgery double for the majority of Albertans who will always have to rely on the public health care system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. minister of health supplement, but I am going to comment on one statement in her preamble, because this speaks to the malicious, vicious kind of misinformation that the Liberals are spreading, and that is reference to two-tiered American style health care. This bill specifically prohibits that from happening. They know it, and they're afraid to get out there and tell the truth. They're either afraid or unwilling to tell the truth. That statement about two-tiered health care is the kind of malicious information that they are spreading. It's wrong, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

MR. JONSON: If I might just supplement, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would respectfully suggest to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that she is confusing her references to the United States with ours when she should be comparing her references to the policy that she has enunciated with respect to private health care, and that is that doctors should completely opt out of the health care system in this province and charge on their own. She also is on record saying that a private hospital should be completely outside the public health care system, and I assume unregulated. Then you really get the true two-tiered system, which then I agree: if they're comparing their own policy, they should compare it to the United States. But that is not what Bill 11 is about.

Another thing, Mr. Speaker, I think is very important here. With respect to Manitoba, which was the reference point, they do have private surgical facilities operating in Manitoba. I understand that they're fairly well received. I do not see the federal minister or the Leader of the Opposition here condemning them.

More importantly, in Ontario they have a private facilities act, a

piece of legislation which, as I recall – I think there was a Premier in Ontario by the name of Peterson, and it was passed under his jurisdiction. They have the legislation. The Prime Minister is not asking for that legislation to be repealed. I really think there should be some consistency in the way the Liberals portray this whole situation.

2:20

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the minister of health is talking about. This is about waiting lists in Manitoba. You know, a Canadian province.

In pushing Bill 11, where is the Premier's evidence that contracting out to the private hospitals or approved surgical facilities, as he likes to call them, will reduce waiting lists? Albertans need to know.

MR. KLEIN: Well, yes, and they need to know from the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, Mr. Speaker. Why should Albertans trust her when she says now that the private sector will destroy health care, but in 1998 she said that the private sector could set up in this province. If it can find its place, it should get in there: that's a direct quote right from her mouth on CHED on Dave Rutherford's show. How can they trust her when she says one thing today and a totally different thing two years ago?

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, just in case Albertans missed that, that's the Premier refusing to answer on the evidence because he doesn't have any.

Given that the great majority of Albertans do not want Bill 11, Mr. Speaker, and given that the Premier hasn't shown one shred of real evidence to support his move to private hospitals, why doesn't he simply do the right thing and pull the bill?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the hon. member's statement that Albertans don't want this bill, that's not quite true. I have five letters. One from a farmer:

I would like to congratulate you and your Conservative Party on the way you've financially managed the province and for your vision of Alberta for the future in regards to Health Care.

Here's another letter.

I am an emeritus professor of surgery at the University of Calgary and I would like to let you know that I fully support your actions with Bill 11. I admire your courage in once again taking on the battle with the socialists and trade unions – and the Federal Government.

Here's a letter from a Mr. Tabler, and he says:

I would have to say that if anyone in Alberta, and indeed in Canada, is to have the balls – the guts – the courage – whatever you want to call it – to lead Alberta and Canada into new thinking about the delivery of health care, it is you, Mr. Premier.

Another letter from a lawyer in Calgary, a QC. He says:

I am shocked, appalled and upset at the abuse to which you are being subjected by the doctors' union, the nurses' union, C.U.P.E., A.U.P.E. and others over Bill 11. The criticism is unfair, outrageous, dishonest, untruthful and disingenuous, and the people involved know it full well.

I'm sure he's including the Liberals in that as well.

Just a small note of encouragement.

I'm with you all the way, don't be discouraged by all the nay-sayers out there. I think the majority of Albertans still believe in what you and your people are doing. Keep your chin up and smile.

Well, I'm doing that.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, those documents will be tabled?

MR. KLEIN: Yes, they will.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party does have the floor.

Security at Constituency Meeting

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are democratically and peacefully voicing their strong opposition to Bill 11. Some of these Albertans attended a carefully orchestrated meeting yesterday evening. The meeting was organized by the Minister of Justice in his capacity as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. My questions are to the Premier. I don't ask them lightly. Why is the government so afraid of public reaction to Bill 11 that it asked two Legislature Building security personnel dressed in plain clothes to be on duty at the Edmonton-Whitemud meeting?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, he's asking me a question that certainly pertains to a forum or a meeting that was arranged by the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to address some concerns around Bill 11. I don't know any of the details surrounding that meeting. I know that the question is germane to the meeting itself, and the only person who can properly answer that question is the hon. minister. Now, I don't know if you would allow that, Mr. Speaker, but if you will, I would have the hon. minister respond.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the security personnel are employees of the Department of Justice and were asked by my office staff in an abundance of caution, not at my request but in an abundance of caution, because I have in fact had forms of threats, not relating at all to Bill 11 but relating to some people who are dissatisfied with certain things in terms of the care they perceive they've received, items which I can't discuss and names that I can't disclose. We have had threats in the office relating to that, and I have had security personnel at a number of meetings including a January 13 meeting that I had in my constituency and prior meetings. My office staff, I presume, will continue to arrange for security personnel to attend those meetings for as long as they believe there may be any threat.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, my second question to the Premier: what evidence does the government have that Albertans are doing anything other than expressing their peaceful opposition to Bill 11 that would warrant the stationing of security personnel at a Conservative MLA's meeting?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I will have the hon. minister respond to that question, but I can tell you that as the Minister of Justice in particular and to some degree as the Attorney General this hon. minister deals with some cases involving some very unsavoury characters.

MR. HANCOCK: Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, I could just supplement to say that I'm extremely disappointed to see a news release that's been issued by the New Democrat opposition. I had occasion, as you well know, to speak with the hon. member this morning. He didn't raise this question with me, didn't take the opportunity to ask whether there was a need for security personnel to be attending a meeting, did not in any way give me any forewarning of this issue.

I could have explained to him quite reasonably the attendance of security personnel at this meeting, at the last meeting I held, and on

other occasions when I've been out in a circumstance where we thought there might be the presence of a person who had made a threat. I could have explained that to him, and there wouldn't have been any need for these sorts of histrionics.

The meeting I had in Edmonton-Whitemud last night, Mr. Speaker, was a very peaceful meeting. I think the *Journal* accurately reported it as a very polite meeting. We had a very good discussion. There were no problems at that meeting, and we didn't anticipate any problems from the constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud, who I invited to attend that meeting. The threat came from someone who is not a constituent of Edmonton-Whitemud but we reasonably believed might attend the meeting.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, the minister himself has recognized that there was no security threat, so I ask the Premier: why are your government resources being used to monitor ordinary Albertans who were only exercising their democratic right to oppose Bill 11 at a public meeting? That's the issue.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I think I've made it perfectly clear that the attendance of security personnel at that meeting had absolutely nothing to do with the constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud, whom I invited by a personal circular to all residents of Edmonton-Whitemud letting them know that the meeting would be there. It was a peaceful meeting. It was intended to be a peaceful meeting. The attendance of security personnel had nothing to do with the discussion on Bill 11.

I'll reiterate again, because the member obviously couldn't listen the first or second times: security personnel were there solely because my office was concerned about certain threatening phone calls and threats that we've received in the office related to an unrelated matter, which he well knows because I've said it twice already. I cannot disclose the content of it because it might lead to the identification of the individual who made the threats. It has nothing to do with the debate on Bill 11. If he can't accept my word for it, I think it might be a question of privilege that would be raised later on.

Speaker's Ruling Improper Questions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair is deeply disturbed by this last series of questions. There has to be some honour in this place among all of us. I have had the privilege of being in here for going on 21 years, and I do know that from time to time Members of the Legislative Assembly do receive threats upon their person or persons in their family. This is not an uncommon occurrence. This happens.

2:30

Systems have been put in place for the protection of individuals. Certain ministers of the Crown are more likely to receive abusive calls and actual physical threats upon them because of their ministerial portfolio. Not in the least of them is the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General. It's a requirement, in fact, for the safeguarding of a democracy that the appropriate security measures are put in place.

From time to time, members of this Assembly who are private members have the need to seek security assistance. There are members in this Assembly now who visited with the Speaker and asked for and received such security provisions and security arrangements. This is not uncommon. What is uncommon and of disturbance to me today is that this matter would be raised in this Assembly in this manner. An hon. member . . . [interjections] Please. Please.

We did have an opportunity, as was correctly pointed out by the hon. Government House Leader, to meet with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona at 11 o'clock this morning. This was ample provision to discuss such a matter not only between the two of you but among other individuals including the Opposition House Leader, which might have helped clarify this matter.

I'm really sorry this type of questioning occurred in this Assembly today. [interjections] Please. Let us move on.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

Gasoline Prices

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the hon. Provincial Treasurer. The federal government, the federal Liberals recently announced that they will spend \$750,000 worth of hard-earned taxpayer money to study pricing practices of the oil and gas industry. Essentially all of this money is going to figure out why the price of gasoline we pay at the pumps is so high. Another study but no action. I certainly hope that Alberta will not follow suit and launch a study. To the Provincial Treasurer: what can this gas pricing study done by the Conference Board of Canada possibly achieve? Can we hope for a reduction of gas prices on the federal side?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, as far as the province of Alberta being implicated in that, that amount of money that's going into doing a study on why gas prices are going up, whether it is \$750,000 or \$600,000 – I think I can answer it, and it won't cost of dime. Simply, the demand for crude based on the supply that's available drives the price up, and as the supply increases, the price goes down.

Now, some time ago there was an agreement signed between OPEC and non-OPEC nations related to a reduction of something like 5 million barrels a day in production, and naturally when that supply begins to drop, price is going to go up. As a matter of fact, today, Mr. Speaker, because that agreement that was signed indicated that those production reductions would hold until March of 2000 – and as you know, this is the time which we are in now. Given the anticipation of those production reductions and production starting to rise again, the market already seems to be anticipating that. We were looking at a west Texas price at noon today of \$27.60. That's a drop of about 20 percent in the price going back over the last couple of weeks.

The province of Alberta will not be investing any money in such a study as is being done. We know why these prices go up, we know why they come down, and we know that we are also prepared for that rise and fall.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Treasurer tell me how our farmers will be impacted by these high fuel costs and whether or not there are programs in place or programs anticipated to help them deal with these current high prices as they plan for spring seeding? [interjection]

MR. DAY: I will give the facts on that, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that there are a couple of programs in place right now directly related to fuel for farmers. The fuel benefit, first of all, allows for the fact that farmers are exempt from the 9 cent per litre provincial tax, the lowest tax in the country, and there is also a fuel benefit that reduces the price of diesel by another 6 cents. Those programs cost between \$110 million and \$115 million.

Further to that, our minister of agriculture has been working very closely with producers, because there have been rising costs facing

our agriculture producers. The federal government, of course, has not seen fit to give any assistance to Alberta farmers on this particular area. So not just an increase in the farm disaster program but in fact a new approach: farm assistance 2000 is in place to address a variety of these costs, including the high cost of fuel. Part of that is involved in an acreage payment of \$4.29 per acre to farmers, and that is going to go a significant distance to making that available in time for spring planting. We care about our farmers in this province, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. GORDON: Again to the Provincial Treasurer. As I'm meeting with farmers in the Stettler area on Saturday morning, could you please tell me so I can tell them: what is the direct proportion of Alberta tax versus federal tax, and is there tax on tax?

MR. DAY: Well, that's a key point, Mr. Speaker. The member can feel free to share some things with the constituents with whom she'll be meeting.

On the federal side – and this should be very carefully noted. Of course every province has a tax per litre on gasoline, and ours is 9 cents in this province. It's the lowest in Canada. The fact of the matter is that the federal government has a 10 cent excise tax on every single litre, and unbeknownst to most Canadians, part of that tax was put in place several years ago as a deficit elimination tax.

Now, a number of provinces have achieved surplus positions over the last few years because of provincial policies. The federal government has skimmed the excess away from the provinces and has walked around bragging about a surplus, yet they continue to tax every Canadian a deficit elimination tax when thanks to the work of the provinces the federal deficit has been eliminated. Not only do they do that, but after all the taxes are in place, they add the GST on top. [interjections]

I know the Liberals are getting excited when I talk about this, but the fact is that Canadians need to remember that every time you put gasoline in your car, you pay the GST on top of all the other taxes. As the price of gas goes up, you pay more. The federal government gets richer; you as a taxpayer get poorer every time you fill that tank.

I'll just close with this thought, Mr. Speaker. The Liberals here in the province sent the Member for Calgary-Bufferalo down to the Liberal convention this weekend. Now, he could have talked to his friends about the federal government not helping our farmers. He could have talked to his friends about the federal government interfering in health care. He could have talked to his friends about the GST on tax. Did he do any of that? No. Do you know what he said was the compelling issue on the minds of Albertans? He went down there, and he whined about the federal Access to Information Act. Those people are out of touch, Mr. Speaker.

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

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Spiritus, a Catholic organization that has representatives from the Catholic Women's League, the Knights of Columbus, and the Catholic school trustees has raised important questions about Bill 11. My questions today are to the Premier. Why is this government promoting Bill 11, which fosters further division and mistrust within the community and where the goal of some could very well become the selling of a product rather than the reaching out to those who are suffering?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, Bill 11 is there to protect the publicly funded health care system and to put some fences and rules and regulations around contracting out.

I would remind this hon. member, if he doesn't already know, that Caritas is an example. Caritas contracts to the Capital regional health authority, and it's a very good arrangement.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Consistent with the Spiritus concern with equality, I would like to ask the Premier: why is the government pushing Bill 11, that maximizes the opportunity for certain people's personal and financial gain, and seems oblivious to patient care, employee remuneration, and the efficient use of public resources?

2:40

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. member has not read the bill. I'll read it to him and see which parts he disagrees with. Does he disagree with this statement? "Whereas Albertans cherish Alberta's publicly funded and publicly administered health system." Does he disagree with that statement?

Does he disagree with this statement?

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to the preservation of the principles of universality, comprehensiveness, accessibility, portability and public administration, as described in the Canada Health Act . . . as the foundation of the health system [here] in Alberta.

Does he oppose that? If he does, stand up and say so now, because it's in the bill and it will become law.

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to the pursuit of excellence in the health system in Alberta through the efficient delivery of quality publicly funded services based on high standards, best practices and effective patient outcomes.

Does he oppose that? Does he oppose that principle? If he does, stand up and say so. And it goes on and on and on.

They are out there opposing these principles that Albertans hold dear. Hold dear. They are out there opposing the principles that Albertans hold dear, the principles of a publicly funded system. They're out there opposing it.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Consistent with Spiritus' concern with the responsible use of resources, I would like to ask the Premier why Bill 11 ignores their concerns that limited public funds are being used to pay private operators for bricks and mortar, which will cost taxpayers more in the long run.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the bill also says – and I would think they would support this provision in the bill – that the RHAs contemplating contracting out must demonstrate cost efficiencies. It must be demonstrated that waiting lists are going to be shortened. There are plenty of checks and balances, and I'm sure that the group to which the hon. member alludes would agree with those principles.

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

Education Property Tax

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On January 26 of this year this government announced a reduction in the provincial education property tax mill rate and an overall reduction of the amount of money collected by \$46.7 million for the 2000-2001 year. At the same time, the province announced that increases in both residential and nonresidential properties would be capped at 5

percent and that individual municipal requisition increases would be limited to 2.3 percent over last year. My question to the Municipal Affairs minister is: why were these specific measures adopted in this province?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, this government believes and is committed to the principles that all Alberta children are entitled to the same education no matter where they live in this province. All Albertans benefit from a highly educated and skilled population, and therefore the method of funding education must be fair and must be equitable. We have responded to suggestions that there may be a better way of funding education. We're trying to seek that out and have commissioned an MLA committee to review the current system of funding. Whether through, indeed, the general revenue or through the property tax, are there other ways? Are there other creative ways? We're certainly open to any funding options that may be available, and we'll continue to explore any suggestions that may be brought forward by anyone in this province.

MR. THURBER: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: can you tell this Legislative Assembly what the current status of the MLA committee reviewing the education property taxes is today?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes. My understanding is that the committee recently met with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, on March 9. They met with the School Boards Association on March 13, and they will be meeting with the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties later on this coming week to discuss recent measures, to discuss any potentials that may be coming forward as to dealing with the new process of funding education. Over the next few months the committee will be developing options, and we'll be presenting those options for public consultation throughout the year.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister: can you tell us what is currently being done to address concerns of communities such as Edmonton that capping and averaging of requisitions results in an unfair and unacceptable taxation system?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It should be pointed out that in 1999 Edmontonians benefited from the capping program on residential properties in the amount of \$5.7 million. One must consider this in light of the \$5.5 million increase in Edmonton's education requisition this year. Even with this year's increase Edmonton is paying \$27 million less than they paid in 1994 as far as the education portion of the property taxes is concerned.

This year, Mr. Speaker, Edmonton's two school boards will receive about \$26 million more in funding from the Alberta school foundation fund than is collected from the citizens of Edmonton. In other words, Edmonton's two school boards will receive \$26 million in property tax funding from other Alberta municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that Edmonton has been and remains a net benefactor from the taxation system that exists today. I know that the members of the MLA committee reviewing this issue as well as myself and my colleagues remain open to any suggestions that the city may have or that any other citizens of this province may have to continue to develop the fairest and most equitable funding mechanism that we can have for Alberta students regardless of where they live, regardless of what part of Alberta they reside in.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. If the private health bill is supposed to protect public health care, why is a health ombudsman not included in the legislation so Albertans have somewhere to go when the private system breaks down?

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to repeat and emphasize for the hon. member that the legislation has nothing to do with a, quote, private health care system. It refers to contracting to a regional health authority through a publicly funded, publicly administered health care system in this province. Therefore, the question is rather irrelevant, I think.

MR. GIBBONS: To the same minister: why are there no details or commitments in the bill that private clinics will be subject to investigation by the Health Facilities Review Committee or the provincial Ombudsman?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's first of all reference the provincial Ombudsman. Some time ago, I believe it was 1998, we established an overall dispute or conflict or complaint resolution mechanism for the operation of our regional health authorities. This step-by-step process does provide that concerns that are raised, be they with a laboratory service which might be private or be they with the hospitals, which are public – there would be a step-by-step process whereby complaints could be filed and disputes resolved. In that overall policy statement there is, as I said, a step-by-step process whereby if it is a matter of doctor performance or that type of issue, then that would be referred to the College of Physicians and Surgeons. If it is an issue with respect to alleged unfair treatment of patients within the system, that would end up ultimately, if not resolved at the local level, in the Ombudsman's office. So we are utilizing the office of the Ombudsman in an appropriate way within the structure of our overall health care system, and Bill 11 does nothing to change that overall approach.

MR. GIBBONS: If the private hospital bill is supposed to protect public health care, why are there no details or mechanisms to clarify how the deinsuring or the de-enlisting will occur to the new private health system?

2:50

MR. JONSON: Well, first of all, once again, Mr. Speaker, we do need to repeat – and I guess it is shown that certain people do need to have things repeated and repeated to them; occasionally they understand – that there is not any private hospitals act or any private hospitals contemplated in this particular piece of legislation. As I've indicated to the Assembly and to the hon. member, we do have in the system currently a number of processes for resolving disputes and dealing with issues within our overall health care system.

The member referenced the Health Facilities Review Committee process. This committee, which I think is very useful, very helpful, very good for the system, visits health facilities all across the province, and they would visit private nursing homes as well as public nursing homes. I'm sure you're aware of that. We also have the Protection for Persons in Care Act, which deals with individual concerns, Mr. Speaker, and they today visit the private nursing homes and the public facilities. Those would still stay in place with the passage of Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we have heard many times lately in this Legislature, surgeries are done today in private surgical clinics providing that the patient stays less than 12 hours. As we all know, every individual reacts differently to anesthetic agents. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what happens today when a patient coming out of anesthesia has an adverse effect requiring more than 12 hours of care?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we do have, yes, clinics in the province which provide medical services, in some cases surgical services, provided that the overall expertise applied to that area of treatment indicates that recovery from the treatment will be well within the 12-hour limit; that is, less than 12 hours. But in a system where there are thousands and thousands of people treated throughout the year, yes, there could be the possibility of some unforeseen reaction to the anesthetic. The provision, of course, that also has to be kept in mind is that the people who give anesthetic have to be well qualified through the overall medical training and accreditation process. I only know of one case in the past three years where there has been an adverse reaction, but in all cases, should that unfortunate event occur, the clear protocol for clinics is to get that person to a hospital, to an emergency room, as quickly as possible by ambulance to be properly treated.

MR. BRODA: Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: does the surgeon who did the surgery on the patient and a nurse who works in recovery continue to care for that patient past the 12-hour time limit?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there may be instances in the clinics where a patient requires more than 12 hours' recovery time, but the guidelines and expectations are quite clear, and that is that the professional staff, doctors and nurses, would stay with the patient, would care for the patient until they are ready to go home, quite frankly. As I indicated earlier, if there is any complication, they are there and they'll make sure that that patient gets the proper additional care should that be required.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: if surgery is done at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, does the patient stay until 3 a.m., and does the facility remain open until 3 a.m. so that the patient can recover?

MR. JONSON: It is my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that it is generally common practice with respect to day surgical clinics that surgery is scheduled starting quite early in the morning, perhaps 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning. The target that is established is that a person having day surgery should be able to be discharged by 3 o'clock in the afternoon, but if there are circumstances which require that a surgery be scheduled later, I would like to just emphasize again that the professionals, the doctors and the nurses and the support staff, would of course monitor and care for that patient until they are in a condition to be released and go home.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's private hospital bill – well, sometimes it's camouflaged as the private surgical clinic bill, but really it's Bill 11 – has led to a firestorm of opposition throughout Alberta.

MR. HANCOCK: Point of order.

MRS. SOETAERT: A firestorm, obviously. Doctors, nurses, seniors, small businesspeople, teachers, and over 29,000 Albertans have signed petitions against the Premier's private hospital scheme. They want to preserve medicare in the public interest, not promote the Premier's special-interest backers. Bill 11 is headed for the ditch, because Albertans just don't trust this Premier anymore on health care. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How can Albertans trust the Premier, trust the minister, trust this government on Bill 11 when there is not one shred of evidence – not one shred of evidence – that the purchase of surgical services from private providers will reduce costs or waiting lists for surgeries?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to indicate – and I won't go on at length about this – that it has been reported in this Assembly that with respect to the provision of eye surgery in Calgary through contracts with surgical clinics, the Calgary regional health authority has been able to provide more of those types of operations under the funding of the regional health authority, so there is no additional charge. They are able to provide more than they did before with the same amount of moneys, and the quality of the service has been very good. I could go on to mention some other examples. I could move over to Manitoba if she wishes.

MRS. SOETAERT: Will the minister admit that there is no evidence that shows that the introduction of private hospitals will reduce costs per day, costs per case, and total hospital costs while improving the quality of care and health outcomes? There is no proof, Mr. Minister.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I've just given one example. Perhaps if she doesn't like Alberta, we can move over to Manitoba, where the government of Manitoba, a previous government, mind you, has seen fit to contract, incidentally without any legislation being in place, with private surgical clinics. My indication, having read material on that particular situation, is that they are finding that the specialized clinics providing surgical services take the load off their very, very busy hospitals, the quality is being maintained, and the cost is basically the same.

MRS. SOETAERT: My final question to the minister: why doesn't the minister just admit that Bill 11 opens the door to two-tiered American medicine by allowing special-interest backers to charge Albertans for enhanced medical services? That's the truth.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I categorically oppose or deny that that is the case with respect to Bill 11. I really wonder why the hon. member across the way really cares, because their policy, the statement of their leader indicates that doctors should be able to opt out completely and practise outside the public health care system. Also, there are references indicating that anybody wanting to set up a private hospital should be completely out of the health care system, and they would have their nice little private system. That's what's so ironic about this and how inconsistent the opposition is in this whole matter.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the time for question period has now left us this day.

3:00

head: Statement by the Speaker

Television Broadcast of Bill 11 Debate

THE SPEAKER: I did indicate at the beginning of question period

that I would be rising at the conclusion of question period and reading into the record a letter that was agreed to today and then would be recognizing the Government House Leader, and it's now my intent to do that. In the past few minutes all members should have received a copy of this letter as well. Essentially, it is a letter from the Government House Leader to the House leader of the Official Opposition and the leader of the ND opposition and as well a letter to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. I want this in the record.

As per our discussions, I would confirm our agreement that the debate on Second Reading of Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be televised on ACCESS television from 8 to 11 p.m. the first day of its introduction for Second Reading. The Government House Leader guarantees at least one week's notice to the Assembly prior to the calling of Bill 11 for Second Reading.

The elements of our agreement are as follows:

1. All parties will use reasonable efforts in good faith to give effect to this agreement.
2. This Agreement embodies an understanding between the Government, the Official Opposition, the New Democrat Opposition and Independent MLA Paul within the Legislative Assembly and as such is not intended to be legally enforceable.
3. The debate will proceed as follows:

	Maximum
Honourable Premier	30 minutes
Leader of the Official Opposition	30 minutes
Minister of Health and Wellness	20 minutes
Opposition Health Critic	20 minutes
Leader of ND Opposition	20 minutes
PC member	20 minutes
Liberal member	20 minutes
PC member	20 minutes

With the rest of the debate proceeding in accordance with the usual practices of the Assembly.

4. It is further agreed that during the 3 hours of television coverage of the 2nd Reading debate, all Points of Order and any other procedural items will be brought to the attention of the Speaker in the form of a note to the Chair and that the Chair may deal with those items following question period the following day.
5. It is agreed that each House Leader will prevail upon their respective caucus for full cooperation in maintaining decorum of the house, with no interruption of speakers recognized by the Speaker.
6. It is further agreed that during the 3 hours of television coverage of the 2nd Reading debate, if a disagreement about the mechanics of this agreement should arise, the Speaker shall be the sole interpreter of this agreement and shall rule forthwith how the Assembly is to proceed.
7. The Speaker be requested, through Members Services Committee and the Legislative Assembly offices to finalize arrangement for the provision of television coverage as agreed.

In the document for the House are the signatures of the hon. House leader of the government of Alberta, the House leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the leader of the opposition New Democrats, and the independent Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. It's acknowledged and was agreed to in a meeting with me, and in my enthusiasm my signature there says March 23. Of course, it should have said March 22, 2000.

I'd simply like to add several other items to this agreement as per the discussions that occurred between myself and the three House leaders. In essence, the control of this feed out of this Assembly of course rests only with the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. There will be no commentary attached to the three hours of television coverage and there will be no editing, this request being made by the

Speaker to Access television. The contract will be signed between the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta and Access to give effect to this agreement. The costs will be paid for by the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta for this particular event, and the costs may very well be in the neighbourhood of \$5,000. That's for the three hours of coverage.

I would only add one additional thing. In invoking this and in looking at this, I want all members to know that a discussion was held with respect to heckling, interjections, interruptions, and the three leaders assured me that in fact all of their members would honour an agreement that will see no heckling, no interjections, and no disrespectful connotations and language. The chair responded that should such an event occur, the chair would simply, very briefly, rise and invite the hon. member identified who would fall under the category of interjections, hecklings, or disruptive behaviour to leave the Assembly. This would be done once, and it would be done on provincewide television. We will conduct ourselves in the highest degree of integrity.

Now, further to this discussion that was held this morning, it was also agreed among the four that at this point the chair should recognize the Government House Leader, who will now proceed to make an announcement and ask for unanimous consent of the Assembly to give approval to this.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege on behalf of all three House leaders, I believe, to ask for unanimous consent of the House that these rules as provided in the House leader agreement and as extrapolated upon by yourself be adopted as rules of the House instead of the Standing Orders for the period specified in the letter, to the extent that they supersede the Standing Orders. I can advise the House in so asking that Bill 11 would be called for second reading at 8 p.m. on Tuesday, April 4.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE SPEAKER: Let me just say to the four hon. people who participated in the writing of this agreement: congratulations; well done. It's a good example of what can happen.

Now, today during question period we also had another event. There was an interjection from the chair. I now want to call on the hon. leader of the third party.

Point of Order Member's Apology

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of privilege to apologize without any equivocation to the Government House Leader, to all my colleagues in the Assembly, and to you for the questions that were raised which seemed to question the integrity of the Minister of Justice. I must say – and I want to iterate this quite clearly – that I hold the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of this province in the highest regard. In my dealings with him as Government House Leader and in my dealings with him as a colleague I have nothing but respect for him. So if in my questions I have erred, I apologize to him personally and apologize to the House for not realizing that the security threats, as the minister said, were a fact.

I did not learn, Mr. Speaker, about the presence of the security personnel at last night's meeting until 15 minutes past noon today; 12:15 was the first time I knew about it. Being alone I had a very busy time before I walked into the House at 1:30. It didn't even cross my mind to call the minister to ask whether or not the presence of the security guards were caused by security threats. Now that I've

learned about it, I'm sorry I raised those questions, and I apologize again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, let us move on to Recognitions in 30 seconds from now. Then I'll come back to the various points of order.

3:10

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Sunday, March 19, the Canadian Multicultural Educational Foundation sponsored their annual Harmony brunch in commemoration of International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The Harmony brunch is a community celebration of reaffirmation of equality and a celebration of harmony and diversity among us all. This year the guest speaker was Senator Douglas Roche, who addressed the issues facing our Canadian immigration department and its policies and their implementation.

My government colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek and I, who have attended many of these brunches along with others, which to express our appreciation to the organizers of this function, which is an awareness raising occasion for the elimination of racial discrimination.

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

Edmonton-Gold Bar Bill 11 Forum

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to recognize every person who came to the debate on Bill 11 last week at The King's University College. Many of those who attended were against the bill, and some were there in favour of it. Regardless of their stance on the issue I recognize each and every one of them for taking the time to exercise their democratic right to be heard. I especially want to recognize those people from my constituency, Edmonton-Gold Bar, who attended the meeting and made their voices heard.

All of these people, either for or against the bill, should not be casually dismissed by those in power as left-wing nuts. The people at this meeting were nothing of the sort. They are concerned and hardworking Albertans, young and old, from every walk of life. I recognize all of them for coming out to the debate, especially in a province where their government is so quick to brand them as left-wing nuts because they are interested and concerned about something as important as protecting our public health care system. I believe the Premier and those who so casually dismiss these people as left-wing nuts owe them an apology.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

World Day for Water

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, you and the other members have in front of you a glass of clean, refreshing Alberta water. We are fortunate in Alberta to have an abundance of this precious natural resource, and therefore I am very pleased to rise in the House today to draw the attention of the Legislature and Albertans to World Day for Water.

Water is enormously important to our health and our quality of life. Clean and abundant water supplies have long been recognized as one of the major determinants of good health. Today the overall quality of our drinking water in Alberta is high, and the incidence of water-borne diseases is among the lowest in the world. Keeping Alberta's water resources clean for both human consumption and recreational use remains a priority of our government and Albertans in general. Sadly, many people around the world do not have access to clean water, and the impact on their health is very serious. For this reason, the United Nations has selected the theme Water for the 21st Century in order to focus on the challenges for water resources for the next century.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Water & Wastewater Association has identified March 22, 2000, as the World Day for Water celebration and to this end has asked that we as Albertans and, indeed, members of this Legislature reflect upon the importance of clean and abundant water in our lives and the importance of wise management of this valuable resource.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Managers of Volunteer Resources in Lethbridge

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize Managers of Volunteer Resources in Lethbridge. This is a group of managers of the different volunteer associations that provide service through volunteer activity in the city of Lethbridge. On March 9 they had a function in the evening, which the Member for Lethbridge-West and I had invitations to attend, where they recognized their volunteers. Maria Craft and her association took that opportunity to provide an evening of recognition to the people who volunteer in our community and make Lethbridge the kind of community it is. So to Managers of Volunteer Resources I say thank you for everything you've done and thank you for recognizing the volunteers in our community.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Eating Disorders

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia are chronic debilitating illnesses that affect more than 30,000 Albertans. They interfere with an individual's ability to function in everyday life. Ten percent of those with eating disorders die within one year of the original diagnosis. For those who have been ill for 10 to 20 years, the mortality rate reaches 20 percent, approximately half by suicide and half by psychological collapse.

Eating disorders impact entire families. The illnesses impact all ages, even those as young as age 8. Early intervention has been shown to reduce the intensity of the illness and the mortality rate. Health promotion and prevention efforts are critical to reducing the prevalence of eating disorders. In fact, the establishment of a provincial eating disorder program is one of the recommendations of the children's mental health initiative action plan, which was developed by the Mental Health Board and supported by government.

This is why I was pleased when the Minister of Health and Wellness announced last week \$4 million in funding to support a co-ordinated provincial program for Albertans at risk or who are suffering from these dreadful diseases and their families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's with great pleasure that I'm able to recognize formally the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, also known as NAARR.

NAARR's mission is to eliminate racial discrimination, to encourage children, youth, and adults to respect people of all colours, races, and creeds. To this end they facilitate public forums, workshops, and conferences, invite high-profile speakers, and host a series of initiatives around the March 21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. March 21 marks the anniversary of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre in South Africa, when scores of peaceful demonstrators against apartheid were wounded or killed.

At this time I'd like to commend the hard work of NAARR's co-ordinator, Charlene Hay, whom I introduced earlier to this Legislature. Charlene is very committed to the goal of ending racism, as is her husband Gordon, both of whom, I'm very honoured to say, are former graduate students of mine. In the spirit of raising awareness and changing attitudes, I recognize and praise Charlene and Gordon Hay and the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

National Women's College Basketball Championship

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday, March 18, the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association hosted the national women's basketball championship at Mount Royal College, and the home team won. Mount Royal College Cougars won their first gold medal championship in a contest that went down to the wire with a final score of 61 to 58 over the College Montmorency Nomades. Paula Walker drained the final free throw of her collegiate career. A victory won on the free throw line was augmented by her own sister's success of scoring 21 points. Annie, Paula's sister, was recognized as the tournament's most valuable player.

In addition to this success, the Cougars will be hosting the national championship again in both 2001 and 2002. On Monday of this week the Minister of Learning and I met with the board, faculty, and students of Mount Royal College, and you can appreciate that the energy in that meeting was quite upbeat following the victory of the team.

Athletically, Mount Royal College is considered a leader in Canadian collegiate athletics, having recently been named the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association's overall sports supremacy champions for the first 25 years. My congratulations to the coach, Donovan Martin, the staff, the team, the faculty, and the college for this tremendous national championship.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Clarification

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Just quickly, my authority would be *Beauchesne* 417. I think it was the first or second exchange between the opposition leader and the Premier. The Premier in his answer talked about the agreement that was in fact the subject of a tabling earlier, and then you read out the text of the agreement. He said something to the effect that the Liberals passed up a chance to have nine hours of televised debate to take three hours. I just want to make this observation briefly.

I practised law long enough to do lots of negotiation, and it's usually not tremendously helpful for parties to go back into a negotiation and pick out something somebody said because that's in the context of offers and counteroffers. The point is: it resolved itself in an agreement that everybody signed.

But now that the Premier has gone there, I have to say, so that we're clear, that the offer of nine hours, as best I can recall and subject to confirmation or contrary advice from the Government House Leader, was on the basis that we would not have people able to speak for their block of time but that we would have perhaps everybody in this Assembly speaking for six minutes or eight minutes or something like that. That was the proposal. That would not have allowed, in my view, the kind of full development of analysis of the bill. It would be very different than what we get in the normal second reading debate. So I simply wanted to make it clear.

3:20

I also wanted to make a request that if we're going to have good-faith negotiations to try and make this place work well, it works best if people respect the fact that there's a give-and-take to negotiations. People take positions, and they adjust and compromise those positions. To the extent that people come in and start trying to use elements of a negotiation, it tends to undermine the process and make people less forthcoming.

That's the observation I wanted to make in a point of order. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously there's not really a point of order but a point of clarification.

While I would concur to some degree with the concept that's raised by the hon. Opposition House Leader, that one normally wants to have the opportunity to have discussions about the parameters of the House business with some degree of understanding that those discussions are between the parties, clearly this issue came up today as a result of cute tricks again being suffered on the House by the opposition in tabling invitations to debate. In that context it's quite understandable that the hon. Premier would refer back to the concept that had been offered of a nine-hour debate, three days of three hours.

Yes, the Opposition House Leader, for clarity, is quite correct that that would have resulted in a need to truncate the normal time for debate for certain members of the House if all members of the House were to be allowed to be heard, televised across the province on Access TV for the full second reading debate on Bill 11. However, that was offered as an option for discussion, obviously – because televising debates in this House is the parameter of the House, of course – and because it was felt that this is an important bill and that it was important that all Albertans have a chance and that all members actually have a chance to be heard on television.

The member is quite right. For other than the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, the health minister, the opposition critic, and the ND House leader it would have resulted in a truncated period of time for each of the private members. For that reason, as he's indicated, they felt that that wouldn't allow them to develop their appropriate analysis. I'm of the view that there's not really a lot important to be said that can't be said in five or six good minutes. If the opposition doesn't agree with that, that's their prerogative. Obviously, without agreement on that, we couldn't bring it to that point.

I think this was an unusual situation where the opposition was raising particularly pointed concepts about debate, about debate

being heard by all Albertans. In that context it was quite appropriate for the Premier to make the remark that he did relating to the offer of televised debate in the Legislature, which, of course, as the Opposition House Leader has said on occasion and has been quoted in this House as saying and is on record in *Hansard* as saying, is the most appropriate debating forum that we have – I've obviously paraphrased the words – and as the Leader of the Opposition was quoted today as well as having said on earlier occasions, challenging the Premier to debate in the House.

Clearly, the point is not a point of order. It's a point of clarification. I take his point with respect to our discussions. I think this was an unusual situation, quite an appropriate one for the comment to be made.

THE SPEAKER: I would view that as a point of clarification. I think both hon. members have had a chance to provide the background that was not afforded to them prior to their asking for unanimous request to the agreement. I think it was a useful exchange, useful for the benefit of all members.

The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Provoking Debate

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I rose on a point of order with respect to inappropriate comments. I would use Standing Order 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," and the citation in *Beauchesne* which refers to the concept that one should not provoke debate. I raise it in the same manner that I raised it on a previous occasion when a member of the House rose and referred to a bill that's before this House as the private hospitals bill. The bill has a name. It's called the Alberta Health Care Protection Act. It's Bill 11.

Regardless of what type of spin or permutation the opposition might want to put on their questions, I think it's only appropriate, when they're using something which they're alleging to be the actual name of a bill, that they should be called to order if they do not use the actual name of the bill, because they're misleading Albertans by suggesting that there's a bill before the House called the private hospitals bill. There is not. There is the Health Care Protection Act. They may put whatever connotations they want on the content of that act while they're debating it, but it's improper, inappropriate, and certainly begs debate if in referring to the bill in the House they refer to it as the private hospitals bill.

MR. DICKSON: You know, it's fascinating to me that a little opposition of 16 people could be accused of massaging public opinion. We don't have the benefit of that \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau.

On that point, Mr. Speaker, I'd just make this observation. It was Professor Peter Lown of the Alberta Law Reform Institute, who chaired the panel of eminent persons, whatever it was called, who said that an accredited surgical facility – and it's basically the same beast in the old Bill 38, version 1, version 2 as we see in the current Bill 11 – is in effect a private hospital. He could see through that. The reference was clearly to Bill 11. I think we're entitled to use the adjectives we choose as long as we mention the bill title.

I don't think any Albertans were confused by the reference, and in fact it was the government's own study that pointed out the semantical game that's being played by refusing to call an accredited surgical facility a private hospital.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you both very much, hon. gentlemen. The

reality is that a bill does have a name. A bill does have a title. One can use a synonym or an adjective to describe it, and all that ever does is lead to provocations and a whole series of other things. In other words, it leads to a debate in the question period. Of course, the purpose of question period is not to have a debate. The purpose of question period is to raise a question.

I do believe there is some merit to the point raised by the hon. Government House Leader with respect to this and would like to advise all members of the House that I really wonder what this question period is going to be like as of April 4, when second reading is given to Bill 11. If one looks at the traditions in anticipation of what's on the Order Paper for that particular day, perhaps the environment in here will be quite different. So we can think about that and how we're going to deal with all that and read the rules.

This is not a lecture. This is just a suggestion or advice. Bill 11 does have a name, as all hon. members have names, and all hon. members are referred to that way. We don't denigrate the names of their constituencies or other individuals or anybody else. It's kind of an honourable thing.

Thank you very much.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure now to move that written questions which appear on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 9.

[Motion carried]

3:30

Women's Shelters

Q9. Ms Olsen moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that the following question be accepted.

How many women were turned away from all Alberta women's shelters in the fiscal year 1998-1999?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to table my response to Written Question 9 and a copy of the Women's Shelter Information System '98-99 statistical report.

Family violence is a horrific social issue that devastates families. Its harm is deeply felt and often long lasting. The effects of family violence upon children are particularly distressing. Statistics show that a child who witnesses abuse at home or is the victim of abuse is more likely to become an abusive adult. The cycle of abuse is perpetuated. We must do everything possible to prevent family violence from occurring and to break that cycle. We must clearly demonstrate that family violence will not be tolerated in our homes, our communities, or in our province. It is simply unacceptable.

Children's Services works to help and support children and families in abusive situations in a number of ways. For example, Children's Services provides funding to women's shelters. In Alberta there are 19 women's shelters, eight rural family violence prevention centres, and two second-stage housing programs. Women's shelters play a key role. Shelters provide temporary accommodation to victims who are fleeing an abusive home. If these facilities are full, we will work with our colleagues in Human Resources and Employment to find emergency accommodation for these family members. Sometimes victims choose to stay with family or friends instead, or they may choose to wait until accommodation is available at a shelter.

It is extremely important to remember that no one needs to return to an abusive situation. Alternative arrangements are always possible. When you examine the number of women who were turned away by a shelter, in other words not admitted to the shelter, because it was full, it's important to note that accommodation was found for them elsewhere. Again, I must emphasize that no one needs to return to an abusive situation.

Another way in which we're working to help victims of family violence is through the Protection against Family Violence Act, which became law last year. Through this law victims of family violence can obtain an emergency protection order, which is available 24 hours daily through police. An emergency protection order provides immediate protection and can enable victims to remain in the home, requiring the abuser to temporarily leave and find accommodation elsewhere. This measure is important for several reasons. First, it enables victims to remain in their communities and maintain their ties to schools, neighbours, and support systems. As well, staying in their own homes minimizes disruption to the lives of their children and provides for greater stability, security, and continuity.

This legislation is also important because it provides short-term and long-term protection. An emergency protection order available through police 24 hours daily provides immediate short-term protection. Long-term protection is provided through a Queen's Bench protection order, which can remain in effect for up to one year.

Another measure provided by the act is a warrant of entry. If someone is not allowed to see a family member and believes that that individual may be a victim of family violence, that family member can call police. Police can ask for a warrant of entry, which allows them to go into a family member's home and make sure that individual is safe. If the family member wants to leave or needs assistance, police can help. The Protection against Family Violence Act has provided us yet another tool for helping children and families.

Children's Services funding for women's shelters in fact has increased since 1997 by nearly \$2 million. This year, a total of \$11 million has been allocated, and approximately 95 percent of this funding is going directly to the shelters.

Education and prevention are also key components of our work in reducing the incidence of family violence in Alberta. Through 18 child and family services authorities located throughout the province, prevention and education initiatives continue. The office of the prevention of family violence is also offering training materials and opportunities for people to learn more about this most horrific kind of example of societal issues.

With all these initiatives, Mr. Speaker, and the help and support of our community we will ensure that children and families in abusive situations obtain the assistance they need to deal with family violence and build a better life.

THE SPEAKER: Before calling on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood to conclude the debate, did I hear the hon. Minister of Children's Services correctly? Did the hon. minister say that she had tabled a response?

MS EVANS: I also tabled copies of a report that was supplementary to it. It was, Mr. Speaker, the 1998-99 statistics from the women's shelters, that were released last fall, that in fact addressed the question.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, this is a fine constitutional point. Did the hon. minister table the response to the question?

MS EVANS: Oh, yes, I did.

THE SPEAKER: Well, then, hon. minister, I have to tell you that that was inappropriate because the House still has not dealt with the question. But that's okay. We'll get through this.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood to conclude the debate.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will certainly thank the hon. minister for providing us with the data. We'll get a copy of that tabling right away.

[Written Question 9 carried]

THE SPEAKER: Now it's most appropriate, hon. minister, to table the response.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I would move and table the response as provided.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you so much.

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's now my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Motion for a Return 11, Motion for a Return 12, and Motion for a Return 23.

[Motion carried]

School Property Tax

M11. Mr. Gibbons moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a breakdown of projections of provincial revenues collected from the school property tax for the fiscal years 2000-01, 2001-02, and 2002-03 by residential/farm property, nonresidential, and linear assessment classes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move an amendment to Motion for a Return 11. Alberta Municipal Affairs collects assessment data for school requisitioning purposes according to the requirements of the School Act and the Municipal Government Act. Section 158(1.3) of the School Act requires that there be one tax rate for residential and farmland properties and one tax rate for nonresidential properties, as defined in section 297(1) of the Municipal Government Act. Section 297(1) of the Municipal Government Act includes linear assessment in its definition of nonresidential assessment class.

Beginning in the 1999 tax year the School Act no longer allows a separate education tax for linear or property assessment. Consequently, education property tax revenue projection data are only available in residential, farmland, and nonresidential assessment classes. Further, Alberta Learning's total education revenue projections are available for public review in its three-year business plan.

Therefore, the amended Motion for a Return 11 would read as follows:

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a breakdown of projections of provincial revenues collected from the

school property tax for the fiscal years 2000-01, 2001-02, and 2002-03 by residential/farm property and nonresidential assessment classes.

If Motion for a Return 11 is accepted as amended, the following options are available. I can provide the immediate tabling information, or we can table it 30 days from the motion for a return. But I can table it today if that is accepted.

THE SPEAKER: Before recognizing the hon. Opposition House Leader with respect to this matter, we do have a policy with respect to amendments and notification of questioners with respect to the amendments. This is something that hon. members have been following with a great deal of diligence in recent years.

Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, you must have a copy of this amendment for everyone, and I take it there was no conveyance of this amendment to the hon. originator of the question.

MR. GIBBONS: No.

3:40

THE SPEAKER: Okay. So we've got another procedural – there is a policy.

Hon. Opposition House Leader, do you want to raise a point further to this or just point out the policy?

MR. DICKSON: Sir, you anticipated precisely what I was going to raise.

THE SPEAKER: Okay.

If I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, this concludes the debate. But we have a procedural – it's not a significant procedural problem, but it is a courtesy procedure that we have here. Can you shake your head one way or the other, that you think it may or may not be okay, before I call it? You don't have to say anything. I'm not going to put you on the spot.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I have an opportunity to resolve the conundrum here. Given that I've erred in terms of the procedure, I being the House leader have to take responsibility for it. We'll ask the hon. minister to reject the question. He's already indicated that he has the information, and he's offered to table the information tomorrow.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to conclude the debate.

MR. GIBBONS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'll be pleased to accept the information tomorrow. I understand what he was saying, that he has the amendment, and I'll accept that.

[Motion for a Return 11 lost]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Education Tax Review Committee

M12. Mr. Gibbons moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports and studies prepared by or for the education tax review committee between January 1, 1998, and February 17, 2000.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: First of all, I'd apologize for the procedural error, and we will try and right that tomorrow, if that is acceptable.

Regarding Motion for a Return 12. Madam Speaker, on researching this request, my officials advise that this material has been the subject of two freedom of information requests. In fact, much of the information that the Member for Edmonton-Manning is seeking is available in these past FOIP requests. I'm pleased to make the information gathered by Municipal Affairs in response to those requests available for review by the hon. member, and this material can be viewed by contacting the freedom of information co-ordinator for Alberta Municipal Affairs, who would be pleased to schedule an appointment.

In addition, my staff has also advised that a third FOIP request for this information is currently under way, and I'd be pleased to commit to the hon. member that this information would also be available for viewing by appointment once it's been released to the applicant.

In the meantime, Madam Speaker, I'll provide the member with a copy of the committee's interim report, which is a culmination of the reports and studies prepared by the committee during its initial review. This report is also available for all Albertans to review on our Municipal Affairs web site at www.gov.ab.ca/ma/corp/educationcomm.htm.

Madam Speaker, as much of the information the hon. member is seeking through this motion is available for public viewing, the government rejects Motion 12.

MR. GIBBONS: I'm hearing two things: it's been rejected on behalf of a tabling or a submission, but I am able to look at it and peruse it. This particular copy I'm talking about is this one right here that I FOIPed last year and got 13 severed pages. I FOIPed again. I know I've FOIPed a third time, and it's in process right now, but the motion was put in a number of months ago. If I'm understanding this correctly, I am going to be receiving something.

The provincial government has an obligation to actually fulfill and not just for perusing but to actually have this information out so that we can research it, do our study, and we can answer questions for those in Alberta that call us instead of calling the government. It is a very important item. It's a very important document. I believe that three MLAs are working on it diligently, and even if it did start a year ago March, there was no review actually submitted from that. I also want to mention that this review committee has gone out and hired people to do things, and we wouldn't mind having a report on that.

So I will sit down, Madam Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 12 lost]

Education Property Tax

M23. Mr. Gibbons moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports and studies prepared by or for the MLA Education Property Tax Committee between March 1, 1999, and March 8, 2000, on the provincial education property tax.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Madam Speaker, as previously noted in my response to Motion for a Return 12, much of the information that has been requested is subject to the past few FOIP requests, and the one that's currently under way is available. Once again I'm prepared to make information from the past few FOIP requests and the one pending available for public viewing by appointment through the FOIP co-ordinator of my department.

Therefore, the government rejects Motion for a Return 23.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to close debate.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to mention that the reason we need this is because of a number of letters we've sent back and forth, and this is doing my diligent job for the citizens of Alberta. It must be important enough information that we see on the Order Paper, under Motions Other than Government Motions, Motion 518 from the Member for Medicine Hat. It reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to explore alternative means of funding education other than through municipal property taxes and to begin discussions with municipal governments to develop new cost-sharing formulas that could be implemented after the provincial government removes requisitions for school taxes.

Madam Speaker, I believe that the hon. Member for Medicine Hat, as he spoke at a committee meeting the other night in room 512 with AUMA, is looking for a structural answer. I do believe that the hon. minister probably is, too, because he spoke quite enlighteningly at that particular meeting.

You know, for the interest of Albertans and the minister, he must be concerned enough that his whole management staff were listening to the AUMA presentation the other evening in room 512. For the record, that was on March 12 at 6 p.m. The AUMA gave a great presentation. I think they're concerned enough that in their latest newsletter they do have quite an issue on that particular item.

We want to emphasize that this committee has been in place since March of 1999. The first report came out in September 1999, but at that particular time all we noticed was a little bit of tinkering and capping. Instead of freezing the tax at a particular level, we should be coming out, I would suggest, with a much speedier answer on this one, considering that we're reading in the paper now how the city of Edmonton, the mayor of Edmonton, who'd never speak against this government, is coming out. Actually, yesterday on the radio I heard that he said that this government has a tiger by the tail with the health bill. Well, they're going to have a lion by the tail with this education tax.

You know, all Albertans are asking for is some answers. Like I mentioned before, there have been people hired by the committee to consult on this, and we'd like to be able to read, share, and help develop something for the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 23 lost]

3:50

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

Bill 206

School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise and bring forward Bill 206, which will amend the School Act to include a student code of conduct.

Specifically, Madam Speaker, Bill 206 adds to section 44 of the School Act, which defines the powers and the responsibilities of school boards. I say that it adds to that section because the school boards already have some powers and responsibilities in making sure that there is obedience in school, but this will add to the school boards' ability to come up with, and hopefully involve everyone in making, a code of conduct for each individual school.

Bill 206 will require each school board to solicit input from the relevant stakeholders that are involved in the school. That means the students as well as the staff, being teachers and principals and the administrative staff as well, if they wish, and parent councils in creating a code of conduct for their individual school.

Madam Speaker, after this extensive consultation process, each school would be required to have their code of conduct also put in writing. This code would set minimum standards of behaviour and the consequences for violating them. In essence, the code is a written agreement amongst educational stakeholders in the community about what is acceptable in our schools and what is not.

Madam Speaker, when the rules of the school are clear to everyone, then students can focus on learning and teachers can focus on teaching. Presently the rules that have been set in schools are in some cases unclear and also inconsistently enforced. Just recently we have heard a number of reports of incidents, but one of the most prime examples was a week or two ago with the greater St. Albert Catholic school board's actions or their inactions in dealing with a student sexual assault case. The board was really unsure on how to proceed in that case, and in the end far too much time was spent in making a decision. The decision also left many students and teachers and parents confused about the rules of the school, and it disrupted the entire proceedings of the school for a good length of time. That's not the best use of students' time, and it's not the best use of teachers' time.

As I have stated, a code of conduct is a tool that can be used by our schools, and it certainly could have been a tool that the St. Albert Catholic board could have used to set levels of acceptable behaviour and the sanctions that students will expect if they violate it. The code of conduct is a tool that schools can use to act quickly when the school environment is disrupted and to rectify the situation. But, Madam Speaker, the code of conduct that I am proposing also takes into account that students are not commodities that can be thrown away when they become a problem. Included in this bill are alternative penalty options that allow disruptive students to pursue their studies and also get any counseling they need to help them with their problems.

As well as dealing with serious problems by including the relevant stakeholders in the community, we will ensure that the values and unique circumstances of each community in Alberta are represented in the code. Madam Speaker, what I'm talking about are communities taking control of their schools.

I first ran across this statement about communities taking control of their schools from a retired staff sergeant who now resides in my community. In talking one day, he let me know how he ran his detachments in small towns. He said: I've often instructed my staff to take control of their community. What that means is not to run roughshod over the community and its people but to work with the community, to understand it and work within the law to enforce what you must do in that community in the name of protecting society, to help the community understand what will and will not be tolerated, to have his officers reach out into that community to accomplish the goals of the community right from young people up to senior citizens so that continuity and progress are made in educating everyone, so that in the name of safety, in the name of security, and in the respect of one another we can make and maintain a better community.

Bill 206 will help every school in Alberta maintain a learning atmosphere which is safe and conducive to the learning process and free from unnecessary disruption. As well, the code of conduct will communicate to parents and the community that unacceptable behaviour by students will not be tolerated. Madam Speaker, this takes us back to the key question that needs to be asked. Are our schools safe? By and large the answer is yes. Schools in Alberta are

safe. They are also caring places and are places for students to learn, yet where the problem lies is in the severity of danger and the pressure our students face. This is why there is great timeliness in introducing this bill into the House.

Recent occurrences of school violence—for example, just recently in Toronto, Ontario, three people, two of them students, were wounded in a gunfight in a local high school. In the United States between 1993 and early 1999 there were 186 school shooting deaths. In Surrey, British Columbia, earlier this month a 14-year-old student jumped off a bridge over the Fraser River. In his suicide note he said that he could not tolerate being relentlessly picked on. He was tormented at school and called a geek, four-eyes, and a fag. In Mount Morris, Michigan, a six-year-old boy walked into an elementary school and shot and killed another six year old with whom he had just had an earlier quarrel. Madam Speaker, right in my own constituency just this last week a headline in the local newspaper read: knife found on student at school. The incident was looked after, but it was rather disturbing to everyone in the community.

So, Madam Speaker, what does this tell us? This tells us that we must go back to the key questions on what is needed and what are the things that should be asked. We're seeing more and more in the news and on television, as I've just recounted, that our communities have an increase in the severity of school violence, problems associated with drug and alcohol abuse by students, and criminal acts committed by students.

In pointing out some of the occurrences of school violence, I did not mention the one that we're all so very well aware of. We all know of the tragic events that occurred in the W.R. Myers school in Taber that took the life of one student and injured another. This event that ended a vibrant young man's life so unfortunately also showed Albertans that these acts of extreme violence are not isolated just to American schools, but they are prevalent here at home as well.

4:00

Madam Speaker, what I do know is that although we may not be able to predict when violence breaks out or occurs, we can take and should take preventative actions. This means that we can first promote positive behaviour in our students and make it clear that we will not tolerate negative behaviour like bullying, harassment, or peer pressure, which sow the seeds of extreme violence. This is where a code of conduct could be an effective tool.

There is also data from across Canada that illustrates this increased school violence, as I had indicated earlier, and a 1995 study sponsored by the Solicitor General of Canada showed that Ontario schools reported an increase in school violence of 150 percent from 1989 to 1991. So it is appropriate that, as we have just heard in the last few days, the Ontario government is looking at a crackdown on student misconduct and is putting together a provincial code of conduct that they want all schools to abide by.

It's also well known in our own province that the ATA reported that in 1992, 50 percent of teachers had experienced some form of physical or emotional abuse. Of that number, 18 percent said that their schools had no policy to deal with abuse, and 62 percent did not know if their schools did have a policy. These statistics are just a few examples of why a code of conduct is needed, and when the rules are clearly defined, schools can act in an appropriate manner if they are broken.

Madam Speaker, a code of conduct is also needed to give schools the ability to act swiftly and with certainty against school disruption. A code of conduct will allow boards to get involved in making sure that the rules are set by an individual school, because they need to

be clearly defined, and the actions they could take of a preventative nature could also clearly be defined.

With a clear code of conduct, situations can be resolved immediately and not linger on. A clear message can be sent to all students that they can have faith in not only their own decisions but the decisions that were put together by the principals, staff, teachers, and their parents, which will protect them, keep them in a safe environment, and will not let them down. Students go to school to learn and to grow and should not be subject to the kind of disorder that occurs in many schools.

The code of conduct proposed in Bill 206 will make sure that students who perpetrate sexual assaults will get the help they need to have a chance to rehabilitate themselves and become responsible citizens.

What I'm proposing, Madam Speaker, is a balanced approach to school discipline and student responsibility. A code of conduct stabilizes the school environment, removes students unwilling to follow the rules, and promotes responsible behaviour. I think if there's one thing that needs to be perpetuated throughout our schools, right from elementary up to high school, it's that for every rule that's broken, you have to accept responsibility for doing that. Responsible behaviour will go a long way to ensuring that in Alberta each student will have a quality education free from disruptions which hinder and interfere with the educational process.

Yet on the other side of the balance are the problem students. When they're a problem in a school, the question always arises: do they not also deserve an education? If they don't want an education, it's our responsibility to try and make them see the light and get a good education. However, if they continue to violate rules created by the community, they must pay the consequences. We're not talking in the school code of conduct about the breaking of the laws of our land, because we have a system in place to handle that. What we're talking about is making sure there are appropriate rules in place within our community and within the school community. When someone violates the rules and they must pay the consequences, we must do everything we can to find a place for these kids.

This balanced approach to student responsibility and discipline will draw much of its strength from the consultation process that will drive this code of conduct. Essentially, it is important for students to view the document as legitimate. With input from students on what they deem as acceptable behaviour and acceptable punishment, they would be more inclined to respect and follow the code of conduct. This would create a spirit of co-operation in pursuing quality education and effective discipline. We must remember that students are intelligent, thoughtful, and capable of determining what is right and what is wrong.

Through consultation a code of conduct can empower students in their pursuit of education because it eliminates unwanted distractions. The code can also be a reflection of the values of the student and be something they can look to as theirs. In other words, there's ownership in this. It's something they helped create, and possibly they will be more inclined to support it. In the end, what will be created is a document all stakeholders will have a vested interest in and will be able to communicate to the community in a unique way.

Madam Speaker, communities need to take back their schools for the benefit of everyone. With the strength of the community behind them and following the code of conduct within the bill, school boards can rest assured that they won't have to make difficult decisions, as I pointed out earlier, as in the situation in St. Albert.

I've got to say that many school boards across the province have said to me in my consultations: "We already have a code of conduct. Will we have to do something more? Will we have to do something that is mandated by the province?" My answer to that has been no,

that you can come up with your own code of conduct. If you have one in place that's working effectively, working very well at this point in time, that's great. Keep it, use it, put it in written form so that everyone understands it, make it work, and make it continue to work for those schools. For those that don't, this would be a good exercise for all schools to go through. Maybe as students go through grade by grade and learn that a code of conduct will help make their school a better place and a safer place, they will grow up to extend that experience into their daily life, so not only did they take control of their school, but they also learned to grow up and take control of their community and be responsible individuals in society.

With that, I'd like to thank all my colleagues for listening to my comments today, and I urge them to please support this bill for the betterment of our students and our school communities. Thank you.

4:10

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

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and make comments on Bill 206, School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act, 2000. I guess when I first saw the bill, my first question was: how many school boards in the province don't have a code of conduct policy in place? It's a question I would ask the mover of the bill maybe to address at a later time. In preparing the bill, I'm certain that that information was gathered, so I would be curious as to how many boards don't have a code of conduct. I ask the question because I know that a code of conduct policy has been the subject of at least one of the Alberta School Boards Association's publications. It has also been a subject of publications by the Alberta Teachers' Association, and there have been a wide variety of community groups involved in making sure there are code of conduct standards in our schools. So I would like to know from the member's research just exactly how many boards are going to be affected by this legislation.

I guess one of the other reactions I had to it, Madam Speaker, is that it lists and will list now in the act a laundry list of abhorrent behaviours – physical violence, sexual assault, sexual abuse, vandalism, the use of a firearm, the possession of a narcotic, the possession of alcohol or tobacco – and it stands in such sharp contrast to what was tabled yesterday in the Legislature by the Minister of Learning.

Yesterday the Minister of Learning tabled a document entitled Safe, Secure & Caring Schools in Alberta, which had been sponsored in part by his department but involved a wide range of groups in the province in putting it together. As you page through that document, there's very much an accent on the positive and a desire to talk in terms of positive actions that can be taken to create a safe and a caring and a secure school environment. It ranges far beyond a listing of the kinds of actions that we see in Bill 206.

One part of that document that I noted with particular care was a section that was devoted to: how do you create a caring and a safe and a secure school environment? They listed the characteristics. They started off, of course, with caring. How do we have schools where youngsters feel that they are cared for, that they're respected? They had a number of really good, positive suggestions: that we spend some time in schools celebrating students' success, that there be a systematic celebration of students' success in schools, that there be an opportunity provided in schools for all students to exercise leadership skills, and that there be attempts to build team and school spirit. Again, a number of suggestions as to how that environment can be made more caring and students can feel that they are part of it.

A number of years ago I had the opportunity to study under Paul Gump at an American university. Paul had written a book called *Big School, Small School*, and although that book is very dated now, it had some information that has relevance to this very problem. One of the things that Gump and his associates found was that the size of school makes a difference in student behaviour. For instance, in small high schools students are forced to take part in more activities. That is, they have to exercise leadership if there's going to be a yearbook; they have to be part of it. If there's going to be a basketball team, they have to be part of it. So there's pressure on small schools for students to become involved, and that same pressure doesn't exist in large high schools.

In large high schools the people that are on the basketball team, the people that are involved in student council are really the stars, and it's very, very possible for students to survive in one of our large high schools and to be quite anonymous. A number of those high schools, I know for a fact, have taken actions to make sure that they re-create in those large high schools the advantages of some of the small schools. By having students be registered in houses, they are identified with a smaller group within the building, or they're identified with teams or identified with teaching teams. Again, taking actions to make sure that students cannot be left to feel anonymous, that they know someone, that they know teachers, that they know other students and that those students are supportive of them. The requirement in the book that part of a safe, secure environment is one where students feel cared for is an important one.

Another of their listings was that a safe and a caring school makes sure that commonly held values and beliefs are made public; for instance, the very notion of civility, that we treat and talk to each other in a civil manner. As long as they're in the building or on the school grounds, that's the kind of behaviour that is expected of them: that they will treat each other civilly, that they'll treat each with dignity and respect.

Some of the values that cause young people trouble are the very values that we promote. We promote, for instance, loyalty. We indicate that loyalty is a good thing. When loyalty is applied in a peer situation, that can lead to difficulties. By making public the values and the beliefs that the school supports or that should be supported in a caring school, I think it helps students better understand the kinds of value dilemmas they may find themselves in and be better prepared to meet them when they arise.

They called for respect for democratic values, rights, and responsibilities. We do this in a number of situations in schools, but it has to be done systematically. As Canadians we're all guaranteed under the Charter of Rights the freedom of religion, the freedom of speech, the freedom of thought, the freedom of belief, and the freedom of association. Those freedoms are precious, but they are bestowed on all citizens of this country, and schools and students have to make those freedoms evident. They have to make sure that students know what their rights are and what is expected of them in terms of their treatment of other individuals.

The member previous mentioned the respect for law and order, and there are a number of really good things going on in a number of high schools. The officer-in-the-school program, which I'm familiar with in this city, I think is one of those programs that contributes to a safe and a caring school. When officers are housed in the school, they get to know the students. They're part of that student culture, and they can help youngsters as they work through some of the difficulties they face in growing up in our society, those teenage years.

I would be surprised if there are many schools in this province, at the junior high school level at least, that don't have some sort of school handbook that students have helped compile, with the help of

teachers and parents, which sets out fairly carefully the code of conduct and rules and regulations that govern what's expected in terms of behaviour in the school. Again, I think it's a positive move in terms of making the school environment secure.

One of the important aspects of a safe school, which I think has been mentioned, is that there are clear and consistent behavioural expectations; that is, making sure that students know the consequences of their behaviour, that if they engage in certain kinds of activity, the consequences are firmly established. I think when that is done in conjunction with students, with their parents, community leaders, teachers, principals, and administrative personnel, it has much better acceptance and doesn't lead to inappropriate behaviour on the part of students but also on the part of people supervising those students. This particular bill focuses on student conduct, but there's also an expectation in a number of those handbooks that I spoke of for staff and administrative behaviour, the kinds of things students should be able to expect when they're being dealt with by those in authority.

4:20

An important part of a caring and secure and safe school is respect for individual differences, and those differences of course are more acute in some settings than others. In Mill Woods we have two high schools that deal with a very large multicultural population. To the credit of both of those high schools, they have exercised a continued effort to make sure that students that enter the doors of those buildings are fully apprised of our obligation to others and are made aware of the impact of racial discrimination and the consequences of racial discrimination.

They have an ongoing set of annual activities. They had a special celebration of the UN declaration of human rights, the 50th anniversary of that declaration. When you go to the ceremonies and to the educational kinds of activities they stage to promote racial harmony in those schools, you can't help but come away impressed. The most impressive part about it for me is always that it's student driven, that students are the ones who are trying to make certain that they and their colleagues are fully aware of the consequences of discrimination. They do a good job, I think, in terms of education and try to help make people who do discriminate understand the source of their actions, why they behave in that way. I think they do a really good job in helping people understand that we have to respect individual differences, not only respect individual differences but celebrate those differences.

A safe and secure school will have effective anger management strategies in place, and we've seen that in terms of peer mediation. We have teams of students who help resolve conflicts amongst students. There will be a whole range of strategies that are employed by teachers and supported by students, from time-outs in classrooms when anger becomes a problem to the involvement, which is part of this bill, at a different level with counseling and counseling activities.

One of the most important aspects of a safe, secure, and caring school is the setting in which that school finds itself and the conclusion that those kinds of schools are best created when they're involved with the community, when there are a wide variety of community members and parents who are involved with the school and helping to make it a better place, when the efforts of the school are supported. In fact, in many cases there's leadership from outside the school in terms of making it a good place for students to come to feel good about themselves and to feel good about the kinds of learning activities and extracurricular activities they're going to be engaged in.

Part of the problem in terms of creating safe and secure schools I

think comes from the very way we organize learning in the province. It's curious that we send high school students and junior high school students out of our communities at the very time when you would hope that there would be community pressure on those youngsters to meet social norms. We put them in buses or let them drive cars and send them across the city, where they can be completely anonymous, where there's no obligation to community members. It's a bit of an anomaly when we do that and keep close to us, of course for other reasons, very good reasons, the youngest children, probably the children that you could send away from the community without fearing that they were going to get into difficulties or not act responsibly. In part, I think, we bring some of the problems on ourselves just in the way that we organize learning instruction in the province.

I've looked at Bill 206 and have talked about it briefly with some of my colleagues. We're going to support the bill, but as I said at the outset, I guess I would have felt much more comfortable had this been part of a positive recommendation that the School Act would require school boards to have a policy on supporting safe, secure, and caring schools. That certainly would have been my preference.

I do thank the member for bringing it forward. It's a problem, has been a problem for a long time. It's been addressed by a number of groups and parents and Albertans in a variety of ways. Although we hear the horror stories – and some of them are extremely tragic – our schools are very, very safe places for our students when you consider the number of schools that we have in this province, over 1,800. If you consider the number of students that are involved in those buildings, we really do have an environment across the province where, for the most part, people can send their children and young adults off to school feeling secure that they're going to be cared for and that they won't come to a bad end.

With those comments I'd conclude. I would be interested if the member who proposed Bill 206 does have information on the number of boards who don't have policies on school conduct in place and could share that with me.

Thanks, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise today and enter into the debate on Bill 206. I would like to start by congratulating my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod for sponsoring this timely bill.

Madam Speaker, I would like to start by saying that in Alberta the vast majority of kids are responsible and caring young members of society. It is easy to forget how good our kids actually are when we are bombarded by news of violence occurring in schools committed by young people. I want to make it clear that the majority of the violence is occurring in the U.S. and not in Canada. School violence is much more prevalent south of the border. I think that probably 99 percent of kids in this province have minimal or no problems with respect for the rules, but it is that 1 percent of kids we must deal with because they have a devastating consequence on the other 99 percent. It is with this understanding that I want to proceed.

4:30

The code of conduct that the hon. member is proposing will go a long way to ensure that Alberta schools are safe. It's about promoting respect and civility and community rights and responsibilities, and that means that students can go to school and receive a high-quality education without the threat of violence. I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. member's comments that creating a code of

conduct and a safe school works best when they are generated not only by school staff but also by students, parents, and representatives from the community. Madam Speaker, this way a true consensus can be developed about what everyone wants their school to be like and the rules everyone is willing to uphold to make this happen. This also makes all members of the community stakeholders in their schools and in the futures of the students in them.

Madam Speaker, I believe that violence amongst youth is placing a lot of pressure on schools, students, parents, and the community at large. Although I do not think there is a general lawlessness amongst our young people, there are many things that need to be done to improve the state of the school environment and to promote good behaviour. School violence – and not just when it erupts into a criminal act – is the single most disruptive factor in the school environment. This includes things like bullying, harassment, taunting, or excessive peer pressure, and my colleague was correct in stating that these acts sow the seeds for future violent outbursts.

Statistics from a 1997 study by the National Crime Prevention Council of Canada show that bullying on the playground occurs once every seven minutes and in the classroom once every 25 minutes. According to the council, bullying is an early behaviour that can contribute to the development of antisocial behaviour patterns, which in turn are causing violence and aggressiveness in our society. As well, school violence, on top of creating an environment of fear, diverts energy and resources from instruction and the learning process. Too often those not interested in learning get the attention of school staff to the detriment of students genuinely there to learn.

I think what the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod wants to see from his code of conduct is a promotion of respect amongst students for each other and for the rules of the school. Respect is a small word with a huge impact that is getting lost in society today. As a member of the Task Force on Children at Risk I share the vision of the Member for Livingstone-Macleod and hope that all members will join me to support that vision. But, Madam Speaker, we as a government must also show our respect for students by ensuring that every jurisdiction has good facilities and resources, access to the latest technologies and to every opportunity to succeed. I think we are then showing our respect. This is illustrated in programs like the Alberta initiative for school improvement, which creates a community-based partnership for school improvement.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Each school jurisdiction consults with parents, teachers, school administrators, and others on ways to improve schools and identify school needs. Jurisdictions then develop programs in consultation with the school community to best meet the needs of the students. It is important to put the decision-making powers in the hands of the young people. Children need to have a voice and be able to participate on issues that affect them. Who best understands school issues but those parents, students, and teachers who are there every day?

Our commitment to our students was also illustrated in the provincial budget, where our government earmarked \$4.6 billion for education for 2000-2001. This includes \$160 million to renovate and build new schools. In fact, spending on education will increase by \$776 million over the next three years. These government commitments are the foundation on which schools can build a safe and stable and productive learning environment. Yet there is also an onus on students and school staff to do their part in creating a safe and stable learning environment, and this is where a code of conduct can be implemented. Institutionalizing a code of conduct demonstrates a commitment to violence prevention and helps students and teachers feel safe. When the code clearly explains school rules and sanctions for violence, everyone knows what is expected from them and what to expect from their schools.

A big problem with the current codes of conduct or policies on school discipline is that there is no consistency in their application. Students and for that matter teachers are not clear on what the rules are and how to deal with someone who breaks them. Madam Speaker, there is sometimes a contradiction between school policies and school practices. We know that every school in Alberta has a comprehensive set of policies dealing with violence and other offences, but enforcement of those policies may be uneven. This can lead to a situation where teachers do not feel supported in imposing discipline, where students do not feel protected by the policies, and those students prone to disruptive behaviours do not think that they will be punished.

I know that the school environment is, by and large, a safe and caring place for young people to develop and further their education. Schools are places where students are surrounded by their peers and educated by hardworking and very caring teachers. Yet problems do arise in this environment, and when they do, rules need to be clear, concise, and action needs to be taken swiftly.

Madam Speaker, I am drawn, like my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod, to the events that occurred in the greater St. Albert Catholic school division. This school division had a code of conduct for its students, but that code had holes in it. There is no way that the two students involved, the attacker and the victim, should have been in the same school. In the end the school board did rectify the situation, but far, far too much time had passed. The emotional pain experienced by the victim could have been far lessened if the appropriate course of action had been followed in the first place. Both students should have been allowed to get on with their lives but in different schools. So there is obviously a problem with the current way of doing things if situations like that can happen.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to see that Bill 206 takes into account the need of all young people to be educated. It would do society no good if students like the one who committed the sexual assault are simply marginalized. I'm aware that some students simply cannot function in the regular school environment. They may be too disruptive or have broken too many rules to be allowed in the classroom. These are the students that need alternative methods of education and counseling. It is through this education and counseling that some students can turn around their disruptive ways and behaviours. Many of the so-called problem students suffer from low self-esteem and engage in self-destructive behaviour as a call for help. If these students can be reached, we should make every effort to do so.

Madam Speaker, this is a way of making schools safer. First we must establish clear, concise rules for everyone in the school. Then if the students choose to break those rules, they may be dealt with quickly so that the learning environment has as little disruption as possible, but we must not disregard those students who need help.

What it boils down to is keeping our schools safe for Alberta students. We want to do everything we can to prevent violence, because once it occurs, we cannot fix the damage. A student code of conduct may not ensure that outbursts of violence like what occurred in Taber never happen again, but what it will do is work to stop the roots of violence, things like bullying, harassment, or excessive peer pressure. A code of conduct will make a clear statement to students that those things are unacceptable in Alberta schools. Madam Speaker, a code will also give schools the ability to swiftly rectify any disruptive situation that may occur in our schools, ensuring that those disruptions are kept to a minimum and do not escalate in frequency and severity.

I will finish by again commending my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod for putting forth much-needed legislation in Alberta. I also commend him for promoting safety in the schools

through a balanced look at school discipline and student responsibility.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. 4:40

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak, as usual, to both sides of the bill. First, I'd like to fully understand the need for it, particularly in light of a publication that the hon. Minister of Learning tabled yesterday in the Legislature. It makes some fascinating reading. For one who has two children that are just going out of the public school system into the postsecondary school system, it makes very interesting reading.

I'm also a past Cub master of some years with, most recently, nine years of coaching hockey and 11 years of outdoor soccer as coach and 10 years of indoor soccer. Although I do not have directly related education experience in the proper sense, I have some experience in guiding young people, particularly in areas where violence is very, very close to what you do in sport. You want to minimize that. With that experience I look at this particular bill and say *en Francais, bien sûr*. I mean: of course. Why would you not have a code of conduct?

Well, I took the trouble to speak to two principals, one elementary and one high school. They said: "Well, of course we have policies and the guiding principles, but we don't always have it written. We don't have it written out that thou shall do this and this is the line." Quite frankly, from my experience being a parent and a leader of children, oftentimes the same occurrence under a different set of circumstances is punishable by a totally different means. Whether the child had the intent to do something or had some forethought has to be taken into consideration. The other instance, of course, is: what is the current situation? What is the effect on that child? If you're not about to have any effect whatever, then save the trouble of embarrassing yourself and the child, because all you're doing is pushing that child farther and farther and farther away from the authority figure and from understanding that the boundaries are there to be exercised with a certain amount of caution.

Now, I have to commend the member opposite for bringing the bill forward, in any event, because it does give one the opportunity to think about these things and to speak of them, but I'm not too sure that legislation is in order. The member himself went through part of his speech to explain that we already have a perfectly good criminal law system. He explained that that was not the intent of this bill and then went on to say that the bill is needed. Well, a bill is a law. A bill does have the force of law, and quite frankly I'm not too sure how this set of principles or written policies would not and could not be construed as same.

If one wishes to set boundaries, those boundaries should be set fairly firmly, and it should be clearly recognized when those boundaries are crossed. To set it down in this hard fashion leaves this member a little less than impressed with the method that this bill intends to lay out. The publication *Supporting Safe, Secure & Caring Schools in Alberta*, filed just yesterday in the Legislature, is by far a better approach. It cares. It takes into consideration an individual child and what is fundamentally best for the child in the school setting. It clearly recognizes that a child misbehaving affects the entire class or the entire school and has to be in some manner dealt with.

It has been this father's experience that example in actions and reactions to events is the best teacher of children and certainly in assisting a child in recognizing the need for boundaries. If you've ever as a parent had 10 or 15 children in the backyard and thrown a

ball or a toy or whatever it happens to be, instantly a game ensues. You'll note, if you're observant, that rules are applied. They change, yes. They may amount to that you can't touch this fence and you can't do that and you have to jump twice to get here and there, all of those sorts of things in children's games. Those are boundaries that are set, and they recognize that. If there is to be any kind of guideline or support structure, I suggest to you that if it's not contained in the volume that I described earlier, it certainly is outlined and does seem to give the impression that it has at least been considered.

Now, in this member's experience, assisting that child in finding their way and channeling that energy to a better purpose is a much, much better way of dealing with a problem or with a problem child. This member's experience is that if you have cast the rules so stiff and so hard, it becomes a debate as to whether it crossed the line or not, totally disregarding the circumstances of the child and/or the institution that has written the rules. I am a little leery in supporting this legislation, but I don't see any malice of intent at all, and I expect that when it gets to the board level and down to the school level, the appropriate choices will be made, as they invariably have been made in most instances in this province to date.

In closing, it is clear that these kinds of boundaries, if you will, and the consequences for crossing those boundaries have been laid out from the first time there was a school and a pupil in the province of Alberta. I'm not too sure that recording it would be absolutely the right thing to do. In any event, until some other debate sways me to the opinion that this bill should not be supported, I suspect that I shall be supporting the bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise this afternoon to express my support for Bill 206, which amends the School Act to include a community-based written code of student conduct for each school in our province. My colleague from Livingstone-Macleod is to be commended for bringing forward this important amendment to the School Act.

The code of conduct will set out expected and acceptable standards of conduct for students and the consequences that will be incurred for failing to live up to these standards. Each code will prohibit activities such as physical violence, sexual assault, sexual abuse, vandalism, and the use or possession of a dangerous weapon, narcotic, alcohol, or tobacco products. The prohibition will extend to activities in the school, on school grounds, or during school-sponsored activities.

The code proposed by Bill 206 will be more specific than the very general requirement set out in the current act, which only requires students to be diligent in their studies, attend school regularly and punctually, co-operate fully with school officials and school rules, account to their teachers for their conduct, and respect the rights of others. The existing legislation sets forth objectives involving student behaviour but is short on specifics. What Bill 206 will bring about, Madam Speaker, is a clearly laid out and specific code of conduct that every student will see, appreciate, and understand and that shows the consequences of their actions.

More importantly, Madam Speaker, each code will be community-based. It will not be prescribed by the provincial Department of Learning, the Alberta Teachers' Association, or any other provincial organization but will instead be based on input from parents, students, teachers, and principals that reflects local concerns and community needs.

4:50

Madam Speaker, the climate in our schools is changing. Over the past decade we have seen a marked increase in both incidence and varying types of disciplinary problems occurring in Alberta schools. Disciplinary problems have always existed in schools and have always presented challenges to teachers, parents, and school boards, but the nature of the disciplinary problems is changing. The levels and types of violence are increasing, particularly in large urban centres. Gangs are making their way into our schools, as are alcohol and street drugs. In fact, the Alberta School Boards Association has identified a number of trends which are emerging in our schools, including a greater number of incidents overall: possession of weapons, the existence of gangs, female involvement in violent acts and incidents, involvement of elementary students, and extortion. As a result, there is an increasing public awareness that safety in our schools is an issue and that further remedial actions are required.

A 1998 Angus Reid poll showed that two-thirds of Canadians believed that public schools in their own communities had become less safe over the preceding five-year period. Albertans who responded to the survey attributed school violence to a number of factors including parenting, disciplining practice of schools and teachers, a lower degree of respect, changing values of morality, peer pressure, and increased levels of violence in movies and in television programming.

Madam Speaker, schools have been finding that some of the traditional disciplinary methods are less effective than in the past. They're looking for more effective ways to promote a more orderly and safe environment for students, teachers, and the surrounding community. The penalty options envisaged by Bill 206 involve a broad range from the more traditional forms of discipline, such as expulsion or suspension of students committing serious offences, to more rehabilitative options such as counseling. In addition, the bill requires penalty options that would enable a student to continue pursuing his or her studies while serving a penalty.

Madam Speaker, I introduced a private member's bill in the 1998 spring session of this Legislature which addressed similar issues as identified by my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod. However, due to its position on the Order Paper, the bill never reached debate. The bill I proposed was similar to Bill 206 in that it dealt with the problems of school violence and substance abuse, and it proposed that in cases of suspected illegal activity such as physical violence involving sexual assault and harassment, misconduct, vandalism, and possession of weapons or narcotics, school principals would be required to contact the local police service and the school superintendent at the earliest opportunity.

The sponsor of Bill 206 and myself are hardly alone in our concern for disciplinary problems and their impact on our schools, students, families, and communities. Madam Speaker, the province of Ontario has also been examining school codes of conduct, and one of the Ontario schools that has been proactive in this respect is Sir Sanford Fleming Academy, which has instituted both a code of conduct and a school uniform policy. The response from students and parents at this high school has been very positive, and in particular they note the improvements in the school's learning environment. As a result, Ontario is considering the creation of a code of conduct in its provincial school legislation which would impose minimum standards for students' behaviour and set out the consequences for infractions of the code.

At this point I'd like to refer to – and I will table this document – a copy that has come off the Internet of some press releases dated March 21. It's regarding specific legislation that the Ontario government has announced that it will be bringing forward in the spring agenda. I just want to note a few excerpts from a columnist's

article regarding the code of conduct. If I could, Madam Speaker, point out:

Expulsion automatic for students who bring weapons onto school property, provide drugs or alcohol to others or who commit criminal assault.

Suspension the minimum penalty for possessing drugs or alcohol, for threatening or swearing at teachers and for vandalism.

Teachers given power to impose detentions and suspensions.

Principals and vice-principals given right to expel students.

Expelled students to be sent to strict discipline programs.

Parents of students with attitude and behaviour problems given power to apply to have their children sent to strict discipline programs.

School property off-limits to all but teachers, students, parents and registered visitors between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Mandatory criminal-background checks for everyone teaching or working in schools.

School uniforms and dress codes to be established if supported by a majority of a school's parents.

Parents to be made financially responsible for property damage and other consequences of their children breaking the law.

Schools in the United States are also addressing the issues surrounding school discipline problems. The American situation, I would suggest, differs substantially from the Canadian position or indeed what we are experiencing in the province of Alberta with respect to the levels and the types of discipline problems, particularly violence. Nevertheless, it may be worth while to consider some of the approaches that they are adopting.

It's interesting to note, Madam Speaker, that three-quarters or more of all American schools in a recent survey reported having zero-tolerance policies for various student offences. Zero-tolerance policies were defined as policies that mandate predetermined serious consequences for specific disciplinary offences. About 90 percent of schools reported zero-tolerance policies for firearms and weapons other than firearms. Eighty-eight percent had policies of zero tolerance for alcohol and drugs. In addition, 79 percent had zero-tolerance policies for violent behaviour and tobacco use. Actions to address disciplinary problems take other forms in American schools, including increased reporting of serious incidents to law enforcement officials and the institution of school uniform policies.

Madam Speaker, the establishment of school codes of conduct will help to create a climate of responsibility and clear expectations for students, teachers, parents, and principals. Our schools and students would benefit from instituting these codes in our province. Bill 206 is not a panacea for all the circumstances involving unacceptable conduct in our schools. I would suggest that all of us acknowledge collectively as legislators, as parents, as students, as teachers, as administrators, and as school trustees that we share a duty and a responsibility to do everything we can to eliminate unacceptable conduct in our schools. Bill 206 is one cog within the total wheel of our collective responsibility. I would ask and urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 206.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm not, to be honest, quite sure whether I support this bill or not. There are a number of reasons. We talked about the school uniform policy in here and the pros and cons of the school uniform policy. I'm not an advocate of that, simply because I think our kids have to have some independence along the way.

However, I will say that I happened to have had a group of young

people from St. Gerard school down at the Legislature for a week. I posed that question to them, and three of the kids said: yeah, school uniforms would be okay, but you know, not really. So three kids said: yeah, we would be okay with that. The rest of the class said: no way. Interestingly enough, the girls said: yeah, it wouldn't be a big deal. The boys said: no way. It was quite an interesting debate that they had in relation to this. A lot of it revolved around their ability to express themselves in what they wear, what they don't wear, what they choose to wear, if they have long hair, short hair, or, in my son's case, red hair, a good Liberal colour I might add. But it is their choice. That's part of the picture.

5:00

I want to also point out that I've been involved in my son's school since grade 1, and at the elementary school level, yeah, they had a policy for conduct. It wasn't as tough a policy as from grades 7 to 9. In fact, my son's school was one of the first schools involved in the Safe and Caring Schools program in Alberta. It was one of the schools that the district felt needed to be part of that. In fact – and I'll be very honest – I had contemplated whether or not I was going to send my son to that school. In discussion with many of the parents in the community that we live in, we all asked that question because we had heard that the particular school was particularly rough. So we thought: well, maybe we'll send our kids out of the community. Then my thought was: why would I do that? There's a school four blocks from home. The kids have lived in this community all their lives, grown up in this community, but I needed as a parent to see some change in the school.

The first time I entered that junior high school, there was a dimly lit hallway. There were no posters on the wall. There wasn't a trophy cabinet. There was nothing in the school that would say to me: gee, this is a delightful place to go. As a police officer my area of expertise was in something called crime prevention through environmental design, and that whole concept focused around using the built environment to construct a safe environment, if you will. I took all the principles and concepts that were involved in the acronym CPTED, and I thought: boy, a lot of work needs to be done at this school. I brought that up prior to my son going to that school.

The next year we had a principal change; we had Safe and Caring Schools. Through this program we have seen the level of achievement go up, we have seen fewer disciplinary problems in the school, and we have kids coming out for sports teams, some which never existed in that school, and now there's a full range of athletic opportunities, there's a full range of leadership opportunities, those kinds of things. I credit the parents of the community for participating and getting involved and saying: "You know, we don't want to lose our community school. We want our kids to be able to go here, and we want to feel good about it," those kinds of things.

We had a policy not only with the directive from the Safe and Caring Schools project, but we ensured that kids weren't allowed to smoke around the school – well, in the neighbourhood. The school got phone calls if they did. They were also encouraged to stay on the school grounds at lunchtime, not necessarily go off but encouraged to stick around. They had a policy of expulsion for weapons in the school. They had a policy of expulsions and suspensions for other issues such as drugs and alcohol and the use of those on the school grounds or around the school.

Also, in relation to cell phones and pagers we have a particular concern with what's called a dial-a-doper. In the police vocabulary, a dial-a-doper, the young person, is generally the courier, so you can call up, you can order your dope, and then you get a courier to run out and deliver it. So the kid has a pager on him. He gets paged by the dealer. He goes and picks up his dope and delivers it to some-

body else. Well, of course they use kids; right? They use kids because the penalty isn't as high. We decided we were going to take pagers and cellular phones away from kids in the school so that we can try and circumvent that particular issue.

So all sorts of things were happening in this particular school, and to date they're doing very well. They're doing well under the program. We've seen all sorts of things change. The achievement levels are going up. As a parent council we put together a specific strategy to deal with some of the issues on the student survey put out by the school board. In fact, we went one further. For the next year's survey we developed a questionnaire that would in fact not just ask the kids: do you feel safe in your school? And the kid would answer yes or no. We went one further and said: why don't you feel safe in your school? You have to have that information to develop a strategy to deal with it. So we were able to do a little bit of an analysis on that and put a strategy together as parents in the community, and it works for the kids.

Then my son moved on. Now he's in his first year of high school. The same type of thing. They have the same rules, only now they're even more strict.

I found it interesting, Madam Speaker, because I was, as you know, opposed to the youth smoking law in the Legislature, the private member's bill brought up. When I asked my son about it, he said: well, yeah, it should be against the law. So, you know, we had a little bit of a difference in our home. His reason for that is: well, it's not good for you, so why allow smoking? Yet he still wants red hair. So I say, "I don't like your red hair. Maybe you should get rid of it." So it's kind of an interesting dynamic when you're talking to kids and how these things play out.

MR. HANCOCK: Red hair won't kill him.

MS OLSEN: Well, you're right, hon. Justice minister. Red hair won't kill him. But do you want to know what it does to shirt collars and pillows?

Given that, I have seen through my son's school career a level of accountability from the parents, the principals, and the teachers in developing solid criteria. The school he's in now, again, as I say, has a specific policy: zero tolerance for weapons and drugs and alcohol, suspensions, in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions. They've got a range of remedies, but in my view the number one issue should be dealing with the kids in a manner that's going to keep them involved in school, you know, having them disciplined in a manner that's going to help the child and not discourage the young person.

I've also seen a number of other schools turn around in this city. You know, as a police officer I had ample opportunity to be at any number of schools. I can tell you that 12 years ago at the high school my son goes to right now, I happened to be working as a special-duty constable at a school dance, and the biggest fight broke out at that school after the dance. It was a particularly violent fight. It wasn't just fists and those kinds of things. In essence, we had to call down a number of other police officers to come and help us out. But because of the turnaround of that school over the last 10 years, when it was time for school selection, I thought: well, is this where I want my son to go? When I searched out all the schools, it's a good school. It's turned full circle.

Part of it is that schools do that. They change. Their culture changes. Their programs change. The student population changes. The other part of it is that they adopt policies that they're very strict on. This particular school has focused on getting all kids through school and into some form of postsecondary education, which is a good goal. It doesn't necessarily have to be high academics but at

least getting those kids to a point where they can make it in a postsecondary school.

So I don't believe the sky is falling. Part of it is my personal experience, my personal experience as a parent and my experience as a police officer. We've always had drug and alcohol problems in schools. Always. We've always had violence in schools. We've always had a number of these gang issues in schools, boy, forever.

5:10

You know, I was a police officer. I started years and years ago, and we still have some of the same issues. If we looked on a continuum of some of these things or if we were to chart them on a graph, some of these issues would rise and fall. There would be a fluctuation. It's not always bad, and maybe one particular high-profile incident will lead to another. I certainly won't deny the fact that we're seeing more gang activity in schools. Absolutely. We are seeing that, and I think that's a particular focus, but not just for one school, for many schools that are in urban areas. It might not be necessary to deal with a rural school in the same manner. I think you have to let, in my view, the parties who are responsible for our kids make some decisions. You know, for the most part they do make good decisions.

I would comment on the issues that arose out of some sexual assaults and harassments at schools. I would suggest that if we all took the sexual harassment issue a little more to heart, then we would be teaching our kids a good lesson about harassment.

The issue of sexual assault. I believe that those issues were resolved, and I'm hoping the boards put policies in place to deal with these kids so the victims don't have to be revictimized by attending the same school.

There are other options, too, Madam Speaker. The community conferencing that occurs, I think, is something that is starting to occur more often in schools. Sometimes if you take a model like that and you take your victim and your offender and bring them together and you try to resolve the problem – that's exactly what's happening in the Department of Justice. They're promoting community conferencing or family group conferencing. It's an ideal model to help break down some of those issues, and maybe in some situations – I'm not saying all, by any stretch of the imagination – where there is an ability for the victim and the offender, especially in the schools, depending on the issue, maybe they will come together and maybe they will be able to resolve some of those issues.

Bullying is an issue in schools, again, where I think the restorative justice model works. We use it in some of the schools here. In fact, the police officers in the schools in Edmonton endeavor to use that model all the time or as often as they can because they've seen it work.

Let's not forget, Madam Speaker, that under 2 percent of all those youth are serious habitual offenders. So under 2 percent of every youth that commits a crime under the Criminal Code is considered a serious habitual offender. We're talking about a small group of people who are serious offenders. Those offenders are not likely to be in our schools, in fact. They're looking at alternative forms of education, or they're maybe at AYOC. There's a tremendous program that Alberta Justice has at AYOC. There are all sorts of options that are happening.

When I say that I have difficulties supporting this, I do believe that schools, boards, parents, and students are all endeavoring to manage violence in the schools. We've absolutely seen some issues we need to deal with. We don't want kids in the same school if they can't overcome their difficulties, especially in a case of sexual assault or date rape, if you will, those kinds of things. Those are power issues, and unless those are resolved between the victim and

offender, then you can't have them both in the same school. That's just common sense, and there shouldn't be a big fight over that.

But I do look at all the alternatives, not just for the criminal offences in schools that are committed but for many other offences. I guess I'm not buying into the sky-is-falling notion in the schools just yet. Yes, there are problems. Absolutely there are problems. Absolutely parents and teachers and boards are taking care of business. They should all be commended for the work they're doing. We've got tremendous programs by the government, and I will in fact say that this is an excellent program. The Safe and Caring Schools program has worked wonders. I've seen the changes in the schools that this has operated in. I've seen the changes in the kids.

I want to draw to your attention, though, just before I close – we talk about all of these things; we talk about violence, and we talk about drugs and alcohol – a Pollara poll that was just recently delivered on the weekend. In fact, I was present at the presentation, and it was a very good presentation. The number three issue that Canadians said would get worse before it got better was child poverty. Okay? That was the number three issue. In the priorities for Canadians, the number two priority was child poverty. Health care was number one in both those instances.

So when we're talking about all the issues identified in this Assembly, when we're talking about criminal offences, when we're talking about behaviours and attitudes of students and that kind of thing, we really need to focus on prevention. And do you know what? All of those programs out there that target zero to six, that target teen mums, that target mums who are pregnant for some prenatal care and introduce them into different programs, that's what's going to help in our schools, Madam Speaker. That's what's going to help. This bill is going to make into law and is going to have the effect of law, as my colleague from Edmonton-Calder said, something that's already happening. I wish we could redirect our focus on prevention, put more money into prevention.

Madam Speaker, I think crime prevention is not just target-hardening. It's not just putting bolts and locks on your doors and alarm systems in your homes. It's attacking child poverty. It's attacking youth issues, education, access to education, health, racism, those issues. They're all part of the big picture.

With that, I would cede the floor to somebody else. I really haven't made up my mind, to be honest, whether I'm going to support this or not. Thank you.

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

MR. HLADY: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and enter into the debate on Bill 206. I'll start off by applauding my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod for having the resolve to sponsor this timely bill. Bill 206 is the culmination of his hard work and consultation with Albertans, and he should be commended for it. Congratulations.

Madam Speaker, I'd also like to say that I'm actually shocked and disappointed with a lot of the comments that I heard from the last member speaking, from Edmonton-Norwood. You know, I have well over a thousand police officers in the city of Calgary who would strongly disagree with a lot of the comments that she made today. I think it's very, very unfortunate that she feels, being a police officer, sitting in here, and making those kind of comments, that they don't need a code of conduct in schools. That's unbelievable, and I think that's very disappointing.

Madam Speaker, my comments today will deal with some of the issues and concerns my constituents and Albertans across the province have expressed to me. Recently I have had the opportunity

to hear what my constituents are saying about the state of education in Calgary and in Alberta as a whole. I've been going across the province and hearing from school boards, 60 out of 64 school boards, on the growth and density study that I'm doing for the Minister of Learning. Much has been done through my work on this committee, and it's been very good information that pertains directly to Bill 206.

5:20

Madam Speaker, what has been a constant throughout these discussions is the need for Alberta, both the government and the people, to embrace innovation and change in dealing with the educational issues. Whether I'm talking to the trustees or the chief superintendents, chief financial officers, or parents, we need to also get back to some basics in our changes. We as a society have put teaching values into our classroom rather than learning them in our homes and in our community. School jurisdictions today cannot fill in for family anymore in regards to teaching, if they don't have the tools to enforce responsible behaviour.

A good example is Ontario's code of conduct which has been introduced. It's very popular with parents and the public and school boards and teachers. I'd like to read a couple of the codes of conduct that they have in Ontario.

Expulsion automatic for students who bring weapons onto school property, provide drugs or alcohol to others or who commit criminal assault.

Suspension the minimum penalty for possessing drugs or alcohol, for threatening or swearing at teachers and for vandalism.

Teachers given power to impose detentions and suspensions.

Principals and vice-principals given right to expel students.

Expelled students to be sent to strict discipline programs.

Parents of students with attitude and behaviour problems given power to apply to have their children sent to strict discipline programs . . .

Parents to be made financially responsible for property damage and other consequences of their children breaking the law.

Very powerful statements made by the Ontario government.

Madam Speaker, as I have just described, the impetus is there for change in our schools. I would like to say that our government has never been afraid of change, especially when Albertans tell us we need to change. This is why I am supporting my colleague's proposed bill. The hon. member is not afraid to challenge the status quo when it is change for the better.

I want to make it clear, Madam Speaker, that Alberta has some of the best schools and students in Canada, if not in the entire globe. Our government has acknowledged the need to embrace science and focus on knowledge-based sectors in our economy. These knowledge-based sectors include industries vital to Alberta's continued prosperity, areas like oil and agriculture, which have adapted and grown as the global economy becomes more complex and integrated.

Madam Speaker, how does this fit with the bill proposed today to create a student code of conduct? I think that by implementing a code of conduct in Alberta's schools, student and school responsibilities are clearly laid out, hence creating a stable school environment, which is vital to the learning process. I agree with many of the comments made by my colleagues today, especially with respect to getting the problem students out of schools and into counseling and rehabilitation settings so that serious violent situations can be avoided at all costs.

This, Madam Speaker, is what my colleague is proposing. The zero tolerance buzzword is thrown around today in the school discipline and school violence debate. Zero tolerance for things like weapons or drug offences are needed as deterrents to keep our schools safe for all our children.

Madam Speaker, when you remove a student from school, you

can't forget about him or her as soon as they're out the door. Disruptive students often act out because of deeper emotional factors like a dysfunctional family unit or feelings of isolation and anger. These students need to be helped; otherwise, their cycle of destructive behaviour will never be broken.

I believe a code of conduct is a needed component in an overall discipline and early intervention strategy. It is an approach based on self-discipline, mutual respect, equity, and co-operation. It is fair to both students and educators.

I'll finish by again urging my colleagues to support this bill as the right strategy for keeping our schools safe and encouraging a stable and co-operative learning environment.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a real privilege to stand this afternoon and speak to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod's Bill 206. This basically puts in place an option so that schools can develop a code of conduct.

This in essence creates a lot of options for the schools. I notice that it's not being put in at a provincial level. It's being put in so that the communities can put in the kind of plan they want. This makes it very appropriate for parents to be able to then go to the school and decide whether or not that's the school they want to enroll their children in based on their willingness to participate in that code of conduct and determine whether or not they are going to look after their children, make sure their children interact with others, and protect their children from outside violence in a way that the parent sees as beneficial to their willingness and want to bring up their children. So this, in essence, provides us with that kind of an option.

I guess the question that we have is kind of determining the breadth: how much consultation, how much the parents will be brought into this? Will this be a way in the end of differentiating

between schools? It's going to be the kind of thing that we need to have set out so that as parents begin to put more and more emphasis on the environment that their children are being taught in, then they'll be able to, as I said, make that choice.

The other thing that I would like to just make a few comments on is the kind of process that would have to be put in place here to deal with enforcement. What are the options for parents to get clarification on issues, to deal with the kind of relationship between the students and the teachers? How are they going to be able to make sure that the code of conduct enforcement activities don't affect the way they are going to be able to interact with the teachers, with other students?

Madam Speaker, we've been following a case in southern Alberta where there's been a real disagreement created between the students and the teachers and subsequently, then, between the teachers and the principal, all based on the kind of conduct the students are being disciplined for. So I think that this bill, which will amend the School Act, in essence provides those schools with a chance to make sure that parents, teachers, students, and administrators all understand the ground rules when code of conduct issues are going to be brought up. This is the kind of thing that we don't want to have indiscriminately imposed on students.

I think this should be put in place, and I hope that as the schools and school boards undertake to put these code of conduct guidelines in place, the students play an important role in it. I think the kind of conduct that students are willing to impose on themselves is probably at least as stringent as we as parents or administrators in the school system would be willing to put on. So if the students are involved, it gives them a buy-in to it. It gives them a chance to develop and formulate the kinds of things that they are going to enforce on each other in terms of behaviour patterns.

You're looking at the clock. Does that mean that I should be sitting down? It's 5:30.

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 22, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/03/22

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

head: Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Offices of the Legislative Assembly

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Yes. Speaking, as I understand it, to the estimates for the Legislative Assembly.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. DICKSON: Excellent. There was a question I had for the Minister of Health and Wellness. There was a matter that came up earlier today. I was interested in the response, and I wasn't able to hear the response.

I sit on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, and one of the things with respect to the budget that was dealt with was a budget for the Ombudsman. The budget has been set up with an expectation that the provincial Ombudsman will be hearing complaints, concerns with respect to different elements of the health sector. There was an anticipation that there would be budget implications in 2000-2001.

Now, we see some of that reflected in the budget, but we don't see any legislation that's going to accommodate that, Madam Chairman. I heard the Health and Wellness minister addressing a collateral but related point earlier today, but I'm afraid I haven't seen the Blues yet, and I didn't hear his comments. I'm inviting the Minister of Health and Wellness to clarify when he expects we will see legislation, when that legislation will be passed.

Madam Chairman, I'm receiving more than the usual number of frowns from the table. If I'm talking about the wrong item, I hope somebody will tell me.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The chair would say, hon. member, that I am really wondering why you're asking the Minister of Health and Wellness about the office of the Ombudsman.

MR. DICKSON: The reason is that the Legislative Offices Committee, which supervises each of the legislative offices, received a budget submission for the Ombudsman, and it's included in here. Each of the legislative officer's budgets is included in these estimates we're dealing with tonight. I think that's accurate. One of the elements here, the budget for the Ombudsman, was built around the anticipation that there would be a legislative basis for the provincial Ombudsman, Mr. Sutton, to be able to investigate concerns that people have at the regional health authority level.

So we see the budget appropriation, but there's no legislative jurisdiction to be able to do that. We're now well into the spring session. I've seen no legislation that expands the authority of the Ombudsman. So, Madam Chairman, is it not a question, then, that we have a budget requisition that was based on a contingent expectation. If that contingency is not going to be realized, if we're not going to see the legislation, then shouldn't we know about it? That's

my question. It's quite innocent, and maybe we can have clarification. Maybe the Government House Leader has the answer.

Absent such legislation, then maybe we should have some question about the amount that's going to the Ombudsman. I'm happy to see the Ombudsman do his work, but he can't investigate things he doesn't have legislative authority to do. The current Ombudsman Act does not permit him to deal with concerns from regional health authorities. What happened to that legislation? When are we going to see it? If we're not going to see it, let the minister tell us so we can consider moving the appropriate amendment to the estimates.

I'll sit down for a moment to see if I get a response on this question. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood is also a member of the same committee, and I suspect she had the same understanding I did. That's the question, Madam Chairman. Hopefully, we'll get some resolution to that.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, before the chairman comments on that, I would ask that I have unanimous consent so we can revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's my pleasure and honour tonight to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 15 Cubs and their Cub leaders: Akela Mrs. Shelly Olsen; Mrs. Christy Mulholland; Hati Mrs. Shelley Dubyk; Rakshaw Mrs. Elda Foote, and Bagheera Mr. Gleb Gladwin, all from the 176 Cub pack in my riding of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Offices of the Legislative Assembly (continued)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair wishes to say something. This is very unusual tonight, that there are questions asked on the Legislative Assembly estimates. The Assembly – and you know perfectly well, hon. member – is independent from asking government ministers to deal with the Legislative Assembly. As well, if you have questions, you can direct them to the chairman of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. You know that as well.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, I may not have been clear. What I'm talking about is that there's an increase here from \$1.4 million to \$1.6 million. That is contingent on some things happening that have nothing to do with the Ombudsman and have everything to do with the Minister of Health and Wellness. So that's...

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, as chairman of tonight's proceedings, I suggest that you take that up with the chairman of the standing committee that looks after Leg. Offices. As I said, the Assembly is very much independent from the government. So my question to you is: why are you doing it at this point in time instead of taking it up in the appropriate place with the appropriate person?

8:10

MR. DICKSON: I was hoping that the chairman of the Standing

Committee on Legislative Offices would be here to confirm, when we're dealing with the budget for this, that the expectation in terms of statutory reform in fact has been dealt with. I'm happy to get the clarification. This is the last clear chance, Madam Chairman. I'm happy to have the chairman of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices answer the question.

We're now well past the halfway point of the spring legislative session. We have seen no legislation yet to expand the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman to deal with regional health authorities, yet the requisition that we're being asked to vote on tonight is a \$200,000 increase, plus or minus, in element 3.0.1. So I'm simply asking for an assurance I guess from the chairman of the committee that the legislation is coming forward in the spring session. If you won't let me ask the question of the minister, I'll ask the chairman of the committee to clarify that, please.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, this is very irregular, but I will recognize the Minister of Justice and Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The hon. member should have raised questions with respect to the efficacy of health legislation at the time of reviewing the business plans for the department of health. The budget for the Legislative Assembly comes through the Members' Services Committee, and the normal practice and custom of this House is that Members' Services recommends the budget to the Assembly, and the Assembly passes it. Government members and Executive Council members are not in a position to defend the estimates of the Legislative Assembly. The hon. member knows that. Let's get on with the traditions of the House.

I might add that it's a common practice to do business plans based on what you anticipate happening. If the legislative framework necessary to bring something into fruition doesn't occur, it would be quite normal to lapse funds that were provided to encompass that.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I hesitate to get into this discussion, because I am not a member of the Members' Services Committee, but I would like to point out that the member indicated that there is no legislation that this Assembly has passed that affects the Ombudsman's office. In fact, this Legislature just recently passed the Health Professions Act, and the Health Professions Act has extensive involvement in the Ombudsman's office and in an appeal process involving all of the colleges.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you. I, too, am a member of the Standing Committee on Leg. Offices, and my understanding of the budget process and the budget that was approved for the Ombudsman's particular part was that it was based on new legislation coming forward so he could in fact have adequate resources to deal with that legislation. I think it's very fair, Madam Chairman, that we ask the question about when that legislation can be anticipated to come through. We have approved the budget for that. It is not an unreasonable question. So the issue still stands. I'm wondering if the minister of health can help us out here. It would be really easy. He just has to answer the question.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: All right. We're going to deal with the main estimates to do with the offices of the Legislative Assembly.

Agreed to:

Support to the Legislative Assembly	
Operating Expense	\$26,727,215
Office of the Auditor General	
Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$14,638,551
Office of the Ombudsman	
Operating Expense	\$1,644,100
Office of the Chief Electoral Officer	
Operating Expense	\$10,678,270
Office of the Ethics Commissioner	
Operating Expense	\$215,030
Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner	
Operating Expense	\$2,718,536

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

International and Intergovernmental Relations

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to be here this evening to continue the discussion on the estimates of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Our previous discussions on February 29 really focused on the ministry's role in leading the development of governmentwide strategies and policies for our relations with other governments within Canada and with governments around the world and with the aboriginal community. In addition, the goals, objectives, and performance measures of the ministry were discussed. My colleague the associate minister and I outlined our priorities for the year ahead as well.

We will continue to aggressively defend and promote Alberta's interests in our dealings with the federal government. We'll focus on implementing our framework for international strategies, expanding trade, and strengthening relations between government and aboriginal people.

The associate minister and I were pleased with the enthusiasm and the questions posed to us by the members during that debate. We were able to respond to many of those questions that evening, but there were a number of questions raised that we were unable to address that evening, so this afternoon I responded in writing to the hon. members who raised those questions. I also tabled my responses in the Legislature.

Edmonton-Ellerslie asked several questions on various subjects. Many of them we were able to deal with that evening, but for those that we weren't, questions related to trade, budget changes in the international section of the department, and the ministry's performance measures, I responded in writing.

8:20

The Member for Edmonton-Norwood was also very thorough in her questions. The questions we've responded to in the areas where she requested clarification were on the aboriginal policy framework, land claims litigation, other aboriginal issues, and how our ministry measures outcomes.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview asked about Alberta's involvement in the World Trade Organization, polling data that the ministry utilizes for its performance measures, conflict of interest policies for Metis settlements, and the role of the ministry in planning for the needs of aboriginal children. Again, I tabled those responses as well as providing them to the member today. I apologize that they didn't come to you sooner than today. We had anticipated having them to you earlier in the week. However, I hope you had the opportunity to review them.

In closing, I want to again thank the hon. members for their thoughtful questions and comments. We'll take good notes, and if there are any questions tonight that we are unable to respond to, again we will respond in writing.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. But, hon. member, the chairman would ask that you just sit a minute.

After what happened when I was in the chair yesterday, I'm going to ask for a vote on whether we will in fact use the 20-20 scenario as far as dealing with the votes on this particular department and the reporting of that department so that I don't get into the same thing as yesterday; that is, 20 minutes here and 20 minutes there.

I would ask that the committee vote on utilizing the agreement that is in place and that I referred to yesterday, if you happened to be in the House. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no.

Thank you, hon. member. You may now rise.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Madam Chairman. I've got a question. It's in an area where I haven't seen the responses that the minister has provided to different people who had asked specific questions, so I'm inviting the minister to signal me if this is an area that's already been thoroughly covered. I find this department always the most difficult department to examine from a budget perspective because you're a facilitator, you're a conduit, you're a co-ordinator, and everything is sort of pieced out. All the substantive work is done by the different departments. I'm mindful of that before I walk into the pit.

My comment would be this. In the budget committees I have been part of, I've been particularly interested in information technology, leadership in terms of various information applications. I've been interested in the government's response to Bill C-6, which is currently just about finished in the House of Commons after coming back from the Senate. I'm interested in the way we respond to the European Union privacy directive that came into force in September. [interjection] Well, I'm still waiting for responses. So here's what I've got so far, Madam Minister. I'm looking for leadership, and I'm looking for who has responsibility in this sort of confusing process.

Now, I've been able to ask questions of the Minister of Innovation and Science, whatever that ministry is called these days. I think the chief information council is under his wing. The chief information council is focused in part on providing leadership – this is what I was told – in the area of information technology. Then we went to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The FOIP unit, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act application, is under that ministry. There's yet a third ministry that's involved. The Ministry of Government Services is also involved in information technology. What I try to pursue and I get no clear resolution of is what role each of the different departments play. Who is providing the ultimate

leadership in terms of privacy protection, the protection of Albertans' information in a world of increasing electronic technology?

You know, one would think that the perfect ministry would be this ministry because you deal with Ottawa, you deal with other provinces, and you co-ordinate things going on in other ministries. But that's not the advice I got when I talked to your colleague.

The minister is signaling me. She would make a great charades player. When she sends me signals across the chasm here between opposition and government, I usually know what she means. Her colleagues aren't always so clear. She'd be the person I'd want on my charades team.

My point is simply this. Madam Minister, what discussions have you had with your colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs? What discussions have you had with your colleague the Minister of Government Services? I don't want to unfairly represent their positions, but my impression from speaking to both was that they were not looking to your ministry to provide leadership in this area, not just on Bill C-6, because that's a federal statute, but on how we comply as a jurisdiction with the European Union privacy directive, so that we don't forfeit and put at risk some \$18 million of trade in services and goods. I wonder if the minister could answer that.

Madam Chairman, I'd like to give the minister some of my time. In other words, I'm going to sit down, and I'd like to give the minister a chance to get up and answer me on what communications she's had with her two colleagues so that it's clear not just to me – I mean, I have an advantage. I'm in the House. I have a little better sense of what's going on than many of my constituents. I'm not sure that other Albertans see that. I wonder if the minister could help me understand the specific role that her department plays in this area of privacy protection and information technology. I'll sit down and give the minister a chance to respond.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I will attempt to respond in a brief way. The co-ordination of the activities around C-6 has been led by my ministry, working very closely with the Minister of Municipal Affairs, with the Minister of Government Services, and with . . . [interjection] For *Hansard*, the member is asking if I discussed this directly with the chief information council, and the answer to that would be no.

However, we have made representations to the federal government on C-6. We have made representation to the chair of the Senate committee to raise our concerns on behalf of Albertans with that particular piece of legislation. I'm recalling the details as I'm standing here. One of our primary concerns was the lack of time and consultation that was spent with us on this legislation and the fact that our businesspeople whom this would impact had not had an opportunity to be fully prepared for this legislation. So we have been involved in those discussions.

As I recall, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and I cosigned the letter certainly that went to the chair of the Senate committee. I believe, if I recall, that I also wrote to my counterpart the Hon. Stephane Dion on that, on the concern of interaction between the federal government and the province on an issue that impacted businesses and so on in our province. I would see no reason I wouldn't share with the hon. member the letter in particular that we wrote to the chair of the Senate committee to outline our concerns. I'd have no trouble doing that at all.

8:30

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, it's always a treat to ask

questions of a minister who's as co-operative and forthright as this one. I appreciate the undertaking to make that material available.

Will the minister indicate why we have not done what the provinces of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario have done, which is take this out to their citizens? In those provinces, for the very reason the minister mentioned, most small businesses, big business, maybe some of the big internationally trading businesses are conscious of the European Union, Bill C-6, and what's going on in other places. Most small businesses in my constituency, I suspect, have no idea about this.

Given the lack of awareness, will this minister commit to undertaking at least limited public hearings around this issue, as at least four other provinces already have? It doesn't have to simply be responding to Bill C-6. It's finding out what individuals and businesses would like to see in the area of privacy protection in the nongovernment area, in the private sector. So would the minister respond to that request, please?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Madam Chairman, again, I'm sorry that I don't have more of my notes with me on this particular area for the discussion this evening. There has been consultation with the business community. That's why we knew they were very concerned about this legislation. I would have to get the information for the hon. member as to how that was held, whether it was through associations or the chambers. I just don't have it in my mind at this moment, but I would be happy to share that.

We've made the representations. I'm afraid we haven't been heard, or we've been heard and there isn't going to be a change. However, I'm hoping that because of our interventions in this area, there will be a commitment to some time for this action that will affect our business community, that there will be some time for them to prepare for it, which is really what we were asking for.

I'll take his advice on public hearings and talk it over with my department or look at what vehicle would be the best to make sure that all our business community is informed. Quite often we do work through their associations, such as chambers and so on, because they have a very good network with their membership and the ability to take information out to them. So I'll take that advice on possible public hearings. The fact is that I'm not sure our interventions are going to have any effect. I haven't seen any changes.

The one effect I hope it does have is on the importance of the time that is required to make sure our business community and others that are affected by this have the time to prepare properly for it and make sure they know. I recall other initiatives that have come through – and I'll mention the GST, which was a good example – that sort of came about and people weren't prepared, and it's not a very helpful thing.

So thank you for that suggestion. We'll look at it.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Madam Chairman. My suggestion would be to the minister. You know, I think Manitoba was the first province to announce public hearings, and how clever, I thought. By holding the public hearings, it strengthens the provincial hand, because those same people who are being consulted and whose input is being solicited are also federal voters. You know, this isn't a case of the same taxpayer; it's also the same voter, the same constituent federally or provincially. You know, I may have a different perspective from some of the business community. I may want stronger legislation, and some would want weaker legislation, but

the notion of broadening the consultation, just giving people more information seems to me a no-lose proposition.

I'd offer this one caution. We went through Bill 40 in the fall, and that was a question where your colleague the Minister of Health and Wellness was talking about how extensive the consultation was. Yet we saw evidence of a large degree of concern. Certainly the people whose information was at risk had not been consulted; namely, Joe and Jane Albertan, Calgarian.

I'm hopeful, Madam Minister. I appreciate your openness to the suggestion, and I'd just offer the comment that holding public hearings is not a sort of one-way street. It actually strengthens the government's hand when you sit down with your colleagues in other areas.

Now, there was another concern, and I don't know whether it was addressed. I'd asked the minister: what specific role has her department played in the work that's being done by Minister Claudette Bradshaw around the homeless initiative? There has been a great deal of federal/provincial interaction around providing funding for those either homeless or at risk of being homeless. Curiously, I've never heard the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations involved in any of those. I go to meetings in Calgary when federal Minister Claudette Bradshaw is in town, and I see the Member for Calgary-Bow. I wasn't sure who she was representing other than the government generally. Now I'm wondering what brief this ministry has on that issue and what role this ministry has played around that very important issue.

I'd remind the minister that in Calgary-Buffalo the single biggest concern continues to be affordable housing. I wouldn't extrapolate that to be a provincewide thing. It has a big parochial interest to me as well as a more general one.

MR. CARDINAL: No federal money. They cut it out.

MR. DICKSON: There is actually substantial federal money going in.

One of the minister's colleagues obviously has not been following what's gone on. The federal government is now providing substantial money, and they are providing it as the agencies on the ground wanted, which is without unreasonable strings attached. There's flexibility.

Anyway, I'll sit down to allow the minister a chance to respond.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Madam Chairman, I will tell the hon. member: very little involvement and a great deal of disappointment. This minister is the minister representing Alberta on the social union framework. I can tell you there was a great deal of disappointment that the homeless initiative rather skirted the social union framework in coming into play. The Minister of Community Development responsible for housing will certainly be the minister who'll be interacting with Minister Bradshaw on this initiative. But it was a source of disappointment to me and I think a source of disappointment to all ministers responsible for the social union framework that this indeed rather went around the framework, because it seems to me that this is very much a social issue. It is a natural for the social union framework, which all our Premiers and the Prime Minister signed. There was a great opportunity for us to work together.

However, I think the issue, as you pointed out, is a serious one. Having registered that disappointment, we now move ahead to make this initiative work. The work beyond the framework of the social union will be carried out by the Minister of Community Development working with other departments. I agree it's an issue that we need to deal with. The member for Calgary-Bow certainly did a lot of work, as the hon. member would know, on the task force in

Calgary leading up to the initiatives. I am just hopeful that this initiative will work with our community agencies that are trying to deal with this and we'll address it.

So having registered our displeasure at the manner in which it came about, the lack of meaningful consultation on the issue – I was at a social union ministers' framework when this initiative was announced. I didn't know anything about what was in the announcement until after it was concluded. As I say, I think that's been registered, our feeling that initiatives like this should be a natural for the social union framework. It was intended to ensure that we work together across Canada on social issues, and hopefully in the future we'll do that, but we put that behind us now and get on with the important work of dealing with the homeless in our communities wherever they are.

8:40

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would appreciate approaching this debate this evening in the same type of format that the minister has afforded to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

I'm referencing the Auditor General's reports from both 1998-99 and 1997-98. In both of those last two years' reports, the Auditor General spoke about the relationship and payments made by the province to the Metis settlements. In the '98-99 report specifically the Auditor General raised reservations, in fact stated that "a significant risk facing the Ministry is whether these funds will achieve their intended purpose." These funds are referenced as being

a total of \$253 million in support of eight Metis settlements pursuant to the Metis Settlements Accord Implementation Act. Additional payments totaling \$80 million, plus certain matching payments to be determined, are also required by this legislation to be paid between 1999-2000 and 2006-2007.

Referencing that same report, the government responded to a concern raised by the Auditor General relative to the same area in '97-98, and the ministry committed that they would

assist the Metis Settlements in their efforts to utilize and improve business planning processes. The Transition Commission will also work with individual Settlements in establishing more performance measures which can be measured quantitatively.

My request, Madam Chairman. I'm wondering if the minister would update us on the progress in that area.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Yes, I'd be pleased to. In fact, we had a very thorough discussion of that in Public Accounts this morning because it was referenced that the Auditor General had raised this. The chair, Mr. Hardy, was there and was able to discuss this issue, as well as the associate minister.

There is a great deal of work being done in that area, the consultation with the settlements, working with them on the development of business plans, and I believe that almost all settlements have reached the goal of having business plans that are consistent so that when you look at them they're consistent over the eight settlements and looking at the accountability factor. There's been a great deal of work done by the settlements.

I think it's a process that will be a work in the making maybe throughout the rest of this year, but we're certainly pleased with the guidance we received from the Auditor General and the suggestions and advice he gave us on how to improve the accountability and how to put in place performance measures that, indeed, would record that the funding was actually meeting the goals it was intended for. I think we've had very good co-operation from the settlements and

from the commission. It is my hope, certainly my desire and, I know, the associate minister's, that in the next reporting function we will see a lot of progress made in that area.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm not sure if those business plans are publicly available or if they're in a form yet to be publicly available, but I think there would be interest, once the work is complete, in being able to examine those business plans. In future years it may even be appropriate that they be encompassed in some form in the government's annual report.

I'd like to turn now to the Get Ready Alberta: Strengthening the Alberta Advantage report that was released this year and specifically ask the minister about her department's involvement relative to two particular areas. There are goals identified throughout this document. On page 8, goal: "Alberta is a world leader in innovation, research, development and commercialization of new ideas." The report outlines a number of strategies that primarily focus on innovation and science, information and technology, the information and communications technology sector. I'm wondering if the ministry of intergovernmental affairs was involved in the development of those strategies and the subsequent ideas for actions.

I noted that there were specific ideas for action that related to creating an advantage by developing and adapting environmental technologies and marketing Alberta's expertise to the rest of the world, recruiting companies, creating centres of excellence, facilitating commercialization of research and new ideas. One of the issues small business entrepreneurs have spoken to me about is that it is not always the issue of acquiring support for the development of a new technology, but it would seem that there are greater barriers when it comes to marketing. Those types of issues are ones which I would assume the department of intergovernmental affairs might be involved in.

I have further questions relative to another goal in this report, but I'm wondering if the minister would be prepared to respond to that particular area at this time.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Sure. I can do that very quickly, Madam Chairman. We were a partner in the development of that paper. There were a number of key government departments, economic departments, that developed that. We were a participant.

However, the document that really deals with our department is the one that I tabled in the House early in the session called A Framework for Alberta's International Strategies. It outlines what our role is working in an international scene, and it really is in the area of: if there are identified barriers to commercialization, to export, to trade, then we are involved. The actual marketing and sales of an item are not in our purview. I would commend this to the hon. member's reading. On pages 2 and 3 it outlines what our role is: building relationships, working government to government if there are trade barriers that affect trade.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman and Madam Minister. One of the things I'm not completely clear about, and it isn't really clear within the business plans of, say, science and technology, intergovernmental affairs, Economic Development, is that if there are trips, if you will, being planned that are intended to promote, as one example, goals in this document relative to research and technology – intergovernmental affairs might be planning trips to promote international relations. Does the taxpayer have any references within our business plan and budget process that assure

them that these types of initiatives are co-ordinated, are done in the most cost-effective manner? I don't have a sense in my examination of Economic Development, science and technology, and intergovernmental affairs that there is co-ordination in those departments to ensure that the taxpayer is getting the best possible use of their representatives and the most affordable trade trips.

8:50

One of the other goals referenced in this report is that Alberta is internationally recognized as a good place to invest and do business. Alberta businesses compete and succeed in a global marketplace.

Another issue that businessmen have raised to me is their increasing frustration with our aviation situation. While it has improved to some degree, Edmonton continues to be less accessible and less flexible in terms of departures, particularly to international destinations, than Calgary. I'm wondering if the hon. minister has had any involvement. The document I've referenced specifically talks about "an Alberta aviation strategy to improve air transportation for passengers and cargo." Has intergovernmental affairs been involved, and would the minister elaborate on that involvement?

Thank you.

MRS. McCLELLAN: The questions sort of pertain to a couple of ministries, but I will advise the hon. member that this ministry is responsible for the co-ordination of international travel. We do ensure, when travel is anticipated, that it is co-ordinated. Often when a minister travels to a country, they can deal with several areas, not only the one they might be specifically in. So that is a part of the responsibility we have, to ensure that there is an overall co-ordination of international travel.

I have had discussions with my colleagues from Economic Development and other economic departments, with Air Canada, our new soon to be single carrier, and raised that very issue with them, the importance of having access to good routes not just within Canada but certainly internationally. Actually, I would say that we had a very good meeting and that they are very aware of our interests. We pointed out to them that we're the third largest exporter in Canada and that having good international air access is incredibly important to us across this province. I felt quite assured from that discussion that they were very aware and were looking forward to continuing to work with us to provide good access to international routes for Alberta.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: All right. After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$24,221,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

head: Lottery Fund Estimates 2000-2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll now deal with the lottery estimates.

MR. SMITH: An excellent idea, Madam Chairman. Thank you so much. It gives me great pleasure to speak very briefly to the lottery fund estimates and also to be ably and capably assisted by my colleagues who use a great deal of the lottery funds for the benefit of all Albertans in communities throughout this fair land.

The creation of the current lottery fund is largely the confirmation and the result of the lotteries and gaming summit recommendation, specifically number 4, that stated "that gaming and lottery profits not be directed to the province's General Revenue Fund." The creation of the lottery fund in its current format provides Albertans with clear, transparent information on where lottery dollars go. The information is set out clearly in budget documents but, of course, is also available on the Alberta Gaming web site, and I'd encourage all members on a daily basis to visit that site at www.gaming.gov.ab.ca.

This year's lottery fund estimates clearly indicate that we have listened and listened carefully to the priorities of Albertans and have directed those funds in those appropriate directions. Of the funds' estimated budget of \$837 million, 88 percent is directed to thousands of public nonprofit community and charitable projects across Alberta. The remaining 12 percent goes to debt repayment, \$50 million into lottery programs, and AGLC operations, \$56 million. Sixty percent of the fund, Madam Chairman, provides specifically targeted support to the priority areas of health, education, and infrastructure.

One of the goals of the lottery fund and the Department of Gaming is to be open, clear, and transparent. Albertans clearly want to know where lottery moneys come from. We update our web site on a quarterly basis to clearly indicate the sources and the amount of lottery fund revenue.

Albertans also want to know where lottery dollars go. We provide that information, Madam Chairman, through this process, through annual reports, and of course on a continually updated web site. We're also completing development of a visual identity for the lottery fund, so Albertans clearly know, clearly identified and very open, where lottery dollars are being spent.

Albertans, Madam Chairman, and indeed all Canadians have clearly indicated in a recent report from the Canada West Foundation that they are comfortable with gaming, that they in fact see gaming as an issue of personal choice and that they prefer governments using gaming revenue as opposed to governments raising taxes. Clearly, gaming is a matter of choice, but it's so important that we balance that choice and we find the balance of responsibility. That is indeed the purpose of the department, to help strike a proper balance between responsibility and choice.

That is not to say, Madam Chairman, that gaming is not harmful to some. In fact, government, service groups, and industries recognize this and provide resources and programs to treat and educate. This includes lottery fund dollars provided to AADAC, the association for drug and alcohol-related addiction, for its problem gambling programs. The industry is also involved in problem gambling initiatives. As a matter of fact, I commend the industry for the work done by the Alberta Gaming Industry Association.

We also recognize that there's a lot we don't know about gaming, and knowing more through listening to stakeholders, customers, and people all across this fair land will help us better determine future public and industry policy. That's why we've set up – and you would know because you had a very, very strong influence in this, Madam Chairman – the Alberta Gaming Research Council. That's why the lottery fund is providing \$1.5 million . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, this is getting difficult. I have to ask *Hansard* whether or not in fact they can hear this. *Hansard*, can you hear this? Hon. minister, they are saying no, they can't hear it.

MR. SMITH: Well, Madam Chairman, it will be my pleasure . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. SMITH: . . . to be able to speak fairly clearly and loudly and enunciate the goals and the objectives of this organization as it benefits all Albertans. In fact, I would love to speak on this topic for a number of hours, not only minutes of the day.

We need to talk specifically, Madam Chairman, about the \$1.5 million per year that's going to the Alberta Gaming Research Institute, which is a consortium of the universities of Calgary, Alberta, and Lethbridge. There are three. Hmm. The institute with the guidance of the council will conduct research into the social and economic aspects of gambling.

I believe we've made great progress, Madam Chairman, in the allocation of lottery fund revenues. Cabinet colleagues were diligent to identify programs and projects that are important to Albertans and Alberta communities. In fact, if you look at health, infrastructure, education, you'll find that about 60 percent of the lottery fund is in these three important project areas that Albertans have said are very, very important and very, very vital to the future of this great province.

I can look back over the years, Madam Chairman, and quote one of the early democratic politicians who once said that

to give away money is an easy matter and in any man's power. But to decide to whom to give it, and how large and when, and for what purpose and how, is neither in every man's power nor an easy matter. Hence it is that such excellence is rare, praiseworthy and noble.

That was said a long time ago by Aristotle in another parliament, Madam Chairman, in Greece.

Madam Chairman, I know it's a noble undertaking. I know we have members looking to see where these funds go, how they go. I know they've been on their web sites most of the day. I know they're ready. We look forward to good debate, good answers, and I thank everybody in the House for their keen attention to this fund.

9:00

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to open up on the lotteries. Let me first of all welcome the two guests that we have up there in the galleries. It's nice to see that we do have Albertans that are interested as to what happens with their tax dollars, and like all the other Albertans out there, I'm sure they're very, very concerned with Bill 11. But we're not here to talk about Bill 11, Madam Chairman, so I won't talk about Bill 11. I will say in my opening remarks that all my remarks will pertain to lotteries, and I know you think I go off track once and a while, but I'm not going to go off track. My comments are going to be restricted to lotteries.

When we look at lotteries, we first of all have to realize that we do have the commission there, but on top of the commission and ultimately responsible is the minister. So we can't just talk about the lotteries commission and leave the government per se out of it, because the government, of course, is responsible in the end when it comes to lottery dollars, how those dollars are spent, and how the dollars are distributed.

Madam Chairman, when I think back on my 11 years here since 1989, I've watched the history of the VLTs and the lotteries expand and develop into the cash cow and the interest that some members have had, which is basically nil, although there was a great deal of interest – we all remember those Samsonite personalized briefcases

being handed out to government members with the applications in there and that type of thing. That's all history, but what I've watched on the other side is that most members really have not paid that much attention to VLTs or gambling in the province. It hasn't been an area of interest in particular. There is an exception. There's one member on the government side who has paid a great deal of interest in terms of gambling activities within this province, who has what I would call a very sensible approach to gambling, from the point of view that gambling is more than a cash cow. There are problems associated with gambling, with lotteries, and that member has taken a number of occasions to point out some of those difficulties.

When the Premier in his good judgment – and it's up to the Premier to make those decisions as to who's responsible for what areas; who becomes the Minister of Gaming, for example. Member for Calgary-Varsity, don't take this as criticism. If he were in the Health and Wellness portfolio, he might make the greatest health minister in the world. He might unravel the crisis that is now occurring in Alberta in that particular area. In Environment he could turn out to be the greatest environmental protector Alberta has ever seen. But prior to his appointment as the minister responsible for gaming, I can't recall when he ever took any public interest in gaming activities within the province. That is not criticism; that is the perception I have of it.

When the Premier chose to appoint that member as the minister responsible for gaming, making it a full-fledged ministerial opportunity, rather than the other member I was referring to, who would have taken gambling in a much more sensible direction but probably not brought in the same amount of revenues, well, it signaled to me that what the Premier wanted was somebody to go in there who would milk the cow, who would see gaming as an activity that would raise as much money as possible. The Member for Calgary-Varsity was the chosen one. The Premier must have concluded that if anybody could suck blood from a rock, it's the Member for Calgary-Varsity, and he has taken an approach, I believe, where gaming is now a big, big industry in the province of Alberta. I think it's unfortunate that not enough attention has been paid to the other side of it.

So it's up to the opposition. Just like it is with Bill 11, it's up to the opposition to now become the watchdog and to try and make sure the government is on track. With the gambling I'm afraid they're not on track yet. There are still many, many concerns.

I want to talk about this annual report put out by the Gaming and Liquor Commission. I turn to page 2 – and this is very important stuff – the return to charities from charitable gaming. They talk about charitable gaming being bingos, casinos, raffles, and pull tickets. Then they say, Madam Chairman, to the minister: "none of the net proceeds from charitable gaming accrue to the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission." Now, the 70 percent that's pulled out of the slot machines that are in the charitable casinos doesn't go to the charitable organization hosting the casino; that goes to the commission or to the government, so that is not really a correct statement.

Then I look at the next column, where it talks about the video lottery operations. It talks in terms of the cap of 6,000. I can recall when that sensible member that I referred to earlier recommended a cap of 6,000 VLTs, but there was a mistake made, and the mistake made was that there was not a cap put on the slot machines in that same period of time. I realize there is a freeze on at the present time on expansion of gaming activities within the province; however, there is an increased number of slot machines that are available as compared to a few months back. I'm not sure what the current number is now of slot machines – well, let's call them casino gaming

terminals. We talk in terms of how the electronic racing games bring in \$13.3 million, with another \$9.3 million from the Sega race game activities and such. But for the slot machines I can't find a number as to how many are operating in the province of Alberta, and I'm kind of curious.

Then I go to the next page, Madam Chairman, and it talks about the summit. We all recall the summit that was held in Medicine Hat, the gaming summit, headed up by the former Ombudsman, Mr. Johnson. That particular summit made a number of recommendations, and the recommendations are all listed here. It says: "The Summit provided eight recommendations which the Government of Alberta has accepted, or accepted in principle." What I draw to your attention is number 4, that "gaming and lottery profits not be directed to the province's General Revenue Fund." Now, if I recall correctly – somebody correct me if I'm wrong – did not a portion of the profits go into general revenue in this year's budget? Was there not a portion going into the general revenue?

MR. WHITE: All of it is general revenue.

MR. WICKMAN: And then it goes to the various departments. Exactly. Possibly you should be the Minister of Gaming, Member for Edmonton-Calder. Good understanding.

Now we look at number 5, that "all gaming and lottery profits collected by the province be directed to supporting charitable or non-profit initiatives." Charitable or nonprofit initiatives. It says that the government of Alberta accepted these recommendations. Well, the government of Alberta did not – did not – accept recommendation 5, because all gaming and lottery profits are not being directed to supporting charitable or nonprofit initiatives. The bulk of it is being sent over to the health department, to education. In fact, I listened to our esteemed Premier on CHED radio. I even taped it for anyone who wants to hear what the Premier had to say.

I listened to the angry Albertans call about Bill 11, by the way, but that wasn't surprising. I anticipated that. But somebody called and said: why not direct the lottery dollars, the gambling dollars towards health care, towards health? The Premier turned around and said that the bulk of it goes there now, goes to health. Then he said: well, not all of it; some goes to learning and such. But on CHED radio on the *Dave Rutherford* program he made it very clear that dollars are going into departments like health and such, and you can't call those areas nonprofit initiatives.

Now, I've been asked – will you allow me to revert for a second to introductions?

9:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You wish to revert to Introduction of Guests? Is that what you're asking, hon. member?

MR. WICKMAN: Yes.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Could I ask for unanimous consent of the committee to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

MR. WICKMAN: Madam Chairman, through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly I want to introduce two guests up in the galleries, Albert Tarrabain and Natasha Scheideman – pardon me if I have it wrong; the member's writing is a bit rough – from Duffield. That's out there by the Stony Plain area. I remember that. If you'll stand and receive the warm welcome of members of the Assembly.

head: Lottery Fund Estimates 2000-2001

(continued)

MR. WICKMAN: Now, trying to get my train of thought back here, the Premier made it very, very clear to me on CHED radio that they are not complying with that recommendation by the gaming summit. Then I go to page 17 and look at the financial statements. Again, the minister did respond in writing to a number of the questions that I asked earlier, and I appreciate that, Mr. Minister. There are some additional ones here.

When I look at the operating expenses, I see the salaries from '98 to '99 going up from \$16,554,000 to \$19,009,000. Now, that's an increase of \$2.5 million in salaries and benefits, which seems extremely high considering there's a review on and we're not supposed to be having an expansion of gaming activities. The other one that strikes me as a bit strange, a bit high, is that I find under travel an increase from \$1,023,000 to \$1,387,000, which is an increase of \$364,000, which I think is a sizable increase. So if the minister could explain that.

Then I go over to page 23, where it talks in terms of the ticket lottery operations, and it lists the various types of scratch tickets and the sporting tickets like Sports Select and such: Western, 6/49, Special Event, Pogo. Pogo: pay for one and you get one free. Quite a bit of money is raised even from a little operation like the pull tickets.

I was speaking to a group of Boy Scouts prior to coming here; that's the reason I didn't get here at 8 o'clock. They were interested in gambling in Alberta, and I asked the question as to whether it's a problem that they think some of their older peers are facing. They say that it's not unusual for guys they know who are under 18 to get somebody that's 18 years of age to go and buy them in particular the Sports Select type of tickets where they can gamble on things like the outcome of a hockey game or a football game or a basketball game.

Now, I'm not sure if the minister in his wisdom in addressing the addiction problems is paying real special heed to those young people that may enjoy the spirit of gambling, because from there the next step, of course, is sort of to graduate to the VLTs in the bars. So it becomes sort of like a training ground for them, and I don't think it's a great training ground because it can go on to cost them for life.

Just some other comments I want to make. There's one other area in here that strikes me as strange that talks in terms of the plebiscites: "In conjunction with civic elections, 36 municipalities representing 70 percent of the provincial population, held VLT plebiscites." Now, we all know that and we know the outcome of those plebiscites, but we also know – and I've said it before and I'll say it again, because I can see so many members paying such close attention to what I'm saying here that they're going to want to hear it again – that the difficulty with the plebiscites is that they did not give the electorate the opportunity for what I consider the other viable option, restricting the gambling to the charitable model, the nonprofit casinos; in other words, allow people to gamble in gambling centres like the charitable casinos, not in the bars, where you're mixing a great deal of booze with the gambling. That's where innocent people get hooked on gambling who don't intend to gamble or had no thought of gambling prior to going to the bar.

The VLTs have quieted down. I'm not saying that the damage has been reduced. Maybe some increased emphasis on the addiction problem has helped, but on the other hand what it could be is sort of a false sense of security. People may have sort of shrugged their shoulders and said: "Well, we've had votes. The government doesn't listen, just like they're not listening on Bill 11. They're not going to listen to us anyhow, so no matter what we think of the

VLTs, why bother squawking? Who cares? Who pays attention to what we want? They're going to leave them in the bars whether we like it or not." So that could be the problem as to why we're not seeing the numbers of complaints about VLTs that we were seeing before. The same types of problems aren't being pointed out.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Although when I read in the paper, I often wonder – we had this case. Some of you may have read about a good friend of many of us – myself, the Member for Edmonton-Calder, and others here – from the Italian supermarket, Spinelli's operation, where \$75,000 had been taken improperly by one of the employees, who was charged. The first thought that came to my mind was: aha, a gambling addiction. But in that case I was wrong. Teresa Spinelli, in making a victim's statement, pointed out that it was not due to an addiction. So in that case I was wrong, but so often I read about some internal theft, and the first thought that goes through my mind is: I'll bet you that person has a gambling problem.

Once in a while my wife will be reading the obituary column. She may be looking for my name; I'm not sure. She'll say: lookit; it doesn't say where to send donations; I bet that person committed suicide because of gambling. We have seen that happen. We've actually seen it publicized in the paper. Relatives have said that kinfolk have committed suicide because of their addiction to gambling. We can't of course get those people to testify, but relatives are of the opinion that that's what caused somebody to jump off a balcony in Calgary, for example. I believe that does happen, Mr. Minister. It's a very, very serious problem.

Now, there are other members here that are anxious to speak. I've spoken for almost 20 minutes, and I've had the chance to speak on a number of occasions before on lotteries and gaming. There are others that are anxious to go, so I'm going to conclude on that note, and let the next one take it. Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through careful examination, attentive listening, and trying to analyze, we do detect one or two, perhaps even three questions that were asked in the long discussion by the member who's been involved with this subject for a longer period of time than I have. It's interesting, Mr. Chairman. Magicians always illustrate by illusion. I think we've seen here that we have politicians illustrating by delusion.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Chairman, when I was carefully listening to debate from the chair, I was rummaging through the numerous letters of support for this government on Bill 11. As a matter of fact, in that broad ream of support letters, I did find something that was quite interesting and that I think applies appropriately to this discussion. It's actually a copy of a letter to the *Calgary Herald* on the 22nd of March, and it's headed up Bar the Liberals. Well, of course, democracy wouldn't allow that. It says:

Allan Rock's excursion to Calgary to speak to most of Alberta's Liberals . . .

There were about 14 there.

. . . brings to mind an observation of American commentator, P.J. O'Rourke. He has written that giving money and power to politicians is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys.

9:20

In fact, when I was reading through this ream of support letters for Bill 11, Mr. Chairman, this letter leapt out at me. It talks about: "Here in Canada, rather than whiskey," which this department is also responsible for, "we give our federal government 'Liberal Boondog-

gle Lite.'" Well, I suggest that these kissin' cousins, these very close relations – I know that because the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was actually within 10 feet of the guy who brought you the airbus, the guy who brought you gun control, and the guy who said that the file is closed on hep C: Mr. Allan Rock, the hon. Minister of Health from Ottawa. He was right there. He was within six feet of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

The letter goes on, Mr. Chairman. It says:

Like its beer namesake, substantially more volume is required to produce the good feelings that quaffers crave.

I'm sure here he's referring to another member who came to Calgary, the Hon. Jane Stewart. Probably sat within 10 feet of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo there too. As a matter of fact, they'll all be sitting together tomorrow night when they're in Calgary. So it's boondoggle lite and boondoggle regular and boondoggle dark, and they're all going to be there together.

The final paragraph:

But, after ingesting huge quantities of Boondoggle Lite and passing it through the system, Liberals are wont to deposit what little remains on the heads of the electorate.

I would submit to you that that's a Liberal credo that runs across Canada.

Mr. Chairman, I know that the member wanted to talk about Bill 11, and I would like to talk about Bill 11, but the House wants to focus on the importance of lottery estimates tonight. When the member talked about for-profit, two-tiered health care, he actually referred to the government as a for-profit government. Well, we all know that programs and services in this organization are not for profit. They're nonprofit. The department estimates are critical.

We would like to go on and on with the trail. First the member talked about looking after big business, expanding an industry, and in fact he then went on to refer to the freeze – the freeze – the fences that are on casinos and expansion of any type of gaming facility in Alberta until there's a gaming policy framework, a licensing policy framework that stakeholders understand, that the public understands, that cities and communities – the Red Deers, the Medicine Hats, the Grande Prairies of the world – can easily fit into, very transparent, very open, as clear in disclosure as our web site.

Firstly, the member from over by the Derrick golf club, Edmonton-Rutherford, says: he's sucking the cash cow; he's milking the lottery fund through gambling and its pervasive movement into Alberta. Then the next thing he says is: what a good move he made; he put a freeze on it. Well, thank you, I think.

He goes on to talk about the lottery fund and the fact that we are going against the general recommendation because about 4 percent of the lottery fund goes to debt repayment, and 96 percent, the balance, the huge balance of this fund – oh, I'm sorry; about 1 percent, \$50 million, is scheduled for debt repayment. The balance is going into programs and services that benefit every Albertan, Albertans in Fort McMurray, the fastest expanding city in Canada today. Mr. Chairman, we know that this is happening.

He then says that we're going against the recommendation. Well, while he's saying that we're going against that recommendation of the gaming summit, which he feels is exceedingly, exceedingly important to the fiscal management of this lottery fund, he also has a motion on the floor, Motion 516.

Mr. Wickman proposes the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the Government to eliminate the Lottery Fund, with all lottery revenues deposited into the General Revenue Fund.

That's the individual that is against the recommendations of the lottery fund summit from Medicine Hat. It's the Liberals again: I want to be on this side of the issue; I want to be on that side of the issue. They don't know what side to come through.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have two questions at this time in the lottery fund debate. The first one obviously is concerning the use of lottery fund money to repair the roofs, in this case the rotting roofs, of community halls and homes throughout Alberta. Now, I've looked through the lottery fund estimates, and I can't find what measures have been taken to fund this program. Last summer, I believe, in Crossfield there was definitely money put forward to repair the roof on the community hall.

I would like to know how many dollars have been used for this purpose and, Mr. Chairman, are going to be used in the future. It seems to me quite unfair that lottery fund dollars can be used to repair some roofs while the government, on the other hand, forces homeowners, good, hardworking Albertans, to the court system to seek compensation for this scandal. I don't have to go to Ottawa to find a scandal. I can go across the floor, and I can go up and down the row. Another scandal, of course, would be Bill 11 and the boondoggle that's turned out to be.

Also, I have a question for the hon. minister, and this goes back to the gaming summit. If he could confirm this for me regarding the lottery fund, I would be very grateful. Apparently it was discussed in the corridors in Medicine Hat. It's this idea of a lottery, not so much a lottery but a means of raising revenue for minor hockey, for the Calgary Flames, and as I understand it, also for the Edmonton Oilers. As it was explained to me and as it was discussed at the gaming summit, there is to be a lottery developed in this province, and the proceeds of this lottery – and it's up to the individual. The individual has a choice of whether they want to purchase this lottery and support hockey. They have the choice, as it was explained to me. If a person goes to the 7-Eleven and they want to exercise their choice to purchase a lottery ticket, the proceeds of this lottery, as I understand it, are to be divided between minor hockey, the Calgary Flames Hockey Club, and the Edmonton Oilers hockey club.

Now, I just listened with a great deal of interest as this was described to me, and I would be very curious if the minister and his department have any plans for introducing such a lottery for hockey in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. SMITH: Well, again I actually thank the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for the good question on the Alberta sport prize bond. In fact, Mr. Chairman, I was not minister at the gaming summit, but this is something that has been bandied about, not in hallways but in good, normal business circumstances, with the Department of Gaming.

There has been about \$250,000 spent over the last two years to examine the business viability of a prize bond lottery that would allow individuals, good-standing individuals, people with disposable income such as the member, who I know has been a very successful businessman – actually, he's a good entrepreneur. A good entrepreneur, Mr. Chairman. In total, total reverse ideology to what he espouses here in the House, that is a good entrepreneur. That's a man who believes in entrepreneurial success, and he's practised it, and he would have the disposable income to buy a bond from this organization.

This money would be deposited into a fund, and the interest and the investments made from that fund would be spent on prizes and to professional sports teams in a manner that they may or may not deem fit and appropriate. It's up to that private-sector organization to develop it, determine the viability of it, market it, sell it, determine the distribution of it.

9:30

It would be regulated by the Alberta government, if it would be headquartered in Alberta, but it would not be run per se by the Alberta government. I have only seen two pages of the study, hon. member. Those two pages indicate that the numbers, the critical mass in Alberta is not sufficient. Even though we've had a burgeoning economy, even though we've had \$30 billion worth of new economic activity over the seven years, even though we have a 4.9 percent unemployment rate, even though we've seen tremendous amounts of people move to this fair province, have seen an increase of 300,000 people over the last seven years – I mean, it attests not only to this government but mostly to the people it represents.

What that means is that this would probably be best served economically – and I know how he appreciates the bottom line. The bottom line says that this should be expanded outside Alberta and perhaps be inclusive of all NHL teams. That is in the private-sector domain. It is up to them to take it forward. I repeat: the government is not entertaining at this point any move to an Alberta sport prize bond.

That was a good question, and I thought it was a question that deserved a clear answer. I know that the member sometimes sees bogeymen behind the doors, sees cronies getting together to conspire. As a matter of fact, I think he even said in *Hansard* that this government conspires by leaking scoops to the soon-to-be-departed Don Martin, from Alberta, with scoops to the *Calgary Herald*. So in fact we might even be in league with those evil newspapermen from the *Calgary Herald*. Mr. Chairman, that is only something the member reported in *Hansard*, but I know he wanted a clean, succinct answer to the Alberta sport prize bond.

Now, he also talked about what I've come to dearly remember him for, a topic close to the member's heart, one that he's looked out on from many roofs throughout the great vistas of this province, and it's about pine shakes. It's about pine shakes in two community centres, and it said to me that the member wants to know more. The member wants to know more. I thought: we need an expert. We need a person from this government who's able to talk about the creation of this, the person who's helped guide gambling development in this province, a person who's helped put the brakes on gambling development in this province, a person who's got a good heart, a clean conscience, occupies important chairs in the legislative offices, and is the first chair of the Community Lottery Board Secretariat. I would ask the Member for Lacombe-Stettler to clearly enunciate the roles, duties, and costs as they pertain to these estimates of the community lottery boards.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I do want to talk a little bit about the community lottery boards and answer the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's question.

This is year two of the community lottery board program, and I believe it's been a good program. That's what Albertans are telling me. One of the things with this program is that there's a great deal of flexibility allowed. The boards themselves are able to decide who in fact should have funding within their communities. This is not decided at the provincial level. There's no interference whatsoever from the government of Alberta. Boards themselves can make a decision on what is the priority of their people and what serves the benefit of the community at large. If those are the guidelines, you would have to agree that that would be a good program.

As well, the members on the community lottery boards are decided by the municipalities. The government of Alberta does not interfere whatsoever in board appointment decisions. This is something that

the municipalities advertise for and the municipalities in the regional community lottery boards make the decision on. So if a person in this Assembly or someone else doesn't like a certain project that has been funded by the community lottery board, they would actually have to take that decision up with that particular board, because they have made the decision. Many of the boards worked very, very hard over the last two years to put in place board guidelines.

Also, another requirement in the program is that all these dollars must be accounted for to the public. So once granting has taken place, they buy advertisements in the paper, and they must definitely say exactly where all their money has gone. The community at large is well aware of projects that have been funded. If an applicant is turned down, they are certainly entitled to make another pitch the following granting cycle.

To date it seems to have worked very well. In the two years I've been involved in this program, I have only heard of two complaints. Both the minister and I receive a number of letters from very, very happy recipients of lottery funds.

Over the next couple of weeks several of the chairs of the community lottery boards will be getting together to talk and network about what has worked well in their communities with the program so that one community board can learn from the other what in fact is working for some of them. So the wheel doesn't have to be reinvented. They can actually take something home with them and make it work in their own communities. That is about all.

As far as the funding of community roofs, there were two communities that were funded. This was a decision made at the local community for what they thought was a local need. I'm very proud because there wasn't any government interference in that decision, even though that particular issue was talked about a lot in question period and during debate in the House. The people on that board in conjunction with community needs made the decision.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased this evening to rise and offer my thoughts relative to the lottery fund estimates. I'd appreciate it, if the hon. minister is willing, if we can have a bit of a dialogue in my 20 minutes. That would be preferable to me.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I have to indicate that in addition to my duties in the House in the last year, Madam Chairman, I've had the experience – I won't call it the privilege – of working in both bingo halls and casinos for our children's elementary school, for hockey fund-raising and lacrosse fund-raising, and I've got a couple of observations relative to those experiences.

Firstly, the reliance this government is placing on families to work these types of functions, if you will, to work bingos and casinos to provide for primary essential funding of education is, in my opinion, misguided and shortsighted. My casino shift was from 9 at night till 3 in the morning, and the bingo shifts have run from 5 in the afternoon till midnight. You have the occasion to talk to people about their thoughts relative to this whole initiative by government. I think that when it comes to sports and recreation most people take a bit of a different view, but the reliance on lottery funds for the provision of essential supports and curriculum aids and technology in our school system I would suggest the majority of people do not support.

Now, we have also had cause to discuss while we're in particularly the bingo environments how unhealthy those environments are

to the individuals working in them. I contemplated, prior to doing my last shift, what kind of response I would get if I went into the hall with an oxygen mask strapped to my face and an oxygen tank. I can tell you that after the seven-odd hours of working in that bingo hall, you absolutely cannot get home fast enough to remove the stench in your clothing and hair from cigarette smoke.

9:40

I think there is also evidence that those people who perhaps are not as economically fortunate as others do an increased number of bingos because it helps pay for their child's registration in hockey. They're being subjected to that health risk through the inhalation of smoke. When you see how your clothing absorbs it and your hair absorbs it, I shudder to think about the amount of secondhand smoke that is inhaled during those long shifts in the bingo hall.

My primary question to the minister is: will he consider making bingo halls nonsmoking? If you are going to expect families to work these as a fundamental requirement to enable their children to get a good education and participate in organized sports, I would like to see the government take the initiative to make bingo halls and casinos nonsmoking.

At that point, Madam Chairman, I will sit down and hope that the minister will respond. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. The member raises a number of good points, points that are fundamentally imbued in Alberta society. One of those is hockey. One of those events that we're faced with a lot is the idea of funding for professional sport franchises. Just as the Calgary Flames have a Saddledome Foundation, that puts money from their revenues back into the community, so does the Alberta lottery fund. Hockey is changing, and I think that's part of a bigger sign that Alberta society is changing as well. In fact, the fastest growing sport in Alberta today is soccer in terms of registration from men and women. I think the terrific job the Canadian team did in Los Angeles winning the Columbia Cup is going to really strike another blow for hockey.

One of the other big parts about hockey is that it's expensive. Hockey is an expensive sport to have children in, and with that comes a responsibility for community, for parents, for coaches, and in some cases for the individuals themselves. In fact, this lottery fund does support amateur hockey. There's a wonderful program in there for athletic scholarships. There are programs in there that support the Alberta Junior Hockey League. There are programs in here that support hockey and the very fibre of Alberta throughout the province.

Also, charities benefit from the structure, as a matter of fact a much complimented structure. Again, when I go through newspaper articles and I'm sifting through those that support Bill 11, I find the odd column that also supports clearly the charitable model of gaming in Alberta and how it's been relatively scandal free, how the government has been able to work in co-operation and conjunction with its partners, the charity partners and the private-sector casino owners.

That then brings us to the next step, which is the charities, the private bingo halls, and the issue of smoking and secondhand smoke. I know how offensive it can be to some and how other people can be indifferent to it. I have been very fortunate over my last 25 years and as the children grew up. I have worked those bingo halls for the Notre Dame Alumni Association. I have worked casinos for the Calgary Old Timers Hockey Association. I have worked casinos for the synchronized swim club of Alberta. I've worked casinos for Notre Dame as well. In fact, Madam Chairman, the only way I could get out of working those was in fact to become elected and

therefore be in a conflict of interest and not be able to go in there. So I have declined from volunteering since assuming this portfolio, and I would recommend that maybe the member might even want to consider that option for her own personal health, to talk about having elected office.

I know it's difficult. I know it's difficult when you get home late at night and it's difficult when you throw clothes away. I know it's difficult when you get through the end of a two-day casino. Your charity has netted somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$40,000 to \$50,000. You're tired, you're worn out, you stink, and you think: why am I doing this?

Well, \$40,000 over a two-day event, Madam Chairman, is roughly what is raised from doing 80,000 to 100,000 car washes. Now, I know the member would have wrinkled hands, cold ears from being outside, and although you would be breathing fresh air, you'd be washing cars every day for 365 days a year at the rate of 3,000 a day in order to get to that level.

With the member's professional background and her commitment to health care in Alberta, I know she is going to move from this Legislature this evening after having talked to me and put pen to paper – and actually when I think of the phrase, immediately the face of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo comes together, writing notes as Allan Rock speaks 10 feet from him, being close at the dinner tomorrow night. It just comes to mind as an aside. But I know the Member for Edmonton-Riverview will be putting pen to paper to talk to the private-sector operators, to talk to the charities, and to talk to the municipalities. I think your own experience, Madam Chairman, would indicate that you would see the smoking issue as being one of a municipal jurisdiction. There's the private-sector operator of the bingo hall, there's the charity that's involved, there are individuals, and there's the municipality, and that's where the debate is going to take place.

There are a number of bingo halls. There are a number of areas where there are no-smoking rooms. My mother only goes to the no-smoking part of the bingo halls, and she's 92. As a matter of fact, she went to the smoking part from probably age 70 to 90, and she says she's a little slower now that she's 90 to 92. But, you know, I think she's been able to move through that. I'm very proud of my mother. In fact, I learned to play bingo at my mother's knee, Madam Chairman, and it was a big part of Alberta.

AN HON. MEMBER: In a church basement?

MR. SMITH: No, it wasn't in a church basement, as you bring up. It was at the Elks hall, and then from the Elks hall I can remember going to a drive-in bingo in Stettler, Alberta. Of course, that's in your constituency, Madam Chairman. At that time you would drive to Stettler, a considerable drive from Red Deer, and you would park your car beside the drive-in speaker. They would call the numbers over the speaker. It was called a drive-in bingo, and you won cars. It was a darn big event in Alberta in those days. I just see members now wanting to spring to their feet because they're getting memories of this great land, of growing up in this province. As a matter of fact, bingo, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo clearly gesticulates, is a part of his heritage too.

MR. DICKSON: Drumheller.

MR. SMITH: Growing up in Drumheller, home of the Drumheller Miners, a hockey team that raised money through car washes, through lotteries, through beer tubs. Probably played against the Hanna Hornets. Who is to say? There was a guy out of Drumheller by the name of Tony Kollman. Let me tell you, could he play hockey. He'd raise money through a number of events that were

available to him in those days. Again they were low-key, small money events. Today charities throughout this fair land, throughout Alberta, raise \$40,000 to \$50,000 from one casino event. That then gives them the opportunity to work at whatever their charities are really designated to do, Madam Chairman.

I know there are others wanting to share in the debate, there's more that needs to be addressed, so I'm actually going to sit down now, Madam Chairman. And I know there are more questions from the member.

9:50

MRS. SLOAN: The only conclusion I can draw from what the minister has just said is that maybe after I work the bingos I should go to the car wash to remove the stench. I didn't hear him commit tonight that he would consider making the bingo halls nonsmoking, as B.C. has done, and I'll continue to dialogue with the minister on that basis.

I'd like to reference the Auditor General's report and recommendations that were made to this ministry in the last published report that we have. I did not see encompassed in the business plan reference to these, so I'd like to ask the minister to give us an update. The Auditor General recommended in his 1998-99 report that "management controls over the issuance of gaming licences be strengthened." He further recommended that

the management of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission provide the Board of the Commission with regular assessments of the operating effectiveness of controls over the issuance of gaming licences.

In the same context the Auditor General also spoke about the issue of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission eligibility criteria, and he goes on to expand at some length about the "standards and procedures to mitigate risks." I would appreciate it if the minister would talk a bit about the developments and improvements that have been made within those standards and procedures in the last fiscal year.

Further, he highlighted the fact that

work plans and stated business objectives for the licensing function were not supported by measurable targets and indicators. The business planning process would be improved if business objectives were linked to deliverables and outcomes for the gaming licensing division.

The results of monitoring performance against targets should form part of the accountability reporting by management to the Board.

Now, as I look at the business plan for Alberta Gaming, I see goals and I see strategies. I do see measures and targets referenced on pages 117, 118, and 119, but there isn't a great deal of elaboration on those, and I would like to have more details as to how the department plans to measure. I'll just give an example. The first measure you cite is that

liquor and gaming activities are conducted in accordance with legislation, regulation and policy. Compliance will be monitored by inspection of liquor and gaming activities.

... compliance rates relate to the first inspections after initial licensing. Following these [investigations] the compliance rate is expected to be 100%.

But you don't indicate how many of the licensed entities are in fact meeting that requirement, if you follow me. Your measure is basically saying that after the initial inspection the compliance rate is expected to be 100 percent. So how many are in fact meeting that target?

I recall seeing in here that you actually talk about one of your key strategies being to

investigate alleged violations of the Gaming and Liquor Act and Regulation ... policies, conduct inspections and audits of gaming and liquor licencees.

But there's no information about how many investigations have been

conducted in the last fiscal year, what were the results of those investigations, and what recommendations have been implemented to increase compliance.

Those are my questions in this set, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Madam Chairman. Because the member's questions are important and I do want to address them as best I can immediately, I'm going to ask for some latitude from you. These questions are relating to the business plan of the Ministry of Gaming, and those estimates did take place two weeks ago and were approved. As a matter of fact, if I remember, so were the lottery fund estimates approved, but that was actually struck from the record. We want the number of hours clearly on the record. It's a big fund, and it's important to have it put there.

I am going to move towards the exact side that the member talks about when she talks about, first, the Auditor General and his report of 1998-99, when this was not a ministry. The Auditor General started to bring up good points about a business that needs to have a clear definition of policy, rules, regulation, and enforcement. Those comments were a fundamental part, I'm sure, of the creation of the ministry. That was also the direct response that we moved to when we developed these performance measures in the 2000 business plan, the very first business plan of the Ministry of Gaming, that said: how can we measure effective performance of our employees?

In fact, what was happening before: we'd have some liquor inspectors that worked 24 hours a day, virtually. They did a lot of their work in the evening. They didn't know how many places they were going to. They didn't know what to expect when they got there. Then they would waste time by the way they followed up. So what we did put into the business plan was a specific target. We thought that the number of inspectors that were there, hon. member, would be able to go through at least 3,000 establishments a year. Now, that is a 25 percent increase from what they were visiting the year before. Then we said, when you follow up, you either get 100 percent compliance or you go to the next step of further fines, further prosecutions.

It was a difficult wording of a business plan performance measurement, and I'm glad you picked up on it. What we want from those individuals is 100 percent compliance, and from that, it then allows us to have expectations of our staff, a clear expectation and one that's out there in the marketplace with the over 8,000 class A, B, and C licences that exist today. There are also, hon. member, the class D licences, where the liquor stores are, but they have a different inspection criteria.

Certainly the end goal of the game, Madam Chairman, is in fact 100 percent compliance. If you take a look at a process we're working on now – the critic, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, referred to it – and striking a blow for freer enterprise, although still some regulated enterprise with inducements and exclusivity, that was finding a way to be able to detect an infraction. Once you could detect an infraction, you could enforce it.

I think that the work done, the inspection by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the estimates and on the business plans themselves, has been very good. In fact, as my colleague for Vermilion-Lloydminster points out, there are no more government liquor stores either on the books or around for inspection. Their rate is zero, because there aren't any. There is now a thriving industry of over 800 liquor stores, 2,500 employees. Wages are up. You know, they're organizing and managing themselves in a marketplace, Madam Chairman. What's important is that the government has become more efficient because it spends less for every dollar of

markup it obtains in the liquor business. In fact, this process of disposal of government assets has put \$65 million, about 10 percent of this year's lottery fund, into the bank accounts of Albertans through the process.

10:00

I digress, Madam Chairman. Enthusiasm is unbridled when it comes to speaking about lottery estimates and its ability to benefit Albertans and its ability to go throughout the province, to be widely distributed, to be used by everybody in such a way that there will be time tomorrow to do this. I can't wait till tomorrow. I can't wait for us to deal with the business of the House with alacrity, with dispatch, and then to move the lottery estimates for Thursday. Therefore, it is a reluctant pleasure for me to ask that we adjourn debate tonight.

Thank you and thanks to all members for the opportunity to speak on a fund so important to all Albertans.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's my pleasure to move that the Committee of Supply now rise and report the estimates of the Legislative Assembly, the estimates of International and Intergovernmental Relations, report progress on the estimates of the lottery fund, and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, for the following department and for the offices of the Legislative Assembly:

Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations: operating expense, \$24,221,000.

Support to the Legislative Assembly: operating expenses, \$26,727,215.

Office of the Auditor General: operating expense and capital investments, \$14,638,551.

Office of the Ombudsman: operating expense, \$1,644,100.

Office of the Chief Electoral Officer: operating expense, \$10,678,270.

Office of the Ethics Commissioner: operating expense, \$215,030.

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner: operating expense, \$2,718,536.

Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has also had under consideration certain resolutions of the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:06 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, March 23, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/23

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O divine Father, as we conclude our work and prepare to return to our constituencies, help us to draw strength from the opportunities to renew our friendships and acquaintances with the people we were elected to serve. Guide us to reflect upon Thy bounty so that we may more deeply appreciate how fortunate we are to live in and to serve in Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of a famous regiment with a long association with this province, the Lord Strathcona's Horse. Raised in 1900 by private subscription from Lord Strathcona for service in the Boer War, the regiment moved by train from the district of Alberta, North-West Territories for embarkation and departure from Halifax. The Strathcona's achievements in that campaign and subsequently in world wars I and II and Korea were marked by courage, selfless sacrifice, spirit, and dogged perseverance. Collectively and individually the Strathcona's have served in every United Nations and NATO operation since 1947.

The regiment is part of the One Canadian Mechanized Brigade group headquartered in Edmonton. At present the regiment's A squadron is serving with NATO forces in Kosovo. The regiment's reconnaissance squadron, as part of the Fourth UK Armoured Brigade, served with distinction and great professionalism while demonstrating their customary panache in leading this brigade into Kosovo in June of last year. While there the reconnaissance squadron was honoured with a visit from their colonel and chief, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. The officer who led the reconnaissance squadron on that tour is here.

Mr. Speaker, with us today are the colonel of the regiment, Lieutenant General Jim Fox; the commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Craig Hilton; the regimental second in command, Major John Stuckart; B squadron leader, Major Paul Pickell; C squadron leader, Major Pascal Demers; reconnaissance squadron leader, Major Paul Fleury; headquarters squadron leader, Major Rick Brown; and the regimental sergeant major, Chief Warrant Officer Doug Gardner.

I know that all hon. members will want to join me in wishing these soldiers and all members of the regiment, past and present, well with their centenary celebrations from the 17th to the 21st of May. They are in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask them to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present a petition signed by 234 individuals from Edmonton, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Spruce Grove, and

Mayerthorpe. They are asking "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table petitions including 219 signatures from Edmonton and Sherwood Park and on behalf of my colleague from Lethbridge-East 271 signatures from Lethbridge, Milk River, Coaldale, Magrath, Coalhurst, and Raymond. These are citizens who petition the Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Today's total of the presentations of our petitions brings the number to 32,493 Albertans.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table a petition signed by 237 Albertans from Edson, up the coal branch in Robb, Hinton, Onoway, Gunn, and Darwell. They are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave today to present a petition to the Assembly signed by 240 people from Edmonton, Camrose, New Norway, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert. All of these people are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted and very proud this afternoon to present a petition that has been signed by 267 Albertans residing in Cochrane, Airdrie, Cayley, and Calgary. These Albertans petition this Assembly to "urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 253 residents of Alberta from Edmonton, Leduc, Ardrossan, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert supporting public health care in Alberta and urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present this afternoon. This petition has been signed by 256 Albertans from Edmonton, Leduc, Spruce Grove, St. Albert, and Beaumont. They are requesting that the Legislative Assembly "urge

the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare.”
Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would present a petition signed by 117 citizens from Edmonton, Onoway, Whitecourt, and Smoky Lake asking the government “to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition today signed by 114 individuals from Edmonton, Ardrossan, Fort Saskatchewan, Stony Plain, and St. Albert. These “citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Assembly from 287 people in northern Alberta from the areas of Grande Prairie, Valleyview, Wembley, Manning, Fairview, Beaverlodge, Grimshaw, Peace River, Falher, Sangudo, and Slave Lake. It says:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present to the Assembly a petition that has been signed by 204 residents of this province who know exactly what’s in Bill 11. They live in Edmonton, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, and Devon. The petition reads as follows:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased today to rise and table with the Assembly a petition signed by 120 citizens of Alberta from Edmonton, Tofield, Redwater, Bruderheim, Cold Lake, and Calmar. These citizens know the truth and found the truth, and they want this government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 235 people from Edmonton, Redwater,

Calmar, Legal, and St. Albert. They are urging “the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 215 Albertans from Edmonton and Spruce Grove who are urging “the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

Thank you.

1:40

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 341 Albertans from Edmonton, Hilda, St. Albert, Calgary, Boyle, Athabasca, Falher, McLennan, Donnelly, and Girouxville. They are petitioning this Assembly “to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition I presented to the Legislature yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition from 233 Edmonton and area residents that I presented to the Assembly on Wednesday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on March 22 against private health care be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would request that the petition I presented on March 22 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday, March 22, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Introduction of Bills

Bill 22

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2000

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to beg leave to introduce Bill 22, the Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2000. This being a money bill Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of the bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

This bill will implement certain changes to the Alberta royalty tax credit program, changes that have been drawn up in concert with industry and others. It will also deal with provisions related to tax-deferred dispositions of property, and it will parallel federal amendments in Bill C-28 and C-72 that are technical in nature but important to be done.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

Bill 23

Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000.

This bill will increase the responsiveness of Alberta's apprenticeship and training system while maintaining Alberta's high industry standard. The changes contained in this bill will complete a four-year consultation with industry and enable the results of this consultation to be fully implemented.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and table with the Assembly five copies of a news release that was issued yesterday by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce stating their "overwhelming support" of the thrust of Bill 11, the Alberta

Health Care Protection Act, 2000, and applauding the government for "taking a bold first step in exploring new initiatives" to help improve our publicly funded, publicly administered health system.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table eight copies of the amended response for Motion for a Return 11. The reason for the amendment was to be consistent with our auditing process.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table appropriate copies of a letter from Fred Debre of my riding, who is very, very, very much opposed to Bill 11 and the government's attempt to dismantle the health care system.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings this afternoon. The first is from Constance Jones. She is with the Canadian Federation of University Women. It's a copy of a letter to the Premier wherein she asks that the reports on the government's vision with regards to the privatization of health care in this province be shared with that particular group and states that there's a very real fear of a further shift to an American model of health care.

My second tabling is from a Robert Betty, who has a furniture sales company, and he undertook an initiative whereby he sent out a survey to 170 furniture retailers around Alberta . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, the tabling, please.

MS LEIBOVICI: Yes. And the tabling indicates that 46.3 percent of respondents disagree with the government's plan. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair has chastised the member for speaking at length, and now we'd like to hear her. She has a number of tablings, which she indicated when she first stood up to table them.

Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. My next tabling is the AMA position statement with regards to RHA contracting with private surgical facilities.

My last tabling is the list of 39 associations that are affiliated with the Alberta Alliance for Mental Illness and Mental Health.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1996 three Albertans – a Sikh, a Jew, and a Christian – decided to hold an international conference on human rights in Edmonton to mark the 50th anniversary of the United Nations universal declaration on human rights. Their ambitious purpose was to educate the world about human rights and to promote the principles and values of the declaration.

The conference, held in November 1998 and supported in part by the Alberta human rights and citizenship education fund, attracted over 700 delegates from 35 countries. At the conference dinner the 1,500 persons in attendance heard Archbishop Tutu, Chief Justice Antonio Lamer, and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson show that peace, justice, and freedom can come to all parts of the globe when nations sincerely respect the rights and dignity of each human being.

Mr. Speaker, 54 of the papers presented at the conference have been compiled into a book titled *Peace, Justice and Freedom: Human Rights Challenges for the New Millennium*. I'd like to table five copies.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MACBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a copy of a letter which I sent today to the Hon. Allan Rock, Minister of Health for the government of Canada, regarding the apparent practice by the Institut de la Polychirurgie de Montreal to charge facility fees for minor surgeries. The point of the letter is to say that "there must be equal treatment of [all] the provinces by the federal government on violations of the Canada Health Act."

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table letters of invitation that I have sent to the members for Calgary-Bow, Calgary-Lougheed, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, and Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have but two tablings this afternoon. The first one is a copy of a letter I sent the Speaker dated March 21, 2000, clarifying a reference I had made to the hon. David Carter in an incident he'd been involved in on April 29, 1992. I've clarified it in this correspondence.

The last tabling, sir, is simply copies of a letter I had received. The original letter, dated March 17, 2000, went to the Premier from Bob, Chris, and Kym Lichacz in the Deer Run community of south Calgary expressing their concern and taking the issue with the Premier's characterization of any opponent to Bill 11 as, quote, a left-wing nut, close quote.

1:50

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of 54 cards circulated by the Raging Grannies whom I will have the honour of introducing to this House later on this afternoon. The main message of these cards is Health Care For People, Not for Profit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of a letter to me from Klaus Harder, who's thanking me for initiating the challenge to debate Bill 11 with the

MLA for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and stating that family, neighbours, and the community will appreciate knowing why he supports the bill.

Thank you very much.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent by Elke Blodgett to the Premier that I was asked to table. In it she says: you know, politicians who don't listen to concerns about Bill 11 will find themselves not elected next time. Then she says she was very upset with "the well-orchestrated and controlled truth dissemination session" held in St. Albert on Monday night by the Member for St. Albert.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of evidence package 15, put together by an injured worker. In it he outlines where an injured worker requires neuropsychological assessment. This was recommended by a doctor in 1999, and of particular interest to all members here in the Assembly is a letter from the department of psychology, Calgary regional health authority, where they "do not accept referrals for neuropsychological assessments in personal injury litigation." So after four and a half years this man can still not be assessed.

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. They are both letters to the editor from the *Oyen Echo* dated March 14, 2000.

The first is from Keith and Eileen Leal, where they talk about the fight for public health care. They state: "Senior Albertans, it's up to you. People under 40 have absolutely no idea of what Klein, the corporate handyman, has in store for them."

The second is from William Dascovich of Vegreville, where he talks about glossing over the issue of the private health care bill. He states that in his view "the response from the Alberta government smells fishy" and "not referring to fresh fish."

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca declining my invitation to debate him on Bill 11 in his constituency. Instead, you know, what he doesn't understand is that Canadians want to debate health . . . [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: This is a tabling, hon. member, not a debate. I mean, I know it's a chamber of debate, but there are appropriate times to debate. Table your letter and a brief characterization, which I believe you've given, and then we can get on to the next tabling.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. I just want to say that I'll debate him on rural Alberta and anything else he chooses.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a very special guest who is seated in the members' gallery accompanied by Mr. Dennis Pommen. Let me explain. Melissa Hallett is a student on exchange with the International Rotary program. She is residing with a family in Sherwood Park and attending Archbishop Jordan high school. Melissa has been a delightful addition to the local Rotary club. I would ask if both Mr. Pommen and Miss Hallett would stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to stand up and introduce to you and through you 65 of the brightest students that we have in our school system today. They come from Blessed Kateri elementary school in my area. They are accompanied by seven adults: Mr. Neil Hutchinson, Mrs. Joanne Sorochak, Miss Lesley-Anne Petcoff, Mrs. Cathy Bereznicki, Miss Brigitte Berube, parent helper Mrs. Asselin, and student teacher Mr. James Van Rye. I would ask that they now stand and receive the very warm traditional welcome of the entire Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce you to a young gentleman. He's taking grade 6 home schooling. He's here on a great tour of the Legislature and was very sharp with the questions, and he knew lots of the answers today. This is Taylor Will, who is in our gallery today with his mom, Rosie Thornton. I would ask them both to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 13 students from Leduc Estates school. They are accompanied by teacher Mrs. Christine Loose and parent helper Ms Pat Blais. I would ask the Assembly to extend to them our warm welcome.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 15 guests with us today in the public gallery. Mrs. Colleen Simpson and 14 residents from McQueen Place and Northway lodge are visiting today to keep an eye on their representatives in this Chamber. I would ask them now to please rise and receive the warm welcome from all members.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two separate introductions today. First, I would like to introduce to you and

through you to members of this Assembly 14 distinguished, well respected, and much appreciated residents from Ironwood Estates in St. Albert. They are accompanied by the bus driver, Mr. Bill Fedeyko, and his wife, Darlene. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Also seated in the members' gallery, Mr. Speaker, are a former colleague of mine in the real estate business in St. Albert, Mr. Martin Sideen and his daughter Amy Sideen. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly as well.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always nice to introduce Albertans that are interested in what's happening in the Legislative Assembly. It's my privilege to introduce two fine gentlemen this afternoon, one from my riding of Edmonton-Rutherford and one from the neighbouring riding of Edmonton-Whitemud. Kuldip Riar and Ranjit Bhargoo are in the public gallery. If they could please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly seven members of the Raging Grannies of Edmonton. They are highly respected for their work on all kinds of public policy issues, including opposition to Bill 11. They are Elvira Leibovitz, Betty Mardiros, Louise Swift, Marg Stephens, Brenda Manasse, Evelyn Tomlinson, Wendy MacDonald. They are seated in the public gallery. I would now request them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

2:00

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you three people. The first is Mr. Brian Bickley, who has more than 30 years experience in industry and is an industrial relations manager with Syncrude Canada Ltd. and a member of the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board. The second person is Mr. Don Lezetc, who is a member of the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board as well as the Alberta Building Trades Council and the Western Apprenticeship Coordinators Association. They're accompanied by Ms Shirley Dul, who is the executive director of the apprenticeship and industry training division within Alberta Learning. I'd ask two things: first of all, that they accept my thanks for all the help and work that they have done on Bill 23 and, second of all, that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta has overseen a massive spin campaign costing millions of dollars in public money, but apparently they forgot to tell govern-

ment MLAs what's in the bill. As proof, yesterday two government members indicated that Bill 11 does not allow for overnight stays in hospitals when of course clearly that's indicated on the very first page as to why this legislation is needed. My questions are to the Acting Premier before he leaves. Did the minister of health or the Premier deliberately misinform their own caucus, or did they just not tell them the truth about what was really in Bill 11?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what government MLAs know about this bill. They know that the bill has been mailed to all Albertans. That's unprecedented, that every citizen will have a copy of it. We all know that this will protect the Canada Health Act. This particular bill will protect it. We all know that this bill will prevent a two-tier system from ever evolving in this province. We all know that this bill will lead to reduced waiting lines, and it will lead to enhanced care. That's what we know about this bill.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, maybe we can try the acting minister of health, Mr. Speaker. Isn't the real reason that the Premier and the minister of health have kept government members in the dark about this bill is so that their own PR campaign could control the message?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, questions shouldn't be argumentative; however, the hon. minister may wish to respond.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. I'd be happy to respond, although I do take some exception to the phrasing of the question because, Mr. Speaker, nobody is being kept in the dark.

This policy, at the request of federal cousins in Ottawa, has been out in the hands of Albertans and other municipalities and jurisdictions across the country since November of last year. Just recently, to further the full disclosure of what the intentions are, to improve the health system in this province, we did a mass mail-out to almost every household in the province. Surely that's not keeping anyone in the dark.

In fact, we're doing quite the opposite. We're encouraging discussion; we're encouraging debate. We're looking for constructive assistance with respect to how to better protect an excellently funded, excellently administered, publicly funded health system in this province, and we hope to continue doing that with full disclosure.

MRS. MacBETH: So, Mr. Speaker, can this minister tell us why even his own government caucus members have been kept in the dark about this bill?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, no one is being kept in the dark, as I just said. However, I would like to state that in particular the bill does state that major surgeries will remain and only be done in fully accredited public hospitals, so the bill specifically precludes overnight stays for major surgeries. However, at the same time, as an option regional health authorities are well within their right to consider proposals for minor surgery to be looked at in their area.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair was unable to hear the last part of the hon. minister's response and wondered if it would be possible for all members to curtail their enthusiasm for his response so that we all may hear it.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. As I was saying, major surgeries will remain in fully accredited public hospitals, but regional health authorities would be allowed to consider as an option overnight stays for minor surgeries that are low-risk, that are provided in a fully

accredited safe environment at no cost for insured medically necessary services, no cost to the patients.

MRS. MacBETH: You know what? I think we should give them a course on what's in this legislation, Mr. Speaker.

My second question is to the acting minister, and it concerns the issues of honesty and clarity in the bill that bears his minister's name. My question is: if Bill 11 protects public health care, as the government has alleged, then why is it that they chose to call the bill the Health Care Protection Act instead of the public health care protection act?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's probably the nicest puffball question I'll ever receive on this, and I'd be happy to answer that. It is deemed and titled the Alberta Health Care Protection Act because that's what it does: it protects public health care.

Let me read to you how it does that. It states, for example, in the preamble:

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to the preservation of the principles of universality, comprehensiveness, accessibility, portability and public administration, as described in the Canada Health Act . . . as the foundation of the health system in Alberta . . .

Furthermore, it also states that "no person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." It further states that no one will have to pay for an insured medical service regardless of where it might be provided.

There are a number of other things that protect consumers and level the playing field and standardize and make more uniform things with respect to charges. These are things that consumers and patients of this province want, and that's why it's called the protection act.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, you might want to save some for the supplemental.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the Manitoba Private Hospitals Act clearly and honestly defines a private hospital to be "a house or building in which four or more patients are received and lodged at the same time for medical or surgical treatment," why did this government try to fool Albertans into somehow thinking that approved surgical facilities aren't private hospitals?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No one is trying to fool anyone with anything here. The bill is out there. It's in the hands of people. People are taking a reasonable amount of time to read it through, to understand it, seek clarification from all of their MLAs. I would hope that the opposition MLAs would be fair and consistent in their own practice that way.

Specifically, however, with reference to what's going on in terms of similar legislation in at least four or five other provinces, I want to just remind the Official Opposition Leader that there will be a meeting of provincial health ministers starting tonight and going on tomorrow, which I will attend, and I want to find out about a few of these inconsistencies that perhaps may exist in other provinces and ask the federal government why they haven't addressed them.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, will this minister come clean and recommend to his minister, who he'll be seeing later today, that they be as forthright and frank and honest in Alberta's legislation as the government of Manitoba has been and admit that Bill 11 simply paves the way for private hospitals?

2:10

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, this bill specifically bans and

prohibits private hospitals from starting up in this province. Not only that, but there are definitions . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: One can readily see the excitement that occurs at these public meetings that are held from time to time across the land.

Hon. minister, in conclusion.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. The question comes down to: what is a public hospital and what is a clinic? There are numerous examples across this province. Some of them are right here in the city of Edmonton, and I would presume that the opposition leader may have visited some of those when she was the health minister, and she should well know the difference between a hospital and a clinic. If she or any other members don't, I'd be happy to take them on tour with me and show them the difference.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Third main question. The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Second supplementary; right? [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The records of the Speaker, who is a novice at this, and the table are in alignment with one another. This is your third main question.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, in 1994 the ministers of health across Canada agreed to take whatever steps were required to maintain quality public health care, all the provinces except one, however. Can the Acting Minister of Health and Wellness tell us which province did not agree with that protection of public health care?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, the ministers of health right across this country have a strong commitment, I'm sure, to the Canada Health Act. However, I want to spell something out very clearly in this regard, and that exists on page 4. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members of the opposition, it is difficult to understand why one would ask a question of someone and then hoot and holler while they give the answer that you presumably needed. Remember that part of the admonition of *Beauchesne* is that this is an important question and you should know the information: bringing government to account and all that kind of thing. So let us hear the hon. minister.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you very much. What I wanted to say was that on page 4 there is specific reference to how in this province under Bill 11

where a person receives an insured surgical service at a designated surgical facility,

- (a) the operator of the surgical facility shall provide facility services to the person, and
- (b) no person shall charge or collect any amount in respect of the provision of facility services.

And it goes on. That's why it's important for the ministers across this country to get together, like they're doing tonight and tomorrow, to address issues like the hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned with respect to some possible contraventions that are occurring in Montreal, I think she said.

Finally, let me just give you a little quick quote here from some of the other Premiers across this country. Here's a quote from national television by Premier Brian Tobin of Manitoba. He said: in Newfoundland and Labrador today we're sending people into . . . [interjections] I'm sorry. Newfoundland and Labrador.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, if the chair recalls the question, the question was: which province? Presumably we're still answering which province it is that was referred to.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, I'm attempting to. I'll just correct that comment, Mr. Speaker.

Premier Tobin of Newfoundland and Labrador said on March 2: in Newfoundland and Labrador today we're sending people into the United States for both cardiac surgery and for cancer treatments; that's happening all across this country; we are already supporting private health care in another country; it's time to deliver the service here in Canada. End quote.

Now, the point is that there are some inconsistencies across the country with respect to how certain principles of the Canada Health Act are being administered, and we need to clear those up. That's why the Premier of this province is meeting with the Prime Minister this afternoon, and that's why I and the minister of health are meeting with other ministers later today and tomorrow.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, for the information of the acting minister of health it was Alberta that didn't sign on to the protection and the quality of public health care in that 1994 accord amongst ministers. So can this minister tell us: is the reason that Alberta did not buy in because they knew all along they were planning to set forth private hospitals?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, there is no private hospital being contemplated or allowed for establishment in this province under Bill 11. That's very clear. However, I would ask the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations to supplement the earlier part of that question, please.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, as this . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hopefully that is in the hon. minister's present capacity.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Yes, it is.

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition is referring to an intergovernmental agreement that applies across Canada, I would like to take this opportunity to fully explain what occurred at the time of that signing, and I will do it with brevity.

The Minister of Health for Canada changed the interpretation of the Canada Health Act as we understood it. The hon. Leader of the Opposition would know that because under her leadership as then minister of health there were some 38, maybe plus, private clinics operating in our province.

MR. SAPERS: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. McCLELLAN: When the interpretation of that act was changed, it required agreement from all parties in Canada to legislation around the protection of private clinics. As I recall, Alberta at that time asked for time to work with the private clinics who were operating in this province, that would be negatively impacted, to come to an agreement. There was an agreement reached, Mr. Speaker, and there are 12 principles regarding the

involvement of private clinics. That agreement was reached with the government of Canada and Alberta Health.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, back to the acting minister of health. If an approved surgical facility is not a private hospital, then can he explain why the definition of an approved surgical facility in Bill 11 is virtually identical to the definition of a hospital in the Canada Health Act?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, the bill and the definitions that it contains are there for very specific reasons. First of all, it's important to clarify what a lot of the lingo surrounding medical services and medical delivery is all about. That is done.

Secondly, it's also important to clarify what it is that we're not allowing, and the definition is very clear. We are not allowing any person to "operate a private hospital in Alberta." That's why it's there, and that's why it's defined, and it's clearly stated.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are curious as to why, almost three weeks after the release of Bill 11, government MLAs remain dangerously misinformed and totally in the dark about the contents of Bill 11. I have a constructive suggestion to address a seemingly intractable problem for the government caucus: invite noted researcher and author Kevin Taft to make a half-hour presentation to the full government caucus. I, like thousands of ordinary Albertans, have had the privilege of hearing Kevin's presentation, and he's incredibly powerful and convincing. My question is to the Acting Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the associate minister recommend to his government that the respected author and researcher Kevin Taft make a presentation to government members to clear up confusion on Bill 11, and if not, why not?

2:20

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I won't commit the entire caucus to a meeting like that, but if the hon. author that is being referred to wishes to have a meeting with me, I'd be happy to meet with him.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the minister for the generosity of giving me the invitation, but will he invite Mr. Taft? Let me ask the question again. Why would the government pass up an opportunity to hear accurate, timely, and powerful evidence from a respected Alberta scholar as to why contracting out overnight surgeries to for-profit hospitals would be a costly and irreversible mistake?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said in reply to the first question – and I think the second question is basically a regurgitation of the first – we have a consultation process that is ongoing and under way right now, hon. member. As part of that, we're allowing all Albertans to bring their ideas forward. Some of them are making their way into various offices right now, and at the same time so too are a number of groups and organizations requesting more information and clarification. I'd be happy to receive an invitation from Mr. Taft, and I would personally meet with him and listen to what he has to say.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental, hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question will go to the Acting Premier, who probably is enjoying his last day in the House. Why does the . . . [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I imagine the group is reacting to the pun as well as to the comment. Could we just address a question to a minister and not editorialize what the minister may or may not be doing?

Third party, let's have the question.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, my last question is to the Acting Premier. Why does the government refuse to let its own members hear both sides of the story when it comes to contracting out complex surgeries to private, for-profit hospitals?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, a lot of people are presuming on my future here today. I don't know if they're happy about the prospect that I may or may not be here, but I'm here today and may be here tomorrow. [interjections] They're begging me to stay, Mr. Speaker, begging me to stay.

Mr. Speaker, members of the government caucus decide who they wish to hear and speak to, and they listen to Albertans. They do that in an increasing way across this province. If I were to suggest to them that they listen to Mr. Taft, that would be a decision they would have to make, but I think they would question why I would want that to happen.

Here's the reason I say this. Back in 1993, when the government policy was to reduce debt and deficit, Mr. Taft followed with a book that seemed to insinuate that we were making up the story about even having a debt or a deficit. I wish Mr. Taft could have been in my office to phone the credit rating agencies for me and say, "Actually there is no debt," and to phone the bankers and say, "Actually we don't owe you any money; it's all a big trick." So I would not be surprised if members here were to say to me: well, we can listen to this guy, but he's running around saying that we made up the story about debt and deficit when international agencies, provincial agencies, banks, and institutions around the world said that we indeed did have a debt.

So I would be somewhat reluctant to say: you've got to listen to this guy. But his book is available. It is out there. It's gathering dust on a number of shelves, and they can take a read of that book, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Tourism Marketing

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents have raised questions regarding the government's recently announced \$4 million Travel Alberta marketing campaign to attract visitors to Alberta from key areas in the United States and Canada, and specifically they raise a question regarding a television commercial only offering images from the province's more southern communities, especially those neighbouring the Rocky Mountains. I ask the Minister of Economic Development the following: who's responsible for tourism, and what is he doing to address these concerns?

MR. HAVELOCK: Hon. member, that is a very good question. I would first like to remind the hon. member and all members of this House that a consortium from Edmonton and Calgary, Travel Alberta International, was awarded a contract last year by this government and was delegated the responsibility to manage the province's international marketing campaign.

As concerns the specific television commercial referred to, Travel Alberta International produced the 30-second commercial which the

member refers to as part of the new Americas campaign. Mr. Speaker, this TV ad was produced in close consultation with private-sector tourism representatives from across the province, and I can tell you that all of those representatives agreed unanimously that in light of the fact that they only had a 30-second time slot to work with, they wanted to concentrate and focus on those icons which were the most recognizable icons from this province.

However, I want to assure this House that this government is in charge with respect to this issue. I have discussed the concerns raised by the hon. member with Travel Alberta, and Travel Alberta recognizes that there is some sensitivity to this issue. As a result, a new wider-reaching commercial has been cut and will be used in the near future. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, please, this is important. I will tell you that the new commercial will show activities and icons from a wider variety of locations around Alberta including the Legislature Building, West Edmonton Mall, and some cultural events.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member will have a first and a second supplemental.

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, the communities within the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake want to be assured that they will receive fair and equitable representation in the province's tourism marketing efforts. Can the hon. Minister of Economic Development tell them what else is being done to assist these communities to market themselves as tourism destinations?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'll speak much more quickly, because there's a lot of information that I want to get out. There are other numerous elements and publications. In fact, I have with me a publication that will be distributed to anyone who calls our 1-800 number, and that 1-800 number is being advertised through the international marketing campaign. In this package – and I have five copies which I will table – we have an all new 60-page Travel Alberta vacation planner. We also have accommodation guides and campground guides.

Also, Mr. Speaker, just today we announced a new in-resident marketing program of \$1.1 million, and we are going to be advertising to Albertans the activities and events that are available for them to take advantage of. So we're effectively increasing destination awareness. We want to promote a wide variety of special regional events and attractions. I will also say that as part of this package there will be a private-sector company participating with respect to an exciting promotion which will be focused on north-central and northern Alberta.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental. Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the strategic tourism marketing plan has been in effect for over a year now, how are we assisting communities to better market themselves?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that in the first year of its operation this industry/government partnership attracted more than \$2.5 million from Alberta companies with respect to participating with government dollars. In fact, that is a leveraging ratio of in excess of 2 to 1, and that exceeded our target of 1 to 1. As a result of this past year's experience we have revised our partnership policy for investments into marketing so that the private sector,

particularly the Alberta private sector, will be even more stimulated to invest. We're increasing the ability of privately funded destination marketing organizations to participate.

We also realize the important role that in-kind contributions play, especially in smaller communities, so we're raising that level from 5 to 10 percent. We've also cleared away an impediment that made it difficult for us to partner with other organizations such as the Canadian Tourism Commission.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, during my tour of tourism regions last summer I discussed with a number of the tourist destination regions some of the difficulties they were having with respect to their boundaries, and we have undertaken a boundary review. In fact, I believe that's impacting the hon. member's riding.

2:30

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Daily we've been hearing in this Assembly that the reason for Bill 11 – and I'm going to quote the Premier – is to put “in place some very stringent regulations relative to contracting to private surgical clinics.”

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, I'm glad we're all agreed, because right now, section 62(a) of the Hospitals Act – and you can all look it up – gives this minister, the Minister of Health and Wellness, the power to make regulations – I'm quoting again out of the act – “prescribing the basis on which the Minister may make contracts with . . . private hospitals, or other institutions, facilities or persons.” So I'm going to ask the Acting Minister of Health and Wellness: will he confirm that section 62(a) of the Hospitals Act gives him the power to regulate the contracts with private hospitals and approved surgical facilities?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is quite clear with respect to the process for any potential proposal that may come in that would require a review of the terms and conditions, also the full disclosure of it. In fact, if the hon. member would refer to the act where it talks about these agreements, what the conditions are, what the issues are with respect to freedom of information and protection of privacy, what the issues are with respect to the conditions that must be met, what the approval processes are, I think she would be quite convinced that it's extremely thorough, extremely detailed, and that patients' concerns are well addressed in that respect.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. Well, given that the acting minister has the authority right now in current legislation, the Hospitals Act, to make regulations governing the contracts with either private hospitals or approved surgical facilities, why do you need Bill 11?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is needed for several reasons. First of all, we do not currently have legislation to ban or prohibit the establishment of private hospitals in this province. Bill 11 will specifically ban those. Secondly, we do not have enshrined in local provincial legislation a commitment to the Canada Health Act. This bill will specifically do that. We do not have in legisla-

tion tight enough controls and protection issues with respect to some of the potential for contracting out of all and various clinics. Those are some of the highlights.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, I'll let you continue. There are some hon. members who are insisting on speaking from their place, and as you know, the rules of the House are that one member stands and speaks at a time. When the chair recognizes the hon. minister, hopefully, since the opposition asked the question, they would give him the courtesy of hearing the answer.

Would you conclude, hon. minister, or have you?

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. ZWOZDESKY: There are many more reasons why people are looking for issues that are covered here under Bill 11, but let me just conclude in the interest of brevity to allow more questions to come up. One of things that we were asked to do by the federal government is to look at creative, innovative, cost-effective new ways of delivering health care in the future, because we all want to preserve an excellent system. We just want to make it better. One of the key things here is to remember that the federal Minister of Health has commanded us to look at innovative and creative ways because in his words: the status quo is not an option. This bill provides some options that are being discussed now.

MS LEBOVICI: I'll keep my questions short, though I wonder why we bothered passing a motion in this Legislative Assembly saying that we agree to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

My question is: is the only reason, then, for Bill 11 so that the new private hospitals in this province and the new approved surgical facilities in this province can bypass the standards in the Hospitals Act? Is that why we have Bill 11?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, that question really hinges on something between the irrelevant and the absurd. There are no private hospitals going to be allowed in this province under Bill 11. Now, let's get that message out there very clearly.

What Bill 11 does is provide an option for regional health authorities to consider under very strict and firm type guidelines the possibility of an insured minor surgery to be done in a safe, fully-accredited setting where the patient doesn't have to pay one cent for it. If they are insured under the Alberta Health Care plan, it doesn't matter if they receive the major or minor surgery in a public hospital or if they receive one of a very narrow range of safe minor surgeries in a private clinic. They won't have to pay a cent for it. What could be more clear than that? [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, I thought you were going to practice for Tuesday, when we had the television on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Sale of Provincial Buildings

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent news release by the Minister of Infrastructure indicated that a number of surplus government-owned buildings have been put up for sale. Since that announcement, I have heard some comments and questions from constituents and Edmontonians regarding the sale of especially the old federal building and the Charles Camsell hospital.

My questions are all to the Minister of Infrastructure. Could the minister inform this Assembly as to why he is selling a building such as the federal building instead of renovating it to house government departments, many now housed in expensive leased space?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not selling the federal building. What we are doing is consulting with five expert authorities on how we can redevelop the federal building for a different use. We've sent letters to people like the architects, the Museums Association, the Alberta Construction Association, and others to form a blue-ribbon panel. We'll get them to review the building, have a look at it, and see what uses we could accommodate in that building in the future.

As to the present leases, there are some that are long term. We'll have to wait for those leases to expire in terms of government accommodation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the city of Edmonton is projected to be Canada's fastest growing city this year, could the same minister inform this Assembly why he is selling the Charles Camsell hospital when it may indeed be needed due to Edmonton's growth?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Charles Camsell hospital, which the hon. member is referring to, is now sitting empty. Many of the programs have been redeployed to other newer facilities. We've had the hospital assessed by a consultant, and we are looking at finding some other uses for that building. It's presently in a residential area. To redevelop the present building – we're told it's not quite suitable for long-term care, but certainly there may be other areas where we'll be looking at renovating that facility by the private sector for other uses, fitting within the context of what is allowed within the general municipal plan of the area.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Third question. Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister inform this Assembly if there will be full public disclosure before any deal is signed as to who the prospective buyers are, what plans they have for each respective building, and the sale price?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, there are appraised values that are attached to all of the surplus properties that we have listed. These will go out in terms of either requests for proposals or tenders, and the successful bidders will know quite well that whatever use they intend the building to put to has to conform to the current existing municipal general plan. After the sale is done, of course, all of the sale prices are totally public. That's part of government's policy: transparency.

Thank you.

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

2:40

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the Acting Premier please explain why spending a million dollars or more on the Bill 11

propaganda campaign, which contains errors which the government's own members seem to have ignored, which didn't anticipate the many amendments that the Premier is now speculating about – would the Acting Premier explain why that kind of a campaign is not a waste of taxpayers' money?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, when you take the unprecedented step of sending to every Albertan, every household in the province, a copy of the bill so that Albertans themselves can be the judge and give us the feedback, that is never a waste of money when you go directly to the people to see what the people think. That's an investment. It's not a waste of money.

MR. SAPERS: Well, then given the failure of that campaign, given the fact that Albertans in droves are saying, "Return to sender," how much more money is the government going to spend trying to sell Bill 11 to Alberta taxpayers? How much more?

MR. DAY: I've already indicated clearly, Mr. Speaker, that this has been sent to every Albertan in the province, and it's interesting how things are beginning to turn right now. We are in a time of listening, listening very carefully to what Albertans say.

But it is fascinating to listen and to read the letters from a growing number of doctors who say that they agree now with Bill 11. It's very interesting to see representatives of communities right across this province – and we don't take the time to put in one letter per day on the issue – chambers of commerce, the people who are the driving force to a prosperous economy in this province, the families and the small businesspeople of this province who have gathered together, analyzed the bill, and indicated clearly that they are in support of this bill. The tide is turning on this, Mr. Speaker, as people have the opportunity to read it themselves, uncluttered by any opposition filtering, and then give us the feedback.

Again, Mr. Speaker, that's an investment, and it's one that is bringing dividends in good insights to us as a government.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, final supplemental.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Will the Acting Minister of Health and Wellness please tell the Assembly how many hip surgeries or knee surgeries could have been performed with the money that's been spent on the Bill 11 sales campaign?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of people on waiting lists for the very surgeries that are being referred to. One of the things that Bill 11 is intended to do is to help reduce some of the waiting lists, and I'm going to explain now so that all the members understand how that might happen. At the moment in the public hospital system all minor surgeries and all major surgeries that require an overnight stay can only be done in a public hospital. What Bill 11 would allow regional health authorities to do is to extract some of the people who are on those waiting lists for minor surgeries, consider having them done in a safe, fully accredited private clinic over here, and that would reduce some of the waiting lists over there. So that is one of the considerations, and it is only an option. It may not apply across the whole province, but in those regional health authorities that are facing those long lineups, such as the hon. member has referred to, they should be looked at, and we've added more money to have that done, by the way.

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noticed with a great deal of interest the recent Fraser Institute study that compared the federal and provincial budgets for the past year, and it ranked the governments in terms of fiscal performance. I was quite pleased with Alberta's overall performance, but I was concerned by our province's relatively poor ranking in the spending category. My questions are for the Provincial Treasurer. Can he tell us, for the benefit of those in the Assembly that may not have read it, where Alberta ranked in the spending category and explain why the subpar performance?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, this study certainly shows that Alberta scored top marks across the country, the top performer in terms of the overall fiscal management of its resources and revenues. On the spending side we achieved a fourth-place rating, and that is because, in fact, we increased spending per capita. We have done that very openly and very clearly especially in the areas of health and education: a 9.3 percent increase in health in terms of our spending this year and a 9 percent increase in terms of spending in the area of learning and education. On those two items we have made a commitment to Albertans that we will not only match growth and inflation but in fact look at ways of increasing because of the increased needs that are being felt there. That's why we scored overall fourth in that particular category.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental, the hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. Given these results and the Fraser Institute's analysis of Alberta's spending, can the Treasurer tell us what Alberta is doing to maintain its fiscal leadership role and to ensure that we stay there?

MR. DAY: Well, that is very important, Mr. Speaker, because Albertans continue to tell us to stay the course, so we're making the commitment very clear. We've made the commitment clear in Budget 2000. We will continue to have balanced budgets. We will continue to have no deficit. We will continue to pay down debt. We will continue to lower taxes. We will continue to manage effectively. We will do all of those things to maintain the number one position – the number one position – in this country right here.

MR. FRIEDEL: My final question, Mr. Speaker, is also to the Provincial Treasurer. Given the ratings, can he tell us what impact these studies like the ones from the Fraser Institute actually have on our economy?

MR. DAY: The impact of the positive news going out across the country about the sound fiscal management that occurs in this province as a result of the input of all MLAs listening to the citizens of Alberta who are saying to stay the course is that it continues to cause people to want to move here to this province. They know that this is a jurisdiction where prosperity and opportunity will continue to abound because we continue to manage things in a good way and create the fiscal capacity to lower taxes and pay down debt and do those other sorts of things. So whereas we can't measure precisely this particular report and its impact, it does continue to enhance the news that this is the place to be because of the policies that we have in place.

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

Private Health Services (continued)

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall this government rammed Bill 40, the Health Information Act, through the Legislature before Albertans could find out that it stripped them of their health information privacy and paved the way for connecting private hospitals to our public health care system. Now the government has brought in Bill 11, which finishes the plan to sell Albertans' public health care system out from underneath them. My questions are to the Acting Minister of Health and Wellness. Will private hospitals, approved surgical facilities, be custodians, affiliates, or both under the Health Information Act?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, if a contract or if a proposal for a private clinic to be established for doing minor surgeries is approved, then that is exactly what it will become and that's what it will stay. By definition it will be a private surgical facility within which a limited range of services are fully paid for provided they are medically necessary and insured services. So the answer to the question is that they will remain as defined in the act under Bill 11.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, we expect the minister to be able to answer the questions having read the legislation which isn't there. I'll ask it again.

Speaker's Ruling Insisting on Answers

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: All hon. members who've read *Beauchesne* about question period know perfectly well that the Speaker has no ability to require anyone to answer the question, so reflecting on whether they do or not is not valid. So would the hon. member ask the question, and if you feel it hasn't been answered, then you can repeat the question. Edmonton-Ellerslie, first supplemental.

2:50

Private Health Services (continued)

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will in fact ask the question again very slowly. Will private hospitals, approved surgical facilities, be custodians, affiliates, or both under the Health Information Act?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, let me say this again and for the viewers who are watching this. I don't know how many times this has to be said so that people across the way here understand: there are no private hospitals that are going to be allowed to start up under Bill 11.

However, in fairness to that particular member asking the question about the custodians of health information, there are a number of people who are custodians of health information. They include doctors, they include nurses, and they include staff who work in some of the facilities: lab assistants, lab technicians, people who do diagnostic services. I mean, there is a wide range of people who Albertans trust with their information, and that is very clearly spelled out.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, one more time. Will the minister please answer the question with reference to Bill 40: will approved surgical facilities be custodians, affiliates, or both under the Health Information Act, as is written in his own legislation? Just answer the question.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I believe I have answered that question. If the member wants a specific definition of what a custodian is or what an affiliate is, I'll be happy to provide her an extended answer in writing with respect to those particular issues.

head: Members' Statements

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We have a number of members' statements. We'll take a 30-second break, and then we'll call on the hon. members.

Hon. members, we have this afternoon three members' statements. The first is Calgary-Fort, followed by Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Health Care System

MR. CAO: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about a real story of health care service. Earlier this year my elder brother Vuc was not feeling well. After being examined by his family doctor, he was referred to a specialist for further diagnosis. The specialist ran several tests and diagnosed that he had cancer in the bladder and one failed kidney. It was terrifying news for our family even though he was a military officer, wounded several times and survived the Vietnam war. Due to the seriousness of his health situation, he was scheduled for hospitalized surgery a few weeks after that. With the amazing advanced technology in medical science he had an eight-hour long surgery. His bladder was removed and replaced by parts cut from his small intestine. His nonfunctioning kidney was also removed. He is now recuperating at home with continuous and regular reporting of his progress to the hospital.

Mr. Speaker, with the current health care debate going on in Alberta and across Canada, I asked my brother a few questions and received answers. My brother is an average American, very similar to an average Albertan. I want to share with the Assembly some points about health care service. The health care service he receives is excellent. He is under a health care insurance program through his work organization. He does not care about how and by whom his health care service is delivered as long as his life is preserved and as long as he doesn't have to pay outside of his insurance premiums. With his personal experience he believes that the American health care system is the top in the world. It attracts both the top professionals and the most critical patients from all over the world. Of course, American people always feel that way about their ways in their country. My brother's advice to me is to keep the health care insurance program public and for everyone, and I believe in his advice.

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

Kananaskis Development

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent weeks I have received many letters from Albertans who are worried about proposed developments in the Spray Lakes area of Kananaskis. If plans go ahead, there could be a large four-season resort at the southern end of the Spray Lakes as well as heli-skiing and boat tours on the lake. A large resort in this location with the volumes of traffic that it would create would cause serious fragmentation of important wildlife habitat. Studies have shown that grizzly bears are particularly vulnerable to human intrusion, and the Spray Lakes area is one of the last relatively undisturbed north/south corridors.

In survey after survey Albertans have made it clear that they do not want further commercial development in Kananaskis Country.

The provincial government has ignored Albertans' wishes by permitting developers to proceed with their application despite the fact that there is so much opposition to it.

We know that the government intends to proceed in due process, which in this case includes an environmental impact assessment and a hearing by the Natural Resources Conservation Board. However, the repercussions of this development are so far reaching that many people believe it should be stopped now before further costs are incurred. This would mean negotiating with the developer and offering an alternative location outside Kananaskis in a less environmentally sensitive area. It could also mean providing compensation. I believe this is a cost that many Albertans would be willing to pay to rectify the current government's mistake.

Development of the Spray Lakes area would have irreversible and far-reaching effects not only for animals in the immediate vicinity but for their movement along the eastern Rockies. We need to protect this very valuable area now, and I urge the government to act immediately.

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

Agriculture Minisummit

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to thank the participants of the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency agriculture minisummit that was held in Camrose last night. The minisummit was attended by over 70 people from the agricultural community of my constituency and nearby farms. Main themes included the rural way of life, land use, youth and agriculture, marketing, transportation, globalization, agriculture research, subsidization, and the role of government and the private sector in agriculture.

Recently in this House through the debate on Bill 204, introduced by the Member for Little Bow, concern was expressed about the future of the family farm and our rural way of life in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, that is also a deep concern of my constituents, as expressed last night. Equally important is the strong resolve on the part of my farming community for meaningful and constructive input and dialogue in helping to solve the problems faced by our primary producers in agriculture.

I was pleased that the minisummit was attended by the hon. Minister of Innovation and Science and by co-chair of the Ag Summit 2000, Brian Heidecker. I'd like to express my thanks to the steering committee members: David Samm, Curtis Vesely, and Susan Malone. I would also like to thank the speakers whose introductory comments and questions helped us to focus on the issues, the group leaders who directed the small group discussions, and the recorders who made sure all ideas and suggestions discussed were recorded. The results of this meeting will be shared at the regional Ag Summit 2000 meeting in Wetaskiwin on April 12 and the provincial Ag Summit 2000 meeting in June.

Thank you.

head: Projected Government Business

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Opposition House Leader.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask under Standing Orders what the projected government business will be for the week following next week.

Thanks.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to advise the House that beginning on Monday, April 3, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading we will consider Bill 16, Condominium Property Amendment Act; Bill 18, Alberta Personal Income Tax Act; Bill 19, Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act; Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act; Bill 17, Fair Trading Amendment Act; and as per the Order Paper.

At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of the Whole: Bill 2, First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act; Bill 4, Surveys Amendment Act; Bill 5, Land Titles Amendment Act; and Bill 10, Securities Amendment Act; and as per the Order Paper.

3:00

Tuesday afternoon, April 4, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders private bills for second reading: bills Pr. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, if time permits: Bill 3, Statute Revision Act, and as per the Order Paper.

Tuesday, April 4, at 8 p.m., as the House has been previously advised, we will schedule for second reading Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, which, as the House knows, will be televised for the period 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. on Access television; and as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, April 5, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading: Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act; and as per the Order Paper.

Thursday, April 6, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading: Bill 21, Appropriation Act; Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act; and as per the Order Paper.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We have a point of order. The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Point of Order

Questions outside Ministerial Responsibility

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under *Beauchesne* 409 and 412. Under 412:

A question may not be asked of a Minister in another capacity, such as being responsible for a province, or part of a province, or as spokesman for a racial or religious group.

And under 409(6):

A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government. The Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his or her present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio.

The question was handed off to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, and in her present capacity in that role she had no jurisdiction to answer a health care question, that obviously was not within her mandate right now. I would appreciate it if that kind of thing was not accepted in this Legislature.

Thanks.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, it's with a great deal of pleasure that I would like to inform the member opposite, as I know I don't need to inform you, that any intergovernmental agreement that is entered into by the province of Alberta must be approved. I can tell you not only in my capacity as Government House Leader but also because I was formerly the minister of intergovernmental and aboriginal affairs, which is the department now represented under the name International and Intergovernmental Relations, that any intergovernmental agreement executed by the government of Alberta must first be approved by the Department of International and Intergovernmental

tal Relations for execution. Any intergovernmental agreement is entirely within the purview of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Therefore it is entirely within that minister's purview and her administrative competence to speak to an intergovernmental agreement that was executed.

The fact that she happened to have additional knowledge of this particular agreement that was being referred to because she also had in a previous capacity been minister of health does not preclude her from answering a question that is entirely within her administrative competence as Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert has raised a point of order with regard to the capacity of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations to answer the question. Hon. members may recall that the Speaker rose on that very same issue and said, hopefully, that it is in the hon. minister's present capacity, thinking, as presumably others may, that the hon. minister might be thinking of her previous capacity some years ago. But in the answer that was given, it seemed fairly clear that she was responding, as the hon. Government House Leader has suggested, in the capacity that she presently serves, so therefore there wouldn't be a point of order.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

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

head: Lottery Fund Estimates 2000-2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: This is day 2 of the lottery funds. I will ask the minister if he wants to lead off, followed by the opposition critic.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just want to make some additional comments and some responses to some of the minister's interesting comments yesterday. The minister implied that I was sort of contradictory in the sense that on the one hand I was saying that gaming was becoming a big industry but then on the other hand recognizing that there's a review in place, a freeze, and how could I be talking about expansion and such. [interjection] I'm missing out on something over here.

In any case, the freeze is good, first of all. I'll say that publicly. The freeze is good. The concept of a review is good, but it's never been fully explained what the terms of reference of that review are to be or if they've been established. If the review is being done on the basis of trying to determine whether the VLTs should remain in the hotels or be relocated to the nonprofit casinos, then that type of review is good. If it's going to try and minimize the impact of gambling in the province of Alberta, that type of review is good.

However, if the review is being done and the freeze is in place to allow the Gaming ministry to look at ways of expanding this empire that is now bringing close to, counting the liquor, a billion plus dollars into general revenues, if it's looking to expand that by allowing for the minicasinos in the hotels, allowing for full-fledged Windsor-type casinos, for example in the Banff area – and that was speculated some time ago, trying to draw the American people to gamble in Canada, where it's tax free, and of course they wouldn't have to worry about taxes on any winnings they had. It would be

nestled in Banff, where tourists like to go, even tourists from the Far East.

Now, if you were only concerned about how much cash you could raise, that's a good concept. However, if you're concerned about the impact of increased gambling, then you start to question if it is such a wise idea. Would being located in those types of areas be harmful to the natural environment? Would it paint the perception that Alberta is simply Nevada North? Those are the kinds of concerns I would have, and that's why I don't really regard my position as being a contradiction.

In fact, if I were made the minister for one day, I think a couple of simple solutions – bang, bang, bang – and it would be done. We'd take the machines out of the hotels. I know the hotels would not be happy about that.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, just one moment, please. Could I please ask people to sit down. We're not having a convention. This is the Assembly. Thank you.

Go ahead, hon. member.

MR. WICKMAN: We've got to remember that the hotels were not built to be gambling centres. Businessmen that built hotels or bought hotels bought them on the basis that their revenue would come from certain sources. Yeah, certainly things have changed, but things have also changed for a lot of other industries, like the small bookstores, for example. When you see the giants coming, of course it impacts on the small bookstores.

3:10

Look at the stationery stores. I used to see Willson Stationers in Southgate and Heritage malls, and they're gone. They're gone because you now have Staples and Office Depot and that. Government doesn't go to those little outlets and say: because you've fallen upon hard times because of a change in marketing approach and a change in people's taste, we're going to allow you to put some VLTs in your bookstore so that when people are looking through the books, they can be popping a few dollars into the machines at the same time. I can sympathize with the Hotel Association to a degree, but there has to be other ways. They have to use their resources and their ingenuity to increase their revenues.

I remember that when I was in the hospital, one of the other patients there came over and talked to me. He was a bit upset with our position on the VLTs. He said that he had bought into an Edmonton hotel on the basis of the VLTs being in there and that the VLTs would continue to be in there and, in fact, that the numbers would expand. Well, I sort of felt sorry for him, but on the other hand you don't buy a hotel on the speculation that increased numbers of VLTs are going to be popped into that hotel. Then he tried to explain to me that there were really no social implications as a result of that hotel. Well, sometime later, when I got out of the hospital, I stopped by that hotel on a Saturday afternoon just to look. I could not believe what I saw. It was not what you would call a four-star hotel by any means. There were people that had overindulged in alcohol, no question about it, some of them trying to play the machines and a guy touching me up for 10 bucks. He had gone through \$120 and wanted a \$10 loan. I felt sorry for him, but no, I wasn't going to give it to him for that purpose.

I guess that's the first thing I would do, is say that, well, we've got to get the VLTs out, but even before we do that, if we talk about true democracy, we could leave it up to Albertans to decide, because I'm confident that if you gave Albertans the option of relocating gambling, as I've said before, they would do it. So allow Albertans to do it in a provincewide plebiscite, once and for all resolve the

issue. Then what you do is you get these minicasinios in place that are going to raise a certain amount of dollars, in fact pretty good dollars. Even before the VLTs, lotteries raised pretty good money. We gave money to the Calgary Stampede board, the Edmonton stampede board, the community facilities enhancement program, the various arts foundations, recreation, and so on and so forth. Even after all that I remember that one year there was \$25,000 shuffled into general revenues because there was extra money, and that was before the days of the VLTs. So you don't need the VLTs to support those programs.

The second part of the Liberal philosophy would be to take the proceeds and abide by what the gaming summit has said. Now, I know that we have a motion on the Order Paper further down the road, that I'll deal with at that particular time. But take the proceeds and run them through general revenue as a technicality, and then put them where they should be properly – and that's in concurrence with the recommendation of the gaming summit – to true nonprofit groups.

Now, I'll look at some of the nonprofit groups, but before I do that, I want to first take a look at this article, because this misperception has to be corrected. This is in the *Calgary Herald*, where they said: "VLT dollars buy hospital beds." "Patient independence and freedom continues to improve at Calgary's Rockyview General Hospital, thanks to video lottery terminal dollars." Then it goes on to say that a cheque for \$157,000 came from the Calgary Community Lottery Board. Okay, that's fine.

Now, the dollars that the municipalities get to distribute to these nonprofit groups and hospitals and libraries and health authorities and such don't just come from the VLTs. They come from all forms of gambling. We can't identify it and say that VLTs bought these hospital beds. Maybe scratch-and-win tickets bought those hospital beds. Maybe Sports Select bought them. Maybe 6/49 bought them. That's an error that pops up repeatedly, and it's not only a mistake made by government members. I recall one press release – I believe it was the Premier that sent it out, or it could have been the former minister – that implied the same thing. Well, we had a correction on that one because it was obvious that that was incorrect.

Now, when we look at the dollars that are spent on community groups, when you look at the annual report, there are hundreds and hundreds of groups. Many of them are great, great groups. Even the introduction earlier of our special guests involved the Lord Strathcona's Horse, celebration 2000. I looked at the brochure that was left behind, and you all have a copy of this brochure. You look at the back of it. It says: our sponsors are very valuable to us; Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) Regimental Society is a charitable organization and accepts donations of any kind. Then it thanks four different organizations, one being the Wild Rose Foundation. Now we know that the dollars that the Wild Rose Foundation gets and that they turn around and distribute to nonprofit groups such as the Lord Strathcona's Horse, celebration 2000 come from lottery dollars. That's a good cause. That's the type of purpose, I think, that the gaming commission was talking about when they said: to nonprofit activities throughout the province.

I look through the list. If you look at the annual report, there are pages upon pages of hundreds upon hundreds of organizations throughout the province that received lottery dollars in some form. I can look at some of them. I'm not playing favourites here, and I'm not being critical of any. I just have to use some as examples.

I look at the Banff Senior Citizens Society. I don't know that much about that organization, but it sounds to me like it's great. It's a group of seniors, and possibly it's social activities that they get together for in probably a centre where maybe they do various activities together. Now, that sounds great, and our seniors deserve that type of attention.

I look at the Baturyn Community League. Again, from the community facility enhancement branch. That's great. Community leagues should get those dollars to enhance their facilities. That to me is the main purpose of the community facility enhancement program.

I look at the Beiseker Arena Management Society. [interjections] Beiseker. I'm thinking of Frank Bruseker. Remember Bruseker?

AN HON. MEMBER: Yeah, the guy that lost.

MR. WICKMAN: Yes, he did. Yes.

MRS. SOETAERT: A good guy.

MR. WICKMAN: A good guy, yeah. He's coming back. Anyhow, that again sounds like a good organization.

MR. SMITH: He'll come back when Lance becomes mayor.

MR. WICKMAN: Lance may make a second run at it. Who knows?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Rutherford, it's you, sir, that has the floor.

MR. WICKMAN: This is interesting.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please.

MR. WICKMAN: I look at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. Now, can you ask for a better organization than the CNIB? Again, a very, very worthwhile recipient of dollars.

The Big Brothers and Sisters of Red Deer and District. I don't see either member from Red Deer – that's another great organization.

Then I look at some here, and I have to question these. There's a whole bunch of golf courses. I look at Barrhead Golf and Recreation Area Society. I look at Collicutt Siding Golf Club, Connaught Golf Club, Foremost Golf Association. It's in the annual report, and a copy can be obtained from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Now, I'm not sure if these golf courses are nonprofit societies or exactly what. Are they operated by municipalities? How do they qualify? I'm not being critical. I'm simply asking. I'd like the minister to kind of explain further down the road what these organizations are about and what justifies their getting this type of money.

Here's one called the Bob Clark Library. Now, maybe this has something to do with the former member of the House Bob Clark. I don't know. The Bob Clark Library is a new one to me. I've heard of presidential libraries in the United States, but I'm not sure what the Bob Clark Library is, and I would be quite curious about that one.

I see a whole bunch here: city of Airdrie, city of Calgary, city of Camrose, city of Edmonton, city of Grande Prairie, city of Lethbridge, city of Medicine Hat, city of Spruce Grove, city of St. Albert. These are cities, municipalities. I guess you could argue in a way that municipalities are nonprofit, but they're not really a nonprofit society, or they're not really a charitable cause. So are these dollars given to the city? This is under the community facility enhancement program now. This isn't the lotteries board. Are these dollars given so that the city then turns around and uses it for parks and recreation? I'm not really sure.

3:20

I see the Coronation Curling Association. Now, that could

possibly be for a new curling facility. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar pointed out a couple of instances where we saw dollars being used for a capital purpose, putting new roofs on some facilities because of the pine shakes. It's possible it's that type of thing. I don't know. I'm simply asking.

The Lakeland Snowdusters Snowmobile Club. Now, that sounds like an interesting one. Does that buy snowmobiles for the members to ride around with? That's a curious one. I don't know what type of snowmobile facility you would build. Maybe it's some type of place where you park these things. I'm not sure.

The High River Tennis Club. I would have to assume that those are tennis courts. The Hinton Flying Club is probably where they would store airplanes. Again, I don't . . . [interjection] Yeah, the member over there is occupied.

So those are the types of questions that I have on those types of causes. I guess the point that I'm trying to make is that all lottery dollars are not wasted, Madam Chairman. Many of them go to causes right in my own riding of Edmonton-Rutherford. Many of the community leagues have enhanced their facilities thanks to the community facility enhancement program. I go into even my own community hall, the Royal Gardens community hall. What's the first thing I notice? A big fireplace in an addition, a very nice room where I even periodically hold my board meetings. I pay rent, of course, and hold my board meetings there. But right over that fireplace, guess what's there? A great big picture of who? Not the Queen. Not me.

AN HON. MEMBER: Who?

MR. WICKMAN: Guess.

MRS. SOETAERT: Kowalski.

MR. WICKMAN: Exactly. The former minister, now the Speaker. A big picture of him handing over a cheque.

MS LEIBOVICI: This is where?

MR. WICKMAN: In my community hall just by my house.

When I went there to see the presentation of the cheque being made, the minister wasn't there himself, but a staff member from his department was there. I guess this picture had been taken sometime prior, and it was framed and a plaque was given. I sat right there as the member, and I wasn't even recognized. Nobody said: MLA Wickman, you come up and be in this picture as well. My board members could have reacted a little more kindly to that had I been in there. They have to sit there and look at this picture while we conduct business.

MS BLAKEMAN: Do you think it's a slush fund?

MR. WICKMAN: Well, it could be a slush fund.

AN HON. MEMBER: We wanted a picture of Murray and we didn't get it.

MR. WICKMAN: A picture of whom?

AN HON. MEMBER: Murray.

MR. WICKMAN: You mean it's going to be replaced by a picture of Murray?

AN HON. MEMBER: Yeah.

MR. WICKMAN: A big picture. That means another grant is forthcoming then; eh?

Madam Chairman, before I get carried away, I'm going to conclude because we have a number of members that want to speak. Edmonton-Centre here is anxious.

Thank you.

MR. SMITH: Madam Chairman, as much as I am extremely, extremely anticipatory and excited about the Member for Edmonton-Centre rising with her questions, I was so electrified by such an accurate illustration and improvisation of the past that I feel absolutely compelled to talk about the present and in fact even return to the subject of the day, which is lottery estimates, which is talk about the future.

Again, Madam Chairman, as I was going through some of my letters of support for Bill 11 and some of the detailed descriptions of accurate information pertaining to the bill, I was able to find some notes that reinforced the continuance of the contradictions from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who last night talked about: I am entirely in opposition to minicasinos; I think the Hotel Association proposal is absolutely the wrong proposal. Today it was: there are minicasinos; I think there's revenue in there, and VLTs apply to that; I think the hotels should come up with more creative ways of finding revenue, and there should be more regulations surrounding how they make a living.

Well, I know the Liberal way is a regulatory way. We've seen it federally. I think we can work closely with the Alberta Hotel Association on this matter, as we have on other matters pertaining to this department, and come up with some strong recommendations that work for them.

I do want to talk about the member's keen comments and recognize his vigil watch over VLTs and how VLTs have been a part of this province for I guess well over – what? – 16 years now, 11 years, a long time, and the member's been there to watch them grow to this year, where they have revenue of approximately \$600 million.

He in fact started to address some of the areas that we actually need to take a look at from a policy perspective, Madam Chairman. In fact, if you have multiple licences and they are recognized as the VLTs in the network that have increased revenue, compared to the singles and the doubles in other areas, that could be interpreted as a signal of a destination gaming place because the revenues are higher. So through network management it may be in the interests, to prevent the ubiquity of gaming and to reinforce the revenue opportunity that the member alludes to, to in fact look, examine, listen, and revise that policy.

So I take those comments for change in the future as good solid comments. I know the member will want to participate not only in photo opportunities – if I'm ever close to one and he's around, he's going to be the first guy I'm going to call: come on up to the front, Percy, because you look good in pictures.

Madam Chairman, I'm not going to focus on the contradictions that continue to come about: supporting VLTs, supporting casino gaming groups, not supporting them, destination casinos, Banff park, national jurisdiction casinos. There are just too many contradictions across the broad spectrum to address them one at a time. Again, I'd remind the member that his motion is on the record, which I'll repeat today:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the Government to eliminate the Lottery Fund, with all lottery revenues deposited into the General Revenue Fund.

Mr. Wickman did propose that motion, that is absolutely one

hundred percent against and contra to gaming summit recommendations, which of course is one of the main cornerstones of gaming policy as it exists in the province today.

I do want to speak a bit about some more of the confusion of community lottery boards and the just superlative job, Madam Chairman, that you did last night in illustrating and explaining and making clear how the community lottery boards work. I would have thought the member would have been poring over the Blues and getting all that information, but let me just supplement in my poor way the very, very good explanation you made last night.

The community lottery boards expect to fund about 4,500 projects this year. The program supports community initiatives which "enrich and enhance" local services, "recreation, culture, libraries, parks, health, education, social services and the environment." Funding has been recognized through your good work, Madam Chairman, and has increased from \$50 million originally to \$53.3 million from the '99-2000 forecast of \$50.8 million, an increase of \$2.5 million, or 5 percent.

Let's talk about meeting population growth and cost increases with program growth. Per capita funding is nearly \$18.09 for the ensuing years. An important note to underscore, that you made so clearly last night, Madam Chairman: the spending decisions were made, are made, and will continue to be made by locally based community lottery boards. These 4,500 projects that went through are those that the community expressed a keen interest in funding. It is devoid of government influence, gerrymandering, or any other such invective the member wishes to hurl this way.

Now, let's focus for a minute on the community facility enhancement program, affectionately known as CFEP. This program has averaged about 700 recipients per year over the past three years. It provides financial assistance for the expansion and upgrading of community-use facilities, and it provides matching grants to municipalities, Indian bands, Metis settlements, and registered community nonprofit groups to build, renovate, or otherwise improve related family and community wellness facilities. This budget, Madam Chairman, provides \$25 million per annum, the same level of spending as in 1999-2000, and received a commitment for \$75 million in April '99 for a three-year period, to April 2002, to continue to review the program on an ongoing basis.

3:30

Now, the member talks about the various things, including the community hall in Edmonton-Rutherford, including our community-owned golf courses, including community-owned libraries. Why he would be opposed to increasing learning, furthering books – if it weren't for books at the Red Deer library in a far and long past time, Madam Chairman, I doubt that I would ever have been fortunate enough to be able to come to this great Assembly today. So I'm certainly in support of libraries, and I'm certainly in support of libraries in rural Alberta. I think I hear the sounds of a rural Albertan there in that fabulous desk thumping that just occurred from this side.

One of the reasons that the member is able to key on all the individual expenditures of the CFEP program and all the individual libraries, parks, community-owned facilities is because the information is all there, Madam Chairman. It's all there in an accountable, disclosing, transparent format. It's published in a report. It's published in the lottery fund. It's published at www.aglc.gov.ab.ca. This member for the first time in his career has absolutely one hundred percent search capability, and anything that he can't find in that search capability our department stands at the ready to be able to assist him where he needs to go.

I'm so glad that he brought up the question of community lottery

boards purchasing hospital beds in Calgary, electronic hospital beds and enhanced service health beds. It's a critical part of the lottery fund, because as we said last night – and I saw the member taking notes last night – 60 percent of the lottery fund is directed towards health, infrastructure, and educational expenses.

Now, I hear members behind me saying: well, what exactly are you spending the lotto fund on in medical expenses? With that questioning roar behind me of members on the government side, I will go into that. As a matter of fact, the day that Bill 11 broke, I was over at the Royal Alexandra hospital in Edmonton, the number one health authority, as it's rated in Canada today by an outside of Alberta party, a health authority which combined with the Calgary authority were two metropolitan health authorities that handled the Christmas bed and flu crisis better than any other major urban centre in Canada. I was fortunate enough to be invited over there to see the installation of a new process for angiograms. The process is less invasive than the former process. It's more efficient, and if a problem is discovered, it can lead to immediate angioplasty. The machine was funded by the lottery fund, which the member correctly points out is an amalgam of moneys from video lottery terminals, from casino gaming terminals, better known as slot machines, and from tickets, from pull tickets, Sports Select, and the like.

That lottery fund, which is, again, fully transparent at the web site as well as through this process, was able to fund in this case an advanced device for the benefit of Edmontonians and for the benefit of rural Albertans outside of Edmonton working in the northern section.

This year alone, Madam Chairman, Health and Wellness will receive \$10 million for advanced medical equipment. They'll receive \$38,207,000 for health authority supplemental capital equipment funding. They'll have \$15 million directed towards Alberta Wellnet, and you will see that they will be able to use these funds in an efficient and efficacious manner.

Madam Chairman, I want to go on and talk about education, and I want to go on and talk about infrastructure funding, but that might be anticipating some of the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

I do want to close with a clear statement to the member that he's doing a lot of his homework. He's on the web site, I know, now. He's working through the documents. He's seeing the benefits of 100 percent transparency, of 100 percent disclosure, and of 100 percent accountability.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. Oh, the lottery fund. I think the issue for me around the lottery fund is one of responsibility and accountability. I've read the minister's comments from last night in *Hansard*. I don't know whether it's a matter of my having a different interpretation or belief in a certain use of language or whether there's just a very sly, slick way this government has of presenting and getting their own way when it comes to using lottery dollars for things.

I am one of the three MLAs that was actually at the gaming summit and was able to hear what people were saying and how definitive they were that gaming funds, lottery funds, should not be used to fund core services. In my definition core services would include health, education, and infrastructure.

I see an inconsistency here. If those are no longer core services, then why do we have ministries of Health, Infrastructure, and now-called Learning? If they're not a core service, why do we have a ministry for them? If they're not a core service, why do we have an

entire budget for them? If the government is going to define these three very large areas as not being a core service, why are they raising taxes under the name of education under property taxes if education is no longer a core service of government?

There's an inconsistency here. When it suits the government to call something a core service, they do, but when they want to use lottery moneys to fund things that should be funded under general revenue, should be budgeted for and should be acknowledged that this is an important expenditure and needs to be done, then the money should be coming through revenue. This government has used the lottery funds to subsidize themselves all the way along. The lottery funds are not reliable funds. They can be transient, and that bothers me as well.

Let's look at the flip side of that coin. Well, if these are not core services and sort of onetime only funding and it doesn't matter if this is funded through lottery dollars, which, as we know, are not reliable – you can't count that people are going to gamble X amount of money every year. There's no way to determine that. You can forecast it in the budget, but unless the minister is going to personally supervise people plugging those loonies and toonies into the VLT machines, this is not a reliable source of funding. What are they saying, then, about health and education and infrastructure if they're willing to fund it out of an unreliable source of funding? So I have a real problem with the sleight of hand that goes on here.

Now, I notice that the minister in his opening remarks states that "gaming and lottery profits [are] not [to] be directed to the province's General Revenue Fund." That's referring specifically to the gaming summit recommendation 4: "Gaming and lottery profits should not be directed to the province's General Revenue Fund." His response to this is: well, we created the lottery fund for it. Once again, those two sides don't quite match up.

3:40

When I look in the Auditor General's report, the Auditor General is pretty clear in his description of how money is moved around. I'll refer the minister to page 121 of the Auditor General's report 1998-99.

Quarterly payments are made from the Lottery Fund to the Ministries requesting Lottery Fund grants and are deposited in the General Revenue Fund and included as revenue of the departments of those Ministries. The departments then draw cheques in favour of the Lottery Fund grant beneficiaries as needed.

The Auditor General is essentially talking about the need for accountability in this money and who is ultimately responsible for the money. Is it the individual ministers that are receiving lottery money? Is it now the Minister of Gaming? Is it the Legislative Assembly? Who's taking the ultimate responsibility for this? I'm questioning the minister's statement there. I see he's just sent a note off, so I'm sure he'll get an answer back right away.

I also notice the statement he made that of the fund's estimated budget of \$837 million, 88 percent "is directed to thousands of public nonprofit community and charitable projects across Alberta." Excuse me? And 88 percent, the minister is claiming, is going to nonprofit community and charitable projects. Well, how does the minister then describe something like the agricultural initiatives funding of \$11,620,000 from the lottery funds in this year? What nonprofit is that, may I ask? Or perhaps we could talk about the fetal alcohol initiative, which I've heard described by other ministers, an excellent project and I certainly do support it. Which nonprofit is this? Or is the government just referring to itself as one huge nonprofit and therefore they can disburse lottery money as they choose?

How about the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission? I wasn't aware that that was a community-based nonprofit. I think

that's an arm of the government; isn't it? Well, the minister is saying: "Eighty-eight percent of the fund's estimated budget of \$837 million is directed to thousands of public nonprofit community and charitable projects." I've just described millions of dollars that are very clearly on government initiatives. All right. The minister is smiling at me.

Let's talk about funds that are coming out for federal nursing stations. What community-based, nonprofit organization is that? Or how about alternate compensation strategies? Those last two are both under Health and Wellness initiatives. Let's talk about the north/south trade – oh, I'm sorry; that's not funded this year.

The water management infrastructure. Now, that project is receiving \$20 million. Which community-based, nonprofit charity is that? Or perhaps we could look at the transportation subsidy school support. Is that a community-based, nonprofit charitable group?

So I'm really wondering about the interesting choice of language. The minister is a clever fellow; I'll admit that. I think he's using very clever language to have Albertans think that one thing is going on when in fact it's quite another thing that's going on.

Another statement that the minister makes. He's talking about: one of the goals of the lottery fund and the Department of Gaming is to be open, clear, and transparent. I appreciate the fact that there's a list of projects that are receiving funding that are listed on pages 174 and 175 of the 2000-2001 government and lottery fund estimates, but this does not give me a lot of description of the projects that are going on. I can't look through this and find any kind of a subvote that describes to me what these projects are, whether there's any additional revenue going into them. Where is the revenue coming from, and how is that money being spent?

This government likes to claim that they're open and transparent, but I have to tell you that there is not a lot of information given in these budget books, so I don't know what the minister's definition of open and transparent is. If it's giving a one-line description of a project, the name of a project, and the amount of money, okay. If that's the way it is, fine. Let's accept that as the definition.

But if I want to understand how this money is spent, even where, what part of the province it is spent in, how am I supposed to get that information? More to the point, how are Albertans supposed to get the information about what these projects are, even given www.aglc.gov.ab.ca, or whatever the web site is, which I suspect is not giving a full breakdown of exactly how these projects are funded and where the money is being spent on them.

I appreciate the comments from the Member for Lacombe-Stettler on the community lottery boards. I don't want to be misunderstood on what I'm about to say. That money that is going through those community lottery boards is much needed by the community, and my understanding, when this program was set up, was that it was in response to all of those nonprofit charitable groups in the community saying: "We don't have enough money. We need help here. You have not put additional funds into the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife, the Wild Rose Foundation, and those other lottery-based grants that are providing operating money to us, and there is no ability to get funds for other smaller groups that exist in a smaller, perhaps ad hoc way in the community."

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

The program was set up to do that, but it was meant to augment things. I'm now hearing that other programs are under pressure to cut off people who qualify, not necessarily get but who qualify, to apply for community lottery board money. They're now being told

that they're cut off from applying for other lottery foundation moneys, and that was not the point of that. It was meant to augment, not to replace.

I know a number of citizens of Alberta who have volunteered their time, a considerable amount of time, to sit on the local community lottery boards. I admire them deeply. It's a great commitment, and they take their job seriously and work very hard. But my initial concern expressed with this program was that there be overriding criteria from the government to make sure that all of the community lottery boards would be able to operate within sight of the same framework.

At the time I said: is there any guidance whatsoever? Should the lottery boards be looking for a certain percentage to be granting to arts groups, for instance? The concern I expressed at the time was that individual artists in Alberta may not be known or recognized in their own community, or people on the community lottery boards may not feel they have the personal background or expertise to know whether what this person was doing was valuable and therefore wouldn't fund them. So what was supposed to be an augment to a program – you could have artists especially in rural Alberta at a tremendous disadvantage because there wouldn't be any kind of criteria guiding the local board that they should be looking for arts endeavours in their community to support. I think that is still a concern.

The second concern. I notice that there are additional funds in the community lottery board pot of money this year. It's \$53 million. I've looked and I didn't see the answer to the question, so perhaps the minister can enlighten me. Is the additional money that is being distributed through the grant program, or is it to cover administrative expenses? I know from talking to some of the boards that I have spoken to – and I think I can refer specifically to Edmonton – they need support money to administer their grants. Again, it's a group of volunteers. I know a couple of years ago they were trying to work through grant applications that would be funded to the tune of \$11 million. That is a lot of administrative work. They need some help to do this. It's an onerous task to expect that they're going to do on their own. So I'm questioning whether that additional money is going to be going into administrative assistance for these lottery boards or whether it's some sort of cost of living increase or something that's going into the actual amount being granted out.

3:50

I'm wondering if the minister was able to respond to the Auditor General's request that accountability for grant expenditures made from the lottery fund be improved. Given the long list of different projects, most of them government projects and many of them core service projects, how is this accountability being dealt with as per the Auditor General's recommendation?

Now, I'm also wondering why – and I'm referring specifically to page 174 of the estimates book – the lottery programs administration has increased fairly significantly. In looking through the *Hansard* from last night, I noticed some people asking about increase in wages and increase in travel costs. Is that what's accounting for the increase that I see on that particular line item? There's also a fairly substantial increase in the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission lottery operations, just about \$2 million. That's a fairly substantial increase as well, if the minister could elucidate on that.

I'm wondering if there are any initiatives planned or under way for efforts to assist organizations in developing performance measurements as part of their accountability back to the lottery fund. Having worked with the Auditor General's staff for some time on this, I'm aware that this is a difficult process to get started and to test

and evaluate and review and revise and move forward. What assistance, if any, is coming through the lottery fund to assist the organizations that are recipients of grants to be able to both develop their goals but also develop the performance measurements that would help them evaluate that?

I've asked the Minister of Community Development and I will ask the minister responsible for this lottery money, as well, whether there have been any plans or anticipation of assistance to nonprofit organizations in Alberta for capacity building, further to the federal government voluntary sector report. If the minister hasn't had an opportunity to read that report, I highly recommend it. Seeing as we have a recess next week, perhaps he can work his way through the book then. There are some very good points that are being raised there.

Under the major strategies, on page 179, there's a strategy to "develop and implement benchmarks and best practice initiatives." For whom, or for what section? Or is this for anyone receiving lottery money? As I pointed out, mostly the government is the recipient of that. Could the minister detail who that benchmark and best practices initiative is directed towards.

I'm also interested in why the minister sees fit to have a highlight of "implement a strategy to further inform Albertans about Alberta Lottery Fund support for community initiatives." Is the minister feeling heat to have to explain to Albertans where their lottery money is going? What has given rise to that as a highlight?

I note again the actual amount of money that is going to charities, the \$160 million that is quoted under financial highlights on page 180. It states that "for 2000-01, charities in Alberta are expected to receive over \$160 million as a result of gaming revenue generated on their behalf." Now, I can do my math; \$160 million out of the \$837 million is not 88 percent. I do note that that \$160 million is for the most part essentially the same amount of money that is brought in through the ticket revenue.

I urge the minister and the Minister of Community Development to go back and have another look at the money that is actually going out to those charitable groups. It has pretty much stayed stagnant, with the amount of money coming into the lottery fund generated by ticket revenues, and I don't know if that's an official or an unofficial tie together or benchmark or association. But it's high time that more money was going to those charitable groups, and that's what they were expecting from the gambling summit. Having been there, I know that's what they meant. They expected that that \$160 million the minister admits to would be upped and that more money would be going into those charities.

I regret I've run out of time, but thank you very much for the opportunity to raise the questions.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. Oh, I'm sorry, Edmonton-Manning. I didn't look to the right.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Chairman, thank you so much, and I'll certainly take that advice and always look to the right in this Assembly.

So many opportunities to clear up misconceptions compel me to rise to my feet. Firstly, there is no *Hansard* from last night, Mr. Chairman. There are the Blues, and we hope the member has directed her attention to those. Let's go back to those Blues where it says:

Eighty-eight percent of the fund's estimated budget of \$837.5 million is directed to thousands of public, nonprofit, community, and charitable projects across Alberta.

I want to read that into the record again.

Eighty-eight percent of the fund's estimated budget of \$837.5

million is directed to thousands of public, nonprofit, community, and charitable projects across Alberta.

So, in fact, there is a great amount of money directed to very, very good organizations driven by very, very good Albertans who come to the lottery fund, who look at it not as a source of government controlling largesse but as a legitimate access source to funds.

One of the greatest funds, which I've looked on with fondness since my first being elected, is the Wild Rose Foundation. Gosh, I've always thought, there are so many special parts of the Wild Rose Foundation when you see dollars from that foundation helping individuals in places like Calcutta, in places where there's extreme poverty. We can see that Albertans do take that extra moment, spend that extra time in realizing how much misery there is in the world and what little bit we can do to take a part to try and alleviate some of the poverty, the overwhelming question of poverty, to give opportunities. For example, it's one of the reasons why there are athletic scholarships in the lottery funds, so that individuals can rise up through education and break through the walls of poverty and be able to move ahead.

Of course, the 88 percent of the public, nonprofit, community, and charitable projects across Alberta was clearly stated in a response from the government way back when, in 1998, when the government said in a press release in response to the gambling summit – it was a commitment to communities and charities reaffirmed. I encapsulate, Mr. Chairman: the government agrees that gaming and lottery profits should not be used to fund ongoing essential core government programs. However – *quand meme, en Francais* – the government does support the use of these profits for broad-based community projects that benefit Albertans.

Then the member started to talk about agriculture, and if that isn't my favourite topic, Mr. Chairman. They often say that farming is not our past; it's our future. Indeed, they've said that farming is not our past but our passion. She asked for a detailed explanation of the lottery fund commitment to agriculture Alberta, that paragon of hard work, that very thing that emphasizes, that defines Albertans' core values, the embodiment of which is two words, Mr. Chairman, the family farm.

4:00

If you look into the Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development community estimates, as the member has clearly pointed out – and I thank her for that by repeating our web site, www.gaming.gov.ab.ca – she found that there was \$11,620,000, and she said: now, what's nonprofit about agriculture?

Of course, if she would have been able to be with our minister, who's down in Ottawa this week taking on the case of beleaguered farmers not only in this province but looking at agricultural disastrous conditions throughout the prairies, throughout the second largest breadbasket of the world, she would know that it's a difficult business. There are lots of community organizations, lots of nonprofit organizations – in fact, that's the very spirit of volunteerism in Alberta, and that's where it came from, Mr. Chairman. It came from places like Carmangay. It came from places like Stavely. I mean, I'd like to talk about the Granum White Sox. That was a baseball team that existed in the early '30s that brought people together, that put community together, that embodied the very community volunteer spirit that the lottery fund and the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta represents and brings forward today in today's politics.

Mr. Chairman, I may digress, so let me just return to the \$11,620,000 in agriculture initiatives. The agriculture initiative provides grant support to nonprofit agricultural organizations throughout Alberta. It includes annual support to over 281 agricul-

ture societies located in Alberta's rural community. It includes grant support to nonprofit organizations with objectives related to improvement in agriculture.

Because I'm a city guy, I guess I always refer to it as the square tomato group, where you could make tomatoes square and they'd ship easier and bruise less, but in fact if you look at what is happening in today's agriculture world, there's a worldwide debate on genetically modified food. There are farmers storming the bastille of McDonald's in France, pelting them with tomatoes because of the use of genetically modified organisms. I can remember a pelting taking place in Vegreville not too far back, and I don't think it was tomatoes.

Mr. Chairman, I know the member comes from Edmonton-Centre, but if she could just go out to Alberta west or Grande Prairie-Smoky or Grande Prairie-Wapiti, even as close as Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, there's just a wonderful richness of vitality, character, integrity, and the great volunteer spirit in the great Albertans that sit outside of our urban environments.

So we take a look at developing the people in these agricultural venues, Mr. Chairman. We look at the development of people – and I wish *Hansard* could record the raising of hands as I ask the question: how many people know what 4-H stands for? What are the four Hs? How many people know here? [interjections] See; there we go. We've got "I was in 4-H." There's a hand from Camrose-Wetaskiwin, Edmonton-Manning, Vegreville-Viking, Edmonton-Whitemud, Drumheller-Chinook, from Edmonton-Gold Bar, from Peace River.

Now, I'm not going to say what the four Hs are, because as someone comes up with the next question, the next set of comments, they may want to inform us what it is, and I don't want to take that away from them. But I can tell you that "head" is one of them, and that means training and leadership skills for adults and youth in local communities, board effectiveness training for agricultural/industrial organizations, increasing the awareness of agricultural issues, expanding the capacity of local leadership to make decisions and improve their communities. Estimated expenditures, \$711,000. Enablement of organizations, successful delivery of agriculture shows, trade shows.

You know, that was one of the things I remember going to in Red Deer, when it was 8,000 people, with my father. We would go and look at all the new machinery that was coming in and being used, and that was way before there were enclosed cabs on tractors and multiple-use equipment and four-wheel drive tractors. They did have rubber tires. They were just moving into rubber tires, it seems.

That is \$2.4 million. Development of vital infrastructure contributes to the operation of fairgrounds, rodeo grounds, and multiple-use community facilities that add to and enrich the quality of life of over 250 rural communities. Capital development and renovation of community multi-use facilities in rural communities: \$3.6 million. Annual operating, program, and capital funding to ag societies: \$4.87 million.

You know, I'm so pleased that the Member for Edmonton-Centre asked about this, because it gives us an opportunity to exchange and share some of those views that differ between rural and urban. Often it's said that if you walk a mile in another man's shoes, in another woman's shoes – although my feet would probably get tired from the heels – or, as they said in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, place yourself in another person's skin, that gives you that opportunity to see the difficulties, the problems, the opportunities. I bet you the Member for Edmonton-Centre will probably want to go out right now and check the Hs in 4-H and say: does it mean head, health, heart, and hands?

So having said that, Mr. Chairman, and having been able to

exchange those views and provide that important amount of information, I look forward to the comments from probably Edmonton-Manning.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can never match that. That is – I won't even say what it is.

You know, I'm going to talk about municipal and infrastructure, and I'm going to talk about the lottery going a few different ways. I, too, did go to the gaming summit, and I did also work from room to room and watched how it was manipulated, facilitated to the answers that . . .

MS LEIBOVICI: Was it something like the Bill 11 forum?

MR. GIBBONS: Yeah. Same way that the Bill 11 forums are being handled right now.

You know, under lottery funds one of the items is Municipal 2000 sponsorship. I've got a question under that on where the money is going, because a lot of it should be coming out of the community enhancement program, the viable community initiative programs, the Infrastructure department, the Health department, the Learning department. Everybody is all part of trying to put money out to Alberta, which is good, because we read from the AUMA last edition. One they're talking about is:

Delegates adopted a "Viable Communities Definition" at the 1999 AUMA convention, the first step in creating a framework designed to help municipalities move towards greater self-reliance. Municipalities currently operate without a clear definition by the Province of the basic "Viable Community" that the Alberta government will support. This creates difficulties for many municipalities, particularly in the wake of reduced provincial grants and support.

They go on and they talk about what do you call viable community initiatives. Then they go on to talk about a "community which has the will and resources to sustain itself economically and socially." That's what they're really pushing under this. Then they go on to say that "Alberta Economic Development has an initiative entitled 'Self-Reliant Communities' that is coordinated with the Alberta Economic Development Authority."

Now, we do see and we do know that today's communities face a number of serious challenges, and we need leadership which will move us towards solutions in partnership with local governments. Talking about infrastructure deficit, the Capital Investment Planning Committee estimated that the \$1.2 billion infrastructure deficit is a major, major problem in this province. An AUMA infrastructure task force estimated a \$1.77 billion infrastructure deficit, including an \$888 million deficit for non transportation related infrastructure, storm drainage, wastewater systems, water supply and treatment systems, parks and recreation facilities, protective and emergency services, solid waste management, and mobile equipment.

4:10

Now, as I started asking questions around the program under the Municipal 2000 sponsorship, this really falls into place. It says that there's a \$1.77 billion infrastructure deficit. Mr. Chairman, why won't the government release the corporate capital plan overview development by ministry, instead of just throwing it all into lotteries?

We look at who the backbone of the province of Alberta is. We have the Minister of Gaming talking about agriculture, farming, rural. It's very true. If you take my constituency, probably 65 percent of the people are from northeast Alberta and have moved to the closest route out of the city right back to the farm. So our

communities are the backbone of Alberta society. We live and work and raise our families in our community. The quality of life within our communities is dependent on the availability of local infrastructure. Maintaining our infrastructure is critical to Alberta's future competitiveness, providing the means of adding value to products and services we produce and sell both here in Canada and abroad. Infrastructure planning should and must be the core business function of the province in close collaboration with our municipalities.

The province likes to take credit for the \$4 billion surplus at the provincial level, but why do they refuse to take responsibility for the infrastructure deficit they've created over the past seven years at the local level? Between 1992 and 1998 general and specific-purpose grants from the Alberta government to municipalities declined by \$402 million, which is 48 percent, the second highest level of decline of provinces in Canada. Our municipalities have been subject to a financial squeeze by the government. Not only were provincial grants to municipalities reduced; the province has taken over a portion of the local property tax base.

My questions today on the Municipal 2000 sponsorship program. The 2000-2001 operating expenses of \$12 million were funded through the lottery funds. This represents a \$2 million, or 20 percent, increase over last year's estimates for comparable and forecast of \$10 million. My question, though, to the minister, probably through the Minister of Gaming, is: what are the criteria under municipal co-operation that the ministry of Municipal Affairs will use to determine whether the project is eligible for the 25 percent bonus pool under the Municipal 2000 sponsorship program?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: They're municipal programs.

MR. GIBBONS: It is? But is it going to be forever? Is it going to be for one year? Is it going to be for two years? It's a carrot as far as I'm concerned. Last year I asked the same question here, and I didn't get an answer whether it was going to be for next year, two years.

My next question to you, Mr. Minister. What are the selection criteria and the composition of the review panel that will evaluate the applications for enhanced grants? Who's on these boards? How did they get picked? If you could submit that to me, I'd really like that.

Next question is to the same minister. He should be taking note of this so he can give an answer back as soon as we come back on April 3. Has the ministry conducted a cost-benefit evaluation of the Municipal 2000 sponsorship program for its first two years of operation? What specific performance criteria or benchmarks have been established by the department to evaluate the effectiveness of the program? Is it the intention of the minister to make the Municipal 2000 program a permanent program? Is it not more appropriate that the programs are under the general revenue fund rather than the lotteries? That's what I referred to in my first sentence. Maybe it should be under Municipal Affairs, Community Development, Infrastructure, Health, Learning.

Can the minister indicate how projects such as upgrading a number of skating facilities, road sign installations, the purchase of roadside spray units, upgrading access roads, construction of potable water fill stations, roof repair, and building renovations could qualify as an enhancement to innovation and excellence under the program? Shouldn't these projects be funded under the community facility enhancement program or the street improvement program or the highway infrastructure program? Is there an established percentage of projects that are funded on the basis of excellence and innovation versus regional co-operation under the Municipal 2000 sponsorship program? Is the funding split 50-50, 60-40, 70-30, et cetera?

You know, I read through your release on this program the other day, and again I would like to know the criteria there. If this government hadn't played their one-string guitar for the last few years on downloading, did we need to put this out? Could we not have built this into all the different programs of Infrastructure and Health and so on? You know, I can see under different items here the deadline for the grant, June 30, 2000. I hope there are people out there that are actually helping with the actual thoughts of intermunicipal co-operation, because as I read through it, I see communities tying together on this one. This one, for example, for the county of Smoky Lake, the villages of Vilna, Warspite, and Waskatenau. Funding was provided for a five-part regional recreation facility upgrade. The five components of this project include Vilna's arena upgrade, the Warspite community park expansion, the Waskatenau curling upgrade, the Smoky Lake recreation complex.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: And all the people use it in that area.

MR. GIBBONS: True. But maybe it should have been funded out of some other program. Maybe it should be established as a community facility enhancement program.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I understand that the minister is trying to be helpful, but through the chair if you don't mind.

MR. GIBBONS: He's just finding out what kind of personality I have. When I get going, I get going.

Now we look at Starland county, village of Delia. Funding has provided for the joint purchase of four sets of self-contained breathing apparatus to be shared by six area fire departments. Great. There's no problem with that. But why isn't it out of the regional health budget? Why isn't it just out of the Health and Wellness budget instead of this particular one?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Because the municipalities wanted it this way.

MR. GIBBONS: Okay. That's the answer I needed on paper.

Now, the town of Brooks. This is the one around the raw water irrigation system. I've sat with the municipality down there, talked about it. I totally understand what it is. But here again I'm wondering: why isn't it under an Infrastructure program?

As we go through the whole list of different communities that got money during 1999 under this particular program – and I don't want to let anybody believe that I think it's a bad program, because it is a good program. But, you know, there are a few things I want to highlight as we talk. Why the program was actually set up: that was around information, computers, and so on. We can see geographic information systems; no problem. Registration information; no problems. We've got computer systems; that's what it's for. We've got software to convert scanned maps and images into electronic format; no problem with that. Now, I see a number of items like this, but here we're going back to arenas. As long as there seems to be partnership in these types of things, we see it go through.

Beaver county: signs for range roads. Yesterday at a meeting with the Alberta Chamber of Commerce a representative from Oyen talked about signs and getting flak from the government. They're off the beaten track. They've got old signs? Big deal.

MRS. McCLELLAN: They don't have old signs. They're new signs.

MR. GIBBONS: Well, through the chair, they're complaining that

the government is giving them a rough time, and they have to get new signs. Okay?

Then we get into the MD of Bonnyville No. 87. The MD of Bonnyville and the town of Bonnyville partnered to hire and share services of two special constables. Well, why aren't we just bumping up our police budget in this province through the justice system instead of coming through this particular item?

We have Cardston county: purchase of a roadside spray unit system. This is Agriculture; this is Environment. Maybe we could be passing that all over the province to start doing our weed control for the thistle epidemic last year and giving it to the CN and CP railroads so they can actually be spraying their problems with the thistles. We have Flagstaff county: a rescue vehicle. This should be Health or Justice again.

4:20

Now, I could keep going all the way through. We set up a Department of Infrastructure, which is massive, but we're using Gaming dollars to do it this way, piecemeal, \$12 million, \$170 million, whatever. Potable water truck fill station for the county of Lethbridge: we all know what that's about. Well spent. Nothing wrong with the county of Lethbridge partnered with the town of Coaldale to establish a regional potable water commission. But why out of this particular program? Mountain View: expand and renovate the county office. Nothing wrong with that. But we've got items in here like purchasing a one-way snow plow for a grader; this is for the county of Two Hills. You know, I think it would be really appropriate if that one came out of Infrastructure just because of the Minister of Infrastructure.

The town of Bon Accord: upgrade town sidewalks by replacing old and unsafe sidewalks in residential areas. Had another complaint yesterday from Beiseker, wondering why they have to be pushed into the lowest bid. Well, I didn't get into that one in front of a lot of people. I'll call them back and talk to them about that one. I was looking for the actual dollars and cents that Beiseker got through this program, but I didn't see it in here.

Town of Claresholm: build an addition to an existing fire hall. Town of Claysmore: replace the existing fire truck cab and chassis. Well, if it's a 1947 International, I guess they had to make a plastic one to make it fit. Crowsnest Pass and Crowsnest: this is all upgrading local sidewalks, snowmobile trails, installation of irrigation system, to improve the ball and soccer fields. The town of Fort Macleod: upgrading recreation centre, replacing the curling piping system. Mr. Chairman, I can go on and on and on. These are all good projects; I'm just wondering why they come out of here. Town of Picture Butte: install an underground sprinkler system. An underground sprinkler system. I know it's dry down there.

The main thing with this is that we're looking at a lottery-funded item that should be directly funded out of general revenue under different programs, whether it's Infrastructure or whatever, but not just: pick the program; let's do it. It should be budgeted and applied for and dealt with through each one of the departments I talked about.

Mr. Chairman, with that I will sit down. I know I didn't take my 20 minutes, but I never do.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

Hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Edmonton-Manning, for those good comments, well-researched and well-thought-out comments.

I do want to just respond very quickly to his last comment. The

budgeting process is truly from the bottom up, and the lottery fund is not one that picks projects and then hands out the money. The lottery fund is one that responds to operating departments such as Municipal Affairs, such as Infrastructure, such as Agriculture, and when those operating departments define onetime areas, specific areas of spending, it's that grassroots process, from the MD, from the farm, that comes up, that is identified, that then the lottery fund can respond to.

The lottery fund is able to effectively respond to those because of the good work that those departments do in continually liaising and co-operating with those individuals who form those municipal jurisdictions. I don't know if the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Minister of Infrastructure wish to comment on the specific comments from the member at this stage or simply table their responses at a later time, but should they wish to do that, I'm certainly able to give them the floor.

I do want to make one further comment that harks back not only to the Member for Edmonton-Manning but more specifically to the Member for Edmonton-Centre. The \$160 million that goes to volunteers, Mr. Chairman, is outside of the lottery fund. That's money that these individual groups and charities earn from participating in bingos and charities throughout this 660,000 square kilometres that make up the province of Alberta. Those funds are theirs, for their use in accordance with specifically drafted guidelines, and are not included in the overall promulgation of the lottery fund, that now is budgeted at \$837,500,000.

If the ministers want to supplement my answers by adding, specifically on Municipal 2000 and those types of programs, they can, or I'm sure, hon. member, they will do it perhaps more completely and definitively through a written tabling.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you. I, too, rise this afternoon to ask some questions with regards to the lottery fund estimates and will probably focus the majority of my questions around the Health and Wellness part of the estimates. But before I do, I'd like to just ask some general questions that have come up through my constituency as well as through looking at the estimates in some of the other areas.

One of the first questions I have. It appears, at least in the Edmonton area – and I'm not sure if it's transferred to other municipalities across the province – that there is now some question as to what the CFEP grant covers vis-a-vis what the municipalities are covering. To be a little bit more specific, I know that with regards to a grant to one of my community leagues, they were told that a particular portion of that grant would no longer be funded because in fact it was deemed to be now the responsibility of the municipalities.

In the past what the province has done was picked up some of the costs that were formerly provided through the municipality structure. As they have cut back, CFEP would pick up those costs. Now CFEP has changed their policy and are not doing it anymore. As a result, this one community league is out \$40,000, even though they have been planning for a park enhancement now for a period of two to three years. So it significantly impacts what they can and can't do. My question is: is that specifically a conflict, in a sense, between the city of Edmonton and the CFEP program, or is that more general across the province? Will it be applied equally across the province if that is now the new policy with regards to CFEP funding?

Another question that I've had asked of me and that in fact the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had brought up as well is the

grants that are provided to golf and country clubs. I will look forward to the information that the minister provides with regards to that particular area.

In noting the facilities that have been granted funding, I'm just wondering what the SGS parents' group is, if we could get a little bit of explanation around that. I'm sure it is a worthwhile project. I'm just wondering what it is.

With regards to the funds that are provided, what type of monitoring is carried on by the department to ensure that the dollars are being used as requested and that the dollars are being utilized in a proper fashion? We've seen what happens at the federal level when there is not a proper oversight function with regards to the provision of dollars, and I would like to know what monitoring mechanisms are in place within the department right now to ensure that that doesn't happen here.

I have a question around lottery fund estimates, page 174, with regards to the Community Development portion of the Trans Canada Trail project. I have received a number of letters with regards to individuals who are not supportive of the project in that the trail will infringe on their property. Especially if we're providing public dollars, I would like to know what the minister is doing with regards to working with I guess it would be Infrastructure and I'm not sure actually which other department in order to ensure that the concerns those individuals have with regards to the Trans Canada Trail project, which I personally do support, are being met. It's a group of individuals at this point, an organized group, it's my understanding.

4:30

Before I move to Health, I just want to make sure that I've looked at the other areas that I wanted to touch on. I think I have. If I move to the health care facilities portion on page 175 under Infrastructure, there is a substantial amount of money, \$120 million, that is being provided out of lottery funds into the health care facilities. My question is: what is the breakdown between private, private for-profit, and public? Which health care facilities are receiving funding, and how are the priorities established with regards to the funding? For instance, is the Red Deer hospital one of those facilities that will be accessing funds out of this program?

My colleague from Edmonton-Centre had, I believe, made a very good point when she indicated that lottery funds were not to be used for core funding programs. When I look at the Health and Wellness budget and their business plan summary in the government and lottery fund estimates, in fact some of their major items that the funds are being provided for from the lottery fund either through Infrastructure or through Health and Wellness are major strategies that have been outlined by the Health and Wellness department.

If lottery funds are not to be core funding for programs, one wonders why in fact we are looking at funding areas that are major strategies under Health and Wellness. The fact that these facilities or these programs that are funded by lotteries require dollars I'm not disputing. What I'm asking is: why are we funneling dollars that are not sustainable dollars to Health and Wellness when in fact what is required in that department is sustainable funding for ongoing projects and for facility planning? That is the crux, I believe, of some of the problems within the Department of Health and Wellness right now, that it is hard for the regional health authorities to plan when in fact they don't have a sustainable funding base.

To move directly into the Health and Wellness portion of the lottery fund – and that's on both page 174 and page 175 – I have a question around the federal nursing stations. Actually I could have asked it as well in Health and Wellness. I'm surprised that there are provincial dollars being provided to the federal nursing stations. I

would have assumed that that would have all been part of federal expenses. So I'd like to know what the breakdown is. Perhaps the minister can inform me as to what the program is and the contracts to have what looks like cost sharing between the province and the federal government.

The Calgary regional health laboratory facility. It's interesting that there was some funding that came from '98-99 to that facility. I believe that was part of the start-up funds for that particular facility. We know that that facility is inadequate and that there are no further dollars being provided through the lottery fund, which in fact supports my earlier argument that here we have a facility that's been set up and has received significant dollars from the lottery fund, \$9 million, and is receiving no money now, so there isn't that sustainable funding base. In fact, we have a facility in Calgary that we know is stretched to the limit. There may be inadequate dollars that are being provided to it out of the Health and Wellness budget. That budget can only stretch so far because of having planned for moneys from the lottery fund. So we've got disjointed planning perhaps occurring.

I have another question with regards to the health authorities' supplemental capital assistance funding, which is interesting. There's a little over \$38 million that's being provided for that particular part of it. I'm not sure if the minister is aware, but according to the Auditor General's report there are only 2.8 years of useful life left in the regional health authorities' capital equipment base across the province. My guess is that those dollars will not even make a dent in the capital equipment replacement that is going to have to occur within the next 2.8 years. The question I have is: what, again, can we in fact expect from this ministry with regards to working together with the minister of health to ensure that we do have adequate turnaround of capital equipment?

I have some very specific questions with regards to the health innovation fund. It was just announced yesterday as to which projects have been approved through Health and Wellness. Now, my first question is with regards to the dollars. When I look at the lottery fund and then I take the Health and Wellness budget, the dollars don't match up, so I'd like an explanation as to why that is. When I look at the news release from the minister yesterday, the news release indicated that \$7.2 million will be allocated in the 1999-2000 year – that was last year actually – for the 33 projects that are coming out of the health innovation fund. Your document indicates that the health innovation fund for 1999-2000 will receive \$4 million out of lottery funds. When I look at the Health and Wellness part of the program, it indicates that the 1999-2000 operating expense for Health and Wellness is \$5,900,000. If we have a total expenditure for '99-2000 of \$9,900,000, which again is last year even though we're talking about this year's budget – it's a little confusing – it means there's a shortfall of \$2,700,000 sitting in a fund somewhere. So I'd like to know where that \$2.7 million is.

Then I notice that in 2000-2001 the total expenditure for the program will be \$14,900,000. That's almost double what the expenditure was for this year. Actually it was this past fiscal year. What I'm wondering is: how many more programs are going to be announced? As of yesterday, we're looking at double the amount, and it would be interesting to know what other projects are going to be announced and what in fact the sunset dates are for these projects.

As the lottery fund is providing significant dollars to the health innovation fund, I've got some specific questions that I'd like to ask the minister. It appeared on overview of these projects that a fair amount were core projects again, that in fact some of them were not as much innovative as required for providing health services to different regions throughout this province. In fact, without continued funding, if these programs were found to be useful, they are not

sustainable given the current budgets within regional health authorities.

My questions. If in fact a program is evaluated – and I'd like to know what the evaluation process is for a particular program and, again, what the sunset dates are on particular programs – what happens if it's deemed to be a useful project? Will the health authorities then receive ongoing funding? Has there been the commitment made from the minister of health to ensure that those programs can continue? There is nothing worse than starting a program, having a two-year program, perhaps, be successful and then all of a sudden it's taken out of the community and is gone.

4:40

What were the criteria for selection, and how in fact will other organizations know for next year, because the funding is doubled, that this program is available and that they in fact can apply for this particular program? Now, the reason I ask that is that in the summer of this year when the program was announced, the people who were informed of the program were selected. They were brought into a room in the Calgary region, and they were informed that this was a fund they could apply for. It wasn't a broad-based call throughout Alberta so that organizations throughout Alberta could apply for this health innovation fund. Given that there is more notice now and more dollars, I'd like to know what the process will be for ensuring that not only the RHAs but other community-based agencies can actually apply for this program.

The outcome. I know that the government is very interested in performance measures and outcome measures, and I'd like to know what in fact those are and if in fact those will be made public.

Now, in terms of some of the specific programs, I'd like an explanation of how this differs from what's currently being provided in the areas or how it differs from the major strategies that are outlined in the minister of health's business plan. For the Chinook health region breast health centre one of the major strategies is to "implement provincial population-based breast cancer screening and province-wide metabolic screening programs," yet here we have a major strategy that's not funded through the minister of health but has to depend on lottery funding to access and to provide that particular program. I'm not arguing whether the program is needed. I'm questioning as to the basis of funding and perhaps the way that this program is providing the dollars.

Another program that I've asked for some information about already is the primary care partnership, and this is the program through the Crowfoot Village Family Practice. Now, it's interesting that we're providing more money to that particular program and I've yet to see an evaluation of that program. My question is: before we provide more dollars to a particular program, why in fact do we not have an evaluation first? If it is such a successful program, maybe we should be, as well, spreading out the advantages of that program to other family practice groups in Calgary.

The CUPS program, the community health centre, and the Alberta Mental Health Board. Now, I have a lot of problems with the way the Alberta Mental Health Board has been dealing with its community groups. Here we have the CUPS community health centre, which I understand provides a very good program, but on the other hand they have to get a grant. Again my question is: is it sustainable, and for how long will those dollars be available that will provide mental health support services to persons who are homeless and suffering from mental illness on the east side of downtown by adding a psychiatrist and social worker to the existing team? How is that innovative? That's a necessity. That's not an innovation.

Ditto for the nurse practitioner and physician collaborative partnership in the David Thompson region. Nurse practitioners and

the idea of nurse practitioners has been one that has been floating around for years, and the minister of health just recently said that he was going to be talking to the AARN to encourage the use of nurse practitioners. Again, is it innovative? It may be new for that particular area, but the idea is not an idea that has not been thought of before. Again, should this not be an ongoing program provided through Health and Wellness?

Medication management. I have a question as to how that particular program will work. Is there going to be information sharing between the physicians and the pharmacists in order to identify and reduce drug-related problems? That would be one way of doing that. What are the health information implications of that particular sharing of information?

The collaborative maternity care team's shared maternity care project. [Ms Leibovici's speaking time expired]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thanks very much. I originally thought that the party opposite would be saving the best for last, but I understand that with some of the changes now in speaker order, they really save the antepenultimate for last. [interjection] That is the next to second to last; in other words, you.

I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for good questions. I really wish the member would have been able to rise to her feet last night when the minister of health was ready with his responses to the lottery fund. But they're very, very good questions, and those good questions deserve very, very good answers. We'll undertake to answer every one of those comments, hon. member. As well, if you do have further and you'd like to table them, that's certainly in accordance with what the other speakers over there would like to do. I'd certainly like to hear more. I always sit on the edge of my seat when the member speaks.

I do just want to make one very quick comment that I think may help in further questions, and that is on the volatility of oil and gas prices over the last 18 months, from \$12 a barrel to a high of \$32 and change and back down to \$27, and the volatility of corporate income tax over the last seven years. I think it has moved from \$350 million to over \$1.56 billion. There's more volatility in other revenue streams to this government than there is in the lottery fund. I mean, if you examine the lottery fund revenues and the normative growth that's occurred in the last five years, this is not funding that's put in jeopardy. What it is is recognition of opportunities in funding streams that operating ministries take from this fund and in a clear, transparent manner apply to their specific ministries.

So I did want to clear that up as well as giving answers to the technical questions and commenting that the Auditor General actually thinks we're better than we were before. He makes comments like: I am pleased to report that the department is making progress. So it's not all bad news from the Auditor General, and it's good news from the funding stream.

I look forward to hearing more from the opposition members.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, hon. member.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I want to just finish off the list that I have here as to the questions, and then they'll be provided all in one shot. I recognize that the Minister of Health and Wellness will have to be consulted in terms of the questions and will respond in writing, and that's just fine.

I was at the collaborative maternity care team's shared maternity care project. The question I have there is that that seems to be more

of a public health function and should be provided and could be provided through the public health delivery system. In the Capital region there are a couple of programs that I have some questions on. One is the adult brain injury caregiver college program, which actually does sound like it is a good, innovative program. I'd just like to know where the caregiver college will be, in case I have constituents who would like to be able to access that, and how far outside the Capital region people will be able to access this particular college.

If I might just add onto that, the idea of a caregiver college is a good one, not only for individuals who have family members who are suffering from adult brain injury but also for individuals who have family members who are suffering from a variety of physical and/or mental disabilities that could use help and support with regards to providing care to their family members.

4:50

The Grey Nuns rehab outreach service I understand has been an ongoing program – and I could be wrong – for the last couple of years, so this is not a new program. What I would be interested in knowing is whether the women's centre at the Grey Nuns hospital did in fact apply for any of the project dollars. If they did and were refused, what was the basis of the refusal? I understand that there is a project that is floating around the Capital region area, as well, for individuals who have weight problems, and I'd like to know if in fact that was a program that was requested in terms of funding.

The Aspen health region. I notice that there is a project called the Aspen Alzheimer's cottage. I'm wondering if that's connected with Aspen house at all or if this is a separate and stand-alone facility and if this cottage is a private, for-profit or public or private operator in the Aspen area.

The Aspen regional diabetic program. I've noticed this with other services that have been talked about by the minister of health with regards to diabetics and their needs. It seems we are doing wellness services and we are doing education regarding diabetes, but the reality is that what people need is to be able to access the supplies, and the dollars that are provided for individuals to access supplies like needles or insulin or what have you are inadequate. As one individual said to me: needles are provided for free to drug addicts but are not provided free to those with diabetes. So this is a huge concern.

The other area around that whole issue is dialysis services. I notice that there was the shared remote diagnostic imaging, which sounds like actually a very neat idea. I would like to know if there were any projects that were submitted with regards to dialysis services and traveling around from region to region or from centre to centre.

The Metis health project. I just have two other questions after this. If I could get an overview. It sounds the way it's written here as if one on-settlement nurse will do both public health and home care nursing to several Metis communities in the Lakeland region. That seems like an impossible task, and I would like to know if I'm reading that properly or if it will be a number of on-settlement nurses that will be providing those services.

The adult day program in the Mistahia region is also a program that is a good program by the look of it, but again the question is around the innovativeness and the sustainability of that particular program. How long is the funding being provided for? Is it two years, three years, five years, or an eternity?

My last question is around the Alberta Cancer Board. I was surprised at this one, where it indicated that there would be a palliative care discharge co-ordinator at the Tom Baker cancer centre

who would provide referral services for regional palliative care programs to terminally ill cancer patients being discharged. My immediate reaction was: is that not being done now? That is an essential service to patients who are being discharged from the Tom Baker who are terminally ill, and I can't quite understand how that would be a program without guaranteed sustainable dollars in the long run.

Those are some of the specific questions that I have with regards to the lottery fund estimates. I thank the minister for listening attentively, as he always does.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have just a few comments today that I'd like to make on the lottery fund estimates. I must thank the minister for remaining behind today in the House to field this vast array of questions. I do know that he's a very proud and concerned Canadian and that he would certainly rather be down in Calgary getting ready to attend the Prime Minister's dinner this evening.

MR. SMITH: I was invited. I would have gone.

MR. BONNER: Well, that's what I said. I knew that you would rather be there, and I do congratulate you for staying behind in the House today to answer our questions.

MR. SMITH: I didn't know if I could get in or not.

MR. BONNER: We will leave Bill 11 and all those other things out of this.

I do appreciate the comment that gambling is a matter of choice. I would be the first person to say that I've been involved as a volunteer with many organizations that have reaped the benefits of moneys that we receive in the way of grants from the lottery fund. I think it is essential, particularly when we look at our smaller communities and we look at our volunteers, that we do give them a hand, and particularly volunteers. These are the people that are having an increasing number of demands put on their time. We expect these people to be experts as volunteers. They attend programs. They attend coaching clinics. Accreditation has been a major part of their getting involved with their communities or with the children in communities. They have demands placed on them not only by the organizations they represent but also by parents, for example.

I was glad to see that the Calgary Minor Hockey Association came out with a plan which would provide a safe atmosphere for their participants and that in this plan they also had as part of their plan an environment where parents would be responsible.

As well, in speaking about volunteers, another component of being a volunteer, of being a parent is to raise funds to provide those opportunities for the youth of today, for people in our communities, whatever it may be, so that they will have opportunities that many of us just dreamed of when we were coming through the program. So we have to look at those things.

Certainly in looking at gambling, we do have a balance between choice and responsibility and accountability. I heard an interesting comparison to gambling the other day. It was a comparison where it was compared to death. In some instances gambling can be described in terms of death: as a friend or, in other terms, as a thief. Certainly when we look at death being a friend, we have to look at

our communities that so many of these funds go to. I was quite impressed when I saw the extensive list and the extensive programs that these funds go towards.

I agreed with the Member for Edmonton-Manning, who certainly indicated that communities are the backbone of this province. We have to look, for example, at what is happening to community life here in the province. I look at the municipal district of St. Paul, for example, which has experienced a 30 percent decline in population over the last decade. I know that these types of funds that go for projects in the municipal district of St. Paul are very, very needed dollars.

5:00

The question I get as I tour around this province is that so many of the VLTs, the bingos, the lotteries, whatever it may be, take so many dollars out of a community, yet so few of those are returned. I look at an example when I was in Cold Lake last summer, how the people of Cold Lake built a marina a number of years ago that was referred to as a white elephant. Well, when I was in Cold Lake last summer, it was very interesting to see that the marina that was once a white elephant now is too small. So many things have happened. The number of boats has increased greatly, the size of those boats has also increased, and so the town of Cold Lake, which is doing a fabulous job of developing and promoting tourism in their area, is faced with a problem where they not only have to expand the marina but bring it up to par for the size of boats they have to deal with today.

Now, as a community they certainly cannot raise those kind of funds for the marina. I certainly would rather see funds being provided for those types of projects out of lotteries rather than seeing that money going to core services. I know core service needs all the help it can get, but I would also like to see where communities that are out there, communities that see themselves in a state of transition, where industries that are in those towns, whether it be the number of farmers in the area is declining or whether, for example, the town's resources have declined, where they can see that at some time in the future those resources are not going to be there to sustain the viability of the town and they wish to move into tourism, then they certainly need some help. I would wonder, in all of these deliberations, if in fact the minister or the lottery fund would ever look at the possibility of providing funds for those types of facilities for towns that are in transition, that require something to keep them viable, to keep them going when there is such an attack on towns in rural Alberta.

As well, in looking at all of this I want to look at the percentage of funds from slot machines from our casinos. Especially the volunteers who go out there, they work hard. Many of them don't get home, if they're on an evening shift, until 2, 3, 4 in the morning, depending how long they're tied up in the count room or whatever, and to see that only 30 percent of those funds goes to that volunteer organization – I would like to know if there is in fact any possibility that more of these funds could be returned to the volunteer groups.

Also, when I look at those funds, it again brings me to the question that when we look at casinos, every casino that I see being built or modified or renovated now is absolutely increasing in size. The number of casinos: I don't know how their limit is regulated. Also, I notice that in all the new casinos there is just a tremendous number of slots. At what point is there a limit? The VLTs were limited at 6,000, and I have to wonder if there is a cap on the number of slots.

As well, in my opening remarks I certainly said that gambling is a matter of choice. It's a matter of choice, but also there is a balance between that choice and responsibility and accountability. The

accountability is something that I would like to look at here for a few minutes. This is one of the areas where gambling is a theme.

Now, in all of these types of gaming that we do have in the province, we have the demographics that I believe indicate that the majority of gamblers and the percentage of gamblers in the lower income group is quite high. It has been said that in many cases this simply is a tax on the lower income groups, tax in a different form.

More importantly, when I look at what is happening in many of our communities here in Edmonton, I'm looking at this whole monitoring aspect. For example, in northeast and northwest Edmonton we have some things that are happening where volunteers have gone out and earned a tremendous amount of money. For example, the community of Lauderdale had raised \$30,000 for community projects through lotteries, through bingos, whatever, and this money disappeared. Their biggest complaint right now is that even after two years they have not been able to get this person into court to try and recover that money. We have a hockey organization in northeast Edmonton that was just defrauded out of \$60,000. We had another hockey organization in northwest Edmonton that was defrauded out of \$120,000, and we hear that there are going to be at least two or three more.

So my question to the minister is: how is Gaming looking into this whole aspect of monitoring what happens to these moneys? There are too many of these hard-earned dollars by volunteers that are going missing out of volunteer organizations, and I would certainly like them to explore different methods by which these organizations could be protected.

Now, I hear the minister's getting a little impatient, certainly not the minister responsible for Gaming, but I look and there have been numerous references here, Mr. Minister, to moneys being spent on golf and country clubs. Certainly, if this is the case – I enjoy golf every bit as much as the minister does, but to get back to my original point, I think if we are spending money on golf and country clubs, then certainly there are other facilities in these municipalities that could be used. For example, I used the case of the Cold Lake marina. I would certainly like to explore that possibility as well.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. As I see members start to tidy up, pack up, and ship out for what's going to be a much, much welcome break – that time, of course, will be spent by this ministry and individuals in my department and myself assiduously reviewing the comments of the Member for Edmonton-Glenarry and ensuring that he has good, solid answers to good, solid questions. We will undertake to do that. We know it's important to him, we know it's important to his constituents, and we'll certainly be complying in doing that.

So short of wishing members bonne semaine, bonne vacance, M. le President, I think we can look for the vote on these estimates, and I'd like to thank all members of the opposition who were charitable in their acceptance of my comments and also keenly interested in their type of questions. For that I thank them.

Thank you.

Agreed to:	
Agriculture, Food and Rural Development	11,620,000
Children's Services	1,200,000
Community Development	60,664,000
Gaming	164,033,000
Health and Wellness	127,528,000

Infrastructure	\$280,000,000
Innovation and Science	\$40,832,000
Learning	\$89,300,000
Municipal Affairs	\$12,000,000
Treasury	\$50,323,000

5:10

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Opposed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply now rise and report the estimates of the lottery fund.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

All resolutions relating to the 2000-2001 lottery fund estimates have been approved. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table a list of those resolutions voted upon by the Committee of Supply pursuant to Standing Orders.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, \$11,620,000; Children's Services, \$1,200,000; Community Development, \$60,664,000; Gaming, \$164,033,000; Health and Wellness, \$127,528,000; Infrastructure, \$280,000,000; Innovation and Science, \$40,832,000; Learning, \$89,300,000; Municipal Affairs, \$12,000,000; Treasury, \$50,323,000.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request unanimous consent of the House to revert to two items: Introduction of Bills and then Projected Government Business.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Bills
(reversion)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the House for allowing unanimous consent.

Bill 21
Appropriation Act, 2000

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 21, the Appropriation Act, 2000. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a first time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

head: Projected Government Business
(*reversion*)

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon under

Projected Government Business I erred in indicating to the House that on Tuesday, April 4 at 4:30 p.m. under second reading of private bills we would deal with private bills 1 to 5. I'm now advised that those bills will not be ready to be presented at that time, so I would amend projected government business at that time to provide for Government Bills and Orders for second reading: Bill 3, Bill 7, and Bill 14.

That having been said, Mr. Speaker, it would be my pleasure to move that pursuant to Government Motion 6, agreed to by the Assembly on March 7, 2000, the Assembly stand adjourned until Monday, April 3, 2000, at 1:30 p.m.

[Pursuant to Government Motion 6 the Assembly adjourned at 5:17 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 3, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/04/03

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Please join me in the prayer. Father, on this day of a new beginning we ask for Your guidance in the responsibility we have undertaken and Your help in fulfilling our duties. As Members of this Legislative Assembly may we faithfully serve all Albertans and, in serving them, serve You. Amen.

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

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

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here signed by Edmontonians and surrounding area residents that is urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 281 people in the Glendon, Ashmont, Bonnyville, Mallaig area. They are petitioning "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." This is on behalf of 221 Albertans from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Gibbons, Bon Accord, Gunn, and St. Albert.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition signed by 327 Edmontonians, and this petition urges the Legislative Assembly and the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 244 residents of Edmonton and St. Albert, mostly from my constituency of Edmonton-Calder, and they "urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me today to stand and present a petition to the Legislature. This is a petition organized by Debbie Dore on behalf of her daughter Tara McDonald, and this petition asks that the Legislative Assembly require "a minimum of two people" for nighttime shifts in businesses in Alberta.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition signed by another 359 Albertans from Westlock, Leduc, Stony Plain, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Sherwood Park, and Fort Saskatchewan. This brings the total number of signatures on this petition to 8,409. The petition calls on

the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today in the House five copies of an information bulletin regarding Information Rights Week, which runs April 3 through 10. This week is initiated by the Canadian Library Association to create awareness of any citizen's rights to information as well as protection of their privacy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish today to table appropriate copies of letters to Mr. Les Pearson, principal of the William Aberhart high school and also to Mr. David Oakleaf, the school council chair for William Aberhart high school. It's a letter expressing my personal condolences and sense of loss on the tragedy at William Aberhart high school and an offer of any assistance, should it be necessary.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings. The first one is an analysis of Shouldice Hospital Limited in Ontario. This is an analysis which points out that Shouldice is an anomaly, a throwback, grandparented before public medicare was brought in, and there are no private hospitals permitted in this province by the Private Hospitals Act. That's the first one.

The second is several letters, Mr. Speaker, all opposed to Bill 11, one of them coming from the Premier's own constituents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of tablings today. The first one is a number of letters and e-mails from residents that are very, very unhappy with the government's direction in terms of health care, and I'll just read their names: Elizabeth Eddy, Mark Henderson, Wesley Eddy, Mike Hanna, Joan Leslie, Tanya Seh, Peter Stevenson, Fred Debre.

Secondly, I have sufficient copies of a letter from residents of Sherwood Park who would be very delighted to have a public debate on Bill 11.

Thirdly, I have a letter from Abe Fehr, who is part of a new organization to hold representatives accountable, including their voting pattern on Bill 11.

Thank you.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon. It's a letter to Elinor Caplan, the minister of immigration in support of Leticia Cables, the Filipino nanny that was recently deported.

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two sets of tablings. The first is from Frances Jablonca of Calgary, and the second is from July Lenek, also of Calgary. Both of them are opposed to the proposed development in Kananaskis Country and would like to bring this matter to the attention of the Premier.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table five copies of the 1999-2000 annual report for Edmonton-Riverview. This report was mailed to all of the 20,000 constituents that reside in Edmonton-Riverview over the last week, and it provides an accounting of the services and expenditures incurred by the constituency in the last fiscal year.

Thank you.

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

1:40

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. Both of them are from constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. The first one is from Mr. Ivan Whitson, and it is a letter addressed to the Premier. Bill 11 does not fool Mr. Whitson.

The second tabling is from Phyllis La Fleur on 52nd Street, and this is also a letter to the Premier. She is very disappointed in Bill 11.

Thank you.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, sir. Both reflect the concerns of themselves over the developments in Spray Valley and Kananaskis Country. The one from Ms Louise Ewadinger is in fact opposed mainly because of the grizzly bear population in the transit zone there.

The second is also concerning that same development, the Spray Lakes development. It is a letter to Mr. Gobi Singh from two Calgary residents Kathryn Fisher and Gerry Stewart, both expressing the desire that the development be stopped.

Thank you, sir.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a document prepared by the condominium advocate association. This is a very thorough collection of recommendations for amendments to Bill 16 around the Condominium Property Amendment Act.

Thank you.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a legal package which examines the WCB act, the duties and responsibilities of the board of directors. As well, this legal package also offers a number of recommendations.

Thank you very much.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I'm pleased to introduce a group of 43 from Calgary. They are parents and children from the CCHEA home school. One of the families is from my constituency of Calgary-Lougheed. This is in fact the first school group that I've had the privilege of introducing in the Legislature. The parents and children are seated in the members' gallery. I'd like to introduce them and would request that they stand after they've been introduced and that we provide them with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly upon doing so. They are Mrs. Sharon Cassley and family, Mrs. Tracy Good and family, Mrs. Cheryl Eadon and family, Mrs. Sandy Widmer and family, Mrs. Patti Boser and family, Mr. and Mrs. Brad Osborne and family, Mrs. Harriet Paul and family, Mrs. Shirley Ann Wensley and family, Mrs. Dianne Conway and family, and finally Mrs. Carrol Zacher and family.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly some guests who are with us today from the town of Foremost in southeastern Alberta. They're constituents of the Minister of Innovation and Science, so I'll be introducing them on his behalf. I'd like to introduce to you Kelly Calhoun, who is the mother of Donnie and JamieMay Calhoun. The Calhouns have been in Edmonton for the weekend and extended their stay so that they would have an opportunity to tour the Legislative Assembly. This morning I met briefly with them at lunch in the cafeteria, so they had the grand tour and even had a chance to sample our cuisine. They're seated in the members' gallery. I ask all members to give them a warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 51 very special guests from Tofield high school accompanied by very dedicated teachers, Ms Trish Loner and of course Mr. Fred Yachimec, who has visited the Assembly before. They're seated in both galleries. I would ask all of them to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two introductions today. The first one: 28 grade 10 high school students from Concordia high school located in Edmonton-Highlands, and they're accompanied by two adults, Mr. Lloyd Grosfield and Mrs. Barb Patricio. I think they are sitting on both sides of the House. I'll ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The second set of introductions, Mr. Speaker, are two young Albertans, Melissa Johnson and Kevin Flesher. Both of them are my constituents. During the noon hour today Melissa MC'd the citizens vigil rally on the steps of the Legislature, and Kevin Flesher composed a song and sang it to the same rally. I would ask both of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The evidence is clear. Petitions, town hall meetings, and poll after poll: Albertans do not want Bill 11 by odds of 3 to 1. The Angus Reid poll just released over the weekend indicates that the more people know about Bill 11, the more they oppose it. My questions today are to the minister of health. Can the minister tell us whether he and the Premier are withholding any government-funded reports or studies that would strengthen public opposition to Bill 11?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think the preamble should not go uncommented upon. There are other polls and other reports; for instance, "Exclusive poll indicates opposition to Klein plan eroding." So there are different perspectives in terms of the polling.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the overall budgetary commitment to publicizing the bill and providing supporting material, there has been an overall commitment to report on the costs of our overall communication program, and that has been stated previously in this Assembly.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the minister didn't answer the question, which was whether there were any government-funded reports or studies, one of which I'm pleased to table today. The study was, in fact, sponsored by the government and obviously suppressed for reasons which will become apparent, because the March 2000 study says, "There is no published study of the efficiency (i.e. cost and quality) of the purchase of surgical services from private facilities by public funders." Have the minister and the Premier suppressed this report to Albertans because it leads to further opposition to Bill 11?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we've had questions in the Assembly previously with respect to what has happened in the province with respect to contracting out. The examples we have right now are the surgical eye clinics in Calgary. We have indicated that the Calgary regional health authority reports that they are having more procedures done under the current contract arrangement for the same financial commitment from their budget as was previously the case.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is this minister saying that he is unaware of a government-funded study by Dr. Cam Donaldson and Gillian Currie commissioned by his department to look into the issue of private surgical facilities?

1:50

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the overall information that we have is that it's very hard to quote any particular cases and evidence here in Alberta because at this point in time we do not, except for the exceptional case of the cataract clinics in Calgary, have these clinics that she's referring to.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the report says that the work presented in this report was funded by the Institute of Health Economics through a grant by Alberta Health and Wellness. Is the minister aware or is he not aware of a report commissioned by his department?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Institute of Health Economics is a section of the University of Alberta. With respect to studies that are done in this particular area, I have portrayed the situation correctly, and that is that in terms of examples here in this province, we do not have private surgical clinics under contract except for the exceptions that I've mentioned.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier of this province told this Legislature on March 8, "If we had something to hide, if we had something to be afraid of, we would have kept this from the public." Was he referring to the government's suppression of this report paid for by their own department?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member across the way indicated in her preamble, she is saying that this is a government report. It's done through the office of health economics over at the University of Alberta, as I recall. That is part of the research that they do. Yes, we do provide funding to the University of Alberta. I think everybody is well aware of that.

MRS. MacBETH: So, Mr. Speaker, with 72 percent of Albertans saying that health is their top concern in Alberta and with the Bill 11 initiative under way, how could this minister not know about the report commissioned with taxpayers' money? Who is running the show?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do have to admit that I agree with the hon. leader, and health care is a top concern of Albertans at 72 percent. That seems to be a commonly quoted statistic. I would also like to indicate to the hon. member in the Assembly that in polling responses as reported in our Alberta Health and Wellness documents, 80 percent feel that they're getting a very good health care system provided to them in this province.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is quite an incredible revelation that the minister doesn't know about his own report. But let's go into the report, the one that was funded by his department. Given that the Premier told Albertans in his November 1999 TV address that there would not be two-tiered, American style health care in our province, why does his own government-funded research paper say that "forms of two-tierism" are likely to arise?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I heard the hon. member's statement, she is admitting that the report has not found any particular examples of two-tier services to Albertans and is making a statement, an opinion, which is not usually considered part of research; that is that in the opinion, I guess, of the author, it could arise, is likely to arise, if that's a correct quote. But I think the actual implication of her having to go to that question is that the report does not indicate there is two-tiered service here.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, how can Albertans believe a minister of health or a Premier that claims that Bill 11 isn't about padding profit margins when his own paper funded by his department says that sources of revenue other than from RHAs may be needed for private hospitals to survive financially? What is the minister's response to those kinds of issues in his own funded report?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out to the hon. member that in her own reading of the report, she has indicated that the author chooses to speculate and to say: may this, may that. Bill 11 has a very specific clause saying that there shall be no private hospitals in Alberta, and I think that is quite significant. Of course, that does not fit in with the tactics or the approach of the opposition, but the bill that we are going to be debating shortly in this Legislature is a very protective piece of legislation. No private hospitals, a whole set of other provisions in the bill designed, for instance, to deal with any possibility of excess charges and improper procedures for enhanced services and supplies: that is very much the theme of that legislation.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know what this government is saying. What they don't trust is what this government is doing in Bill 11.

Mr. Speaker, I quote again from this government-funded review: our review has shown that "private facilities, generally, provide faster access to those who can pay and . . . do offer enhanced services." How can this minister stand here and tell Albertans that his bill isn't going to do enhanced services, two-tiered health care, and on and on?

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

MR. JONSON: Because Bill 11 has specific provisions in it to deal with the whole matter of preventing queue-jumping, preventing being able to get faster service by virtue of any ability to pay. That is a very important part of this legislation.

As I've said before, it bans full-service private hospitals, Mr. Speaker. It has a number of other controls and recording procedures designed to provide for more openness with respect to any contracts that might be arrived at. It has a set of criteria designed to protect the public interest with respect to what factors a regional health authority must consider in terms of approving any contract. It is, as it's aptly named, the health protection act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite asking a leading question that didn't even mention overnight patient stays, a solid majority of Albertans are found by a recent *Calgary Herald* Angus Reid poll to oppose Bill 11. The poll also shows that what little support the government has is soft while the opposition to Bill 11 is rock solid. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why hasn't the minister sent an angry letter criticizing the *Calgary Herald* like he did last week with A-Channel when the spin-doctored question asked by the *Herald* was clearly designed to underestimate public opposition to Bill 11?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in terms of responding to surveys, I reserve the opportunity to comment on polls and their methodology if it is felt they are not appropriate, not accurate, not sound. If the *Calgary Herald* were to do a poll or use methodology which we questioned, I would certainly communicate with them.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me ask the minister another question. Why won't the minister admit that the more Albertans find out about Bill 11, the less they like it, as evidenced by this weekend's poll which shows that Albertans who have read Bill 11 strongly oppose it by a margin of 3 to 1?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we could certainly at some other time have a debate about the interpretation of various polls that are taken. My interpretation of recent polls over the weekend is something that, of course, is very good and in keeping with our intent as far as government is concerned, and that is that more people are indicating they feel fully informed with respect to the legislation. In terms of debating what the different trends may mean, that is illustrated by the article that I quoted from previously. There are different interpretations of the data that's coming in, but certainly one that I don't think is being argued with is that more Albertans are availing themselves of the information that's available, and that is what the government's intention is.

2:00

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is the government refusing to listen to the overwhelming majority of Albertans, including the president of the Capital Region Medical Staff Association, who last week described the government's proposal to contract out overnight surgeries as dumb, disastrous, and a threat to patient safety?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of that particular comment by — was it the chair of the Edmonton medical staff association? But I am aware — and it has been recorded in this House — that there are a number of prominent physicians who feel that the legislation is appropriate and will be of advantage to the overall health care system in this province.

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

Violent Crime

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Edmonton-Castle Downs are bolting down the hatches and ducking for cover. It seems like the only thing to do as a result of the recent rash of shootings. This is not the only area in the city of Edmonton to have seen the escalation of violent acts either by gang-related or nongang-related individuals. People are afraid to move freely about the streets of our city as they don't want to be an innocent bystander involved in one of these random drive-by shootings. Newspapers are filling pages detailing shootings, stabbings, robberies, and gang activities that are occurring in our city and across the province. My questions are to the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Are you working to find solutions to resolve the gang or nongang violence that is occurring almost daily? If you are, Albertans want to know what steps you have taken. When are we going to see an end to this violence?

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That may be all three questions in one; I don't know. Let me, first of all, deal with the preamble to the question, because I wouldn't want the public of Alberta or the citizens of Edmonton to believe what I believe to be a gross overexaggeration of the situation that has just been put forward. The streets in Edmonton are safe. Our communities are safe. There have been a few violent incidents. That happens in larger municipal centres, but let's not overexaggerate it. The citizens of Edmonton are not bolting for cover, are not batten-

down the hatches, and are not hiding from people in this city. This is a safe city. We have had a few incidents.

Now, to get to the details of the question. In November of 1998 an organized crime strategy was announced, and the provincial government put, I believe, \$8 million into that strategy. That strategy is working, Mr. Speaker. For example, there's a trial to begin this fall in September with respect to one of the major actions that has been taken against gangs in this province. The city of Edmonton police are working closely with the RCMP and other police jurisdictions around the province to deal with incidences of organized crime and gangs. There's good co-operation happening, good information-sharing happening, but I want to end where I started by saying: let's not exaggerate the situation and scare the citizens of Alberta. There are a few incidents that are happening, but our streets are still safe.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Minister, but in fact I've had more calls on this incident than on health care.

My first supplementary to the same minister: have you been communicating with the federal Justice minister to stop the availability of illegal firearms coming into the hands of our criminal element?

MR. HANCOCK: No, Mr. Speaker, I haven't spoken directly with the federal Minister of Justice on that issue. I know that our departments talk all the time on issues, but with respect to the question of importation of firearms, that's clearly a federal jurisdiction.

MS PAUL: My second supplementary to the same minister. The Premier offered financial assistance to the former Edmonton chief of police in dealing with gang-related incidents, which you know was refused. Is this offer still on the table?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is speculating from a news story that was printed early in January. I'm not sure that there was an incident of a specific offer of cash made. I think it was probably a response to questions relating to: if more resources were needed to combat organized crime in this province, would more resources be available? Of course, this government is very committed to combating organized crime. It's one of my department's clear objectives. It's a high priority area, and we will put forward the resources necessary to appropriately combat organized crime in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Seniors' Benefit Program

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is most definitely benefiting from a very strong economy under the leadership of this government, I might note, and the majority of our seniors lead active, independent lives. However, there are low-income seniors who are receiving help from our income support program who are having a difficult time covering rising costs, especially with rent, gas, and other services basic to shelter costs. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. What are you planning to do about this concern?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's worthy to note that Alberta has the highest threshold of qualification dollarwise of any jurisdiction in Canada, meaning that we bring in and start to assist seniors at the highest income level anywhere in Canada.

That's within the context of the advantages that you have in Alberta. In addition, this year we will have a minimum increase of 10 percent to every individual who is receiving Alberta seniors' benefit payments at this point in time. That will be coming forward with the approvals very, very shortly.

The other aspect, Mr. Speaker, that I think it's worthy to note is that Alberta is the only province with a special-needs program that addresses the very issues that have been brought forward by the hon. member. I would like to point out that we have increased the staff there, increased the budget to this program with the intention of having a much shorter wait time to have approvals for the program. I'd like to also note that the program this year has served some 6,000 people with an average payout of about \$2,700, which is considerably less than the \$5,000 maximum that would be available if they can show need.

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is to the same minister. Given that it is generally agreed that shelter costs are higher in some areas of the province than others – for example, in Calgary and Fort McMurray – are you considering a review of the Alberta seniors' benefit program to accommodate higher shelter costs in some areas of the province?

Thank you.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, we are certainly aware that in places like Canmore, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, and to some degree Calgary – anywhere you have a high degree of economic activity, shelter costs go up across the board. We've been looking at this program to see what we can do, but I think it's worthy to note that currently the province provides some 23,000 government-funded housing units in the province. These range from lodges and cottages to self-contained apartments. Quite frankly, eligibility is based on need, but I might reiterate that if people are finding themselves in dire straits, they can apply to the special-needs program.

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental is again to the same minister. Given that some middle-income seniors are just above the threshold cutoff between low- and middle-income levels and feel somewhat disadvantaged, are their concerns justified considering Alberta's total benefit plan for seniors in relation to the plans of other provinces?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, it's quite known that Alberta has the best programs for seniors of any jurisdiction. That can be shown statistically, comparatively, any way you want to look at it. I'd also like to point out that there were some 306,000 seniors in Alberta as of September of 1999. If you take one aspect, simply the health care premium, of those, 130,000 have the premium totally paid for; another 50,000 have a partial payment towards it. Quite frankly, we will be looking further at what we can do to aid seniors. We're constantly in a review process, making sure we stay ahead of the needs of the seniors to see that they live comfortably and securely in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

2:10

Private Health Services

(continued)

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no evidence to show any benefit from the contracting out of surgical operations to private

hospitals. The government claims that under Bill 11 regional health authorities will have to show through a cost-benefit analysis that contracting out surgical procedures to approved surgical facilities will be more cost-effective. My questions are to the minister of health. Why should Albertans trust anything this government says about the cost-effectiveness of private providers under Bill 11 when the report from the Institute of Health Economics done for his own department says that "it seems that in no country is there a system in place to monitor costs, quality of care or outcomes in private providers"?

MR. JONSON: The answer, Mr. Speaker, is and should be, I think, quite clear to the hon. member, and that is that we are bringing under the auspices of provincial legislation and through a contracting process the provision of surgical facilities under contract. In the legislation, as the hon. member has acknowledged through referring to one clause among many that deal with setting the rules and parameters and controls around contracts, we will have the ability to control through a contract and through the criteria through which that contract has to be arrived at the overall funds to be dedicated to that particular contract.

It also, therefore, sets the situation whereby that contract will be able to be monitored. It will be able to be costed. It will be able to be evaluated, Mr. Speaker, as the overall health care system is subject to accountability measures. So the reference to countries or other places in the world where they have a freestanding, so to speak, private health care system is really not relevant to what is contemplated in Bill 11.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the study points out on page 4 that people in rural areas tend to have lower access to health care than urban residents, the report then goes on to ask "whether the Alberta proposal would exacerbate this situation so that conditions and access would not be reasonable or uniform around major urban centres," why is the government proceeding with this privatization plan?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am fairly familiar with the rural areas of this province, and it is certainly the case, as has been acknowledged, that the full range of services cannot practically be delivered in every rural part of this province. We take the overall strategy that in our regional hospitals and in the specialized hospitals in Edmonton and Calgary we planned and we fund a wide range of very difficult, needed services which just cannot be practically provided in every centre in the province.

Bill 11 is designed to provide an option whereby in a site or in an area where there is sufficient volume and need for a specialized surgical service, it can be done under contract if, in the terms of the overall assessment that's done of a proposal, it is deemed to be an advantage for all Albertans in terms of reducing waiting lists or providing a service.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The same study on page 17 states that

there are serious issues and questions raised regarding the Alberta experience with private provision of a publicly funded service, which should be investigated seriously by a government considering further extensions of private provision.

Will the government withdraw Bill 11 until such investigations are complete?

MR. JONSON: As I've indicated in this Assembly before and I think all members of the Assembly are well aware, in terms of the delivery

of services in the overall health sector it has been for decades and is today, Mr. Speaker, a mixture of totally publicly run facilities and services, the voluntary sector – our voluntary hospitals, for instance, operate across this province – and the private sector has been involved. There is high-quality service being provided by all of those sectors.

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

National Infrastructure Program

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government has announced its intent to establish a new infrastructure program requiring funding participation from the federal, provincial, and municipal levels of government. Since the federal budget announcement many questions have been raised about this program by municipalities in my constituency and others throughout the province. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Should municipalities be budgeting now for this program, and if so, what information is available to both the province and municipalities to enable both levels to do so in a responsible manner?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: In the past the federal, provincial, and municipal infrastructure program has been a very, very successful program. Mr. Speaker, it might be wise for municipalities to consider their mid to longer range planning and prioritize what their needs may be. Unfortunately, at the present time we have very little information regarding this particular program and absolutely less detail, so we're not in a position to provide any advisement as to the nature of this program at the present time. It remains a question as to just when this information will come forward and whether indeed that information will be here in time for this coming year's budget.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you. My second question is to the same minister. While you have said that there is very little information, I'm wondering if you might enlarge upon what the individual municipalities might be eligible to receive?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: As I pointed out, Mr. Speaker, there are very few details and very little information regarding this program. What we do know is that the federal government has said that it will provide \$100 million for the year 2000-2001 budget, \$350 million for the year 2001-2002 budget and \$550 million for the four years following that. These moneys would need to be matched by the province as well as the municipalities. However, I should point out that the details are certainly not there and are very, very sketchy at the present time.

Mr. Speaker, it's completely unknown as to what portion Alberta will receive as well. We would be assuming that we would be receiving approximately 10 percent, which would be on a per capita basis, but there is no guarantee that this is going to be the case. If that were the case, if we received 10 percent of the overall on a per capita basis, that means that Alberta would qualify for something like \$205 million over the six-year period of this program. Therefore, municipalities would be asked to contribute on an equal basis. When you put it into the perspective that indeed the federal government collects well over \$600 million a year in fuel tax alone, \$205 million over six years certainly is not what we consider a fair share to be returned to this province: to the municipalities or to the province.

Obviously there are some major anomalies in the overall program. Nevertheless, we're still awaiting the details as they may come forward.

MR. JOHNSON: My final question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Can he advise as to what process will be used in finalizing details of the federal infrastructure program? In light of recent federal actions in the agriculture sector will Alberta be included?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will do our very best to negotiate an amount of the expected dollars that were announced recently by the minister responsible for infrastructure. If it's done on a population basis, it should be at least 10 percent. However, there has been some talk now in circles in Ottawa that they would be looking at block funding for individual provinces and then do some part of the residual amount in a population grant. That would be grossly unfair. This is the province where we see a large increase in wealth, and it's the wealth that's being produced here in the province that's taxed by the federal government and goes back to Ottawa.

2:20

So at the end of the day we hope that we see a fair share, at least 10 percent, and as the Minister of Municipal Affairs said, 10 percent of the \$100 million in the first year is \$10 million. We would hope that all of that goes directly into very hard infrastructure: roads, water projects. No Zambonis this time; we're out of that business.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans realize that the Premier and his Minister of Health and Wellness have been less than forthright about their plan to privatize our health care system. [interjections] That's what's happening. Today we had yet another example from one of the government's own reports which contradicts what the minister and the Premier have been trying to tell us. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why should Albertans trust this minister's claim that their private health care scheme will reduce costs and waiting lists when your own report says that "there were no comparative studies of effects on costs per day, cost per case, total hospital costs, quality of care or health outcome"? Where's your evidence for Bill 11?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, they seem to quote selectively from the report. For instance, reading from page 28, since that has evidently been the approach of the opposition, it indicates that

the most common result of these studies is that no differences in efficiency were detected between for-profit and not-for-profit hospitals.

Keep in mind, of course, that we're not talking about full service, private hospitals in Bill 11.

This was the case for five of the studies reviewed. Two [other] studies found that for-profit hospitals are more efficient. One study found that not-for-profits performed worse.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is an overall analysis that's been provided, and it does not have the overwhelming, consistent negative message that the opposition across the way is portraying. I think it is quite a balanced report of what does exist in some parts of North America and, for that matter, the world. It does provide useful information, but it doesn't reach the conclusions that are being portrayed by those across the way.

MS LEIBOVICI: Right at the beginning it says that the main finding of this study is that "there is no published study of the efficiency . . .

of the purchase of surgical services from private facilities by public funders."

My second question is again to the minister. This government-funded report states that extra costs will be involved in contracting out to private providers. How can the minister tell Albertans that this is in the best public interest?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think it would be helpful, and we will certainly commend the report to all members of the Assembly to read for themselves, because the report is quite balanced, I think, in the information that they have provided. They indicate quite clearly in the report that they had no particular example to quote where you had a private surgical facility entering into a contract under the types of controls and protections which are imbedded in Bill 11. That is what is quite important with respect to the overall protective features of Bill 11. Built right into the legislation that we're proposing to the Assembly is the set of controls which address and provide for the determination of the various issues and advantages that are referred to in our overall presentation of the bill.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, before you proceed, please. A number of hon. members today have really violated the rule with respect to preambles, so get to your question, please, hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why won't the minister just stop the experiment and pull the bill?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the overall legislation, Bill 11, has a number of very important provisions in it, including the one the member is focusing on, and that is the very extensive section which deals with the criteria that would have to be met through private firms or voluntary firms, nonprofit firms, bidding for and obtaining a contract to provide a select, narrow range of surgical services. There are a number of other features in the bill, which I will not try to go through in question period, such as the prohibition on queue-jumping, the openness of contracts, and so forth that, if their memories are not too short, the members across the way have from time to time indicated they're in favour of.

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

Health Care System

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Reflecting questions from a number of my Calgary-Fort constituents, I would like to ask our Minister of Health and Wellness: given that our public health care insurance program is the foundation for our much-valued health care system in Alberta, is there any legislation to protect our public health care insurance program in terms of changes in premiums and coverage?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we do raise about 12 to 13 percent of our overall health budget through the charging of premiums, and the authority for this charge is through the Health Insurance Premiums Act. It is a piece of legislation approved by this Assembly. The rationale for premiums was that there should be an obvious charge to Albertans to support the health care system. It's a very important service, one that Albertans value very highly, and as I've noted, it is a small percentage of the overall health care budget.

As far as the changing of rates in terms of the premiums, Mr. Speaker, they've not been changed in this province since 1995, and

they are rapidly going down as a proportion of our overall spending on health care in the province.

MR. CAO: Well, thank you, Mr. Minister. My first supplementary question is also to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How is our health care insurance coverage decided in terms of insured persons and insured services, and are there any insured services covered in Alberta and not covered in other provinces?

MR. JONSON: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, we provide a wider range of coverage of individual health care services than, I think, pretty well any other province in Canada. Some of the areas where we provide total or partial coverage that is not provided in all provinces would be in the whole area of chiropractic treatments, in the whole area of physiotherapy. Those would be two of the key examples. Also, the way that we limit charges that are provided to individuals in long-term care is not uniform across the province. Overall in our coverage we certainly comply totally with and, as I say, far beyond the provisions of the Canada Health Act.

In addition to that, I think it should be pointed out that for low-income seniors we have partial or total forgiveness or no charges for people in that category, also low-income Albertans that are on assistance programs. So it is a charge which is sensitive to the relative ability of Albertans to pay, and it is established on that basis.

2:30

MR. CAO: Thank you. My last supplementary question is also to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the revenue from our public health care insurance premium payments in comparison to our total public health care expense?

MR. JONSON: We collect in health care premiums, Mr. Speaker, I believe in the neighbourhood of \$650 million, and as I indicated earlier, in terms of a percentage it is in that 15 percent range as far as its proportion of the health care budget.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has promised time and time again that Bill 11 would not lead to queue-jumping, so let's put that promise to a little test this afternoon. I have three questions, all for the Minister of Health and Wellness, and each one of the questions is based on the study entitled *The Public Purchase of Private Surgical Services: a Systematic Review of the Evidence on Efficiency and Equity*. My question first to the minister would be this: how can Albertans trust this government when it promises to prevent queue-jumping when its own report says – and it's right here on page 6 – that

complications will arise however where surgeons are permitted to offer 'enhanced medical services' in private hospitals, as is currently the case in Alberta . . . Thus, the package of enhanced medical services includes . . . faster access to care (i.e. queue-jumping) for those willing and able to pay?

MR. JONSON: Well, there are three or four things that need to be said in answer to the question, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the provisions of Bill 11 provide for legislation which will put in law a set of provisions to prevent the whole issue of queue-jumping or being able to get faster service by virtue of your ability to pay, whether it's your ability to pay for getting the service up front, so to

speak, or whether it's your ability to pay by purchasing something else that might be attractive or get you advanced in the line. So that is the purpose of the legislation.

The other thing that should be acknowledged here is that the provision of uninsured services is part of our overall health care system. We have the whole area of cosmetic surgery. That is one of the areas of service that is not insured under the Canada Health Act or under our own health care insurance provisions, but it does happen and is paid for in our system.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, since it may be that this Minister of Health and Wellness may be the only person in the province that doesn't understand: enhanced services are enabled by Bill 11, not prohibited.

Mr. Speaker, how can Albertans trust this government when it promises to prevent queue-jumping when its own report says:

The forms of two-tierism that will result from this are, firstly, receipt of different quality services according to ability to pay and, secondly, likely receipt of 'enhanced' services quicker (i.e. queue-jumping)?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think there is something, you know, with the comments across the way and the question, that should be pointed out, and that is that the position of the Liberal Party across the way and their leader is that doctors should be free to opt out of the health care system, operate entirely on their own, and also it would be fine for anybody who could qualify and I guess get the approval of the College of Physicians and Surgeons to set up a hospital and charge Albertans directly. I'm sure that they would charge and would be very appreciative of those that could pay more to get faster service.

In other words, the Liberals are on record, at least their leader is, as having a completely private system in this province outside of the public system with all the difficulties and so on that they seem to be concerned about with respect to queue-jumping and so on which are being addressed in a positive way in Bill 11. That is the Liberal position over there. So I'm really quite amazed that they're concerned about these things since that is their overall policy and position.

Now, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the legislation there is provision in the bill, as the member across the way well knows, to deal with the whole issue of limiting the charges with respect to any kind of enhanced service, with respect to preventing queue-jumping for insured services by virtue of a person's ability to pay. Those are provisions in the legislation, and we need that legislation to deal with those types of situations.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta's record when it comes to cataract surgery and MRI treatment speaks for itself, I would ask this minister my final question. How is it that we might expect Albertans to trust this government with respect to Bill 11 when its own commissioned report says, "If patients start requesting such services, they will be offered, and, if surgeons start offering such services, they will be taken up."

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know about Albertans trusting the hon. member across the way, because he forgets to read, of course, all of the relevant sections of a particular report. For instance, when he was talking about queue-jumping and two-tierism, as I think he was referring to, the report goes on to say in the section he was quoting from: this is a form for two-tierism and would, therefore, contravene the Alberta government policy. So it would be useful if they would report the whole.

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before we conclude question period, I would just like to advise all hon. members that a review of Orders of the Day and the scheduled motion – in light of certain bills scheduled to be debated over the next several days, the chair would like to remind all hon. members about Standing Order 23(e), which provides that

a member will be called to order by the Speaker if . . . that member . . .

(e) anticipates, contrary to good parliamentary practice, any matter already on the Order Paper or on notice for consideration on that day.

The chair has commented numerous times that questions concerning the content of a bill will be out of order if the bill is scheduled to be debated that day. As the chair indicated in its March 3, 1998, ruling on this subject, found on page 649 of *Hansard* for that day, this Speaker "will give the greatest degree of flexibility to private members when they choose to rise in this . . . Assembly." Of course, this latitude is tempered by the rules which members themselves have chosen to be governed by. Accordingly, the chair simply wants to remind members about Standing Order 23(e) so that no one is caught off guard in the next few days.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, a few seconds from now we'll call upon the first of seven hon. members to participate in Recognitions, but prior to that will you all join me in congratulating the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on reaching another milestone in his life. Happy birthday.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Provincial Midget B Hockey Championship

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. March 24 to 26 Three Hills and Trochu arenas were the sites of the 1999-2000 provincial midget B hockey championships. I extend congratulations to the towns of Three Hills and Trochu as well as all the sponsors, volunteers, fans, and players for making it such a successful event, drawing packed crowds to enjoy the display of top-notch hockey and sportsmanship provided by young hockey players from Whitecourt, Winfield, Lac La Biche, Sexsmith, Drumheller, Taber, Sedgewick, and the Three Hills area. I extend a special congratulations to the Three Hills Chiefs, who are a young team with only six second-year players and a very young coaching staff, on their outstanding level of play and their success at winning the gold medal for provincial midget B hockey by winning it five games straight with no losses. An outstanding achievement in light of the good competition, and I'm sure the fans got to preview some of the stars of the future.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

2:40

Val and Flora Matteotti

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the 17th of March the Member for Lethbridge-West and I had a chance to attend the 13th annual management scholarship fund-raising dinner. Each year the Faculty of Management honours businesspeople in our community. This year they chose to honour Val and Flora Matteotti, and I want to congratulate Mr. and Mrs. Matteotti today for the fact that they support our community in such a broad-based way. They have given to numerous causes in our community, but they really favour sports,

health, and education because, as they say, these require discipline and dedication to succeed. The sports teams that have been supported in our community have been numerous, and Mrs. Matteotti is quite proud when she says, as she has on a number of occasions, that when she looks out on the community, she has more than 2,500 children.

This family shows what it is to contribute to the community. They've put their money back into our community to make it strong, and everybody in our community thanks them for doing that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

Amy Fox

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to rise today to pay tribute to one of my young constituents who has received one of the highest honours a high school student in Canada can receive. Amy Fox, a grade 12 student from Hay Lakes school, a small school of 70 students, has succeeded in winning both the Canadian merit scholarship, valued at \$45,000, and the Morehead scholarship, valued at \$100,000. The Canadian merit scholarship must be applied to a Canadian university, whereas the J.M. Morehead scholarship must be applied to the University of North Carolina. Both scholarships pay for tuition and living expenses for four years of study.

Amy first heard about these scholarships from her school guidance counselor, Mr. Lyseng. Although she was competing with students from large schools, the competition interviewers were amazed at her capabilities considering she came from such a small school. Amy herself believes that going to a small high school is a great advantage in that she knows the teachers and they know her. She believes she has excellent teachers and appreciates how everything is personalized. Students who receive these scholarships are assessed on values beyond those visible on academic transcripts, though Amy's marks are between 94 and 96 percent. Candidates must show good character, service to the community, and entrepreneurial energy, all of which Amy expresses through interest in 4-H, her school paper, her students' union work, and the 15 hours of dance she takes per week in Wetaskiwin.

I would like to commend Amy Fox for her achievement and wish her the best of luck in the future.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, notwithstanding the merit of the recognition comments, the time allocation is one minute.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

CIAU Hockey Championship

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my very great honour and privilege today to recognize the University of Alberta Golden Bears hockey team. The Bears won their second consecutive CIAU hockey championship last weekend. They defeated the University of New Brunswick Varsity Reds, and CIAU player of the year, Russ Hewson, scored the winning goal eight minutes into the second overtime. This win ties the Bears with the University of Toronto for a record of 10 university cups. This championship also brings the U of A the prestige of winning a total of nine medals in the 1999-2000 season, the most won by the university in a single year. Special recognition goes to coach Rob Daum, U of A defenceman Mike Garrow, and forwards Kevin Marsh and Ryan Wade, who were named to the all-star team. Kevin Marsh also was named tournament MVP. Russ Hewson was named CIAU player of the year, and goaltender Clayton Pool received CIAU rookie of the year honours.

The hardworking and dedicated men who form the Bears hockey

team deserve tremendous respect and admiration for their accomplishments and for bringing the CIAU banner home again to the University of Alberta. Congratulations, Bears.

THE SPEAKER: Once again, hon. members, notwithstanding the merits of the statement being in place, the time allocation is one minute.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

California School Field Trip Deaths

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Students at two Calgary high schools, William Aberhart and Bowness, returned to their classes this morning. Today, as they have been since March 25, they will be mourning the loss of two fellow students and one parent, Barbara Clement, a 45-year-old mother of two, a wife and active member of the community and lover of the outdoors, fatally swept out to sea by a rogue wave. Brodie McDonald and David Elton lost their lives while trying to save her. Brodie McDonald was described as someone loved by all, a boy with a kind and giving nature. He enjoyed and was excited by the outdoors and saw a future career there. David Elton, like Brodie, was participating in the Lost Coast hike in northern California because of his keen interest in the outdoors and his leadership skills.

There's no explaining why tragedies occur, why bad things sometimes happen to good people. What we do know is that three individuals, Calgarians and Albertans, lost their lives doing something they enjoyed doing. One of them was giving her time and energy to assist a group of young Albertans to better understand and enjoy and appreciate the natural environment. Two of them, young men with bright futures before them, were experiencing their love of the outdoors.

On behalf of all of the Assembly we express our appreciation and sympathy to the families and the community.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Dominion Seniors Legion Curling

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past week Spruce Grove saw some of the finest curling in Canada. The Dominion Seniors Curling Championship took place at the Spruce Grove Agrena. This grand event was hosted by the Spruce Grove Legion branch 281, and this event was organized by a strong team of volunteers chaired by Blaine Price. Along with excellent curling there was a spousal program which allowed the hosts to show off the many tourism highlights in our area. Tuesday night the Calmar Legion hosted a banquet and combined it with their mortgage-burning party. Thursday night the team from Newfoundland cooked a caribou for the teams, and Spruce Grove hosted the closing banquet, that recognized the winning team from Ontario.

Our thanks and recognition to the Spruce Grove Legion for their continued commitment to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Preambles

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, you did reference it earlier during your remarks. I'd like to refer to Standing Order 13(1), "the Speaker shall preserve order and decorum and shall decide questions of order." I kept a very close eye on the progres-

sion of the questions through the House today, and I'd like to recap for you what occurred.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition during her first question, first supplemental, tabled a report and gave a rather lengthy preamble. During her second question, first supplemental, she gave another lengthy preamble. During her third question, in both the first supplemental and second supplemental, she again provided us with a lengthy preamble. It was at that point in time I believe I raised a point of order.

I'm happy to say that the leader of the third party actually complied with the rules. We then went to the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, who came awfully close. However, in her second supplemental she also gave us a lengthy preamble. The Member for Lethbridge-East: I'm quite pleased to say that he skillfully crafted his introduction so as not to actually offend the House rules. We then went to Edmonton-Meadowlark; in the first supplemental there was a lengthy preamble and also a response to the minister's response. At that time, Mr. Speaker, you interrupted, prior to the second supplemental being asked, and you indicated that a number of members had actually offended the rules of the House and directed the member to go straight to her question. Notwithstanding that advice, the Member for Calgary-Bufferalo provided us with a preamble in the form of an argumentative response with respect to his first supplemental and gave us another preamble as part of his second supplemental.

Mr. Speaker, the House leaders' agreement was executed some years ago, and my simple point of order is to request, when there is any deviation from that House leader agreement, that you please intervene immediately regardless of the side of the House which happens to be offending the House leader agreement. Unfortunately, because these lengthy preambles take up so much of question period, we did not get to as many questions today as I felt we could have.

So again I ask that you enforce the terms of the House leader agreement and in particular, if the House leader agreement is being offended by a member very early in question period, that you intervene at that time. That will hopefully preclude any further such infractions with respect to such agreement.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader on this point. 2:50

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, you know, sometimes when lawyers plead a weak case, you use what's called a scattergun approach, which is that you absolutely throw everything in front of the judge and hope something sticks. What's curious is that I saw him rise on a point of order, but much of what he has talked about are things that happened subsequent. If he's going to offer us his colour commentary on 50 minutes of question period, one would hope he would have also addressed the numerous breaches that we witnessed on the part of those people responding to questions.

So you intervened, Mr. Speaker. We heard your admonitions, certainly in terms of anticipation, but I think there's been no legitimate point of order raised other than a general lament that that particular minister, that particular government representative didn't like the tone of question period today. But unless we're going to go through and systematically deal with every breach of question period on both sides of the House, I'm not sure where his intervention takes us.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. members. Several very interesting things occurred in the last 10 days. One had an opportunity to

review *Hansard* for the last 10, 15, 20 years, and one conclusion that this particular Speaker came to was the conclusion that whenever there have been House leaders in the House who were not trained in the law, there is a corresponding reduction in the number of points of order that are raised in question period. So I find it interesting today that in essence the two distinguished leaders, the Deputy Government House Leader and the Opposition House Leader, both do happen to be, coincidentally, trained in matters of the law and both chose to participate in the point of order today.

Interestingly enough, I suspect if one then says that in a court of law we throw out information and then we ask for adjudication, one would hope, though, that one would provide all of the information rather than just perhaps pertinent points that might be beneficial to one particular cause.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order that basically – and I quote from the Blues when the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition rose and said:

Mr. Speaker, Albertans know what this government is saying. What they don't trust is what this government is doing in Bill 11.

Then she went on.

Mr. Speaker I quote again from this government-funded review: our review has shown that private facilities generally provide faster access to those who can pay and do offer enhanced services.

Then the question.

How can this minister stand here and tell Albertans that his bill isn't going to do enhanced services, two-tiered health care, and on and on?

So, in essence, there definitely was a supplemental with respect to this third question, and it definitely does violate clause 5(4) of the April 30, 1997, House leaders' agreement. No doubt about that. So from that perspective there absolutely is a point of order.

I note, however, that no one rose on a point of order when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs provided her question, but preceding her question she did say the following, which was clearly a preamble, "I've had more calls on this" issue, meaning crime, "than on health care," and then proceeded to go on to raise her question. It's always of interest to see that again no one rose a point of order with respect to that particular preamble.

I might add that the hon. Member for Calgary-West in her third question was definitely seeking opinions and asking for an opinion with respect to that, yet some leverage was provided to that, she being an honourable hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, in the chair's view, in his third question gave a very long preamble prior to arriving at his third question.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark on the second question gave a very long preamble. There was an interjection following that. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark quickly came to the point.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose was certainly on the edge – on the edge – in seeking opinions with respect to his question.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo did, obviously, give a very long preamble prior to arriving at his second question.

So there's been a bit of give-and-take, but the good point about all of this today was that there were 11 questions, allowing us to arrive at 33 questions in all, which is just slightly above average. However, the chair last week did have an opportunity to go to an adjoining parliament and visit the parliament of British Columbia. In British Columbia their daily question period is 15 minutes – I repeat, underline: 15 minutes – and in the parliament of British Columbia there were in that 15 minutes 12 questions and answers. Twelve questions and answers in 15 minutes. We arrived today with

33 questions and answers. They in British Columbia had 12 questions. I just say that as a bit of a comparative.

The bottom line of this was very correctly provided for us by the Deputy Government House Leader, who did basically say that the conclusion to all of this is that fewer members have a chance to ask a question. In today's question period there were eight hon. members who still did not have an opportunity to ask a question, and when you recognize that there has been a brief adjournment of the House for a few days, one can conclude that those eight hon. members had matters of importance with respect to this.

So thank you very much, Deputy Government House Leader, for raising the point of order. You win. Thank you very much, Official Opposition House Leader, for participating in this. Thank you all very much for the joy of having this daily intervention.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 16

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Bow I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 16, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow in 1996 sponsored a condominium property amendment act that actually received royal assent but was never proclaimed after stakeholders expressed strong concerns with some of the amendments. Therefore, a working group of condominium owners and developers was formed in August of last year to address these concerns. The amendments that are before you in Bill 16 have been unanimously recommended by a working group of people representing both condominium owners and developers. The members of this group are to be congratulated for finding a common ground to resolve the often opposing views of condominium stakeholders. These amendments will also fine-tune and clarify the legislation and will allow for greater flexibility without eroding the consumer protection that it also affords.

Going through Bill 16, Mr. Speaker, you'll find that the first amendments add some definitions to the act. Section 3 of the 1996 act is then repealed. This section allowed for individuals to discharge blanket mortgages under certain conditions. Mortgagees have shown that this is not a workable practice, and the proposal to delete this section is also supported by the consumer representatives. Section 8 has been clarified following the new definitions.

One of the key amendments, Mr. Speaker, allows condominium developers access to more of the funds that are held in trust pending completion of a condominium development. In fact, instead of requiring 50 percent to be held back, an amount that developers complained was unrealistic and truly is, section 11 now ties the amount to be held back in trust to the amount required to complete the project. This ensures developers have access to funds as they complete their project. It still ensures that there is enough in trust to protect the purchaser.

The next few amendments have been requested by condominium corporations. At present, Mr. Speaker, a corporation may not amend its legal condominium plan once the plan has been registered at the land titles office. Section 14.1 will allow for suitable mechanisms to amend a plan as required. Section 21 clarifies the voting rights of

owners and mortgagees at board meetings. The new section 29 allows corporations to go to small claims court to recover damages and sanctions up to the limit in force under the Provincial Court Act. Section 33 allows corporations to charge interest on the balance of any unpaid condominium fees, but the rate will be capped in the regulations.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, corporations in the insurance industry told us that the insurance requirements in section 38 were unworkable. As a result, they have been moved to regulation to allow for flexibility as insurance instruments change from time to time.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Bill 16 brings these amendments and those of the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 1996, into force on September 1, 2000. This will allow time to develop both the regulations required for this legislation and the information and educational materials that condominium stakeholders are asking for. Hopefully, this will bring a close to a long battle over having an amended Condominium Property Act.

I'd also like to say a special thanks on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Bow, Mr. Speaker, to the condominium stakeholder groups and the critics from the side opposite, who have sat down and reviewed this bill and are all in agreement with the process. I know she wanted me to thank you for your co-operation and diligence in being briefed on what the intentions were.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Bow.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today to speak to Bill 16, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, which is amendments to the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 1996. Changes to the act are long overdue and are as a result of a legislative review process that has been under way in Alberta for at least 10 years. While Alberta legislation on condominiums was one of the first in the country, it has since lagged behind other jurisdictions and is no longer up to date, considering that we started in 1980 and up to 1996 and so on.

Mr. Speaker, in 1996 Bill 23 was introduced with proposed changes to the Condominium Property Act. Some of the changes included removal of the unanimous resolution, recognition of phased developments, coverage of all condominiums, and mandatory reserve funds. The Condominium Property Amendment Act, 1996, was passed and received royal assent but was never proclaimed because of the strong concern expressed by stakeholders. In 1999 under the present minister thankfully this was carried forward and the working group formed by the government proceeded with this process. The passage of this legislation will allow not only the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000, to come into effect but also the amendments of the act in 1996.

It should be noted that the bill is developer driven and caters more to their concerns. What we're noticing in section 11 is the focus that the bill panders more to the developer than was originally intended when they drafted regulations in 1996 in Bill 23.

Many of the changes in section 11 of the Condominium Property Act help to provide better consumer protection. First, it gives a much more extensive and detailed definition of common property. Secondly, it allows for money to be held in trust for those things promised in the purchase agreement. Thirdly, it puts into the act the right of a corporation or interested party to go to court if the developer has not met the requirements. The bill also clarifies the voting right of the insurance coverage.

Passage of this bill will allow the Condominium Property Act, 1996, to be brought into force. What I'm noticing and realizing is that what the group and the organization is looking forward to is September 1 for actually putting it into existence.

When studying the bill, one of the concerns jumping out at us and from some of the stakeholders we have talked to is that it does not touch upon the condo fees. Is it pressure from the banks that condo fees were given such a low priority compared to the mortgages when recovering the fees? Self-regulation is a question we did ask in the meeting when we were briefed. People contacted feel that the lack of enforcement is a severe problem and do not see the act as a self-regulation. We should note that there have been four prosecutions under the condominium act and only one actual conviction. The concern with the enforcement is that it is left up to the consumer, who does not have the resources or the skills to enforce them. It's a major item that was brought back to us from the information that has been e-mailed to us so far.

After perusing Bill 16 and believing that it's a good compromise and may be a workable piece of legislation with some amendments coming forward in the later process, the main thing we want to emphasize in this is that why the bill is a good, workable piece of legislation is that it defines, fine-tunes, and clarifies the existing condominium act, considering that, as mentioned before, we never did enact the 1996 bill and the original bill was in place since 1980 with very few changes in that time period. It brings the Alberta condominium laws up to date.

It improves the amendments first made in the condominium act of 1996 to tie the amount of money held in trust to the costs of completion. Stakeholders are happy to see the many changes in regard to the developer and trust moneys and feel this will definitely protect the public in a more certain manner. This, in fact, was one of the stakeholders' main items that was present from the Alberta Real Estate Association back in '96. It allows condominiums to be built in phases. With this process in this bill, it will protect the rights of the condominium owners while allowing the builders to finance their project more easily.

As we're looking through different items and getting e-mails in from different people, they're talking about this new condominium amendment act, which was tabled and now is in second reading, and the processes to protect the rights of the condominium owners while allowing the builders to finance their projects more easily. Reserve fund requirements are now in the act, and there are now provisions for phasing condominiums with consumer protection built in. I wish it were a little bit stricter and that the holdback was considerably more, but if we are going to have a condominium, the condominium's developer has to be able to proceed with the project.

As the 1996 act stood, the builder had to hold back 50 percent of the sales proceeds until the project was completed. In a typical project the builder would not be able to discharge the project mortgage on the home and give title to the home buyer until the project was completed. By and large, with a phased project this could mean that for three to five years all the money would be set up in trust, and nobody benefits in that period of time. It means that they couldn't give title to the unit until the whole project was built. It also creates a cash flow problem for the whole development.

This is a major concern that, from what I'm understanding in talking to different stakeholders, we have to bring out. I hope that during our discussion we will be talking more and more about the type of builders that are in this game. Are we presenting a better product out there with condominiums than what we did see back in the 1970s and early '80s?

We're looking at what was in the paper this past weekend on the condominium over in Mill Woods, that people were evacuated

because of fungus growing and so on. We're also looking at a number of condominium projects in my constituency that were built back 30 years ago. With the condominium boards and the fighting that's going on as they are trying to bring them into shape, they're finding out it's what isn't behind the walls that is the main concern.

The current act also mandates that every corporation must have a reasonable reserve fund and a chunk of money set aside for major nonannual repairs such as reshingling the roofs or fixing collapsed sewers. Under the current legislation there is no requirement that condominium corporations keep a reserve fund.

Other items dealt with in this new act include changes in voting rights of the condominium owners, mortgages that are more than 30 days in arrears, their fees, and clarification with respect to condominium insurance.

As we read some of the concerns that were given to us, insurance is a major, major item. Many owners of condominiums are not properly insured. Maybe there will be some enactments, some different things within this bill and with the regulations coming forward so that people will start to understand what type of insurance they should have. As we read different articles, people honestly don't know. A lot of people are still getting what they call a package that they think is the right one, and then condo owners often don't know what their insurance is and what is covered under this.

Mr. Speaker, this bill I hope will be talked about a lot. I believe that there are a lot of members on our side who would like to speak to this and bring up different concerns that were brought forward to us by the discussion group recommendations that were tabled today.

So as I sit down, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad of the opportunity to enter into the debate in second reading of Bill 16, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000.

As I was going over all the information around this bill and the background on it, I found that sometimes MLAs have to become instant experts when they're debating a bill. I'll admit that I've never been a condo owner, so I've had to do a fair amount of groundwork in understanding this. What I can say is that there are a large number of condominiums in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre. We have had a lot of rental apartments converted into condominiums. We've had warehouses and even office buildings converted into condominium residences. I think in just one section, one district of Edmonton-Centre – and that's the district of Oliver – in 1998 we had more than 12,000 units, and that is climbing every day.

Obviously a lot of people have a great interest in condominium living. I know that for many people it is an economic decision, but for others it's a lifestyle decision. The importance of having comprehensive legislation and I think strong consumer protection is very important. So to the question, "Do we need some legislation on condominium development and ownership?" yes, indeed we do. This bill, Bill 16, the amendment act for 2000 – is this it? I'm going to reserve my opinion on that one. I will be listening very intently to the debate, but I have a number of questions.

I'll note that this seems to have been a struggle for the government. The '96 legislation was amending the 1980 legislation, but it was never proclaimed, and that was a surprise to me as a starting MLA. One of the first calls I had from a constituent was: when is this bill going to be proclaimed? I phoned up and made my way through all the different employees and finally got somebody that said: well, we're having trouble with the regulations; probably six

months from now. So I phoned back in six months. "Well, no. They're still working on it. Maybe six months later." I have phoned every six months for the three-plus years I've been elected, and every time I'm told that it might be coming. So I'm glad to see that there's at least an amendment act that I can debate.

One of the things I've noticed is that there do seem to be two distinct interest groups around this bill. One is the developers, the builders, the home warranty people, those folks, and the other is the owners. Even amongst the owners there are some differences, because there seem to be owners who in fact own a condominium but don't live in it and those who both own it and do live in it. That affects the way they make decisions about the condominium association.

I do note that I had received a letter from the Canadian Condominium Institute, which, according to who was listed, seemed to be representing a lot of the builders' side and the builders' interests. They were very keen on the bill and said: "Dear MLA. We've worked with the minister. We got invited into the consultations. We're gung ho on the bill. It's a great bill. Pass it quickly." I said: "Okay. Fine."

Then I also received documentation from a group called the Condominium Advocate Association, and they are representing owners. They're pointing out that they have some reservations and some concerns, and they want some changes. Actually, earlier today during tablings I did table a copy of the document they prepared in which they were suggesting a number of amendments. But they didn't mention that they had had a cozy working relationship with the minister and were invited into meetings. I thought: well, maybe they just didn't mention it in the letter. So I followed up and contacted the group and said: "Well, were you asked to the meetings? Were you invited? Were you included?" They said, "No, we weren't." I thought: oh, dear; that's a concern. I'm sure the minister will be able to talk about why that group wasn't included.

I am very concerned that this be a bill that has balance in it and that is fair and is equitable. There are obviously two different parties, and I think it's absolutely critical that both sides are well represented. If anything, I will probably end up showing a bias in favour of the owners, because I find that those are the people that really end up with everything. The developers are gone, have moved on to other projects, but the owners are still there and are having to deal with whatever is left. So I do hope that if this bill does pass, we're able to craft it into a bill that is equitable for all interested parties.

Now, plain English. I can think of a few other bills in which it's more important, but boy, is it important in this bill. This affects the most intimate part of people's lives: where they live, their home, and how things go on around their home and the control they have over what happens in their home and just outside the door. Plain English is absolutely critical because individual Albertans out there will have to be sitting with this bill and going through it. It is going to guide them as to how they run their life, their home. I don't think many of them are going to be able to have a lawyer sit down with them while they go through it.

I think part of the reason that we need very clear, plain English legislation on this is that we've had a very long history of home ownership, and I think that most people, even if they don't own their home, have got a pretty good idea of what's involved with it. There's a lot of common knowledge about the obligations and responsibilities of home ownership, and by that I mean detached single-family dwellings, just to be clear about it. I think much less is known about the ins and outs of condo ownership, and I started out by saying that indeed I had had to phone a number of people and say, "Okay; tell me how this works," just so that I understood what was going on here.

Now, I have some reservations or concerns. It's actually a puzzlement. I was listening carefully to what the minister was saying as she introduced the bill, and I think my concerns may have been alleviated, but I'll put it on record nonetheless. We're all aware that the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 1996, was indeed passed and received royal assent but was never proclaimed. This 2000 amendment act is amending the 1996 act, which has never been proclaimed. I'm really hoping that in fact the '96 act is going to be proclaimed because otherwise this gets really confusing, where we're amending something that still isn't going to be proclaimed. I see the minister nodding at me, I see others nodding at me, but I'd like to get her on the record with that one because it sure would be a mess if we didn't.

One of the other issues that I have run across while I've been researching this is how quickly this whole area of condo ownership has changed. When I spoke to my mom, she told me she bought her condo in 1980. At that time the whole concept of condominium ownership was so new that she told me that a number of her good friends and advisers were cautioning her about whether she really wanted to get involved in this as yet unproven business, and boy, she really had to question whether she was making a wise move here. That's a mere 20 years ago. This entire idea and everything around it has moved very quickly, and I would like to see something in the legislation that allows for updating on a more regular basis. I noted somewhere that the sponsoring member had suggested a sunset clause with a five-year review in it. Now, I haven't actually run across that in the legislation. If it's not in there and it was going to be amended or put in there, may I suggest that it be a much faster review process, more like two years, just given how quickly everything is changing in this sector.

3:20

I think for me it's very important that this condominium act should have very clear consumer protection. In fact, that's what it should be. It should be a bill about consumer protection. If you do buy a single-family, detached home, you know what you're getting into. You know that you are responsible for everything: taxes, improvements, your good relationship with your neighbours. If you fail to maintain your property, well, you lose. You didn't do the right things, and you will pay for it. The value will go down, and you'll get less when you sell your home. But condos are different in that decision-making, for instance, is done by a board of directors. It can in some cases be hard for an individual to know whether all the paperwork is being done, whether the bills are being paid, whether the maintenance is being done properly, whether there's enough money in a reserve fund.

Yet that individual, that condo owner, has to bear the consequences of this decision-making process, which they are not or may not necessarily be involved with. They are bearing these consequences through their home and through their pocketbook, so I think it's very important that full disclosure is built into the clauses of this bill, that all the information is up front, and that there is a system that allows individual owners to be able to scrutinize the work of the board of the association without tying their hands. I'm not recommending miles and miles of red tape here. I think it's important that we be sensible and use common sense for this.

Even in just chatting the last few days and saying that I was going to be debating this bill, I've had people say: "Oh, yeah. This is what happened with us. The board decided to do such and such, and we didn't know about it until afterwards." Well, I'm sure there are just as many complaints on the other side from the board associations going: "Why won't this owner pay their condominium fees, for heaven's sake? What are we supposed to run this thing on?

Buttons?" So it's important that there be as much disclosure and sharing of information as possible so that all parties can make informed decisions.

Under that same category, some people had talked to me about the ability of the owners to have the board of the association call a general meeting. In some cases it's not set down anywhere how often there has to be a meeting. It's just never called, and in many cases they don't have in their bylaws the ability to call the meeting. That's something else that we should be looking at.

There's a large section on special resolutions, and I have a concern about that. I've actually brought the same concern up in context of other legislation. It's saying that special resolutions can be passed by 75 percent of the current owners that are "entitled to exercise the powers of voting." Well, I'm assuming what that means is that it's like saying: by a member in good standing. In other words, your dues have to be paid up. You can't be owing any money. I think in many cases that could be a problem in this situation. We can certainly have scenarios – and I've heard of some of them – where owners are precluded from voting on something that's really critical to the condominium association because they owe money. But in some cases what I've heard is that they owed money because they were assessed thousands of dollars for their share of a reserve fund study. So we have to be really careful about that, because you could have quite a minority of people making decisions that affect everyone. You could have 20 percent of that 75 percent that are making very critical decisions.

This issue that I'm about to discuss is not limited to condominiums by any means, but I'm surprised to see it turn up here as well. It's the issue about the developer setting aside moneys for costs for unsold units where owners are assessed or must contribute, but they're being hit for the whole development, even when they don't own those other parts or if they don't own those other units. I had something similar happen in my home district, where there were only homes on one side of the street. The other side of the street was a city park. Well, they decided to pave the road, and they wanted to assess the entire cost of the road to the people living on one side of it. You know, that wasn't fair at all. There was enough protest, and finally it was done a different way, but I can easily see that happening here, where you have only part of the unit sold and people being assessed for the entire costs of something. So that's another thing to look for here.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It's acknowledged in the bill – and I think there's still quite a bit of work to do – about the setting up of the condominium association. Now, the builder is responsible to get that going and to convene the first association. They're also responsible for developing the original set of bylaws, but I'm hearing concerns from people that in some cases the developer has put forward bylaws for the association which are very friendly to the developer and which cause the owners severe problems down the road. Long after the developer has ceased any obligations to the association, they're stuck with these bylaws. I think we are in a position to be making sure that that sort of thing isn't happening.

I think my time is close to running out here, but I do want to speak briefly about regulations. I had spoken earlier about the reassurances I kept getting from department staff that the 1996 amendment act was coming, that they were just working on the regulations, which they were struggling with. I think this is a perfect example of a bill that needs to have the regulations go before the all-party legislative Committee on Law and Regulations. A lot of mistakes could be found if we were all putting our heads together on this one.

The government refuses to call that Law and Regulations Committee. It should be, and it particularly should be in this instance. Who knows? There could be thousands of regulations that hold up this legislation, and it is virtually impossible for a person out there, an Albertan, an owner, a potential owner of a condominium to get their hands on the regulations and understand what's really going on.

What we often have with legislation is that the legislation is the what and the regulations are the how. That's where all the specifics of exactly what's supposed to happen are embedded. They're very difficult to get hold of, to even know that they exist, to find any kind of changes that have happened to them. I really urge the government to call that Law and Regulations Committee in this instance on this bill. Then, you see, once they find out that it's a good process, I'm sure they'll be doing it for every other bill, which is what should have happened in the first place.

One thing that I am really pleased to see is the regulations around the reserve fund, because that has been a cause of great heartache for a number of condominium associations. Some are very well managed, and they looked ahead and knew that they had to have a reserve fund and started setting it up, however they did it. One of them that I asked about had their condominium fees that everyone submitted, and at the end of the year if there was a surplus, well, that surplus went into the reserve fund. That's how they built it up. There is a common and joint responsibility to have money set aside to cover those large repairs and large maintenance bills. It has caused great unhappiness to some. I know that in some cases people didn't do it because they weren't required to do it. This legislation does enshrine that requirement, and I think that is a very good thing.

3:30

One of the hesitations that I have is that enforcement of any bylaws or rules or regulations is left up to the consumer/owner, and in many cases I think people don't have the personal resources to pursue this. So while there seems to be a raising of the fines that can be given to people for not following the regulations, the way it's set up is that, yes, this is what you're supposed to be doing, but then it's the owner's responsibility to chase this through court. Even then, when they get into court, it looks like the judge can decide on what the final fine is anyway. So I think we might need to look at that and tighten it up or make it a little clearer.

I always have a concern where the actual enforcement of something is left up to the individual, because many, many times people either don't have the wherewithal, the knowledge, or the finances to pursue that through the courts. As a result, people just get away with things, and the entire setup becomes a big joke. Who really loses? Well, Albertans are the ones that really lose there, so I think that's something we need to be careful of.

I notice that my time is gone, and I do look forward to continuing this debate in Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege and, quite frankly, it's a duty to speak a certain amount on this bill in that it does affect a great deal of people living in the city of Edmonton and certainly in my constituency. It affects a great deal of who they define themselves to be, where they live, and how they function with their neighbours.

Condominium associations are always difficult to deal with as an owner in that these are people that affect your daily life and are not always people of your choosing. This particular piece of legislation had a great deal of discussion in the early '80s and resulted in a great number of changes in the act. As an alderman at the time, in the

early '80s, I heard a great deal of the complaints and had to deal with them. As a matter of fact, a large part of one session dealt with a great number of difficulties as it related to conversions of properties from rental accommodation to condominiums, the lack of reserve funds to properly maintain those structures, and a great many other concerns, many of which were simply the lack of rules for a condominium association to follow to manage their properties and to manage them in a manner which was sustainable, because hitherto it had never been done in legislation.

I would like to acknowledge, too, that there's a great deal of regulation that falls from this act that the condominium associations must follow. In fact, a great deal of the regulations are more suggestive than anything else – and so they should be – to help condominium owners with the management of their collective properties. The difficulty I find myself in here in trying to rationalize agreement with Bill 16 is that the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations of this House simply does not sit. I would think that a great deal of these problems could be ironed out with some public hearings, some interest shown by the population in the law and regulations that relate to this act, and I think perhaps a good working group could be put together and the proper amendments brought to a place where they could be actually studied.

Of course, we know that the tendency of this government is to not hold meetings, particularly meetings that have any kind of representation of opposition members, for, heaven forbid, they might move something that was of value, and then the government would be forced to defeat that just simply because it came from a nongovernment member, which happens, we know, in this House a great deal. It is unfortunate.

Examination of this bill would not be reasonable without looking at the history. It was in a previous session of this Legislature that Bill 23 was passed, given royal assent, but it was never proclaimed. That is a terrible, terrible indictment of a piece of legislation. It goes through all the readings, has all the comments of members elected to represent their part of this great province, passes through all the supposed checks and balances, and is not proclaimed because there are some stakeholder issues. That is the worst possible legislation you could have in this province. It brings expectations up to a level that cannot be fulfilled and then dashes them.

All kinds of lawsuits and interested parties were all left hanging for four years. This is ludicrous. It takes four years for a government to decide it needs a new working group, that it needs some more input? This government should be roundly and soundly ashamed of a piece of legislation that cannot be proclaimed for some interests. It doesn't even identify what those interests are. Well, this member has had some experience at another level of government, where when you passed a piece of legislation, quite frankly it was enacted immediately. If you made a mistake, you were told. If you had to reverse, you had to do it immediately, and you knew why.

This piece of legislation, while well received now, is late, horribly late. This member feels that, hopefully, consultation with the interested parties has taken place to this point and that enough input has been sought so that there are some clear lines and definitions set out so everyone knows what to expect. Yes, perhaps everyone is not satisfied, but at least they had a good airing with someone. It certainly wouldn't be with Law and Regulations and certainly wouldn't be with the opposition members, because in the government's eyes we are oh so unworthy to do so.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of changes that were intended to occur at that time, in the '96 bill. The removal of unanimous resolutions has, in effect, taken place, but I gather it is not in law.

The recognition of phased developments, which is the norm these days for a substantive development. It's not likely that a developer

can risk the failure of a development by reason of being unable to market enough properties in a timely fashion, therefore putting a larger burden of finance on a project. So that was supposed to have been done.

Insurance coverage of condominiums. I mean, it would be painfully obvious to anyone that studies anything of tenants' rights and tenants' responsibilities to try and superimpose those on a condominium and leave it at that. The changes in coverage for condominiums, for both common property and for individual property, were sorely needed in regulations. Now, it has not been put in place. I'm told by most of those that are in condominium situations and in ownership of their property that they are very aware of the insurance responsibilities and their individual responsibilities to their own units and to those of their neighbours and co-owners of the property. This regulation may not have the effect that it could have had in earlier years when that kind of knowledge was not prevalent in the ownership of condominiums.

The establishment of a mandatory reserve fund. This member would think that there should be a fairly substantive body of work that has gone into this area, the development of a reserve fund, so as to truly plan for the maintenance and upkeep and the major work that must go on in a condominium, in the physical property, so that a new owner or an existing owner always knows where they stand with regard to the repair and maintenance of their property and therefore can easily discern whether in the next year it will need some major input of cash. This should be a moving target. The fund should be maintained and reviewed on a regular basis so that all those that are selling and buying properties will know what they're getting themselves into.

3:40

There's a particular area that did concern me while I was an alderman and still does today, and it's cited by a noted lawyer in Edmonton who deals with the condominium act and the difficulties that are related to holding property under the act. A gentleman by the name of Don Kramer, a lawyer here in town, is concerned that consumer protection is rather limited in the bill as it is drafted. I'd like to hear from the government side to see how they feel that it is in fact protected and to further that debate. It's section 11, and when we get to the portion of debate in committee, I suspect that I'll ask some of these questions and have them answered.

There is some concern about proper consultation. I mentioned earlier that the '96 act was a disastrous failure and that this government should apologize to all of those that hold property under the condominium act in the province of Alberta for that failure. I wonder why the organization called the CAA, the Condominium Advocate Association, was not consulted and given any credence at all for their position. We wonder why. If it is going to be four or 10 years in the making, surely you could ask one more interested party, that does have some expertise in the matter, for their input. This obviously was not done. I would like to know why there would not be any of these members in the working group. I don't understand why these people would not be included.

Another area of some concern to a number of people that participated in the consultations is: will the enforcement of the act be enhanced at all? It's a sad record that in 20 years of history there have been four prosecutions and only one conviction on the matter. Now, I don't know of any industry that has players that are all that honourable and just that would not give rise to a number of prosecutions. Certainly the enforcement provisions appear to have been so, so weak that they would give cause to any claimant to back off for fear of spending a great deal of money chasing, in this case, a developer and coming up empty because of the provisions of the act

or because of the major expense to get to a place where you could enforce an action.

Of course, the legislation should be and is, I suspect, under continual review, but every once in a while review has to stop and you say: okay; this is going to be debated. That being done in '96, it showed it to be a failure. Here's hoping that this same situation will not occur with this bill.

There's another section that was tried in '96, and we're not sure whether it's going to be fulfilled in this bill: the user-friendly language. It's most important that this principle be applied as fully as possible to define those responsibilities of each party in contract so that the average soul out there that wants to sit on the condominium association and help manage their own property can understand what the intent of the act is, understand all the provisions, and is not having to run off and seek legal counsel every time something of magnitude has to occur within the association. This member would think that that would be a notable contribution to any act and particularly this act in that it has to be applied by so, so many people.

The provisions under one particular section, amendments, have some interest to me, having been, in a former life, in construction and contracting. The definition of substantial completion will be better defined. That's always a concern in the relationship between the developer and the owners of any property, that it is clear at the outset what that definition is so that when that point arrives, it is not a shock to either party. It defines the amount of holdback, that which is held in reserve for some completions of the project.

We would hope that those provisions are seen to be fair both to the developer, because certainly the developer is not expected to finance a project to the extent that the bottom line of his or her operation would be affected in the negative to the extent that they could not further develop any of these properties, and to the condominium owner/consumer such that the provisions are adequate to protect them should the developer suddenly cease to be in business or pass away or any number of other events that could frustrate any contract and such that another could pick up from where that project left off and continue to completion to the satisfaction of all concerned.

There's some calculation of interest on outstanding accounts that seems to be a bone of contention for a great number of condominium owners in that their fellow condominium owners at times do not contribute in a timely manner their portion of condominium fees. It puts the whole project in jeopardy, of course, and the interest on those funds oftentimes was so low that there was actually an incentive for one not to pay their condominium fees and to just set those funds aside collecting interest in an interest-bearing account and be further ahead in the long run. Well, of course that was most detrimental to the operation of any condominium association, and that is being addressed and repaired.

Hopefully, there will be some regulations that'll prevent the unscrupulous activities of some developers. I know of two such instances – one of them has been rectified, and the other one has yet to be – and that's where a condominium owner has purchased the properties and then, while the developer is still in the process of completing the project, is dealing with the developer to buy another parking stall or buy another piece of property on the site. It's happened twice in my experience that this particular developer sold property that was not severable by title, such that that property was common property, and the developer attempted to sell that property and, in fact, received what would be fair value in the estimation of the purchaser.

When the developer went to register that piece of property – and I'm speaking this time of parking stalls and surface parking pads – the developer found that it could not be registered, not just because

the entire package of registration was not ready because the construction hadn't been completed, but a year later they found that they couldn't register it because the property was held in common. In the interim, of course, the developer held the funds all this time and then in one instance said, "Oh, sorry," and returned the money.

3:50

In the second instance the older person, plus 82, I believe, just does not want to fight, just does not want to put up with all the consternation it takes to deal with lawyers and the like. It is a sad situation and in fact puts a very, very bad taste in the mouth of those that do not want to have the responsibilities of the individual property, with land and the like. They're older people, and they would just as soon have a condominium that has all of this taken care of, only to find that that is not the case because the regulations are such that it does allow these kinds of unscrupulous activities to go on unchecked and unprosecuted.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you for your time and consideration of this matter. I look forward to the clause-by-clause review of Bill 16 so as to be able to amend those portions. Thank you, sir.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much. You know, this is actually a pleasant surprise, because I had expected that this was going to be adjourned by the government, as we discussed before. Since arrangements change frequently, it's always a useful idea to pack your bill file with you.

The concerns I've got with respect to Bill 16 are numerous. Let me start off by recognizing that this is a bill that has a number of different audiences, or constituencies, if you will. It has condominium unit owners, who have a very obvious interest. *Calgary-*Buffalo**, I suspect, has probably the largest concentration of condominiums certainly in the city of *Calgary* and, I suspect, because *Edmonton*'s downtown is more dispersed, maybe anywhere in the province. So I've got lots of constituents who own condominium units who have been keenly interested in what has been happening with this legislation.

The second group is developers. One thing about condominium developers: they have been working hard to ensure that their interests are front and centre in any sort of legislation that's going to affect condominium developments. We expect that; we understand it. They have a clear interest.

The third group is a group that sometimes isn't thought of so readily. These are the people who manage condominium developments. What's interesting is that each of these three groups – unit owners, developers, and condominium managers – has a different set of problems, issues, challenges, and so on to deal with.

Now, I know that after I sit down, assuming there are no government members that are going to participate, I'll have at least some other colleagues that will also want to participate in the debate on Bill 16, but in the time that I've got, I want to say that there has been a great deal of frustration in the community. You know, the process of overhauling our condominium property legislation has taken a decade, a full decade, ten years, to try and fine-tune legislation that has been shown to be deficient in a host of different ways. We thought government was finally going to be able to address some of those things. In 1996 many of us were in this Chamber and looked forward to that debate, participated in that debate, got feedback and so on. You may remember, members who were here in 1996, that the assurance we all received was: "Let's pass the bill, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, Bill 23. Then we'll have some regulations that will look after the remaining outstanding items."

Well, Mr. Speaker, what did we find? The Legislature passed Bill 23 in 1996, and then we saw one of those processes that many of us in the House marvel can happen in a province with as many smart people as *Alberta*. Something happened between royal assent to Bill 23 and proclamation. What we discovered was that when government sat down to make the regulations, as they're wont to do, with their selected group of stakeholders, what they found was that there were major, substantial disagreements between some of those three communities that I've identified. Condominium property managers had some issues that were different from condominium property developers, and unit owners in some respects had yet a third perspective.

Many of the people who live in *Calgary-*Buffalo**, who now we've got to know on a first-name basis, are tired of phoning my constituency office saying: "Dickson, when are the rules going to change? When is this new law going into force?" Mr. Speaker, I don't like making apologies for the government of the province of *Alberta*. I really don't like having to make apologies for the government that I pay taxes to. I want to be able to tell people that this government really gets it right most of the time. I'd like to be able to tell my constituents that the regulations really are just the minutia to make a well-thought-out piece of legislation effective.

Mr. Speaker, I can't do that because we see with this shades of – what was it? – the mobile home tenancies act. Now, this is an act that was never proclaimed. My recollection is that it was passed about six years ago, and because the regulation-making process was a closed rather than a very inclusive, expansive one, what happened is that there were problems that had been sloughed over, glossed over in debate in this Assembly. Then when it came time to do the regulations, we found that there was not clear consensus, that people in fact were still battling key issues that should have been addressed in the debate in the Legislative Assembly.

We've seen some other legislation like that. We're in such a darn rush to take that bill and tie the ribbon around it and package it up, gift wrap it, if you will, and send it out. We've got that \$8 million budget in the Public Affairs Bureau just salivating at the prospect of telling Albertans how great this government is. Maybe if we spent a little less time worrying about how we're going to gussy up the package, how we're going to decorate the package, and a little more time worrying about what's in it, regulations would be done more expeditiously. We'd have the major debate where it belongs, in this Assembly.

What's happened around the Condominium Property Amendment Act of 1996 is that there have been some substantial protracted disagreements, debate, if you will, around what should happen with the bill, but it doesn't happen here, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't happen where there's a *Hansard* record, and it doesn't happen where members of the public can come in and view. Where is it happening? It's happening in backrooms of governments. It's happening in the smoke-filled rooms where developers and government bureaucrats sit down and decide what the law is going to be. Does nobody else see something wrong with this picture? Is it just perhaps this misguided member that thinks there's something wrong with this process? In any event, I have some real concerns with the process that's evident here, and I can only hope that we do a better job in terms of the process of dealing with legislation.

4:00

Now, I've got a number of concerns I'm going to share with the new Provincial Treasurer when we move to the next stage of this bill, but right now we're talking in principle about the bill, and I wanted to highlight a couple of thoughts. The first one is that in *Alberta* what we've got is a process or a regime which is largely

self-regulating. Really what that means is that if you're a unit owner or you're on the board of a condominium corporation and there's a problem, what your government says is: go down and hire a lawyer, pay the retainer, and go to the Court of Queen's Bench, because that's where you have to go to get your remedy.

Now, a lot of those constituents that I represent and many of the people living in condominiums are seniors. They're not all \$2 million condominiums, like you find in the Eau Claire community. Some of them are very modestly priced. People have little left by the time they've finished putting down the down payment and then making mortgage payments on their condominium. To tell these people, "If there's a problem, you're on your own," to say to a condo corporation board in a small project, "If you don't like what's happening here, you go down and hire a lawyer to do it," does not seem very satisfactory. For some reason we've got a government that doesn't seem to see that they have a legitimate role and a valid role in terms of enforcement to make sure that the safeguards and the protection in their legislation in fact are going to be properly regulated.

In fact, I saw an interesting statistic. I don't have it in front of me, Mr. Speaker, but if you'd recognize that this is just going from memory. I think in the entire history of the Condominium Property Act there have been four prosecutions. I stand open to correction. If there's any member that has more current information, more current statistics, please signal and let me know. Of the four prosecutions I think only one actually resulted in a conviction. If you're going to suggest to me that there have never been any illegal acts, improper acts around condominiums in this province other than four, I think that just wouldn't be credible. I know you wouldn't try and tell me that, but there might be others that would try and suggest that.

So I think one of the things that's worth while asking is whether there is not a role for government in appropriate cases to do some of the enforcement, to do some of the compliance monitoring. You know, Adam Smith I'm sure was a wonderful guy in his time, and the laissez-faire economists of the time would see nothing wrong with this kind of approach, but in a complex society such as we have in the year 2000, condominium legislation is very complex. Large condominium developers are a pretty formidable opponent. I think we at least ought to be talking about: is there not a more efficacious way of trying to ensure that provisions in condominium purchase offers are adhered to or complied with? Is there not a more efficacious way of ensuring that some of the representations made by developers are in fact realized?

Mr. Speaker, we talked about the process that has been used with Bill 16, and we note again that if you look at section 11 of Bill 16, we have extensive, extensive provision for regulation. We go through and we look at three pages of matters that are going to be dealt with by regulation. In fact, my count is off; it's actually four and a half pages of material. We can start at page 15 and go all the way through to page 18 dealing with matters that are going to be dealt with by way of regulation.

Need I remind you, Mr. Speaker, that we are, I think, the only jurisdiction in all of North America where regulations are not reviewed, vetted by some kind of an all-party committee, some kind of a process. I daresay that if we had the moribund Standing Committee on Law and Regulations activated, we wouldn't have seen such long delays in terms of trying to resolve regulation. [interjection] Mr. Speaker, I'm getting some great advice from the new Provincial Treasurer, who I think is so darn excited with his new position that he just cannot sit in his seat any longer. He's been ignored for the better of 50 minutes in question period. He's sat here for another couple of hours, and he is chafing – we can almost feel

that member's pain of wanting to get up and just be able to talk, as he does so well.

Anyway, getting back to Bill 16. I am concerned that there are issues with the bill that have not been adequately answered to this stage. I'm just looking for some of the notes I made of some of the amendments that I'm hoping we'll see to this. I think I noted one concern – and I think you've heard this from other members – that the question of condo fees is not dealt with in Bill 16, and that's a huge concern.

I have a relative who right now is looking to move into a new condominium under construction in the lovely subdivision of Tuscany in northwest Calgary. One of the first things she asked was: what are the condominium fees going to be? What you find is that there is a very substantial disparity in terms of condominium fees. This is a woman that had lived in a condominium in Victoria. They have some very different legislation out there, and she was quite surprised to find in Tuscany, I think in the constituency of Calgary-North West, that the Alberta legislation doesn't have a lot to say, doesn't have a lot to say to her, doesn't have a lot to say on that issue. I'm confident that my MLA for Calgary-North West is going to want to participate in this debate, because I know that he's got lots of constituents like my relative that want to hear what concerns he may have with this bill and what constructive proposals he has to put forward to address some of those concerns.

So what's going to happen with condominium fees? There is a concern that when a project doesn't proceed or there are problems down the road, the mortgagee is in a terrific position. The mortgagee is in a wonderful, preferred position as a preferred creditor, a secured creditor, but when it comes to condo fees, that's a very low priority, indeed.

I think that the bill in many respects – and I pay a compliment to the draftspeople and the people involved in putting the bill together – is not an unfair compromise. I think it has tried to address a number of difficult issues, and it seems to me that it may in fact be a significant improvement over what we had before. I think it's a workable piece of legislation. I do think, however, that government has had much more acute hearing when listening to the concerns of developers than property managers or unit owners.

There had been a huge concern in the last bill about windows and doors, Mr. Speaker. Who would have responsibility for repairs to windows and doors? As I understand Bill 16, the compromise that has been achieved is one where we allow more flexibility to the condominium corporation. You have what we might call a default formula, as the condo corporation is entitled to elect to deal with windows and doors in a different way, and I think that flexibility is positive. If government had afforded us a more ample opportunity to debate the bill the last time we dealt with this, in 1996, we might have been able to avoid all the years of indecision and address some of these things at an earlier stage.

Now, I think the clarification in terms of voting rights seems to be appropriate. There was an issue before in terms of whether votes were by individuals or number of units owned, and I think some resolution there, some clarity has been helpful.

I think the money to be held in trust and tying that in with the cost of completion on new projects is advantageous.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, I suspect I'm getting very close to the end of my time, and I just want to give notice to the Member for Calgary-Bow, actually a member for whom I always have considerable respect, that I'm going to be suggesting to her a number of amendments. I know she'll be looking at those amendments and dealing with them in good faith, going back to people in the department and seeing what

can be done with those. I'm hopeful that we can pass a bill that will become a statute, a bill that will become an act and become enacted in time to be able to have some impact on the large number of constituents living in those kinds of dwellings.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we now adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 18 Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo did indicate that I wanted to get right up here and start speaking. What better bill to start on than moving second reading of Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, 2000.

Because of some of the statements that have been made by the opposition over the last year – I could read them, and sometime I will in here – I know that they support this bill because they support the lowering of taxes for Albertans in a balanced approach, and I'm sure they're going to stand up and acknowledge that to Albertans in this session.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has led the country in tax reform, and we have introduced a new, single-rate provincial income tax, scheduled to take effect January 1, 2001. This bill will officially introduce our new, single-rate tax plan to the people of this province, making a bold step towards meaningful tax reform. The people of this province deserve to keep more of the money they work so hard for, and we're going to continue to review taxes in the province to make sure that this happens. This bill will set the framework in place for the tax system that will truly benefit all Albertans.

Now, let me take a moment, Mr. Speaker, to outline the basic components of this plan. The province will unhook from the federal system by levying provincial income tax on taxable income. This is an important component of this plan because it means Alberta, not the federal government, determines how we cut our taxes now and in the future. I'd also like to point out, as we unhook from the federal tax system, that if we did not, we would not be able to address the fairness issues such as the differences in taxes paid by single- and two-income families.

We should also keep in mind that simply passing through the changes announced in the past federal budget would not have taken 132,000 low-income Albertans off the tax rolls. Under our plan minimum wage earners won't pay any Alberta income tax, but they'll pay federal income tax. This is possible, Mr. Speaker, precisely because we are able to unhook from the federal system.

This new legislation will also see the introduction of our single rate of 11 percent, which will apply on taxable income. The basic spousal exemption will also be increased to \$11,620. The remaining nonrefundable credits will still apply, and the credits will be fully indexed to offset inflation.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of debate about the effect that the federal tax changes will have on this plan. It is true that given the tax cuts announced in the federal budget, some Alberta taxpayers would save more under our current personal income tax system. However, we've said that we're committed to ensuring that federal savings are passed on to Albertans. The rate and/or the exemption level will be adjusted, following the first quarter, to pass the federal

savings on to Alberta taxpayers. Details of these changes will be provided following the release of the first-quarter report.

Now, I realize the argument across the way will be: why would we pass this legislation only to change it? Well, Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question is really quite simple. We need to put the structure in place so that we can provide lower taxes to the people of this province. Of course, there will always be influencing factors which may change things, but with the foundations in place we can make adjustments to ensure we get the results that the people of this province desire, and that's lower taxes.

Mr. Speaker, we need to pass Bill 18 to be ready for the launch of our new tax system on January 1. The early release of the bill allows companies and accountants time to develop the software needed to calculate provincial taxes under the single-rate tax and to make the required source deductions starting January 1, 2001. Once a clear understanding of the structure is in place, it is not hard to make these simple adjustments.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have the right to keep more money in their pockets, and we've done a lot of work to get our fiscal house in order so that we can pass those benefits on to Albertans. I trust that all members of this House will support this bill, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, 2000. Let's get on with lowering taxes.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Welcome to the debate, Acting Provincial Treasurer. It's nice to have some fresh thinking on this issue. The problem, of course, is that somehow into your notebook you seemed to slip the notes from the former Provincial Treasurer. It's too bad you were saddled with those notes, because the fresh thinking that I was hoping for I think would've seen a more robust defence of passing along sustainable tax reform that all Albertans would benefit from instead of just a select few and then only at the political desire of the government of the day. I know this, members, because I've reviewed his *Hansard* record over the past few years. I know that he's committed to this notion of lower taxes, but I must say that I was a little bit confused just now with the comments about ensuring that a foundation be in place first.

Now, if this member has carefully read the arguments of the Official Opposition regarding the need for sustainable, comprehensive tax reform that's fair and equitable, then he would understand, of course, that Alberta Liberals have been talking about the need for a firm foundation for a long time. It was this same hon. member who just talked about the need to put in place a foundation first and then worry about the details who of course, when he was on some of his earlier privatization escapades, it was: full speed ahead and damn the torpedoes; we don't need the legislative framework; we'll just go ahead and privatize things like registries and liquor stores because we can't wait for the legislation. So it's a little curious.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

As the member knows, I used to work for an organization whose credo in part was that people can and will change. Of course, it's encouraging to me that perhaps this member has seen the light of day and understands the importance of putting in place a foundation, a firm foundation, a predictable one and a legislated one, so that governments can't play quick and dirty with the facts or with the rules. Maybe this member has proven the credo that people can and do change. Maybe it's a new corner that he's turned, and I'm happy to see that.

Now, the problem that I have with Bill 18 is that it is in fact more of this incremental, politically driven tax reform. The government would have us believe that they have to delink from the tax-on-tax system to pass along true tax savings, but as the facts come out in this debate on Bill 18, what we will quickly discover is that all Albertans would receive a greater and fairer share of tax relief if we simply lowered the existing rate. The government would also argue that we had to move to a flat tax to get rid of bracket creep.

Now, this government has collected untold millions of dollars through bracket creep over all of these years when they simply could have indexed the provincial rate and eliminated the provincial portion of bracket creep, but they chose not to do that. They chose to sort of backhand collect these taxes and then somehow try to blame it on the federal government.

Now, it's the federal government over these last couple of years that has passed along the only meaningful, real, and sustainable tax relief not just to Albertans but to all Canadians. It was only the federal government that figured out a way to deindex and then eliminate bracket creep without selectively picking some Canadians who would benefit and others that wouldn't.

4:20

So when I hear this government defend its own ideologically driven bills to the exclusion of the facts, it makes me wonder exactly whose interests they're serving. Of course, with Bill 18 we know the answer to that question. They are serving the interests of a select few very wealthy taxpayers. [interjection] I hear the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations talking about the GST. I'm so glad she mentioned the GST, that great Conservative legacy brought in by that Conservative government. You know, when it comes to tax policy, Canadians know full well whom to blame when it comes to things like the GST and raising taxes.

Mr. Speaker, you may be interested to know that this government has increased taxes by billions of dollars since 1993. In fact, over 12 percent of the fiscal dividend, over 12 percent of the more than \$9 billion worth of budget surpluses have come about exactly as a result of tax increases. For a government that prides itself on saying that the only way the taxes are going is down, of course the facts tell an entirely different story. So I would hope that the government will quickly rethink its position on this flat tax and will come to the conclusion that it's not fair, that it's an unequal distribution of benefits, and it destroys some of the parts of Canadian tax policy which have made this country one of the most desirable places in the world to live and this province one of the most prosperous places in the world to live and do business. I think this government at its peril will dismantle this kind of progressive tax regime.

[The Speaker in the chair]

We want to make sure that any tax changes maintain the values of equity. This is something that this government seems to have lost. We also want to make sure that in any change we don't lose the benefits of progressivity, and of course we want to make sure that it does not create new tax burdens on some Albertans.

The bill that's proposed by the government will unhook us from the federal system. It will impose a single rate, and it will raise some exemptions. It will also deindex. I can go along with deindexing, and I can certainly support raising personal exemptions and getting low-income Albertans off the tax rolls. Of course, both of these could happen without delinking or without imposing a single rate. In fact, both of them have been parts of Alberta Liberal policy for some time. So again it's nice to see the current government giving the government-in-waiting a little bit of credit by taking some of our

better ideas and incorporating them into their own provincial policy.

As is usually the case with this government, you know, Mr. Speaker, they mix in the good with the bad, so we have some of this good, sustainable, reasonable tax policy mixed in with this notion of a flat tax, which punishes the middle class and rewards the very wealthy. The government has said that maybe what they'll do is tinker around a little bit with the rates, but we've heard promises and musing from this government so many times when it comes to tax policy.

Let me refresh our collective memories here for just a moment about this government's musing about tax policy and their propensity for making up tax policy on the fly. Now, it's obvious that this government has not done its homework by assessing the distributive effects of the 11 percent single rate on various income classes and family types. To get the majority of the benefit from the federal tax reforms, this government would have to totally rework not just its exemption levels but also the single rate. But they didn't do that homework, and they didn't anticipate even though, clearly, the federal government telegraphed what its intentions were.

Now, we only need to look at the record of this government over, let's say, the past six to eight months to see how this government has been veering from one side of the road to the other on tax policy and has been making suggestions on the fly, everything from giving people hundred dollar rebate cheques to eliminating personal income taxes. We've had the Premier saying one thing and the former Treasurer saying something else, and who knows what the current Acting Treasurer is going to say and whether or not he's going to be around to be accountable for it.

We had the Premier back in the middle of July of 1999 musing about accelerating Alberta's single tax rate scheme in 1999 and 2000 by increasing the personal and spousal exemptions to \$11,621 as a means of providing tax relief to low- and middle-income Albertans. What he didn't realize, of course, is that under the existing tax collection agreements the province cannot adjust federally defined amounts of nonrefundable tax credits while remaining linked to the tax-on-tax system. So that was just an oops, I guess, Mr. Speaker, and they had to rethink that.

Then we had later on in the year, in November of 1999, the Premier saying that the government, to provide Albertans some fiscal benefit from its surpluses, may lower the 9 cents per litre gasoline tax. But that didn't seem to be a workable solution, because it was just two days later, November 25 of '99, that the Premier out loud said: I know; we should have a gasoline tax rebate. But that didn't seem to fly either, because a month later, in that quiet period between Christmas and New Year's, on December 29 of 1999, we had the Premier musing again about providing Albertans with a hundred dollar tax rebate cheque in the mail.

So we've gone from a reduction of the amount collected at the pump to maybe a tax rebate overall to now a cheque that would be sent to every Albertan, we think, but it didn't happen. Of course, this government loves to talk about tax relief and do very little other than the talking.

Right after the beginning of the year, seven days into the new millennium, we had the Treasurer now saying that the government is considering a personal income tax cut in the year 2000. This wasn't anything that was announced in the budget. It wasn't part of the government's tax plan. It was just the Treasurer, we suspect, freelancing maybe to get a headline. Ten days later, on January 17, the Treasurer again said: I know; it won't be a tax reduction; maybe we'll reduce health care premiums. Another headline, another day.

The very next day, on the 18th of January, that very same ex-Treasurer said: "Well, you know what? We should use the surplus to pay down the debt rather than being used to provide tax cuts."

Now, I'll stop at this point in the history, Mr. Speaker, because in fact it's interesting to know that the Treasurer might have just kept his word on this point. If you take a look at the record of the federal government and their fiscal surplus, their dividend, and the provincial government and how it's used its fiscal surplus, what you note is that the federal government has been able to commit a full 42 percent of its surplus to tax relief, while this government has provided 12 percent. So, obviously, the Treasurer and his colleagues in cabinet made the decision that they would much rather pay down the debt even though we were years and years and years ahead of the debt-servicing plan and would deny Albertans the tax relief that they had been demanding, because it is the ordinary working Albertans, the taxpayers of this province, that have enabled this government to see the prosperity that it reaps the rewards of.

I think it has done a disservice to those taxpaying men and women that this government, in spite of some clear direction to the contrary and some promises to the contrary, would once again choose to accelerate that debt repayment plan rather than provide some balance, as the federal government was able to do in balancing debt repayment and tax relief, to say nothing, Mr. Speaker, of course, of the absence of meaningful investment in sustainable, comprehensive, and high-quality social programs.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, the history goes on. About 10 days later, January 26 to be exact, the government offered an 18 cent reduction in the mill rate for the education property tax applicable to the next fiscal year. Now, this will amount to about \$22 or \$23 in tax cuts to the average homeowner, and this was after all these months of speculation of meaningful and sustainable tax cuts. What homeowners got was about \$22 a month.

On February 24 the Treasurer, for the eighth time since it was originally announced – this has got to be a new personal best for the ex-Treasurer – announced the 11 percent flat tax scheme one more time as though it was newsworthy once again. Of course, this was on the heels of other jurisdictions who have explored flat taxes and other politicians in other jurisdictions exploring flat taxes saying: well, we're not going to proceed with this because it's inherently unfair.

On February 27, prior to the federal budget, the ex-Provincial Treasurer, the one who's left us now, called on the federal government to cut taxes. I quote. He said: what we're saying to Mr. Martin is try it; you'll like it. End quote. Well, of course, we learned very soon thereafter that Mr. Martin not only liked it, but he did it much better than the ex-Provincial Treasurer would have.

On February 28, when the ex-Treasurer commented on the federal budget, he did say that federal tax cuts didn't go as far as Alberta's, but they were better than tax increases. Well, then the reality sunk in, that of course as a result of the federal initiative in leadership, Albertans in most income classes were going to be paying much more under the flat tax scheme than they would have if we had left it on the tax-on-tax formula.

Now, this was brought to light by Brad Severin, who is the senior tax manager at BDO Dunwoody, when he crunched some numbers and disclosed that Alberta's 11 percent flat tax will cost middle-income earners more than staying under the current tax-on-tax system based on the tax reduction measures announced in the year 2000 federal budget.

Even with that information in hand, on March 3, the next day, that former Provincial Treasurer – and maybe we understand now why he was anxious to go – said, and I'm quoting: well, 10 months from now our entire tax reduction kicks in; we're not going to wait for the

federal government to incrementally bump things downward, end quote.

Well, the problem is that he seemed to ignore what Mr. Severin and others had so clearly indicated, and that is that at several tax levels Albertans were going to be paying much more under the 11 percent rate. For example, for an income earner at the taxable income level of \$30,000, they were going to be paying at least \$60 more under the Alberta rate, and these are supposed to be some of the low-income earners that this government is promising to bring relief to, meaningful relief. All they're going to get from this provincial government if Bill 18 becomes law is a tax increase.

Now, on March 12 further calculations prepared by Brad Severin showed that middle-income earners in Alberta are better off within the existing tax-on-tax system than under the 11 percent rate. The former Treasurer said that maybe Mr. Severin's figures were wrong, but that argument only lasted a mere 24 hours, because on March 13 the Treasurer said: oops, maybe. In fact he was wrong, and he said: we'll have to cut the proposed flat tax to keep up with the federal reductions.

Then, most interestingly of all, Mr. Speaker, on March 14, the day after all of this to-and-froing on the part of the former Provincial Treasurer about the 11 percent flat rate, we had the Premier declare in one of his uncharacteristic outbursts that he would bring in a law to ensure that Albertans will always have the lowest personal income tax rates in Canada. He made this statement with the suggestion that as a result of federal tax initiatives, he wanted to make sure that Albertans were never going to be shortchanged.

Well, two things that the Premier seemed to have forgotten. Number one is that he's not going to have anywhere near the tax room in this province that any Prime Minister of the country would have, but most importantly he seemed to have forgotten that a key part of his tax policy was delinking from the federal government, and in that outburst he relinked. What he said was: we are going to make sure that we always have the lowest tax based on what the federal government does. So, in fact, he's once again contradicted his policy and his Treasurer, and if I heard the Acting Treasurer correctly when he said, "You know, one of the joys of Bill 18 is that tax policy for Albertans will no longer be made in Ottawa," if I understood his point correctly, he'd better sit down with the Premier one of these days and see which one of them is really speaking for the government when it comes to delinking or relinking with the federal government. Of course, the Official Opposition wants to ensure that Alberta taxpayers receive the full benefits of federal government tax reductions, but we wonder whether the Premier and his government have considered all of the implications of this latest thinking out loud or thinking on the run by the Premier.

Most interestingly, if you do follow through the numbers, Mr. Speaker, the provincial government has not set aside enough money in the current budget to fully flow through the benefits of the federal tax reductions at the predicted rates of growth, so we have some serious concerns regarding this government's intention to follow through on that pledge even if they could.

Now, the other part of the difficulty I have with the Premier's comments in light of Bill 18 is that provincial program spending commitments, particularly in health care and education, are growing at a faster rate than federal program spending commitments. In fact, if you review the numbers – and more of this might come up when we're dealing with Bill 19 – I think just to help the House follow through with the argument, the former Provincial Treasurer's, not this Acting Provincial Treasurer, spending has actually gone up at a higher rate than I think any of his predecessors, and with that rate of spending increase it would be very hard to know where this provincial government would find the revenue to back up the Premier's

boast about always maintaining in law this lowest tax regime. Of course, then you have to wonder whether or not the lowest tax regime on the single measure of income tax is the most sound fiscal policy if you simply isolate that as the one objective and you don't put it together with other tax policies and fiscal policies for government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm thrilled to be able to stand and speak a few moments on Bill 18, Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, as introduced for second reading today by the hon. Minister of Resource Development. You know, I'd like to mention that it's nice to hear the support from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, that he wants to see that we move maybe even faster to reduce income taxes. I'm thrilled to hear that he's put that on the record, that he would like Albertans to continue to see that we push for more progress for more and faster tax reduction. I'm glad to hear that on record.

It's nice to say that by the time this act is introduced in 2001, taxes would have been reduced by over \$852 million from 1999. It's nice to say, "Well, let's do more," but let's put it in perspective. How much more? Then from that aspect, how is it that you're actually going to then also finance all of the expenditure plans that we will hear also pronounced from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and from the opposition? They want us to drive all of the taxes down faster but also want to increase the spending significantly. So it's nice to be able to say both, but it's nice to also have their issues on record.

On the topic of fairness one of the greatest distortions I would say about fairness that's been sold to the public is that it's fair to have complex, multiple levels of rates of tax. It would be interesting, if we would survey even the members here, how many would know the three federal rates and at what levels of income they kick in. That's just one simple part of the Income Tax Act.

4:40

When you start adding on the complexity of that Income Tax Act, you've now had to ask the public to go to accountants and lawyers and give all of their money to plan. They're going to have to assess how do I divide the income between that of my spouse or a child or amongst their employees so that you start looking towards how you maximize tax and spend all that time and effort and all that money to professionals who specialize in this area. That very productive work could be better put towards everybody being able to understand a very simple, fair basis of taxation. What could be better than everybody looking towards how do I contribute towards the services I receive, that all Albertans would know and understand. In fact, for the first time in talking to people, they understand: yes, 11 percent. It doesn't matter if it's after the personal exemption level of \$11,620, but after those rates I'm only going to pay 11 percent. I'm now not going to be penalized for working harder, being industrious, and trying to save.

We talk about being fair. In fact, all the multiple levels of tax do is penalize the middle income from being able to save and accumulate their wealth. As soon as they start accumulating sufficient wealth, it gets taxed at higher rates. They can't break through that threshold of being beyond the middle income. We keep them down at that level. If we don't take away that incentive from them, from being able to save and to earn higher levels of income and to save those moneys, then we will keep the middle income literally in that class. The wealthy already have the ability and will always have the ability to arrange their affairs, be it corporately, be it through

income-splitting techniques, through investments, and through all kinds of deductions that are available in various income tax acts to be able to avoid and/or delay the tax that they would pay. This makes it very visible, it makes it understandable, it makes it simple for everybody to understand, and it certainly probably makes the fairest basis of taxation. Why is it that everybody shouldn't contribute in the same fashion to making this country a very prosperous one?

This tax did provide, by unhooking from the federal system, some major advantages. If we don't unhook, we don't have the same latitude of assessing where it is that income tax policy should benefit and to what extent Albertans should benefit and in which areas. We wouldn't have had the ability to pass the federal changes through to 132,000 lower income Albertans on the tax roll. The minimum wage earners wouldn't have had the ability to no longer have to pay tax, those at the very low end of the scale. It's by having significantly changed and improved the exemption level for personal and/or spouse or for the married equivalent that those will help reduce. Those that are at the lowest levels now will no longer have to pay tax; 132,000 lower income Albertans will no longer have to pay provincial income taxes.

Now, I don't know if you talk about fair, but after you start earning any level of income beyond the very low amounts, everyone is now able to understand what it is that they will pay for tax.

I would like to also make mention that part of the challenge we do face is that we can't look at Alberta or even Canada in isolation from the world. When we look at tax policy, you have to be looking at a fashion or a way of how you attract and maintain the brightest and the best and those that would attract the capital and allow the capital to freely flow into Alberta. How is it that we create an environment that says, "This is a place to come and set up our businesses and earn our income"? Already this single issue of a flat tax is attracting many. Alberta is a place where they want to come and start their businesses. It is a place where there will be an opportunity for their children to find jobs in the future. It is an ability to then drive the policy to see that that income will stay here versus being put into other countries and other nations, to just shelter the tax so that they will leave it in Alberta. We're finding many already will come to Alberta and find reasons why their residence should be here on December 31 rather than maybe somewhere else in the rest of Canada so that they can already take advantage of the low taxes.

We do have in this income tax act some significant changes with respect to the flat rate taxes I've just discussed, but because of the complexity of the federal tax many of these things still have to stay on their own. All the nonrefundable tax credits will be left in place so that no one will be penalized. The charitable donations, all the medical expenses, the tax credits: those will all be left in place so that we will not be penalizing anyone. All Albertans truly do benefit by seeing this new income tax act being put into place as of January of 2001.

I have not specialized in income tax, but I certainly have had that opportunity of working with income tax. I can tell you that one of the greatest problems that people come looking for advice on their income tax is just the plain ability to understand it, for them to be able to predict with some certainty what it will mean for them for the future and that they won't be left to the interpretation of tax courts and tax accountants and tax lawyers as to how to invest their money, how to save it, and how to earn it.

The best thing that we could do is to simplify taxation for all Albertans. This tax act will start in that measure for it. This is only one piece of income tax in relation to all the forms of taxes that are collected in Alberta. There is the whole question of mix. Albertans already have the lowest tax load of all provinces in the country. It's

going to be harder for us to have the same percentage decreases in our tax rates versus the other provinces as we're already substantively lower. When we start comparing hypothetical situations of what could have existed if we'd remained under the old roll, one can always make an argument for their particular case that maybe it was advantaged or not. Overall this system will be much fairer, simpler, and more understandable for all Albertans and will probably help drive this province for the next century, for the next millennium to be the place to live in Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure this afternoon to get up and speak to Bill 18. It was interesting. As the Acting Treasurer sat down from moving second reading on this, he closed by saying: let's get on with lowering taxes. That's a paraphrase of his exact quote, but it was kind of that. When I look at Bill 18, Bill 18 deals with the structure of taxation much more than it deals with the level of taxation. What we want to do then is look at Bill 18 in terms of how it determines how we're going to tax, because each of the parameters within this bill can be adjusted at any particular time by an amendment to the act which will then allow for a particular level of taxation. So the real issue then becomes one of: are we going to deal with a different structure of taxation?

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the four major parts of the bill and how it's going to change the structure, what we're going to look at first, I guess, is the one that a lot of people are talking about and that forms the basis for this whole bill, and that is the unhooking from the federal process. From my perspective and I think from a lot of people's perspective this is a good idea. This gives us the independence at the province to deal with our taxation. We are then directly accountable to the people of Alberta on the basis that we tax them, the level that we tax them, and how that tax gets measured. It's not clouded over or masked by changes at the federal level, because we're dealing with a measure of income and then we're dealing with a tax on that income as opposed to a second level calculation from that income. So I think that all Albertans should feel very positive and very encouraged as we move from a tax-on-tax system to a tax-on-income system.

The other one that we're talking about is the relationship of income tax to income earners. The historic approach that we've had in our income tax system has been that the person who achieves that income is the one who is responsible for basically paying the income tax.

We've gradually started to create exemptions. You get exemptions for your children, and you get exemptions for your spouse. What we're seeing here now is basically a separation and an attempt within the structure of our taxation to develop some degree of equity for families that have one or two income earners so that the tax payable by that family is more equitable or more even than it was under a system where each individual was individually responsible for their income and their income taxation. So what we're seeing then is basically a change now to more of a family income tax situation rather than an individual income tax situation.

4:50

The other thing that comes up and is very, I guess, straight in terms of how this is applied is the recognition that within the federal and provincial systems there were a number of tax credits that were offered at the federal level that will be honoured and dealt with within the context of this new tax structure in Alberta. So those

three, basically, I think most Albertans would see as being reasonable, would see as actually improving our taxation system.

The one that's left out of that, then, is the move to the 11 percent single provincial tax rate, and I think that is where we have to really look to see whether this new structure is going to be reasonable or whether or not it's going to be reflective of some of the things that we've heard in the lead-up to this debate. Also, we heard from the Member for Calgary-North West as he talked about the equity that was going to be created for people as they increased their incomes. I guess the thing we have to look at here is that if we're going to have a single rate of taxation and if we want to deal with equity, we have to look at how we measure the income that that single rate gets multiplied by.

Within the structure of incomes of individuals in any of the western economies what we're basically seeing now is that as you earn more income, you in essence develop and achieve options to delay the reporting and measurement of incomes in the context of an income tax form. I know, Mr. Speaker, that I do it on a regular basis when I sit down and I talk about: "Well, I've got money in some investments. Do I put those into an income-earning investment where I can get interest on it?" If I do that, then at the end of the year, whether or not that interest is actually transferred to my bank account, I get a little statement from the financial institution which then gets added to my taxable income, and I pay income tax on that income. But if I put it into an equity fund, that income or the growth in the value of that asset is measured in the context of equity, and this effectively is a capital gain, which is not taxed for taxation purposes, is not measured as income for taxation purposes until I actually liquidate that asset.

So what we're seeing, then, is that this kind of a structure discriminates against people as they get older, because almost all of our financial planning institutions tell us that as we move through the aging process, Mr. Speaker, we're supposed to transfer more and more of our money from the equity base, where there's a high degree of risk and a high degree of speculation, into a more capital-secure investment style.

Well, generally those are income-earning investments rather than equity-earning investments, so what we're in essence seeing is that if we have a middle-income earner, where they have to start thinking about someday having that investment to spend as part of their income after retirement, they're going to have to start and make sure that they protect that capital base. Any financial adviser will tell them, as they age, to put more and more of it into that income-earning format rather than the equity-earning format. So what we're seeing is that these individuals are going to be paying income tax on that and the person who is either younger or whose investment is not critical to their financial management will be tax exempt. They will be exempt.

Well, the whole idea behind a progressive taxation system, where you have steps, is effectively saying that as I put more and more of my money as a middle-aged person into equity, then some degree of fairness in that taxation system needs to be applied. So, in essence, by having a slightly higher tax rate, it compensates for the income that I earn which is not being reported as taxable income on my tax form. I think we have to look at this.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be the first to admit, and I think a lot of Albertans would, that our tax rate differences were probably much too broad. But the idea of having a progressive tax system needs to be looked at in terms of: is it an equitable tax system when we have this option to hide incomes or to divert incomes so that you don't have to report it on your income tax form? That's the kind of question that we have to be looking at as we go to this 11 percent.

Now, for a young person going through their very rapid increase

of income with new employment advancement, the gaining of experience, probably a flat tax is very reasonable for them, because what you're going to see is that by the time they're paying off their student loan, they're buying their home, they're doing all these other things, they effectively are spending their total income. They don't get into the decisions – at least, Mr. Speaker, I never had enough money to start saving until the kids were all gone, the mortgages were paid. Then I could put my money away in terms of looking at: how can I prepare for my future?

Well, you know, those individuals may find a flat tax very attractive, and we may find the spin-off that comes from that very supportive to our economy in terms of multiplier effects. But I think that if we're going to look at this in the context of the entire spectrum of incomes and tax possibilities, we have to very seriously look at whether or not the 11 percent flat tax is the kind of tax system that we want as a structure in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we see all kinds of things that talk about, you know, who pays less, who pays more. Well, when we're talking about a change in structure, there always will be winners and losers, even if it's degree of winning or degree of losing. It's not necessarily this thing that everybody has to come out a winner. Once we change anything in our tax system, any structure in our tax system, any rate in our tax system, unless we sit down and calculate it – and I would suggest that maybe our computer capacity isn't enough to sit down and calculate the proper adjustments so that everybody is treated equally. Any time we change taxes, there is an inequity created. The debate here has to be as to whether or not this new structure is going to give us a more equitable, a more fair tax system than what we had before.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said, three parts of it I like, I think would be very attractive, but the movement to the flat tax I have to question, because I don't really think that this is going to give us the fairer taxation that we see in Alberta. I can give you some examples of that. I've talked to a number of individuals in my constituency who are what I would consider middle income, the rising income level person. What they've talked about is: well, you know, it's going to be nice to know that if I get a \$5,000 raise, I don't have to jump to a new bracket. Well, when you start talking about how they are going to spend that \$5,000, a lot of them are saying: we're going to buy some investments; we're going to start saving some money. You say: well, how are you going to save that money? You start explaining it to them, and pretty soon they say: okay; maybe it isn't quite fair when all I do is pay the flat rate. From this year forward the 11 percent attaches to all of your income, but when you take some of that and put it into a saving, then how you save that determines your income for the next tax year and tax years subsequent to that until you convert that saving pool back into an income stream.

What you end up with then is a real discrepancy, and most Albertans realize that they can effectively defer taxation by choosing how they invest their dollars. They then are putting themselves, based on their risk aversion, their willingness to accept risk, in a different category from someone either who is not quite as much of a risk-taker or someone who is older who has to have the higher degree of certainty associated with their actual capital accumulated stock, the stock of capital that's in that saving program.

5:00

Basically, what they're realizing is that, yes, within the context of a flat tax rate there are some advantages, but also then you end up in a situation at some time when there is no real equity created by a flat tax. So what I would do is encourage the Acting Treasurer to look at that and determine whether or not that inequity can be addressed

in the context of how we're going to deal with this. Using the federal taxable income form as the base for our flat tax will not allow this to occur.

Mr. Speaker, what we may have to do is go to some kind of a net worth taxation so that you get the tax from all sources of income treated equally, no matter how you deal with risk or how you deal with your investments. I don't think that in itself is reasonable. The administrative load, the degree of reporting, the ability to not quite report all of your assets would be a temptation, I think, that we don't want to have to enter into in the context of trying to have Albertans approach a fair taxation system. That means we have to go back to looking at how we can deal with adjustments in the issue of the measurement or the rate of taxation as opposed to the base of taxation.

With that, we need to make sure that we look at the possibility of putting into account the ideas of a progressive tax. I think all of us that work in this room effectively report to the Ethics Commissioner every year an asset base, effectively a net worth statement, and I don't think that we should be expected to have to deal with putting that into the tax domain and in the context of trying to look at what proportion of those investments that are reported in our disclosure statements are income-earning as opposed to equity-earning sources or investments. So it really creates a dilemma for us in terms of trying to make sure that our taxation system is really fair.

Mr. Speaker, as I kind of close and summarize, what we have to do in terms of looking at Bill 18 is look at it basically in the context of who pays the taxes in Alberta. At what level do those individuals who are paying the tax have to pay? Anytime we can move to reduce taxes, we can do that in any kind of a structure. As I said to start, Bill 18 is an approach that will take us to a new structure, not necessarily any particular level of taxation, because the taxation level will be determined later as we adjust whether or not 11 percent is right, whether we adjust the consumer price indexing of the categories, the exemptions, or the credits. We have to look at that from the perspective of what it is that we want in the context of an equitable tax system for Albertans.

The option that we've got in here that is going to continue to look at and honour the nonrefundable tax credits at the federal level I think is quite easy. What it does, then, is create a consistency between how a lot of the activities that we undertake with charitable organizations, the contributions we make – as long as we're going to keep some kind of a consistency between the provincial and federal government levels in taxation, what we'll be able to say is: okay; these are the benefits that you get for making a charitable contribution. If we were to break ourselves off on that area, what we'll end up with is people starting to make decisions about where they will make their charitable contributions based on where the tax credits or tax deductions are. Then what we end up with is a fight between the two levels of taxation to decide who's going to get people to put the money into the charitable organization that they want to give the credit for as opposed to the other one. So the idea that we're going to keep that tied together, keep it uniform, and keep it linked I think is a good process that we're looking at.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those kinds of comments on the base level and the principle of what Bill 18 stands for, I'd just like to conclude by saying that if we could deal with this bill from the perspective of the three sections, I think it would be worth voting yes for. When we look at how it impacts on the equity and the potential equity and the perceived equity, because this bill is being sold as being a fair representation of taxation, I think maybe with proper looking at the data, we might be able to determine that maybe it is fairer than what we already have, but it is not fair in the sense that it provides for a lot of options and a lot of income shifts. I can tell you that when you

deal with this now, you're going to look at what the impact would be in terms of how you make investments, how you defer income. I haven't even gotten into the whole area of what happens to the issue of stock options, what value they get taken at for the executive-level people in the province who participate in share ownership.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my comments. Thank you very much.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to listen to the debate on Bill 18. It's very difficult to argue with lower taxes. However, there have been some comments from both sides on methodology, and I think that's a very helpful and useful debate. I think Albertans are proud of the fact that their province in fact has led the nation in the importance of reduction of taxes to strong economies, to chances for advancement for our businesses, for our corporations, and for our young people.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I would now adjourn debate on Bill 18.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 19

Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to start the debate on Bill 19, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000.

This bill is a milestone as we have got rid of the net debt in the province of Alberta, and now we're getting rid of the 8 percent deficit elimination surtax that was put in place at the time. This tax was imposed in 1987 as a temporary deficit elimination tax on Albertans with incomes greater than \$44,000, and if you refer that to today, it has the equivalency to about \$47,000. This was essentially put in place to combat government waste and overspending, and it was intended to deal with the mismanagement of taxpayers' dollars by increasing the amount of money we took from taxpayers. I just don't understand that, Mr. Speaker.

We have taken the trend of mounting debt and reversed that, and we've put our financial house in order to this date. It's a model for the rest of the country that we've done this, and it's a source of pride. So taking this surtax out is definitely that milestone I talked about.

5:10

Now that that net debt is gone, we are going to get rid of this tax completely. We've gone a step further though. While we got rid of the debt and we're going to remove this tax, we've also put in place legislation that says that deficits are illegal in this province.

In addition to this, Mr. Speaker, our good financial position and strong Alberta economy mean that we are able to accelerate the elimination of the surtax 18 months ahead of the schedule that we had set back when we passed that law. This legislation also does some cleanup, and it will continue for seven to 10 years. For example, the legislation removes terminated credit programs and reference to corporations which are now dealt with in corporate-specific legislation. Ultimately, the bill will leave more money in the pockets of the people of this province and finally lay to rest one of the last reminders of deficit spending in the province of Alberta.

We should also note that while this particular tax is directed towards Albertans who originally had tax imposed on them, it is not the only recent tax break that has come into Alberta. In fact, in 1997

we introduced the Alberta family employment tax credit, which gives tax breaks of up to a \$1,000 to lower income and middle-income families. In 1998 we cut the tax rate from 45 and a half percent to 44 percent, which benefited all Albertans. The combined impact of those moves meant a 65 percent cut for a single-income family with two children earning \$30,000 a year. I repeat: a 65 percent cut for single-income families with two children earning \$30,000 per year.

Personal income tax will be paid under the new Alberta Personal Income Tax Act beginning in 2001. However, the Alberta Income Tax Act will continue to remain in effect for seven to 10 years for administrative purposes. The government will use this opportunity to make some technical amendments that will delete obsolete passages.

Also, in 1999 we have matched the federal increases in basic and spousal exemptions.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that we have total support for this and that this marks an end to an era of overspending in government and puts back in place some sensible taxation processes. I can remember a day when I sat around the table when the deficits were mounting, when the total debt was mounting at a massive rate, and a group of four or five taxes would be brought in for discussion by government. When asked which one they'd like, the government of the day would say: we're going to have to have all of them to try to stem the flow. They were done on almost an ad hoc basis.

I can remember a day, too, when we started the arduous task in '92-93 of removing the massive deficit, the 3 and a half billion dollars, to get rid of the net debt as well as deal with the massive true mortgage in this province. When we came to debate removing taxes, there was long, long debate, not that ad hoc approach. It was hard to get rid of taxes that we'd put in place. Governments like taxes. They like to feed on taxes. It's easy to put in a percent here, an 8 percent surtax on certain brackets, but it's very hard to remove them once the animal starts to feed on them. That's a good reason never to bring in a sales tax in this province until all the other taxes are gone or lowered.

Mr. Speaker, I would continue this debate at a further time and bring up examples of how taxes have been misused by government, even this government and other governments in Canada, but at this time I would like to adjourn debate. We'll certainly have ample time during committee to bring out the historical nature of tax.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we now call it 5:30 p.m. and that when we reconvene at 8 p.m., we do so in Committee of the Whole.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion put forward by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, would all hon. members in favour please say aye?

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The motion is carried. The House is adjourned until 8 o'clock tonight, when it reconvenes in committee.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:15 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 3, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/04/03

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order, please.

Bill 2

First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, do you wish to . . .

MS CALAHASEN: Keep going. We were just listening to them.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thanks, Madam Chairman. There were so many people standing in the House I thought everybody wanted to speak right away on this, but I see that's not happening.

Madam Chairman, I'd recently addressed a couple of issues about this bill. One was the whole issue of the ministerial responsibility and how that seemed to be a pretty powerful section. That's section 2(2), and I guess I had some concerns about that.

Also, on behalf of some of the other stakeholders who brought up some issues, what is the definition of First Nations? Who will define what First Nations sacred ceremonies or artifacts are? That's not clear. That should be outlined in the text of the legislation, not left to regulation. There should be some sort of common notion as to what that is.

Where is the appeal process for aboriginal groups that don't agree with the minister's decision? Section 2(2) says, "The Minister must agree to the repatriation of a sacred ceremonial object unless, in the Minister's opinion, repatriation would not be appropriate." There's no appeal process. There's no mechanism for the First Nations community to go elsewhere. It's the minister who has the ultimate say, and if that minister of the day isn't familiar with the traditions of a particular First Nations community, it could cause some problems. So I'd like to see an appeal process set out. I'd rather see that set out in the legislation, not in the regs, so I'm hoping that the minister will be able to address that tonight.

I guess it goes back to the whole notion that the bill is vague, and the powers of the LG or the minister and the regulations are a little bit too broad and need to be defined. I think it's important they are defined in the legislation so that the aboriginal community sees this.

In fact, I've spoken to a number of people and have spoken to a couple of chiefs in the aboriginal community who didn't know that this bill existed, so I'm a little concerned. [interjection] Absolutely, Madam Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. There are First Nations communities – and I can tell you right now that I have sent this bill out to their legal counsel. Those communities are in the south, and I'm sure they'll be contacting the ministers. Those particular communities don't know that this bill exists.

I'm wondering if the ministers can put on the table for us a list of stakeholder consultations that they have undertaken to assure this member and all the other members in this House that this consultation was broader than the two or three First Nations that are outlined here, and that's the Blood tribe, Peigan nation, and Siksika.

I'm hopeful that the minister can help us out here. Please reassure

us. Probably the best way to do that is to table a list of the stakeholders in the House. I've taken the word of the hon. ministers that they've done their homework, and it seems to me that after running into a couple of people – and that was just by chance – speaking to a couple of chiefs, they're not aware of this. So please inform us as to the consultation process.

Also the feedback of the museums. I'm interested in what their comments were in relation to this. I know that they're somewhat supportive, but they have some issues as well. How were those addressed? What sort of compromise or consensus did the ministers come to in dealing with the stakeholders?

I think what happened is that this bill was tabled and it was a feel-good bill for a very good reason: we were going to repatriate artifacts to the aboriginal community. However, I'm hoping that along with the feel-good this bill puts forth, the work was done and that it's not just smoke and mirrors for the aboriginal community and creating difficulties for both the aboriginal community and the museum community. So I hope we can hear something today that will help us feel a little more comfortable about where we're at with this bill.

Before I conclude my comments, I'd like to put forward a couple of amendments. Madam Chairman, I think you have the amendments. Okay. The first amendment that I'd like to put forward is: I move that Bill 2 be amended in section 2 by striking out subsection (2). So really what we're doing, Madam Chairman, is taking out the section that says "The Minister must agree to the repatriation of a sacred ceremonial object unless, in the Minister's opinion, repatriation would not be appropriate." We haven't had defined for us "appropriate." We don't know what this really means. "In the Minister's opinion" based on what? What is "appropriate"? This just can't be some pie-in-the-sky decision. This affects lots of communities and their particular sacred ceremonial objects.

Although, Madam Chairman, I have spoken to one of the hon. ministers in relation to this who assures me that the elders would be involved in this decision, I think it's very patronizing and very paternalistic to have section 2(2) included in this bill. If we're really talking about wanting the aboriginal community to be self-sustaining, if we want to talk about the aboriginal communities as entities that can look after themselves – and that's what they want; they want to be able to take control of their lives and not have so much government interference – this, quite frankly, is a very obscene clause. I believe that this particular section needs to come out of here to ensure that the right – you know, like I said, it's fine for the Premier to sit in the House in a traditional headdress, but it can't be just photo ops and feel-goods. There has to be some substance to this.

So I'm hoping that the House can support this amendment. We can see some other form of control if that's what the minister needs to have, but I think this is just far too paternalistic for the aboriginal community. I think that if they went out, Madam Chairman, that if the consultation was broad enough, then this particular section would've been struck.

I'm aware that this is A1, Madam Chairman. [interjections] Yes. Thank you. My colleagues are helping me out here. With that, Madam Chairman, I'll let my colleagues speak to this. I think it's very important.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, the chair would thank you. We will deem this amendment A1.

With that I would recognize Edmonton-Calder, who wishes to introduce guests. I have to ask for unanimous consent of the committee to revert to Introduction of Guests. Could I have unanimous consent?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's a pleasure today to introduce two guests we have in the public gallery. They've come along to see what transpires here. Interestingly enough, one has a very famous name. The young man is Trevor Strome. Everyone here will recognize the name. Whether it's connected, we're not sure. It is a nod. It's an affirmative. We have a guest from Winnipeg, Karen Serfas. I'd like to welcome them to the Assembly. If they'd please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

8:10

Bill 2
First Nations Sacred Ceremonial
Objects Repatriation Act
(continued)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Centre and then the minister.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I am rising to speak in favour of amendment A1, put forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood. I know that she has been very involved with this bill and very concerned about the correctness of what's being done here, and I appreciate her taking the time to put forward this thoughtful amendment.

I do agree with the sentiment that is embodied in this amendment in that we are recommending that section 2(2) be struck. It is a patronizing, sort of Father Knows Best clause in the bill, and without knowing too much of what's being intended here, the legislation is not elucidating at all for me as an individual. We have no idea of what is appropriate or not appropriate. The minister is making a lot of decisions here, either giving or withholding permission on something without any idea of why that might be the case.

There is no avenue of appeal that's incorporated in it. Generally, if you're going to have a decision made at that level or a decision made by a quasi-judicial body, there is an avenue of appeal that's incorporated into the legislation, and that is not the case here. So if I could envision any concerns arising about the passage of this bill, that's where it's going to come, because people will not understand why something has either been granted or denied, and there's no avenue of appeal to follow up and say: well, please explain why this has happened.

I'm concerned generally about the amount of information that is inferred will be put forward through the regulations, and as usual I have difficulty with that. The government is very fond of putting forward shell bills in which they empower themselves to do whatever they wish in the future without that ever having to come before either this Legislature or the people to allow any scrutiny or understanding, which is also an important part of the process.

I think this is important. This is a good bill. It's much needed. If anything, I would say that it is long overdue. But there are a few suggestions on how to make it a better bill, and this is one of them. Especially when you're dealing between two sovereign nations, there needs to be a clear process outlined as to how decisions are reached and how discussions can take place about that and how there can be further discussions if there is a disagreement about the decision that's been reached. That just isn't in this bill, and I think it sets up what should be a good thing for a great deal of acrimony in the future, and I don't think that was intended when the bill was put forward; quite the opposite, I imagine. But they've certainly set themselves up for a fall with this.

So I would ask that the hon. members in the Assembly do support this amendment. I'm not sure if anyone else wishes to speak to it, but I will not drag this out, and I'll take my seat at this point.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm a little bit dismayed at this particular amendment. I think it should be made clear that this legislation didn't just drop out of the sky. There was a lot of thought given to it. Just for the record, before it was introduced, every native band, every treaty band in the province was given a letter to the effect that it was coming and what was to be expected in it, and I would be glad to share that list with you at some point if you wish.

With respect to the amendment specifically, I think that there's a lot of needless fear mongering going on from across the way. We have to understand, quite frankly, that there has to be at some point a final authority with respect to when repatriation will proceed. Now, the clause is quite specific. It says that the minister "must," unless the minister deems it's inappropriate. Well, what could trigger such a situation? We are a provincial entity within a sovereign nation called Canada dealing with First Nations folks and having to do with objects that belong to them within this country. If for some reason it was deemed that there was going to be a movement of the said sacred ceremonial objects outside of Canada without the proper processes, if you will, taking place, then that would be a reason for it to be deemed inappropriate.

In addition, this bill is set up in such a way that upon the request of the First Nations groups, we will sit and deal with each First Nation in their own parameters, within their own guidelines, because they are different, as we well appreciate, and there are different levels of desire to have these objects returned. Certainly, obviously, there would be and would have to be an appeal, if you will, all along the way, even in the identification of what a sacred ceremonial object is. That's all virtually impossible to define. That has to be gone through with the people who lay claim to it, and we're quite prepared to follow that on each basis.

As a test run, if you will, the Blackfoot agreement identified some 250 objects. These were done in consultation with the people. As a matter of fact, the First Nations folks there are the ones who removed from the list ones that they felt were better to stay with the province. So I think that if you look at the intent of this bill, you understand that it is triggered by the request from groups to have their objects come back. We're dealing with First Nations people. We may be dealing with chiefs and councils. We will definitely be dealing with elders – there's no question of that – and there are various societies within these bands who use these. So it's not just a simple idea of coming in and cataloguing an item and giving it back to someone.

The other side of this equation is that these objects belong to the people to which they're being returned, and at the same time they must be looked after for longevity and continued use by these same people that own them. If we were to draft regulations here and now in the bill to cover every possible variation, if you will, then we'd have a bill that you couldn't get through.

It's quite clear. It's a request of the First Nations folks. The term "First Nations" can be variable. That's a very recent term. Before that, they were called tribes. Some groups like to be called tribes even today: the Blood tribe down south. Consequently, if there is some more direct action with them, they would be referred to as the Blood tribe, but for the purposes of this legislation it's defined in the regulation in consultation with what they want to be called.

I feel that the bill is very good. This amendment, quite frankly, although I do have a degree of understanding, is totally redundant and would take away from the spirit of the bill, and I would ask us to turn it down.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. Just a couple of points. Firstly, you know, it looks like we haven't advanced very far. We might as well still have the company of adventurers trading into the Hudson's Bay. We could have the factor of the old fur-trading post of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company exercising what they thought was best judgment in terms of the aboriginal peoples who lived in this country. I think that the reason for this amendment has been ably described by my two colleagues, and the minister has been absolutely, completely unresponsive to the concerns expressed in the amendment.

You know, what section 2(2) provides is that a minister – and it may not be this minister. It could be any minister. If you look at section 1(c), it's any minister designated under section 16 of the Government Organization Act. So this minister is having discussions over here in the left corner. In the meantime there's some other minister charged with responsibility under the act. What we have is a minister under section 2(2) who can act recklessly, capriciously, inconsistently, unilaterally. There are absolutely no bounds on the unfettered discretion provided in section 2(2). What strikes me is that one week the minister, whoever that minister may be under section 16 of the Government Organization Act, may exercise his or her discretion in one way and then the following week may exercise his or her discretion in exactly the opposite way on virtually identical fact situations. There's nothing fair, just, or certain about that.

8:20

Legislation, Madam Chairman, is designed to import a degree of certainty, to provide a degree of finality, subject to perhaps appropriate appeal, subordinate lawmaking through regulation, but to have a provision in here that's as wide open as this one, as I say, suggests that this government is no more committed to respecting the sovereignty of First Nations people than we might have expected from the governor of the Hudson's Bay Company a couple of hundred years ago.

The concern, I think, would be this. Regulations in this province are scary enough, and all members no doubt will soon be treated to a novel argument around the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. But while they're waiting for that novel argument on a favourite amendment that members know and love and always look forward to on bills, we can consider that this is a case where the government is not even comfortable with the hammerlock they have on the regulation process. They control it completely. They control it absolutely, completely, and they can change the regulation from week to week if the minister so chooses. Yet here that's not enough. On top of everything else, they want the minister to be able to make an assessment: he has to agree.

You know, it's a fundamental principle of administrative law that if there is discretion to be exercised, it is for us as legislators to identify the criteria that should be applied when the discretion is exercised. The fact that no criteria have been enumerated in Bill 2 suggests that this government doesn't really know where they're going. I mean, that's one reasonable inference, Madam Chairman, from section 2(2). The government has absolutely no idea of how they're going to manage these kinds of cases in the future. Once we do sort of the one-off thing that plays well to camera and gets great media attention, the reality is that once we get past that, we find that the government has virtually no plan at all in terms of dealing with this in the future. There's not even a stipulation that the exercise of

the discretion has to be in the best interests of the province. It doesn't have to be in the best interests of the First Nations people.

Madam Chairman, I've seen a number of curious provisions and statutes in the eight years I've been in this Chamber. This is clearly one of the most curious. I don't ever remember a minister having the temerity to come into the House and suggest that he wants absolute, unfettered discretion. All ministers aspire to this. There's not a member in this front row that wouldn't love to have a provision like this in a bill. Once we give it to this minister, the Minister of Community Development, can we not expect that his colleagues are going to say: "Hey, I like this unfettered discretion thing too. Sign me up. Mark me down. Where's the government leg. review committee? I'd like a few provisions like that."

I understand it's tough work being a minister. It's darn tough work having to meet standards and meet tests, but just as I told my daughter going into the elementary school track meet, Madam Chairman, there's no point in trying to win if there isn't a significant challenge to overcome. There's no challenge here because what the minister, what the government purports to give with one hand, they are reeling back in virtually simultaneously with the other. I think the excuse we've heard proffered from the minister is more alarming than perhaps silence would be, because it tells us that this bill, for all the grandstanding, for all the fancy wrapping, is not about much of anything. That's disappointing, because I think the minister would agree in his heart of hearts that this is too important an issue to be treated as cavalierly as Bill 2 would treat it.

So, Madam Chairman, always hoping that maybe I'm more persuasive on this amendment than I routinely am on amendments, I'd suggest that this is an amendment we could embrace. It means that the minister is going to have to work a little harder in crafting regulations that give him the kind of flexibility he needs, and he'd be able to do that in regulations. I wouldn't be perfectly happy with that, but it would be less offensive than section 2(2) in the bill in its current form.

I'd make this challenge to the minister through you, Madam Chairman. Will the minister stand in his place and enumerate the criteria that he will apply and he will warrant on behalf of the government of the province of Alberta? In saying yes or no, what criteria will be applied by other ministers who have the power under section 16 of the Government Organization Act? What are the criteria? If he tells me with precision and with exactitude what those criteria are going to be, I will sit down happy in knowing that the amendment may not carry but that at least we've been able to put some flesh on this bare skeleton, and I think that's really what's required here.

I challenge the minister. He's had weeks to think about this, first before drafting the bill and then when it came in for first reading and received second reading. The issues we've raised have been raised before. Will that minister stand in his place tonight at 8:30 and for all members and Albertans and anybody who accesses *Hansard* on the Internet and the guests that are bravely here tonight particularize the criteria that will be employed in making that decision under section 2(2)?

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. First of all, I want to address a few issues that have come to the forefront on this bill, because it's very important from the perspective of the First Nations and the elders.

First of all, this is the only bill in the country which allows repatriation of sacred ceremonial objects – the only bill, Madam

Chairman – and it is the only bill that's going to be able to allow the First Nations people and aboriginal people to be able to take back what was taken away from them. In many cases they might have lost them along the way.

One of the areas that I want to talk about is exactly the questions that have been coming out. In order for us to do this, we had to do proper protocol. What do we mean by proper protocol? First of all, we had to go to the elders, and I think many people do not understand what proper protocol in Indian country is, despite the fact that they may feel they do and pretend they do. I'm just really frustrated with the fact that I think we get people who don't have a clue what the heck they're talking about discussing something of this nature.

I really feel strongly, Madam Chairman, that when you're talking in consultation with First Nations, it doesn't mean that we go after the fact, after we build the bill. It means that we have a legislation that's enabling, to allow First Nations to be involved. I'm tired of the business of going to the First Nations after the fact and saying that we consulted with them. That's something that I really want to bring to a halt here, because these are the kinds of things that I'm hearing from the opposition, and I think it's time to shut up or put out.

Number two, we also have to look at: the elders committee has to be established. That is what the elders indicated, and that to me is the primary consultation that has to happen because they are the only ones who can determine what happens. I don't think it's up to us, whether you're white or whether I'm Metis or whether there's a First Nation in here, to determine that process. We let the First Nations determine that process in consultation with the minister and myself. I think that is the proper protocol and something that we need to be very aware of despite the fact that we may think this is something that we want to put little fences around.

I don't agree with that. I feel that's really losing out on the intent of what we're trying to do. Regulations cannot be built by anybody. They have to be built working with the First Nations people, and that is an important facet that the Minister of Community Development and I have talked about to the elders and some of the chiefs that have wanted to become involved.

8:30

I have a question for the Member for Edmonton-Norwood. I would like to know who the First Nations chiefs are that did not know about this bill? Every single one of the chiefs in this province received an invitation to come to this as well as to know what was happening. I think that's a very important protocol when we're talking about dealing with First Nations.

When we're talking about the fancy wrapping that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo just discussed and talking about cavalierly dealing with this bill, well, I think what is happening – if we're talking about criteria that have to be applied, the criteria have to come from the First Nations and those elders. It's not up to you. It's not up to anybody on the opposition side. It's not up to us to do that. We have to do it in consultation with those First Nations. That is something that has to happen with those First Nations. Whether we like it or not, it's about time we started talking about working in co-operation with them.

Madam Speaker, I also want to talk about some of the concerns. I'm really disturbed by the Member for Edmonton-Norwood. I always thought she was quite sensitive to aboriginal people. She calls this a feel-good bill. She says that it shouldn't be smoke and mirrors, and she indicated that it's fine for the Premier to sit in the House with his headdress. In my books and in aboriginal country that's blasphemy. When you talk about the headdress, when you talk about the designation that the Premier got from those First

Nations as honorary chief, it was not cavalierly done. It was done with feeling. It was done with meaning, and they love him in giving that designation. I am very, very appalled that we would even begin to think that that's something that we should just toss off as if it meant nothing. To us it means lots. It means lots.

That's important when you're talking about involvement in the consultation processes with the people who are going to get these objects, the people whom they rightfully belong to. That's something the elders told me. When I went initially to talk to them about this, when I took my offerings and did the offerings that needed to be done, when I had to go and talk about what we needed to do, they were the ones who outlined what had to happen. It wasn't I. It wasn't the minister. It was they who outlined what kind of process we had to use. I for one want to see this bill passed, because it is an important bill for aboriginal people. Finally the whole issue of patronizing the aboriginal community is starting to disappear. We are working with them, not against them and not according to what we want. It's according to what they have identified to us.

These objects are very important. It doesn't mean that these objects can be just taken and given away any old time. They want to see a process identified that would involve them, and they want to see that process put forward in a format that's going to be good for them, for those people who will be accepting them. These are powerful objects in aboriginal country. These are objects that mean a lot to them, and these are objects that they are finally going to pull together at all their sacred ceremonies to start understanding and to be able to know what they have to do to get better. That's the healing process of aboriginal people, who want to see this bill passed. This is the reason I support it and the Premier supports it.

I was totally honoured that the Premier asked me to bring this bill forward, because we had to carry it out with the proper protocol, in the way that the elders, chiefs, and Metis people were able to carry it out. I for one would not want to say no to those aboriginal communities to what they have put forward in terms of what needed to be done.

So that amendment, Madam Chairman, I think is just something that somebody else wants and throws at the table without really proper dialogue with the elders who are part of this process as well as some of the Metis and the aboriginal community. So in that sense I believe that whatever happens, however the bill comes in, is written, that's exactly the way we have to pass it. I don't think I would want to go back to those elders and those chiefs that have supported this a hundred percent and say: oh, the Liberals wanted it changed; they wanted to see some things done because they don't believe that you as an aboriginal community can be involved in the decision-making along with government. Not arbitrarily made for them but rather with them.

So I cannot support the amendment as outlined, because it's a process that we've gone in, it's a process we've dialogued with, and it's a process that I want to carry through to make sure that whatever we do is going to be for the betterment of the First Nations and the Metis people in this province.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Chairman did not see who was up first, so I'll let you decide.

Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. Well, I'd like to thank the minister for her eloquent speech. However, my concern is this. Nobody's talking about not consulting with the aboriginal community. In fact, Madam Minister, what you're talking about isn't identified in this particular bill, if you really want to know about it. What you're identifying is not supported by this bill. What you're asking for is

not in this bill, because section 2(2) doesn't allow that to happen. That's what we're talking about. That's why I'm saying that this section needs to go. It is as paternalistic, Madam Minister, as it can possibly be. This is allowing any minister on this front bench without any degree of knowledge or consideration, if they so choose, in their opinion, to just say: no, this is not a ceremonial object. That's what that's all about.

This isn't about whether the Liberals believe that something else should be changed. It's not about that at all. What it's about is erasing and getting rid of the paternalistic behaviour that is imparted on the aboriginal community time and time again. You talked about that. Then do something about it by supporting, Madam Minister, this particular amendment to remove that power. You talk about the elders. The elders have no say under this bill as it is. They have no say because it's not outlined in the bill. So one day somebody in this government sitting over in his bench could say: who cares about the elders? That's what this bill can do, because it's not outlined in it. So if you believe that, then put it in the bill. I think you've missed the point. This is not fear mongering. The reality is that the history of this government shows what happens when this kind of section is added into a bill. We've seen it time and time and time again.

You can go on and you can talk all you want, Madam Minister, about what this member might or might not feel, but I believe that this particular amendment is supporting exactly what the aboriginal community wants. They don't want any more paternalism. That's what they don't want.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the minister.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. I've been inspired to rise again on this amendment. What's interesting about this is that I think everyone in this Assembly wants this bill to pass. I haven't heard anyone say that they don't want it to pass. As a matter of fact, I've read the *Hansard*. I think every single person that stood has said: good idea; we want this bill to pass. So let's be clear about that and not be sort of throwing about accusations that somebody's trying to sabotage a bill.

As a legislator in this Assembly it's important to me, wherever it's in my power to craft stronger legislation, legislation that will stand, legislation that will be true to its original source, legislation that can't be used further down the line for something that wasn't anticipated in the original drafting of it, then I think it's incumbent upon us to do whatever we can to strengthen that legislation. We can't assume that people years from now or even months from now will somehow be able to cast backwards through some sort of reverse telepathy and understand what was in our minds at the time. It has to be written in the legislation.

8:40

Now, this government has a habit of writing it into the regulations, which are even further afield and more difficult for people to access and find out what's going on. I think it's important that we do the best job we can, when we identify something that could be strengthened in a bill, to do it. You know, I'm excited that this bill was brought forward. I think it's very appropriate that these moves are made, and I said when I rose earlier that I wish it would have happened earlier.

I have to say that I don't appreciate a member opposite getting up and somehow attempting to insult me in my attempts to uphold this bill. That's not what it's about. It's about creating good and lasting legislation that will be clearly understood by everyone now and in the future.

I listened with great interest to the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, who spoke very passionately about the need for the criteria to be generated from the community, and I am certainly not going to disagree with her there. I do agree. I think it's important that those who are most affected by a process are deeply involved, intimately involved in establishing the process, or it's not going to work for them. Especially when you are dealing with different cultures, it's absolutely critical that those people are represented at the table and are able to establish their own criteria.

My concern on behalf of the member is that the criteria are not in this bill. What I heard her say was so important to her and important to the people that she represents is not in this bill, and I worry for the future if the member thinks it is in the bill and finds out later it isn't. She spoke so passionately about it. I don't understand why, having identified what's important to her, she wouldn't be making sure that it was specifically drawn out in the bill.

There's nothing in that bill that talks about that process. There is nothing in this bill that talks about those criteria. Nothing. There's not even any reference to it. All it says is that the minister will decide, unless he decides not to. That's what it says. It doesn't say in here that the elders will be consulted. Nowhere in here does it say that. It doesn't say that a process that's respectful of that will be incorporated or will be used or will be sought or followed in any way. It's not written in the bill.

Hon. member, you know, I'm concerned, in being able to follow what you've identified as being so important to you, that it's not in here. If you do want it in here, then I would advise that you support the amendment that is before us. Work with us. I mean, everybody's trying to get the same thing happening here. Why are we arguing about it?

Thanks very much, and I'll give way here. Thank you.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Madam Chairman, I just want to speak very briefly to the amendment and to urge members not to support it. I think that if one reads the whole bill, there is a better understanding of what is meant. You cannot take one section by itself. You have to look at section 2(1), then (2), then (3).

You have to also understand that there has to be for the objects that have been in the care of the province a process for repatriation. You have to ensure ownership. Many of these objects have been out of the hands of First Nations for many, many years. They have been, as the hon. minister indicated, sometimes sold, sometimes gifted. Sometimes it's very difficult to trace. So it is important to have a process in this bill that will deal with it.

The important thing that the associate minister emphasized is that this bill was developed with the Minister of Community Development, the Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations responsible for aboriginal affairs, in consultation with first the elders and the chiefs and the Metis people, as the regulations will be developed and the criteria will be developed with those same people. It is incredibly important to the First Nations that their elders be consulted, and that process is enabled in this bill.

I sat in this Assembly the day this bill was introduced and the Premier wore his headdress, which, as the associate minister said, is not gifted lightly. It is a very great honour to have that. When the associate minister, my colleague, stood in her ceremonial dress and presented this bill, I looked up at the gallery and I saw all of the representatives from the different nations sitting there and the elders, agreeing with this bill being presented – it was a part of their making – and how moved I felt when I heard them talk, and I'll paraphrase, of this being an opportunity to have the pages of their Bibles returned to them.

I believe this House has a responsibility to our First Nations

people to pass this bill. They have been waiting a long time for the repatriation of some of these sacred objects. It is incredibly important also that the minister who has the authority and the responsibility for many of these objects today have a role in deciding whether repatriation is appropriate, for the reasons I outlined. It is difficult in some of these cases to trace the origins, to trace which tribe perhaps used these objects. Some of these are a hundred years old and more. So you have to have a process.

If you take this section out, you almost render this bill useless, and I think you have to think about that when you ask to have section 2 removed. Maybe it would've helped if you had an opportunity to be a part of the years of discussions, first all of the discussions with the Glenbow Institute – the minister had an opportunity to be involved in that discussion, as I did earlier and as the associate minister did – and to understand how we came to this wonderful, I think, historic moment in our Legislature, another very proud moment in Alberta's history, where we could present a bill that will in an orderly and fair fashion repatriate these very important sacred objects to the First Nations.

As the associate minister indicated, the consultation must occur with the elders. If the hon. members opposite would stand and outline to me which chiefs, which elders, which persons from the First Nations or the Metis communities have asked them to have this bill amended, then I would listen very carefully and very seriously, as I did anyway, as is my practice. I would have considered support, but I did not hear that from any member opposite that spoke on this bill. I do know that the minister whose department brought forward this bill and the associate minister who presented this bill in the Assembly did have those consultations, did have those requests from the First Nations, and I am going to have to support the First Nations' support for this bill, not some ideas of interest that we might have here. As I said, there's a lot of consultation. A lot of work has gone into this.

I would encourage any member opposite to give me that information. Tell me which First Nations have asked for these amendments, which elders wrote or phoned or spoke to them on the street and asked for these amendments. Then I might consider supporting it, but I frankly wouldn't risk supporting an amendment to a bill this important that I have absolutely no indication that the aboriginal community has asked for.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

8:50

MR. DICKSON: I was just thinking, Madam Chairman, that this would be an appropriate time to consider a further amendment. You know, I just feel mischievous enough tonight that I'd like to be able to pull out of my pocket a different amendment than the old Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, but then I realized I've given myself away. We had the amendment distributed earlier, and in any event I'm not moving it. But if I were to move it, I think what I would want to identify . . . [interjection] If it has not been, I'd be hoping that the table could assist us in distributing the second amendment to this bill. I thought it had been distributed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It is distributed.

MR. DICKSON: I'm not moving that amendment. I just wanted to make sure it had been distributed, and I understand it has now. I expect my colleague for Edmonton-Norwood is probably ready to move that amendment momentarily, but I just wanted to make the point that it's clear that the two government members that have

spoken most recently to this really don't appreciate the reason, the rationale, the motivation for putting forward the last amendment. One would hope that they will at least understand the value in having the regulations vetted in some kind of a process that's not internal.

You know, we heard impassioned speeches from the government side about respecting what the First Nations people want, and it seems to me that that is precisely what my caucus colleagues are alive to. That is precisely why we say: why would we give all of that power to the minister? We should be empowering the First Nations people. They're the ones who stand to benefit from this. [interjections] Madam Chairman, I think that when I'm reincarnated, I want to be able to come back in some fashion that is more persuasive than my current version. Anyway, I'm straying a little bit.

The point I wanted to make was simply this. These regulations are important for all of the reasons that the government members who have spoken to it have mentioned. It's too important to be treated as something a single minister with some kind of a selective consultationalist – can't we do this in a way so that every First Nations person in this province can see what's going on, that everybody knows that this is not a closed consultation but rather should be an open one.

I think that if there were an amendment such as I anticipate may come and may become A2, what that would do would be to open up that process. It doesn't hurt anything. I say to the government members that have spoken against the last amendment: you know, there's a sense we're creating some kind of a false contest here. There's nobody on the opposition side that wants to disempower First Nations people. Rather, what we're all about tonight is respecting their ability to know what the rules are going to be and to have input in those rules. The most straightforward way of doing that is to open up the regulation-making process. In fact, the government has nothing to lose by opening up the regulation process, because what they clearly have now with section 2(2) unamended is that it means the minister can do whatever he or she darn well pleases in any event.

So, Madam Chairman, I hope that someone will come forward with an amendment to open up the regulation process, and I'm going to be holding my breath waiting for that announcement.

Thank you very much.

MS OLSEN: You know, Madam Chairman, my colleague took all the anticipation out of this. It's called the Dickson amendment, I want you to know, and I think it should be framed, and everybody should get a copy signed by my hon. colleague. But you know what? It's the best amendment – it's the best amendment – that comes to the floor of this Legislature and for all of the same reasons that we've discussed in the past.

I'd like to move amendment A2, Madam Chairman. The amendment states that Bill 2 be amended by adding the following after section 5:

- 5.1 (1) In this section, "Standing Committee" means the Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly on Law and Regulations.
- (2) Where the Lieutenant Governor in Council proposes to make a regulation pursuant to section 5, the Lieutenant Governor in Council shall cause to be forwarded to the Standing Committee a copy of the proposed regulation.
- (3) On receipt by the Standing Committee of a copy of a proposed regulation pursuant to subsection (2), the Standing Committee shall examine the proposed regulation to ensure that
 - (a) it is consistent with the delegated authority provided in this Act,
 - (b) it is necessarily incidental to the purpose of this Act, and

- (c) it is reasonable in terms of efficiently achieving the objective of this Act.
- (4) When the proposed regulation has been examined as required under subsection (3), the Standing Committee shall advise the Lieutenant Governor in Council that the proposed regulation has been so examined and shall indicate any matter referred to in subsection 3(a), (b) or (c) to which, in the opinion of the Standing Committee, the attention of the Lieutenant Governor in Council should be drawn.

Now, Madam Chairman, at some point somebody will see the significance of this amendment. You know, there's a particular bill that's going to be before the House tomorrow that this amendment should apply to, but this also should apply to this. You see, we have this committee called the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. I am a member of it. I know that the chair of that committee would dearly love to be able to chair the committee and be involved.

In fact, a reporter was just telling me the other day that one of the things that the opposition members in the House of Commons like best is their committee work, and they do have these committees. They review this process, and that cuts the time that they spend in Parliament debating these kinds of bills, because there's some agreement in the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations on the laws and the regulations.

We have so many of the members in this House saying, "We should never be here," and "We're wasting our time," and "Our job is in our constituency." Well, that's the government side. We on this side, we the Liberals, believe that we have a job to do, but we could be far more efficient if this government would just let us, if this government would just pass this type of amendment and put into their particular legislation this amendment so that we could go forward, Madam Chairman, and bring this kind of legislation to some sort of agreement before it hits the floor of the Legislature, and that's really what those committees do.

In fact, I would say that the hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs gave a great speech in support of my last amendment. Her speech actually supported my amendment, so I sort of anticipate that she would probably want to support this one because she gave such a great speech in support of the last one.

I really feel, Madam Chairman, in all seriousness, that there is a better process and that we ought to be using that process. We ought to be sitting down as legislators like we do in other committees and talk about the legislation that comes forward. I would bet that had that happened with Bill 26, the sexual sterilization bill, the outcry on that would never have happened. It would never have surfaced because we would have dealt with it from the outset.

9:00

Bill 25, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act that was brought in a couple of years ago, required 20 pages of amendments, some astronomical number of amendments. We would have had that refined before it even got to the floor of the Legislature.

Bill 11 that's coming to the floor of the Legislature. You know, if we were able to go through a process in committee that dealt with these kinds of things, then we might be able to see the light of day and at least come to some agreement, even if in that bill it's to agree to disagree.

I would suggest, Madam Chairman, there are bills that come to the floor of this Legislature that we could agree on, and we do agree on, and this bill we agree on. It's part of the process that we're not agreeing on. We're not going to not support the bill, but I think there are some issues that could have been dealt with in a committee prior to bringing it to the floor of this Legislature. That wasn't done. There's no opportunity to do it. The hon. Member for Banff-

Cochrane never gets to chair the committee she's chair of, you know.

I think it should be incumbent upon this government, if they want to be more efficient and use this Legislature and this Legislative Assembly in a more efficient manner, that they should pass this amendment.

Thank you.

MS CALAHASEN: Madam Chairman, first of all, I know that the hon. members on the opposition side do want to see this bill passed. I know that, because they have indicated that they support the bill and are trying to make sure it gets passed. I know that they have some really good intentions, but I think that's all they've got, because if you look at what it is they're trying to do, it really makes me question what it is that they're trying to bring forward.

First of all, when you look at the amendments that have been brought forward and when you look at this latest amendment by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Norwood, you're talking about the standing committee making the regulations, things of that nature. When you think about what it is that she would like to see on this bill, it makes me question who's patronizing now. If you think there should be a group that determines who makes the regulations, well, that's a different story, isn't it, when you begin to look at what it's all about. Because all of a sudden somebody else will be making the decisions, not necessarily in the consultative way that we have identified with the First Nations and the elders.

The elders have often said: "We're not just one homogeneous group; we are diverse. There are so many of us out there that have different ways of being able to deal with different sacred objects, and we need to be able to bring that in." That's where we have to find a process that will just enable them to establish what needs to be done, because that's one of the problems they've always had. So they're saying: "Let us make that decision. Don't let him make the final decision, because ultimately it is still Community Development who has the legal right. However, it's going to be ours once we determine that process."

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

It's really interesting that all of a sudden we see the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act – something that was so sacred, something that's so good, something that was wonderful because we had the First Nations and the elders and everybody who felt very good about this – being used to try to do a number of things, in my view. One, I see it as trying to do a job that would create more work for people or change legislative processes. Well, aboriginal people are not stupid. They do not want anybody to be using them to be able to advance their own causes. They want to see what can be done, and they want to be involved.

I for one do not support the idea of sending it to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. I mean, how patronizing can one get? Even though the Member for Banff-Cochrane is probably one of the most wonderful people – she has many, many people in her constituency. She spoke on this bill when we were coming through it. She was very supportive. She did all those things, but, you know, Mr. Chairman, she was very good because she said: we can't make those decisions; let the First Nations make those decisions; we have to enable them to be able to do that and not have our own white biases in this whole process. So now we see that whole change, and I for one have supported her a hundred percent in what she was saying because I agree with her. The elders told me that. The First Nations chiefs we met with told us that. They are saying: let us make those decisions.

Mr. Chairman, it's like one of my colleagues said: you can't suck

and blow at the same time. I don't know if the member across the street knows how to do that, but I think she has a skill that I still haven't found.

MR. WICKMAN: Just very, very briefly, Mr. Chairman. I respect the views of the member speaking on this particular bill. She, of course, with her cultural background is in the position to probably understand these types of issues more so than other members in this Legislative Assembly, sort of like issues that relate to persons with disabilities mean a great deal to me because certainly I can identify from a firsthand point of view. So I give the minister full credit from that point of view.

However, I don't understand, Mr. Chairman, why there would be hesitation with the amendment. When we look at the amendment where we talk in terms of the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, there is no arguing that the agenda of that particular committee is overcrowded or that that committee is so busy meeting that it doesn't have time to take this particular one on, because we know that's not the case.

That particular committee was struck for a reason, and in the 11 years I've been here, I don't ever recall that particular committee meeting. Why would there be hesitation when there's an opportunity to say, "Let's activate that particular committee and let's support this amendment so we do have a provision that ensures that before regulation change occurs, it would go to that committee."? Then possibly other ministers would follow suit with their particular pieces of legislation.

I don't see, Mr. Chairman, that the elders would hesitate at this type of amendment or this type of procedure in that it allows members from the opposition party or parties to also participate in the decision-making process. So rather than the elders being restricted in terms of their lobbying or their decision-making channel to the governing party, they have the opportunity to feed in in a meaningful fashion to the opposition party as well.

With all respect to the minister and what the minister is saying, what that member is saying, I have no problems myself supporting the amendment and feeling it is a good amendment, and it's not being done for political purposes. It's being done because it enhances Bill 2, which is a very, very great bill. It's a great bill. It's a bill that should have been presented in this Assembly a long time ago. In fact, I guess if you look at history, it should have never been done in such a way that there is a need for this bill, because the items that are affected by this bill should have never left the hands of the native people to begin with.

So, Mr. Chairman, just to conclude, I certainly will support the amendment.

9:10

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is interesting. I listened very carefully to what the member opposite was saying, and I would have to comment at this point that I wish she would extend the same courtesy to what's being said by other members in this Assembly, because very clearly what we are suggesting with this . . .

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, excuse me. There seems to be a meeting going on here on the right. You know, if there's a need to have a meeting, could you go and have it in the

Confederation Room, please, because I can't understand a word the Member for Edmonton-Centre is saying.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you for that courtesy, Mr. Chairman.

No one has said that there is any attempt, understanding, indication to make regulations here. This is about asking that a standing committee that was established by this Assembly long before this government was in – it's an all-party committee – that that all-party committee, with all the good intentions and all the good resources it has, be used in being of assistance to this legislation. So I don't understand why the member would be saying that someone is trying to make regulations here. I think if she checks the *Hansard* and listens carefully, what's being suggested is that any regulations that are forthcoming be referred to that committee, and I think that's been quite clear.

There are three reasons why I think this is a good amendment and why it's helpful. It always clarifies any regulations. It brings into the open regulations that are being brought forward in support of a bill, and certainly we've already had a discussion in this Assembly as we tried to understand what are the criteria. The Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs has said: well, there are criteria to be followed that have been agreed upon; it's in the regulations. Well, good. Then this helps to bring those regulations into the open and allows us to make a better bill.

There's quite a bit in this bill that is decided by regulations: the definition of First Nations, the process and procedures to be followed in repatriating a sacred ceremonial object, regulations about who is to represent a First Nation for any purpose relating to the repatriation of a sacred ceremonial object, regulations about the consultations with a First Nation that must be completed for the purpose of section 2(3), and regulations respecting the process by which input may be obtained by the minister from persons, other than a First Nation, that apply for repatriation under section 2 before a decision is made by the minister. All of that we've all supported and decided in this Assembly are important regulations, and certainly bringing them before the all-party standing committee on regulations should be very helpful to that.

Secondly, I have spoken a number of times about this amendment in the context of other bills, of the need for this government to be more open and transparent. It's very difficult for members of the public or members of interested groups to get access to the regulations of any given piece of legislation. Having regulations referred to the Law and Regulations Committee, to have that debated, *Hansard* taken of it, the *Hansard* available, would really help people to be able to understand what the process is, exactly what's intended, exactly what's behind everything, and in fact what the regulations are, because it is darn difficult to get what the regulations are for any piece of legislation the government has.

My colleague from Edmonton-Norwood has already spoken about how in other jurisdictions having committees on law and regulations meet makes the work of the Assembly itself more efficient because a lot of the questions and misunderstandings and clarifications have already been worked out in the committee. Indeed, I agree with that. A lot of times I wouldn't have to be standing up here asking questions if in fact it had gone to an all-party committee.

So once again I'm confused about why the member would believe that referring regulations that are coming under this bill to a legislative all-party committee is somehow changing the legislative process. You know, we're all appointed to these committees. It's a well-known and accepted practice of this Legislature. I'm not

understanding why the member would believe that this is somehow changing a legislative process, exactly the opposite actually, since everything is in place.

MS CALAHASEN: We don't need it.

MS BLAKEMAN: Ah, well, the member doesn't think we need any of these processes. We should just trust her or something. I'm not sure what she is meaning by those comments.

AN HON. MEMBER: You guys are just wasting time.

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, yes, you see, now we get comments from the other side about wasting time. I find that most unfortunate, because I think that when we meet in here we are meeting to make legislation better and to bring forward . . .

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. Hon. members, you're making it absolutely impossible for me to hear anything that is being said, so let's get back to the amendment, please.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, it's interesting, because the interruptions and the sort of heckling from the members opposite always do seem to extend the debate longer. So I don't think the accusation could be thrown on members on this side for extending the debate but rather on the other.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: I had wanted to speak in favour of amendment A2, and for all the good intentions, for all the legislative protocol that is involved in the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, I hope there would be support for that and upholding this process that is available to this Legislative Assembly in Alberta.

With those words I will take my seat. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. I just want to close the debate, my debate anyway, Mr. Chairman. You know, from a parliamentary process and from looking at this legislation in the big picture, the big scheme of things, which is sometimes very difficult for some of the members on the other side – it is really important that we look at the broad picture, and when I see something in a bill that gives the minister an override like that, which quite frankly I think is unnecessary, shouldn't exist, I view it as a paternalistic section of this bill. I would have that perspective on any other bill.

For the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs to suggest that we're trying to use the community for our amendments – it's unfortunate she thinks that, because it's not what's happening at all. Also, it's unfortunate that the hon. member, whom I've worked with very closely, decided that she had to take a few low blows for whatever reason. You know, it's not very gracious, and it doesn't often get us very far in the Legislature. So I'm sorry that this particular debate went that far.

I know that the hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs will come along. You know, we do work together and I would hate that

to stop. Nobody on this side of the House is saying that we shouldn't pass this bill. We want to make the best legislation possible. We want to ensure that everybody is looked out for.

Quite frankly, we're in a partisan province. We each hear from different sectors of the community. We each hear different things from different sectors of the community. That's the nature of politics in this province. It doesn't make one person right and the other person wrong. What it does mean is that that's why we're here, to debate the merits of it. Quite frankly, we're in support of this. We've brought our issues and concerns to the table. I just hope that what I feel could happen down the road doesn't happen, because I don't want to have to tell the minister I told you so.

So thank you, and with that I'll take my seat.

9:20

MS CALAHASEN: I feel I have speak on this, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to say thank you for allowing the bill to go through. I know there's interest from the opposition to see this bill go, and I know the interest is there to make sure it's the best it can be, and I appreciate that.

However, I get very excited when I think that my own people are being used, and I don't like that. No matter who it is, it's always a difficult one, because I take it personally. I know that's exactly what the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has indicated on the disability side. So when you think about that, it really affects me when things are belittled, and I don't like that, so it's a very important part.

I want to thank the members for the comments they've brought forward and the support. As you know, the legislation has the support of the elders and in many instances as many of the chiefs as possible, but I want to be able to identify that it is a government commitment. When you have the political will and you have a Premier who is also an honorary chief and got his name through a ceremony, you begin to wonder that if he says something is going to go, it does go. He really is a strong supporter of making sure that the people get what is rightfully theirs. We have to ensure that whatever happens, it is going to be something that will be good and that it's good for the people.

I thank the members for their comments, and we'll certainly see if we can move this along so it is the best bill that can possibly come out.

[The clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 4 Surveys Amendment Act, 2000

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Minister of Environment, I'd like to table a response for members opposite which was raised during second reading regarding Bill 4.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, did you want a copy of those responses?

MR. WHITE: Yes, sir. I would like to respond to those.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: All right. We'll get a copy for you immediately, but go ahead and start.

MR. WHITE: Well, Mr. Chairman, it's rather difficult to respond, because those items are precisely what I was looking for. On the 13th of March of this year the minister indicated that he'd be happy to review all the comments made by members of the Assembly and respond accordingly. Well, we have the response now, which is a time when you'd normally put some amendments to the bill. Those questions and answers coming forth immediately prior to speaking make them rather difficult to respond to. So I'll have to go through the questions again to make sure they're clearly on the record.

This bill does what's required so that a private contractor is able to respond to the public and able to file some maps. These particular maps are filed electronically a great deal of the time, and they're called cadastral maps. They basically outline subdivisions and the specific location of evidence in law and in survey law.

The questions we had were surrounding the firm Spatial Data Warehouse, how it was formed, where it was funded, the object of the exercise, how one searches the net proceeds, although it's a not-for-profit organization. It would be nice if we had all those answers before us. Quite frankly, it is a private firm, and it's a single source private firm, as I said, albeit not for profit, but certainly there will be excess of cost over income or income over cost. They certainly won't match. We'd like to know where those funds go and how they're carried forward and to what purpose they're put.

It's well known in the private sector that any firm can be non-profit, by definition or by practice. Quite frankly, this member and other members would like to know what the operating procedures of this particular firm are and how it's been laid out and what protection the public has not to be gouged at any point. We have not had those answers until they were just put in this member's hands. Unfortunately, this member will not have time to review those while standing and speaking.

It is a simple procedural matter to file these, Mr. Minister, when you clearly know that one has to respond to them. It really is not in the best parliamentary tradition of this House, so I would ask that the sponsoring member in fact consider an adjournment of this bill, albeit it's a little out of the ordinary and I'd not normally ask that that be done. With the process being a little tardy, it would be nice and it would be only reasonable to expect that a bill might be postponed even for an hour in order to enable this member to read the data and understand what is transpiring here.

So with your permission, sir, I'd like to move that debate be adjourned on Bill 4.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to call the question on the bill and ask for the support of all the members of this Assembly.

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are we agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

9:30

Bill 5

Land Titles Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. JACQUES: Thank you. Madam Chairman, when we concluded second reading on March 13, I believe it was, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo had asked some questions with regard to the consulting process beyond that of the Law Society and the federal government. At this time I'd like to table three copies of a letter dated March 14, and I did provide the Member for Calgary-Buffalo with a copy earlier this evening.

I don't want to go through the entire letter, but it is from a Mr. Mirth, QC, who is chairman of the Legislative Review Committee of the joint Canadian Bar Association/Law Society of Alberta. Rather than trying to interpret what had been concluded by them during their deliberations going back to last fall, including consultations and discussions with the department, we thought it best that they put in their own words their findings. That is included in the letter. Needless to say, basically they have been involved in the development of Bill 5 and at this point in time have no objections to it.

So with that, Madam Chairman, I would call for the question.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to stand to speak to Bill 5, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2000. Even if it didn't take much time for the presenter to put forward, I think it needs some points put on the table. I've seen the letter the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti talked about for about the last 10 minutes. I see that there are no concerns, as per what they're saying there, and I see that they haven't had any complaints through the bar society, but we have some questions from people we have talked to.

Virtually what's happening on this particular bill, Madam Chairman, is that this bill will establish the use of only one seal for land titles, make reference to the general registry, and deal with other housekeeping manners. Just to put on record what I talked to some lawyers about, where is the one office going to be, in what city, if it is going to be Edmonton or if it's going to be Calgary? I want to reflect on the fact that in the early part of this province there was a war between Edmonton on this side of the river and Strathcona on the other side about where there was going to be a registry office. So what's going to be actually happening here has never come out very clearly.

I've been told that this is something the Law Society has been asking for for a very long time, and it's general revenue. The question we'd like to have some clarity on is section 122(9). Is this by a civil action, when a person being filed against can't borrow money or is registered from buying property because of the lien? Is there any compensation for wrong against someone?

Section 33 of the Land Titles Act is repealed, and a substitute is inserted. This section currently allows the deputy or acting deputy of the minister in charge of the National Parks Act of Canada to clarify and copy certificate originals for registry. The new section would extend this power to the chief executive officer under the Parks Canada Agency Act of Canada. Issue might be taken with the continued extension of decision-making power and further development of the bureaucracy. This person is equivalent to administration

in this province. Where is the pressure coming from to extend this position? Is it from the federal level? Why is this position introduced? Is it that the deputy of administration can't handle it himself? Who has the decision-making? Is this just further diluting the present position?

The largest portion of the bill deals with the repeal of sections 17.1 and 17.2 of the Land Titles Act. These will be replaced by new sections which include most of the original text in sections 17.1 and 17.2. The first deviation is the removal of the provision allowing for the creation of a "general register" in which is kept "a record of all copies of writs of enforcement and other registrable instruments" and "set out in alphabetical order the names of the persons whose land is affected by writs of enforcement and other instruments." There is no replacement made for the general register. Question to the presenter. Maybe we can get some of these answers over the next period of time.

The other key deviation between sections 17.1 and 17.2 is the new section condensing the two terms "writs of enforcement" and "other registrable instruments" in the single term "instrument." This seems to be a simple housekeeping change as the definitions of the original terms are made in the opening of the proposed new section. What may be questioned, however, is why such an extensive change needs to be made when the result of these is essentially the same as the original.

Now, under instruments. Why are these terms to be changed to the word "instrument"? This seems to be implying that instead of the north and south registers there would only be one.

Under the general register, the main amendment of this particular one: in the wake of the removal of the general register, is there any sinister motive in the movement to Edmonton or Calgary? I understand there might be, and this is one item that I would like to come out maybe over the next questions.

Now, we have contacted the Canadian Bar Association in Edmonton and the Canadian Bar Association in Calgary. The Canadian Bar Association has not had any major concerns with this. We also contacted a law professor at the University of Alberta specializing in real estate. He has brought out a few concerns, but there haven't been major items.

Some of the questions I'd like to have on record. Another issue is the extension under section 33 of the powers of the CEO under the Parks Canada Agency Act to certify copies of the duplicates of originals. Is there a good reason for this? If so, what is it?

The bill repeals sections 17.1 and 17.2 and replaces them with almost identical wording but omits the term "general register." What does that do to the registry system? The second change is the combining of the terms "writ of enforcement" and "other registrable instruments" into the single term "instrument." I can't see anything wrong with this. But why is it necessary?

Another question. There are some specific areas of the new bill that I'm trying to find out what the effect is to be. First of all, is it consolidation of the land registries districts into one? The main concern I see is the inability of Albertans in the area far from the location of the new office to access its services. For example, the new offices in Edmonton: what does that mean to residents in southern Alberta?

So, Madam Chairman, I do believe I've brought a few things out here, and maybe over the next few weeks while this bill is going through the steps, we can get some answers from the presenter. In the meantime, hopefully we'll have some more questions back from stakeholders.

9:40

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It is a pleasure this evening to rise and speak briefly to Bill 5, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2000. I would like to congratulate the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti for sponsoring this bill and bringing it forward.

There are a couple of highlights here that I think we have to look at. Bill 5 effectively creates a single land titles office with one registrar as opposed to a registrar for each land titles office in the province. Hopefully this will lead to more efficiency in the whole process here in the province. As well, what this bill will do is create one seal for land titles here in the province.

Now, as I understand it, there are a number of reasons why this has taken place. Of course, one of those is that it will place certain land title practices in legislation and ensure that the Land Titles Act is in sync with certain federal legislation. Of course, this is of primary importance here in the province where we do have a number of federal national parks.

In repealing section 122 of the Land Titles Act, it removes the section splitting Alberta into north and south land registration districts, effectively creating one. I think this is a very good step. I think – and time will bear this out – that in the public good, with technology as we have it today, it certainly will give us better centralized control in the storage, retrieval, and transmission of this type of information throughout the province. I would just hope that in doing this, access to this information will not be hindered by people in other parts of the province. Again, this has to deal with where that single office is going to be located.

Now then, what I hope this will do as well is that through technology we will be able to give a timely service to all those people involved in any transactions where we do require the services of land titles. Can one register work effectively? I think that with the passing of this bill we will in fact find out if we do have to alter this bill in order to have more than one office here in the province.

Another minor amendment, as I mentioned earlier, was that now we will be able to use one seal. With only one district, one land titles office, and one registrar, there certainly isn't any need for more than one seal. Of course, what this legislation will do is accommodate the recent amendments to the Parks Canada Agency Act by the federal government.

With those few comments, Madam Chairman, I would like to close my section here. In doing so, I just want to mention that I am happy to see that there were a number of stakeholders consulted in the development of this bill. They were the Canadian Bar Association, the Edmonton office, the Calgary office, and also Registrations Are Us Limited.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 10

Securities Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Madam Chairman, thank you. I do have a couple of typographical corrections to be made through two small amendments, so if we could get those handed out, that would be great. In the meantime, I'll just speak to a few of the concerns that were brought up during second reading.

The Member for Edmonton-Glenora had a couple of concerns in regards to attracting capital, and Alberta still has a little bit of that problem. Some of the pieces are being filled in by the Canadian Venture Exchange. There are still some gaps in the early venture capital, and I think they'll be addressing those issues.

There were also some concerns by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora about two businessmen who felt they were being overregulated and because of lots of red tape weren't able to get money from the marketplace. We weren't able to get specifics on that complaint, so it was very hard for us to do any checking on that. We don't really know if there was a true complaint there or not, Madam Chairman.

Bill 10 also leaves a number of issues for discussion in committee, and that's why we're here today, particularly the breadth of scope of section 196, the need for disclosure, openness, and transparency in relation to the regulations.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo noted that subordinate legislation under the Securities Act can be made either as a regulation or as a rule under the heads of power enumerated in section 196 of the act. The commission was given rule-making powers in June of '95, and most of the then existing regulations were deemed to be rules by the commission. The act provides that rules made by the commission have the same force and effect as the rules through the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

The only real change we've had since that power has come into effect is that we had an amendment to the fee schedule, Madam Chairman, which was a reduction in fees in 1997 made at the request of the commission following consultation with industry participants.

I think those were some of the main concerns that were brought up during second reading, and what I will do now is go to the amendments. I'm very close to getting all of those handed out. I think they're almost there. You've got them? Great.

Okay. The two amendments were just for typographical errors in printing. The first amendment was going from "a exchange" to making it "an exchange," and the second amendment was to add "or" in section 13. I would like to see if we can get some approval on that, Madam Chairman.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, Madam Chairman. In regards to the amendments put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, these are certainly housekeeping, to say the least. I am glad to stand briefly and support them. Meanwhile, I am anxious. I have some questions concerning this bill, but in regards to the amendments here, they're simply a correction of grammar, and I support them.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

9:50

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's the first

opportunity I've had to speak on this bill. I think it will be recognized perhaps 10 years in the future as one of the first steps in a significant change in the economy of not only Calgary but also the entire province, because I, too, share the concerns of my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora regarding the raising of venture capital in this province.

Specifically on the bill, I have some questions for the House and specifically hopefully for the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and that is on section 35, the regulations and rule-making. Section 196 sets out the regulation-making powers of the cabinet, from which the commission derives its rule-making authority. Now, the amendment to section 196 is intended, as I understand it – and if the hon. member could clarify this – to clarify that the cabinet and the commission have the authority to implement a permanent registration system by way of regulation.

Now, also under the same section, in section 196(j), amendments, the cabinet and the commission will have the authority to make regulations or rules in respect of securities in which there is the category of registrant, and I understand that this is the category of registrant that may or may not trade. Does this include mutual-fund dealers or, for instance, scholarship plan dealers?

Section 196(k) now is being amended here in Bill 10 to clarify that the cabinet and the commission have the authority to deem a particular form or type of disclosure document to be or not to be an offering memorandum for purposes of offerings of exempt securities.

Now, on the next section of 196 that is being added, the hon. member can correct me. Is this to clarify that the cabinet and the commission have the authority to deem any type of trade in securities to be a particular form or type of disclosure document, to be a distribution? As I understand it, there is no current provision prescribing the circumstances in which an exemption from the prospectus requirements of the act, the regulations, or the commission are deemed to be a distribution.

As I understand it also, Madam Chairman, under the proposed resale national instrument, the resale of securities by a purchaser in an open jurisdiction without resale restrictions backed into a closed jurisdiction will be deemed a distribution. This will ensure that an issuer does not sell into an open jurisdiction under a private placement in order to avoid applicable resale when those securities are sold back into the issuer's home jurisdiction or another closed jurisdiction.

Now, if the hon. member can also in due time explain to the House the amendment to section 196(n). Is it correct that it is going to clarify that the cabinet and the commission have the authority to establish a system to integrate prospectuses and continue its disclosure?

With those remarks and those questions, Madam Chairman, at this time I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 10 in committee.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I move that the committee do now rise and report.

[Motion to report progress on Bill 10 carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following:

Bill 2, Bill 4, and Bill 5. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 10. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly. I would also like to table copies of the documents tabled during the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur with this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the opposition for their co-operation this evening. I think we had a very productive evening.

[At 9:59 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 4, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/04/04

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, we thank You for Your abundant blessings for our province and ourselves. We ask You to ensure to us Your guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have a long list of hon. members who have advised me today that they would like to participate in this point in the Routine, as we have long lists for other aspects of the Routine. So let us be patient as we move forward.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to present a petition signed by 7,500 people. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to . . . introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight. Employers must be responsible for their employees' safety! We are asking the Legislature of Alberta to pass a "Tara McDonald Law" to protect employees' lives.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition here from a number of young people in St. Albert and area who are in support of Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition today signed by 100 Albertans from Leduc to High Prairie and a great many in north-central Edmonton. They do petition and "urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare," sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These petitions just keep rolling in regardless of the damage control the Premier tries to do. I have more than a hundred here signed by people throughout Edmonton, St. Albert, Leduc, and Spruce Grove who are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table a petition signed by 247 Albertans from Edson, Robb, Carrot Creek, Grande Cache, Wildwood, Hinton, St. Paul, and Smoky Lake. This petition is urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 369 people from the Edmonton, Stony Plain, Carvel, Sangudo, Spruce Grove, Seba Beach, Evansburg, Wabamun, and Sherwood Park areas, and they are petitioning "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present this afternoon. The first is a petition signed from citizens in Calgary and Edson urging

the Government to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

The second is a petition signed by 352 citizens from Edmonton, Leduc, Ardrossan, and Sherwood Park urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have two petitions to present today. The first is signed by 185 people from Edmonton, Grande Prairie, St. Paul, Calgary, and Devon. This is on the issue of mature and aging women and asks that the government take an enlightened, preventative approach and add medications and therapies to the Alberta drug list.

The second petition is signed by 125 people from a variety of locations in northern and central Alberta. They are asking that the government "stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table petitions signed by citizens from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Beaumont, Legal, Carvel, Fort Saskatchewan, and Alberta Beach asking "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [our] public health care [system]." At the end of today's tablings we will have tabled 5,033 names, bringing the total to date to 38,426 concerned Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to also table a petition. It is signed by 495 Albertans who reside in Edmonton, Gibbons, Redwater, Ardrossan, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert. They are asking the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [our] public health care [system]."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling petitions with 155 names of Albertans from Edson, Robb, Carrot Creek, Wildwood, Gainford, Boyle, Smoky Lake, Lamont, and Bonnyville urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to be able to present a petition to the Assembly. This is signed by 291 Calgaryans, including those living in a number of the southwest Calgary constituencies like Calgary-Glenmore. They are petitioning this Assembly to "urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present to the Assembly a petition signed by 215 Albertans. They reside in Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Morinville, Vegreville, and Fort Saskatchewan, and the petition to which they've added their names reads as follows:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta, urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care" in the province. This is signed by 332 Albertans from Red Deer, Sylvan Lake, Ponoka, Stettler, Vermilion, Smoky Lake, St. Paul, New Dayton, Warspite, Cold Lake, Vilna, and especially Edson.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present today. The first one is signed by 265 Albertans from Peace River, St. Isidore, Fairview, Grimshaw, Grande Prairie, McLennan, La Crete, Nampa, and Falher. Their petition states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

The second petition that I have today, Mr. Speaker, states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

It is signed by 154 citizens of this province from Edmonton, Millet, Stony Plain, Gibbons, and Sherwood Park.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Assembly. It's signed by 439 Albertans from Red Deer, Lacombe, Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Cold Lake, Rimbey, Bluffton, Ponoka, Smoky Lake, Leduc, Spruce Grove, Eckville, Rimbey, Wetaskiwin, Stettler, Mulhurst, St. Albert, Grande Prairie, Fort Saskatchewan, Lethbridge, Raymond, and Cardston. These citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table a petition signed by 1,055 Albertans from Grande Prairie, Beaverlodge, Wembley, Sexsmith, Calgary, Rimbey, Marwayne, Morinville, Canmore, Banff, Blackfalds, Medicine Hat, Fort Saskatchewan,

Leduc, Stettler, Valleyview, Red Deer, Bashaw, Bluffton, Winfield, Edmonton, Darwell, Lethbridge, Fox Creek, Carvel, Barrhead, and Fallis. This brings the total number signing this petition to 9,464. The petitioners request the Assembly "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the petition standing in my name on the Order Paper be read for a first time.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition which I recently tabled with this Assembly urging the government to stop its move towards privatizing our public health care system now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to rise and request that the petition I tabled recently be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to protect, support, and enhance public health care in Alberta and to ban for-profit, private hospitals from receiving public dollars.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that at this point the petition with respect to concern about erosion of our public health care system be now read and received please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure this afternoon that I ask that the petition I presented the other day now be read and received. It's the one dealing with stopping private health care in this province.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled the other week be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I presented yesterday and, if possible, the petition I presented on March 23 be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to ask that the petition filed on the 22nd of March and another one on the 3rd of April be now read and received. They are regarding the privatization of health care in the province.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented in this Assembly on March 23 regarding the underfunding of public health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask now that the petitions I filed in the Assembly on March 23 and April 3 now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative

Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented regarding the undermining of public health care and the concerns about it be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would request that the petition I presented on March 23 urging the government to stop privatizing the health care system now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented against for-profit health care on March 23 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented on behalf of 114 Edmonton and area residents requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, request that the petition I presented on March 23 signed by 287 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the

petitions in respect to support for public health care that I introduced on March 23 and yesterday, April 3, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 7, 8, and 10.

I'm also giving oral notice today that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 13, 14, 15, 16, and 24.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of a letter I sent to the Prime Minister confirming the discussions that took place in Calgary on March 23. This letter alludes to the Prime Minister and myself agreeing that there would be a review of all legislation across the country by various provincial jurisdictions as it pertains to contracting out medical services.

It alludes to an agreement between the Prime Minister and myself that we would uphold the five principles of the Canada Health Act, that these principles are paramount, and we agreed to work together to defend those principles. We agreed that "Canada should not allow a two-tier, for-profit health system to develop." The letter states that we agreed that "the status quo in health care is not working and we agreed to work together in developing a new system that is economically sustainable" but still operates within the parameters of the Canada Health Act. It points out to the Prime Minister that the Prime Minister "raised no objection to the passage of Bill Eleven."

1:50

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table responses to written questions 218, 219, 220, 226, and 227.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file with the Assembly today a news release entitled No NAFTA Implications for Bill 11. Accompanying this is a legal review by Shawna Vogel, an international business lawyer with an Edmonton firm, Cruickshank Karvellas.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to table five copies of a document entitled Restoring Federal Funding Support for Alberta's Health System.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and table a statement in recognition of Building Safety

Week, being held April 2 through to the 8th. In recognition of this week I invite all members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing the importance of building safety, construction, and building codes and the dedicated building officials who administer these codes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table five copies of a letter I signed today in response to the letter dated March 21, 2000, from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I would like to quote two sentences in my letter. If she

would like a thorough debate on Bill 11 with full record and in an environment representative and open to all Albertans, there is no better place than the Legislature. If this challenge is just a cheap political ploy to attract attention, please don't waste my time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table several letters from concerned Albertans from Fort McMurray, Calgary, and Edmonton who are opposed to Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings this afternoon. Let's start off with a letter from Michael Dobbin, a very prominent Calgarian, expressing his opposition to Bill 11.

Next, a commentary which appeared in the April/May 2000 issue of *LawNow* by the editor, an analysis of Bill 11 and where it takes us.

The next one is a program from the groundbreaking for the Calgary Centre of Hope, a wonderful new facility by the Salvation Army in that city.

Next, a report on homelessness. Now, this is a summary of federal government initiatives dealing with homelessness dated January 21, 2000.

The next one is a summary of national activities prepared by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities providing a perspective on housing with a bigger focus on how we provide safe, affordable housing to every citizen.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the most voluminous document I've got is a report from the government of Canada and the Hon. Claudette Bradshaw, Minister of Labour and minister responsible for homelessness, that inventories, catalogues some of the programs that deal with homelessness across the country, including this province.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings this afternoon as well. The first tabling that I have is a letter from Mrs. Anderson from Edmonton, who has asked that a copy of this be tabled in the Assembly. She has herself faxed a copy of her correspondence to every Member of the Legislative Assembly, and it is imploring the government to scrap Bill 11.

The second tabling I have is from Monica Hughes, a constituent of Edmonton-Glenora, who writes the Premier and suggests that Bill 11 should not be passed and that there is no justification for supporting this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I also have five copies of the cover page of several copies of the government's householder that are being sent back to

the Premier, including statements saying: "I am absolutely opposed to this Bill"; the Premier and "his band of 'truth squad' bandits"; just say no; and say no to Bill 11.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of an Alberta Liberal caucus news release dated April 4, 2000. I'm taking the unusual stand of tabling a news release in the Assembly because of the importance of the issue. The news release says that despite the Acting Provincial Treasurer, the Alberta Liberals will oppose the imposition of a sales tax in the province of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a number of tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter from Dr. David Bond, who is president of the Alberta Medical Association, wherein he outlines his understanding of the meeting that was held between himself and the Premier. He indicates that he anticipates the proposed amendments to Bill 11 by mid-April, whereby they will be assessed each on its own merit and that this may not necessarily translate into support from the AMA for the legislation.

The second is a letter from Darlene Konduc from Sherwood Park, wherein she indicates that there is a place for free enterprise and business for profit in our society, but as a tax payer, a voter, and a businessperson she does not want any of her tax dollars to support health care for profit.

The third is a paper that has been put forward by Dr. Laura Shanner. She is with the J. Dossetor Health Ethics Centre and department of public health sciences at the University of Alberta, and she indicates that Bill 11 should be removed entirely and a new approach to actual reform of health care undertaken. Increasing surgical facilities will do extremely little to reduce costs and improve health care for Albertans. The paper is entitled Ethical Concerns about Bill 11.

The other tabling that I have is from Dr. Kathrine Peters, who is associate professor of the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Alberta. She indicates that the Premier appears "to have no regard to the constituents" that he serves, and it appears that he has "been starving the public health care system to prepare the way for a private system."

My last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a copy of a speech entitled The Immorality of Bill 11 given by Reverend Dr. Bruce Miller that indicates:

Besides being dishonest and deceptive, with the name "Health Care Protection Act," Bill 11 undermines the moral foundation of our health care system, and puts in jeopardy the very values which we treasure, such as compassion, universality and accessibility.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a response from the Alberta Partnership for Health in regards to Bill 11.

MS LEBOVICI: Not endorsing it.

MR. WICKMAN: Not endorsing it by any means. No, no, no, no, no.

MS LEBOVICI: Sixty-eight associations.

MR. WICKMAN: Oh, yes, all 68.

My second one, Mr. Speaker, is from a constituent, Mr. Don

Dickson from Edmonton-Rutherford, who wishes it known that he is strongly opposed to Bill 11.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today, the first of which is from a very prominent Edmontonian, a gentleman and long-term educator in the province of Alberta, a fantastic soccer coach and football coach. He is now a councillor in the city of Edmonton. His name is Bryan Anderson. He has written a letter to the Hon. Halvar Jonson decrying the discrepancies between the cataract surgery at the Royal Alex hospital and that which is in Lamont at the Archer memorial hospital. He decries the difference between the service there and the service here and that the foldable single lenses are provided free of charge there, where they're \$250 here, sir.

The second tabling is from a resident of Banff, Alberta, Yvonne May. She's writing the Premier with regards to the Genesis Land Development Corp., the heli-skiing operation, and four-seasons resort plan for the Spray Valley. She asks that the Premier immediately halt this development.

The third is also of the same subject matter, sir, and will not be repeated, save and except the person that wrote this letter to the Premier is Bruce Bembridge from Exshaw, Alberta.

The fourth is the same sort of letter to the Hon. Ralph Klein, again that the Genesis Land Development Corp. stop the development immediately and is from Pascal Beaurais from Canmore, Alberta, sir.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two tablings. The first tabling is a letter to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board signed by 22 people who live just northeast of Edmonton who are opposed to the drilling activity in the vicinity in which they live for a variety of reasons which are outlined in the letter.

The second set of tablings I have is three letters, one from Lisa Hauser of Calgary, Laura Downing of Calgary, and Lisa Downing of Canmore. These three people have written in opposition to the Genesis Land Development proposed development of the Kananaskis Valley, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies signed by six different Albertans. They are Annie Larrivee, Philippe Gauthier, Phil Villeneuve, Terry Burstrom, Darrell Skinner, and Carrie Skinner. These letters are all opposed to the Genesis Land Development Corp. proposal to develop a heli-skiing operation and four-seasons resort in the Spray Valley.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've just brought a small sample of some of the correspondence that have come to my office from Cathryn Furtak, Geoff Collinge, Carl Scullion, R.L. Sylvester, Karl Kolm, and Patricia Henderson, all expressing grave concerns about Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a letter from Jennifer Chipman, a very thoughtful letter urging all MLAs to support the integration of the midwifery services evaluation project and, further, to support the funding of midwifery services under Alberta health care.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table the appropriate copies of two separate letters from constituents of Edmonton-Manning, Abe Fehr and Marie Fehr, and they're CC'd to just about everybody. The gist of the letter starting off is:

The Alberta Government, under Premier Ralph Klein is once again proving that they are totally irresponsible to the people of Alberta by attempting to privatize our hospitals.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to table a report. In fact, it's a study prepared by Dr. Donna Wilson, professor of nursing at the University of Alberta. This very valid and reliable study talks about the shift away from hospital use by terminally ill and dying patients.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling this afternoon on behalf of a constituent, Rita Talen. She is on the board of directors of the Rehoboth Christian ministries, a nonprofit organization serving Albertans who are mentally challenged.

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how to handle this, but obviously there are some games being played here relative to tablings. I have just in the past few days received maybe 300, 400 letters in support of Bill 11. I could read every one today and table them, but we'd be here until 6 or 7 o'clock this evening. I'm just serving warning. I'm just going to table a couple today.

The first one is addressed to the Leader of the Official Opposition. It says, "Dear Madam: I am totally disappointed listening to you and your socialist followers trying to scare me and my family into believing Bill 11 is all wrong." Another letter here says:

Congratulations! Bill 11 is a masterpiece. In my view the bill:

1. is a victory for democracy; we citizens have been consulted prior to the legislation. That is a first.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just file one more.

Last week I spent an afternoon with a cup of tea and Bill 11. I had heard so much about Alberta's Health Care Protection Act in the media that I wanted to read the document to gain a better understanding of the contents and what it means to Albertans.

I expected to read a much more radical bill than the one put forward. This legislation is a common-sense approach to help solve our health care problems. You and your government should be congratulated, not condemned, for your initiative in this bill.

And it goes on and on and on.

Mr. Speaker, I'm serving notice today that if this nonsense by the opposition on the other side continues, I will make sure that we pull out every single letter in support. It will take us until midnight each and every day to table all of the letters that we have, if they want to continue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Forestry.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies in response to a letter that was tabled by the Member for Edmonton-Norwood. This letter, of course, is in response to debate. I've asked in writing for the member to identify what some of the policies are of their government in rural Alberta, and I'll just read one little part of it. The last policy we heard was in '91, of course, when the Liberal leader at the time said: what it means is that instead of building hospitals in every rinky-dink town in Alberta, we start saying no. That is why I'd like to know what their policies are.

It also goes on to say . . . [interjections] This is very short. For the amount of time you take, this is short. The leader also goes on to say: what it means is that instead of building curling rinks in every town, we say no. He also indicated that they would say no to recreation centres, shelters, and roads: all important issues to rural Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to see their response in writing.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a constituent of mine in Edmonton-Whitemud, Mrs. Armelle Bridgeman. She's seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that she please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me today to introduce to you and to members of this Assembly some 19 grade 12 students from St. Matthew high school in Rocky Mountain House. They're accompanied by their teacher, Darren Brick, and parent Mrs. Darlene Levitt. I believe they're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they now rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Legislature 16 distinguished visitors, and 13 of those are very progressive, dedicated students from Mimiw Sakahikan at Pigeon Lake. It's really a pleasure to have them here today. They're accompanied by Richard Espinoza, Michael Toohey, and Elizabeth Rowan. I would ask that they now rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you 29 bright, enthusiastic grade 6 students from Clive school in Clive, Alberta, accompanied today by their teacher, Mr. Rob MacKinnon, who is one of my favourite teachers; parent-helpers Mrs. Gloria Friesen, Mrs. Wanda Grose, Mr. Verle Lang, Mrs. Bev Northcott, Mr. Neil Ronald, Mrs. Margaret Ronald, Mr. Allan Rowley, Mrs. Wanda Wagner, Mrs. Margaret Westergreen, Mr. Mark Westling; and bus driver Mr. Jerome Wildeman.

They're seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 11 students that are here in the public gallery. They are with NorQuest College. NorQuest College is very good about having tours through the Legislative Assembly. This group today is accompanied by their group leader, Mr. Cap Tiege. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a great group of students to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly. I've been in their grade 10 classroom, and they had great questions to ask. There are 18 of them here. They are here with their teacher, Miss Dunn. They're from Sturgeon composite, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point this afternoon I'm delighted to be able to introduce to you and through you to all of our colleagues in the Legislative Assembly five individuals who have been very effective and very strong advocates for a strong public health care system. I spot them in the public gallery opposite: Dr. Harold Swanson, Verna Milligan, Dr. Malcolm McPhee, Jane Walker, and Wilma Kassian. I'd invite each of our guests to stand and receive the customary warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a great deal of pride and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a distinguished Canadian who is accompanied by a very, very special Albertan and Edmontonian. The distinguished Canadian is none other than Shirley Douglas, a woman of remarkable talent, dedication, and principle. She is currently the spokesperson for the Canadian Health Coalition and a noted actress. For several years now Ms Douglas has been speaking out across the country about the problems facing the universal public health care system, and as my colleagues have perhaps already guessed, she is the daughter of Tommy Douglas, the former CCF/NDP Premier of Saskatchewan and the man who pioneered medicare in that province. The very special Albertan is none other than my wife, Swinder Pannu. Both of these guests, Mr. Speaker, are seated in your gallery. I will now request them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you a constituent of Edmonton-Glengarry, Bev Dockrill. She is seated in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask that she now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I've received notices from 21 hon. members who indicated to me that they wish to raise a question in question period today. I've never had such length of a list. There are 21, so I ask for brevity in questions and brevity in answers today so all hon. members will have an opportunity.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. First main question.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 8 in this Legislative Assembly the Premier said the following about his private hospitals policy: "If we had something to hide, if we had something to be afraid of, we would have kept this from the public." Yesterday the Official Opposition released a secret report funded by this government, by the Department of Health and Wellness. The government has held on to this rather damaging report and thus chosen to hide it from Albertans, I guess because it told the truth, not the misinformation being spread by the government's million dollar propaganda campaign. My questions are to the Premier. Why was this report kept hidden from Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I am going to have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness supplement, but since the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition has alluded to hiding things, I would like to table a letter dated December 16, 1994, and it says:

Dear Nancy:

We have recently been approached by the Department of Health with respect to your records as the former Minister responsible for that department. They would like to transfer the material to the Provincial Archives of Alberta. We would like to accept the material.

As ministerial records are currently considered the private property of the respective ministers, your approval will be required to effect the deposit.

According to my information, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has not replied to this particular memo, and I understand that there are some 155 boxes of records that were compiled when she was Minister of Health that she now refuses to release to the public.

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader, please. As the hon. Government House Leader has already risen on a point of order that will be dealt with at the conclusion of question period, I can only anticipate that the point of order that the hon. Government House Leader would probably want to raise with the House would have to do with pertinence, relevancy, anticipation of a debate that would go on tonight. I want to make it very clear that yesterday the chair did rise with respect to this matter and did indicate that questions dealing with Bill 11 would not be dealt with today as there is a scheduled debate tonight and it's on the Order Paper. However, that does not preclude questions respecting policy of the government on various matters. So my only plea to anyone who's raising questions today is: be very skillful in the words of your questions so the chair will not have to intervene again.

Private Health Services (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier has talked over the last few months about the importance of debate, about providing Albertans with all of the information about his health care policy, about the importance of being open and accountable, how

can he justify hiding from Albertans one of the few Alberta-specific reports that are available on private health care policy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the report to which the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alludes was prepared autonomously by the University of Alberta, yes, I understand, at the request of the Department of Health and Wellness, and I'll have the hon. minister respond.

2:20

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the Official Opposition's portrayal of the status of this report is false. The study by the Institute of Health Economics, which is an independent and very reputable agency at the University of Alberta – and, yes, it is funded by an unconditional grant of \$250,000 a year, and there are at least a dozen other agencies or companies or institutions that provide funding to that institute as well.

Mr. Speaker, the document that was alluded to in this Assembly yesterday is an early draft of the report. It still has to undergo further work and also, as is traditional with the institute, peer review. This document is not a final document. It is independent of government, and the funding that we provide to the institute is on an ongoing basis with no strings attached in terms of the whole assistance that we're providing.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that yesterday his minister said that there's very little, if any, evidence in Alberta dealing with private health care, is the Premier keeping his study hidden because it contradicts his private hospital policy and his minister of health?

MR. KLEIN: It's not my study, Mr. Speaker, but since she referred to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, I'll have him respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we look forward to the final report. As I said, the institute has been of considerable assistance to Alberta Health and Wellness and to the health care system in general in terms of providing independent and learned reviews of a number of issues and policy matters as far as the health care system is concerned. I would suspect that the final report, which the hon. member should have enough courtesy to recognize and acknowledge is what anybody should be quoting from, I'm sure will be fair and balanced and constructive as far as the health care system is concerned.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why did the Premier tell Albertans on March 14 that there was evidence to support his private hospitals policy when his own report, hidden until yesterday, says that there is no evidence to show that the public health care system is not efficient? Why would he misinform Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this government has never, not now, will never, have a private hospital policy, so when the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alludes to a private hospital policy, she asks a question that is absolutely totally irrelevant.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why did the Premier tell Albertans on December 10 of 1999 that private hospitals are more cost-effective when his own report, hidden until yesterday, says that there is no proof of this claim? Why would he misinform Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I've never alluded to private hospitals.

It is not in the language of this caucus. There is nothing being considered by this government that includes private hospitals. As a matter of fact, the opposite, the absolute opposite is true.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, in fact, it talks about private hospitals in this funded study from the government of Alberta.

Why did the Premier tell Albertans on March 14 that under his private hospitals policy there would be no queue-jumping when his own report, hidden until yesterday, says that enhanced services and faster access to care will be available for those able to pay, at least according to this government-funded report?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that's what a University of Alberta report might or might not say. I understand that it's only in draft stage and has not been subjected to a peer review.

Relative to the report itself I'll again have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would like to first of all indicate and repeat that this study is being done by the Institute of Health Economics, which is a respected independent agency of the University of Alberta. That is the first misstatement that has been made across the way.

Secondly, it is my opinion that the hon. member is misquoting or selectively quoting from this particular report. Some might call it paraphrasing, but they have a curious way of paraphrasing. However, Mr. Speaker, I think the important thing here is that the report is in the development stages. I would think that any responsible person across the way would want to wait until the final report is completed before quoting it as a set of final findings.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, if this report is an interim report, then why wouldn't the government pull its private hospitals policy statements and discussions and await the final report before proceeding further with their policy, which has caused so much concern amongst Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no private hospital policy statement; therefore the question is irrelevant.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why did the Premier tell Albertans on November 16, 1999, that under his private hospital policy there would be no two-tier medicine in Alberta when his own report, which has been hidden from Albertans until yesterday, says that his private hospital policy could lead to two-tiered health care. Why would he misinform Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again there is nothing to allude to a so-called private hospital policy, so that question is irrelevant. It's quite clear that any policy being developed by this government does not allow a two-tier, for-profit health system to develop, unlike the policy of the Liberal Party, where the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition said: if there is a place for private hospitals in the system, let them operate. She is the only person who has alluded to private hospitals.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the issue is in fact extremely relevant to the people of this province, why did the Premier tell Albertans on March 10 that there was evidence that contracting out surgeries was more cost-effective when his own report, hidden until yesterday, says that no comparative studies to back up the Premier's claim exist. Why would he misinform the people of this province on such an important debate on public policy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the only person misinforming the people of this province is the leader of the Liberal opposition and her devoted group of loyal followers; namely, the Liberals, who have been on a very intensified campaign of spreading vicious and malicious misinformation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Public opposition to the government scheme to legalize private, for-profit hospitals under a slightly different name has been growing steadily since last November. All of the government's expensive PR spin-doctoring has only deepened and solidified public opposition. My questions are to the Premier. Why does the Premier persist in shoving down the throats of Albertans something that they clearly – clearly – do not want?

2:30

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not so sure that that is the case. I can allude to the policy of the NDs, obviously not the bill. The policy is quite clear and is against what virtually every doctor, even the AMA, has told us. The policy of the NDs is to eliminate all surgical clinics whatsoever, including therapeutic abortion clinics, including cataract clinics. The policy of the NDs – and this hon. member can clarify it – is to immediately close all surgical clinics that are contracted to regional health authorities. In other words, the policy is no contracting out whatsoever. Everything must be done within the confines of the bricks and mortar of a full-scale hospital. That is their policy.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Premier for explaining my party's policy to Albertans. He should leave it to me to do it. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I'd like to proceed.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. member, I gave you my permission, and you proceeded to give a statement and a preamble. When you throw it out in this House, you've got to expect to get it back.

If you have a question, I'll recognize you. Proceed.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier again: why won't the Premier admit that his expensive PR spin-doctoring has failed for the simple reason that Albertans don't support his privatization scheme no matter how it is packaged?

MR. KLEIN: No spin-doctoring here. No privatization here, Mr. Speaker. The only people who have been guilty of spin-doctoring: well, certainly the Canadian Union of Public Employees, who have probably spent millions on this campaign; the Liberals in particular, who won't tell us how much they've spent on their campaign; and the Friends of Medicare, backed by the Alberta Federation of Labour. That's been the only spin-doctoring.

Mr. Speaker, all we have sent out is a copy of a bill that purports to become law, and as I've said, nothing can be more truthful than the law.

DR. PANNU: I hope he listens to the AMA, if not to the AFL.

Mr. Speaker, my last question to the Premier: why doesn't the Premier understand that when Albertans say no, they mean no when it comes to the privatization of health care?

MR. KLEIN: I find it so very, very strange that this member in particular would be asking those kinds of questions: the great defender of medicare. Yet he fails to question in any way, shape, or

form the legislation that was passed in Saskatchewan, the birthplace of medicare. The daughter of the late hon. Tommy Douglas is here in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. That piece of legislation, passed in 1996, is an act respecting health facilities. Our act is very, very similar to that act passed in Saskatchewan by the NDs, only our act is much stronger. It even puts more fences around contracted-out surgical facilities.

Relative to a comment that was made by the leader of the third party, I'm not trying to explain ND policy on this particular issue, but if he would stand up in this House and explain the policy, I'm sure Albertans would be most appreciative.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Hospital Construction

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Lakeland health authority announced that the Fort Saskatchewan health centre will undergo major fire code upgrades and improvement to the surgical suites. I'd like to ask the Minister of Infrastructure to speak to the reasons the upgrades are needed and what they are expected to accomplish.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recently announced project in the Fort Saskatchewan hospital deals with upgrading much of the fire and the electrical requirements but also adding some additional space for the much-needed surgery that's taking place. Many of the staff are working in small space, especially medical records. We're also concerned with some of the fire regulations, and we'll be looking at some window upgrades and improving the total envelope of that part of the hospital.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Fort health centre is a busy facility and does a great many surgeries and they've been using temporary facilities, temporary additions for several years, I'd like to ask the minister how a future new facility would fit into the ministry's long-range plans.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, what happens now in the province of Alberta is that individual regional health authorities will be prioritizing projects based on need and also on space requirements and program delivery. That particular list will then come to Alberta Infrastructure, and with the co-operation of the minister of health our department will review those space requirements and prioritize them on a provincewide basis and then make the necessary announcements as per the budget dollars available in that particular year.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to that question, would the future construction of a new Fort Saskatchewan hospital or any other health facility be impacted by health authorities leasing facilities in their community?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, from about '92-93 to '99 the government invested close to a billion dollars in not only new hospitals but renovations, repairs, and upgrading and in bringing in new technology. Over the next three years we'll be rolling out a business plan with a \$324 million investment, again not only preservation of facilities but new facilities and some upgrades. The regional health authorities will look at what strategy gives them the best value for the tax dollar, but we're committed to spend at least \$324 million over the next three years.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of discrepancies between what the Premier has been telling Albertans about private health care policy in this province and what is in reports that the government has commissioned and received. I'm wondering for the record this afternoon if the Premier could define for Albertans the difference between a private hospital and an overnight private surgical facility. What is the difference, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's in the policy statement that, of course, led to the bill, which will be introduced for second reading later today. If the hon. member is confused as to what a hospital is, I would reiterate the challenge that I made and ask her to go and visit the Royal Alex or University hospital or Misericordia or Grey Nuns. If she wants to know what a surgical clinic is, whether it's a day clinic – first of all, there are no overnight clinics that I know of in the province other than, I think, HRG, which contracts to WCB and British Columbia for some services. I know of no overnight surgical clinics, but I would suspect that an overnight surgical clinic would be an extension of the kind of clinics that now operate on a day basis. There are 140 of them operating in Alberta as I speak.

So if the hon. member wants to first of all go to a hospital, like the Royal Alex or the Grey Nuns or Misericordia or University hospital, if she doesn't know what a hospital looks like, then I would invite her to go down and have a look at one of those. If she wants to know what a surgical clinic looks like, then I would invite her to go down and have a look at one of the local therapeutic abortion clinics or cataract surgery clinics.

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, all hon. members have been circulated the document called Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, if you'd like the chair to assist, Definitions, section 29 in the act, defines what a designated surgical facility is. There are also sections in here about what public hospital means.

2:40

We indicated yesterday that as the debate has been established and scheduled to start tonight on second reading, there'll be ample opportunity for it, and the question period should not be used in terms of talking about things that are clearly before all members of the House. Now, there have been great liberties taken with some of the questions already this afternoon. I would like to refer all members to *Beauchesne* 409(11), dealing with government policy.

Hon. member, would you continue, please, but remember what the chair has said.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Premier. Why did the Premier tell Albertans on November 24, '99, that under his private hospital policy no one would get faster service because they have a credit card or cheque book when his own government report, hidden until yesterday, says that there could be receipt of different enhanced services for Albertans according to the ability to pay? Were you not concerned this would mislead Albertans, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Before answering the question, I stand to be corrected, Mr. Speaker. I talked about 140 clinics. I mean there are 140 procedures being done in 52 clinics, and I'm sure that some of those clinics exist here in Edmonton. I reiterate that if the hon. member wants to see the difference between a surgical clinic and a hospital, go down and see for herself.

Mr. Speaker, I'll answer the question. Since this government has never alluded to private hospitals – only the Liberals have alluded to private hospitals – since the government has never alluded to a private hospitals policy, I consider the question to be irrelevant.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, why did the Premier tell Albertans on November 16, 1999, that there would be no two-tiered, American style health care in Alberta when the government's report, hidden until yesterday, says that sources of revenue other than that from RHAs may be needed for private hospitals to survive financially? Were you not concerned that this would mislead Albertans, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the question of two-tier, for-profit, again, this government has never alluded to allowing a two-tier, for-profit health care system to develop. As a matter of fact, I will reiterate the agreement made between the Prime Minister and myself where we agreed that Canada should not ever allow a two-tier, for-profit health system to develop. It's as simple as that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Organized Crime

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you my questions this afternoon have absolutely nothing to do with health policy or Bill 11. My questions this afternoon are to the hon. Minister of Justice and the hon. Minister of Infrastructure. Albertans are encouraged that the government has committed itself to combating organized and gang crime, but many are concerned with recent media reports of a new courtroom under construction in Edmonton. My first question is to the Minister of Justice. Apart from spending 1 and a half million dollars on a new courthouse in Edmonton, what exactly has the minister done to stem the increase in gang-related activities in this province?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Organized crime is a very serious concern of this government and indeed of all governments across the country. That's why when I attended a meeting with attorneys general in December – December 5, I believe it was – in Vancouver, we spent a good half day hearing from RCMP and other police forces across the country about the nature and extent of organized crime, the nature and extent of gangs in the country, what is happening with respect to them, what we need to do, and speaking as well about how we can co-ordinate our processes and our information to best combat organized crime.

Mr. Speaker, organized crime does not respect boundaries, so the fact that we police on a municipal basis or on a provincial basis is a bit of an inhibitor in the war against organized crime, and therefore it's absolutely essential that justice departments across the country, attorneys general across the country, work together to make sure that there's a good sharing of information and good co-operation between our police services. For example, I would point out that there was a conference, organized not by the Attorney General's office but by police forces themselves, in Banff this last weekend talking about gangs and particularly focusing on aboriginal gangs.

So there's been a lot of effort. I've referenced in the House before the \$8 million which we allocated in November of 1998 to the sharing of information and the Criminal Intelligence Service of Alberta, which again co-ordinates and helps the police forces across this province co-ordinate their efforts on organized crime. One significant result of that was the very significant bust last September where some 30 individuals were arrested and charged with gang-related activities.

Of course, that brings us to the need for a courtroom, not a new courthouse but a courtroom which is of the size and magnitude to allow us to prosecute large groups as may come before us with these arrests on organized crime issues.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister please explain just exactly why a special courtroom is required to try gang members? Can't they use the same courtrooms as everyone else?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is essential, as part of our battle against organized crime, that we have in place the resources necessary to deal with the second stage. The police of course have the obligation to investigate and to arrest and to bring to justice the people who are involved in organized crime and gangs, but we then have to provide the infrastructure necessary to deal with those charges in court. When you have gang-related charges, it's necessary to have all of those who are charged on an associated basis in court at the same time, thus the need for a large courtroom.

But I would indicate again that we're not building a specialized courthouse as has been done in other provinces. Rather, we're renovating some space in the basement of the existing courthouse in Edmonton to provide for a larger courtroom which will be used for prosecution of gang type offences like this and for many other uses within the province.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Given that the minister is responsible for constructing this courtroom, can he advise if other alternatives were considered prior to this costly construction?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, our department, in co-operation with the Department of Justice, looked at a number of alternative locations. One was the base at Nmao. However, logistics and some of the security provisions would have been considerable. So we again looked at the courthouse in the city of Edmonton, knowing quite well that the level we're looking at, the basement level, hasn't been renovated since 1980. There are some much-needed code upgrades as well. We also consulted with the three levels of court that had assured us they will be using these court facilities in the future. As a result, we decided to get the best value for the taxpayer dollar and do the renovations, knowing quite well that these courtrooms will be used in the future as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Private Health Services (continued)

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Alberta Liberals released a government-funded report that this government suppressed. The report confirmed that this government's push for private hospitals will lead to higher costs to taxpayers, longer waiting lists in the public health care system, two-tiered medicine, and queue jumping. My questions are to the minister of health.

Albertans would like to know, Mr. Minister, which branch of the government commissioned this study and when. Was it Health and Wellness? The Premier's office? Public Affairs Bureau? Which one was it?

2:50

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the funding, as I indicated I think at least twice this afternoon in answer to other inquiries, is provided to the Institute of Health Economics by Alberta Health and Wellness. I also previously in the Assembly during question period named the amount, \$250,000 annually, and that relationship or agreement has been in place since 1995. The institute has an oversight board which is made up of very well qualified people, both in the area of policy development and academia. The institute reviews issues with Alberta Health and Wellness and with others in the health care sector each year and decides on what their agenda as far as studies and policy development and recommendations will be. They operate quite independently. They are a very credible group, and I think they are a group that we get value from in terms of the studies and the recommendations and the findings they provide for the overall direction and management of the health care system.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that has to be emphasized here is that once again the status of this report is being very much misstated. The members across the way know very well that it is in one of its earlier drafts. There still has to be work done. There still has to be the standard procedure of a peer review of the report done before it is released and before anybody is going to be expected to consider its recommendations.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that this is an interim report. It's not a draft report. It's an interim report, so it's valid as it stands. It's not a draft. Mr. Minister, my question to you is: did your department specifically request this report? Did you, your department, commission this report?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I just indicated in my previous answer, the Department of Health and Wellness, other institutions such as our universities, and other parts of the health care sector discuss with the administration and the board of the institute topics that could be well investigated as far as their agenda is concerned as an institute. However, we did not commission that particular study. You know, if she wants to check with the institute as to how they go about their business and how much money we pay them – if they don't believe that we pay them \$250,000, well, fine, because it is the case. It's not anything unusual or out of the way.

I think we have received over the years good value from this particular institute or agency, Mr. Speaker. It is valuable because they do independent work, and we look forward to their final report. If the hon. member had any courtesy or reasonableness at all, they would want the final and complete report, with the peer review, before they comment or reach conclusions that are not valid.

MS OLSEN: Well, I find it difficult to understand why reputable professors at an institution would release this without standing behind it, and it was released to your office, Mr. Minister. So now that you've read it, can you tell us if you agree with the summary of findings in it?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've not read the report or received it, of course.

THE SPEAKER: And seeking opinions is totally inappropriate for the question period.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, I'm counting on you.

Turner's Syndrome

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two separate families in my constituency have children who've been diagnosed with Turner's syndrome. It's a growth disorder that affects one in 2,500 female births. In both those situations the drug Humatrope has been prescribed at a cost of approximately \$1,000 a month, even though it is not approved for funding by Alberta Health and Wellness for the treatment of Turner's syndrome because, as I understand it, Alberta Health and Wellness deems it to be ineffective for the treatment of Turner's syndrome. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: how does the policy of Alberta Health and Wellness compare to other jurisdictions in Canada regarding the approval of payment for Humatrope in the treatment of Turner's syndrome?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to clarify that the pharmaceutical product referred to, Humatrope, has been approved on a limited basis in Alberta for an area of treatment where our expert drug committee deems it to be effective according to scientific evidence, and that is with respect to adults which are at a certain stage in this disease or condition.

Mr. Speaker, the only province in Canada that I am aware of that covers Humatrope at this time is Manitoba. There may have been some more recent developments in other provinces, but that is the best information I have at the present time.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister of Health and Wellness tell me what the professional qualifications of the Alberta Expert Committee on Drug Quality and Therapeutics is? That's the body that decides which drugs are covered by Alberta Health.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the expert committee is, I think one would agree, a very prestigious committee in terms of their qualifications. It is made up of physicians, pharmacists, people who are very knowledgeable in the whole area of drugs themselves. There are socioeconomic experts with respect to the effectiveness and the long-term efficacy of having certain drugs approved. I think the list of individuals that are part of that committee is an indication of a very well qualified group of people, both in terms of practical experience and also in terms of scientific knowledge and its application.

MR. MARZ: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the same minister: would the minister inquire into why Alberta doctors would be prescribing medications that are not considered to be effective treatment?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the process in Canada is that once a pharmaceutical product, a drug, is approved by Health Canada's approval agency, then it is legal for a physician to prescribe that particular drug for treatment. However, across Canada each of the provinces has a process of reviewing the scientific evidence, the value of treatment, and the effectiveness of treatment in terms of what should and should not be covered under their respective drug payment programs. Therefore, it is not uncommon for a physician to prescribe a particular pharmaceutical product to an individual case without there being coverage by the province's drug program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Private Health Services

(continued)

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are serious issues and questions raised regarding the Alberta experience with private provisions of a publicly funded service, issues and questions which should be investigated by a government considering further extensions of private provisions of insured services. Not my words, but words primarily from the report of the Institute of Health Economics paid for by this government. My questions are to the minister of health. Will the government continue to support a policy of further health care privatization when this report claims there is trouble with what we already have?

3:00

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I will reiterate that in another circumstance the hon. member across the way would be criticizing anyone who was quoting from a report that is not finished. It has some distance to go in terms of finalizing its findings, but it is convenient and it is in keeping with their pattern across the way to quote from partially completed documents and those that may change in the future and so forth.

With respect to the draft document that the hon. member is referring to, I will take the view that when that report is complete, it is certainly something that Alberta Health and Wellness will review very carefully and consider in terms of its findings. But the point here, as the Premier has well stated many times today and previously, is that we are not contemplating a bill that has a provision which deals with establishing a two-tier health care system in this province. We are not contemplating at all establishing private full-service hospitals. No, Mr. Speaker. Those decisions are already made, from the government standpoint, in terms of what should be in the legislation. It is in the legislation. It is in Bill 11. So to keep bringing forward what I regard as irrelevant comment is inappropriate.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Did the minister investigate current privatization efforts before moving ahead with his private health care policy?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do not have any private health care policy. We have brought forward and reported many factors relevant to why we are establishing a very protective piece of legislation. We're moving forward with that, and that is because we want to protect the public health care system and adhere to the principles of the Canada Health Act. No one has been able to indicate any way that we are not adhering to the principles of the Canada Health Act, so this innuendo and implication and false assertions are not relevant or constructive with respect to the matters before the Assembly.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, my third question is to the same minister. What are those other private provisions that the government is considering that are mentioned in the report?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure what he's alluding to in terms of private provisions. We are not, in Bill 11, developing a private hospital system or a private health care system. We are developing a public health care system, one which is for the public, one where they will not have to worry about queue jumping, one where they will not have to worry about being charged extra for insured services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Child Health Benefit

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government has taken many good steps and developed programs to encourage the families who rely on social services alone to become more self-reliant and proud working families, my question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. What do those programs entail?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, in this government we try to provide assistance to those people who need our assistance. Many of them, of course, are not able to work, but there are people amongst our citizens that, while they are working, still do need some assistance. So we have programs that can top up earnings, but I think the more important one would be identified as the national child benefit, and in this particular case we've been able to use funding in partnership with the federal government to provide for some medical benefits. To list them, it provides coverage for prescription drugs, for dental and optical services, for emergency ambulance service, and for essential diabetic supplies, again, for children in low-income working families. It's my understanding that this year the child health benefit program will be helping more than 50,000 children.

MR. CAO: Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that postsecondary education costs are rising and postsecondary students have made a commitment to learning and have the skills and knowledge to become productive workers in the future, why doesn't the government provide health care benefits to their children? Some of them are married students.

MR. DUNFORD: When we were initially investigating this matter, Mr. Speaker, representatives of student groups said, "No, we don't want to be in that program; we want to make the decision ourselves," so we went ahead. What has happened since that time is that we have heard from students within the system, so now we have changed our policy to cover them, and we expect that 6,500 children will be covered by that benefit now.

MR. CAO: My last supplemental question is also to the same minister. How will the students get coverage for their children?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, it's a matter of applying for the coverage, Mr. Speaker. I can read into *Hansard* a phone number they can call here in Edmonton, 427-6848, or certainly from anywhere in Alberta they can dial 310-0000 and of course ask to be referred. We can provide them, then, with the information they will need.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I will call on the one member who will participate in Members' Statements today.

Calgary Centre of Hope

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I don't know whether this means I get six minutes instead of two.

On April 1, 2000, I had the opportunity to attend a wonderful event in downtown Calgary. This was the groundbreaking for the Calgary Centre of Hope. The Centre of Hope is a new facility being built by the Salvation Army in the city I'm from. It's going to provide 119 transitional housing beds plus 116 emergency beds for men. There's going to be a new separate program with 32 beds for a women's emergency residence. The addictions rehab unit will be increased to serve 46 clients. Significantly, because some 30 percent

of the homeless people in downtown Calgary present with a range of mental health issues, there will be a mental health diversion crisis stabilization unit with 30 beds.

Mr. Speaker, what's so significant about this is that we've seen a recent report which estimates that in the city of Calgary on any given evening we may have as many as 5,000 men, women, and children who are in some form or another of housing crisis. There may be somewhere in the order of another 10,000 or 12,000 Calgarians who are one slim paycheque away from the street.

I think what we've seen in the city of Calgary is a leadership not by any level of government but by the community. We see an amazing leadership not just from the Salvation Army but from churches. The in-from-the-cold program developed by the city of Calgary is a wonderful example, and we've seen support from a range of nonprofit organizations, the work done by CUPS and organizations like that.

In connection with that, on March 24 and 25 I attended a homeless in Calgary Future Search conference. The Member for Calgary-Bow attended that session as well, and you saw the energy of people in the Calgary community coming together to identify what progress has been made since the last Future Search conference two years ago and what more has to be done.

I just want to salute all of the men and women working hard in terms of this process to solve the homelessness problem in Calgary. Thank you.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the hon. Government House Leader has advised of two points of order. Hon. Official Opposition House Leader, did you advise of a point of order? I heard you say something.

MR. DICKSON: No, I did not, sir. No. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, on your first point of order.

Point of Order Preambles

MR. HANCOCK: Actually, Mr. Speaker, there were three points of order, but the first two related to the preamble in the hon. Leader of the Opposition's questions, so perhaps I could deal with both of those as one.

Under Standing Order 23(e), anticipation, and 23(j) as well as 409 and virtually every other rule in *Beauchesne*, the hon. Leader of the Opposition started off the proceedings today firstly by breaching your admonition yesterday not to raise questions which clearly dealt with a matter which is on the Order Paper. You, I think, dealt with that earlier during question period.

As well, we've seen a continuation of a practice which has become unfortunate in this House, of the Leader of the Opposition and her minions raising in preamble matters which use "abusive and insulting language . . . likely to create disorder," encouraging debate. I refer specifically to the reference to private hospital bills and private hospital policies when it's clear that there is no such thing and we have before the House Bill 11, which is not called the private hospital act. It is in fact labeled the Health Care Protection Act. So it is argumentative and it is abusive language and it is encouraging debate to continue to use question period to misinform Albertans about the nature of the policy and the nature of the bill.

The rest of her preamble and many of the other preambles, I might say, were argumentative in that they referred to a study for which the minister of health has quite clearly indicated the source of that

preliminary report and who paid for it. Ignoring those clearly stated answers as to the source and the preparation of that report, they continued to refer to that report as a government-commissioned report, as a government paid for study, as your report, all of which were argumentative and in the nature of debate rather than appropriate questions, which, if I can go back to 409, "must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate."

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd make this observation. I would have expected the Government House Leader to be more specific in terms of the concern and more precise in his use of language.

Sir, I'd refer the Government House Leader to November 7, 1994, when actually this very issue of anticipation was dealt with if not exhaustively then most thoroughly by your predecessor. In fact, we have virtually an entire column on the page of *Hansard* – for the Government House Leader's reference, it's page 2854 – and if I could just go to a quote that the then Speaker made. I think it was Speaker Schumacher, and he was referring to previous rulings of the House. He was referring to a ruling on June 15, 1989, which he quoted with approval. That was the Reverend David Carter, and I might quote this.

Questions can be developed and not ruled out of order if a Bill has been introduced in the Assembly. Once the Bills reach second reading stage, then they're going to be ruled out of order in terms of question period. Questions developed after a Bill's introduction should not be detailed and should relate to the general policy rather than a clause-by-clause examination of the Bill.

Now, I listened as carefully as I could and had the benefit, in fact, of seeing some text before the questions were asked, and each one of the questions specifically talked about the policy of the government of the province of Alberta. You, sir, will recall that the government, with much hullabaloo and fanfare, produced a policy statement in November, and that dealt with a range of facilities. It is very clear that there was a policy statement, and I'd say, with respect, that we are entitled in this House to ask questions about that policy statement, what the government means by it, and to explore the nuances and the vagueness and the gaps in that policy statement.

Never at any time was reference made in any one of the questions to Bill 11 because we are mindful, sir, not only of your admonition yesterday but the direction of the House since at least Dr. Carter's comments on June 15, 1989. If the Government House Leader is suggesting that that eliminates any question about policy of the government of the day, then that's completely, absolutely at variance with all of the precedent of this Assembly.

Now, he goes on to raise a second matter. He's concerned that we persist in talking about private hospitals and private facilities when he professes innocence and says that the government is doing no such thing. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the evidence has been very clear. Most recently an interim published report, not a draft report, said that the accredited private surgical facility that this government is talking about would, in the minds of 10 out of 10 Albertans, be a private hospital. I think Albertans are smart enough to understand that this government can under their policy create a facility as big and as sophisticated as the Foothills hospital in Calgary, and as long as it does not do emergency services, that would not be a private hospital. In the minds of the government perhaps, but in the minds of Albertans without question that is a private hospital.

So we're perhaps parsing and mincing words in terms of nuances and definition. [interjection] I received some good advice, as I always do, from our friend from Calgary-Varsity. I don't want to spend most of my energy this afternoon when we'll get a chance to debate the bill at length tonight, but I just did want to make that

observation that an interim report is something that in fact has been published. It's entitled to be talked about and discussed, and it is clear that the government has funded the report. Now, did they do it by a direct requisition? Did they do it by indirectly paying the institute that has done it? I read the report, and it says that it was commissioned by the Department of Health and Wellness. To me the linkage is clear and irrefutable.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there were certain interjections this afternoon by the chair with respect to this matter, and the chair did make a statement in the House yesterday with respect to anticipation. The hon. Opposition House Leader is absolutely correct about the rulings that were given by previous Speakers with respect to this and the traditions of parliaments with respect to this whole matter.

If I listened, though, very carefully to the Government House Leader, he was as much concerned about the tone of words and the usage of words as he was about the type of direction with respect to the question. It's on that point that I'll make these brief comments.

I do quote from the Blues. It says:

Mrs. MacBeth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 8 in this Legislative Assembly the Premier said the following about his private hospitals policy: "If we had something to hide, if we had something to be afraid of, we would have kept this from the public." Yesterday the Official Opposition released a secret report funded by this government and funded by the Department of Health and Wellness. The government has held on to this rather damaging report and thus chosen to hide it from Albertans, I guess because it told the truth, not the misinformation being spread by the government's million dollar propaganda campaign. My questions, Mr. Speaker, are to the Premier. Why was this report kept hidden from Albertans?

It certainly makes rather pointed allegations with respect to a member, and while there's no doubt at all that the chair and, I do believe, a great number of other members would feel that the tone of the question might be rather aggressive and might be rather harsh and could be deplored, I suppose, by some as horrendously unparliamentary to a certain degree, the chair would have to really reach, though, to see if it violates any provisions of sections of Standing Order 23, because it has to be taken within the context of the whole thing.

However, that having been said, the chair is confused. I know that the chair is not supposed to be getting involved in any of the debate in this Assembly, but the Leader of the Official Opposition said, "Yesterday the Official Opposition released a secret report funded by this government." Then the chair heard – and he's positive about this – the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood say that an institute released such a report. There has to be consistency with respect to the whole thing. If one hon. member stands up and says, "Well, we have a report," and another hon. member stands up and says, "Well, no, it's not a report; it's an interim report, and it's not funded directly by the government," there is a point in time where you're going to have two absolutely conflicting views of the whole thing. Presumably, that has to do with a further debate that should really not be taking place in question period.

3:20

Again and again and again I want to remind all hon. members of what the purpose of question period is. The bottom line today was that after indicating there were 21 members who were on the list, I do believe we arrived at no greater than eight members having an opportunity.

Now, hon. Government House Leader, a second point.

Point of Order Decorum

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I won't pursue it in any great detail, because it's sum and substance the same point of order as the last one. I simply want to make the point again for the House and to ask for your more active control of the House under section 13(1) of Standing Orders in that we do have members in this House who seek to ask questions for information. Unfortunately, most of the members of the opposition seem to want to ask questions for the purposes of allowing lengthy, argumentative preambles which twist the realities that we know to be existent in Alberta. It's those irrelevant, irresponsible, unnecessary, and under our rules illegal preambles which create the responses that come, which are necessary to set the record straight.

As a result, we don't have in this House a question period, as is the great parliamentary tradition, where private members of this House get to examine members of Executive Council, members of the government, on the policy and direction of the government. Rather, we have positioning by members of the opposition with totally inappropriate preambles, and we see again and again and again in this House posturing for the cameras. We want to have Albertans see what's happening in this Legislature.

It would be my fondest personal dream that we would broadcast all the proceedings of this House someday. We can't do that, I don't believe, if the result is going to be the animal acts that we see during question period, with a great twisting of the truth that comes in these obnoxious preambles. I think, Mr. Speaker, it's time to start ruling them out of order and asking members of the opposition and members on the government side, if necessary, to make their preambles relevant to the question, to make them short, succinct, and in accordance with the rules.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, another one of these free-flowing points of order. The only thing that's clear to me is the frustration of the Government House Leader, but need I remind him and you, sir, that there's an opposition and there's a government. Each of us has different roles to play. Each of us has different perspectives on many of the issues of the day. The Government House Leader can talk all he wishes about pointed questions that he thinks are argumentative. I can point out to the same extent responses that are not forthright, are not candid, that avoid being provocative and argumentative.

So where are we left? If the Government House Leader wishes to use Westminster as the standard and to suggest that the questions in some fashion fall short, let me retort that if he watches question period in the House of Commons in Westminster, he will find that responses are at a much higher level and set a very different standard than anything we see day after day in this Assembly.

So the Government House Leader is frustrated. Well, let me assure you, Mr. Speaker, that members of the opposition are equally frustrated, if not more so, with a government that refuses to accept responsibility for things they do. We will continue to try and hold the government accountable. If the Government House Leader chooses not to like the tone of the questions, then he should work with his colleagues to be more forthcoming and provide us with snappy, pithy, direct, responsive responses instead of the nonsense we hear day after day from the front bench of this government.

THE SPEAKER: I honestly do believe we enjoy this. I honestly believe that at the conclusion of the question period every day this little exchange is better than a coffee break for a lot of people. I really, truly believe that. It just gets us going.

Okay. Well, the hon. Government House Leader has referred to section 13(1), "The Speaker shall preserve order and decorum and shall decide questions of order." Yes, that's very correct, and the Speaker would love to make sure that we would preserve the order and the decorum according to everybody's interpretation of what order and decorum is all about. But as there are 82 individuals in this House in addition to the chair, we all have our own subjective decision and interpretation of what decorum really means. So I guess I'll have to explain what mine is again, just so that everybody really understands.

We have two groups of players in this Assembly. We have one group called the government, and we have another group called the opposition, but part of the government is also private members. The purpose of the question period is to basically allow all private members in the Assembly to bring the government to account, which means that they have great latitude and a wide-ranging opportunity to raise questions of members of Executive Council. Now, we've tended over time to basically say that it is only to members of Executive Council. We've also said that the questions should be brief and should be to the point and that the answers should also be brief.

We also have other rules that talk about argumentative things and opinion and representative and undebatable things, and we all know that on almost a daily basis these things are all being violated by virtually everyone, because we tend to evolve in terms of what these words mean and how things are.

We also know that we have something called television, and somehow people believe that this is a good thing. Today not too much got on television, because I do believe that we didn't really start the question period until about 2:17, and by that time most people have already walked away and gone to do their grocery shopping or are out doing their yards or what have you. So that caused a little problem with some other things in terms of decorum.

The chair today was actually going to stand up and start really, really being quite aggressive with tablings, and the first person who tabled was the leader of the government, who then proceeded to read from a letter, which sort of shot that little argument out of the way because if it was good for one, it had to be good for everyone else. So 25 minutes later we're into this. Maybe one of these days all members will recall that the Speaker several weeks ago indicated in a letter to them that one day he actually foresees – I'm sure it will come to pass – that we will be here at 5:30 and will still be into tablings. There will be no question period that day, and that sort of thing will happen.

Preambles and relevancy are really important. I'll appeal to you once again. The hon. Opposition House Leader referred to Westminster, and he basically then said that questions are a certain type and answers are a certain type. But the hon. Opposition House Leader basically forgot to give to the House by way of information that it has been to a great degree a long-standing tradition in Westminster that those who want to raise questions actually send the question to the minister in advance. The minister can anticipate, knows what the question is, and then when he comes to stand up, he does provide an answer. If the hon. Opposition House Leader is basically saying that we want to establish that tradition in the parliament of Alberta, that's something the House leaders might want to rediscover for themselves in advance. If we want to start tomorrow, then henceforth by 11 o'clock in the morning the questions should be sent to the members of Executive Council, who would know what the questions are. I'm sure they'll have a chance to stand up and respond, and I'm sure we'll have brevity.

You know, these tete-a-tetes on a regular basis basically do cause some problems for hon. private members. Now, the chair is going to end this, and we're going to proceed.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 205

Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the opportunity to speak for a moment, I would like to thank all who have participated, including the Calgarians who had this idea.

At this time I would like to move third reading of Bill 205 and call for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a third time]

3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Advisory Council on Women's Health

505. Mrs. Fritz moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish an advisory council on women's health to support education and research promoting women's health and to address issues relating to the prevention and treatment of diseases including osteoporosis, eating disorders, heart disease, and breast cancer as well as diseases which women are becoming increasingly susceptible to such as lung cancer and autoimmune diseases.

[Debate adjourned March 21: Mrs. Soetaert speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe I had just started to speak on this motion, which I am pleased to be able to support.

Some people may not remember back a few years ago to when a women's advisory council ended before its time. It was mandated to go for another year, yet it was shut down by this government. I remember voting against that at the time and in fact asked questions about it in the Legislature.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It was a pity that that was ended, because you know what? Those women on that council did some very good work from across this province. You know what else? That was a neat aspect of that advisory council, because there were women from right across this province. We talk about the differences and we celebrate those differences, but certainly women in isolated rural communities have different needs than women in cities, to some respect. Some are all the same; some are different.

Now, the motion on this women's health council. Women's health is the same across this province, with the same issues: the fact that we have women in their childbearing years, that we have women with breast cancer, osteoporosis, AIDS, endometritis, all kinds of things that affect women regardless of where they live. So I think this council is a good idea. I am hoping, though, that we will have women from across the province on this council. I've been to some farm women's conferences, some women's wellness conferences across the province.

In fact, I will be speaking at another wellness conference. I'm glad nobody over there is questioning, but they'd be welcome to come and feel well for an hour. Just imagine how well this Assembly must feel sometimes when I'm done speaking. In fact, stress is a factor that many women and men deal with, and that, I'm sure, will be covered. We all deal with things differently.

Certainly on the issue of women's health, as I was mentioning before, rural women have issues of isolation that often we don't understand. They don't have the same ability to access health care that others do that live in bigger cities. The real issue, too, is that if you have to come to the city for treatments, you don't just plan two hours of child care. You may plan two days or may have the expense of a hotel room or hope that you find a relative that lives in the city that will help you out. So those realities for women in rural Alberta and their health and wellness I hope will be addressed by this council. That is one of the things that I would really like to see on this council: people from across the province.

I would also love to see a native woman on this council. The chief at Alexander First Nation in my riding is Victoria Arcand. She's a remarkable woman, and she has also worked with health care within her own reserve and with others across the province. They have issues, too, that are different, that relate to their community differently. I would love to see a representative from that community, because I truly respect the work they have done and the balance they could bring to that council.

I would hope that one of the focuses of this council is, of course, preventative medicine for women. One of the things that I know is supported by this government and that I hope will not be changed is the whole fetal alcohol syndrome program, which of course affects women. A totally preventable disease yet totally incurable. I have a nephew who has fetal alcohol syndrome, and the heartache that his family has gone through and that he has gone through – if only people could know what drinking when you're pregnant does to you. I think there's a lot of work to be done in preventative medicine, and certainly this advisory council could have a powerful, powerful role in that and could put very positive resolutions through to this Assembly that, with commitment, could be acted upon. That is my hope for this council.

So I will be supporting the motion. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the remaining time I have left, I want to rise today in this Assembly and lend my support for Motion 505.

Before I continue, I want to congratulate the Member for Calgary-Cross for her well-respected expertise in this Assembly. We are very fortunate to have the member in this Assembly. She often stands on relevant issues and legislation to do with health care, and I thank her for her previous professional status and her professional opinion that she brings to this Assembly often. We've indeed been very lucky to have her, and I can say on the public record that I do believe she would have been an excellent nurse, a very caring caregiver, as she certainly in the Assembly brings forward timely health issues and legislation.

Mr. Speaker, there's so much that can be said for this particular motion. I think everyone in this House would agree that it is something that needs to be done and put in place.

Something I think was interesting. I do know that in British Columbia, for instance – I don't know whether they're still utilizing it, but they used to – they would equip vans and buses with all the necessary equipment to allow women to come to the van or bus for

mammograms. They took this specially equipped vehicle out so that the mammograms went to the people instead of the people coming to them. I thought this was a very innovative approach, and I know that often in downtown Vancouver you could see a van or a bus parked there on a Saturday allowing women, as they did their grocery shopping or other shopping, to come in and have this very worthwhile test.

I don't have a lot of time to expand upon this, but I think we can see certain things in the health care field that we could look at to be innovative and work towards early prevention and early diagnosis and early treatment to do with women and women's health issues.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on the motion under consideration.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried unanimously]

Support for Stay-at-home Parents

506. Mr. MacDonald moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to demonstrate its recognition of the contribution made by parents who stay at home to care for their children by providing support equal to that received by parents choosing other child care options.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to bring this motion before the Assembly. There was a similar motion, by the hon. Member for Wainwright, dealt with earlier in this 24th Legislature, and we have, I believe, seen progress with this issue since that motion was first discussed in this Assembly. As the discussion on this motion progresses, I look forward to the comments from other members of the Assembly.

3:40

Well, we look at this motion and have to recognize that the most important job in society is raising the next generation. A motion such as this gives parents simply one more choice or one more option in raising their families. Now, this motion comes before the Assembly at a time when one of the most well-recognized public figures perhaps in the western world, the Prime Minister of Britain, and his wife are expecting their fourth child. This is a debate that goes beyond the province, because of course how are the Prime Minister and his family in England going to deal with this? It's going to be interesting to see how that unfolds, and it could also be in a small way some direction for us.

Now, when I first talked about this motion with many people across the province, I have to give credit to many people who brought this issue forward before. They would be the Kids First Parent Association, and I've read also information from the Alberta Federation of Women United for Families, the Alberta/Northwest Territories Network of Immigrant Women Association, the Calgary home educators, or CHEERS, the Catholic Women's League from Calgary, and the National Foundation for Family Research and Education. All of these groups have developed ideas and policies regarding this issue.

In 1998 a Calgarian, Beverley Smith, a former schoolteacher, decided to raise her four children in her home. Mr. Speaker, you would almost have to withdraw the phrase "stay-at-home parent" and

say: a parent who works in the home. Certainly it is work, and it is hard work. It is work that I think should be recognized by all hon. members of the Assembly. Beverley Smith brought this issue into the national spotlight by challenging our federal government to treat families in which one parent chooses to stay at home or to work at home to care for the children the same as families in which both parents are working outside the home. Beverley Smith believes that stay-at-home mothers or fathers, but mothers in particular, are discriminated against both socially and by our current tax system. She went so far as to make a formal complaint to the United Nations about our federal government's treatment of stay-at-home parents.

Now, hon. members are correct in asking: well, what's he talking about with the federal government? An idea has to start somewhere. Earlier, when the hon. Member for Wainwright brought this issue forward – and I will get to that in my remarks in a minute – there were some positive things that came about, and I think with this motion there can again be positive results, Mr. Speaker.

I spoke earlier about the Kids First Parent Association of Canada, but they have gone national with their concerns and their ideas on this issue. We should look carefully at what they have to say, and I assure all hon. members that later on in my remarks we will. I would appreciate it if everyone in the Assembly, all hon. members, would have a look at this motion and consider supporting it, because we must value equally parents who want to stay in their home and work and raise their families that way. We must respect that choice.

The volunteer care sector of the economy is made up of many of these individuals, and their work cannot be taken for granted. We all know that it makes a large economic contribution to society, whether it's in the service clubs, whether it's in the schools. These are the volunteers who help out teachers. Many of our teachers are overworked. There are a lot of students in each classroom. I'm not going to get into that, Mr. Speaker. These individuals – and it doesn't matter whether it's a mother or father – are picking up a lot of the slack, whether it be with Boy Scouts, whether it be with church groups, or whether it be with schools, all service organizations. It is a factor that we have to consider in this debate.

Now, this government's flat tax proposal will not completely fix the problem, even though it does remove the inequity between single- and dual-income families. That was an issue in our tax policy that I believe was long overdue for correction, and I would commend the hon. members from across the way for incorporating that into the provincial tax regime. But I think the spousal tax exemption must be increased further to achieve equality.

Whenever I talk about spousal tax exemption, I am not just referring to the stay-at-home mother. Mr. Speaker, in the last 40 years women have been entering the workforce in larger numbers. In some couples it would be the woman who would have the greatest earning power. If a couple wants to make that choice of staying in the home and working in the home and raising their own children, if this decision is going to be based on who can make the most amount of money in the workforce, in some cases it would be the father that would remain in the home, not the mother. I don't want all hon. members of this Assembly to get confused about that issue, because in some circumstances it could be the father that's staying home.

Now, we all know that parents who work in the home take a financial hit. They are giving up an income in order to raise their children themselves. It is not only working parents who incur more expenses to raise their children, and this is an issue that I would also remind hon. colleagues about. I said before that the term "stay-at-home parent" is very misleading. These parents are not simply staying at home. They are working in their homes raising the next generation, and in many cases they are putting in longer workdays than employed people and spending much of their time outside the

home going to appointments, whether it's to the doctor or to the dentist, wherever, or they're simply running errands. Sometimes these errands are on behalf of the schools.

I think at this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to incorporate into my remarks some of the remarks and some of the concerns that were brought forward by the Kids First Parent Association of Canada, which is based in Airdrie. They have studied and written extensively on this issue. Here's what the Kids First Parent Association of Canada has to say regarding current tax policy. It is their view that tax policy has changed significantly in the past 50 years.

3:50

We have moved away from a system that held true to the traditional principle of ability to pay - one which recognised that taxation should reflect not only the level of income but the number of people dependent upon it - to one that sees children as just another individual expenditure. As a consequence, the parental caring of children is seen as a waste of an adult's time and talent and, for women, a significant barrier to equality and fulfillment.

This devaluation of parental care through tax policy . . . occurs at the same time as an ever expanding body of research is confirming what common sense has always told us - parents are critical to a child's optimal well-being. It is parents who have the greatest potential and ability, the intrinsic motivation due to their immense love and instinctual bond, to . . . meet the needs of their children.

What children need to thrive and develop positively is massive quantities of time with their parents.

Children themselves call this quality time with dad or mom.

Yet families today are deprived of the vital time they need together to bond and to nurture with "unhurried patience". The logical solution would be to remove the disincentives and barriers to parental care, to give families the opportunity and flexibility to decide what is best to meet their individual family's needs.

This is the choice that I believe Motion 506 would provide to all Alberta families.

Family life is not static but dynamic. The combination of work and family varies significantly . . . depending on each family's circumstances. A family may have a parent at home full-time during the preschool years, with that parent gradually re-entering the paid labourforce once children are in school. Circumstances such as illness or disability, job promotion or loss, separation or divorce and relocation may mean a change in work and family patterns. Policies [of all governments] must recognize the dynamics of family life and support families, not frustrate them, in moving through transitions.

The intense care demands of young children [move forward all the time.] A family of two or three children, spaced two or three years apart, means full-time parenthood for ten or twelve years at the most. It should surely be possible to plan for this short-segment of the lifecycle, which represents less time than most able-bodied people spend in retirement, for which increasingly lavish provision is made. Some of the thought, planning and finance that now goes into the construction of pension schemes and student loans needs to go towards the re-creation of tax policies that will support parents at the most heavily loaded point in the lifecycle.

Those are the comments by the Kids First Parent Association of Canada regarding our current tax policies in this country.

What about the issue of making the decision to work in the home or being given that choice, whether it be the father or the mother?

One of the biggest myths surrounding the issue of at-home parenting is that families need two incomes to make ends meet, while single income families can afford the choice to have a parent at home. This inaccurate perception is what fuels current discriminatory policy that rewards dual earner families and penalises those with a parent [working] at home.

Statistically, low family income is more common among single-earner families, especially young families. The average income of one earner families is \$26,000 less than that of dual-

earner families. In the majority of families, the decision to have two wage earners is not based solely on economics but takes into account factors of lifestyle and values. If two incomes are really necessary to "make ends meet", we would expect to find a much higher proportion of working spouses (full- and part-time) in families whose head had a lower income. In fact, the percentages of double income families is virtually equal . . .

And this is quite interesting.

. . . across all income levels.

This fact was acknowledged in the Sub-Committee on Tax Equity for Canadian Families with Dependent Children's report [called] For the Benefit of Our Children: Improving Tax Fairness. The report found that the decisions on how to combine work and family "are largely independent of the financial position of the families . . . no matter what the income level of families, roughly the same proportion of families have both parents working full-time all year. Looked at in a different way, the probability that a mother would choose to work full-time in the labour force is, for the most part, independent of the income of the father. This point was confirmed by Status of Women Canada when they stated that "Fathers' income does not have a large effect on mothers' employment status."

The temptation might be, therefore, to argue that since economics are obviously not the dominant factor in how families combine work and family the current tax system, despite inequities, is not influencing a family's decision . . . Since factors of lifestyle and values are more influential in terms of affecting decisions, it could appear that the status quo is fine. This, however [I believe] is misguided. Although economics is not the prime factor in a family's decision regarding whether to have two parents in the paid labour force or a parent at home, the tax system has a powerful impact on shaping social attitudes with respect to how it values certain choices. Modern society places much emphasis on money; value is equated with monetary gain or the amount of wealth generated. This combined with rampant consumerism and materialism feeds the social pressures that families experience, heavily influencing both parents to continue participating in the paid labour force regardless of the negative impact it may have on their own and their families' physical and emotional health. Money is viewed as more important to a child's well-being than parental time, material possessions are given priority over family time. Despite the research to the contrary, these attitudes continue. While tax reform can't address the whole problem it can, by eliminating tax inequity, send a powerful message to parents that their presence and time is important and that parental care is a valuable contribution to society.

That is the view that the Kids First Parent Association presented regarding the decisions and choice to the Standing Committee on Finance.

Now, I find that very, very interesting, and it is an accurate reflection of our entire province as far as our ability to have the choice of whether we want to stay at home with our children or whether we want to see them placed in day care and continue in the workforce. Any changes and all changes must treat all families and all parents fairly and equitably.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I shall sit down and anxiously await the comments of my hon. colleagues.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to enter into the debate on Motion 506, sponsored by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. The family unit and its well-being are extremely important to me as I feel that no other bond ties the society of this country together more than strong, vibrant families. The family is an important institution to all Albertans. I believe that we

as politicians have a responsibility to ensure that we do everything possible to foster environments in which to raise loved, secure, healthy children and strengthen the family. A healthy family means strong communities and a strong country.

4:00

While I respect the intent of the hon. member's motion, I am unable to support it for reasons which I will explain. The Canadian family is undergoing a transition, as it has been increasingly for decades. I believe we have come to a point where we need to revisit the role of the state and the development of the family unit. Our government has been committed to the family throughout its mandate and has focused on ensuring its strength in a world that increasingly poses challenges to the nature and the role of the family.

One of the ways in which families have faced an uphill battle is with respect to the financial penalties suffered by one-income families in which one parent stays at home to care for children relative to two-income families where both parents work. For example, a one-earner family with two children currently pays approximately \$4,394 in personal income taxes. However, a dual-earner family earning the same gross wage would pay \$3,332, or almost \$1,000 less. Obviously, this type of differential tax scheme has a clear financial effect on one-earner families as they put less money in their pockets at the end of the year.

It also has a negative psychological effect, essentially telling one-earner families that we do not value the role of the stay-at-home parent as much as the wage-earning parent. The lower dependent spouse exemption rate particularly sends this message. We have been implicitly influencing the choice for many families instead of leveling the playing field so that they are free to weigh all the factors and make this decision for themselves.

I appreciate that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar shares this concern and wishes to ensure that one-income families are not penalized financially for making the sacrifice to one's career or to that of a new car or to a greater vacation in order to focus on the health and well-being of the children in that family. Indeed, I think we would all appreciate that the workday of the stay-at-home parent is from 8 a.m. one day to 8 a.m. the next day.

The financial penalization of single-income families is a problem that has long concerned this government and has been addressed in a clear and significant manner with the introduction of the new flat tax regime, which will come into effect next year. Starting next January 1, the tax system will be leveled for one-income and two-income families where incomes are equal. First and most importantly, the personal and spousal exemption rates will increase substantially and will also be equalized. In other words, a two-income family earning \$50,000 a year will pay the same amount of provincial income tax as a single-earner family earning \$50,000.

In 1998 the Alberta Tax Review Committee was established to review personal income taxes in our province. The committee listened to the views of Albertans through a consultation process and a number of background papers. The committee heard arguments on both sides of the issue of differential tax treatment between single- and dual-earner families. Two positions essentially emerged from this debate. One view expressed was that the differential between dual- and single-income families earning the same gross wage was too large, placing an unfair burden on single-income families. This camp also argued that incentives for child care services encouraged nonparental rather than parental child care. This position made up the majority of views heard by the Tax Review Committee.

However, I must cover the other side of the debate. They had less of a problem with this taxation differential, arguing that this

differential is more than offset by the increased costs of child care expenses when both parents work as well as the increased transportation, wardrobe, and other costs that come with the dual-earner lifestyle. Their position is essentially that there is value in dual-income families, including the increased independence of each spouse should anything happen to the family unit and the ability to contribute to pension plans and, further, that society should not discourage highly skilled spouses from entering the workforce.

Eventually the committee recommended that Alberta move to a new flat tax system, wherein individual and spousal exemptions would now be the same. This goes a great way to leveling the playing field for single- and dual-income families.

Another significant benefit of the new tax plan is that it leaves more money in the hands of families and individuals to make their own choices and handle their money as they see fit. Albertans will see their taxes drop by \$852 million per year by 2001, a benefit which all Albertans will experience regardless of their levels of income.

Another exciting aspect of the new tax system is the benefit which low-income Albertans and their families will experience. In effect, about 132,000 low-income Albertans will be exempt from paying any provincial income tax, and the rest will see their taxes reduced. A two-parent family, whether single- or dual-income, earning less than \$31,000 per year will pay no provincial income tax at all.

I will be extremely pleased to see Bill 18, which will enshrine the initiatives I've just described into law, pass in this House and come into force in time for the new year.

We also need to remember that in terms of support, such as subsidies or deductions for child care, stay-at-home parents do not incur such costs and thus don't need to be compensated for child care.

A proposal to essentially pay parents to remain at home, though, is not the answer. First, who is to pay such a wage, Mr. Speaker? It seems that it would be robbing Peter to pay Paul, as inevitably such a scheme would penalize Albertans who work outside the home at the expense of those who work within the home. To compensate stay-at-home parents with an amount that would be fair is extremely difficult as well. Who can value the cost of a parent's love and nurturing? I also question whether there would be any net benefit from this or whether it would be a purely symbolic move, which would simply add much bureaucracy without much else, as the old family allowance plan used to do.

In 1997 the Provincial Treasurer introduced the Alberta family employment tax credit, the result of extensive public consultation and consideration. The end result of that: \$35 million were put back in the pockets of Albertans who need it most, working families with children. This program has two objectives: to support children in low-income and middle-income families and to provide an incentive for the parents of these children to work. The Alberta family employment tax credit supports families both financially and through encouraging healthy values and stability. It provides tax credits to approximately 130,000 Alberta families annually. Under the program a family may receive \$250 per child up to a maximum of \$500. In order to qualify for the program, the family's working income must exceed \$6,500.

We need to establish a level playing field, Mr. Speaker, and ensure that the choices are open to parents, regardless of whether one parent chooses to stay home to look after the children or both are involved in the workforce full-time. I think the family employment tax credit is a great initiative that helps families, an initiative that does not discriminate between single-earner families and dual-earner families. A family with a net income of less than \$26,000 can receive all the service I mentioned absolutely free for as many as four children.

Mr. Speaker, the government offers another program to low-income families. The Alberta children's health benefit is a premium-free health benefit plan that provides dental, optical, emergency ambulance, essential diabetic supplies, and prescription drug coverage for children living in families who have low incomes.

It is important to note these things as we debate this motion, because it's so easy to get caught up in the negativity. Like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar we all want more for our children. On that point I'm sure we are all in agreement, and I guess here I would like to include the word grandchildren.

It's important to note some of the positive initiatives that have been happening in this province for years and that essentially make this motion redundant. We must recognize that our government has taken significant steps towards helping single-earner families in this province. Budget 2000 is a tremendous milestone for the province and a great benefit to the working poor. That's why I can't support this motion. I imagine that when the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was considering this motion idea, Budget 2000 still hadn't been tabled. Given the flat tax proposal included in this latest budget and some of the initiatives this government currently has in place, Motion 506 seems particularly unnecessary.

4:10

I appreciate the opportunity to rise today in this House to speak to Motion 506. I think the intent of the motion is well meaning, and certainly this is a situation that needed to be looked at. However, I truly believe that our government has made some significant steps toward addressing this situation and helping those working families that need it most.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to add that the new tax regime is very timely. This economy is moving at a great pace, and Albertans are benefitting. The economy is more diverse now than it ever has been in our history. The plan outlined in Budget 2000 provides a platform from which Albertans can maximize their benefit from this new Alberta economy. We need all hands on deck in order to ensure we keep moving in the right direction. Tax laws that keep people at home against their better judgment should be done away with. Likewise, tax laws that keep people working against their better judgment should be eliminated. We need to foster an environment of choice in Alberta, an atmosphere that attracts the best and brightest from other provinces and countries, and we want them to bring their children.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, while I commend the spirit behind the motion from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I am unable to support Motion 506 for the reasons I have stated. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to be able to take the opportunity to speak for a minute or two about Motion 506. I'd like to read the motion so that people get it clear exactly what the intent is.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to demonstrate its recognition of the contribution made by parents who stay at home to care for their children by providing support equal to that received by parents choosing other child care options.

Now, that is not asking for a wage for stay-at-home parents. I see it as asking to have tax exemptions and tax considerations based on fairness. I like to look at all issues on the issue of fairness.

You know, it's interesting. As a woman who had young kids in the early – of course, they're still young, and so am I. [interjections] I knew I'd wake some of them up. I had preschool children in the late '70s, early '80s. It was interesting what people would say to

you. You know, they would say, "Are you just at home?" "No. I'm raising my children at home." For a while there I was working full-time.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I wouldn't want to be at home with you.

MRS. SOETAERT: Who doesn't want to be at home with me? Ah, the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. He's afraid to be at home with me, but I serve a mean cup of coffee. Come on over, and we'll have a little discussion about policy.

AN HON. MEMBER: Serious mistake.

MRS. SOETAERT: A serious mistake on his part.

On the motion, through the chair, as always, Mr. Speaker. Where was I?

You know, when you're an at-home mom, people come up to you and say, "Oh, you're just at home," belittling that role. Then for a while I was working full-time with preschoolers. "Oh, you're working full-time?" Now you're a neglectful mother. Then you try working part-time. "Oh, trying to be everything for everybody; are you?" You know, for a while there a woman couldn't win. It didn't matter if you were at home, if you were part-time, if you were full-time. You were criticized by society, not by all society but certainly by some, by many.

I would like to think, now that we're in the new millennium, that people are more accepting. [interjections] I can hardly wait to hear their debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Why is it that it's all the men that are heckling?

MRS. SOETAERT: It's all the men that are heckling me, which is rather interesting in itself; isn't it? Where was I? It's so seldom I lose my train of thought. I was inviting people over for coffee. Cancel that. I'm too busy this week but maybe once session is out.

Society I think, I hope, is being more accepting of all the roles that women play. Parenting, being a mother and being a father, everyone in here agrees, those of us who have children, that that's the most important thing in our lives. Nothing comes before that. But the reality of the world is that some choose to stay home, some have the ability to stay home, some don't have the choice, some choose to work. That is the reality of our world. I'd like to think that it's more accepted now that those are choices that we give not just men but women in our society.

In fact, you know, when I go to talk to some of the school groups, we talk about the number of women in the Legislature. [interjection] Well, half of our caucus is women but generally in the whole Assembly it certainly isn't equal numbers of women.

I say: why aren't more women in politics? I'm not going to give you some of their answers because that would start a debate in itself. It's always lively. One of the things I ask too: do you think the role of men as parents, as child care providers, as nurturers is changing? I think it is. If you ask those students, "How many of your dads cook," you know, lots of them put up their hands. If you say, "How many of them clean," there are a few less that put up their hands, but nonetheless there's a good portion. Now, here's the cruncher though. Here's the real test: how many of your dads do laundry? Oh, the hands go down. Regretfully, the hands go down considerably. It's fine for the men. I guess maybe it's good for the dry cleaners down the road. I don't know.

MS CARLSON: Peter does laundry.

MRS. SOETAERT: I'm glad the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne

does laundry. That's why he has two different coloured socks on, I guess, sometimes. I'm almost short of wind over here, Mr. Speaker.

Back to the motion. The point I was trying to make is that I think this new generation of dads is far more nurturing and far more involved in their families than my dad was. [interjection] Oh, we see; Calgary-Montrose is hoping to be a father. Maybe there's news that could be announced in the Assembly someday. I don't know. We're hoping for you. We'll make him a little Liberal.

MS CARLSON: Now he's changed his mind.

MRS. SOETAERT: Now he doesn't want children. Oh, dear.

This is a serious motion that, believe it or not, I'm trying to support despite the banter from the floor. I do believe I've raised some good issues in the reality that many men are doing much more of the nurturing. Many men are choosing to stay home. So this is a motion about families, and those that have the ability or have chosen to stay home just want fairness when it comes to tax exemptions.

I think it is a motion, too, about families, whether you're at home or whether you're working full-time or whether there are two incomes or one income. I know all of us value family and any definition therein of it. We have many single-parent families. We have grandparents raising children. Within all of that we make time for our families, and I think that's key. Time with families is very precious. I know many people in here might not make Sunday commitments in their constituencies because Sunday is a very important family day. I know I try to do that because that's the one time when even my extended family gathers. So the whole concept of time when you're raising children is very important.

4:20

I guess I'll end my comments, but I hope I've expressed that this is about fairness, about those who are stay-at-home parents deserving the same tax exemptions as people who aren't at home, whether that be by choice or whether it be out of necessity. People are making lifestyle choices, and it's just an issue of fairness for everyone. I also recognize that society is becoming more accepting of all the lifestyle choices that we choose: the way we choose to raise our families, whether people work part-time, full-time, dual income, one income. I think we all accept that what works for each family works for them. It may not work for me, but it may work for you, and I think we've learned to respect that. I think we've made great strides from when I had preschool children, and I'm glad to see that.

I will be supporting this motion, Mr. Speaker, and I'm hoping that other members will as well. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to enter the debate on Motion 506, introduced by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I believe the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's intention is fair in moving to equalize the tax bill of single- and double-income families, but I believe the hon. member has failed to recognize the innovative and groundbreaking initiative undertaken in the recent provincial budget.

On February 24, 2000, the hon. Provincial Treasurer announced a new and groundbreaking tax system that will become effective on January 1, 2001, a system that will unlink the province of Alberta from the old federal/provincial income tax system. The personal income tax system is where the tax inequity between single- and dual-income families exists. This new system that will be put in place will all but eliminate any tax discrimination that exists between single- and double-income families. This new tax regime will make

Alberta the most people-friendly province in the country.

Under the new system both types of families will see their taxes go down, but the single-income family, which includes single parents, will see their taxes go down even more. Mr. Speaker, this initiative lightened the load of all Albertans. The indirect benefactors in all of these changes are the people whom we all here hold dear, and that is the children of Alberta. This initiative may well provide another child care option for many Alberta families, an option that many may not have been able to consider before, and this is good news for Albertans.

Many of us had the benefit of being raised at least in our early years by one parent who stayed at home. I don't want to date myself, but that's the way it was for many of us here. Many of us in this Assembly may believe that it is the best way to bring a child into the world. There are statistics and studies that indicate that there may be truth to this hypothesis. Parent advocacy groups across North America have been very active in promoting early childhood involvement by both parents, particularly since dual-income households have increased in prominence. Their position is supported by many commonly accepted beliefs that children whose parents take an active role in their early development are more socially adjusted.

Even further arguments have been made regarding the need for fathers to be as active in early parenting as mothers. Among others, Dr. Paul Amato of the University of Nebraska demonstrated a direct relationship between children's behaviour and the amount of time and support provided by not just mothers but fathers as well. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there are volumes of social science research that address the issues of early childhood development and the effect of a young child's environment on how that child will function in society as he or she grows up. The findings of these studies are consistent, indicating that the quality of care vis-a-vis a child's development psychologically, emotionally, and intellectually is consistently better when that care is from a parent as opposed to a paid caregiver. No matter what the facility there is no equal for parental care in the child's formative years.

The president of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Dr. Elliott Barker, has argued that nothing is more important in the world today than the nurturing that children receive in the first three years of life, for it is in these earliest years that the capacity for trust, empathy, and affection originate, and if the emotional needs of the child are not met during these years, permanent emotional damage can occur.

So what is the role of the government of Alberta in all of this? I'm sure that those of us who are parents wish we could spend more time with our children to teach them what we know. Unfortunately, this is a luxury few can afford. Therefore, we must be very careful. The economy of today is dramatically different than it was 30 or more years ago. Dual-income families have arrived in a big way.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not a child care specialist, but I do know that it is important to spend as much time as allowed with my children, but I have to provide for them as well, just like every parent in Alberta should be trying to do, just as many Alberta parents do day to day, and that is part of our Alberta advantage. I think we need to be very clear that those parents choosing to work outside the home or having to work outside the home are recognized for their contribution to the economy. Alberta benefits through everyone who participates in the workforce. We have to ensure that parents know that. Regardless of being single- or double-income families, they are a valuable asset to this province, and of equal importance as employees, small businesspeople, and professionals is a stay-at-home child caregiver.

Mr. Speaker, in 1992 it was the Premier who began building the

policy framework for a caring yet unintrusive government. This framework has led to unlimited opportunities for Albertans. It has also allowed our present status as one of the most vibrant jurisdictions in the world. Albertans pride themselves on that. They also pride themselves on being a fair province.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has now concluded.

4:30

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 7

Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate March 14: Mrs. Soetaert]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have an opportunity to put my comments on the record on Bill 7, the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act, 2000. In general, I think I am in support of this bill as it stands right now, but we do have a few issues and some questions that I would like to speak to as I go through my comments here.

First of all, I just want to ensure that I'm understanding what happens with this amendment act, and I'm hoping that they can be clarified before we get to committee in terms of ensuring that I'm on the right track. What I think happens here, Mr. Speaker – right now we've got the authority that's a provincial agency that ensures that science policy corresponds to the Ministry of Innovation and Science business plans. As a result of the reorganization that happened back in the spring of '99, new agencies were added to that ministry, and they have to report to ASRA. Bill 7, as I see it, ensures that these new groups also report back through the authority.

As I'm understanding what I read in here, the old agencies that now move within the ministry are the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority, that is now known as the energy research institute. The mandate of this new institute is wider, dealing not only with oil sands, as it did formerly, but with other energy-related research. The old research fund, the oil sands technology and research fund, is gone, and the assets are transferred to ASRA. Then there are changes made to the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, now to be known just as the agricultural institute, and that was moved from Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. As we understand it, it will continue to compile and assess and distribute information on aspects of the science and engineering and technology side that relate to agriculture. As I see it, the last change is that the Alberta Forest Research Advisory Council becomes the Alberta forestry research institute, and the forest development research trust fund is transferred to ASRA from the environmental protection and enhancement fund.

All generally good moves as we can see it. Particularly what I like about it is that although the members of these institutes will be appointed by the minister, the board chairs will be elected by members of the Legislature. This is a new idea as we see it and quite welcome. I'm hoping that this opens up the process and that we see some interesting and innovative changes come about. Of course, even better would be elected members or some other forum for the members of the institutes to be put in place rather than simply being appointed by the minister. That always has the appearance of

political heavy-handedness in it, so that is always a concern to us.

I would ask a question about that process in terms of how the minister intends to make those allocations. Is there going to be some kind of an open process where the minister calls on related industries in the community for names to be put forward and then in some sort of open and transparent process those people will then be appointed? That would be also very welcomed by this side of the House, if we could see that kind of a process implemented, and would set a precedent that would, I think, be important to the people of the province and altogether supported by all of those who are interested in this process. So if the minister then looks for a wider range of names through which to make the appointments, that would be good.

The minister could take a suggestion from us in terms of going to independent consulting or headhunter companies to get the names of experts in addition to a process where industry members and other related interest groups could put forward names. The appearance and the smell of political patronage is in all cases something that we want to avoid in this Legislature, and unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that hasn't always been the case in the past, so we would look firmly for some sort of independence in this review process as we move forward with these revisions to the bill.

We think that bringing the research funding together under one organization could lead to a number of efficiencies and clear direction with respect to accountability. That's particularly important, because we've undergone a phase in this province with the reorganizations that were done last spring that led to a case of a number of inefficiencies and definitely a lack of direction in terms of accountability and authority.

Over the past year we've heard numerous concerns and complaints from people who work within the various departments about them not knowing who they report to, who they are accountable to, who is to give them direction. Some people have two or three ministers that they're reporting to in the reorganization process, and in fact that's still occurring. So in this case that's also a concern, one that starts to be solved by this process, where we see the research funding coming under one organization.

Hopefully the lines of direction will be clear, and the lines of responsibility and authority will be very clear and will assist those people working within these departments. We would like an update on that at some point, Mr. Speaker, to find out how the process is going and what kinds of improvements they still need to make. That update could come in an interim report. It could be incorporated into the budget planning process with the business plans, where we could see consistent monitoring and benchmarking being done and a degree of detail there that would provide the kind of information that those not intimately involved in the organization would be able to evaluate it by. So what I'm speaking about here is a little more detail than we currently get in the business plans. Once again, this would be an excellent place to explore that opportunity and test out some more valuable and in-depth ways of monitoring efficiencies, direction, and accountability.

We also see where doing this, putting all the research funding under one organization, can lead to greater consistency in fulfilling the goals for research and technology as set out in the business plans. It's been a little bumpy ride to this point. Progress is being made, but definitely there are a couple of areas that we need to take a look at. If you can provide a framework for consistency in fulfilling goals in a research environment, then the research environment itself can thrive. It can focus on what their job is, and that's doing research, and they don't have to worry to such a great extent about the kinds of accountability problems or consistency problems that have happened in the past. What we want to do, Mr. Speaker, is ensure that all areas of research and development in this province can focus

completely on their goals and not have to worry about management and organizational practices. So we hope that those are the things that will happen with this, and we look forward to watching them and monitoring the progress.

But we do have a few questions about the progress and the process, Mr. Speaker, and I'll speak to them for a little while. We're wondering to what extent ASRA and the institutes complement businesses and to what extent they will be competitive with business. This is an old problem for this government, where they were previously in the business of being in business and were in direct competition with other producers within the province. We saw how flawed that process was, and this province paid a very high price for doing that.

We take a look at the boondoggles of the past. Let's talk about Swan Hills for a minute. There's a great example, that's still existing, where because of government involvement, because of government underwriting that process in terms of putting in capital dollars to develop the plant and the lands around them, they've given that company an unfair competitive advantage as compared to other competitive companies in not just Alberta but in Canada itself. So what happens is that when industry can see that government is interfering in the process, when they are coming into direct competition with the business sector, then they stop the flow of research and development dollars, Mr. Speaker, and what that does is retard the growth in the province and retard future investment and development, and that can be a real problem. We've seen that.

4:40

We had an opportunity a few years ago in this province to leap ahead in terms of the environmental research and development that we were doing, something that clearly falls within the framework of this bill, and because of the kinds of interference the government had in the process at that time, corporations just dried up the dollars and they said: "We're not going there. We're not going to risk placing ourselves into a competitive market where our main competitor is the government, who has unlimited access to resource dollars and doesn't always make the best business decisions based on competitive markets." That isn't any kind of hearsay. We've seen that happen in this province, Mr. Speaker, and everyone in here has been a witness to that process.

The problem, then, in a province like ours, that is so heavily dependent on fossil fuels and other primary kinds of development, like trees and oil and gas, is that we don't see a process developing where we see significant value added, and that becomes a problem in a resource-based economy when the market and the prices fall, and we've seen that. We go through these boom-and-bust cycles all the time, Mr. Speaker. You'd think that after 30 to 50 years of having done that, the governments of the day would have learned, but they haven't seemed to.

This is particularly important when you talk about the research and development side. Here we are moving to a stage where we're consolidating these under one ministry and taking some steps in the right direction, but the past history of this government has the very people, the business sector, concerned about it in terms of what the government is going to do tomorrow. Are they going to be in direct competition, or are they going to keep their research and development side quite different and separate from what business is doing? That becomes very important in terms of value added. We see right now that the biggest concern coming to us from industry is: what is this government doing to support value-added products and the building of value-added products when we are in a boom time period? Now is the time that we have the dollars to spend, that we have the time to sit back and in a visionary kind of process take a

look at the long-term research and development aspects of value added.

[The Speaker in the chair]

We can support industry at this stage by creating an environment for value-added products to flourish, and this is the time to do it, when we have the money, not two or three or four years down the road when the cycle bottoms out and we once again do not have the kind of cash flow to support basic programming in this province let alone the research and development side. So now the government has a real opportunity, a window of opportunity, to move forward in this regard and ensure that the practices that they're putting in place with the amendments to this bill really take us a step further than we ever have been before in this province.

I know that this opportunity can be exploited to the fullest possible extent, but we haven't seen that happening so far, Mr. Speaker. We see the framework being built, but we don't see the fleshing out of that framework happening. I take this from two conversations I've had in the past month with businesspeople in this province, businesspeople who are self-professed Conservatives who in most regards support this government on all sides, except they see that this government doesn't get it in terms of the necessity to support the building of value-added products at this time.

It isn't good enough to just put the framework in place for the research and development. They have to ensure that they're going to provide an environment where that research and development can really take off. One of the ways that they can do that is by reassuring the business community that they will not be in competition with them. So that's a real problem.

In the past ASRA has definitely been seen as a competitor as they focus more on commercial operations rather than policy. The focus of this organization should be facilitating research and as a funding agency to facilitate research. So once they focus on the commercial operations side rather than policy, we get into trouble. That's a basic policy decision that this government has made in the past that needs to be addressed, and this bill would be an opportunity to address that policy decision and to give some clear direction on where the government intends to go. So I am expecting sometime during this debate that we will have the sponsor of this bill and perhaps some of the ministers who have a direct interest in terms of their portfolios stand up and address that.

The business community needs to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they will not be competing with this government on commercial operations at any point in time. They need to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that this is a policy-focused institute that facilitates research and provides the funding for that research, nothing more and nothing less, and that they give wholehearted support to funding and facilitating research with a focus on value-added products, which is the basic framework. Well, let's put the meat on the bones here and put some confidence into the business community so that they will come up with matching dollars and support projects and know that in the coming years they can operate in a free market environment without any interference.

That, I think, is a critical issue that needs to be addressed, and I'm hoping that we will see some responses to that soon. Certainly if we haven't seen any responses to this by the time we get to committee, I will be coming back on this topic and will be discussing it, because it's critical to the long-term growth of this province and to us being global competitors. If we don't spend more time facilitating research and industry and helping fund research, we will not be globally competitive, and in fact I think in a number of industries we are

already losing the competitive edge that we formerly had. So I hope those questions can be addressed.

Next, I would like to talk about the needs of agricultural research. Are they being met, and will they be met with the amendments under this bill? We know that there's a lot of concern right now that the new institute may be less sensitive to the different regional requirements, and with agriculture it's very important to retain links with the community.

MRS. SOETAERT: Agriculture, that really concerns me too.

MS CARLSON: Well, I'm sure that it really concerns you. It should concern all of us. Agriculture is part of the backbone of the economy in this province, and we have a history of supporting agriculture and agriculture-based families. We need to ensure that they will have the kind of support that they need.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It's our future, not our past.

MS CARLSON: Well, that's a very good comment, and I'm glad that the minister made it. It's only our future if we help to facilitate research and development in that sector; right?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I agree with that.

MS CARLSON: He agrees with me. That's great. Mr. Speaker, that doesn't happen too often, but I'm glad to see that we have a meeting of the minds on agriculture from both sides of the House.

Agriculture is a great part of our future, and we need to support it, and we need to ensure that research is supported here in terms of facilitating that and these organizations being funding agencies. So in terms of that, I'm sure that this minister will help address my concern, which is that the new institute may be less sensitive to different regional requirements.

We know the kinds of problems that happen, the sensitivities that there are in those north/south, east/west splits and the sensitivities there are in terms of different agricultural sectors. We need to know and the agricultural community needs to know that they are not going to have any kind of influence by the government that treats different sectors or different regions differently. We want to ensure that fair treatment is available for everybody.

When I travel in northern Alberta, I know that they have a great number of concerns that they may not always get the same kind of focus as sectors in southern Alberta. We see that happening all the time in tourism. Those people from that sector have a very valid concern, so I'm hoping that the same thing doesn't happen in agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be back.

4:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to have the opportunity to rise and speak at second reading to Bill 7, the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act, 2000. I have read this bill and was listening to my colleague speak about it. It's an interesting bill. On the surface of it it's actually about something pretty straightforward in that the three agencies that operated under separate umbrellas are now being brought together; that is, the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority, the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute – now, that one gets a new name out of this too, becoming the agricultural institute – and the Alberta forest research council, which

becomes the Alberta forestry research institute, are all being brought under this Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act.

I take it that this is to help co-ordinate the government's policy and assistance to these research sectors of agriculture, forestry, and energy but also to revamp the reporting structures. Yes, these agencies are given direction by the minister, but the reporting for it will also come back through it. That I always find really interesting.

As some of the members know, I sit on the Public Accounts Committee. While I wish that we weren't examining public accounts that were quite so far behind us, nonetheless it's a very interesting experience. One of the issues that the Auditor General has repeatedly raised is the reporting of agencies, boards and commissions, and delegated administrative organizations. In a lot of cases the government has made choices to download responsibilities onto, particularly, delegated administrative organizations, and then there seems to be a bit of a problem in the accountability factor coming back. Some of that criticism can also be placed on the agencies, boards, and committees. I'm not sure how these institutes would be classified, either as a DAO or one of the agencies, I suppose. But the point is that if there's taxpayer money going into an entity, there should be strong governance that is set up, responsible governance, and there should be a very clear direction of policy, what they're following, a good evaluation process.

There needs to be accountability that is brought right back through to the Legislature and therefore to the people of Alberta on how the money is spent and what it's being used for and that this is good value for money for Albertans. I know that this has been a struggle for the government, to create a good system that works, and I hope that what's being proposed through this legislation will assist in that and that we will have strong accountability, because there can be a lot of money in research, particularly around information technology. It seems to be a growing field.

A couple of other things that I had a few questions about as I went through it. It's sort of done in three parts that are all more or less the same: one for the agricultural institute, one for forestry, and one for energy. In each case "the Minister must designate a member who is a member of the Legislative Assembly" as the chairperson of the institute. Then someone else from the board becomes the vice-chair. I think this is worth noting. I guess the questions that I'm asking to the minister responsible for the act are: then I take it that this person is also paid an additional sum of money as the chairperson of this committee, and will the money for the payment of that salary be coming out of the institute's budget? I know that a number of members chair committees and I think are paid – it's set out in the Standing Orders – an additional \$15,000 or something a year, and I'm wondering if that's what's happening here.

Second to that, the minister is appointing no fewer than three and no more than 11 members to these institutes. I'd like to hear back from the minister whether the PAO directive that was established and in fact brought forward by the Premier in 1992 is being followed in the recruitment, selection, and training of members of the public or of related industry being appointed to this board. I think it's really important that there is good representation and that we have the most qualified people available that we're able to recruit as essentially volunteers.

There is a designation in the bill that institute members would be reimbursed for travel expenses and I think a per diem. Yeah, they're paid remuneration and receive reasonable traveling expenses, but for many of these people the per diem is not equivalent to what they'd be earning in their real lives or in their professional lives. So in some ways I suppose we could consider them volunteers, but I think it's important that we do get those that are most highly qualified. I

for one would not want to see the government in a position where they were being accused of using these as patronage posts. I dearly hope that wouldn't happen here, seeing as we're sort of starting over with the designations about how the minister appoints people to the boards, and we do have the PAO directive that is available. I'm hoping that's going to be followed, and perhaps the sponsor of the bill could speak to that.

I did have one question in that I note – and I'm sure there's a very simple explanation for this – that in each case it's mentioning that the Regulations Act does not apply to the bylaws that are put together for the individual institutes, and I'm wondering what the reason is behind that. I would just appreciate the minister explaining that one.

I've talked about the fact that these three agencies are coming together, in some cases getting reconfigured a bit, to sit under the Alberta science, research, and technology department. I'm also wondering about the limitations or the restrictions or perhaps the criteria of the research that's being done. It's quite clear in the bill that each of these institutes is responsible for – oh, there's a bunch of typical language here, and I don't want to get specific about it because we are in second reading of the bill – assessing and compiling information on science, engineering, or technology specific to energy or forestry or agriculture, those being the three institutes under this bill now.

I'm wondering. When you talk technology, is there an anticipation or a vision that that includes technology or – what's the other word that's being used right now? Intellectual knowledge I think it's called.

MRS. SOETAERT: Property.

MS BLAKEMAN: Property. Thank you.

As an Albertan I appreciate and I really value research, and I'm glad to see that there is a very strong proponent for research and technology on the bench opposite. I think we're way past time where we needed to be putting some real money into these areas, because it is the future for us. But I'm also a little worried that we are driving down a road that says for development of gizmos only. It's a very narrow focus. The expectation is that these institutes would come up with research or would invent very specific little products. I guess that's part of what's meant by value added these days. My concern is: where is the balance for this? Was the minister anticipating in the wording of putting these institutes together that research in the social sciences or humanities or even the fine arts would be incorporated as part of these? In the language that I'm reading, it doesn't seem to be the case. I'm just looking for clarification on that, because if it is that narrowly focused, I have a concern.

5:00

You know, there's been a very good argument put forward by those in our academic institutions – and that's what they're to do after all – that we need to value our general arts and our social science academics and the research and the thinking, the new thinking that they bring forward. Certainly I think most of us are familiar with the arguments that, you know, everyone had to have a very specific kind of MBA. Everybody had to have an MBA, and that's the only way that you were ever going to be successful in the business world. In fact, what we know now is that large companies and even small ones are coming back into the universities looking for someone that has a better mix, that they have perhaps a general arts degree and some management training as well or perhaps even accounting because that wider training, that wider realization of what's out there in the world brings you a better product in the end.

So I guess I am looking for that definition of how narrowly focused each of these institutes is, and if it is to be that narrowly focused, then I am urging the minister to broaden their horizons and think a little bigger. I think it's of more benefit to us in Alberta to bring in all the possibilities, and that does include the thinking and research and exploration that's happened in the humanities and social sciences, for example. Certainly those are the areas where we've had the most leaps forward in understanding institutional change, and that's also part of what we're grappling with here. How do we redesign these groups or agencies, the style of management, the way we've done research for so long? It's not working for us anymore. So how do we redesign it to take us forward? I think it's important to pull from those areas that do specialize in that sort of organizational thinking to bring their expertise into it.

Part of that is also language. If we're looking at a global economy – yes, English is very widely used, but it is not the only language in the world – and if we are really trying to compete in a global marketplace, then language becomes very important. I'm wondering, in all of this thinking and reconfiguring of these institutes, where that sort of component could be found or where the encouragement of that would be found.

So I've talked about my concerns around the appointments process to the different institutes. I don't know if I have a concern that the chairperson is always going to be a Member of the Legislative Assembly. I suppose that could be a very reasonable thing, but it certainly does narrow us if we're looking for leadership in a particular field. Otherwise, it just sounds like we're going to appoint whichever MLA has sought or found favour with the minister to head up these institutes and without any particular background or interest or ability that they're bringing to that very specific institute. So I have some hesitations around that. As well, I was asking about the budget to pay for that person. Will there be the typical \$15,000 plus change taken out of the budgets to pay for the top-up to the MLA's salary on that?

Those are the questions that I really wanted to bring forward to have answered. I think overall I'm very supportive of the direction that the government is taking with research. I have made the points that I think research needs to be more widely defined and certainly should not be leaving humanities and social sciences and fine arts out in the cold. I don't think that's going to serve any of us very well. So if the minister is not going to pursue that, I'd be interested in hearing whether there are any initiatives on the government side to be upholding and strengthening research and development in those areas, either in partnership with universities and colleges or outside of those.

So with those comments and observations and questions, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to the bill. At this point I believe that I'm going to be supporting it, and I certainly do commend the Minister of Innovation and Science and technology for his enthusiasm in helping this government come into the 21st century.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. This is one of those bills that I really do like. There are not many that come through this House that would jar me to my feet to support the government on this particular matter. I have to again compliment the minister for his energy which he has put into this ministry and for his newfound ways of spending some of the government's money very wisely.

We will remember that in this House in 1993 that particular member, a private member at the time, sat in the back. I don't think they called them the Nix Six, but they might well have been because

they were not overly complimentary about anybody's performance in the Legislature. That particular member was most adamant that the government should not spend any money on virtually anything. He has found a place where investment is warranted, and he has done it well.

This particular bill, with the amalgamation and bringing under one roof the direct research in some fundamental areas of science in the province of Alberta, is more than welcome. I suspect it will give some better focus to some research in the areas that are outlined in the bill and will provide, hopefully, a co-ordination of those overlapping areas. They're all engineering and science related obviously, but sometimes they slide from one area of technology into another, and the co-ordination there is most rewarding when it is done in a fashion that fosters all the growth in the areas.

Now, there are some concerns in the pure scientific community that this agency may – I wouldn't expect that it would, but it may – focus so much upon the commercialization, on that end of technology, that it loses sight of the fundamental research. In my particular area of expertise in engineering there has been a great deal of research recently in the nature of materials. That has to be done in test labs and at universities and is in fact done in the universities, but there is the application of the science that goes from that to a commercialization. This agency or the agencies under this particular act will hopefully facilitate a lot of that.

Now we turn to some of the areas that seem to be and hopefully will be managed rather well. I've noted that there's a gentleman by the name of Darwin Park, I believe. I don't want to insult the man, but I can't recall the name of the firm that he's with. He is a principal in the firm, and his job is to interview and to find throughout the province of Alberta and perhaps beyond – I'm not sure what the mandate is – board members. He has written to all members to search for those. I've responded with some suggestions, and I'm sure he will find those Albertans that are interested in this area and have a great deal of expertise in the area, having grown in their business through this province and through the wealth of this province and in the hinterland, on the edge of new technologies all the time. We recognize that the science of oil sands was entirely invented right here in Alberta.

5:10

You'll note that a great deal of the innovations in downhole drilling are grown right here. You'll note that today there is still the higher end technology of oil recovery shipped all over the world from points just south of here. Nisku is a noted example of shipping that kind of technology everywhere. Well, that kind of technology is fostered, yes, by economic activity but often needs a bit of a catalyst at times to explore the areas and push that envelope of knowledge just that much further, and there is some risk. There's no question about risk, that oftentimes a channel of thought or a potential innovation just simply doesn't work. But if you don't take that step to find that, then you're forever held back at a level that is status quo. Certainly that hasn't been the history of Alberta, and it certainly hasn't been the history of those that are involved in science and technology in this province.

This province has one of the stronger engineering societies, and they're always looking for innovation and trying to foster that growth within their membership. They do a great deal of work in the foundations trying to get young people interested in the sciences, and through I think it's Mr. Gray from Calgary, that started an institute that does precisely that, they disseminate that interest in the sciences at the grade 8, grade 9 levels, where students are starting to look beyond just that which is being taught in their curriculum and to find out what areas they do have a little more interest in than others and

a little better knowledge. They start pushing that, pushing their teachers, and finding that actually they are not that far away from research capabilities, and that of course goes through high school. Then, of course, we get to universities, in which we have an abundance of really good talent in this province.

I don't want to digress much from the research, but one of the problems I've always had with the funding of universities in this province is that element of research. It was not and is not in the criteria for funding. It was, yes, included, but a small element, and in order to qualify for the grants programs and for the additional moneys to continue these programs, it was publish, publish, publish. Well, having spent a little time in the field myself, I find that publishing, while it may be a gauge for some, certainly is not in the hard sciences, where you're dealing with basic research, where you're dealing with the nature of matter and trying to build from the microelement into an action and reaction on a much larger scale.

Well, if that elementary/basic research is not done, then the building blocks are simply not there for different end research that is being more applied. You'll note that the geophysics and geology in this province have led the world in deep hole exploration and drilling. That all comes from two universities that have very, very qualified staff in these areas, not only in teaching, but they do a lot of research too. That's where the fundamental science comes in. Having a testing ground close at hand and having co-ordination bodies through industry certainly makes the discovery in these areas of science much, much easier.

The transition between the base research at the university and the application of the research has always been a bit difficult in this province. The ARC, Alberta Research Council, has been in that business for a long time, but they have a limited resource. When they strike out to advance in an area, it takes a great deal of time to build that area. Once built, it's logical to continue that. Well, those areas have to be limited.

AOSTRA was a great vehicle for furthering knowledge in oil sands, but it didn't do and hasn't done a lot of that transition work from the fundamental science to application science in other areas of energy, notably natural gas discovery and separation and natural gas measurement. You'll recognize that one of the big difficulties with shipping natural gas is to measure it, because it's all measured in cfm, or cubic metres. That's a measurement difficulty, to measure the quantities of solution gas and higher level gas. That's been a recent innovation right here in Alberta using fundamental science, using some venturi principles and some other higher end gauging. Well, those are the kinds of things that would not and could not be marketed throughout the world if there wasn't a vehicle to fund these areas. That appears to be what the intent of this bill is, and that's in fact what the minister is saying it is.

Agriculture research. Being a city fellow, I guess there are a number of things I don't know about that area, but I do know some. I do know that durum wheat basically built the whole of western Canada by extending the growth in a shorter period of time and by producing that very, very hard wheat that is marketable and is some of if not the best in the entire world for both nutrition and for working in the hammer mill.

The advances in oilseeds are second to none in the world. Between Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta you find the best of science in those areas, and it has changed a great deal of the production in the province of Alberta. I know there are a number of experts in this House that know a great deal about the production of oilseed, because they have in fact been in the business at different times.

The forestry industry has had a major boom since about 1980. The research there, particularly boreal forest research, is most

necessary and should be ongoing. The innovations in pulping have expanded the extent of the potential harvest in this province far beyond what anyone would have expected in the '60s and '70s or even the early '80s. It has been a boon to a lot of good industry in this province.

There are, of course, some areas that I'm a little concerned with. There's a portion of the bill that speaks of ownership, that all of the ownership of the discoveries in whatever form – patent, copyright, technology, and the like – will and shall be owned by the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority.

5:20

There's another portion, too, that talks about an agreement between those that are doing the inventing, if you will, and the authority. Well, that has some difficulties, because a great deal of the work has to be contracted, of course, and if there is no agreement in place to share the proceeds, as it were, then the incentive for the science agency that is putting out this work – it would be darn difficult to attract them. Hopefully the government is not in the business of being in this business except to foster growth, so that there is, yes, a reasonable royalty on some discovery of science that can in fact be marketed, but here's hoping that the authority will not hamper the growth of science simply by looking to have the hand out to have some kind of payback.

This member believes that this piece of legislation is a good investment. There's painfully little that is returned in the way of royalties or patent rights or the like. That would be just fine with this member and would allow the industry to fully take hold of the possibilities allowed in this bill and really work with it.

Mr. Speaker, one of the concerns that the oil sands operators had with the research funds being shared with the entire energy sector was that they would be shortchanged. Well, I don't believe that to be the case. Quite frankly, they are all substantive operators. There are a number of them in the business now. It's not like the early days of the Great Canadian Oil Sands and those that had a tough time scratching out a dollar or two. Recently they have been doing exceptionally fine, being able to produce a barrel for in the order of \$14 to \$15 and get it to market at that rate, and with plus 20 dollar a barrel oil they are doing really, really quite well.

The innovation in oil sands is heavy field work, because in fact it is all cost-related. It does not have a lot to do with innovation and science. It has more to do with the economics of production and not with the oil sands. So I have a little difficulty with their arguments, particularly in the energy sector, from wind to solar right through all the oils and all the gases and through the further production. That's where research is required. That's where there has to be innovation.

In summary, I'd like to again say that this piece of legislation, if enacted properly and instituted as it seems it shall be under the guidance of the minister and the energy of the minister, can be an exceptionally fine example of how government can be a catalyst for long-term growth in this province. Quite frankly, I'm quite happy to speak to it and speak in favour of it.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate on the matter at present.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 4, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/04/04

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness it is my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 11, the Alberta Health Care Protection Act.

I would like to begin by thanking you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing this debate to be televised and for facilitating the broadcast. This evening, Mr. Speaker, I address not only you and Members of the Legislative Assembly but also thousands of Alberta families who are watching at home. Televising this debate will give many Albertans a chance to see their Legislature at work. It reminds them and us here as well that the Legislature is both the seat and symbol of representative democracy in this great province of ours. From Acme to Zama, from Olds to Youngstown, from Brownvale to Red Deer, Albertans in every community of this province elect men and women to come to this Chamber and speak for them.

It was in this tradition of democracy that hundreds of men and women have been elected in the 95 proud years of Alberta's history. It was in this tradition that Albertans sent William Aberhart from Okotoks-High River. It was in this tradition that Albertans sent W.W. Cross from Hand Hills and Peter Loughheed from Calgary and Grant Notley from Spirit River and Helen Hunley from Rocky Mountain House and Laurence Decore from Edmonton. It is in this tradition that we gather to debate the business of today and, Mr. Speaker, that business is Bill 11.

I think it most appropriate that here under the eyes of Albertans is where this bill will be debated, among the 82 of us privileged to serve. Normally, as you know, Mr. Speaker, there would be 83, but as Albertans know, the Assembly currently has one vacancy due to the resignation of Pam Barrett, the former Member for Edmonton-Highlands. I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to Pam for her years of effective service to this Assembly and to her constituents.

As I said at the outset, this is the best place to debate Bill 11, and I quote the Leader of the Official Opposition, who said in a news release in November that she wanted the debate to be held right here on the floor of the Legislature. Well, Mr. Speaker, tonight that debate begins. Tonight in the time allotted to me, I want to explain why the Alberta Health Care Protection Act is needed, what it will achieve, and how it protects the publicly funded health system. I will also answer head-on the most common criticisms of the bill.

Mr. Speaker, in recent weeks and months many Albertans have asked: why do we need Bill 11? What is Bill 11 all about? There are those who say that Bill 11 will destroy the public health care system as we know it today. They say that it is the first step on the slippery slope to a two-tiered system, where the rich can buy better and faster service than the rest of us, but there is no reason, there is no motive, no rationale under the sun that could explain why my colleagues and I would set out to destroy the Alberta health care system. We all need it. Why would we make it our mission to destroy something that we, our families, our friends, our constituents all need and rely upon? We need the public system to be there for us too.

Mr. Speaker, although some have tried hard to assign sinister motives to this bill, there are two simple purposes to Bill 11, a bill that in fact is being brought forward as the result of requests by the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons and by the federal Minister of Health asking for legislation to regulate the activity of surgical facilities in this province. The two purposes of the bill are straightforward. Bill 11 will protect the public health care system and give us one more tool to use in our efforts to drive down waiting lists and waiting times that only prolong pain and suffering. Both those goals are what motivated this government to draft this bill. There are no other motives.

Tonight I want to speak to both of those purposes, starting with the second one. Mr. Speaker, we have to try and find new ways to reduce waiting lists. All Premiers, all health ministers in all provinces including the federal Health minister have said that the status quo is not an option. Too many Albertans have to wait months or even a year or more for surgery, and that is unacceptable in a province that devotes one of every three dollars in its budget to health care. Albertans deserve more for their health dollar. The money is there, and unlike the federal government, our government has restored every penny cut from health in the mid-1990s. In fact, we've restored almost three pennies for every penny cut, three dollars for every dollar.

There are people who simply say: spend more on health care. In fact, we are now spending a billion dollars a year more on health care than we were five years ago, and we are further increasing health spending by another 20 percent over the next three years. That will be over \$15 million a day, \$15 million a day being spent on health care.

So the money is there, and our regional health authorities are already working hard with that money to reduce waiting lists in a variety of ways. They are trying to reduce demand on hospitals by providing other less expensive alternatives to hospital care such as home care and long-term care. They are trying to reduce pressure on emergency wards with community-based primary care clinics like the Crowfoot Village family practice in Calgary and the Northeast health centre in Edmonton. Health authorities are recruiting more doctors, nurses, technicians, and other frontline workers. They are opening existing wards and beds so that more surgeries can be done, and they're opening new hospital facilities such as the new pediatric intensive care unit at Edmonton's Royal Alexandra hospital, which incidentally will open next month.

But more money alone is not the answer. Even Allan Rock says that more money is not the answer. It would help, but it's not the total answer. We also need to give our regional health authorities more choice and flexibility under the Canada Health Act. Bill 11 will allow health authorities one more tool to use in their effort to improve access to health care for all Albertans. The option is contracting out of minor – and I stress “minor” – surgical services.

Why should we allow this option? Mr. Speaker, medical advances are making it possible to do an increasing array of procedures safely and conveniently outside the full-service hospital. The fact is that today people don't require hospital admission for many minor surgeries that only a few years ago might have required hospitalization. Contracting out is nothing new. There are now 52 surgical facilities in Alberta performing more than 20,000 procedures a year within a range of 156 different procedures. Those procedures range from therapeutic abortions to cataract removal to varicose vein stripping, all services that used to be done only in hospitals.

8:10

Alberta is not alone in this. There are surgery centres doing minor procedures within the public health system in British Columbia,

Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and perhaps other jurisdictions as well. Contracting out minor surgeries has relieved pressures on hospitals by freeing up operating rooms and beds for more complex surgeries. For example, by contracting out cataract surgeries, the Calgary regional health authority has freed up thousands of hours of operating room time for other procedures every year. Approximately 6,000 cataract surgeries are done in Calgary in clinics. As the authority itself reports, every hour of surgery that's contracted out is an hour available in the hospital to meet demand. Over 90 percent of clinic patients report being satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received.

In Edmonton, for example, renowned dermatologist Dr. Don Groot performs removals of the common birthmark known as port-wine stains. Dr. Groot performs about 500 of these surgeries each year in his own clinic under contract to the Capital regional health authority and at no cost to the patients. If Dr. Groot were forced to perform his work in public hospitals, he would be taking up operating room space in hospitals that would otherwise be used for other procedures. It would also mean that his patients would lose the convenience of a specialized community-based facility and instead would have to go through all the complicated steps required for hospital admission.

We can look outside Alberta for other success stories as well. A Vancouver area health region decided last year to follow the Calgary example and contract out cataract surgeries to surgical clinics. According to the North Shore health region, in the first six months of the contracts the move has resulted in a 13 percent drop in surgical waiting times at the region's Lion's Gate hospital. It's reduced the waiting list for cataract surgery by 29 percent, and it's freed up 28 surgical hours per week at regional hospitals.

Contracting out also lets health authorities direct more dollars to patient services instead of capital purchases. It eliminates the need to postpone elective surgery because of more urgent cases, as often happens in hospitals, and believe me, Mr. Speaker, I receive a lot of mail from a lot of people in anguish who have to wait months and, as I said, even a year or more for very serious surgery.

Let's not forget quality of care. Patient surveys show a high level of satisfaction with surgical facilities. Otherwise healthy patients like being able to go to a community-based small facility for minor procedures instead of to a big hospital. Further, surgeons at these facilities are able to become experts in their fields because of their focus on a narrow range of procedures. For example, ophthalmologists in Calgary have developed centres of excellence for cataract removal. In Manitoba surgeons at the Pan Am Sports Medicine Centre in Winnipeg are helping to relieve pressure on that city's hospitals with their expertise in orthoscopic and plastic surgery. Surgeons at the Shouldice hospital in Thornhill, Ontario, are regarded as the best in the world at their craft and have managed to cut in half the time and cost of hernia repair thanks to their expertise.

The Shouldice is but one example of what my colleagues and I have in mind for Alberta: a few surgical facilities focused on a few specialized procedures, working completely within the publicly funded system and available to all Albertans without paying extra and, I would point out, Mr. Speaker, without jumping the queue.

An issue that has arisen with the bill is the matter of overnight stays in surgical facilities. Some people argue that stays of longer than 12 hours at clinics are going too far, that it could create an unsafe situation for patients if something goes wrong during a procedure. Well, Bill 11 makes it clear that no clinic can offer overnight stays unless and until the College of Physicians and Surgeons says it is the safe thing to do.

The bill makes it clear that no clinic may operate without first meeting the high standards of care prescribed by the college.

Appropriately trained physicians and staff must be the only ones providing care. Systems must be in place to deal with emergencies, just as systems are in place when, on rare occasions, something goes wrong in an existing clinic or a dentist's office or a long-term care centre. It's quite simple. The backup systems are there, starting first with an ambulance.

The precedent of overnight stays has been set and very positively, I might add. Again I refer to the Shouldice hospital. At the Shouldice hospital, at that clinic, patients typically stay for two to three days following surgery, but under the supervision of trained and accredited staff. I don't think we should close the door on such clinics operating totally within the publicly funded system and performing only minor surgery, but given the growing scope of opportunity posed by freestanding facilities, we need clear rules in place to govern contracting out. Mr. Speaker, those rules simply do not exist now. Many other provinces already have similar legislation. Bill 11 is our response to that need. It does not force health authorities to do anything. It simply says that if a regional health authority wants to contract out surgery, then here are the rules they must obey.

The rules are as follows. I think this is most important. One, health authorities must abide, without question, by the Canada Health Act. Two, only minor surgeries may be contracted out, meaning that all major surgery must continue to be done only in a hospital. There will be no private hospitals in Alberta. In fact, part 1, section 1 of Bill 11 says, "No person shall operate a private hospital." Three, the patient cannot be charged extra for insured services. Four, queue-jumping is not allowed under Bill 11. No one will be able to buy their way to the front of the line. Five, patients cannot be pressured into buying enhanced services. Six, there must be a need for the service and a benefit to the public. That must be demonstrated beyond a doubt. Seven, facilities must be accredited by the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons and approved by the minister. Eight, all contracts must be open and transparent and public.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, health authorities will also be expected to make the best possible use of existing hospital facilities before choosing to contract out.

8:20

Mr. Speaker, earlier I said that Bill 11 has two purposes. I have talked about one of those purposes: to give health authorities one more tool to use to reduce waiting lists. Now I would like to address the other equally important purpose for which the bill is named, and that is protection of the public health system in Alberta. That's what the bill is all about.

Bill 11 contains five key elements to guarantee protection of the public health care system. Those elements are a commitment to the principles of medicare and the Canada Health Act. Nothing could be clearer. That is the preamble. That is the foundation for the act. Nothing could be clearer: a commitment to a single-tier, publicly funded system in which access is based on medical need and not personal wealth; a commitment to banning private, for-profit hospitals; a commitment to banning private hospitals – that's clear in the bill – a commitment that all facilities providing insured services operate under the umbrella of the public system regardless of who owns them; a commitment to search for new and better ways of doing things, including the establishment of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health, chaired by former Deputy Prime Minister Don Mazankowski.

Mr. Speaker, again, the only card that Albertans will need is their health care card. That card is the only card Albertans need to obtain insured services. The only card they will need is their Alberta health

care card, not, as the Liberals say, a credit card or a Diners Club card. Their health care card. Nothing more, nothing less. That, sir, will be the law in this province once Bill 11 is passed and proclaimed.

Section 3 of Bill 11 reads:

No person shall give or accept any money or other valuable consideration for the purpose of giving any person priority for the receipt of an insured surgical service.

That's very simple, Mr. Speaker. It means no facility fees, no queue-jumping, no paying out of your own pocket to get an insured health service. Anyone who tells Albertans any different either misunderstands the bill or has chosen to deliberately misrepresent it.

Under Bill 11 this protection of the single-tiered system will be the law in Alberta, a law not subject to the whim or trustworthiness of me or of the Minister of Health and Wellness or of any member of the Legislative Assembly. Quite simply, the law provides fines of up to \$10,000 each and every time this law is violated. I don't know how we could pass stronger legislation to prevent queue-jumping or a two-tiered system. I don't think any physician is going to risk \$1,000 or \$10,000 a shot to break the law.

Mr. Speaker, we'll hear a lot tonight about tax dollars being used to subsidize private clinics and about studies of completely different health systems in completely different countries, and I suspect we'll also hear about lawyers and legal opinions and about academics and their journals and reports and all kinds of other things. However, there are no studies on what we are talking about in this bill, which is surgical facilities that specialize in a handful of procedures. The studies are in what has happened in the past with the surgical facilities that are already operating and operating successfully in this province. Those are the studies.

Indeed there is evidence from one end of Canada to the other that these facilities help reduce pressures on the system. I alluded to the situation in Calgary: 6,000 cataract surgeries that used to be done in hospitals, that would have had to be done in hospitals, that are now being done in surgical clinics. I cited statistics from the North Shore health region near Vancouver showing that waiting lists have shrunk significantly following contracting out of cataract surgery. In that same province the Cambie Surgery Centre reports that it performs orthopedic surgeries for 60 percent of the cost of the same procedures in public hospitals. These kinds of statistics point to cost efficiencies but, more importantly perhaps, to relief for patients waiting for minor surgeries.

Ultimately Bill 11 recognizes that no one study or opinion is likely to be true in all cases. The bill, therefore, requires that all contracts demonstrate a measurable benefit to the health system before those contracts are approved. If a particular clinic service doesn't have a net benefit to the system, it won't be approved. Why would it be? It's in no one's interest to waste health dollars, Mr. Speaker.

We will also hear tonight about the North American free trade agreement, or NAFTA. On this matter, too, Albertans can be satisfied that Bill 11 will not require us to open our doors to so-called big American health firms under NAFTA. As long as health care is delivered for the public good, then the system is protected under NAFTA. The proof is in the pudding. There have been private facilities delivering publicly funded insured services throughout Canada for a decade or more, and there has never been one challenge – never been one challenge – under NAFTA to allow American firms into the system.

Above all, none of those academic issues speaks to the central issue that rests at the heart of Bill 11; that is, leaving the door open, open but well guarded, to new options for reducing waiting lists as long as those options are safe and completely respect and adhere to the Canada Health Act.

Mr. Speaker, last month I met with the Prime Minister of Canada on the subject of Bill 11. He did not raise any objections to the bill, nor did he suggest that we withdraw it. In fact, after I reviewed with him the many examples of contracting out and overnight stays currently occurring across Canada, he acknowledged that what Alberta is proposing is similar to what is already happening in other provinces. To that end we agreed that after Bill 11 passes, we will ask the ministers of health from across Canada, including Allan Rock, to review and compare legislation and practices in Canada and report back to the first ministers when they meet this summer or fall.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that a national review of Bill 11 and similar laws in other provinces will be an important step on the road to real, meaningful health care reform in this country, and I would urge every member of this Assembly to take advantage of the opportunity to participate in what has become now a national process. Let each of us work as hard as we can to ensure that Bill 11 is the best possible piece of legislation it can be. Let us work hard to ensure that the letter of Bill 11 is true to its purpose, which is to protect our public health care system while at the same time allowing one more tool for reducing waiting lists.

Before I close, I would like to address some questions to the Leader of the Official Opposition. The Liberals have told Albertans that Bill 11 will lead to a two-tiered, American style health system. They've said that in interviews and advertisements and in this Assembly. They've said that to Albertans, Mr. Speaker, and that is wrong, one hundred percent wrong. But what is the Liberal position? Do the Liberals want existing clinics to be shut down? Who knows? Do the Liberals want patients to be able to pay out of their pockets for insured health care? Apparently yes, because they support private hospitals as long as they don't receive any public funding. But then again, who can be sure what the Liberals think?

With the New Democrats, at least people know where they stand. They want all clinics banned and all current clinics closed. In other words, they want no contracting out whatsoever. They've been consistent, rigid, and unbending perhaps but at least consistent.

As for the Liberals, in their haste to oppose the bill, they have created confusion amongst Albertans. They have also neglected to say what their own position is on the complex questions the health system faces. Therefore, let me ask the Leader of the Official Opposition these questions. Why does she continue to insist that Bill 11 be withdrawn when the federal government has encouraged us to pass it and then work collaboratively on a national review and comparison of legislation across Canada? If surgical facilities are a threat to medicare, as the Liberals allege, why did their leader allow over 30 of them to operate when she was minister of health, and why did she allow them to charge facility fees? Something that was banned after she left government. If surgery centres are a threat to medicare, why has she not raised concerns with her Liberal counterparts in Ottawa about facilities in other provinces that are doing surgery under contract to the public system? Why has she said that the entire bill should be scrapped, unread by Albertans, when the bill enshrines our commitment to the principles of medicare and the Canada Health Act, bans extra billing, prohibits queue-jumping, bans private hospitals, limits contracting out to minor surgeries only, makes it mandatory for contracts to be made public, and leaves medical decisions to physicians? Is she opposed to all of these?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and

participate in this the second reading on Bill 11. And here we go again. For the third time in the three years since the last election the Alberta government has brought forward legislation that will expand the role of private, for-profit health care. At the moment we are discussing Bill 11, legislation which expands the scope of the proposed surgical facilities to allow overnight stays. In the spring of 1998 it was Bill 37 that was introduced and then held over until the fall. Later on that year Bill 37 was withdrawn amid loud and determined opposition by you, the citizens of Alberta. I estimate that we as a Legislature have spent the equivalent of 40 days in this government's futile attempt to push through a solution that the majority of Albertans do not want. Today the governing party's determination to push their privatization is there as the public outcry grows stronger.

Many Albertans have attended town hall meetings, public forums, written letters to the Premier, to the Leader of the Opposition, and to newspapers. Others have signed petitions, attended debates, phoned in to radio talk shows, and protested on the steps of this great Legislature. We have participated in as many of these events and activities as possible, from Athabasca to Fairview, from Lacombe to Lethbridge, from Hinton to Mundare, in Calgary and in Edmonton. It was remarkable to see a hundred concerned people in a rural community and over 800 in a major city. No issue or cause in living memory has provoked such a large number of people from across our province to get involved in public debate over proposed legislation.

In responding to the letters, the e-mails, answering the questions at forums, listening to the government's responses to Albertans' concerns, there is one question that keeps appearing and reappearing, one question that is most frequently asked, one question that remains unanswered. We have just listened to the Premier's address and the question looms even larger. That question is: why? Why is this government so determined to push this through? After all, this government will face an election within a year or two. Normally, governments close to election time avoid contentious and divisive issues. Certainly, governments always back down with a majority of voters so strongly opposed. At least until now they always have. Is it arrogance, is it stupidity, or is it greed?

Health care has been called the electrified third rail of Canadian politics. The current debate and the passions aroused prove that there is no more explosive issue for Canadians than our universal publicly funded health care system. The government would know this from the focus groups, from the blue-ribbon panel, the health summit, the growth summit, the health roundtables, opinion polls: all of which confirm that this issue is one of the most contentious, where opinions are deeply felt by most voters.

The message is clear. Ensure that our health care system is there for us and our children. Make changes if necessary, but never, never threaten our belief that the system will be there when we need it. To do so is to attack a fundamental Canadian value, a sense of identity that we share as Canadians.

In the face of this, why would this government push forward? Why would it spend at least 1 million taxpayer dollars to try to convince us that they are not wrong about Bill 11, dispatching truth squads across this province? Why would they try three times to impose their direction for health care on a suspicious and an unconvinced electorate?

Sometimes the simplest answers are the right ones. One of the ways to determine why people take the actions they do is to look at the flow of money. Everyone knows that money is a very powerful motivating factor. Certainly money was the reason given by this government when cutting 30 percent from the hospital budget in the mid '90s. According to them, there wasn't enough money to finance all the demands for the hospital system, so the publicly funded

institutions were starved of the resources they needed to perform their required tasks.

Today operating rooms and entire floors remain in darkness as a result of the cuts. Doctors specializing in surgeries with lengthy waiting lists are limited to a mere three to four days a month of operating room time. In Calgary two public hospitals were sold at fire sale prices to private operators, and one was demolished in an unforgettable televised display. As a result, the system is straining to meet all of the demands of a growing population.

When the Premier says shortages of beds and doctors, waiting lists, crowded emergency rooms, and streams of wealthy Canadians heading to the U.S. for treatment, he is talking about the situation which he created. While there is no evidence of streams of wealthy Canadians heading to the U.S., concerned citizens are more likely to accept this exaggeration because of a perceived crisis. More and more, however, Albertans are remembering that it was this government that created the crisis in the first place.

Now this government is using the shortage of beds, the lack of operating room time, the insufficient number of doctors and nurses, and the lengthy waiting lists as a justification for inviting the private, for-profit operators to come to the rescue. And, amazingly, the Premier has discovered he has the money to pay for-profit operators that could not be found to open beds and operating rooms in the public system. It is an unbelievable degree of arrogance that would allow a Premier of this province to suggest that taxpayer dollars are better spent subsidizing the creation of a private, for-profit tier than they would be in reopening the surplus capacity in our hospitals.

This is the second question heard everywhere at forums and town hall meetings across Alberta: why not utilize the existing capacity of our health care system to the fullest extent? After all, taxpayers have already paid for those perfectly adequate facilities. Nothing the Premier has said today answers this question. Why would the Premier be so eager to put money into the private, for-profit facilities when he is so unwilling to fund the public system?

At various times it's been alleged that the private operators would not be more expensive. Well, how can this be? These operators would have to earn a return on capital of 15 percent compared to a cost of capital in the public system of 5 to 7 percent. For-profit operators would have to pay taxes on any profits earned, as well as property taxes. Administration costs would be higher. Advertising is necessary to promote the growth demanded by shareholders. Private operators would need to buy insurance. The cost of executive salaries would be much higher in the for-profit world. Inevitably these for-profit operations will be much smaller than the public system, losing the important advantage of the economies of scale in purchasing and administration. Every credible study has shown that private, for-profit operations cost more, but the studies do not examine the model proposed by this government since no jurisdiction has ever attempted this particular experiment before. In fact, the government's own funded study of the academic literature, kept secret until yesterday, shows that there is no evidence to support the government's plan.

The Premier has complained on several occasions that opposition to his bill is organized by the unions. Since one stated cost saving of his plan is to use cheaper labour, maybe there's some truth to this. But would employing nurses in the for-profit sector really save money?

8:40

If it were possible to find nurses that would work in for-profit environments for less money – and this is a very big “if” today with the shortage of nurses – the money saved would only be transferred

to the owners of the for-profit facility. There is no overall savings to the health care system in such a shift from one group to another. The money saved by paying nurses less would increase the profits of the private hospital. None of this money would return to the taxpayer, who is spending the money in the first place. If the government's view of the future prevailed, where two models of delivery exist, there will be competition for a limited pool of professionals, especially nurses. As a result, higher costs are very likely as the public and the private operators compete for scarce nursing staff.

The biggest factor determining the relative cost of the two systems will be the contract negotiated between the regional health authority, or RHA, and the private operator. The RHA is that government-appointed body that the Premier holds up as the authority that will save us from any negative effects of this legislation. According to the government, the RHA will not proceed if there is any chance of more expensive operations or two-tiered health care creeping in. However, if the Premier is wrong and the RHA is unable or unwilling to negotiate a good deal for the taxpayers, the advantages will accrue to the facility owners.

It is unbelievable to all who hear it for the first time that some of the people negotiating on behalf of taxpayers, the officials of the RHA, are also owners of the facilities proposing to gain these contracts. Let me repeat, Mr. Speaker, for I know it's hard to believe: the same people with the responsibility to negotiate, to get the best possible terms for the taxpayers, are also owners of private hospitals and private clinics. What kind of a deal would these people get for us? They would be negotiating with themselves.

This government is asking us to write a blank cheque to a small number of owners of private surgical facilities. How can this be anything but bad for the public health care system? Albertans don't believe in subsidies to pulp plants and shopping malls. They don't want subsidies for millionaire hockey players and team owners, and they certainly don't want subsidies for private hospitals. I mean surgical facilities with overnight stays.

As the debate developed over the last few months, the Premier has backed away from his early claim that this plan would be less expensive. He now uses more wishy-washy terms such as efficiency and benefits to the system. Once informed sources refute his claims with solid evidence, he changes the way that he talks.

While the Premier avoids discussing costs, there is substantial evidence that private costs more. Most of the evidence comes from the U.S., which has the most expensive health care system in the world. When physicians are allowed to practise in both the publicly funded and the private sectors at the same time, there is a huge temptation to divert their most straightforward and profitable clients to the for-profit sector while leaving the more complicated and costly cases for the public sector.

This practice might make the private facility appear to be more efficient since it handles only the easy cases. This is called cream-skimming and is a very serious concern in jurisdictions where physicians have an ownership interest in the private facility while working as well in the public sector. The for-profit operator gets the upside, while the public sector takes all of the downside.

Even with the advantages of cream-skimming the private operators are less efficient, in most studies. Perhaps their goals are not so much efficiency as providing the most expensive and profitable service for those who can pay. This may be entirely acceptable in a purely private operation, but where the taxpayer is paying, this is a dangerously open-ended invitation to escalate costs.

This government continues to make the argument, ridiculous as it is, that somehow bricks and mortar costs can be avoided by going to the private sector for help. Does this Premier really believe that

these for-profit operators will avoid charging the government for the cost of these buildings? Or does he plan to continue to sell off public buildings at a fraction of their replacement cost and then have the taxpayer pay for them again by renting them back from the private operators?

Through the use of creative accounting techniques one can create the illusion that the public sector is not cheaper. This is due to accounting differences between the public and private systems. In the public system all costs are charged in the same year of spending, so the total cost of a hundred million dollar hospital would hit the government books all at once, at a hundred million dollars. In the private sector that cost might be spread over 20 years, the expected life of the building, so the cost looks as if it's only \$5 million in the first year.

The Premier is fond of telling Albertans that all they'll need for his new private hospitals is their Alberta health care card. The pamphlet delivered to households repeats this statement by saying that "these surgeries will still be covered by Alberta Health Care and people will not have to pay for them." He misrepresents the fact that Albertans will pay for these private hospitals through their taxes.

Most Albertans believe that there will be more costs involved. The trend towards deinsuring some services is well established. In Bill 11 these extras, some of which used to be covered, are called enhanced services. For the so-called enhanced services patients will be required to pay again, either with their credit card or by purchasing supplementary insurance. It is obvious to everyone that we will pay more under the government's plan to include private hospitals – that is, surgical facilities with overnight stays – than under a comprehensive, publicly funded plan. How long before the lobbying of the private operators to deinsure some services is successful? We see today how easily swayed this government is by the lobbying of private interests. We wouldn't be having this debate here today if it weren't for that pressure.

The Swan Hills waste treatment plant, a project this Premier was involved in when he was the Minister of Environment, has cost the government at least \$400 million in subsidies, and we haven't even begun to talk about the cleanup costs yet. When this Premier won his first general election in 1993, one of his first acts, taken in secret, was to expand the funding by \$100 million. At first this plant was only to handle waste from Alberta. Then it was expanded to include waste from the rest of Canada, and recently we heard that waste can be processed from anywhere in the world. With this in mind Albertans are wary of this government's request to approve payments to private-sector operators on a limited basis.

All of this concern created by the government's private health care proposal is unnecessary. We can solve the challenges within the public system. The more economical solution is to use up excess capacity already available in the public system and, second, if necessary, to build new facilities in the public system, where costs are lower.

But the lure of a \$75 billion industry in Canada is too strong to resist. This is a golden opportunity for a few who wish to open the system to profit-making opportunities. Are we any closer to understanding why this government would push ahead with this proposal in the face of so much public concern and opposition? I think so. The more closely the government's proposal is examined the clearer it becomes that Dr. Charles Wright is correct when he says, and I quote: current demand to dismantle the system is not coming from a public outcry but rather from a relatively small group of entrepreneurs and specialist physicians who stand to gain personally. Dr. Wright is the vice-president of medicine at Vancouver hospital, as quoted by the British Columbia Minister of Health in 1995. Without question the vast majority of physicians and health

care workers would prefer to work in a properly funded and managed public system and have no interest in the promotion and practice of for-profit medicine.

This government has failed to make a case for their proposal. They have failed to produce any evidence to contradict growing concerns that their plan will cost more and create longer waiting lists. They have failed to stem the growing suspicion that their plan is simply an attempt to create an opportunity for a small number of profit-seeking promoters to make large amounts of money off taxpayer subsidies.

8:50

This is more than enough to send the bill to a richly deserved oblivion in a democracy, but there are even more problems. One of the potential devastating effects of inviting corporations to bid on health care services is the risk that an exemption for the public service sector from the requirement of free trade legislation would be lost. According to some experts, this exemption would be at risk once a for-profit component is added to the delivery of public health care services. These services have been carved out from the free trade agreement signed by the government of Canada, but the exemption only holds up if Canada keeps the public-sector delivery of these services. Once the services are delivered by the private sector, the trade agreement allows foreign corporations to demand the right to compete for business. If denied, they then have the right to challenge the government legally and seek compensation. Although the potential for this is unclear, the risk is there. Again Albertans are asking: why? What is the upside for Albertans that is worth risking so much for all Canadians? The government gives nothing but vague assertions that there won't be a problem. Well, "Trust me" isn't good enough anymore.

The bill purports to ban queue-jumping, ignoring the fact that some individuals have no choice but to pay for access. This happens when a patient goes to a for-profit diagnostic clinic for an MRI and returns to their specialist, report in hand. This allows the go-ahead for surgery in advance of those waiting still for an MRI in the public system. Bill 11 does nothing to address this unfair situation already happening here in Alberta.

I've covered a lot of material tonight, Mr. Speaker, so far. It's clear to most Albertans that the government's attempts to justify this proposal are weak. The questions are growing. The answer to the most profound question of "why" is nowhere to be found, just as the Premier is nowhere to be found when a public forum or a town hall meeting on this important issue is held. If he's afraid to face the left wing nuts now, he will find it even more difficult to face them later in an election. Voters will have the final say on this proposal, no matter how hard the government tries to avoid it.

Since this government took over in '92, the private component of health care delivery in Alberta has grown by 50 percent. In the previous 30 years the private-sector delivery had remained relatively constant around the 20 percent mark. Today the Alberta government has made it clear that the purpose of Bill 11 is to continue the expansion of the private component of health care in spite of the protests. To the majority of citizens who elected them this government is turning a deaf ear.

As an Official Opposition we are listening to Albertans. When over 50,000 Albertans take the time to sign petitions urging this Assembly to stop promoting private health care, we pay attention and we listen. Our purpose is to set health care on a course towards sustainability and affordability so that our children may enjoy the advantages of what we've been given; that is, the security of knowing the health care system will be there when they need it.

What needs to happen here in Alberta? Well, first of all, Bill 11

must be withdrawn. While we understand the government's reluctance to admit their error and strike out for the third time, the protests will continue until the legislation is pulled. Second, the Legislative Assembly needs to impose a moratorium on any new private facilities in Alberta until the appropriate legislation controlling the existing facilities is passed. Third, any legislation that is passed must ensure that taxpayer dollars are going to the public health care system. The line between what is truly private and what is public needs to be redrawn and clarified, as required under the Canada Health Act. Once the leak in the bucket has been sealed, the job of strengthening our public health care system can start.

What are some of the innovations that can occur? Well, commit to standards of good health by reducing the numbers of needless deaths and injuries caused by preventable accidents. Support healthy children. Children born in poverty, as one in five in Alberta is, don't have a chance to succeed in school, and their health suffers as a result. Build an integrated community health network that complements our hospital system. Bill 11 is about more medical services when we need more community services to take the pressure off our hospitals.

Concentrate our efforts on building a good primary care team model that delivers home care, palliative care, and mental health services outside the institution. Join together with other provinces and the federal government and commit to the sustainability of our public health care system instead of wasting time pointing the finger of blame. Recommit to building and maintaining the world-class health and medical facilities, and recommit to the people who run them: our physicians, our nurses, our administrators, who make Albertans proud of what we have. Activate Best Practices, that are working across Canada. Reduce the stress on our families, many of whom are caring for loved ones in their home with inadequate support, and while we're at it, let's thank them for their efforts.

Base future changes in our health care system on high-quality practical research. Let's involve our health care providers in the discussion stage, in assessing the impact of change, and enlist their support. Together we can build a plan that allows access to the necessary health services, regardless of where we live in this province. Let's accept that it is as important to someone living in Manning, Alberta, as it is to someone living in downtown Calgary to have access to the services that are needed. Let's stop dividing the province into the haves and the have-nots. This is a beginning, a beginning that is built on innovation and a respect for the well-being of Albertans.

In conclusion, this debate can be reduced to a question of values. Unlike this government, the majority of Albertans know that their health care system is too precious, too important to be subjected to an experiment which allows a few people to make an extra dollar from the taxpayer. The debate is about the priority we put on a public system available to all, regardless of their ability to pay. Do we allow our public system to deteriorate while building a for-profit tier with superior service available only to those who can afford it? What happens to the publicly funded system once we start down that road?

There is a uniquely Canadian value that says that we share the risk of ill health and the cost of it as a society, financed primarily by our taxation system. This system recognizes that all of us have a responsibility to each other. We do not discard those who are ill or who cannot afford to pay.

The debate tonight is about trust: trust between doctor and patient; trust in the health care system, that it will be there when we need it; trust between Albertans and their government. In their opposition to Bill 11, demonstrated in recent public opinion polls, letters, town hall meetings, and petitions, Albertans are saying that they have lost

confidence in this government when it comes to health care. Albertans are suspicious when the government tells them that Bill 11 will not lead to a two-tiered, American-style health care system.

We are still waiting to hear the answer to the fundamental question: why? Why does this government want to increase taxpayer dollars going to private-hospital operators instead of funding the full utilization of the public system? In the face of this suspicion and mistrust the Premier and his government have only two options: either withdraw Bill 11 or call an election immediately and let you, the voters, decide.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. JONSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today to speak to Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act. This is an important issue for Albertans, and there is an important need here for legislation to protect our public health care system. However, I regret that there are those who have intentionally spread misinformation about the bill to impede the understanding by Albertans as to what this legislation will actually achieve. I think we had an example this evening, very early in the hon. Leader of the Opposition's speech in quoting some statistics about the Alberta budget. Yes, back in the 1993-94 period we did, in our overall beneficial effort for Albertans of balancing the budget, reduce health care spending by 13 percent. Now that has suddenly become 30 percent tonight from across the way.

9:00

Indeed, we've just heard from the Leader of the Official Opposition some rather inaccurate claims, that there is some evil intent behind Bill 11 and that it heralds the end of medicare as we know it and we will end up with an American style health care system. Completely not true, Mr. Speaker.

We have heard ominous and unsubstantiated allegations about taxpayer subsidies to private hospitals and inaccurate claims, as I've said, about the reductions in health care spending. You heard references to NAFTA and the spectre of open doors for the U.S. and Mexico, and you've heard references to various other studies arguing against the evils of a two-tiered system. I think, Mr. Speaker, it is important to separate fact from fiction. The fact is that Albertans did not hear any answers from the Leader of the Opposition to those key questions posed by the Premier. So I will repeat them again, and perhaps the opposition leader may want to reflect upon them and reply later.

Why, Mr. Speaker, does the member continue to call to withdraw Bill 11 when her federal colleagues, including the Prime Minister, have said "pass the bill"?

Secondly, if surgical facilities were such a threat to the health system, why did she allow over 30 of them to operate when she was health minister and allow them to charge facility fees to patients?

Thirdly, if surgical facilities are such a threat to the health system, why has she not raised concerns about such facilities in other provinces, Mr. Speaker?

Why suggest that the entire bill be withdrawn when it contains key commitments to the Canada Health Act and prohibitions on facility fees and queue-jumping? Is she not in favour of these measures? How many taxpayers' dollars have the Liberals spent in their overall advertising campaign since that was alluded to as well?

Mr. Speaker, while the opposition party may not be interested in answering certain key questions, let me start by reaffirming what by now almost everyone realizes, that this is Bill 11 and it is consistent with the Canada Health Act. There are no implications under

NAFTA. There is no move towards any American style system.

Let me talk this evening about the facts, facts that answer the questions and issues raised by the member across the way and by others. Mr. Speaker, the fact is that Bill 11 is simply a tool and not the solution to every challenge that faces our health care system. We need Bill 11 because today we have no legislated authority to regulate and control private surgical facilities in this province. I'm sure members across the way as well as members on this side remember years past when questions and issues were raised with respect to this in this House. Today if a private hospital were to be accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, that facility could begin performing surgical procedures and there is absolutely nothing that this government could do about it. In fact, we have limited legislative authority even over private day surgery clinics that exist in the province today.

Certainly the need for legislation in this area has been a concern of this Assembly during question period for the last number of years. I remember questions and debates surrounding the eye clinics, surrounding the Health Resource Group, and we have recognized, Mr. Speaker, that there is a legislative gap. So recognizing that there is this gap, our government has three basic options facing us.

Option one was to do nothing and let private hospitals set up at the will of anyone in the province. Mr. Speaker, I think every member of this Assembly would agree with me that this was clearly not desirable, especially if you want to be able to protect our publicly funded health care system. The federal government also agrees that doing nothing is not an option. The federal Minister of Health has expressed to me his concern about what he called the absence of a legislative framework in our province and urged our government to bring forward legislation to regulate private facilities.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta also called for legislation to be brought forward. The college passed a motion to urge our government to develop legislation to regulate surgical facilities. The government also struck a blue ribbon panel chaired by Alberta Law Reform Institute's Peter Lown. This, too, confirmed the existence of a legislative gap and the need for legislation. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, even our opposition members across the Assembly have agreed that Alberta needs legislation in this area. So for these reasons it was clear that doing nothing was not an option.

Our second option was to go to the other end of the spectrum and totally ban surgical clinics from Alberta. I'm sure the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona would perhaps prefer that, but that would rule out the 52 clinics that are already in operation in the province under contract to the public system. This would mean that we would not have the performance of 156 different insured day surgeries, and I could go on on the services provided by those private clinics. In fact, Mr. Speaker, as has been I think already mentioned in the Assembly, we would not have 20,000 day surgeries a year being provided through surgical clinics in this province. It was clear that a total ban on all clinics was not a reasonable option. Banning something that is working well to the benefit of Albertans just doesn't make sense, and it is not what Albertans want. Indeed, even our opposition members across the Assembly would agree, I think, with that particular position.

Mr. Speaker, to do nothing, as I've said, was not an option, so we have gone to what we think and we know is the third and reasonable option. That was to ban private hospitals outright and to tightly regulate and control our surgical facilities so that they only operate when it is of benefit to Albertans and to the publicly-funded system. That's what we've done in Bill 11.

These surgical facilities would only be allowed to perform minor surgical procedures, and in doing so, public hospital operating rooms could be freed up for more complex surgeries. At the same time,

Mr. Speaker, more minor surgeries would be done. Surgical facilities under contract to our public system also have the potential to plan and provide elective surgery without some of the rescheduling that can occur when emergency surgeries and urgent medical needs are facing us. That is, I think, very important, because we want that full-service hospital. That is something that will remain in the public system, but there is that specialized service where I think there is a good possibility, there is the potential, there is evidence that there will be an advantage to the overall system.

In other words, I think it's important to realize and to acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 11 protects our publicly-funded health system from any of the negative impacts of the private-sector involvement by prohibiting private hospitals and strictly regulating surgical clinics. At the same time, it gives health authorities another option to provide surgical services as they look for ways to improve access to publicly-funded services and reduce waiting lists.

However, Bill 11 does not say that health authorities must contract with surgical facilities. This was well emphasized by the Premier, but it needs to be emphasized again. It simply offers them the option to contract with such facilities if the health authorities have evidence that there would be a benefit to patients, as taxpayers, in doing so. There may be opportunities to be realized through partnering with the private sector, but we also acknowledge that such a partnership may not always be the most efficient way to deliver a service. That's why a detailed individual analysis would be done for each and every contract proposed by a regional health authority. This is another basic principle in the bill, Mr. Speaker. Only those contracts that would yield a public benefit by reducing waiting lists in the public system, improving access to publicly-funded services, or increasing the efficiency of the delivery of services would be eligible for approval.

Mr. Speaker, contrary to the allegations of the Leader of the Opposition, there will be no opportunity for surgical facilities to skim off easy, profitable procedures. It will be the health authority that decides what, if any, procedures would be contracted out. If health authorities consider any contract with a surgical facility, they will have to demonstrate that the contract won't harm the publicly-funded health system and will be within the principles of the Canada Health Act.

9:10

Bill 11 strongly protects equitable access to publicly-funded health care for all Albertans. Albertans have been very clear in their directions in this regard. They have told us they do not want an American style, two-tiered health system in which the wealthy are able to buy faster or better service, and our government, Mr. Speaker, agrees completely. That's why we've made the government's intention very clear in the preamble to Bill 11. The preamble affirms the commitment of the government of Alberta to the preservation of the principles of universality, accountability, portability, and public administration as described in the Canada Health Act. To make certain of this, we submitted both our policy statement and then Bill 11 itself to the federal Minister of Health for his review. I asked him to tell us if he saw areas of the bill that are inconsistent with the Canada Health Act, because if there are, we will fix them. In response to our discussions with the federal government, the Prime Minister recently told our Premier: go ahead; pass the bill. Go ahead; pass the bill.

As well, as has been indicated, Mr. Speaker, I'll be asking all provincial health ministers to join me in reviewing and comparing legislation across Canada to try to ensure a consistent approach to contracting with private facilities. The bill also commits the government of Alberta to ensuring that no person who is entitled to

an insured surgical service can be required to pay for that service or be able to pay to get faster service.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is the Health Care Protection Act. It is very much protective of the principles of the Canada Health Act, of the system that we have grown to value and want to preserve and improve. I would like this evening just to refer to the health care system and the priorities that this government has placed upon our health care system. The Premier has outlined the very, very significant increases in funding for health care. We rank at the top of the list as far as provinces are concerned in per capita funding on a formula or age-adjusted basis. We have committed additional funds to a whole host of priority areas. We have committed additional funds to continuing care in response to the Broda report. There's a very significant increase, therefore, for long-term care and home care in our budget.

In the area of surgeries the volume of high-priority surgeries in this province has never before been higher than it is now. We recognize that there are waiting lists, and we want to address those. We are putting funding into that particular area. We are putting a very significant additional amount of money this year into province-wide services.

Then, Mr. Speaker, we certainly are a government that has shown through Alberta Health and Wellness our commitment to innovation and change with respect to the health care system. In Toronto over the last couple of days, at the end of last week, we had a very thorough discussion among health ministers about what each province was doing in terms of innovation and giving priority to all parts of the health care system and wanting to move it into the future. I can say, I think very, very correctly because it was acknowledged by others around the table, that in the area of primary care we have numerous pilot projects under way: the Northeast health care centre, the Crowfoot project which has been referred to, and also out in the rural area in locations such as Bassano.

Further, we are committed to innovation and change in other areas. I think we could say that we are leaders in this country in terms of telehealth and telepsychiatry in an effort to reach and provide more specialized advice and knowledge to all parts of this province on a more equitable access basis for our Albertans outside of Edmonton and Calgary. We have announced the initial 20-plus recipients that will be receiving funding this year for their projects through our health innovation fund. Mr. Speaker, once again this is an area where the creativity and the dedication and the forward thinking of our health care providers, both in administration and at the front lines, is being recognized in this province. Health care is clearly a priority of this province. We have shown this in our budget, in our business plans, and we demonstrate it over and over again in concrete ways, through actual action, through actual commitment of money. So there should be no doubt – it is well shown, well illustrated, well approved and recognized across this country, I think – that we are leaders in a number of areas of health care reform, and we are committed to continuing to go in that particular direction.

We are proposing in Bill 11 protection of our public health care system, our publicly funded, publicly administered health care system, Mr. Speaker. We want to improve that system. We want to address any of the issues, any of the problems that are facing us. We're up to that challenge. This legislation is necessary – and I think it has been well illustrated and will probably be well illustrated further on tonight – to protect the health care system and, yes, to put a structure in place so that we can take advantage of initiatives in the area of surgery, specialized surgery, minor surgery, which will be officially performed or of an advantage to a health authority and will

better Albertans in terms of the overall treatment and delivery of services across the system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The debate around health care is often emotional because health or the lack of it is an issue that affects all of us in our daily lives and is often a matter of life and death. Access to quality health care that can help to make us healthy or at least lessen our pain, be it emotional, physical, or mental, is now considered a right, not a privilege.

Daily, as both the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark and the Official Opposition health critic, I receive letters, e-mails, faxes, phone calls from people across this province who are desperate, asking why they have to wait for a necessary medical service like an MRI, why they can't have their hip replaced in a timely manner, or why they have to wait months for a cancer treatment or bypass surgery. They're angry because they have to wait months or have had their surgeries canceled. They're told that the hospitals are full and that the doctors can't see them.

This year in Alberta \$5.6 billion will be spent on health care. Now, you and I will all agree that that's a lot of our taxpayer dollars spent on maintaining and sustaining our health care system. After indiscriminate slashing year by year, we have seen this government's expenditures on health care continue to increase, yet somehow our services seem to be decreasing. Emergency rooms are full, wait lists are long, and surgeries are postponed, yet Albertans know, as does each and every MLA in this room, that there are hospitals in neighborhoods with empty wards, darkened operating rooms, closed emergencies, and empty laboratories. So right now we have the capacity, and we have the bricks and mortar. There's no need to build more hospitals, only a need to utilize what exists more efficiently.

Now, this isn't just something that I dreamed up tonight to present. The Auditor General in his 1998-1999 report indicated that 40 percent of hospital facilities are not utilized for their original purpose. This is the state of the province's health system today, yet what has this government done?

Well, they have tinkered with our health care system for seven years, and most importantly they've lost control. How have they lost control of the system? Since 1993 this government has followed an agenda to privatize public services. They divested themselves of control over the delivery of health care by creating 19 unelected regional health authorities, RHAs, and provincial boards, which are really 19 mini departments of health. A recent cost-benefit analysis of regional health planning and delivery in Alberta concluded that a fragmented system with considerable duplication and considerable costs has developed through regionalization. In the process, health care boundaries have been established that have made it increasingly difficult for Albertans to move from one RHA to another to obtain services, and health care services offered now vary depending on which region you live in.

9:20

In this province we no longer have a seamless, efficient, integrated health care system. Rather than creating a vision of better health care, rather than attempting to regain control, to manage our health care system, this government has practised the politics of deceit, pretending to take one path, while sneaking down another. While we have been told that the government was protecting our public health care system, in reality they have been preparing the foundation for the path of privatization. Under the guise of tackling the debt

and deficit, they have closed hospitals and hospital beds, laid off nurses and other health care professionals, restricted access to services like physiotherapy and speech therapy, and encouraged the contracting out of nonmedical services to the private sector.

The only piece of the path that this Premier has been unable to build is to establish private, for-profit hospitals that will be subsidized by taxpayer dollars. Maybe, just maybe the Premier and his government members truly do not know that private, for-profit delivery of health care services is more expensive, less efficient, compromises quality of care, and is not innovative but a throwback to the days before medicare. It is hard to believe that this can be true as the case against privatization is overwhelming and grows daily in this province.

Over the last seven years Alberta's health care has been evolving out of necessity, not because of leadership from this government. There has been an increase in the number of surgeries that are performed on an outpatient basis, not only due to technology and ability to do so but also as a result of decreased capacity in our hospitals because of the cutbacks. This major shift from inpatient to outpatient services has created a market for increased contracting by regional health authorities with private providers who have seized the opportunity to enter the health care marketplace. Former public institutions such as the Grace and Holy Cross were sold for nothing, and institutions and clinics like HRG and Surgical Centres are now established in Alberta.

But this is not enough for this government. Encouraging words from key members like the Premier and former Treasurer Jim Dinning have promoted the privatization of Alberta's health care system, and while the Premier tonight talked about his commitment to the Canada Health Act, we all know that he has also talked about delisting insured services and establishing a list of core services. We also know that as Treasurer and now as CEO of the Calgary regional health authority and one of the biggest promoters of Bill 11, Mr. Dinning has said that the private sector should build, maintain, and administer hospitals.

This talk is costly to Albertans, and the actions speak volumes. This government's drive toward privatization in health care is seen explicitly and implicitly in this government's policy directives and initiatives. Actions codified in the 12 principles and a policy entitled Contracting by Regional Health Authorities establish the basis by which RHAs throughout this province are guided in making their decisions about providing services.

We heard tonight that there were no guidelines for contracting out. There are guidelines. I will just remind you of two of these principles which have conveniently been left out of Bill 11. One:

The following Goals will guide the RHAs in their contracts with private clinics . . .

Maintain a role for the private sector.

Another goal in the 12 principles: ensure a strong role for the private sector both within and outside the publicly funded system. Taking one path while sneaking down the other: that's what we're seeing. The result of these 12 principles is that services formerly provided by the hospitals are now contracted out to large corporations, services such as food and housekeeping, laundry, laboratory, and home care.

To say that our health care system is now 100 percent delivered by the public sector would be a falsehood. However, to say that we have information relative to the cost-effectiveness, benefits, standards, and the quality of services currently provided in this province by private contractors in our health care system would be an out and out lie. The Auditor General indicated that 10 regional health authorities cannot account for 570 million of our taxpayer dollars going to voluntary and private-sector operators.

A government who is in control of our health care would make sure that they knew all the facts before entering the dangerous

quicksand of Bill 11, but as we have seen since 1993, the way this government makes decisions continues to be shaped by the motto: it is better to experiment than to plan. Our position is that before we experiment any further, it is necessary to stop and assess where we are. It's time to look at the current contracts that exist before the decision is made to open the doors to any more. It is time for the government to be honest with the public about the path it is taking with Bill 11, for this path is one that will risk the loss of our precious public health care system.

The issue of contracting and regulating insured medical services is not what is at the heart of Bill 11. The main principle of the bill is to enable the establishment of overnight, for-profit surgical facilities, which are really private, for-profit hospitals, to undertake more complicated surgeries, surgeries which will be performed in facilities that do not meet the standards of Alberta's Hospitals Act and surgeries that will be subsidized by public taxpayer dollars.

The bill pretends to lay out rules and regulations that are needed to control private facilities, but those regulations already exist in other acts. The Premier would like us to believe that this bill is required to fill a legislative gap to regulate facilities that are able to do surgeries requiring an overnight stay. Well, let's see if that's true.

As the Premier said, regional health authorities currently contract with private surgical clinics to provide about 140, 150 surgical procedures, procedures like hernias, like finger amputations, wart removals. So the private clinics exist now. But currently private, for-profit facilities are not permitted to perform surgeries that require overnight stays. That's the legislative gap. The reason for that is that facilities that perform those kinds of surgeries in the province are currently known as hospitals and have to meet the standards of Alberta's Hospitals Act. So let's get the facts straight. Other than public hospitals there are no facilities in this province which provide surgery that requires an overnight stay. So contrary to what the Premier has said, there exists no legislative gap, because these facilities do not exist nor can they exist unless this legislation is passed.

Do we not have legislation in this province that controls the types of surgeries that are done? Of course we do. We have the Hospitals Act, the Regional Health Authorities Act, the Medical Profession Act, and of course the Canada Health Act. Interestingly enough there are two acts which give the minister the exact authority he claims he doesn't have: control over facilities that wish to provide overnight stays and control over the current day-surgery facilities.

In Alberta's Hospitals Act section 62(a) states that the minister has the ability to make regulations relative to "contracts with . . . private hospitals," institutions, and such facilities. So, in effect, right now, tonight, this Premier and this minister with his cabinet colleagues can go behind closed doors and pass a regulation which says that there will be no overnight stays at private hospitals or facilities if that's what they want to do.

Currently section 93 of the Medical Profession Act states that the council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons "may make by-laws as to all matters pertaining to the establishment and operation of diagnostic and treatment facilities." Well, I'm sure that all Albertans are relieved to hear that, because up to now what the minister has told us is that there are no regulations governing the standards of those day facilities.

So the government has the power to regulate and to stop private, for-profit hospitals and facilities, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons does set standards to regulate diagnostic and treatment facilities. What is needed is legislation to control existing independent facilities, as exists in many other provinces. Bill 11 doesn't do that. It just opens the door to overnight surgical facilities, which even the College of Physicians and Surgeons has acknowledged as private hospitals.

9:30

Now, the bill pretends to support the principles of the Canada Health Act – principles of accessibility, portability, public administration, and comprehensiveness – yet as I indicated earlier, the real guiding principles are the missing principles which eat away at the spirit of the act and promote privatization. Bill 11 pretends to outlaw private hospitals but allows the same thing under a different name: approved surgical facility.

Now, the Premier has tried this trick wording before. When the citizens of the province disagreed with him, the Premier established the blue-ribbon panel on Bill 37. The result of that panel was clear: an approved surgical facility that provides surgeries that require an overnight stay is a private hospital. Yet this Premier insists on trying to distort the English language by claiming that these facilities are not hospitals.

The first section of Bill 11 says that there will be no private hospitals, and in the second section a public hospital and an approved surgical facility are defined. What's interesting is that when we read the definition for private hospital, surgical facility, and facility services, we learn that there's very little that distinguishes a hospital from a surgical facility. In fact, the definition of facility services is almost identical to the services that a hospital provides under the Canada Health Act and under Alberta's own Hospitals Act.

The only private hospital that is banned by Bill 11 is one which provides all of the following: emergency, diagnostic, surgical and medical services and admits patients for medically supervised stays exceeding 12 hours. Any facility in this province lacking, for instance, an emergency room or that contracts out diagnostic services is therefore not a hospital under these definitions but an approved surgical facility.

Now, for all of you who live in rural Alberta and have seen the services in your public hospitals downgraded, you need to be aware that according to this definition, as stated in Bill 11, your hospitals could well be renamed as surgical facilities. In fact, many of you in the Edmonton area will remember the Misericordia and Grey Nuns, which were renamed as community health centres. Did that make them less of a hospital? No, it didn't. No matter what the Premier wants to call these buildings, they are in fact hospitals.

The bill pretends to follow what is legislated in other provinces but opens rather than closes the doors to further privatization. Ontario, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan have all passed legislation with the intention to prohibit private, for-profit hospitals and discourage private, for-profit clinics from opening.

You know, Saskatchewan took three years to develop its regulations, yet Mr. Dinning is ready to contract out as soon as the bill is passed. Well, does he know something that the Premier isn't telling the rest of Alberta?

Tight monitoring, frequent inspections, and control are in other provinces' legislation but nonexistent in Alberta's. This bill in its current form does not prevent but enables privatization.

The bill pretends to outlaw queue-jumping but in fact will expand the opportunities for faster services for those with money. The ban on queue-jumping is only for an insured surgical service. Already we have in this province examples of people who can afford to access an MRI in the private sector and are therefore able to jump ahead of those who can't and therefore have quicker access to an operation. Bill 11 does nothing to address this issue.

Furthermore, as we know, one of the main purposes of the bill is to open the doors to the selling of either enhanced or better goods or services or uninsured goods or services. Once this happens, there is no way of controlling faster access to an insured service while someone is receiving an out-of-pocket uninsured service.

The bill pretends to curtail the selling of enhanced medical

services but actually outlines the procedures that must be followed so such selling can occur. The potential for conflict of interest as physicians work both in the public and private systems is not addressed by this legislation even though current examples exist of these conflicts.

Private, for-profit hospitals that can provide both insured enhanced and uninsured services open up the opportunity for doctors or administrators to pressure patients to pay for extras. The doors are open to an entrepreneurial health system where the doctor is no longer the professional but is the businessman looking for the profit margin and watching the bottom line.

The bill pretends to regulate private, for-profit medicine but is silent on the monitoring and compliance of health care providers. What is disturbing is that the bill does not provide full disclosure of the contracts. Information as to the details of the contracts, the shareholders of the private, for-profit hospitals, publication of performance outcomes, annual reviews by the Auditor General, publication of complaints issued, and the resolutions are just a few of the items missing in the legislation.

Now, the Premier and the minister have said that Bill 11 will reduce waiting lists, improve access to publicly funded services, be more cost-efficient and -effective, but every shred of evidence from around the world just says the opposite.

The bill pretends to address the issues of providing better access to health care and indirectly help to improve the health of Albertans yet in reality only deals with a narrow part of health care delivery. Albertans understand that this bill does not do what it's meant to do. The hundreds of phone calls, the thousands of people who have come to the public forums all understand that Bill 11 is not the solution and that this government has lost control of our health care. They have discovered and are not willing to follow the secret path of privatization set out by the Premier. It is this Premier who does not wish to understand, who dismisses as irrelevant the thoughtful input of Albertans and continues to promote the interests of a few against the interests of the many, who continues to tinker with Albertans' health and well-being. Mr. Premier, you have the power to pass the bill, but Albertans have the power not to forget.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party in the House.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past three years the New Democrats have led the fight inside the Legislature against the Conservative government's repeated attempts to legalize private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta. Working together, Albertans from all walks of life – the frontline health care workers, nurses and doctors, trade unionists, seniors, youths, and tens of thousands of concerned citizens – have twice forced this government to back down. The bill that was twice withdrawn because of fierce public opposition was called Bill 37, yet the Conservative government seems to have learned absolutely nothing. Here we are back again with a new bill to legalize private, for-profit hospitals by way of this bill called Bill 11.

Well, you know what they say in baseball: three strikes and you're out. If Bill 11 is so innocuous, as the Premier claims it is, then why have the people of Alberta unleashed unprecedented public opposition to Bill 11? Why is the government prepared to defy the public will and stake its political future on Bill 11 if it were really no big deal? Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 really is a big deal. The Premier knows it and Albertans know it. That's why people across Canada will be watching the Bill 11 debate as it unfolds in this Legislature.

For the first time since medicare began, a provincial government

is going to allow U.S. style for-profit hospitals to not only set up shop in Alberta but to put their hands into the taxpayers' pockets as well. The current government has been warned repeatedly that should Bill 11 become law, the door would be open for U.S. corporations like Columbia/HCA to set up shop not only in Alberta but across Canada. This is not fear mongering; this is reality.

While the government claims that NAFTA does not compel them to open the doors to American health care corporations, you know and I know that these are hollow assurances. We all know that if a company like the Health Resource Group is sold to American interests, the Conservatives would not block the sale, and once this Pandora's box has been opened, it will never be able to be closed again.

9:40

The New Democrats have led the fight against Bill 11 because we are a party of medicare. It was the NDP in Saskatchewan under the leadership of Tommy Douglas that pioneered the then radical notion that hospitals and medical care should be equally available to all citizens, regardless of their financial means. In Ottawa it is the NDP who have called the federal Liberals to account for their most recent budget, which offered a paltry 2 cents for health care for every dollar in tax cuts.

This is an important point, Mr. Speaker, because as we debate Bill 11, we must also debate the state of health care in Canada. One cannot discuss the state of our national health care system without considering the federal government, and the point must be made that the federal Liberals are not blameless in the increased privatization of our health care system. It was the federal Liberals that gutted medicare funding, and it is the federal Liberals who refuse to defend public health care as Bill 11 makes it way through the Legislature.

So it is with great pride that I stand this evening as the leader of Alberta New Democrats, as the leader of the party of medicare. As I stand, I will outline for Albertans why the New Democrats are so opposed to Bill 11. I want to assure Albertans that the New Democrats stand fair and square on the side of public health care. New Democrats pioneered medicare and New Democrats will strengthen it and protect it. Medicare has withstood the test of time, Mr. Speaker. The beauty of Canada's universal health care system is that it is not only fair, it is also by far the most cost-effective way to deliver quality health care services.

One of the most persistent myths spread by those opposed to medicare is that health care spending is escalating out of control. Let's look at the facts, Mr. Speaker. When medicare became a national program in 1967, Canada spent about 9 percent of its national wealth, or GDP, on health care. Today in the year 2000, 33 years later, Canada is still spending the same 9 percent of its GDP on health care.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Meanwhile, 30 years ago the United States also spent 9 percent of its GDP on health care, about the same as Canada. Today the United States spends 14 percent of its GDP on health care, and it is rising. The U.S. has by far the most privatized and commercialized health care system among the western developed countries. The U.S., unbelievably, spends 30 percent more per citizen than any other western developed country, yet it ranks at or near the bottom of the heap when it comes to health measures like infant mortality and life expectancy. This shouldn't surprise anyone when you consider that 44 million Americans have no health insurance coverage at all and another hundred million are underinsured. Mr. Speaker, shiny new hospitals with fancy new equipment don't do you much good if you can't afford medical treatment.

Does our public health care system need to innovate and adapt to

changing realities of the 21st century? Absolutely. Is Bill 11 the correct prescription for the challenges facing our public health care system? Absolutely not. Bill 11 will take Alberta down the failed road of more health care privatization.

So what's wrong with Bill 11? The first thing wrong with Bill 11 is that it's a dishonest piece of legislation designed to fool Albertans. The first section of the bill leaves the misleading impression that the government is banning private, for-profit hospitals when this is clearly not the case. The government is choosing to relabel them approved surgical facilities instead. Put simply, Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 proposes to ban private, for-profit hospitals in section 1 only to legalize them in section 2 under the name of approved surgical facilities.

I have spoken at numerous public forums over the last several months, Mr. Speaker, and guess what? Albertans were not fooled by this ploy. It appears that the only people who were fooled were the government's own backbenchers. Several government MLAs were busy telling their constituents that no overnight stays would be allowed in so-called approved surgical facilities when clearly that's the very reason for the legislation.

The more Albertans learn about Bill 11, the less they like it. In the Angus Reid poll published just over the weekend, a full 62 percent of Albertans who had read the Bill 11 householder sent out by the government expressed strong opposition to it. Yet the Premier refuses to listen to the people. Why? The question has been posed to me many times. Why is the Premier so adamant about Bill 11 when all of the available evidence concludes that private, for-profit hospitals will cost more and deliver less? It's a reasonable question. Albertans are asking that question over and over again.

Albertans are being asked, on the other hand, to accept on blind faith that the Premier's scheme will work, with no evidence to back this up. The Premier announced this foolish scheme on November 18 last year. That is more than four months ago, and since then the Conservative government has not been able to provide one shred of evidence that this will save money or shorten waiting lists. Meanwhile, the evidence showing that the Premier is wrong is piling up.

First out of the gate in January was a report prepared by the Alberta branch of the Consumers' Association of Canada. This report contained solid evidence that privatization of cataract eye surgery has meant higher costs and longer waits for Albertans. In Calgary, where all cataract surgery is performed in private, for-profit clinics, waiting times are significantly longer than in Edmonton, where 80 percent of cataract surgery is done in public facilities. In February health care expert Kevin Taft and journalist Gillian Steward released a readable little book called *Clear Answers: The Economics and Politics of For-Profit Medicine*. This book reveals all the evidence on the comparative costs and benefits of for-profit versus nonprofit delivery of health care.

The one-sided nature of the available evidence is summed up in a quote from the August 5, 1999, issue of the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*. I quote: for decades studies have shown that for-profit hospitals are more expensive than nonprofit hospitals; no peer-reviewed study has found that for-profit hospitals are less expensive. End of quote. Many other prominent health economists have also published over the last few months and weeks compelling evidence that the Conservative government's plan will not work.

So if all of the evidence concludes that private, for-profit health care costs more and delivers less, the question remains: why does the Premier keep pushing this agenda? The only conclusion that I can draw is that Bill 11 has nothing to do with saving money and everything to do with bailing out well-connected health care investors who can't turn a profit on their own. These investors include the Health Resource Group in Calgary, who have close

connections to the Conservative government. A few weeks ago the New Democrats released a document showing that HRG lost \$2.1 million last year. Shortly thereafter we released another document which indicated that HRG directors were aggressively lobbying the Calgary caucus of the government members for permission to do overnight stays and for public funding. The absolute stubbornness of the government to steamroll over public opinion and pass Bill 11 suggests to me that the aggressive lobbying by private health care interests was successful.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier likes to call those opposed to Bill 11 all kinds of names, including left-wing nuts. I'm wearing one of those wing nuts right here. He says we are people who fear change. Nothing could be further from the truth. Bill 11 would take the most cost-effective part of our health care system, our hospital sector, and make it less efficient through costly privatization experiments. The government's cure is worse than the disease.

How do we reduce waiting lists for lifesaving surgery? Albertans know the answer, even if the government doesn't. Open up beds and dust off the mothballed operating rooms in our public hospitals. What should we be doing to improve the public health care system? The Alberta New Democrats have a vision for the future of our universal health care system, Mr. Speaker. Medicare needs to be strengthened, not torn apart or blown up, like the Conservative government proposes to do. The New Democrats propose four concrete and realistic steps to improve public health care, control costs, and reduce waiting lists.

The first step is an outright ban on private, for-profit hospitals. Any medical procedure that requires an overnight stay must be performed in an approved public hospital. Mr. Speaker, I cannot emphasize enough that the New Democrats are the only party in this Legislature proposing an outright ban on private, for-profit hospitals. This is a highly radical notion. The province of Alberta has no for-profit hospitals now. I'm not aware that Alberta has ever had a for-profit hospital. When those generations who came before us established institutions to care for the sick and injured, it did not occur to them to try to make a profit from the misfortune of others. Instead, they looked to churches and governments to establish nonprofit hospitals. Bill 11 marks a radical departure from this proud tradition by allowing private, for-profit hospitals.

9:50

The second step of our plan would be to set firm targets for waiting times for all medically necessary services. There's no question that the Conservative government's reckless closing of beds and operating rooms in public hospitals has led to unacceptably long waiting times for procedures like hip surgeries and bypass surgeries. The brutal cuts to the public health care system have caused pain and suffering; no question about that. The Auditor General reported last year that almost 40 percent of the province's hospital beds remain closed. The bricks and mortar are in place, Mr. Speaker, and ready to go. All that is needed is the political will to reopen closed beds and operating rooms in our existing hospitals. However, the Conservative government prefers to put its energies into dangerous misadventures like Bill 11 in health care privatization.

The third step of our plan would be to undertake an independent cost-benefit study of existing day-surgery contracts. This is something the government is obviously afraid to do. Currently there are some 26 contracts with private, for-profit clinics for procedures like cataract eye surgery and ear, nose, and throat surgeries. Before allowing private, for-profit hospitals to contract for complex surgeries requiring overnight stays, the cost and benefits of existing day surgeries must be studied.

I find it remarkable and totally irresponsible, Mr. Speaker, that

more than four months after announcing this private, for-profit hospitals scheme, the Conservative government has not been able to provide a shred of evidence that existing day-surgery contracts are either saving money or reducing waiting lists.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The fourth and final step in the New Democrat plan is the most important, Mr. Speaker. We need to renew and reaffirm our vision of Tommy Douglas, the father of medicare. Canada's universal medicare system is an unfinished tapestry. It has been over 50 years since Tommy Douglas brought hospital services inside the medicare umbrella. It has been almost 40 years since medically necessary physician services were brought under the medicare umbrella. Albertans, like other Canadians, want medicare strengthened, not demolished.

The missing pieces of medicare's unfinished tapestry need to be filled in. For example, Alberta should lead the way by developing a public and truly universal pharmacare plan to cover prescription drug costs outside of hospitals. A universal pharmacare plan is needed to control the spiraling costs of prescription drugs. In 1975 10 cents of every health care dollar were spent on drugs. Today drug costs have doubled to 20 cents of every health care dollar. We now spend more on drugs than we do on doctors. All of the available evidence shows that a universal pharmacare plan would put a brake on rising drug costs in the long run. Instead of inventing a scheme to legalize private, for-profit hospitals, if the Premier were serious about protecting and improving medicare, he would champion a universal pharmacare plan for Alberta. Now, that would make Tommy Douglas proud.

We also need to make improvements and innovations in home care services. When you leave the hospital and still need medicare at home to cover the costs, your public health care card should follow you there. It doesn't now. The New Democrats support innovations in primary care, such as establishing community-based, 24-hour, walk-in clinics staffed by health professionals working together as a team, with doctors on salary instead of fee for service. Such an innovation may well take the pressure off hospital emergency wards and operating rooms. There is a fine example of such a facility not far from this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, called the Boyle McCauley health centre.

Alberta does need legislation to control the growth and expansion of private clinics. We need to put a stop to patients being pressured to pay hundreds of dollars for so-called enhanced services at private eye clinics. Albertans are demanding that a stop be put to queue-jumping at private MRI clinics, which is taking place in this province morning, noon, and night. Private MRI clinics are not even covered by Bill 11. I wonder why.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, we need to put a stop to the blatant conflicts of interest in the RHAs, like the CRHA, the Calgary regional health authority, where some doctors pad their own pockets by referring patients to clinics which they own themselves. Again, Bill 11 does nothing to address this serious problem of conflicts of interest.

Bill 11 contains none of the provisions that are needed to effectively regulate private, for-profit health care facilities in Alberta. It only sets up a framework for significant further expansion, yet the Conservative government presses on, even though it has no mandate from Albertans to expand private, for-profit hospital care.

The Premier threatens to use the heavy hand of closure to choke off debate on Bill 11. The Premier says he will enforce party discipline, even if it means that government members will be voting against the clearly expressed wishes of their constituents. Govern-

ment members are mistaken if they believe that public anger will die down should Bill 11 be forced through this Legislature with the heavy hand of closure, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that the government's spin doctors have been telling government members just that for months. But guess what? Public anger and opposition to Bill 11 has been growing steadily since last November. The bill's passage will not change this. Therefore, I urge the government to respect the wishes of Albertans and withdraw Bill 11.

The government has no mandate to force such dangerous and untested health care policies down the throats of Albertans. If you really believe that Bill 11 is the way to go, have the courage of your convictions. Seek a mandate through an election or by holding a referendum, but please, don't throw the future of medicare in jeopardy in this province and in this country in clear defiance of the wishes of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House tonight to discuss and debate Bill 11 and the future delivery of publicly funded health care in our province. I am doubly pleased that many fellow Albertans across the province are watching this unprecedented televising of an evening's debate in their Legislature.

As we all know, Mr. Speaker, health care is an issue of great importance to every one of us and to every one of our families. Indeed, it is an issue that truly transcends political boundaries, and it is an issue that is beyond provincial and territorial boundaries, for it is truly a national matter. So let's consider Bill 11 and the future of health care in the national context.

Every health minister in Canada will tell you that in the area of health care there has been an enormous increase in medical information, incredible advancements in health technology and medical procedures, unprecedented improvements to medical equipment, diagnostics, lab services, and so on, and tremendous benefits from new drugs, pharmaceuticals, and other medicines. All of these things are very positive changes, Mr. Speaker.

Every health minister would also tell you that as a result of these significant advancements, particularly during these past 10 years, public expectations have also increased dramatically and that every province's budget has grown enormously to try and meet those expectations. But how can the provinces keep pace with these ballooning budgets? In Alberta today, we are spending more on health care than ever in the history of this province.

In 1982 health care costs constituted about 22 percent of our provincial budget. In 1991 health care costs rose to 26 percent of our total budget. Today our health care costs represent about one-third of our provincial budget. In fact, we are now the third highest spender in Canada on a per capita basis on health care, and if you factor in age and gender, I believe we would rank first. We would rank as the highest spender on health care. Now, I'm not boasting or complaining, Mr. Speaker, but the fact is that I don't want anyone to tell you or anyone else that the Alberta government isn't doing its part to bolster and boost our public health care system, because we certainly are.

To demonstrate this point further, our new budget will add an additional \$1 billion to health care over the next three years, and that's on top of the \$1.3 billion that we've already added over the past five or six years. This year alone we will spend about \$5.6 billion on health care in Alberta. With this huge budget we will hire 90 more doctors immediately this year and 2,400 more nurses will be hired over the next three years.

10:00

But while Alberta is dedicating 33 percent of our total budget to health care, the federal government, which claims to be our partner in all of this, are only giving us a contribution of 13 percent. That's a far, far cry from the 28 percent that they were giving us about a decade ago, and it's even a further cry from the 50 percent that they originally provided when medicare first started in this great country. In fact, it may interest you and others to know that today the federal government of Canada only dedicates about 5 percent of its total spending to health care. Five percent, and that's while they are boasting of surpluses in the tens of billions of dollars. Therefore, every province and every territory has asked Ottawa to restore its funding for health care to at least the 1994-95 levels, yet Ottawa remains silent and unresponsive to this request.

While we do need and would appreciate more health care dollars from Ottawa, we also recognize that money alone is not the total answer, and the Premier was very clear during his remarks in that regard. It certainly helps, but we can't sustain the system by constantly just throwing more and more money into it at the current rate. As Premier Tobin of Newfoundland-Labrador said on national television on March 2:

We all recognize that we need to reform the health care system, that we can't continually grow these budgets by ten percent a year, nobody, not federal, not provincial governments can sustain that.

During that same broadcast Premier Romanow of Saskatchewan said:

If we're going to be seeing this kind of reduction in Ottawa's role, our capacity to maintain national standards and [the] publicly funded health care system is very much at risk.

All other provinces and territories have spoken to this issue unanimously and through their ministers of health have indicated in writing to the federal Health minister that we unanimously agree that the federal government has to reaffirm its fiscal support for the Canada Health Act by at least restoring its Canadian health and transfer payments to 1994 levels, along with an escalator provision to help cover the costs of inflation and rising health costs in general.

Mr. Speaker, the facts are that medical advancements, medical innovations, and new pharmaceuticals are wonderful additions and tremendous improvements, but they are expensive. Pharmaceutical costs, for example, are rising by about 15 percent per year. Now, the demand for MRIs is also outpacing availability of dollars at a cost of about \$3 million per machine, and that's not including all the costs of installation, the hiring of technicians to operate them, the engagement of doctors to read the results, and so on.

We should also note that we are very fortunate to have a growing and an aging population right across Canada, and that's a good thing, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it's a very good thing. However, so too is the fact that we will all be needing and we will all be using more and more health services in the future. There will be many more of us needing and demanding those services, and we will all be looking for faster intervention, broader intervention, and more effective intervention by the health system as we grow and as we age.

So the question is: how do we sustain and enhance our publicly funded, publicly administered, publicly accountable, universally acceptable, beloved health care system in the future? That's the question. We know that the federal Health minister has asked us to become more creative and more innovative because, in his words, the status quo is not an option, and I think we would agree. Now, the federal government hasn't exactly explained what they mean by this, so the provinces have had several meetings to discuss the matter, but one thing is very clear, and that is that every province has already been innovating. We've been creating, we've been reforming, and we've been adapting for almost 10 years now. All we want

is for Ottawa to realize that we don't have a lot of room left to be even more creative and even more innovative unless they show us some examples, which we'd be happy to receive.

However, we do have some options available that are completely within the Canada Health Act, and one of those options exists in Bill 11. In presenting this option, we have looked at the practices of other provinces and at their legislation. We've looked at Ontario, where the Shouldice hospital near Toronto has operated for about 50 years as a private, for-profit surgical facility and now performs about 7,000 hernia operations annually under contract to the Ontario government. We've looked at British Columbia, where the Cambie clinic in Vancouver operates as a private surgical facility in which about 3,000 patients per year stay in about 10 different recovery rooms, and that includes overnight stays. Mr. Speaker, neither of these facilities has been accused of violating the Canada Health Act. Neither of them has harmed or destroyed or brought down medicare, and neither would we.

There are other examples of surgical clinics elsewhere. Mr. Speaker, there are many other examples of surgical clinics operating privately in other provinces. We have surgical clinics in Manitoba, in Atlantic Canada, and in Quebec, and of course we have about 52 or so of these clinics right here in Alberta. The public purse helps support these clinics by contract, and they perform a vital role in the delivery of health care.

I noted with surprise that 37 of these 52 or so clinics in Alberta were operating and/or were ushered in by the leader of the Liberal opposition when she was Alberta's health minister. Those clinics were also charging patients facility fees for insured services under her watchful eye. Bill 11 specifically prohibits those kinds of facility fees and those kinds of charges to patients in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, prohibiting these charges is just one of many patient protection issues in Bill 11. The bill also requires more disclosure of information and requires contracts to be made public. It demands more accountability, and it standardizes and makes uniform various aspects related to enhanced medical services or medical goods. It provides tough enforcement, it requires stricter adherence, and it stipulates hefty penalties for any breaches. Bill 11, then, will be the toughest legislation we have in this regard, and that's one reason why it's called the Health Care Protection Act.

Bill 11 prohibits a two-tier system in this province, and it commits us by law to the single-tier system we already have. It prohibits private, for-profit hospitals, and it commits us by law to a single payer, publicly-funded system like we already have. Bill 11 also places stricter controls on existing clinics, and it protects patients from extra charges being forced upon them. Bill 11 prohibits queue-jumping, and it ensures that Albertans will continue to have universal access to publicly-funded health services, in fact with the specific aim of having increased and improved access to those very same services.

That brings me to some of the realities facing us as we begin this new century, Mr. Speaker. One of the unfortunate realities that we know is lineups and waiting lists for doctors, for specialists, for MRIs, for surgeries, for beds, and so on. Every jurisdiction in this country has these waiting lists. Here in Alberta we're determined to do something about them and to reduce them, and we're going to do that within the confines of the Canada Health Act and within the publicly-funded system.

I'm reminded of what one journalist wrote not long ago. He said that despite our political, religious, or cultural differences, Albertans demand high-quality health care. We all want to be diagnosed quickly and correctly. We all want to be treated efficiently and effectively. In the end, we don't care where we get these services; we just want to be cured of what ails us.

Most importantly, we don't want to pay extra for those services, and we don't want anyone jumping ahead of us in the lineup to receive them. I know many if not most Albertans who are here tonight or who are listening or watching this debate have had the experience, perhaps the frustration, of waiting for access to a medical service. I certainly know I have, Mr. Speaker, just recently in fact.

Once you get in, of course the care is excellent. The service is quite fantastic, but it's the length of time it takes to get you into the system that causes us concern. So we are responding to improve this situation, and health authorities are responding as well.

10:10

The Capital health authority in Edmonton, which was voted as the best health care provider in Canada last year by a reputable national magazine, has been doing its part to hire more staff, engage more doctors, and open up more beds. Over the last year, for example, they opened 37 general beds, added about 150 long-term care beds, opened up 74 new temporary flex beds, added 16 new alternative level of care beds, added half a dozen new subacute care beds, and they're in the process of adding another 63 new beds right now, Mr. Speaker. In fact, that will bring them well over the 2,000 mark. As I said, more and more are being added all the time.

Bill 11 will simply provide one more option, one safe, affordable option for our regional health authorities right across the province to consider by allowing them to receive proposals for some narrowly defined, contracted-out minor surgeries which will be paid for by the public purse. If health authorities feel they can perform their services more efficiently and more effectively in public facilities, then so be it; those services will remain in public facilities. But no one – and I repeat, no one – will force a health authority in this province to contract out.

Some say there's no way that a private surgical clinic can perform any service more efficiently and effectively than what's already being done in our public hospitals. If that's true, Mr. Speaker, then I can tell you with confidence that there won't be any contracts approved under this particular legislation. The fact is, however, that dozens of private clinics in Alberta already do provide efficient and effective medical services. Can you imagine if those clinics, those medicentres were to suddenly be shut down, not be allowed to operate? Can you imagine the ramifications on the system? Can you imagine the additions to our lineups, the costs to the budget, and so on? So let's keep that in perspective as we look at Bill 11. In fact, under Bill 11 health authorities would have to look at the optional use of their own facilities first before a contract is considered.

You see, Mr. Speaker, health authorities are given a certain budget. They are funded to provide quality health care for all Albertans. Money for contracts comes out of their own budgets, which is our public health care purse. I am certain that no health authority would pursue a contract outside if it's going to take a bigger chunk from their own budget or if it's not going to reduce waiting times for minor surgical procedures. Under Bill 11 there have to be clear benefits to any contracting out. They have to be clear to the regional health authorities, or they won't pursue them in the first place. They have to be clear and accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and they have to be clear and accountable to the minister of health, or they won't be approved. Most importantly, they have to be clear to Albertans. That is why Bill 11 requires all contracts to be open, and that is why the minister's rationale for the contract is also required to be public information.

What is also required in Bill 11 for contract approval? Well, let me answer that. First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, all contracts have to comply with the Canada Health Act. That means all Albertans will continue to have access to a publicly-funded health care system

in this province. No one pays extra out of their pocket for an insured surgery, and no one cuts into the lineup regardless of how deep their pockets might be.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, all health authorities will have to prove that the contracting out of a particular service is a better alternative than continuing to provide that service in a public hospital. What are the benefits? Is it more efficient? Is it more effective? Are their own facilities being used to maximum benefit?

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, our health authorities have to show that the contract won't harm our publicly-funded system in any way. The contract must tell us what results are expected. How many surgeries will be performed, at what cost? How will waiting lists be reduced? How is it more efficient? How is it more effective? I want to emphasize that in order to ensure patient safety under Bill 11, all surgical facilities will have to be accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons and our trusted doctors in this province. Those facilities can be investigated, they can be visited, and they can be inspected and reviewed at any time by the minister or his representatives.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 gives Alberta's regional health authorities more flexibility to continue to deliver high quality, publicly-funded health care in a safe, fully accredited setting where Albertans do not have to pay one cent for it. As long as you have your health care card, you'll receive that service at no charge.

Bill 11 requires health authorities to use existing operating rooms and beds for more complex surgeries. Those that require the full support of a public hospital, those particular surgeries that require full diagnostic, emergency, lab, medical, and intensive care services will be done in the proper facilities, the public health care facilities. Specifically, Bill 11 mandates that major surgeries will only be done in full-fledged hospitals. The contentious part of Bill 11 comes down to this: is it okay for an insured, minor surgery that requires an overnight stay to be done in a safe, fully accredited private clinic where you don't have to pay a cent for it?

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that many Albertans understand, and they understand even better now, what Bill 11 is all about. But we don't want Albertans just to watch and listen to the debate tonight. We've worked hard to engage Albertans in this debate and to gather their feedback. That is why we presented our policy paper and mailed it out to every household in this province. We have asked Albertans for their comments on this bill and how they might want it improved. We have said, and the Premier has committed to acting on what we hear. When the bill moves into committee, as the Premier has said, we will introduce amendments that respond to what Albertans have told us. In the end, I'm confident that we will have a tremendously stronger bill, one that's reflective of Albertans' priorities. That has always been our goal.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell all members to act in the best interests of the health system and the patients we're all trying to serve. Look for supporting Bill 11. If there are parts of it you can't agree with, let's fix those parts, but let's get on with the broader agenda of helping to reform the health care system for the benefit of all Albertans and all Canadians.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Those Albertans who are still following this debate electronically have listened to a little more than two hours of speeches. We've heard six different speakers. We heard three in support of Bill 11 and three opposed. Each one of those speakers has argued that this bill either is a wonderful thing, part of a well-intentioned experiment to make our health care system

work better, or a very dangerous experiment that will prejudice our public health care system and, ultimately, patient care. Each of those six speakers I think has made a fine speech tonight.

But what have we learned so far? Well, we know this: we know that the bill is vague in a number of key areas. There are lots of things the minister may do and very few things he must do. When the minister is given discretion, like he is in sections 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 18, 22, and 24, that discretion is largely unfettered. The criteria he must follow in making decisions are vague and ambiguous. The government has, by section 23, made it difficult if not impossible for anyone to appeal that minister's decision. Those facts have not been refuted by any one of the government speakers tonight.

Mr. Speaker, many critical decisions will be made by regulation. Section 25 permits decisions in some 20 different areas to be made by regulation. While we're talking about regulations, maybe this is the time to let Albertans in on a little secret. Alberta is the only province in Canada and I believe the only jurisdiction in all of North America where regulations can be hatched in secret. It's the only place where there's no oversight in this Assembly or by this Assembly or by an all-party committee of MLAs. Government decides who it will talk to when they consider regulations, but any consultation is secret. It's not done in a public forum. There's no *Hansard*, no public record. Most importantly, those discussions about regulations are not accessible to the opposition, they're not accessible to the media, and most importantly, they're not accessible to concerned members of the Alberta public. Those facts, Mr. Speaker, have not been refuted by a single government speaker tonight.

10:20

Last week Calgarians were asking me a very simple question: will Bill 11 allow private hospitals? Clearly, the answer is yes. There's been an excellent analysis done by my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark, but this is such an important issue and a question so often asked that I want to offer a comment about it as well. Section 1 in this bill is misleading if not dishonest, Mr. Speaker. The key, of course, is the definition of what is a "private hospital." Now, curiously, the government is not using the dictionary definition of hospital. It's clearly not using the definitions used in the Alberta Hospitals Act or in the Canada Health Act.

For purposes of Bill 11 the government has come up with a completely different and very narrow definition of private hospital. That definition has been neatly tucked away in the back of the bill, the last place anybody would expect to find it. According to section 29 the only thing banned by Bill 11 is a facility that does all of the following:

- (i) provides emergency, diagnostic, surgical and medical services, and
- (ii) admits patients for medically supervised stays exceeding 12 hours.

What does that all mean? It means that a private facility like Health Resource Group in Calgary and their private hospital can do every single thing that the Foothills hospital does as long as it does not offer emergency services. Under Bill 11 and the peculiar definition such a facility would not be a private hospital even though that is exactly what you or I and I think virtually every other Albertan would understand was meant by the word "hospital." Now, that fact has not been refuted by a single government speaker this evening.

Mr. Speaker, in fact this bill can truly be said to be a prescription looking for a diagnosis. It's offering an answer to a question that Albertans aren't asking. There are no answers in Bill 11 to many of the questions that Albertans are asking. It's therefore necessary to consider the government's record in health care to project what this government is likely to do. How are they going to fill in the gray

areas, the empty areas, the empty spaces? Can my constituents in downtown Calgary trust this government to promote public health care? That's frankly what it comes down to. We heard the speeches and we can read what's in the bill, but what really counts is whether this government is going to fill in the empty spaces in a way that we can be comfortable with, a way that's going to enhance public health care, a way that's going to advantage each one of my constituents, each one of your constituents, every one of the 3 million men, women, and children that live in this province.

In 1993 the government told us that health care spending was out of control. Health care spending would bankrupt the province if we didn't act immediately to arrest it. Mr. Speaker, that was not true. We see now that health care spending was virtually flat for the three years before the 1993 election. It was clearly not spiking up, as the alarmist message from the government was in 1993. This government lied to my Calgary constituents in 1993. It lied to Albertans. Can it now be trusted to do what it says?

The government took more than \$600 million out of the health care budget, and it did so without a plan. It eliminated 10,000 positions of highly skilled, highly trained nurses and health care professionals, and it did that without a plan. Calgarians watched the Grace hospital close, later to reopen as a private hospital. Calgarians watched the Holy Cross hospital in my constituency sold for less than \$5 million after \$32 million in renovations had been spent on that facility. Like the Grace, the Holy has now been converted to what? A private health care facility. Calgarians watched as the General hospital was blown up, even though at least two of the buildings on that site were as modern as the Foothills hospital.

Albertans understand that while the government likes to boast that we have a few more beds in 2000 than we did in 1993, the government completely ignores the fact that Calgary has grown by 116,000 new citizens since 1993. Albertans intuitively understand that there's no better way to foster demand for private health care than to close hospitals in the public system. The Premier in his comments boasted of the private cataract surgery services in Calgary, and indeed that's the very model he wants to expand and apply to a whole range of services not just in the city of Calgary but across this province.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, health care ultimately is about individual patients; it's about individual citizens. Let me tell you about the senior that called me last Thursday in my office. This is a woman who was going blind with cataracts in both eyes, so she goes to one of those private eye clinics in the city of Calgary in late October. She's advised that she'll have to wait eight to 12 months in Calgary to have a lens installed that will be covered by the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, or she has another option: she could pay \$2,000 in advance for each eye to have a superior, uninsured lens installed, and the wait would only be a week and a half. This woman didn't want to pay more. She didn't want an enhanced lens; she wanted the regular lens, but she was going blind, Mr. Premier, through the Speaker. She was afraid she was losing her sight, and she paid the \$2,000 for each lens. To add insult to injury, she discovered that the private clinic was participating in a drug company study, and the clinic got a thousand dollars from the drug company for every patient they were able to sign up to participate. Before she gets the second eye operation, she gets a letter from the foundation of the clinic soliciting a financial donation. That's the model that this government and this Premier want to spread out across this province, and this is a question of abusing the trust of Albertans.

You know, while we're talking about trust and while we're talking about the record of this government, Mr. Speaker, this Premier promised my constituents in March of 1997 that in the following

year we would be able to elect the members of regional health authorities. Albertans remember that promise. Less than three months later this Premier trashed that promise. He broke that promise. He said: do you know what? The Calgary and Edmonton regional health authorities want a little more time to implement their plans. What he didn't tell us is that he was just darned nervous of democracy and that the regional health authorities were nervous of democracy and didn't want to see that happen.

Mr. Speaker, government has allowed regional health authorities in this province to operate in a culture of secrecy. The Calgary regional health authority spends more than a billion tax dollars; \$250 million of that goes to private facilities. But do you know what, Mr. Speaker? You and I can't get access to the terms of those contracts. We can't judge for ourselves whether we are getting good value or whether there's some kind of fat subsidy in there to private contractors.

Now, section 12 of the bill is not going to strip away that secrecy, and I'll tell you why. It's for two reasons. The first one is it doesn't come into effect for a minimum of six months. One would think, Mr. Speaker, that if there were ever a time that Albertans and Calgarians should be allowed to access those contracts, surely it's now, when we're debating Bill 11, not six months after this bill comes into law.

The second problem is this: much information that Albertans are entitled to and have to see is information that's only available under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. But do you know what, Mr. Speaker? By one of those secret regulations, one of those regulations hatched in secret, what the government has done is that they've taken all of that information under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act and they've moved it out from under our access to information legislation. You can't access it. You're not going to be able to access it. That's shameful that government would try and pull this kind of sleight of hand trick by saying "transparency," while in the detail of the bill what they're doing is pulling the shroud of secrecy back over the private contracting dealings.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier was dismissive of studies, and he said something about academics in a pejorative way that suggested that this government has all the answers. Is it not the ultimate irony that in the year 2000, when physicians practise what's called evidence-based medicine – and that means that they don't prescribe medication and send people for diagnostic tests unless there's some solid basis that it's going to do some good; it's a fundamental policy of evidence-based decision – we have a provincial government that is prepared to go and make major, major changes, with a potential to prejudice our public health care system, and to do all of that with no empirical evidence to back it up, no studies that suggest it's going to significantly advantage individual Albertans and individual Albertans when they go to seek medical treatment?

10:30

Mr. Speaker, why wouldn't we consider studies from similar experiments that have been done in South Australia and Western Australia and the state of Victoria and a number of other places that have shown it doesn't work? Are we not smart enough in this province and in this Legislature to be able to look at experiments that have failed, read the writing on the wall, and decide that we invest our energy and our resources in innovation and improvement in the public health care system?

The Premier has threatened to cut off debate. He said he would do that if he thought the opposition was being obstructionist. Now, the threat is disappointing firstly because we only started two and a half hours ago debate on Bill 11 and the Premier is already talking about how much is enough. That's really the question, isn't it? How

much time is too much time to spend on a bill that may have major destructive impact on our public health care system? Is it two hours? Is it four hours? Is it tomorrow afternoon? Is it Thursday afternoon? Mr. Speaker, the government has used closure in this province 26 times to cut off debate. The Lougheed government used it but one time in the entire Lougheed term of office, but this government has used it 26 times.

Now, Albertans may be asking: what is closure, and how does it work? Let me give Albertans an example. Let me tell Albertans about what happened last December, Mr. Speaker, when we were debating Bill 40, the Health Information Act. That was a bill that fundamentally changed the way your personal health information can be used, shared, collected. With Bill 40, for the first time the government has now made it possible that your personal health information can be accessed without your knowledge, without your consent. When that bill came forward to be debated, we put forward as an opposition over 50 changes to make the bill work. You know what happened? The government took two of the amendments, they debated eight other Liberal amendments, and then invoked closure. They said: that's enough; we're moving on. We didn't debate the other amendments. We didn't discuss them. We didn't vote on them.

That's the style of governance that Albertans have seen in the past. Is that what we expect on Bill 11? You know, you don't deal with the merits of opposition arguments. You sit there haughtily and dismiss them and say: "This is a waste of time, spurious arguments. We know better. We have all the answers, so we're cutting off debate." Mr. Speaker, that's not good enough for my constituents, and I don't think it's good enough for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm talking about Bill 40, the Health Information Act, there's something else that Albertans should know. There was a carve-out, and it didn't receive a lot of attention at the time. What Bill 40 said is that we're going to have certain rules for protecting your patient health information, your most personal information. It will apply when you go to a public hospital, when you're in the public system, but the rules don't apply if you go to a private hospital or a private facility unless you're being paid by the Alberta health care insurance plan.

So if you're having an enhanced service in one of those private clinics, the rules don't apply. The rules don't apply. At the time we said: why is it that you would carve out and create special treatment for private hospitals? Well, I think the answer is abundantly clear to all Albertans. Private hospitals, we know from all the evidence, can't be run economically if they have to meet the same standards as the public system, so what you do is lower the threshold. You reduce the rules. You carve out an exemption. You make a sweetheart deal for somebody who wants to run a private facility. That's what Bill 40 did, and that's what Bill 11 is doing in a big way.

Mr. Speaker, while we're talking about closure, this government at some point, at some time has to understand that might is not right, that even big, powerful majority governments make serious mistakes, and let me be clear: Bill 11 is a mistake. The government has talked very little about conflicts of interest. In one of the great gaps in Bill 11, there is no provision for conflicts of interest, even though the government's own commissioned study by the Institute of Health Economics identified potential conflicts of interest as a major problem. This is the government's own study. This isn't something the opposition cooked up. Bill 11 is absolutely silent on this issue in terms of potential conflicts. In the Calgary region three of the most senior people, the people making key administrative decisions in terms of how we spend those one billion tax dollars and how long the waits are appropriate in the health care system in that city, also have interests in private surgical clinics.

Mr. Speaker, there is something about what I call a weak, invisible protocol that the government makes vague reference to from time to time in the Calgary region, but it's nothing that has the confidence of the 800,000 people in the Calgary region. There's no publicly accessible registry people can go to and find out who has a conflict and whether there's some declaration of conflict. There's no independent officer to police those conflicts. What we have is that one billion dollars being spent, and we just simply have to hope somebody in there is doing things to advantage Albertans.

I'm running close to the end of my speaking time, and there is so much more to say. Let me just say this. You know, I had a chance to attend a meeting in Calgary at the Red & White Club a couple of weeks ago. Eight hundred concerned Calgarians came out. Those weren't left-wing nuts. They weren't all Liberals; I can tell you that. Many of them were seniors. They were interested. They were people genuinely concerned. [interjections] I hear people laugh, Mr. Speaker.

They were Calgarians concerned about the direction of this government's private health care initiative. They were concerned about Bill 11. You know what was interesting? The questions went far beyond what's in this little bill. What it talked about was a question of trust. What it talked about was questions about an unelected regional health authority, questions about who chairs the regional health authority. Mr. Speaker, just because you can run the crane, run the wrecking ball, it doesn't mean you can be an architect.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise tonight to speak to Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act. We all know that Albertans take enormous pride in our publicly funded health care system, but that same health care that Albertans treasure faces many challenges. One of the challenges, as the Premier and my colleagues in caucus have rightly pointed out, is that a legislative gap currently exists in Alberta, a legislative gap that impairs our ability to control private health facilities.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta needs Bill 11 to provide clear rules for surgical facilities and clear rules for any contracts with these facilities. Alberta needs Bill 11 to ban private hospitals, such as those supported by the Leader of the Opposition, from ever opening their doors in this province. Alberta needs Bill 11 to regulate the surgical facilities that already exist in this province and that could exist in the future as regional health authorities continue to seek new and better ways to reduce waiting lists in response to demand from Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, before I go on, I'd like to clarify the difference as identified in Bill 11 between a private hospital and a surgical clinic, because I believe there has been a great deal of misunderstanding on this point. I believe that once Albertans understand the difference, they'll also gain a better understanding of this government's efforts to improve our publicly funded and publicly administered health system.

First, let me emphasize that there are currently no private hospitals in Alberta, and under Bill 11 there never will be any. Now, Mr. Speaker, this is contrary to the Liberal opposition position. The Liberal opposition believes that a private hospital, one with acute care beds, with operating theatres, with X ray and other diagnostic equipment, with an emergency room, with an intensive care unit, should be able to operate and charge Albertans directly. It would do everything our public hospitals do but with one significant difference: the patient would pay for everything. That is truly what two-tiered health care is all about, and as the opposition leader seems to support, the wealthy could access services faster than other Albertans. That truly is what queue-jumping is all about.

10:40

Again, let me make one thing very clear. With Bill 11 the government of Alberta will ensure that such a facility will never exist within the borders of this province. That is because it runs counter to everything our Canadian health system stands for and everything this government stands for. In contrast, Mr. Speaker, surgical clinics as regulated by Bill 11 are not private hospitals. Under Bill 11 surgical clinics will not be allowed to provide all the acute care and diagnostic and ICU and ER services that a full-service hospital offers. They will only provide those minor surgeries that they have been contracted to provide to the public system, and they will only be contracted to provide these minor surgeries if such a contract provides a benefit to the public system.

A health authority must determine that contracting with a facility will help reduce waiting lists or help increase access to medically necessary services before a contract would be approved. The surgical facility will only be allowed to perform these minor surgeries if the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta has determined that those services can be provided safely and effectively outside a public hospital and in that particular facility. They will only be allowed to provide insured services if the Minister of Health and Wellness is satisfied that the contract can pass the whole list of criteria required under Bill 11 that the minister himself shared with us earlier. If a proposed contract cannot fulfill all these requirements, then under Bill 11 it will not be approved. It's as simple as that, Mr. Speaker.

Our government steadfastly believes in the principles of the Canada Health Act, so much so, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 11 commits to those principles in the very preamble of the legislation. We believe that medically necessary hospital and physician services must be available to all Albertans. That's the comprehensive principle of the Canada Health Act. We believe that all Alberta residents must be covered in the health plan of our province. That's the universality principle. We believe that all Albertans must have access to medically necessary hospital and medical services without charge and without extra fees. That's the accessibility principle. We believe that a citizen of one province or territory should be able to receive hospital and medical services in any other province without being charged. That's the portability principle. Finally, we believe that the provincial health care insurance plans must be administered on a nonprofit basis by a public authority. That's the publicly administered principle.

Each one of these principles, Mr. Speaker, is committed to in the preamble of Bill 11 and supported in the detail of the legislation. Each one of these principles will be adhered to in surgical facilities regulated by Bill 11.

Bill 11 protects the rights of Albertans as patients and consumers of the health system. Bill 11 clearly states that no Albertan will pay any fees to receive medically necessary services. That includes facility fees, service fees, physician fees, equipment fees, all fees. All costs for necessary surgeries will be paid by health authorities no matter where that service is performed.

The key point is that a surgical facility would be, from the patient's perspective, just like another ward of a public hospital. It's part of the public health care system. Patients would be eligible for the same insured services paid for in the publicly funded system. A patient's doctor would decide on appropriate treatment and on the necessary timing of that treatment, and queue-jumping would be absolutely prohibited, just like in a public hospital.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, if a patient in either a public hospital or a surgical facility chooses to purchase an enhanced product or service, Bill 11 ensures that providers must disclose both verbally and in writing why such upgrades are being sold. They must clearly

outline to the patient the cost of such upgrades and in a way which allows the patient to give proper consideration to the decision. In addition, Bill 11 enables people to cancel an agreement to buy upgrades if they change their mind. What we need to keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, is that these are not medically necessary services. They're the extra services and products Albertans can and do already purchase in our public hospitals.

Perhaps most importantly, Bill 11 gives the Minister of Health and Wellness the authority to limit the amount of charges for enhanced goods and services, whether sold in a public hospital or a contracted surgical facility. This, Mr. Speaker, ensures fairness and equity in pricing for Albertans. In fact, to demonstrate our government's commitment to containing such charges, the Minister of Health and Wellness has already imposed this cap on the public hospitals. Bill 11 will enable the extension of that cap to surgical facilities as well.

If facilities or providers do not adhere to these rules, they could be fined up to \$10,000 for the first offence and up to \$20,000 for every offence after that. If it is found that someone has been charged a fee to receive a medically necessary service or if it has been found that someone has received payment to allow an Albertan to receive a medically necessary service ahead of others, Bill 11 outlines strict fines for the contravention of the protections provided to Albertans under this act.

Mr. Speaker, as I've discussed the principles of Bill 11 with my constituents and other Albertans, one of the questions they have asked has been: where will we find the health professionals, the doctors and nurses, that will staff surgical clinics? That's a good question, and I'd like to address it tonight. There's a concern that the publicly funded health system will be negatively affected as surgical facilities recruit their staff, but I'd like to assure Albertans watching tonight that through the criteria outlined in section 8 of Bill 11, that concern is clearly addressed.

However, first of all, many Albertans are not aware that the number of physicians practising in Alberta has been steadily increasing over the past few years. For example, over the past two years there was an increase of over 400 doctors practicing in Alberta, and a further increase is expected this year.

Second, people don't seem to be aware that doctors won't have to choose between working in either a surgical clinic or a public hospital. Doctors will be able to provide services in both locations, and they will continue to be paid by the government and at the same rates. In fact, that's a point worth emphasizing, Mr. Speaker. There will not be one fee schedule for surgeries performed by physicians in public hospitals and another for surgeries performed by physicians in surgical facilities. The fee schedule negotiated by the government with the Alberta Medical Association will continue to determine payments to doctors regardless of where they perform a surgery.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, it's important to keep in mind that as well as introducing Bill 11, this government has also put in motion a six-point plan for health that directly addresses increasing the number of doctors and nurses in Alberta. That plan provides funding for even more than 90 physicians this year. In co-operation with the Alberta Medical Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, Alberta medical schools, and the health authorities, government has completed a comprehensive physician resource plan for Alberta. This plan will further assist in ensuring that Albertans have appropriate access to physician services in the years to come. The six-point plan also provides for the addition of 20 postgraduate residency positions to Alberta's medical schools this year and another 20 positions next year to help train even more doctors in the future.

The six-point plan also increases funding to enable regional health authorities to hire up to 2,400 more nurses and other frontline staff,

especially in the areas of emergency wards, long-term care, home care, and acute care over the next three years. That's in addition to the extra funding provided to the health authorities last year to hire almost 1,200 new full-time equivalent positions, including more than 600 nurses. In fact, Mr. Speaker, over the course of several years, this government is providing funding to hire over 3,600 nurses and other staff to help, as does Bill 11, reduce waiting lists and improve access to services. Our government also recognized the need to train additional nurses. In that light, we have announced an additional 195 spaces in the postsecondary institutions to train new nurses in the year 2000-2001.

With these strategies, which are just part of the overall six-point plan for health, this government has clearly demonstrated its commitment to improving our publicly funded and publicly administered health system on several fronts.

10:50

All that being said, Mr. Speaker, the bottom line regarding the staffing of surgical facilities as regulated by Bill 11 is this: if a proposed contract was perceived to be a threat to the supply of professional staff in the public system, it would be rejected. It's as simple as that. If there was a threat to a health authority's staff supply, they would not propose a contract, and if the Minister of Health and Wellness identified the risk, the contract would not be approved.

Again, I think it's important to emphasize here that under Bill 11 such contracts are simply an option, a tool for the health authorities to use if they think a contract would benefit the health system. In fact, Mr. Speaker, in the case of day surgeries, contracting with private facilities is already an option that is used throughout our province and has been for many years. As has been mentioned before, we already have 52 privately owned accredited surgical clinics providing over 20,000 surgical procedures each year on behalf of the public system.

Mr. Speaker, that's over 20,000 Albertans receiving necessary surgeries paid for by our health system without taking up essential space in our hospitals. This is a fact that seems to have been missed by those who say that the contracts with surgical facilities as outlined in Bill 11 threaten the public nature of our health system. What they don't understand or refuse to recognize is that the private sector has traditionally played an important role in supporting and complementing Canada's and Alberta's publicly funded health system.

There are currently over 4,500 physicians in Alberta who are, in fact, private-sector health providers and who bill the public health system under the terms of the contract for services provided to the public system. Bill 11 does not change this arrangement. Physicians will continue to be paid as they are now and at the same rates no matter where a surgery is performed.

There are also close to 600 chiropractors, over 230 opticians, over 275 optometrists, and close to 40 podiatrists who are private operators in Alberta yet do work for and in support of the public health system. We have almost 800 pharmacies in the province which are all private-sector health providers yet which play an integral and essential role in our public health system. We have 34 privately owned long-term care facilities in Alberta providing long-term care to our seniors under contract to regional health authorities. Mr. Speaker, thousands of Albertans receive quality care under this arrangement, and these are similar arrangements to those proposed in Bill 11 for minor surgeries.

We have privately owned laboratory companies providing lab services to our publicly funded health system at over 90 different sites. We have 375 private-sector ground ambulances located in 135 communities throughout Alberta. Again, Mr. Speaker, similar to

Bill 11, these are services provided by the private-sector yet paid for by the public system.

We have the many walk-in clinics and medicentres at locations near our homes that our families often use when needing nonemergency services in the evenings or on the weekends. Again, these are private, for-profit facilities providing services for Albertans as part of the publicly funded health system with services paid for by the publicly funded system.

What Bill 11 does is ensure that surgical facilities safely support and benefit our health system in the same way, and what Bill 11 does, Mr. Speaker, is ensure that the publicly funded health system is protected from any potential negative impacts from private sector support and involvement. In fact, the principles of Bill 11 are really no different than those supported by the Leader of the Official Opposition when she was minister of health back in 1991.

Some nine years ago or so she brought forward to the government caucus a discussion paper outlining possible legislative options to regulate nonhospital facilities. The paper states, and I quote: each option is designed to be able to regulate the number, type, and location of the facilities; the payment of facility fees for insured services by Alberta Health through a fee for service or global basis would alleviate concerns about possible violation of the Canada Health Act and allegations of two-tier medicine. Mr. Speaker, I don't know about you, but it sounds a great deal like Bill 11 to me. Our opposition leader suggested it and supported it then, so why is she so opposed to Bill 11 now?

If you look at the same discussion paper provided by the Member for Edmonton-McClung, you will see the options considered in that paper were threefold: an independent facilities act to licence private facilities, designating private facilities under the Hospitals Act, or directing contracts between hospitals and ambulatory care facilities. Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure about you, but it sounds very much like Bill 11 to me.

So, Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago, when the hon. member was the minister of health, the basic principles incorporated into Bill 11 were just fine for Alberta's health system. Today her position has changed. I'll quote from a recent Liberal news release. Today her position is: ban private, for-profit hospitals from receiving public taxpayer dollars. It's important to note that the release does not call for an outright ban of private hospitals. I take that as meaning that she doesn't support banning them completely as is done in Bill 11. Her view is to let them operate outside the public system and cater to the wealthy and prosperous.

Well, this government does not support two-tiered medicine. Bill 11 rejects private hospitals and prohibits anyone from getting faster service just because they can pay to do so. The bill rejects it because Albertans reject it. Bill 11 rejects any American style, two-tier private health system for this province. Bill 11 puts in place an Alberta solution to some of the challenges we face in protecting and preserving our Canadian style, single-payer, publicly funded health system, because above all else, Mr. Speaker, this government's goal with Bill 11 is to ensure that our publicly funded and publicly administered health system is sustainable now and for our future generations.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, momentarily the special three-hour unedited television and radio coverage of this evening's debate on Bill 11 will end. On behalf of all members of the Alberta Legislative Assembly may I extend thanks to those citizens who chose to visit their Alberta Legislature this evening or who chose to view or listen to these proceedings via Access Television, CHED radio, or QR77 radio. CPAC will also carry this evening's proceedings.

Further debate on Bill 11 is scheduled for tomorrow and Thursday in this Assembly.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure this evening to rise to speak to second reading of Bill 11. I want to take an approach that looks at this from the perspective of a number of the constituents that have approached me.

As you are aware, I travel a lot of rural Alberta, and rural Albertans have raised a lot of issues about how Bill 11 affects them. They're talking about the issues of how it is going to affect their access to health care if they see a lot of these surgical facilities arise in the major areas like Calgary and Edmonton, wherever the volume of service is available to get the mass that's necessary for them to be able to operate. So they want to know what impact this will have in terms of the time that's required for them to get access to health care, what it means in terms of their emergency services, what it means in terms of their ability to get a reasonable level of broad-based health care in their local community.

11:00

They also want to know what it means in terms of distance and location. A lot of it there boils down to the issue of how they deal with long-term care. How do they deal with the issue of providing the local community contact that their parent or their family member who's in long-term care has been used to getting? Contact with friends, contact with family? Are they going to be asked to move to a different place, a different geographic location where a private facility has taken the option to set up? This is one of the concerns they're raising. They've seen private facilities start in some communities, and they've seen where their family members or their friends have been asked to move to a different community because that's where capacity exists. They want to know what relationship this kind of bill will have on their impact.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

They're also talking about how it's going to affect their priority on the waiting lists. A number of them have seen cases already where, when they need to travel to a centre where a surgery or other medical procedure is provided, they see that these have different impacts. They're also seeing that preference is given to people from the local jurisdiction or the local health authority because the local health authority there has to pay the cost of someone in a waiting queue if they're in a facility, whereas if they're in a different facility, it's not part of the cost to that health authority. So they see that kind of discrepancy come up, and they want to know how they are going to be treated if we end up with a number of these private facilities. They trust the public health care system. They trust the experience they've had in terms of getting fair and equitable access under the public system. They want to know why that can't continue for them.

The other thing they look at also is the whole idea of how you define the concepts of accessibility and universality and how they apply to them. A lot of them now are seeing that, okay, there's no user fee applied to a service that they have to travel to get, but they end up with different costs than someone in an urban area. Historically, a lot of them have assumed that that's just part of the advantage of living in a rural area, but now it's getting to the point where some of these costs are significant.

They have to go to the major centre. They have to get accommodation there while their family member is being cared for. They have to travel back and forth to visit. They have to travel back and forth to see the specialists. They have to travel back and forth to

have follow-up medical care. Those costs add up. This is not an equitable health care system. This is not a system that shows universality of equal treatment of every Albertan, and they're wondering how much more it's going to cost them for their health care as they live in rural areas. How will Bill 11 affect that? These costs are going to increase for them.

The other thing they want to look at is: how do they deal with the effect of the definitions of health care facilities in their community. A lot of issues have come up in terms of the change in service in some of our rural health care facilities. If someone is traveling around Alberta now and they go into a community and say, "Well, where's the hospital?" that is going to mean something different to everybody in a different community now because those facilities provide different services, depending upon which community you're in. So there's no consistency. How will people traveling around rural Alberta or living in rural Alberta know what facilities are available in which place by name, because those names will not be consistent. They have to have those kinds of confidences built.

Mr. Speaker, I've had a number of meetings in southern Alberta and, as I said, across rural Alberta. One of the issues that comes up is: how are we going to look at the cost-effectiveness of these private facilities? How are we going to measure this in the context of our public health care system? I've had communications with a number of the regional health authorities, and in fact in almost all of them now I've talked to somebody there in authority, and they all admit that they have excess physical capacity in their region.

What we're looking at then is: how can Albertans feel confident that a reasonable decision is going to be made if they have to look at a facility that's standing there empty? How can a private sector compete with that when it's already there in the public sector? To increase our capacity in that public sector all we have to do is provide a staff complement. This is the level of staffing that's required, all the way from the specialist down to the service personnel. Then we also have to provide a supply complement.

Now, under the regulations of our Health Professions Act those two are going to be reasonably comparable within either system. What we then end up with is: if we're going to contract out, that contract also has to cover the cost of a new or a different facility, of course, unless we're going to rent space to them in our own facilities. The other thing they have to cover is the cost of a return on investment and a return to shareholders for that private operator. Mr. Speaker, while we have excess capacity, how can we justify a contract that can be cost-effective? It can't be done.

We have to look at it also, then, in the context of: what happens as we expand the need for health care and we need to have new facilities? The public sector then has a choice of building a facility or contracting out for this facility fee. If we use proper public accounting processes, where we provide ourselves with an internal rate of return to the public, what that does is transfer that internal rate of return from one pocket in the public to the other. Those dollars are still available for the use of the public sector. We can expand our health care delivery, we can use it for another service, or we can even give a tax cut by it.

Mr. Speaker, if we deal with that kind of internal rate of return and return to shareholder for equity in the private sector, what happens is that those dollars move out of our care, out of our supervision, and away from access to improve our public services. They go off to provide a greater return for the financial institutions, or they go off to provide a return on investment and return to shareholders. Those dollars are no longer available in the public sector. So how can we justify looking at this in the context of the cost-effectiveness of our system?

Now, Mr. Speaker, I heard earlier this evening that each contract

was going to be evaluated separately. I would hope that is not the process we use. We have to look at all these contracts in the total context of the business plan of that health authority. It's very easy to deal with a single surgical procedure and say: okay, if we're going to specialize in that one particular service, we can create a very specialized facility and get some kind of cost benefit for it. But what happens if we've got three or four of those and we want to put them all into a public facility?

There should be cost economies in that. Those economies should exist if we look at the whole business plan of that health authority, better still at the whole business plan of Alberta Health all across the province, because a lot of those services are going to be provided to people who are not in that health authority. People from Lethbridge are going to travel to Calgary. People from Medicine Hat are going to travel to Lethbridge. So we have to look at this in the context of the whole mandate of Alberta Health. We can't look at it just in the context of the mandate of one regional health authority for one surgical service or one surgical procedure. We've got to do it in the context of: what is cost-effective for our entire health care system and the taxpayers of this province? It's their dollars we're spending, Mr. Speaker. It's their dollars we're using to provide them with a service.

Mr. Speaker, that gets down to another issue that we heard addressed this evening. When we're talking about, well, Alberta spends more on health care than any other province in Canada or almost as much as any other, when we talk about it in the context of we're spending a third of our budget, which is more than anybody else, that kind of comparison is only relative and only relevant if we're making sure that every other province is providing the same basket of other services to add up to the other two-thirds. We know that in Alberta we are not providing a lot of the public services that are being provided in other provinces, so that kind of comparison is a deception. It's a misrepresentation of data for Albertans. We should never do that.

11:10

Mr. Speaker, as we look at this, some of the other questions that come up as I've talked to people in rural Alberta and southern Alberta deal with the context of: how do we deal with queue-jumping, two-tiered health care? You know, all these different issues. I think that after reading the bill, a lot of Albertans now don't necessarily see the concept that you can pay for a covered service in a private facility. They see that kind of concept of two-tiered health care being excluded by this bill. You know, they're trusting.

The thing they want to know, though, is: what about queue-jumping? What about queue-jumping in the context of diagnostic services? We are looking at a system here where if you've got the dollars, you can get your diagnostic service outside the public health care system, take the results of that diagnostic service, move it into the public system, and get in the procedure queue quicker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, a lot of the seniors in this province – and we heard an example of this already tonight – are very concerned about that. They have to decide: "Do I spend money on my health so that I can get in that queue quicker, or do I spend money on the other kinds of things needed for a necessity in life?" They don't have a lot of disposable income. So, in essence, we've got to make sure that when we talk about no queue-jumping, when we talk about a universal system in this province, it means from one end to the other and all the services associated and all the needs associated with the obtaining of that health care service. We can't have diagnostics separated out.

Mr. Speaker, when we came to this Legislature – and I think you and I came about the same time, in the early '90s – what we ended

up with was very little discussion at that time with the concept of MRIs. You know, a MRI was something that was very uncommon. Well, now it's expected by a lot of the doctors and it's expected by the patient. Now, a lot of questions can arise as to what the options are when we allow expectations to drive our health care system. That can become a real issue in itself. But still, to get a proper diagnosis – and that's essential now for some of our specialized drugs, for some of our specialized procedures – we have to have an accurate diagnosis. Are we saying that people who can't afford to pay for it on their own can't get the same quality of health care? I think we've got to look at that and make sure this bill deals with that kind of queue-jumping as well as, you know, I'm just going to pay to get in the queue a little faster for an approved surgery. Well, that isn't enough, and Albertans want to see the bill changed.

The other thing we need to look at is that essentially people are asking how they can deal with accountability in this bill. They look at section 23 and, Mr. Speaker, they read it totally different than the little sidebar in that handout. The little sidebar says that the courts can be the judge or be the control over the minister, yet when you read it, it basically says that no decision made by the minister can be challenged or in any way altered by the courts. Well, I'm sorry. They need some explanation on that particular clause. They need to know whether or not, if they don't agree with a decision by the minister, the courts are available to them. When they read section 23, they read it as saying no, yet the little sidebar says yes, and they want to know about that.

This also gets down to the idea of accountability in the context of decision-making by their regional health authority. The minister has the ultimate say, but it's the health authority that prepares the data that then is presented to the minister to back up and justify that kind of decision that the minister is going to make. Well, what if the citizens in a health authority don't agree with the way that health authority board provided the data or developed the data? There's no accountability. They want elected health authorities before Bill 11 becomes part of their health care system. They would rather not have Bill 11. They would rather have a public health care system that was strong, that gave them the kind of health care system they wanted, and that provided them with services they felt comfortable with.

Mr. Speaker, I've had a number of people ask how the public benefit is going to be defined. What are we going to use as the

criteria? I don't know. A number of them have said, "Why is it that we never did get the health care charter that was promised by the Premier three or four years ago?" That was going to define what could be the expectation. This kind of died off in a meeting somewhere. I think it was in Red Deer. This is the kind of thing that people want to know. What is it that they can count on the public sector to deliver? What can they count on in terms of their health care through that public sector? If they've got some kind of written document or some kind of base they can use as a judgment in terms of the quality of the delivery, they feel more comfortable.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I just want to talk a little bit about kind of the marketplace, what drives health care. You know, private enterprise only operates when a market exists. We never had to deal with the issue of the private sector's involvement in health care until we started to have a shortage of funds, a lack of service provided by the public system. Once that started, we had to come in and look at how we deal with decisions on the basis of a one-year budget as opposed to a long-term budget at the provincial level.

What we need in this province is a commitment to infrastructure to support our public services of health care and education. That fund then becomes the source against which we take our capital allocations over time. We can give ourselves an internal rate of return, and as I explained before, that goes from one of our public pockets to the other; it doesn't go off into the financial institutions or the private sector. It gives us a greater return on our public dollar. It gives us accountability and a proper use of the public fund.

Mr. Speaker, I've covered a lot of ground, and I see I'm getting down to just about the end. As per our agreement with the House leaders, at this point in time I think I've finally concluded what I wanted to say. I will move adjournment of debate on Bill 11.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had a wonderful start to the debate on Bill 11, but I think the time has come to move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[At 11:19 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 5, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/04/05

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Xu Youfang, senior adviser of Alberta's sister province in China, Heilongjiang, along with members of his delegation. He is accompanied today by Mr. Gu Huaming, consul general of the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier had an opportunity to host His Excellency over lunch and conveyed to him the importance of the trip that he led, the Alberta mission to Heilongjiang last year and how impressed he was by the dramatic and very positive changes that he saw in Heilongjiang. We'll celebrate the 20th anniversary of our twinning with Heilongjiang next year. I'm very pleased that His Excellency is in Alberta today to see the exciting growth in our province, and I wish him and his colleagues a very pleasant and a very productive visit.

I would ask that our honoured guests, who are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, please rise and receive the very traditional welcome of this Legislature.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Robert Smolen, undersecretary of state, presidential chancellery from Warsaw, Poland; Mr. Krzysztof Smyk, Polish consul general from Vancouver; Mr. Jarek Nowinka, president of the Canadian Polish Congress of Alberta; Mr. Zygmunt Potocki, vice-president of the Canadian Polish Congress from Calgary; Mr. John Szumlansky, the vice-president of the Canadian Polish Congress, Alberta branch; and Mr. Archie Grover, former Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Smolen is in Alberta to attend some of the exciting events that are being held during Polish Week in Edmonton March 30 to April 8 of this year. Polish Week in Edmonton has been organized by the Polish Culture Society of Edmonton with support from Polish organizations and the University of Alberta.

They're seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I've been advised that we have quite a list today, so let's be patient.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table today a petition from very wise and fair-minded young Albertans who have signed this petition in support of the intent of Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to present on behalf of residents of Fort McMurray in support of Bill 11. It reads that they

urge the Government of Alberta to provide respective Regional Health Authorities with the flexibility necessary to provide the delivery of publicly funded, publicly administered overnight surgical services cost-effectively and efficiently.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I again have the pleasure to rise and file with you a petition signed by 272 Edmontonians and citizens from Spruce Grove, Carvel, Stony Plain, and Sherwood Park. They are all in unanimous support of the resolution that reads: "urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 318 people from the Lethbridge, Redcliff, Medicine Hat, Raymond, Coaldale, Fort Macleod, Picture Butte, Cardston, Pincher Creek, and Taber areas. In fact, with today's tablings that'll be 1,607, totaling so far 40,033 that we've brought here, wise people from Alberta who believe in democracy and the ability to petition. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to "urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly from 325 Albertans from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Spruce Grove, St. Albert, and Jasper. These individual citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to "urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta on behalf of 210 Albertans from Fairview, Chauvin, Beaverlodge, Hythe, Fox Creek, and Wembley. This is urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today as well to rise and table a petition signed by 247 citizens of Alberta from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Spruce Grove, Onoway, and Stony Plain. These citizens implore that the Legislative Assembly "urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present to the Assembly a petition that's been signed by 209 residents of Calgary and Canmore. Not only don't they like Bill 11; they don't want closure on debate on the bill either. Their petition is:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition signed by 245 Albertans from Edmonton, Lethbridge, Calgary, and Spruce Grove. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained." With this submission the number of signatures on the petition is well over 10,000.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the petitions in my name be read back to the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, request that the petition standing in my name on the Order Paper be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to have now read and received the petition I tabled yesterday, which reads:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I tabled yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am requesting two read-backs today, please. The first is a petition that I presented on April 4 in support of mature women's health, and the second petition, also presented on April 4, was signed by a number of citizens who are against private health care.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Alberta Government to take an enlightened preventative approach and add the newer and more effective medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I request that the petition I presented on April 4 urging the government to stop promoting private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition I tabled yesterday regarding the undermining of public health care that's happening in this province be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday urging the government not to support private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to ask that the

petition I tabled yesterday urging the government to support public health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition with respect to support for public health care that I introduced yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to be read back today. They're both in relation to the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care and request that it be stopped. The first petition is signed by 265 Albertans, and the second petition is signed by 154 Albertans.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition from 439 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped that I presented to the House on Tuesday, April 4 be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request at this time that the petition I presented on April 4 registering opposition to private health care be now read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition which I presented to this Assembly yesterday

expressing the concern of Albertans regarding this government's health care privatization scheme now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, this afternoon I would like to table five copies of an independent legal review of Bill 11 by Chris Levy, professor of law at the University of Calgary. The review concludes that Bill 11 does not violate any of the principles of the Canada Health Act and indeed is in full compliance with the Canada Health Act in its overall scheme.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to table with the Assembly five copies of a letter recently sent to the Leader of the Official Opposition pertaining to the disposition of records from her time as minister of health.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of regional health authorities in the province for the year ended March 31, 1999. I provided the required number of copies for tabling earlier to the Clerk's office.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table with the Assembly today five copies of the Safety Codes Council 1999 annual report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to file with the Assembly a letter of congratulations to the University of Alberta Bears hockey team. On Sunday, March 6 in Saskatoon the Bears won the second straight CIAU men's hockey championship. The latest win brings the total of crowns in Bears hockey to 10, a remarkable accomplishment that demonstrates the U of A's excellence in sports and, indeed, Alberta's tradition of excellence in sports.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table information from the latest report of the Canadian Institute for Health Information, in which the minister will note the drop in hospital costs and hospital funding in Alberta in the mid-1990s.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings. The first one is a summary of the expenses totaling \$17,064.68, which was the cost of all advertising undertaken by the official Liberal opposition in opposition to Bill 11, and we'll be tabling some incidental expenses as we have them.

The next one is for the benefit of the Premier. I'm tabling a checklist that the Premier can simply fill in, listing the expenses that the government has incurred with respect to promoting and proselytizing Bill 11.

The third item I'm tabling is a petition signed by . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, the Premier's speaking so loudly, I can't hear myself speak.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

THE SPEAKER: Okay. I think we're going to ask for some attention. Everybody who participated in Tabling Returns and Reports today violated the rules of this House. Everyone. Now, under Tabling Returns and Reports you table them with no editorial comment, and if the hon. members want to go outside and continue the debate, they're invited to do so.

Tabling Returns and Reports: table them without any editorial comment. Then there's no need for any debate. There's no need for any chitchatter. Without editorial comment: that's the rule. That's to be enforced by the various House leaders who have violated their enforcement procedures with respect to this matter.

So let's go on with no editorial comment.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports (continued)

MR. DICKSON: Next, I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of a message signed by 606 people in the Vermilion area registering opposition to the privatization of health care.

The final item I'm tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a set of letters from 67 correspondents in the city of Medicine Hat registering their opposition to Bill 11 and the private health care initiative of the government.

Thank you.

1:50

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, I have three tablings today. My first one is an excerpt from the *Camsell Mosaic* about a public hospital in Alberta with a rich and majestic history of service to the people of Alberta which the government is now proposing to sell for a dollar.

My second tabling. Further to the Premier's suggestion yesterday that I should tour Alberta's health facilities, I am pleased to table today . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, just table it, and let's move on.

MRS. SLOAN: . . . five copies of my graduate and registered nursing diploma, signifying that I have spent more hours in health care facilities . . .

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter from a constituent, Joan Leslie, which I will table without comment.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a media release from the minister of health in Ontario announcing the closure of two private hospitals in order to protect Ontario's public health care system.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling a number of letters today that are all opposed to the Genesis proposal for Spray Lakes. They are from Maegan Hawkes of Calgary, Chris Fitznar of Banff, Lance Steinke of Canmore, Kevin Milliken of Canmore, and also from Bill Marshall of Canmore.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have for tablings this afternoon, some postdebate feedback for the Premier: copies of the Bill 11 householder marked returned to the Premier, one with a cartoon that says, "We said no damn it!"

Mr. Speaker, my last tabling is from a constituent of mine, Marcel Gibello, who asks that I please table the following letter in the Legislature in regards to Calgary's push for private MRIs.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first one is the strike time line from November 8 until April 5 for the strikers that are having job action with the *Calgary Herald*.

The second is the Alberta Labour Relations Board decision still pending regarding that unfortunate labour dispute.

The third one is very interesting, Mr. Speaker. This is the complete version of the Conrad Black/Andy Marshall confrontation as well as it can be heard. This is a transcript for all hon. members of the Assembly to have.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. I'm sure there's somebody else who wants to participate in tablings today.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three tablings today. The first one is a letter to the minister of health from Dr. W.A. Fuller from Athabasca. It's a three-page letter opposing Bill 11 and giving reasons for it.

The second letter is from one of my constituents, E.J. Kowal, again opposing Bill 11, a fairly extensive two-page letter.

The third one is one from David Finch from Calgary, vehemently opposing Bill 11 and asking the Premier to read his letter carefully.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. I have to make a correction to what I said a little earlier. There were actually two members today who did follow the rules with respect to tablings: the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who was absolutely correct, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. All others failed.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of 60 senior high school students from across this province who are visiting the Legislature with the Forum for Young Albertans. The Forum for Young Albertans is a nonpartisan political learning experience which provides the opportunity for close study of provincial and local politics. Joining this group of enthusiastic young Albertans is Mr. Blair Stolz, executive director for the Forum for Young Albertans, and group leaders Tanya, Jeff, Anne Marie, and Richard. They are seated in the public gallery this afternoon. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests visiting from Warrington in Cheshire, England. They are concluding a two month long world tour and depart for the United Kingdom tomorrow. Colonel Bill and Rosie Spiegelberg are in the members'

gallery. I would invite them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly students, teachers, and parents from Avondale school in Grande Prairie. The students are accompanied by teachers Paul Waite and Mrs. Joanne Bordeniuk and parents Mr. and Mrs. Don and Brenda Girard, Mrs. Pat Proudfoot, Mrs. Cecilia Littleton, Mrs. Irene Gaw, Mr. Don Sellick, Mr. Kevin Pringnitz, Mr. Paul Plant, and Dorothy Brown. They're scheduled to be seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that if they are here, they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to have two school groups from the Wainwright constituency today, the first being a group of talented grade 5 students from the Sedgewick Seventh Day Adventist private school. They are accompanied by Debi Anderson and Sherilyn Grovet. I welcome them to the Legislature to watch government in action. They're in the members' gallery. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second group, Mr. Speaker, is a delightful group of students from the Wainwright high school. They are accompanied by teacher Brent Allen. They are in the members' gallery. They are here to observe the Assembly in action, and I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'm pleased to introduce to this Assembly two former pages of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta who are seated in the members' gallery. Karen Diepeveen served as page from November of 1999 to December of 1999. Karen is currently completing her grade 12 at the Edmonton Christian high school. Also joining us this afternoon is Agnes Mickus, a former Speaker's page from November 1998 to May 1999. Agnes is also completing her grade 12 at Maurice-Lavallee. We are pleased that they are able to view this Assembly from a different perspective this afternoon. I would ask them to please stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Erin Wiley. Erin is a grade 10 student at McNally high school. She's enrolled in the international baccalaureate program there. She is diligent, conscientious, and she's a graduate of Holyrood elementary school and Kenilworth junior high. Erin has been selected to represent Edmonton-Gold Bar in Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament. She is present in the public gallery. I would now ask her to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a longtime constituent and friend, Mr. John Webster. I had the pleasure today of meeting with Mr. Webster, along with Miss Karen Grose and Mr. Larry Stevens. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to introduce three very special visitors from Calgary today. These prominent individuals are nationally renowned journalists. Today is the 149th day of the *Calgary Herald* dispute. Today these individuals met with all caucuses represented in this House to draw their attention to Alberta's poor labour laws and seek their support in concluding their first collective agreement. These journalists are also asking the Minister of Human Resources and Employment to show some leadership in the resolution of their first collective agreement.

They are seated in the public gallery. They are Andy Marshall, president of CEP local 115A; Brian Brennan, a renowned journalist; and Murray Lamb, a visitor from British Columbia. I request that the guests now please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you two constituents of mine that I had the pleasure of meeting with today. They are Laura Shutiak and Paul Drohan. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Expansion of the Swan Hills waste treatment plant, government refinancing of the West Edmonton Mall, and now the Premier's private health care privatization campaign: each boondoggle bears this Premier's hallmarks of misrepresentation, blanked-out pages, hidden documents, and in the end costs taxpayers a bundle. My questions are to the Premier. Given the Premier's tendency to blank out pages and hide taxpayer-funded reports, are the Premier and his minister hiding any documents that examine private hospital policy in other provinces of Canada?

MR. KLEIN: The answer to the question, Mr. Speaker, is no.

You know, we just learned that there are 155 boxes of documents from the former minister of health who is now the Liberal leader. I understand she has consented to release those to the archives, and perhaps she might want to release those to the House, so we can get an idea of where she was coming from. We don't know today where she's coming from. Perhaps those documents that have been kept in locked boxes for something like 10 years could shed some light on where the minister was coming from then.

I know, for instance, that she removed a whole bunch of hospital signs along the highways so that people wouldn't know whether they were going to a hospital or to, as she described it then, a community health centre or a community clinic, Mr. Speaker. You know, we would like to know what her rationale was at that particular time. We would like to have access to those documents.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are not FOIPable, and for the viewing public, FOIPable means that they are not subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. They use it against us all the time, but they will not table their traveling expenses. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo spent more per kilometre than any other MLA in the smallest constituency in the province.

You know, people run that constituency at noon hour. They run the length for their exercise, yet he spent about \$45,000 traveling the length, the width, and the breadth of his constituency. And you want to talk about hiding things. You know, hiding things. I don't know. How much did this little odometer that he had on his pocket cost? What does he charge up? Does he charge a penny a stride? They want to talk about hiding things. Mr. Speaker, these are the people who are hiding things.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition in the preamble made some reference to West Edmonton Mall. I don't know; I'd like to look at the Blues to see what reference was made. This is before the courts at the present time, and I'd have your indulgence in telling the leader that they should watch what they say about this case.

MRS. MacBETH: Getting back to the question that the Premier refuses to answer, Mr. Speaker, why are the Premier and his government misleading Albertans by saying that his policy on private surgical facilities is the same as the other provinces?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this government is not misleading anyone at all. But, yes, when we talk about – and this is Liberal vicious, malicious misinformation. We don't know how much this cost, but I'm going to read from it. It says: Why Bill 11 Is the Wrong Prescription for Alberta. This handout, this publicly paid for piece of trash says that it “legalizes private, for-profit hospitals.” That, Mr. Speaker . . . [interjection] Well, no, no. I'm going to address that later. It “creates a two-tier health care system,” it “opens the door to extra charges without protecting patients,” and it “permits the queue-jumping that is going on today.”

Mr. Speaker, I read from *Beauchesne*. These are the words that we're allowed to use. That's a “barefaced falsehood.” That is deception, and it purports to “deceive.” It is “dishonest.” It is “false.” It is “fraudulent.” It is “indecent.” It is “insincere.” It is “malicious.” It is “misinforming.” It is “misleading.” It purportedly “misled.” It's “not telling the truth.” It is “phony.” It is “scandalous.” It is “rotten.” It is a “smokescreen.” It is a “stinker.” It is “stupid.” It is “untrue” and “untruthful.” And, you know, one last phrase I could use: “The pig has nothing left but a squeak.”

MRS. MacBETH: Let's get back to the issues that are on the minds of Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I would like to repeat the question about the other provinces, that the Premier has misrepresented the laws that are in place in other provinces. Perhaps I can brush up the Premier's memory by tabling a document from his own department of health on the background of private facilities in other provinces and ask: why is he misleading Albertans, saying that his policy is consistent with the provinces when, in fact, his own government document shows that there are huge differences between what other provinces are doing and what this Premier is doing with his private hospital policy?

2:10

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we tabled some time ago in the Legislature legislation that has been introduced and passed by other

provinces: British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario. In my recent meeting with the Prime Minister we agreed that we would sit down and review all of this legislation to make sure that there is indeed some consistency in the legislation. All of that legislation, by the way, refers and alludes to contracting out minor surgeries to private clinics. We want to know: is our legislation consistent with that in British Columbia, in Saskatchewan, in Manitoba, in Ontario?

What we want to do across this country, Mr. Speaker, is really to have an intelligent review of the situation to end the patchwork of legislation that exists across the country where certain things are allowed in one province but for some reason are not allowed in another province. The Prime Minister has agreed to that.

Thank you.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the document which we tabled today, which of course the government prepared in terms of a survey of the other provinces, says quite a different story than what the Premier might have had in his little discussion with the Prime Minister.

Given that the government's own report says, and I quote: ministry officials in British Columbia consistently indicate that there are no facilities that provide insured or uninsured surgical services that require an extended stay, end quote, why would this Premier continue to mislead Albertans by saying that his Alberta private hospital policy doesn't completely contradict the British Columbia one?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, there is no private hospital policy, and that question is absolutely irrelevant.

Specific to the question, in our research there is nothing in any of the legislation as it pertains to British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, or Ontario that prohibits overnight stays. As a matter of fact, in Ontario, as I understand it, there are about three clinics that do accommodate overnight stays under the publicly funded health care system.

I've read various letters saying that the Saskatchewan legislation prohibits overnight stays, but if you read the legislation very carefully, there is nothing in that legislation, Mr. Speaker, that prohibits overnight stays, nor is there anything in the ND government's legislation from British Columbia that prohibits overnight stays, nor is there any in Manitoba, and certainly there is nothing in Ontario, where in fact the bill, introduced by a Liberal cabinet minister at the time, Elinor Caplan, is entitled the Private Hospitals Act.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that this government's own report says that, and I quote, Saskatchewan Health indicates there is no provision of either insured or uninsured surgical services requiring extended stays, why does the Premier continue to mislead Albertans into thinking that his Alberta hospitals policy isn't completely inconsistent with Saskatchewan's?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, our statement relative to the Saskatchewan legislation is quite true. There is nothing in their legislation that prohibits overnight stays.

I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness elaborate on this issue.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The Saskatchewan government has in effect passed and proclaimed the Health Facilities Licensing Act. As far as overnight stays are concerned, there is nothing in the legislation which prohibits overnight stays. It provides for the licensing of clinics in a very general way without any prohibition with respect to overnight or day clinics.

There are a number of unlicensed facilities operating in Saskatchewan as well. They are approved by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. They are the Horizon eye centre, Regina, Saskatchewan, and the Midwest Laser Centre, Regina, Saskatchewan, which does facial plastic surgery, laser work. There's also the Gimbel Eye Centre in Saskatoon.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's move on to Manitoba. Manitoba says that there are no facilities that are providing extended stay services, yet this government wants to do it in its legislation. Why is the Premier misleading the people of this province by saying that his legislation is consistent with Manitoba when the exact opposite is true?

MR. KLEIN: The exact opposite is not true. As a matter of fact, I was in Winnipeg only two days ago and had a long discussion with Gary Filmon about this particular piece of legislation. It is probably the most comprehensive legislation relative to the regulation and legislation related to surgical facilities, again introduced not by the Conservatives but by the socialist NDs under Howard Pawley in Manitoba. Again, there is no prohibition. No prohibition.

Yes, former Premier Filmon admitted that there are no facilities that offer overnight stays, but there are numerous surgical facilities now operating in Manitoba, the most recent being the Pan Am sports medicine facility, which treats a number of sports injuries through surgery on a day basis. But he admitted quite freely that there is nothing in that legislation that prohibits overnight stays.

Speaker's Ruling Question Period Practices

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'm going to recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition for a question momentarily, but the tone is not good here. The tone is not good here. In fact, the intent in the questions and some of the responses would lead one to suggest that this is not a parliament, that this is something else. There are words that can be used in a context, and they have certain meanings, and they can convey certain things. The purpose of question period is to ascertain information with respect to government policy and matters of urgent business. And this place is called Alberta. It's not called Saskatchewan or British Columbia or Manitoba or something else.

There's also a time-honoured tradition in this House that if one hon. member says something, we accept the word of the hon. member. Words like some of the ones that have been quoted here, leaning all the way from "misled" to "phony," are not words that basically should be found in the question period.

The purpose of this particular point of our routine is to ask about "matters of sufficient urgency and importance as to require an immediate answer." This is not part of the debate. We started the debate on a certain health bill yesterday, which I think is the background for much of this, and far as I can see in the Orders of the Day, it's scheduled for later today and tomorrow as well.

MR. DICKSON: Policy.

THE SPEAKER: Why don't we listen for a moment. Why don't we listen for a moment, hon. Official Opposition House Leader, to what's being said.

We'll deal with each question as it comes up, but there will be interjections from the chair unless the tone is improved dramatically. We deal with what the whole purpose of the question period is supposed to be. This is not part of the debate.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since the Premier claims that he's not proposing private hospitals, then why do his focus group documents – remember those focus group documents we talked about about two months ago? Why do those focus group documents with the blanked out pages say that the focus groups were convened for the purpose of discussing the proposed policy statement on the future role of private hospitals in Alberta? Why is that?

2:20

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, quite simply, the focus group participants were guaranteed anonymity in return for their participation. This is not uncommon. Well, I don't know but I would think that the Liberals would hold focus groups from time to time, convene focus groups, and would respect and guarantee the anonymity of those participants. We would do the same thing.

MRS. MacBETH: So, Mr. Speaker, if Albertans are to trust this Premier, then will he now show Albertans just exactly what's in these 30 hidden pages and the report that he's been hiding from Albertans on his private hospital policy for the last two months? Will he just show them, let it out? He can cover up the names.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, FOIP in terms of legislative law is very, very new, and there are some people who handle FOIP requests properly. I'll commit to this today: to provide without the names, if the hon. House leader will submit, the comments that were offered by the focus groups if I could have an undertaking on the part of the Liberal Party that they will share with us all of the focus group results and so on.

MRS. MacBETH: Absolutely.

MR. KLEIN: Fine. We'll do that. No problem. Okay. Without the names.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the government's attempts to put the best possible spin on its morally bankrupt private, for-profit hospital scheme, Albertans are not being fooled. Earlier today I delivered thousands of postcards from angry Albertans, many of them Conservative supporters who are breaking ranks with the government on this issue. Much of the opposition comes from the government's own Calgary backyard. My questions are to the Premier. What does the Premier say to R.W. White of Calgary, who writes: I have supported Mr. Klein since he first ran for mayor of Calgary, but this action is the last straw; no more, Mr. Klein?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess the only answer to that question is purely political. I've been in this game now for 20 years, and I get letters like this day in and day out. If I went into my shell and if I buried my head in the sand and if I ran away because every person who wrote me a letter said, "I voted for you as the mayor, I voted for you as the MLA, but I'll never vote for you again," you know what? I wouldn't be standing here today. You fight for what you think is right.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is obviously

abandoning his own supporters. What does the Premier say to Thomas Clausen, also of Calgary, who writes: I have been a PC supporter since Peter Lougheed and a strong supporter of Ralph Klein; I suggest a plebiscite on this issue?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there will be a plebiscite on this issue and every other issue facing this province in the challenges of the future. That plebiscite is called an election. There will be an election, and we will fight that election, and I welcome the participation.

We will fight the election not just on Bill 11 but on a government that has done a \$30 billion turnaround, a government that is the envy of the world, not only of the country but of the world, Mr. Speaker, a government that cares about health care, a government that cares about education, a government that cares about agriculture, a government that cares about preserving and protecting our energy industry, a government that is concerned about protecting our environment, a government that wants to build sensible and strong infrastructure, a government that wants to have safe and secure streets and good justice. That's what the election is all about.

Mr. Speaker, we are a party of all things to all people. We are not a one-trick pony.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans accept the Premier's challenge so long as he calls the election before he wrecks their medicare system.

My last question to the Premier . . .

MR. KLEIN: Well, with all due respect to the . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I listened very attentively to the questions.

MRS. SOETAERT: It wasn't a question.

THE SPEAKER: You can't have a preamble, so it must have been the question.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the election will be held in due course. I would remind the hon. member and the leader of the third party that we're only entering the third year of our mandate. There are so many challenges for this government as we enter the new millennium. One of them, of course, is Bill 11. You know, when that bill is done and it's passed, believe it or not, people will look out the windows, and they will still see the building standing. People will be going to their workplaces, people will be going to their hockey rinks and their community halls and their golf courses and their workout places, and the world will not have collapsed. As a matter of fact, hopefully they'll be going to their workplaces in their communities and their churches and so on, and they'll say: hey, this is still a very, very good province.

You know, if there's one thing that makes me so proud to be an Albertan, it's people from this province who travel elsewhere, including Liberals, by the way, because I've heard of them boasting about Alberta and the Alberta advantage and how good it is here. It is so good to hear people who travel not only to other parts of Canada but to other parts of the world who come back and say: you know, in Germany, in the Czech Republic, in the Slovak Republic, in Uganda, in South Africa, in Uruguay they know about Alberta, and they know about the success of this province. They come back and say: do I ever feel proud being an Albertan.

The only people who don't feel proud about being Albertans are the Liberals. The NDs do. The hon. leader does. He's consistent, and he feels proud. These people over here don't feel proud at all,

but most Albertans feel proud about their province and what we have accomplished, what we have accomplished as a team, a wonderful team. They feel proud. There's a sense of pride.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:30

Gasoline Taxes

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a lot of rhetoric but little action coming out of the federal Liberal government about lowering the price of fuel at the pumps. The federal Finance minister was recently quoted in the media as saying that he was willing to lower the federal taxes – and I stress “taxes,” because the federal government has both an excise tax and the GST applied per litre – if the provinces would lower their fuel tax. My question to the Acting Provincial Treasurer is: what is Alberta's response to the challenge from the federal government?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, a bit of a lead in to that is that the federal government has 10 cents a litre on the price of the fuel, and we have 9 cents as a gasoline tax plus the GST. The other day the hon. Stockwell Day, the Treasurer sent a letter to – he was Treasurer when this letter was written – Mr. Paul Martin recommending that he look at the GST as it was a tax upon a tax and that perhaps they could do something with that. Following that up, Mr. Martin made an offer to the provinces that he would consider looking at movement on the taxes if there were offers coming from the province.

So I sent a letter yesterday to the Minister of Finance, Mr. Paul Martin, and I asked him:

Please advise me of the rate reduction you would consider and the anticipated duration of the reduction. I would . . . like to know the extent of the provincial participation you would expect, including the size of provincial tax cuts and whether other provinces must agree to take part before federal fuel taxes will be reduced.

I asked him to meet with me as soon as possible if he would like to discuss that. In that letter and following that I make the statement: whatever that decision is, it's your move, Mr. Martin.

MR. HLADY: My supplemental to the same minister: what would be the budgetary impact to Alberta if Alberta decided to lower our tax and over what period of time?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, if we lower by 1 cent the 9 cents we have on, it would be approximately \$60 million, so if the 9 cents were removed in total that would equate to \$540 million. Mr. Martin phoned me yesterday after this took place, and I said to him: you have about \$500 million coming out of Alberta in your 10 cents, and we have roughly \$540 million; what would you be willing to lower on a matching basis? He said that he wouldn't make that commitment and that he would have to talk to the other provinces but that he would get back to me on it.

What it means budgetwise is that we would – say it was 3 cents over a six-month period; we'd probably be looking at about \$90 million.

I make an emphasis here, a very strong emphasis, that this money goes into roads and infrastructure. We're spending this year \$1.2 billion on infrastructure. The \$540 million we take out of the 9 cents plus about \$190 million on licence plates and registrations does not come close to what we're spending. In fact, it's a little over 50 percent of it. So we could not sustain this if the price of oil goes down. It's \$25.23. We could not sustain forever taking out the 9 cents, because I don't think the people of Alberta want their roads to deteriorate.

Mr. Martin, on the other hand, could take this out for a period of

time and not affect his road budget. You know why? Because out of the \$5 billion that they collect across Canada in that excise tax, the gasoline tax, they only return \$221 million a year to the 10 provinces and two territories.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting that in other provinces surgical facilities that allow overnight stays are called hospitals, but in Alberta they're called accredited surgical facilities. While other provinces like Ontario are clamping down on these facilities because they know how much they threaten medicare, this government's policy is moving in the opposite direction. On March 3 the Ontario government announced that it's closing two private hospitals "as part of its ongoing efforts to protect Ontario's public health care system." My questions are to the Minister of Health. Why does this government want surgical facilities to provide overnight stays when other provinces have realized how much this threatens medicare and are taking steps to protect the public system?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the information that I've received, comments from individuals at the recent health ministers' meeting in Ontario, would indicate that in Ontario, as has been accurately reported, they do have an Independent Health Facilities Act, and they also have another piece of legislation that fits with it called the Private Hospitals Act, which regulates insured services in private hospitals. So they have passed that legislation, and as was pointed out earlier, it was done by a Liberal government. As far as I know, there are no plans to repeal that legislation, at least as of approximately a week ago there weren't.

The point that we are making is that for years in Ontario – and I won't go through the list of all the other provinces unless they want to question those too – these hospitals or clinics or centres have been providing surgical services. They are private operations. They've been under contract arrangements with the Ontario government, and at least in the case of the Shouldice clinic they've done a very, very substantial business with uninsured persons, particularly our neighbours to the south, the Americans.

We are first of all apprized that these clinics have provided good service, quality service. It has worked well within the Ontario system. That is the point that we've made all along with respect to our particular policy. It is more protective, more restrictive than these other pieces of legislation, and we have to raise the question as to why there is concern from across the way and why there is some reticence on the part of the federal government, although I would like to emphasize that the Prime Minister has said in conversation with the Premier that we should go ahead and pass Bill 11.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, given that this government knows very well that private hospitals in Ontario are grandfathered from prior to medicare, why don't they just stop misleading Albertans by using Ontario examples to bolster their weak argument? They don't apply, and he knows it.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, it may be – I would have to verify this – that there is some discussion of some kind going on in Ontario at this particular point in time. This was not just solely a matter of grandfathering. If it was grandfathering, why did the

Ontario government – it's a rhetorical question, I know. If this was the case, why did the government of Ontario go to the very extensive effort to pass two pieces of legislation, one called the Independent Health Facilities Act, which provides for the approval of these facilities, and also, fitting with it, the Private Hospitals Act, which regulates insured services in private hospitals? Why would they do that if they didn't feel it was acceptable and worked well for them?

MS BLAKEMAN: Why won't this government just admit that when a person walks into a private hospital in Ontario or an accredited surgical facility in Alberta, they'll be walking into the same kind of place? They're both private hospitals. He knows it. The government knows it. The focus groups knew it. That's why they blanked out the pages; isn't it? Admit it.

2:40

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I reported the titles that the Ontario government has used for their surgical clinics. I think if you looked at the types of services that these specialized hospitals provide, they may use the other term, but in fact our term "surgical clinic" is much more accurate. For instance, the most famous in Ontario of these private facilities is the Shouldice hospital, which does only one highly specialized procedure, and that is hernia operations. They do it very well. They do it very efficiently.

We're debating over names, Mr. Speaker. If you go to the Cambie clinic in British Columbia, there they refer to it as a surgical clinic, and it covers quite a wide range of specialized services. Again, it is highly regarded in terms of its quality and its provision of services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Apollo Gas Inc.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Minister of Government Services. Last week we heard that Government Services would not renew Apollo Gas Inc.'s licence to market natural gas to Alberta effective April 1, 2000. I understand that 64,000 Albertans, including a number of St. Albertans, have signed contracts with this company for the provision of natural gas. Can the minister explain why the decision was ultimately made?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have in the province of Alberta a code of conduct that we expect to be followed by companies operating or licensed in this province, and we don't look at that very lightly. We take it quite seriously. We work with companies to make sure that they in fact operate within those parameters, and when we do have difficulties, then we usually work very closely with the company to try and bring them onside and to bring them in line with accepted practices within the province.

In this particular case we've worked for well over a year trying to bring this group into that framework. We were not successful. We had issued some warnings and some suspensions, and quite frankly there's only so long you can go. I relate it to almost a ball game: three strikes and then that's it.

Now, insofar as the 64,000 Albertans who have contracts with this group, we are working with the company to make sure that their service is not interrupted. There are options where their contracts can revert back to the original utility company, but they will be looked after. There is a process in place to help ensure that customers are looked after.

I have to stress that our rules are very tough, but they're very fair, and if you follow them, there's no problem. If you don't, then we

have to come down hard on companies that do not work within those parameters that we've laid out.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. While I understand that Apollo Gas may appeal the decision, can the minister explain the status of my constituents' contracts with Apollo Gas today and during the possible appeal process?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, I have received a request for an appeal on this. Under the Fair Trading Act I am obligated as minister to put together within 30 days a review panel that will look at the application for appeal from the company, and they will proceed on with that. Separate and apart and in the meantime, we will ensure that the 64,000 customers are, in fact, dealt with to ensure that there's no interruption in their delivery of service, and that will proceed on.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the Minister of Resource Development. Can we expect the same concerns with the anticipated deregulation of the electrical industry later this year?

DR. WEST: No, Mr. Speaker. The short answer is that the reason for that is because the Minister of Government Services has been working diligently with the Department of Resource Development on this. I'll have her supplement this answer, but I think it's noteworthy to say that the issue around Apollo or any other marketer that has come forward and been in that gray area about marketing contracts has been good for electrical deregulation because now there is a good focus by Albertans on this issue. The Minister of Government Services is taking due diligence in looking at good rules, and I'll have her answer around that.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, just to supplement. We've had the benefit of working in a deregulated environment with natural gas. That has been a good guideline to show us where there are some potential loopholes that are being tightened up right now, and they will be fed into the electrical direct marketing concept and regulations. As I said before, our regulations are tough, but they're fair, and if you operate within the code of conduct within those regulations, we welcome you to Alberta. If you don't, we don't want you here. It's very straightforward. Consumer protection is critically important.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Private Health Services (continued)

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government claims that it conducted this review of the private provision of medical and hospital services in other jurisdictions to see how other provinces protect their health care systems. Now, the document reports that B.C. "prohibits practitioners or facilities from charging fees beyond those in the fee schedule for insured services." My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why won't the Alberta government follow the British Columbia example and have a policy prohibiting fees for enhanced services? After all, if these services are necessary, then they should be covered.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we do in Alberta exactly what British

Columbia does, and that is we negotiate an overall agreement, an overall fee schedule with our physicians in this province: Alberta Health and Wellness on behalf of the government and the people of the province, and the Alberta Medical Association on behalf of physicians. A fee schedule is arrived at. This fee schedule governs the provision of payment to doctors for insured services. That's the way they are reimbursed today, and that is the way they'll be reimbursed under the provisions of Bill 11. That is very much, I think, in keeping with what is being done in British Columbia.

MRS. SOETAERT: My second question. Why does the Alberta government allow wealthy Albertans to jump the queue by paying for diagnostic services like MRIs when in Saskatchewan private health facilities are prohibited from charging for diagnostics so that people cannot jump the queue?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, that particular question is now being posed for the third or fourth time. It was initially raised as a good question by a member of the government caucus. The interpretation under the Canada Health Act of the provision of MRI services is that it is not in the category of being a mandated insured service under the Canada Health Act. There are, I believe, two provinces besides ourselves that have MRI clinics operating in the private sector. I acknowledge that in Saskatchewan, for instance, they have, as far as their government is concerned, declared it an insured service. Certainly that is something to be reviewed. I would acknowledge that.

Mr. Speaker, the other point here, though, I think is very important, and that is the very considerable effort that government is making and will continue to make to expand the capacity in the province for MRI scans. I have alluded to it before, but I think it should be repeated, and that is that just in these past number of months we have approved and expanded the MRI capacity of MRI services in this province paid for by the public health care system to Lethbridge, to Red Deer, soon to Mistahia or to Grande Prairie. Approval has been given as far as Medicine Hat is concerned. So there is recognition of the need for additional MRI capacity in this province which will be paid for out of the public health care system, and we are following up on that.

2:50

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then to the minister: if MRIs then are needed for all medical diagnoses, will you not put that under the public system, put all MRIs under the public system?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure of the question. As I understand the question, it was: if they are needed for all medical diagnoses. Well, it is a very state-of-the-art diagnostic tool. As I've said, we have dramatically increased the capacity for paid-for MRI services in this province through our health authorities, concentrated, yes, in Edmonton and Calgary but also in the regional hospitals that I've mentioned. We are certainly cognizant of the importance of this particular diagnostic tool, and we want to have the expansion of its availability on a paid-for basis to Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Sarcee Trail Extension

MS GRAHAM: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Infrastructure. On Monday of this week the council of the city of Calgary voted to sign the memorandum of understanding which would permit negotiations to

now begin on the 37th Street extension to Sarcee Trail through the Tsuu T'ina Nation. My constituents in Calgary-Lougheed, which is very traffic congested, are very interested to know what's going to happen next. Can the Minister of Infrastructure tell us what the next steps are in this process?

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Calgary has approved the memorandum of understanding with amendments. The city will forward these amendments to the Tsuu T'ina Nation and also to our department for further review. Once we have looked at the amendments, the three parties to the MOU will then meet to discuss the amendments and to decide on the process for signing the memorandum of understanding.

This MOU is an agreement to negotiate, so once the province and the Tsuu T'ina Nation have joined the city of Calgary in signing the MOU, that's when negotiations can begin. We will be negotiating all parts of the project including, as well, who will finance the necessary planning studies. The time lines, though, for this project are part of the negotiation.

MS GRAHAM: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the same minister. Now that the city has ratified the memorandum of understanding, does the minister know of any reason why the province won't sign on to the agreement straightaway?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we haven't officially received the amendments, but I don't know why we wouldn't sign the memorandum of understanding if we receive agreement from the Tsuu T'ina Nation on the amendments. I'd like to make it clear that we recognize the importance of protecting the environment, the ecological resources, the historical and archeological sites that are in that area, and we have written this into the MOU. We are committed, of course, to a consultative process that includes Calgarians, the Tsuu T'ina Nation, and of course all Albertans. Four open houses were held in Calgary to discuss the details of the MOU. The process for further consultation will be defined in the next set of negotiations.

Now, signing the MOU will definitely set the principles and values which guide the next set of negotiations. However, I want to be clear that it does not commit us or anyone to the project. The process will be open and transparent. The city once again plans to consult with its residents before any further decisions are made after the signing of the MOU.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question then. It's my understanding that the due date for the finalization of the negotiations is in fact October 31 of this year. Is that going to stand, or will that have to be changed? Does the minister know?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, that's one area that's still open to negotiation. I can't say for sure that if we don't reach an understanding by that certain day, all parties just go back and not proceed further with negotiations, but that is a time line that's there. It's there at the request of the Tsuu T'ina Nation, and we respect that. I think it's a time line where it now gives us a date to work towards, and if we accomplish it, fine. If not, then at that time we'll again look at it and see if we can come to a common agreement on how we can proceed further.

Definitely the hon. member highlights an issue with respect to congested traffic. It's a major road going through the community. The city of Calgary has just issued to us the most recent updated census, and they're projecting a million people in the city of Calgary by the year 2007, so that's a huge, huge growth.

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we'll call upon the first of seven members to participate today.

Hon. members, it's also the birthday of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie today.

Now we'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Douglas and Cherie Gillett

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to recognize Douglas and Cherie Gillett, who are celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary on Thursday, April 6, 2000. Douglas is a native Edmontonian born in Rosedale, and Cherie arrived in Edmonton at the age of six months. They have two children, Ken and Jane, and are the proud grandparents of three grandchildren. Both Doug and Cherie are very active in St. Luke's Church in Strathearn and are involved in the choir. They also operate a group called the Heart and Soul Singers, who perform at lodges and seniors' homes. They are both accomplished artists, and Doug gives art lessons in the community. The Sherard Musical Theatre is another project in which both Doug and Cherie actively participate. I wish them every happiness in their 50th year of marriage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

100th Anniversary of Cowley Mail Service

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If one goes into any village or hamlet in rural Alberta today and visits their post office, you get a unique opportunity to meet with grassroots Alberta. The village of Cowley celebrated 100 years of postal service to that community and surrounding district on Saturday, April 1, 2000, and that's 100 years to the day. Much is changed from the days when mail carriers would provide rural service by traveling from the main post office, like Cowley, to outlying posts and exchange incoming for outgoing mail. Today families come to the Cowley post office and appreciate and enjoy the traditional one-on-one service. I'd like to thank Marjorie Haugen for the invitation last Saturday to mix and mingle with these families and relive the history of their great community.

I'd also like to recognize former and present postmasters for providing continuous, reliable service to the residents of Cowley. They are: from 1900 to 1907, James E. Davidson; from 1907 to 1912, Donald R. McIvor; from 1912 to '52, Matthew A. Murphy; from '52 to '57, Marjorie Haugen; from '57 to '61, Edith Evans; from '61 to '83, Alice Sepeta; and from '84 to the present, Lucille Martin. Congratulations to them all on reaching this great milestone, on continuing tradition.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

3:00

Edmonton West Raiders

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to recognize a group of dedicated coaches, parents, and soccer players: the under 13 girls' B division Edmonton West Raiders. On March 18 and 19 they obtained silver in the provincials in Calgary, and this team has a history of winning. Last year they won a bronze in Medicine Hat. These young girls have poured heart and soul into the game of soccer. They practised many hours every week in all types of weather to achieve the excellence they have. The support and dedication of the parents has also been essential to

the success of this team. Coach Paul Kuin and assistant coaches Tony Procacinni and Stuart Burritt also need to be recognized for their dedication and hard work.

On behalf of the Members of this Legislative Assembly I would like to extend congratulations to the Edmonton West Raiders. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

Daysland Thunderstars

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to give recognition in this Assembly to a true triple crown winner, the Daysland peewee-A Thunderstars in the Wainwright constituency. This talented hockey team was truly magnificent throughout the 1999-2000 season as they first captured and won their zone and then the gold medal at the 2000 Winter Games in Sherwood Park. The second leg of the crown was the winning of the league championship after a hard-fought battle. The third and final leg of the triple crown was captured in Wainwright, March 24 to 26, at the provincial playoffs, where they defeated Beaumont in the second overtime period.

Congratulations to the players, coaches, managers, parents, and fans. They all played an important role in developing this super team of young men. Congratulations to the community of Daysland.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Tommy Douglas

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize a remarkable Canadian and a former giant of Canadian politics, the late Tommy Douglas. All of my colleagues in the Assembly know that Tommy Douglas is the father of Canadian medicare. He fought tirelessly for his vision of medicare, and fortunately for us all he succeeded. His dream of universal medicare became reality, and it touches us all. Achieving his dream didn't just simply happen. Tommy Douglas worked ferociously; he never gave up.

Today Canadians and Albertans find his life and work incredibly inspiring. When asked why he stayed with the NDP when he could have done better with a more powerful party, Douglas replied:

I have watched politicians for the last forty years drop their principles in order to get power only to find that those who paid and controlled the party which they joined prevented them from doing all the things they really believed in.

Tommy Douglas believed. Tommy Douglas endured. We are forever indebted to Tommy Douglas, the father of medicare.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

World Figure Skating Championship

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to rise today to bring recognition to the three Alberta figure skaters who participated in the world figure skating championship in Nice, France. Many Albertans held their breath through triple axels, quadruple lutzes, and wonderfully choreographed performances of the young skaters who represented Canada at the 2000 World Figure Skating Championship. Alberta Games alumna Jamie Sale and David Pelletier, her partner, finished fourth in the pairs competition. Although Jamie now trains in Quebec, she still is an Albertan in our heart, and we will be closely watching her rising career. We shared the disappointment of Jamie and David in their fourth place finish after being touted for a medal in Paris. Well, Jamie and David, we are extremely proud of you.

Many will also remember Kristy Sargeant, from Alix, a Canadian champion and an Alberta Games alumna. Her pairs skating experience will continue to take her and her skating partner to new heights.

Mr. Speaker, these skaters demonstrated pride and excellence in their classes at the 2000 World Figure Skating Championship. This is the calibre of athletes that sustain Alberta's reputation for excellence in sports.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Sergeant James Brown

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Her Honour Lois Hole, at a recent investiture of the Royal Life Saving Society presented a rescue commendation to Sergeant James Brown of our Edmonton garrison. Sergeant Brown was one of six individuals awarded the rescue commendation. Sergeant Brown had been involved in search and rescue early in his military career, and over the last two years instructed in first aid.

In August of last year Sergeant Brown was enjoying a day at Allan Beach with his family when his attention was drawn to a woman screaming for help, as her husband had disappeared into the water while sailboarding. Sergeant Brown without hesitation dove into the water and pulled the man from entangling weeds. Upon reaching the shore, he performed CPR for 40 minutes until STARS air ambulance arrived. Unfortunately, the 36-year-old father passed away shortly after midnight that day.

Sergeant Brown credits his St. John Ambulance training to enable him to react in an emergency situation and believes that everyone should have that excellent training.

I would like this Legislature to recognize the brave efforts by Sergeant James Brown.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Televised Second Reading Debate

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, last evening during the special debate that all hon. members agreed to the rules for, there was notification of a number of points of order, but I'm pleased to advise that today I've been notified that in fact there are no points of order arising out of the session last evening, so that's very, very positive.

The chair would also like to recognize and basically thank the vast majority of members yesterday for abiding by the rules that people agreed to. I know that some members sent me personal notes as the evening wore on about how difficult it was. I received these notes from all quarters of the House but for the most part would like to recognize that it basically means there could be a model that could be used.

The chair also recognizes that at a certain point last evening one could almost take out the Sergeant-at-Arms' sword and cut through the tension that was in the air and the desire that various members really had to do more than simply look at one another with a smile. Presumably that sort of attitude basically carried over to the early part of the question period today, and I guess that type of exuberance is all part of the human spirit. Nevertheless, there are two points of order that we have to deal with today. Again, I hope I'm not providing a personal view with respect to it. Perhaps it's an extension of what didn't occur last night, and because it couldn't occur last night, it occurred today in the question period. That's probably the reason we have these two points of order, but once again, I guess I'm not supposed to do that.

First of all, we'll deal with the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, the Official Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This arises from the first set of questions from the Leader of the Opposition to the Premier. The authority would be *Beauchesne* 408(2), and I'd suggest that that authority was offended in two ways.

The first way was that the Premier said that the Liberals are not FOIPable and went on to complain that the Liberals had in effect concealed information, had not shared information to inform Albertans as to the cost of their campaign. In response to that, Mr. Speaker, if the Premier had been paying close attention, he would in fact have heard the tabling, but mere moments before, of documents establishing that the cost of the Liberal opposition advertising was \$17,064.68. He would have heard me undertake that there were some minor consequential costs for a couple of room rentals that I'd be tabling as soon as I had them. So in fact the information had been provided from the Liberal opposition in response to the queries from the Premier both last night and then again this morning.

The second respect in which 408(2) would be offended would be this. When the Premier singles out and suggests that the Liberals are not FOIPable, that's actually an inflammatory exaggeration of the facts. The facts are that it's been the Liberal opposition that has pressed to make amendments to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, most recently in the three-year statutorily mandated review of the FOIP act. It in fact has been government members that have uniformly and consistently resisted all such efforts to allow for fuller disclosure.

So on those two counts I think 408(2) was offended. Thank you.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's really much to say on this. I think the hon. member was trying to clarify the fact that he'd made a tabling and perhaps it was missed in the din and hue of the afternoon and wanted to re-emphasize what was in it. That's simply a clarification and nothing more.

As respects the various representations he makes before committees with respect to the FOIP act, they speak for themselves. I don't think we're in a position this afternoon in the House to get into debate on what he's put forward with respect to the FOIP act, but if he's suggesting that we should have FOIP applied to private members and their business in the House and those sorts of things, well, it's not even worth going there. It's a matter of clarification. It's not a point of order.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: Two brief comments with respect to this. I do believe that there was some degree of exuberance with respect to this, and the word "inflammatory" was used. In my recollection of the first 20 or 25 minutes of the question period today there was a fair amount of inflammatory activity going on both in responses and in preambles to questions that we all could have done better with. Again, let's be careful with these preambles. They're getting us into a great deal of responses that only lead to the heightening of tension in here and basically violate I think what's the best in us.

Government House Leader, you have a point of order?

Point of Order

Preambles

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You just dealt with it. I was rising with respect to the Leader of the Opposition, specifically with respect to her second supplementary to her first question, when she engaged in what I thought was a rather lengthy, unnecessary, inflammatory, inappropriate, and misrepresenting preamble, which then begged responses which would correct the misapprehension that

people might have if they believed the assertions which were being made in the preamble. But you've dealt with that, I think, today and I think should continue to do so.

The only thing I'd add to that, Mr. Speaker, is that in dealing with that type of question earlier on, you indicated that the House leaders should keep their caucuses in order. I would also ask that you intercede on a more regular basis when these unnecessary and inappropriate preambles are being put forward and also would like to indicate that I appreciated the fact that you interceded when such a preamble in the form of a question was put forward by the leader of the third party.

MR. DICKSON: I was almost going to associate myself with the comments of the Government House Leader until he made the last observation. I'm not so sure, Mr. Speaker, that I'd encourage you to participate to a greater extent in question period. I think you've used wisely your discretion to intervene sparingly. I think we're dealing with a hugely important issue, and as you yourself recognized, there's always an emotional component when people feel strongly about an issue important to their constituents. Obviously, we all have to do a better job on both sides of the House in terms of asserting and exerting self-discipline and trying to find a measure of restraint, notwithstanding the passion of our convictions.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, both hon. leaders, for your comments with respect to this. I just want to repeat once again what the philosophy is that I use with respect to this. This is the highest court in the province of Alberta. The honourable people who are here have earned the right to be here. They have earned the right to participate. They have earned the right to represent their constituents. They have earned the right to rise and be recognized. They have earned the right to rise and be recognized and respond to the question as much as the question is given, and they're all honourable people.

This is called question period, and the purpose of question period is to bring everyone accountable on both sides. The last thing in the world that this particular individual wants to do is interject every 30 seconds or every minute. He can do that, and in fact there are Speakers across the country who do that. There was recently one, a very good friend of mine in Ontario, who is no longer the Speaker, not for these reasons. He used to take it upon himself to interject every minute, and he didn't think it was a good day unless he threw out at least six members every day. That was his objective. He was going to throw out six members every day, and that was his quota. It was absolutely chaotic.

Now, that is not the philosophy of this Speaker. This is not his philosophy. He thinks the hon. members are honourable and that the hon. members should have the right to ask questions and also another hon. member respond. On the one hand, if the need is that we should interject every 30 seconds, this will no longer be a question period. It will be simply known as Mr. Speaker's interjection period. That's the way that would be.

So the discipline is on everybody. I have no difficulty doing the interjections, but I think that a little more brevity and clarity with respect to the question and a little more brevity and clarity with respect to the response would help us all.

Thank you very much.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure on behalf of the Deputy Government House Leader to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 7, 8, and 10.

[Motion carried]

Contaminated Sites

Q7. Mr. Sapers moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that the following question be accepted.

What was the total number of contaminated sites recorded by Alberta Environment on December 31, 1999, how many of these were underground petroleum storage sites, how many of the remaining sites were classified as severely, moderately, or lightly contaminated, how many were unclassified, and how many in each category had been visited and reviewed between January 1, 1998, and December 31, 1999?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The motion is very straightforward, and I think it describes what is a perfect subject for a written question. It asks for statistical information, detailed information, very, very specific information, and of course taken in its totality, it would give Albertans a picture of how many contaminated sites there are around the province in several different categories. Any lesser information would not represent disclosure and would not represent, I think, goodwill. So we are hoping that the government will help us communicate with Albertans regarding a number of contaminated sites, particularly on how Alberta Environment has treated these sites and how many of them, as I say, are represented in each category and whether or not they've been reviewed in the last calendar year. I look forward to the government's affirmative response to Written Question 7.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd associate myself with the comments made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, but I would like to suggest some amendments to Question 7, that it be amended by adding the word "approximate" before the expression "total number"; by striking out the expression "how many of the remaining sites were classified as severely, moderately, or lightly contaminated, how many were unclassified"; and finally, by striking out the expression "in each category." Accordingly, the amended question would read as follows:

What was the approximate total number of contaminated sites recorded by Alberta Environment on December 31, 1999, how many of these were underground petroleum storage sites, and how many had been visited and reviewed between January 1, 1998, and December 31, 1999?

Mr. Speaker, my department is developing a database of all contaminated sites, but it is not yet complete. Accordingly, I would only be able to provide an approximate list of these sites.

Finally, the reference to sites as being "severely, moderately, or lightly contaminated" bears no resemblance to the manner in which these sites are classified. Sites are not classified by the degree of contamination but are classified according to the nature of the contaminant. Accordingly, my response would clarify this for the benefit of the member asking the question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the amendment?

MR. DICKSON: Yes, on the amendment. I was listening carefully, because when I saw the amendment – and I'm not sure why the department is not able to tell us the total number of contaminated sites. If the minister gave an explanation for that, I'm sorry; I didn't hear it. I heard his explanation in terms of the classification system. I would think that notwithstanding all the cutbacks we've seen in staff at Alberta Environment, this would be an important number to track and that the number would be available. As I say, I didn't hear an explanation in terms of why that information isn't available.

3:20

On the other part of the amendment, "how many of the remaining sites were classified as severely, moderately, or lightly contaminated." The minister says that they use a different classification system, that this doesn't accurately reflect the departmental way of classifying them, but I note that in the amendment he doesn't propose to provide information that reflects that. It may be that the department has 40 different variables. I mean, I don't know whether it's that complex. I understand him to say that it's a different sort of measuring stick, a different sort of valuation, and that's fair, but I'm not sure we've heard a reason why we wouldn't be able to see that information, to know how many were severely, moderately, or lightly contaminated. This minister in particular is certainly creative enough, I would have thought, to find a way to be able to provide that information.

The purpose clearly is because Albertans value the quality of their environment. I think they want to know and are entitled to know with some specificity the extent of the problem, and that, I think, is the import of the question. To have it come back in the form that's proposed as amended, there's no gradation, no sort of qualitative assessment as to how big the problem is. I mean, to know, whether it's approximate or absolute, "the total number of contaminated sites," I would think is not so much useful information as having some sense of what the range of the problem is. [interjection] It may be that the Acting Treasurer wants to get involved in this too, but as I understand it, we're trying to quantify the extent of and seriousness of the contamination.

Although the minister will certainly give us some information with the amendment, his amendment doesn't address the degree of contamination. I think that is implicit in here. That's a key part of what my colleague is trying to find out. I think it's a key element that Albertans would want to know, and I don't understand why you don't have that information. As I say, maybe it takes a little more work on the part of the minister. Maybe the grading system is just so complex, there'd be no way to do that in a manageable way, but I didn't hear the minister say that. Maybe that's the case, but I didn't hear him make that assertion. So that's the comment with respect to this.

"How many were unclassified" is the other element that would be dropped with this amendment. Once again, you know, the job of opposition is, frankly, to keep government on its toes and keep ministers on their toes. If in fact there would be a significant number of contaminated sites that weren't classified, there are some things that flow from that. We would hope, I guess, that that number of unclassified contaminated sites would be a small number, because that would suggest that there's some work that had not been done and ought to have been done. So I think that would be useful to have.

I don't know how the site visits work. What we're still left with is: how many had been visited and reviewed in that time period? There's an issue of the visit, the review, and presumably that's sort of a necessary precedent to the classification. In the minister's very skeletal, very brief submission we didn't hear those particulars, Mr. Speaker.

So those are the problems that I have with the amendment. This minister, I'd just add, usually distinguishes himself in the House by trying to go the extra mile to accommodate opposition requests for information. I'm assuming that he probably may think he has some good reasons for not providing the other information, but I didn't hear with the kind of fullness and the kind of detail that I'd hoped to hear, Mr. Speaker, why that information wouldn't be proffered to the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on the amendment.

MR. GIBBONS: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I stand looking at the amendment and talking about it, I've got concerns around "approximate" and "in each category." The main thing is that other contaminated sites around the province are a major issue. We have talked with many people and organizations throughout the province who want to know the status of these. I do understand, by visiting with municipalities throughout the province, that when you have underground areas where you've got ex filling stations and so on and the cleanup and that they want to do something with this, this is something that we have to really look at. There are major contamination problems throughout the province.

What are municipalities supposed to do when the owners have closed their businesses and, with no fault, have moved away or gone into bankruptcy? This is a cost that goes back on them. Now, we've asked these questions on a major issue, asking how many there were, but we're getting the amendment back that actually stresses an approximate number. If you'd actually even change "approximate" to 99 percent of them or something like that, because approximate could be 50 percent out there in the province while the actual fact is there are maybe a thousand sites that we have to look at. Striking out "how many" is the same type of variation.

With a classification of severity, we're talking anywhere from the Bovar site down to gas stations and other types of contaminated areas: sloughs, problems with spraying throughout the province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will sit down.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on the amendment.

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thanks very much. I won't repeat the observations made by my colleagues. I'll simply add a note of disappointment in that I'm surprised to hear that the minister would not be collecting information that would distinguish between severely versus lightly contaminated sites. Clearly there's a range of sites and remediation for these sites. The amount of concern that nearby residents would have would be affected not only by what has contaminated the site but also by how badly contaminated that site is. At the very least I would have hoped that the minister would give us this alternate scheme for classifying contaminated sites and may take under advisement the suggestion that some scale be applied to the degree of contamination in reporting to Albertans.

The one comment that I don't believe I heard my colleagues make reference to was the use of the word "approximate." Again I'm a little bit concerned. When the minister says that there's this alternate scheme which lists sites by what has contaminated them, it would lead me to conclude that there would be a count, that there'd be a tally at the end of that classification. By using the word "approximate," it suggests that the minister in fact doesn't have that information and that we could get back a response to this amended motion that would say that there may be approximately 100 sites or

200 sites or 1,000 sites, and we wouldn't really know what that meant. We wouldn't have any confidence that we actually would know how many actual sites there were and which sites would pose a health or an environmental concern.

It's not too late for this minister to rethink this amendment, and it's not of course beyond expectation that the House may not accept this amendment. Then we'd be able to revert to the original motion as proposed by my colleague, which would provide a much better quality of information and would provide a higher degree of certainty as to what it is that Albertans are dealing with. So I would ask the minister to rethink the amendment, but in the absence of that sober second thought, I would ask my colleagues in the Assembly to not accept the amendment so that we can proceed to a vote on the motion as it was originally proposed.

[Motion on amendment carried]

3:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close the debate.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I suppose reasonable argument doesn't always carry the day.

MR. HANCOCK: The vote was unanimous.

MR. SAPERS: Was it a recorded vote, Government House Leader? Okay. We'll debate through the chair, obviously, Mr. Speaker, but I can't account for the lack of hearing on the part of the government. Maybe that also accounts for why they didn't accept my reasonable arguments to defeat the amendment.

In any case, I accept the minister at his word, and I hope that he will provide the highest quality and the most complete information that his department can assemble. If he can give us an actual number instead of an approximate number, I think the Official Opposition and all Albertans would appreciate that. If he can provide us with this alternate classification scheme in his answer, even though the amended motion doesn't require it, I think we would all appreciate that.

Certainly I would appreciate the minister providing a response to my colleague who is the Official Opposition critic for matters regarding the environment as to our suggestion that he begin to classify contaminated sites according to their degree of contamination, particularly with reference to those that are severely, moderately, or lightly contaminated.

While we will get some information, I'm concerned that it won't be the quality of information that was originally sought, but I do hope that the minister will do what he can to still make this a worthwhile process by ensuring that the information that is received is as complete as possible and takes into consideration the nature of the discussion we've had on Written Question 7.

[Written Question 7 as amended carried]

Trade Offices

Q8. Mr. Sapers moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that the following question be accepted.

What are the estimated costs of operating Alberta's trade offices and engaging trade consultants under contract abroad for the fiscal year 1998-99 broken down by accommodation costs and salary ranges for consultants, clerical staff, commercial officers, and posted staff?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm aware that the department does a review of foreign offices. There is some information that is available, but the information does not satisfy the natural curiosity of taxpayers when it comes to how their money is used supporting these foreign offices.

Keep in mind that it was just a little bit earlier on, actually late in the year 1999, that there was some government speculation that there was going to be an expansion of trade offices and a reopening and restaffing of trade offices. I think Albertans made it very clear that no such activity should be undertaken before there was a good understanding of the outcomes and the benefits of such an initiative. I think Albertans are very cost conscious when it comes to this kind of government program and want to make sure that there is value for each and every dollar spent when it comes to staffing and operating Alberta's trade offices and engaging in trade consultations on a worldwide basis.

Now, the Official Opposition is certainly not saying that Alberta should stop participating in these international activities. We believe very strongly that Alberta's future in part depends on our ability to have our products and services sought after in the global marketplace. We certainly support the joint federal/provincial trade missions and encourage Alberta business to get on board and tell the world about good-news stories that are born right here in Alberta, but what we would like to see as well is the highest level of accountability for tax dollars spent when it comes to promoting Alberta business. There's a fine line to be walked between government policy which supports, promotes, and enhances business opportunities on a worldwide basis and government policy which actually provides a direct subsidy to a select handful of Alberta enterprises.

This is a government that has said that it's out of the business of being in business. This is a government that has said that it no longer wants to pick winners and losers in the marketplace. I think that we'd like to hold them to those commitments, and we can do so by ensuring some transparency in the accounting for how Alberta trade offices and trade consultation initiatives are contracted for and what their cost estimates are and by providing the information on how much money is paid to each and every one of the men and women that are engaged on behalf of the province of Alberta to participate in these trade initiatives.

I hope that the Assembly will find favour with Written Question 8, and I would seek its speedy acceptance.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Economic Development I would move to amend Written Question 8 by striking out the word "estimated" and substituting the word "actual" and by striking out the expression "accommodation costs and salary ranges for consultants, clerical staff, commercial officers, and posted staff" and substituting the expression "posted staffing costs, locally engaged administrative and clerical staffing costs, accommodation and operating costs, and what was the salary range for posted staff?" The written question would then read:

What are the actual costs of operating Alberta's trade offices and engaging trade consultants under contract abroad for the fiscal year 1998-99 broken down by posted staffing costs, locally engaged administrative and clerical staffing costs, accommodation and operating costs, and what was the salary range for posted staff?

Salary ranges for consultants, commercial officers, and locally engaged clerical staff vary based on the type of service, length of term, and the local labour markets. There is no standard range. The actual figures are published in the annual report. This is a more accurate reflection than the estimate requested by the hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on the amendment.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. Just to speak a bit on the amendment. The amendment, of course, does provide a shot at the information that was requested in the original motion. These types of trade consultants and facilities and such have always come under question by the public, and that's why it becomes so important to have all that information disclosed. Even with the information fully disclosed, there is still some question as to whether the benefits of spending those dollars by having those types of facilities and consultants is a worthwhile investment.

Then the question comes into play on the appointment of the trade commissioners, or the expression that's used when they go to places like London, for example. London is a classic example. I can recall a former minister of a Conservative government being posted over in London. Possibly the person was very, very qualified; I don't know. Then, on the other hand, it is a bit of a coincidence that she did happen to be a member of Executive Council, of the government side. Upon my retirement I don't expect that the government is going to be sending me over to Finland to run a trade office over there.

Mr. Speaker, on the federal level we see the same concern being expressed by the public. We have the recent example of a person with probably one of the shortest if not the shortest reigns of any Prime Minister being shipped off to Los Angeles with a surprisingly big budget. I'm not sure exactly what that person does in Los Angeles other than entertain and socialize and such. Those are the types of instances that cause the public to question the costs that are associated with these types of expenditures, these types of facilities, these types of consultants, and as to whether this money could be put to better use.

3:40

Another question that is probably in order to be responded to at a later date is a question along the lines of trying to get some tangible indication of return on that expenditure. In other words, if the operation in London is going to cost \$1.5 million a year to operate, what economic benefit is it to Canada? Is it increasing the economic benefit by a multiple of 10, in other words tenfold, or is it actually a minus situation?

I commend the minister that he has gone some distance here to make the question acceptable by incorporating his amendment, which I'm speaking to, and on that basis it softens the blow somewhat. I thank the minister for that.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close the debate.

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not talking about small potatoes here when we're talking about Alberta trade and the international community. I think it's worth while reviewing for just a moment the nature of that trade. With the United States of America, that my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford was just speaking of, I believe our local agent is actually posted now in Portland but probably does a high degree of business in California as well. I notice that trade exports to the United States last year from Alberta equaled something in the order of \$25 billion, and manufactured exports to the U.S. were about \$7.8 billion.

In Japan there is one Albertan locally posted in Tokyo and nine locally engaged representatives maintaining a full-service office.

Total exports to Japan from Alberta are \$1.3 billion, and manufactured exports are just shy of \$800 million, soon to be a billion dollars.

When it comes to China, there is a newly assigned collocation agreement with the Canadian embassy. We had some representatives from the People's Republic here with us today in the Assembly. It's our fourth largest trading partner actually, totaling about \$400 million in exports and \$250 million, give or take, in terms of manufactured exports. That's separate, of course, from the business that's done in Hong Kong, which reaches \$90 million in exports and \$80 million in manufactured goods.

It goes on, Mr. Speaker. Alberta businesses are doing business in South Korea, in Taiwan, in Mexico, throughout the European continent and the European Union. In the U.K. market alone there are exports exceeding \$230 million and manufactured exports exceeding \$150 million. Clearly we're talking about a sizable business exchange that goes on between Alberta and its global partners and its global business associates. I think that's why we would like to see the highest quality information and the highest level of disclosure when it comes to how the Alberta government is supporting these initiatives, is making sure that money is spent where it needs to be spent and that we're getting value for those tax dollars.

I appreciate the minister's undertaking to provide both some reasonable amendments and also some high-quality information.

[Written Question 8 as amended carried]

Highway Maintenance

Q10. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mrs. Soetaert that the following question be accepted.

How much has the government saved each year from 1996-97 to 1998-99 as a result of contracting out highway maintenance, and on what evidence are the figures based?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Written Question 10 the hon. member is inquiring of the government as to the amount of savings for the years '96-97 and then again '98-99 as a result of the contracting out of highway maintenance and for some evidence as to those particular figures.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Now, there have been no amendments coming forward, so I'm not sure if the government wants to accept this and provide that information on some restricted basis, with some amendment in place, whatever. The question that has been put forward by the member is a very, very valid question, because when we start getting into the privatization question, the measurement of dollars, the measurement of efficiency in terms of those dollars, and the measurement of output in terms of those dollars become very, very important. I've had lots of Albertans tell me that since the maintenance of highways throughout the province has been privatized or contracted out, the road conditions have deteriorated considerably. I'm not sure if other members have heard that. I'm not sure if other members, as they're driving to wherever home is, feel all those bumps on the road that you didn't have years ago.

Obviously, if the government's concept or perception, which I disagree with incidentally, is that by contracting out you save money and if the level of service being provided is of a lesser level, then there should not only be savings from the contracting out to the

private sector but also additional savings because the same degree of performance is not being achieved. In other words, it's lesser quality.

On this question of the benefits of privatization, yeah, in some instances privatization can work very, very well. There's no question about it. But there are other instances where the taxpayer says: "I pay good money for certain things. I pay good money in taxes and such to have roadways that are worthy of the vehicle that I'm driving. I don't want that vehicle of mine breaking down because of roadway conditions, because some private contractor hasn't done the work up to par." It may be saving the government a few bucks and he might save himself \$2 in terms of taxes in his wallet, but then he's laying out \$800 for a new transmission.

We see that happen, Madam Speaker. We not only see that happen on the highways; we see similar complaints in the municipalities. I can remember that during my days on city council it was a very, very standard, typical argument where somebody would say: so you guys are trying to save a few bucks by only paving this roadway every 10 years instead of every five years. Meanwhile, it's cost him three tires, one transmission, a clutch, and such; in other words, \$2,400 worth of repairs so that he can save about 75 cents on his tax bill. So it's a false economy.

Madam Speaker, as I wrap up, I touch on privatization. It is impossible to touch on privatization without at least referring to Bill 11 in passing. That's all I'm going to do, just refer to Bill 11 in passing, because we're not dealing with that bill. We're dealing with the aspect of privatization of roadway maintenance.

Madam Speaker, I'm trying to remember the rules here now. The minister is going to get up and respond and may accept the question, but if he doesn't accept the question, then of course my colleagues will also have the opportunity to speak.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm not sure what games are going on this afternoon. It looks like we're going to be debating written questions and motions for returns all afternoon, perhaps so that the Leader of the Opposition doesn't have to come and promote her bill. Maybe she's decided not to bring forward Bill 207 this afternoon.

MR. SAPERS: Is this relevant?

MR. HANCOCK: It's very relevant to the whole question, because it's normal in the House to ask whether a question will be accepted. Of course I'm more than delighted to indicate on behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure that we'll be prepared to accept this question.

Don't be so sensitive over there, Edmonton-Glenora.

3:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close debate.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Seeing that the minister was good enough to accept the question, I'm going to be good enough to commend him for it, thank him for it, and say that I have no further comment on it.

[Written Question 10 carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Deputy Government House Leader it's my pleasure, proper notice having been given yesterday, to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 13, 14, 15, 16, and 24.

[Motion carried]

Special Waste Treatment Centre

M13. Mr. Gibbons moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the plan that Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd. and Bovar Inc. were required to draw up under the enforcement order that was announced by Alberta environmental protection on January 15, 1997, showing how they will address all sources of PCBs, dioxins, and furans identified in the inventory required by the enforcement order together with a copy of any design plans that were subsequently drawn up to address any potential adverse impacts on the environment and any evaluation of these plans carried out by or for those companies or Alberta Environment or Alberta environmental protection from that time until February 28, 2000.

MR. MAR: Madam Speaker, I move to reject Motion for a Return 13. In light of the ongoing investigation into this incident, I'm not able to provide the information requested here and must reject the motion accordingly. I am however able to provide the assessment plan required of Chem-Security and Bovar and will undertake to table the same requisite number of copies following the vote.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. The whole legacy with this government and Bovar is an interesting one, and it's been an expensive one. We seem to go a couple of steps forward and then two or three steps backward every time the opposition asks for information. This really is a made-in-Alberta boondoggle, and there are some very serious concerns that persist to this very minute regarding the environmental safety of some of the things that are going on in and around that plant.

This is a very reasonable request. Albertans deserve to know how Alberta Environment will address sources of PCBs, dioxins, and furans identified in the inventory required by the enforcement order that came about as a result of this very significant problem. The minister just said that he's unable to comply, and he didn't really tell us why.

I think Albertans want a little more clarity from this minister on this very important issue. This is not going to go away, and it certainly doesn't make any sense for the government to bury its head collectively in the sand on these environmental problems. We should fess up to them so we can try to correct them the best we can. The more disclosure there is, the greater the understanding will be and the easier it will be to address the issue.

This is a serious concern of mine, because not only are Albertans still paying the tab, but because of the deal that was negotiated, Albertans will have to pick up the cost for any site cleanup and remediation. In the meantime we can't even find out all the details that we could reasonably expect to receive from this government of the adverse impacts on the environment as a result of some problems at that particular site.

This minister, I think, will probably want to be remembered for being a good steward of the environment. I think this minister will

probably want to be remembered for always doing the right thing and not just the political thing, and he can certainly begin working on that legacy by reconsidering his rejection of this motion for a return.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to close debate.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased that we are receiving some of the information. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie thought that this one was going to be accepted and was going to be quite happy that some easy information was going to come forward, but it continues to be an ongoing issue, especially now that the Premier has actually broken his promise to Albertans by allowing hazardous waste to be imported from out of the country. The first delivery from Japan is expected any day now. So it's a major concern. When the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie left here today, she thought this one would be totally accepted and that even with their legal problems there would be some forthcoming information from this department.

So I'm closing debate right now, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 13 lost]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Consistent with my earlier undertaking to provide the assessment plan required of Chem-Security and Bovar, I'd like to table the requisite number of copies with the House.

Special Waste Treatment Centre

M14. Mr. Gibbons moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a monthly summary of all monitoring results and any individual values that exceed permitted limits from April 1, 1997, to February 28, 2000, collected by Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd. and Bovar Inc. as required by the approval to operate the Alberta Special Waste Treatment Centre at Swan Hills and by the enforcement order announced by Alberta environmental protection on January 15, 1997.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to move that Motion for a Return 14 be amended by striking out the expression "and by the enforcement order announced by Alberta environmental protection on January 15, 1997." Accordingly, the amended motion for a return would read:

... a monthly summary of all monitoring results and any individual values that exceed permitted limits from April 1, 1997, to February 28, 2000, collected by Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd. and Bovar Inc. as required by the approval to operate the Alberta Special Waste Treatment Centre at Swan Hills.

Madam Speaker, once again, in light of the ongoing investigation into this incident, I'm not able to provide the information requested based on the enforcement order of January 15, 1997. The monitoring results required outside this order are public information and will be provided accordingly.

4:00

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thanks very much. The amendment on the

face of it appears reasonable. While we're disappointed with the results of the earlier motion for a return, we will take a look at the enforcement order just tabled by the minister. The information from this amended motion will help fill in the picture a little bit. We'll review the information. I know my colleague will get back to the minister, and there'll be some subsequent follow-up questions.

Contrary to what the Government House Leader may have said on the record before in terms of this being a game, this is a sincere attempt on the part of the Official Opposition to obtain information that is of interest to the public and is in keeping with our capacity as the Official Opposition, which is in part to hold the government accountable on behalf of all taxpayers and even, interestingly enough, Madam Speaker, some who maybe even voted for the government.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the amendment, hon. member.

MR. GIBBONS: Madam Speaker, I rise to close debate and will accept the amendment as given.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, there is no closing of debate on an amendment.

MR. GIBBONS: Okay. We'll let the amendment go.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Now on the motion as amended. Hon. member, you will be closing debate.

MR. GIBBONS: I will. Thank you. I rise to close debate with the amendment and accept the information. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 14 as amended carried]

Forest Service Contracts

M15. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. White that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of all contracts issued by the Alberta forest service in the calendar year 1999 indicating the purpose of each contract, the name of the company to which it was awarded, and whether the contract was awarded as a result of a public tendering process.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a legitimate question that's being asked, with no game playing involved. If the minister over there would indicate to me whether it's going to be accepted, I could minimize my comments. [interjection] You have to get up and say that publicly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I need someone to respond, please. The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Madam Speaker, I would move to accept Motion for a Return 15 with these comments. It is a poorly worded question as there is no entity as the Alberta forest service, and there has not been since 1993. I believe the hon. member was referring to the land and forest service, the correct name. I would have thought that the member opposite would have known that by now. However, I do accept this motion in the spirit in which it was asked.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close debate.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, to close debate, let me remind the minister that Motion for a Return 15 was prepared by the Member for Edmonton-Calder. Even though he's a colleague of mine, I'm not going to take the fall for him on this one. He's on his own, quite frankly.

In any case, I thank the minister for accepting the motion for a return, and I will have no further comment on it.

[Motion for a Return 15 carried]

Government Reorganization Secretariat

M16. Mr. Sapers moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all studies and reports prepared by or for the Government Reorganization Secretariat between May 26, 1999, and February 17, 2000, relating to a review of government agencies, boards, and commissions.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, this is entirely in keeping with the government's commitment to disclose the results of this study. There are several – and the number seems to grow almost daily – government boards, agencies, and commissions doing delegated work on behalf of the government. Often they operate without the same degree of accountability or transparency or openness as other parts of the government, and sometimes we come to the conclusion that the government sets up these delegated organizations simply for the purpose of avoiding public scrutiny.

So we think it would be very worth while if the government would disclose studies or reports prepared by or for the secretariat relating to the review of government agencies, boards, and commissions. I think those reports would be of great interest to anybody who follows the public policy process in this province.

I've had no indication from the government whether this motion is going to be accepted or rejected. I've had no notification of an amendment. I can only hope that this lack of prior notice indicates speedy and willing acceptance.

DR. WEST: Madam Speaker, it's amazing. I've read quite a few motions for returns that have been directed towards this department, and I have to say that a lot of them are almost fishing trips, looking for things that may or may not be. If they would just come forth and ask beforehand, they would save this Assembly a lot of trouble in whether they accept or reject something and give an explanation. If they'd just come and ask. I mean, we are open. The door to my office is open, and if the hon. member has some questions about the reorganization secretariat, I have no problem. This area is the vice-chair's area. The hon. Member for Medicine Hat is doing the work on the boards, agencies, and commissions.

It's work in progress. The work is not finished. I reject this motion on that premise. Certainly we are open for discussion, to come and discuss how it's going and what we're doing. To say that there is a start or end point by some study or by some report – it's work in progress.

The other side of this. I would recommend to the member who is interested in understanding government reorganization and what we're doing that there are several books out termed Shared Services or the Reorganization of Government or Government Administra-

tion. They're in the libraries, and there is more on the Internet. If the hon. member would come to either myself as chairman of the reorganization or the vice-chair as it relates, they'd be glad to get references so that they can go to the library and read at night, and then we wouldn't be wasting the time of this Assembly with these redundant types of motions for returns.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. It's perhaps a good thing to see the Acting Treasurer bring his customary feistiness to his new portfolio.

I'd make this observation. In 1993 when we were talking about the need for a genuinely open government, we talked about the need for a freedom of information regime. The calculation then was that something like 72 percent of written questions and motions for returns were spurned, rejected, discounted, dismissed by the government of the day. Now, there's been some progress. I'm happy to report that actually the success rate now in terms of motions for returns and written questions is significantly higher than it was in 1993, but it's not 100 percent. We still have ministers that come forward and in a dismissive way reject legitimate, genuine requests for information, requests as written questions, requests for documents under motions for returns.

4:10

You know, to hear the flip response from the Acting Treasurer – let's just think about what he's told us. What he's told us is that we're welcome to go to the Internet and that he's got a couple of books in his library he's prepared to share. I mean, I still expect he's got Gaebler's *Reinventing Government*. He's probably put a few more on top, but that probably has an honoured spot in his bookcase.

DR. WEST: Never read it. I'm writing a book for him.

MR. DICKSON: I'm sorry. He read Sir Roger Douglas's New Zealand version of Gaebler's book *Reinventing Government*.

The point, Madam Speaker, is this. This is not like reading the literary review in the *Edmonton Journal* or the *Vermilion Times*. What I want to know and what my colleagues want to know are the studies that are undertaken by the government of the province of Alberta, paid for by the taxpayers of the province of Alberta. That's what we're asking for.

The minister insults every single Albertan when he says, in effect: go to the library; go to the Internet. Why should we have to do that? We have a government that you would think somewhere in their \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau budget would be able to find a means to be able to make accessible to the people of this province the information that's gathered, that we paid for, about our resources, about our reorganization. [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. [interjection] Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, I guess it's an indication when your colleagues lose faith in the observations being made by their colleague. They're trying to crowd me off the platform so they can make some observations of their own, that I think will be much better.

DR. WEST: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: There's a point of order.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

DR. WEST: Madam Speaker, there was reference made just a minute ago in this House as to my presence or not, and I want that corrected here. That is improper conduct in this House. I either want an apology or a retraction of what they said because I'm still here, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: I'm the one that had the floor. I'm the one that was speaking, and I made no reference to this minister leaving. He's put it on the record now himself. Every time a member of the opposition gets up to walk out in question period, we hear the catcalls and we hear the good-byes and the waves. That happens all the time, Madam Speaker. The point is that I'm the one that was speaking, and I didn't draw anybody's attention to the fact that the minister was fleeing from the Chamber because he didn't like to hear the arguments mounted against him.

Those are the points I wanted to make, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: If you'll recall, I interrupted the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo and made reference to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood for exactly what the Acting Treasurer has stood up and made a point of order about. There is no need for people to do that. If I recall, earlier I heard the Speaker of this Assembly talk about decorum. Now, let's get on with the work of the Assembly. I don't think it was necessary to make any kind of comment as to what the Acting Treasurer was doing. He has rejected what you've asked for. I want to hear the debate take place in accordance with that.

Debate Continued

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Is there anyone else that wishes to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Madam Speaker, I just want to make a point. The hon. Treasurer and minister of energy has alluded to reading some periodicals or books in the library, and I'm sure that that academic text is available to all of us, but what we're really looking for are the actual studies.

I have to reflect on what occurred in Public Accounts recently when the hon. Treasurer and minister of energy advised us, when we asked a similar question about presenting studies and tabling those, that studies weren't a big deal when it came to the electrical deregulation because this was ideology and ideology didn't have studies and therefore wasn't important.

Well, quite frankly, when you're making decisions that impact on all Albertans, impact on industry in this province, you have to have something that you're looking at. If this minister is telling us that those things just don't exist, then that's irresponsible government and that's poor management, quite frankly.

I'm hoping that he'll reconsider our request and he'll in fact put the actual studies and reports, the government reports, on the table for all Albertans to see and so we would know what's going on with this shared services reorganization, that he is telling us is going to save us a bunch of money when in fact there are studies out there that show just the opposite.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader and Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wouldn't normally intercede in a debate of this nature. The hon. Acting Treasurer has indicated that the question is being rejected. He indicated, as I heard him, that it was being rejected because the situation was a work in progress and that it wouldn't be appropriate to provide reports at this time. I'm not sure that there even are reports at this time.

The only reason I'm interceding in the debate is because Calgary-Buffalo tried to put a connotation on those remarks to suggest that the hon. minister of natural resources and Acting Provincial Treasurer, a hardworking, dedicated servant of the people of this province, was somehow hiding something, was somehow being flippant with them. He was being sincere, honest, and open, as is his wont, and that should be on the record.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on behalf of Lethbridge-East to conclude debate.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much. This is very entertaining, and it's nice to see some rootin'-tootin' participation here from the provincial minister of both of those portfolios that he's minister of now.

A couple of comments about the rejection. When the minister of natural resources says, "Just call me," I think the people that are going to be reviewing *Hansard* have to know that this minister who says, "Just call me and I'll give you answers to information," is the very same minister who has sat in this Chamber and ripped up amendments and bills put forward by private members in this Assembly. This is the very same minister who has refused to answer questions during budget estimates and has said on the record that he won't answer questions.

DR. WEST: Point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Go ahead.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

DR. WEST: Under 23(h), (i), and (j). These comments are to disrupt this House and bring me to my feet. He had better bring forth some proof of what he's just been saying. He's making allegations about another member in this House, about habits that they have. He does not know that I rip up amendments or that I don't answer questions. I've been through the budget process, and I've answered all their questions. What is the inference this member is doing here? He is damaging my reputation to function in this House by putting allegations out that could be false. Prove it.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much. Yeah, I will. Of course, as the Speaker has often said, you have to take all hon. members at their word. I've seen that minister rip up bills. I've seen that minister rip up amendments. You know, Madam Speaker, if he's not going to admit it, then that's his responsibility, but I've certainly seen it happen. If he's a little sensitive about his own behaviour, that's his problem, and he certainly doesn't need me to do anything to damage his reputation.

4:20

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I'm a little concerned here. I don't like it when allegations of a

personal nature are made against another member. As the Acting Treasurer said when he rose on the point of order, you are making an assumption. I don't like assumptions and I don't like allegations.

I have noted with great interest all afternoon that more and more of this debate in this Assembly is becoming personal, very personal. I want you to know that Albertans who tune in and watch question period and see what goes on in this Assembly are very, very discouraged. We are supposed to set an example. I believe the hon. Acting Treasurer is right in seeking something here. I don't like to hear when someone accuses someone else of something. I have no idea what the hon. Acting Treasurer does with amendments, nor do you really.

MR. SAPERS: I've seen him do it.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I have no idea what you just tore up now. Does anybody else in this Assembly?

Now we are going to proceed with the work that we are to do this afternoon. I want everyone in this Assembly to stay away from personal remarks. Let us get on with the business at hand, quickly.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: As I was saying, of course those activities and those actions make it very difficult to take with any seriousness this minister when he says: just call me.

Now, on the issue of whether or not we're dealing with a work in progress, I would like to draw all members' attention to the motion for a return as it's written, which is: copies "of all studies and reports prepared by or for the government" relating to the review. The motion for a return is not asking for the final report. We recognize that it is a work in progress. In fact, I have correspondence from the Member for Medicine Hat dated February 24, 2000, in response to a letter that I sent him. He said that it would be premature to provide the final report or further information.

So now we've asked the question. We have done what the Acting Treasurer has said. We have simply gone and asked the member for the information. They haven't provided it. We understand that it's a work in progress, but we also know that they've done some preliminary work in advance. So that's what we're asking for, the preliminary work. It's very disingenuous to say, "Just ask me," when in fact we did ask and received the response on February 24 saying: we're not going to give you the information. If the government wants to keep things secret from Albertans, I guess they can do that for the time being, but I think they should at least be up front and say: no; we're just going to keep it secret. They shouldn't try to mislead people by saying: just ask.

[Motion for a Return 16 lost]

Trade Offices and Consultants

M24. Mr. Sapers moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of activity reports prepared by the Department of Economic Development on Alberta trade offices and trade consultants abroad for the fiscal years 1997-98 and 1998-99.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment on behalf of the hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that Motion for a Return 24 be amended by striking out the expression "activity reports" and substituting "monthly report summaries" and also

striking out the expression "and trade consultants." Accordingly, the motion would now read:

... copies of monthly report summaries prepared by the Department of Economic Development on Alberta trade offices abroad for the fiscal years 1997-98 and 1998-99.

Madam Speaker, activity reports generated by the trade offices and consultants contain third-party confidential information, the disclosure of which is not appropriate. *Beauchesne* 446(2)(e) supports this exemption as well as sections 15 and 16 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The activity reports are summarized into monthly reports for trade offices, which provide information on the activity of trade offices without providing personal information.

[Motion for a Return 24 as amended carried]

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 206
School (Students' Code of Conduct)
Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned March 22: Dr. Nicol speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me pleasure today to rise to speak to Bill 206, the School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act. I'd like to commend and thank the Member for Livingstone-Macleod for bringing this private member's bill forward.

School violence is an issue that is very important to every Albertan, and solutions are especially valuable in addressing this problem. Events last year in Colorado and even closer to home, in Taber, Alberta, emphasized the necessity for governments to wake up and take notice.

This bill does exactly that. It shows that this government is proactively addressing some of the concerns surrounding this issue and deliberately finding solutions. This bill essentially requires school boards to implement codes of conduct for their students, combating school violence, substance abuse, and on-campus school discipline.

These codes of conduct would be clearly defined written agreements between schools and students in order to lay out acceptable standards of behaviour as well as consequences for infringement. In drafting a code of conduct, the school board would receive input from parents, students, teachers, and principals. This consultation is aimed at creating a community-based, stakeholder-driven code of conduct, reflecting the needs and priorities of a particular school district.

One unique attribute to this legislation is that it would provide a new approach to discipline by moving away from the traditional methods of suspension and expulsion to an approach of seeking rehabilitation. This way the code of conduct would include penalty options which allow students to continue their studies while offering counseling when necessary. Suspensions and expulsions of students would become a last resort.

Madam Speaker, by raising the standards of expectations for our students regarding their conduct, we are ensuring the safety of young people while at school or involved in school functions. Essentially, it will enable school administrators to nip in the bud any signs of deviant or violent behaviour that could pose a threat to other students.

In this way Bill 206 meets one of the fundamental priorities of this government: to provide Albertans with safe and strong communities. Bill 206 is a preventative initiative to reduce the incidence of school violence and youth crime in our province.

4:30

Madam Speaker, the untimely death of a young person often becomes a rallying point for a community as people come together expressing their grief and trying desperately to understand how such a tragedy could occur. When death occurs due to the violent actions of a fellow student, the questions and confusion that result are only amplified as the community tries to deal with the crisis they are facing.

This bill, Madam Speaker, seeks to address this problem by preventing violence before it occurs. Given that Alberta schools have experienced an increase in violence in recent years, this bill is in response to that fact and works to address the problem.

Madam Speaker, the province of Ontario in their Ministry of Education business plan for the year 1999-2000 stated that they are committed to introducing a provincewide code of conduct for students. Ontario's code of conduct would set minimum standards of behaviour and consequences for infractions. For example, the code would make expulsion automatic for students who bring weapons to school, provide drugs or alcohol to others, or who commit criminal assault. Suspension would be the minimum penalty for possessing drugs or alcohol, for threatening or swearing at teachers, or for vandalism.

Furthermore, a news release by the Ministry of Education stated that already the results were very positive. Students at a Toronto high school told the Ontario Minister of Education, Janet Ecker, that student life at the school has improved because of the school's code of conduct. In addition, the students said that the learning environment at the school was much better after the school introduced a code of conduct, because students are required to have respect for themselves, for others, and the responsibility of citizenship.

The Ontario government implemented a code of conduct based on input from parents who voiced their concerns that Ontario schools need to provide a safe, secure, and respectful learning environment. The news release also clearly stated the benefits to students, teachers, and schools. When the rules of behaviour are clear to everyone, students can get on with learning and teachers can get on with teaching.

Madam Speaker, I would imagine that with time a code of conduct would become a part of the school culture and would be easily accepted by all students and staff. Furthermore, I believe a student code of conduct would help in fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect in which everyone knows what is expected of them.

School can often become a haven for youth who are faced with violence at home or in their neighbourhood. Students who can use their teacher and other staff as mentors and role models often find their time at school productive and their learning experience enhanced by the input of these individuals. Without mutual respect between staff and students these relationships are harmed and become unproductive. A student code of conduct that raises the standard of behaviour within a school learning environment will only benefit these relationships and may make them more attainable to students who face more challenges in their personal lives.

Simply put, a safe school is a place where students can receive a high-quality education without being threatened. This ultimately builds the level of trust among students and between students and teachers. When the level of trust goes up in any relationship, the potential for growth and learning – intellectually, emotionally, and physically – also increases. Madam Speaker, this is what we want

for our students in Alberta: a safe, secure environment in which they can learn and grow.

Some of the most important years in a child's life are the years of growing and changing, and this occurs most predominantly at the preschool age and when a child reaches their preteens and teenage years. These are the important years of growing and developing attitudes and behaviours that can last a lifetime. We want to do our best to develop the right attitudes and behaviours for our young people that will catapult them into a lifetime of success and happiness. Negative attitudes in learning environments will not produce these results, Madam Speaker.

Bill 206 is a step in the right direction to address the concerns surrounding school violence and youth crime. I would urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 206.

Madam Speaker, after listening to both sides of the Assembly, I think we've heard a lot of good comments. I would also urge the federal government to tighten their Young Offenders Act, because with the implementation of that act we have seen a lot of changes within our own youth that we never saw before, and I think we need to address that issue nationally, not only provincially.

So with that, Madam Speaker, thank you. I hope everybody supports Bill 206.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to speak a bit here on Bill 206, the School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act. Let's just look for a minute at what a code of conduct is all about. Obviously, there is a formal and an informal code of conduct in this Legislative Assembly, for example, that will permit certain things and not permit other things. Some of it is tradition, wearing a tie and wearing a sports coat, for example.

I'm not sure. If I were to enter this Assembly without a tie on, would I be allowed in? The former Speaker said no. Maybe the current Speaker would. I don't know if there's an actual code of conduct that states, "Thee must wear a tie," or if it's simply a tradition that's been passed on year to year.

I look in the news clippings today where we talk in terms of a code of conduct in the federal Parliament buildings. I know we're dealing with the schools, and I'm getting to the schools. Now, would this activity be allowed in this House, what has been allowed down there? They talk about the New Democrat caucus buying their fashion accessories from Home Depot. It appears that a number of the New Democrat MPs in Ottawa were wearing wing nuts. Why would they wear wing nuts? Well, they said that it was because of some statements made by our esteemed Premier here in the province of Alberta.

When I look at this bill, in the five minutes that I have to speak to it, let's see what it says first. Okay; we go to section 1: the policy regarding the various activities. Let's look at those activities. Physical violence. Yes, none of us want physical violence in the schools. The previous member made reference to Taber. We've seen it happen in schools in Calgary. At the school my niece goes to one of the young fellows that was considered overweight was picked upon. He was knifed. He was knifed to death in the schoolyard. No school condones that type of physical violence. No school is going to condone sexual assault, whether it be a student or a teacher, and we've seen instances of sexual assault occur. Sexual abuse. Vandalism. A teacher or a principal is not going to close their eyes and say that vandalism is fine or, going down, that you can possess a firearm or a dangerous weapon.

I got a call from a constituent the other day. The Edmonton

school board took away their child's right to attend that school forever and ever because that child had a penknife in his wallet. The blade was two inches long. I said to the mother: "I'm sorry. I can't go to bat for you on this one. The boy did wrong." In terms of the violence occurring in the schools, the boy did wrong.

4:40

After I finished speaking to her, it suddenly dawned on me that I had given my oldest granddaughter, who was 10, this seven-in-one tool. It has a screwdriver, a punch, a pair of scissors. Unfortunately, it also has a knife. I thought: "Oh, my God, did I give her a dangerous weapon? If they find it on her, she can be suspended?" Fortunately, her mother had the good sense to tape that blade down so it couldn't be opened. But those types of things can happen.

That's where the situation has got to in terms of school violence and the precautions that have to be taken. School boards themselves very capably set those policies in place, and they should, because it will differ in various parts of the province.

It's the same with dress. Some schools can actually have a uniform code, that everybody has to dress per uniform. In Edmonton it could work, but in rural Alberta, where some of the students have to go home at lunchtime and do some farming – feed the cattle, milk the cows, or whatever – they can't be going with a real nice uniform on. They don't have time to change and that. Sometimes they rush home after school. They don't even have time to change. They've got to go attend to the chores right now. So to work, discretion has to be given to the individual school boards.

I could see an umbrella saying that we encourage school boards to develop the policies and such, but the school boards I think are very capable. If we go back years ago and we talk in terms of a code of conduct, when I was in grade 1, going to a little rural school, do you know what was acceptable? One of the rich kids – I guess the only rich kid in the school. His father owned a gas station and a rural grocery store. His father came back from Duluth in the States. He brought back a switchblade knife as a present for his son who was in grade 4. You couldn't buy them in Canada then. We all thought it was great. The teacher didn't say anything. Back then it was acceptable, but times have changed.

I can recall a teacher of ours that got rather rambunctious. I was in grade 2, so he appeared to me to be quite mature. He was probably only 18 or 19. At recess time we used to go out and pretend that we were Robin Hood. We'd go in the bush, carve off these pointed sticks and go chasing each other. One kid got a stick right in the windpipe, in the neck, and he lay there gasping for breath. We thought he was going to die. He was rushed to the hospital. Obviously, that teacher was fired.

Back in those days they didn't have a code of conduct in that school board. I don't think any of them did. If there was physical violence in the yard, for example, we would scrap it out as youngsters. We would just scrap it out. The best man wins, and I always lost.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. member, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod to close debate on Bill 206.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We really appreciated all the input that we've got from both sides of the House on this particular issue. It's very enlightening to hear different members speak about not only their personal experiences but their own philosophy towards how society should make its own rules and how it should control and govern itself.

We don't often have an opportunity to talk about some of the good

things that we can do for today's society, neither do we have much opportunity to set a firm foundation on how society could conduct itself in the future. Each and every one of us, I'm sure, at times has talked about and also examined some of the things that we all need to do, and that's to concentrate on what's important to us and how we conduct ourselves in our personal lives, in our business lives, and in our public lives.

We've even had times in this Assembly within the last week to examine and to question our own conduct here in this Assembly, and within the last 24 hours specifically we've had to refer to a written agreement between all parties of this Assembly and participate in the discipline required to maintain the decorum that we need to see progress in the business that we do here to make for a better Alberta.

We've been debating the principles of Bill 206, the School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act. In that debate we heard from a number of members why school boards should develop a written code of conduct and how that code of conduct should be developed through the collective involvement of teachers, parents, and students so that a successful code of conduct may be of benefit to the learning environment.

I'm grateful for the testaments and the experiences, some of them very personal, that some hon. members have had in being part of and developing a code of conduct. The fact that much of this was done on a volunteer basis I think is a bonus. It tells me for sure and everyone who is concerned about a safe school that a successful code of conduct properly prepared can work.

We had some questions about why this bill is needed and the fact that some school boards don't have codes of conduct or even policies on rules. Yes, they all have rules, but some boards don't have policies on rules or rule setting or the implementation or the consequences of those rules and the actions of students. Madam Speaker, we are trying to determine the accurate figures on those questions, but generally it is known that about 75 percent of the schools in this province have rules and/or codes of conduct. I'll be pleased to share with the hon. members an update on those figures after our research is done. I'm sure that we'll have an opportunity in Committee of the Whole to talk about actual figures of school boards and schools that do have some set of rules.

But the fact that some have a code of conduct should not prohibit all schools from having a written set of rules. This bill will reaffirm some of the values we wish to preserve for society and pass on to our young people. I just want to make mention of one thing about this bill. I've been receiving some calls, many of them supportive of the bill, but many questions have come forward and say that if a school has a code of conduct and they find that it works and they are happy with it, can they keep it? The answer to that is yes. If they are presently developing one, I'm encouraging parents, I'm encouraging teachers that have called me to keep working on it. This bill will not preclude your hard work.

Just as our own written agreement worked in this Assembly, it can work for our young people too, and we are an example and should be an example to our young people. So, Madam Speaker, in moving second reading of Bill 206, I ask for all members to support this bill.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a second time]

Bill 207 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and to present Bill 207, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act.

Madam Speaker, the object of Bill 207 is to provide local governments in Alberta, whether they be for rural or urban municipalities, with access to a portion of provincial personal income tax in order to create a more stable and a more predictable funding framework between the province and local governments and to provide our municipalities across Alberta with an enhanced ability to meet their priorities on a medium- and a long-term basis in accordance with fulfilling their significant roles and responsibilities.

The bill is presented as a positive opportunity to discuss some of the issues that are very much affecting our province today. The bill is put forward as a discussion opportunity, an opportunity to look at some of the messages that have come to us as legislators from provincial associations like the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, where they have clearly outlined the problems they face as municipalities when, in the context of the last decade, municipal grants have been reduced substantially, and along with that has been downloaded responsibility from the provincial government, leaving our municipalities not knowing what the long-term funding framework looks like for them, therefore unable to deal with and deliver the kinds of services that we need in our local communities.

4:50

On many occasions when I have been privileged to meet with groups within our municipalities around Alberta, I have talked to them about the reality of our world today, where we have very much global trade, global communications, global access to communication and information. However, when it comes right down to it, we live in our local community, whether that be our town or our neighbourhood or our city. It really doesn't matter the form it might take. What matters is that that is the environment where we raise our families, where our children go to school, where we return to at the end of each day, that local community which is so important. In Alberta that local community is defined by a municipal structure, and we believe that a new partnership needs to be forged between the provincial government and our municipalities, a true partnership because of the level of maturity and growth that our municipalities have reached in this past decade certainly, but it's time for a new arrangement.

This bill suggests one mechanism by which that partnership agreement could be structured, matching both roles and responsibilities for our municipalities with the resources, both fiscal and economic, to build the communities, but we don't for one moment believe this is the only option. This legislation was built on the basis of the legislative framework that exists in the province of Manitoba, but there are certainly other options that could look at this subject of revenue sharing with kind of a 21st century perspective.

I've been around this provincial government long enough to recall a former Deputy Premier and actually the MLA for Barrhead, Dr. Horner, who served this Legislature very, very effectively as the MLA for Barrhead, but he let slip a comment many years ago, in the mid-70s, that in fact the municipalities were the children of the province. In fact, it was probably a very accurate statement, and it was a statement that I think prevails today with the provincial government: this whole notion that the municipalities exist and have given to them their allowance, if you like, in a more parent/child relationship as opposed to what we think our municipalities are capable of, which is a far more mature relationship, reflecting certainly the very sophisticated, corporate in many cases, municipal structures that are now in place. It's time for a new partnership, a

time for a new vision, a time to move away from a '70s perspective into a 21st century perspective with our municipalities and become the true partners that we can.

Bill 207 proposes to allocate a percentage of personal income tax revenues to Alberta municipalities on a per capita basis beginning in the fiscal year 2000-2001. This would allow the province to eliminate unstable and unpredictable grant programs and to provide a framework for increased accountability for our municipalities, responsiveness, efficiency, and fairness between the province and local governments.

Bill 207 is just one component of the Official Opposition's initiative to create a new partnership between the province and local governments by developing a system of, number one, predictable funding arrangements with our municipalities; secondly, clarifying this whole issue of the division of powers between the province and the municipalities, the roles and the responsibilities that we expect for our municipalities; and finally, allowing local governments to determine infrastructure priorities required to sustain their economic and human development within their own boundaries.

As I indicated, Madam Speaker, Bill 207 is modeled after the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act in the province of Manitoba. Unfortunately, because Bill 207 is a private member's bill, it is restricted from having a number of important elements, including a mechanism through which the municipalities would be able to access the income tax base. As all members are aware, private members' bills cannot deal specifically with money issues since nongovernment members are unable to introduce a money bill in the Legislature. Nonetheless, what Bill 207 does do is provide that framework for a discussion. Certainly it's one that's generating a lot of discussion with municipalities around the province and generating discussion with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the AAMD and C and, as well, even most recently with the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, with whom we had the privilege to meet in the last couple of weeks.

So that's the background on the mechanism to actually transfer, if you like, a portion of income tax to the municipalities, which, of course, we can't do because it's a private member's bill. It's not included in the text, but it's certainly part of the overall discussion framework, and I think it's an important focus for the discussion.

Funding arrangements between the province and local governments are an important component in clarifying the roles and responsibilities and establishing clear lines of accountability to citizens. The Official Opposition wants to encourage an informed participatory debate with our citizens and with all members of the Legislature as a means of ensuring and looking ahead to our local governments and giving them some promise of a new relationship that might emerge as a result. We certainly encourage all Members of the Legislative Assembly, as well as all Albertans, to express their views and to continue to express their interest.

We then move to the three elements which we think are important in this debate. The first one, in terms of the policy of which this is part of what we've been building across the province, is this whole issue of stable and predictable funding. I thought I might quote from the Alberta Urban Municipalities' initiatives proposed for the provincial budget which was put out in February of this year, February 2000. This was a statement of offering a new perspective and a solution, if you like, to the Provincial Treasurer as he prepared for his budget. I'd like to quote the AUMA when they say:

The province should include, as part of their business plan, the creation of a legislative framework that would give municipalities access to a stable and long-term source of revenue to ensure self-sufficiency and sustainability. Continued reliance on the province for grants and other programs prevents municipalities from becoming

self-sufficient. Access to a stable source of revenue is the best way to ensure municipalities remain sustainable during high growth periods or economic downturns.

Thus, Bill 207 is a product of the initiative of the Official Opposition to forge this new partnership.

Adequate fiscal capacity at the local level is the only way a municipality can control the services that they offer and thus be held accountable for their expenditures. Local governments must be fiscally responsible to their citizens, but in order to be so, they must have access to stable and predictable sources of revenue that will allow them to meet these roles and responsibilities that have been outlined and shared and agreed to between them and the province in an efficient and effective manner.

5:00

In the past decade local government responsibilities have exceeded and grown faster than the opportunities to raise revenues from local sources have. This has been exacerbated, especially over the last eight years, by the provincial government's unilateral reductions to provincial grants and the intrusion into the local property tax field through the provincial education property tax. According to Statistics Canada, between 1992 and '98 general and specific grants from the Alberta government to municipalities declined by \$402 million, or 48 percent, the second highest level of decline in any province in Canada. When increased responsibilities are given to or downloaded, as we know, onto local government, it is only fair that adequate funding to support these responsibilities should follow, yet Alberta's property tax base has been fragmented by the province's reliance on the education property tax. This creates problems of accountability and uncertainty for our municipalities.

According to Statistics Canada the Alberta government collected nearly 46 percent of the real and general property taxes generated in the province during 1998, the third highest percentage amongst all Canadian provinces. Meanwhile, in addition to that, the provincial education property tax burden on residential properties in Alberta increased by \$87 million, or the 13 percent that we have referred to frequently, between 1995 and 1999. That's an increase in the provincial education property tax of 13 percent, or \$87 million. Our municipalities are well aware of that increase, as are our local property tax payers.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Provincial revenue sources are growing at a much faster rate than local government revenue sources. We're certainly well aware that our municipalities are not talking about tax cuts in the same way that the provincial government is. Yet if we look between 1992-3 and 1999-2000, Alberta's own share of revenues grew by a cumulative 51 percent, or an average of 7.3 percent growth per year provincially. Between the same period Alberta's personal income tax revenues grew by a cumulated 78 percent, or an average of 11 percent per year.

On the other hand, the wide disparity between the fiscal capacity and responsibility of the Alberta government and local governments is clear. The revenue-sharing mechanisms within Bill 207 would assist in reducing this disparity and ensure that the fiscal capacity more adequately responds with the roles and the responsibilities of our local municipalities.

In the response to the provincial budget the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association said:

An increase in the infrastructure dollars for municipalities is welcome news, however, short term funding is no substitute for long term planning.

This is from our own Urban Municipalities Association. "The Government . . . has not addressed the need for long term financial solutions."

In short, Mr. Speaker, we believe that a predictable funding framework for our municipalities alongside a clear and defined role of whose responsibility is whose between the province and the municipalities is long overdue in this province. It is time to reflect that our municipalities have grown up from the childlike treatment that they get from the provincial government, and it is now time for a new partnership that's reflective of the reality as well as the hope for the future of our municipalities.

In terms of the third component of what we in the Official Opposition have been talking about with our municipalities and our important municipal associations, the issue of stable, predictable, and longer term infrastructure planning dollars is very, very important. While the provincial government certainly opened up, to the credit of the Municipal Affairs minister, some important dollars for infrastructure in the last year, unfortunately that doesn't give the longer term planning framework that must be in place for our municipalities.

We know from a development point of view that municipalities have to plan subdivisions seven to 10 years out, yet if they only have the infrastructure plan for two or three years or even less, there's not a match between the services that they need to be performed and the resources they are given to perform them and to perform and plan them and manage them effectively. Add on top of that the down-loading from the provincial government in terms of increasing the responsibilities of municipalities, and you have the clash of those two things coming together and major concerns about whether the infrastructure planning is coming at an appropriate level and whether in fact we might be wasting taxpayers' dollars.

Let me quote the Auditor General, who has certainly noted this trend in his report and who made the following comments on this issue of infrastructure planning. He said:

Capital expenditures do not occur in isolation – they create a stream of subsequent operating costs that are often not fully recognized at the time of the original investment . . . I believe the quality of the government's capital planning initiative is critical to managing these expenditures in a way that establishes an equilibrium between legitimate program requirements and funding provided. Proper planning will make the difference between a reactive mode, which this government has forced municipalities into and which merely distributes allocated funds, and a predictive mode,

which anticipates and justifies funding required.

That's the kind of mature relationship we believe our municipalities deserve, and I urge all members to support Bill 207 and invite all members to participate in the debate, which we will certainly be sharing with the urban and rural municipalities associations and the many, many municipalities including our major cities of Edmonton and Calgary as the debate ensues.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to rise today and speak about government support regarding our municipalities, what we consider the pillar, the foundation of this province. Certainly working with the municipalities is going to be our key to developing a stronger province, and we all very well appreciate it.

First of all, I'm a little surprised at the content of Bill 207 in that to me it certainly appears to be very close to being a money bill, one that indeed is appropriating money fairly directly. It was my understanding that private members were not to be dealing with money bills. Nevertheless, we do have the bill here, so ultimately I'll be very, very pleased to be involved in discussions regarding this particular bill.

I listened intently to the hon. Leader of the Opposition and with great interest, because indeed we are involved in ongoing discussions with municipalities, with our colleagues in the Alberta Urban Municipalities as well as the AAMD and C. The municipalities do face challenges. We acknowledge that. Indeed, listening to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, I was impressed by the identification of her presentation. She was very rich in challenges but very, very short on solutions. The solution that came forward was simply to add more money. That's very similar to the usual solutions that come forward from across the way, so I guess I shouldn't have been too surprised regarding this.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to get into some depth on our workings with the municipal organizations, and I would like to be able to do it all in one presentation, so at this time I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:10 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 5, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/04/05

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please be seated or find your way to that.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 11

Health Care Protection Act

[Adjourned debate April 4: Dr. Nicol]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to enter into the debate on Bill 11 at second reading. This is obviously a very interesting piece of legislation that people from across the province and in fact from across the country have been talking about for many weeks.

Mr. Speaker, it's not surprising that many people are talking about it. Albertans cherish their health system. They take it very seriously. As a former minister of health I understand how seriously they do take it, and as a former Minister of Community Development I know how important this is to our seniors population. Albertans want good, quality medical care for themselves and their loved ones. I would suggest that every member in this Assembly wants good, quality health care for their loved ones.

That's why it's important that we discuss this bill rationally, logically, and seriously, without resorting to exaggerations and misinformation. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, in many cases that has not happened. In the last months I've heard dozens of inaccurate statements made in this Assembly and outside about Bill 11, and I'd like to address just a few of them tonight.

One such statement is that the goal of this bill is a two-tier health system and private, for-profit hospitals, quoted December 12, 1999, Edmonton-McClung. Wrong. This bill specifically outlaws private hospitals, queue-jumping, and physicians charging patients for insured services.

Under this legislation there will be no so-called second tier of health care designed to cater to those willing to pay out of their own pocket. The legislation bans such a system from developing. I find it interesting that an apparent quote from the Leader of the Opposition actually would put in a second tier if private, for-profit hospitals were allowed to operate in this province outside of the public system, doctors opted out. You would have under that scenario the ability to have a second tier. This bill, Bill 11, clearly outlaws a second tier in health care.

Another hon. member suggested that Albertans would need to purchase private health insurance as a result of this legislation. This was Edmonton-Centre in March of this year. In her speech last night the Leader of the Opposition continued this fear mongering by saying that patients will be required to pay for enhanced services with either a credit card or by purchasing private insurance. This legislation clearly prohibits anyone forcing or coercing patients into paying for enhanced services. It lays out solid guidelines for how enhanced services could be presented to the patient.

There is also no indication that this bill in any way would expand the need for private health insurance. In fact, it affirms the Alberta

government's unequivocal commitment to the Canada Health Act, and it prevents physicians from charging patients or making people pay for medically necessary health services. To suggest to our seniors, many of whom are on fixed income, that they should adjust their financial plans because they will need to purchase private health insurance is completely irresponsible.

Equally irresponsible was the suggestion that seniors are being used as a scapegoat for Bill 11. This government has demonstrated clear commitment to our seniors. That's why we have the most extensive seniors' benefits in Canada. That's why seniors are moving to our province in very large numbers. That's why in two years running we had almost 2,000 seniors move into this province. That's net, Mr. Speaker.

However, we can't ignore changing demographics. To ignore changing demographics would be irresponsible. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: There's a bit of confusion this evening. We have two people who want to enter into a dialogue or a debate, and we've only one hon. member who's been officially recognized. So if the others could go outside the Chamber and carry on their debate, we'll be able to hear better the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Debate Continued

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, to ignore the changing demographics in the province would be irresponsible. We need to prepare for those changing demographics. That's why this government led a study to review the impact of an aging population on our society, so that we could plan in areas of health, in areas of housing, many other support areas for those changing demographics. That's responsible.

I find it interesting that members of the opposition, I understand, are passing out Friends of Medicare brochures, which contain many erroneous statements, grossly inaccurate. For example, it says that under Bill 11 major surgeries will be performed in private hospitals. Bill 11 clearly says that they will not. Private hospitals, first of all, are banned by this legislation. Secondly, the bill clearly says that major surgeries will only be performed in a public institution.

The brochure also says that the government is assuming that private health care delivery is cheaper than publicly delivered health services. That's not the case. Bill 11 simply gives our regional health authorities one more tool to deliver important health services to the people they serve. That's why they have to decide if they will use a private contractor for a service on a cost analysis as well as show that there's a need for the service.

This brochure also stated that cataract surgery waiting times were longer in Calgary than other parts of the province. On a per capita basis – and these are facts; this isn't fantasy. The fact is that on a per capita basis there are more cataract surgeries done in Calgary than there are in Edmonton. The fact is that Albertans living in regions where more surgeries are contracted out do not wait longer than other regions. These are facts, Mr. Speaker, and you know we're willing to back our facts up.

Many other inaccurate statements have been made in this Assembly: for one, that private surgical clinics would be subject to less cost controls, assertions that Bill 11 won't lead to cost savings, suggestions that the Premier has backed away from saying that this legislation would result in cost savings. This is simply wrong. It is very clear in the legislation that no regional health authority will be allowed to establish a contract with a private surgical facility without

a clear, demonstrated cost saving. That is fact, Mr. Speaker, not fantasy, not whimsy. It also makes it very clear that through Bill 11 there'll be firm cost controls on private surgical facilities. The accountability is there and so are the savings if indeed this occurs.

Another statement is that Bill 11 would put in motion the privatization of health care in our province and that the government wouldn't be able to control it. Wrong again. In fact, this legislation puts very strong measures in place so that government can regulate and control the role of the private sector in our health system, something that was not done by the Leader of the Opposition when many of these private clinics came into being under her watch when she was health minister. [interjection] Oh, yes, it did happen under me. An hon. member mentions this. [interjections] Yes, I was the health minister when the federal government fined this province, took precious health dollars away from us because that activity had not occurred. We did address the issue, and we did come to an agreement with the federal government that agreed to 12 principles under which they would operate.

8:10

This inaccurate statement was made by the Leader of the Official Opposition in the Assembly on February 28 this year, and I'm going to quote it directly because this is a serious inaccuracy, I believe.

This is the government that inherited a cost-controlled health . . . system in this province when they took over in '92, this is the government that rapidly cut . . . close to 20 percent of that health care sector, and this is the same government that now, realizing the error of their ways, is throwing money back at health care, trying to buy back support from the people of this province.

Well, there are several inaccuracies in that one statement. Firstly, the costs that we inherited in 1992, I can tell you, were increasing at an alarming rate: 10 to 12 percent a year, far beyond our population growth and inflation rates. There were over 200 administrative health boards scattered across this province with overlapping borders and responsibility, hardly what you would call inheriting a cost-controlled health system.

Secondly – and this is most important – health budget reductions from 1993 to '95 were never 20 percent, and they certainly weren't 30 percent as the Leader of the Opposition incorrectly stated in her speech last night. The most the health budget was reduced was just under 13 percent, and that funding was quickly restored and grew from there. Restored by this provincial government.

How can you trust . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. [interjections] No, no, no, no. He did; she did. Whatever. Let us just sit here and listen to the speaker that is speaking at the moment. The only one that's recognized is the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. If you have a point of order, rise on the point of order when the opportunity reaches you, but in the meantime let's keep our counsel to ourselves and listen to the speeches. If you feel the need to vent, then go out on the balcony and do so there.

The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Debate Continued

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I again ask how you can trust an opposition that can't get facts that are so readily accessed right. How can you trust an opposition that would use those figures so inaccurately?

If you want to talk about health funding, maybe the finger should be pointed at the federal government. Federal spending on the Canada health and social transfers has been reduced dramatically in recent years, to the point that federal transfers today pay for 13 percent, 13 cents of every dollar that we spend in this province. Alberta has absorbed these federal reductions. We didn't pass them on to our health authorities and to our citizens, and we've managed to boost our health spending significantly in those years. I wish the opposition in their tabling of letters every day would table the letters they've written to the federal minister, Mr. Rock, requesting him to fully restore the CHST to 1994 levels.

This government is not throwing money at the health system. Our health spending is being done carefully with clear plans to real demands, and we're doing it without the support of the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many inaccuracies that we're going to have to deal with some of them, to debate this at another time, but I want to talk just briefly about the one where they're talking about Bill 11 amounting to a taxpayer subsidy of the private sector. Wrong again. This shows not only a fundamental misunderstanding of our health system but also of our economy. Every doctor's office in this province is essentially a private clinic. It is a private business, and it is paid on a fee-for-service basis by the Alberta government. This doesn't seem to be considered a taxpayer subsidy by the opposition. It works the same way when government uses the private sector for any services. That's where we get into the little economics lesson. It's tax dollars going to a private business to perform a service, and that's what it would be and is today as private surgical clinics are contracted to perform services.

I wanted to get into the issue of the definition of a hospital and a surgical suite. That has been covered in this Legislature so clearly by our Premier and our health minister over the past days and weeks that I don't want to take the precious time I have, but I would again repeat the invitation that if you don't know what a hospital is, go visit one. If you don't know what a surgical suite is, go visit one. Get informed and then tell Albertans the facts.

There are no code words for private hospitals because there will be no private hospitals under this government's watch. Article 2(2) of Bill 11 quite clearly says that "No person shall provide a major surgical service . . . in Alberta except in a public hospital." Very clear. The first article in the bill says that no person in Alberta shall operate a private, for-profit hospital. What could be clearer?

There is another error or inaccuracy that was in a Liberal news release. I don't usually read them. I don't know what drew me to that one. It stipulated that the bill stipulates that once the provincial government makes a decision, no one can challenge it. Well, I have to suggest that this possibly comes from the privative clause in Bill 11. I don't understand why people who have been in this Legislature this long and have dealt with as many statutes as we have in this Legislature over time don't understand what a privative clause is.

It is a common clause that's used in many, many pieces of legislation, but let me tell you what it does in this legislation, because that's what's important. It ensures that if the minister of health rejects a contract because it might have a negative effect on the public health system, the courts could not force the minister to approve the contract. Are the opposition against that? Do they not understand that recourse to the courts continues to be available if the minister doesn't follow the requirements of the act or makes a decision that's unsupportable? Ministerial discretion can always be reviewed when a minister exceeds their jurisdiction. I understand them not understanding ministerial jurisdiction, and I hope that they never have the opportunity to.

There's been a lot of discussion in the Legislature about Saskatch-

ewan law. Statements have been made comparing their legislation and ours. The one that really caused me to have a lot of concerns for the opposition's ability to understand this legislation was the one that said that Saskatchewan's law protects medicare and Alberta's Bill 11 would undermine it. I believe that statement was made by Edmonton-Glenora, and that shocked me. In fact, the two laws are very similar. Peter Lown, chair of the Alberta Law Reform Institute, did an independent review of both pieces of legislation and found that they did do similar things and that in many ways, many ways, Mr. Speaker, our legislation is even more detailed and more explicit. Our legislation expressly prohibits the operation of private hospitals while the Saskatchewan legislation does not.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry, hon. minister. There are some people on the front benches of both sides who seem to anticipate their opportunity. One has not yet had his opportunity. The other has already spoken. We wish them both now to respect that only one member gets to speak on this at a time, and that member is the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

8:20

Debate Continued

MRS. McCLELLAN: I could talk about NAFTA and the inability to understand NAFTA, but I tabled a NAFTA review in the Legislature. I want to tell you what this legislation does. I want to talk about what it actually does without rhetoric, without emotion. It does several things. First, it affirms the Alberta government's solid commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act. These are principles that Albertans hold dear, and we have no intention of violating them.

Secondly, it puts a strong legal framework for us to regulate private health care deliverers, the legislation that has never been in place. It allows the minister to review and approve or deny any private health clinic. The College of Physicians and Surgeons has told us we need that. The federal minister has told us they need that.

Thirdly, this legislation gives our regional health authorities one more tool to use in managing health care delivery in their region. One more tool.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I believe Calgary-McCall is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. SHARIFF: Under *Beauchesne* 482 I'm wondering if the hon. member will entertain a question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member only has to say yes or no and doesn't have to give any reasons in the 10 seconds that may remain in her time.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'll be pleased to answer the hon. member's question immediately after I conclude.

Debate Continued

MRS. McCLELLAN: I want to tell you again how important it is to debate this bill fairly and reasonably. Albertans deserve that, and we who should hold the respect of the people who put us in this Legislature should abide by that.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. [interjections]

The chair has been called upon to stop the interruptions a number of times and would appreciate it if the people who are showing sort of a gamey attitude to try and join in this would restrain themselves until their proper turn.

Right now we have recognized the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. Twenty-two years ago, Mr. Speaker, I fell in love. From our first introduction I was hooked. The intricacies of this living entity bonded me to her. From the complexity of human anatomy to pharmacology to the simplicity of holding a hand and making a bed I was destined to share a journey with our health care system that has led me to hospitals, health units, cities and communities, and finally to the Legislature of this province.

As a registered nurse and MLA I have seen the system inside and out and know intimately her strengths and weaknesses, complexities and vulnerability. We have shared and witnessed so much together: the ecstasy of birth, the peace and agony of death, the unpredictable power of the human spirit. During my journey with her I have gathered data, written briefs, followed individual cases, acted as an advocate for health care workers and patients alike, and debated the issues of health care around boardroom tables and in the Legislature of our province and country. What this system has taught me cannot be summarized in this short debate.

Recently, as many of you know, a tragedy in our family took me back to the bedside of this great system, and once again I experienced the great compassion and caring of the public health care system. To the staff at the Medicine Hat and Foothills hospitals and the paramedics who cared for our niece Tara and our family in the final days of her life, I want to formally express our gratitude and deepest appreciation. With these reflections on our journey together being made, it is of no surprise that fundamentally I believe the public health care system is as vital and sacred to our society in this province and country as the system of democracy each of us is here entrusted to preserve.

I have also come to believe and learn that sometimes, perhaps most times, Mr. Speaker, the politics of an issue can be a consuming beast, and in this sense I cannot say this evening that I have come to love this system the same way in which I loved the health care system. In health care when we were focused on a problem and were required to stabilize a patient, all members of the team pulled together to find that solution or cause and make the plan work. That is not the case when it comes to dealing with the complexity of issues and problems that face the system as a whole. Even though I'm an experienced health care professional, the barrage of government announcements accompanying the release of Bill 11 have left me feeling overwhelmed by rhetoric. Underneath the polished words of ads and news releases Bill 11 prompts more questions than solutions, more complications than clarity, more politics than sound public policy. Bill 11 if passed will rock the foundations of our public health care system, both Alberta's and Canada's. Of this I am certain.

In my conversations with constituents and citizens at rallies, meetings, town halls, on sidewalks, and in homes across this province I've encountered a great deal of unease in Alberta from many who are waiting for the other shoe to drop, people who have more questions than answers, more trepidation than anticipation. As I contemplate this bill and look ahead to a crucial year for our health care system, I feel this challenge is one I have been preparing for all of my professional life.

Let me make the following general observations about Bill 11. Observation one: there is madness in the method. Access is a critical issue in our current health care debate, but there are no provincial or

regional figures available as to how many Albertans are currently waiting for surgery or consults, because the province does not require regions to publish these numbers. Furthermore, there are no published figures on how many public hospital beds are currently closed and could be opened with the funds proposed to flow to the private health facilities. Without this data Albertans are kept in the dark about how accessible our public system truly is or could be.

Over the past year Edmonton-Riverview has fielded many calls from citizens that feel frustrated by the public health care system. Many complain they've been denied access as they wait for many months to see specialists or have surgery. Others feel they are being manipulated at their most vulnerable state, when they are fearful for their own health or the health of their loved ones. An accident victim or cancer patient can wait two weeks for a hospital MRI or pay hundreds of dollars to have one done immediately by a private provider. This is just one example of many. A weakened system is vulnerable for change, and now that the government has destabilized the public health care system and a growing number of Albertans cannot access it, the stage is set for the introduction of a private tier of care. There is madness in the method, Mr. Speaker.

Observation two: things are not as they seem. The government maintains it is committed to the public health care system despite the savage, unplanned cuts it implemented in the system between 1993 and 1996. Thirty percent of the public hospital budget in Alberta was cut during this period according to Dr. Robert Evans, a renowned health researcher with the University of British Columbia. Now what they propose is a private health care policy in accompanying Bill 11 so that we can regulate facilities that are able to do surgeries requiring an overnight stay, as stated in the government's own brochure.

8:30

Bill 11 is titled the Health Care Protection Act, but neither the bill nor any of the accompanying government press releases or brochures actually tells Albertans what the mandate or scope of the bill's application will be or how it will achieve true reform of the system, how it will address the critical and growing shortage of qualified health professionals, including registered nurses, registered psychiatric nurses, licensed practical nurses, and physicians. Nothing in this bill or in the materials released conclusively proves how this bill will save money or be more efficient than the public delivery of surgical services.

Commitments that Bill 11 signifies this government's support of the Canada Health Act also ring hollow when you contemplate that the definition of what is medically necessary is being redefined as we speak. Would advancements in medical care in the future only be offered as enhanced services for extra charges? The government determines by an order of the cabinet what services will be deinsured. No public consultation and no debate. Such services could then be offered by a private facility as an enhanced service under Bill 11. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that this government has never had nor do they have today a long-term plan and vision for a sustainable public health care system. Things are not as they seem.

Observation three. It is our system. I am committed to working towards a health care system that will serve all Albertans equally well. Achieving this will take vision, courage, commitment, and dedication from all elected representatives regardless of their party affiliations. Bill 11 does not achieve reform of the system, and Bill 11 is not a comprehensive plan. This government does not have nor have they ever had a comprehensive plan for the preservation and reform of our public health care system. Bill 11 simply offers a narrow option on how to contract surgical services.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm sorry to interrupt you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Edmonton-Riverview is able to speak on her own behalf and needs no prompting from any quarter, particularly the quarter it's coming from. Several of the members who are moved to make comments have not yet spoken and will await their turn. Please, you wait your turn. Right now the turn is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's without interruption.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. Bill 11 offers a narrow option today on how the contracting of surgical services would occur. Its application and interpretation in the future, particularly given the statutory authority of the minister to decide what to approve and the explicit denial of any legal appeal of his decision, will have much broader implications.

It is our system, and it is in its interest that I would like to work with this government to truly strengthen, sustain, protect, and preserve our public health care system in ways that Bill 11 cannot. It is our system, Mr. Speaker.

Observation four. We need a plan. More than ever before we need a plan to guide our priorities, planning, and budgeting of health care in Alberta. Every day inside the system professionals discuss, debate, and implement comprehensive plans for the patients in their care. Meanwhile, we who are entrusted to care for and be the stewards of the system as a whole focus on an ill-conceived bill that in the end doesn't strengthen the system but only distracts us from addressing what the system really needs. To use an analogy, the government's suggestion that Bill 11 is a solution to the system would be like a doctor suggesting that the splinting of a fracture on a patient who is hemorrhaging from a femoral aneurism will save that patient's life.

Priorization and planning for the current and future needs of the health care system is what we need to be debating this evening, not Bill 11. We need a plan. To this end let me outline the fundamentals of what such a plan would have to address, fundamentals which Bill 11 does not.

Number one, information. Concise, consistent collection and public release of information relative to Albertans' needs and the utilization of health care: including the number of citizens waiting for consults, diagnostic tests, procedures, and surgery; the geographical distribution of poverty, disabilities, mental health illnesses, and environmental hazards, and the accompanying utilization rates of health care services as a whole; the number of operational beds, both real and potential.

We have had since 1995, when the government cut Alberta health care and dramatically reduced the collection of information, a substantive decrease in the amount of information that can be utilized for decision-making in our system. This must change. Bill 11 does not enable us to have at our access any better information for decision-making. In fact, it restricts us, Mr. Speaker, from the information necessary by making these private clinics not accessible to the public under FOIP.

Number two, Bill 11 does nothing to increase the democratic accountability of governance in the system. What is required is the election of not only governance bodies but the monitoring, investigative evaluation of standard committees governing our public health care system, and the accompanying elimination of a long-standing practice of this government to appoint partisan MLAs to chair committees. Bill 11 does nothing to take us in that direction, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 11 further does nothing to address the need for a comprehensive long-term plan for the health workforce, including five- to 10-year commitments at least for educational seats in the faculties of nursing, medicine, pharmacy, psychology, and psychiatry. Bill 11 does nothing to assist us in developing labour union strategies that would assist the system's negotiation and mediation mechanisms for the successful and timely negotiation of collective agreements and the resolution of labour/management issues. Bill 11 does not provide us with comprehensive commitments or strategies for the prevention of workplace injuries.

Bill 11 does nothing to establish equitable mechanisms that would formalize and facilitate the utilization and accessibility of alternative health practitioners such as chiropractors, massage therapists, herbologists, and acupuncturists. Bill 11 does not provide concrete strategies and mechanisms that would focus on the reduction of illness and the promotion of health at both macro and micro levels, such strategies that could target issues like the high incidence of illness, disabilities, low birth weights among our aboriginal population; the growing incidence of mental illness in our child, adolescent, and adult populations; the environmental hazards that continue to grow in our province, like intensive livestock operations and herbicide use and the accompanying health impacts; and poverty, the addressment of its roots and impacts on health care and other public programs Bill 11 does nothing to address.

Bill 11 does not provide a concrete plan for the construction, demolition, and sale of our public health care facilities.

Bill 11 does not provide concrete strategies that offer tangible evidence on how to strengthen the provision of public health care, home care, palliative care, and the accompanying impact on the utilization of our acute care system. Bill 11 does not provide strategies for the full disclosure and cost containment of pharmaceutical and diagnostic costs, an area that has consistently risen and which the government chooses to do nothing to address.

Bill 11 does not provide for the full disclosure of the government's position and submissions relative to health care at the social union, internal trade, NAFTA, and MAI negotiations. On this point let us be clear. It is not the federal government or the Alberta government's interpretation of NAFTA that is in question. It is the interpretation under NAFTA by the U.S. trade representative's office that must be sought. If the government really wants to reassure Albertans that American companies will not be able to utilize Bill 11 to set up shop, they should get a letter from the U.S. trade representative's office that explicitly relinquishes their right to apply or utilize Bill 11 to expand the American market share in the Canadian and Alberta health care system. That is what is needed.

8:40

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, there is madness in the method. Things are not as they seem. It is our system. We need a plan. If the government is prepared to scrap Bill 11 and commit itself to establishing a comprehensive plan for the public health care system, which I dearly love, they will have my commitment to work to help them achieve this goal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity this evening to provide my thoughts at this initial time on this bill.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, since the election of 1997 health care has been the predominant area of calls, letters, and concerns received in my constituency office. I have remarked often to people that health care policy will be the most important policy item for governments for the next 20 to 30 years. I want to say from the

outset that there's a lot of reaction and concern that has been expressed to me with respect to Bill 11, and I hope to give some information on those specifics in my comments.

From my perspective, the most positive aspect to come out of the debate on Bill 11 is that it has caused Canadians to think and to talk about where health care is going in our country. Health care issues are not unique to Red Deer or to Alberta but to all of Canada. Health is a very personal issue, because ultimately our health is the most important thing to us as individuals. As governments we dedicate enormous amounts of resources to health care and prevention of illness.

I want to make several points this evening. The first point is obvious, yet we often forget it. The point is that delivery of health care has changed since the inception of medicare some 30 years ago. In 1978 my wife was pregnant, and the doctor suspected twins. At that time we lived in Brandon, Manitoba, and the doctor suggested we should go for an ultrasound two and a half hours away in Winnipeg because it was the only ultrasound in the province. We opted not to go, and yes, we did have twins. Today ultrasound tests are performed routinely in every centre, and in fact parents often want to have pictures of the ultrasound for their albums.

A recent *Maclean's* article noted that 38 years ago the system did not have to pay for CAT scans, cardiac surgery on people in their 70s, or expensive and complicated chemotherapy treatments for cancer patients. These technologies and abilities just did not exist. Today all these technologies are available. Not only are CAT scans available in every hospital, but we now have magnetic resonance imaging, or MRIs, available as diagnostic tools. Where 10 years ago we made do without MRIs, today we have lineups waiting to use them. Not long ago cataract surgery required several days' stay in the hospital. Today it's over in 20 minutes and you go home.

Not only has delivery changed, our attitudes have changed as well. That same *Maclean's* article refers to the McDonaldization of medical care. People today demand convenience, 24-hour service, and prompt cures. The second point is that health care delivery is going to continue to change. Not only has it changed over the past 30 years, but also it will continue, and the rate of change will accelerate. For instance, gene therapy is only in its infancy, but with a human genome mapping almost complete, this will lead to therapies that most of us cannot begin to predict.

The main reason I am making these two points is that the way health care will be delivered in the future is going to change. For any government or organization or association to suggest the status quo should be maintained is simply not being realistic. We need to continue to discuss the issues because of the changing dynamics.

As we discuss Bill 11, I think it would be useful to review some legislation and terms. It starts with the Canada Health Act. The Canada Health Act is all about cash contribution to the provinces from the federal government. It sets out the criteria the provinces must meet in order to qualify for a cash contribution from the federal government. These criteria include the five principles often talked about with respect to medicare; namely, public administration, comprehensiveness, universality, portability, and accessibility.

The Canada Health Act also sets out some of the services that are considered medically necessary that the provinces must provide. There is a lot of confusion around the terms "medically necessary" and "insured services." Basically, the provinces must provide medically necessary services and pay for them on behalf of their citizens. The provinces may insure services that are not medically necessary, and in fact Alberta does just that.

Under the Canada Health Act the federal government may withhold money from a province if it deems that the province is not complying with the act. At one time the federal government

contributed 50 cents out of every dollar to the provinces for the delivery of health care. In Alberta they now contribute 13 cents out of every dollar. The Alberta government is responsible for delivering health services within Alberta. For this budget year we have allocated \$5.6 billion to Health and Wellness. That represents 30 percent of our entire budget. That is more than \$15 million per day. Of the \$5.6 billion, the regional health authorities and cancer boards get \$3 billion. Payments to physicians for their services are an additional \$1 billion.

It is important to have an accurate picture of how the money flows. The provincial government through Alberta Health sends the money to the regional health authority to provide the services in their region. They make the determination within parameters provided by Alberta Health as to how that money is spent. Physicians are paid from Alberta Health, not the regional health authority. The David Thompson health region, in Red Deer, which I am from, will receive a total of \$166 million this year, an increase of \$12 million from the 1999 budget year. This past year they also received approval to replace the Richard Parsons auxiliary hospital, plus capital funding to add an additional 15 continuing care beds in our region.

This background is important because it is often not part of the debate, but it is fundamental to some of the points that are being made, and the context is important in understanding Bill 11. There are many other activities and plans and developments going on that are probably far more important than Bill 11 itself, yet this gets lost in the discussion.

With respect to Bill 11 I am going to refer to the petition which I presented in the Legislature on March 1. It contained more than 5,000 names, mainly from the central Alberta area. I want to read the wording for you. It says:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta reaffirm our support for the five basic principles upon which Medicare was built: accessibility, universality, portability, comprehensiveness and public administration. We urge the Government of Alberta to uphold the letter and spirit of these principles.

We also oppose two-tier health care and urge the government of Alberta to maintain an adequate system of public hospitals and to not permit the development of private hospitals in the province of Alberta.

The petition has three main points. First, the signers reaffirm their support for the five principles of the Canada Health Act. The Alberta government has on many occasions confirmed its support for the principles of the Canada Health Act, and it does so again in the preamble to Bill 11.

The second element in the petition is the opposition to two-tier health care. In section 3 of Bill 11 it reads:

No person shall give or accept any money or other valuable consideration for the purpose of giving any person priority for the receipt of an insured surgical service.

Simply put, the province will pay for all insured and medically necessary surgical services regardless of where that service is delivered. You will not have to pay extra for that service. Where the debate gets confusing is going back to the definition of medically required services and insured services under the Canada Health Act. If you want to receive non medically necessary services such as hair removal or chelation treatment, you will have to pay for those yourself, but again, if it is medically necessary, you will not have to pay other than through your taxes of course.

8:50

The third element of the petition encourages the government to not permit the development of private hospitals. Section 1 of the bill reads, "No person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." From my reading it seems clear that all elements of the petition are

complied with. There may be some disagreement on what some of the definitions mean, but it is my opinion that the principles are clear.

So then the question becomes: what is the purpose of the legislation? First and foremost, it provides the government with legislation that will permit us to regulate private surgical facilities. Currently we have no legal way to regulate and control private surgical facilities or private hospitals. We had three options: one, do nothing and let happen what happens; two, totally ban surgical clinics from ever doing anything in Alberta, including those already in operation such as those doing cataract surgery; or three, regulate and control private clinics so that they only operate when it is a benefit to Albertans and to the publicly funded system. We chose the latter option.

By regulating and introducing clear rules for operations, we have given the regional health authorities another option for the delivery of health care services in their region. Do I expect to see this happen in Red Deer in the near future? I don't think so, but as I indicated earlier in my comments, delivery models will change, and we must be prepared to act with these changes. The growth in our population will demand ever more resources, ever more innovation. Bill 11 makes sure they happen within the confines of the Canada Health Act.

I must address one other aspect that is frequently discussed, and that is the consequences under NAFTA. I have read Mr. Hepburn's paper regarding his concern about NAFTA. He points out that the North American free trade agreement contains a reservation for health care as follows:

Canada reserves the right to adopt or maintain any measure with respect to . . . the following services to the extent . . . they are social services established or maintained for a public purpose.

That includes health. The concern arises from whether the operation of a private facility is in fact for a public purpose or if it is for a commercial activity.

This is where my comments about the flow of money are important. Money flows from the Alberta government to the RHAs for the express purpose of providing a public service. Whether this service is contracted to a profit provider or a nonprofit provider, it is still for the public purpose and therefore meets the criteria of the reservation. The services are insured at the same rate, so necessary insurance services are provided at any facility at no cost to the patient. While lawyers seem to be able to challenge anything, we have had contracted services for probably the entire time free trade has been in existence, and we have not yet faced a challenge.

While some will disagree with the direction of Bill 11, I hope I have given some things to think about. I don't stand here with all the answers, nor do I suggest that everything our government has done has always been the best, nor do I think a government should merely ignore changing times and try to retain the status quo, because that is not an option. It may be okay for our generation, but it will not be okay for our kids and grandkids. We must continue to look for innovative ideas that will improve the delivery of health care services within the context of the Canada Health Act.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I was just hoping I could convince a few people to carry their joyous conversations to the lounges out back. Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to have a chance to join the debate at second reading on Bill 11. As is the custom and the procedure of the House, I'll try to confine my remarks to the principles that underline this bill.

I think that no bill we've had before us in this Legislature has

generated more interest on the part of constituents of Edmonton-Mill Woods than has Bill 11. I suspect, from the number of e-mails I get that are copied to government members, that the same may be true of them. In Edmonton-Mill Woods we have a group of citizens who are acutely attuned to changes in the health care system. They first sounded the alarm when the Grey Nuns hospital was turned into a community health centre and stripped of its emergency ward and intensive care units. Fortunately, the protests of those citizens and the good sense of the Capital health authority saw the reinstitution of the Grey Nuns as a full-service hospital, although, we have to all admit, at great, great expense. The staff had been disbanded, the equipment had been dispersed, and it was at tremendous expense that that hospital was restored to a full-service facility.

At a number of different points since I was elected in 1993, we have sent short surveys to the constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods. The first survey asked for their opinions on the recall of members of the Legislature, whether that should be in legislation. Since then we've had surveys about education, the provision of education services, the kinds of cuts that were made to the budget, their opinions on those cuts, the changes to the education system, and with each of those surveys we pretty well know the number of people who will take the time to phone, e-mail, fax, or send us their response.

We recently put out a similar survey on the provisions of Bill 11 and the move to more privatization being made available to patients. Never have we had such an overwhelming response, and on no question have we ever had such agreement from those constituents. Over 97 percent of them indicated that they did not want public dollars spent on private facilities. I don't think anything could be clearer.

I don't pretend, Mr. Speaker, that the surveys would meet the standards of a research faculty. They are distributed to households, and people send them back as they will. I have some confidence, though, that what people in Edmonton-Mill Woods believe is more reflective of the general population when you compare their results with the results of polls by commercial firms such as Angus Reid. I do have some confidence in that survey, that feeling on the part of the people in Edmonton-Mill Woods that they value very much the public health care system and that any tinkering with that system had best be done with their approval, because they're watching.

As you try to examine the goals of the underlying principles in Bill 11, what strikes you immediately is the conflict in the principles in the bill. There's a conflict between the goals that seem to uphold the letter and the spirit of the Canada Health Act by having those provisions of the Canada Health Act in the preamble, yet the provisions in the bill, the principles, seem to support the furtherance of a for-profit health care system.

9:00

They list in the preamble the five principles of the Canada Health Act. As I think all of us know, if you ask a number of Albertans to give you the five principles of the Canada Health Act, many of them would be at a loss to do so. I think unless you've been in this Legislature or been concerned with the health care system, many of us would have been in this same position. They may not know the details, but they certainly know the spirit and the intent. That they know very, very well, and that they prize.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

So here in this act we seem to have a set of principles that support that spirit of the Canada Health Act and a one-payer, publicly tax supported system. At the same time, while endorsing the act, it

further the patient-pay principle by making possible patients paying directly for enhanced services in so-called surgical clinics.

We've been over the problem of the definitions of private hospitals and surgical clinics so often in this Legislature. I took a call before 5 o'clock this afternoon from a constituent who, having watched the debate last night, asked the same question: what's the difference between a private hospital and a surgical clinic? Having watched that debate, he certainly was no clearer.

We know that right now, for instance, you can pay for enhanced services in a public hospital. You can pay for a television set, you can pay for a telephone line to be put in for your stay, but I think there's a huge difference between paying for those kinds of enhancements and paying for a list of medical enhancements in a private, for-profit surgical clinic. It's that tension between the principles underlying those goals that I think plagues Bill 11.

There's a conflict between adhering, again, to the spirit of the Canada Health Act and adhering to the legalistic interpretation of the text of the Canada Health Act. On one hand, Bill 11 lists the provisions, as I've said, of the Health Act, and one might assume that the thrust of Bill 11 would be in support of a publicly funded, one-payer public system. But at the same time, the bill seems to take advantage of the general nature of the Canada Health Act that lacks these kinds of specific articles of prohibition to stop patients paying for services in a for-profit, private, two-tier health care system. We see that tension in the taunting of government officials, taunting federal officials to interfere in Bill 11. If it violates the Canada Health Act, they challenge them. I think it reflects the government's retreat in Bill 11 to the legalism that they're using to further the provision of private health care services in the province and enabling that sector of health care to grow through the provisions of Bill 11.

Most alarmingly, Mr. Speaker, there have been comments about the bill by public officials that would seem to endorse the merits of moving to a pluralistic health care system or growing a pluralistic health care system to a much greater extent than we have in the province at this time. I think the statements by those public officials is at the root of much of the alarm surrounding the bill, because while they are told and they're assured by government and by elected officials that the bill will not in any way compromise public health care, they see former members of this Legislature now occupying positions in the health care system making statements that would seem to make those assertions suspect at least.

The alarm is with foundation. I had an opportunity to look at some of the materials provided in the United States by the Physicians for a National Health Program. Those physicians in that country are arguing very hard and trying to organize to bring to the United States a health care system similar to the one we have been able to create in our country. Those physicians, commenting on privatization, warned that "the winners in the new medical marketplace are determined by financial clout, not medical quality." So the dismissal of concerns about privatization and that we have no business voicing our concerns and that to do so is to fear monger I think is a disservice to Albertans and doesn't allow the full exploration of the issue.

I think there are more conflicts in the so-called altruistic, harmless goals of the bill that support universal health care than those provisions contained in the preamble. You see that seeming support for the public system again in the preamble, yet we get a list of very, very detailed provisions for more privatized services and how those privatized services, those enhanced services must be provided, the rules those providers must follow in approved surgical facilities. There's a list of almost specific regulations in terms of what they must do, and it can't help raising suspicions of why there is need for all that detail and that concern with the provision of those services by private providers if there isn't the intent that that's the direction

the government is going to go in the provision of health care services. So that conflict again is another conflict that beleaguers the principles of the bill.

There's underlying conflict with respect to values. The values of community and compassion for others in the Canada Health Act reflect so much about what we are as Canadians and are in conflict with the survival of the fittest and the values of an unfettered free enterprise market in this bill. You see it again in the words that seem to support the Canada Health Act and public health care. You look at the Canada Health Act, and even though those values aren't made explicit, they are certainly implicit. Canadians a long time ago decided that we're better off creating a safety net, that we're better off looking after each other than leaving each to his or her own devices in terms of health care, yet the inclusion of principles that support private, for-profit health care facilities seems to put forward the values of individualism and the survival of the fittest that unfettered free marketers would support.

You see those values in operation south of the border when you look at some of the descriptions of the private operators and their ability to decide who does and who doesn't get service, their ability to exclude doctors, to decide who will practise, their ability to decide what will be included and to really leave patients, to put patients in the role of victims. It's really quite alarming, yet those conflicting values can be found in the provisions of the bill that we have in front of us.

9:10

There are other value conflicts. The values of the equity and fairness in take-your-turn philosophy that we have developed and that are characteristic of our public health care system conflict with the preferential treatment and queue-jumping made possible by expanding patient opportunities to buy services privately, and there's no way around it. In the last number of years, whether or not Bill 11 says it can't happen, queue-jumping is now a fact of life in our province. It hasn't been a concern until the last half-dozen years, but the growth of private clinics has changed all that. Clinics like MRI clinics now make queue-jumping possible. Patients buy a diagnosis at a clinic and then return to the public system and are able to get in line ahead of others who are still waiting for MRIs at the public clinics and have their surgery performed.

It happens with cataract surgery. We had an experience with a member of the family who was told by a physician that they would have to wait six weeks in a wait line for cataract surgery, but if they wanted to go to the physician's private clinic and pay a fee, the work would be done immediately. Given the age of the family member, there was no choice at all. So we have queue-jumping already, and the provisions of this bill have the possibilities of expanding that kind of behaviour. The insurance in Bill 11 that queue-jumping won't be allowed with the advent of private surgical clinics rings hollow when citizens are well aware of what happens right now without the bill.

I think there are broader conflicts in the bill, Mr. Speaker, that are disturbing. We've seen the same conflict in much of the legislation put forward by the government. The conflict, at least to an outsider, seems to be the result of ideological tensions that arise when a group in government, as Jeffrey Goldfarb describes them, believes in the fundamental proposition that government is part of the problem, not the solution, that government saps free entrepreneurship and individual initiative. This tension, I think, within government results in bills like Bill 11, a bill which seemingly tries to accommodate both those in government who believe in the more altruistic principles underlying the Canada Health Act and those in government who would reject those values in favour of more self-centred

goals. The latter group seems fervently attached to a new right-wing Conservative ideology and, one must conclude, would support more privatization given the nature of Bill 11, this ideology that according to Goldfarb has them behaving outside of reason. I quote: when one thinks ideologically and acts ideologically, opponents become enemies to be vanquished; political compromise becomes a kind of immorality.

We've seen that with Bill 11. Opponents are labeled as left-wing nuts, members of special interest groups and, worse, malicious spreaders of misinformation. Such statements, Mr. Speaker, make me pessimistic that the changes that are needed to make Bill 11 a bill that all Albertans will feel comfortable with are almost impossible. If compromise is considered immoral, then what are the prospects for change?

Thanks very much.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, before I call on Calgary-Montrose, I just want to remind all hon. members that we're not in committee, and therefore the conversations and the interruptions we're hearing should probably be dealt with outside the Chamber.

Thank you.

Debate Continued

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to join second reading debate of Bill 11 today. This debate is very important for many of my constituents. Most Albertans for the past few months have received many conflicting interpretations of Bill 11. On one side are the Liberals and the NDs, the Friends of Medicare, the union of public employees. They portray Bill 11 as public enemy number one. They claim that this bill will destroy the public health care system we have here in Alberta. They also claim that this bill will open the door for a two-tiered, Americanized health care system.

To counter that negative campaign, the government of Alberta sent out the actual text of the bill with a very modest request. We asked all Albertans to read the bill for themselves and tell us what they thought of the bill. Some of my constituents actually took the time and went through the bill, and they called me and expressed surprise, genuine surprise. They told me that they went through the bill many times, and they couldn't find any section of the bill that could hurt our public health care system. They could not find any section that would allow queue-jumping. They couldn't find any section that forced Albertans to pay for basic medical services.

Mr. Speaker, they are absolutely right. Bill 11 begins by committing Alberta to the principles of the Canada Health Act. It says right in the preamble that

the Government of Alberta is committed to the preservation of the principles of universality, comprehensiveness, accessibility, portability and public administration, as described in the Canada Health Act.

That's the foundation of the health system in Alberta.

In part 1, section 1 it clearly spells out that "no person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." With that section we outlaw private hospitals not only today but forever in Alberta.

This Bill also forbids queue-jumping. It makes it illegal for anybody to make or take payments in order to jump ahead in line for surgery. No individual can be charged a facility fee for insured surgery, and this surgery must be paid for by the health system. Therefore, all Albertans need is their health care card, and all the

services that they receive will be paid for by our system, our publicly funded system.

MS LEIBOVICI: Point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark on a point of order.

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

MS LEIBOVICI: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As the Member for Calgary-Montrose indicated that he would like to debate with me in second reading . . . [interjection]

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Citation.

MS LEIBOVICI: Citation 482.

That was the letter he tabled in the Legislative Assembly just a couple of days ago. Would he be willing to entertain some questions, and we could get into a debate in the next 20 minutes?

MR. PHAM: I'd be more than happy to after I finish my speech, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Go ahead then, please.

Debate Continued

MR. PHAM: Mr. Speaker, I already see some excitement on the other side. I think people will begin to jump up and down, because when they hear the truth, sometimes it can hurt.

Mr. Speaker, this bill also gives the authority to the College of Physicians and Surgeons to define which surgical services are major and which are minor. All the major ones must be done in a public hospital. Only the minor ones can be done in accredited surgical facilities, and the bill clearly spells out that all the surgical facilities will have to be accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Not only that, the facility can only provide the kind of service that they're approved to perform.

9:20

Mr. Speaker, this bill, when it is passed, will not force anybody to do anything. It is an enabling piece of legislation. All it does is allow the regional health authorities to have one more option, that they can choose to contract with some private facilities to provide some of the minor surgical services if they see there is a benefit from it. The bill clearly spells out the conditions under which the regional health authorities can enter into a contract with these surgical facilities.

First of all, those contracts have to comply with the Canada Health Act. Second, the health authority will have to demonstrate a need for the service and that a contract is a better alternative than providing the service in a public hospital. Also, the health authority has to show that the contract will not harm the publicly funded health system. Furthermore, the health authority will have to show how the contract will provide a net benefit to Albertans as patients and as taxpayers, and the contract must set out the result the surgical procedure will be expected to achieve.

Mr. Speaker, that is not all. The most important requirement this bill will force the regional health authorities and these private surgical facilities to go through is that the terms of all these contracts have to be made public. Because of that, everyone in Alberta, including the media, including the opposition, can go through these contracts and see for themselves if the regional health authorities

have met the conditions that were spelled out in this bill.

Mr. Speaker, that is the reason why many of my constituents were surprisingly happy to find out that this bill is far from what the opposition is trying to portray, and they compliment this government for bringing in this bill because it is truly a mechanism to protect the health care system that we have in Alberta.

They also asked me the question: how come there are so many people willingly spreading misinformation about this bill? And now I would like to focus on some of that misinformation that is out there, because it affects not only the debate on this bill but how our constituents are thinking regarding this issue.

First, I want to focus on the federal government and its involvement with Bill 11 and health care in general. Not long ago funding for the health care system was a cost-shared project between the provincial government and the federal government. This started out as 50-50. The federal government of Canada has chosen to diminish itself from that responsibility, and that ratio has continuously gone down, especially in 1994-95, when the federal Liberal government in Ottawa made a significant reduction to provincial transfer payments. Today the ratio of contribution that the federal government makes to our Alberta health care budget is 13 percent.

That is not only affecting Alberta. It affects every province in Canada. That's why we have the health care crisis in Canada today. For the first time that I can remember in the history of Canada, all 10 ministers of health and all the ministers of health in the territories, too, agreed unanimously that the federal Health minister should restore funding immediately, not two years from now but immediately. The crisis that is being faced today is because of the money the federal government is taking away from sick and old Albertans, and anybody who suggests that that is okay for them to do should be ashamed of themselves. [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, we were doing quite well for some time there. Maybe we can revert to the normal process during Chamber, please.

MR. PHAM: I can see that some opposition members are trying to defend their cousins in Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, but the numbers are there. Nobody can dispute the fact that the federal government has significantly reduced transfer payments to the province to pay for health care and education in Alberta, and when faced with the challenge of how to cope with the severe cutbacks in funding, the province has to come up with innovative ways to deal with the limited resources we have.

Instead of giving us a hand, the federal Minister of Health decided to immerse himself in a drive-by smear campaign. When we asked him to give a simple answer to whether or not our Bill 11 violates the principles of the Canada Health Act and, if it does, to tell us which sections violate the act, surprisingly, Mr. Speaker, he was deathly silent. All he could come up with was rhetoric. Until today nobody in the federal system could point to any section in this bill that violates the Canada Health Act. Either they should put up or shut up. I think it is very, very clear that our health care protection bill is clearly within the intent of the Canada Health Act.

You know why the Liberal federal government is trying to attack our government on this health initiative? I want to read this reason into the record so that our constituents at home understand it too. Of course, it is a lot easier to shift public attention from the real cause. The real cause of the public health care crisis is a shortage of funding caused by the federal government. They want to pick Alberta as the public enemy. They want to ride high in public opinion polls as the defender of the public system. Mr. Speaker, guess what? Talk is cheap. They should put their money where their mouth is.

Now, I want to focus on the opposition party, on the Liberal Party, the party that has committed to a negative campaign through misinformation and fear mongering to Albertans on this issue. They have slipped so far from telling the truth that now they've become a group of—I hate to use the words—political opportunists. They've become a one-trick pony, as the Premier indicated today.

Take the leader of the opposition party as an example. At the beginning of this session she came into the Legislature with a document with many blank pages which she obtained through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. She knows and all members of the opposition party know that that is a piece of legislation that we passed in this House with the support of everybody. The information they requested through that act is sent to the department, and the information had to be given according to the terms of that legislation. So there should not be any surprises for them when they receive blank pages, because this information is protected under the legislation. What they're asking us to do is break the law, to give them information they're not authorized to see.

MR. LUND: They've got no respect for the law.

MR. PHAM: They have no respect at all for the law. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

It makes things even worse that without actually seeing the bill, the Leader of the Opposition indicated she was opposed to that bill, no matter what was in there. She is on record as saying that. I think that is very irresponsible, Mr. Speaker. When we are opposed to something, at least we have to have the courtesy to read it in order to decide whether we disagree with it or not. Right?

We could have put in there that we want to eliminate, you know, half the ridings in Edmonton. If the opposition member is saying that she is going to oppose or support that idea, she has to read the bill in order to find out exactly what she's supporting or what she is voting against. [interjections] Again, Mr. Speaker, I begin to hear, you know, some noise from the other side.

9:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: You know, it's interesting that when the debate focuses on the bill, things tend to go reasonably well, but when they start focusing on individuals, then you get what you get. So let's cool it.

MR. PHAM: Mr. Speaker, the last thing I want to do is bring up individuals in this debate, but if you remember, for the past two months this Liberal Party has engaged themselves in a very, very nasty campaign. They call into question the credibility of our Premier. They want to link this issue with the credibility of our Premier, and I just want to point out to my constituents at home the kind of credibility of the people that are bringing those negative campaigns to the Legislature.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, the tactic didn't stop at that. She went on and attacked Mr. Jim Dinning, the chair of the regional health authority, a very, very good friend of hers, and when I use the term good friend, that is the parliamentary language that I'm trying to use here. Anyway, Mr. Dinning could have defended himself, but he was not in the House, and therefore that kind of attack was very cowardly.

Mr. Speaker, last night the Leader of the Opposition stood in this Legislature in front of a TV audience. She claimed that the health care funding cutback in 1994-95 was 30 percent. Thirty percent. That was a lie, because the record speaks for itself.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We're likely to be on Bill 11 for a long, long time. There are differences of opinion as to what is truth, but we assume that all hon. members are indeed that, honourable members. So I think perhaps you should reconsider those words and withdraw them and then address the rest of your speech without that.

MR. PHAM: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, maybe I should use another word. According to *Beauchesne*, I should use that is false, that is inaccurate, that is misinforming, that is malicious, that is misrepresentation, and the list can go on, go on, go on.

Debate Continued

MR. PHAM: Anyway, the point is very, very simple. You have the public accounts information every year. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, what we're talking about is that you speak through the chair. If you want to get angry at the chair, please do so. But speak to the chair.

MR. PHAM: Maybe the opposition member didn't hear it properly so I will repeat it. Instead of using the words "that was a lie," I will now say that it is false, it is inaccurate, and according to *Beauchesne*, it was misrepresentation, a malicious attack, misinforming, misleading Albertans, and the list goes on, Mr. Speaker.

MS LEBOVICI: A point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j).

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I don't know whether the hon. member is rising on a point of order that may deal with repetition, but the quotation that you're giving is 23(h), (i), and (j).

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MS LEBOVICI: Imputing false motives. [interjection] No, I can't say that unfortunately. The reality is that if he's indicating that the Canadian Institute of Health Economics is false and misleading with regards to their figures as to the drop in hospital expenditures in this province, in actual fact he's saying that Don Mazankowski . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Once you start elaborating on it, then you're into the debate, hon. member, as opposed to dealing with precisely what we're talking about. The chair interrupted the hon. member a few moments ago about the use of unparliamentary language. That's one thing.

Presumably you're defending the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition on the issue of whether it's 30 percent or 20 percent or whatever. In my admonition to the hon. member the chair reminded him that we have different views of what is truth, and if anybody wants to use statistics to change things, they certainly are able to do so.

I wonder if the hon. member could get on with his speech and not have any further interruptions by those who are eager to speak or by using inflammatory language that's likely to cause other members to get up and raise points of order or to refute your arguments.

Debate Continued

MR. PHAM: Mr. Speaker, all I'm trying to do is bring the truth and the true facts to the debate.

MS LEBOVICI: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark on another point of order.

**Point of Order
Questioning a Member**

MS LEIBOVICI: Briefly. It's 482. Will he entertain a question now?

AN HON. MEMBER: *Beauchesne*?

MS LEIBOVICI: I'm sure it's *Beauchesne* 482. Will he entertain a question? Because he . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. We did have an attempt earlier by one hon. member to ask a question of an hon. member. All you have to do is say yes or no. You do not have to give any reasons nor should any reasons be given in terms of your asking the question.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will give my answer once and for all. I would like to keep my speech uninterrupted from now until the end. I would not want to take any questions until I have finished the speech.

Debate Continued

MR. PHAM: All I'm trying to do is bring the truth and the true facts to this debate, Mr. Speaker, because when somebody is claiming that we cut 30 percent out of our health care budget, that is not true, and that fact can be verified very easily. Every year we publish a thing called public accounts; right? How much money we spend every year, from year to year to year, is already recorded. It's public information. All they have to do is take the amount of money we spent in 1993-94 and compare the amount of money we spent in 1994-95, and if they can come up with 30 percent, maybe they should go back and take math 10 or math 9 or whatever. I could not understand that. They spend millions of dollars on research, and last night they stood up in this House trying to mislead Albertans, trying to scare, trying to fear monger my constituents. I find that unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. [interjection]

Now I see the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is joining the debate. Just a few days ago I received this document from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Almost the entire document talks about health care and Bill 11. I was so amazed, so amazed to read this information being presented to her constituents, and I feel sorry for her constituents, Mr. Speaker, because the information stated in here is very bizarre. It says, and I quote: "the recent announcement of \$3 billion in health care funding over three years takes us to 2002. Yet the government must call an election by March 2001, at which time earlier funding commitments are no longer binding." [Mr. Pham's speaking time expired]

Mr. Speaker, can I ask for unanimous consent to continue?

9:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member has asked for unanimous consent to let him continue his speech.

[Unanimous consent denied]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I know it's getting late for all. We have a member that wishes to speak, and it's now his turn.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When I left my approved domestic residence this evening and got into my approved

personal transportation device to make my way to this approved legislative facility, I was wondering exactly how I might begin my remarks. Then I got here, and I heard nothing but personal attacks from members of the government. I heard the minister of health, from the relative safety of being off mike, call the Leader of the Official Opposition a liar. Then I heard the Member for Calgary-Montrose talk about how the opposition is lying and misleading.

Then I was reminded, of course, of that old adage in law that when the facts are with you, argue the facts, and when the facts are against you, pound the table and yell like hell. That's about all we've heard out of the government tonight, because they have no facts to back up their position. They have no substance to back up Bill 11. All they have to argue, of course, is calling people who are opposing the government left-wing nuts and special interests and liars and malicious. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We're trying to hear, hon. members. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, people that are encouraging you are only encouraging others to demonstrate.

Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. So let's get on to talking about the substance of Bill 11. Let's get on to introducing some fact and truth into this debate. Let's start off, first of all, with the difficulty in understanding the government risking so much on such superficial arguments, with no analysis, no understanding of how the system really works, no understanding of the implications of what it is they're saying, and being willing just to read the bill or, in the case of some members, not even read the bill yet blindly defend it as they would blindly defend the party line. Mr. Speaker, that's just not good enough when it comes to medicare.

Now, in committee I will take some time to do a section-by-section analysis to expose some of the gaps and contradictions in Bill 11. During second reading debate I'll stick to the principle of the bill, but I do want to make comment on one of these gaps or contradictions that the government is exploiting and misrepresenting, and it was most evidenced in the arguments just put forward from Calgary-Montrose when he talked about the fact that all Albertans will be able to see contracts, that it says so in the bill.

Now, I don't have the Blues in front of me, but I listened carefully to that member, and he said that all Albertans will get to see the contracts. Well, that's not what the bill says. The bill uses a very different word. The bill says that agreements will be released. It says "agreement." Let's say for the sake of argument, Mr. Speaker, that the agreement between a regional health authority and one of their private hospitals is that we will keep the contract secret. Then all that Albertans will see is the agreement to keep the contract details secret. So when you talk about misleading and shaving the truth, there is an example, and there is a section of the bill which will not serve the public interest.

Let's take a look at what exactly Bill 11 does. Bill 11 allows doctors to sell enhanced services and products, some of which are now available to Albertans without any extra charge. No other province has a law which provides for so-called up-selling. Not one other province will allow this up-selling to patients who are receiving a medically necessary procedure.

Bill 11 allows for queue-jumping. By excluding diagnostic procedures such as MRI scans from the law, people who have the money can buy a diagnostic image and then get to the front of the surgery line. Bill 11 will reduce capacity in public hospitals. There are a limited number of surgeons in Alberta. We already don't have enough doctors in some specialty areas. Having some doctors work in private clinics splits resources, not adds to them. Not only will

this add overhead costs to the system, but it will increase the downtime for doctors, because they're going to have to do more traveling, more marketing, and more accounting. They're going to have to do more paperwork, and they're going to have to spend more time competing for business. Fewer doctors doing work in public hospitals means longer waiting lists, not shorter.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 puts the minister of health above the law. Section 23 makes it impossible to seek a legal remedy if anyone suffers as a result of how this government policy is implemented. This amounts to a provincial notwithstanding clause that limits the legal rights of Albertans, not a surprise from a government that wanted to limit the legal rights of those who were forcibly sterilized.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let's look at some of the definitions. I don't know about you and I don't know about your constituents, but where I come from, if my doctor sends me to a place where I'm going to be put under anesthetic, laid out on a stretcher, have my body cut open, be fed through a tube, be stitched back up, and then be supervised by doctors and nurses around the clock to check on my healing – where I come from that's called a hospital. It's not called anything else. An approved surgical facility is a hospital. The government has been playing games with definitions for quite a while. Remember when our downsized hospitals became health centres?

Governments use words quite on purpose. Words can illuminate or they can obscure. Defining something by what it isn't or by what you don't want people to think it is is misleading and intellectually dishonest. A government shouldn't do that. A government should tell the truth, the whole truth all the time. A government that tells a half-truth is a government that lies. I want my government to tell the truth, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it is my government. I may not be part of it, but I am an Albertan, and I don't want my government to lie to me.

Mr. Speaker, private surgical centres, these approved facilities, these private hospitals that the government would have set up under Bill 11, to be efficient must have profit as their number one goal. Their investors and their bankers wouldn't have it any other way. Private surgical centres will have to pay property taxes, GST, business tax, all kinds of other overhead and infrastructure costs, extra administrative costs, bill collecting, et cetera, and on top of all that they're going to have to provide a profit. Public hospitals don't have any of these expenses. All of the extra costs will be passed along to the taxpayer because they will be included in the contract negotiated with regional health authorities.

Now, we've heard from the Premier on down and every supporter of this bill that all these costs are going to be borne within the public system. What that really means is that all these extra costs, which the health care system does not have to bear today, are going to be paid for with tax dollars, taking money away from the provision of patient care. It is malicious misinformation to claim that Albertans will not have to pay extra for private clinics. They may not have to take a dollar out of their wallets at the clinic, but they will have already contributed their tax dollars to support private enterprise in the form of these private hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, the government will face many extra costs as a result of these contracts. Somebody has to pay the bureaucrats whose job it will be to negotiate and monitor the private contracts. Bill 11 calls for policing and enforcement of violations of contract and other legal conditions. This will require new government spending. There will be increased audit costs for the regional health authorities, and the Auditor General has already raised concerns about sloppy and inadequate bookkeeping for over half a billion dollars worth, that's \$500 million, of contracts between the RHAs and private suppliers. If you take a look at the United States, if you take a look at the United Kingdom, if you take a look at Australia, what you see are all

kinds of law enforcement and criminal justice costs that have escalated because of prosecutions to do with fraud in private health care. Why would we want to import that experience into Alberta?

All the increased costs incurred by private operators and by the government will be paid for with tax dollars, the sweat-soaked loonies that the former Provincial Treasurer loves to talk about. This means less money being spent on patient care.

9:50

While we're talking about less money being spent on patient care, let me just set the record straight. When the Leader of the Official Opposition put on the record the fact that hospital spending decreased by 30 percent by this government, she was quoting a paper that was tabled in this Assembly, that I would have thought the Minister of Health and Wellness would have taken the time to read. It's a paper called *Private Highway, One-Way Street: the Deklein and Fall of Canadian Medicare?* by Evans, Barer, Lewis, Rachlis and Stoddart. It says, "Alberta cut provincial hospital spending by 30% between 1992 and 1995." So if he wants to call the Leader of the Official Opposition a liar, then he's calling these well-respected academics liars as well, Mr. Speaker.

Not only that. Earlier today in the Assembly the Leader of the Official Opposition tabled statistics compiled by a national recording organization, based on numbers provided by that minister's department, which pegged the same hospital spending cut at 27 percent. So is he now doubting his own staff in his own department who supplied those numbers, Mr. Speaker? I think not. If he has the courage, I will leave my space and he can stand and apologize. But I don't think he'll do that.

While we're talking about misinformation, let's take a look at what this government is saying that is wrong about the federal government role. The federal government contributes \$2.4 billion to this province through tax points in the Canada health and social transfer. This province as well as other provinces went to the table and said: give us block funding; remove some of the strings. This Premier praised block funding. What block funding means is that the money comes in a lump sum. They can spend it as they choose. If they choose not to spend it on health care, then they can't say that the federal government isn't carrying its weight. It's a provincial government choice, and they've got to be accountable for it. It's not the federal government that cut hospital spending by 30 percent. It's this provincial government that did it.

It's not the federal government that said: please, take away some tax room. It's this government in 1997 that with other provincial governments went to the federal table and said: please, give us more tax collection room; modify that 50 percent contribution. So how can members of this government now stand up and complain that the federal government did exactly as they asked them to do? It is dishonest to make that kind of argument. The federal government right now contributes far in excess of the 13 cents on the dollar that they claim it does. They know that it's misleading, and they should stop telling those kinds of stories.

Now, the biggest problem with the money argument is that if this is all about money, Mr. Speaker, then why does the government's own Bill 11 information web site say it's not about money? Why does the government's own Bill 11 web site say that private clinics will not cost the system less money and that that's not the purpose of these private contracts? Why would it say that? Why would this government make the argument that it's all about money and it's the federal government's fault and they should give us more money, when they're saying that it's not about money? They can't have it both ways.

Now, let's take a look at this notion about competition and the role of doctors and doctors' offices. Competition works well within a defined market with the characteristics of supply and demand, informed consumers, and minimal regulation. That's the best market model. Let's see if that applies to health care, Mr. Speaker. Health care is characterized by nearly insatiable demand, huge variations in supply, consumer choices most often driven by need and made based upon circumstance, not necessarily careful comparison shopping and not research. Many, many layers of regulation and accountability quite properly exist within health care. Hardly that perfect model of competition.

Now, doctors operate businesses, but they are all paid the same for similar work, receive income from a single government payer, and they do not have to worry about collecting their bad debts. Hardly the model of private enterprise, Mr. Speaker. Scarcity of doctors does not necessarily drive up costs or produce more profit. Doctors earn a living from the practice of medicine, but nondoctors are prohibited from doing so. Private investors cannot control or own medical clinics because the profit motive would conflict with clinical judgment and decision-making. As one observer, Christopher Levant, has said, medicine is about mercy, not money.

Mr. Speaker, now let's take a quick look at some of these arguments, these curious arguments, about other jurisdictions. The Shouldice clinic has come up. The Shouldice clinic in Toronto has been operating since the 1940s. It pioneered one type of surgical procedure to correct hernias. It operates on a private, not-for-profit basis, and it charges the Ontario government a legislated 6 percent surcharge on top of professional fees.

It still only provides one type of surgery, and it cherry-picks its patients. If you are obese, diabetic, have high blood pressure, or present in any way a complicated medical profile, you will not be treated at the Shouldice clinic. The procedure used at the Shouldice clinic is no longer unique, and there is no appreciable waiting list for hernias in the province of Alberta. This is not about the Shouldice clinic, Mr. Speaker.

Now, the Cambie clinic in Vancouver is another example that has been trotted out. The Cambie clinic in Vancouver provides a variety of surgical services, including some which require overnight stays, but none of them medically necessary, according to the clinic. However, it operates entirely outside of the public system. It does not receive one single penny of public money from medicare. Not one. It's outside. The legislation in British Columbia prohibits private insurance coverage for benefits for eligible residents. It also prohibits practitioners or facilities from charging fees beyond those in the fee schedule for insured services. The ministry officials in B.C. consistently indicate that there are no private hospitals in British Columbia, even though this government and this Premier would have us believe that their legislation would allow them.

Now, let's take a look at Saskatchewan. In Saskatchewan facilities that provide insured diagnostic or therapeutic medical procedures other than facilities operated by the minister, a health district, or an affiliate are covered under the Saskatchewan Health Facilities Licencing Act. They are prohibited from charging a facility fee, they are required to follow stringent standards, and they are subject to public inspection at all times. Most importantly, no funding is provided by either Saskatchewan health or the health districts for facility fees. Not a single penny. No facilities have been licensed yet under this act, and the act regulates only the provision of insured services. If the Minister of Health doubts that, maybe he should hire some better researchers in his department or at least some better briefers in his own ministerial department, because these are the facts, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Manitoba. The Manitoba government passed changes to the Health Services Insurance Act to prohibit private clinics and surgical facilities from charging extra fees to their patients. To prohibit, not to allow, Mr. Speaker. In Manitoba the new surgical facilities regulation was created under the Health Services Insurance Act. The regulation declares insured medical and related services provided by any facility that provides endoscopic, ophthalmological, or orthopaedic procedures outside of a hospital. They are only for outpatient services. That means day surgery. That means no overnight stays. A huge difference between what this government is trying to impose on Albertans, a huge difference.

Mr. Speaker, there are some other areas of misinformation that I think need to be cleared up here tonight. Let me talk in my closing couple of minutes here about what this government has done and not done to provide some balance to the debate in health care.

Recently the Member for St. Albert was at a public meeting in St. Albert, and at that public meeting in defending Bill 11 that member used the example of the craniofacial reconstruction program at the Misericordia hospital, called COMPRU, as an example of a private clinic operating within the public system. I cannot tell you just how absurd that assertion is. COMPRU is an outstanding example of public innovation within the public system paid for by public dollars. That's what COMPRU is. It has nothing to do with private care. When the chairman of the board of the Caritas group pulled the member aside and corrected her misapprehension about COMPRU, did she take the opportunity to correct the public record? No, she did not. That's the kind of misinformation that members of the government's so-called truth squads are spreading about health care in the province of Alberta and the role of Bill 11.

10:00

Now, I was recently down in Calgary, and I was visiting the constituency of Calgary-Glenmore. I believe the MLA from Glenmore is another one of the captains of the truth squads. As I was driving through the constituency, I came across a portable sign. The sign said: public information meeting on Bill 11; phone to register. Do you know what? I phoned, and I was told, "You know, these meetings are really just for residents of the constituency." I said, "Well, I was under the impression that this member was appointed by the Premier to be on his health information panels, or what he called truth squads, so as a member of just the concerned public shouldn't I be able to go?" "Well, you know, why don't you go back and contact the minister's office?"

Then I happened to get a copy of an e-mail that was sent to a constituent of mine from the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, who is the junior Minister of Health and Wellness. Now, my constituent wanted that member to provide some answers to specific questions about Bill 11 and his role in the government creation of this policy. Do you know what he was told in that e-mail message that he got back? My constituent was informed that even though this truth squad captain, junior minister of health, member of the Executive Council of government, whose job it is to defend public policy, even though that's his role, he was told: sorry; my office is way too busy to answer those questions; please redirect your inquiries back to the senior minister of health or to the Premier's office.

So here we have these members of the truth squad, Mr. Speaker, who don't even want to answer questions.

Speaker's Ruling Reflections on Members

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair would express disappointment that some speakers in the last little while have gone to personality

attacks and not entirely to the bill itself in their speech, and I think that's unfortunate. If we could get off the personalities of the individuals involved and get into the issues, that would be more helpful.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, in light of the hour I would move adjournment of the debate for this evening.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 10:03 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 6, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/04/06

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, welcome.

Let us pray. Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue our work under Your guidance. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before I call on the first member for a petition, I'm going to appeal to all hon. members again today to try and dig down and exercise the greatest form of decorum that we possibly can in this House.

In reviewing the *Hansards* of the last several days, I noticed that on Tuesday night, when we sat for some 3 hours and 20 minutes, there was not one interjection required by the chair. In reviewing the *Hansard* last night, when the House sat beyond 10 o'clock, there were 19 required interjections by the chair.

We know what the rules are. We know what decorum is. We know what the word inflammatory means. We know what the utilization of intent and motive is. Today I'm appealing to all members to exercise the greatest degree of decorum with respect to this. I am, however, prepared to interject as and if required. The last thing in the world that I would want to see is today's question period being referred to as Mr. Speaker's interjection period, so I'm appealing to you for your co-operation.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

head: Presenting Petitions

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table in the Legislature a petition signed by, again, a number of young Albertans who are in favour of Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to table a petition from people from the communities of Plamondon and Lac La Biche. They're urging the government "to pass a Bill banning . . . for-profit hospitals in Alberta."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and present a petition signed by residents of Alberta supporting Bill 11.

Thank you, sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." This is on behalf of 252 residents.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two hundred and fifty-four people from Edmonton and the surrounding area have put forward a petition urging the government of Alberta "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care" in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 408 Albertans from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Gibbons, St. Albert, Redwater, Leduc, Spruce Grove, and Fort Saskatchewan. They are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by another 302 Albertans from Beaumont, Bonnyville, Jasper, Edmonton, Provost, and Willingdon. They are requesting the Legislative Assembly of Alberta "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained." This brings the total number of people signing this petition to close to 11,000.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask now that the petition I tabled on the floor of the Legislature be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I too rise to ask that the petition I tabled yesterday in support of public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented regarding the undermining of public health care in this province be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish that the petition I presented to the Assembly on Wednesday, April 5 from 325 Edmonton and area residents requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like the petition with respect to public health care that I presented yesterday to be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and ask that the petition I tabled yesterday in support of public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I request that the petition which I tabled in this Assembly yesterday urging the government to stop undermining our public health care system now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petitions that I tabled in the Legislature on Tuesday, April 4 and Wednesday, April 5 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to provide respective Regional Health Authorities with the flexibility necessary

to provide the delivery of publicly funded, publicly administered overnight surgical services cost-effectively and efficiently through the contracting-out of such services if deemed necessary.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to provide respective Regional Health Authorities with the flexibility necessary to provide the delivery of publicly funded, publicly administered overnight surgical services cost-effectively and efficiently through the contracting-out of such services if deemed necessary.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on a Standing Order 40 application.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you said, pursuant to Standing Order 40 I wish to inform you and my colleagues in the Assembly that today, Thursday, April 6, 2000, I will move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to deal with the following matter of urgent and pressing necessity.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to respect the right of journalists to freely join trade unions and to condemn any infringement of this basic human right.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to table eight copies of the responses of the Ministry of Children's Services to the questions from the designated subcommittee of supply.

Thank you.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would wish to table on behalf of the minister of federal and intergovernmental affairs copies of a letter sent to the Hon. Allan Rock, federal Minister of Health, regarding Bill 11 and its NAFTA implications.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table with the Assembly five copies of a current interprovincial listing of private surgical facilities across Canada.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the answers to the questions from the designated supply subcommittee meeting of March 13, 2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to table with the Assembly five copies of the Declaration of Arbroath, which is in recognition of Tartan Day.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table seven copies of the response to Written Question 10 that was passed yesterday in the House.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this

afternoon. The first is a report by Steven Shrybman, an international trade lawyer, entitled *Alberta NAFTA Opinion Says a Lot of Nothing*.

The second is a letter from Dr. Walley Temple from the University of Calgary, Faculty of Medicine, departments of oncology and surgery, asking that Bill 11 be eliminated.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today. The first one is the requisite copies of a report in the *Edmonton Journal* today, April 6, 2000, with the headline *Klein Critical of Journalists' Labour Disputes*.

The second tabling is a press release and a NAFTA related legal opinion which says: *Alberta NAFTA Opinion Says a Lot of . . .*

THE SPEAKER: Fine. You've given the title. It's tabled.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. They are from Jeffrey Anthony of Canmore, Dave Sutherland of Lac des Arcs, and also from Jill Briscoe. They are all to the Premier in opposition to the Genesis development in Kananaskis.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would table five copies of *Must Be Tough*, one of three postcards protesting tuition charges distributed by students from the University of Calgary for forwarding to the Minister of Learning.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a resolution passed by the Alberta Public Health Association in favour of women's organizations and women's health policy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table for the benefit of the House a letter on behalf of a constituent, Therese Beaudoin. She has a great deal of concern about Bill 11.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon for the Assembly. The first is an analysis of the government's pension plan prepared by Mr. Ken Smith, which points out a discrepancy between the 2 percent promised return and the 1.4 percent actual return on that pension plan.

The second tabling is actually a package of correspondence. One is an e-mail from a constituent; the other two documents are an exchange of letters between myself and the Minister of Justice regarding the Young Offenders Centre visitation policy. The package clears up a misunderstanding.

The last tabling is a facsimile copy of a letter received by the department of economic development and tourism on May 19, 1994. The correspondence is from Mr. Nader Ghermezian, and it relates to private-sector refinancing of West Edmonton Mall.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling one document. It's a Treasury document that shows a 17.5 percent decrease in health expenditures from '92-93 to '95-96.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter which I wrote to the provincial Ombudsman in January of this year asking him to investigate the inaccessibility of our public health care system.

The second tabling is five copies. It's about an upcoming rally that is scheduled to demonstrate citizens' opposition to Bill 11. The rally is being held both here in Edmonton and in Calgary.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Hon. member, please sit down.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise and talk about my favourite town – I think actually named after a Scottish deer by the name of Red Deer – and to recognize three individuals from that town who were from Joffre. They are actually seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and if you'll notice, the female side looks suspiciously like one of our members, that member being the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. The father, Mr. Don Graham, has had the confidence to be in your gallery and wear a kilt, which I think is an amazing feat. It gives me great pleasure to ask Don Graham, Colleen Graham, and Audrey Graham Thievin to please rise and receive the formal and warm welcome of this Assembly on this important Tartan Day, recognizing that Mr. Graham is adorned in the clan Graham tartan.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a man who sits in the members' gallery. He's a proud father. He is the father of the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod. I'd like to ask Mr. Jim Coutts to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of months ago I had the pleasure to visit with the next group that I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly. It's rather a distinction, I think, that for nine straight years Vauxhall elementary has taken part of their social studies course to come up to visit with us from some distance away. Today there are 34 students, three teachers, and seven parents. I'd like to introduce to each and every one of you here parent helpers Mrs. Glenna Pepneck, Mrs. Paula Olfert, Mrs. Paula Dumonceau, Mrs. Joanne Farnsworth, Mrs. Sue Skidmore, Mr. Dean Egeland, Mr. Richard Pepneck; the 34 students; teachers Mrs. Lori-Jo Plotzki, Mr. Terry Olfert, who's been here nearly every one of the trips, if I'm not mistaken, and last but not least – and he's not from Barrhead – the newest teacher on staff, Mr. Chris Ward, who hails from Scotland, joined the British army, was shot accidentally on manoeuvres in Suffield, was recovering in the Medicine Hat regional hospital when he met his Florence

Nightingale who became his wife, Jane. He had a change of careers. Chris studied at the U of L and just recently took on a job at Vauxhall elementary. I would like all my guests to stand up and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 53 bright, energetic H.E. Bourgoin school students from Bonnyville. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Kelly Trepanier, Miss Rhonda Castle, Mrs. Linda Orr, Miss Dara Green, and parent helpers Mr. Lydon Harley, Mr. Phil Kushnir, Mr. Roger Turcotte, Mrs. Carrie Scott, Mrs. Susan Smith, Mrs. Myra Layton, Mr. Daryl Luchynski, Mrs. Shelly Hutchison, Mrs. Patricia Michaud, Mrs. Kim Sydora, Miss Susan McLean, and Mrs. Heather Jankauskas. They are seated in the members' and the public galleries. I ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and to Members of the Legislative Assembly five wonderful people who have come all the way from High Prairie. Four of these go to school at St. Andrew's school and are in grade 10, and they are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Chris Bouyea. The students are Ernest Patenaude, Harlen Patenaude, Jerry Caudron, and Quentin Bellrose. They are seated in the members' gallery. I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce two individuals in the public gallery. Susan Thompson works in my constituency office and has been there from day one 11 years ago. She's accompanied by a young fellow from Thunder Bay, Ontario, the home of Bobby Curtola, Paul Schaefer, and Myrna Lorrie. If Rob Corbett and Susan Thompson would stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the executive members from the students' union at the University of Calgary, the past year's executive: Rob South, Heather Clitheroe, Nassr Awada, Jared Lorenz, Amanda Affonso. They are accompanied by next year's group: President Toby White, Mark Hoekstra, Duncan Wojtaszek, Alix D'Archangelo, Matt Lauzon. They are either in the gallery or will be in for question period, so I would request that they receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main opposition question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Private Health Insurance

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of my questions today are to the Acting Premier. On March 15, 1994, the Acting Premier told this Assembly:

There isn't a government operation, a government business, a

Crown corporation that is as efficient as the private sector, and indeed they're 20 to 40 percent less efficient.

Given that 159 private insurance companies are now registered with this government to underwrite sickness, or health insurance, is this a signal that his government intends to gradually replace Alberta health insurance with private insurance because of his government's philosophy that the private sector is always more efficient?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. acting leader of the government.

DR. WEST: It's going to be quite an act, Mr. Speaker.

I would say that that was a question that was directed towards health, and I would ask the minister of health to perhaps respond to that.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the answer is no.

MS CARLSON: Once again, Mr. Speaker, to the Acting Premier, who should be able to answer these questions: given that just a few years ago almost no health insurance was offered in Alberta, why is there a sudden proliferation of private insurers advertising that their insurance bridges the gaps in the Alberta health care plan? Isn't it because Alberta health care insurance is no longer adequate for people in this province?

DR. WEST: I will keep referring it to the minister of health. This is a tactic that they always use. They go to our leader when they should be addressing the minister responsible for these areas. I'm sure that the minister of health will answer this one.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think it should be noted and emphasized that Alberta provides coverage for health care services to its population directly through the health budget and through the various other provisions that we have; for instance, for chiropractors and for providing physiotherapy. We provide a very wide range of coverage out of the taxpayers' pool of money that is available to us. We're right there at the top as far other provinces are concerned.

As far as the reference to the taking out of private insurance, this is an individual Albertan's decision. I think it is probably an indication that many Albertans plan to travel. They want to have coverage in other locations, Mr. Speaker. They want to have insurance coverage for a wider and wider range of optional treatments. That is, I think, a sign of the strength of the economy and the vitality of the economy and the travel that takes place in our society.

I would like to repeat that as a government the government of Alberta provides the widest range of coverage for services in this country.

MS CARLSON: My final question is once again to the Acting Premier, who is the person who made the quote. Given that insurers only enter a market when there is a demand for their insurance and an opportunity for profit, will the minister confirm that his government's delisting of medical services creates the demand for private health insurance in this province?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, no, it does not.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, when the Trans Global Insurance Company approached this Assembly through private health lobbyist Gerald Chipeur in 1997, the Official Opposition proposed an

amendment to Bill Pr. 3 to ensure that this insurance company would not offer private health insurance. Here we are two years later, and the Alberta Treasury now lists Trans Global Insurance as being listed to offer accident and sickness insurance. To the Acting Premier: given that the government's majority rejected our amendment in 1997, will the Acting Treasurer confirm that it was their intent all along to allow Trans Global to offer sickness insurance?

MR. SMITH: Acting leader, Acting Treasurer. Holy smokes.

DR. WEST: I don't know what I'm doing now, Mr. Speaker.

At any rate, this is another health issue, and the minister of health will answer.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm assuming that this particular company met the criteria for offering accident insurance and life insurance and so forth. That is a process, as I understand it, that a proposal for a private insurance company can go through to meet the legal requirements to provide that extra type of insurance. It has absolutely nothing to do with Alberta Health and Wellness in terms of the priority that we place on a wide range of quality health care services in this province. I think it is demonstrated in our business plan, our budget, and the comparisons with other provinces that we are leaders in terms of providing coverage to Albertans.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, given that government members promised that this company would not offer sickness insurance, yet two years later the company is offering exactly that, why should Albertans trust any of this government's promises about health care?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that I didn't promise Trans Global or whatever it is anything with respect to their coverage or any relationship with the health care system. It's obviously an insurance company. It obviously went through the regulatory approval process.

Mr. Speaker, what we're interested in in Alberta Health and Wellness and in the government is quality health care services and treatments for Albertans in this province, and our commitment is well demonstrated in our budget documents and in our business plan.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, will the Acting Premier or acting health care minister confirm that this government's plan will lead in just a few short years to ads like this one in New Zealand that reads, "This is a \$12,000 hip replacement operation [and] it's yours from \$21.34 [per] month." Isn't that the real agenda that's at work in this province?

2:00

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the trend that we have in terms of our provision of health care services is that of providing higher quality services, more services than before. We can take, for instance, the whole area of transplant surgery or angioplasty, where we're providing thousands more treatments in those areas than we did years ago. That's where our priority is.

With respect to an activity of a particular insurance company, Mr. Speaker, this is really a stretch in terms of trying to link it to some policy of Health and Wellness.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Private Health Services

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proposed changes to the

government's health care policy could open the province to foreign health care providers. Steve Shrybman, an international trade lawyer, says, "The province's [most recent] legal opinion is a house of cards perched on a foundation that's shaky at best." My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that several U.S. investors have already invoked expropriation procedures under NAFTA to challenge Canadian measures, what guarantees can the minister give that the government's proposed private health care policies will not open the door to any further challenges?

Speaker's Ruling Legal Opinions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, please. *Beauchesne* section 408 says that "such questions should . . . not require an answer involving a legal opinion." If there's a legal opinion requested in here, it does not have to be responded to.

Private Health Services (continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, I guess the minister isn't prepared to give any guarantees.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please sit down. That is incorrect. The chair ruled the question out of order. The chair ruled on it. Look at the response.

You have the floor, hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Please proceed.

MS LEIBOVICI: As this is not a legal opinion that I'm asking of the minister, what I'd like to know is: as even the lawyers commissioned by the government have indicated that the provision of annex 2 may not necessarily apply to the government's new health care policy, what assurance can the minister give that Alberta will not be forced to allow U.S. and Mexican companies the same access as Canadian providers of health care services? That's not a legal opinion.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, that basic question has been posed several times before in this Assembly during recent weeks. There have been thorough answers given in the Assembly by the Hon. Shirley McClellan, the minister of federal and intergovernmental affairs.

Mr. Speaker, the point here is that we have consulted lawyers. We have contacted the federal government. We have determined that the provisions of Bill 11 are within the rules of NAFTA, and we have the ability to control and protect our health care system.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in your role as minister can you give Albertans a hundred percent guarantee that foreign health care providers will not be allowed in under NAFTA? Yes or no. Are you willing to do that as minister?

MR. JONSON: We have taken the responsible steps and acted responsibly with respect to this matter. We have consulted the best legal advice. We have – and I think this is very important, Mr. Speaker – contacted the federal government, whose legislation it is, who's in charge of that legislation. They are responsible for its application. We have had no negative ruling there, so I think we've acted very thoroughly and responsibly with respect to this matter.

THE SPEAKER: Before recognizing the leader of the third party, hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, it's totally inappropriate to

refer to an hon. member by her real name in this Assembly. It's titles only.

MR. JONSON: My apologies.

THE SPEAKER: The leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I delivered to the Premier's office over 4,000 cards from Albertans opposed to private, for-profit hospitals. These continue to come to my office at the rate of at least a hundred a day. Many of these Albertans are supporters of the government who are ready to abandon the government because of its policy of expanding for-profit health care. Today we learned that the Premier yesterday found it necessary to whip his caucus into line to make sure that the government's scheme to legalize private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta has their support. My questions are to the minister of health. Why is the government refusing to listen to some of his own MLAs whose constituents are overwhelmingly opposed to legalizing private, for-profit hospitals?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the government caucus we meet regularly. The views of MLAs are listened to by caucus and the leader, which is the governing party of this province. We discuss things thoroughly, and we make decisions on behalf of the best interests of Albertans.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is also to the minister of health. Why hasn't the government grasped what individual Albertans, both opposition parties, and some government MLAs seem to understand; that is, that private, for-profit hospitals cost more and deliver less?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the government caucus we made that decision some time ago, and it's reflected in Bill 11, and that is that Bill 11 clearly prohibits the establishment of private hospitals.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, my final question to the minister. What aspect of the government's for-profit hospital scheme is causing its own backbenchers to oppose the policy: the fact that it will drive up costs or the fact that it will destroy medicare?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all I reject the contention that is the first part of this question.

As far as the second part of his question, Mr. Speaker, neither.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have nine additional members who would like to participate today, so let's go quickly.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Children's Services

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of reports and reviews under way in government. Some of these include the government's response to the Children's Forum, the report of the Task Force on Children at Risk, the child welfare caseload review, and the office of the Children's Advocate. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. How are we going to measure progress in these areas?

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children's Services provides a co-ordinating function for all the partnering ministries from the Alberta children's initiative, and we do share the common vision that

children should be well cared for, safe, successful at learning, and healthy. In terms of our joint accountability we will be responding collectively within the next few weeks on both the children's task force, the Task Force on Children at Risk, as well as on the forum issues, but a report card later, prior to summer, will be released on the state of Alberta's children which will clearly identify the measurements of what we believe are significant for children in Alberta and the status of how they're doing.

Relative to the Children's Advocate review and the caseload review, Mr. Speaker, we intend to follow through with the knowledge we gain on the scope and sequence of the findings and incorporate those into best practices for Alberta so that children are truly well cared for.

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, given that the government is not in a position to do it all and has to work in partnership with the private sector and the community, can the same minister tell us what government is doing to ensure that community partners are at the table and participating in a spirit of co-operation?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we will never forget that the primary partner for the child is the parent, and the primary opportunity for government and other community agencies is to nurture the parent/child relationship wherever possible. Beyond that, through the child and family services authorities partnerships have been enhanced, I believe, with many potential partners. I would use as examples the tutorial with the police in the communities on the FAS/FAE initiative, as well as on family violence and protection, the work that we have been doing with universities and with the university through Dr. Margaret Clarke, particularly through pediatricians in work that will again hopefully improve the results and prevent FAS/FAE.

We have partnerships beyond with other ministries and corporations. Just yesterday, Mr. Speaker, we arranged for a partnership between the University of Alberta and two of the school jurisdictions that have similar interests in early intervention for the care and protection of children.

2:10

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the same minister as well. Given that one of the most sensitive and critical issues within the Ministry of Children's Services is the number of children who die while in care of government, can the minister tell us how the ministry is going to report this as a measure of its ability to protect children?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, every death of a child is tragic, and it is particularly tragic when a child in the care of the province through some guardian is obviously dead with explanations sometimes difficult to contemplate. In those cases, a special case review process is in order. This year in the annual report we intend to release the figures on the death of children in care and publish them, probably, for the first time.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I want to make something very clear. *The Public Manager* periodical in an article in the winter of '98-'99 stated:

For government agencies administering to clients . . . who do not have a . . . freedom of choice . . . [performance] measures may distort an understanding of how these agencies are truly performing.

I would contend that the publishing of figures of death of children or particular trauma related to children does not constitute the most appropriate performance measure. Therefore, I would claim and offer that the Ministry of Children's Services will do over this next year a renewed effort to in fact ensure that the performance measures

successfully and independently acknowledge those children that should be even freer of abuse and neglect, et cetera.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A review on government private health care policy from a member of the Health Ethics Centre at the University of Alberta has stated that the government's policy

offers no improvement in services for residents of rural or northern communities. Private, for-profit surgical centres would open only in urban areas with sufficient population to ensure steady patronage and profits.

My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister confirm that the government's private health care policy will result in varying health care between regions to the detriment of rural Alberta?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker. I would like to add – and perhaps the hon. member is not aware – that highly specialized procedures with high volumes are now provided mainly in our two major cities and our regional hospitals across the province, although he does allude to the northern part of the province. Certainly there is a regional health authority serving that area in Grande Prairie, also other good hospitals, one with quite a range of services in Peace River. So the government is supporting quality health care in the northern part of this province.

With respect to specialized, high-volume services, Mr. Speaker, I think it is logical that those would in most cases be located in centres of population where you have the efficiencies and the demand.

Certainly across this province, Mr. Speaker, through our air ambulance system, through our overall ambulance system we have a very good transfer capacity, whether it's an emergency or a necessary medical transfer, in terms of reaching northern Alberta and providing good service to it.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you. Given that the Premier said back on December 12, 1993, that health care could vary between regions, why should Albertans believe this minister when he says that his private health care policies will ensure that rural Albertans receive the same level of treatment as in urban areas?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, an overall principle or policy of our approach to health care in this province is that we make the highest quality of health care possible available to every single Albertan. As I said, through our overall transportation system in health as far as emergencies are concerned, in terms of the strategic location of regional hospitals, we provide that service to all Albertans.

There are certain basic practicalities with respect to distance in this province. It's a large and great province with much activity going on from the southern border to the northern border. We place no less priority on the people of High Level getting quality health care service than we do on the people of Edmonton. There are just very practical considerations with respect to travel and the time involved and the concentration of populations that mean that you have to do certain procedures, have certain programs in certain places, Mr. Speaker.

MR. GIBBONS: Is the minister asking Albertans to believe that

private facilities that can make more money setting up in Edmonton and Calgary will choose instead to open up in rural Alberta?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, I don't think that anybody could understand that question. I certainly didn't.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Health Ministers' Meeting

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health ministers from across Canada met in Markham, Ontario, last week to discuss their provincial health concerns. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: in your discussions with other health ministers, what was their reaction to Alberta's Health Care Protection Act, Bill 11?

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Whoa. Whoa. We've got an anticipation rule, and this afternoon on the agenda we have a debate on Bill 11. Now, we're not talking about health policy. The hon. member is asking for a direct response with respect to a bill on the agenda of the House this afternoon. So I don't think that's going to fly in this question period.

Do you have a supplementary?

Health Ministers' Meeting (continued)

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for that.

I will ask the health minister: did the health ministers make any progress in their agenda at their meeting with the federal minister, and did the federal minister have any suggestions to ensure the sustainability of the publicly funded health system?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that progress was certainly made on the part of provincial ministers in that we were unanimous in recommending a request that the federal government restore the money that had been cut from the federal contribution through the CHST, the Canadian health and social transfer. That message was very strongly conveyed to the federal minister; that is that at a very minimum we want that funding restored given the financial health of the federal government, the large surplus that they are running.

Mr. Speaker, we also indicated that in addition to the restoration there should be an escalator clause so that it is adjusted for costs into the future. This was done in the context, when you look back, of medicare originally being supported by the federal government on a 50-50 basis with the provinces. I think that without going through all of the very good arguments that we had, we should realize that now the contribution by the federal government is about 15 percent of health care expenditures across the provinces.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, my final question to the same minister: given that media reports have suggested that some provinces are threatening to deinsure some services currently covered by their provincial health care plans, will Alberta be deinsuring any services?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker, there are no plans for deinsuring services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Advanced Education Tuition Fees

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is creating an incredibly complicated patchwork quilt of loans, bursaries, and scholarships and remission to deal with the simple problem of high tuition, and further it's time for this government to acknowledge there's a problem with tuition levels in this province and do something about it. Those aren't my words. Those are the words of students at the University of Calgary who gave the minister such a raucous reception when he attended a senate meeting just a couple of months ago. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Does this minister agree with the students I've quoted and two-thirds of those Calgarians who in a recent survey confirmed that they believe tuition fees are too high in this province?

2:20

DR. OBERG: No, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DICKSON: Given that students dispute the government claim that no student graduates with more than a \$20,000 debt, what specific steps has this minister taken to investigate the student assertions of excessive debt loads?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the hon. member for asking me that question. As the hon. member is fully aware, in Budget 2000 there were significant steps taken to ensure that the net debt of students was decreased. We increased the student finance awards through bursaries, through loans, through remissions by 22 percent. Over three years that will be increased by a total of 50 percent. Included in that was a \$3 million new scholarship that will go to students purely as a scholarship.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that we have done in conjunction with CAUS, which is the university students' association, is to undertake a study to look at accessibility and see exactly if there is the so-called price shock that is stopping university students from coming into university. We certainly want to have every child, to have every student, to have every person in Alberta have the opportunity of going to university. We feel that that is absolutely essential.

MR. DICKSON: Given the government claims of being open and accessible, why has this minister refused to meet with students at the University of Calgary to specifically address their problems and their issues around tuition?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, there were a significant number of students at the university senate about two months ago. I have met with the president of the students' union probably about three or four times in the last three months. As a matter of fact, the president of the students' union, Rob South, was actually in my office on budget day as the budget was coming down. He received a prior briefing just before the budget, which obviously was embargoed.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just go through a previous meeting I had with CAUS, which, as I say, is the association that represents all university students. This was on August 13, 1999. What they did was put forward their concerns about student finance.

If I could go through them, the first was credit checks. CAUS was concerned that the federal loan regulations may have an impact on Alberta students. Mr. Speaker, we looked into that. Needs assessment: the maximum allowable amount that students are permitted to

earn a year without penalty was increased in this budget. The \$1,600 maximum earnings and the \$800 scholarship exemption: that was increased; the \$800 scholarship exemption was doubled to \$1,600.

MRS. SOETAERT: Nothing to do with tuition, Lyle.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, obviously there is someone over there yelling or yipping or whatever.

The bottom line is that the issue is not tuition; the issue is net debt.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie and then I gather it's the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, building on the previous question, not only are the students from the University of Calgary here today expressing their concerns, but I also represent Mount Royal College in my constituency, so the students' concerns are very important to me. My questions are also to the Minister of Learning. The students are questioning the need to freeze tuitions. Will the minister please respond to that request?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member realizes and knows the whole idea of tuition is a board of governor's decision, and the board of governors at the University of Calgary has decided on a tuition increase. That is certainly within their mandate.

Mr. Speaker, we have mandated that tuitions cannot be more than 30 percent of the expense of the universities. We have also mandated that university tuitions cannot go up more than \$243.50 on average per year.

Mr. Speaker, I'll give you a little bit of an anecdote if I may. At the University of Alberta there was recently a discussion about having differential tuition fees. What this would mean is that some university departments would go up higher in tuition fees and some would actually see a decrease. One of those faculties that would see a decrease was the Faculty of Arts. The students of the Faculty of Arts complained, put forward a huge protest saying that they did not want their tuition fees decreased because it would decrease the value of their degree. I found that extremely interesting.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Could the minister please respond to students who say that Alberta students pay higher than the national average for their tuition and university costs?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the answer is reasonably obvious. I think we have excellent universities here. We are probably about the sixth or seventh of the top universities when it comes to tuition. Our average tuition is around \$3,500 or \$3,600, which is very comparable across Canada. The only ones where there are decreases in tuition is British Columbia, where tuition has been frozen for several years.

Interestingly, though, in British Columbia the net debt of students has been rising at a rate that has been a larger proportion than Alberta. In Alberta the net debt of students has actually decreased by \$1,000 over the past year. We see the net debt going down even further in Alberta despite the fact that tuition fees have gone up.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll reiterate my answer. The whole issue about tuition fees is not tuition; it is net debt.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: given that the government is responding to the issue of tuitions by their remission policy, will the minister please comment on the high cost of transferability for students as they move through the system.

DR. OBERG: Yes, certainly, Mr. Speaker. Transferability is probably one of the main issues that I have to deal with on the postsecondary side. We have colleges that are not accredited by universities. We have universities that have differing degrees of transferability between the universities. Quite frankly, we have issues from high school to college, high school to university, university to college, and indeed college to college. The unfortunate part about all this is that it costs the students. When a student has to take two or three statistics courses just to keep his options open, it is a cost to the student.

When I first became minister, the first thing I did was set up a task force with the presidents of universities, and I told them that I wanted the transferability issue stopped, an end put to this transferability issue by September of 2001. They are moving on this, and we're certainly looking at it. This certainly is a priority for this department.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans, especially citizens with chronic illnesses and seniors, have watched and tried to cope with this government slowly, methodically, systematically delisting medical procedures and health supplies from its Alberta health care and Blue Cross insurance programs. From eye exams to dental work, from vitamins to laxatives, each year the government delists and chips away little by little the public health system in de-insuring services. Each time the province delists these services and products, it increases the demand and creates an even larger market for private health care insurance. My questions are to the minister of health. Before this government goes any further in its privatization policy, will it come clean with Albertans and inform them exactly what procedures and supplies are slated to be deinsured and delisted over the next five years, sir?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we have absolutely no plans to delist coverage for necessary medical services.

I think that buried in the preamble, Mr. Speaker, might be an issue that can be responded to. Let us take the whole area of coverage for drugs or for pharmaceuticals. Part of the process that is gone through there, of course, is that through our expert drug committee, which reviews new products that are approved to come onto the market, they look at the list of proposed new products, and where they find that there's a new product on the market which is more effective, some type of a pharmaceutical product, a pill that is more effective, then they will recommend to us and we will approve the coverage of that new pharmaceutical product and delist the old one, which is not as effective. That's all that goes on there.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: will the minister confirm or deny that any further delistings are to occur in the next year at least?

2:30

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we're acting very responsibly, for instance, in the whole area of Aids to Daily Living and the whole area of pharmaceutical products. We want to be focusing our financial resources on paying for the most effective, the most reasonable piece of equipment or pharmaceutical product. So certainly we are going to be approving new products, giving new authorizations to new advanced drugs. When that particular product

replaces or is better in most cases than one that was previously used, yes, we would probably be delisting some of those pharmaceutical products as far as coverage is concerned. They're still on the market if people want to purchase them, but our priority and our funding goes to the newer and better product.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In that the Acting Treasurer has the superintendent of insurance reporting directly to his office, why would he not respond to the questions about health insurance from the members for Edmonton-Riverview and Edmonton-Ellerslie?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. members would like to write me a letter with all their concerns, I'll be happy to pass it on to the superintendent of insurance.

MRS. SLOAN: Read the transcript.

DR. WEST: They asked me if I want to read *Hansard*. Certainly, but I think it's much better if they would personally write it down and put their signature to it so they can be accountable for what they've said.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Calgary Herald Strike

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I met with constituents who are on the staff of the *Calgary Herald* newspaper. A lot has been said about this government intervening in the dispute at the *Calgary Herald* to end the strike. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Are there any steps that the government can take to establish the first agreement in this dispute?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear that this dispute is really a private matter between the unions and the management of the *Calgary Herald*. Of course, as the minister responsible I have to be very, very careful that I remain neutral. It's my job to ensure that our legislation protects both the unions and the employers. Part of those rights include the right of a worker to engage themselves in a legal strike, and that in fact is what they're doing.

To answer the question specifically, there are no provisions to force the parties to give up their rights to negotiate, and certainly as minister it won't be me that would be using such a heavy-handed method.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary question is also to the same minister. Is Alberta the only jurisdiction that does not have first agreement legislation?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is not alone in this situation. It's my understanding that neither Nova Scotia nor Prince Edward Island would have legislative provisions to impose a first agreement. Most jurisdictions, however – and this would include Alberta – insist that parties bargain in good faith. So any questions that either party might have about the other in terms of their position during the collective bargaining process of course can be handled by the Labour Relations Board.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplementary question is also to the same minister. Are there any provisions in our labour relations legislation that could end this strike?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, yes, the labour relations code does provide that a government could declare an emergency and impose a binding arbitration type of provision, but normally we would only use that heavy-handed method if damage to health or property was likely to be caused, if health services were to be impacted, or if an unreasonable hardship was being caused to others who weren't a party to the dispute. I would use as an example in that case students in the case that there was a teacher's strike. I think clearly, Mr. Speaker, and to all members of the Assembly, we can see that none of these factors exist in the current strike involving the *Calgary Herald*.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Access to Medical Services

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Partnership for Health, a coalition of 68 health charities and community agencies which provide services to Albertans living with chronic, progressive, and/or disabling conditions and illnesses, recently released a position statement. This position statement referred to current government health policy and how it fails to address and protect the needs of their many clients. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How will this government address the delays in timely access to diagnosis and treatment of diseases as diverse as cancer, mental illness, and arthritis, delays that further impair these individuals and occur in urban and rural areas particularly where the retention of family practitioners is a problem?

MR. JONSON: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the rural areas of the province we have taken a major initiative starting actually over two years ago to make sure that there is an adequate supply of general practitioners in rural areas of this province. We developed the rural physician action plan. In co-operation with the physicians that were part of that committee through the AMA, we worked on an overall recruitment program to bring some rural physicians to this province and to get others to go into rural areas. We were successful in that regard, as I recall, placing some 70-plus people in needed areas of the province.

We also negotiated through the AMA and government the rural on-call program, which helped a great deal to make the workload more attractive in terms of providing on-call in rural areas. So we've certainly worked in that particular area, Mr. Speaker.

In a broader sense across the province we are providing more services than before. I can quote to you a series of measures that are reported via our business plan and our annual report in terms of the expansion in services, both in terms of quality and quantity, which apply to both rural and urban areas of the province, Mr. Speaker. So we're certainly working hard as a government in performing in that area.

MR. SAPERS: Given that the current government plans and programs fail to meet identified need, when will health funding adequately provide for the home care and therapeutic needs of Albertans with long-term, chronic, and degenerative diseases and conditions?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think we have demonstrated our priority and our focus on the whole area of long-term care and home care. We have had a very, very thorough plan developed, the report *Healthy Aging*, which was chaired by the Member for Redwater, and we're following through on those recommendations. The recent budget reflects a number of initiatives

in that area, additional funding specifically for home care, some 50 millions of dollars, as I recall, on top of the overall increase to regional health authority budgets.

In addition, we have taken certain initiatives in the capital construction area in terms of a program for innovative approaches to seniors' housing. Overall, we are demonstrably supporting the whole aging in place philosophy for our seniors population.

There was more to the question, I know, but I will stop at that point. I think I could certainly go on, though, and provide other information that the member should be aware of.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

2:40

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In its policy statement on the delivery of surgical services the government claimed that there will be no two-tier medicine. However, the report prepared by the Institute of Health Economics for this government states that if there is no regulation to prevent the offering of enhanced services in private facilities, two-tierism will be the result. My question is to the minister responsible for Health and Wellness. Why won't the minister simply admit it is the policy of his government not to prevent the offering of enhanced services in private facilities but to encourage it, despite what the report from the Institute of Health Economics says?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I seek your advice here, because I can certainly categorically answer his question, but it requires quoting a section of Bill 11. We have demonstrated very clearly, first of all through the overall policy announcement that was made some days ago with respect to controls on pricing, et cetera, for enhanced services through our regional health authorities and, secondly, in Bill 11 with the specific clauses that put in place the mechanism, the legislative ability to make sure that people do not have to purchase enhanced services needlessly, to make sure that they are informed ahead of time of their availability. That is very clear in the legislation. It's very much demonstrated in the legislation which is before the House. It was demonstrated previously with the policy that we established for regional health authorities, and that is clearly a priority of government.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I'm going to recognize you for a supplementary, but please note that I did rule out a question from the hon. Member for Redwater in anticipation of something this afternoon, so govern yourself accordingly.

MR. WICKMAN: Dealing with government policy, Mr. Speaker, how much longer can the minister continue to ignore the overwhelming evidence that his private hospital policy will lead to two-tier, American style medicine in Alberta?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in response to his second question, the legislation that is before the Assembly and under debate currently is, I think, a clear demonstration of the fact that we are not privatizing the health care system. We do not have private hospitals in mind. We are wanting a single tier of quality health care in this province where people have their insured services paid for no matter what their particular income or status in life might be. I could go through the provisions of Bill 11, but I'm sure the hon. member will have a

copy, and I would invite him to perhaps read the bill at some point in time.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, my final question: why doesn't this government simply do the honourable thing and scrap its ill-conceived notion of allowing for-profit hospitals?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the legislation clearly bans for-profit hospitals. In the provisions of the bill, yes, there is provision under a very much controlled contracting process where very strict criteria have to be met. The contemplation of having specialized, narrowly focused surgical service clinics in this province is part of the bill – the hon. member knows it – and this I think is done on a very sound basis.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll call upon the first of three members to participate in Members' Statements.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Tartan Day

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, April 6, is Tartan Day across Alberta, Canada, and many parts of the world. Tartan Day is celebrated for two reasons. It recognizes the tartan as a symbol of Scottish culture and Scottish clans, and in keeping with that, my family members and I are wearing the tartans of our clan, the clan Graham.

Tartan Day also commemorates the signing of the Declaration of Arbroath, also known as the Scottish Declaration of Independence, on April 6, 1320, at Arbroath, Scotland. It was there that Scottish nobles, including four Grahams amongst them, gathered at the Abbey of Arbroath and pledged to defend Scotland from persecution and foreign domination. This document is now recognized as one of the earliest expressions of the right of humanity to a peaceful and productive life free from oppression. With the assistance of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Bow, I have circulated to all hon. members a copy of this document, which is written in the form of a letter to the Pope in a very poetic and passionate language. I hope you all take the opportunity to read it, as it speaks to important principles of freedom.

Tartan Day also has personal meaning for my family and I as members of the clan Graham. We remember with great affection my grandfather, my father's father, Alexander Christie Graham, who emigrated from the town of Arbroath, where the declaration was signed, to Lacombe, Alberta, in 1920. We visited Arbroath and the abbey as well, and this is in the midst of lands on the east coast of Scotland which are traditionally occupied by the clan Graham. My grandparents and my parents as well have always encouraged a love of Scottish culture and tradition and pride in our clan. History suggests that our clan is known for leadership, particularly in battle.

I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in recognizing Tartan Day for its meaning for Scots and non-Scots alike.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Tartan Day

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the contributions of Albertans and Canadians of Scottish descent are invaluable and monumental. Today across North America parliaments and citizens will celebrate Tartan Day by recognizing the anniversary of the

declaration of the independence of Scotland, or Arbroath, and celebrating our Scottish roots. The declaration was signed on April 6, 1320. The connection between Scotland and Canada dates back to the 16th and 17th centuries, with thousands of members of the great clans emigrating to our country and province. Central to life in the early years was the kirk, with both the Presbyterian and United Church of Canada arising as living memories of the Scottish immigrants today. Early Scots dominated the fur, timber, and banking industries, and the first two Prime Ministers of Canada, John A. Macdonald and Alexander Mackenzie, were born in Scotland.

Today Scottish contributions past and present continue to touch every facet of our society. For being leaders in government, economics, science, technology, architecture, medicine, and literature, accompanied by the enriching pastimes of golf, curling, and Highland dancing, we are deeply indebted to our Scottish ancestry. I am proud today to honour our family's Scottish roots by wearing the Morrison tartan. On behalf of all Members of the Legislative Assembly may I wish all Alberta Scots a happy Tartan Day.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: The chair would be happy to accept from any Scot an invitation to play 18 holes anytime.

I'm going to just interrupt a bit. We've had an identification from the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed about what tartan she's wearing. May we ask what tartan the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is wearing?

MRS. SLOAN: I am wearing the tartan of the Morrison clan.

CFB Calgary Development

MRS. BURGNER: I should say that I was born in England, and I'll let it go at that.

Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to rise in the Assembly this afternoon and bring some information about a community initiative in Calgary-Currie. The citizens' advisory roundtable that has been appointed through the community to look at the development of CFB Calgary has brought forward a couple of proposals which I think the community would be quite pleased to participate in. In the first place, they are looking at an affordable housing policy in the city of Calgary with respect to CFB Calgary lands.

Mr. Speaker, the community group recognizes that we have much to be thankful for in our community, and given the huge amount of land that is now available to us through the federal government for the development of housing, the community has asked that a certain portion of that land on the west side of the Crowchild Trail be set aside and be developed in response to the needs of those who find housing a difficult opportunity in our community. In addition to that, they would like to recognize the work that's being done on the east side of Crowchild, where a portion of property has been dedicated in their proposals for this very unique purpose.

Mr. Speaker, it takes leadership in the community to identify that the citizens of Calgary, particularly in our area, are interested in finding solutions to the housing problems that we face. They draw on the work that's been done by the community of Calgary, the report that was written in conjunction with my colleague from Calgary-Bow, and members of city council. This initiative will be watched and supported by myself as the chairman of the intergovernment liaison committee, and I would encourage all colleagues in the Assembly to support this initiative as it moves forward.

Thank you.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Opposition House Leader, in this case the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. Under Standing Order 7(5) I would ask the order of government business to be brought forward to the Assembly for next week.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, April 10, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading we anticipate dealing with bills 7, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 11, and as per the Order Paper. In the evening at 8 o'clock under Government Bills and Orders for second reading bills 11, 3, and 13, and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, April 11, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading and Committee of the Whole, as the case may pertain, bills 20, 22, 23, and 11, and as per the Order Paper. Tuesday evening at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading or Committee of the Whole, as the case may pertain, bills 11, 18, 19, and 20, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, April 12, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading or Committee of the Whole, as the case may pertain, bills 10 and 11, and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, April 13, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading or Committee of the Whole, as the case may pertain, bills 21 and 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Anticipation

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the relevant section of *Beauchesne* and under the Standing Orders wherein it's inappropriate to ask a question relating to a matter which is on the Order Paper for discussion. In particular in this case, while I'm delighted and I know my colleagues are delighted to have the Minister of Health and Wellness answer the questions of the opposition relating to Bill 11 at any given time because there needs to be a lot of clarification for the misinformation they have, it is inappropriate under our rules to raise questions when a matter is clearly on the Order Paper.

There's been a certain subterfuge and attempt to get around those rules, and I know, Mr. Speaker, it puts you in a very, very difficult position to exercise your authority in that respect when people purport to ask questions under government policy when they know full well that that policy has been translated into a bill, that the bill is Bill 11, and it's on the Order Paper. So I would ask you to call to order the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford when he raises a question purporting to ask about the policy of the government on surgical facilities, which he clearly knows has been translated into a bill, and when there's a bill before the House on that very same matter. You can't answer that question, as the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness indicated, without dealing specifically with the provisions of Bill 11, which puts the Minister of Health and Wellness in a difficult position in abrogating the rules of the House by responding.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on this point of order.

MS CARLSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Clearly today he is fishing for ideas to rise on a point of order. He would have more appropriately risen on a point of order for his own member, the Member for Redwater, who did ask a specific question on Bill 11.

The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was very clear in terms of the outline of his policy question for the minister of health, and it is appropriate to ask policy questions at this time on all aspects of health policy because they are still, even in light of Bill 11 being on the Order Paper, running hospitals, still making decisions. So it's very appropriate for us on behalf of the people of this province to ask those kinds of questions.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I really do appreciate the co-operation received from hon. members to the plea that the chair made at the beginning of the Routine today. He's been listening very attentively, so I think he's starting to really see through this and really understand what's going on here.

Essentially what's going on is that one hon. member stands up and says: you said that. Then the hon. member on the other side stands up and says: no, that's not what I said. Or one hon. member says, "This is what you're doing," and the other hon. member stands up and says: no, this is not what I'm doing. That essentially is the basic theme for the most part in question period.

So here we now have this scenario. We have been in this session for a period of time. Health seems to have been one of those interesting questions for the question period, and this week on Tuesday we started in on the phase known as second reading of Bill 11. Then after the admonitions that did come from the chair about anticipation, consultation was made with the House leader of the Official Opposition, who advised the chair that basically there would be great clarity and attention to the drafting of the questions that would come from the opposition members with respect to health. They would relate to the official policy of the government as outlined in a policy paper in the latter part of 1999. They have informed me that they've drafted their questions in such a way so it's on the edge. Now, today the House leader of the government has basically said: but now we've translated the policy into a bill. So we're getting right on the edge here with a lot of this stuff.

I would like all hon. members to take the next several days to look at two skill developments. Good work today, by the way. This was good. Just spend a little more time refining the merit of the questions before Monday. For those who are responding, perhaps just spend a little more time refining brevity in terms of the response. This would really be good. Today we had 13 sets of questions, and yes, acting leader of the government, you got through it okay.

The hon. leader of the third party on a Standing Order 40 application.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party on a Standing Order 40 application.

Journalists' Trade Unions

Dr. Pannu:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to respect the right of journalists to freely join trade unions and to condemn any infringement of this basic human right.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be speaking to the urgent and pressing necessity of the matter. The necessity for debate in this Legislature on the motion arises from some events and statements that happened yesterday. Some of them

are reported in today's *Edmonton Journal* in a report by Dean Bennett of the Canadian Press and in statements made by the Premier in his press availability yesterday afternoon, an availability at which I was present. So this motion addresses in my judgment a highly urgent matter and needs to be debated today in this Assembly.

3:00

Yesterday 30 journalists who had been on a legal strike against the *Calgary Herald* visited the Legislature. They met with me and with members of the Liberal opposition. However, the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, who is responsible for labour relations in the province, refused to meet with the journalists. The journalists were also told that other members of the government caucus were discouraged from meeting with them. Now, I have four reasons, Mr. Speaker, that will lay out considerations which raise . . .

Speaker's Ruling Standing Order 40 Motions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I want to caution you that under this particular kind of application, this is a nondebatable application. Now, that means that this is not a debate offered, so when the hon. member chooses to invoke other members of this Assembly, they have no opportunity to participate, and they have no opportunity to provide an alternate view of the matter or correct it if they believe that a mistake has been made.

I'm not suggesting here for a moment that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is doing such a thing, but there has to be a great deal of care to deal with the urgency of the Standing Order 40 application. Please remember that no other member can participate unless the Assembly gives unanimous consent to a debate. So, please, let's go with the urgency of the motion.

Journalists' Trade Unions (continued)

DR. PANNU: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm in complete and total agreement with your direction, and I respect the very spirit of Standing Order 40, so I would very much respect the understanding that I share with you with respect to what I should say. I certainly am open to your direction at any moment when you think that I may not be so doing.

Speaking to the urgency, Mr. Speaker, I have to draw attention to some facts. The owner of the *Calgary Herald*, Conrad Black, recently said that he plans to wait for two years and then to decertify the union. Doesn't this fact make it imperative that the minister listen to the concerns of the employees who are legally on strike against an employer who so clearly refused to bargain? Doesn't the minister's inaction, combined with the refusal to even meet with the journalists visiting here yesterday, show that there is a need for this Assembly to urgently debate this matter now that the minister has shown his inability to enter into this?

The second reason, Mr. Speaker, is that the inaction of the minister was compounded by statements made yesterday by the Premier in his media availability. I have referred to the *Edmonton Journal* article on this, but I heard the Premier clearly say that journalists should not have the right to strike, and in another statement he strongly suggested that the journalists should not even be able to join the trade unions.

Now, does this signal, Mr. Speaker, an immediate change in government policy with respect to labour relations and the labour laws of this province? That's the question I've raised, and it needs the urgent attention of this Assembly.

The next reason, Mr. Speaker, has to do with: does the Premier's statement show a studied disregard for the hard-fought right of all

employees to freely decide whether to join trade unions? If the right of journalists to join unions is questioned today, who is next? Teachers or nurses?

When employees democratically decide to join a union, shouldn't the government respect and uphold this decision? The Premier's statements bring into question, serious question, this government's commitment to uphold any basic human rights of working Albertans. This is a matter that only this Assembly can decide, and that's why, given the serious nature of yesterday's events, I urge all members to allow a debate to proceed on a motion which reaffirms the Assembly's commitment to the collective bargaining rights of employees, including journalists.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Unanimous consent denied]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the third party, I would invite you to come and visit me – we'll have a cup of coffee one of these days – and we'll talk about Standing Order 40 applications. Okay?

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 21 Appropriation Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move Bill 21 for second reading, the Appropriation Act, 2000.

There has been considerable debate in the Assembly on the budget process. This act, the third appropriation bill to be here this session, is the final bill that brings forth the money for the operating expense and capital investment, as well as the nonbudgetary disbursements, the lottery fund payments. Again, I encourage all members to support this. It is the money that is needed to provide the excellent programs for this province, and it does support this Legislative Assembly, because there's \$26,727,215 for the operation of this Assembly. I would encourage all members to vote for this bill on second reading.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to be speaking to second reading of Bill 21, the appropriation bill, and I'm hoping that we will have the opportunity to have a number of speakers speak to it this afternoon. In the event that that doesn't happen, which I understand is a possibility, I have solicited major concerns from a number of my colleagues that I will be discussing.

First of all, I'd like to just talk about the budgetary process a little bit and firstly thank those ministers who responded in a prompt fashion to our questions this year. It's often been the case in budgetary estimates that we don't get answers to our questions for a very long time. Sometimes nearly a year passes before questions get answered. In this case, particularly from the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, we had some responses within 24 hours of those questions being asked in debate.

Secondly, I would like to talk a little bit about the budgetary process. I find it very helpful in the budgetary process when ministers come to the table with their deputy ministers and other support staff from the department to answer questions. That gives us an opportunity to get more than the political answer and more

than just the policy answer, Mr. Speaker, but also some accurate and definite and helpful answers from the people who work very hard within those departments. I would like to thank those people who were available to answer questions this year, and I would support the government, in their review of the budgetary process, taking a look at expanding that role.

It is much more helpful, I think, to be able to sit down at a table and ask detailed questions and get detailed answers than it is with just an opportunity here in the Legislature, where we stand up and ask a series of questions and sometimes get answers to them and sometimes not. So in the budgetary process review, which I understand is an ongoing process in this Assembly, I would hope that all of the House leaders would take that under consideration and review it, and I look forward to seeing some movement made in that regard.

With regard to the way the rest of the budget estimates time is devoted, I am very unhappy with that, Mr. Speaker. We have more than one department debated at the same time in this Assembly, sometimes not just two departments but three departments, and that just isn't very helpful. We want, as representatives of the people of the province, to be able to ask all of the questions we have in all of the areas, and often that's an impossibility if two departments are being run concurrently. Also, by squeezing the budget estimates into so few days, we don't have an adequate amount of time to take the budget as presented, to go back to our constituents, to ask them to review the information, to think about it, to then present us with questions that they have and that they would like to see answered in this Assembly, and then also meet the requirements of being at the particular budget day at the particular appropriate time. It doesn't work. It's way too tight a time line.

I think often the government chooses that kind of an option for exactly that reason. So while they tell us that we have approximately 40 days dedicated to budget review in this Assembly, certainly that isn't the case in terms of real days, and we would like to see that process changed. Sometimes there just isn't an opportunity to ask all the questions.

3:10

In addition, we would like a review done of the time committed to the budgetary process, because once again there isn't enough time allocated to the different departments. I know that in Environment estimates I myself had many questions that I was not able to ask in person. They had to be submitted in writing, and while that's the second-best choice and the minister does respond to those questions in a reasonable fashion, it certainly can't replace what is going on in terms of asking questions at a point where you can ask a rebuttal question and he can give a rebuttal answer or his staff can provide some support.

When the House leaders get together to review the budgetary process, I would also ask on behalf of all my colleagues that they review the time committed to budget estimates and look at expanding it, particularly for the departments like Community Development, which seem to be catchall departments for a number of different areas of interest to a variety of people in this province. That department is a particular issue for people who have concerns and want those questions asked.

In addition, with the consolidated departments that the government has come up with in their latest reorganization, it also creates concerns for us in terms of the budgetary process because the consolidated departments merit a day of debate themselves on each sector they're representing. For instance, in the Learning department certainly we would like to within the budgetary process be able one evening to talk about advanced education and another evening other

areas of education, because they do have quite separate and distinct issues in many areas, Mr. Speaker. I believe the minister knows this, and we would appreciate his support on that kind of a division in budgetary estimates. We would say that the time given for those purposes is not adequate, and certainly we would like to see that reviewed in the future.

Now I will go to some comments that my colleagues had with regards to issues they feel are still outstanding on appropriations in the event that they don't have an opportunity this afternoon to speak to this bill at second reading.

The first is from my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo. He brings a Calgary concern to the floor of the Legislature today, and that is that there are still problems with the arbitrary and inflexible school utilization formula. That means that new schools cannot be built in Calgary. They've grown by over 116,000 new people, but there are no new schools there. Mr. Speaker, we hear this concern every single time we go to Calgary. It doesn't matter whether we're talking to parents, schoolchildren, people within the advanced education system, business sectors, community development sectors, or environmental sectors; they all say that this is one of the top three or four issues facing the residents of Calgary at this time. That utilization formula just doesn't work. No shame in the government saying that, and no shame in them addressing it so that it would better meet the needs of large, growing communities like Calgary is.

We have to remember that education is one of the major keys we have in terms of being globally competitive. If we're forcing our children into overcrowded schools or busing them for long periods of time, then clearly they are not in an environment that provides the kind of stimulation and enrichment so that they can grow and really maximize their potential. This continues to be an issue. We will continue to raise it, Mr. Speaker, because it's something that could have been addressed in this budget and certainly was not.

From my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark. She has concerns, of course, on health care, and she has this point that she would like raised. Though dollars are increasing in health care, there is no real way of tracking the dollars, especially dollars to provide services and to provide information on contracts. When will the contracts be open so that we know where the taxpayer dollars are going? This has been an ongoing issue in question period, it was an ongoing issue during the budget estimates, and we still don't have the answer. Why is it that private contracts are not being open and available to taxpayers when it's taxpayers paying out those dollars? It's a fundamental question that needs to be asked and answered. We will continue to ask that question as time goes on, unless of course before the vote on this bill we get an answer to it.

Private contractors need to be open and available to the same scrutiny as any other government department if they are receiving taxpayer dollars. That's simple common sense. It's what the people of this province want. They want to know that money is being properly spent. We hear all kinds of concerns coming from the RHAs that dollars aren't being tracked in an appropriate fashion in some instances, and we want to know why that is. It isn't just us asking this question, Mr. Speaker. It is the Auditor General as well. We know that when he asks the question, it isn't rooted in any kind of policy debate or partisan politics. It's a legitimate concern that deserves an answer.

Certainly private contractors who are going to make a buck from the people of this province should come under the same scrutiny as any other public dollars that are spent, and those contracts need to be open, they need to be accessible, and they need to be reviewed by representatives of the people. So we say: bring them to the floor of the Legislature; let us take a look at them and ask why they aren't available. We get the rhetorical answers from the minister, but in

fact if they're refusing to make them available, then perhaps they have something to hide there, and we want to have the answer to that question. I think that those are legitimate concerns that need to be addressed.

Perhaps the answer to the question of why they are not being open and reviewable is that they are responsible for why health care expenditures are increasing. While our services have been decreasing over the past few years, we have seen costs go up. The government brags all the time about spending in health care reaching dollars similar to what they were prior to the cuts being initiated in 1993. There isn't a person in this Assembly or in this province that doesn't know that service has drastically decreased. We have serious problems out there, and they have everything to do with the wrong kind of funding. [interjections] Well, I'm hearing lots of noises from the other side of the House, Mr. Speaker, but the fact is that I have more concerns about the delivery of services and health care in this province now, in this year when funding is back up at the pre-1993 levels, than I had during the time period of the cuts, and I had a substantial number of concerns at that time.

So we know that it isn't working, that there are some real problems, that this social experiment that this government conducted in health care isn't working and won't work in the manner in which they are conducting it. We want to know if one of those reasons is because private contractors have contracts that would be unacceptable to the public were they available for public scrutiny. Once again we are asking for that information to be made public so that the people of this province know how their money is being spent. I think that's a legitimate request, Mr. Speaker. They just want to know where their money is going. With any other service that you buy, you get a bill and you get a statement of accounting. If you go back to the company, you can get more of an accounting than what they initially gave you, but not from this government, and that is not a fair way to treat the people of this province.

The next concerns I have are from my colleague from Edmonton-Centre. While she has a whole host of questions that remain about the budgetary process, she particularly wants to focus these final comments that we have in this reading on seniors. In this budget there are once again, Mr. Speaker, no increases for seniors. They have not yet restored the 5 percent cut to this group, and that is appalling. This Premier made a promise that he would restore those dollars, and he has not. We want to know why not. We have seen increases in the budget, but they are for volume demand. They are not increases in the thresholds or the benefits.

3:20

Here we have the people who have built this very province, who have given us a rich and diversified economy and history, who have done a lot of work to get us where we are, and this Premier is turning his back on them. He made a promise to restore the 5 percent to all groups, and it simply isn't happening. Why is that? That question was not answered during budgetary debates. They talk about relative dollars, but any fool can see through that. It isn't appropriate in this case. They didn't get the 5 percent back. They want to know why. It's a legitimate question, and we want it answered.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We also see that there have been no increases in the quality-of-life sector. Once again, that's a legitimate question that needs to be answered and wasn't addressed during the budgetary process. This government makes more and more from lotteries, but no more is going to areas like sports, arts, volunteers, parks, and those kinds of areas that are under Community Development. Why is that, Mr.

Speaker? We know, from all of the studies we have seen, that for every dollar in lotteries that you take out of people's pockets, it costs us \$3 more to support the resulting problems. Those are quality-of-life issues. Those are social issues. Those are education issues. We do not see those dollars coming back in a proportionate fashion. It is shameful that that happens.

We expect better answers than the ones we've gotten. We expect answers that adequately fund these areas, and certainly we expect the proper dollars, the dollars promised to seniors, to go back into their pockets. Many seniors in this province live on very low incomes, and they should not be penalized for something that was not of their making. Promises made should be promises that are kept. In this case, it isn't the situation.

My next concerns come from my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood. She would like to know about money to build a new aboriginal school in this city. The new high school will be staggered through a number of schools. How can the government be serious about assisting urban aboriginal problems when they do this? The aboriginal community wants the school, and it is, once again, a legitimate request. Mr. Speaker, we know that a great percentage of the aboriginal population in this city is in the north-central region of the city, and there are certainly adequate provisions that could be made to accommodate a high school within that area. To have these programs chopped into a number of miniprograms in a number of schools throughout the city doesn't meet the needs of the people.

It's surprising that the Premier would condone this kind of activity, given what he says is his support of this community. You know, you just can't talk the talk; you've got to walk the walk. An aboriginal school that focuses on the needs of this community would be some measure of getting to where we need to be. We need to take the concerns of the aboriginal community seriously. We need to address them. We have specific schools for other populations who have particular concerns or needs. Why is it that in this particular population we are prepared to ignore them? Well, I tell you, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we are not prepared to ignore them, and this is not an issue that's going to go away. It is an issue that we will continue to pursue even though this Premier and this government refuse to do so in this particular budget year.

The next issue is from my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar. He, too, has concerns about schools. Many of the schools in the older neighbourhoods of Edmonton and Calgary are in need of repair, and the current process needs to be speeded up or reviewed, Mr. Speaker. I would say not just in the older areas of the province but even in some of the newer areas. Certainly I have schools in my own riding, in Edmonton-Mill Woods, that are about 20 or 25 years old, which I don't really deem to be old, that need substantive repairs. They have ice-cream buckets in the hallways collecting the drips because the roofs need to be repaired. It's true. They have mousetraps all over the place because rodents are getting inside the school. Those are real problems. The rugs are worn so thin that they've had to put duct tape over some of the holes because kids were catching their heels in the holes and falling on their faces.

These are problems in newer schools. I can't imagine what it's like in older schools. I'm sure that the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne would also like to address this issue, because I'm sure there are schools in his riding that have problems that need to be addressed. He's shaking his head no. [interjection] He says: no mice. But there are other problems certainly. We have seen that happen throughout this province. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to speak through the chair on this issue.

I'm sure that every member in this Assembly has got schools that have problems that need to be addressed, that are really major problems, not minor problems. Something is wrong with the

maintenance process that we have, and we would like to see that addressed in a more wholehearted fashion than what we saw addressed in these budgetary years. Certainly I haven't had any calls from principals jumping up and down with glee because they're getting the dollars they need to put in some very necessary maintenance procedures in their school. I look forward to that day, and I'll be one of the first people to congratulate the government if they make the move to do that. Unfortunately, I can't congratulate them because they're not doing it. Perhaps they could put some pressure on their front bench to address this particular concern. That would be a good idea.

My colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry is worried about tourism. He's very disappointed about the funding for tourism promotion, particularly the chronic underfunding in northern Alberta. It's been a problem for a long time, Mr. Speaker. When you take a look at the dollars spent in the different regions of this province, certainly they are not proportionately spent.

I'm out of time. I have lots of questions to go yet. We hope that someone else will have an opportunity.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn debate on Bill 21.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

[Adjourned debate April 5: Mrs. O'Neill]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is an initiative which is before us in this Chamber in response to two situations. Currently we do not have the legislative capability to prevent the establishment of private hospitals, the establishment of which would clearly and surely establish a parallel, private health care system. In addition to that, we do not have the governing power to regulate existing surgical clinics. Therefore, this proposed legislation is meant to fill a legislative and a regulatory void.

The second situation that Bill 11's initiative addresses is a universally recognized new way or the demand for finding new ways of maintaining and sustaining our publicly funded health care system and for sustaining all those health care services for us now and for future generations. Mr. Speaker, this bill is a response to enshrine in legislation our commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act by putting them in the preamble. The principles of the Canada Health Act articulate what is the essence and what I consider the core of the medicare system. The medicare system is something we cherish, that is part of our identity as Canadians, and it is something that we as Canadians and as Albertans and as the government of Alberta want to write into the legislation of this province.

Our commitment to those principles of universality, portability, comprehensiveness, public administration, and accessibility, those principles that are the underpinnings of this social contract that we the citizens of Canada have with our governments, the principles of medicare, the principles of the Canada Health Act translated into what we call and I will call the vernacular – these five principles mean that everyone can have access to health services as they need them, in every province and territory of this country. Those services will be provided for all that is deemed medically necessary, and all

will be looked after within the jurisdiction and the administration of our public system.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, I'm a person who has experienced life without medicare. It is a situation that I wouldn't wish for anyone to ever experience in their families, in their lives, so I say with great conviction that I believe that Bill 11 is necessary. It is necessary for us to enshrine in our legislation our commitment to those principles, but it is also necessary so that we and the rest of the members of our families, the rest of the people of our province and of our country will never experience the economic devastation that can come to a family who has a great need for medical services that they cannot afford. I say that, too, because I believe that this government, this bill does not mess with medicare, and because it doesn't mess with medicare, we have to realize that it is something that we must commit to and that we must work with.

Bill 11 is legislation similar to that which is already in place in other provinces. It is fully consistent with the principles of the Canada Health Act, and at the end of the day, when this enabling piece of legislation passes, Alberta will still have a universal, publicly funded health system where government covers the cost of all medically necessary health services. I say that and I'd like to repeat it, because unfortunately there are a number of citizens in this province who are spreading falsehood and fear. In fact, they are engaged in a feeding frenzy of fear among some who are most vulnerable in our communities and telling them that they are going to have to pay for services in the future and which Bill 11 says that they specifically will not.

I believe that the most explicit part of Bill 11 is part 1, Protection of Publicly Funded Health Care. I would like to emphasize the first sentence of that section, which in its simplicity and in its essence reads, "No person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." This is an irrefutable statement that what this legislation is all about is protecting against the possible development of a two-tiered system. We need that protection because right now we do not have the regulatory powers over the 52 private clinics that currently exist in this province. We have no legislative capability to regulate and control private surgical facilities to prevent the establishment of private hospitals. We need the legislative protection Bill 11 offers us, protection for the sustainability of Alberta's publicly funded and publicly administered health care system. Bill 11 prohibits private hospitals and tightens the rules around contracting out surgeries, including both day surgeries and those minor surgeries requiring an overnight stay.

The essence of Bill 11 is that it enables and gives the authority to our regional health authorities to consider, should they deem it necessary, the ability to enter into a contract where they could provide more surgical services for more people in a more timely fashion.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. Member for St. Albert. We have several members who are so excited about the debate that they seem to wish to enter into it. Hon. member on this side and hon. minister on that side, when the opportunity comes, please stand. [interjection] Okay. It was one of the other persons, an hon. member on each side. The point is that we should only have one person speaking at a time, and this calling back and forth just escalates until we can no longer hear the person. So let's save it for when it's our turn.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This issue, this topic, and this bill are very much at the top in the minds of my constituents, and it is something that I'm taking very seriously. However, my attempt to deal with this is a concern of mine because I feel that there are a number of people who are not taking this seriously, who quite frankly are not concerned about the concerns they are adding to what people already have.

Debate Continued

MRS. O'NEILL: I will continue, Mr. Speaker, by saying that because of this legislation of course no parallel, private, for-profit health system will be allowed to develop in Alberta. I might add that if we do not pass this legislation stipulating just that, what will happen is that the worst nightmares of those who are surrounding this bill with their unfounded fears will come true.

This legislation ensures that surgical facilities will only be able to provide services under a contract with the public system when it is in the best interests of the publicly administered, publicly funded health care system. Most important, though, is the fact that the publicly administered system will have regulatory control over our private surgical facilities.

This piece of legislation will protect public health care in this province – make no mistake about it – but it will do more than that. In trying to reach our end, we have inadvertently found that the means are to our advantage. It will also provide regional health authorities with the flexibility to provide the most services to the most people in the most timely fashion.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation doesn't say that health authorities must contract with private surgical facilities. In fact, it simply offers an option to contract with such facilities if the regions have evidence that there will be a benefit in doing so. This is what we call enabling legislation; this is not what we call directive legislation. Surgical facilities are not necessarily more cost-efficient than private hospitals. An individual analysis would have to be done for each and every contract proposed to a regional health authority by a surgical facility. Only those contracts that showed a net benefit to the public and to the public system could be or would be approved.

Let me clarify what a net benefit means: increased access to services, something that my constituents are constantly asking for; improved cost-effectiveness or efficiency, something that my constituents are certainly aware of. These factors would have to be demonstrated in the contract proposal or it would not be approved. My constituents and, I say, all Albertans have been very clear that any movement towards an American style, two-tier health system is intolerable. Well, I want to stand here today and say that it is also intolerable to me. I will not stand for anything that would interfere with the universality, the accessibility, the comprehensiveness, the portability, and the public administration of our social contract called medicare.

Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, affirms Alberta's commitment to a quality, publicly funded and administered health care system and to preserving those principles that we find and hold so dear to us and that we hold so dear to our Alberta and Canadian identity. It is something that we believe in and we stand in solidarity on with all fellow Canadians across this country. It is in this spirit that we have introduced Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 prohibits queue-jumping by reason of having extra money offered to reach the head of the line. It prevents charging facility fees for medically necessary services, and it prohibits anyone from requiring patients to purchase goods and services that are not medically necessary. This, I believe, is what I

call responsible consumer protection. It also sets out clear rules for the sale to patients of goods and services that are not medically necessary. I have great confidence in the citizens of Alberta, as I have great confidence in my own constituents, that they are able to make the decision as to whether they want and are capable of purchasing additional and enhanced services.

It also establishes in legislation the new Premier's Advisory Council on Health to provide strategic advice on the preservation and the continuing sustainability of quality health services for Albertans and on the purposeful direction of the publicly funded and administered health system, including the broad issues to be explored of how we will configure primary health care delivery, how we will deal with the increased use of technology and the great demand for new pharmaceuticals, and how we will explore alternative compensation models for those who deliver health care in our system.

Provincial health funding will continue to flow directly to health authorities, and it will be the health authorities that decide whether to use that funding to open up more operating rooms and beds in their own hospitals and their own facilities.

Mr. Speaker, some aspects of Bill 11 seem to get misunderstood all too often, or maybe they are conveniently ignored, so let me repeat: no Albertan will have to pay for medically necessary surgeries, whether it's performed in a public hospital or in a surgical facility under contract to a health authority. The publicly funded system pays the whole cost, period. No Albertan will be able to pay to get faster service, and no facility operator or physician will be able to receive payment to give faster surgical services to individuals. No major surgeries will be performed outside a public hospital, because under Bill 11 private hospitals are prohibited.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 will not fix all the problems facing Alberta's health system. It was never intended to do that. Bill 11 is two-pronged: in its enabling attempt and in its protective nature. Bill 11 and the rest of the Alberta government's six-point plan will address the key challenges facing health care and make great strides towards a solution. I might add that the six-point plan involves the key directions of improving access to publicly funded services, improving the management of the health system, enhancing the quality of health services, increasing our emphasis on health promotion and on disease and accident prevention, continuing to foster new ideas to improve our health system, and taking the necessary steps to protect the publicly funded system from any potentially negative external factors.

This is the plan, Mr. Speaker. This is the plan that our Minister of Health and Wellness has put before us. This is the plan and the vision and the encompassing direction that we as government are looking at beyond the parameters of the one small step called Bill 11. The details of this plan are clear evidence of this government's commitment to Canada's single-payer, publicly funded style of health care and our commitment to making that system better to meet the challenges of this new century.

The Health Care Protection Act is only one part of this larger, overall plan envisioned for our health system, our plan to continually improve the quality and accessibility of publicly funded health services in this province. The bottom line remains this. When passed, Bill 11 will prohibit private hospitals and will prohibit any surgical facility from offering insured surgical services without a contract with a health authority. This legislation would prohibit the development of a parallel, private health care system in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to conclude by making the following comments. I believe that this Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, is a very, very enabling piece of legislation. It operates within the confines of the principles of the Canada Health Act, and its purpose

is specifically to provide regional health authorities with the choice and the option to find within their budget the ability to provide more surgical services to more people in a more timely fashion.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A poll done by Pollara in March 2000 showed that health care is the most important issue facing Canada today. The same poll also identified health care as the number one priority for Canadians and that Canadians ranked health care as the number one issue to get worse before it gets better. Health care in Alberta is at a crossroad, and this government has chosen to steer this province in a direction that few Albertans support.

Bill 11 has been touted as the answer to the Alberta health care woes. However, a recent Angus Reid poll shows that over 90 percent of Albertans are concerned about the by-products of this bill. They are suspicious of the road this government is traveling, and that equates to a lack of trust. Albertans do not trust that this government will do the right thing with their health care. You see, Mr. Speaker, trust is not a commodity and cannot be bought or sold any more than health care in this province should be bought or sold.

In his book *The New Politics of Confidence*, Pierre Pettigrew suggests – and I’m paraphrasing, Mr. Speaker – that when globalization presents health and education as mere commodities, we are coming dangerously close to the errors of Marxism. Those errors include reducing human beings to the single role of economic actors. That is essentially what this government has chosen to do with its so-called Health Care Protection Act.

I think it’s important to have a short history lesson on medicare to put Bill 11 in perspective and highlight the importance of publicly funded health care for Albertans, to outline the reasons why citizens of this province do not want the Premier to tear apart the single most valued social program in the country in the same way that Mr. Bouchard is tearing apart Canada or would love to tear apart Canada.

In 1919 the federal Liberal Party proposed universal health insurance as an election platform. Nothing was brought forward on this issue again until the Depression. The prairie region was one of the areas hardest hit during the Depression. A great majority of people could not afford to pay for doctor or health care costs. Many voluntary insurance programs emerged, and by late 1961, Mr. Speaker, most Canadians were covered under these programs. In 1961 Prime Minister Diefenbaker appointed Chief Justice Emmett Hall as chair of the Royal Commission on Health Services. In 1962, under severe opposition, the Douglas government in Saskatchewan required physicians to collect their fees solely from the government.

Justice Emmett Hall is considered the true founder of medicare in Canada. Justice Hall’s team compiled a report that recommended medicare for all Canadians. In 1966 Prime Minister Pearson’s federal Liberal government passed legislation to ensure that all Canadians had a health plan that was comprehensive, universal, publicly administered, portable, and accessible. Mr. Speaker, although not all provinces were enthusiastic about jumping on board, by 1972 all indeed had. All provinces and the territories had joined. In 1980 Justice Hall was again asked to review the health care system. He determined that although there were problems within the system, it was, and I quote: by world standards one of the very best health services today. There’s no reason to believe those words don’t apply now.

3:50

Let’s fast forward to the year 2000 and Bill 11. Bill 11 has been presented to Albertans and in fact all Canadians as health care

reform. This it is not. What this bill does represent is an attempt to bring back an archaic, expensive health care system. It does not represent new thinking. It will not achieve the goal of reducing waiting lists, nor will it be cost-effective to taxpayers. This bill will take us back to the pre-Pearson era, the days when Alberta citizens paid for every doctor’s appointment, every diagnostic test, and every day in the hospital.

At a forum I recently held, one of my constituents, an immigrant from Italy, Mr. Speaker, recited a time in the days of premedicare when the hospital advised him and his wife that they could only take their son home if they paid the \$10 outstanding from his hospital stay. That’s not something I want to see come back to this province or this country.

The Premier would like Albertans to buy into this bill. It’s cleverly worded to appear as though it’s harmless, that it will provide protection for citizens who use the existing day-surgery facilities, that it will reduce the waiting lists and ban private hospitals. The Premier is desperately trying to sell this bill as a fix to the system. This government would have Albertans believe that overnight stays in an approved surgical facility are minor adjustments to our existing private surgical facility policy. Well, if I recall, Mr. Speaker, that same rationale was used by then Justice Minister Havelock when he tried to invoke the notwithstanding clause on sexual sterilization victims. It’s not a minor adjustment. It’s a major departure.

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: A point of order. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Referring to a Member by Name

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, you are well aware that the hon. member across the way should not refer to other members by name. I’m sure that it was inadvertent, but perhaps she’d like to simply withdraw that. Thank you.

MS OLSEN: I would simply withdraw the minister’s name.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.
Edmonton-Norwood.

Debate Continued

MS OLSEN: Thank you. What I find rather curious, Mr. Speaker, is that no other Premier in this country has endorsed Bill 11, not even those who, according to the Premier, have similar legislation. Could it be that the legislation in other provinces has been misrepresented? I would suggest that his own government report titled *Background on Private Provision of Medical and Hospital Services* in other Jurisdictions would support my assertion. Let’s not forget that the Premiers in other provinces are having similar problems with waiting lists and the like, and quite frankly they don’t operate government-funded private hospitals.

The Premier, however, would have Albertans believe that the Prime Minister of Canada has endorsed this bill. He would have Albertans believe that Prime Minister Chretien, whose very Liberal roots were entrenched within the Pearson era, has given the go-ahead. The Premier stated on April 4, 2000:

I met with the Prime Minister of Canada on the subject of Bill 11. He did not raise any objections to the bill, nor did he suggest that we withdraw it. In fact, after I reviewed with him the many examples of contracting out and overnight stays currently occurring across

Canada, he acknowledged that what Alberta is proposing is similar to what is already happening in other provinces.

Now, I wasn't at the meeting, and only the Premier and the Prime Minister know exactly what was said, but I would suspect, Mr. Speaker, that it was more like this. I would suggest that the Prime Minister stated that he can't pass judgment on a bill that is not passed, that is not law. That's correct. He cannot do that, nor should he. He probably also said something along the lines: I can't interfere, stop a province from passing a law. Well, again, if he did that, this province would be up in arms, and more fed bashing would occur. I also bet he suggested to the Premier that he take the existing laws to the health ministers' conference, where they can be assessed.

Now, I'm not saying that the Premier twisted the remarks of the Prime Minister, but my colleagues and I spoke with the Prime Minister later that evening, and I'm sure that what I heard from the Prime Minister wasn't quite the same thing.

This government has a habit of blaming the federal government when a problem arises that they don't want to take responsibility for. Fed bashing is a hobby for this government. Another recent example is the Premier's whining over Minister Rock's visit to Calgary, accusing him of a drive-by smear and whimpering over apparently not being informed about the minister's visit here. Well, maybe he didn't inform the Premier, but I know he informed his minister, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, this isn't a chorus. You don't need to agree or disagree with each and every statement that's made. You'll get your turn.

Edmonton-Norwood.

MRS. FORSYTH: Your nose is growing.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. I'm glad we've been able to put a personal note to this.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to bring this note forward. You see, the Premier has come to my constituency many times. You know what? He hasn't phoned me. He hasn't told me he's coming. You know what? I'm not whining about it; okay? So, you know, it works both ways.

Minister Rock has stated that the status quo is not acceptable. He's right. Alberta needs to look at true innovation, change that will exist over the long term, change that is sustainable. Bill 11 is a long way from taking that step.

Bill 11 has created a number of major problems. I will focus on overnight stays and enhanced services, but it also fails to address the queue-jumping that already exists and conflicts of interest. The bill allows for overnight stays for surgery. In my view, whether it's major or minor is not the real issue. Most surgeries now, including radical mastectomies, have a stay of less than 72 hours, Mr. Speaker. Very few hospital stays are over three days. The government wants the College of Physicians and Surgeons to determine what type of surgery will be done. I would suggest that this would create a conflict of interest given that doctors will be allowed to operate on a for-profit basis by offering enhanced services to patients.

The government states that contracting out to private hospitals will reduce waiting lists. The Premier is trying to sell this even in the face of research in Alberta that shows that contracting out does not reduce waiting lists. In fact, it shows that the queue will be longer. The study by Dr. Cam Donaldson and Dr. Gillian Currie shows that the provision of private sector beds seems to be associated with longer waits for care in public hospitals, potentially exacerbating problems with two-tier health care.

The issue of enhanced services creates an equally disturbing

problem. Enhanced services are a nice way of having patients pay for extras. Fibreglass casts are an example. Now there's a Goretex cast. How about the lens associated with cataract surgery? You can get the cadillac lens if you have the dough, Mr. Speaker, but without it you get what? An inferior lens? This type of service delivery does not allow many of my constituents choice, a word the Premier has depended upon to try and make his case. Many of my constituents cannot afford the extras. In fact, many of my constituents can't afford the necessities of life. How is a patient supposed to know what he or she really needs? How can a patient have consumer confidence about the entire range of health care products? Should it be a stainless steel hip or a titanium hip? Will they have to rely on *Consumer Reports* to help them determine the best buy?

Conflict of interest is an important element in this discussion. I find it interesting that it's not addressed. We only have to look at the current executive of the Calgary regional health authority. It was by design that the past Provincial Treasurer and friend of the Premier was appointed as the chair of the Calgary regional health authority and the Premier's friend and past adviser, Rod Love, was appointed to oversee communications and his friend and past deputy minister, Jack Davis, was hired as the CEO of the Calgary health authority. You see, Mr. Dinning is a supporter of private hospitals and has recently stated: it's okay to experiment; we can always go back. Well, ask the sexual sterilization victims how they feel about that rationale, Mr. Speaker.

Let's talk about another issue not covered in Bill 11, the whole notion of private diagnostic centres. These centres allow for those who have enough dough to get a diagnosis at, say, an MRI clinic within a couple of weeks and then take the MRI to their doctor and get put on the waiting list much sooner. Quite frankly, this just recently happened to a friend of mine. Within the time she would have to wait for an MRI, she's done her hip surgery.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it is incumbent upon us as legislators to develop a model of health care reform. During Tuesday night's debate the Premier kept asking my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to help him. I would suggest that this is not the path we can help the Premier with, but there is a third option. I will offer some suggestions to the Premier and the government. There is no one cure for the problems that ail the health care system in this province and this country. However, Bill 11 does not contribute to real debate.

4:00

Throwing money at this problem will not alone be the answer. Yes, I too would like to see my federal counterparts contribute a bit more money. However, I would also like to see this government not misrepresent the contributions of the federal government. The federal contribution in actual dollars and tax points represents about 25 cents of every dollar spent on health in this province, not 13 cents. Maybe that 25 cents should be increased, and in fact Finance Minister Paul Martin has alluded to more funding, but I challenge this government to come up with a long-term plan that works within the existing publicly funded system before I encourage Mr. Martin to put that money on the table.

The Northeast health centre and the Boyle McCauley health centre are two innovative approaches to health care reform right here in our capital city. In fact, when my son broke his arm in January on a ski hill, I took him to the Northeast health centre, and we were in and out within an hour. Now, I do have friends in policing who state that the backups are still about four hours on some nights, and that's important in different professions, because it takes policemen off the street when they have to wait at the hospital for four hours.

Nonetheless, this centre offers innovative ways of treating patients, from prevention to emergency procedures.

Prevention is a critical part of health care reform. We have made huge strides in the past few years with such things as drug and alcohol and tobacco prevention. Our schools play a huge role in prevention. It is important to ensure emerging health concerns are dealt with in our schools. Nutrition programs, personal hygiene programs, encouraging athletic involvement for children, and even teaching CPR on an ongoing basis will be highly beneficial in reducing health care needs and therefore costs in the future.

Community care and long-term care are two incredibly important concepts. I remember as a police officer I went to a home where a senior had died. The fellow was in a hospital bed in his living room. His wife said to me: don't think badly of me, but I'm glad it's over. She told me she had been looking after her husband for six months. She had received four hours of respite care a week – four hours – and that was it. Her son lived out of town and was not available on a regular basis. The home care nurse came every day at first, but after a couple of months she came only twice a week. This elderly woman had worked very hard to accommodate her husband's needs and felt overwhelmed. He should have been in a home, Mr. Speaker.

Home care will ensure that sick folks are taken care of on a regular basis. Many patients can be at home after surgery but only if adequate services are available at home. Changing roles for the health care professionals is something many doctors, nurses, and, for that matter, citizens are concerned about. I would however encourage the doctors to look at the areas that can be delegated, such as nurse practitioners. Dr. Carolyn Bennett, MP for St. Paul's in Toronto, has undertaken a number of initiatives that have enhanced patient service delivery in her practice.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few observations that I have in relation to health care reform, and they do not require Bill 11 in order to be achieved. Bill 11 is in fact a Trojan horse. It is not what it seems. It does not provide Albertans with reform. The private hospital debate is not just about whether the Premier is breaking the law or not. It's not just about whether a titanium hip is better than a stainless steel hip. It's about the spirit and the intent of the Canada Health Act, and it's about what's good for all citizens and what Albertans want. They do not want privatized hospitals. They do not want legislation that will support private hospitals. They do not want Bill 11.

It is time this government quit blaming the sick, the poor, the elderly, and other governments for a problem they created. Mr. Speaker, Albertans have said: no means no; we don't want this bill.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today, I believe, during second reading, which provides an opportunity, to further the dialogue and debate on the important issue of health care in this country, in this province, and Bill 11 does exactly that.

Since the legislation was introduced, a number of questions have been raised. The following are some of those questions that I've received from constituents in my constituency of Fort McMurray. Why is the government proposing this legislation? Will patients have to pay extra if publicly funded services are contracted out to surgical clinics? Who does pay if insured medical services are contracted out? Why not just spend more money on the publicly funded system to reopen beds and wards in existing facilities instead of contracting out? Where is the proof that using these facilities will save money? How would surgical facilities make a profit if they are

doing the same things done by the public system and are not able to charge the patient extra? How will these contracts be more efficient? Why not just make the publicly funded health system more efficient? How would these contracts be approved? What are the implications on NAFTA and opening the door to American companies under the North American free trade agreement? Won't this legislation lead to pressure by the private sector to deinsure services that are currently paid by the publicly funded system? You know, these are all very good questions, and I'm going to use my time this afternoon in this debate to answer these questions.

Another question was: once the private sector is allowed to get a foothold in Alberta, won't it just be a matter of time before it expands and eventually takes over the publicly funded health system? Another question asked by a citizen was: how will patients be protected from pressures to pay for additional goods and services? One of the final questions asked: isn't this just two-tiered health care under another name? How do we safeguard the public health system if private operators are allowed to take part? How do doctors in these facilities get paid? The final two questions: will physicians be able to work both in a public hospital and in a private facility? Didn't Albertans say no already to this type of proposal in the recent health summit and other forums, and is the government listening?

I think they're very good questions in furthering the debate of health care specifically during second reading. I have taken the time to respond to each and every one of these questions relative to Bill 11. The first question was: why is the government proposing this legislation? Well, at this time Alberta has no legal authority to regulate surgical clinics performing surgeries requiring overnight stays. This is a serious gaff in the law, and without legislation there is a real possibility of a two-tiered system developing. Bill 11 would give government the authority to protect the public health care system by prohibiting, restricting, and controlling surgical clinics in Alberta. It would also enable health authorities to consider all options and tools in determining the best way to deliver publicly funded surgical services so that efficiency and access to care are maximized. Similar provincial legislation, as already mentioned, already exists in the provinces of Manitoba, Ontario, British Columbia, and the home of medicare, Saskatchewan.

The second question was: will patients have to pay extra if publicly funded services are contracted out to these clinics? The answer is simply no. Albertans will not have to pay for medically necessary surgical services, and no person will be allowed to pay directly to obtain faster services. Facility fees charged to individual patients will not be permitted.

Who does pay if insured medical services are contracted out? Quite simply, you'll use your Alberta health care card. Every Albertan will simply use their Alberta health care card.

Why not just spend more money on the publicly funded system to reopen beds? Well, government has increased health spending very significantly in the past few years and will continue to increase spending on the publicly funded health system. Health spending increased by over \$1.6 billion, or 40 percent, over the past four years, including an increase of close to 10 percent just last year alone. Spending will further increase by about \$1.1 billion, or 21 percent, over the coming three years. Alberta has never spent more on the publicly funded health care system than today. This is more than just about throwing money at an old system. It's about giving health authorities more tools to help patients. This is why it is called the Health Care Protection Act. Healthy patients will be able to go to community-based, small facility clinics for minor procedures instead of full-service hospitals.

Another question asked by citizens: how would surgical facilities make a profit if they are doing the same things done by the public

system and not able to charge the patient extra? Surgical facilities would have to be efficient in delivering their services so they could cover costs and salaries on the rates that the public system will be willing to pay. Such cost savings might be possible because the facility would be performing only certain surgeries. The health authority will decide how much it's willing to pay for a contract, based on what is cost-effective for the publicly funded system. If it is not cost-effective for a health authority to contract out, then it will not be contracted out.

The Shouldice clinic in Ontario is perhaps the best example where doctors use their expertise and experience in reducing both the cost, it by half, and the procedural time for hernias, because – you know what? – practice does make perfect. This is another example of a centre for excellence.

4:10

How will these contracts be more efficient? This is another question posed by citizens. Well, each proposed contract will be considered on its own merits. Contracts for publicly funded services will only be approved if they demonstrate a net public benefit. If there is no increased cost-effectiveness or -efficiency or improved access to publicly funded insured services, there will be no contract.

Why not just make the publicly funded health system more efficient? I want to say this: the publicly funded health system is always looking for ways to become more efficient. We have, all of us in this Assembly, an attitude that we can do better, be it in health care or education or whatever the particular issue is at hand. Sometimes contracting out to a surgical facility specializing in doing one or two services could be the most efficient way of delivering a service. It could free up expensive operating rooms for more complex surgeries by having services that do not require the support of a full-service hospital in a surgical clinic. It also provides and makes it possible that the prospect of competition could encourage the public system to become even more efficient, and these centres of excellence that I mentioned, such as the Shouldice clinic, are good examples of where practice makes perfect. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the health care professionals who in fact garner their expertise and build on that expertise in delivering more efficient health care services.

How will the contracts be approved? Well, before any contract between a publicly funded regional health authority and a privately operated facility will be approved by the Minister of Health and Wellness, specific criteria will have to be met, such as the contract must yield a net benefit to the publicly funded system, considering factors such as improved access and reducing a waiting line as well as other important components such as the services to be provided must be required in the region, the contract must comply with all the principles of the Canada Health Act, the private facility must be accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, not by politicians. I think that's important, that the College of Physicians and Surgeons has come forward and said that we need rules to regulate what is taking place in Alberta. That is the intent and sole purpose of Bill 11.

The regional health authority must be able to afford to fund the proposed services within its budget. As well, the two final components of why and how these contracts will be approved: the contract or agreement must be in the public interest with no negative implications to our existing health care system, and finally, the contract must include acceptable standards about the results and outcomes to be achieved and performance measures.

Another question that has been posed to me by citizens in Fort McMurray is: won't this legislation just open the door to American companies under North American free trade, or, as we use the acronym, NAFTA? The answer to that in responding pertaining to Bill 11 is absolutely not. NAFTA contains a carve-out or reserve

clause that allows federal and provincial governments to protect the publicly funded health system. Similar contracts already exist in other provinces where they have similar legislation without any implication to NAFTA. I think it's very important to recognize that in those other four provinces that have existing legislation that we're following no impact has been made. I think it's an important point.

I enjoyed my discussion with some of the union representatives from Fort McMurray where they have posed some very legitimate questions. I thought it very important during second reading to make public in this Assembly those answers to those questions that were asked by citizens.

The next question that was asked by citizens was: won't this legislation lead to pressure by the private sector to deinsure services that are currently paid by the publicly funded system? No. Contracting with surgical facilities to deliver services on behalf of the publicly funded system has nothing to do with deinsuring services. The government has no plan to deinsure services, and all contracting out will be done in accordance with the principles of the Canada Health Act. Ladies and gentlemen and members of this Assembly, the principles of the Canada Health Act will be upheld, as every member of this Assembly agrees. The Alberta government is committed to that principle, and it is to be included in the legislation.

Another question was: once the private sector is allowed to get a foothold in Alberta, won't it just be a matter of time before it expands and eventually takes over the publicly funded health system? That's a good question. The simple answer is that no parallel private, for-profit health system will be allowed to develop in Alberta, perhaps some of the strongest legislation in this country pertaining to that issue. The legislation ensures that surgical facilities will only be able to provide services under a contract or agreement with the public system when it is in the best interests of the publicly administered, publicly funded health system. There will be no charges to patients for insured services, and the publicly administered system will have total – total – control over any private facilities in this province. [interjection] I appreciate those questions being asked.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We just had one of the hon. members apparently wanting to get into the debate, and I wanted to remind her that she was already in the debate earlier in the second reading process.

Continue, Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another important question asked by citizens in this province and in Fort McMurray: isn't this just two-tiered health care under another name? You know, that's a very good question. Of course, the simple answer is no. There will not be American style, for-profit hospitals allowed to operate in this province. There will be no queue-jumping by anyone wanting to pay cash for faster health care. There will be no private surgical facilities operating outside the public system. It will be within the public system. This is the purpose and sole intent of Bill 11, because there are no rules in place today. What this legislation does under Bill 11 is put rules in place to prevent those things from happening.

Another question was: how do we safeguard the public health care system if private operators are allowed to take part? Well, the legislation under Bill 11 commits Alberta to a publicly funded health care system and to the principles of the Canada Health Act. All proposals for contracts will be scrutinized to ensure that they are a useful addition and pose no threat to the publicly funded and administered health system.

One of the final questions that was asked was: how do the doctors

in these facilities get paid? Are they on salary to the facility, or are they paid on the regular fee-for-service basis? What about other staff? Well, physicians will generally be paid for surgical services through the Alberta health care insurance plan, just as they are today, on a fee-for-service basis with a set rate for each procedure. There are opportunities, however, for doctors to be paid through other means; for example, on salary with either a public hospital or a private facility or through a contract with a regional health authority or private facility.

One of the final questions asked by my citizens was: will physicians be able to work both in a public hospital and in a private facility? Won't this be a conflict of interest if they do? Well, certainly a physician will be able to work in both locations. In both instances the physician will be working for the publicly funded system, doing surgery on behalf of the public system and paid by the public system at the same rate for the same procedure in other locations. In either case, the physician, or doctor, is prohibited from charging the patient extra. There is no conflict of interest.

One of the final questions asked was: didn't Albertans say no already to this type of proposal in the recent health summit and other forums that were held, and is the government listening pertaining to this regarding Bill 11? What Albertans told us as legislators during the health summit was that they wanted a strong and vibrant publicly funded and administered health system in Alberta. Bill 11 responds to what Albertans said and affirms the government's commitment to such a publicly funded and administered system. The legislation prohibits private hospitals and prohibits the development of any private, two-tiered system. So we really have more to fear if we stand here and do nothing as opposed to moving forward with the purpose of Bill 11.

This concludes my remarks on this important piece of legislation and the questions that citizens have been asking me. Of course, this legislation, Bill 11, is called the Health Care Protection Act, where Alberta is committed to solution-driven ideas – and I repeat, solution-driven ideas – to protect and sustain our senior citizens, our families, and a health system for all Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This bill is probably one of the most important bills that I've ever spoken to in this Legislature. I appreciate, actually, that for the first time in my seven years here both sides of the House have participated in a government bill, not just one or two members but several members. That tells me that this is pretty significant and that people have been getting calls to their offices and that people are very, very worried about this, because people speak passionately about this bill.

I have some heartfelt concerns about what the ideology of this bill is really all about. There is no denying that the actual purpose of this bill is to expand private health care in this province. It is not about protecting public health care. It is absolutely about allowing more private health care in this province. You know what? Albertans know that. That's why people are speaking in this Legislature.

You know, I looked at this bill piece by piece, and as I was reading through it, I turned to my husband and I said: "You know what? This is a sneaky bill. It's a pretend bill. It pretends to do something while it actually does something else." It actually does. It's interesting. I think that if people tell themselves often enough that something is the way it is, they start to believe it.

You know, I've heard from every member on the opposite side

and I've heard from the Premier and it says in the bill that there will be no queue-jumping. What a bunch of malarkey, Mr. Speaker. You know what? Queue-jumping happens now. Nothing in this bill will prevent that. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Hon. members in all three rows, you do not have to respond to everything that any member says, and that holds true for both sides.

Hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, through the chair.

MRS. SOETAERT: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I was just saying that queue-jumping will not stop because of this bill. If you can afford to buy . . .

DR. TAYLOR: Tell the truth, Colleen.

MR. BONNER: Tell that guy to be quiet.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's okay. I'd rather take my 20 minutes with him interrupting me. I really would, Mr. Speaker, because I have important stuff to say, and he always hassles me.

DR. TAYLOR: And you never interrupt?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. The hon. minister will have his chance. Please wait for it.

Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you have the money to pay for an MRI, you jump ahead on the surgical list. Nothing in this bill stops that. So how can you blatantly stand there and say that there will be no queue-jumping when it's not true? I guess if you say it often enough, you start to believe it.

The minister is above the law in this bill, and you know what? You say: no, he isn't. So if you say that often enough, you start to believe it.

Then they say that all contracts will be made public. Not so. The agreements are made public. Will the cost of each? Who are the contracts with? Maybe we'll be there. Will we know who the investors are, who the board members are, which doctors may be in that investment group? Do you see what could happen with conflict of interest there? Nothing in this bill addresses that. So members on the other side will say that all the contracts will be open. Not so. But if you say it often enough, you start to believe it.

This government uses the Shouldice clinic as an example of excellence. Well, you know what? We have to do more homework on that and tell the entire story about Shouldice. Those patients are handpicked. You have to be healthy. You have to be a certain weight. [interjection] Do your homework. Look it up on the Net, Member for St. Albert. Have a look. No complicated surgeries can go there. You have to be extremely healthy. You have to be a good candidate to get to go to the Shouldice clinic. Furthermore, how can it be cheaper when you stay three nights for something that is done usually in day surgery here? And people are paying out of their pocket. So you know what? Before this government uses this as a good example – and you keep saying what a wonderful place it is. Maybe you're starting to believe it, when you haven't done all the homework.

You know what? It's true. Some people say: oh, this could save us money because the contracts will only happen if it's going to save money. Then maybe some of the contracts right now with Gimbel in Calgary should be shut down, because that one is more expensive

than the ones done in Lamont. It's easy to say: oh, it saves money and it's more economical. Not so. But if you tell yourself that often enough, you start to believe it. So I guess it's just rhetoric over and over and over again.

How can it possibly be cheaper to go to a private system where our tax dollars are supporting a private business? How can it possibly be cheaper when people must make profits? That's the idea behind a private enterprise.

DR. TAYLOR: Didn't you have your lobotomy in a private clinic?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science keeps trying to speak out of turn. Perhaps he might like to go back to his office and cool down and, when it's his turn, return. Otherwise, please contain himself.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. I was talking about how it could possibly be cheaper when you're putting taxpayers' dollars in private hands. You know, people resent that, and people understand that. When you use your tax dollars to put it back into a public system, then that public system is supporting you. When you give it to a private enterprise, you are giving it away, because they're making money on you. You get a service, plus you pay them to make a profit. But if you want to believe that oh, no, it doesn't matter – I mean, that's common sense. But somehow government members here can justify giving to a private company.

We've seen what's happened. The reason this province is in debt is because of a consistent pattern of this government giving money to private companies. Well, it is time that it stopped. [interjection] That's right. Any businessperson would know that. I would think the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat would know that.

MS LEBOVICI: If he were a successful businessman.

MRS. SOETAERT: If he were a successful businessman.

I want to know. I was thinking about this. Mr. Speaker, you know, if I were part of a government that was insisting upon pushing a bill ahead that my constituents did not want, how would I react to that? What would I do? You know what? In my office I've had over 689 letters, e-mails, and faxes in the last two and a half weeks. That is the most I've ever had on anything. Of those, 42 support the bill and the rest are opposed to it, over 90 percent. You know what? Lots are from Stony Plain, St. Albert, Redwater, the whole area around my constituency.

DR. TAYLOR: All Liberals.

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes. You bet they're all Liberals, and next time it'll all go Liberal. You watch it. Some of those seats are pretty vulnerable over there, so I'd be listening to my constituents if I were them.

People phone me and say: "How can we stop this, Colleen? Are they just going to push ahead despite what we say?"

DR. TAYLOR: Yeah.

MRS. SOETAERT: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat says yes. They're not going to listen to us. I don't believe that. I believe in democracy, and I believe it matters that over 52,000 people have signed a petition. That's not counting the other ones that other people in here have tabled. I believe in democracy. If people phone and write and e-mail, I do believe they're listened to, and I'd hate to

think the Premier has painted himself in a corner and that now he says: I don't know how to get out, so we're just going to duck and do it anyway. I would hope that is not signed, sealed, and delivered.

4:30

If you are truly representing your constituents, what do you do about a bill like this? What do you do? Hide? Follow party line? Follow the Premier? Follow private investors' interests? Or do you represent the people who elected you? What a dilemma for some people. It shouldn't be. It shouldn't be a dilemma. People know how many people have called them. They know that they value public health care. They know, Mr. Speaker. They are not stupid.

Albertans know what this bill will do, and that's why so many letters and faxes and phone calls have been happening. You know what? If those MLAs aren't representing, I do believe they're in trouble. I do believe you sell part of your soul when you actually vote against something you believe in, and I believe there are times when there are things that, hmm, part of it I can live with, part of it I can't. That happens. That's what politics is. Some of the things you know you can live with; some you can't.

But you know what? I would bet you that every MLA in this Assembly has had more calls opposed to this than supporting this. I get copies from them, and if there are a few who don't, fine. But I'll bring in all the stats from my office about it, and they're overwhelmingly opposed to this. So despite what you feel in your heart, despite if you have to sell your soul, do you go ahead and follow something you don't believe in? That's what I see happening with government members.

You know, it was interesting. I've heard very good speeches, and I thought the Member for Edmonton-Riverview's analogy last night was actually a good analogy. I think she's lived very close to this system, as probably a couple of others have in this Assembly. Her love of the public health care system made me realize how very dear it is to all of us, every single one of us. I want it there, and I want to trust that it'll be there. I want to trust what these government members say, that it will still be there.

But you know what, Mr. Speaker? How can I trust a government who was very deceitful about Swan Hills and Bovar? How can I trust them when just after the Premier was elected, another \$100 million was sent to Bovar and a promise of no waste from out of province? Then they said: no waste from out of country. Oh, not true. All not true.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am citing *Beauchesne* 489. The hon. member used the term deceit in her remarks regarding the prior government's position with respect to the Swan Hills waste treatment facility. I'd refer you to 489, where under the debates from March 22 of '77 "deceive" was held to be unparliamentary. The term "deceived" was also held to be unparliamentary. I would therefore suggest that the hon. member retract her statement.

To pre-empt any argument, Mr. Speaker, that the term is also held to be parliamentary, it was held to be parliamentary, but that was in 1970. So it seems that actually the use of the word has been ruled to be unparliamentary most recently.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Speaker, I said "deceitful." It is also parliamentary language. If the minister is really worried about it, then I'll retract it, because I want to use the rest of my time wisely. I won't stoop so low as other people in this Assembly who list them off and use them.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: That's kind of a qualified withdrawal of the comments.

The chair has had to intervene a number of times, because once you start getting catcalls back and forth, then we start getting more personal and start saying things that really are unparliamentary and unkind and unworthy.

Hon. member, if you are prepared to take both comments back, then we can go on.

MRS. SOETAERT: Sure, Mr. Speaker. I'll retract.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: All right. Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: Good. Thank you very much. I want to talk about trust and the lack of it. I'm safe there. When the government made the promise about Bovar, they broke that trust; right? Now we have waste from all over the world.

Ah, the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall. Could we trust them there? No, we couldn't.

Oh, we were promised to have elected health authorities. The power we're giving these health authorities and they're not elected. They're handpicked by Conservatives. You know what? I know some very good people on those health authorities, some excellent, excellent people that could run in an election and win because they're credible people, and that way they could serve with some independence, not under the thumb of this government. Yes, they would work with them much like school board trustees, but they are not under the total thumb of this government.

Now, there are people here who don't like school boards. That's not my problem. That is theirs, and there we go with another issue of trust.

I realize I have only a few short minutes left, and I regret that, but I want to speak for a minute. To me this is a debate about what we value. Unlike this government the majority of Albertans know that their health care system is way too precious and too important to be subjected to an experiment which allows a few people to make an extra dollar from the taxpayer.

The debate is about the priority we put on a public system available to all regardless of their ability to pay. Do we allow our public system to deteriorate while building a for-profit tier with superior service available only to those who can afford it? What happens to the publicly funded system once we start down that road? I think that's an ethical question we all have to ask ourselves. What do we value, and what do we think is ethical for all the people of Alberta?

I think that medicare, public health care, is absolutely a Canadian value. What it says is that we share the risk of ill health. Only by the luck of the draw, by God's grace, by whatever you want to say, some of us are born very healthy and some of us are not. So here we have a cost that as a society we've decided to share and finance primarily by our taxation system, and this system recognizes that all of us have a responsibility for each other, not just for me and my children. If I can pay for it quick, then I'll get it done quick, because we all feel that way. We would do anything for any member of our

family. We would mortgage the house. We would do anything, but that's not a Canadian value of caring for everyone. That's why we're in a public health care system. That's why we're in medicare. We believe that everyone – everyone – should have the same opportunity to health care. That's what this bill is undermining.

The debate I think is also about trust, trust between doctors and patients, between health authorities and the people they serve, between representatives and their people. You know what? It's about trust, but mainly it's about trust in the health care system. We trust that it will be there when we need it. We trust that. In all the public opinion polls, the letters, the town hall meetings, and petitions, you know what Albertans are saying? They have lost their trust. They have lost their confidence in this government when it comes to health care. You know what? Albertans are suspicious of this government and Bill 11. They know and they fear rightfully so that it will lead to a two-tiered, American style health care system.

I still want to know the answer to the question: why? We live in the most beautiful province in the world. We have a booming economy. We have great people. We're just one of the most fortunate places in the world. Why? Why would we go down this path? We don't need to. So, Mr. Speaker, I don't know why this government wants to increase taxpayer dollars going to private hospital operators – I don't know why – instead of fully funding the public system.

4:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science is rising on a point of order?

DR. TAYLOR: No. She's asked the question: why do we need this bill?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We don't need an explanation.

DR. TAYLOR: I would like to provide her with the answer.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I don't know that there's any provision for that, so it's not a point of order.

MRS. SOETAERT: Good try. I was hoping he'd ask me another question because I'd go for another 20 on the answer, but anyway you can ask a question if you'd like.

I just want to say finally – and I know I only have a minute or two left, Mr. Speaker – that I want every MLA to really, really think about why they are backing this bill. I know that more than 50 percent of their constituents do not want it. Do not want it. Over 50 percent of Albertans do not want this. But the ideology of this government is such that privatization is above all, above the common good, above health care, and that disappoints me. I would urge each single member in this Assembly to really think twice before they stand in unison and follow this path, this very destructive path. [interjection] I know. I know they say that they're going to do what they're told. I wish for once they'd represent their constituents instead of just following like lemmings over a cliff. I would like them to just stand up and vote against this bill. [interjection] You like the lemming idea. [interjections] Let them go, people are saying. Let them go. I know. It's tempting, but I have faith in this Assembly. I have faith in democracy.

When people stop me just walking down the mall or at IGA or Safeway, they're all saying: "Colleen, what can we do to stop this? Is he honestly going to push ahead with this?" I am really hoping, because I do believe in democracy, that their concerns are heard. These aren't just my constituents, Mr. Speaker. These are constitu-

ents from Redwater, from St. Albert, from Stony Plain, from Edmonton. You know, those places I shop in, those places I have friends and relatives in, those places I'm in all the time. Maybe I can't speak for Cypress-Medicine Hat with all his contacts down there, but I certainly speak for those constituencies that are right around me, Lac Ste. Anne as well. Absolutely those people are more than 50 percent opposed to this bill, yet their MLAs, I fear, are going to support this, whether they know it is right or not. I think that might be a bit of a moral dilemma for them, or maybe it's not. Maybe they honestly just don't care. But I've got to tell you that I would rethink this if I were them. I would rethink this.

You've got to respect David Kilgour. Years ago he crossed because he was opposed to the GST. Well, that you've got to admire, standing on your own two feet.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, I wish to comment on remarks made by the Member for Edmonton-Norwood prior to my formal remarks. The Member for Edmonton-Norwood is clearly confused in her assertion that Bill 11 returns us to the pre-Pearson days, when patients had to pay out of their pockets for their health care. Bill 11, as anyone can clearly read, protects, upholds, and maintains the publicly funded health system. Bill 11 was written after an extensive review of existing legislation in other provinces. And for the member to suggest that medically necessary services provided to Albertans are inferior is not just plain wrong but an insult to Alberta's first-class doctors.

Contrary to what the Member for Edmonton-Norwood has said, the federal minister and the Prime Minister were provided with copies of the bill and its preceding policy statement, and we are confident that senior staff have read them closely. If there was any concern with the Canada Health Act, they have had plenty of time to say so.

The Member for Edmonton-Norwood spoke of her positive experiences at the Northeast community health centre. We agree with her comments. This is one of the new government initiatives to show innovation and adaptation in responding to the health care needs of Albertans. Likewise, Bill 11, as part of the government's six-point plan for health care, is one more option in addressing those needs.

Mr. Speaker, there has been much discussion about our health proposal over the past several months. While some of it has been based on fact, unfortunately some of it has been based purely on emotions. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry to interrupt you. It seems that Calgary-Fish Creek wants to get in on the debate, and I'd just only ask her to wait her turn and not interrupt an hon. member, even on her own side, when they're speaking.

On the other side I wonder if the two people who have already spoken to the issue could cease adding to the disruption and let us hear each hon. member in their turn without all the extra voices being heard.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Debate Continued

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, some

of it has been based purely on emotions and perceptions rather than looking at what the legislation actually says.

Mr. Speaker, I've received calls, letters, e-mails and faxes from Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituents regarding Bill 11. They ask questions like: why does the Alberta government want to pass legislation that would let private facilities do surgeries in the first place? There are, in fact, several reasons why we need this legislation. One is that right now we have no legal way to regulate and control private surgical facilities or private hospitals. Right now if a private surgical facility is accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, they could set up shop, and there is absolutely nothing the Alberta government could say about it. We need this legislation so that government can protect and ensure the sustainability of Alberta's publicly funded and publicly administered health system.

Government, therefore, had three options: one, do nothing and let it happen; two, totally ban surgical clinics from ever doing anything in Alberta, including those already in operation, such as those doing cataract surgery; three, regulate and control private clinics so that they only operate when it was a benefit to Albertans and to the totally publicly funded system. We could have said an absolute and total no to surgical facilities, but we have introduced this legislation because it provides health authorities with another option as they seek to improve the way they deliver publicly funded and publicly administered surgical services.

I want to make something perfectly clear at this point, Mr. Speaker. The legislation doesn't say that the health authorities must contract to private surgical facilities. In fact, it simply offers an option to contract with such facilities if the regions have evidence that there would be a benefit in doing so. An individual analysis would be done for each and every contract proposed to a regional health authority by a surgical facility. Only those contracts that showed a net benefit to the public system, considering factors such as increased access to services, improved cost-effectiveness or -efficiency would be approved. Because the bottom line is this: the health authorities remain accountable to the Minister of Health and Wellness and to Albertans to maintain a quality publicly funded and publicly administered health system. This means that it's up to them to make sure they spend the public health funding they're provided in the most responsible manner possible. Albertans have been very clear in their directions to us in this regard. They have told us they do not want to go down the slippery slope toward an American style, two-tiered health system in which people with money are able to buy faster or better service.

At this point I want to interject with a point that needs to be kept in mind as we discuss the legislation. Critics claim that the reason health care has problems today is due to budget cuts of the past. In 1992-1993 the health system was spending about \$4.1 billion per year in Alberta. From 1980 to 1992 health costs had increased by 215 percent. Even considering population growth in that same period, 17 percent, and inflation at 63 percent, this rate of growth was clearly not sustainable, especially when considering that the province as a whole was spending \$3 billion a year more than it was receiving in revenue. Between 1992-93 and 1995-96 health spending was reduced by about \$500 million, from \$4.1 billion to \$3.6 billion, a reduction of about 13 percent. At the same time, administration costs were cut. The more than 200 hospital boards and agencies were reduced to 17 regional health authorities.

Since 1995-96, however, health spending has increased in each of the past four years. Overall annual spending on health has increased by 40 percent in that time so that this year health spending will total about \$5.1 billion. This is \$1 billion more a year than was spent in '92-93, the year that spending reductions began.

Per capita spending on health in Alberta in 1999-2000 is about \$2,013 per Albertan. This is the third highest per capita spending rate of any province in Canada, behind only B.C. and Newfoundland. However, Alberta is also the youngest province in Canada, and when you adjust for the age of each province's population, Alberta has the highest per capita health spending in the country. Today health spending is higher than it ever has been in the history of the health system in our province. In fact, we now spend over \$15 million each and every day in Alberta's health system, and we're also providing more services than ever before.

4:50

Our government will continue to increase spending on the publicly funded health system. Our annual health spending will increase by over \$1 billion, or 21 percent more, over the next three years. That will increase daily health spending to more than \$17 million a day by 2002-2003. Spending will be \$2 billion a year higher than in 1992-93, an increase of 49 percent over the past 10 years. While this significant new funding will be provided over the next three years, we have to realize that there are limits to the dollars that can be provided. We now spend \$1 out of every \$3 in the provincial budget for health services.

While our government is committed to addressing priority areas such as health and education, we also remain strongly committed to the principle of fiscal responsibility. We cannot allow our province to enter into the vicious cycle of deficit budgeting again. For that reason, we are committed to working with stakeholders in the health system to use innovation, imagination, and strong management skills to make our health system accessible and sustainable both now and in the future.

In that spirit, we have introduced Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act. It enables the regional health authorities to consider one more way of providing health services while keeping our health system publicly funded and publicly administered. In other words, a publicly funded system will continue to pay for medically necessary services as determined by physicians. To make sure our health system continues to be there in the future when we need it, we need to plan for that future and we need to find new and better ways of delivering health services. In other words, we need to change.

To protect and preserve the valued elements of today's health system, we believe that a program of action is necessary, action that will put in place the barriers that will prevent the slide of our health system down the so-called slippery slope toward two-tier, American style private health care, action that at the same time makes certain that our health system has the flexibility and the adaptability to deal with the challenges of today and of this new century.

From the very beginning of the proposed legislation the government's intention was made clear. The legislation affirms the commitments of the government of Alberta to the preservation of the principles of the Canada Health Act, affirms the commitment of the government of Alberta to continually improve the quality and accessibility of publicly funded health services in the province.

The legislation specifically bans private hospitals in Alberta. It prohibits facility fees for medically necessary surgical or physician services that are covered by Alberta's health care insurance plan. It prohibits queue-jumping and payments by individuals to get faster service. Existing legislation prohibits anyone from requiring patients to purchase goods or services that are not medically necessary as a condition of receiving medically necessary services or faster service. It sets out disclosure rules for the sale to patients of any goods or services that are not medically necessary. It prohibits any private surgical facility from providing insured services unless that facility has a contract with the regional health authority to provide those services on behalf of the health authority

and unless the Minister of Health and Wellness has approved that contract.

The legislation prohibits the Minister of Health and Wellness from approving a contract unless he or she is satisfied that it is consistent with the principles of the Canada Health Act; that there is a need for the services to be provided; that the contract would not have an adverse effect on the publicly funded system; that there is a public benefit resulting from the contract, considering factors such as access to publicly funded services, quality of service, flexibility for the health authority, cost-effectiveness, and other economic considerations; that the health authority can afford the contract; that the contract indicates performance expectations and measures; and that the surgical facility is accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta. In short, if the minister determined that a proposed agreement was not in the best interests of Albertans or of our publicly funded and publicly administered health system, he would not approve it. And remember; being able to stand up and say no is not something that he's able to do now.

Highlights of the legislation are: prohibits a private surgical facility from providing uninsured surgical services unless approved by the Minister of Health and Wellness, requires that health authorities make available to the public for inspection any contracts between the health authority and a surgical facility, sets significant fines for any person contravening the provisions of the act, and establishes in legislation the new Premier's Advisory Council on Health to provide strategic advice to the Premier on the preservation and future enhancement of quality health services for Albertans and on the continuing sustainability of the publicly funded and administered health system.

Benefits of the legislation for Albertans as patients. There will be no facility fees and no charges to patients for insured services. Paying to jump the queue will be illegal. Doctors will continue to decide who receives services in which order according to the most urgent medical need. It provides patients with the potential for increased access.

Let me give you an example to demonstrate what I mean by that. In a surgical facility elective surgery can be planned and provided without the rescheduling that occurs when emergency surgeries and urgent medical needs arise that a full-service hospital must handle. As well, performing less complicated procedures in facilities can free up hospital operating rooms for more complex procedures that require all the sophisticated resources of a hospital for diagnosis and intensive care. This could reduce the waiting times for more complex procedures in hospitals. The safety and quality of services provided by surgical facilities would be protected by the College of Physicians and Surgeons' accreditation.

For the benefit of Albertans as taxpayers the proposed legislation would provide the potential to improve access, efficiency, and effectiveness. Because the surgical facilities would focus on providing one or two types of surgical procedures, they could become very good at providing that one service, thereby allowing them to serve a greater number of patients at the same cost. The region would have to demonstrate a benefit in spending taxpayers' money on a contract. All physicians would continue to be paid the same way they are now, through their fee-for-service contract with the publicly funded health system. The regional health authorities would continue to be responsible and accountable to the minister for the way health spending was spent. And it would provide the potential to defer major front-end construction costs.

The bottom line remains this, Mr. Speaker. If passed, Bill 11 would prohibit private hospitals and would prohibit any surgical facility from offering insured surgical services without a contract with a health authority. In other words, this legislation would

prevent the development of any parallel private health system in our province, and it would give us a means of sustaining our publicly funded health system by giving health authorities more options to consider when finding new and better ways to meet the challenges facing health care both now and in the future.

The Health Care Protection Act is only one part of a larger overall plan envisaged for our health system. In his televised address to Albertans in January Premier Klein announced government's six-point plan to protect and improve Alberta's publicly funded and publicly administered health system. The details of this six-point plan are clear evidence of our commitment to Canada's single-payer, publicly funded style of health care and our commitment to making that system better able to meet the challenges of this new century.

As the Premier noted in his address, there are six key directions in our plan, including improving access to publicly funded services, improving the management of the health system, enhancing the quality of health services, increasing our emphasis on health promotion and disease and accident prevention, continuing to foster new ideas to improve our health system, and taking the necessary steps to protect the publicly funded system from any potentially negative external factors.

I've already discussed at length that final point, so I'd like to focus now on the remaining five points. In fact, the plan highlights close to 20 initiatives to support those directions. First, our government is going to be increasing our annual health spending by over \$1 billion, or 21 percent more, over the next three years. I can also tell you that much of the new money is targeted toward hiring more nurses, recruiting more doctors, increasing the number of cancer, heart, and neurosurgeries that we do, and increasing access to home care and continuing care services.

When speaking of recruiting more doctors and hiring more nurses, I think it's important to recognize that Alberta's nurses and doctors are among the best paid in Canada. We are successful in attracting health professionals to Alberta, and as evidence of that I'd like to point out that in last year's budget we targeted hiring an additional 1,000 nurses and other frontline health professionals in our health authorities. We have already exceeded that target of 1,000. In fact, almost 1,200 new full-time equivalent positions have been staffed, including more than 600 nurses. Over the next three years we'll be hiring up to 2,400 more frontline staff.

In terms of doctors, by the end of September of 1999 we had increased the number of doctors practising in the province by more than 250 from the previous year and close to 400 over two years, and we expect at least 90 more this year. To support that direction, Health and Wellness Minister Halvar Jonson has announced an increase of 40 postgraduate residency places in the province's medical schools and Learning Minister Lyle Oberg has announced close to 200 additional spaces for nurses in our postsecondary . . .

Speaker's Ruling

Referring to a Member by Name

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, that's three times in a row. In baseball you're out. We're not permitted to use the names of hon. members. We use the name of their position, their ministry, or their constituency but not their proper names.

Debate Continued

MR. DUCHARME: The Learning minister has announced close to 200 additional spaces for nurses in our postsecondary education system.

As I mentioned, our government is also targeting new funding to areas such as cardiac surgery, cancer surgery, neurosurgery, and

kidney dialysis, life-saving procedures where we want to reduce waiting times and ensure timely access to surgery.

At any given time during this year close to 30,000 Albertans will be receiving home care support, and we intend to increase that number next year.

5:00

However, as I said earlier, improving the health system is about more than just increased funding, more health professionals, and more procedures. It is also about doing things better, and that is why we are focusing so much time and effort reforming our primary health care system.

Right now we have 26 pilot projects being funded through the health transition fund, and several others which are funded through our alternative payment plan project, which are looking at new and better ways of meeting the primary health care needs of Albertans. Many of these projects are focused on an integrated approach to the delivery of health services through groups of health professionals working as teams, sometimes in a 24-hour-a-day facility, to better meet the health needs of patients.

Our plan also includes strategies to increase the emphasis on promoting wellness and preventing disease and injuries, like a new five-year immunization strategy, screening plans for breast cancer, cervical cancer, and metabolic disorders.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

These are just a few of the initiatives highlighted in our six-point action plan, but they are indicative of the leadership role Alberta is playing among all provinces in protecting, improving, and reforming our publicly funded and administered health system. Through increased access, reformed primary care, new direction in long-term care, increased emphasis on health promotion, protection, and prevention and better use of technology, we are taking the steps necessary to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of our health system.

Alberta is not the first province to bring in this type of legislation. The provinces of B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario have similar legislation already in place. Clearly, these laws have not destroyed Canada's health system, as our critics claim Bill 11 will do.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak about the private-sector involvement in the public health system. The private sector has traditionally played an important role in supporting and complementing Canada's publicly funded health system. Some examples of private-sector involvement in delivering quality health services to Albertans include that there are currently over 4,400 physicians in Alberta who are, in fact, private-sector health providers and who bill the public health system under the terms of a contract for services provided to the public system.

There are 588 chiropractors, 233 opticians, 278 optometrists, 1,414 dentists, 180 denturists, and 38 podiatrists who are private operators in Alberta with their own private businesses yet do work for and in support of the public health system. We have 375 private-sector ground ambulances located in 135 communities throughout Alberta, and we have 14 private-sector aircraft that are contracted by Alberta Health and Wellness to provide dedicated air ambulance service throughout the province. These are just some examples of the private sector already working in our publicly funded and publicly administered health care system.

I'm proud to rise today in support of Bill 11. Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is not a fix-all for all Albertans' health care system. I don't believe that anyone in government has promoted the bill as such. However,

Bill 11, combined with other initiatives, can help to stabilize the health system in this province. I'm eager to keep looking at the bill throughout the debate process and trying to come up with ways that will improve it even more. I would be interested in discussing any amendments that might strengthen the bill and address some of the concerns of my constituents without removing the intent of the bill.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, I and my government colleagues are not above health care. Critics of Bill 11 claim that this government is out to destroy the Alberta health system. Why would we make it our mission to destroy something that we and our family and friends and constituents all need and rely on? We need the public system to be there for us too.

I'd like to conclude by saying that the debate has tremendous value to all Albertans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am looking forward with pleasure to the debate on Bill 11. I know what Bill 11 is not, and it's not the public health care protection act. Now, earlier some hon. members said that this is enabling legislation. Well, I know what's enabling about it. This bill has finally enabled all Albertans to see the mess that's been created by this government in the last seven years in our public health care system.

We already know how this government has deliberately underfunded public health care. They have laid off thousands of health care workers and forced hundreds of doctors and nurses to leave the province. Mr. Speaker, they have closed down, blown up, and sold off public hospitals to create a shortage of beds and waiting lists. They have underfunded the remaining public hospitals so that now they sit with empty beds, darkened corridors, and empty operating theatres.

This government has stopped building and upgrading long-term care facilities and auxiliary hospitals. This has resulted in longer waiting lists and patients being shipped off to facilities far away from their families, their communities, and their places of worship. Everyone knows but the government members in this Assembly what this regime has done to our public health care system.

Now we have truth squads, that tell us that they have a plan to fix the problem. Bill 11 is the problem. This government is the problem. The direction they've taken in health care is a major problem. Now, Mr. Speaker, there is a single word that's missing from the title of this bill, and that's "public." Protect our public health care. But, no, they're trying to ram a bill down the throats of Albertans. The reason this word "public" has been left out of this bill is because Bill 11 creates a two-tiered health care system. Bill 11 creates a two-tiered system. It creates private hospitals, but this government doesn't have the political fortitude to call them private hospitals. The reason they don't have the political courage to do this is because the Premier and the cabinet are back in the business of being in business. Now they want to set profit levels for the owners and operators of private hospitals and they want to subsidize these hospitals with taxpayers' money.

I'd like to talk a little bit more about Bill 11, this Health Care Protection Act, Mr. Speaker. I heard one of my constituents describe this bill as the most cynical piece of legislation that he has yet to see, and this gentleman is over 70 years old and has been politically active in this province and has seen a lot come and go.

The first thing that this bill does is pretend to ban private hospi-

als. It pretends to ban private hospitals, but then in the very next section of the bill it turns around and creates something called approved surgical facilities, that will perform approved surgical services. Just what are surgical services? Just what are overnight stays? There has been confusion not only in the province about this, but there has been confusion in this Assembly because some hon. members have had difficulty comprehending that we have overnight stays in this bill. I find that astonishing, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I have a question. Is the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre at the University of Alberta not a hospital because it's called a science centre? Of course it's a hospital. Is the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota not a hospital because it's called a clinic? Of course it's a hospital. Is HRG in Calgary, with its 37 beds, including four intensive care unit beds, three state-of-the-art operating rooms, X-ray equipment, and lab services a hospital? Of course it is, if Bill 11 goes ahead.

As all hon. members of this Assembly, particularly the government members, fan out across the province this weekend and converse with Albertans, whether it's in their constituency offices or in the local shopping centres or on the main streets of their towns, I certainly hope that they realize that Albertans do not want Bill 11 and that they will do the right thing, come back here and tell members of Executive Council: we've had it; we're either crossing the floor and joining the Liberals or you pull that bill.

Playing games with words, or doublespeak, as George Orwell called it in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is the hallmark of Bill 11. I think this deception and doublespeak in Bill 11 is exactly what Albertans are saying about it. They see this, and this to them is the most cynical piece of legislation that they've ever seen.

5:10

Now, it is interesting to discuss health care in this province, and it's interesting to compare all of Canada and all of America. It is very interesting to compare the percentages of gross domestic product spent on health care in Canada and the United States from the 1960s through to the present. What's interesting is that the amounts that the U.S. and Canada spent on health care costs as a percent of gross national product were almost identical until the full implementation of medicare in 1971, but then a strange thing happened. Canadian costs have leveled off at about 9 percent of GDP, while U.S. costs have increased to about 14 percent of GDP and are still climbing.

So Canada brought in medicare, and all of a sudden the percentage of GDP that Canadians spent on health care began to become less and less compared to what the Americans with their private, two-tiered system were spending. In spending an amount equal to 14 percent of their GDP on health care, the Americans are leaving over 40 million men, women, and children without any form of health care. On the other hand, I would like to remind all hon. members of the House that Canada now spends an amount equal to about 9 percent of our GDP, and every single citizen is covered. Why would you want to go backwards with this costly, unfair, U.S. system of private, two-tier health care? Not only that, but Canadians with their medicare system have longer life expectancies and lower infant mortality rates than in the U.S. Moving towards a two-tiered system just doesn't make any sense.

Now, seven months ago the *New England Journal of Medicine* published an article that compares costs between public and private hospitals. Here's what it said.

For decades, studies have shown that for-profit hospitals are 3 to 11 percent more expensive than not-for-profit hospitals; no peer-reviewed study has found that for-profit hospitals are less expensive.

That's one of the most highly respected medical journals in the world talking.

What else did this comprehensive study reveal? Well, for one thing, medicare spending in the U.S. was 13 to 16 percent higher when it was connected to for-profit hospitals instead of not-for-profit hospitals. The study found that spending increased faster in geographic areas served by for-profit hospitals than in areas served by not-for-profit hospitals. Finally, when compared with spending in areas served by not-for-profit hospitals, it found that spending increased more in areas served by a mixture of private and not-for-profit hospitals because the private hospitals pushed up prices in not-for-profit hospitals because they had to compete for doctors and nurses.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the private, for-profit hospital path being pushed by this government and this Bill 11 just doesn't make any sense. The reassurances of the hon. member across the way that they're hiring all these doctors and nurses . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Where can you find them?

MR. MacDONALD: I don't know where they're going to find them, and I wish them well and hope they're successful in their pursuit, but we are setting up in the system two parallel systems.

The Cambie centre in British Columbia pays their registered nurses wage levels or compensation packages that are greater than the collective bargaining agreements that are negotiated. No hon. member in this House can tell me . . .

Bill 21 Appropriation Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but in accordance with Standing Order 61(3) the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a second time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, before we return to your speech, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you a very prominent member of the medical society in Alberta. Dr. Grant Gall is the dean of medicine at the University of Calgary. Grant, can you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act (*continued*)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, we were talking about the supply of doctors and nurses in this province. It was claimed by the Premier that there were going to be big savings

for all these private hospitals, but when we compare it to what is going on currently in British Columbia, it is just not reality.

Now, in 1994 the U.S. public-sector spending alone on health care averaged 600 U.S. dollars per person for a system, I remind all hon. members, in which over 40 million citizens had no health care insurance, and many other people were facing substantial deductibles, fees, and premiums. By contrast, in Canada public-sector spending was about \$1,450 per capita. That means their spending was \$150 less per person, but we covered every Canadian and without the user fees, deductibles, and premiums.

Now, a highly respected economist by the name of Dr. Bob Evans, at the University of British Columbia, has found that Americans pay more in taxes for health care than Canadians or almost all other people in the developed world despite their massive contributions to the private sector. Why do Americans pay more for less coverage? The primary reason is the Americans' huge administration costs. The biggest advantage of the Canadian over the American system is in administration cost savings. Canada's single-payer insurance plan means more control and lower administration costs. In fact, processing the multitude of private insurance schemes requires four to five times the administrative resources needed than with the universal plans of public systems.

An American professor speaking in Toronto last year gave a very concrete example. He described an American private hospital with 900 beds. The hospital had a staff of 317 in its billing and collections department. By contrast, a Canadian public hospital in Toronto with the same number of beds had a grand total of 16 people administering billings.

Now, where is the administrative cost in Bill 11? Who is going to administer the contracts but the regional health authority officials? This is going to cost them more time and more money. We're already doing this with the Workers' Compensation Board. The Auditor General pointed this out in his last annual report in September of '99. There are billing irregularities. There are problems with that. Fortunately, he was gracious enough and keen enough to point that out, and he should point this out to all government members, because they're going down the same road with Bill 11. You're going to increase administration costs for the regional health authorities. You have no idea what you're doing. Listen to the people.

Not only is the cost to citizens under medicare lower, but the costs to businesses are lower in this country as well. Living next door to the Americans and their big businesses and the huge economies of scale means that Albertan and Canadian businesses must make use of every economic advantage possible to prosper, to compete, and to create jobs. Our current medicare system costs employers far less to insure workers than the American system.

A study published by the Conference Board of Canada in March of last year entitled *Corporate Health Care Costs in Canada and the U.S.* showed that total health care costs for Canadian firms ranged from a low of a little over 3,000 Canadian dollars to a high of about \$13,500 per employee. In the United States that range was from \$7,500 to nearly \$28,000. Total health care expenditures, private and public, averaged 14 percent of gross payrolls in Canada and 24 percent in the United States. The study found that the health plans cost firms more than 9 percent of the payrolls in the United States. In contrast, health care plans cost Canadian employers between 1.4 and 2 percent of payrolls.

5:20

The evidence doesn't stop there, Mr. Speaker. A study by KPMG called *The Competitive Alternatives*, a comparison of business costs in North America, Europe, and Japan, was also completed last year.

It examined the total annual costs of a typical firm in eight different jurisdictions. It found that labour costs were the key. Labour represents 58 percent of location-sensitive costs while taxes represent just 12 percent. Overall Canada has the lowest cost of all countries in the survey. In attaining the lowest overall cost rating, Canada had its biggest advantage in employer-sponsored benefits, with health care insurance being the largest component.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you might ask yourself the question: where are the statistics, the reports, the studies, the research from the Premier and this government? Where are the studies about how we're going to benefit from the opening up of our public health care system by creating these private hospitals? We have not seen one credible study, not one statistic or one report . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, we have a point of order. The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, under *Beauchesne*, the sixth edition, 459 on relevance. The hon. member has been going on in his diatribe about private hospitals. Bill 11 prohibits private hospitals in the province of Alberta, so what he is saying is totally irrelevant to the debate?

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, this is ridiculous. There's a definition of private hospitals even in this bill. If the hon. member hasn't read the bill, I will show him where the definition is.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hardly a reply to a point of order.

I would say that at second reading we are allowed a certain amount of width in our debate, and if the hon. member wants to debate that black is white or white is black, then if it's relevant to the debate at hand, he's quite able to make that point. We may disagree with it, or we may agree with him or have yet another opinion of it, but that characterization is allowed. It may not be what we think is right, but it is certainly within the parameter of his right to debate.

Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the convenience of all hon. members on the opposite side of the House, definitions,

section 29(m) of the bill: "'private hospital' means an acute care facility." I'm not going to go any further, but there it is for all hon. members.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have not seen one credible study to back up the demands that this government is trying to have. They're demanding that Albertans have this bill as one of our laws. Not only are Albertans suspicious; all Canadians are suspicious of this parliamentary initiative.

Mr. Speaker, the irony that is going on with the debate on Bill 11 is that in Alberta the current provincial government would like to experiment and tinker with the system by adding a private-sector component to our public health care delivery. The only model that looks similar to what is proposed in Bill 11 here is what we currently have in the United States. Our system is an economic advantage not only to all Albertans but to all Canadians. So why would we want to copy a model that so obviously doesn't work, a model that doesn't work as well as the one we already have?

But we have a little bit more evidence closer to home, in Calgary to be specific. One of the Premier's privatization experiments is under way there, in the fine city of Calgary, at the moment. For some time now cataract surgeries have been performed entirely in private clinics outside of the hospital system and partly paid by the government or the taxpayers. The Alberta branch of the Consumers' Association of Canada recently published a study on waiting lists for cataract surgeries, and the experiment that's going on in Calgary is just not making sense. It doesn't make sense for the taxpayers; it doesn't make sense for the patients who are waiting for surgery.

Now, moving to more private hospitals or private surgical facilities – if the hon. members across the way are sensitive to that, then I will have respect for it – they just doesn't make any sense, Mr. Speaker. So if this doesn't make any sense, why is this government, at the risk of losing the confidence of the electorate, pushing ahead? Bill 11 certainly won't make health care cheaper. In fact, it will lead to higher costs for taxpayers. It's not going to make waiting lists shorter. In fact, it will increase waiting lists. It won't reduce costs for businesses. In fact, it will increase costs and kill jobs.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I would like to adjourn debate, please, on Bill 11. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 5:27 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 10, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/04/10

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we begin a new week, help us, O Almighty, to also begin with the principle of You as the giver of all things. Amen.

Hon. members, would you please remain standing as well for the singing of our national anthem. I will ask Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us.

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Thank you. Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present with your permission a petition signed by 225 Albertans from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Stony Plain, and Ardrossan. They are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, with permission I present a petition signed by 320 citizens from Edmonton, Ardrossan, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 265 people from Edmonton and Spruce Grove. They are urging the "Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glangarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present a petition to the Legislature signed by 254 Albertans from Edmonton, Wabamun, Beaumont, Leduc, St. Albert, and Stony Plain. They are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my duty today to present a petition signed by 261 residents of Alberta from Edmon-

ton, Sherwood Park, Devon, Leduc, and Spruce Grove. All of these people are urging the government of Alberta "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care" in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta, urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care" and signed by 251 Albertans from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Lake Isle, Gibbons, and South Cooking Lake.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Legislature that says:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

It is signed by 286 Albertans from Fort Vermilion, High Level, Grande Prairie, and La Crete.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 1,300 constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They are urging the Legislative Assembly and the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." This group of petitioners brings the total in Edmonton-Gold Bar alone to over 2,500.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition with 323 signatures of Albertans from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Mundare, Willingdon, and Fort Saskatchewan urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." It's been signed by 257 Albertans from Lethbridge, Cochrane, Milk River, Picture Butte, Coutts, Warner, and Brooks.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table petitions signed by 386 Albertans from Edmonton, Stony Plain, Entwistle, Gibbons, Riviere Qui Barre, Fort Saskatchewan, Leduc, and Beaumont. When the Official Opposition has finished tabling our petitions today, we will have totaled 4,894 today, bringing the total so far to date in the Assembly to 45,842 Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of

222 residents from Edson, Fort Saskatchewan, Barrhead, Westlock, Mayerthorpe, Sangudo, Evansburg, Devon, Rocky Mountain House it is my pleasure to present the following petition in the Assembly.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and fulfill my elected responsibility to the following 269 petitioners from the communities of Fort Saskatchewan, Gibbons, Redwater, Bruderheim, Bon Accord, Willingdon, and Andrew. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge this "government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition signed by 275 Calgarians in constituencies such as Calgary-Fish Creek, Calgary-Glenmore, and Calgary-Nose Creek. The petition urges "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of 511 Albertans from Camrose, Calgary, and Leduc I'm pleased to table this petition, which reads as follows:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to support for public health care that I presented last week be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented on the floor of this Legislature last week now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the

petition I presented last week supporting public health care in this province now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented on April 6, last Thursday, be now read and received.

1:40

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have a number of tablings today. The first tabling includes letters that were sent over the weekend between the Prime Minister and myself relative to health care in Canada, in particular the bill that is now before the House.

I would like to also table an article that appeared in the *Calgary Herald*, headlined MacBeth Started Billing for Upgrades. [interjections] Well, okay. Mr. Speaker, then I would like to table the order in council signed by then minister Nancy Betkowski putting in place the process whereby health facilities can charge for enhanced services.

I would like to table also a letter that was sent by the Leader of the Official Opposition to the archivist requesting that all ministerial records be transferred to the Provincial Archives "with a restriction on public access for fifteen years."

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to table a letter that I sent to the Prime Minister relative to his most recent appointment to the Canadian Senate. I want to make it clear that Mr. Banks is an outstanding Canadian who has done so much to enhance the cultural mosaic of our country. It is not the qualifications of Mr. Banks that I question; it is the process.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all this afternoon I would like to table five copies of my reply to the letter of April 7 received from the Hon. Allan Rock, Minister of Health for Canada. Also attached to the reply are five copies of a letter from the Hon. Diane Marleau sent on January 6, 1995, having to do with facilities.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Alberta Mental Health Board for the year ended March 31, 1999.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Alberta Cancer Board for the period ended March 31, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three letters to table. The first one is from the United Church of Canada, Alberta and Northwest Conference. The letter of the church is requesting that Bill 11 be withdrawn.

The second letter, Mr. Speaker, is from Mr. Boulter from Sherwood Park opposing Bill 11.

The third one is a letter from Professor B.Y. Card, now a resident

of Lethbridge, professor emeritus of the University of Alberta, also expressing profound concerns about Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all I would like to table a letter that I wrote to the Premier on April 4 reminding the Premier of his promise to make the private hospital blank pages public documents.

I would like to table the answer to a question in this Legislature, which shows that private MRI clinics were not in operation in this province before May of 1993.

I would like to table a document called the Ambulatory Care Services policy developed in February of '91, which of course prohibits overnight stays in private clinics.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I haven't seen the documents the Premier tabled, but they sounded very different. This is a recommendation of the Lieutenant Governor in Council on the hospitalization benefits amendment regulation, which of course speaks to uninsured services being delivered in public hospitals with no incentive to the physician, not the private hospitals that's been proposed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's on behalf of Mr. Brodie, who is a constituent of Edmonton-Mill Creek. This is his "personal response to the MLA's report on the School Council Review." It is interesting that Mr. Brodie's great-grandmother was the first licensed school teacher in Alberta.

Thank you. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Whoa. [interjections] Whoa. Whoa. Whoa.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a report that was conducted by Martin Dooley and Lori Curtis of both McMaster and Dalhousie universities. The title of the report is Child Health and Family Socioeconomic Status in the Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth.

The second tabling is a report titled *The Changing Nature of Home Care and Its Impact on Women's Vulnerability to Poverty*. This research project was conducted by Morris, Robinson, Simpson, Galey, Kirby, Martin, and Muzychka for the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women and published in November of 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table today with the appropriate number of copies from residents in opposition to Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. They are from Laura Weckman and David Biggin-Pound, Aric Storck, and Lisa Young. All three tablings are letters to the Premier voicing their opposition to further development in Kananaskis Country by Genesis Land Development.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a program for a concert, *Welcome to the 21st Century*, that was held at the Jubilee Auditorium last Thursday evening. It was attended by a number of members from this Assembly. It featured the cadet honour band of the prairie region of cadets.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a copy of a letter to the Minister of Health and Wellness that was also copied to the Premier. It's from the Loowells of Edmonton, and their letter concludes, "I cannot support bill 11, and I will not support a government that does."

Mr. Speaker, the second is the appropriate number of copies of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta newsletter *The Challenger*, volume 10, March 2000, issue 2 with the headline article *If It Walks Like a Duck, and Talks Like a Duck, It's Probably a Duck*, where they conclude that approved surgical facility is code for private hospital.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to table today five copies of the 1998-99 Year in Review for the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, which is a review of activities for the council for the year ended March 31, 1999.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 88 students accompanied by 11 adults from St. Teresa Catholic elementary school in the riding of Edmonton-Rutherford, 88 eager students all wanting to be future leaders and politicians. They are accompanied by teachers and group leaders as follows: Mrs. Camille Hamel; Mrs. Jackie Dahlen; Miss Alexandra Jerrard, a student teacher; Mrs. Yvette Beaudoin; Mr. Charles Stuart; Ms Kathy Kiss; Mrs. Judy Winters, a student aide; and parents and helpers Mr. Gus Baert, Mrs. Karen Hughes, Mrs. Margaret Kufuor-Boakye, Mrs. Mary Gibson, and finally Mrs. Sheryl Schuh. They're seated in both galleries. If they would please stand and receive the warm traditional greeting of the House.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's not often that I get to introduce someone to you and through you to the Assembly, but I have five visitors from my constituency here today, and I would like for them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. Their names are Bill and Teresa Church and their children Mike, Stephanie, and Maria. They're dedicated home schoolers, and they've brought their children here to observe the Assembly, so I'd ask the Assembly to greet them, please.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to

introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 14 students from Sir Alexander Mackenzie school in St. Albert. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Marlene Keanie, and associate teacher, Miss Cheryl Anne Coon. They are in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly this afternoon 10 individuals from Concordia University, Gold Bar campus. They are led by Dr. Linda Kerr. She's accompanied by nine students this afternoon. They are here to witness the proceedings in the Legislative Assembly. They're in the public gallery, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 37 grade 10 students from Ponoka composite high school. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Brady Teeling, and Mr. Ron Labrie, and I would welcome them to the Assembly and ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The group I'm going to introduce will be in the Legislature shortly, but for the record I would like to introduce them at this time. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly 21 students from Mee-Yah-Noh elementary school, which is in Edmonton-Glengarry, and they are participating, very enthusiastically I might add, in the School in the Legislature program this week. They're accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Marjorie Scharfenberger, along with her father, Mr. Wes Rider, who she recruited to help her and who is a retired principal from Edmonton public, as well as parent helper Mr. Leonard Bauder.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly this afternoon 14 political science students from Augustana University College in Camrose. They are visiting the Legislature today. They're accompanied by their instructor, Professor Roger Epp, and driver Brian Spielman. I believe they're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd like them to rise and be recognized by the Assembly at this time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly some very good friends of mine who are also neighbours and strong political supporters. In the members' gallery are my good friends Marilyn Tetz with her daughter Melanie Morgan, her grandsons Dustin and Braidon Morgan, her son Greg Tetz and his friend Leanne Kinsey. They're accompanied today by my lovely wife, Janis. I would ask the Assembly to please give them the traditional warm welcome.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Resource Group Inc.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Dr. Charles Wright, a vice-president of medicine at Vancouver hospital, has said, and I quote: current demand to dismantle the system is not coming from a public outcry but rather from a relatively small group of entrepreneurs and specialist physicians who stand to gain the most personally. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier tell Albertans whether his government or his handpicked regional health authorities are hiding any proposals to establish private hospitals in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Not that I know of.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, can the Premier, then, indicate his awareness of a document called Developing a Positive Working Relationship with Calgary Regional Health Authority written by Health Resource Group, which basically sets out a proposal to establish private hospitals in Alberta? I'm happy to table it.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if it has crossed my desk, I haven't seen it. Perhaps the hon. minister of health has, and I'll have him answer.

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, as it indicates in the document that HRC is not accredited to do the surgery that requires an overnight stay for medical reasons, then why does the Premier need to proceed further when he already has the control over overnight stays that exists right now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the policy alludes to providing some options under very strict conditions to regional health authorities for minor – and I stress “minor” – surgeries such as those that are being done in the Shouldice hospital in Thornhill, Ontario, where they have been very successful. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: The chair allowed the Leader of the Official Opposition to proceed with the question. The chair did not hear any interruptions. The chair then recognized the leader of the government to choose to respond, and then he heard a whole series of interjections.

The hon. leader of the government.

Health Resource Group Inc.

(continued)

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I heard from across the way a comment as it alludes to surgical services requiring an overnight stay. There are none in Alberta, as I understand it, that offer private stays relative to insured services. There is one, I understand, that offers services relative to WCB contracts and, as I understand it, a contract with the British Columbia government. The only other one that I know of offering medical surgical services is the Shouldice clinic in Thornhill, Ontario, which provides overnight stays for those patients who are recovering from hernia operations.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that Albertans have been wondering why this Premier is pushing ahead with his privatization plan for hospitals when his own studies, of course, show that contracting out to private, for-profit hospitals will result in longer waiting lists and higher costs. In terms of the question of why, which is so fundamental to Albertans, we've now got a very clear answer courtesy of the Health Resource Centre, which stands to make quite a substantial profit if the Premier's policy were to go ahead. My question is to the Premier. Given that the Health Resource Group says in this document that we have been given from the Calgary regional health authority that "Health Resource Centre . . . has been designed, built and equipped to meet all acute care hospital standards throughout the O.R., inpatient, and support areas," why wouldn't the Premier just come clean and admit that his government's policy is to make private hospitals operational in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, every policy document that we have released which, of course, purports at some time or another to become legislation specifically bans any person from operating a private hospital in this province.

2:00

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the Health Resource Centre has the "complete mechanical, electrical, hospital systems," why doesn't the Premier just come clean and admit that it is government's policy to make private hospitals operational?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I'm bewildered by the question, because obviously the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition has not read the bill and, if she has, does not understand the bill, does not understand the very, very simple phrase that's only six or seven words: "No person shall operate a private hospital."

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, can the Premier indicate what assurances have been given to prompt these people to invest obviously millions of dollars to set up private acute care hospitals? Why would anyone set up a private hospital unless they expected to be able to use it?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness supplement my answer, but HRG was set up to my knowledge some time ago to handle things that are not insured or not covered under Alberta health care, such as WCB contracts and, as I understand it, contracts with other provinces, perhaps as they relate to WCB and perhaps some uninsured services. I just don't know what they offer. I've never been through the hospital. I've never seen the hospital.

The only person I know in this Legislative Assembly who has actually visited the hospital is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I don't know if he did, but I know that his predecessor did, because she shared that information with me. She said it was a fantastic facility, but she couldn't support it, and I appreciate that.

Relative to HRG and its operations and so on, I'm sure the hon. minister knows more than I do.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that the Assembly, at least on the government benches, is quite aware that the issue of the Health Resource Group applying to the College of Physicians and Surgeons for accreditation to provide overnight stays is a matter of historic

record. The College of Physicians and Surgeons at the time, while they were prepared to draft such bylaws, held back and sent a message in writing to the minister of health indicating that we needed to have legislation in this particular area to decide on whether or not such a facility should have accreditation.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind hon. members in the Official Opposition that that is exactly one of the major provisions of Bill 11: to put a strict legislative framework around any possible contracts with surgical facilities.

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Nongovernment Entities

THE SPEAKER: The chair would like to remind hon. members that to his knowledge the College of Physicians and Surgeons is not an agency of the province of Alberta and, further, that HRG is not an institution that's a part of the province of Alberta as well. So, please, let's be careful of what we do here.

Health Resource Group Inc. (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this is actually a very interesting business plan of the Health Resource Centre, and it talks to the political factors that are a difficulty for the centre. Given that it says "the political issues would be real, but could be managed through strategic cooperation," can the Premier describe what "strategic cooperation" is occurring between the Health Resource Centre and the Calgary regional health authority, his handpicked board members?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea whatsoever what strategy, if any, is being developed or devised between the Calgary regional health authority and the Health Resource Group. I have absolutely nothing to do with the Health Resource Group whatsoever, and I do take offence at the question that was shot across very gratuitously by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora asking me if I had any shares in HRG. How rude. How awful. Had that statement been made public, which I've just made public, it would be without question a point of privilege that purports to impugn my reputation.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that this newly received document from the Health Resource Centre says under the Political Factors which are difficult: "shared planning and ongoing coordination of a public and a media communication plan is proposed," can the Premier describe what is the ongoing public and media communications plan between his own handpicked Calgary regional health authority and the Health Resource Centre?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea. Certainly we had a strong desire to appoint Mr. Dinning as chair of the Calgary regional health authority, and I can't understand for the life of me why this hon. member would be opposed to Mr. Dinning. I mean, they were good, good buddies. Mr. Dinning was so involved in her leadership campaign. They were good buddies. I just can't understand why she is making such an issue of the appointment of Mr. Dinning.

Now, if this hon. member is so curious to find out what arrangements, what dealings, what conversations have taken place between HRG and the Calgary regional health authority, what I would advise her to do is what any good-thinking individual would do: pick up the phone and talk to the people at HRG. Is she afraid? Is she afraid to talk to the people at HRG? Is she afraid they will bite her or something like that? I mean, why ask me about third-party conversations? If she doesn't have the ability to pick up the phone and dial

the number, I'll do it for her, Mr. Speaker. That's what I'd advise her to do.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I can understand why this Premier would avoid answering the question.

Let's go again to a third political factor identified by the Health Resource Group. It says that "agreements on key message content, timing, spokesperson(s) and methods of internal and external communications would be essential." Can the Premier describe what agreements have been concluded between HRG and the CRHA on the message, on the content, the timing, and the spokespersons for their private hospital?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, no I can't. I am not privy nor should I be privy to discussions between HRG and the Calgary regional health authority. I am not privy to those discussions, but the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition obviously wants to become privy. She wants to know more about those discussions, but she's asking me. She's asking the wrong person. If she wants to know about those discussions and the intent behind those discussions and what HRG hopes to achieve and the role of the Calgary regional health authority, then do the simple thing. I mean, a three year old can pick up the telephone. Surely the Leader of the Opposition can and find out for herself.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Private Health Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the Premier tabled a document. According to this document in 1992 the then health minister amended the hospitalization benefits regulation to allow direct patient charges for so-called enhanced goods and services received in public hospitals. The New Democrats opposed the practice. The decision to provide an upgraded appliance should be based on the needs of the patient, not financial considerations. My questions are to the Premier. Why has the government not rescinded the 1992 regulation that allows direct patient charges for so-called enhanced medical services and goods?

2:10

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this speaks to the bill and one of the amendments that will be introduced. The hon. leader of the third party does raise a very good point, and that is the order in council that was signed by the then minister of health, Nancy Betkowski, which states in 5.2 – and this applies to a publicly funded, full-scale hospital as we know it today, not a surgical clinic but a full-scale hospital, a person going in and expecting in a publicly funded hospital all of the services of that hospital. Nonetheless, she signed an order in council that was passed that says in section 5.2(1):

If a person requests and receives enhanced goods or services, other than accommodation, from an approved hospital, the board of that hospital shall charge that person the extra cost of providing those enhanced goods or services.

We're going to have to look at that, hon. member. We're really going to have to look at that, especially in public hospitals. To allow that, Mr. Speaker, is a total switch and a total change from her position today.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again: in calling the Shouldice hospital a model for Alberta, why has the Premier failed to point out that the Shouldice is a premedicare, grandfathered private hospital and that Ontario legislation prohibits the granting of any new licences to private, for-profit hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, whether the hospital was grandfathered or not I think is a moot point. The fact is that it is operating. It has been an absolute success according to any authority that you talk to. It has established a centre of expertise relative to hernia operations. It has taken pressure off the public system, and it is still funded under the Ontario medical system. The procedures are still publicly funded under Ontario health care.

You know, we went through a situation here where we made the same argument, however unsuccessfully. That was the case of the Gimbel eye clinics, where for years and years – and I'm not sure how many years but at least ten years – the clinic had been charging a facility fee, and Ms Marleau, the federal minister at the time, said: well, I don't care how long they've been charging facility fees; we aren't going to grandfather it in; we're going to say that it's illegal. I guess they could say the same thing in Ontario relative to the Shouldice clinic, but they don't. They don't because the clinic has been a phenomenal success.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier seems to want to go back to the premedicare days. I don't know why.

My last question to the Premier is this. Why is the Premier surprised that the federal Health minister would consider surgical clinics with overnight stays to be private hospitals when the services they provide are identical to those offered by smaller public hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, in Mr. Rock's letter to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness – this is probably one of the most bizarre statements I have ever heard. You know, the good news is that without spending one single cent of taxpayer dollars, according to Mr. Rock with a stroke of Mr. Rock's pen, we now have 52 hospitals more than we did have. Fifty-two more hospitals than we had. With the stroke of his pen. Mr. Rock said that he considers surgical clinics to be hospitals. There are now 52 operating in this province. I don't know how many more are operating across Canada. The good news is that he's given us 52 new hospitals without spending a cent of taxpayer dollars. The bad news is that we don't whether he wants to close them all.

THE SPEAKER: To the last two hon. members who participated in question period, I'd ask you again to recognize that no preambles are permitted on supplementary questions.

The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Capital Region Governance

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Municipal Affairs publicly released the interim report on the Alberta capital region governance review last week. Prior to the release of the report a number of municipalities had said that they would not participate in the next phase unless the government indicated its acceptance of the recommendations. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Has the government accepted the recommendations contained in the interim report?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me say how pleased I am with the hard work and the co-operative effort that has come forward to this point and the degree of achievement to this point. I also want to point out that this is an interim report. The recommendations to date are of a general nature, and of course there is a great deal of refinement that will have to take place in order to get the more detailed version of this process.

I've indicated that we generally are pleased with the recommendations, generally accept the recommendations and certainly look forward to the ongoing work that will be coming forward as we progress. I encourage the participants to continue to work together and to indeed make this capital region a region that's been designed here at home by the local municipalities, by the local participants.

MRS. O'NEILL: My first supplementary: will the provincial government or the minister start being more active in the review in order to provide specific direction on what the government would like to see accomplished in the next phase?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, the mandate has always been to develop a made-at-home type of solution process, and indeed it's always been the government's intent to have the municipalities work and develop and devise the recommendations and to work out the development of these solutions that will be required.

We would certainly be pleased to have the chairman, Mr. Hyndman, carry on in the chair position. The level of participation will be determined by the participants themselves. Indeed, it will be driven by the local groups providing the information and the discussion partners and the needs that the municipalities find are required and are appropriate.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. My second supplementary is to the same minister. What's the process that the Alberta capital region governance review will be following in developing the final recommendations?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Well, as I see it, Mr. Speaker, the process will continue to be a local municipally driven process to develop the solutions that will be required. There are a lot of details to work out. There are a lot of issues and details that'll have to be worked out to bring this to a successful conclusion. The process is one that's been initiated through much of North America. Much of North America was regionalized years in the past, and indeed the original concept, the delivery of services, is working very, very successfully in these other areas.

I'll be awaiting the final report. Indeed, if there is a wish or need for the province to participate and that request comes forward from the local municipalities, we would certainly be very interested in working with the municipalities to develop a solution that will present the capital region in a more competitive mode with the rest of North America.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Health Resource Group Inc. (continued)

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not only does this government's private health care policy allow for a small group of entrepreneurs and specialist physicians to gain all the upside, but it leaves the taxpayers paying for all the downside. It sounds very much like the Treasury Branch's mall refinancing deal or perhaps one of the Premier's Swan Hills deals. My questions this afternoon are to the Premier, of course. Given that the Health Resource Group in Calgary has clearly expressed their intention to participate in open discussions with the Calgary regional health authority related to joint planning and shared risk, will the Premier, speaking on behalf of his surrogate regional health authority, tell Albertans exactly what risks have been discussed? How much tax money is this Premier prepared to put at risk in those discussions?

2:20

MR. KLEIN: I don't know what he's talking about because there is no surrogate regional health authority, Mr. Speaker. If he's alluding to something that I control and I manage on a day-to-day basis, then I would consider the question to be irrelevant.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, given that nobody in Calgary elected Mr. Dinning to spend their one billion tax dollars, and given that HRG has said that they want to negotiate a "shared risk" agreement with the Premier's appointed regional health authority, would the Premier tell us precisely what negotiations have taken place to date and how much taxpayer money has been proposed to backstop agreements between the Health Resource Group and the Calgary regional health authority? It's real simple, Mr. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Yes, I know it's real simple, Mr. Speaker. The question is a very simple question, but he's asking the wrong person. I have no knowledge of any negotiations that are taking place, have taken place, perhaps will take place between the Calgary regional health authority and HRG. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness can shed some light on the situation.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of what document, if there is a document, they refer to that is current. This, however, sounds suspiciously like a discussion that took place about three or four years ago when HRG first formed and was public at that time.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that is very much forgotten in the thrust of the question of the member across the way is that the legislation that this Assembly is currently considering is designed to deal with any of the concerns that would arise in such discussions.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, scarier and scarier.

My final question to the Premier would be this: will the Premier admit that his private health care policy, at least as evidenced from what appear to be secret negotiations between HRG and his surrogate regional health authority, is all about getting back into the business of business? Isn't that really what this is about, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. Without getting into any kind of a detailed answer, which I can't do because I have no knowledge of anything going on between the Calgary regional health authority and HRG, I take strong exception to the use of the word "surrogate" board or "surrogate" authority.

DR. TAYLOR: There's a surrogate opposition over there.

MR. KLEIN: Yes. Well, yeah, that is a surrogate opposition over there. Right. They had to find a Conservative to become their 'consurrogate' mother. [interjections] Right. Their surrogate leader. Well, maybe I will from now on talk about the surrogate Liberals, you know, under their surrogate leader, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Rosebud River Fish Kill

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Actually the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills does have the floor.

MR. MARZ: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There were reports of hundreds of dead fish along the stretch of the Rosebud River in my constituency this past Saturday. This is a concern to both my constituents and myself. My question today is to the Minister of Environment. Would the minister please explain what has caused so many fish in this river to die?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, any incident involving a fish kill is taken seriously by the Department of Environment. The department first became aware of this situation on the Rosebud River on Sunday and made arrangements to visit the site the very next day.

At this point we don't know the reason for this particular fish kill. There may be a number of reasons. A wildlife biologist and a conservation officer have visited the scene. This is standard procedure in these types of circumstances. The investigation by those people from the department will be an attempt to determine the cause of death for these fish and whether any further actions by the department are required.

Mr. Speaker, in the spring fish kills in Alberta water bodies are not uncommon, and it's usually the result of natural causes. However, as I indicated, at this point we don't know whether the fish kill in the Rosebud River was as a result of natural causes or if it was as a result of some other activity.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what natural phenomena would cause fish to die in this way?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has many water bodies in it in which fish sometimes find it difficult to survive over the winter, and there can be any one of a number of reasons for this. As an example, in water bodies where there's very little water movement, such as in lakes and in ponds, the decay of vegetation over the winter frequently depletes the level of oxygen that's available in the water. That makes it difficult for the fish to survive over winter, and they often die before spring, at which time they then wash up on the shore as the ice cover melts. Fish kill can also be a problem in slower moving rivers and streams, where oxygen levels are not as high as they are in faster moving rivers.

I want to emphasize again that at this point we do not know if the Rosebud incident was a result of natural phenomena or some other activity. Our investigation will determine what the cause of this incident was.

MR. MARZ: Mr. Speaker, my final question again to the same minister: what can your department do to prevent this occurrence from happening again?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we will complete our investigation to determine the cause of the fish kill in the Rosebud River, and until that time it would be premature for me to indicate what our course of action would be. I can say that if the incident is the result of natural phenomena, there is little that we can do beyond the water monitoring process that we already have in place, and we would continue to do that in the future. That's not just in the Rosebud River but throughout the province. If our investigation determines that there was a cause other than a natural cause, then we would take such action as would be required to ensure that it does not happen again.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Health Resource Group Inc. (continued)

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's private

health care scheme is nothing more than a blank cheque for a small group of entrepreneurs and specialist physicians who are going to gain the most, like the HRG backers. So my first question is to the Premier. Given that HRG says that "there would be no minimum number of surgeries, procedures, patients or beds," will the Premier admit that once in place his private hospitals policy means that there will be absolutely no limits placed on the capacity of private hospitals in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we don't have a private hospitals policy. As a matter of fact, again I allude to the policy, and that is that "no person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." But we don't know where we stand now, because Mr. Rock, much to the surprise of not only myself, the Minister of Health and Wellness, certainly every other Premier in Canada, every other health minister in Canada, and every clinic operator – we don't know about dentists' offices. We're all very, very surprised to learn that Mr. Rock considers surgical clinics as hospitals. [interjections]

I allude to the letter – I'm getting a lot of yipping and yapping over there – relative to overnight stays. Mr. Rock's letter was quite clear. He said: I consider surgical clinics – he didn't mention overnight stays; he said surgical clinics. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, you know, again they haven't read the letter. They don't read the letter. It said: surgical clinics under the Canada Health Act I consider to be hospitals. That means that we have at least 52 more hospitals in the province.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, you asked a question. The hon. leader of the government responds to the question, and then you continue to interject. I don't understand this process.

I'm going to recognize you to ask a question, and then would you be quiet.

2:30

Health Resource Group Inc. (continued)

MRS. SOETAERT: My second question, with great hopes for an answer: given that HRG says, "Contracts could be defined by any appropriate criteria including: defined services, quota, length of time, or by dollar/budget amounts, outcomes, etc.," will the Premier admit that these are all just code words for being back in the business of business?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, no. I do see the letter here now. [interjection] Well, it was sent over apparently. I guess this is the stuff that was tabled. There are a number of dates. I allude to the one of December 9, 1998. Is that the one? Am I on the right track here? Help me. Is this the one? This is a letter to Dr. John Morgan, who was then chair of the Calgary regional health authority, where

HRG was asking for a meeting with the Calgary regional health authority to explain what their operation is all about. It seems to me sort of a one-way communication. HRG is writing to the CRHA saying: here's what we're all about; here's some documentation; come and visit us; sit down; we want a half an hour luncheon meeting, maybe a tour of the facility. Nothing wrong with that.

What is confusing, however, is really the Alberta Liberals, who are always confused, and their federal cousin Allan Rock. It seems that there is a very deliberate campaign here to confuse the issues. I'm getting back to this whole point: what is a hospital, and what is a clinic? The most recent example, Mr. Speaker, is the letter from

Diane Marleau. Now, the hon. Leader of the Liberal Opposition remembers Ms Marleau. I'm sure she does. No, no. Actually Marleau came after. Right.

Anyway, in the letter from Diane Marleau to our health minister in 1995, which has been tabled, Ms Marleau says exactly what I've been saying for months now relative to what a hospital is and what a private clinic is. She says:

While the . . . provision of many physician services at one time required an overnight stay in a hospital, advances in medical technology . . . has made it possible to offer a wide range of medical procedures . . . outside of full-service hospitals.

Right. And we know that.

I want to make it clear that my intent is not to preclude the use of clinics to provide medically necessary services. I realize that in many situations they are a cost-effective way to deliver services, often in a technologically advanced manner.

Then she goes on to say that she wants to bring consistency throughout the system and basically to eliminate facility fees. So what Ms Marleau is talking about is clinics being able to do a number of surgical procedures. Now, unbeknownst to all and much to our amazement, much to our astonishment, Mr. Rock comes out and says that they are now all hospitals. Mr. Speaker . . .

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. We're moving on here quite a bit.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: given that HRG says, "Alternative pricing structures would be open for discussion including: fixed sum, price per unit of service, cost plus, gross dollar, etc.," will the government concede that its policy of contracting out isn't about maximizing health and minimizing waiting lists, but it is all about minimizing costs and maximizing profits for entrepreneurs?

MR. KLEIN: What the policy is all about, Mr. Speaker, is upholding the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. What the policy is all about is protecting the publicly funded system as we know it today. What the policy is all about is putting rules and regulations in place relative to contracting out by RHAs to surgical clinics. There are 52 clinics operating now without regulations, without guidelines. That's what it is all about. It's about putting in place legislation similar to legislation that exists now in at least four other provinces, legislation to protect the publicly funded system, regulation and legislation to uphold the principles of the Canada Health Act, and legislation to make sure that all people who are sick and injured will need to access public health care in this province is their Alberta health care card. Nothing more, nothing less.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

School Attendance

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent of Calgary-Fish Creek has brought to my attention a recent article that appeared in the *Fraser Forum*. Schools receive operating grants for students enrolled, and as taxpayers we pay whether they attend or not. He believes that attendance is important to success and that truancy leads to dropping out of school and delinquency and places students at higher risk for illegal behaviours. My questions are all to the Minister of Learning. Mr. Minister, do school boards provide attendance records to your ministry?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for

that question. No, individual school boards do not give us attendance records unless a child has been referred to the Attendance Board. What then occurs is that they ask the minister and the Attendance Board to rule on what happens to that child.

I think there are some indirect measures, and probably the best indirect measure is the measure of the number of students who graduate. Quite frankly, if the kids don't go to school, they're not going to graduate. So we do have an indirect measure, but the answer is no, we do not get a day-by-day, blow-by-blow attendance record.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question: Mr. Minister, given that school boards get paid for the number of students registered in the classroom, how do you keep track of who's in and who's out?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, what happens is that on September 30 of the school year, what is called a school count is done. The schools are then funded according to that count. We have looked at variations on that theme, whether or not we have two counts, whether or not we have three counts, and in each case the two and three counts have become very administratively cumbersome. In fact, we would waste dollars that could be put into use in the classroom. We feel that with the September 30 count, albeit some school jurisdictions are going to miss out, others are going to gain, so what we do is we do one count a year and fund the school jurisdictions according to that count.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you. What is the minister doing to retain students and keep them in attendance?

DR. OBERG: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, as I alluded to in my first answer, if kids are going to graduate from school, they do have to attend. School attendance is critical. School graduation is critical. Presently we have roughly 70 percent graduating from grade 12, and 70 percent, albeit a high number and one of the highest in Canada, still is not 100 percent, which is what we have to have.

Mr. Speaker, this morning I met with representatives from the Northland school district, from that general area, and in many locales they have a 5 or 6 percent graduation rate. So this is definitely something that we have to work on, it's something that we have to concentrate on, and I will give the hon. member my undertaking that it is of the highest priority of this department to get as many students as possible to graduate from grade 12.

Health Care Workforce

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, patients continue to suffer at the hands of this government as it constricts and reduces capacity in the public system in order to create a market for private hospitals in this province. Public MRIs sit idle, and whole floors of public hospitals sit empty because this government claims that there are insufficient, qualified professionals to operate those public facilities. My questions are to the Premier. How many doctors and nurses left this province as a result of this government's cuts to the public system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I take exception to that. I would challenge this hon. member to show me, right after if he wants to, any MRI in a public hospital in this province sitting empty or idle. That is a ridiculous statement.

MR. BONNER: My next question is also to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. Given that HRG says that "agreements are also in place

with several contract agencies” and that “HRC is confident they can staff up on short notice,” why isn’t the government utilizing this extra staff?

2:40

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I’m going to have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness elaborate, but I think this is fundamental to what we’re trying to do not as it relates to HRG but to surgical clinics generally, that there are no rules and regulations surrounding the contracting out of these facilities to regional health authorities. That’s what it’s all about. It’s about that, and it’s about providing under very strict conditions, with the absolute concurrence of the highest of medical standards set down by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the ability to expand some minor procedures perhaps, possibly, if it ever happened, to overnight stays. That’s the only thing that is perhaps different. The bill doesn’t speak to – well, I can’t mention the bill. The policy doesn’t speak to overnight stays. It’s silent, much as the legislation is in other jurisdictions on this issue.

But if anything is to happen, it has to meet the most stringent of conditions. Whether it’s HRG or any clinic that is now existing and wants to have its contract renewed or any other clinic that wants to open up and offer another service, they will have to meet the strictest of conditions.

The way the Liberals would have it is to not have the bill at all and let everything be wide open the way it is today. That’s what they’re advocating, Mr. Speaker.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister of health admit that creating staff shortages in the public system was a deliberate strategy by this government to create a market for private hospitals in Alberta?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker. The government has demonstrated its commitment to the funding of the health care system through our current three-year business plan, through our very significant reinvestment of dollars in the health system of this province. I would like to remind members across the way that during this past year the number of doctors practising in the province increased very significantly, something that we are very grateful for and is not characteristic of a number of other provinces.

We have hired an additional 1,200-plus frontline staff, Mr. Speaker, as projected in our last business plan, and we plan to accommodate many more in the coming two years, so that is something we’re certainly giving priority to. Yes, we do have a very competitive job market right now. There are many people vying for the talents of the professionals and support workers in the health care system, but it is very well demonstrated in our overall approach and in our overall plan for health and wellness in this province that we do need and we do value and we do plan to expand our health workforce.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Fish Conservation

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sauder Reservoir, or Rattlesnake Lake as it’s known locally, is a popular water sport and recreational fishing area around the Medicine Hat area. Recently there have been changes made to the regulations regarding sportfishing across Alberta and specifically at Rattlesnake Lake that have a number of my constituents upset. My questions today are to the Minister of Environment. I would like to ask on behalf of my

constituents: why is it that the number of fish that can be kept by fishermen has been drastically reduced in the past year or so?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, when you look at the number of lakes that contain fish in the province of Alberta, it would be roughly 1,000 lakes, and we issue roughly 300,000 to 400,000 anglers’ licences each year, so the fishing pressure would be 300 to 400 anglers per lake. Compare that with the province of Saskatchewan, where there are close to 100,000 lakes and the number of anglers per lake is more in the range of about two anglers per lake.

As a consequence, Mr. Speaker, there is a great deal more pressure on the fish populations in the province of Alberta than in other parts of Canada. While many anglers enjoy fishing as a recreation, to get outside with friends and family, and practise catch and release, there are still a number of people who would prefer to keep some of the fish they catch. That’s the reason that we do place a limit on the number of fish that any angler can catch and possess at one time. The current catch limits of three walleye and three pike spread the catch around so that more anglers have the opportunity to catch and keep a few walleye and pike from the reservoir.

MR. RENNER: Mr. Speaker, since the anglers who have talked to me indicate that the larger fish have more eggs and hence reproduce more rapidly than the smaller fish, why is it that the larger fish are the ones that are kept and the smaller fish are the ones that are turned back?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Environment uses a number of techniques to maintain fish populations in the province, but explaining the minimum-size limits requires an examination of the status of our fish populations. As I indicated earlier, there are enormous fishing pressures because of the number of anglers, and as a consequence fish populations have decreased. When this happens, the large fish are the first ones to go because they’re currently in low numbers. That’s why there are minimum-size limits that have been introduced to protect small and medium-sized fish: to build back our fish populations and ensure that the fish have spawned at least twice before reaching the size allowed for harvest by anglers.

Mr. Speaker, the small to medium-sized fish that are protected by the minimum-size limits contribute the majority of the total eggs spawned each year, and that’s why the minimum-size limit of 63 centimetres is used, to protect the majority of the spawning population of fish.

MR. RENNER: Mr. Speaker, my final question is really the crux of the issue and the one that most people ask me about. If there is so much pressure on the fish population in Alberta, then why are we allowing commercial fishing on a small lake like Rattlesnake Lake in Medicine Hat?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a fine question. My department staff have been working with anglers and with lake advisory committees to develop management plans to protect the fishery. In the case of Rattlesnake Lake, commercial fishing for whitefish is heavily regulated and monitored to make sure that there’s a minimal impact on the nontarget species such as walleye and pike. Tolerance limits for these nontarget species have been set, and when the limits are reached in the commercial fishery, then it is shut down regardless of whether the whitefish limit has been reached or not.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we’ll begin with the first of three recognitions today.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Volunteer Week

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the week to recognize and raise awareness of volunteerism. April 9 to 15 is designated as Volunteer Week in Alberta.

I love volunteering. I have volunteered to support causes I believe in, volunteered to try something new to learn different skills, to help a friend or a family member, and volunteered just to have fun.

I'd like to recognize the efforts of the Edmonton and Calgary volunteer centres for the hands-on, frontline work they do in recruiting, training, and placing volunteers and also for their work in the charitable nonprofit sector to increase awareness of good volunteer management practices. I'd also like to recognize the advocacy and policy roles played by Volunteer Alberta and Volunteer Canada. At the same time, I want to caution this government against assuming that every program and service can be or should be downloaded to the voluntary sector. Volunteers are not free, as I've heard some member say. Individuals may donate their time for no pay, but voluntary-sector agencies and organizations still incur costs in running their organizations.

Once again, I recommend to the government the excellent panel report *Building on Strength: Improving Governance and Accountability in Canada's Volunteer Sector*. Thank you.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mill Woods Community League President's Council

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to recognize the members and the work of the Mill Woods Community League President's Council. This council is made up of the presidents of the community leagues that serve the 90,000 citizens of Edmonton-Mill Woods, Edmonton-Ellerslie, and Edmonton-Mill Creek. The council meets monthly, along with community service, recreational, and cultural representatives and elected officials, to promote services and to respond to community needs. The president's council is unique. From sponsoring Canada Day celebrations to monitoring pipeline safety and co-ordinating sports events, the council is involved. The members of the council volunteer their time to both their local community and to the efforts of the council.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and myself congratulate the council this week as we recognize volunteers. We congratulate the council on its work. Together they make Mill Woods an even finer place to work and live.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Cadet Honour Band

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand today to recognize here the cadet honour band of the prairie region, whose theme for this year was *Welcome to the 21st Century*. This was a very enjoyable evening at the Jubilee Auditorium, Edmonton. The honoured guest this year was Her Honour Lois Hole, the Lieutenant Governor. After *O Canada* was sung, all stood to pledge the oath of Canadian citizenship, which was for many in the audience their first time.

The cadets were representative of sea, land, and air. All 10,000 cadets in the prairie region are eligible to audition for the prairie region cadet music concentration, Exercise Honour Band. Video-taped auditions are prepared during September and October and submitted to the regional cadet music adviser by the 15th of November. The tapes are reviewed and initial selections announced

by Christmas. During the months of January and February final auditions are conducted in person at preliminary rehearsals. A six-day training period is scheduled for all selected cadets, after which five concerts are performed between April 1 to 6, 2000. The concerts are in Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, and Thunder Bay.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on a point of order.

Point of Order

Offending the Practices of the Assembly

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My point of order refers to an exchange in question period between my colleague from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and the Premier. I will cite Standing Order 23, in particular the subsection regarding making "allegations against another member," which is section (h), and (l), regarding the introduction of "any matter in debate which offends the practices . . . of the Assembly."

During that exchange, Mr. Speaker, I think it typified the way that the Premier has been distorting several facts regarding the position of the federal government and of the Official Opposition. In fact, the way that he was whittling away around the truth, I wonder whether or not we were looking at the same letter. The correspondence he was referring to, dated April 7, 2000, from the Hon. Allan Rock, the federal minister, makes it very clear that his concern is the surgical facilities as defined in Bill 11. The Premier would have Albertans believe that the minister was referring to the 52 existing freestanding clinics, none of which do inpatient services or allow for overnight stays. The Premier keeps on seeming to forget that fact, but the federal minister didn't forget that fact, and he knows that the surgical facilities as defined under Bill 11 would be considered hospitals under the Canada Health Act because they will admit patients overnight.

I would hope that the Premier would (a) withdraw his allegation that members of the Official Opposition were not familiar with the correspondence from the federal minister, and (b) I wish he would stop offending the practices of this Assembly by introducing into debate matters which just simply aren't true and therefore offend the practices of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. There is no point of order. All the hon. member across the way has done is simply clarified his party's position regarding the particular matter. It's a question of interpretation of the documents in question.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I will say briefly that for much of question period today after the HRC document was tabled, the opposition went to great lengths to misrepresent the contents of that particular document not only in this House but also to ensure that their message was conveyed to those watching on the Access channel.

In any event, nothing's been distorted. It's a question of interpretation, and he's simply used the point of order to clarify his party's position with respect to the matter.

Thank you.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, today in the question period 36 and

a half minutes of the 50 minutes devoted to the question period related to health-related matters. This is day 25 of this particular session, and over the past weekend I have reviewed all the *Hansards* starting with day 1 through to day 24. The conclusion basically is that on any given day we're spending approximately 35, 36, 37, 38 minutes out of the 50 minutes with respect to health matters.

Now, that in and of itself is not unremarkable. What is remarkable is that if one takes a look at the Order Paper for day 25, Monday, April 10, 2000, it clearly lists, as was alluded to, that on Monday, April 10, there would be debate on Bill 11 in the afternoon, Bill 11 in the evening. Then if I look at Tuesday, April 11, it says Bill 11 in the afternoon, Bill 11 in the evening. If I look at Wednesday evening, Bill 11. If I look at Thursday, April 13, again it says Bill 11.

These questions are so on the line, so on the line. The thought was as of last Tuesday, when we were going to go to the actual scheduling of second reading of Bill 11, that in essence that would preclude a lot of questions, and then very skillfully the word "policy" got into the whole thing.

There's absolutely no doubt at all in my mind that question period is no longer question period. Question period has now become debate period and a further extension of the whole thing. So if we're going to take another 36 to 37 minutes a day in the question period for debate, those who are taking and garnering up the minutes associated with Bill 11 might take the liberty of saying: well, we've had an additional 36, 37 minutes a day with respect to this.

I presume that the questions with respect to a letter from a federal minister are here simply because there is a bill before the House that basically is looking at a particular policy. Otherwise, we wouldn't normally even be talking about a letter from a particular federal minister. That's the only reason, I would suspect, that it comes at this point in time.

It seems to me that what we just had again here is another further point of clarification arising out of a further point of debate that we continue to deal with. If the questions and the answers are going to be in the area of debate, well, then so be it, but it seems to me the House is missing a grand opportunity to deal with other business that the citizens of the province of Alberta might have. However, that's the choice of hon. members who are recognized, to raise whatever question they want.

Factually and very, very clearly today there were 36 and a half minutes out of 50 minutes on health-related matters, yet the agenda says that this afternoon and this evening and tomorrow and the next day and the next day are devoted to Bill 11. If one goes back and, on the other hand, researches the previous 24 days, you will see the statistics that I quoted today basically following through again.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

[Adjourned debate April 6: Mr. MacDonald]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill does little to protect individuals or Albertans in general. The government has three choices: scrap the bill, amend it to disallow overnight stays in approved surgical facilities, or ram it through and hope the firestorm dies down. Like the *Titanic*, charging ahead at full steam through a sea of icebergs, so goes this government, charging ahead with Bill

11. April 14 is the anniversary, only four and a half days away from the sinking of the mighty ship. Is the year 2000 going to be the year of the going down of this provincial government?

Our Premier claimed that he and his government were listening. Of course, he failed to explain who they were listening to. The Premier has resorted to name-calling, which simply underlines the weakness and desperation of his arguments. Concerned Albertans have been insulted by the Premier and recently have been called left-wing nuts. I am not a left-wing nut, maybe a wing nut if that satisfies the Premier's tantrum.

As one of the government MLAs mentioned to me in a conversation, Bill 11 will have same the same effect on the residents of Alberta as did the effects of Bill 40, on which the government invoked closure in December 1999. Their thoughts seem to be: just give it six months after pushing it through and Albertans will forget all about it. What's wrong with this picture? Perhaps Ralph's team is like the crew of the *Titanic*, being led to the disaster. Why? As many, many Albertans are concerned about the health care system, which should be here to protect our children and our grandchildren, we should always be very vigilant to the statements repeated over and over again by this Premier: trust me; while I am the Premier of this province, there will be no two-tier health system in this province. What happens after he isn't the Premier?

3:00

What is wrong is that these politics are not the words of the bill. A feeling is now deeply embedded in many Albertans that Klein's administration has a secret plan to erode public health care. People don't trust this government and their health care. I repeat: Albertans don't trust this government with their health care, nor should they. Premier Klein has been unclear about his intentions. Not long ago he openly questioned why those people with money shouldn't get faster access. This goes totally against the sense of fairness and equality that Albertans have, and they resent it. Is this like creaming from the top?

Bill 11 allows certain services to be contracted out to the private clinic hospitals, but at what cost to the public system? Does privatizing mean cheaper, or does it set up people or companies to profit at our expense? We can only draw one conclusion, which unfortunately cannot be proven. I believe that sometime in the future there will be a personal gain for the Premier and some of his close and party supporters. Let's not forget what the present head of the Calgary regional health authority and former Treasurer of this province said on national television a short while ago: it is better to experiment on our health system than it is to plan. Can you believe this arrogance? How can we trust this government with these thoughts in the back of our minds?

Remember Multi-Corp? Remember Mr. and Mrs. Klein, Mr. and Mrs. Love, and their shares? Is a block of shares still being held by one of these people's brothers? Were they really turned back?

MR. HAVELOCK: A point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Referring to a Member by Name

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is well aware that he should not be using the individual names of the members of this House in the way that he has.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: That's absolutely correct. Does the hon. member want to make a point on this point of order?

MR. GIBBONS: No.

THE SPEAKER: Well, four times the Speaker has written down the use of these names and was waiting for such a point of order to be arrived at. That is clearly not in the tradition of this House, but more importantly the chair has had an opportunity to talk to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on a number of occasions and does not view that that's his personality. It's not his personality coming through, in the chair's view.

So, hon. member, would you kindly refrain from the activity with which you just conducted yourself on a minimum of four occasions in the last few minutes and proceed with whatever points you want to make in participation.

MR. GIBBONS: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, in that particular case.

Debate Continued

MR. GIBBONS: Who would have guessed some of these things that have happened over the past few years? It happened in the federal system in past governments. Again alluding to the *Titanic*, the arrogance of its owners and navigators led to its destruction. Could this be the final arrogance that will sink this Tory government?

The polls which were published in our papers over the past few weeks confirmed that the rebellion against Bill 11 is not merely an Edmonton issue or that of the wing nuts. In two of the traditionally most Conservative regions of this province, resistance is strong. In central Alberta more people oppose Bill 11 than support it. In southern Alberta opposition is high, as high as it is in Edmonton. No longer can rural Albertans be taken for granted as the unquestioning supporters of anything this government does.

We also read of the slim margin featured in the article from the major newspaper in Calgary. I can only compare this paper, in its coverage and in its articles on this particular case, as being no different than a streetwalker, without saying the direct words.

In the move to oppose this bill, I will state that it's too vague and it's lax in hard facts. To Albertans trying to comprehend this bill, it's not what the bill says; it's what it doesn't say. The surgical facilities referred to in the bill are in reality private hospitals. The bill claims to ban private hospitals, but on closer examination it fails in its promise. For example, the bill could not stop a person from providing hospital services as long as the facility was not a full-service hospital. If emergency services were not provided, for example, the institution would no longer fall within the definition of a private hospital.

It does not prohibit people from privately paying for MRI scans or any other diagnostic tests. People who can buy an MRI can queue-jump ahead of other people who are on the waiting list for diagnostic tests, which will then lead to faster surgery or other treatment. The bill claims to ban queue-jumping, but in reality patients do pay extra money. In order to jump ahead in the line, they pay extra money to get the service they require, and this bill will still allow that. When it states in the bill that it will not allow queue-jumping and will provide large fines for violations, who will be the watchdog on this one? The person who has been allowed to move ahead in the line will not be complaining. How will we know? Are we going to spend more money for some bureaucrats to watch this? For example, could this be the same person who's protecting this government over the West Edmonton Mall financing information?

This government didn't get involved in queue-jumping for the \$2,000 per eye cataract operation in Calgary until the nationally televised health documentary about Alberta. To this we only received lip service from the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Whether he actually is doing anything about this issue is the big question.

Nothing in this bill ensures that contracting out services to private facilities will open more beds within the public system. Hospital beds, operating theatres, and other services are already available to open up within the public hospitals but remain closed because of the shortage of funding or professional staff. It is fundamentally incorrect to think that the solution to this problem of scarce resources within the public system is to split the resources between the two systems. Why isn't it better to take the same amount of money that the Premier and his government would hand over to the private hospitals and give it to the public hospitals, which have the capabilities to meet the needs? Where's the evidence that giving the same amount of money to the private hospitals is going to cost less in the long run or provide a better income?

We only have to go over to the University hospital and ask why a previous cataract operating theatre sits empty and is a play/waiting room. This operating theatre, previous to the dismantling and tinkering in our health care system, performed 18 cataract operations per day. If you take this and multiply it by 20 days per month, there were 360 patients receiving operations per month. Multiply that by your 12 months and let's calculate it. Would this not help in clearing the backlog?

The government has given no data to show that this will be of benefit to the health care system. What kind of a department is this minister of wellness running? Perhaps the data is available, but it does not show any information that the government wants us to see. We read that this government admits to the fact that this legislation is based upon a philosophical basis. Mr. Speaker, if they have data, then show us, the severely normal Albertans.

There have been some positives. The government dissolved some 150 health boards and came up with 17. This proved to be smart. Maybe all we need are eight regions in the province. Guess who were chosen to run these regions? Friends of this government. A promise by the Premier to elect two-thirds of this board in the 1998 civic election never came to be, but the Premier now has promised it for the 2001 civic election. How many promises in his political career have been broken like this past one?

The Capital region health board has done a very good job in holding their budget in check while they witness their neighbour to the south in Calgary spend at will and still receive more money in the latest handout.

This government hasn't given proper time to see if the centralization of supply and services and the linen service will work. I believe that this was a matter of cost savings, to buy as one instead of all the separate entities.

Then we hear from this government that this bill has no bearing on the free trade agreement. Well, many experts are not so sure. As I understand it, the clause that could be the problem indicates that the U.S. companies have to be treated the same as Canadian companies. Does that mean that U.S. firms can demand equal opportunities? Once the door is open, it may not be able to be closed. Like the old statement, once the barn door is open, the stallion is already out.

Under the leadership of Premier Klein in 1992, the political spin of the day in this province was the same as in Australia, New Zealand, and England, where cash-strapped governments were looking for ways to react to their overspending. Someone had the brilliant idea to decimate our health care because health care was the root of government overspending. Starting with the spin that by dismantling the health care system the government would save money, a slow creep of privatization began, especially in Calgary. With control over health care, everyone would be happy. The government would save money, a small percentage, but friends of

the government, the private operators would make money. The patients would be served.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, there's been a void in support in this country for the plan over the last seven years of both the federal and provincial governments in their pretext of reducing their debt. While there's downloading at the federal and provincial levels, the health system has had a tremendous growth in technology. Not only has technology grown; so have improvements and costs of pharmaceutical advancements. Maybe health care is costing more, but what is too much? With the new and advanced technology, remember that there was never a plan.

With 8,200 nurses let go in the province, many leaving the province, nursing schools were shut down. Now we have a tremendous shortage of nurses, and our regions are trying many methods of attracting nurses back into the system. Remember that hospital beds, operating theatres, and other services are already available to open up within the public hospitals. These remain closed because of a shortage of funding or professional staff. This week a notice was given to the OR staff recommending that they ask for pay for overtime instead of banking time when forced to work overtime because of the shortage of OR nurses. Staff would have to submit for overtime. As of July 2000 staff would bank time, and some 20 to 30 days would be paid out. Doesn't this highlight a shortage of staff? It should be noted that our hospital personnel morale has been decimated. Where doctors once walked into an operating room knowing that they had a familiar team of professional staff to back them up, now they may not.

I have had many conversations with health care workers and caregivers. This government has experimented without a plan and with no input from workers who weren't in upper management. People in the field such as my wife, who has been a nurse for 30 years, couldn't be consulted because it would be considered that she had a vested interest. This was told to her by the mayor of Edmonton on a social occasion. Her answer or question back to him: what knowledge could he present to the health system, being a former tire salesman or store owner? Figure that.

What these individually picked Tory friends who sit on the regional health boards fail to realize is that the clinical practitioners and nurses have various capabilities of critical-thinking skills, from expert to novice. Nursing is an art and a science, with applied knowledge from various academic facilities to provide the highest possible level of care to the general public. Nurses are self-governed professionals, not unlike doctors, engineers, and lawyers. They hold full legal and ethical accountability for their actions. We're witnessing that this government has already said, given that they've given money into the system, that these nurses are an asset. Maybe when this country at large recognizes that professional nurses are an investment, not a liability, the future of health care will be secured.

I learned very early in my career that if you want to save time and money, ask people who are the most affected by the proposal. It's the frontline workers who know where the waste is and how to eliminate it. The government did not do this and therefore did little to rectify some work patterns of the past. The peaks and the valleys in health care funding do little to give any stable system to manage health care budgets. Real reform means stable funding, the utilization of multidisciplinary teams working together to meet patients' needs in the most appropriate setting, whether it be acute care, long-term care, or home care, and increased health promotion and health preventions.

The most disturbing aspect when reading the newspaper articles and reading between the lines is trying to understand why this

provincial government is pushing ahead with Bill 11. We as Albertans have witnessed the political appointments on the health boards of personal friends and political hangers-on, who in some cases contribute little but manage to remain on the inside track.

Today we realize that when the voting public gives any political party an overwhelming majority such as this Conservative government, we are basically allowing dictatorship. Citizens should be allowed to vote on Bill 11. An election should be called. This bill is so narrow, so ill conceived and detrimental to the future of public health in Alberta that there is no option: no amendments, no tinkering, no Bill 11. Scrap this bill.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce an amendment to Bill 11. I have copies to hand out, and I'll just wait until they're handed out to everybody.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please proceed.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce an amendment at this time reading that

Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be not now read a second time but that the order for second reading be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

Mr. Speaker, over the last few weeks since this bill has been introduced, too many Albertans have spoken out with their concerns. They have spoken out to us by petitions, they have spoken out by letters, and they have given their concerns as to why this bill should be pulled. Alberta did have a top health care system. We can be there again, not by tinkering but by building a plan. Competition in health care will not be resolved by having a second system. We have to rebuild. I had mentioned in my speech before that we have operating theatres, that we have floors in hospitals that should be worked on first. The money being put back in the last few months isn't the answer either. We do not have the people. We do not have the staff. The system has been decimated to a point where it has to be looked at in some respect, and we are very, very concerned.

We look at what's happened in other countries, and we read extensively about what's happened in Australia, New Zealand, England. Most Canadians feel very strongly about what has happened in the United States. We do not want to get there. We talk about a two-tier system. We talk about the American system. We as Canadians look, talk, and do everything like Americans, but we have something that we should be proud of. We have a very precious thing: public health care.

In my speech I mentioned about the void that has happened over the last seven years in our governments across Canada, starting at the federal level and down. That void should be worked on. We should be putting pressure on the federal government to draw the provinces in to deal with this. We should not be sitting and trying to point fingers and whatever. I fully back up Albertans saying: let's get the federal government involved in this.

Why the Premier would want to destroy the health system is the biggest question that people are asking me. Well, tinkering with it and experimenting with it is not building anything more than what we're doing. The other item that's been asked of me: is the Premier at least trying to fix the system? With the amendments that were talked about and on which we heard the minister the other day, requiring the RHAs to look at existing resources before contracting out, well, why wasn't this done before?

3:20

This bill is legally correct. If you turn the legal beagles loose on it, there's nothing they can be pointing a finger at. Principle 11 of the federal system is probably the only thing there can actually be

blame on. Principle 11, Bill 11: is there any coalition there?

We also hear of the strength of the privative clause. Nobody is above the law. We should not even think about that. We should scrap it, relook at the bill, and bring it in another day. We need further studies. The point is that the Minister of Health and Wellness has actually said that the studies haven't been done to date.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Assembly now has before it a debate on an amendment to Bill 11. Hon. members might want to refer to *Beauchesne* with respect to this. It has been the tradition of our Assembly that when we do have amendments with respect to bills, the amendment itself is the matter for debate, not the bill. Just so there's absolute clarity in here, we're now debating that

Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be not now read a second time but that the order for second reading be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

That is the amendment we are now debating. Not Bill 11 but the amendment.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to speak to this amendment to Bill 11. I think it is critically important that this matter be sent to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations as soon as possible. We do believe that at this time, in the best interests of Albertans, this bill should be discharged at second reading, withdrawn, and referred to that committee. The reason for that becomes readily apparent to anyone who has concerns with this particular bill. If we take a look at the Premier's comments of last Tuesday in his opening speech in the debate, we can look for a level of consistency in his remarks with what's been said inside and outside of the House and with what actually exists within the bill. There are certainly enough examples of what I would consider to be inconsistencies that it is important for this matter to be put before this committee.

When speaking of this committee, I would refer all hon. members to one of the last meetings of the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, which occurred on Tuesday, May 29, 1984. In the minutes of that particular meeting there is a bit of an outline in terms of the expectations of what that committee does and who it works with from the community. I think it's important to spend a few moments reviewing that, Mr. Speaker, because as we well know, this particular committee certainly has never been called since I've been in the Legislature, seven years now, and by the looks of it, in terms of what I could find in the library, it has not been called since Wednesday, January 30, 1985. In fact, the committee performs a very valuable function in this Assembly.

If we refer back to the minutes of 1984, the committee was called, and a member of the board of the Institute of Law Research and Reform was asked to make a presentation at that committee. This fellow, Mr. Hurlburt, goes on to explain why it's important to have this committee and why the Institute of Law Research and Reform is an integral part of that committee and can certainly contribute to legislation in this province. He states in his comments there that he asked for a meeting with the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations as a result of the Attorney General and the institute speaking and deciding "that they wished to establish a good means of communicating with both the government and the legislature."

He went on to explain

that the Institute of Law Research and Reform was a self-structured, self-directed body of lawyers whose advisory function was to recommend improvements in the law. These recommendations were primarily directed through the office of the Attorney General but

when other Departments of government were involved, the Institute dealt with the Ministers directly concerned.

Those ministers directly concerned in this instance and, in addition to that, all members who are members of the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations are in the Legislature and do have for review before them Bill 11.

He goes on to talk about how the institute or other members "may see something wrong in a particular piece of legislation or the Attorney General may ask the Institute to look into a particular issue." In this case, in this particular bill, Mr. Speaker, we see a number of things that are wrong. We see inconsistencies that are wrong. We see interpretations that we feel need to be clarified because, certainly on this side of the House, we feel that many of the interpretations made by the government members are incorrect.

Mr. Hurlburt goes on in this discussion to talk about how the time the Institute devoted to projects would be wasted if persons in government did not take an interest in what they were doing and they hoped that the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations would take such an interest. The Committee could be empowered to look at their suggestions, form an opinion and get it into the legislative process and in that way, members would see it as coming from a committee representing the whole Legislature with no political overtones.

So this is very relevant to our discussion today, Mr. Speaker. In fact, on a bill of this magnitude, that will have this kind of power over the province of Alberta and how the moneys of the people of Alberta are spent and how health care is delivered in the future in this province, we certainly hope that those decisions are made with no political overtones.

What better way to measure that, Mr. Speaker, than to send this bill and the multitude of concerns involved with it and surrounding it to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, who would have for support Parliamentary Counsel and representatives from the Institute of Law Research and Reform. That would certainly ensure that outcomes from that would not have political overtones, I'm sure. Having the committee empowered to look at the suggestions and to form an opinion and to get it into the legislative process is also a very important aspect of what this committee will do when they can review Bill 11, review all of the information available on it from a variety of sources, and then come back with a recommendation.

As we see, Mr. Speaker, the debate is getting more and more heated as we progress in this Legislature. It is certainly a time for calm heads to reign and to begin the process of making decisions about this legislation that would be done in a completely nonpartisan fashion, that will weigh the merits of all the arguments, will address those as compared to how the legislation reads, make suggestions for improvements at that time to the legislation, and then we can go forward.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, it will do nothing to detract from the bill. Certainly the possibility is that it will do everything possible to enhance the bill, and that's what we're asking for. We're asking for all Members of this Legislative Assembly, regardless of which side of the floor they sit on, to take a look at the significance of this bill in terms of its impact on the history of this province and on the people of this province and to make their decisions based on that impact, not on which political party they belong to, not on any form of partisan politics, but on the merits of the bill, on the potential for improvements, taking into consideration all of the concerns that have been heard from throughout the province at this point in time. We would be happy to support that kind of a move and to point out to the members of the Assembly some of the things that I think could be reviewed by that standing committee.

I'm going to address just a couple of the issues that I had with what the Premier was saying in his address last Tuesday. In his

remarks, Mr. Speaker, he talked about shortening waiting lines. Specifically, what he said was that this will "give us one more tool to use in our efforts to drive down waiting lists and waiting times that only prolong pain and suffering." Well, first of all, I have a problem with this because it's the direct actions of this government that have caused those waiting lines to increase and that have directly caused the increased suffering of people in this province.

3:30

The drastic cuts that this government brought in in 1993 were completely unsustainable, and they knew that at the time. We had gone through a period of health care funding in this province where, if you looked at the funding on a total basis, on a gross basis, yes, health care funding was going up year by year, but if you looked at it on a per capita basis, Mr. Speaker, it was flat. It was a level amount of spending that was being spent per person in the province. There were problems in the system. It wasn't a perfect system; that's for sure. Rather than doing what the government did and escalating the problems by drastically introducing cuts, they should have taken a look at the system, evaluated it in terms of assessing what was wrong with the system and what could be improved in it, and then gone about fixing the system.

Well, that wasn't what they wanted to do. They made these drastic cuts. Drastic cuts meant that we lost a number of very valuable staff in this province to hospitals south of the border. We lost doctors, we lost nurses, and we lost other staff. A few of those people have come back, Mr. Speaker, but not the large majority of them. So we are in a state now where we are still understaffed in many of those areas.

The government saw that that didn't work, Mr. Speaker, that drastically cutting health care costs just made people mad and it really hurt the health care system as a whole. So in the last year and a half, when the revenue stream of the government has been more positive than it was in the past, what we've seen is a drastic increase in spending, also unsustainable in the long term if the same number of dollars keeps being added to the system. However, having said that, we are still not back at the per capita funding levels that we were at prior to '93. We see that with all this money dumped back in the system, the system still isn't working. This government doesn't know what to do about that particular situation. What they're going to do, then, to try and solve it is to institute private-funding mechanisms.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So the question is: will it address the Premier's point of shortening the waiting lines? Of course it won't, Mr. Speaker. If this government could prove that were the case, then we would have seen that information tabled in this Legislature. In fact, we would have seen it shoved down our throats at every possible opportunity. Instead, what do we see tabled in this Legislature with regard to documentation saying that the introduction of private health care in this province will shorten waiting lists? We've seen nothing, not one report, not one study. In fact, the studies that we have seen, some of them commissioned by this very government, indicate only that waiting lists will continue to increase.

Then let's talk about the Premier's other point at the very beginning of his speech, which was that shortening these waiting lines and introducing private health care will lower costs. Once again, that simply hasn't been documented. Every study we've seen, once again including the studies tabled by this government, indicates that costs will only go up. In fact, last week we had the Premier saying that too, so he has contradicted his own statement. He has

tried to lead Albertans down the garden path in terms of shortening waiting lists and lowering costs, knowing full well that they aren't accurate statements. But I'll tell you something, Mr. Speaker. Albertans aren't being fooled on this one. They've got it figured out in terms of what they're doing.

In terms of the relevancy of that, referring this to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, there are two particular points that I would like this committee to address in their review of this particular bill: to take a look at what the Premier has said, to take a look at the documentation that is available, and to decide whether or not in fact they are accurate statements as they are reflected in the bill, and can they be enacted in this province? I don't think they can, Mr. Speaker, and I think that we are doing a grave disservice to the people of this province if this bill gets passed under the conditions that the Premier has talked about.

We think it would be better, Mr. Speaker, if they fixed the existing system before we take a look at any other kinds of options. This is a recommendation that could come forward from this committee. They could say that it is premature to bring in a bill on private health care at this particular time in this province. They could say that the problems with the waiting lists at this point in time are more reflective of a Premier who has blown up a hospital and sold another one for a dollar and who continues to refuse to open up existing beds in hospitals in this province than it is a reflection of what private health care will do for this province. So we would like them to take a look at that concept.

We know that this government has made lots of mistakes in health care. They cut the funding drastically. They dumped money back in, and that still didn't work. Well, let's talk about what happened in Mill Woods for a minute. This government was going to shut down the Grey Nuns hospital in Mill Woods, clearly a mistake. They were wrong. Fifteen thousand people marched twice to tell the government that what they needed was an active care hospital that continued to have a fully functioning emergency system, not some sort of prorated kind of community service that this government was proposing. The government listened that time, Mr. Speaker. People made their voices heard. They brought their concerns forward, and the government listened to them.

We need the government to have an independent kind of review that they can listen to once again, because they can't seem to get it right on health care. Private health care is not going to improve the system. It doesn't solve the existing problems they have. I understand that the government doesn't want to listen to the opposition, but let them listen to outside experts who can review this from a legal perspective, who can take a look at this with all of the implications in a nonpartisan fashion, who can bring experts to the table to discuss the merits and the nonmerits of the bill, and make rulings based on that, Mr. Speaker. Take it out of the Legislature at this time and give it a nice independent, nonpartisan review. That's what we're asking for.

This government doesn't seem to get it right, and they just don't seem to know that not fixing the current system is an act of irresponsibility, both from a fiscal and a moral perspective, Mr. Speaker. Fiscally, if you don't fix the system you've got, it's going to cost you more money. Morally, if you don't fix the system you've got, people are not going to be getting the kind of service that they need and want.

You know, this government all the time likes to think that it's operating like businesses do, with the same kind of smart thinking that businesses do, but let me tell you what this model of change in health care would look like in the business world. If a company had a piece of equipment that was crucial to their operations, that was a key component of their operating abilities and wasn't working

properly, like if our health care system wasn't working properly, you would think that they would first of all take a look at why it wasn't working properly. In this case, if we take the parallel to the health care system, the piece of equipment wouldn't be working properly because it hadn't been maintained properly, because additions hadn't been made to it to bring it up to state-of-the-art equipment operated in a state-of-the-art function. Both the hard costs, making sure that their equipment is state of the art, and the people costs, making sure of training and the different kinds of perspectives you can bring to make pieces of equipment operate efficiently and effectively, were neglected.

Now we've got this piece of equipment that has been neglected, and the service providers, the operators of it, have been neglected, so it's not working properly. This company that owns this piece of equipment they've neglected knows they have to do something to solve the problem, but they don't know what, Mr. Speaker, because they're not really quick thinkers. What they think they should do is just keep that piece of equipment operating the way it is and buy a brand-new, really expensive piece of equipment and add it to the stream, because they justify to themselves that it will certainly help their business if they do that.

Not only do they have this brand-new, state-of-the-art piece of equipment that's got all of the nifty bells and whistles that they've been sold by the salesman – in this case, read HRG for salesman – but they're still going to have the old system, that old piece of equipment that's clanking and clinking along. They convince themselves that this is going to be even better, that they can increase their capacity, which is exactly what we hear the government talk about here. They delude themselves into thinking that this is a good idea, that they don't have to fix the old piece of equipment. They just buy a new one, bring it onstream, and they can run the old one and the new one together, and isn't it going to be great? But, Mr. Speaker, the shareholders of this company don't agree with them. They know that to operate efficiently, you first have to solve the inefficiencies in the existing system so that the share price of the piece of equipment goes down.

3:40

In the case of the province, Mr. Speaker, our share price is the confidence of the people, their confidence in this government that the government can adequately run the systems required within the province, and also global confidence in terms of our ability to maintain any kind of a leading edge. What happens if you bring a brand-new piece of equipment into a company and you refuse to address the existing problems that were in the other piece of equipment? Well, what happens with that piece of equipment is that it doesn't run effectively and eventually breaks down. So now you have this old, mothballed piece of equipment that doesn't work very well, if ever, and this brand-new piece of equipment that takes over all the old business. Well, the relevancy of this to the health care debate is that that is what will ultimately happen when you bring a private system onstream beside a public system when you don't fix the problems in the public system.

Some of the smarter colleagues get this, but some of the other ones don't, Mr. Speaker, and it's too bad, because it's a good parallel in terms of what's happening in this province, I think. It's an example that perhaps the Premier should take a look at. If you don't solve the current problems in the public system, it's very important, in terms of relevancy to this particular amendment, because these are the exact conditions that I am requesting that this committee take a look at when they review this legislation.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just take a few brief moments to urge the members of this Assembly not to support this amendment. In fact, I'm rather surprised that a group of individuals,

a caucus, who have been talking about not enough discussion, not enough debate, not enough information on this whole issue would bring in an amendment to a bill which in fact inhibits debate. Rather than allowing the members of this Assembly to talk to the principles of this bill, they are now confined under second reading to dealing with the amendment.

I encourage the debate for this bill to be held on the floor of this Legislature. There are 83 persons who were elected by citizens of this province to debate legislation. I suggest that this bill is needed. We have had requests from the federal government, from the federal Minister of Health at least, and we have had requests from the College of Physicians and Surgeons asking us to put rules around the operation of private clinics. Clearly it is needed.

Mr. Speaker, nobody on this side of the House has ever suggested that Bill 11 is the answer to all of the problems that might be facing the health system. We have encouraged the federal government to respond to some of the needs in the system by restoring some of the millions and millions and millions of dollars they took out of the system and have yet to return. We feel that that would go a long ways to supporting the system. What we're trying to do with Bill 11 is to give our regional health authorities one more tool to answer and respond to the needs of the people that they serve.

I want to just tell you why I believe we need this bill and why we should be debating it here today rather than putting in an amendment that simply inhibits the debate. One, we need this bill because it confirms and reaffirms our Alberta government's solid commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act. This side of the House thinks that's important. Secondly, it puts in place a strong legal framework for the government to regulate private health care deliverers in this province. This legislative authority has never been in place. We have been asked to put it in place, and this is the opportunity to do it. Rather than speaking to the principles of that, the opposition are inhibiting the debate now to the amendment.

As I indicated, this gives us one more tool. It gives our regional health authorities one more tool to use in the management of health care delivery in their region. Mr. Speaker, this caucus is not so presumptuous to think that we know all of the answers as to how to deliver health services. However, we do have a great deal of confidence in the College of Physicians and Surgeons being able to identify procedures that could be dealt with outside of a full-scale hospital safely, efficiently, and we would believe that those contracts should be managed in that way. The reason we need this legislation is to ensure that there are clear guidelines that the authorities must use if they want to utilize the option. They have to be cost-effective, they have to have a detailed contract which would be made public, and there are measures of accountability.

A lot has been said about queue-jumping, Mr. Speaker. This bans queue-jumping. It bans the charging of fees for insured services, and it bans private hospitals. As I've indicated before, if the opposition do not understand what a hospital is, we on this side certainly do. Of course, we are as amazed as anyone could be over the federal Minister of Health's rather bizarre statement today, if you take it at face value, that he's going to give us another 52 hospitals just in this province and goodness knows how many across the country.

Mr. Speaker, I have tried to just identify a few of the reasons why I believe we need this bill. We need to debate it on the floor of the Legislature. We need to have the opportunity, which we had until this amendment came into play, to debate the principles of this bill. We had an opportunity to debate it fairly, honestly, and straightforwardly. I believe that this amendment takes away that opportunity from my colleagues on this side of the House who would have wanted to exercise that prerogative.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on the amendment.

MR. SAPERS: It's on the amendment.

The only reason that Alberta or the Alberta government needs this bill is to allow for the legalization of private hospitals which have inpatient or admitting or overnight stay capabilities. That's the only reason why we need this bill. We don't need this bill in this province to deal with regulations, because we have lots of regulations. We have regulations that the minister of health set in providing guidance to regional health authorities for contracting out. We have regulations that were set out in correspondence with the Auditor General on contracts handed out by regional health authorities. We have guidelines set under the Medical Profession Act, through the College of Physicians and Surgeons' bylaws, on what kinds of medical procedures can be done in what kinds of facilities. Of course, we have the Alberta Hospitals Act and the regulations attendant to the Alberta Hospitals Act. All of this creates a rather complex web of authority and regulation dealing with the contracting out of medical services to private facilities.

The one thing that that whole complex web doesn't allow for is contracting out surgeries to private surgical centres when the surgeries are so complicated – and they can call them minor if they want to, Mr. Speaker – that they require inpatient admitting. The reason why that complex web of existing law and regulation doesn't allow for that is because it would violate the Canada Health Act. So it is really not the case that Alberta or Albertans need Bill 11.

A careful reading of the amendment would indicate that the amendment deals with the subject matter of the bill, not the bill itself, being referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, probably the most underworked committee of this Legislature and a committee that the chairman, I'm sure, would love to call to order and exercise his or her authority over. In doing so, by referring it to this committee, this committee would further the debate on the subject matter and engage members of the public. So contrary to the minister's comments that this would somehow shut down or forestall or stifle debate on Bill 11, it would do just the opposite. It would for the first time put the debate into a forum where there could perhaps be public input on the record in *Hansard*, where all the rules and orders of the committee would apply. I believe we could have a very fine discussion with Albertans, indeed, regarding whether they believe we need this policy.

3:50

Of course, I've heard loud and clear from my constituents and from Albertans right across this province not only that they don't need this policy but that they don't want it. They're not being sold, they're not being convinced, and they're quite resentful of a government that is spending millions of dollars trying to sell them something that they don't want to buy. In addition, not only that but of course they're funding the sales campaign with their own tax dollars, which they would much rather see go to frontline services in health care, maybe hiring a few more nurses or running an MRI machine just a few hours longer every week.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the reason I support this amendment from my colleague from Edmonton-Manning is because I think it accomplishes a couple of things. Number one, it does broaden the debate; it does allow for this public input. Number two, I think it also gives the government a rather graceful way out of the dilemma that they find themselves in. When I made my earlier comments at this stage of the bill, I talked about the fact that while I am not part of this government, it is still certainly my government as an Albertan and as a taxpayer, and I would like to assist this government, my

government, in terms of finding a way for them to extract themselves from this policy dilemma that they've put themselves into.

The fact is that they know, as every member in this Assembly knows, that Albertans don't want Bill 11 to become law. They know they've made mistakes, because the Premier just today in question period already said: well, we're going to amend the bill. So they already know that it's flawed, and based on that, Mr. Speaker, I'd think that they would seize the opportunity to accept this amendment, recognize the political solution it provides them. You know, we won't even take credit. We'll sit back quietly and go to bed that night thankful and with warm and glowing thoughts that we have saved the taxpayers of Alberta, the people of Alberta. In fact, based on the messages I've received from right across the country, we have saved Canadians from going just too far down this privatization path. So I'm surprised that the government wouldn't seize that opportunity.

You know, when the Premier in question period today admitted for the first time, I believe, on the record in *Hansard* that the government was going to amend Bill 11, it made me think that this is another reason why we ought to refer it to a standing committee. Obviously, after the more than a million dollars that was spent circulating the Bill 11 propaganda to every household in the province, Bill 11 is really just a work in progress, a fictional work in progress at that. Nowhere in the householder – and I just reviewed a copy of it – does it say “draft.” Nowhere in the householder does it say: this is Bill 11, we think. In fact, it says: “This is your complete copy of Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act,” and this is why we need the legislation.

So the unsuspecting taxpayer bringing this in with their morning newspaper would think that is in fact the true intent of the government, but the Premier today just laid waste to that and said: this isn't the true intention of the government; in fact, our true intention is to amend this bill. So it is a bit of a pig in a poke, and that's another reason why I think it needs to be referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. We'll accept the fact that it's a draft. We'll accept the fact, because we're getting used to it, that the government couldn't get it right, and we'll refer it to the committee and let the committee do its good work. Then, hopefully, Albertans won't have to shout down their government a fourth time. As we know, Bill 11 is really just a shadow of other initiatives that this government has already put on the table and has been forced to withdraw before.

Some other reasons why I believe the Health Care Protection Act, as it is called and, I believe, wrongly titled, should be referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, why the subject matter should be referred to the standing committee and the bill itself be not now read a second time. Similar initiatives in other jurisdictions have led to frauds, criminal charges, prosecutions. In fact, with health care of America in the United States several vice-presidents have been incarcerated as a result of being convicted for health system related criminal activity. I would hate for us in this province to not learn some lessons at the expense of those others and put the brakes on going down a path that has led to disaster in other jurisdictions.

It seems to me that the best thing this government could do if it were really sincere about, you know, protecting the principles of the Canada Health Act – I find it quite amusing, by the way, Mr. Speaker, to see members of this government now wrapping themselves in the Canada Health Act, because I've had the experience in this Assembly since 1993 of trying on two different occasions to convince this government to legislate the principles of the Canada Health Act into Alberta law, to incorporate those same five principles into Alberta law, and on two separate occasions this government

shot down that notion, said they wouldn't be led around by the nose by the feds. I just find it so ironic and so amusing now to see them wrap themselves in that particular federal bill, much as you'd see, you know, dead fish wrapped in newspaper, trying to pass themselves off as the great defenders of medicare.

As I say, that's just parenthetical to my argument that there are certainly some areas that need to be explored not just within the legislation itself, but because the motion would refer the subject matter to a committee whose duty would be to also deal with the regulations, we'd be able to look at those many, many, many sections in Bill 11 that are really left open, that call for the executive of this government to make regulations. We could take a look at the fact that there are no regulations from the College of Physicians and Surgeons at this very minute that define what major or minor surgery is. You wouldn't know that from reading the bill. In fact, if you read the bill, what you would be led to conclude is that there are regulations which determine what's major and what's minor.

The difficulty is that the bill that was sent out to every householder makes reference to other acts, like the Canada Health Act, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, the Alberta Hospitals Act, the Medical Profession Act, but it doesn't include any of those other bills. So a casual reader would have to go to the Legislature Library or the Internet or somehow get all these other pieces of companion-related legislation and read them all together to understand just what a piece of Swiss cheese this Bill 11 really is, just how full of holes it really is. Another reason why I support this amendment is because this referral to the Committee on Law and Regulations would allow a full examination of the regulatory framework that exists and also the regulatory gaps that are created by Bill 11. Then we'd have a fuller appreciation of why this is such a dangerous, dangerous legislative initiative.

Now, on the question of minor and major surgery it seems to me that the government is trying to have it both ways. They're saying: we've got 52 existing clinics, so therefore this bill must be okay. If they've got 52 existing clinics, why do they need the bill? Of course, then, when they're faced with that particular conundrum, they argue: well, we need this bill to regulate the other stuff. What other stuff? The only other stuff that they can come up with as an example, because of course the Premier was embarrassed to find that he could no longer use hip surgeries, is the Shouldice clinic in Toronto, which does one kind of surgery, that being abdominal hernia surgery. So we're then led to conclude that in this whole bill wherever it reads minor surgery, it must really mean hernia surgery, because that's the only example the government has used.

4:00

So that's another reason we perhaps need to refer this bill out, because maybe we need to take a look at the wording, and maybe we need to systematically and methodically go through Bill 11, and in every case where it says the words minor surgery, we need to replace them with the words hernia surgery. Then we can have a debate on whether or not that's the proper prerogative of this Assembly; that is, not for the College of Physicians and Surgeons, whose duty it is now, but for this Assembly to define in law that hernia surgery is a minor surgery and that we need to have a legislative framework around just hernia surgery.

I see the smile coming to your lips, Mr. Speaker. Of course you recognize that I am speaking somewhat tongue in cheek, because that would be an absurdity, but the reality is that that's the only kind of surgery that this government has provided as an example to Albertans for what may be covered by Bill 11 or why we need it.

As I was saying, they can't really have it both ways. They can't talk about the existing clinics because they obviously don't refer to

Bill 11, and they can't talk about complicated surgery because the College of Physicians and Surgeons wouldn't permit that. So, really, what are we left with? What we're left with is just really an empty promise that it'll only be this minor surgery and it really won't change things. Of course, if that were the case, we wouldn't be here debating this, because Bill 11 wouldn't be on the floor of the Assembly for debate.

Now, another reason I would speak in favour of this amendment is that the Premier has gone to great lengths to tell Albertans about the chat he had with the Prime Minister of Canada a few short days ago. Apparently in that chat between the Premier of this province and the Prime Minister of this country an agreement was reached that there would be a federal/provincial review of legislation from one end of this country to the other dealing with this matter of surgical services or hospital services or medically necessary services – it's kind of hard to know what the Premier is talking about for certain – that are provided outside of public hospitals. So this legislative review apparently has been agreed to and will be forthcoming. Of course this legislative review, as the Premier said, will be very, very interesting. He was very supportive of this legislative review, and I would like to see this legislative review.

Certainly there's a difference of opinion. I think the law in Saskatchewan outlaws diagnostic services. The Premier of this province tends to have a different representation of that law. I think the law of Ontario came into being to prohibit the growth of private hospitals. The Premier of Alberta tends to represent that as something that was enabling. Obviously there's a difference of opinion, so I'd like to see this legislative review that's going to go from coast to coast, and I would like that review to inform the debate in this Assembly. I would like to have the benefit of that. I think that would be very useful.

Perhaps we should again expect the members of this government who support their Premier, who supports this legislative review, to support this amendment, because obviously the Premier wants this review. You would have to assume that all members of his government want this review. We should have the benefit of that review before we're asked to pass further judgment and proceed further down the debate path on Bill 11. That only makes sense. I mean, surely the Premier wouldn't want to embark on this federal/provincial initiative, which is going to take up the time of civil servants and bureaucrats and eat up tax dollars and occupy so many people, if it were just a PR stunt. I mean, certainly he wouldn't want it to happen and then have the review come in after Bill 11 was disposed of one way or another. That wouldn't make any sense. Far be it for me to accuse the Premier of Alberta of being a PR stuntman.

So I'm convinced, once again, that upon reflection members of the government will want to support my colleague's amendment because it would be supporting the Premier's very own position on this need for a federal/provincial review before we go further down the path of privatizing health care.

Now, I'm also a little curious about the government's response and the one government member who spoke against the amendment, because it talks about referring the subject matter of the bill to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations obviously for the purpose of further study. Again we have a little contradiction. Early on in this whole private health care policy debate we saw the Premier call on the federal government. I always find it curious. You know, we have the Premier so often saying that he won't allow Alberta policy to be dictated from Ottawa, and in fact he's even said on this bill, Bill 11, that he'll let Albertans be in charge, that Albertans will be in the driver's seat. Yet when it's convenient, he says: we're waiting to hear from the federal government; we would

like to see a response from the federal Minister of Health. In fact, he's even said that the Prime Minister didn't say that the bill was a bad idea. What the Prime Minister actually said was: I'm not going to give any final comment on this until we see the bill in its final form. Of course, the bill could look like anything when this government is finished amending it.

So there's this irony. We have the government of Alberta on the one hand saying: please, federal government, comment on our policy; please tell us what's right and what's wrong. Then, on the other hand, when they do comment, when the Minister of Health does say that he doesn't like it, that he's concerned about its violations of the Canada Health Act, the Premier takes it personally and starts talking about things like drive-by smearings, those kinds of things. It seems that there's just no pleasing this guy, Mr. Speaker. He seems to be confused in his own position.

I wonder what it is he really wants. Does he want some federal guidance and some adherence to national standards on this whole matter, or does he want to be just in a cocoon here in Alberta and just hold his breath and pout until he gets his own way and take down the medicare system along the way as he's behaving like that? So I am confused. Again, by referring the subject matter of this bill to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, we would be able to pursue that particular irony. We would be able to come to some resolution as to what it is that the Premier really wants and what's really in the best interests of the people of Alberta.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, I'm all in favour of national standards when it comes to health care. I think that's one of the values that most Canadians respect as well, and I just wish the Premier would get it clear when he's talking about those kinds of standards what it is that he means. On the one hand he talks about national standards and wraps himself up in the Canada Health Act, and in the very next breath he talks about: well, maybe I'll amend the Canada Health Act; I don't want Ottawa to tell me what to do. It must be difficult to be that confused about such an important public policy matter.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I feel compelled to rise after almost falling asleep on my backside listening to the previous member's unreasoned debate to a reasoned amendment. In fact, it's to this amendment . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: It's not a reasoned amendment, hon. member.

MR. SMITH: Yeah. Okay. That's correct. It's not. Thank you for, as usual, that good guidance from yourself, sir.

I do feel compelled to comment on a couple of issues. One is that one part of the federal government, which is the top part, the Prime Minister, which I think is a reasonable place to start, has said: bring the bill forward; get the bill through; get the bill into a position where we can analyze it, and we can come back. The Premier has tabled ample correspondence from those individuals who seem to be able to make logical decisions at the federal level, namely the Prime Minister. It would seem to me that any holding back on the passage of this bill and any filibustering by this Liberal opposition is directly contrary to what outcome they would perceive to be important from the federal level. I know that the good-thinking members of that opposition will look towards expediting the passage of this bill such that it can get into the federal domain and such that it can be analyzed, as the federal government has put forward. So, Mr. Speaker, I heartily encourage all members, including the opposition,

to reject this amendment, because now I think that clearly it's pointed out that time is of the essence. We need to get this bill in a position where the federal government can comment on it.

4:10

After all, the work of the Premier here to put health care on the agenda in Alberta has had some interesting outcomes. In fact, it has exposed a facility fee-charging hospital in Montreal. It has exposed the export of patients in the Maritimes to U.S. facilities. It has exposed an operating specialty hospital in Toronto in Allan Rock's own riding. At one time he was an ardent jogger, when he was looking for *Globe and Mail* coverage, and he's probably jogged past that hospital on a number of occasions. He might even have had occasion to use it. Also, the Premier has exposed what's being taken on in Manitoba and what's being done at the Cambie hospital in Vancouver. In fact, by having the debate about Bill 11 and the debate about health care in Alberta, it's actually exposed the federal Liberal government for not looking after health care, for not being true to their own word, for not being responsible to the Canada Health Act.

What the Alberta government proposes to do is nothing in conflict with the principles of the Canada Health Act and is in fact occupying regulatory room that is not there. Mr. Speaker, if there were to be unbridled private health care in this province, you'd simply leave the accreditation to the College of Physicians and Surgeons and you'd wake up one day and find out, as we did with the previous health minister, now the Leader of the Opposition, that there are a number of private operating clinics. So this is open. It lays it on the table. We need to be expeditious in our debate on this bill and get it passed and get it in front of the federal level for discussions at that level.

So I know all members will join me in defeating this amendment and urging early passage of the bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this amendment today. I think it's a very wise and prudent amendment when you consider the fact that the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations is one of a number of committees that is enshrined within our Legislative Assembly rules, including other committees like privileges and elections, Public Accounts, Private Bills, Public Affairs, and the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, along with Legislative Offices.

Now, we see for almost all of those other committees, Mr. Speaker, a precedent that this Assembly uses those committees for their purpose of upholding public accountability, but in fact the Law and Regulations Committee, I believe – I stand to be corrected – has not met now for some years. It would seem to me that this amendment proposes a healthy opportunity for the engagement of this committee.

I'd like to prod the government this afternoon with a number of opinions and expert reports that in fact specifically talk about the regulatory risk that Bill 11 poses, citing first from the government's own report, which they chose to keep under wraps and hidden from the public, the report titled *The Public Purchase of Private Surgical Services: A Systematic Review of the Evidence on Efficiency and Equity*, interim report to Alberta Health and Wellness. In this report the authors told the government:

Not only will waiting lists be difficult to control [under the auspices of Bill 11] but the evidence indicates that forms of two-tierism are likely to arise if some regulations are not introduced. If there is no regulation to prevent the offering of 'enhanced' services in private facilities, simple market forces will ensure that such services are

offered. If patients start requesting such services, they will be offered, and, if surgeons start offering such services, they will be taken up. The forms of two-tierism that will result from this are, firstly, receipt of different quality services according to ability to pay and, secondly, likely receipt of 'enhanced' services quicker.

The authors go on to say:

The 'missing link' in proving anything conclusive about the association between work in the private sector and waiting lists is data on private sector [availability] of surgeons. It may be that this should be monitored in Alberta.

Something which we have not to date done.

Other possible regulatory measures to avoid two-tierism would be to (a) prevent working in both private and public hospitals . . .

Something which Bill 11 does not now do.

. . . (b) more relevant in Canada, prevent 'enhancement' of services (either by legislating against it or by ensuring that RHAs purchase upgraded as well as basic services).

Two primary examples right from the government's own research, Mr. Speaker, that explicitly suggest that the regulatory examination and contemplation of issues arising from Bill 11 must be considered, and there is no mechanism now in Bill 11 that allows this Legislative Assembly on behalf of its citizens to do that.

Now, further, let me speak to even more global implications relative to the current negotiations undertaken by the World Trade Organization and this government's involvement and preparation of submissions for that table. One of the items on the agenda both past and present has been the agreement on government procurement, which is backed up by an agreement on competition policy, the original policy being proposed by the United States and the European Union.

Citing from this analysis, the authors say that "it is essential for those opposed to the commercialization of health care not to be intimidated by the technicality of these issues." This is one area where the Law and Regulations Committee could in fact increase the public's understanding of the issues contained within Bill 11 and its application to NAFTA and the MAI.

The world's health care budgets are massive, amounting to billions and billions of dollars. From the standpoint of the WTO, why not, then, classify the health sector not only as a service industry, but also as a public procurement? One of the favourite methods used by the WTO to liberalize any sector is to reclassify it under a different category.

Now, speakers with expertise in this particular area – and I'm quoting a statement made by Robert Vastine, president of CSI, who gave a speech relative to the agreement on competition policy. He said: "The WTO members are being asked to consider making reforms to their regulatory regimes." We've never had any reports from the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations that indicate what Alberta has been asked to do in this regard, but here we have an industry president saying that "WTO members are being asked to consider making reforms to their regulatory regimes." "National regulations," he tells us, "should have four central attributes: adequacy, impartiality, least intrusiveness, and transparency." Needless to say, this gentleman is not demanding transparency of corporate practices or nonintrusiveness of transnational corporations. What in effect he means is what the competition policy means, and that is that parliaments, whatever legislation is under consideration, will have to issue regulations that are "adequate" and "impartial" towards business interests.

We have not in this Assembly had any information. Further, Mr. Speaker, we've never had a meeting of Law and Regulations to contemplate the complexity of issues that arises relative to Bill 11, creating a legislative standing, a legislative foot in the door, if you will, for transnational corporations who want to expand their market share in health care. That is why I believe this amendment this

afternoon is so timely and in fact resolves so many of the government's dilemmas.

The motion reads that we would in essence not continue to read the bill, "but that the order for second reading be discharged [and] the bill withdrawn," and subsequent to that, "the subject matter [would be] referred to the Standing Committee." What a perfect opportunity, Mr. Speaker, for the government to engage the public in the debate of Bill 11, something that they've been scurrying and skirting away from, engage the public in the debate about privatization of health care services in this province.

Granted they have spent a million dollars sending out material, which some have referred to as propaganda. They have spent thousands, probably hundreds of thousands more on human resources staff across the province and here in this Legislature to spin and articulate the countering messages on a daily basis. Everyday the opposition will get up and bring more reasoned analysis of this bill to the Assembly floor, and what we see is the members on the government side articulating their preauthored, prepared spins on how those analyses projected by the opposition don't apply. So, Mr. Speaker, rather than engaging in this expensive tit-for-tat dialogue, if you will, let's refer the bill to a standing committee of the Legislature, and let's have a real engagement of debate with the public on the proposal to privatize health care.

4:20

My third reference in citing this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, comes from A Legal Opinion Concerning NAFTA Investment and Services Disciplines and Bill 11: Proposals by Alberta to Privatize the Delivery of Certain Insured Health Care Services. This analysis is authored by Steven Shrybman, a solicitor in British Columbia. He offers the following analyses relating to regulations. I'm reading excerpts of what he said.

The following offers a summary of our opinion concerning these matters:

In many ways, the trade liberalization objectives of NAFTA are incompatible with policies that seek to exclude market forces in order to achieve other societal goals, such as the provision of universal and accessible publicly funded health care . . .

In negotiating NAFTA Canada failed to insist upon a broad exclusion for health care, relying instead upon the more limited protection of certain "reservations" (listed under NAFTA Annexes I and II) and on exceptions for government procurement and funding.

That would be the Conservative federal government at the time that was responsible for negotiating Canada's position on NAFTA.

Further, the author says:

The risks that privatization poses to the integrity of Canada's public health system have been well documented by more than one federal health minister and many others. The influence of NAFTA's investment and services rules will significantly exacerbate the problems already associated with privatization in three ways: [firstly] the rights accorded foreign investors and service providers under NAFTA limit government policy and regulatory options to a degree that is not true vis-a-vis domestic investors and service providers under Canadian law.

So, in essence, the government becomes the weakest link, Mr. Speaker. They are required, they are forced to dilute and weaken their regulatory and policy frameworks to such a degree that it does not constrain trade. Secondly,

the same is true with respect to the proprietary interests of foreign investors, which are accorded much greater protection than is available to Canadians under our statutory or common law,

in essence saying that the individual protections are no longer as great or as strong as those protections afforded by our legislation and law to corporate entities. Thirdly,

only foreign investors have recourse to the extraordinary and highly coercive enforcement machinery of NAFTA. We have already been able to observe the constraints on public policy that even the threat of investor-state claims can exert.

Now, Mr. Speaker, at this point I'd like to suggest that if somewhere in the bowels of the Legislature there's someone crafting a response to what I'm saying this afternoon, I would like to urge them to get an opinion from the U.S. trade representative's office that in fact the U.S. trade representative's office has absolutely no interest and will sign away its rights and any rights on behalf of any corporate entities to activate or utilize Bill 11 as an entry point into the Canadian health care system. Don't waste your time coming up with any sort of enlightened rhetoric that we haven't already heard in this Assembly. Simply phone down to the U.S. trade representative's office, kindly fax them a copy of Bill 11, and ask them to write back to us and indicate that absolutely in no way, shape, or fashion will Bill 11 be a mechanism that they will seek to utilize for establishment. [interjection] I'd ask the hon. Minister for International and Intergovernmental Relations if she would table that letter from the U.S. trade representative in this Assembly. I would be most appreciative and I'm sure the public of this province would be most appreciative of hearing that response.

I would just like to quote further from the opinion offered by Mr. Shrybman with respect to Bill 11's application to NAFTA and specifically again reference the legal concern that there are mechanisms and manners in which Bill 11 will reduce our regulatory and statutory powers in this province, once it is passed, to prevent the privatization of health care.

In contemplating the question, "Is Bill 11 consistent with NAFTA investment and services disciplines," the opinion responds:

In the event that Chapter 11 and 12 rules apply fully to Alberta's proposals there is a significant risk that the province's experiment would quickly escape whatever bounds it may have intended. Without the protection of Annex I and II reservations the province would lose important regulatory authority necessary to preserve the public, non-for-profit character of Canada's health care systems.

Again a reinforcement of the need for us to seriously contemplate the legislation and engage the standing committee.

Even the government's renowned daily of choice, the *Globe and Mail*, Mr. Speaker, has been cited as saying that Alberta will be the first province to entrench a large-scale private component in its public health care system. Even the Conservative king, if you will, in our press in this country is acknowledging the reality of Bill 11 and circulating that within its paper to the readership across this country.

This opinion is certainly most available to all members of the Assembly, and I would encourage as well that the hon. minister of health and the minister of international and intergovernmental affairs read the concerns that arise under NAFTA investment and services rules. There are a number of them, and I won't take the time of the Assembly this afternoon to go through them in detail.

I would like now to turn to a couple of other reasons, Mr. Speaker, why I think it's important to engage a standing committee and particularly the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. We've all had in this Assembly a variety of correspondence and conversations, circulations, reports, research studies cross our desks, and I can speak for those members at least on this side of the House. We read those correspondence, reports and opinions, research, and there are a number of very sound and esteemed thinkers within our citizens in our province, and they have very strong beliefs and opinions about what Bill 11 will do.

One such group is the Seniors Community Health Council, a completely voluntary association, who took it upon themselves to publish a position paper on issues relating to a privatized health care

system. Now, I'm not aware that the government has responded at all to this well-intended group's position statement, nor have they given them any audience or any opportunity to express their concerns about this bill. A representative of the health council was invited to the public debate on Bill 11 that was held in Edmonton-Riverview just a short time ago and did provide some very astute analyses with respect to Bill 11, but I'm not sure that the government has in fact engaged such a group in discussion.

4:30

The Seniors Community Health Council paper speaks about their endorsement of the values that were embodied in the federal government's National Forum on Health report *Canada Health Action: Building on the Legacy*. They talk further and list a number of the common arguments utilized for privatization of the health care system. "People who can afford to pay for health care should not be denied the right to choose private health care." They provide just as an example, Mr. Speaker, a corresponding answer to that question.

If the health care system meets the standards envisioned by the majority of Canadians, such as comprehensiveness, good quality . . . accessibility, people should not need or want to pay privately for health care. This approach violates the first principle of the Canada Health Act, that health care [should be and] shall be universally available. It supports the rights of the individual over consideration for the welfare of [its] citizens. A private health care system would allow some people to "jump the queue", and [others] will suffer as a result.

I'd like to commend the seniors health council on their paper and recognize them this afternoon in this debate.

I'd also like to recognize Bishop Fred Henry, who has also sounded some concern relative to Bill 11 and its application and has written about this subject in Calgary. Mr. Speaker, despite the highly respected and honoured position that Bishop Henry holds in our community in Calgary, he's been subjected to some, what I would say, highly questionable retorts from this government. I regret that I cannot provide the excerpts of his comments this afternoon but perhaps at a later time.

Thank you for permitting me to comment today.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the notice of amendment before us. I want to speak in favour of this amendment. I want to start by noting that this Bill 11 has received the unprecedented attention of Albertans. In my 40 years in this province I have not seen any other bill that's ever come before this Assembly to have roused such serious concerns among Albertans.

Albertans have expressed their concerns in many, many different ways. We have seen on the steps of the Legislature since the bill was introduced a month and a half ago, more or less, a citizens' vigil on a regular basis. Students, young people, parents with babies in their arms, grandparents, physicians retired and working all have come here regularly to express their concerns to us, called on us to listen to them before proceeding with this bill. Tens of thousands of signatures on petitions have been tabled in this House, and those petitions continue to be tabled day after day after day. I just submitted to the Premier's office last week 4,000 cards sent to me by Albertans and another 4,000 or 5,000 are yet waiting to be delivered to the Premier's office saying no to Bill 11 in its present form. Letters, e-mails, phone calls, visits to our constituency offices – and I know that all of my colleagues in the Assembly have been hearing from their constituents. These concerns have been expressed so frequently and in such large numbers that they can't simply be ignored.

[The Speaker in the chair]

High school students, university students, junior high school students are getting involved in the debate on Bill 11. Last Friday I had the opportunity to attend a high school forum on Bill 11 at Harry Ainlay high school in the city. The Minister of Justice, who represents that area, was also on the panel. What we are hearing from these young people who will be eligible to vote in the next general election is: don't proceed with this bill unless you have answered our questions, unless we have had a chance to substantively participate in shaping and changing the direction in which we might want to go with respect to health care in Alberta and the future of medicare in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to participate not only by way of letters and e-mails, which are written in the privacy of one's office or home or kitchen to any one of us, but they also want to get together in some forum where they can share with us their concerns about the changes that Bill 11 proposes to make, and they see those changes as radical changes, not minor changes. Radical changes. They fear those changes because they see them as a radical restructuring of our public health care system. So they want to be able to tell us members of this Assembly and the government of Alberta about their concerns, about what they don't like about the bill, about what they fear most if this bill is rushed through this Assembly, and they also want to share with us their hopes about the future of public health care in this province and in this country.

Eminent physicians at the universities, at some of the best hospitals that we have, physician staff associations, the AMA, nurses' associations and organizations are all calling on us to stop at this point and listen to all of them. Without their understanding of what this bill is trying to do to our health care system, to our hospital system, we simply cannot operate. These are frontline health care workers that we must trust, that we must be able to rely on for their co-operation if we are to deliver these most necessary services to Albertans.

This amendment, Mr. Speaker, I think will provide that opportunity. The amendment proposes that the bill be withdrawn at second reading and the subject matter at hand be referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. I think that's an eminently sensible proposal.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity two years ago as a member of an all-party public hearings committee on justice to go around the province listening to Albertans. We spent several months doing that. We held over a dozen and a half meetings all over the province. Albertans welcomed the opportunity at every stop that we made in a small town or a big city. Albertans who came to these hearings thanked us for giving them the opportunity so they could have an impact on shaping the future of the justice system in our province.

4:40

I was deeply impressed and moved by the intense interest that we encountered but also was impressed by the wisdom and the balanced inputs that we received from them. Some of our own misconceptions about what the concerns of Albertans, broadly speaking, might be about justice had to be revised as a result of this. The committee then was able to produce a report that I think certainly won the respect of this Assembly and Albertans. So here's a process that can be used as a model, as a template by this committee for it to have the opportunity to invite Albertans to participate to review with this committee the concerns and the subject matter of Bill 11.

Mr. Speaker, this amendment provides this House with an opportunity that we must not lose. We should give unanimous consent. We need to re-establish a consensus in this province on this

most important and vital of issues. Why would we not take this course of action when even the Premier received a letter from Mr. Rock, the Minister of Health, today expressing the need to seek clarifications, to in fact engage in further dialogue with Ottawa on the genuine concerns that may have been expressed by Mr. Rock however belatedly in his latest letter? If the Premier is willing to go out of the province to Ottawa to listen to the federal government, why would we not want to be even more eager to listen to Albertans? Albertans are the ones that are going to be impacted most and the first ones to be impacted by the privatization agenda of this bill. I think it's about time we respected Albertans and their concerns and said to them: we are here to listen to you.

As I've gone around the province, Mr. Speaker, from small towns to Calgary, Lethbridge, Lac La Biche, St. Paul, and other places, people are expressing more than just concerns about the economic aspects of this proposed privatization agenda. They're also expressing important ethical concerns about Bill 11, and I would like to take the next five to 10 minutes to share some of these concerns with my colleagues in the Assembly. Bill 11 raises some fundamental ethical concerns. Let me just share with you a few.

AN HON. MEMBER: Get back to the amendment.

DR. PANNU: The amendment will give the opportunity to this Assembly to listen to these concerns, and that's why these concerns become part of my remarks on speaking on the amendment and speaking in favour of this amendment.

Health care, Mr. Speaker, always involves the core values of a people, of a society, of a community. The reason for that is that health care interactions typically arise in the most poignant moments of human lives: births, deaths, illness, injury, pain, and amid the tension between fear and hope. Further, moderately good health is an essential prerequisite to engage in education, productive work, taking care of others, and other important human undertakings. Everybody thus has an interest in good health and in an effective and accessible health care system, and I know that all of us agree on this. All of us in the Assembly regardless of party lines agree on the significance of health and good health care for all of us.

The Premier's words that he used in his leading speech on the second reading of Bill 11 still ring in my ears. He said: "We all agree that it's important. We all have families. We have children. We have parents. We have community members, all of whom share these concerns with us as human beings. We are vulnerable to illness, to disease, and therefore we need health care." I agree with the Premier on that. If that is the case, then we must take into consideration the very basic values that should form a health care system and the ethical concerns that Albertans are raising, driven by the commitment to those core values.

What are those values, Mr. Speaker? Values that are central to health care include but are not limited to nonmaleficence, the avoidance of harm; beneficence, the promotion of good; justice; respect for persons; respect for autonomy; trust; honesty; care; accountability; protection of the most vulnerable; balancing of individual and common interests; and the avoidance of conflict of interest. Health care reform is so difficult, not merely because it presents a practical challenge — and it does — but because so many of our core human values are called into play. That's why it's so easily understandable why so many Albertans are concerned about the future of health care, given the agenda of privatization that Bill 11 includes.

Let me talk quickly for the couple of minutes remaining about the nonmaleficence issue, the above all do no harm kind of caveat. The Hippocratic oath traditionally taken by physicians and adopted in

principle by most other health care professionals requires that great care be taken not to leave the patient worse off than they were before. Why would someone have to stay overnight after surgery rather than go home the same day, Mr. Speaker? The answer is that the surgery was so invasive or difficult that the patient is at risk of serious complications that may require immediate medical attention.

The complications of surgery can affect any part of the body and may include neurological problems from the anesthetic; vascular problems such as embolisms, air bubbles that is, or blood clots that may cause a heart attack, stroke, or other major organ complication; difficulty breathing; pinched nerves from blood clots pressing on nerves; internal bleeding; allergic reactions to anesthetics or other medications; et cetera. It does no good merely to notice that a patient is suffering postsurgical complications. Immediate intervention may be needed to protect the patient's health or even to save his or her life.

Any facility that does surgery complicated enough to require an overnight stay will therefore require a full array of health care specialists to address any complication, and all these caregivers must be available 24 hours, seven days a week. What's needed is a full hospital staff, hardly affordable on the budget of a small, private surgical centre that aims to provide profits to shareholders. A hospital is a hospital. If it isn't a properly staffed and equipped hospital, it shouldn't be doing surgery requiring overnight stays.

Mr. Jim Dinning, chair of the Calgary regional health authority, has suggested that dedicated surgical centres will not require fully equipped operating rooms to deal with all sorts of surgery and thus will save money. This restriction would be reasonable for truly unrelated conditions such as burns or obstetric emergency. However, postoperative complications may take many forms. If facilities are not fully equipped for that wide variety of needs, then that facility is unable to attend to the postsurgical complications that will undoubtedly arise for some patients. Being purposely under-equipped is a danger to the health of patients and thus is ethically unacceptable.

4:50

The College of Physicians and Surgeons, Mr. Speaker, has rightly indicated . . .

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member. We are on the amendment. It strikes me that the hon. member is doing almost a clause-by-clause review of Bill 11. The debate before the Assembly at this point in time is the amendment.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just about to conclude and wind up in any case, but I certainly was speaking to the amendment, because the amendment, as I suggested, would provide a forum for public hearings at which these issues must be discussed. We cannot simply brush them aside.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: So, Mr. Speaker, moving towards the conclusion, the college has indicated that stand-alone surgical centres would likely not be approved to do hip replacement surgeries and others requiring overnight stays. In short, a full-service hospital is needed to provide postoperative care. Many hospitals are insufficient. It would violate the most fundamental principle of health care, do no harm or do not make matters worse, to perform nonemergency surgery that leaves the patient with unattended and potentially life-threatening complications. The objection by the major health care provider unions and associations reflects this commitment to the partners' good.

Let me conclude, then, by saying that I support this amendment, and I certainly would call on my colleagues in the Assembly to give their support to this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Again I want to reiterate that we have an amendment before the Assembly, that "the subject matter [be] referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations," and that basically is the gist of the amendment as far as the chair can understand it.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your wise direction and advice. I am really glad of the opportunity to rise in support of this amendment, which is essentially that

Bill 11 . . . be not now read a second time but that the order for second reading be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

I was very interested in listening to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona talk about the potential, if this amendment is successful and in fact the bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, for public consultation or public input. He used as an example his experiences on the justice committee consultations. To be honest, that hadn't occurred to me, that that would be a possibility under this process, but in fact I think it's a very good one.

For any of us that have been involved in public consultations or open forums or speeches where people have asked us to come out into the community, you do get people who feel very strongly and seem to want to do what is essentially a testimonial, but inside that testimonial, if you listen carefully, is both a fear and a misunderstanding, a seeking of information, and an opinion about Alberta's public health care system. So I'm in favour of this amendment referring the bill to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

I think it would be valuable for all of us, members of this Assembly and Albertans, to take a step back and look at this calmly, to bring together all the information and reports and studies that have been dug up or brought forward and be able to give some real concerted, concentrated study to this bill, because what I see is the public asking for real information. Certainly I've had a number of letters where they're saying: this is rhetoric; it's not answering our questions; we just keep hearing the same thing over and over again. They're looking for an opportunity for some really clear exchange of ideas, such as we could be having from the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. I think that referral to this committee would allow us a more in-depth look at the proposals that are in this bill.

What is it that people don't seem to understand? What is it that we could be sorting out or looking at in a more intimate way in this committee? One of the things that people say is: well, how exactly would the queue-jumping be stopped by this bill? I say: I don't know, because all the bill says is that there will be no queue-jumping but does nothing to address how that would be stopped. There's nothing set out in the bill beyond the commandment thou shalt not queue-jump.

Then they say: well, is there queue-jumping going on now? Yes, of course we know there's queue-jumping going on now, and it's even said now that there is no queue-jumping. But, in fact, we know it's happening, and I'd like to see a referral to the committee so that we could sort out some of these inconsistencies.

What exactly is anticipated aside from the statement that there will be no queue-jumping? What is anticipated to stop the queue-jumping? There has to be some detail in the bill or some consideration from the government on the specifics of how this would be done, and that's not available at this time.

I'd like the committee to look at the bill stating that there will be no sale of enhanced services and then going on to detail how enhanced services can be sold with an agreement and all the rest of that. That's certainly something that's been raised, I'm sure, with every member in the Legislature. Again, how can that be? It says that there's no sale of enhanced services, and then it goes on to detail how that could be done.

I want to support this amendment to refer the bill to the committee to be able to look more clearly and in depth at other examples that are before us in the world. The government often references the Shouldice clinic, but then when you really look at that, it's not applicable here. Shouldice was grandfathered before the Canada Health Act, and they have a very restrictive bill that they operate under.

Saskatchewan has been referenced, but in the Saskatchewan bill it specifically excludes the sale of any extras. I for one would like it clarified in a very thorough manner by the government why they're referencing, for example, those two things, because it doesn't help me to understand how the government believes this is going to solve their problem.

I was on my feet in this Assembly last week showing that Ontario had passed legislation to close two private hospitals and was quoting the minister saying that he was doing it to save public health care. So we're ending up with a lot of statements, a lot of information out there. In some cases they absolutely contradict one another. In others there are gaps in information left, and I'd like to see the bill referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations to be able to work some of this out, and I do like the idea of being able to involve the public in it more.

I notice that the Premier has said that the primary motive in introducing Bill 11 was to cut waiting lists, but inquiring minds still want to know how. There's still no concrete information that shows how this is going to happen or demonstrations of where it's happened in other parts of the world where it's been successful. We've got examples from Australia and New Zealand, where it hasn't been successful. Where are the demonstrations of where it has been successful?

DR. TAYLOR: We're going to be the leaders and do something new.

MS BLAKEMAN: The Member for Cypress . . . I can never remember his name.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, it's the Minister of Innovation and Science, and he's out of order.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was going to say that I agreed with him that we were moving into something new. The way I had it was that it was uncharted territory.

I think many members here have spoken that we recognize that there needs to be some legislation that does in fact regulate private hospitals, that does regulate private clinics, that does regulate the relationship and our concept of public health care when we start mixing it with a profit-motivated entrepreneurial relationship. I would like that explored more if this bill could be referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

5:00

I think that's an opportunity for the government to produce any studies that they have. I know there have been a few tablings, but I think some of them were fairly antiquated, written in the '70s or referring to statistics from the '70s, so I'm sure that in the meantime

the government will have been able to come up with – I hope they can – newer studies or perhaps even the fulfillment of the interim report that was tabled here earlier. At least the government referred to it as an interim report that they had commissioned through an institute. So the point I'm trying to make in this is that we need the referral to that committee to bring all of this information out and to be able to sort through it, separate the wheat from the chaff, and be able to have a rhetoric-free discussion about it, if that's possible.

I have always been in favour of referrals to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations because it is a public process. As a member who sits on the Public Accounts Committee, I fondly refer to people that attend and sit in the galleries to watch us as fun seekers and sports fans. It's really heartening to see the public coming out to watch the committee work, which is where I think a lot of the real work does get done. It is a more informal setting but also a more intense setting.

AN HON. MEMBER: There are none up there.

MS BLAKEMAN: That's okay. They'll come. I know that if this Bill 11 was referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, they would come. There would be people in both galleries, because they would be so interested, and they would be able to see all of those points brought out and discussed in a give-and-take style of debate.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: They could be here today.

MS BLAKEMAN: They could, and I would encourage anyone that's reading *Hansard* at www.assembly.ab.ca to please be following all of the debates in *Hansard* and certainly invite anyone reading it to come down and join us.

So we have a different situation, a different setup in the standing legislative committees, which does allow a different process to be in place that I think would be very helpful to this debate of public and private health care in Alberta. Certainly it's got a lot more of the give-and-take, a question and an answer. If an answer can't be provided on the spot, it can be provided in written form at a later date.

I mentioned some of the studies or issues that have been brought forward that I would like to see incorporated into the process of looking at this bill in the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, but a few of the other ones I'm interested in are the reports by the American Medical Association, the J. Dossetor Health Ethics Centre, the department of Public Health Sciences, Health Law Institute, the Institute of Health Economics, the Consumers' Association of Canada study on the private clinics. There have been a number of papers, I am aware, that have been presented, I think, to the special private committees that the government has that nobody else gets to go to: special standing policy committees. Dr. Donna Wilson presented to some of those. Certainly we've had some very interesting papers brought forward from Professor Richard Plain and also Kevin Taft and Gillian Stewart.

So, very briefly, that is a short list of the long list of information that is now available to us to consider and to be able to look at these things in detail and get away from a rhetoric style of debate: I say this, you say that, and we both disagree.

The other thing I'd be interested in is the regulations. This is the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations that we're talking about, referring this bill for what the amendment is advocating, and it would also allow us to look at regulations for this bill. I'm thinking immediately of the consternation that's been caused over the years with the condominium amendment act. Now, there's an

example of where legislation was passed in this Assembly which had a huge body of regulations that were needed to support it, and in fact in the end they were not able to successfully complete the regulations, and that was for the condominium amendment act, 1996. It was never proclaimed.

Now we have another amendment act in front of us, and it will end up, I would hope, going to Law and Regulations to have a look at the regulations to support that bill. When I look at that experience – and that was about a condominium act – the issue of public health care is larger than that, and it makes me afraid for what kind of regulations we would have to effectively put in place to support a bill like Bill 11. So there's an opportunity to be doing that sort of work if we refer to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

Part of what I'm interested in – and the Minister of Innovation and Science did refer to it earlier – is that this is new. This is uncharted territory. I guess I have to agree to disagree with the members opposite, because I would prefer to see more thought go into where we're going with this rather than just leaping in, rather than the Jim Dinning risk-is-better school of management. We do know that there are some other places in the world that have attempted a system not exactly like what the Alberta government is proposing but similar enough. I would like to look at those in the context of this committee to see if there are lessons that can be learned, whether there was anything that could be pulled from it that did work. I've heard it described as disastrous and never go there again, but still there might be lessons we could learn even from the mistakes of the Australian and New Zealand experiences.

There are a number of other areas of issues that I would like to see addressed by this committee if we're able to refer it. What about the issues of private clinics in training? If we move to a system where private clinics are providing 60 percent, 70 percent, 40 percent, whatever, of surgeries in a given field, I'd like to know if there have been any studies or any attempt to look at how that affects the opportunities for residents; that is, doctors who have yet to complete their practicum? How does that affect residents' ability to complete that practicum, to get in the required number of hours or the required number of surgeries for them to get their certification?

My brief look at that tells me that the private clinics are not keen on having residents in, and in fact I can't find an example of where they do. Perhaps that's something that could be worked on if we're able to refer to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations and get some private operators in here to explain whether or not they're interested in upholding that system that we have of practicum placements or residents in hospital settings. You know, time is money in the business sector, and I think there's a real reluctance or perhaps a total negation of the concept of being willing to slow down and allow a resident to watch what is going on enough to learn or perhaps to even slow it down enough to let a resident take a try. We understand that's going to take more time. It does slow down the procedure, and perhaps you can't, you know, do one every 10 minutes. I'd like to hear from the private operators what their attitude towards that is.

5:10

I'd also like to hear from the private, for-profit clinics and hospitals or surgical facilities or however we want to talk about these: where does the idea of preventative medicine come in? What we've talked about so far has been essentially acute care. It's been addressing something where there's a real problem, whether it needs to be some sort of surgery in most cases or some sort of direct treatment.

How, then, does prevention work into any of this? Is prevention left totally to the public system? How does the public system cope

with that then? It's more difficult on an annual basis to show some sort of performance outcome. I also have to start to question that because it seems to me that it is in the best interests of the private, for-profit operators to have people be sick, because they make money when people are sick. So what is their commitment to prevention or to wellness models? It strikes me that it would be very little. I'm more than willing to listen, but I can't listen to that sort of information in this context. Once again, that's why I'm supporting this amendment put forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Manning to refer this bill to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

I think people have developed very strong feelings, and to a certain extent there's a matter of pride and reputation that's involved in the debate about this now. I've noticed the level of hostility rise, the name-calling, and it has been name-calling on and off the record. I would like to see in this debate everybody take a deep breath, stay calm, and actually start to talk about this. [interjections] And there we go. Indeed I have engaged people to more hostility, but I don't hear the name-calling yet.

I think the point is that I hope we would all be attempting to develop and to move forward into the future with a better health care system. There are real questions about whether Bill 11 is it, and I still want to see that debate happen.

I take it my time is over. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon and speak to the notice of amendment on Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act. This amendment was moved by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Manning: that the motion for second reading of Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be not now read a second time but that the order for second reading be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

I want to commend him for proposing this amendment right now. I think Albertans are skeptical about the direction this government not only is going but has pursued over the last number of years. We have heard in this House how drastic cuts in health care occurred without a plan. We have heard of the 90-day fix of our health care system on more than one occasion by the Premier. So I think that by referring this bill and the studies that are currently being done to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, Albertans will get clear and concise information on a bill that beyond a doubt is the most important bill that we have debated in this Legislature for some time. Now, that is not to say that what we do in here is not important. All bills are important, but here we are speaking to an amendment to Bill 11, an amendment that I strongly favour.

We heard earlier how the Member for Calgary-Varsity wanted us to expeditiously pass this bill, but Albertans are telling us that they don't want this passed expeditiously. What they want is information. They want information. Regardless of this million dollar plus promotion that has been put out, this PR exercise by this government, Albertans are not buying in.

So we do require this amendment, Mr. Speaker. We require it for Albertans. They have spoken out against this bill in so many different ways. We know, for example, that we have had on a regular basis many, many demonstrations on the steps of this Legislature. These demonstrations have been by all Albertans. It doesn't matter the age, sex, whatever. They are extremely con-

cerned about Bill 11, and they are seeking information. They come to this place, this building, the symbol of free speech here in the province, to get information, and they want that information. By referring this to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, they will have the opportunity to gather information, to complete and get the final copy of the interim report which was prepared and which outlines so many shortcomings of this particular bill.

Now, as well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are very concerned about this particular bill, and the reason why we need this amendment is because of all the information that has been tabled in this Legislature. There is very little that supports this issue that we must rush headlong into expanding the role of private providers in our health care system. They have indicated that through a number of different ways, not only by demonstrations, but many, many letters have been sent to all of us in this Legislature.

Each morning when I check my e-mails, I have at least 25 e-mails, many from call.com, I believe it is, but I also get a number of e-mails from constituents. I get a number of e-mails that are sent to me from individuals across this province. All of them are having a great amount of difficulty understanding why we need Bill 11. So research certainly would help us get a clear understanding of exactly what is in Bill 11, and it would also help Albertans in making up their minds, because at present they do not support this bill.

Now, then, when we look at referring this for further study, we are hopefully going to provide a piece of legislation which will clearly protect our public health system. We need a lot of assistance in protecting our public health system, because, Mr. Speaker, as this bill currently is, it doesn't do that. The government sees this opportunity to try and push it through, but one thing they did not count on was how dearly Albertans treasure their public health care.

5:20

As I mentioned earlier, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity certainly did want this pushed through expeditiously, but we want further study. We want further debate. We want Albertans to have a clear indication of what this bill is about. We are not frightened of further research. We are certainly not worried about any reports that are presented here on the floor of this Legislature from countries that have tried this experiment.

We look, for example, at similar experiments that have happened in the health care systems in the Australian states of Western Australia, South Australia, and Victoria. These were disasters. We have seen how this radical new approach that was taken in New Zealand, where we had it privatized and which was the model for the direction that this government went, has proven to be such a failure, and of course we all know what happened to that particular government and what the people of New Zealand thought about this. So we do require a study, and the place for that study to occur is, of course, the standing committee.

Now, we look at the composition of the standing committee and why it is appropriate that each one on that committee should do a careful study of the issues that have been identified by the Alberta Medical Association. These issues have been identified by the John Dossetor Health Ethics Centre, the department of Public Health Sciences, the Health Law Institute, the Institute of Health Economics at the University of Alberta. This just continues, Mr. Speaker. The impacts of this bill on every facet of the lives of Albertans is critical, so yes, we certainly do support a full study of the effects of this.

I look at one area in particular, the administration of claims, for example. We'll look at these in American dollars. To administer a claim in the United States costs somewhere between \$1,200 and \$1,300 per capita just in administration costs. Now, if we convert our Canadian dollars into U.S. so that we can compare apples to

apples and oranges to oranges, those costs here in our publicly administered health care system are only \$250 per capita. So this is quite a difference.

I keep hearing all these references back to when Nancy Betkowski was minister of health, but I never hear what's happened since 1992. All we have heard since 1992 is from Albertans on how a public health care system that was serving their needs so well has been starved. The number of dollars per capita have been decreased immensely, and when we look at statistics, statistics that are very accurate, from 1985 to 1992 the average per capita cost for health care in this province hovered around \$1,300. Now, in 1995 these costs were down, I believe, under \$1,200 per capita. [interjections] We keep hearing people talking about this amendment. Well, costs per capita, Mr. Speaker, are a very, very important area of study that must be looked at in order that we can present something to Albertans that is meaningful.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Try \$1,666 per capita.

MR. BONNER: I look forward to the minister entering debate later, and I certainly hope you do have the opportunity.

The one thing, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans realize is that there is no free lunch here. We have to pay for our health care whether we go to a public or a private system. Albertans realize that if they do put money into a public system, the costs of all medical procedures are shared across that system, and the dollars stay in the system.

MS CARLSON: They don't seem to understand that.

MR. BONNER: Well, right; they don't understand that. They also don't understand that of those dollars that go into the private system, 15 percent are profits. They are removed from the system.

MS CARLSON: At least 15 percent, more if they can increase it.

MR. BONNER: At least 15 percent. Right. They require 15 percent to make a go of it.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, our public health care taxpayer dollars that are put into that private system, once they are removed for profits, are gone. Probably they are gone, some of them, not only out of the public health care system, but they are also gone out of this province, and I'm sure in some cases some of those profits will be gone of this country. So, yes, Albertans are very concerned about how their public taxpayer dollars are being spent, and yes, it is a very important part of this amendment that those things are studied.

MS CARLSON: And not just by MLAs but by the lawyers who will be referencing that particular committee.

MR. BONNER: Right. There are many people that do have to reference this. [interjection] I'd like to tell the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne that, yes, I am planning on coming back to debate this evening.

MS CARLSON: Well, in light of that, you could adjourn now.

MR. BONNER: Yes. In light of that, Mr. Speaker, I could adjourn now, but I will use my time here now, because I think it's so very, very important that we do talk about this.

I know that the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne is totally responsible when it comes to costs here in the province and how our taxpayer dollars are spent. I think he was an excellent choice to be chairman of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee,

and he is doing a marvelous job there. I enjoy sitting on that committee with him and listening to his wisdom. I know that he is very, very concerned at this point that my comments are very well thought out and that they will serve the people of Alberta in the same

way that he serves this province with his watchful eye on all those billions of dollars.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 10, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/04/10

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

Mr. Gibbons moved that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be not now read a second time but that the order for second reading be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

[Debate adjourned April 10: Mr. Bonner speaking]

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would like to continue the debate where I adjourned today at 5:30, and I would like to continue to debate on the amendment to Bill 11 and add a few more comments as to why I would like all members of this Assembly to support this amendment.

Now, I think Bill 11 will have as big an impact on this province as \$10-per-quarter land had on this province right at the turn of the century. When we go back to that, Madam Speaker, we know that the principles that this province was built on are the same principles that are not covered and not protected in this bill.

What Albertans want at this time is a real debate, a debate that is not stifled but a debate that is enhanced, a debate that is enhanced based on evidence and not opinion. They want a debate that includes public input from all sectors. They want a debate that was only started by the precedent-setting TV debate last Tuesday. They want a debate because to this time their concerns have not been quelled when they look at all the implications of Bill 11.

Albertans want their own homegrown health care professionals and researchers to have input into this particular bill and this particular debate. This is something that they haven't had the opportunity to do so far. Albertans want a debate that will help answer the questions and concerns in the letter from the federal Health minister. These concerns that he raised are very legitimate concerns, and we know the repercussions of what happened the last time this province did not follow the mandate that's set out by the Canada Health Act. We were fined literally millions of dollars.

They want a debate, Madam Speaker, that extends beyond the four walls of this Legislature, beyond the four corners of their TV set. They want this debate to continue in every community in this province, in every church, in every coffee shop. They want the principles . . . [Mr. Bonner's speaking time expired]

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity to add my remarks.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's with interest that I rise this evening to debate this amendment to Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act. I'm very pleased that this amendment has been presented to the Assembly, and I'm proud to say that I support this amendment as brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Earlier today we heard Bill 11 described in this way by the Premier: quote, it is a work in progress, end of quote. If it is a work in progress, then this amendment as proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Manning is timely and very, very appropriate for the government because it will certainly give the government a chance to do the right thing and withdraw this idea of increasing the privatization of our public health care system. We can have as an Assembly a very, very good look at this idea and where it will bring the public health care system in this province.

Now, Madam Speaker, when you look at the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, I realize it's some time since it last met. It's over a decade. It's 15 years, I believe, to be precise. We have to look at the membership of this committee. The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane certainly would do an able job as chairperson, and in the absence of that hon. member, the able Member for Red Deer-South could do an adequate job as chair.

We have members from all over the province, Madam Speaker. We have the hon. Member for Calgary-East. We have the hon. Member for Redwater, who incidentally did a long-term care report and who I'm sure would have some valuable insights that would be recognized by the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations regarding how we're going to maintain long-term care within the public health care system without contracting out to for-profit operators. Now, it would be very interesting to hear that hon. member's perspective, and the only way the entire province, I believe, would be able to hear this is through the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

We also have the hon. Member for Fort McMurray. We have the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. We have the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod. I'm sure the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod would be delighted to participate in the committee that would completely review this attempt at contracting out public health care.

Now, we also have the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer, and I'm sure he would have a few words to say on Bill 11. I'm quite sure of that. We have the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross. I believe that is the constituency where the Peter Lougheed hospital is located, in the northeast section of Calgary. We have the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. We have the hon. member from the north-west section of Calgary, Calgary-Bow. We have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. She is our current health care critic and is doing a very good job. She would have some very valuable insights into this.

I myself, with a large number of seniors in my constituency, have some very strong views on this whole idea, this idea that we're going to allow an increase in the privatization of health care delivery in this province. We also have the hon. Member for Calgary-North West. The hon. member's insights would also be very welcome as the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations could meet for the first time in perhaps 15 years and talk about this issue. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, I don't think, realized when he brought forward this amendment – that's why I'm urging all government members to support it – that it's a way out of the political firestorm that you created when you introduced this poorly drafted legislation into this Legislative Assembly.

Now, we certainly need further study of this whole legislative concept, and I think we can start by looking at what other provinces have done, are doing, and are planning to do, Madam Speaker. There's no reason why the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations could not be the body that will do this.

8:10

We talk about British Columbia, and we talk about the Cambie

Surgery Centre, or hospital, in Vancouver. Perhaps the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations would come back to this Assembly and say: we have discovered that registered nurses that are employed in this facility are compensated more than registered nurses in British Columbia that are working under negotiated collective agreements. Then we could perhaps deduce from that that in order to attract employees, registered nurses and other health care professionals, to the private hospitals to be legislated in Bill 11, we are creating two parallel streams that are going after a workforce that is in great demand. Then the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations would simply say to this Assembly that this is the wrong thing to do because we are driving up wages, we're not working in the best interests not only of health care budgets in this province but of people who are sick, people who are on waiting lists.

I know it's going to be very difficult for the government in this case to listen to the opposition. The government is not listening to the majority of Albertans, but perhaps, Madam Speaker, they would listen to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

Now, the committee could look also at British Columbia and how the Medical Services Commission is operating, how it is administering the medical service plan. It would be interesting how the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations would react to this and how all this fits into the Canada Health Act. It would also be interesting to hear a report from the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations on how the committee would deal with the issue of this proposed bill, that hopefully will no longer be before the Assembly because hopefully all hon. members of this Assembly will support the Member for Edmonton-Manning in his legislative amendment.

We have an interim report that came before the Legislative Assembly last week from the Institute of Health Economics here in Edmonton, from the University of Alberta. This is an interim report, and it was to deal with the issues of accessibility and universality. Interestingly enough, Madam Speaker, the interim report has some concerns about universality and accessibility, particularly for rural Albertans.

As this Bill 11 is set up now, the surgical centres, also known as private hospitals, will probably be located where they're going to be able to at least try to recruit registered nurses and specialists and other health care professionals, and that's in the larger centres. So this whole issue of accessibility has to be addressed, because someone living in rural Alberta, perhaps a two- or three-hour drive from one of these centres, is not going to have the same accessibility as, say for instance, someone from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's constituency in the south end of Edmonton. There is that issue of accessibility, and this is what's worrying the experts. The Standing Committee on Law and Regulations could look into this. It might take them time, but, Madam Speaker, they could look into this, and they could report back to the hon. minister of health, other members of Executive Council, and all members of the Assembly.

I don't know where the Member for Edmonton-Manning got this idea to come forward with this amendment, but it was an excellent idea. Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has allowed the government of the day to get out of a tight political situation. Now, whether they're going to use it or not is entirely up to them.

The majority of Albertans, close to 60 percent of Albertans, are saying no to this Bill 11. They want to see more study. They want to see some real cost-benefit analysis, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The amendment please, hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: I'm certainly on the amendment.

Now, Madam Speaker, we look at this amendment, and we look at the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. I'm not stating that this Standing Committee on Law and Regulations should travel the length and breadth of this country or into the United States of America, but they certainly could get together, perhaps upstairs in room 512. They could get on the Internet, and they could look at some of the issues that have been discussed by Albertans. They could look at the legislation in Manitoba. The hon. minister of health himself brings forward on the odd occasion the clinics in Manitoba, legislation in Saskatchewan. The thing that would be of most interest to the Committee on Law and Regulations is the comparison of what we're trying to attempt with Bill 11 and the model in other parts of the world. So many areas of the world are admiring what Bill 11 is trying to dismantle.

The amendment, Madam Speaker, would give time for study. It would give time not only for the individuals to complete their study for the Institute of Health Economics, but it would give the government time to perhaps take a good, thorough look and compare it to what's existing in the current form of Bill 11.

Now, I don't think that when we look at the delay this amendment will mean to Bill 11, there's any harm in that, Madam Speaker. The amendment by my colleague from Edmonton-Manning is really a favorable one to all Albertans. While this is being studied, as I said before, there can be a cost-benefit analysis done to see if the contracting out proposed in Bill 11 will have any beneficial characteristics for the taxpayers and the regional health authorities. I have yet to see this, but as a member of the Committee on Law and Regulations perhaps with a team of other hon. members we could find such information. I think we'd be looking pretty hard, but I don't know what could be done until it is tried, because certainly, Madam Speaker, this legislation as it exists now is not in the best interest of Albertans. The amendment will certainly give us the necessary time.

8:20

Whenever we talk about the facilities that are the model for this bill, the first one that's mentioned is the Shouldice hospital in Ontario. I'm not suggesting for a minute that the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations visit it, but there is not an urgent need in this province – and anybody on the opposite side can correct me – for a hospital that's going to deal exclusively with hernias. Some hon. members across the way may be carrying a considerable political weight with this bill, and they may need a hernia belt because of the political weight they're carrying back to their constituencies, but there is no need for this sort of private hospital in this province.

Now, I'm wondering, Madam Speaker, if we were to fast-forward a year and the chairperson of the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations were suddenly to go downstairs and hold a news conference or, in the absence of that hon. member, the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, just exactly how excited they would be in discussing this report with the individuals in the media and how excited they would be to come into this Assembly and table a report from the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations before all members of this Assembly and all Albertans. This would simply be a report stating that the government was wrong, that Bill 11 was a mistake, that the Health Care Protection Act, which should have been called the public health care protection act, was going to be withdrawn forever, that the government was going to open up existing hospital beds, that it was going to open up existing operating rooms, that it was going to hire but first it was going to train the health care professionals at the training centres at the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary, and that it was going to build

the best public health care delivery system not only in Canada but in the industrialized world.

This is the opportunity we have this evening if we were to say yes to the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. All hon. members of this Legislative Assembly, this is your chance. This is the ideal opportunity to see that Bill 11 was a legislative mistake. This is the opportunity that you're waiting for, and I encourage you to support the . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll stick to the amendment in front of us to the best of my ability, and if, like my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, I speak too fast because I've got so much to say, please slow me down.

Madam, Speaker, before I start, I want to welcome the guests on both sides of the House here in the gallery who are taking in some of the debate this evening. It's always nice to see interested Albertans watching what's happening in this Legislative Assembly.

Now, let's be very, very specific. The amendment in front of us, moved by the Member for Edmonton-Manning, is an amendment that would ask that second reading of the bill be withdrawn and "the subject matter referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations." The amendment is made for a reason. When we talk in terms of referring it to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, the amendment means that we feel much further study and consideration has to be given to the bill before any consideration is given to the bill proceeding.

Madam Speaker, I think it goes without saying that Albertans throughout the entire province are concerned about what's happening with Bill 11, are extremely concerned. We see that day after day in the legislative session as petitions are tabled from Albertans that are saying no, no, no: 45,000 now and thousands more waiting to be tabled. Letters, e-mails, telephone calls. Any place I go, it just seems people are stopping me and saying: what's going on with Bill 11? People want to know. People are concerned about the provisions of Bill 11. They're concerned as demonstrated by rallies that have been held such as the public forum in the riding of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They are concerned as taxpayers about the hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not a million, if not more than a million – who knows how much? – on full-page ads in the paper trying to sell Albertans on Bill 11.

Bill 11 has not been given the detailed study by this Legislative Assembly that it deserves, that it would get if it were referred to Law and Regulations. After very careful consideration of the details of the bill and the various provisions, then consideration should be given to the thing being scrapped, to the thing being killed: is there anything there; do we just start all over? But we can't do that in this particular arena.

Let me go one by one through the things in the bill that have to be studied in detail. First of all, the bill talks in terms of enhanced services. I read enhanced services as meaning that at least in the initial stages the basic health needs as defined by the government or whomever would be covered, and then anything over and above that would be considered an enhanced service. Now, where the line is between the two I'm not sure.

I want to give you an example of how enhanced services can get out of control. A number of years ago, in 1988 to be exact, we were heading down to Scottsdale. On the way we stopped for a couple of nights in Las Vegas to sort of relax, and in the hallway of the Desert Inn of all places I had an accident, and it wasn't because of gambling

debts. My wife accidentally pushed me forward as we were going down the hallway. I lost my balance and toppled forward. I heard a couple of snaps and such, but being a paraplegic, I didn't realize the extent of the damage. So we went down by the pool for a while, had breakfast, hopped on the plane, and went down to Scottsdale.

By the time we were checked into the facility there, I was feeling feverish. I knew something was wrong. I got a friend down there to drive me to the hospital. I spent one night in the hospital. I ended up with two full-length casts. I came back the next day. One night in the hospital. In the morning the nurse rolls up the foam mattress that they had on top of the regular mattress. It's a foam mattress like you would buy at Canadian Tire for \$17, and she says: you might as well take this home with you. I say: why? She says: because it's costing you \$100. My bill was four pages long. These so-called enhanced services: a box of kleenex, charge for the meal. That list of enhanced services went on and on.

So when we talk in terms of Bill 11 and when we talk in terms of the need to look in detail at areas like enhanced services, that's why it has got to be studied in detail by Law and Regulations. Who's defining enhanced services? What's to say that the government can't say: well, we're going to deinsure this, this, and this, and they become enhanced services? Pretty soon we're like the U.S.A., where virtually everything is an enhanced service at the expense of the taxpayer. Now, that's one concern, the enhanced services.

We talk in terms then of surgical facilities. This is quite cute, because the government doesn't want to use the term "for-profit hospitals" or "hospitals" period. They like to use the term "surgical facilities." But what is a surgical facility? My understanding of a surgical facility is like the facility that is in Calgary and waiting that has three operating theaters, a number of beds for overnight stays. Whether those stays would be for 72 hours, four days, seven days, whatever, we don't know. There is no regulation we're aware of that defines the length of stay, so we have a so-called surgical facility that allows a person to go in there and have a certain type of operation and then spend time recovering. How much time is needed to recover? Who knows at this particular point? There isn't any suggestion by government that they'll bring forward an amendment saying it be restricted to, say, 72 hours, 48 hours, 24 hours, whatever. Right now as it stands, it's unlimited in terms of time.

Now, during the stay in the so-called surgical facility, what happens if something goes wrong? Some operation is carried out, and there were instances, Madam Speaker, in the past . . .

8:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, the chair will remind you that we have an amendment before us, and I would ask you to be specific to the amendment.

MR. WICKMAN: And the amendment calls for the bill to go to Law and Regulations so we can look in detail at the very issues I'm bringing up that are in Bill 11. Those are the very issues I'm bringing forth, the issues that have to be looked at by Law and Regulations, and surgical facilities is one of them. It's probably the most contentious issue in the entire bill, and Albertans want us to study that in detail. Albertans are telling us that it's got to be studied in detail, that it's not acceptable in its present form. Albertans are also telling us that there's a need to study what has happened in other parts of the world. In Australia, where they've had experiments with so-called privatization of the health care system, we know where that's led. The fact is, Madam Speaker, that no other province in Canada – and let's not throw that red herring Ontario in here – has a similar bill.

However, if the government is successful by some fashion in

getting Bill 11 approved, Premier Harris in Ontario will be following just like that, and he'll probably even outdo what's done here, which will force this government to try and outdo the Ontario government like they do with the taxes. Who's got the lowest taxes? Pretty soon it will be: who provides the most private health care, or who keeps the health care costs lowest by shuffling off to the private sector?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, on the amendment. I don't see anything to do with gasoline prices in this amendment. So on the amendment.

MR. WICKMAN: I didn't talk about gasoline prices. I was using an analysis. [interjections] No. I was talking about taxes. Taxes.

Another area that has to be looked at very carefully by the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations is the question of the Canada Health Act and the threat now by the federal Minister of Health, Allan Rock, that he is not happy with Bill 11. He wants to see amendments to Bill 11. What amendments does he want to see to Bill 11? How can we possibly consider allowing this bill to go through at this particular time without giving it that detailed study that has to be done?

There's also a concern, when we look at the provisions of Bill 11 at the current time, that we have to also look at it from a long-term point of view. Is there a mechanism by regulation, by legislation, whatever, for putting safeguards on any such type of legislation or policy that would prevent the bill from simply becoming a crack in the door? We see that door widen and widen and widen until pretty soon we're going to have the full-fledged facilities, a two-tier system. Doctors, Madam Speaker, through the Alberta Medical Association, with the exception of a handful of those that do tend to support the government, are saying that they have concerns with this bill. They feel there's a need for further study as well, because they're concerned from the point of view of: what's going to happen with the shortage of doctors there is at the present time? How many doctors will give up practice in the public sector to go to the private sector in an attempt to make more dollars? So we have to look at that particular aspect of it as well.

Madam Speaker, in the last few weeks we've seen various groups that have come forward. I've mentioned already the Alberta Medical Association, which we understand had the opportunity to meet with the Premier, probably with the Minister of Health and Wellness as well, to express their concerns, and obviously they had concerns. Obviously they had a great number of concerns. Now, I hear the Premier saying that he thinks they're coming onboard. Well, we haven't had any indication that they're coming onboard. There is no indication to perceive that at all.

Just very recently there was a very detailed document submitted by the Health Ethics Centre from the University of Alberta which detailed numbers of issues that have to be addressed before this bill can advance any further than it has at the present time or the intention of the government, to ensure that they get third reading of this bill before this session is completed.

So we have the Alberta Medical Association. We have the Health Ethics Centre. We have the Friends of Medicare, who are out front every Monday and Thursday demonstrating their concern with Bill 11, their concern that enough study hasn't been given to Bill 11. We have a number of unions – the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, the Canadian Union of Public Employees – having to pay good money to run ads to try and counteract the vast amounts of money the government is spending on trying to advance, trying to brain-wash, trying to put a certain spin on this bill in the hopes the public will buy the bill. But, Madam Speaker, it's obvious that the public is not going to buy the bill. They have said it repeatedly, and as we go on, the opposition to the bill continues to grow.

Now, we can diminish that opposition to a degree by agreeing to refer this bill to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, because then Albertans would feel that at least it's being given consideration in terms of detailed study of the various provisions, with the possibility of the committee concluding that the bill should be thrown out entirely and that the government should go back to square one when it comes to the concept of attempting to so called restructure or re-engineer the health care system in the province of Alberta. We all recognize that there's always a need for some change within any system, and there probably are some very, very valid opportunities for change that would benefit tremendously like, oh, opening up the empty beds that are now closed down in your major facilities in Edmonton in particular.

These groups I talk about, Madam Speaker, I would venture to say would welcome the opportunity to appear in front of a committee such as Law and Regulations to make presentations, to provide their input; in other words, to become partners with government in trying to determine the future of health care in this province. How can we, as representatives elected by these very same people, deny them that opportunity? They're the ones that placed us in this position of trust to do the right thing, but at the same time we want to close the door on them and say: well, despite what your feelings are, we're going to go ahead and ram this bill through.

Madam Speaker, if I could poll each of the government members one by one in a private conversation where they could let their soul kind of hang out, I would suspect there are a number in there who are not particularly happy with Bill 11, who would probably agree with our amendment that it should be referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, because it would take the heat off you in your own ridings, where you're getting tremendous heat. Even in rural Alberta we understand there's tremendous heat, because these petitions that we file every day come from Fort Saskatchewan; they come from all parts of the province. Many ridings alone, many constituencies alone have submitted petitions that go over a thousand names in one particular constituency, so we can see there is this very, very widespread concern.

We've attempted as the Liberal caucus, as the Official Opposition, doing what we feel is the right thing to do on behalf of Albertans who are using us as their voice because they have no other effective mechanism to get their concerns expressed to government because government doesn't appear to be listening to what they're saying. We've tried to provide other opportunities; for example, the challenge by members of this caucus to every government member to have public debates on Bill 11. In that way the public in that particular constituency would have an opportunity to come out to quiz their elected representative in the provincial Legislative Assembly as to his or her feelings on Bill 11, as to whether he or she feels there's a need to provide this bill with further study by referring it to a committee like is being suggested by the Member from Edmonton-Manning or if it means scrapping the bill, whatever.

But up to now when I try and count the number of acceptances of the challenge – I don't know. I understand there was one coming in the Fort Saskatchewan area, but that's not a challenge from a Member of the Legislative Assembly; that's a challenge from a representative of an outside group. So as far as I can understand, other than the debate or the town hall meeting, whatever you want to call it, that took place prior to the written invitation attempting to engage government members in debate that was in Edmonton-Gold Bar where – how many hundred people showed up?

8:40

MR. MacDONALD: Five hundred.

MR. WICKMAN: Five hundred? Five hundred people showed up.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, on the amendment, please.

MR. WICKMAN: Now, on the amendment as I wrap up now, when I go through the amendment – boy, 20 minutes can sure be a long time, eh?

As I wrap up, let's be very careful about the wording of the amendment, that

Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be not now read a second time but that the order for second reading be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

When we look at the very wording of that amendment, it tells us a number of things. It tells us that the bill is temporarily withdrawn. That's not to say that the government couldn't bring back the bill with a number of amendments in it that would make it acceptable to the people in Alberta, to the residents of Alberta, the taxpayers of Alberta, but to do the honourable thing while the whole concept of the protection act is being studied, the bill would have to be withdrawn.

I've attempted to outline some of the concerns of the subject matter, such as the enhanced services, the surgical facilities, the experiments that take place in other countries like Australia, the fact that no other province in Canada has similar legislation, the fact that there is a federal threat that it may be in violation of the Canada Health Act. If that's the case, there could be a withdrawal of transfer funds from the federal government which would put an additional financial burden on all Albertans. Also, the possibility of the legislation being a crack in the door for future expansion of the privatization of the entire health care system. The concerns that have been expressed by a number of organizations like the Alberta Medical Association, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Friends of Medicare, the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, and others. The concept that we really haven't had the opportunity, whether it be in the legislative chambers – and the Premier likes to refer to this being the place for debate.

Well, the only difficulty is that in terms of a debate we can sit here and debate, but the public has to sit up there and watch or they have to watch the televised debate that was held on – and that really wasn't a debate. That was a number of speakers.

You did a fine job that evening, by the way.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you.

MR. WICKMAN: And the Member for Calgary-Buffalo we were particularly proud of and of course our leader.

Madam Chairman, it's asking very specifically that Bill 11 – the buzzer didn't go, eh? Oh, the buzzer went?

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MR. WICKMAN: Oh. It's asking very specifically . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Madam Speaker.

MR. WICKMAN: Madam Chairperson, Madam Speaker. Okay; Madam Speaker.

It spells out very carefully that Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, "be not now read a second time." In other words, the bill has been given first reading, but it wouldn't be read a second time. It would go directly to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations instead of going to committee stage here and then coming

forward for third reading further down the road. Meanwhile, the bill would be withdrawn and the subject matter would be studied in detail.

Now, the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations – and I recognize it's a committee that doesn't meet on a very regular basis.

MS LEIBOVICI: Never that I've known.

MR. WICKMAN: Never? This would be a good exercise for that committee to finally get its teeth in something, and it would be interesting to see the outcome of it. Members of the government side, members of the opposition side . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. member, but your time has expired.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was just so intrigued by that speech that I thought I couldn't pass up the opportunity to get up and speak against the motion.

You know, it's interesting because . . .

DR. TAYLOR: He had me convinced.

MR. HERARD: Well, now you're going to have to pay attention to this one, and maybe we'll unconvince you.

You know, every morning I wake up and wonder: what kind of new twists and turns is the opposition going to pull today to feed the media feeding frenzy and to promote conflict, confusion, confrontation, and the misunderstanding of some fairly simple underlying policy issues? And today the answer is: well, let's refer this bill to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

Now, I don't know what it is they think they're going to learn by doing that, because it's actually fairly simple. Over the last 10 years improvements in technology and surgical procedures have made it possible for about 50 or 52 private surgical facilities to perform more than 20,000 relatively minor . . .

DR. TAYLOR: How many?

MR. HERARD: Twenty thousand relatively minor surgical procedures that formerly were all done in hospitals.

Now, I remember my own kid, my youngest one, spent about three days in hospital for tonsils. Well, everybody knows you don't need a Committee on Law and Regulations to tell you that you don't do tonsils in hospitals anymore. So in the last decade an increasing volume of procedures done safely every day in clinics frees up thousands and thousands of hours of hospital operating room time.

DR. TAYLOR: How much?

MR. HERARD: Thousands of hours. I mean, if there are 20,000 procedures done a year, that frees up thousands of hours of operating room time. Not only that, but it frees up beds in hospitals that cost between \$600 and \$1,000. You don't need a committee to tell you that that's happening. That's reality. So why would you want to refer this to a committee?

All that time that's being saved in all these relatively minor surgical procedures every year essentially results in improved access for the more serious cases that continue to be done in our hospitals. In addition to that, cancellations due to emergencies are all but eliminated. You know, you didn't get up at 6 in the morning to get to your appointment at the hospital only to find out that there's been

an emergency and your operation's been bumped. So from that perspective, why do we need to refer this to a committee? This is what the committee would find out, because that's the reality of the current system today.

Now, currently there are more than 150 different types of surgical procedures that are done safely every day in existing clinics, but they're subject to a 12-hour rule, which, in essence, prevents the health system from taking advantage of continuous improvements in technology and surgical procedures such as laparoscopic and laser techniques, that continue to be perfected and improve outcomes each and every year. What the committee would tell these people is that that's what's going on in our hospitals today. So why do we need a committee to determine that?

What Bill 11 does is remove the 12-hour barrier and empowers the College of Physicians and Surgeons to define which of these new-age minor procedures can be done safely in a clinic. You know, that's what they would find out if they went to this Law and Regulations Committee, because the health care professionals would tell them: hey, wake up guys; this is what's going on.

I've got a whole lot more that I can say, but I know they're going to give me more opportunities to stand and talk about this because of the games they're playing with respect to the filibuster on this issue. So I'm going to sit down now, but I expect they'll give me more opportunities to get up.

8:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's interesting that when we challenged all the government members to a debate, they said the debate would happen here in the Legislative Assembly. Now when we are actually entering into the debate, every one of the members can actually take the dictionary and see what the meaning of debate is. You will find that it means to discuss within the confines of this Legislative Assembly this particular bill that is at hand. So what we are having now, ladies and gentlemen, is a debate. It is not a game. It is not a filibuster. It is a debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the chair will remind you that we are not in second reading of Bill 11. We are on an amendment.

MS LEIBOVICI: Part of the debate on Bill 11 is the amendments that we have put forward as the Official Opposition. The amendment, just to remind everyone here, moved by the Member for Edmonton-Manning is that

Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be not now read a second time but that the order for second reading be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

So I found it interesting that when the Member for Calgary-Egmont entered the debate on the amendment to discuss what the subject matter was, he seems to have misunderstood what exactly the bill is about. What the bill is about is promoting private, for-profit health care in this province. That is the premise of the bill. Whether that is through the use of surgical facilities that provide minor, under 12-hour surgeries or major, over 12-hour surgeries, the premise of the bill is private, for-profit health care, and that is the bottom line.

If in fact the bill were to regulate surgical procedures in surgical facilities, as we have in the province right now, you would not find section 16 in the bill. You would find section 16 in the bill in a manner that would in fact control the amount of procedures that are

performed in day, uninsured surgery, and that is not what is happening, Madam Speaker.

What this bill does is open up to overnight stays, it expands on the definition of what is considered minor surgery right now within this province, and it allows for the charging and for the conflict of interest that is inherent with the concept of the enhanced services clause that is in Bill 11.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, on the amendment. You are going through section 16 of the bill. We have an amendment before us. On the amendment, please.

MS LEIBOVICI: The amendment is that "the subject matter [be] referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations," and the subject matter is private, for-profit health care, and that is the premise of Bill 11.

Now, the government members have talked about the sky is falling. They've said and they've pledged that there's no one here to destroy medicare. They have indicated that we are fear mongering. You know, Madam Speaker, in the last seven years I've heard them say the same thing about other objections we have had with the way the health care system has been mismanaged within this province. They have said that the victim of the week did not exist, that in fact nobody was suffering from the health care cuts that they put forward from '93 on. They indicated that the government had a plan, and we can count how many plans this government has had. You know what? Not one of them has obviously been successful, because here we are with another ill-conceived plan that promotes private, for-profit health care this time.

They have indicated that what is needed is to have these facilities because in fact it will help with the waiting lists in the province right now. Well, as the member just indicated, there are 20,000 procedures that are being done in this province on an annual basis by 52 clinics throughout the province. You know what? Those waiting lists haven't been diminished. So where is your proof that in actual fact these surgical facilities are going to have any impact on waiting lists? There is no proof because there isn't the case for it.

The reality is that if this government were in fact interested in doing something about the health care mess they created in this province, they would be looking at other issues. They would not be promoting the subject matter which is being referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations of private, for-profit health care in this province. What they would be looking at are issues of long-term care and putting a real commitment to long-term care. They would be looking at issues of home care. They would be looking at issues of preventative medical care. They would be looking at issues of working with the professionals within the system to ensure that the professionals who are doing the jobs are in the right place when they're required. That is what they would be doing, not this half-baked scheme to allow a few private operators in this province to make a profit on the illness of people.

We have seen over and over again, Madam Speaker, that there needs to be more study on this particular issue. It has been brought to every single member's attention within this Legislative Assembly, and they have the stubbornness and the gall – I wasn't sure if that was parliamentary; that's why I wasn't using it – the gall to sit back and say that they know what is right, that they know better than the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, than the Canadian Nurses Association, than the Alberta Medical Association, than the Consumers' Association of Alberta, than the many law professors who have written on this subject, and the federal Minister of Health. The list goes on and on and on. In actual fact, what is here in this bill is what they believe it to be as opposed to what every other organization,

just about, in unison has said not only in this province but across the country.

If I can just start with one of those issues that there is unanimity on, the fact that the private hospital as defined in this piece of legislation is in actual fact an approved surgical facility.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I've allowed a lot of leeway here. I'm listening very carefully, and it sounds to me like this is a speech for second reading, not on the amendment. Let's get back to the amendment that was brought forward by one of your colleagues.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: The reason that it's so important for this amendment to pass is just so this issue can be discussed in front of the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. We could have presentations by those groups. We could have presentations by the academics, by the lawyers, by the associations that in fact have sent information to the government members. Who knows where that information has gone? The Standing Committee on Law and Regulations would be able to call people in, would be able to listen to their arguments, would be able to see whether or not those arguments have bearing with regards to the subject matter of the bill, and would be able to bring that report back to this Legislative Assembly.

Is that such a terrible thing? Is that such a terrible thing in a democracy, to have a committee that is actually a standing committee of this Legislative Assembly take a look at what this particular bill implies, what this particular bill is? If the government indeed had the courage of its convictions, it would not sit back and say that this is not needed, that this is not required. In fact, what they would do is welcome this initiative with open arms and indicate that yes, this is a good idea, that yes, this might restore confidence back in the government, because as we know there is starting to be a lack of confidence in what the government is promoting, and would in fact allow for those very things we are talking about in the Legislative Assembly to be taken out of the combative forum we're in and put into another forum where in actual fact there can be some listening and there can be some understanding of what the issues really are when it comes to what is needed in this province with regards to control of the surgical facilities that exist right now and have been allowed to expand by 50 percent under the watch of this government. That is what it's all about, Madam Speaker.

To say that what this is about is what kind of surgeries are going to be provided – and that's what the committee will talk about – is quite frankly misreading and misconstruing what the amendment is and the intent of the amendment. In actual fact we know that there are many, many problems with regards to the definition that has been put forward by the government with regards to the artificial terms minor and major surgeries.

9:00

If any of you take the opportunity to visit with your local GP or visit with any specialist that you know, they will in fact tell you that there is no definition of minor and major and that the definition hinges on what the recovery time is that's required for individuals who have undergone a procedure and that the reason there is a 12-hour limit is because anything over that is considered to be dangerous if you don't have the full capacity of a hospital to back it up. So that's why the committee can look at these things, Madam Speaker. The committee in fact can take this information, can then distill the

information, and then can provide it back to the Assembly for discussion and decision-making.

But do you know my fear, Madam Speaker? My fear is that the government has already made up its mind, that the government has no intention of listening to either the well-brought-up objections of the Official Opposition, of the third party in this Legislative Assembly, or of the many thousands of Albertans who have in fact indicated that they are against this bill and the subject matter of the bill. In fact, what they have decided is that they're going to push this bill through no matter what in order to ensure that there is private, for-profit health care in this province.

Do we need this amendment? Yes, we do. We need this amendment because without it we will be rushing through a discussion that will have a major impact not only on this province but across Canada. We have already heard what some of the opinions are with regards to NAFTA. We already know that there are opinions that vary. That in and of itself should send a message to each and every one of the government members: if we have two different legal opinions, we know that there is going to be judicial review required and that we may well be on the losing end.

We also know that there have been similar kinds of experiments with regards to private, for-profit health care in other countries around the world, and in fact they have shown that it does not reduce the wait list, that it has no impact on the costs to the public health care system other than pulling away dollars and pulling away professionals from the public health care system, and in fact is more costly to individuals out of pocket.

I can only urge, Madam Speaker, that individuals look carefully at what this amendment is, that individuals look and search and hopefully have had a chance to maybe even talk with their constituents over the break that we've had from 5:30 to 8 o'clock to decide whether or not this is something that they should vote for. This is not a matter of caucus solidarity but is a matter where each member can look at this amendment on its merit and then make a decision that in fact what needs to occur is more discussion and that the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations would afford for that particular discussion to occur.

Without this amendment it will be very difficult to have that kind of openness that's required in order to look at what the NAFTA implications are, to look at what the ethical implications are, to look at what in fact the various associations, as I indicated earlier, have indicated, to look at the different models of health care delivery that are present throughout the world, whether it be in Great Britain, whether it be in Australia, whether it be in New Zealand, whether it be in Japan, whether it be in Sweden, whether it be in South Africa. I, Madam Speaker, have had an opportunity to read about all those countries and the kind of health care they provide and the problems that occur when you have a public system running parallel with a private, for-profit system, and you know, the stories are not good. The stories are actually quite frightening as to what occurs when you have two systems running side by side, which is exactly what this bill will provide for.

The members can believe the spin. They can. The government members can believe the spin. They can believe the junior minister, who says no. They can believe the senior minister, who says no. They can believe their Premier, who says . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, on the amendment.

MS LEIBOVICI: The Standing Committee on Law and Regulations will allow the opportunity for all of the members to in actual fact

have those positions put forward to them so that they can make those decisions on their own.

The amount of information that is present right now is overwhelming, quite frankly. Every day there's another report that lands on my desk that indicates that this is ill conceived. A committee that is set up, that is an all-party committee, can look at those reports, can filter through those reports, can see if perhaps there are biases in those reports, either on one side or on the other side, and find what the actual matter is at hand and what the actual truth is.

From what I have seen, Madam Speaker, it is very clear that there is an understanding that this bill promotes private, for-profit health care, that this bill actually sets up private, for-profit hospitals – call them what you may – that this bill provides for and does not control the provision of uninsured services and provides limited controls on the provision of insured services. In actual fact it provides very little other than the opening of the doors to private, for-profit health care, which isn't controllable right now under the legislation that exists, the legislation that exists under the Hospitals Act and the legislation that exists through the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Medical Profession Act.

We need to look at what this bill is about, Madam Speaker. We need to have a clear understanding that in actual fact the minister has the ability to control what he says he doesn't control. What he doesn't have the ability to do is to control an entity that doesn't exist, and that's an entity that provides overnight services. The easiest way to make that a controllable issue is to shut the door tight on it, and that's not happening. The forum that I was just at indicated – and it was interesting actually. The Member for St. Albert indicated that without this bill HRG would be able to tomorrow come forward and actually set up a private, for-profit facility. Well, Christine Burdett, from the Friends of Medicare, came back and said: with this bill HRG will be at the door with a contract in hand for Mr. Dinning to sign on the bottom line to open a private, for-profit facility.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, we are dealing with an amendment. We are not dealing with second reading of the bill. We are dealing with an amendment.

MS LEIBOVICI: I keep going back, Madam Speaker, and I thank you for keeping me on track. The subject matter is private, for-profit health care, and I'm trying to make sure that the members understand why we want this referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. If I go off track, I know you will put me back on, so I appreciate that.

Without that clear understanding of what the elements of the bill are that say that we want that subject matter to be referred, I don't think the members can make an informed decision. I'm trying my best to open up their minds to see that in actual fact this is a very important matter. It needs to go the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. There needs to be open and honest give-and-take discussion on what this is about. This is the least that can be done to protect the public's interest with regards to protecting our public health care system. I don't think that's a whole lot to ask from the Members of this Legislative Assembly. It would be a first, granted, in the seven years that I have been here, to have anything referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. In fact we are the only province across Canada that has not made it a part of its legislative process to refer items to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

This is not a sign of weakness by a government. I think it would be considered a sign of strength for this government to admit that this is a process that could well serve not only the citizens of the

province but could also serve to expand the understanding that each and every one of us has with regards to this particular issue.

9:10

So I can only reiterate that I think this is very important, that it needs to occur, that in actual fact there needs to be a referral to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. This is not something that the government members should back off from. This is something that the government members should in actual fact endorse because it is an important initiative that would demonstrate to Albertans that they are open to and willing to listen to what the concerns are. Those concerns, I am sure, have been coming fast and furious to each and every member within this Assembly.

With those comments, Madam Speaker, I would like to again encourage that the members vote for this particular amendment. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:13 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner
Carlson
Gibbons

Leibovici
MacDonald

Sloan
Wickman

Against the motion:

Amery
Broda
Cao
Clegg
Coutts
Ducharme
Havelock
Herard
Hlady
Jonson
Klapstein

Kryczka
Laing
Magnus
Mar
Marz
McClellan
McFarland
Melchin
Oberg
Paszowski

Severtson
Stelmach
Stevens
Strang
Taylor
Thurber
Trynchy
Woloshyn
Yankowsky
Zwozdesky

Totals:

For – 7

Against – 31

[Motion on amendment lost]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) I move that this question be now put.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Point of Order Previous Question

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The question cannot now be put. The amendment that we talked to and just had the vote on was a referral amendment, not a hoist amendment. There is quite a bit of validation in both *Erskine May* and *Beauchesne* to tell us that we can continue.

In addition to that, I would refer to a note that we got from Mr.

Speaker earlier today confirming that second reading debate would continue should this amendment fail. Definitely that was the ruling of the Speaker earlier this afternoon. I could produce this if you want.

I would refer you to page 475 of the 21st edition of *Erskine May* on this particular point with reference to such an amendment. The amendment “may seek further information in relation to the bill by committees, commissioners, the production of papers or other evidence.” The purpose of the amendment is to seek more information before proceeding, not necessarily to kill the bill as might be the case with a hoist amendment. So based on that, in terms of *Erskine May*, the question put by the Government House Leader right now is not relevant or valid.

If we go on, in *Beauchesne* clauses 673 to 676 clearly deal with the referral of subject matter of a bill to a committee. Section 673 suggests this amendment can be used “where further information is desired in direct relation to the terms of the bill before the House,” just as we had here. It notes that the subject matter, not the bill itself, is what is being referred to committee. So once again the vote he is calling at this point in time is not relevant because we do still have speakers at second reading who wish to put their concerns forward.

Referral of the bill’s subject matter is not a defeat of its merits necessarily, Madam Speaker, but merely a question of the content and subject matter. Our amendment specifically holds the bill in abeyance to be evaluated by the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, who would then report back with their findings. Since the amendment does not actually refer the bill to the standing committee, only the subject matter itself, the bill is not being called into question, only the subject matter. So there is no justification for going to the vote for second reading as there would be with a hoist amendment.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would ask you if you would like me to refer the note to you, the ruling that was made earlier today by Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAVELOCK: Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Just one moment, hon. Deputy Government House Leader. This is a proper question. It can be put to the Assembly. The motion is debatable, and it cannot be amended.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Just so I understand then, Madam Speaker, what this motion allows all members of this House to do now is speak to the bill at second reading one more time. Once that has been concluded, if I’m not mistaken, then the vote must be called. Is that correct? It also precludes any further amendment of the bill at second reading stage.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The motion that you brought forward, hon. member, is debatable under Standing Order 18(1)(c), and it cannot be amended. If carried, the vote is immediately called on the original question. In other words, we then go to second reading of Bill 11, but we are right now dealing with the motion that the question be now put. That is what we’re dealing with, and once all those who wish to speak to this have, then we will vote on that, and then we would move immediately, if that’s passed, to the vote on second reading of Bill 11.

9:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, the chair would like to seek some clarification. It sounded to the chair as though you were wishing to debate further the amendment

to the motion that we just previously dealt with under a division, and that was defeated. In fact, we’re now speaking to that this question be now put under Standing Order 47(1).

MS CARLSON: So just as a point of clarification, Madam Speaker, are you telling us that now we are going to revert directly to second reading on Bill 11?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: We must. This motion that the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has brought forward is under Standing Order 18(1)(c). The motion is debatable. It cannot be amended. If carried, the vote is immediately called on the original question. In other words, we would revert to second reading of Bill 11.

MS CARLSON: I’m sorry, Madam Speaker. I need some clarification in terms of the intent of that.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I would ask that you look under Standing Order 18(1)(c).

MS CARLSON: I am there, and I do see that this is a motion which is debatable for the previous question, and as I understand the question, the Deputy Government House Leader is requesting that we now vote on second reading of Bill 11.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader has brought forward that this question be now put under Standing Order 47(1). If you would look that up, I will read it for you.

The previous question, until it is decided, shall preclude all amendment of the main question. The previous question shall be in the following words: “That this question be now put.”

Everything that is before the Assembly is in order.

MS CARLSON: Madam Speaker, just as a point of clarification, my question is: does that then conclude second reading debate?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: If this is carried, the vote is immediately called on the original question, and the original question is second reading of Bill 11.

MS CARLSON: Madam Speaker, no. We would disagree with that.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Right now before the Assembly there is a motion. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has moved that this question be now put. This is what we’re debating right now.

MS CARLSON: Once again on a point of clarification then, if we debate the motion that the question be now put and the government wins that vote, then that would conclude second reading debate, which we are saying is not a fair and reasonable question to be put at this time because the amendment that we had under discussion is not a hoist amendment. In addition to that, Madam Speaker, we have a note from the Speaker this afternoon, who said that second reading debate would continue this evening on conclusion of the vote on the amendment that we just voted on.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: As I read to you, under Standing Order 47(1) “the previous question, until it is decided, shall preclude all amendment.” The chair is just doing as the Assembly has instructed the chair to do. The motion was made that the question be now put. It is part of our proceedings in the House under Standing Orders.

I must in fact move ahead. I've tried to explain what all is involved here. We are now debating that the question be now put. That is what we are debating within the Assembly at this point.

MS CARLSON: Okay. Well, Madam Speaker, I rise to debate that particular motion then. I find it to be completely out of order in this House, and I find your ruling on that particular motion also not to be in good faith with the nature of this Assembly. In fact, I went through a number of circumstances both in *Beauchesne* and in *Erskine May* outlining why we should be able to continue debate on Bill 11 in second reading at the conclusion of that last standing vote, so I would put forward that the Deputy Government House Leader's motion was out of order in this House. I do question how it can be put forward, particularly when we have the word of the Speaker of this Assembly from this afternoon, who stated particularly that second reading would continue.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, what has transpired here is definitely in order. It is within our Standing Orders. This is what we use in this Assembly along, certainly, with other references. Again I would ask you and all members of the Assembly to please pay attention to section 47(1) and take a look at it, because it is in order.

I certainly, hon. member, have a number of people that advise me very well on the procedures of this House, and I would ask that you not keep questioning my decision on this matter. It is in order. I've gone over it when you were seeking earlier clarification. I have spelled out for you what all is involved here. The debate right now will take place on what was brought forward, that this question should be now put. So that is what we're debating. It is debatable.

MS CARLSON: I am supposed to be debating it, Madam Speaker, and I would request that by tomorrow at 1:30 we have a written decision in terms of the Speaker's comments this afternoon that second reading would continue after conclusion of this debate.

I will send that information to you in writing, Madam Speaker, and find out precisely why instructions that we were given earlier this day do not carry forward into this evening. I find that to be quite an appalling state of affairs when we have a number of speakers who still wish to speak to this bill at second reading. They now do not have the ability . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I am the Speaker this evening, and I have gone over what exactly is involved here, what the procedure is. We are dealing with a motion that is on the floor. We are also dealing with what is within our Standing Orders. You can send me a letter if you wish, but I think we need to move ahead and debate what we have before us right in the motion. That is that it has been moved that this question be now put, so I would ask that you debate that.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: And that is what I was debating, Madam Speaker. I don't agree with the motion, and all of the arguments that I'm putting forward are supporting disagreement with that motion. This is closure. This is a closure motion coming in on second reading of this particular bill. You can dress it up any way you want to, but the fact is that it's still closure, and you are stifling debate in this Assembly on one of the most important bills that we will ever see in the history of this province. I do not agree with it, and I will argue for a full 20 minutes on this particular point.

Madam Speaker, we have at least five more speakers who wish to

speak to this bill in principle. If this motion is voted on, then they will not have the opportunity to speak in principle on this bill because it will be out of second reading and we will be into committee and we will not have the same kinds of opportunities that we would have had now.

We have a number of points to be made. I myself have not had an opportunity to speak to this bill at second reading, and I have a number of concerns in principle with what many of the government speakers have said, including the Premier, including the health minister, and including the junior health minister. There are many comments they made that in principle I find to be quite appalling and quite out of order with the nature of what we can see as being the interpretation of this particular bill.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Order. Order.

MS CARLSON: Settle down, you guys, because all you're going to do is get me going for a longer time period and every single other person here. I mean, we've got a lot of time to put in tonight if that's what you want to do.

There are a number of issues in principle that have to be resolved with this bill, and I am going to itemize them point by point, Madam Speaker, and use up my 20 minutes.

First of all, we have seen a number of speakers in this House trot out that private clinic in Ontario, the Shouldice private clinic. It is not a discussion relevant to Bill 11, as many of the government members have tried to make it, for a number of reasons. Should I get the opportunity to speak in principle to Bill 11, these are the kinds of comments I would make about that clinic. First of all, it does not apply to the Alberta example because it's a grandfathered clinic. No private clinics since that date, which was in the late '50s, have been allowed to operate in Ontario. They have been specifically outlawed, Madam Speaker, so it's an unusual and unrealistic and quite questionable example for a number of the government members to have used in their debate.

9:40

If I had the opportunity to speak to Bill 11 in second reading, I would go on to point out what really does happen at Shouldice hospital, Madam Speaker. It is quite appalling when you think in terms of how they use government funding and how that same principle and that same idea would be applied in this province. If I were allowed to speak in principle to Bill 11, this is what I would say about this particular hospital in Ontario. This particular hospital only takes very, very low-risk surgeries from the most fit clients. I would put it to you that there is hardly an MLA in this Assembly who would fit the criteria of Shouldice hospital, because you cannot have more than 10 percent body fat, you cannot have any extraordinary conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure . . .

DR. TAYLOR: Speak for yourself.

MS CARLSON: Well, I'm looking, boy, and I don't see too many, I've got to tell you.

So any kind of extraordinary complications, medical complications – as commonplace as high blood pressure is, if you had that, you couldn't get into Shouldice clinic. It is discriminatory, Madam Speaker, in the widest possible context, because they only take the very . . .

DR. TAYLOR: On the motion.

MS CARLSON: I am on the motion. I'm talking about what I would

speaking in principle on Bill 11 should I get the opportunity to talk to it, and I'm going to be talking about Shouldice.

Hardly anyone in this particular Assembly could get in there, Madam Speaker, because they wouldn't in the first place fit the criteria. Secondly, they only take the least complicated surgeries, so the very simplest hernia operation is all they take. They have a mandatory three-day stay regardless of the fact that simple hernias are day surgery in most jurisdictions. And guess what happens? It's a mandatory three-day stay in Ontario, and they charge the Ontario hospital system for all three days for a day surgery procedure. [interjection] Well, that is appalling.

The government members say that it would be cheaper to have private clinics and that it would reduce the waiting lines, but when you take a look at the facts, which this government is not prepared to do, that does not happen. For a simple day surgery, patients – and they're clients, really; they're not patients – are required to stay for three days, at which time Shouldice charges the government of Ontario for a three-night stay for a simple day surgery.

Then what happens? To get in there, you have to sign a waiver, Madam Speaker. Go figure. In the waiver they set out all the issues that could happen with complications, such things like losing feeling in your body. You have to sign a waiver to say that you will not charge them or go after them in any manner should they muck the operation and you have serious complications. Minor complications or serious complications: it doesn't matter. If you're going to go to Shouldice, you're in there for three days – they charge the Ontario government for three days – and you're signing a waiver effectively giving away all the patient rights you ever had. That doesn't sound like a very fair practice. Once again it sounds quite discriminatory.

Here's what happened in an actual case of a friend of mine, Madam Speaker. He happened to fit the criteria to get into the hospital. My buddy went in, and when they did the first initial discussion and diagnostics with him, it turned out he had a triple hernia, not a simple hernia. Of course, he doesn't fit their criteria. He's kicked off the list and has to go back on another list to get into the public system. Already now we've incurred costs for the government of Ontario in that case, because his initial visit was charged to the Ontario hospital. So we've got a cost there already.

They refused to take him. He asked them at that time what would have happened had they not realized, prior to his being on the operating table, that this would have been a complicated surgery, and this is what they told him, Madam Speaker. They would have taken him into the system. He would have come in that afternoon like all of their patients do, had a nice supper, which is an extra billing charge because that's an added service, gone to sleep that night in the hospital at the cost of the Ontario taxpayers, and then they would have put him on the operating table the next day. They would've opened him up and realized the surgery was more complicated than what they're willing to do. What they would have done at that point is clipped him back up and sent him in an ambulance to the public system.

Now look at the costs that we've incurred in a case like this. They charge for the initial examination. They charge for the first day's overnight stay. They charge for cutting him open, the initial exploratory surgery. They charge for putting him in an ambulance, and he gets sent to the public system, where he's got to have the same procedure done. What does that cost the taxpayers, Madam Speaker? A whole lot more than it does for day surgery, to have it done in the public system in the first place. So all of those things get charged to the system.

What happened to this fellow, then, when he went into the regular public hospital? He was scheduled for day surgery. He goes in at 8 a.m. He's scheduled for a 35-minute surgery. It ended up taking

an hour and 45 minutes because it really was very complicated, with extensive concerns that he had there; there was quite a bit of stitching and so on. Madam Speaker, he's out at 7:30 the same evening. He goes in at 8 o'clock in the morning and is out at 7:30, so minimal cost to the taxpayers within the public system. Well taken care of, triple hernia surgery, a very complicated surgery. Everything goes very smoothly. He's able to go home. He's happy to go home, and this is in the public system.

Now, had he been in the Shouldice system, it would have been much more expensive for the taxpayers there. In the public system the charges are for the pre-op exam, the day use of the bed, and the operation itself. Let's remind ourselves what it would cost in the Shouldice system. It's the pre-op exam, the initial exploratory exam, the overnight stay, the ambulance, the surgery in the public system, the day use, and a post-op exam. Even a fool can figure out that it's about three or four times more expensive to go to the Shouldice system in a situation like that. It is more than three times more expensive in any case, because the costs are for three overnight stays plus the operation and the exams themselves as compared to day surgery in the public system.

So, Madam Speaker, were I able to speak in principle on Bill 11, I would be very concerned that the example this government is using in terms of putting forward this particular example as a way for us to go in a private health care system like they are proposing for this province is going to cost us substantively more than what using the current public system does. Substantively more. I request the government to put forward some figures or to table just any kind of information at all, even a very limited amount of information, indicating that this would not be true, because this is not the only example I have. I have several examples of Shouldice clinic particularly being horrendously more expensive than standard procedures would be in the public system. The example the government is using and the way they are using it is, I put to you, misleading in terms of the effect it's having on the people of this province when they are trying to evaluate this bill. That is a major concern for us. In fact, what they have done with those kinds of examples is fed incorrect information even to their own members.

Earlier this evening, Madam Speaker, we heard from Calgary-Egmont, who didn't like some of the comments that we had made and rose to speak to them. If we are not able to continue debate in second reading on this bill, we will not be able to address those kinds of concerns. He talked about things like the results causing improved access. Well, we've just heard from the example of Shouldice that in fact that doesn't happen. Most of these people get bounced back to the public system anyway, so what happens? Now they're in emergency, so they bump to the front of the line. So his comment that cancellations due to emergencies are almost eliminated in a private system is completely unfounded. In fact, the reverse may actually be true. Because of complications occurring in the private system, we may see more cancellations due to emergencies in the public system. That is completely different than what they are trying to tell the people of this province, and it is certainly a situation that we want to address.

Now, how do these clinics make their money? If they're getting the same amount of money for an operation as the public system does, clearly that isn't going to meet their needs. They're going to have to do fancy footwork like Shouldice does, and those are things like keeping people in the hospital for longer stays than what they would get in a public system. They will be doing things like pushing the value-added services that they talk about. The instant you go to a doctor and you go to a clinic or a hospital, be it private or public, and that doctor tells you that an enhanced service would enhance the quality of your life or enhance your performance upon leaving the

hospital or just be better than the average one, which may or may not last the amount of time as the enhanced service does, you are playing on people's vulnerabilities, Madam Speaker. That is a horrendous place for us to be going in this province.

9:50

People trust their doctors. They believe what they tell them. We as laypeople do not have the technical knowledge or the medical knowledge to be able to do a benefit analysis of services being provided or services being pushed by doctors or by clinics in terms of being enhanced, and we do not have the kind of criteria to evaluate those kinds of determinates in a manner that is realistic. It's unrealistic for this government to be saying that that is going to be a legitimate service provided by private clinics in the future.

There's a good reason why Saskatchewan doesn't allow that to happen, Madam Speaker, and it's because people pay more than they need to. It is no different than people going door to door and ripping off vulnerable people at the door by telling them that they need their roof repaired when they don't really – they've got five or six shingles that need to be repaired – or any of the other kinds of house repair scams we see. This is a health care scam.

Everybody in the province will do everything they can to support family members when they need health care, Madam Speaker, but they will not be able to argue value-added products that are going to be pushed by these clinics so that they can up their profit margins, because they don't have the ability or the technical knowledge to do it. This government then becomes a conspirator in promoting services for people that may not be needed, and that is a very serious situation and will hurt the people of this province, not to mention that it will cause people to spend more money on health care than we would see otherwise happening in a properly funded public system. So that's a real issue.

When we take a look at the private system, the American system particularly, we see that those costs are exorbitantly higher than the public system here. So how can the Premier say in his remarks that a private system is going to be cheaper when we know just the administrative costs go up astronomically when you start to introduce a private system?

We know that's happening in this province right now. The number of health insurance companies that are out flogging their wares at this particular time has more than tripled since the potential for private health care has been introduced into this province. What does that mean? Once again consumers who don't have the kind of detailed background information that they require to make informed choices are being bombarded with advertising. Seniors particularly are being hardest hit with this advertising, and quite frankly, Madam Speaker, the people I've talked to just don't know what to do. They're saying: "Do we need another insurance carrier? Everybody is telling us that Alberta health care does not supply us with adequate coverage at this time. We've got Blue Cross, but, gee, all these new wonder drugs aren't covered under Blue Cross. What am I supposed to do? Under one of these other insurance companies will those drugs be covered? Will I get better coverage? Should I have better coverage? How do I analyze it? How will I know it's better?" What's worse, people have all these questions that can't be answered, and the government, instead of doing their job and helping them out . . .

A HON. MEMBER: Just tell them the truth.

MS CARLSON: Well, we are telling the truth, you know, and that's the point that's being made here. There's a lot of information that needs to be put forward on this bill and analyzed in a comprehensive

fashion. People are asking these questions. The health insurance companies know exactly what they're doing. They know that if they're first in, their chances of making a buck are substantial. The first in to get the people signed up to the new health care insurance regime will likely keep those people as contributors for a very long time, and that means substantial profits for those companies. What it means for the health care system is more paperwork. What it means for doctors is more paperwork, and what it also means for doctors is a move to managed care, Madam Speaker.

We know from the American examples what happens under managed care. Patients suffer and the doctors suffer, because they cannot always do the full kinds of services that are required. We have a similar system of managed care in this province right now, Madam Speaker. I would put to you that the WCB runs a managed care system for people who have been hurt in this province in work-related accidents. In fact, many doctors are told what they can and cannot do in terms of providing service for people under WCB. WCB keeps their own roster of doctors that people who have been hurt in work-related accidents are required to go and attend. They can't always go to their own physician. They cannot go to specialists of their choice. They are directed to go to WCB doctors. What's covered and what isn't covered is substantially directed by WCB.

We have in my office at this point five or six different cases where WCB doctors have made a statement one year and then a year or two down the road, when nothing has changed in the patient's condition, have completely reversed what they said before and come up with a new ruling that is more harmful to the patient than the previous one, all based on no substantive evidence, no scientific evidence.

These are concerns, and these are concerns that we will have if we cannot proceed on Bill 11 in second reading.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be brief, but I think it would be important to put on the record of *Hansard* what happened this evening. As you've indicated, it's never too late to explain things to the opposition.

The motion that was placed before the House this morning, Madam Speaker, was consistent with the Speaker's ruling this afternoon, and it was consistent from this perspective. After the amendment was defeated, we reverted to second reading, and there's nothing to preclude anyone in this House from moving a Standing Order 47(1) motion during second reading. So we were in second reading, and the Speaker's indication to the opposition members this afternoon was certainly honoured.

Now, as concerns the arguments that we have limited debate, Madam Speaker, this evening the opposition had an opportunity to debate their amendment. Of the 16 members of their caucus only nine availed themselves of that opportunity for some reason which is not clear to me.

Nevertheless, Madam Speaker, we should also look at what the motion which is now before the House now provides. It provides an opportunity for each and every member of the opposition to once again be allocated a full 20 minutes to address the issue, and in fact listening to the hon. member's comments which she just made, it's very clear to me that we have through this motion provided, I think, a very good opportunity for each and every member in this House to actually participate once again. I would also encourage members of government to enter the debate later on, because I think a number of the comments that have been made should not go unchallenged.

So with that, Madam Speaker, I will take my seat, but again I just want to emphasize that what transpired this evening was entirely

consistent with our rules. To date at second reading I believe we've had 11 members of the opposition address the issue, another nine addressed the issue through the amendment, and we will now probably hear all 16 members of the Liberal opposition address the issue once again.

Plus what was very interesting today, Madam Speaker – and I think the Speaker was right when he indicated that each and every day we're having additional debate in this House taking place for approximately 30 to 35 minutes during question period. In the time I've been in the Legislature, there's no issue that's been given the opportunity for debate and that actually has been debated as much as this particular matter.

So thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll now turn the floor over to the opposition if they'd like to certainly get involved. Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Previous Question

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before you do, those that have sent me notes, I would have you refer to *Beauchesne* 521: "The form of the motion is 'That the question be now put.' Once it is proposed, the debate may continue on the original question." As you just duly noted with the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, I mean, she was speaking on the original question, so the debate will continue as long as those wish to debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, you referred to 521. Yes, you are correct from my point of view in your interpretation that once the question is put, every member of the House has the opportunity to speak the amount of time they are able to speak under the normal rules, which means 20 minutes per member. My interpretation would be that the Leader of the Official Opposition would be granted the 90 minutes that she's entitled to, because it reverts, of course, to the original question.

When we talk in terms of the previous question, the previous question is used at the federal level, and it is used at the municipal level. A question put. It's the same thing. It's the terminology that's used. When that happens, it's done when it's deemed that all debate, all possible useful debate has been exhausted, that those opposed to a bill, a motion, whatever, are simply attempting to waste time.

10:00

Madam Speaker, when we look at what's happened here and when we look at the amount of debate that has taken place on second reading, the limited number of members that have had the opportunity to speak, it hasn't exhausted fully, by any means, the debate that should be afforded on second reading of the bill. I look at this, and to me this is just a clever way of moving closure without calling it closure. But let me say: it is closure, closure, closure. There is no other way of putting it, because it restricts each of us to speaking once and then the matter is put to a vote, so it's closed at that point. It's closed.

Let me point out to the Deputy Government House Leader that under *Beauchesne* 525 "a motion for the previous question is not admitted in a Committee of the Whole or in any committee of the House." So the member may think he's getting away with something quite shrewd here. However, he's neglecting to take into consideration that once second reading is concluded and the question is put and we know which way the motion is going to go, we're then in committee stage, and there is nothing to prevent this opposition from making our voice heard by moving 200 amendments if

necessary. Let me remind the member that he is not in a position, according to *Beauchesne*, to move closure during that stage. We're being forced into a situation where we have no alternative but to look at those types of strategies where we have to introduce 200 amendments, whatever, so that we are afforded the opportunity of debating this bill the way the people that elected us, the people that we represent, want us to debate the bill, Madam Speaker.

Let me take a look at the bill itself. First of all, let me talk about some faulty assumptions. The first faulty assumption is that private health care will cost less. Now, the government seems for some reason to be under the opinion that private health care will cost less. I've heard references that what this is going to mean is that there will be no change in the public system per se, that the same number of staff that work in the public system will continue to work there. However, there are going to be further contracts out to the private sector, thereby reducing the lineups.

Now, let's look at that. When we talk in terms of looking at the public system and then we talk in terms of that being supplemented by this privatization of the health care system, that privatization is going to cost money if these people, the private health caregivers, are allowed to bill Alberta health care. That's additional money being spent on top of the dollars that are now being spent by Alberta health care under the billions of dollars that are budgeted for health.

Now, when you talk in terms of private health care costing less, let's look at private health care. First of all, they are going to build in a profit. They are going to build in a return on their original investment, plus they're going to have to develop new facilities and pay costs on that. There's absolutely no indication that when you look at all those factors, they can do it for less than the public system. When we look at the public system – and I wish I had the count of the exact number of beds. I know that in the Misericordia – and I know because I've toured the facility – the top three floors have been converted to office space. Three floors, that once housed beds, have been converted to office space. So if I were to ask the government how many empty beds there are in the Misericordia, the response would be a very small number because it doesn't take into consideration that there are no longer beds on these three floors. The beds have been removed. However, the space is there and can be utilized to accommodate the required beds needed to prevent the so-called arguments of having to contract out because of the huge lineups in the health care system.

So to assume that private health care will cost less is foolhardy. We know it's going to cost more, but we can also figure out fairly clearly that what's going to happen is that under the concept of enhanced services more and more of it is going to be considered a user fee in the sense that in addition to the taxes one pays towards the health care system, the premiums one pays to Alberta health care for health care services, there'll be an additional charge, and that additional charge will be those enhanced services afforded by the private sector.

We've heard some of the instances already of the differences in rates charged by clinics in Calgary versus Edmonton, depending on the demand, because these are businesspeople. They're not there to provide a service to Albertans. They're not there because they feel an obligation that they've got to provide a good health care system to Albertans because that's what they were elected to do. They're in the private sector. They're in business. They're there to make money.

When we have a doctor, a well-known specialist, in the city eyeing up the Charles Camsell at one point to turn it into a private health care facility, or we have the HRG group in Calgary, that have a facility going to some extent, losing a great deal of money, they're not going to invest – what was their loss last year? Something like

\$2 million? They're not investing this kind of money out of the goodness of their hearts. They're investing that kind of money because they expect a return. They expect that in the long run it's going to pay them dividends, and they're going to be rewarded handsomely with profits and such. So let's forget this idea that private health care is going to cost less.

Now, we also talk in terms of the other faulty assumption that private health care will shorten waiting lists. Well, it's been pointed out that despite the so-called 52 clinics throughout the province right now, the waiting lists continue to grow. I don't see the waiting lists getting narrower. If I wanted to talk about specific cases of people waiting, I could talk about it. I could parade constituents up here one after another, people that have been waiting for surgery of various forms, people that have had their surgery postponed. There is a limit.

We even hear, Madam Speaker, in the *Journal* today and in the *Sun* the other day talk in terms of Camp He-Ho-Ha, which is a recreational facility for something like 700 or 800 persons with disabilities so they can enjoy the outdoors in the summer, something they look forward to year after year. Because there's a requirement that they have two full-time nurses on staff at all times and they haven't been able to recruit two nurses this year for the first time, Camp He-Ho-Ha, which stands for health, hope, and happiness, may not open. They can't find two nurses.

If there is such a shortage of nurses, can you imagine what's going to happen when nurses start to work for the private sector instead of the public system? They're going to be forced to close more beds because the staff isn't there. Government will argue: well, we would like to keep these beds open, but we can't because we can't get the staff. Then what will happen? The government will simply increase the opportunities for the private sector by enhancing the private sector even further. Meanwhile, because the public system becomes much, much more limited in what it's capable of offering because of the difficulty in attracting staff, it's going to have increased waiting lists. The waiting lists will be longer than they are right now because there are many that will not be able to afford enhanced services, the enhanced services that are in the bill right now. I question it.

Another faulty assumption: the argument that the private sector will build the facilities, so the government no longer has to build them. Well, let's say the private sector does build a facility. Let's say they build a facility that's worth \$5 million. Say they've got to invest \$5 million into that facility. On that \$5 million that they've invested you can count on them wanting a return. What's a reasonable return on \$5 million? Ten percent, \$500,000 a year? What does a businessman require in terms of a return on investment? We know it's not chicken feed. We know that they're going to be accountable to their shareholders, to their partners, and whatever, and they have to try and justify massive profits, profits as large as possible.

10:10

When we talk in terms of having to build new facilities, again I go back to my argument. When we have major unused facilities throughout the province, it makes no sense to ask the private sector to build new facilities that are going to create a financial obligation on their part, that are going to force them to go to government and say: look, you've got to bail us out; you've got to extend the degree of privatization that's now allowed in Bill 11.

We'll see amendments come forward, and pretty soon we're going to be in the situation where you're going to have a tough time telling what is private and what is public as the public system diminishes and the private sector picks up. Yes, there are people that because of desperation to get the surgery done may actually put a mortgage

on their house, so they can get their surgery done now instead of waiting. You can imagine particularly the seniors, who are more victim to feeling those types of pressure than other people. Can you imagine a senior citizen who has spent their life and worked in Alberta being forced to put a mortgage on their house to get medical attention because they can't afford to wait the period of time to access the public system?

Another faulty assumption: outlaws queue-jumping. How does it outlaw queue-jumping? At the present time, when you're in that position that you can go to a private clinic to have eye surgery, whatever, by paying additional dollars, is Bill 11 saying that that's no longer going to be allowed? In fact, I would suggest that those that have the dollars, who will be able to buy the enhanced services which are going to be promoted by those that go into business, are going to jump the queue because they've got the bucks to jump the queue. The MRIs at the present time. My sister waited six months to have an MRI done at the University hospital. On the other hand, if you've got 750 bucks, whatever the cost is now, a thousand dollars, whatever, you can have it done in a matter of days, I understand. But you've got to lay the money out of your own pocket.

AN HON. MEMBER: Well, look at these hockey players.

MR. WICKMAN: The hockey players are a classic example, and the argument is put forward by the public: how come the hockey players get the special benefit and they don't have to wait? The reason they don't have to wait is because the hockey club on their behalf can afford to pay that charge for the enhanced service, for queue-jumping, and that's going to continue. Are those hockey players going to be told, when Bill 11 passes, that they've got to wait in a lineup like anybody else, even though the Edmonton Oilers may be prepared to pay \$800 to allow them to get their medical treatment right off the bat? No. There is going to be queue-jumping.

Let's look, for example, at the question of the concept of private hospitals. Does this legitimize, does this legalize private hospitals? Yes, yes, yes. You can call it a surgical facility; you can call it whatever. What is the expression? If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, it's a duck. If you ever saw a duck, you've got a duck in this particular case.

Again I'll refer to the situation in Calgary where you have a facility that is about as close as you can get to a private hospital just waiting for Bill 11 to pass so they can pounce into action and start reaping the benefit of — call it a handout, call it a reward, whatever, that's going to be afforded by this government.

So let's not fool the public. Let's not fool ourselves. If we pass Bill 11, we're saying that we're going to legitimize, we're going to legalize private hospitals in the province of Alberta, the first province in Canada to legalize private hospitals, possibly not the last, because as I said earlier, the Premier of Ontario, Mike Harris, will jump at the opportunity, I would venture to say. I'm just guessing, speculating.

I did talk to an MPP very recently. Just last weekend he phoned me and wanted to know the status of Bill 11 because he was concerned, saying that he fears that as soon as it's passed here, Premier Mike Harris is going to want to do the same thing. So he was asking me if I thought there was any chance that the bill may be scrapped. I had to be honest with him. I said: "Well, we're going to try. Albertans are trying. There are petitions, there are letters, there are e-mails, but despite every effort being made by Albertans and by this caucus, there is no indication that this government is in fact prepared to withdraw Bill 11." There is no indication that the government is even prepared to refer it to a committee so it can be

studied in detail. The government members for some reason have chosen to ignore the outcry of their constituents that are coming to us asking us to file petitions on their behalf, that are e-mailing us, that are writing us, that are phoning us because government members simply are not respecting their wishes. Their wishes are very, very clear. They do not want private hospitals legalized in this province.

Now, let's look at another assumption here: no limits on size and scope of private facilities. That's not an assumption. That's going to happen because there are no limits, really, in Bill 11 as to how many overnight stays there can be and so on and so forth. By simple regulation the government will be able to add medical/surgical techniques, whatever you want to call it, to those that will be presently permitted.

Enhanced services. What are enhanced services? Well, I guess enhanced services are something like when you go into the hospital – and there are some forms of enhanced services right now. The Premier tried earlier the old smoke screen by suggesting that the Leader of the Official Opposition supported payment of enhanced services when she was the minister of health. However, he neglected to differentiate between dollars for enhanced services going to the public system versus payment for enhanced services going to the private sector. There's a great deal of difference. When it stays within the public system, it's spent on the public system. When it goes to the private sector, a portion of it goes into the pockets of the business community.

To give you an example right now of what will occur, my understanding is that if you go in for, say, hip joint surgery, what's covered now is a plastic apparatus. However, you can get, I believe, it's silver – correct me if I'm wrong – but you have to pay extra for that. That's not covered by Alberta health care. You have to pay extra for that. That's an enhanced service. It's like a cast. If you get the plastic cast, my understanding is that that's covered by Alberta health care. However, if you go for that fibreglass cast, then you're charged an additional fee because you've upgraded. Who wants a cast made out of plaster of paris? You can see why enhanced services can become attractive, why government wants to exploit the concept of enhanced services. There are people that are desperate, that need those particular pieces of equipment or surgical procedures and are going to be prepared to pay extra out of desperation. So enhanced services, in my opinion, are going to increase.

Which services can be privatized? Well, technically speaking, if the government has the authority to bring forward Bill 11 and have it passed, what services can be privatized? I guess there's no limitation on what services can be privatized, because all they have to do next year is bring forward amendments to Bill 11 that would enhance the number of services that could be privatized. I venture to say that if I had to draw a scenario, this is the scenario I'd draw. Bill 11 will be rammed through in this legislative session. Come high water, whatever you want to call it, it's going to be rammed through. Whether it's done under the cloak of closure, in a misguided fashion, it is going to be done, and I would expect we're actually going to see closure probably in committee stage. The government may very well do it.

Then what will happen is that the government will say: okay; now it's done. There will probably be an approach used by the government . . . [Mr. Wickman's speaking time expired] And I was just getting started.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me begin by just providing some educational background on the mechanism of

putting the previous question. I would cite this evening from *Beauchesne* 521 on moving the previous question: "when the original question is under debate in order to force a direct vote on it, thereby preventing any amendments to the original question to be proposed." You will find that moving the previous question in *Beauchesne* is under the chapter Closure, the Previous Question, further fuel, Madam Speaker, to my comment that this government is becoming a master of premature closure on democratic debate on legislation in this province, even on legislation that they have proposed.

10:20

As previous speakers have indicated, this particular bill has garnered more debate, more inquiries, more consternation within the electorate and citizens of this province than perhaps any other bill in the history of this Legislature. How does this government respond to that? They respond by moving a mechanism of closure to cease debate on the bill at second reading. Now, what do the rules of parliament tell us about second reading? I would cite from *Beauchesne* 659. It says:

The second reading is the most important stage through which the bill is required to pass; for its whole principle is then at issue and is affirmed or denied by a vote of the House.

Further, *Beauchesne* 661 says:

While Standing Order 63 precludes amendments to the main question when a motion has been made to refer a bill to a committee, this has never been an impediment to the offering of amendments at the second reading stage . . . The Chair has accepted amendments without question.

Yet here we find, Madam Speaker, a junior House leader who cannot stand to see full democracy in action and has to jump to move a motion that in fact impedes and restricts the full debate of this bill in this Assembly.

Now, just let me finish my references to the stage of debate that we're at for citizens reading *Hansard* and trying to understand what tactics and antics the government is up to yet again. In *Beauchesne* 640 second reading is referenced as the stage which

is primarily concerned with the principle of a measure. At this stage, debate is not strictly limited to the contents of a bill as other methods of attaining its proposed objective may [also] be considered.

What that in fact says, Madam Speaker, is that not only should we be debating at second reading the principle behind the bill but also other methods that the government might consider to achieve this objective. In fact, there have been some suggestions of other mechanisms and other issues that Bill 11 does not address. The government is not interested in listening to those arguments or those suggestions. They want to, yet again, use their heavy hand to choke off any consideration of well-meaning citizens' concerns on this bill.

Now, we actually look at what we are talking about really here in terms of time. In essence, if we had been allowed as the opposition to utilize all the tools that exist for us in second reading, we perhaps could have had in this Assembly about 640 more minutes of debate at second reading, or perhaps just one more workday, Madam Speaker. But this government, by utilizing the mechanism of putting the previous question, is ratcheting down the debate that will be permitted to less than one working day, despite all the concerns they've received from citizens across this province. Despite how many health professionals have told them that they don't believe this bill will work, who don't understand the government's reasoning for putting it forward, this government thinks it is democratic and fair and right to restrict debate at this time to less than one working day. That speaks volumes. It speaks volumes about where this government is at mentally, where they are at on their arrogance meter when

they think that because they've made up their minds and set their agenda, all the concerns that exist out there should somehow be crammed in. That is where this government is at.

Now, just today in the Assembly we got on our desks yet another report, and the report was from the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. As with many of these types of advisory committees under the leadership of this government, they're chaired by a government MLA. Aside from that being a mechanism the government can use to pay their members more, it's also a mechanism whereby government can sift and filter what these committees actually produce in their annual reports. But to the credit of this committee, Madam Speaker, in the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta's annual report for 1998-1999 they raise a number of very important issues, two of which relate to health care: long-term care and health care services and accessibility.

I'd like to cite from the report. They say:

Accessibility of health care services continued as a major issue for Alberta seniors and their organizations. Alberta seniors have expressed their desire for a holistic, interdependent approach to quality of life and quality of health care. The Council has heard concerns regarding the availability of health care services. Seniors report that there are long waiting lists and administrative delays in accessing services. Seniors also have difficulty finding physicians willing to do home visits for house-bound individuals.

I would interject in my quotation here to ask: are the private, for-profit providers willing to provide home visits in their contracts to the regional health authorities? I somehow doubt it, Madam Speaker.

The report goes on to say:

There continues to be a lack of coordination between health care regions and between health care service providers. Lack of transportation continues to be an important barrier for seniors in accessing health care services in rural Alberta.

Bill 11, Madam Speaker, does not hold any assurances that the concerns that exist amongst seniors and the general population in this province with respect to accessibility of our health care system will be resolved. The questions that have been put countless times already in this Assembly as to how Bill 11 will increase our supply of health care professionals, both in terms of specialists and nursing staff, have not been answered.

When we have asked questions about how these for-profit contracts will in fact reduce waiting lists when there is recent evidence to suggest that waiting lists grow longer under such a plan, again the government provides no concrete response or answers. Yet, Madam Speaker, this is exactly the time in debate when those questions should be answered and those other alternatives explored. Once the government has successfully rammed this motion for the previous question through, we're going to move on to committee, and then we will be occupied with amending sections of the bill and focusing on sections of the bill. This is the time when we should be debating the implications of Bill 11 as a whole, and it's an affront to this Chamber and everything it represents to have a government on such an important and controversial bill use this crafty little mechanism to shorten debate.

Now, another issue that would be appropriate to debate at second reading – and I'm quite confident now, Madam Speaker, that we will not be able to debate it to the extent it should be – is the concerns raised by the federal government, concerns that Bill 11 as proposed will violate the Canada Health Act, concerns that the ability that Bill 11 provides for private, for-profit facilities to sell enhanced services in combination with insured services creates a circumstance that violates the principle of accessibility. We have not heard the Premier, his minister of health, or the esteemed junior House leader respond to those concerns. We have not heard any evidence to suggest that they've taken those types of concerns into account.

10:30

Further, the federal government questioned the premise of Bill 11 that private surgical facilities are not hospitals. According to the federal government's interpretation, all private surgical clinics would be considered by the federal government as hospitals under the Canada Health Act. It's hilarious that this government thinks that by some magical spin campaign they will be able to convince Albertans, even those that currently practise in the health care system, that private clinics keeping patients overnight would not be the same as hospitals. Really, Madam Speaker, I'm not sure where they think Albertans are at, but for those of us that have had the privilege of working in the public health care system and continue to work in the public health care system, the differentiation between a fully functioning hospital and a private, for-profit overnight surgical facility – I haven't heard any arguments to differentiate the two. If there have been any made, they're certainly muted.

So this is the time, during this stage of debate, when the government should be getting up and in fine detail explaining to Albertans how a for-profit, overnight surgical facility is different from a public hospital and how that difference will be defined and interpreted under the Canada Health Act. If the Premier or the minister of health has responded to the federal government in this regard, if there is correspondence they can table, then please let them bring that correspondence forward, and let's debate in principle the merits of their response. But we're not going to have the opportunity except now for one last 20-minute period each per member, of which only the opposition will avail themselves, I'm sure, to debate the principle of Bill 11 in this Assembly. That is regrettable and unfortunate, and I'm hoping I'll see a number of the members on the other side jump up to take this opportunity to debate the bill in principle.

The House leader I think quite intentionally in an attempt to engage debate listed the number of opposition members that had spoken to the bill thus far in second reading. I found it somewhat odd that he didn't list the number of his own members that had spoken or had not spoken to second reading. Perhaps he didn't choose to do that because he would have suffered some embarrassment because of the abysmal number of members on the government side that have chosen to represent their constituents and their constituents' concerns and spoken on the record about Bill 11.

We can see through that, Madam Speaker. We can see that by moving the previous question, the hon. member's intent was really to spare his government members the agony of trying to defend a bill that is undefendable. Every argument that you put forward, people increasingly are laughing at. They're a joke, and they have no rational basis in research, in practice, or in principle in this province or in other jurisdictions.

[Mrs. Laing in the chair]

As I said in earlier comments on the bill, that's really unfortunate, because I as much as any one else in this Assembly would like to get on with establishing a plan for our public health care system and ensuring that it's sustainable for the next generation. Bill 11 doesn't take us to that. It doesn't even begin to establish a plan. It's a distractionary bill that serves a completely other agenda and other purpose, Madam Speaker, and it's unfortunate that we find ourselves in the position we're in. It's unfortunate but becoming quite a common occurrence in this Assembly.

I'd like to just conclude by making reference to Bishop Fred Henry's comments. I made reference to these comments earlier in debate, and my time was running out and I wasn't able to do them justice. So I'd like to just utilize Bishop Henry's review of Bill 11

and some of the comments he has made in the conclusion of my remarks today.

Bishop Henry says:

Even in a cynical age, when respect for authority in religion and politics has been eroded by a stream of scandals and revelations . . . the doctor-patient relationship is held sacred by millions of the sick, and those who minister to their bodily and mental ailments.

There is a similar investiture of trust in nurses, physician assistants and social workers who labour alongside physicians, and are just as important to patients, although less well-compensated.

Until recently, money has not been the chief goal for these health care workers, nor for the hospitals where they work.

Although there are a few arguable exceptions, physicians and hospital administrators have been compensated fairly and even generously by society because society values health care for its members as an important goal and a form of social justice.

Most of us are also convinced health care is a fundamental human right; that medicine and nursing must not be diverted from their primary tasks – the relief of suffering, the prevention and treatment of illness and the promotion of health – and that potential financial incentives that reward overcare or undercare, weakening doctor-patient and nurse-patient bonds, should be prohibited,

exactly the point Bill 11 proposes to make, Madam Speaker, that there would be incentives for overcare and undercare, thus weakening the doctor/patient and nurse/patient relationship and bond.

Bishop Henry points out as well that

our Canadian tradition supports hospitals as non-profit public institutions, meaning any surplus of revenue over expenditure must go back into more health care,

another argument of principle, Madam Speaker. In this scenario Bill 11 proposes, we know that excess or surplus revenue is not going to go back into the delivery of more care. It's going to go to the profits of the shareholders of that for-profit company.

Bishop Henry says, "Health care has grown increasingly mechanistic, commercial and soulless." Just contemplate that for a moment, fellow members.

Under the rubric of a need for economy, we have downsized, rationalized, re-engineered and reorganized. But all too frequently, our efforts have simply created anorexic organizations, reciting a "lean and mean" mantra and threatening to fundamentally alter the trust and loyalty that grounds the physician-patient relationship.

Such insight and such a rich perspective on this bill and its intent. How do we see this government, Madam Speaker, responding to that type of expertise? I believe the government has referred to the bishop and his comments as something about it being a twerp. Just an affront.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, your time is up. Thank you.

Next we have Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. SAPERS: Point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Okay.

Point of Order Clarification

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. I rise under Standing Order 13(2) seeking some clarification from the chair on the matter that's before the Assembly right now.

DR. TAYLOR: We've already gone through that.

MR. SAPERS: I hear members saying that they've already gone through that, so I guess we'll have to sit here and listen to it again.

Madam Speaker, would you please confirm whether or not the

motion from the Deputy Government House Leader is a substantive motion?

10:40

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I believe the chair already said that it was.

MR. SAPERS: It is a substantive motion? You're confirming that. Thank you very much.

In that case, then, further under 13(2) I'd like you to explain why the rules have not been applied in regard to notice of motion when it comes to substantive motions?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: All right, hon. member. I've had advice that it's a superceding motion.

MR. SAPERS: Well, is that contrary to your comments just a moment ago that it was in fact a substantive motion?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I said that I've had further advice, and it's a superceding motion. This was already decided, and we've been through this. It's a superceding motion. Therefore, we cannot go back.

MR. SAPERS: I'm just curious, further under 13(2), then, Madam Speaker, is it the Clerk who makes a decision whether it's substantive or superceding or is it the chair? I understood from your comments just a moment ago that it was a substantive motion, so I would like your distinction between a substantive and a superceding motion so we can understand how you're applying the rules.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Well, superceding means that it takes precedence. We've been through this already. We spent quite a bit of time earlier. The decision was made by the chair, so we should get on with it. No point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Under 13(2), then, Madam Speaker, I'd like to know whether or not the House is still following the tradition of precedent by Speakers when it comes to the application of the rules?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I already asked for the next speaker, who is Edmonton-Strathcona. I'd already announced him.

MR. SAPERS: It's normal practice to recognize a member standing on a point of order. It is a legitimate point of order under 13(2). I'm asking under 13(2) if you would explain whether or not the rules of this House are still following precedent of decisions of other Speakers.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Perhaps I could help a little bit. Of course, under 13(1). I'm not going to get into the argument with the hon. member across the way, because this is simply a delaying tactic with respect to the issue, and he's a little hurt, as are all members of their caucus, at being totally unprepared for what happened this evening.

Nevertheless, Madam Speaker, you have explained the ruling. It was explained earlier. I would humbly ask that you apply what you're supposed to under 13(1) – that is, maintaining decorum within the House – and not allow members of the opposition to simply use the Standing Orders to try and delay or detract from the debate which is taking place.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I have ruled that there is no point of order and that the decision was made. So we'll now go on to the next speaker. [interjections] Excuse me. [interjections] Order. We have been through this. I have given you my ruling; it has been settled. There was no point of order, and we're ready to go on to the next speaker. Edmonton-Strathcona. [interjections] Excuse me. [interjections] Order. Order.

MR. SAPERS: Answer my question.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me. We have settled this matter. [interjections] Excuse me.

MR. SAPERS: You have not addressed my question.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me. Right now you are challenging the authority of the chair. I have had advice from the officials. I've given you the order that was made, and now we're ready to proceed with the debate. You have not spoken yet to this. You may speak when it's your turn.

Edmonton-Strathcona.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am rising under Standing Order 13(2). I am asking whether or not in this Chamber this evening we are still following the tradition of precedent in applying a Speaker's ruling to the running of the business of this Chamber, a simple question.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I listened with interest on the speaker phone. I find it rather interesting that some time ago, approximately an hour and a half ago, the chair clarified for the members of the Assembly what we were proceeding to do here with the motion that the hon. Deputy Government House Leader brought in. We went through Standing Orders. We went through *Beauchesne*. We have followed what is set out. What we utilize in this Assembly is what we follow.

These Standing Orders are reviewed from time to time by various House leaders and determinations are made whether they need to be revamped, revised, changed, added to, deleted from. Everything was fine. Now we have before us points of order seeking more clarification. This chair has ruled. For this evening and several other times during the proceedings of this Assembly I sit in this chair, and I have made the decision in keeping with what is here and in *Beauchesne*.

I repeatedly have heard for the last several minutes that there isn't enough debate on Bill 11. We have ample opportunity right now to debate Bill 11, because under this provision, "that this question be now put," we are able to revert to the original question. So there is ample time here for everyone in this Assembly who deems that they wish to do so to speak on Bill 11.

Now, we are following what has been moved here as outlined, as I've said. I find it somewhat alarming. One of the people in this House relieved me so I could go and make a phone call, and it has brought up all these different things when this had been ruled on approximately an hour and a half ago.

If you wish to see me tomorrow to discuss this, we can. But what I have done in this House and what my hon. member just proceeded to do is to follow the proceedings of the House as indicated by this Assembly through Standing Orders and as preceded by what is in *Beauchesne*.

Now, let us get on with the debate at hand. [interjection] Sit down, hon. member. [interjection] Sit down, hon. member. The chair is going to recognize the hon. member that was speaking, and that is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: Madam Speaker, it's a matter of concern to me and it should be a matter of concern to all of us that what's happening here tonight is to close debate, is to gag people from speaking on the most important bill in the history of this province, in the history of this Assembly as I know. Albertans tell us that this is the most important bill. They tell us that this is a bill they do not want to be rushed through this Legislature. They tell us that this is a bill they want to be heard about.

10:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, we are not in the committee stage of this bill.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I just assumed that since we're throwing away the other rules, I could just . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, would you please get back in your seat. Hon. member, now. [interjection] One moment, hon. member.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: May it be duly noted for *Hansard* exactly what transpired in this House.

The chair will say, before I go on, that the Speaker here often talks about decorum. I take very seriously the job the people of this Assembly voted me to do. It's very obvious that there are some members of this House that are very, very disrespectful, and I find it rather appalling. Several precedents for what has transpired here have happened in this House before, one going back to December 7 of 1998. If people sincerely want to do the business that Albertans want them to do in this Assembly, then these kinds of shenanigans should stop and debate should continue, because what was allowed here was for debate on the original question to be allowed.

Now, I want it duly noted that that hon. member left very disrespectfully, not listening to the chair, and I will be dealing with it tomorrow.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The second reading debate on this bill started with a great deal of fanfare on Tuesday of last week. We have had around three days of debate on the second reading of this bill. Tonight we already are rushing in to close debate, and I want to express my deep concern about this as I use my 20 minutes to say my piece on the motion before us.

I think the motion is unreasonable, I think it's arbitrary, and I think it's regrettable that this matter is being used to impose closure so early in the consideration of this bill. The Premier had indicated to Albertans that there will be full debate, that they will have an opportunity without fear of closure being called this early in the debate so that their views can be expressed through their elected representatives on the floor of this House. That certainly has not happened.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: How much time do you need?

DR. PANNU: There are members of the front bench who talk about

how much time you need. I think that what they need to ask and answer is how much time the people of Alberta want this House to have on this bill. This government has become far too frequently used to ignoring and disrespecting the people of Alberta and their concerns. This is not an ordinary bill, Madam Speaker. To see the member of the front bench taunting me by saying, "How much time do you need?" – I have my 20 minutes, but this House needs more time. To cut short the debate in this House by way of this motion is an insult to the people of Alberta. It's a slap in the face of their democratic rights, and that's why I say this motion must be regretted and regretted very deeply and regretted on behalf of my constituents who have been in and through my office perhaps thousands of times over the last month and a half to express their concerns.

Here I am faced with a closure motion three days into the debate on the second reading of the bill. The Premier has been making claims that there's confusion in the minds of the people of Alberta. They want to understand what the bill is about. Then what we hear tonight is the closure of the debate, the very debate demanded by Albertans in order that their questions can be addressed and addressed seriously. What we find here are members of the front bench turning themselves into hecklers rather than respecting their serious positions as members of the cabinet and respecting the decorum of this House and setting an example for the rest of us. We're supposed to look up to them. [interjection] Here I find now the minister of unlearning also stepping into the fray.

There are lots of things to be unlearned by these members sitting around here. One of the things they need to unlearn is this terrible arrogance they have and the terrible disrespect in which they hold Albertans who disagree with them. Now what we find here with respect to Bill 11 is that the vast majority of Albertans disagree with this government, and this government is trying to spit in their faces because it doesn't want to hear people disagree with it. I think that's wrong, Madam Speaker. That is wrong, and it should be recorded in this House that these members sitting on this side of the House are intolerant of those who disagree with them. They're disrespectful of the rules of democracy, and they're behaving like dictators, if I may say that.

I think that to keep them awake, to keep them listening to Albertans, I have to stand here and raise my voice on behalf of my constituents, on behalf of the constituents of these cabinet members who are sitting there. These members are betraying the expectations of their own constituents here tonight.

Madam Speaker, Bill 11 should never have been proceeded with. It's a bill that should be dropped. It should be dropped because this bill is incompatible with the spirit of medicare in Canada. It is an affront to the values that underlie medicare. It's an attempt to bring in privatization through the back door and bring in private, for-profit hospitals in order to strike the final blow that they think will undo the system. They've used the last seven years to Trojan-horse the system bit by bit, to undermine it. After seven years what this government has found is that Albertans still have a strong allegiance to the system that's been under fire in the hands of this government. This government is trying to destroy it. Albertans don't want to destroy it. They want it saved, protected, and enhanced.

So Bill 11 appears on the scene at the end of seven years of attempts to destroy the system, and this bill uses privatization as the only solution to all problems. This government has used, of course, privatization the same way as bloodletting was used in the medieval period by the quacks at that time to fix every malady. So what quacks did by relying on bloodletting to save people from pneumonia, from plague, from everything else, in the same way this government uses privatization as a sledgehammer to, quote, unquote, solve every possible problem. Privatization of health care doesn't work. This government started out by talking about cutting costs by

privatization. They couldn't find any evidence. Evidence to the contrary clearly demonstrates that private health care is more expensive, more costly, and delivers less. It has been piling up, so they have now retreated from defending Bill 11 by making references that it will save money for Albertans. Now they know it won't save money. Then they said that it will reduce pain and suffering by reducing waiting lines. There's now enough evidence that privatization, contracting out does not do that, so that argument is abandoned.

11:00

They want to bring in choice now, another argument. Choice for what? If you designate certain surgeries to be done only in the so-called designated surgical facilities but you want that surgery to be done in a full-fledged hospital, you won't have that choice. So the bill in fact removes from Albertans the choice to be looked after by a team of experts in a regular, fully equipped hospital. Now they will have to go to a surgical facility as designated by the likes of Mr. Dinning and Mr. Love and others. I think there are some other names being mentioned. I think Albertans know what all this is about. It's about privatizing a system in order that friends of the government can make their millions and billions out of this.

This government has been the enemy of public health care over the last seven years. What they are trying to accomplish by pushing this bill through this Legislature now is to demonstrate to Albertans that this is exactly what they always meant to do, and now they are going to do it regardless of what Albertans are saying.

So the bill before us, Madam Speaker, not only will lead to privatization increasing costs but also to the siphoning away of scarce and precious public dollars into private facilities, where they'll be used not to enhance the health of Albertans but to guarantee the profits of investors who want to run private, for-profit hospitals. That's what this bill is really about.

If doing this, if going this route, if legalizing private, for-profit hospitals under a new name means exposing Alberta's health care system and Canada's health care system to the threats that are inherent in an international agreement such as NAFTA, then so be it. If the Canadian system of medicare, the public health care system in Canada, will be sacrificed in the interest of serving a few private friends, if that means Albertans and Canadians are deprived of the best health care system in Canada that they have been able to build over the last 35 years, then that doesn't matter. That's not a matter of concern to this government.

The Premier has been using all kinds of false examples, falsifying data, using examples that are not relevant at all. For example, Madam Speaker, the Premier said earlier in the second reading debate that Shouldice Hospital was a model for what this government wants to do under Bill 11. Well, now it's very clear that that's a strange model. The Shouldice Hospital, which only does hernia repairs, was established in 1945, 23 years before Canadian medicare was born. In 1973 the Ontario government passed the Private Hospitals Act. Under this legislation, because private hospitals had been seen to be incompatible with medicare, no new private hospitals are allowed to be established. Existing private hospitals are being phased out. They're not allowed to expand. They're not allowed to be sold or even to make a profit. As their owners retire, their licences are revoked. Shouldice is one of only a few such private hospitals left in Ontario. Phasing out the remaining private hospitals has been the policy of Ontario governments of all political stripes, even the current Mike Harris government.

Setting up a scheme to legalize private hospitals for profit, owned on a commercial, for-profit basis, Madam Speaker, is a radical departure from Alberta's traditional community and publicly owned hospitals. Bill 11 also is a radical departure from the policy of other Canadian provinces to phase out any privately owned hospitals in their jurisdiction. There's no question that should Bill 11 become

law, there will be political pressures on other provincial governments to allow commercial, for-profit hospitals to establish in these provinces. Clearly the owners of the Shouldice Hospital are not going to want to operate under the onerous restrictions of Ontario's Private Hospitals Act if Alberta's rules are much more permissive. Hospital corporations will no doubt pressure other provincial governments to do the same thing that they are allowed to do in Alberta.

Another observation, Madam Speaker, that's worth noting. This government has pointed to the fact that most physicians' offices are privately owned. A physician's office delivers primary care from which a professional income is earned, mainly through billings to the Alberta health care insurance plan. While the method of remuneration is different for physicians than it may be for other health professionals such as nurses, who earn a salary, in practical terms they are the same. Doctors and nurses are both directly involved in delivering health services, and both derive an income from doing so. A doctor earning an income for delivering medical care is completely different than a hospital corporation contracting for public dollars with regional health authorities. The hospital corporation . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It's getting very, very noisy in here. We are not in Committee of the Whole. Can we please carry on so that the Speaker at least can hear the member?

DR. PANNU: The hospital corporation, Madam Speaker, has shareholders who expect to make a profit from their investment. As a commercial business, a hospital corporation would need to pay taxes. It would incur marketing and advertising costs to create demand for its services. Health care is a clear-cut case of market failure. The for-profit model does not work well within the context of a public good like health care.

Another argument, Madam Speaker, that the government has advanced in proceeding with Bill 11 is that we already have 52 private clinics doing day surgery. About half of these private clinics contract for public dollars with regional health authorities. The argument goes that since we already allow private businesses to do day surgeries, what's wrong with letting them do more complex surgeries requiring overnight patient stays? This very seductive and wrongheaded argument reminds me of a statement made several years ago by Dr. David Himmelstein of the Harvard Medical School. Dr. Himmelstein was commenting on the ever expanding role of commercial business interests in the American health care system. Himmelstein said, quote, that each step justifies the next step, end of quote. But until that step is achieved, the advocates for commercial medicine deny these steps will logically follow after that.

11:10

Applied to the Alberta context, Dr. Himmelstein's analogy works like this. We'll restrict private, for-profit hospitals to doing a limited number of surgeries requiring inpatient hospitalization at the beginning. Then we'll let them gradually expand into more and more complex surgeries. The argument goes like this. Well, the private sector seems to be doing okay in doing contract surgeries, so why not let them do hip replacements? After they do hip replacements for a while, then why not heart bypass surgeries? Expanding the role of the private, for-profit sector in health care has been a preoccupation of the Conservatives in this province for many years. It began many years ago, but it's now picking up speed.

Another good argument, Madam Speaker, that needs to be considered for not allowing Bill 11 to go forward is the uncertainties that are created under international trade rules such as those set out in the North American free trade agreement. The Conservative

government has spent considerable time and resources and public moneys countering the claims of those who argue that if Alberta opened the hospital sector to commercial involvement, it would have to do so equally to Canadian and foreign investors alike.

No one questions the fact that NAFTA allows the Alberta government to restrict health care delivery to public entities or to voluntary organizations which operate on a not-for-profit basis. However, if the government through Bill 11 opens the hospital sector to for-profit involvement, all bets are off. This is clear to most knowledgeable people with the exception of the deaf, dumb, and blind provincial Tory government. Unlike sectors such as transportation, telecommunication, and cultural industries there are no special laws requiring Canadian ownership in those sectors of health care open to commercial, for-profit involvement.

The minister of intergovernmental affairs has made much of the fact that . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I'm afraid your time is up, hon. member.

The hon. Minister for Health and Wellness.

MR. JONSON: Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would move that the Assembly do stand adjourned now until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:14 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Kryczka	Stelmach
Broda	Laing	Stevens
Cao	Magnus	Strang
Clegg	Marz	Taylor
Coutts	McClellan	Thurber
Ducharme	McFarland	Trynchy
Havelock	Melchin	Woloshyn
Hlady	Oberg	Yankowsky
Jonson	Paszkowski	Zwozdesky
Klapstein	Severtson	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Sapers
Bonner	MacBeth	Sloan
Carlson	MacDonald	Soetaert
Gibbons	Massey	

Totals:	For – 29	Against – 11
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[Motion carried]

[At 11:27 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 11, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/04/11

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently and the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, today I've been advised that there is quite a list, so let's have some patience with respect to several of the matters on the Routine today.

We'll first of all recognize the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition I received last Friday at one of my open houses urging the government to withdraw Bill 11.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition signed by 328 Albertans from Edmonton, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, Wabamun, Stony Plain, and Fallis. It is urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining our public health care system." I'm pleased to note that by the time the Official Opposition tables the petitions for today, which will be 4,317 additional, it will lead to a total to date of 50,159 Albertans from right across this great province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition signed by 340 residents of Sherwood Park. Their petition reads as follows:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table petitions signed by 205 Albertans from the communities of Edmonton, Wainwright, and Vegreville. These citizens "petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted this afternoon to present a petition signed by 257 Albertans from the communities of Calgary, Okotoks, and Cochrane who "urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege today to

present a petition on behalf of 789 Albertans from Lethbridge, Barons, Coaldale, Raymond, Longview, Cardston, Milk River, Medicine Hat, and Taber asking the Legislative Assembly to institute an after-hours law that would make sure that everybody has someone else working with them when they're working in businesses in Alberta.

As second petition, Mr. Speaker, is from 3,221 Albertans from Calgary, Lethbridge, Okotoks, De Winton, Coalhurst, Fort Macleod, Raymond, Duchess, Vulcan, Taber, Granum, and Pincher Creek. It's in a different form than the other one. This is a petition also requesting that a law be introduced to protect employees' lives when they work after hours.

Mr. Speaker, a third petition again is from 336 Albertans from Lethbridge, Claresholm, Redcliff, Medicine Hat, Coleman, Bellevue, Hillcrest, Blairmore, and Picture Butte. This is petitioning "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition this afternoon. It's petitioning "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." It's signed by 236 Albertans from Edmonton, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, and St. Albert.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 126 Albertans from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, and Morinville urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two petitions. The first one is signed by 734 Albertans who come from Priddis, Cold Lake, Vegreville, Spruce Grove, Edmonton, Edson, Onoway, Ardrossan, Leduc, St. Albert, Westlock, Morinville, Redwater, Calgary, Drayton Valley, Wetaskiwin, Westlock, La Crete, Sherwood Park, Rimbey, Gibbons, Tofield, Bon Accord, Whispering Hills, Thorhild, Bruderheim, and Boyle.

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by 69 Albertans. Both petitions are asking for this Assembly to bring in legislation to ban private, for-profit hospitals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present a petition signed by 264 Albertans from Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, Sherwood Park, and Ardrossan. They are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would

present a petition signed by 215 citizens from Edmonton, Stony Plain, Carvel, and Sherwood Park urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 233 people in St. Albert, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, Alberta Beach, Legal, Riviere Qui Barre, Calahoo, Onoway, Alcomdale, and Leduc. They are petitioning "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to present a petition signed by 218 Albertans from Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, Spruce Grove, and Sherwood Park. They are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to present a petition signed by 218 residents of Alberta from Edmonton and Sherwood Park. They are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased and proud to present to the Legislature today and table with the Assembly a petition from 230 residents of Edmonton, St. Albert, and Sherwood Park. Primarily they are from my constituency and were gathered by two elderly, courageous ladies. The petition is to "urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care," sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition supporting public health care from 219 residents from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and Ardrossan urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly that states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

It's signed by 239 Albertans in Slave Lake, Widewater, Grande Prairie, Wembley, High Prairie, Fox Creek, and Grouard.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present to the Assembly this afternoon. The first petition is from a group of 257 individuals from Edson and Sangudo. They are urging the Assembly and the government of Alberta "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." The majority of these signatures were acquired at a public meeting held in Edson on March 21 of this year.

Mr. Speaker, the second petition I have is from another 396 constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and my constituents are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Once again, hon. members, there's quite a lengthy list. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to have a petition on behalf of the Member for Lethbridge-East from March 23, 2000, read and received and, secondly, that a petition in my name from April 10 on private health care be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, request that the petition standing under my name be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday opposing private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition which I presented to the Assembly on April 10, 2000, regarding the government's promotion of private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would rise and ask that the petition under my name on the Order Paper be now read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. At this point in this afternoon's program I'd request that the petition I introduced the other day with respect to concerns about undermining public health care might now be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented the other day now be read and received. It was regarding supporting public health care in this province.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition I presented to the Legislature yesterday urging the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented regarding the undermining of public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would request that the petition I presented on April 10 regarding private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask with your permission that the petition I presented on April 10 from 225 Edmonton and area residents opposing private health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request the reading of the petition I presented to the Legislative Assembly on April 10 by 1,300 Edmonton residents requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, request that the petition I presented on April 10 signed by 286 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to public health care that I read yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name from April 3 with respect to people on night shifts now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 11, 12, and 13.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 30.

Thank you.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of the response to estimates from the March 13 subcommittee D meeting.

I'd also like to table five copies of the response to Public Accounts held on March 15 for the Department of Resource Development.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of the Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the last session I accepted motions for returns 233 and 234, and today I table the requisite number of copies of my responses to those two motions for returns.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated on March 15 during Committee of Supply, I am able to now table five copies of the responses to questions raised that evening.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings today. I'd like to table with the Legislative Assembly five copies of two news releases dated March 22, 2000, and April 7, 2000, concerning bills 207 and 208.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three tablings today. The first one is a letter from Debra Morris, chairperson, Edmonton presbytery, United Church of Canada, representing 30 churches in Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert area, and she's requesting the Premier to withdraw Bill 11.

The second one is from Ms Moira Hogg from Calgary, again requesting that the Premier withdraw the bill.

The third one, Mr. Speaker, is also from Calgary from Harry Chase protesting Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table three recent reviews of public opinion with respect to private hospital legislation currently before this Assembly. The first is the Angus Reid worldwide poll that shows that 65 percent of Albertans are very concerned about Bill 11, a poll released today by the Canadian Union of Public Employees showing that 55 percent of Albertans are opposed and 33 percent support Bill 11, and finally an A-Channel Insight Research health care poll showing that 58.5 percent of Albertans would oppose Bill 11, whereas only 21 percent support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quickly I have six items to table. Firstly, a cost-benefit analysis of trust on Bill 11; secondly, a Liberal news release of even date with respect to the government propaganda campaign on Bill 11; thirdly, the complete package evidencing Liberal costs of \$29,290.78; fourthly, an updated checklist for the reference of the Premier when he completes his outline of government costs in its propaganda campaign; fifthly, a summary entitled Government Closure of Second Reading on Bill 11 Limits Debate; and finally, a list of those MLAs not afforded a chance to speak at second reading on Bill 11.

Thank you very much.

Speaker's Ruling Inflammatory Language

THE SPEAKER: You know, hon. members, tabling returns and reports could be such a simple little thing. Oftentimes certain language is used in question period and during debate which may inflame, but there's really no need for such language to be used in tabling returns and reports. Let's be very clinical about this.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports
(continued)

MR. WICKMAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table this afternoon, one from Con Duemler providing an analysis of Bill 11 and asking that Bill 11 be withdrawn, the other from Dale Levy, who is expressing his opinion of Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings today. The first tabling is five copies of a May 2, 1994, letter from the former deputy minister of health suggesting that the Gimbel foundation bill could violate the Canada Health Act.

Along with that letter I'm tabling supporting documentation, Mr. Speaker, that faster care at a price, Klein wants medicare changes . . .

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS OLSEN: I have two tablings.

THE SPEAKER: Well, I'm sorry. I've recognized the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents

to table, both from constituents. The first is a letter from Brenda Gilboe, and with that came the Bill 11 mail-out.

The second was also the Bill 11 mail-out being returned from Ewa Cyganek.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from the mayor up north in the town of High Prairie, and he's sending a letter to the Minister of Environment about the concerns he and his town have with regard to the importation of foreign toxic waste at Swan Hills.

The second is a letter from Richard Collier of Calgary, and Richard is opposing any further development in Kananaskis, specifically the Genesis land corporation proposal.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings from Delwood school parents, the parent council: a letter signed by 102 parents representing 109 parents and 142 children discussing the many challenges incurred by the school as a direct result of current underfunding for public education.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a report completed by the Calgary Homeless Foundation, Housing Our Homeless, a stakeholder consultation assessing shelter needs in Calgary, dated March of 2000.

The second is a report released by the South Peace Social Planning Council, Working Together to Break the Chains of Poverty, an excellent analysis of the demographics of poverty in Alberta.

The third report I'd like to table this afternoon is titled It's Up to Us: Report of the Progressive Conservative National Caucus Task Force on Poverty, dated January of 2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter dated September 1, 1999, that I received from the hon. Minister of Justice, and in this letter we are discussing the Fatality Review Board.

I also have a policy declaration from the Canadian Alliance as my second tabling, Mr. Speaker. This is an initiative to restore democratic accountability by allowing free votes in a Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First of all, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a phone survey that has been ongoing in Castle Downs since the introduction of Bill 11 asking for constituents' comments.

The second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of a questionnaire with respect to Bill 11 that I placed in the local *Castle News*.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you

and through you to members of the Assembly a group of volunteers seated in your gallery. April 9 to 15 is National Volunteer Week. It's a special time set aside to honour people who donate their time and energy to their fellow citizens. It's also meant to raise awareness of the vital contribution volunteers make to our communities.

On your behalf, Mr. Speaker, and on behalf of the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta I'd like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to the following volunteers in the public information branch, visitor services office who are seated in your gallery: Jean Yates for eight years of service, Doreen O'Callaghan six years of service, Myrna Grimm two years of service, Pat Foster two years of service, Jean Sui two years of service, and Rita Alfrey two years of service. I'd also like to recognize Clive Lomax, who was not able to be with us this afternoon, for five years of service. I'd now ask that the group rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of the Assembly.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 64 students from Bluffton school. They are accompanied by teachers and supervisors Mr. Dan Eveleigh, Mrs. Sharon Johnston, and Ms Michelle Jean. I'd like to point out that they are seated in both the public and members' gallery, and I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce two parents from Delwood school council to the Legislative Assembly. They were responsible for obtaining all the signatures on the letters that I presented today. Mr. David Colburn and Wendy Keiver, if you would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 21 students from Mee-Yah-Noh elementary school. They are currently participating in the School in the Legislature program. They will be here all week. They had a debate this morning on a bill. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Mrs. Marjorie Scharfenberger; her father, Mr. Wes Rider, who is a retired principal from Edmonton public schools; and parent helper Mr. Leonard Bauder. They are seated in the members' gallery today, and with your permission I would ask they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and to introduce a good friend of mine to you and through you to members of the Assembly. Louise Kidney, a member of our constituency, certainly was a tremendous supporter to myself in our last campaign. She's sitting in the public gallery. I'd ask that she stand now and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and through you Matthew Holden of Spirit River and his fiancée, Ann Eikeland of Norway. We welcome Ann to Dunvegan and to Alberta and to Canada. Matthew and Ann are to marry on June 24

in Norway, and in August Ann will be moving to Canada to make Spirit River her home with Matthew. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly and wish them all the best.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 26 students from M.E. LaZerte high school in the Edmonton-Manning constituency. They're in the international baccalaureate program, grade 10 social studies. Their teacher accompanying them is Marie Freiha, and they're in the public gallery. With your permission I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to rise and introduce some special guests who will be joining us later in question period. We have with us this afternoon a total of 28 students from the Laurier Heights elementary school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Louise MacGregor, and parent helpers Jean Lundeen and Anne Lalonde. I would like to welcome these students to the Assembly. They have a fantastic French-immersion program at Laurier Heights school in the constituency of Edmonton-Riverview. I would ask all members to welcome them to the House this afternoon.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, likewise, I would wish to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 37 guests that will arrive from Jean Vanier school today, three teachers and four parent helpers who will join us soon. Accompanying the students are Nadine Gerrie, Darlene Korpany, Mrs. Mairead Michniewski, Teresa Busenius and teachers Vicki Whalley, Bob Dulaba, and Kristen Kowalchuk. I ask the Assembly to welcome them as they will be walking in forthwith.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my very special pleasure today to introduce to you and to all of my colleagues in the Assembly two very special guests, Mr. and Mrs. Koticha, who are very new Canadians. Jitendra Koticha is a civil engineer and a businessman in Edmonton. Neeta Koticha is an accomplished artist. Since her childhood Neeta has been very creative and enjoyed painting on canvas and fabric. Her imagination flows in both ancient and modern art, uniquely blending both culture and time. They are seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to now rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a now frequent visitor to the Assembly. Mr. Con Duemler has joined us again this afternoon. He is a friend to seniors in particular in this province and has recently just prepared an excellent analysis of Bill 11. I hope that all members of the government caucus in particular will read that analysis. I thank Con for that. I welcome him to the Assembly and would ask him to please rise and be welcomed by all members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very

pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Melissa Wheeler. Melissa is participating in Mr. Speaker's Youth Parliament as the MLA for Edmonton-Centre for the Rupertland Municipal Party. Melissa is also a grade 11 student at Victoria school of performing and visual arts. Her favourite class is drama, so she was very well matched with me. I'd also like to thank her grandmother, who encouraged her to come and participate in the youth parliament. Melissa is in the public gallery, and I would ask her to please stand and accept the warm welcome of the Legislature.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Limiting Debate on Bill 11

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not only is public health care on the critical list in this province, so is democracy. The members of this Assembly are elected representatives and are the voices of the people of this province. To stifle these voices is an affront to the people of this province and an act of cowardice. My questions are to the Premier. When dismantling the public health care system in this province, how does the Premier determine how much time he will provide for the views of Albertans to be spoken and which voices will be heard? How much time is enough?

MR. KLEIN: The simple answer is: as much time as is reasonable, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, in response to the preamble we are not dismantling public health care. We're protecting publicly funded health care as we know it today and fulfilling our commitment in law – if they're opposed to it, let them stand up and say so – to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. That can hardly be dismantling it.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know to what aspect of democracy the leader of the Liberal opposition alludes. As I understand it, there was an amendment. It was supposed to be a reasoned amendment proposed by the Liberals, which was accepted, but only seven members of their caucus bothered to show up to even vote on their own amendment. Seven members. That is a disgrace to democracy, and the Liberals should be ashamed of themselves.

MR. DICKSON: Point of order.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, does the Premier decide to limit debate when he's afraid of what his own backbenchers might say?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, democracy in action. There were 31 members of the government caucus in the House to vote. There were only seven members – now, this leader of the Liberal opposition will say: well, they were in the back room. Right? They were in the back room, and they were ready to come out. Do they not have speakers in the back room? Do they not have a party whip? Do they not have any discipline over there in the Liberal caucus? You know, they talk about democracy, and when they have a chance to participate in democracy, they don't even show up.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given this Premier's record of invoking closure 26 times to cut off debate when his predecessor invoked it once under Premier Lougheed, does he muzzle debate when he's afraid to hear what Albertans are saying about his legislation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I noticed with a great deal of interest that at the Liberal policy conference over the weekend the delegates, all 300 of them, voted not to rule out the use of closure as a tool in the legislative process.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I hold out the promise again: if the Liberals promise not to filibuster, we promise not to use closure. Now, I understand and maybe they can correct me if . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. the Premier, you have the floor.

2:10

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we haven't used closure. There's still lots of time to speak on second reading. [interjections] If they care to show up, they will have the opportunity to speak to second reading.

MR. DICKSON: Point of order.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what I find is an absolute disgrace and an affront to democracy and affront to this Legislature is that they introduced an amendment, and only seven of them showed up. And they talk about democracy. They have made a mockery out of democracy.

THE SPEAKER: That first exchange of questions led to two points of order for me to deal with later. Sometimes one should look at these points of order during the question period, but let's see how we develop further.

Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We must open up the government to more public scrutiny to give us in effect a more human face; I foresee more meaningful participation by private members, free votes in the Legislature: not my words but the words of the current Premier on September 17, 1992, when he announced his candidacy for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party. Albertans vote for their MLAs in the expectation that they will represent their views in the Legislature, but this Premier seems to have a view contrary to the words he used when he launched his leadership in 1992. He sees MLAs as pawns to push his agenda for private hospitals, contrary to his earlier pledge. My question is to the Premier. Why has this Premier broken his promise made in 1992 to Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that more private members' bills have been passed since 1993 than ever in the history of the Legislature, and the largest percentage of those bills were the result of free votes, Mr. Speaker.

Now, as for the leader of the Liberal opposition's assertion that MLAs are being used as pawns, I would only hearken back to those who were private members when the leader of the Liberal opposition was the health minister. The biggest complaint that I received and one of the reasons she lost the leadership is that in fact she was using the MLAs as pawns.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why won't this Premier let his MLAs represent the wishes of their constituents on his private hospital policy? Why is that?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no private hospitals policy. Therefore the question is irrelevant.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will this Premier just change his mind and let the MLAs vote according to the wishes of their constituents?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the bill before us is a government bill, and therefore there is caucus solidarity. I'm sure the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition understands that. When she was minister of health in the Conservative government, she absolutely demanded, as she does, I understand, in her own caucus, absolute solidarity. That's why none of these people ever stray from their script. I'm told by members of the Liberal caucus that they are not allowed to stray from their script. Now, is that being dictatorial or not? I think it is. That's not the way I operate with my caucus, but it's obviously the way she is still operating with her caucus.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DR. TAYLOR: Three strikes and you're out, Nancy.

MRS. MacBETH: A government that dictates the way its members vote, a government that cuts off debate . . .

THE SPEAKER: Please. I'm going to let you start over again, but I'm going to ask certain members to my right, who are members of the government caucus, to kindly button it, and that includes the Minister of Innovation and Science.

The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, a government that dictates the way its members vote, a government that cuts off debate, a government that ignores the wishes of the people and forces its members to toe the party line: I am not talking about some dictatorship but rather talking about Alberta. My questions are to the Premier. Will this Premier confirm that part of the reason he has muzzled the voice of Albertans is to save his backbenchers from being forced to toe the party line in direct conflict with the views of the majority of their constituents?

MR. KLEIN: Well, the simple answer to that question, Mr. Speaker, is no, absolutely not. We operate in a much less restrictive fashion than the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition was used to when she was a member of cabinet, a member of Treasury Board, and a member of priorities. I recall as a minister having to set up at least three or four weeks in advance an opportunity to even have a phone call with that minister. That's the way she operated, and that's the way she's still operating today.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I can understand that the Premier doesn't want to answer the questions, but let's try again. What is so important about this government's private health care policy that this Premier is muzzling not only the opposition but his own caucus as well?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you know, I would ask each and every member of this caucus as they proceed through the debate on Bill 11 or any other bill in the Legislature to stand up and slip in the word that they're being muzzled. I don't know. I look around, and I see this marvelous caucus here. Just nod. Can you shake your heads? Are you being muzzled?

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier has shot down the opposition, has muzzled his own caucus, is ignoring doctors, nurses, the majority of Albertans as represented in the three recent polls that I have tabled, just who is this Premier listening to in this discussion?

MR. KLEIN: We're listening to Albertans, Mr. Speaker, and overall Albertans have a tremendous amount of trust. What we do from time to time might not be the most popular thing to do, but as I've always said, you have to make tough decisions. That's something that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition failed to do when she was minister of health. She would never go out into the constituencies. Instead, she sent her bureaucrats out to do her dirty work for her. This caucus is willing to stand solidly behind a decision that is made collectively by all members and make the tough decisions to do what is right for this great province of ours. That's what it's all about.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: The citizens of Alberta may not necessarily be aware that the Legislative Assembly of their province sat until nearly midnight last night. One tends to think that there's a correlation between lateness of sitting and exuberance the next day in question period.

The hon. leader of the third party.

2:20

DR. PANNU: Thank you . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Why don't we just take the next couple of minutes and everybody just yell back and forth at one another. Okay? Just do it. Hon. leader of the third party, wait for the all the exuberance – let them go back and forth, yell and everything else.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Private Health Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Poll after poll, including the one released just this morning by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, shows that the opposition to the private, for-profit hospital scheme is rock solid while what little support the government has is soft, soft, and soft. The government has become so desperate that it's now making medical decisions to try to blunt public opposition. My questions are, of course, to the Premier. Now that your government has made the long overdue decision to do away with direct patient charges for foldable lenses, will it move quickly to get rid of patient charges for other upgraded medical appliances like titanium hips?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know, and I'll have the hon. minister supplement relative to the situation vis-a-vis upgraded services.

There was one interesting outcome from that poll. I'm not discounting the poll. I understand there was a sampling of 700 people. This survey was done by HRGS WorkScans in Ottawa. I don't know the firm, but we have to assume that it was a reputable polling firm.

Question 4 says, understanding that the opinion showed that the majority of people were moderately opposed or strongly opposed to the bill, "For each of the following possible amendments, please let me know whether it may or may not help you change your opinion": "a ban on overnight stays," 21 percent yes, 68 percent no. So

obviously the 68 percent were fundamentally, ideologically opposed to the bill. But here's the very interesting one. It says, "A guarantee of no extra billing": 71 percent of those polled said yes, that would have an influence on them changing their mind. Perhaps we can accommodate that if the hon. member would help us.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party. We've been going on to long answers. Brevity. There are many, many members here today.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is very little in that poll for the Premier to seek comfort in.

My second question to the Premier: how many Calgarians had to endure long recovery times and additional suffering simply because the government has until now turned a blind eye to the practice of add-on patient charges for foldable lenses?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond to that.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it would be accepted across this nation that Calgary through the significant number of very expert doctors has probably had the best, most advanced health care relative to eye care in the country. They have pioneered a number of new techniques, and I think Calgarians are well served.

With respect to the overall issue of foldable versus solid lenses, Mr. Speaker, this is something that we have asked to be assessed by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, because we know that the science is changing. There is continuing evaluation of what is the best type of appliance for eyes. We also have looked at what other provinces do, and generally speaking, they do not cover the foldable lens accept for Ontario and Prince Edward Island, as I understand it.

After an overall assessment and noting that, yes, there was inconsistency in the province, generally speaking in terms of the rural parts of the province outside of Edmonton and Calgary providing foldable lenses and the two major cities not doing so, both in terms of patient comfort and in terms of consistency across the province, we made the announcement that has been communicated today.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister still hasn't answered the question on the number of Calgarians who were put in this position.

My last question to the hon. Premier: why is the government choosing to make piecemeal changes, such as the decision on affordable lenses, rather than doing what Albertans really want, which is to scrap its private, for-profit hospital scheme?

MR. KLEIN: There is no private, for-profit scheme, Mr. Speaker. Basically, the bill comes about as the result of a request by the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the federal minister to provide some rules and regulations as those rules and regulations affect surgical clinics. The simple fact is that there are 52 surgical clinics now in operation in this province. Many of those clinics were stand-alone facilities, and in recent years, with Alberta's adherence to Minister Marleau's request, with the elimination of facility fees, those clinics are now contracting to hospitals. What we need to have are simply rules and regulations relative to contracting out as it affects surgical clinics that now do 152 different procedures, as I understand it, and perform about 20,000 procedures a year within the publicly funded system. All we want to do is put some fences around them. It's as simple as that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Foldable Intraocular Lenses

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the announcement made earlier this morning about the foldable lenses being paid for by the public system, I'd ask the Minister of Health and Wellness to elaborate on the reasons for the move and if the public health system will also be paying for foldable lenses supplied in the private surgical facilities.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health and Wellness as an integral part of the government overall is fulfilling its responsibility in continually assessing the provision of services under our publicly funded, publicly administered system. I would remind members of the Assembly that periodically we make changes in coverage. A very good example would be the whole area of funding approval for the coverage of certain pharmaceuticals, and the same is the case with respect to appliances.

This issue of foldable versus solid lenses has been a matter of discussion for many months. As all members of the Assembly would know if they were interested in this particular area, there has been a debate on the whole issue of what is medically required: are there advantages in having the foldable lens? Mr. Speaker, after an overall assessment of the situation and looking at also, yes, the need to have consistency across the province, we made the announcement that was conveyed to the public today.

2:30

MR. LOUGHEED: Further, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: regarding the benefit of the foldable lens to the patient, would he elaborate on that and why the publicly funded health system did not previously pay for that lens?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it – and I can only speak from a layman's perspective as it is explained to me – as the foldable lens went into use in certain parts of Canada and in this province, there was an ongoing assessment made of the benefits of using the lens. It has been determined over a period of time that it does help in terms of comfort and recovery time following an operation, and that is deemed to be important for patients, albeit both types of lenses do serve basically the same purpose or perform the same way in terms of restoring or improving one's sight.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to the same minister: would he comment please on whether the hard lens is an inferior product as compared to the soft lens?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that in terms of the actual restoration or improvement of sight after a certain surgical procedure has been done, the results are very, very, very comparable, but as I've said, in terms of recovery time, in terms of comfort and certain other factors, it has at least for a significant period of time an advantage over the solid lens.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Wednesday this Premier made a commitment to us in this Assembly to release the 30

blanked-out pages from his private hospitals policy, including focus group research, if the Official Opposition would release the results of its focus group research. Well, the Official Opposition has not conducted any focus groups on the Premier's private health care scheme. We don't need to do that because we listen to the thousands of Albertans who communicate by faxes, letters, e-mails, public meetings, and telephone calls. My questions are all to the Premier. Let me start by asking the Premier this: given that the Official Opposition has released and in fact tabled today the full costs of its campaign to protect public health care in Alberta, will this Premier now release all of the invoices, the receipts, the copies of the contracts from his taxpayer funded propaganda campaign at least since it was initiated in June of 1999? Will he live up to the commitment he made last Wednesday?

MR. KLEIN: There was no propaganda campaign. I don't know what the hon. member is talking about, Mr. Speaker. The bill that was mailed out purports to be law. There is nothing more honest and straightforward than the law. This hon. member, if I can use that word, is a lawyer. He knows what the law is all about. Or maybe he doesn't. He's sat here in this Legislative Assembly day in and day out making a mockery out of the law and himself.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my follow-up question to the Premier would be this: will he in fact do what he said he would do last Wednesday? Will he make available the full particulars of those focus groups? We don't need names; we just want the input, Mr. Premier, through the Speaker.

MR. KLEIN: Yes.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question is: will the Premier, then, fill out the checklist that we had provided as a courtesy earlier this afternoon that gives us the full particulars of all of the costs and expenses that this government has incurred in terms of promoting its private health care project?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the public accounts provide that checklist.

I don't have the tablings, and I don't have the checklist. I find it incomprehensible for this leader to stand up and honestly say that they only spent – what was it? – \$290. I mean, the radio ads, the television ads, the brochures. How much did it cost to produce this piece of garbage? And how much did it cost to produce this? You know, I've had some experience in media and public relations. You don't produce this kind of garbage propaganda and send it to hundreds of thousands of people for \$290. Who is this member trying to kid? What is the cost of this? Are you saying that this cost \$290? Mr. Speaker, he sits there and lies. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The only two teams in the House that followed the decorum of the House in the last few minutes were the team led by the hon. leader of the third party and the team led by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Endangered Species

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents and other Albertans work with conservation groups to protect the natural habitat of animals on their private property. Today they're concerned about the federal government's endangered

species legislation that was introduced earlier, and I'm not talking about Liberals. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. What are you doing to ensure that Albertans' rights as landowners are protected, Mr. Minister?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to say that we've worked very co-operatively with landowners, because it is our view that co-operation with landowners is the most critical thing that we can do to ensure that the habitat for these species is protected. As minister responsible for wildlife for the province of Alberta I can assure you that I'm working with my department and with landowners and with nongovernment agencies and others to ensure that we do take steps to protect wildlife and its habitat.

Now, it would come as a surprise to many Canadians, Mr. Speaker, that the last time a mammal was extinct in Canada was back in the 1920s, and the last time a bird was extinct was the passenger pigeon, which also was roughly 85 years ago. Interestingly, I'm advised that the last fish to be made extinct in the province of Alberta was a fish in Banff national park, the longnose dace.

So, Mr. Speaker, that raises an interesting question as to the necessity for the legislation that was tabled today by the federal minister, Mr. Anderson, his Species at Risk Act. First of all, I think we are doing a good job with our legislation, and we do have a number of outstanding examples where we have brought species back from the brink of extinction through programs that we've undertaken.

Mr. Speaker, what this government opposes is the use by the federal government of their criminal power authority to enforce what I believe to be a confrontational and punitive approach to the protection of species. Now, Minister Anderson himself says that 99 percent of Canadians are doing the right thing when it comes to protection of species at risk. I agree with him, and that raises an interesting question. If you have legislation that many landowners will find offensive, will they in fact comply with it? The question then is: will this in fact have the exact opposite effect of what the Minister of the Environment from the federal government is trying to achieve?

Mr. Speaker, I'd simply like to conclude this by saying that we believe co-operation with landowners is the most critical thing that we can do to ensure that there's protection of habitat and species in the province of Alberta.

2:40

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Given that the fox will take more burrowing owls than any human, what is Alberta doing to respect landowner rights and respect the protection of endangered species co-operatively?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we are interested in partnerships. We are interested in co-operation. In fact, in 1996 the federal government, with the provinces of Canada, signed an accord, a national accord for the protection of species. That accord, in my opinion, was a good model for co-operation among provinces, territories, the federal government, and stakeholder groups. However, this legislation seems to fly in the face of that very accord.

We've been involved provincially for over 25 years with solid legislation, our Wildlife Act, which protects plants, insects, invertebrates, and fish. Mr. Speaker, we've expanded our traditional coverage of these areas. We've in fact had our legislation reviewed by the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy, and they indicate that Alberta is in a very good position to meet its obligations, as set out in the accord, for the protection of endangered species.

Mr. Speaker, we are improving our standard conditions and

buffers to prevent disturbance or displacement of threatened or endangered species in areas of industrial activity. But I must reiterate that co-operation with landowners is critical, and it's the reason why we've done such a good job of protecting endangered species in this province.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. I do know that the federal government has a group of scientists and specialists that identify and track endangered species in Canada. Would you please let me know what you've done to complement this with common sense in Alberta?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have co-operated with the federal government and others and with COSEWIC, which is the committee that the hon. member is referring to. COSEWIC is the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. We have worked with their scientists, and that was pursuant to the accord. The accord, in my opinion, is a model for co-operation that, if lived up to by the provinces and the territories and the federal government, I think would be a continued good model for the protection of species in Canada.

Now, Mr. Speaker, under our own Wildlife Act we do have an Endangered Species Conservation Committee, which is chaired by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. The purpose of that committee is to identify management and recovery of species at risk in the province of Alberta. The input is then provided to the federal committee and outlines the progress and the initiatives that we are taking. We can report great progress on species such as the peregrine falcon, the sage grouse, Sprague's pipit. It's been accomplished by working with our landowners, with our stakeholders, with nongovernment organizations. Albertans through this process have been educated and have worked with us co-operatively, and that has been key.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 27 at the Amethyst Lodge a group of concerned residents in Jasper held a vote on private health care, and all except one were opposed to privatization of the public health care system. The Member for West Yellowhead stated: the people spoke to me here tonight; if all the people of West Yellowhead said no, then I'd have to stand up, but the big thing is, I'm only one voice out of 64. To the Premier: would you let this one member speak out and represent the voices of the Albertans he was elected to represent?

MR. KLEIN: If the hon. member is alluding to the Member for West Yellowhead, well, he can speak out as much as he wants, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet, I would like to take this opportunity to apologize sincerely and most profusely to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I did call him a liar. I understood him to say it was \$290. I guess the chattering back and forth drowned it out, the \$29,290.

I accept the breakdown, Mr. Speaker, of the costs associated with the Liberal's propaganda campaign, and I again apologize to the hon. member because I didn't hear the \$29,000 part of his answer. I just heard \$290, so I do apologize.

MRS. SOETAERT: My second question, Mr. Speaker. Given that last night in a debate in St. Albert people wanted their MLA to

represent their views against this government's privatization, will the government allow the Member for St. Albert to vote the way her constituents want her to?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no private health care bill on the table. I can understand why members of this caucus would not participate in a debate on private health care, because there is nothing, and that's what I find so offensive about this pamphlet. Whether it's included in the \$29,290 or not is beside the point. The pamphlet, no matter how much it cost the taxpayers of this province, is wrong. It is misleading. It is fraudulent, because it says that it legalizes private, for-profit hospitals. That is wrong. It says that it "creates a two-tier health care system." That is wrong. That is fraudulent. That is misleading. That is absolutely wrong. That is false, and they should be held accountable for putting out false advertising. It says, "opens the door to extra charges without patient protection." That is absolutely wrong, as you will see by the amendments to address this particular situation as a result of our correspondence with Mr. Rock and our consultations with the public.

Here is the biggest – what can I say? This is the biggest fabrication, and this is the most flagrant of all the malicious information that the Liberals are putting out, paid for by taxpayers. They say that the bill permits queue-jumping. That is wrong, wrong, wrong. The bill specifically and absolutely prohibits queue-jumping.

Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of vicious, malicious misinformation that the Liberals have been talking about. When this hon. member talks about town hall meetings, it's no wonder there is fear and confusion, and it's no wonder that members of our caucus won't attend those contrived, those phony kinds of meetings when they're discussing this kind of malicious, vicious misinformation.

MRS. SOETAERT: My final question to the Premier: how many more government MLAs are not allowed to represent the wishes of their constituents who are opposed to the privatization of health care? How many more?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, why would any of the hon. members of the governing caucus attend a meeting that is predicated on this kind of malicious and very deliberate misinformation, this kind of misinformation that portrays the face of the leader of the Liberal opposition? You know, I can't for the life of me understand why she would allow her name and her face to be attached to fraudulent misinformation, deceit, and a total misrepresentation of what Bill 11 is all about. Why this hon. member would allow herself to be associated with something that is so false and so misleading and so malicious is beyond me.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

2:50 **Brewery Industry Labour Disputes**

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are breweries in our Calgary-Fort riding, and there are a number of my high-spirited constituents working in the brewery industry and distribution system. My question today is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. We've heard a lot about the labour dispute affecting the Brewers' Distributor Ltd. in Calgary. Could the minister provide an update on this dispute?

MR. DUNFORD: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that this is a private matter, of course, between the Brewers' Distributor Ltd. and the union that represents the employees. As of

this moment in time, it's my understanding that no job action has begun.

Last Friday there was a vote that was supervised on the last offer of the employer, and we received word earlier today that that vote in fact turned down the employer's offer by a very wide margin.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is also to the minister. Can the minister tell us what will happen as a result of the workers rejecting the proposal?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I don't want to speculate, Mr. Speaker, on what the parties would do next. However, I think it should be clear that the union is in a legal position to strike. If they decided to do that, of course they would present the employer with that particular notice and could then take that legal job action in 72 hours. For their part, the employer of course can conduct a lockout poll and choose to lock out their workers.

Now, this is a situation that has happened in Edmonton. I'm not sure that anyone is particularly happy with that kind of a situation, but once again, Mr. Speaker, we have a democracy in this particular province. We have freedom for employees to bargain collectively. We have freedom for an employer to conduct their business. So what we have in the situation in Calgary, as well as in the dispute that's ongoing currently in the city of Edmonton, is legal entities practising their legal obligations under legal legislation.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is also to the same minister. What steps is the government taking to assist the parties involved?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, we've been involved for a period of time now in the sense of having appointed a mediator. The mediator has worked with the parties and of course is still on standby, and I believe he's meeting today with one or both of the parties.

I guess the point is, hon. member, that we are doing what we can in order to come to grips with this particular situation. So we're there, we'll work as hard as we can on this situation, but again this is a private matter between the employer and employees.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A month ago a dedicated group of Albertans came to this Assembly with a petition from Red Deer and area signed by 5,000 citizens from central Alberta opposing this government's privatization of public health care. The former Treasurer and still hon. Member for Red Deer-North recognized the importance of free votes in a democracy and is quoted in his web site as saying that "where an MP finds that a clear consensus has been reached on an issue, his or her responsibility is to represent that consensus over party or personal views." Just a week ago the hon. Member for Red Deer-South described the concerns of his constituents when he was saying in quoting them, to quote him: with a probability of more opposition than there has been for it. My questions are to the Acting Premier, if there be so on that side. Why is this government ignoring the voices and the wishes of the people of Red Deer?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, this government listens very closely to the voices of people from all over this province, including the people of Red Deer. There is an opportunity for debate in this

House. There have been I believe, if I'm not mistaken, some 700 minutes of possible debate on this bill. I believe that during that debate there's been ample opportunity for both sides of the House to reflect the views of their constituents, to reflect the views that people have given them over the period of time. But I will – and it is well documented by standing votes in this House – place this government's record on free votes in the Legislature against any other party in this House, most certainly the opposition party.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, why won't the Premier and his government whip allow those representatives from Red Deer to truly represent the interests of their people by speaking for their people in a free vote on that particular issue?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the two government MLAs from Red Deer have spoken in this House, and the Member for Red Deer-South most recently in this debate had his opportunity, with the amount of time that was allotted to each and every member in this House to speak on this matter. This caucus has the opportunity to debate this fully, and they will vote on this bill representing what they believe is right and based on the input they've had from talking to people all over this province.

MR. WHITE: Will the government caucus not allow the members to represent those that have voiced their concerns through poll after poll, through all the information you've received in this House, in the Assembly, and outside in a true free vote? Not a caucus controlled vote but a free vote.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate and I know every member of this caucus appreciates the concern that the member is showing for this government caucus. However, I think this government caucus has demonstrated and demonstrated in the last election that they're quite capable of taking care of their own concerns. I would just advise the hon. member across the way to look after the needs and the views of the Liberal caucus. I would suspect that they could use his help a little bit more.

3:00

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll call upon the first of three hon. members to participate in Members' Statements.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Leaders of Tomorrow Awards

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to acknowledge the leaders of tomorrow awards that have recently been presented to young people in my constituency in recognition of their hard work and volunteer efforts in their communities. These awards are given to young volunteers in four age categories, between six and 21 years of age, who have demonstrated outstanding dedication and excellence in their community service and work.

In the Camrose area 19 outstanding young people were nominated to receive leaders of tomorrow awards. Thirty-three outstanding young people were nominated from the city and county of Wetaskiwin and the town of Millet. Each nominee is given a certificate and an invitation to a reception in their honour. At the March 22 reception in Camrose, Melissa Knockleby, Cari McIllduff, Savon Meak, Michael Wetsch, and Amy Armstrong were named as the recipients of the year 2000 awards. At the ceremony held at the Reynolds-Alberta Museum last evening in Wetaskiwin, Kristine Huot, Chris Kirwin, Cody Soanes, and Shawn Gist were awarded

this recognition. The winners were given an engraved plaque to recognize their efforts and a \$100 cheque that they will contribute to a nonprofit organization of their choice.

Congratulations to all award winners and recipients for the contributions you have made to your communities and for the important work you do as volunteers. You are leaders of today, and your service and generosity which is recognized now will make you leaders of tomorrow.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Pine Shake Roofing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No one would argue that education should be a top priority for government. Parents warn of overcrowded classrooms, overworked teachers, and having to fund-raise for things like textbooks that are essential learning tools. That makes the situation facing two schools in St. Albert even more appalling. L'école Marguerite d'Youville and l'école Marie Poburan are facing a quarter million dollar bill to replace the rotting pine shakes on their roofs. What a complete waste of taxpayers' money, money that should be going into classrooms to help educate our children. Even worse, these pine shakes were approved and promoted by this very government who is now forcing Alberta's children to pay for their bungling. The Premier was in St. Albert last June and made a promise to set up a task force on the pine shake issue, quote, to see how we can bring about a shared responsibility for this problem, end of quote. I guess we can add this to the growing list of the Premier's promises not kept.

The Premier and the government have continued to dodge this issue by claiming that they do not consider testing for durability as a part of their job when documents show that they did indeed check for durability in 1991 when a roofing contractor warned that untreated pine shakes were a faulty product. Schoolchildren would be sent to the corner for telling such an obvious untruth, but this government just turns a blind eye and continues with business as usual.

While these St. Albert schools see thousands of much-needed dollars paying for a government mistake, the government picks and chooses and decides who to help and when. It has given lottery money to some community groups so they can replace their rotting pine shake roofs. What a double standard. What could be more important than making sure that all money needed for education is going into the classroom to benefit students, not cover government mistakes? The government acted in bad faith by advancing its political agenda at the expense of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Volunteer Week

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a Member of the Legislative Assembly, as a member of the government, and as a representative of the constituency of St. Albert, I wish to pay tribute to one of the most important segments of our society, the volunteer sector. This week has been proclaimed as Volunteer Week, and the theme of this millennium year is: volunteering, a time-honoured tradition. I believe the volunteer spirit of Albertans is contributing directly to the health and to the well-being of our communities.

I would also like to acknowledge the Wild Rose Foundation, who in collaboration with Volunteer Alberta facilitates the provincial focus on Volunteer Week. This year 112 Alberta communities,

which, I might add, is a record number, representing more than 2 million Albertans are participating in this weeklong series of events.

In my own community last Saturday night we recognized the leaders of tomorrow, specifically Shannon Davidson, Alishia Mannix, Stephannie Britton, Gillian Hansen, Kirk Duffee, and the group and members of the St. Albert Youth Council. We also recognized the nominees for the volunteer citizen of the year: Matthew Boiko, Anne Emberly, Nancy Nelson, John Power, and Millie Seitz.

In recognizing past citizens of the year and citizens of the decade, we did recognize the volunteer citizen of the decade from 1990 to the year 2000, the Hon. Lois E. Hole, Lieutenant Governor of Alberta.

I am very proud of all of these citizens who represent our community and who contribute so well to the well-being of St. Albert. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I have three notices for points of order today. As the agenda today involves time for private members, the plea here is for brevity with respect to these points of order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on your first point of order.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

MR. DICKSON: The authority would be *Beauchesne* 408(2). In the first set of questions from the Leader of the Official Opposition to the Premier, the Premier responded by talking about an event last night in the Assembly and indicated that there were only seven Liberals there to vote. The point is that the Votes and Proceedings are clear. What it also indicates is that there were 31 government members present. There are 64 members of the government caucus. By my limited mathematical skills, that makes 33 members of the government caucus also missing. So it seems to me it does nothing other than flame an argument to attempt to suggest that there's less than full participation from one caucus when the Premier's own caucus was less than 50 percent staffed.

Those were the observations I wanted to make on this point of order. Thank you.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously there's no point of order at all on that point, and it's surprising that it was even raised given that the first questions from the Leader of the Official Opposition today were trying to point out some sort of insinuation that democracy itself had died because of what happened last night. The Premier quite rightly pointed to the Votes and Proceedings of the House, which showed that opposition members couldn't be bothered to show up to vote for their own motion. To make those types of insinuations and direct comments in the preambles to a question was clearly inflammatory, clearly designed to get the type of answer that they got. Then to stand up on a point of order to argue that the answer was not appropriate because it didn't go far enough to detail all the rest of the details of the Votes and Proceedings is really quite strange.

The fact of the matter was that democracy didn't die last night. That the Liberal members opposite didn't come out to support their own motion is their problem. Standing Order 47, the motion that was moved, gives every member of this House an opportunity to participate in debate at second reading once again. In fact, debate at second reading has now proceeded far longer than debate on second reading on any bill this House has seen for a long, long time. The hon. member should know and the hon. Leader of the Opposition in posing her questions this afternoon clearly should know that debate in second reading relates to the principle of the bill. We dealt with

the amendment last night, which attempted to negative the principle of the bill, and we go on to continue debate on second reading tonight under Standing Order 47.

Democracy is still alive and well. The fact that the Premier alluded to the Votes and Proceedings, which is the written record of the House that is available for all members to look at and to tell the public about, and that only seven of their members cared to show up to vote for their own amendment is not the fault of the government, nor is it a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. members might like to read *Beauchesne* 289, the Canadian House of Commons, which says: "Standing Order 15 states that 'every Member is bound to attend the service of the House unless leave of absence has been given him or her by the House'." The chair has also noted on other occasions that it's the duty of all hon. members to attend this House. There were a lot of folks last night who didn't ask for permission from the chair, in this case the Speaker.

3:10

If we look at, again, the oft-quoted statements of the public record, Votes and Proceedings, there is a notification here of so many for the motion, so many against the motion. In the question period today the hon. leader of the government responded in one case by saying that there were several hon. Liberals and in the other case that there were 31 hon. members of the government caucus. Essentially when we refer to absences of this and absences of that, we generally are referring to the absence on identification of an individual member. It is certainly public information and public record that there was a vote last night. It was 31 to 7. So an important point of clarification.

Second point of order. The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition.

Point of Order Clarification

MR. DICKSON: I will try and be brief and hope that my friend across the way does similarly.

The same authority, 408(2). I heard the Premier say that the Liberals can still debate Bill 11 at second reading. Well, Mr. Speaker, once again the rule is abundantly clear on this, that once the motion is made that the previous question be now put, it means that every member of the Assembly is entitled to speak to that. Once that speaking list has been exhausted, the vote is put on that motion, and immediately the vote then takes place on, in this case, the second reading motion.

So for those members that did not have a chance to participate in the second reading debate before the motion was put, they in fact will be denied their opportunity to stand in their places and speak for 20 minutes. The only thing they can speak to is the motion that the previous question be now put. I'm not sure whether it was you or your predecessor, but we've had occasion to deal with this motion before. It is not accurate to say and in fact is inflammatory and inaccurate to say that those Liberal members who did not have the chance of participating in second reading prior now can participate in second reading.

If that's the case, it's wonderful news, but that's certainly a variance in our procedures. My advice to my caucus colleagues is that they are limited to speaking to the motion that's currently in front of us and that once that's finished and voted, there will then immediately be a vote on second reading. That's my understanding, so as much as anything I may be asking for clarification, under 13(2), if in fact my interpretation is inaccurate. Clearly, if the

Premier is correct in what he said, then my interpretation is wrong. So I'm hoping for some clarification on that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader, and it would be helpful to the Assembly if the hon. House leader would clarify this understanding or misunderstanding.

MR. HANCOCK: I would be delighted, and I will be at least as brief as the hon. Opposition House Leader was in making his presentation.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier was absolutely correct in his assertion. It wasn't inflammatory, and in fact the only thing that has been inflammatory in this whole process is the suggestion that debate has been cut off. In fact, many members have spoken at second reading, and by my recollection there were only six Liberal members who hadn't spoken as of yesterday afternoon. One of them took the opportunity to speak and then took the opportunity to move an amendment. It is perfectly in order to do so, although quite out of the norm. We on this side do not complain when people use the rules of the House to put forward their viewpoints, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning did so and did so quite appropriately. He moved an amendment that Bill 11 be withdrawn and that the subject matter be referred to a committee.

At second reading there are three types of amendments which are appropriate: the hoist amendment, which if brought would result in an immediate vote on the bill after it was voted on; a reasoned amendment, which after being voted on would allow us to go back to debate on second reading; and the referral amendment, that the hon. member put forward, which would allow us, after being voted on, to go back to second reading. After the less than vigorous debate that was put forward by the opposition members on their own amendment, we took a vote last night. After that vote took place, we returned to second reading, whereupon as I understand it, according to the Blues or the record that I've been provided of the debate last night, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader under Standing Order 47 moved the previous question in the form that the question be now put. That then puts on the floor of the House the opportunity for every member of the House who desires to be involved to debate the question as to whether they're ready for the vote.

Now, I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I think that when you're debating as to whether or not you're ready for the vote, you have to deal with the question of whether or not you've had the opportunity to put all of your arguments forward and whether everything has been canvassed.

In fact, second reading debate is a debate on the principle of the bill. The amendment that was brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Manning in effect negatives the principle of the bill, and I would certainly argue that whichever choice you use in terms of amending at second reading, all of them amount to the same thing: it's negating the principle. We heard their rather, as I say, less than enthusiastic arguments on that and took a vote. Any further amendment at that stage would be attempting to do exactly the same thing, and I presume that the reason why their sixth-last speaker moved the amendment was because they maybe wanted to have their fifth-last and their fourth-last and their third-last speakers try a reasoned amendment or another referral motion. But I would only be presuming that.

Nonetheless, everybody has the opportunity to speak at second reading. The fact that they cut off five of their speakers by moving the amendment when they did is not the problem of the Government House Leader or any other Member of the Legislative Assembly. In

fact, I would be inaccurate and misspoke myself: he didn't cut them off but moved the amendment at that point in time, leaving them open to bring in redundant amendments after that. The only amendment which is appropriate at second reading is to negative the principle of the bill, and the House had already dealt with that subject matter.

So it's entirely appropriate, then, to move a Standing Order 47, which, again, is in the rules of the House and quite appropriate, just as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning's motion was quite appropriate, and allows every member of the House an opportunity to speak yet again to Bill 11 as to whether or not they're ready for the question. Again, Mr. Speaker, I don't know about you, but in speaking to that type of motion, if I wasn't ready for the question, I would be putting forward the reasons why I wasn't ready for the question, and that certainly would be dealing with some of the essence of the bill.

Now, I'm not going to tell members opposite how to raise their debate. Our members are smart enough to figure out how they're going to raise their debate. We certainly can represent our constituents well in this Assembly. There's no cutoff of debate, and apart from the three members, I believe, who spoke to it last night already, every member still has the opportunity to speak to Bill 11 in debate.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair certainly respects the views and the positions put forward by the two hon. speakers with respect to this. The bottom line of the whole thing is that debate will continue on Bill 11, and a great deal of flexibility will be provided in terms of the range of the topic for the individuals standing forward. It will not be restricted to one very, very fine line.

One takes it, hon. Government House Leader, that there will not be a series of interjections with respect to relevancy by certain people on the government bench as other members do participate with respect to further continuance.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I would be alarmed if anybody would suggest that any comment about why a person wasn't ready to vote on Bill 11 would be considered irrelevant.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. In keeping with this, hon. members must be aware of Standing Order 29 with respect to this matter as well. Now, that's very helpful.

With respect to that, hon. House leader of the Official Opposition, is there a third point of order, or was that dealt with by the apology?

MR. DICKSON: No. That's been addressed by the Premier, and I'm not doing anything further with respect to that. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Thank you very much.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 207 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act

[Adjourned debate April 5: Mr. Paszkowski]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated last

week, I'm very pleased to be involved in the discussions regarding this particular bill, even though it does indeed appear to be very, very close to if not a money bill.

MR. COUTTS: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod on a point of order. Proceed with a citation and go forward.

Point of Order Money Bills

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in accordance with Standing Order 79(1), which says:

The Assembly shall not adopt or pass any vote, resolution, address or Bill for the appropriation

- (a) of any part of the public revenue, or
- (b) of any tax or impost,

to any purpose that has not been first recommended to the Assembly by Message of the Lieutenant Governor in the session in which such vote, resolution, address or Bill is proposed.

I would further like to cite *Beauchesne* 980(2), Mr. Speaker. It's a long section, but I want to just highlight the areas that I'm concerned with. In section (2) it says, "the principle that the sanction of the Crown must be given to every grant of money drawn from public revenue." Then it goes on to say a little farther down, "nor can a Member other than a Minister move for the introduction of a bill framed to effect a reduction of duties."

3:20

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to make reference today in this point of order to the Alberta Liberal caucus news release dated March 22, 2000, tabled by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in the Assembly.

Bill 207: the Provincial/Municipal Tax Sharing Act will allow for the allocation of a percentage of provincial personal income tax revenues on a per capita basis to local government.

The release goes on to state that

Bill 207 provides the basis for a new partnership between the province and local governments, emphasizing the principles of respect, fairness, financial stability, accountability, and clear roles and responsibilities.

That was a quote by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

I'd further like to reference another Alberta Liberal caucus news release, dated April 7, 2000, also tabled by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in the Assembly today, which states that "Bill 207 would provide local governments with access to a portion of the provincial personal income tax base." In this same release the Member for Edmonton-Manning is quoted as stating that Bill 207 . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, you have to help me here, please. What the House has before it is the debate on a bill, not a debate on somebody's press release.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be pointing out the difference between what is in the bill and what is in the press releases.

THE SPEAKER: We have a point of order that the hon. member is bringing forward here with respect to the acceptability of a bill or not, within the rules of the House. It's not a debate about what was said outside the House or in some other source.

MR. COUTTS: Might I then, Mr. Speaker, cite the wording in Bill 207 itself. The bill says in section 3(4) that "a percentage figure set by the Provincial Treasurer under subsection (3) shall be debated and voted upon by the Legislative Assembly." This bill not only

requires a Provincial Treasurer's report on tax sharing; it further requires the critical component that its content, the income tax percentages to be shared, be determined through a debate and vote in the Legislative Assembly.

Now, the Leader of the Official Opposition was quite, quite clear on what the intent of this bill is, and I refer to page 764 of *Hansard* of last Wednesday, where the Leader of the Official Opposition said:

Madam Speaker, the object of Bill 207 is to provide local governments in Alberta, whether they be for rural or urban municipalities, with access to a portion of provincial personal income tax.

I also refer to page 765.

Bill 207 proposes to allocate a percentage of personal income tax revenues to Alberta municipalities on a per capita basis beginning in the fiscal year 2000-2001.

Given these statements, Mr. Speaker, and supplemented by the statements in the news releases that I cited earlier, it is clear that Bill 207 contravenes Standing Order 79(1)(a). Further, it is apparent that Bill 207 will contravene *Beauchesne* 980(2) given that this bill contemplates sharing of the provincial income tax, thereby reducing revenues contained in the general revenue fund for the province of Alberta.

Further, Bill 207 necessitates an annual discussion of income tax rates in the Legislative Assembly for the purpose of preparing a government of Alberta report, in direct contravention of Standing Order 79(2), which specifies that any such bill "shall be introduced by a minister," and 79(2)(a), which requires that "the recommendation of the Lieutenant Governor shall be attached" to any such bill.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to rule Bill 207 out of order pursuant to Standing Order 69(3) as it is an infringement on the prerogative of the Crown.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be brief because this is a private member's bill, and as you've enjoined me from time to time, it's important that we maximize the opportunity for debate.

The point would be this. If one looks at Standing Order 79, the operative word is "appropriation." Appropriation has a defined and a specific meaning. This is not a bill about appropriation, that creates appropriation, that effects appropriation.

Standing Order 2 provides that

in all contingencies unprovided for, the question shall be decided by the Speaker and . . . the Speaker shall base any decision on the usages and precedents of the Assembly.

I refer you, Mr. Speaker, to a number of bills which would all in a similar way talk about an allocation and formulas but don't amount to an appropriation. I refer you to 1995, to Bill 205, Debt Retirement Act, sponsored by Dr. Percy. I refer you to 1998, to Bill 222, sponsored by Mr. Zwozdesky. That was the Fiscal Stabilization Fund Calculation Act. Those are both bills that were introduced that created a framework or a scheme as it relates to the distribution of money, which is qualitatively different than an appropriation.

The member clearly is leveraging his argument on the basis of some comments that were made, but your own intervention shows, Mr. Speaker, that you're very much alive to the notion. The issue is: within the four corners of Bill 207, does this bill violate Standing Order 79? It is not an appropriation bill. It is in no sense a bill for appropriation. What the member is doing is talking about comments in debate. Well, we hear flights of hyperbole all the time when people want to make their bill something grander, something different than it really is. The point is that the Leader of the Opposition may want to see a different scheme and in fact a different appropriation, but Bill 207 is not that appropriation.

So those are the observations I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker, on the point of order. I'm just suggesting again that for you to in fact

uphold the point of order effectively, you're overturning a number of precedents and past traditions of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The chair brought to the attention of all hon. members some time ago that this was private members' day and asked for some brevity with respect to input. Unfortunately, that has not come about, and we're now about a minute and a half away from the next segment of business for today.

The chair wants to say the following. Private members' day is very unique in this parliament and this Legislature. It is unequaled in virtually any of the 150 parliaments found that follow the British form of government. The changes that were made in this Assembly in 1993 afforded private members, nongovernment members, an opportunity to bring forward an idea and actually have something done about it. The chair believes that in the last six or seven years there have been some 20 examples, including one just a few days ago of a bill brought to this Assembly. So some degree of leverage and some degree of empathy is given by this chairman to the aspirations of private members.

One of the things that the chair hopes is not happening on private members' days is filibustering a bill by way of points of order. So there's an instruction here to the Clerk that the last number of minutes dealing with this particular purported point of order are not to be part of the speaking time allocated for the debate with respect to the particular thing.

The question has been raised by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, and in fact the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, when participating in this debate a few days ago, questioned openly but did not pursue a point of order with respect to this being a money bill or not. This afforded the chair an opportunity since that time to in fact review the matter, review the bill, review the precedents, and review situations that have been dealt with in this House in the past. So he does not come here today unprepared to see such an argument coming forward.

It's very correct that money bills, or bills that require the appropriation of funds, can only be moved by a member of Executive Council and must contain the royal recommendation, as stipulated in Standing Order 79 and in section 54 of the Constitution Act of 1867. The chair has taken the time to review this bill. He's read it clause by clause, and the chair fails to see how Bill 207 would be considered a money bill as it does not require the expenditure of funds. In fact, it appears to the chair that the bill is drafted in such a way so as not to be considered a money bill.

3:30

Section 2 of the bill states that

the Provincial Treasurer shall prepare a report on how the financial affairs of the Government would have been affected by sharing income tax revenues with municipalities.

The bill then goes on to outline what conditions would apply to the calculation of the report.

The chair would also like to remind members that it is not the chair's role to rule on how people interpret what is before the Assembly or what is said outside of the Assembly. In deciding whether a bill is a money bill or not, the key is to look at the bill itself. If members wish to further review this matter, they may wish to examine Speaker Schumacher's ruling of April 28, 1994, at pages 249 and 250 of the *Journals*.

This is not a point of order that we are considering. This bill can proceed through debate in the normal steps of the matter. Hon. members, I make it very, very clear that the time allocation used in dealing with this point of order will not be part of the time allocation provided for the debate on the bill. Those minutes are still there.

Now we've passed the required time of 3:30 on this particular day.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Support for Stay-at-home Parents

506. Mr. MacDonald moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to demonstrate its recognition of the contribution made by parents who stay at home to care for their children by providing support equal to that received by parents choosing other child care options.

[Debate adjourned April 4: Mr. Cao speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to continue speaking on Motion 506.

Albertans pride themselves on being fair and maintaining a province of fairness. By the year 2001 Albertans will see their taxes cut by \$852 million a year. Albertans from all walks of life will benefit, and the high exemption will mean significant benefits for lower income families. Low-income Albertans get a real break with the new plan.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

In 2005 families with two children who earn less than \$31,000 a year will pay no provincial income tax at all. In fact, for these families the refundable Alberta family employment tax credit exceeds the Alberta tax payable. In addressing fairness, the new system reduces the differences in Alberta taxes paid by single- and two-income families. In the old system the single-income family paid more in personal income taxes than a family at the same income level with two parents working outside the home.

The government's role is clear. Action has been taken to provide for more fairness in the tax regime. This is the fairness that I speak of, a fairness that makes me proud as an Albertan. But I am also proud to leave the decision on what type of child care parents choose up to the parents in Alberta.

Madam Speaker, as a representative of the Calgary-Fort constituency I can say that we believe in the principle and practice that public assistance should be based on need and the level of need. Our existing child care subsidy program is helping large numbers of Alberta families who need assistance.

Talking about child care, as a private member I have already introduced Bill 209, Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2000. This bill, on infant child care, aims to allow working parents who are in need a longer parental leave to care for their infant. This bill will be in second reading debate in about a week's time.

Madam Speaker, it is for those reasons that I cannot support Motion 506, brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Thank you.

MS LEIBOVICI: Could I just ask how much time is left on the bill so that I know how to gauge my minutes? Great. In the two minutes that I have, I'd like to speak in favour of this motion.

I believe in and have been a longtime supporter of the Kids First group – I believe that is what they're called – that has fought long and hard to recognize the contribution that stay-at-home parents, be they mothers or fathers, contribute to their children. Their objective is not to have a subsidy in order to be able to stay at home but is to ensure that there is equity between individuals who choose to stay at home to care for their children and individuals who choose or need to go to work in order to support their children and choose

other child care options rather than that of staying in the home.

I see no reason for anyone in this Legislative Assembly to not support that principle. If we are indeed in support of allowing choices to parents and ensuring that those choices are based not on financial consideration but are based on what is best for that particular family, this motion allows for that to occur. It has nothing to do with subsidization. It has nothing to do with whether an individual is on welfare or not, if I understood the speaker before me. What it has to do with is allowing parental choice in whether or not there is the ability to stay at home and raise families and that there be no discrimination in the legislation that is put forward either at the provincial level or at the federal level with regards to swaying a parent to make a particular choice.

If we can provide a tax credit for having a stay-at-home nanny, if we can provide tax credits for child care, we can provide those same tax credits and value the work that stay-at-home parents provide to their children in their own home.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The time for this item has concluded.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 lost]

Long-term and Home Care

507. Ms Leibovici moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to further increase the number of beds and improve standards for long-term care facilities and home care services with regard to staffing ratios and levels of service to adequate levels and ensure that regional health authority boundaries do not become barriers to placement.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to move the motion that I have on the Order Paper, Motion 507. This is a motion that I would hope all the Members in this Legislative Assembly could support. It in fact supports and expands upon the long-term care review that has been put forward by the government of Alberta, the Department of Health and Wellness, and which has been a rather extensive process of the policy advisory committee with regards to long-term care, known fondly, I guess, in this Legislative Assembly as the Broda report. What in fact has occurred is that the Broda report made a number of recommendations that are substantiated by the motion that I have put forward. In fact, I believe that if members vote against this particular motion, then they are putting a vote of nonconfidence in the recommendations of the Broda report.

Because this motion is multifaceted, I would like to break it down into its components and address them one at a time. The first component is with regards to increasing the number of beds. Now, we all know that there is a shortage of available long-term care beds throughout this province and that there are a large number of individuals who are on wait lists. Yet what was surprising with regards to the Broda report was that it seemed to indicate that there should be a reduction in spaces over the long term when we look at what the number of spaces are that are available currently within our system and what the projection is for spaces to the year 2016.

3:40

At this point in time we have, I believe, 12,844 beds that are available in our health care system. That's mostly where the long-

term care beds are. In 2016 we're actually going to a level of 12,685, which is a decrease. As we have heard over and over in this Legislative Assembly, a lot of the decisions that are being driven by this government are based on the fact that we will have an aging and a larger population to deal with. So though I recognize that there are other recommendations in the report that have dealt with the concept of aging in place and providing solutions other than long-term care beds, the reality is that there is, I believe, a need to increase the number of beds, not decrease the number of beds, and that the bed reduction targets as put forward may well not be sustainable in the long term. In the short term there is a real need to increase the number of beds.

Another consideration is with regards to the benchmark that the number of beds is based on, and that may well be one of the reasons that the number of beds being recommended is so low. Age 75 is what is considered to be the benchmark for planning long-term care spaces. In fact, a recent recommendation from the Alberta Medical Association with regards to the final report of the policy advisory committee, the Broda report, indicated on January 31, 2000, that the government should in fact be using projected care levels as opposed to age to plan for the entire spectrum of continuing care. So those numbers that are currently being projected and are currently being assessed as perhaps sufficient to meet the needs of individuals who require long-term care beds are based on a benchmark that may in fact be faulty. It would be interesting to know whether the government has in fact moved to that benchmark of 75 from the current benchmark that was utilized prior to that.

The other concern with regards to the current number of long-term care beds within the system is the fact that the Broda report seems to have relied on using the current acute care beds within our system. Right now we have a proposal in front of us, Bill 11. One of the reasons that that particular bill is being put forward is to alleviate the current shortages within our acute care system, yet conflicting with that particular direction of government is now a recommendation that says: use those acute care beds for long-term care patients. That is not a satisfactory use of those current acute care spaces. In fact, those acute care beds are required for acute care patients. As we know, there are shortages within the system.

As well, in actual fact what the use of those acute care beds may well lead to is a warehousing of elderly patients in acute care facilities. I don't think that anyone wants to see our elderly patients or patients who are in need of long-term care being warehoused in acute care facilities. Those facilities do not provide the kind of stimulation, the kind of physical surroundings, or the kind of care required by patients who are in a long-term care setting.

With regards to the particular part of the motion that requests that the government "further increase the number of beds," what I hope I have set forward to the members is an indication of the needs at the current point in time with regards to the beds and the lack of beds available to the individuals requiring long-term care as well as the future needs. If in fact the thoughts of members are, "Well, we don't want to build more bricks and mortar," that in fact is a logical response, but there are some facilities that have been closed down that could well provide the spaces that are required. Vilna is one such example of a facility that is fully functional and that has been closed down and in fact did house long-term care patients but is now standing empty and not being utilized.

What we are trying to avoid by ensuring that there are enough long-term care spaces in all of the jurisdictions across this province is what I call the phenomenon of divorce by institution, where you see individuals who have lived together for 40, 50 years who no longer can live together because the facilities are not there to accommodate them in their own communities. What they are is

separated, and their families are torn between visiting elderly parents – the families themselves are generally elderly – and being able to meet the needs of their parents. So this resolution would urge the government to increase the number of beds to deal with those kinds of situations.

A second part of the resolution is to “improve standards for long-term care facilities and home care services.” One of the common complaints that I hear with regards to the standards for long-term care services with regard to staffing ratios and level of services to adequate levels is the shortage of staff and the qualifications of staff. In fact, one of the recommendations of the Broda report was that additional funding should be targeted to increase the number of qualified front line staff available to address the increasing acuity of people in long term care centres.

I agree with that particular recommendation wholeheartedly.

The issue of staffing is poignantly outlined in the winter of 2000 document *Health & Healing: A Review of the Catholic Health Association of Alberta & Affiliates*, wherein the writer, Micheline Pare, who's the founder of the Pare Labrecque Centre, indicates that there are considerable concerns with regards to caregivers' working conditions. She indicates:

My hope also is to give caregivers better working conditions. Most of them are “casual” full time, with no benefits and obliged to work in 2 or 3 long term care facilities in order to make a living. How can we expect quality of care if we are not concerned with the welfare of our caregivers? Who would be ready to be underpaid, over-worked and experience unfair conditions of employment??? Our loved ones are suffering from it and one day it will be our turn. Do we wish to be treated like this???

She further indicates that she saw dedicated, compassionate caregivers but also caregivers without sufficient knowledge and/or skills, that in order to care for the elderly with respect and dignity, it is important to understand their journey with a compassionate heart. These are very fine observations that indicate what some of our problems are currently within our long-term care centres. The staffing ratios are ones that are questionable as there are, in my understanding, no standards across the province with regards to the number of frontline staff required on each shift and the ratio of RNs, LPNs, PCAs, for instance, on any particular shift.

If I can just refer to an e-mail that I received with regards to a particular long-term care centre in Calgary – and it's the new Signal Pointe Alzheimer's long-term care centre – the point is made that “on each shift there is 1 RN and 2 Personal Care Aides per each of the five homes for a total of 11 staff for up to 60 residents.” This e-mail further goes on to indicate that

Signal Point is badly understaffed . . . and while only one RN for up to 60 residents per shift may meet legal requirements, I question whether one RN is sufficient for up to 60 residents . . . It would seem very shortsighted to build a fairly expensive facility . . . and then economize on staffing to the point where residents are given, perhaps, inadequate care.

So staffing is a key issue. The issue of ensuring that there are adequate ratios of LPNs to RNs, PCAs to residents is also key.

3:50

Another concern that was brought up, I believe, in Broda as well as having been addressed in other areas is to ensure that the use of volunteers is appropriate, and if it is, what kind of training is being provided. So what we need with regards to improving the standards for long-term care facilities and with regards to staffing and levels of service are clear standards, quantifiable standards, and measurable standards, and there needs to be systemwide legislation. What we also need are some surprise inspections. I have often heard from individuals across the province that inspections are made of long-term care facilities, but they are not surprise inspections. So, in fact,

if a complaint is provided, what ends up happening is that the facility is then investigated – and I use that term loosely – and all of a sudden the meals provided are just so much better than they normally are in the facility.

I would also like to indicate that the FAIRE group, which is the Families Allied to Influence Responsible Eldercare, has put forward an initiative addressing the needs and rights of Alberta's nursing home residents. In there they outline a number of recommendations which directly support this particular motion. They indicate – and I'm reading from their document – that there should be:

- Increased Staffing Levels and Proficiency
- Staff/Patient Ratios Comparable To Those In Germany (1:5) – Belgium (1:3) – the Nordic Countries & the Netherlands (1:1)
- Increased Daily Hours of Direct Patient Care, Including Substantially More Hands-on Care by Registered Nurses
- Regulated Entry-Level Certification For All New Personal Support Workers
- Government-Funded Mandatory Training Programs for Current, But Undertrained Personal Support Workers
- Standardized Criteria That Determines the Required Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes of All Care Providers
- Increased Involvement of Physicians and Geriatricians in Direct Patient Care . . .
- Training of Nurse Specialists in Geriatric Care . . .
- External Quality Assurance Audit That Assesses Facility Compliance With Legislated Standards; Staff Competency and Suitability; The Quality, Delivery and Effectiveness of Patient Services; If and How Resident's Individual Needs and Goals Are Being Met
- A Mechanism For Residents and Their Families to Voice What They Want & Need Within The Facility
- A Mechanism That Holds Regional Health Authorities Accountable For The Job That Is Done

And last but not least – and I've left out a few for the sake of time.

- Regional Ombudsman Appointments To Long Term Care.

So we know that there needs to be and there appears to be a consensus that the standards for long-term care facilities need to be standardized and staffing ratios as well.

If I can move to the third part of my motion: we need to improve “home care services with regard to staffing ratios and levels of service to adequate levels.” I know that the Member for Calgary-West was at a conference for Canada's Association for the Fifty-Plus, which has put a lot of work into home care and home care requirements and services.

There was a national conference held just a little while ago, and the results of that conference as well as their report on home care in Canada in 1999 – so this is a very recent study – indicate that “home care is underfunded, undervalued and over-stressed.” In fact, there seems to be a lack of leadership by governments, which “have extolled the virtues of home care, in part, to deflect criticism of hospital restructuring,” that there's a “lack of commitment and follow-through to develop home- and community-based care.”

“Human resource issues emerged as the most important concern” in the study they did. Eighty-eight percent of those that were part of this particular study

felt it was an issue in their community [and that] people working in the home care environment are over-extended and under considerable stress from difficulties in the workplace such as low wages, recruitment and retention and training.

“Inadequate funding was the second largest issue facing health care” that was considered by this particular report. There were also significant pressures on the voluntary sector, especially with regard to informal caregivers. It was felt that that terminology was insulting to individuals who take on the caregiving burden of their loved ones and are doing this on either a part-time or a full-time

basis and in fact become the primary caregivers. What has occurred is that there have been many responsibilities shifted to the caregivers in their particular homes without any support provided to the caregivers that are looking after their loved ones.

There are a number of observations in this report on home care, but they made an observation with regards to the role of the private, for-profit providers in home care and what in fact their profit margins were with regards to their bottom line and how much of that is transferred to individuals who are providing home care services. This is a very, very important point and one that should not be overlooked with regards to the provision of home care services.

They made a number of recommendations, and I would like to know actually – and this is slightly aside from the motion – what the government's position is with regard to the recommendations of CARP.

I look forward to the debate on this particular initiative. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's certainly my pleasure to rise on Motion 507, sponsored by the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Although I agree with a lot of the comments made in the motion itself or the content of the motion, I do think that at this time in point the motion is really redundant.

As she has referred to the Broda report, I'd like to bring forward, Madam Speaker, how we arrived at some of the comments in our report itself. When the long-term care report began in November of '97 – and it was also chaired by my colleague for Calgary-West – we had committee members that did not represent any specific organization. We had seniors, physicians, health authority personnel, consumers, and long-term care, home care, and housing-sector individuals. We went to 55 sites throughout the province to gather information from everyday Albertans, to hear from them as to what they saw the need to be in long-term care. Certainly, before we even went out to the communities, we consulted with the regional health authorities, the Mental Health Board, and the Cancer Board. Also, these 55 sites that we attended throughout the province worked via the community health councils, which put those on, and we had community people facilitating that for us. We listened to what Albertans said.

The report itself reflects the high values Albertans place on their health system. It shows that while Alberta is leading the nation in developing and implementing innovative approaches to continued care, we need to carefully plan for the future to ensure that our increasing numbers of seniors get the kind of continuing care they need when they need it.

4:00

Madam Speaker, we also had consultants from expert panels. As a matter of fact, we had three expert panels. We also had consultants from not only the province of Alberta but also from across Canada, nationally, and internationally. We heard from these expert panel sessions the changes that are occurring in other areas of the world, not only here in Alberta. We looked to see whether we could adopt some or whether we could not, that maybe it wouldn't work here. So it was important to attend those sessions. We also had Canada Health involved in those three expert panels. They were very interested to know what was happening in Alberta, as we have always been frontrunners in our health system in this province.

Madam Speaker, in reference to Motion 507, as I said, I agree with the comments made in there, but the motion is redundant, seeing that we've already done a report. There have been some very

good reports out in the community, as the member opposite has indicated and referred to. Those reports are something very valid, that have to tie together not only the report that I was involved in, but I think there are other reports out there that the government has taken some time to look at. I think it's important to do a good job rather than going into it full tilt, without looking at what is really out there. It's not a matter of spending more money. I think it's a matter of looking at what we have out there in the communities that we can utilize more effectively and more efficiently.

There was reference made by the member opposite that acute care beds are being used. Yes, they are right now, in the interim, till we see something happening. I'm sure the member realizes that new construction doesn't happen overnight. It's not like mushrooms, that grow just when it rains.

MS OLSEN: What do you know about mushrooms? Are those magic mushrooms?

MR. BRODA: Well, they could be magic mushrooms.

It's important that we work to create a culture that supports seniors that are able to stay in their own homes as long as possible. I'll tell you that for any individual that stays at home, it's home to them whether it be a lodge, apartment, or single-family dwelling. I know I feel better when I'm at home. So I think it's important to see a different focus or a different change. What we've seen in the past is that we were more focused on facilities. We're finding that, yes, the facilities have an important role in what we're looking at, but we have to look at a paradigm shift, where we're looking at not only facilities. Maybe we should focus on the home place first and then look at how we can address the issues beyond that.

The final report, which was released in November of '99, which the member alluded to, is a report that describes the visions of aging in the 21st century and guiding principles to help the health system respond to Alberta's aging population. I think this government is showing leadership in giving serious consideration to some 50 recommendations that were made in the report. As we are doing so, we are asking the health authorities, Alberta government departments, health stakeholders, and Albertans for their comments, priorities, and suggestions on how best to implement the recommendations. We have the recommendations there, but we still have to continue working with them. The recommendations and subsequent feedback will serve as a basis for planning continuing care strategies, expectations, and the next three-year health business plan and budget.

The recommendations from the long-term care review committee will join also those from the Health System Funding Review Committee and the health summit to provide a solid foundation for future health policies and services delivered to Albertans. The recommendations build on many successes and strengths in today's health system and describe a very different future for continuing care in Alberta. We encouraged all Albertans to consider our recommendations carefully and to begin now to prepare for a new generation of older people. We received good responses not only from departments and regional authorities but also from individuals. I believe there were somewhere in the neighbourhood of 10,000 reports that were issued, and we're still getting calls for additional reports to be submitted. I can tell you that we've had a lot of interest from B.C. and Saskatchewan.

Going back to the motion, that we should be on, it refers to a lot of things that have already been identified in a report. Madam Speaker, this is why I say that the motion that is presented, although a good motion, is redundant, because what we're talking about has already been discussed in a report, and it has to be put together.

Other long-term recommendations include a conference on the use and effectiveness of drugs for seniors, a continuing care act to ensure consistent standards – and I think it addresses some of the concerns made there – appropriate monitoring and clear responsibilities for organizations involved in continuing care, and increasing the current cost recovery charges in continuing care centres to more accurately reflect both housing costs and people's ability to pay while ensuring appropriate subsidies for those who need them. The committee recommended using additional revenues to improve services in continuing care centres, expanding home care services, and renovating and upgrading existing continuing care facilities.

If the member would have looked – I'm sure she has – the Minister of Health and Wellness did issue a news release back on November 18, '99, indicating that there would be \$265.8 million put into long-term care beds and health facility modernization. This total is part of the capital funds to add new long-term care beds and replace and renovate existing health facilities in the province.

The new funding includes \$115 million over the next three years to develop 1,090 new continuing care beds including 370 additional beds and the replacement of 720 existing beds in older facilities.

That even goes beyond what our recommendation in the report said. Our report recommended 200 beds per year over the next three years. That equates to 600 beds. I'm pleased to see that the department looked at it. Yes, when we discussed possible shifts in the way we do our long-term care, we looked at a reduction of beds, but I see the additional funding that's been put in place. Not only that, but I think we recognize that the 720 existing beds in older facilities – there are a lot of the four-bed wards that we're saying we want eliminated over the next five years. So there are going to be some changes done.

I understand that regional health authorities have now issued a request for a proposal for some additional beds in both Calgary and Edmonton. My understanding is that the contracts haven't been let yet, but we're going to see a lot of changes in the upcoming years. When we looked at the paradigm shift, we thought that it was important to look at home care, supportive housing, and then look at facility based as the last resort.

I may be repeating myself in a lot of things or even making comments that are maybe not in your Motion 507. However, I felt it was very important that I address those issues so that both sides of the House here have a better understanding of how we arrived at what we did in the report. I do encourage everybody on both sides of the House to take the time to read it. I think it's important that we look at what we did.

Also, I'm very proud to have heard the minister say, as well, in the news release that we think seniors are important, and we looked at drug utilization such as palliative care drugs. They're now provided at home as of February 1999. So elderly people can remain longer at home. The palliative care drug can be provided with home support in the home setting. That is a good one that I think has been well received by the communities, and I think that, yes, there is a place for our facilities, but we've also got to look, as I said earlier, at how we address the whole issue.

4:10

I know there have been a lot of recommendations, some on a long-term and some on a short-term basis. A lot of long-term ones are actually being looked at right now. I mentioned the paradigm shift already. I know that the member opposite who is sponsoring this motion has also brought up the importance of keeping people in their own communities, and I think we all agree with that. That's why I mention it. It's not a matter of spending more money. It's how we use the system or even the facilities that we have more effectively.

We can even look at lodges, that really come under housing.

These serve an important part in our senior population, because to some of them that has been home for that last 25, 30 years or even longer. By not providing a little bit of medical component in there, we're forcing people to move to outlying communities, as the member opposite has indicated. That's why we say that we have to look at how we can enhance some of our lodges, provide some services in there, some home care, because no matter whether you're paying for your own house, an apartment, or a lodge, it is your own home. So I think there's a big need.

I know that at the very beginning, when we started our report, there was opposition from everyone, but I think right now we're finding, after the report has been released, that there's been a lot of good buy-in, and people are saying: let's work together. So I think it is happening. Again, I think Motion 507 is a good motion, however being redundant at this point because a lot of the things have been addressed and will be addressed further as the government is going forward.

We also encourage the private and voluntary sectors to expand the range of support of living options available across the province, to expand the support of housing to include light- and medium-care cases, people with mild dementia, and young people with disabilities. When we refer to long-term care, it doesn't mean you have to look at 65 or over. Today 65 is not old age. I think that 65 was a benchmark that we used. I think we're nearing more the 75, 80 range. We're seeing more and more people celebrating 100 years old.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's the care they need, not the age.

MR. BRODA: That's right.

The thing is that when we say having the private sector involved, we've got to look at some examples. Morinville's Aspen house is an example of the private sector going in there, providing the capital funding. The operator is a nonprofit operator. And guess what? Health is in there also providing the services. If you go to that community of Morinville, which is in my constituency – and I'm very proud of it – it's one facility that anybody you talk to on the street is very proud of.

We've had private-sector facility operators for the last 20, 30 years, all publicly funded but privately owned and operated, and – guess what? – they haven't fallen apart. The people are in there, and it's a service that's provided. It doesn't mean, again, like I say, spending more money, whether it be government money or somebody else's money. It's out there. So I think there's a role to be played by everyone. I'm not saying that it has to be totally private, but there are roles to be played by everyone, and we see the private sector out there working very, very well.

I agree with your Motion 507 that we have to take steps to increase the numbers of qualified professionals. That was something that we addressed as number one, because as we toured some of the facilities, there was some understaffing and there was some staff that were not trained. So when we look at increasing the professionals and health care providers to work with older people, to establish designated stand-alone positions for training in geriatric medicine at Alberta's medical schools, I think it's important that we get into the educational sector to increase the number of nurses specializing in geriatrics. Yes, we do have nurses. We hear a lot of times that there is a shortage of nurses. There's a shortage of nurses in specialized areas. There's quite a number of nurses out there, but we need some specialists in there. We need to look at a change. Should a doctor always be the individual assessing the elderly person, or could maybe a nurse do that in consultation with the doctor?

We have to increase the number of trained people available to

work in the community and in continuing care centres. Yes, that is very important, and that is addressed in your motion as well. Again I'm saying that we're already looking at it.

We have to expand geriatric education and training for health care professionals, set new standards for skills and competencies for people working in continuing care centres to establish a new network of excellence in seniors' health and geriatric care. I can't overemphasize – and I may be repeating myself – that I think the motion that's there is a good motion but redundant. It's being looked at.

I would urge everyone, Madam Speaker, all of our members on this side and that side, to defeat this motion, not for the fact that it's a nonconfidence motion, a comment made on the opposite side. I don't have the exact words. I don't think it's having to say that it's nonconfidence, what your motion is saying. Why go through a motion to do something that we're already doing? I think it's redundant.

Madam Speaker, I think we have to also look at the things that are happening. I'm pleased also to say that we've had the new drug Arisep, which is on the formulary now for Blue Cross. Now that drug is available for people with dementia and early stages of Alzheimer's. It's certainly not a cure for Alzheimer's, but what we're looking at is that if caught early, it stalls the progress of the Alzheimer's disease. So I'm very pleased that the minister is taking action in that particular aspect of the drug area.

Also, the Minister of Health and Wellness has responded to the short-term recommendations with an immediate increase of \$15 million per year to address immediate pressure points in home care, long-term care, and waiting lists for long-term care beds. So those have been addressed, Madam Speaker.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to speak to this motion and disappointed that the Member for Redwater would find it redundant. There's lots I could say around that, but I'll control myself today. The reality is that even though the report is done and the government is looking at all these things, when you urge them to action, it might give them a little boost, and I think they need that when it comes to long-term care beds.

I was listening to my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark, and she had some excellent points. One thing I know she didn't have time to get to in the motion is the very last part of it.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to further increase the number of beds and improve standards for long-term care facilities and home care services with regard to staffing ratios and levels of service to adequate levels and . . .

Here's the last part.

. . . ensure that regional health authority boundaries do not become barriers to placement.

No one in this Assembly is surprised that that's a concern of mine. It should be a concern to people like the Member for Redwater, people from St. Albert, people from Stony Plain, people from Whitecourt-St. Anne, because often our constituents are limited by their availability to find beds because of boundaries. I've spoken about that in here. For example, before Aspen house was built – the care given at Aspen is wonderful, and the availability for my constituents to access that facility is a gift that we certainly didn't have until it was opened. In fact, that only opened about a year ago. Prior to that time anybody from Villeneuve or Calahoo or Morinville who needed long-term care could not get it anywhere near their

community. They would have to go to Barrhead or Mayerthorpe or Westlock.

4:20

Now, that's a pretty sad statement, because people needing long-term care are often in the last stages of their life. They are not necessarily seniors. Many young people who have illnesses that will end their life are forced to go to a long-term care facility and live out the rest of their life far away from family. That's exactly what the boundary issue did. People who lived in Villeneuve or Calahoo or Morinville could not get to the Youville Home in St. Albert, and that was a tragedy.

In fact, I even brought up the issue of an aunt of mine, Bertha Berube, who ended up leaving Calahoo and having to go to Barrhead. The care there was excellent, but the reality was that her family couldn't visit her like they could have had they been in St. Albert. The natural trading route and shopping route and school route is not to Barrhead from Calahoo; it is to St. Albert. So that was a tragedy for that family, that their grandmother in her last stages of life was sent far away from home. It's not like the family didn't try. At one point they had hired with their own money people to stay with their mom and help her. That wasn't to be. Fortunately, the WestView regional health authority and Aspen did a trade at one point, and she at least got closer to home in Stony Plain.

That's the reality of regional health authorities, and that's why I would urge all members to support this motion. The reality of regional health authorities is still an issue. For example, I've had people go to Sturgeon hospital and end up needing a long-term care placement. Now, these might be people from the Villeneuve area. They go into Sturgeon, and then they realize that in order to get a long-term care placement, the only place they can get a bed may be Barrhead, or they can refuse to leave and stay in the acute bed. That has happened. Now, how productive is that? Furthermore, is that the type of care they really need when they're at that placement? We know the long-term care facilities really gear to making that institution a home. They really do try. So that's neither productive for the family nor economical for Alberta Health. So there's another issue of boundaries there.

Another reality with boundaries is now working in reverse in my area. Because Aspen house is open in Morinville, we now have people who originally lived in the Morinville-Villeneuve-Calahoo area who found a lodge available in St. Albert. Then when they need long-term care, they're in the Capital region and they can't get back out to Morinville, where their family is. They now are placed in Capital. It's the reverse of what it used to be. This whole issue of boundaries is not addressed in the Broda report. I don't know why more MLAs, certainly those who live outside of major cities, don't share this concern. Either they do and they don't express it in here or they aren't aware of what's happening.

[The Speaker in the chair]

So I would urge people to support this for even just that reason alone. Certainly the boundary issue has not been addressed in the Broda report, and that is certainly not redundant.

I want to speak for a few minutes about the avenues that we could take in this province when we're innovative. We talk about increased beds, and we need them. That's obvious. As we do increase these beds, I think we also have to look at home care services, which are mentioned in this motion. There are so many exciting and innovative things that we could do with home care. One of the realities, I think, of where we've failed in health care is that when you are on IV therapy in hospital and you come out to

receive home care, the IV therapy is not paid for. Now, if you stayed in hospital, it would be paid for. What is the incentive to go home, except that people truly enjoy being in their home more than in hospital? But the reality is that a family cannot afford a hundred bucks a week. That would be the minimum actually at home. So then they choose to stay in the hospital.

I think that within this home care we have to really regard the reality of staffing levels too. If we could increase staffing levels, then we are avoiding the acute care beds. It only makes sense. Two reasons: one, it's economical, and the other is that people far prefer to be in their home and in their community. So if we look at innovative ways of providing home care, maybe incentives such as granny suites, the whole concept of aging in place – I think it's time we looked at that, because with a bit of vision we could avoid people in acute beds and even long-term beds. If we talk about aging in place, examples like the CHOICE program, then our long-term care facilities would not have lineups of hundreds of people, stressed-out families, that reality that it puts on families.

I want to speak for a moment about some recommendations about employment and care levels that came forward in this Putting A Face on Home Care from the CARP national forum. There are some excellent suggestions in here, and if we have the political will to implement them, I know that we will serve people better, which should be our main goal. We can also serve them more cost-effectively, which is also a reality of how we want our tax dollars spent.

It's interesting that one of the recommendations is that people who have left employment to care for family members should receive credit adjustments for employment insurance and CPP, such as is available to women after childbirth. It took a long time for society to recognize that when women had children, it did affect their employment pension plans, retirement plans, ability to move within a place of employment, and it took a while for the world to recognize that that had to be accounted for.

Now, here we have, you might say, the opposite end of life's spectrum, where we should be acknowledging people who give to that. People who volunteer their time and give up their present employment to stay at home with family members or others who need their care I think we should recognize. We would once again serve our community better and be more responsible with tax dollars. So that specific recommendation I think certainly should be followed up on, and that only follows with the motion about "staffing ratios and levels of service to adequate levels."

Also, government should encourage companies to develop caregiver leave programs and flexible working conditions for employees engaged in short- or long-term periods of caregiving. Another recommendation: governments should develop direct payment policies to compensate informal caregivers.

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, but the time limit for consideration of this type of business has now concluded for the day.

4:30

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

Mr. Havelock moved that pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) the question on second reading of Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be now put.

[Adjourned debate April 10: Mr. Jonson]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. Mr. Speaker. The debate that we are forced into this afternoon sort of saddens me, because I was looking forward to a fairly complete debate at second reading without the intervention of any curtailing motions.

There's been some procedural to-ing and fro-ing in the Chamber. The intent of the government's motion is very clear to me, although subsequent to it being introduced, of course, members supporting the government have said that the real reason to introduce such a motion is to prolong debate, but of course that's absurd, Mr. Speaker. Why else would the government introduce the motion that the question now be put, if in fact they didn't want to hear any more discussion at second reading or any more discussion of potential motions for referral, et cetera, that may come at second reading? The government can't really have it both ways. They can't argue that they're trying to expand debate when in fact it's very clear that their purpose was to cut off debate at this point.

That confuses me, because I've been saying to my constituents who raise this specter, the concern that the Premier would use closure: well, no; I've heard the Premier say that he expects a full debate at second reading. I would have expected all of his caucus to respect that. I suppose that should really come as no surprise, because most of the debate has been, of course, critical of the government's proposed policy initiative and most of the feedback the government is receiving is critical of their initiative. I'm sure the government is tiring of hearing the reasonable and worthwhile arguments put forward by those opposing the legislation, and I'm certain the government is getting tired of being told by their own otherwise supporters that they're barking up the wrong tree when it comes to Bill 11. So, clearly, their fuse is short and their patience is thin, and that's the only way that I could understand this procedural move of theirs to curtail reasonable debate at second reading on the principle of Bill 11.

I also find it very ironic that we've heard even just again today the Premier suggesting that he doesn't have to answer questions about the government's private health care plans because they don't have any private health care plans. But the whole purpose of Bill 11 – and it says so right in their bill – is that they want to expand the authority of regional health authorities to contract with private care providers, which is an expansion of private health care. So, again, I find it difficult to accept the government would have it both ways, that they would say, on the one hand, that what we need Bill 11 for is to give more flexibility to regional health authorities to contract with private providers and on the other hand claim: I don't have to answer any questions on behalf of the government because we don't have any private health care scheme. Only one of those two responses can be the truth. I guess the proof is in the pudding, in the Bill itself, which is the subject of the debate, a bill that's all about private health care, and that's clear, Mr. Speaker.

So I would hope that the Premier and others would stop trying to introduce this diversion into the debate by saying that they don't have a private health care plan, when in fact their own public material, their own public statements, their own web site all talk about private health care.

While I'm on the subject of the web site, that leads me to another concern that I have, the kind of misinformation that is available from the government, which is why I am so opposed to this government initiative to stop debate and why I am so concerned with the government's reasoning for the motion.

If one were to visit the government web site on Bill 11, one would find a number of menu options, including answers to commonly asked questions. Those questions and answers I've been reviewing on an almost daily basis. You have to review them on an almost daily basis, Mr. Speaker, because the government keeps on changing the answers that they post on that web site.

It wasn't that long ago that in response to the question about the cost efficiency of private care providers, the government said: well, cost efficiency isn't really the issue; the issue is that we need the flexibility. The government seemed to acknowledge that these private providers weren't more cost-effective, or at least there was no proof that they had to offer that they were.

Now when you visit the web site and see the answer to that same question – the question is: what evidence is there? – they answer the question without providing any evidence whatsoever. They simply say that there is some evidence that in the existing private facilities there may be some cost savings, but of course they fail to go on to say that this is irrelevant because none of the existing facilities are inpatient-admitting facilities. They only do very low-intensity outpatient services, and of course what Bill 11 is all about is much higher intensity inpatient services. They want to be able to admit people for not just overnight but perhaps several nights. The reason why we know that, of course, is because the Premier keeps on talking about the Shouldice clinic, which sometimes requires stays of three and four days postoperative. Previously, of course, the Premier was talking about hip replacement surgery, which requires postoperative stays of even a longer duration than that.

There is other misinformation that is being circulated by the government. There is a daily summary of the debate that goes on in this House regarding Bill 11, and if you took a look at that daily summary, you would be led to believe that the only people that are speaking are members of the government, because they don't tend to quote those who are opposed to the bill, other than to misrepresent their words.

For example, Mr. Speaker, there has been some discussion regarding the drastic nature of the funding cutbacks in health care since the current government has come to power. The stated initiative of the government was to cut back about 20 percent. As events would unfold, the overall funding, unadjusted for inflation, was about 13 and a half percent across the whole health care sector. Of course, that doesn't account at all for the population growth, so on an adjusted per capita basis it's an entirely different figure.

The other notion is that it's not just the overall health care budget that was being referred to. For example, when the Leader of the Official Opposition made her opening comments in debate on Bill 11 in second reading, she repeated the fact that hospitals funding has been decreased by 30 percent. Now, this got a response from government saying: oh, no, no, no, that's not true. In fact, the government has now posted on their web site, has introduced into debate, and has tried to circulate the misrepresentation of the Official Opposition. They've tried to pretend that what the Leader of the Official Opposition said was that health care funding has been cut by 30 percent, which is not what was said in this House or outside this Chamber. If you take a look at the government's debate summary, they say in the misrepresentation department that the opposition is saying that funding was cut by 30 percent, when in fact it was only 13 percent.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's really unfortunate the government would put that kind of information under the title misrepresentation. Not only does it bring disrespect to the whole process; it misrepresents the facts, the facts being that if you take a look at the Canadian Institute for Health Information's published reports, you will find that Alberta hospitals funding decreased by 27 percent over the period in question. If you take a look at the report on health care in Alberta that was completed by Dr. Evans et al, you'll note that he makes direct reference to hospitals funding in Alberta being cut by 30 percent, which is the figure that the Leader of the Official Opposition used.

But nowhere in all of the government information will you find an

acknowledgment that there are two credible references to support the facts as stated by the Official Opposition. Instead, what you have is the repeating and the repeating and the repeating of the government's message, even though it's clearly wrong. It reminds me, Mr. Speaker, that it doesn't matter how often you repeat a lie; it's still a lie. Just repeating it doesn't make something true. So I wonder what the government's purpose is in repeating and repeating and repeating these things that aren't true to try to justify their position. It would seem to me that the government would have a lot more credibility if they simply acknowledged the facts as they are and then argued the merits of their position, and then of course Albertans can come to their own conclusions.

4:40

Now, I have some other concerns as well. On the government's web site on Bill 11 what you see are several opportunities for feedback. I don't understand why the government, if they're getting feedback, as they're claiming, in support of the bill, is not telling us about that feedback. Why don't they publish, release the feedback that they're getting, the responses? I note that after every one of their questions and answers, they say: is this information useful to you? You have a chance to say yes or no, and if you say no, you get a chance to explain why it's not useful. I would be very, very curious to see the government release that information. What are they hearing from Albertans who are visiting their web site?

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of other issues I want to raise. One is that we haven't heard much about the down-the-road implications of Bill 11 when it comes to the practice of medicine in Alberta and in particular when it comes to the training and teaching of medical practitioners in the province of Alberta. I've had a chance to visit with some physicians who are either adjunct to the University of Alberta medical faculty or in fact are senior practitioners and participate in training through rounds at hospitals in the Capital region. What they raise is very interesting in relation to Bill 11.

They talk about the commitment that the public hospitals make to the training of physicians. They talk about the commitment that they as individual practitioners make to provide free-of-charge participation in the training process by either taking young doctors in training under their wings and taking them on rounds and being in case conferences with them or in fact by participating on committees, by dealing with curriculum development, by contributing their vast knowledge and expertise to the provision of scholarly works, the development of research protocols, by participating in the development of clinical practice guidelines, their peer review of the examination process, et cetera, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, there's just a myriad of ways in which the current structure supports the training of doctors. We're at a point in time in Alberta where there is a shortage of physicians, particularly in many specialties and subspecialties, and it is precisely in these areas of specialization that we hear the government saying: we are going to take doctors out of the public system and put them into a private system.

Now, if I can move my main argument to the side for just a moment and talk about this confusion that the government seems to have about why there is a backlog in so many surgical areas. It's certainly not because we don't have the capacity in our public hospitals. It's because we don't have the personnel in our public hospitals. So, Mr. Speaker, it's an absurdity to the extreme to suggest that somehow we'd be adding capacity to the public system and minimizing waiting lists if we simply had more private provision. It's as though this government believes that there is a secret cache of doctors locked in the basement someplace that they can

simply call up, as you would call up, you know, players from the minor leagues, to come and add capacity to the Alberta system. The fact is that if you have more private clinics, you're going to take those doctors out of the public clinics and you're going to have fewer doctors on the public side providing the same amount of service. So you don't add capacity at all.

Now, back to my main argument about the training. If you have these specialists now going to these private clinics – and these clinics are going to be forced to operate at a profit because the investors of those clinics will demand that – what you'll see is that these doctors will not be able to provide that same contribution. They're not going to be able to provide pro bono guidance and education and training. They're not going to be able sit on those committees. They're not going to be able to help develop those clinical practice guidelines. They're not going to be able to do rounds with doctors in training. They're not going to be able to participate in university discussions because their time is going to all have to be billable time for the company store.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, if the argument is put forward that we can simply make that a contract condition, that we'll force these private clinics into making sure their medical staff do all of these things, well, then you can rest assured that the private clinic owners are going to insist that there is compensation. So instead of all of these contributions being free of charge to the people of Alberta, courtesy of the medical profession in this province, we are now going to be in a position where the taxpayers are going to have to start paying and paying quite mightily for this, which would be otherwise a benefit that we would receive because of their participation in the public system.

Now, maybe there are some physicians out there that are saying: well, good, it's about time we get paid for that kind of contribution. But, of course, Mr. Speaker, most physicians that I've talked to have said that they are perfectly happy, perfectly willing to maintain their contribution because they see it as part of being a professional. They see it as part of what it is that defines them as a doctor in this society. I would like to hear from the government some response to this concern. How will we guarantee that this same degree of commitment from our senior practitioners will be there? How is it that it will not be eroded through the expansion of this array of private clinics, which will fundamentally alter the relationship that physicians have with each other, with their patients, with the regional health authorities?

Mr. Speaker, there's another point I'd like to raise – and I see that I only have a few minutes left, so I'll try to get to this one quickly – and that is regional disparity. When you again visit the government web site, what you find is that the authority for these contracts is primarily vested in the regional health authorities. There's language used in explaining the government's position that it will be up to each regional health authority to determine which contract and contractor will provide a benefit or a service, and I use the word benefit quite advisedly.

What we can see is an increasing growth in the patchwork nature of the provision of services, in the array of services. You will find in one health authority they'll decide that they want all private provision of, let's say, cataract surgery. In another health authority they'll say: well, we want all public. In another they'll say: we want a mix.

Now, we've got that situation in cataract surgery today, and it's created quite a bit of confusion and quite a bit of controversy. In fact, just today the government tried to address some of that controversy by introducing a new policy on foldable lenses.

Now, imagine if this were now the case when it came to tonsillectomies or hip replacements or hernia surgeries or any other of a vast

array of surgical services. What you would find is that region-by-region decisions would be made not based on what is best value for the taxpayer or in the best interests of the public or particularly what will provide the best care level for the patient. Depending on the salesmanship of the private provider, depending on the relationship that that salesperson has with the regional health authority, what you will see is that some health authorities will grab onto one sales pitch and run with it. Another might reject it, and then another might say: well, we'll have to wait and see. You'll have Albertans not knowing what it is that they can expect, not knowing where to go for service, not knowing what it's going to cost them, and you can see a real growing disparity across this province because the provincial government has neglected to do one of the most fundamental things it can do when it comes to health care, and that is having a province-wide vision for what level of service Albertans can expect.

Because I had some experience in both being a contractor and approving contracts, I could see this variation not just being a problem across regions but even within regions, because of course in the more lucrative regions, those population dense regions, there will be all kinds of competition for the dollars. You'll see vendors popping up trying to undercut each other and trying to recruit the best salesmen so that they can try to take the business away from somebody else. This is hardly the picture of stability or the vision of health care that I find comfort in. It sounds much more like car salesmanship or maybe the fast food industry or some other kind of business, but it certainly doesn't look like health care, Mr. Speaker. So I am concerned as well about this patchwork quilt of contracting services.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

4:50

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to speak to the need to keep this discussion going, and I think one of the biggest reasons is that the public needs a chance for input. They need a chance to be heard, because they don't feel that's happening.

I look at the implications of this bill passing, and I have real concerns. It doesn't matter where I go. People come up to me and say: "Colleen, don't let them pass this bill. You've got to fight for us. They're not listening to us. They don't care." I heard it last night at a forum where the majority of the people expressed grave, grave concerns about this bill passing. I know that they even asked the Member for St. Albert to vote against it, to vote the way her constituents want, and they were told no.

MR. DICKSON: How many people were at that forum?

MRS. SOETAERT: There were probably between 250 and 300 people. Were there that many? Would you say that there were 200?

MRS. O'NEILL: Absolutely not.

MRS. SOETAERT: Would you say 200, St. Albert? I don't know. She had a hard time looking up. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Please. I recognized the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to participate. I would ask that all hon. members, once given the chance to participate in the debate, take the

opportunity to participate and put their views forward. It's not debate time, participation back and forth, where I'm going to ask you a question or anything else. So please, let's recognize who has the floor, and you, hon. member, please focus on the subject matter.

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So a lot of the people didn't have the time to ask questions and express their concerns. They didn't have the time, and that's a reality of a forum. I agree with that. As one gentleman left, he said: you know, Colleen, these are my concerns that I never got to express or ask the questions on. So I'm going to relate some of those concerns that he had.

He said that for some of these questions what he would request are "straight answers." He didn't feel he was getting straight answers. "We are here," he admitted, "to discuss the pros and cons of our health care, and it is serious business."

His first question was: "What happens if this is not properly administered?" There are no regulations for how this is going to be administered across all these private surgical facilities. Right now in our public facilities there is a system to check up on all the details, including cleanliness of a facility. Who's going to check that that is properly administered? The regional health authorities? How much are we going to put on regional health authorities? How can this possibly be cost-effective?

Another thing: "Could it [possibly] mean devastation of many families? Possible loss of life due to high cost of service and a medical problem put off for [far] too long." [interjections] You know, I hear comments and groaning about this. These are concerns that were handed to me on a piece of paper last night by a gentleman who didn't have the time to ask his questions. So I would think out of courtesy to the average Albertan that he has a right to ask the questions. He certainly isn't getting answers from this government, but he certainly has a right to ask them.

MR. HANCOCK: Send them over to me. I'll take them.

MRS. SOETAERT: Send them to your office, the minister says?

MR. HANCOCK: Sure.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. Well, he's obviously not getting responses from where he lives.

Let's try this. "Will this Bill 11 give all of us the same opportunity to health service as we have today at [the same] cost?" Well, we're afraid of that. We're afraid that it won't happen because of the enhanced service clause that is in that bill, and that's where it should be different. I know the federal minister requested that while making amendments, be sure to address this. Can't you see the conflict of interest happening when we have enhanced services that are optional and done in a private system? If they're done in a public system and they're needed, then they're covered and the money goes back to the public coffers and the public buildings and the public facilities. If those enhanced services are done in the private sector, people are put in a dilemma. Is that doctor saying that you need that enhanced service because you need it or because there's an extra buck to be made for that private facility?

Now, we would say that most are very scrupulous people and are doctors that believe in making patients well, but that will not cover those people who do not feel that way. After all, they've got to answer to a board of directors, they've got to answer to investors, and they're thinking: oh, this would make us another 250 bucks, and we're going to need that to make the profit margin this month, so

let's tell that person that really they should pay for an extra enhanced service, whether they need it or not. That conflict is going to happen, and there's nothing in this bill to check up on that and to stop that. In fact, this bill allows for that to happen. They actually open the door for that. They pave the way for this. So that was one of his concerns.

The next question: "Will the cost to set up these new . . ." Now, he thought they were not-for-profit centres, so he obviously didn't understand the full implications of the bill yet. These are profit centres. They're making money at the expense of our health. "Will they be borne by the operators and not by an up front tax or hidden tax?" We're paying for these private operators to make money off our tax dollars. We're paying for it. We're paying for private businesspeople to make money off tax dollars. That should go against some people's grain in here, but it doesn't seem to. [interjection] Well, you know what? Speak, hon. member. I haven't heard you speak on this bill yet, so why don't you?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair has recognized the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. The chair will recognize any other hon. members that want to participate and in fact will make a special note to call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek next.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Continuing on with this gentleman's concerns. "Is this right? The general understanding that once this lucrative system is in place the U.S. or Mexico [can access it] through NAFTA, can through a company or subsidiary invade our country and our system, or even challenge and sue for surgical values and lost potential profits. U.S. lawyers always look for a potential lawsuit."

Now, he has grave concerns about what this will mean with NAFTA, and to be very honest, we have several differing views on what it will mean. We're only going to really find out when it's challenged. You know what? That's too late, because if we lose that challenge, we've lost. So we're risking an awful lot on a couple of opinions. We're risking a great deal on a couple of opinions.

He says, "This is only a skim of what we do not know." It's what we don't know that concerns him. "Further, insurance companies will be advertising – You May Not Be Covered." In capital letters he's written this. You may not be covered. Get your insurance here. Hips Are Us. What will be next, Mr. Speaker? "We will not know if we are [covered] or not." That is another concern with the bill, the reality of who and what and how many things will be deinsured. There's no control on that. There are no regulations for that, and people are concerned about how many things will be deinsured. So I'd like to see a process for that simply through a regulation. [interjection] What kind of regulation?

MR. DICKSON: Secret.

MRS. SOETAERT: A secret regulation. That gives me absolutely no level of comfort. Why haven't we built a proper system that talks about what's insured and deinsured? Why haven't we done that? A simple regulation that is in secret. Bingo, suddenly something is covered. Bingo, suddenly something is not.

One of the suggestions I heard is that simple tonsillectomies be done. Well you know what? Tonsillectomies can be very serious surgery. Yes, I bet you 90 percent of them are quickly done, but the reality is that there is a high-risk factor there. Certainly the older you get with a tonsillectomy – when you hit the ripe old age past 18 . . . [interjection] Hey, you know what, Mr. Speaker? I've just thought of another thing, inspired by a member from over there. Try getting your tonsils out – no; this is to do with the bill – when you're 40.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I thought you were going to suggest that something else be removed from the hon. member.

MRS. SOETAERT: Gee whiz, Mr. Speaker, you're on a different train of thought than I am.

DR. NICOL: But not necessarily a bad one.

MRS. SOETAERT: Not necessarily a bad one. I was seriously talking about tonsillectomies.

There is a doctor in this Assembly that I'll bet would tell you that if as an adult you're getting your tonsils out, you'd better not be in and out of surgery in a couple of hours, because you'll end up staying in the hospital at least overnight or a second night, and I know that from personal experience. Even a greater tragedy than having to stay in hospital for two days was that I couldn't speak for a week, Mr. Speaker. It was an absolute tragedy, not to my family but certainly to me. We weren't in session at the time, so I'm sure others would have found it a tragedy. It would have been catastrophic had we been in session and I had had that surgery.

5:00

Back to the bill and the concerns of this gentleman who came last night and handed me this paper because he didn't have time to express his concerns. "Do we have a safeguard against all possible intrusions and extra costs with this Bill 11?" Well, absolutely not; we don't. Then here's another note: "Can you trust this government to help us this time?" No. This is his comment, not mine.

In 7 years our medical costs have risen up to 30 percent for some people yet [people regretfully] accept it blindly. Examples: eye testing and glasses, dental, some medications, out of province coverage, cutback on maternity care, the monthly health care charge, and many sent home from hospital to fare as best they can.

Sadly, this bill does nothing to address that.

They talk about being innovative. If we want to be innovative, there are all kinds of things that I think Alberta has led on and could continue to lead on that are certainly not addressed in this bill: things like IV therapy at home; examples like the CHOICE program, that the Member from Edmonton-Gold Bar speaks of highly; the fetal alcohol syndrome program, that the former minister of family and social services promoted and that I hope the present one will encourage and continue and expand. Those are the kinds of innovations that we should be talking about. Long-term things are the smartest things we can do for our society. Educate them and get people out of poverty, give them an opportunity to change a life cycle. Those are the things that can long term help us in our health care system, not forcing people to accept a private, dual-track system that will cost us more.

His final question:

Do you not think we should have a moratorium on Bill 11 until the facts and safeguards are addressed and understood? It is serious.

Don't ignore it. These are the questions we would like addressed.

That wasn't just somebody fear mongering. That was somebody with very, very serious questions and concerns, and he didn't get a chance to ask them at the forum. But you know what? I will probably send a copy of this to the Justice minister because he said he would address those concerns. I have his name, but I will get his address for you, and I hope that you can answer them for him because I intend to. I would hope that the government will have that opportunity as well.

I want to speak for a moment – lots of things have been said about the ethics of this bill. Why would we push through overnight surgical facilities? Why would we push that in this province when in reality people would rather go home to recuperate? Day surgery

and modern technology have allowed for a lot more day surgery, and people go home that night. Why would someone have to stay overnight? Obviously the answer to that is that the surgery was so invasive or difficult that the patient is at risk of serious complications that may require immediate medical attention.

The complications of surgery can affect any part of the body and may include neurological problems from the anesthetic; vascular problems such as embolisms or blood clots that may cause a heart attack, stroke, or other major organ complications; difficulty breathing; pinched nerves from blood clots pressing on nerves; internal bleeding; allergic reactions to anesthetics or other medications. So here we've got some serious, serious surgery happening, and that's why this government is pushing through the overnight hospital stay.

Yet look at the implications. Do you know what's going to happen with this? Number one, I hope that this bill gets scrapped, because that's what people in Alberta are asking for. They don't have enough information. I don't think the government knows all the ramifications and implications of this bill. They want those answers, and they haven't got them yet. All they know is that democracy is being undermined because people are being asked to vote for something that their constituents don't want, and they have concerns that have not been addressed.

A few more ethical problems. I'm talking about overnight stays here and why this legislation would push this through when obviously it's going to put people at risk. It's going to put people at risk, because the surgical facilities will not be able to provide all that the public system can with the proper intensive care and emergency care situations that are expensive to maintain, no doubt. We're just letting private clinics do the cream skimming, and that's not acceptable. It's not acceptable. So it's not merely good enough to notice that a patient is suffering postsurgical complications. Immediate intervention may be needed to protect the patient's health or to even save his or her life. Any facility that does surgery complicated enough to require an overnight stay will therefore require a full array of health care specialists to address any complication, and all these caregivers must be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. What is needed is a full hospital staff, hardly affordable on the budget of a small, private surgical centre that aims to provide profits to shareholders.

You know, it's interesting. Jim Dinning has suggested that dedicated surgical centres will not require fully equipped operating rooms to deal with all sorts of surgery and thus will save money. If they are not fully equipped, though, then that facility is unable to attend to the postsurgical complications that will undoubtedly arise for some patients. Being purposely under-equipped is a danger to the health of patients and, thus, should be ethically unacceptable, and I think we all should think of the ethical implications of this bill.

Now, let's say that in the event that a patient experienced postsurgical complications beyond the capacity of a surgical centre, that they're unable to treat it, where would they go for assistance? What happens then? They would be transported back to the public system, which would have to absorb the high cost of treating complications. Patients with emergency postsurgical conditions would likely jump the queue ahead of patients waiting for surgery in the public system and may even bump nonsurgical but desperately ill patients. Why has no one addressed that ethical concern in here? Or are government MLAs just blindly accepting that it doesn't really matter, that health care isn't about ethics? It absolutely is, and I think there are government MLAs here who are failing to see that.

Bill 11 fails to regulate private health care facilities or providers outside the limited realm of surgery. Diagnostic clinics are not addressed in this bill, and that's one of the concerns about queue-

jumping. Long-term care, nursing home facilities, home care services, and other outpatient providers such as physiotherapy services: all elements of private-sector contracted care should be regulated according to similar standards and co-ordinated within the public system. This bill does not actually regulate private health care services at all but serves primarily to allow private surgical facilities to open.

I'm hoping, Mr. Speaker, that I will have another opportunity at some time. Thank you.

5:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, actually I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion. Obviously, I'm certainly opposed to an early shutdown of second reading, and you know, there are some 52 MLAs from the government side and half a dozen from this side of the House that have not yet had the opportunity to address this bill in principle. Now, I would be surprised if those 52 MLAs did, because that would be a record, I think, in this House.

Quite frankly, I actually would encourage every member in this House to get up and speak. This is probably one of the most contentious issues that we will debate in this Legislature, certainly in my time, and I dearly believe that it's incumbent upon everybody in this House to put their position on the table. We were told that people would debate in the House. I have challenged four hon. members to debate. All of those members have said that they won't debate me and have said that they will debate in the House. So I'm expecting all those members to do that in the House, to put their statement of principles on the table for all Albertans to read and enlighten us all.

MR. DOERKSEN: Did you not read mine?

MS OLSEN: I haven't got yours yet.

MR. DOERKSEN: I gave a speech.

MS OLSEN: Well, that's great. The hon. Member for Red Deer-South has said that he's spoken. So out of four, that's one down, three to go. I'm very happy that the hon. Member for Red Deer-South has been able to put his information on the table. You know what, hon. member? I'm going to read that, and by the time we get into committee, you can rest assured we'll have some discussion about it. How's that?

Here we are needing to really discuss the merits and the principle of this bill, and in no short time we've seen a procedural motion used to stifle that. So, Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting, because I view democracy as giving a certain number of freedoms and liberties to citizens of a country or, in this case, this province. In fact, just for the information of the House, I always count on the Oxford dictionary simply because I think it's probably the best written reference book that we have. It states that democracy is defined as

government by all the people, direct or representative; form of society ignoring hereditary class distinctions and tolerating minority views; principles or members of Democratic Party.

Well, you know, I would like to think that every single person in this House has a pretty standard view of democracy and that as we move through our debate and as we do the job we were elected to do in this House, people understand what that word is all about. I sometimes see things happen in here that democracy is only okay and acceptable if it's the government's form of democracy. You see, democracy is only acceptable to this government or to the Premier

when it suits them. So it's okay for the Premier to bellyache about Bert Brown not getting appointed to the Senate, and he cites the fact that there was an election, a democratic election that put Bert Brown and Mr. Ted Morton as the two front-runners from this province that should go to the Senate. But you know what he did? On the other hand, he fired a democratically elected school board. So he uses democracy when it suits his need, Mr. Speaker, and I have a little difficulty with that.

The other thing he did was reneged on his promise to elect regional health authorities. Instead, he put his pals at the helm. This government, the Premier, who's the kingpin of the show, if you will, put his pals in the Calgary regional health authority and dispersed within all of those authorities around this province. Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that's wrong. This government here will go after the federal government saying: that appointment was patronage; this appointment was patronage.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on, I presume, a point of order.

Point of Order Inflammatory Language

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), inflammatory comments and making allegations. I do hesitate to rise, but it should be clear to all members of this House that there was an appropriate process for the appointment of hospital board members. It was a public process. There was advertising. There was an independent committee that reviewed and interviewed them. So it's totally inappropriate for the hon. member to indicate or to say to this House and to say to members of the public of Alberta that the Premier put his buddies on the health boards.

There was a public process advertising for nominations. Everybody who's taken any look at it at all knows that there was a committee. As I recall, in fact a very prestigious member of Edmonton city council was one of the members of the committee that I can remember off the top of my head who reviewed the applicants and made recommendations as to who went on the committee.

In light of what I said earlier, I would hesitate to intervene in debate at all, but it's totally inappropriate for the hon. member to make the allegations she suggested on the nature of the appointments to the hospital boards.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: On the point of order, Mr. Speaker, and addressing that directly, I think no point of order has been made.

I recall that when I had the privilege of being the Official Opposition health critic from about January of 1998 until about February of 1999, I had lots of opportunity to study the process whereby men and women were appointed to regional health authorities. Let's be absolutely clear. There may well have been changes to the process for appointment of the men and women to the 17 RHAs, but in no sense is that what anyone could ever describe as an open process. The government chose the people who were doing the screening.

I'd be the first person to say that there were some excellent candidates that came forward and were vetted through the screening process and now sit on some of those 17 regional health authority boards, but the reality is that the government controlled the process, controlled the people who were appointed. It was not transparent in any sense. I remember attempting to get information on criteria that were applied. In fact, it was exceedingly difficult even to find out who was on those panels.

We all remember that in the Calgary regional health authority we had a situation where Dr. John Morgan had been appointed as chair of the Calgary regional health authority, was the chair for less than a year – my recollection is that it was something like eight months – took some positions that were very much inconsistent and conflicting with the position of the government of the province of Alberta and the Department of Health and Wellness, as it is now, formerly the department of health. What we had was Dr. Morgan, poof, mysteriously, there one day and gone the next. Who arrives in his place but our cheerful Provincial Treasurer.

Now, I remember going to the Red & White Club in Calgary just two weeks ago. In fact, I went with the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. Speaking specifically to the point of order, Mr. Speaker, I remember that there were some 800 Calgarians that showed up, and you know the thing that drew the longest and most vociferous response is when somebody challenged the legitimacy of the Calgary regional health authority as being representative of the 800,000 people in the Calgary health region. People applauded. They rose from their chairs virtually as one, provided a standing ovation to this one Calgarian that posed the question. It was an astonishing circumstance that brought home to me that regional health authorities in Calgary certainly don't have the trust, the confidence, and the respect of the people in the Calgary health region, and from my experience with many of the other health regions around the province, the same thing would apply.

5:20

The Minister of Justice on his point of order suggests that my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood, with an excellent reputation for accuracy and tough, penetrating analysis – I would think that the Minister of Justice would have appreciated that when she makes those observations, they are consistently well supported, buttressed by evidence, and that would certainly be the case here.

Those are the observations I wanted to make. I'm looking forward eagerly to your ruling. I don't know whether other members wish to participate – even the Member for Edmonton-Norwood may in fact want to offer some observations on the point of order – but those are the comments I wanted to share with you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I would just like to add to the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Very briefly.

MRS. McCLELLAN: It will be brief.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the point of order is well taken. There is a process that is documented for appointments to these health authorities. They are publicly advertised. There is a screening committee. It is very transparent. I think the member opposite does a huge disservice to the hundreds of people across this province who virtually volunteer their time in the service of their communities.

There are guidelines that the screening committee must follow. They are required to look at a variety of backgrounds. They look at

people who have had experience in health services. They look at people who have had experience in community service and business experience and a variety of others.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the process for the appointment of regional health authorities was made public, and I think the hon. member, as I indicated, does a huge disservice to the hundreds of people across our constituencies. I certainly would take great exception if she is alluding to any of the members who serve on the three regional health authorities that are in my region. The people who serve on those authorities are doing it in the best interests of their community. They get no reward other than a sense of service to the community, and I think the honourable thing would be for that hon. member to withdraw that comment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood on the point of order.

MS OLSEN: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: On the point.

MS OLSEN: Just very, very briefly on this point of order. I in no way meant to impugn the reputation of anybody in this House. I do know, however, that Mr. Dinning was a member, and if we look at the Calgary regional health authority, Mr. Speaker, I think it speaks for itself.

So I don't believe there's a point of order. Your decision.

THE SPEAKER: Well, this is indeed unique. During the day, during the question period the chair heard a number of observations from members about the need to participate, the lack of availability of time. The chair recognized this hon. member at about 9 minutes after 5. The time that we've now exercised in debating a point of order is part of her speaking time.

The chair was listening very attentively with respect to all the comments to be made on Bill 11 and then heard quite a few comments that I guess prompted the suggestion that there was some violation of section 23:

- (h) makes allegations against another member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives . . .
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language.

Then the points of order just basically rallied around health boards. The chair really thought that the point of order and the House would be dealing with statements and accusations against the leader of the government.

So the time goes on. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, you may continue your debate in whatever time is left.

MS OLSEN: Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on this bill right now. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:25 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 11, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/04/11

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated. Hon. members, prior to recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, which we will do momentarily, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker, Member for Highwood, and Rotarian.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted this evening to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly this evening 13 Rotarians and Rotary Anns and an exchange student who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. They are all from the Barrhead Rotary Club. They are Edwin and Christine Haltiner, Sara Haltiner, Don and Donna Meunier, Graham and Elaine Anderson, Vern and Donna Stocking, Patricia Shepherd, Sarah Crowfoot, Dr. Charles Godberson, and Deca Ambrosi, an exchange student from the fine country of Brazil. I would ask them all to rise to receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have some special guests in the gallery this evening. We have Lieutenant Kjosness and seven of her charges in the 395 air cadet squadron of the city of Edmonton. If they would be so kind as to rise and have the members give the traditional welcome.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

Mr. Havelock moved that pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) the question on second reading of Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be now put.

[Adjourned debate April 11: Ms Olsen]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to go back to my topic of democracy and speaking about this motion to close down debate at second reading.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, it seems like our Premier has a bit of a bad habit and this government has a bad habit. It seems that they have a huge addiction to closure. You know, closure 26 times since '93 is a significant number of times.

What the Deputy Government House Leader did last night was effectively bring in closure under another name. It's unfortunate, because we, as I said, have one of the most significant debates before us. It is in fact the most important debate we've had in this Legislature since I've been elected. I clearly don't understand why

this government would want to do this given that this is the most important bill they've debated in an awfully long time. I'm not sure what the intent of it is, but I certainly know there are a number of people that need to speak to the principle of second reading, and that's just not going to happen.

Interestingly enough, we've talked a little bit about private health care, and this isn't a private health care bill, but I heard the junior minister of health on CKUA this morning. The junior minister was talking about the issue of enhanced services, and he said: well, you know, if we can have enhanced services now within a public system, why can't we have it within the . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Referring to Proper Titles

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. I'll be very brief, Mr. Speaker, but to ensure that we don't have a recurrence of what happened last night, perhaps you can encourage the hon. members across the way to refer to members in this House by their correct names. There is no junior minister of health. There is an Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: I have no desire to speak on the point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm sorry; I don't understand what you're saying.

MS OLSEN: I have no desire to speak to the point of order. I'd like to get on to my debate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Oh. Well, okay then.

I think what we wanted to say here is that when you start referring to people by other than their proper title, then that's inflammatory and leads to debate. So if you want to refer to an hon. minister, please do so in the proper way. That is only the parliamentary way. Referring to him as anything else – Mickey Mouse, junior, or whatever – is really improper and unworthy.

Do you have any desire now to enter into this?

MS OLSEN: No. I'll continue on with my debate, thank you. I heed your advice, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm just trying to understand where the hon. member is coming from. If we're going to characterize each other with all kinds of things other than the proper way to address in this House, then it's going to just degenerate into catcalling and all the rest of it. Do you have an understanding that there isn't a junior minister? We have hon. members. We have ministers. We have associate ministers. We have leaders of the opposition. We have House leaders of the opposition. We have House leaders here in the Legislature. Do you understand that, hon. member?

MS OLSEN: As I said, Mr. Speaker, I take your advice, and I heed your advice.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Debate Continued

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To go back, I'm listening to the radio this morning, and I hear the associate minister of health speaking about private hospitals. He says: you know, if we can have enhanced services in the public system, why can't we have it within a private system? Well, I think that's clear. I think that's the reason we're here, is it not? If you have it in a private system, that means somebody's pocketing the dough; right? So any money over and beyond the cost of an enhanced service goes into a private entity; it doesn't go into the public system. So I'm not sure where his logic was. I'm never sure from time to time where his logic is.

We don't believe in for-profit hospitals: I understand the Premier said that over and over and over again. Then I listened to something that I believe is very misguided logic. So I need to know: do we believe in private hospitals, and do we, then, say it's okay for doctors and other entities to make money in this manner? I'm under the impression that that's not what's in Bill 11, but I sure heard that from the associate minister, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek. The Canada Health Act doesn't allow for that, Mr. Speaker. So what he maybe is asking and suggesting is wrong, because the Canada Health Act doesn't allow for it.

I see a lot of misguidance. All the more reason to refer this bill to a committee, as my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Manning suggested yesterday. I mean, let's face it. We have so many folks over on the other side: some people don't understand the bill, and somebody thinks it means something that it's not saying, and they make public statements about it. We don't know where others are coming from. So clearly a debate, like they do in the House of Commons, Mr. Speaker, where they take a particularly contentious bill such as this and then all parties sit down and scrutinize that bill – that's what we should be doing. That's what we should be doing, and that's what would serve Albertans better than ramming this bill through and bringing in this form of closure today.

Carrying on from there, we also have the issue of what I believe is misrepresentation, Mr. Speaker. I get offended when I hear things being twisted and I hear things being said that clearly misrepresent statements. I'm going to give you a few examples right here. Yesterday, as reported in the press, Mr. Premier said that he found it hard to reconcile Mr. Rock's proposed changes with Mr. Chretien's message, which the Premier interprets as: go ahead and pass the bill. That's what he's saying Mr. Chretien has said.

Well, clearly, if we refer to the document that was tabled in this Legislature, the Prime Minister of Canada's letter to this Premier states:

As for Bill 11, I understand that the legislation is still being debated and you may be considering amendments. With this in mind, we have some concerns about the potential long-term implications of the current draft bill, which could be addressed through amendments. I understand that the Honourable Allan Rock is sending a letter to the Honourable Halvar Jonson in which Mr. Rock outlines these concerns. I trust that you will welcome his suggestions in the spirit of constructive dialogue which characterized our meeting in Calgary.

A little bit different than the Premier reporting that the Prime Minister says: pass this bill. I don't think so. A true misrepresentation, Mr. Speaker.

8:10

I also look at the issues outlined in this particular bill by the hon. federal Health minister. He does have concerns about overnight stays, and he does outline in here, Mr. Speaker, specifically what the Saskatchewan legislation and the Ontario legislation say, and it isn't the twist that's given by this government. Clearly, they do not allow

for enhanced services. I would suggest that members of the public get hold of these documents that have been tabled, because this Premier and this government, as far as I'm concerned, are twisting the words of the federal Prime Minister.

Let's be up front and honest. You want us all to lay the information on the table. Let's not misrepresent it. Let's not misrepresent all the studies that have been laid on the table. The World Health Organization: we've done that. The Institute of Health Economics report by Dr. Cam Donaldson: let's not misrepresent that either. The only thing they're waiting for in that particular document is the 54 studies that they used and wanted for their report. I mean, that's a study they're standing behind, and they're standing behind it, Mr. Speaker, because they've already given it to Alberta Health. If they're not going to stand behind it, they're not going to release a study like that at all. For this government to say, "Well, let's wait, and let's get the final report," fair enough. Let's get the final report, but don't use that as an excuse to misrepresent or diminish the reports that are put out by academics on this issue.

Let's talk about the hon. Minister of Government Services' comments about dismissing Dr. Rachlis' report and saying that that's not worth the paper it's written on. Dr. Rachlis may have a different opinion from the hon. minister, but she has no business diminishing the work that he has done. None, none at all. Whether she agrees with it or not is another story, but to dismiss it out of hand the day it comes out, in fact likely not even read, is an absolute atrocity.

I feel that if we're going to tell Albertans about this bill, then let's tell them the realities of it. I have no problem standing up here and telling them about my fears about that bill. Not at all. I have not yet misrepresented one bit of information and in fact can cite specifically and submit a bibliography for everything I've said on that bill.

I think it's important that if we're going to talk about democracy and we're going to talk about giving Albertans information, let's make sure we're giving them the right information, Mr. Speaker. Let's not just say that there's only one side to this argument. Clearly, there is not only one side to this argument. I'm not the least bit impressed, nor would I call it democratic, to have the government try and twist everything that's coming out. I look at the examples that I've cited here today in terms of reports, and I just feel very appalled that that's how the government of a province as well-to-do and respected as this particular province is tries to pass bills.

Let's do the right thing, Mr. Speaker. Let's take this bill and put it before the Committee on Law and Regulations. You know, there's some validity to that. Do you know that members of the House of Commons see committee work as some of the most productive work they do? They get to look at the bill, they get to assess the bill, and they get to debate the bill amongst the group that's dealing with it. If it's a justice bill, then this group of justice committee MPs will look at that bill. There is nothing wrong with that process. That is an excellent process. In a truly democratic society we should not be afraid to use that type of process.

Mr. Speaker, I have to make a comment. You know, I watched the movie *Doctor Dolittle* with my son, and it was quite an interesting movie really. What it started out as was the sale of two physicians' practice to an HMO, and the one, Doctor Dolittle, had a little bit of difficulty with taking all this cash and abandoning his patients and was worried and concerned about what was going on, and in the end he doesn't sell out. In the end he says: "No. My patients are what's important to me. I am a doctor and I will look after patients. You know, the money that I can make selling my practice to an HMO isn't the way it should be."

I don't ever want to see our doctors put in that position, where the health and well-being of Albertans is registered in economic units. I don't ever want to see that, and that's what I'm afraid this bill is

doing. This bill is putting the whole notion of health and well-being into an economic unit, and obviously that's not what Albertans want. Albertans want fairness. Albertans want access. Albertans want to be able to trust that their government is going to do the right thing for them, and at this stage that's not what they believe. The Premier can talk about, you know, the little incremental changes in the communications war, but he is not winning. He is not winning that war, Mr. Speaker.

I see my time is out, and I will take ample opportunity in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Speaking to the motion by the Deputy Government House Leader and Minister of Economic Development. Premier Klein has been scrambling to clarify the health care plan, but most pressing in the debate is the question most Albertans are asking: why? What is in this for him? Premier Klein, the Premier, may be the only person who . . .

Speaker's Ruling Referring to a Member by Name

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, as you well know – and you've even caught yourself. Two strikes. As hon. members here we're obliged to refer to one another by the seat we represent, the constituents we represent, or . . . [interjection] Hon. member, the Speaker is standing at the present time, which means that you don't talk. We refer to other members as hon. members from their constituency or the position they hold. We don't use last names, and just within the first however many minutes or seconds twice you've referred to an hon. member. Premier is fine or the member for his constituency. If we could kind of keep to that, it helps keep the tenor.

Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take your advice.

Debate Continued

MR. GIBBONS: The Premier may be the only person who understands Bill 11. Alberta did have a good health system prior to his crowning in 1992. Doctors say that they're frustrated. They say that they're continuing to be pressed for a lack of operating theatres to work in. Why is this?

In a conversation with a surgeon recently, in his frustrations due to the lack of theatre time, he said that he hopes the bill goes through so Albertans will finally realize how bad this government is and their capability to govern this province in everything. After the conversation about what this government did in Calgary, blowing up a hospital, selling off a facility for next to nothing, creating a shortage, it didn't take him long to figure out what I meant by this is Calgary driven. We both can't figure out why the rural politicians aren't speaking out about their constituency concerns.

Mr. Speaker, when I was away a couple of weeks ago down in the United States on holidays, I was listening to a number of radio ads from law firms. They were stressing that if you think you have medical malpractice cases against your family, contact this law firm. Could that be what our future is in Alberta or Canada? Once the creep is over the boundaries into the other provinces, then we've got it right across. Dr. Modry's lame excuse to gain media support for his political friends is quite sickening. Thank heaven for the voice of reason from Dr. Alex Procyshyn, responding as the head of 1,800

Capital region physicians, when he pointed out that Dr. Modry speaks for a very small percentage of physicians in our region.

8:20

To get to the point, this government is grasping for any supportive letters from their political buddies. Maybe they are more than just political buddies to the Premier. Dr. John Di Toppa, head of ear, nose, and throat, will only support Bill 11 as long as there is no other money put into the public system, and it is not necessary to support the risk of unknown results. Doesn't this point out or sum up some of the major problems in the public system?

Some people are guessing or asking what's going to happen to the Charles Camsell. Well, maybe we might sell it off. Maybe Dr. Modry might want to run it as his own, but at the same time maybe we can give it to him and let him run it as a public system. Maybe he can be making the same kind of money. Maybe we shouldn't be jealous of the good physicians we do have in the province and try to hold them back on the amount of operating-theatre time that they do have in our system.

You know, we have to wonder about these doctors that are pushing for warehouse areas to give public health care to the poor and then keeping everything else for the ones that can afford it. The same doctor that I was mentioning before mentioned that a few years ago in a number of clippings. Also, he has told nurses that stand up with him and scrub with him within the operating theatres today that they can come with him when he does get his own private system, but he'll offer them \$12 an hour. His comments were: that's all they're worth. Well, is this union-breaking? Is this a mentality that's spreading down from himself at these social functions, or are there other doctors that do agree with him? Guess who this gentleman is friends with.

The era of this government has been characterized by a number of broad themes since 1993. They include both privatization of public services and the tendency to limit the role and importance of the Legislature. When Albertans realize that Albertans actually govern and manipulate by the kitchen cabinet out of Calgary, maybe somebody's partner, well, it makes you wonder. Trust has been challenged.

Bill 11 should be called this government's and its partners' private hospitals bill. I'm concerned about sections in the bill like section 23. It goes a great length in prohibiting court challenges, previous judicial injunctions, restraining orders. It even prohibits questioning about the act or ministerial decisions. Why are all the protective measures needed? Once the act becomes law, is there no recourse?

Now, reading over different things. The Premier has suggested that there are a number of studies and reports on which the government based its rationale for Bill 11. The Institute of Health Economics study states that there is no published study on the efficiency of the purchase of surgical services for private facilities by public funders such as the RHA. You know, Mr. Speaker, this government has stated that there will be no queue-jumping and no two-tier health care. The study, however, indicates that two-tierism will likely result in the proposal. While the study provides strong evidence against Bill 11, the results themselves are not surprising. What is even more significant is the fact that it was Alberta Health and Wellness that funded this study, making it all the more difficult for the government of today to dismiss the findings of the group as the work of, with us, wing nuts.

Even more telling is the fact that the government had had this study in its possession for at least two weeks at the time we the Official Opposition made it public. Would this important study have been buried forever if it wasn't for the Official Opposition bringing it out? This government is already withholding from the public the

results of the taxpayer-funded focus groups on private hospital policies. What other information is this government keeping from us and keeping away from this debate until it's over? More importantly, do we trust this government anymore?

Trust is a major item, and trust goes a long way. Let's think of a few years ago. Do you remember the name Schreiber? Do you remember the name Mulroney? You know, those things really pin on people, and they stay. They result in only a couple of seats left in there. This government's amendment to Bill 11 seems to be insignificant, but it is major, major. We think about what was said on the stairs of this Leg. by the minister in coming up here the other day: that he's going to change a few things, that he's going to maybe require RHAs to look at existing resources before contracting out. Should this not have been happening already? How much is being wasted now? Isn't this a common service that should be there? Do we have to have legislation around this? Then we had another item that actually was mentioned on the steps: strengthen the queue-jumping section. It is happening now.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives Relevance

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I know that it's extraordinary for me to rise on a point of order when I'm not as familiar with *Beauchesne*, but it seems to me to be on the whole matter of relevance and section 23(i). I'd like to ask if in fact there have been references both to things that I would suggest define motives for this government which I do not believe to be correct and also in the manner in which the digression in discussion continues to explore other governments and other people in other places. I would just ask for your ruling.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.
On the point of order, Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thanks very much. I appreciate the opportunity, in fact, to compliment my colleague for what I think is a robust and vigorous debate and analysis of Bill 11. [interjection] In fact, I hear someone query whether my colleague is reading some of his speech. If we were to disallow every government member that read from their speech, we could wrap up the session in about a week and a half instead of three and a half months.

Mr. Speaker, the issue in terms of relevance. I'd hasten to add that I'm taking some direction from the Government House Leader, who in fact raised a most interesting argument on a point of order today and made the observation, that was concurred in, in fact, by the Speaker, sitting in your place, that the debate is – I paraphrase; it is not a quote – as substantial and as vigorous and as broad as any debate could be at second reading and that in no way is the member constrained by the fact that there's a text of a motion. That was welcome news to this member and to my colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I've been listening attentively and in fact making notes in preparation for my own comments. I'm being guided much by the Member for Edmonton-Manning. In my view, everything he said is directly related to what's in the bill, the program and the policy behind the bill, and it is certainly fair and appropriate for any member of this Assembly to query what the rationale is, what the motivation is. That's what Albertans expect us to do. Your constituents in Highwood would have the same expectation.

Now, there may be some other colleagues that have some views, but those are the points I wanted to make with respect to the point of order. There may be other debate as well on the point.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, on the point of relevance.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We've had two people, one from this side, one from that side, and there hasn't been anyone else, so I think that's quite all right.

We have two points of order raised by the hon. minister. The first one was on motives, and 23(i) clearly states and deals with the issue of motives. It says: "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member." Certainly the hon. member was imputing motive to the government, and as the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has said, that is not quite as offensive. It's when they single out an individual member. The term "relevance," though, has another attachment to it, and if we were going in strict adherence to certain things, that might be true.

8:30

However, this afternoon the hon. Government House Leader did say, contrary to some comments, that on this part of second reading, under this putting of the previous question, wide allowance for speeches by all hon. members on second reading would prevail. That was concurred in by the hon. Opposition House Leader and by the chair. So what in other circumstances may appear to be a violation of the relevance under those conditions is not so, and the chair will rule thus.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning in continuance.

Debate Continued

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was mentioning about what was happening on the stairs of this Legislature the other day. We might as well start spinning right from the start, because we've had lots of spins over the last few months, starting with this. One was maybe that hip operations could be done out there. Well, that was totally thrown out right off the bat.

Then there was hernias. Let's talk about hernias. You know, one little nick could end up the same as what happened in Lloydminster a few weeks ago with that young 21-year-old lady.

Then we talked about operations last night, of tonsils, brought forward by Calgary-Egmont. I've done a little bit of studying on tonsils, and that's very, very scary. There aren't going to be too many anesthetists or doctors that are going to accept going out into any private area. Then there are other little secrets that haven't quite got out into the public in the last while as anesthetists start setting up their own little theatres and drawing in doctors. Did you know that a four-year-old child died in the last couple of weeks because of just dental surgery? Let's think about things like that, and those things still haven't got out into the public yet.

Getting back, Mr. Speaker, to what was actually mentioned on the possible amendments that are going to come forward in committee, in third reading, if we ever even get to them, because this government wants to push things through so fast.

Strengthen the queue-jumping section. Happens now. It should already have been stopped. In my previous speech yesterday we were talking about how if it wasn't for national television, we probably wouldn't have heard about the \$2,000 per eye case down in Calgary. And, you know, has that really been checked into already? I don't know.

The third item that is a possible amendment is the strength of the privative clause. Nobody is above the law, Mr. Speaker. We'll need an overhaul to look at it totally.

Then the next item that could be possible is clarifying the process by which the minister can withdraw the designated status. Boy, I've got one big question on my side about what the rationale on that one is.

The fifth one: strengthen the conflict of interest rules. Another one I've got a great big huge item on.

The key message: this is just tinkering. It's just tinkering with a bill that should have been handled properly in the first place. You just don't put all the legal beagles in the world together and come out with the legal side of it, because as I mentioned yesterday, outside of Bill 11 in a responsive relationship with principle 11 of the federal system, we really do have a major, major problem with this bill. It is a bill that should not even be tinkered with anymore, not amended, not anything but pulled, Mr. Speaker.

After what must have been the 10th meeting between the deeply divided Conservative caucus in the last few days, the actual minister started talking about tinkering with it, and this is what the results are. We're seeing these few five items, and maybe there'll be six items or maybe there'll be seven, whatever. But how does everyone in this government accept what the truth squad – or is this the trust-us squad? Because if you want to tinker with the words and tinker with things, you're going to change the Cs and the Qs or whatever you have. Isn't it bad enough that this bill is being rammed down our throats and that this government refuses to hear any of the opposition to it? It's horrifying that we support such a following that we can blindly be led – and you got blindly led over the last few years, and this really, really concerns me.

This government promises more choice, but private health care insurers can refuse to provide people with the coverage. This government promises increased access, but private hospitals can refuse to provide you with the service. This government promises more efficient and cost-effective services, but administrative costs of private hospitals in the U.S. are 14 percent of the total budget as compared to 9 percent in Canadian public hospitals. This government promises to improve quality of services, but recent studies at Johns Hopkins and Harvard indicate that the focus on making a profit translates to a compromise in quality. This government insists that it is not creating another tier, just simply extending what we already have. This government doesn't acknowledge that abortion clinics and cataract surgeries have been contracted out for a variety of specific reasons. What this government wants to do is allow for more private, for-profit hospitals to operate.

This government assures us there is a plan, but there is little action that we can see, and over the last seven years the cutbacks, the layoffs, and the bed closures demonstrate otherwise. This has been a total void in the whole system, and not just in our province. It's a void right across the whole country. But the fact is that we're Albertans. I defend Albertans, and I could care less than to point my finger at somebody else, but we have to work with the federal government and build something, not be sitting there and the whole spin on today's world is what they're doing. You know, we can talk about agriculture all night, about what we should be doing on that one.

This government promises a system that will be transparent, but in reality will the private health care provider be shielded by the provincial laws that protect third-party business information? We now can't get access to the terms of private operators. Does everybody remember the past Treasurer, who designed and implemented the scheme to cut about \$800 million out of health care spending? A theme that allowed no time to reform health care delivery, a theme that focused on firing more than 8,000 nurses and health care workers, a theme that ignored advice from the doctors in Alberta, but more a theme based on a huge lie.

The lie was that health care spending was absolutely out of control and that health care spending was driving us into bankruptcy. In fact, health care spending under the health minister of the day, now Leader of the Official Opposition, had flattened and was virtually

level for three years before this present government came into place or this present Premier took over. In any event, when we think of the past Treasurer, now reincarnated as the saviour of health care with his unelected CRHA board loyal to no one other than himself and this present government, we are reminded that being able to operate the crane with the wrecking ball doesn't qualify you to be an architect.

So what is our plan as the Official Opposition? Slam the door on two-tier care by banning private, for-profit hospitals. Second, impose a 180-day moratorium on new expansion of private diagnostic and surgical facilities to allow for a determination of what changes are required before we conform to the Canada Health Act. Third, require doctors who practise in private hospitals to opt out of the Alberta health care insurance plan. Don't let them double-dip because, you know, there's only 5 percent of the real true doctors out there that are really into this game of looking for privatization. Fourth, require RHAs to disclose all expenditures paid to private health care operators so that Albertans can see whether these contracts are of benefit to them or just to the shareholders of the private operators. Five, we'd have to go back once we were government and repeal most, but not all, of Bill 40, the Health Information Act, and enact legislation that covers private health care providers too, not just public providers.

You know, Mr. Speaker . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, we seem to have a lively debate between two people who are hopefully going to stand up at some later time this evening and debate when they're recognized. Right now it's only Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes they think I need help. Sometimes somebody standing up with a point of order or something like that really gets me going here too. So how much more time do we have?

You know, Mr. Speaker, about once every 15 years Canadians engage in a debate about changing our health care system and the values upon which it's based. The last time it happened, Alberta led the debate, then over allowing extra billing by physicians. Finally Alberta was dragged, kicking and screaming, into the prohibition of extra billing with the passage of the Canada Health Act in 1984. This issue is upon us again, but this present government seems determined to privatize its way out of the responsibility for the mess they have created over the last few years.

8:40

We have to stress that we as the Official Opposition would like to stop the creeping of privatization which has been leading to the edge here in Alberta. I mentioned before that once the edge closes in on the boundaries of the borders of the other provinces, I don't know how they're going to stop it.

The private sector's involvement in health care has grown from 22 percent to over 31 percent since this present government came in place in 1992. Taxpayers' dollars are going to subsidize private operators whose contracts are hidden from the public view. We are in favour of free enterprise but don't believe in public dollars going to subsidize those who otherwise couldn't make a profit. Albertans don't believe in public subsidies, not for hockey players, not for struggling airlines, and not for private health care separate privatization systems. We should renew our commitment to public health care as the best way to foster health and economic well-being now and in the future.

Predictable funding formulas by the federal and provincial governments is one main thing that should be driven at. Like I

mentioned before, there's been a void in actual plans and plans and plans, trying to keep up with technology. Everybody's talking about technology. Yes, technology is one of the major, major items, but we also have to have the plans to go along with it.

Involve health care providers and workers in defining and restructuring the public system. Find cost-effective and innovative ways to deliver health services complementing institutional care and community supports. You know, look at training and education. We're trying to work on every method possible to attract nurses and medical people back into our province. Yet we look at Grant MacEwan College, the only college training ground that we have in our city, in the Capital region area: 107 positions filled; 800 and some more applicants not attracted to it.

Well, believe me, if we're so short – and we know we're short, because if you take a look at the hospitals and at the emergency centre in the University hospital which will be opening in the next few months, they haven't got enough staff right now to open that. So this is a major, major item we have to think about.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise tonight and to enter debate on Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act. I do just want to comment briefly on some of the comments that were made by the two previous speakers of the Official Opposition, specifically from Edmonton-Norwood and also the speaker from Edmonton-Manning.

It's interesting, listening to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood and reflecting back on *Hansard* and reflecting back on the Member for Edmonton-Manning, who made the motion yesterday with regard to raising Bill 11 on almost a closure basis to going into committee, and then listening to the Member for Edmonton-Norwood tonight talk about closure and talk about thwarting, if you like, debate on Bill 11 in terms of second reading. How interesting that all of them in the Official Opposition have the opportunity to speak not once, not twice, but three times on Bill 11. I just find that interesting, and virtually every other bill in the history that I've been in this Legislature, for the last seven years, Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry to interrupt you, hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Hon. members, you'll have your turn. No need to drown him out while he's speaking. [interjections] No, no, no. I'm not wishing to enter into the debate at this point. I'm just wanting to remind you of courtesy and parliamentary decorum.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Debate Continued

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was saying how in the seven years I've been here, in virtually every case each member has spoken only once on second reading, and somehow all of a sudden this transcends into something that is not normal or something that is completely unaccountable or not consistent with the standards of this Legislative Assembly. I just find that staggering, and I find it staggering that that Member for Edmonton-Norwood would attempt to twist the facts and the realities that we are faced with in this Legislative Assembly.

I listened to the Member for Edmonton-Manning, his attack on physicians who speak out in support of Bill 11, his attack on keeping things from the opposition. This is probably the only government in the history of Canada that would come out five months ahead of legislation and lay out the principles so everybody, including the opposition, could have the opportunity to see it. It's too bad that their Liberal cousins, their Liberal fathers in Ottawa wouldn't do the same thing, Mr. Speaker.

They attack the RHAs, Mr. Speaker. He sits up there tonight and attacks the regional health authorities, people who are community-minded, people who are out there trying to work on behalf of all Albertans. I mean, I just don't understand this. He attacks amendments he hasn't even seen. I mean, how can you attack something you haven't seen. It goes beyond comprehension.

Then he talks about how they're free enterprisers, but God help you if you make a profit; God help you if you operate a private clinic; God help you if you're in a private practice where you make money. I mean, really. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, you will have a chance, but it's not while someone else is recognized and speaking. Is that clear? Edmonton-Ellerslie?

Hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, direct it through the chair.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't going to offer those comments, but I just couldn't resist with the members having stood up tonight and not contributed in a meaningful way to the debate before us.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to share three observations and comments involving, if you like, the process and the decorum that surrounded this debate in terms of Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act. First of all, I do want to commend all Albertans and particularly the opposition members, regardless of their political affiliation, whether it's the independent, the NDP, or the Liberals, because all of them have contributed to this debate, all of them have been voicing their concerns and what they believe are the views of their constituents, much as I have.

Having said that, I would like to reflect on some discussions that I had with three constituents last week who were here, and they were attending the Forum for Young Albertans. Most of us, a good number of us, had the opportunity to host them. Mr. Speaker, we talked about Bill 11, we talked about question period, we talked about the decorum in this Legislature, and we talked about the language we use in debate and so forth.

By coincidence and purely coincidence, the very next day – I happen to have a condominium in this great city of Edmonton – there is a flyer which has been sent out, I believe, by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. I looked at the statements on the front, and I said: "Okay. Well, I guess that's normal rhetoric. I can't get upset about it. I guess what they want to say, they want to say." But then I opened up the flyer, and what did I see in here?

Now, remember. This is going to constituents and trying to sell your belief, the Edmonton-Centre member's belief, on Bill 11. So the member took some quotes out of *Hansard*: asked by the member on March 8, asked by the leader of the opposition on March 15, asked by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and didn't give the date. Then I highlighted some of the comments. Now, remember, this is all surrounding the decorum around Bill 11 and talking to the youth of our province and debating the issues of Bill 11.

I highlighted these words, and there were I think nine phrases in the questions by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. It talks

about “after six years of attacks.” It talks about the Premier now threatening, about the Premier failing to anticipate, about shredding the senior’s report, about slashing, about double-crossing, about “attacking the very people,” about blaming seniors, and about “scapegoats.” Now, that is nine phrases in essentially two sets of questions by one member. The interesting thing is that when you look at the leader of the opposition, only one: “intellectually bankrupt.” Well, I guess that’s not too bad. And believe it or not, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, none.

8:50

Now, I may not agree with the tone of the questions that may arise; that’s beside the point. The words were not inflammatory. They dealt with, if you like, the issues of Bill 11. Again, I may not agree with the tone. Fair game. The interesting thing is that now I get to send this out together with my comments to these three young constituents who were here and say: “Okay. I had a hard time expressing to you what I was feeling and trying to express about decorum and the debate surrounding Bill 11. If you take this, hopefully this will maybe serve, quote, as an example.” It’s probably not the best example, but unfortunately it’s the only one I could come up with in that short period of time.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank my constituents who have provided a lot of feedback to myself and to both my offices with regard to the whole issue of Bill 11 and their comments.

The other thing I wanted to do, Mr. Speaker, is to acknowledge in particular and to express our appreciation in terms of the health care providers of this province. Really, when we debate Bill 11 and all the issues surrounding health care, the health care providers are the ones that are on the front line. They’re the ones out there, if you like, feeling the heat and the pressure every day. All of us, I think, have had experience of them comforting us, praying with us. Certainly, there’s no question in my opinion and I think that of my caucus that they demonstrate a relentless pursuit of excellence in everything they do.

The last thing that I want to acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, prior to getting into specifics is that we do have health care successes every day, health care good-news stories. I did want to share with you if I can find it here, which I probably can’t – anyway, I will have to set that one aside and come back to it.

What I was trying to get at – and I will table it. It was an obscure little article in a newspaper in the city of Edmonton about a week ago. It talked about hearing tests being expanded. It talked about a grant from Alberta Health and Wellness of, I believe, a million and a half dollars to a researcher so that basically all newborn children in this province will have a hearing test where only approximately 50 percent may be done at the present time. The researcher had come up with very good evidence to suggest that this is a good thing to do in terms of the whole ability particularly of young children to learn, if you like, not the thought pattern, but in terms of the speech and the sounds, particularly during the first six months of their lives.

Those are the types of things that I think happen every day in this province, not because of the government, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we contributed a million and a half dollars, but we have excellent people in this province in terms of research capacity. We have almost a billion dollars in a medical heritage trust fund, unlike any other province in Canada. Tremendous work and tremendous research comes out of that every year for the benefit of Albertans and indeed the benefit of all Canadians. Those are the things that somehow as we go through the debate on health care and particularly on Bill 11 for some reason seem to get set aside and almost ignored.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, is only one step in terms of the six-point program this minister and this Premier

have outlined with regard to some of the challenges facing health care. I think the significant fact is that we’re not prepared to sit back as Albertans, we’re not prepared to sit back as a government and let somebody else try to do something. That is not Albertans’ nature. We confront things head-on. We make the changes. We come up with the innovations. It comes back to conviction, and I think it comes back to courage. That’s what Albertans have, and I think that’s what we are seeing in terms of Bill 11. Bill 11 is really saying that we’re not afraid to challenge the status quo.

At the same time, we recognize that Bill 11 is only a very minor step in terms of the total health care provisions in this province. It’s only a basic extension really of what’s happening today and putting some fences around those things that Albertans have expressed their concerns about.

The other thing I want to comment on, Mr. Speaker, is the whole issue of Bill 11 and the kind of consultation process that has evolved over a period of time. Yes, there’s no question that Bill 37 and the predecessor bill prior to that over the years constituted debate, but I think what they did do was permit a process whereby all Albertans had the opportunity to raise the issues, to express their concerns, to offer their alternatives, particularly through a panel which was struck at the time that basically Bill 37 was not preceded with. I think those are some of the fundamental issues we cannot set aside in terms of looking at the path and the history that has led us up to Bill 11.

The other thing I think we have to note, Mr. Speaker, is that Bill 11 is not a panacea, and we acknowledge that. It’s not intended to solve, as I said earlier, all the challenges. People have said: put more money in. Well, the reality is that some \$1.6 billion has been put in over the last four years. That’s a 40 percent increase, a 40 percent increase in four years, 10 percent in the last year alone and a commitment in our business plan to increase that by another 21 percent over the three years. Those are very significant.

The one thing I did want to underscore there is that if you look back to that committee that I had the honour of serving on back in 1998, when we were reviewing the whole health care funding formula, we met with all 17 regional health authorities and the Cancer Board and various other groups, 30 some odd in total, with people like Mr. Percy, for example, who used to be a member of the opposition and who’s now a dean at the University of Alberta. Dr. Clarence Guenter was another one. All of these people, very knowledgeable, came together, setting aside partisan politics trying to come up with this issue.

One of the things as a backdrop – and it was only a backdrop – showed that in 1998 out of the five provinces including Ontario west, Alberta ranked third in terms of straight per capita spending. Nothing really to brag about, but that’s where we were. When you adjusted that by figures based on a nonpartisan organization and reflected strictly on the basis of setting aside or recognizing, if you like, the age population, the demographic population, the interesting thing is that we were number one. In fact, we were number one in Canada, and when you take into account since that time the expenditures we have made and the expenditures we will be making, I think it would demonstrate – and I wish I had those numbers today. I think it would clearly indicate that even on a per capita basis by far, let alone adjusting for demographics and for age, we’d certainly be number one without any question.

One of the issues that has been raised is two-tiered health care, the smear, the fear that somehow Bill 11 is creating or purporting to create another layer of health care. The thing that we have to point out, Mr. Speaker, that we have to look at, I believe the very essence of Bill 11: Albertans will not have to pay nor will they be able to pay for medically necessary surgeries performed in private surgical facilities. That’s the bottom line on that particular issue in Bill 11.

No matter how you cut it, no matter how you address it, that is the bottom line. That means there is only one system in terms of your economic posture in this province. Whether you're an MLA or not an MLA, whether you're a member of the opposition or the government or somebody in the gallery, what it simply means is that that health insurance card we carry is what you need to get health care service. As the Premier has said, nothing more and nothing less.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that Bill 11 also prohibits very clearly any kind of, quote, American style, for-profit private hospitals operating in Alberta. It even goes on further to say that no private facilities performing surgical services can operate outside the public system. It will also be illegal for anyone to pay for faster health service. There will be no queue-jumping allowed. It is very clear. Let us not even debate that issue. No queue-jumping. Read the bill. Black and white.

Another thing that I think we have to really set in the context of Bill 11 – and we've said it before, and I think we have to keep saying it, because I don't think there are a lot of Albertans that understand or even recognize it – is that there are 52 private surgical facilities operating in the province of Alberta today. Those 52 private surgical facilities perform over 150 different types of procedures, Mr. Speaker, and in the course of any given year perform over 20,000 of them. That exists today in the province of Alberta. It is good for medicare, it is good for our province, and it is good for those that want to take advantage and require that type of surgery. It also operates entirely within a publicly funded and publicly administered health care system, and that's what Bill 11 is all about.

9:00

We could go on and talk about, I think, the examples shown in other provinces in terms of the Shouldice hernia centre, for example. Yes, the debate says: well, it was grandfathered when medicare came in. But the point is, Mr. Speaker, that it's a private facility that operates today in the province of Ontario. For some reason – God, I don't know why – what we're going to attempt to do in Alberta is not consistent with that. It exists. It has existed for many years, and it's successful. Let our citizens of this province have the same opportunity that the citizens of Ontario have.

Let's not forget, Mr. Speaker, that every surgical facility in this province must be accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, not by the minister, not by myself, not by the Speaker, not by the Leader of the Opposition but by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. If I had to trust anybody in our medical system today, it would be the College of Physicians and Surgeons. I trust them. Maybe the opposition doesn't, but I trust them.

The issue with regard to NAFTA, Mr. Speaker, and the WTO. Certainly I think the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations has laid it out time and time again in question period, has issued the legal opinions. It's quite clear that Bill 11 will not permit any concerns under NAFTA. Quite clearly the carve-out provisions do apply and can apply. As we speak, the other contracts and the other facilities that are operating not only in this province today but in other provinces have never been and most likely will never be challenged under NAFTA. If they are, they are protected.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to conclude. I could go on, I guess, to many of the provisions, the individual phrases within Bill 11, but we will have lots of opportunity to do that in committee. I'm sure we'll be there a long time, in committee. We'll also have that opportunity again in third reading, so there will be lots of opportunity to get into more detail.

One thing I did want to share with you, Mr. Speaker. I sent a letter to a constituent very recently. Because the person had asked

me: Wayne, would you please – pardon me; Mr. Jacques, Member for – well, he called me Wayne in the letter. Would you please put in your own words from your strictly personal point of view, setting aside politics, setting aside the fact that you're an MLA, why you would support Bill 11. I wrote these three sentences. I said: first of all, in three and a half years I will be a senior citizen. I said: on April 7 our grandchild celebrated her first birthday. I don't have to tell grandparents what the significance of that is. I said that for those reasons I support Bill 11.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's unfortunate that we have to rise at this point in the debate on Bill 11 to speak to an amendment that in effect is a closure amendment on second reading of Bill 11. I say it's unfortunate because it's at second reading – not at committee stage, not at any other stage of the bill except third reading when there's cursory return to it – that we debate and explore the principles of a piece of legislation.

I can't think of many pieces of legislation we've examined in the last seven years in this House that have principles that have Albertans so upset, and I can't think of another bill that's been before us that contains principles that are in such conflict one with the other. I can't understand for the life of me, Mr. Speaker, how any member of this Assembly could return to their constituency without having spoken to the principles at second reading of this bill.

If I understand the count, there are close to 50 members on the side opposite that have yet to voice their opinion on these principles and four or five on this side of the House that have yet to voice their opinion on the principles. Again, I think that's extremely unfortunate, and it shows that as legislators we have not done our job.

The principles of the bill, as I said, Mr. Speaker, are too important to be ignored. The substance, the nature of those principles is conflicting. We have two sets of principles: those principles that are embodied in the preamble of the bill that pretend or would embrace the principles of public health care, and we have then following a whole set of principles that endorse private medicine. The bottom line of the bill is that private medicine in this province will be expanded. We can argue about the details of that expansion and what the implications are for the future of that expansion and the kinds of devastation that expansion might have for the public health care system, but that's what the bill is about, an expansion of private medicine. So we have these two sets of principles in conflict with each other, demanding debate and demanding clarification.

There is a publication, or parts thereof, that I read recently – I didn't particularly agree with the point of view being expressed – a publication entitled *Health Care Reform Through Internal Markets*. One of the good things in that publication was a little summary chart at the end of one of the chapters where they laid out the kinds of principles that govern private medicine and those principles that undergird public medicine. It's that comparison, Mr. Speaker, that I think is so important when we look at this bill.

For instance, in private medicine there's a strong belief that individuals are the best judges of their own welfare. Opposed to that in the public system is that when ill, individuals are frequently imperfect judges of their own welfare. In defence, those people who argue that the public system is best indicate that sick and worried patients often can't look after their own interests and often don't even want to. They want someone to help them through it. The consumers, particularly sick people, often have no time and don't even have the option to shop around for the best buy.

I have an example from my own constituency, where a constituent

was diagnosed with cancer, a rather rapidly progressing cancer. He phoned my office in great distress and frankly admitted that emotionally and mentally it was destroying him. He had been told that he had this frightful disease and that it was going to take at least six weeks to have the operation performed. That constituent was in no frame of mind to go shopping. He was having a very difficult time making his judgment. All he knew was that he wanted the work done and he wanted it done immediately. I think that's the kind of tension between the principles of private and public health care that you often find in terms of individuals and what happens to them when they're ill.

9:10

The private system believes that priorities are determined by your willingness and your ability to pay, that that should be the priorities in a health care system that's privately funded, while in the public system priorities are judged by the broader community about need, about what we have to have. We've heard much of that debate in this country over the last five or six years, about the kinds of services, the kinds of components we should have in the health care system. It's unfortunate that we aren't debating in front of us now a more comprehensive bill aimed at improving the public health care system rather than being taken off on a side journey into the world of private medicine. That fairness, that all people will be treated equally, that has been such a large part of our public system, is a principle that's abandoned in the private system where a willingness and, again, ability to pay becomes an overriding principle.

In terms of demand, if there's an erratic or catastrophic event, that's supposed to be mediated and taken care of by private insurance. When those same catastrophic events occur under a public system, they're made irrelevant. They're made irrelevant because they are part of the system. They're supported through those of us who have joined together, all Canadians, in provision of a system that we can draw upon regardless of our financial means. The research on the behaviour of the private financiers in the health system south of the border should certainly make us very wary and very careful when we examine that principle that somehow or other private insurance companies will alleviate concerns of a catastrophic nature when they arise.

The matter of equity is not addressed in a private health care system. Equity is a principle that's somewhat irrelevant to the system. For the public system equity is a major, major concern, the notion that income is not distributed equally, the notion that access would not be equal. A whole cluster of issues and principles surround that notion of equity and have been very, very influential in the development of the public system. If there's one thing we've been able to achieve, it's to insulate patients from the influences of inequity due to income or access or other kinds of problems that might plague them. There are vast differences when we start to look at demand in a private system and demand in a public system and how those systems respond to that demand.

There's a difference in terms of supply. In the private system profit is a proper and effective way to motivate suppliers to respond to the needs of demanders, and again that's a pretty firm principle. It's one that, interestingly enough, George Bernard Shaw commented on some time ago. I'd just like to quote Shaw's comments on doctors being involved in private medicine, because while the majority of the doctors in our province and certainly in our country fully support the public system, there is a handful – as the Premier has indicated in this Legislature by reading some of their support – a handful of doctors who would like to see not only Bill 11 pass but, I suspect, further privatization of the system.

This is what George Bernard Shaw said in that regard.

It is not the fault of our doctors that the medical service of the community, as at present provided for, is a murderous absurdity. That any sane nation, having observed that you could provide for the supply of bread by giving bakers a pecuniary interest in baking for you, should go on to give a surgeon a pecuniary interest in cutting off your leg, is enough to make one despair of political humanity. But that is precisely what we have done. And the more appalling the mutilation, the more the mutilator is paid . . .

Scandalized voices murmur that . . . operations are necessary. They may be. It may also be necessary to hang a man or pull down a house. But we take good care not to make the hangman and the housebreaker the judges of that. If we did, no man's neck would be safe and no man's house stable.

That's a little wisdom from earlier in the last century, Mr. Speaker, in terms of private medicine and the involvement of the medical profession in private, for-profit provision of services to patients.

Now, as I indicated, supply in the private system is properly and effectively controlled by profit, and it responds to the needs of the demanders. But the position we have accepted that is proper for our doctors and for medical provisioners is the one that's in the public system, and that is that professional ethics and dedication to public service are the appropriate motivation, focusing on the success in curing or helping those patients who need help. That's an important principle, Mr. Speaker. It's one that medical doctors promise to adhere to when they take the Hippocratic oath. It underlines the altruism we expect from those people who enter the medical professions and that we have become accustomed to being exposed to when we deal with those individuals, and any action, any movement towards privatization such as we see in Bill 11 challenges that.

I recently read an article from the States – I can't recall where it was from – where that very point was being lamented and how doctors and medical practitioners were being forced more and more to become entrepreneurs and to abandon this dedication to humanity, this dedication to making things better. I hope that by legislation like this we are not starting to open those doors or to push our doctors and our medical provisioners in the same direction.

When you speak of supply, Mr. Speaker, there are again vast differences. The priorities in the private system are determined by people's willingness and their ability to pay, and that's really the priorities and how they're set. In the public system that can be quite different. Priorities can be determined by where the greatest improvements or curing can be effected. So again a vast, vast difference. In the public system a reasoned approach to the improvement of the provision of services and establishing priorities for the provision of services and, incidentally, research contrasts quite starkly with those in the private system, where a willingness and an ability to pay are really the determining factors in setting priorities.

Again, in terms of supply, suppliers have a strong incentive to adopt least cost methods of provision in the private system. In the public system the predetermined limit on the available resources generates a strong incentive for suppliers to adopt least cost methods. Again, the public system has mechanisms built into it to contain costs, and the private system doesn't have that. If you read the literature – and I don't pretend to have read it extensively, but in the articles I have read, in terms of the Americanized system, private health care in other countries, in Britain and the movement there, a major concern is the growth of health care costs under private provisioners. We see it in the often quoted statistics – and we've had them quoted a number of times in this Legislature – about the amount of GDP that Canadians devote to health care as opposed to the amount of GDP that Americans do, something in the order of a 5 percent difference, with the Americans paying much more and being able to do much less with the dollars they provide in terms of

covering all Americans and providing the quality of service that we accept in our country as a given.

9:20

There are a number of differences between private medicine and public medicine in terms of how adjustments occur. In the private system the theory is that competing suppliers ensure that prices are kept low and reflect costs. In the public system there's a central review of activities, and this is the mechanism that's used to generate efficiencies, through audits of service provision and management pressures to keep the system cost-effective. We saw that in the most recent report of the Auditor General of this province, who takes that responsibility to audit the health care department and health care spending and their provision of services. He takes that extremely seriously and has made some comments about the utilization of empty beds in the province and the inability of some of the authorities to keep track of money.

So we have quite a difference again in terms of the mechanisms that are used to keep prices low, and there's a sharp difference, too, in terms of how public the knowledge about those mechanisms is. We've again seen that contracts that have been undertaken with private provisioners have not been available for public scrutiny, in stark contrast to those between public bodies.

Mr. Speaker, there's a great deal more in terms of comparisons of the principles of private medicine versus the principles of public medicine that are at the heart of Bill 11. Again, I return to my comments at the beginning. I don't think we can afford to leave here before every member of the Assembly has had an opportunity to voice their opinion on those principles.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I wonder if we might have unanimous consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually there are two groups to introduce. The first one I espy in the public gallery opposite, a very distinguished labour leader in the province of Alberta. I'd invite Audrey Cormack to stand up and receive the customary warm welcome of the members of the Assembly.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I recognize a number of folks behind me in the members' gallery. I don't know all of their names, but I'd like to invite all those people who are here to witness the debate on Bill 11 to stand and receive the customary welcome of members of the Assembly, please.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 11 **Health Care Protection Act** (*continued*)

Mr. Havelock moved that pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) the question on second reading of Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be now put.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and it's indeed a pleasure to stand and speak at second reading of Bill 11. First, I want to say that I certainly agree with all of those who don't want a two-tiered, for-profit, American style health care system, and if I thought for one minute that what we were doing was leading us in that direction, then I certainly would be voting against the bill.

There's always been a fundamental difference between Canadians and Americans when it comes to health care. Americans do not see health care as a fundamental right to be provided by government, except for seniors and low-income children, pregnant women, people with disabilities, and some low-income parents. Everyone else must provide for their health care coverage through federal and all kinds of insurance schemes. About 65 million people in the United States are eligible for some form of assistance out of a population of more than 300 million, and many million do not have coverage of any kind.

This is not the kind of health care that Canadians or Albertans want. We in Canada are very proud that everyone is covered under our federal and provincial health care systems, and it's done through a federal and provincial partnership. The problem with the partnership is that the feds have reduced their support payments from 50 percent, when health care first began, to roughly 13 percent, and that certainly means that the provincial share is, by necessity, 87 percent for insured services.

Another fundamental difference is that Americans of means can buy the best of the best and avoid queues by paying for the service. If what is being proposed here in Alberta even remotely resembled that system, then I would be seriously against it. What makes this proposal quite different is that it continues the single payer, publicly administered, publicly delivered health care system but proposes to allow increased contracting out of surgical services that can be safely done in private clinics.

The health authority will take control of all the waiting lists, whether the service is being performed by a public or a private facility, so that no one can jump the queue and no one can pay for an insured service. It will be against the law for a facility to charge for insured services. Your Alberta Health card is the only currency you will need.

The service will be contracted out only if the facility and the staff are certified. The quality of the service is equal to or better than what could be provided in our public hospitals, and it's shown to save precious health care resources. Additional benefits would result in our public facilities because of the freeing up of beds and surgical suites in our existing facilities. The proposed changes in delivery of certain surgical services is no more than an extension of the regional health authority's ability to add flexibility to deal with increasing waiting lists.

The unusually high and growing volumes of these procedures are typical of an aging population and exist everywhere in North America, not just Alberta. The demand will continue to grow, and every province can ill afford to build new structures for this peak demand.

Now, many of my constituents have correctly observed that this bill sets out important terms and conditions that apply to all existing private clinics. Because our existing legislation does not provide the province with the tools to regulate their activities, Bill 11 provides needed controls. Everyone knows of examples of queue-jumping practices. Bill 11 will prevent queue-jumping by no longer allowing private facilities to control their own waiting lists. RHA professionals will now centrally control the lists and enforce severe penalties – \$10,000 for the first offence and, I believe, \$20,000 for the second offence – for anyone who buys or sells an insured service to circumvent the waiting list.

9:30

Everyone has heard of examples of inappropriate sales tactics and pressures to purchase optional enhanced services. There is currently no legislation or regulation that specifies standard products or services being offered by the regional health authorities. They're currently free to choose the standards that they wish. This has resulted in one RHA, for example, offering foldable lenses as their standard while others offer the rigid lens. Bill 11 establishes provincial standards, and the province has already moved to provide foldable lenses as recently as today as the provincial standard. The proposal provides the College of Physicians and Surgeons with the responsibility to choose the best products and services that will then become the standard for the entire province.

Other features of the bill make all new contracts public and prevent contracts that are not in the best interests of the RHA. For example, an RHA could not propose a contract that would cost more than the services currently cost that would not result in a benefit such as shorter waiting lists. So Bill 11 provides complete contract transparency.

MRS. SOETAERT: No.

MR. HERARD: Yes.

Now, as I said yesterday, every morning I wake up and wonder what the new twists and turns are that will happen today with respect to the feeding frenzy that goes on in terms of the media that essentially promotes conflict, confusion, confrontation, and the misunderstanding of relatively simple underlying policy issues. We saw the kinds of games that were played with respect to the description of what took place here yesterday as an attempt to close debate and closure and all that stuff, when in fact they know full well – you know, they've been around long enough to know – that if you want to delay a bill, then you send it to that famous never-never land of that committee that never meets. That's what happened here. The problem is that they got caught at it.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, we have had almost one hour of relative quiet where people politely listened to each other and we have gone back and forth. I know that you're anxious to get into the debate, but you've already spoken. So we would wonder if you would just take that as your turn in this series and let the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont continue without interruption.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. I will try.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, very much. In fact, I was quite amazed at how quiet it has been.

Debate Continued

MR. HERARD: Anyway, we'll leave the games that are being played aside, and let's deal with the bill. Over the last 10 years improvements in technology and surgical procedures have made it possible for 52 private surgical clinics to perform more than 20,000 relatively minor surgeries every year that formerly were all done in our hospitals. We can all remember, for example, that our children's tonsils probably were done in a hospital, but we don't do those in hospitals anymore.

In the last decade an increasing volume of procedures done safely every day in clinics frees up thousands of hours of hospital operating

room time per year and releases expensive hospital beds that cost between \$600 and \$1,000 a day. This results in improved access for more serious cases that continue to be done in our hospitals. In addition, cancellations due to emergencies are all but eliminated.

Now, this type of cancellation happens all too often, Mr. Speaker. You know, people present themselves at 6 or 7 a.m., prepare for surgery, and wait for hours only to be told that due to an emergency their surgery has been canceled, with relatively no information about when it will be rescheduled and no consideration for what you the patient went through to prepare, only to be disappointed and delayed. Currently more than 150 different types of surgical procedures are done safely every day in existing clinics, but they're currently subject to a 12-hour rule. This in essence prevents the health system from taking advantage of continuous improvements in technology and surgical procedures such as laparoscopic and laser techniques, that continue to be perfected and improve outcomes each year.

Bill 11 removes the 12-hour barrier and empowers the College of Physicians and Surgeons to define which additional new-age minor procedures can be safely done in an accredited clinical facility. There are currently a number of new procedures that could be safely done in a clinic but would require more than 12 hours to ensure appropriate monitoring and recovery. Should the province continue to use the most expensive route to health when every month we all marvel at the new techniques that are implemented by our health care professionals? Why should the regional health authorities be prevented from implementing new accredited advances brought about by an increasing investment in high technology and world-class medical research, that we're so proud of in this province?

Many members of the opposition have asked: why are we doing this now when we may be more than halfway through our second mandate? I mean, why would a politician even consider taking on this kind of an issue late in a mandate? The answer is that a politician would not dare to do that, but a statesman who believes in doing the right thing would do this and is doing this because it is the right thing to do. It's the right thing to do because it ensures that Albertans can take advantage of new medical advancements while controlling costs for future generations. The difference between politicians and statesmen is that politicians do things for re-election and statesmen do things for the next generation. Mr. Speaker, we all know where the politicians are in this Chamber.

I want to speak briefly about how disappointed I am at my fellow human beings across the way for placing partisan politics and their desperate re-election hopes ahead of the good of all Albertans. I say that, Mr. Speaker, knowing that some of those people are pretty decent people individually and they themselves abhor what they're forced to do by a power-hungry leader who will use any tactic to attack the trust that Albertans have of their government.

Mr. Speaker, in life as in politics relationships that are based on truth and honesty thrive and blossom, but those relationships that are based on lies, falsehoods, and bearing false witness soon are rewarded by banishment and defeat. So I say to my colleagues across the way that have forgotten why they're here and rely on falsehoods: the wages of your actions will amount to your defeat.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before we call on the hon. Leader of her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, may we have unanimous consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, when I was introducing some folks in the gallery earlier, I neglected to note that there's another fellow in the Chamber that I thought deserved some recognition. Each year when I participate in the Forum for Young Albertans, there's a Conservative representative who does such an effective job at presenting the government case that I have to tell the students that he is really much fairer and much more reasonable than the government he's there to represent. I'd invite Ken Chapman to stand and receive the warm recognition of members of the Assembly here this evening.

9:40

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

(*continued*)

Mr. Havelock moved that pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) the question on second reading of Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be now put.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel privileged to rise and speak in this Legislature. The fact that this is a motion under Standing Order 47, a motion to choke off debate, to silence Albertans, does not give me pleasure. Nonetheless, I believe it's important that I do rise to speak to this motion.

Interestingly, I note the Government House Leader's concern about this being a closure procedure, but of course we know it is, and former Parliamentary Counsel Mr. Michael Ritter, who had very noble service to this Legislature, said so. Actually, he called it closure by another name today on a radio show. We all know that's in fact what it is, because of course the impact of this government's decision last night to move the question under Standing Order 47 was to have the effect of shutting off those speakers who had not yet had the opportunity to speak on second reading of Bill 11.

Let's look at what kind of a bill this is, Mr. Speaker. Probably in terms of the term of this government, since it took over in 1993, there has not been a more serious issue before this Legislature, one that affects as many citizens as Bill 11 does, one that affects one of the fundamental values of our nation as this one does. Yet after a very short period of time, four partial days, I think 11 hours of debate, not the 700 hours of debate that the minister of international affairs referred to today but rather 700 minutes of debate, on a bill which can have major, major ramifications even if the government members don't wish to address it.

So let's in the first instance establish why this discussion is going on here this evening. It is in order to stop any further discussion, addressing of the issues on second reading by those Members of this Legislative Assembly, who were sent by the voters of their constituencies to represent them in this Legislature. With one fell swoop this government's acting House leader stood last night, and the effect of his words was to shut down debate. It is a shameful display of power. It is a government that does not want to listen to Albertans, and interestingly, you know, Albertans will not be silenced on this issue. They will have the last word.

Mr. Speaker, as we head into this debate this evening, as we talk about this motion, this Standing Order, I as well as my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo would like to welcome the visitors to our gallery, to thank them for being here, to thank them for all their hard

work, to thank them for fighting for public health care and doing the work of many more people than their numbers would indicate, for being the spokesmen for public health care in this province, and for providing the kind of leadership that has made sure that it's not just in Alberta in this Legislature that this debate is taking place tonight. This debate, this discussion, this bill has attracted attention right across the country as we see a government that has moved to try and in effect, in fact dismantle our public health care system even if they don't wish to admit it.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to this evening in the time that's allotted to me – and I take it as a privilege as the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition – outline one Canadian's understanding of medicare, how I came to have the views that I hold, why I believe it is wrong to choke off this debate, and why I think it's important that the debate go on and that members are free to speak with the conviction that their constituents give them to speak in this Legislature, not their own, not their party's but their constituents' views.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to begin at the very beginning. Well, I guess it won't be the very beginning, but it'll be something that's pretty monumental in my life, and that is my father's ascent in understanding in terms of health care. My father was born in Prescott, Ontario. He attended Queen's University, where he graduated with a medical doctor's degree. He then did his specialty in England at the Hammersmith hospital in internal medicine, and then throughout his period as a student at Queen's University, something about this province just said to him: you've got to go to Alberta. I don't know what it was. Well, I do know what it was, because now I happen to be privileged to live here.

My father actually decided that from Queen's he would come out and work in Alberta in the summers. He found his way to the Jasper Park Lodge, and he found his way to being a bellman at the Jasper Park Lodge, as so many students from across this country do. I mean, they end up at one of the big CN hotels working for the summer.

Golf was his second love after medicine. He happened to be a very good golfer and happened to find a very good golf course at the Jasper Park Lodge.

I think it's instructive because that early foray into Alberta in his university days at Queen's gave him the conviction that Alberta was where he wanted to return to, and he did. He came back to Alberta in 1937. He was on staff at the Royal Alexandra hospital here in Edmonton. He then met my mother, who was a lab tech, a University of Alberta graduate, and my mother and father were married in 1939. My father then, of course, volunteered for service, as so many of that age did, and while he was initially posted in England, he returned to Canada in his service for the army and became a medical officer here in Alberta.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, in fact this whole issue in terms of my father's history, the fact that he was a physician is very much germane to this debate. My mom and dad had five children, of which I am the fourth, and here is the debate that was ensuing. I was born in 1948, which makes me 51 years old, and that period, the '50s and early '60s, was the whole period during which the very earliest parts of the Canadian health care system began to be formed: the medical services act in Saskatchewan, the hospital diagnostic act in Saskatchewan. Throughout the '50s there was a good deal of discussion. We've had discussions about it here during Bill 11. That was the period of time leading up to 1963, when some of the early federal work was done to try and promote the Canadian health care system.

Nineteen sixty-three was a very important year in my life. That

was the year my father actually passed away. He had a massive heart attack. Even though he was very committed to the public health care system that he'd seen developing, he wasn't able to practise in that system, sadly, but that was exactly the time when medicare was coming in. That time obviously had a very important effect on my life. At the time my brother was just heading into his first year of medical school and graduated from the U of A medical school, as did my younger brother, who followed me, both of whom are now practicing in Alberta in medical specialties.

My own experience as a student took me to the University of Alberta, and after doing my degree, a bachelor of arts, here at the university in languages, French and Russian, I then moved on to study at Université Laval in Quebec City, and I think this is another piece of this one Canadian's journey in terms of support for and why I so strongly believe in the Canadian health care system.

9:50

While I was studying in Quebec, I lived in the old town of Quebec City in an old apartment that was actually an old home that had been rebuilt overlooking the St. Lawrence River just down from the Chateau Frontenac, where the guns shoot over the edge of the walls in this wonderful, wonderful historic city of Canada that is so fundamental to what this country is all about. If we look at the city and living in this city, living there being part of the city was a very important part of my education as a Canadian for it was here that I met my first separatists. This was the time, of course, in 1970 when the Parti Québécois had elected its first members of the National Assembly, as it's called in Quebec. Its first members from the Parti Québécois were actually there in Quebec City and two of them, very ardent workers for the Parti Québécois, lived in the apartment upstairs from me and my girlfriend as we were studying as students at Laval.

You know, the reason why I became so committed to Canada, the reason why I thought it was so important that we look at the Canadian system is because of the Canadian values that I had firsthand experience with right there in Quebec. It was there that I learned about the whole issue of equality, the equality provisions that are so fundamental to the Canadian values that we have. Remember it was on those Plains of Abraham in Quebec City, those gorgeous plains that I used to walk past everyday as I walked my way out of the town to catch my bus to Laval University, where the English defeated the French. But Canada, to its honour I would say, instead of building a country based on the dominance of one culture, decided to build a country based on the equality of two cultures, a model of equality, a fundamental part of what has established Canadian values.

Those equality provisions, of course, have led Canada to be a leader not just as a bicultural nation but as a multicultural nation, a multilingual nation, a nation that believes in the equality of all persons, a nation which has benefited, I believe and have mentioned on so many occasions, from the fact that a former leader of the party which I am privileged to represent, Laurence Décarie, took that model of equality that Canada had been built on, that I was experiencing there in Quebec, and in fact drafted the section in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which speaks to the equality of all cultures in Canada given that model of equality from which to build.

So what are the other manifestations of this model of Canadian equality? I would say that the second one is equalization. In other words, there are some provinces that have greater wealth or greater fiscal capacity than other. So what did Canadians do? Did we say that we were going to simply reward the ones with a lot of money and let them grow unfettered and let the poorer ones just sit there

and, you know, take the luck of the draw? No. That's not what we did as a nation.

We were a nation that believed in the equality of persons and of regions, so we built into our constitutional framework the decision to ensure that those provinces with less fiscal capacity, those poorer provinces, would benefit from those that were more wealthy, a sharing of the resources of this wonderful country with each other. That's what we did. That's another piece of this puzzle, another piece of this commitment to the equality of Canadians that was built right from the very beginning, what distinguishes us as a nation.

What else, Mr. Speaker? What else gave us Canadian values? What makes us proud as Canadians? What distinguishes us? Well, let's look at another one. Education. Education without question. Unlike our American neighbours to the south in Canada we decided that we as a society, through our progressive income tax system, were going to support the right of every single person in this country to get the best possible education they could. You know, we didn't build our universities and our postsecondary institutions on private funding, on those who could afford to pay. We built them on the basis that all Canadians would have access to education because we deemed it to be a public good. We didn't see it as a private commodity. We saw it as a public good. So education is very much in keeping and consistent with the values that have defined this nation and this province until now.

Finally, let's move to probably the most tangible expression of Canadians' commitment to each other, and that is our public health care system, Mr. Speaker, our public health care system, which has grown to recognize that the risk of illness is shared amongst us all. It isn't one that's based on those who can afford to pay get better care. It is built on the notion that all Canadians, regardless of their ability to pay, should have access to the very best health care we can possibly provide as a nation, as a society, as a community.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, in this one Canadian's journey to here tonight and the reason I believe it is wrong for this government to choke off debate, there was my vision of Canada. I returned to Alberta in 1971, actually got my first job with the newly elected Progressive Conservative government under Peter Lougheed. It was interesting, because, again, in terms of the mandate that Peter Lougheed sought from Albertans at the end of the Socred era, after 35 years, the mandate that Lougheed sought was a mandate very much based on values: values of a world-class health care system, values of a public education system, values that addressed the needs of our seniors, values of the disabled, the AISH program that eventually came, values like human rights, human rights and the equality of all Canadians. Here it was. The very first piece of legislation that the Lougheed government brought into this hallowed Assembly was a piece of legislation called the Individual Rights Protection Act.

What was it about? It was about inclusion, Mr. Speaker. It was about equality. It was about the commonality that we share. It was all about reflecting the equality of Canadians. Mr. Speaker, as my colleague reminds me: look how far we've fallen. Look at the examples and the actions of this government when it comes to taking those values of seniors and pulling them away, the values of the equality of all persons and pulling them away and having arrived at the point where one in five Alberta children live in poverty. That is what's become of a vision that was very sound in '71. In 2000 it has been very seriously tarnished.

Let's move along, Mr. Speaker, move along through those years, the '70s, the early '80s, move to 1982, a very pivotal year in Alberta, a year when actually in the riding of Olds-Didsbury a member of the Western Canada Concept was elected as the MLA in a by-election. That was my first contact, if you like, my first experience not with

Quebec separatists as I'd had in my university days in Laval but with Alberta separatists, people who believed that somehow the equality of the provinces should be smashed apart and those with the greatest amount of resources and those with the greatest amount of money would rise to the top and to heck with all the rest. Well, I worked in that 1982 election, and I think it was the election in which I really got the bug. I got the bug to run for public office in that election because I believed there were some things worth fighting for. As I participated as a member of Peter Lougheed's advance team in setting up that election, I realized that this was the kind of thing I wanted to do. It was to fight for some of the things I truly believe in.

As I was preparing my remarks for tonight, it reminded me of how important it is that all of us, all of us, not just talk about the issues that matter to us. The real test of the woman or of the man is the actions we take in order to fight for the things we value for ourselves, yes, absolutely; for our country, of course; but most of all, for our children, for the people that will pass on, and for the concern over what we will pass on to them.

10:00

The year 1982 was also a very turbulent time. It was the year in which closure was used once by the Lougheed government, once, Mr. Speaker, in that 15-year reign. Once it was used. Yet here we are again tonight as government is using the same amount of clout and heavy-handedness that an earlier version of them – although that's probably not fair to the Lougheed Conservatives – had used only once.

Let's move from '82 to 1984, because 1984 was a very important part of this standing for the equality and the values of our Canadian health care system. It was in 1984 that the Canada Health Act began to be discussed across Canada, obviously debates about the authority of the federal government to move into an area of provincial jurisdiction. The reasoning was that the federal government needed to ensure that there was a Canada-wide health care system, that there was a principle of portability in that health care system. As a result, the federal government brought forward legislation to present to Parliament on the Canada Health Act and the five principles, which we have thought for some time on this side of the House are extremely important. In Bill 11 we finally see them included in legislation in this province in terms of the work that's being done.

Anyway, let's look at the Canada Health Act. Let's look at the circumstances under which it came in and the debates that carried on in this Legislature. I think it's fair to describe it, Mr. Speaker, as: this was the province that was dragged kicking and screaming into the Canada Health Act. This was the province that wanted to continue the practice of extra billing, thought the federal government was wrong to come in and tell them what kind of health care system to have.

Guess who changed the views of this government in terms of the Canada Health Act? These people, Albertans, changed the views of this government, and the government finally realized they would have to agree with the Canada Health Act because it was the right thing to do. The infamous debates between Dave Russell, the Minister of Health, one of my predecessors in the post, and Monique Begin, who currently is a professor at the University of Ottawa, were debates that were amazing, full of colour, full of vim and vigour, but fortunately for all Canadians, Alberta's difficulty with the Canada Health Act was silenced as the bill passed in 1984.

Mr. Speaker, 1986, a pretty special year for me. I made the decision to seek a nomination for the riding of Edmonton-Glenora. It was a very highly contested nomination, and I'm pleased to stand here and recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder, who also was running in that nomination, and the former Member for Edmonton-

Whitemud. Of course, after Lougheed stepped down, Premier Getty needed to seek a new seat, and the person who was in Edmonton-Whitemud, which had been Premier Getty's former seat, stepped aside, and the Premier ran there. He got the nomination, and the person that had stepped aside for him came to the Edmonton-Glenora riding across the river. I mean, it's a big river; it's a big divide. He came across and sort of said that he wanted to run there. After checking to make sure that it was still an open party, as I had believed it was, and that anyone had the right to run for a nomination, I was assured it did. As a result, I was elected the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora in 1986 and was delighted – delighted – to be appointed the minister of education right off the bat.

Let me move to the issues of 1988 when I was then appointed minister of health, and let me set the context for when I was appointed minister of health. As I say, in 1984 there was the difficulty with the Canada Health Act, and there was extreme difficulty with the relationships within the health care sector. Recall that in 1988 in the spring before I was minister, there had been a nurses' strike in this province, a very divisive one, a very, very difficult one.

You know, in 1987, a year before I became the minister of health, the temperature, the tensions, the difficulty, the turbulence that existed in the health care sector had resulted in the Premier of the day, Premier Getty, taking the very important step of calling in December of 1987 the establishment of the Premier's commission on the future of health care, The Rainbow Report, and I do want to talk a little bit about The Rainbow Report, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to lay the groundwork, lay the stage for what was happening in health care, because the reality was that there was no trust within the health care system. Nurses had had their right to strike removed in 1982. Physicians were feeling that they couldn't trust administrators to design a system or to develop a plan that was going to serve them. People just didn't trust the health care system.

I remember the instruction from the Premier when he called me: I would like you to take over the health portfolio, and I'm going to combine the old community and occupational health with the hospitals and medical portfolio into a single health portfolio. His instruction to me was: please, take it off the front pages of every newspaper in this province. So, Mr. Speaker, that was the environment. That was the kind of tension and difficulty that existed in health care in 1988 when I took over in September.

So I think it's important to look at The Rainbow Report, and contrary to what the Premier has said on many occasions, The Rainbow Report was not called when I was the minister of health. Rather, it was my predecessor, the hon. Marvin Moore. I was privileged to be the minister to receive The Rainbow Report and to respond on behalf of government.

Let's look at some of the issues within The Rainbow Report, some of the very important context within which The Rainbow Report was developed. Here was a consultation process over a two-year period, Mr. Speaker, chaired by the hon. Lou Hyndman, in whose riding I was privileged to follow as the MLA, who had given me my first job in this Legislative Assembly, and for whom I have the absolute greatest respect for his continuing work as he continues to serve this province in so many, many ways.

Anyway, it was Lou Hyndman who chaired this panel of very distinguished Albertans who did a process of consultation over the two-year period, which was, I guess, a model for what I believe consultation with Albertans is all about. You know, I think Albertans have become a little jaded to this term "consultation" because what they've been subjected to is health summits over a two-day period or a gambling summit for a day and a half or this guise of consultation which goes out when allegedly there's a bill like Bill

11. They do a health summit, they do a blue-ribbon panel, they do all these things. But guess what? They forget to consult with the doctors. You know, it's bizarre, Mr. Speaker, absolutely bizarre.

10:10

Anyway, when I think of consultation, when I think of listening to the people of this province, especially on something as fundamentally important as health care, I think the process that was embodied in Bill 11 was a really important indicator of the kind of consultation that needs to go on when something as fundamental as our health care system is debated.

What kind of things did they do? Well, they met with experts. They documented their studies. They actually have something called a bibliography at the back of The Rainbow Report document of the kinds of studies that were reviewed, the kind of responsibility they were prepared to take for the recommendations they made. They went to town hall meetings, unlike the current government, which avoids them at all costs. They went around to the people of this province and asked them what they thought: what do you think about where our health care should be in the year 2005?

Well, it was an amazing response, because The Rainbow Report, like other royal commissions across Canada in the early 1990s, was really a blueprint of what needed to happen in health care. Succinctly put, the conclusion of not just The Rainbow Report but the conclusion of the similar reports from across Canada in the early 1990s, whether it was Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Ontario, or the Maritime provinces – virtually every single province did a commission to look at it. And you know what? There's a striking similarity in terms of the recommendations of all those reports.

The conclusion was basically: there's adequate resources in health care; the key, however, is that we're not spending the dollars to get maximum value out of it. So the recommendation was not about increasing support for health care but about reorganizing the way we deliver health care, taking advantage of the technology advancements but also not just switching away from hospital services, which had been part of the planning that had been going on for many, many years, but building a community support infrastructure to receive the people who were being given short stays in the hospital and who could, with the appropriate development of that community model, prevent people from getting into the institutions in the first place. The implications of that little nugget of reform, that new direction for health care in Canada, and the consistent review of all the provinces across Canada is what led to government responding to The Rainbow Report, a role that I had the privilege to chair.

Mr. Speaker, The Rainbow Report, as you would know, didn't just talk about health care services. The Rainbow Report was this broad-reaching effort to link issues like educational achievement with poverty indicators, with health reform, with youth who were having difficulty, whether it was with addictions, whether it was with falling into the criminal justice system. There were lots of things we could do to live up to the goal of The Rainbow Report, which was healthy Albertans living in a healthy Alberta.

Let's look at the response to The Rainbow Report. As a result, there were actually 12 ministries that came together, which I was privileged to chair, who then worked out a response to The Rainbow Report, an action plan that each ministry would then commit to carrying out the goals that were identified in The Rainbow Report. That response came in December of 1991, and I think it's important to put it on the record because, as I say, the process was massive and it led to many, many of the recommendations being accepted, such as the establishment of a health service innovation fund, establishment of a health unit, health facility partnership adventure, the establishment of a collaborative process to develop health goals for

the province of Alberta – what a concept – and the development of role statements for all the health partners, not just the health functions but health partners; in other words, this broad 12-department co-ordination exercise to develop a grid, if you like, a framework within which public policies could be analyzed to make sure that we were delivering programs that met the test of building towards healthier Albertans. I mean, it was quite a wonderful context.

MR. DICKSON: It didn't require \$600 million being cut out of the health care budget?

MRS. MacBETH: No, it didn't require dollars being cut out of the health care system, and I will get on to that, Member for Calgary-Buffalo, if you just give me a moment here.

Many of the recommendations of course were accepted. A Health Ethics Centre, ethics of course rising to the top in terms of that with this technology is the need for ethical decision-making. Increased emphasis on health promotion, very much in keeping with the goals of The Rainbow Report.

But there were some recommendations of The Rainbow Report that were not accepted after this very broad consultation. One was the recommendation of The Rainbow Report to establish personal health budgets for Albertans. We hear this notion coming out again. In fact, I'm reminded of the research we've seen in recent months where this whole notion of giving people a personal health budget to manage for themselves would somehow give them the incentive to be healthier, and I suppose with some people that might be the case. But what about someone whose behaviour, if you like, hasn't led to their ill health? What about a child that's born with AIDS? What about that? Is that child responsible for his own health? Does that mean that his allotment for a personal health budget will only go so far and then: oh, sorry; it doesn't follow anymore. And while that's not a completely thorough review of the recommendation, it was the wisdom of the government of the day to refuse that recommendation.

Next we had the establishment of a supplementary health insurance plan. That was rejected by the government of the day, the supplementary insurance plan. Of course, it was this whole notion that was very much there in the minds of some Albertans at least, some of whom were even in the government, that somehow there should be a supplementary plan for this whole notion of enhanced services for people that could buy their way into better health care services than someone else. Well, in the wisdom of that 12-department review, that notion of a supplementary health insurance plan was rejected. It was not accepted as a recommendation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The other recommendation that was rejected, interestingly enough, was the establishment of nine autonomous health authorities to manage health services across the province. Interestingly, one of the reasons why this whole notion of the regional authorities was rejected was because members of the caucus, of which I was one, thought this would create what they called a superboard, a superboard that would have the ability to kind of run the health care in the region, that would sort of take precedence over other boards that might have a very important role. As a result, the nine autonomous health authorities was rejected, but what was accepted was the whole notion of describing the role of reaching out beyond health care to look at access to the services that were needed to make a healthier population.

10:20

Just before closing on The Rainbow Report, I think it's very important to clarify the record, because there have been some completely inaccurate statements in this Assembly about what The Rainbow Report recommended, and there are two of those statements that are very key to this. First of all, The Rainbow Report was very, very clear, Mr. Speaker. The Rainbow Report recommended level spending in health care. The Rainbow Report did not utter one word about cuts of 30 percent to our hospitals, what followed in 1992. The Rainbow Report did not talk about . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, if you disagree with the hon. leader, you're free to get up and take your turn and speak, but for quite some time we've by and large each been listening politely to one side after another. Let us continue that for the rest of the evening and in the morning.

The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for your intervention.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: So what didn't The Rainbow Report recommend? It did not recommend cuts. No, Mr. Speaker, it didn't. It recommended that the dollars that were being allocated to health care should be reorganized and that it shouldn't all be in a state heavily weighted towards acute care and towards the institutional side, which frankly will always carry the greatest portion of the dollars because it's the most expensive piece of the system. But very, very important was the reallocation of dollars towards the community, towards supporting things like mental health services in the community, towards making sure that the community was ready to prevent institutionalization – and this is such a fundamental issue when it comes to long-term care and mental health services – and also to be there when people exited from the health care system after perhaps a major surgery, after perhaps an intervention with respect to mental health services.

Let's be absolutely clear. The Rainbow Report did not recommend that there be cuts to the degree that Albertans have borne over the last decade in this province, which were brought about by this government contrary to the recommendations of The Rainbow Report.

Mr Speaker, there is a second action that this government took and in fact is the subject of this discussion on Bill 11. The second action which this government took which was not recommended by The Rainbow Report was the proliferation and the growth and the attention being paid to the private sector in health care. What has led to a 50 percent increase in the size of the private-sector involvement in health care was not recommended in The Rainbow Report. The Rainbow Report was committed to taking the resources that we have in the public health care system and getting better value out of them, plain and simple. That's what I believe was the most fundamental mistake this government has made. The combination of their cuts and the growth and proliferation of the private sector in health care have led us to where we are today, where this government now wants to legislate the role of that private sector forevermore. It is a despicable action to take in response to a public health care system which is value based and so important to the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, here we have The Rainbow Report, which I was

privileged to receive, and then as I mentioned, the 12 departments co-ordinated the response. I was privileged to chair that. The job, I guess my job as the minister of health, was to then take The Rainbow Report and from the response by the government at the end of 1991 to work with the health care sector to come up with a plan for the future.

Part of that discussion was the ambulatory care policy, Mr. Speaker, because there was the notion that the private sector would be a better way, in the view of some, to develop our health care system. I didn't share that view. The first words out of my mouth when I was chosen as the minister of health in 1988, in September, were that I was a very strong proponent of the Canada Health Act, that I always had been and always would be.

Anyway, I actually had colleagues at the time, Mr. Speaker, who said to me: "How can you possibly say that? Think of all the fights this government had on the Canada Health Act." I said: "Well, so be it. I'm the minister of health, for the time being at least, and I believe that the Canada Health Act is probably one of the crowning glories in Canada in terms of legislation through the Parliament of Canada." I still think so.

So, Mr. Speaker, let's look at what led to the ambulatory care policy, which presumably this government sent in the brown envelope to the newspaper a couple of weeks ago. I've actually had it here in my desk, and because it was a document that went to cabinet and went to caucus, I was sort of thinking: should I make it public or shouldn't I? I withheld it, and then all of a sudden I find that in fact it has been leaked. As a result, I thought it would be okay to refer to it. Of course, it was referred to in the Consumers' Association of Alberta's study, which actually reminded me of the ambulatory care policy, because of course it was the policy that started to look at this whole notion of the proliferation or at least the desire of the private sector to expand.

Ever since medicare was established in the mid-60s, the percentage that's been allotted, if you like, to the private delivery of care, whether it's plastic surgery or physician services or physiotherapy or any of those kinds of services, has been around the 20, 21 percent mark. It was solid; it was really very consistent on that mark from 1963 right through to 1992. But guess what? In 1992, aah, it took a great big jump. That was when the 50 percent jump took place, Mr. Speaker.

But let me back up a little bit. As the minister of health I knew that there was a lot of pressure. In fact, I had lots of people that were very strong proponents for private care, many of the same who are now spokesmen, on the side of them, for expanding the role of the private sector. As a result, I brought forward, with the help of the very capable people within the department of health at the time, an ambulatory care services discussion paper. You know, unlike the government of today, these are the kinds of documents that then went out for discussion with medical groups, nursing groups. It was kind of: let's identify the issues with private care; let's make sure that we are building a very sustainable health care system instead of just writing a blank cheque to the private sector, which of course has been what has happened over the last eight years.

MR. DICKSON: Sort of a white paper.

MRS. MacBETH: Yeah, it was a bit of a white paper. It was a discussion paper, and I think it's very important to put the ambulatory care paper in context. Of course it's tabled, and if any of our visitors here tonight would like to take a look at it, they might find a very useful document in terms of what was proposed in 1991. If it had been enacted, in fact Alberta wouldn't be having to deal with

the mess that's been created over the last eight years by this government.

Saskatchewan and Ontario, especially Ontario, had put in place a legislative framework to control the independent health facilities that because of technology were able to deliver services offsite of the hospital but would be able to be controlled, and there wouldn't be this difficulty with enhanced services. Of course, Ontario's legislation stopped it. Saskatchewan was very much working with Alberta, and they in fact brought their legislation in following up on Ontario's.

It's interesting, I think, to note in this discussion paper that I put out in 1991 a very pivotal issue, a very important issue, and one that's the subject of this bill, because what is ambulatory care? What does it mean?

10:30

I think it's important to put on the record what the definition of ambulatory care is in this paper, Mr. Speaker. Ambulatory care is defined as "the mode of service provision that requires the patient to ambulate [walk] to the location of the provider and leave on the same day after receiving care." So what does that mean? Well, what it means is no overnight stays. This was about services that could be delivered on an outpatient basis beyond the hospital walls but needed to be co-ordinated, but it ruled out overnight stays.

It talked about the model of the Ontario legislation. We knew that there were people in Alberta who were very, very much interested in setting up private facilities, but instead of doing what the Canada Health Act would have permitted them to do, which was basically set them up completely outside of the health care system, which of course the Canada Health Act does and always has permitted, these people wanted to have a framework, an ability to take a piece of the public health care system to deliver with public dollars in a private setting. Well, that was exactly the reason why this paper was developed, to stop that practice, to put a legislative framework in place so that those community services, not overnight but community services, would have the legislative framework that was needed.

Well, guess what, Mr. Speaker? It didn't get approved. It was very clear that the government, the caucus was not prepared to go along with these recommendations. You know, Mr. Speaker, as a minister I was very disappointed. I thought it was the right way to go, but rather than stay focused on that, I decided to dedicate my energies for the next year and a half towards building a plan for health care on the assumption that this ambulatory care policy would be brought in in due course. However, the government chose to ignore it, to their peril I would say, because had this policy been in place we wouldn't be having the discussion we're having on Bill 11 right now.

MR. DICKSON: And Albertans wouldn't be paying that price.

MRS. MacBETH: That's right. Just one other point, and the Member for Calgary-Buffalo reminds me. I think it's important to look at Bill 11 in context. Bill 11, as we know, not only takes these community services that are being delivered offsite of the hospital; it allows, of course, overnight stays. It allows the opening of the door towards private-sector care provision. Overnight is a very key point in the delivery of health care. It's that whole issue of admission to a health care facility, which is very different from simply walking in and getting the service one needs on a short-stay basis, not overnight.

As well, this paper, unlike what the government is proposing in Bill 11, would have included the private MRIs. This paper would have included the diagnostic, the fertility clinics, all of those things

that are not covered by the surgical procedures only that are covered in Bill 11. That's another one of the gaping holes in the legislation. It goes too far on overnight stays, and it avoids the whole area of diagnostic, fertility, mental health, home care, nursing services that should be part of the framework of delivery.

Mr. Speaker, the framework for the future was then a major job that I had and was privileged to have as minister of health. The framework was really developed by working with every conceivable group in health care and often spread beyond health care as the communities came together to look at how we could take the dollars that were allocated in health care and recast them to build this community support base which was so necessary and so unanimously endorsed by the provinces across Canada. It was probably, I must say, one of the most exciting times in health care policy. The credit for coming up with the plan that was there by the fall of 1992 went to Albertans. The credit went to the many, many, many people – health care providers, community groups, health units, municipal councilors, MLAs – everybody that worked so hard to come up with this plan, which I was privileged to build.

Mr. Speaker, let's remember the context. Dollars were very, very tight. It was a very difficult time, and Alberta was living with a very tight fiscal framework. I would like to talk a little bit about the record of that time just for a couple of moments. With regard to health care over that period of time, contrary – and this was so well documented in the Taft/Steward report on *Clear Answers: The Economics and Politics of For-Profit Medicine*. The Taft/Steward report quoted this government as saying that they had to do the cuts because, quote, health care spending was out of control. Do you remember that? Do you remember those lines? Albertans had to be punished because the so-called health care spending was out of control.

Well, let's look at the record. Let's just put it out there and say what really was happening over that four-year span. This is, of course, something that I've tabled, but I think it's important for the members that are here this evening to know and to know that the credit goes to Albertans for the incredible cost control that was going on in Alberta from '88 to '92.

These are figures from the health information of Health Canada, very valid figures – I'm happy to table them – showing that Alberta from the period of '87 to '91 had the best cost control record, in real terms 1.3 percent growth on average over that four-year period. Now, that's pretty substantial, Mr. Speaker, when the Canadian average was 3 percent. One point three percent. That's to the credit of Albertans, who were living with very tight controls but who were moving towards something. That's what gave it the energy. That's why it came off the front pages of the newspaper. People were working. They knew there was a plan. They knew there was a way out of the difficult situation we were in.

Put another way, I think if we look at all the other provinces, we can look at the fact that Alberta's spending was kept at the national average, in fact slightly below the national average, as we moved through that period. Very, very different from the spin that was put on by the provincial government of the day to say to Albertans: everything's out of control, the sky is falling. Well, there's the record.

I think, as well, in terms of the record that it was important to reorganize the way that health care dollars were spent. I've already touched on that and of course the push toward privatization even with that very, very tight fiscal framework within which we were operating in Alberta. There was no growth in the private-sector delivery of service, Mr. Speaker. It stayed in that 20, 21, 22 percent range, where it had been for the previous 30 years.

10:40

Mr. Speaker, let's move on to '93, a new era, a new party. Some have suggested that in fact the name of the party should have been changed back in '93, suggestions of things like the Mayo Clinic north came to be, all of those notions of Alberta being up for sale, including the health care system. It was a very different time and a very disturbing time for a lot of people who had worked for a government and for a party that had seemed to support the notion of good management and sustainable health care, but that kind of came to a screeching halt once '93 hit.

I know the government doesn't like to be reminded of the facts in this issue of the cuts that were done to health care. It's very painful, but let's put it on the record just one more time. The cuts to the public hospital budget in the mid-90s was a 30 percent cut in the words of the Robert Evan's study that was focused, and of course . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, if you wish to dispute any of the things that the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition is saying, do so in your turn but having a chorus – this is not a choir, and you certainly aren't a choir. Could we just let . . . [interjection] Hon. minister, could we just let the hon. leader give her speech, and then if you wish to refute any or all of the things that she said, you're free to do so in the spirit of debate. Let us hear it.

Hon. leader.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know they get a little touchy. They don't like hearing the truth. The truth is here in the Evan's report, and if they don't like hearing about the 30 percent cut in public hospitals that took place in the '90s, which is the truth, they can go to the latest numbers coming out of the Canadian Institute for Health Information, which has shown that in fact it was just under 30 percent at about 28 percent. So, you know, the numbers speak for themselves. It talks about public hospitals and the cuts that took place in public hospitals. If they would actually read the information that's available to them, the kind of incredible information that this awesome opposition has put forward in fighting this legislation, they would be better informed, and frankly they'd be able to answer the concerns that are raised by their constituents in town hall meetings across this province.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to look at some of the issues that of course are very important. While this whole issue of hospitals being cut by 30 percent was going on in '94, guess what else was happening, just as an aside to my comments? This was when the West Edmonton Mall deal was being financed, when Albertans were being put on the hook for a \$400 million debt that we don't know the end of. The same time as they were cutting hospitals by 30 percent in this province.

As well, let's look at 1994. A very important thing happened, you know. The other provinces in the meantime were watching Alberta, watching what was going on in Alberta in 1994, and they were watching it from the point of view of health care and especially from the point of view of private health care. Now, remember, by this time Ontario's passed legislation; Saskatchewan is developing its legislation, doing the work of trying to control this private-sector growth.

I think it's important to put on the record a meeting of health ministers in September of 1994, when federal, provincial, and territorial ministers of health discussed a number of issues, including

the Canada Health Act, co-operation, and especially the whole issue of private clinics. It's important to put this one on the record, Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to read from the communique of the health minister's wrap-up of that September '94 meeting.

A small number of private clinics have recently been established which provide some insured health services for which the patients are charged a service or facility fee.

Well, we know what happened there.

Ministers [federal, provincial, and territorial] are concerned that continued growth in the number of such private clinics could lead to the development of a private system of health care in which people who can pay will get faster access.

Is the picture coming into view?

Such a system would have a negative impact on the publicly funded services available in Canada, where access is based on medical need. It was noted that Alberta is still reviewing the issue of private clinics and has not reached conclusions regarding their role and impact on the health system in Alberta.

Well, guess what? Alberta didn't go along with the plan to build a public system and to control the growth of the private sector.

It goes on. This is September of '94.

Ministers of Health agreed [all except Alberta] to maintain a high quality, publicly funded medicare system and agreed they will take whatever steps are required to regulate the development of private clinics in Canada. Alberta reserved inclusion in the regulatory strategy until its review . . . [was] concluded.

Well, here we are in 2000. Presumably their review is concluded, and the result is Bill 11, which, as we know, opens up private, overnight stay, surgical clinics-cum- private hospitals and ignores the private MRIs and all the other diagnostic services that should be covered. So an important part of the record, Mr. Speaker.

Let's move on, then, to Bill 37 and the first attempt to expand the private clinic role in Alberta. You know, this has been this whole debate over listening to who stands to benefit in terms of this piece of the public system being offered to private operators on a for-profit basis. Well, those who stand to benefit are those who can make a business out of it or, as I quoted in my remarks a week ago tonight, actually on the 4th of April, those few specialty physicians. Those are the ones who stand to benefit from this enabling of private, for-profit health care, medicare, to be delivered and which of course Bill 11 cements in the laws and statutes of this province.

I wanted to look at some of the excellent work that's been done by researchers, international, Canadian, and Albertan. I will do a little bit of a review of those documents. I was reminded of the health summit that many of us attended. In fact, I attended and sat with the hon. Member of Edmonton-Meadowlark, and many others of us were there, and we were privileged to hear Dr. Tom Noseworthy when he made his opening remarks at the health summit in 1999.

Of course, Dr. Noseworthy was with the department of public health services, the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry at the University of Alberta. He was a member of the National Forum on Health, which made such important recommendations for the Canadian health care system last year. He's someone that has a lot of experience in health care. He was an intensive care physician, an emergency physician. His remarks at the health summit were wonderful. They were tremendous remarks. You know, I actually am one of those people that keeps every piece of – oh, I don't know; I'm a bit of a health care junkie, I guess. I keep all these wonderful reports, and as I was going through that pile of reports in my office, I came across Dr. Noseworthy's remarks. I remember the discomfort of the government MLAs in the room when he made his plea that we shut off the leak of the private sector. He said, "Get rid of it. Dump it. Forget it. Stop it. Work on the public system, and the private system will go where it needs to go, which is wherever it needs to go."

10:50

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I thought it was important to look at this whole issue of healthy Albertans and to look at the issue of the illness patterns, which Dr. Noseworthy talked about so eloquently in his presentation. You know, he said that it isn't just about the money we spend on health care. It's all about how healthy our citizens are. He went through some of the most incredible statistics, which I think are worth reading into the record in terms of the health status of Albertans.

Do you remember that little bit I spoke to you about, the health goals in The Rainbow Report? Well, these indicators are the kind of indicators that we need to improve upon. I think any of us as legislators need to listen to some of these numbers and make sure that we develop healthy public policy. It's not about trying to find a role for the private sector, that this government is so hung up on. It's about trying to build a health care system that makes our citizens healthier.

So let's look at some of the reality of the statistics. These are the ones that the government doesn't really want to show and with good reason. They're not very pretty. It shows that "injury is the leading cause of death for [those] from 1 to 44 years" of age in this province, 1 to 44; preventable, avoidable injuries, Mr. Speaker.

- Injury accounts for more potential years of life lost than any other disease.
- On average, 3.6 people [in Alberta] die every day due to injury.
- Comparing all provinces, Alberta's rate of injury hospitalization ranks second behind Saskatchewan.
- Injuries lead to hospitalization over 30,000 times every year and costed the hospital system approximately \$524 million from 1985 to 1990.

This is Alberta, Mr. Speaker. These are the Alberta statistics. This is what needs our attention.

- Injuries, whether intentional or unintentional, fatal or non-fatal, result in tremendous financial and productivity costs.

Look at the costs of injury in terms of our economy. Look at the workers that this wonderful Member for Edmonton-Glenarry spoke to yesterday when he made the presentation to the WCB report.

- Motor Vehicle Collisions:
In 1997, 391 Albertans died from motor vehicle collisions. That is more than one death every day, all year.

That's unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. Why aren't we having legislation in this Legislature that looks to how we can improve the health status of Albertans instead of how we can enable the private sector to make a buck off the public health care system.

Let's look at the statistics of suicide. "The suicide rate [in Alberta] is higher than the rest of Canada," an indictment, Mr. Speaker.

- In 1997, more Albertans died of suicide than of motor vehicle collision injuries.
- Falls:
The rate of in-patient hospitalization is 24% higher [in Alberta] than the national average.

Why is that? Don't you think that's a worthwhile thing for us to start to probe so that we can eliminate the amount of injury from people falling? Look at our older people and the number of falls they have. What are they doing about it? Nothing.

- Work Place Safety:
From 1993 to 1997 work place fatalities increased [in this province] by 56%.

These are Dr. Noseworthy's numbers, Mr. Speaker.

- Gun control:
The rate of children killed with guns is almost twice the national average, and it is in fact comparable to the combined rates of Israel and Northern Ireland.

The death of children killed with guns, Mr. Speaker. What are we

doing when we're not working to bring that rate down?

- Sport and Recreation:
In 1997, an estimated 194,310 injuries, or 532 per day, requiring medical attention resulted from participation in sport and recreational activities.

You know, we can teach our kids to be safer. We can do it. We can make a goal that we're going to reduce the number of young people having sport-related injuries. We can bring it down. That's what health goals are all about, Mr. Speaker, and it's not happening in Alberta.

To quote Dr. Noseworthy:

Death does save the health care system money, but it's hardly a strategy worth pursuing. This naturally shifts to the common rhetoric – to fix this problem all we have to do is to keep people healthy. The logic is absolutely inescapable. The reality is anything but.

That's what we need to be working on, Mr. Speaker, not on private health care, that this government wants to pursue.

Let's move to some of the other studies. We've extensively quoted the U.S. studies that show that private health care is more expensive, that the waiting lists are longer when it's a private, for-profit mix with a public system. In fact, many, many studies will show that the quality of care deteriorates in the private sector because of course there are different motives than what exists in the public health care system.

Let's look at some of the studies that have been done. I just want to cite them because I think they're really important. In Britain, a wonderful study by John Yates, the Institute of Healthcare Management. Interestingly, this is the study, the Cam Donaldson paper, that the government of course hid from the view of Albertans, the one that we've brought forward which shows that there is no evidence – remember? – in their preliminary study. The Cam Donaldson study is an interesting one. Of course, we brought it out because the government refused to. This was one they'd commissioned with their own Health and Wellness ministry.

This study showed that there wasn't any evidence to support this push to privatization which was being proposed in Bill 11, but the government responded to the fact that they'd kept it hidden for quite some time by saying: well, it's only an interim study. Of course, this is very germane to this debate here; isn't it? Because the amendment last night that we proposed or one of the amendments that I think we could have proposed would have been to take the interim report of the Cam Donaldson paper – you know, take Bill 11 off the Order Paper and wait until the final results of the Cam Donaldson paper come forward before going down this blank path with absolutely no research to justify where they're going. They wouldn't even do that. They're so bent on giving the private sector a role in taking up public health care.

Anyway, the basis of that Donaldson paper is here, and I would refer any members to *Private Eye, Heart and Hip* by John Yates, an excellent study.

I think the only piece I just was reviewing tonight, which is well worth noting – I know I can find it if I just take two seconds to do it. It cites the British health care service where, of course, physicians can practice in the public system and the private system. It took 16 surgeons who were operating in both the private and the public system and compared the waiting lists of those surgeons, depending on whether they were in a national health services clinic, which of course is the public system, or in a private group, and it was very instructive.

The waiting list for an orthopedic appointment with one surgeon was 14 weeks in the national health services clinic, but for the same surgeon who was operating in the private sector, guess how long the wait list was there. Three weeks. Imagine: three weeks in compari-

son in the private clinic. Let's take another surgeon. Another surgeon had in his national health services service a 23-week waiting list, 23 weeks, Mr. Speaker, for working in the public system, for someone that was followed by the public system. This same surgeon with the 23-week wait in the public system: guess how much it was in the private system. One week. He's operating in both systems. Why is that? Well, I'd refer members to the John Yates study. They might learn a little bit about why Albertans are so concerned about this legislation.

In Canada, of course, we have some excellent studies that have come up, and I really applaud the health care economists, the people who have been working on health care policy for many, many years in this province. We had five of them come together. I've never seen five researchers come together and collaborate on a study as Robert Evans, Morris Barer, Steven Lewis, Michael Rachlis, and Greg Stoddart did in Private Highway, One-Way Street, an excellent, excellent review.

11:00

This study, of course, repeats the 30 percent cut in public hospitals that Alberta put into place. This is the paper that reviews Bill 11, the one that many, many Albertans have been able to read because they've pulled it off the web site. It says – and we all know this, but I think it's worth quoting into the record – that “a unique feature of the recent Alberta proposal,” i.e. Bill 11, that is the principal focus of this paper, “is to allow private for-profit facilities to be the site of overnight care covered under the [Canada Health Act].”

It goes on, but I think the conclusion of the study is a very important one. It says:

Stripped to the bone . . .

Stripped to the bone, Mr. Speaker.

. . . the Alberta proposal appears to be little more than taking lousy odds on a very small payoff, and gambling with the health of Canada's health care system, for the sake of a few Alberta health care providers who would stand to gain considerably in the short term. It is troubling that the rest of Canada has been so slow to take notice of [what's going on in] Alberta, and that the premier has taken so little notice of Albertans' vehement objections.

Which brings me, Mr. Speaker, to what we're doing here tonight. Over and above Albertans' vehement objections to this legislation is a government that after 11 hours – 11 hours – have to move closure to keep Albertans quiet, to silence them, and it is a completely unacceptable . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Two things. One, we have the hon. Government House Leader rising on a point of order.

Secondly, the chair would rise on a point of decorum. We're getting people shouting at the leader, disputing whatever it is that she is saying. That's perfectly fine for you to do, but we prefer that you do it during your speech on second reading, not while the hon. leader is making her speech.

Now, a point of order, the hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j). I've listened for the most part quietly to the hon. Leader of the Opposition's 90 minutes of discussion tonight or almost 90 minutes – it will be in 10 minutes – but I can't sit quietly while she makes allegations that a member of the House moved closure, when in fact closure has not been moved on this bill. In fact, the only reason that this member is speaking tonight for 90 minutes is because she has the opportunity to do so because debate has been extended by a Standing Order 47 motion, which allows

every member of this House one more opportunity to speak on this bill. So it's totally inappropriate for her to make the allegation that closure has been moved, when in fact closure has not been moved in any way, shape, or form.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I take your gesture and as always your helpful direction. I'm going to focus specifically on the point of order raised by the Government House Leader. He suggests in some fashion that what happened last night was not a form of closure. Well, I am astonished that the Government House Leader, who we assume is conversant with the parliamentary authorities, is not familiar with the citation which makes it abundantly clear. It's in *Erskine May*, which specifically says that to move that the previous question be not now put is a form of closure. It's not always styled closure, but that's the reality. If the Government House Leader has forgotten his parliamentary procedure, let me remind him. What it prevents the opposition from doing is moving amendments at second reading. We moved one amendment. We had at least two other solid amendments to move.

How many times have we heard in this House the Premier say: “Bring your amendments forward. We'll deal with your amendments. Have you got amendments to the bill? Bring them in”? So what happens, Mr. Speaker? Last night we come in. We have a number of amendments. We move the first amendment. It's debated and we vote on it, and the Deputy Government House Leader is on his feet insisting that the question be now put. What is that if it's not a form of closure? It prevents any further amendments being put.

You know, Mr. Speaker, if we'd had the opportunity, we might have moved an amendment that would say: let's defer any further consideration of this until we see the final report, not just the interim report. The health minister went on the other day about how important it was that we see the final report from the institute and Cam Donaldson and his colleague. Well, fine. Let's park Bill 11. Let's park it until we get the final report. That might have been the amendment we would have brought forward. We weren't afforded that opportunity.

Frankly, I'm astonished that the Government House Leader would suggest in any way, shape, or form that what happened last night was not a form of closure. That's contrary to the parliamentary authorities, it's contrary to the experience of anybody that's been in this Assembly for more than six months, and it's certainly contrary to what in fact was said in the course of debate.

Now, I may have colleagues that want to participate in the point of order as well, Mr. Speaker. I think it's of particular concern when the Government House Leader rises on a point of order. We assume that he's doing so with deliberate thought and with a careful plan, and I expect there may be colleagues that want to offer their opinions. This is an important matter for him to interrupt the Leader of the Official Opposition while she's using the time that's allotted to her under our Standing Orders.

Those are the observations I want to make at this point on the point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, as the hon. member for Calgary-Buffalo has indicated, there has been an interruption in the flow of the speech by the Leader of the Opposition. It is a point of order. That's perfectly legitimate in the scheme of things if there is a point of order. Citing his reasons, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has counteracted the thoughts of the hon. Deputy Government House Leader. Before we enter into a back and forth, there has

to be a back and forth, and so far there's been a this and this and there's nothing coming from the other side.

The chair would make a couple of observations. First of all, the original citation, as I recall it, by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader is 23(h), (i), and (j), which we can all remind ourselves are from the Standing Orders of this House. It's "makes allegations against another member." There was the inference, the allegation that someone brought in closure – and that was definitely a member – that the hon. Minister of Economic Development did do that, and it has been referenced before. So that would fit. Now, whether or not it is a proper allegation is the second thing.

"Imputes false or unavowed motives to another member" is (i). I didn't get the sense that that was being alleged here.

"Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." Certainly, while the hon. Deputy Government House Leader did speak before he was able to issue his thoughts, the chair saw fit to intervene because disorder was coming perhaps with the nature and the enthusiasm which the speaker was using, and that's "language of a nature likely to create disorder."

Now, ending the comments, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader got into the whole business of whether it's closure or whether it's not closure. Then we have the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo saying that *Erskine May*, which would be the third reference that we use, says that it is a kind of closure. Then one could also probably find someone who might say that amendments at second reading are not amendments which actually bring anything to the bill. They're all negating, as has been brought up before. The three kinds of amendments are a hoist, which kills the bill; a reasoned amendment, which kills the essence of the bill; or the referral of the subject matter, which again does that. So what we're getting here is a debate over what's closure and what isn't closure, is a kind of closure. I suppose one could get into a debate that the referral of a subject matter to a committee is a kind of filibuster, and that really isn't helpful to the debate, it seems to the chair.

11:10

I would say that there is language that's likely to cause disorder in the House when we are characterizing it with a pejorative word like closure. Whether or not that's intended, it has resulted in a kind of dispute. I wonder if we could continue the debate without interruptions and hopefully to a peaceful conclusion.

The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was quoting from *The Deklein and Fall of Canadian Medicare*. There were a couple of other quotes I just wanted to cite in this whole review of some of the excellent Canadian and Alberta literature that has been produced. I quote from the report: "Moreover, relative to provincial GDP, the Alberta government's expenditure on hospitals was, in 1999, estimated to be 22.4% below the national average." Those numbers, of course, are from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, and I think it's a very important point.

Finally, we have a government – and in fact there were members this evening who stood up and said that there was no queue-jumping going on in Alberta. Let me quote again from the report Deklein and Fall of Canadian Medicare? where it says:

The latter case is illustrated by private MRI facilities in Alberta offering accelerated services for patients waiting for MRI in the public system. The private facility is permitted to offer patients an immediate MRI scan, at their own expense . . . In effect, then, the private clinic is profiting by selling patients the possibility of earlier access to public facilities, of queue-jumping.

There it is, Mr. Speaker, right there in the report.

Now, there are a couple more I want to make sure I get to before my 90 minutes have expired, and that is to put on the record the excellent work done by Michael Rachlis in terms of being very much a supporter of public health care in this country, a wonderful speaker who, of course, spoke to a public forum sponsored by the Alberta Liberal Party on the weekend and gave an excellent, excellent address, Mr. Speaker. But I wanted to note the letter to the editor in chief at the *Edmonton Journal* wherein he basically wanted to respond to the letter which was sent by the Alberta minister of international and intergovernmental affairs talking about the whole issue of NAFTA, which, of course, we know is a major concern in terms of the impact of Bill 11.

I think the key point that's made in the Rachlis letter, as has been made in countless studies – but here it is in two pages, and it's kind of easy to get through – is that the risk of the impact of Bill 11 and the possibility of a ruling by an international tribunal is enough to make most people say: let's not go down this road. That is the point. This government has no right to stand up and say that there will be no problem with NAFTA, when in fact there are many, many arguments to say that there may or there may not. At least they could admit that there is a risk, and that's what the reports show.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on about the U.S. and Canadian health care costs, the advantages to our employers in this country for public health care. I gave remarks to the Calgary Chamber of Commerce on February 9, which I'd actually be pleased to table in the Assembly, where I outlined the benefits to Canada of our public health care system and the huge disadvantage that would accrue if we moved along the lines of the American system in terms of costs to our employers in this country. So the evidence is clearly there.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

I want to note in terms of Alberta as well in the few minutes I have left the excellent economic overview done by Richard Plain of the department of economics and public health at the University of Alberta, someone who actually has worked very, very hard for this provincial government but who is obviously a little distressed by Bill 11. I would like to cite an excellent paper done by Donna Wilson, who is someone who has done incredible work as a volunteer to attend health forums right across this province, who has worked tirelessly, and who is a strong, strong advocate for public health care. She has not just talked about it; she has put it into action in her report, a 10-point critique that is also available on her web site and an excellent review of the problems with Bill 11. Another excellent Alberta study is from Laura Shanner, a PhD at the John Dosssetor Health Ethics Centre, on the ethical concerns about Bill 11, an excellent, excellent review from a different perspective.

So here we have the economic reviews, the nursing reviews, the medical reviews, the ethical reviews, all of them pointing to what a disaster Bill 11 is, if only this government would just listen.

I tabled in the Legislative Assembly today, Mr. Speaker, the polls. Polls are a measure of the concern that Albertans have. These polls are unanimous, whether it's the Angus Reid poll, the A-Channel poll, or the one released today by the Canadian Union of Public Employees. All of them assert that by far the majority of Albertans are opposed to Bill 11. Interestingly, the more Albertans get to know Bill 11, the more they're opposed. That's what we're seeing as the trend line goes on the polling information. Yet what happens in this provincial Legislature? The government is ignoring the polls. They're ignoring the town hall meetings. They're not attending to the issues. The Premier refuses to do the debate with me, and I can understand why because here is the pile of evidence just in tonight's

debate to show that where they're going is wrong, wrong, wrong.

So, Mr. Speaker, I could certainly go on, but my time is nearly up. I want to say that of course this whole issue of telling some of our members, including members on the government side, that as a result of this Standing Order 47 and this motion that the question be put, the impact is to finish off debate, to not allow any more amendments to come forward, amendments that we think would be very useful. Let's remember that we're at the point of discussing the principles of this legislation, the principles which Albertans find abhorrent, yet it is on the principles that this government has decided that, no, the guillotine will go down and there will be no more amendments, no more discussion before we get into the bill. They can call it what they want, but Albertans know full well what's going on in this Legislature tonight.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, let's go back to the lens, the lens that's looking on this Legislature to welcome and thank all the people that are here in our galleries tonight. Let's not forget that the lens isn't just here. The lens isn't just here. [interjections] I'm so glad you're there. Thank you.

The government may think that they're pulling one over on the people of this province. They might actually think that, but it's not true. Albertans won't be silenced. Albertans will have the last word. Either pull Bill 11 or call an election and let the voters decide.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

11:20

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am truly amazed that the Member for Edmonton-McClung would continue to play politics with one of the most important things that we have in our lives. When I say that, I know that when she talks about the percentage of cuts, that has been an indication of her speech all evening long. She knows perfectly well that the cuts were roughly 13 percent, and she knows perfectly well that there was \$500 million taken out of a \$4.3 billion budget. She knows that.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, much as the previous Speaker, who perhaps has more experience than I do, I think we have to try and be consistent. When an hon. member is on his feet speaking, then please confine your comments to when it's your turn to speak and give the hon. member the courtesy of giving his speech.

MR. DICKSON: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. DICKSON: Under *Beauchesne* 333 will the member entertain a brief question, Mr. Speaker?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. member simply has to reply yes or no.

MR. FISCHER: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Carry on.

Debate Continued

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Member for

Edmonton-McClung has taken her math and she can divide the numbers just as well as anyone else in Alberta. I do know that when some of those cuts were made, a lot of that money came out of administration and went right into hospitals. She might be able to find one hospital or one along the way that got cut, but that is misleading the public.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just make another comment. The opposition member mentioned that she had a plan back in her Rainbow Report days. Rural Alberta really remembered her plan all right, because she went up to the Peace River country with her bureaucrats – and I believe that she stayed home because she was afraid to go up there – and she told them that the way she was going to fix the budget and the costs was to shut those hospitals down. She terrorized people in that country and in St. Paul and in Bonnyville country. If we hadn't gotten her stopped, she would have gone right across rural Alberta shutting down every rural hospital. That was her intent at that time. She was a member of our caucus at that time, and she knew perfectly well what she was doing. So that was not acceptable to rural Alberta, and it still isn't acceptable today. We have to find better ways of controlling the cost.

I wanted to say one other thing about the overnight stays that the Member for Edmonton-McClung keeps talking about. For people in rural Alberta to come up here, whether it's public or private, to see the doctor and then be told to go to a hotel every night and come back in the morning for your operation is not acceptable to us either, Mr. Speaker.

I wanted to remind the Member for Edmonton-McClung of one other thing. She talked about herself and the past almost in her whole speech. I just wanted to remind her that we're in the year 2000 now, and things have changed an awful lot from that time.

Mr. Speaker, health care is something that's near and dear to every one of our hearts. To have health care at the right time can mean the difference between life and death. I'm sure everyone here has witnessed on a few occasions the lifesaving miracles of the Alberta health care system. We as Albertans should be very, very proud of the wonderful system that we have, and we should be proud of the people, the doctors and the nurses, who provide these miracles for us. It's not everybody that has a system like this. If you were going to be sick in Canada, Alberta's the place to be. Whether it's Canada or maybe North America, Alberta is still the place to be when you are sick. I don't think we should forget that, because it says a lot for the people that work in it and it says a lot for the system that we have now. This is what Bill 11 is all about: preserving and improving the system we have.

I also know that every member of this government feels very, very strongly on this issue. Each of our people has family and friends and relatives, and we know that someday they're going to have to depend on and use our system. We all want it to be there when we need it.

Certainly I'm a little bit different than the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti in that I'm not quite to the retirement age yet, but we do have a big family and a lot of grandkids and aunts and uncles and so on, an extended family, that we want to see have an excellent health care system. We're not going to do anything to destroy this system.

So when people say that we're out to destroy and dismantle this system, they're totally wrong. It's untrue, and they're misleading the public. Bill 11 is here to protect and preserve public health care in Alberta, and it's to provide options for the RHAs to use to help alleviate the long lineups and to relieve the pressure on the public system. Each member in this Assembly as well wants to abide by the principles of the Canada Health Act, and each member is certainly against any form of private hospitals in this country.

Mr. Speaker, both the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the

federal Minister of Health, Allan Rock, in a letter to the province, have strongly suggested that we regulate and control the private health care clinics that are in this province now. They also suggest that changes must be made and that the status quo is not an option. When we look at the expenditures we have and the increase in costs – and I don't want to go over that too much, because it's been said many, many times – all we have to do is look at this chart for the last five years and see where the costs are going: an increase of 40 percent in the last five years and increasing at roughly 10 percent a year. Ten percent a year. Are we getting a better health care system because we put more money in it?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. FISCHER: Many people will say no.

So what are we going to do, then? Put more money into it? Keep on feeding it more money, more money and don't change anything? That's what the Member for Edmonton-McClung wanted us to do: feed it more money. [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, please wait your turn. Go ahead.

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, when we look at the many, many private clinics that are helping the public system today, performing something like 20,000 operations in a year, can you imagine if they weren't there? Don't we think it is assisting the public system now, and doesn't anyone think that there should be some rules and regulations in place so that those public clinics can never turn into private hospitals? I have to say that somebody has their head in the sand if they think we're going to stand and have no regulation whatsoever for those private clinics.

11:30

Back in '92-93, when the Galahad hospital was shut down, what happened? In came Hotel de Health from the U.S. I went to the meetings. The doctors were there explaining all the things they were going to do and so on. We didn't have one bit of legislation in place to stop those people. The people from Galahad did a great job in saying no to them, but we didn't have anything to stop them. Surely to goodness this Assembly has enough gumption to put some regulation in place.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We have how many long-term care facilities? Do we have private facilities now? We have a lot of them, and they offer a lot of health care in those facilities. What are we going to do? Are we going to let them develop into private hospitals, or are we going to regulate them? People are building more and more. Or do you want the government to build everything? I guess that seems to be what I'm hearing.

We want to have a health care system in this province that's going to be suitable for everyone. And we've got to be able to afford it. When you look at the costs and the chart, is it sustainable? Of course not. Every province in Canada knows that, and Allan Rock knows that, and he's suggesting that we do something about it. So I say that we should open our eyes and look at what we have now and look at where we're going from here. I don't think we can go back to 1988 and say that we should have done this or that or something else. Things aren't going to be perfect. Things change as you go, and no one's forecast is absolutely perfect.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say, yes, we've got a lot of work

to do yet with this bill. Yes, we want to have a bill that protects us. I want to have a bill like Saskatchewan has or like B.C. or like Manitoba or Ontario or maybe even Quebec. I think we deserve that. Why in the world would you think we would travel to those provinces and go to Saskatoon or maybe Regina to get something done instead of having it done here. Is that what the members across the way want? It sounds like it.

When we talk about free trade and the risk of free trade shutting us down and letting private health come in here, well, how many years has Ontario had their clinics? For 30 or 40 years they've had their clinics down there. Has free trade been a factor in it? Of course not. Would it be a factor in B.C., or is it a factor in these other provinces? When the Pan Am sports clinic in Winnipeg is doing their services, does free trade come in and interfere with that? No. So I think we have to look at this, and somebody has to use their common sense. It's time for the fear mongering to quit. I can say that you can't continually stand up and put fear into people because this might happen. Well, it's not going to happen, because the bill says that it won't happen. That's the law, and you know that.

Anyway, I want to just finish off by saying that we have a good health care system, and we're out here to protect it. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm not very pleased to get up and speak to this motion that was put forward under Standing Order 47, and that was that the question now be put. I'm one of the people that wasn't very happy about this because I didn't get an opportunity to speak in second reading debate. [interjections] I was here every time. I was in the lineup to be to a speaker. Whatever happened, the debate would adjourn. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members on both sides of the House, we have an hon. member who indicates that she wasn't able to speak, and we suddenly get a lot of noise. Now, perhaps that's because she's obviously spoken at least twice on this bill. [interjections] Then the record is wrong. She's speaking now and was speaking, according to the record, on the amendment, so that's twice at second reading.

We all have an opportunity to speak. Shouting at someone because you disagree with what they're saying is really not very well mannered. It's discourteous. We've tried to hold for most of the evening that we quietly listen to the opposite members, whichever side is speaking, and hear them out. Let them speak. Let them be heard. All hon. members, even the ministers.

MR. BONNER: She spoke to the amendment.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Edmonton-Glengarry. Edmonton-Centre.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, no, I have not been given the opportunity to speak to the principles of the bill, as is usually the case in second reading. By the motion being put, I do not now get the opportunity to speak to the principles of the bill in second reading.

AN HON. MEMBER: This is your opportunity.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, that's interesting, because I'm actually being coached to go against . . .

Speaker's Ruling Clarification

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I just hate to intercede again here, but we did have a ruling made by sort of a joint effort by the hon. Government House Leader and the hon. House leader of the opposition and the chair this afternoon that said that you would have full range to be able to speak, and no one would be brought to heel on that. So if you wish to speak on all of the principles, this chair will defend that right, should anybody try and call "relevance" or whatever, as long as you're on the principle of the bill at second reading. So you do have the 20 minutes assigned to you on this occasion.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much for clarifying that and getting it on the record. I think there are a number of members that didn't understand what in fact had been happening, so I appreciate you doing that.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: I do feel that this asking that the question now be put is in fact stifling debate. Certainly I would have an opportunity to have spoken more often than I'm now being allowed to do. I'm not up here speaking for myself. I'm up here representing the people that live in Edmonton Centre.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Not all of them.

MS BLAKEMAN: No, that's absolutely true, minister of intergovernmental affairs. I am indeed their elected representative. It's interesting, because the members opposite are very fond of heckling across to here, going: "Well, you guys lost; you guys lost. So tough beans." Well, as a matter of fact, I didn't lose. I won. I am the elected representative for Edmonton-Centre, and I am here representing the views of the people in my constituency.

How have I done that? Well, I've collected all of the e-mails and faxes and letters that were sent in and all of the little telephone message sheets, and I've got over 300 of those. To be fair – and I will put it on the record here in reference to those that requested it – I have had three pieces of correspondence in support of Bill 11 and four and a half phone calls in support of Bill 11. [interjections] Well, I'm putting the half in to be fair, because the gentleman actually phoned with concerns about the most recent Senate appointment and as part of that conversation mentioned in passing his support of Bill 11. So to be fair, I'm putting him in there. He did mention it, but that wasn't the purpose of the phone call. Three documents that I've received were in support of it. So a total of seven. Over 300 and getting close to 400 now – and I get a few more, about a dozen more every day – are very much opposed to Bill 11. So I am here speaking for these people, and my notes have been comprised from going through that correspondence I received. That's exactly what I intend to do here.

11:40

Now, one of the interesting things that happened and I suspect caused the reaction from the Conservative caucus so that this Standing Order 47 was brought in was that the opposition had introduced amendments at second reading. I thought: gee, is that such a bad thing? I looked in *Beauchesne*, and in fact there are two

and a half pages in here all about how you can introduce motions at second reading. So I thought: well, this is obviously a legitimate process that can be used and called upon as part of parliamentary procedure. There are all kinds of things you can do: hoist amendments, reasoned amendments, referral of subject matter to a committee. Well, for goodness' sakes, I said. There's a reason why all of this is in here. It's obviously a reasonable option, a process to be called upon if there are people that believe it needs to be used in order to prevent the will of a government overriding the will of the people, and indeed that's what happened. But it seems to have very much upset the members opposite.

So I was able to speak on one amendment, and I'm now up speaking to this one, but I guess I don't get to speak again in second reading. I would like to go over what some of the qualities of talking about a principle of a bill are. If I check the dictionary, we've got things like: a general truth or law basic to other truths, as in the principle of self-government; a law or rule of personal conduct; moral standards collectively, as in a man of principle; that which is inherent in anything, determining its nature or essence; a source or cause from which a thing proceeds; a fundamental cause; an established mode of action or operation in natural phenomena, and the principle of relativity is an example of that. That is in essence of what second reading is about. It's discussing the larger, overriding principles and philosophy behind what is being proposed in a piece of legislation.

I wonder when Albertans get to have their long discussion on principle, because this one got a little truncated. I think it's perfectly appropriate that that discussion do take place. I've noticed, you know, that there's a really interesting thing that's been happening. I'll be looking forward to whoever gets up following my speech. There's some little rabbit warren of people back there from the public affairs department with laptops that churn out this Bill 11 debate summary instantly, as soon as one of us has spoken, and then puts their spin on it. So I'll be really interested in what kind of spin they put on what I'm saying, because my goodness, they certainly do appear to be sterling individuals when they are on the government's side and the spin is written about what theirs is. I wonder how much money that's costing taxpayers, to have that sort of 24-hour-a-day information turned out.

DR. MASSEY: The spin machine.

MS BLAKEMAN: The spin machine in the rabbit warren back there.

I wonder: what is the rush? What is the rush of this government to have to get through this section of the debate of the bill so quickly? I mean, is there some imminent time line out there I don't know about? Is everybody in a big hurry to have Bill 11 in their Easter baskets to take home? What is the big rush? If this is the most fundamental principle – and I heard one of the members earlier talk about this being one of the biggest things we've done in Alberta in a long time – I would think we would want to take all due care in discussing this and making sure that we were in fact doing something that was in the best interests of Albertans.

I notice that we've had – what? – 12 hours of debate on second reading or the amendment in second reading of this bill. I go: 12 hours? I mean, if everyone in this Chamber spoke, we'd have 27 hours of debate. So what's the big rush at the 12-hour mark? I mean, when they were debating the land claim in B.C., they didn't call closure until they had had over 100 hours of debate, but we're in such a big hurry that this government can't stand the 12 hours.

I will note and give credit to the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti. You know, I offered to come out into the communities of four MLAs, and those were the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, the Member for

Banff-Cochrane, and the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti. I didn't get the courtesy of a reply from the first three, but I did get the courtesy of a reply from the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, and I noticed that he actually managed to be one of the lucky ones that has been up to debate. I do commend him for that, both for following up with a reply but also getting up to debate, because I would like to hear what the 50 members of this Assembly who have not yet spoken on the principles of this bill have to say. Certainly we've been promised that that debate and those views are going to be brought forward into this Chamber, and I'm looking forward to what they have to say.

I have a couple of questions that I wrote down as I listened to the Premier doing his debate. I'm wondering exactly how the clinics that exist now fit under this bill. I'm aware that March 31 was a renewal date for the contracts with the Gimbel eye clinics and a few of the other private clinics in Alberta. Now, that date has come and gone. Does that mean that these have now been renewed for some unspecified period of time and the legislation wouldn't affect them? What are the terms of the contracts that have been renewed? We don't get access to those, because they're secret. They've now been renewed, and we don't know for how long. We don't know under what terms they've been passed. So, you know, there could have been a contract signed for 25 years under the existing terms. They wouldn't be subject to any of the things that are being offered or at least talked about under this bill.

Over and over again people in Edmonton-Centre have said: why? Why this bill? Why does the government choose this as their vehicle for change in the health care system in Alberta? Why? They've watched question period, and I'll tell you, question period is going to be hitting the Neilsen ratings right away quick here. I am very surprised at how many people are watching question period and, in particular, seniors. Very interesting, the number of seniors that are watching question period. I commend them for that.

AN HON. MEMBER: How many in the gallery tonight?

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, well, everywhere that I could see, there were people in the gallery. It's 10 to midnight, so some of them have left now; I don't blame them. Certainly we had a very good showing out tonight. I also recommend that people follow along with this debate on the Internet, and they certainly can at www.assembly.ab.ca. I hope they are following along.

I can't get any satisfactory answers to the question: why? Why is this the choice? Why is this vehicle, this Bill 11, the choice, the vehicle that this government wants to somehow improve or change health care in Alberta.

I think the other question that's really important is: who benefits? A lot of Albertans are looking at it and trying to answer the why question. They can't answer it. They end up defaulting to: well, I'm not going to benefit from this, so who does benefit from this? Two important questions that need to be answered from this.

It was very interesting listening to the Leader of the Official Opposition as she led us through a history of health care here in Alberta from the 1960s to now, the various changes that have gone through, the proposals that have been brought forward, and the work that was done on it. I think the debate on Bill 11 really started in 1993. A number of other people have raised the issues of the health roundtables that were raised for discussion with the public about changing the health care system, but I always found it very strange that health professionals were specifically excluded from those roundtables. They didn't want doctors and nurses there. If you were one of those, you couldn't be at the roundtables. I thought: what a strange way to change a system, to exclude the very professionals

who work in it every day and who could be giving you very good suggestions on how to change or improve it.

Nonetheless, the health roundtables happened. There were cuts. That certainly happened, and that was accompanied by a statement from the Premier that things were spiraling and spinning out of control. Well, we know now that they weren't spinning out of control in fact. There's never an answer from the members opposite as to why those statements were made and then the facts showing that they weren't true. I'd be interested in hearing that one. So maybe the people in the little rabbit warrens that do the really fast spin and have it back here in 20 minutes could put an answer into the next person's speech to answer that question.

11:50

We had a number of things change and happen here, and all of us were hoping that we were actually going to have the rethink of our public health care system, that there actually had been a plan in place. I think people really wanted to believe that. Then we got an announcement – when was it; last year, 18 months ago? – sorry; oops, no plan. Excuse me.

What results of other changes did we get to health care in the early and mid-90s? Well, certainly the medical practitioners, the doctors and nurses, have felt abused. They felt there wasn't a future. They abandoned ship and went to work in other places. The regionalization created its own series of problems. We spent a lot of money setting up all those different RHAs, but despite an increased reliance on home care we didn't get much more money put in there. The budgets have not increased in proportion to society's reliance on it.

So I think we didn't need to cut at the time. I think there were plans in place that we could have taken advantage of that would have saved us from that, but the government did cut, and now we have waiting lists and now we have people suffering. There's been a lot of talk from the other side about: oh, you know, we're spending this much more money than we did in 1982. Well, I should hope so. We've got a lot more people in Alberta than we did in 1982, so even if you spent exactly the same amount of money on each person, you're still going to have a larger budget by now. You've just got more people here.

The effect this has had on the people in Edmonton-Centre has been very real, and we really see that in the constituency office. For me, it means that the health of the constituent who waited so long to get in and get surgery deteriorated generally to the point that even though she got the surgery, she died. That is not a healthy system as far as I'm concerned.

I am looking for good legislation. I am looking for legislation that regulates and controls the private, entrepreneurial style of health care provision, but I'm also looking for all of those other important components of the health care system. We have a government that responds to waiting lists by suggesting that RHAs be empowered to contract with private providers, which is what Bill 11 is, and somehow the theory is that that would clear up the waiting lists. I have yet to see any kind of reasonable argument or proof on that.

You see, the question to me is that if a procedure costs X amount right now, and that's how much money is paid into the system or is paid to a hospital that's providing that particular procedure, then how is this better done in the private system, where there is at least a 15 percent profit margin built in? So if you're paying \$500 for a certain procedure in the public system, and now you're going to pay that \$500 in the private system, how are they going to make their 15 percent profit? When we're spending that \$500 in the public system, this is not a system that needs to advertise its services to attract a client base. It doesn't need an enormous administration to co-

ordinate payments from a variety of different payers, insurance plans and all.

How could this procedure possibly cost less in the private system? I think the answer is that it can't. Well, then, how is this possibly managed? I still don't have that answer for why. I'm not getting that answer for why. There's a lot of rhetoric tossed back and forth across over here, but my constituents are looking for some real thorough debate on this complex subject, which is why I was in favour of referring it to the committee, which is where we could have had some of this discussion. But that's not going to happen.

Part of my frustration and the frustration of people in Edmonton-Centre is hearing people get up and go: "It's in the bill. Read the bill. It says there will be no queue-jumping, so that's it. There will be no queue-jumping." Well, excuse me. You say there's no queue-jumping now, and there is. Nothing in that bill details how the queue-jumping will be stopped. It is a one-line sentence that says that there will be no queue-jumping and then does nothing to deal with how it will be stopped, and it exists now.

The same thing happens with enhanced services. It says that there won't be any enhanced services and then goes right on to say, yes, there will, and here's how you can do it: as long as you signed the piece of paper and you know it costs money and your doctor said it's okay, then you can buy enhanced services. Well, why isn't the government looking at things like what the Saskatchewan legislation did, which is say: no sale of enhanced services, end of discussion. What's more than that, they dealt with the queue-jumping problem by bringing all of the MRIs underneath the public health care system. That's where our queue-jumping problem is happening. It's happening with the diagnostics, and it's happening with the enhanced services. Lots of people have detailed stories prior to me, so I won't go into them again. I'll just refer you to www.assembly.ab.ca. You can read the *Hansard* for yourself.

I think there's a real question about whether we want to go to a system where we start having to view our doctors as medical entrepreneurs, because this is what happens. Particularly for seniors, this is where their concern is. There are two things the seniors say to me. One, they were here before medicare, and they do not want to see medicare eroded in any way, shape, or form. That's what they tell me over and over again. Okay. The second thing is that they find the idea of their doctor as a medical entrepreneur to be a really frightening thing. They're used to getting advice from a doctor which means this is what they should do, but they're not used to a system where they have to say, "Doctor, are you giving me medical advice or are you trying to sell me a product?"

I can see the Speaker starting to rise. Perhaps I could get unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent denied]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's fortunate that I don't need unanimous consent to speak, because it would be rather difficult to get a word in edgewise.

Cutting off debate in this Legislature is something that this government seems to do with ease but without grace. It's a heavy-handed government that must resort to cutting off a minority of speakers in a democracy that is supposed to have full and open debate on every subject that a member wishes to speak upon.

Citing section 47 of the Standing Orders is a pretty lame way to deal with an opposition that is supported by the public. Those opposite know that if there were no support in the public, we would not be here. Why not take the easy route and allow the debate to

occur until such time as the public loses interest? That is how this democracy of ours works. It doesn't work on all the rules. It doesn't work on all of the impositions of position and policy. It's what the people out there believe is occurring. This government just throws that off, and it may be at your peril. I believe it is.

I don't think this government will ever, ever recover from the damage that you've done to the trust the people had in this government. Yeah, it's possible that you could be re-elected by buying a vote when the economy is so great. We went on and on and on with a couple of members opposite about the integrity of all of this and the debate on this issue and how it should not be carried on. We've heard all of that before. The fact is that a government cuts off debate because either they're lazy or they're afraid. That's it. There is no other reason.

12:00

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes, there are other reasons.

MR. WHITE: I sat in my place and listened to that member opposite make arguments, and I didn't hear one, not one argument other than that the government is afraid or lazy when cutting off debate. There is no other reason. Greater minds than I have written this, not me.

In fact, it's a sad day when this government cannot debate the issues. Some members opposite actually did their best to do just that, and I give them credit for that. Perhaps before the Member for Wainwright leaves – oh, he's not intending to leave. I will get into debating controlling the private clinics.

Let's step back for a moment and explain who I represent here. I represent an area of the city of Edmonton that is not rich. It has middle to lower socioeconomic wage earners by and large, a great deal of retired senior citizens, and some young families working their way into the higher income brackets. Virtually everyone is concerned about this issue. It is at the top of their list, the very top of the list, and this government decides that they don't want to hear any more debate? They don't want to explain to the populace what is transpiring?

The people in Edmonton-Calder want to know. They don't feel satisfied with the deliverance of a bill that they had a great deal of difficulty reading and understanding. They don't have the context of those that draft and redraft bills for this Legislature. These people are concerned about their here and now, and they're concerned about their future.

I get letters all the time and phone calls right at the moment from people, primarily seniors, if they have an opportunity to call during the day. And they're worried. They don't know what the bill means. Do you think this government has explained it to them? No, it totally and completely missed them. You can send all the bills you want, and it does not help them understand what the intent of the government is. In fact, they read, and they remember Bill 37, and they say: "Well, we didn't like that one. We're not exactly sure what it did, but we didn't like it at the time because it changed the system such that it was going to cost us more." Then another iteration and then the final iteration. What this government has done is successively made bad moves in this particular area of policy to scare the folks out there as to what the true intent is. [interjections]

Some of these people just don't listen well. I'm not scaring them. They're scared. And I haven't been getting the message out as well as the millions and millions of dollars of the government's program.

MR. DICKSON: An \$8 million budget for the Public Affairs Bureau. Eight million dollars.

MR. WHITE: I'm reminded that there's eight million dollars spent annually in the public information bureau, a bureau that is to explain these things to people. That's eight times our entire budget,

including living in the box next door. And you say I'm the one that's fear-mongering? I'm the one that's causing it? I mean, it's quite a compliment if I can do all of that to my constituents, inform them that well. I should be elected forever. But that's not the case. The case is they are afraid. You've heard it. There can't be anyone in this room who has listened to any constituents of their own and can say that they haven't heard of a great deal of concern and fear. Fear of change, and fear of change is real.

The people of Edmonton-Calder, like most other people, want a government that cares about them and a government that listens to them when they have some concerns. We've had a great deal of concerns. I personally filed almost 5,000 signatures here gathered by citizens in the constituency. I would like to think I could get that many people working for me on a campaign. It's not likely to happen. These people are working to benefit themselves and rightly so. This is the kind of thing that spurs people to change governments, and this government has lost its listen. They're not understanding how deeply this has cut, and I should hope there's some better discussion than I've heard on this floor in that government caucus.

Always we've heard before, today, and just this evening: what fundamental question do the folks want to know? What is the intent of this government? Is it to build private clinics/hospitals or whatever you want to call them? Is it to foster that growth and somehow by pure philosophical might save the taxpayer dollars in deliverance of the service? Is that what it is? Or is it, as the Member for Wainwright said, to control private clinics?

Well, that's the biggest joke I've ever heard. I mean, to control a private clinic, all you have to do is just not pay them. They'll go away. If they're not getting paid through the public purse, it's not very difficult to do. If you say you're not going to use them, you don't need a law to do that. You just say: sorry; we've got other ways of providing the service. And they stop. But you don't need to control them. What's to control? If you don't write the contract, you don't pay it, then the party to the contract that has the money definitely has the control.

Then ask, if you're going to start off in a direction, why reinvent the wheel entirely? Why not study it and say: look, there are humans throughout the entire world, there's health care throughout the entire world, and there are other civilized societies that have just as much money as this society and do provide health care. You'd think you'd do a literature study and say: well, see what works in the world heading in a new direction. Either this government did not do that, or when they did do that, they found that the answers were all contrary to this major philosophical push that was philosophically driven entirely and completely, because the facts just don't match. There is not a body of evidence that says a for-profit, private hospital or clinic, if you will, in combination with a public health care system works. It just doesn't work.

Then we hear all this Shouldice, Shouldice, Shouldice. Shouldice has been in business as a nonprofit hospital since 1957.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nonprofit?

MR. WHITE: It was built into the system in 1957. [interjections] Well, it seems some members opposite are challenging the status of the Shouldice clinic. Well, gee, it wouldn't be hard to file a document, as it is filed at Queen's Park in Toronto under the legislation for nonprofit entities. It's a society. Somebody's missing something if the member opposite hasn't bothered to do a due diligence on that one. Citing that particular instance over and over and over and over again like some blind mantra and then not even

knowing the fundamental facts of it? You're incorrigible in your disdain for the facts.

So why else would it be? We had a great one the other day. "Because it's the right thing to do." The right thing to do. I mean, gee, have you been hit on the head too often or what? Come on. Explain that. I mean, I go out and explain that to a senior, "It's the right thing to do"? Well, what? To cross a street? I mean, it's the old chicken jokes. I mean, that's as bad as it is. It has no basis in fact at all, and you're trying to sell that? I mean, that's getting pretty low. If you can't do better than that, let's just start over.

Then there's our former Treasurer. His great statement is: why wait for the facts; just go out and experiment. I mean, it's hard to believe that a man that has spent as much time on this earth as he has would experiment with something like health care. From my position when I have to hear senior citizens and the good citizens of Edmonton-Calder ask me why and they tell me they're fearful, I can understand why, because this government hasn't explained at all the rationale behind this bill.

Now, what happens if you're wrong? What happens if you're wrong on this one? What happens if you mess up royally, and this is not the right thing to do? Can you turn it back easily? I don't think so.

12:10

AN HON. MEMBER: Without suits?

MR. WHITE: No, I don't think so. Once you have contracts in place, and you have contractors, it is exceedingly difficult to wind it down. When you have a system up and running and you've replaced, in this government's terms, the bricks and mortar of the business of deliverance of health care, it's exceedingly difficult to wind that down. And if it costs more, we just pay.

I'd like to include in the record some of the comments that this member gets. There are about 30 letters or so that I intend to file, actually, so I won't be quoting precisely but just generally. I'll file them someday real soon when I have all their permissions to do so.

A letter to the Premier with the copy to myself as being the MLA. "There's something terribly wrong with the health care system in Alberta since you became Premier." It's a little tough, but we'll deal with that. "I therefore wish to register my opposition to the plans for the privatization and the for-profit hospitals/clinics in our health care system." It goes on to decry the nonrepresentation of their views in hospital administration, because this government promised and then reneged on the promise to elect the health authorities. These people were waiting for the opportunity to do that, and we all know how much the hospital system eats up of the budget.

Then there are some seniors. "My husband and I are seniors, and we worry about our future. We have seen our health care cut back over the past few years, and people like us have only small pensions and have to cut back on clothing and food and such so we can afford dentures and eyeglasses."

Now, you may think: oh yeah, I've got people whining and crying about it and feign crying on the other side. Well, that's really fine if you have a large income. You sit here. A lot of these people that I represent don't have that opportunity. They're past the years where they have earned income. They have to live on what they have, and since this government came to office in 1992, it's cost them a great deal more in pharmaceuticals, eyeglasses, dentures, and the like and other prostheses that are required for their daily living. It changes their health care plan, and it changes how they must live.

Here's another from just outside my constituency, and he's writing, again to the Premier. This private citizen, not a senior but able-bodied, towards the end of the letter: "The private health care

bill is bad and you, the Liberals, must stop this one for sure. It will come again and again if it's not stopped this time and every time. It is bad medicine." And it is signed by the citizen.

And another one. I've got a copy, and why they would send me a copy, I don't really know, but they're from St. Paul, Alberta. They say of the research available that "what you're quite prepared to ignore indicates that private hospitals cost more." And they close off, the very bottom line, "Please, for the sake of my grandchildren, don't do this." This is a letter to the Premier.

Now, these are heartfelt, individually handcrafted letters. No, they're not cranked out on a computer. This looks like some kind of an old Olivetti that's been sitting in the corner gathering dust. It has a little dust mark in the A.

Here's one that's handwritten and is exceedingly difficult to read, quite frankly. This one is written just to me: "Let me restate my definite and unequivocal opposition to the further privatization of our health care system." This letter goes on and the hand gets shakier and shakier until the signature line. It's only a one-page letter, and it's direct for me. These people actually do take the time to write these letters, and they're heartfelt. They are fearful. They are fearful of what this government has in store for them now and in the future.

Another handwritten note. This one obviously not quite so old and shaky. This is a copy to me from a constituent. It's a letter actually to the Premier. "Please be informed that my wife and I are strongly opposed to your proposal of private health care." It goes on: "money back into the health care system to help alleviate the queue lines established by your earlier financial cuts." That's the simple belief of this person that obviously doesn't have a computer, doesn't have that opportunity. But they live in Edmonton-Calder and are fearful enough and concerned enough that they write a handwritten note to their Premier and to their MLA.

Another one – and I know not why I would get a copy – from an art gallery out in Sherwood Park. This particular woman cites that she is a taxpayer and a voter and a businessperson. She "deeply resents having my tax dollars spent on 'health care for profit'." It's an in-depth analysis, a three-page letter. She spent a great deal of time on it, obviously. Her distribution list is not terribly extensive, but it does cover me and a couple of other members on both sides of the House. She finishes off with: the health care for-profit system is a deciding factor, not increase in service and not increase in standards. This is a businessperson, Mr. Speaker, and she doesn't cover any fear of the system changing; she as a professional believes it is definitely the wrong way to go in the business.

Oh. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, I took more time than I intended.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sitting here trying to be very quiet and listening to the speeches. I must admit that at times my exuberance has gotten the best of me, because in fact I've heard many things that I believe are not quite what they seem to be. If I can just start with a quote by George Orwell from *Politics and the English Language*, 1946. He says: "political language . . . is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, what we have been hearing from the government members is pure wind.

If I can provide a quote from a constituent, who indicated that she wanted this read out loud.

I have been listening to the news and to hear our so-called "Government" make a statement like he will not hold a town hall meeting

because all there will be is a bunch of "Left Winged Wacko Nuts." Do we not have a right to our own opinion without being called names by the Premier . . . If he cannot handle an honest debate; how can we say he is trustworthy.

I think those two go together quite well, and what we have seen in this Assembly is a lot of discussion from government members which seemed to be based on pure faith. There almost seems to be a cult developing with regards to what this Bill 11 is about. If you believe in Bill 11, you know that it will not provide private, for-profit health care; you know that it will not provide for queue-jumping; you know that it will not provide for enhanced services. The only people that seem to believe that are the cult members in this Assembly of this government. In fact, we know that when we ask questions like, "Will it be more cost-effective," the answer is no. Will it provide more efficiencies? The answer is no. Will it reduce waiting lists, whether it's for hips or for any other procedures? The answer is no. Will it increase the number of doctors or nurses in our health care system? The answer is no. Will it regulate facilities that have overnight stays? Well, no, those don't exist right now. So the answer is, no, it doesn't do that.

[Mr. Renner in the chair]

What does the bill do? Will it cost us more as taxpayers out of our pockets? The answer is yes. Will it increase the wait lists? The answer is yes.

12:20

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, while the chorus is entertaining and probably took a while to rehearse, it's inappropriate for parliamentary procedure.

MS LEIBOVICI: It would be impossible to rehearse this speech, Mr. Speaker.

Will it increase the wait lists? Yes. Will it decrease access to the doctors and the health professionals in the system? The answer is yes. Will it provide profits to private, for-profit health care operators in this province? You bet. That's a resounding yes.

I heard the speech from the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, and quite honestly I'd miss him being shocked and appalled. It was good to see him being back on track. I heard the Member for Calgary-Egmont. When he ran out of facts, what he had to do was insult our leader, and quite frankly I think that is inappropriate.

I heard the heartfelt remarks from the Member for Wainwright. I listened very carefully to his remarks because they seemed to come from the heart. It allowed me to have a bit of an insight into why the government members so fervently adhere to what they're being told with regard to Bill 11. But what I also heard him say was that the reason we need Bill 11 is in order to improve the system. Well, what's interesting is that when I look at a letter that the Premier of this province wrote to Mr. Booi, who's the president of the ATA, what he indicated was that "government has never claimed that contracting out some surgical services would be the solution to all challenges facing the health system." It's only an option. So, quite frankly, member, you can't have it both ways. It can't improve the system and solve the problems within the system yet be only a small piece and in fact something the government has never claimed would do just that.

So it's time to get some of the facts straight. It's time, I believe, to look at the fact that this government has been unable in five months to present one single report out of Alberta that substantiates their claims. We have brought forward reports from various associations, from various doctors, from the ATA – the list goes on – yet this government, with its thousands of employees and millions

of dollars, has been unable to produce a report. The only report that has been produced by the government, like the interim report that we tabled and the report from the Department of Health and Wellness that we tabled, indicates that this plan will not work. What more do you need as evidence?

The reality is that the piece that's missing in the privatization plan of this government is the piece that deals with private, for-profit hospitals. Without the piece, the plan is incomplete. The only way this government can get that plan through is by pretending that they're approved surgical facilities, because the public will not buy the establishment of private, for-profit hospitals in this province. Is that not what the thousands of e-mails, the thousands of letters, the coupons, the thousands of signatures have said to us? That's exactly what they've said. You know, quite frankly, members, I know that's what you're hearing as well.

The speeches may be fine. In fact, they say the same thing over and over and over again. They are written almost by rote, and what they say is: "This bill will be the answer. This bill does not do what the Official Opposition says, and this bill is foolproof." Well, if it's so foolproof, may I ask, then: why is the government bringing forward amendments? Why is the government bringing forward amendments to deal with conflict of interest if that's not a concern? Why wasn't it in the bill when you've had three years to do it? Why is the government bringing forward amendments on enhanced services when you're so foolproof? You know what? You're not so right. The bottom line is that you're not so right. In fact, you are not doing the right thing; you are doing the wrong thing.

The reality is that we have many analyses here that have not even been tabled as yet. There's the analysis from the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, who oppose the bill. They say that the bill "will be detrimental to the system by siphoning off valuable human resources into the private system. It will not address the need for reform." It does not support the principles of the Canada Health Act. It "claims to ban private hospitals, [but] there's nothing in the act that actually prevents private hospitals." It "will not ban queue jumping." It goes on to say what it will not do: everything that each one of these members who has spoken in this Legislative Assembly from the government has said it will do.

There's a recent letter that's come in to each one of you. Each one of you members received this letter from Dr. Daniel Cohn on April 6, so by now you probably should have had time to actually read what he has written. He is with the social sciences and humanities department. He's a Research Council of Canada postdoctoral fellow at the University of Alberta. What he says is that he urges you all to read this particular piece of information. What he says is:

I find myself in an interesting position with Bill 11. I never in my wildest imagination ever felt that I would have to explain to members of the Conservative Party how market forces work.

He goes on to say:

No one seems to have stopped to ask . . .

Other than us, of course, on this side.

. . . will the measures proposed in this bill actually achieve the stated aims of the government by lowering costs to the public, cutting waiting lists and improving access? In order to answer that question we have to consider how markets work, including the most basic of all market rules, the law of supply and demand.

Unfortunately, as the attached essay shows . . .

And maybe I'll send you some of these reports, because obviously you haven't read them all. [interjections] Thank you, minister. I have two ministers who are requesting that information, and you will be receiving the information of some of the reports that we have tabled.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

You know what? I'd also like to get your opinion as to whether you agree or disagree with the reports and what in fact you disagree with, because I think that would help the debate along. Hopefully I have a commitment from you as well to do that.

. . . the measures proposed in Bill 11 are only likely to succeed if the law of supply and demand is suspended in Alberta. Otherwise, the most likely scenario is that either costs and waiting lists will rise or access to care will be seriously eroded in rural communities and small towns.

For all of you MLAs in the rural areas . . . [interjections] I'm not saying this; this is Dr. Daniel Cohn.

It is not the works of Karl Marx or Vladimir Lenin that tell us this, but the works of Adam Smith and Milton Friedman.

I will send this to you just in case it's gotten lost in your mail, because I think it's important that you read that piece of information. Perhaps we can get some meaningful dialogue going on the actual facts of this bill and what this bill does and does not do and say.

12:30

Now the issue of the federal government. I've watched with amusement, actually, the play that's gone on with the Premier and the Minister of Health and Wellness and the federal Minister of Health and the Prime Minister. What I find amazing is that when the Premier says, as he did many months ago, that he wants the opinion of the federal government and he gets that opinion and he doesn't like it, what he does is go running off to the Prime Minister to say: give me another opinion. Those of us who do have children and those of us who can remember when we were children, remember how if we didn't like what our mothers said, we went running off to our father or vice versa. That's exactly the play we're seeing here.

I don't see what could be more clear than the federal Minister of Health having said to withdraw the bill, which obviously they're not doing. When you didn't like that, what he then said – and you've been asking for this all along – is that he's compared this legislation to other legislation across Canada and finds that it is not similar. Maybe I should just include this letter in the package as well. It is not similar to the legislation in respect to other provinces across this country, and in effect, while the provisions in Bill 11 seem to deal with queue-jumping, "it is our view," the federal minister's view, "that those provisions should be strengthened to ensure that services in Alberta will continue to be offered on uniform terms and conditions," and he suggests that perhaps you look at, as I believe the Member for Edmonton-Centre indicated, the Saskatchewan Health Facilities Licensing Act, that that would be wording that you would want to use to outlaw enhanced services. So it will be interesting to see what, if any, amendment the government brings forward on that tomorrow, I would assume.

He also indicates that to permit for-profit facilities – and I wish that everyone would listen very carefully to this one.

To permit for-profit facilities to sell enhanced services in combination with insured services would create a circumstance that represents a serious concern in relation to the principle of accessibility.

Just in case you don't know, that's one of the five principles of the Canada Health Act.

He in fact goes on to say that "the prospect of overnight stays" – and I know you all had your lesson on this bill dealing with overnight stays – "in private, for-profit facilities represents a significant enlargement of private, for-profit delivery of health care services in Canada." This is not, as the Premier likes to say, a small minor change. It's not a small minor change; it is significant. Have we got it now? Not small but significant. We've got it; we all understand it.

. . . a significant enlargement of private, for-profit delivery of health care services in Canada, and since it may have implications that will

be felt in provinces and territories across the country, I suggest that it might be helpful to add a provision to prohibit . . .

I didn't hear the Premier say that that was an amendment he was bringing in. In fact, that's the amendment he wants, because that's enabling, as the Member for St. Albert likes to call this legislation, the enabling provision that allows for private, for-profit hospitals. That's where it is, Member for Wainwright, that's where it is, Member for Calgary-Egmont, and that's where it is for all the other members who talk about it. That's exactly where it is.

Further, he goes on to talk about conflict of interest, which this government didn't think was a problem until quite recently. It wasn't even in the bill.

Then he goes on to say that "'surgical facilities' as defined in Bill 11," which is your act, which is on the first page, section 2 – you talk about approved surgical facilities, and you look at the definition, and there are various kinds of surgical facilities that will be able to operate. These surgical facilities "would be considered hospitals under the Canada Health Act."

Members, can it be any clearer? Obviously that hasn't sunk in, so I'm going to repeat it again, even though I am using my valuable time to try and teach you something that by now you should know. That is that "'surgical facilities' as defined in Bill 11" – and if you all want to look at the definition in Bill 11, it will be there – "would be considered hospitals under the Canada Health Act."

MR. WOLOSCHYN: By whose definition? Who said that?

MS LEIBOVICI: By the definition of the federal Minister of Health. Your Premier, your leader asked for his definition, and he's given it to you. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, with outbursts like this, when the chair finds it necessary to quiet the House down, it does not take away from the time of the speaker. It just makes us all be here that much longer. I wonder if we can keep our comments to ourselves and save them for when we have a chance to speak.

Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have unfortunately just been informed that I only have two minutes left, but if we want to do unanimous consent, I could go longer.

I need to address quickly Shouldice and enhanced fees, because I know that those are two issues that keep cropping up. What I would like to say on Shouldice is that besides it being a facility that has been grandfathered, a facility that is in fact nonprofit in terms of its surgical clinical part, for-profit with regards to the corporation that's set up to hire the doctors so there is a split – in fact I would like to know what the evidence is that the government has that Shouldice is cheaper.

Hernias that are done at Shouldice are done on an outpatient basis here in Alberta. Outpatient is supposedly cheaper than inpatient. Shouldice keeps their patients for an average of 3.2 days: overnight, three days. That's a significant cost to the OHIP system. So I would like for the government to explain to me how Shouldice is the example that shows how cost-effective the private – it's not for profit – facility is, the only example they've been able to find of a facility across Canada. How in fact is that cheaper and more cost-effective? Why should it be the example we use and that we're building our bill on?

The other issue that I'd like to bring up is the issue of the foldable lenses that Alberta Health is now paying for. I think this is a prime example of where private, for-profit has now driven the policymaking of a government. In fact it is the private, for-profit sector that has dictated to a provincial government, to a public body, what will be covered in order to ensure that there are no contraventions. That in fact is what this is about. To say that it is about medical necessity would be wrong, because in fact, Mr. Speaker, if it were about medical necessity, it would have been covered originally under the terms of the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act.

With that I close my remarks unless, of course, we have unanimous consent for me to continue a little bit more.

[Unanimous consent denied]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to rise this evening to talk a little bit more about the issues that are relevant to Bill 11 and the concerns that a lot of my constituents are having as they contact me to deal with some of the concerns they have. It seems that a lot of the constituents are at the point where they're waiting now to see what the amendments are that we hear the government promised they are going to bring forward and how those amendments will fit to the idea of how they approach the bill. What a lot of them are missing is the approach that Bill 11 takes to a fundamental change in the way our health care system works.

12:40

Historically we've looked at this as being a publicly provided system, a publicly operated system, a system that provides our health care services through public delivery. Over the last number of years we've seen that this has gradually been changing a little bit as private-sector, for-profit firms get involved in different aspects of that delivery of the health care system.

Mr. Speaker, that's one of the things that a number of people have raised about Bill 11. When we're talking about the involvement of the private sector in health care, why are we only dealing with the surgical facilities in this Bill? Why are we not dealing with the delivery of our health care by private-sector operators in the whole scope of services that are available? Why are we not dealing with it in diagnostics? Why are we not dealing with it in some of our mental health and long-term care facilities as well?

I think there's enough evidence now in the system that we should be able to look and see how some of those options have worked, how they're comparing. I know that we've seen some real debate in southern Alberta about the cost-effectiveness of some of the long-term care options that are being provided and how these are being delivered by the private sector, by contracting-out types of situations, and whether or not it's more effective to do it within the system.

The other thing that we have to look at, Mr. Speaker, is how some of our health authorities have dealt with a lot of the contracting out options and others have not. I know that in our area the Chinook health region has chosen to maintain their lab services inside the system. If we listen to the administrators and the board members from the Chinook region, their contention is that they are actually getting their lab services at a lower total cost than what some of the other regions are getting when they have to contract out. So why do we not have those kinds of comparative data sets available so that Albertans can look at the relative costs of the different versions of how their health care system can be delivered and the cost-effectiveness of that?

We talked about that quite a bit as I addressed second reading in

my initial discussion the other night, but what we still have to look at is why it is that we cannot get effective cost data, comparative cost data from the system. If the true purpose of this process is to bring about some degree of competitive cost-effectiveness within the system, then we should be able to have benchmark situations created, even if they are budgeted scenarios, that will allow us to look at how the costs will compare. We're undertaking now the possibility of some significant changes in delivery of services, especially in the surgical facility area, and we want to make sure that the public is getting the best value for their dollar. Whether or not it can be done through an expansion of the public system or whether it should be done through contracting out has to be clearly costed out.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other things that constituents are still raising is dealing with the integrity of that public system in terms of who makes the decisions and on what basis those decisions are going to be made. People have always felt reasonably confident up to this time that when they go into the health care system, the criteria for decisions on what services or what treatment they're going to get, what diagnostic procedures will be applied, how the family doctor will deal with specialists – these have all been done with the sense of the citizen that these are being done in their best interest, in their health's best interest. Now what they're doing is asking: are these decisions going to be made on the basis of the dollar, or are they going to be made on the basis of the amount of profit that can be made? Will certain issues or certain procedures be encouraged or discouraged because of the option to make or not make more money through a private operator? Will they be looking at it from the perspective of: how can the patient feel that their good health is the criterion?

If we look at a number of situations, we've seen some of this privatization, and the bottom lines start to creep in already. We're seeing situations where people are being asked to leave or asked to check out of hospitals because they are being directed by the administrators as opposed to the medical staff. This is the kind of thing that we have to make sure doesn't go on as we move to separate those decisions from the public system even one more level. We want to make sure that the health of the patient is the part of the health care system that forms the basis for that kind of decision-making.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think many Albertans would really challenge or question the option of having multiple objectives in terms of the overall health care system, but the major objective that they want to see out of this is good health care for them when they get to access the system. So we have to make sure that confidence and that trust is maintained in the system. When we look at the accountability criteria that are implied in Bill 11, when we look at the accountability system that we have through the public health care delivery now, I think there are going to be some real questions raised as to the transparency and the degree to which individuals can enter into that trust and that full understanding of why decisions are being made and how decisions are being made when it comes to dealing with their health care.

Mr. Speaker, we also have to look at some of the other issues that we want to deal with, especially as we start dealing with the delivery and the access to our health care. We heard the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark speak a little while ago about some of the impacts that may result as we move to a cost-benefit or a profit-driven type system. She made reference to the idea of how supply/demand has to work. I mentioned this in my talk the other day. We are creating a situation by squeezing the public health care system. We're effectively creating a market, a demand for health care services outside the public system. We have to watch also that as we go ahead and do this, if we do create a situation where private

surgical facilities are allowed to operate, are allowed to be involved in the health care system, that we'll be expanding the demand for staff, for qualified technicians, for nurses, for surgical specialists.

What we're going to see then is that as this expansion occurs, and especially if it occurs in a short period of time, we'll have a shortage of these professionals in their particular areas. What we'll see then is that there'll be a movement of people into the area or into the geographic location where the surgical facilities have a critical mass to operate in a profitable manner. What this will do is it'll take the trained professionals out of the smaller centres and out of the rural communities and concentrate them in the major areas. This will only exacerbate the situation that we see already where a lot of our rural health care facilities or rural health care clinics are not able to attract the kind of professionals that have the credentials that are necessary to give a well-rounded delivery of health care in those communities.

What we have to do is make sure that the staff are available. We have to also make sure that those staff are paid in a competitive way. We keep talking about the issue of globalization, of mobility of workers, and this is especially true when we get to the area of professional workers. We have to have a reward system for our health care providers in this province that is competitive with the rewards offered in all other jurisdictions where those people can move to freely. That basically means that we have to have a system of remuneration for our health care workers in Alberta that's comparable to all of Canada, comparable to all of North America, and probably comparable to quite a bit of Europe, where people with good credentials and training and experience can basically go and get residence in those areas and move their employment opportunities to the area where they can receive the highest remuneration for their service.

What we have to do is make sure that within Alberta we do have that opportunity without jeopardizing the service in our smaller communities, because they will be the communities that have the most difficulty in trying to attract and retain the kinds of professionals and the trained individuals on a diverse basis that'll allow them to provide a reasonably comprehensive health care system.

12:50

That's kind of how we have to look at this process and its potential impact on the access to and delivery of health care in rural Alberta. The smaller regional health authorities, where they don't have the critical mass to warrant one of these surgical facilities, are going to have to look at how they deal with getting their citizens access to those health care services. They've lost the critical mass from some people that want to move to the major centre, to the concentration centre to have those services delivered, and that's going to just erode their delivery as well.

Mr. Speaker, those are the kinds of decisions that we as Albertans within the context of our public health care system can make. We can make those decisions to make sure that everybody has a degree of access and a degree of equity of access to their health care systems and to the same quality of health care. If we allow the profit-driven motive to be the function, what we'll see is that the health care services provided in the areas where there's a critical mass will be at a different level than they will be in the other areas. What we'll then have to do is rely basically on the public health care system to provide the services in those other areas, and we'll be having to deal with how we provide that in the context of a cost-effective delivery system.

The other thing that I wanted to just mention very briefly is the way that we're going to be dealing with some of the other concerns that my constituents have been having. They're still not convinced, even after the discussions of this week as the bill has become much

more publicly debated, that the queue-jumping options that we're dealing with in the bill will be fair to them and are going to eliminate the possibility of persons with the money getting services, getting access. That needs to be further explained. We have to look at how they will be able to feel comfortable that they're not being pushed down the list because other persons are able to come in.

It was good to hear in the last couple of days where we're going to be seeing changes now in the foldable lens funding and the paying of that. This is going to provide some other options and some more equitable delivery across the province. But that's the kind of situation that we have to be able to monitor and deal with before it becomes a public issue.

There has to be this degree of planning in the system so we can make sure that kind of differentiated delivery, the differentiated special services or add-on services or enhanced service, isn't driven by the private sector. It's got to be driven by the need of our citizens to feel that they're getting quality health care under their public system. We don't want them to be in a position where it becomes part of the negotiation as to where they get their health care delivery: if you go to the private facility, you can have this enhanced service, but if you go to the public system, that service is not going to be provided. This then becomes an issue of: how do we deal with that kind of equity and that kind of fairness in the delivery of our health care system?

Mr. Speaker, I think that just about covers the issues that I wanted to talk about in my limited number of minutes, but I think that we've got to look at the real issue here, the principle of what we see as the fundamental structure of our public health care system. As I spoke the other day, the background that I have in public accounts, in economics, in accounting, in public policy: it's really difficult for me to perceive how we as a public cannot deliver our health care system to Albertans at a cost that is less than what we can do when we do it through a private system, a system that's full of contracts, where we've got a whole series of administrative units built within those facilities to handle their transactions, to keep that extra level of bookkeeping that's necessary to go between the public system and the private system where, if we're doing it all in the public system, it's all done in one system of bookkeeping.

Every time we add another level of decision-making, of administration, of accountability to our delivery system, that adds a cost to the system. What we want to be sure is that whatever we do, we deliver quality health care to Albertans, and it's our responsibility as legislators to make sure that the public's dollars are used as effectively as we can to give them the level of health care that they perceive as desirable in their perception of what we should have as a public health care system. I don't think we can do that by adding a private sector to our public system. We can do it much more effectively within our public system. We can provide that quality health care, we can provide it on a timely basis, and we can provide it to the satisfaction of all Albertans at a more effective cost than any other system.

We don't want to lose that competitive advantage that this gives us when we have to deal with the rest of the world in the structure of our economic systems. We're already at enough of a disadvantage in the context just of geographic location. We have a lot of transportation costs to get our products to those markets. When we've got an advantage like our health care system, I don't think we want to jeopardize it by adding in another level of cost structure to that public health care system where we lose some of that advantage that we can give to our businesses in this community.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I'll just conclude and say that you'll be hearing a lot more when we get into committee.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suppose it would be unusual to say, at this time as I stand to speak regarding perhaps the most important bill that has come before this Legislative Assembly since Bill 41 and the dramatic change that brought about for Albertans . . . Last evening when the hon. Minister of Economic Development, the Deputy Government House Leader, came forward with the motion to restrict and limit or invoke closure at second reading on Bill 11, that is the most unfortunate of circumstances. This motion is an abuse of the rules of this Legislative Assembly. It is a motion of closure.

1:00

Have the hon. members across considered what the Alberta Medical Association would think of that motion? Would the hon. members across stop and pause for a minute and wonder what the College of Physicians and Surgeons would say about this motion? The College of Physicians and Surgeons are more interested in delivering a public health care system that will relieve the long waiting lists for hip surgeries, but they're living in a province where a government and its leader believe that if they're not hearing the right thing – in their minds they want to hear nothing, and therefore this fascination with closure.

Closure would be a symbol in some jurisdictions of fascism. That's what it would be. Everyone in a democracy has a voice, and they're entitled to express their voice. They certainly should have their voice heard, and with this motion that's not happening.

I wonder, Mr. Speaker, what the head of the Calgary physicians and the head of the Edmonton physicians, who have come out squarely against Bill 11, feel about this motion. Their opinions and their right to express them are being denied. So I do not understand how the Premier and his government can continue to push Bill 11 down the throats of Albertans.

One argument that the Premier and most recently the hon. Member for Sherwood Park have used is that our population is aging. Seniors are very upset that this regime is trying to scapegoat them, to blame them for all that has gone wrong with their attempt to reorganize our public health care system. The blame is solidly in their quarter, Mr. Speaker, because they have mismanaged the health care system. Now they want to blame the seniors of this province, but the seniors have every right to be upset.

Seniors remember what paying for health care or going without was like before medicare. They're now certainly not prepared to sit back and watch as this provincial government brings in a bill and forces it through this Legislative Assembly with closure, a bill that will destroy one of the very best health care systems in the world. Seniors are upset. They know how this government works. They know that this government is addicted to the use of closure, and they have firsthand experience of how this government's creeping privatization works.

In 1994 seniors' health benefits for eyeglasses and dental work were cut back by the Premier and Mr. Jim Dinning. Six years later they must pay out of their own pockets for services or pay into private insurance programs that will cover these services previously provided under the public health care system. Seniors see this same method of operation under way now. Our senior citizens and soon-to-be seniors are also worried whether or not they'll have enough money to cover deinsured surgeries or private health care premiums.

Prior to 1994 a lot of people retired or took early retirement as firms and governments rightsized and downsized and rationalized their operations. In negotiating their retirement packages, these older Albertans didn't bother negotiating for Alberta health care

insurance premium coverage because seniors in Alberta didn't pay premiums. Many of those retirees today now pay over \$400 each a year in health care premiums because of the Premier and Mr. Dinning's budget cuts, and these budget cuts took away the universal premium exemption for seniors in 1994. Seniors know how this government, with their idea of management, can mismanage a health care system. They do not trust this government whenever it comes to protecting our public health care system.

Seniors and their families remember that the Premier in his 1993 election literature promised to, quote, continue to support the people who built this province, end of quote. They remember that within 12 months the Premier had broken the promise and turned their world upside down, and now the Premier can't understand why no one in the province trusts him. That is one of the reasons.

Seniors also realize the Premier's promises to them weren't worth the paper they were printed on. Seniors are upset because they see the same type of promises being given again with Bill 11. I realize that governments get sensitive when the public loses trust in them, but this is what's happened in Alberta. Bill 11 has coalesced this mistrust. I'm sorry; that's how it is. The polls reflect this, Mr. Speaker.

Seniors also remember the Premier's promise to elect regional health authorities. Here we are, nearly six years later, and every single regional health authority board is still handpicked by the Conservatives. Seniors remember.

Now, this is another promise, and we can't understand. We get very sensitive, but you've lost the trust of the public. When the Premier promised that the expansion of the special waste treatment plant at Swan Hills would not lead to importing hazardous wastes from outside Canada, here we are 10 years later, and what do we have? Foreign hazardous waste going to the Premier's special waste treatment plant.

MR. HERARD: You're next.

MR. MacDONALD: Now, that's another promise not kept.

Mr. Speaker, I hear one of the hon. members over there, I believe from Calgary-Egmont, say that I'm next to go to Swan Hills. That sounds like this is a government that even denies that Auschwitz existed.

Mr. Speaker, seniors know that given time, the Premier's promise that Bill 11 doesn't mean two-tiered medicine is as empty as his promise to elect regional health authorities and keep foreign waste out of Alberta.

Now, another very large group of citizens who are very worried are rural Albertans and those people living in some of the smaller centres across the province. They know that the private hospitals will locate where the largest demand for services is, where the greatest number of potential patients live. So as the private hospitals go ahead under Bill 11, these citizens will be left wondering and worrying about how much and which services and surgeries will be contracted to the private operators. Rural Albertans already have to take time and money to come into the larger centres for specialists and tests.

This concern is addressed in the government's own study from the health research group. Their own study tells them this, but will they listen? No, Mr. Speaker, they just want to deny; they want to deny; they want to deny. People in smaller centres are already asking: if their local health authorities contract out even more procedures, how much time and money will rural patients and their families have to spend as they trek into the cities for care that used to be provided in their own health regions?

MS LEIBOVICI: And will they have priority in that other health region?

MR. MacDONALD: That is another question: will they have priority? That's a very good question.

The other question that needs to be asked is: how much money allotted for rural regional health authorities will be siphoned off by the private hospitals? For every patient that comes into the city for an operation, the public money that would have been expended in the patient's rural public hospital will now be going to the private operator's hospital, not the local public hospital. So the citizens outside the big cities want answers from this government before anything further happens.

1:10

On the CFRN news tonight they announced that 50 government MLAs have yet to speak at second reading on this bill. Fifty. Fifty government MLAs have yet to speak. Now, Albertans are smart, Albertans are practical, Albertans are innovative, and Albertans do not appreciate closure on any bill. All Albertans should be asked to join in on these health care discussions, Mr. Speaker, yet there is a denial, there is a convenient denial placed by the government with this motion. I am very, very disappointed. I'm very disappointed in this government that they would do something like this. Albertans need the full story, and they're not going to be able to get it with this use of closure. That is why it was initiated yesterday evening.

On behalf of all Albertans the Alberta caucus of the Liberal party asked for the results from the focus groups which were asked, I assume, a number of interesting questions. This first one that would come to mind is: what would you like to see on the front of our new health facilities? Is it "private hospital," or is it "approved surgical centre"? We all know what happened. Albertans are very suspicious, and they do not want to hear about a private hospital in a focus group, nor do they want to hear about it in a piece of legislation. We have to understand that when this government invokes closure, they are trying to hide the facts from Albertans, the facts, Mr. Speaker.

We have seen many attempts to find the truth. When we mention the word "truth," the first thing that comes to the minds of Albertans is the truth squads. Now, I see a couple of hon. members in here tonight that are members of the truth squad, but the truth is a very rare commodity when the truth squads fan out across the province. Mr. Speaker, the truth squads are going to have a great deal of difficulty now whenever they attempt to engage Albertans in debate, because the first thing Albertans are going to ask is: tell us the truth about closure. Tell us why this had to be done, this guillotine on debate. It is almost censorship.

There are many reasons why the hon. members across the way are sensitive to any debate that will get real answers as to why they're supporting Bill 11. There is no evidence that Bill 11 will lead to reduced health costs or waiting lists. The only tactic that this government has to sell Bill 11 is advertising. The government does not want to hear from other hon. members in this Assembly. It wants to just buy its way with taxpayers' dollars.

Now, instead of providing Albertans with the information they need – and they're denying it with the use of this closure – this government is giving us spin and propaganda, as I said before, paid for with tax dollars. I'm sure all hon. members have seen or heard the TV ads, the commercials, and the infamous mail-out containing the doctored version of Bill 11. The evidence is clear. Albertans understand this, and they do not trust this government.

If the government has so much evidence, it's not producing it. Mr. Speaker, the government has no evidence, no public support,

and no medical support outside of a very few rich doctors who stand to make millions and millions of dollars if this bill goes through. The Premier, members of his cabinet, his MLAs, and the shadowy figures backing them have embarked on a major propaganda blitz to try and push this bill through. So it begs the question: why? Why the big push to go ahead? Why is this information in the contracts and the focus groups being kept from Albertans?

Now, it is interesting. We have to look no further than the Progressive Conservative Association of the hon. Gaming minister. A board member there is part of a family of doctors who were virtually given the Holy Cross hospital for \$5 million right after \$30 million of public money was spent upgrading it. That's a reason why. Who benefits, Mr. Speaker? You don't have to look any further than the donor list of the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta. Insurance companies, private laboratory companies, private hospital owners, health management firms, private nursing home owners and operators are all pouring money in and waiting for our health care system to be privatized piece by piece.

If this government were truly committed to protecting public health care, there would be a commitment to innovating our current public system. They would be opening up the empty beds and whole floors of hospitals, for instance, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek. Let's open up the Grey Nuns, make it fully functional. They would hire staff. They would be hiring technologists and diagnostic professionals, so the expensive diagnostic equipment would be working full time.

Mr. Speaker, I think a member of the Friends of Medicare showed great insight when she likened the Conservatives' health policy to running a bakery in a grocery store. She described it this way. It's as if the Premier was the manager of the Co-op bakery. There's a growing demand for bread, and the store keeps running out, but instead of making more bread, investing in new ovens, and hiring more bakers to bake more bread, the Premier just tells the customers to go buy their bread at Safeway. It just doesn't make sense.

Mr. Speaker, I would request unanimous consent to continue my remarks.

[Unanimous consent denied]

MR. MacDONALD: I'm disappointed, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I asked for unanimous consent. I had at least one or two dissenting voices, so there's not much point in pursuing that.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am a little dismayed tonight that I'm rising to speak to a motion that was invoked on the floor of this Assembly yesterday, a motion that will invoke closure. It perplexes me, particularly when I read in *Hansard*, the March 2 edition on page 223:

I have given an undertaking to debate the bill in front of live television in this Legislative Assembly when it reaches second reading stage. There is no better place, Mr. Speaker, with you, sir, as the referee to debate a bill. That's where a bill should be debated, not in Liberal orchestrated or ND orchestrated town hall meetings but in the Legislature.

So I waited with great anticipation yesterday to speak to Bill 11 in second reading.

1:20

Now, as well, when I was looking today in *Beauchesne*, I looked under Stages of a Bill, at *Beauchesne* 640, and particularly section

(2) on second reading.

The stage of second reading is primarily concerned with the principle of a measure. At this stage, debate is not strictly limited to the contents of a bill as other methods of attaining its proposed objective may be considered. This stage is coupled with an Order to commit the bill.

So I certainly looked forward to speaking on this bill at second reading. I still cannot understand why I was denied that right, but I do look forward to speaking to the motion.

Now, I also looked at a number of things here, and I wondered why the Premier invited us to bring on amendments. It was a very fine amendment that my colleague from Edmonton-Manning had brought to the floor of the Assembly last night, an amendment that would have allowed us to gather more information on which we could make a very good decision on Bill 11. We debated this bill, but then after this amendment, we had the Deputy Government House Leader bring in a motion. Why would he do that when the Premier wants open debate? I looked over the *Hansards*, and I counted that only seven Conservatives out of a total of 64 members had spoken at second reading, for a maximum of two hours and 30 minutes. There were eight Liberals that spoke, for a maximum amount of time of two hours and 50 minutes, Mr. Speaker. Our lone ND had certainly taken his opportunity, and he had spoken for 20 minutes, his 20 allowable minutes. Therefore, at second reading we had a total of 16 speakers out of a possible 82.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning introduced his amendment, a very fine amendment, as I mentioned earlier. Now, this is even more perplexing. We had only three Conservatives out of 64 who spoke to the amendment. We had eight Liberals that spoke to this amendment. Again, the hon. leader of the NDs spoke to this. I must commend the Minister of Gaming, who certainly wanted to express some views on Bill 11. I must commend the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations for speaking. I must also compliment the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, who spoke on this bill. But when I look at the standing vote – again, that's a very good indication of what happened here – I notice that seven members of the Liberal caucus were here to have the standing vote. We had another member that came in the door just seconds too late, and she was not allowed to vote, which is fine. We agree with that ruling, but there were eight of our caucus here at that hour of the night last night: half of our caucus, 50 percent of this caucus.

MS CARLSON: The other 50 percent were out doing community work.

MR. BONNER: Well, that's right.

Now, I notice here in the standing vote that there were 31 out of 64 Tories that were available for the vote, and that's great. What I also notice here is that we had in the House last night the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. They were also present in the House last night. Mr. Speaker, we are debating a bill in this Assembly that will fundamentally change what we have known as a very good public health care system in this province. It is going to be one of the major pieces of legislation that is passed in this Assembly. We had the minister of health and the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness present in the Assembly last night, and they chose not to speak to this bill that has brought more public concern, more public opposition than any bill since I've been in the House. Those two

hon. ministers did not think that it was in their best interests or the interests of their constituents or the interests of Albertans to speak. This is unacceptable, totally unacceptable.

As well, yesterday I had found on my desk the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta's 1998-99 year in review. Of course, they did a summary of issues. In the summary of issues they did mention many of the concerns that our seniors have. One of their major concerns, of course, was the long-term care system. They indicated that it was a very important concern for them throughout the province, and it was a major focus of the council's work. Now, this became even more important to me, Mr. Speaker, because another one of the concerns that these seniors had throughout this province was the accessibility of health care services for our Alberta seniors. This became a very important point because they are concerned about the availability of health care services as they get older. That was their major concern. [interjection] Yes, they are even concerned up in the constituency of Dunvegan. They are very concerned.

My concerns, the ones expressed to me in my constituency office, were by a senior who was doing her best to live in her own home, an 84-year-old senior. What happened was – and they didn't know how – she ended up with infection in both legs. Now, living on her own, she no longer drove, so she had to rely at first on neighbours, friends, and family to take her to the hospital three times a day at eight-hour intervals so she could receive her antibiotics by intravenous. This went on for a few days, and her family started to tell her they could not be available. They were starting to get concerns expressed by their employers that they could not be taking this amount of time off continually.

The reason that she had to do this was because they didn't have a bed for her in a hospital. They didn't have a bed for this 84-year-old person, so she was faced then with the decision of taking a taxi. She could take a taxi from her home down to the Royal Alex and back. A one-way trip was \$10. So each day, if she didn't have a neighbour, a friend, or her family to drive her, this senior had to pay \$60 per day to go to the Royal Alex for treatment. This is why this particular senior has grave concerns with the availability of health care services.

1:30

Now then, as well, Mr. Speaker, I also have a number of concerns that constituents have expressed to me. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to bring their concerns here to the floor of the Legislature. It's amazing that one of their first concerns when they read this bill was: it's called the Health Care Protection Act; why is it not called the public health care protection act? If we as a province are truly committed to the principles and spirit of the Canada Health Act, why is this legislation even required? What has happened to public health care in this province that has led to the introduction of a bill on the floor of this Assembly that cannot be supported by myself, by my colleagues in the Official Opposition, and by the vast majority of the constituents of Edmonton-Glenarry and Albertans as a whole? Bill 11 is a bill that is seriously flawed, and one that in the public interest should be pulled.

I was talking to an old friend over the weekend, a fellow I used to play a lot of hockey with, and we had a very good discussion. This is a gentleman who ran for the Tories in 1993 here in the city of Edmonton. Of course, we all know that in those days it was 'Redmonton,' and it still is, and we're very proud of that.

This person who ran for that party told me that he had spoken to many people that he'd met in that particular party over the years. He'd even spoken to MLAs that're currently serving. I know they won't admit this, and I don't expect them to step up, but he told me

that this should not be called Bill 11, that this should be called Ralph's bill. None of them can understand why, when there is such a public outcry and such public opposition against this bill, this Premier continues to push this down the throats of Albertans. He did it last night again through his junior minister when he brought in his motion which effectively invokes closure at second reading.

Now then, why have we got to this point? What has been the combination of events in this province that has led us to where we are today? In 1993 a new ideology was presented to the people of Alberta. We were told that privatization was the way to go. We were led to believe that the private sector was more efficient, that our problem was spending, and that spending was out of control. Was this in fact true? Was the spending pattern in the area of health care prior to 1993 really out of control? All evidence indicates that from 1986 to 1992 – and I might add we had a very competent health minister at that particular time.

MRS. MACBETH: Best cost controls in the country.

MR. BONNER: That is absolutely correct. There were.

So when we had massive cuts in the public service areas of education, social services, transportation, Mr. Speaker, health care basically remained the same. This is where the twisted truths of this party began to take shape.

A closer look shows that in 1986 the per capita cost of health care in this province was \$1,360. Now then, six years later those costs have risen to \$1,393. A whole difference in six years of \$33. If we want to average that out, that was only \$5.50 per person over that time. So that funding wasn't that out of control here in the province.

Unfortunately, what happened in 1993 was that we started to get these drastic cuts. So from a level in 1992 of just over \$1,300, in 1995 we dropped to \$1,156. What a cut. No wonder our public health care system is starved. Those outcomes were predictable. A starved health care system had predictable outcomes which would force hospitals to close hospital beds, to cut staff, and not only that but to close hospitals. Again, who did we blame? We blamed Albertans who got sick. They were overusing the system. Can we believe something that looks that bad?

I think that when we're having this entire debate, Mr. Speaker, what's very important is that we rely on evidence, we rely on reliable studies that have been presented here. I know one was tabled earlier in our discussions, and this was headed up by nursing professor Donna Wilson, who compared seniors to other people who died in acute care hospitals. Her findings showed that the elderly patients received fewer high-cost treatments and that most received low-cost treatments. Ultrahigh costs account in just 3.8 percent of the deaths and skewed the statistics, but seniors were not to blame. The ultrahigh costs were associated with younger people with chronic illnesses, including those born with chronic diseases like cystic fibrosis and diabetes with complications.

Now then, if we want to look at diabetes with complications, one of the complications that diabetics have is that they lose the use of their kidneys. So they must go on kidney dialysis, which is a very serious condition in itself but also a very costly condition, because they require teams in order to treat people that are on kidney dialysis. So this is one of these illnesses that strikes all levels and certainly not one that can be pinned simply on seniors.

As well, Mr. Speaker, on Monday, April 3, 2000, a report titled the Public Purchase of Private Surgical Services: A Systematic Review of the Evidence on Efficiency and Equity was tabled in this Legislature. It was an interim report, and this interim report was very well done. Again it showed many, many fallacies in what we have been told about our public health care system. When we look

at our public health care system, it is clearly demonstrated that it not only can compete with private, for-profit hospitals but that it can do it cheaper, it can provide better service, and it can also cut waiting lists. Our public system already has in place all the aspects of the Canada Health Act: accessibility, portability, affordability, universality, and public administration. [Mr. Bonner's speaking time expired]

Thank you very much for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to make these comments. I do have others, and I would ask through you for the Assembly's permission for me to continue with my comments.

[Unanimous consent denied]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: All right. Thank you very much. Let me start off by expressing my deep regret that as a consequence of the government's decision last evening to introduce a motion that the previous question now be put pursuant to Standing Order 47, some 50 government MLAs have been denied the chance to speak to the principle of Bill 11. They may well be afforded the chance to speak at the committee stage, but then, of course, we can only speak to detail of the bill, and at third reading debate is truncated. So it's a sad problem, Mr. Speaker, that on probably the single most controversial bill I've seen in the eight years I've been in this Assembly, 50 members of the Conservative caucus have been deprived of the chance to speak at second reading.

1:40

Something like 70 percent of the calls to my constituency office come from the other 20 constituencies in Calgary, many of them from Calgary-*Varsity*, and I don't know what to tell those Calgarians when they phone me and say: "Why is it that my member isn't standing up to reflect my concerns? Why is it that my member is not answering my questions around public health care?" Mr. Speaker, I don't know what I can say to those people to account for the fact that we've had so few MLAs in the city of Calgary who have been heard in speaking to the principle of this bill. So that's a concern I raise there.

You know, the Premier came to Calgary, put in an appearance in Calgary on March 16, and he was speaking at the fund-raising dinner. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you were there. This was the Calgary Premier's dinner. [interjections] Oh, I've talked to a number of people who were there, and I've got all kinds of feedback in terms of the mood of the meeting. But what was most interesting is that the Premier spent some time to talk about a visit by the federal Minister of Health to Alberta.

MR. SMITH: You and I were at that meeting.

MR. DICKSON: I'm going to get to that, Minister of Gaming.

In fact, it's interesting to me, all this sort of byplay around the Hon. Allan Rock's visit to Calgary. We have the Premier going on in his speech to the faithful and not so faithful but with deep pockets, coming out indicating that the media had received more notice than Minister Rock had given the Alberta minister of health. Well, you know, I find this so ludicrous. Is that to suggest that when the Premier goes to Victoria to deliver a luncheon address, he has to phone the B.C. Premier in advance to tell him he's coming? The federal minister showed the courtesy to Albertans of coming to the city of Calgary to address it. I don't understand.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Premier went on to say that the audience for his speech was handpicked. Well, I saw the Minister of Gaming there. I saw the fellow who runs McDougall Centre in the audience, and they had prime seats. I got a front row seat, and the Minister of Gaming was in the second row, but the sight line was pretty good.

It struck me that for the Premier to go on talking about, quote, his political staff barring an Alberta minister of the Crown entry to his news conference – what absolute nonsense. You know, this is the government that provides private screenings to members of the media of Bill 16 and denied that to the opposition.

MS LEBOVICI: Bill 11.

MR. DICKSON: Bill 11. Well, you know, Bill 16 is darn important too, but not as important as Bill 11.

Mr. Speaker, the point I was simply going to make is that the overreaching we saw in the Premier's speech at his fund-raising dinner reflects so much of the hype and the nonsense we've seen around Bill 11. I think the Premier does a huge disservice to the thoughtful, rational, intelligent people of this province by indulging in painting caricatures, caricatures of the federal government, caricatures of anybody opposed to Bill 11. It's so foolish, yet he persists in doing this, as we see day after day in question period.

I think, frankly, that Minister Rock did exactly what I would hope a federal minister would do. He came to Calgary. He acknowledged some really neat innovative projects going on in the city of Calgary. He talked about the Northeast clinic in Edmonton. He talked about the 8th & 8th clinic in Calgary, which incidently was closed the other day. You know what the sign was on the door? No physician available. For a period of time the 8th & 8th clinic was closed because we couldn't find a physician to operate in our facility.

Mr. Speaker, a couple of points I wanted to raise. When the Premier went through and was so busy slagging Ottawa, he didn't do much of a job in terms of making the case for Bill 11. He makes a big reference to the Shouldice clinic, and that's strange because the Shouldice clinic demonstrates the kind of cream skimming that we've been told by all the experts is endemic to private facilities. In fact, I've talked to people and I've got a number of accounts from people who, if you're outside the very narrow criteria of people who have a particular kind of hernia and present a particular kind of patient profile, you can't go there. They do the high-volume hernia procedures and leave all the more complicated ones for the public system. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, a couple of other concerns I wanted to raise in terms of . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: For a little while I was unable to hear the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* because of the noise that was going on on both sides, where we had several dialogues going. Right now we're just on one speech, and that's the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to have time in the 12 minutes or so I have left to cover all of the areas that I think are important.

I want to advise the Minister of Gaming that if he goes to www.garydickson.ab.ca and he looks under the speeches tab, what he'll find is that I've done a little five-page analysis. All members, drop by the site. I've done a little five-page analysis of Bill 11, so

anything I don't get to today I encourage people – there's also a rotating question. It isn't just my constituents who can register their comments on Bill 11. I will table those comments in the House before I refresh the question. I wanted to make sure that that information was available. [interjection] No, but the other thing that would be helpful to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek: there are a number of hot links that will allow her to go directly to find out what the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness is doing in the area of PDD, to find out what the FOIP bureau is doing in the provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, the point I wanted to make is that there is an area here that begs further scrutiny. I go to the comments of the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. You remember the Tuesday night televised debate and the anchor of the government side, if you will, was the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. He attempted to make a number of observations, and I thought: well, here's an intelligent, thoughtful member of the government side, so he really would have the last word, and it would be interesting to see what he had to do in terms of analysis.

One of the things he said is that Bill 11 would mean that the government would "ensure that such a facility will never exist within the borders of this province." What he was talking about was a private hospital, Mr. Speaker. I think we've been able to establish that in fact a private hospital, as Peter Lown would recognize it – Peter Lown is the gentleman, the prof at the University of Alberta, that shared the blue-ribbon panel. You remember when he dealt with Bill 37, number one and number two, and he and his panel, appointed by the Premier, by the health minister, not by the opposition, said clearly that what was being talked about there was a hospital. If you have an approved surgical facility with overnight stays, that in effect is a hospital. It's a hospital under the Alberta Hospitals Act. It's a hospital under the Canada Health Act. It's a hospital in the parlance of – if you take 10 Albertans and line them up and you put to them the model and you say, "Is that a hospital?" Ten out of 10 of them are going to say: of course it's a hospital. It's only the government that persists in this nonsense that says it isn't.

1:50

I also want to draw the members' attention to a couple of excellent articles. This is all about privatization in health care, and there's a wonderful article that was done. Actually, it's a presentation by Pamela Bloomfield, Deputy Inspector General for Management, Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General. Her analysis was entitled *Flawed Public-Private Partnerships: Lessons From Bad Bargains*. One of the interesting things that she identifies under the heading *Avoiding Bad Bargains* – and one has only to think of some of the deals that the CRHA has made to see that we have the examples here, and they're readily available. She says:

Private firms that undertake public-private partnerships will ensure that their interests are protected, and public agencies have an obligation to do the same.

Then she goes on to say:

Developing and enforcing effective contract safeguards is also essential to protecting the public interest. The major business terms of the contract should be established prior to and incorporated into the competitive selection process to encourage realistic price proposals and reduce the public's financial exposure over the contract term.

However, high political stakes will increase the pressure on responsible public officials to move forward with the public-private partnership at any cost.

Then skipping ahead to the last part of the paragraph:

If walking away from the contract negotiations or replacing the contractor are not regarded as realistic options, the benefits of competition can evaporate.

That's confirmed by another study, in the CSG & ASPA magazine, entitled *Privatization and Cozy Politics*. I'd just quote the following observation.

Distaste for the "politics of politics" does not prevent some actors in the public and private sectors from turning privatization to their own political purposes. What might be termed "cozy politics" comes into play when goal displacement occurs. Cozy political arrangements enable companies or nonprofit agencies to win public agency contracts through political influence rather than technical core competence. The result is that those designated to provide the goods and services, along with their legislative and political executive allies, benefit at the expense of the intended program beneficiaries. On occasion, the public agency itself may become involved in such contracting out agreements.

Why is that important? Well, Mr. Speaker, it's because of the sorry experience we have in this province of section 15 of the FOIP Act, the section that the provincial government has refused to change. The three-year review was torpedoed because the government members on that review absolutely refused to reduce section 15. I filed a dissent to it. That's on my web site, too, Minister of Gaming, which I'd invite you to visit and review the comments there.

We had a bad history with section 15, in the way that's enforced. Why is that significant? Well, in the city of Calgary you have Dr. Steve Miller who serves as both medical director of HRG and head of orthopedics at the Foothills hospital. You've got Jim Saunders, former chief executive of HRG and now vice-chair of the board and had previously served as vice-president of the former Calgary regional hospital group, and so on. Then in June of '99 Saunders joined North American Medical, a Calgary company opening a U.S. style hospital in Cabos San Lucas. You've got Jim Saunders' job as chief executive of HRG taken over by Tom Saunders, no relation, who is president of Columbia Rehabilitation, another private health venture. He was also previously on the board of HRG.

Columbia Rehabilitation has contracts with both the CRHA and workers' compensation. The CRHA recently announced the EGO, the Equity Office Condominiums Corporation. They're talking about a one-stop medical facility in Douglasdale in southeast Calgary. Then we see another range of opportunities for clinics. Well, two of the key people associated with that are Fred Johnston, president of Equity Office Condominiums; Adrian Abbott, vice-president of marketing. Kabir Jivraj, the CRHA's chief medical officer, is one of the owners of Surgical Centres Inc., a privately owned company. The CRHA has surgical contracts with two clinics run by Surgical Centres Inc., one near the Foothills hospital and the other at Southland Court. Dr. Peter Huang, division chief of ophthalmology for the CRHA, and his brother Dr. John Huang were involved through Holy Cross Surgical Services. They paid \$4.5 million to take over the old Holy Cross site after we spent . . .

MR. SMITH: In a public tendering process.

MR. DICKSON: Well, actually this becomes very interesting. The suggestion is that it was a public tendering process. What you had was that the government appointed a little group that screened a number of applications according to criteria that were approved by the minister of health. The entire process was not in any sense transparent. It was a closed process, and what we were left with at the end was an announcement that we were going to award the contract to the Huangs. I can go on detailing the concerns, but we have a number of concerns with the existing contracting relationships and the lack of conflict of interest legislation.

The Member for Calgary-Glenmore, getting back to his comments in the speech, talked about the protections that would exist. He talked about the health authority as one of one of the safeguards.

Well, I don't have very much confidence, Mr. Speaker, that the Calgary regional health authority is going to do the job of protecting public health care in the city of Calgary. They have no mandate other than what they get from the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Premier. The Member for Calgary-Glenmore said that we can rely on the Minister of Health and Wellness because he's the guy who has all of this discretion, but as I tried to point out in my initial speech at second reading, he has very broad and general discretion. There are very few criteria. There are very vague criteria in terms of how he's going to be able to apply that, and that's an enormous concern.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we go on. We have the Member for Calgary-Glenmore talking about the accessibility principle. In fact, all of the evidence suggests that accessibility is compromised now in the city of Calgary. It's interesting that the government is desperate to sell Bill 11. Hence you saw the announcement the other day that suddenly the foldable lens is now going to be insured. The foldable lens is now going to be covered. Just a scant few days ago, did we not hear the officials in Alberta Health and Wellness – it's usually Mr. Norris rather than the minister or the associate minister. In any event, Mr. Norris on behalf presumably of the department, the minister, and the associate minister will say: this is a medical decision; this isn't a political decision, and we don't have the medical studies that show that the foldable lens is an acceptable item, and even though Lethbridge provides it as part of the insured service, in the rest of the province we're not sure. The government is mired in quicksand up to their necks in Bill 11, and we suddenly have an announcement: the foldable lens is going to be covered. I'd like to think that that woman I talked about in my second reading speech who had to pay \$4,000 is now going to get her money back.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and participate in this debate this evening. We've heard much throughout the evening about last night and how limiting the amount of debate that one can have on second reading of a bill to a maximum of three times per member was somehow or other stifling the democratic process. Well, I can't understand the logic in that. I've been in this House for seven years now, and until now I haven't encountered an occasion where there would be a number of amendments that were introduced at second reading of a bill. So I frankly have no problem supporting the motion that is at hand.

As a matter of fact, I appreciate the ruling that was made by the chair, and I understand that in conjunction with respective House leaders, that in addition to discussing the motion that's before us – and that motion is to put the previous question – there is a great deal of room for members to speak to all aspects of the bill. So I would like to spend a little bit of time speaking about the bill this evening, but I also want to point out to all members, including the members of the opposition, that we are now at second reading on a bill. Parliamentary procedure dictates that after second reading we move to Committee of the Whole. At Committee of the Whole there is ample opportunity for members to voice concerns that they have heard, and Mr. Speaker, I intend to participate in the debate in Committee of the Whole. I may even participate in debate at third reading on this bill. So I don't feel that there is any way that I feel hampered in my ability to represent the views of the people who elected me from Medicine Hat on this bill in light of the motion that's before us.

2:00

I do want to spend a little bit of time talking about the principles of the bill. Much of what I had planned to talk about at second reading I will probably reserve until Committee of the Whole, because I think most of the input that I have been hearing from people in Medicine Hat has to do with some very specific issues on the bill, issues which I feel very confident will be dealt with through amendments, amendments introduced by the government, and I fully expect there will be amendments introduced by the opposition. In fact, the opposition has indicated that they have many amendments which they would be proposing to introduce. So I look forward to listening to those amendments and perhaps participating in the debate.

What I want to talk about tonight, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that we have heard repeatedly throughout the debate on Bill 11 about what an historic bill this is, how this is going to forever change health care from the way we know it. Well, I simply don't agree with that contention. Frankly, I think there has been massive misrepresentation made of what Bill 11 is all about.

Mr. Speaker, we have in place now a publicly funded, publicly administered health care system where there is some private-sector involvement through contracted surgeries. There is public-sector involvement. There are public/private sector partnerships. The system is not perfect, and no one ever said that the system is perfect. The system can be improved, and I think it is the obligation of any responsible government to constantly try to improve the system. Will this bill cure all of the problems that we experience with health care? Of course it won't. This bill never was intended to be – and I heard another member say it earlier this evening – a panacea.

What this bill does is provide a tool to regional health authorities so that they will have an opportunity to take the very positive experience they've had with contracting facilities for procedures that require less than 12 hours of convalescence on the part of the patient in the facility and extend those positive types of contracts to procedures that perhaps will require more than 12 hours. That is all this bill is about. It then goes on to say that if there is going to be a contract that requires more than 12 hours recovery, then there are some rules that are put in place on how that contract will be dealt with. That is the essence of the bill.

There is nothing in this bill that will force an Alberta resident to pay for a medical service. There's nothing in this bill that will allow for the quote, two-tiered system to develop in health care in Alberta, absolutely nothing. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I contend that without Bill 11 in place, if the status quo were left in place, we would very seriously see a threat of a two-tiered system developing in this province because there would be facilities that would establish themselves and they would be out there with the Visa sign on their door and people would be able to walk in and get the services. Bill 11 prohibits that. Bill 11 very specifically prohibits that, and it does it in a number of ways, most of which are included in the detail of the bill.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I want to get into some debate on the detail of the bill at the appropriate stage in debate in this House, and that is the Committee of the Whole stage. Therefore, I would move that we adjourn debate this evening, and I look forward to taking part in further debate at Committee of the Whole.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:08 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Broda
Calahasen
Cao
Clegg
Doerksen
Dunford
Evans
Fischer
Forsyth
Friedel

Fritz
Graham
Hancock
Herard
Jacques
Johnson
Langevin
Lougheed
Marz

McClellan
O'Neill
Paszkowski
Pham
Renner
Smith
Tarchuk
Woloshyn
Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Blakeman
Bonner
Carlson
Dickson
Gibbons

Leibovici
MacBeth
MacDonald
Massey

Nicol
Olsen
Soetaert
White

Totals:

For – 28

Against – 13

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 2:20 a.m. on Wednesday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 12, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/04/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Mr. Green Josiah, high commissioner for the Republic of Kenya. Accompanying His Excellency is his wife, Mrs. Anne Josiah. This is the ambassador's first official visit to Alberta since his appointment last December, and we're very pleased to welcome him and his wife to our province. Kenya, as members would know, is a Commonwealth nation in east Africa with deeply rooted traditions, a diverse landscape, and rich ecosystems unique to the world.

We had an opportunity over lunch to discuss opportunities for co-operation between our province and the Republic of Kenya, and we're very interested in having His Excellency and his wife return to our province very soon. We are very pleased that they've come to Alberta. We want to wish them a very productive and a very enjoyable stay in our province. Mr. Speaker, I would ask that they now rise and receive the very warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we seem to have a list today.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to present a petition to urge the provincial "government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]." It is from citizens in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Picture Butte, and Coaldale. I would ask that it be presented at this time.

THE SPEAKER: We'll come to that a little later.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a very interesting petition this afternoon. It is signed by 268 individuals from Redwater, Spruce Grove, and Edmonton. This petition reads:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Government of Alberta to withdraw Bill 11. We strongly oppose the use of For-Profit firms to provide health care. We request that all additional health care funding be directly invested to expand our existing Public Health Care system. All Albertans have a right to equal and affordable access to Health Care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 266 people from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, St. Albert,

Cardiff, Ardrossan, Lamont, Mundare, Two Hills, Chipman, Tofield, Morinville, and Ashmont. They are urging the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table a petition that has been signed by 234 citizens in Alberta from the communities of Spruce Grove, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Leduc, Camrose, Plamondon, Hay Lakes, Busby, Bittern Lake, and the city of Edmonton. They "petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition with 80 Albertans signing it from Vermilion, Mannville, Minburn, Elk Point, Hanna, Dewberry and the petition reads:

We, the undersigned the citizens of Alberta, strongly oppose the privatization of health care services in Alberta. We do not wish to see for-profit services used in our health care because we believe that this will lead to a two-tier system. We call for funding to be restored by the Provincial Government to public health care to reduce the current long waiting lists.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to table today signed by 511 Albertans from seven different communities across the province including Valleyview, Sunset House, Grande Prairie, New Fish Creek, Beaverlodge, Little Smoky, Calgary, Sherwood Park, Alberta Beach, Gibbons, Clyde, Ardrossan, High Prairie, Spruce Grove, Coronation, St. Albert, and Leduc. This brings the total number to over 13,000 today.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Once again, hon. members, there is a list here.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the petition standing in my name on the Order Paper now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and ask that the petition tabled under my name yesterday now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition introduced on April 11 with respect to concerns about private health care now be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to ask that the petition that's on the Order Paper in my name now be read and received. It's the one dealing with promoting private, for-profit health care in this province.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition I tabled yesterday from Albertans opposing the privatization of health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the two petitions I presented yesterday now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to introduce a Bill banning the establishment of private, for-profit [hospitals] to ensure the integrity of public, universal health care may be maintained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on April 11 signed by 264 Albertans opposing private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I request that the petition I presented on April 11 asking that the government stop promoting private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented regarding the undermining of public health care in this province and people's concerns about it now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition standing under my name on the Order Paper regarding concerns for our public health care system now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday in support of public health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respectfully request that the petition I tabled yesterday, the 11th of April, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to public health care that I introduced yesterday now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, wish that the petition I presented yesterday signed by 239 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday, April 11, I presented two petitions to the Legislative Assembly. The first was from 257 individuals from Edson and Sangudo, and the second was from 396 constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. If these two petitions could now be read and received, I would be grateful.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to file with the Assembly copies of a letter of congratulations sent by the Premier earlier today to Stacy Schiff. Ms Schiff is an Edmonton-based writer who yesterday was named the recipient of the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for literature for her biography entitled *Vera*.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I table today in the House the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission business plan for the years 2000 through 2003. AADAC, of course, is a provincial agency within Alberta Health and Wellness. In tabling these five copies of the business plan today, I want to acknowledge the sincere and hard work of the chair of the commission, the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, and the dedication and expertise of commission staff and their CEO in serving the citizens of this great province through their important work in treating and preventing addiction-related problems.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table five copies of Court Reporters' Brief from April 2000. It was prepared by a number of the court reporters in the attempt to support the position they have taken with respect to court reporters being taken out of the courtroom. Along with that, I would ask that this synopsis and briefing be sent to the Minister of Justice on their behalf.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a brochure that was distributed to the constituents of Edmonton-Centre, encouraging them to get more information on Bill 11 by reading, watching the televised debate, and checking *Hansard*.

Thank you very much.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I have three tablings today in opposition to Bill 11 from Darrel Runka, Linda Thomsen, and Joshua Stuart. Appropriate copies will be tabled.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is from Stephen Bown and Nicky Brink. They are opposed to the proposed development in Kananaskis, and they're sending their letter to the Premier.

The second tabling is from Michael White from Calgary. He is also opposed to any additional development in the Spray Valley area of Kananaskis County, and he is sending his letter to the Premier.

The third tabling I have today is from Lisa Downing, who states a number of facts about why any further development in Kananaskis Country should be stopped. Her letter is also to the Premier.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a document on behalf of Gwyneth Foster-Newell and Dan Newell on 94th Avenue in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. This is a simple reflection of their opposition to Bill 11.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, both to the Premier of the province. One is from a lady down in Strathmore, Ms Martineau. It's concerned with the development of the Kananaskis Valley.

The other one is from Elise Parker, with great concerns about the development in Kananaskis Country.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have three tablings. All three are diametrically opposed to the proposed Genesis development in the Spray Valley and Kananaskis Country. The first is a letter to the Premier from Emma Hannah of Canmore. Her particular and special interest is the habitat of grizzlies and wolves.

The second is from Gail Boehm from Calgary. Her particular interest is that she is a backcountry hiker and skier and is diametrically opposed to the development.

The third is from Jennifer Thornton from Canmore, again. She wishes an immediate stop to the future development.

Thank you, sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three brief tablings. The first one is an excerpt from the report of the Canadian Institute for Health Information showing provincial health care expenditures on hospitals declining by 27 percent between 1992 and 1995.

The second one is a summary and brief analysis of Bill 11 second reading debate from Tuesday, April 11.

The final thing is a list of the 48 government members that have not yet spoken at second reading on Bill 11.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, all expressing opposition to Bill 11. The first one is a letter from Genevieve Thurlow, a constituent of Calgary-Egmont. She presents an extended analysis of reasons to oppose Bill 11.

The second one is a letter from Margaret Zyla from Calgary, again expressing detailed concerns about Bill 11.

The third one, Mr. Speaker, is a 25-page document written by Blair McPherson, and the title is *The Real Reason for Stamping on Bill 11*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have three tablings today. The first two are to the Premier from Terry Forkheim and Dale Hughes. They are opposing the development of a heli-skiing operation and four-season resort in the Spray Valley.

My last tabling today, Mr. Speaker, is to the director of environmental assessment from Shirley Marsh. Again, she is urging the government to stop the development of a heli-skiing operation and four-season resort in the Spray Valley.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have two letters with the appropriate copies regarding concerns and people expressing that they do not want any more development in the Spray Lakes area, Kananaskis Country. They are from Gisele Villeneuve and Martine Wilson.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table what's called a petition, but it isn't in the natural framework. It's from a group of Edmontonians who are Francophone. It says:

Nous les soussignes, citoyens de l'Alberta, petitionnons L'Assemblée Legislative de rejeter tout changement dans la législation gouvernant les soins de sante presentement fourni par le systeme public qui voudrait transferer ces services a des organisations a buts lucratifs.

[Translation] We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to reject any change in the health services legislation that would use private for profit organizations to deliver health care services currently provided by the public system. [as submitted]

Merci.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and table the required number of copies of correspondence from three citizens who are writing with concerns with respect to the Genesis Land Development in the Spray Valley. To summarize their concerns and expedite the tabling, they raise concerns about power generation, the impact on wildlife, road upgrades and who would be responsible for costs, water quality downstream in Canmore, and the cumulative impact of this development.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Timothy and Jeff Duncan, two Mount Royal College students who happen to live in my constituency. I am happy to say that years ago Tim was involved in my campaign. He's actually much bigger now. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that they stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly six former pages of this Alberta Legislative Assembly. They are seated in your gallery this afternoon. Jonathan Seinen served as Speaker's page from August of '96 to December of '98, along with former pages Maria Yu, who served from January of '98 to May of '99; Ashley Rose, who served from April of '98 to December of '99; Sana Siddiqui, who served from November of '98 to December of '98; Robin Wilson, who served from November of '98 to April of '99; and Erin Martin, who served from February of '99 to December of '99. Accompanying former page Ashley Rose is her mother, Sharyn Rose.

We are pleased that they are able to view this Assembly from a different perspective. I would ask them now to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I would like to introduce to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon 13 grades 5 and 6 students from the Meadowview school. The school has students from your constituency and also some from my constituency. They're seated in the members' gallery. They're accompanied by teachers Jeanette Shipton, Anita Sherwood, Lorraine Bartholow, and, I believe, Rose Phillips. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three people who work very hard for the province and people of Alberta: Danielle Brezina, John Nichol, and Dick Batten. They're up from Calgary today. They all work with the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, and they've been extremely helpful to work with in regards to drafting and making Bill 13 happen. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have two introductions to make today. First of all, I'd like to introduce 50 very special guests, 50 examples of our most precious resource. They are students from Minchau school in my constituency who are accompanied by teachers and group leaders Laurel Chomyc of Shumka Dancers fame; Teresa O'Neill; and helpers Donna Graham and Anna Stevenson. I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's also a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to everyone in attendance Ms Paddy Meade, the chief executive officer of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. AADAC, as you know, is a major provincial resource

in providing addictions expertise and in serving as a focus for substance abuse and gambling-related services. The commission is also a very major contributor to cross-government initiatives, including the Alberta children's initiative. Paddy is seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that she rise and receive the very warm welcome of our members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege today to introduce to you 14 students from Rosemary, Alberta. They're accompanied by Mr. David Blumell. I'd like to draw the Assembly's attention to something very special. This will be about the ninth or 10th year in a row that Mr. Blumell has brought students from Rosemary school to the Legislature. Considering how far Rosemary is from Edmonton, I think that's a great honour. Accompanying David and the students are Mrs. Valerie Watson and Mrs. Lenora Dyck. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and introduce a young student who is visiting the Legislature for the first time. She is also an excellent defenceman on the Edmonton Girls Hockey Association Shooting Stars, who won the playoffs for their division in Edmonton this spring. I would ask Melissa Stevenson to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought you were playing hard to get today.

I have three introductions. My first is 32 students from Delton elementary school with teachers Mrs. Kathy LeBlanc and Mrs. Michelle Korchinski and parent helper Mrs. Williams. I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I would also like to introduce to you and through you Ms Deirdre Crandall. She is the vice-president of the Highlands constituency association and has a long involvement in Liberal politics in Edmonton East and Edmonton Highlands. If she would rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My final introduction, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly court reporters who were very instrumental in preparing the documentation for the Minister of Justice today: Sandy Dowhaniuk, Brenda Fusco, Shanane Clark, Joyce Lopatka, Michelle Fradette, and AUPE representatives President Dan MacLennan, Lynne Gingras, and Mike Boyle. If they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Free Votes

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 8, 1995, the Premier said in this Chamber:

One of the beautiful things about a free vote in the Legislature is that the leader of the government and the Leader of the Opposition are just part of the Assembly. They are no more, and they are no less. I would hope that that would be the spirit that the hon. leader of the

Liberal opposition would adopt when we enter into this very important phase of legislative democracy.

My question is to the Premier. Why has he changed his mind about free votes?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I haven't changed my mind vis-a-vis free votes. As a matter of fact, we've had more free votes since 1995 than in any other period in the history of this Legislature as it relates to private members' bills.

To speak to the issue of democracy – and I'm glad that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition has brought it up – I would have the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General and Government House Leader talk about democracy.

2:00

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an interesting question that's been raised because, of course, since 1993 and the rule changes, private members' day – and today, Wednesday, is a private members' day – more private members' bills have been passed in this House than in any other Legislature that I'm aware of in the parliamentary Commonwealth system.

It's important to note that members vote on a free basis on private members' bills in this House, and Mr. Speaker, it's important to note . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: How many closures?

MR. HANCOCK: I hear the opposition yelling "closures." The debate on private members' bills is time-limited debate. We get two hours of debate at second reading on a private member's bill, and those bills can be as important in terms that they become law when they're passed by this Assembly. That's the democracy as we know it in Alberta. Every member of this House has an opportunity to bring forward a private member's bill and have it debated. Those private members' bills at second reading, at Committee of the Whole, and at third reading are subject to closure, as the opposition defines it, because it's time-limited debate by our Standing Orders.

That's democracy in Alberta. That's the democracy we operate by. Private members have the opportunity in this province to make law. We've seen it made, and we've seen it made in this province more often than in any other parliamentary democracy that I'm aware of.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, the first question had to do with free votes, and one of the time-honoured traditions of this Assembly is also free speech. That means that when an individual is recognized, other members have their freedom to listen to that particular individual and not interfere with them.

Today is one of those unique days in which we have a whole series of young people from around the province of Alberta in our galleries, and a number that I had an opportunity to meet a little earlier. I in fact extolled to them that one of the things we have in this Assembly is something called decorum, and when one hon. member is recognized, all other hon. members listen. So let's see if we can actually put that into practice, all members. That would be very useful, quite frankly.

Free Votes (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, maybe the Government House Leader didn't get enough sleep last night. We're talking about government bills, not private members' bills.

Given that 56 percent of Albertans in the latest poll oppose this government's private health care policy, why won't the Premier let his MLAs reflect that reality in their positions in this Legislature through a free vote?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no private health care policy in question. Therefore, the issue is irrelevant. Relative to the democratic processes that relate to government bills, again I will have the Government House Leader stand up and explain the rules of democracy to the Leader of the Official Opposition. Obviously she doesn't understand them, never has understood them, and still doesn't understand them today. So I'll have the hon. minister give her a clinic.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In responding to that, I just want to correct one of the statements that was made. The hon. Leader of the Opposition indicates that for some reason government bills are more important than private members' bills. Indeed, the government agenda is an important agenda, but every bill passed by this House becomes the law of the province of Alberta. Private members' bills come forward – and the hon. leader is sponsoring one, I think, this afternoon. If it passes, it becomes the law of the province of Alberta, and it's dealt with in time-limited debate under the Standing Orders of this House, two hours of debate before we vote.

It seems to me that as of last night there were some 1,100 minutes of debate on another bill before this House, 1,100 minutes. Under the Standing Orders of this House, of course, there's an opportunity to amend bills, and there's an opportunity under the Standing Orders to move the previous question, which was done. The Leader of the Opposition seems to complain that that's not democracy, but those same Standing Orders are the Standing Orders that this House has approved, the Standing Orders that this House operates by, and that is democracy in Alberta.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's try it again. Given that two-thirds of Albertans say that amendments of the Premier's private health care policy won't change their minds, why doesn't the Premier just drop his private health care policy altogether and do Albertans a favour?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, no. It's the right thing to do. The policy is to protect the public health care system as we see it today. It's to put fences and rules and regulations around something that has existed in this province for many, many years.

Getting back to this issue of democracy, this is a very, very important issue. Some people who were here in the Legislature when this leader of the Liberal opposition was the minister of education recall when she stamped her foot, and she said: I demand that every one in this caucus vote for the School Act; I demand.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the democratic process – and I know that one can only direct a question through parliamentary convention and tradition to a minister. Again, this is a question that has been posed by the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition. She said that there is no unanimity, that we're split. I will ask the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Affairs to respond as to how she feels about the government's health policy.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, we've spent eight minutes on this series of questions.

We'll move along to the second main question. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Foldable Intraocular Lenses

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All the polls say that the Premier is in trouble with his private health care policy. Albertans know it. Despite a million dollar advertising campaign with their own tax dollars, Albertans don't trust the Premier, his government, or his policy. But now he's finally spending another \$3 million on upgraded lenses to try and fix the mess that's been created there. In other words, he's doing what he said he wouldn't do and that is to make a political decision to determine medical necessity in this province. My questions are to the Premier. Does the Premier plan to reimburse those Albertans who have paid out-of-pocket for the upgraded lenses up until now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, when she was minister of health, created the mess. She was the minister of the day who put through the order in council signed by her to allow for enhanced services.

Mr. Speaker, relative to health policy: the bill that is before this Legislature now, I would remind all members, is only one component of a six-point plan.

Relative to what is happening generally I am going to have first the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness speak to this issue, followed by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Premier, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to make a quick comment here off the top with respect to foldable lenses. This issue has been under study and under diagnosis, you might say, by this government and also by the medical fraternity in a broader sense for quite some time. We're happy with the very positive results that came out just recently so that we could make this important announcement yesterday, which will see about a \$3 million investment into this area that will tremendously benefit Albertans. Equally important, it will standardize that particular issue, and it will take away any disparities that may have existed.

It's a very positive step, a very warm step for Albertans, and I will assure you that Albertans will be highly in favour of this as they come to know more about it.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we know, according to the Lamont hospital the cost of an upgraded lens is about \$117 for that hospital's procedure. The cost at the private clinics ranges anywhere from zero to \$250 to up to \$750 for the same procedure. Can the Premier tell the people of this province and this Assembly what the government is paying for these upgraded lenses?

MR. KLEIN: An interesting question, Mr. Speaker, but first of all, I would like to pose the question. I'm not quite sure where the Liberals stand on this issue. Are they for or against the foldable lenses being covered as an insured service? Would they stand up or will they stand up now and declare where they stand on this particular issue?

Relative to the cost of this particular instrument, this particular device, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

2:10

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like to suggest that perhaps the next request from across the way will be to reimburse all the Albertans that paid facility fees to clinics under her particular regime.

Mr. Speaker, the cost for a foldable lens is some \$250. The cost for a solid lens or inflexible lens is about \$35, \$37. So in terms of the financial impact, yes, it is a significant financial impact, but we

are following the changing assessment of what is beneficial to individuals in terms of having these lenses. We've adopted coverage for the foldable lens. I might just indicate that in Canada we are among only three provinces, as I understand it, that cover the foldable lens, which is the one that is deemed most beneficial to the patient.

MRS. MacBETH: We'll try again, Mr. Speaker. Given that the contracts that have been amended, obviously to accommodate this new payment scheme, will those contracts now be made public so that the public can see what the government is paying and what the clinics are charging for that procedure and those lenses?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if the Liberals would quit their filibustering, would stop their political nonsense and let us get on with the bill, then we can address the whole conflict of interest situation and the issue of openness and transparency as it relates to contracts, as it relates to folding lenses, as it relates to any other technological advance in medicine.

I'm pleased and very, very proud that we have within this government the Department of Innovation and Science that oversees the Alberta heritage trust for medical research. To talk about some of the marvelous advances that are being made relative to medical research, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: I think we've now spent six and a half minutes in this set of questions. There are many members who have questions today.

Third question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Conflict-of-Interest Guidelines

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, almost daily the Official Opposition has presented very solid evidence on the economic, ethical, social, and business case benefits of public health care. The Premier has not answered the questions about who benefits from his private health care policy. So in reflecting the questions that Albertans have put to us and asked us to raise in the Assembly, will the Premier sign a declaration guaranteeing that he will not benefit from any association with private health care clinics in Alberta for a minimum of 10 years upon his leaving office?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have never heard such a sleazy question. I mean, this is the height. You know, will this hon. member sign an agreement? She was a consultant after she left as minister of health, went directly into the field of consulting on health care. No one ever posed to her the question: would she refrain for 10 years? That is a disgrace. It's embarrassing.

Relative to economic evidence, there are two ministers involved with the development of economic evidence as it relates to health care. One is the Minister of Innovation and Science, and the other is the Minister of Economic Development. Again, I will have the Minister of Innovation and Science supplement.

MR. HANCOCK: Point of order.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we have to recognize in this province that there has been a lot of economic development because of the direct evidence of this government, because this government has recognized the importance of innovation and a knowledge-based economy.

Now, if I could give you just one quick example. A number of years ago the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research was

established. It is now a one billion dollar fund; a one billion dollar fund. This was done by a Conservative government that has the foreknowledge and the recognition of the importance of a knowledge-based economy, not by the nattering nabobs of negativism opposite, Mr. Speaker.

Let me give you an example of this. We have today a product going to market because of funding from the AHFMR. It was developed by Dr. Patrick Lee at the University of Calgary, and it is a cancer-eating virus. It was developed, it was first announced a little bit . . .

I see you're wanting me shorten up, Mr. Speaker, but this is important that Albertans recognize . . .

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Let's move on.

MRS. MacBETH: Given that there is a current cooling-off period for members of Executive Council, will this Premier amend it to include a cooling-off period with respect to any benefit flowing from association with private clinics? It's the question that Albertans have asked us to raise in this Assembly.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how long I'm going to be around in this business, but certainly I plan to be around for at least another term.

I see that even the CUPE poll, although they tried to make it as negative as they possibly could, still had us at 40 compared to 24, which is not bad. You know, I like 66 percent a little bit better; I like 72 even a little bit better. We'll get back up there. That's no problem.

So I plan to be around here. I don't plan to get into the medical business, the oil business, whatever business whatsoever. I plan to stick around to represent Albertans and to keep this province strong and proud.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, it's a simple question. Will he amend his conflict-of-interest rules and regulations to provide for the review of the private, for-profit health care and the involvement of his own or any of his ministers in benefiting from those private health care clinics? Will he amend his conflict-of-interest rules and regulations? It's a simple question.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if anyone could have used a cooling-off period, it would have been the leader of the Liberal opposition. This leader, after losing the Conservative leadership, and not very gracefully, mind you, and serving out her time in the backbenches until the next election, went directly into the health consulting field. She had no problems with conflict of interest, no problems using her expertise – well, supposed expertise that she supposedly developed during her term as minister of health – as a consultant. This is the perfect example of the pot calling the kettle black.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is using health care policy changes as a public relations tool in a desperate attempt to win public support for its for-profit hospitals scheme. After years of turning a blind eye towards them, long-standing problems such as profiteering from the sale of foldable lenses at private eye clinics are finally being addressed.

Yesterday, the Premier told reporters that the government plans to announce a new MRI policy. Pursuant to this soon-to-be-announced

MRI policy, will the government refuse to approve Calgary regional health authorities' proposal to have private MRI clinics contract for public dollars?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond relative to the MRI situation as it pertains to all of Alberta.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, our overall initiative through Alberta Health and Wellness as a government has been, yes, for a number of years in our business plans to expand diagnostic services, particularly with CAT scan and MRI technology. There have been several occasions, including the examination of Alberta Health and Wellness' budget, where we have outlined the work that we are steadily doing to expand capacity for the benefit of Albertans in these areas.

I have by way of illustration indicated that over the past year we have added MRI machines, and the services will be shortly in full operation in Lethbridge. The diagnostic equipment is in Red Deer. It is moving towards being operational. Also, work is being done in Grande Prairie where one is planned, and the very beginnings of planning and work is occurring in Medicine Hat. So this initiative on the part of government is not at all new. It is a continuing effort, and we are looking to the advice of our Diagnostic Imaging Advisory Committee to plan further in terms of improving this service in the province.

2:20

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question again to the Premier: will the government commit today to ending queue-jumping by investing in additional MRI capacity in public facilities rather than choosing to have public money siphoned off by private MRI clinics?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the AMA and all the medical professions agree that within the system there has to be a private/public kind of partnership. The AMA has said that quite clearly. The contracting out has always been part of and always will be a part of the system. What we want to do is to put some rules and regulations around the contracting out as it pertains to surgical procedures.

With respect to MRIs, this, as the hon. member knows, is not covered under the Canada Health Act, and it seems to me that it would be unreasonable for Alberta health to pay for a person who simply wants to get himself or herself checked out. I can guarantee you, and I can tell this hon. member that if a doctor prescribes an MRI, that will be paid for by the publicly funded health care system whether it's in a hospital, Mr. Speaker, or whether it's in a private clinic. It will be paid for if it is prescribed.

If a person, a perfectly healthy person – and I assume that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is; he looks very healthy to me. If this hon. member wants to say, “Well, you know, I'm not so sure about myself, and I'd like to go get checked out,” and there's nothing wrong with him and a doctor hasn't prescribed an MRI, then he should pay. Don't you think so? [interjections]

No, you should pay. Oh, you would never use an MRI? Well, okay. Let's hope that you don't get banged up in a car accident, that you don't have a serious illness, and let's hope that your doctor never prescribes an MRI for you, because you know what, sir? One day you might just need one, and you'll be so thankful that you will be able to access that MRI through the publicly funded system.

DR. PANNU: My last question to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: what evidence does the government have that subsidizing private, for-

profit MRI clinics is more cost-effective than adding additional MRI capacity in public facilities?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is much, much more to MRIs than the so-called socialist approach. There are MRIs in the private sector. I would ask the hon. Minister of Innovation and Science to speak, for instance, to the MRIs, the high-tech MRIs that now exist in public hospitals that are used not just for medical treatment but also for research in a number of fields. There are different uses and different applications of MRIs. This is new and advanced technology, and we want to make sure that we're on the cutting edge and that we have in place the environment to accommodate cutting-edge technology as it relates to MRIs. I'll have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, no; sorry. You've already spent another six and a half to seven minutes. We're moving on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Private Health Services

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, has been consuming Albertans, union members, health care givers, and the media over the past few months. Published daily in our newspapers, there seems to be endless opposition and distrust with the bill. Uncertainty over the future directions in health care is unsettling to all Albertans and in particular to some of the constituents in Edmonton-Castle Downs. So Bill 11 needs to be amended to alleviate this distrust and uncertainty. My questions are to the Premier. Will the amendments that the government will be introducing during Committee of the Whole alleviate Albertans' distrust and concerns with respect to a number of sections in Bill 11?

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, we have a debate coming up today. It's clearly on the point. You went specifically to Bill 11. You talked about amendments. That question is clearly out of order, and if your supplementaries are on the same subject, I'm going to rule them out too.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS PAUL: My first supplementary is also to the Premier. How can Albertans be assured that their public health care system is being safeguarded under this bill when the distrust of the hidden motivations behind the bill have been so forcefully voiced and written?

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. Premier. I mean, we're into a debate. Go on to your second supplementary question.

MS PAUL: Thank you. My second supplementary, also to the Premier: will the Premier keep the promise he made to Albertans that they will be electing from the general public two-thirds of the health authority boards in the next election?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, yes. Absolutely I will commit. I will absolutely commit that there will be two-thirds of the regional health authorities elected in conjunction with the next municipal elections, which I understand will occur in October of 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Catholic School Board Boundaries

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that there is a proposal to expand the boundaries of the Roman Catholic school jurisdictions in the province. Public school boards in my constituency are concerned about losing student funding and school facilities. My question is to the Minister of Learning. What is this proposal all about?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that excellent question. Roughly two to three months ago the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association presented to me a proposal that would eliminate the need for four-by-four votes. Four-by-four votes are something that have been in the constitution since before the province actually became a province. What happened then in essence is that electorates within a four mile by four mile area had the right to elect a school board. The Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association – I give them the utmost credit on this – came forward and said that this kind of process is becoming very, very divisive to communities. It's ripping communities apart. There has to be a better way.

The Catholic School Trustees' Association put forward a proposal to the president of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta and the president of the Alberta School Boards Association. These three people then got together and came up with a very good proposal that they then presented to their constituents. Mr. Speaker, what this proposal entails is that the 16 Catholic jurisdictions would expand their boundaries to encompass all of the province. This would, in essence, eliminate the need for four-by-four votes and hopefully eliminate the need for this divisiveness that occurs within communities.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: could you please tell me what is the status of this proposal?

2:30

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, on March 10 of this year the three presidents, as I alluded to in my first answer, presented this proposal to their constituents. They talked about it. They held information sessions in Calgary and Edmonton, and subsequently what will be occurring is that each school board will be voting tomorrow as to whether or not they feel that this proposal should go forward. If the vote is yes, if the vote is more than 50 percent plus one, if it is very strong – obviously, at 50 percent plus one I will not act – it will come down to putting some legislation before this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I think this is something that we all should hope for. We should all hope that that very divisive practice occurring in communities around the province will stop and that we can put some sanity to this whole process.

MR. BRODA: My final supplemental is to the same minister. What will this proposal mean to the public school boards in this province?

DR. OBERG: Thank you again for that excellent question. First of all, Mr. Speaker, what is occurring now is that when a four-by-four votes, the public school board has absolutely no input into it. The only people that can vote on this, the only people who can decide are the Catholic electorate, providing they are a minority within a four-by-four, four-mile by four-mile jurisdiction. The Catholic school board, or the Catholics within that jurisdiction that want that vote can go ahead without talking to anyone.

What is in it for the public school boards is that under the proposal that has been put forward by the president, first of all, there would

be binding arbitration. Second of all, there would be a process that would entitle the public school board within an area to talk to the Catholic school board and come up with some administrative details. For example, what is going to happen to the students in small jurisdictions? If there are only 100 students in a small town, obviously you cannot have two schools or neither school becomes cost-effective, neither school becomes efficient.

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe there's a lot in it for the public school boards. I believe that the public school boards would stand to be the winners in this, because all of a sudden they would have a voice in something that they have never, ever had a voice in before in the past.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MLAs' Freedom to Speak and Vote

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not even nine months ago the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness, a truth squad commissar, said, and I quote, we are all responsible to our constituents as MLAs. It doesn't matter what the issue is or if it may be contentious.

My questions this afternoon are for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, why is this Premier preventing his MLAs from fulfilling their responsibilities to their constituents by closing off free speech and denying them their democratic right to vote freely?

Speaker's Ruling Intimidation and Threats

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we had a series of questions in this particular vein here today, but I want to make it very, very clear that in this Assembly there is absolutely no intimidation. There is no threat. Members can freely come to this Assembly uninterrupted by anyone, are protected by the traditions of parliaments in this Assembly, will have the protection of the chair to make sure that absolutely nothing interferes with their right to do what their responsibility is.

This chair will follow the traditions found in the British parliamentary system of government and, if a vote is called on any item, will ensure that any hon. member can stand in his or her place and vote with his or her conscience. If this Speaker is informed by any hon. member in this Assembly that there is intimidation or threats or any other type of mechanism used to interfere with their right to function as a member in this democracy, then this Speaker will use all the weaponry within his authority as Speaker to deal with that matter.

Now, this chair will also accept points of order or points of privilege if any member in this Assembly feels that their integrity is being threatened with anything stated in this House by any other member.

So, hon. member, you proceed with your supplementary in the tradition of the parliaments to which we belong.

MLAs' Freedom to Speak and Vote

(continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Premier also. Given that the hon. Member for Red Deer-North is parading around this country holding out democratic responsibility and the virtues of free votes as ideals, why is this Premier and his government making a mockery of the former Treasurer by invoking closure and denying MLAs their rights in this Legislative Assembly?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out before, we have had more free votes on private members' bills in this Legislature since 1995 than ever in the history of this Legislature. That is democracy. But when they talk about democracy over there in the Liberal Party, there are three proud members now of the Conservative Party who used to be Liberals. They crossed the floor because there was no democracy in that caucus, they couldn't express their feelings, they couldn't vote the way they wanted to vote, they had to stay to the script. They're over here with this party because they want to know what democracy is all about. That's why they left.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is also to the Premier. Given that the majority of citizens in northern Alberta oppose the Premier's private health care policy, are the demands of the private hospital lobby so strong that the Premier is willing to sacrifice government MLAs by denying them the right to speak freely and vote the will of their constituents?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, there is no private health care policy.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Premier, I'm going to recognize the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti. I presume it's a point of order you want to raise?

MR. JACQUES: Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: It'll be dealt with at the conclusion of question period.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, sir.

THE SPEAKER: Fine. Thank you. The hon. the Premier.

MR. DICKSON: I'm raising a point of order as well, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Two points of order. The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this caucus is the epitome of democracy. I'm going to be honest and frank and share some happenings within our caucus. I know that this is a departure, but when we were discussing the health care policy as it relates to the bill, I asked the whip to exclude me from the meeting because I wanted caucus members – I'm proud of every one of them – to be able to sit around the table and to decide for themselves, without any influence from myself, as to where they felt they should stand on this bill. I understand that with myself out of the room the opinion was unanimous and the caucus was unanimous in their support for this bill. That is democracy. That is democracy. That is something that is so unfamiliar to the Liberals. They have no concept of democracy, but I'm going to have my hon. friend, the Government House Leader and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General stand up and give them a little clinic on what democracy is all about.

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Caucus Activity

THE SPEAKER: Please, please, please. Hon. members, I'm really bothered by the tone of what's going on in here. First of all, there's absolutely no requirement by any leader of the government to have to explain to anyone what goes on in the caucus in which he is a member. That is not the business of this House. That is not government policy.

Secondly, the type of question which may provide for aspiration

with respect to purported intimidation or the like – we have one point of order that we'll deal with later in the afternoon, but this is a matter that I believe almost verges on the question of privilege. If there are suggestions being made that hon. members are, quote, being intimidated or pressured or anything else, then I want those hon. members to either rise in this House on a point or alert me later this afternoon that such a thing is happening because I would want to deal with each and every one of those cases and make sure that that will not happen in this particular Assembly.

Now, we're moving on. There are other members here this afternoon that want to participate, and I'm now recognizing the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

2:40

Day Care System

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have recently either met with or heard from a number of constituents who have a business in the child care field. I have learned that there are a number of issues in day care regarding accessibility, staff wages, and retention. My question is for the Minister of Children's Services. Has the elimination of the day care operating allowance affected the ability of families to access child care?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it's just one year ago April 1 of this year that the child care subsidy program came into our province as a result of my predecessor's actions. It has done a number of things. First of all, it has increased the number of families and children who have been supported by the subsidy program. Some 23,000 children are currently receiving subsidies at a rate of about \$350 per child.

Secondly, the qualifications for income increased so that if two wage earners were earning less than a certain threshold, they could qualify for day care and support in either qualified day care establishments or family day homes. As a result of this, Mr. Speaker, we're very satisfied that more children in Alberta are receiving regulated, good quality day care.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is also to the Minister of Children's Services. Parents and day care operators are concerned about maintaining quality care as there is high staff turnover. Can the minister tell us what is being done to address this issue?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we are concerned about the retention of staff in day care. There are two things that I think are important to note. Number one, for level 1, basic orientation of day care workers, our department has contracts with colleges in the province, and day care operators on behalf of their staff simply need to apply for their staff to come and take that basic orientation or training. It can take three to six weeks. It's approximately 50 hours. We expend anywhere up to \$370,000 annually in support of those operators and those day cares.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we're looking at both long- and short-term solutions. We will be bringing to the standing policy committee some discussion about some options that are available. Many of the day cares also have advised me that they are very satisfied that they can work with those subsidy programs and with the families and in fact feel that they are well on their way to supporting their staff in the manner in which we would hope that it would happen.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental is to the Minister of Learning. How will we ensure enough qualified day care workers across Alberta when tuition is rising and enrollments in day care training programs are declining?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. Minister of Children's Services already alluded to, a level 1 certificate, which is all that is needed to work in a day care, takes roughly a 50-hour course. The department of child and family services pays for that. If you as a student want to take the level 1 day care course, you just go and request that from your child and family services authorities. To receive a level 2 or level 3, which is required for an operating manager or an owner of a day care, then there is other training required.

Mr. Speaker, the interesting part about the enrollment issue is that we really have not seen declining enrollments in early childhood services. At Mount Royal College, for example, the enrollment has been roughly 2,300 to 2,700 consistently over the last five or six years. We are not seeing a decline in that enrollment. With regards to tuition fees, the tuition fees are roughly \$2,400 for a course, but interestingly, again we have not seen a decline in enrollment in that particular service.

Mr. Speaker, obviously this government is worried about qualified day care personnel. We are attempting to ensure that there are qualified day care personnel, and obviously it is a very high priority for us. I feel that we are giving our students the opportunity to be educated in the very important, very critical work of day care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has access to the Public Affairs Bureau, with a budget of about \$8 million, but when it comes to selling private health care, it's just not getting the job done. Each new petition, new fax, new e-mail, each new letter, phone call, town hall meeting against the private hospital scheme shows that Albertans will not be manipulated by the chicanery of this government. Yesterday the Official Opposition provided a full and complete accounting to the penny of the costs that we have incurred to protect medicare. The Premier and his government, however, have failed to reveal the true costs of their propaganda campaign. So my question to the Acting Premier this afternoon is: why should Albertans believe the Premier's promises on health care when his government continues to hide the full cost of the multimillion-dollar, taxpayer supported campaign?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member fully knows, the government cannot hide expenditures at all. One, they will all be accounted for in the accounting of whatever department they're incurred in. Secondly, at a committee called Public Accounts, which I believe is chaired by one of the Liberal opposition, there is an opportunity for at least two hours – I spent some time in that committee about two Wednesdays ago – where you can go into detail on every expenditure made in your department. You have two full hours to do that in Public Accounts.

As well, as I explained, we have a process where at the end of the year the accounts will be made available to Albertans. Mr. Speaker, interestingly enough, Albertans have been very pleased with the accounting they've gotten in the last years from this government. Rather than showing huge deficits and debts, they are showing balanced budgets and surpluses and a sustainable way to maintain our health care and our school system, which was not there in the time of the leader of the Liberal opposition.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, given that information delayed is

information denied, why should Albertans have to wait for two years, under the process the minister suggests, to get access to the receipts, the invoices, the true cost of our government's expenses to try and sell us a private health care policy we don't want in the first place?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's interesting, and as usual there's an assumption made by the opposition, which has been the method used in this whole debate. Rather than clarity and facts, it has been assumptions and innuendo.

One, the debate on Bill 11 is not concluded. I don't think the opposition have finished their discussion, because I hear new things daily. I doubt that they were in those receipts.

Secondly, there is an opportunity for FOIP in this Legislature. The opposition should know about it because it is my understanding that they are the biggest user of it, and taxpayers' money might be paid to access that.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my question is back to the minister. Never mind FOIP; never mind Public Accounts two years from now. Why won't you provide us the receipts right now so that Albertans can see that information while we're debating and voting on Bill 11? That's what it's all about.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Again, Mr. Speaker, why doesn't the opposition pay attention to what occurs in this Assembly? That would be a good question. That would be a very good question. In fact, some days ago, maybe weeks ago, in this Legislature was tabled an accounting of the expenditures, and I believe it came to \$1.2 million that had been spent on those communications.

Is it any wonder that this opposition doesn't know what's contained in Bill 11 when they don't know what's occurring in this Legislature on a day-to-day basis? Unless that tabling maybe got mixed up in the multitude of tablings that they do in each and every session.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in about a minute from now we'll call on the first of five members to participate in Recognitions.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

2:50

Edson Mohawk Bantam Warriors

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize members of the Edson Mohawk Bantam Warriors. The team very successfully competed in the recent Alberta provincial bantam A championships, held in Medicine Hat during the weekend of March 17, and brought home the silver medal. These young Albertans are 14 to 15 years of age. Their passion for our national sport of hockey is evident in their commitment and dedication to the game and to their teammates.

I also recognize coaches Clarence Wanchulak, Dave Stewart, and Bill Taylor, the sponsors, the parents, and the fans for the support, time, expertise, and encouragement they provided to the members of the Warriors team.

Mr. Speaker, the citizens of West Yellowhead are indeed proud of these young ambassadors representing our region. I would ask all members of the Assembly to join me in extending our congratulations and best wishes to the team's members.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Racial Discrimination

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the short time I've got, I wanted to acknowledge the range of concerns I hear from the multicultural community in downtown Calgary. I think my constituency is home to perhaps the largest number of recent immigrants of most of the constituencies in this province. There were three studies that were done last year under the auspices of the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, and there was an identification of some major issues, with a much smaller number of complaints in the area of racial discrimination than the numbers and the statistics warranted.

We know that racial discrimination continues to be a significant problem. I'll speak in terms of the city of Calgary, but I have no doubt it exists in other parts of the province. Mr. Speaker, groups continue to want to see a more aggressive stance taken by the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. There's ongoing concern that we're not seeing a more focused approach in that respect.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Lo-Se-Ca Foundation

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In St. Albert we have a nonprofit organization called Lo-Se-Ca. The name stands for love, serve, and care. In their mission statement they state that this association

is dedicated to advocating for and improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities and their families by providing residential and other support services that enhance human well-being.

The Lo-Se-Ca Foundation opened its inaugural group home in 1992. This year they are beginning to celebrate their 10th year of operation and of giving to our community. Currently Lo-Se-Ca has a volunteer base of approximately 160 volunteers. In their vision statement they state that they vision "that all persons with disabilities shall have their individual needs supported so that their potential can be realized." They believe that "all people are entitled to live with dignity in the community." Today I wish to recognize their sterling efforts.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Volunteer Week

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week we celebrate volunteers. We acknowledge and thank those who give their unpaid time and energy to helping out. Edmonton, as you know, has been applauded for having a very high number of volunteers who give their time in a variety of capacities.

I'm particularly pleased to recognize the following generous men and women who assist me and my staff on a daily basis. We could not do what we do without them. They are Chuck Chamberlin, Merrill Stewart, Bill Kobluk, Alex McEachern, Irene Payne, Jean and Merv Rogers, Amy Poon, and Cesar Faundez. We owe them a lot, and I take this opportunity to express our thanks and personal gratitude to them all. Kudos to them and to all volunteers in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Friends of Medicare

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like this afternoon to

recognize yet again the Friends of Medicare, who are dedicated individuals and volunteers, for supporting and promoting our public health care system. What they will be doing this weekend is putting on a rally in Calgary on Saturday and in Edmonton on Sunday. I urge all of the MLAs and Albertans who are able to come to this particular rally to make a point to come and to hear what some of the speakers will be providing.

In Calgary one of the speakers, it's my understanding, will be Dr. Harold Swanson. In Edmonton we will have Shirley Douglas and her son Kiefer Sutherland, who I am sure most people will want to come and meet, as well as Mel Hurtig. Entertainment will be provided.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising under 23(h) and (j) and under *Beauchesne* 101. During the question period the hon. Leader of the Opposition in I believe her first main question made the innuendo that the Premier of this province might profit from a policy of the government. Now, I'm saying that that's an allegation against the Premier. What the Leader of the Opposition did was the lowest form of low. It's a drive-by shooting. It's a smear by any other name, and it was purposely done for that effect. It was low, unwarranted, uncalled for, and unparliamentary.

Knowing full well, of course, that we have an officer of this House, the conflict of interest commissioner, who monitors an act of this House, the Conflicts of Interest Act, which provides for the rules with respect to disengagement once you leave this House and provides for the rules under conflicts of interest, and knowing that at common law in this province there are conflict of interest provisions that one should not benefit from what they do under a fiduciary duty to the people of this province, knowing all of that, in a forum where one cannot properly defend himself against that type of innuendo and that type of smear, she raised a question purposely designed – purposely designed – to raise in the minds of the people of Alberta that a member of this Legislature might benefit personally and financially from doing their public duty once they left office.

Mr. Speaker, it's almost a point of privilege. It probably should have been raised as a point of privilege. Certainly it's offensive to the rules of this House. It's offensive to the members of this House. It's certainly offensive to the Premier and offensive to Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition on this point.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, what I recall was a reference to the Conflicts of Interest Act. We have legislation in this province that accepts . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, please. I'll recognize others on this point of order, but right now I'm recognizing the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. We have legislation in the Conflicts of Interest Act that clearly contemplates that a cooling-off period is appropriate for members particularly of Executive Council, that there is a perceived problem always with potential conflicts of interest.

The question that was asked was: would the government contemplate a change in that legislation? Well, I don't have the Blues in

front of me. The Government House Leader suggests that conflict of interest was not part of that question. That's clearly what I heard. It is a perfectly legitimate question to ask whether the government will support and bring in, enact changes to that legislation to address the concern that many of us hear from Albertans.

By introducing a larger and larger role for the for-profit health sector, by enabling private stand-alone hospitals, that creates an enormous potential to abuse the public trust. The question is: will the government amend our conflicts of interest legislation to cut that off? That's what I heard, and until I see the Blues, that is my clear understanding and recollection of that set of questions.

3:00

The Premier, as I understood it, at no time said that he was prepared to countenance or champion such changes, and I think that is a perfectly legitimate question. The Government House Leader may read into it whatever he wants, but until the conflicts of interest legislation, a creation of this Assembly, ceases to be something we can talk about, I think it's perfectly appropriate to talk about potential conflicts, to talk about how we police them. The Government House Leader may read all kinds of motivation into it, but I'm dealing with the question as I heard it, and I think, Mr. Speaker, with respect, that that's the only basis on which you can deal with it and make a determination.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Sorry. You've already had input, hon. Government House Leader, on this point of order.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, it's important that misinformation be corrected.

THE SPEAKER: Well, that's fine. The chair will deal with it. It's not a debate that goes on and on and on. Do any other members want to add something to this point of order?

I'll quote the Blues.

Mr. Speaker, almost daily the Official Opposition has presented very solid evidence on the economic, ethical, social, business-case benefits of public health care. The Premier has not answered the questions about who benefits from his private health care policy, so in reflecting the questions Albertans have put to us and asked us to raise in the Assembly, will the Premier sign a declaration guaranteeing that he will not benefit from any association with private health care clinics in Alberta for a minimum of 10 years upon his leaving office?

That is the question before this point of order.

I might add as well, hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*, that you're next to be recognized with a point of order, but it may very well be that what I'm going to be saying here with respect to this point of order will not be dissimilar to what I'll say to the next point of order.

I'm very, very bothered about what's happening in this Assembly. The purpose of question period is to deal with policy. It is not to deal with personality. It is not to deal with innuendo. It is not to deal with types of questions, however skillfully organized they might be, that would suggest anything improper about an hon. member. Certainly Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j) and others and *Beauchesne* and the like can be quoted.

In this question, as the chair reads it again and again and again and as the chair heard it during the question period, it strikes me that the question is very clearly suggesting that there's something amuck here and that because a person happens to be the leader of the government – and it is this Assembly, by the way, which passes legislation, not an individual in this Assembly. This is still a democracy, and all hon. members will be in their places to vote one way or the other with respect to it.

The suggestion in here is that because someone out there has said to someone, "Gee, we don't know who's going to benefit from this; it seems that the only person that's going to benefit from this is the leader of the government," why don't we just get him to sign a declaration for 10 years? Well, what's that got to do with government policy? That's the suggestion being made against one member by another member.

I don't like this, and I'm not going to allow it. It's not going to happen again. It's not going to happen in the question, and it's not going to happen in the answer. The next point of order that will come up will probably have to do with an answer. So I give fair warning that the comments with respect to the question are applying with respect to the answer. I don't know. I mean, if you take a look even – well, I have to wait to see what the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*'s point of order is about. I'm just assuming what it is.

I'm not permitting this type of question in this Assembly anymore. I will stand up, and there'll be constant interjection and intervention, not only on the questions but also on the answers. Everyone in this Assembly has earned the right to be in this Assembly. They are duly elected. They are answerable to no one but their constituents. And I want to underline that again. Every member in this Assembly is answerable to no one but their constituents.

They are not answerable to the leader of their party. They are not answerable to the House leader in this Assembly. They are not answerable to a whip. They are not answerable to the Speaker. They are answerable to only one group. That is their constituents. They're individual people in here, and if any House leader or any whip or any leader of a party believes that they are better, more powerful, and more demanding than anyone else, then I want that hon. member to come and see me, and we will deal with it in point of privilege, and we will deal with it in this Assembly.

This is a democracy, and it's not a sleazebag, innuendo kind of Chamber. We're going to end this, and we're ending it now.

Hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*, you have a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, as usual you've fully anticipated the item I was going to raise. We've moved from what you've characterized as innuendo to an express allegation by the Premier against the Leader of the Official Opposition. Once again I don't have the Blues; hopefully you have them in front of you. What I understood was the Premier to suggest that the Leader of the Opposition, after leaving public office, went to work in the health care field. I don't know whether he said for the government of the province of Alberta, but what I took from it was a clear allegation that the Leader of the Opposition had violated the provisions of the Conflicts of Interest Act.

I wanted to make it very clear, Mr. Speaker, that in raising this, my first reaction was that this may well be a question of privilege. I want to be able to review the text of the question-and-answer exchange, but I wanted to give notice now.

The point, of course, would be that the Leader of the Official Opposition, after leaving government service, did consulting work for a contractor that did work for the government of the Northwest Territories. She checked with the Ethics Commissioner, and pursuant to the Conflicts of Interest Act there are provisions, sections 40, 41, and 42, that all provide for members being able to go to the Ethics Commissioner to get advice. Earlier in this session you in fact reminded members of the significance of advice sought and received from the Ethics Commissioner. The point is that the Leader of the Official Opposition at no time since leaving elected office in this province has done consulting work of any kind for the government of the province of Alberta.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I say, I may well want to canvass the Leader of the Opposition in light of the observations you made a moment ago, but at this point I simply wanted to give notice that that is a concern. You've delivered a powerful message to both sides of the House, and I would appreciate an opportunity to be able to evaluate that, in fact specifically with the Leader of the Official Opposition, before having to characterize this issue as a question of privilege under Standing Order 15 or simply as a point of order.

Thanks very much.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's just say that I thank you for the statements you made earlier. It's about time. We need it in this House because we've gone far too far away from what we got elected to, which is an honourable and respectful position. The people of Alberta elect us to represent them in this House and to do so honourably. It's a privilege that very few people enjoy. I appreciated your comments. We on both sides of the House need to get away from this slide into sleazeball accusations. You characterized it very well, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for it.

THE SPEAKER: Well, we've still got to deal with this, and we're going to have another kick at it. Here's what the leader of the government said.

Mr. Speaker, if anyone could have used a cooling-off period, it would have been the leader of the Liberal opposition. This leader, after losing, and not very gracefully, mind you, the Conservative leadership and serving out her time in the back benches until the next election, went directly into the health consulting field. She had no problems with conflict of interest, no problems using her expertise – well, supposed expertise – that she supposedly developed during her term as minister of health as a consultant. As a consultant. This is the perfect example of the pot calling the kettle black.

3:10

Now, a number of remarks were made a few minutes ago with respect to the first point of order. The same remarks apply to this second point of order. What is good for one side is demanded of the other side, and there's no exception to that. Hon. Opposition House Leader, I want you to know that I intend on intervening dramatically, and, Government House Leader, I want you to know that I intend on intervening dramatically. We're going to get to the questions. They're going to deal with substance and they're going to deal with policy, and we're going to get the personalities out of this.

I'm also going to implore on the whole question of brevity. There's no definition in this parliament of what brevity is, but brevity is now going to mean not four minutes for an answer or two minutes for a question. That's what it's not going to mean. If we have to whittle that down, we will whittle that down, and we'll find the model found in the Canadian House of Commons, which is 35 seconds for a question and 35 seconds for an answer. Unfortunately, if the time for an answer is 35 seconds, the hon. Minister of Innovation and Science will never be able to supplement an answer.

There is no time frame but let's get on with the business. There are hon. members in here, private members, who have an opportunity to raise questions. They're here to represent their constituents and have not had an opportunity, because it seems a series of individuals are dominating the question period. That's not fair and that's not right.

Now I want to really hear the point of order from the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm referring specifically

to the questions that were posed by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to the Premier. I believe, if I'm correct, Mr. Speaker, that you stood after the first question, prior to the addressing of the first supplementary, with a certain caution, and the member persisted. I stood at the conclusion of his second supplementary, i.e. third question, and the issue that I am referring specifically to – and I perhaps need some help or guidance in this, because I'm not an expert in parliamentary procedure. I refer to Standing Orders 15(1) and (2) with regard to a point of privilege, particularly the procedure involving a point of privilege, and also section 23(1) of our Standing Orders, together with *Beauchesne*, section 75, which deals with freedom of speech, and section 92, which basically deals with the "interference" with members.

I'm very concerned that, on one hand, it could be simply a point of order, that the question is not appropriate to be asked in this Assembly, but it was more in the context that the question was asked, that it in some way was suggesting that my ability to function within this parliamentary Assembly and indeed represent my constituency was somehow being muzzled, and I think that could possibly be one of the words. Unfortunately, again, I don't have the Blues in front of me. I know you do, sir, and maybe you could help clarify this issue.

I know that you did raise a caution. I'm not sure whether the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was doing this on purpose or whether he was attempting to cast some aspersion on my ability to function freely and totally freely within this Legislative Assembly. I'm very concerned about the words that were used. The tone is one thing, and I can excuse the tone. I cannot excuse the words that are written and captured in *Hansard*, and I would ask your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, if you would maybe kindly refer to the transcript in terms of the *Hansard* Blues. I would like your advice on that particular matter.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, as I understood the comments, the member hasn't decided whether to assert a claim of privilege. He referenced Standing Order 15. I take it he's doing similar to what I'd proposed to do on a concern I had raised, that he's giving notice now at the earliest opportunity, and he's going to evaluate his remedies. If he's looking for relief now, then I'd make some observations. If he's simply giving us notice and he's telling us that he's coming back tomorrow to particularize what his claim is, then I'd make my observations then.

So I hope I understand correctly what just went on.

THE SPEAKER: I'm going to make some statements with respect to this whole matter and hopefully bring it to an end. First of all, I'm not prepared to accept any points of privilege for what happened here today, and I say that to the hon. Opposition House Leader. In terms of the previous point, the hon. House leader indicated that he might look to see whether or not the hon. Leader of the Opposition might come forward with a point of privilege. I'm not prepared to deal with that. I'm not prepared to look at it. I'm not prepared to accept it.

To the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, in light of what I said a few minutes ago with respect to the other two points of order, I want to also make it very clear that I'm not prepared in terms of what happened today to review a matter with respect to a point of privilege on that. The chair did intervene when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar did rise. He gave clear statements in there, and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was further recognized. I just take this from the Blues:

Why is this Premier and his government making a mockery of the

former Treasurer by invoking closure and denying MLAs their rights in this Legislative Assembly?

I suspect that in terms of what the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti is raising, it has to do with “denying MLAs.”

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was further recognized, and he went on to this one:

Are the demands of the private hospital lobby so strong that the Premier is willing to sacrifice government MLAs by denying them the right to speak freely and vote the will of their constituents?

If I understand the comments made by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, after clarification there was something about further reviewing it. We’re going to deal with it now, hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, if you trust me to make the following, and I’m going to repeat what I said a little earlier.

This casting of aspersions with respect to members probably violates Standing Orders 23(h),(i), and (j), but more importantly than that it denigrates this Assembly. We can have an argument, and we can have a personality thing, and one member can say something about another member. We can deal with that, but it brings dishonour to everybody in this Assembly. He or she is raising it, and he or she feels intimidated by it.

I’m going to repeat this again, and I’m going to make this request again. If any member in this Assembly feels intimidated, feels threatened, feels cajoled – and I can find a hundred other adjectives to use to describe this – then they have a responsibility to no one but their constituents, and they must – must – rise in this Assembly or must visit the Speaker to discuss this matter. All of the authorities vested in a democratic parliament will be brought to bear against that member who provides the threatening or the intimidation or to that force outside of this Assembly who provides that threatening or that intimidation in terms of the protection of the integrity and the dignity and the opportunity and the responsibility of the member.

When a vote is called in this Assembly, an hon. member may choose to be in the Assembly or may choose not to be in the Assembly. That is his or her right. They’re answerable only to their constituents. We have an opportunity in this Assembly to have recorded votes. The names of those people are listed. That is public information. And I repeat again: no one can be intimidated, no one must feel intimidated, and the penalty for that is indeed very, very severe.

The hon. Opposition House Leader on the fourth point of order.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker’s Ruling

MR. DICKSON: This in fact was a 13(2). In fact you’ve raised the very issue that gives me some concern, Mr. Speaker, and it’s this. I certainly understand the concern about any member being intimidated by any outside force or some member threatening another, but given the question that was being asked, here’s what I’m trying to square. The substantial provisions dealing with party machinery in parliament, if we look at *Erskine May* from pages 210 through to I think it’s about 216, deal with the roles of parties and party organization. If I look at *Beauchesne*, starting at article 195 on page 55, there’s a great deal of focus on the role that the parties play in the House. The questions related to parties and party discipline.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, I know that you’re a keen student of what goes on in other parliaments outside of this place, and I see on a regular basis it being an issue and a question sometimes for debate, certainly for comment in the House in terms of when discipline is rigidly enforced, strictly enforced through the whip of a particular caucus, when it is not. I wanted to be clear whether your suggestion went so far as to suggest that it’s inappropriate in any way for one party to

query whether the whips are on in another party and whether party discipline is being exercised to its full extent or not at all.

I’m not trying to enter into an argument but just to be clear in my own mind, to understand where it’s appropriate to recognize the role that political parties have, that whips have, that party organization has on the major public bills we’re dealing with. We’re not talking about private members’ public bills here and that area you have clearly said is verboten, the area of threatening members and so on. Your comments as I heard them were very broad, very broad, and they might have even gone so far as to eclipse or forbid discussion about party discipline and party solidarity and whether that is fair comment in this Assembly.

That’s my query, Mr. Speaker. I hope it’s somewhat clear.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, there was a question of explanation to the chair.

MR. HANCOCK: I’m happy to sit down, but I had a subsequent point of order which related to the same issue, and I thought it might be more appropriate to put them in the same context.

THE SPEAKER: Go ahead.

MR. HANCOCK: I had raised a subsequent point of order, and I was going to raise it under 23(j).

Mr. Speaker, first of all, every member of this Assembly, as you so rightly have pointed out, is responsible to their constituents and to no one else. If we join together in common cause with a common philosophy, with a common direction because we campaigned to our constituents on common themes, that is a member’s personal privilege that they bring to this House. As and when they determine to leave that common cause or stay with that common cause, it’s always a matter of that member’s personal privilege. The member opposite would know because a number of their members left their common cause when they no longer agreed with that common cause, five, as I recall, in the last two terms.

Mr. Speaker, it is always inappropriate, in my humble opinion, to suggest that any member of this House is precluded from speaking under the rules of this House. As you well know, you don’t call for a vote until no one rises to speak unless you’re called to do so by the Standing Orders, which have been adopted by this House by all members voting in favour of it, or unless you’re called to do so by a motion of this House which has been agreed to by all members. So all members determine what rules govern their actions in this House. All members determine whether they wish to rise to speak to a question or not.

There have been occasions in which members of this House on both sides have risen to speak, and sometimes people have risen to speak in opposition to a government bill, and that’s a member’s privilege. Whether they feel they can continue to support the government or not is a member’s personal privilege. They’re elected to represent their constituents, as you pointed out, and the question of whether they’re appropriately representing their constituents is a question for their constituents at the duly appointed time of an election. It is not up to any member of this House to suggest that any other member of this House rose to speak in the House or didn’t rise to speak in the House for any reason other than representing their constituents in the way that they think most appropriate.

In fact, there’s nothing compelling a member to rise in this House – the Liberal opposition wouldn’t know this or aren’t prepared to understand this – to merely repeat arguments that have already been made or that have been made ad nauseam. Therefore, one would not expect and should not expect in a democracy that every member of

the House would speak to every issue every time it's called. That would be totally inappropriate, and we'd never get the business of the House done.

It runs against the principles of privilege in *Beauchesne* and in *Erskine May* to suggest that any member, because they do rise or they don't rise, because they do vote or they don't vote, because they vote yes or they vote no is being intimidated, is being forced to do so. It's a matter of personal privilege. Whether I attend the caucus of my party is a matter of personal privilege for me as a member. Whether I come into this House having attended a caucus of my party and made a collective agreement with the caucus of my party as to what business is going to be brought before the House and how it's going to be brought before the House is a matter of my personal privilege. If I don't agree with the decision that's made, if my aggrievement is sufficient that I should excuse myself from the caucus, then that is my personal privilege. The members opposite should know that, because they're the ones who had several members take that advantage and make that decision.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is totally inappropriate to suggest that any member in this House is constrained in any way by party discipline, by party membership, by party rules, because a member is always free – always free – to express their opinion, to speak and to vote as they wish in this House. If they choose not to sit with the government or they choose not to sit with the opposition, that is the member's personal choice, for which they're responsible only to their electorate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo in raising this under 13(1) essentially asked for an explanation. I think the clarification that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo was seeking from the chair was one that the chair would intervene at certain times if certain members were to say certain things. Now, I'm going to reiterate and review these Blues from this little exchange with respect to this matter and may have something more to say on Monday if what I have to say now doesn't cover what it is.

This is a parliament. The people in here are Members of the Legislative Assembly. When this chair looks out, he sees 82 Members of the Legislative Assembly. Now, when hon. members come in here, hon. members choose. Some go to one side; some go to another side. Some come in as a member of this party; some come in as a member of this other party. Some with the majority party come in as members of the government; some with the second party come in as members of the Official Opposition. Those are designations that the members essentially outside of this Assembly give to themselves. This chair looks out and sees 82 Members of the Legislative Assembly who have all earned the right to be here.

Now, if the particular grouping that an individual belongs to, the party in other words, has certain rules of discipline for their members – the chair would never, ever, ever accept a point from a member who stood in this Assembly and said: Mr. Speaker, I'm really concerned about the disciplinary rules being imposed upon me by my caucus, and I want you to do something about it. It is not the chair's business if there are disciplinary rules. Or if an hon. member were to stand up and say, "Mr. Speaker, I have a point of privilege because my whip is telling me that I have to attend the House today, and I don't want to come," well, I'm not getting involved. This is not a matter for review. Or if it's said that you have to go to a certain event on behalf of the group, or the caucus, and you want to stand up here and say, well, your privilege, other than the fact that you are being denied the right to be in this Assembly – if you're being told that you have to go somewhere because someone doesn't want you in here to do your duty, then the chair in that case would get involved because that would be a form of intimidation for the member.

Party political stuff remains outside of this Assembly. Here you are hon. members, again, with no responsibility to anyone but your constituents.

Now, this little lesson here in political science, Alberta style, in this Assembly in the year 2000 I'm sure will be ongoing, but the bottom line for all of this stuff that happened today is that we're going to find some honour. We're going to find some integrity. We're not going to cast aspersions. We're not going to allow intimidation, and we're not going to make suggestions that anybody is going to vote a certain way. I have no idea who's going to vote which way until the vote is called.

It doesn't make any difference what the whip says. It doesn't make any difference at all. Somebody says: the whips are on. That exchange from one House leader to the next House leader, from whip to whip, makes no difference to the chair. If the government whip says, "The whips are on," and if four government members want to vote one way, that's their choice, and there will be no action permitted against that member in this Assembly.

Now, outside this room, if you don't get invited to the next cocktail party and if you don't get invited to the next thing, you live with that. I mean, those are the rules of the group. But in this Assembly that means nothing.

In fact, I have seen it in this Assembly when I as the Government House Leader stood up and led the vote on behalf of the government. After being a member of the government caucus and everybody agreeing that this is the way we're going to vote, my own Deputy Government House Leader right beside me stood up and voted against his colleagues and never even told his colleagues he was going to do that, which caused an internal thing. It had no difficulty with respect to the management of the House, but it did cause that particular Deputy Government House Leader some difficulty.

3:30

Now I've never had the current experience of being the Government House Leader and having the current Deputy Government House Leader in the House being my deputy, so it's not that particular deputy, but that certainly has happened in the past. I've seen members of Executive Council stand up and vote against government bills. That has happened in this Assembly, and there is no intimidation. You choose whatever you want to do and how you want to do it, but you're free to do as you want to do it in this Assembly.

Let's move on to Orders of the Day.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move the written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 11, 12, and 13.

[Motion carried]

Maintenance Enforcement Program

Q11. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that the following question be accepted.

As of March 1, 2000, how many active files in the maintenance enforcement program were in receipt of payments from a jurisdiction named in the declaration of reciprocating states regulation?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes. From my understanding that has been amended, and I guess I'll speak after the minister clarifies that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be prepared to accept this question if it were amended, so I would move the amendment that we strike out "as of March 1, 2000" and substitute "as of March 31, 2000." So the question as amended will read:

As of March 31, 2000, how many active files in the maintenance enforcement program were in receipt of payments from a jurisdiction named in the declaration of reciprocating states regulation?

Mr. Speaker, just by way of explanation, we didn't have our computer programs written to provide this type of information when the question came forward. I looked at it and indicated that that's the type of information I'd like to have. We've rewritten the program so we can provide it, but we have to provide it as of the 31st of March rather than the 1st of March. I hope the amendment would be accepted.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert on the amendment.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the minister sent over the amendment yesterday to my colleague, and it was accepted. I must say that that's an idea where a good opposition suggestion went forward. These kinds of things come to our offices often when collecting maintenance enforcement from people who are out of province. Out of country is sometimes extremely difficult. I know that all members in this Assembly get called about maintenance enforcement and the difficulties surrounding it in all their ridings.

That amendment is absolutely fine with the hon. member who requested the question, and I look forward to receiving that information.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that the information will be forthcoming.

[Written Question 11 as amended carried]

Maintenance Enforcement Program

Q12. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that the following question be accepted.

As of March 1, 2000, how many active files in the maintenance enforcement program were paid to creditors in a jurisdiction named in the declaration of reciprocating states regulation?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand there is an amendment coming forward which was spoken of before.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to accept this question if it were amended. Therefore, I move the amendment that we strike "out as of March 1, 2000" and substitute as "of March 31, 2000." So the amended question will read:

As of March 31, 2000, how many active files in the maintenance enforcement program were paid to creditors in a jurisdiction named in the declaration of states of reciprocating states regulation?

Mr. Speaker, this question is essentially the same as the last question except the last one dealt with receipt of payments where this one deals with active files where we're making payments.

Again, the only thing I would add is that lest the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert that believe the sole motivation for this was the opposition questions, these are questions to which I had requested answers. We are constantly trying to improve the maintenance enforcement program, and in order to operate the maintenance enforcement program in the most appropriate way we need to have good management information. This type of information is useful to us.

So, again, by this amendment, we'll simply provide the information as of a date by which we can provide the information, March 31.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the amendment.

MRS. SLOAN: Yes. I appreciate the hon. minister's acceptance of the motion in an amended state and the provision of these statistics. I would just like to add the following comments, though, with respect to the request being made by the opposition, also in consideration of the responsibilities referenced in the lengthy debate we've just had relative to the responsibilities and rights of members to constituents.

We certainly have had in the constituency of Edmonton-Riverview a number of families who have found themselves involved with the department of maintenance enforcement. Regrettably, Mr. Speaker, I cannot just call up Justice and ask for information. In one particular case we had a constituent who had matters that related to needing to deal with Australia.

Now, we are aware that there are quite a number of jurisdictions under the declaration of reciprocating states regulations, and these include a number of states in the Commonwealth of Australia, Northern Ireland, Malta, Wales, England, Papua New Guinea, Barbados, Fiji, New Zealand. We have all the Canadian provinces, Northwest Territories, Yukon territory, Nunavut, the state of Alaska, and I believe quite a number of American states. We also have the Republic of South Africa, the Republic of Singapore, the federal Republic of Germany, and the Republic of Austria. All those jurisdictions are covered by the Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act.

Regrettably, it is time consuming and in my mind causes unnecessary delay when members of the opposition are not afforded the type of access to information that might be available to government members to deal with these very complex and troublesome matters. Many times you find families that are in this situation of dealing with this department. They are living an impoverished existence. Their children are not afforded the opportunities, Mr. Speaker, to access activities and supports that others might be, and this is compounded by the fact that we continue to have government policy in this province that supports the clawing back of maintenance payments if a mother is on social assistance.

If a woman is receiving social assistance in this province and she has a maintenance enforcement agreement, in most cases they're

forced to undertake such action to have a formal agreement. Even when their ex-spouse has been providing support in good faith, this government chooses through social welfare policy, Mr. Speaker, to force them into a maintenance agreement. What we see happen then is a conflict escalation in the family unit, and quite often we see those families in our constituency offices.

Now, with respect to all of the written questions on this subject this afternoon, it would be of interest to me as to why the government does not include these as a performance measure in Justice or in the Department of Children's Services or perhaps in the department of human resources, because there is always the question – at least the question is always in the minds of the party supporting the children – did this person move away particularly to evade having to pay support?

3:40

Now, as in the case of this one constituent that we had, the ex-spouse was residing in Australia, and she was owed somewhere around \$50,000 or \$60,000. She'd had absolutely no success in having the department collect the money owed from her ex-husband in Australia, despite the fact that they were obviously a jurisdiction that was covered by this regulation.

Back to my point. What are the trends in this area? What are the trends with respect to parties that have status with maintenance enforcement leaving for other jurisdictions? We are asking this afternoon for active files. We could be asking: what has been the enforcement rate that this government has undertaken in those jurisdictions? How many files have they successfully collected moneys owing from? We're not asking for that material, Mr. Speaker, but there is a whole Pandora's box of problems in this area, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed found out. I believe that she was part of a review of this program just a short while ago.

So I appreciate the fact that the minister is agreeing this afternoon with amendments to provide the information asked for, but my main point is that this information should be publicly available and it should be included in the business plans of the department, whether it's as a performance measure or as a general reporting statistic.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased at this time to conclude my discussion and to support the amendment.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the amendment, hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Did you not speak at the outset?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, it's the only opportunity I have, Mr. Speaker, to close debate, because the motion is actually a motion from the opposite side. It's necessary for me to close debate on the amendment, because it's the only opportunity I have to speak, unless you can tell me that I have another opportunity to close debate at another time. But it's actually the opposition's motion, so I must, if I wish to speak, which I do, close debate on the amendment.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Assembly would normally vote on the amendment, then the debate would continue on the question, at which time you could sum up on the question. But you don't have a right to close debate on the amendment.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, that would be great, Mr. Speaker, except I spoke to the motion when I moved the amendment, so the only opportunity I have now to speak, as I understand it, is to close debate

on the amendment. However, if I'm wrong, I'd be happy to speak to the main motion.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, the rightness or wrongness of it, the chair would certainly recognize you once we have the amendment vote finished. [interjection] No, the chair may not. I did see Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Hon. member, did you wish to speak to the amendment?

MRS. SOETAERT: I did; didn't I?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. No. I thought you were rising . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes, I would like to speak, and then I close debate on this; right? Yes, I'm right. I'm right.

On the amendment. I appreciate the minister giving us the information. I think it was well explained, the issues that we all face within our offices. This one is actually talking about people from Alberta who owe people in other countries, which is the same concern reversed. Just because those people leave our province doesn't mean that we don't care about those children, wherever they are, and that the noncustodial parent in the same way doesn't have that same responsibility to pay.

So I appreciate the amendment. I look forward to the information that we'll be getting from the minister. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Now, on the question as amended, hon. members.

Hon. minister, on the motion as amended, before the debate is closed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't wish to prolong this. I just simply rise because unfortunately I believe that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview has really abused the process of written questions by going on at length on other issues. But I don't want to deal with that. What I want to deal with is the allegation that members opposite don't get the same courtesy as all members of this House from my office when dealing with maintenance enforcement, which I hope is totally wrong, I believe is totally wrong.

I think if she questioned other members of her caucus, in particular the Member for Edmonton-Centre, she'd find that when they have the appropriate FOIP release from an individual to inquire about an individual's situation, they get the information, and when they inquire about policy issues, we respond on the policy matters. If that's not the case, then I think it would be appropriate for her to draw that to my attention as minister rather than to raise it in an inappropriate way during Written Questions and Motions for Returns. The only thing that's relevant to the discussion on the written questions and motions for returns is whether or not we should provide the information that's requested.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: To conclude debate on Question 12 as amended, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To make some things very clear, written questions have a broad range of availability for debate within them. I think the issues of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview were very responsibly brought up, with very sincere concerns about what happens in her office. I also respect that this minister is one of the most available ministers, and

his office, for me, has been very co-operative when we call. But I do think that if there's an issue there, usually the minister would look into it instead of being defensive, and I encourage him to continue being that way.

I do question though – and I think this is one of the things – when you have to FOIP something. Due to issues of policy, I know that I have and I know Edmonton-Riverview has always had a consent signed by any constituent that we were asking about or advocating for. Always. That's a given. That's a given practice, I would assume, with every Member of this Legislative Assembly. If we're asking about policy on maintenance enforcement, it shouldn't have to be FOIPed. It shouldn't have to be FOIPed. So those are some of the concerns that were raised and that I hope have been clarified.

To the amended question, in closing debate, I look forward to the information on this. I also note that the minister said that it was totally his own idea and that he wanted this information long before we asked the question. Well, maybe that's so, but I know we don't often get credit in here for giving them a little shove in the right direction, a little motivation for action. That's certainly our role in here, and we do it well. Whether they want to admit that or not, Mr. Speaker, that's fine, but I do appreciate the responses that are coming.

Thank you.

3:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair would first of all apologize to the Assembly. When we were on the amendment, it really should have been strictly on the amendment, and the chair did not direct the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Her comments would have been valid in the latter part of it, and she didn't choose to repeat them again. So I apologize for that.

[Written Question 12 as amended carried]

Maintenance Enforcement Program

Q13. Mrs. Sloan moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that the following question be accepted.

As of March 1, 2000, how many active files in the maintenance enforcement program related to creditors or to debtors where the payee or payor was resident in a jurisdiction not named in the declaration of reciprocating states regulation?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is of interest as well, and as I looked through the best list that we were able to access with respect to those countries, states, and provinces that were covered, there were at least a couple that stuck out that were not part of that list. One notable one is Saudi Arabia. Another one that is not is Scotland. Another is Mexico, and I believe the entire South American continent is not part of the list.

These are jurisdictions that seem to be jurisdictions where I think Albertans do tend to go and reside, particularly those that have involvements in the oil and gas sector, because similar types of resources are in those jurisdictions. The premise of our question this afternoon relates to how much work the department has undertaken with respect to files and how many active files exist where the payee or payor was a resident in a jurisdiction not named.

Again, we are not afforded this type of information in the business plan from the Ministry of Justice. It's not something that on an annual basis we or any member of the public who might have cause or have an interest in this particular area can look at and see, if

they're entering into a maintenance enforcement agreement and they know their ex-spouse is going to be moving out of country, if there in fact is a record of pursuit, if you will, for that particular jurisdiction if it's not covered by the regulation.

I'm hoping the hon. Minister of Justice might talk about whether or not the department has had any discussions with the jurisdictions that I mentioned that are not part of the regulation and if there's any exploration being undertaken to consider including them under the declaration. I may stand to be surprised by this, but I somehow think, Mr. Speaker, that if there are jurisdictions not covered in the declaration, we probably won't find that they're – well, there may in fact be many active files that have not achieved much progress with respect to successfully paying or billing the parties for moneys owed.

As I alluded to in my earlier remarks, this is a program which has many complexities and many warts. Regrettably, we have an increasing percentage of our society in situations where they are confronted with needing to use the program because of our incidence of divorce. I believe that the statistics still remain that somewhere over 50 percent of marriages in this province end in divorce. I was struck by Reverend Laing, whom I haven't met but who made comments relative to the children at risk task force report, which was leaked to a scab worker with the *Calgary Herald* this week, about the fact that the report doesn't appear to address the root issues of what is causing family breakdown and why there continue to be a very large number of marriages ending in divorce. This is an area where I think we have to be very, very vigilant as legislators, as elected officials who are responsible, particularly in cabinet, to oversee and administer these types of programs.

We have a large percentage of our population that is in the category of either being on maintenance enforcement or possibly needing to utilize it, and we haven't had – and again I wasn't able to be part of the Justice debates this spring because we had simultaneous budget debates going on. I believe that on the day for Justice, Children's Services or Health or another debate was happening at the same time, so it was very difficult, and I was not able to take part in Justice. The measures that we utilize to monitor our success, if you will, and our progress in this department I think have to be continually examined, and questions 11, 12, and 13 this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, are very generic questions. All three are talking about active files and are not bringing forward – perhaps we should contemplate doing so – the complexity of other issues that exist within those files relative to maintenance enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that we are anticipating an amendment before the Assembly this afternoon to suitably make the question supportable by the government. With those remarks, I thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, do you wish to move the anticipated amendment?

MR. HANCOCK: Certainly. She put me to sleep, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] I'm sorry. I do apologize to Edmonton-Riverview for saying that she put me to sleep. It was untoward of me to say so, and in my new model I will refrain from those sorts of comments. I'll even refrain from referring to Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert when she says she gives me a little shove, but I've always known she's pushy.

Anyway, I think where we were at was that I was to accept the question if the House would agree to an amendment. Then I would move the amendment, that we strike out "As of March 1, 2000" and substitute "As of March 31, 2000" so that the question would read:

As of March 31, 2000, how many active files in the maintenance enforcement program related to creditors or to debtors where the payee or payor was resident in a jurisdiction not named in the declaration of reciprocating states regulation?

Mr. Speaker, in speaking to the amendment I would just say a couple

of things. First of all, I'm going to make the presumption, although it's not explicit in the motion, that they mean outside of the province of Alberta, and I trust they will read it in that context.

Secondly, just to clarify earlier remarks when I mentioned FOIP, my point was not that any member of this House should have to make a FOIP request to get information from maintenance enforcement, but if they were requesting information on behalf of a constituent – because Edmonton-Riverview clearly indicated that she had requests from constituents and was advocating on behalf of constituents – we would be pleased to deal with those requests if they had the appropriate authorization from the individual whose personal information it was, allowing us to release that personal information to them or discuss the file with them. I just wanted to be clear on the record with that.

4:00

Maintenance enforcement has done an excellent job, Mr. Speaker. It's a difficult unit. It's a difficult business to be in because it's always difficult to satisfy both the person who's expecting the payments and the person who has to make the payments, and they do an excellent job. I might say, while I have the opportunity to put it on the record in this House, how proud I am of maintenance enforcement and the job that they do. But there always is room for improvement. There's always room to do better. Sometimes we do fall down by not providing the service that the public has come to expect, but for the most part it's an excellent, excellent unit, and it does a wonderful job.

The amendments that were brought in and the changes that were made as a result of the work that was done by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed have only served to improve that program. I would just say to the hon. members opposite that if they want information about the program or if they want information about policy or if they want to talk about measures of success, we're always open for business.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: To close debate on Written Question 13, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would simply just like to thank the hon. minister for his co-operation this afternoon in making the question permissible, and I anticipate the government's support with respect to the main question.

Thank you.

[Written Question 13 as amended carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it is my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 30.

[Motion carried]

Woodland Caribou

M18. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of any

studies or reports that the government has authorized, conducted, or examined since January 1, 1995, concerning the historic or current population and distribution of woodland caribou in Alberta and copies of any documents indicating what measures the government has taken to ensure healthy populations of these endangered animals.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Motion for a Return 18 be accepted.

MRS. SOETAERT: I would like to thank the minister for the information. The hon. minister has inspired me to actually praise the minister for the information that we're getting. I mean, the importance of caribou in this province is quite important. These species are one of the few that are truly impacted by human contact, unlike moose and elk. The caribou are certainly different, and we'd hate to see that wonderful animal become extinct. I mean, actually, you know, it's on the quarter. The quarter has the caribou on it. There's a tune to that effect, too, but probably only those with younger children might remember it.

So, Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the information, and I look forward to receiving that on behalf of my colleague.

[Motion for a Return 18 carried]

Government Members' Travel

M19. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of written approvals provided by the Premier, Executive Council, Treasury Board, and/or the agenda and priorities committee for out-of-province and out-of-country travel by cabinet ministers and government Members of the Legislative Assembly, MLAs, for the period January 1, 1993, through November 17, 1999.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately I must reject this particular motion. Ministers do file and they're required by the policy of this government to file news releases including their itinerary and the cost of their travel. So that's a matter of public record. It would be unusual to release Treasury Board agenda and priorities documents, those sorts of documents that are being requested, and there's no need to do so seeing as the information is a matter of public record in any event by virtue of the news releases, which I would advise the hon. member he can get off the government web page if he doesn't already have an easier way of getting it.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite surprised that the minister can't get us this information. A news release is quite a bit different than actually giving us

copies of written approvals provided by the Premier, Executive Council, Treasury Board, and/or the agenda and priorities committee for out-of-province and out-of-country travel by cabinet ministers and government Members of the Legislative Assembly.

The reality is that not long ago there was a bit of a scandal in this province about ministers traveling at taxpayers' expense and the question of whether government business was done or not. So I'm surprised that the minister isn't coming forward and wanting to make

sure that all the public out there know where the money is spent and where people are going and for what reason. We don't want somebody golfing in Mexico at taxpayers' expense. If it's at their own expense, that's something quite different.

The reality is that people in Alberta are concerned about the abuse of this policy. You know what? What's sad about this is that I would bet you that most ministers who travel overseas on a business trip work very, very hard – I believe that they do – and it's not much fun. But the reality is that the public image out there is that they're going on a junket. I would think that responding to this would be a way of assuring people out there that ministers are actually working and are not on a junket at taxpayers' expense. We've seen that happen in this Assembly with ministers going with no explanation of itinerary, and after it's found out what they're doing, then they come up with an itinerary after the fact.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier said he would look into this. The caucus members want to make sure our tax dollars are spent wisely, I am sure. So why are we hiding this kind of stuff? A news release is not sufficient information. It does not give us what we are asking for. I would think that most cabinet members, particularly, would really want this kind of information public, because I've heard several of them say how hard they work, how they don't like being away from home, how it's long, long hours, and that they really do work hard on these. Then don't allow some to go on junkets, and make sure the public know about it to keep your own members in check.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

DR. TAYLOR: This member raises a lot of kind of negative allegations about ministers that travel. As one that traveled internationally as recently as last week, I would like to make some comments on that, Mr. Speaker.

All of our travel has to go through agenda and priorities for approval. So there is a very . . . [interjection] Mr. Speaker, if she wants to talk, I'll sit down.

4:10

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Innovation and Science, you're the one that the chair has recognized.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. So we have already a process. Now, once it's through A and P and approved, then a press release is released giving exact details of the travel and the meetings that one goes through.

If I might use my example, since she thinks ministers are going on pleasure trips. Last week I traveled to the United States. I caught a 9:30 plane out of Edmonton to be in Seattle. I flew to Vancouver, and because we were too late to make a connection, I rented a car in Vancouver and drove to Seattle, because I was the keynote speaker, the only Canadian invited to speak at a congress of world leaders, at a Microsoft conference for world leaders, by invitation only. There were 400 people there, Mr. Speaker. I was on at a quarter after 8 in the morning.

I got into Seattle at 2:30 in the morning, got up and spoke at a quarter after 8, had meetings the rest of the day, spoke again, another speech, not organized by us but invited by the Canadian consulate, who had invited 130 expatriate Albertans, people that were all graduates of the U of A, the U of C, NAIT, or SAIT. They thought there would be 30 to 50 people. That is what they told us. There were between 115 and 120 people that showed up out of their invitations. I spoke there, and we went into meetings until 11 o'clock that night. I got up at 6 o'clock and got a 9 o'clock plane out of Seattle back to Edmonton.

Now, if that member thinks that's a junket, if that member thinks

that's a pleasure trip, Mr. Speaker, I take great exception. It was nothing but hard work, and we got a lot of attention from that. We have now Microsoft people coming to Alberta to meet with our officials to see how Microsoft can be part of Alberta and what Microsoft can bring to Alberta. I just get tired of the crap from those people in this Assembly.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Would you like to reconsider your characterization of information that may be received that you disagree with?

DR. TAYLOR: I'll withdraw the word "crap," Mr. Speaker, and substitute "garbage." [interjection] Well, I can't use that word either. I think that would be definitely ruled out of order.

You know, it's all innuendo, and the public reads this, hears about it, and thinks that that's what ministers are doing. I would ask those members to at least be honest in their commentary and not try to mislead and lie to the public.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We have another offending word in there that maybe you might reconsider.

DR. TAYLOR: Which one?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: You indicated: "and lie."

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. I will change it.

MRS. NELSON: A barefaced falsehood.

DR. TAYLOR: The Minister of Government Services just suggested to me "barefaced falsehood," so that's the one I will substitute.

Debate Continued

MS LEBOVICI: It appears that we're a little touchy this afternoon.

The question was very simple, and in fact the minister himself referred to what our motion for a return is:

copies of written approvals provided by the Premier, Executive Council, Treasury Board, and/or the agenda and priorities committee for out-of-province and out-of-country travel.

Now, I recognize that out-of-province and out-of-country travel is not always a junket and in fact is a lot of hard work because of the time frames that we do see that the ministers have to comply with in terms of their meetings, but the request is very simple, Mr. Speaker. It is to ask for the written authorization. Why in fact could that not be produced? That is what the question was, and that is what I have yet to hear the answer to.

So I thank the minister for outlining what his work was last week. It sounds like he did some very good work, and we appreciate the work that he did on the part of the province, but still the issue at hand is: why can we not get the written authorizations? That would be very simple, I would imagine, to bring forward to this Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a tone coming from the opposition with regards to this motion for a return that there's something that is not being openly laid out for the public. Quite

clearly, as a minister who has been overseas a number of times, each time before my group, whether it was Energy or Economic Development, traveled abroad or stateside, our itineraries were reviewed and released in detail by our communication people to the media, who printed them or chose not to, whichever the case was, depending on the trip.

I can go back to the original trade mission trips that went down to Houston and the three times I was in South America. I've been in six different countries in South America. I've been on four trips to Asia. All of that information has been laid out. Clearly, if they're looking for something untoward, I don't know what else you could do but lay out the itineraries, even listing the meetings, who you're meeting with, the purpose of the meeting, and who will be in attendance.

The document that's filed is very comprehensive, and it's updated almost daily whenever you're going on a trade mission because inevitably what happens on these missions is that up to the very last minute or even when you're in that country, the add-ons, the add-on meetings that get put on it are fierce.

In my case I can tell you that when you first get asked to go on one of these trips, you think, "Oh, wonderful," and then you go on one and realize you take two sets of staff, a day staff and a night staff, because you wear them out. You try to pack 21-day trips into 10 days so you can get back. I know. I have. And places I've been I can remember coming back, and one of my staff brought over some pictures. I was showing them to my family, and my mother asked, "Did you go on the trip?" I said, "Well, I did but I didn't get to see any of that stuff" because we were in that room, that meeting room, and that meeting room. But we got pictures from the staff who went and saw it, because you take 2 sets of staff, a day staff and a night staff. They wear out pretty quick.

The itineraries, the schedules, the meetings, the purpose, the programs for the companies. I know we took 120 companies over to Asia, and we worked our bones off, literally. All of that was laid out. It was a big story for Alberta, a major profile.

Our process goes through agenda and priorities; it doesn't go through these other areas. Treasury Board does not approve these trips. It is an agenda and priorities item, so it doesn't do that. There isn't a process through there. We've talked about this in this House before. They're very tightly controlled because there are so many players that feed into this, particularly from the private sector and from the foreign counterpart that you're meeting with on a diplomatic level.

We do release details. We may not always put location as to where the meeting will be, and that is for security purposes. When we were in Lima, Peru, the streets were lined with assault vehicles, and submachine guns were on rooftops of the buildings outside our hotel room. We were protected by four RCMP because of the national security with the Canadian embassy there. We were not able to list off the actual meeting locations because of security purposes. We live in a country that is safe, but some of these other countries just are not. So you do get a shock when you go into some of them. I always say that when I write the book, I'm going to talk about some of the foreign travel and the places we've been where there have been military coups going on as we've been leaving, the tanks rolled down the street in the middle of the night, and we got out as fast as we could. So those schedules are not printed, but they'd make an interesting read afterwards.

Everything is open, Mr. Speaker. I know we can't provide you with approvals from Treasury Board. I've sat on the Treasury Board since 1990, 1992, and this is not a Treasury Board issue. This goes through agenda and priorities. I've also sat on that committee. Clearly, the way this is written, it's not there, but whatever comes

there is filed with the press. So I think the motion is out of order, and we would not be able to honour it.

4:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just very briefly. I hadn't even planned to speak to this, but there seems to be a great deal of sensitivity being shown by members of the government side on this particular motion for a return. If you look at the motion very carefully, what the motion is asking for is copies of written approvals provided by the Premier, Executive Council, and so on, on out-of-province travel. Nobody is implying an abuse of travel opportunities. Would I dare suggest that the minister of community services would go on a junket? No. I'm sure she goes on these trips for business purposes. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and so on.

As a member of the opposition, I've only ever had one opportunity to travel at taxpayer expense, and that was to a parliamentary conference in Victoria. Certainly there's an agenda laid out ahead of time, and you do your share of work when you're there. Although a parliamentary conference – let's be honest about this – does allow some opportunity for relaxation, socialization, and exchange of ideas, too, which is good.

Particularly, when I look back at my experiences on city council, a lot of times we were forced to travel. We didn't want to travel. Nobody likes to be away from their family, but you're forced to travel. When the mayor comes to you and says, "Look; I need you to go down to Ottawa to attend a multicultural conference on behalf of city council," you can't say, "No, I'm not going to go." You have a responsibility to go. So you're away from your family. You catch these late-night flights, and you go down there, and you work, work, work. It is not fun. Nobody is suggesting an abuse here, although there were some questions raised during the summer, mind you, and we have to recognize that.

Just simply, again, the question of public perception, what the public perceives as being right or wrong and to lay down, just like we have in the dollars I spent for out-of-town travel in the province. We table those in the House and in public accounts. The amount of money that I use for transportation is clearly there: my salary, my benefits, everything. So just to provide Albertans, the taxpayer, every bit of information possible just so they can make that judgment themselves, that this was proper, that this went through the proper channels, that it was approved, and that there's accountability. That's the key, accountability.

On that note I'd conclude, but I don't understand why they're so sensitive about this one. Puzzled.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to conclude debate.

MR. DICKSON: Yeah, I don't mean to belabour debate. Just a couple of observations I want to make quickly. The first one is that I have a great deal of sympathy for the sensitivity of cabinet ministers, Mr. Speaker. I'd acknowledge that, I think, last calendar year I made 117 one-way trips, and half of those were waking up at 5 in the morning to catch the 6:20 flight from Calgary to Edmonton and then going back. So I understand the frustration that travel is no fun. Believe me, I have a great deal of sympathy for cabinet ministers that have to travel in terms of selling our province and selling the products and services this province has. That's part of the necessary work, and I wish the Premier would appreciate that.

I recall in question period he had some fun talking about my jogging around my constituency, and I laughed too because I thought it was pretty entertaining. But it's the same issue that transportation is a necessary part of our work. Whether you're a Calgary MLA that has to come to work in this place and then get back as often as possible to participate in events, meetings, and that sort of thing in that city, that's part of the job. I take the minister of innovation and the Minister of Infrastructure, and I think that when you do a lot of travel and particularly air travel, you realize, frankly, it is tedious, it is boring, it is draining, and it just isn't any fun. It's clearly no bonus. I suspect the same is true whether you're flying back and forth between Edmonton and Calgary or whether you're going to Bolivia or Ecuador or anywhere else.

Anyway, the observation I wanted to make is, firstly, that I have some sympathy for cabinet ministers, so this is not a question that travel is bad. It is simply a question of accountability. I heard the Minister of Innovation and Science say, reinforced by the Minister of Government Services, as I understand it, that the agenda and priorities committee approves all travel, and when a news release is issued, that in effect is an indication and confirmation that that travel has been approved by the agenda and priorities committee. I think the whole purpose of this is simply to ensure that if there's any travel, it has been properly authorized, there has been a process, and somebody is accountable other than the traveling minister. I think that's what we're asking for.

I appreciate the clarification from the minister of innovation, who I think has made it abundantly clear. I take it that applies to out-of-province travel, out-of-country travel by cabinet ministers and government Members of the Legislative Assembly from the period '93 to November 7, 1999. If that's what he's telling us, that all of that travel has been, in effect, stamped by the agenda and priorities committee, then that's exactly what I think my colleague was looking for. I take it we have that information, and I thank the minister for that clarification.

That's all I wanted to say on this, and hopefully we can vote it and start making some progress through this long list.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 19 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M20. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of financial planning and human resources minutes dated May 14, 1997, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 40 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Premier, I would like to indicate that, as has been said numerous times in the House previously, the issue of the West Edmonton Mall refinancing is now before the courts, and as such we will not be accepting this motion.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to conclude.

MR. DICKSON: Exactly, sir. We're hoping to make some progress here this afternoon.

The comment I would make is that it is one thing to offer

commentary on a matter which is currently before the courts. If there is a subsisting issue in the courts, then I think all members should respect that process. But this issue is not asking for the government to comment on anything. What we want to access – it's a motion for a return. That means we want a document. What do we want in this case? It's a copy of some minutes. It's the financial planning and human resources minutes.

We know the record exists, Mr. Speaker. I have in hand the affidavit on production. Maybe things have changed since I practised law. This is styled "affidavit of records." But in the style of cause the Alberta Treasury Branches is the plaintiff. The defendants include a number of the Ghermezian family and a number of numbered corporations and named corporations. The action number is 9903-18469. In the affidavit of records, in the first schedule, the first part: "showing records in the possession of the Crown which it does not object to produce." So, in other words, there is no claim of solicitor/client privilege or any other kind of privilege. It's right there. It's number 024, and the document is identified.

So the document was part of what the Crown was prepared to disclose for purposes of the litigation. The document clearly exists, and the minister has not asserted that it does not exist. On what basis would he refuse to share it with us? He said: well, it's part of some ongoing litigation. Well, you know, the pleadings are part of some ongoing litigation, and you or I can go down and get a copy of that. That is no excuse, no reason. This is the former Minister of Justice telling us that it can't come because it's part of a court proceeding. Well, that's just utter nonsense. Utter nonsense. That's no reason the document can't be shared.

4:30

When the Member for Calgary-Glenmore was involved in litigation not so many years ago – well, he had a client who happened to be a particular litigant. If the litigant wanted a document that had been disclosed in the course of production, all he had to do was give instructions to his counsel, his solicitor, and his solicitor would make that document available. So it's the same thing here.

Now, we have a new Minister of Justice, and maybe he hasn't had time to turn his mind to it. But why wouldn't the current Minister of Justice make available to us a document which has been disclosed in the affidavit on production in this litigation? The fact is that it is cited in an affidavit. There is no privilege claimed. It's a disclosed document. This is one of those things that suggests that this is a government that still buys into a culture of secrecy, not what they claim to be, a government that's open and transparent.

It seems to me that the litigation is but an extremely convenient excuse to roll out that great big blanket of secrecy over top of the document. We could have understood if this had been in the second part of the first schedule, which was documents the Crown refused to produce or objected to. Minister of Justice, through the Speaker, why won't you share with Albertans this memorandum? The minister didn't even claim that this was going to violate section 15 of the FOIP Act or section 16 of the FOIP Act or sections 22 or 23 or 27, one of those often-cited exceptions.

Why don't we get it? Because government chooses not to share it. Not good enough, Mr. Speaker. I think we want to see that document, and I hope every member is going to be able to vote for this, because the reason that's being proffered by the government is nonsensical. It's bogus; it's empty; it's vacuous. It simply doesn't in any reasonable sense provide justification for keeping this document secret.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 20 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M21. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of excerpts of cabinet agenda with attachments dated August 13, 1996, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 34 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that we are rejecting this question on the same grounds. I'd just simply add that in the last session of this Legislature there were a series of questions relating to West Edmonton Mall, which we debated ad nauseam in the House, as I recall, and all of that debate applies mutatis mutandis – I just wanted to say that; I haven't been able to say it for a long time – so I don't think it bears repeating.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to conclude debate.

MR. DICKSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what's more distressing: the fact that the government won't share the document or that our top law guy in the province, the Minister of Justice, doesn't seem to see any difference between a document and answering questions on a matter of government involvement. I could understand government having a higher and better claim to not have to disclose information about what government did or didn't do, but we're talking about a document. Once again, this is in an affidavit of records in action 18469, and if one looks at the first schedule, the first part, document 024, it's right there: excerpts of cabinet agenda with attachments.

Now, one might have expected that the government could say that cabinet privilege attaches. Maybe this is a section 21 or maybe this is a section 23 of the FOIP Act. That would be a reason at least to withhold it. Somebody could say that it was a privileged document. There's no claim to privilege here. If Albertans could only hear the top law person in this province standing up and simply saying: we choose not to share it with you. There's no legal impediment to sharing the document with Albertans.

You know, I was talking about what was scary before, Mr. Speaker. The prospect of the former Minister of Justice and Attorney General offering legal advice to the current Minister of Justice and Attorney General is frightening.

AN HON. MEMBER: He's not taking it.

MR. DICKSON: Oh, I'm heartened by that. That's really . . . Right, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry.

You know, I've always said that we'd never have had the strong freedom of information and access to protection of privacy law if it weren't for the member who formerly was the Minister of Justice. I have always given him credit, because he was the one, when the government caucus was wrestling with whether to do this, who sat down and industriously in the fall of 1993 did I think it was a 13-page analysis of the B.C. act and what ought to be done in this province. In 1993 that member was my hero, because he managed to persuade his caucus colleagues to bring in what is arguably one of the strongest freedom of information laws anywhere in Canada. He did a good deed, and he did good work on that.

It's too bad, then, that the government did a number of things. [interjection] I see that we've piqued the interest of the minister responsible for the FOIP Act, but I have to remind him that we then

sort of screwed things up with our fee schedule and a bunch of other things, but the act has always been a fine act, and I tell people in Ottawa that, and I tell people in Edmonton that, Mr. Speaker, and in downtown Calgary.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're digressing.

MR. DICKSON: I am. Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I thought this might be a refreshing change from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who typically occupies the better part of most Wednesday afternoons in a single-handed stand for disclosure of documents. I thought I might be a little briefer, and I'm falling into the same trap.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It's a very exciting subject.

MR. DICKSON: Hon. minister, it is a very exciting subject. I don't know whether he's seen the button my caucus made up with my smiling mug in the middle that says: don't FOIP with me. I'm going to share one of those buttons with the minister.

Anyway, those are the observations I wanted to make. There has been no proper explanation in terms of why the document cannot be shared other than that the government chooses not to. There's no legal impediment. There's no mandatory or discretionary exception in the FOIP Act that's been cited. It's just that government prefers secrecy to openness. Sad day, Mr. Speaker. Sad decision. Sad representation on behalf of the people of Alberta who want to see a greater degree of transparency and accountability.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 21 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M22. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of excerpts of agenda and priorities committee minutes dated February 9, 1998, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 40 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

MR. DICKSON: Since I've managed to make a lot of the observations I wanted to, I'm hopeful I can be a lot briefer in the ensuing motions for returns. I'm getting some advice from my colleagues to my right here who I think are anxious about something more exciting to come along. I know that the Member for Banff-Cochrane was one of the members who was here at 2:30 this morning and is probably anxious to see us move to a speedy conclusion. Heeding that sort of great advice I'm getting from my three colleagues to my right, I'm going to sit down and keep quiet and look forward hopefully to a positive response.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

4:40

MR. HANCOCK: Are we on Motion for a Return 22, Mr. Speaker?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We are.

MR. HANCOCK: I would advise that the government rejects this motion. As we've said in debate on numerous occasions with respect to questions relating to this matter, there was a complete review of this matter. I think it was by the Auditor General. Or was it by the Ethics Commissioner, or was it by everybody? In any

event, this has been the subject of significant review. It's past history. It's long gone. It's of no more value. We just have to reject the question for the same reasons that we've given on an ongoing basis.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, all the minister has to do is say: we've disclosed it in our affidavit on production; we'll send it over. You know, if he were a little more creative, what he could say is: consistent with our past position, I won't answer questions about it; the government won't answer questions because it's been dealt with by the Auditor General. But he won't even give us the ruddy document to look at and make an assessment in terms of whether it's significant or important.

Mr. Speaker, in the affidavit of records, the affidavit on production in action 9903-18469, it's right here, the first schedule, the first part. It's document 024, excerpts of agenda and priorities minutes. The government is prepared to disclose it to litigants. Why can't it disclose it to Albertans?

You know, there's a kind of irony here. We've got a bit of a cabal, a little sort of secret club. We've got Alberta Treasury Branches over here. We've got the government of the province of Alberta. We've got the people involved with Triple Five Properties Inc. and the multiple associated corporations. They get to see these documents, but this minister is blocking. This minister is standing in the way of the people in this province being able to see this document. He's absolutely obstructing our access to it.

He didn't claim privilege, so we know it's not solicitor/client privilege. We know it wasn't part of a without prejudice letter. We know that it apparently doesn't offend sections 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 of the FOIP Act, because we know that this minister is a competent minister, and if it had offended one of those, he would have used that. He would have cited that. He didn't cite any one of those exceptions. He comes forward and he simply says: no, we're not going to share it with you because somebody else has looked at it.

Well, you know, I could care less, Mr. Speaker, whether the Auditor General has seen it. I haven't seen it. My colleagues haven't seen it. The people of Alberta haven't seen it. And that was the problem with the Auditor General's report. So let us see it. You know, let the secret out. Lift the veil of secrecy back. Let us have a peak at this document.

I'd love to see excerpts of agenda and priorities minutes. It may be the closest I ever get, Mr. Speaker, to seeing a cabinet document. Just once in my history as a legislator, could I have a chance to look at one of those top secret, high-powered cabinet docs? I don't know. Are there little borders around it? Are there little animal stamps around the margin? Are there little places for people to . . . [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, we're getting a kind of disclosure here in the House that had never been contemplated by the Standing Orders. But thank you. I can die a happy man now that the minister has shown we one of those cabinet documents. If my 51-year-old eyes were a little sharper and hadn't started getting a little fuzzy around the edges, I might be able to read what she held up.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I've tried to make the point. I've tried to make the argument. Now it's up to the conscience of each man and woman in this place in terms of: do we support government secrecy when there is no compelling legal reason to do so, or do we say that the citizens of this province are entitled to know? The freedom to know, the right to know: it's guaranteed in section 3 of the FOIP Act.

You know, when the FOIP Act came into force, they had to delay the release of the government information video by two weeks because the Premier wanted to be on the front of that video. This is the training video they use. As the lights come up, we see the Premier seated there smiling behind a desk. He's grinning benignly, and he is saying to the people of this province and to everybody who watches the training video that his government is committed to a new culture of openness. I think those are the words he used. It gladdened my heart. As Chief Dan George used to say, my heart soared like a hawk, Mr. Speaker, when I heard that observation. Yet now when that same Premier's government has a chance to choose one of those two paths, they vote for secrecy.

Those are the points that I wanted to make. Please vote yes.

[Motion for a Return 22 lost]

Royalty Tax Credit Program

M25. Mr. White moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies and reports prepared by or for the Department of Resource Development between May 25, 1999, and March 17, 2000, reviewing the Alberta royalty tax credit, ARTC, program.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the minister of natural resources I would reject Motion for a Return 25. The information that's been provided to me is that the department has no studies or reports on ARTC for the time frame given. The minister made the decision on what changes we were going to make on April 1, 1999. Treasury has met with industry on reporting requirements since then, but that would not constitute a report by or for the department.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to conclude debate.

MR. WHITE: This is probably one of the larger pieces, not in magnitude of the volume of writing but in the effect on one of the substantive industries in this province, and this government has just said that it doesn't do any study to change them. I mean, that bears repeating. That message will have to be sent to CAPP and a few others. We'll definitely send that message. This government is obviously not in care and custody of a large part of the income of this province when it offhandedly makes decisions and appears to make them ad hoc, without much forethought. It's unbelievable to this member that there could possibly be these changes without any study.

You'll recall that perhaps two to four years ago, in that time period, the Alberta royalty tax credit program was revamped considerably, and I would have thought that there would have been some writings, any kind of writings, recognizing that we're looking for all studies and reports prepared by and for the Department of Resource Development. It may have been at the time the department of energy, but regardless, the files moved from one to the other, and there may be some reports in Treasury. If those reports are in Treasury, then surely those opposite could say so and produce those reports. I mean, these cannot be secret documents. There may be some parts of the documents that may be a little sensitive and were sensitive prior to enactment, but after enactment, surely they couldn't be. This member fails to see how this government can justify this denial of information and still maintain that they're accountable and open and transparent. That is the worst hypocrisy

that this member has seen in a long time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like the motion upheld as presented.

[Motion for a Return 25 lost]

4:50

Electrical Power Revenues

M26. Mr. White moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies and reports prepared by the Department of Resource Development between May 25, 1999, and March 17, 2000, evaluating the potential aggregate revenues in the balancing pool, BP, from the auction of the power purchase arrangements, PPAs.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Resource Development I've been requested to reject this motion requesting copies of studies and reports evaluating potential aggregate revenues, if there were any reports of this nature. I would have to advise that one of the reasons for holding an auction is to allow the marketplace to determine the values of the PPAs, and the proceeds of auction would be held by the balancing pool for the benefit of consumers. Speculation by the government about how much revenue and provision of estimates about how much revenue would be derived from it may well be harmful to the auction process and not in the best interest of consumers.

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's something to do with bovines that comes to mind in dealing with that answer.

It is unbelievable that we are going through, as we speak, today actually – they have just broken up a meeting of the bidders in the power purchase arrangements in Calgary today. This government maintains that they cannot disclose any reports and estimates of a balancing pool. The member opposite hedged his bets and said: if there were any reports even. Well, if there are no reports, then this is the biggest pig in a poke that this government has ever, ever seen. In fact, this member has done all he can to find out about what actually is transpiring in this matter, and having gained a certain amount of expertise, I'm beginning to think, as many members of the public knowledgeable in these areas are, that this government is running purely and completely on ideology to move the electricity business from a regulated industry to a quasi-regulated, quasi market driven business. They're doing it totally and completely on the basis of ideology.

Now, one would think that way back in 1994, when this was contemplated and contemplated out loud, you would have some due diligence at the time and understand that if an option was to take place, some kind of divestiture of the assets would be in order and that it would be thought out at that time such that a decision would have been made whether this long process, this five-year process, would be successful. It hasn't been determined until July of this year, and even then we're not sure. Five years in the making has stalled all capital investment in the industry in the base load development power in this province. You'd make that determination then whether it could be done or not, without breaking up the forced divestiture of TransAlta, which currently holds 60 to 65 percent of the generation capacity. You'd think that that determination would be made then.

Then to get this far along and have the minister through the

Government House Leader say that there may or may not be reports and that if there are, they're held tight to the vest so that the rest of us can't see them – well, there are very few people in this province that are really interested enough to follow what the estimates of the balancing pool will be. In fact, to put a finer point on it, it's rather difficult for the average citizen to follow it. The balancing pool is in fact the net between that which is achieved by the power purchase auctions and the current costs in, which are determined already by the ITA and subsequently reviewed by the EUB. That being said, this is not a number that should not be disclosed. I mean, the bidders are going to review it and say, "Yes, maybe it is worth that or maybe it's not," but they certainly aren't going to change their bids because of an estimate.

In order to even go down this road, one would have to know what the costs are and what the expected realization is of the balancing pool. The balancing pool is the payback for us the citizens, that have supported the capital debt retirement of all of these facilities in the province under a regulated system. To do this transition, a balancing pool must have a substantial net positive balance in order to make it worth while. Otherwise, it would appear that the regulated system that we had prior, which, incidentally, guaranteed supply, which the current system does not appear to be doing, would be a much better system and should in fact prevail in the marketplace past July 1 and certainly be back in place on January 1 of this coming year.

Without this knowledge that this member is asking for in MR 26, if we don't have that information, the judgment can't be made. Quite frankly, the information will not affect any judgments of a purchaser in the power purchase arrangements, i.e. the bidders, and this member cannot see why this government wouldn't be open and accountable and set a bar, if you will, as to what is success in power purchase auctions and not.

Mr. Speaker, I would prevail upon the members present to vote in favour of this motion so as to truly be open and accountable to the people of the province of Alberta.

Thank you, sir.

[Motion for a Return 26 lost]

Electrical Power Revenues

M27. Mr. White moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies and reports prepared by the Department of Resource Development between May 25, 1999, and March 17, 2000, evaluating the potential aggregate revenues raised from the auction of the power purchase arrangements, PPAs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the minister of natural resources I would advise that the government is rejecting Motion for a Return 27. The rationale given is exactly the same as for 26, so I would ask members to refer to that and won't repeat it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to conclude debate.

MR. WHITE: The same arguments again apply, sir. The potential aggregate revenues are an estimate for the inputs to the balancing pool, and they have to have been studied. So either the government will not allow these estimates to be disclosed, in one case, which is way more secretive than is required in this matter, and/or they have

not done any study at all, in which case it would border on negligence on behalf of the people of Alberta.

I would ask that the members present support the motion and, again, be truly open and accountable to the people of the province of Alberta.

Thank you, sir.

[Motion for a Return 27 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M28. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of excerpts of agenda and priorities committee minutes dated April 28, 1997, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, WEM, as listed on page 40 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta, November 30, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This document, again, is one of the documents that was disclosed in an affidavit of records. The deponent in the affidavit, the Assistant Deputy Provincial Treasurer and representative of the Crown, swore an affidavit of records on November 30, 1999, in action 9903-18469 in the Court of Queen's Bench, judicial district of Edmonton.

One looks at the first schedule. "The first part: showing records in the possession of the Crown which it does not object to produce." If we go through the catalogue of the first schedule, we see number 24. The document is catalogued as "Excerpts of Agenda & Priorities Minutes."

5:00

Mr. Speaker, the issue is the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall. The interest is in accessing documents that Albertans have paid for with their tax dollars, and there's nothing more basic than that. Nobody's asking for the government to do anything other than to let us see a document which is being freely distributed and used in the course of the litigation. I suppose that the minister would say: Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you can go and sit in the courtroom and wait until this is used as an exhibit at some point in a six-week trial. It shouldn't be necessary to do that. Albertans have paid for this document.

It's only a document. We're not asking for the government to make a commitment, an analysis, or anything else. It's just a single document we're seeking. If the minister resists this, let him particularize specifically what legal impediment he is citing that would prevent Albertans from having disclosure of this document.

We see a very worrisome trend in a number of these things. Everything that's mentioned about West Edmonton Mall we see the government so anxious to put the shroud of secrecy over. In the words of George McClellan, the first Ombudsman in this province back in 1967: let's let a little sunshine into this dark corner of government activity. Let a little sunshine in. We'd all be better for it. Albertans will be better for it. Even the Minister of Justice is going to be darned happy. Once he's got the document out, he can say to his constituents that he believes in openness and he lives that principle. He doesn't just mouth it at election time, but he actually lives it in the work he does.

So with that, we're all waiting with bated breath to hear the minister rise and solemnly declare on behalf of the province of Alberta, on behalf of the government – will they let the sun shine in?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course the government will let the sun shine in, but we're rejecting this question. The fact of the matter is that I'm a very strong advocate and members in this government are very strong advocates of the people of Alberta having access to information and in fact brought in, as the member has characterized himself, the strongest freedom of information legislation probably in the country. Information is shared on an ongoing basis and a daily basis with Albertans.

What this question is asking for is excerpts of an agenda and priorities committee minute. I think the member would be actually quite disappointed if he were ever to read agenda and priorities minutes. That aside, agenda and priorities is a committee of cabinet. Cabinet documents are subject to the usual rules relating to discussions in cabinet.

MRS. SOETAERT: Oh, they're not open to the public.

MR. HANCOCK: No, cabinet documents are not typically in any parliamentary system open for public scrutiny at the time of creation or for some considerable period of time thereafter.

However, the Auditor General has fully reviewed this matter, has had access to all appropriate documents, and has made a report based on those documents. There is a lawsuit ongoing, and in the fullness of time, in an appropriate contextual situation, all documents that are relevant to be disclosed will be disclosed in the course of that lawsuit. The people of Alberta have been well served by their Auditor General, will be well served by their court system. I'm sorry; I had to slip that in there, being the Minister of Justice and believing that the court system serves Albertans so very, very well. The people of Alberta are well served by this government on freedom of information, first of all, in the context of bringing the freedom of information legislation in and, secondly, in adhering to the concept of open government, open democracy, and – was it sunshine you wanted? – sunshine.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 28 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M30. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of correspondence from Triple Five Corporation Ltd., N. Ghermezian, to Peter Elzinga dated February 14, 1994, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, WEM, as listed on page 9 of the affidavit of records of the WEM corporate defendants, November 30, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point I'm almost to the point of having to implore members of the Assembly. I'm going to have to go back tonight and report to my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora that on his behalf I tried to do what he normally does, and I hate to go back and say that I have been no more successful than he has. I want to implore members. My reputation with my colleague is on the line. I need a little assistance here. I need a little help on this last motion for a return.

It's the same kind of thing we've talked about in all the other ones. I'm not going to go through the particulars. It's the same issue. I would say this: if the Minister of Justice were as proud of the FOIP Act as I am, then he'd look at section 21, and that deals with cabinet and Treasury Board confidences. Do you know what he'd find? He'd find that that exception, firstly, is mandatory, but

it does not apply if it's information in a record of a decision made by the Executive Council. So once the Executive Council has made the decision, then under 21(2)(b) the exception falls. The exception doesn't exist anymore. Now what we've got is that the Minister of Justice wants to rewrite the law. He thinks section 21 doesn't go far enough. That would seem to be what he wants to do. Maybe we'll get some good advice from the minister responsible for the administration of the FOIP Act, but I thought we were all supposed to follow the law of the land.

Mr. Speaker, I'm anxious again to get to the vote. The Minister of Justice has done me no favour. I've already been embarrassed when I go to meet with my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora to report on my dismal success this afternoon on his behalf. My only hope is that I have to reach above and beyond the Minister of Justice. I have to implore colleagues on all sides of the Assembly to just give me a little bit of help here to be able to take one positive thing back to my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora. You know, members, we're doing it on behalf of the people of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, again on behalf of the government I would reject this question. First of all, I'd point out that this question deals with a document which isn't even a government document. The hon. member hasn't brought that forward.

MR. DICKSON: It's in your production.

MR. HANCOCK: Actually, the question refers to the affidavit of records of the WEM defendants, so it doesn't look like it's in our production at all. It looks like it's in the production of the other party to the lawsuit.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite did ask for some help, and I would give him some help. We've spent a lot of time in the last session and a little time in this session on these types of questions, and the responses have always been the same. I'd give him a lot of help in terms of: perhaps he could ask questions for information that would be helpful to him, and we would be happy to respond with the information in an appropriate manner.

[Motion for a Return 30 lost]

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

Bill 207 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act

[Adjourned debate April 5: Mr. Paszkowski]

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated last week, I'm pleased to be involved in the discussions regarding this particular bill. We've been working with municipalities as partners, and we find that we have a process in place in working with the municipalities to determine the physical challenges. They are basic.

Most recently we met with the two municipal umbrella organizations to talk about municipal/provincial financial issues, and we have agreed to work together as partners to try and deal with the issues at the table in developing long-term and lasting solutions. We're reviewing the education property tax. We're reviewing the farm assessment and taxation. We're developing new rates and schedules for the assessment of linear property. All of these initiatives have an impact on municipal sources of revenue. They have a very direct impact.

The Leader of the Official Opposition spoke about allowing local

governments to determine infrastructure priorities. We're not just talking. We're doing something. Just last week we provided a million dollar grant to the development of a new web-based computer system to help municipalities judge the condition of their infrastructure. It's important to know existing conditions and future pressures on the order of setting priorities on infrastructure. Those are indeed long-range capital requirements and fit into the municipal long-range capital plans.

5:10

When my colleagues and I toured the province last summer, municipalities told us that there were pressures that needed to be addressed, pressures like roads, water and sewer, transportation issues, wastewater issues. We met with the municipalities, Mr. Speaker. We listened and we took action. This government is making a substantial investment in areas that are a priority to Albertans and meet the needs of the municipalities. We've put in \$425 million in 1999-2000 and \$475 million in 2000-2001. With this funding guarantee local authorities can allocate the accelerated dollars to their key infrastructure priorities on a preplanned basis over the next three years.

Government took over financial responsibility of all secondary highways and keeps primary highways along with major trade corridors through the cities. We also provided additional funding for water and wastewater facilities, reservoir projects, health facilities and other health projects, capital renewal and postsecondary institutions, environment and agricultural capital infrastructure, rural road studies, and to improve training of fire and disaster services personnel.

The hon. opposition member talked a great deal about the roles and the responsibilities. We've already agreed to work with the municipalities as partners in clarifying provincial/municipal roles and responsibilities. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it's in our business plan.

The Leader of the Opposition stated that according to Statistics Canada, provincial grants to municipalities went down between 1992 and 1998, when in fact the 2000-2001 budget shows that provincial funding to municipalities is the highest it has been in the last 10 years. The Liberal leader also alluded to an increase in education property taxes between '95 and '99. We listened. In fact, from '95 to '99 basic education spending – and that includes K to 12 – increased \$693 million and is continuing to increase. Education funding comes from education property taxes and provincial general revenues. It's important to note that the proportion of education funding derived from education property tax revenues has decreased from 50 percent in '94-95 to 38 percent this year. The facts speak for themselves.

Let's take a closer look at what the Liberals are saying in comparison to what is actually in the bill. The descriptive rhetoric used by the hon. member to describe this bill in no way reflects the speculation that appears in the paper. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, there is no resemblance between what's in this paper and what is being needed. The Liberal news release:

Bill 207 would provide local governments with access to a portion of the provincial personal income tax base in order to create more stable and effective funding arrangements.

Mr. Speaker, nothing is further from the truth. This bill could not do this even if it were passed. In fact, eliminating grants and relying on a source of income that can be unpredictable and uncertain would create a situation where funding to municipalities would reflect the volatility of this tax base.

This government has committed to ensuring that Albertans pay the lowest income taxes in the country and has even speculated about the possibility of eliminating provincial income taxes altogether. Where would that leave the municipalities?

Also, the bill actually before us gives us no idea of the method of the allocation to municipalities. Would it be allocated on a per capita basis? Would it be based on personal income taxes paid by the municipality residents? Would it be pooled and redistributed based on the equalization of need formula? Would this income tax revenue be a replacement for other sources of revenue, or would it be in addition to what municipalities already receive from the province? Nowhere does it show it in the bill.

If funds were allocated based on the place of residence, rich communities would get richer, and poorer communities would obviously be the ones that keep getting poorer and poorer and poorer. In fact, it could result in rural municipalities receiving comparatively very little income with such an approach. What if the amount of revenue allocated isn't enough? How would that be handled?

As you can see, this bill raises more questions than it has answers. Without these basic details it would be difficult, if not impossible, to provide a report that would be of any use. So how could you develop a report that could be of use and be functional? In its present form this is not a bill worth considering or debating. Most importantly, Bill 207 is not consistent with the collaborative approach we have taken in dealing with our municipal partners, and indeed, working with our municipal partners is the best solution.

Mr. Speaker, it's always worth while to look at other ways of doing things because that's how you improve and that's how you

better yourself. Certainly that's the approach this provincial government is taking, and that's the approach that our municipal partners are anxious to participate in. This is the approach that we are using: working in partnership, working together, and working in all areas for the betterment of the province. I've said – and I mean it – that the municipalities are the foundation of this province, and the stronger the municipalities are, the stronger this province will be.

Working in partnerships in developing the solutions for long-term, long-lasting solutions, solutions that work, solutions that indeed are actually applicable to work with the success of municipalities is the process we want to work with. We're listening to the municipalities' needs. We're listening to their causes. Indeed, this summer we'll be traveling and meeting with the municipalities again to hear what their specific needs are. We want to hear from every municipality in this province what their specific needs are so that we can work with them. I'm looking forward to it. In our consultative process we've been able to keep the municipalities strong in the past, and we look forward to keeping the municipalities even stronger as we build a better and stronger province.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move adjournment of debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:20 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 12, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/04/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

THE SPEAKER: I'll introduce the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View in just a second, but might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Felix D'Souza, a grade 12 student at Austin O'Brien high school; Joanne Howell, librarian at Austin O'Brien high school; Rosemarie Humniski, careers and postsecondary education counselor at Austin O'Brien high school. These visitors are guests of Howard Yeung, one of our pages. It's Howard's last evening in the House. So with your permission I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

Mr. Havelock moved that pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) the question on second reading of Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be now put.

[Adjourned debate April 11: Mr. Renner]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening and speak to second reading of Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, and offer some constructive comments on this very important bill. Indeed, the discussion surrounding this bill is important to all Albertans.

At the outset I would like to make clear that it is my belief that Bill 11 reaffirms this government's desire to improve our publicly funded and administered health system by entrenching in legislation our commitment to preserving the principles of the Canada Health Act. I also believe that one of the most important things to result out of the debate on Bill 11, Mr. Speaker, is that it has forced Albertans to think about their health care system, its positive aspects as well as its drawbacks and how they think they wish to see it survive into the future.

Canadians cherish their health care system. It's something that helps define us as a nation. This government shares this view and wants to preserve our medicare system, but everyone agrees that it needs to be reformed to stay sustainable into the future.

Today in Alberta we spend \$15.5 million a day on health care. This number increases to \$17 million a day by 2002-2003. Total health care spending will increase by \$1.1 billion over three years, Mr. Speaker, from \$5.2 billion in '99-2000 to over \$6.26 billion in

2002-2003. Health care expenditures presently make up 31.9 percent of our budget. In 1992-93 the health system was spending about \$4.1 billion per year in Alberta.

From 1980 to 1992 health costs increased by 215 percent. As a whole the province was spending over \$3 billion a year more than it was receiving in revenue. Between '92-93 and '95-96 the health budget spending was reduced by approximately \$500 million, from \$4.1 billion to \$3.6 billion, a reduction of about 12 percent, not the fraudulent 30 percent number stated by the Leader of the Opposition. Since 1995-96 our health spending has increased.

THE SPEAKER: We have a point of order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising under Standing Order 23, particularly the subsection that talks about making allegations against another member. I heard the Member for Calgary-Mountain View say that the Leader of the Official Opposition was somehow fraudulent in using the number 30 percent. I can understand why that member would be confused, because the government's own web site repeats the misinformation that the cutback was only 13 percent and also makes the allegation that the Leader of the Official Opposition was talking about health care funding when in fact a careful reading of her comments will indicate that she was talking about hospital funding.

Mr. Speaker, on several occasions, including sessional papers which had been tabled in the House, it is clear that the hospital funding cutback is documented in academic work and in the Canadian centre for health . . .

THE SPEAKER: I gather that the hon. member has made his point. Does somebody else want to respond to this point of order?

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Very briefly, Mr. Speaker. I want to make two points. One, under *Beauchesne* 490 "fraudulent" actually has been held to be parliamentary.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, it's a question of interpretation. I think the hon. member across the way was clarifying his leader's position with respect to the issue. Our member was simply giving his own interpretation, which I might add was likely the more accurate of the two, of what has happened in the past.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, *Beauchesne* very, very clearly says that unfortunately from time to time the House must accept conflicting interpretations or conflicting views on exactly the same situation. Not a point of order.

Would you continue, Calgary-Mountain View.

Debate Continued

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

Since 1995-96 the health spending has increased in each of the past four years. Overall annual spending on health has increased by 40 percent. Per capita spending on health in '99-2000 is the third highest in Canada, behind only British Columbia and Newfoundland. However, Alberta is also the youngest province in Canada, so when adjusted for age Alberta has the highest per capita spending in Canada.

DR. TAYLOR: Repeat that.

MR. HLADY: Highest in Canada.

DR. TAYLOR: You're sure?

MR. HLADY: Indeed.

As a province we have seen more and more money going into health care every year since '96-97. Clearly, Alberta is doing its part to ensure that our health care system is adequately funded. Yet waiting lists persist, and people continue to talk about how the system needs to change to address the problems within the system.

Clearly, the status quo is not an option anymore, Mr. Speaker, for our Alberta health system. We can no longer afford to continue adding more and more money to our health care system. It quite simply is not sustainable. The challenges of our increasing and aging population, new medical treatments and technologies, and increased public expectations require that the system change if it is to remain accessible and sustainable to all Albertans.

Some examples I'd like to use, Mr. Speaker. If we build it, more people are using the system. The best example I could come up with is around X rays, CAT scans, and now MRIs. As better technologies become available, people want to use them. However, there is not a lessening of use on our earlier technology. So we're actually seeing just increased spending. We are not seeing a more efficient use of the things that we've had.

Surprisingly, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition agrees, or at least she did when she was the minister of health in 1991.

Reform has to occur. It seems to me that if we keep adding new resources, we won't get to that reform. I'm not an advocate for adding on to the existing system. I think the existing system needs a whole bunch of change.

MacBeth, *Hansard*, June 10, 1992. Why doesn't she stand and say that now?

THE SPEAKER: Repeatedly, in the last several days reference has been made to names of individual members. That's inappropriate.

I'd ask you to move forward.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize. The Leader of the Opposition.

If I were to make the case for why Bill 11 is before the Legislature today, I do not think I could make a better case than the Leader of the Official Opposition did in 1991. "The existing system needs a whole bunch of change," she said. "I'm not an advocate for adding on to the existing system." Yet she stands in the House eight to nine years later and still offers no solution to the problems and states that we do not need Bill 11 when she did eight or nine years ago.

I'm extremely disappointed in the politics being played by the Liberals and the extremist rhetoric they are using in relation to this bill. Mr. Speaker, I think they lack honour. But they do not care. They do not think they should be accountable for the fear they've been creating in this province.

The Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert repeated this rhetoric in her speech last Thursday. The Liberals believe that if they repeat this rhetoric enough, people will start believing the lies and fears that they keep representing. As an example, the pamphlet they've been passing out around the city which states, "Legalizes private, for-profit hospitals." This bill does not do that. "Creates a two-tier health care system." We protect Albertans from that happening, Mr. Speaker. And it continues on and on.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is also guilty of this. He has

spoken of closed beds and what he called "darkened corridors." As usual, Mr. Speaker, the opposition is using a song book full of wrong notes. So that Albertans will know the facts, 15 new or replacement facilities have been built across Alberta to meet increased demands since 1993. Each of these new facilities has opened new beds, brightened new corridors, and increased our capacity within the system.

8:10

While we have been actively doing something, Albertans might like to know what the opposition's real position is. Perhaps the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would ask his leader if she stands by what she told the *Edmonton Journal* in May of 1992, and I quote: I don't deny that the system's going to change or must change, nor do I assume that the number of beds is the only measure of the effectiveness of our health care system. He might also ask her about something else she said, again in May of '92: we have among the highest number of acute care beds per capita here in Alberta; maybe we should look at really making a concerted effort to move into more outpatient centres and care.

The member has also referred to the American health care system, and he doesn't like it. Neither do we, Mr. Speaker. Bill 11 bans in clear language any private, parallel, two-tier American health care system. Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, affirms Alberta's commitment to a quality publicly funded and administered health system for the province and to the preservation of the principles of the Canada Health Act, that foundation of Alberta's health system.

Currently there is no legislated authority for government to prohibit, restrict, or control private surgical clinics in this province. This is a serious legislative gap that the government has been asked by the federal government to address. Presumably, if a surgical clinic wishes to begin operation in Alberta, all it requires is accreditation from the College of Physicians and Surgeons. The government has no legal authority to intervene.

The legislation bans private hospitals and prohibits the development of any parallel, two-tiered health system in Alberta by controlling private surgical clinics. At the same time, it enables publicly funded regional health authorities to look for new and better ways to deliver health services, improve efficiency, and reduce waiting lists through limited contracts with surgical facilities to deliver some surgical services.

A private surgical facility cannot provide insured services unless that facility has a contract with a regional health authority to provide those services and unless the Minister of Health and Wellness has approved that contract, Mr. Speaker. Bill 11 also ensures that no private surgical facilities operate outside the control of the public system.

It prohibits queue-jumping. It prohibits facility fees for medically necessary surgical or physician services that are covered by the Alberta health care insurance plan. Bill 11 also prohibits anyone from requiring patients to purchase goods and services that are not medically necessary or to receive faster service. It also sets out clear rules for the sale of goods and services to patients that are not medically necessary. Mr. Speaker, the legislation sets significant fines, up to \$100,000 for a violation of the act.

The government is committed to the fact that no parallel, private, for-profit health system will be allowed to develop in Alberta. The proposed Health Care Protection Act ensures that surgical facilities will only be able to provide services under a contract or agreement with the public system when it is in the best interest of the publicly funded health system. There will be no charges to patients for insured services, and the publicly administered system will have total control over any private facilities.

Mr. Speaker, there are currently 52 privately owned surgical clinics in the province accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Most but not all have contracts with the regional health authorities to deliver some surgical day procedures. A few of the clinics do only uninsured services such as cosmetic or dental procedures. Among the surgical procedures performed in these clinics under contract to the public system are ophthalmology procedures such as cataract surgery; ear, nose, and throat surgery; oral and dental procedures; plastic surgery; dermatology procedures; and pregnancy terminations. Interestingly enough, when the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was the health minister, she allowed 35 of these clinics.

DR. TAYLOR: How many?

MR. HLADY: Thirty-five of these clinics she started and allowed them to charge facility fees, and she did nothing about it. We're doing something about it, Mr. Speaker. It is additionally curious to hear some of the criticisms leveled at us by the Leader of the Official Opposition. She suggests that we cannot be trusted on health care because we are creating a two-tiered, American health care system with the advent of Bill 11. This is preposterous. It's untrue, and she should be ashamed of herself for stating this.

In fact, how can Albertans trust the Leader of the Official Opposition now on her public stance against Bill 11 when in 1991 she said:

My view is that we don't have all the answers in the Canadian health system. I think we should always be open to learning more, and it may well be that we can learn something from the quality management structures that the Americans have put in place.

That was in *Hansard*, June '92. She now creates fear when a few years ago she moved away from that.

She then went on to say this about the U.S.

But I believe with their HMOs . . . there may be better ways to measure quality in health care than we may have imagined in Canada. In terms of learning, which I happen to believe should be a lifelong goal of all of us, including our health system, there may well be something we can learn from the American system without compromising our own.

Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we're doing in Bill 11. We're trying to make things work better in this province.

Indeed, apparently now the Leader of the Official Opposition feels differently than the rest of us. Apparently she is the one who feels that implementing an American health care system in Alberta would be beneficial. The record says so. It's an undisputed fact. Unlike the Leader of the Official Opposition, this government wants to protect and preserve our medicare system. We want to reform our health care system from within and come up with new and creative ways to make the existing system better. Bill 11 does this by giving RHAs the flexibility, the tools, and the options required to make the best use of their budget and their resources.

I would like to thank all my constituents of Calgary-Mountain View for their comments and suggestions on Bill 11. I have found them constructive and useful in preparing my comments for today. In particular, many have suggested to me that the government needs to examine further how to implement clear cost accountability measures in the system. People tell me that it would be nice to know what doctors are charging or levying on their behalf whenever they access the public system; in essence, what they are costing the public system every time they visit the doctor or the hospital.

Perhaps an amendment in the future, maybe not in this bill but elsewhere or in another bill, could be the introduction of a mechanism where every Albertan receives a yearly or monthly bill or a statement of account, similar to a utility bill, that shows their own

personal cost to the health care system. This would close the loop on creating some accountability. This kind of mechanism would not only add cost accountability and transparency to the health care system and could help eliminate double and triple billing, but it would also allow Albertans to understand better the value the existing system provides.

I would also like to tell all the seniors in my constituency that Bill 11 will ensure that they will receive the care they need when they need it and when they need it most. It will help improve access and reduce waiting lists for the minor surgical procedures they require while at the same time freeing up valuable operating time for major surgeries in our hospitals.

In closing, I would like to share an observation. When medicare was introduced back in 1968, it was originally a 50-50 cost-share agreement between the federal and provincial governments. In 1998-99 the federal government contributed only 10 and a half percent of the funding for Alberta's health care system. In the recent federal budget these transfers were boosted, and Alberta received an additional \$420 million from the federal government, Mr. Speaker, or enough to keep our hospitals open for about 30 days. For our system to become strong once again, the federal government has to either come back to the table as an equal partner or recognize the value of their contribution and let provinces like Alberta innovate and find new ways to strengthen our system.

The Health Care Protection Act will not solve all the problems in the health care system, Mr. Speaker. The government still needs the support and co-operation of all Albertans and health care professionals and administrators to find long-term solutions. Alberta also will need the continued support of the federal government and a renewed commitment to restore and enhance their funding commitments to Alberta's health care system.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to allow me to speak this evening, and I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to address Bill 11 in second reading. Before I get to the specifics of Bill 11, I want to speak just a little bit about the past, because it may help shed some light on where we are today, where we have been, and how we arrived at this point.

Some of you may or may not know that prior to being elected here in 1993, I served for four years on the Calgary General hospital board. I also represented the Calgary area on the Alberta Healthcare Association board for four years and was further elected by them to represent Alberta on the Canadian hospital board. I was, in fact, appointed to the Calgary General hospital board by the then Conservative minister of health, now the Leader of the Opposition. I was appointed not once but in fact twice by that same minister. I have heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about how when she left her ministry to run for the leadership of my party, she left things in good shape. I'd like to talk about that era, because during that time there were a number of things that did occur that have a direct bearing on the contents of Bill 11 today.

8:20

A nurse's strike had occurred, if memory serves, just before the Winter Olympics in Calgary back in 1988. The demands were for an over 20 percent increase in their wages. When the strike finally ended, the nurses in fact had won a very sizable wage increase, but the then hospital and health unit boards were told to find the money inside their existing budgets, as the minister of the day felt no responsibility to cover those increased costs of the single largest

expense inside the health care system. That was, and still is today, wages.

The minister told hospital boards they had to improve their information systems so that the department of health and the minister could in fact have a better and more timely information system about what hospitals were doing with the money that was being allocated to them. They did not, of course, allocate additional dollars to the hospitals for those computer systems, nor were there any guidelines from the minister as to what types of systems we should have. We ended up with a variety of different computing systems and programs. For the most part, no one system could talk to any other system in the province.

We spent millions and millions of dollars that could have gone to patient care, but instead the money went to feed endless streams of data to a department that never did tell us what they wanted it for, nor did they ever respond back to us with advice on how to become more efficient inside our hospital system.

In addition to the money spent on the new and improved computer systems, we also had to hire more systems analysts, more programmers, and data entry clerks to input that endless stream of information. Every time things like this occurred, there were always dollars allocated away from patient care and over to more machines and more bureaucrats.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we were in a time of change, but the biggest changes were just coming. The next major shift in funding was called the acute care funding formula, the incredibly complex system designed in the United States for American private acute care hospitals. There was little or no consultation with the hospitals that would be impacted here in Alberta. The new funding formula was announced to the Alberta Hospital Association, and it was another example of the top-down management style that we had come to expect. The logic behind the funding formula was recognition of dollars to acuity level. In and of itself it was a very good idea. Everyone knew, for example, that a burn patient was going to require more care and attention than someone having a minor surgical procedure, and therefore that patient would cost more to look after.

Hospitals that had higher acuity levels would in fact receive more funding than those with lower acuity levels. There was a major flaw in the funding formula, though, and perhaps it's because private acute care centres in the United States don't have long-term care psychiatric patients. But here in Alberta many rural hospitals and some of our majors, such as the Royal Alex and the Calgary General, did in fact at that time have that type of patient and still do today.

The Calgary General hospital was in fact the psychiatric centre for southern Alberta. We had patients that were remanded into our custody by the courts for 30 days. We had a geriatric centre of excellence at the Peter Lougheed Centre, yet neither of these areas were recognized in the funding formula. The end result was that we were deemed inefficient inside the system. We made big headlines, Mr. Speaker, big headlines: Calgary General hospital inefficient.

We lost funding, millions of dollars a year. We lost it to the Foothills and to the U of A, who achieved increases, and please note that these were not new dollars in the system. It was simply a switch of dollars from one facility to another. When we would try to explain to the minister of the day that the formula was flawed and that while in fact it might work in the United States in private hospitals, it was not working appropriately here, we were told by her and her department that there was nothing wrong with the formula.

Well, that being the case, we did what others were doing inside the system: we hired a firm to come in and try to break down the funding formula so we could find ways to get around it. We were, however, forced by the annual reduction in our funding at the General to look for innovative ways to try and save money and try

to maintain our patient programs. So we closed beds. We closed whole units. In fact, we closed whole buildings. We privatized everything we could, from biomedical waste handling to privatizing housekeeping in the hospital. We managed to save 2 and a half million dollars in the housekeeping move at a time when we had been cut 3 million dollars for being inefficient.

Because things were not interesting enough at the time, all hospitals were told to do a complete inventory of all programs offered in each facility. The theory behind this move was that at the end of the inventory there would be a rationalization of health care services to eliminate duplication. It turned out that the only program rationalized in the Calgary area was the cardiac program, and it still operated out of the Holy Cross, the General, the Foothills, and the Rockyview. Not much of a rationalization. All other programs stayed basically the same, and turf protection became the order of the day.

We were all told that our patients were staying in the system too long, and in order to comply with the acute care funding formula, pressure was applied across the board to get the length of stay down. A new computer system was invented, and its purpose was in fact to track doctors who admitted patients and the length of stay attached to each patient. This way pressure could be put on individual doctors to have a more timely release of their patients more in line with that of their colleagues.

Home care was the next big push from the department of health, but rather than have home care come under the same system that had the patients while they were in hospital, home care funding was given to the health units. There were not even any common linkages between the health unit system and the hospital system. We did not, for the most part, even communicate with one another. People being released from the hospitals were likely to have to contact the health unit themselves to try and arrange for home care as the pressure for shorter and shorter lengths of stay increased so that we could comply with the acute care funding formula.

Inside the health care system everyone was so preoccupied with the endless tasks required by the minister and her department that rare was the day when we actually talked about services for patients. And all this in the so-called great system that supposedly had few, if any, problems under her guidance. At the same time, this same minister was on Treasury Board helping to firmly place this province into a cycle of deficits, borrowing, and huge interest payments, interest payments that have not created one job, provided one service, or helped one sick or injured Albertan and are still close to a billion dollars this year. Ten years later we're still paying for it.

Private laboratories were encouraged to set up. Private MRI clinics came on the scene as the minister stubbornly refused to supply money needed to buy the new technology. Gimbels and Morgentalers flourished under a system that allowed for physician fees to be paid by the public system, but patients could be and were billed directly for the facility fee, and all of this under her watch. Health care boards were told that we were part of the problem. If we could not get our spending under control and balance our budget, she'd hire somebody who would. There was lots of big talk and lots of threats and very little follow-through.

There was no follow-through on the information system. We were never told what the data was for or how to improve our efficiency in the hospitals. There was no follow-through on the big wage settlement, just less patient care as we scrambled to cover the costs. There was no follow-through on the acute care funding formula even when defects in the formula were shown to be there. Millions of dollars were taken away from a few facilities and given to others. And there was no follow-through on home care. Instead, an idea became the rule of the day. The \$35 million to start a new service

which \$500 million might well have paid for resulted in a shift of nurses out of the acute care system and into the home care system.

Some of the other things that were going on at the time were meetings, endless meetings, Mr. Speaker. Because in addition to the 200 or so hospital and health unit boards, we also had an Alberta Hospital Association, a teaching hospital council, a long-term care association, a mental health council, a Catholic hospital association, a rural hospital association, plus too many regional boards to count. All of these management layers, and no one listening to or agreeing with anyone else. One goal in mind was to survive with programs intact and funding restored. And once again, no follow-through from the minister. Yes, I must say that things were just great.

In 1993 this government did follow through. We eliminated all those boards and created 17 regional health authorities to try and bring together all those different elements of this huge, growing, and dynamic business. And have no illusions, Mr. Speaker: it is a business. It is one of the biggest and most expensive businesses in this province, and there are all kinds of people making all kinds of money out of the system. From the people who supply groceries to those who supply oxygen, from Aids to Daily Living to the diagnostic services, from the individual doctors and surgeons to the private contracts many nurses have to supply home care to the regional authorities, there is in fact profit being made. All of these elements go into making a health care system work, and despite the rhetoric and hysteria being manufactured by the opposition, this system does work.

Can it be better? Yes, absolutely, but one thing is certain. It will continue with or without Bill 11 to evolve and change, but with Bill 11 in place there are some basic truths. This bill and our system will not violate the Canada Health Act. This system will be universal. This system will be publicly funded. People will not pay for medically required services. This system will be publicly administered. Private clinics will do only minor surgeries, and private hospitals will not exist.

However, for the first time in the history of the system, private clinic contracts will be made public. They were not made public under her watch, Mr. Speaker, but they will be under ours. But the rhetoric and fear mongering continue, comments like "it will be a two-tiered system" and the "it is a slippery slope" argument, comments designed to create fear and mistrust when clearly the bill does exactly the opposite.

There is nothing in this bill that will encourage that, allow that, promote it, or legalize it. And let's be clear. It was under the leader of the Liberals that for-profit clinics started. Facility fees for eye clinics and abortion clinics came into being. Private, for-profit MRI clinics opened up, and privately owned labs that billed the government directly flourished. Was it a problem then? No, apparently not. Is it a problem today, when we try to get it under control? Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, today everything seems to be a problem.

8:30

So here we are today with the Friends of Medicare, the Liberals, and the unions mad about Bill 11. They see it as a panacea for the private sector to do something while possibly without union involvement. Who knows? Yet here we have today AUPE asking for over 20 percent wage increases for some health care workers. Some are suggesting that essential health care workers should be able to go out on strike. We don't hear any of the friends talking about that.

What should be talked about is that in 1969 when the publicly funded system started here in Alberta, the total cost was \$34 million, 50 percent paid for by the federal government and 50 percent paid for by the province. Today, just over 30 years later, the cost in

Alberta is close to \$6 billion for 3 million people, and the federal government is paying less than 11 percent. In the decade between 1992 and 2002 we will have gone from a system costing approximately \$3.5 billion to one exceeding \$6 billion.

If there's one thing I'm thankful to Bill 11 for, it is that it has provoked a debate on health care, a debate we'd better not be afraid to have. We have to find new and innovative ways to sustain our system, a system we all want to preserve. We do have to be aware of the constant rise in utilization and the constant rise in cost. If we can't talk about it openly and honestly without hysteria, in 10 or 20 years we're going to have a problem so big that talking about it won't matter anymore, and then we'll all be worse off for that.

If a private clinic can do hernia operations in Toronto and because of their ability to streamline and become more efficient they've been able to cut operating time in half and the cost in half, why is that a bad thing? Why can we not do that here? There's not one member of this government that wants to destroy public health care. We all use the system. We have aging parents. I've got children. Some of us even have grandchildren. What possible motive could any of us have to destroy a universal, publicly funded system?

I am neither arrogant, stupid, nor greedy, as implied by the Liberal leader. The majority of us, unlike the leader of the Liberals, will not have a pension plan when we leave here. I have serious doubt that I would ever be able to pay for health care when I am 65, and for sure today I do not have the ability to go across that border and buy services in the United States, the way so many people do today. So many want to criticize the United States' system, yet so many Canadians go across the border to use it.

Funny, isn't it, that even in the United States there are commercials running on television telling people to be afraid, to be very afraid of any electoral candidate running in the U.S. election that might be talking about universal medicare or bringing in some kind of government-funded system. It's good to know that the rhetoric and the misinformation knows no borders in North America. There's just as much misinformation and fear-mongering about our system in the United States as there is about their system here.

Maybe just by utilizing some of our own home-grown health care entrepreneurs, we might find some innovative ways to improve delivery of health care services to our aging population, ideas that might improve universal access, streamline some procedures, and be cost-effective for all of us that not only use the system but in fact pay for it.

We seem to have forgotten that many of the facilities in the province of Alberta were not even built by government. Many hospitals were actually built by organizations like the Catholic hospital groups, the Salvation Army, and even the municipalities. Most of the long-term care facilities that are in use today in Alberta were built by organizations like Bethany Care and Carewest. One of the most effective assisted-living models in this province is the St. Michael's Extended Care Centre right here in Edmonton, and it was built by the Ukrainian community. Government funds these organizations only in part, by paying per diems for the patient residents and paying for home care and physician fees, yet few Albertans would realize that these facilities were not built nor are they owned by the government of Alberta.

One hundred and thirty-five ambulance systems throughout the province are not owned by the Alberta government, yet funding mechanisms exist to help Albertans cover part or all of the costs associated with ambulance and paramedic assistance. The government does not own the aircraft, either fixed-wing or rotary, that make up the 14 contracts used to transport people into the major centres from remote locations. Government pays for those services by way of a contract. Government does not own pharmacies,

doctors' offices, chiropractic or physio clinics. We do not own optometrists' clinics. We don't own abortion clinics and we don't own eye surgery clinics, yet we use a contract system to help provide services to Albertans. Do these people make a profit? Well, I sure hope so. If not, why would they be here? They provide services to Albertans by being in business. They're here where they contribute to the well-being of all of us. I for one am thankful that they are here. I do not think it is a bad thing if somebody makes some money and pays income tax along the way.

There are many effective examples in this province of public and private and nonprofit organization partnerships that have evolved to serve the needs of Albertans. The complexity of the system makes it really difficult for people not involved on a day-to-day basis in that system to understand what the government owns or doesn't own and that universal access, publicly funded does not necessarily translate into government ownership. Health care technology is going to force the system to continue to evolve and change, and nothing can or will stop that. Pretending that the system today is all provided for by public servants in publicly built facilities will not make it so.

If the College of Physicians and Surgeons had approved the Health Resource Group to do overnight surgery for the regional health authority – and they could have, Mr. Speaker; they could have done so – there would have been nothing in place to prevent it, to question it, or to ensure that it benefited any of the people that live in this province. Bill 11 provides the law, the regulations, and the guidelines to allow not only clinics of today to be examined and monitored to assure the public that their money is well spent, providing much-needed services to them, but also the clinics of tomorrow.

I would like to talk briefly about the word "hospital," because the opposition have had a pretty good time with that word. The reality, however, is just a little bit different. Back in the late '80s and the early '90s many smaller hospitals in Alberta were going through a transition, and it was a change in their name from the word hospital to community health care centre. In fact, even the Alberta Hospital Association changed its name to the Alberta Healthcare Association. I wonder if anybody ever wondered why that happened. There was a time in Alberta, when you were driving the highways of this province, when you might in fact have seen a lot of big, green H signs, indicating that a hospital was so many kilometres away. It was a sign that indicated to the passing public that there was a hospital nearby where you could get the care and attention you would need if faced with an emergency of some type.

Many smaller rural hospitals and even a few of the larger centres had an emergency room with no emergency physician. They had fully equipped operating rooms yet no surgeon, no anesthetist or staff to handle an emergency surgery. The bottom line was that there was a growing concern as to whether or not a facility could be sued for calling itself a hospital when in fact it had no ability to respond to an emergency situation. They had no intensive care unit and, for the most part, no staff trained in trauma, unlike the advanced life support offered by many of our paramedics in this province.

So 10 years ago the shift started away from the term hospital to health care centre, and there was a very good reason for it. In people's minds a hospital was to be able to handle all manner of situations, when in fact many could not. So what's in a name, Mr. Speaker? Well, really quite a lot. When we talk about no private hospitals in Alberta, that is exactly what we mean, and the Liberal leader knows it because she was the minister of health when the shift started away from the word hospital to health care centre. A clinic can and does do surgery. A clinic does not handle trauma, as does a hospital, and while it might be easy to confuse many Albertans, I am confident that despite the rhetoric, truth and common sense will

in the end prevail. After all, this would be the same person who said, while she was running for the leadership of my party, that she would not leave a legacy of debt and deficit to her children. Well, she was wrong then, and she is wrong now.

This bill is none of the things she says it is. It is a straightforward piece of legislation that allows RHAs one more option to look at in their quest to restructure this system to provide services and enhance access. It provides the College of Physicians and Surgeons with the regulations, guidelines in their mandate to accredit facilities to provide services to Albertans. It gives the minister the ability to review contracts to ensure that a net benefit to Albertans is achieved.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to address this Assembly this evening, speaking to Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act. The main reason I ran for the PC nomination in Calgary-West in 1996 and then for the PC Party in the 1997 provincial campaign was because I had the greatest respect for the Premier's leadership in bringing this province's fiscal house in order and also overseeing the development of a strong economy, which is both envied and respected by provincial jurisdictions across Canada and beyond.

8:40

To quote from a recent supportive letter from a Calgary-West constituent: families are responsible for their household bottom line, and governments are expected to play by the same rules and act fiscally responsible by making their ends meet. I am not inclined to look over my shoulder at what-if life situations. Life is ever changing, and survivors look forward with an open-mindedness, learning from experiences.

I personally support this government's present focus to carry out business plans which will improve the quality of life for Albertans today and in the future. These business plans are grounded in Albertans' priorities and will provide a solid framework for a very bright future. They are innovative, achievable, and realistic and reflect the goal of sustainability in the future.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have very high expectations and standards, and I'm just one of those Albertans. We want excellent-quality service and results for what we pay, whether from chefs, hairdressers, accountants, teachers, our children, and our medical services. We want to stay young and healthy forever, and we don't like lineups. We want the benefits of efficiency and timely service. As a government we're willing to pay for it. Alberta is, as a result, tops in Canada in per capita funding, including recent increases in the health care budget.

Our increasingly high-tech, highly researched, and highly utilized public health care system comes with a price tag, and that is increasing at an alarming rate. Presently Alberta's health care system costs approximately 33 percent of our total provincial revenue pie. This is what I don't hesitate to tell seniors, for instance, in my constituency. I also tell them that at the rate we're going, in three to five years it could be 40 percent. They listen carefully to that and accept that information.

In speaking to my constituents of Calgary-West in past years, there's a clear majority that are satisfied with the services offered in the Calgary health services. As always, these people are the silent majority. I have also heard, though, from a small minority who are unhappy with their experiences with the system and want me to believe that all is dark. One of my tasks as MLA, I believe, is to put it in an objective perspective.

After a bit of reflection I've decided to include some of my own

personal comments and experiences, only a few. I realize that actually in the last number of years I have had many personal, family-related incidents with our health care system in Calgary. I would say that most of these events are emotional and quite often have an unhappy ending, and therefore you have unpleasant memories, such as when a wee grandson of mine – his name was Scott – died of SIDS in 1995 or when a dear friend's 11-year-old son died just a year ago, in 1999, after a lengthy illness with a brain tumor. Speaking objectively, the services provided at the time were excellent, caring people looking after sick people and their families. I also remember when I waited not too long ago for two hours in a local hospital in Edmonton, acute care, for only three stitches. All of these experiences were basically positive in terms of the hard-working, dedicated people, but there was very noticeable evidence in my mind to bring about improvements.

Just briefly to comment on a few: physicians and staff could work as a much better team to provide more efficient and better service to the patients; citizens who go to emergency acute care who should be in a community clinic; critical funding dollars could go toward research that can save young lives.

A second major reality is the aging of our population, Mr. Speaker, which is also a worldwide phenomenon. Alberta's population is younger than most Canadian provinces and European countries, for example, so we can learn from their experiences while developing our own made-in-Alberta solutions. Demographics indicate that Alberta's seniors population will double in 15 years. In 30 to 35 years the seniors population will increase from 10 percent of the population as we have it today to approximately 25 percent. Population profile projections also indicate that there are going to be fewer younger taxpayers to support this increasing older population. Also, we know we are living longer, more so than anywhere else in the world. We know that at 65 years of age health care costs incurred by our older population are approximately 44 percent of the total health care budget. I said that's at 65 years of age, and we know this percentage increases with advancing years and frailty.

Mr. Speaker, it becomes clear that we cannot carry on with the same approaches to health care. The status quo is not an option. We have three choices in my mind: either increase the tax base to cover these increasing costs – and Albertans do not want increased taxes – or shift funding from other government-funded programs such as education – and young families, young adults don't want that – or develop innovative approaches that will provide increased efficiencies, cost-effectiveness, and better service to Albertans.

On March 11, 1997, a clear majority of the people of Alberta contracted with this government to manage this province and their tax dollars. The choices this government has made, to my mind, fit its philosophy and those expectations to encourage innovation so that quality government programs and services which Albertans value so much are assured sustainability.

The government's six-point plan for health has evolved from the recommendations of last year's health summit and the public input. This plan, which includes legislation that we now know as the Health Protection Act, is to protect and improve the publicly funded and administered health system in Alberta. There are six initiatives in the government's six-point plan for health which will address and actually are addressing present concerns and expectations and the future demographics.

First, by improving access to quality funded services. This involves, for example, ensuring adequate funding, which is now at an all-time high, as I've said; reducing waiting times for lifesaving surgeries and procedures – as I've said, we don't like to wait – increasing the number of physicians, nurses, and other health

professionals; and increasing access to home care and continuing care.

Second, by improving the management of the health system: for example – and I was referring to that in one of my examples – establishing a health services utilization commission that will enhance public accountability of the health system, supporting improved management and delivery of health services, and also the launching of a health innovation fund project with goals to fund projects that improve patient access and ensure system affordability.

Now, I've only read two of the points in the six-point plan, but this is certainly far extending Bill 11.

Third, by reforming the delivery of primary care, supporting, for example, community-based projects that focus on health professionals working in teams and examining new methods of physician service delivery and funding, whether urban or rural; purchase of new high-tech medical equipment; expansion of telehealth services, probably the most outstanding initiative of its type anywhere; launch of the pharmaceutical information system providing vastly improved, cost-effective drug therapy across Alberta.

Fourth, by increasing emphasis on wellness promotion and disease and accident prevention; for example, launching a new five-year immunization strategy, implementing a new aging in place strategy for seniors or soon-to-be seniors, implementing a new provincial breast cancer screening program and a new provincewide metabolic screening program.

Fifth, by fostering new ideas to improve health care by establishing a special Premier's advisory council on health, which will provide government with advice on health care reform which will protect and ensure our health system.

Six, to protect the publicly funded and administered health system through introduction of legislation, the Health Care Protection Act.

I'm going to read four key principles of the act: that health funding will continue to go directly to publicly funded RHAs who will decide whether each contract with surgical clinics would be a benefit to the public system, also that any contracts would need to demonstrate a net benefit to the public system, that no Albertan would be required to pay for an insured service and surgical clinics would be prohibited from charging patients extra for insured services, and that no person would be allowed to pay to receive faster service.

8:50

Mr. Speaker, this government has spent a lot of time focusing on only one change but a worthy change within the comprehensive six-point plan. A very significant point, I believe, is that this government does have a plan and that the Prime Minister supports that plan, acknowledging that Canada has a health care crisis. Governments owe the public logical, innovative, cost-effective solutions to problems.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to be clear that today's seniors should be reassured as they will experience and are experiencing the positive impact of this government's realization that we need to reform our health care system. Seniors will benefit from increased access to acute care hospital services when they need them. That will evolve as a result of maximum use of present facility space and by more minor surgeries occurring in surgical facilities.

Seniors will also benefit from the development of an increasing number of long-term care facilities and Alzheimer's care centres built through partnership combinations of government, RHAs, private, and not-for-profit foundation funds. They will benefit from the trend encouraged by this government and stated clearly in the long-term care review final report: to age in place in their communities with the assistance of an increased number of better trained home care workers and other community supports.

Seniors will also benefit in that the informal caregivers or family

members will provide better care as a result of training and much-needed respite supports. Seniors will also benefit from the increasing number of community-based health and wellness clinics which are already providing and will provide easier access and information on health and accident and injury prevention.

Speaking of benefits, Alberta's seniors have the best overall income support and benefits programs in Canada. Thousands of seniors from across Canada must recognize Alberta's strengths because they're relocating here.

With regard to the aging population or tomorrow's seniors, Mr. Speaker, if you're going to become a senior in the next 30 years, as most of us in this room I think will be, you will want to be a key participant in Alberta's health care reform. In order to control the skyrocketing costs of health care, I propose that we need to continue to actively pursue implementation of all initiatives in this government's six-point plan for health starting yesterday and with the co-operation of all key stakeholders. That, of course, means passing Bill 11, the sixth point in this plan.

There's much work ahead communicating information on an ongoing basis, developing different systems, setting realistic expectations, and encouraging changes in attitudes and behaviour regarding health and injury prevention. I believe we must move forward with health care reform, and by passing Bill 11, we will help ensure reaching that goal.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Before calling on the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment, might we refer briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I note that seated in the members' gallery is the president of the United Nurses of Alberta, Ms Heather Smith, and I would ask her to stand and receive the recognition of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The Official Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. There are some folks I met earlier who came into the gallery this evening, and I'd like to ask all those people who are here to express their concern and their interest in Bill 11 to please rise and receive the customary welcome from members of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must single out one of the gentlemen up there who is a neighbour of mine, lives in my neighbourhood, and is an individual very, very dedicated to the public health care system. If you'll acknowledge Clarence Collins with the warm applause of the House.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

(continued)

Mr. Havelock moved that pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) the question on second reading of Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be now put.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to begin this evening by thanking the constituents of Lethbridge-West who have taken the time, either through telephone, through the normal mail, or of course through e-mail, to contact me regarding their concern about Bill 11. I'll get back to that in a few moments.

I also want this evening to talk about my experience and my relationship to Tommy Douglas and to the medicare system as it developed in Saskatchewan. That might be particularly poignant given the fact that, as I understand it, there's to be some sort of celebration here this weekend that might involve his daughter and grandson.

I also want to talk about Bill 11 and use the metaphor that I've used before in the sense of a sword and a shield, and then I would like to conclude by talking about some of the stakes that are at play over this particular debate.

Now, in terms of contact with constituents of Lethbridge-West, we have had to date something in the order of 210 contacts. We don't worry so much in Lethbridge-West about whether or not they are particular constituents. I think what has evolved in the city of Lethbridge through the representative of Lethbridge-West and then, of course, my colleague from Lethbridge-East is that people in Lethbridge understand that if they have an issue they wish to deal with and they want to present an opposition viewpoint, then they know they are free to contact the representative from Lethbridge-East. Likewise, if they have a concern and they want to express a concern about something that needs a government perspective and perhaps is even antigovernment, they know they can contact me as the representative for Lethbridge-West. So in that context we have had as of today, I believe, 210 calls. Now, just to place that into some context, that puts us into the midsignificant range.

We have certainly had to deal with issues that struck the fancy of the people I represent much more than Bill 11, but I don't want to in any way diminish the concerns those 210 people have and, in fact, others more informally that would have been expressed to me in just my normal goings-on throughout the constituency. But I think it must be made clear to all the members of this House – especially the colleagues in the government caucus know that Lethbridge-West has been a touchstone for activism and perhaps controversy for at least 20 years, far before I ever had the honour to represent that constituency. My predecessor, John Gogo, had evolved a system where they knew that if there was something they wanted to get off their chest, they could call the Lethbridge-West constituency office, and I'm proud to say that that has been able to continue.

Of the 210 calls, I would say that 200 of them have been opposed to Bill 11. What I have done, then, is try to contact the various individuals from time to time, as my time will permit, to discuss the principles of Bill 11. Now, I want to indicate once again that that level of calls puts this issue in the midsignificance area. This is a significant issue, but where this issue transcends all of the other things I've had to deal with in the seven years I've been representing those particular folks in Lethbridge is that there has never been such a divergence in the perception of the reality of Bill 11. Of course I would want to talk, then, about how some of that might have come about.

9:00

The important thing is that this government had the courage back in November of 1999 to release and distribute the policy that it was contemplating in terms of delivery of health care. This was further followed up by the distribution, then, of Bill 11. One of the things we noticed immediately in Lethbridge-West was that upon receipt of the bill and upon people beginning to read it, our phone calls – they didn't drop off a cliff or anything like that. We were still

receiving a few calls a day, but two things happened. The first thing that happened was that the calls themselves diminished, but I can tell you that the most gratifying aspect, once Bill 11 got out to people's homes and they had a chance to read it, was that the viciousness of the phone calls then dropped almost to zero.

When I talked about the huge divergence between perception and reality, this issue was also characterized by some of the most vicious, emotional calls that I as an MLA have ever had to deal with. The circulation and distribution of Bill 11, I'm thankful to say – and I would thank publicly the Minister of Health and Wellness for doing this – took the viciousness out of the debate. Since that time I've contacted I'm not sure whether it's a hundred of those folks; it's not over 100, but it's certainly more than 70. We are now finally getting into a discussion where emotion doesn't take over, where at least now we can start to try to zero in on what some of the aspects of this bill might be.

So this has been an educational experience, as any of these issues are, for all of the MLAs in this Assembly but certainly for your representative of Lethbridge-West. I truly want to thank, then, all of those people that have contacted me, and to that end I want to thank the people that are here tonight listening to this debate, not only the members that are here in the Assembly in their places but also the people that are here in the galleries. Each and every one of us considers ourself an advocate for a health care system in this province.

MR. SAPERS: You're sending this one out; aren't you?

MR. DUNFORD: Absolutely. I don't know if *Hansard* was able to pick up the interjection. I hope they were. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora says that I'm sending this one out, and actually this is something I've learned from him. I would never have thought at one time to make copious copies of *Hansard* and circulate them to constituents. I certainly am going to consider doing that this evening.

Those of you here in the room tonight that consider yourselves an advocate for the health care system, I want you to know that I consider myself one of you as well. Now, I am a Progressive Conservative. I plead guilty to being a conservative when it comes to the fiscal management of this province, but I am also a progressive when it comes to social policy as it exists in this province. Here's where it comes from, because I have the moral authority to speak about this issue that some of you might not have. That is the fact that my father, honourably discharged from the Canadian air force after the end of the Second World War, moved his family, which at the time included my mom, myself, and my little brother, back to a little town, a little area called Portreeve, Saskatchewan.

Now, some of you might have heard me talk about this previously. Portreeve, Saskatchewan, is not a very significant place in this world, but it had something going for it in 1946. It was simply a matter of geography, but Portreeve happened to be in the Swift Current health region. Now, I have friends in Cardston who argue that Tommy Douglas was the first one to bring forward a co-operative style of health care system. Dr. Brigham Card, who has contacted many of you, makes an extremely good case. This evening I want to focus on what Tommy Douglas was trying to do in Saskatchewan, because many of you may not have had that firsthand experience like my family happened to have.

So July 1 of 1946 I happened to be living there.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're old.

MR. DUNFORD: Besides being old, as has been pointed out, I've

probably lived in the medicare system longer than anybody in this room this evening. I believe that then gives me an opportunity to talk about my experiences, because after all, it's our experiences that form the character and of course the philosophies that we live by for the rest of our lives.

In that little town a little girl is born with a hole in her heart, and the family is not a rich family. In fact, in 1952 or '53, whenever this would have happened – and I can be corrected on those dates – our family had the general store. We actually were the social services of that little town in that particular way. We knew the families that we had to support, and this little girl was born to one of those families.

In the Swift Current health region this little girl born with a hole in her heart had at the time a life expectancy of six years. She was sent to Rochester, New York, to the Mayo Clinic, a private, for-profit hospital, to have her little heart repaired. She comes back to us, and she is not entirely healed. As she gets older, I believe at the age of three or four, she is sent back to Rochester, New York, to the Mayo Clinic, a private, for-profit hospital, and she has her little heart healed. The point I want to make as clearly as I possibly can is that from day one Tommy Douglas and the government of Saskatchewan, in looking at this pilot project in the Swift Current health region, contemplated the integration of the private and the public systems, because we the taxpayers of Saskatchewan at that time paid the full shot for that little girl to go to Rochester, New York. And that wasn't day surgery, my friends; that was major heart surgery. That little girl today is a grandmother, as I am a grandfather.

So on Sunday, when you're out there and you're having your rally and Tommy Douglas's daughter is talking to you about what her dad did, it was a great thing that he did. There's no way that I'm going to stand in this House or anywhere and bring down Tommy Douglas and what he did. I believe in a publicly administered, publicly funded health system. It's because of our verbiage in Bill 11 and what we're trying to do with Bill 11 that I can stand here as a Progressive Conservative and I can support this bill, and I can do it with a clear mind and an open heart.

9:10

Bill 11, the sword and the shield. Previous speakers on the government side have talked about the need to fill the legislative gap. So the shield part, then, of Bill 11 is to provide the protection for Albertans and for the Alberta system to prevent a parallel private, for-profit system from being developed in this province. I believe that to reasonable people with reasonably open minds, that is clearly understandable. I think they understand the metaphor of the shield.

The metaphor of the sword I think is easily understandable as well. Other speakers tonight have talked – so I don't feel like I have to get into it – about the role the private clinics play already in this particular province. So what is the sword part, then, of Bill 11? It would extend the opportunity for the private sector inside a publicly administered, publicly funded health care system to go to the overnight stays that would be required with minor surgeries, which would be determined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, in facilities that would be accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. A significant step.

And the logic? I think the logic is apparent to everyone in this House this evening. If on the waiting list for the Lethbridge regional hospital or for any other public hospital in this province a knee surgery or a hernia repair is then off-loaded, contracted out to a private facility, there now is room for the patient who is waiting for hip replacement to move up on the list. It will work that way. The situation is that we have to take a look at this, and we have to find ways to bring down the waiting lists. While I've talked about the 210 phone calls that have been made about Bill 11, Mr. Speaker, I

need to inform you and need to inform members here in the Assembly tonight that I receive more calls, many calls from families worried about where they are on their wait lists, asking me what I can do to get their loved one provided with the medical service that they need.

I want to talk about why this debate is as extensive as it is. There are huge stakes here. The president of UNA has been introduced to us, and of course Heather and I know each other anyway. In terms of the stakes that UNA and the other public unions might be faced with, I want to state it as matter of factly as I possibly can: we are discussing here tonight more money going into the health system. Bill 11 is going to determine in some small way where the money is going to go. The public service health unions have a virtual monopoly on all of the labour that's inside that area. So it is not surprising to me – in fact, I think she and others are doing what is morally, ethically, and legally their responsibility. When there is a possibility that increases in the labour force might end up in a non-union environment, I think they have a responsibility to take a look at that. The opposition parties – we clearly know what that is.

Later tonight the Minister of Health and Wellness is going to be tabling some amendments. I want to thank him for his timing, because this is going to allow me to go back to my constituency this weekend and talk about how we have listened to the concerns.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:16 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Jacques	O'Neill
Calahasen	Jonson	Paszkowski
Cardinal	Klapstein	Renner
Clegg	Kryczka	Smith
Coutts	Laing	Stevens
Ducharme	Magnus	Strang
Dunford	Mar	Tannas
Evans	Marz	Taylor
Fischer	McFarland	Thurber
Haley	Melchin	Trynchy
Havelock	Nelson	Yankowsky
Hlady		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	MacBeth	Sapers
Bonner	MacDonald	Sloan
Carlson	Massey	Soetaert
Dickson	Nicol	White
Gibbons	Olsen	Wickman
Leibovici	Pannu	

Totals:	For – 34	Against – 17
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[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 47(2) and *Beauchesne* 521(2) I must now put the question on the original question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:29 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Jacques	O'Neill
Calahasen	Jonson	Paszkowski
Cardinal	Klapstein	Renner
Clegg	Kryczka	Smith
Coutts	Laing	Stevens
Ducharme	Magnus	Strang
Dunford	Mar	Tannas
Evans	Marz	Taylor
Fischer	McFarland	Thurber
Haley	Melchin	Trynchy
Havelock	Nelson	Yankowsky
Hlady		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	MacBeth	Sapers
Bonner	MacDonald	Sloan
Carlson	Massey	Soetaert
Dickson	Nicol	White
Gibbons	Olsen	Wickman
Leibovici	Pannu	

Totals:	For - 34	Against - 17
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[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

9:40

THE CLERK: Committee of the Whole.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, sorry. I know the chair cannot be in Committee of the Whole, but young Howard Yeung has his last evening with us tonight. He's going to do university examinations shortly, and then he'll be undertaking summer work with one of the hon. members as a STEP student. He'll come back later to get acknowledgment, but would you tonight wish him bon voyage.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order. For the benefit of those in the gallery, this is the informal session of the Legislature. It's called committee. As you can see, hon. members are able to take off their jackets. They're allowed to have juice, coffee, or tea, and they're allowed also to be in places other than their own seats. Now, they're not allowed to talk unless they're at their own place, and the same rules apply as in the Legislature in the sense that we only have one person standing and talking at a time. We try and practise that.

Just so that you understand, according to one of the great books that we use, when a committee is examining a bill,

the function of a committee on a bill is to go through the text of the bill clause by clause and, if necessary, word by word, with a view to

making such amendments in it as may seem likely to render it more generally acceptable.

So the principle has been established by second reading. Now the detail is what we're about.

To begin this evening, I want to know whether there are any questions, comments, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill, and the first man to be called is the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. JONSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise this evening to move a package of significant government amendments to Bill 11, which, as I've indicated, I wish to advise that I would move be voted on as a package. These amendments represent a very careful and thorough assessment of responses to the bill, and they represent an overall, comprehensive response to the issues and opportunities that were posed in the response to Bill 11.

These are amendments, Mr. Chairman, that will give us an improved piece of legislation and better protection for Alberta's publicly funded health system. You know, our government has said frequently since the very beginning of the process of developing Bill 11 that we wanted to hear from Albertans, that we wanted the bill to reflect the key priorities of our citizens. We should recall at this stage that the very development and introduction of this legislation was in response to the priorities and needs of Albertans.

It was the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta which first brought forward the need for legislation giving the government authority to prohibit, regulate, or control private health facilities. Mr. Chairman, a gap in legislative authority was further acknowledged by the federal Minister of Health and, indeed, by opposition members across the way. It was reinforced by Albertans, who wanted this government to fill the legislative gap and to have the ability to regulate surgical facilities in this province.

Our government then took the step of releasing some five months ago our policy statement on the delivery of surgical services. That policy statement, which identified the overall direction we planned to take with our legislation, was distributed widely across the province, and we actively solicited the views of Albertans on that proposed direction.

Mr. Chairman, we then took that extensive input received and used it in developing the formal legislation, Bill 11, which was introduced in this Legislature on March 2. But we were not yet done consulting with Albertans on this very important piece of legislation. We took the important, unprecedented step of mailing a copy of Bill 11 to each and every home in Alberta so that Albertans could read for themselves the content of the bill and give us their further comments. As we waited and assessed – and we waited a full month before proceeding with second reading debate so that Albertans would have ample time to provide their input – we used this time to meet further with many groups across Alberta, groups including the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Alberta Medical Association, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses. Throughout this long and thorough process we repeatedly stated – repeatedly stated – our willingness to bring forward any amendments that would clearly strengthen our legislation.

Mr. Chairman, today I am very pleased to bring forward the amendments that have resulted from this consultation process. They are, I am confident, amendments that respond to the concerns that we have heard with respect to Bill 11, and they are amendments that will give us stronger health protection legislation.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, in respect to the issue of queue-jumping, there will be no queue-jumping. One of the most important amendments brought forward will strengthen the prohibitions against

people being able to pay to jump ahead in the line for insured services. The amendment will make it illegal under the legislation not only for a person to pay for faster service or receive a payment to give faster service, but as well it will prohibit giving faster access to an insured service through the purchase of an enhanced product or service or even through the purchase of an uninsured service. There will be no queue-jumping allowed by this legislation, Mr. Chairman. It will be illegal. There will be no loopholes and no exceptions.

9:50

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, with respect to charges for enhanced services, we are introducing an amendment that will prohibit a public hospital, a surgical facility providing insured services under contract to a health authority, or a physician from charging more than the product costs and a reasonable allowance for administration for the sale of enhanced medical goods or services in connection with the provision of an insured service. This will eliminate any and all concerns with respect to patients being pressured to purchase such services and remove any reason for such pressure to be applied.

Thirdly, Mr. Chairman, we have the issue of use of existing space in public hospitals. We are also bringing forward an amendment that will make it very clear, that puts into law the requirement for a health authority to ensure the efficient and effective use of existing capacity in their own hospitals before considering a contract with a surgical service. We will make certain that existing operating rooms, existing hospital wings are assessed in terms of their best possible use before we approve contracts with surgical facility providers.

Fourthly, Mr. Chairman, we have the matter of withdrawal of designation. I am introducing an amendment that puts into law a clear process to be used by the minister in withdrawing the designation of a surgical facility. This will ensure that should the circumstances that existed when a surgical facility was designated substantially change, then there will be a visible and transparent process followed by the minister to consider and implement any necessary withdrawal of designation.

Further, Mr. Chairman, we will deal with the clarification and strengthening of the privative clause, which has been an area of some concern. We'll be amending section 23, the so-called privative clause. While this type of clause is frequently used in legislation here in Alberta and across Canada, there was some concern that this clause precluded any judicial review of the minister's decisions. This amendment with respect to the privative clause will make it very clear that while the minister's decision to approve or not approve a contract is final and conclusive, that decision is still subject to judicial review if the minister does not follow the requirements of the legislation or the authorities provided to him in the legislation or if the minister makes a decision that is totally unreasonable given the availability of evidence. The minister must make reasonable decisions. That is the bottom line.

Further, we are proposing changes and strengthening with respect to the conflict of interest provisions in Bill 11. Another important amendment to this bill, along with amendments to the Regional Health Authorities Act and the Cancer Programs Act, will address the concern that some potential exists for conflict of interest situations in the contracting process. These amendments, Mr. Chairman, will ensure that health authorities have in place clear conflict of interest bylaws for board members, agents, and senior officers and employees. They will also ensure that health authorities monitor physicians' practice to ensure that the College of Physicians and Surgeons' bylaws on conflict of interest and on ethics are not violated by physicians. For the record, I would like to table for the Assembly five copies of the appropriate bylaws of the college

dealing with conflict of interest and the background to those bylaws, and I will do so in a moment.

Mr. Chairman, there are further amendments. With respect to physician payment, I am proposing amendments that will clarify that health authorities are only contracting and paying for facility services and that the payment of physicians will continue to be done through the Alberta health care insurance plan in the same way as for surgery in public hospitals.

Further, amendments with respect to the role of the college and the Dental Association. There are amendments that will clarify that it is the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta that will determine what surgical procedures can be safely performed in a physician's office. They will also clarify that major dental surgeries will only be done in public hospitals and that the Alberta Dental Association will be consulted in defining those major dental surgeries.

Each of the amendments reflects suggestions and concerns that were raised by Albertans or by organizations such as the Alberta Medical Association, the Chambers of Commerce, the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, and others. Each of the amendments reflects our best effort to listen to those concerns and to take action.

Mr. Chairman, some might claim that our amendments do not reflect every concern and comment that we heard, and that is true, because we accepted recommendations that would strengthen the bill, not weaken the protection it provides to the publicly funded system. We accepted recommendations that would help enhance the public system and give it greater flexibility in finding better ways to deliver services, not those that would restrict its ability to try and reduce waiting lists or improve access or improve in providing increased efficiency.

Mr. Chairman, we accepted recommendations that help meet the need to give the government a better ability to govern and regulate surgical facilities, not those that tried to close down a very valuable tool being available to and possibly being used by our publicly funded system. Bill 11 in its amended form will give very strong protection to our publicly funded health system, very strong protection to Albertans, and one more option for health authorities to use in building a better health system for the future. I would encourage each and every member to support these very important amendments. Each of the amendments reflects suggestions and concerns that were raised by Albertans or by organizations such as the Alberta Medical Association, the Chambers of Commerce, and many others across the province as well as many, many, many individuals.

That is, Mr. Chairman, my presentation of amendments. I believe that these amendments are comprehensive, that they are related, and they will further improve what is, I think, a very much needed and sound piece of legislation for this province.

THE CHAIRMAN: I just wanted to get some understanding of how it is we're going to approach this. They've been moved as one. Is it the agreement of the Assembly that you go through them as a whole or clause by clause, section by section?

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to address that, if I might.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before we commence our detailed review of the amendments, there is a process question we must deal with. All members, at least opposition members, have just been presented moments ago for the very first time with a

proposal to entertain 14 separate amendments changing 14 different elements in the bill. In fact, the package is six pages long. The opposition has had no opportunity to review this before.

Here's my initial observation. When I look at it, I can see that we're dealing with provision of surgical services. There's a purported attempt to deal with conflicts of interest. We're dealing with 14 disparate elements. It seems to me that if I look at the authorities in *Erskine May* and the provision dealing with amendments, pages 343 through to 349, and if I look at *Beauchesne* in terms of the provision dealing with amendments, articles 567 through 579, what we find is the importance of amendments isolating issues to allow an informed debate of specific considerations.

Mr. Chairman, where am I going with this? I think, to be fair to all members, that rather than deal with this in an omnibus form, each one of these should be dealt with in turn so that it receives that kind of scrutiny. How could I possibly support all 14 changes? Maybe there are some that are positive, remedial that I'd like to support. Why would any member be put in a position where it's all or nothing? That's preposterous. It may be that if we'd seen some advance notice of these, if we'd had an opportunity to review them before, we might have a degree of comfort in saying: sure; we'll deal with the package. [interjections] Well, some of my colleagues think not. I'm just saying hypothetically, colleagues.

10:00

The point is this, Mr. Chairman. Why would any member in the Assembly be put in that position? It might be different if they were all speaking to the same issue, but they are truly 14 disparate elements. This is sort of an omnibus amendment set. It may be administratively nice and neat to put it forward as a package, but surely when it comes to consideration, debate, and then votes, why wouldn't we deal with each one sequentially?

So my proposal, Mr. Chairman, is that we would sever A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N so that we treat those amendments separately. That's the proposal I want to make. There may be others who have some observation on the process.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on how we're going to deal with this package.

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It seems to me that we have some precedent to help guide us in the decision about how to deal with these rather lengthy amendments on Bill 11 that have been proposed by the government. We have special provisions in our Standing Orders, for example, when it comes to dealing with so-called omnibus bills, bills that would be put forward by the government that would amend or alter more than one statute. By extension I think that we can take a look at such a lengthy list of amendments and treat it much the same way. So perhaps we need to have some special procedure or rule for dealing with such an exhaustive list of government amendments. Bill 11 itself is barely 20 pages long, and we have over six pages of amendments. Because of course these amendments deal with the entire breadth and width of Bill 11, it's very difficult to deal with them in one reasonable debate.

Furthermore, Mr. Chairman, I will draw your attention to *Beauchesne*, pages 491 and 492, particularly when it deals with the sections on inadmissible amendments, and I will make specific reference to paragraph 6 on page 492, where it goes on to talk about an amendment may not be moved to insert words at the beginning of a clause with a view to bringing forward an alternative scheme to that contained in the clause,

et cetera. I look at proposed amendment H to section 23, which adds a new wrinkle to the government's interpretation of what a privative clause may be. I'm just wondering whether or not we may apply some of the direction given us in *Beauchesne*.

I could make a similar argument for the wording changes that are proposed in amendment I, which deals with the original section 25(1), in paragraph (c), where there is a fairly substantial change that may very well alter the meaning in a substantive way of the subclause. The original wording of the bill is to include "services and non-medical goods and services." It is now separating them. It's now making it selective. It can either be a medical good or a medical service. It's a very substantial change, I think, as all members of this Legislature will appreciate, that the words "and" and "or" make a world of difference.

So because the form of some of these proposed amendments is questionable at best and because it deals in such a comprehensive way throughout the four corners of the bill and because it is a debate of such public importance, I would support the submission of my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo that we deal with each of these as a separate vote.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also want to speak to the process that I would hope the Assembly would use dealing with the proposed amendments. I trust that each of the amendments is substantive and serious. Otherwise, the minister wouldn't bring them forward. If that assumption is true, is valid, that the minister has given very serious thought to suggestions that were received and therefore each amendment is serious and substantive, then I would hope that the Assembly would adopt a procedure which allows each of the amendments to be debated and scrutinized separately in its own right. Six pages of substantive and serious amendments all bunched together cannot be voted on seriously by this Assembly to the satisfaction of Albertans.

Therefore, I would suggest, in order to make sure that the debate here is transparent and satisfies the concerns of Albertans and our constituents, including my constituents, that each amendment be debated and voted on separately.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members of the committee, if we look at the traditions of the committee, we are only occasionally faced with a large collection of them, and as it has been the case in the past, if there is not an agreement between the sides of the House, you go through it then section by section. If you are able to make arrangements that you put H and I together later on by agreement, then so be it. But we are going to proceed, then, as is suggested in *Beauchesne* and as tradition normally has it. We will go through this amendment, which is called A1, section by section – in other words, section A, section B of the amendment – and vote on them as such.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Excuse me, Mr. Chairman. I believe that the hon. health minister wanted the package voted on as one. Are you informing this House that based on *Beauchesne*, that will not be the case, that simply we will vote on this section by section? I understood the way that the rules worked is that in Committee of the Whole the committee determines how they wish to proceed. All right. So the minister has indicated that he wants it voted on as one amendment, and that's a decision for this Legislature in committee to make regardless of *Beauchesne*. Am I understanding correctly the way it works?

THE CHAIRMAN: How you go through a group is not a matter of whether one side of the issue has more members than the other side. The issue has generally been, certainly in my seven years of experience, that if there is a group of amendments that come through, even if they are requested – they can be moved as one, as was done this evening, but if we don't have consensus on both sides of the committee, then we'll have to go for it as instructed in *Beauchesne*, section by section.

MR. HAVELOCK: Excuse me, Mr. Chairman. My understanding – and I did have a brief discussion with the Speaker earlier – is that it is up to the committee to determine how they wish to proceed with respect to the vote. I am not challenging the chair, although it may sound like it to members of the opposition, but my understanding is that if the committee wishes to vote on this as one amendment despite the fact that it contains a number of different parts – now I see the Clerk shaking his head. Perhaps we could have some clarification from the Speaker on this, because that certainly wasn't my understanding.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, your understanding is your understanding. All I'm just trying to say is that in committee we have been faced with this on occasion before, and always in my experience and that of others it has been that we have a consensus. It's not been a vote. I don't ever recall – and I have others that would substantiate – that we had a call for a vote on whether we would pass something in a block or in part. If the three sides are in agreement with that, fine and dandy, but if they're not, then we would go through it clause by clause.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: I appreciate your patience, Mr. Chairman. I guess the problem I have with that is that you could have a situation where only one member in the committee doesn't wish to proceed that way, and therefore the determination by what could be conceivably 82 members would be overruled by one member. I don't believe it's a reasonable interpretation of the way this committee is to proceed. [interjections] Excuse me, you can have your chance later, Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

I wouldn't suggest that the other side be commenting on this particular debate in light of what happened two nights ago with the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. [interjection] Well, to refresh your memory, it was when he stormed out of the House and showed complete and total disrespect for the Speaker.

In any event, Mr. Chairman, could you please point out for me where in *Beauchesne* that is mentioned? Also, I would like to ask you if you would consider taking about a five-minute recess right now just so that I could discuss this matter with you a little bit and perhaps you can further clarify it for me.

10:10

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. A couple of observations I wanted to make. Because we're in committee stage, there's nothing to prevent the Deputy Government House Leader from stepping outside and caucusing and meeting with whomever he wishes. There's no reason why we have to adjourn this committee so that that member can find out what the past practices are.

I'd take this position, and I'm open to the comments of others. It seems to me that if one looks at the Standing Orders, they're very clear that we proceed in accordance with, number one, the Standing Orders and, secondly, with "the usages and precedents of the Assembly and on parliamentary tradition."

As I understand it, Mr. Chairman, what you've identified is that

the default process when amendments come forward is that they be dealt with severally – that has also been my experience in my eight years in this Assembly – and only in the event that there would be unanimity in terms of dealing with it in another fashion. But the default process under Standing Order 2 and Standing Order 1, the cumulative effect of those is that we must deal with amendments severally. There were different times when I've been in this Assembly and I've agreed or my caucus has agreed to do some organization and some aggregation and some collecting, but we've always understood that the default process was that we would have to deal with them individually if they couldn't be dealt with in some different fashion.

So I would ask the Deputy Government House Leader to respect the traditions of this Assembly, to respect the past practices. Whether he may want to undertake a different fashion tonight, we've had that opportunity and we're signaling. This is not a case of one member being contrary minded. I think I speak for the Official Opposition when we indicate we feel very strongly. We want the opportunity that the customs and precedents of this Assembly permit us, which is to deal with each one sequentially, to carefully review each amendment, to debate it vigorously, and then to vote on each amendment.

To do otherwise, Mr. Chairman, would create this particular problem. The most fundamental right that every member in this Assembly has is the freedom to speak, the freedom to participate in debate. To lump all of these together, in effect, what you do is erode that ability of members to speak in favour of one amendment and contrary to another one. You put us in the proverbial cattle chute, and that would be completely inconsistent with the basic tenets of all of the authorities that talk about the ability of members to speak to those ones individually. So that's the technical argument.

The second argument would be what I might call the public policy one. Why would this government representative suggest that people's rights should be further curtailed? We saw a form of closure invoked but two nights ago. It was a form of closure. The authorities say it. We saw the government eliminate the opportunity to introduce further amendments. [interjection] Look at the authorities, minister of innovation. It makes it very clear that to introduce a motion that the question be now put is a form of closure because you can't move any further amendments. That's the reality of it. Talk to your Deputy Government House Leader. He'll tell you that.

So it seems to me that the signals that Albertans are getting and certainly members of this Assembly are getting is that the government is hell bent on jamming these changes through and doing whatever they can to minimize the full and complete public scrutiny that Albertans are demanding, whether they're in Lethbridge-West or Calgary-Buffalo or Edmonton-Riverview or Edmonton-Centre. Those people want us to deal with these individually. They want us to scrutinize each one.

Why would the Deputy Government House Leader try and move this thing along just because it suits the government's timetable? [interjection] Well, I was prepared to maintain my seat until the Deputy Government House Leader kept on getting up to try and assert a position which is at variance with the authorities.

Mr. Chairman, those are the points I wanted to make with respect to the comments we just heard from the Deputy Government House Leader. Thank you.

MR. HAVELOCK: Pursuant to 13(2), Mr. Chairman, if you could just once again, for me, please explain how you've arrived at the decision that you have.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll reiterate some of the things and then give you the citations. Tradition and practice in this Assembly when we're in committee has been as I've described it. If there is not consensus or agreement between the parties, then we will go clause by clause. If you want to look at that, then Standing Order 1 is what goes there.

If you wish to appeal to the Speaker, just remember that the title that I hold is Chairman of Committees, and we'll go by past practice. You can look at *Beauchesne* 690 and 691, but the practice in this Assembly, which is Standing Order 1, has been to do it that way.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. I appreciate that. The practice also in this Assembly is that the Assembly sets the rules by which it will govern itself. Nevertheless, Mr. Chairman, at this stage I will accept your ruling, certainly. However, I may need to seek further clarification from you later on.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. The two sides have either accepted what is established practice and the other side have requested that we go through it section by section.

THE CHAIRMAN: The first section is section A.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for that clarification.

I've got a couple of questions while we're dealing with amendment A. Once again I just received my copy moments ago, so I'm slowly working my way through, and I'd ask for the patience of members while I try to understand exactly what we have in front of us. It looks to me like the primary change in amendment A1 is to deal with dentists. We have a provision that provides sort of a parallel obligation for dental surgeons, as they used to be called, or dentists now. I'm wondering if we can receive some information from the Minister of Health and Wellness. What I'd like to know is some sense of what volume of cases we're dealing with in Alberta hospitals. For example, in the current year how many insured surgical services are done in this province by dental surgeons, by dentists?

There must have been a reason why dentists weren't initially dealt with. We know the government has been working on this bill since Bill 37 first came in – and when would that have been? – in about March of 1998. There are some pretty darn bright people in that Department of Health and Wellness. Last time I looked, we had about 700 employees. One would've expected that they wouldn't have missed something in the first go-round. So, Mr. Chairman, I'm looking for some clarification.

I know that other members may have other comments to make with respect to this amendment A1, but I'm hoping we could get some explanation of how many procedures would be done.

MRS. NELSON: You don't want to see this?

MR. DICKSON: The Minister of Government Services is asking me a question, and that would be excellent if the minister has maybe got an answer for me. I'd be very interested in having the Minister of Government Services . . . [interjection] Perhaps I'll sit down for a moment. I'm not sure I quite take her signal, but she's giving me some advice around this question I've raised. So I'm going to sit down for a moment and invite her to say it on the record, Mr. Chairman.

10:20

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much. I appreciate that. Mr. Chairman, the proposed amendment causes some confusion in my mind. I did listen carefully to the Minister of Health and Wellness when he was introducing his amendments, and it's not clear to me that this difference addresses the question that many people had regarding the lack of definition in the original section.

Now, if you take a look at Bill 11 as it was originally tabled, what section 2 tells us is that "no person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta." Now it's saying that "no physician shall provide a surgical service . . . and no dentist . . .", et cetera, et cetera. The original section dealt with the definition of person, that included corporations. The new section actually may cause me more concern than the original section, because what it's saying now is that "no physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta" except in one of these approved facilities. The government is still calling them approved surgical facilities. The rest of the world, of course, still knows them as private hospitals.

It makes me think that somehow the government is trying to sneak something by in terms of the ownership of these so-called approved surgical facilities. The reason why is because this subclause (2) goes on to talk about bylaws made under the Medical Profession Act, and it's the Medical Profession Act, as I understand it right now, that prohibits anybody but a physician from owning or benefiting directly from the practice of medicine, so either owning a business that deals with the practice of medicine or directly benefiting. Now, the absence of the reference, as obscure as it was, to a corporate provision of services disturbs me.

Finally, my question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness, and I do hope he'll clarify this, because it's really quite important. When I anticipated an amendment to this section, I was looking for some clarification on the definition of minor and major surgery, because it seems to me that so much of the bill depends on what is a major surgical service as described under bylaws. Of course, when you look at the bylaws under the Medical Profession Act, the bylaws that can be established by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, right now they are silent on the distinction between major and minor surgery.

A couple of years ago, when the college visited this, they said that this was asking them to get involved in political decision-making, and they asked the government to come back and provide some legislative guidance. This is sort of a reverse shot now, saying: well, you still have to do it under bylaws. If you read the bill, you'd think that the bylaws were there, but they're not. Now when you look at the amendment, you don't take the argument any further. So you've taken out the whole distinction of major and minor.

In the first sentence of the clause you say that "no physician shall provide a surgical service," but then you go on to sort of confuse it in the second clause. If you were going to leave out the distinction between major and minor, why didn't you just leave it out entirely? If you were going to keep the bill sort of dependent on that distinction between major and minor surgical services, why didn't you clarify it instead of basing it on a college bylaw which doesn't yet exist?

What you'd be asking the people of Alberta to do, of course, is to just take an act of faith that there will be bylaws, that they will be to their liking, and that somehow there will ultimately be public accountability for that distinction that's made between major and minor surgery. The last time I checked, the men and women who sit on the board of the College of Physicians and Surgeons aren't accountable to anyone but themselves. They certainly don't run for

public office. The college is a self-governing body, and they do an outstanding job, but what we're doing here is really imposing a public duty onto this nonpublic body.

So, Mr. Minister, could you briefly address my concerns, first of all about the reference to corporate ownership or the change in definition, anyway, between the original bill talking about "no person" and now narrowing it to "no physician" or "no dentist"? Could you also help me with this conundrum about the distinction between major and minor services and also the absence of current bylaws under the Medical Profession Act, which makes it impossible for anybody to come to a reasonable independent conclusion about whether or not the public good will be served by this section of the bill?

Mr. Minister, I'll sit down, because I appreciate the fact that you've been paying attention, and I would appreciate an answer.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, with respect to the questions raised by the previous speaker, I think there are two specific points to be made. First of all with respect to the questions surrounding dentistry, quite frankly we did not make the connection in the original drafting of the legislation to the fact that dentists would probably – and they did – take issue with the College of Physicians and Surgeons making the rules respecting the type of surgery that could be provided in what settings as far as dentists are concerned. As you know now, they do have some dental surgery which takes place within their offices according to their overall standards, and there is other surgery that is provided for in hospitals. But they are a separate profession, and it was pointed out to us that they wanted to be designated as such under these rules.

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, the member across the way might remember, I think, a very important sequence of events, and it's background is what we've said many times, and that is that in this province at this point in time we do not have the needed legislation to provide for the protection of the public health care system. I think this is well illustrated by some of the background to section 8. The college does see its role as being the most appropriate body to provide rules, policies, directions in terms of what type of surgical procedure should be provided in what setting and what the period of time required to recover might be.

Rather than talk about it generally, I'd just like to refer to an actual circumstance which occurred, and that is that a firm in Calgary – yes, HRG – applied to the College of Physicians and Surgeons for a designation according to the role that the college fills, and that is doing an evaluation, setting out rules in terms of a facility's, an entity's ability to provide certain types of medical services, in this case surgeries. So the college is quite capable – and we are depending upon them in the legislation to provide this service – to decide upon the nature and the listing of major and minor surgical procedures, and of course they are in the best position to judge this as medicine changes, as technology changes, and it is not a new role for them.

The point here is that we want to make it clear that we are depending upon the professionals to provide that judgment and that categorization. We also, of course, have in the legislation the requirement that even when the college gives that particular designation, there is a whole set of other rules and requirements that the surgical entity or surgical proponents must meet for protection with respect to enhancements being sold under undue pressure upon the patients, et cetera, et cetera.

10:30

So point number one is that, yes, the matter of the dentist was something that had to be picked up and covered, we felt, in the

legislation. It was not given its proper priority and picked up in the original drafting. Secondly, with respect to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, this is a role that they have been willing to assume in the past. In the judgment of government they are the most qualified group of people or entity to make this kind of evaluation. They do it on an ongoing basis in any case, and we should recognize it in the legislation and use them for the purposes of this act.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, Mr. Minister. You didn't address the issue that I raised regarding the removal of the words "no person shall" and inserting instead the words "no physician shall" and "no dentist shall." My question isn't whether dentists would or wouldn't be upset by being governed somehow by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. My question is that the legal definition of "person" includes corporate structures, and you've removed that notion of corporations being prohibited from doing certain things by changing the words. You didn't explain that, and that's a substantial change. I think we need some clarification.

The other notion I will raise with you, Mr. Minister, I do with some hesitation, because I in no way am suggesting that the College of Physicians and Surgeons does not discharge its responsibilities with professionalism and honour, but I will make this observation. The membership of the College of Physicians and Surgeons changes according to a schedule of their choosing. Most of the members of the College of Physicians and Surgeons are of course themselves physicians. Almost all of them are in active practice, if not in fact all of them. Some of them may be called upon to make decisions for their bylaws which will make a distinction between so-called minor and major surgeries that will directly affect their medical practices. Perhaps some of them may be owners or in partnership with those who would operate some of these private clinics.

In any case, the definition of minor and major will change, not just according to breakthroughs in medical technique and technology but also based on the composition of the members of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. This means that a regional health authority may be able to enter into a contract with a private hospital or an approved surgical facility at one point in time based on a ruling by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and then there may be a change in the membership and there may be a change in the view of the College of Physicians and Surgeons which may alter the definition or the understanding of that surgical procedure.

Then where are we? We may be dealing with a regional health authority that has perhaps entered into a long-term contract with a private clinic to do a certain kind of surgery that would now be considered contrary to the bylaws of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. On the other hand, we may find that the college would change its position and allow something that a previous college board had disallowed, which would then give a green light for a health authority to begin to contract.

So, through the chair to the minister, if you would please comment on the change in the wording regarding corporate ownership, and if you would acknowledge where in the bill this potential for change is in terms of the definition, where the Alberta public interest is going to be fully protected, and where accountability can be fully brought back to the government.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. JONSON: I will, Mr. Chairman, just respond briefly. First of all, really, with respect to the member across the way, I think he fully knows this, and that is that we actually have in this province

some of the best and most progressive and complete legislation for professions of any province in Canada. He talks about the accountability of the professions. Well, first of all, they have rather comprehensive responsibilities as a profession if they're going to function as a profession in this province, a very important part of which is that they must accept on their board members of the public as appointees. One of the purposes of that is to make sure there is another group of people represented on that board who are not solely physicians. There are a number of other requirements of professions in the way that they function which are designed to protect the public interest.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, the very essence, the very basis of designating any occupation as a profession is that they get that designation because of their devotion and having a structure which is designed to protect the public interest. Otherwise, they could be an association or they could be a guild or have some other organizational designation. That title of profession has a lot of meaning and a lot of responsibility attached to it.

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, with respect to what I think is a question about what happens if the members of the professional council change, well, nobody lives forever; no one stays on a board forever. It is going to change, but as I said, with the professional legislation such as it is, designed to be there to protect the public interest, and with professions for the most part I think wanting to make sure they have very responsible people serving on the board or council of their profession, this is certainly a protection. At least it is certainly – and I don't think it can be argued – a structure which brings expertise to bear on such things as what can be done in one period of time or in one particular location with respect to surgeries versus another. I don't know who else you would better consult in terms of getting advice and direction on this. And because this legislation is designed to use the best options and decision-making available, this is the way we propose it.

MRS. SLOAN: I think, to begin, there's a bit of an allure and anticipation that exists surrounding these amendments. I would have to say on the record that I believe I've only had one direct call and probably less than five pieces of correspondence that have actually supported this bill in any form. The rest of my constituents that have corresponded or spoken to me about this bill do not have sufficient confidence, Mr. Chairman, that the bill is necessary. So I find this evening that entering into discussion on amendments to this bill is somehow engaging in this allure that if we amend it, it will be satisfactory. In fact, the majority of constituents who have spoken to me and expressed their concerns about the bill do not want Bill 11 in any form, amended or not.

10:40

We are debating section A, which has to do with a section that falls under the part of the bill which is designated as protecting the publicly funded health care system, part 1. There have been a number of concerns, but just let me say generally a few comments with respect this section first.

There have been a number of concerns expressed about the inability of this bill to protect the publicly funded system. I do not see within the amendments proposed in this section that there are really sufficient changes to offer any greater degree of protection than what was in the original bill.

What even I, as someone who has over 20 years' experience in the system, find myself deliberating about, Mr. Chairman, is the complexity of terms. As I read these terms, I'm thinking: all right; we have surgical services and insured surgical services. We have major surgical services. We have uninsured services and nonmedical services. We have a differentiation between surgical

service being offered by a physician and an insured surgical service offered by a dentist. Despite all my experience, I find myself somewhat perplexed to differentiate these.

As I look through the amendments, the definitions – they were not strong in the original bill. There are no elaborations to the definitions accompanying these amendments this evening. How is the public to know? Where this really takes us in principle is down the road of defining insured and noninsured services, defining public and private services, defining basic and enhanced services. This is the road that this bill embarks us upon. We will come to a point shortly after the proclamation of this bill where the government then embarks on establishing that these services fall under the insured list, these services fall under the noninsured list, these services are designated as minor surgery, and these services are designated as major surgery. Given the advances in medical technology and expertise, we will probably find within 12 to 24 months of having things on the major list that they can now be performed in a minor capacity.

Clearly what I hear Albertans saying is that they don't want to go down this road. They don't want to go the road of having a list, as Oregon has, of 600 and some services, or whatever the number is, that are insured in the public system and then an accompanying list that is not provided in the public system. The public does not want that. Suffice to say that in general terms the amendments do not offer a great deal of assurance to myself, nor will they I believe tomorrow offer a great deal of assurance to the public, that this is actually going to make Bill 11 a salvageable bill, because it is not.

The federal government I believe talked about and expressed in a letter to the minister a number of concerns they wanted to see addressed relative to the protection of the publicly funded health care system. I believe Minister Rock, if I'm paraphrasing his letter correctly, expressed concerns about Bill 11's ability to permit for-profit facilities to sell enhanced services in combination with insured services, therefore creating a circumstance that would represent a serious concern in relation to the principle of accessibility. I do not see – and I'm not trying to jump ahead into the next sections, Mr. Chairman. In section A I would be most interested in hearing explicitly how this differentiation that

no physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta, and
no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta,
except in

- (a) a public hospital, or
- (b) an approved surgical facility,

as section 2(1) says, takes us any further to overall protecting and strengthening the public health care system.

Accompanying what we're saying in this section about insured surgical services or major surgical services, we're not saying anything about whether or not those are overnight. Certainly gallbladder surgery was at one time considered a major surgery and required an overnight stay. With the advancements in that field, generally people will remain overnight following that type of surgery, but it is not anywhere near the weeklong hospitalization they used to be required to experience.

Under this section, which falls under "Protection of Publicly Funded Health Care," there is no differentiation about the private hospitals, and I see that the government hasn't offered any changes or enhancements to the definitions but has continued to leave the designation and definition of a private hospital in the definitions. So in essence, Mr. Chairman, private hospitals are going to continue to exist under the auspices of this legislation, and how insured and major surgical services are provided for is still a question in my mind.

I clearly cannot establish in my mind which services – ma-

nor/minor, insured/noninsured, enhanced/basic – in the government's conceived plan within this bill will be designated to approved surgical facilities and which ones will be designated to public hospitals. Is the minister suggesting that approved surgical facilities could provide both insured and noninsured? These are some of the basic questions Albertans want to know. Obviously, the public system, the public hospitals, are going to be providing insured services. What is envisioned, Mr. Minister, with respect to that? To me, despite my experience, it just proposes that we create a maze that is extremely difficult, time consuming, and complex for the average citizen to navigate.

I look forward, Mr. Chairman, to the further discussions on this bill and on the amendments to Bill 11. I'm also hopeful that we will see the minister of health or perhaps the Premier at some point clarify the application of these amendments. It's unfortunate that as we go along in this, we don't have the ability to have a televised debate, as we did at the onset of the discussion. I think there are many thousands of members of the public who would like to continue to monitor this debate, and because of their area of residence they're not able to do it as closely as they wish.

In any event, I appreciate the opportunity to provide those comments on section A and will look forward to further discussion of the amendments. Thank you.

10:50

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark on A1, section A.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to stand – actually, you know what? It's not a pleasure. It's not a pleasure to rise this evening to talk to these amendments, because quite frankly they are not significant, nor do they address the major concerns that Albertans have with regards to this bill and the concerns I'm sure the MLAs in this Assembly have heard continually with regards to Bill 11.

It's unfortunate that the minister did not take the opportunity to have the bill state and be changed to reflect exactly what those observations have been from individuals across this province, nor did he take the opportunity to look at providing controls and prohibiting the sale of enhanced services in facilities that provide insured as well as uninsured surgical procedures.

He also did not take the opportunity to address other key areas that are of concern with regards to private, for-profit health care in this province, and those are areas with regards to diagnostic and laboratory provision of services.

Point of Order Relevance

MRS. NELSON: A point of order, Mr. Chairman, under *Beauchesne* 459, relevance. I understood we were debating the initial section A of the amendments, not the principles of the bill again. We have completed second reading.

THE CHAIRMAN: On the point of order, Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: I just want to make a couple of observations. It seems to me that if we're going to talk in terms of relevance, that means we get to look at all the elements of amendment A1. It talks about "public hospital," it talks about "approved surgical facility," and it talks about a "surgical service" and an "insured surgical service in Alberta." I mean, I counted 18 different elements in this one amendment, so it may be that some members want to focus on the third element and some on the 18th element and some on the

13th, 14th, and 15th. Mr. Chairman, all of that surely would be relevant.

Now, I want to allow my colleague the chance to tell us which were the elements she was focusing on. I think it's pretty clear that we get to look at all the phrases and all the elements of it and the key words. As I say, there may be some who have found more than 18 elements in amendment A1. I was listening carefully, too, and what I heard was discussion that related to those elements. I think the member talked about three or four of the different elements.

I wanted to make that observation on the point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair would observe that when we were discussing how we were going to deal with the amendment, collectively A1, it was decided that we'd go section by section. Certainly the chair heard the hon. member refer to other parts of it. We shouldn't have it both ways, should we? If we're going to deal with it section by section – I think the comments of Calgary-Buffalo were also well taken, that there is a certain amount of width, but I heard the hon. member being beyond the width. So in that sense the point of order is well taken.

Insofar as you can contain yourself right now to A1, section A, that would be helpful.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, thank you to the chair. So I will contain my comments to this particular section.

When we look at the first line it talks about "no physician shall provide a surgical service." It would have been opportune for the minister at this point in time to also talk about the fact that this particular clause in the bill could have talked about diagnostic services and it could have talked about laboratory services, and in fact the minister chose not to. What he chose to do is not amend this particular section of the bill, 2(1), which is under amendment A1 – I believe that is what the chair has called it – and has not chosen to amend it by including the words "diagnostic or laboratory services."

That is quite frankly astonishing given the kinds of discussions we've had in the province and the concerns the people have had for the last number of months with regards to the services that are provided that are uninsured in this province. That is a key, key issue. For instance, the whole issue of MRIs is one that could have been addressed in the first line of this particular amendment. So that is a very key concern, and the Minister of Health and Wellness, in conjunction I would assume with his cabinet colleagues as well as the Premier of this province, decided to ignore what Albertans were saying to him.

It's interesting that they've changed the second word in that particular line. Originally it said that "no person shall provide . . ." Now it says that "no physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta." I would have liked to have known why in fact that has been changed or eliminated, whether that now means that only physicians can be owners of these approved surgical facilities, whether in fact we are now saying that there are no persons or corporations that can own these approved surgical facilities. What exactly is the meaning behind the changing of "person" to "physician"?

That is a very significant change that the minister has made. For him to make that change indicates that there has been some kind of decision that's been made by the department. He did not explain that decision when he produced these amendments, nor did he indicate what the amendment was supposed to do in the news release that was provided just probably an hour ago with regards to the

meaning of that particular provision. So it would be interesting to know why the words have been changed.

You know, the hon. Minister of Government Services has indicated that I said that before. Unfortunately, she didn't hear me earlier, but we are going to be picking up on this particular amendment word by word, line by line if it takes us until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon. So that's what our plan is for tonight, and hopefully there's nobody in a rush here, because that's exactly what we are going to be doing.

Each amendment is important, and I would assume that if the government has spent a month, two months, three months, as the minister had indicated, and these are significant changes, then each word has meaning. I can see the lawyer in the crowd in the second row there nodding his head in agreement, because in fact he knows that every word has weight when it comes to an agreement, a contract, when it comes to legislation. As such, we will need to take apart and look at and dissect every word within these amendments. We must take time. We will not and cannot be rushed, because in fact what we are going to do is ensure that these amendments have been examined with a microscope, have been looked at, and in fact reflect what the minister would like them to reflect. So that is what we are doing right now, and that is what we will continue to do.

11:00

So, as I was indicating, there is some question in my mind. At any point when the Minister of Health and Wellness wishes to stand up and explain exactly what the amendment is supposed to do and what the change of the words is in those amendments, I will be willing to take my seat and listen to whatever his explanation is.

As I indicated, there has been a change from "person" to "physician." That is to my mind a fairly significant change that we need some kind of explanation about. We need to have a full understanding of what exactly that means, because elsewhere in the legislation when it talks about "no person shall give or accept . . . money," it doesn't talk about physicians. It sticks to persons, so it's only changed in clause 2 from what I can see. There has to be a meaning of what that reasoning is. That's my first point, on the second word in amendment A1.

The second point, that I had talked about and touched on briefly, was to deal with the provision of surgical services in Alberta. My question there was around: why did the minister not take the opportunity to expand that particular service to include the laboratory and diagnostic needs? That is something Albertans are concerned about. That is something the minister would've heard about.

If in fact he was looking at putting fences around the services that are provided, as the Premier has indicated, as the minister has indicated, as the junior minister, when he's here, has indicated, what needs to occur is that those fences should not be solely on surgical facilities but should be expanded to include the other services that are required when one requires medical intervention. That, to my mind, makes sense; doesn't it? I think it does. How could it not make sense that when you're looking at putting fences around medical intervention and procedures, those fences do not in and of themselves also include laboratory and diagnostic and medical services, that that would be part and parcel of the whole package. That should've been an integral part of this piece of legislation, could've been addressed in this particular section, and the minister chose not to.

It would be interesting to have the information from the minister and what the basis was upon which he decided not to provide that within this amendment. This is the opportunity to do it, and he decided not to. Did his research studies tell him that this was not

necessary? Did any medical professionals tell him that this was not necessary? Did the AMA or the College of Physicians and Surgeons tell him that this was not necessary? Has he consulted with the AARN? Has he consulted with, perhaps, UNA or some of the other associations that are related in providing surgical services? Has any of that consultation taken place at all? Did he talk with the radiologists? Did he talk with some of the laboratory technicians? Did he talk with the Health Sciences Association to see what their involvement could be and some of the concerns they have with regards to the fences that are left out of this particular legislation?

That's the kind of thing I thought we would be hearing from the minister when he introduced the amendments and when he brought in these particular amendments, and in fact it's not here. It's not here, and I must admit that I'm disappointed that it is not here.

MRS. SOETAERT: I'm disappointed too.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, I think our caucus is disappointed. I don't think it's just myself. I know that it's our caucus and it's Albertans who are disappointed that they are not seeing what they thought they would see: this much promised salvation, as it were, to Bill 11. In fact, the Premier and the minister have for a long time now said: wait to see our amendments, and it will alleviate the concerns you have with regards to the bill.

I look at the first amendment, and all I have to do is look at the first line and notice that a change which is not explained has been made and that there's another change that could have been made that was not made. That is just on two words in the first line of the first amendment. I know that at some point soon I'm probably going to run out of time, but I will rise again because I have the second line to deal with, and the third line and the fourth line and the fifth line, to ask the minister exactly what his intention was in bringing this particular amendment forward. I understand we may have lots of time to deal with these amendments, and I am pleased to know that we will not be rushed in that. I'm looking quite forward to dealing with these amendments on a word-by-word, line-by-line basis, to ask the questions that need to be asked that are of concern to Albertans when it comes to amendment A1.

Now, I don't want to tip my hand too much, but I notice that in the second line the inclusion has been made of dentists providing insured surgical services in Alberta. That is interesting in that that was left out of the original legislation and is now placed into this legislation. Obviously there have been some concerns brought forward by the Alberta Dental Association that in the government's haste to bring forward legislation, they must have left something out. They must have overlooked something. It was perhaps an oversight, though further on in Bill 11 it does talk about dentists. But they left it out of the front part of this section.

I think that's significant in terms of how that actually impacts on dental practice right now, or what the potential impacts could have been on dental practice with the way the bill was originally written, when they are now put into this particular section of the bill. What in fact does that issue address? Now dentists who have been performing surgeries in their offices may have to be accredited is what that sounds like, because they are now included under this particular amendment.

I guess it might be interesting to know what the Alberta Dental Association recommended with regards to this particular recommendation, whether in fact they will now be having to have excess costs out-of-pocket because of the accreditations that are required to perform these dental procedures in approved surgical facilities, whether the Alberta Dental Association has a process in place that can be easily transported to meet whatever flimsy conditions there

are under Bill 11 with regards to accreditation, whether the dentists will have to pay out-of-pocket for that, and whether their annual fees will have to be increased now that there has to be accreditation processes put into place and more work in monitoring by the Alberta Dental Association. Just off the top of my head, those are some questions I have with regards to what the impact is now of having this particular provision and the inclusion of dentists in this clause within Bill 11.

It's a huge issue that's just been opened up that hasn't really been addressed in the past other than when you look at 25(1), where it says that "the definition of surgical services of minor surgical procedures that may safely be performed in a physician's or dentist's office" could be excluded. In fact, there is an amendment later on that deals a little bit with that. If my memory serves me correctly, it takes out the physician part of it but keeps in the dentist part of it.

So this is a package now, Mr. Chairman, that we're looking at in terms of the amendments that've been made that will affect the operations, potentially, of dental offices throughout this province. I think it's important that we recognize that these are not surgical facilities that are only confined to the medical clinics as we know them and/or the private, for-profit hospitals that will be opened – under this particular amendment, actually, will stay opened – or in public hospitals. We are now talking about dentists' offices as well, because that's what this amendment squarely does.

To do that without having addressed it openly in this forum, without having even mentioned it, I think, in the news release, and without having indicated what the recommendations were that brought this amendment into place I think is not being open and accountable with any of us in this Assembly or with the public. I think that when we look at putting in place another set of professionals into a particular piece of legislation, it's very important to have consulted with them and to know what the outcome of the consultation process is.

11:10

If I can just indicate that we passed in the last legislative session a piece of legislation that had to do with 43, I believe, health professions. That was a mammoth job, and I have to give credit to the Member for Medicine Hat, who chaired that committee and I don't think has ever quite got his due. I think he did a magnificent job in terms of ensuring and dealing with the concerns. There were some problems, I must admit, right at the end. But he was very good at working out and listening to what the problems were that the individual groups had, whether it was the Association of Registered Nurses, whether it was the ambulance or the paramedics and firefighters and the problems that were inherent with the health professions bill had it been passed there, as well as the – what are those guys on the ski hills called? – ski patrol officers. They had problems with the changes that would have been put in place. When push came to shove, he sat down and listened to the concerns of the various groups with regards to the health professions bill.

That, quite frankly, would have been a model that I would liked to have seen brought forward in dealing with this particular amendment, when we have now brought a professional group that wasn't discussed at all before in the amendments in this bill into and under the cover, as it were, of Bill 11. So that is a point I would like to hear from the minister on. I would hope that if the minister's staff is still around and listening to the comments I have, we will see some kind of response tomorrow. This is very, very important, and it needs to be addressed.

Generally, I have found that when we come to the amendments stage we ask the minister, and do you know what? We don't get the answer. We are then forced to make a decision whether we will vote

for or against the amendment without any answer from the minister.
Thank you. I will rise again.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As is my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark, I am not very happy to be rising this evening speaking to this amendment in the committee stage on Bill 11. I was one of those people who was disenfranchised by the moves of the government and not allowed to speak at second reading of this bill even though many people in my constituency wished me to do so. Unfortunately, because of the aggressive moves on the part of the government to stifle debate on this particular bill, I am forced to speak to this only at committee stage. That is really an indication of the kind of heavy-handedness this government has used in terms of trying to push this bill through the Legislative Assembly and down the throats of Albertans.

THE CHAIRMAN: Amendment A1, section A.

MS CARLSON: I am speaking to the amendment.

THE CHAIRMAN: Good. On the amendment.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Chairman, I am speaking about why I am opposed to having to speak to it at this particular point in time.

MR. SAPERS: It works.

MS CARLSON: It works for me, Mr. Chairman, and I think it works for the people we have watching us here this evening.

There are a lot of things wrong with this amendment. Specifically, some of the things I see wrong with it right off the very top are that this particular amendment doesn't address any of the major issues that Albertans are concerned about with this bill. So when we take a look at this and go down to 2(1), we see that

- no physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta, and no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta, except in
 - (a) a public hospital, or
 - (b) an approved surgical facility.

Read private hospital there, Mr. Chairman.

It strikes me that as the very first amendment this government brings in on this bill, it is very unsubstantive and doesn't address any of the major reasons people have concerns about this bill. For example, "no physician shall provide a . . . service," as the amendment says, doesn't address the definition of hospitals. That has not been cleared up in this amendment, and that is a major cause for concern for people throughout the province. It doesn't address their concern that private hospitals be banned in Alberta. It doesn't say that anywhere in here, yet this is the number one concern we have heard – well, I have heard, anyway, from my constituents. I know many of those constituents are also e-mailing, letter writing, and phoning the Premier.

Phoning the Premier is also a problem, because it's taking three days for many of those people to get through on the lines. I have had numerous reports of those people being treated very rudely by the people taking the calls, but that's another issue for another time. It's not addressing this amendment, which is a problem and something that we can talk to at this stage.

So it doesn't address the issue of private hospitals being banned in Alberta, but it does again address the issue of private surgical facilities. It doesn't go on to talk about them in any detail, but we

know they're going to be allowed to perform a wider range of procedures that are currently only performed in public hospitals, Mr. Chairman, and we have a major problem with that. On behalf of the people of Alberta, those thousands and thousand and thousands of people who have signed petitions and sent in information to the government, we know they have a problem with private surgical facilities having a wider range of procedures that they can perform. That is not addressed in this first and what should have been the primary amendment the government brought in on this legislation.

These private surgical facilities that we're talking about here really are hospitals. You'll be able to take that label, that sign and plunk it in front of any hospital in this province and see that they provide exactly the same service as the hospital did before only under a different name. That hasn't been addressed in this amendment, Mr. Chairman. We would like to know why because tomorrow, when I go out into my constituency, people are going to be asking that question. They're going to be saying: have the amendments that the government brought in really strengthened the bill, have they addressed our major concerns, and have they addressed the concern about what a surgical facility or private hospital will be able to do? It hasn't. This first amendment doesn't even come close to addressing that, and we want the minister of health to explain why that is.

Does it address any of the concerns about public scrutiny and accountability, Mr. Chairman? Well, I don't see it here again, although the second part of the amendment starts to just touch on that, where it says:

No physician or dentist shall provide a major surgical service, as described

- (a) in the by-laws under the Medical Profession Act, in the case of a physician, or
- (b) in the regulations under section 25(1)(a.1), in the case of a dentist,

in Alberta, except in a public hospital.

What does that really mean, Mr. Chairman, when we talk about lack of public scrutiny and accountability? Well, it doesn't address it at all. It says that now they are regulated by their independent associations, which is a good thing, but it doesn't talk about what's going to happen with those doctors and those dentists in terms of public scrutiny and accountability. That also is a very major concern that should have been one of the very primary factors addressed in amendments, and we don't see it.

So why is that a problem? It's a problem because by leaving the decisions about what surgeries are major and what are minor to the College of Physicians and Surgeons and now also to the Dental Association, this bill essentially gives a huge amount of power over provincial health policy to a body that is neither publicly elected nor publicly accountable.

We know that this is a huge concern for people, and we see a little tinkering with it now by addressing the concerns of the doctors and the dentists, but when are they going to address the concerns of Albertans? That's the big question here. Let's deal with the major concerns first and then deal with the minor concerns.

11:20

Speaking about major concerns, Mr. Chairman, how can it be that we have a bill that closure is brought in for at second reading, we get directly into speaking at a committee stage, and before anybody's even allowed to speak at committee, we have amendments brought in? How can that be? This government has so many resources at their fingertips. They've got departments with many, many employees who are well educated, who understand the issues, and they bring in a bill and on the very first opportunity that I get to speak to it, Mr. Chairman, I'm speaking to amendments instead of the bill itself. How can that be? How can they have done such a poor job on such a major piece of legislation in this province?

I think that's a question that needs to be answered, and it isn't addressed in these amendments at all. It seems absolutely baffling that a government which suggests to people that they can adequately manage \$17 billion in revenue a year cannot properly draft a bill and bring it to the Legislature in a proper form that can be discussed and debated without a series of amendments coming forward on the floor of the House before we even have a chance to talk to it.

So far all I've been able to talk to on this bill, Mr. Chairman, is the adjournment motion that was brought up last night. It completely bypassed me at second reading. There were five of us in the Legislature who never got to speak to it at all on our side and I think more than 50 people on that side who weren't able to speak to it. How can that be that this thing is rammed down our throats in a fashion that isn't even properly drafted, because we've got all these amendments before us now, and we don't even get to speak to it. I think the people of the province want to know how that can happen.

Now it comes here to committee stage, and I still can't talk to the bill; I have to just speak to the amendments. I'm going to speak to this particular amendment in terms of what's missing in the bill.

If we don't have anything on the public scrutiny and accountability side, how can that be? That's a huge issue. These decisions are going to be made behind closed doors by associations and not in front of the general public, where they can have any kind of scrutiny by the general population, and certainly not voted on. That part, the lack of public scrutiny, is strengthened by A2 of this amendment. This is a place in the amendment where they could have addressed that issue. Instead of just talking about the accountability for the physicians, the dentists, they could have talked about adding a portion to that that talked about public scrutiny and accountability.

Certainly it could have come as A2 or A3. It could have been in there, and we could have talked about that. That isn't in this, and I want to know why. I'm hoping the minister of health will address that before this has to come to a vote this evening, Mr. Chairman. If he doesn't address it, I'm going to stick around. I'm going to keep popping up and asking questions as the night progresses into the next day. I'll be quite happy to stay here. How can it be, when we talk about accountability, that the general public is never going to have an opportunity to have any input into the decision-making process when we are limited merely to those two bodies to decide how and what kinds of major surgical services can be provided? So that's a problem with it.

Once again, one of the other major concerns people have had with this bill is the enhanced services portion, Mr. Chairman, and again I don't see this addressed here. One of the major concerns in this province, and it doesn't talk about it at all. It's very limiting in terms of the scope of this particular amendment. We should have been able to talk about enhanced services. It's one of the major flaws in this bill. It is what keeps it quite separate and distinct from the same bill that's been put forward and passed in the Saskatchewan Legislature. We know that enhanced services is the part of the bill which allows for the greatest scope for people of the province to be disenfranchised by the public health system, because what's going to happen is that the money is made for these private surgical facilities, or private hospitals, on the enhanced services portion.

We know what's going to happen. You go to a private clinic, you want a basic service that the government is going to pay for, including the profit portion of the private clinic, and the private clinic is going to say: well, you know, that isn't enough; if we can get them to just upgrade two or three times, we substantially increase our profit margin on providing this basic service. You've already got the body in the door. You've already got them in a bed. It's very little cost added to top up the services.

MR. DICKSON: How does it work with the Shouldice clinic?

MS CARLSON: With the Shouldice clinic. That's right. That's something that could have been addressed in this amendment, particularly when we're talking about the physicians providing services as described in the bylaws on the Medical Profession Act because I believe that's where Shouldice in Ontario is covered in that province.

Here's what happens there, Mr. Chairman. It's really too bad in terms of . . .

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the Shouldice clinic is a very interesting topic, but really tonight Committee of the Whole. We're dealing with it because by agreement, although it wasn't quite agreed, we did come down on that we're going to go section by section. You're talking about all kinds of things. I've admonished you before, but if you'd stick with what we're dealing with right now. I mean, you can talk about the moon or anything else, but really what we want you to talk about and what the rules are is that you talk about what's before us. It's A1 section A that's before us.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, if I might just make an observation on your direction, I'd appreciate it. I was just going to indicate . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Order.

THE CHAIRMAN: He's been recognized.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, you make an excellent point in terms of the importance of staying on the amendment. I was thinking myself, as I was listening to the member speaking, about the reference in the amendment specifically to section 2(1)(b), "an approved surgical facility." I'm thinking, as I look at that amendment, that I've heard the government talk extensively – our friend from Calgary-Glenmore spent a good part of his second reading debate talking about the Shouldice clinic, and the Premier and the minister of health. It seems to me that the Shouldice clinic is put forward by the government, by the propounders of this bill, as an example of what an approved surgical facility is. I was thinking to myself, as I listened to those arguments, that it's clear the government understands that the Shouldice clinic is their notion of what would be an approved surgical clinic facility.

What I appreciated about my colleague's commentary is that she has some firsthand experience about how the clinic operates. When I decide whether this is an amendment I could support in terms of what an approved surgical facility is, I find it really helpful to sort of know what that means and how that operates in other places.

I'd be hoping, Mr. Chairman, that we'd be able to develop that element. As I say, it's amendment A1, section 2(1)(b), "an approved surgical facility," and just what that would be. As I listened to my colleague I think that's sort of where she's going. So I would hope, Mr. Chairman, as we get into discussing that that we'll be able to sort of tease out exactly what that means by reference to what the government has been putting forward as part of the argument.

I just wanted to make that observation, Mr. Chairman, and hopefully that's consistent with your understanding of what we're about tonight as well. I appreciate my colleague for letting me butt in and make that observation.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. I think, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you did touch upon the right point, the definition. There's a whole

section on definitions, and we're not there yet. But the hon. member said at the outset that she was going to talk about what was not in the whole thing and proceeded to do just that. The frustration of the chair is trying to keep people on the topic. I mean, if you want to talk forever on the topic, then so be it. But we were digressing all over the place, and I was just trying to bring her back. That's all. Is that clear, hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie?

MS CARLSON: It certainly is, Mr. Chairman, and I thank you for that.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: I will limit my comments on Shouldice to how they apply to an approved surgical facility as outlined in the amendment, which talks about "no physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta . . . except in an approved surgical facility" – and if you look a little further down the amendment – "in the by-laws under the Medical Profession Act." That is exactly the example the Premier has been using. It's a very good example of private, for-profit operations, and we need to see what that's going to look like and how that will split out in terms of applying to this particular amendment. So I will limit my comments on Shouldice in terms of how they apply to an approved surgical facility.

11:30

The problem with that, Mr. Chairman, and the reason this amendment is not good enough in that regard is because Shouldice is an approved surgical facility that in fact gouges the provincial government, the public health care purse as compared to what a public hospital does. That's a real problem with an approved surgical facility as outlined in this amendment.

What happens in Shouldice is that there is a minimum three-night stay required. That three-night stay is paid by the Ontario hospital system. Shouldice only takes premium patients, Mr. Chairman. They cream-skim. They won't take patients who have any medical complications. They do not take patients who have high blood pressure, a history of heart conditions, diabetes, MS, CF, any of those kinds of chronic diseases, or anyone who has more than 10 percent body fat. So that's a problem, because they just take the very premium quality of patients for a very insubstantive operation and keep them for three nights.

In the public system that we have now, those kinds of patients are often in the system for just day surgery, which is a minimum kind of cost, Mr. Chairman. That's important, because it's we who pay for that cost. We pay through Alberta health care premiums. We pay through our taxes. We pay through a number of user fees. These are all the different ways that we are paying for that service.

So now you have an approved surgical facility which has physicians in it, whose services are described in the bylaws under the Medical Profession Act as exactly laid out in this amendment, who can charge more to the public system, to us as taxpayers than would happen in a public hospital. In fact, we have many cases of exactly that happening.

I have a situation where someone I know went to Shouldice to have a hernia operation performed, and they rejected him, Mr. Chairman. He met all of the physical criteria, but in fact his operation was a triple hernia operation, so widely outside the scope of Shouldice. So what happened there is that he went for the preop exam and spent one night in the clinic as a result of that. They rejected him the next morning.

So now the public system is paying for that preop exam. They are paying for the one-night stay. He gets rejected from Shouldice and has to go back into the public hospital system. They take him in,

talk about it being a 45-minute operation, and set up the appointment for day surgery. Mr. Chairman, now this fellow's going to have a triple hernia, widely outside the scope of Shouldice, and it's going to be done in day surgery. He comes in at 7 o'clock in the morning, and he is gone at 7:30 at night for what is a much more substantive operation. So he goes in there. It's supposed to be a 45-minute operation, but it turns out to be longer than that, about an hour and 45 minutes. Still, everything goes smoothly, and he's out that night by 7:30.

So, what has the public taxpayer paid so far, Mr. Chairman? I think that's important for people to know. They paid for the preop exam at Shouldice. They paid for a one-night stay there. They paid for the preop exam at the public system. They paid for day surgery at the public system. Much more substantive than if we had just stayed with the kind of system we have right now in Alberta, which is the public system. Then he would have only paid for a preop exam in day surgery and been gone. Minimum cost to the taxpayers.

What happens in the case of somebody who is accepted at Shouldice? They pay for the preop exam, they pay for a one-night stay, they pay for a two-night stay, they pay for a three-night stay, and they pay for the operation. If something happens to go wrong, they also pay for the hospital ride back to the public system, where the cost associated with fixing the problem is incurred. That, Mr. Chairman, costs a whole lot more money to all of us as taxpayers than the current efficiently running public system that we have right now.

So the question is: is this amendment addressing that particular concern? The answer to that, Mr. Chairman, is absolutely not. The scope of the amendment is not wide enough. It only outlines the specifics of how the physicians can provide their services, public hospital or an approved surgical facility. Unfortunately, it doesn't refer to the additional costs that there are in the system and the kinds of concerns that we have about that. Overnight stays is just a problem because it is a mechanism by which the private operators can in essence gouge the public system. That's gouging our pocketbooks, not anybody else's.

The surgical facilities as they're outlined in this amendment are still private, for-profit hospitals. It's still a huge problem for us. Enhanced services are still offered, and that's a conflict-of-interest issue, as we can see in the case of Shouldice. What are the enhanced services there, Mr. Chairman? They talk about it right in their operating manual, and that is a country club atmosphere. That's the enhanced service of Shouldice. Who pays for that country club atmosphere? You and I, not anybody else. Those are the kinds of issues that we have to talk about when enhanced services are still offered. That is a conflict of interest.

Shouldice is well written up in a number of articles and textbooks across North America, and why is that? It isn't because they provide the best possible service in an enhanced surgical facility; it's because they are a very good example of an operation that is efficient and maximizes their profit. That's why they're written up in textbooks. They're written up in operational courses. In fact, I took a case study on Shouldice clinic for my MBA, and the model that we were doing there was taking the operations of Shouldice hospital and looking for maximum profit points. It wasn't for maximum benefit to the health care system, to the public system or to the private system. It wasn't looking for maximum benefits to the patients themselves. It was looking for ways to maximize the profits for the shareholders. What do you think happens in this province when we bring in private health care directly through approved surgical services? The same thing. We maximize profits.

THE CHAIRMAN: Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be able to speak to amendment A1. You know, I had great hopes when these amendments were tabled, and I thought maybe this would help this bill in some way. I thought it was beyond help, but I'm ever a hopeful person. You know, I am a person of hope. So I always had that hope. But, you know what? It still has that fatal flaw. That fatal flaw in the amendment and thus in the bill is still the reference to and the expansion of the private health care system. It didn't address that at all. So here we go with amendment A1.

I've asked a couple of my colleagues about one thing, and we chatted about it, but I'm hoping the minister will answer. I would like to know why section 1 was changed to:

No physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta, and no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta except . . .

as compared to before: "No person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta except in . . ." Now, I haven't heard an explanation for that unless I missed it somewhere tonight. I still haven't got that quite clear. Does that mean that these clinics, these surgical clinics, that hospitals – anyway, I just have all kinds of questions around that. If I missed it, I will read the Blues tomorrow or tonight and see if the minister did answer that one, but I'm not sure if that was clear.

The second part says in a "public hospital," and that's good, but (b) still remains the same. It's called "an approved surgical facility." Now, Mr. Chairman, nothing happened to stop that from being overnight stays. We do have approved surgical facilities in this province, which I have concerns about, and this amendment didn't address them.

11:40

My main concern is that, as we give our taxpayer dollars to private surgical facilities, as well as maintaining their facility and hiring their staff, they also have to pay their investors, their board members, and they expect a minimum of 15 percent. That's a minimum. Now, that's quite a chunk of coin when we compare that to the public system. If there's a profit to be made in that, then why aren't we putting that money back in the public system? I haven't seen that addressed in this amendment anywhere, and that's what I was hoping. I'll tell you, right away when I saw that in the original wording of the bill, that was to me the two tiers, the two-tiered approach right there: an approved surgical facility. I can just see the neon lights: Hips-R-Us. You know. You've heard it . . . [interjection] No, I didn't say anything else. I'm always very proper in here. Very proper.

It also didn't address in this: how serious are these surgeries within this approved surgical facility? The amendment still refers to both "a public hospital" and "an approved surgical facility." I think that was one of the biggest concerns that people have asked me about. They're not fooled by this surgical facility line. You know, it's the old groups that say: "You know what? Don't use the term private hospital. That doesn't sell. That grates on people's nerves." So right away the spin doctors of the bill say: "Okay. Right in the bill, at the beginning, we'll say no private hospitals." So that was kept in, but guess what? They put in that we will allow "approved surgical facilities."

Well, they're really smart. They saw through that. That's a private hospital. And the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat argues with me every time I say that, but you know what? If they were to take a little straw vote of Albertans, they'd agree with me on that one, and I know it.

The other major impact is to designate who does the surgery, physicians and dentists. From my understanding as I look at the original, dentists had been forgotten or missed out, and now they're included. What a coincidence. I was at the dentist's this morning. But that's not on the amendment. It had me a little quieter than usual for about an hour, but that's all, and . . .

MS BLAKEMAN: Strong teeth.

MRS. SOETAERT: Strong teeth. In fact my dentist this morning couldn't believe this whole bill. He didn't support it at all. He was asking – in fact, I was kind of sorry I had made such an early dentist appointment, but I kept it anyway. It was a good visit to the dentist, but it is hard to explain what you're doing in the Legislature, you know, when you've got all cotton wads in your mouth and he's working on you, and that's definitely the time they ask you a question. I guess that's just a habit dentists have.

So that is added, and that's most interesting. Now, I'm well aware that dentists do perform surgical services at clinics. I realize they must have been forgotten in the original, because actually a daughter of mine was under anesthetic to get wisdom teeth removed at a private clinic of a dentist. So I do see why dentists were added to that, unless they are under other legislation somewhere else. I see why they were added and am surprised they could have been forgotten before. In fact, I think I will phone a dentist tomorrow morning and say: "You've been added to the bill. How do you feel about that?" He didn't like the bill, so I don't know how he's going to feel about that. But that is a part of the amendment.

Then we look at the next part of this amendment, and it says:

- (a) in the by-laws under the Medical Profession Act, in the case of a physician, or
- (b) in the regulations under section 25(1)(a.1), in the case of a dentist, in Alberta, except in a public hospital.

The reality is that this first amendment, which is one of many – it's interesting, Mr. Chairman, that we almost had to go through the whole alphabet to get all the amendments in. I have seen many pieces of legislation that this government has brought in. In fact, I think there was another bill that actually had more pages of amendments than the bill. With L, M, N, O, and P here, we're almost at that many amendments this time.

As always, I'm glad that the minister is looking to improve it. Regretfully, though, he hasn't improved it. He had the opportunity in this section to improve it but didn't, because it kept the same fatal flaw of an approved surgical facility that allows overnight stays. Mr. Chairman, that has not addressed my concerns.

When I take this back to my constituents – you know, it'll be interesting. When I get in my car tonight to leave, 10 to one there will be messages on my machine, and it'll be people saying: "Oh, I heard on the news that second reading is over. What can you possibly do to stop them from pushing this bill through?" We will speak to the amendments and make sure that every amendment has certainly been thought out. Obviously the bill originally wasn't, so we will force them step by step to at least make the amendments palatable.

Do you know what? Here's the first one, and it isn't palatable. I can't accept that. It does add dentists – and I realize that's a necessity – but the reality is that it didn't take away "an approved surgical facility." It could have added: with no overnight stays. Maybe we should make an amendment to the amendment that says: with no overnight stays. I'm going to think about that. I realize that if I do that, it has to go through Parliamentary Counsel and be written up, and I haven't had a chance to look at it enough to suggest that that might help. It might be a good idea to do that.

Do you know what else? This amendment does nothing to allay the fears of the constituents I have talked to, not just constituents of mine but certainly constituents from the whole area around my riding: people in Stony Plain, people in Onoway, people in Morinville, the good, good people in my riding of St. Albert, and all the people in St. Albert and Spruce Grove and Sturgeon. Honestly, I just brought in to show my colleagues the box of letters, e-mails, and faxes I have had on this bill: over 700. When I go back to the constituency or write an article for the local paper, when I say: I

looked at the amendments and I hate to break it to you; they are still going to allow overnight stays in surgical facilities . . .

MR. CLEGG: Yeah.

MRS. SOETAERT: The Member for Dunvegan says: yeah. I don't know. [interjection] I can't believe that your constituents think so differently on this.

MR. CLEGG: I said that they're good thinkers.

MRS. SOETAERT: I thought that was what you said. I would really take offence to it if you were slamming my constituents, who've expressed grave concern over this bill.

I would express, then, once again that this "approved surgical facility" does nothing to allay the fears of my constituents that have called me. I must say that it's overwhelming at my office. Overwhelming. I only have one staff person. I have some volunteers that come in, but the e-mails are phenomenal. With e-mails, you know, some are from all over the province, but many are from my riding and the ridings around. People are not sure if they're being heard or considered when they phone and e-mail their MLAs.

Do you know what? If they had been heard, this amendment would be different. This amendment might have added: an improved surgical facility that did not allow overnight stays. Why can't we put that in there? I don't think the MLAs that have been hearing the concerns of the people have implemented the people's concerns in these amendments. Certainly not. They had a golden opportunity in A1 to add it, and they didn't.

I had a couple more things I had written that I wanted to mention about A1. You know, it doesn't change the idea that private, for-profit hospitals will be open, and often they say: oh, yeah, what's wrong with making money in health care? Well, the reality is: is

that how our tax dollars should be spent? To have private operators make money off sick people? I don't think so.

I just have to express my concerns that A1 will not allay the fears of all the constituents who have call me. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.
11:50

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 11. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly. I would also like to table copies of documents tabled during the Committee of the Whole this day for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 11:53 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 13, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/04/13

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Oh God, grant that we the members of our province's Legislature may fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all our people. Guide our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased and honoured today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly four distinguished visitors who are seated in your gallery: the past and the present Lieutenant Governors of the province of Rupertland and their wives. They are here today as we begin the second annual Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament.

This wonderful project came to life thanks to the generosity of the Alberta-Northwest Territories Command of the Royal Canadian Legion. We all know how active the Legion is in communities all across this province. Legionnaires have proven repeatedly their profound commitment to our country and its democratic institutions in time of war and in time of peace. Their sponsorship of this youth parliament is one of the many examples of the Legion's commitment to Canada and to Alberta.

I'd ask all members of the Assembly to join me in recognizing His Honour the Honourable Stu Black and his wife, Flo. In addition to being Lieutenant Governor for a day, Stu is the Treasurer of the Alberta-Northwest Territories Command. Also in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, are Mr. Tom Barton and his wife, Sunny. Tom is past president of the command and served as Rupertland's Lieutenant Governor last year. We have them all standing and would appreciate the warm traditional welcome being extended to them.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you kindly, sir. It's a pleasure and, indeed, a responsibility of this member to file with the Assembly a petition signed by 250 Albertans from Camrose, Red Deer, St. Albert, New Sarepta, Westlock, and Edmonton. They collectively "urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 180 people from Didsbury, Carstairs, Olds, Innisfail, Onoway, St. Paul, Tofield, Busby, Barrhead, and Westlock. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition with 130 signatures of Albertans from Fort Macleod, Lethbridge, and Cochrane who are urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure of tabling a petition signed by 1,100 Albertans who come from Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, Rycroft, Wanham, Eaglesham, St. Albert, Grassland, Perryvale, Boyle, Athabasca, Fort McMurray, Spruce Grove, Canmore, Redwater, Calgary, Banff, Ponoka, Claresholm, Camrose, Grande Prairie, Leduc, and Medicine Hat, a total of 22 different communities. This brings the total number of signatures on the petition to over 15,000 today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, with your permission I would request that the petition which I presented to this Assembly on April 11 urging the government to stop its plans to privatize health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to also rise and ask that the petition I tabled yesterday with respect to urging the government to stop the promotion of private health care in Alberta now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday regarding the concern about the promotion of private health care and undermining of public health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday, April 12, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning

private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition I introduced the other day be now read and received, please.

THE CLERK: There are no petitions in order under the hon. member's name.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the petition I presented on April 12 re private health care and asking the provincial government to stop promoting private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got four tablings altogether. The first one is a letter from Reverend Trudeau and Dr. R.B. Sheard of Stony Plain. The letter opposes Bill 11.

The second letter is from Vegreville from five concerned citizens. They are, of course, also opposing Bill 11.

The third letter is from Chipman, and that also opposes Bill 11.

The last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the requisite copies of a letter from the former Premier of Saskatchewan, Mr. Allan Blakeney, written to the Prime Minister asking him to intervene to stop Bill 11 from going through.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DICKSON: I have two tablings this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. The first one is a summary I've prepared of Bill 11 debate from Wednesday, April 12, 2000.

The second one is a list of the 44 MLAs who did not speak to Bill 11 at second reading.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a report entitled Lone Female Headship and Welfare Policy in Canada, which was conducted by researchers at McMaster University and the University of Quebec.

My second tabling is a report on low-income cutoffs dated December 1999.

My third tabling is a report, Canada's Great Divide: The Politics of the Growing Gap Between Rich and Poor in the 1990s, which was completed in January of 2000 by Armine Yalnizyan.

Thank you.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have four tablings for the Assembly. The first is a copy of the Alberta government Bill 11 web site Bill 11 debate summary for April 10, 2000, indicating the errors on that web site.

The second is a copy of the government of Alberta Bill 11 web

site Bill 11 debate summary for April 11, 2000, indicating the several errors in that summary.

The third, Mr. Speaker, is from the government of Alberta Bill 11 web site reports and studies summary indicating that three of the four studies cited by the government to support Bill 11 deal with private hospitals.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, a copy of a report compiled by my constituency office regarding a letter count to 5 p.m. April 11, 2000, indicating that of the 208 messages I've received in my constituency office, fully 95 percent are opposed to Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the honour of presenting to you and through you to members of the Legislature two letters from residents of Calgary that are categorically opposed to the proposed development in the Spray Valley in Kananaskis Country. The first is from Deborah Sanderson from Charleswood Drive in Calgary. Briefly, it

should not be allowed to convert the habitat of the Spray Valley into a . . . resort [development] simply because it [is] contrary to the wishes of . . . Albertans.

The second is from Miles Tindal of northwest Calgary in which he states that the major development in the Spray Valley proposed by Genesis "would inevitably have a major adverse effect on the environment."

Thank you, sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is from the Sierra Youth Coalition of Calgary and about 100 concerned citizens who attended the Tent Ridge Hurrah on March 5 of this year. They are adamantly opposed to any further development in the Spray Valley of Kananaskis Country.

The second tabling today is from Janet Miller, who lists nine specific reasons why she is also opposed to the proposed development in Kananaskis Valley.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly this year's Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament. Today in our galleries we have 83 grade 10 students from across Alberta, each one representing one of our constituencies. They are now Members of the Legislative Assembly of Rupertland and will participate in their model parliament in this Chamber tomorrow.

Also in the galleries are 11 grade 10 social studies teachers who are here to participate in the teachers' component of this program. They are joined by approximately 12 members of the Royal Canadian Legion and five members of the teacher advisory committee who helped put this program together.

I should add that thanks to the support of CFRN television, Access Network, and Alberta Learning the proceedings of the model parliament will be televised on Access from 9 a.m. to noon and from 1 to 3:30 tomorrow, and of course the galleries here will be open to the public at all times.

I'd ask all of these guests and legislators to please stand and be recognized with the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you and to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Thelma Lubchynski. Thelma has been out collecting signatures on a health care petition and has been very active in this regard. On behalf of the Legislative Assembly I'd ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Conflict of Interest Guidelines

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is generally recognized that serious conflicts of interest can arise when public health care providers contract with the private sector. My questions are to the minister of health. Why is it government policy to allow regional health authorities to set their own conflict of interest standards? Are the ethics different in different parts of the province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the process is one in which, yes, regional health authorities do establish their conflict of interest policies. There are basic principles, of course, under which conflict of interest policies or charters, if you will, are established across this province. Through our business plan monitoring process and the overall supervision of regional health authorities, we make sure that they do have conflict of interest provisions, and of course the proposal before the Assembly ensures that as well.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the government rethink its policy on conflict of interest and ensure that there is consistency right across the province with respect to the regional health authorities and their conflict of interest policies?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the basic principles or characteristics of conflict of interest policies in all sectors, I'm quite confident that those are provided for with the regional health authorities. Also, I would like to mention that the government is proposing further action via legislation with respect to strengthening conflict of interest provisions across the health care system.

MRS. MacBETH: Will the minister show the leadership which Albertans expect and deserve by laying down airtight conflict of interest standards instead of abdicating his responsibility, or does he prefer a 17-tier policy for his two-tiered health care?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in terms of providing leadership and providing for this within the health care system, as I've indicated, regional health authorities do have conflict of interest policies. They do have a great deal of consistency in terms of the basic issues regarding conflict of interest. As I've indicated – and it's difficult to give the direct answer to the member across the way, and I think she knows that – the matters before the Assembly are going to further strengthen the whole area of conflict of interest guidelines and policies and rules within the health care system.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Reports on Bill 11 Debate

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the government has spent well over \$1 million on its propaganda campaign, TV and newspaper ads,

direct mail to every household, in a desperate attempt to sell its privatization plan. It's failed. They are now putting out their so-called Bill 11 debate summaries and trying to pass them off as factual. The truth is they are not fact, they are fiction. My questions are to the minister of health. Who is putting out these debate summaries? Is it the Public Affairs Bureau, is it the ministry of health, or do we have the truth squads back?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there is of course an overall and very concentrated effort on the part of government to provide accurate information with respect to all health policy and all department directions. With respect to the information being provided on an ongoing basis with respect to the matter before the Assembly, I would stack the accuracy and straightforwardness of our information any time against the kind of information that the Liberals have been spreading around this province.

1:50

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that there's no answer as to the source, why is the government so ashamed to indicate the source of those documents?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Health and Wellness has produced a great deal of material on this particular topic. It's a very important matter. It's very important that the accurate information gets out there. It's increasingly important given the low quality and inaccuracy of the material put out by the Liberals, and we do not apologize for that because one of the major directions and efforts of the Department of Health and Wellness, as of all agencies and departments of government, is to inform the public of this province on important matters that affect them.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, let's try again for a third time. Who is responsible for putting out inaccurate debate summaries? Is it the ministry of health, is it the Public Affairs Bureau, or is it the truth spin doctors? Who is the source? We've identified the source on all of ours.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness does have the floor.

MR. JONSON: I have no doubt that the hon. member across the way is experienced in putting out and recognizing what isn't accurate because they've become experts at it.

With respect to information that's put out from the communication branch of Alberta Health and Wellness, I take responsibility for that as minister as to its value to Albertans in terms of informing them accurately of the nature of the legislation and other matters and initiatives that government undertakes on health.

MRS. MacBETH: So he's turning ministry of health officials into spin doctors.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Since December, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the more Albertans learn about this government's privatization policy, the less they trust it. In poll after poll increasing numbers of Albertans oppose this government's privatization policy, and as of this week the latest poll shows that only one in three Albertans support the government's private health care policy. My questions are to the minister of health. Why does the government continue to

proceed with its private health care policy when it is clear that the majority of Albertans oppose it?

Speaker's Ruling
Referring to Newspaper Articles

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the first two questions, pretty close. The third question is, I think, over the line in terms of extending debate on Bill 11, and we're going to move on with the next . . . [interjections] Well, if we're going to have interjections, then 408 in *Beauchesne* says that "such questions should . . . not inquire whether statements made in a newspaper are correct." Polls are usually published in newspapers and the like, so that would rule that question out of order.

But I'm going to recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition to proceed with her second question in this set.

Private Health Services
(continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How many taxpayer dollars have been squandered on polls that have been conducted by the government on their privatization of health?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, given that a responsibility of government that this government certainly takes seriously is to provide information and inform the public of this province as to what the nature of legislation and other initiatives are, I think there is a great deal of expertise and quality exhibited in the work that our employees do in this particular area. Therefore, the answer is none. We have not squandered anything.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is the government hiding the results of its latest government-commissioned poll, which has been referred to before, because it shows that despite the government's massive propaganda campaign Albertans are still overwhelmingly opposed to the privatization of health care?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the member across the way is certainly entitled to give her own interpretation to the information. We have found, however, that the responses we've had from Albertans, both in terms of answering basic sets of questions but also, I think, more importantly in terms of them providing their own thoughtful critique of the bill, has led to a very significant set of amendments placed before the Assembly yesterday. We are responding and listening to Albertans. We value that input, and we are responding to the concerns that they've raised.

THE SPEAKER: The leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I tabled a letter to the Prime Minister from former Saskatchewan Premier Allan Blakeney. Mr. Blakeney says that it would be extremely unwise to have in-patient hospital services, both insured and uninsured, delivered by the commercial for-profit sector. Furthermore, he argues convincingly that not only public health care in Alberta but all across Canada will likely be thrown open for business because of NAFTA. To the minister of health: why does the government refuse to heed eminent Canadians like Allan Blakeney who warn that Alberta's for-profit hospitals policy would unravel the public health care system not only in this province but across the country?

Speaker's Ruling
Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, once again, I truly believe that question goes over the line in terms of where we've arrived at.

Considerable liberty was afforded in this Assembly in question period in dealing with, quote, health policy, always surrounding a certain bill. This Assembly yesterday gave second reading to that bill. This Assembly, one part of it, the Committee of the Whole, is now into a clause-by-clause review of this particular matter. With respect to Bill 11 questions in the question period there's ample opportunity now in Committee of the Whole to deal with such questions.

Second question, sir.

Private Health Services
(continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the minister of health. Why is the government risking national medicare standards in all Canadian provinces in its reckless pursuit to expand private, for-profit health care delivery in this province?

Speaker's Ruling
Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. member, once again, if that isn't a similar question to the first one, then I have missed something. It was simply an extension of the debate in the question period of something that has already been dealt with by this House, and there's now another mechanism dealing with it in Committee of the Whole. I'm sorry. We're going on to your third question now.

Private Health Services
(continued)

DR. PANNU: All right, Mr. Speaker. Let me have my third question to the minister of health. Saskatchewan was the birthplace of medicare. Why does this government want Alberta to be medicare's graveyard?

Speaker's Ruling
Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, you've risen. If you want to say something, I'll invite you to say it, but it seems to me that that question follows in the same tradition as the first two with respect to this.

The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Forest Fires

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. In the last two years there were more than 30,000 wildfires in Alberta's forests, and to say the least, these have had a very devastating impact on not only the forestry industry but also the tourism industry in Alberta. This year already there have been quite a number of fires, and we're not even officially into the fire season. I wonder if the minister could briefly update us on this year's conditions, focusing on the readiness of the department relative to firefighting.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, 1998 and 1999 were the two worst years on record for wildfires. There were approximately 1,700 fires in 1998 and roughly 1,400 fires in 1999. As a consequence of that and early indications that this year will also be a dry season, I can assure you, members of this Assembly, that our readiness has been heightened.

As an example, on 23 February of this year I signed an order starting the fire season one month earlier than normal. We have

staffed-up our equipment; our crews are trained; our tankers are ready on a 12- to 36-hour notice. Ten lookout towers have been opened in the highest risk areas, and a number of other towers are due to be opened in the next few days.

2:00

We've also worked on a public education program. We are concentrating on the prevention of fires. This is particularly critical in the time leading up to the May long weekend, which is traditionally the first weekend that many Albertans will go out into recreational areas.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have done a number of things with respect to firefighting, readiness, and also with respect to prevention.

MR. FRIEDEL: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: considering that there have already been a number of fires, how does this relate to the same time last year in terms of numbers?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, as of the last date that I saw, which was April 6, there were 48 fires that had started in the province. That was significantly higher than April 6 of last year.

Our meteorologists have been tracking the snowfall. In most parts of the province the snowfall has been lower than the normal amounts recorded. This problem has been compounded by the fact that the previous fall was also very dry. I think, Mr. Speaker, in looking at the assessments of the conditions, that we would rate the fire rating as very high or high in many parts of north-central Alberta in particular.

With respect to how it might relate to the two previous years, 1998 had conditions of low humidity, strong winds, and grassy fuel. There was a very heavy load in grassy fuels. In 1999 there were a lot of heavy fuels and very dry spring weather. In this particular year, Mr. Speaker, all of those conditions exist, which will lead us to suggest that there is going to be a very busy fire season. Of course, that can all change with a good spring rain or a heavy snowfall that may take place.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans that may be interested in seeing these conditions being updated can go to the Alberta government web site for Environment at www.gov.ab.ca/env.

MR. FRIEDEL: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: considering that forest fires have a major impact on the forestry industry, is the role of the industry players changing at all relative to suppression and fighting along with the government?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, my department has been very actively engaged in working with the industry in terms of fire suppression and prevention. We've worked with both their staffs and with their equipment in terms of fighting fires. Just as importantly, though, we're also working with the industry on the subject of fire prevention.

In particular, Mr. Speaker, we struck a steering committee to look more closely at the subject of fire prevention. This committee will be comprised of stakeholders and government to offer directions and insights into helping us reduce fires from things like power lines and railroad fires.

Mr. Speaker, I think our commitment to fire prevention and suppression is evident, and I want to again assure members of this Assembly and the Alberta public that we are well prepared for this fire season.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Government Reports on Bill 11 Debate (continued)

MR. SAPERS: My questions today, Mr. Speaker, regard government practice and policy regarding the provision of information to Albertans. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Part of this government's multimillion dollar or at least million-dollar-plus propaganda campaign on its private health care policy is a web site. Why does the web site publish factually incorrect information on the progress of debate in this Legislative Assembly?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the member across the way is making an unsubstantiated allegation in this Assembly. As I've indicated, we certainly do have a web site to provide through modern technology information to Albertans on a whole range of important topics dealing with health and wellness. In fact, we've even been complimented periodically on having that particular avenue of communication available to the public of this province.

As to the allegation that the member across the way chooses to make in a very general way, I do not think that it really merits an answer.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, both the questioner and the responder, I hope we're not getting into debate here with respect to a certain health care matter, because I'm going to rule them out.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How much is it costing Alberta taxpayers each and every day to provide this one-sided reporting in the Legislature on the government's private health care policy?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as has been indicated in this Assembly several times, Alberta Health and Wellness provides detailed information in terms of its expenditures through the process of public accounts and the Auditor General's scrutiny and the Public Accounts Committee. That information is certainly not going to be withheld from this process. It'll be an integral part of it.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If this government wants to be unbiased in its reporting on health care policy, will the minister make a commitment to post all current reviews and all reports on the web site and not just those selected comments that support the government policy?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in terms of Alberta Health and Wellness' record in doing detailed reports in terms of developing policies, I think I can refer to the recent ones. The report done by the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness dealing with persons with developmental disabilities, a very up-front presentation: the material was sent widely across the province, is available to anybody who wants it, is provided through means of technology as well. We had prior to that the Broda committee report in place, the committee that came up with the report on aging, Healthy Aging, a very comprehensive report, a very widespread initiative there to provide that, make that available, particularly of course to the senior's population and stakeholders but to the whole population of the province, too.

So, Mr. Speaker, yes, it is a policy, a part of this government to provide information in the most up-to-date and thorough way.

MR. SAPERS: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Health Care Funding

MS GRAHAM: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta has

announced significant increases in health spending, not only for this year but for the next three years to come. These increases are in addition to significant increases in health funding over the past several years. My question this afternoon is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that some people continue to believe that government is still reducing health spending or in fact has never reinvested in the health system, would the minister explain to Albertans the facts about government funding measures in health?

THE SPEAKER: Well, once again if we're dealing with factual information with respect to the budget, so be it.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and I will certainly adhere to that.

In keeping with our overall government plan in Budget 2000, Alberta's health system will get an additional \$482 million, or 9.3 percent, as of April 1, 2000. Also there's a total increase of nearly \$1.1 billion, or 21 percent, over the next three years that is projected in our business plan. These increases mean that health spending this year will increase to \$5.65 billion, an increase of \$1.75 billion, or 45 percent, over the past five years as part of our overall performance here. This is the fifth consecutive budget to emphasize spending on health care, and, Mr. Speaker, that I think indicates that we have assigned priority to the whole area of the health system in this province.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that some critics, including some in this Assembly, allege that Albertans receive fewer health services today than they used to, could the minister say if the current and planned spending increases will in fact mean more health services?

2:10

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I will not endeavour to cover all the initiatives and the program expansions that we are planning for. For instance, one of the priorities to be addressed with the funding available is that of our plan to be able to add to the health care system an additional 2,400 frontline workers, 1,200 of which we project to be nurses. Actually, we've had a very good year the past year in terms of retaining and attracting more physicians to the province, but the funding projects for another 90 physicians in this province. In addition, we are planning in the area of provincewide services to increase the performance of the system significantly. For instance, the capacity or the number of people being served in kidney dialysis will be up about 10 percent.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister: can the minister tell the House if any of this increased spending will be targeted towards contracts with private clinics?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, in this particular year I think we will not be affected in terms of our budget with the passage of Bill 11. However – and I'd like to emphasize this – there is no additional money earmarked for contracts with surgical facilities. None at all. That has to be part of the overall budget and the overall decision-making process that regional health authorities will go through with respect to setting their priorities and their consideration of the most efficient way and highest quality way of delivering service.

Protected Places Legislation

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, for once industry and environmentalists agree. We need an effective natural heritage act. Without clear rules battles will continue valley by valley and hill by hill, creating

uncertainty for industry and continuing the threat to our natural environment. My question today is to the Minister of Resource Development. Why is this minister preventing the reintroduction of the improved natural heritage act?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I am not.

MS CARLSON: Nobody believes that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: as a result of this minister's interference when can Albertans expect clear rules so that protected areas are properly protected with plans to phase out industrial activity? We expect an answer from you.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, there is legislation in place today that regulates and protects areas in this province. There is other legislation in place that the EUB operates under and the NRCB, the Natural Resources Conservation Board, that protects the environment and allows a balance between that environment and sustainable development. Those will continue until we have a full debate on this new act that has come forward. We want it complete. We don't want to introduce an act that has to have a thousand amendments in the first year. So in the fullness of time this legislation will come forward.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Environment this time: why does the Minister of Resource Development have more power than the Minister of Environment on this policy? When habitat and species are lost, they are gone forever, as you very well know.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this type of legislation really highlights conflicting values with respect to environmental values and economic ones. As the minister of natural resources said, it is important to strike a balance between the two, and we are working on resolving some of those difficult, difficult issues. This legislation will come back when it's ready.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Statute Revision Act

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the past number of months I've had the remarkable opportunity to attend a number of forums to talk about the health policy. On those occasions, I've heard a number of concerns expressed by both my constituents and by citizens of the capital region, but I've also had the opportunity to hear some inappropriate, some misplaced, and some ill-informed comments made by opponents of our health policy. Most recently, on Monday evening I heard the leader of the Friends of Medicare say to the group who were gathered that they should be fearful of Bill 3, the Statute Revision Act. My question is to the Minister of Justice. Would you please tell us what is the policy that has prompted this act?

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, once again Bill 3 is on the Order Paper. It's certainly not on the Order Paper today, but we're not going to have a debate in the House over matters that are already scheduled at one time or the other. Maybe the second question can give me more comfort, hon. member.

MRS. O'NEILL: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask a question that

is a concern of mine and expressed by some constituents of mine as to why they should be fearful of Bill 3.

MR. HANCOCK: It's not on the Order Paper today.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, certainly it's not. Nothing is on the Order Paper with respect to Bill 3 for today, but a question dealing with why anybody should be fearful of a bill that hasn't arrived at a conclusion yet is really speculative. If we come to a point where a bill is voted on and becomes the law of the province of Alberta, then one could almost make the argument, yes, but we don't know if this bill is going to come to third reading. How can we speculate on things? This is my difficulty with it.

I'm going to invite the hon. Member for St. Albert to try it a third time.

Statute Revision Act (continued)

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, would the Minister of Justice please tell me most specifically why the Statute Revision Act is before us?

MR. HANCOCK: I'll be brief, Mr. Speaker. This is an important issue. There have been a number of people who have indicated – and I've heard these concerns raised as well – that somehow the Statute Revision Act is allowing us to escape the Legislature in making laws for the province of Alberta. It should be perfectly clear to citizens of Alberta that the Statute Revision Act is a purely normal procedure that we use about once every 10 or 20 years to bring in a consolidated revision, an authorized legal consolidated revision of the statutes of the province of Alberta and results in no revision or no change to the laws of Alberta but merely a consolidation of those laws so that Albertans have a consolidated place where they can look for the laws of Alberta. It's not intended to make law outside this Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: And the chair will certainly look forward to a full debate on this particular bill when the contribution just made by the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General can appropriately be done with respect to debate of the bill and not debate of the bill in question period.

Bill 11 Publicity

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, it's perhaps evidence of this government's desperation in attempting to hide the full cost of its taxpayer-funded propaganda campaign on private health care that we saw yesterday that they're now trying to change the mandate of the Public Accounts Committee. The Official Opposition has provided full accounting of all of the costs that we've incurred to protect medicare, including invoices and receipts, and we'll continue to provide those as any additional expenses are incurred. On the other hand, the government is still hiding in the shadows, failing to reveal the true costs of its multimillion dollar taxpayer propaganda campaign. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why should Albertans trust this government on health care when this department continues to hide the full cost of its campaign? We know it's not just \$1.2 million. It's much, much more, Mr. Minister.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, we will as Alberta Health and Wellness, as all of government does, report on the expenditures that we make from public dollars. This is something that will certainly occur in a comprehensive way.

2:20

I would like to add, Mr. Speaker, that it seems that the direction of the questions from the opposition is to indicate that we are not providing accurate and responsible information to the public. If I could, by way of illustrating my point, I would just like to refer to an advertisement which has the Official Opposition home page reference on it, and there's identification down below. You're supposed to come to a public meeting of some type, and it says that they will lead the audience to better understanding "Bill 11, The Private Hospital Act." Now, that is blatantly incorrect, wrong. It's deceiving in terms of the overall title of the bill. I could go on and elaborate.

If they think across the way that they can portray themselves as being accurate, honest, and straightforward and all the rest of it, there is a great deal of written material such as this, which I'm prepared to file copies of, that shows this not to be the case.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, will the minister meet the standards set by the Official Opposition and release all of the invoices, all of the receipts, copies of all of the contracts entered into to help spin and sell this private health care policy? That's the question, Mr. Minister.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we would not at all want to go that low in terms of our standards with respect to providing information.

Mr. Speaker, this Assembly has established the laws, the rules and regulations in terms of dealing with the accounts which account for the money we collect from the people of this province in terms of revenue and taxes. We will follow the rules, the laws of the province with respect to providing this information.

MR. DICKSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's put that to the test. Let me ask the minister right now: will this minister, instead of giving a partial accounting of the cost, fill out the form that we prepared for his reference, tell us precisely what the costs are of that advertising campaign component by component, give us the source documents, the receipts, and the invoices? Will you do that, Mr. Minister?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way has an exhibit, obviously prepared from his own point of view. I'm not going to agree to anything with respect to any exhibit that he's waving across, and I think I'm justified in saying that because of this one, which is totally inaccurate, that is being put out across the province by the Liberals.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Kananaskis Development

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past week alone I have corresponded with over 400 individuals who have raised concerns regarding the proposed Genesis project in the Spray Lakes area of Kananaskis. While many of these individuals were from across the constituency of Banff-Cochrane, others were from Calgary, Red Deer, and Edmonton. They all reiterate the multitude of environmental concerns I have heard previously from many and are asking that the government act immediately to stop this development. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. With all the concerns being raised by so many Albertans, can the minister tell us why government is allowing this proposal to go through a review process?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, in light of the many people that have commented on the development in Spray Lakes proposed by Genesis, I believe that this is a very important question.

Almost a year ago the Premier of this province announced that there would be a new policy with respect to recreation and future development in the area of Kananaskis, and that policy, which was the result of the input of many thousands of Albertans, clearly spells out that there will be no new development in Kananaskis Country. But because the Spray Valley proposals had already received some degree of processing prior to that policy being put in place, the fair thing to do was to allow them to still be eligible for consideration.

Now, having said that, Mr. Speaker, having consideration for the numbers of Albertans who have expressed concerns on both environmental and social issues, I think that the company, Genesis, the proponent of this development at Spray Lakes, must seriously consider whether or not they wish to continue to proceed with this particular application.

MRS. TARCHUK: Mr. Speaker, my second and last question is also to the Minister of Environment. With so much opposition, can the minister tell Albertans if he would consider terminating the review before we continue with what could be a very lengthy and expensive process?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, at last count over a thousand Albertans have had their views formally made known about the Spray Lakes proposal by Genesis, and I should note that the overwhelming majority of them have expressed their opposition in their comments. If I can refer to documents tabled by the Member from Edmonton-Ellerslie today, yesterday by Edmonton-Calder, by Edmonton-Riverview, by Edmonton-Glengarry, I have to say that the letters they have tabled have been consistent and constructive in terms of their suggestions for the terms of reference for the environmental impact assessment that Genesis must now go through.

December last, Mr. Speaker, I ordered Genesis to combine their environmental impact assessments for all three of their proposals: the heli-skiing, the boat tours on the Spray Lakes, and also their four-seasons resort. I think that is an appropriate cumulative approach which will take into account the proposed development that they have.

I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker, and all Albertans that the comments being made by Albertans and the feedback on the Spray Valley proposals for development are being considered seriously and will form the basis for the environmental impact assessment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week the Premier once again promised to release the 30 blanked-out pages from his private hospitals policy. Actions speak louder than words, and so far the government has been all talk and no action, especially when it comes to releasing the 30-page secret agenda here. Albertans are really struggling to trust this government on any promises on health care. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Just how long will Albertans have to wait to see the secret, taxpayer-funded focus group research? A month? Two months? Or maybe until after the whole policy debate is over. Please let us know.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I recall the exchange, the Premier in his answer indicated that there would be certain require-

ments and expectations of the opposition with respect to their meetings and discussions and so forth. That is my understanding of the situation. To my knowledge the slightly bigger party across the way has not met that obligation, and therefore I can comment no further.

MS BLAKEMAN: Okay. When will the government stop hiding behind these promises and agree to release the full 30-page document of this private hospital plan, not some doctored version and not just the pages of the focus group? When?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm quite sure that with respect to any definitive commitment the Premier may have made, he will follow through on meeting it.

MS BLAKEMAN: Perhaps the Minister of Health and Wellness could explain why the government is so reluctant to release this document.

2:30

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I recall the Premier, as long as both sides of the exchange are living up to their commitments or what was stated, the information will be provided. I'm not the expert on this particular exchange, but I'm sure the Premier will follow through on whatever he committed to.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Victims' Assistance Programs

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although crime rates across our province have declined slightly over the last few years, many Albertans unfortunately continue to be victims of criminal actions. My constituents continue to raise concerns about some aspects of justice such as sentencing for serious crimes and how the system affects victims. We often lose sight of the impact of crimes on innocent victims, and it was just over a year ago that the Alberta justice summit recommended that our justice system should provide victims of crime with better supports. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. What is this government doing to support victims of crime in light of that review?

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has among the best victims' support programs in the country. Back in 1991 the government made funding available to victims' assistance programs for the first time, and at that time there were only eight victims' services programs available. We now have 60 police-based programs, which operate 110 victims' services units. These units are staffed by approximately 1,300 volunteers across the province, who provide victims with information and support during the criminal justice process.

In 1998-99 more than \$9 million was collected from the provincial fines surcharge for programs to assist victims. The funding goes to Alberta's victims' services programs and to victims' financial benefits programs, which provide financial assistance to victims of crime in this province.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you. My second question. Victims' services units are staffed by volunteers, and I'm concerned about the quality of their formal training dealing with victims. Do Alberta Justice or the policing community provide any training or support for these volunteers?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member has pointed out, each victims' assistance program is responsible for training its own volunteers. However, victims' assistance program co-ordinators have received training from Alberta Justice since 1992. The comprehensive training program provided for these co-ordinators has not been available anywhere else. It's unique to Alberta. In fact, we've had co-ordinators from other provinces, in particular Saskatchewan, come to take our co-ordinator training program. This year training was expanded to include Crown prosecutors to increase their awareness of the victims' issues in the criminal justice system and was undertaken as a direct result of one of the recommendations of the summit.

MRS. BURGNER: My final question is to the same minister. Does Alberta Justice have any plans to upgrade the training it provides to volunteer victims' assistance workers?

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. One of the projects that's under way right now in the department is the preparation of a victims' assistance program training manual. It is a major project at a cost of about \$50,000. It will provide the training for the volunteer training program. It will be delivered to all victims' services units across the province. The net result of this training is that victims of crime will have improved service during the difficult time in their lives. We expect that the training program and the manual will be operational by the spring of 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Health Resource Group Inc.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary's HRG has a huge investment at stake in the HRG hospital in Calgary and has lobbied this government and this government's branch plant, known as the Calgary regional health authority. With donations to the government party coffers and a web of interpersonal and governmental relations, HRG has access and influence with this government, and it's well known. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that HRG's business plan calls for a co-ordination of messages and political strategies between HRG, the health authority, and the province, can the minister assure Albertans that there are absolutely no discussions, negotiations, agreements, or planning of any kind that have occurred between the government and HRG with respect to the communication plan of HRG and their operation?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think this is a repeat question. Nevertheless, it is the case that quite a number of months ago – I would say at least a year or a year and a half – there were pieces of correspondence. There were a couple of meetings with respect to HRG and the regional health authority, also with government. This was around the time the very need to have legislation to control the situation with respect to private clinics was being identified. That took place at that particular time.

We, of course, have put our emphasis on protecting the public health care system and providing a very solid legal framework to protect our health care system and to provide for contracts and make sure that they're arrived at on a responsible basis with no detriment to the system. Beyond that, whatever discussions or news releases or whatever might have been released, they have not been significant nor have we had any contact over the last while.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister appears not to have knowledge of any of these discussions, if there are discussions, how does the minister explain that there's a fundamental problem here when it comes to dealing with a company that is in business for business, for profit and has a great deal at risk and has influenced this government? How does that jibe with having absolutely no indication that the government is willing to help this business along its way?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder is seeking an opinion. That, of course, is inappropriate. If the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has something to offer in response, please go ahead.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make one statement with respect to the question, and that is that the Minister of Health and Wellness has had no dealings with the Health Resource Group.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, then would the minister assure this House that the conflicts of interest legislation in this regard with the local authority will be of strength enough to prevent any kind of difficulties that may be foreseen?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I am aware that the Calgary regional health authority, as indicated earlier, does have a conflict of interest policy. I am not aware of that conflict of interest policy, as far as the regional health authority is concerned, having been violated in any way.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in less than a minute from now we'll call upon the first of three members to participate.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Fort McMurray Oil Barons

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today as MLA for Fort McMurray to rise and extend congratulations to the Fort McMurray Oil Barons on winning the Alberta junior hockey league championship last evening. In a hard-fought match with the Camrose Kodiaks and also the Lloydminster Blazers, the Oil Barons captured the Alberta junior hockey league provincial crown.

To the players, Nick Roberts, Galloway Carroll, Skip Renauld, Scottie Upshall, Quinn Sherdahl, Shane Frank, Scott McQueen, Colin Murphy, Kent Beagle, Clint Orr, Brad McTavish, Travis Gladue, Nathan Rosychuk, Tyler Brough, Chad Kletzel, Justin Trudeau – no relation to the former Prime Minister – Craig Strain, Scott Basiuk, Dave McCulloch, Jason Boyd, Captain Robbie Staudinger, Jeff Drummond, Mike Brown, and Brent Zelenewich, the MVP of the playoffs, we want to extend our congratulations. To the coaches, Fran Gow, Wendel Hodgins, Gates Genereux, and Kevin Higo, of course we congratulate them on excellent coaching, and their training staff Shane Kearnie and Curtis O'Brien. To the president of the Alberta Junior Hockey League, Nick DeHoog, and Dave Britt, Lee Mask, and Terry Connors, and all the board of directors, on behalf of all of our fans in Fort McMurray who bused, flew, and drove the entire year to watch them, we're very proud.

2:40

To perhaps the Fort McMurray Oil Barons' loudest fan, Brian Hatfield, who also happened to be my campaign manager, I can truly say that he is the only person I know who can talk the leg off a chair.

To Bob Clark and Kim Marsh, the president and chairman of the AJHL. They were on hand to make the presentation.

We'd like to invite all Albertans to come May 5 to May 14 to Fort McMurray, Alberta, when Fort McMurray will host the national junior A hockey championship, the Royal Bank Cup, previously called the Centennial Cup.

So to all of the players we want to say best of luck on their road to the national junior A hockey championship.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Labour Relations Policy

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unions are an important part of the fabric of a democratic society. At the most fundamental and basic level they involve the joining together of people to represent a collective interest. They operate democratically to give workers a strong voice to represent their rights as employees and as citizens.

The important role that unions play should be respected, because a union is more than an organization. It is the hopes, dreams, rights, and voice of its membership, all of whom are hardworking and dedicated Albertans. It is very unfortunate that this government does not treat unions with the respect they deserve. Instead, they view unions in much the same way as Conrad Black, as gangrenous limbs to be amputated.

Well, Mr. Speaker, unions are not going away, and it is this government's job to create a positive labour relations environment where unions and employers can interact on a level and fair playing field. This is not the case in Alberta. The current beer strike here in Edmonton and the long-standing strike, the unfortunate strike at the *Calgary Herald* are just two of the latest examples.

This government, like governments in other provinces, should make a simple change to improve the situation. They could introduce binding arbitration for first collective agreements so that unions, unions that have been legally created and supported by a majority of employees, by the way, are not simply cast aside by a company willing to wait them out. This is not fair, and it creates divisive situations that lead to hardships for workers and their families.

Unions have a positive and proactive role to play in our society. The government has a responsibility to recognize this instead of siding with bullies. We are talking about the democratic rights of hundreds and thousands of Alberta families. I believe the government would be very surprised at how well the system could function if they would just take off their ideological binders and act as consensus-builders instead of being part of the problem.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Men's Health

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several constituents have asked that I communicate their concerns on men's health issues to the House. In the movies John Wayne and James Bond don't worry about their health. They get shot at, get into fights. They get up, and they finish off the bad guys. Reality, however, is quite different.

John Wayne developed heart disease and had a cancerous lung removed. Ian Fleming, who created James Bond, died from complications of a chest cold because he bucked his doctor's orders and played golf instead. Look at any health stats and the real story is the same: men live much shorter lives than women, and they have

higher risk for all 15 leading causes of death. Despite these stats most men think their health is excellent, and they're dying to prove it.

Although their health risks are largely preventable, it is obvious that men's health is in a far worse state than women's health. Millions are spent on women's health centres, women-only cancer screening and research, and preventative programs for illnesses that specifically affect women. There is little money spent on men's health issues.

A recently opened male health centre is the first centre in the U.S. specializing in male health. Taking a holistic approach to health care enables the centre's physicians to look at the whole man and not his symptoms. It provides support to men and helps them overcome the fears and misconceptions often associated with male health problems. Sharing experiences as well as treatment options, they often offer a sense of assurance and provide an additional perspective that helps ease anxiety.

Another advantage in men talking to each other is eliminating the fear of the unexpected, plus it's a lot more believable when another guy tells you that it's no big deal for what the doctor is suggesting, Mr. Speaker.

I encourage the government to look at initiatives and approaches in dealing with men's health. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, in fact, after hearing the last private member's statement, I'm feeling a little weak in the knees. But pursuant to Standing Order 7(5), I invite the Government House Leader, who hopefully is in better shape than I am, to share with us what government business we might anticipate to be able to deal with next week.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of your observation yesterday that we should be careful about personal comments, I won't be able to make the comment that comes to mind about where the Opposition House Leader might in fact be weak.

Nonetheless, under projected government business for next week, on Monday, April 17, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading in the afternoon we may deal with bills 3, 7, 13, 14, and 15, and in Committee of the Whole, Bill 11. On Monday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, bills 16, 17, 18, and 19, and in Committee of the Whole, Bill 11.

Tuesday, April 18, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, private bills as listed on the Order Paper, and in Committee of the Whole, Bill 11. Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, bills 20, 22, and 23, and in Committee of the Whole, Bill 11.

Wednesday, April 19, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders and Committee of the Whole, bills 10 and 11, and for third reading Bill 21.

Thursday, April 20, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for third reading bills 21, 2, 4, 5, and in Committee of the Whole, Bill 11.

Mr. Speaker, it would be fair of me to advise at this time that although we have a number of bills on the Order Paper, I expect we'll spend most of our time on Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we had 14 sets of questions today, which is the largest number we've had in this session. So thank you very much.

One point of order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Point of Order
Factual Accuracy

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to make reference to our Standing Orders, to Standing Order 23, in particular (h), the section dealing with making allegations against another member, and I'm also going to reference Standing Order 49, which has to do with the composition of committees.

Earlier today in question period I had an opportunity to question the Minister of Health and Wellness regarding the government of Alberta's web site as it relates to health care policy and particularly the summaries provided on debate on Bill 11.

Also, during tabling I tabled four documents. Amongst them were two pages, each being a single day's summary of the debate as posted on the government's web site for April 10, 2000, and the other for April 11, 2000. On both of these summaries there are in fact several factual errors. That information was tabled in the Assembly prior to question period. When I asked my question to the minister of health, he stood and he said: that member referring to me "is making an unsubstantiated allegation." Mr. Speaker, I take offence at that.

Certainly the question relating to the errors in the summaries was backed up by the tabling of the documents, which are now marked as sessional papers. I will draw your attention and the attention of all members to sessional paper 624/2000. It is the Bill 11 debate summary for April 10, 2000. The opening paragraph of that summary says:

MLAs spent much of the fourth day of Bill 11 debate discussing an amendment proposed by the Liberal opposition that the bill be referred to a little-known Standing Policy Committee.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the standing policy committees are committees created by the government. They are made up entirely of government caucus members. The amendment proposed by the Liberal opposition was to refer Bill 11 to a select standing committee that is established by Standing Order of this Assembly, an all-party committee, not a government-only committee, and a committee that has a long-standing history in this House, even though this government is loath to call it to action, that being the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, I could go on, because I have indicated at least five errors in those two pages of summary that I tabled with the Assembly. If the Minister of Health and Wellness does not want to take responsibility for the mistakes emanating from his department, that's his business, but it becomes my business when he makes the allegation that somehow I was misleading or misrepresenting the truth and the facts. I would like him to take back that allegation and accept responsibility for the errors that were presented to this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on this point of order.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, heard during question period the exchange, and I very clearly heard the Minister of Health and Wellness take responsibility for all the documents that are issued under his direction. So that particular comment by the hon. member should be corrected.

What the hon. member has indicated is that he takes offence to a comment made about unsubstantiated allegations. In fact, until this very moment they were unsubstantiated allegations. The hon. member has now got up and in the House referred to what he considered to be not factual in that documentation. Now, if he had really wanted an answer to his question and if he had really wanted to clear up what he considered to be mistakes on the government web page, it would have been a good idea for him to actually send a copy of the document over. But as is usual in this House, the members opposite don't want answers to their questions; they want to obfuscate the issue and make innuendo themselves. So they table the document and then ask questions about it without the minister necessarily having had time to receive a copy of the document or know to which document they are referring.

At the time that the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness responded to the question from the opposite side, there was a sessional paper on the table which was a copy, as I understand it, of a page from a web site, and a question by the hon. member alleging that there were facts in that document. But there in fact had been no substantiation of any of those facts or pointing out what facts were alleged to be wrong. At that point in time the minister of health was not incorrect when he indicated that there were unsubstantiated allegations, so it was quite appropriate for him to make that comment.

If, in fact, the hon. member wanted a real answer to his question, he would have provided the information to the minister and said: "This is not factual. Who's responsible? These are the errors that I foresee in it." The minister could then have ascertained as to the complaint that was made.

Obviously, this error that's pointed out – and I haven't seen those documents as yet, but I take the member at his word that it makes a mistake in referring to an SPC rather than a standing committee of the House. If that's the case, I will undertake to the hon. member to go back and have a look at it and make sure that those corrections are made on the web site.

But with respect to the point of order, I would submit that, at the time, the Minister of Health and Wellness was absolutely correct: it was an unsubstantiated allegation that there was a mistake in the document. If he had pointed out that mistake and in fact brought it to the minister's attention, it probably would have been corrected without all of this.

THE SPEAKER: There seems to be a higher charged discussion and debate on this particular matter in the last few minutes than actually the tone that was set during the question period. It appears that a question was asked by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to the Minister of Health and Wellness, with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora – and I'm taking his word, not having seen this sessional paper, and assuming it to be absolutely correct – pointing out that there was an error, a factual error with respect to something printed on a particular web site. The chair heard the minister say that the minister was responsible.

Now, this is part of our problem in this place. First of all, why would a government web site refer to the political name of a grouping in this House? One of the basic rules in this thing is that if public dollars are to be expended, the public dollars are not to talk about political parties, and that's a normal rule in any expenditure. So if a member of the opposition puts out a piece of paper and chastises the Progressive Conservative Party, they get a note from the Speaker. They get an intervention from the Speaker and in fact have been told that we are not paying for the publication of that document. That's factual. That's happened in the past. That's been done. That's been the penalty.

So why would the government then go out and print something that would refer to another political party, using taxpayers' dollars to do that? If it did do that – I mean, rules can't be two ways. The rules have to be one way. Secondly, there has to be a responsibility for the printing of anything that comes out, and the chair clearly heard that the Minister of Health and Wellness said that he would assume responsibility for that. The chair also heard that the Government House Leader said that he would personally look into this and assume a responsibility to make sure this is corrected, and I take the word of the hon. member on that as well.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is absolutely within his right to stand up and raise a question with respect to that if it's factually incorrect. It's not the member's responsibility, either, to convey something to a member of Executive Council before he asks the question on it. It's not the responsibility of the member to do that. It's the responsibility of the originator of the document to be correct, and if the originator of the document is incorrect, it's fair game for a member of this House to bring it to our attention in whatever form they want to use.

Now, some might argue that courtesy, politeness, harmony, tranquillity would suggest: "Gee, too bad. Gee willikers. Gee whiz. I read this thing, you know, and you really got me here. This really hurts me, and I'm coming to see you." But we also know that people's schedules are very difficult at certain times. You phone up; you want to deal with things. Sometimes the person is not in; you've got to wait until after. You want to deal with it. There are some reasons for all of this.

Number one, it's within the right of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora to raise a question with respect to this matter. Number two, the Minister of Health and Wellness assumed responsibility for it. It's truly unfortunate that the phrase "unsubstantiated allegation" was used, and it may have been factually correct, at the time, that the Minister of Health and Wellness was unaware of what the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was saying. Again, obliqueness is not a good thing in this place, and the closer you get to the actual words and the intent of it, the less trouble we're going to have. It would be helpful as well.

But it was correct to raise it, it's correct to deal with it, and as far as the chair is concerned, the matter's been dealt with. It certainly forms a correct point of order. I hope that the matter will be corrected factually, and I hope that everybody will learn a lesson.

I'm going to repeat: on anything that comes under the authority of the Speaker that has public dollars expended, it's a clear violation if political party names are used in the publication of any of those documents, and they are not paid for. They are sent back and rejected. We've had some pretty blatant and embarrassing examples in the past of that happening. I'm not going to put it on the record, say who it is or anything else, but there is a responsibility. There's a responsibility for the government to be correct. There's a responsibility for the opposition to be correct.

Orders of the Day.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry. The Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: May I beg your indulgence? I've been advised by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora that the document in question was forwarded to a government member's office yesterday afternoon. I will investigate that and make sure, but I didn't want to leave the record uncorrected.

THE SPEAKER: Fine. Now that ends it. Harmony, and we smile.

Sorry. I know we said Orders of the Day, but I want to end this

week on a high note. I don't like what happened Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. That's why I started interjecting yesterday and today, and I'm going to continue doing it on Monday.

3:00

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

THE CHAIRMAN: We have before us a collection of amendments under the title A1, and we're going at them one section at a time. So A1, section A, is what we're discussing.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to spend a few minutes talking specifically about the amendment that's in front of us, and that is the amendment you described that's numbered A: that section 2 is struck out and the following is substituted.

Now, when I say a few minutes, I'd like to spend 20 minutes on it, but I do have a duty to go up and talk to the young parliamentarians about the role of an effective opposition. I'm sure that even those enlightened people will have their opinions not only on this amendment but also on Bill 11 and the whole question of health care reform.

Looking specifically at the amendment in front of us, we're talking in terms of an amendment to section 2, which in the original document falls directly below a section called "Protection of Publicly Funded Health Care." Now, stop and think. Weigh those words very carefully: protection of publicly funded health care. If that's what this bill was all about and if that's what this amendment was to achieve, publicly funded health care, I think Albertans would be delighted. I think the opposition would drop, and I don't think you'd see this party opposing the bill once it is amended.

When we look at it very, very carefully, the original wording of the bill in section 2 was:

- (1) No person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta except in
 - (a) a public hospital, or
 - (b) an approved surgical facility.
- (2) No person shall provide a major surgical service, as described in the by-laws under the Medical Profession Act, in Alberta except in a public hospital.

One of the first things that strikes me when I look at the amendment is the wording. Instead of saying that "no person shall," it now says that "no physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta, and no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta." I'm not sure why specific reference to a dentist has cropped up in the bill. It was not in the original proposal, and now it's in there.

Getting back to what I said earlier about the publicly funded health care, the difficulty I have with the amendment as it relates to that aspect is that if it were truly, truly, truly an amendment that protected the publicly funded health care system, you would not have the (a) and the (b) in the amendment. You wouldn't have "a public hospital" or "an approved surgical facility," because an approved surgical facility is another word for a hospital. The difference would be that instead of a public hospital the opportunity would be there to contract out and provide a surgical facility that would not be funded by the public system.

As to how that provides a protection of publicly funded health care, I'm not sure, because once we get into the private sector, once we start talking in terms of enhancement, once we look at the various aspects, at queue-jumping and such, we are not talking any longer about a publicly funded health care system. We're talking in terms of an aspect of private health care. We're talking in terms of additional fees for enhanced services and so on.

Basically then, Mr. Chairman, what happens is that we go from a system that has been publicly funded in the sense that even the contracting out that takes place now basically is within the public system in most cases. There are some instances where there have been some cases where it's gone somewhat beyond that, which does cause concern to some Albertans. But we can't look at the past; we have to look at what's in front of us right now. Of course, the danger of this type of amendment that includes an approved surgical facility is the fear that it could lead to a two-tier system. Let's face it: a duck is a duck. If it walks like a duck, it talks like a duck, and it quacks like a duck, it's a duck. An approved surgical facility is nothing more, in my opinion, than a hospital, so let's not play around with terminology.

Now, when the minister gets up to speak to these amendments, he's going to have to explain the significance of the change in terms of including a dentist, which wasn't there. He's going to have to explain the significance of not only section 2(1) at the preamble but also (2)(b), where it refers specifically to "in the regulations under section 25(1)(a.1), in the case of a dentist." When we look at the concept of an approved surgical facility, the way I see the perception of it from the government's point of view is a facility that would provide for surgical services. It states that very clearly, "shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta," which again implies overnight stays, overnight stays of 48 hours, 72 hours. Who knows what length those overnight stays would be?

I'm not sure what type of surgical procedure a dentist carries out that would require that type of facility. Now, I may be incorrect, but I would believe, generally speaking, that a person would go in as an outpatient and be out later that day if there was a case to put the person to sleep or whatever before the surgery was performed.

An interesting aspect of these two sections. When we talk about 2(1) and we look at (2), we see a substantial difference in wording. The first 2(1) says that "no physician shall provide a surgical service," and of course (2) in the amendment says that "no physician or dentist shall provide a major surgical service." So we're talking in terms of a surgical service versus a major surgical service. The major surgical service under this amendment of course would have to be conducted in a public hospital. Those that would not be classified as major would of course be allowed to be carried out in an approved surgical facility.

3:10

When we start looking at definitions of minor, major, whatever, and try to look at a concrete definition of a surgical facility, it changes so rapidly, again, how do you start defining major, minor? There was a period of time, not that many years ago quite frankly, that if you needed an intravenous, for example, because you had an infection of some sort and you were required to be under intravenous for, say, a 10-day period, you had to be admitted to a hospital. You actually had to be admitted to a hospital and occupy a hospital bed for that period of time.

But now, with the changes in technology and such, you can do it under a program – I'm not exactly sure what it's called, but the concept of it is that you take your equipment home, and home care will come down and demonstrate to you how it's done. Then from there you're sort of on your own, with the assistance of a spouse or

somebody else. In some cases you don't even need that assistance, because since then I understand – I haven't actually seen it – that they've actually advanced from that requirement to drain the fluid in your arm or whatever two or three times a day to a system where there's some type of pump that just automatically injects that. That's a significant change in a procedure that at one time I guess would have been considered major, because if you've got to go in the hospital for 10 days, that to me is quite major.

Without question, one would now classify that as minor, because you go to the emergency room and two hours later you can be back home. You don't see a great danger. You don't see immediate danger and something going wrong, because it's not a surgical procedure. However, a surgical procedure being done in an approved surgical facility can be a whole different ball of wax because they're not fully equipped like a public hospital is. When you look at the University hospital, when you look at the Royal Alex hospital and look at the Grey Nuns hospital, they are fully equipped. If something goes wrong, they're there. You can be attended to immediately. You can be whisked down to the operating room. They've got different equipment.

I've experienced it firsthand, so I have a pretty good idea of what can happen. It can. In my go-round in the hospital a couple of years ago, one night I woke up at 2 o'clock in the morning and thought for sure I was having a heart attack. It was just pounding and all that. It turned out it was just a buildup of fluid around the lungs that a week later kind of worked itself back into my system, but it was very, very scary. Now, had I been lying – and in that case, of course that would not have been a surgical facility. I'm sure it wouldn't have been. However, when you go to emergency, you never know. That was very, very scary. Fortunately, they were able to respond immediately, which gives a person a great deal of comfort.

Now, I realize I've only spoken for 14 minutes, 13 minutes, whatever, and I could go on for quite some time, but we do have 14 different amendments that one has the opportunity to speak to. So to get to my previous commitment of addressing those young parliamentarians about the role of an effective opposition, I'll have to conclude. I follow, I understand, the Minister of Government Services, who is up there right now.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood. I have a couple of names here.

MS OLSEN: Sorry. We're fighting here for position. It's a jockeying.

Thank you, and I appreciate the opportunity to get up and speak to amendment A1. I have some concerns about this amendment. I see that the amendment does not carry forward the worst element of Bill 11, and that is talking about the private, for-profit hospital as exactly that. Instead, the government continues to call it an approved surgical facility, and that causes me some concern.

We just recently received a copy of a letter that was sent to the Health and Wellness minister, Ponoka-Rimbey. I'm going to quote from this letter. "Private clinics or 'surgical facilities,' as proposed under Bill 11, are considered hospitals under the Canada Health Act." He in his letter says, "I do not believe there is any reason for confusion here." Well, neither do Albertans. Neither do Albertans, Mr. Chairman. There is no need for any confusion here. A surgical facility is a hospital. Enhanced services offered in surgical facilities, then, consequently would be in a private, for-profit hospital, because somebody is making money.

Mr. Chairman, I find it very difficult to accept the notion that a

surgical facility is going to be operated independently and outside of the existing system, on contract, and that those people who are operating those surgical facilities on contract are not going to build in a profit margin. Very clearly this would say to me that that, then, is a private, for-profit hospital. To say otherwise, I believe, is to mislead Albertans, and I think the federal Minister of Health has identified that here in this very letter that he's written to the hon. Health and Wellness minister.

The issue of the interpretation goes back long before my time in this Assembly. At that time the federal Minister of Health, Ms Marleau, wrote to her provincial and territorial counterparts – at that time it would have been the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations – and stated that

as a matter of legal interpretation, the definition of “hospital” set out in the [Canada Health Act] includes any facility which provides acute, rehabilitative or chronic care.

I guess I'm wondering what the problem is, why this government insists that these definitions are not solid. They know what the past history was. Certainly the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations knows what the history was. Now we have that history outlined in a letter. I guess I'd better table the letter because I did refer to it and quote from it. I table five copies of this particular document, Mr. Chairman. I probably should table 64 of them so that everybody gets a copy of it and understands the definition, but I'm sure there are some lawyers in their caucus over there that can help them out.

So what is the problem? What is it that this government doesn't understand? This particular amendment A1 should include “approved private, for-profit hospital” instead of the camouflaged words “approved surgical facility.”

Mr. Chairman, I hope that the minister will be able to respond in a timely fashion to the definitions outlined by the federal minister and give us some feedback on what he thinks the letter really means, and we'll go from there. I'm not sure the minister understands that what he is putting forward is in fact a private, for-profit hospital. It cannot be seen any other way. It cannot be read any other way, considering there's going to be enhanced services and those enhanced services are going to have a profit margin.

Another issue that I have in relation to this particular amendment, Mr. Chairman, is the addition in 2(1) that

no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta, except in

- (a) a public hospital, or
- (b) an approved surgical facility.

I'm wondering if the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has any data from the Alberta Dental Association determining what is a minor or a major dental surgical procedure, what sort of discussions he's had with the dental surgeons, the dentists, the orthodontists, and what kind of support he has received in this regard. I think that's important to the discussion.

3:20

To just decide you're going to change the definition or the meaning of section 2(1), the provision of surgical services, without any documentation or discussion from the Alberta Dental Association is a concern for me. We don't know if they've been consulted. We don't know what their position is. Albertans don't know what their position is, and Albertans don't know what the dentists have to say about this particular issue. Does that mean that as it stands right now, the minister feels that some of the procedures being performed in those particular facilities by dental surgeons are now illegal, or are they performing, as far as he's concerned, illegal services now? To what extent does the major/minor definition go? We haven't seen any of that.

The other thing that we don't know is what the guidelines are for this particular debate or for this particular issue in this debate. I think that that has to be outlined, Mr. Chairman. We don't see any of that here. We haven't heard any of that. We simply have an amendment put forward from the government that purports to do something but in fact doesn't do anything. A surgical facility is still a private, for-profit hospital. An overnight stay is still an overnight stay. We don't see any of that defined here.

I was reading an article in the *Globe* on Saturday, and in the article a plan has been outlined. Discussions have occurred between the federal government and the provincial counterparts. There are a number of issues that would address health care reform where the federal government is willing to be a productive partner in health care reform. We know that there are some pretty good facilities operating right now in this province.

In fact, the CHOICE program has been mentioned. I've been there on a few occasions. It's in my constituency and is an excellent facility for seniors, where seniors get care but can go home. They get delivered to the centre and returned to their homes. Their needs are taken care of. They're interacting. It's far more rehabilitative to have seniors in a location where they can interact with other seniors and have their health care needs met by a gerontologist, who knows the issues with seniors. Certainly the seniors like it. That to me is something I'd like to see expanded across this province. I think it's also a very efficient and cost-effective way to deal with the senior population, and the seniors like it.

I see that in some of the discussions that have gone on in relation to – well, the *Globe* calls it “the peace pact that may save health care.” I think there's some reality to that. The whole notion of reform across this country with health care cannot occur just with Bill 11 in Alberta or some other bill in some other province. I think that in order for the minister to work in the best interests of all Albertans, he ought to look at working with all the provinces and the federal government. That's in our best interest. That's in my constituents' best interest.

I just want to highlight some of the things that have been talked about in terms of broad reform. Bill 11 is not a part of the broad reform. We mentioned the CHOICE program, but home care is another issue. Better home care is seen as a key to relieving the burden on overcrowded hospitals. I think that's been said time and time again in this Legislature, that home care is an absolutely essential service that needs to be broadened. That will help relieve the stress on the existing system.

Drug costs. I mentioned in my debate a couple of years ago that drug costs have soared. The costs to insurance companies therefore have gone up. Subsequent to that, the costs to the insured and the noninsured patients have gone up. We need to see something dealt with from that perspective and on a broad base. We know that scales of economy are important when we're talking about things like drugs. You know, maybe the regional health authorities with their ability to purchase costly drugs on a provincewide basis are going to be more effective than one regional health authority purchasing one expensive drug for their own needs. Maybe it needs to be on a broader basis.

There are all sorts of programs, like co-payment programs, and many of us are in independent insurance programs. Certainly in the Legislature we have Blue Cross, and there are other programs, but for those people who don't have drug plans and those people who rely on the government for their drugs, there are better ways of dealing with this. I think the federal Health minister has talked about a pharmacare program, and I don't see that as something we should close the door to in this province. Like I say, it's the bulk buy, and that's better for all of us who are purchasing any medication and especially for those people who can least afford it.

Increased accountability is another issue talked about. We absolutely need to see increased accountability. This province got what it wanted when it said: we want no strings attached; we want to be able to take the CHST money and run with it in a way that suits the needs of the province of Alberta. I think that's fair, but on the other hand, it's a two-way street. It's not just a one-way street. To be constantly banging heads with the federal government isn't going to solve the problems in this province in relation to health care. I think there has to be political will to go to the table and not continue to fed bash and to certainly pick up the issue as a positive and remember who we're all here to represent. I urge the government members to remember who they're here to represent. They're here to represent Albertans, and it's Albertans who are suffering from the erosion of our good health care programs. So I need to see some commitment from the government in accountability – we also need that – and it has to work both ways. That's an important issue.

Primary care reform. We've talked a little bit about that. I brought that up. I think the updates the government put out on their web site from my initial debate suggest that I wasn't listening to the January news conference that the Premier had when he talked a little bit about health care reform. Well, you know, I couldn't have been more glued to my set. I'm not one for wanting the Premier in my living room, but I did listen to that debate and that production that was put out at taxpayers' expense.

3:30

We're still waiting to see what initiatives this government is going to move towards in terms of primary care reform. By working with all of the provinces and territories and the federal government, then maybe this government might start moving along with more effective primary care reforms in a manner that's going to really impact Albertans, because we haven't seen that yet.

Long-term care. Well, we are waiting for the government to respond . . .

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair has some difficulty with where we're going. We're on A1, section A. Long-term care and reviewing it with all of the other provinces and so on I'm sure are important thoughts and considerations, but I'm not sure that they're germane to what we're on.

MS OLSEN: In talking about a public hospital and approved surgical facilities, I think they're germane, but I'll take your remarks. I'll heed them and move on to something that's more acceptable to you. I can save the rest of this debate for later and certainly move on to other issues.

Debate Continued

MS OLSEN: Let's talk, then, maybe a little bit more about the reason that this government is walking down the path of private, for-profit hospitals, and I can clearly say that today, Mr. Chairman. I feel that the letter I tabled in this Assembly today from the hon. Minister of Health, Minister Rock, speaks to that issue. I feel that we must look at the reason behind this. Were primary care reform and long-term care not issues that were in fact germane to this bill? I think they were. I think they do speak to the public hospital issue, and I think they do speak to the approved surgical facilities. Quite frankly, I would like to see that discussion happen, and I'm hoping that as we move through the amendments, we can have that discussion.

However, the private, for-profit aspect of it is clearly outlined. I

would expect the Minister of Health and Wellness to explain to us why he would not withdraw this bill now, based on this particular letter. I think we have to also be clear. The federal government is moving in a direction, and I think the direction that the federal government is moving in with this province clearly says: this surgical facility is a hospital; private clinics are hospitals.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat and share the podium.

THE CHAIRMAN: Would the committee grant unanimous consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of teachers from Hungary visiting Canada and at NAIT to learn more about our vocational educational system. They're in the public gallery, Mr. Chairman, and with your permission I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act (*continued*)

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to welcome our guests to our Legislative Assembly. I met with them earlier, and I'm delighted to see them here.

I want to move on a bit in my discussion. Mr. Chairman, maybe you could just advise me as to how much time I have left. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, the whole issue of public health care goes beyond this amendment, goes beyond this bill, and I'm waiting for the minister now to speak to us in a public way about how he's going to deal with Mr. Rock's letter and how he sees the position of this particular bill in relation to it. I think it's important because we are currently debating an amendment that talks about "approved surgical facility," and quite frankly we need to hear.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: I hate to interrupt you, but the timer did go. That was 30 seconds.

MS OLSEN: Well, there you go. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll have ample time to carry on.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: I'm sure we'll hear from you again.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make a few comments relative to the amendments that are before the House and dealing with where the surgeries can be done and what types of surgeries. Certainly in the Rocky Mountain House constituency I heard a number of concerns expressed about the whole issue of what is minor, what is major, and the fact that dentists are doing some things today in their clinics that would certainly fall under the

definition of surgery that we're talking about here and what can happen in a surgical facility.

I think these amendments clearly, clearly outline what can be done in a surgical facility and what needs to be done in a full-fledged hospital, with all of the bureaucracy and with all of the other facilities that go with a hospital. Certainly in listening to some of the comments of the opposition and their discussion about what is a surgical facility and what is a hospital, for the life of me I don't understand how they are having so much difficulty understanding the difference with a facility that does certain surgical procedures that are clearly defined, clearly administered under the College of Physicians and Surgeons, clearly showing that they have to have a certain backup, a certain amount of ability to handle that type of surgery. With this amendment it now clearly indicates that when you get into the more difficult surgeries, those would have to move to a public hospital, where you have even more facility to take care of a patient and handle whatever that surgery might be.

Mr. Chairman, we all know the way technology is moving. To try to define today a list of what could be done I don't think is something this Legislature should try to do. I don't think it's something that politicians should be trying to do. I think it is extremely important that this be done by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. We have to make sure that we allow some latitude with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, because with the technological changes, that list will change. It's going to change as well relative to what one facility in one place can do and what another facility in another area can do. That will happen. The fact is that we will have to have the College of Physicians and Surgeons determining what kind of equipment is necessary, what kind of backup is necessary.

Also, I think it's really important that the College of Physicians and Surgeons have the ability to outline – there may be some patients wanting a certain procedure in a facility allowed to do that procedure, but because of some other complications that that individual might have in their health, they wouldn't be allowed to do it in that facility. Certainly that is something we cannot decide in this House, and it's extremely important that the experts are the people that decide that. I think that with these amendments, that's exactly what will happen, and we will find ourselves with a very safe system that will provide a very good service to the public. We'll be able to move on and lower the waiting lists and certainly have a more efficient system than we currently have.

3:40

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I'm rising to speak to amendment A1, section A, put forward by the minister of health last night. I have to admit right off the bat that this amendment is a real struggle for me for a number of reasons. I've mentioned previously that I've had almost 400 pieces of correspondence from constituents now. I will be careful to mention that three of the pieces of correspondence were very much in favour of full support for Bill 11, and four and a half phone calls out of several hundred as well were in favour of Bill 11.

Those other almost 400 were not instructing me to put forward amendments or to support government amendments to the bill. Almost without exception they're saying things like – and I have to be careful here not to quote, because I do not have permission to table these letters. They're saying things like: we're against the bill; I'd like the bill withdrawn; I can't support the bill; it's not the answer to our health problems. As a representative of the constitu-

ents of Edmonton-Centre, it's a struggle for me because in even speaking to this amendment, I am in some ways going against the wishes of my constituents who are just saying: no bill; pull the bill, and that's the end of it.

I think one of the things that's become apparent to me as I studied the amendments overnight is that in particular with the clauses that have been raised – and A is one of them – that were causing people the most difficulty, this is not an amendment to remove the clauses. This is about tightening up those areas that were causing people concern, but it's not about removing them. Essentially, all of the issues and concerns that people have been raising are still in this bill. While there may be some changes inside of those individual clauses, they're not being removed, which is what my constituents are asking for. So as a good representative do I just say, "No; no bill 11," and sit down, or do I try raising in the context of the amendments the issues and concerns that have been identified in the correspondence I've received?

I'm familiar with the quotation that says that politics is the art of compromise, so I'm going to compromise. Having, I hope, clearly stated that the overwhelming majority of constituents that have contacted me have indicated nonsupport for this bill and for this bill in its entirety, I will nonetheless raise the points of concern and discussion that I am able to glean from this amendment.

Specific to amendment A1, section A. Actually, a lot of the areas of concern are contained inside of this amendment. I understand and I personally can have no fault with the attempt to clarify the initial part of section 2(1), which previously read, "No person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta, except." It's now been clarified to read, "No physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta, and no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta, except." That's a clarification, and in my opinion it's probably a welcome clarification.

I think one of the points that I had seen raised is that in law, as I understand it, a corporation can be interpreted as being a person. They're both entities, and you can take a corporation to be a person. That sounds bizarre, but I gather that in law that's possible. So I suppose that could soothe some people. I understand, of course, that dentists do do oral surgery and should have been specifically included under this, so being in favour of inclusion, as I am, and being on record as many times as I am for being in favour of inclusion, I can find no objection in that change.

We go on, and very quickly the concerns that have been raised come up again. It does go into, once again, that they shall not provide this

surgical service in Alberta, except in

- (a) a public hospital, or
- (b) an approved surgical facility.

So nothing was done with this definition that has caused so much concern for people.

I understand that the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development was wondering previous to my getting up why people couldn't understand that these things were very clearly there and that an approved surgical facility was very clearly not a hospital. I'm afraid I have to differ. There's nothing clear about this. You know, we've had correspondence flying across the country between our Minister of Health and Wellness and the federal Minister of Health, between our Premier and the Prime Minister, and between any other combination of those four people you want to talk about. So I would say that this is anything but clear. Certainly I'm sure that all of us in the Assembly have heard from constituents expressing concerns about "approved surgical facility" and their very real fear that this is a private hospital in everything but name. We've all heard a number of times the little children's nursery rhyme that if it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, it's a duck.

This amendment is doing nothing to deal with that. It's exactly

the same as it was in the original. I think that as we get more into the intricate levels of debate on this piece of legislation, the specific wording becomes ever more important. In some ways I'm glad that we have gotten to a more complex level of discussion on the bill. I mentioned before that my constituents were starting to express a concern that this was a war of rhetoric and that, the way it was expressed to me, certainly the government and I think in a few cases the opposition could be accused of just repeating the same statements over and over and over again and that it wasn't moving the discussion further in any way. People wanted to see real, substantive discussion about exactly what this meant.

As we do get further into these discussions, more information comes up, more clarifications come up, and more concerns are raised on those clarifications, et cetera. In that way I'm glad to have the opportunity to debate this bill clause by clause and in some cases word by word. That's what I'm doing this afternoon with this amendment A1, because it does allow us to bring all of those other points out and to try and work this out, if it's possible to work it out.

Back to the discussion about section 2(1)(b), "an approved surgical facility." Nothing has been changed with this, and people really are concerned. [interjection] Yes, it is part of the amendment. It's clearly written into the amendment. People really are concerned that this can mean a private hospital in the sense that taxpayer dollars are going to a profit margin, a medical entrepreneurial endeavour that is providing medical services. I think we have to be very clear about this. If I could make a suggestion – which I don't think will be accepted – it might help if the government did call it a private hospital, because then there would be fewer people trying to argue the point about what exactly this stands for.

So "approved surgical facility" is still in there. We now have the federal government going: well, that may be okay under your laws and regulations and the various acts and statutes that you have that deal with the medical profession, but as far as the federal acts are concerned, what is being discussed here would indeed be considered a private hospital. Then that opens up a whole other series of ramifications on the federal level.

3:50

One of the things that I would like to see happen less or not happen at all is a searching for scapegoats, a blaming, a looking to place blame on some level of government or another. I don't think it's helpful in this process. The fact of the matter is that there's only one taxpayer in Canada, and that person pays federal taxes and provincial taxes and municipal taxes. It's not helpful to them to have one level of government blaming the other level of government for everything that's wrong. So I would hope that we could try and get over that.

There is a real issue about the "approved surgical facility." You see, when I look at the definition that's available in the back of Bill 11 – and that's really strange. I've never seen a piece of legislation that has the definitions at the back. They're always at the front so you can read them all and you know what you're doing, so you know what the definitions are as you start to read through the bill. It's never been explained why the definitions are at the back of this bill. It's an interesting departure from tradition. However, there are definitions at the back.

When I look, "approved surgical facility" means a designated surgical facility and a surgical facility referred to in section 16." Okay, hang on; we'll go to section 16. Section 16 says:

No person shall operate a surgical facility at which an uninsured day surgical service is provided unless the surgical facility is accredited to provide that surgical service.

Well, I suppose it's clear to some, but it's not clear to a lot of the people that are contacting me. What we're really starting to talk

about here is that it depends on what you do as to whether you're classified as a public hospital, an approved surgical facility, or a private hospital.

Let's look at the "private hospital" definition in here. A private hospital, according to the act, is "an acute care facility." Now, that's an acute care facility. That's interesting. So it means no emergency care, and it probably has no intensive care. So there's no heart ICU.

DR. MASSEY: Intensive care unit.

MS BLAKEMAN: Intensive care unit. But there's also the coronary unit. There's a different set of initials for that one.

So it's an acute care facility that

- (i) provides emergency, diagnostic, surgical and medical services, and
- (ii) admits patients for medically supervised stays exceeding 12 hours,

but does not include a public hospital.

So that's the definition of a "private hospital," which these approved surgical facilities are not supposed to be. A point that have been raised in the past is that there are some existing public hospitals that all of us would recognize as public hospitals that in fact would fit under the definition of private hospitals right now because of what they are or are not offering as services. So it does start to get clear as mud. So begging forgiveness for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, it is not clear.

The whole idea of a private hospital is abhorrent to many Albertans and certainly to many of the people that have expressed views in Edmonton-Centre. It's absolutely against everything that they believe a public health care system should be. I don't know what causes this fear in people. I know from the seniors that I've spoken to – and I just spent a couple of hours at lunch today with 50 seniors at the Minerva volunteer appreciation lunch – certainly what some of them were expressing was that they were here before medicare and they know what it was like. It frightens them, and anything that appears to be eroding, scratching away, lessening in any way really frightens them and causes them great unease, and I have to accept that when they say it to me.

I'm sure we've all noticed that it's been the seniors that have been in here with us after midnight a couple of nights lending moral support, and certainly at the lunchtime rallies that have happened on the steps of the Legislature on Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:30 to 1, a lot of them have been seniors. Seniors are taking this discussion very seriously. They don't want anything to threaten public health care. This whole idea: well, no, it's not a hospital; it's not a private hospital; it's an approved surgical facility that does everything except this or that, and therefore it's not a private hospital – this really causes people concern.

Now, another whole area that's opened up in the words here from amendment A – and we're still talking about section 2 of this act; we haven't gone anywhere else; we're still on section 2 – is the nondescription of the major surgical services. When we get up to section 2(2):

No physician or dentist shall provide a major surgical service, as described

- (a) in the by-laws under the Medical Profession Act, in the case of a physician, or
- (b) in the regulations under section 25(1)(a.1), in the case of a dentist.

So what we have here is that no dentist shall provide a major surgical service as described in the bylaws of the doctors or of the dentists. That's the plain way to say that.

What we've got there is we get into the whole discussion of who decides what is a major surgical service and on what criteria that is

decided. I think this is another area where people have raised some very valid points, because we are aware that technology is driving the provision of medical services forward. We all have stories of the old days when a gallbladder surgery took three weeks in hospital. Now they zap them with sound waves or something, or they do an operation through your belly button instead of a huge, major surgery. So we know that medicine is advancing, and we want to be flexible enough in our system to take advantage of that and not be locked into an old system.

What people regard as criteria for determining the difference between major surgery and minor surgery is more than just the clinical medical model. I think what's important here is that we look at whole health, because it is more than just that clinical model.

My colleague from Edmonton-Norwood was talking about home care and then started to talk about long-term care, but that is part of what we need to consider when we look at these definitions, when we look at the amount of time someone spends in the hospital after surgery, when we look at the very specific medical criteria for what is the difference between major and minor surgery. We get some idea of the points that come up for discussion when we look at the changes that have taken place in even the last three or four years.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Now, as everyone knows, I've got a lot of seniors in Edmonton-Centre, and I pay attention when they talk to me. What we hear a lot of people talking about is: they went for surgery – it was day surgery – and then they were sent home. There's a question about whether it was appropriate to send them home, not because of the purely medical definition but because of the kind of support system they had at home. Well, everyone says: "Don't worry about that; there's home care. Home care will be there for them. Home care will be there the instant they step out of the cab." Well, no. We have not increased the funding to home care to keep up with the demand.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Chairman. The point of order is with respect to relevance. As I understand it, there was a substantial discussion last night about whether the amendment should be debated en masse or whether it should be debated clause by clause, and the opposition wanted it debated clause by clause.

4:00

Now, my initial feeling when we put in the amendments on the basis that we did was to allow the widest latitude for members to discuss and debate in this House the provisions of the act, and by putting all the amendments together, it would have allowed that wide latitude of debate. But the members opposite didn't want that wide latitude of debate. They wanted it narrowly focused on a section-by-section, clause-by-clause analysis. So I'm very curious as to where home care fits into a discussion of an amendment to the act which provides for the exchange of a new 2(1) and 2(2) for what was in the act before. The net result, if you read the two together, merely adds a provision for dentists and doctors.

Now, I would grant that they have the latitude to discuss in this section anything that's in this section, but home care is not in this section. The debate has been wide ranging and not narrowly focused. If the members of the opposition or any member of the House want a wide-ranging debate in Committee of the Whole,

which was our original preference and the whole concept behind tabling all of these clauses as one amendment and bringing them in and moving them as one amendment, to provide for that wide latitude of debate that the opposition seems to want to have now, we would agree to revert to that. But if they want the clause-by-clause analysis, Mr. Chairman, then I would request that you keep them to the clauses which are being discussed at the relevant time.

THE CHAIRMAN: On the point of order.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes. My understanding is that in Committee of the Whole one can discuss things even inside of the amendment to look at things even word by word. That is certainly what I was doing in discussing the implications of major surgical services, which are indeed a part of this amendment, and in bringing forward the views of my constituents. Their concerns around the major surgical services part of that definition include home care and what kind of care is available for them after the fact. I probably shouldn't get into the debate again, Mr. Chairman. I'm sorry. But certainly there is no point of order here. I have not wandered far off discussing exactly those words that appear in this amendment.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair would observe that, indeed, last evening we had a discussion as to whether or not these government amendments would be put through as a package, which they were moved as, or whether they would go clause by clause or section by section. The two opposition parties wanted it section by section, and because we did not have an agreement, that's the way we're going.

However, the Government House Leader is only following up on what I would say has been an intervention on the part of the chair on most speakers, that they were extending it far beyond. Although you may make the point that home care is an extension of the surgical services, I think we would all in fairness agree that that's a pretty big stretch.

The question would really be: do you wish to discuss the whole of the bill through all of the different amendments, or do you want to go one section at a time? If you're going one section at a time, then you have to stay within at least section 2 of the bill and therefore what is being amended there. The rest is getting to be quite a stretch. Yes, it does pertain to medicine. Yes, it does pertain to health in some way. But I have to concur with what the Government House Leader has suggested in that home care, tying it in there, there's absolutely no mention of it. I know it's important to your constituents and I'm sure to all the constituents of all of the members. It doesn't take away from the importance of what you're saying. It's just that there is a time to discuss certain things, and the certain thing that we are on right now is section 2 of the bill, and it's part A1, section A. So the chair would ask again to please stay within the parameters of what we're supposed to be discussing, which was the request of your House leaders last evening.

Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for reining me in. I will do my best to concentrate on the words in front of me and not allow those definitions to take me too far away, even though my constituents insist that that's part of it.

My time is up? You're kidding me.

Debate Continued

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to just get in on the actual amendment that we're dealing with. I think it's still

A1, section A. I'm afraid I stepped out of the Assembly to meet with the Youth Parliament delegates. I was telling them exactly how I felt it was important to have the process move forward when you bring in policy from a government and then put it into the frame of legislation and take it through the House. They asked me: well, what if you find something is wrong? I said: well, the government then has the opportunity to correct that through bringing amendments forward. I used the example of Bill 11 as one of those processes, where the government in committee would bring forward an amendment called a government amendment to a government bill, and that process would then be debated.

I did tell them that we were in the process of starting the debate on the government amendment. However, I didn't tell them that we'd spent two and a half hours last night on A1, section A and an hour at least today on A1, section A. I guess when you focus on that and you look at the section that we are amending, I've highlighted in my document the changes that have been made with this government amendment – I'd like to just clarify that so members opposite maybe won't spend three and a half to four hours – by simply inserting the terms that deal with the dental surgeons, being a part of this and clearly governed under this, plus the physicians. Surely to goodness it doesn't take three and a half to four hours to determine that they should be part and parcel of this bill. Maybe it's a little difficult.

Mr. Chairman, just for clarification, the original section 2(1) read, "No person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta except in . . ." All that's being transferred in the amendment is: no physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta, and no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta, except in . . . The next two subsections are the same, and then we go down to 2(2), "No person shall provide a major surgical service, as described," and we're substituting "no physician or dentist." We're just taking out "no person," and we're putting in "no physician or dentist." This is not real rocket science to put this in. Of course we have to acknowledge the bylaws of the governing bodies of these two groups. So all we're doing in this section is taking out the word "person," recognizing the dentists and the physicians and their governing bodies. The other sections of this amendment stay the same.

This is not a long one. This is probably one of the easiest amendments. To have gone now almost four and a half hours to decide whether you're putting physicians and dentists in there instead of "person" – surely to goodness the constituents of even the opposition would not want them to waste that much time to put the dentists into the bill.

So my argument, Mr. Chairman, is that surely we can move on to the other eight amendments or sections, that are now going to be A(1), A(2), all the way through at the request of the opposition. I think it would be a little embarrassing if I had to go back to my constituents who have also expressed concerns – and I would like to get into an actual dialogue on that at third reading or even part of this. My constituents would have no problems with substituting "person" with "physician or dentist." So surely the members opposite could go back to their constituents and have them agree that that would not be a contentious amendment, and we could reasonably move on with this debate.

4:10

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have a lot of concern about this amendment A. I was listening with keen interest to the hon. Minister of Government Services, and I am like the majority of my constituents whenever we have this long consultation process with Albertans, and this was outlined in the document *We Are Listening* provided to all Albertans.

Now, this came out in February, and it was a document on this

public health policy that has turned into this Bill 11. If the government had been listening to Albertans, I don't think that on the first day of committee we would have – the government says that there are eight amendments; other people say there are 14 amendments. We're dealing with A1, section A right now, and I'm grateful we had the opportunity to break these up. I think that was a very prudent and wise decision on behalf of the chair last evening.

But if *We Are Listening*, the document, was fact and not fiction, then none of these amendments – A1 or it doesn't matter – would have been necessary. How can we have faith in the process when suddenly the Legislative Assembly is flooded with amendments? I can understand the hon. Minister of Government Services and the framework of the legislation, but I have concerns about this, Mr. Chairman, when we talk about an "approved surgical facility," as is in this amendment.

My colleague from Edmonton-Norwood presented to the Assembly earlier this afternoon the concerns of the federal Minister of Health, Mr. Allan Rock, about clinics, surgical clinics, and hospitals and just how strongly he feels about it and how he feels that in the definition of the Canada Health Act it is very important not only in this amendment to talk about the addition of dentists, but we also need to discuss the definition of an approved surgical facility. An approved surgical facility, Mr. Chairman, is another form of hospital.

Now, we can say that it's a public hospital, we can say that it's an approved surgical facility, or we can say nothing. That is one of the most contentious phrases in this bill. I would encourage the government that if they were sincere with their amendments, an approved surgical facility would simply be called what it is and what everyone in the province knows it is, and that's a private hospital. If a physician or dentist under the bylaws of their respective professional bodies wants to practise in that private hospital, then that would be entirely up to the individual.

Mr. Chairman, whenever we talk about the Medical Profession Act, as is outlined in this amendment, we realize that the College of Physicians and Surgeons advises on what constitutes major and minor surgeries. Now, earlier in the debate this afternoon in committee the hon. minister of agriculture talked about we should leave this decision of what's major and minor to the College of Physicians and Surgeons. I believe the theme of his speech was that this does not belong in the political arena, that it's not a political decision. Yet at the same time, members of the government, which he is an active participant in – and I think this is a double standard – are complaining about judicial activism and how judges are making decisions that rightfully belong in this Legislative Assembly.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I believe that the citizens of Alberta want us to make this decision on what's major or minor surgery or at least do it in co-operation or in full discussion with the experts, which certainly would be members of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, but we, all hon. members of this Assembly, should be involved in that decision. We shouldn't simply want to pass the buck, so to speak, to the College of Physicians and Surgeons. We've been trying to hand off this political football for so long. It is time for us to accept the political responsibility and deal with what is major and minor surgery.

Hon. members across the way, when we were in second reading on this bill, discussed how technologies are changing, medical technologies in particular, and as these technologies change, the definition of major surgery and minor surgery would also change. So we must accept our responsibility as legislators, I believe, and we cannot just simply pass this off to the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Now, the college, I would remind all hon. members of the Assembly, Mr. Chairman, is not accountable to the public. Further-

more, it was established to set standards for medical practices, not to accredit for-profit, commercial enterprises, that are the private hospitals that are disguised in this legislation as approved surgical facilities. For instance, let's say that one of these approved surgical facilities was going to locate up here on 100th Avenue in the city and it was going to have out on its marquee, "an approved surgical facility" – I just can't see that happening, Mr. Chairman.

In closing, I would like to remind all hon. members of this Assembly that the decision as to which surgeries are minor and therefore open to contracting out in these approved surgical facilities in reality is left to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. I understand there's going to be this consultation process. Whether it's going to be open or secret, I'm not so sure. If the hon. minister could inform the House as to whether this consultation process with the College of Physicians and Surgeons is going to be open or secret I would be very grateful.

With those few brief remarks on amendment A, Mr. Chairman, I shall cede the floor to another hon. member of the Assembly. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd also like to speak to the amendment that's on the floor before us today, and in doing so, I would really like to say that I sincerely appreciated the points of view of my constituents, as well, whether it was through letter writing or e-mails or phone calls or personal contact. My constituents were very passionate and to the point, and one question that they always ask me, which this amendment addresses, is: what types of surgeries will these clinics be able to perform?

In addressing that question, I had the opportunity of asking the College of Physicians and Surgeons for their bylaws as to what surgeries are performed now as an approved medical service and are being performed in a diagnostic or treatment facility. A diagnostic or treatment facility, as we already know, means a medical facility. That means that it's supervised by a medical director, and that also means that it's accredited by a resolution of the council. The council takes their work very, very seriously, and I'm certain that this amendment they are taking seriously as well.

4:20

The council then gave a list of the types under these bylaws. They gave a list that I could give to my constituents of what were approved medical services that can be done, as I said, in these facilities. That list included diagnostic imaging services, medical laboratory services, pulmonary function diagnostic testing, neurophysiologic diagnostic services, sleep medicine diagnostic services, vestibular diagnostic testing. What's really interesting and was interesting to my constituents especially was

the use of drugs which are intended or which may induce general anaesthesia or sedation requiring the monitoring of vital signs, including all uses of intravenously administered sedatives or narcotics, except in emergency circumstances.

We heard here earlier, Mr. Chairman, just when the previous member was speaking, that technology changes, practices change, and what that will mean for the future. I think this amendment addresses very much the vision of health care when we talk about the surgical facilities and the public hospitals. Currently there are 52 nonhospital surgical facilities that were approved by the college for day surgery.

Now, Mr. Chairman, when I reflect on this, as I said, you reassess your own viewpoints. You know, you think you have a certain belief in everything that you know about your health system and that it's going to remain status quo. This whole Bill 11 has caused all of

us to reassess that, which is why amendments come forward. But then you also stand rooted in your years of knowledge you have about the health care system as a whole and the faith that you have within the system. So when I was looking at that, I asked the college as well: what are the types of procedures that we were doing and accomplishing 10 years ago in a public hospital that are now being performed in nonhospital surgical facilities? That list was extremely extensive, and I was very surprised when I looked at it.

I won't go through all of them, but there are a number that I would like to address. For example, today in a nonhospital surgical facility you can do an arthrotomy of the knee, with meniscus repair, using an arthroscope. You can have eyelid surgery, including removal of tumors on the lid, which used to require a stay in hospital 10 years ago; plastic surgery on the eyelids, like a blepharoplasty; lesions on the jaw removed by oral dental surgeons – and I'm pleased to see that this amendment includes oral surgeons – also carpal tunnel surgery and removal of ganglions.

You know, Mr. Chairman, the changes, as I said, that were addressed just by this previous speaker – what comes to mind for me for a public hospital and surgical facility is just one, and there are over a hundred on this list under the bylaws that are being done currently. The one change I know even right now is current discussion because of the screening that's being done for colon cancer. Colonoscopies can be done in these medical surgical facilities, but with colonoscopies they will no longer be doing fecal occult testing to the extent that they are, but they may actually be using colonoscopies more than they do now for screening. I think with the change in the future that perhaps nurses will even be doing colonoscopies for physicians, and that means that you may have a longer stay. You may need nursing observation which would require an over 12-hour stay in a clinic. So I think we really do need to keep in mind that these facilities are being governed in a way that sets very, very high standards through the college.

I must say that I really did appreciate the question from my constituents about what types of surgeries are being performed now in the nonmedical facilities and what can be performed in the future, because I had been completely unaware myself as to the extent of the numbers that are being done. An example I think that fits in with what is currently being done now of the kind of procedure with a stay longer than 12 hours that could be done in a surgical facility would be the nasal or facial procedures that would require, as I said, nursing observation overnight or even orthopedic procedures such as ligament repairs of the larger joints on healthy patients that require observation overnight. You know, that should be said for surgical facilities as well, that these patients are healthy.

So I am pleased to see this amendment here, and I am pleased that my constituents did address this important issue with me.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. [interjection] Well, I appreciate hearing that from the Minister of Government Services.

Earlier today we heard that perhaps we're spending too much time on this amendment. You know, history will be the judge of that. The fact is that what amendment A does is really set the plate for this dinner of private surgery. It's very true that we're spending time on this amendment, but it's only because it's through this amendment that the whole privatization scheme that so many Albertans are opposed to is created. It's not simply, as it's been represented, a matter of substituting the word "person" for "physician" or "dentist." It goes much further than that.

In fact, I quite enjoyed the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross in her

comments just now, because I think it brought some new information to the debate in terms of the breadth and scope of services that are provided. I do recall that a list of such services, I believe, was tabled by my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark. It's nice to hear the recognition of the variety of services that are going to be made available. I also wanted to commend you on the pronunciation. I dared not go down that path because I always get tongue-tied when I try to say things like arthroscopic surgery. So thanks for bringing that into the debate. It underscores why we're taking this amendment so seriously.

The fact is that amendment A divides the world into two places, places that have private hospitals and places that don't, and then Alberta becomes a place that does but will be calling them approved surgical facilities. We've had lots of conversation about approved surgical facilities in this House.

One of the private hospitals that's actually been referred to in the Assembly is the Shouldice Hospital in Thornhill, Ontario. I note that whenever the Premier talks about Shouldice, he talks about the Shouldice clinic. In fact, if you take a look at their own literature, they call themselves the Shouldice Hospital. The Shouldice Hospital is a licensed hospital, and it is licensed under the Ontario Private Hospitals Act. So I'm actually quite pleased that the Premier relies on the Shouldice Hospital as an example of the kind of thing that he's thinking should happen in Alberta, because what the Shouldice Hospital is is a licensed hospital under the Private Hospital Act; i.e., it's a private licensed hospital, which is exactly what the Official Opposition has been saying all the time, that what Bill 11 does and what's reinforced in amendment A is create private hospitals in the province of Alberta. The government for political reasons has chosen to call these private hospitals approved surgical facilities, but by their own words, by using the example of the Shouldice Hospital to bolster their argument, they are admitting that in fact what they are talking about are private hospitals.

4:30

Mr. Chairman, if you'll permit me, while I am talking about the Shouldice Hospital, I have received some new information just this afternoon about the operation of the Shouldice Hospital, and I would like to update the comments that I made on Wednesday, April 5, I believe it was, when I had an opportunity to first speak to Bill 11 at second reading, but it is relevant to the amendment.

When I was speaking at second reading, I entered onto the record my understanding of how the Shouldice Hospital operated and how it billed and I believe made reference to how the administrative costs, or what I called the profit, were legislated, and it had some relationship to the professional fees paid to the surgeons who operate in the Shouldice Hospital. In fact, I have found this afternoon that that's not the case, Mr. Chairman. According to the Shouldice Hospital, there is no relationship between the professional fees and the overhead costs, and that's because there is no contract with the government of Ontario. Isn't that interesting?

The earlier information which had been provided to members of the Official Opposition regarding the Shouldice clinic was predicated on the notion that there was, in fact, a contractual relationship. Again, I find this very interesting, because in clarifying my own understanding of how the Shouldice Hospital operates and having the opportunity now to put that clarification on the record through this debate on this amendment, I've learned something brand new about the Shouldice Hospital, which again makes me question why the government would use it as an example.

The Shouldice Hospital as a licensed hospital in the province of Ontario operates without a contractual guarantee from the government of Ontario, entirely different from what's being proposed in

Bill 11. I find that fascinating. So the private surgical facilities here under Bill 11 would be dependent on a contractual relationship; in other words, a minimum or maximum number of services that could be . . . [interjection] Should I wait for the minister? Okay. [interjection] Would the minister of environmental protection like to put something on the record? He's saying that there should be continued dribbling or driveling, and I'm just wondering whether he wants to get in *Hansard* that he's making some insightful commentary on Bill 11. His constituents would be thrilled to hear his insightful comments on private health care. So go ahead, Mr. Minister. Take it away.

Chairman's Ruling Factual Accuracy

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair would observe . . . [interjection] Hon. minister. [interjection] Well, you do so in tones that we can't hear.

The chair would observe that there is no minister of environmental protection in the Chamber. The titles of certain ministers have changed. There's no longer a portfolio called environmental protection. It's the Department of Environment.

I would also encourage you to continue with the debate, and we'll try and deal with those people who would like to interject.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much. My apologies to the minister who is responsible for the environment. I was referring, of course, to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, who was making noises and inappropriately interjecting at this point. But since he won't take the occasion to rise and put his comments on the record, I'll just continue with my comments.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: The issue with the Shouldice Hospital is that they operate without any kind of a contract. In fact, in the words of one spokesman for the Shouldice Hospital that I was talking to today, they could do every hernia surgery in Ontario or no hernia surgeries in Ontario and they would still operate as a private hospital – and that is exactly what they are, a private hospital – without depending on any kind of government guarantees.

What the government of Alberta wants to do is handpick a few private clinic operators and then give them some kind of platinum card guarantee that they're going to get patients. They're going to guarantee them a certain minimum number of patients and therefore a certain dollar volume of services. I find it, as I was saying before, extraordinary that the government would continue to use the Shouldice Hospital as an example when it really doesn't reflect what the government is doing at all.

But that shouldn't really surprise me, Mr. Chairman, because as you've heard before, this is not the only misinformation that the government has been repeating and repeating and repeating regarding its private hospitals plan. So it shouldn't surprise me that they would distort what happens at the Shouldice clinic. As I said, I'm glad I had this opportunity to correct my own understanding about the manner of billing and compensation that reflects how the Shouldice clinic operates.

The Minister of Government Services should not be surprised with the robust nature of the debate on this amendment because this is a keystone section of Bill 11. I would suggest to that minister and all government members that this debate is going to continue on this amendment for some time, until we are satisfied that it makes good public policy sense to proceed. I think that if members of the

Official Opposition can't be satisfied that it would make good public policy sense to proceed, then we'll use the opportunity in committee to make our arguments to try to convince members who would otherwise support the government of that conclusion.

When we think there's enough support to defeat the package of amendments or at least this amendment, if they can't be further corrected, then I guess we'll allow it to get to a vote. But until then, I don't think any government member should be operating under the impression that debate will be swift on these government amendments. The government amendments, in my reading of them, don't do a lot to deal with the deficiencies of the bill. So we will carry on with debate on this amendment as we see fit, and I look forward to additional opportunities myself to participate.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and start my part of the debate on this most important of all bills that this Legislature has ever seen come before it over its 95-year history, in my judgment at least. Bill 11 is indeed a piece of legislation that has roused unprecedented concern and opposition to it by Albertans.

At second reading on behalf of the New Democrat opposition I spoke to why the principles underlying this Bill 11 will lead Alberta and Canada down a blind alley. During committee stage I will explain why Albertans are not going to like what's at the end of this blind alley. Albertans in poll after poll have expressed a great deal of concern about this bill, including section 2 and the amendment that we are debating now. Amendment A1, section A deals with this very critical section of the bill, the section of the bill that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has called the keystone section of the bill. I agree, because it's in this section that for the first time we learn that there will be an approved surgical facility, which is a new entity being created by a sort of definitional fiat by this government in this bill.

4:40

Albertans in poll after poll have told this government that they don't want an expansion of private, for-profit health care. They don't want private, for-profit hospitals to be operating in this province. They have told the government, of course, that instead of costly privatization experiments, governments should be doing something more constructive rather than just hoping that private, for-profit hospitals will repair the damage from the government's own policies, certainly by way of first underfunding and then closing hospital beds in the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, if not thousands, and also underfunding regional health authorities so that they can't even put into operation on a regular basis all the operating theatres that they have and thereby creating backlogs, long waiting lines and lists, and causing pain and suffering as a result of all of this.

Albertans were hoping that this bill would provide a serious and honest answer and attempt on the part of this government to relieve Albertans of the unnecessary problems that they have been facing when they get sick, when they need medical care and need to go to publicly funded, publicly administered, publicly delivered services and the locations where these services are delivered, that is the hospitals.

Mr. Chairman, this amendment A, interestingly enough, retains in it the very part of the section which Albertans are opposed to in the most strenuous way. That is, of course, it retains section 2(1)(b), "an approved surgical facility." After all the efforts that Albertans have made through a variety of ways, forums and meetings and vigils and

petitions and letter writing campaigns and phone calls and e-mails to MLAs' offices and to the Premier's office and to the office of the minister of health, they find that the government has failed to respond appropriately and positively to their concerns.

Mr. Chairman, when you look at what's an approved surgical facility as it's defined in this bill and when it appears in section 2, with which this particular amendment deals, and you ask what is an approved surgical facility, you very quickly come to the conclusion and realization that it's different from a regular hospital only in the most minor – most minor – of ways. In other words, it's no different from a regular hospital that is defined in the Hospitals Act of this province and in the Canada Health Act.

Albertans were hoping that this sort of definitional trick that's represented in the way in which this particular entity is to be created, if this bill ever passes, will be different from a hospital. They are offended by this so-called amendment. I'm sure the minister has been serious about bringing this amendment forward to address the very concerns that Albertans had about the idea of the approved surgical facility.

This amendment is really not a serious attempt. In spite of his serious effort to accommodate the concerns of Albertans, Mr. Chairman, the amendment, I guess, specifically now includes reference to physicians and to dentists, and that's all it does, but that wasn't the primary concern of Albertans. So why make another attempt to yet again mislead Albertans into believing that some substantive change has in fact been made by way of this amendment to respond seriously and honestly to their concerns?

Albertans are continuing to express concern. I heard today, Mr. Chairman, from some of my own constituents and some other Albertans from outside my own constituency expressing extreme frustration with the effort of this government to in a sense stonewall this whole debate by bringing in these amendments, which really are no amendments. They really have no substantive content. This particular amendment falls short and in fact does absolutely nothing to assuage or to meet the concerns of Albertans about, what they see correctly, I think, an attempt by way of this section to approve and give legal status to the idea of private, for-profit hospitals.

Much has been made, Mr. Chairman, on the side of the government of the idea that this approved surgical facility is not really a reality; it's an idea that's offered as a choice to RHAs. It's argued that it's no more than enabling legislation. I just wonder how this enabling legislation and this amendment that sticks to that very basic idea that Albertans continue to object to, want excluded from this bill, should assure them that private, for-profit hospitals will not come into being and having come into being will not drain away, siphon away, badly needed public funds within the public hospitals themselves.

These people are concerned about and oppose the surgical facility alternative as proposed in this amendment and in this bill. They know from the evidence that's available to them, evidence that is produced by economists, by health care specialists, by university-based scholars, published in the most reputable scholarly journals in the world, which simply shows that if you send public dollars to a private, for-profit facility, another name for a hospital in this bill, it's going to cost you a lot more – a lot more – yet create all kinds of other problems given other sections in this bill which deal with enhanced services. I obviously won't talk in detail about enhanced services.

4:50

But the fact is that these facilities will be licensed now, if this bill were to be passed by this Assembly, to do what our public hospitals have never done as a rule; that is, sell to Albertans medical services

that are not insured. Nevertheless, that will be proposed to them as something that they should consume. If they're treated as consumers rather than as patients, surely then they'll become the subject of high-pressure marketing techniques to buy these services. If that doesn't happen, then of course the so-called approved surgical facilities, in order for them to survive, will need payment for their services at a level that will be at no comparison to the costs which are incurred for doing the same surgical procedures in publicly owned, publicly operated and administered hospital facilities.

That's why the whole idea of having a private, profit-driven surgical facility doing what can normally be and should be done in facilities where we have already put public wealth, public resources in bricks and mortar, in all kinds of technologies and machinery, in all kinds of infrastructure – why would Albertans not object to a proposal as contained in this section 2, to which this amendment A speaks, when they know that this proposal will lead to enormous wastefulness, enormous drain, if you wish, of public resources?

So, Mr. Chairman, it really is a disappointment, a disappointment to me and to Albertans that this amendment has failed to address the most central, the most critical of concerns that Albertans have expressed – expressed through polls, expressed through their letters, expressed through public forums – about the fact that they consider this particular proposed development most undesirable and a most serious threat, not only a threat to the responsible way in which fiscal matters should be handled but a threat to the very idea of public health care that they so proudly own up to and identify with.

Mr. Chairman, it's an amendment – and I'm speaking to this approved surgical facility section of it – which I cannot lend my support to. I can't see how I, against the wishes of the vast majority of Albertans and the vast majority of my own constituents and based on my own judgment, can support it.

I go to section 2, which is part of amendment A:

No physician or dentist shall provide a major surgical service, as described

- (a) in the by-laws under the Medical Profession Act, in the case of a physician, or
- (b) in the regulations under section 25(1)(a.1), in the case of a dentist,

in Alberta, except in a public hospital.

But what this amendment doesn't do is make any attempt whatsoever to indicate what this bill will mean when it says major surgical service. How is that to be determined? It seems to me this failure to define, a failure to even make an attempt to identify and give examples of what might be considered major surgical service is a cop-out. It's to leave the door wide open to let the surgical facilities engage in a contentious debate with some other authority, in some other forum to see whether or not the surgery they want to do, the surgery that they make an application to this entity to have approved in order that they could do it, is major or minor. It leaves the area of defining major surgical procedure service wide open to contention, perhaps even to legal challenge, and to something that may lead to divisions even within the community of experts who is responsible for providing us medical surgical services on which we all depend for our own well-being when we are in difficulty, when we are in need.

This amendment, therefore, Mr. Chairman, falls far short of what the vast majority of Albertans expected to see the minister and the government bring forward in this House. They are aware of the fact that the government itself has been wavering over whether hip surgery is major surgery or minor surgery. They know that government doesn't mean to seriously address the issue of whether or not these surgical facilities will be allowed to do minor or major surgeries. It simply wants to sneak its way around this whole issue and let the private providers who are in the business of making profit

get into the battle of defining what's major and what's minor.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I will not be able to support this amendment A, as proposed by the minister of health last night in his submission to the Legislature.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to speak just ever so briefly to this amendment. Quite frankly, I'm very proud of section 2 of this act. When we reflect back to the policy that was put on the table last November, it talked about:

No person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta except in

- (a) a public hospital, or
- (b) an approved surgical facility.

One of the changes that was made in translating that policy into legislation, into this act, was to add subsection (2) which said:

No person shall provide a major surgical service, as described in the by-laws under the Medical Profession Act, in Alberta except in a public hospital.

What I believe the addition of that subsection in the act did was to respond to the concerns of Albertans and the concerns of Edmonton-Whitemud as expressed to me in the town hall meeting which I held – we call them community focus meetings in Edmonton-Whitemud – on January 13th, where people said that they were concerned about the types of services that would be provided in a surgical facility.

In translating the policy into the act, we were able to, in the course of our caucus discussion, bring forward some of those concerns and have them drafted into the act. One of the very important ones is subsection (2), which said that major surgical services must be done in a public hospital, and what is major would not be a political decision but would be a medical decision, a medical decision as determined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

That's something the constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud specifically asked me to bring forward and that I was able to bring forward, as did others in our caucus, and have it translated into the act. So that's a very, very important section and something that's been entirely overlooked by the opposition in their quest to have everything determined to be a private hospital and very clearly is not a question of everything being a private hospital, a very clear and distinct difference between what is a hospital and what is a designated surgical facility or an approved surgical facility under this section. Specifically, then, instead of putting in an artificial designation about how long one might stay in this place – because, after all, we're not talking about hotels, where overnight stays are the order of the day. We're talking about a surgical facility, which is a medical facility, and the question about how long one stays in a medical facility is a medical question. Whether it's appropriate for a person to stay in a medical facility is obviously a question which must be determined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons as to what is medically appropriate and whether the facility itself has the type of instruments, the type of technology, the type of people, the type of medical staff which would make it safe and make it reasonable to do the procedure in that facility and to stay in that facility for postoperative follow-up and observation.

5:00

So instead of putting an arbitrary or irrational definition about 12 hours in the act, what we've clearly done is put in subsection (2) the concept that major surgeries must be done in "a public hospital." The College of Physicians and Surgeons on a medical basis determines what's major surgery, and it is open to them, of course, in their bylaws to determine whether something needs a 12-hour stay or a 24-hour stay. If that's how they define what's major or minor,

that can be done in the context of the bylaws. That's an important thing to bring forward, and I just wanted to take this opportunity to put on the record that in fact we have listened to what Albertans have said, that we've listened to what the constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud have said in the drafting of this bill and put right into the original drafting of this bill subsection (2).

All we're talking about now – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona indicated that we were trying to tell Albertans that this was a substantial amendment. Mr. Chairman, the amendments that were put forward by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, which include sections A to N, which will be dealt with by the House, are indeed substantial amendments, but A1, section A, is not substantial. A1, section A, is actually a very small and minor amendment.

The only people who are saying that it's a substantial amendment are the people who are taking some four hours now to debate what in essence is taking out the word "person" and inserting "physician or dentist" because in the original drafting of the bill it wasn't made clear; in fact it left out the concept of surgical facilities that happen in dental offices. That's the only impact of this amendment. The only people who are trying to pretend that this is a substantial amendment are the opposition by debating it for four hours, when the only real issue here at this stage on this amendment is to replace "person" with "physician" and to add the line "and no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta," and then in subsection (2) by replacing "person" with "physician or dentist" and adding subsection (b), "in the regulations under section 25(1)(a.1), in the case of a dentist."

So that's really the only thing that's happening with this particular portion of the amendments which were put forward, and it bears no further discussion. It really doesn't need four and a half hours of debate, because that's not really substantive. So any proceeding ad nauseam on that one would be irrelevant.

I did want to take the opportunity to point out the important fact that subsection (2) in the amendment is something which was brought forward as a result of input that we received from the constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud and others and the constituents of St. Albert and the constituents of many, many other constituencies in this province and many members in this province.

I just wanted to point those things out, Mr. Chairman, before I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 11.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that the committee do adjourn debate on Bill 11 at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

MR. HANCOCK: I would move that when the committee rises, we report progress on Bill 11.

[Motion to report progress on Bill 11 carried]

Bill 21 Appropriation Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: The Hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's not necessary to move it in committee, but I would just like to indicate that we've had a month of debate on the budget. We now have it in committee for clause-by-clause analysis, if any is necessary. I would hope that we would be able to accomplish that this afternoon.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I share your frustration; believe me. The problem that we've got here is that this vote is going to be dictated by the clock. That means that at 5:15, if I'm not finished speaking, I won't get the benefit of the last eight minutes of debate time, that I otherwise would have been entitled to, because you'll be compelled to interrupt me. Now, of course, we had anticipated this and had some understanding about what may happen this afternoon in the House, and it didn't happen. This leaves me in a bit of a conundrum because I have some things to say about the budget process and about the implications of Bill 21.

Of course, one of the themes that you've heard so often from the Official Opposition is how much we resent the fact that we cannot fully do our jobs because of the budget debate process. We can't fully represent our constituents because the government has engineered, in fact the former Treasurer when he was the former Government House Leader engineered a process that curtailed our ability to fully participate in the budget process. Now we see that through some kind of procedural timing the government has once again limited final comments on the appropriation bill on some \$17 billion worth of appropriations to about seven or eight minutes of discussion. I'm not fast enough to do the math about how many tens or hundreds of millions of dollars a minute that is, but it certainly is an insult to the process and to the taxpayers that we would be left such meagre time when it comes to the government's most significant policy, that being its budget, its spending policies. Mr. Chairman, I must say that I am very disappointed and very disheartened that we find ourselves in this position yet again.

Now, Bill 21, the appropriation bill, is the final step in something that started that day when the Treasurer stood up with his well-rehearsed speech and talked about the new vision. I have some questions about that new vision. Where was the plan to alleviate the shortage of health care professionals? Where in this appropriation is the money to hire 2,200 teachers and teachers' aides and classroom aides? Where is the money, in fact, for the new classrooms, for the refurbished schools? How does the government expect to hire and recruit these professionals? Where's the vision for the future of public education in this province? Where would we find that articulated in this funding policy?

Where's the plan to deal with housing shortages and homelessness? I understand that there was only an additional \$3 million in new funding, so where's the plan for that? Mr. Chairman, what about shelters for adults? A 5 percent increase in funding there will hardly be adequate with the growth we've experienced, particularly in our urban centres in this province.

Where's the plan for postsecondary education? How are we going to make it more affordable? I was told today that fully 49 percent of the students at the University of Alberta are there with student funding of some kind, student financing of some kind, and that the cap of \$40,000 is becoming insufficient. So it's not bad enough that so many of these students are going to be graduating with \$40,000 worth of debt. For many of them that means they also can't then go on to graduate studies. Because they don't have the money and they've already reached their lifetime cap, they can't go on. Where's the plan to deal with that?

5:10

Where's the plan to deal with those students who the Students Finance Board determines come from households that are too wealthy because their family happens to have more than \$10,000

worth of disposable income? Where's the plan to allow those students to carry on, Mr. Chairman?

How are we going to make sure that our children have the skills that they need to compete in the global economy? The Minister of Innovation and Science is talking about all of these new strategies for information technology and for moving ahead in the global economy, but we don't see all of those things that have to come behind that policy in terms of preparing our children to meet that future head-on. Where are the plans for that?

It certainly seems to me that the government is adrift, and when you get to read this budget in the detail that I've had an opportunity to read it in, you understand by looking at the business plans that are attached to the budget, you understand by looking at the performance measures that are in the budget – you get a picture of a government that once again understands the cost of everything. You know, they're good accountants, this government, but they're lousy planners. They know the cost of everything, and apparently they know the value of nothing or at least of very little.

The only thing that the government appears to continue to value is their budget numbers, and they seem to lose sight of what those budget numbers are supposed to support. Of course, the primary reason why you would have a balanced budget is so that you can afford to pay for the programs that are so important and so vital to Alberta and its citizens. To have a balanced budget as a goal is shortsighted. To have a balanced budget for the purpose of being able to pay in a sustainable way for core programs and services seems to me to be a much more laudable goal, a much more visionary goal.

Mr. Chairman, we see in this budget the coming of a flat tax, and I hope that the departure of the Treasurer who brought in this flat tax, who seemed to have the currency or the muscle in cabinet to convince his colleagues that this flat tax was a good idea, the fact that he's now moving along to pursue some other things means that the government will pause and reconsider this flat tax initiative and will in fact come to the same conclusion every other jurisdiction that's looked at a flat tax has come to, and that is that the flat tax is not the best way to give evidence to tax policy. It's not the best way to ensure stable funding. It's not the most fair way to impose tax policy. In fact, it's wrong-minded, because, particularly as a result of federal government tax initiatives, many, many Albertans, instead of getting a tax cut as a result of this flat tax or this 11 percent single rate, are going to instead receive a tax increase.

Mr. Chairman, the budget that we are presented with in the appropriation bill that flows from the budget does not deal adequately with the whole issue of user fees. It doesn't deal with it adequately at all. The government is in the position, after being embarrassed after their intervention in the Eurig estate decision, which flowed out of Ontario, to have to rethink its entire flat tax proposal.

I see that you are moving to interrupt.

THE CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, but under Standing Order 61(4) I must put the question proposing the approval of the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for consideration by the Committee of the Whole.

[Motion carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 21.

[Motion to report progress on Bill 21 carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 21. The committee reports progress on Bill 11. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 5:18 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 17, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/04/17

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Hon. members, would you please remain standing so that we might participate in the singing of our national anthem. I will call upon Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us.

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted this afternoon to present a petition signed by 982 Albertans in the communities of Calgary, Cochrane, Bragg Creek, Turner Valley, Okotoks, Claresholm, and Stavely. Together with other petitions this afternoon that will bring us to 55,310 with the 3,473 we'll see this afternoon.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to table this afternoon with 638 names of Calgarians who are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to table a petition. It's the first installment of a petition signed by 571 students that states the following:

The . . . government is proposing two separate bills which will have an incredible impact on your . . . way of life. Bill 11 and 18 are currently being proposed that would affect both the health care system and also the tax rate . . . we have been unable to attain any factual evidence to support the move to a privatized health care system and also to an 11% flat tax rate . . . By signing this petition, you are saying that if these two bills are passed and go into effect, then when you are able to vote you will not support the Conservative Party.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I thank you for presenting that petition. It sort of just violates most of our rules.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present this

petition with another 364 Albertans' signatures on it. The signatories to the petition are from Forestburg, Mayerthorpe, Spruce Grove, Edmonton, Vauxhall, Taber, Lethbridge, Leduc, Devon, Thorsby, Millet, Wetaskiwin, Fort McMurray, and Radway.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for showing the way to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition signed by 951 Albertans. They are from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, Leduc, Beaumont, New Sarepta, and Gibbons. They are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 898 people from Edmonton, Stony Plain, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, Camrose, and Leduc. They are petitioning "the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to present to the Assembly this afternoon a petition organized by Jean Rogers.* It urges "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition of 1,859 citizens of the Grande Cache area of Alberta due to the fatality February 7 on highway 40 south of Grande Cache.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully request that a petition that was tabled on the 13th of April in the Legislature by myself be now read and received, sir.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented from 180 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped please be now read and received.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled last Thursday signed by 130 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented on April 13 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that immediately following the question period today I will move pursuant to Standing Order 40 the following motion:

Whereas this government has undermined, underfunded, understaffed, and destabilized Alberta's public health care system for the past seven years to create an artificial demand for private health care, whereas this government has pursued a policy of promoting private health care to take advantage of the turmoil it has created in the public health care system, whereas all legitimate opinion polls show that a majority of Albertans oppose Bill 11, whereas Albertans have signaled their concerns through tens of thousands of letters, e-mails, faxes and through their attendance at town hall meetings and rallies, including 3,000 at Calgary's Round-Up Centre on April 15, 2000, and 7,000 at the Northlands Agricom on April 16, 2000, whereas government is ignoring the advice and findings of its own report, produced with taxpayers' money . . . whereas the government has not released the true cost of its massive propaganda campaign, nor has it provided the people of Alberta with the information contained in the blanked-out 30 pages of documents requested by Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, whereas the government has invoked a form of closure to limit debate at second reading on Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, and shows every indication that it will proceed to further limit debate on Bill 11 with a goal to passing [it] before the Easter recess, and whereas the amendments proposed by government ignore the many serious concerns with Bill 11, be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to consider the following motion: now therefore be it resolved that this Assembly has no confidence in the government.

I will seek unanimous support to allow the motion to be debated and voted this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to rise and table the appropriate number of copies of a comprehensive and collaborative strategy involving parents, communities, and the government: the report of the Task Force on Children at Risk.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 1999-2000 annual report for the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta; the 1999 annual report for the Alberta Association of Architects; and the Two-year Review of the Personal Directives Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings this afternoon. The first is a list of proposed amendments to Bill 11 submitted by Dr. Richard Plain.

The second is a number of letters all opposed to Bill 11, and I'll just read the names of the individuals: Brian Jackson, Pilar Gateman, Evelyn Soltys, Gabor Takats, Jack Clack.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have appropriate copies of a letter from Peter Nettleton of Calgary urging the Minister of Environment to listen to all Albertans when it comes to the consideration of the Spray Valley development public hearings.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One is a letter from Justin Brooks. He's a grade 6 student in Brookwood school in Mrs. McFarlane's class, and he is expressing his concern and opposition to Bill 11.

The second one is yet another challenge to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to do a public debate in his constituency. I am challenging him once again because of calls that have come from his constituency.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling this afternoon that is a news release from the Official Opposition dated April 15 of this year, and it is urging all members of this Assembly to vote against Bill 11 and follow the wishes of their constituents.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is excerpts of a report titled Progress of Canada's Children, which outlines a number of indicators and measures which can be utilized to monitor children's well-being and may be a useful reference in contrast to the Task Force on Children at Risk report released today by government.

The second tabling is a report by Curtis, Dooley, and Phipps

completed in December of 1999 titled Does Mother or Father Know Best? It is an assessment of parent/child agreement in the Canadian national survey of children and youth.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today my first two tablings are updated copies of the Bill 11 debate summaries published on the government of Alberta's Bill 11 web site for April 10 and 11. So there will be no confusion, these may look similar to sessional papers, but they are updates. Language has changed even though the government has not made any reference to what they've changed in their re-creation of history on the debate of Bill 11.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of a statement titled Is Bill 11 Good for Albertans? It is a statement prepared by the Interfaith Coalition on Justice in the Workplace, Edmonton, Alberta. It was circulated at the rallies in Calgary and Edmonton on Bill 11 over this weekend.

Also, Keeping Medicare Public, a document prepared by the savemedicare.org coalition: the words to the song *Oh Medicare* sung to the tune of *O Canada*.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 49 guests made up of students, teachers, and parent helpers from Hazel Cameron elementary school in Vulcan. They are here, I believe, for about the eighth time, and it actually started with a teacher who grew up in your area, Mr. Speaker, Sharon Steinbring, who's now teaching in another school in Palliser regional school division. With the group today are teachers Mrs. Debbie Leech, Miss Jennifer Garbutt; teacher assistant Danielle Gibson; parents Mrs. Jessy Douglas, Deb Hartung, Darlene Carlson, Wendy Miller, Mr. Ray Shaw, Mrs. Sue Mills, Mrs. Sue Schmeelke, and Dr. Shawn Webster from the Vulcan community health centre along with bus driver Al Wiens. Would they please rise in the members' gallery and receive the warm, traditional welcome of our Assembly.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly special guests from the Girl Guides of Canada. Our guests are seated in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon, and I would ask them to rise as they are introduced: Edna Dach, Edmonton area commissioner; Lana Miketon, resource co-ordinator; Laurie Robertson, Spark Guider; Kathleen Robertson, Spark; Heather Robertson, Brownie; Shannon Robertson, Guide; Cindy Fendall, Pathfinder. I would ask all members to express their appreciation for the box of cookies kindly provided by our guests this afternoon and provide them with a warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you the McDonald family from that great town of Thorsby in the member's constituency. Dave and Teresa McDonald and their son Dakin are seated in the members' gallery. It seems that Dakin is very interested in politics and actually requested that mom and dad come here to observe the Legislature at work today.

I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional, warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 66 wonderful, outstanding students from St. Lucy Catholic school in Edmonton-Castle Downs. They're here with two of their teachers, Mr. Bernie MacGregor and Mrs. Lynn McLagan. They're here with 10 parent helpers. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure this afternoon to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly members from Chateau Mission Court, which is a wonderful facility and housing centre in our community of St. Albert. They are here today and are seated in the members' gallery. With Trish Gyepesi, who is the activity co-ordinator, and the bus driver, Jack Soulsby, are the members and residents of Chateau Mission Court: Elizabeth Kehoe, Alice Brown, Jerry Chambers, Avenal Dayman, Kay Van Deelen, Pat Smart, and Donna Mitchell. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce Kellie Zdebiak and Caroline Landreville. They are two senior high school students who initiated the petition that I presented earlier. These two students were not satisfied with the answers that the government provided and, in their own words, indicated that "trust me" was not good enough. I would like to congratulate them both for their leadership and their commitment to public health care and ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege to introduce to you and through you today seven people who are visiting here from Guadalajara in the state Jalisco. Patricia Martinez is the Alberta government representative. Martha Reinos is a student education program director for the state of Jalisco. Karen Carter is the international program co-ordinator here in Alberta. With them and most important are Andres Ampudia, 14; Janet Nava, 15; Alfredo Gómez, 14; Alejandro Gómez, 11; and Rocio Avila, who is at Paul Kane high school. The first four kids that I mentioned are staying for a month at W.D. Cuts junior high in St. Albert, and the last lady that I mentioned is here for five months at Paul Kane senior high. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly several youths who are concerned about Bill 11 and are present, I think, in the public gallery. Their names are Yoav Englebert, Trevor King, Tom

MacDonald, and Amy VanKeekan. Also, there are several other citizens who were present today at the citizens' vigil against Bill 11 on the steps of the Legislature. I'll ask all of them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, you'll have a school group that will come from Crystal Park school. They are scheduled to be here between 2 o'clock and 2:30, and they will not be in the House to hear their introduction. Would you like to introduce them now or at the conclusion of the question period?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I'd rather do it after question period.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend almost 10,000 Albertans rallied in Calgary and Edmonton to speak out in support of public health care and against the Premier's privatization scheme. Despite this government's multimillion dollar taxpayer-funded propaganda campaign of misinformation, Albertans are speaking out against the government's policy and this Premier's policy through petitions and e-mails and letters, faxes, town hall meetings, and rallies. It appears that the Premier neither listens nor cares. My questions today are to the Premier. Why did the Premier not have the courage to show up at the rallies and defend his privatization scheme? He might have in fact seen some of his former supporters there.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, on Wednesday and Thursday I clearly indicated that we were going to try and get to questions in question period that would be as brief as possible, would be nonargumentative, would not have an expression of an opinion, nor would they lead to debate or have expressions. I want to advise all members today that that's the expectation once again. The questions should follow through the normal urgency matter with respect to question period, and I would ask for brevity with respect to responses as well.

Thank you very much.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the only campaign of misinformation that is being conducted is being conducted by the Liberals and their cohorts. The truth is in the legislation. The legislation is the law. The truth is always in the law.

Mr. Speaker, I saw no need for me to attend the rally. There were plenty of people there, depending on which newspaper you read. There were 2,500 in Calgary and, I understand, anywhere from 5,000 to 7,000 in Edmonton. There was simply no need. I don't do protests, nor do I deny anyone the right to protest. Protest is the essence of democracy.

The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition was there. I don't know if any of the government MLAs were there. I very much doubt it.

When this member was a minister in this government, I can recall protests of the magnitude of 3,000, 4,000 people, mostly environmental groups. I can recall one at the Oldman River dam where

there were over 10,000 protesters. I was the minister at that particular time. I didn't attend then, and I don't do protests now, nor do I deny anyone the right to protest. It's all part of democracy.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, how many more rallies and petitions and e-mails and town hall meetings and letters and phone calls does this Premier need before he does the right thing and scraps his privatization policy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is the misleading misinformation. There is no private health care policy. This is a very simple policy that purports to and proposes to put regulations around clinics that have been operating in this province for 10 to 15 years, 30 of which were commissioned under the watch of the former, former, former minister of health, who happens now to be the leader of the Liberal Party.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier make a commitment to allow a vote on the motion of nonconfidence which I placed before the Assembly this afternoon?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know. I wasn't in the Assembly to hear the motion 40 petition, but as I understand the rules, we have to first of all debate the question of the urgency of the debate.

I will say something. Having come into the Assembly and having been informed that neither you, Mr. Speaker, nor the Government House Leader were informed of this motion 40, this was obviously another Liberal dirty trick and an absolute blind side.

MR. DICKSON: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Nonconfidence Motion

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we're going to deal with the basic rules of the question period, and the Speaker is now going to get – no, he won't get involved in the debate, but he will make some comments with respect to decorum so this matter does not go unattended.

First of all, hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, the question is directed to the Premier of the province of Alberta, who is not in a position to determine what the Assembly will do with respect to a Standing Order 40. A Standing Order 40 requires "unanimous consent" of all members "of the Assembly." Regardless of the position taken by the person to whom the question was directed, it will be the Assembly who will determine that question, not the leader of the government.

Secondly, to the leader of the government, the chair was verbally informed by the Official Opposition House Leader at mid-noon that there was going to be a Standing Order 40. In terms of the latter part of the statement, it would not be the leader of the government's right to know what an hon. member has conveyed to the Speaker, so he would not be in a position to know what has been conveyed or not conveyed to the chair. But it may very well have been the case that the Government House Leader was not informed. So that's just clarification for all of that.

Now, let's very calmly move on to the second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Opinion Poll

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend the government leaked another of its taxpayer-funded political polls as part of their propaganda campaign. Using a rather slanted question

of 74 words, the government tried to put a positive spin on the fact that the majority of Albertans oppose this government's privatization scheme and the way the government is pushing it through the Legislature. My questions are to the Premier. Research shows that private health care institutions won't reduce waiting lists, so why does the government poll instead mislead Albertans by saying just the opposite?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the government poll doesn't mislead anyone. It asks honest questions to seek honest answers, unlike this piece of garbage which is Liberal propaganda that is full of absolute mistruths and fraudulent statements. It says: Bill 11 "legalizes private, for-profit hospitals." That simply is not true, and they know it. It says it "creates a two-tier health care system." Our policy, which is the framework for the legislation, specifically prohibits, absolutely prohibits the creation of a two-tier health care system, yet the Liberals will deliberately and maliciously put out this kind of misinformation, this kind of fraudulent material. And what's even sadder: they cheer for themselves. They're admitting that they're fraudulent, and they cheer for themselves. What is so shameful about this is that they also put it out at taxpayer's expense.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Words that may be used one day may not necessarily be used the following day, and so much of it depends on the tone. To the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition: I guess in the context of the day and the intent and the mood and what have you, words like "mislead" and others have certain connotations and can be very argumentative. To the leader of the government: if you want to respond to such words for clarification, it can also lead to inflammation. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora: it would be really welcomed if we did not hear from you by way of interjection.

Government Opinion Poll (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that research and experience here in Alberta show that in fact private facilities such as cataract facilities are less efficient than the public sector, why does the government poll say just the opposite?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we're into the whole question of why, why did this leader of the Liberal opposition when she was minister of health allow 30 private clinics to operate, many of them cataract surgery clinics, and allow them to charge facility fees? Why?

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that this latest poll funded by the taxpayers shows less support for the government's privatization scheme than it did several months ago, will the government back down a third time and kill the privatization proposal?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, how can you kill something that is not alive? There is no privatization proposal. The only person in this Legislature to my knowledge who has proposed private hospitals – that is, private, for-profit hospitals – is the leader of the Liberal opposition, who has stated publicly that if there is a place for these hospitals and if they can add to the overall health care, then why not let them operate? She's the only person who has made a statement relative to the operation of private, for-profit hospitals.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Holy Cross Hospital

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After spending \$32 million at least of taxpayer money on renovations, this government sold the Holy Cross hospital for only \$4.5 million to Enterprise Universal Inc., a corporation controlled by the Huang brothers. Dr. Peter Huang at the time was the head of ophthalmology for the Calgary regional health authority. Now, Poon McKenzie Architects, on behalf of Enterprise Universal Inc., is applying for a development permit from the city of Calgary to redesignate the facility as a private hospital. My questions are to the Premier. Is the government's private health policy designed to accommodate the conversion of the Holy Cross site to a private hospital, or rather an approved overnight stay surgical facility?

MR. KLEIN: I have no idea what kind of a contractual relationship or any other relationship this operation has with the Calgary regional health authority, Mr. Speaker, but I'll have the hon. minister shed some light on the situation.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the words that are used here are quite flowery and quite possibly misleading. First of all, with respect to any proposals that might be put forward by the proponents mentioned, this would have to be considered by the regional health authority and go through due diligence and approval. I know of no interest, quite frankly, that the regional health authority has in this particular piece of property, and I think it might be quite a different proposal when you actually look at the wording of it. This is not something that has been approved or is about to be approved.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, my question is again to the Premier. What discussions has this government had with the owners of the facility regarding the redesignation of the Holy Cross hospital as a private hospital, or an approved overnight stay surgical facility?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there would be no reason or purpose for anyone in this government to have a discussion with the proponents over a land use redesignation. Maybe she needs a clinic in municipal politics and how it works. That is a matter for city council to decide. A land use redesignation is the result of a public hearing before the council. It has nothing to do with the province of Alberta or the government of this province.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What steps will this government take to assure Albertans that the Holy Cross hospital will not be subsidized by the taxpayers, who've already lost millions of dollars on the earlier fire sale of the site?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what is being proposed. I don't know the details of the land use redesignation application, if in fact there is one. I don't know of any discussions that have taken place with the Calgary regional health authority. I do know that the Huang brothers were proposing a long-term care centre, and there's been a demonstrated need throughout this province for more long-term care.

Also, there's been a lot of talk in all areas of this province about public/private partnerships relative to long-term care centres as they exist today. There are numerous long-term care centres that provide for the care of the elderly who are sick in long-term care centres. Is the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition proposing that we close all these down? If she is, stand up and say so.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday the government announced two new MRI machines each for Edmonton and Calgary hospitals even though they won't be up and running until next year. Their timing is suspicious, to say the least, given the current public opposition to the government's private health care agenda. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the government relying upon PR tricks in making the announcement of new MRI machines now instead of waiting until closer to the time when the new machines will actually be operational?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. minister supplement. But, you know, he called this a PR trick. I would challenge him to make that assertion, make that statement to the hundreds and hundreds of doctors who are standing up today saying that this is good news, that this is the right thing to do, that this will put Alberta on the leading edge relative to MRI capacity and the use of MRIs in this country and that is good. You know, this is the amazing thing about being in government. Anything that is good for this province, anything that is good for the people of this great province is bad for the opposition. They're so good at making pigs ears out of silk purses. Honestly. Any good news, they've got to find something bad with it. Right. Pathetic.

2:10

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary to the Premier: how does the government expect to find enough qualified personnel to operate the new MRI machines when there's a severe shortage of personnel to run the ones already in place, a shortage caused by the five private MRI clinics hiring away staff from the public system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this all goes to one of the other points in our six-point program. Two ministers can allude to this, and that is the training of more frontline staff. You know, we don't get the opportunity actually to speak about the other five points in the six-point program.

Certainly I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond as well as the Minister of Learning, because there are some plans in place.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, members of the Assembly would recall that this matter has been announced before. There is actually a very good story which extends back over at least six months with respect to the expansion of MRI services in the province. I might just reference one that has been raised here before, and that is the establishment of an MRI service in Lethbridge. Lethbridge is doing MRI scans now for the people in the southern part of the province. They do have adequate staffing, albeit we do recognize that there will need to be additional people trained in the future. Certainly we want to extend the hours as long as possible per day per machine.

We have announced MRIs for Red Deer, for Grande Prairie, for Medicine Hat, and, Mr. Speaker, the four additional ones for the two major cities were part of our overall continuing effort to provide MRI services at a level right at the top of the list in terms of MRIs per thousand of population in this country.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very, very quickly in direct response to the hon. member's question, the access fund for this year will be keen on health professionals, and in that access fund MRI technicians will be one of the goals that we're looking at in the access fund for the upcoming year.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that two MRIs have been announced for Calgary, albeit not to be operational for another year, will the government put a stop to the ludicrous proposal by the Calgary health authority to install privately owned MRIs in public hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

We want to create as much capacity as we possibly can. Yes, we'd like to create it all inside, but if we can use the resources that exist outside to have publicly funded procedures – that is, procedures prescribed by a doctor under health care – for MRIs, why not do it? Why not do it? Why not use every possible method to get people faster access to MRIs? That's what it's all about. It's not about ideology; it's about access and getting people treated.

You know, to the NDs it's all about ideology. To us it's about getting people faster access to essential services, Mr. Speaker. That's what it's all about.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Children's Services

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Children's Services. Today the Task Force on Children at Risk released its report, which contains a number of recommendations. Will the government implement these recommendations, and how much funding will be provided for this purpose?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, today when we released the task force report, we identified as task force members that this is a report to government. It identifies the need for parents, communities, and governments at all levels to work in support of strategies to benefit their communities and to be assured that no tragedy such as the one in Taber ever occurs again.

Start young and start now is the thrust of this. Throughout the next few weeks the ministers that are working in collaboration on children's issues will review their own respective areas and determine what should be done, and those releases, in conjunction with the forum response, will come later this spring.

MR. HIERATH: My first supplemental is also to the Minister of Children's Services. The task force was established to help prevent tragedies like the Taber shooting. How will we know if these measures are indeed making a difference for children at risk?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, within the last two weeks I did identify in this House that we would be providing the first-ever Alberta children's initiative report card later this spring and annually. The task force has recommended that a similar report card on the effectiveness of all of the recommendations be reported to Albertans.

The report is to Albertans. It acknowledges that many circumstances may change. It acknowledges and anticipates that improvements will be made and that we will report annually on those improvements.

MR. HIERATH: My final question is to the same minister. The task force report is one of a number of reports regarding children recently developed by the government. Why are these reports being created, and how are they going to impact children, families, and communities?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, within the last decade there have been significant changes in the manner in which we organize and serve

those that are at risk in the province. The creation last spring of the Children's Services ministry was a follow-through to some of the work that had been done by previous ministers in the evolution of the child and family service authorities in Alberta. All 18 authorities are relatively recent and have celebrated their first anniversary within only the last few months.

Through this process a number of things are being discovered, not the least of which are issues that relate to poverty, issues that relate to substance abuse, issues that relate to ideal circumstances for the learner. Mr. Speaker, throughout the reports and the recommendations not only do we want to identify best practices, but we want to be assured that overlap and duplication in programs between levels of government and in fact between community agencies does not occur. I would anticipate that will come out subsequently as the government ministers respond to this report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Bill 11 Publicity

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The first casualty of this government's taxpayer-backed propaganda campaign to promote private health care has been the truth. The government continues to tell us that they have spent only \$1.2 million to date as the cost of financing their propaganda campaign. When we ask the minister of health day after day after day, we simply get some vague indication that we may get some additional information. The Official Opposition has been completely up front on all of its costs. We've tabled the receipts, we've tabled the material. The Premier can't wait for the question, so let me go to it directly. How much more has it cost the taxpayers of this province over and above the \$1.2 million that's already been acknowledged?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, everything will be disclosed in public accounts. That's a responsibility and an obligation of the government, unlike the Liberal opposition, who can, you know, dream up any amount of figures. We don't know any of the hidden costs involved in their real propaganda campaign, the propaganda campaign that included that pamphlet I waved around earlier. Imagine spending thousands and thousands of taxpayers' dollars on a piece of literature that contains nothing but untruths and is fraudulent. And they're proud of it. They're proud of something that is untrue, they're proud of something that is fraudulent, and they're proud that they spent thousands and thousands of taxpayers' dollars to create that kind of malicious piece of garbage.

MR. DICKSON: This Premier knows full well that we have tabled all of the receipts, all of the invoices documenting \$29,000 in expenses. Will this Premier commit, Mr. Speaker, this afternoon that he will today or tomorrow table all of the source documents, the receipts, the invoices, the estimates? Let's have that material so we know exactly how much money has been spent by the government on behalf of Alberta taxpayers.

2:20

MR. KLEIN: You know, all the travel, all the research, all the collaboration with the Canadian Union of Public Employees, all the collaboration with the Friends of Medicare, all the collaboration with the New Democrats, all the collaboration with AUPE, the Federation of Labour, the United Nurses association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, all the midnight meetings and the travel and all the hidden costs: we don't know what that is. When you add up the whole campaign, whether it's supported by taxpayers or not, I

mean, they have spent millions, millions, absolutely, to spread out misinformation and to bamboozle the people of this province. They have been part of a multimillion dollar campaign of misinformation and untruths, much of it very, very malicious.

Speaker's Ruling Inflammatory Language

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, an argumentative, opinionated question usually brings a response in kind. We have some very gifted orators in this Assembly, and we can live with that. What we shouldn't live with, though, is the insidious thing that it does to other members. It really moves them to want to participate in the volleys back and forth. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo moves the hon. Premier, the hon. Premier moves the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, the hon. member moves the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and all of a sudden, we have excitement. So let's just deal with a question, and let's just deal with an answer.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Bill 11 Publicity (continued)

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll try harder to avoid being baited.

Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta Health must have over 600 employees, given that the Public Affairs Bureau has a budget of over \$8 million, can the Premier not find a clerk somewhere that can fill out this checklist detailing all of the individual items of expenditure around the government's private health propaganda campaign?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I'll say that unlike the Liberals we have to be accountable. We have to be accountable. We just can't pull figures out and provide what we think is the right figure to add up to the right number. We have to show everything in the public accounts, and that will come out. I'll ask the hon. member to be patient.

MR. WHITE: Point of order.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Health Care Workforce

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At one of my MLA open houses constituents raised the issue of the shortage of qualified doctors and nurses in Alberta's health care system. They were also concerned about doctors and nurses leaving the province immediately upon graduation from Alberta's educational institutions. My question is directed to the Minister of Learning. Since the taxpayers of Alberta fund in excess of 70 percent of their tuition costs, has the government considered making it mandatory for doctors and nurses to practise for at least two years in the province as a condition of graduation?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To preface the answer, we were signatories to the internal trade agreement. The labour mobility clause of the internal trade agreement specifically prohibits us from putting up undue barriers to mobility across Canada. So what actually sounds like a reasonable plan – the member is absolutely correct; we do fund 70 percent of the costs for the education. Due to the internal trade agreement we are unable to do that. I would also say that it is not something we want to do.

We expect doctors to move into Alberta, and indeed many doctors are moving into Alberta. We have a very positive atmosphere when it comes to health care. We have a very positive atmosphere when it comes to taxes. I would like to say today and I can confidently say that the brain drain is in reversal when it comes to physicians, as the number of physicians is actually increasing in the province. I would say that this will continue to be so.

I believe that the best possible way – and I'm speaking as a physician, Mr. Speaker – that we can have more doctors stay in the province is by doing exactly what we're doing: by putting more money into health care, by having a positive environment for health care and having a positive environment on taxation.

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. As the population increases and ages, the need for physicians will continue to grow. What is the government doing to increase the number of spaces available in Alberta universities for doctor training?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, that's an absolutely fascinating question. If I could just take you on a little trip back, about seven or eight years ago two health care economists who were actually recently referenced in this Assembly, Barer and Stoddart, put out a report that suggested that the number of spaces for physicians should be decreased by 10 percent. This was put out in about 1993-94. The federal Health minister at that time plus all the ministers across Canada agreed to that report. Using the retrospectoscope, using hindsight, we look back and we realize that the Barer/Stoddart report was absolute garbage, as are many of the other reports that they have done recently.

Mr. Speaker, we are increasing the number. As I mentioned earlier, the access fund this year will be specifically for health professions, and I have specifically put medical students in that access fund this year.

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the government doing to attract physicians to practise in rural Alberta?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we have had an overall initiative called the rural physician action plan with respect to recognizing, as the member correctly identifies in his question, a need in Alberta as far as physicians are concerned. We have established, first of all, parallel to the last round of negotiations with the Alberta Medical Association, a rural on-call payment program, which was very effective, in my view, in retaining and providing a more positive situation for rural physicians, who are usually in small numbers in a particular centre and have to provide 24-hour coverage. So that has certainly helped with respect to retention.

We have continued making available our overall rural retention initiative, which was successful in attracting to rural parts of Alberta 82, as I remember it, physicians to areas which needed doctors to be in service. That has been very successful.

We're not stopping there, Mr. Speaker. We are following up, working with the universities to establish a rural internship program, because of course I think all members of the Assembly would like to see our graduates, wherever possible, relocating to rural practice.

So it is very much a priority with Alberta Health and Wellness, and working in conjunction with Alberta Learning, we're making progress.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to put politics over long-term health care planning. Last week's announcement regarding four new MRIs is a perfect example of the government's efforts to deflect attention from current political criticism. Now, really a good-news story would have been the government announcing a policy that said that no Albertan would pay out of pocket for medically required services. My questions are to the Premier. Before having made the commitment to finance four new MRIs, can the Premier tell us what studies he has about the excess capacity that currently exists in the system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not so sure there is excess capacity. There is a problem, of course, recruiting technicians, and I think that we have already addressed that particular situation. We want to provide as much access as we possibly can.

Mr. Speaker, the assertion that Albertans would be denied medically required service is absolutely wrong. That is wrong. Bill 11 says that all Albertans will be provided medically required services under Alberta health care and within the parameters of the Canada Health Act.

MR. JONSON: Certainly the Premier has covered the essential point, but if the question is about MRI services in this province, we've recognized that we do need to increase capacity. That is what these announcements over the last number of months, including those just recently for Edmonton and Calgary, are all about.

MS LEIBOVICI: Given that there are long waiting lists right now and that the new MRIs will not be operational for one year at least, what is the Premier going to do to accommodate those who are in need of an MRI today and are paying out of pocket to jump the queue?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, there's a priority protocol, and if a doctor prescribes an MRI, that person gets in on a priority basis.

You know, I can allude to one MRI, and the hon. minister can correct me if I'm wrong. A case in point is the state-of-the-art neurological MRI at the Foothills hospital in Calgary. It's an MRI that's used for research, and it's also an MRI that's used to examine and do diagnostic assessments of those people who have been involved in serious trauma, a very serious car accident or other kind of brain injury. The priority, of course, is to get those patients in. The MRI is set up about three seconds from the emergency room, and research and research activities take second place to the trauma activities, which are medically necessary services.

2:30

MS LEIBOVICI: He's still not answering.

Will the government reimburse those Albertans who today are paying out of pocket for private MRIs for timely diagnosis for medically required services? A simple question. Will you pay for those individuals who are paying out of pocket today?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if an MRI is prescribed by a doctor, that individual gets treatment. If a person is deemed to be perfectly healthy and asks his doctor for an MRI and the doctor says, "No, you don't need one," and this person says, "Well, I want to go to a private clinic and get one anyway," I guess that's up to that individual. Why would we pay? You know, the Liberals would have the taxpayers pay for a perfectly healthy person who has no need for an

MRI to get the service. That simply does not make sense, but most of what they say doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton Gold Bar.

Crop Insurance

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As farmers are heading to crop insurance offices across this province to file their spring cropping reports, they're expecting the 30 percent decrease in rates announced by Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Instead, they're quite alarmed to find out that the insurance coverage from their previous year has also been reduced by an equivalent amount. My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Could the minister please explain why a program intended to benefit the farmers during these tough times seems to only maintain the status quo of last year in real dollars for the amount of dollars paid in premiums?

MR. LUND: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many factors that go into the coverage and what the premium would be for crop insurance. First of all, I guess it's important to understand that when a person takes out crop insurance, really what they're doing is insuring a certain yield. Where the price issue comes in is when you talk about the shortfall between the amount that the farmer is insured for, the yield that the farmer is insured for, and the shortfall, and that's the amount that the crop insurers pay.

Now, there are a number of factors that come in. A farmer has the option of picking 50, 60, 70, 80 percent of the risk area yield. On top of that, they can take two price selections, which is a low price and a high price. Then there are some other factors that come in that can change on an individual, that being their past record. If their record is good, they get a percentage increase in the insurance and a reduction in the premium. If the reverse is true, then the reverse happens. So there are a number of factors.

I can tell the hon. member that the ones I have looked at where in fact the price per commodity has gone down – and that's based on the average price on the market. In fact, if someone is trying to get to that same dollar value, if last year they took the low dollar value, this year they have to take the high to get to the same value, and if they take the same percentage, say 50 percent, well, in fact they will find that their premium is down. The one I looked at, they went to the 70 percent, 50 to 70, low to high. They got about the same amount of coverage.

The thing also that may be somewhat confusing is that the numbers that were sent out from the all-risk to the farmers is a price that was before the 30 percent reduction. So I would urge any members to in fact check if it's the true price or the one that was printed, because they'll find that when they actually go to sign up, there is still that reduction.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that farmers have raised many concerns about the effectiveness of the current crop insurance program, could the minister tell me what other initiatives he has planned to improve the current system?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, crop insurance is a production insurance; it's not a dollar insurance. What a number of farmers have said to us is that they would like to see us look at some way that it would in fact be an assured income or insuring against input costs. Because there's quite a lot of discussion about the operation of all-risk insurance, we committed back on October

14 that there would be a complete review of the hail and crop insurance program, and we have brought on board a former federal agriculture minister, the Hon. Charlie Mayer, and he is going to head up this whole review. We're asking farmers to look outside the box: what kind of program would they like in the future?

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: when can we expect those recommendations and the implementation of those recommendations?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are making some minor modifications for the year 2000, but that's not related to this review. We are trying to implement some of the more common things that we've heard.

The work of Charlie Mayer will continue. We expect to have the report some time in October, and hopefully we can then talk to farmers and figure out what can be done and what would fit the current program and hopefully make those modifications for the year 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the Premier is not careful with his private hospitals policy, he's going to be able to hold a caucus meeting in his Volkswagen. It's now been 11 days since the Premier promised to release the 30 blanked-out pages from his private hospitals policy once the Official Opposition released its focus group research. The Official Opposition has fully lived up to its end of the commitment, and we've gone one step further by tabling all the invoices and all the receipts. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the Premier refusing to live up to his commitment to Albertans to release the 30 blanked-out pages from his private health care policy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, in answer to that question, that information is being prepared, and once it's prepared, it will be released. I've given that undertaking in the past, and in the fullness of time – and hopefully it's not too much time – that information will be released. I simply ask the Liberal opposition to be patient.

I'll have to get – well, I don't know if you can get a bigger Volkswagen – a huge, monstrous Volkswagen. It would have to be a Volkswagen bus and more, Mr. Speaker, to hold not only the existing members of caucus but the increased number of caucus members after the next election. You know, they tried in 1997, and they tried in 1993. The leader of the Liberal opposition tried in a leadership race in 1992. And you know what? They lost, they lost, they lost, and they're going to lose again.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Premier also. Is the release date when the government will release the 30 blank pages timed with after your health care policy becomes law in this province? Tell us.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it will be tabled in this Legislature when it is ready. It will be tabled in this Legislature when it is ready.

2:40

MR. SAPERS: When?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, could you ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to button his lip, please.

THE SPEAKER: Again?

Final question, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is also to the Premier. Why is the Premier so afraid to release the 30 blanked-out pages immediately? Is he scared that Albertans will find out the truth, the real truth that it's hiding from everyone and that really the purpose of this secrecy is to set up private hospitals in this province?

Speaker's Ruling Imputing Motives

THE SPEAKER: It seems to me that question violated just about everything you'd find under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j).

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Advanced Education Funding

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans realize that there are many important priority areas that need public attention besides the health care issue that has recently been much politicized by the opposition forces. Last Friday I attended part of the forum organized by the postgraduate students at the U of C reflecting the concerns being voiced about the funding of postgraduate studies. My first question today is to the Minister of Learning. What programs are available to help students finance their studies?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, they are entitled to student loans. As I've said numerous times in this Assembly before, we increased the amount of dollars available for student financial assistance by 22 percent this year, by 50 percent over the next three years, so certainly they are able to get the student loans.

Mr. Speaker, we have a number of scholarships and bursaries that graduate students can qualify for such as the Sir James Lougheed awards, the Ralph Steinhauer awards, government of Alberta graduate scholarships and fellowships, Foundation for the Arts, the Alberta Ukrainian centennial commemorative scholarships, and on and on.

Graduate students are an incredibly important part of any university. They do a lot of research. They're the ones that go forward and get the master's degree, the PhD that is going to put Alberta at the top of the world. They're something that we feel very strongly about, and they're the people that we are trying to help.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among the topics discussed at the forum was the commercialization of research and the involvement of private enterprise in the university's work. My first supplemental question is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. What is the government's position on the influence of private enterprise on postsecondary research studies?

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. If I might, just before I answer that part, supplement the Minister of Learning a bit on the private bursaries. [interjections] Okay; I'll go on.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, please. You pleaded so many times to have an opportunity to respond to a question. You've now been recognized to respond to a question. Please do it.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. One way to help graduate students, Mr. Speaker, is to look at our ICORE program. We are providing

\$15,000 to \$20,000 bursaries for graduate students to be part of our studies in information and communications technology. As well, we have a number of programs that we partner with the private sector on, and we actively encourage private-sector partnerships. We have, for instance, the intellectual infrastructure partnership program, commonly known as I2P2 or, to the engineers, I²P². We have the Alberta oil sands technology research program. We have the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute programs that actively partner with the private sector. They have concrete results.

If I could give you an example; for instance, the Glaxo Wellcome chair in virology that was just announced within the last month. Glaxo Wellcome, a private company, Mr. Speaker, put in almost \$2 million. I believe the figure was \$1.75 million . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

DR. TAYLOR: It was \$1.75 million, and from our budget, my funds, the government put in \$1.25 million, an active partnership that created the Glaxo Wellcome chair in virology.

Another example would be the supercomputer, Mr. Speaker. We have one of approximately 40 supercomputers in North America, and it puts us as number one in Canada in terms of supercomputing opportunity. Number one. This was a partnership of the U of A, the U of C, and, once again, government dollars. It's about a \$20 million project.

I can see the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert isn't interested in this. It's good news for Albertans.

Speaker's Ruling Brevity

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Innovation and Science, brevity is one of those wonderful things that we can call upon members to do. In considering that the House has now already dealt with the estimates of the hon. minister and, quite frankly, approved the estimates of the hon. minister and that there's been ample opportunity in the estimates to ask questions and debate it, we should actually focus on the question.

I think, hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, we've probably run the gamut today with respect to this.

Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll call upon the first of seven hon. members to participate in Recognitions today, but before we do that, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly the members from the Crystal Park school improvement committee. They are made up of a group of approximately 30 junior high school students from Crystal Park school, located within the constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky. This is a school . . .

MR. MAR: A great school.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, it is indeed a great school. It's a unique school in that it deals with a whole gamut of students: students who are challenged, students who are normal, and students who are indeed exceptional, as these are. These are students who have come

to contribute in a very, very significant way. These students are accompanied by Dr. Roger Mestinek, the principal; Mrs. Lisa Kenna, a teacher; Ms Wendy Kimble, a teacher; and Mr. Ken Skiba, a retired teacher. There are 27 students from grade 7, grade 8, and grade 9. The group is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them now to rise and receive the usual warm and cordial welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you someone who probably requires no introduction to you, but through you I would like to introduce to the rest of the Members of the Legislative Assembly my predecessor, the former Member for Medicine Hat and former Deputy Premier, who I see is in your gallery this afternoon. I guess he didn't get enough of this place in the 18 years he spent here, and he needs to come back for a little bit more. I'd ask Mr. Jim Horsman to stand and receive the recognition of all members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a student from Simon Fraser University in B.C. He is the president of the British Columbia PC youth, and his name is Warren Smith. I'd ask him to please rise and be recognized by the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you members of the PC youth association, who were kind enough to ask me to join them at their table today at a function in honour of our esteemed Member for Leduc. I wonder if Ms King and her entourage would rise and receive a warm welcome and thanks for their generosity.

2:50

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first hon. member for Recognitions.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Volunteer Calgary Leadership Awards

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday, on April 13, I was honoured to bring greetings from the province of Alberta to 500 Calgary business and community leaders and youth volunteers at the Palliser Hotel. The fourth annual Calgary volunteer leadership awards, which is a local component of national Volunteer Week, is a very worthy recognition event to publicly celebrate the contributions of youth, business, and individuals to Alberta communities.

Volunteers of all ages are everywhere at the forefront of important community areas such as seniors, health, social housing, arts and recreation programming, and education. They make society tick. The individuals and corporations recognized last Thursday have given freely of their leadership ability, and it is critical that we all recognize their great contributions to keep our communities strong and to ensure that Alberta is the best place to live.

Congratulations.

84th Anniversary of Women's Right to Vote

MS BLAKEMAN: This week is the 84th anniversary of Alberta women getting the vote, Mr. Speaker. This is a critical achievement for women, as it entrenched our right to participate in the democratic process. While Alberta was the third province to enfranchise women, in April 1916, we were the first to have an election in which women could exercise that franchise, in June 1917. One of our Famous Five, Louise McKinney, was elected in that election.

However, I will note that aboriginal women or men did not share in this. They were denied a vote until the 1960s, a shocking denial and a blight on our history.

I think women's franchise has helped elect more women to all levels of government. I am proud that Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has 50 percent women in our caucus and is the first Official Opposition in Alberta led by a woman.

So here is my celebratory cheer to the women of Alberta. Congratulations on your ninth decade of democratic participation in this great province, and keep up the good work. Make your voice heard in the next election.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday and Friday, April 13 and 14, 83 grade 10 students from across this great province gathered in this Assembly and experienced democracy in action as representatives of their constituency in Rupertland in Mr. Speaker's Youth Parliament. I am confident that they enjoyed their experience.

I would like to recognize the Royal Canadian Legion, Alberta-Northwest Territories Command, for their sponsorship. The Legion's presence and involvement was also apparent as comrade Stuart Black of Innisfail branch acted as Lieutenant Governor and Danni Dundas of branch 215, one of two female branches in Canada, served as Sergeant-at-Arms. I would like to thank Jasper Place branch 255 for Thursday's banquet. I'd also like to extend to Dr. David McNeil and his officers and staff the thanks from the youth who benefited from your counsel.

To you, Mr. Speaker, and your staff for promoting and organizing the event, to the attending teachers who participated in the sessions, and to the teachers in every grade 10 class across this province for their encouragement to get participation and send quality participants, thank you for promoting democracy.

90th Anniversary of Girl Guides

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, as Girl Guides of Canada celebrate the 90th anniversary of their commitment to girls and women in our country, it is an honour and privilege as legislators to recognize their outstanding contributions today. Guiding has grown from a movement initiated by Lord and Lady Baden-Powell in 1910 to a global movement involving 140 member countries. Alberta has over 21,000 guiding members and 4,500 members in the Edmonton region alone. Honouring the fundamental principles of faith in a Supreme Being, responsibility to our community, and service to others, guiding achieves and promotes the development of young women who have strength of character, strong values, and sensitivity to the needs of others.

April 1 to May 15 marks the Girl Guides' tremendously popular annual cookie-selling campaign. An initiative which began as a home-based idea in 1927 has grown to become a nationwide campaign, with CIBC and SmartStart as national sponsors for 2000-2001.

I am proud today to wear my guiding sash and Canada cord, earned as a guide and cadet, and to acknowledge the significant impact guiding made on my life.

Special acknowledgment and thanks to our guests today. Happy 90th anniversary, and may 2000 prove to be the most successful cookie campaign ever.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Baisakhi 2000

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday over 4,000 members of the Calgary Sikh community proudly celebrated Baisakhi 2000 by walking to Prairie Winds park from the Dashmesh Culture Centre, which is a Sikh temple in northeast Calgary. It was a very cold, snowy day, but the friendship among families and friends of the Sikh community was heartwarming.

Baisakhi is one of the most important events in Sikh history. This is when Khalsa, the brotherhood of the pure, was created over 300 years ago, a brotherhood committed to courage, sacrifice, and equality. Mr. Speaker, this event was an incredibly beautiful and colourful tribute to the spirit and joy of the Sikh community, a spirit that manifests itself in hard work, charity, and justice.

I congratulate the many volunteers, organizers, and members of the Sikh community who spent countless hours to make this event a tremendous success. Wah-i-Guru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wah-i-Guru-Ji-Ki-Fateh.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Brian Staszewski

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate Brian Staszewski for being recognized by *Time* magazine as a hero for the planet. Brian is one of only four Canadians to receive this honour. The destination conservation program that he founded in 1987 helps schools to save energy, conserve water, and minimize waste production. It is ironic that at a time when the Alberta government shut down its energy efficiency branch, Brian and his team have helped Alberta schools save more than \$770,000 through energy conservation and other initiatives.

Destination conservation is now being delivered in 2,700 schools across Canada and is being piloted in 10 U.S. states. In years to come, destination conservation will be delivering environmental education to children in schools throughout the world. Brian's work, which started at the Environmental Resource Centre in Edmonton, is teaching future generations how to conserve resources and make tomorrow's citizens more environmentally responsible.

Our congratulations to Brian and those who work with him.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Tom Whiting

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tom Whiting, an honourable man with a kind and gentle face and manner, died in St. Albert on Sunday, April 9, 2000.

I had the honour of knowing Tom. He was an intuitive, industrious, and tenacious businessman who in the 1980s fought the national energy program for the jobs of his employees and all the oil patch workers in Alberta. Tom established his businesses in central Alberta and created in one of those endeavours a natural environmental product that absorbs and cleans up the oil spillage on your driveway, as an example.

Those who knew Tom and worked with Tom appreciated his loyalty, his hard work, and his wise advice. Tom Whiting will be dearly missed by his family and all of us who had the honour of knowing him.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader on a point of order. Did we deal with it?

MR. DICKSON: In fact you did, sir. You anticipated me very nicely. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: It's been dealt with.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. This is a point of order?

MR. WHITE: A point of order, sir.

Point of Order Provoking Debate

MR. WHITE: I rise to speak to the point of order, sir. It was during a response of the Premier, and I cite two citations, sir, in *Beauchesne* 417 and 408(2), which reads that "answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised, and should not provoke debate."

You'll also know, sir, that section 416 cites that "a minister may decline to answer," which is logical. In this case, the Premier did not. You'll also note that in that whole section of question and answer there is no citation about the truth, so we believe that to be silent.

The Premier, while not ever wanting to mislead the House, may have misled the House in error in that he declared in the answer which he was giving to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo that all of the information he was requesting will be in due course presented in the public accounts. In public accounts that is, in fact, not the case. There is no breakout of individual expenditures to that extent, nor has there ever been in any of the public accounts, sir.

It may in fact be a correction, and the citation, reading in particular "should not provoke debate," did cause debate from this member and other members.

Thank you, sir.

3:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an interesting way to bring up the question. I think it's fair to say that anytime a question is raised – and you made the admonishment several times yourself during question period. When questions are raised in the manner in which they have been raised in this House, with the preambles that are in them, providing the appropriate answer can be, in fact, seen as well to be provoking debate, but the rules relate to the questions and not to the answers. It's not the answers that provoke debate. It's the questions that provoke debate, and the debate comes in the answer. [interjections] Read the rules. The rules are very clear about it: the question "should not provoke debate." It doesn't say anything about answers.

However, the point that I think the hon. member is trying to clarify is the role of Public Accounts in examining the public accounts of the province. The hon. member, as chair, should well know that when a minister and ministerial staff are summoned before Public Accounts to defend their accounts and defend the spending of money, Public Accounts can ask any question they want, and if they wished to examine on specific expenditures, they could examine on specific expenditures. The fact that they've never done it doesn't mean they can't do it. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: This is not a debate.

As a former member of this very esteemed committee called the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and as one who has spent many a Wednesday morning in this Assembly both going through public accounts as a member and being questioned as a member of Executive Council, my recollection is that for virtually any question under the sun that any hon. member wanted to raise on any specific subject with the requisition of any particular kind of a paper, it was always there.

I hope that hon. members are not taking the view that while a question cannot be provocative or argumentative or opinionated, that being the only rule, to suggest that the answers, however, can be argumentative, opinionated, or anything else is certainly not the case, not the case at all. The rules will apply equally to both the question and that response.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: Now, hon. members, we have before us a Standing Order 40 application. The chair would like to make this observation before we call on the Leader of the Official Opposition with respect to this matter, and that has to do with Standing Order 40. The rule is very, very clear in 40(1).

A motion may, in case of urgent and pressing necessity previously explained by the mover, be made by unanimous consent of the Assembly without notice having been given under Standing Order 38.

Then the chair would also like to go on to Standing Order 42.

A substantive motion or any amendment shall be in writing before being debated or put from the Chair and shall contain no preamble.

This application under SO 40 certainly does contain a preamble, so let's get to the point. There's been a lot of time already in Notices of Motions with respect to this. Urgency is the question.

Nonconfidence Motion

Mrs. MacBeth:

Whereas this government has undermined, underfunded, understaffed, and destabilized Alberta's public health care system for the past seven years to create an artificial demand for private health care, whereas this government has pursued a policy of promoting private health care to take advantage of the turmoil it has created in the public health care system, whereas all legitimate opinion polls show that a majority of Albertans oppose Bill 11, whereas Albertans have signaled their concern through tens of thousands of letters, e-mails, telephone calls, faxes and through their attendance at town hall meetings and rallies, including 3,000 at Calgary's Round-Up Centre on April 15, 2000, and 7,000 at the Northlands Agricom in Edmonton on April 16, 2000, whereas the government is ignoring the advice and findings of its own report, produced with taxpayers' money, which indicates that private clinics will cost more and produce longer waiting lists, whereas the government has not released the true cost of its massive propaganda campaign, nor has it provided the people of Alberta with the information contained in the blanked-out 30 pages of documents requested by Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, whereas the government invoked a form of closure to limit debate at second reading on Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, and shows every indication that it will proceed to further limit debate on Bill 11 with a goal to pass this bill before the Easter recess, and whereas the amendments proposed by the government ignore the many serious concerns with Bill 11, be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the

Assembly to consider the following motion: now therefore be it resolved that this Assembly has no confidence in the government.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't, according to your ruling, take the Assembly's time to reread the wording of the motion, which of course was read into the record this afternoon on notice, but I do think there are some very important issues which justify this motion being put forward as a Standing Order 40 under the rules of the Assembly. I will speak to both the urgency and the pressing necessity of this motion being dealt with this afternoon.

First of all and I think most important is the outpouring of public concern which we have seen over the past two days in both Edmonton and Calgary, where at least 10,000 Albertans came out and raised the very serious concerns they have not only about the legislation before this Assembly but about the government's overall policy and ongoing policy with respect to privatization and about the government itself.

It was unfortunate that no government MLAs that I'm aware of were able to attend the rallies, presumably due to pressing business that they had elsewhere. I do know that for those of us that were at them and at both of them, this is clearly, clearly, Mr. Speaker, an issue of urgent concern in the minds and hearts of Albertans, many of whom are in our galleries today, and I thank them for being there.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the reason for putting forward this motion of nonconfidence in this government arises out of those rallies and, as well, the Premier's indication last Thursday, outside of this Assembly but certainly as a matter of public record, that Bill 11 would be passed before the Easter recess. As I look at my calendar, that means that by Thursday it is the Premier's intention to ram this legislation through the Legislature, and that is offensive to Albertans. That is in fact an extremely pressing issue in the minds of Albertans. Albertans' anger is not just about the substance of the bill. It is about the process this government is using to quell the legitimate voice and the legitimate concerns of Albertans who don't want to see a privatization policy go further.

I think thirdly, Mr. Speaker, with respect to urgency and pressing necessity, there has been a very clear failure on the part of this government to say why this legislation is necessary. We know that the "why" question has not been answered or that it has been contradicted. Secondly, there has been inaccurate information with respect to the impact of this legislation on Albertans. That is clearly, clearly an issue of urgency to the people of this province who believe that it's important that this Assembly and the members of this Assembly accurately reflect not just the content but the impact and the consequences of legislation as defining and dismantling of public health care as this Bill 11 is.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the issue of urgency and pressing concern is the evidence that we brought forward today in the Legislative Assembly which shows that it appears that there may be yet another private hospital waiting in the wings, in this case again in Calgary, with a development proposal for the old Holy Cross hospital site. Of course, we mentioned in the question period today the reality that at least a \$32 million renovation was done on that hospital before it was sold off for 4 and a half million dollars. The difference of almost \$28 million is not the only issue. The issue of the capital structure and the value of the capital structure, let alone the renovations, is of urgent and pressing concern to the people of this province as they see proposals coming forth in a backdoor way. It would never have been found out if we hadn't been checking records of the development process in Calgary. That wouldn't have come forward.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would say that there is a very real issue of nonconfidence in this government. It is in fact extremely urgent, if

we are to listen to the leader of the government and listen to the words that he has given out with respect to his intentions in this legislation. For that reason I think it would in fact be a very clear and positive action which could be taken by the government members to vote this motion, to allow the discussion to take place. Because clearly on the minds of Albertans and certainly those 10,000 at rallies over the last weekend the question is: how can a government proceed with legislation when clearly the majority of Albertans, according to any of the legitimate polls that have been done on this issue, are opposed to it? For that reason I propose this motion, and I look forward to the government coming forward and allowing it to proceed.

For a conclusion, I would simply say, in keeping with your ruling, Mr. Speaker:

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to consider the following motion: now therefore be it resolved that this Assembly has no confidence in the government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, under Standing Order 40 unanimous consent of the Assembly is required in order to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to deal with the motion in question.

[Unanimous consent denied]

3:10

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We are dealing with amendments to Bill 11. I see two members standing. I take it, hon. member, you wish to speak?

MR. SAPERS: With your permission, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We are dealing with amendment A1, section A, if everyone recalls from Wednesday evening and Thursday of last week. The chair will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much. Yes, I've had an opportunity to speak on this amendment previously. I've also had an opportunity to check with some constituents about the ongoing concerns with the bill. One of the questions that was asked of me was: since the government took it upon itself to spend more than a million dollars sending out its annotated householder with Bill 11 and saying that this was the bill they wanted to become law in the province of Alberta, will the government, now that they have proposed some 14 amendments, take the time to send out a new annotated version of the bill, as they would propose to have it amended, so that they can continue to get feedback from Albertans? So far I've been told that the answer to that question is no, that the government has no intention of sending out another householder with the updated version of the bill.

So Albertans are going to be a little bit confused. They won't know whether or not the government was serious when it spent the first million dollars saying, "This is the bill that we want," or whether the government is serious now by saying, "Well, this is the

bill that we really meant to send out, the one with all of these amendments." Of course, I can understand why the government would like to keep that level of confusion in the minds of Albertans, because what we see, of course, is that they can reap some benefits from that confusion.

The government trumpeted just today the release of a poll where they claim that 54 percent of Calgarians are overall in support of Bill 11. I found it very curious, though, that in that very same poll where they say that 54 percent of Calgarians are supporting Bill 11, what the government didn't bother to highlight out of that poll is that 55 percent of Calgarians, when asked how familiar they were with Bill 11, said: not very familiar at all. So you have 55 percent of Calgarians saying that they're not very familiar with the bill, yet 54 percent of them said that overall they're in support of the bill.

To further indicate the confusion in the minds of some Calgarians, at least, when asked whether or not those who are willing to pay will be able to receive faster service at privately owned surgical clinics, it's very interesting that some 56 percent of Calgarians agree. So 56 percent of Calgarians in this survey agreed that you should be able to buy your way to the front of the line. Maybe that's why they're supporting the bill, but of course the government says that that's not really an intention of the bill, so we have all kinds of confusion.

I say to the government that if they want to use this poll to bolster their position, good on them. All that this poll tells me is that the government's communication plan has fizzled, that Calgarians, at least, are not well informed. They admit that they're not well informed, and there is some confusion about what the bill itself will permit.

Now, while I'm talking about this poll, I'll say that this April 17 poll showing 54 percent stands in contrast to the February 4 news release where the government was talking about how they had 59 percent support. Of course, February 4 was before the government launched its multimillion dollar campaign. So as a result of the government spending millions of dollars and several weeks trying to sell Bill 11 to Albertans, their support has actually dropped. Again I say that I welcome the government using this particular survey if they think it serves their interest, because it clearly does not.

When we look at what this amendment does, it reinforces another point that the Premier continues to deny. When members of the Official Opposition ask questions regarding the private health scheme of the government, the Premier says: well, we don't have one. But what the bill does and what's even reinforced in this amendment is that there will be private clinics. Now, those people who believe in truth in advertising will say that these private clinics are private hospitals. The government, who chooses to mince words, says that they are approved surgical facilities. But clearly the intent of this bill, as is reinforced in this amendment, is that there will be private surgical services provided. In other words, there will be nonpublic places to go. There will be private businesses that'll be operating under contract to the government of Alberta to provide insured medical services.

For the Premier to say that there is no private health scheme is clearly a fabrication of his making, because the government's own proposed law is to create these private hospitals, as I'll call them and as most people who recognize them will call them, or private approved surgical facilities, in the government's language.

Now, I have no quibble with the amendment in terms of it including dental surgeons in the act, and I have no quibble with the amendment in terms of making it more specific; that is, talking about a range of minor surgical services. What I do quibble with is that again we don't see the distinction drawn out well between major and minor, and we see the removal of the word "person" in terms of "no person" operating a hospital. I have not heard from the Minister

of Health and Wellness or any other member of government as to why they dropped that legal corporate definition and instead replaced it with a much more narrow definition of physician or dental surgeon. So I'm still waiting for some answers to the questions that were raised when this amendment was first introduced.

I know I've heard some government members speculate inside the Chamber – it was the Government House Leader, I believe, last week – and I've heard outside through newscasts that they can't understand why members of the opposition are spending so many hours debating just this one seemingly innocuous amendment. Well, if the government would provide some rationale for the amendment, if they would help us understand how it's going to protect medicare and the public health care system in this province, if the government would give us one shred of evidence that they are sincere about the outright banning of the provision of medically insured surgeries in private hospitals, if they would give us the guarantee and the explanation as to how this amendment would accomplish all of that, well, then maybe we could get on with it. Maybe I could even convince my colleagues to support this amendment.

3:20

In the absence of any concrete answers, in the absence of that evidence, I don't know why the government would be surprised. In case members of the government haven't noticed, the majority of Albertans don't support them on this initiative, and in case the government hasn't noticed, most Albertans who have taken a look at Bill 11 don't like it. So why it would come as any surprise at all to the Minister of Health and Wellness or the Government House Leader or the Deputy Government House Leader that the opposition is not going to allow quick and easy passage of these amendments is really a surprise to me. Frankly, Madam Chairman, I think the best thing for this government to do is admit that the original draft of Bill 11 was flawed and wrong, admit that these amendments do nothing to rescue the bill, and quickly admit that they're running down the wrong path when it comes to embracing private health care.

The best way to demonstrate to Albertans that they are sincere about protecting medicare is to kill Bill 11 now. Given the input that we've had from thousands and thousands of Albertans in rallies, petitions – and I understand that the numbers are rapidly approaching 75,000 – and the e-mails and the hundreds of letters that each member of this Assembly has received, I would expect that the best way for the government to acknowledge all of that is for the Minister of Health and Wellness to rise as I finish my comments and say: the government does care; the government has listened, and we have decided to not proceed with Bill 11. Then we can move on to some other pressing business in this Assembly.

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Just before I recognize the next speaker, the chair would remind everyone that last week the Chairman of Committees indicated, after some discussion and in keeping with what was said last week, that we will be doing these amendment by amendment, and within the Committee of the Whole stage it is the intent that we look at the clauses principle by principle. So I would ask that we try to keep to that and avoid repetition and be cognizant of relevance to the amendment we have before us, which is amendment A1, section A.

Hon. member.

Debate Continued

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to the proposed amendment

A1, section A. This particular amendment still is causing a tremendous amount of confusion to all Albertans. They are having a great deal of difficulty understanding it, as I am. Again, what this amendment doesn't do is address a question that many people had regarding the lack of definition in the original section. What does section 2 look like in the original section? I looked at that, Madam Chairman. In the original section it says:

No person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta except in

- (a) a public hospital, or
- (b) an approved surgical facility.

Now, when we look at the amendment, we see in 2(1) that "no physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta, and no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta, except," and of course there we go into that particular part of the amendment. Under section 2(2):

- (a) in the by-laws under the Medical Profession Act, in the case of a physician, or
 - (b) in the regulations under section 25(1)(a.1), in the case of a dentist,
- in Alberta, except in a public hospital.

Again, what this does is certainly cloud the whole issue of exactly what the government intends to do or the intent of this particular amendment. We do not have a significant change and not a change that is going to address that confusion. People cannot understand how we can switch from "person" to "physician" and how that is going to clear up all of the confusion around this particular part of the amendment.

Now, as well, the original section dealt with an individual, and that will include corporations. Of course, this is the fear that all Albertans have, that this will allow private corporations to come in and run these facilities. There certainly isn't anything in the amendment which will stop this from happening. It now says that "no physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta" except in one of these approved facilities. The government is still calling them approved surgical facilities when in fact they are private hospitals. They are known by many Albertans as private hospitals, and the problem here is that once they are private hospitals, or approved surgical facilities, then these corporations, these facilities are accountable to no one but themselves. Even what is done there does not, under Bill 40, have to be made public, and certainly the medical information that's gathered there on patients is kept private. Again, this amendment does not address that problem as we see it.

As I mentioned, all of this is presently covered under the Medical Profession Act, under subclause (2), and it opposes anyone but physicians benefiting directly from the practice of medicine or owning a business that benefits from the practice of medicine. There certainly is an absence of reference in this whole amendment to corporations, and of course that really is what not only Albertans but all Canadians are concerned about, that we are constantly moving down this road to privatization.

You know, this is one of those areas that should be determined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and of course along the same lines the college is the one that should determine what is minor surgery or what is major surgery. This is a very, very important component of all that is happening. Much of what this whole bill is about and what it depends on is this distinction between minor and major surgery. The College of Physicians and Surgeons, Madam Chairman, certainly don't want to get into these decisions that are based on politics and not on medical decisions. They have informed the government on many occasions that the government is the one responsible for providing the legislative guidance.

Certainly this bill does not do that at this particular time. These amendments that have been proposed will certainly not do this, and what this government is presently doing is forcing the College of

Physicians and Surgeons to make decisions in their bylaws. You would think, upon reading the bill, that the bylaws pertaining to this were in place, but they're absolutely not. There are no bylaws in place under current legislation which will govern this.

So, again, we don't have any distinction here in this bill on the difference between a major and minor surgery. I note this with quite a bit of concern and quite a bit of interest. In northeast Edmonton we had Marion Spencer, who for years, since the late 1980s, pushed for the Northeast medical centre. Through all this time she certainly realized the importance of having an emergency component of that particular facility because emergency departments for any surgery are a must. The ICUs certainly have to be available.

3:30

What we see here is that "the College of Physicians and Surgeons decides what can be provided safely in a surgical facility." Now, these are the words of the government in their Coles Notes version of the bill that was sent out to the people of Alberta. When we start looking here at "an approved surgical facility" in section 2(1)(b), then certainly it just leaves too much confusion as to exactly how Albertans are covered.

With those few comments, at this particular time, Madam Chairman, I would certainly like to take my seat and listen to the concerns of other members of this Assembly. I thank you very much for this opportunity.

MR. JONSON: For the record, since this debate on this straightforward amendment has gone on for some time, I'd like to repeat what was stated in my opening remarks with respect to these amendments, and that is that the amendments in part A, section 2, deal with making it clear that when it comes to providing surgical services in this province, it is not exclusively done by physicians. There are also surgeries that are done by dentists. It makes it very clear that the College of Physicians and Surgeons will deal with physicians, pertaining to the standards that they have, and that dentists will have their responsibilities and their identity, as they do now, with respect to providing for bylaws and regulations pursuant to their practice in a public hospital or in an approved surgical facility. That is all this amendment is, Madam Chairman. It's important to have that clarification. It is something that has been drawn to our attention by the dental profession, and that is what that amendment is about.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I am happy to rise for the second time to speak to this particular amendment that is before us in the Legislature. Unfortunately, I have to rise a second time and speak to this amendment for two reasons. The first is that the minister of health, in spite of his comments just a few seconds ago, hasn't addressed the concerns that I brought up previously on this amendment, even though that was last week. I believe it was Wednesday evening when I last spoke to this amendment. I had expected by this particular time to see some response in *Hansard*.

In reviewing the comments that have been made since that time, I don't see any specific references to my concerns. However, Madam Chairman, in reviewing those responses, I did read the Government House Leader's comments on this amendment from Thursday past, and I do have some concerns with the items that he brought forward at that time. So in the spirit of debate in Committee of the Whole on this amendment, I would like to respond to some of those points that he made.

He talked about the initiation of this policy. He reflected that

when the policy was first put on the table in November, it talked about how

no person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta except in

- (a) a public hospital, or
- (b) an approved surgical facility.

One of the changes that was made in translating that policy into legislation, into this act [we see before us], was to add subsection (2) which said:

No person shall provide a major surgical service, as described in the by-laws under the Medical Profession Act, in Alberta except in a public hospital.

The part that I have a problem with, Madam Chairman, and that is important to us today is the part where he talks about the changes made in translating that policy. It's the people of Alberta who have said to us that the changes this government made in translating that policy into legislation do not reflect their wishes in any part, particularly with regard to the approved surgical facility portion that we see in this legislation and in this particular amendment in section 2(1)(b). It's the problem that the government has in translating their policy into legislation that is the issue here.

The government, I believe, has not properly listened to Albertans in that regard. Even when they got a second chance in terms of bringing forward the amendments to this legislation, they still haven't heard what people have said, even though the message is coming through very clearly. Even though in the past the Premier has made his reputation on changing whatever he needed to change in order to reflect the wishes of the people, for some reason this time he has completely abandoned the majority of the people in this province when it comes to this legislation. Even though he's tried to sugarcoat private hospitals under the new heading of "an approved surgical facility," he isn't fooling anybody and certainly not the people in this province, who will be deciding in a few short months who to re-elect and who not to. I think what we need to reflect upon when we talk about this amendment are the kinds of problems that occur when the government, who doesn't listen to the people of the province, translates its policy into legislation. That is what we need to talk about.

The Government House Leader then said that he believed that the addition of this subsection in the act responded to the concerns of Albertans and particularly to the concerns of his constituents. Well, Madam Chairman, my constituency is a next-door neighbour to this particular minister's constituency, and I can tell you firsthand from the number of phone calls and conversations I've had with those people that this minor amendment we see here does not do anything to move forward to represent their particular concerns, except with the part that pulls out the regulations in the case of a dentist. That speaks to concerns that dentists had, but it doesn't speak to the majority of the constituents I have heard from in that constituency. I've logged over a hundred phone calls now from Edmonton-Whitemud residents, not to mention the number of people that I have met at different functions in and around the city since this legislation has been tabled. This is minor. It's in fact mickey mouse, I would say, in terms of any kind of substantive amendment and doesn't address the concerns that I have heard.

People are still having particular concerns with the "approved surgical facility" really being a private hospital. They would like that issue addressed. Why isn't this government just prepared to call it what it is, what people understand it as? Instead of trying to wordsmith or spin-doctor around the descriptors here, just call a spade a spade and put it on the table and say, "We're pushing private health care" – people know that's what they're doing; that's what people hear out there – and not the kind of speaking with a forked tongue that we've seen come from all members of the government on this particular legislation.

The minister talked about a meeting that he had in his constituency on January 13 “where people said that they were concerned about the types of services that would be provided in a surgical facility.” Of course they are, and we continue to have those concerns, certainly much more recently than January 13, Madam Chairman. I wonder that he hasn’t been out in his constituency since then with his ears open and listening to his constituents. If he had been, we would have seen a much more substantive amendment come forward and not one that just laid out two very small identifiers in terms of minor amendments to the bill.

I’ll go on to talk about what else he had to say in his debate. He talks about how, in his opinion, one of the important ones brought forward into their own caucus discussion and in having some of the concerns drafted into the act was subsection (2),

which said that major surgical services must be done in a public hospital, and what is major would not be a political decision but would be a medical decision, as determined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Yet what did we see happen last week, Madam Chairman? A political decision was made on the use of MRIs and the purchase of MRIs and jumping the queues in this province.

So what’s it going to be? The government has to be able to say, “Yes, they’re going to be political decisions,” or, “No, they’re not going to be political decisions.” If they’re not going to be political decisions, then they’ve got to get their nose out of health care in all regards in terms of these kinds of decisions. We had MRIs and foldable lenses last week, both issues that were purely politically driven decisions.

MR. BONNER: Ten million dollars and counting.

MS CARLSON: Ten million dollars and counting is exactly right.

In no case did he adhere to what he stated was his own policy when, in speaking to this amendment last Thursday afternoon, he said that “what is major would not be a political decision but would be a medical decision.” Well, that doesn’t wash with any of us, Madam Chairman, because we’ve seen the exact reverse happen in the very same week in which he spoke these words. I would like that minister to stand up and defend himself and these particular words.

3:40

Perhaps the minister of health could shed some light on this as well. Will he define specifically for us what are going to be political decisions in terms of health care and what specifically are going to be medical decisions made by the College of Physicians and Surgeons? We have two different messages coming from this government in the same week. We have two examples in the same week where they made political decisions and only one instance where a minister stood up and said that they would be medical decisions. Certainly before I am prepared to vote on this particular amendment, I expect an answer to that question, and I expect an answer that’s in enough depth that we can take it to the people of the province and ask them for their opinion on that.

He went on to talk about concerns that were translated into the act and said that it was

a very, very important section and something that’s been entirely overlooked by the opposition in their quest to have everything determined to be a private hospital and very clearly is not a question of everything being a private hospital, a very clear and distinct difference between what is a hospital and what is a designated surgical facility or approved surgical facility under this section.

Well, Madam Chairman, first of all, that sentence didn’t make any sense, and he still hasn’t convinced anybody that I’ve talked to over the weekend that in fact there is a clear distinction between a private

hospital and a designated surgical facility. A designated surgical facility will do medical procedures, and it is a for-profit operation. It is a private hospital.

So he has done nothing to clear up any division in terms of definitions, because in fact, I submit, Madam Chairman, there is no difference. I think that is something that those folks listening to us in the gallery would agree with. In the debate that we’ve heard here, in the hours of debate that we’ve heard at the different readings and now to this amendment, this government cannot defend the difference between a private hospital and an approved surgical facility because in fact they do exactly the same processes and procedures.

He goes on to say:

Specifically, then, instead of putting in an artificial designation about how long one might stay in this place . . .

He is talking, I assume, about the approved surgical facilities.

Because, after all, we’re not talking about hotels, where overnight stays are the order of the day. We’re talking about a surgical facility, which is a medical facility, and the question about how long one stays in a medical facility is a medical question. Whether it’s appropriate for a person to stay in a medical facility is obviously a question which must be determined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons as to what is medically appropriate and whether the facility itself has the type of instruments, the type of technology, the type of people, the type of medical staff which would make it safe and make it reasonable to do the procedure in that facility and to stay in that facility for postoperative follow-up and observation.

Well, in fact once again we have a series of fallacies in this statement, Madam Chairman. This government has trotted out time after time after time the Shouldice clinic in Ontario as a good example of how private hospitals have operated for a number of decades in this country with approval of the federal government and have been a value-added service. They forget, when they talk about that, that that facility was grandfathered under the old regime. They forget to tell us that that facility also has to return its profits to the government of Ontario, so in fact it isn’t a for-profit operation, as is being proposed and supported and promoted by this particular government. There are some unique differences.

Also, with specific reference to this paragraph, Madam Chairman, there are also some unique differences. The minister says that for “a person to stay in a medical facility is obviously a question which must be determined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons.” But if you use Shouldice as the example and what happens in Ontario, that’s not the case at all. Shouldice has a mandatory three-night stay for patients for minor hernia operations. The same Ontario hospitals do complicated hernia operations and also minor operations as day surgery. Clearly the direction from the college in Ontario has to be that it is reasonable to do hernia operations as day surgeries, yet the private clinic, that this government promotes as a good example, has a mandatory three-night stay.

So which is it again, Madam Chairman? They’re speaking out of both sides of their mouth. Clearly they’re not giving us the kind of statement that we could take to the bank in terms of whether or not it’s really going to be the College of Physicians and Surgeons who determines the medically appropriate time to stay in a facility, be it a public hospital or be it a private hospital that they’re calling an approved surgical facility. It isn’t going to be the college that makes those decisions. It’s going to be profit that makes those decisions, profit motivated by how much money they can milk out of the government system and therefore out of taxpayers’ pockets.

We haven’t seen any clear kind of statement regarding this in terms of defining the time periods or who is going to be making those decisions. This minister is jumping to conclusions, Madam Chairman, about who’s going to be making the decisions in terms of the length of stay. Clearly, if they follow any of the examples that

they have trotted forth in this Legislature and out in the public domain in terms of what they're going to allow and what they aren't going to allow, they've got conflicting evidence everywhere. This decision is going to be made either by politicians or by private clinics and not by those who are best able to make those decisions. Hopefully, the minister can also clear up some of those issues and talk about them.

Once again, he stated that the College of Physicians and Surgeons is going to be determining whether the facility has the type of technology to make it safe and reasonable to do the procedure. Well, we know now, again, that that isn't the existing case in this province. We know that the College of Physicians and Surgeons would like to have more MRIs in the publicly funded system so that the queues could be shortened up. That would be a good example of having adequate resources in terms of the type of technology, but that hasn't happened here, Madam Chairman. What's happened? There's been so much pressure on the public system because of inadequate supplies of the proper technology that we have huge waiting lists which have driven people to move out of that queue and into the shorter queue, where they have to pay money.

Speaking of queues, Madam Chairman, I would just like to put on the record a clarification for the Premier, who doesn't seem to get it in terms of queue-jumping and what that means. It doesn't mean that people in the for-profit queue are going to be able to move from the back of that lineup to the front of the line. What it means is that people who are now in the long public queue will jump across to the private queue and pay additional moneys, more than what they're already paying out of their tax dollars, to move up in terms of the time period to get to the front of the line in order to get the medically necessary service.

When the Premier talks about addressing queue-jumping, he only talks about moving from the back of a short lineup to the front of that line. In fact, there are two jumps that are made in queue-jumping. The first is to jump out of the public line into the private line, which gives them a shorter waiting time to get this service. Some people can afford to do that, but we have a lot of people in this province who absolutely cannot afford to do that for a variety of reasons. We're saying that those people are disenfranchised by this legislation and are not enfranchised by any minor adjustments that are made by this particular amendment. That, Madam Chairman, is an issue that needs to be addressed, and we'd specifically like the minister of health to address that. What about the jump from the long public queue to the short private queue? That in itself is queue-jumping, and it needs to be resolved.

To go on with the Government House Leader's comments that he made in terms of this amendment, he said:

So instead of putting an arbitrary or irrational definition about 12 hours in the act, what we've clearly done is put in subsection (2) the concept that major surgeries must be done in "a public hospital."

So let's talk about major surgeries. Who decides what major surgeries are?

DR. OBERG: Doctors.

MS CARLSON: Well, good for you to say that, because in fact this government said that hernia operations were not major surgeries, that hip operations were not major surgeries, and the doctors said that hip operations were major surgeries. The College of Physicians and Surgeons came out and said that hip surgeries were major surgeries and were going to be too complicated to put into private clinics.

So, Madam Chairman, the point on that is that there are all kinds of conflicting information out there. Today it's a major surgery; tomorrow it's a minor surgery. Who decides? Who decides at the

end of the day is not the college, as they're pretending is happening out there, but who decides at the end of the day is the almighty buck and how long the lineup is. We've seen examples of that this week with the MRI decisions that have come down. That's who ends up deciding. Those are the wrong people to be deciding, the wrong concept to be deciding who gets health care and who doesn't and what is minor surgery and what isn't.

3:50

So those are the issues that we need to see addressed, and I'm hoping that the minister of health will get up and give us some explanations to those, because at the end of the day it's certainly not the college who is going to be defining what is major and minor when we get to the kinds of services that are borderline at this time in terms of technology and in terms of access.

When the Government House Leader talked about the ability of the college to make the decisions on what is medically appropriate, part of that was the type of people and the type of medical staff which would make it safe and make it reasonable. Well, they don't address in here, when they talk about the "approved surgical facility," where they're going to get the staff. They're going to scoop them up from the public system, Madam Chairman. Then where are we going to be in the public system? It's going to be way worse than it is now. So why haven't they addressed that issue?

We don't see any kinds of incentives to be training more doctors or to be training more nurses or the other appropriate staff that's going to be required here. If this government were serious about its commitment to fix public health care, then what they would have done is put a huge push within the system to attract doctors and nurses from outside Alberta and to properly train those inside. There's no doubt that we are going to be facing a huge shortage of doctors in the near future, and it hasn't been addressed by this government at all.

They think that by privatizing, they're going to solve all the problems, but we know in fact that that isn't true. All that's going to happen is that more people are going to be forced into the private system because they're not going to get access in the public system. Why? Because we're not going to have the proper staffing components to properly support them. Those people will have been attracted out of the public system and into the private system, and we'll have an acute shortage. We have a shortage now, Madam Chairman, but it's going to be acute soon in the public system. That has not been addressed in this amendment, and it's too bad. It's too bad that when the minister was referencing his remarks last Thursday afternoon, he didn't talk about how he was going to solve that particular problem.

Then he spends quite a bit of time talking about the College of Physicians and Surgeons on a medical basis determining what's major surgery and that it is open to them, of course, in their bylaws to determine whether someone needs a 12-hour stay or a 24-hour stay. So once again, Madam Chairman, he is unable to tell us there how it can be that in Ontario all hernia operations are day surgeries and they are not . . . Oh, my 20 minutes are up. Sorry. I'm not done. I'll be back.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased this afternoon to rise and speak to amendments under section 2. As referenced in my earlier remarks, I'm still struggling and have not received any information from the government as to how insured surgical services or major surgical services are defined in this

province, which leads me to assume that we are going down a road of defining basic and enhanced, public and private, insured and noninsured, minor and major, covered and not covered health services in Alberta. This is the subliminal route the government has us embarking upon in the discussion of this amendment before us this afternoon. I for one am not prepared nor have I been convinced that this is the route that we need to be taking in this province, and again the minister has not provided any additional supplements to clarify this for the public.

I could not find in the definitions section of the act nor in the accompanying amendments any definitions for “insured surgical service” or insured “major surgical service.” I’m wondering: as the professional colleges for physicians and dentists contemplate how they might want to instruct their members, how are those professionals in fact to know what services do or don’t fall under those terms of “insured surgical service” or “major surgical service” when the government has not defined them? I mean, really, we’re navigating the ship in the dark. We’re embarking on a course which the government declines to tell us what the destination is. They decline to tell us who is steering the ship. They decline to tell us what stops we might be making on the way or who the additional passengers might be that we might be taking on this journey.

I’m wondering this afternoon when in fact the government will get around to defining the particular terminology that they’ve chosen to use in the amendments and when they might be proposing to share that with the public and with the members of this Assembly. I think it’s vital. It’s vital because if their true intent is to define basic and enhanced or to define insured and noninsured services, then let’s do that at the onset, Madam Chairman. Let’s be transparent about that to the public. Let’s be clear that in the future there will be a list of services which the Alberta health care card will cover and there will be a list of services for which Albertans will need to get supplemental insurance in order to access. Really, at this point in time we’re all in the dark as to what services might fall under either heading.

Additional information that I’ve asked for on at least two occasions in this Assembly and have yet to receive is clarification with respect to how the U.S. trade representative’s office interprets Bill 11, the amendments and terminology used within it, and their commitment to not utilize any of the reservations or clauses in NAFTA to access health care services for market purposes in Alberta, utilizing the bill as it’s proposed or the amendments proposed in this Assembly. So in light of the fact that the minister has not provided any additional clarification with respect to that, I thought it might be useful this afternoon to in fact talk about the U.S. trade representative’s interpretation of insured . . .

Chairman’s Ruling Relevance

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I will go back to what I said originally. Last Wednesday and Thursday a determination was made in concordance with the wishes of particularly your caucus and the other opposition caucus that we would abide by going through these amendments principle by principle. Presently we are dealing with amendment 1A, section A, which does not talk about NAFTA. We are dealing with this, and I would hope, in keeping with the spirit – I’ve had the opportunity to read what several members of your caucus said in regards to going section by section, amendment by amendment – that we keep with that if we can. We are dealing with section 2, as you indicated when you first started to speak, so I’d ask you to come back to relevance, please.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I will try to

abide by your suggestions with respect to that, but I would point out again: exactly how is an approved surgical facility defined in these amendments? How is it defined for the purposes of Bill 11? How is it defined for the purposes of all of our other health legislation? How is it defined by our College of Physicians and Surgeons and the college of dentistry? How is it defined by NAFTA and the accompanying internal trade agreement? This is an issue that’s at the heart of this bill and of this amendment. We have no clarification before us, despite the fact that we’ve asked multiple times for the government to explicitly define their intent and their definitions.

There is a great deal of relevance to the discussions that occurred between Oregon and the U.S. trade representative’s office and how that might apply to Alberta, because Oregon in fact is one of the states that has gone the furthest in defining insured and noninsured services. They have approximately a 600-service long list of those services covered by the public plan and an accompanying list of those not covered. So when Oregon wrote to the United States trade representative asking a series of detailed questions about their health services list, they received the following reply, and I’m just citing some excerpts for the purposes of clarification in this House today.

4:00

While the U.S. trade representative’s office “did not include answers to each of the detailed questions posed by the Oregon Attorney General and fails [as well] to define key terms,” they offered the following response:

Describe and explain the scope of Annex II-U-5, including the definition of “public purpose,” and give examples of “similar services” provided on a “commercial basis” that might result in exclusion of state law enforcement, social or other state government services from this reservation . . . The reservation in Annex II (II-U-5) is intended to cover services which are similar to those provided by a government, such as child care or drug treatment programs. If those services are supplied by a private firm, on a profit or not-for-profit basis, Chapter Eleven and Chapter Twelve apply. If a private firm provides those services on contract to the government, then it is considered government procurement.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair is hoping that you will be tying this to amendment A1, section A, dealing with section 2.

MRS. SLOAN: I absolutely will.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Soon.

MRS. SLOAN: The most direct statement from the U.S. trade representative’s office on the scope of social services annex in NAFTA was this: “If (social) . . . services,” to which health would apply, “are supplied by a private firm, on a profit [emphasis] basis, Chapter Eleven and Chapter Twelve apply,” Madam Chairman, which means that NAFTA is engaged.

So what we are saying in the amendment is that there are going to be provisions to protect our public system. I’m going to take the government’s word that what they’re going to do is protect insured services and protect major surgical services from for-profit delivery. But what about the noninsured services, and what about the minor surgical services that are not mentioned? These are the two areas, Madam Chairman, which by de facto we must debate. We must acknowledge that these go hand in glove.

Insured surgical services and going down that path will result in an accompanying list of uninsured services. The definition of a major surgical services list will hand in glove result in a list of minor surgical services being offered. This is the tangled web that the

amendments proposed to Bill 11 weave, and this is exactly the area that will engage NAFTA. The uninsured surgical services and the minor surgical services, which most certainly will accompany the definition of these two areas under these amendments in this section, will be the areas in which the private sector, the for-profit sector, can look to to expand their foothold in market-share delivery in Alberta.

Let me emphasize that those particular corporate entities will not be restricted to Alberta-based companies. That is clear. Again, for the record, we haven't had any additional information. I have called upon the government to table in this Assembly an assessment, an analysis, of Bill 11 and the accompanying amendments by the U.S. trade representative's office, and they have declined to provide that, Madam Chairman.

Let me move on. I have questioned the government's priorities relative to the emphasis on surgical services that Bill 11 and the amendments embody. Why is it that this government is choosing to put so much political policy, fiscal resources into emphasizing and highlighting?

The Friends of Medicare, which have been an absolutely stellar group in prompting debate on this subject, in their newsletter of February 2000 raised the following questions relative to Bill 11. They asked the questions: "What is to protect us when he's gone?" Meaning the Premier. Or what is protect us when this government is gone and there might be other representatives whose definitions or interpretations of the bill may be somewhat different? They also ask:

When and why did [the Premier] change his mind? In 1995, he argued vigorously with the federal government that the Canada Health Act should be changed to allow private clinics to charge patients "facility fees." That was two-tiered medicine in its purest form. Even just a year ago, he was saying that he could "see nothing wrong with a little two-tiered health care." The original Bill 37 would have permitted this. If he did change his mind very recently, what is to prevent him from changing his mind again?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On this particular amendment, hon. member.

MRS. SLOAN: Yes, Madam Chairman. I think the issue, again, is that this government has been somewhat all over the map with respect to their decisions, priorities, and initiatives in health care. We've gone from savage cuts in the early '90s . . .

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, this is the kind of debate we have in second reading. We have an amendment before us called amendment A1. I ask you to come back. I want to hear some relevance to do with amendment A1, section A.

MRS. SLOAN: Well, when the government was implementing their savage cuts in the early '90s, I happened to be asked in a previous position to sit on the health plan co-ordination project by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, which at that time was the hon. Member for Drumheller-Chinook, the intergovernmental affairs minister now. One of the items that was placed on the agenda of that committee was in fact to embark on the definition of insured and noninsured services. So this is entirely relevant, Madam Chairman, because the terminology and the differentiation of insured, noninsured, major, or minor surgical services has been something that's been percolating in this government since 1993.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: Here we find it today in the amendment. We find

it before us now finally on record, but the problem is, Madam Chairman, that they haven't brought an accompanying amendment to say what would be uninsured or to say what would be minor. As I said, this is the haphazard, all over the map type of response we've seen from this government on health care.

I have also questioned: why are we only looking at surgical services and not the equally important services for mental health, for palliative care, for home care, and public health, all of which have been absolutely, dramatically, appallingly underfunded by this government for at least the last decade? We didn't see any mention of children's mental health or adult mental health in the throne speech this year.

All the while the government seems to wish to torque a discussion about contracting out and private delivery of surgical services when there is a whole mosaic of issues that need to be addressed in health care, something which The Rainbow Report tried to bring forward certainly in a more substantive and comprehensive way than Bill 11 or the amendments before us this afternoon propose to do.

The other thing that I find somewhat concerning about the amendments before us is that we may in fact find that insured services and major surgical services become defined by regulations, and that causes me great concern, Madam Chairman, for this reason. Regulations are established by this government and approved by this government by an order in council. We've had unpleasant experiences with that in the course of this government's term. The most prominent that comes to mind is when they decided that they would retract the regulation that required registered nurses to be in charge of operating rooms. That happened in 1995 without any consultation, any public notice, no notice even to the professional groups affected. What occurred subsequent to that was an immediate widespread lobby by primarily the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses urging the government to rescind their order in council and reinstate that regulation. In fact that was done, and registered nurses continue to be in charge of operating room theatres today.

4:10

The risk that we fall into when we look at how significantly and dramatically regulatory definitions of major surgical services or insured surgical services could be is that we could in fact find ourselves somewhere down the road with the cabinet defining exactly what falls under those terms. Again, there is no requirement for public consultation. There's no requirement for public notice. There's no requirement for professional bodies to be notified. That is something, Madam Chairman, that the public is just not prepared to accept. They do not believe that this government has demonstrated or produced the substantive evidence that we need to go the route of defining what is insured and noninsured in Alberta or in Canada in our health care system.

Regrettably, the whole discussion of amendments to Bill 11 is somewhat moot. Really, I would state once again that Bill 11 is not a salvageable bill. It's not a bill that with amendments of any form is salvageable. It doesn't go where the public think we should go in health care. It doesn't heed the public's concerns over what has been happening in our health care system. It doesn't offer any substantive proof that the current inaccessibility that exists . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair is going to interject again. Basically, what you're talking about now is second reading debate. We are within the Committee of the Whole stage. We are dealing with amendments. Let's get on with amendment A1, section A, please.

MRS. SLOAN: Well, all right. Let me try this route. The longest

waiting list that we have currently in the province exists in the area of surgical services: coronary surgery, hip surgery, MRIs, and orthoscopic surgery. Will those areas fall under the definition of an insured surgical service or a major surgical service? I ask the minister of health because we don't know this afternoon. Would those areas in fact be covered by these definitions?

DR. OBERG: What kind of surgery are you talking about?

MRS. SLOAN: Orthoscopic, hip, coronary. I repeat them for the hon. Minister of Learning.

The point is that without that assurance the public can have no faith that the extensive waiting lists that exist in those areas in Alberta today, where thousands of Albertans have to wait for surgery, are going to be reduced by this bill. There is nothing even in the research, the government's own research, that can prove conclusively that these amendments will reduce waiting lists for surgical services. That is one of the most critical issues that we as legislators should be debating this afternoon. We have citizens in this province who are waiting upwards of six months for surgery. They are deteriorating. They're suffering pain and hardship.

I thank you for the opportunity to make those remarks this afternoon.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. I see two members opposite. Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: That's fine. Sorry. Can I defer to my colleague, please?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. As I stand today to talk about the proposed amendment A1, Albertans are still having great concerns with both the main bill sections and now amendment A1. As we spoke on the main bill and as members of the Official Opposition said, Bill 11 does little to protect Albertans. I also closed my speech at that particular time stressing that the bill is so narrow that any tinkering would be lost in the actual overhaul. Albertans have, you know, no confidence in the actual tinkering with such a bill.

Now, we look at A1, section A: "No physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta, and no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta, except in . . . a public hospital." As I spoke last week in one of my times up here, I spoke of a four-year-old boy dying in a surgical suite set up because of the anesthetists being forced out of the main hospitals and wondering why they can't get more surgery time. Also, the surgeon, who was forced out because of lack of surgical time, had to slow down to a point that he was at a snail's pace. Then he goes over to a surgical suite where there is very little backup. We know there was no backup because there was a problem and he had to be rushed off to the hospital. This child died because of a pecking order.

Last week I was accused by the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti of having no confidence in the doctors. I have confidence in 99 percent of the doctors in this province. Who I do not have any confidence in is the 1 percent of the doctors that are pushing this. They're pushing this for their own profit. They're the same people that are creating the problems within our health system right now due to the fact that they're playing their pecking order, that they're the kings of the castles, and everybody underneath them has to fight to get what case they can get. We look at creaming from the top. If we do go with this new legislation, Bill 11, this same 1 percent of

the doctors will be creaming from the top if they aren't controlled and aren't kept within the system. I don't care how many truth squads you send out there. You're not going to change my mind on that particular item.

We do look at the cost factor. We do look at approved surgicals as being the myth that we are going to save money. Are we going to save money? No. Chances are there's going to be more money spent. You know, we look at the faulty assumptions in Bill 11. Bill 11 is based on the assumption that private health care costs less and helps shorten waiting lists, but there's no data behind that. There is absolutely no data at all. Everything that has been done around the world, whether it's in England, Australia, or New Zealand, has come back to the point that the neoconservatives of the time – the full circle has gone around to proving that they were wrong, the Margaret Thatchers of this world pushing their agenda at the time, as she did. This woman is rated anywhere in history as how to destroy health in Great Britain. We look at New Zealand and what they're trying to rebuild today.

We have to look at the whole thing, even starting with A1, as being faulty to the point of why no physicians or dentists shall provide a major surgical service, as described, outside the actual public hospitals. It's because of write-ups in the paper: boy's death prompts investigation. If that death had been in the family of someone else within here, we'd be very, very concerned.

I think that it is disconcerting that members here just want to see how fast these amendments can go through. We're going to be here for days just on amendments, and maybe some of these will be picked up, maybe some of the items we said last week. Maybe the item on MRIs was picked up, but why weren't they part of the original bill? We look at the original bill and look at the faultiness of it but legally totally within all parameters, totally everything that the lawyers that this government actually paid to put this together. Did they consult with anybody but that 1 percent of the doctors that have lots to gain and little to lose? Experience from other countries suggests that this would not be the case; that is, that they're saving money. All available evidence shows that private health care costs more and leads to longer waits for treatment, not shorter ones.

4:20

The definition of a hospital, Madam Chairman, is something that should be brought into this amendment for sure. Section 1 of the bill says that the private hospital will be banned in Alberta, but the bill goes on to say that the private surgical facilities will be allowed to perform a wide range of procedures that are currently performed only in public hospitals. These private surgical facilities will be a hospital in all but name. So the promise to ban private hospitals, contained in section 1, is virtually meaningless.

Conflict of interest in this particular amendment, Madam Chairman, is that Bill 11 says that the private surgical facilities will only be allowed to perform minor surgeries, but what constitutes minor surgeries is never defined. The job of deciding which surgicals are for minor or enhanced or contracting out is left up to the College of Physicians and Surgeons. The problem with this is that some of the doctors sitting on the college's board have personal financial interests in the private surgical companies. This is clear conflict of interest. That's going back to that 1 percent I talked about before. These same doctors in that 1 percent surely do have a vested interest, whether or not they are the biggest funders of this particular government or they help to pay off somebody's – well, maybe it's a debt. We have to keep wondering about that.

Public hospitals are something that we have to protect. We cannot look at it in any other direction but to think that our hospitals – and maybe it's the health care people, the ones that have been totally

decimated over the last few years. When we look at the health system in this province, where 10,000 medical people, from the janitors to the nurses' aides, the LPNs, the nurses – and chasing the doctors out of the country has created a void. As I talked last week, the void didn't just happen in this particular province. It's happened throughout Canada, the void of lack of planning, the void of not playing the game, of paying down your debt at any cost but forgetting that technology has changed. Technology and pharmaceuticals have exceedingly jumped, quadrupled over the last few years. Imagine what it's going to be over the next 10 years, if it has changed as it has now.

If the federal government and the governments of all the provinces and the territories aren't willing to sit down and get working at it, we're going to be sitting here – we think of what's happened over the last few years. The health system has only been looked at a few times. It's exceeding the costs of what's happened over the last few years. It should be an ongoing study. It should be an ongoing factor. Instead of this type of legislation coming forward and trying to play the heavy hand in the country, this province would've been better off coming out with a direction and working at the Premiers' conferences, pushing for a change, not looking at it and trying to play politics, what we're seeing with the federal government system and a member from this Legislature running for the position of leader of an opposition party.

You know, Madam Chairman, we look at different questions that should be brought forward. This government continues to tell us that it needs to find new approaches to health care. They claim that one of the approaches is to allow overnight stays in surgical facilities. Well, it might be an idea, but it's a bad one. Allowing overnight stays in private surgical facilities which are not fully equipped is, according to members of the department of public health sciences at the University of Alberta, a danger to the health of patients and thus ethically unacceptable.

Questions around this. If a patient experienced complications, like that of the surgical suite, beyond the ability of the surgical centre to treat, how are these private surgical facilities going to cope? Another question about the surgical suites, Madam Chairman: will this government admit that its policy of pushing for overnight stays in surgical facilities will not improve health care but will put the lives of Albertans at risk by placing them in clinics which are not equipped to deal with real emergencies? Now, we do see that they've actually taken action on the dental suites.

Looking closer, when this debate first came forward a few months ago, we were talking about hip operations. Then when that was disproved by the AMA, they came out with hernia operations. Well, we do know how little mistakes can happen and how a 21-year-old mother from Lloydminster, who has two young children, has no arms and legs. That's just astronomically terrible. I mean, it should bring tears to everybody in this room, how that can actually happen.

A question around health care professions. Economists and researchers continue to tell us that the government policies will undermine the health care system in Alberta and possibly put lives of Albertans at risk. Will this government do the right thing and listen to the evidence and abandon this private hospital policy?

You know, Madam Chairman, in its policy statement on the delivery of surgical services, the government claimed that there would be no two-tiered medicine in Alberta. However, the report prepared by the Institute of Health Economics for this government states that if there are no regulations to prevent the offering of enhanced services in private facilities, two-tiered medicine will be the result. A question around this: why is it this government's policy to allow the provisions of enhanced services to private facilities when this leads to two-tiered medicine, as we have already seen with the cataract surgeries in Alberta?

It was pointed out last week in a number of speeches by our members about the cataract operations in Calgary, that people can queue-jump, in the case of money \$2,000 per eye. Now we see that finally the government is starting to talk about maybe they're going to put more control on queue-jumping. But believe me, who's going to monitor that? Who's going to tell if you actually paid the \$2,000 to queue-jump? I wouldn't. Most of these people wouldn't even tell that story.

Why does the government turn a blind eye to the charging and the queue-jumping that is already creating a two-tiered system in Alberta? Will this government prohibit the offering of enhanced services in private facilities to prevent the two-tiered system that the Institute of Health Economics study warns about? Will the government prohibit the offering of enhanced services in private facilities to prevent those who can pay for enhanced services from getting quicker treatment?

Now, it was also brought up last week – and another one of my statements was: grabbing in the air, we're looking at different ways of what we can do in the private surgeries. One member from the other side brought up tonsils. Well, talking to a number of medical people over the weekend, as well as that particular night and next morning – I phoned a few people. Tonsils, if you work in surgery, is one of the scariest operations that can be. Maybe it's the one that's been around the longest, but if you get what they call a bleeder, everybody runs for assistance and makes sure that everybody is back in that surgical room.

You know, the Premier has told Albertans that this government policy to allow overnight stays in approved surgical facilities will not endanger the lives of Albertans. Well, Madam Chairman, allowing for overnight stays in private surgical facilities which are not fully equipped is, according to the members of the J. Dossetor Health Ethics Centre at the University of Alberta, a danger to the health of patients and thus is ethically unacceptable.

How are these private surgical facilities going to cope with patients experiencing complications in this particular one? You know, every report we're getting, whether it's the University of Alberta or other studies around North America or New Zealand and Australia, is discounting a lot of these myths that this government has actually been putting out as the reason why they want to do that. [interjections] Now, we seem to have other members wanting to enter into the debate, Madam Chairman. Maybe they'll stand up afterwards and help us out with this.

Will this government admit that its policy to push overnight stays in surgical facilities will not improve health care but will put the lives of Albertans in jeopardy by placing them in clinics that are not equipped with emergency backup?

4:30

We can go on and we can talk about data which we know that this government hasn't got. We can talk about no confirmed information. No, they haven't got that either, but we have to take a look and withstand some of the things that they've been putting forward to us, that hopefully the tinkering of 14 amendments coming forward will make Albertans forget what actually this is all about.

I didn't go to Calgary on the weekend, but I did go to the Agri-Com, where anywhere between 6,000 and 7,000 people were in attendance. Some of the placards probably were liable, but at the same time people were expressing their concerns.

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair will ask you to move quickly back to the amendment we have before us.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you for pointing that out, Madam Chairman, but at the same time, I think this is all pertaining to what's through this whole bill.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, the function of a committee on a bill is to go through the text of the bill clause by clause and, if necessary, word by word with a view to making such amendments in it as may seem likely to render it more generally acceptable. We are in the committee stage. We have before us amendment A1, section A, and I would ask that we talk about and debate in committee the relevant sections to do with the amendment that is before us.

MR. GIBBONS: Madam Chairman, the approved surgical facility is part of that, and people were bringing that up yesterday. At the rally that I did go to, they were talking about . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: You didn't have the answer; right?

MR. GIBBONS: Oh, don't worry about that. I've got the answer for it.

Madam Chairman, I would tell the people on the other side, if they want to get up and debate, to stand up in their own due time.

Debate Continued

MR. GIBBONS: Going back to the amendment, Madam Chairman, I think I was totally within the realm of this amendment, talking about how people are concerned about this, and a rally should be recognized for how important it is. I saw lots of people in the AgriCom that used to vote for this government. They were there showing their concern and their disappointment. Even if we are talking about public hospitals and surgical facilities, I do believe it is very important to bring that out.

Madam Chairman, with that I will sit down.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to participate further on amendment A1, section A. There were some things I didn't get a chance to say the other day when I spoke to it for 20 minutes. At the end of this, there were two things that crossed my mind, we may all think. The first one is a quote from Abbe Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, who lived from 1748 to 1836 and who made the famous statement: "J'ai vécu. I survived." It strikes me that we may all be of that mind when we finish this process. The other one I was thinking of was the comment of Will Durant, the American historian, who said, "Democracy is the most difficult of all forms of government, since it requires the widest spread of intelligence."

Now, what I hope you're going to find, Madam Chairman, when I sit down in 20 minutes, however much of a stretch it is, is that we've been demonstrating if not breadth of intelligence at least a robust and vigorous examination of the amendment that's in front of us.

There are a couple of items I didn't get a chance before to query. Now, when I look at the amendment, there are some key parts to it that I wanted to run through and seek some clarification on, Madam Chairman. If you look at amendment A1, section A, it's the proposed section 2.

Might I just make a parenthetical comment? I think it was the Minister of Government Services who said: "What's the big deal? We're putting in dentists here." The point is that as I read the

amendment, all of the old section 2 comes out. If this amendment passes, then the entire section 2 in the bill that we all got a couple of weeks ago comes out and this new section is imported into it. It would seem to me that this in fact is the chance we can explore each of the elements of this. If we don't do it, we may well find that once it's been voted, some sharp member on the government side is going to jump up and try and cut off a person like me from speaking to some of those things, saying, "Well, you had your chance on Monday afternoon, April 17." Madam Chairman, I wouldn't want that to happen.

This is my question to the Minister of Health and Wellness. If we look at the proposed new section 2(2)(a), we refer to "by-laws under the Medical Profession Act." Now, I don't know whether members have had the chance to do it, but I've gone to the Medical Profession Act. This is the one specifically referred to in the amendment. I thought: well, how many kinds of bylaws are there in the Medical Profession Act that A1, section A would relate to?

Do you know what I found, Madam Chairman? I didn't hear the minister explain this. You can look at section 31 of the Medical Profession Act, and section 31 provides that the council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons "may make by-laws." There's a range of things including 31(e), which is "the regulation of the practice of medicine and the governing of the affairs of the profession." Now, are those the bylaws the government contemplates would be referred to under A1, section A? I don't know, and I haven't heard an answer to that.

MRS. SLOAN: That was my question.

MR. DICKSON: Exactly. My colleague for Edmonton-Riverview may have the same query.

Madam Chairman, I think some of my colleagues are breaking out the Girl Guide cookies, and I think you should tell them it would be rude to be eating while there are other members that are talking. We hope that's not going to lead to an outbreak of cookie munching for the balance of the session.

So we have bylaws under section 31. We also have bylaws under section 32. "The council may make by-laws governing" a host of things. Now, I assume that that would not apply to this amendment, but I don't know that for sure because it's quite wide.

It could be under section 33: "The council may make by-laws." Now, that appears to deal with a special fund, so presumably that is not what the government had in mind.

Then we could go to section 74 of the Medical Profession Act. If you look at section 74, "the council may make by-laws" dealing with a bunch of things. That seems to relate to professional corporations, so I assume that's probably not what is intended.

Then I went to section 97, and "the council may make [certain] by-laws governing fees." Now, what I wonder there is whether in fact in the course of prescribing fees under section 97 of the Medical Profession Act, that would be one of those bylaws that's captured under the amendment in the proposed 2(2)(a). I don't know.

I know the minister is in his seat this afternoon. We've got lots of time. I'd specifically ask the Minister of Health and Wellness: will he identify the specific section in the Medical Profession Act? I notice he's ably assisted by the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. Surely between the two of them they can give me a precise, specific answer to the question I'm asking: which section is this under, gentlemen, through the chair? Is it section 31, 32, 33, 74, or 97?

Now, if in fact it's under section 31, there's something that I notice hasn't been brought to the attention of members. We've heard a lot of concern – and the Minister of Learning said this earlier

– with: why would we want politicians, politicos, involved in deciding what's a major service and what's a minor service?

Well, you know something, Madam Chairman? They already are. Do members not know that under the Medical Profession Act, section 32(2), we have: a bylaw “does not come into force until it has been approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.” Is that not the cabinet, and is that not the most secret, inappropriate, ineffective way of having some political control? Wouldn't we sooner have that done in some more public process?

4:40

My colleague for Edmonton-Riverview made an excellent point when she reminded us of the change, the de-skilling move in terms of the operating rooms of hospitals in this province. Was that subject to any sort of public review? No. It was a closed consultation with a few designated stakeholders, and the rest of us found out about it after we read the *Alberta Gazette*.

Madam Chairman, when I deal with this specific amendment and I look at section 2(2)(a), I've got those questions, and I'm sure hoping we get an answer. But it is interesting that under the Medical Profession Act we've got provision for at least some regulations to not become law until they've been approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. So what does that do to all these people who say, “Gee, we don't want legislators having anything to say about what's a major medical surgery or a minor medical surgery”? It might be fairly selective.

Now, it may be that I'm missing some key points here. So would the minister of health or the associate minister please clarify what specific section they're relying on? That's the first thing I wanted to raise.

Now, the second matter had to do with the provision specifically for dentists under there. You know, I'm glad this is there, because it raises a concern I saw. The Minister of Health and Wellness and his assistant, the Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness, I'm sure have seen the report. It's the Health of the Calgary Region. It's a report produced by the CRHA, 1999. It's come out just scant few weeks ago with a message from the medical officer of health.

What this amendment talks about is oral surgery. You know, it's an interesting thing. If you look at pages 91 and 92 of the CRHA status report on the health of Calgarians – and I don't want to be parochial, but we have over 900,000 people in the Calgary health region. My question, obviously, is: how is this going to affect my constituents? The Member for Calgary-Cross the other day and the Minister of Government Services and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General spoke in terms of how this related to their constituents, and in the same way the chair allowed them to speak to that, I know, Madam Chairman, that you're going to allow me also to speak to it while I'm addressing the amendment.

I look in Calgary, where in fact we've got an increase in the number of children two to nine with a painful tooth in a 12-month period. The children who miss school in a 12-month period because of a toothache has increased in the Calgary region from 1995 to 1999. A significant situation was the number of seniors who have only a few or no natural teeth. These are statistics, and, Madam Chairman, I have a particular interest. My father at one point had been the president of the Alberta Dental Association. I know that's a professional organization that's very much focused on the prevention of tooth decay and dental disease and the promotion of good dental hygiene, but it seems to me too often we are sort of worrying about complicated oral surgery after the fact when we don't do enough work in terms of prevention at the front end, and I'm not going to talk about the Halloween candy I was never able to have.

Madam Chairman, the other concern I come to quickly is, looking

at the amendment, 2(1)(b). Now, I want to come back to this. I raised some questions the other day, and I hoped that there might be more compelling answers. Here I am a few days later and a number of hours later and they still haven't been answered.

This approved surgical facility. I'm very concerned with the news I found out on the weekend that the Holy Cross hospital – this is the place that had been renovated for \$32 million and sold at a fire sale price of \$4.5 million to Enterprise Universal Inc., the company controlled by Dr. Huang and Dr. Huang. That corporation is currently in front of the city of Calgary. Do you know what they are proposing to do?

This, I think, may be one of these approved surgical facilities, but I would like the minister to tell us. I can scarcely believe that since the CRHA is now simply a phone call extension away from the Premier's office – and we know the complete control asserted by the Premier's office over the Calgary region and the Calgary regional board. It would be beyond comprehension that the Huang brothers and the Universal company that purchased the Holy Cross hospital – and do you remember? The notion was that it was going to be used by Mount Royal College and it was going to be used for a private eye clinic, but there would be some other facilities, long-term care facilities.

Now what's happened is that Universal has made an application to the city of Calgary. Do you know what they are proposing to do? They are going to spend on two floors – and this may be news to the minister of health, because he professed not to be familiar with this in question period. Two floors are going to be committed to laboratory services. Now, this may be the answer. The Calgary region has been looking at where they're going to put their laboratory since it was not allowed to go beside the Colonel Belcher long-term care facility, on the old motor vehicle branch. They're also putting in a series of clinics there. You know, Madam Chairman, there's no question in my mind that the intention of Universal is to create an approved surgical facility.

Madam Chairman, if this section goes through, here's what will happen. Alberta taxpayers who have been burned, absolutely burned with what happened at the Holy Cross hospital, are now going to be invited to turn around and pay through rich lease payments, presumably, and service contract payments – we're effectively going to try and buy back the Holy Cross hospital. We're now paying a profit to the people who were skillful to persuade the government of Alberta to part with a gem, an asset like the Holy Cross hospital, and then be able to provide the same kinds of services that had been in the hospital before, but now we pay through the nose for them. I don't blame Dr. Huang and Dr. Huang. I expect that an entrepreneur's job is to maximize their profit, but I have absolutely no patience for a government that's prepared to sell out the interests of Alberta taxpayers. The question under section 2(1)(b): is the Holy Cross site going to be designated an approved surgical facility? Might that meet the criteria? Will the Minister or the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness tell us that?

The parking lot across the street from the Holy Cross hospital has been valued by the city of Calgary for assessment purposes at \$3 million. The hospital itself was sold for \$4.5 million, but fair market value for the parking lot is \$3 million. The fair market value of the Holy Cross hospital is probably in excess of \$30 million or \$40 million.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: More.

MR. DICKSON: More? What do I know about property valuation? I'm getting some advice here that I'm way too low. Two of the wisest ministers in the government of the province of Alberta are

telling me I'm much too low when I'm saying that the value of the Holy Cross facility is maybe around \$30 million. What? Fifty million dollars? Sixty million dollars? Tell me when I'm warm. Tell me when I'm close.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We're not polling the audience, hon. member. Carry on.

4:50

MR. DICKSON: But they wanted to be included in the debate. With the respect I have for those two ministers, I would be prepared to sit down right now if they would like to offer their assessment of the value. All they have to do is give me a nod. If they'd just give me a nod, I'd sit down right now so they can tell us what the value of that facility is.

MR. SMITH: If it'll get this bill out of committee, I'll do it.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, they put forward a condition that pains me to no end.

In any event, I'm trying hard to stay on the amendment. You know, that's what the people in Calgary-Varsity want to know and the people in Calgary-Fish Creek. It's not just people in Calgary-Buffalo. People in Calgary-Glenmore want to know: is that Holy Cross hospital now going to be one of those approved surgical facilities?

If the Minister of Health and Wellness, who I have great respect for, really thinks that we're going to accept that there have been no discussions between the CRHA, those minions of the Premier's office, before they went ahead to get the facility redesignated, get a new land use classification, then, Madam Chairman, I have an enormous problem with that. I can't accept that. We're going to have, it looks like, two approved surgical facilities right off the bat in Calgary, HRG and this one.

Madam Chairman, I had a great note here, and I'm just trying to find it now. I can't put my finger on it immediately, so maybe it'll come back to me later.

When I looked at the amendment – and I'm trying to understand the amendment to section 2 – I looked to see what the Minister of Government Services had to say about it. I thought that might make it a little clearer. I regret to report that after carefully reading all of the comments of the Minister of Government Services, I'm more confused by the amendment than I was when I started reading them.

Then I went to the comments made by the Member for Calgary-Cross. She made some observations. She is a registered nurse, a proud graduate of, I think, the General hospital nursing program, when that still existed. She talked about a number of services that can be done on an outpatient basis in day surgeries now. She concerned me a little bit when she talked about a stay of more than 12 hours in the clinic. I'm just reading what the Member for Calgary-Cross had said at page 1000, Madam Chairman, on April 13, 2000, when she was speaking to this same committee. [Mr. Dickson's speaking time expired] Oh, I think there may be somebody else to follow up.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It's a pleasure once again to enter the discussion this afternoon on amendment A1 to Bill 11, or, as I like to call it, the public health care amendment act.

Now, we have to then look at the definitions, in this case 2(1)(a) if we're going to talk about "a public hospital" and/or (b) "an approved surgical facility." Well, when we do this, the big difference between the definition of those two facilities, Madam Chairman, is the fact that one has an emergency facility and the other does not. The public hospital is going to be the centre that is going to have to look after all emergency care. We know that as a result of the severe cutbacks that were initiated by this government, not only the cutbacks in beds and in emergency services but also in staff, that emergency care, this safety net has unraveled. It's very important that all hon. members of this Assembly understand that there's nowhere in the definition of "an approved surgical facility" that it has to provide any sort of emergency care.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning talked earlier of skimming off the top of the public health care system. All the difficult cases would wind up not only in the public hospital, but the majority of them would probably come in through the emergency ward. There is no money to be made in emergency care. This is certainly reflected in articles. I have read extensively on the model that is provided in the United States of America, Madam Chairman. There is no money to be made in an emergency situation, because of course you have no idea what's wrong with a person, and that's the problem. I think this is why an approved surgical facility, as we're talking about in this amendment A1, does not include emergency care.

Now, all hon. members can understand what has happened not only in the Capital region but certainly in other regional health authorities across the province. There are things that we commonly refer to as red alerts. You hear of the red alerts more often in the winter, during flu season, than at any other time. A red alert simply means that ambulances are shopping for a place to drop off a sick person. The emergency ward in one hospital is full, and the staff are working to maximum capacity. Another one on the other side of the city is also working to maximum capacity, and there are ambulances coming to and fro. One would question: well, if an approved surgical facility will improve our system, why aren't they deciding that they're going to provide emergency services? We all know that's not going to happen.

One of the reasons why the approved surgical facilities would certainly not be interested in providing this, Madam Chairman – and I will remind all hon. members of the Assembly of this – is that whenever there are fewer hospitals, like I said before, there are fewer emergency rooms as a result and there are fewer beds. So this is the reason for the ambulances having to shop around.

We've had the nursing cutbacks and the nursing shortages. We have the shortages of emergency room physicians and other official . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, we are dealing with an amendment before us. Can we have something relevant to the amendment at hand?

MR. MacDONALD: We certainly are, Madam Chairman. I'm talking about amendment A1, and I'm talking specifically about the difference in the emergency wards in a public hospital and in an approved surgical facility. An approved surgical facility has no emergency ward because they can't make a profit off it. It's as simple as that.

Now, I can't say that this amendment is going to improve access. It's not going to improve access for people who require emergency care. That is one of the most difficult items to fix in our current public health care mess. I'm not going to get into any detail about who created it, because everyone in the province knows that, but this

mess that was created is not going to be improved by contracting out to any of these approved surgical facilities.

5:00

Now, when we talk about an approved surgical facility, if it's not going to be involved in any emergency care, what kind of services that a public hospital cannot provide will an approved surgical facility provide? For instance, maybe we're looking at a heart hospital down the road, because I understand, Madam Chairman, that we don't have public hospitals in other jurisdictions, but we have an approved surgical facility devoted exclusively to operations centred around the heart.

We could also have an approved surgical facility that would deal exclusively with issues related to women and women's health. I'm not talking about we're going to have an approved surgical facility that's going to deal with simply hip replacements or knee replacements or that we're going to have a facility that's going to deal exclusively with hernias, because I think that argument has been put to rest, so to speak, with the evidence. I've said it before and I've said it publicly that the Shouldice clinic in Ontario, which is brought up as a fine example of an approved surgical facility – I think some hon. members have even called that facility a centre of excellence. This is what we need in Alberta, these centres of excellence. This was the description of an approved surgical facility, but there could be any number of health care services that these facilities could provide that we have yet to see. We can only suggest just what might be behind this amendment A1 whenever we look at a public hospital and an approved surgical facility. It could be a heart facility. It could be a facility to deal with respiratory problems, anything that could be contracted out.

When I look at what's going on in America and I look at the health management organizations, now I wonder aloud to all members of the House whether an approved surgical facility, as it's described here, could be administered by a health management organization. If it's going to be administered by a health management organization, that company could have its headquarters, for instance, in Fargo, North Dakota, or it could be in Arizona, in Phoenix. It could be anywhere, and how many of these approved surgical facilities could that HMO own, Madam Chairman? That is an interesting part of this whole debate, not only on amendment A1 here but on the entire bill, the entire Bill 11, the not to protect public health care act, as I call it. We have to look at this, because when we look at this amendment and we see a public hospital and we see an approved surgical facility, that is the two-tiered system. That's the two-tiered system that everyone is talking about.

Everyone was certainly talking about it yesterday afternoon at the fabulously rally at the AgriCom. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was very busy there. She was collecting petitions, names, signature after signature after signature on her petition. Regardless of whether the hon. member said that the petition was on protecting public health care or on amendment A1, people were still willing to sign it. They were lining up to sign this. It is amazing. It is amazing that whenever we're here in this Assembly, we see ourselves removed, removed from public opinion as is obvious and is evident by the hon. members in the government refusing to not be satisfied with amending this bill.

We have to work with this bill, and we have to try, as difficult as this may seem, to improve it. It's a very difficult task, and I just cannot support this amendment because it does not serve a purpose in improving this bill. I encourage all hon. members to vote against this amendment.

I cannot go to a public rally where there are 6,000 people in attendance – I saw people with signs. They had signs up, Madam

Chairman: Vegreville, Alberta; Vermilion; Athabasca. I even had a busload of people – I was startled. I was standing by the door. They came from Innisfail – Innisfail – and they certainly want a public hospital. They want only public hospitals. They do not want an approved surgical facility in Innisfail. The Albertans who came from Innisfail were very delighted to sign the petition. The only disappointment I have is that I didn't keep their names separately on the petition. They're lumped with hundreds of other people. I would have been very proud to stand in this Assembly and present to all members of this Assembly that petition on behalf of the people from Innisfail.

When we look at this – and it's not left-wing nuts. It's not people who are opposed to change, because we have radically changed the health care system in this province in the last five years, but it's people who know that the government is not listening to them.

Now, Madam Chairman, whenever we talk about our amendment here, hon. members from the other side of the House can stand up, and I'm sure the argument will be: these amendments are because we have listened to the people. We have listened to the people's concerns across the province, and we know how they feel. But in reality these amendments, particularly this A1, are not a reflection of what Albertans are thinking. It doesn't matter whether you're in Calgary or whether you were in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, or Edmonton yesterday afternoon. People do not want this two-tiered system as is plainly outlined here.

The government gets quite defensive whenever they talk about this bill and this amendment. No, they assure everyone, Madam Chairman, this is not the introduction of the two-tiered system. Well, I'm afraid that it is. I'm sorry to disappoint all hon. members across the way, but as defined here in amendment A1, this is the introduction of two-tiered medicine to this province.

Now, where are we going to be if the government doesn't do the right thing and pull this bill? In five years we will probably have in this province a debate raging on how we're going to control the health management organizations, how we're going to control the whole idea of managed care, how we're going to control the growth of these health management organizations and possible mergers. These are all questions that I think in the future hon. members of this Assembly will be debating if this amendment goes forward in this bill.

In closing, I would like to say, Madam Chairman, that if the private sector – and the private sector in this case is going to be an approved surgical centre – gets a foothold or a toehold in Alberta, it's just a matter of time before it expands and we have what is called by everyone in this province, with the exception of the government, a two-tiered system, a two-tiered system of delivery.

Now, I know that government members are going to say that we've always had this system, but since the introduction of medicare, there has usually been about 25 percent of health care services provided by private or outside sources. Oddly enough, in the last decade it has risen. It has risen from that constant 25 percent to over 30 percent.

5:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The chairman is going to ask you to please get back to the amendment that we have on hand, amendment A1, section A. Please refer to that and have your comments relevant to it.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Getting back to an approved surgical facility. Now, the approved surgical facilities are certainly going to pick up more of the slack. They're going to deliver more of the service, and essentially they are

going to be businesses that are going to be subsidized with taxpayers' money. That's simply why, if I had the top 10 reasons why I could not support this amendment A1, that would be the first one. That would be at the top of my top 10 list. Patients, I do not believe, would be protected from pressures to pay for additional goods and services in an approved surgical facility.

Will this lead to pressure from the private sector to deinsure services that are currently paid for in the public system whenever we're talking about an approved surgical facility? Madam Chairman, I would have to say yes. If an approved surgical facility is, as everyone claims – and I believe last week we saw the start of this with the set fee. The minister is going to set that fee. That's the profit level in there. If private surgical clinics, or these approved surgical facilities, can't charge extra, then how are they to make a profit, if we are to believe the fact factory? Now, I know some hon. members call it the Public Affairs Bureau, but I have renamed the Public Affairs Bureau the fact factory, because I, like a lot of other Albertans, are getting very, very confused because there seems to be fact and there seems to be fiction.

I'm afraid that the fact factory, as I call it, is just like the pages in the document, the 30 pages in the FOIP request that we constantly ask the Premier for. Albertans and members of the opposition are looking at blanks, because there are no facts. There are no facts here. I cannot understand how this approved surgical facility is going to make our public system more efficient.

With those remarks, Madam Chairman, I will cede the floor to another hon. member of the Assembly. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I, too, rise this afternoon to speak to the amendment that's before us. I think it's A1, section A, or something along those lines. The last time I spoke to this amendment – and I was going through it word by word and line by line – I talked about the fact that change in the amendment was from the wording that indicated that “no person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta” to “no physician shall provide a surgical service,” and what was added in is that “no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service.” So it's interesting to note that when we look at the difference between what a physician can provide and what a dentist can provide, the physician can obviously provide insured and uninsured surgical services. The dentist is restricted to insured services. So that's an interesting differentiation between those two sets of services that a medical person can provide.

What we also saw was that not only has the wording changed from “person” to “physician,” but in actual fact now we've had the addition of dentists into a section that they were originally omitted from. So the question is: was this an oversight? If it was an oversight, how many other oversights are throughout this piece of legislation? This is one of the most important sections in the bill that sets up private, for-profit delivery of health care in this province, and obviously in the rush to put this together, the department has left out a whole group of individuals that are providing medical services.

The last time I spoke to this particular section within the bill, I had provided, I thought, some questions that were worthy of answers from the minister and, to date, have received no answers with regards to the inclusion of dentists in this particular section of the bill. The questions surrounded the consultation that had been done with the Alberta Dental Association, if there was any, and if there was, what was the context of that consultation? Have all their concerns, if it was brought up by the Alberta Dental Association, in effect been met?

What is the implication now on dentists who have clinics set up

throughout this province who are providing an insured surgical service in the designation that has to occur as an approved surgical facility? An approved surgical facility is outlined in the bill, and the definition means something. It means that it is designated, and designation, in effect, means that it's designated under part 2, division 1 or 2 of the bill. So there has to be some kind of impact on those dentists' clinics that are throughout this province that provide services, and to date I've had no response from the minister.

Now, in fairness, the minister has asked for a meeting tomorrow to discuss amendments. I'm assuming they're his amendments that he wishes to discuss and am looking forward to receiving an agenda of that particular meeting tomorrow at 4:30. The minister is looking at me. I was informed on Friday that the minister's office had phoned to ask for a meeting, so if that's not the case, then I should know so that I can clear my calendar. If that is the case, it would be, I think, worth while to know what in actual fact the agenda of the meeting is. I will be making that request more formally to the minister as well.

The issue around that and the change from “person” to “physician” I think is also noteworthy. There is no definition in those provided in the legislation with regards to a person. We know a person can be corporate or it can be an individual, but there was no definition provided in here, so now it's been made more constrictive, that it's the physician who will be providing the surgical service.

Those were some of my initial comments when I spoke last time to this particular section within the bill, and as I indicated, I will continue line by line and word by word to look at what some other concerns are that we have with regards to this particular amendment.

It was very interesting, Madam Chairman, at the rallies – and I did attend the one in Calgary as well as the one in Edmonton. In the conversations I had with individuals at those rallies, they had a good grasp of what this legislation did and did not do, and they understood very clearly the dangers of having insured and uninsured services provided in the same facility. They very clearly understood that an approved surgical facility is nothing more than a private, for-profit hospital. That didn't need any explanation.

5:20

What I also found interesting is that that was corroborated by the government's own poll that they released this afternoon. In the poll it became very, very clear that most Albertans in this province are aware of what Bill 11 is. They understand. They've heard something about it, or they've read Bill 11. In fact, 88 percent of Albertans have actually heard of or read the bill, and that's an amazing number. What's most amazing is that they, I think, understand it as well.

They indicate that, yes, they would support a goal that would reduce waiting lists, they would support a goal that would increase overall efficiencies, and they would also support the fact that private institutions should not charge fees to Albertans who receive these services. There was 55 percent total support for that.

But, you know, they're not fooled by the bill. When they were asked specifically, “Will those who are willing to pay more be able to receive faster service at privately owned surgical clinics?” 59 percent said yes. That's the government's own poll. They knew that this bill does not protect against queue-jumping and that if you paid out of pocket – that's what this poll says – in effect what that would mean is you would get better service.

The other thing that the government's own polls said was that when it was asked: do you think that Alberta's . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, you're on amendment A1, section A.

MS LEIBOVICI: Absolutely. I'm right on it.

When it was asked, "Will Alberta's health care system be more cost-efficient?" 42 percent said no.

So what this amendment sets up is a private, for-profit hospital that in effect can provide insured and uninsured services at the same time, which in effect can provide for queue-jumping, can provide for faster access to treatment, and actually does not provide cost efficiency to the public health care system. That's what this clause, this section is about, and the amendment continues that distortion to our public health care system. The amendment does nothing to address the concerns that have been expressed and the reality that people know this bill sets up.

I think that what the amendment tries to do is address a concern that perhaps the dentists have brought up. It addresses perhaps a concern which should have been caught right at the front end, that you don't have someone who's unqualified provide a surgical service, that in fact it has to be a qualified individual, which, according to what we're looking at here, is a physician, that provides a surgical service. The way it's written right now, I guess I could perform surgery. As a result, what we've got is a clause that is unworkable.

My question is: how could the government, the Premier – this was his most important bill.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. member. It's very, very noisy in here. I would remind people that though in committee you certainly can visit, we are not to be standing in the Assembly in committee. Hon. members, please be seated.

Okay, hon. member.

MS LEIBOVICI: What this amendment does not do is address those key, key issues that have been brought up over and over and over again as to what the fundamentals of this bill are about. Now, this bill is the most important bill. The Premier has said that over and over again. This is a bill that's sponsored by the Minister of Health and Wellness. This is not a bill that should have come to us flawed in the first pages. This is page 3, the second section, and already we have some fundamental questions as to the drafting of this particular section.

So what we've got is an amendment that does not deal with the issues that are at hand with regards to whether we wish to set up in this province a system of private, for-profit hospitals, because that is in effect what we're seeing happen here, and whether the approved surgical facilities that are being set up are appropriately defined further on in the bill as well. What we've got are surgical services, insured and uninsured, as I indicated earlier, that are going

to be performed in the same facility. The approved surgical facilities are in fact broken down into three different kinds of facilities. You have what is called a designated surgical facility, which is in fact then further broken down into insured and uninsured facilities, which further on the uninsured side is broken down into uninsured inpatient surgical facilities and uninsured day surgical facilities.

So by this very clause and the definitions that are therefore part and parcel of it, we have set up three kinds of surgical facilities in this province, three kinds, three different sets of rules, three different sets of requirements with regards to how they operate, and they can do both insured and uninsured services. Rather than trying to address the issue and the confusion that is around this terminology because of the three different kinds that exist, rather than admitting that in fact an approved surgical facility that provides either insured surgeries that have an overnight stay or uninsured inpatient surgeries by in and of itself means an overnight stay, rather than clarifying that so people know that's a private, for-profit hospital, what we still have is confusion with the way this sits.

The other part of the equation that should have been addressed with regards to approved surgical facilities is to do what every other province across Canada has done, and that is address the issue of overnight stays. The majority of the provinces have said that there are no overnight stays allowed in surgical facilities, that if it requires an overnight stay, it is in fact to happen in a public hospital.

Those are just some of the issues that have not been addressed when we look at this line by line.

We talked about the fact that "no person" shall provide has been changed to "no physician." We've talked about the fact that "no dentist shall provide" is an add-in to the section. We've talked about and addressed the issue of the surgical services that can still be performed in these facilities by physicians and that those are uninsured and insured and that the dentists are only insured and that there's a huge, huge issue around providing uninsured and insured at the same point in time. We've talked about the fact that an approved surgical facility, the way it's defined here, means that it's a facility that provides for overnight stays. That is a private hospital, and that's in 2(1) of the amendment.

I still want to address 2(2) of the amendment.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair hesitates to interrupt you, but pursuant to Standing Order 43 the Assembly stands adjourned until 8 p.m., when we will reconvene in Committee of the Whole.

[The committee adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 17, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/04/17

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order. First, I want to say to the people in the galleries that this is the informal part of the Legislature. It's called committee. Normally when we're in Assembly, the Speaker or his designate would be there, and hon. members would not be allowed to have coffee or juice nor take off their jackets. During this time, too, hon. members are allowed to go and sit in other places but not speak in other places. So you can see that it is less formal. The gallery is also reminded that you're observers and not participants.

Bill 11

Health Care Protection Act

THE CHAIRMAN: We at the close of the day apparently had an hon. member speaking with a few moments remaining, although there wasn't an adjournment as such, so the chair would recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. You have, I think, about four minutes.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, in the four minutes that I have left, I'd like to just briefly recap and also welcome everyone to the Legislative Assembly. It's a little lonely in here sometimes, so I'm glad to see you all here.

To recap the amendment that we're on, we're on the first government amendment, which basically has not made any change with regards to separating insured from uninsured services being provided in a private, for-profit facility and has made no change at all with regards to the change in language that says "an approved surgical facility" and is in fact a private, for-profit hospital, nor have they addressed the issue in this particular amendment of overnight stays.

So what I am going to be proposing - and I do this with some trepidation in that we feel that this bill is a bill that should be pulled and withdrawn and that these amendments do not go far enough in addressing the issue at hand. But I'm going to be putting forward a subamendment to the amendment, and I have the requisite number of copies here with regard to that subamendment. Basically what it is proposing is that where the government's amendment indicates that "no physician shall provide a surgical service," we are proposing an amendment that says that "no physician shall provide an insured surgical service" and also amending the clause that deals with approved surgical facilities to indicate and make it very clear that that is to deal with 12 hours and under only. In other words, "no physician shall provide a surgical service" in Alberta in an approved surgical facility "that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours."

I know that sounds a little bit complicated, but in effect what that does is that it separates out the insured from the uninsured services, and it also indicates that what will be provided is to take away the ability of private, for-profit facilities to have overnight stays. We know that that is one of the key concerns with regards to this particular bill.

We know that another key concern with this particular bill is with regards to the profit motive when an insured and uninsured service are provided at the exact same time. We feel that this subamendment

provides an avenue whereby those avenues can be constricted.

Again I'd like to say that this bill needs to be withdrawn. As we go further on in debate, it will be very clear that the number of amendments that are required to make this bill halfway palatable to Albertans is so immense that in fact what needs to happen is the complete withdrawal of the bill and a rethinking of the philosophy that underpins the bill that is being put forward by this government.

By now most members should have received that particular subamendment, and I know that we will have some vigorous debate on this particular subamendment and will in fact be addressing it. I look forward to the minister's comments with regards to this particular subamendment. We know that in dealing with the subamendment, we will have to deal with both A and B, I am informed, at the same time, so unfortunately we will be unable to break out those particular subamendments. As I indicated, it does attempt to address a couple of the issues that are at hand with Bill 11, and I would hope that the government will see that this is in fact an amendment that must be supported.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before we move on, the chair would like to just be clear on this, hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. This subamendment that you have moved would be called subamendment A1, section A. So that's clear to everyone, if you're following along? Then it's going to be, in terms of letters and numbers, SA1, section A. Okay?

Any further comments, questions, with respect to the subamendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to speak on the amendment as proposed by the good Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, my colleague, and if I do get offtrack, please direct me back on track, because when we talk in terms of an amendment, particularly an amendment to an amendment, at times it can be difficult to find exactly the content of the amendment in the related discussion because of overlap.

The subamendment itself to the amendment: let me just read it again into the record. The proposed section 2(1) is amended (a) by striking out "No physician shall provide a surgical service" and substituting "No physician shall provide an insured surgical service," and (b), in clause (b) by adding "that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours" after "approved surgical facility."

Now, my colleague to my right said that it would be preferable to have the bill withdrawn, and there's no question about that. It appears, despite what we have heard out there, despite the howls of protest from 6,000 people yesterday at the AgriCom and probably another 4,000 that were turned away because of the overflow parking and the requirement that it took an hour to get off the Capilano to get into the facility - because I was there. I know it took an hour. Despite that, despite what happened in Calgary, despite that continuous cry that we hear of kill the bill, kill the bill - we hear it in the front here twice a week, every Monday and every Thursday. My constituency office has logged hundreds of phone calls, letters, e-mail. Everywhere I go shopping, people stop me and say: "What is wrong? Why is the government going ahead with Bill 11? Why don't they just kill the bill? Kill the bill." But obviously the government isn't going to kill the bill. The government now takes some comfort in their poll that they claim shows 54 percent support.

I listened to the question that was asked in that poll. It's like the Premier will say that he'll sign our petition . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Speak to the amendment.

MR. WICKMAN: I'm speaking to the amendment.

In that poll, Mr. Chairman, that leads up to the amendment, the wording was so misleading and so wishy-washy that I would have probably said yes had I been phoned, because it was like everything to everybody. It was extremely misleading.

Anyhow, to get to the amendment, the purpose of the amendment and a series of other amendments that we'll have to follow, of course, is an attempt to try and at least modify the bill so it's halfway compatible to the wishes of people. Because what I hear, what I heard at the rally there yesterday from dozens and dozens of people, from people I talk to on the phone when I take the opportunity to ask them, "What bothers you the most about Bill 11?" the one thing that comes out continuously that bothers them is that it allows for a surgical facility that allows for unlimited overnight stays. In other words, that's an interpretation by the welcomed guests in the galleries here that are watching the proceedings tonight that it's another name for a hospital. It's another name for a hospital. [disturbance in the galleries]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order. Order in the gallery. You're not part of the proceedings.

8:10

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, if the maximum stay for any type of surgical procedure, an insured surgical procedure in one of those facilities was 12 hours like the amendment proposes, of course it would no longer be perceived as a hospital in the eyes of the public, in the eyes of the opposition, in the eyes of most Albertans. So the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has drafted up an amendment to try and convince the government, and hopefully the government members will look at the amendment and feel that in fact this could be an opportunity for them, that this could be an opportunity for them to proceed with the bill, at the same time getting the egg off their face. In other words, a nice, gentle way of kind of wiggling out, because then you really wouldn't need the bill because it wouldn't serve the intent that the government wants it to serve; that is, to set up a system of what I call private hospitals. They may be referred to as private surgical facilities, but to me they're private hospitals.

Mr. Chairman, clearly this amendment if approved – and hopefully the government will allow its members to vote according to the wishes of their constituents. I would assume there are many, many members sitting in this House here tonight who, when they talk to their constituents – and we're hearing even more in rural Alberta than in urban Alberta that the opposition to Bill 11 is as strong as it is. Very, very strong. I would say that there are ridings out there, particularly in urban Alberta, where if the MLA had the opportunity to talk to each of their constituents and respected their wishes, they would realize the vast majority of their constituents do not want surgical facilities that allow overnight stays on an unlimited basis.

Once you start allowing that, when you say a surgical facility for minor surgery, we've got to remember that just as this government has the power, the authority to pass Bill 11, to pass its amendment, to pass this amendment or reject this amendment, the government at any time also has the legislative authority to redefine what they call minor surgery. Pretty soon a minor surgery could become more and more a major surgery that would be performed at one of these so-called surgical facilities.

Mr. Chairman, if the government were to amend the bill as recommended by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and supported by myself and I assume other members of this caucus – and I'm sure it would be supported by most Albertans as well – at least it would be one step in the right direction to try to minimize the damage this bill is going to do to the public health care system. Of

course, this amendment then would have to be followed by some other amendments that would even tidy up the bill and make that bill more and more compatible to the wishes of the people. There's actually no question in my mind that what the public is saying is to protect our public health care system. The bill should actually read "protection of the public health care system," which it doesn't, but that's what Albertans want. They want to have a public health care system that responds to their needs, a health care system more compatible with what we saw five or 10 years ago, where you didn't have the massive lineups you have now.

Where you have more and more contracting out, where you have a bill that's going to allow even more and more contracting out until it comes to the point where a good portion if not the majority of health care provisions in the province are carried out by the private sector, the taxpayers are telling me, Mr. Chairman, that they don't want their tax dollars being funneled off to professional health care givers, who are businesspeople with a portion of those proceeds going into their pockets as profit. They don't want that. They want a system that is governed by the legislators, that is accountable to the legislators, that is accountable to Albertans. That is a public system, and they want that public system preserved. They don't want to see in Alberta what has happened in other countries, like New Zealand, where this type of experimenting has led to disastrous results.

Mr. Chairman, because of the number of members of our caucus that want to speak to this amendment proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, I'm going to conclude my remarks at that point and allow others to follow.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. You were looking around so hard I was thinking maybe you were hoping somebody else would speak at this stage of the committee.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, hon. member. To be truthful, another member indicated to me that he was going to speak and then chose not to. He would have normally come next, being on the other side. But Calgary-Buffalo is the one that stood up, and the other one didn't.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I'm not perhaps going to take all of my allotted time, so I'm sure that there'll be lots of opportunity for other members to participate in the debate.

I'm delighted to speak to the subamendment that's been brought forward. What are we, A1?

THE CHAIRMAN: SA1, subamendment number 1, section A.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much.

On the subamendment. I think what's important about this is that this really puts the test to the government's claim that we're not proposing to do anything different than what's being done in other provinces. We've heard in the House comments about Saskatchewan and comments about Ontario and British Columbia. Well, those of us who have done any independent investigation have determined that in none of those provinces are they doing overnight stays. In Saskatchewan, that we've heard so much of, we're talking about day surgery. In British Columbia it is day surgery. The Shouldice clinic I'll come back and address in a moment because there's so much confusion about it. In Ontario, if you look at the independent facilities act and the Private Hospitals Act, it's clear there that what

you're talking about is you're not having insured services done in facilities that keep patients on an overnight basis other than public hospitals.

So my colleague for Edmonton-Meadowlark has put forward an amendment which really tests the government rhetoric. In fact, what she's challenging the Minister of Health and Wellness to do is to live up to those many bland assurances we've heard from the Premier since November: "Look, folks; don't panic. This is no big deal. It's just what's being done in other parts of the country." Well the reality, Mr. Chairman, is that what's proposed is significantly different, qualitatively and quantitatively different than what's being done in other provinces.

Now, the proposal also ties in with the concern that I raised earlier this afternoon. I've now got in front of me a city of Calgary application for a development permit, land use bylaw number 2P80. This is the one I referred to earlier where we discover that the former Holy Cross hospital operators are in fact . . .

MR. HERARD: Point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. HERARD: Yes. Relevance, Mr. Chairman, *Beauchesne* 409. You know, we're speaking to an amendment, and I don't know what the city of Calgary's development appeal and/or whatever has to do with it.

MR. DICKSON: To the point of order. Well, if the Member for Calgary-Egmont looks at the subamendment that's in front of him and he looks down to the (b) part, we're adding some words after "approved surgical facility." The words we're adding are "that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours." What I'm attempting to do is talk about a proliferation of facilities certainly in the city I'm from and that member is from, the city of Calgary. That's what I'm speaking to, but it's specifically the (b) part of the subamendment. So people can look at it and see that what we're doing is talking about what kind of services are going to be possible in an approved surgical facility.

I'm raising the question as the MLA for Calgary-Buffalo. I'm very concerned about the proposal, which is currently in front of the city of Calgary planning department, to turn the old Holy Cross hospital into a private hospital. I would think that the Member for Calgary-Egmont would be as concerned as I am. I'd think he would be as worried about the prospect of yet another private hospital being set up in the city of Calgary.

8:20

The reason we talk about the importance of the 12-hour cutoff, which is the gist and essence of the sub part of the amendment, is the fact that many of us don't want to see us move from day services being contracted out to major surgery being done in overnight places.

Mr. Chairman, I'm talking specifically to the (b) part of the amendment that we have in front of us.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. Thank you very much. I was just wanting to check and see whether you'd finished addressing the point of order before going on to the rest of your comments.

MR. DICKSON: Actually, that was all directed to the point of order,

and if you're not persuaded yet, somebody else may want to speak to the point of order, but I'll wait for your ruling, Mr. Chairman, before I proceed.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont referred to – I thought you said 409, or was it 459? If it's 459 then it is relevance.

Just so I can understand what we're saying, you're talking about clause (b) of the subamendment, that it requires a stay greater than 12 hours, not under; right?

MR. DICKSON: Less than. We're explaining why that's important.

THE CHAIRMAN: If I understand you right, hon. member, the point is that no physician would be able to provide an insured surgical service, except in – that's where I'm kind of missing the point. The point is that we're talking about a property proposal in the city of Calgary, and you're trying to make this part of your discussion. That's what the objection is. I don't have a problem with your doing that as long as I understand how it is that it is part of the subamendment of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. That's what I need help with.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I wonder if I might try and help, Mr. Chairman. I understand the confusion, and I take full responsibility if it hasn't been as clear as I'd hoped.

The purpose of the amendment, of course, is to ensure that we don't have private hospitals in this province. That's really what this amendment is all about, and I think it's engineered and designed specifically to make it crystal clear to not just my 82 colleagues in this place but to Albertans that we're not sanctioning private hospitals. So what the subamendment currently says is that "no physician shall provide a surgical service," and there's the (a) part, which I'll come to in a moment, but the (b) part is what I'm speaking to: "except in . . . a public hospital, or . . . an approved surgical facility." Now the proposal here is that it would be an approved surgical facility "that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours." So it's a limitation that's imported into the second part of section 2.

People may ask: why is that important? I think it's tough sometimes talking about legislation as if it exists in some kind of a sterile academic context. These things are in a real world context, and what I was attempting to do for our friend from Calgary-Egmont was to help him appreciate that we have decisions being made right now by the Calgary regional health authority, by Enterprise Universal Inc., the outfit that owns the former Holy Cross hospital, that in fact are going to give the meaning of these sterile words on a piece of paper a very real meaning, the real meaning being a private, overnight hospital.

That's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to suggest that there is a context that this amendment should be reviewed in. I haven't even gotten yet to talk about the Health Resource Group, which is Calgary's other private hospital, just salivating at the prospect of more contracts and more public money, and they would love to be able to do overnight stays. That's what they've asked for.

I'm attempting to make the case, Mr. Chairman, why that 12-hour cap is in there, why it's in the amendment, and why it's necessary. That's what I'm attempting to do. I see that I'm not doing a good enough job, because I see the Minister of Learning, a very knowledgeable member, in fact the one member of the Assembly who is a physician – and I don't know whether he's on what would be called sort of the active practising list, but he's certainly a trained physician. If I haven't been able to make it clear to that minister,

I've got some distance to go, and I hope in the time remaining I'm going to be able to make it clear to the Minister of Learning as well as to his other colleagues.

So, Mr. Chairman, if there's any other confusion, just say the word.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member. We're still on the point of order, if you believe it. To the extent that you've explained that, then that would presumably fit within the thrust of your subamendment, which raises a whole other question. I think we've explored that point of order enough.

Would you continue or conclude, whichever the case may be, your comments on subamendment SA1, section A.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much for the invitation, Mr. Chairman. Perhaps you might confirm that that time won't come out of my speaking time, that that time spent with the point of order won't count against the 20 minutes . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: No.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, the question is: why is it important that there be a 12-hour cap? Some people may say: why couldn't it be 15 hours or 20 hours? What's the magic in that? Well, I guess my view of this whole private health care thing is that there are sort of two fights that have to happen, two major things that have to happen. The first one is to absolutely, irrevocably say that in this province a private, for-profit hospital receiving taxpayer dollars is just plain outlawed. It's bad. It's forbidden, verboten. It can't happen. That's the first thing that has to happen.

The second thing that has to happen is to find a way of addressing the proliferation of private surgical services, whether it's ophthalmology or a host of other clinics, and determine how we get a handle on these things that in fact have created real issues in terms of accessibility. They have in many respects undermined what I understand to be the five principles of the Canada Health Act. So I think it's critically important, Mr. Chairman, that that be done secondly. That's sort of the context within which I speak to the two amendments.

In terms of the amendment (b), I understand from speaking to people who have been involved in health care administration, health care supervision in a host of other provinces and places . . .

MRS. SLOAN: Can you hear them chanting, "Kill the bill"?

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, it may be a reflection of the depth of conviction and concern that Albertans have that even in this place, not only do we hear the voices of legislators, but from time to time we hear the voices of Albertans. [disturbance in the galleries]

8:30

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: I will say again that people in the galleries are not participants in this debate. I'll clear the galleries the next time anyone claps. You're here to watch and that's it, regardless of what's going on out there.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair has some concern that what we're hearing outside this Chamber is in fact an intimidation of the Chamber, of how we should conduct ourselves in here regardless of

how popular or unpopular whatever going on here is. I at times cannot hear the hon. member even though he be only a few metres away. I don't know whether other members are finding it difficult to hear.

Calgary-Buffalo, as long as we can hear you.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. The two comments I'd make. Firstly, the . . . [disturbance in the galleries]

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll continue as long as we can hear. For those who are still in the galleries, we presume that you're going to remain here with good purpose in mind as we carry on the debate. If you're going to be disruptive, then we will have to clear the galleries. That would not be something I would like to do, but we are going to continue.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I think the point I was making is that of all the concerns I have heard – and I have heard many, not just from Calgarians, not just from constituents but from a host of people in different places – the number one issue appears to be the prospect of allowing overnight stays in these approved surgical facilities. I see the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness is here. Maybe he or the Minister of Health and Wellness might challenge that. If they've heard another more frequently cited problem with Bill 11, I wish they'd stand up and say that. But the single one that seems to resonate, that seems to offend most Albertans is that one that specifically deals with a stay which is longer than 12 hours.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to carry on. As much as I'd like to take credit for all these people who've come out tonight, I can assure you that they have come of their own will. If you had been at the Round-Up centre at the Calgary Stampede grounds on Saturday afternoon and saw 3,000 people come out, you would understand why this subamendment is in front of us. This subamendment would go a long distance to addressing the issue that was identified by person after person. You know, it may be that some of the government members – I'd like to encourage them. They missed the opportunity to attend the Round-Up centre in Calgary, and perhaps they missed the opportunity to attend the Northlands AgriCom, where the meeting was on Sunday, but they would have found out how many people were looking for an amendment like subamendment A1. So it seems to me there's a very rich context that supports the need for this kind of change.

I see that I have not been particularly persuasive with the government members in the Assembly, so I am going to suggest that one of my colleagues who is a more effective presenter than me speak to this, and our colleague from the third party looks poised to offer some commentary as well. Perhaps I can offer some advice later on.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members will recall that when we're in debate, it goes back and forth and back and forth. If you go to one side and there isn't anyone wishing to speak at that time, then you might have two or three on one side speaking in a row. We do have an indication from at least one member on this side that they would like to speak, so we'd call on the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, in speaking to the amendment, I would like to first of all put my opposition to it in context. In Bill 11 it is quite clear that the legislation bans private hospitals. There's

clear provision in the legislation stating that categorically.

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, the legislation does propose that there be approved surgical facilities under a very, very limited mandate in terms of providing a specialized targeted surgical service.

The issue as to 12 versus 24 versus 18 versus six hours: that particular provision is to be handled by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. They will decide the safety factor, the overall ability of the facility through its staffing and through its other characteristics to offer that service safely and in the interests of the patients they would serve.

I would like to further point out, because the amendment is quite wide ranging in terms of things that have been said in support of it, Mr. Chairman, that the legislation has very specific provisions, for instance, to prevent anyone being forced, or verbally harassed at least, to buy enhanced services. That is very, very clear.

It is very clear in the legislation that there will be no queue-jumping. There will be no incentive provided to the facility in any way to not provide services in a regular and equitable way to the people that are referred there for surgical treatment.

It's very important, I think, at this point to emphasize that the bill overall bans queue-jumping. It bans people from having to be forced into paying extra for either materials or services that are not required for dealing with their particular condition.

8:40

Further, since it is also being referred to in debate on this amendment, elsewhere in the legislation there are very strong conflict of interest provisions. There is a very wide-ranging set of criteria that has to be considered when a contract would be approved by a regional health authority.

So there are many, many controls and protections for the public interest in this particular section of the legislation.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I would like to refer to a couple of other things that have been raised in debate. One is the reference to what is happening in other parts of this country. I notice that the reference to the Shouldice clinic was passed over rather quickly, but the fact of the matter is that that facility does offer surgical services. It does have overnight stays and has been operating quite successfully. I would credit the facility and the government of Ontario, but it has been operating quite successfully for many years. So that is an example.

We can refer to the Saskatchewan legislation, but the fact is, Mr. Chairman, that although perhaps at this point in time Saskatchewan has not chosen to have a surgical facility approved, the legislation is quite open to that occurring. In fact, it is more wide open with fewer requirements and protections than Bill 11.

I would also like to point out, Mr. Chairman, that my reading of the amendment that's been put before the committee would in fact remove our ability to deal with another very important control and protection in this legislation, and that is to deal with the whole area of regulating uninsured services that would be offered in our public health care system in a surgical facility that might be approved but also throughout the system. So I do not support this amendment for that reason as well.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The opposition really finds itself in a bit of a tight spot with this bill, because in our minds Bill 11 is an unsalvageable piece of legislation. It doesn't matter how many amendments we make to it, it is not what Albertans want. It's not what numerous reports of government have told, and I'll

make reference to the government's own health summit report in a moment.

The public have for weeks now been trying to get their message across to this government with respect to the bill. The government's response was to introduce a form of closure to quickly end the second reading of this bill. We now find ourselves in committee, which is the amendment phase of the bill, and if we took the solid position, Mr. Chairman, that this is not a salvageable bill, we would not be introducing amendments this evening. But, in essence, that would give the government what they want. It would give them an expedient passage through committee. So we find ourselves tonight proposing amendments to the bill under section 2(1) that have been read into the record, so I will not repeat them. I think it's appropriate, though, to just reference back to some of the suggestions the public made to this government in 1999 through the government's own orchestrated health summit.

I'd like to specifically highlight the two that related to the public wanting a clear plan for health care, recommendation 3. Under that recommendation the following reference was made:

Government should establish a forum for health planning to develop a long term plan for Alberta's health system." This is what the public told this government less than a year ago. "The forum should include an ongoing process for significant involvement of people across the province, people in the health system and community members." The government didn't respect that recommendation, Mr. Chairman. We didn't see widespread consultation on Bill 11. We didn't see any form of public input into the bill that's before us, and subsequently the government's got it all wrong. Now the public has found another way to express their opinions and give their input.

I'd like to make reference to another recommendation in the health summit report that is under: "The public should have effective ways of participating in future decisions." The recommendation: "Government should consider extending the public consultation process on a regular basis to involve more people in discussions about the health system and its future." It's interesting, Mr. Chairman, that we're here this evening debating subamendments to government amendments on the Health Care Protection Act, Bill 11. The public has not had any say on what was proposed in that bill originally, nor does the government find itself even honouring the recommendations made by its own summit less than one year ago.

I think it's also important to point out in the context of the subamendments that if we look back to what was perhaps the seedling of Bill 11, the Gimbel Foundation Act, it is important to reference in the record what the Gimbel Foundation Act was to accomplish. In its objects it said that the foundation would engage in every phase and aspect of rendering the same medical services to the public that a registered practitioner of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of the province of Alberta is authorized to render. This was the legislation, the private member's bill, proposed by Howard Gimbel, who performs many of the cataract surgeries in the province.

Further, the proposed bill was also intended to establish and maintain health clinics, institutions, lodgings, and facilities for those in need of health care or education and for the aged; to engage in, conduct, support, aid, and advance medical, surgical, scientific learning, skill education, investigation and research; and most importantly, Mr. Chairman, to provide health care including, I would emphasize, surgical services in Canada and throughout the world. Exactly the intent that was in Private Member's Bill 6, the Gimbel Foundation Act, in 1994 we now find embodied . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Point of Order Clarification

MR. HERARD: Mr. Chairman, besides relevance, under *Beauchesne* 459, the hon. member has now several times said: private member's bill. Wrong, wrong, wrong. It was a private bill from a citizen of this province, not a member of this Assembly. Try and get it straight, because that is not the same thing.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Chairman, I think what the member is providing is a point of clarification. This is most certainly relevant to the discussion tonight. Explicit in the citations I've referenced was the discussion about the provision of surgical services.

THE CHAIRMAN: There are three kinds of bills: a public bill, a private member's public bill, and a private bill, which is by a private company and applies separately for usually insurance companies, religious orders, that kind of group. To be truthful to the committee, we were discussing other issues related to this and I did not hear the reference, so I can't really comment on the reference other than to make the comment that there are three kinds of bills. You know perfectly well, hon. member, since you sit on the Private Bills Committee, as does the chair, that there is a substantive difference between them. So if that was the point of the intervention, then it's quite right. Hopefully you can address the subamendment, hon. member.

8:50

MRS. SLOAN: My honoured colleague from Calgary-Buffalo would like to make a few remarks.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if I might make the observation that the Member for Calgary-Egmont stood and referenced a question of relevance. Well, I didn't hear a ruling on the point of order in terms of relevance. What I'm suggesting is that if the Member for Calgary-Egmont wants to harass opposition speakers while they're speaking to a bill . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair was trying to make a point. One, the chair could not hear the hon. member in the sense of what she was saying about whether it's a private bill or a private member's bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont got up and indicated that she was talking about a private bill. The chair confessed that at the table here we were discussing another issue, so the chair had not actually heard what the hon. member said, but if we are dealing with three kinds of bills and we're talking about a private bill – she's a member of the Private Bills Committee, as I am and some other members are – that is not the same as a private member's public bill.

MR. DICKSON: That's not a point of order, Mr. Chairman. That's a clarification. If he wants to debate it, he can.

THE CHAIRMAN: You can't make a point of order on a point of order, and I think you recall that.

Could we just move on – we're in difficult times anyway – and let the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview continue.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would hope the same provisions apply to the exchange relative to this possible point of order not being taken from my debate time this evening.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: With reference to the Gimbel Foundation Act,

perhaps to alleviate any discomfort the government members may have with respect to the reminder about this particular bill, one of the things the Gimbel Foundation Act also proposed was that the foundation would have the rights, capacities, and powers of a natural person, which makes it very, very interesting, Mr. Chairman, that the government's initial reference under this section 2(1) was with respect to a "person." We find ourselves this evening in a position where, in proposing the amendments to this section, it's a mechanism which the opposition is utilizing to restrict any intentions the government or potentially a government in the future might have of someday approving private hospitals, 24-hour facilities, under this bill.

I also, though, want to just quickly reference debate that occurred on Bill 37. Again, really we're redebating, Mr. Chairman, things we had debated in 1998 and in 1994. I would reference the *Alberta Hansard* of February 17, 1999. At that time we were debating Bill 37. I would like to cite statements made by both the Premier and the minister of health. The Premier says:

Well, Mr. Speaker, during the last session, the fall session, we attempted to introduce legislation that would indeed protect the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. Obviously that legislation was not acceptable to the opposition Liberals or the opposition New Democrats. So the Minister of Health struck a blue-ribbon panel to examine that legislation, and hopefully legislation will be tabled later in this session that will address that issue.

I will, if time permits, cite from the blue-ribbon panel report. Somehow I think the government has strayed yet again from the recommendations made by its own committees and summits.

The minister of health said on the same date:

What I am aware of is that the College of Physicians and Surgeons is working on by-laws and regulations with respect to what services or procedures require overnight stays in a facility and what procedures or services can be safely and appropriately provided within a less than 12-hour period. This area of developing clinical practice guidelines is something that the College of Physicians and Surgeons has had under consideration for some time. I am pleased to see that they are addressing that area in more detail.

My point, Mr. Chairman, is that we have not seen in this Assembly nor has the public had the privilege of seeing any of this work completed by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. So how are we to be in a position to be confident that in the designation of providing services, whether it's within a 24-hour period or a 12-hour period, the government vis-a-vis the College of Physicians and Surgeons has done their homework in this particular area? We don't have those before us this evening.

Now, I'm going to go back to the health summit report, and I'd just like to highlight a couple of other things Albertans told the government and the amendments to Bill 11 do not address. The first one is that the health summit told the government that "people know what they want from the health system," and they listed a number of areas: access, accountability, affordable and sustainable, adequately funded, publicly funded and administered, consistent with the Canada Health Act, standards, information, choices, and the list goes on. The health summit told this government that they wanted the government to "explore options for managing the growing costs of pharmaceuticals including the feasibility of expanding public coverage for pharmaceuticals," again something which Bill 11 does not address.

Thirdly, the health summit told this government that they should look at establishing

a task force to review education and training programs for health care providers to develop better links among the programs, build greater awareness and understanding of the roles of . . . health providers.

They recommended the government look at alternative ways of paying providers, particularly physicians. I'm referencing all these areas, Mr. Chairman, because our debate, the debate on this bill, is being confined to a very, very narrow aspect of health care. The government, on the other hand, has been given by the public this broad range of recommendations which the public expected them to act on. Instead, we find the government bringing forward a bill which really doesn't benefit the public but demonstrates providers who will provide care in a private, for-profit context.

In terms of the subamendments which we've proposed, the first one this evening, Mr. Chairman, is just to clear up what I believe was probably an administrative error on the government's part. They indicated in their amendments that "no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service," but when they referred to physicians, they simply said that "no physician shall provide a surgical service." That clearly, I believe, was an oversight. I think they intended that it would be: no physician shall provide an insured service except in a public hospital or approved surgical facility. We've assisted the government in clearing that matter up.

9:00

In terms of our 2(1)(b), adding "that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours" after "approved surgical facility," again, Mr. Chairman, to put it on the record, this is clearly that only patients whose surgery requires less than 12 hours' stay would in fact be appropriate for these types of surgical facilities, even though in principle we don't agree with the concept of contracting out public services to surgical facilities in the first place.

With respect to the subamendments that we proposed this evening, that pretty much sums up my comments. I know that there are other members of our caucus who are willing and ready to respond. I look forward, Mr. Chairman, to referencing the amendments made by government at some point later in this debate.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to stand up in the Assembly this evening and speak to the subamendment that's on the floor. But prior to doing that, I would like to say to you – and I know I'm not going to ask for a ruling on this – that I quite frankly see this subamendment as being contrary to the bill and the amendment originally. I know it's been signed off by Parliamentary Counsel, though, so I will speak to it.

We did have previously in the Legislature here, from a number of members in this Assembly, what I'm going to speak to, in regards to the 52 nonhospital surgical facilities that are currently operating in the province of Alberta. In those clinics, Mr. Chairman, we have over 150 surgeries that are taking place today and have been for a number of years. Those surgeries, I have to stress, have been approved by the College of Physician and Surgeons. They are surgeries that we look at as being elective surgery. It's surgery that's conducted on people that are relatively healthy. It is not surgery that is urgent or emergent but is elective.

In Calgary alone we have 12,000 people on the waiting list for elective surgery, which is one of the reasons why this bill has come before the Legislature. And that is – and it fits it in with the Canada Health Act – that we look at accessibility for people that require day surgery.

Now, the college provided a list, and members of the Legislature have had the list given to them. I think it was the Member for Calgary-Buffalo who mentioned in the Legislature that this list was filed with the Legislature. In this list, which was approved by the

college, I must say that many of these surgeries require a general anesthetic, Mr. Chairman. Not only do they require a general anesthetic or sedation, which means that you need to monitor the patients' vital signs, but they include all uses of intravenously administered sedatives or narcotics.

I think that is something that could be stated over and over again, and it may be during this debate in the Legislature. I really don't know. It's something that's very serious. You go in, and it's elective surgery. It means that you can have a general anesthetic, but also you can have the use of drugs by injection which are intended to or may induce a major nerve block or a spinal epidural or intravenous regional block.

I am absolutely amazed, when I read this list, that people would look at it and say: I can go in for my surgery and have a general anesthetic in the OR at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and because that clinic is open for 12 hours, I can have that surgery at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and can be in the OR for two to four hours. They may have complications arise with the nursing observation or whatever, when they've had sedation or if they require a dressing change or some pain sedation of some sort. I may have that, and you expect me to leave that facility within a four-hour period and go home and recover? I don't think so. I think it makes good sense for patients to be able to have nursing observation and stay in that facility as long as necessary.

So, Mr. Chairman, what I'm going to say too – and to the people in the gallery as well – is that patients that go home too early are the patients that get into trouble, and that is why it is so necessary to have this bill be over a 12-hour stay.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I'm very happy to be able to speak to this subamendment, which amends a very flawed bill, and eventually to respond to the Member for Calgary-Cross's comments.

First of all, on the subamendment. I would like to share with you what the folks outside have been saying to us about this subamendment and other components of the bill. Those several hundred people who have gathered in the rotunda have moved up the stairs to the Legislature and are up on the upper floor trying to get into the gallery. Of course, we're in lockdown now, so they can't get in. So to our guests in the gallery, if you leave, you can't come back in. Perhaps at this point in time this may be the safest place to be, because those folks out there aren't very happy. They're fully in support of all subamendments, not just this one but any future subamendments that we bring on to this Legislature floor this evening to prolong this bill, giving the government a chance to have sober second thought and do what they are asking for, which is kill the bill.

The hundreds of people out there are insisting that we prolong debate as long as it takes for the government to consider killing the bill, and you can hear them in support of that out there now. I would suggest that when hundreds of people start to gather and are this enthusiastic – and it's the first time certainly since I've been elected, since 1993, that we have seen this kind of response to any legislation that has hit this floor – the government has misjudged themselves on this legislation, and they need to kill the bill.

MRS. SLOAN: This is their House.

MS CARLSON: This is their House. This is the people of Alberta's House, Mr. Chairman, not the government's House. It is for the

people of Alberta, and they have a right to have their voices heard. They are being heard in a lockdown situation right now outside of this Chamber. [disturbance in the galleries]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order. Order in the gallery. For the third time, you are not part of the proceedings. You are simply here to observe.

MS CARLSON: We certainly appreciate the support of all of you who have come this evening and those who are outside so that when we need information in terms of whether people support this legislation and any subamendments we may bring forward, we can get firsthand knowledge from those people. They support what we are doing. They do not support what you are doing, and you are going to find out next time in the polls. All of these folks who yesterday were not activists politically are today activists politically, and they will keep that in their minds when it comes to working on campaigns and supporting legislators who want to be in this Assembly after the next election. I thank you very much for that.

Mr. Chairman, the Member for Calgary-Cross made some quite frightening statements in terms of her comments. First of all, she talked about the parameters of this bill in terms of the connection to the subamendment fitting in with the Canada Health Act. You know, at the end of the day, Calgary-Cross, we may find that this bill does adhere to the letter of the law of the Canada Health Act, but one thing I know for sure and one thing that all those folks out there know for sure is that it is not in the spirit of the Canada Health Act. There is nothing in this legislation that adheres to the spirit of that act, and it is certainly not in the spirit of those people who founded the act.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have a point of order, hon. member.

Point of Order Provocative Language

MRS. O'NEILL: I don't know what the point of order is except for the fact that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is inciting the gallery and the sentiment of the people outside. Quite frankly, it's unacceptable.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, you know the rules about speaking as you move and when you're not in your place.

To the point of order, Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: If government members think that somehow they're going to discourage the opposition by standing up without citations, without authority, to harass opposition speakers to this amendment, I can tell them that they will be unsuccessful. Mr. Chairman, I know that you're not going to allow interruptions unless there's a properly documented citation. Without a citation, we end up with a bit of a free-for-all, and I would think that in this place we try and maintain some order.

Thank you.

9:10

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader on the point of order.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'll provide the hon. member with a citation. It's 23(j) of our Standing Orders, which precludes members from using language "likely to create disorder." The hon. member is clearly speaking to the gallery instead of speaking to the members. Now, I appreciate that we have people in the gallery here

tonight. Many nights we work late hours, and we have no one watching and no one listening, so I think it's great that we have people here tonight.

But the rules are the rules, and the hon. member should not be inciting the gallery to participate in the debate, nor should she be applauding what's happening outside. By giving any encouragement to that sort of disorder, it does abuse the privileges of the members of the House, and it could be something rather grander than a Standing Order breach that she's accomplishing. I would ask you to admonish members to be very careful not to breach the privileges of the members and not to create disorder by encouraging disruption from the gallery.

THE CHAIRMAN: I have several people wanting to speak on this point of order. You have spoken once already, Calgary-Buffalo – have you not? – on the point of order?

MR. DICKSON: Yes, I did.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have Edmonton-Rutherford on the point of order, which is Standing Order 23.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, government members are standing up and suggesting that we should somehow participate with them in muzzling Albertans. Certainly if you don't get the message by now, with all due respect, that Albertans don't want this bill . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, you're debating the issue. There's nothing wrong with debating the issue, but right now we have a point of order, and when it's your turn, you can have your opportunity to debate the issue.

MR. WICKMAN: I'm speaking on the point of order in response to the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

THE CHAIRMAN: Certainly you have a right to speak, hon. member, but you have to speak to the point of order as opposed to entering into the debate.

Edmonton-Ellerslie, are you wanting to speak to the point of order, or would you like me to rule?

MS CARLSON: To the point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Chairman, it is not my intent to incite anything in this Legislative Assembly. However, I was elected to be the voice of my constituents in this House, and I intend to do that. I intend to be a voice that is representative of what they want to say. It is not my intention to incite or to provoke, but if the government members feel provoked to enter into the debate based on what I have to say on behalf of my constituents, then I welcome that debate.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair would observe that although the hon. member did not know the citation, it was presented to her. Citation 23(j): "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." Not unlike beauty, it's in the eye of the beholder. Nevertheless, it is a point to be recognized, hon. member. The hon. citizens who are without the doors, I am sure, are unable to hear us, so it would be of some difficulty to do that. To the extent that the present members in the gallery are prepared to listen without clapping of hands or encouragement or boos to discourage, as long as they're here as observers, that's perfectly fine.

So if the hon. member could continue her reflections on subamendment A1, section A. Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to continue. I was just getting to the part in my discussion here this evening on this subamendment where I was responding to the Member for Calgary-Cross. She made some statements that are clearly not accurate and are clearly out of touch in terms of how the current medical system is conducting itself. I expect that in her comments she was referring to the subamendment being amended in clause (b) by adding "that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours" after "approved surgical facility." She talked to us about the sedatives in narcotics and the use of drugs by injection in terms of citing reasons why patients should be in the hospitals for longer than 12 hours in some cases.

But it's clear to me that she doesn't know what happens in hospitals now, Mr. Chairman. For sure there are any number of day surgeries that occur where in fact people are given injections, when people are put under general anesthetic, and it's day surgery. They're in at 8 o'clock in the morning. They don't go for their operation until 11 or 12 o'clock, lunchtime, and they're out of that hospital by 2 o'clock because the hospital needs that bed.

I know that from personal experience. My son, when he was 10 years old, had to go for day surgery to have a tube put down his throat to have his stomach looked at. Well, he was just a little boy, and we know how serious it is to put young children under general anesthetic and how they need to be specifically monitored and watched afterwards. Well, in we went, no breakfast. Of course, we're there by 7 that morning. He doesn't go in for the scoping until 11:30, 12 o'clock, at noon. He's out of there by 2 o'clock. He's out of the anesthetic by 3 o'clock, and we are out the door by 3:15.

So if the Member for Calgary-Cross is deluding herself by thinking that the kind of legislation they're going to pass here is going to change that in this province – it's not going to, Mr. Chairman. It's already happening, and because of that we think it's very important that the legislation be specific now and that we include a clause in this subamendment that states: "that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours" after "approved surgical facilities." If you don't do that, you're talking about major surgery in this province, not minor surgery. That is exactly where we say the government is going on this bill, and that is not what they have been telling the people of the province.

I stand by these words, and I'm happy to see her correct them if she can, but she can't. In fact, the exact example they use in this Legislature day after day as being a good example of that is Shouldice in Ontario. Shouldice requires people for hernias to stay three nights in their hospital, when the same public hospital in Ontario will do complicated hernia operations – not simple hernia operations like Shouldice does – and kick them out as day surgery. Now, how can that be, Mr. Chairman? If we don't put some qualifiers in this legislation, like we have in this subamendment, then how are the people of the province ever going to know what's going to be happening with this legislation and ever have any control over what's happening? They're not going to, because this government wants people not to understand what's happening, to promote private hospitals, and to allow different kinds of behaviour in the private hospitals than is currently happening in public hospitals, and we know that because they've used example after example where across this country it's happening right now.

They say that's not the case, but in fact we have proof that it is the case, Mr. Chairman, and that is why we need to bring in these

subamendments to tighten up this legislation. Who can believe that in a bill like this, that's been studied for years, we need to go to the extent that we have subamendments that we have to bring in? It's unbelievable that a government with the kind of manpower and alleged expertise that they have can bring in a bill that's so flawed that before it even gets to committee, the first thing they do is introduce amendments. The first thing that has to happen is we have to correct their amendments.

Look at what they left out. I refer now specifically to subamendment SA1. We're striking out "No physician shall provide a surgical service" and substituting "No physician shall provide an insured surgical service." Was it their intent all along, Mr. Chairman, to say that private hospitals in this province under their legislation would be able to provide surgical services that weren't insured? That's how the legislation reads right now, and that means that somebody out there is going to make a pile of money, and it means that it's completely contrary to what they've been stating in this House, that they were talking about only insured surgical services. Yet that's not what the legislation says.

So exactly what is the intent of this legislation? I believe that it is the government's intent to deliberately mislead the people of this province and ram this legislation through this House as fast as they can. We will see closure this week one more time, and it will be a shame, because this is the most substantive bill that has ever hit the floor of this Legislature since I have been elected, and it is the most seriously flawed legislation as well.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and make room for my colleagues.

9:20

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It certainly is a pleasure to be able to get up tonight and speak on this very important bill. The hon. member's absolutely correct. It is a very important bill, as are the subamendments.

Mr. Chairman, I will preface my statement by first of all letting the gallery and the MLAs know that I am a licensed anesthetist; I give anesthetics. I'm also a licensed surgeon; I do surgery. I'm also a licensed practising physician in the province of Alberta as well as being the Minister of Learning.

Mr. Chairman, what I would like to do tonight is address three points as they pertain to this subamendment. The first point is the overnight stays or the 12-hour stay, depending on which side you look at. I would put to you that it is an absolute fallacy to put a time limit on the procedures. To put a 12-hour time limit on the procedures is absolutely wrong. What should be done and what we are looking at in this bill is that we must look at each procedure individually.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons is the licensing body of every physician in the province of Alberta. It is a public body. It is a body that has every one of its meetings in public. You can go and listen to what the College of Physicians and Surgeons are talking about at every single meeting that they have.

Mr. Chairman, the overnight stays, as I said first, are an absolute fallacy, because what has to happen is quite simply that a patient should stay at the facility as long as is necessary. The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross hit it right on the nose. There is no reason, if you go in at 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock in the afternoon and if you have a complication from an anesthetic – and as I've already said, I am an anesthetist, and there are complications from anesthetics – that that patient should be kicked out, that that patient should be sent to a hotel, which is what happens right now, or that they should be sent

to the hospital. I say this a little bit facetiously, but half of it is partially true. I think that the 12-hour limit is extremely discriminatory against rural people.

Mr. Chairman, when my people come from rural Alberta to have surgery in a day clinic, whether it's day surgery in the hospital or whether it's in a surgical facility, because of the 12-hour rule they do not have the ability to go home and have their family look after them. They go to a hotel, and the nurse calls them in the middle of the night to see if they're okay. What is wrong with this scenario? What needs to happen is that these people need to be in a facility overnight if they need it. As everyone in this room knows, people are individuals. What that means is that . . . [interjection]

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, if you wish to speak to this bill again tonight, you're perfectly free to do so. As you know, you can speak an unlimited number of times in committee. So I wonder if we could just hear the Minister of Learning, and when he's finished, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Debate Continued

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. As I was saying, every patient is independent and every patient is individual in how they respond to an anesthetic. To put a 12-hour artificial time limit is wrong. What you must do is approve or disapprove procedures that are done in surgical facilities.

Mr. Chairman, this amendment is absolutely wrong. It has to allow overnight stays where the procedure warrants an overnight stay, where the patient warrants an overnight stay. Let's get away from this . . .

MRS. SLOAN: Point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think, hon. members, we have a point of order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Chairman, under 23(i). The member is imputing that the opposition somehow has false motives in bringing forward this subamendment with respect to 12-hour stays, and I would cite from *Hansard* in 1994 where the hon. minister of health, in fact, indicated that he was directing the College of Physicians and Surgeons to establish what services and procedures can be safely and appropriately provided within a less-than-12-hour period. He's implying that we have some type of false agenda this evening when his own licensing body and the minister of health have clearly been on the record as saying that 12-hour guidelines are necessary.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members are reminded that the point of order as cited is whether or not a member "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member," not to a group. We've had that raised a number of times. Whether you're saying it's the government or whether you're saying the opposition, it isn't a specific individual, so therefore it doesn't obtain. That's why it's there, to protect an individual member, and there was no individual cited that the chair heard.

MRS. SLOAN: It's false.

THE CHAIRMAN: But it doesn't go to a group.

MRS. SLOAN: The individual is affected by the 12-hour stay whether it's appropriately applied or inappropriately applied.

THE CHAIRMAN: No. Anyway, the hon. Minister of . . .

MRS. SLOAN: I'd like to know, Mr. Chairman. I might need a 12-hour procedure someday.

THE CHAIRMAN: Right. You're arguing the issue, and that's fine. You can argue the issue when it's your turn, but you can't use it as a point of order, because it doesn't obtain. But you can argue that as an issue. You're free to do that. I'm just the referee.

The hon. Minister of Learning.

Debate Continued

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member just said a very interesting thing. She said, "I might need a 12-hour procedure." I'm sure that what she is saying, because she is a nurse and I am a doctor, is that we want to stay in hospital as long as is necessary. We want to stay in the hospital if it's done in the hospital. If it's done in a surgical facility, quite frankly, if there are complications with my anesthetic, if it is me, I want to stay there where my doctor is, where my nurse is, and where the people who are recovering me are. The people who did my operation, who know exactly what happened in that operation, I want them to be there. I don't want to be transferred to a hospital anywhere to look after my recovery.

A couple of other points that I'd like to say, and the one issue is, I suppose, a little bit in rebuttal. The hon. member was talking about regional anesthetics, injectable narcotics, and she was talking about them leading to a general anesthetic. Well, obviously the hon. member does not know what she's talking about. In many cases they are given injectable narcotics. They are given benzodiazepines, and they are not asleep for some of these procedures. Mr. Chairman, you know as well as I know and as well as the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross knows, often these drugs can cause as many side effects and can cause as long a recovery as a general anesthetic. So quite literally, if I were in a facility of any sort, I'd want to stay there until my recovery was complete. I don't want to be kicked out after 12 hours if I'm not well.

9:30

Mr. Chairman, there's one other point I'd like to say – and it is in this subamendment – and that's just the whole discussion about the hospital versus the surgical facility. I will fault our side a little bit, I'll fault the opposition a little bit in that it has not been absolutely clear what a hospital is and it has not been absolutely clear what a surgical facility is. I'll be the first one to say that. But it really is quite simple. Ask your 3-year-old kid, ask your 5-year-old kid what a hospital is. "A hospital is where I go when I get sick. A hospital is where I go when I have an emergency."

These surgical facilities have nothing to do with emergency treatment. Mr. Chairman, these are elective surgical facilities. They will undertake surgery on patients when it is an elective procedure. That is the difference. Hospitals provide all-spectrum care. They provide emergency services. They provide 24 hour a day emergency services, 24 hour a day inpatient services. When you get pneumonia, are you going to go to a surgical facility or to a hospital? You're going to go to a hospital because that is what a hospital is for. It is not an elective surgical facility, which is what is being contemplated here.

Mr. Chairman, quite simply, the elective surgical facilities will be in place. They will decrease the waiting lists in the public system. They will allow the public system to focus on the sick people. [interjection]

Obviously the hon. member who just threw out something at me has not been in a hospital. She is a nurse, but she obviously has not been in a hospital. Mr. Chairman, hospitals are for sick people, and when I'm sick, when I have diabetes, when I have heart problems, when I need surgery, I want to be in a hospital. That's what our hospitals are for. When I need a small operation, when I need a hernia done, when I need something minor done, I want to be in a surgical facility. I want to be in a surgical facility and I want to stay there until I am fully recovered. This is what this legislation is all about.

MS LEIBOVICI: On a point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: A point of order.

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

MS LEIBOVICI: *Beauchesne* 333. I'd like to ask him a question. Then why does Bill 11 define a private hospital as one that provides emergency services, diagnostic services, surgical services, and medical services? Why does your own bill say that, then?

THE CHAIRMAN: Order. Thank you, hon. member. As you well know, you're entitled to ask whether you can ask a question . . .

MS LEIBOVICI: And I did and I want an answer.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no, no.

. . . but you don't ask the question. The hon. member who is being the question has two choices, to say yes or no, and they give no reasons for it.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Chairman, I will not answer that question, but I will allude to that question.

Debate Continued

DR. OBERG: It is common sense that a hospital is where you go when you have an emergency when you are sick. In elective surgical facilities that is not what happens. Mr. Chairman, if these members don't know that, then these are the people that are trying to put across falsehoods to the people of Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, another thing I want to comment on – and this is indirectly what is related to the bill – is the whole idea of contracting out. Under section A in the amendment it says:

No physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta, and no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta, except in

- (a) a public hospital, or
- (b) an approved surgical facility.

Mr. Chairman, I have done lots of surgery. I have done lots of surgery in clinics. I have done lots of surgery in my clinic, that I built, that I own, that I pay the expenses on. If that is not a private clinic, I don't know what is. We do it all the time. If you go in for stitches, if you go in to have surgery on your back, on your arms, you do it in a clinic. That is contracted out from Alberta Health to the physicians. That happens every day in Alberta.

AN HON. MEMBER: Aren't you in conflict of interest? You're in conflict of interest.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Chairman, it sounds like they're calling me on a point of privilege.

Mr. Chairman, what it says in the bill, if I can read this in making reference to the question that was asked:

"Public hospital" means

- (i) a hospital that is established by or under, or the establishment or operation of which is governed by, the Hospitals Act, the Regional Health Authorities Act, the Cancer Programs Act or the Workers' Compensation Act, or
- (ii) a hospital that is established by the Government of Alberta or the Government of Canada.

It is very, very plain the difference between a hospital and an elective surgical facility. That is something that has not been brought out.

I was getting at the contracting out, and I was reading from subamendment A. Mr. Chairman, contracting out happens all the time. Contracting out is happening everywhere we go in Alberta. When we are talking about overnight stays, all we are saying quite literally is that where things can be done cheaper, where the quality is equal or better than what is in the public facility, where the contracts are made, where we can put money into getting people service rather than the bricks and mortar of hospitals, the bricks and mortar of surgical suites, we will look at that. I think it is imperative upon us as elected members to look at saving money for the taxpayer of Alberta if we can.

But, Mr. Chairman, I will say that we will not sacrifice patient care to save money. If the private sector can do it under the accreditation of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, under the numerous things that the Minister of Health and Wellness has put forward, if those are satisfied, then, yes, I agree that overnight stays should occur, I agree that surgical facilities should be open, and I agree that we should do it right now, that we should do it today.

Is this going to turn Alberta into a two-tier system? Absolutely not. Absolutely not. Mr. Chairman, we still pay as the government of Alberta. We're the ones who put out money. As an individual citizen of Alberta am I going to have to pay when I go to these surgical facilities? The answer is no. The answer is very simple. The answer is no. Regardless of who owns a facility the answer is no; citizens of Alberta will not be paying for health care when they go to the elective surgical facilities.

The elective surgical facilities will decrease waiting lists. The elective surgical facilities will increase patient care. They will decrease patient suffering, and, Mr. Chairman, that is what Bill 11 is all about. It is not about Americanization. It is not about two-tier systems. What it is about is improving patient care. Let's get off the politics. Let's talk about patient care.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the subamendment introduced by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I think it's important to note the context of this subamendment and the amendment it would change.

Mr. Chairman, we have in front of us a bill that's been sent to all Albertans, a bill that is a little less than 20 pages in length, yet before the Assembly the government has placed in front of us six pages of amendments, so it's that subamendment that we're discussing tonight. But that's the context. How well thought through, how well crafted is a piece of legislation when just weeks after its introduction we're forced to look at six pages of amendments by the government and I'm not sure how many subamendments by the opposition and then some substantial amendments? So it's within that context of a very flawed piece of legislation that we look at tonight's subamendment.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, we have a point of order, I presume. The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Pursuant to *Beauchesne* 333, would the hon. member permit a question?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes or no is all you have to say.

DR. MASSEY: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. You got your answer.

9:40

Debate Continued

MR. MASSEY: The offending word in the amendment and the offending word in the . . . [interjection] You'll get your turn. The offending words in the subamendment that have been modified are "approved surgical facility." Those are the words that have everyone in the province hung up, and it doesn't matter how the government tries to spin, how the government tries to define what an approved surgical facility is, people read "approved surgical facility" as private hospital. No matter what kind of spin campaign, no matter how many million dollars are spent, that's how people are interpreting it.

I find it quite astounding that members opposite would stand up and try to declare that people don't understand, that they're being misled by the opposition. After all, this is the bill that was sent to every Albertan in the province, and as much as I like to think the opposition is powerful, we're not quite that powerful yet, Mr. Chairman.

The test of any amendment – there are a number of tests. One, does the amendment clarify? I would submit that's exactly what this subamendment does. It clarifies that the services are to be an insured surgical service. It clarifies that the approved surgical facility is not going to be an overnight surgical facility. Those are major, major items of importance to those people who are opposed to Bill 11.

Does it correct errors? Well, I think it does correct an error. The error was in ever introducing approved surgical facilities and trying to pass them off as something other than a private hospital.

One of the other criteria for a good amendment is that it should provide some assurance in response to a concern that's been raised, and that's exactly what the amendment from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark does. It assures Albertans that approved surgical facilities will remain clinics, that they won't in any way become private hospitals.

Another criteria for a good amendment: does it strengthen the bill? Yes, certainly. By referring exclusively to insured surgical services, by limiting the length of stays in these approved surgical facilities, it assures Albertans that we don't see the introduction of private hospitals.

Does it change the bill for the better? Another criteria of a good amendment. Certainly it does in ways that I've already mentioned: by containing the kinds of activities that can be undertaken at an approved surgical facility and by directing the kinds of services that can be performed at those facilities.

Does it set some standards? It certainly does. By including the notion of 12 hours and limiting stays to that, it sets a standard that can be used to judge approved medical facilities.

Does it alter the bill for the better? Yes. Again, it makes the bill clearer, and it makes it very certain in people's minds exactly what these approved surgical facilities are going to be.

The last criterion that I would look at: does it correct some

oversights in the original bill? I think it can be argued, Mr. Chairman, that these two subamendments do exactly that.

Mr. Chairman, all of the upset, all of the discussion, all of the protracted hours of debate could be eliminated if this subamendment were adopted. It would take the most obnoxious part of Bill 11 and make it palatable for people in the province.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I know there are other speakers that want to make comment.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak about the amendments, and I'm pleased to speak about Bill 11. Today it's not difficult to find a newspaper article that doesn't talk about physician shortages, long waiting times for treatment and lack of high-tech equipment. It doesn't matter what daily newspaper you pick up, the problems are the same in Saint John's, Toronto, Saskatoon, and Vancouver. They're the same all over this country.

Let's recognize what the political partisans reflect to acknowledge: we have a problem in health care. The Liberals speak with great passion when they espouse their point of view on health care. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre speaks passionately in her newsletter about Bill 11, and I'll quote: I personally feel strongly that Bill 11 will not address the problems in our health care system. Well, through the whole newsletter there is not one idea about how to fix that problem.

Why all the fuss? First, a vocal stand is popular with Albertans and Canadians. Health care continues to poll well. For all their rhetoric the federal Liberals cut the transfer payments by 50 percent to 13 percent, a cut that certainly impacted provincial health care funding. The federal Liberals are . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Relevance, Mr. Chairman.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes, Mr. Chairman, we've given a lot of latitude tonight. Bear with me, please. We're talking about an amendment that's been brought forward from the opposition, and I'm speaking to the amendment.

The Liberals can easily blame all problems with the medicare system on the provinces by pointing out that health care is after all a provincial responsibility as set out by the Constitution, but the federal government does have an important role as the guardian of the principles of health care. The provinces have a legitimate grievance. The federal government contributes well under a quarter of the funds for health care yet refuses to allow flexibility. Well, Mr. Chairman, the simple solution is to put up or be quiet. One must examine the Canada Health Act and the irony of Mr. Rock, who has made it clear that there is no flexibility in the five principles of the act.

Let's examine it for a minute, Mr. Chairman. Portability: portability means that a Quebecker getting medical care in Alberta wouldn't have to worry; the insurance coverage is portable. Well, Quebec doesn't have an agreement with the other nine provinces. Many physicians in English Canada are reluctant to take Quebec patients because the Quebec government pays low compensations to physicians, and the Quebec government doesn't cover hospital stays in other provinces. Portability across Canada? I think not, Mr. Chairman. Not once did the hon. Leader of the Opposition talk about that when she spoke about her life and time spent in Quebec in her passionate speech about equity.

The principle of universality is supposed to mean that every citizen is covered by insurance, but this isn't the case in several

provinces when citizens are charged to help fund some medical services.

Accessibility is another one, Mr. Chairman, a principle that Canadians hold dear. Wrong. Provinces must provide services with uniform terms and conditions.

MS BLAKEMAN: Point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order Relevance

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. The citation is 23(b), relevance. As I understand it, the amendment that we are looking at is discussing insured and uninsured services and stays of 12 hours. While I appreciate that the member may not have had an opportunity to do her second reading debate, we do have an amendment in front of us that's fairly narrowly focused.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to make comments on the point of order?

MR. HANCOCK: On the point of order, Mr. Chairman, I think it's passing strange that as we sit quietly and listen to wide-ranging debate from the Liberal side of the House and people shouting across at me, I'm wanting to muzzle debate when I'm asking for a little decorum. Then when one of our members gets up to speak to this very important section of this very important bill, members opposite want to curtail debate down to the narrowest of the narrow.

In fact, the hon. member is following the practice that has been happening in this House over the last, I think, six hours that we've had in debate on amendment A1, section A, and its subamendment SA1. There's been about six hours at least and maybe seven hours of debate so far on this particular section and this rather modest amendment to the bill. That debate, if we review *Hansard*, has been very wide ranging in coming back to this particular section, so it would be totally inappropriate for the chair to rule this hon. member's contribution to the debate as irrelevant when there's been so much irrelevant debate from the other side.

9:50

MR. DICKSON: I hadn't intended to join the point of order, but after hearing the provocative comments of the Government House Leader, let's recognize that every one of my colleagues who spoke to it has referred to elements of the amendment that's in front of us. [interjections] Every single one of them. I challenge any of these people . . . [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: I wonder if we would allow the gentleman to have his point. Calgary-Buffalo is the only one that's been recognized.

MR. DICKSON: I listened to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and no doubt they're heart-felt, genuinely believed sentiments, but they had absolutely nothing to do with the subamendment in front of us. You know, we started off with her colleague. I don't know what happened to the Member for Calgary-Egmont, who was quick on his feet a couple of times to raise questions of relevance when we started out but was nowhere to be heard when his colleague started taking us on basically her second reading debate speech. I understand she may have been one of the 44 government MLAs that never spoke at second reading of the bill, so she's probably taking some heat at home and she's anxious to get up and get some items on the record now, but she's not being relevant, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. On the point of order, or do you want to continue?

MRS. FORSYTH: I'd like to continue.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Well, the ruling first, then.

The hon. Government House Leader has made an astute observation in that we have been trying, whether it's for five hours or seven hours or whatever, to bring members to please address the amendment that was before us for about four or five hours and now, since 8 o'clock, the subamendment. The chair feels that indeed it's been honoured more in the breach than in the keeping. To the extent that members are staying at least within the parameters of the package that has been referred to as these six pages of amendments, collectively known as amendment A1, then I think the chair has been relatively quiet on that.

However, the chair is anxious to hear how the comments you're making are related to the subamendment. If you can then make your comments and fit them to the subamendment, that really would be then in compliance with the rules of the House.

Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think, you know, I really have to say that sometimes patience is a virtue, and I am getting to the subamendments. I think if you hear what I have to say, you'll see how it all intertwines.

Debate Continued

MRS. FORSYTH: Now, I was talking about the universality, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to add that the Prime Minister and the Governor General in this country are treated at the National Defence Medical Centre in Ottawa. One must ask herself why the silence on the problem with the health care system? As I said earlier, when I mentioned the brochure from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, lots of talk and no action. Health care is a very emotional and sensitive issue, probably more important than any other issue in this country. Every citizen is touched at one time or the other by health care, and we must examine what health care means. Well, it means different things to different people.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Chairman, a point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MS CARLSON: It isn't relevant. She is not on the subamendment at all, Mr. Chairman. We have just had this discussion. She's not getting to the subamendment at all.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair will not reflect upon past members who were called upon a number of times to try and discuss the issue at hand but will say one more time: please tie your remarks into the subamendment.

Debate Continued

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the subamendment, then, one must ask oneself: why have hospitals meant to provide acute care become centres for non acute care? Part of the answer lies with people's demands. Given the choice between in-hospital recovery and day surgeries, people prefer the convenience

of a hospital stay. Given the choice between an impressive teaching hospital and a surgical facility, people choose the hospital. Why has the system become so reliant on institutional care? Why was an elderly patient occupying a bed in a surgery ward at approximately \$800 or \$900 a day when a home care program would be just as effective? Why would you take up an operating room for minor surgery when it can be used for major surgery?

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

The health service utilization working group report *When Less Is Better: Using Canada's Hospitals Effectively* cites several studies that estimate inappropriate use of between 19 percent and 60 percent of total patient care depending on the type of hospital. In other words, on any given day roughly half the hospital beds are taken up by patients who don't need to use them.

So in closing on the amendment, Mr. Chairman, we know health care is a big problem made up of several small problems. Firstly, health care is a societal problem; Canadians are getting older. Secondly, health care is a budgetary problem. Thirdly, health care is an economical problem. Fourthly, health care is a political problem. Fifthly, health care is a moral problem. With waiting lists continuing to grow, there are bigger problems, urgent problems, complicated problems.

Reform in the health care system requires people to change their thinking. The opposition asked in question period if there was a free vote. Yes, Mr. Chairman, my colleagues can make up their own minds on this very, very delicate issue. Yes, we are getting calls, faxes, and letters, and yes, we are listening to what they have to say. In the same breath we also are getting calls of support. The calls are asking questions about the bill. Yes, Mr. Chairman, I also believe that this government is doing the right thing.

As a baby boomer I will be utilizing the health care system in a few years. I have a 77-year-old mother who has not been well for some time and using her full share cost of health care. I have a son who was in a terrible, terrible car accident several months ago, and, yes, he used the health care system also. I have another son whose career continually takes him into high-risk situations, and, yes, Mr. Chairman, he uses the health care system too.

Hell will freeze over before I will jeopardize what we hold so dearly to us and cherish. Mr. Chairman, Bill 11 is about reform. Nothing more and nothing less, and I believe it's the right thing.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With this dissertation I suspect that this member could go on from bed knobs and broomsticks. The relevance in that last little speech left something to be desired, but I shall not. I shall do the best I can to deal with the amendment and the supplement to that amendment and therefore do the best I can to expose the fallacy of this entire bill. The effect of this bill is more than just that which is written on the pages, and we all know that. The effect is a fundamental change in how we perceive the deliverance of health care through the hospitals in our province.

This particular amendment, particularly the second portion, which would limit stays of a patient to under 12 hours would definitely make approved surgical facilities redundant. There would not be any need for them. In fact what is needed here is funds to run the hospitals that we have. There is no question about it. You needn't go so far as 12 feet out that door to hear the almost – almost, I say

– riotous situation in the province of Alberta. Those people are here for a reason. It's not to listen to an amendment and a subamendment, and in fact it goes to the heart of the bill. They simply do not want two tiers. They don't want anything to do with private clinics. They don't want to have to concern themselves about the loss of the health care system for their lifetime.

10:00

I heard the member opposite speak of her 77-year-old mother. We all have those. We all have mothers and relatives and sisters and aunts and uncles that are elderly. We have younger people that require the system, and we all want the best that we can provide for them. But those people and this side are worried. This is the third time, not the first, not the second, but the third time this government has tried to – I can't say manipulate, but it certainly would be mold, change, augment, modify the current system of delivery. [interjections] Manipulate might be a little bit strong, Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

These people understand that. They don't have to understand the fine points of the bill. They don't have to understand that. They understand the intent of this government's work. They bring forward for the third time a bill that purports to modify the system – and that's being euphemistically correct – and they get worried. Listen to them. That's not insightful. I mean, how do you pay people to do that?

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I've listened for a while now, trying to weave the amendments into what you're saying, and I hope that you'll do the same. Please confine yourself to the amendments.

MR. WHITE: You're calling me on relevance after that? Mr. Chairman, you're going to call this member on relevance?

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: No, no. I'm saying, hon. member, that I'm hoping that you're going to weave the amendments into what you're saying, because the history of two other bills that have already been decided in this House is not relevant.

MR. WHITE: It is relevant relative to 12-hour stays.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Are you challenging the chair, sir?

MR. WHITE: I'm merely pointing out that what's good for the goose has got to be good for the gander here.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Please, on the amendment. Carry on on the amendment.

Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: Thank you. I'll do the best I can to weave, as you will, the patient stays under 12 hours.

Approved surgical facility is a misnomer at best. This is an approved debating facility, I suppose. We probably would not call it a House on any other day.

If we do restrict stays to 12 hours, then it is clear that all reasonable precautions would be taken for any kind of procedure in a hospital, in a proper hospital. You will recall that about five days ago the Member for Edmonton-Manning made mention of the loss of a child in what would be under this bill an approved surgical facility. This particular procedure was a dentistry procedure that in

the current law is allowed to be held in another facility. There are a number of them in the province that dentists do their work within. That procedure was a normal procedure. An anesthetist performed the function, and that particular child developed complications. That child was rushed not to an approved surgical facility but to a proper hospital, where the child didn't make it, and that's a shame.

Would we want that to be repeated again and again? This member certainly wouldn't want that to occur. Not being a medical expert certainly but knowing the history, that complications do occur and reoccur from the simplest – the simplest – of procedures, this member would prefer that anything that requires over a 12-hour stay with a recovery would be in a proper hospital, defined in, I believe, the Canada Health Act. In any event, it is properly defined, and actually it is defined, I think, at one point in Bill 11 as a proper hospital.

Now, moving on to the other part of the amendment, "No physician shall provide a surgical service," there's a difference between a surgical service and an insured surgical service. This particular item is rather difficult to debate, because quite frankly it's an error, a void, if you will, in the act as it was written. This merely repairs that act so as to prevent any kind of misinterpretation of what actually should occur in those facilities. It is an insured service. Uninsured services, of course, can be left outside this subamendment, and it would not offend this member, nor would it offend this side of the House.

However, I do believe that the surgical services required are insured services, and so long as this government doesn't try to move away from or redefine insured services, this provision would be a natural. It would be quite reasonable and proper, and this member believes it would be a reasonable assumption to pass at least that portion of this subamendment so as to fully and completely define that which is required in the service.

So in closing, Mr. Chairman, I did try my best to stay on the topic, but quite frankly this particular amendment on 12-hour stays goes to the very heart of what an approved surgical facility is, in this member's view, and what a hospital is. That is the fundamental argument for a great many of the people that are gathered here today outside these doors.

Thank you for your time, sir.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to stand and join in the debate on subamendment SA1. Before I discuss the amendment in some depth, I would like to just quote *Hansard* from July 2, 1992, to put my remarks into context. The question was raised by Ms Barrett.

The government can save a lot of money if it doesn't allow hospitals to contract to the for-profit sector. On that basis alone, will the minister reconsider her position and tell hospitals the for-profit sector has no role in the public health system?

The answer from the minister of health on July 2, 1992, was this.

Again, Mr. Speaker, no, I will not, because the private sector does in fact have a role if it can prove that it is efficient, that it's operating fairly, and that it's meeting the responsibility of our health sector to provide access to health services.

Mr. Chairman, that is what Bill 11 is about.

I respect the right of every Albertan to provide their comments on this bill, and I think there has been ample opportunity to do that. In fact, I have had now three meetings in my constituency to encourage people to come and ask questions and provide their input, which has led in part, I believe, to some of the amendments that we are looking at tonight.

What is difficult in this debate and has been experienced tonight is that there is a lack of accurate information, and sometimes things are alluded to in a way that suggests things that don't occur.

I'll be interested to review the Blues on the Member for Edmonton-Riverview's statements on the Gimbel Foundation Act. That was, in fact, a private bill. It was not a private member's bill. It was not a public bill. The member should know very well that private bills can be brought forward. Some pass; some do not. This bill was in fact brought to this Legislature. This bill was in fact dealt with by this Legislature. In my recollection this Legislature defeated that bill, and it did not pass. I think we should have things on the record in the right context and displayed for the benefit of the people who are here and those who may choose to read *Hansard*. Accurate information should be given to them. That is a point that must be made.

10:10

Mr. Chairman, also raised in that discussion was the point – and I believe rightly so – that the College of Physicians and Surgeons are determining what array of surgical services might require an overnight stay, but the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's comments would leave me the impression that somehow that August professional body might not appropriately determine that. Well, I have a great deal of faith in the professionalism of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and I do believe that they are the appropriate body to determine the appropriate setting for surgical services. It gives me a great deal of confidence when any member of my family – and I've mentioned before I keep a picture of my three grandchildren on my desk to remind me very clearly of what this is all about. This is about the importance of a health system that will serve not only my generation, my parent's generation, my children's generation, but my grandchildren's generation.

I would remind all hon. members that 10 years ago or so a lot of services were delivered in hospitals. I recall all abortion services being delivered in hospitals, and I also recall the consternation of some professional staff in those hospitals at having to participate in that activity. They had a great deal of difficulty with their personal feelings and their professional life.

Cataract surgeries 10 years ago or so were all provided in a hospital and for good reason. The technology, the medical know-how at that time made that the most appropriate place to deliver that service. I recall that at the time elderly people in my community traveled 200 miles to Calgary to have this service provided. They were in hospital for a week or 10 days, their head in sandbags. When they were allowed up it was to be very carefully monitored. They were not allowed to lift anything. They came home to six weeks to six months of convalescence. They couldn't lift. They couldn't actually perform many of the day-to-day duties they needed to do.

Well, you know, the government didn't change that, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues. Medical technology changed that, and we should applaud that. We should say thank goodness for the people in the health field who are every day performing research and learning new technologies, new drug therapies that allow people to convalesce at home in a setting that is comfortable to them. We can't put our heads in the sand and say: the same as I've always had is all I ever want. The world will not allow us to do that. Technology and medical know-how will not allow us to do that, nor should we want them to.

There are some 52 clinics in this province. Over 30 of those operated under the past health minister's watch without guidelines governing them. We paid the price for that in 1994. The federal government at that time asked us to introduce private clinic legislation to deal with this very amendment, putting rules around how private clinics can operate. There were four provinces that moved ahead. We said that we felt we had a responsibility to have a

discussion with the health professionals in our province to make sure the rules and guidelines that we put in place were appropriate, and out of that came the 12 principles that were agreed to by the federal government and by the province.

Today there are 52 clinics in this province. They provide about 152 services. They save 20,000 hours of operating theatre time in this province that can be awarded to those surgeries that truly do require a hospital stay. Mr. Chairman, I am not a medical professional, nor have I ever pretended to be. We do have some in this Legislature, and I listen with great respect when they speak, on either side of this House. However, this amendment talks about stifling the ability of the College of Physicians and Surgeons to determine the appropriate setting for services to be delivered in this province. I don't believe that this Legislative Assembly is the determiner of what services are provided. It is our responsibility to ensure that there are guidelines, appropriate rules that will ensure that those services will be delivered in a safe manner. The appropriate people to determine the setting and determine the professional security of care in that setting is the College of Physicians and Surgeons working with groups such as the AARN, who, incidentally, were miles ahead of any of us in this Assembly on health reform.

We have examples in the nursing fraternity of nurse practitioners. It was not allowed a few years ago. However, it was happening in northern Alberta where, because of remoteness, nursing professionals were called upon to provide care that perhaps was not in their guidelines. We worked with them and the AMA, with some difficulty, to ensure that they were protected, that they were able to offer the care, and that they were trained to do that.

Mr. Chairman, that's what Bill 11 is about. No matter how much some try to say that it's something else, it is about protecting the integrity of the delivery of surgical services. It is something that perhaps we should have done in 1994, and you wouldn't have heard any of this today. Saskatchewan's legislation – and I've looked at it carefully – will allow, if they wish, overnight stays. It is totally silent on that subject. We're more up front, and we're saying that if this is allowed, this is how it will be done and this is who will determine it. I've looked at that legislation very carefully. It is not in any way as restrictive on the issue of overnight stays as, in fact, ours is.

One last thing about what happens when you bandy around information, and again I'm going to read from the bill, because I heard Edmonton-Meadowlark very indignantly quote out of the bill on a surgical facility. Well, I read it as saying that a "surgical facility" means a facility whose primary function is to provide a limited range of surgical services." What I read in here, which I understood to be the quote on surgical services, is that

"private hospital" means an acute care facility that

- (i) provides emergency, diagnostic, surgical and medical services, and
- (ii) admits patients for medically supervised stays exceeding 12 hours,

but does not include a public hospital.

Well, in fact, in this bill those hospitals are banned.

So let's tell the facts. Let's not try to incite people by misinformation. Let's be accurate. Let's depend on our medical professionals, in this case the College of Physicians and Surgeons, to determine what is appropriate for an overnight stay and what professional security of care should accompany that.

10:20

Mr. Chairman, all I ask is the opportunity for fair, honest debate. I have a lot of respect for this Legislature. When I came here almost 13 years ago, I promised my constituents that I would treat this House in a manner of respect. I have tried – I'm sure I've strayed

once in a while – to keep that promise to them. When I met with a group the other day, I thought that one of the elderly gentlemen of the Legion was going to give me a bit of a lecture on Bill 11. What he said was: Shirley, I wish that when you stand up in the House, you'd speak into your mike; I'm having trouble hearing you.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

The opportunity has been there in my constituency. I have had people who have raised concerns. I have tried to provide to them by simply using the bill – we sit down with the bill and go through clause by clause. Where there have been questions raised, I have passed them on to the minister of health and asked if we could amend this bill to clarify that. I believe that the minister has responded and introduced those clarifications.

If the opposition really wants to help the system that we have presently in this House, if they devote as much energy to encouraging the federal government to put \$4.8 billion back into the system out of the \$18.8 billion that they removed rather than passing that off as inconsequential, I think they would serve the people of this province in a much better way.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to be able to be here tonight and speak to the subamendment proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. With previous amendments, I had spoken of my frustration in trying to answer my constituents' concerns that this bill was not acceptable in any form or shape, yet I did want to be able to comment on amendments. This is an amendment that I can support, so I'm very pleased to be able to rise and speak to that.

Now, that is not to say that this amendment is perfect, that this makes the bill wonderful. It's amending one very small section. It doesn't correct a lot of things that are happening outside of this one section, but speaking specifically to subamendment SA1, I think this is worthy of our consideration because it is constructive. One of the issues that is concerning Albertans the most is the problem of overnight stays and getting into a definition of major surgery. For many people following the logic along, if it's major surgery and you need to be in this approved surgical clinic for several days or for a week, then that's pretty major surgery, and that's gone beyond the scope of what this legislation was supposed to be talking about. So the overnight stay really makes people uneasy, and having this amendment narrow that to 12 hours I think relieves some people's anxieties on this.

I have to be perfectly honest and on the record here. I have not had constituents writing, e-mailing, phoning, and faxing saying: please support this amendment requesting 12 hours. As I say, the overwhelming response – and I'm now at over 400 responses opposing the bill – has said: we don't want the bill, period; pull the bill; get rid of the bill.

Let me try to put something on the record for consideration. We all know and certainly I know that a major frustration with the bill has been the government's reluctance, inability – I don't know what words to use – to describe why the government feels that it needs this legislation. Well, it's to make waiting lists shorter, but when you look at the proof about shorter waiting lists, private clinics do not make the waiting lists shorter. So the whole idea of why we need this and the inability of the government to come forward with something concrete that Albertans can grab hold of has been a concern.

Now, the Minister of Learning spoke at some length that to put a

12-hour limit was not a good idea, that it wasn't long enough, that there were complications that could arise that would justify a longer stay. I'm not from a medical background, but I'm having trouble following that logic. Truly, this is a simple procedure that is being done in these clinics. It is minor surgery, and therefore it should be a very simple procedure. There should be no need for intensive or dramatic – or whatever the medical word is – intervention with it. Therefore, you shouldn't need to be in there longer than 12 hours. I mean, according to the definition in here, a surgical facility, section 29(q), "means a facility whose primary function is to provide a limited range of surgical services." I understand. That's the definition that's in the bill.

If what we're trying to do here is very limited, very narrow, very easy, very simple surgical procedures and then we have someone who's acknowledged as a medical doctor, trained, licensed, certified in this province, telling us, "Well, no; there could be complications; it needs to be longer than 12 hours," I say: where's the acute care in these clinics? There isn't one. Where's the emergency department? There isn't one. So if complications arise, as we heard the Premier say, no problem: pick up the phone, dial 911, get an ambulance and take them to a real hospital. Why would we need more than 12 hours? This doesn't logically follow. There's been more debate from members on the other side than I've ever enjoyed in my time in this House, so I'm sure someone will get up and answer me on that one.

MS CARLSON: It could happen; right?

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, it could happen. Sure. There could be an answer there.

The second issue that's been raised by this subamendment is the concerns that come out about insured and uninsured services. That is the first part of this amendment, changing it from "no physician shall provide a surgical service" to "no physician shall provide an insured surgical service." That has been another issue of concern that's been raised through the letters and correspondence that I have received. That's the idea of the government being able, behind closed doors and without consultation with Albertans, without any kind of advance notice actually, to delist what's considered a covered medical service.

Now, let me stop here and say that I'm not asking and nobody that I've listened to in the Official Opposition has said: let's go backwards in time. No one on this side has said: let's stay with the status quo. Everyone is saying that there needs to be an improvement in our medical system, in our health care system. We need to have legislation to deal with controlling private clinics. We need to be flexible enough to recognize when procedures through the use of advanced technology and pharmaceuticals are no longer, for instance, major surgery and in fact could be considered minor surgery or at least less invasive surgery. A number of people have talked about gallbladder operations. I remember my aunt was in the hospital for about three weeks, and now I think they do it through your belly button or they shoot you with laser sound waves or something.

MR. JONSON: Orthoscopic surgery.

MS BLAKEMAN: Orthoscopic surgery. Thank you very much. That was the minister of health assisting me.

So I do understand the need for that flexibility. We do need flexibility. That's fine. But the idea that the services that people have come to expect can be uninsured, delisted, taken off the coverage behind closed doors and without them knowing about it

really bothers people. They feel they got suckered somehow. That sort of debate needs to come out more into the public and have more consultation.

It's important that we tell people and be very up front about the fact that, you know, only the insured stuff is covered and don't be guaranteed it'll be covered forever. Because we already know that for those people who pay for Blue Cross, which is the extra coverage, the extended benefit coverage that's available, that's delisted all the time.

10:30

I have a constituent that grabbed me by the elbow and walked me about four blocks, telling me how some sort of dental surgery or dental checkup had been taken off that listing. That was a serious issue for her because it was costing her a lot of money out of pocket to be able to pay for a service that used to be covered. So that delisting really bothers people. We do need to come up with a way to involve people more in that whole discussion of how it happens, but I'm also not saying that we shouldn't be flexible enough to understand that things change.

I think that this amendment with its 12 hours and with its insertion of the insured services does give us some reasonable safeguards built around this first section in the bill. When I was speaking previously, I know I had been mentioning things like the idea that nothing had been done in the amendment to change these approved overnight-stay surgical facilities, whatever name we're calling them by now.

The other thing we have to remember is that legislation is not forever here. I mean, in my short time in this Assembly I've seen changes in the condo act from 1996. We're now amending it in the year 2000. It's only four years. I mean, if there's a real problem and adjustments need to be made, we can bring it back into this Assembly and open it up. [interjection] Well, actually if you had just waited, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, that would have been the very next thing on my list, talking about the number of changes and the number of times that the Municipal Government Act has come back into this Assembly. Well, I don't think that's a bad thing. If you didn't get it right, then keep bringing it back. We'll happily work on it. You know, there were problems with it. They were identified, and we brought the act back in again. How many times has it been back from the original time? Twice more since then. So in three years we've had it forward three times.

We don't need to be so concerned that the bill or these amendments be written in such a way that they're going to last us for 15 years. Let's be honest about it. The likelihood that the act will be back in front of us here in four, three, or two, like the MGA, is pretty high. Let's take the time to do it right; then it will last us a bit longer. This amendment takes us a little bit down the road towards doing it right.

Those were all the comments I wanted to make on this subamendment. There is no need for me to repeat the excellent arguments that have already been raised and brought forward by my colleagues. There's another colleague jumping up, and I will allow him to speak.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman. I rise tonight to speak specifically to the subamendment of the amendment. First of all, I'd like to talk about the duplicity that I've heard this evening coming from across the floor. When people argue that this is an unsalvageable piece of legislation and then proceed to suggest, as they have put before us, a subamendment to an amendment, it tells me that they want to be engaged, that they want to

participate in something but for no other reason than to spout what they believe are the inconsistencies in their own minds. So I find it very difficult to put any credibility to what they are saying with respect to their subamendment to the amendment.

However, having said that, I would like to say that the suggestions that they have made in this subamendment seem quite inconsistent with what I have heard from a number of people, particularly those in my own community and my own constituency. The concerns that they have raised have been around the area of patient care. They want to be sure that this system is there for them. They want to make sure that this system is able to deliver the services to them in a very timely fashion. If we are to limit the procedures or the surgical services that this particular bill speaks to, if we are going to limit those, then we are going to break into what is called the vision or the ability that this piece of legislation enables health authorities to do, and that is to provide surgical facilities other than in public hospitals, the ability to provide surgical services and to deliver surgical procedures that are in the best interests of patient care.

So if we are to limit it to 12 hours or less, then what we are in effect saying is that the clinical care guidelines, which I heard a great deal of from a number of my constituents, those clinical care guidelines which are the guidelines that govern the stay, if you will, or the length of stay that is postoperative for minor surgical procedures as well as major – in this case I'll make reference to minor surgical procedures – then those clinical care guidelines would be enabled, put in effect, and brought to bear upon any stay that an individual would have in a surgical clinic, having received a minor surgical procedure.

There has been a lot said about the Shouldice clinic. From my experience I'd like to make mention of it, because it happens to be a facility that delivers a surgical service to a number of individuals and has done so over many, many years. In fact, it is the norm to stay longer than 12 hours after a hernia operation. I don't know whether anybody here has been to that facility, but it happened to be almost in my own backyard when I was growing up. This is a facility that provides for many, many, many people in the province of Ontario and beyond the opportunity for them to receive a surgical procedure, to get health care provided to them, and all they need is their OHIP card. Because it was built in the days when there were only semi-private rooms offered there, now there must be that cost, if you will, for the semi-private room, which is added to the OHIP care.

However, that is something that many, many people very happily pay because it provides them the ease of access, the surety of their appointments, and the confidence in the fact that they are receiving this surgical procedure delivered by those who are experts in that particular field.

So I would like to return the discussion to, again, what I have heard most specifically from my constituents when they say: please, make sure that the standards of care that are administered in these surgical facilities are those that are in due respect to the care that the patients deserve. So it seems to me extremely limiting, Mr. Chairman, if we were to prohibit a surgical facility to allow individuals or to disallow individuals to stay beyond 12 hours. It is not looking at the care for the individual. It is more specifically looking at what are the rules and regulations so that we can say we are in favour of the public health care system delivery over and above the fact that the public health care system most prominently and essentially is there to deliver health care and surgical procedures offered to individuals under the best conditions, not only for the procedure being done but for that care which follows the procedure.

So for us, Mr. Chairman, to agree to this subamendment, I think would be quite counter to the sentiments that Albertans who have

spoken to me have expressed, and that is their desire to receive in these clinical or surgical facilities care that is specifically and very carefully and directly focused on the delivery of health care to the individual who has received that minor surgical procedure.

10:40

I would remind the opposition and those who are in effect proposing this subamendment that there are other areas of this bill – in fact clause 3, that immediately follows this section, begins a very restrictive designation, if you will, of how these surgical facilities as identified in section 2 should operate. So there is ample room in the rest of this bill to accommodate the concerns that we have that we must protect and regulate and give us as government the ability to regulate the procedures and the manner of operation in these surgical facilities.

Again I return to the fact that if you were going to limit the time of stay in these surgical facilities, then you are in essence saying that we really don't want to go by the best clinical care guidelines that are already established in the health care field. More than that, you are saying that we really, really don't want to give the best health care that we can possibly give to the people who have come to this facility to receive that service.

So to be so limiting I find is quite unvisionary. To be so restrictive I find is quite inhibiting. I believe the citizens of Alberta want us to put in place legislation that will not only protect the public health care system but will also make sure that in the delivery and implementation of our legislation we are not restricted from giving what is the best kind of health care that we possibly can give.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. MacDONALD: No. I was next, Mr. Chairman. I'm sorry. You recognized me before, and I was sitting waiting patiently for my turn.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has been here about half a dozen times trying to get his chance, then goes back out.

MR. MacDONALD: He goes back out. Exactly.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Chairman, I rise to speak on the subamendment before the House. Speaking the other day on the amendment itself, I observed that this amendment as proposed by the government proposes no change of any significance in the original bill and that the substance of the proposed amendment was highly questionable. There was very little in it of substance, in any case.

The government amendment that's being amended by the subamendment reads: "No physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta, and no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta." In this statement itself there is asymmetry. The first sentence only talks about "a surgical service," whereas the second sentence, which refers to what a dentist can or cannot do, talks about providing "an insured surgical service in Alberta."

Of course, the second part of the proposed amendment to which this subamendment refers says: "except in (a) a public hospital [or] (b) an approved surgical facility." Of course, the notion of an approved surgical facility has received lots of debate both inside this House and outside. Albertans have expressed and continue to express right at this moment, as we hear outside, their concerns about this far too fine a distinction that's being made between what is an approved surgical facility and what's a hospital.

Mr. Chairman, subamendment A1 is an attempt to lend some

substantive status to the government's amendment A1. In section (a) in the subamendment it is proposed that "no physician shall provide a surgical service" be struck out and be substituted with "no physician shall provide an insured surgical service." The word "insured," which was missing in the original amendment, is now inserted in the proposed subamendment.

It's important to note that this subamendment is highly significant. It restores the balance to the government's amendment that was proposed, where the government saw fit to indicate that dentists shall provide only insured services while the physicians could provide any service, insured as well as uninsured.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, we have a subamendment, so you can't have a second subamendment. You can't have a sub subamendment, so we won't be able to move another amendment at this time.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Chairman, I take your point. I'm speaking to the subamendment.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. It's just that your amendments had come up here.

DR. PANNU: I have amendments, but I'm not speaking to those at all.

THE CHAIRMAN: Good. Wonderful. Thank you.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

DR. PANNU: I'm speaking to the subamendment which was moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Chairman, if I may go on. Speaking to the subamendment moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, what I was saying was that the subamendment makes a very important change in the amendment as proposed by the government. I was speaking in favour of subamendment A1, section (a) on the grounds that it specifies that "no physician shall provide an insured surgical service."

Mr. Chairman, part (b) of the subamendment, "in clause (b)," proposes an addition to clause (b) of the government amendment, which refers to an "approved surgical facility." So the amended subsection (b) of the government amendment reads then: "an approved surgical facility that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours." That, I think, is a very, very important addition by way of the subamendment to the proposed amendment by the government.

Speaking on it the other day, I drew the attention of this House to the fact that the reason that I considered this first amendment in the package of amendments moved on that day by the minister of health really didn't speak to the central concerns about the bill that Albertans have been conveying to all of us. My constituents have been speaking to me about their concern with respect to this particular provision, and I'm sure that constituents of my colleagues have also indicated to them their serious objection to the notion of "approved surgical facility."

10:50

The amendment proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark does a great deal of service to all of us in that it clarifies that such surgical services will only handle surgeries that require no more than 12 hours of stay. If we were to approve this amendment – and I hope we do – we will do two things at least. We

will address the most serious objections that Albertans have, short of scrapping this bill, which would be their preference and which is what my advice has been to the House and to the minister of health as well, that the bill be dropped rather than proceeded with. But given the stubborn resolve that the government has shown not to listen to not only members of this House in opposition but also to a vast majority of Albertans, we have to find ways of salvaging this bill by making the most reasoned and reasonable amendments possible, given the stance of the government not to listen to any major changes in this bill.

So this rather innocent little amendment that's being proposed here will limit surgeries in the so-called surgical facilities to those which require under 12 hours of stay. That's how it should be.

The Premier, talking on this bill, has talked at length about how concerned he is to provide some regulatory framework for the so-called 52 day surgery clinics that presently operate in this province. If this amendment were approved and received the support of the House, then we'd have a framework within which the very thing that the Premier so desperately now wants to do all of a sudden would be possible for us to do within the overall framework of this bill.

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, the federal government has also belatedly made its position rather clear about whether or not the proposed "approved surgical facility," which is referred to in the amendment by the minister of health – and that amendment is being amended by way of this subamendment. The federal government has belatedly spoken to clarify its position whether within the Canada Health Act provisions such an approved surgical facility will indeed be treated as a hospital. The answer that the federal government has given to this question is yes, the Canada Health Act would see the approved surgical facility as nothing but a hospital, a point that Albertans have been making to this government ever since the introduction of this bill and a point that all of us have been making. Certainly I've been making it in this Assembly on this score, and my colleagues have been making it on this score.

So if this amendment of subsection (b) were to be amended as proposed by the subamendment A1, then this bill in its amended form will have met one of the most serious concerns that Albertans have about this bill, the reason Albertans find this bill unacceptable and the reason they're here tonight, were in the galleries, but they have not been able to return to the galleries if they left once. The galleries are locked, so I have met citizens who were sitting in those galleries waiting outside to be let in, but the galleries are locked up. They cannot get in.

These are the very citizens who are out there and were in here before. They are calling on this government, they're calling on us, this Assembly, to make sure that these approved surgical facilities do not have legislated authority to undertake surgeries which will require 12 hours or more of stay in these surgical facilities.

So we have here, then, in the making by way of this SA1 amendment a good direction in which we can move, on which we can all agree. All Albertans can perhaps be persuaded to agree and can feel somewhat assured, not fully assured but assured to some degree, that this Assembly has moved some way at least in addressing their concern. Also, we can move forward with some degree of certainty that the federal government's interpretation of the Canada Health Act and how that is seen to interpret this proposed approved surgical facility – that concern, that direction, which is clearly encoded in the Canada Health Act, can be respected as well as we as legislators, we as lawmakers, move forward our debate on this bill and take seriously our undertaking that the government has been trying to give to Albertans and to Canadians that this bill is designed to respect the Canada Health Act and the provisions of that Health Act.

If this amendment were to be defeated, I'm sure that this bill as

amended through the proposal of the minister of health will be in violation of the Canada Health Act. That much we know. So why would we then want to proceed in full knowledge of the fact that to make approved surgical facilities legal in this province, giving the licence for overnight stays, would violate the Canada Health Act? Yet we say that we respect the Canada Health Act. There's a contradiction there in the logic of the government's defence, and the contradiction lies in this, Mr. Chairman. The federal government has clearly said that the proposed approved surgical facility will indeed be a hospital, and if it's a hospital, then it cannot be approved, it cannot be legislated unless we want to ignore what the Canada Health Act says. We have hospitals in this province. We have very good surgical facilities available in those hospitals, and what's not there can be installed on short notice without proceeding with this bill, which includes the provision of approved surgical facilities, which if approved will offend the Canada Health Act, and certainly it offends the citizens of this province who are out there chanting right now.

We must listen to Albertans. We must listen to them for a change. We have underestimated their resolve to make us listen to them. There's no point in pointing fingers at them in the galleries if someone sitting there shouts. There's no point in saying that that is wrong if we don't pay attention to what Albertans are saying.

11:00

What Albertans are saying loudly over and over again, whether they get together in the tens of thousands or whether they get together in the hundreds in the rotunda of our own Legislature, is to remind us that it is our duty, that it's our obligation to listen to them, to respectfully listen to them. We can ignore what people say to us only at the risk of imperiling the democratic institutions that we have. In a democracy legitimacy of authority is very, very important. If people withdraw their trust in your power to make rules, then the rules that you make become unacceptable to people.

That's the danger that lies in our proceeding with this bill without considering either dropping the bill altogether or at least doing everything we can to bring in reasonable and thoughtful amendments. That's what this subamendment SA1, section A represents. It's an attempt, as a last resort, to bring all of us back to reason, back to a stance where we can say that we're open to listening to the people of Alberta. If we don't, we'll be creating a crisis of legitimacy in this province, a crisis of legitimacy that we will regret to have created in the wake of the debate on this bill and in the wake of passage of this bill if it's not properly amended and, better still, if it's not stopped and scratched. That's what I think Albertans want. That's what we should do. Short of doing that, at least we should give our support to a subamendment like this, which will make some improvements. It would go at least a small way toward indicating that we understand.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt, but your time is up.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise tonight and speak to the subamendment to amendment A1 as presented by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. She is to be congratulated for bringing this amendment forward. There is certainly no doubt that this was necessary. I'm surprised that it wasn't in the original bill, because it is in the original policy document that was presented by the government to

the people back in the middle of November, and I will elaborate on that in a few minutes.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Mr. Chairman, I listened with a great deal of interest to hon. members who have spoken before me. I heard about the Shouldice clinic. I heard about the Canadian health and social transfer. I heard about a variety of issues which are really current to the discussion on Bill 11, which is not only going on inside this Assembly but outside this Assembly all across the province, Mr. Chairman. There was also a concern brought up about patient care and how this is going to be dealt with. Of course, as in the subamendment here, the number one concern of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is patient care in the public system.

In starting my remarks, Mr. Chairman, I am going to refer to the policy statement on health principles as released by the government of Alberta. This was dated November 17, 1999. It was not a fireside chat. I don't know what you would describe it as, but it was certainly the start of this entire public discussion since Bill 37 and the blue ribbon panel report occurred. This was the start of the current stage of the government's attempt to privatize the health care delivery system.

Now, the mission here was to adhere to the principles of the Canada Health Act. I'm not going to get into that, because I want to speak specifically to this amendment. If we go down a little further, we read the proposed policy on contracting for surgical services. This is where I have to commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, because obviously she has detected something here. I don't know whether it was overlooked or whether it was omitted.

The government of Alberta proposes the following policy with respect to the delivery of surgical services:

1. All Albertans will have access to insured surgical services on a fair and equitable basis through the publicly funded and publicly administered health system.

That is why I have to commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for proposing this amendment to describe and provide insured surgical services. This is what's in this document as provided to the Alberta public by their government of the day. I can't understand why "insured" would have been inserted in the following phrase to start with in section 2(1) of amendment A1: "No physician shall provide an insured surgical service" in Alberta.

If we go further down in this policy document, we see that another goal on the proposed policy is this, Mr. Chairman:

3. Private providers of insured surgical services . . .

Here we see the word "insured" again.

. . . will operate only under the jurisdiction of a Regional Health Authority. There will be no private hospitals; there will not be a parallel health system.

We know that there are going to be private hospitals, and this is where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has struck the nail on the head with her amendment, because "insured" is key. It's key to the whole debate what an insured surgical service is. It is a necessary word. We can go through these amendments one by one and satisfy not only the crowd that's outside but all Albertans. Sixty percent of Albertans, poll after poll after poll, tell us they're not satisfied with Bill 11.

Now, we look also at another statement from the policy statement. In here it states:

4. Regional Health Authorities are responsible for determining the appropriate means for delivery of all insured surgical services.

There's that word again to describe insured surgical services.

Now, if it was to be included in the policy statement, perhaps in the description of surgical services, it should be included in the bill. This is why I commend the hon. Member from Edmonton-

Meadowlark, and I would encourage all hon. members of the Assembly, to quote the hon. Member from Edmonton-Rutherford, do the right thing and support this subamendment. It is crucial that “insured” be in there to describe surgical services.

11:10

We are going to, if we are to believe what was in the policy statement, leave everything up to the regional health authorities. The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations spoke earlier about how the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses was miles ahead in health reform. When they go around the province and talk to their members in the professional association, it is interesting to note that they have a map, and I believe their map has the province divided up into seven different regions, not the 17 that came about with the Regional Health Authorities Act. I would like to remind the hon. minister across the way of that fact.

When we talk about an approved surgical facility, what has everyone in the province upset is the length of the stay. I think we should remember that when we talk about an approved surgical facility, this is a hospital, and it is a private hospital. No one in this province wants a private hospital to have this ability to provide an insured surgical service and compete with the public hospitals – that’s what’s going to happen – and also compete with the public hospitals for health professionals, which are in short supply. I do not believe that in discussing this amendment at this time we will talk at length about the health professions and the shortage. It doesn’t matter which regional health authority you talk to. Every one of them is experiencing shortages in at least one discipline.

When we talk about the 12-hour stay and what exactly that means, I would commend the member for clarifying this, because if we don’t clarify the length of stay – and it certainly should be reduced – we’re going to have to start dealing with many other definitions. We’re going to have to deal with coinsurance, cost shifting, copayment, employer contributions, fee for service, health management organizations. These are all definitions Albertans will have to familiarize themselves with if they want to understand the government’s initiative with this bill.

The 12-hour stay as described here in this subamendment will satisfy the majority of Albertans, because that is exactly what is going on in the province now. When we talk about 12-hour stays, sometimes, Mr. Chairman, some hon. members of this Assembly get confused. They think that other provinces have these approved surgical facilities and they have more than a 12-hour stay. That is just – well, they’ve been misled or they’ve been misinformed. Certainly I wouldn’t say this is going to change anything, but I don’t think there is any need for change. This is reflected in the second part of the hon. member’s amendment, but there’s no consistency with this bill. What the hon. member is trying to do – and she certainly has her work cut out for her – is to give this bill some consistency and some direction, but it is difficult to see if the hon. members across the way are going to agree or not. I can only encourage them to support this subamendment.

In conclusion, I would like to remind all hon. members again that when we’re talking – this is the government speaking, the policy statement on health principles going back to November – about surgical services, the word “insured” is there before it. And it’s not on one occasion. In the entire document, when we describe a surgical service, we are using the words “insured surgical service” in an approved surgical facility.

So with those brief remarks, at this time, Mr. Chairman, I will cede the floor to another hon. member of this House. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise, although I hesitate to put it in these terms, and report progress.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:18 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Hierath	O’Neill
Cao	Jacques	Pham
Clegg	Jonson	Renner
Doerksen	Langevin	Severtson
Forsyth	Lougheed	Stelmach
Friedel	Lund	Tarchuk
Fritz	Mar	Trynchy
Graham	Marz	West
Hancock	McClellan	Woloshyn
Herard	Oberg	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	White
Gibbons	Olsen	

Totals:	For – 30	Against – 14
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[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

11:30

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports very little progress on the following: Bill 11. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with that report, minus the editorial?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 7
Alberta Science, Research and Technology
Authority Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate April 4: Mr. White]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman – Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry. I've spent so much of the evening seeing you in the chairman's chair that it takes a moment to readjust.

A couple of observations I wanted to make with respect to Bill 7. Let me go specifically to the things that give me some concern. First I'd say that I think the new section 4, dealing with ownership of intellectual property, makes some sense. If you look at the old section 9, it was sort of convoluted, and it makes some sense in terms of dealing with who's going to have the copyright or the patent or the industrial design equity interest. I mean, it makes sense to deal with that, and in fact I think it's much clearer in the way this is being presented. So I think that's a significant improvement.

I should say that I'm supporting the bill, so whatever comments I make, Mr. Speaker, should not be taken as criticism of the bill or at least a reason to vote against it. Unlike some members opposite, if I've got a concern with a bill, I expect my constituents would want to see those things identified on the record. So I'm going to take a moment, depending on how much encouragement I get from across the way, from Dunvegan, to go through the items that gave me some concern.

The first one is the new section 7, 16.1(5) and 16.1(6). Now, if you look at the existing Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Act and the provision for who is going to be appointed to the authority, we have the provision for appointing citizens to the authority. In the new bill what we've got is that the persons appointed to the Alberta Ag Research Institute "must include at least one member of the Legislative Assembly." You know, Mr. Speaker, I've watched with some concern as we have seen members of the government caucus appointed to a host of boards and agencies. I don't mean to be critical of individual members, but, you know, I'm not sure it represents necessarily value added to each one of those agencies. That's not because the MLAs who are appointed to the boards don't have talents and abilities.

DR. WEST: What a slam. Shame on you. What a slam.

MRS. FORSYTH: Very offensive.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I was going to make a couple of observations and sit down, but I see I'm being encouraged to develop this line of argument more fully. It's clear – the Member for St. Albert is so busy shaking her head – that I didn't make it clear, so I'm going to spend a little time, then, going through and trying to explain why I think this is a problem.

I think the difficulty is that it sends mixed messages to members of the public. You know, whether it's the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute or whether it's the Alberta Oils Sands Technology and Research Authority, there is some value in these groups being seen to be at least independent of government. I would assume that government would not appoint fools and incompetents to these various boards. Why is it felt necessary to install a government member on each one of these agencies? I mean, what's the reason that advantages the work of the different institutes and so on?

I think of the succession of people who have been on the AADAC board. I pick on that because AADAC is in the same office building where I have my constituency office. You know, it comes up from time to time, and you look at the succession of government MLAs that have been appointed to the AADAC board. The question is: do these groups really have any genuine independence from government? Maybe the answer is that there's no interest in having these groups independent from government. I think there is. I think it affects the credibility of the recommendations. I think it affects the weight – and I'm not talking about the weight that I assign to it; I'm talking about the weight of Albertans. We can go through, and

whether it's the Seniors Advisory Council or the board dealing with persons with disabilities, all those boards I think are in effect weakened and compromised by insisting on having a government representative on every one of them.

I note that it appears for each one of the boards that is covered in Bill 7, and I'm disappointed to see that. I haven't heard compelling reasons why we do it this way. The Member for St. Albert: I'm not sure what board she's on, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure she expects she's doing a darn effective job. But it seems to me that at some point we've got to look at what the impact is on the particular board or commission or agency. So I'm disappointed to see that, and I think it's not very helpful.

The other comment would be on page 5. If we look at 16, the new 16.12, where the institute, in the (b) part, "must, at the request of the Authority or the Minister, advise the Authority or the Minister on questions of science, engineering and technology," would it not make more sense to have the authority advise the Assembly? Why is it that we create these little loops where the minister gets advice from this group or that group?

You might use the example of the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. The mandate of that commission is to offer advice to the minister. Well, some of us wonder why we don't get more advice from that human rights commission to the Assembly. You can apply the same test right across, Mr. Speaker, to a whole range of different authorities. So I have a real concern in Bill 7 when I see that in both 16.12(b) and (c) we have recommendations going to the minister and no recognition that the executive branch is but one component of government. The other component is the Legislature, and it's effectively written out of this process.

The other thing is that the Regulations Act doesn't apply to bylaws of the different institutes. There's no compelling reason that's being offered why the Regulations Act wouldn't apply. The problem with these bylaws – and we find bylaws for each one of these organizations – is that they can be virtually inaccessible to Albertans that are interested. You know, you talk to reference librarians in the province, and one of things people have a lot of trouble finding are bylaws. Whether it's bylaws of a professional organization or bylaws of a quasi-public authority, it's tough to find those things. One of the things the Member for Peace River and I have both heard from different panels we've been on is that citizens say they want laws to be accessible, understandable. They don't want to have to follow some great chase to be able to find out what the law and the regulation that applies to them or their interest area, what those rules are.

11:40

We have a provision here that makes it difficult rather than easier for Albertans to get access to that information, and I think that's a step backwards. Section 16.3 talks about an annual report being done by the ag institute "in a form satisfactory to the Minister." What we have seen in this Assembly is that too many reports come in, frankly, that are not very helpful in terms of answering the questions people in the Assembly have, so whether the minister is satisfied or not may not be the test.

If you look at the proposed section 16.4(5) and (6), the same observation that I made to the ag institute applies. Similarly in the new 16.42, the energy institute, once again we've got the authority advising the minister on questions on science, engineering, and technology. Why wouldn't that be a resource to at least the Legislative Assembly? If the group does credible work and they develop some expertise, why do we have to rely on a minister who most often will not share the information with the legislative branch of government? So that's a problem in 16.4(2).

For section 16.5(2) my question is: why? Section 16.51: why would we do it that way?

Part 4, section 8, the proposed section 16.7: I've got a problem with 16.7(3) and (4). Again in the proposed 16.8(2). So those are the concerns I've got.

I think we could just do so much better and frankly make the authorities far more effective than they're going to be with the limitation imposed by Bill 7, and I would have hoped we would have learned something from the record of having so many government MLAs on a host of these boards and tribunals. I think there's a better way of doing it and a way to make these boards and agencies more effective.

I expect the government MLAs have lots of other things they can do to occupy their time. I'd hope that none of them have so much time on their hands that they have to wait for an assignment like this, so I hope we'd see some changes in that respect with respect to Bill 7. Otherwise, I'll support the bill, but I'd sure encourage the Minister of Innovation and Science to try and address some of those areas of concern.

Thank you very much.

MRS. SLOAN: Just a very brief comment with respect to Bill 7 this evening, and that relates to the amendments proposed to section 9 being repealed and a new section substituted. These areas deal with the issues of ownership, and I think these areas have been quite elaborated from what was in the original bill. Again, as is the common practice, we haven't had the privilege of any kind of consultation or recommendations from those parties affected, but it seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that what was in the previous bill,

all discoveries, inventions and improvements made in processes, apparatuses, or machines by a person while engaged under section 8(1),

is quite different than

the ownership of any invention, work, information or material, regardless of form, including any patent, copyright, technological or industrial design process or trademark acquired or produced by the person

that results from or is connected with a person's engagement under section 8.

To me, Mr. Speaker, the government has chosen to quite extensively expand its ownership rights under the amendments proposed to the Alberta Science, Research, and Technology Authority Act. I think particularly as researchers, regardless of what field they may be in, whether it's forestry, whether it's agriculture, whether it's energy, these researchers spend considerable time, a considerable number of years in their professional career making discoveries, establishing the basis for their research and products, and all it says here is that "the Authority may compensate a person described in subsection (1)" and we really don't have the benefit this evening of knowing whether or not that compensation will be fair, whether it will be negotiated or made on the estimate of the market value of that particular work, patent, copyright. How are we to be assured that researchers in this province will in fact be fairly compensated by this government given the vagueness of amendments proposed under section 9?

I also would like to raise a concern with respect to section 16, remuneration. It has been quite a common practice for the government to provide honorariums for those individuals that have provided service, whether it be on community health councils, whether it be in the child welfare area. It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, to be somewhat of an inconsistency to say that members who are not employees but are appointed by government to serve as members of the institutes, whether it be agriculture or energy, will in fact actually be paid an hourly wage, if I'm reading this amendment correctly. In addition to that they will be paid "traveling and living expenses." I think the government would be wise to consider having

some consistency as they increase the variety of appointments they make to these boards, albeit they're not elected, that there be some consistency in those processes.

Relative to the comments made about appointment of members of the Legislature to the authority, I would read from the sections proposed in the bill that we would be seeing members of any party or any jurisdiction in the House really eligible for appointment, and I would expect there would be some diversity of representation on the agricultural institute or energy institute boards with respect to that area.

With those comments I would conclude my remarks. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Bill 3 Statute Revision Act

[Adjourned debate March 14: Ms Blakeman]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 3, the Statute Revision Act, at second reading. As I read through it and the comments we have heard in this Assembly on this particular bill, I do have some concerns.

As I read the bill, it looks like once again this government is taking sweeping powers to revise the *Statutes of Alberta* under the direction of the Minister of Justice. As we have said many times in this Assembly, we don't approve of that at all and don't support it. Why? Because we've seen some rather shoddy legislation come through this Assembly, legislation that has required many revisions and amendments, and there's no guarantee that wouldn't happen again when we see the government try to make a major power grab and diminish the powers of the Legislative Assembly and strengthen Executive Council's power. So what we see happen is that bills get passed in essence as mere shells, and the real laws are put forward through regulations as set out by the minister or by orders in council. It just doesn't work for us at all.

11:50

In this bill the power certainly is excessive, and I particularly have concerns about section 3, where they talk about revision powers.

- (h) make minor amendments to clarify what is considered to be the intention of the Legislature;
- (i) make changes to reconcile apparently inconsistent provisions . . .
- (n) make minor amendments to other enactments not being revised that are required to reconcile them with a revised enactment as if the minor amendments were amendments consequential to the revised enactment.

All those sections send up serious red flags for me, Mr. Speaker.

As I understand it, there are some amendments coming that we'll be seeing in committee, and certainly this is a bill that requires amending, Mr. Speaker. So I am looking forward to seeing that set of amendments and listening to the government's comments as they come forward, and I will save the rest of my comments until that time, at which point I will be happy to engage in debate on the amendments as they come forward.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had hoped that we could just proceed to a vote, but I think it wouldn't be appropriate to

do that without making some comment on the comments we've heard tonight and comments we've heard previously in second reading.

Bill 3, the Statutes Revision Act, is simply that. It's the type of legislation which has been brought forward on a periodic basis every 10 years, in this case 20, to provide for the provision of an official consolidation of the statutes. This act that's being brought forward is entirely consistent with earlier acts that have been brought forward in this province since 1905. To suggest that in any way there's a power grab or executive lawmaking or any of those connotations which the hon. member tried again to allude to is absolutely untrue, unfounded, and patently inappropriate.

Now, I have agreed with the hon. Opposition House Leader, and we're working with the leader of the third party to bring forward some clarifying amendments. It's clear that there is absolutely no intention in this act to in any way take power or authority away from the Legislature, and there could not be in any way any attempt to write law outside the Legislature with this act. It is simply a process that is being brought forward, as has been done in the past, to

consolidate and provide an officially consolidated version with one exception – and it's a very important exception: to allow the authority to continue to do those consolidations on an ongoing basis as and when it's needed.

So I have to rise and protest most strongly again the connotation that there's something insidious or wrong about this act. It's a very valid act. It's a very appropriate act. It has the powers and the authorities that these acts traditionally have. It's being done in the traditional way, but because there's some wording in section 3 that members opposite take some offence to, I'm perfectly happy to see if there's a clarifying way to make sure the intent of the act is clear, that there's no intention to bring forward any executive lawmaking authority.

I just wanted to put that on the record again, Mr. Speaker, before we went to the vote.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

[At 11:55 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 18, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/04/18

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Lord, renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service of the people of this great province. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, a little patience. Today we have a few of them.

The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition signed by over 100 residents of the Drumheller, Rosedale, East Coulee, and Carbon region who support "the reinstatement of front license plates."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table a petition signed by 121 Albertans mostly from the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency urging the government of Alberta "to reinstate the front license plate on all vehicles registered in Alberta."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present I think the third in a series of petitions signed by a committed group of 63 individuals from the Edmonton area who are urging the government "to take a more enlightened preventative approach and add . . . medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition that's signed by 571 Albertans from Lethbridge, Coaldale, Coalhurst, Magrath, and Raymond. These

residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight. Employers must be responsible for their employees' safety! We are asking the Legislature of Alberta to pass a "Tara McDonald Law" to protect employees' lives.

This petition has been organized by Deb Dore and family, and this is Tara McDonald's mother.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: I have a petition signed by 239 Albertans from Lethbridge, Pincher Creek, Waterton, and Cardston urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table with the Assembly a petition from 245 residents of Alberta from Lethbridge, Coaldale, Coalhurst, and Medicine Hat. They do "urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care," sir.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. The first is signed by 75 residents of Edmonton, and their petition reads as follows: "We the undersigned, are in favour of adequate funding for our present medicare system, and are opposed to private-for-profit hospitals in Alberta."

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by 143 residents of Calgary, Cochrane, Edmonton, Westrose, St. Albert, and Sherwood Park, and their petition in support of public health care reads as follows.

To the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in Legislature Assembled:
We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table a petition signed by 280 citizens of the communities of Lethbridge, Taber, Coaldale, Brooks, Cochrane, Morley, Raymond, and Carmangay. The citizens are petitioning the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Assembly signed by 276 Albertans from Edson, Peers, Sangudo, Mayerthorpe, Evansburg, Barrhead, Tofield, Didsbury, Olds, Carstairs, Seba Beach, Carvel, St. Paul, Elk Point, and Dewberry. It states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition this afternoon as well. It's signed by 136 Edmontonians, and the petition urges the Legislative Assembly to "reinvest in the public health system rather than support private for profit health care systems."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 531 Albertans from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, Devon, Donnelly, Girouxville, Falher, Jean Cote, St. Albert, Leduc, Ardrossan, Spruce Grove, Warburg, Wabamun, Tofield, Bon Accord, Hinton, Grande Prairie, and Morinville. This brings the total number of signatures on the petition to well over 16,000.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled in the Legislature on April 6 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to provide respective Regional Health Authorities with the flexibility necessary to provide the delivery of publicly funded, publicly administered overnight surgical services cost-effectively and efficiently through the contracting-out of such services if deemed necessary.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you. I'd ask if the petition I presented the other day with respect to concerns about privatization of health care might be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday in opposition to changes to the health care system be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented from 951 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday regarding the concerns that people have about the privatization of health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Legislative Assembly on Monday, April 17 on behalf of 40 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees

MS GRAHAM: Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that the following four private bills proceed: Bill Pr. 1, Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the Province of Alberta Repeal Act; Bill Pr. 2, William Roper Hull Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 2000; Bill Pr. 4, Calgary Municipal Heritage Properties Authority Amendment Act, 2000; and Bill Pr. 5, Calgary Foundation Act. I request the concurrence of the Assembly in these four recommendations.

THE SPEAKER: Would all members of the Assembly in favour of concurring with the report, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

1:40

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 14, 15, and 16.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 29, 31, 32, 36, 37, 38, and 42.

Thank you.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table answers to Written Question 231 as amended and Written Question 232 as amended.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings. There are two letters, one from Edmonton from Mr. Norman Connors and another from Reverend Janni Belgum, chair, Church in Society Committee, Calgary presbytery, United Church of Canada. Both of these letter writers oppose Bill 11.

Two letters from high school students from Canmore, Mr. Speaker, are opposing any further developments of the Spray Valley. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of letters to be tabled, quite a list of people opposed to Bill 11. I'll proceed as quickly as possible and read out the names: Elsa Robinson Brighid McGarry, Carol Ward, Merrienne, Andree-Ann Thivierge, Eldred Stamp, Christina Arnold, Tom St. Clair, John Zurawell, Keith Leal, Mima Cecchetti, Charlene Ball, and a couple of others again by the same Merrienne, plus a list of 25 people who have phoned in the last couple of days asking that their opposition to Bill 11 be known.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have one letter to table this afternoon. It's from Dr. Meredith McKague of Calgary, who indicates her opposition to Bill 11.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I'm tabling copies of my correspondence dated April 17 to the Government House Leader with respect to his request for Liberal amendments on Bill 11.

The next three items I'll just do together to save time and say that it's basically a similar letter from three residents in Canmore registering objection to the Genesis proposal for Spray Valley from John MacLeod, Damian Martin-Lamartine, and Riley McGurk.

Thanks very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a copy of an e-mail to table for the benefit and information of the Assembly this afternoon. It's from Mr. Bob Blakey. He's a striking *Calgary Herald* employee and long-time resident of Alberta, and he's urging "the government to use its legislative power" to resolve that long and bitter labour dispute.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would table five copies of a summary of meetings held with Members of the Legislative Assembly by the Council of Alberta University Students in regards to tuition fees and loan arrangements.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, once again. One more tabling here: five copies of a story appearing in the *Edmonton Journal* today in which the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses calls on the government to axe Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of an exchange of correspondence between myself and the Minister of Health and Wellness regarding the government's support for contracts with private medical laboratories.

I also have the appropriate number of copies of a single-page document that is entitled Vote No to Bill 11. It was distributed at the rallies in Edmonton and Calgary regarding Bill 11, and it calls for some participation in cyberdemocracy by voting www.voteAlberta.org.

Mr. Speaker, finally, I have five copies of yet the third version of the Bill 11 debate summary for April 11, 2000, from the government of Alberta's web site on the progress of Bill 11 debate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to also table correspondence received from my constituents opposing Bill 11, 100 percent of which are opposed to Bill 11.

My second tabling is the most recent final report, *Children and Youth in Care Review: Listen to Their Voices*, published by the Saskatchewan Children's Advocate office, April 2000. Excellent reading, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table today, both of which are in opposition to the Genesis plan in the Spray Valley, the first of which is from Peter Vermeulen of north-west Calgary. In brief, he believes that the project "will destroy grizzly . . . habitat, compromise a major wildlife corridor." As well, he believes the environmental protection is of such natural import that it should be in federal jurisdiction.

The second is from Dr. Clive Pryburn from Canmore, and he starts out, sir, by complimenting the government. He admires that which the government has done in the past two years – deficit and provincial debt pay-down – but he does believe that the government is in error allowing this project to go ahead.

Thank you, sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. They are letters from Steve Arthur of Calgary and Bruce Green also of Calgary. Both are opposed to any further development in the Spray Lakes area of Kananaskis Valley.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to make two tablings today. They are from Martha McCallum and Dicksie Helm, and both of these tablings urge the government to reject a proposal for development of a high-priced resort/recreational facility in the Spray Lakes area near Canmore.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter to the Minister of Health and Wellness signed by four physicians: Dr. Schuurmans, Dr. Hanley, Dr. Wirzba, and Dr. Mackey. They are asking the government to assign

sufficient priority to the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis, an entirely preventable disease.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 30 visitors who are coming to us from NorQuest College today. They are accompanied by their instructor, Elaine Nichols. I did have a chance to meet half of them, and they're a very keen group. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you 124 grade 8 students from the Olds junior/senior high school. They are accompanied today by teachers Gayleen Roelfsema, Kelvin Beaudry, Garry Woodruff, Jolene Burgeson, April Curr, Kara McDonald, and Terry Miller. Also in the group are parents Gayla Moore, Cathy Kemmere, Dwayne Becker, Sandra Sawkins, Julie Brennen, Bob Loyek, Tami Gardner, Adeline Johnson, Grace Frost, Sharon Pederson, Jean Sutherland, Betty Astell, and Bev Toews. Unfortunately, they can't all be in the members' gallery at the same time, and they will be changing shifts at 2 o'clock, so we could have them pass on the greetings. I would ask all who are in the gallery now to stand to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today visiting the Legislature are 21 special guests from Erskine school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Hank Boer, and parent helpers Mrs. Cindy Long, Mrs. Sandy Rairdan, and Mrs. Wendy Volker. Unfortunately, this group is not in the Assembly right now but will be here later. I would like for us to recognize them. I would ask that we give them the warm welcome, and it can be recorded in *Hansard*.
Thank you.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce two queens of the north. They are good friends of our government, and they truly are two senior citizens that make our province "the True North strong and free." I'd like to ask two ladies who have lived on this earth almost nine decades, Olive Woodward and Marthe Lovett, to stand and receive the warm welcome of all members of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and to my colleagues in the Assembly today the spokesperson for Friends of Medicare, Christine Burdett, and her son Kevin Burdett, both of whom are sitting in the public gallery. I would now request them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly Don Mitchell, who's a representative of the coalition of unions, and their focus is to prevent health care privatization. I wish Don to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night hundreds of Albertans came to this Legislature, their Legislature, to show their support for public health care and to show their sense of betrayal over this government's private health care policy. In fact, these citizens have been incited to protest by a government that refuses to listen. One way to stop the wrath of Albertans is to withdraw this fatally flawed policy. My first question is to the minister of health. Will the minister finally listen to Albertans, given that the Premier won't, and live up to his responsibility as a minister and a trustee for the health care system and pull his private health care policy?

Speaker's Ruling Inflammatory Language

THE SPEAKER: Once again I'm going to give the daily reminder about argumentative, opinionated, incitive language in the House, and if it continues, I'm going to move on to the next person I'm going to recognize.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the government is listening to Albertans with respect to this very important and necessary piece of legislation. We have demonstrated this by introducing a number of significant amendments to the legislation. We have committed more time as an Assembly under the government's leadership to debate of this bill than any other piece of legislation on record or certainly since I've been privileged to serve here, and we will continue to proceed as the government.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, my next question is to this minister as well. Can he possibly explain how this government has become so detached, so arrogant that it is ignoring the will of the people when it comes to public health care?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the overall approach of government we are proceeding with this important piece of legislation. We have made health care in this province a priority in terms of our budget allocations, a very significant increase in funding. We are developing new programs and expanding others and improving the quality of health care as resources permit and making health care in this province a priority for the government.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, my third question is to the Minister of Justice. Will this minister confirm that this building will remain open to allow Albertans to show their passionate support for public health care?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Legislative Assembly is open to the public. We have public galleries. I would anticipate the

public will be allowed to view the operations of the Assembly from the public galleries tonight as usual.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the words of an Albertan who was here at this Legislature last evening: "We've seen the cutbacks, we've seen the promises, and we have seen the lies. It's time Albertans stood up and said: no more." My questions are to the minister of health. Why doesn't the minister live up to his leadership obligation and respect the will of the people?

Speaker's Ruling Improper Questions

THE SPEAKER: The purpose of question period is for hon. members to ascertain information of the government, not to ask questions on behalf of other people, and there are enough precedents in all those documents that have been written with respect to this matter. So I'm going to ask the hon. minister to ignore the usage of the word "lies," which I view as totally inappropriate in the context of the question period, and to focus on the part of the question that he feels worthy of response.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to very briefly indicate that our provincial budget, which has been dealt with in this Assembly, is evidence of the priority that the government places upon health care in this province. Within that overall plan are initiatives which are actually leading Canada with respect to innovation and change and certain areas of increased funding. We will continue to place a high priority on quality health care in this province.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is this minister refusing to withdraw his private health care policy because of the threat of lawsuits by private operators?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the answer is no, and I feel it's rather ironic although not surprising given the statements of the hon. leader favoring a two-tiered health care system that she is now on the side of the private operators.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, what was it that caused this minister to invest taxpayer dollars in public health care facilities in Ponoka but to do a complete about-face and recommend private health care facilities for the rest of the province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member and opposition leader should know, there is a process. There are criteria which are followed in the approval of capital projects. The government has a very extensive multimillion dollar commitment to new facilities in this province: a new hospital in High Level, a new hospital in Manning, other additions which I would be pleased if my colleague the Minister of Infrastructure would like to outline to the Assembly.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the public dollars that are going into public facilities, I'd like to very quickly inform the Assembly that we have invested over \$947.2 million since '92-'93 in about 276 capital projects. I don't want to take the Assembly's time all afternoon to read off the hundreds of

projects that have taken place and are being constructed in the province today, but new health centres in Airdrie, Drumheller, Fort McMurray, Grand Centre, High Level, Lamont, Manning, Medicine Hat, Peace River, Ponoka, Sherwood Park, Spirit River, Stony Plain. If we have more time this afternoon, I could even add further to that list.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

2:00

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Time and time again this government has used the Shouldice hospital as an example for its private health care policy. What the government hasn't told Albertans is that Shouldice operates as a grandfathered, licensed private hospital without any contractual guarantees from the government of Ontario, and it's not for profit. So my questions are to the minister of health. Why did the minister fail to tell Albertans that the Shouldice hospital returns its profits to the taxpayers? It goes back to the department of health.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the Shouldice hospital is operated under a foundation. I further understand that the physicians that work at the Shouldice clinic are opted out of the Ontario medical care plan, so they can be reimbursed as to the level that the foundation board deems appropriate.

With respect to the grandfathering, Mr. Speaker, I have indicated that this clinic has operated for many years in the province of Ontario. That is nothing that is new to this Assembly; it's been reported before.

MS LEIBOVICI: They operate under the same fee guide.

Given that the government's health care policy is to contract with private surgical facilities, is it the government's intention that these private facilities here in Alberta will return their profits to the taxpayers just like Shouldice in Ontario does?

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: It seems to me, hon. minister, that on the agenda again today is some discussion on the Order Paper with respect to a particular bill, and there is a clause-by-clause review of a particular bill that's already been scheduled.

Secondly, the Shouldice hospital in Ontario does not come under the ministerial responsibility of anyone in the province of Alberta.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, do you want to proceed?

Private Health Services (continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Absolutely.

Will the minister give Albertans a guarantee that private facilities in Alberta will not get a guaranteed minimum for payment of any procedures that are provided in their facilities?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, to answer the question I have to refer directly to the legislation.

THE SPEAKER: Well, we're not going to do that because we're going to have a discussion clause by clause later today.

The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tens of thousands of

Albertans have attended rallies and health care forums in every corner of this province for the last two months, yet this government refuses to listen. Instead, it insults and belittles prominent Albertans who disagree with this approach. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What steps will the minister take to correct the harm caused by his chief spin doctor's comment that the president of the Alberta registered nurses is indulging in rhetoric and is just plain wrong?

Speaker's Ruling Improper Questions

THE SPEAKER: I take it that this particular person made these comments in this Assembly? Other than that it tends to be hearsay. Now, hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, if you want to make a comment, you go ahead and answer.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, it's not hearsay. I tabled the document today in the Legislature.

So let me proceed with my second question.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the third party, the chair would not know what the hon. member has tabled. Please go ahead.

Private Health Services (continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What does it say about the state of democracy in this province when the president of the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses is not allowed to express principled opposition to government policy without being belittled and insulted by the chief spin doctor in the minister's office?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of inaccurate portrayals from across the way. There was a case I believe about three or four days ago in question period where I pointed out that on literature from the opposition party the bill was deliberately, I assumed, misnamed so it could create a false impression with respect to the content of the bill. This type of thing unfortunately does occur.

With respect to any particular specific the member is referring to, I think the facts of the case would have to be checked out.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is also to the minister. Why has this government that he's a member of, which ran in the last two elections on a platform of listening to Albertans, suddenly stopped doing so, choosing instead to steamroll with his policies of health care privatization?

MR. JONSON: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, we have I think demonstrated our commitment to having very thorough debate over the legislation that is being referred to. We have spent more time on this bill than any previous bill in this Assembly's history as far as second reading is concerned. We are now into many hours of debate in committee. The government has reviewed the input from Albertans and has introduced a comprehensive set of amendments which deal in very great detail with concerns that had been raised. So the contention of the hon. member I just do not agree with.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Medical Research

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been recently reported

that two of the country's leading medical researchers are moving to Alberta and specifically to the University of Calgary. These are two skilled and renowned researchers in their respective fields, and their intention to locate in Calgary is a real coup for the province of Alberta. My question this afternoon is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. Can the minister advise whether the Department of Innovation and Science played a role in recruiting these prominent researchers?

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. The two researchers are Dr. Frank Jirik and Dr. Jay Cross, and both of them are medical doctors and will practise medicine as well. We are excited to have them here.

Dr. Jirik is creating 18 positions for people at the university. These are highly skilled, highly paid positions. He's going to have quite a lab there. Now, what caused him to come here is that he's moving into a new lab that was partially funded obviously by the departments of Learning or Infrastructure through unit funding to the university. Also, we have a funding envelope in our department called the research excellence envelope, which is attempting and is determined to attract research excellence from across the country and across the world. So that applies to Dr. Jirik. His research is in the area of arthritis and cancer and several other areas.

Dr. Cross is coming from the University of Toronto. Once again, the research excellence envelope helped to attract Dr. Cross. Without that, these people would not be here.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to that answer, I'm wondering if the same minister would say what immediate next steps are being taken by his department to attract other highly qualified researchers to the province?

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of steps I might mention. One is the creation of ICORE, the informatics circle of research excellence. It's a \$30 million commitment by this government to attract researchers in the area of computing and information communications technology. We recently placed the ads for people, and we're negotiating right now with a lead researcher in Europe and a lead researcher in the U.S. in the area of wireless and Internet protocol. Researchers are interested in having their research funded, and if we can guarantee continuity of research funding, these people will come.

2:10

Another step: we've just passed Bill 1 with an initial commitment of \$500 million to AHFSER, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research. That will increase \$100 million a year for the next five years to create a billion dollar fund, and we can attract research. We're the only jurisdiction in North America that is doing this. I recently spoke in Seattle, and they had heard about it already down there and were asking me about it and were excited.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. I'm wondering if the minister can say what policies his department, the Department of Health and Wellness, has in place to increase the number of practising physicians in the province.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in terms of people practising in the health care system of the province, we have announced an increase in internship positions available for graduates of the medical schools in the province: 20 this year and a further 20 the following year for a total of 40. We are going to have discussions with Alberta

Learning on an ongoing basis to look at our overall capacity for the training of physicians, because that is certainly a very important matter to be addressed in the longer term.

Further to that, of course we have our rural physician action plan, which has been very successful in attracting physicians to rural areas. Contrary to some impressions that're left by some people, our overall physician component during the last complete year has increased by about 250 physicians in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the government handed over facilities and equipment worth millions of dollars to private investor-owned medical laboratories some five years ago, they did so based on a document which I tabled earlier in the Assembly. This document, titled Laboratory Restructuring Proposal, was to serve as a template for this privatization. I'd like to quote from that document.

In Edmonton, Calgary and some other urban communities, the regional boards would be required to enter into contracts or joint venture arrangements with one or more investor owned laboratories to provide comprehensive services.

My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the government be using this laboratory model, this template, for RHAs when they contract out surgeries to investor-owned, overnight surgical centres?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it's extremely important to keep in mind that the private sector has played a major role in the provision of laboratory services in this province since well before the advent of the Canada Health Act and the public health care system as we know it. They continued on with the passage of the Canada Health Act, and this is perfectly allowed all across this country under the Canada Health Act's application in the various province.

When the regional health authorities were formed back in the early 1990s, it was necessary to make sure that there was an opportunity on a fair basis for the laboratory companies that had been providing sound and quality service to those areas of the province to have an opportunity to enter into a new contractual relationship with the regional health authorities because the previous governing structure under which they were contracted, the local hospital boards, et cetera, no longer existed.

MR. SAPERS: I think he said no, Mr. Speaker.

I quote again from the government's document. Given the principle

to ensure that provincially funded facilities do not have a price advantage over investor owned labs, regional boards will no longer have access to provincial funding for capital equipment,

are there plans to cut the regional health authorities capital budgets so that public hospitals don't have a so-called price advantage over private hospitals or surgical centres?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reference to plans that the hon. member makes are rather convoluted and vague.

I'd just like to point something out to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the Assembly, and that is that we have in the province today very sophisticated laboratory services, which are serving the province rather well. In the course of reorganizing services around the

regional health authority model, there was realized some \$50 million in terms of overall cost savings. As I've indicated to you before, the material being referred to is material which was needed to be provided in policy terms to bring about the transition to the regional health authorities.

MR. SAPERS: To the same minister: is there a plan for mandatory joint ventures in contracting out between regional health authorities and surgical facilities just like the mandatory contracts that were imposed by your government with the private laboratories?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government has recently announced a review of MRI services in Alberta and implied that access in Alberta was perhaps less than in other provinces in the country. Subsequently, on Friday of last week the Alberta government announced that both Edmonton and Calgary will receive two more MRI machines. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister please advise whether Friday's announcement was a direct response to the review by the federal government?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. I would draw members of the Assembly's memories back to a number of other questions that have been put forward with respect to MRIs and the capacity in various parts of the province for that particular diagnostic service. I have indicated on at least two previous occasions that we have been first of all planning for the expansion of diagnostic services. We have had an expert committee working on that and advising us.

Secondly, we have indicated over the past number of months approvals for MRI units in the Chinook region at the Lethbridge regional hospital, and that unit is up and running now, Mr. Speaker. Approvals have also been given for the installation of MRIs in Red Deer, in the David Thompson region; in Grande Prairie, in the Mistahia region; and in Medicine Hat, in the Palliser region. Very recently we announced the significant expansion of those services going forward in Edmonton and Calgary.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I appreciate the clarification.

Given that the announcements of the new MRIs is welcome news, the fact remains that waiting lists for MRI services are already long now, and it will take at least six months for the new units to be put in place. What, if anything, will the government do to address the current situation in the meantime?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the regional health authorities will be running their existing magnetic resonance imaging units to maximum capacity according to the staff and the resources they have available. I note that they are running far beyond the usual eight-hour days, usually being in full operation about 14 hours a day.

I'd also like to indicate, Mr. Speaker, that there's always provision for an emergency MRI to be done in the major cities should that be needed at any particular hour. There is also in Calgary a plan to enter into a short-term contract with a private MRI facility to provide

additional scans until such time as their two new units are up and running.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell us whether or not the addition of the two MRIs will be sufficient to adequately meet Albertans' needs for MRI services over the longer term?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is our judgment that when all of the MRI units that have been announced are up and in full operation, we will be meeting the need. We will be providing I believe somewhere in the neighbourhood of 42 scans per thousand of population, which is a measure that's used in comparing the provinces. This would bring them up to slightly over that of the leader right now, which is Ontario.

2:20

Child Welfare

MRS. SLOAN: Children's Advocate reports for the last decade have continuously raised warnings about this government's underfunding of child welfare and the accompanying impacts of the fiscal limitations imposed year after year on these services. Yesterday the fatality inquiry report into the untimely death of Jordan Quinney raised once again these same issues. My questions today are to the Minister of Children's Services. How do you explain your government's inaction in addressing these ongoing issues that have now been attributed to the death of a child in your care?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the death of a child anywhere is always a tragic loss not only for the family but for all Albertans. I take seriously the responsibility as Minister of Children's Services for the death of any child that is in government's care and protection.

We have fully accepted and acknowledged through the special case review process the recommendations that were made to us. We have in fact instituted and assured and confirmed that the training for all of the workers that was suggested in that review process would be in place so that proper training for workers is in place before they make very important decisions in regards to children.

In the release yesterday that has been provided, we have acknowledged further our belief that those recommendations are appropriate. If there's anything we take some satisfaction from, Mr. Speaker, it's the fact that it's recognized that our department, Children's Services, has followed through with commitments and recommendations made in the special case review.

MRS. SLOAN: To the same minister: what evidence will be sufficient to prompt your cabinet to allocate sufficient funding to ensure that vulnerable children in the care of this government are safe?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, a number of initiatives through the past year have been addressed as it related to children's authorities. The Children's Advocate review has in fact cited some of those areas that we have to improve upon that are areas of emphasis as we review the budgets of the child and family service authorities.

In terms of children that are very highly at risk, the work that we're doing on early intervention, early assessments, the work that we're doing with the Foster Parent Association, the work that we're doing in training child care workers and day care workers, every part of our training, every part of our work with the universities and colleges, whom I met with yesterday, is geared to making sure that in the very first instance when the parent is unable to follow through with the appropriate services and care of the child, we take action, that we assess the situation and follow through. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: I can't believe, hon. members, that when an hon. member is given the floor to ask about the death of a child and when an hon. member of Executive Council is responding, there would be members in this House who have to interject. I just find that astounding.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Child Welfare (continued)

MRS. SLOAN: When, Madam Minister, will the adequate protection of children in care be a priority for this government equal to tax reform and reduction?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, in the task force report that we released yesterday, *Start Young, Start Now*, we identified that in many circumstances throughout the province there are excellent programs provided, but one of the particular concerns was the duplication of effort and support that is provided. In other words, we are frequently putting support in some areas where other gaps exist.

Mr. Speaker, an assessment of that will be done not only by myself as Minister of Children's Services but by all of the partnering members of the Alberta children's initiative, all of the other ministers who will, as I will, address those areas of program delivery to determine what gaps in fact exist and where the priorities can be given. I feel assured, as our Premier stated yesterday, that where we can provide funds and institute change and where it is demanded and needed, we will do so.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Catholic School Board Boundaries

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Learning provided members of the Assembly with an update on a proposal put forward by Alberta's three school board associations related to the formation of separate school districts. As part of this update the minister advised us that school boards across Alberta were meeting last week to vote on this proposal. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Can you advise us as to what took place at this vote or what the results were?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The vote was held on Friday. Of the 61 school boards that participated in the vote, 37 voted against it and 24 voted for it.

MR. BRODA: My first supplemental: what are the next steps to be taken in resolving this long-standing issue?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the interesting point about this whole process is that following the vote, the school board chairmen that were present agreed unanimously to continue talking about this very important issue and to come up with a resolution of this very important issue as soon as possible.

MR. BRODA: My final supplemental to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: could you please advise us whether a time line has been set to complete this next phase of work?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I have not been formally notified of a time line. There has been some suggestion that they are working towards an October time line. I would say, though, that that time line is not hard and fast from my department.

I think what needs to happen is that the three associations need to get together. They need to sit down; they need to come up with a resolution that everyone will understand, that everyone will support and bring it forward to me. It may or may not need legislative changes. It probably will, but that's one of the things we'll be looking at.

Hopefully something will be brought forward in the near future, whether it's October, whether it's August, whether it's December. Again, I'll reiterate that it's a very critical issue to schools in Alberta, and I hope that there is a resolution that is brought forward.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Private Health Services

(continued)

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is now day 12 since the Premier promised to release the 30 blank pages of responses from his private hospitals focus groups once the opposition released its research. The government's stonewalling is very reminiscent of the Premier's 90-day health care action plan. It's now in day 1,663. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister stop the nonsense and release the full 30 pages of responses from the private hospitals focus groups now?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that this matter is being dealt with according to the legislation and the procedures and time lines that apply.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: will the minister assure Albertans that the full 30 pages of responses from the private hospitals focus groups will be released and not a sanitized version?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite sure that there are no documents such as the person refers to, and that is dealing with private hospitals.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Foldable Intraocular Lenses

MR. STEVENS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Last week the government announced that the softer foldable lens sometimes used in eye cataract surgery will be fully paid for by the public health care system effective April 12. Some people who had paid for this lens from their own pocket before that date are asking where they stand now in light of this change. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: will patients who have already paid for this foldable lens be reimbursed by the government for their costs?

2:30

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the answer is no, if they have not yet been scheduled or had the surgery. There are cases, however, where a person had the surgery scheduled prior to the date of the announcement and also paid for the lens, and in those particular cases they will be reimbursed.

As with many changes with respect to coverage, whether it is

pharmaceutical products or in this case an appliance, there is an upgrading here. Yes, there is an additional area of coverage for the public of this province, but there is also a definite starting date, and the date of this being announced is the point from which people will not have to pay.

MR. STEVENS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the foldable lens now become the standard lens used in cataract surgery throughout Alberta?

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker, the standard foldable lens will be provided as part of an insured service when cataract operations take place. That is what the change is about. It is an upgrade of the appliance being used. Upon the advice of people working in the field, we have chosen a particular level or quality of lens of the foldable type, and that is what we will be funding.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: why was this change made now?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we covered the solid or rigid lens under our overall insured coverage. The technology, the material used, the type of lenses that are available have advanced in terms of the treatment of eyes and following up on cataract surgery, and after assessing the situation and finding the advice was that there was a clear medical benefit to having a standard foldable lens, we made the decision to provide that coverage.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has told Albertans that this government's policy to allow overnight stays in approved surgical facilities will not endanger the lives of Albertans. Well, allowing for overnight stays in private surgical facilities which are not fully equipped, according to the members of the J. Dosseter Health Ethics Centre at the University of Alberta, is a danger to the health of patients and thus ethically is unacceptable. My first question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: how are these private surgical facilities going to cope if a patient experiences complications beyond the ability of the surgical centre to treat?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have currently in the province some 152, as I recall, day-surgery procedures that are provided in a clinic setting. They have been provided for well over a decade. They were provided and approved by the government at the time the Leader of the Opposition was health minister and certainly expanded a great deal at that particular time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, very rarely there are unfortunately occasional cases where they need the services of a hospital emergency ward. Provisions are there to seek additional help and to transfer to an emergency setting for proper treatment when some difficulty arises.

MR. GIBBONS: To the same minister: will this government admit that its policy of pushing for overnight stays in surgical facilities will not improve health care but will put the lives of Albertans in jeopardy by placing them in clinics which are not equipped to deal with a real emergency?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the track record, the quality control with respect to what we do have to refer to right now – and that is over 50 day-surgery clinics in this province – is very, very good in terms of safety and quality treatment. They have a very good record

in this province, and I'm sure that same level of quality will be maintained in overnight stay surgical facilities.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, see what you create with the seeking of opinion? Keep going.

MR. GIBBONS: To the same minister, a question that I asked yesterday: what deal is so important that this government is willing to put the lives of Albertans in jeopardy? [interjections]

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the member's colleagues were enjoying his question so much, I did not hear. Perhaps it could be repeated.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Child Care

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend about 300 child care workers gathered in Calgary to look at what they're calling the wage crisis for child care workers in Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. What is the minister doing to address the concerns of these child care workers in Alberta?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I have met with the network of child care providers who have approached me and identified a number of options that we could discuss. I think that on reflection the operating allowance that was provided for families with children in need was exactly the right way to go. Today we serve more families. We serve families with dual incomes. We are able to provide more money for more families receiving child care.

Mr. Speaker, one of the options that I related in this House last week relative to training is that we could expand in fact some of the options of training, and we're looking at that. We expended \$370,000 last year training level 1 child care workers. They apply for that directly through the colleges, and we subsidize the colleges. As I've stated earlier, one of the ways that we can help enhance the opportunities for retention of staff is assuring that we're providing options and opportunities for training and support of those staff.

Mr. Speaker, one final note. Those same people from the day cares, for example, have determined that they would like to make a presentation to government, and I understand that they will be doing that in the near future.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: in the matter of training needs identified from the special case review in the death of a child, what specific action has been taken in this respect?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the time of the special case review was prior to the actual implementation and the opportunities for local child and family service authorities to be fully up and running, but since that time there has been extensive work under way with those agencies as well as with child welfare workers to provide and ensure that child protection services training is available for the workers. As I indicated earlier, our relationship is such with Justice that we ensure the adequacy of those courses provided, that child protection workers have in fact got all the training they need, and even those that are home workers and others that are in charge of children at risk or families at risk will always be assured of having been provided services.

Mr. Speaker, we are working on tools for assessing risk from May

until September this year. It is a pilot that we hope will enable us to make sure that we have child care protection workers fully cognizant of all the risks when children are in care, risks that might lead to very tragic conclusions.

One final item, Mr. Speaker. One of the key components of a CPS training program is to know how to identify abuse and to expand and improve information for workers and for that sharing. These are some of the ways that we hope to address some of the tough questions that have arisen as a result of the death of a child.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Political leaders can strongly influence our life. As Kevin Taft said in 1997:

People with differing points of view can be sincerely considered, or they can be called humiliating names. Governments can help people get a fair break and build a better society, or they can further enrich and empower those who are already rich and powerful.

My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why does this government call people left-wing nuts instead of sincerely listening to them?

2:40

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, members of government caucus have, I know, been extensively meeting with people all across this province in their constituencies and other constituencies. They have been reading their correspondence, replying to correspondence, and they have brought their views to the table of government. We have introduced extensive legislation dealing with key issues brought to our attention, so I think we have demonstrated that we are following the proper model and fulfilling our responsibility in government.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. This question is also to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why does this government not build a better society instead of promoting the privatization of health care, which will benefit a few who are already rich and powerful?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to preface my answer by saying this, and that is that the government is not taking sole credit in any way for what a great province we are privileged to live in. The province of Alberta is a place which is a destination sought by many people in terms of relocating, whether they are coming to do business and to pay taxes and to support our government services or whether they are seniors, which are very welcome, who are coming here to access some of the programs that we have. Our population is growing steadily. We are regarded as a good place to live because of our education systems, because of our health care systems.

Therefore, I think we are following through to the best of our ability in taking our responsibility in government very, very seriously and taking advantage of what is Alberta.

MS BLAKEMAN: After the thousands of people who have protested this weekend and the hundreds more last night, will the government finally tell the truth about why it wants to privatize more health care? Why? Who benefits?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, that question violates Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) by going to aspersions, so we're going to wrap this up.

In 30 seconds from now we're going to have the Clerk stand up and call Members' Statements.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Bill 11 Protest at the Legislature

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night in this Assembly we saw democracy come through the doors. Nearly 500 Albertans came into their Assembly and made it clear that they want the government to kill Bill 11. They made it clear that their MLAs were elected to represent the public good for Albertans. MLAs are not elected to bend to the wishes of a few who want to get rich by pushing an agenda of private health care.

Democracy is about the will of the people. It is about freedom: free votes, free speech, and freedom of association. Every member in this Assembly was elected to make good decisions on behalf of their constituents. MLAs have a responsibility to listen to their constituents. Listening does not mean nodding in agreement and then dismissing the views of those constituents. It means giving careful consideration to all ideas and looking at all the facts. It requires MLAs to understand the issue at hand and to make decisions based on the collective will of the people. It means, Mr. Speaker, that a democratic Assembly must use its collective wisdom if the people are to continue having trust and faith in the democratic process.

Last night's peaceful protest was a success due in part to the professionalism of the Legislature security. They handled a difficult situation with calm and reason. I would like to commend them for the job they did. They're an important part of the democratic process. Other staff essential to the operation of this Assembly are to be commended for going about their business with calm and professionalism as well.

Tonight we expect another successful demonstration to occur. I know the doors of this Assembly will remain open to the people of Alberta. It is their Assembly, after all. Democracy is not always quiet, and sometimes the will of the people needs to get loud to be heard.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 207 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act

[Adjourned debate April 12: Mr. Paszkowski]

MR. GIBBONS: I'm pleased and proud to stand today to speak in support of Bill 207, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act. This is the first private member's bill to be put forward by the Leader of the Official Opposition in this spring session. It speaks to the importance of creating stable and predictable funding for Alberta's municipalities.

It has been my pleasure for the last three years to hold the position of Official Opposition shadow critic for Municipal Affairs in this Legislative Assembly. In this capacity I've traveled the province extensively, meeting Albertans as well as municipal administrators and elected leaders from both the rural and urban municipalities. In attending the AUMA and the AAMDC regional conferences and their conventions, I've had the pleasure of speaking with and getting

to know about 60 percent of the elected municipal officials in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 is brought forward with the best intentions. The Official Opposition wants to engage all members in discussion of how we can ensure stable and predictable funding for our municipalities and our communities. It is about realigning existing revenue sources to meet roles and responsibilities. It is not about creating a new source of revenue. The source of revenue we're talking about is the taxpayer. The provincial government must respect the taxpayer and be committed to working with Alberta's municipal leaders toward responsible funding arrangements for communities. Bill 207 is a framework for discussion. That is what Bill 207 and the provincial-municipal tax sharing calculation are about.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to respond to some of the comments made by the Minister of Municipal Affairs regarding this constructive piece of legislation. On April 11 in this Assembly the Member for Livingstone-Macleod raised a point of order so that the Minister of Municipal Affairs could try to avoid debating this bill. These hon. members tried unsuccessfully to state that this is a money bill. They tried to say that this bill is about creating a new source of revenue. As I've already said, this is not about creating a new source of revenue; it is about equitable, predictable sharing of existing revenue. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod have both been members of this Assembly long enough to know that political games should not be played when constructive legislative initiatives are presented. I am pleased to let these members know that their reluctance to debate this bill, a bill which is intended to establish stable and predictable funding for Alberta and municipalities, will be widely communicated.

The minister has been critical of this bill on several points. He raised concerns because he feels that there are necessary components missing. As the minister is well aware and pointed out, this is a private member's bill and therefore cannot be what is described as a money bill. When the Leader of the Official Opposition made her opening remarks on Bill 207, she noted that this is a framework for discussion. She also noted the limitations that are placed on private members' bills.

2:50

There are other areas of provincial/municipal relations where the minister has said some troubling things, and I would like to take a moment to clear up this misinformation. In his comments on April 12 regarding Bill 207 the minister indicated that the government is "reviewing the education property tax." This so-called review will see education property tax increase from \$651.2 million in 1995 to a projected \$774.7 million in 2002. This, Mr. Speaker, is a projected increase of 19 percent. The only long-term solutions that the government has publicly suggested for replacing the education property tax are a 4 percent sales tax and a 38 percent increase in provincial income tax. Those figures are from the hon. minister in this Assembly on March 13 of this year.

I think Albertans should be very concerned if this is the type of review currently going on regarding education property tax. I think it is important to note that the MLA for Medicine Hat recognizes the need for realistic long-term solutions regarding the education property tax, and it is seen in Motion 518 on today's Order Paper. This motion states:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to explore alternative means of funding education other than through municipal property taxes and to begin discussions with municipal governments to develop new cost-sharing formulas that could be implemented after the provincial government removes requisitions for school taxes.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to develop new cost-sharing formulas. That is exactly what Bill 207 is about.

As I've traveled across Alberta, I've spoken to municipal leaders about this bill. These leaders have been impressed because finally somebody was listening. I impress upon everybody in this Assembly that there are very, very many fingerprints on this particular bill. On many occasions I have heard that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs should include as part of its business plan the creation of a legislative framework which would include municipalities' access to long-term, stable sources of revenue to ensure self-sufficiency and sustainability. Continued reliance on the province for grants and other programs prevents municipalities from becoming self-sufficient. Access to stable sources of revenue is the best way to ensure municipalities will remain sustainable during a high-growth period.

In the minister's further criticism of this bill he alluded to the idea that grants are a more predictable source of income and would in some ways be preferable to relying on a percentage of the tax base for income. These comments were made in the Assembly on April 12, Mr. Speaker. On this point I'd like the minister to note that the government's grants to municipalities have been very uncertain over the past eight years. In 1992, 21 percent of a local government's revenue in Alberta came from the provincial general or specific purpose transfers. By 1998 only 10.2 percent of a local government's revenue came from the provincial general or specific purpose transfers.

Accelerated onetime increases in 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 for these same grants are expected in the general or specific purpose transfers, up to 27.1 percent of local government revenue for 2000. Mr. Speaker, the grant level has gone down from 21 percent to just over 10 percent and now back up to just over 27 percent. How can the minister call that a stable source of funding? In contrast, provincial personal income tax, the taxes that would be the basis of the funding arrangement as proposed by Bill 207, have increased an average of 11.2 percent per year between 1992 and 1999-2000. I think a funding source with a history of progressive increase is a far better base from which to create stable sources of funding than the grants.

Bill 207 is a product of the Official Opposition to forge a new partnership with Alberta municipalities. This partnership, Mr. Speaker, would be based on values of accountability, efficiency, responsibility, and equity. By providing access to a portion of the personal income tax revenue through revenue sharing, Bill 207 recognizes that local government authority and financial resources should correspond to their responsibilities. The Official Opposition believes that we need a long-term vision to sustain our local communities. The ad hoc, reactionary funding announcements from the Conservative government are not acceptable.

The Official Opposition values and respects our fellow leaders in this province and respects the taxpayers. Bill 207 is about respecting the roles and responsibilities for the provincial government and our partners in Alberta's municipalities. The Department of Municipal Affairs in their 2000-2003 business plan has no performance measures for the target of "a coordinated provincial government approach towards municipalities." They also have no benchmark or target for this performance measure:

Level of satisfaction with the Ministry's activities, services, programs, and legislative framework in enabling and promoting a cooperative and well managed local government sector.

Bill 207 is an integral part of the framework for discussion of improvement of provincial/municipal roles and responsibilities in Alberta. A minister whose business plan talks about the need to redefine the relationship with the government but then does not include the targets or benchmarks is hardly in a position to try to

dismiss a constructive piece of legislation which is part of the framework for this discussion.

One of this government's favourite pastimes is being critical of the federal government. It is curious that the Minister of Municipal Affairs would not support a revenue-sharing principle in Bill 207 when he constantly criticizes the federal government for failing to return a fair share of the federal fuel tax to Alberta. The minister is even on record as supporting tax realignment. It makes sense that if the minister would be in favour of the federal government sharing tax dollars with the province, he would also be in favour of the provincial government sharing taxes with our municipalities. Bill 207 would allow for this tax sharing to take place in a predictable way, and this would help the provincial and municipal governments provide the best services to Albertans.

There also seems to be some confusion on the part of the minister as to how Bill 207 would allocate these dollars. On April 12 this minister asked about the money.

Would it be allocated on a per capita basis? Would it be based on personal income taxes paid by the municipality residents? Would it be pooled and redistributed based on the equalization of need formula? Would this income tax revenue be a replacement for other sources of revenue, or would it be in addition to what municipalities already receive from the province?

I'm pleased that the minister has thought through this issue and realizes the questions that need to be asked.

It's also my pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to quote the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod as he reads from an opposition press release, a release which was tabled by this minister in this Assembly.

Bill 207: the Provincial/Municipal Tax Sharing Act will allow for the allocation of a percentage of provincial personal income tax revenues on a per capita basis to local government.

The minister also had concerns that under those arrangements those communities which are more prosperous would get richer while other communities would get poorer. The per capita formula would not lead to this situation, Mr. Speaker. The mechanism for this formula would be an agreement between the province and the associations representing municipalities in Alberta: the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, known as AUMA, and the Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the AAMDC. The per capita allocation would be based upon the latest census, updated by population figures on municipalities prepared by Statistics Canada and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

I commend the minister for his concern about the fair and equitable distribution of taxes. Government grants of 5 percent per litre from fuel sold in Calgary and Edmonton will go directly to those cities, and future allocations of this grant will be tied to the population growth. Interestingly enough, other cities and municipalities will not be able to access this revenue stream even though almost 39 percent of fuel tax in Alberta is collected from outside these two main cities.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 is about equity. This is clear in the per capita formula that is proposed. Revenue sharing has the advantage of promoting greater fiscal co-operation between the province and Alberta local governments and heightens the awareness of specific roles and responsibilities of each level of government within the overall framework. This will result in improved communication and consultation between the levels of government and greater accountability to citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 is brought forward before this Assembly to serve as a framework for discussion on revenue sharing between the province and our municipalities. This bill will provide local governments in Alberta, whether they be rural or urban municipali-

ties, with access to a more stable and predictable source of funding. This will give our municipalities an enhanced ability to meet their priorities.

I have today, Mr. Speaker, a complete set of copies, which I'll table, of my dissecting the actual speech put forward by the minister when he spoke on the 11th and the 12th about this one. It's pertaining to items like what the Minister of Municipal Affairs said and what our Official Opposition's response was to it point by point. These I believe will be tabled tomorrow at the AUMA meeting in Lethbridge, and one will be tabled in Calgary on Thursday.

Mr. Speaker, one thing, one of the few items the minister did say that I totally did agree with in his statements was that our communities are the backbone of Alberta's society. We live and work and raise our families in our communities. The quality of our life within our communities is dependent on the availability of local infrastructure. Maintaining our infrastructure is critical to Alberta's future competitiveness, providing the means of adding value to the products and services we produce and sell both here and in Canada and abroad. Infrastructure planning should and must be the core business function of the provincial government, in close collaboration with the municipalities.

The province likes to take the credit for the \$4 billion surplus at the provincial level, but why do they refuse to take responsibility for the infrastructure deficit they created over the last seven years at the local level? Between 1992 and 1998 general and specific purpose grants from the Alberta government to the municipalities declined by \$48 million, the second highest level of decline of any province in this country. Our municipalities have been subjected to a financial squeeze by the provincial government. Not only were provincial grants to municipalities reduced; the province also took access to a portion of the local property tax base. Meanwhile, provincial education property tax burdens – we all know about that. We also know about the committee. We all know about the tinkering.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I will sit and let somebody else stand and speak on this one.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to have the opportunity to add to this debate on Bill 207. I agree with the previous speakers from this side of the floor, and I'm somewhat confused as to the advantages that this bill would supposedly bring to Albertans.

I had the honour to serve as the Minister of Municipal Affairs from 1995 to 1997. During that time I worked very closely with all of Alberta's municipalities, particularly in relation to determining their needs and the kinds of funding pressures they were experiencing. And they were; it was a difficult time for all levels of government. All levels of government were facing budget pressures, and difficult decisions had to be made on what programs and services were of greater priority. We met many, many times with the associations and with individual municipalities, and thanks to them, in part, we were able to come through this as well as we have.

Municipal governments faced the same decisions that we as a provincial government faced, that being: do we raise taxes, bring government spending under control and in some cases reduce government spending, or do we do both? As is so well known and documented – it is no secret – this government of Alberta, on the direction of the people of Alberta I might add, brought government spending under control through sound, reasonable, and responsible economic management, and I think we should give credit where credit is due. These measures worked, and the prosperity we are all enjoying today is a direct result of this effort that was put forward by

not only municipalities but by this government and the people of Alberta.

Hindsight is always 20-20, as the cliché goes. It is always easier to criticize than to do, and at its heart this is what this bill is all about. Bill 207 seems to propose an arbitrary and artificial process that is only likely to cause confusion and difficulties between the province and the municipalities. There is no recognizable benefit from this bill.

This bill would require the Provincial Treasurer to prepare a public report each year that sets out in detail the effect that sharing an assumed percentage of provincial income tax revenue with municipalities would have on provincial finances. The assumed percentage is to be determined by the Legislative Assembly on a motion moved by the Provincial Treasurer. If the Legislative Assembly does not approve the motion, then the Provincial Treasurer must set the assumed percentage himself and then make it public. In this case the rate chosen by the Treasurer must then be debated and voted on by the Legislature within 15 days of being established. If the Legislature is not in session, then it must be debated within 30 days of the commencement of the next sitting of the House.

There's no guidance in this bill regarding what factors are to be taken into account when determining this percentage either from the perspective of the province or of the municipalities. There's no mention of tying the funding given to municipalities to performance measures, objectives, or goals. Albertans want to see targeted funding and accountability, and this government has supported such measures through our budgets and business plans.

There's also no mention of the effect that contributing a percentage of provincial income taxes, whatever that percentage might be, would have on the existing funding in the municipalities. Would the system envisioned by the sponsor of this bill replace existing municipal funding? I don't know; it doesn't say. If so, causing municipalities to rely on fluctuating provincial income tax revenue will destabilize their funding and make budgeting very difficult both in the short and the long terms. Or does the bill propose that in addition to the provincial funding and revenue generated by the municipalities themselves through their property taxes and services, the province further grant them a percentage of provincial income taxes? It doesn't say. If we were to dramatically increase the amount of funding going to municipalities, this would be done at the expense of other priorities such as health care and education.

Bill 207, in my view, would entangle municipal and provincial tax policies in an undesirable way. Calculating a transfer amount to municipalities as a percentage of provincial income tax revenue would tie municipal revenue to provincial tax policy decisions. This would leave municipalities with less independence than they currently possess. They've asked for independence, they've asked for powers, and we've been giving them that over the years. It would just mess up everything. They wouldn't have a chance to know what they were getting. It would also leave them more vulnerable, since reductions in provincial income tax revenue would translate into a reduction in the revenue which would be transferred to the municipalities.

We have three-year business plans now that generate a foreseeable future for them to determine the amount of money that's coming to them. For the same reason that we as a province argue to delink our income tax regime from that of the federal government, so also should municipalities not have their revenue tied to the province's tax policies, over which they have no control. The government is already addressing pressures on municipalities by increased funding and providing onetime grants, when we have the money, to address infrastructure problems associated with strong economic growth in our province.

Currently we have a stable and predictable funding arrangement in place with municipalities. The sources of funding are certain, coming from the various grant programs. As I mentioned before, the department's three-year business plans have contributed to this stability, enabling municipalities to forecast their budgets predictably over the next two to three years.

In 2000-2001 the province will fund approximately \$815 million directly to municipalities. Of this, \$110 million will come from Municipal Affairs and \$705 million will come from the Department of Infrastructure. In addition, a new system of transportation grants will be phased in over the next year to help address pressures in Calgary and Edmonton.

This current system is far superior to the method proposed by Bill 207, which would essentially require the Treasurer to pull a number out of thin air to determine the level of funding that municipalities should receive. This bill serves no purpose other than to create municipal/provincial conflict with respect to funding. It is possible that the percentage voted upon by the Assembly would be criticized by municipalities, regardless of how high it is, as being insufficient. Since the bill provides no mechanism for consulting municipalities in determining the percentage that would be proposed before the Assembly, conflict would very definitely arise here as well. Finally, as somebody has pointed out a little earlier here, Bill 207 really wanted to be a money bill, which of course private members' bills cannot be, and that's one thing we do agree on.

There are many problems and disadvantages with the proposal contained within Bill 207 and no advantages that I can see. Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members to vote against this bill because it's a know-nothing bill.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd like to go over a little history of municipal finance in this province and understand a little bit about what a municipality does and the breadth of a municipality's interest, and then I'll perhaps debunk some of the statements by Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Having had some experience in that arena, in municipal finance, I can tell you that the breadth of decisions that one makes is relatively narrow and that the expenditures are very, very predictable in a municipality. The level of taxation does not vary a lot on the income side, so the income side and the expense side are relatively stable, as you'd find in a large corporation that doesn't have a great deal of income that is related to income of its citizenry or income of the tax base.

Saying that, when this province downloaded a great deal of the services – i.e., police, transportation, social services, and general municipal grants – onto the municipalities, they were hard pressed to make up the difference. In fact, they cut and cut and cut, and today I believe there's probably in the order of perhaps 20 percent fewer employees in that level of government than there were in, say, about '89 to 90. They have jumped to the pump, as it were, and rose to the challenge. Yes, their taxation rates had to increase, and they apologize for that profusely at every opportunity to their electorate and in fact are held accountable for those increases.

The difficulty they find themselves in is from the expansion of the areas of responsibility without the commensurate expansion of taxation. We all agree in this House that there is but one taxpayer. It's the same one, whether it pays provincial tax in the way of income tax or federal tax or excise tax or gas tax or municipal property tax. The difficulty the municipalities find themselves in is that they are taxing on behalf of the province for education and on

behalf of themselves in the way of their municipal allocation, and the municipal allocation is based on the value of property. It's not based on services to property. Otherwise, things like recreation, social services, and the like would not attract tax. Those would be expenditures of the general revenue. Those would be expenditures that should fall from the generation of wealth in a province, not from the expenditure of wealth; i.e., on personal property.

I'm sure every member in this House would agree that it's wise to encourage our residents to expend some time, effort, and money on the development of their personal properties and therefore their quality of life and enjoyment of life, but this taxation system in the province of Alberta is a detriment to that end. It does nothing to further that end at all. This piece of legislation goes somewhat in that direction. It says to municipalities, "Here is an opportunity, albeit we'll have to cut back some granting and some solid granting," that is supposedly ongoing, although it never is. "We'll cut back on that and give you some percentage points on a per capita basis for your residents," knowing full well in doing so that that rate will rise and fall and vary with the economy.

Now, I believe, as most others believe, that the elasticity in a municipal tax budget is rather limited, as I said earlier, but it does have some elasticity, and that is demonstrated very well by virtually every municipality. They do manage. On a day-to-day basis they are much more reactive than a provincial government. A provincial government by its very nature must take care of all of the parts of a province. A municipality is much more locally based. It can act and react much more quickly.

Aside from that fact, when you have municipal governments in the order of, say, 300 municipalities that have some magnitude, that can act and react to these expenditures and have a staff to assist them to that end, and one provincial government, if there's a large influx of income over one year to the next or, on the contrary – we don't like to think of it – perhaps a drop in income, then the elasticity in the entire province and therefore the utility of the expense in those areas and the product it will turn out is so, so much better in aggregate. It's this member's view that in allowing municipalities that leeway and in fostering that growth so that they are continually thinking of the economic good of the province, because it has a direct relationship to that which they call income in their budgets, it would be, I would think, of benefit to all concerned.

Now, this perhaps is not the be-all and end-all of provincial/municipal taxation sharing, but it goes some way to doing a very, very important thing also. It does speak to respect for that level of government. We heard the member opposite awhile back say – I think I can quote him fairly closely – that this bill would make the municipalities less independent. Now, this member has a great deal of difficulty understanding that logic, because the current system is a system of grants which can be modified, added to, taken away from at the whim of a minister, and in fact history has shown that it changes ever so rapidly with the mood change of a province or an election or a new minister. It changes not on a daily basis but certainly changes on a year-to-year basis, and municipalities hang on tenterhooks every year to find out what the minister is going to grant them or not. It's not quite always a crapshoot, but it is certainly not as predictable as one might like.

To have a percentage of an income tax that's generated in the province of Alberta, which is a well-known, published number, to know that that comes out on a quarterly basis perhaps, and to then say that that is less predictable and makes the municipalities less independent is absolute balderdash. It could be said worse too. Any member of any council will understand that fully and completely.

The member opposite also said that he found a great deal of difficulty deciding on how the percentage would be arrived at. Well,

that's a matter of negotiation between the municipalities, of course, and it has to work over time. It has to be structured, and it would have to be dealt with by the AAMDC and the AUMA, of course, and have their input. It may start out as a relatively small figure, until such time as the municipalities felt comfortable with the method of finance, and then move into a final level of perhaps as high as 11 percent, with the commensurate reduction in the grants as they sit today. The funds would then be relatively stable and predictable over the course of time and do that which is so important to a municipality, which is to actually respect their opinions and their positions.

3:20

Now, I haven't touched on a very, very touchy subject with the municipalities that they would dearly love to do away with, and that's the collection of the property tax along with the municipal tax. That of course is a bit of a sore point with all of the municipalities because while receiving no funds or recognition for collection of those funds, they continually receive at tax time, when municipal taxes are due, all that negative feedback from their electorate, which is of course understandable.

There are a number of reports, the most recent of which was really quite an enlightening report from November of '98, not that terribly long ago, Mr. Speaker. It was titled Joint Calgary-Edmonton Case for Provincial Investment in the Two Cities. It's quite emphatic about the cities being the generators of more growth, and quite frankly I can't see how any arguments can be made that in fact they're not. Yes, the gross domestic product is aided and abetted by traditional industries: the oil and gas industry of course; the timber industry; the coal industry, which is in a low ebb right at the moment, but it shall return; and of course the solid agricultural base we have. But that is not the area of growth that is going to sustain the growth at a level in this province such that our children and grandchildren are able to have stable and solid employment. It's actually in the cities.

These cities in their municipal management are exceedingly sophisticated, and I'm not talking just about Edmonton and Calgary. I'm talking about Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie. These people that manage these municipalities, from the administrators to the politicians, are exceedingly good at managing their funds. I recognize, as I said earlier, that there's limited scope for variance from one year to the next because their capital expenditures are laid out in lockstep. As well, the maintenance programs are fairly well laid out too.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So the range of expenditure is rather limited, and they can spend a great deal of time working very hard at deciding where the next major capital expenditure is going to foster growth in their area, to be a facilitator for those entrepreneurs that wish to take advantage of some special conditions or an initiative designed to enhance value or to allow the entrepreneurs of the local area to be able to grow in and foster their community. Well, this particular piece of legislation aids in that area. This rises and falls with the economic generation in any given area. Yes, it falls perhaps a year, perhaps 18 months after the fact of this increase, but it does nonetheless, such that that element of the budget of a municipality can rise and fall and vary with the economic activity. They can predict it, they understand it, and they can manage it exceedingly well. This piece of legislation says respect, respect, respect and that we understand how you can manage better than we the province.

There are a number of other areas that need to be covered in this

debate. Some of them are quite easily understood in putting this piece of legislation forward. When one reviews the amount of money that in fact is generated by the residential property tax in the province of Alberta, the education portion is that sore point, of course, and we remember the \$650 million that was generated in and around the '95-96 budget area. It will be going up to some \$775 million in the year 2002. That's an increase of some 19 percent over that six- or seven-year period.

On the face of it, it would not sound to be a great deal, but recognize that that is coming out of the hide, if you will, of that beleaguered taxpayer every time that homeowner puts an addition in the way of a porch on the back or rebuilds a carport. Anytime they get a building permit to with their own hands build something, the value of their property goes up, which makes them very pleased and makes them much more proud citizens of course, but it's double-jeopardy. Now they pay more tax upon that property and in an area that has nothing, absolutely nothing, to do with the services that that property attracts; i.e., education, recreation, social services.

I suppose one could say that land use management would be related. Emergency services certainly would be. Infrastructure elements such as the roadworks, the underground sewers, all of that lot would be related. A property owner can understand that, can understand how an addition to their property could in fact trigger more tax—that's not so difficult to understand—but in an area where tax would be likely to be attracted, not in some totally, completely unrelated area.

There was a time not long ago that the province actually forgave the educational portion of the tax to senior citizens on the basis that they were no longer using the service. Well, that was some recognition that these services were paid from the property tax when in fact they were not in any way related. This government dropped that provision in the early '90s. Quite frankly, I think it did nothing but terrible things to the senior population. It moved a lot of them out their homes because one of their fixed costs was of course tax, and it added burden onto another area of provincial expenditure now, which is long-term care and the like. That's the extent of changes in taxation policy. This government does not pay a great deal of attention or at least does not appear to pay a great deal of attention when these bold strokes do occur, incidentally with very, very little debate in the Legislature.

There are of course a number of studies, and I think that by my count the AUMA has fostered in my time, from about '83 to today, in the order of seven studies that would say: look, provincial government; share a little of the economic largesse with us, and we will be respectful of that and will do the best we can to expend funds as they should be expended. I believe that at virtually every AUMA annual meeting the resolutions come forward, and there are at least three and sometimes as many as 17 elements of taxation that deal with provincial/municipal taxation and the sharing of what is sometimes gas tax, sometimes income, sometimes any number of things.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I see that you've indicated that the time has expired for this portion. I shall take my seat. Thank you, sir.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are you ready for the question?

MR. WHITE: No, sir. I believed that you were indicating that the time ran out. At least the table officers indicated that the time was expired.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. The chair was asleep.

We have to interrupt your speaking because the time consideration

for this item of business has expired. It was just that the cries of "question" triggered the wrong response.

3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Long-term and Home Care

507. Ms Leibovici moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to further increase the number of beds and improve standards for long-term care facilities and home care services with regard to staffing ratios and levels of service to adequate levels and ensure that regional health authority boundaries do not become barriers to placement.

[Debate adjourned April 11: Mrs. Soetaert speaking]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe I have a few minutes left on this very important motion, just three short minutes on this very important motion. It is a motion expressing concerns and the need to act upon the lack of long-term care beds for people who need long-term care placement and on the issue of accessibility across boundaries in regional health authorities. I know that members have said, "Oh, we addressed this in the Broda report," but that's just not so. There are still issues of not being able to access a long-term care bed in a regional health authority that you do not live in. The reality of our world is that people like to be near family in their last stages of life, so if they're sent far away – yes, they need care, but they also need family near – that makes it very, very difficult, I would say, for everyone involved.

This motion virtually states that the number of beds is inadequate. We know that. I'm tired of reports that say that we have to address it and then we don't. I would urge all members to support this motion. It is calling for some action.

Home care services. Wouldn't we be smart, you know, if instead of investing in all kinds of private opportunities, we would properly manage home care and promote that? We would save money and be far more efficient and serve our constituents' needs far more than they are now. Certainly we have wonderful people working in those areas. All we need to do is ask them for input, and they could tell us. They could tell us how to make it better.

It also expressed concern about "staffing ratios and levels of service to adequate levels." Often we're concerned about de-skilling, and we certainly have to be cautious of that in these situations so that these people are well cared for.

Of course, the one that always concerns me the most – and people here have heard it often – is the ability to access care in a different health authority. If we're doing this with physiotherapy and we're doing this with long-term care, how soon will it be before we're doing it with acute care? I think we should all be concerned, especially those of us who don't live in the big centres of Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer. Those of us who have constituents who are just outside a boundary had better be concerned about that. I know they've heard the same heartaches and have had the same calls about families unable to access long-term care beds close to them.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I urge all members to support the motion.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Apparently the 55 minutes allowed for a private member's motion have elapsed. That's what the timing was, not that the hon. member had but three minutes to speak. While that was true, it was that the whole debate, the 55 minutes, was finished.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:35 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Massey	Sloan
Dickson	Olsen	Soetaert
Gibbons	Paul	White
Leibovici	Sapers	

Against the motion:

Broda	Hlady	Severtson
Burgener	Jacques	Shariff
Calahasen	Johnson	Smith
Cao	Klapstein	Stelmach
Coutts	Kryczka	Stevens
Ducharme	Laing	Strang
Fischer	Magnus	Tannas
Forsyth	Mar	Thurber
Friedel	Marz	Trynchy
Graham	McClellan	West
Haley	McFarland	Woloshyn
Hancock	Melchin	Yankowsky
Herard	Nelson	Zwozdesky
Hierath	Paszkowski	

Totals:	For - 11	Against - 41
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 lost]

Cell Phone Use while Driving

508. Mr. Trynchy moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to examine the results of the study undertaken by the provincial auto insurance Crown corporation of Quebec, Societe d'Assurance Automobile du Quebec, SAAQ, on the dangers of handheld cellular telephone use by drivers of motor vehicles and then consult with Albertans on whether and what restrictions should be imposed on the use of handheld cell phones by operators of motor vehicles while driving.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce Motion 508 this afternoon. As a cell phone user myself, I must say that I find them to be a very useful tool in allowing me to stay in contact with my job here as MLA, with the business world, with family, and with other people.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The proliferation of the cell phone since its introduction in 1983 and its usefulness have caused me and many Albertans to see this device as essential in our everyday lives. The cellular phone allows a new freedom to Albertans, the ability to be mobile and still able to reach and be reached by family and work. This ability to communicate underlies this communication revolution that our global society is currently engaged in. This device has proven to me and many

Albertans its usefulness. It allows Albertans to be more efficient and productive with their time and dramatically cuts down on emergency response time to accidents. But we have heard some concerns. In 1996 the cellular phone had penetrated 20.8 percent of households in the province of Alberta and 26 percent of households in Canada by 1998.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, in my travels through my constituency and the province I have heard a great deal of concern regarding the safe use of handheld cellular phones by drivers. The use of such a device could be a threat to traffic safety and may be causing accidents on Alberta highways. The reason I brought this forward is that when I received my cellular phone, I looked at the instructions in the pamphlet, and something struck me as quite important. I want to read into the record just part of what was in there. It said:

Check the laws and regulations on the use of wireless telephones in the areas where you drive. Always obey them. Observe the following guidelines when using your phone while driving.

- Give full attention to driving – driving safely is your first responsibility.
- Use hands-free phone operation, if available.
- Pull off the road and park before making or answering a call if driving.

That is quite a message from those people who provide the cell phones.

Many of my colleagues have expressed the same concerns, and also we've heard it from the police sector. That's why I'm introducing this motion. It is a responsibility of this Assembly to address issues that concern Albertans and to protect the motoring public. The purpose of this motion is not to ban cellular phone use. It's not worded that way, and it's certainly not my intention. It's my intention to ensure that constituents and Albertans have a say in what, if any, restrictions should be initiated on drivers using handheld cell phones while driving and to base those decisions on accurate and viable scientific results, results that only a comprehensive study of the risks and dangers of handheld cellular phones used by drivers can establish.

Mr. Speaker, currently all Canadian jurisdictions by virtue of their membership in the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators are awaiting the results of the Quebec study referred to in this motion before considering the restriction of use of handheld cell phones. Lawmakers in many countries and provinces are waiting for full direct evidence that indicates that the use of cellular telephones in cars contributes to roadway collisions. Despite the lack of conclusive evidence, laws against using handheld cellular phones while driving have been put in place in Brazil, Israel, Japan, China, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and two Australian states and have been debated in many jurisdictions. Even in New York City a limitation of cell phone use applies to city taxicab drivers.

Advocates can cite both simulations and real driving experiments showing that a telephone conversation involving mental tasks slowed reaction times by half a second or more. Placing a call was found to be more distracting than turning on the car radio or engaging in a conversation, and it makes steering more imprecise in city traffic, especially by users of handheld phones.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that handheld cellular telephones cause a distraction to drivers. Although there is no direct evidence to prove that distractions cause vehicle accidents, it is important to note that 99 percent of total accidents involve driver error and distraction that can cause a driver to err.

Overall, the number of reportable collisions in Alberta has been increasing in recent years. Reportable collisions for a thousand drivers exceed the old Alberta transportation and utilities target rate

by 2.5 percent, for a total of 44.7 collisions per 1,000 drivers in 1997. Moreover, Alberta has the highest rate of injuries, 84 per 10,000 motorists, and the second highest rate of fatalities, 1.6 per 10,000 motorists in Canada. In 1998 the overall number of collisions increased by 6.8 percent to 98,601, while injury collisions increased by 4.3 percent to 24,935. Fatal crashes increased by . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Hon. members are reminded that this is Assembly and not committee.

Hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, sorry to have interrupted you because two members forgot where they were.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you. As I mentioned, the overall number of collisions increased by 6.8 percent to 98,601, while injury collisions increased by 4.3 percent to 24,935, and fatal crashes increased by one death to 429. Over the last five years the number of collisions were the lowest in 1994 and the highest in 1998. Mr. Speaker, it's yet to be ruled that cellular phones used by drivers account for at least some of the increase in collisions.

The Department of Infrastructure recently conducted a survey called Rules of the Road. In that study respondents were asked if they felt regulations should be put in place to address distractions that take a driver's full attention away from the care and control of a vehicle. Mr. Speaker, more than 70 percent of the respondents and stakeholders agreed that restrictions should be in place. Of the general public 73.1 percent felt some restrictions should be in place.

The most highly publicized study on this issue between cell phone use and accidents was printed in 1997 in *The New England Journal of Medicine*. The study was conducted in Toronto and polled 699 drivers who owned cell phones and were involved in motor vehicle accidents. The researchers then compared accident reports against phone company records to determine whether the driver was actually on the phone at the time of an accident. The authors concluded that the use of a handheld cellular phone while driving actually quadrupled the risk of collision.

Quantifying the risk of using a cell phone while driving was the subject of an exhaustive 1998 report from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in the United States. The study, an investigation of the safety implications of wireless communications in vehicles, drew on industry surveys, state highway agencies, its own fatal analysis reporting system, and other evidence. The study concluded that the use of cell phones while driving does increase the dangers of a crash. While stopping short of indicating a natural increased risk level, because that data to quantify the risk does not yet exist, the study nevertheless made some interesting discoveries.

Mr. Speaker, they found that it was not just the actual handling of the phone that was dangerous but the mere act of having the conversation that increased the risk of an accident. The study also indicated that the overwhelming majority of handheld cell phone users were in the striking vehicle. Finally, the most prevalent factor in crashes attributable to cellular phone use was driver inattention. Although these studies indicate safety concerns of cell phone use by drivers, none have claimed to be comprehensive enough to justify legislation on the matter. Mr. Speaker, Motion 508 is a proactive measure that may decrease the 17,345 casualty collisions on Alberta roads, many of which are caused by driver distraction or inattention.

The idea of banning the use of cellular phones while driving is getting a lot of attention. Bills have been introduced in Arizona, Colorado, Florida, New York, and throughout the States, but so far none have been passed into law. Currently the only jurisdiction in North America to pass an ordinance is a small town of 11,000 people, Brooklyn, Ohio. Except for emergencies Brooklyn forbids drivers from using handheld cell phones while the car is in motion.

It does not forbid the use of handheld phones or talking on these phones while the car is parked. Mr. Speaker, this ordinance took effect in March of 1999, and by the end of August of 1999, a short time later, 150 warnings had been issued. It is interesting to note that this municipality was also the first North American jurisdiction to institute mandatory seat belt legislation back in 1966.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, I encourage debate on this motion because Albertans have asked for it, but I also want to ensure that Albertans are consulted before any legislation is put in place and that there is conclusive evidence of the dangers of handheld cellular phones while driving. Let's review the study. Let's find out what the results are and find a way to educate the motoring public for the safety of our Alberta highways.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, may we have unanimous consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really honoured today to introduce to you and to Members of the Legislative Assembly a very bright young woman who is the provincial vice-president of the Metis Nation of Alberta, the first woman ever elected as the provincial vice-president. She's doing some really absolutely wonderful things with the MNA, and I know that she's very proud of what she's been able to accomplish to date and continues to do so. She's standing in the members' gallery. Her name is Ms Brenda Bylan-Calliou, and she hails originally from Buffalo Lake but now lives in Edmonton. I'd ask that the Assembly give her a warm welcome, please.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

(*continued*)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I looked at this motion and thought: I know I'm the transportation critic and I know that it's dangerous to be driving while you're on the phone, yet so many of us in here do it. It's kind of hard to really speak on one side about safety and no cell phones and on the other side be doing it. So here I am, doing both.

Of course, if we're going to look at a study – and as I understand it, it's part of a consultation process right now within the department under the regulations of the Traffic Safety Act. Now, I could be wrong on that, and maybe the minister will clarify that later. Who knows? My understanding of that is that Albertans are being consulted right now in our own province. However, I see no harm in looking at a study that's been undertaken in Quebec. If they've done a lot of research on it and it can give us some information, of course we should accept that.

The reality is that it is dangerous to drive while on the phone. Some people shift gears while they're doing that too. They're shifting and clutching the phone – and if this was a visual, I think

people in TV land would appreciate it – putting on lipstick and shaving at the same time, I heard the Minister of Transportation say at a conference. I hope he wasn't referring to women on that. [interjection] "Putting on mascara too," says the minister across the way.

Seriously, I do believe I read somewhere that Alberta has one of the highest use of cell phones in the country. Anything to do with cell phones is certainly going to affect a great many people. I have to say that I do worry when I see somebody making a lefthand turn while they're talking on the phone during rush hour, probably telling somebody to pick up milk and bread on their way home. That's worrisome. That's very dangerous.

On the other hand, I know that in instances of calling 911 or calling the police on dangerous drivers and drunken drivers, then the reality of using a telephone in your car is essential. Plus there are many of us who spend many, many hours in our vehicle and sometimes that's the only way to contact our offices and make business connections, et cetera. Maybe that's not an excuse, but I'm wondering in this report if hand held is different from hands free, if the results on the safety of hand held is different from hands free. Some say there is no difference. I would like to think there is. I'm going to be interested to see the results of that.

I know most of us probably have hands-free phones in our cars, and now there's about a \$40 attachment that you can just wear as ear phones and connect to your cell phone to be used in the car. I'm sure as we drive along and people look at the neighbouring car and see you talking to yourself, they may wonder who you are talking to, or maybe you're just singing along with something. I think we do have to address the issue of safely driving in this province in many aspects.

We have one of the highest accident rates in the country, as well. Cell phones are most likely attached to that. There are laws in different parts of the world about using handheld phones while driving. It's interesting though. There are studies on fatigue while driving, and I've got to say that sometimes driving home late from the Legislature – I'm probably one of the few people who drives a bit of a distance home every night. There are probably a couple of others in the Assembly that can commute, but they don't live within the city. Actually, I will phone someone at home who I know will be awake just to touch base and kind of wake up again. Now, that's not safe driving, but it's the reality of cell phones in some ways being an assistance.

So I of course support this motion. We do already have the capability within the law, if we are driving dangerously, for policemen to enforce dangerous driving. I believe that's under the highway Traffic Safety Act as well.

I look forward to the results of this. I realize that before any legislation on cell phones takes place, it's going to be a while and we're going to have the people in Alberta aware of the dangers of it. With the reality of a \$30 piece of equipment that you can plug into a cell phone, maybe that's the answer. I don't know. Many people who do not have cell phones have phoned me and complained about, you know, the dangers. Being on the phone and driving is very serious. I don't allow my children – isn't that funny? – to use their dad's cell phone while they're driving. They can take it with them, but they'd better not use it while they're driving. Once again, it's hard to preach if you don't practise. However, mine is hands free, but it still is not without a concern for safety, and I think people recognize that.

I think this will be an interesting study to look at. I look forward also to the consultation progress and process of our own government and what they're doing in the Department of Infrastructure. I don't know the answer to the whole cell phone issue. I wish I did. I think

the reality of our world is that we do have cell phones available to us in most parts of this province, though I have to say that some areas need more towers, because the reception isn't good all over the province.

The reality of the advantages of being able to use a cell phone - and I often think: you know, we have home care workers in isolated parts of this province. It's a safety feature for them. It's the availability to phone the office and say: "I'm going into this home. I know that some things have not always been safe there, and I want you to know I'm going in. I will be checking in with you in another 20 minutes or half an hour. If I don't, would you please send someone?" It's a safety feature for many health care workers. We should be looking at better reception all over this province, because there are parts of the province where the reception isn't that good.

I think there is a balance to be found here. Maybe the balance is in that they are a hands-free phone when you are speaking in the car. I don't know if that's the answer. The reality is that we're in that age when phones are available everywhere and people have them in their vehicle. They should pull over when it's a dangerous situation or they shouldn't be using it or they should have at least hands free.

4:10

I've been all over the map here, but I want to say that I have concerns about people using handheld phones in the car while they are driving. I do think we have to address that. I've seen instances where really it's a good thing somebody is defensive driving because other people using those phones are not. So I understand the concern.

I look forward to the report. I also know the reality of our world is that we do have phones in the car, so maybe we will need some guidelines and restrictions within that. I look forward to the government examining the results of the study. How could I not support that? It'll be interesting when we see if we are going to have legislation or regulation regarding that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to speak in favour of Motion 508, proposed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. It is a motion urging the government

to examine the results of the study undertaken by the . . . Societe d'Assurance Automobile du Quebec . . . on the dangers of handheld cellular telephone use by drivers of motor vehicles and then consult with Albertans on whether and what restrictions should be imposed.

Mr. Speaker, the cellular phone has become part of the everyday life of many Albertans. Mobile phones are an enormous asset to people in all sorts of ways. They help us at work, they help us stay in touch with our families, and they are of great benefit in emergency situations. In fact, since the proliferation of cellular phones the response time for emergency vehicles has been significantly reduced, no doubt saving lives. Over 7 million cellular phone calls a day are placed in Canada.

While cellular phones are a great asset to many Albertans, they may not be an asset to a driver seeking to properly control a vehicle. Mr. Speaker, we all know that the use of cellular phones by drivers of automobiles is becoming a concern for many Albertans. As the use of cellular phones grows, so does the potential danger on Alberta highways. I must say that I drive quite frequently in this province, and the evidence of my own eyes identifies the need to address this issue.

We have all seen that guy in the car swerving through the traffic with a phone glued to his ear. The driver endangers himself and the lives of other drivers and pedestrians on the road because his phone

call is so important. That image is a frightening one, indeed, and the main reason why this motion has been brought before this House.

Cellular phone use by drivers has been banned in many jurisdictions throughout the world. From Victoria, Australia, to Brooklyn, Ohio, legislatures and local governments have decided that driving and talking on the phone shouldn't be done at the same time. New York City taxi drivers can't use phones and drive, and in England, Singapore, and Brazil drivers must use hands-free devices while talking on the phone.

The question is, Mr. Speaker: does outlawing cellular phones while driving make sense? It seems like a no-brainer here. Surely the cellular phones could be banned if they are the cause of many fatal accidents in Alberta. But are they? We cannot reach a conclusive answer to this until we have more evidence to support this claim.

Mr. Speaker, the reason this motion is worded as it is is to bring much needed information into the debate on the safety of cellular phones and to initiate consultation with people affected by any law that would be put forward. Albertans have to have their say. Furthermore, any decision to ban the use of cellular telephones by drivers in the province of Alberta should be based on scientific evidence. That evidence will be available with the conclusion of the Quebec study.

All Canadian jurisdictions, by virtue of their membership in the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators, are obligated to the council. This is to ensure some level of uniformity in driving regulations across all provinces in Canada. In addressing the issues of cellular phones, the council decided that the evidence that was available on the issue did not apply well to Canada and left some gaps and questions unanswered. That is the reason the provincial auto insurance Crown corporation of Quebec was commissioned to conduct a study. It was Quebec's turn to conduct a study, and all Canadian jurisdictions are awaiting the results before considering restricting the use of cellular phones.

Mr. Speaker, in order to facilitate discussion on the issue, the Department of Infrastructure recently conducted a survey called Rules of the Road, a consultation that asks some serious questions about traffic safety issues. In that study respondents were asked if they felt that regulations should be put in place

to address distractions that take a driver's full attention away from the care and control of an automobile (e.g. reading, eating, family pets, cellular telephones.)

More than 70 percent of respondents and stakeholders agreed that restrictions should be put in place. Of the general public 73 percent felt some restriction should be put in place.

These figures are important in this debate because before we discuss banning phone use, we must address other distractions that drivers face. There are clearly many activities that drivers participate in behind the wheel that could cause distraction. We must assess the relative level of distraction. If we ban the use of cellular phones, should we also ban the whole list of other actions? Would it be necessary to ban drivers from tuning the radio, drinking coffee, eating a sandwich, or conversing with passengers in the car?

Mr. Speaker, that is why, first of all, we need to establish what sort of danger a cellular phone represents relative to other distractions that drivers face, a distinction the Quebec study should provide. Studies and polls have been conducted in other jurisdictions, but they have been vulnerable to scientific criticism. Although these studies have been highly questioned, I would like to discuss the results, because they provide evidence as to why more study is needed on the issues.

The most publicized study appeared in *The New England Journal of Medicine* in 1997. It indicated that drivers whose attention is

distracted while talking on a cellular phone are four times more prone to having an accident. The University of Toronto study discovered that younger drivers are more prone to problems than older drivers. The study also concluded that talking on the cellular phone while driving was at least as dangerous as driving while at the threshold of legal intoxication.

This study was highly criticized within the medical and statistical communities. The final figure was seen to be overexaggerated because the sample group only included vehicles that had cellular telephones and did not include nonusers of cellular phones. The study also faulted cellular phone use if the phones had been used up to 10 minutes before an accident occurred. Even the author of the study admitted that the media was making erroneous claims from the results. They also indicated that the study only examined the association of accidents and cellular phone use and did not examine the cause and effect relationship. Therefore it cannot indicate if drivers using cellular phones were at fault in a collision.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, multitasking has become a familiar buzzword in the last few years. When we work on our computers, we can accomplish one task while the computer does many tasks. In the workplace people who can manage multiple tasks without confusion are often the most efficient employees or businesspeople. However, the act of driving is a task that should require the full attention of the driver. With modern technology people have been trying to find ways to make that time behind the wheel more productive and entertaining. It seems that this modern and technically advanced society does not see driving as a task requiring concentration but as an inconvenient time spent getting from A to B, time that could be made more productive.

Indeed, for some people a car is a perfect place to apply lipstick, to do crosswords, to guzzle coffee while keeping one eye on the road and one hand on the wheel. These days it is also a good spot to plug in the laptop, the fax machine, the cellular telephone. If the market demands it, the producer will build it. Many cars nowadays come with not only one power outlet but three so that we can plug in all our gadgets and gizmos. In fact, in Japan, where traffic jams are a national pastime, a world-renowned car manufacturer offers a new option, an in-car karoake machine. We can do some singing. Mr. Speaker, multitasking can make commuting more effective or fun, but it also makes driving more dangerous.

In a district of Japan a law prohibiting the use of cellular phones while driving a car has local police claiming a 75 percent reduction in the number of traffic accidents. In the month of November of 1999 62 accidents were caused by drivers using mobile phones, compared to 223 the previous November. Researchers in Japan found that overall the use of mobile phones while driving was responsible for 27 percent of all car accidents last year in Japan, resulting in 33 deaths and 3,473 injuries. [interjection] But in Japan they drive on the left-hand side.

In Taiwan a survey found that 7 percent of respondents openly admitted to having been involved in car accidents because they were talking on a mobile phone while driving. Researchers in the U.K. and Switzerland also found that drivers were distracted and reacted poorly to emergencies and drove slower when talking on mobile phones. Admittedly, driving the streets of Tokyo and the U.K. would be a far cry from driving on an open part of our highway 2. That is why it is important to have a Canadian study on the table before the discussion of regulation begins. These figures and studies cannot be discounted, though they certainly point to the existence of an astonishing problem that we must address.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that any law that comes about due to this

motion would largely be a preventive measure. After all, we have seen the effect of seat belt legislation. Sure, it was controversial at the time, but I doubt that now many of us would question the impact of driver safety with safety belts. Lives were saved, and that occurred simply because wearing seat belts became part of the law of the land. Albertans are law-abiding people, and when the measure became law, that had a significant effect.

When Brooklyn, Ohio, was the first jurisdiction in North America to pass a seat belt law, many people laughed at them. Today seat belts have proven to be lifesavers and are the law of our land too. Today Brooklyn is the first municipality in North America to fine people who drive and use their cellular phones at the same time.

Mr. Speaker, our government is not in the business of restricting personal freedom. However, sometimes government officials must act responsibly and with courage in the wake of opposition and intervene for the greater good. If it becomes a specific offence to use a handheld mobile telephone while driving, I believe few people will wish to be seen as pariahs on the road, prepared to use a mobile phone while everyone else is obeying the law.

Already a vast majority of people are well aware of the common sense of not using a mobile phone while driving one-handed on Alberta's busy roads. Sadly, there are deaths which are directly connected to the use of mobile phones while driving. Experts are quite sure that this has been a significant contributory cause of many other deaths and accidents that have resulted in injuries.

We have heard from our constituents that cellular phones are a danger on our road, and now there is a motion before the House that allows us the opportunity to look into the matter. I'm sure that we all recognize that too, although we have fewer causes for anxiety. All of us experience tension when driving a car in today's road conditions. We are all concerned when people take liberty with our road space or endanger us in any way. We all know the importance of trying to keep calm while driving. What greater affront is there to one's sense of safety on the road than to see people making mistakes on the road because they are using a handheld mobile phone while driving?

Mr. Speaker, around the world many jurisdictions have voted to simply ban handheld cellular phones, but similar legislation in the U.S.A. has been voted down. I feel that given the scientific evidence available, a move to ban cellular phone use behind the wheel would be premature in the province of Alberta. A cellular phone in your automobile can be an effective and productive tool and an invaluable link to the outside world. It is also an important safety aid to drivers. We must stress to Albertans that they need to be used safely.

Mr. Speaker, the conclusion in the Toronto study gives us more questions than answers.

Also at issue is the level of congestion on Alberta highways as opposed to other jurisdictions. Banning the cellular phone in Tokyo makes more sense, given the level of congestion on the streets and freeways. Driving leisurely down an open stretch of an Alberta highway and using a handheld cellular phone is surely less of a threat than driving down Deerfoot Trail in rush hour and talking on the phone at the same time. Different jurisdictions require different laws. What is good in the U.K. or in New York, for that matter, may not have the same implication here.

Throughout the process we set out in this motion a conclusive snapshot of what issues should come about. The Quebec study should clarify some of the questions that previous studies have brought about and have been ineffective in answering. Mr. Speaker, from this study we should be able to tell without a shadow of a doubt what sort of risk is involved.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member

for Calgary-Fort, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

4:30

head: Private Bills
head: Second Reading

Bill Pr. 1
Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks
of the Province of Alberta Repeal Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the Province of Alberta Repeal Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 2
William Roper Hull Child and Family
Services Amendment Act, 2000

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, it's with pleasure that I move second reading of Bill Pr. 2, William Roper Hull Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 2000.

I'd like to make a couple of brief comments about what this is about. It changes the name of the act to Hull child and family services act. The corporation which is established by the act has a corresponding name change to Hull child and family services. The objects of that corporation are expanded so that it promotes the emotional and psychological well-being of not only children and their families but also adults through the provision of educational, preventative, and treatment services. There are some corresponding amendments with respect to the powers of the corporation reflecting the expansion of the scope to adults.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 4
Calgary Municipal Heritage Properties
Authority Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill Pr. 4, the Calgary Municipal Heritage Properties Authority Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, this bill creates a new entity by the merger of two existing historical committees which act on behalf of the citizens of the city of Calgary in the preservation of historic sites. The Calgary Municipal Heritage Properties Authority and the Calgary Heritage Advisory Board will be joined under the new title of the Calgary heritage authority.

I would urge all members to vote for Bill Pr. 4. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 4 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 5
Calgary Foundation Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to move second reading of Bill Pr. 5, the Calgary Foundation Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill responds to the growing aspects of the Calgary Foundation and the role it has had in our community. I am pleased to be its sponsor.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 5 read a second time]

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Bill 11
Health Care Protection Act

THE CHAIRMAN: This afternoon the committee has under consideration amendment A1, section A and the subamendment to that amendment.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This is the first opportunity I've had to speak to this subamendment. I think what this subamendment is about is not allowing overnight stays, which is one of the largest concerns I have had with people calling and contacting my office, because virtually once you allow overnight stays, you are allowing private hospitals. The people of Alberta are smart. They've connected those two. No matter what you call it, it's a private hospital, and they don't want that.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Chairman, I was at a DARE grad at Muriel Martin school in my riding last Thursday, and the constable and the class told me that I would be welcome to use their eight ways of saying no to Bill 11. It was quite well received by all the people in the gymnasium, and I said that I would share with the Assembly the eight ways to say no to Bill 11, indeed supporting this subamendment that we have put in.

One of the ways is to just say: no, thanks. I think several people have said, "No, thanks" to Bill 11, thousands and thousands of people. So here we are putting in subamendments to try to make it palatable, but it certainly isn't.

The second way was giving a reason or an excuse. Well, I think the reason is that we know public health care serves us better. It's more efficient. It's cost-efficient. Going private will not reduce waiting lists, and I think we have to question who benefits, because it certainly looks like private health care providers are the only ones that will benefit by this and certainly not the general public.

The third way of saying no was repeated refusal or keep saying no, like a broken record. No. Just keep saying no to Bill 11. Certainly people have said no to Bill 11 a thousand times over, so just maybe the government will catch this.

The fourth way was walking away. You know what? That would give the government an opportunity to say no to this bill. They could walk away from it. They could table it if they don't like this subamendment. If they don't like the pressure they're getting from the outside, they should listen and walk away from this bill. Leave it on the Order Paper or dump it or kill the bill, as the chants are now out and about in Alberta.

The fifth way is changing the subject. Well, certainly we could change the subject and say: put that money that you're putting into private health care into public health care; open the beds that are available in public hospitals all over rather than supporting private industry that will allow overnight stays. So our subamendment would stop the overnight stays.

Avoiding the situation. Well, I don't know how we would avoid discussing Bill 11 unless, of course, it was dropped from the Order Paper, and that would be a good suggestion on my behalf. You

know, the longer we spend on these amendments, the more time it gives the people of Alberta to have a real look at this and say: no, we don't want it.

Another way of saying no to Bill 11 is the cold shoulder. Now, I'm wondering how many MLAs have received the cold shoulder from constituents on Bill 11. If they're getting the cold shoulder, maybe they just haven't picked up that that is another way of saying no to Bill 11.

The very last and most powerful way of saying no – and any of you who have been to DARE grads I know have heard this – is strength in numbers, and I think that's been indicated across this province time and time again, a huge rally in Calgary, a huge rally in Edmonton. I know that the Member for Lethbridge-East had three town hall meetings, virtually hundreds of people showing up, expressing concerns about Bill 11 and wanting more information. They're opposed to it. They are saying no.

Petitions. With all the combined petitions in this Assembly I bet it's close to 90,000 people who have said no. They don't want this bill.

4:40

I think it was part of Alberta's history last night that the Legislature was stormed by people who said no to this bill. In fact, I read in a book about the history of natural gas in Alberta that the only time the Legislature was stormed – people were in the Legislature and on the stairs. It was farmers in the late '30s, possibly. It would be interesting to see when that has happened before, maybe only once in the history of Alberta. I have to have the time to do a little homework on that, but that would be most interesting and most telling about the number of people saying no to this bill.

This strength in numbers is, I think, a very powerful, powerful way of saying no. I think everybody should pay attention to how many people are saying no to Bill 11. Certainly DARE graduates and their parents across this province are saying no. "Use our eight ways of saying no in the Legislature, please, Colleen. Go tell them no from us." I have done that. I will send this out to Muriel Martin school and thank them for their help and their participation in democracy and on the issues of Bill 11.

Specifically to this subamendment, Mr. Chairman. People have said: why do they want overnight stays? There are private clinics right now that do some surgeries, which, by the way, have not been proven to be more efficient. Instead of promoting that, I would think government members would be questioning it and certainly wondering what's going on and where our tax dollars are going.

It's interesting people will say fiscal Conservative with pride, but I would question that pride. The fiscal Conservatives I have seen have run a horrendous debt for this province, cut and slash programs without a plan, and now we're putting in a Bill that will give money to private industry rather than back in the pockets of the very taxpayers. Fiscal Conservative are certainly not words of pride that I can see anybody being proud of.

These overnight stays are where dangerous situations can occur. I think the Member for Edmonton-Manning today expressed that in his question very well. When you don't have the medical backup for an operation that requires an overnight stay, I think in this province we're going to start seeing headlines that say: tragedy occurs at a clinic because of lack of medical backup. In fact, I think we read about that the other day in the paper. I don't mean to exploit anyone who's going through a tragedy. It's a very difficult time for their family, but the reality is that we have to be aware that we are putting citizens at risk if we are going to allow surgeries that are that complicated that they require an overnight stay, yet the medical backup is not there at that facility.

All kinds of things can go wrong in surgery. People can have an allergic reaction to the medications or to the anesthetics. Often people don't realize how very serious – you go in thinking it's a simple operation, and it is not. I think I gave the example in here the other day of tonsils. People think that's a quick and easy surgery. But, actually, it has quite a high risk factor. You know, that was one of the concerns expressed to me. If we end up putting all the tonsillectomies in private clinics, then what about those cases where it is not just a simple tonsillectomy? What about the difficult ones where there are complications or the patient is an older patient, not just a child? Those clinics won't have the backup for that kind of operation. Will these still be available in the public sector? You've got to start wondering, as we totally go to private industry, what it is going to do to our public sector.

I am very concerned. I am hoping that members of this Assembly will support this subamendment. Maybe, in fact, it would change the bill so much to their liking. Certainly I know that this is one of the most contentious things in this bill. I know it from calls to my constituency office. I know it from doctors who've talked to me about the realities of the abilities of these clinics to take overnight patients and what that means. So I'm hoping that everyone here will support this subamendment.

MR. DICKSON: I'm persuaded.

MRS. SOETAERT: I've persuaded the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* – and that makes me happy, because he's a very intelligent man – and there are more. There are more and more MLAs, I think, across the way who are going to be convinced. Certainly their constituents are calling them, because they're calling me. They are calling me concerned about this bill and saying, "What can you do to not put it through?" They've asked me twice to challenge the Member for *Lac La Biche-St. Paul*. They say: "Come on. Make him speak about it in public if he's so determined." He said: no; I won't debate you in public. Well, I challenge him again. He learned how to say no but, of course, to the wrong things.

I had calls from *Stony Plain* as well concerning this bill and the realities of overnight stays being one of the major concerns they have. That's why this subamendment might actually help some of the Conservative MLAs. Maybe they'd say, "I support it", and they're not going to have overnight stays anymore. Maybe that would help them, because certainly they must be getting that kind of call.

We're way over 800 contacts to our office right now: e-mails, letters, faxes. My constituency office can't even answer them in a timely manner, which I like to do, but we can't. There's only one person working in my office, and believe me, she's a gift to me and my family for the workload she carries. People are aware of that. I've put it in the columns in the local paper about the reality of the phone calls. Of those over 800 – I think we were at 820-some today – 58 have been in support of the bill and the rest are opposed. One of their main concerns is: once you stay overnight, that's a private hospital, and here we are losing something very, very dear to us in this province.

You know, one thing someone told me: "Do you know what? This government is trying to push its values on me". They resent that. That's the opposite way of the way it should be acting. A government should be reflecting the values of the community of people they represent. The values of the people in this province are to totally protect public health care and to not put tax dollars into private operators' pockets. Absolutely. They've said that time and time again. They said it about *Bovar* and *MagCan* and *NovAtel* and *Gainers* and *West Edmonton Mall*, and here we are. We'll have

scandal after scandal in a few years about private operators that have got all kinds of taxpayers' dollars in their pockets.

I see my rural counterparts out there, Lac La Biche-St. Paul and Redwater and Whitecourt-St. Anne, just chuckling a bit. At a mutually agreed upon time I'll gladly come out to your constituencies and debate this. If you think your constituents are this supportive of it, I can take the heat out there. But I'll bet you that you couldn't get 20 people to come and support you on this out there.

So on the subamendment, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's not necessary for other members to enter into the debate. You know that the tradition of the Assembly and of the committee is that we only have one person speaking at a time. So hon. members who wish to enter into it may do so in their turn, but right now it's Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think I've pretty well expressed some of my concerns about this subamendment. I realize other people want to speak to it.

But just to recap. It's funny. The wise words out of the mouths of our children gave me eight ways to say no to Bill 11. Say no, thanks; give a reason or excuse; repeated refusal, keep saying no; walk away; change the subject; avoid the situation; cold shoulder; and strength in numbers. Good advice from wise, wise students across this province. They have said no to Bill 11. A gymnasium full of parents supported that statement when these young students and their constable gave me permission to use eight ways to say no to Bill 11.

This subamendment is a start in making this bill a bit more palatable, but to be honest, the best thing we could do to this bill is give it a decent burial.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

4:50

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm standing this afternoon to speak to the subamendment to government amendment A1. I find it interesting that we're not hearing anything new on this particular item from the government. As I spoke in moving to disagree with Bill 11, I stated that it's too vague and that it lacks hard facts. Now that we read amendment A1, we still lack the commitment to stop surgical suites. This is one of the most contentious items of this whole item.

Our subamendment to this, by adding "insured," seems to add some squeamishness to this government on this particular item. Albertans are still trying to comprehend this bill. It is not what the bill says; it's what it doesn't say. By that one slip of the word right there, by not adding "insured," it is doing nothing to make them feel any better.

You know, if we want a true amendment put forward, we have to commit to certain items, and I really believe that the surgical facilities referred to in this bill are in reality private hospitals. The bill claims to ban private hospitals, but on closer examination it fails in this promise. For example, the bill could not stop a person from providing hospital services as long as the facility were not a full-service hospital. If emergency services were not provided, for example, the institution would no longer fall within the definition of a private hospital.

Mr. Chairman, in my questions today I pointed out – and I pointed this out in the last few days, and I pointed this out before the dentist part of this came in – the tragic happening in this province last month. It happened in March.

I want to point out one of the principles in the case of hospitals. If there is a case for opening up hospital sectors to for-profit, overnight-stay facilities, then it must rest on the argument that such facilities can provide care more efficiently than is possible in a public hospital.

We did hear yesterday from the hon. Minister of Learning that by putting this subamendment forward, we're actually picking on rural Alberta. Well, I find that is very false. The fact is that what's happened over the last six years has been a restriction, something that should have been brought out, and we tried to bring out a number of cases of what was happening to rural Albertans when they did come in.

We see a hotel being built over by the University hospital right now. In conversations with different people that are involved in it, I said: "Oh, boy. Are there that many foreign students coming into this great province we have and going to the University of Alberta?" The answer back to me was: no; it's all the patients coming in from northern Alberta that have to be put up overnight. Well, there's something wrong with a system when that is occurring. They should not be coming in, bumped out of the system, and having to put out their own dollars to keep themselves going. They're the ones that waited on the list for a matter of months to get there. Those stories keep adding up. I don't believe there's anything in this bill or in this amendment that is going to give any safeguard to rural Alberta, and that is something that rural Alberta MLAs should be very concerned about.

The word "insured" there is something that we feel is going to bring out what was missing in it.

We also bring out the fact of a 12-hour stay. Well, we look at day surgeries that were disseminated throughout this province over the past few years and the lack of planning and the experiment: first taking major day surgeries out of major hospitals in our own cities, putting them out to what they call the community hospitals, very good hospitals but community hospitals; totally dismantling teams and sending them every which way to work. Blame it on the unions. Blame it on whatever you want. I sit in the middle and say that, you know, unions have their place, that unions have their reason for being. If we're doing everything on union breaking, there's something totally wrong.

Talking about justifications offered to Albertans for the proposal – that is, meeting the unmet needs of expanding service capacity to deal with shortages, waiting lists for care – this argument seems to be seriously incomplete. Alberta cuts to hospital spending since 1992 to 1995 were dramatic. The 1999 levels were still in the figures of 15 percent below 1992.

You know, these figures combined with the lack of dealing with the federal level, that they pull out of any necessary plans to go anywhere, all add up to the fact that we are in serious shape. Mr. Romanow, the Premier of Saskatchewan, I believe has got a good case that he's brought out in the last few days; that is: when are we going to as a complete country sit down and make sure, as we go into this new millennium, that our cost factor and everything else that actually happens in health isn't going to force bills like this coming forward? If it is the political game played, that seems to be playing out, that it's this government against Albertans in general and this government and the federal government, I don't like the game. The game isn't for the people that I represent.

Nothing in this bill ensures that the contracting out of services to private facilities will open up more beds within the public system, and this is where we really have missed it. We have those facilities. We have places we can open up. Let's enshrine that into our system without bringing amendments to a bill that actually came out before.

Hospital beds, operating theatres, and other services are already

available, Mr. Chairman, to open up within the public hospitals but remain closed because of the shortage in funding of professional staff. It is fundamentally incorrect to think that the solution to the problem of scarce resources within the public system is to split the resources between two systems. Why isn't it better to take the same amount of money that this government would hand over to the private hospitals and give it to the public system, which has the capabilities to meet the needs?

If we look at what we have just in our own city of Edmonton, we have wards. My mother was in the St. Albert hospital last month. Walking out of the ward that she was in, looking down another ward, all I could say: there's another dead ward in our system that could be opened up, could be part of the system.

You know, we have the capabilities. Where's the evidence that the same amount of money to private hospitals is going to cost less in the long run or provide better incomes?

Going back to the insured surgical services, why are we promoting something that we do not – this is why I'm trying to translate the amount of dead wards we have in this province. We have the argument, the items we read, of Didsbury maybe selling off the centre core to HRG and actually having different wings going off. This is a program that actually is in place throughout the country. There are places like this in actuality, out of Quebec City, and I do believe that it probably is a system to work at. The fact is that when people in Didsbury have to start wondering where they're going to go from there – if you're worrying about rural Alberta, maybe some of the helicopter pads, like the one that's been announced in the last while at the Misericordia, could be set up so we can move our physicians out to our public hospitals in rural Alberta, when we can set up enough cases for them. I think that if the system is costing what it is today, what is it if we can't transport some of our surgical people to those and make sure that we have a team?

5:00

The government has no data to show that this will add any benefit to the health care system. Perhaps the data is available, but the government does not want to show us any information because maybe it doesn't play into this overall scheme, like the government-sponsored study that the Official Opposition tabled and have had questions on over the last while, Mr. Chairman.

You know, we read that this government admits the fact that this legislation is based on a philosophical basis. If they have data, then show us, the severely normal Albertans. I really call myself a severely normal Albertan, and I am having trouble understanding where this amendment is going. I look at our subamendment. I believe that by adding the word "insured," it is clarifying it a lot closer, tightening it up. The 12-hour stay: well, we had day surgeries. We should keep the day surgeries open. We should reopen them. We should go back and look at the teams that made up those.

It all reflects what has actually happened in our province over the last few years. Under the leadership of the Premier in 1992-93 the political spin of this province was no different, no different at all from other countries like Australia, New Zealand, and England, where cash-strapped governments were looking for ways to react to overspending. You know, when you look back on it – and we've seen charts in this province – it wasn't a case of it climbing exceedingly. It needed a plan. You had The Rainbow Report, that had to come out. It was worked on by this particular government. The fact is that someone had the brilliant idea to decimate our health care because health care was at the root of government overspending. I really believe it was a total falsehood, but it was the political spin of the day. The political spin of the day was tax cuts. In listening to

what the minister said on Bill 207, it wasn't tax cuts on his part but listening to other parts.

Going back to the subamendment. You know, with the spin that dismantling the health care system would save the government money, the slow creep of privatization began, especially in Calgary. With the control of our health care, everyone would be happy. The government would save money. The small percentage of friends of this government, private operators, would make money, and the patients would be served.

Mr. Chairman, one little phrase like adding "insured surgical services" – this is the point that is very, very important. I'm not as hung up as maybe some are on the 12-hour, 72-hour, or whatever, but the 12 hours is just totally back to a day-surgery system, which I think should be opened up.

We're looking at the value of physicians in this province. Ninety-nine percent of physicians in this province really want to go about doing their work. They really want to go about going to work every day and making sure that they have enough theatre time that they can do their job. If the word is right without insulting – because I do have a lot of respect for doctors – they're eccentric. They want to go to work, and they want to get better. They want to improve their technique of operating, like the cataract operations today where you can have the foldable lens.

I'm glad that this province finally realized that the time saved with the foldable lens was very important. With the foldable lens today, some physicians that are doing it don't even do stitches. They just have a tiny, little slit. They slip it in and move on to the next case. One of the members was saying yesterday that years ago people would have to stay in for a week and be ice packed and everything. I totally agree. We have gone miles, but this bill in its entirety is not going there. What we need is government on both levels that really, really wants to drive to make our health system endure the costs of technology, endure the pharmaceutical costs.

Actually everything has happened to them over the years: a void of planning. With everything that actually has happened over the last 10 years, we have slipped behind in this particular case, but we could be the leaders in this world again by sitting down, working on the public system as it is today, thinking about what type of enhanced services we have to have, what type of insured surgical systems that are in place within the system, and working on that. Quit tinkering. Tinkering is as bad as saying you're experimenting, when we're talking about billions of taxpayers' dollars being spent per year. I really believe that we've gone beyond where we should.

I hope that we can convince this government that adding insured services to their amendment A1 is a very important one, and at this time I will sit down, Mr. Chairman, and let somebody else stand.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I don't know whether I'm going to have time to say everything I wanted to in the remaining time, and I know there will probably be some other colleagues that may want to say a few words before we get to 5:30, but let me try in the allotted time to make a couple of observations.

The first thing is that I've received a copy of a Bill 11 debate summary prepared by Alberta Health and Wellness, and this is on the subamendment because we've got a section here. It's produced April 17, 2000, day 8. It says ominously "total time elapsed: approx. 29 hours." It reminds me of the debt-o-meter that Laurence Decore had developed in 1993, Mr. Chairman, that clock that talked about the provincial debt that was running out of control. Anyway, I digress.

The Bill 11 debate summary I'm looking at has been prepared by

Alberta Health and Wellness. Now, I take it that the purpose of this is to give some accurate information to the people of this province in terms of what's going on in the House around the most important bill that we've seen in decades. So one would assume that the Minister of Health and Wellness would be chiefly concerned with accuracy and precision in terms of dutifully reporting what in fact is going on. You know what we find in here? We have this note about the subamendment. "The Liberals proposed a subamendment that significantly changes the original."

Then they go to a quote from our colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark in explaining one of the major modifications, and in four lines they take a quote. Now, what's interesting here is that I've got the *Hansard* from last night, or I guess these are the Blues. This is sort of the Blues-plus, because it's organized and formatted in a way we typically see it when we get it tomorrow. My colleague spoke to the amendment for, it looks like, 15 minutes, in two columns, to make it very clear what this subamendment was all about. What has been taken is two sentences and not the whole two sentences but phrasing from them, and this is what somebody who had not been in the House last night would take from it.

In other words, "no physician shall provide a surgical service" in Alberta in an approved surgical facility "that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours."

Now, that's nonsensical. That's not what amendment A1, section A says at all, Mr. Chairman. In fact, if you were to go on and read the text of the subamendment and read the explanation by my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark, you would know that this skews completely the thrust of the subamendment.

So I think that the Minister of Health and Wellness does an enormous disservice to all of us in this Assembly and certainly shows a complete lack of respect for Albertans and a lack of appreciation of his key leadership role by putting out a summary that so distorts the purpose of the subamendment.

5:10

You know what's interesting is that they don't put in the text of the subamendment. As my friend here from Calgary-Glenmore with his many years of legal experience would tell you, leave out the editorial comment, put in the precise text, and everybody then can form their own opinions. But that's not what happened here. The Minister of Health and Wellness has taken a quote out of context on the subamendment. In fact, we're talking about how the subamendment has been viewed by the Minister of Health and Wellness, and the statement of it in here is just wholly misleading and wholly inaccurate. I'm not accusing the Minister of Health and Wellness of misleading the House, but I'm certainly accusing his department of misleading Albertans and misleading this House. I hope that's going to be changed.

As we go on to read this, we have a comment from the minister, one of my favourite ministers in the House, International and Intergovernmental Relations, a woman with a great deal of wisdom in this House, not just because she recognizes my old hometown of dear old Drumheller but because she's a pretty sharp minister. There aren't very many things you get past this minister. When she speaks in this House, many of us listen . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: On the subamendment.

MR. DICKSON: On the subamendment, because what I'm reflecting, Mr. Chairman, is the comment that this minister made the other night. She said:

This [subamendment] talks about stifling the ability of the College of Physicians and Surgeons to determine the appropriate setting for services to be delivered in this province.

Now, the subamendment does nothing of the kind. It's her interpretation that this would stifle the ability of the college council.

This raises a real conundrum, Mr. Chairman. I had the privilege of being the opposition health critic between about January of 1998 and about February of 1999, and that was the time when we dealt with Bill 37, version 1, and Bill 37, version 2, and what we found is how scary it was to go to a meeting of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, that governing council. Let me tell you how, in some respects, inaccessible it was to go.

Before I go there, I just want to say that I have enormous respect for the men and women who serve on the college council, and I think of people like Dr. Betty Flagler, from Calgary, in her term as president of the college council and what wonderful, wonderful leadership she provided. But I think that here, in talking about the comments on the subamendment, Mr. Chairman, the College of Physicians and Surgeons is not an ideal forum to reflect public concern, to reflect broader constitutional issues.

I went to some of those college council meetings. First, the meeting would be scheduled for two days, and I would plan on coming to Edmonton for a Thursday morning. Then, on an hour's notice, I'd get: no, this item on the agenda has been moved to Friday. Then I'd get there and find that there were only maybe 10 or 15 seats for members of the public to go and sit in, and you'd discover there's no opportunity to speak. I went one time with Harold Swanson, who's a former president of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. They may have heard I was coming and didn't want to give me the floor, but you would think they would've given a former president of that college council the opportunity to speak. He didn't have that opportunity to do it. [interjection]

Now, my friend from Calgary-Egmont wants to get into the debate, and if he signals when he's ready, I'll sit down so that he can speak, but I want to finish my train of thought first. [interjection] Colleague from Calgary-Glenmore, I have a lot of trouble staying on task, so I'm afraid if I surrender the floor to you now, I may lose the train of this thought, and I'm working so darn hard to stay on task and on relevance.

What I'm saying, Mr. Chairman, is simply this. The College of Physicians and Surgeons is a respected, competent organization, and we should be proud of the work they have done. We should be proud of the work the council has done, but it is no appropriate vehicle to be deciding issues of public policy. They certainly bring to bear an expertise in the area of the practice of medicine, but what we have been doing with them and what this government was attempting to do with the college in the spring and fall of 1998 was effectively abdicate to that college council a policy-making role that people on the college council told me personally they felt uncomfortable with.

Well, what we're talking about is the very essence, because if you look at the second part of the subamendment, that deals with the Medical Profession Act and the bylaws under that. That's a key part of the amendment. It's a key part of the subamendment, and that's what I'm addressing right now. I think what I'm saying is that the concern around the college and the way they operate is not in any sense an ideal forum for public policy to be developed in.

I'll bet people in Peace River right now are saying: "We've got a darned effective MLA. We know what he does, because he comes into a public forum and speaks occasionally in this place, and there's *Hansard*, that records his voice." There's no public record of the college council. It's difficult to get access to one of their meetings. There's no equivalent to *Hansard*. You don't get advance notice typically of what they're dealing with and when they're dealing with it. My experience in 1998 left me with a sense that no matter how important the role of the college council is, it is a far, far less

satisfactory forum for discussing important public policy questions than this place is, Mr. Chairman.

That's one of the reasons I'm supporting the amendment, because that tries to address some of those concerns. [interjection]

Now, the second point on the subamendment is that we had the Minister of Learning . . . [interjection] I'm sorry. I've got the Minister of Government Services excited thinking I'm supporting the amendment. I want to make it clear that I'm speaking to the subamendment, and I'm sorry if I've misled any members in the Assembly. I support the subamendment. I was about to be drummed out of the caucus. In fact, the papers for expulsion were being drafted as I spoke.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, these side comments and conversations are all very interesting, I'm sure, to the individuals involved and directly engaged in them, but it's not part of the decorum of the Assembly nor of the committee. So I wonder if we could address ourselves to the issues that are in front of us and not engage members of either the other side or of your own side in these kinds of side conversations, hon. member.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, thank you for your guidance. My colleague for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who succeeded me as health critic, is much more competent than I ever was, and I need all the instruction and advice I can get from her as I try and soldier through.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: On subamendment SA1, we had the Minister of Learning, who again reaffirmed his credentials as a physician licensed to practise in this province, speak, and the theme was picked up on by our friend for Calgary-Cross, who we know has been trained and practised as a registered nurse. They both talked about some of the value of overnight stays and their concern about people being discharged too early from a clinic.

You know, when I listened to the Member for Calgary-Cross – remember that she highlighted some of the things on that list of things that could be done in day surgical services – I cringed. You may have cringed and winced, whatever, too. I'm always bothered by the notion that general anesthetic can be administered in a day clinic. Maybe the solution to some of those things is not then allowing more day clinics to keep people on an overnight basis. Maybe the solution is to ensure that we are more selective in looking at the list. Maybe some of those things should properly be done in a hospital that's got the backup to be able to deal with the complications.

5:20

I mean, I think the concern I heard from the Member for Calgary-Cross was that people shouldn't be discharged, that in some cases people need to be kept overnight. I respect her training and her experience, but there are two solutions, members, to that. One is to then allow more of these clinics to have beds and allow people to stay on an overnight basis. The other one is maybe to say: we should be more selective and more discerning, more discriminating in deciding on what procedures can be done outside hospitals that have that sort of backup and support.

I'm reminded by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek that time is marching on, and we want to hear from the Member for Calgary-Egmont yet, so let me quickly move to the other part that I hadn't touched yet in dealing with the subamendment. It's this. I had asked a question the other day that has not yet been answered.

Mr. Chairman, I'm getting tired of speaking to subamendment SA1. I expect there are members in this Assembly that are getting tired listening to debate about subamendment SA1. Maybe we should be starting to think about moving on, but before we can move on, we have legitimate questions that have not yet been answered.

In *Hansard* the other day I had identified some issues around which bylaws under the Medical Profession Act were in question in terms of the subamendment and the amendment. Here we go. Those questions were asked, and this is for the reference of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and any other members that may be getting ready to speak. They maybe can answer this. If our friends from Calgary-Egmont or Calgary-Fish Creek could answer this question: when we talk about bylaws under the Medical Profession Act, are those bylaws under section 31(e)? Are they under section 32? Are they under section 74? Are they under section 97? Those are all bylaw-making powers in the Medical Profession Act, and nobody's answered that question yet. Has anybody heard an answer, Mr. Chairman to that question? [interjections]

Now, Mr. Chairman, I heard someone say that it doesn't matter. [interjections] Does not matter.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. member should address himself to the amendment. If you're trying to engage others, as I suggested that you not do, and then trying to catch whatever is said and by so doing invite them to say it louder or whatever, this is really not what this debate is supposed to be about. So, hon. member, if you could engage yourself in the subamendment to the amendment, that would be helpful.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, thank you for the direction. I have to confess that every now and again in sort of a Walter Mitty-esque frame of mind I dream of actually engaging people in real debate, not 15-minute, 20-minute set speeches. I'm sorry. Every now and again I just think that there's maybe a chance that we could have a more meaningful exchange in this place than we do.

Anyway, we're enforcing the rules here, and I'm not doing a good enough job of following them, so I'm going to try harder.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: In any event, I do think that it would be very easy. Maybe the sort of shadow health minister, our friend from Calgary-Glenmore, who probably knows more about this bill than any other person in the Assembly, can tell me which bylaws in the Medical Profession Act are the ones that are an issue with the subamendment and amendment A1 itself. Those are answers that I think we're entitled to know. We want to know, and I think we have to have some response to that.

People may say: why do we talk about the medical profession? Well, we have two choices here. We have two options. We either completely subdelegate it to the College of Physicians and Surgeons – and that would be the government model – or what we do, Mr. Chairman, is build in a 12-hour limit, which is what the Liberal opposition would do with this subamendment SA1. I mean, isn't that really what we're confronted with here? Isn't that really the issue here? We either, on one hand, have the college determine it on some basis that we don't really know, using criteria we don't really know, or we set out some kind of formula in the legislation.

If I get a signal from the Government House Leader, I'm happy to adjourn debate. Otherwise, we'll keep on going until 5:30. Fine. I'm encouraged. I think the direction I'm getting from the side

opposite is to keep on going. Maybe that means there's some prospect of changing some minds here in the three or four minutes that we've got left.

Is my time up, Mr. Chairman? Okay. Thank you.

MS LEIBOVICI: I had the opportunity to introduce the amendment and only got four minutes on it, so I didn't really ever have an opportunity to actually speak to my own amendment. I'm more than pleased to start it now and to finish it when I get back at 8 o'clock, and then I know I will have ample opportunity tonight to get up over and over and over again. Unfortunately, all we have are the Blues this afternoon from the *Hansards* last night. What I plan to do in my remarks on the amendment is to actually look at the indications of the Member for Calgary-Cross, I believe, the minister of intergovernmental affairs, as well as the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I think those were the three that had spoken. Did I miss one?

AN HON. MEMBER: Dr. Oberg.

MS LEIBOVICI: Oh, yes, and especially the Minister of Learning. I will look at what the remarks were that they made which were

pertinent to the bill, which were absolutely pertinent to the amendment. I plan to go through each and every one of those speeches to address their concerns so that they can fully understand what the amendment was that I proposed.

The amendment, as I've indicated – and it's unfortunate that the little government blurb that's put out every day seemed to take it out of context and spin it a little bit – was meant specifically to do two things. One was to ensure that both the uninsured and insured services were split apart so that there could be no profit motive. I would think that every government member would say: yes, that's exactly what we want to see in health care, that there is no profit motive and that in fact every decision that is made is based on whether it is the provision of good health care and not on the issue of whether it is the provision of cash in someone's pocket. That is exactly what has to occur.

The other one has to do with the issue of the 12-hour stays. I had indicated – and I'll repeat it – that what the clause does, and it's in *Hansard* . . . Oh, we do have the *Hansards*. When did those appear?

[The committee adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 18, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: **00/04/18**

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order, please.

Before we proceed, I have been asked whether we can have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It is my pleasure to introduce to members of the Assembly tonight a number of guests of mine and my Liberal colleagues who are in the galleries. Some of them I just met this evening for the first time while they were waiting in line to go through the security doors to get a pass to come in. Many other guests are still waiting outside and for some reason have been denied access. At this time I would like to call upon all of my guests who are here to show their anger about Bill 11 to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Chamber. [disturbance in the galleries]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order in the galleries. Order in the galleries. Order.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We are dealing with subamendment SA1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was the last to speak and is on her feet.

Before I begin, I should tell the guests in the gallery that Committee of the Whole is a stage within the bill where we deal with amendments, and we go clause by clause through the bill. It's more of an informal stage. The members can move about, and they can take off their suit jackets and be more comfortable. We do allow people to move about the Chamber and have coffee or juice.

With that, hon. member, go ahead.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, and I'd also like to thank everyone who's come to watch the proceedings this evening and to participate in the democratic process.

I'd also like to let you know that the score, as of about five minutes ago, was 2-2 in the Oilers game. I know we have a lot of Oilers fans in the balconies tonight.

I'd also like to thank the security guards and the others who are manning the doors on behalf of the individuals within this Assembly. They do not have an easy task. I know that their position is one we all wish they were not in, but I do want to thank those individuals for being there to protect us if required.

What I would also like to say at the outset is that I resent the position this government has put us all in. It's a position where we are in lockdown, where in fact the democratic rights of individuals who usually have the freedom to roam this Legislative Assembly at

will are no longer able to do so. It is their building. I resent the government who has put us and them in the position of not being allowed to enter their own building.

I would also, on the other hand, like to thank them for the awakening of democracy that is occurring not only in this city but across the province everywhere. From the e-mails, the faxes, the letters, the number of people that have come into all of our offices in the last few days and in fact over the past few months, we know that this is an issue that is not going to die and that will continue and continue and continue to grow until this government recognizes the mistake they have made and the underestimation they have made of people's ability to understand exactly what Bill 11 is about.

I would also like to remind the government and ask them if they think this is what it felt like during the French revolution, when Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were holed up in their castle as well, and the people were at the front door waiting and pushing to get in. Marie Antoinette said: let them eat cake. What this government is saying is that . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Meadowlark, we are dealing with a subamendment that you introduced. Could we please proceed with the subamendment?

MS LEIBOVICI: Absolutely.

Those who can afford private health care will get it, and those who don't will get the underfunded, understaffed public health care system. [interjection] It is true, member.

The subamendment that we have in front of us this evening is an amendment that will attempt to make a god-awful bill maybe a tiny bit better. What the amendment does is split out the insured and uninsured services so that only insured services can be provided. What it also says is that surgical facilities will not have overnight stays. We know that that is a major concern individuals have, that this legislation sets up the ability for overnight facilities, private, for-profit hospitals, to set up in this province, to do so with the blessing of this government, of the Minister of Health and Wellness, and that in effect what we are setting up is a two-tiered system. Everybody knows that, yet this government denies it.

I was in a coffee shop the other day, and I said that I was getting a coffee because I had to go back to work at 8 o'clock at night. The young lady behind the counter said: well, what do you do that you have to go back to work at 8 o'clock at night? I said: I'm one of the MLAs. She said: oh, are you a Liberal MLA? And I said proudly: yes, I am. And she said: "Thank you. Thank you so much for standing up to protect our public health care system." I didn't have to twist her arm. She was no member of a union. She was not a left-wing nut. She was an educated, informed Albertan who knew exactly what the dangers of this bill present. And she thanked us for what we are doing.

I just came back from one of the schools in my constituency. It was a heritage fair there. It was a wonderful exhibit of what the students have put together to celebrate our heritage. As I was walking around the room, people talked to me about Bill 11. They said: "Go and fight for us. Make sure that Bill 11 does not pass, make sure that this government withdraws the bill, and make sure that you tell Ralph," which I wish I could, "that he needs to pull the bill." And that's what we are doing right here and right now.

For those individuals who weren't here the other night, I will put into the record exactly what the amendment tries to do. It says: "no physician shall provide an insured surgical service" in Alberta and no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta except in a public hospital or an approved surgical facility "that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours." No overnight stays and

splitting apart the insured from the uninsured services so that nobody can make a buck off someone's illnesses. That's what the amendment says, and that's what we have put forward and will speak to tonight.

I listened very carefully to the speeches, and I know I will get an opportunity, because I do not have a lot of time left, to rise again. I have indicated that I will do so, and I will very carefully continue to look at the speeches that the government members made last night with regards to their defence of a bill that is indefensible. I must admit that in listening to those speeches, for the first time I heard the government members admit that they have a number of constituents, more than five or 10, that are phoning them to complain about this bill. That, I think, is an important first step. We now have government members admitting in fact that they are hearing from their constituents about this bill. So I thank all the constituents who are phoning their government members, and I hope they will continue to do so to bring that message home.

The second step that I found encouraging was that the Premier today it seems indicated that closure would not be brought in this week. That is a move from what he said last week, when he indicated that in fact closure might be brought at the end of this week before the spring break. So at least now he is saying very clearly, unless I misunderstood his comments that were on the radio at 6 o'clock, that closure will not be brought in at this stage and, I am assuming, at the next stage of the bill. In fact, we will be able to go to spring break. People will have the opportunity to meet with their MLAs yet one more time to explain what the problems are with the bill. In fact, what it does is allow us to bring forward amendments like the one that I have on the table tonight. The amendment is a very important amendment, that we need to keep talking about.

8:10

The third step that I think needs to still occur is for the facts now to be heard, to be listened to, and to be understood by the government members. As part of the bringing forward of those facts, the amendments are very, very important because they allow us to indicate to the government members what the facts are with regards to private, for-profit health care.

Now, the government members that spoke last night were very passionate in their defence of the public health care system. They indicated that they would do nothing to harm our public health care system, but somehow I fear that they are – and I'm perhaps a bit bold in saying this – misguided in their reading of what this bill is. So I find it necessary to talk and explain the amendment so that they can understand exactly why we need to pull the requirement for overnight stays, why we need to clarify that in fact an approved surgical facility as outlined in section 2(1) of the bill, as defined in the definitions in the back portion of the bill, is nothing but code for private, for-profit hospitals.

In fact, what needs to be understood by the government members is that there is not one shred of evidence that either the department or any of them or any of their researchers have been able to produce since November – I believe that was when the policy statement was brought forward. Since November 400-odd employees of the Department of Health and Wellness and millions of dollars spent have been unable to prove one shred of evidence that this providing for overnight stays at private, for-profit hospitals in this province is going to be more cost-efficient, is going to be more cost-effective, will reduce waiting lists, and anything else they've dreamed up in the last five months to try and sell this bill.

If the passionate appeals of the government members in preserving and maintaining our public health care system are to be believed, what needs to be recognized is that that belief does not mesh with

the facts, and dissonance amongst the members themselves I think must be pretty amazing. To be able to sit and justify a position that is not based on fact is one that I find very difficult to understand. There have been countless studies that we in the Official Opposition have put forward. In fact, as promised to the Minister of Community Development and the Minister of Infrastructure, I am sending over some of those studies, and you will probably be receiving them in your mailboxes within the next couple of days. I indicated in the speech I gave a few days ago that I would be doing that because the ministers were asking for that information.

Obviously, we are for this amendment. If in fact the government members are to vote against this amendment, they must do so with full knowledge of what they're voting against. They are voting against public health care when they vote against this amendment. They're voting against preserving our publicly funded health care system. They're voting against the principles of the Canada Health Act. They may shake their heads as much as they wish and say that it's not true, but there are too many opinions out there, too many research studies that are out there that indicate that it is true. As I indicated earlier, with the strength and might of the Department of Health and Wellness the minister has been unable to prove otherwise. We have sat here day after day and have listened carefully, and other than a Fraser Institute report based on old studies, that were not relevant and that were quickly discredited, in fact there is nothing else that the government can put forward.

I think it is established here that what we are voting for is a very important principle, that this amendment addresses that very important principle, that as long as overnight stays remain part of this bill, as long as surgical facilities are defined to be hospitals, and as long as approved surgical facilities can do both insured and uninsured services at the same time and charge for enhanced services as well, and later on – I don't think today, not sure if tomorrow, but at some point in time we will be dealing with the enhanced services part of the amendments that the government has put forward.

As long as those elements remain in the bill, this government is doing something that no other government across Canada has done. In fact, what this government is doing is opening up the doors to private, for-profit businesses that thrive on making a profit on people who are vulnerable, people who are sick, and people who are ill. I don't think that is something the government members want to see occur, yet they stare the facts in the face and deny them. They deny the reality that is in front of them. Based on what? If you could at least tell the people of Alberta what it is based on other than a whim, a wish, ideology, then maybe they might start to think that there's some substance in this, and they might understand what in fact you are trying to do. But that's not what this is. Bill 11 is not that. Bill 11 is just the opposite, and I know that each one of you in your heart must know that as well.

This is important. This is something we will stick with for a long time because it is important. It is the essence of the bill, and until it is taken out or the bill withdrawn, which is definitely preferable, there doesn't seem to be a lot of reason to move from this particular amendment. Hopefully I will get a sign of hope from the House leader, from the Minister of Health and Wellness that can tell me differently, but I don't think that that will be the case. I don't think so at all.

I know that I'm drawing near to the end of my time and I know that there are others anxious to get up as well, and I thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm delighted

to rise and enter this debate between second and third readings on an amendment to an amendment. Before I go ahead, I just want to say hello to the people in the galleries and welcome them to this part of the democratic process. It's very good to see you all here. Thank you for coming.

8:20

I also want to comment specifically on some of the statements that were just made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, whose opinions I respect and whose viewpoints I also respect. However, there were a couple of points that she mentioned which in relation to this subamendment certainly need some clarification. One of the comments she made was that people are voting against or that the government is somehow moving against the spirit, the principles, and the concept of the Canada Health Act. Now, that is absolutely false. Madam Chairman, the people in this House and the people in the galleries know full well that this bill, the Health Care Protection Act, goes a long way to strengthening some areas that were weak in the system, and that's very true. I'm going to give you a couple of examples of where and why that is the case.

I hear the fire alarm bell ringing, and I'm not sure – do we just keep going? Okay.

First of all, Madam Chairman, as many people perhaps know and perhaps many others do not know, there is currently no legislation in the province of Alberta to prohibit private, for-profit hospitals, but Bill 11 will in fact do that. Now, I understand the comments with respect to defining the difference between a full-fledged, full-functioning, acute care, emergency care hospital versus the definition of a surgical facility or a private clinic or a clinic of any kind. There are ample examples of this in our system today not only in Alberta but elsewhere. I would tell you that the fundamental difference is similar to the definitions that must have been used 10 or 12 years ago when clinics first started up in this province.

Madam Chairman, the fact was that 12 years ago or thereabouts there were a number of pressures on the health care system, and private providers were brought into that equation in a stronger way than ever before to look at where they could help out so that the spiraling costs in health care could be maintained in order to protect one publicly funded health care system.

Now, today we're at a similar point. We know that the federal Minister of Health, the Hon. Allan Rock, and the Prime Minister of this great country, Jean Chretien, have written to us, put in writing, that they want us to look at creative and innovative ways of addressing the future demands of our health care system because, in their words, the status quo is not an option. Now, having said that, I was expecting that they might provide some kind of clear comment, some kind of clear direction on what they meant by an innovative, creative approach to health care, given the increasing costs.

Unfortunately, up until now they have not provided any of that, so each province is kind of left on their own to try and come up with some ways of dealing with these advancements that have been made in medical technology, the advancements that have been made in surgical procedures, the advancements and the tremendous amount of advancements specifically in information technology, all of which are very, very good, solid things. I think we all have to keep in mind that as a result of these tremendous advancements the expectations that we all have of the health care system have changed dramatically.

Madam Chairman, what was laser surgery eight, nine years ago? Virtually unheard of. What was orthoscopic surgery? A similar amount of time . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The chair does have to remind you that we are dealing with an amendment to an amendment, as you

indicated when you first stood up. I would ask if we could move back to that amendment, please.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I appreciate the reminder, which I know you've given to all members here, because we do tend to get wrapped up a little bit.

I just want to make the point as we're looking at the amendment to the amendment, that in fact what would happen if the subamendment that was brought in were to be enacted is that it would take away the right for us to look at and to have regional health authorities consider as an option what is central to this whole issue of redefining and re-examining overnight stays.

Overnight stays, for the information of everyone listening, are simply a stay that is longer than 12 hours in length. It doesn't matter what time of day it happens. Technically, if you're in a facility longer than 12 hours, you are deemed to be in an overnight stay situation. The fact is that with the improved amount of technology now, we know that recovery times have changed. This subamendment is unacceptable for that reason, because it fails to acknowledge that. I acknowledge and I respect what they are trying to do here, but the fact is that they are wrong in some of the explanations. So I needed to clarify that.

In fact what the amendments do, Madam Chairman, as you well know, is talk about not only strengthening the many things that Albertans have asked us to do, but they also provide a tighter package of guidelines and restrictions that govern our clinics that are out there today. Without them we may have . . . I'm sorry. Are you signaling the fire alarm again? No? Okay.

Without those stricter guidelines in place, we would be accused of not having a uniform system across the province. What is important with these amendments is that we are trying hard to make things uniform so that the level of care and the level of service you would receive in northern Alberta or southern Alberta or Edmonton or Calgary or Sangudo or Okotoks is standard for everybody, and that is a good thing.

These amendments are necessary for some of those very obvious reasons, but I would also tell you that in the process of these amendments, Madam Chairman, we are also strengthening the prohibition against things like queue-jumping. We know that there are concerns about that. It's important for the individuals listening and for people participating in the debate to understand that we're not trying to do something here that would harm that. We're trying to improve the prohibition against it. That's a critical part of the bill, because Albertans asked for that to be done, and we're intending to do that.

There are a number of other things that these amendments speak to that the subamendment, if brought in, would curtail. But the essence of the first amendment, Madam Chairman, has only to do with adding in a particular definition to include dentists. That's really what the first amendment is all about, but the subamendment as worded would not only take away that particular necessary change, which we've been asked to put in, but it would also defeat a lot of the other points that are trying to be advanced.

Now, another comment that the hon. member made was saying that someone is denying the reality of what the health care pressures are today. In fact, Madam Chairman, the exact opposite is the case. We are acknowledging the reality. The reality is all of the advancements I mentioned before. The reality is that we have a very fast-growing population, which is a great thing, and we have an aging population, which is also a great thing. What we're trying to do here is to simply say that those growing pressures have to be addressed somehow. Yes, money is part of the issue. Of course it is, and that's why we're pressing Ottawa so hard to restore its funding back to

1994-95 levels. But this subamendment would take away some of that thrust, and that's why the subamendment is unacceptable.

We know that when medicare was first brought in – this will come as no surprise to some of our listeners. Do you know, Madam Chairman, that circa 1960 when Tom Douglas brought in the idea of a medicare program in Saskatchewan, there was tremendous opposition to that. That's why this amendment, which speaks to change, which speaks to progress has to be looked at in that context. Yes, of course there are some people who are opposed to this. I understand that. But so, too, were 90 percent of the doctors opposed to what Tommy Douglas was trying to do back when he was trying to bring in medicare. Who would argue that he was wrong? Who would argue that Tom Douglas was wrong with his dream for a medicare program? Obviously he was right in spite of the fact that there was a lot of opposition to it.

Now, what we're talking about here and what this amendment and consequently the subamendments are talking about is simply bringing us up to speed in a very progressive way to allow us to have regional health authorities consider as an option one set of very narrow, very low-risk, minor surgeries that could possibly be done in a private setting that is safe, that is fully accredited. That's what the amendment is all about, Madam Chairman. This amendment that simply reads "no physician shall provide a surgical service" and substitutes "no physician shall provide an insured surgical service" and so on speaks against the spirit of that necessary change.

8:30

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, there's a point of order.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MS LEIBOVICI: *Beauchesne* 333, if he'd entertain a question as to when HRG became a regional health authority so that they could ask for overnight stays.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We first ask the hon. member whether or not in fact he will entertain a question.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Madam Chairman, the hon. member has been here for seven years, and she knows full well that there is a point for questions in question period. She's welcome to ask that question. If she has a question about the amendment or the specific subamendment, that's a different issue. This has nothing to do with HRG, so it's totally irrelevant.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Continue the debate, hon. member.

Debate Continued

MR. ZWOZDESKY: What I also want to refute here are some comments and some references that were made earlier in the debate in reference to this amendment and subamendment, the fact that there are no more beds being opened up, which is obviously not true. In our Capital health region alone over the last several months we have opened up literally hundreds of more beds. Literally hundreds. Right now we are in the process of opening a further set of beds, about 63 right now. We're also in the process of hiring 90 more doctors and 2,400 more nurses to help staff and look after those beds. [interjections] That's all part of what was offered earlier in the debate, and if it was allowed earlier in the debate and questions asked, then they need to be answered. I heard the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* say this afternoon that questions were being asked in relation to this amendment and this bill that were not being

answered, so I'm trying to answer some of those questions. He offered them in good faith, and I'm responding in good faith.

Now, I just want to go on with this subamendment and some of the comments that were made there by previous speakers. The fact is that we have to look at this amendment and subamendment in the context of the bigger picture of health care delivery right across Canada, not just what's going on in Alberta but particularly what's going on in Alberta and also with reference to the national context. It may surprise you to know that we will be, I think, the only province that will ban private, for-profit hospitals, and we will be the only province that comes out and openly says that there is a problem in that regard, that there's a loophole in that regard, and once this amendment is dealt with and brought in, we will see a much stronger piece of legislation. And do you know what, Madam Chairman? Nothing will happen in the end. We'll have a lot more people accessing faster service, better service with high quality being provided the way it has traditionally been provided. That's the truth. That is precisely why we need to look at health care through the eyes of the broader picture.

With this amendment, Madam Chairman, we are making a very sincere effort to honestly address some very stark and harsh realities with respect to not only today but the future. We're all concerned about health care. We all use it. We all need it, and we all will. So for members opposite to suggest that somehow there's a self-serving element in this is absolutely false. It would not benefit anyone to take away or to destroy something that is very, very solidly enshrined as one of our Canadian values. We strongly believe that, and we're doing what we can to help improve it and help protect it.

Now, as I look at this amendment, which we're supposed to be discussing, regarding section 2, we are simply saying – and I'll read this into the record, because a lot of people may have just joined us for this debate – that section 2 is struck out and the following is substituted:

2(1) No physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta, and no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta, except in

- (a) a public hospital, or
- (b) an approved surgical facility.

What the subamendment says is to strike out "no physician shall provide a surgical service" and substitute "no physician shall provide an insured surgical service." Then it goes on to talk about the issue of the 12-hour stay, which I talked about earlier.

Since they've referenced 12-hour stays, I want to just comment briefly on what that means here, Madam Chairman, and because it's part of the subamendment. At the moment we all know that a full-fledged public hospital is the only place you can go for major surgery and for minor insured surgery that requires a stay of longer than 12 hours. But we have advanced beyond that now. We have surgeries that can be performed much more safely in surgical settings, and that's what this discussion is all about.

Madam Chairman, as you look at this and you consider the 12-hour stay, think of it in terms of some of the orthoscopic surgery. What was a hip surgery 12 to 15 years ago? It was virtually unheard of 15 years ago – virtually unheard of – because of the technology not having existed at the time. Today we have enormous advancements that have been made in that regard. I'm not for a moment saying that hip surgeries for everybody is a minor surgical procedure, because for some it's a major surgical procedure. If the doctors deem that it's a major surgical procedure or if the patient is somehow in need of the full backup of a full service, an acute care emergency centre, then I can tell you for sure that doctor would undoubtedly be recommending that that particular person's case be dealt with in a full-fledged public hospital. It might have to do with

the patient's age. It might have to do with the patient's heart condition. It might have to do with the patient's blood pressure. I mean, come on. What you have to look at here and trust is the doctors making the right decisions on behalf of their patients. To suggest that we have no trust in the doctors, as some members opposite are inferring, is simply absolutely wrong.

The fact is that under the 12-hour stay rule we do have people that are being in some cases rushed in and rushed out because they don't want to violate the 12-hour rule. Well, what happens if a particular surgery requires a 13-hour stay or a 14-hour stay? What happens in those cases, where we're sort of borderlining it? Can't we take a look at taking some of the minor surgeries that are currently only allowed to be done in a full-fledged public hospital and move them over here into a different setting where that is safe to be done, that is fully accredited by the college, where the minor surgery has been defined as being okay to be done, but for some reason, Madam Chairman, it takes longer than 12 hours of stay?

Now, hernias are a popular example of the 12-hour stay rule. I've had constituents and other people calling me saying: you know, I've had a hernia operation, and I was in and out in four or five hours. I think that's terrific that they have. I've also had others phone me up and say: no, no, no; I had to stay longer than 12 hours. As the subamendment talks about 12-hour stays, Madam Chairman, it's important to realize that there is a difference of condition that we all have with respect to our own medical health and with respect to the medical health of others. So let's not be blindfolded into thinking that one size fits all here. Patient concern will remain the number one priority of our doctors and of our health authorities.

Even having said that, the guidelines, which we are toughening up through our amendments, by the way, are very, very strict. We need to put in some kinds of restrictions and stronger guidelines surrounding the operation of these clinics. Madam Chairman, these clinics that are out there, be they privately owned or else how owned, are not going to go away. They are here. They are all across Canada. It's part of the evolution of health care. They were allowed and – you know what? – medicare never fell apart, and it's not going to fall apart now either.

The fact is that those clinics provide a very valuable service. They provide an efficient service or they wouldn't be there. It's simply impossible for some members to suggest under this amendment or some other amendment that we should cancel all our associations with some of the privately provided services. All we're doing is contracting for the service only. The doctors get paid the same amount of money on a fee schedule if that surgery is done in a hospital or if it's done in a clinic for insured services, and members opposite know that. We are outlawing facility fees. We have now for some time, but this bill strengthens that resolve, and that's what's important.

AN HON. MEMBER: Read the bill.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Read the bill is exactly right, hon. member. It's in the bill, and facility fees are prohibited. Don't confuse facility fees with facility services. Those are two different things. Facility fees, okay? Facility services are just a definition of what's provided, everything from nursing care to food to whatever.

My 20 minutes are up for now. I'll come back later. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

8:40

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. So that's what our health care system has come to, I suppose, four-hour posthernia stays. Well, that will be news to the college.

You know, context is very important. Context helps us understand the meaning of so many things, so in the context of debating this subamendment, I would like to comment on the circumstances that we find ourselves in here this evening. As a member of this Legislature, who is being called upon to pass judgment on the subamendment from my colleague, I find that I am now being treated as somewhat of a second-class legislator. I was told earlier this evening that if I wanted to enter the Chamber, a Chamber which I'm very proud to enter every day, being elected and then re-elected to represent my constituents, very proud to walk through the front doors and walk up those steps into this Chamber . . .

Privilege

MLA Access to the Chamber

MR. DICKSON: A point of order, a question of privilege, Madam Chairman. I've just been advised that two of my colleagues are unable to get access to the building. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry are outside the east entrance and unable to get access to the building. I understand that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is out there as well. Now, there's no more basic right than the right of members to be present in this Chamber to be able to participate. I'm raising that at the earliest opportunity. I'd be raising it under Standing Order 15.

AN HON. MEMBER: Did they have their security card?

MR. DICKSON: Well, my understanding is that they have used their security card. It does not work. They're not able to get access. Three MLAs are down there at the entrance, and I regard this as a serious matter.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, leave it with us for a minute. We will check on this. I'm sure that we will ensure that they are indeed welcomed into the building, and we do want them in the Chamber.

Go ahead, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much. Of course, that information just furthers the point that I was making, Madam Chairman, that when I was told that at 6 o'clock this evening that I wouldn't be able to walk up those front steps and walk through the doors that I normally access this Chamber through so I can do the job I was elected to do, I felt that this government was trying to not just intimidate so many citizens but also intimidate this member of the Assembly.

While we're talking about context, of course, we're talking about the context in which we were told one thing up until 4:30 this afternoon about the accessibility of the Chamber and then something else entirely different when it was too late to do anything about it, and I don't appreciate that kind of duplicity either, Madam Chairman.

Now, when we take a look at the amendment that's before us and the argument we just heard – I suppose the associate minister was speaking for the government – the one thing that certainly struck home to me is that this government is trying to have it both ways. They're trying to defend their move to privatize health care in the province of Alberta by using the example of some existing freestanding day surgery clinics where a very limited number of very low-

intensity surgeries are performed right now. They're trying to use that experience and then extrapolate that, jack that up into an experience that would call for much more complex and major surgeries.

Nowhere in the associate minister's talk did he actually give us that distinction between major and minor. Nowhere did he tell us what kinds of surgical procedures there would be. He gave us some hyperbole about the miracles of modern science and the fact that there may be some new surgeries, but the fact is that this government first tried to sell its private health care initiative by using the example of hip surgery until the College of Physicians and Surgeons quite rightly pointed out that that was far too complicated a surgery to be done in a day surgery setting or in a freestanding clinic setting.

Then this government used the example of the Shouldice hospital in Ontario, which of course bears no resemblance at all to what this government is trying to do. The example was hernia surgery, and there is no appreciable waiting list for general surgery or hernia surgery in this province right now. The fact is that in the Shouldice hospital in Ontario patients stay for as long as three or three-and-a-half days after their surgery.

So it seems to me that this government is trying desperately to find examples to trot out when in fact there are no examples in this country of what this government wants to do, because this government is going into uncharted territory. They are pushing well beyond any reasonable limits that any other jurisdiction has put around private involvement in the provision of surgeries, and they are embarking on this quest now to serve some corporate interests instead of the public interests. I think that the associate minister's remarks themselves speak directly to the fact that this government has abandoned the public good when it comes to health care. It is instead catering to the selfish interests of a few who may profit from private health care.

Now, I have some questions that were provided to me. They come in the form of a copy of a letter that was sent to the Premier from Mr. Cetinski of 160th Avenue in Edmonton. He asked me if I would make sure that these questions were asked. In his letter he talks about a "Big Business culture," and he wants to know whether or not this big business culture is somehow running roughshod over the government of Alberta. He says in his letter:

Economic efficiency as it pertains to commodities is very measurable and can be attained in the free-market concept, but truly how can this efficiency be transposed to the treatment of illness in mankind which cannot be measured by scientific rationality?

A very good question. He has not received a very good answer from the Premier.

He asked a second question as well that he wanted me to raise in debate today. He says:

The second thought that comes to mind, should a competitive relation between private and public health care culminate (as your proposal does not take this in account) how will resources of professionals in this industry be attained to satisfy both the public and private health care systems?

Again, an excellent question.

This government talks about its policy being one that will alleviate pain and suffering. Somehow, they say, without offering evidence, it will shorten waiting lists. This would of course be based on the simplistic notion that if you have surgery available in two centres, you'll somehow diminish the waiting time. But it's not the surgical centres that create the problem, Madam Chairman. It's the number of surgeons available to do the surgery that creates the problem. So if you have, as this bill would call for, the same number of surgeons working in different settings, you're doing nothing but splitting resources. So, again, Mr. Cetinski asks a very good question.

His third question has to do with this point directly.

Thirdly will this two tier system of health care greatly reduce the waiting list for needed treatment (keeping in mind question #2) and has the projected cost figures, keeping in mind the demographics and escalating cost runs to year 2016 when baby boomers will all become senior citizens, accomplish any savings?

Now, in response to these very thoughtful questions from an individual whom I'm assuming the Premier may have been thinking of when he dismissed critics of his policy as left-wing nuts, for these very thoughtful questions, Mr. Cetinski received not a response from the Premier but a form letter response that did not address his questions at all from the Minister of Health and Wellness. I can tell you that he's not the only Albertan that has brought this to my attention. They took the Premier at his word when he invited comment from Albertans. He asked them to respond. He invited them to visit their web site. He asked them to read their brochure, and he asked them for their feedback. When they provide their feedback and their thoughtful questions, they get back form letters. I think that is very unbecoming of the government, Madam Chairman.

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, the chair would be amiss if she didn't mention that we are dealing with a subamendment here. Can we please discuss that?

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. I was of course dealing with the subamendment in the same way as the associate minister of health was. I think he said: the rather wide-ranging and international aspects of the issue. I will try to constrain myself to comments much as he did, Madam Chairman.

8:50

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: Now, when I took a look at the government's web site – and I was anticipating debate on this subamendment which would limit stays to 12 hours – I wanted to see what the government had to say about the difference between a private hospital and a surgical facility. The government web site gives us the following explanation.

A surgical facility, as referred to in Bill 11, would only provide limited minor surgical services based on contracts with regional health authorities. These surgical facilities would not charge patients for medically necessary services.

What we have heard from the associate minister again is this reference to only minor surgical services. Well, my question to the government which I would dearly love an answer to is: would they provide us with this list of minor surgeries which require contracting out? Could we please see this list that could not be done within the existing legislative and regulatory framework?

We already have guidelines established by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. We already have bylaws under the Medical Profession Act. We already have sections of the Alberta Hospitals Act that allow for the contracting out of some services. We already have regional health authority guidelines and Auditor General guidelines for the contracting out of services. We already have a well-established protocol within the AMA for dealing with fee-guide issues. The government has already admitted that there are, I believe, 170 minor surgical services which don't require any kind of intensive, invasive procedures that are being done on a day-surgery or outpatient basis right now.

So if that's the case and this regulatory framework currently exists, what possible thing could Bill 11 add unless it is that you have to read between the lines? And reading between the lines, what

we're hearing is: well, we need Bill 11 because we have to allow for greater than 12-hour stays; we have to generate a new regulatory framework so that Albertans, instead of going to hospitals for complicated surgery, will go to private health care centres or private surgical facilities or whatever the language of the day is from this government.

So my challenge to the government is: provide us with the list of surgeries. Let Albertans know exactly what it is you have in mind for them. Let Albertans know if in fact, contrary to the wishes of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Albertans will be sent to private hospitals for a hip replacement or a knee replacement. Let Albertans know if that's the way Albertans are going to receive orthopedic surgery. Let Albertans know if that's the way Albertans are going to be receiving other kinds of general surgery or ENT or cancer-related surgeries. Let Albertans know if in fact that's your plan, that you want to set up this array of for-profit, private surgical facilities that have to do much more invasive and much more complicated surgeries, and that's really why you need Bill 11, because we all know that it's those more complicated surgeries that generate more income for those people who are responsible for providing them.

Is that really the pressure that's on this government? To provide those income opportunities for those people who benefit directly from the ownership and the operation of these private surgical facilities? Is that why you want to extend the 12-hour rule, and not this nonsense that somebody might run into a complication and they're being kicked out of the clinic sooner than the 12 hours would allow for? If you could name one example where that's happened, then I would like to see that reported to the College of Physicians and Surgeons for follow up. That was a very insulting argument that we heard from the associate minister.

I'd also like to refer the Assembly once again to the government of Alberta's web site on Bill 11, where they answer the question, "How would contracts between regional health authorities and surgical facilities be approved?" What we learn when we read this information from the government of Alberta's web site is that this is going to be done on a piecemeal basis. There is not going to be one protocol or one set of guidelines. This is going to be done on a very situational basis. It means that depending on who you know and who you talk to and how soon you talk to them and how fast you get into the line, you will get an answer on whether your contract is approved or not.

After the College of Physicians and Surgeons decides that the facility can be approved, which is a fairly narrow process in terms of the guidelines that the college has, then it will be up to each regional health authority. So the people of Edmonton may have to go to a private clinic for knee surgery, and the people of Calgary may have to go to private clinics for ophthalmology, and the people in Grande Prairie might have to go for general surgery to a private centre. So what we're dealing with is not two-tier medicine. We're dealing with 17-tier medicine. We're dealing with a situation where Albertans won't know from region to region what kind of services they can be entitled to. Not only that, but we won't know in terms of the quality.

Can you imagine the audit costs and the control costs and the downside if one of these private businesses should fail? Then where are the residents going to go in that particular jurisdiction when the regional health authorities put all of its surgical eggs into that one private basket? Then what's going to happen to the quality of patient care and accessibility and cost control? Who knows whether or not that regional health authority will have the ability to negotiate a contract that's in the best interests of Albertans? How will we know that it's in the best interests of all Albertans and not just those few who are going to directly benefit?

When I see this answer on the government's own web site, it generates so many more questions. For example, it says that the contract would provide a benefit to the public system by improving access to publicly funded services or increasing cost effectiveness or efficiency in the delivery of services.

Well, those are some mighty big ors, and I would ask the minister how exactly he is going to determine that. What are the criteria? What are the performance measures? How are you going to determine whether it's more efficient or less efficient? On what basis of cost-effectiveness?

You haven't done the studies, Mr. Minister, and in correspondence you've sent to me, you've told me that you haven't even done a capacity study of the 17 health regions now. You don't even know what capacity there is in terms of surgeries and facilities right now, and that's in correspondence with your signature on top of it. So if you don't know that basic information now, how can you possibly make a judgment on whether or not it'll provide a benefit or greater access?

You've said in your amendments that what you're going to do is ensure that the capacity in the public system is used first, but you haven't even measured that capacity. You don't have audit information on all the existing public hospitals now, and that's according to the Auditor General. It's going to be a matter of three blind mice or eeneey, meeneey, mineey, mo. It certainly is not going to be based on fact. It's going to be entirely based on fiction, and what we're left with is a government that has nothing more to back up its private health care policy than saying: trust me.

Privilege

MLA Access to Chamber

MR. SAPERS: Now, Madam Chairman, you had said that in leaving my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo's motion on privilege to you, you would deal with it. I've just been informed that there are three more members – the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, the Member for Edmonton-Norwood, and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar – who at this very minute are being denied access, including the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Edmonton-McClung. I would like to know before we continue what it is you're going to do to ensure that these elected members of the Assembly can take their seats in this Chamber and participate in the debate?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member, please have your seat a moment. A few minutes ago the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo rose. We talked to the Sergeant-at-Arms. He has gone out, if you'll notice, to see what the situation is. He is not back yet to report to me. I do notice that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry made it into the Assembly, and we are trying to see where the rest of the people are. I will report to you and the rest of the committee when I've heard back. Okay?

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. I understand that he was escorted in by six policemen, and I would like to request that perhaps we should ask him.

Madam Chairman, I'm just wondering whether or not you might consider an adjournment until we can get all members into their places so they can participate, because it is a breach of their privilege that they are being denied access to this debate at this time.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I'm going to wait until the Sergeant-at-Arms comes back to report to me. I'm going to have you continue the debate until I have a report back. We have sent someone out. Two members have now entered the Chamber.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, I apologize. I just entered the Chamber, and I didn't hear your full comment.

We've managed to find one member who with some difficulty managed to access the east entrance. We still have a number of other members who have been attempting to get access to the building but have not been able to make their way to the east door.

I think it is appropriate. There is no more fundamental right than the right of every member of this Assembly to be here for all of the debate, not part of it. Madam Chairman, I'm going to respectfully urge you to declare a recess until every member of this Assembly who wishes to be part of this is in fact present in the Assembly. To do anything else is effectively denying members the right to speak and to participate, and I don't think you would want to be complicit in that sort of travesty.

9:00

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Madam Chairman, I too came from the Annex, and the east doors were blocked. It's easy to go back to the Annex, enter, and come through the pedway using your security card. I was out there, and two members were outside at the same time I was. I had no trouble accessing the building. You can go to the Annex, go through the tunnel with your security card, up to the Legislature, and into the Chamber with no problem.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I'm going to take all this under advisement.

A few minutes ago, Calgary-Buffalo, I asked the Sergeant-at-Arms to go out and see what the situation was and report back. He will be coming back, and then we can deal further with this.

I would ask that we continue the debate on the subamendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora still has some time remaining.

MR. SAPERS: It's very difficult to continue the debate, Madam Chairman, while I know that some of my colleagues are feeling denied their ability to do the same. You and I seem to have a history of getting into this kind of situation. I would simply say that I still believe the most appropriate course of action would be to recess until this is resolved. I don't know why some members can get in and some members can't, but the very fact that some can and some can't is disturbing to me.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, on the subamendment.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: Yes, well, on the subamendment. The subamendment of course is only as relevant as the democratic process in which it will be voted on, Madam Chairman, and of course that's what I'm commenting on.

The amendment is one that I believe my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark started off this evening by saying that it may help save this bill in part. I don't believe that this bill is entirely salvageable, but the one issue that seems to really crystalize the debate is this question of minor and major surgeries, and part of that debate, of course, is the over-12-hour stay. So if there is one way that this government can demonstrate that it's putting Albertans' money where the government's mouth is, it's to accept this amendment. At least then we would know that this government is sincere that they don't want to contract out major surgeries. We'd know that

they are sincere that they don't want to erode the role of public, full-service hospitals in the province of Alberta. I would ask all members of this Assembly to give this subamendment their full consideration.

Madam Chairman, before I take my chair, let me just register again my disappointment in the circumstances in which we find ourselves this evening. It seems to me that the much more honourable thing for the government to have done is to welcome Albertans into this Chamber, particularly after inviting them to participate in the debate.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm going to keep my comments relatively short because I spoke on this subamendment last night, but I have some further thoughts.

Let me say, first of all, that in everything we can find something positive. The one thing positive about the subamendment, about the amendment, about the issue we're dealing with, Bill 11, is that it's demonstrated the passion, the appreciation that Albertans have of the public health care system that we have, and it shows, Madam Chairman, by the number of people that were here last night, the number of people here tonight, the hundreds of people I expect are outside right now trying to get in because they want to demonstrate their passion, their appreciation, their commitment to the system that we have, a system that unfortunately this government is intent on destroying, a passion and an appreciation that was demonstrated Sunday at the rally at the AgriCom attended by 6,000 people, probably another 4,000 turned away because they couldn't get into the parking lot. It took me an hour to get in; it took me one hour to get off the Capilano into the parking lot. In Calgary, thousands of people showed up.

It doesn't matter where I go, Madam Chairman; I am stopped. I am stopped and people say to me: why is Ralph Klein determined to destroy the health care system that was built here in Alberta? I have friends, I have relatives, I have an MPP from Ontario phoning me saying: you guys have to get Ralph Klein back on track, because if he destroys the health care system in Alberta, you're going to see that contagious disease spread to Ontario by the Premier down there, Mike Harris, possibly by that new Conservative Premier that was elected in Prince Edward Island. Fortunately, up north there at least we have a Liberal Premier that has enough sense not to follow the lead of this particular government.

Clearly, Madam Chairman, whether you're the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and you go into a store or a cafe and somebody says to you, "Oh, you're an MLA," right away what do they want to talk about? They want to talk about what's happening here, what was happening yesterday, what's happening today, and what will continue to happen. The people here have to be thanked and they've got to be welcomed and they've got to be appreciated. How often do we see the galleries the way they are tonight? How often do we see the type of demonstration we saw last night? In my 11 years here I've never seen that.

Madam Chairman, this is the first time that security has had to – and I don't blame security for what they're doing. They've got a tough job. They've got to protect us. Mind you, when you're on the side of the angels, you probably don't need the same degree of protection that you would otherwise. They're doing their job, but it's the first time in 11 years that I have seen Members of the Legislative Assembly, members of the public denied access to their building. It's not the government's building. It's not our building. It's the taxpayers' building, and let's remember that. It's like you

going home and being told that you can't enter your own home, even though you paid for that home. [disturbance in the galleries]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order in the galleries. You will not participate. You are there to watch only.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, would you get back on the subamendment, please.

MR. WICKMAN: Madam Chairman, what is this subamendment all about? This subamendment is an attempt to at least modify somewhat the amendment, the concept of Bill 11, what's behind it. Ideally, if we respected the wishes of the people, we would simply kill the bill. We would set up some type of mechanism where we could work as partners with Albertans, with the people that elected us, with the taxpayers. We would work as a partnership, and we would come to some type of an agreement. We would come to respect the public health care system, and we would look at other mechanisms such as opening the three floors of beds that have been converted at the Misericordia in the west end, the beds that have been shut down at the Grey Nuns – you can't rebuild the hospitals that have been blown down in Calgary – building additional facilities rather than farming it out to the private sector.

The question of 12 hours came up last night, and there were references made to it again tonight by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek as he spoke about the subamendment. It was implied that there would be dangers if you restricted it to 12 hours. What would happen if somebody needed 13 hours? Well, first of all, if the surgery was of that nature that there was that type of risk, then you would go to a proper facility to have it done, and a proper facility to have it done of course would be a hospital, not a clinic. The government is not proposing clinics. The government is proposing surgical facilities. The same argument could be used for any surgical facilities that have an unlimited stay in terms of overnight – and we're not talking 24 hours; we're talking unlimited, but we're talking in terms of hospitals not properly equipped. A person could go in for some type of surgical procedure, and there could be complications. Then what happens? Is that person rushed out then to a public hospital? Is that what happens to that individual because they're in a facility that is not properly equipped to deal with emergencies that may arise as a result of that surgical procedure that's being carried out?

Now, one thing that has been accomplished – and I listened to the radio tonight. The expression that the Member for Calgary-Bufferlo likes to use is that his spirits soared to the sky. They're lifted because of something positive happening. Well, I listened to the news earlier on today, and I heard the Premier of this province being quoted as saying that the original plan for closure or to end this bill by the conclusion of this week because of the Easter break has been derailed.

9:10

We will come back after the Easter break, and we will deal with Bill 11. We'll continue to deal with it. Why? Because the people that have come out here have shown their distaste for the way the government was trying to ram the bill through, force the bill through. We saw that indication at second reading of the bill when the Deputy Government House Leader brought forward the previous question limiting the amount of debate that could occur. So again something positive has happened, but it didn't happen on a voluntary basis by the members of the government. It happened because the people of Alberta have spoken out.

Madam Chairman, there's a member standing.

MR. HLADY: Madam Chairman, a point of order.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. HLADY: Madam Chairman, thank you very much. *Beauchesne* 459, relevance to the subamendment. He's not even anywhere near it.

MR. WICKMAN: Madam Chairman, let's talk about the subamendment for a minute. When I talk about the subamendment . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

On the point of order, Calgary-Bufferlo.

MR. DICKSON: Just a couple of points I'd like to make quickly. If our friend from Calgary-Mountain View refers to *Beauchesne* 459, I'll quote it for him:

Relevance is not easy to define. In borderline cases the Member should be given the benefit of the doubt, although the Speaker has frequently admonished Members who have strayed in debate.

I reference the latitude given the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness, who led us on a tour of things that the federal Minister of Health had neglected to do or failed to do. Madam Chairman, I'd say that if you were to intervene now and limit the debate of Edmonton-Rutherford, having allowed the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness to take us on his meandering path around the health care issues of the nation, then we'd be having a very uneven application of the rules. I know that that has never been your custom, and I'd ask you to use your usual even hand and make sure that the same rules apply equally on both sides.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

MS CARLSON: On the point of order, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On the point of order, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: I would like to reference *Erskine May*: Rules Governing the Contents of Speeches, Relevance in Debate on page 378. This is an often used book that we refer to when members are called on relevance, Madam Chairman. In the past you yourself have so designed to take relevance in debate as it is outlined in this particular book, where it says:

A Member must direct his speech to the question under discussion or to the motion or amendment he intends to move, or to a point of order. The precise relevance of an argument may not always be perceptible.

In fact, that is the particular line that has been used a number of times in this Assembly to support items under discussion.

Sometimes it takes some time to get to the exact essence of the point that you are making, particularly when it comes to amendments, Madam Chairman. So we would ask you, in reviewing this particular part of *Erskine May*, to take that into account in your ruling.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. We tonight are in Committee of the Whole. We are dealing with an amendment to an amendment, a subamendment introduced by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Since we've started tonight, the chair has allowed

each and every committee member speaking a lot of latitude – each and every member.

Now, I would ask that we do try, please, to look at the subamendment which you have before you and try to reference your remarks to that subamendment. This particular stage that we go through in Committee of the Whole is supposed to go through each and every section within the bill, and we look at that. It is not second reading debate. It is not third reading debate. However, it allows us to look very, very closely at the bill and to bring forward, if necessary, amendments. This is what we are doing here tonight.

I've allowed each and every one of you latitude, so I don't think we need to point fingers at anyone. The chair has allowed some latitude, and I will continue to do so. But I also want to remind you that we are dealing with the subamendment, and I want to hear some discussion as to the contents of this subamendment and how it interacts and relates to the amendment.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. We all appreciate that latitude that's shown. This is an issue of deep, deep concern, and it's an issue that at times we do get emotionally wrapped up in.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: I just have a few more comments. I am going to relate it in terms of the subamendment. When we talk about the subamendment, one of the terminologies that's used is "surgical facility." That same expression, surgical facility, that same term, that same definition, name, whatever you want to call it, is also used, of course, in the government's amendment, and it's also used in Bill 11 itself: "surgical facility."

Now, let's remember that for a second, surgical facility, because I want to draw a parallel. The poll that the government boasted about earlier this week that showed 54 percent of Albertans agreeing with Bill 11, which is down, incidentally, five points from their previous government controlled or sponsored poll, shows a decline in support even though the poll may be somewhat questionable.

I'm going to read the question that Albertans had to answer. Listen carefully just to see if you can even find any reference to "surgical facility." This is rather clever. This is rather good.

The stated goal of the Health Care Protection Act is to reduce waiting lists and increase overall efficiency. Under this plan, Alberta Health will pay for all insured services performed at private institutions and these private institutions will not be able to charge fees to Albertans who receive these services. Based on this, would you say you strongly support its position, somewhat support its position, somewhat oppose its position, or strongly oppose its position?

Now, we're talking in terms of private institutions. Suddenly the government is afraid to use their own terminology, "surgical facility," because they know that Albertans will not be deceived. They will not be fooled. Albertans know a surgical facility is simply another name for a hospital, so they use the term private institution. A private institution could be a dental clinic. A private institution could be a school. A private institution could be whatever. It could be Hallmark, Wal-Mart, whatever. If I was asked this question, I would say yes, but had the question been properly phrased and included the term surgical facility rather than private institution, I would of course have said no. But despite all that, there were still 36 percent of Albertans who said no even to this question, because 36 percent of those polled instantly saw through what the government was doing. Instantly saw through it. That is marvelous that Albertans can be so perceptive when government makes a manoeuvre to try and cleverly disguise some terminology.

As I conclude, I am reminded of a movie, and you have to wait for the conclusion of my remarks on this as to how it draws into the subamendment. Just like yourself, Madam Chairman, a person who enjoys reading books, so do I, and I know there are members in this House – the Member for Sherwood Park, for example, enjoys going to a good movie once in a while. I see her there quite often. Quite frankly, I'm a movie buff myself. Some of the movies I really, really enjoy are the old black and white classics.

Now, there's one that reminds me of the situation that we're dealing with at the present time, and that movie to the best of my recollection was called *All the King's Men*. It was about this man. He was the editor of a small newspaper, not a reporter. He attacked the politicians in Washington, the powerful politicians who catered to the select few to retain their power. He did his editorials, and pretty soon he became very popular, and people urged him to run as the people's choice. The grass roots wanted this guy to be their voice in government. He went to Washington being the voice of that grass roots, those people.

After he was there for a while, he got a taste of this power. He surrounded himself with these influential friends and suddenly he forgot his roots. He forgot about the people who put him there. Pretty soon he started to ignore the wishes of the people, and he chose instead to listen to those select few, to those very, very select few. It's very similar to what we see happening here.

9:20

We have a Premier in the province who was elected on a grass-roots movement. He was very popular with the grass roots, because there was the perception that he listened to the people, that he listened to the little guy. But is that happening now? Is the little guy being heard?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Rutherford, excuse me. Does Edmonton-Ellerslie have a point of order?

MS CARLSON: No, I don't. I'm sorry. I'm just organizing my desk. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. Go ahead, Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: My colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie is not going to rise on a point of order against one of her own colleagues. I would hope not.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Rutherford, the chair never knows.

MR. WICKMAN: Do you see what has happened here, Madam Chairman? We're in a similar situation, where government has forgotten the people that have put them in power and has allowed itself to be swayed by a small number of influential people that stand to gain, that stand to profit, who have interest, motivation to have this bill passed even with these minor amendments, because the minor amendments are not going to affect the potential that they see as a result of this bill.

I read a column recently in the *Calgary Sun* written by – well, he goes by the name Dinger – Rick Bell, in other words, who used to cover the Legislative Assembly at one time, a very popular writer, by the way, a columnist who ran for mayor of the city of Edmonton and fashioned a campaign very similar to the campaign the Premier had when he ran for mayor of Calgary. We all know that this columnist, Rick Bell, has had a very close and still may have a close

association with the Premier of the province. That's obvious by talking to him, by reading his columns.

He made a plea in his column there. He made a plea: Mr. Premier, don't forget who put you there; don't forget the people you once used to defend; don't forget the people you spoke out for; in other words, return to your roots. There are thousands of Albertans that are asking the Premier of the province to return to his roots, to again listen to the people of Alberta, to respect their wishes and do what they're asking him to do. In this case, Madam Chairman, without any question, without any doubt, they are asking the Premier, they're asking this government to kill this bill.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. JONSON: Madam Chairman, I would like to first of all indicate that the amendment to which the opposition has made a further amendment was a section whereby we were just clarifying that in terms of the standards, in terms of the approval process that had to take place with respect to surgical clinics, we were including dentists and the whole area of dental surgery in addition to that provided by physicians. So in terms of the issue before the House at this particular point in time, that is the issue. This particular amendment I think is very straightforward. It could have been approved by the committee, and we could have gone on to more relevant debate.

Since the debate has ranged perhaps somewhat further, there are two points I would like to make at this particular time. In keeping with the commitment of the government to use the best information sources available in terms of making decisions about what might be approved for a day-surgery clinic, of which there are 52 in the province, Madam Chairman, and well over a hundred, about 170, different procedures that can be performed therein and extending that to the provision of overnight stays, the important thing here is that the legislation provides that the College of Physicians and Surgeons will make the judgment as to what setting a particular surgical procedure will be provided in. That's very clear in the legislation.

There was the challenge that was brought forward with respect to some examples of what procedures could be provided in a surgical clinic, and there's quite a list actually. As I said, there are some 152 listed in the blue-ribbon panel report as to those things that can be done in surgical clinics. But I would just like to perhaps mention about half a dozen or so that would fall into that category: drainage of a pilonidal abscess; a colonoscopy; hernia repair; evacuation of incomplete abortions; bone tumours; a radical resection with respect to bone tumours; carpal tunnel release; surgical excision, removal, of malignancies; and orthoscopic surgeries of different types. So those are just a few examples of what is on the list.

But the important thing here is that the amount of time, the setting, and the standards in which such a procedure would be provided is the decision of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. They have established lists in these different categories, Madam Chairman. The legislation is very respectful of that role the college has, and that is referenced and dealt with in the legislation. So it is not a matter that people who are not qualified will be making decisions as to what can be provided on a day-surgery basis or on an overnight-stay basis within the overall health care system.

The thing that is very, very certain in the legislation is that surgical clinics will deal with a specific area of surgery which is approved by the college and satisfies the criteria that are listed in the bill. Further to that, there is a whole set of criteria in the legislation which makes sure that before the regional health authorities issue any kind of a contract or get into any type of agreement, they have

to consider such things as the existing capacity within the health care system, the regional health authority in which they're considering a contract, the overall benefit that will be gained in their view by entering into such a contract, and the amount or the volume of work that needs to be done in this specialized area, Madam Chairman. These things are all referenced.

Finally, I think the important thing is that we're dealing here initially with an amendment proposed by the government to add to the criteria, to add to the legislation the reference to dentists and dental surgery.

The second point here is with respect to surgical clinics. This particular section of the legislation deals with, as I've said, a process where the college deals with the judgments that have to be made on a medical basis, in the interests of the patient, in the interests of safety, and the criteria for such a contract reflect that plus a number of other considerations, such as the whole area of dealing with any possible conflict of interest, dealing with the whole area of overall benefit in terms of balancing financial savings over the existence of additional capacity within the health care region. All of those criteria are built into this overall bill, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Part of your difficulty this evening, I suspect, in trying to call for relevance is that this subamendment and the amendment that the government put forward is the first time in Bill 11 that the term "an approved surgical facility" appears. So I think it's that term that has us bogged down, and it's that term that has led to the wide-ranging debate, and it's of course that term that is at the root of the dissatisfaction and the outrage across the province by citizens who see approved surgical facilities as code for private hospitals. We are stuck on a subamendment and have been for a number of hours, and I suspect we're going to be here for a number of hours more until it becomes abundantly clear that Albertans, our constituents, do not want private hospitals.

9:30

If you look at the subamendment as put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the subamendment attaches to (b) an approved surgical facility "that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours," and by that subamendment the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is making sure that these are not private hospitals but that they remain as clinics. I think that's crucial and that's what Albertans want.

It's been very, very difficult, sitting on this side of the House, trying to understand why the bill is going ahead. The evidence, the correspondence, the pleas, the research are all anti what this bill is all about, yet the government plods ahead with it and tries to convince us that this is going to be a good thing.

I looked at the stack of reports on my desk that have to do with it and picked out a couple of those reports because I knew I'd have a few words to say this evening. I looked at the Alberta Medical Association's position statement on RHA contracting with private surgical facilities. I'd like to read into the record one of the underlined principles and statements that they have in that document on page 5. This is the Alberta Medical Association. This is what our doctors are saying about Bill 11.

In our view therefore, Alberta's plans to privatize the delivery of surgical health care services threaten the integrity of Canada's public health care system in a manner that has far-reaching and adverse implications both for Alberta, and for the rest of Canada.

That's our doctors, and they're telling us: look, this movement to privatization is going to be bad for us; it's going to work against that

very strong health care system we have tried for so long to put in place. This amendment would take away that criticism that the AMA has levied against the system.

Another report, one of the two that I picked out, Madam Chairman, is an analysis of Bill 11 done by the law firm of Arvey and Rankin. Their analysis concludes with this statement: "When Quality and Speed of Service Varies with Ability to Pay, the System is 'Two-tiered'." That's exactly the fear that the many in this Assembly and in these galleries and out on the lawns and across this province have: that if Bill 11 is enacted without the subamendment that we proposed last night and again this evening, then that is where we're heading, to a two-tiered system.

Madam Chairman, a lot of what Albertans fear is rooted deeply in memory. We remember the days before we had medicare, before there was a strong health care system. Every family in this province that's resided here for any number of years I'm sure has a tale of woe to recount in terms of the damage that was done to their family economically by not being covered by a universal health care system. I look at our own family, where after the birth of my younger brother my mother needed an operation, and it took the family 10 years – 10 years – to pay for that one operation. That memory remains strong with Albertans. We know what it's like when we don't have the strong universal system that we have come to expect and that Albertans are standing up and defending in the face of Bill 11.

I decided I'd keep my comments based on the kinds of remarks that physicians have made, and I referred before in debate to the Physicians for a National Health Program in the United States, a group of physicians down there who have come together and are trying to get what we have here. They live in a privatized system, and they know what privatized medicine is all about. If you get on to their web site, you can see the kinds of points that they're making, and it refers directly to the subamendment and those approved surgical facilities when they grow into the kinds of private hospitals that we know they are destined to become.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Commenting about the American system, those physicians said: "Our pluralistic health care system is giving way to a system run by corporate oligopolies. A single payer reform provides the only realistic alternative." That's what we have, a single payer system, and Bill 11 without this subamendment would move us to the very thing that those doctors are railing against. They go on to say that "the winners in the new medical marketplace are determined by financial clout, not medical quality." Again, that's at the root of our fears. When you move to privatized medicine, the bottom line, not patient care, becomes the major concern of providers. They talk about the growth of private chains south of the border.

A second major point that they make in their materials is that "a single payer system would save on bureaucracy and investor profits, making more funds available for care." Just what we have here and what Bill 11 without this subamendment would have us move toward, a system where a number of private companies, a number of private hospitals are destined to try to cover overhead, to try to generate profit to cover their own billing systems, and they go on to detail the waste in such a private system.

They talk about physicians there, and the comparison they make is between a physician south of the border and a physician here in the public system.

The average office-based American doctor employs 1.5 clerical and managerial staff, spends 44% of gross income on overhead, and devotes 134 hours of his/her own time annually to billing. Canadian physicians employ 0.7 clerical/administrative staff, spend 34% of

their gross income for overhead, and trivial amounts of time on billing.

Is that where we want to go with our physicians? That's why this subamendment to Bill 11 is so important, so that we make sure those approved surgical clinics remain that and don't become those private hospitals that we all fear.

A third major point they make in their materials is that "the current market-driven system is increasingly compromising quality and access to care." These are physicians talking. Why would they say that if they weren't concerned? Why in heaven's name would we head in that direction or in any way that might possibly take us in that direction? Why would we want a system that compromises quality? Why would we want a system that compromises access to care? That's what Albertans are asking: why? They cannot understand the focus and the thrust of Bill 11.

They go on to enumerate the number of Americans that are not covered by health care. They list the woes and the kinds of distress that Americans suffer because they don't have the kind of system that we have here, and they envy what we have.

A fourth major point that those physicians make is that

a single payer system is better for patients and better for doctors. Canada spends \$1000 less per capita on health care than the U.S., but delivers more care and greater choice for patients.

That's what we have in a public health care system, that's what we want to avoid by having the government Bill 11 go forward, and that's what this subamendment is all about: making sure that Alberta and Canada don't head down the road to where those costs per patient are higher, the quality of service is lower, and our health care system – something that we value dearly and that has been built up over a number of years – is destroyed by a government that seems determined to proceed with a scheme that has no support from any study in a refereed journal, to proceed with a scheme that, on the face of it, can only benefit investors.

9:40

Again it has Albertans puzzled and as many times it's been asked over and over and over again in question period in this Assembly. It's been asked in forums across the province. It's been asked everywhere – coffee shops: why are they proceeding with a bill with the inclusion of approved medical facilities which can be interpreted as private hospitals. Why are they proceeding when it doesn't shorten waiting lists? It doesn't improve the system and it has every chance to destroy what we have in place now.

So, Mr. Chairman, it's very important that the members of this House look very carefully at subamendment SA1, section A, and what that would do to Bill 11. If that subamendment were passed, then I think there would be some truth in Bill 11 where it, in the preamble, talks about being dedicated to the principles of the health care act, but without that subamendment, that preamble remains hollow.

I think with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll await my turn to comment again. Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister for Health and Wellness.

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Chairman. I'll wait my turn. You might keep me in mind.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise again to debate the subamendments presented on Bill 11, and let's focus on a couple of issues on the debate.

Firstly, Albertans have had private clinics doing medical procedures such as abortions for some time. No one objected. Everyone took it for granted that these clinics would carry out insured services by private providers. Now, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to take a little walk down memory lane just for a minute. The then health minister and now the Leader of the Official Opposition was asked in question period the following:

MS OLSEN: Was this just e-mailed to you?

MRS. FORSYTH: No, it wasn't. And Mr. Chairman, I will quote: "The government can save a lot of money . . ."

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has the floor. Would everyone please respect that?

You may proceed.

MRS. FORSYTH: And, Mr. Chairman, I'll have it on the record that it wasn't e-mailed to me. I'm in my WordPerfect, so thank you.

Then the health minister and now Leader of the Official Opposition was asked in question period the following, and Mr. Chairman, I am going to quote:

The government can save a lot of money if it doesn't allow hospitals to contract to the for-profit sector. On that basis alone, will the minister reconsider her position and tell hospitals the for-profit sector has no role in the public health care system?

Her response, Mr. Chairman:

Again, Mr. Speaker, no, I will not, because the private sector does in fact have a role if it can prove that it is efficient, that it's operating fairly, and that it's meeting the responsibility of our health sector to provide access to health services.

Ironic, isn't it? Here we are debating a subamendment that states, "No physician shall provide an insured surgical service" in Alberta, and adding under (b), after "an approved surgical facility," "that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours."

You know, Mr. Chairman, when medicare was introduced politicians had little to worry about: costs, Canada's population was young and healthy, the economy was booming, the high-tech high-cost revolution had yet to take place. Government spent freely. In many ways medicare was successful in its early days because it was untested.

The first period was its golden era. In debates over health care, people often point out that health care worked well. We recently heard about Shirley Douglas speaking about the golden era. She recalls the golden era fondly. The problem with that is that was then and this is now. People didn't anticipate that one day every province across this fine country would be facing long waiting lists.

The problem with the golden era was that when the program was introduced the Canadian population was young and healthy with half under the age of 21. The median age of Canada's population was 25 when Parliament passed the Medical Insurance Act. In subsequent years the median age hit 30. Today the median age is approaching 40. [interjections]

An aging population means new and more demands are placed on . . .

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Order please. I think members should have the courtesy, the decency to allow members who have been recognized the opportunity to express themselves. You will have your time as well.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has the floor.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you. I am continuing to speak on the subamendment.

The second trend was the advance of medical technology. In areas such as diagnostic equipment and pharmaceuticals, major breakthroughs have taken place over the last three decades. So, Mr. Chairman, in the year 2000 tough decisions have to be made. We now know that as long as we seek band-aid solutions for the problems of the health care system, as long as we are not prepared to embark on miracle solutions, we will never move forward. Bill 11 to me is the miracle solution.

Sustainability is the most significant health care issue in the country, more important than hospital closures, physician compensation, or any of the other issues politicians are not willing to discuss.

It is difficult to fully appreciate how much modern medicine has improved our lives. These advances have improved not only healing – doctors have a greater ability to diagnose and treat diseases – but also quality of life.

Recent figures in the winter 2000 *Innovation* magazine provide some startling figures, Mr. Chairman: total patient visits to doctors' offices from 1989 to 1990, 18 percent increase; drug store pharmaceutical purchases from 1989 to 1999, 112 percent increase; total patient visits with treatment recommended from 1989 to 1999, 29 percent increase; total prescriptions dispensed from 1989 to 1999, 36.3 percent increase.

Mr. Chairman, in the same period, what is even more scary is prescriptions, and I will provide just a few examples: cardiovascular, 44.1 percent increase; cholesterol reducers, 655.6 percent increase. The top 20 that were listed are all showing increases except for two. These figures clearly show the cost of progress. The catch is that easy advancements in medicine come with a price tag. We are clearly now seeing only the tip of an iceberg.

So we have an amendment before us, and does that solve the problem? No, Mr. Chairman, it doesn't.

So if patients are troubled today by lengthy waiting lists, overcrowded emergency rooms, what will health care be like in the coming years? Over the next 40 years the number of seniors will continue to grow; emergency rooms will still be overcrowded; health care workers will continue to be discontented.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is rising on a point of order. Citation please.

Point of Order

Tabling a Cited Document

MS CARLSON: Mr. Chairman, in accordance with *Beauchesne* 495 to 500 and also in accordance with the Speaker of the Assembly's admonition on March 4, 1998, at page 684 about reference to notes and reading speeches, I'm making a request that that hon. member table the document she is reading from.

We have heard repeatedly from the Speaker of this Assembly that any information provided in debate that is an essential component or from which a member is quoting should be tabled in this Assembly so that it is available to all members of the Assembly.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The citation that the hon. member has used is *Beauchesne* 592?

MS CARLSON: No. *Beauchesne* 495 to 500. In addition to that, I'm using a citation from *Hansard*, page 684, specifically Speaker Kowalski's comments on March 4, 1998.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Okay.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View on the point of order.

MS HALEY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First off, you don't

table things that are already in the record in this Assembly, and she was quoting from a *Hansard*. Just, you know, for the record, *Hansard* is something that you have in your desk. [interjection] Would you like to sit down? Sit.

9:50

Every person in here from time to time uses notes that they've handwritten or typed themselves in order to be able to reference back to the debate. We are having a debate in here. I really resent the implication that my colleague is not allowed to speak in here without the constant interruption of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek on the point of order.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'd be pleased to provide the quote from *Hansard* where I quoted the hon. member from the opposition. It's page 1,746, July 2, 1992. Please feel free to look for it.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: In that case, I guess this clarifies the issue.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, you can proceed.

MRS. FORSYTH: I'll repeat that so she understands it: *Hansard*, page 1,746, July 2, 1992. I can repeat the quote if you would like.

May I start again? Thank you.

Debate Continued

MRS. FORSYTH: Over the next 40 years the number of seniors will continue to grow. Emergency rooms will still be overcrowded. Health care workers will continue to be disconnected. This is not a transition; this is transformation.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood speaks about Michael Rachlis and may consider him a guru of sorts. Rachlis recognized, however, that health care must be changed. He is quick to point out in his book *Strong Medicine*, and I will quote:

An important step in making our health care system more efficient and effective is to examine the respective roles of governments and service providers. Medicare is often called a government-run system, but of course only the insurance side is run directly by the government. Most doctors are in private practice and most hospitals are non-profit, private corporations. Is this . . . right . . . [a] public/private mix? What role, if any, should governments play in health care delivery?

Mr. Rachlis talks about:

Any offers to radically change Canada's health care system along these lines must deal with long-standing beliefs about what is really wrong and how to fix it. Some of these beliefs are supported by good evidence; others are not. Most curious of all are these ideas that ought to have been killed off completely because the evidence against them is overwhelming.

Madam Chairman, he further goes on to express that the politics of health care are challenging.

Mastering the art of the possible takes courage, strategy, and perseverance. We can learn a lot from the debates over public health care insurance [and] how to do it well. The issues may be different because at times we are talking about restructuring health care delivery.

Mr. Rachlis also acknowledges that Ottawa has an important role to play in making medicare work, including a role in supporting

health care system reform. After all, at least part of these difficult decisions provinces face were made in Ottawa. He suggests in his book that, one,

- Canada needs an overall strategy for health . . .

Two,

- Ottawa should transfer enough targeted cash to the provinces so they can provide reasonable equal access to health and social services. These cash transfers should grow at the same rate as the country's economy (measured by the gross national product).

Madam Chairman, I wish I was a fly on the wall listening to Mr. Rachlis speak at the recent opposition's policy conference – and the costs to have him speak to 300 delegates. I had the privilege of listening to him speak a couple of years ago at a health policy conference, and he credited the government at the time for their health reform. He even signed his book for me.

Another well-known health guru, Mike Decter, also acknowledges and recognizes that medicare must be changed: it isn't reform that will bring about the demise of medicare but the absence of it.

So, Madam Chairman, on the subamendment. Does it make the health care more appropriate, efficient, and effective? I think not. One must remember that hospital reform has been the preoccupation of all provincial governments for close to a decade: private providers providing care. I'll give you an example: hospice care contracts with the regional health authority, providing loving and tender care to the dying. Madam Chairman, my father-in-law died in a hospice, and he stayed overnight. He was well taken care of. We were all well taken care of as a family, all provided by private providers.

Again, and on the subamendment, one must ask the relevant questions. Why have we become so reliant on institutional care? Why have hospitals meant to provide acute care become centres for non acute care? Why not utilize the surgical facilities for minor surgeries? Several years ago I entered the hospital for a day-surgery procedure for a tubal ligation. They found out I was allergic to the anesthetic and had to send me home. The ability of the surgical clinics would be to keep me overnight and observe me.

Closing on the subamendment, Madam Chairman, when it comes to health care, we must decide on the direction of health care reform. A painful question with painful results is shown tonight. We have to make hard and difficult decisions. People of all ages are afraid of change. It's doing what's right. The protestors can protest, but we must move forward. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. I was able to speak briefly to this subamendment last night, but I have had some information from my trusted and wise constituents in Edmonton-Centre and have been asked to raise a few more points, which I'm happy to do on their behalf. Democracy is a wonderful thing, I think. It can be noisy, it can be messy, and it can be time consuming, but I certainly think it's worth it. I'm very pleased and proud to be standing in this Assembly participating in a democratic process. I hope that all members that wish to be in this Assembly were able to be in this Assembly tonight.

Specific to this amendment. You know, it's really interesting. I've heard the Minister of Health and Wellness rise a couple of times and say, "Why are they talking about all this other stuff: approved surgical facilities, overnight stays, defining the length of the stay, what's an insured service, an uninsured service? Why don't they just know that this amendment that was put forward is just about adding in physicians and dentists as being those approved to provide

surgical services?" Well, the point is that we're in Committee of the Whole. In Committee of the Whole we can discuss this bill clause by clause, word by word, and there are a lot of interesting words in this particular amendment that has been opened up by the government putting the amendment forward. Some of those words include words like "insured surgical service," "approved surgical facility," "public hospital," and "major surgical service." There are a lot of interesting concepts that get opened up there, and we're perfectly entitled to be discussing them.

The instructions I have from the people in Edmonton-Centre that contacted me are saying: why didn't they change some of the things that we've been asking them to change, that the people are telling this government it's important the government change if this bill is to be acceptable to people? Now, what we've had happen in this building and what I gather is still happening outside of this building should be telling the government how much the people of Alberta do not want this bill. If it is going to be acceptable, if the government is going to put forward amendments, then there are a few more things they need to be looking at changing than simply adding the words "physician" and "dentist" into this particular amendment.

So we have a subamendment that's been brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark which is an attempt to try and address some of the key concerns that have been identified by people about this particular section. A big part of that concern is the whole idea of a public hospital and an approved surgical facility and what's the difference. I've heard the government also speak about approved overnight-stay surgical facilities, which I presume are the same as an approved surgical facility since in this amendment they're certainly talking about overnight stays. This is what really concerns people.

The whole idea of the 12 hours being the sort of cutoff line, the guillotine line, that you've got to be able to stay over 12 hours. The subamendment is proposing that the 12 hours is a good cutoff. If this is going to be minor surgery, 12 hours is perfectly appropriate. If you're going to go over 12 hours, you've gotten into something different here. The government is indeed claiming that the contracts are issued by the regional health authorities to the private clinics for provision of minor surgery. Well, I would think that most minor surgery could in fact be done in under 12 hours.

10:00

If you need longer for complications – and those are some of the issues that have been raised by the other hon. members in the context of debate on this amendment and subamendment – well, then is this really minor surgery anymore? If you're dealing with trying to open that window of more than 12 hours because of some sort of complications that might arise in this minor surgery, how is this going to help us? We know that according to the definition of these approved overnight stay surgical clinics, there are no acute care beds in there and there are no emergency care beds. The Premier himself suggested that these clinics would deal with those kinds of emergencies or traumas in the same way that any other clinic does: pick up the phone, dial 911, and get an ambulance to transport you to a hospital.

I guess one of the questions that I have for the Minister of Health and Wellness is: will the government then be paying for that ambulance that is now transporting this person from a private clinic to a public hospital? Right now individuals pay for ambulances themselves out of their own pocket, unless they happen to have Blue Cross, which is the extended health care coverage. I think that's an interesting dilemma, and I would like to hear the minister respond to that.

If somebody went in and the government is paying for someone to have minor surgery and complications arise, there are two things

that are happening here. One is that the person gets punted back into the public system. When that happens, first of all there's the ambulance ride. Who is going to pay for that? It certainly wasn't the patient's fault that these things have happened. It certainly wasn't the patient's fault that they got put into a private clinic for this surgery and the private clinic is unable to deal with their trauma or complications. So is the government going to pay for the ambulance ride there?

Two, is the private clinic then going to reimburse somehow the public system because the public system is now dealing with the acute care or the trauma treatment from the complications for this patient? The public system didn't get the money for the original surgery here. So are they going to get reimbursed for having to deal with the complications arising out of that surgery? I'd like to get an answer to that, please.

Essentially, I guess I have to ask: if the private clinic cannot care for that person receiving minor surgery, then why do they need the overnight? You know, keeping them overnight isn't going to help any more. As we know, they're either going to get shipped off or they won't be accepted into the private clinic. So I still don't see how the private clinics move us further forward here.

Flexibility is a reason that the government often gives, and the point was raised I think last night that we need to be giving the regional health authorities flexibility to deal with changing medical requirements, changing population, new technology, pharmaceuticals, et cetera, et cetera. Well, I raised the point last night that there have been a number of acts brought back into this Assembly in my short time here. The condominium act from '86 was also brought back in 2000. The Municipal Government Act was introduced and passed in '97 and has since shown up in '98 and '99. So there's obviously no hesitation on the part of government in a number of other instances. If you need to be flexible and adjust your legislation, bring it back into the Legislature. You had no problem doing it with the MGA and the condo act. Why would it be a problem doing it with this Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act? So you can set limitations inside of this act that will relieve some people's concerns about what's being put forward here.

There is also the argument that I've heard that the clinics need to be able to keep people longer than 12 hours for narcotics or local or general anesthetic to wear off because this affects different people differently. I'd be interested in hearing what the doctors have to say about that, because I suspect that those kinds of decisions about whether someone is suitable to go for that kind of surgery should be made by their doctor, not necessarily by an RHA contracting with a private service provider.

A number of times the constituents of Edmonton-Centre have talked about getting lost in the rhetoric here. Every time I go back to the beginning and try and work my way through the different arguments that I've now heard about this, I don't get very far. Was there a need for legislation to regulate private hospitals and private health care in this province? No question. Nobody on this side has ever disagreed with that. We all recognize the need to be able to regulate private health care and private hospitals.

The Premier says that this Bill 11 will reduce waiting lists and reduce pain and suffering. Well, a couple of points there. This government is really good at taking the credit for things that it may not have done and not taking the responsibility for things that it shouldn't be getting the credit for. For example, I don't know that the price of a barrel of oil and the ability to balance the budget on that really had much to do with the government. I think it had to do with the price of oil. In this case, you know, what did that pain and suffering get caused from? I think it got caused from a number of cuts to the health care system and choices that the government made, that caused some of those waiting lists.

I won't say that the government caused all the waiting lists. We do have an increasing population in Alberta. We certainly have to deal with that increase in volume. But everybody seems to want to talk about those long waiting lists, and I don't think we can blame all of that on an increasing population. So the idea of reducing these waiting lists – we don't have enough doctors and nurses. Doctors and nurses fled Alberta and went to other places. I still can't understand how opening up private clinics is going to shorten those waiting lists. Where are the doctors and nurses supposed to come from? When you've got a supply and demand situation, I think that the doctors and nurses are likely to move over to the private system, where they're going to be wooed with higher money, and leave the public system. So we still don't have more surgeries being performed in the public system.

I thought this whole thing about private clinics was to take the weight off, that they would take the extra lines and allow a whole bunch more work to be done in the public system. By whom? Who's left? Where are these doctors and nurses supposed to come from? In addition to that, the minister has never been able to answer my questions about the availability of surgical suites for residents to practise in, for want of a better word. My apologies to those in the medical profession. I don't know what you call it. I understand that as a resident you must spend a certain amount of time . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, Edmonton-Centre. I do have to remind you that we are dealing with a subamendment.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes. Thank you very much for the reminder.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Let's focus on the subamendment.

MS BLAKEMAN: I am certainly willing to talk about the subamendment, which is covering a number of things, including public hospitals and approved surgical facilities. I'm talking about how that's going to get staffed. If we don't have the staff, how do we create the positions for the new staff when those residents cannot get time in those surgical suites, particularly as we have more surgical suites opening in the private clinics? They won't allow the residents to observe or to practise. That's a real catch-22, and I'm not hearing any answers. This is the second or third time I've raised that issue.

Another question that has come up is that the Associate Minister for Health and Wellness underlined several times and with great drama that there would be no facility fee being paid to the private clinics. But something that's occurred to me is that we now have this foldable lens that's going to be paid by the government, but we also had quite a debate going on about how much those foldable lenses actually cost. I think we have Lamont hospital talking \$200, their ability to do it for that amount of money, yet people at private clinics were being charged up to \$750 an eye. There's quite a difference there. That's five hundred bucks difference. So my question is: will the government be paying the private clinics that use this foldable lens the same rate at which they pay the Lamont hospital for this surgery, or will they be paying what the private clinics currently charge for any enhanced service? I think the taxpayers would have a lot to say, not only if their tax dollars are going to subsidize private business, but they're going to pay those kinds of truly enhanced fees that go with the enhanced service. Why do the people in Edmonton-Centre, if this is the case – and please, answer the question. Why should the people in Edmonton-Centre and elsewhere in Alberta have to be paying a private clinic \$750 when the Lamont hospital manages to do the same surgery for \$200? I look forward to the minister's response to that question.

10:10

Now, we also have the whole idea of insured and uninsured services in this particular amendment and subamendment being discussed along with it. I'm really glad that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark raised that inside of her subamendment, because it's certainly an issue that's been raised with me a number of times. When you start talking insured services and uninsured services, the first thing that happens is that certainly the seniors in Edmonton-Centre start going: "I've been there before. We used to have things that were insured, and then the government deinsured them, delisted them. We weren't involved in the consultation. We didn't know what had happened. In many cases we didn't receive any notification about it. We didn't know until we'd actually gone to the doctor or to the clinic or to whatever medical service." Had it, then: "Oh, by the way, this is no longer covered. Can you get out your wallet or your credit card, please?" This is a real shock to seniors and to anyone that is living on a fixed income, because they didn't plan to spend that extra money. So the concept of whether you've got an insured service or an uninsured service is a really important one and needs to go in, and this amendment is proposing to do that quite clearly.

I just have a few minutes left, Madam Chairman, but there are some points that were raised by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek that I just want to comment on. She raised the idea of sustainability of the health care system. I found that a really interesting concept, because I don't view health care like a tree or an oil well or coal, where you're worrying about whether we can harvest enough and can we get more of it from somewhere. I think the point about health care and sustainability is political will and the will of the people. Frankly, if that is the single most important thing to the people of Alberta and they want full service health care and they're willing to pay for it, then that's what should be delivered to them. So I think sustainability is about political will and following the will of the people, not some sort of definition that comes from natural resource development.

MS OLSEN: Nonsustainable.

MS BLAKEMAN: Nonsustainable. Thank you. Nonsustainable resources.

Health care is a service and in some cases a product that is offered by the government to citizens by way of a publicly administered, single-tiered health care system. At least, I hope it still will be.

Madam Chairman, I'm going to have to rise to speak to this amendment again because I've made notes and I can't read my writing anymore. So I'll have to try and search through and find out what the rest of my notes were trying to say. I look forward to continued debate on subamendment SA1.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I've had indication – Minister of Health and Wellness, did you wish to speak?

MR. JONSON: Not at this point, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to rise this evening and speak to the subamendment as proposed by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark. Once again I'm rising to

urge all hon. members of this Assembly to support the initiative from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Yesterday we talked at length about insured surgical services and what exactly that means to the public health care system in this province. I referred to the document that was put out by the government on November 17, 1999. This document was the first stage of the plan to further privatize our public health care system. However, in that document we described services, interestingly enough, as insured.

Now, we go along further in the debate and we wonder why this amendment has come forward, and we wonder why it is so suitable and why all members of the Assembly should support this initiative. At least you have to give the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark credit for trying. She is working diligently to take a very, very poor piece of legislation and trying to improve it.

The majority of Albertans, Madam Chairman, are very concerned not only about their health care system but about democracy and free speech. It keeps coming back and back and back to the statement that the Premier used in Fort McMurray in the 1997 election, and that was: I believe in free speech as long as you say the right thing.

I realize that my comments should be on the amendment, and in light of what happened this evening, I shall keep them to the amendment. We look at what has been done with taxpayers' money, and we look at what's been accomplished or at least tried, because it is yet to be seen if this amendment will be successful. We look at this study funded by the taxpayers, by Cam Donaldson, PhD, and Gillian Currie, PhD, experts at the University of Calgary.

Now, this is the interim study, and I'm very, very anxious to receive the final report. Perhaps I can get my own personal copy from the hon. minister of health. I understand that it is near completion. It's going to be, I think, an interesting read not only for hon. members but for the public. But there is no published study of the efficiency of the purchase of surgical services and private facilities by public funders such as regional health authorities.

Now, when the hon. member proposes that we restrict an approved surgical facility to 12 hours or less, what the hon. member is doing is saving Alberta taxpayers money. We know that the existing clinics, the day clinics as they're called, are well regulated within existing legislation. We do not need Bill 11 for those 52 or 53 clinics that already exist. We don't need this legislation. What we need this legislation for is to provide these overnight stays, and as a result of these overnight stays these health entrepreneurs, these providers of market medicine are going to need Bill 11. But if we all vote for the hon. member's amendment, then there will be no market niche for them, because there will be no overnight stays, and the first finding of the interim report will be honoured. It will be recognized by all members of this Assembly – and it may be recognized by some hon. members sooner than others – that this is not the way to improve our health care system.

Now, we can say: what should we do? Well, we don't need an approved surgical facility that requires a patient stay of over 12 hours. We don't need any of that. We should open up hospital beds. We should open up operating theatres, and these operating theatres and these beds are already built. It would be nice to say to all hon. members, when debating this subamendment, that maybe those beds would never be needed, but in case they are, they're there. Emergency rooms and the crisis we have in emergency care I talked about last night. In emergency rooms people wouldn't have to wait for up to 48 hours, sometimes longer on weekends, to get to one of these beds. In an approved surgical facility with the overnight stay we get into what is called the bricks and mortar argument. In this regional health authority there is sufficient capacity to last – and this is

according to the CEO of the regional health authority – until the year 2008.

10:20

Now, it's a different situation in Calgary. I can understand if some hon. members are a little bit reluctant to see the truth about this amendment. Two hospitals have been closed in Calgary and a third has been demolished, but an approved surgical facility is not the answer, and I can understand the hon. minister from Calgary-Varsity. In that part of Calgary they would have been served very well by the hospital that was demolished. However, when we use an approved surgical facility, it's not going to pick up what that hospital used to provide Calgarians.

I believe I'm quoting from memory here, Madam Chairman. Earlier in the debate, going back to 1994, the hon. minister of international and intergovernmental affairs said that the Foothills hospitals was going to be adequate as an inner-city hospital, because in some other jurisdictions, I believe, it could be used for that, but that is the furthest from the truth. This is why this approved surgical facility and this idea, this amendment as proposed, is an excellent way of taking Bill 11 and actually diffusing the situation.

Whenever we talk about an approved surgical facility that allows a 12-hour stay or less, one that is going to be allowed as Bill 11 exists now, it is essentially a private hospital. It is essentially a private hospital if it allows overnight . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I do ask you to talk about relevance. We are dealing with subamendment SA1. I've had to remind each and every member, but I would ask if we could focus our debate, our dialogue on the subamendment, please.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. I certainly am. Madam Chairman, I'm trying to display to all hon. members that by adding "that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours" after "approved surgical facility" is making it quite understandable for all hon. members. When we talk about a private hospital, that certainly is what has my constituents and the majority of Albertans concerned. They say to me: if I go in there and there are hospital corners on the sheets, then it's a hospital. Those are their words. So when we look at this amendment, through the keen legislative mind of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, she is removing private hospitals from all talk in Bill 11. She's simply doing that by this amendment, by restricting the stay to 12 hours or less, and there is going to be no one, hopefully, that is going to try to have a private hospital under those conditions. This is what the majority of Albertans are concerned about, the private hospitals. They know the difference. They know that the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre is a hospital. They know that the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota is a hospital.

Facts that every hon. member should know about the private versus the public health care system – because what we're also talking about here in this amendment is the two-tiered system, the public hospitals and this "approved surgical facility" that requires a stay by the patient. Now, in this amendment if it's accepted by the House, Madam Chairman, it will be 12 hours, but if it's not, then we're simply talking about a private hospital. All hon. members of this House should know that where we have so many private hospitals, in America for instance, health care administration costs. In this province administration costs are certainly going to go up with the contracts that we're looking at here, and sure we're looking at them in this amendment. We are looking at them in this section. Administration costs are going to go up. That is the joy, the benefit

of our system, but costs in the private American system are \$995 per person. In our Canadian public system they are \$248 per person.

Now, we will lose if we do not vote for this amendment. We will lose our economic advantage in this country. I'm not going to go into that in detail because I've spoken about that before in this Assembly. Hon. members across the Assembly are very proud to talk about the Alberta advantage, but we would be selling out our Alberta advantage if we were not to support the amendment and restrict these approved surgical facilities or private hospitals to less than the 12-hour stay. You can say anything you want about our system, our Canadian public health care system, and how it's been devised over the last 30 years, but you must admit that it is far more efficient and it gives us an economic advantage that our neighbours to the south do not have.

With private health care – and that's what we're going to have. That's what we're going to have here in this amendment, a public hospital or an approved surgical facility. That's the two tiers. That's the parallel stream we will have if we allow this to come to pass and become law, Madam Chairman. We will have, eventually, Albertans and Canadians that are without any form of health care. This will be a step backwards. This whole bill – I know I'm getting off the subject and the subamendment here – is a step backwards. We're going backwards because we are increasing the section of our health care delivery system that will be provided in an inefficient way through the private sector.

Now, we look at the amount of business, and we can say to start off on this amendment that with an approved surgical facility the door is just open a little bit. The amount of business which the approved surgical facility will receive from the health authorities is going to be very small. It's going to be very, very small, but we look at other parts of the health care administration system. We look at long-term care. We look at how the regional health authorities are taking that out, and they're delivering that through a series of contracts here and a series of contracts there. We don't have any accountability for this.

The private surgical facilities that require a stay by the patient of under 12 hours: will they provide faster access to those who pay? Whether it's a 12-hour stay or whether it is an indefinite stay, will we talk about the delivery or their offer of enhanced services? I'm looking forward, when we get further into debate on Bill 11, to the discussion we're going to have about enhanced services.

10:30

At this time I'd like to cede the floor to one of my colleagues. In closing, I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to say yes to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and support her courageous effort to take what is really one of the worst pieces of legislation I've seen in my short time in this Assembly – it had hardly got to committee when there was a rush to table 14 amendments. And we went through this long process. We went through this long, long process. We went through panels, the blue ribbon panels. We went through the whole exercise of Bill 37. We went through the Premier's speech in November.

MS BLAKEMAN: A fireside chat?

MR. MacDONALD: It was sort of like a fireside chat, but it certainly wasn't a New Deal for the people of Alberta. It certainly wasn't an FDR style fireside chat, because it had been discovered by all Albertans when they got the bill in their mail that this is an attempt to privatize their health care system and further increase this manner of delivering services with a two-tiered, parallel system.

With those remarks, Madam Chairman, I cede the floor to one of my hon. colleagues. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I've been listening here this evening to what is being said, and I couldn't resist but to rise and make some comments on the approved surgical facilities' 12-hour stay. I think there's maybe a little bit of misunderstanding. When we say over a 12-hour stay, what we're talking about is that sometimes there may be somebody who has minor surgery who needs observation that requires an overnight stay. This way here, taking that particular surgery out of the public system and doing it in a private surgical facility, would alleviate the pressures out there and allow somebody else to go into the public system and receive a service that requires more medical attention than possibly one that could be done safely, efficiently, and effectively in an approved surgical facility that would have overnight stays.

Since I guess the beginning of session, we've heard nothing but "private health bill." Well, I want to make it clear that there is no such thing as a private health bill. What we have is the Alberta Health Care Protection Act. I see the members opposite don't even want to hear because they know they're wrong by making false representations . . . [interjections]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order. Order. Hon. members, there's one member speaking, and that's the hon. Member for Redwater. Please let us continue.

MRS. SLOAN: But he's not making any sense.

MR. BRODA: Madam Chairman, I sat here all evening listening to the people opposite, listening to members on this side as well, and I think I deserve the courtesy to continue speaking. And if I'm not making sense, neither is that member over there. I think there was a member that mentioned free speech. Obviously they don't believe in that as well. Tell the truth when you go out there instead of . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chairman is going to ask you for relevance. We are dealing with a subamendment. Please, let's be relevant here.

MR. BRODA: It is very irrelevant, but anyhow, Madam Chairman, thank you for the reminder.

We are talking about the subamendment to an amendment. Yes, we have had 14 amendments that were put into place, and we've been listening to Albertans. As one member said, that's why the amendments are here. We are listening to Albertans. We're making reasoned amendments, not making some subamendments to amendments just to delay time and have rhetoric here this evening and yesterday without making any sense, if that's what you want to call sense.

Going on to the amendment, Madam Chairman, the "approved surgical facilities" that we're talking about and, again, overnight stays. If we say 12 hours, what happens if you go into a facility and have surgery done at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and you do have to have observation overnight because of anesthetics or whatever? It is probably very, very minor surgery, but you need observation. We're not permitted to do that, so by allowing overnight stays, we would allow that particular procedure to follow, that an individual could get – or the physician is the one who's going to determine what kind of surgery will be provided in a surgical facility. Now, when we talk about private surgical facilities, those will only be put into place if the regional health authority can see that there is a need for them in their own region. Speaking of my region, I don't even

know if we'll ever see any private surgical facilities because there is no need for them.

So the fear out there, telling everyone that you're going to have overnight stays, you're going to become a hospital – well, I think that's very false, and I think a lot of people that are hearing this are really saying: is that true? When I go out there and explain it to my people, they say: that's not what we've heard. So I think it's important, because the thing is that what is being spread out there has been very untruthful. I think it's about time the opposition sat down and listened to what they're talking about and what kind of false information they're spreading in our communities.

Madam Chairman, the overnight stay in the subamendment by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is an amendment that I think would restrict us from doing any different types. If we look at technology today, we have changes in technology. The surgical procedures we're seeing are different than what we saw 10 years ago. You can have a gallbladder operation which is only a half-inch incision that is done laparoscopically or done overnight. But sometimes there may be a need for additional surgery in gallbladder operations rather than laparoscopic which may need observation overnight, so that's not restricting them to having to go only into a hospital. It could be done safely in a surgical facility.

Madam Chairman, I think we need Bill 11. It gives regulations to our private surgical facilities that we don't have right now. We've heard from the College of Physicians and Surgeons saying: we need regulations. This bill will place the regulations to the private surgical facilities. I think we've even heard from the federal government that the status quo is not an option, that we have to look at change, and I think we're innovative. This province has always been a front-runner to all provinces in Canada here, and I think not only in Canada but in the world. When people look at Alberta, they know that we have done the best possible for everybody. We're the envy of all the world, and people are moving to this province because of what this government has done.

When we talk about our Premier, that there's no trust for him, I have a lot of trust for the Premier. I think he's one of the most honest persons I've ever met, and he's got a lot of integrity, not like the members on the opposite side.

With that, Madam Chairman, I move that we rise and report progress.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:40 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Hierath	Paszkowski
Broda	Hlady	Severtson
Calahasen	Johnson	Shariff
Clegg	Jonson	Smith
Coutts	Kryczka	Stelmach
Doerksen	Laing	Stevens
Ducharme	Magnus	Strang
Evans	Mar	Thurber
Fischer	McClellan	Woloshyn
Forsyth	McFarland	Yankowsky
Hancock	Melchin	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Olsen
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	White

Totals:	For – 33	Against – 12
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[Motion to report progress on Bill 11 carried]

Privilege

MLA Access to the Chamber

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before we leave Committee of the Whole, I said that I would address an item the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo brought up earlier. I did in fact talk to the Sergeant-at-Arms, who did go out to find the members that were mentioned, and the chair would duly note that the members did finally make it to the committee. We are pleased that they did.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has given notice that he would like to raise a point of privilege or a question of privilege with the Speaker tomorrow after question period regarding the MLA access. The chair would duly recognize that this can be done tomorrow, and I thank the hon. member for his indulgence.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports progress on Bill 11.

Madam Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 4

Surveys Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has made a number of comments in regard to this particular bill, and I've given her my undertaking that I will review those questions. My understanding is that a memo has been prepared in complete answer to the inquiry she made when we last discussed this in second reading, and I'm prepared to look into the status of that particular memo and answer fully accordingly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to hear that a memo is in transit to me regarding these issues that we had with this bill. I feel that at this point in time I'm satisfied with the answers being supplied. If there are any concerns still outstanding after receiving the memo, I will be in contact with the minister on the issue.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I do have to ask the hon. Minister of Environment whether he would please move third reading.

MR. MAR: I move third reading of Bill 4, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To conclude my remarks at third reading on this bill, I am looking forward to reviewing the memo sent by the minister, and subject to that, any concerns I have will be brought up with him in writing with regard to the issues we discussed.

Other than that small outstanding item, we don't have any concerns with this bill, and we're happy to support it at the third reading stage.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

Bill 2 First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act

MS CALAHASEN: Madam Speaker, I'm going to make a few comments before I move third reading. This is a bill that has been very important to aboriginal people. First Nations and Metis people are looking forward to this bill being passed. In fact, elders continue to reiterate that we need to ensure that these sacred ceremonial objects are returned to their rightful owners, and with elders being part of the process, which I will ensure occurs, I am positive it will work out extremely well.

I thank all the people who have contributed to this debate, Madam Speaker, because this is such an important bill for aboriginal people across this province. I thank all those who have taken part in this debate.

I move third reading of Bill 2.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's good to be able to get up and agree on a bill and its swift movement through the House.

I've brought up my issues and concerns regarding this bill. I still have some concern that it's paternalistic. I think the reality is that the section that gives the minister full control still bothers me. However, I would appreciate it at some point if the hon. minister could forward the regulations, when they're complete, so that we have a good sense of what's happening. Then we can also be sure to pass the information along.

In our discussions we talked about the need for the aboriginal community to take control of their own environment and their own world. This is part of a step to doing that. It's part of a step to self-government. It does still cause me some concern. I often think that if we're going to achieve something, we should do it the whole way and not partway, but this is a step in the right direction. I'm hoping my questions at some point will get answered.

Madam Speaker, hopefully this bill will be closed off very quickly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffero.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. A couple

of points I wanted to make. I'd just indicate, as I had done at second reading and then at committee, that while I support Bill 2, I register again my concern that throughout the entire course of the treatment of this bill, we never received a satisfactory explanation in terms of why we have not only the provision to make regulations but a minister who has the absolute discretionary power to say no. Even if all the provisions in the statute have been met, even if all the regulations have been followed to a T, the minister under Bill 2 still has the power to nix, to say no to a proposed transfer, repatriation.

11:00

Madam Speaker, I've listened to explanations that have been offered, and people talk about this being what the elders want or this being what certain aboriginal organizations wish to see, but I suspect that it was a question that you had groups agreeing to sort of the principle of the bill, not necessarily agreeing to the absolute discretion that's vested in the minister. I actually have to say "a minister" because this is one of those things where the minister could be any one of a number of people, anybody designated under the Government Organization Act.

So the problem still persists, not reason enough to – I was going to say torpedo the bill, as if one member could do that. It wouldn't be reason enough to vote against the bill, but it continues to be a concern. All of us feel a degree of responsibility for every bill that leaves this Assembly. Somewhere down the road people are going to look at this and say: well, how is it that legislators could agree to give a minister this absolute, wide, sweeping discretion without setting out some criteria, without setting out some kind of fairness test?

We just finished a little while ago dealing with Bill 11, which once again has huge discretionary powers, and it just seems to be setting the new standard for lawmaking. It's not a new standard; it's a standard we see in a lot of statutes in this province.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, I know you didn't want a tour through the 10 least favored elements of current legislation in the province. I think I've said enough. I'm simply reinforcing a concern I'd expressed earlier with respect to the bill. Having said all of that, I'm going to take my place, and I'll be voting with, I expect and would hope, all members in support of the principle of the bill, which involves repatriation of aboriginal valued objects to the people and the nations from which they came.

I'd conclude by acknowledging again the excellent work of the Glenbow institute, that has, I think, shown some real leadership. Let's also acknowledge the work of people in the office of the Department of Community Development, who I think showed some leadership in this area as well. So a lot of people can be proud of this bill as well as the bill's sponsor. Let's just hope that we'll be able to bring it in next year and touch up the discretionary power provision that's too vague now.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure this evening just to make a few comments before we vote on Bill 2, the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act. Again, I do agree with the Member for Calgary-Buffero that certainly I can accept the principles of the bill.

The concerns I have are the concerns that were expressed by others as well that there is a paternalistic approach to this bill. I certainly don't see anything wrong with the repatriation of the sacred

objects to the First Nations. Certainly they are more than capable of taking care of their own artifacts, and this self-determination is one of the things I would have liked to have seen in this bill, but it certainly does not omit them being included at some later time.

I do continue to have some concerns with the amount of power given to the minister under regulations, but I do support this bill, and I would also urge all members of the Assembly to support this bill.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I would also like to compliment the member from Lesser Slave Lake for all of the work that she has done on this bill and the passion and concern she showed in speaking to it.

Thank you, very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs to close debate.

MS CALAHASEN: Just to say that regarding the regulations, as I indicated, I'll make sure we send the information over to the critic for the opposition members.

In terms of looking at some of the issues that have been brought up, I really feel strongly that whenever we're doing something, we have to ensure that, as the elders have indicated to me, these objects go to their rightful owners. We have to ensure that there is a mechanism in place for that to occur. They have certainly brought forward some recommendations that we will be following. I think it's very important to look at that when we see some of the regulations that have come forward in a number of instances. We've made decisions for aboriginal people in the past without their involvement. We need to ensure that whatever we do, they are part of this process. As I indicated, we'll continue to make sure they do that.

So on that basis, Madam Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 2.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure tonight to move second reading of the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000.

Last year people from across the province sat down at the justice summit to tell us how we could make our good justice system better. One of the main themes that came out of the summit was simplification: make the justice system more accessible and user friendly. We have listened to what Albertans have been saying, so access and simplification are the main focuses of this bill.

Madam Speaker, in dealing with the court system, it's never easy, and for Albertans, trying to work their way through a legal case can seem quite daunting. If you will allow me a moment to describe our court structure, you will see what I mean.

We have three levels of court in Alberta. The lowest level is the Provincial Court, which sits full-time in 23 communities and part-time in 51 others.

Provincial Court is broken down into three divisions. The Provincial Court, Civil Division, hears small claims cases under \$7,500. This level of court provides Albertans with quick civil remedies and with relatively little cost.

The Criminal Division is the court of first appearance for all

criminal cases. It holds trial and preliminary hearings for these cases.

The Family Division and Youth Division deal with maintenance, guardianship, and custody and access matters not dealt with under the Divorce Act and all matters under the Child Welfare Act except adoption. It also hears all cases under the Young Offenders Act.

The Court of Queen's Bench is the superior court for criminal and civil matters and sits full time in 11 locations and on specified days in two others. It hears criminal cases by judge and jury or judge alone, as well as civil cases. In addition, it deals with family matters including divorces and maintenance and custody and access matters under the Divorce Act. Issues of guardianship, adoption, custody and access, spousal support, and maintenance for children of both married and unmarried parents are also included. Finally, foreclosures and bankruptcies are also handled by the Court of Queen's Bench.

Then, Madam Speaker, there's another court, the Surrogate Court, which sits in the same locations as the Court of Queen's Bench. This court hears cases pertaining to wills and estates as well as applications under the Dependent Adults Act. The jurisdiction of the Surrogate Court to hear dependent adult matters has recently been called into question in the courts. Some decisions have held that only the Court of Queen's Bench can deal with dependent adult matters, even though the same justices serve on both the Court of Queen's Bench and the Surrogate Court.

Finally, Madam Speaker, we have the Court of Appeal of Alberta, which sits only in Edmonton and Calgary, and hears appeals of decisions made in the lower courts.

As you can see, Madam Speaker, sometimes it can be a job for Albertans just to determine which court to go to, and then there's the matter of hearing the case. This bill aims to simplify that process for Albertans.

11:10

As I said earlier, the Provincial Court sits in 74 communities across the province, while the Court of Queen's Bench is only located in 13. It makes sense that to give the most access to Albertans, we should broaden the jurisdiction of the Provincial Court, and this bill accomplishes that goal in a number of ways.

First, the bill allows Provincial Court judges to carry out some procedures that currently can only be carried out in a higher court. For instance, if an individual breaches a Provincial Court order, right now the case must be heard in the Court of Queen's Bench. In our view, this is an unnecessary step when a Provincial Court judge is already familiar with the individual and the background of the case.

With this amendment the Provincial Court will be able to deal directly with breaches of its orders, as well as breach of orders granted by justices of the peace. This means that serious issues like breaches of emergency protection orders can be dealt with quickly, particularly in areas where there isn't a Queen's Bench location nearby. I know this would be of assistance to many Albertans who are being protected by emergency protection orders.

In addition, Provincial Court will be enabled to deal with tenancy agreements, and it will be able to deal with contractual issues more effectively. Under these changes Provincial Court will be able to terminate or order compliance with a contract. It will also have the power to grant orders for the return of personal property other than land, normally referred to as a replevin order.

At the present time, Provincial Court can only order monetary payment for civil claims. I'll give you an example of what I'm talking about. Let's say I'm taking a case to a court in the Civil Division of Provincial Court because a person borrowed a stereo from me and failed to return it, saying it was given as a gift. My

only option in Provincial Court is to sue for the monetary value of the good. Under this amendment the court could order a replevin. In other words, they could order that the stereo be returned to me, something that right now can only be done in the Court of Queen's Bench.

So these changes, Madam Speaker, will allow Albertans to bring more matters before the Provincial Court, where proceedings are less formal and where they can represent themselves in many cases for much less cost than required to hire a lawyer and also, as I mentioned earlier, in many, many more locations around the province. It will also free up Queen's time in the Court of Queen's Bench so that other matters can be heard more quickly, and that is part of what we're striving to do.

The bill will also simplify the organization of the Provincial Court by enabling the three separate divisions, civil, criminal, and family and youth, to be merged. In other words, we'll take out the statutory requirement for three civil divisions. The operation of the court would still function in those types of divisions, but by removing that formal structure, it will allow the court to organize itself more efficiently, and it will allow the Chief Judge of the court to ensure that judges of the court sit in whichever area they're most needed at the time.

For example, if there's a long waiting list in family and youth court, it may be possible for the Chief Judge and the assistant chief judges to organize the judges on the bench who would normally hear civil claims or who might normally be in the criminal division to have them sit in family and youth division and hear cases in those divisions and thus put the bench power, so to speak, where the immediate need is. It will also help us as we look to the longer term in terms of the unification of the family court perhaps, which is a process which is under way right now. [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. minister, you do have the floor.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you. When you were waving at me, I was wondering.

In any event, what it will allow is for the Chief Judge and the Assistant Chief Judge to better organize the bench power, as I said, to areas of need, and it will provide for a better alignment after the review is done, for example, with the task force on the unification of the family court or perhaps as we look further at unification of the trial division. It will allow us to do that more straightforwardly. The courts will continue to be administered in the same way as they are now, but by eliminating the formal divisions, it will be possible to, as I said, assign judges to meet the needs of the court with more flexibility and efficiency.

This bill, Madam Speaker, raises the potential civil claims limit of Provincial Court from \$10,000 to \$25,000. The current actual limit, as I mentioned, is \$7,500. That's set pursuant to the regulations. By raising the potential limit, we advise the public that we're moving in that direction, and it allows us, as and when we have the adequate resources to deal with the increased limit, to raise that limit on a progressive basis. Again, that will provide the public of Alberta access to civil claims resolution at lower costs.

With the success of the civil claims mediation program, the increased workload in Provincial Court has been successfully handled, on the previous increases in limit, and in fact the use of mediation and pretrial conferences for civil claims has worked so well that these amendments put forward will enshrine them in legislation.

By increasing the potential civil claims limit, we have the opportunity to further increase the actual limit, as I said, as resources come available.

In addition, Provincial Court judges will be allowed to award costs in family court matters where a party has been guilty of delays or has brought forward frivolous proceedings. This puts a tangible penalty in place for those who bring forward unnecessary court actions or who waste the court's time, time which could be used to hear other cases, and the time and money of others involved in the proceedings. Those who are guilty of delays or frivolous proceedings may be required to pay the other party's court fees.

A further change will result in the broadening of a section of the Provincial Court Act that allows for civil judgments out of Provincial Court to be filed and enforced in Court of Queen's Bench. With this change, orders granted in Provincial Court for the payment of money under the new access enforcement amendments of the Domestic Relations Act can also be filed and enforced in Queen's Bench. This means that remedies under the Civil Enforcement Act, such as writs of enforcement or garnishee summons, can also be used to collect the money owing.

Another issue that we're aware of is that creditors who receive civil claims judgments need a more effective means of collecting those judgments. So these amendments will provide for default hearings in Provincial Court.

At the present time when defendants fail to appear on a claim in Provincial Court, a judge can rule in favour of the plaintiff without hearing evidence, but the same rule is not in place, Madam Speaker, when a defendant has a counterclaim and the plaintiff fails to appear. So changes are being proposed in this bill which will allow the corollary to occur. That again will help speed up processes and access for litigants in Alberta.

The bill also deals with issues of when administrative decisions of the Chief Provincial Court Judge and Assistant Chief Judge can be challenged in the courts. The amendment ensures that purely administrative decisions on the part of the Chief Judge or Assistant Chief Judge will not be routinely challenged in the Court of Queen's Bench, tying up court time and resources. This will not prevent any clearly unreasonable decisions from being reviewed by the Court of Queen's Bench.

In addition we have put forward a number of other amendments which will benefit Albertans involved in the legal process. For example, the bill amalgamates the Court of Queen's Bench and the Surrogate Court. As I mentioned before, judges of the Court of Queen's Bench are also judges of the Surrogate Court, and it seems an artificial distinction in this day and age to require them to remove one hat and put on the other just because they're hearing a different type of case. By amalgamating the courts, it becomes much easier to deal with all of the issues at hand. The Surrogate Court has a very specific mandate of what it can and can't hear, and even though the judges are the same judges, anything that arises in Surrogate Court that doesn't directly fall under the jurisdiction of the Surrogate Court must now be dealt with in Queen's Bench.

Other changes. We're bringing forward a civil claim appeal. Anyone bringing forward a civil claim appeal will be required to file transcripts within three months instead of six. Again, when we're looking for access and ease of process, litigants want a speedier result. As transcripts are now available much sooner than in the past, this restriction will ensure that civil claims appeals are not delayed unnecessarily.

Other administrative changes enable Provincial Court to strike out pleadings or enter default judgments when parties fail to attend a pretrial conference. Provincial Court judges will be able to award costs for pretrial conferences as well as for hearings. Pretrial conferences are important to help narrow down issues before the trial begins and sometimes, Madam Speaker, even to resolve the issues without the need of a trial.

In addition, Provincial Court will be granted the authority to deal with the destruction of exhibits. That's currently an authority that the Court of Queen's Bench has, but the Provincial Court does not have that authority.

Other minor amendments are included in terms of dealing with registered mail, et cetera.

11:20

The Provincial Court Act will be amended to allow any person to apply for access to a child if the parents are deceased. This fills a gap in current legislation which only allows an application to be made when parents are living apart.

Finally, the bill makes changes to the Provincial Offences Procedure Act. Back in 1989 the limit for what were called part 3 tickets was set at \$400. These are tickets where you can't be arrested or serve any jail time for failing to pay the fine. However, they can be enforced by placing restrictions on your motor vehicle privileges, like not being allowed to register a vehicle until the fine is paid. Usually these tickets are issued for violations of the Highway Traffic Act, the Motor Transport Act, and the Motor Vehicle Administration Act. We're increasing the limit for part 3 tickets to \$1,000 to reflect changing economic times.

I should also advise that we're working with the federal government to allow our provincial ticketing scheme to issue penalty tickets for some minor federal offences. Some of these federal penalties already exceed our current \$400 limit. Other changes would make it easier to pay traffic tickets by giving Albertans the option – and I would underscore that, the option – to pay at registry offices rather than just courthouses. Albertans will still be able to pay offence tickets at the courthouse or by mail-in, but this provides one more option to them. A small fee, of course, would apply at registry offices, but that would be a choice that the person paying the ticket would make. As I stressed, they do have the option of paying them at the courthouse.

Simplicity and access: that's what Albertans have asked for in their justice system. Madam Speaker, that's the object of this bill. It's one of the steps that we're taking to simplify the system and provide better access for Albertans to their courts.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the opposition critic in this area and the Opposition House Leader, who I had an opportunity to talk to about the bill in bringing it forward. The bill covers a number of justice statutes which we've encompassed in one bill. It's convenient. They deal with similar theme areas. It allows us to bring forward a number of amendments to a number of acts which we wanted to deal with in a packaged way which makes sense, and I appreciate the co-operation that we've had from the opposition in allowing me to do it in this manner.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, thank you very much. I hope that members opposite hadn't thought that the bill would come in and be introduced and there would be no opposition commentary on it. In fact, I want to tell my friend from Calgary-North Hill that I think we're actually under Standing Order 29(c). That would be:

A member other than the mover, speaking in debate on a Bill proposing substantive amendment to more than one statute, shall be limited to 30 minutes' speaking time.

So in fact, as I understand it, unless I'm advised otherwise, I'd think that if I needed it, I'd have a good 30 minutes to review Bill 20.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I think, hon. member, that we will tell the Assembly that the mover of the bill under that Standing Order has 90 minutes.

MR. DICKSON: Quite, quite. To disarm me further, the Minister of Justice said some very complimentary things about my colleague and about this MLA, so that makes it really tough, then, to aggressively challenge the government on the bill. But, you know, I wasn't going to do that anyway.

Actually Bill 20 is for the most part pretty much a good-news story. People are always saying that the opposition is always so darn negative and are always poking away and saying that this isn't good enough and this doesn't meet the standard. You know, Madam Speaker, the reality is that too many bills don't measure up and don't meet the standard. But in this bill, it's a compliment to the Minister of Justice and his officials that in fact many of the things in here represent what Albertans want to see. They represent changes that are overdue in terms of our justice system, and they're reflective of a number of things that are very positive developments.

Now, it's not all perfect. I'm going to spend a minute, Madam Speaker, pointing out a few things that could be done better. For the most part, this is a bill that I'm still going through, but there's a darn good chance that some of my colleagues are going to be prepared to support Bill 20. We're still looking for some more feedback from people that are going to be directly affected. That continues to be a concern, but I'm happy to say that I don't think we're going to have to spend 17 or 18 hours going through Bill 20. Maybe only one bill a spring session warrants that kind of treatment, Madam Speaker.

Let me highlight a couple of things, though, in going through it that I think are worth comment, and I'm hopeful that people directly affected by the bill will take the time to communicate by e-mail, if they can get through to MLAs, and certainly the Official Opposition is looking for advice and input before we get much further on the bill.

One of the things that came to my attention immediately is on page 4, and it's section (6) of the proposed section 21.1. It's interesting. After we have just gone through this situation with his honour Judge Reilly, who had been the Provincial Court judge in the Cochrane-Canmore circuit, we've seen some interesting litigation over questions of the power of the chief provincial judge, the ability of that officer to designate and redesignate the areas in which different Provincial Court judges should operate. If members look at page 4, the proposed section 21.1(5)(a), (b), (c), and (d), it looks to me like there is a power that the province has decided they're going to codify.

Now, the Minister of Justice has accused me from time to time of being a codifier, probably just the nastiest thing one could say about another legislator, and I know he means it in a generous way. His argument would be that I think legislation should codify rather than leave things to the discretion of somebody, and you know, he's right.

For the most part I start off feeling maybe just a little distrustful, and I like to see things spelled out. I get a little nervous when I see broad discretionary power like we saw in Bill 2 and we see in Bill 11, but here we've got one where now I'm going to sort of change roles a little bit. I'm going to ask: is it perhaps appropriate that the Chief Judge should have this power? I want to be able to review more carefully the decision, and I'm not really sure of the justices who went to the Alberta Court of Appeal. As I recall, there was a trial judge, and I don't know whether it was Justice Mason or not who heard the first application, and then I think it went to the Alberta Court of Appeal, and we saw that judgment recently. I'm hopeful that my colleagues and I are going to have a chance to be able to review the lower court judgment, the Alberta Court of Appeal decision, and see if there is some discretion that we lose, Madam Speaker, by going through the provision that we see in section 4.

The provision in terms of eliminating the distinction between the criminal division, the civil division, family division, youth division

makes some sense, because even now Provincial Court judges who are in criminal courts may do a bit of a tour where they spend some time in small claims court or whatever. That happens from time to time, and judges will tell you, as they've told me, Madam Speaker, that they find that's often a useful experience. They appreciate the chance, having done some small civil claims material, to be able to go and spend a little time in criminal court or to be able to go into youth and family court, but there's one nagging concern I've got, and I put this to the Minister of Justice.

What this nagging, niggling concern is is that many of us on this side support the notion of a unified family court, that notion where you develop a body of expertise. You get judges who specifically want to deal with those most vexing, complicated, challenging of all issues that lawyers can deal with. My own bias is showing, the issues in the area of family law. We've seen in Ontario and in Manitoba and in other places where they have done an integrated family court. Do you know what? It's been pretty darned effective.

11:30

One of the things I didn't hear the Minister of Justice address is: does he still have that interest in a unified family court? Now, I think in fact he does, but I'm not sure I heard him say that. If he did, I didn't hear it. I think it's important that we hear from the minister how we can allow, on the one hand, for an integration of all the provincial court judges despite the different sectors they work in and yet, on the other hand, be pursuing a unified family court. My caucus, unless since the last caucus meeting there's been a change of opinion, feels pretty strongly that we want to see the advantages of a unified family court.

MRS. SOETAERT: Absolutely.

MR. DICKSON: We need that kind of assurance. Well, we've got one colleague that is paying close attention, Madam Speaker. That's not bad; we've got one out of 82. [interjections] Oh, I'm sorry. I'm in big trouble now.

MR. SHARIFF: It must be a pretty boring speech.

MR. DICKSON: Well, it may well be a boring speech.

I said that in jest when I suggested there was only one other member paying close attention. I know that there is a roomful and of course you, Madam Speaker. I know that just because people listen with their eyes closed and the book open doesn't mean they're not paying attention to what's being said. I know that. It may be just a little fiction I like to manufacture for my own purposes, but that's what I like to believe.

Madam Speaker, there is a concern with this bill with regulation-making power. One would think that the Minister of Health and Wellness, who has endured how many questions about the regulation-making power in Bill 11, would have taken his colleague the Minister of Justice aside and said: you know, this just doesn't work in Alberta; this notion of secret lawmaking has got to come to an end. If we can't find a champion in the Minister of Justice to ensure that subordinate lawmaking is done in an open and responsive way and is something that's overseen by elected legislators, then who the heck is going to champion that on the government side?

Do we have to wait for new cabinet appointments? When the cabinet shuffle happens, let's say in a month, is it a question of having to start buttonholing the people we think may be in cabinet next time and start trying to see if we can develop a little sensitivity around this issue early in the hopes that they'll transport that with them when they move into cabinet? Madam Speaker, it might be

you. I mean, we could go around and spin the dial. Who knows who is going to be in cabinet after the cabinet shuffle? Will one of those people be the champion? I'm afraid to say that the Minister of Justice, very able legislator and cabinet minister that he is, shows us in Bill 20 that he's not going to be our champion in terms of law and regulations, so we're going to have to find somebody to pursue that concern.

We have a provision that the Lieutenant Governor in Council will be able to make regulations outlining situations in which court fees can be waived. That's important because there are no provisions now in terms of a waiver of court fees. It's not just a Liberal researcher who shows up at the courthouse trying to get the latest scuttlebutt on some litigation involving the government of the province of Alberta. There are interested Albertans that try and do that.

Sometimes the fees are steep, very steep, Madam Speaker. Sometimes I think in this province we're just nickle-and-dimed. The fees for FOIP requests, fees for accessing court documents: every time you turn around, there's another user fee. But members should take some comfort. The Official Opposition Treasury critic, with his expertise in the area of the Eurig decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, has developed some particular expertise in that area. He's applying that expertise to a host of other user fees in the area of the court system, and I'm hopeful we're going to have a report, an analysis which is going to identify a number of others.

We saw some movement. I think the Surrogate Court fees have come down. It's a huge amount, \$60 million. You know, there's a reason why the Eurig case was the one where the Supreme Court of Canada was given the platform and the opportunity to identify user fees as being illegal taxes. That's because it's through our court system that we find so many of those illegal taxes and user fees. To the everlasting embarrassment of many of us in Alberta, it was the province of Alberta that was an aggressive intervenor in that Supreme Court challenge. This was not a case – what do we call the former Provincial Treasurer now, in his hiatus period?

MR. SAPERS: The member from Edmonton-North.

MR. DICKSON: The Member for Red Deer-North.

MR. SAPERS: Well, he wants to be the member from Edmonton-North. That's right.

MR. DICKSON: In any event, the former Provincial Treasurer always used to make those speeches about what a great job we were doing in terms of responding to the Eurig decision, never to my knowledge ever acknowledging in this House that the province of Alberta was right there at the table fighting with the province of Ontario to try and defend illegal taxes. To read the factum of the province of Alberta is to weep. It is a document that is discouraging and depressing. Enough of that. Let's move on to some of the other things.

One of the positive things is the provision in section 5(a)(iii). I skipped over to that. That's on page 2. I'm not going exactly sequentially, Madam Speaker. I'm sort of bopping around here a little bit. The item is on page 2, section 5. Something that when I was Justice critic I always encouraged the provincial government to look at was raising the small claims fee, and we suggested \$10,000. What the province did was actually bring in a change a couple of years ago that it could go as high as \$10,000 but that it would be set by regulation. I think it is set at \$7,500 now.

This is one where in fact the provincial government has trumped the opposition. We were looking for a \$10,000 limit, and the Justice

minister – and nobody ever accused him of being afraid of a challenge – has increased the provision to \$25,000. The issue and the question that goes along with that, however, would be this, Madam Speaker. Is the money going to be there to hire the additional provincial court judges to make this work? We understand that there was a great deal of consternation on the part of the government for moving it from \$5,000 to \$7,500, and the argument was: it's going to cost us more money because we're going to have to hire more judges.

That was always a bit of a specious argument because on the other hand, you know, we have other judges. It means we've got more Queen's Bench judges. Now, the difference is that they're paid by the federal government whereas the Provincial Court judges are paid out of the Provincial Treasury. So we've got a little bit of: after you, Alphonse. It's sort of a question of everybody agreeing that we'd like to see small claims jurisdiction enlarge, but the question is: who's going to pay for the additional judges that's going to require? So we actually have quite an audacious, quite a bold move by our provincial government in proposing a \$25,000 ceiling. You know, I support that, but I do want to know where the provincial judges are coming from there.

11:40

There may be members in this Assembly that decide that rather than running again, they'd like to apply for a Provincial Court judgeship, knowing that now there's going to be a need for new Provincial Court judges subject to the six-month cooling off period. Maybe what we should do is circulate a list. In our caucus we have sign-up lists to be a speaker to a bill. Well, if anybody here would like to have one of those new positions, we can distribute the list around and see who signs up.

Madam Speaker, that's a good item in 5(a).

Now, there's a provision for payment hearings in 5(b), and that's also a good move. You will have noticed that most of the things I'm saying are pretty positive, and this is another one.

We have a provision, though, that too much of this is being done by regulation so why don't we get that out of the way right now. I've always said, Madam Speaker, that I'm ready to retire the day the provincial government finally addresses regulations and says that we're going to . . . [interjections] Well, this may be my final offer. I've exhausted everything else. Maybe I could suggest that if the provincial government will commit to actually giving our friend from Banff-Cochrane, the chairman of the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, the power to actually deal with regulations, then maybe we're in a position where some of us can move on – well, not to our great reward or no reward – and then it's somebody else's turn to carry on.

So that's my challenge to the Minister of Justice. I think it's a great bargain. We'll send over the contract tomorrow. If we can take all the regulations here and get a commitment to submit them to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, boy, you know, we'd be able to get some real change going.

Madam Speaker, maybe the thing to do, maybe there's a spot in Calgary-West. Maybe the nominations haven't closed in Calgary-West yet, and maybe there are more people that should join that race.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, this is too much fun, and we've got a lot of stuff to deal with yet. I'm not sure how much of my 30 minutes I've got left, and we've barely started here. [interjection] Okay. Thank you very much, Madam Clerk.

MR. HANCOCK: You don't have to do it all at once.

MR. DICKSON: Well, there'll be some left for committee, I'm sure.

I should have mentioned before that I'm simply standing in for my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood, who has done, as is her usual custom, a much more organized presentation. So overlook the sloppiness tonight. When my colleague speaks, you're going to hear a very pinpoint analysis of the weaknesses in the bill. All I'm trying to do now is just hit some of the things that are a bit of a highlight for me.

I think there's a very good provision here in terms of authorizing pretrial conferences and mediation. I think that's a really important area. I know that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed has a lot of mediation experience, and I think that's been very effective. I think that . . . [interjections]

Well, Madam Speaker, there may be other people that wish to speak. On the other hand, we may just want to go home. I would hope that my colleagues would stand because they're interested in this bill. [interjections] I'd like to think that was going to be a pat on the shoulder, an encouragement to keep on going. Who says you have to be delusional to be in opposition in Alberta, Madam Speaker? It isn't so.

Madam Speaker, just a couple of other things quickly to identify here. There's a provision in here – and I can't find it readily – to deal with contempt, and I think that's a positive thing.

The privative clause on page 4. I think everybody in the Legislature has now become an expert on the privative clause, what it means, what it doesn't mean, and I see it's in fact one of the interesting amendments we've got. In fact, the interesting amendment on Bill 11, the House amendment that's come forward, says nothing other than what the section currently says. It just says it in different words. It doesn't expand or restrict the notion. The minister of health may think he's somehow contracting or narrowing the scope of the privative clause, but as I read it in Bill 11, it's exactly the same after as it was before. I don't see any change.

Here we have a privative clause, but we know it's going to do something. It's going to mean that if there is a Provincial Court judge like His Honour Judge Reilly and there is an issue in terms of whether that judge can be exported to another part of the province, he would be denied that kind of redress. I think the Minister of Justice would agree. If this becomes law, we wouldn't see what happened most recently, where there was an application to the court that went on to the Court of Appeal. That wouldn't happen.

I guess we have to ask ourselves: is there any value in leaving that in? From an administrative point of view there's never anything good about an appeal or a judicial review, but sometimes there are issues of fairness that warrant some further review. That's a policy question. I haven't resolved in my own mind whether this is appropriate or inappropriate, but it's something that ought to be designated.

The provision in terms of contempt of the court, page 12, section 21.61, I think is interesting.

The management of exhibits. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar has raised a concern around what happens to exhibits in a Provincial Court trial. In fact, we've seen an issue recently on quite a famous environmental matter trial where there were matters that were put in front of that court, exhibits that members of the public were keenly interested in seeing. You know what? People may not recognize that pleadings are accessible but exhibits are not for the most part accessible. Madam Speaker, I think it's appropriate we see some provision dealing with exhibits. [interjections] There are so many things I can think of saying, but that's going to take us on longer and longer, so I'm going to try and fix my attention on the chair and we're going to try to get through this.

I think there are some useful provisions in terms of if both parents

of a child are dead, a person would be able to make an application for access. I'm not sure how often this comes up. I haven't run into it very often. It looks like it was a gap that's now addressed by this.

We see the end of the Surrogate Court, and that's something that the Legal Archives Society may regard as a significant black day in the history of the province. I've always found it a bit of a nuisance. The Surrogate Court was never anything different than the old district court when we had a district court, then the trial division of the Court of Queen's Bench now. It's been a long time since I've looked at a style of cause in a document. It was always pretty silly. The difference, I understood, was that there was some additional money involved to somebody who sat as a Surrogate Court judge as well as a regular judge, so we've ended it. It was a bit of a fiction. I think it just meant a lot of articling students probably having documents rejected for errors in the style of cause. It probably confused members of the public who had to access the court system in terms of accessing documents and so on. So I think that's probably a very positive matter. In fact, I compliment the minister for moving on that.

11:50

The Contributory Negligence Act is amended so that the last clear chance rule is finished, and that's probably a good thing. The last clear chance rule made lots of sense before we had contributory negligence legislation. We have that now. It's well established. It's been the subject of a lot of judicial determination, so we know that's there.

The provision in terms of amendment to the Survival of Actions Act. There is a question of an estate claiming for loss of life expectancy, and that makes some sense as well.

So, Madam Speaker, far too many regulations. Some questions around some key parts but, on balance, a lot of actually really positive provisions in this act. The more I read through it the more I like it, but we have some questions we're looking for some

information on, and we hope we'll be able to get that information sooner rather than later. I think this is one that has a lot of detail in it, and I'm hopeful members are going to have lots of latitude at the committee stage. Maybe we should tell the minister now that this is a bill that probably won't attract a lot of attention at second reading, and that's probably why I've gone maybe a little longer than members would have liked. Probably we won't hear a lot of other commentary on this at second reading.

MRS. SOETAERT: I might; you've inspired me. I want to talk about regulations.

MR. DICKSON: Well, maybe we'll hear some tonight. Maybe we'll hear some other second reading debate tonight. Certainly at the committee stage, Madam Speaker, we're going to be able to do a lot of work on this bill, and we'll be bringing those amendments forward. [Mr. Dickson's speaking time expired] Is that my 30 minutes already?

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Madam Speaker, the Minister of Justice, I think, gave us a very, very good overview of this bill, and I think every member in this Assembly recognizes the amount of work and collaboration and consultation that went into developing this rather complex piece of legislation. I think the opposition critic has given some interesting comments on it.

I had intended to spend a few minutes on this bill, Madam Speaker, but in view of the hour I would suggest that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 11:53 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 19, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/04/19

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Though we as legislators of this great province and its people are taken from the common people and selected by You to be architects of our history, give us wisdom and understanding to do Your will in all we do. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Audio of Proceedings on Assembly Web Site

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I would like to reiterate to each of you and to all Albertans what I said in the House on March 14, 2000. Audio proceedings of this particular Assembly are available on the Internet. Citizens may listen on the Legislative Assembly web site at www.assembly.ab.ca. If one were to look at that page, one would see a reference to live audio, and when one clicks on it, one would be able to hear the activities of this Assembly from any appropriately equipped computer in the world. Coverage normally begins at 1:30 p.m. on a daily basis and continues to the conclusion of each sitting day. In other words, this is gavel-to-gavel coverage.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, some patience today. We have a very long list.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of many constituents in Little Bow I wish to present the Legislative Assembly of Alberta a letter from Mrs. Margaret Dyck, a thank you letter, a copy of one of a number of petitions signed by approximately 2,326 individuals, as well as a copy representative of 395 similar letters. They are all signatures from constituents in Little Bow relating to the saving of 24-hour emergency care service within the communities of Picture Butte and Coaldale.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present a petition in support of public health care in Alberta urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." The current names that I'll table are 382 from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Morinville, Fort Saskatchewan, and Spruce Grove. Today's total will be 3,074 signatures. The total to date of all of the petitions from Albertans around the province who have been signing them is 60,423.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 304 Albertans from Edmonton, Camrose, Hanna, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert. They are urging this Assembly "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present a petition signed by 280 individuals from Grande Prairie, McLellan, Fort Vermilion, High Level, Rainbow Lake, Fairview, Peace River, La Crete, High Prairie, Wabasca, Slave Lake, Jousard, Canyon Creek, and Grimshaw. They're asking "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table a petition signed by 109 Albertans from Vermilion, Bonnyville, Sedgewick, Camrose, Lac La Biche, Peers, and Stettler. They are urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table a petition signed by 168 Albertans from Red Deer, Bashaw, Castor, Alliance, Camrose, Hardisty, Sedgewick, Calmar, Thorsby, Leduc, and Millet. They urge "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table petitions signed by 267 Albertans from the communities of Edmonton, St. Albert, Ardrossan, Sherwood Park, Spruce Grove, Morinville, Beaumont, Stony Plain, and Whitecourt. These citizens are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions this afternoon to present to the Assembly. The first one is from 224 residents of Hinton, Alberta. These residents of Hinton are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

The second petition this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is on behalf of 2,187 residents of Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Coaldale, and Fort Macleod. This petition is on behalf of men and women everywhere in the province. There must be "a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight. Employers must be responsible for their employees' safety." These residents are demanding that the Legislative Assembly "pass a 'Tara McDonald Law' to protect employees' lives."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 313 people from Sherwood Park, St. Paul, Beaumont, Leduc, New Sarepta, Millet, St. Albert, Camrose, and Edmonton. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I

would present a petition signed by 218 citizens from St. Albert, Spruce Grove, Fort Saskatchewan, Sherwood Park, and Edmonton urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from 263 Albertans from Edmonton, Spruce Grove, Gibbons, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, and Leduc urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request permission today to table a petition signed by 224 residents of Alberta from Fort McMurray, Grimshaw, Grande Prairie, and Berwyn. They are all urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care" in this province.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I would like to present to the Assembly a petition supporting public health care in Alberta. It reads as follows.

To the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in Legislature Assembled:
We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system].

This petition has been signed by 319 residents of Fort McMurray.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly signed by 188 Albertans from Athabasca, Kinuso, St. Paul, High Prairie, Jousard, Slave Lake, Grande Prairie, Bonnyville, Perryvale, Peace River, Grimshaw, Silver Valley, Spirit River, and Beaverlodge. The petition states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MRS. LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to present a petition on behalf of 266 Albertans. They are from Edmonton, St. Albert, Calgary, Airdrie, Spruce Grove, Sherwood Park, Stony Plain, and Gibbons. They are all requesting that the government of Alberta "stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition which I think I've misplaced at the moment, so I'll try again tomorrow afternoon.

Thank you very much.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I tabled yesterday in the Assembly be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to re-instate the front license plate on all vehicles registered in Alberta.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday on osteoporosis prevention be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Alberta Government to take an enlightened preventative approach and add the newer and more effective medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Assembly on Tuesday, April 18 requesting the introduction of a bill requiring "a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight" be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I respectfully request that the petition I tabled on the 18th, yesterday, that urged the government to support public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, with your permission I would request that the petition which I presented to this Assembly in support of our public health care system on April 18 now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and request that the petition I tabled yesterday in this Assembly be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the

petition I presented on Tuesday, April 18 signed by 276 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Opposition House Leader, do you have a notice that you want to present?

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, there's a matter that was going to be dealt with after question period. I'd given notice last day, and the chair of the committee had indicated that it would be dealt with at that time. I haven't done a formal written notice.

THE SPEAKER: That's fine. Notice has been given.

The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 15(2) earlier today I provided written notice to your office of my intention to raise the matter of privilege, which I hope I will have the opportunity to do later on.

Speaker's Ruling Privilege

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, notice has now been given that there will be two questions of privilege to be dealt with at the conclusion of question period today. In the 21 years that I've had the privilege of being a member of this House, I view these questions of privilege to be the most significant procedural matters that this Assembly will have to hear in 21 years.

So my advice to those who are rising this afternoon after question period is that one be absolutely sure of what one wants to say. Be extremely well prepared. You have approximately an hour. You know what the rules of this House are and what the traditions of Assemblies are. I will invite all members who want to participate on these questions of privilege to participate. I will want no emotional responses to anything: clinical, factual information with respect to the questions at hand.

The penalties for privilege are very severe in this Assembly, as they are in all parliaments in the world.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to table for the Assembly copies of answers to questions from Committee of Supply.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I wish to table five copies of the president's letter from Dr. David W. Bond, president of the AMA.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings here today. The first one is a letter from Alise Palk opposing Bill 11.

The second one is a letter from Wayne Sklarski, a constituent of the Premier's own riding, again opposing Bill 11.

And two letters, Mr. Speaker, one from a grade 8 student from Edson and the other one from a grade 10 student from another town, also opposing Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first tabling is a letter to the Premier regarding the development proposed in the Spray Valley by Genesis Land Development Corp. signed by Garry Denman of Calgary, Alberta.

My second letter, again to the Premier, is regarding the Genesis proposal for the Spray Valley and is signed by Bonnie Roll of Exshaw, Alberta.

My third tabling, again to the Premier, is again on the Genesis proposal for Spray Valley and is signed by Peter Laird of Banff, Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter from Dr. Peter R. Winters to the Premier expressing opposition to the development of the Spray Lakes area by the Genesis corporation.

The second letter is to Annette Trimbee from Norma Stimpson, and she is also expressing reservations about the Spray Lakes development.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three letters to table with the Assembly today, all three directed to the Premier and all three categorically opposed to the Genesis proposal in the Spray Valley. The first is from Alison Kranias and Keith Etsell where they say that "large mammals need wildlife corridors."

The second is from Kathy and Michael Brett of Edmonton citing the same: "degradation of one of the finest valleys in our province."

The third is from Sue Arlidge from Exshaw, and she wants no further commercial development in the valley.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two tablings. The first is from Mary Trumpener of Edmonton, who is requesting protection of wilderness areas in the province in a letter to the Premier.

The second is a letter signed by 26 people who live in the county of Strathcona who are expressing their "strong objection to any seismic, oil and gas activity in the County" and near their homes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is addressed to the Premier from Sharyn Honeywell. The other is addressed to the hon. Member from Edmonton-Ellerslie from Theresa Wood. Both of these are stating their opposition to the proposed development of the Spray Valley.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three letters all regarding concerns about development in the Spray Lakes area. They are from Sonya Biamonte, Kimberly Dudinsky, and David Owen.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have more letters to table in opposition to Bill 11. They come from Marjorie Staples, Scott Sugden, and Lynn Koss.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first two are addressed to the Premier in opposition to the Spray Lakes development. One is from Paul McKendrick, and the other is from Diana Sheprak.

The third letter is also addressed to the Premier from a Mr. Nick Chamchuk indicating that he's filed a complaint with the Advertising Standards Council of Canada regarding the government's ad on Bill 11.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first one is copies of my correspondence to you, sir, and to the Government House Leader identifying certain concerns with what happened last night and some suggestions to prevent a recurrence this evening.

The second thing is a copy of an invoice for \$50. This was an additional cost with respect to the campaign of the opposition around Bill 11.

The final one, Mr. Speaker, is an estimate of the government's expenses in trying to promote Bill 11 totaling \$2,239,570. That's our best estimate of the government expenses in promoting Bill 11.

Thank you very much.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of my responses to questions raised at supply subcommittee D, Resource Development, on 13 March 2000.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a letter from constituent Eugene Mondor, who is expressing his opposition to the plans for privatization in the creation of for-profit hospitals.

Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Opposition House Leader, you rose in the

Assembly a few minutes ago to table a letter that's been conveyed to the Speaker. It arrived in the Speaker's office at 1:44 p.m. today. Just a little reminder. It is most unusual for a member's correspondence to the Speaker to be tabled, as it is most unusual for correspondence from the Speaker to the member to be tabled.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, I am tabling today the public inquiry into the death of Jordan Quinney. The facts contained herein indicate child welfare abdicated their responsibility to protect this child through their failure to apply for protection orders, their failure to apprehend this child, and their failure to assess the issues of caseload intensity and staff training in child welfare.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a single tabling today. It's a one-page chart. It is taken from a book called *Clear Answers*, authored by Kevin Taft and Gillian Steward. The chart is titled *Conflicting Interests at the Calgary Regional Health Authority*, and it was handed out at the rallies protesting Bill 11 in both Calgary and Edmonton.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am privileged to have two introductions this afternoon. The first one is the introduction of 19 guests, and I wish to introduce them to you and through you to members of the Assembly. They are from St. Mary's high school in Vegreville. They are accompanied today by Mrs. Colleen Fjeldheim and also by parent helper Mr. Darrell Kavich. I would ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it is also with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly this afternoon a gentleman by the name of Mr. Dustin Bateyko seated in the members' gallery. Dustin is from the town of Two Hills and will be leaving Alberta shortly to attend Harvard University for a four-month bioethics program. This is a tremendous opportunity for an individual, and it's very well deserved. He is a bright young man, very articulate, and is showing a great amount of courage as he has recently lost his mother in a car accident close to the community of Two Hills. I know I speak on behalf of the House when I offer sincere congratulations to Dustin and give him a warm welcome, not only a thank you for your courage but also a job well done. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the membership of this Assembly this afternoon eight students in grades 7, 8, and 9 from the Calgary Academy located in the constituency of Calgary-West. They're seated in the members' gallery. These students are very special. They're members of the Calgary Academy debate team, and they also debate citywide in Calgary as part of their extracurricular program. Three teachers are accompanying them today: Charles Brodeur, Jennifer Brewer, and Rosemary Gerts. Would the students and teachers please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 19 visitors from the Mallaig school. In the group we have 18 grade 10 students, and they are accompanied today by Mr. Todd Tanasichuk, a teacher. I would like to ask our visitors to please rise and be recognized by the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly here today some grade 10 students from Thorsby who haven't actually come into the House yet, but I want it on the record that they were introduced properly in here. There are 31 intelligent and dedicated grade 10 students. They also have one student in there who I might mention is the nephew of the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. They're also accompanied today by their principal, Mr. Al Bratland. I'd like to give the traditional warm welcome to these students.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly three of my constituents from Camrose, including Rita Kane, outreach supervisor with Camrose and district community living and two of her clients, Carolyn Bell and Sara Pound. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions to make today. The first one is a guest, Mr. Abdul Bhimji. He's seated in the public gallery. It's my pleasure to introduce him to you and to my colleagues in the Assembly. Mr. Bhimji came to Edmonton from Toronto 16 years ago, and while in Ontario he worked for the ministry of health. I would ask Mr. Bhimji to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to rise today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a distinguished Albertan and an internationally known environmentalist. Mr. Brian Staszewski has just been recognized by *Time* magazine as a hero for the planet. He also is the executive director of the Environmental Resource Centre located in Edmonton-Strathcona. It's my pleasure to request that Mr. Staszewski and Ms. Flo David, a board member with Destination Conservation, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's both an honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 65 very bright and enthusiastic students who are here today from Holy Family Catholic school. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Beth Devlin and Mrs. Juliet Lidstone and also by parents and helpers Mr. and Mrs. Bud Arbeau and Mrs. Bobbi Stevens. I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you very much for coming today.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a special class. This is the transitional vocational program from NorQuest College. There are 15 students, and they are accompanied by their teachers, Judy Dobbs and Cap Tiede, and also their sign language interpreter, Donna Holterhus. I would ask if they would all please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a constituent of mine who I believe is here on her first visit for a firsthand view of the Legislative proceedings. I'd ask Gloria Filax to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three members of the St. Albert Protestant separate school district No. 6 board of trustees. They are seated in the members gallery, and they are Morag Pansegrau, who is the chairperson, and trustees Irene Harvey and Joan Trettler. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Representing the Public

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just eight weeks ago the former Provincial Treasurer stood in this Assembly and referred to the Premier when he talked about the process that had led to the development of his budget. In fact, he commented in his opening remarks in that budget by saying:

It's input based on government MLAs following the instructions of our Premier, who above anyone else reminds us in a regular way that we need to listen to our bosses, our bosses being the people of Alberta.

Albertans deserve an answer to urgent questions. To the Premier: why has the Premier stopped listening to his bosses, the people of this province?

MR. KLEIN: I haven't, Mr. Speaker. I haven't. You know, I try my best to stop listening to the lies – oh, I'm sorry – the misinformation of the Liberal Party and their ND allies and their union allies, CUPE and AUPE and the Federation of Labour and the Friends of Medicare. You know, I try not to listen to the misinformation that is being put out by these organizations, because it is so wrong. It is so fraudulent. It is so dishonest that these people should be ashamed of themselves. I try not to listen to it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, wouldn't the Premier agree that the unrest his government has provoked is because government MLAs are following the instructions of the Premier instead of following the wishes of the people that they were elected to serve?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. She's got it all wrong. She's got it all backwards. The only people who have provoked unrest through a malicious campaign of misinformation and absolutely vicious propaganda are the Liberals – the Liberals – and the NDs to some

extent and certainly backed by the Friends of Medicare.

You know, when you talk about the agenda and the program, I had a friend who attended the rally in Calgary. The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alluded to me not being at the rally. He says:

For example, I was singled out even as I entered the rally, with one red-vested rally official telling me that a special table had been reserved for the likes of me. Presumably this was the table with a card saying that the table had been reserved for the P.C. party, but they were unable to attend because their safety could not be guaranteed.

He goes on to say:

We were denounced as "Tory spies" over the loudspeaker and our location within the rally area announced so that we could be further insulted . . . Despite being billed as a family event, one of my friends who had brought his very young son was nonetheless happy to leave this decidedly un-family atmosphere at this point.

He said that "at the back of the room, there were tables and tables of printed materials, featuring Castro, Lenin, Marx . . ."

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. [interjection] Hon. member, please. Please. Thank you very much. Would you do the House the courtesy now of tabling the document you're quoting from.

Hon. members, the purpose of question period is to ascertain information about the policies of the government, and events which occur outside the precincts which have nothing to do with the government are not really subject matter for the question period.

Representing the Public (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, with public health care in crisis, with people rallying in front of this Legislature, can the Premier explain how he became so out of touch with what is going on that watching a movie is more important than doing his job as the Premier of this province?

THE SPEAKER: Okay. I'll recognize the hon. Premier, but, boy, this tone is inflammatory once again.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what has watching a movie – I very seldom get to watch a movie at all. What was the question? The question alluded to me watching a movie. It has nothing to do with health care policy. It has nothing to do with the work of this Legislature. It has to . . .

MS LEIBOVICI: It's like Getty golfing.

MR. KLEIN: Yes. Maybe it's like golfing or fishing. Is this member over here saying that she doesn't get away to her little chalet in Jasper and do a little R and R some time, Mr. Speaker? Let's get real.

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Okay, hon. members. Again there's going to be a lesson reviewed here about the question period. There's an oblique connotation with respect to the questions – nothing oblique about the answers – having to do with some bill that apparently the Assembly has before it. Well, it's clearly on the agenda that the bill will come up again for debate, so perhaps at that time those questions might be reserved for the appropriate time.

The Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Second main question.

Representing the Public (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Father Lacombe, the Grey Nuns, the Holy Cross, the Edmonton General, and the Misericordia hospitals: Alberta's Roman Catholics have bestowed a legacy of providing nonprofit health care to Albertans for well over a century, a legacy of tending to the sick not for profit, but because it is the right thing to do in a caring and compassionate society. Their principles are very simple: one helps another human being; one does not profit from another human being's suffering or illness. But now there is concern that this government has forsaken those values. The bishops of Calgary, the archbishop of Edmonton, and now the Catholic Health Association of Alberta and Affiliates, whose letter to the minister of health I will table, are calling for private health care plans to be set aside immediately. My first question is to the Premier. What or who is so important that this Premier and his government have chosen to ignore the pleas and the values of over 700,000 Roman Catholics in this province?

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I stood up less than several minutes ago basically saying that if we're going to have a question and we're going to have a debate, there is time allocated in the Assembly for something called Bill 11. It's up again on the Order Paper for the day. Now we're having a question which directly relates to it.

I have observed and I have listened to all of the discussion in committee. The Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Chairman of Committees have provided the widest variety of options for participation. Normally committee goes clause by clause. Both of these distinguished members of this House gave ample opportunity for wide-ranging debate.

If there's a specific question, get to the specific question, and if it's argumentative, opinionated, misleading, or anything else, the person to whom the question is addressed does not have to feel compelled to respond.

MR. DICKSON: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

2:10

Representing the Public (continued)

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to make one statement. The government and the RHAs value tremendously the relationships they have with various religious boards that operate hospitals, including the Catholic organizations.

Mr. Speaker, there are contractual relationships with groups like Caritas here in Edmonton. Relative to the policy surrounding those contractual arrangements, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, our policy in this province is to maintain our agreements with the voluntary hospital sector. They, of course, are mainly facilities and programs that are run by the Roman Catholic church, but the United Church of Canada is also involved and other agencies and organizations. Perhaps one of the ironies here is that this sector of our health care system operates under contract or agreement with the public health care sector. It has a certain amount of independence and latitude and decision-making ability that is not there as directly in the public health care system. In other words, they certainly show the benefit that can come in

some cases from more independence, more creativity, more flexibility with respect to offering a particular program.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier listen to the Catholic Health Association when it says:

We believe that Bill 11, with the proposed amendments, is premature and that it is imperative that it be set aside until the broader dialogue around sustainability and the common good has occurred.

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, please take your place.

Okay. Now, this is the third time today I've interjected with respect to questions in the question period specifically with respect to Bill 11. It's on the Order Paper today. It will be dealt with later.

Do you have a third question, hon. Leader of the Official Opposition?

AN HON. MEMBER: Point of order.

THE SPEAKER: You've got your point of order.
Third question.

MRS. MacBETH: Third question or third part?

THE SPEAKER: Third question, please.

MRS. MacBETH: Third question of the second set of questions?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader. Hon. leader.

MRS. FORSYTH: Not too bright, are you?

THE SPEAKER: Please, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. This does not help the situation.

Hon. leader, I said the third question, meaning the third main question of the Official Opposition, and if the Leader of the Official Opposition chooses to begin raising it, one question with two supplementaries. Please.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you for the clarification, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 11 Protest at the Legislature

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, if the Premier had been on the Legislature Grounds last night, he would have seen and could have listened to hundreds of Albertans: seniors, families, parents and grandparents, young people, people in wheelchairs, children in strollers, women and men in business suits, young Albertans in jeans, health professionals. They were here because they tried to tell the Premier and his government through letters and e-mails, through faxes and phone calls, through petitions, coupons, rallies, and town hall meetings that they do not want his government's health care privatization agenda to proceed any further. Yet the Premier proceeds with his agenda and ignores the fact that these Albertans have urgent questions, and they deserve answers. Given that the Premier has ignored all attempts of these people to communicate with him, exactly what form must their message take for this Premier to listen and pay attention?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, with regards to what happened last night, certainly I wouldn't be at a rally such as that, because that was simply a manifestation of the rallies that took place over the

weekend. Obviously I wasn't welcome at those particular rallies, because they were rallies that were organized, aided, and abetted by the Liberals, the NDs, the Friends of Medicare, and all of the unions to spread a lot of misinformation about what we're trying to achieve.

I wouldn't attend a rally where the tires of police cars were slashed, where a security official of this Legislature was struck. The only picture I saw, the one that is indelibly in my mind, is this angry-looking person hanging on to a doorknob that he had ripped off the Legislature door. A person who is alleged to have deliberately set off the fire alarm and the Liberals out there inciting all that: that's what I saw, Mr. Speaker. They should be ashamed of themselves. That is the most shameful activity I have ever seen.

MR. DICKSON: Point of order.

MS OLSEN: Point of order.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, what will it take for this absentee Premier to stop watching movies and pay attention to the people he was elected to serve?

MR. HANCOCK: Point of order.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what movie is she talking about? Tell me. What movie is she talking about? The last movie I went to I think was *The Insider*. You know, I happened to have a little bit of time off that day. I think it was a Sunday or something. But what movie is she talking about? Do you have the name and the title of the movie? [interjections] Well, she's talking about a movie.

Relative to my record in this House, I think my attendance record is pretty darned good, Mr. Speaker, pretty darned good. You know, I figured it out I think it was a couple of weeks ago that I sat in this Legislature and answered I think it was over 200 minutes' worth of questions from the Liberals, none of them intelligent. That's what made them so difficult to answer. Mr. Speaker, over 200 minutes. That was a question every 2.7 minutes.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're an embarrassment.

MR. KLEIN: No. Mr. Speaker, I heard across the way that I'm an embarrassment. They're an embarrassment. These are the people out there inciting riots. These are the people that condone slashed tires. These are the people who condone people ripping off door handles. These are the people who condone striking and using violence against security people at the Legislature. These are the people who are out there inciting this kind of deplorable, despicable behaviour.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, with over 60,000 signatures on a petition, tens of thousands of phone calls and faxes and letters, thousands at rallies in Calgary and Edmonton, and now nightly rallies at this Legislature, what more must Albertans do to have this Premier pay attention and withdraw the bill?

MR. KLEIN: Maybe I should send over a Fisherman's Friend. Her voice is starting to crack, Mr. Speaker.

The bill is the right thing to do. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. The policy is the right policy. The policy is the right policy because all it does is put fences and rules and regulations around what has been in place for years and years and years. If they do not support the policy, then I take it that they do not support RHAs contracting out to clinics, which means that they should now stand up and be honest to themselves and to their constituents and say that the 20,000

procedures now being done, 152 different procedures in something like 52 clinics, should all go back totally into the public system. Can you imagine the kind of chaos that that would create?

2:20

If they want to say that, if they want to eliminate contracting out, which, by the way, the leader of the Liberal opposition started when she was the minister of health, and allow them to charge facility fees, if they want to do that, then go to the Morgentaler Clinic and say: we want you to shut down. Be honest. At least the NDs are honest. They would prohibit all of those clinics from operating.

We say that those clinics provide a very good service. They take pressure off the public system, but they've been operating without rules and regulations, and that's what the policy is all about. It is benign, it is simple, but it is being misunderstood because of the deliberate malicious and vicious misinformation and misrepresentation that is taking place by the Liberal Party of Alberta, backed by their ND friends, the Friends of Medicare, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Alberta Federation of Labour, and all the rest.

Speaker's Ruling

Adjournment of Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, it's apparent to me that now after spending 19 minutes with respect to three sets of questions and at least three, now four, interjections from the Speaker about the tone of question period today, the subject matter covered, the responses covered, and then the constant interjections about kill this or kill that, this whole thing here in the last 20 minutes is about a bill that is already on the Order Paper.

In addition to that, six points of order have been directed to the chair, and we've got two points of privilege, so I'm going to declare a recess under the authority given to the chair as chairman of the House. We will reconvene back in here at the conclusion of question period, which is at 2:52.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:23 p.m. to 2:52 p.m.]

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we're now back to work. We're into Recognitions, and in just a few seconds from now we'll call upon the first hon. member to participate.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Edson Legion Midget A Sabres

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize members of the Edson midget A Sabres. This has been an extremely successful year for this team. Their most recent achievement was winning the gold at the Alberta provincial midget A championship, which was held in Slave Lake during the weekend of March 24. Their passion for our national sport of hockey is evident in their commitment and dedication to the game and to their teammates. They are enthusiastic, energetic young Albertans who use their free time well.

I also recognize the coach, Harold Switzer, the assistant coaches, the sponsors, the parents, and the fans for their support, time, and expertise and the encouragement they provided to the members of the Sabres team.

Mr. Speaker, the citizens of West Yellowhead were indeed proud to have these young ambassadors representing our region. I would ask all members of the Assembly to join me in extending our congratulations and best wishes to the members of the Edson Legion midget A Sabres.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Passover

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. My recognition this afternoon is in honour of Passover, which starts tonight. I will be reading an excerpt from the Saturday Prayer Book, which explains the story of Exodus.

Indeed, the story of the Exodus has entered the stream of world history to become a saga of the universal struggle against tyranny and of the promise that freedom's cause is irresistible and is destined to prevail no matter how formidable the forces arrayed against it. "Let my people go!" has been reiterated by the oppressed of all the ages . . . And the vision of the children of Israel marching toward the Promised Land has been the inspiration . . . for peoples on the march toward . . . a better life enabling them to fulfill their God-implemented yearning to be free.

This reading is still applicable in our everyday lives, Mr. Speaker, especially given the events of the previous days. We urge the Premier to recognize the concern of all Albertans.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Wetaskiwin Composite High School Musicians

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to recognize today a group of 105 talented young people from the music groups of Wetaskiwin composite high school. They are leaving today to represent Canada in the Harrogate International Youth Music Festival in England. International events such as this one provide an important opportunity for young musicians to perform in the company of their peers from other North American and European communities. In addition to the invaluable musical experiences these students will receive, these talented performers will return home to Wetaskiwin with many new, lifelong friendships and wonderful memories of their visit abroad.

I'd like to compliment the city of Harrogate for organizing this festival. It provides a unique and welcome opportunity for over 1,400 young musicians from around the world to get together and share their talents and celebrate their common love of music.

I know that Mr. Paul Sweet, Wetaskiwin composite high school's music director, will prepare the Wetaskiwin music groups well for this great challenge. I wish them all a wonderful journey and great experiences abroad.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

McHappy Day

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we think of McDonald's, we think of our children, our grandchildren. We think of teeny-weeny Beanie Babies, little Furby's and other toys, Happy Meals, Big Macs, and Quarter Pounders. Yes, they are superb at marketing, but there's another aspect to McDonald's. They are a good corporate citizen, and they support many worthwhile causes.

One of their most noticeable causes, which occurs every second year or every 18 months, of course is McHappy Day. McHappy Day this year is set for May 16, and the proceeds are being earmarked for two different charitable organizations, one being the Aaron Moser foundation for spinal research, which has deep meaning for me and I know has deep meaning for the local franchise of McDonald's for that particular individual.

On May 16 each of you as individual MLAs will be asked to participate for an hour or two. Please do it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition.

Privilege

MLA Access to the Chamber

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I take it this is with respect to the notice I'd given last night during Committee of the Whole. I had indicated that I wished to raise a question of privilege because I'd just been informed that three of my colleagues could not get access to the building and to the Assembly room. Subsequently my colleagues were able to obtain access to the building.

I have decided in the circumstances not to proceed with the question of privilege. I raised it last night before we had more information. With the subsequent information, I'm not going to be proceeding further with it. We think there are more important public issues to be addressed, and that's the reason for the withdrawal of that question of privilege.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise with pride today to recognize Mr. Brian Staszewski, head of the highly successful . . .

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. member. We've already done that. This is your point of privilege. We've already introduced the gentleman.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I had a recognition; did I not?

THE SPEAKER: Just a second here. Usually I get notification that an hon. member wants to do a recognition. I have not received such a notification, but if it's okay with the House, could we revert to Recognitions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions
(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Brian Staszewski

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I proudly rise to recognize Mr. Brian Staszewski, head of the highly successful Destination Conservation school-based program. Over 973 schools across Canada participate in this very excellent program in which students, staff, and utility companies interact to initiate environmental education. Such interaction results in the conservation of energy resources in schools.

Mr. Staszewski is also executive director of the Environmental Resource Centre, located in Edmonton-Strathcona. He's been a most valuable resource for me and my colleagues when dealing with environmental concerns. *Time* magazine has declared him a hero for the planet. I couldn't agree with them more.

I take this opportunity to congratulate him for receiving this distinguished honour and applaud his singular achievements as an environmentalist.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. members, for allowing that last recognition to proceed.

Now, hon. leader of the third party, we're going to deal with the point of privilege notice that the hon. member provided to the chair.

Privilege

MLA Access to the Chamber

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on a question of privilege pursuant to Standing Order 15(1). I want to note that I do it with a great deal of reluctance and regret, but as a member of this Assembly I want to respectfully submit to you and to all members of the Assembly that my experience yesterday evening obliges me that I bring this matter to the attention of the Assembly. Yesterday evening I was denied entry into the Legislature Building for some 35 minutes and thus prevented from being present in the Chamber while Bill 11 was being debated by my colleagues. I believe that denying me entry constitutes a breach of my privilege as a member of this Assembly.

I also cite in this regard *Beauchesne* 129. Pursuant to Standing Order 15(2), earlier today I provided written notice to you of my intention to raise this matter. I will briefly outline the reasons why I believe a breach of privilege has taken place.

I recognize that a question of privilege is a most serious matter, and I fully appreciate the seriousness of my doing so. The events of yesterday evening were also extremely serious and have left me somewhat shaken. I'm sure that these events were also upsetting to all members of this Assembly. I think it's incumbent for all of us to learn from these events and ensure that they are not repeated. It is in that spirit, Mr. Speaker, that I rise to make this case.

In support of my argument for privilege, I will briefly recount the events of yesterday evening that gave rise to it. I arrived at the Legislature front steps at about 8:05 after parking my car at the west end of the grounds of the Legislature, which is what I normally do when I come back for the evening session. I arrived at the Legislature front steps at 8:05, as I said. I was informed by one of the several hundred citizens gathered that the front doors were locked and no one was being allowed in. Shortly thereafter John Kolkman, the research director for the New Democrat opposition, who had been in the building, informed me that all of the entrances to the building were locked and that he had been informed by security personnel that no one else was being allowed to enter the building by these doors. This included several people outside the building including an Edmonton city councillor and others with valid visitor passes for the public and members' galleries.

I then walked from the front steps to the east door of the Legislature beside the loading dock along with Mr. Kolkman. I noticed two of my Liberal colleagues being interviewed by a TV reporter. After the interview they informed me that they were not being allowed to enter the building. I approached the east door myself and was immediately recognized by two security personnel who were standing some 10 to 15 feet from the door. I first asked to enter the building by the east door at about 8:25 p.m. At the time that I was seeking to enter the building, there were only a handful of Albertans at the east door. The manner in which I sought to enter was to press the doorbell, which I did five different times over this period.

Shortly after being denied entry, several police cruisers arrived, parking on the access road to the loading dock. This, of course, caused some of the people who had been peacefully protesting in front of the north door and other locations to make their way to the east side of the building to see what the arrival of the police was all about. I and several of my Liberal colleagues were finally allowed into the building at about 10 minutes past 9 last night. I estimate that this was about 35 minutes after I first requested to enter. By this time the crowd gathered by the east door was considerably larger than when I first requested to enter.

I think it's important at this point, Mr. Speaker, for me to also note that at no time during yesterday or before was I informed, formally or informally, that I might have difficulty entering the building except through the pedway. I use the pedway only when I park my car in the underground south parkade, and since I have always used the front door to come in when I am coming here in the evening and parking outside, I never thought that it would cause a problem.

So I want to just make sure that you understand, that all of my colleagues understand the context in which I experienced this problem.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it's incumbent on all of us, as members who learned from yesterday evening's events, to ensure that they are not repeated. I recognize that the security personnel were doing their job in the best way they knew how. However, I believe it is incumbent on us as politicians accountable to our constituents to learn from past mistakes in order to avoid future ones, and it's in that spirit that I am speaking.

The rights of people to freedom of speech and expression are basic rights of democratic citizenship on which we all agree. Sometimes democracy can be a little noisy and messy. On Monday evening those gathered in the rotunda were peaceful, if not a bit vocal and exuberant. No one was assaulted. No property was damaged. [interjection] Mr. Speaker, I'll be closing soon.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, as the chair had indicated at the beginning of Routine today, the chair views a question of privilege to be a very serious question. The issue before the Speaker to determine is whether or not there is a case to make a recommendation that the matter move forward, so it would be helpful to be very clinical, very factual, very specific about the event that the hon. member is raising the question of privilege on.

If the chair understands it correctly, the event that the member is raising before the House is that he was denied entry into the Legislature Building for 35 minutes and was thus prevented from being present in the Chamber while Bill 11 was being debated by his colleagues. That occurred last night, not Monday night.

So, please, specifically to the privilege before the chair.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the event that I rise to speak on occurred last night. You're absolutely right.

Mr. Speaker, to conclude, I want to be clear that I am rising here in a constructive spirit, not to seek any retribution or anything of that sort. So to avoid repetition of yesterday's events, I have two suggestions to make. First, please don't lock the doors of the Legislature to keep out the public, or MLAs for that matter. Let Albertans freely enter a building that belongs to them. Second, have a security presence commensurate with the security threat posed.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 15(6) I urge you to "allow such debate as . . . appropriate in order to determine whether a prima facie case of breach of privilege has [indeed] taken place."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, again, some time ago I alerted the House that I expected all members to be aware of essentially what would be the parameters of such a discussion. I'm prepared to hear any and all members who feel directly implicated in the matter, and when I'm satisfied, then I will terminate the discussion on this and take the matter under review.

This is a very fine point and an extremely important point, and it has to do with a member making an argument that he was denied entry into the Legislature Building.

Hon. Government House Leader, did you want to participate?

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is indeed a very serious allegation and a very serious point of order. There could be nothing more serious, in fact, than a member not being able to take his place in this House and participate in the debates of this House. So I take the comments of the hon. member in the spirit in which he's offered them, in that he wants to move forward and make sure such incidents as he's alleging don't happen again, and I appreciate that that's the spirit in which he indicates he's bringing it forward.

First of all, however, I would argue that the hon. member was not denied access to the House. There were security measures in place, as now is common knowledge among all members and in fact the public, which would deny the public access to the building after hours, which is in fact the normal procedure. We don't necessarily always lock the doors, but in fact the building is not open to the public after hours for indiscriminate viewing. We don't have tours after hours. We don't allow the public in to walk around after hours. We do allow the public to come in, because we have debates in the evening, and be in the galleries.

3:10

So in that spirit and in anticipation of a number of people coming, more than would fill the galleries, a procedure was put in place then, through the co-operation of the Legislature security and the Legislative Assembly Office, to ensure that people, the public, could have access to the galleries but that other members of the public could not have indiscriminate access to the building. As a result, I understand, of those security procedures being in place, the hon. member is indicating that he was denied access to the building.

I would first of all point out that I have canvassed members of our caucus and have been told that no member of our caucus, certainly none that I'm aware of, had any difficulty accessing the building. Some members indeed indicated that they'd presented themselves at the selfsame door that was mentioned, and upon discovering that they weren't able to get access through that door, they went and gained access to the building through the pedway, which every member knows is open and available through their access cards. I would suggest that the hon. member could have done, in fact, the same thing.

Now, I did ask Legislature security about the incident relating to access at the door. I was advised that indeed some members had presented themselves at a door but that there were a number of members of the public, demonstrators, behind them, and for obvious reasons they could not open the door at that point in time. I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that this does not constitute a denial of access to this Assembly to the hon. member because there were options open to that hon. member to access the building and access the Assembly, in fact options that were taken advantage of by other members of the Assembly at or about the same time.

Also, I would indicate that a denial of access is a very serious charge, as you have mentioned. One would think that before indicating that they couldn't get through one door of the building, being a denial of access, one would – and I understand that this perhaps was a tense time, a difficult time. But any member in that situation I think would simply call security, call the front desk of security and say: I'm here to do my job, and you must let me in. They would have to find a way to let them in, and I'm not aware of that having been done.

However, Mr. Speaker, I think there's another issue that needs to be addressed specifically in this context, and that is the privilege for all members of safety and security. There's been some suggestion – and even the hon. member suggested it – that perhaps the building should be open tonight, that that would be one resolution. It is

important for us to have safety and security for our members in order to be able to do this job. I think the measures that were taken last night to provide that safety and security in this building were demonstrated to be prudent in that there were, for example, incidents reported to me that eight police tires were slashed, that the window of a police vehicle was broken, that a security officer was assaulted. In other words, there were people here.

Now, I would stop there and say that I expect and believe that most of the people who came to the Legislature grounds last night came to proffer their opinion in a peaceful way about a bill that was before the House. I think most people did that. I think a very few people might have had other things on their minds, and those are the people who perhaps participated in the slashing of tires. You don't do that with a pen, Mr. Speaker. You must have a sharp object, probably a knife, to slash a tire. I think the fact that those incidents occurred demonstrates that prudent procedures were taken to protect the safety and security of members in this House.

I have been approached, as I assume others in this House have been approached, by members of the Assembly indicating that they did have some concerns about their safety, about their security. I have assured them that we will take every step, insofar as it is my responsibility as Minister of Justice, through the public security division to provide that safety and security. It is unfortunate that if in providing for the privileges of the members of this House in terms of their safety and security, it might have for a brief period of time inconvenienced a member's access to the House.

But, as I say, the member did have access to the House, as I have been advised by other members of my caucus who were there at about the same time and were able to obtain access rather readily by coming through the pedway, which every member knows is available to them. If they had any problem with that, it would seem to me that the next step would have been to ascertain from security why a member was not being allowed into the House, because members do have a right to be in this House.

So, Mr. Speaker, speaking directly to the question of privilege that is being raised, I would say that it is unfortunate, very unfortunate, that due to the circumstances last night, some members when they approached the Legislative Assembly building, in recognition of what was happening – and I think it was fairly obvious what was happening outside in terms of the crowd, but one might have spent a little time thinking about how one might reasonably gain access. I myself never park underground. I parked underground last night so that I could access the building through the pedway.

It's unfortunate that the member was not advised earlier. I took specific care to ensure that the Liberal caucus was advised as to how they might access the building. I take the member's word for it that he was not advised ahead of time as to how he might safely access the building, but I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the member had options and he didn't choose to avail himself of those options.

The right of access is not a right of access through any door of the Assembly at any time. It's a right of access to the Assembly, and if there's an appropriate way of getting that access, then the hon. member has not been denied access.

I understand his feelings with respect to what happened. I don't try to in any way detract from his sense that he has been aggrieved by what happened. I'm simply saying that, from the perspective of the privileges of the House, this hon. member was not denied access to the building. In fact, the security measures which were in place were reasonable given the privileges of safety and security for all the members of the House in terms of the conduct of their business. There was an option for him, which he was able to avail himself of later on and could have availed himself of immediately if he had thought to do so.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the third party, I'll recognize you. I want to make it very, very clear that the question before the House is a question of privilege, and if it has to deal with the obstruction of a member, then it is more than that. It is also contempt of this Legislative Assembly, which impacts and affects all Members of this Legislative Assembly.

Now, we're not going to have a debate. If you want to add additional information with respect to that, I will recognize you, leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to additional information, I want to state categorically that I was not informed that only certain access would be available to us. I want to put it on record. The hon. minister has indeed recognized that problem, and I appreciate that, but I want to put on record that I was at no time aware of that fact. In fact, I left my security card at home in another pocket because I changed my jacket as I was leaving. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, please. I'm going to ask for absolute quiet on this. Because some members may have known, it doesn't mean that all members knew, and that's a very important point.

The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I want to categorically state that I was not informed. I did not know ahead of time that there was only certain access available.

As to ascertaining it with security, I had no phone with me at the time. I waited for half an hour, and the security personnel who were there at the door, which I was advised was the only one through which one could enter, did not offer this information to me. So I just want to put it on record again, Mr. Speaker, that I was not advised by the security personnel who were there that there was indeed another entry I could use.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to limit my observations to facts which are relevant to entry having been denied to me. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I have a number of hon. members that have already advised me that they want to participate. I am going to ask for brevity on this. I'm going to insist that we're dealing with the point of privilege and that it has to do with entry and it has to do with contempt of the Assembly with respect to that matter. It's not a debate. It is a matter of adding information that would assist the chair in coming to a conclusion on this question.

I'll recognize the following three members in this order: the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

3:20

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to just address the point of privilege very briefly. I have great respect for what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has brought forward in regards to access to the building. I can tell you that over the past seven years as a Member of the Legislative Assembly I have felt very safe in this building. I have always been aware that there has been access in different ways to the building – and one of those, of course, is through the pedway – and have not needed to be notified that I can access the building in a certain way. You've certainly brought forward what you saw as being a need to be notified about access to the pedway.

Also, Mr. Speaker, it was mentioned that there was a peaceful demonstration which was occurring outside the Legislature Building. I think that's the area of this point that I would like to address. I

really think it's important that it be stated for the record, and I know that the Government House Leader did state this. I as a member of the Legislature was made aware that we did have a security guard assaulted and that we had vandalism of the Legislature Building itself, that there was property damage, and that there were tires being slashed. I want to tell you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, that I did not feel safe with that occurring. I do not like the feeling of being vulnerable. I did feel far more safe in knowing that the doors to the Legislature were locked, although I understand that when the fire alarm was set off, the doors were opened and many people could access the building in that way as well. Hopefully, that too has been looked at.

I can also tell you this. I am very, very grateful for the strong presence of our security personnel, the Sergeant-at-Arms and others, both inside and outside the Chamber during this very difficult event last evening. I really believe, Mr. Speaker, that their professional demeanor and skill level served to de-escalate the situation, and that included locking the doors in the appropriate areas that they did. I thank you all for that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I choose also to comment briefly on the point of privilege that's before the House this afternoon. Like my colleague from Calgary-Cross, there is a certain amount of vulnerability that one feels when the building is under siege. While the majority of the demonstrators were handling their presence and their concerns in an appropriate civic display of frustration and in a public display that they are allowed to do and that we welcome in this democratic society, I myself witnessed a number of citizens crashing through a door. As I was watching, there was no opportunity to hold these people back from coming into the building.

Like my colleague who just previously spoke, Calgary-Cross, we are not used to this facility being under siege in such a way. I want to just make it very clear in the point of privilege, Mr. Speaker, in your deliberations and in your considerations, that it would be very important to me that my community and my constituents understand the difference between access to the Assembly, which allows us to conduct the business of this government and of this House and the provincial responsibilities that we have, separate from what I believe to be access to the public facility. I don't believe that many people separate those two issues. Right now there are a number of people who feel that they have been denied access to government and to their due process of law by virtue of the fact that the building was secured by the security officers last night.

I think that in addition to the issues raised by the point of privilege, it's important if you could in your ruling please acknowledge that difference so that the recognition of the security of all members of this Assembly, not ones for or against Bill 11 but all members of this Assembly, be understood by our constituents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to add a note as to my experience with respect to last night. About a quarter to 8 I was returning to the Legislature, and after having some difficulty getting around to the west side, I did park my vehicle there. I found that my normal route had been locked, so I went around to the front of the building, and of course there was a large crowd that had gathered.

There was a lot of chanting and so on, which I assessed as being in quite a peaceful demonstration type of manner.

I did go to a security guard who was stationed nearby and said: how do I get in? He said: well, it's obvious that we can't open the doors for you right now, but if you want to get in, go to the Annex and use your card. I was informed that that really should be the way to enter this building. It was a very simple question, but the guard had the answer. "You wouldn't expect me to open the door now," so to speak: he was implying that you couldn't control the crowds. So I did in fact get the appropriate direction to enter the building in that way.

I, too, want to express my thanks to all of the security people in this building, who day in and day out do their job extremely well. Certainly I think it's a very sad day in the history of this Legislature when one of those would be assaulted in this sort of way.

That's all I have to say, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just briefly. I, too, was one that tried to enter the east side just slightly after 8 o'clock. I might add that I did not have any notice ahead of time that it was a lockdown, so I'm the same as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I had no knowledge of the lockdown. But I just returned to the Annex. There's easy access to the Annex. There's a button to call the security guard if you don't have your security card with you. I entered through the pedway, which was secured, and there were security guards in the pedway for our safety.

I would just like to express, as the previous member did, my appreciation of the security around here. I think maybe members should sometime go and look at the door of the elevator coming in from the pedway. There's a bullet hole in that door from the general public. They've made great strides over the years in improving security for all of us in this Assembly. I find it quite difficult to think that members took 35 minutes to realize that they can have access through the pedway. It took me about two seconds to realize that I had to turn back and go through the pedway to get access to the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I think it would be appropriate to add just a few specific comments which perhaps would assist as well.

We had a meeting of three House leaders in your office yesterday afternoon. While normally discussions of House leaders are not commented upon, in a general sense I think it's important for this debate to comment on some of the context in that there was a discussion about members of the public being in the building, and there was discussion about providing for those members an ability to hear the debate even if they weren't going to be able to be in the gallery. There was specific assurance given that to the extent of the capacity of the gallery, people would be allowed access, but we discussed the ability to provide for the security of the building if members of the public were let in.

It was specifically indicated that members of the public would not be allowed in the building. I think that's important, because while I didn't feel that I was in a position to specifically comment on security measures – it's not normal procedure to comment on specific security measures – the clear indication was that members of the public were not going to be allowed into the building unless they were going to go through the process and into the galleries. That should have been, I think, fair indication to everyone there for

communication to their members that there might be some difficulty accessing the building and that they would have to be conscious of that, that it wouldn't be a normal process. One wouldn't normally, I would think from that, expect to be able to walk up to the front door and gain access to the building. So I add that.

3:30

I don't intend to indicate that there was any specific reference on my part at that meeting to indicate that the doors would be locked or that there would be a lockdown or that city police would be used, although we did indicate that there was a protocol in place as to when and if police might be called. The bottom line is that my feeling is that there was a good indication at that meeting that security measures would be in place with respect to the building to protect members and to ensure that public access to the gallery was maintained but not to the building. I think the members there should have taken from that that access would not be of the usual walk up to the door and open the door variety. So I just bring that to the attention of the House.

I would also indicate that while I did personally take the responsibility of calling security and making sure that they got a message to the Liberal caucus – and I have to apologize to the members of the House for this – I did not take that same step to advise members of my own caucus as to access to the building, nor did I take that step to encourage them to bring to the attention of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that access should be through the pedway or the east door.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to also put two more facts on the record. I appreciated the opportunity to meet with you and my colleagues who are House leaders for the other two caucuses yesterday at 4 o'clock – I want to thank you for making that happen – at which time we did discuss, I think rather openly and in a spirit of co-operation, the concerns that had come to all of us and how to deal with them. I also want to thank you for meeting with me prior to that, at 1 o'clock, when I had first approached you and requested that perhaps there was a need for a meeting. So I took every possible action that I could as a member of the Assembly to make sure that we dealt with the probable situations that were going to arise in ways that would serve the best interests of this House and of Albertans.

The only other matter on which I want to make a statement, Mr. Speaker, is that I finally entered through the east door. It was this morning that I realized the door flung open. It wasn't opened for me. It flung open for other reasons, but I entered. When I did enter the building, I entered through the east door, and the security people, who were about 10 feet away from the door, were doing their duty. They at first stopped me, but one of the security persons was regular Legislature security staff, and he was most courteous when I said: would you let me go in? He said: certainly, sir. So I walked in, with his consent, through that door at that point, around 9 o'clock.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'll be very brief. Clearly I acknowledge that I was part of a conversation with yourself and the other two House leaders. I'm going to respectfully suggest that if we're going to be in a lockdown situation, at minimum there ought to be some memorandum that's made available to, ideally, all members of the Assembly or, failing that, at least to some responsible officer of each of the caucuses with specific particulars in terms of how access may be gained not only at 8 o'clock but subsequently during the course

of the evening. I'm following up on the suggestion of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who invited you to give some direction.

The second concern I have is closely related, and that is that I think it's important that if in fact the only access members of the public will have to the building is 250 seats, whatever it is, in the two galleries, that's information that should be shared with people in advance so that people coming to the Assembly to see debate on a bill as important as Bill 11 come with a clear expectation in terms of what sort of access they're going to have. I think that's important.

The last thing I'd suggest and that our caucus has suggested before is that some attempt be made to find an audio feed to ensure that people who are unable to get access to the Chamber would at least be able to follow what's being said in here. It's a poor second, but it's far better than leaving out people who are so vitally concerned, particularly about this bill that's an issue they desperately want information on, and they want a window into what's being debated. With respect, Mr. Speaker, I think they're entitled to that.

So, Mr. Speaker, I sent to you – and it is somewhat out of the ordinary – a letter listing a number of concerns. A copy went to the Government House Leader, and a copy is making its way to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Now, they relate more to how we allow the public access and information. I meant no discourtesy to the Speaker, but because my colleagues have an enormous number of constituents who want to find out what's going on and how they can follow what's going on, I think we have an obligation not only in terms of the safety of members in the Assembly but to ensure the access side, that all citizens of this province are entitled to access what's going on here and get information on it.

Those are the observations I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West on the point of privilege.

MS KRYCZKA: Yes. I just have some information that I would like to contribute to the discussion based on what I observed and personally went through last night.

Well, first I'll make a subjective statement about myself. I think that normally I'm fairly observant and calm about situations around me. I would have to say that I was not in the House on Monday night, but because I did hear reports of what had happened, especially in the public area outside the Chamber on Monday night, I decided that I would move my car to the west side of the parking lot outside the Legislature. For one thing, when I leave later at night – and I knew it would be late last night – I am concerned about going back to the Annex. That's where my office is. I have to say that sometimes in the Annex you do have concerns about arriving on your floor later in the evening, when all the lights are off and you know that no one is on that floor. So there's always some small degree of apprehension.

However, when I looked out the window of my office last night at the east side of the roadway going around the Legislature, this building, I could tell from the crowd that was out there that there was no way I was going to get my car through there to go around to the west side, though the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont did get through. I decided not to, and my colleagues on my floor said, "Well, let's go through the pedway," which is what I felt confident to do. But I would like to add that as we came up the stairwell to the north end of the building, there were many persons – definitely more than one person – loudly banging on the glass of the window. That was my first indication of what the evening was going to be like, having not been here on Monday night.

I won't go on about anything that happened during the evening

here. I certainly respect everything that security did for us and the need for the city police and having them stay so that when we did leave, there were many of them at the doorway. We walked back over to the Annex through the pedway, which is the right thing to do.

I guess what I have to say is that one of my colleagues had to come with me and another colleague to my car, which is just outside the Annex building. Normally you don't even really think twice about that unless, as I say, it's late. We'd been advised to check the tires to see that they hadn't been destroyed, but it was also just for the security of walking outside our building 20 feet to the car. This experience has left me very shaken.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the third party, how would you like to proceed? Do you feel that you've had a chance today to air your concern? Do you want the chair to continue the review of this and come back to this House and rule on the question of privilege? Are you satisfied that the points you've made will now be dealt with without a ruling on the question of privilege?

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity. I am concerned about us being able to take effective action and develop a policy that will help us avoid similar difficulties in the future. What's the best way to accomplish it? I'm going to leave it to you and to other members of the House. I have no particular preference in that regard so long as we get the results that we all desire, it seems to me. There's a consensus in the House that access for us should be facilitated, and if there are any chances by way of certain protocols that that access might be obstructed or may be less easy, then we need to address that part of the protocol and make that information available to all of us ahead of time so that we respond appropriately.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the third party, I appreciate that. I'll continue to take this matter under review but will make some preliminary remarks about some of this now, at this point in time.

Security is one of those things that is seldom talked about in a public environment. After all, why would you talk about security measures publicly? They wouldn't be security measures. I want to advise all members that in the variety of involvements I've had in the 21 years that I've had the privilege of being here, they include the following. When I was minister of the environment, I was also minister of public safety services for a rather lengthy period of time, five or six years as I recall. I've also had the privilege of being minister of public works, supply, and services. When I was a member of Executive Council, I also chaired the cabinet committee on security. There were a number of members of Executive Council on security, but I was the chairperson.

There have been events in this building either prior to my being an elected person or since then. We have had deaths in this building. Members may not know this, but in the early 1970s, before this person was an elected person, this person was in an office of the building currently now occupied by the Minister of Environment. Early one afternoon this person was having a meeting with another individual in that office, and there was a gunshot. The person beside me ran out of my office, out of the current Minister of Environment's office, and passed at that point in time the Provincial Treasurer, Mr. Hyndman. It may have even been that the Leader of the Official Opposition was working in that office on that particular day.

As the individual ran out of my office and ran by the office I think currently occupied by the minister of human resources, a bullet flew

through the door, past the individual who ran by, went through the door on the other side and lodged itself in a file cabinet in an office then occupied by Mr. Getty, who was later to become the Premier of the province of Alberta. A man had come into the building to visit his lady friend, and he shot her and committed suicide. He came through the front entrance of the building.

A number of years ago there was an event around 7 o'clock in the morning – and some in this Assembly may even have been participants in it – when several members arrived in one of the parkades at a quarter to 7 and there was a person with a gun who wandered through the pedway and the precincts. There is a remnant of that event, a bullet still lodged in the elevator as you walk out of the main Assembly and go down on your way to the pedway. You can observe the bullet in there. It was kept in there.

In Canada there have been events. There was a recent event a number of years ago in the National Assembly of Quebec where a person entered the Chamber, and you can still all remember the visuals of the person sitting in the Speaker's chair with a gun and shooting sporadically.

Now, despite all of that, every intent, to my knowledge, about security in this environment is to keep security to an absolute minimum. An absolute minimum. From all of the elected members of the province of Alberta that I am familiar with, who I've ever participated with in a discussion on this in previous cabinet positions or since being in the chair, there's almost been an insistence that this is a public building, open to the public, and there should be a minimal amount of security. Since I've had the privilege of being the Speaker in this Assembly, the advisers on security consistently come to me and say: this place is too lax. As security people they're consistently providing recommendations about improving security.

The position I've taken as the Speaker is: "Fine. The people of Alberta are very honourable. We'll have a minimal amount of security, but we're not going to go overboard with it." In consultations that I've had with the current Minister of Justice and Attorney General, who's responsible for the security outside of this Chamber and in the building and on the grounds, he also has taken that view. It may very well be that the security forces or advisers to both the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General want to have greater amounts of security. The response has been: no; we will go with a minimal amount of security. So what do we have? We have a situation that invariably works very, very well for the most part. There are very, very infrequent and unique circumstances.

In the last couple of days there have been some events, which is not uncommon, by the way, in the history of Alberta. We've had other events, and I dare not perhaps even mention them here this afternoon for fear that it'll give rise to somebody else's imagination to go to the next step to try and pull some of them off. But we've had events. I'll just give you one. It was a fanciful day in the history of this Assembly when hundreds of people were in the rotunda and they released chickens, pigs, rabbits, goats, what have you. It was a fine day.

We've had a camp-in on the grounds of the Legislative Assembly, where a number of people showed up with hay bales, erected a hay-bale city, and spent the winter on the grounds of the Legislative Assembly. I for one know that I was an employee in this building at the time, and my minister would say: why don't you go out there and let them into the building and give them some hot soup and let them use the bathroom? I think the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was here at the same time too. We probably went out hand in hand to do it. That happened. But in the background were highly trained people who knew how to respond and knew how to react, who kept a low profile, and that's what we have today: people with a low profile. That's what I hope we will always want.

Now, having said all of that, I also have received a dozen or more contacts from hon. members in this Assembly expressing a great degree of discomfort over what transpired on Monday, over what transpired in terms of them being able to conduct the business that they feel they are responsible to conduct in this Assembly, because of disturbances outside of those doors. That's something that had to be recognized, and that's something that had to be taken into consideration. Members should not be interrupted in the conduct of their business, and I'm talking about the process here. The issue of the day is not the important point in my discussion here. This has to do with the privilege of the hon. members to conduct their business without any intimidation and/or anything else. Not only hon. members have made comments to me, but others have as well, using such words as "intimidation" and a whole series of other things. So that's something that certainly had to be considered.

Yesterday the hon. Government House Leader, the hon. House leader of the Official Opposition, and the hon. leader of the third party and I had a brief discussion. Again, it was just a wide-ranging discussion about concerns that would happen. I made it very clear that the people who would deal with the security on a minute-to-minute, hour-to-hour basis would be those who are in charge of the security business. The Sergeant-at-Arms has a protocol and ultimate direction from the Speaker, the director of security for the building has a protocol and ultimate direction from the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, and protocols have also been established with other police agencies in the province of Alberta, depending on the type of circumstance.

On a moment-to-moment basis, the chair would not be aware of what's going on. The chair's focus or the Deputy Speaker's focus or the Deputy Chairman of Committees' focus is on what's going on in the House. So that is handled and that is being dealt with without interference, and decisions have to be made for whatever the circumstances are and, hopefully, will be responded to in an appropriate way.

It is regrettable – it is regrettable, I repeat – that yesterday not all Members of the Legislative Assembly were aware of the preferred entrance into the building as a result of the unique circumstance. I'm going to say it for the third time. It is regrettable that not all hon. members were aware of that.

3:50

A few minutes ago a memo was circulated from the Sergeant-at-Arms to all Members of the Legislative Assembly with some advice.

As a matter of prudent security practices, I wish to advise all Members of the Legislature Assembly that access to the Legislature Building is available through the Legislature Pedway system by use of Members' personal security access card.

Members are reminded that this access card is provided solely for their personal use and cannot be loaned, transferred or used to provide admission to any unauthorized person into any building.

Members are also strongly advised to use the underground parking facilities.

Perhaps that's a reminder.

Secondly, yesterday in the discussion among the four of us it was made very clear that access to the public galleries was there, that it was open, and that the public would be invited to occupy the chairs in the members' gallery and the public gallery. Once the chairs are occupied, there can be no more access and entry into the building.

There's a protocol for demonstration that has been developed, long-standing use in this province, for years and years and years. If individuals want to have a demonstration on the steps of the Legislature Building, they are free to do so. In fact, we even go beyond. A podium is provided. Electrical systems are provided. They can have the demonstration or call it by whatever other name you want.

I've been here long enough to have seen demonstrations that have gone from the steps of the building to way over on the other side of the grounds where the other buildings are, way on the other side. I haven't seen anything even comparable to that in the last few days. But who knows what'll happen with respect to that. That's part of the process, and that's in there, but there has never been a tradition for demonstrations within the rotunda of the province of Alberta, particularly when it intervenes with the work of the members or the table officers associated with it. So access again.

I have to believe that in terms of today and any other day in the future the process will be followed that, in essence, entry to the building will be accessed in a similar way, presumably, to what it was last night. The first 200 to occupy a chair in the gallery will be welcome, and the others unfortunately will not be able to come in. I suppose it's akin to saying that if you have a hall and the seating capacity is X amount, you can't put in any more than that. It's prudent management, and I don't think it's overt security.

Now, the other point then is: how do members and how do individuals have a knowledge base of what's happening in here? The chair finds it rather interesting that at a quarter to 5 yesterday afternoon this Assembly broke itself into Committee of the Whole and was discussing clause by clause Bill 11, and there were that many people in the Assembly. How is it that from a quarter to 5 to 5:30 there are two people but at 8 o'clock there are hundreds? Now, some hon. members might make the argument: well, everybody's at work. But the chair was here last evening to observe, to make up with the individuals who were here, and not all of them were either of working age or anything else. That's subjective of the fact. It's just that I wanted to make the comment that the building was wide open at a quarter to 5, and there could have been 198 more people in the Assembly if they would have exercised the right to do that.

Now, the last several points that I want to make, then, have to do with: how does anybody find out what's going on in here? Hon. Opposition House Leader, I think you missed what I said earlier today. The chair rose in this Assembly on March 14 and said that technology is now available, that this Assembly has wanted to make itself an open Assembly. This Assembly was the first in the Commonwealth in 1972 to actually go to television and televise the proceedings of this Assembly. That was a first, a unique experience. Great debate among some members saying: oh, heavens no, we could never have television in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. There still may be some today who feel that we should not have, but the fact of the matter is that we did it. This Assembly did it 28, 29 years ago.

We have *Hansard*, every word recorded in this Assembly. In the last couple of years members were asked if they wanted to have their desks wired so that they could have access to a laptop. Well, more than half of the Assembly now have access to a laptop. We have programs, and we have communications. We hear the Minister of Innovation and Science from time to time standing up and talking about all the new ideas and all the innovation in the province of Alberta.

Well, one of those innovations is basically the Internet. We now have complete access to the Internet, and as of 1:30 today all of the proceedings of this Assembly are now available to any citizen in the world who has a computer and access to the Internet, every word, gavel to gavel. As we're talking right now this can be picked up. The web site, again, is www.assembly.ab.ca. More than half the citizens of Alberta, I'm told, have access to a personal computer or own one, told consistently that this is the highest number of these machines anywhere. So it would only seem logical to me that every citizen in Alberta should have access to the proceedings of this Assembly, and no member would even want to suggest that they

should be denied any access to their Legislature and their parliament from gavel to gavel. Why else would we have the wires and the lines and the machines and anything else? So that's in place as of 1:30 today. No one can say that they cannot hear what's going on at 8 o'clock tonight.

The last point. If there are some individual members in this room who feel that, you know, it's too bad that only 200 can access the Assembly, please remember that every office of every MLA in this Assembly is connected to this Chamber. We have provided a box in your office so that you can follow exactly what is happening in this Assembly at all times. There is nothing to prohibit you from inviting anyone you want to your office to have them join with you or without you in listening to the activities of the Assembly. That was available last night. That was available Monday night. Any member can invite anybody they want into their office. If you want to invite 30 people, that's your business. If you want to invite four, that's your business. You're responsible for your office; you're responsible for your guests. That is available.

So we've got the proceedings, everything, gavel to gavel, available on the web site, the Internet. It's there. Members can invite people to their offices if they want. Two hundred will come into this Assembly tonight, and if people want to assemble on the steps, they can do that. I'm not sure if there's anything more I need to clarify as far as I know about this in the interim.

Again, if there is anything further that needs to be communicated with respect to security, you have to recognize that the Sergeant-at-Arms will look after the security in this Assembly. Discretion and integrity will be followed in that. The same will apply to the security people outside this Assembly. If the Government House Leader has something that he feels he wants to share with the House leaders of the two other parties in this House, then I would encourage him to do that, but there may be some things that he can't share, as well, on the question of security, and members have to be apprised of that. I don't know what further can be said about this matter at this point in time.

There is a provision, hon. members, under Standing Order 13(2): "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision upon the request of a member." I'm not sure I made decisions here in the last few minutes, but if anybody wants to ask a question about any of this, do it now. The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your comments. I listened to them in depth. I have one small problem with your comments, that being your suggestion that our offices are open at any hour, night and day within this building or in fact within the Annex for those of us who do work out of the Annex. There are a number of floors that are specific to each of the various parties in this province, and I have to say after last night's interesting episode that not only was I intimidated by a great deal of what went on last night, but I feel that by allowing our offices to receive as many people as the individual MLA wants on a particular floor, as one of those MLAs that has to move within that building from the ground floor to the sixth floor, I would indeed be intimidated if I had that same crowd that was here last night, with all their malingering and their nasty tactics – I would feel very, very intimidated getting into the same elevator with those same people to go up to my office. I feel that by making this ruling, while I understand your predicament in that MLAs should have some rights to take people into their office, I don't feel that those MLAs who happen to be on the other side of any given issue at any given time should be intimidated on the way to their own offices by an elevator full of demonstrators.

4:00

THE SPEAKER: Well, I would be very, very pleased to clarify that for the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill. There was not a ruling

by the chair with respect to this. The chair simply pointed out the opportunity for individual members in this Assembly to invite guests to their office if they want. Also included in there is the assumption of absolute responsibility by the hon. members for the conduct of their guests. Now, an honourable person with honourable guests: there should be no problem. If something dishonourable occurs, then it is the member's responsibility to answer for that.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, you have a question?

MS OLSEN: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker. I just wonder if you could clarify for me. I was a little concerned. You suggested that the House leaders could get together and discuss anything else they might want around security, but then you said that all security measures may not be discussed between all House leaders. We're all Members of the Legislative Assembly, and if there are security practices that are going to be used this evening, for instance, I think it's incumbent upon all members to be aware of what is going on and what security measures are going to be taken. I understand and of course fully acknowledge that security measures can be – we don't want the public having access to them, but I as a Member of this Legislative Assembly believe that we should be aware of those measures that are going to impact me and impact my colleagues, not just half or one person in the Assembly but all of us.

THE SPEAKER: That's exactly my point, hon. member. I have to assume that if you have a House leader, the House leader is conveying those messages to you. I just have to assume that.

Secondly, hon. member, there are no different procedures that I'm aware of that are going to occur tonight than occurred last night, none whatsoever. The hon. member comes to the building. The hon. member parks her car in the parkade. The hon. member takes the pedway to the Assembly, and she's here at 8 o'clock. No issue. No problem. If the hon. member chooses to do something else, that's the hon. member's privilege too.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to clarify something. The last statement you made was that the hon. House leader may not be sharing all of the information about security. Now, if I have to get the Blues, I will.

THE SPEAKER: Sit down, hon. member. Please sit down. There are some events which will occur that are not the right of hon. members to be aware of per se. Let me give you an example. If there is a death threat against a member in this Assembly . . .

MS OLSEN: Fair enough.

THE SPEAKER: Well, that's the type of example. [interjection] Well, I presume that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood as a former member of the Edmonton police force might understand some of these things. There are some things . . . [interjection] Please. [interjection] Please.

Does anybody else have a question they want to raise on this matter? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, I do require some clarification on your invitation for our offices to be made available to our constituents. As you're aware, some of us will be in the House and consequently not necessarily able to manage who may or may not be in our offices. I would also like to know what security will be provided to conduct our guests up and down to those offices.

I have a discomfort with that particular blanket statement that you have suggested. I appreciate that you have suggested it so that the

people who want to understand what's going on in this building – you have expressed to them in your statements that there are a number of opportunities, one of which would be to visit in our offices. Quite frankly we've had some wonderful visits in our offices and in 503 on the opening of the Legislature, when we're debating the budget, when something is happening in a standing policy committee. There is a long-standing tradition of having guests visit in our office. I want to clarify. What you are suggesting is that in answer to accessing the Legislature during the proceedings that we're now debating before the House, we can accommodate demonstrators from outside by giving them access to our offices.

I would like to categorically state that that is inappropriate. I would also like to know what security measures will be made available to me to (a) greet those guests, (b) accompany them to my office, (c) have them monitored while I may or may not be in the House, and (d) escorted out if something unruly happens or if proceedings complete.

I am having a great deal of difficulty with that recommendation.

THE SPEAKER: Are you on this point, hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose? Because I've got to clarify that. There's total misunderstanding here again.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that the part that you mentioned before was very, very clear. Every Member of this Legislative Assembly has the right to invite whoever they want into their office. That doesn't mean that the Speaker condones people bringing demonstrators into the office in any way, shape, or form.

However, Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise a very serious issue of decorum in the House. Never before in this Legislature have I seen members sitting in their chair and speaking directly to the Speaker when you are making a ruling, sir. What I am saying is that if we do not respect the decorum of this House, if we do not bring respect to this institution, who do we expect will bring that kind of respect here? I find that type of action very, very disturbing. I urge you, Mr. Speaker, to exercise all of the powers vested in you to make sure that this kind of action will not happen again, sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, just a question.

MR. MAGNUS: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a member of this Legislature for the last seven years I know and I expect that all of us in this Legislature will be expected to be honourable members, to in fact use the traditions of this House to allow ourselves to act in a responsible manner. After listening to the debate and the questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, I have a tremendous concern. Last night, as an example, within the vicinity of this building some people definitely had sharp objects. There was a baseball bat seen. There were windows broken. At this point in time I'm not convinced that when I get into an elevator with 10 or 12 people, which is, I believe, about the maximum any elevator could take, I could in fact trust an hon. member who happened to bring those people in the elevator to control them. As I said, it is extremely intimidating, and your ruling on this in allowing great gobs of people into an elevator is disturbing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, both you and the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie are totally out of line on this. You've not listened to what I've said, and that's very, very abusive language, which I find totally disturbing.

This is what I said. Every office in this building comes under the

purview of the hon. member who occupies it. So the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill has an office, and if the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill wants to invite somebody to his office, he can. If the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill chooses not to invite somebody to his office, he doesn't have to. Nobody compels him. If the hon. member invites somebody to his office, he's responsible for the conduct of those people. Right now individuals from across the province visiting Alberta are in offices in this Assembly. There is no marshaling to say that the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul can invite somebody to his office but somebody else cannot. Nobody knows, and there's no great surveillance, so don't get carried away. If the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill doesn't want to invite anybody to his office, he doesn't have to. Nobody is going to make him invite anybody to his office. If he chooses to bring somebody to his office, he's responsible for their conduct in his office.

What would be the purpose of bringing anybody to his office in the context of what we were talking about? It had to do with listening to what was going on in the Assembly. As of 1:30 today we have a web site that they can be referred to, so they don't even have to go to the office to listen to it. They can listen to it at home. So what have we missed here?

Hon. Government House Leader, if this is the kind of communication problems we have, then I can understand why the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona rose on a point of privilege. We've got to make sure people start listening to what's going on in here.

4:10

Okay. We've got six points of order. We had a question period that was abbreviated. We had a recess in the question period. We've had a discussion here now. Six points of order: the Opposition House Leader, the Opposition House Leader, the Opposition House Leader, the Member for Edmonton-Norwood, the Government House Leader, the Opposition House Leader. I'm going to ask this question: have we dealt with these six points of order, or should we now entertain these in the order in which they are?

It was not – it was not – a good situation in the question period. There were six interjections by the chair in a matter of minutes. Six interjections. We'll have a debate, scheduled for 8 o'clock tonight, on Bill 11. The language was not appropriate. The atmosphere was terrible. Do you want to deal with the six? Well, that's okay with me. It's only 10 after 4.

The first point of order.

Point of Order Oral Question Period Rules

MR. DICKSON: Thank you. Actually, both the first and second would be under 13(2) in terms of Standing Orders. I wanted to ask this question of you, Mr. Speaker. I recognize the difficulty the chair has in question period with the kind of intensity we are seeing these days, and I understand that it's an art, not a science, but the most recent authority, the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* book, edited by Marleau and Montpetit, identifies at page 425 that the

primary purpose must be the seeking of information from the government and calling the government to account for its actions [and that] members should be given the greatest possible freedom in the putting of questions that is consistent with the other principles.

Mr. Speaker, you referenced the matter of inflammatory questions, but I have to understand where the balance is with urgency. When we have an issue that is galvanizing the people of the province and our job as legislators, in particular as the Official Opposition, is to test the government, challenge the government, to reflect this

enormous degree of concern, how do we ensure that that high, intense level of public concern can be reflected in the one and only place where the government can be held accountable if the questions are deemed to be inflammatory, when the subject itself is inflammatory?

I don't mean to be argumentative, but I'm trying to get some clarification in terms of how we address the urgency and how we ensure that that sort of public focus can be fairly and accurately represented in here by the opposition.

That's both my first two points of order.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate having the opportunity to address this. First of all, let me say that I think your interjections were entirely appropriate this afternoon. This is a passionate subject, and it does have intensity. It behooves every member of this House, then, in asking questions in the House and in providing answers in the House, as you pointed out, not to further inflame it by using inappropriate language which would be argumentative or provoke debate. It should not be very difficult for a member to phrase within the rules of procedure of this House a succinct preamble, not more than one sentence, if I remember the rules correctly. Presumably, a preamble is to put something in context and then to frame a question. What we've been seeing in this House and what you quite correctly have been admonishing us on for the last month and a half or so is that the preambles have not been succinct and in fact have been putting hypotheses which, in this member's humble opinion, have been in many cases totally incorrect, which then begs response and does inflame the debate.

Now, if one were to keep to the rules of the House, one would provide a succinct preamble, presumably a factual preamble, but I understand that sometimes different people see facts in different ways. Rather than colouring and providing a wide scope of both content and length in the preambles, it would provide for better decorum in the House if members opposite, when raising their questions, provided that one succinct preamble, to the point, and then a brief question and did not then proceed to try and in fact inflame the House with the type of language that we've seen, the type of language that we saw on the two questions on which this point of order was raised.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, today is nearly day 30 of this particular session. Let me just say two things. I've said this time and time again. The briefer the question, the briefer the answer, the more questions and the more participation by hon. members. I view very, very strongly that the chair's job is to ensure that hon. members have an opportunity to participate in the question period.

The British Columbia Legislative Assembly, where the Speaker was several weeks ago and observed the process in the House, has a daily question period of 15 minutes. In the 15-minute time frame, when this Speaker was there, there were 13 questions and answers. No parliament in the country is more divided nor polarized than the British Columbia Legislative Assembly in terms of intensity. Today in the House of Commons they're timed: 35 seconds for the question, 35 seconds for the answer.

When I hear the questions and the stuff that goes on in here and the recognition that this many days have been spent in here, the general recognition that if the matter is on the Order Paper, it's not to be the subject matter of debate in the question period, and when one looks at the Order Paper again for today and sees a certain subject matter on the Order Paper at 8 o'clock tonight, then it causes interjections.

This is not the first time this has happened. This chairman started saying that as soon as we passed second reading of this particular bill, which was more than one week ago, and has interjected on numerous occasions since then, including today: in a 20-minute time frame six interjections.

This is question period. Latitude is given to questions. Well, let's try brevity of 35 seconds and see how many interjections there will be. Let's try that tomorrow: 35-second questions, 35-second answers. Please convey that to your hon. leaders.

Third point, the Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Inflammatory Language

MR. DICKSON: Actually, I'll deal with the next two together because it was twice. This was, I think, in the third set of questions from the Leader of the Opposition to the Premier. The Premier said that the Liberals were inciting the crowd outside. He came back and said that again.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you talk about provocative language and inflammatory language. Given the history of what we've just been through a scant few moments ago about damage to property, about MLAs feeling fearful for the Premier, who to my knowledge was not on the premises either Monday night or Tuesday night, to accuse my colleagues or this member of being inflammatory is an irresponsible statement.

The reality, as I understand it, is that both on Monday night and last night some of my colleagues were encouraged by security officials to in fact speak with people. There was advice given each night after we adjourned, at least after we left Bill 11. Some of my colleagues informed people outside that it had been dealt with and were thanked by some of the people responsible for our security because it allowed people to disperse and go home, knowing that was the end, presumably making it safer for members to make their way back to their cars or their offices.

I understand that those of my colleagues who have spoken to people outside who came to participate in fact have encouraged people to act appropriately, to be peaceful and have given them information, which has reduced, I believe, the frustration of those who are so frustrated about this issue.

In any event, I just think that for the Premier to make that sort of allegation - and I note, Mr. Speaker, that you have talked about inflammatory questions that caused you to intervene numerous times when questions were asked by my colleague the Leader of the Opposition, but there was no intervention when the Premier twice made an allegation which is as inflammatory about Liberals inciting the crowd outside. There will be people watching that on TV who will assume that the Premier was there and that some of my colleagues were encouraging people to slash tires or to enter a window improperly.

AN HON. MEMBER: He never said that at all.

MR. DICKSON: Well, that's the implication. That's what it does. It suggests that there's a nexus between what my colleagues have been doing on the last two nights and anything else that happened. I think, frankly, that the Premier should be thanking my colleagues who have been taking the time to keep members of the public informed.

That's the observation I wanted to make on those two points of order, and that exhausts the points of order I have this afternoon.

4:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood was on this same point of order. They both rose at the same time.

MS OLSEN: Yes. Actually I'll speak to this one, and it will also address my further point of order.

THE SPEAKER: I didn't know you had a further one.

MS OLSEN: Oh, well. Okay. We'll deal with this.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague has made some interesting points. I think it's very important that all of our colleagues in here understand that at no point did our leader or anybody in here incite anybody to behave in an illegal – illegal – manner. I think it would be highly unfair of the Premier or any other member in this House to suggest for one minute or to leave the impression with people who are watching on television today and in the audience today that we were responsible for slashed tires, for security and special constables getting beaten up, and all of those kinds of things. In fact, that is so highly untrue, and that is inflammatory.

In fact, if I might say, myself and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora went outside specifically to talk to people at the end of Bill 11 to tell them: please, head on home; it's over. At no time did the Leader of the Opposition or the Liberals here in this caucus do any such thing. We encouraged peaceful demonstration. That's what we believe in. We denounce the violent behaviour that was exhibited by a very few people outside. That's why the police were here. That's what they were here to deal with, and that's what they should deal with. For the most part, the folks that were here were quiet. They were here for a reason. They were expressing their frustration. For me and for my colleagues it's very important that the Premier acknowledge that nobody was encouraging rabble-rousing. I don't want to see that kind of behaviour tonight. I don't want to see that kind of behaviour on these premises or on these grounds at any time and do not condone it.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake on this point of order.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the hon. House leader rose and brought up what went on Monday night in his point of order, I'd like to read to you from *Hansard*. After the Sergeant-at-Arms had intervened twice and asked the gallery to come to order, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie said:

This is their House. This is the people of Alberta's House, Mr. Chairman, not the government's House. It is for the people of Alberta, and they have a right to have their voices heard.

She was speaking directly to the gallery when they had interrupted the proceedings of this House two times earlier.

The Sergeant-at-Arms had to intervene again: "Order. Order in the gallery. For the third time, you are not part of the proceedings. You are simply here to observe." Then when decorum came back, Edmonton-Ellerslie led off: "We certainly appreciate the support of all of you who have come this evening," again addressing the gallery. If that isn't inciting the gallery to get involved and do away with our right to represent our constituencies, to speak and to be heard in this House, then I don't know what is.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: On this point of order, hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul?

MR. LANGEVIN: Yes. On this point of order. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some members of the opposition are trying to deny that they tried to incite the demonstrators, but last night I was sitting on the balcony with the hon. Member for Dunvegan, and the hon.

Member for Edmonton-Glenora walked out to talk to the crowd. There must have been 150 to 200 demonstrators out back there, and if that's not inciting the crowd, I don't know what it is. He thanked them for coming. He said: we need your support; we need your assistance; we can't fight this alone; I will come out every 15 minutes or half an hour to update you on what's happening in the House; this is your House. So I was a witness that he was really trying to incite the crowd on this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on this point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I guess that's why there's a problem with eyewitness testimony. In fact, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul is correct. He and I also exchanged words immediately following my address to the crowd. I asked the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul if he knew who it was that made the decision to lock up the Assembly, and he said: I don't know, but if it were up to me, I wouldn't have locked up the Assembly; I would have used a water cannon on the crowd. So in terms of making inciteful comments, I'm surprised he didn't put it all on the record.

Now, as a matter of fact, on Monday night I talked to many of the Albertans that were here at the Assembly and made a point, Mr. Speaker, of going out into the crowd and doing a little temperature check and seeing what was going on when we heard pounding at the doors, et cetera. As a result of that, I've had comments from several members of the security staff acknowledging that and in fact expressing some gratitude for not just my efforts but in fact members of the Official Opposition in terms of keeping things as cool as they were on Monday night.

On Tuesday evening, last night, it was made very, very clear that if I left the Assembly, I would have difficulty getting back into the Chamber. Somewhere around 8:35, 8:40, I think it was – and maybe the Member for Dunvegan or Lac La Biche-St. Paul can confirm the time, because I wasn't looking at my watch – I heard some noise coming from the south lawn area. I looked over the balcony to see what that was. There was an assembly of I'm not sure how many hundred Albertans there. They were chanting. They were quite boisterous, but they were not violent. At that point I motioned for them to please be quiet. [interjections] The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul will confirm that and so will the Member for Dunvegan. I told them that we were proceeding with debate on Bill 11. I passed along the information that was provided to us, that should members of the public who were present in the gallery leave, we were informed that as they left others would be allowed in. I told them that, that they should be patient because they may be able to come into the Chamber, and I told them that I or somebody else would make an attempt to keep them updated on what was going on. You see, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important in terms of communication, in terms of crowd control, in terms of honesty of the process to keep people informed as to what's going on.

Now, if the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul believes that was inciting people, to provide information, to acknowledge their presence and their frustration, well, then he and I have very different interpretations of what inciting a crowd is. I would ask that Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to take the opportunity to clarify his allegations about my behaviour and to reflect carefully before he does. I had an opportunity to briefly work with that member before he sat as a member of the government, and I know that he is a man of some integrity, so I would just ask for him to carefully consider the allegation that he just made.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on this point of order.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would take the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood at her word, as we must in this House and as I want to do, because she is a member with a great deal of integrity and a police officer. It should be clear that at no time was anybody suggesting – and I was here right beside the Premier. I think it would be a real stretch to suggest that the Premier was alleging that the members of the Liberal opposition were inciting the crowd to do illegal acts or inciting anybody to slash a tire or do any of that. I don't believe that was the intention or the import of the words that the Premier used, and I think that should be perfectly clear. I do not believe that any member of the Liberal opposition was inciting any member of the public to do an illegal act or to go to any extreme.

4:30

It is, however, I think quite appropriate to recognize that people must take some responsibility for the natural consequences of what they do. In a situation where we have a very heated topic with a lot of passionate people involved in the topic, we as members must be very, very circumspect in our actions and very, very circumspect in our words in terms of what we do when there is a crowd of the nature that we had Monday night and of the nature that we had on Tuesday night. It behooves all of us as members of this Assembly to respect the dignity of the Assembly and to deal with our differences as matters of principle and matters of issues and not as matters of personality and not as matters of creating passions which are reflected in manners which do not contribute to debate and sound discussion of ideas but rather contribute to emotionalism with the ultimate intention of trying to change a result by overpowering or by creating an emphasis of power. I only say that because I think it is important to reflect on what happens when a member leaves this Assembly and goes out to a crowd and makes comments to that crowd.

Now, I would not deny any member of this House their right to speak to any member of the public at any time in any circumstance. I simply suggest that we all as leaders must reflect on what happens when we do that, how we do that, and what the intended result or the unintended result might be when we do that. In that case, using the word inciting and talking about inciting, the actions must be taken in that context. Because by going out to a crowd – and it happens all the time. When there are demonstrations on the steps of the Legislature, members of this Assembly go out and join the demonstrators and speak to them and talk to them.

MR. DICKSON: Some government members too.

MR. HANCOCK: Sometimes government members. I said members of the Assembly. I didn't limit it to any particular party.

That is appropriate. But one must always be circumspect in terms of the circumstances in which they do that, the method in which they do that, and what the intended and perhaps the unintended results of doing that might be. I simply put that on the floor today because I think it is very important when we're in a discussion of health care, which is a passionate discussion for most Albertans, if not all Albertans, and when we can expect people to come to their Legislature and not have enough room in the galleries for all people who might want to be here.

The question then is: what is there for other people to do who are on the grounds of the Legislature? For some of those people it's making noise and making their views known, and that is an entirely

appropriate form of representing one's viewpoints although, in this humble member's opinion, not a very effective one. But it's there, and it's used from time to time, and it's appropriate, and it happens on the steps of our Legislature. But we should not as members try to raise those passions or by our actions, whether trying or not, raise those passions to a level which is inappropriate. I think it's appropriate to say to members that they should not incite that type of inflammation of the passions of the people who are coming to make legitimate protest.

We also have to recognize that when people come to the Legislature to make legitimate protest or anywhere to make legitimate protest, sometimes there are people who none of us condone, not the members opposite and not the members on this side. There are people who take advantage of a situation like that to cause mischief, that have nothing necessarily to do with the issue at hand, but because there is that type of emotion at hand, it's time for them to do illegal acts. We don't condone that, we don't encourage that, and we don't incite that, but it is the natural consequence of an inflamed crowd. So again I would encourage all members to be very, very circumspect in terms of how they deal with crowds in this sort of a situation.

With respect to my friend from Edmonton-Glenora, when there's a crowd of that nature, speaking from the balcony at the back of the House might well have the effect of encouraging the crowd in terms of their antics of banging on the door or shouting louder or doing other things. Some of those might be very legitimate, but one has to in a circumstance where we have security in the building – we have police that have been called because there have been some acts which are not routine acts. In fact, when there have been people come in through a window – and I believe the hon. member knew this, and I'd be happy to be corrected if he didn't – and there has been an altercation with a security guard, then it's even more necessary for us to be circumspect in our actions and not go out and play the crowd, so to speak. Even though in our normal course that might be considered appropriate, in a circumstance where the situation is already very inflamed and we must deal with the security of members and the security of the building, some of those same actions may be inappropriate in that circumstance.

So I'd just ask all members of the House to reflect on that as we go through this debate with passionate people, passionate Albertans and passionate people on the floor of this House, that we deal with how we interrelate with the people who come to the Legislature to make their expressions known and that we be very careful that we not encourage them to do more than bring a reasonable protest, which is the norm in Alberta.

MR. SAPERS: Talk to your staff.

MR. HANCOCK: The hon. member says talk to my staff. I wasn't going to allude to this, but the invitation is now open for me to do so. Last night I left the House on several occasions to consult with members of the security staff in the House. On one of those such occasions I had to intercede in a heated discussion between a member of my staff and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. I had to tell both of them that in a circumstance like this, we should be leaders. We should not be having that type of heated discussion in the midst . . .

MR. SAPERS: Explain why.

MR. HANCOCK: It doesn't matter why. The hon. member says, "Explain why."

THE SPEAKER: Please. Please. You see, hon. members, with all of the words that are said and everything else, both of you violate the fundamental principle of this Assembly and cause an inciting of disruption in the Assembly by failing to abide by again the most fundamental of all rules: you speak through the chair. If you speak through the chair, you don't hear what anybody else says and you don't get baited by what anyone else says, and then the chair will take the time to recognize the other person maybe.

Put it akin to fishing. Okay; you're sitting there on a nice happy day. The boat is bobbing in nice water, and you throw out your line. Wow, it's peaceful and everything else. But if some silly fish out there makes a mistake and snags that hook, then all of a sudden the adrenalin in your body starts to move, that fish starts to fight, and, boy, there's a great adrenalin flow. You don't ever catch the fish by throwing out the line. It doesn't happen.

So address your comments through the chair and focus on the issue and ignore everybody else, both sides. We don't have any inciting.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, having started, I must finish, because I think it is appropriate to have it in context. At the front door in the midst of security and in the midst of dealing with this issue, it was not an appropriate time or place for a heated discussion about who was told what, when, and where. So I had to prevail upon both the hon. member and the member of my staff not to engage in that type of a discussion at that point in time and in that place and to be leaders. Now, if that's the type of calming influence the hon. member was having outside the House, then I think there may be some merit to the Premier's remarks.

Mr. Speaker, I go back to my earlier point, and I do apologize. I only made that reference because I was baited. You're right. I shouldn't have listened, and I couldn't keep my mouth shut because I was speaking. The important point that I have to make – and I've said it a few times, but I think it bears repeating again – is that all of us must be circumspect in how we deal with members of the public when we have an issue of this passion, and it's not appropriate for us to be making inflammatory remarks, but it is entirely appropriate for us to be out and talking among the members of the public. If that's what the hon. members were doing, then I don't fault them for that. But I think in doing so, if that were to cause additional demonstration of an inappropriate behaviour – for example, if one were to say to people that the building was open and they could come inside and demonstrate, that would be inappropriate and that would be inciting the type of thing that we had on Monday night.

4:40

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Thank you very much, hon. members, with respect to that.

This all started with a point of order with respect to the usage of words in question period today. There was very, very inflammatory language in the question period today, and that prompted the recess that we were given. I can go back. I have the Blues in front of me: words like "absentee Premier," "stop watching movies," "pay attention to the people" and then the response coming from the leader of the government and then some hon. members' interjections saying, "You're an embarrassment," at which time the hon. Premier says:

Mr. Speaker, I heard across the way that I'm an embarrassment. They're an embarrassment.

Well, okay.

These are the people out there inciting riots. These are the people that condone slashed tires. These are the people that condone people ripping off door handles . . . These are the people, Mr. Speaker, who condone striking and using violence against security people at the

Legislature. These are the people who are out there inciting this kind of deplorable, despicable behaviour.

None of this, from the absentee this to you're ignoring "the pleas and the values of . . . 700,000 Roman Catholics" – and, oh, by the way, I am one – to stuff like that which is just . . .

Let's try a 35-second question tomorrow and let's try a 35-second answer. Okay? Let's just try and see what happens. We're going to try it. We'll try really, really hard to do it; won't we? That's going to be brevity. Let's try and do it tomorrow, and you're going to get away from inflammations and big speeches and everything else.

Then, in terms of all the other information things, here's the latest note I got. "Mr. Speaker, last night I was off from House duty just past 8 o'clock. On my walk home from the Legislature Annex I met a man with a shovel and hammer in his hand. I made the comment that he was going to fix the flower beds." He said: "No. Hell, no. I'm going to the demonstration," and raised the shovel up and hit it with the hammer, apparently to make a noise. "Please let our security know this."

Let's be careful with some of this stuff.

Government House Leader, you have a point of order now. It had to do with somebody's use of the word absentee.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

MR. HANCOCK: It did indeed, Mr. Speaker. We had a series of questions or an attempt at a series of questions this afternoon which clearly, clearly attempted, in an absolute breach of the rules of this House, to refer to a member's presence or absence in the House.

Now, the members of the opposition have not been so subtle in terms of recording their presence by voting on adjournment every night. That's perfectly valid. It's perfectly valid to do so, to have a standing vote at any time that there's a vote and by so doing record their presence in the House. But by raising questions in the House relating to an allegation that the Premier was watching a movie, the clear intention in that question – and by the way, I checked with the Premier's security staff, and he hasn't been to a movie in weeks. I think it is a rule of law that you can't do indirectly what you're prohibited from doing directly. What they're trying to do is skirt the rules of this House which say that you cannot refer to a member's presence or absence. The hon. Leader of the Opposition clearly had designed in her question and in the comments which you just read out about "absentee Premier," a flagrant abuse of the rules by attempting to do indirectly what you can't do directly, which is attempting to make allegations as to the Premier's absence for a particular discussion in this House, and that's entirely inappropriate.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, as I understood the reference to "absentee," I understood it to be reference to a big rally in Calgary on Saturday, a big rally in Edmonton on Sunday, a large demonstration in terms of people here on Monday night and people here on Tuesday. I don't have the Blues. That's what I understood it to be. The Leader of the Opposition knows full well that we don't make reference to people not being present for House business, and I understood it to relate to those other matters.

I understand it was the Premier in a television interview that at least one of my colleagues had seen where he had been at the Salvation Army in Calgary speaking and then told a reporter where he was going to be, why he wasn't going to be here. He was asked what he thought about the demonstration. His comment was that he chose to watch a movie instead and he wouldn't attend. I didn't see the TV thing. I'm reporting thirdhand what I heard.

The point is this: if you look at the context, I did not understand it to be a reference to the Premier not being present in the House. I understood it to mean the Premier not being present for a host of

other demonstrations and expressions of the popular will of Albertans, the people we're supposed to be representing and advantaging with the work in this Assembly and the legislation we pass. The argument being that with a bill like Bill 11 and the private health care policy, we're doing none of those things.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, it wasn't that long ago that I was born, but I wasn't born yesterday. There is so much innuendo in some of these questions and everything else. I really like the Government House Leader, and I really like the Opposition House Leader, but I think you both like playing lawyer, and you both like doing it in this Assembly. There are some basic rules, so I'm going to say again, one more time, let's try tomorrow a 35-second question, a 35-second answer, sort of like mimicking the House of Commons in Canada. I see a lot of members sort of nodding and saying that's probably a pretty good idea, so let's see how we go with that. [interjection] Oh, no. It's absentee, watching movies, not paying attention, and on and on and on. Anyway, I've made enough comments about that.

Speaker's Ruling Addressing the Chair

THE SPEAKER: I'm going to say one other thing as well about inciting and playing to the crowds, that came up as well, because I neglected to comment on this a little earlier. I believe the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake in his point was talking about inciting, presumably inciting people in this Assembly and talking to the galleries. We don't do that. Nobody talks to the galleries.

Now, listen. This chairperson was either in the chair or observed or listened to the proceedings of this House, and the first person to speak to the gallery was not a member of the opposition. The member knows who he is, and he's smiling, and he got a note from the chair at that time. After that, several members of the opposition played to the gallery. Then last night another minister of Executive Council spoke to the gallery not through the chair, and that was – well, we didn't mention any other names, so we won't mention these. So don't anybody start calling the kettle black here. Don't start doing that. You talk to the chair – tonight it'll be the Chairman or the Deputy Chairman of Committees – not to the crowds. I've had a discussion with them, and they're going to be very, very firm about repeating that again, and if people want to play to the crowd, that's inciting. That's a contempt of this Assembly.

There's a reason for doing it. There are long historical reasons why you speak to the chair. There's a reason why you're supposed to address and look at the chair. You don't turn your back to the chair, because who knows what you'll do with your back to the chair about somebody else from – well, I'm not going to give any examples. There are enough in trouble in here as it is. There are many, many examples in the history of parliament why that is there, why you face the chair, why you speak through the chair. You are also protected by the chair as a result of that. That's just a little example about avoiding inciting of this or inciting of that.

Now, hon. members, it's 10 minutes to 5. We've dealt with these points and what have you, and the only bottom line through all of this is that if chaos is going to be the order of the day around this place, then a lot of people have got to do some real deep, deep thinking. I'm telling you that the letters I'm getting in my office about the conduct of this Assembly and the e-mails that are mentioning names of hon. members on all sides of the House are not complimentary. These same people are going to send those letters to the newspapers in your constituencies, not by any encouragement from this person. They're going to do it, and they're going to

circulate them, and there's not one person out there who elected anybody in this House to have them come and be anything but the most honourable of honourable. If you feel really moved that you can't control yourself, get up, go to the washroom, hit your head against the wall, or go for a walk.

4:50

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science on behalf of the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 14, 15, and 16.

[Motion carried]

CRHA Acute Care Beds

Q14. Ms Leibovici moved that the following question be accepted.

What are the actual numbers of and occupancy rates for acute care beds serving the Calgary regional health authority from April 1, 1992, to March 20, 2000?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important question given the context of the debates we've had over not only the last few months but the last number of years. We know that there are concerns regarding the availability of acute care beds in the Calgary region. We know that in fact there have been two hospitals that have been sold and one that has been blown up, yet we keep being told that there are more beds now than there were in 1993, I believe. The question, though, is: what exactly are the numbers of those acute care beds in the Calgary health authority, and what are the occupancy rates for those beds from April 1, 1992, to March 20, 2000?

Now, the government may well say that they can't provide those figures because in fact they did not have a regional health authority at the time, but they had a number of individual hospitals. I would think, Mr. Speaker, that given the fact that those hospitals would have had to supply information to the department of health at the time, in fact it would be very easy to count the number of beds that were available at that time and the number of beds that are available at this time. So I will wait for the government's response to my request.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me. A response maybe?

DR. TAYLOR: I apologize. I was listening to the House leader, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to be able to say that the government is accepting this Written Question 14.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to close debate.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you. I look forward to the response.

[Written Question 14 carried]

Shooting of Bears

Q15. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that the following question be accepted.

How many bears were shot between April 1, 1998, to March 31, 1999, and April 1, 1999, to March 31, 2000, by private landowners and grazing leaseholders on Crown land or by anyone acting on their behalf, and in how many cases did landowners or leaseholders call Alberta Environment to trap nuisance bears?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. I am pleased to respond that the government will accept Written Question 15 with the amendment. I move the amendment as well. Do I need to read that, Mr. Speaker? It has been distributed. Okay.

I move that Written Question 15 be amended by (a) adding "According to Alberta Environment records," before "How"; (b) striking out "shot" and substituting "killed"; and (c) striking out "trap" and substituting "deal with." So Written Question 15 will read:

According to Alberta Environment records, how many bears were killed between April 1, 1998, to March 31, 1999, and April 1, 1999, to March 31, 2000, by private landowners and grazing leaseholders on Crown land or by anyone acting on their behalf, and in how many cases did landowners or leaseholders call Alberta Environment to deal with nuisance bears?

We will be accepting that amended written question.

MR. DICKSON: I have no expertise in the area of how we track this kind of statistic. I expect we would be pleased to get the information, and I suppose to the extent that we require additional information, we will pursue that, but we'll appreciate the information we can get and thank the minister for providing us with this information.

Thank you.

[Written Question 15 as amended carried]

Maintenance Enforcement

Q16. Ms Blakeman moved that the following question be accepted.

How many agreements is the Department of Justice and Attorney General currently negotiating with other jurisdictions pursuant to the Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science on behalf of the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Once again on behalf of openness and attempting to please the opposition we're pleased to accept this Written Question 16.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I'm pleased to hear this, because this is a question and an issue that I know many members in the Assembly deal with. It seems to be on the problems that arise out of the lack of reciprocal agreements that seem to be on the rise and is causing not a large number of individuals but certainly those individuals that are affected. It affects them in the most intimate way possible in that they don't have the finances to provide for their family, or in the opposite case they are not able to release the money that they would like to. Specifically I'm looking for how many agreements are being pursued, and I expect that with the answer will come an indication of which jurisdictions are being pursued currently.

I did ask this question last year at the same time, and I'm hoping that each year I'll be able to have more names added to the list that the government is pursuing to get reciprocal enforcement of maintenance with additional countries, states, and provinces, as appropriate.

With those words, I thank you.

[Written Question 16 carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour and the emotion of the afternoon and all the other things that go into it, I would move that we adjourn at this time until 8 tonight, at which time we reconvene in Committee of the Whole.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion put forward by the hon. Government House Leader that the Assembly do now adjourn but reconvene at 8 o'clock this evening in committee, would all those in favour please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Carried. Thank you.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:59 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 19, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/04/19

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order. We have as our first item for consideration Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act.

Before we proceed with that, I'd like to just address the gallery for a moment. This is the informal part of the Legislative Assembly. You're probably used to seeing the Assembly when the Speaker is up here, and there are a certain set of rules and regulations that govern that process. This is the informal part, where you're allowed to go clause by clause through a bill, to look at it, to ask questions, and it allows either side to ask an unlimited number of questions – whereas in the Assembly there are specific limitations to that – or to debate unlimited amounts of time, except only 20 minutes at a time.

I would also like to remind people in the gallery that you're here as observers, not as participants, which means, then, that if something good is said, you're not to encourage that through clapping or cheering or, if it's something that you don't care for, by booing or stomping your feet or whatever. In other words, you're not invited nor permitted to engage in whatever debate goes on here.

For those of you who are here and may wish to sometime later on this evening or at another time, we are on the Internet. I can't say that I'm that fluent in the language, but if you want to copy down the location, it's www.assembly.ab.ca. You might want to refer to that later on this evening or perhaps at another time.

The chair would make the usual reminder to hon. members that only one member speaks at a time. Only one member stands and speaks at a time, although, as you can see, hon. members are allowed to take off their jackets, because it does get warm in here. They're allowed to have coffee or juice at their desks, and they're allowed to go and sit and talk to other members. Very quietly they're allowed to talk. It is much less formal than the regular Assembly.

With that, I would begin this evening with the opportunity to introduce guests. May we have unanimous consent for Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two people seated in the members' gallery this evening: John Craig from Ardrossan and John Stainton from Sherwood Park. I would ask that the members here present do acknowledge their presence with pleasure.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Sorry, Calgary-Buffalo; I'll get to you.

MS BLAKEMAN: You'll get your turn.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very active family that lives in my constituency. I think there are four of them here tonight. This is John and Diane and Tim and Kate

Oxenford. John and Diane are very active with the Concerv group in Rosedale, and I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE CHAIRMAN: Now the patient hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Not wanting anyone to be left out, I'd like to invite all of those people that are here to express their concern with Bill 11 to rise and receive the warm welcome of Members of the Legislative Assembly.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

(continued)

Bill 11

Health Care Protection Act

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, just to remind ourselves where we're at, we're on a subamendment to the first amendment. So it's subamendment SA1, part A.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to again thank the citizens that have expressed so much interest in this particular bill and have made a point of coming out and viewing the debate that's carried on here. This is now the third night in a row that we've seen the galleries full, and in my 11 years that I've been here, I haven't seen that before. It's the third night in a row that we've seen crowds: Monday night, of course, inside the building; Tuesday night and Wednesday night, outside of the building. Again, there's a crowd out there tonight.

Mr. Chairman, I would hope that you would show us the same latitude that was shown by the chairman last night when we were making comments. At times we do stray somewhat, but that latitude was basically given to all members. Again, I thought it provided a great deal of assistance in allowing the members that participated in the debate to really participate. So if there's no objection to that.

Mr. Chairman, on the way here I drove into the parking lot where the people are gathered. I was going to go out last night and speak to the people out there and explain to them what we were doing, why we were working on this subamendment that we feel is so important, but because of what I saw there on the main floor – you know, the full alert, basically, the sort of a shutdown – I kind of hesitated. I thought: well, maybe it would be a bad scene out there. But when I drove there tonight and I looked at the young people and the people with Canadian flags and a fellow pushing his wife in a wheelchair, to me it looked like citizens that are peacefully demonstrating, that are very, very concerned about this particular bill.

Mr. Chairman, the frustration that these people find and that I find and that I'm sure all members of the opposition find is: what do we have to do? Now, this is the third night we've been debating this subamendment. What do we have to do to try and get the viewpoints of Albertans across that there is major concern with this bill, with the amendment that was proposed? Albertans want to see it radically changed. Despite the fact that we had 8,500 participating in two rallies over the weekend, with potential for thousands more if the AgriCom could have accommodated them, despite the rallies, despite the petitions, despite everything, the government for some reason chooses not to listen.

So as we are the voice of Albertans in the Legislative Assembly who want to express an opinion that's contrary to the government position or philosophy, they have no choice but to come to us and

ask us, and we have no choice but to aid them and do what we're doing now by debating this and continuing to debate it. If we've got to go till June, if we've got to go till July, if we've got to go till August, so be it. Eventually somebody is going to start to listen to Albertans, and they're going to realize the error of their ways. They're going to say: well, we've been wrong, and we've got to in fact make some changes in our philosophy towards health care reform.

On this subamendment specifically, Mr. Chairman. I know that last night and the night before there was a tendency for the audience to want to participate and show their agreement or disagreement with statements that were being made by various members. When the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, for example, was up and sort of indicated that he felt that Albertans in the gallery were supportive of what he was saying, well, there was a chorus of boos that came down. Of course, our good Sergeant-at-Arms has no choice but to call the House to order. Mr. Chairman, if people really want to show their displeasure, can't they do like those guys do on TV reviewing the movies: two thumbs down or two thumbs up? If you like what I'm saying, two thumbs up. That'll give me a signal. If you don't like what the government members are saying . . .

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, just listen. All hon. members, when you have the opportunity to address the committee, you do so through the chair, not to the gallery, not to your opposite number over here but through the chair. That's a long-standing tradition that helps keep our tempers down and helps us to perhaps focus. That's why I try and keep visual contact with you, and if I nod from time to time, it primarily means that I'm agreeing that I'm hearing you, not that I'm agreeing or disagreeing.

So with that in mind, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, would you continue.

8:10

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you once again, Mr. Chairman, for your valuable guidance. It's always appreciated when we go off track just a wee, wee bit, and it helps put us back on track.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: One of the things that I talked about last night when I spoke – and I want to touch on it again because it is so, so important to the subamendment. The subamendment that we're dealing with right now really revolves around one of the most important aspects of Bill 11, one of the aspects that I feel that Albertans object to so strenuously, as I'd indicated, and that is the question of the surgical facilities being allowed to operate with no maximum stays in terms of overnight stays and that type of thing.

There is a perception out there, which I agree with, quite frankly, that these surgical facilities are for-profit hospitals, and that's what's so bothersome. Now, we see the terminology "surgical facility" of course used in our subamendment because we're addressing the amendment that was put forward by the Minister of Health and Wellness, which again referred to surgical facilities but added the terminology of the dentists. Of course, "surgical facility" is in the original bill.

I would have hoped that one of the government members, when they stood up last night to speak, would have addressed one of the concerns that I expressed. I'm going to express that concern again in anticipation of being somewhat optimistic that it is going to be addressed. That goes to the whole indication of the government's

perception of the overall support for Bill 11 where they indicate that a majority of Albertans support the particular bill, down from their own previous poll, by the way. I just wonder why the government didn't have the courage to state within the question that Albertans were asked that it was surgical facilities that were being referred to, not private institutions.

Why did the government choose to be so misleading in that question they asked Albertans if they really wanted to find out how Albertans felt? This question doesn't give any indication as to how Albertans feel. In the previous three polls that we have access to, where the question was more direct and addressed the issue, in all three cases without question the vast majority of Albertans by a substantial portion indicated that they were opposed to Bill 11. Had this been properly worded, the same thing would have happened as well.

It troubles me, Mr. Chairman, that we see that type of thing happen, because when the government brings forward a bill, the government has a duty, a responsibility to try and sell the content of that bill to the public based on what is in the bill, not on some cleverly worded terminology that may deceive Albertans or may fool them or mislead them, whatever expression you want to use. That's what's happening here. First of all, in that poll using the term "private institutions" is really, really startling. Equally startling is why in the bill they used the term "surgical facility" instead of just saying what it is, a hospital. Just imagine. If the question asked of Albertans would have read, "The stated goal of the health protection act is to reduce waiting lists and increase overall efficiency; under this plan Alberta Health will pay for all insured services performed at for-profit hospitals," how many Albertans do you think would have said yes?

MRS. SOETAERT: Maybe two.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, one doctor would have said yes for sure, because he does stand to benefit. He made that position very, very clear in his support of Bill 11, that he did in fact support the bill.

You know, interestingly, Mr. Chairman, in the hundreds of phone calls my constituency office has received, the e-mails, the letters, the people that I have talked to, there's only been one – and I tabled that letter in the House as well in fairness to the person that sent it to me, because I promise people that if they want their views tabled in this House, I'll do it. Just one has contacted me and said, "I support Bill 11," and he raked me over the coals for opposing it, and he said that I was way out to lunch, that I hadn't read the bill. I didn't want to get into a debate with him, but I could have pointed out that there were government members that were confronted by the media that obviously hadn't read the bill, because they weren't sure of the content of the bill.

But all members of this caucus have read the bill, studied the bill. We've debated the bill. We've talked to Albertans about the bill. We've talked about the amendments. We've talked about the subamendment. We've gone over it so many times that I am extremely comfortable that I have a pretty good perception of what this bill is going to do, what this amendment would do, what this subamendment would do, and I think the people that come out here and listen know what's going on, and that's why they're coming out here. It's a fine evening. If you had your druthers, would you rather be sitting here watching us or would you sort of rather be at Hawrelak Park on a picnic with your family, whatever, or enjoying a good movie, like some people do? Now, on occasion I do enjoy a good movie myself, although I don't make movies priorities over the opportunity to debate here in the House when we have a chance to present our views to Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, you may wonder and government members may wonder why we have made a point of going on with this subamendment for the number of days that we have. It has now been – what? – three full days, or did we first introduce it last week?

MS CARLSON: Wednesday night we started.

MR. WICKMAN: Last week, Wednesday night. We're already a week down the road, and we're still dealing with the same subamendment. It's so important to us, and I guess we'll . . .

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: No, don't conclude, hon. member. It's just that I want to try and discourage this business of engaging others in the discussion and also those people from entering into the discussion, because it isn't. It's a debate, one person at a time.

So if we could keep that in mind, hon. members, and with your indulgence and the indulgence of all members, please stick to the script or your heartfelt thoughts.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I don't know what we'd do at times without you trying to keep us on track.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, questions on the surgical facilities have been raised, and I've gone through some of the documentation here. Government members have stood up and talked about the various issues. They key in on what they support in what the Minister of Health and Wellness is proposing in terms of the original bill, in terms of the amendment that he's proposed, and why they denounce the subamendment that we've made. When I go through, the one thing that comes out the most often that they refer to, that they're uncomfortable with is this 12 hours. They're feeling that this 12 hours is going to create a problem.

I guess they feel the 12 hours is going to create a problem in the same sense that we recognize that if there isn't a subamendment to that, then the other option the government is proposing is to allow the overnight stays to continue to happen on an unlimited basis. So what we're trying to do through a subamendment is take what the government is attempting to do, turning these facilities into private hospitals, and we want it focused on just the clinics we see out there now. When you need surgery that's going to require more than a 12-hour stay, then it should be done in a proper facility, and a proper facility of course is a public hospital that we as Albertans pay for through our taxes, pay for through Alberta health care premiums.

Mr. Chairman, I know there are members in this House besides myself that have had to use the emergency services because we saw a need for some type of surgical procedure. When I had to go by ambulance a couple of years back – I didn't actually have to go by ambulance; I drove. I was having a medical problem, and my first thought was: "Well, where am I going to go? I'm going to go to a hospital because I've got a problem here, and I would venture to say that I'm going to be there for more than two or three hours." I called that one right, because I ended up being there for actually 10 weeks. Had I gone to a clinic at that particular time, I'm not sure what would have happened. They, of course, wouldn't keep me in there – I would hope not – for the whole 10 weeks.

8:20

If the government feels that 12 hours isn't acceptable, that it should maybe be 14, well, fine, then bring in a sub subamendment.

But 14 hours, 12 hours, that two hours wouldn't make any difference. The point is that in my opinion you cannot allow facilities that are going to perform the basic function of being a hospital that provides some enhanced services that are going to cost taxpayers more dollars than they're presently paying through their tax base and such.

Mr. Chairman, I've said it before; I'll say it again. When we come back after the Easter break, I'm sure this debate is going to continue, and we're going to have lots of opportunity to repeat it. I plead with Members of the Legislative Assembly of all three parties that are represented here: recognize what Albertans are telling us; recognize our obligations to those people; recognize that they put us here to respond to their wishes, to respond to what we feel will benefit them, not an agenda that we choose to take upon ourselves because we feel, for whatever reason, that it's government's right to do it and government is the first to have it done that way.

Mr. Chairman, that's not right. That's not what we're elected for. We're elected to listen to the people. We're elected to act upon what the people are telling us, and other than the one day when the Premier rushed out of here – I think he may have been a little upset that day. He came back with two letters of support that he read into the record, and of course previous to that he read into the record a letter from Dr. Dennis Modry. Other than that, there hasn't been any evidence presented to me, to this caucus by government that Albertans want this.

What are they basing their decision on that this is for the benefit of Albertans, that this has to be done, that this is good? Whose wisdom is directing them? It's not coming from the people that elected us. I don't care if one is from Edmonton, if one is from Calgary, if one is from Drayton Valley, if one is from Beiseker, Thorsby; Albertans are saying the same thing. That evidence is being tabled in the House. That evidence is being tabled by members of this caucus when we table the petitions day after day after day from all parts of the province. We're over 60,000 now. By the time the dust settles, I would say well over 100,000 people will have asked us to represent them, to table on their behalf their opposition. If you look at where those petitions come from, they don't all come from Edmonton; they don't all come from Calgary. They come from all parts of the province.

This concern is very widespread. Our member here from Lethbridge-East is participating in the agricultural summit, and from his comments that come back to us as he travels northern Alberta, there's a fever out there, and the fever out there is the opposition to Bill 11. That fever continues to grow. It continues to escalate, and it's going to continue to escalate. It's not that this caucus is directing that opposition. That opposition is developing on its own; it's growing on its own. Certainly there are groups out there that are representing their members, whether it be CUPE, the Alberta Federation of Labour, Catholics. All types of various segments of the population are expressing their opposition to the bill.

We can't just write these people off as left-wing nuts, Mr. Chairman, because they're not left-wing nuts. They are concerned Albertans.

THE CHAIRMAN: We appear to have a point of order. The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. SMITH: *Beauchesne* 459. Mr. Chairman, as engaging as the speaker is and as far as the latitude ranges, from The Pas to La Paz, Bolivia, I can assure you that I have heard no word of amendment SA1, and I believe A1, section A has been the subject of discussion

and debate since last week sometime. I would just ask that the speaker stay on topic.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair would comment that the chair has heard on a number of occasions the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford referring to subamendment SA1, but the other part of the commentary is quite correct. The hon. member is ranging wide. If hon. members recall, this afternoon the Speaker commended the chairs for allowing a wide range of . . .

Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on the point of order.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Chairman, it seems that on these points of order at the beginning of every evening here we have to establish the parameters that are allowed for the speech. I would remind the member who brought up the point of order and refer him to *Erskine May*, page 378, Relevance in Debate, where wide scope is given to people in debate on subamendments and in committee. It has been the standard practice. We have seen that from all members in the House on both sides of the Assembly.

Specifically with reference to page 378 I would point the chair to the sentence that says, "The precise relevance of an argument may not always be perceptible." We do have 20 minutes of speaking time in our debate time to get to the point, Mr. Chairman. Certainly the hon. member who has the floor at this point in time has several times referenced the subamendment and the amendment to which it refers. So we would point that he was entirely within his mandate to make the comments he did.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Edmonton-Ellerslie and Minister of Gaming.

As the chair was trying to say, there is a bit of a contradictory nature to this. When we were discussing whether or not the group of government amendments should be dealt with as one unit or separately in the 14 units, both the House leaders of the two opposition parties wanted to go at them clause by clause or section by section, and because it requires a unanimous sort of arrangement to make it otherwise, then one would have thought that the debate would have followed the request. If you request them to be voted on one at a time, then the debate would. However, the chair has experienced that this is darn near impossible to enforce, and unless one wants a life of continuous hassle, then the wide-ranging would be allowed, hopefully, staying within basically the parameters at least of the bill and, better yet, of the set of amendments that have been forthcoming.

So in that light, the chair has not interceded with relevance because if we were on the narrow application it would be certainly called. Again recalling that the Speaker had indicated that this would be allowed, then we will continue to hear. But, please, let us not stray beyond the confines of the bill, and I don't think that the hon. member has.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you. Mr. Chairman. A ruling with a great deal of wisdom, I might say.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: In any case, I'm down to my final minute of speaking time. So I'm going to conclude by saying that as long as I sit here, as long as this bill is in front of us, I'm going to continue to support the subamendment, I'm going to oppose the government

amendments, I'm going to oppose Bill 11, and eventually the will of the people of Alberta will prevail. I'm convinced that somewhere along the line the government will see the light.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair would make one other observation. It's quite warm down here, and I can imagine that it's even worse up there. We have arranged for the outside and the inside doors to be opened. I don't know whether it's our imagination, but there is a little bit of breeze, so hopefully it will be able to reach the levels there.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont to enter into debate. [interjection] You remember the long tradition that debate is on one side, then on the other side, then back? Okay. Good.

8:30

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in committee on the amendment. I'm going to try and speak to the amendment rather than everything else.

I think it's important to start to realize that, first of all, there's been, from what I understand, a total of 31 hours of debate so far on this bill: 19 and a half hours at second reading and 11.6 hours in committee, 6.4 hours on the amendment and 5.2 hours on the subamendment. We're still on the first amendment, so I'd like to speak to the amendment. To speak to the amendment, I think we have to look at where we are in this province prior to Bill 11 and then after Bill 11.

The thing is that we have to recognize that private clinics have been a reality and a fact of life in this province for a decade or longer. This is not just in Alberta. This is pretty much all over Canada.

AN HON. MEMBER: Not with overnight stays.

MR. HERARD: I'll get to that, hon. member, through the chair.

Over the last 10 years, there have been a large number of surgical clinics in operation. I know that they began at a time when the hon. Leader of the Opposition was health minister, and I don't really have a problem with that. You know, that was then, and this is now. It started back then. There were 30-some odd clinics during that time, and now there are approximately 52. Over the last 10 years improvements in technology and surgical procedures have made it possible for 52 private surgical clinics to perform more than 20,000 – 20,000 – relatively minor surgeries that formerly were all done in hospitals. So I can understand why the Leader of the Opposition, when she was minister of health, could see that there were better ways of doing things.

In fact, when you look at 20,000 surgeries per year, that's quite a few per day, isn't it? Because I would imagine that we're not looking at any more than perhaps 200 or 250 days a year when surgical facilities would be in operation. That's a lot of Albertans who are getting the benefit of surgeries done in private facilities. The reason they're being done there is because they can be safely done there. That's the reality that we have in this province at the moment.

In the last decade we've had an increase in the volume of procedures done safely every day in clinics, and it frees up thousands of hours of hospital operating room time per year and releases expensive hospital beds. We all know that they can be up to, you know, \$800 a day or more. That's the reality in this province as we speak. What this does is improve access for more serious cases that continue to be done in our hospitals. In other words, if 20,000 of these cases were put back into the hospitals, imagine just what would happen to the waiting lists. So this improves access.

In addition, cancellations due to emergencies are all but eliminated. We all have heard of cases of that; I've had it happen in my family. I'm sure everyone has. It happens much too often. You know, you go to the hospital at 6 or 7 in the morning, you're prepared for surgery, and all of a sudden you're told that due to an emergency they can't do you today. They can't tell you when they can do you, but they'll be in touch. So there you are, having to go back home, and you've got to reschedule the operation.

Currently we have more than 150 different types of surgical procedures that are done safely every day in existing clinics, but they are subject to the 12-hour rule. That's where we go from prior to Bill 11 to after Bill 11. Essentially they are subject to a 12-hour rule. This prevents the health system from taking advantage of continuous improvements in technology and surgical procedures such as laparoscopic and laser techniques, that continue to be performed, perfected, and improved, with improved outcomes every year. Essentially the College of Physicians and Surgeons can look at what's being done in hospitals today, and we know there are certain numbers of these procedures that could be done safely in an accredited facility, assuming that the College of Physicians and Surgeons accredits the facility and the staff and the procedure and so on. But today, you know, if it takes a little bit more recovery time or monitoring time, then you have to keep that procedure within the hospital system, the most expensive route, even though a clinic properly equipped and accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons could quite safely do the procedure. I know that all of us have a great deal of esteem for the College of Physicians and Surgeons because they represent the professional side of the medical profession.

So should the province continue to use the most expensive route to health when every month we all marvel at the new techniques that are implemented by our health professionals? Why should regional health authorities be prevented from implementing new, accredited advances brought about by an increasing investment in high technology and world-class medical research? We know how proud we are over medical research that's being done in this province and how successful it's been, but for some reason there's some magic around this 12-hour thing. Why should regional health authorities not have the option? If in fact a facility can be accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the procedure can be done safely with good outcomes, why should they be forced to continue to use the most expensive OR and surgical recovery and hospital bed?

So that's really the issue around what we're talking about, because before Bill 11 all those things that I've talked about happened every day in this province and with great success. After Bill 11 there is the 12-hour situation that as a result of the bill is now opened up so that . . .

MRS. SLOAN: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on a point of order.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MRS. SLOAN: Under *Beauchesne* 482, I'm wondering if the member would entertain a question.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. member is reminded that you only have to say yes or no and you don't have to give any reasons.

MR. HERARD: No, Mr. Chairman, because I didn't note what time

I started, and I don't know how much time I've got left. Therefore, I think I'll just continue. She'll have her chance many times, I'm sure.

Debate Continued

MR. HERARD: Anyway, the bottom line, I guess, the fundamental question is that if the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the federal Health department didn't want us to look at this, then they would not have asked for this bill. In fact, the bill introduces controls that should've been there from the start but weren't. I'm not going to point the finger as to why that may or may not have happened.

MS OLSEN: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: We appear to have another point of order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MS OLSEN: Yes. Mr. Chairman, I'd just like to know, under *Beauchesne* 333, if the member would entertain a question regarding his comments on the federal government.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no. Just: would he entertain a question? Again, either a yes or a no.

MR. HERARD: That meant no.

8:40

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. That's the second time, hon. members. I think maybe we get the point that the hon. member does not want to answer any more questions than almost anyone else when they are in debate.

Before I call the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, perhaps I'll explain a little bit to the gallery. Each member is allowed 20 minutes. As I've already said, they can speak unlimited times; they just can't succeed themselves. Many have spoken three or four times to this already. When someone has a point of order, the clock stops and doesn't start again until they have recommenced, so it doesn't take away from their speaking time. They still get their 20 minutes. If you get a lot of interruptions, it could be 25 minutes, but they only get to speak for the 20 and the other five are taken up in the interruptions or points of order.

So with that explanation, the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Debate Continued

MR. HERARD: Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. I guess the bottom line is that if you look at the province before Bill 11 – and I guess that's where we're at today because Bill 11 has not passed – then we know what is happening everyday safely in 52 clinics, and if Bill 11 were to pass tonight, tomorrow the difference would be that the College of Physicians and Surgeons could look at a list of procedures that could be safely done inside a clinical setting that could take longer than 12 hours if required.

Now, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense to have an artificial regulation get in the way of a doctor's performance with a patient. It seems to me that things go well in many cases, not so well in some cases, and not very well at all in other cases, and a doctor should be free to make the decision as to how long that person should be under his or her care, because it's the doctors that discharge patients. It's not the regional health authorities or, thank goodness, politicians. So doctors have to have the flexibility to be able to treat their patient

with absolutely the best possible care, and that's what this is all about. There's no magic with respect to a 12-hour or an 18-hour or a 22-hour or a 27-hour stay. If that's what's required medically, then that should be done automatically and not stopped because some piece of legislation says you can't do that.

You know, there's not a lot of real science with respect to what we're trying to do here. It's very simple, but unfortunately it's been blown into a whole host of things that it isn't. So from that perspective the amendments that are being proposed would in fact, I think, almost be considered negative amendments to the principle of the bill, because they're just reversing what it is the bill is trying to do. If that isn't negative, I don't know what is. So I could not support that amendment, and I would hope all hon. members would see their way clear to not supporting it as well.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise to address the issue. A key point for me under the subamendment is that the clause that adds "that requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours" seems to be a significant issue.

Before I move on to that, I had wanted to ask the last hon. member – he talked about the last 10 years, but he failed to mention the pre-Pearson era, when there was no medicare, when people didn't get surgeries because they didn't have the money or people lost their homes because they didn't have the money to pay. As I've previously said, I had a constituent who wanted to bring their very ill son home from the hospital and were told that unless they came up with 10 more dollars, the child was going to be staying in the hospital. God knows what would have happened to him.

It was the collective wisdom, I might add – and there's not a lot of collective wisdom happening over there – of Emmet Hall, Tommy Douglas, and Prime Minister Pearson that allowed for medicare to expand across this country, but the other side seems to neglect the purpose of this whole process and the purpose of medicare. I think it's important that we keep highlighting that.

The other aspect that I was trying to focus on. The hon. member brought up the notion that the federal government asked for this bill. Okay? Well, I'm asking through the chair for that member to table all the documentation, the letters, the source material, to back up his statement.

I'm going to read into the record here, quite clearly, that private clinics or "surgical facilities," as proposed under Bill 11, are considered hospitals under the Canada Health Act. I do not believe there is any reason for confusion here.

That was from a letter, tabled in this Legislature, to the Hon. Halvar Jonson, Minister of Health and Wellness, and it was written by the Hon. Allan Rock, the Health minister. He has very clearly stated that a surgical facility is, in fact, a hospital under this bill.

I want to get back then, Mr. Chairman, to the issue at hand, and for me that's the 12-hour stays. I find it interesting that the associate minister of health states that, technically, if you are in a facility longer than 12 hours, you're deemed to be in an overnight stay situation. Well, there's nothing technical about that. The relevant fact right now is that if you are in a facility for over 12 hours, then you are considered to be in a facility that should have overnight stays, and that's a hospital in this country. That's a hospital in this province. It's not a surgical facility. It's not anything by any other name. It is a hospital, and that Mr. Rock has addressed. So I'm wondering where the leap of logic is missed here for the other side. I'm wondering what they don't get, and what they don't understand.

I'm going to also speak to this issue. Dr. Bond from the AMA has

also denounced the bill once again; the AMA has denounced the bill once again. He has a number of concerns that were outlined. His letter was also tabled in this Legislature today. There are a number of issues that he has identified, and in one of those issues he says:

There are no "provincial standards on what services are covered and the level of access" as called for by the position statement. If contracting out of services is to be extended, there has to be much greater attention paid to the mechanisms that will ensure that patient interests come first.

The AMA is saying: nix this bill because it doesn't do the job right now. So again I'm not sure where the leap is for this group over here. They don't seem to get it.

I want to then draw your attention to some of the statements that have been made by previous speakers from the other side. I will start, Mr. Chairman, with the notion that the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross stated on April 17, 2000, and for *Hansard's* reference, page 1041 in *Hansard*: "They are surgeries that we look at as being elective . . . It's surgery that's conducted on people that are relatively healthy." Okay? Surgery conducted on people that are healthy. "It is not surgery that is urgent or emergent but is elective."

Now, I'm just wondering. All surgeries that are going to be performed in these facilities are not elective surgeries, Mr. Chairman. Hernias and the proposal for gallbladders as well may be deemed nonurgent, but they are not necessarily elective. In fact, those specific surgeries may need to be done sooner than later in some instances, and a lot of that depends on the patient's overall health, the patient's well-being, emergency situations, complicating factors such as other diseases, maybe diabetes or something like that. There's a whole range of issues to deal with. They're not all just elective, that healthy people are going in and having surgeries, because healthy people don't usually have surgeries.

8:50

The second comment that hon. member made was regarding waiting lists. She stated in this respect that

in Calgary alone we have 12,000 people on the waiting list for elective surgery, which is one of the reasons why this bill has come before the Legislature.

Two points I want to make very clearly, the first one quickly. The Calgary regional health authority chair, Mr. Dinning, has stated as recently as today, as a matter of fact, that they have more money in their budget, so they're going to be able to address the waiting list, but he'll need Bill 11 down the road. Well, maybe if we fund the system adequately – and that is what Mr. Dinning has just said: oh, my goodness, we're being funded adequately – they don't need Bill 11 down the road. Okay? So I'm not quite sure again. Leaps of logic are being made that are incongruent.

Let's go back to that waiting list. Clinics in the province, in Edmonton and Calgary, that are doing procedures such as hernias have waiting lists, and they're not diminishing. We've already stated a million times in this Legislature that a lot of those procedures that are being done currently in those private clinics have not – not, I repeat – reduced any waiting lists. So I'm wondering what the hon. member was driving at there. I can't see how private surgical clinics, hospitals, whatever you want to call them, are going to reduce the waiting lists. What we have Mr. Dinning telling us today in Calgary is that they have money, that they're going to be able to reduce the waiting lists.

Maybe it's a management problem. I don't know. [interjection] There are no beds in Calgary because they blew them up. That's why there are no hospital beds in Calgary. I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, we've made intercessions before.

Certainly one of the rules is that you don't speak when you're not in your own place, and only one member speaks at a time. So we ask hon. members not to engage one another in a dialogue when an hon. member is actually speaking. That goes two ways.

Sorry to interrupt you, hon. member, but I didn't want this to encourage others to do the same.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. Sometimes I take guidance from my colleagues, and I apologize. I should have been paying attention to you. Sometimes their guidance is really wise.

Debate Continued

MS OLSEN: Mr. Chairman, I want to go on and highlight another point, and that is where the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross speaks. I'll quote from *Hansard* again, page 1041. I don't know why I look up to the *Hansard* people. She says:

What I'm going to say too – and to the people in the gallery as well – is that patients that go home too early are the patients that get into trouble, and that is why it is so necessary to have this bill be over a 12-hour stay.

Well, okay. Yes, she's right. Patients that go home too early are patients that may be at risk. However, they go home early. They get readmitted, and that's another cost on the system. But that's not a reason for this bill. That's not a reason to give private clinics stays over 12 hours. Again, I'm looking for some good deductive logic here, and the dots aren't connecting.

MR. DICKSON: We're all looking for it.

MS OLSEN: Yes, we are.

So I would challenge that member that if patients are sent home too early, then the operation should not have been done in that particular facility. You know, the comments that the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross made indicate to me that current facilities are not being properly monitored if patients are being sent home too early. Or is it that these patients go into clinics that are under 12 hours and they just want to make so much money that they're just putting them in and throwing them out the other side? All of a sudden we have people who need to be readmitted to the RA or the University hospital with some serious problems. So again I'm looking for some logic that is going to make sense, because that just doesn't.

The hon. member also said:

I am absolutely amazed, when I read this list, that people would look at it and say: I can go in for my surgery and have a general anesthetic in the OR at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and because that clinic is open for 12 hours, I can have that surgery at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and can be in the OR for two to four hours.

Then she talks about, "They may have complications." Well, if they have complications, then their surgery shouldn't have been done there. If they have complications, then maybe there's not a good management use of the surgical facility they're in and they should go to a hospital. That's what would make sense to me, Mr. Chairman. I'm still waiting, and I'm hoping that one day we'll be able to connect the dots, but we can't right now.

I spoke a little bit about some of the issues that other provinces have talked about, and we know that other provinces don't have overnight stays, so we know that when the Premier and the truth squad and all the other players in this puzzle here tell us that this is just a little bit different than the other pieces of legislation in other provinces, that is untrue. That is absolutely untrue. Okay? The other provinces do not allow – and I will repeat for the members in this Chamber: do not allow – overnight stays in a private, for-profit facility. So that's a big difference, if you ask me. You know, for the

life of me, I wonder why this connection continues to be made when it's very clear.

Again we have a letter from the federal Health minister, and he very clearly states the position of the other provinces. A lot of people have done a lot of work. All these folks in the galleries have done a tremendous amount of work to try and educate this Conservative caucus over here, but they're not getting it. They're not getting it. So, Mr. Chairman, we're going to keep going, and we're just going to try and try to help them out.

I think it's absolutely necessary that we educate people. I think it's very important to have an education process in place where everybody gets a little bit more information. You see, just saying: oh, you're telling me that, Mr. Health Minister; I'm going to take you at face value – a couple of members in this Assembly did that. They didn't believe the bill allowed for overnight stays. In fact, they went out and gave out bad information to their constituents based on that good faith they had. So you can't always just believe what you hear. You sometimes need to go out and check all other sources of information, and with that, Mr. Chairman, we have better informed legislators.

I in fact know that my colleagues have done that. We've got pounds and pounds and pounds of information in our offices, and there's not a whole lot of it that's similar. We all took on a different responsibility to attempt to keep ourselves informed, look at what's going on around the world, look at what's going on in the U.S., look at what's is going on everywhere else. Quite frankly, that has been part of the strength that we have. We've actually opened a book. We've actually done so much work that I couldn't file all the information I have on this. But I do know one thing. I do know where this bill is going. I do know where this amendment is going, and I don't like where it's going. I'm having difficulty supporting any notion and of course I'm not supporting any notion that this is the best direction for Albertans.

9:00

If I can just grab one of the books that I've read, Mr. Chairman, on this issue, one of the things that I did learn about the American system – and this is a quote from John C. Goodman on health insurance out of *The Fortune Encyclopedia of Economics*. It's a great text for people to read. You don't have to believe everything in it, but you certainly need to read it. What Mr. Goodman says in his quote is:

In the thirties and forties a competitive market for health insurance developed in many places in the United States. Typically, premiums tended to reflect risks, and insurers aggressively monitored claims to keep costs down and prevent abuses.

Do we think that for one minute that if this bill is passed, if this government gets that opportunity, we're not going to have an explosion of health insurance? We're going to have more American companies come up here. They're all going to be going out there, and they're going to be going to all of these folks here and all those folks out there, and they're going to be saying: Hey, we've got a good deal for you.

Point of Order Referring to the Galleries

MR. JACQUES: Point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti rising on a point of order.

MR. JACQUES: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to reflect back on your earlier admonishment this evening with regard to reference in debate particularly to the gallery and to others who

may be observing and in particular to the ruling and to the advice that was given this afternoon by the Speaker on this subject. I believe that all members in the Legislative Assembly at the time took this to heart and are attempting to follow it, but I do notice there is consistent reference by the member, and I would ask that you uphold your original concern in this area as well as the concern that was expressed by the Speaker this afternoon.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: On the alleged point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: Yes. I heard no citation, but let's be absolutely clear. What the Speaker admonished all members not to do was to solicit reaction from members in the gallery, to involve members in either the public gallery or members' gallery in what's going on down here. Never was there ever a suggestion that a member cannot refer to the fact that we have Albertans in the gallery. That would be as foolish as saying that we can't talk about Albertans who are outside the building or Albertans who are in your constituency in northern Alberta, in Grande Prairie. I mean, those people exist.

I'm sorry if I was speaking too loudly, Mr. Chairman, but my concern was simply this. We do not operate in a vacuum. We're not here representing numerals. We're not here representing some abstract quantity. We're here representing the 3 million people in the province.

There's absolutely nothing offensive – and I'm astonished that the Member from Grande Prairie-Wapiti would take issue with it – for any member in this Assembly to simply acknowledge that there are people that have concerns. That was not a solicitation. It was not an invitation. It was not some means of invoking any other reaction. I think the thin skin that we've seen evident around the debate on Bill 11 keeps on getting thinner and thinner.

Let's be real focused here and allow members the kind of liberty and the kind of latitude that all members are entitled to as part of their freedom of expression in this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members will reflect back, as the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti has, on the Speaker's direction about calling upon the gallery and making a visual reference to them by waving one's hand, et cetera, in the spirit of debate. This is a contentious debate. We did have some examples of people speaking to the gallery in the past couple of days that was probably less than parliamentary, and that's what the Speaker was speaking about today.

I was trying to pay attention, but a number of individuals felt it important that they convey their thoughts to me at the time that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood was speaking. I wondered whether or not she was beginning to tread on the admonition that was given this afternoon. In that sense, the point is well taken, although I didn't hear a breach, nor see it, but just so we all take that caution either in praise of or in condemnation of.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, with those strictures in mind.

Debate Continued

MS OLSEN: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, if you could just advise me of how much time I have left here.

THE CHAIRMAN: About two.

MS OLSEN: Thank you.

I was speaking about the 12-hour stay in relation to health insurance, and there is a correlation because health insurance could be offered for surgical facilities, well, maybe we could have health insurance that reflects a 15-hour stay or an 11-hour stay or a 24-hour stay. The reality is that the longer you are in a hospital, the next time you go to get a premium, it's going to cost you a lot more.

I just want to address that. This is out of *The Arizona Republic*.

Health Plans Fight Hard for Business

Health insurers fought hard last year to grab a bigger share of the managed-care market, snatching up contracts with big employers and shedding money-losing operations.

The health plans that came out on top were those that could bargain a price, volume, good medical results and geographic convenience.

Mr. Chairman, that speaks a lot to this whole bill.

There are inequities for sure. The whole issue of 12-hour stays is an issue. And trust me, it will be an issue with health insurers. We already know that Liberty Mutual, I believe it is, are offering to insure people for the gap that now exists between Alberta health insurance and what used to be covered and is no longer covered.

So as we go through this process and we look forward to deinsuring more things, then we're going to have all of these insurance companies come out and market great insurance plans to Albertans, and I have a little difficulty with that. We have Alberta health care. We have a good health care system. We need to look at the management of it. We don't need to go down this path. We don't need to go over a 12-hour stay in these clinics that exist right now. We do not need private health care, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, as is sometimes the case in committee, debate becomes quite wide ranging, and I hope you will allow me some latitude in my remarks this evening.

The previous speaker, correctly I think, referenced Saskatchewan being somewhat the origin of our current health care system vis-a-vis the Canada Health Act in terms of the leadership of Mr. Douglas and others, but this province of Alberta has been, I think, a leader in developing programs, developing protection for its citizens. [disturbance in the galleries]

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and other hon. members. Again, hopefully those people who remain in the galleries are there for a good purpose, to hear the debate and not to disrupt it as we've had several instances of. With that idea, then, I wonder if we could have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness continue without interruption.

9:10

Debate Continued

MR. JONSON: The point that I want to make, Mr. Chairman, is that in Alberta I think we've had leadership for a long time that has been demonstrated in terms of being innovative, wanting as a province through our health authorities and through the government to provide for the health care needs of Albertans on an equitable basis.

If we go back to the 1950s, Mr. Chairman, one of the very first programs or initiatives that took place anywhere in Canada in terms of providing a base of support for its citizenry was exhibited in the area of Lamont. The people in the municipal government area of that time decided that in their limited scope of operation at that

particular time, they would levy I think it was a \$10 or \$20 levy against each quarter section of land so that there would be a pool of money which would support the local hospital, which was very highly regarded at that time and on into the years following. People wanting to access hospital services would have the ability to go there without charge. They would be covered within that limited area of the province.

Then later on, Mr. Chairman, in the history of Alberta – and probably one of the reasons that we're not identified as much with the Canada Health Act and its inception and later on with the commission that took place and so forth is that we developed an affordable insurance program which was a combination of something called MSI and Blue Cross. There were also provisions within that overall scheme for those people that were totally without income and resources to be able to use the health care system on a reasonable and equitable basis. So Alberta has not in many areas of providing services to its citizens been in any way behind or reluctant to provide the needed basic services to its citizens.

When the Canada Health Act came into existence, there was debate, as there was in all provinces across this country, in terms of what their obligations were going to be: was the federal government going to treat us fairly in terms of the way the legislation would be outlined and how it would be funded and supported at the federal level vis-a-vis the provincial level? But Alberta is a full participant in the Canada Health Act in the overall approach to health care being provided for people in this country. The legislation that is before the Assembly certainly states very, very clearly our adherence to the principles of the Canada Health Act, and those things which flow from it.

The second point I would like to make, Mr. Chairman, is that there have been also in these wide-ranging remarks on the subamendment to the amendment that we are currently debating this evening to the federal government, and I think that's probably quite relevant. I would like to just point something out, though. We have had correspondence back and forth between myself and the Hon. Allan Rock, Minister of Health for the dominion of Canada, and also there's been correspondence going back and forth between our respective first ministers.

The point that I would just like to make is that the Hon. Allan Rock has written to me and indicated:

It is my intention to ensure that medically necessary services are provided on uniform terms and conditions. The principles of the Canada Health Act are supple enough to accommodate the evolution of medical science and health care delivery. This evolution must not lead, however, to a two-tier system for health care.

And we agree, and we're very careful in this legislation to make sure that is the case.

However, he also says in his letter, "In summary, the position of the federal government has not changed since the introduction of the federal policy on private clinics in 1995." Mr. Chairman, I would like to go back to 1995, when Ms Marleau was the Minister of Health for the federal government. She indicates in her letter – and I quote from it. This is public knowledge. I think it has been tabled in the Assembly already. I'm quoting from her letter. She's talking about equitable access to health care services, which we certainly agree with. She says:

I want to make it clear that my intent is not to preclude the use of clinics to provide medically necessary services. I realize that in many situations they are a cost effective way to deliver services, often in a technologically advanced manner. However, it is my intention to ensure that medically necessary services are provided on uniform terms and conditions, wherever they are offered. The principles of the Canada Health Act are supple enough to accommodate the evolution of medical science and of health care delivery.

This evolution must not lead, however, to a two-tier system of health care.

This government completely agrees with that. So that is a bit of background.

Let's get to the amendment which is before the Assembly. If we could just possibly, Mr. Chairman, get back to the actual amendment. The government has brought in an amendment to a section of the legislation which makes it clear that in terms of a judgment being made as to what should be offered in a surgical clinic and for what period of time, that is a judgment that should be made by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. That is what our original legislation said, and I think that is a very, very sound approach to this matter.

The amendment, which has been debated for a record period of time, Mr. Chairman, is simply to acknowledge that as part of our overall health care system in this province right now, it is a fact that dentists do surgery. We want to make sure that dentistry and dentists are included in this particular process and that there is reference to them, that we recognize that they do surgery in clinics, and it sets up a regulatory framework for the supervision of the dentists' surgery as well as for that which deals with physicians. That's what the amendment is about.

It would be, I think, helpful if we could get on with focusing on the actual amendment, deciding whether or not we should have dentists under standards, under regulations, or not. We on this side of the House certainly believe that should be the case. We feel the amendment as proposed should be passed. It was part of the representation that was made to us as we listened to Albertans on all aspects of the bill, and there are some very substantive ones in our other amendments as well.

I would suggest, Mr. Chairman, to all members of the Assembly that we just possibly deal with the amendment – I think it's a meritorious amendment – and get on with what I think is a very sound piece of legislation, which, yes, needs some amendment and improvement. We have responded to Albertans. They've indicated to us that those changes which are in our overall amendment package are needed and get into place what I think is a very important piece of legislation.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I was interested in the minister of health's intervention and the issues he raised. I think it's important, and the reason why we have proposed this subamendment is . . .

MR. JONSON: A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Reflections on a Member

MR. JONSON: Just very, very diplomatically. I would just like to indicate that I thought the Liberal opposition recognized that the people on this side of the House, including the Minister of Health and Wellness, had the ability to engage in debate. I did not think it was a negative matter.

9:20

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, my responsibility is to respond to legitimate points of order. As hard as I listened – and maybe it's later than I thought or I'm more tired at the end of the week than I

thought – I don't have a clue what the Minister of Health and Wellness was saying. Can I make a proposal? After the Leader of the Opposition is finished, maybe the Minister of Health and Wellness would like to get up and spend his full 20 minutes developing that thought so it's comprehensible not only to me but to all members of the Assembly.

Thanks very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader on the point of order.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Chairman, I wouldn't have risen on the point of order. I thought the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness made his point perfectly clear, but because we've had this rather flippant response, I think it does bear saying that we have been in debate on the amendment and the subamendment for in excess of 13 hours. We have listened and relistened and sometimes relistened to points being repeated, and then when members from this side get up in the House, they are met with chastisement and obnoxious comments from the other side. That was the point the hon. minister was making, and he made it very quickly and very diplomatically and didn't need the type of response that he got.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has some additional thoughts on this point of order.

MS CARLSON: I do, Mr. Chairman. We speak about irreverence in this House. If a member is going to stand on a point of order, at least they could do the proper thing and bring forward a citation before they rant when a member on our side barely has a chance to make her opening comments.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister.

MRS. NELSON: Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. I apologize.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no. I wasn't recognizing you. I was just hoping that . . .

MRS. NELSON: I thought you were, with my laughing at the hon. member.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

The chair must confess that he missed what struck the chord of the Minister of Health and Wellness, and if that's inattention on my part, then I apologize that I missed it. I assure the hon. minister that I will henceforth listen very carefully to the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition as she continues her thoughts this evening.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Start over.

MRS. MacBETH: I will start over.

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I was rising because I wanted to pick up on some of the comments which the minister of health made. I thought it was important to put into context the reason we in the Official Opposition are proposing this subamendment. Really, if we look at the bill and look at part 1, Protection of Publicly Funded Health Care, and go to section 1, "No person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta," that's a pretty clear statement. You know, I think most Albertans would have picked up this bill with, as I keep saying, this dear little boy on the front of it and

thought: well, that's a good sentence. I think it is important to put our subamendment in context, and that's what I'm going to attempt to do tonight.

If we say, "No person shall operate a private hospital," I think it's very important to then go to the definition section of what a private hospital means. If we go to that section on page 17, section 29(m), we will see the whole definition of what a private hospital is. It says that it's "an acute care facility." This is one of the issues which the government members may not have heard in terms of the work they have done to listen to the input on the bill, but I think it's a really important one to highlight. If we then look at the definition of a private hospital, which is allegedly prohibited under this act, we see that there are five criteria which need to be met. For a private hospital, that's an acute care facility it has to deliver "emergency, diagnostic, surgical and medical [facilities]" and admit patients for . . . 12 hours." So there are five criteria that have to be met.

The question becomes – and most people who have read the bill understand – when you then look at that definition, let's say that only four of those criteria are met; for example, let's say diagnostic, surgical, and medical, but no emergency services are delivered in an acute care facility, and it "admits patients for medically supervised stays exceeding 12 hours." Basically what you have there is a hospital, leaving aside whether it's private or public for the moment, which is delivering everything except emergency services for a period exceeding 12 hours. So that by the definition under this act would not be a private hospital. Yet I think most Albertans would say: "Wait a minute. Of course that's a hospital. It's delivering all those services." But under this act it would not be prohibited.

That in a nutshell is why people have concern about a bill that says, in the context of our subamendment, when we look at it, that part 1 bans private hospitals. It only bans the private hospitals as defined by this act, and if the criteria are not those that meet the definition, then that thing can go ahead. It's not banned by this bill, and a person will be able to operate it if we read the legislation as it's written. I think it's a very important context upon which to look at this bill.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Then becomes the question, as we move to the subamendment, of the whole issue of overnight stay. People will often say: "Why is overnight stay such a big deal?" Why has the opposition made it its first amendment of many that will come, and why is it so significant? Well, there's a reason why overnight stays are as significant as they are. The best example I can give is that if we find our daughter or son comes home and has a crooked arm and we think, "Oops, we've got a broken bone here," you go to the hospital or emergency, and they look at the arm and they say: "Yup, take an x-ray. Yup, it's broken." So that young person then goes in, gets the arm set, gets the cast put on, maybe gets a fibreglass cast, maybe not – that's not what we're talking about here – but gets the cast, walks into the casting room, walks out. Their stay at the emergency maybe, if they're lucky, will have been about, say, three to four hours. It's done. They're in; they're out. That's part of the delivery of the service. That's what's known as an outpatient service.

But what happens if a child, for example, wakes up in the middle of the night wheezing terribly, has asthma perhaps or at least early asthma? You go to the hospital, the same emergency department. You walk in, and you perhaps expect to get emergency care. But just a second. The attending physician comes in and takes a look at the child and says: "You know what? I'm not comfortable with this. I'm going to admit this child to the hospital." At that point the child is no longer an outpatient service, no longer an emergency service. The child is then admitted to the hospital. That's the difference

between overnight stays, admitted to hospital, and an outpatient service. At least that's the way I think of it in my mind, and perhaps it can clarify some of the reasons why it is such a significant thing.

Now, the minister of health referred to the record of Alberta when it comes to health care, and he's absolutely right that before medicare there were MSI and Blue Cross insurance schemes in place that covered most Albertans, and it was certainly a precursor to medicare, which began to then come in at different stages from about the mid-60s on. I've told people that my father was a physician and never was able to practise in the medicare system because he passed away before it became operational. I actually remember that sometimes he was paid for physicians' services with things like fresh farm chickens. I mean, I love fresh farm chickens, and they used to come as part of the payment for the medical services if someone couldn't quite afford the dollars. To this day I miss those farm chickens and try to get them at the market or on the farm or wherever I can get them. That's part of the wonderful history of this province, part of the wonderful story that then led to medicare.

I would like to correct the minister's point about Alberta being such a leader in health care, because I think that in fact Alberta has been a leader and has the capacity to be a leader, yet we need to point out that the Canada Health Act, which the government says they are becoming strong proponents of in this bill, in the legislation – I think it's important to recall that Alberta was the last province to come under the umbrella of the Canada Health Act in 1984. Alberta felt that the extra billing – isn't that interesting that it was extra billing that was the key? – that was going on should continue. So let's not rewrite history. Let's accurately reflect the history of this province.

9:30

Mr. Chairman, getting back, then, to the bill, I now want to move on to section 2(1). Of course, this is the section which is the subamendment that we have proposed. The second section says: "No person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta except." Here's where we come to the creation of two tiers of hospitals in this province.

- No person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta except in
- (a) a public hospital [where we're used to having them provided],
 - or
 - (b) an approved surgical facility.

Mr. Chairman, what I believe and what I have heard from Albertans is that, on the one hand, you have the first section of this bill saying that "no person shall operate a private hospital" – we've already talked about what that might mean – and then the second section goes on to set up a framework by which exactly that, a private hospital, can operate. That is what gets people riled. That is what leads people to say that this is deceptive. This is not clear. That's why the issue of trust is before us in this legislation.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont made some comments this evening with respect to the issue of facilities that may have been in place, really, in the late '80s and into the early '90s, facilities that were operating, if you like, almost as an outpatient service. He is very accurate in saying that those facilities were operating. He tried to make the connection, I think, that it was during the time I was the minister of health that these facilities began. That's inaccurate. In fact, there had been some in place in Alberta from about the mid-80s and on in various kinds of degrees.

One of the reasons why the facility fee issue was not one the federal government penalized Alberta for in that period from '88 to '92 was because we were working very hard as a province when I was the minister of health to come to grips with this whole issue of the independent facilities. The federal government was well aware of what was going on, was well aware of the issues that were being addressed, and I think it's important to talk about the ambulatory

care services policy paper which was around at the time. The reason this is so important to this discussion is that the ambulatory care services paper was a very important part of getting a framework, a handle, a legislative control over these stand-alone facilities.

I think it's important to talk about what ambulatory care means. The definition in the policy statement that we came up with was: ambulatory care is defined as "the mode of service provision that requires the patient to ambulate," that is walk, "to the location of the provider," that is wherever the service is being provided, "and leave on the same day after receiving care." In the example I gave, it's the child going to the emergency clinic and getting the cast and leaving. That was the framework of this paper. This paper that we were trying to put in place, or at least beginning the discussion to put the legislative framework in place back in the early '90s, was simply for outpatient, non overnight stay services.

So when the government says that it's no big deal to just take this next wee little step, as the Premier is fond of saying, to move beyond these surgical centres that deliver day services into overnight services, in fact it's a huge step. It is a massive step, and it is a step that none of the other provinces have taken. Despite the attempts by this government to try and talk about what the other provinces are doing, none of them are sanctioning overnight stays and all that implies.

Mr. Chairman, I think there's another important part of this ambulatory care services. I kind of like talking about this paper because I think it actually laid out a framework, and had it been approved by the government of the day, we wouldn't be in this mess right now that Alberta is in. The Premier said and in fact repeated today at his news conference: you know, we have to get some kind of framework around these surgical centres because Alberta's behind the eight ball. He's absolutely right, but I guess it begs the question of what he's been doing for eight years. What has been going on for eight years?

So let's look at the process. The minister mentioned the whole issue of the subamendment, which is this whole issue of overnight stays, and said that it was important to look at the overnight stays in the context of the information he had received from Albertans. Well, the consultation process that led to this is puzzling to everybody. It's puzzling because the question becomes: who is supporting this legislation? The physicians don't like it. The nurses don't like it. The Roman Catholic health association doesn't like it. The Dental Association obviously didn't like it, because there's now a new amendment to involve them. The Calgary Medical Staff Association, the Edmonton Medical Staff Association, and all those people out there tonight quietly lighting and holding their candles are saying: we do not like this legislation. So the question becomes: how can the minister stand and say that he's consulted in order to come to this provision under this particular subamendment? It's beyond me.

The one group the Premier could name today that was supportive of this legislation was the regional health authorities. There you go. The people appointed by the Premier. I wonder why they might be saying they're supportive of this.

I think the process that's involved is extremely important. Let's look at the process that led to a paper like this. It isn't just something that lands on someone's desk out of some free thought by a couple of people in the public service. No, Mr. Chairman. It's a process that was first of all chaired under the utilization committee of Alberta Health back in the late '80s by a physician by the name of Dr. Moe Watanabe from Calgary, a fabulously committed Canadian to the Canadian health care system who led the utilization committee, whose recommendations then formed the basis for this paper. These were the issues that needed to be identified, and here was this very fine person. So there was a step-by-step-by-step process to lead to this.

Mr. Chairman, that process is extremely important. That process is what then allows pieces of legislation or policy papers to go out and be discussed without this question of why. Why do you need it, and who supports it? I mean, why wouldn't that be just checked off right off the top, right before anything else is done? But it hasn't been done. So that's why Albertans are concerned, and that's why we're spending the time on this vitally important amendment, which is one of several we will be bringing forward, but certainly overnight stays is a big one, a huge one, and one that we think is very, very important.

9:40

Now, I just have a couple of other points I would like to make, Mr. Chairman. I think it's important to just say that this section . . . I found my thought. It must be too many late nights. This particular section:

- 1 No person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta.
- 2(1) No person shall provide surgical services . . . except in [one of two tiers]
 - (a) a public hospital, or
 - (b) an approved surgical facility,

and then simply for purposes of context – I'm not diverting from the subamendment:

- (2) No person shall provide a major surgical service, as described in the by-laws.

In those three points, Mr. Chairman, lies the essence of this bill, the essence of it, because let's look at the issues of minor and major, which is clearly . . .

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Are you rising on a point of order, hon. member? The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Mr. Chairman, under *Beauchesne* 333, I wonder if the hon. member would entertain a question.

MRS. MacBETH: No. No, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: You may proceed.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, the point I wanted to make in terms of the context is that in these three sections this whole issue of minor and major is a very big one. I've been here each night to listen to the remarks by the members, and several have talked about this whole issue of the advancement of technology.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

You know, the advancement of technology has been going on since the practice of medicine began however many hundred years ago, and the advancement of technology is a very tricky thing when it comes to the safety of patients. I know that my learned colleague from Edmonton-Riverview is far more informed on the issues of patient and clinical care than I, but I suspect she will corroborate the whole notion that safety in terms of medical procedures is not just about the amount of time it takes to deliver a service that's been advanced technologically. Sometimes something that takes very little time – for example, a gall bladder operation may be relatively simple from the point of view of being three minor incisions, but don't ever mistake that that is major surgery. That's a major

operation on an individual. [interjection] Sorry, Mr. Chairman. You're saying something to me, and I don't know what it is.

Chairman's Ruling Speaking Time

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. I'm trying to indicate that the 20 minutes are up.

AN HON. MEMBER: Mr. Chairman, point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. Right. I know it has been drawn to our attention that the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier are allowed 90 minutes' speaking time, but 62(1) deals with committees.

The Standing Orders of the Assembly shall be observed in the committees of the Assembly so far as may be applicable, except that

- (a) a member may speak more than once, and
- (b) in committees of the whole Assembly no member may speak for more than 20 minutes at one time.

There's no exception that I understand here.

The fact is, though, hon. member, that if you want to speak for another 20 minutes, as soon as someone else has spoken, you're quite free to speak again. It's no reflection on you as a person. It's just that that's the rule.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Chairman, I will thank you for your ruling. I will look forward to that opportunity.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Debate Continued

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to participate in this debate and voice my support for Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act. It's clear throughout the province that health care is an important issue to Albertans, and I'm proud to stand today and say that the government is doing something about it.

Mr. Chairman, before I go on about the subamendment, I want to make some comments that the Leader of the Official Opposition made in reference to a definition on page 3 of the bill in describing what public hospitals are, and she then went on to describe what her thoughts on surgical facilities are. She neglected to go back to page 17, where in the bill they describe what a public hospital is, and I'll read it:

"public hospital" means

- (i) a hospital that is established by or under, or the establishment or operation of which is governed by, the Hospitals Act, the Regional Health Authorities Act, the Cancer Programs Act or the Workers' Compensation Act, or
- (ii) a hospital that is established by the Government of Alberta or the Government of Canada.

Then farther down it gives a definition of a surgical facility, which "means a facility whose primary function is to provide a limited range of surgical services," and that's the key, Mr. Chairman. The description in this bill makes a definite difference, because it's a limited range of surgical services that can be provided by a clinic. The Leader of the Official Opposition made it sound like a surgical facility could do a wide range of services, but it's prohibited in this act by the definition.

Mr. Chairman, I have some points that need to be addressed in regards to the subamendment. This subamendment would undermine the whole purpose of this legislation. The reason the government has brought this legislation about in the first place is because currently Alberta has no legal authority or regulation governing

surgical services being performed that require overnight stays. Currently our government has no method of controlling or regulating private health entities that perform overnight surgeries in this province. This is a serious gap in the law. Without legislation there's a real possibility of a two-tier system developing. Bill 11 gives the government the authority to protect the publicly funded health system by prohibiting, restricting, or controlling private surgical clinics.

Mr. Chairman, I want to remind this Assembly that this legislation was brought about at the request of the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons. I'd like to remind members across the way that not only has the College of Physicians and Surgeons agreed upon the need for such legislation; so has the federal government.

Mr. Chairman, this subamendment would leave us with the same problem that . . .

MS OLSEN: Why don't you just table that information so you can substantiate that?

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, by and large during the course of the evening we've been able to get by without additional help to the speaker, and I wonder if we could continue to allow speakers to go unaided and unabated.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I was saying, this subamendment would leave us with the same problem that brought about Bill 11 in the first place. It would have no legislation to govern overnight stays. Any private clinic that performs surgery that requires overnight stays needs to be regulated. They need to be monitored to ensure that they do not contravene the Canada Health Act, so they do not create the ability to queue-jump, and so we can shut them down should they become a second-tier health provider.

Mr. Chairman, we are at the crossroads of how health care can be provided in this province. Every day new medical advances are occurring that make it safer to provide surgeries. Bill 11 allows us the ability to adjust to the new realities. It allows us to supplement our current health care system with private overnight clinics that can provide these services safely and only if it benefits the current public system.

9:50

Mr. Chairman, as we face the challenge of a growing and an aging population and changing health care needs, we need legislation that will adapt to the needs of Albertans. The consensus is that it would be irresponsible for this government to sit back and do nothing while the current state of our health care system needs to be addressed. The status quo is clearly not the option.

Right across this country, in every province, we have problems with health care. Presently in this province we're spending 33 cents for every dollar we spend on government programs. Mr. Chairman, that's 33 percent or one-third of all our budget that is spent on health care. Inaction would send the message to Albertans that the current inefficiencies are okay and should be accepted by Albertans, as the opposition would have us do.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 11 is only part of the solution that will ensure that Albertans receive the medical care they deserve. The Alberta government is firmly committed to protecting and improving Alberta's publicly funded health system, as it's committed to preserving the principles of the Canada Health Act.

Mr. Chairman, when considering the health of Albertans, we need action. We need to be aggressive to ensure our system provides the best for Albertans. Our government will always be committed to a

quality, publicly funded health system that is accessible to all Albertans. That is what Albertans want, and that's what Albertans deserve.

Bill 11 will allow RHAs to contract out some minor surgeries requiring overnight stays. This subamendment would remove this possibility and maintain the status quo, with long waiting lists and inefficiencies. I do not believe that the way Albertans receive health care will change much with this legislation, but faster quality service will result, and the system will be prepared to adapt to future needs and developments. As elected representatives, we must provide solutions. We must support Bill 11 and reject subamendment SA1.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Patience and patient waiting helps, doesn't it?

Mr. Chairman, with your permission I would like to speak to the subamendment before the House. I heard the Minister of Health, when he was speaking a while ago, saying that we have spent so many hours on this, and of course so did the Minister of Justice and Government House Leader sort of complain about the fact that so much time has been spent on this particular amendment. This amendment speaks to the most important section of Bill 11.

Bill 11 and the government amendments proposed to change the original version have now been available to Albertans, professional bodies, and nonprofit health delivery organizations, and they have been, of course, also listening to or watching the debate in the House on this particular subamendment. Some of these bodies have come to the conclusion that in spite of all the government amendments proposed, the bill "is premature and . . . it is imperative that it be set aside until the broader dialogue around sustainability and the common good has occurred." These are words that I take from the Catholic Health Association of Alberta & Affiliates' news release dated April 18.

If we were paying heed to the advice we are getting from these responsible public bodies, nonprofit health delivery organizations, we would be seriously considering the withdrawal of the bill on that side of the House, on the government side, but that has not happened as yet. I continue to hope that good sense will prevail and the government will in fact heed this advice and withdraw the bill, but until that happens, we must take very seriously the debate on amendments to the bill.

While I'm making reference to these either learned professional bodies or nonprofit delivery organizations giving this advice, I would also make reference to another letter, dated April 13, issued by the College of Family Physicians of Canada, Alberta Chapter. This is an important letter, Mr. Chairman; it does get to the heart of the subamendment and the issues associated with it. So with your permission I would like to read a few sections of the letter in order for me to get to the subamendment itself, because the letter does speak to the subamendment and what it proposes to do.

Just to give you background, the Alberta chapter of the College of Family Physicians of Canada is a provincial organization composed of more than 1,500 voluntary members. This organization focuses on the quality of family practice and on the role of family physicians within the health system of Alberta. The college strives to provide an environment for family physicians who offer the best possible care for patients. Among its many endeavours, the college supports and facilitates postgraduate training, continuing medical education, and primary care research. The activities of the college are guided by the four principles of family medicine, and the family physician follows the following four principles. He or she has a

patient/physician relationship based on trust, has comprehensive clinical skills, is community based, and is a resource to a defined practice.

I move on to the key and important observations made here by Dr. Connie Ellis, the president of this association, in her letter of April 13 addressed to the Premier. Dr. Ellis goes on:

While we must be concerned participants in the debate, it is not the role of our College to lead the discussions about the funding implications of Bill 11, or whether or not this Bill infringes upon the principles of the Canada Health Act. However, as a standard setting body involved in ensuring the highest quality of care in the relationship between family doctors and their patients, we do have a responsibility to challenge the introduction of any model that could threaten the integrity of our publicly funded health system.

The model they refer to being introduced is by way of this new surgical facility in Bill 11. Dr. Ellis then suggests:

We do question therefore, the validity and veracity of the research evidence that purports to support the underlying thesis of Bill 11, namely that the growth of private surgical facilities will reduce waiting lists, and that the services provided by these private facilities will be based on high standards, best practices and effective patient outcomes.

This challenge presented by Dr. Ellis on behalf of 1,500 family physicians in the province is an extremely important and serious challenge presented to the section of the bill that amendment A1, section A proposes to change. Dr. Ellis goes on to say:

The practice of medicine is based, as much as possible, on evidence-based research and the application of the outcomes of this research to foster thoughtful and sound patient care. What evidence-based research has been done to validate the underlying thesis of Bill 11?

10:00

Has the government conducted any studies to determine why the current system cannot manage long waiting lists? For example, it is well known to family physicians in all practice settings – rural, regional and urban – that a key element to expand surgery in any form is the availability of trained, experienced staff, yet almost every jurisdiction in Alberta is experiencing a dire shortage of physicians and nurses. The introduction of new facilities will not address that concern but will compound this serious problem.

The next paragraph in this letter by Dr. Ellis is most important, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Ellis observes that

physicians, by the very nature of their profession in patient care, are required to first consider what is best for the patient: . . . 'first, do no harm.' All decisions in the provision of health care, whether they be in the doctor's office or by the government in the introduction of new health delivery systems . . .

as is being proposed, by the way, in Bill 11,

must bear in mind that the primary responsibility of all parties is to ensure patient well-being. It is not sufficient to introduce change in the delivery of health care simply because the current options are difficult to sustain. [The first, do no harm principle] implores all those who are responsible for the care of patients to utilize the best of the current system until there is clear evidence of improvements available.

In summary, the good doctor says that

the Alberta Chapter of the College of Family Physicians of Canada questions the fundamental premise of any health reform measure that is not based on clear evidence that supports and enhances the best interests of patient well-being.

Mr. Chairman, that is why it is so significant, so important that the subamendment before us should be debated for as long as it takes until the point becomes clear to the minister of health and to the government of Alberta that this bill is premature, it does not put the best interests of the patient up front, and therefore it's not worthy of

further consideration by this Assembly and should be withdrawn.

Mr. Chairman, a few other important observations that I would like to put on record. The Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons has restricted private facilities to doing day surgery since the first private surgical suites were accredited in the 1980s. It is only because of constant pressure from private interests like HRG that any consideration is being given to accrediting private facilities for overnight stays. There is nothing artificial about a 12-hour recovery limit, as some have argued. Twelve hours is the very outside of necessary recovery time for a day-surgery procedure. The 12-hour limit already exists in the college bylaw. Putting the 12-hour limit in Bill 11, as the subamendment attempts to do, will bring this very flawed legislation – nevertheless, since it's before us, then we must debate it – into line with what is already the practice of the College of Physician and Surgeons.

Make no mistake, Mr. Chairman. The reason for Bill 11 is to allow private facilities to expand into surgeries with a post-operative recovery time of more than 12 hours. With the 12-hour limit gone, the college will face constant pressure from private facility owners, some of whom are college members, to allow more and more complex surgeries to be performed by the private sector. That is the reason, Mr. Chairman, it is important in this bill to do what subamendment SA1, section A proposes to do, and that is, insert this statement which says that the surgeries will not be done except that it "requires a stay by the patient of under 12 hours," thereby banning any facilities from going on to take patients who need surgeries that require many nights' stay in those places.

Another authoritative professional body with a great deal of credibility, the Alberta Medical Association, after having carefully studied all the amendments proposed by the government, has come back and in its letter of April 18 has restated that the position that it has taken with respect to Bill 11 remains. It has not changed its position. In the view of the Alberta Medical Association, a body of physicians, Bill 11 should be withdrawn; it doesn't serve any useful and helpful purpose.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, I just want to bring some ordinary Albertans into the picture as well. What we are hearing from these professional bodies, from these highly reputable and credible social agencies is echoed in the letters to us in the House, letters by ordinary people, including grade 11 or 12 students. Let me just bring the ordinary grassroots Albertans into the picture here in concluding my observations on this bill.

There's a letter from Wayne Sklarski, a constituent of the Premier. In a letter to the Premier dated April 17, Sklarski asked the Premier:

Honourable [Premier] Klein, Premier of Alberta and MLA for my riding, I would like to voice my opposition to Bill 11, the so called "Health Care Protection Act". I believe that passage of this bill will erode our medical safety net.

As a former U.S. citizen who has fully experienced both systems (i.e., Canadian and American), I can tell you that the U.S. system disenfranchises many people from receiving even the most basic health care; a deplorable state of affairs for the "world's richest nation". In contrast the Canadian system of health care is excellent and available for meeting the needs for all Canadians.

I strongly oppose Bill 11 and feel that it should be withdrawn.

Moreover, I feel an election should be called on this matter.

The point Mr. Sklarski is making here is the point being addressed by the subamendment: to give some assurance to Albertans that if this bill passes with these amendments that are being debated now, it'll perhaps help slow down the slippage toward the two-tier American system. That's why I'm speaking in support of subamendment SA1, section A.

Mr. Chairman, would you indicate how many . . . Three more minutes. All right. Thank you.

I just want to read a letter from a young Albertan, 14 years old. The writer says:

My name is Alise Palk. I am 14 years old, I live in Edson, Alberta. I am in grade 8 and attend Jubilee Junior High School. I have received honors in every subject, every year that I've been in school and like to think that I am a pretty reasonable person.

Then she goes on. I'm just reading some excerpts from it.

10:10

The majority of Albertans are middle class citizens who can barely afford health care as it is now with all the extra billing. With Bill 11, I am positive that things will undoubtedly decline. This morning before I went to school I was listening to the radio. They were talking about the protests that had been going on at the legislature. Mr. Klein then gave his opinion of the ordeal. It was something like, we are free to protest, disagree, and have our own opinions, but he is also free to govern just because he was elected, and that's what he will do. To me, a 14 year old, it sounded like he was saying that we can do anything and everything in our power to try and get him to see that we do not want Bill 11! But our efforts will be ignored because he is almighty, all powerful so he can't be bothered by what his people think. Oh I probably shouldn't say his people, it might lead him to think that he owns us!

Pretty telling words, Mr. Chairman, from a 14 year old living in Edson, a grade 8 student.

With all due respect, [she continues] if certain people (meaning you) . . .

Here this letter is now addressed to all of us. I've received it as part of everyone else receiving it.

. . . do not open your eyes and stand up for Albertans, I doubt you'll be in a position to do so for very long. I am sure that deep down you are all good people, so please do not make the mistake of letting Bill 11 pass. By the way, this letter was not influenced by the opinions of anyone but me, and I took time out of my life to share my opinions with you so I would appreciate it if you would share yours with me.

That's a moving statement by a 14 year old, a young student who is going to spend most of her life in the next century. Mr. Chairman, I say, let's pay attention to it; let's look at the amendment before us seriously and support it.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real pleasure tonight to join in this debate on the subamendment that's put forward by the members opposite on Bill 11, particularly what appears to be the early stages of committee stage before us.

The subamendment that we're dealing with right now would limit stays in an approved surgical facility to less than 12 hours. What I'd like to do is provide a perspective on this subamendment and what the less-than-12-hour stay would mean as it applies to my rural constituency. In doing so, I'd like to make reference back to the comments the hon. Minister of Learning made in this House last Monday night. I'd like to echo some of those comments as well as some of the comments I've heard from some of my colleagues on this side of the House regarding overnight stays and what constitutes an acceptable stay within an approved surgical facility under Bill 11.

The hon. Minister of Learning is a qualified physician, surgeon, and anaesthetist, and the Minister of Learning quite obviously points out that it is difficult and even improper for us to outright limit the length of stays at facilities. He suggests that it should be up to attending physicians to determine on a case-by-case basis what constitutes an appropriate stay in a facility. Any one of us who has been to a public hospital or even a private clinic can tell you very

clearly about how they feel following the completion of a procedure. They may tell you that they feel sluggish. They may feel tired, fatigued, and perhaps in some minor discomfort. They may also suggest that they need some time to recuperate, possibly to even sleep or relax and to recover from whatever procedure they just went through.

One of the issues related to health care that my constituents constantly bring up to me is that they feel rushed getting out of a hospital following any procedure that they undergo. I know that I share their feelings on this issue, and I assume the members opposite do.

A couple of contrasts when it comes to a city versus a rural setting. I recently heard from someone here in Edmonton who underwent a procedure where she was put under anesthetic that left her groggy and incoherent for quite some time after. Despite this, she was sent home in a cab shortly after the procedure ended while still having some effect from the anesthetic. She commented that she was very surprised to wake up in her own bed later that day, because she didn't remember leaving the hospital to get into the cab.

Now, I'd like to compare that with a lady from Crowsnest Pass who a week ago last Monday was referred by her doctor to a specialist. That specialist had time and a place in a private surgical facility in Calgary to do the procedure that she required. She got in there, and the procedure was done. This lady traveled two hours and forty-five minutes to get to Calgary. She's a senior; she's a feisty lady. She had the procedure and luckily enough nothing went wrong. However, if something had gone wrong, she would probably have to have been put into a hotel or something like that without any care or any attention and probably made her way back home the following day.

No one knows what can or can't happen when you're dealing with folks who are elderly, and a procedure that might seem quite normal can give them some discomfort. So in a case like that, the private surgical facility could have given my constituent some reassurance and some comfort level that she could be looked after.

A two hour and forty-five minute drive down highway 22 to Blairmore could be a very, very uncomfortable situation for my constituents. So that shows you the need for a safe, well-regulated surgical facility that might have the opportunity to have a stay longer than 12 hours.

Mr. Chairman, doctors and nurses should be able to decide on a case-by-case basis, just as I have pointed out tonight, when it is appropriate to send a patient home. However, the deciding factor on when a person leaves a clinic should be when they feel better, not simply when a doctor or nurse is assured that a person isn't going to take a turn for the worse. If it is after just a few hours, fine, but if someone needs a little more time, a little more sleep, they should not be tied to an arbitrary number that is devised by the politicians and particularly, in the case of this subamendment, the members opposite.

I disagree with members opposite when they suggest that any procedure requiring a stay longer than 12 hours constitutes a major surgical procedure. The College of Physicians and Surgeons will make the determination of what procedures are major and can only be done in a public hospital. This is the way it is now, and it is the way it will continue to be under Bill 11.

10:20

I want to encourage all members to reject the Liberal subamendment and support the original amendment presented by the Minister of Health and Wellness, and on behalf of my rural constituents who need that comfort level, Bill 11 will supply that comfort level for them with the amendments that we have brought forward for Bill 11.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to ask the committee if you would agree to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I see in the gallery a good friend of mine, Mrs. Ellen Tarvis. She actually taught me when I was in grade 4. I went to school with one of her sons. She's a very good, well-informed community volunteer who often gives me some very sage advice, which I appreciate. I would ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

Bill 11

Health Care Protection Act

(*continued*)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, it's a privilege to stand and debate the subamendment to the amendments to Bill 11 this evening. I have listened to the majority of comments being made on both sides of the House tonight, and I think that in general they've had everything and nothing to do with the subamendment, which is perhaps fitting, because in a way Bill 11 has everything and nothing to do with the future of our health care system.

Really, the irony of all this is that I find myself sitting here as a health care professional wishing that we could channel the collective wisdom and effort and energies that we're expending in this Chamber this evening and have expended now for several weeks on Bill 11 to developing a collective vision and plan for health care in this province, because truly that is what is needed. That is what the citizens and the electorate that we represent want, I believe, and I believe that is also what the system wants. The problem is that politics, I have come to find, is sometimes more debilitating than facilitating, and there is a huge price that's paid for that, a huge price.

We've heard comments this evening about Alberta being a leader in health care. There is certainly truth to that statement, and there is untruth to that statement. We have been leaders in many areas, including the disabled programs and bringing in programs that at the time in which they were created were more comprehensive for disabled people than existed anywhere else in our nation. We have, however, had a period of time in this province when those same programs were cut and, similarly, a time in this province when our health care system was cut.

The debate – the bill, the amendment, and subamendment SA1 – really has everything and nothing to do with that history, the present or the future. I'm pretty new at this political game, and I've thought about how long the government has been in power in this province. What you come to learn very quickly, Mr. Chairman, is that politics is a lot about, if not completely about, relationships.

In the course of 30 years I am certain that relationships are built that are very strong and loyal and that are trusted tremendously. I've found myself contemplating what I would do if I'd been in politics for a long period of time and the network of relationships that I had built, that I trusted and relied upon, that had supported me through the peaks and valleys of my political career, if those mentors and

supporters told me that the only way to reform the public health care system was to introduce private, for-profit delivery. That's a perplexing contemplation for me.

I certainly value the relationships that I have had both prior to and during my political career, and I rely on the judgment and advice of those people tremendously. I'm sure that the minister of health and the Premier have similar relationships, and it is the input that they receive from those relationships upon which they have introduced Bill 11 and the amendments.

I haven't fully finished exploring that thought, but one of the things I have concluded is that we are here today for reasons that are partially my fault and the health care system's fault and the health professionals' fault. Number one, we haven't built relationships that convey the degree of trust and support and wisdom that those recommending Bill 11 to the government have. We have not come up with an alternative to reforming the public health care system or addressing the expenditure side of the equation. We haven't collectively come up with a plan or a vision for the system as health care professionals, as citizens, as a public interested in maintaining and preserving our public health care system. So I have concluded, Mr. Chairman, that there is an onus and a responsibility that perhaps we can take up that torch, if you will, and do something about it.

Nellie McClung once said, "It is so much easier sometimes to sit down and be resigned than to rise up and be indignant." That was a quotation from *In Times Like These*. Her words ring very clearly. I'm amazed. She is a woman that I've acquired quite a degree of respect for even though I obviously didn't know her and she lived in a political time that was very different but also very similar to the time that we're in now. I think there is a lot of truth to her words and a lot of application.

As I indicated earlier, we focused a lot of energy on debating this bill, debating the amendments and subamendment, the terminology of surgical services and insured services, of physicians and dentists, of 12-hour stays and overnight stays. We've gone, I think the hon. minister said, 13-some hours on the amendment at this stage. Probably much to the government's relief there is going to be a day when we will not be debating the subamendment. I'm sure we will all be quite relieved.

10:30

MR. DICKSON: I'm grieving it already. I'm grieving that moment already.

MRS. SLOAN: There are times when I worry about my hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo, as he says that he will be grieving when that day comes.

We have to find a more comprehensive way to develop that plan and the solutions that are required in health care.

The debate this evening has also talked about the federal government and the provincial ministers and the discussions, correspondence, communications that have been conveyed with respect to Bill 11 and the issues confronting public health care. One of the things that I've concluded – and I may be incorrect, and I will expect that the minister of health will correct me if I'm wrong – is that Bill 11 really wasn't shared or discussed in any draft form before it was introduced in this House with any of the provincial ministers or the federal minister.

I've been in situations where, perhaps, there's not a lot of trust or there's a degree of competition, so that would lead to some things being withheld. I see it, and I think the public sees that kind of politicking. The public sees that as politicking. Really we're talking about a system that to most Canadians there is nothing more sacred or precious. I think we discredit our profession as politicians when

we go about negotiating or planning or legislating things without communicating those plans or legislation to other parties that will be affected by it. I'm doing my best to not be provoking, Mr. Chairman, but in many respects the lack of communication that occurred with the federal and provincial ministers has also existed in the lack of communication with respect to this bill and its intent with the public.

I spoke in my debate some time earlier about the health summit, and even in my career in the health care system, which is encroaching on 22 years this year, we had a variety of consultations about health care. The Rainbow Report being one, the health care roundtables occurring in the early '90s another. The health summit which occurred in 1999 was probably the last one. What I find difficult to understand is that all of those consultations produced reports. I happen to have only the health summit report with me tonight. I believe that in the health summit report, as an example, there were 30-odd recommendations, quite comprehensive and broad recommendations, Mr. Chairman, but as I refreshed my memory and looked through those, the majority of them have not been acted upon.

I think back to the roundtables, which I participated in as a registered nurse, The Rainbow Report, which our nursing association made submissions to, in addition to making submissions on the community health centre model, alternative proposals for the delivery of care. Where are those proposals and plans? Where is the government's action plan, if you will, in undertaking the public's suggestions and recommendations that have been contained in all of the consultations? It doesn't appear to be publicly available, Mr. Chairman.

It is quite extraordinary to be in the position of being in this Chamber at this point in time and seeing the level of interest and activism that Bill 11 has generated. It's not something, I think, that we will see probably for some time again. I thought it was also kind of an interesting contrast on Monday night when the first spontaneous rally happened here inside the Legislature Building on the same night that the Oilers' game was on, the contrast in interests and priorities, I guess, if you will. Don't get me wrong. Our family has a healthy passion for hockey, so it wasn't like I didn't have an eye on both.

I think what this bill has done has really brought people right down to basics. As I said in the beginning, Bill 11 has everything to do with and nothing to do with reforming the health care system. It has everything to do with, even in a more general sense, the system and respect and integrity of our democracy. I certainly will have a lot more contemplations about this whole process of Bill 11 once we're through and it's a piece of history, some of the extraordinary debates and circumstances that we have witnessed as this debate has proceeded. I'm anticipating my time is up.

The whole 12-hour issue and the comments that have been made about doctors and nurses should be able to decide when a patient goes home – you know, I hate to tell you, but the doctors and nurses' ability to be able to determine when patients go home, Mr. Chairman, has already been constrained and restricted because of the funding limitations that exist in our health care system now. [interjections] I kid you not, government members. I kid you not. Physicians are forced to discharge patients because the bed is needed for the next patient. Whether they are medical or surgical, that has been the case. Listen; I am not feeding you a bogus argument here. If you talk to any practising physician in the urban areas for sure, Calgary and Edmonton, their judgment relative to how long a patient should stay in hospital is constrained by the number of functioning beds and the number of cases waiting in the operating room.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. member is saying what she believes. All hon. members are entitled, when it's their turn, to say what they believe, but if we all enter into each other's debate, we'll have babel. That's in a biblical sense. So I wonder if we could continue in the vein that we have for most of the evening, and that is determine what things we're going to say when we have our chance and say them then as opposed to being spontaneous.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to continue.

10:40

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Chairman, if I can characterize the argument, the argument is that physicians should want to have Bill 11 and the accompanying private clinics because then there would be more accessible beds. Well, that argument is not true. Number one, physicians are opposing Bill 11 quite solidly, at least from my reading and my contact with them. [interjections] Let's also acknowledge the fact that . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, we seem to have enlivened one of your own supporters here. Edmonton-Norwood, I wonder if we could try and practise what we were trying to preach on the other side.

MS OLSEN: I apologize, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hopefully, we'll hear you no more until it's your turn to speak.

Sorry, Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: It should be a lightning rod to government, Mr. Chairman, when physicians say that Bill 11 will not solve the waiting list problem. It should be like a bolt of lightning that they acknowledge and respect. The reality is that the physicians know. They've worked in the system for years. They know how it works. Many of them have gone to the States to take their specialties and have chosen to come back here, and they know, as well, how the private/public system mix works. So with due respect to the government members who say that this is going to solve those problems, that just will not be the case.

As I said in my introductory remarks, I think we would get far further on this debate if government members could look beyond Bill 11 and beyond opposition and focus on the development of a plan that will truly sustain the health care system. Bill 11 amended or not will not do that, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to stand this evening and speak on this subamendment before us tonight. I'd like to start by speaking to the fact that this subamendment would put a 12-hour limit on patient stays in approved surgical facilities, and I'd like to mention that it has been implied that this subamendment could clear up the misunderstandings that Albertans have on the difference between a private surgical facility and a hospital, and I believe we can clear that up right here tonight without this subamendment even being necessary.

Hospitals are for emergencies or major surgeries. Surgical facilities are for procedures that are advantageous to the patient but

not urgent or life threatening. Elective surgical facilities are the focus of Bill 11, not a hospital, not something that provides 24 hours a day emergency service.

Mr. Chairman, it's common sense that a hospital is somewhere to go when you're sick and an elective surgical clinic is not. It's where you go when you need a procedure that's not putting your life in imminent danger, and it's something that should be defined, that can be safely done by and defined by the medical professionals that do this. A 12-hour limit on patient stays is not necessary to differentiate between surgical facilities and hospitals.

Mr. Chairman, the contracting out is already happening in Alberta, and it has for many years. All we're talking about here is the addition of overnight stays. We are regulating surgical clinics in a way we never have before, and yes, we are expanding the scope of what they're doing, but we're regulating how they do it. If this means that we can do things cheaper with the same quality or better quality than a public facility, then we should look at doing that.

I'd like to get back to the gist of this subamendment, the 12-hour cutoff. Whether a length of stay is 12 hours, 18 hours, 24 hours, or whatever, should that be decided by legislators in this House or should it be decided by medical professionals, such as the College of Physicians and Surgeons, or, even more importantly, by the medical professionals that have done the surgery and that are attending to your recovery?

The college should decide this safety factor, Mr. Chairman, and the ability of the facility to offer the services safely and in the best interests of the patient. It makes good sense for patients to be able to have nursing observation and stay in that facility for as long as possible. My colleague from Calgary-Cross previously made the statement that patients that go home too early are patients that get into trouble, and this is very true. I know that if I were to one day be a patient in a surgical facility, I'd definitely not want to be evicted before I totally recovered just because of the 12-hour rule.

I have some personal experience in this. I haven't had to undergo this myself, but I just checked with my family member, and it was back in '95 that I had a family member that underwent spinal surgery for a herniated disk at a major hospital in Calgary. The doctor suspected this would be a seven-day stay, depending on how she reacted to the surgery. Monday she went in for the surgery, and after me going down every day, she called me Thursday night and said: "Don't bother coming down Friday, because the doctor's going to see me and I may be able to get out. I'll phone you if I need you to come." Friday morning she called and said: "The doctor was just in. I can't leave, and I'll be here till Monday."

So I made arrangements to come earlier that evening to visit, stay overnight, and visit again on the Saturday. When I got there at 5 o'clock in the evening, she was sitting in the waiting room with a suitcase beside her and had been there since 10 o'clock in the morning. She was told about an hour after the doctor left that because the other patients were discharged, she was the only one left in the ward, and rather than move her, they were going to discharge her. This had nothing to do with the doctor's orders. It was what she was told by the staff.

Mr. Chairman, this had nothing to do with legislation, and it had nothing to do with policy. It had everything to do with a specific attitude of some people that worked in that facility at that time. As a result, after getting her home, there were some complications, and I had to take her back into a rural hospital, where she spent a number of other days.

So I've got some real experience with a specific time limit that would be superimposed on a patient's stay, and I believe it's totally unacceptable to impose such a time limit based on policy or based on a specific time frame. I believe that the medical professionals,

the doctors, are the ones that should decide how long a person stays in care.

Under this subamendment I'm afraid to contemplate what would happen if a patient were to have a complication, and as I stated, these things are not unheard of. I think it's careless to consider that a patient not be allowed to recover past the point of danger in the care of the doctors and nurses that treated her. The people that performed the operation are without a doubt the best people to recover a patient. They know exactly what happened, and they should be there.

Some argue that if a patient's stay is not limited to 12 hours, it could be a major surgery that is performed in surgical clinics. Mr. Chairman, this is simply not true, and section 2 makes this impossible to happen, even as it's amended by the minister of health in the amendment that he introduced, which clarifies it even more so.

To put a 12-hour time limit on procedures is absolutely wrong, and it does nothing to take into account new technologies and procedures that come onstream almost daily. Last week when I got back to my constituency, I contacted my mother-in-law, as all good sons-in-law do, and I asked her for some clarification. She's in her early 80s, and her husband had cataract surgery, which I thought was about 10 or 12 years ago. But after talking to her, she said that it was in 1974, so time does fly. He had one eye done at a time, and he spent four to five days per eye in the Holy Cross hospital, and it was a couple of months between surgeries. So that's just an example of how technology has changed the way we deliver health services in this province.

What was commonly a lengthy stay now can be done in day surgery, but should we limit that day surgery to a specific time frame? I don't believe it's in the patient's best interest to do that. I think every procedure must be looked at individually because we're talking about people and their well-being here. Everyone reacts differently to different procedures. Bill 11, as it is proposed and as the amendments are proposed by the minister of health, allows us to provide individual patients with the care they require.

Mr. Chairman, with that, I'll conclude my remarks by saying that if an overnight stay is warranted, then an overnight stay must be allowed. Thank you.

10:50

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. First let me say that if my children are still listening via the Internet, they should go to bed now. I would also like to thank the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for his comments. I will in a moment take issue with a couple of them, but I appreciate him participating in the debate and letting us know how he feels about the distinction of a 12-hour stay, plus or minus, or what's major and what's minor. It made me think that there is a fundamental flaw, though, in the argument and this whole discussion we're having on the subamendment in terms of what would require more than a 12-hour stay.

See, we have to have a cutoff somewhere. Even the government's legislation talks about the college developing new bylaws that would determine what's major and what's minor. One of the ways that those decisions are made right now is based on how invasive the surgery is, and one of the aftereffects of major surgery is that the body takes longer to recover from the anesthesia, from the incision, from whatever the procedure was. It's been explained to me that, you know, the deeper you go in and the more you cut out, the longer it takes to recover. So you've got some general distinctions between what might be considered major and minor.

Now, current bylaws, current provisions, part of the current

regulatory framework already calls for this 12-hour distinction. In fact, that 12-hour distinction is referenced in Bill 11 itself. Because we need to have some cutoff, because we have to have some demarcation between what's major and minor, we could do what the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills was suggesting the Liberals want to do. I suppose we could. We could have legislators sit and list all of those procedures and then say that everything that's on the list is either in or out. Or we could do what I think is much more reasonable – this is where I will agree with the hon. member – and we could leave that medical decision to medical experts: to the physicians, to the college.

There is no way that the subamendment, if it's passed, will take that away from the profession, because what it says is: no procedure that requires more than a 12-hour stay. But the College of Physicians and Surgeons are still going to be required to determine that list of procedures. We're not going to legislate the list of procedures. So if we're going to legislate that it's going to be major or minor, depending on some bylaws that the college will develop, we could just as soon give them the direction that it was only for day surgery purposes.

Now, there are lots of reasons for that, because as technology progresses, we will be able to see miraculous surgeries take place in a matter of minutes that right now take hours. We will see recovery times that right now might be a matter of days become a matter of hours, and there is nothing in this subamendment that would prohibit Albertans from taking full advantage of that technology. You see, the beauty of this subamendment is that it is giving some assurances to the people of Alberta that if they are going to have to go through major surgery – and we will define major surgery as that surgery which at that point in time requires, according to clinical practice guidelines and the best evidence that we've got in medicine, more than a 12-hour stay – it will be done in a full-service public hospital that has trauma and ICU capability and everything else, not in a freestanding clinic.

So this would give assurances to Albertans that the government means what it says when they say now that Bill 11 is just about building some fences – that's the language I've now heard coming from the government – around the existing clinics, those 52 day surgery clinics, those private clinics now.

Now, I don't believe that Bill 11 is just about building these fences. I think Bill 11 is all about expanding the role of the private sector in the provision of surgical services. I think Bill 11 is all about the creation of private hospitals. The government says that they're not private hospitals; they're approved surgical facilities. But, you know, when they used the Shouldice hospital as an example, I think we see clearly what the government has in mind. They would like to see private hospitals, and they want to see the role of these private hospitals expand from the current day surgery utilization. So if the government is now sort of changing its mind and saying, "No, no, no; what the bill is really about is just building fences around these existing clinics," then so be it.

One of the ways we could make sure that this legislation is just about building a fence around the existing clinics is to put in a limitation in terms of recovery time, because none of these existing clinics do any overnight surgery. All of these existing clinics do day surgery, and as the government themselves have put forward, if there is a complication, if there is an issue that comes up in somebody's treatment that requires them to be admitted to hospital, they will be taken to a hospital. They will be admitted. As the Premier has said himself, if something goes wrong at the Gimbel clinic, they call an ambulance, and the ambulance takes them to a hospital. So this whole sort of bogeyman – that if this amendment becomes law, it would mean that people will get kicked out before they've recovered

– is really nothing more than that. It's a bogeyman. It doesn't make sense. In fact, it contradicts what the Premier has said himself about how private clinics would handle emergencies or a medical crisis.

It just seems to me that while the argument is presented, it doesn't really make a lot of sense in comparison to how the system operates today, so the government needs to make it very clear. Is Bill 11 now just about building fences around private clinics? If this is the case, then we don't really need Bill 11. We could do some other things within the existing regulations or the existing Alberta Hospitals Act. Or is Bill 11 about expansion of the role of private surgical facilities? Now, if it's about the expansion of private surgical facilities, then I can understand why the government would vote against my colleague's subamendment, because my colleague's subamendment really slams the door on the expansion of private facilities.

So if the government wants to support their new contention that this is about building fences, support the subamendment. If the government wants to say, "No; really what we're saying, Albertans, is that we want the private sector to have an expanded role," then I can understand why they would want to defeat that subamendment.

Now, I've been doing some very interesting reading over the last few days about the ability of the private sector to work in public/private partnerships. There has been lots of research done in North America in terms of government contracting out services, some of it done right here in Alberta as a result of government deregulation and delegation and the creation of delegated administrative organizations. Some of it was done in Ontario. Ontario has an extensive history of privatized child care services, with some of it done in the field of corrections, mostly community corrections, and a little bit of it in terms of institutional corrections. Road maintenance, bridge and dam construction and maintenance: there's been a whole host of research when a government privatizes what used to be a public service.

11:00

This research, I think, is very relevant to today's debate; for example, an article that was published by a researcher by the name of Hurl. The article was titled *Privatized Social Service Systems: Lessons from Ontario Children's Services*. This article was published in a journal called *Canadian Public Policy*. He found that

the delegation of governmental authority for decision making and/or task performance to nongovernmental (private sector) organizations contravenes [several] tenets of democratic government by [giving] these private organizations with . . .

what we could only describe as

. . . public power. Further delegation was thought to create organizations which are [therefore] vested with public authority, carry-out public functions, and spend public funds, yet are able to resist government influence

because they operate at arm's length.

Hurl found that

the self-interests of non-governmental organizations will therefore ultimately act to confound government efforts at planning.

Now, what he based this on is that these organizations have a survival instinct. They want to keep going, whether they be not-for-profit or for-profit, and because they have this survival instinct, they will work towards ensuring their continuing role in whatever the service provision is, often in contradiction to what existing government policy may be or in opposition to where government may want to take policy in the future.

The Ontario experience with privatization of children's service systems highlights major problems in the integration, cooperation, and accountability of privatized systems, and illustrates the difficulties of exercising control over [these] service systems [which are now] dependent on the nongovernmental sector.

If we can apply this experience in children's services to what may happen in health care, we can begin to see the dangers.

For example, if all surgery of one type is contracted out in one region and then that contractor decides to make a unilateral change outside of the contract, the ability of the government to react is very much diminished because there has now been a dependency created on that provider. Now, this is not a fantastic or unimaginable circumstance.

Mr. Chairman, I've had the experience of being a contract provider of services to government. I can tell you and maybe the Acting Provincial Treasurer at some point might want to remind you or familiarize you with an experience that we shared regarding young offenders open-custody facilities and the dependency that the government had on provision of open-custody young offender beds on the nongovernment sector. Now, I don't think that dependence worked out poorly for the public interest in Alberta of the day, but I think at the time the then Solicitor General might have voiced a disagreement.

Clearly, when the private sector is in a position where it has a monopoly service, government is at a disadvantage because government typically can't react with the speed that happens in other private-sector to private-sector transactions to those kinds of changes in relationships.

Now, in a paper called *The Prison Business: A Literature Review of Privatization In Correctional Institutions*, that was done by Jamieson, Beals, Lalonde and Associates in Ottawa, published in April, 1989, they come to the following statement:

In Canadian and other democratic societies, a major societal value is the idea that the general public (voters) shall hold their elected officials responsible for the actions and omissions of all public sector employees (including both bureaucrats and civil servants). When a public sector function is assigned to a private entity, such as through a contract, there is an inevitable weakening in the lines of political accountability and decision-making capacity.

Now, this loss of accountability is something that I haven't heard the government talk about. If you follow this through, Mr. Chairman, you'll see where my worry is. We have the government of Alberta, and it creates the Department of Health and Wellness. Now, most taxpayers, most voters would assume that if they have an issue with government policy or the delivery of health services, they would be able to get in touch with the minister or maybe the Premier or certainly the executive branch of government and be able to communicate their concern and have it dealt with and resolved.

But what happens right now quite often – and I know this from my own experience in my constituency, and I'm sure, Mr. Chairman, you've had the same experience in your constituency – is that when a constituent comes to you with a concern about medical treatment and you contact the Minister of Health and Wellness, either on the telephone or in writing, the response you receive back is: well, that's very interesting, and thank you for bringing it to my attention, but you should really direct your inquiry to the regional health authority.

Then you take that advice and you contact the regional health authority. Now, what I'm worried about is we've already gone down one notch in terms of accountability, in terms of that direct relationship between those who are governed and those who govern. We've already diminished that relationship by a factor of one. Now, if this bill goes ahead, what we'll see is that the relationship will be diminished even further, because not only will you not be able to go to the Minister of Health and Wellness without him directing you to the regional health authority, but the regional health authority will in turn say: "Don't come knocking on our door. If you have a problem with the XYZ clinic, you have to go to the XYZ clinic. You have to deal with them, because, you see, they're just a contractor that provides services to us. We don't deal with those kinds of complaints."

Now, another concern that I have is the role of the Ombudsman,

for example. The Ombudsman does not get involved when it comes to dealing with those who provide contracted services. We don't know what the relationship will be in terms of the Health Facilities Review Committee and what their role will be when it comes to dealing with these contracted services.

You know, when it comes to nailing down accountability – and again I'm sure you've had the same experience, Mr. Chairman, that I've had – often corporations for various reasons, most of them legitimate, will have a variety of legal entities, some would say shells, around them: numbered companies, interrelationships, partnerships, proprietorships, holding companies, and just a whole variety of corporate construction around them. Sometimes that makes it very difficult to pursue any kind of satisfaction when you're looking for either compensation or an explanation or somebody to take responsibility for something when something goes wrong.

Certainly these issues of accountability and the transference of responsibility are serious and significant issues. Again, if we look at the literature, what we will find is that there are many circumstances where the government as an unintended consequence of its privatization has lost the ability to fully account to the taxpayers, to the people who foot the bill, for the provision of services and how those services are ultimately received by the recipients.

So, Mr. Chairman, I think that the government is working very hard to have it both ways. They want Albertans to embrace privatization, the expanded role of privatization, yet they say that they are intolerant of or unwilling to accept in law a limitation that would speak directly to the nature and the quality of the service provided, a limitation that would speak directly to the fears and concerns of Albertans about their ability to know what kind of services they can get and where and under what circumstances, and they are unwilling to entertain an amendment that would make the law, at least on the surface, look like it was paying attention to the experience in other jurisdictions when they have contracted out other public services.

11:10

To conclude my comments, this unwillingness to accept this constructive assistance to Bill 11 leads me to question the government when they say that this is just a bill about building fences so that medicare can be protected. I remain convinced, particularly based on the comments from government members who have urged members of this Assembly to vote against the amendment, that Bill 11 is all about the expansion of private surgical facilities at the expense of support for public hospitals in Alberta.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real pleasure to participate in this debate on the subamendment to Bill 11. This bill, along with the amendment and the subamendment, has received the most debate in the history of this Legislature. I believe that it's about 35 hours and still counting. This bill is a straightforward bill. It's designed to erect fences and place rules and regulations around the existing private facilities that are in existence at the present time, many of which were established under the watch of the former health minister, who happens to be the present Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Chairman, when I ask my constituents as to whether or not we have private health care facilities at the present time, the answer is no. But when I bring to their attention that all the walk-in clinics, the lab services, the abortion clinics, the eye clinics, and many others that are providing many valuable services and taking a load off our health care system are private clinics, privately owned and operated,

and when I tell them that these clinics perform over 20,000 operations every year at no cost to the patients, they realize that we are doing the right thing.

Bill 11 states very clearly that no person is allowed to pay money for any insured services and that no person is allowed to receive money for any insured services. Mr. Chairman, this is the law. Nobody can pay for and nobody can receive money for any insured services. It's very hard to accept the opposition allegation about the two-tiered health care system or that a stay of less than 12 hours is a one-tiered health care system or that a stay of over 12 hours is a two-tiered health care system.

Mr. Chairman, I lived in a country where a two-tiered health care system exists. The system did not resemble in any way, shape, or form the system that we have in this province. We had the private hospitals, where people went and paid the full shot for all the services, and we had the public system, where people received services and did not pay anything for them. To me this is a two-tiered health care system.

Mr. Chairman, I've heard a lot of mention about the great Tommy Douglas, the father of medicare, and how disappointed he would be if he was alive today. We certainly heard from his daughter and his grandson. Even the great Tommy Douglas, the father of medicare, did not say where an operation should be performed, whether it is performed at an approved or an accredited clinic or at a public hospital, as long as it is paid for by the publicly funded system.

Mr. Chairman, approximately two years ago I went through a gallbladder operation. That operation took only 12 minutes in the operating room, but I had to stay at the hospital for three days due to unexpected delays. To me the operation could have been done at an approved clinic instead of occupying a hospital bed for three days.

Mr. Chairman, I have heard a lot about American doctors and American companies. I am really puzzled here. On one hand, we have the opposition complaining about Canadian doctors moving to the United States because of more money, more opportunities, and less taxes, and on the other hand we hear the opposition tell us we should stop the brain drain and end this migration of our well-qualified doctors to the United States.

The opposition is talking about the American invasion of our health care system. This doesn't make any sense to me. The free trade agreement has been in place for the last 10 years and the North American free trade agreement, NAFTA, has been in place for five years, and we have not seen any evidence that the Americans are moving to Canada in droves to take over our medicare system.

I think what is being done here today and over the last two weeks is only adding to the confusion of the public and planting fear and doubts in people's minds, especially our seniors. Mr. Chairman, it's incumbent upon each member of this Assembly to be honest with his or her constituents and tell them exactly what Bill 11 and this amendment are all about and what this legislation will accomplish and how it will improve our sacred health care system.

The health care system that we are accustomed to as Canadians and as Albertans is what sets us apart from other countries, mainly the United States. Bill 11 will not change our valued health care system. On the contrary, it will enhance it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. You know, there is so much to say. I started out trying to make notes as government members were speaking to this. First, I'm still so overwhelmed with the kind of participation we have seen, and I'd like to pay tribute to every one of those government members who

has had the courage to stand up and share with us their views and their opinions. I respect each of them for doing that.

Too often, you know, we go into an election, Mr. Chairman, and we never really know where those government members have stood on the key issues. You might see in a standing vote. It is wonderful to see these members stand up one by one and indicate why they think Bill 11 is a good idea and why a little further erosion of the public health care system is not too prejudicial. I think it's important that we hear those comments, and it's important that Albertans are able to access them.

Mr. Chairman, a couple of concerns in terms of dealing with subamendment A1. The whole business, of course, is the notion of trying to limit overnight stays. I start off by thinking of and referencing a letter that's already been tabled in the Assembly, so I won't be tabling it tonight. It was a letter from the Hon. Allan Rock, Minister of Health, April 7, 2000, to our Minister of Health and Wellness.

You know, he makes the point in this letter – and I'll just quote the one sentence from page 3 of that letter.

MR. JONSON: Read the whole thing, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: I'm delighted to see that the Minister of Health and Wellness is showing that same level of energy we saw earlier when he was getting into debate.

He makes this observation.

In this respect, the Alberta Government has now proposed a role for private, for-profit facilities that goes beyond what is already in place in other provinces of Canada.

He was referring there, as the Minister of Health and Wellness will remember, to the provinces of Saskatchewan and Ontario. Why? Because Alberta had attempted to make an argument, actually quite a bogus argument, that in fact Bill 11 was no different than what was being done in other provinces.

11:20

You know, I would think that a government might be able to try and get away with that, but not when you've mailed out copies of the bill to households across the country. People look at it, and they can see that there's something qualitatively different in terms of what's being proposed.

The further comment I'd quote from the federal Minister of Health, who says on the same page in that same letter:

Since the prospect of overnight stays in private, for-profit facilities represents a significant enlargement of private, for-profit delivery of health care services in Canada, and since it may have implications that will be felt in provinces and territories across the country, I suggest that it might be helpful to add a provision to prohibit overnight stays until the full implications for Canada's health care system are understood.

Well, what subamendment SA1 does is attempt to do exactly that, to prohibit overnight stays until the full implications to Canada's health care system are understood.

There is always an advantage in being prepared to be a pioneer; there's an advantage in having the courage to be a pioneer. But to charge blindly down a road that all of the evidence suggests is going to prejudice your health care system is not farsighted. It's not progressive. It's stupidity. This is not an issue of leadership, as sometimes this thing is tarted up and touted to be. It's an inane kind of action that we're going to have to pay the price for for a very long time.

One of the tests I typically use in this House in assessing bills and Legislative initiatives is: what impact is this going to have on my constituents? I've got some good information, Mr. Chairman, on

that. At 11:30 this morning the CRHA held a news conference, and Dr. Kabir Jivraj made a number of announcements. Dr. Jivraj is a former president of the Alberta Medical Association, and he is the chief medical officer for the CRHA. Now, he was the spokesman at this briefing. I know this is old news to the minister of health, but it may be news to some of the Calgary members, in particular the Minister of Government Services and some other members who may be interested in this.

In the course of the presentation by Dr. Jivraj – what was interesting was that he took questions from the media. We shouldn't be surprised, that. Until the intervention of Mr. Roman Cooney, the media guy for the CRHA, most of the questions were about Bill 11. Mr. Chairman, I think one of the most interesting parts of the presentation – and once again I'm confident that the minister of health has seen this. When you go through the budget presentation for the CRHA, you come to an interesting section, and this is Increasing Access to Operating Rooms. In one of the little nuggets in here, which I'm drawn to immediately – and this is directly relevant to SA1, the overnight stays. Now, this is a note in terms of hospital beds in the Calgary region. This is the sentence:

In 1994/95, when all of Calgary's hospitals and community care facilities were organized under one Region, there were 1,748 staffed hospital beds. Today there are 1,818.

Mr. Chairman, we have added 116,000 new Calgarians, and the CRHA is touting the fact that we have something less than 100 additional hospital beds. If you look at any statistic I've ever seen in terms of number of hospital beds per thousand population, what you find is that in the city of Calgary there has been a dramatic erosion in terms of necessary hospital beds.

In all of those clinics that our friend from Calgary-Cross talked about the other day – remember that long list of services she went through that can be done in outpatient clinics? That does not change the need for an adequate number of hospital beds. I cannot help thinking that much of the impetus for this bill comes from the city of Calgary.

It's interesting that Mr. Dinning was not there answering questions, the gentleman from the provincial government who was sent to the CRHA. In fact, we have a bit of a trade going on. I understand that we have a member of the CRHA board who would like to be the Conservative candidate in Calgary-Buffalo. I see now we have a wonderful two-way exchange. The Legislature sends Mr. Dinning to the CRHA, and the CRHA starts sending board members into the Legislature. What we have is a very nice sort of connection. In case we thought communication wasn't going adequately between the Premier's office and the CRHA, we're going to have some additional lines of communication there. That's real good, Mr. Chairman. When we're dealing with subamendment SA1, it's good to know that the Calgary region is lockstep with the machinations of the Department of Health and Wellness, and whether that person will become the Conservative candidate, whether he'll be successful, is for the voters to determine, but the closeness is interesting.

The other thing that was interesting in the CRHA presentation this morning at 11:30 was your plan in terms of surgical services. Now, I suggest that particularly all the Calgary members in the Assembly, Mr. Chairman, might want to look at page 9 of the CRHA operating plan. This is where we talk about what's going to be done in terms of our operating capability within the CRHA for budget 2000-2001. I won't go through all the detail now because that would probably exceed even the generous terms of relevance that we've set this evening. But I do want to make the point that what's proposed there is that they're going to operate another operating room at the Peter Lougheed centre. They're going to convert a second operating room at the Foothills medical centre.

But you know what this puts me in mind of? When Mr. Dinning was being interviewed in the early days, when we had the private

health policy, before we'd seen the bill, I remember Mr. Dinning being asked by reporters: "So you've got this \$1 billion budget. How much of it could potentially go out in terms of being spent on these private facilities?" He suggested: well, it might affect like 3 percent of our budget. Three percent. What astute reporters asked Mr. Dinning was: if it's only going to impact 3 percent of your budget, how is it going to make a significant impact in the wait lists, which are chronic and so serious in the city of Calgary, in the Calgary region? No compelling answer. No complete answer.

I see my friend from Calgary-Cross is shuffling her notes. I'm hoping she's going to get up and she's going to maybe have some answers on some of these things, or there may be some other Calgary members who have better information than I do. I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. I'm doing what you asked us not to. I'm going to focus back on you. I think that's the question. And I'm not going to be looking across either because I just get baited too darn easily.

We've got this problem in the Calgary region, and as a Calgary MLA I'm asking: why wouldn't we go for an amendment like this to make it absolutely clear that we don't need what the government is offering? If, in fact, they want to regulate clinics, which was the original rationale for the bill, then they should embrace this subamendment.

Now, the other comment I wanted to make. It's interesting. We heard a long discussion, page 1043 in *Hansard*, from the Minister of Learning, who reminded us that he is a physician, so I was interested in what he had to say. I had occasion to look at a speech that that minister had delivered. This was a speech that had been delivered when he was the chair of the standing policy committee on health care restructuring to an insight conference in Calgary on March 11, 1996. I was wondering what he'd had to say about this notion that we see subsumed in amendment A1, section A, in March of 1996. He wouldn't have seen the bill. He wouldn't have seen the subamendment, but he was talking about the notion of overnight stays and so on.

The minister in that speech is making fairly inconsistent points. He starts off by talking about: "We need to develop more consistent criteria for what health services are collectively provided through the public purse." He goes on to talk about:

We often wonder why the federal government and the press focus so much attention on a handful of private clinics in Alberta rather than focusing on the real reform efforts in Alberta.

Well, doesn't that capture it, Mr. Chairman?

11:30

The provincial government is focusing this huge amount of energy and effort on some potential overnight clinics that are not going to make a significant difference, according to Mr. Dinning, the chair of the Calgary regional health authority, because it's a tiny, tiny sliver of the budget of the Calgary region. They're not going to make a big impact there, and it seems to me the Minister of Learning – well, I can't characterize the way he presented his speech because somebody could turn around and accuse me of the same thing. When the minister talked about the merits and the advantages of Bill 11 and why he was opposed to the subamendment, what he was doing was exactly what he accused the federal government of doing on March 11, 1996: we see the government focusing "so much attention on a handful of private clinics in Alberta rather than focusing on the real reform efforts."

You see, what I don't understand is how it can be that the National Forum on Health, that was a federal initiative with leadership from Dr. Moe Watanabe and from Dr. Tom Noseworthy – we have some tremendous experts in this province in the area of health care reform. They have done outstanding work. They did outstanding work for the National Forum on Health. They came out with a report that identified the need in terms of better health information systems.

What did we do in Alberta? We brought in Bill 40. The government's idea of health information was a skewed and distorted version of what was required. We saw recommendations in terms of home care. Mr. Chairman, what I'm attempting to address is the commentary that is available in *Hansard*, pages 1043 and 1044, when the Minister of Learning was speaking. Having staked out a position, he can't then hide – and I know he wouldn't want to hide – behind some argument of relevance when those who come back challenge his arguments. The point I'm making is that the Minister of Learning had made the very argument which those of us now opposing the subamendment would use. In that same speech by the Minister of Learning, he said:

Canadians deserve a serious discussion of this issue and not political posturing by anyone. Sloganeering has populated the health debate for too long. I hope that this conference can allow for some open debate and does not descend into silly ideological posturing.

Well, you know, if there's anything about the bill that we're being sold, this is ideological posturing, the very thing our Minister of Learning cautioned us against in 1996 about the government's not heeding that advice and then going helter-skelter down this very dangerous road.

The other observation I wanted to make in speaking to the amendment. I've got some more questions about the operating budget for the Calgary regional health authority, but I'll come back to that tomorrow.

The other point I was going to make is this. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek – I pay particular interest to what my Calgary colleagues say in the House – raised some issues when she was speaking to the subamendment that require refutation. The first one is that she used inaccurate figures about the federal government contribution to health care. She talked about it being 13 percent. The reality is that the federal portion of health care spending in Alberta is in excess of 30 percent. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek may be accepting the propaganda her government puts out, but if you look at the numbers and look at the information put out by the Institute of Health Information, a reputable independent organization that has no particular axe to grind, those things have all been identified.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Gaming is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I feel compelled to rise on a point of order under Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j). The numbers quoted by this member and the numbers quoted accurately by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek are evidently in dispute. By declaring that those numbers are false, I think the member is clearly out of line. If he can acknowledge that those figures are in dispute or that his figures are bigger than her figures, that would be acceptable, but to say categorically that these figures are wrong I think is a false assertion on the member's part and should be stated as such.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I hadn't heard a point of order, Mr. Chairman, so I was going to carry on with my debate.

THE CHAIRMAN: The member said 23(h), (i), and (j) and proceeded to refer primarily to what I presume is (i).

MR. DICKSON: Well, in fact the Minister of Gaming argues against himself. Mr. Chairman, he actually had me a little worried when he threw out the citation, and I must admit I caught my breath for a moment. But then what he pointed out is that there's a serious disagreement on the facts, and serious disagreement on the facts is what debate is all about. I'm glad he acknowledges that the figures the government propounds and promotes and publicizes are contested, are disputed, are not accepted. It's a really important myth to put to rest, and I thank the Minister of Gaming for clarifying the fact that some of the information that that \$8 million budget in the Public Affairs Bureau is distributing . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think we've heard quite enough from both sides on this point of order.

Firstly, 23(h) says: "makes allegations against another member." I didn't hear that in what he was saying, other than that the figures used were inaccurate, which is a debatable point. The second one, (i), is: "imputes false or unavowed motives." I didn't hear any motives being referred to in the speech, but there was certainly the assertion that the figures were in fact false or unreliable or whatever. [interjection] Whoa, hon. minister, if the chair is speaking, it's bad form.

11:40

MR. SMITH: Mr. Chairman, I feel compelled to apologize for my outburst from my chair, and it was only at the anger of . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no, no. Thank you for the apology.

Hon. members, the third point of order was: "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." Obviously, there was something, whether it was abusive or insulting but certainly language that somehow struck a chord in the hon. minister. I think at best it's a point of clarification.

I would ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to continue.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the intervention from the Minister of Gaming, because what it allows us to do is recognize that the entire basis of Bill 11 is built on a series of faulty assumptions, inaccurate information, and in fact when that Public Affairs Bureau with its \$8 million budget rolls out the ads and the radio announcements and the myriad kinds of publications they have with their inexhaustible reserves and resources, Albertans are understanding that a lot of that information is just plain wrong, just as they're understanding that the bill is just plain wrong. They remind us of that every day in our e-mails.

You know, the people in Calgary-Varsity that I get a chance to talk to from time to time have seen through the government PR campaign. These are not stupid people, Mr. Chairman. Now, I was going to say there were two exceptions, but no, that's fine.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Due to the hour – it's a quarter to 12 – I'm just going to make a few very brief comments in regard to the amendment that's on the floor. The reason I've chosen to make these comments is that the Member for Edmonton-Norwood in her debate earlier this evening said she had a very difficult time in connecting the dots. In fact, in that debate she highlighted and commented on the earlier debate I'd made in the House, and still she as unable to connect the dots, so I think we have a responsibility to assist one another in the Legislature with understanding. Having

said that, I'd like to just offer further clarification on what emergency surgery is, what urgent surgery is, and what elective surgery is and how that relates to this amendment.

This is my understanding, Mr. Chairman. It's not been given to me by medical personnel. This is completely my understanding of what these surgeries involve. Emergency surgery is when surgery is done within 24 hours in a public hospital, and there are several classifications under emergency surgery which are universally used by the operating room staff in Calgary. This list, I must emphasize, is prioritized by the OR staff. There are six elements to this list. E0: to my understanding would be that it would be very, very high risk, very high need, and an example of that would be gunshot wounds coming into emergency. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood would understand, given her background as a police officer, how high risk that surgery is. The second is E1, surgeries that are necessary to be done within an hour. Third, E2: an example for an E2 emergency surgery would be open fractures. An E6, which is a point 4, Mr. Chairman . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: If we could just maintain that silence for the next few minutes so we can hear the rest of Calgary-Cross's speech, that would be helpful.

Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Point 4 in the classification is what we consider to be an E6 surgery, which is done within six hours. An example of that would be an appendectomy, which of course can be upgraded to an E2. An example of an E12 surgery would be if somebody came in with kidney stones. An example of an E24 would be fractured hips. What I'm trying to emphasize for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood is that emergency surgery occurs in a public hospital, and it occurs within 24 hours.

Now, the second classification I discussed earlier in the Legislature is called urgent surgery, and there are two classifications to urgent surgery. The first is when the patient is already in hospital and the surgery is necessary and required within three days. The second classification of urgent surgery is that the patient is outside of hospital and surgery is necessary within two weeks. As I said, Mr. Chairman, this is simply my understanding of emergency and urgent surgery that I'm explaining.

Then we come to elective surgery, Mr. Chairman, which currently can be done in a public hospital or it can be done in a private surgical clinic. This is really important for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood to understand: the priority list and facility for elective surgery is determined by your physician. It's not determined by the OR staff in the public facility. The College of Physicians and Surgeons, which is a public licensing body . . . [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, you may disagree about what one nurse thinks and another one thinks, but right now we're listening to the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross if you could only remember to save your comments for later.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know we've discussed this in the Legislature before, and many members have stated it over and over again, but we'll restate it once again: it is the council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, which is a public licensing body – and members are welcome to attend the meetings because they are public – that has determined the list of elective surgery that can be performed in a nonhospital medical clinic. As we said earlier, that list can be quite extensive. There are specific types of surgical services, and they are very appropriate for currently operating surgical facilities.

I can tell the hon. member that I can't change the facts. The facts are here. They've been filed in the Legislature. They have been determined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. There are over 150 minor procedures being performed. They are being performed in 52 surgical clinics in Alberta. Quite frankly, as has often been stated as well, there really aren't government regulations at this point in time for those clinics, which is why this bill is before us.

Now, Mr. Chairman, also in Calgary we have approximately 28 operating rooms – there may be a couple more than 28, but I think it's about 28 operating rooms – outside of hospital which perform minor surgery that was determined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. I want to go back to: they do not do emergency or urgent surgery; they do elective surgery. Now, the minor surgery that you have in that clinic can still require a general anesthetic, an intravenous, an intramuscular type of pain sedation.

I'm also hoping that in assisting the hon. member to connect the dots – I know that in her debate she said she believed that even if you have your surgery in the late afternoon and your surgery requires a general anesthetic, you should get up and go home. She also believes that if you have a minor complication from your surgery where you don't believe you should go home – for example, if you have nausea or dizziness following your general anesthetic or pain requiring a bit more sedation – you should then get up and go to the hospital.

Well, I happen to disagree, Mr. Chairman. I continue to believe that you should be allowed to stay in a surgical clinic following minor surgery for as long as it takes you to recover. I can also tell you this: on Friday I met with a very experienced OR nurse that I have a great deal of respect for. It was in the hospital, and it was at the OR. I went and just had coffee and met with her about the bill. She did say to me: "Yvonne, you know that when a patient comes in for surgery, it can take place at any time in that 12-hour window. It can take place at the end of the 12-hour window, and you know this. Sometimes all that patient really needs is to stay a little longer and to sleep before they go home." Those are her words, and I agree with her as well on that point.

11:50

Also, Mr. Chairman, I think it's really important for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood to get the letter that was filed in this Legislature earlier today. It's the letter from the president of the AMA, Dr. David Bond. If she would refer to the second page of the letter, it's the third point. I happen to agree with Dr. Bond when he makes this statement. It's a very important statement. It says:

Regarding overnight stays in private facilities, the AMA's focus is assuring that quality care will be delivered in the appropriate place by the appropriate caregiver, regardless of when or for what hours the care is received.

They couldn't say it any more clearly than that.

Having said that, I would like to say that if the hon. member continues to not connect the dots, I'd be more than willing to meet with her privately or hear her debate this once again in the Assembly.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I move that we rise and report progress.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:51 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery
Boutilier
Calahasen
Cao
Cardinal
Clegg
Coutts
Doerksen
Dunford

Evans
Fritz
Hancock
Herard
Jacques
Johnson
Jonson
Klapstein
Langevin

Against the motion:

Blakeman
Carlson
Dickson
Leibovici

MacBeth
Olsen
Sapers

Totals: For – 27

Lougheed
Marz
McFarland
Nelson
Renner
Severtson
Shariff
Tarchuk
Taylor

Sloan
Smith
Soetaert

Against – 10

[Motion to report progress on Bill 11 carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 11. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 12:05 a.m. on Thursday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 20, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/04/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, a little patience, please. We have quite a list today.

The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present today signed by my constituents and the surrounding area in support of reinstating front licence plates.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table a petition signed by 272 citizens residing in the communities of Devon, Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, Ardrossan, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Leduc, and Edmonton. These citizens are urging "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to present a petition on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Calder.

It is a petition signed by 276 residents of Alberta from Wabamun, Vegreville, Sherwood Park, Morinville, St. Albert, Beaumont, and Edmonton. It petitions "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Mr. Speaker, on my own behalf and on behalf of 274 citizens of Red Deer, Carvel, Vimy, Stony Plain, Morinville, St. Paul, Sherwood Park, and Edmonton I would like to present a petition which reads as follows:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

Thank you.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present petitions by Albertans who are concerned about this government's promotion of private health care and undermining of public health care. The petitions tabled today will bring the total to 64,000.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present this afternoon. They're from Spruce Grove, Edmonton, Calgary. We've got petitions from just about every corner in Alberta. They are urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 269 Albertans from various communities in northern Alberta including Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, Drayton Valley, Carvel, Vegreville, Vermilion, St. Albert, Stony Plain, and Edmonton. They're urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to present a petition signed by 235 concerned citizens of Sherwood Park, Leduc, St. Albert, Edmonton, Calmar, New Sarepta, and Fort Saskatchewan. They are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again I have a petition signed by 265 people from Tofield, St. Albert, Stettler, Sherwood Park, and Edmonton. They are urging "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd present a petition signed by 219 citizens from St. Albert, Devon, Gibbons, Stony Plain, Red Deer, and Edmonton urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure this afternoon to present a petition signed by 255 Albertans from Spruce Grove, Sherwood Park, Edmonton, St. Albert, and Westlock urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." Now, I'll note as well that these are even signed on the back.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two petitions to present. The first is signed by 1,800 people from the Banff-Canmore-Calgary region. This petition urges the government to

- (1) maintain Kananaskis Country in a natural state that provides high quality wildlife habitat and nature-based recreational activities;
- (2) deny development approval to any intensive recreational developments, including Mount Shark Resort, Mount Sparrowhawk Heli-skiing, Alpine Village Resort, and Buffalo Nations Cultural Society; and
- (3) create a Wildland Provincial Park that protects the Kananaskis and Spray River Valleys and is bounded by Banff National Park, Wind Valley Natural Area, Bow Valley Provincial Park, the Elbow-Sheep Wildland Provincial Park, and Peter Lougheed Provincial Park.

The second petition I have today is signed by 276 residents of Boyle, Sherwood Park, Innisfail, Andrew, Ardrossan, Red Deer, Calmar, Leduc, and Edmonton. It is urging “the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care” in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Assembly that states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

It is signed by 276 Albertans from Sherwood Park, Beaumont, Millet, Spruce Grove, Bruderheim, St. Albert, and Edmonton.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to present to the Assembly another health care petition signed by 218 Albertans from Viking, Airdrie, Westlock, Clyde, St. Albert, Red Deer, Spruce Grove, and Edmonton. This petition reads:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present this afternoon. The first one is from 133 people in each of the four quadrants of the city of Calgary and urges “the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

The second petition with identical wording is from 212 Albertans living in St. Albert, Fort Saskatchewan, Edmonton, Calmar, Spruce Grove, and Bon Accord.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition signed by 1,020 Albertans from Banff, Canmore, Cochrane, Calgary, Edmonton, Bruce, Vegreville, Hairy Hill, Holden, Innisfree, Ranfurly, Mundare, Nanton, Sylvan Lake, Camrose, Westmore, Fort Saskatchewan, Leduc, Sherwood Park, Bluffton, Rimbey, Millarville, Airdrie, Bloomsbury, Barrhead, Clyde, Gunn, Lone Pine, Vimy, Picardville, Rochester, Cherhill, Alberta Beach, Camp Creek, Neerlandia, Okotoks, and Onoway. The petition asks the Legislative Assembly

to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Before calling on the hon. member, I'd just like to make a brief comment with respect to Presenting Petitions. When we have Reading and Receiving Petitions, that is actually when the petition is read. Standing Order 82(2) indicates that there should be brevity in terms of presenting the petition, so it's not required that when presenting the petition, it actually be read. Now is the time at which it will be read.

1:40

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday signed by 280 people on private health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition I presented yesterday now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented regarding private health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented from 109 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented earlier this week now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented April 19 signed by 188 Albertans be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Wednesday, April 19 I presented two petitions to the Legislative Assembly. I now ask that the petition from 224 Hinton residents and the also petition from 2,187 Albertans regarding the minimum of two people on a shift from dark to daylight be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

The second petition was not in order to be read and received.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and request that the petition I tabled yesterday in this Assembly be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I would request that the petition I tabled in this Assembly on April 19 signed by 319 residents of Fort McMurray urging the government to stop their promotion of private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition standing in my name on the Order Paper be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give me great pleasure this afternoon to ask that the petition I presented the other day now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to table five copies of the 1999 annual report of the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal as required by statute.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. First, the appropriate copies of a letter that we sent out on the Day of Mourning for April 28, 2000, and also the 1999 annual report for the Alberta Society of Engineering Technologists.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, this Assembly will reconvene on May 1, and on that day I'll ask hon. members to observe a moment of silence to commemorate the National Day of Mourning.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today copies of responses to questions raised during reporting estimates for International and Intergovernmental Relations on March 22, 2000. These have also been transmitted to the hon. members who asked the questions.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table the requisite copies of information regarding the sale of the Gainers property in Edmonton, including the environmental and market assessments. I only have one copy here; the balance were tabled directly in the Clerk's office.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four letters to table today. All the letters express opposition to Bill 11. The first two are from Edmonton, one from Hannah Noerenberg, a long four-page letter, and the second is from Dennis Rusinak.

The other two letters are from Calgary, including one from a physician, Dr. Robert Lee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table two letters, both expressing concerns on the Snowshoe Creek clear-cutting of old growth forest. One of them is signed by David Greenshield of Lethbridge. The second is signed by Amanda Vollmer, also of Lethbridge.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today my tabling is from Monika Schaefer, who is the chair of the Jasper Environmental Association. On behalf of that association she is writing to the Premier about her concerns with regard to the importing of wastes for treatment by Bovar at the Swan Hills waste treatment facility.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have copies of a letter sent to the Member for St. Albert from Elke Blodgett, who is expressing her concern about how she was treated Tuesday night here in the Assembly and the rude reception she receives when she phones the Premier's office and the minister of health's office.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. The first is addressed to the Minister of Health and Wellness, and it is a listing of the questions that remain outstanding in the estimates of the Health and Wellness budget.

The second tabling, from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, is Standards for Non-hospital Surgical Facilities.

The third is an ad in the *Grande Prairie Daily Herald-Tribune* indicating: For Rent, Operating Room.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have appropriate copies of a resolution or motion that was passed by the Edmonton city council requesting "the Government of Alberta to withdraw Bill 11."

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I have one tabling today. It's a letter to myself dated April 17, 2000, from Sian Barraclough. Sian suffers from avascular necrosis, AVN, and it's a chronic ailment. She details her experiences with the health system and passes some comment on Bill 11.

Thank you.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three letters to table today in regards to the Genesis Land Development Corp. proposal for the Spray Lakes. All three of these letters express the concerns of citizens Lena Shellian, Shirley Mushey, and Leigh Sifton with respect to their concerns and opposition to the Spray Lakes development.

Thank you.

head: Ministerial Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

Anniversary of Taber High School Shooting

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On April 28, 1999, two students on their way to class at Taber's W.R. Myers high school were shot. One of these students, 17-year-old Jason Lang, died. In the tumultuous days that followed this tragedy, Albertans watched the television coverage and read the stories in the newspaper. We saw headlines like Terror in Taber, and we saw the images: students consoling one another, flowers and mementos stacked around the walls of the school. There were extraordinarily moving and often disturbing scenes set against the familiar backdrop of small-town Alberta. This tragedy shook our province. We were disturbed and deeply saddened by it.

Today, almost a year later, we are still trying to understand and come to terms with what happened that day. As we near the one-year mark since the shootings, I know a lot of Albertans are looking back and revisiting this tragedy. Many are still mourning the loss of Jason. April 28 is not going to be an easy day, but I think we owe it to ourselves and to Jason's memory to approach it in a spirit of hope and understanding. The past year has after all been a time of profound healing and learning. Albertans have really come together. They've rallied around the people of Taber. Their hearts and prayers have been with Jason's family and friends. The people of this province have resolved to make something positive grow from this tragedy.

Over the course of the past year parents, students, teachers, social workers, law enforcement professionals, and other concerned Albertans have sat down with one another to talk openly and tackle the difficult issues surrounding school safety. Jason's father, the Reverend Dale Lang, has been instrumental in these efforts, and I applaud him for his courage and dedication. Together, I believe, Albertans are making some very valuable changes.

We all have a role to play in ensuring that our province's schools and communities are safe and caring places. On April 28 I would encourage Albertans to take a few moments to think about their individual roles and how we can come together with our neighbours from across the province to improve the quality of life for all of us, especially our children.

As Minister of Learning, a parent, and a citizen of this province I am personally committed to doing my part to continue to build this great province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This month marks the anniversary of two high school tragedies. Today we mourn with our neighbours to the south the loss of life at Columbine high school, and next week we will turn to our own grief at the loss of Jason Lang in a shooting at Taber's W.R. Myers high school.

Since those young lives were lost, we have asked ourselves over and over again: how could it have been prevented? We have grieved, we have prayed, we have tried to take precautions against a recurrence, and we have suffered the frustration such untimely deaths leave.

Albertans will pause on April 28. They will interrupt their everyday tasks, their telephone conversations, their meetings, and their family dinners to remember Jason and the Lang family. The remembrance will be difficult. We have come to know that Jason was a fun-loving, talented, compassionate, and committed young man. The remembrance will be difficult. We have had shaken our

belief that the most trusted of our institutions, our schools, are always a safe haven for our children. The remembrance will be difficult.

In the next few months many in this Assembly will be looking into young faces much like Jason's as we speak at graduating classes across the province. Let us tell them in those speeches and everywhere we meet those young Jasons how much they are loved, how much they are valued, and how much it hurts when we lose one of them.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you. I'd like to say welcome to the Legislature to 56 constituents from the Whitecourt area. There are 46 students from St. Joseph Catholic school accompanied by 10 adults, two teachers and parents. Awhile ago I met with the students, and we had a good discussion over a long, long time. I think it was two hours. They asked me a number of questions about the Legislature, and a question they were most concerned about was: how does question period work? I went on to explain. In the end I had to tell them the truth. I said to the students: if you acted the same way as some of our members act in this House, you would be sent to the principal's office very quickly. Mr. Speaker, we look to you as the principal of this Assembly to keep law and order. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly 59 very bright and interested visitors from St. Anthony school in Drayton Valley. They are accompanied here today by two teachers, Mrs. Patricia Molzan and Mr. Gerald Perry, and parents and helpers Miss Jody Birney, Mrs. Louise Mikulin, Mrs. Brenda Chermnok, and Mrs. Danuta Thesen. I would ask them to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly five members of the organ and tissue donation awareness committee. I would ask them to rise as I introduce them. First, Kathy Tachynski – she is the chair of the committee and also happens to be my niece – Karen Ashby, Howard Guse, Gurpreet Dulai, and Marla Rohde. They're seated in the members' gallery. I would ask everyone to give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

In my second introduction, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a Rotary International exchange student from Belgium, Pierre Brennecke. Pierre is being hosted by the Morinville Rotarians and has been here since August 1999. He is accompanied by his sister, Laurence Brennecke, who is visiting from Belgium. They are here with one of Pierre's hosts, Connie Lewis. I will ask them to rise from their seats in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure of introducing to you and to all members of the Assembly a very special guest today, Mimi Williams. She's a social activist and a longtime New Democrat. She's a single mother of two sons. The younger of the two, Alex, celebrates his sixth birthday today. Mimi Williams is also a graduate student at the university. I would ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two people who are joining us today who have worked very hard to preserve the wildlife and the landscape in this province and work on behalf of the people of the province in doing that. They are Dave Poulton, the conservation director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society for the Calgary and Banff chapter, and Dieter Gade, the wilderness campaigner, who is located in Bragg Creek, Alberta. They are in the members' gallery. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:00

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you Syrena Courtorielle. Syrena grew up in Slave Lake, Alberta, moved to Edmonton six years ago, and is residing in northeast Edmonton. She is employed by the Royal Bank of Canada and is very interested in politics. Would Syrena please rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly someone described as a great friend of the PC youth of Alberta, a constituent and a resident of Sherwood Park, Mr. Jack Nickerson, who is seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that he stand and receive the accolades of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege today to introduce to you and through you a lady who has been working in my communications department for the past two months. She is a student at Mount Royal College. Her name is Anika Woycechowsky. She's been a great help to us. I would ask Anika to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Brevity in Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before recognizing the first speaker today, I would like to make a brief comment. Some time ago I provided to the three House leaders in this Assembly a book called *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and I would like to quote some lines from a certain text in that book. They amplify what I've said in this House on numerous occasions.

There is a statement made by the then Speaker of the day, Speaker Bosley, who said:

Mr. Speaker Jerome, in his statement 11 years ago, put his view with

regard to the first principle of brevity so well that I would merely quote it:

There can be no doubt that the greatest enemy of the Question Period is the Member who offends this most important principle. In putting the original question on any subject, a Member may require an explanatory remark, but there is no reason for such a preamble to exceed one, carefully drawn sentence.

It is my proposal to ask all Hon. Members to pay close attention to this admonition and to bring them to order if they fail to do so. It bears repeating that the long preamble or long question takes an unfair share of the time, and invariably, in provoking the same kind of response, only compounds the difficulty.

And I further quote:

I agree with these comments and would add that such comments obviously also apply to answers by Ministers. I would also endorse Mr. Speaker Jerome's view that supplementary questions should need no preambles; they should flow from the Minister's response and be put in precise and direct terms without any prior statement or argument. It is the Chair's view that it equally follows from the first principle, that time is scarce, that Members should seek to avoid merely repeating questions that have already been asked. I do not mean that other questions on the same subject should not be asked – as apparently I have been interpreted – just that subsequent questions should be other than ones already asked.

For similar reasons it has always been a fundamental rule of questioning Ministers that the subject matter of the question must fall within the collective responsibility of the Government or the individual responsibility of one of its Ministers. This is the only basis upon which Ministers can be expected to answer questions.

I further quote:

These two statements, along with some of the guidelines adopted by the House [of Commons] in 1965, are used today by the Speaker as a reference in managing the Question Period. In summary, when recognized in Question Period, a Member should

- ask a question;
- be brief;
- seek information;
- ask a question that is within the administrative responsibility of the government or the individual Minister addressed.

Furthermore, a question should not

- be a statement, representation, argument or an expression of opinion.

Yesterday in dealing with the question period, at the conclusion of the question period when there were points of order and points of privilege, the chair further indicated that brevity would be the key of the order in terms of the question and brevity would be the key of the order in terms of the response. It appears that a great number of members heard what the chair said yesterday. Today is the longest list of questions that I have been advised hon. members would like to ask since I have been in the chair of the Speaker.

It's my intent to see if we can move this question period on the basis of a brief question and a brief response so that I can actually work in the 19 additional private members, in addition to the two leaders of the two parties, who have indicated that they want to ask a question today.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Bill 11 Protests

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Fifty years

ago Supreme Court Justice J. Abbott said that "the right of free expression of opinion and of criticism" were "essential to the working of a parliamentary democracy." Given that nearly 1,500 seniors, children, moms and dads, and health workers peacefully gathered at the Legislature Building and McDougall Centre in Calgary last night, will the Premier explain his rather inflammatory labeling of these citizens of Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I've always said that protest is the essence of democracy, and I mean that. I deny no one's right to protest. I've been in this business now for 20 years, and I've undergone my share of protests when I was Minister of Environment and certainly as Premier, when I was the mayor of Calgary. I know what protests are all about. I certainly don't deny anyone the right to protest.

What offends me and I think what offends Albertans is misbehavior that destroys property and misbehavior that results in one case in an assault on one of our security people, the kind of misbehavior that saw a handle being ripped off the Legislature door. It's that kind of behaviour that I object to and that I believe Albertans object to.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier join me and speak to the citizens who are peacefully assembling at our Legislature Building?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the citizens are being heard, and although the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition characterizes all of those who are protesting as peaceful people, seniors and so on, I have been advised by our security people that within the crowd there are people who have the potential of being violent. I don't want to expose myself to that, and I don't think the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition would like me to be exposed to that.

MRS. MacBETH: Given that Premier Hamm of Nova Scotia had the respect yesterday to go out and face those citizens of Nova Scotia who were concerned about education cuts in their province, will this Premier show the same respect to our citizens?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I explained before, I have been in this business for 20 years, and I've been through a lot of protests. Some of those experiences have not been very pleasant. I'll recall – and I'm sure the leader of the Liberal opposition will know of this because she was in cabinet at the time – when I went to a protest rally in Calgary then concerned over some environmental moves that were being made, especially with respect to the Alberta-Pacific pulp mill, which was supported by this government at that particular time, having dead fish and dirty water thrown at me and on Christmas Eve having a coffin put on my front lawn and people chanting and yelling outside my house.

Mr. Speaker, I respect people's right to protest, but I don't any longer do protests.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are still waiting for the Premier to present one shred of evidence that shows that private hospitals or approved surgical facilities achieve anything other than higher costs and longer wait lists. The latest annual report of the Calgary regional health authority makes reference to a number of studies comparing the costs of acute care facilities and private

facilities. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier table any studies that might be helpful to Albertans in understanding the dynamics and the evidence on this very important issue?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will allude to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, but I'm sure there are plenty of studies that do demonstrate that surgical clinics – and they are nothing new at all. They've been operating for years. As a matter of fact, all ophthalmology services in Calgary are operated by surgical clinics under contract to the regional health authority.

2:10

Now, I understand that some 6,000 procedures are allowed in Calgary per year. It only stands to reason, Mr. Speaker, that if you were to put all those procedures back into full-scale hospitals, it would put tremendous strain and pressure back on the system, and what we want to do through our policy is to provide options where people can get faster access to the surgical procedure that is required and take pressure off the system so the system can accommodate more complex and more serious procedures.

MRS. MacBETH: Will the Premier confirm that the Calgary regional health authority study shows that there is no evidence to support the Premier's claim to Albertans that the private facilities are less costly than public hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that may or may not be true, but relative to future contracting and what is proposed in putting fences around the operation of these, they will have to show beyond a doubt that there will be cost-effectiveness and that it will reduce waiting lists.

I would hope that the evidence is in the law that will make those requirements. Right now there are no requirements for surgical clinics that operate in this province and have been operating for years and years. There are no rules or regulations relative to the operation of these clinics relative to contracting with RHAs. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, recognition was given to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. The floor then was given to the hon. Premier to respond, so there's no need for interjections from other people to incite debate in this Assembly.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given the fact that the Calgary regional health authority receives 850 million taxpayer dollars, will this Premier instruct the authority to release all of their studies and evidence on the cost-benefit analysis of contracting out surgical services?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that they have good reason now to contract a number of surgical services. I would like to point out – and this is not speaking to the bill – that right now there are I believe 52 or maybe 53 surgical facilities operating in the province of Alberta. All of those surgical facilities have contracts with various RHAs. I understand that they perform some 152 different minor surgeries, and I understand about 20,000 procedures are done per year.

MRS. SOETAERT: Cost-benefit analysis.

MR. KLEIN: Well, the analysis – and you don't need to be a brain surgeon . . .

THE SPEAKER: Please, there is a response there to an interjection from the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, and if it happens one more time, I'm going to invite her to take an early Easter break.

Queen Elizabeth II Hospital

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, three operating theatres sit empty and idle at the Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Grande Prairie because of staff shortages, yet another symptom of this government's mismanagement of public health care. As of March 1 of this year almost 1,100 patients are on the wait list of the QE II, a 100 percent increase over this time two years ago. People in Grande Prairie don't want their tax dollars siphoned off to investor-owned surgical clinics; rather, they want the money used to open up the public operating rooms that are already there and waiting. And the debate goes on in Grande Prairie. My questions are to the Premier. Why is this government spending millions of taxpayers' dollars on advertising agencies and media consultants instead of using that money to open up operating theatres in the Grande Prairie QE II hospital?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond to this issue, because indeed this is one of the issues we plan to address in our six-point plan, of which the policy relative to contracting out and putting rules and regulations around surgical clinics is one component.

Certainly there are problems relative to waiting lists, not only at QE II but in other hospitals. As a matter of fact, I'll take the leader of the Liberal opposition back to 1990, when she was the minister of health. This is what she said then, and she's alluding to heart surgery in this particular case: waiting lists for heart surgery are the price Albertans pay for a universal health care system, says health minister Nancy Betkowski.

She goes on to say: at times for certain procedures waiting lists are part of the universal system; Betkowski said solving the waiting list problem is not just a matter of pouring in more dollars; if you're going to allocate more resources, where are you going to find the resources?

Mr. Speaker, I simply put it back to her.

THE SPEAKER: We'll ask for a tabling of that document if it's not already been tabled.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Premier agree with his chairman of the Mistahia health region that the solution is to rent out the operating rooms already paid for by the taxpayers?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness heard the question, so I'll let him answer.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think there are two points that need to be made with respect to this situation. First of all, in the budget recently passed by this Assembly we have provided very significant additional dollars to the Mistahia region specifically for expansion and improvement of secondary services at the Queen E hospital.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I will not elaborate here, but there is an issue of management and administration and scheduling and co-operation with respect to the physician component up there, and we have been providing assistance with respect to resolving those difficulties.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, we are aware of the situation, and we are directing resources towards it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, does this government, either the Premier or the minister of health, agree with its own appointed chairman who says that the solution to the Queen E II operating room problem is to rent public operating rooms out to the private sector?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in my previous answer I clearly indicated the action we are taking to resolve the difficulties facing the Queen E hospital. That is our answer. That is our approach. The chairman of the board may have expressed that particular view. It is not the view of the minister or, as far as I know, of the overall board collectively, and I've outlined the action that is being taken.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Opposition to Bill 11

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday evening over a thousand citizens of all ages and walks of life held a peaceful rally on the front steps of this Legislature. Over 400 citizens held a similar rally in Calgary in front of the McDougall Centre. All participants at the rally in Edmonton were peaceful and respectful of persons and property. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier please reciprocate and start listening to the heartfelt concerns of the citizens with respect?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we are listening to citizens. Yes, last night there was – I think the fellow was quoted in the paper today – a Conservative supporter who was out there, and he was out there because he was frustrated. His wife unfortunately had just been diagnosed with a very serious ailment, and in his mind she couldn't get timely treatment. That had nothing to do with the issue at hand, Bill 11. It had something to do with what we're trying to address through the other six points, and that is timely access for people with serious ailments to the full-scale institutions that we have today. That has something to do with business plans that call for the hiring of more nurses and more doctors and more equipment such as MRIs, and the fellow admitted that.

Those are the kinds of things where we would like to sit down with people like that and say: "Lookit; this has nothing to do with your concern over a particular bill. This has something to do with the long-term sustainability of health care." This has something to do also with the health ministers from across this country working with their federal counterpart to find a way to make sure the health care system is sustainable.

His concern had nothing to do with Bill 11, if I can mention that bill. It had something to do with his frustration with another component of the system.

2:20

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier also listen to the Alberta Medical Association, the Alberta College of Family Physicians, Alberta's registered nurses, the Catholic Health Association, grassroots Conservatives, all of whom say no to the government's health privatization scheme?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, we will listen to the AMA. As a matter of fact, I would point out that the AMA was reasonably pleased with the treatment of the amendments that they proposed. I have spoken to Dr. Bond, the president of the AMA, and I have said that we would pursue with the AMA concerns that they have

that do not relate to Bill 11, concerns that relate to some of the underlying causes for strain on the system. How do we approach hiring more frontline staff, doctors and nurses and LPNs? How do we go about putting in place sustainable funding for capital costs? How do we address a multitude, a myriad of issues that pertain to the sustainability of health care?

I would be willing to talk to all of the associations that were mentioned about those particular issues, because we need their help. We need their positive input to help us deal with these issues that go far beyond the simple issue of putting rules and regulations around the contracting out of certain surgical procedures.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why does the Premier continue to insist that only he is right and that doctors, nurses, seniors, families, clergy, grassroots Tories, and hundreds of thousands of Alberta citizens are all wrong?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is not the case at all. That is not the case at all. If people have reasonable comment such as the AMA have on Bill 11, we will address those particular issues, and we have.

Bill 11 does not address some of those other issues, Mr. Speaker. Those are contained in the other five points of our plan. We would welcome the associations to which the hon. member alludes to sit down with our Minister of Health and Wellness, myself, our officials to find ways and design ways to address these issues.

Mr. Speaker, I guess when it comes to dealing with the issue that has caused so much controversy, my frustration comes again. Well, I have in my hand a document from the Liberal web site.

THE SPEAKER: With all respect, brevity please. Thank you very much. Let's move on.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Economic Outlook

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Premier. A Swiss-based institute for management released a study yesterday on the economic competitiveness of countries. The study notes Canada as slipping in its competitiveness, falling behind resurgent north European countries. Will the Premier tell us how Alberta's competitiveness through our fiscal policy of balanced budgets, debt pay-down, and low taxes is affected by Canada's competitiveness?

MR. KLEIN: Well, it's quite obvious, Mr. Speaker, that if Canada is not competitive, it greatly diminishes the opportunity for Alberta to be competitive. It's not good news for Alberta that Canada's competitiveness is slipping. Many financial analysts have alluded to this. This has been cited as one of the causes for the brain drain. So it's not good news for any Canadian province or territory.

The member is correct that the institute for management ranked Canada 11th for competitiveness, down from 10th in the previous two years. Meanwhile countries like Ireland and Sweden have jumped ahead of us, and that is wrong. We are trying to do the best we possibly can in this province to maintain within Confederation our competitive edge. I'm not just saying that, Mr. Speaker. We've got the proof to back it up. The Dominion Bond Rating Service has now upgraded our short-term debt credit rating to R-1. This shows that those in the business of measuring economic competitiveness recognize Alberta as a leader.

MR. DOERKSEN: Again to the Premier: can the Premier tell us how this rating measures up against other provinces?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, Alberta is given the highest rating mark of any jurisdiction in Canada, and it has pushed us to top spot ahead of Ontario and British Columbia. Now, I know that the Liberals don't like to hear that because it is good news. This is what the people who are not protesting like to hear. This is what the people like to hear, the people who have a tremendous amount of pride in our province and the people who are concerned about maintaining our economic sustainability and the tremendous prosperity that we have created in this province. That's what the majority of Albertans want to hear about.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, while Dominion is just one of several major rating agencies, can the Premier tell us where Alberta ranks with the other agencies as well?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, all the major bond-rating agencies have recognized our fiscal strength. Not only did the Dominion Bond Rating Service just upgrade us; Moody's has also put us on notice as a possible upgrade. In fact, they were in town, I understand from the Provincial Treasurer, just this week meeting with the Acting Provincial Treasurer and department officials.

As a matter of fact, I had the opportunity of listening to the *Rutherford Show* for a short while today, and a fellow by the name of Mr. MacBeth was on the radio praising not the Liberal Party but praising Alberta. As his company pointed out: another day in paradise.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Bill 11 Publicity

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, when the Premier says that Albertans like to hear good news, I think he's right, but I think Albertans also want accurate information on how their tax dollars are spent, and they want that information in a timely way. Yesterday the Official Opposition tabled an additional invoice, bringing the total cost of its campaign to protect medicare to \$29,340.78. In the meanwhile, the Premier's \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau and the gigantic Health and Wellness department continue to put out deliberate misinformation, claiming that the cost of the propaganda campaign of the government is only \$1.2 million. Nobody believes that, Mr. Speaker. So my question to the hon. Premier would be this: will the Premier promise to release all of the invoices, all of the receipts, copies of all of the relevant contracts and to do that today so Albertans can find out precisely how much of their money, their tax dollars, is being spent to privatize health care in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that will all be compiled and reported in detail in the public accounts.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member for Calgary-Buffalo in that Albertans do indeed want honest information for their tax dollar, and that takes me back to the web site publication of the Official Opposition, where it says: Understanding Bill 11 The Private Hospital Act. That is wrong. That is misleading. That is fraudulent. There is no bill, no piece of legislation before this Legislature called the private hospital act, yet they deliberately go out and publish at taxpayers' expense Understanding Bill 11 The Private Hospital Act, a bill, a piece of legislation that simply does not exist. That is misinformation.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Somehow in the exchange it seems that there was a lot of yelling and bantering, and I distinctly looked at the eyes of

the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who was expressing something which I did not hear. Did you want me recognize you?

2:30

MR. SAPERS: No. I'd like question period to continue.

THE SPEAKER: Well, stand up. If you stand up, you can be recognized. If you don't want to stand up, you will not be recognized.

Bill 11 Publicity

(continued)

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, given that my question must not have been clear to the Premier, will the Premier promise to release today copies of all the receipts, all the invoices, all the contracts representing the cost to Alberta taxpayers to spin, sell, promote the private health care agenda of this government?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we have spent nothing on promoting what the hon. member alludes to as a private health care agenda. Yes, we have spent some money on distributing a bill relative to the protection of health care in Alberta, the Health Care Protection Act.

What is false, what is wrong, and what is misleading is this publication. I want to table five copies of this publication. It says: Understanding Bill 11 The Private Hospital Act. That is fraudulent. It is wrong. It is misleading. Not to my knowledge, not to the knowledge of anyone in this caucus is there any such bill called the private hospital act. They have used taxpayer's dollars – I don't know how much – to put out this deliberate, malicious, and absolutely false information. That is a misuse of taxpayers' dollars.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, when the hon. leader of the government was responding to that question, there was a very sharp interjection that the chair did hear from the hon. Minister of Gaming. The tradition in this House is that members do face the chair; they do not turn their backs to the chair. It seems that the reason for the provocation of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora perhaps a few minutes before was that the hon. Minister of Gaming in fact did turn his back to the chair and did utter something. That is totally inappropriate.

Bill 11 Publicity

(continued)

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier can't seem to find anyone in his 128-person, \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau to do the math, will he confirm that the estimate the Official Opposition put forward yesterday, which suggested that the cost of the taxpayer-funded propaganda campaign will likely exceed \$2.2 million, is accurate?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there was no propaganda campaign. There was a mail-out of a document that had the contents of legislation in it. That was not propaganda. That was something that purports to become law. There is nothing more truthful and nothing more basic in a democratic society than a law. Moreover, there is nothing more fundamental and nothing more basic in a democratic society, where all Albertans have an opportunity to provide input into a law, reasonable input.

The only thing that is disgraceful and dishonest is this publication put out by the Liberals at taxpayers' expense that alludes to the

private hospital act, an act that doesn't exist, an act that has never existed, an act that never will exist as long as this government is in power. So that is false, and it's misleading, and it's an absolute misuse of taxpayers' dollars.

THE SPEAKER: That series of questions, hon. members, took seven minutes. We're now behind schedule.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Liquor Sales

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Gaming. Please tell the Assembly if the AGLC review on exclusivity and inducement is complete, and if so, what are the results?

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me apologize for inadvertently turning my chair earlier and say that, yes, the AGLC, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, has completed its review related to exclusive sale of product and using cash to induce selling of alcoholic spirits. There's been a solution to the violation of the program brought forward by industry. Fines have been levied on the appropriate parties, and new regulations are prepared to go forward. I believe they're already in process.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. What effect will these changes have on consumers and small licensees?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, this new set of regulations will induce some market discipline. It'll induce regulatory discipline, which was asked for by industry, to industry. It will level the playing field so that all people involved in the sale of alcoholic spirits in Alberta will be able to compete on a level playing field. There will be no volume discounts. All sizes and types of licensees will be able to participate, and all regulations are directed towards consumer benefit.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell the Assembly any penalties or fines that have been assessed to licensees for action related to product exclusivity or inducements?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, all licensees who were involved in the activities were being reviewed by the board of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, which runs as a regulatory board, and they are prosecuted or subject to penalties under the act. They're within the purview of the commission. The process is to inform the violators. Then there's an appeal process. The board may hear the appeal, and then the fines and all the information are posted on the AGLC web site.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, by the way, both hon. members, that was just excellent in terms of brevity.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

MRS. SLOAN: On the eve of a federal government investigation into the inaccessibility of MRIs in Alberta, the province announces that they will purchase four new machines while many in the province remain underutilized because of cash shortages. My questions are to the Premier. Just how exactly, Mr. Premier, are you going to explain to the federal government how Alberta has allowed private, for-profit MRIs to proliferate while public MRI machines have remained underfunded and understaffed?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's a matter of striking the right balance. If the hon. member thinks it's wrong to provide more MRIs for the public system, then stand up and say so. I mean, she seems to have a problem with this. If she thinks it's wrong and it's not the right thing to do, then stand up and say so.

Relative to the operation of MRIs generally, yes, when I alluded earlier to the overall problem of sustainability, not only of MRIs but any other component of the medical system, this has to be a national effort, and we would encourage and welcome the participation of Mr. Rock to find solutions. I know that in our six-point plan we will be allocating resources to bring into the stream as quickly as we possibly can the technicians that are required to operate those MRIs.

I'll have the hon. minister expand even further.

THE SPEAKER: We're going to keep going with our process of brevity as much as we can.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier explain what economic sense it makes to buy four new machines when the MRI at the Grey Nuns hospital in Mill Woods sits unutilized because there are no staff to operate it?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you know, again it is so frustrating. [interjections] No. It is. The Liberal opposition seems to want to read only what they want to read, and they want to be negative on the points where they either don't know the information, haven't taken the time to research the information, or want to ignore the information.

I take the Liberal opposition and you, Mr. Speaker, and my colleagues in the House to an announcement that was made I believe it was in January, and I'm going to have the hon. minister supplement. It says, "To address the increasing demand for MRI technicians, Alberta Learning announced in January, an increase of 26 post-secondary spaces to train MRI technicians." Now, that was a public news release, and it amazes me that they wouldn't have the honesty, if they had read this, to allude to it.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

2:40

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will say that we are even going one step further in that our access fund for this coming year will be aimed solely at health professionals, with MRI technicians being right at the top of the list.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, isn't this situation just further evidence of this government's unrelenting pursuit to privatize health care services regardless of the delays in procedures for citizens in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, how could anyone, even with an imagination as wild as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's, construe that buying four MRIs for the public system is playing into the hands of the private operators? I mean, this is beyond comprehension. To explain exactly what we intend to do and how they'll be used, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Minister of Learning has indicated the commitment to add to the current complement of people being trained as MRI technicians.

Secondly, the four MRIs, plus those I've announced previously for the regional centres, will be in the public system, Mr. Speaker, and

the end result will be a per capita capacity in this province for MRI scans which ranks right at the top of the provinces in this country.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Workers' Compensation Board

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few months ago the Minister of Human Resources and Employment ordered an MLA WCB service review as well as a WCB appeal system review. As a member of the MLA WCB service review committee, I'm finding that many injured workers still have no knowledge that the process is taking place and, in fact, is well under way. So my question today is for the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Can the minister explain his communication plan and how he is informing the WCB injured workers that these reviews are in fact taking place and that their input is required in order to effect meaningful change?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I think we need to make sure that all members realize and appreciate that the main service review is under way by the WCB. Now, what we've done with the MLA input committee is provided another way and perhaps a more streamlined way for members of this House to be able to provide input, then, to that main service committee. So to that end we have been utilizing that in our correspondence, and of course a press release was released yesterday.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that yesterday's press release announcing the extension to May 15 for submissions has, to my understanding, not been published in any daily newspapers, will the minister ensure that injured workers are aware of the process by placing advertisements in the daily or weekly newspapers?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, we did provide a press release yesterday, and yes, it's true that there's another issue here in the House that is perhaps using up all of the ink on the part of the media. I did not see any communication on our press release in today's clippings, so it puts me in the situation of indicating to the hon. member that we're going to have to go back and take a look at what it is that we are doing. Certainly the Workers' Compensation Board itself has been advertising the times and places where injured workers can have the input. I have not provided the MLA input committee with a budget for any advertising at this particular point in time and am not currently contemplating doing that.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the hon. minister. Given that he's indicated that there won't be any further advertising at this point due to budgetary constraints, will he then agree to take other steps to ensure that injured workers are informed that the reviews are ongoing?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, we will have to do that, Mr. Speaker, because it's very, very important, when you set up a review mechanism, that in fact you do get the input. Part of the rationale behind not only convincing the Workers' Compensation Board to do their system review but in putting together the MLA input committee was that I believe MLAs are in a great position to know and understand what is going on inside of their constituencies. So I would put out the call right now that if any MLA here in the Assembly feels there is inadequate information that is being provided to their constituents,

they join me in using some of their budgets to get that information out.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Medical Laboratories

MR. SAPERS: On Tuesday in the Legislature I quoted from the government's document entitled Laboratory Restructuring Proposal, which states in part:

To ensure that provincially funded facilities do not have a price advantage over investor owned laboratories, regional boards will no longer have access to provincial funding for capital equipment.

My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier confirm that this policy is the reason that public laboratory facilities in Calgary are underfunded and lineups and wait times are as long as they've ever been for simple tests?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know that to be true, and quite frankly I simply don't have the information on that situation. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness does.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the laboratory system in Calgary, as I think you're referring to, is a very effective one. It's a partnership between the regional health authority and the private firm that is involved in providing the service. They have very good equipment and very good procedures. They have been improving their turnaround times in terms of providing test results. Yes, I am aware that at the sites, with respect to gathering material or specimens for testing, there have been lineups at certain peak periods. People go to these locations, which are often close to a shopping centre and so on, and concentrate at certain times of the day, but the system seems to be working very effectively in Calgary.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Premier, is the government's underfunding of public labs a result of a deliberate plan to create a favourable market condition for the private sector?

MR. KLEIN: I take exception to that, Mr. Speaker, because we have increased funding by 40 percent over the past four or five years. We're planning to put about another billion dollars in the health care system, and that will take our spending to well over \$5 billion annually, over \$15 million a day. For every dollar that was taken out of the health care system, we put \$3 back in.

Relative to the specific situation as it concerns, I believe, diagnostic services in Calgary, I'll have the hon. minister reply.

MR. JONSON: Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, what the members across the way – and I could expect this type of position being taken by the leader of the NDs. The fact of the matter is that our health care system has benefited from having the private sector involved in laboratory and diagnostic testing for years and years and years. That has been perfectly legal and appropriate according to the Canada Health Act. It exists in other provinces, and this is a very effective part of our health care system. It's a mixture of public and private, and private has been there for a long time, stayed there, complied with the Canada Health Act, and continues to contribute to the health and well-being of Albertans.

MR. SAPERS: Given the population growth in Calgary and the long lineups that Calgarians are experiencing today, will the Minister of Health and Wellness please advise the House what specific steps he has taken that will alleviate those problems in the immediate future?

2:50

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there have been a very few number of times that it has been brought to my attention that there has been a lineup which has caused some concern. However, it was the regional health authority that contacted me indicating that they recognized they had this particular problem on a particular day and advised on what they were doing in terms of rescheduling and opening new capacity.

They do respond to the difficulties they face in terms of these gathering centres, Mr. Speaker, but overall my information is that the waiting times for tests on average are shorter than they used to be when they had the previous system and approach.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Workplace Health and Safety

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary-Fort constituency covers a large industrial area in Calgary. Recently there have been quite a number of industrial accidents, resulting in fatalities, injuries, and property damage. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Could the minister update the Assembly on the statistics of industrial accidents in Alberta?

MR. DUNFORD: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question. It certainly is timely in the sense that next week we will be observing the Day of Mourning for Injured Workers, and this might be an opportunity, then, for me to just stand in my place and to express our sincere sympathies to all of the families that have been affected by workplace injury or incident over the past period of time.

I also have to say, Mr. Speaker, that we don't have all of the statistics for the year we're now in. We have not started out very well, I have to admit to you, but I guess we'll just have to see what develops through the rest of the year.

We do have preliminary numbers, though, in terms of injury in the workplace in Alberta. As a matter of fact, in the year 1999 we did drop to an all-time low of 3.2 lost-time claims per thousand person-years worked, and of course I want to thank all of the previous ministers that were in place at that time for their care during their particular watch. I would indicate that in Alberta we're on a downward trend, and of course maintaining that trend will be a priority of this ministry.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplement is also to the same minister. What is the enforcement program to monitor the safety compliance of companies and to penalize those who fail to protect workers?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that I advise all members of the House that in workplace health and safety we think it is very prudent and very wise to be educators rather than enforcers, and I believe that I've tried to bring that message through to this Assembly on more than one previous occasion. Having said that, of course we have workplace health and safety officers that do investigate every incident and respond to any question or any concern we get regarding workplace health and safety.

When we see a trend start to develop, then we would assess the particular industry or company, and if we feel there's a problem there, then of course we will target that industry or that specific company for more frequent inspections. I must say that we also ask for and direct our workplace health and safety officers to do so-

called cold calls and do unannounced inspections of work sites, and if we have willful noncompliance, we will enforce the act.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is also to the same minister. What is the proactive preventive program, and how is it carried out?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we're extremely proud in Alberta of the partnerships program that we have in health and safety. This works very, very effectively. It's based on a co-operative joint approach, and this involves workers, involves the companies and the industry associations. We strive to achieve practical solutions to work site safety issues. We believe in this program and will continue to support it.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before the Clerk rises and calls Members' Statements, please join with me in acknowledging that today, April 20, is the anniversary of the Member for Calgary-McCall, who was first elected to the Legislative Assembly in a by-election on April 20, 1995.

Following Members' Statements, I'll also be making a statement on the question of privilege that was dealt with yesterday.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week takes place next week, April 23 to April 30, 2000. Organ and tissue donations save lives, restore health, and give hope for new beginnings. Unfortunately, the need for organs and tissues for transplantation is far greater than the available supply. Last year in Alberta 22 people died waiting for donations.

Everyone should consider themselves a potential organ and tissue donor regardless of their age. It is the health of the individual, not the age, which is the deciding factor. One critical reason why waiting lists are so long is that the family does not know the wishes of the potential organ donor. This is critical, because in Alberta it is the family that makes the final decision regarding donations. Less than 50 percent of Canadians are aware of their family members' wishes regarding donation.

The green ribbon you were all given today symbolizes the promise of lives that may be saved or improved through organ and tissue donation. The Canadian Transplant Association, the Kidney Foundation of Canada, and the HOPE program have been promoting public awareness of donation through the distribution of green ribbons across Canada since 1997. We hope all Albertans will wear it proudly, especially during donor awareness week, April 23 to 30, and talk to their families to show their support for the greatest gift of all, the gift of life.

Remember, transplants work. Between 80 and 95 percent of recipients are doing great one year after surgery. Please make a lifesaving decision for the nearly 3,000 Canadians waiting. The five members of the organ and tissue awareness committee I introduced earlier today are transplant recipients, and their quality of life has improved immensely.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Bill 11 Protests

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with pride that I rise today to note that the citizens' democratic spirit is fully

alive once again in Alberta. Where the people of this province once felt they had no voice because the government didn't listen, we now see a citizenry galvanized, energized, and determined to make their voices heard. The recent protest rallies have been truly breathtaking events of democratic, peaceful power.

One significant result of recent protests is that it reaffirms overwhelming opposition to Bill 11. This is a fact that has long been known to us. Poll after poll has shown overwhelming opposition to Bill 11. However, the larger and infinitely more important point, Mr. Speaker, is that people of this province are feeling empowered. They are seizing their inherent rights to free speech, free assembly, and political participation. Albertans have rediscovered and recovered their voice, and they know in their hearts that with persistence, passion, and clarity they will be heard and they will carry the day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

3:00 Anniversary of Taber High School Shooting

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Learning and the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods have already mentioned that almost a year ago a young teen walked into W.R. Myers high school armed with a .22-calibre rifle and opened fire. In the aftermath 17-year-old Jason Lang would die of his wounds, and another student was seriously injured, a tragedy that touched all Albertans.

April 28 marks the first anniversary of this tragedy. W.R. Myers high school held a memorial service on Tuesday, April 18, with a theme of Hope, Remember, and Challenge. W.R. Myers students, teachers, and parents gathered to sing songs, pray, and listen to a speech from Reverend Dale Lang, Jason's father. The service was held 10 days early because the anniversary falls during the school's Easter break. The town of Taber will also be holding a memorial prayer evening service on April 27.

Mr. Speaker, it has been almost a year of healing for the community of Taber, especially those whose lives have been personally affected by this tragedy. I would like to recognize the personal commitment and contributions of certain individuals that were first at the scene and have continued to provide support and counseling for the staff and students of W.R. Myers. Their efforts have reassured the parents and students that their school is a safe place to be. A special thanks to Reverend Dale Lang for his personal contribution and for demonstrating the power of forgiveness.

Thank you.

head: Projected Government Business

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 7(5), for those of us who cannot wait to get back into the Assembly on May 1, I wonder if the Government House Leader would tell us what treats he has in store for us for the week of May 1 to May 4.

Thank you.

MR. HANCOCK: There likely being few in that category, maybe I should just send you a note.

However, on Monday, May 1, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading we would anticipate discussion on bills 13, 14, and 15 to the extent that we don't complete that today; in Committee of the Whole, bills 3, 7, and 11; and as per the Order Paper. Monday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, subject to completion of the earlier agenda, second reading on bills 16, 17, 18, and 19; Committee of the Whole on Bill 11; and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, May 2, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, bills 22 and 23, and, time permitting, Committee of the Whole on Bill 11, and as per the Order Paper. Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, bills 22, 23, and 20; Committee of the Whole on Bill 11; and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, May 3, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of the Whole, bills 10, 13, 14, 15, 11; and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, May 4, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, bills 20 and 23; for third reading, Bill 5; and thereafter as per the Order Paper.

Privilege MLA Access to the Chamber

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, yesterday, April 19, the leader of the third party rose on a purported question of privilege under Standing Order 15. The chair would note that proper notice of this matter was provided in accordance with Standing Order 15(2). The purported question of privilege concerns the ability of the member to access the Legislature Building on the evening of Tuesday, April 18.

At the outset the chair would like to state that there is no doubt that Tuesday night was an out-of-the-ordinary evening for the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta. The chair would also like to emphasize to all members that obstructing a member from attending the House is a very grave matter and in most circumstances would give rise to a prima facie case of privilege. The chair wants to assure all members that this matter is taken very, very seriously.

The events on Tuesday night and the week in general bring to the forefront some of the most fundamental issues in a parliamentary democracy. It is fundamental to any parliament based on the Westminster model that members have unimpeded access to the Assembly. To emphasize this principle, the chair wants to quote from page 176 of Joseph Maingot's text *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, the second edition:

No impediment should be placed on the Member in going about his [or her] parliamentary business, whether in the House, on his [or her] way to the House, or while on his [or her] way home. On the contrary, Members are "to have free and unimpeded access to the Parliament buildings."

The Assembly is the forum where democratically elected members represent the views of their constituents. No function is more sacred. In order for a member to discharge his or her parliamentary duties, that member should not be obstructed or intimidated in speaking or attending.

Several members indicated during yesterday's discussion on the purported question of privilege that they felt intimidated by the demonstrations in the building on Monday night. While there were no violent confrontations that night, it could have deteriorated into a most regrettable situation. The events on Monday night led to the implementation of Tuesday's security measures in order to protect the ability of members to represent the views of their constituents. However, as the Minister of Justice and Attorney General intimated, events unfolded rather quickly, and the security service had to put a program in place quickly, without knowing what circumstances would be encountered.

The hon. leader of the third party was aware of the general approach on Tuesday afternoon at the House leaders' meeting in the Speaker's office. As the chair emphasized yesterday, it is most regrettable that the member was not advised of the specifics of the security measures, but it seems clear that other members were

escorted in or went through the pedway to gain access to the building. The hon. member volunteered that he did not have his security card with him.

The chair would also like to point out to members that it is a well-accepted principle that members of the public, as opposed to members, do not have access to Legislative Assemblies as a right. This principle was established in 1904 in the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Payson versus Hubert*. It is very interesting that a case from Nova Scotia that was decided just before Alberta became a province could have so much relevance to the life of a Legislature in the next millennium. Mr. Justice Davies said this at pages 212 and 213:

The true rule which must guide the Speaker and the offices of the House in the exercise of their duty of preserving order and decorum is, in my judgment, that the public have access to the Legislative Chamber and to the precincts of the House as a matter of privilege only, and under either express or tacit license, which can at any time be withdrawn or revoked when in the interest of order and decorum it is judged to be necessary.

This 1904 case was referred to and cited with approval by the majority of the Supreme Court of Canada in their 1993 decision in *New Brunswick Broadcasting versus Speaker of the Nova Scotia Assembly*, which established that the inherent privileges of Assemblies enjoy constitutional status. One of those privileges is the ability to exclude strangers. Of course – and the chair wants to stress this – the Legislative Assembly of Alberta has attempted to ensure the greatest possible access to the galleries consistent with the security of members, staff, and the preservation of order.

It is most regrettable that the member was delayed in attending the Assembly on Tuesday evening. In the chair's view, a delay in accessing the building does not constitute a denial, especially in this case where the member indicated that he was without his security card and he did not point to anyone who specifically denied him access. Accordingly, there is no *prima facie* question of privilege.

The chair would note that in the Canadian House of Commons on May 25, 1970, Speaker Lamoureux found that a delay in accessing the Parliament buildings did not give rise to a *prima facie* question of privilege.

The chair certainly wants to encourage a practice of giving all members adequate notice of any security measures in a timely fashion so that this matter does not arise again. The Sergeant-at-Arms has worked closely with Justice staff to ensure that members have access to the building while preserving the safety of members and staff, and that procedure and process will be continued.

Thank you.

3:10

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 21 Appropriation Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Treasurer it's my pleasure to move Bill 21 for third reading.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government's appropriation act, of course, is to seek the authority for the spending of all supply for all departments. In this case it will amount to in excess of just \$15 billion. That's the amount net of

lottery fund transfers. Almost all of that is for operating expenses across various government departments.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

You know, for the most part, the Official Opposition doesn't have a lot of question or quibble with individual initiatives of individual departments. We have some initiatives going on in Justice or Children's Services or Human Resources that are quite supportable. The difficulty is that when you're dealing with an appropriation bill such as Bill 21 and you're asked sort of a yes or no question, it's all or nothing, and this is often the position that the Official Opposition find themselves in.

The Premier and other members of Executive Council will often accuse Liberals and others who oppose the government on specific issues of always just criticizing and complaining, of never being supportive. Today, in fact, there was a question that was clearly a setup kind of a question or what probably should have been a ministerial statement about the financial affairs of the province and the credit rating of the province. I think the Premier during that exchange made some comment that they, referring to the Official Opposition, "don't like to hear that because it is good news." Well, I don't know any member of the Official Opposition that doesn't like to hear good news about the province of Alberta. We are proud Albertans, and we are proud of the men and women who make this province work. Those men and women are the ones to be congratulated on the state of the economy.

But you have to understand, Mr. Speaker, that the fact that some Albertans are enjoying prosperity does not mean that all Albertans are enjoying prosperity. We believe that the role of government should be, to the extent possible, to help everybody have some equal opportunity to participate in that prosperity. A government that loses sight of that and simply wants to rest on the laurels of others is a government that I think is clearly out of touch.

When we come to look at the appropriation bill, I have many concerns about the government's priorities when it comes to spending. Those concerns may in and of themselves be enough to tempt me to vote against this appropriation act. Now, if I were to stand up and say, "No, I am in opposition to supporting the appropriation of nearly \$15 billion worth of taxpayers' money for operating expenses or the transfer of nearly a billion dollars of the lottery fund to meet the commitments that have been made through that fund," then I know full well what would happen. Members of the government would stand up and say, "Oh, well, that hon. member is against providing funding for long-term care centres," or "That hon. member is against road construction on this dangerous highway," or some other nonsense like that, Mr. Speaker. Of course, that's what it would be. It would be nonsense.

As a member of this Legislature and as a member of the Official Opposition what I want to do is make sure that the government exercises its responsibility carefully, after due consideration, when it comes to spending plans. While this government brags that its budget, which this appropriation bill reflects, sets new high-water marks when it comes to funding for public education or funding for public health care, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that that's just simply not the case. It's simply not the case. The money put into this budget for education, for example, doesn't even bring us back to where we were before the massive budget cuts began. It doesn't in any way account for inflation. It doesn't account for population growth. It doesn't really help us get to the place where we can have even national averages when it comes to pupil/teacher ratios.

When the Minister of Learning was asked, "Will this guarantee the hiring of X number of new teachers?" he said: well, no; that

would be a local school board decision. Those same local school boards have to weigh the priorities against hiring new instructional staff, new maintenance staff, and putting money into the crumbling infrastructure. There are schools all over the province that really don't provide very safe or sound places of learning. In my own constituency there are schools where I've been taken on tours where the windows are so loose in the frames because the frames are rotting that a good push would pop the windows out, where doors don't close, where furnaces or boilers haven't been properly inspected. So, Mr. Speaker, saying that we've solved the problem in public education because we've put some new money into it is really underestimating the problem.

There are still parents and students all over this province that go door-to-door selling goods and services for the purposes of providing textbook sets for their schools. There are children that go door-to-door around this province soliciting funds so that they can upgrade their schoolrooms to accept computer installations. There are children that literally go begging saying, "Please buy these chocolates or these cookies," so that the schools can have some discretionary funds to provide some services or some programs that are readily available in other jurisdictions. So, Mr. Speaker, when I say that I'm not in favour of this government's spending priorities, those are the kinds of things that I'm thinking of.

When I turn my attention to public health care and I see the extent to which this government is going to sell its private health plans, it just makes me wonder what the government priorities truly are. You know, the Premier has said as early as today in question period – I believe he said it today in question period; you know, these last few days have been a little compressed, but it's certainly been this week – that the government has no private health care plans.

MR. BRODA: It's true.

MR. SAPERS: I hear an hon. member, I think the Member for Redwater, barking out, "It's true". Well, Bill 11 is a private health care plan. It's called the Alberta Health Care Protection Act, but the purpose of the Alberta Health Care Protection Act is to allow the minister of health through the regional health authorities to contract . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, do you want to explain to the government members about appropriation debate, or may I just continue and ignore their interjections?

Speaker's Ruling Decorum Relevance

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First of all, hon. member, if someone does interject when they're not supposed to, then making reference to them and about them only encourages more of the same, and you wouldn't want to do that.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is perfectly right that this is an appropriation bill, and the appropriations do cover health care in all of its ramifications, as it covers everything that government does. To that extent, then, it's part of debate. People may or may not appreciate the comments of the hon. member, but it is right to make them.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying, while the government may protest that they have no private health care plan, the heart of Bill 11 is to provide authority for the expansion of contracts through regional health authorities to private surgical facilities. That's what it's all about.

So, you know, whether we call the bill one name or another name, the purpose of the bill is to enlarge private care, to see the provision of more private care in the province of Alberta.

When I take a look at the appropriation and I hear the government say, "Look at all the new money we're spending in health," then I realize, based on the research that's been brought to my attention, my own research into the issue of the provision of private care, the comparisons in terms of cost-efficiency in the public sector versus cost-efficiency in the private sector, when I look at the experiences in the United States, in the United Kingdom, in Australia, in New Zealand, when I look at all of that and I understand all the additional expenses that come into play when you increase the delivery of surgical services and hospital services through the private sector, when I look at those additional overhead costs, the administrative costs, the legal costs, the monitoring costs, the standard-setting costs, the negotiating costs, all of those other costs and I understand that those services provided in the private sector cost more, that it's not as efficient as doing the same services in the public sector, then I begin to understand why this government is putting more money into health care. They are going to have to send more money to the regional health authorities simply to meet the additional expense, the additional cost, that is going to come along with the provision of care in private clinics.

3:20

So we're not going to see that additional money go into reducing pain and suffering, which was the claim of the government. We're not going to see that additional money going into hiring more frontline staff. We're not going to see that additional money going into shortening waiting lists. We're going to see that additional money going into advertising and legal fees and all of the guaranteed profits to the private providers. That's where the additional money is going to go, Mr. Speaker.

So when I take a look at the government's appropriation bill and I say that I'm not happy with the amount of money that's being spent on health care, I know what the government is going to say. They're going to say: ah, there's another one of those tax-and-spend Liberals who just wants to solve all the world's problems by throwing more money at it. I'm saying that nothing is further from the truth. It's these tax-and-spend Tories that are creating the problem. They know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. They want to throw more money at the private sector, and they want to see taxpayers subsidize that private sector, the very same government that ran an election and said: we're out of the business of being in business. I think they're back in business, Mr. Speaker. They're back in business.

Again I find it difficult. I may very well find somewhere in the budget something that I like. I may find, for example, that I am entirely in favour of the plans to allocate \$500 million to a new foundation to support basic science and engineering research. I'm happy to see that, but then my joy turns to dismay as I move from the estimates of Innovation and Science to the estimates of Learning. I look at the estimates of Learning and I see that there is still this 30 percent legislated cap; tuition fees are still rising through the roof. I see that there is still not adequate funding so that library collections in Alberta's advanced education institutions can come up to par. I see that there is still not enough money to attract scholars at the world-class level throughout all faculties, not just science and engineering. What about the arts and the humanities? I see that there is no commitment to ensure that we are going to be world leaders in cultural pursuits.

I can find something to support in the budget. I can say that this innovation and science foundation is a good thing and something

that will be of benefit to the people of Alberta. But then I think to myself: why can't this government understand the concept of balance? Why can't they get that right? Why can they only do one thing at a time? It's like that old joke about not being able to walk and chew gum at the same time. Why can't they support business, economic prosperity, and the generation of wealth at the same time that they're supporting the continuation of Canadian cultural pursuits, at the same time that they are supporting the voluntary sector, at the same time that they're supporting advanced education and the creation of knowledge for the sake of the creation of knowledge?

Why can't they support the public institutions that Albertans rely on? Why is it that so many of our public institutions are under siege? Why is it that police organizations and the courts and our correctional system and our public education institutions and our hospitals and all of our public institutions are so constrained or still feeling the burdensome effects of those budget constraints even though we had the Premier and the Treasurer trumpet from the hilltops, "The deficit is over. We're past that debate, and we're into bold new plans. We're into reinvesting, and we're into making this a wonderful place"? Well, why is it that those public institutions are still feeling the burden? Why is it that those public institutions are still being told that they have to continue to tighten their belts and there's not enough money to go around, that we don't have enough money to hire enough men and women to get rid of the waiting lines, that we don't have enough money to hire the teachers that we need so that our children have access to the best education? We could afford the best education in this province.

Why is it that we have reports coming out of fatality inquiries that say we don't have enough people doing child welfare and child protection work? Why is it that we don't have enough men and women providing community-based correctional services? Why is it that we don't have enough money in this province to make sure that those nongovernment organizations that work in partnership with government can pay their staff a fair wage when they're doing that work on behalf of the government for the benefit of the people of Alberta?

Mr. Speaker, these questions have not been addressed in the budget or in the appropriation bill. I think the government needs to take its blinkers off and it needs to understand that a real balance sheet, when it comes to governance, is not just about dollars and cents. A real balance sheet is about quality of life, and a real balance sheet includes things that you can't find in an auditor's report.

Mr. Speaker, this government needs to maybe stop thinking so much about GDP measurements and start talking about something that's perhaps called a GPI, a genuine progress indicator, that has been suggested by some. The difference between the two, if I can just use an example – when you only measure things based on dollars and cents, you have a situation where you add up all of the benefits of economic activity, but you don't necessarily subtract any of the difficulties that that economic activity may have resulted from. So the GDP sometimes is not a very good indicator. A GPI, on the other hand, would be able to do a net gain kind of an analysis. For example, last year we had the worst forest fire season, I believe, in Alberta's history. [interjection] I've been corrected. The last two years have been worse and worse.

MRS. SOETAERT: Point of order. That's not proper English.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, that's precisely the thing I was talking about just a few moments ago. Once you start

engaging one another in debate, then it degenerates from there. So that's why the centuries old tradition of speaking to the Speaker or the chair, whichever the appropriate case may be, is the best way to go. If you could adhere to that.

While I'm up on my feet, I might mention to the three or four gigglers in the back that sometimes your voices come very clearly over the PA system, so if you could suppress your levity for the period of time that your colleague is speaking, that would be helpful.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and you're right. Of course, the only reason for those interjections is that I was having fun at the expense of the English language, and I'm sorry.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: We've had two horrible forest fire seasons in Alberta. Extra money has had to go into the suppression of these fires and into reforestation and the cleanup.

Now, if you just look at the traditional way of measuring economic activity and GDP, what happens is that all of that extra money that's spent dealing with forest fires is part of the economic activity. It's part of the measure of the growth of the economic activity in the province, so it's seen as a positive thing.

Now, forest fires aren't a positive thing. Forest fires are a negative thing. They are a bad thing. We don't want to see our standing timber burnt out in that way. We don't want to see the loss of property or the threat. We don't want to see that. So that's a negative.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the balance sheet, it all gets added up. All that economic activity is seen as a positive. All those transactions, all those men and women that were put on the payroll temporarily to go into fire suppression crews, all of the money that was spent on the temporary lodging, and all of the money that was spent on the transportation is all seen as good economic activity. So, you see, simple measures don't really tell the true picture.

3:30

We could say the same thing about how the government does its budget. As long as they see themselves in a simple way saying, "Well, here's how much money we're going to use to address the problem," they think they've done what's required of them. But often what we see when we look through the plans of the government is that when it comes to their spending priorities, there hasn't been any analysis, there hasn't been any rationale, and there hasn't been any connection made to the performance measures and the outcomes. We haven't seen any true measure of value, and we haven't seen any big picture or long-term review of what the spending plans have wrought.

When we consider that, Mr. Speaker, all we have to do, once again, is look at our health care system. Over the last seven years we've seen the continual erosion of that system. It's brought us to the point where we are now, where the government believes the only way to save the system is to further privatize it. I don't think that serves the public good, and that's why I have difficulty in supporting the Appropriation Act. I think it reflects a government that is devoid of long-term vision and hasn't been able to see beyond its rather blinkered view of the world.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to be able to participate in this debate. Bill 21 is sort of like an old

friend that we haven't seen for a bit. It's been around, but it seems like so much has happened since we had a chance to offer commentary at second reading, and it's important to come back and recognize that what drives the provincial government over and above their privatization agenda is the budget.

This is really our last opportunity to reflect before we vote what is a very large sum of money. It's an opportunity to reflect a little bit in terms of what it tells us in terms of the spending priorities of the government of the day. As my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora had said before, it's really a question of reflecting on this in terms of what it tells us about the priorities that the 64 members in the government caucus and the members of the cabinet think are appropriate for the province. We've certainly had a chance through the estimates process, leading up to the appropriation bill, and now in debate on the appropriation bill to identify some of the areas that we think government has missed.

Some specific examples. You might take, for example, the funding for the DARE program, the driving and alcohol education program that's been so successful. We're talking about a very small, a very modest number of dollars in a budget the size of the one for this province. But it's one of those things you look at and you say: there's really no substantial public support for a program that makes a difference in terms of making (a) our roads safer and (b) ensuring that hopefully young people aren't drinking and driving. Sometimes I think it's so easy to get lost in the magnitude. You talk about \$17 billion of spending. Sometimes what we lose sight of are the individual trees in the forest, and it's important that we identify some of those trees and identify some of the areas where we're not meeting the needs that have to be met. Certainly the DARE program is one of those examples I've heard my colleagues speak of so often, and one would expect we'd see some action there.

You know, once again, the budget is not just an academic matter, Mr. Speaker. It's something that affects real Albertans in terms of their real lives. You might take as an example the Jordan Quinney inquiry report. This was a child in care of the province who died while a charge of the province, and there were a host of thoughtful recommendations that came as a result of the fatality inquiry.

You know, the notion of a fatality inquiry, particularly when a child dies who is in the care of the province of Alberta . . .

MRS. SLOAN: He was known to them. He wasn't exactly in care when he died, but he was known to them.

MR. DICKSON: Okay. I don't want to misrepresent the situation. I understand that it's inaccurate to say that the late Jordan Quinney was in the care of the province, but he was certainly a child identified as being a child at risk and receiving monitoring from the child welfare authorities in the province.

When we're voting a budget, sometimes we should sit down and take a look at the specific recommendations that were made by the learned Provincial Court judge who heard that fatality inquiry. What the Provincial Court judge identified, I think it's fair to say, was a lack of independent checking. There were issues of supervision that didn't happen. There were probation officers who perhaps didn't do as much investigation, weren't perhaps as diligent as they should have been. I'm sure those workers were probably committed professionals working as hard as they could. As I know from my encounter with social workers working for government in Calgary, caseloads are huge, stresses are enormous, and supports often aren't there. So what you've got are significant problems. It's all laid out. This is only a nine-page report from the Jordan Quinney fatality inquiry.

You have to ask yourself: are there answers in this budget to

ensure that another child isn't going to die as Jordan Quinney did? Is this budget going to make a material difference in the lives of other children who are identified as being at risk, known to the province? Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that I can say with any degree of confidence that that's the case with this budget.

We might turn to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Goodness knows, it's not because he has not had a tough spring session. I don't want to be accused of piling on in any way, because he's a minister who works very hard. But I look at this budget, and I hear the announcements about the additional amount of money going into health care. Somewhere along the way government seems to have forgotten what I and my colleagues in this Chamber from the city of Calgary know, that since this government got elected in 1993, 116,000 new people have made their home in the city of Calgary. That's a staggering statistic. It is to me, anyway. You can say that this is wonderful because it shows confidence in the province and in the city, and there's certainly an element of that. Doesn't it also follow that that means that there were huge additional needs to be met?

When the Calgary regional health authority yesterday released their local budget for 2000-2001, it's right here on page 9 where they note: we've gone from "1,748 staffed hospital beds [in '94-95]. Today there are 1,818." Well, Mr. Speaker, that's less than 100 new hospital beds. I must say and the Minister of Health and Wellness knows that the number of beds that existed in Calgary before – in fact, this is in dispute, but the point is that even if you take the CRHA's number, you've got significantly less than 100 new hospital beds, but you've got 116,000 new people. So when we hear government in a sort of corporate way beating its chest and saying, you know, "We're just doing such a darned good job in this province," we have to say: where's the recognition of the growth? You can put in significant additional amounts of money, but it doesn't mean a net improvement, a net enhancement of the quality of service for people requiring health care.

In fact, what else is instructive, if you read the Calgary regional health authority report that was released on behalf of the chairman by Dr. Kabir Jivraj yesterday at their 11:30 CRHA advance briefing, they're talking about provisioning a second operating room at the Foothills medical centre, opening one more operating room at the Peter Lougheed centre. You want to ask: why wouldn't we be pursuing that, and why haven't we been pursuing that instead of this nonsense around creating more opportunities for a private hospital? It's those niggling questions that still cause me distress even as we're about to vote this budget.

3:40

As a Calgary MLA one of the things I always look forward to – and I expect my colleagues on the government side also look at it – is a wonderful publication that's produced every year. It's called Health of the Calgary Region. I must say that as critical as I have been about different decisions made by the provincial government, I also, to be fair, have to acknowledge that there has been some excellent work done by the health regions, certainly the Calgary and Capital regions in particular, because I'm most familiar with those, in terms of trying to look at a systemwide analysis. In Calgary's case we've got – what is it? – about 924,000 people in the Calgary health region. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I didn't mean to try and invite debate from government members. I just hope for answers. It's been a positive thing to gather that information, but then my question is trying to relate the statistics in here to the budget we've got in front of us.

You know, you go through here and you look at some of the key indicators, Health Status at a Glance, and you look at some of the

statistics in terms of economic influences. In the Calgary region you can go through and identify issues like husband/wife families below the poverty line, and you see a trend that's increasing from the last census. You see women with children below the poverty line. You see a decrease there, but it's not as big as you want it to be. You look at some of the gaps in income, the households that run out of money, parents with no dental coverage, seniors' households who run out of money. I mean, you can go through the list – and I won't bore you with all the individual numbers – and what it identifies is this big, wealthy, prosperous province that has such an abundance of natural resources and clever people and strong, creative entrepreneurs, and we still have an unacceptable rate of teen suicide. We still have an unacceptable rate of single mothers struggling with a couple of young children. We still have really major problems with access to mental health services.

You know, the minister of health or somebody may get up and say: why is the opposition always with the doom and gloom scenario? I think it's part of our responsibility, because I don't hear the acknowledgment from government that these problems exist, and if we can be accused of taking too dark a view of the province, then surely the government can be accused of continuing to never take off the rose-coloured lenses. The hope would be that if we were to acknowledge some of the things that really work in this province and if the government would reciprocate by not trying to deny the reality that we have a lot of needs that aren't being adequately addressed in this province in April of 2000, then maybe we'd be able to come up with some of the concrete solutions to make things work.

One of the other areas that's of huge concern in downtown Calgary is access to mental health services. When the health plan done by the Calgary region did some consultations, one of the major things they identified as being a problem was mental health. In fact, at page 10 of the CRHA budget plan for 2000-2001 they say, "Mental Health care emerged as one of the single most important issues in the Health Plan consultations."

What we have are huge problems. It's partly a question of money, but it's also partly a question of leadership and clear direction. We have some excellent, excellent people working at the service delivery level. What seems to be lacking is the kind of co-ordinated focus and leadership at the cabinet level, at the highest levels of decision-making. That continues to be a significant concern, Mr. Speaker.

Some of the other things that I'd like to see addressed in terms of how we make this region and how we make the entire province of Alberta a more terrific place in which to live and raise families – we would go through this thing, and we'd be working through the statistics. Maybe what we should really do as a companion to the budget is highlight some of the statistics of children at risk that are done on a provincewide basis.

You know, the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness devoted a good part of the last year to deal with persons with developmental disabilities, and I think the associate minister, to his credit, did a good job of listening to what those groups said and produced a report that identified some of the needs for flexibility in terms of program criteria, in terms of funding support, identified a need to provide agencies that provide support to people with developmental disabilities, that there's a need for that too.

We don't sort of always see enough awareness of those kinds of issues on the part of government, and it always seems to be groups after the fact coming and looking for assistance in key ways and a government that too often isn't prepared to recognize that if you spend a dollar on prevention and early intervention, you may save spending \$6 or \$7 later, when the problem becomes more severe at a later stage in the process.

There are currently between 3,000 and 4,000 people who are homeless on any given night in the city of Calgary, arguably the

most prosperous city in Canada right now, and you've got 3,000 to 4,000 people homeless. There's been an analysis done by the city of Calgary, not by the Liberal opposition but by the city of Calgary. The Member for Calgary-Bow would certainly be able to confirm this. They estimate that there could be 30,000 to 40,000 additional people in Calgary who are one slim paycheque away from the street.

When you go to some of those consultations like they have in Calgary where you see all these agencies working together, what you find is that it's the same problem that comes up time and time again. By having the lowest minimum wage in the country, by having supports for independence rates that don't take into recognition the high-rent areas like the city of Calgary and Grande Prairie and Brooks and places like that, you create enormous problems for people. By not adjusting the income thresholds for seniors with the Alberta seniors' benefit plan, what you're left with are too many seniors that still have to choose between paying the rent and buying medication. You know, that's part of this province too. I'm not sure we see the kind of focus by the provincial government that's going to address that. We're doing a little better in some areas, but when you look at some of those key indicators like homelessness, like suicide rates, like access to mental health, what you see are ongoing problems.

We have a large percentage of people in the Calgary region who do not have sufficient money all the time to buy food. In 1999 the number of seniors reporting that they didn't have sufficient money to buy food in Calgary dropped, which is good news, but it's still significant. In 1999 we had 21 percent of people over 65 years of age who reported they didn't have sufficient money all the time to buy food.

What you've got is a huge gap between income of the highest and lowest quintile in our society in Calgary. It's an important measure of social cohesion, and that's increasing. You know, if you want safe, stable communities, what you have to do is ensure that you don't have this enormous and growing disparity between the wealthiest people in the community and the poorest.

3:50

Just so many concerns, more than I'm going to be able to list in the time available to us, but I did want to make those observations. We ask this time after time, and I know I've had the chance to speak to previous budgets. You know, before we get to the appropriation thing, we go into the consideration of the estimates. As opposition MLAs we go in with long lists of questions, and I'm often told by government members: "Why do you have all those questions? Why do you just have all those things? Why are you trying so hard to point out the things government isn't doing?" Well, the answer, Mr. Speaker, is that nothing would make me happier than to be able to go into one of those committees reviewing the budget for the department that deals with children, Children's Services, or dealing with mental health and not have anything but praise to deliver. I'm still waiting for that opportunity.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 13

Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate March 20: Mr. Hancock]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to be speaking to Bill 13, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2000. Finally in this Legislature this session we have a good-news bill. Certainly, from all aspects this particular bill is an improvement on the system that we had before, and from an environmental perspective we are very happy with the progress on this bill. The expansion of the orphan well program as outlined in the bill is now going to include the abandonment and reclamation of upstream oil and gas related facilities, including pipelines, and it deals with many of the concerns expressed by us as the Official Opposition and other stakeholders back in 1994, when the original amendments to the Oil and Gas Conservation Act were brought forward. We're very happy to see the government incorporate these concerns in legislation, and certainly this is a step forward.

The orphan well program, Mr. Speaker, is a unique example in this province of how a joint industry/government regulator consultation process and partnership can lead to the development of reasonable and prudent criteria for dealing with a particular issue. We could only hope that the government would take the same action on Bill 11 when we come back from our spring break in terms of dealing with that legislation as well.

So with those few words I commend the government on their actions on this particular bill, look forward to them using this model with other legislation, and I will conclude my remarks.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to conclude debate.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments from across the floor. I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a second time]

Bill 14

Alberta Treasury Branches Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate March 20: Mrs. Nelson]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to rise and speak to Bill 14, the Alberta Treasury Branches Amendment Act. We certainly support the changes that are proposed by this bill. It changes the fiscal year of the Alberta Treasury Branches and the establishment of policies and procedures relating to the treatment and disbursement of unclaimed balances. These changes are necessary to bring the operations of the Alberta Treasury Branches in line with the standards and processes established by private-sector financial institutions such as Canadian chartered banks.

We also believe that changing the fiscal year-end of the Alberta Treasury Branches from its current March 31 to October 31 in accordance with the year-end of chartered banks is a positive step that will permit more effective benchmarking of performance against comparable financial institutions in Canada and the U.S.A. in Alberta Treasury Branches' annual report. Currently, Mr. Speaker, the March 31 year-end makes it difficult to compare Alberta Treasury Branches' performance versus other comparable financial institutions which operate on an October 31 year-end.

Currently the ATB uses the following performance measures to

benchmark itself against comparable financial institutions: operating revenue growth, net interest margin, net interest spread on average earning assets, other income to operating revenue, return on assets, operating expense growth, net impaired loans to total growth loans, credit losses to total loans, loan growth, deposit growth, and asset growth. We are hopeful that with the change in the fiscal year-end, the ATB will expand its performance benchmarking versus other comparable financial institutions to include such key performance indicators of profitability, liquidity, credit quality, and productivity used by private-sector financial institutions such as average assets as a percentage of average equity, operating profit as a percentage of average total equity, operating expenses as a percentage of average total assets, loan loss provisions as a percentage of operating profit, gross impaired loans as a percentage of total equity, and operating expenses as a percentage of operating revenues.

Establishing policies and procedures relating to the treatment and disposition of unclaimed balances is long overdue. In fact, it was mentioned as a concern of ATB management as far back as the Flynn report in December 1994.

With those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly urge all members to support Bill 14 at second reading. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to adjourn debate on Bill 14.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 15

Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate March 20: Mr. Hancock]

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to provide some comments with respect to Bill 15 at second reading. The Official Opposition is supporting the amendments that are being made to remove section 42 from the Business Corporations Act because it makes good business sense. The government has received input from lawyers, accountants, from businesses who have been impacted by this section of the act, and these parties have indicated that it has been restrictive and cumbersome and unworkable for them as businesses to comply with the section's requirements.

It's important to stress that the changes proposed still offer protection to parties that are involved. It certainly continues to provide and protect shareholder and creditor protection. So we are pleased this afternoon to support this amendment.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to adjourn debate on Bill 15.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:00

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Government House Leader.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very long week, and there's an Easter weekend coming up when members want to be with families and friends. Therefore pursuant to Government Motion 7, agreed to by the Assembly on March 7, I move that the Assembly stand adjourned until Monday, May 1, at 1:30 p.m.

[Pursuant to Government Motion 7 the Assembly adjourned at 4:02 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 1, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/01

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Welcome back.

I would remind members to remain standing after the prayer for the singing of our national anthem. I would also ask members to remain standing in order that we may pay tribute to a former colleague who passed away recently and to also commemorate the National Day of Mourning.

Let us pray. As we begin a new week, help us, O Almighty, to also begin with the principle of You as the giver of all things. Amen.

I would now like to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem.

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Alois (Al) Paul Hiebert

June 4, 1938, to April 23, 2000

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, last week my office received notice of the passing of a former member, Mr. Al Hiebert, who passed away on April 23, 2000, at the age of 61 in Edmonton, Alberta. Mr. Hiebert was first elected in the election held March 14, 1979, and served until May 8, 1986. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar for the Progressive Conservative Party.

During his years in the Legislature Mr. Hiebert served on the select standing committees on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; Private Bills; Public Affairs; Public Accounts; Legislative Offices; and Law and Regulations. He also served on the following special committees: the Auditor General Search, the Chief Electoral Officer Search, and the Ombudsman Search.

Mr. Hiebert leaves his wife, Lorraine, and children, JoAnne, Arlene, Lois, and Douglas. With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of his family who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember Al Hiebert as you may have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

National Day of Mourning

THE SPEAKER: I would now ask members to observe a moment of silence to commemorate the National Day of Mourning, April 28, 2000, a solemn day when Canadians remember and recognize those workers who were killed or have been injured on the job.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Senator the

Honourable Maxine Henry-Wilson, the Minister of Information for Jamaica. Accompanying her is the high commissioner for Jamaica, His Excellency Raymond Wolfe, and Ms Carolyn Goulbourne-Warren, information attache, Jamaican consulate general's office.

Jamaica is a Caribbean island with a very rich culture and a long history. Many Albertans enjoy traveling to Jamaica and relaxing on its beautiful, white sandy beaches, particularly if there is a cold Alberta winter. We appreciate the warm hospitality Jamaicans always have shown to visitors from Alberta, and we're glad to have the opportunity to return their hospitality.

I'm pleased our honoured guests have come to visit us, and I wish them a productive and enjoyable stay while they are visiting us in Alberta. I'd ask them now to rise and receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to submit names of 218 Albertans from different parts of the province – Evansburg, St. Albert, Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, Camrose, and Spruce Grove – urging the government “to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care” in the province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to present a petition to the Assembly. This petition is signed by 211 Calgarians, and it is urging “the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 221 people from Calmar, Devon, Seba Beach, Pickardville, St. Albert, Morinville, Spruce Grove, Ardrossan, Beaumont, and Edmonton, and they are urging “the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted this afternoon to present a petition signed by 213 Calgarians in the constituencies of Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-North West, Calgary-West, Calgary-North, and I think even a couple from Calgary-Buffalo. They're petitioning this Assembly to urge “the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to rise and present a petition to the Legislature from 3,255 Albertans from Lethbridge, Coaldale, Raymond, Picture Butte, Taber, Blairmore, Calgary, Pincher Creek, Claresholm, Fort Macleod, Magrath, and Medicine Hat. These petitioners are asking the

Legislative Assembly to urge the government to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people in after-hour workplaces.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to table today. The first petition is signed by 1,038 Albertans opposed to Bill 11 from Grande Prairie, Valleyview, DeBolt, Sunset House, Whitecourt, Cayley, Medicine Hat, Sherwood Park, Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, Nisku, Gibbons, Stony Plain, Cold Lake, Carvel, Redwater, Jasper, Duffield, Darwell, Alberta Beach, Wanham, Calgary, Redcliff, Rimbey, Bluffton, Camrose, and Morinville.

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by 56 Albertans from Edmonton, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, Grande Cache, and Calgary, and the petitioners are asking the Assembly to urge "the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, a little patience, please. We have quite a list today.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition with respect to support for public health care that I introduced in the last week of session be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, wish the petition that I presented on the 20th of April signed by 276 Albertans requesting stopping the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be now read.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Legislative Assembly on Thursday, April 20 from 218 Albertans requesting stopping the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on Thursday, April 20 signed by 235 Albertans opposing private health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd request that the petition I presented on April 20 with regards to private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would ask that the petition I presented regarding the privatization of health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request the petition I presented signed by 219 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented signed by 276 Albertans in support of public health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask if the two petitions I had presented on April 20 with respect to concern about private health care expansion might be now read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise as well and seek your indulgence that a petition I tabled on April 20 with respect to citizens' opposition to the privatization of health care in Alberta now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 20 I presented a petition signed by 274 Albertans requesting that this government stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care. I would request that that now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition standing in my name and tabled on April 20, 2000, with respect to the government undermining public health care and promoting private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request that the petition I submitted last week standing on the Order Paper under my name concerning public health care protection please now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also request that the petition I presented from 119 Albertans who know that they are right when they ask the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining the public health care system now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request, too,

that the petition I filed last from a number of citizens opposing private health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I tabled on April 20 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to request that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name concerning the protection of workers in after-hours employment now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of the following motion.

Be it resolved that further consideration of any or all of the resolutions, clauses, sections, or titles of Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, shall when called be the first business of the committee and should not be further postponed.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is regarding employment standards information for employers and employees in the restaurant and hospitality industry.

Secondly are the answers to the questions that came up in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have six tablings. The first one is from the Alberta Building Trades Council, which represents 22 locals of various unions around the province. This letter is in favour of Bill 23 and the amendments to the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act.

The next five are from Construction Labour Relations, An Alberta Association, the Merit Contractors Association, the Alberta Construction Association, the Motor Dealers' Association of Alberta, and the Construction Owners Association of Alberta, all in favour of Bill 23.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. They are from Allison Burstin of Canmore, Barbara Hardt from Calgary, and Kristian Kiml from Calgary. They are all in opposition to the Genesis proposal for Spray Valley, another issue that this government would like to force closure on.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first item I'd like to table is one of only five letters that I have received in favour of Bill 11. This is written by a constituent, Kyle Franz . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: One, eh? Okay.

MS BLAKEMAN: Out of five.

The second is the appropriate number of copies of a new publication called *The Thorn*. I believe this is their premiere issue, so I encourage everyone to have a look at this.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, and I have the appropriate number of copies of each. The first one is a letter from four residents of Edmonton-Manning who are psychiatric nurses concerned with Bill 11.

1:50

The second one, Mr. Speaker, is about a great evening I went to last Thursday, April 27. It was called the 2000 Rotary integrity awards to Edmonton and area citizens for their contributions to business and community. This was made up of 12 clubs in the Edmonton area, eight from Edmonton and four from the outside areas.

The third one, Mr. Speaker, was a weekend full of events in northeast Edmonton, and it's called Together 2000, a reunion of people who attended north Edmonton public and St. Francis Catholic schools prior to 1950. There were 500 in attendance, and they came from all over the world. So the roots of north Edmonton have branched out from there.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is a letter from Robert Blakely, the president of the Alberta Building Trades Council, endorsing Bill 23.

The second tabling I have this afternoon is from Joanne Ramondt. She is a striking *Calgary Herald* employee, and she is urging the government to resolve this long and divisive labour dispute.

Thank you.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, facts about health care are very important, and I'd like to table two reports today that will contribute to the factual information relative to our health care system in Alberta. The first is a report titled Health Care Facts, primarily facts which come from Alberta Health and Wellness, including a breakdown of CEO and executive salaries by regional health authorities in Alberta.

The second report is the first annual report of the Canadian

Institute for Health Information. This report contains a great deal of information that would be relevant for the government to consider in the context of Bill 11, and I regret to say that they most likely will not have a chance to read this substantive report before closure is invoked tomorrow evening.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a two-page document. The documents are reprints of web pages from voteAlberta.org, the first dated the 24th of April, 2000, the second from the 30th of April. What it shows is that support for Bill 11 from those people who have voted at this web site has decreased from 27 percent to 23 percent, so 76 percent of the more than 2,700 Albertans who have voted in this format are firmly against Bill 11.

MRS. SLOAN: That's reason to bring in closure.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, did you have another tabling?

MRS. SLOAN: Regretfully, Mr. Speaker, I don't.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is a speech given by Dr. Dennis Modry and submitted to the Fraser Institute. It's entitled Medicare is Killing Us: Patient Choice in a Re-engineered Health Care System. I think it's the basis for this government's Bill 11.

The second is a statement by the Interfaith Coalition on Justice in the Workplace, where there are nine recommendations under the heading: Is Bill 11 Good for Albertans?

The third is the Angus Reid poll on April 20, 2000, which indicates that 59 percent of Albertans are against the new health care scheme.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is from Kenman Gan, which is a letter expressing concern about osteoporosis.

The second is a number of letters all in opposition to Bill 11, and I'll just read out the names to expedite things: Steve Virag, Len Douziech, James Fleckenstein, M. Boisvert, Barb Baker, Edwin Parks, Linda Cheu, Dorothea Thielmann, Noel Somerville, Joseph Buijs, Brent Jeffery, Keith Leal, and one jointly signed by James Edwards and Iqbal Lakhani, all in opposition.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased – well, maybe “pleased” is the wrong word in light of the closure motion by the Government House Leader. Let me table the text of a eulogy for the burial of Bill 11 which was given this weekend in Ponoka on Friday, April 28 at 10:30.

Secondly, I'd like to table a list of contributions to the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta with some interests in private health care, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got five tablings. The first four are letters or statements signed by Albertans opposed to Bill 11.

The first one is from Carol and Murray Roy from Camrose expressing opposition to Bill 11.

The second one is from Mr. Con Duemler from Edmonton opposing Bill 11.

Then there are two statements; the first one signed by 96 Albertans who are opposed to Bill 11 from Andrew, Lamont, and Chipman, and another similar statement signed by 13 Albertans from Clyde, Rochester, and Westlock. They're all opposed to Bill 11.

The last one, Mr. Speaker, is a document that I'd like to table today. This is the Calgary regional health authority personal conflict of interest guidelines for medical officers. This is dated January 2000.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Alberta Dental Hygienists' Association for the year ended October 31, 1999.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 100 bright, enthusiastic students from the Morinville high school. Accompanying them are four adults: teachers Rosie Kruhlak, Debbie Wojtkiw, Michelle Boucher and parent helper Bonnie Brochu. They are seated in both the members' and public galleries. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Minister of Economic Development and MLA for Calgary-Shaw I wish to introduce to you and through you Miss Victoria Conway. Victoria is a grade 6 student from his constituency and is here to learn about the government of Alberta. She is seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly 25 bright students from St. Anne Catholic elementary school, which is located in Edmonton-Glengarry. They are accompanied today by Mr. Shawn Carson, their teacher. They are seated in the public gallery, and with your permission I would ask that they now stand and receive the warm, traditional welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is a member of the Edmonton-Glengarry constituency. His name is Jim Ragsdale. Jim is sitting in the members' gallery, and it gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly Jimmy Ragsdale. Jim, I'd ask that you now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Closure on Bill 11

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's obvious that the Premier has lost his patience with democracy, and rather than allowing Bill 11 to have full and open debate in this Assembly, we have now been given the introduction of closure. Have the Premier's special interest groups been exerting so much pressure that he has listened to the very few and has invoked closure in order to satisfy them?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, notice was given to bring about closure because there has to be some finality. This gives everyone an opportunity to vote. Closure simply means that we're bringing about a process to have a vote on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are on record 33 times saying the bill cannot be amended to make it acceptable to them. They are on record 14 times saying nothing will stop the complete filibuster of Bill 11. So just as a filibuster is a tool of the Legislature, closure is a tool of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, it seems that they're very anxious to speak on this bill. In one breath they say that they want to filibuster it, that nothing will be acceptable in terms of amendments, yet the Member for Edmonton-Centre has spoken on this bill five times, the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry two times, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie five times, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo 10 times, the Member for Edmonton-Manning four times, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark eight times.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: I think we'll move on, with brevity being the key.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, thousands of Albertans are on record as saying: pull this bill. So why is it that the Premier thinks the protection of public health care in this province doesn't need more debate? Could he share his perspective on that with Albertans, please?

MR. KLEIN: I'd be very happy to, Mr. Speaker, because the bill in its entirety is designed to protect the public health care system as we know it today and to fulfill our commitment to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. If the Liberals are opposed to those principles, let them stand up and say so now.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has refused to meet with the citizens who come to the Legislature. He's now closed off debate. Why doesn't he just call an election and pull his blasted bill? Chicken. Call an election.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we're only in the third year of our mandate. There will be an election called sooner or later, and I'm sure overall, when Albertans have an opportunity to consider the bill in question in the context of our six-point health care plan, when they put it together with the fantastic financial record that this province has, when they look at the economy and they look at this province being the envy of all provinces in the country, you know what? They're going to give us another mandate. Just watch and see.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has not presented a shred of evidence in this Legislature to show that his private health care policy will not increase costs and waiting lists. In fact, in setting the rules that private companies can play by, this government

demonstrates its intent to sell off our public health care assets. Since 1993 private health care services, management, and an insurance company have poured over \$300,000 into the Alberta Progressive Conservative Association coffers and those of individual candidates. My questions are to the Premier. Are substantial financial contributions to the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta the only way the Premier will listen to the people of this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, is this hon. Leader of the Official Opposition saying that no doctors, that no operators of private doctors' offices or private clinics have donated to the Liberal party? If she is saying that, I don't think she is telling the truth.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, how much does the average Albertan have to contribute to the Premier's party before he will start listening to their concerns about health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this leader of the Liberal opposition knows about donations to Tory candidacy both during the elections and leadership campaigns because she was part of it and a very, very substantial recipient of many donations to her own constituency and her party when she was a Tory.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why will the Premier meet with and listen to large political donors, yet when ordinary citizens gather, the Premier simply turns a cold shoulder?

MR. KLEIN: No, I don't, Mr. Speaker. I just don't do protests, especially Liberal-organized protests.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Bill 11 Publicity

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been 25 days since the Premier promised to release the true costs of his massive taxpayer-funded propaganda campaign. Now the ads that have been unleashed show another barrage of television and radio spots for its private health care proposal propaganda complete with blatant deceptions on issues such as similarity with other provinces' legislation and reducing waiting lists. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier promise to release all of the invoices, all of the receipts, all of the contracts today, as he promised, so that Albertans can find out how much of their money has been spent on propaganda for the government's private health care policy?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, not one single cent has been spent on promoting a private health care policy. Not one single cent.

MRS. MacBETH: So in the absence of a response, as the Premier promised, will he just confirm this estimate prepared by the Official Opposition, Mr. Speaker, which shows that the real costs of the taxpayer-funded propaganda campaign are now nearly \$2.7 million and counting?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there hasn't been a single cent spent on a propaganda campaign. Yes, money has been spent on a campaign to get the truth out.

The shameful waste of taxpayer money is contained in this document that appeared on the web site where it says, "Join the fight

for Alberta's Public Health Care. Understanding Bill 11 The Private Hospital Act." Mr. Speaker, that is fraudulent; that is wrong. There never has been and never will be before this Legislative Assembly a bill called the private hospital act, and for the Liberals to go out and to tell the public, using taxpayers' dollars, that there is a bill in this Legislature called the private hospital act is untruthful. It's a flagrant misrepresentation of the facts, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why did this government spend so much money over the past weekend with its new message on its campaign when its whole intention was to issue a closure motion today?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, a reasonable amount of money has to be spent to get the truth out. The truth, as I say, is in the bill, which purports to become law. There is nothing that is more truthful than the law. But in light of the massive misinformation campaign being conducted by the Liberals, the NDs, and all of the unions combined – I would suggest that they have spent millions and millions of dollars to spread misinformation to put out fraudulent material – I think that Alberta taxpayers deserve to know the truth, and a reasonable amount of money to get the truth out there is not an unreasonable expenditure.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Closure on Bill 11

(continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past six months the Conservative government has defied the will of Albertans and chosen instead to placate a few private business interests like those at HRG. As a final insult to Albertans the government has introduced closure to the most important, crucial, and hated piece of legislation in Alberta's history. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the government so afraid of public opposition that it needs to choke off debate in this ruthless manner?

2:10

MR. KLEIN: First of all, it's not ruthless. It's a tool of the Legislature, Mr. Speaker.

As I've indicated before – and I'm sure the ND opposition is of the same bent, the same mind as the Liberal opposition in that they would want to filibuster this bill – at the rate we're going now, our researchers estimate that it would take until December of the year 2003 to debate this bill. Seven times the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has spoken on this bill. That's in addition to the countless hours he has spent in question period questioning myself and the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and other ministers on this particular matter. When the opposition members make it quite clear that they are going to filibuster this and filibuster this, there has to be a point where the vote is called. That's democracy.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised that this powerful Premier is afraid of this one single member prolonging the debate beyond his limits of tolerance.

My second question to him: will the Premier have the courage to join me outside the Legislature this evening and justify his decision to suspend democracy in Alberta, and if not, why not?

MR. KLEIN: To stand in front of a thousand committed NDs and a spattering of Liberals – Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, I recognize

that politics from time to time is a blood sport, but I'm not a masochist. No.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the Premier doesn't have the courage to call a general election, will he at least call a by-election in Edmonton-Highlands before proceeding with this closure motion, and if not, why not?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, an election will be called in due course. We have a mandate of a maximum of five years. Like the Liberals and the NDs we're in the process now of nominating candidates. There will be an election in the fullness of time.

You know, once Bill 11 is through, people will see that this is not the end of the world, that this has done something very significant to enhance and protect public health care as we know it today. Mr. Speaker, politically speaking, I think they don't want to see that happen. They don't want to see that happen. That's why they want to prolong the debate. That's why they want to keep us in the House, so they can continue with their campaign of malicious misinformation and confuse the Alberta public. They don't want to see this bill passed, and they don't want to see Albertans saying: "What was all the fuss about? This is working. This hasn't destroyed public health care. This has gone the extra step to protect health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Bragg Creek Water Quality

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Environment. The University of Calgary has released the results of a study that indicates that 39 percent of drinking water wells in the hamlet of Bragg Creek are contaminated. Would the minister please tell us whether his department concurs with these findings?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By way of background the study that was conducted was a joint project between students from the University of Calgary as well as the regional health authority, and in my review of it we can say that the students did a very comprehensive study. As the hon. member indicated, 39 percent of the water wells in the hamlet of Bragg Creek were found to be affected by contaminants from private sewage systems used in the hamlet. I can confirm that this number is consistent with earlier water well surveys conducted by the Department of Environment.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you. My second question is also to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister tell us how private sewage disposal systems in Bragg Creek are impacting water quality in the Elbow River?

MR. MAR: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to comment and emphasize that the water quality in the river is still good. My department has been studying water quality trends in the Elbow River for some time. We are, however, seeing a trend in increasing levels of nutrients, bacteria, and sediments, and while these levels are not sufficient to cause alarm, I am concerned about the possible long-term environmental effects associated with shallow groundwater contamination in the hamlet of Bragg Creek.

Mr. Speaker, this has been a long-standing issue with the residents

in the hamlet of Bragg Creek, and I understand the concerns that the residents have with respect to the cost of a wastewater pipeline and the resulting impacts on the hamlet. The Department of Environment is committed to working with the residents in the hamlet as well as with the regional health authority, the MD of Rocky View, and groups such as the Bow River basin council to protect water quality not only in the Elbow River but also in the groundwater. Currently, the council is working with the community and stakeholders to develop recommendations about the flow and water quality in the Elbow River.

MRS. TARCHUK: My final question is also to the same minister. As stated, constituents are concerned about the financial and population growth impacts of a wastewater pipeline to Calgary. Can the minister tell us more about what solutions are available for the hamlet of Bragg Creek?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to emphasize that there is not one simple solution to this particular problem. There are a number of options available, including individual pump-out tanks to a wastewater pipeline to the city of Calgary. My department, in addressing this particular issue, has concluded that a wastewater pipeline to Calgary is a practical long-term solution for the hamlet of Bragg Creek and will also provide benefits to the broader region. However, it is important that we work together to find a solution that Bragg Creek residents will ultimately be comfortable with, so the department is dedicated to working, as I indicated, with stakeholders in the area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Closure on Bill 11 (continued)

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hundreds of thousands of Albertans from across this province are speaking out against this government's private health care policy. Rallies, petitions, e-mails, faxes, letters, and phone calls: Albertans are just saying, "No dismantling of public health care." The Premier has one last chance to admit that closure on Bill 11 is a mistake. Will he undertake to instruct his House Leader not to move closure?

MR. KLEIN: Of course not. Notice of closure has already been given. No, I'm not going to instruct it, Mr. Speaker.

The Liberals and the NDs are the only ones talking about a private health care policy. This government is talking about protecting health care. [Disturbance in the gallery]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

MR. KLEIN: Protecting health care: that's what we're talking about. That is the name of the bill before us. The only people talking about private health care are the Liberals. As a matter of fact, the leader of the Liberal opposition says that if private health care can find a place, then why not let it happen? She is widely quoted as saying that. So the Liberals and the NDs are the only ones talking about private health care. The only ones.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the Premier: what is the test to move closure on health care? How many hours of debate, how many people at a rally does it take, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've already indicated that thus far the opposition members have risen to speak to this bill 84 separate times. There has been a total of 2,071 minutes, or 34.52 hours, of total debate on this bill, plus another 12.5 hours of question period time on Bill 11. That's 47 hours combined. That is the most that any bill in the history of this Legislature has ever been debated.

2:20

Now, I said to the Liberal opposition: if you don't filibuster, we won't use closure. Mr. Speaker, they are on record 14 times as saying that nothing will stop the complete filibuster of Bill 11. Fourteen times they have stated that they will filibuster this bill. I have promised that there would be no closure if there was no filibuster. They have not promised that there would be no filibuster. Therefore, I am now promising that there will be closure.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Well, Mr. Speaker, over 50 government MLAs have not spoken to this bill.

Will the Premier stop hiding from the truth and agree to show up this evening and face Albertans in the people's Legislature to discuss health in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Absolutely. I go many places and attend many functions and talk about Bill 11. No, I'm not going to go to Liberal-orchestrated protest meetings or ND-orchestrated protest meetings or protest meetings organized and orchestrated by the Canadian Union of Public Employees or the Friends of Medicare backed by the Alberta Federation of Labour or the United Nurses Association or the Alberta Teachers' Association. No. Of course not.

Mr. Speaker, there were six people associated with my constituency who attended the Friends of Medicare rally in Calgary. Just to give you an indication as to how these people were treated, they had a table set aside, and it said: this is for Tory supporters; it's vacant because we can't guarantee their safety. At the back of the room were the writings of Trotsky and Lenin and Che Guevara. One of our people said: what has this got to do with Bill 11? The person behind the desk replied: it has nothing to do with Bill 11; this is about protecting the rights of workers. They were snapping pictures of our people. They announced who they were and where they could be located on the bullhorn. Finally, fearful for their safety, they left the rally. That's what those rallies are all about, and that's why I don't do those kinds of protests, never will.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

School Construction and Renovation

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently met with the ABC charter school as well as the Waldorf school in my constituency. Both of these schools have space requirements which need to be addressed. The Calgary board of education is proceeding with the learning environment action plan and met recently with Calgary caucus to outline their plans. The master plan for CFB Calgary is also considering community needs in their discussions. Clearly there is a need to communicate between our schools and the community to respond to the appropriate allocation of resources to meet the needs of students. To the Minister of Infrastructure: how

will the learning environment action plan, or LEAP, as it's called, be considered or implemented by government?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary board of education initiated the LEAP project, which is the learning environment action plan. From that has come a request for the disposition of seven schools. The action committee, the task force, had members from of the Calgary board of education, the Calgary Catholic school board, Alberta Infrastructure, Alberta Learning, and the city of Calgary. There were seven public schools and two separate schools that were identified for disposal.

We will be reviewing each of the nine individually and recommending alternate and best uses or disposition on those schools that have come forward. As of today no recommendations have been made as yet, but we are in the process of making those recommendations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will private or charter schools be given equal consideration if any excess space is identified by the Calgary board of education?

MR. STELMACH: The task group, Mr. Speaker, will certainly look at the best use for each of those facilities, and the needs of the private and charter schools will definitely be considered.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the minister considering the growth of the number of students in these schools in facility planning in the future?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, there is a process in place for reviewing enrollment growth. We also have criteria put in place that the School Buildings Board follows quite closely. The School Buildings Board, of course, is the independent body that reviews all of the applications and facility funding decisions. At the same time, we now also have a committee comprised of members of the Alberta School Boards Association, Alberta Learning, and Alberta Infrastructure looking at the whole issue of utilization rates and how those fit into future funding decisions as well. All of that information will come to this body sometime in June.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Wainwright.

Cancer Treatment

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mismanagement of health care by this government continues. Timely treatment for cancer is unavailable in Edmonton because of a severe shortage of radiation therapists. Fourteen months ago the final report of Alberta Health entitled Current and Emerging Health Workforce Issues in Alberta identified a shortage of radiation therapists at the Alberta Cancer Board. This now has resulted in unacceptable waiting lists for radiation therapy, which are so long that the Cross Cancer Institute no longer meets national treatment guidelines for breast or prostate cancer patients. My questions are to the Premier. Why was nothing done to address this shortage when waiting lists were identified because there was a shortage of staff?

MR. KLEIN: These questions are specific to the delivery of health care. I'm going to have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness answer these and subsequent questions.

Thank you.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health and Wellness has worked with professions and occupations in the health workforce in terms of establishing an overall health resource plan for the province in terms of professionals and workers. We have added through the good offices of the Department of Learning a number of training positions in our postsecondary institutions across the province. We have also announced additional internships for physicians. We have anticipated that there will be a demand for health care workers.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Cancer Board is taking every possible measure to retain and to attract and to move the technician resources that there are in this province and use them effectively. I would draw to the attention of the opposition members of the House generally that this is a situation that has been faced before and more dramatically by other provinces in Canada. It is my understanding that there are provinces in eastern Canada that have been sending patients out of Canada to receive treatment in the United States. We are still optimistic that we can cope with the situation here.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the rest of my questions, then, will be directed to the minister of health. Given that last month recent graduates in radiation therapy left the province, why did this government wait so long to renegotiate wage increases in an effort to retain and recruit these necessary and vital health professions?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we have through the Alberta Cancer Board been at the table. We have negotiated, I think, within a very reasonable period of time additional compensation for the radiation technicians. That has been part of our overall effort in this particular area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question, also to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness: given that 10 radiation therapists are urgently needed in this city alone, can the minister tell this House how many radiation therapists are currently being trained at the Cross Cancer Institute?

Thank you.

2:30

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite aware, as I've indicated, that we have a shortage. It is a shortage nationwide.

In terms of the Cancer Board, which is of course very, very concerned and working hard to meet this particular challenge and rectify the situation, they have negotiated I think fairly and reasonably with the technicians with respect to remuneration. I think that will help. They are looking, as I've said, at the best deployment of the staff that's available to them, and as I've indicated, this is not unique to Alberta although we are certainly very, very concerned about the situation here as it applies to people in Alberta. [Dr. Oberg rose]

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry. We're well beyond my definition of brevity.

The hon. Member for Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Grain Transportation

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Last week the federal Liberals' Canadian Transportation Agency announced another increase of 4.5 percent in freight rates charged directly to the farmers. This is in addition to an average increase of more than \$17 per tonne all absorbed by the Alberta farmers since the elimination of the Crow rate. The Premier has written the Prime Minister demanding quick action on transportation reform, and I know that the minister of agriculture has lobbied Ottawa in favour of implementing the Kroeger/Estey reports. To the minister: what does last week's announcement mean to Alberta farmers?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, this is very concerning to us and to all Alberta farmers. The fact is that this increase in freight rates will come directly out of the farmer's pocket, and we estimate that it'll probably mean between \$11 million and \$12 million direct increased cost to the Alberta farmer.

Now, that's the direct cost. There's another cost here that we have to also recognize, and that is the fact that the price on the domestic market is somewhat related to the export market. So when you create a lower price for the farmer at his gate by this increased cost of transportation, you are also going to be lowering the gate price for the domestic market.

In direct costs it looks like a farm of about a thousand acres of wheat will have an increased cost of \$1,400 to \$1,600. So it's very significant when you consider that this is increased cost. We've got the cost of fuel going up; fertilizer is going up; land prices are going up. It's not a pretty picture.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you. Having not heard a decision out of Ottawa on the issue of transportation reform, how does the minister plan to pressure Ottawa to ensure that maximum efficiencies will be sought rather than the full burden of the costs being continually passed on to the farmer?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, last spring the Premier and I met with a number of organizations, and these organizations have representation from right across the prairie provinces. All of them were urging that we push ahead with the reforms that we find in the Estey/Kroeger reports. I went down to Ottawa and met with eight senior ministers in the federal government along with representation from the Prime Minister's office, from the Privy Council. We were urging that they move forward with the reforms that are suggested in the Estey and then the Kroeger implementation reports. We're worried that they may just come with part of it.

One of the examples, of course, would be a cap on the rail. While that would help and would be a good thing particularly in light of this most recent increase, the difficulty is that that's only one component of a more major problem that we have, and until the government starts to listen to these groups from across the prairie provinces as opposed to the people on the board of the Canadian Wheat Board, we are going to have a problem. So we are going to continue to lobby. We'll be on the phone, we'll be writing letters, and we will be speaking to ministers of the federal cabinet.

MR. FISCHER: Is this indecisiveness on grain transportation reform a systematic example of Ottawa's record of contempt in dealing with the issue facing Alberta farmers?

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, if a question ever invited an opinion, that certainly did. So let's stick to the facts and briefly.

MR. LUND: I will stick to the facts. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The facts speak for themselves. The fact is that the Alberta farmer was left out of the most recent announcement for Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The fact is that the Alberta farmer has had a vote on dual marketing while the federal government has chosen to ignore it. There have been a number of other cases where in fact the Alberta farmer has spoken loud and clear that they want reforms, but these reforms have not been forthcoming. Mind you, they're dealing with Liberals.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Highway.

Mental Health Services

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 29, 1999, the Minister of Health and Wellness stated in this House, "Since 1993-94 spending has increased 100 percent or it's doubled as far as community mental health services are concerned." In contrast to that claim the now disbanded Provincial Health Council of Alberta commissioned a national health practice report by Deloitte & Touche in 1997, which found that between 1992 and '96 mental health expenditures were reduced by 4 percent for community services and mental health was reduced by 9 percent. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister provide proof of his claim that spending to deal with the mental health crisis has increased by 100 percent when in fact funding for community programs appears to have decreased?

MR. JONSON: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important for the hon. member to recognize that this is the year 2000, and he is quoting from a period of time between 1993 and 1996, as I understand it. The questions that he is referring to me were raised with me last fall, in 1999, and I'm quite prepared to provide him the statistical information he's seeking.

MR. GIBBONS: Will the minister of health commit funding to a comprehensive system of community-based services in line with nationally endorsed best practices in mental health reform?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the statistic that I was referring to before – that is, a doubling of the overall financial effort in terms of community programs – is the case. We have a number of initiatives under way. Most recently we announced – and this would be above the money that I mentioned earlier – a program for anorexia/bulimia treatment, something very much needed. I think we are leading in many ways in that particular area now in the country. We have been active participants in the children's mental health initiative through Alberta Learning. I could go on with quite a long list of initiatives that are under way in the area of a community-based system of support for those people in the mental health system.

MR. GIBBONS: Will the minister answer as to how Alberta's psychiatric hospitals, in particular the Ponoka hospital, fit within the contemporary system of mental health care delivery in this province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is recognized that there is a necessity to have a hospital type of facility for the care of the mentally ill.

One of the things, of course, that has happened and that the system is not given a great deal of credit for is that the length of stay in these hospitals is reduced. Certainly the whole area of mental health treatment has changed a great deal, but there is still a need in the system for hospitals.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Workers' Compensation Board

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday, April 20 the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, in response to a question from my colleague from Calgary-Cross, agreed to take additional steps to let seriously injured workers know that a WCB service review and a WCB appeal system review process are currently under way. Despite the minister's latest press release extending the deadline for submissions to May 15, I'm finding that many injured workers have no knowledge that the process is even taking place. Can the Minister of Human Resources and Employment explain what additional steps he is taking to ensure that WCB injured workers know how to participate in this process?

2:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There seems to be some concern about the amount of knowledge that injured workers might have in order to provide input. It was one of the reasons, then, that in my answer previously I talked about perhaps the need for MLAs to become directly involved. We've tried to examine what it is that in fact we have done, particularly with the questionnaire that's been involved. I'm assuming that the hon. member is questioning about the ability we have to get that questionnaire into their particular hands.

I would like to point out to the hon. member and the rest of the members here in the Assembly that we have provided 500 of these questionnaires to the Alberta Injured Workers Association, 300 have gone to the opposition parties here in the Legislature, 300 were sent to the Calgary injured workers group, and then 50 were sent to the group that has been recently formed down in my area. Actually, they were sent to Taber, but they are the southern Alberta chapter of the Injured Workers Association. We have also sent out and responded to 600 individual requests. So, Mr. Speaker, we have something in the order of 1,750 questionnaires out there, and of course we're awaiting their return.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the latest press release announcing the extension for submissions to May 15 has not been published by any daily or weekly newspapers that I'm aware of, will the minister place ads in those dailies and weeklies to make sure that we get meaningful input for a meaningful outcome?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, again I want to indicate to the hon. member and to members here in the House that in putting together the government MLA input committee, I had not contemplated the expenditure of funds for the realm of advertising in terms of input. As I stand here today, I'm still not inclined to do that.

I believe that it is my responsibility as a steward of taxpayers' money to use my budget, as other ministers do, in the most meaningful way and of course in a way that's based upon the business plans

that have been approved by this Legislature. I know that with advertising you have the constant problem of: are you getting through the clutter of advertising that's out there, or are you simply adding to it? Thus far in my analysis of the situation, with 1,750 questionnaires that have gone out to the specific groups that we are concerned about in this input review, I do not see the need for paid advertising with the use of taxpayers' money.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With great trepidation, to the same minister: what's the good of having a review process on the WCB service and appeals issue without funding an appropriate communications plan, which results in what you've got today? The majority of injured workers don't even know that it's happening.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I'm not prepared to accept at this time that a majority of the injured workers are not knowledgeable of the particular situation. Through the initial discussion about what was going to be done regarding the Workers' Compensation Board, there were a number – I don't recall them initially, Mr. Speaker – of press reports about whether or not the minister was doing enough, whether he wasn't doing anything. The opposition managed to get into the situation, as they should. I mean, that's a responsibility that they have here. Every MLA in this House has had an opportunity to deal with this particular situation.

It was determined, Mr. Speaker, that the simple addition of a service review by the WCB would not be enough, so I was able to arrange, I believe on behalf of every MLA sitting in this room, the opportunity to provide some input. If not directly to the WCB, they could do it to this government input committee. Every MLA has had an opportunity to do that, so now if the message is not getting through, I ask all MLAs to look in their mirrors.

Private Health Services (continued)

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, it's now day 25 since the Premier promised to release the 30 blank pages from his private hospitals policy research. This Premier's suppression of the contents of his 30-page private hospitals policy is as toxic to democracy in this province as the Premier's \$440 million hazardous waste plant was toxic to the pocketbooks of taxpayers. There's something hazardous about this government's behaviour when it comes to health care, and it's called hiding the truth. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that the government keeps talking about giving Albertans full information on health care, why are the minister and this government withholding the 30 blank pages from their private hospitals policy playbook? When are they going to keep their promise and release the documents?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there is no private health or private hospitals paper.

MR. SAPERS: Point of order.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. We recognize that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora wants to raise a point of order later.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Given that this document says "private hospitals policy" on page 31, on page 34, on page 41, on page 44, and on page 47, will the minister promise

Albertans that they will see the full 30 pages from the private hospitals policy, not some sanitized version prepared by his \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau, before the final, forced vote on his private health care policy?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I believe that this question has been raised before, and as I've indicated, the matter is being followed through on according to the rules that apply as far as the release of information and our own legislation in this Assembly.

MS CARLSON: Stop the stonewalling, Mr. Minister.

Will the minister put the \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau and the \$5 billion Ministry of Health and Wellness on full alert and give Albertans access to the 30 blank pages tomorrow, before the closure vote hits the floor of this Legislature and that bill is gone forever?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, the legislation that applies to this particular matter is being followed, and that is the process that's in place.

2:50

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: In 30 seconds from now, hon. members, I'll call on the first of five members to participate in Recognitions.

The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Creative Library Service Award

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Library Trustees Association board established the creative public library service award in 1986 to recognize innovative achievements, activities, programs, and partnerships. So it is with pride and appreciation that I wish to note that a service that connects seniors to our community through Internet training as well as the formation of a book club has made the St. Albert library this year's creative public library service award winner.

As the Minister of Community Development noted, the St. Albert library responded to a real need in the community by providing useful, imaginative, and creative services. We all know that this week, May 1 to May 7, is Alberta Library Week, and as such it is dedicated to raising awareness of library services and promoting lifelong learning in our communities.

I wish to take the opportunity now to express my appreciation for the remarkable resources offered at St. Albert Public Library.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Library Week

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Today is the first day of Library Week in Alberta, and I want to recognize, celebrate, and give a cheer for our libraries. I know that many of us have fond memories of the local library from our youths, whether that be for the summer reading contests or for that special librarian who helped you find the information you needed to finish your student essay. Well, keep those memories in a safe place, but open your eyes to what is happening now.

Let me tell you, libraries are happening places today. To quote the nearest 15-year-old: sweet. All libraries have computers with Internet access, and many have rentals of tapes, CDs, and even videos. So any Albertan with a library card can access the Internet, even accessing *Hansard* at www.assembly.ab.ca. Libraries have kept up with changes in technology, and this year's theme is Reading is Smart Technology.

Sadly, the government is still funding libraries on a 1997 per

capita basis. Given the increase in population for many Alberta centres, this has really made it difficult for the staff and the boards. So this week get way cool and check out your local library, and while you're there, give the staff a big smile and a thank you.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort-McMurray.

Fort McMurray Oil Barons

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today as MLA for Fort McMurray, the oil sands capital of the world, to extend my congratulations to the Fort McMurray Oil Barons for not only winning the Alberta Junior Hockey League but as of yesterday defeating the British Columbia Chilliwack Chiefs to win the Doyle Cup and Pacific championship. They now move on to the premiere of national championships, the Royal Bank Cup, to be hosted here in our province of Alberta, in fact in the city of Fort McMurray, May 5 to May 14, starting this Friday. As co-chair of the national event, along with Robert Campbell and 500 volunteers we're very proud to be hosting all of Canada in junior A hockey. We wish all teams from across Canada the very best in this national championship.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Earth Day

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was Earth Day, the day when we remember the finite nature of our planet and the need to preserve it for future generations. As caretakers of this planet we must safeguard the biodiversity that exists here now. Environmental diversity is crucial because of the interdependence of living things.

Since this interdependence is not fully understood, human beings must be careful to respect and preserve all species in sufficient numbers. This means preserving their habitat as well. Unfortunately, this government has not committed to this goal. We see Bill 15, the Natural Heritage Act, shelved for another year because of ministerial infighting. We see a government approve the import of hazardous waste from around the world in spite of significant public opposition.

On Earth Day we remember that time is running out, and I call on the Alberta government to return to the vision that originally inspired the special places program, to become inspired by what we can still save in this province. They are headed in the wrong direction.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

55th Anniversary of Liberation of Holland

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and recognize the contributions made by Canadian soldiers from the Lord Strathcona's Horse regiment in the Second World War. On April 19, 1945, soldiers from this regiment liberated the village of Nunspeet, Holland. This was the last village liberated by this regiment, and the Dutch people have not forgotten these heroic Canadians. Now, 55 years after this historic moment, the people of Nunspeet have honoured our veterans with a memorial, placed next to the town hall where the liberation was signed.

Mr. Speaker, our veterans are honoured when Canadians recognize their contributions, but to hear thank you from half a world away and 55 years later, to know that people have not forgotten their sacrifices and that Dutch children will continue to be told of the

battles fought by Canadians must be a special honour, which words fall short of truly expressing.

Mr. Speaker, war is a horror that no person should have to endure. I believe the best way for Canadians to honour the victories of our veterans is to never forget their sacrifices and to continue to be a nation that leads the peace process around the world.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before calling Orders of the Day, I have notice of at least three points of order. Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, do I have notice of a fourth? The hon. Opposition House Leader, first point of order.

Point of Order Abusive Language

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'll collapse my second one into the first one because it was the same wording used by the Premier. This relates to the first set of questions and the authority would be 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I heard the Premier say that 14 times the Liberals said that they would filibuster Bill 11. That was in the first set of questions. Then he came back and said it later.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I spend as much time in this Assembly probably as any member, and I specifically have never heard a single member of my caucus at any time in the entire debate on Bill 11, at second reading or in Committee of the Whole, talk about a filibuster. The Premier was waving some papers, and hopefully he tabled those, but I challenge the Premier to find a single time when a member of the opposition caucus said that what they were about was a filibuster.

Now, that's an American invention. You don't find it in the parliamentary authorities, but in December of 1912, when the Naval Aid Bill of Sir Robert Borden was being debated, that was a filibuster. In 1983, when the bell-ringing episode occurred in the House of Commons, that was a filibuster. To have members of the Official Opposition stand up and make thoughtful, forceful debate about a bill that they can see through . . . [interjections] If the 15 members of the government caucus don't understand when the wool is being pulled over their eyes, the opposition clearly does not have that problem. We see the bill for what it is. If you look at the *Hansard*, it speaks for itself. You go through and you read the *Hansard*. That is not a filibuster. It's people repeating and emphasizing and stressing weaknesses in a bill that's ill conceived, poorly drafted. Then all of that's compounded with this enormous \$2.7 million marketing campaign.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is not a filibuster, and I challenge the Premier or the government representative to find a single incident in *Hansard* where a member of my caucus has said that the opposition had undertaken a filibuster in Bill 11. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on this point of order.

MRS. NELSON: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased that the Opposition House Leader raised the issues of the response to the debate and particularly in committee of the opposition to Bill 11. When the Premier was talking about progress and the time frames that were involved in the debate at committee – when we last debated the bill, the last evening we were in debate, I believe we had spent a number of hours on subamendment A1, section A, and all we were trying to do was to add the dentists to the clause, "physician or dentist." That was the only amendment, and I don't believe that we've got off that.

3:00

Just to give you some idea of how this debate has gone, I will say that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who is chitchatting over there, is quoted in *Hansard*, page 1002, on April 13:

When we think there's enough support to defeat the package of amendments or at least this amendment, if they can't be further corrected, then I guess we'll allow it to get to a vote. But until then, I don't think any government member should be operating under the impression that debate will be swift on these government amendments. The government amendments, in my reading of them, don't do a lot to deal with the . . . bill. So we will carry on with debate on this amendment as we see fit, and I look forward to additional opportunities myself to participate.

Then the Leader of the Opposition, who was having a hissy fit here today, came with: we believe the bill is beyond amending and needs to be pulled completely; they are scrambling in desperation to find out how they can get the bill somehow palatable to Albertans. Then she says: I don't think this bill is amendable. It goes on and on.

Another one. This is about the amendments. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark: it won't make any difference; the bill is flawed; what they need to do is to go back to the drawing board; what they're doing is just continuing to move towards privatization of health care; it won't make any difference at all.

It goes on and on. There's a whole list of them. It doesn't matter what the amendment is, Mr. Speaker. One of the members opposite said that this bill is narrow and there's no option, no amendments, no tinkering, no bill; scrap this bill. Right at the back, Edmonton-Manning.

It just goes on and on. There's a whole list of them. There's no intent, Mr. Speaker, for the amendments that have been put forward in this House to be debated in a logical, rational fashion by the opposition. In fact, if you look at the debate and the hours that have been spent on the first amendment, there's been everything else discussed but that first amendment, which was simply to add the dentists to the original bill with the physicians. Then entering into a subamendment on that clause was another play to deliberately delay passage, and there were other amendments to come.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, you can go on. Every one of them has just gone off on little tangents and said: it doesn't matter what comes forward, we're not going to debate it; we're not going to deal with the issue; we're not going to look at the amendment; there'll be no tinkering; there'll be no responses. I don't know what you would call that but filibustering.

I don't think there is a point of order. I think the Premier was simply telling the truth, telling Albertans how many hours have been spent to simply add the word "dentist." That's all we've got to on this bill on the amendments. It is ludicrous to carry on like that. I think the point of order is ill founded. I don't think that there is one, Mr. Speaker, and I hope you'll rule in that way.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Opposition House Leader, you rose twice on it. We've dealt with both of them at the same time, so I don't have to get up twice to deal with this?

MR. DICKSON: I'm sure, Mr. Speaker. If I was not clear, the second one was a second reference by the Premier to exactly the same point, so my arguments would apply to both, please.

THE SPEAKER: Well, one has had the ability to review the Blues, so here's what the Blues say. These are the words of the hon. leader of the government:

So just as a filibuster is a tool of the Legislature, closure is a tool of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, it seems that they're very anxious to speak on this bill. In one breath they say that they want to filibuster it, that nothing will be acceptable in terms of amendments, yet the Member for Edmonton-Centre has spoken on this bill five times; the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, two times; the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, five times; the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, 10 times; the Member for Edmonton-Manning, four times; the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, eight times.

At that point in time the Speaker interjected and talked about brevity. Then a little later, again the leader of the government:

Mr. Speaker, notice was given to bring about closure because there has to be some finality. This gives everyone an opportunity to vote. Closure simply means that we're bringing about a process to have a vote on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are on record 33 times saying that the bill cannot be amended to make it acceptable to them. They are on record 14 times saying that nothing will stop the complete filibuster of Bill 11.

So there's certainly reference to the use of the word "filibuster," which is an acceptable word in the parliamentary text which we have.

In essence, the chair looks at this, hears this, and basically would note that one person's filibuster is someone else's legitimate democratic expression. We might have two versions of the categorization of the same action. That ends that.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on a point of order.

Point of Order

Offending the Practices of the Assembly

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is, I suppose, an accumulation. I'm rising under Standing Order 23(1), which reads in part: "introduces any matter in debate which offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." That is, of course, that a member will be called to order if that happens.

I'm referring specially to the exchange that involved my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie and the Minister of Health and Wellness. Of course, I could have also risen when the Premier, as he has on several occasions, said: the government has no private health care policy. Specifically what triggered my intervention, Mr. Speaker, and what I'm hoping you will call the minister to order for is his assertion that there is no private health care policy.

My colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie was making specific reference to a package of information that was provided to the Official Opposition on February 3, 2000. It comes from Alberta Health and Wellness information services unit in correspondence signed by Mr. Roger D. Mariner, the freedom of information and privacy co-ordinator. The package of information, Mr. Speaker, which is several pages long, in no fewer than a dozen places and perhaps even more, if my count is faulty, makes specific reference to: private hospitals policy and policy position on private hospitals, cabinet, October 1999, for example, for discussion only. Throughout the pages it talks about the private hospitals policy of the government.

The minister and the Premier may wish that they had no private hospitals policy. They may be trying to convince Albertans that they have no private hospitals policy, but clearly from the government's own Department of Health and Wellness in policy document papers, in briefing notes provided to cabinet, in copies of e-mail between senior members of the minister's policy branch there is repeated reference after reference after reference to the private hospitals policy of this government.

The government can't have it both ways. They should not be introducing into debate in this Legislature something which is contrary to the practices and precedents and that is to be misleading about what government policy is.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to call the Minister of Health and

Wellness to order, to accept responsibility for the private hospitals policy and for the paperwork provided by his own department, which makes repeated reference to the private hospitals policy, so that we can get on with dealing with what this bill is, and that is a bill that creates private hospitals under the name of surgical facilities.

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the only people who keep spewing about private hospitals in this Legislature and outside are the opposition.

He talks about misrepresentation. The documents that the hon. member is waving came from focus groups that looked at concepts prior to a policy decision coming forward by this government. Clearly, in this bill the first clause says: there will be no private hospitals in the province of Alberta. That's the policy statement. The misrepresentation of standing up with photocopied sheets, that were letter sized and that they've put to 11 by 14 and wave around as blank little pages and have their little hissy fits, has gone on long enough in this Legislature. They talk about misrepresentation and misleading Albertans. That's the only group that's doing it.

The policy of this government has been clearly enunciated in Bill 11: there will be no private hospitals in the province of Alberta. End of debate right there. For him to run around and say something different is misrepresentation, Mr. Speaker, and I hope you'll rule on that.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: Well, the only thing the chair is going to rule on – and this was raised time and time again in the days prior to the break – is that question period is a time for the solicitation of facts and information with respect to government policy. It's not a time for debate. So when debatable points are introduced in questions in the question period, I guess this leads to this sort of thing. So let's deal with the question period the way we're supposed to, and we'll have ample opportunity to debate whatever it is we're supposed to debate. No point of order. Let's move on to Orders of the Day.

MS OLSEN: Shame on you.

THE CLERK: Government Bills and Orders . . .

THE SPEAKER: Mr. Clerk, please sit down.

Did the chair hear the hon. member say to the chair, "Shame on you," in terms of this ruling? I'm going to give the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood an opportunity to rise and say it to the chair or withdraw it.

MS OLSEN: I'll withdraw that, Mr. Speaker. I'll withdraw the comment that I said, "Shame on you." Thank you.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 18 Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

[Adjourned debate April 3: Mrs. McClellan]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and offer some comments on Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax

Act. In fact, my comments on Bill 18 are not favourable. The object of this bill is to establish the rules and procedures of implementation and administration of Alberta's 11 percent single-tax system, as originally announced in the government's budget.

This is a significant deviation from the way Albertans are taxed now, and the government would like to put forth that this is the best and the only way to tax Albertans. Well, I think we need to put some perspective to it. I think we need to talk about some of the background and the history of how this government feels it's been brought to this place and how, I guess, the opposition feels that Albertans will not be fairly taxed. Fair taxation is the issue here, Mr. Speaker.

I have to point out that although the Provincial Treasurer seems to maybe admire some of his southern neighbours and looks at some of the fiscal policy in the south, especially the Republican view certainly falls in line with his ideology probably, let's also note that the U.S. right wing, the Republican Party and its extremes, have also distanced themselves from this tax strategy. They have said: "You know what? This isn't a fair and equitable system, and we are not going to pursue this path. This is not a tax strategy we want to see for the citizens of the United States." They have a tremendous number of economic think tanks in the U.S. that talk about this.

Let's go to the history, Mr. Speaker. We'll go back a couple of years, to December 1997, when federal and provincial finance ministers agreed that provinces should be able to levy tax directly on taxable income. It was also agreed that provinces could choose to move to a tax-on-income structure or remain within the tax-on-tax structure.

Under the agreement reached between the federal and the provincial finance ministers, the following elements are applicable to this structure. The provinces would agree to adopt a federal definition of taxable income as a base upon which to levy provincial income tax. The provinces would agree to limit the number of provincial tax brackets, including a zero rate on a narrow first bracket. The provinces would be permitted to establish a distinct block of provincial nonrefundable tax credits, to be multiplied by the lowest nonzero provincial rate. The provincial credits would be based on the federal credits but would add supplemental provincial amounts. I think it's interesting that this province would be involved in a tax credit system as we're talking about health care and we're talking about the federal responsibility and the federal share – this particular government doesn't like the idea of tax credits – and would misinform Albertans about how much, between a tax credit and the actual cash, is being paid by the federal government. I find it interesting that they would want to adopt a tax credit system here.

Provinces would retain access to existing low-income tax reductions with either individually based or family-based income testing, and not all provinces would have to move to the tax-on-income system at the same time. Some provinces would levy tax on income while other provinces could continue the current system of levying tax on tax.

In October 1998 the Alberta Tax Review Committee recommended that the province of Alberta move to a new system of tax on income from the current system of tax on tax. As to the elements of the tax-on-income system in Alberta, the Alberta Tax Review Committee made the following recommendations. They stated that the province should introduce a single rate of provincial income tax. The single rate should be set at 11 percent for all taxpayers, and the basic personal and spousal exemptions should be increased to \$11,620 and fully indexed to inflation.

They also stated that the temporary deficit elimination taxes, the flat tax rate of .5 percent and the 8 percent Alberta surtax, should be eliminated in conjunction with the implementation of the 11 percent

single rate. According to this committee, the implementation of the 11 percent single rate with personal and spousal exemptions of \$11,620 would have taken an additional 78,000 low-income Albertans off the provincial tax rolls and would have reduced the differences in provincial income taxes paid by double- and single-income families.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's a bit of the history of how we got to where we are today.

I think there are some other key points that we need to talk to as well. In the province's budget the government adopted the key recommendation of the Alberta Tax Review Committee, and the following key elements of the Alberta tax plan were presented at that time. They stated that in 1999 Alberta matched the federal increase in the basic and spousal exemptions to \$7,131 and \$6,055 respectively. The 8 percent surtax was to be eliminated by July 1, and the .5 percent flat tax and the selective tax rate were to be eliminated on January 1, 2002. On the other hand, the committee did recommend that they go hand in hand, that the deficit elimination taxes be eliminated at the same time that a flat tax is brought in. The 11 percent single rate on taxable income is to apply as well.

Mr. Speaker, there are some flaws with this whole notion, as we have spoken to. There are some major flaws. I want to focus on the 11 percent single tax rate. The first thing I want to draw to the attention of the Assembly is the fairness and equity issue. I believe that fairness and equity are being compromised under this particular tax system. The distribution of tax cuts under the 11 percent single rate is skewed towards the 4 percent of tax filers earning above \$100,000, while the 39 percent of middle-income tax filers earning between \$30,000 and \$70,000, who pay over 45 percent of the provincial personal income taxes in this province, receive smaller tax cuts as a percentage of the current PIT paid. So where's the fairness in that? It's the middle-income people who are also again getting shafted by a tax system.

This also erodes the progressive nature of the tax system. All taxpayers regardless of taxable income pay the same 11 percent single rate. This is mitigated to some extent by the fact that some 132,000 Albertans are taken off the provincial tax rolls because of the increase in basic and spousal exemptions of \$11,620.

3:20

We talked about the tax grab on the middle class. Those taxpayers who earn less than \$70,000 in taxable income would receive a larger provincial tax cut under the current tax-on-tax system starting in 2001 – that's the existing system – if the federal tax measures announced in the 2000 federal budget are flowed through than they would under an 11 percent single-rate system. So already the notion of this flat tax system, this single-rate system, has created a problem in terms of how the government is going to show an actual reduction to Albertans.

Taxpayers in the high-income bracket, above \$60,000, would have a significantly lower Alberta marginal tax rate under this system as well, but the marginal tax rate for the low-income earners would rise to 11 percent from 7 percent, and the tax rate at 11.4 percent, I believe it is, for the middle income would be reduced by only .44 percent, Mr. Speaker, under this particular scheme.

Also, when we talk about the tax grab and look at the alignment between the existing federal structure and the existing provincial structure, we see that the greater reduction in that structure would occur in that particular system for the middle-income earners. So again we have some concern about who is going to get the biggest share of the tax break, and it's not the people in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, not them at all.

Let's talk about the higher marginal rates for low- and middle-

income earners. That's going to prove to be an interesting issue. As we've already said, we're talking about trying to flatten out the tax rate, but we still have those low-income earners who are still going to remain taxed. Their particular marginal rate is going to go up. That's significant given the notion that this is supposed to be in the best interests of the middle-income people, and that's just not bearing out to be true.

I think what's interesting is that the hon. Treasurer and the Premier and this government could get into: who's going to lower taxes further? Well, we know who can lower our taxes further, and it's not this government. They don't have the base to do that. First of all, they don't have enough taxes to do it. Second of all, they don't have enough money to do it. Even reducing this particular tax now to give the tax break that Albertans were supposed to receive if they were to remain under the current system, which they won't receive, is going to cost this government far more money than they anticipated.

You know, I wonder how that whole concept is going to come to a conclusion. Is it going to be a tax race? Who can lower the taxes fastest? Who can give the biggest tax break? Is that the kind of game that the government wants to get into? I don't think that's in the best interests of Albertans, because let's not forget that when we're talking about tax reductions, we're talking about tax strategies, and strategy is the operative word here. So we don't want to get into a position where we're playing a game of who can reduce their taxes the fastest here.

I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, to point out that a comparable \$877 million tax reduction package under the current tax-on-tax system consisting of the elimination of the 8 percent surtax, about \$162 million, the elimination of the flat tax rate, about \$325 million, retaining the Alberta selective tax reduction, about \$85 million, and a reduction in the basic federal tax on tax from 44 percent to 41 percent, about \$305 million, would result in a far more equitable reduction on all taxes across the board, including, as I've said before, significant tax cuts for middle-income earners.

A key point here is this whole notion that the flat tax is going to be the be-all and the end-all, and that just isn't true, Mr. Speaker, and it has been pointed out by other chartered accountants in this city. Mr. Brad Severin, I believe, has identified that as a huge deficiency in the tax policy that this government is going to.

I'll be interested in hearing from the Treasurer or anybody else that can help me understand how they're going to meet the tax reduction that they aimed for without causing considerable concern in other areas of fiscal restraint or having to make adjustments by reducing the flat tax rate from 11 percent to, say, 10 or 9.5 percent. At 9.5 percent that would cost a significant amount of money.

You know, if we look at the whole issue of the tax grab and if we look at that based on the federal tax measures, we see that, and I'd just like to highlight a few key points here. In 2001 a taxpayer earning \$35,000 will pay about \$2,300 in provincial taxes under the current tax-on-tax system while paying \$2,700 in provincial taxes under an 11 percent single rate. That, Mr. Speaker, is a tax grab of about \$186. If we look at 2004, that same \$35,000 income earner will pay about \$2,200 in provincial taxes under the current tax-on-tax system while paying \$2,500 in provincial taxes under the 11 percent single rate. That tax grab is \$322.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at the \$50,000 income earner, they'll pay just over \$4,000 in provincial taxes under the current tax-on-tax system, and under the proposed 11 percent system they would pay \$4,221, a tax grab of about \$177. If we look at that same income earner, by 2004 we look at \$3,700 in provincial taxes under the current structure and \$4,100 under the 11 percent tax structure, and that is a \$379 tax grab.

If we just keep looking at that, as you move up now, look at the \$65,000 a year wage earner. Under the current system they pay \$5,700, and under the 11 percent rate they pay only \$5,800. That, Mr. Speaker – and this is where you can see the actual rate for the higher income earners is less – is only a tax grab of \$76. If we look at that into 2004, we also note that same \$65,000 income earner will pay \$5,300 under the current system and \$5,800 under the 11 percent structure. That's a tax grab of \$436.

Mr. Speaker, my time is running short here, but I think the point is clear. Going to the 11 percent tax scheme – and it becomes a real scheme in my view – deprives middle-income earners in this province of an acceptable rate of tax reduction. They don't see the intended tax reduction by this government, and it behooves me as to why the government would want to continue on this path when there is no tax break for Albertans under the 11 percent scheme.

Thank you.

3:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is my first opportunity to speak to Bill 18, and I'm glad to do that. I have to tell you that it takes a bit of doing some homework for me to speak to this bill.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think a lot of people, unless they take some financial courses or go to some accounting courses or some business management courses, kind of just deal with taxes with a blind eye. They just know they have to pay them. I see some people disagreeing, but listen to the whole discussion. They know they have to pay taxes. They know stuff comes off their cheque. They're very busy with life, and then come time to file their income tax, they hand it over to somebody who does it for a living and they do it. They're glad if they get some money back and upset if they have to pay a little extra, but on they go with life. But what we all have in common is that we don't want to pay more taxes. We realize that we pay them for the benefit of what we value, so we pay them, but we don't understand sometimes the intricacies of how they are paid and how different levels happen.

Here we have a proposal that looks simple. It looks simple. In fact, a lot of people don't understand there's a federal level and a provincial level. They think: oh, good; I'll only be paying 11 percent on all my taxes. That's totally false. I like to think I'm an average person, but I don't think the average person truly understands all the implications of an 11 percent flat tax. It may seem simpler, but I don't think it's fairer. So I'm glad to take a few minutes to talk a bit about it and to talk about some of the things that this bill will do if it goes through.

It's going to unhook from the federal system by levying a provincial tax on taxable income rather than on a basic federal tax as of next January. A single provincial rate of 11 percent will apply on taxable income as of next January as well. We're going to have basic and spousal exemptions of \$11,620 established as of next January and indexed to Alberta CPI, and then other federal nonrefundable tax credits will continue to apply and will be indexed to Alberta's CPI.

Now, I remember the Treasurer who had the young couple in the gallery when he brought in his budget and talked about how it will save them money, et cetera, et cetera. But what he hadn't accounted for was the federal budget and how this flat tax is actually going to

hurt some Albertans, because the federal minister did a far fairer job of reducing taxes. So I'm hoping there are going to be amendments, and hopefully we can see them before we get into committee. Are there going to be amendments to this bill, Mr. Acting Treasurer? I'm hoping there are going to be amendments to Bill 18 in committee, the 11 percent one. The changes at the federal level, I'm thinking, may make you want to rethink some of the things because it's not going to be as fair as it could be if you addressed that. He's going to think about that, I'm sure.

In the 2000 tax year alone under the federal government tax plan the middle-income tax bracket will be reduced from 26 percent to 24 percent as of July 2000. So there will be an increase in the threshold of the middle- and high-income tax brackets to \$30,000 and \$60,000 respectively, and the basic and spousal exemptions will increase to \$7,231 and \$6,140 respectively.

Its impact on these tax measures on Alberta could be \$66 million in the 2000 tax year alone. As a result of the impact of the federal government tax measures through to the year 2004, it's going to happen that Alberta taxpayers below \$70,000 in taxable income are going to be paying more in provincial personal income taxes under an 11 percent single tax rate in the 2001 tax year and subsequent tax years than they would under the current tax-on-tax system.

On March 14, this past March 14, the Provincial Treasurer announced that the provincial government reduced the 11 percent single rate and raised exemption levels in order to flow through the federal government tax measures contained in their budget. But on March 15 it was announced by the Premier that the government would introduce amendments to Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act.

Remember the big kerfuffle? We had the big announcement here of the 11 percent cut. Then the federal budget came out, and it was: oh, my gosh; this isn't going to be good for Albertans. So the Premier said: well, we're going to have amendments to our bill. But we haven't seen those yet, so I'm assuming they must be in the works or worked out. Actually, if the Acting Treasurer were really smart, he could send those amendments early. We'll look at them and be ready to support them or not support them. Maybe they're not drafted. I don't know. Anyway, I know that announcement was made, and I am sure that those details will follow. In all fairness it's really hard to support this at this reading if we don't know what the amendments are going to be, because to support this would be unfair to Albertans.

Now, if we talk about some of the major flaws in this bill – and I think all of us like to talk about fairness and equity. Well, certainly I do. When you look at this, the distribution of tax cuts under the 11 percent rate is skewed towards 4 percent of the tax filers earning more than \$100,000. They get a bigger break than anyone else, so we have to wonder who this bill is for. If it's only serving a select few at the very top end of the pay scale, then it's not the best move for this province, certainly not when we're thinking: how can we serve all of the people of Alberta, not just a few at the top end of the pay scale? It's skewed towards the 4 percent of tax filers earning above \$100,000, while 39 percent of middle-income tax filers earning between \$30,000 and \$70,000, who pay over 45 percent of the provincial personal income taxes in Alberta, receive smaller tax cuts as a percentage. So we've got something that isn't fair for everyone and certainly beneficial for a few.

The progressive nature of the tax system will be eroded. All taxpayers, regardless of taxable income, will pay the same 11 percent to the extent that some 132,000 Albertans are taken off the provincial tax rolls because of the increase in basic and spousal exemptions. What happens is that there's going to be a tax grab on the middle class, taxpayers who earn less than \$70,000. You know

what? People think: oh, well, \$70,000 is a pretty good wage. It certainly is, but when you're raising children and they're going to college and they need vehicles to get to and from university or a bus pass, et cetera, et cetera, of course every dollar saved helps during those very expensive years. I do believe that people have expensive years in their lives. Once your mortgage is paid off and your car payment is paid off and your kids are done going through college and maybe they've left home, just maybe there's money left at the end of the month.

Now, I'm not there yet, and the Speaker in the chair right now says that he isn't there either. [interjections] We've got people who didn't get a good enough break, Mr. Speaker, but that's okay. I am speaking about what the 11 percent tax means, and you can speak very generically at this second reading about taxes and what they mean to families.

3:40

Of course I think we do have to look very seriously at what this bill means to the middle income. It's going to be a higher tax grab for them. Taxpayers who earn less than \$70,000 in taxable income would receive a larger provincial tax cut under the current tax-on-tax system starting in the year 2001 if the federal tax measures announced in the 2000 federal budget flow through than they would under an 11 percent single-rate system. This is due to the fact that the distribution of tax cuts under the 11 percent single rate is skewed towards those taxpayers earning \$100,000.

Now, you know, Mr. Speaker, I had to read this, and I've read it over three times. This is confusing stuff to the average person out there. The reality is that this is not a good bill for middle-income earners. Simply put like that, most of us know that there will be less dollars in our pocket, in the middle income, if this goes through.

Higher Alberta marginal rates for low- and middle-income earners, assuming the elimination of the .5 percent flat rate tax in January of 2001 goes through – taxpayers in the 17 percent bracket, which is up to \$30,000, and 24 percent of the middle-income tax bracket, which is between \$30,000 approximately and \$60,000, would have a higher marginal rate under the 11 percent single rate than they would under a tax-on-tax system in the 2001 tax year. Taxpayers in the high-income tax bracket, above \$60,000, would have a significantly lower Alberta marginal rate under the 11 percent single-rate tax than under the current tax on tax. Those are some flaws I see in this bill. I'd like to see some changes made to this.

Let's have a look at some other fairness and equity that I think is compromised under Bill 18. If we talk about the 39 percent of Alberta taxpayers in the income class between \$30,000 and \$70,000 per year, they receive a cut of an average of 9 percent in their provincial taxes under the 11 percent single rate. The top 1 percent of Alberta tax filers in the income class of \$150,000 and over per year receive an 18 percent cut in the provincial taxes under an 11 percent single rate. I just don't see that as fair. Unless I'm missing something – and I welcome others to join the debate to explain it to me – I have real concerns that the group around the \$40,000 to \$50,000 is going to only see a 9 percent cut and the people over \$150,000 will see an 18 percent cut.

I guess it's the old argument: well, those people have worked harder for their money; they get to keep more of it. I guess that is an argument, but we can also say that I'm glad I have the ability to pay. Those struggling on minimum wage – I'm glad I make a better wage than that and can afford to pay more than they can. I'm grateful for the opportunity to have a job that pays better and to work at that. Not everyone has the capability of making a large income. We can say: oh, some people just don't work hard enough. That's not true, Mr. Speaker. That's not true. Lots of people work very, very hard,

but they truly only have the ability to make a minimum wage.

I have concerns that we're going to a very self-centred, me first, what I make is mine kind of mentality in this province. I think we're forgetting that collectively we do care about our neighbours. Part of that caring is making the tax system as fair as it can be. I agree that nobody likes to pay more than their share of taxes. On the other hand, we should be grateful that we have the ability in our personal lives to make the money that allows us to pay taxes, that we're not sitting there below the poverty line and going to food banks or going to local organizations to maybe help our children with school fees.

I look at the whole issue of taxes maybe not from an accountant's point of view or a business management point of view but maybe from a social or a community point of view, where we try to make it as fair as we can. You know, if I'm making a decent wage, I don't want to pay over half of it into taxes. I don't. But I also know that I do have to pay some and that there are others who I'm going to have to help along the way. When looking at this bill, I do think we've missed some of the fairness in this issue.

A few more points about fairness and equity in this. The middle 39 percent of Alberta tax filers in the income class between \$30,000 and \$70,000 receive 26 percent of the total tax cuts under the 11 percent single rate. The top 4 percent of Alberta tax filers in the income class of \$100,000 and over receive 31 percent of the total tax cuts under this flat tax rate. So once again we've got a difference, where people making more money are getting more of a cut than people making less money. I just don't see that as equitable as it could be. Maybe that's my own perspective, but that's the way I see it.

Alberta's tax filers in the lowest 52 percent of the income scale – that's under \$30,000 – get an average annual tax reduction of \$358 under this single rate. Alberta tax filers in the middle 39 percent – that's between \$30,000 and \$70,000 – get an average annual reduction of \$368 under this single rate. The top 4 percent of Alberta tax filers of the income scale – that's over \$100,000 – get an average annual tax reduction of \$4,000. The top 1 percent of Alberta tax filers – that's over \$150,000 – get an average annual tax reduction of \$9,000.

A taxpayer with \$35,000 in taxable income paid \$2,499 in provincial taxes in 1999 but pays \$2,571 in provincial taxes under the flat rate that this proposes. So that's a tax increase of \$72. I'm hoping that wasn't the intent of this bill. I don't think the homework has been done on this like it needs to be, especially after the federal budget came down. Now, a taxpayer with \$50,000 in taxable income paid \$4,333 in provincial taxes in 1999 and will pay \$4,221 in 2001. So that's a cut of 2.6 percent. A taxpayer with \$65,000 in taxable income paid \$6,344 in 1999 and pays \$5,871 under this flat rate. Now, that's a cut of 7.5 percent. Meanwhile, a taxpayer with \$100,000 in taxable income paid \$11,342 in provincial taxes in 1999 and pays \$9,721 under this single rate in 2000. That's a cut of 14.2 percent. So you see the differences. The higher we get, we get a larger cut percentage-wise. I don't see that as fairness across the board.

However, a taxpayer with \$125,000 in taxable income paid \$14,912 in provincial taxes in 1999 and pays \$12,000 in provincial taxes in 2001. He gets a tax cut of 16 percent.

I only have one minute. I can't believe it. I'm just getting into this.

I guess I have concerns about this bill, very big concerns. The feeling out there is: oh, this must be a good thing. In reality, it's a major tax grab on the middle-income earners, so I have deep concerns about this bill. I haven't seen the amendments. I'm anxious to see those. I can't support it the way it stands right now.

It's interesting. I've only had, to be honest, about four calls on

this whole thing from people who truly understand this. They're not in support of it, and they're saying: look; I used to be an accountant; I used to be a treasurer's assistant.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker.

3:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand and speak today on Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. When we look at the bill in its entirety, we start wondering: why was it brought forward? Was it the spin toward a federal election, or was it in actuality what Albertans were asking for? You know, it was interesting in today's paper. According to one letter to the editor on this particular item, is there some correlation between this and Bill 11, with this present government talking about Bill 11 and bringing it in because of some vested interests and people backing private hospitals? Then we get back to this particular item. Is this something to do with the vested interests, that this present government only cares for those with \$70,000 plus as an income?

I really believe that we do have a concern with taxes throughout the country, but at the same time we're not the United States. We do like luxuries in different things, but we do have to look at taxes in their entirety. Taxes should be another item that should be dealt with from the top down and dealt with as the federal Treasurer brought out this year, where some of the tax cuts – I know we get a lot of complaints and a lot of flak thrown at myself that maybe he should have been paying down more of the debt, but at the same time, everybody was demanding some cuts to certain things or the paying of dollars toward more of our programs.

The object of Bill 18 is to establish the rules and procedures for implementing and administering Alberta's 11 percent single-rate tax system as originally announced by this provincial government in Budget '99. Alberta's 11 percent single-rate system has the following major components. Alberta will delink or unhook from the federal system by levying provincial income tax on the taxable income rather than on the basic federal tax as of January 1, 2001. The single-rate 11 percent provincial tax will apply on taxable income as of January 1, 2001. The basic personal, spousal, and equivalent-to-spouse exemptions will be established at \$11,620 by January 1, 2001.

Other federal and nonrefundable tax credits really relate to the age amount, dependant amounts, CPP and EI contributions, pension income amounts, disability amounts, tuition and education amounts, medical expenses, caregiver amounts, interest on student loans, and donations and gifts. They will continue to apply and will be levied at 11 percent of the maximum amount permitted by each credit. The basic personal, spousal, and equivalent-to-spouse medical expense, pension, education, caregiver, age, and disability credits will be indexed to inflation on a year-to-year basis.

The full cost of implementing Alberta's 11 percent single-rate tax is estimated at \$852 million for the 2001 tax year, Mr. Speaker. The government is estimating a \$181 million, or 21 percent, recovery on the implementation of the 11 percent single rate in the 2000 tax year, leaving the net costs of implementation at \$671 million. According to the government, by the year 2006 Alberta's real gross domestic product is expected to be about 1 percent, or \$1.3 billion, larger than it would have been without the tax change. Alberta employment is expected to be about 20,000 higher based on the scenario we're looking at.

You know, as I peruse *Hansard*, I look at what the Acting Treasurer said when introducing this bill: let's get down to lowering

taxes. But I look at the graphs that illustrate Albertans' yearly income. As the Provincial Treasurer at the time was putting a spin on his budget, he stressed that Albertans making \$50,000 would be getting major reductions. Well, the case is that as we go through different graphs and we look at this, it isn't so. I am concerned that this is another case of words: how are we spinning this?

Now, the problem that I have with Bill 18 is the fact that more of this increment is politically driven as a tax reform. The government would have us believe that they have to delink from the tax-on-tax system to pass along the true tax savings, but as the facts come out on Bill 18, what we will quickly discover is that all Albertans would receive more than their fair share of tax relief if we simply lower the existing rate.

The government would also argue that we had to move to a flat tax to get rid of bracket creep. Well, similar to what we're seeing in many other cases, there seems to be a lack of planning before some of these bills go forward. So when I hear the government defend its own ideologically driven bill to the exclusion of the facts, it makes me wonder exactly whose interests they are serving. Of course, we know that Bill 18 answers that question. They are serving the interests of a select group of taxpayers that they seem to be listening to, similar to what was brought out in question period today as to who this government or the Premier is really listening to on some of these bills.

Mr. Speaker, you may be interested to know that this government has increased taxes by billions of dollars since 1993. In fact, over 12 percent of the fiscal dividend, over 12 percent of the more than \$9 billion worth of budget surpluses have come about exactly as a result of tax increases. While the government prides itself on saying that the only way taxes are going is down, of course the facts tell us an entirely different story. I'd hope that the government will quickly rethink the position on flat tax and will come up with the conclusion that it is not a fair implementation of taxes, that it's an unequal distribution of benefits, and that it destroys some of the parts of Canadian tax policies which have made this country one of the most desirable places in the world to live and this province one of the most prosperous places in the world to actually do business.

I think the government at its peril will dismantle this kind of progressive tax regime by pushing this one through. Right after talking about the budget, the Treasurer at the time said that he's considering personal income tax cuts in the year 2000. This wasn't anything that was announced in the budget, but it was part of the government tax plan. Why did the Treasurer actually start pushing for this? Like I mentioned before, I think it was a push towards where he was actually thinking of going over the next few months of his life.

In December '97 federal and provincial finance ministers agreed that the provinces would be able to levy tax directly on taxable income. It was also agreed that the provinces could choose to move to a tax-on-income structure or remain with the current tax-on-tax structure.

You know, Mr. Speaker, what I'm seeing by going through a lot of this literature is that there are major flaws in the 11 percent single-rate tax. Fairness and equality actually come out loud and strong. The distribution of tax cuts under the 11 percent single rate is skewed toward the 4 percent of tax filers earning above \$100,000 while 39 percent of the middle-income tax filers earning between \$30,000 and \$70,000, who pay over 45 percent of the provincial personal income tax in Alberta, receive smaller tax cuts as a percentage of current PIT paid.

4:00

The progressive nature of the tax system is eroded. All taxpayers

regardless of their taxable income pay the same 11 percent rate. This is mitigated to some extent by the fact that some 132,000 Albertans are taken off the provincial tax rolls because of the increase in the basic and spousal exemptions to \$11,620. Taxpayers who earn less than \$70,000 in taxable income would receive a larger provincial tax cut under the current tax-on-tax system starting in 2001. The federal tax measures announced in the 2000 federal budget are flawed, though, under the 11 percent single-rate system. This is due to the fact that the distribution of the tax cuts under the single rate is skewed toward those taxpayers earning over \$100,000.

You know, we look at higher margins for Albertans in tax rates for lower and middle-income earners. Assuming the elimination of a .5 percent flat rate tax on January 1, 2000, taxpayers in the 17 percent bracket and the 24 percent middle-income tax bracket would have a higher margin rate under the 11 percent single rate than they would under a tax-on-tax system in the 2001 tax year. Meanwhile, taxpayers in the high-income tax bracket – that is, \$60,000 plus – would have a significantly lower Alberta margin rate under the 11 percent rate of tax than under the current tax-on-tax.

I'd like to point out that a comparable \$877 million tax reduction package under the current tax-on-tax consisting of elimination of the 8 percent surtax eliminates the flat tax rate. Retaining the Alberta selective tax reduction and the reduction of basic federal tax-on-tax from 44 to 41 percent, which actually stands for \$305 million, would result in a fairer and more equitable reduction of taxes for Albertans, including significant tax cuts for middle-income earners. Now, just think about an attempt to rectify the major flaws of the 11 percent single rate by proposing a constructive amendment to improve the prospect of significant tax cuts for middle-income earners by flowing through the federal tax measures. What the minister should be proposing back to us is that the 11 percent single rate be reduced to 10.5 in the 2001 tax year. Maybe we've got to be careful about what is actually presented, because when you start getting into \$30,000, \$35,000, they are following the actual current rate.

Mr. Speaker, back to the fairness and equality comprised under Bill 18. The middle 39 percent of Alberta tax filers, in the income class between \$30,000 and \$70,000, receive an average of a 9 percent cut in their provincial taxes under this 11 percent single rate. The top 1 percent of Alberta taxpayers, in the income class of \$150,000 and over per year, receive an 18 percent cut in the provincial tax under the 11 percent single rate. The middle 39 percent of Alberta tax filers, in the income class between \$30,000 and \$70,000, receive 26 percent of the total tax cut under the 11 percent single rate. The top 4 percent of Alberta tax filers, in the income class of \$100,000 and over, receive 31 percent in total tax cuts under this 11 percent single rate. You know, Alberta's tax filers are the lowest, at 52 percent, on the income scale between zero and \$30,000, with an average annual tax reduction of \$358 under the single rate.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we can go through this and bring all of these figures out, but the fact is: has the government actually gone into looking at different margin rates for lower income earners? We look at what can happen to these earners over the next few years, and Bill 18 is a tax grab on the middle class based on the federal reduction measures contained in the 2000 federal budget. In 2001 a taxpayer earning \$35,000 will pay \$2,385.69 in provincial taxes under the current tax-on-tax system while paying \$2,571.80 in provincial taxes under the 11 percent single rate. That is by all measures a tax grab by this present government of \$186, and this keeps creeping up each year. By 2004 it's \$322.76.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 18 may also force Alberta taxpayers with income derived exclusively from dividends of up to \$24,114 to pay the provincial tax under the 11 percent single rate when we currently

could earn the dividend tax free under the existing tax-on-tax system. That is because the 11 percent single-rate system establishes a rate of 32 percent on gross dividend income. If the equivalent dividend income credit is conformed with the current treatment under the tax-on-tax system, it would be 33.8 percent.

We need to get some answers on some of these items, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that maybe when we get into amendments, we can see some of these coming at us. We're making policies on the fly, and we are going to feel this over the next few years. It's obvious that the government has not done their homework by assessing the distribution effect of the 11 percent single rate on various income classes and family types as it relates to the impact of federal government tax measures once the province delinks the tax-on-tax system in 2001. That is why the government will be required to amend Bill 18 in order to reduce the 11 percent rate and increase the exemption level to ensure that all taxpayers receive the same benefit under the 11 percent single rate as they would by remaining under the tax-on-tax system. We need only examine the record over the past eight months to see that this government has been making, as I mentioned before, policy on the fly without assessing the impact on taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I will sit down and let one of the other members speak to this bill.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the Assembly this afternoon and enter into the debate on Bill 11, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. There has been a lot said not only in this province and in this country . . .

DR. WEST: A point of clarification. He addressed it as Bill 11.

MR. MacDONALD: I apologize to the hon. minister. The minister is absolutely right. This is Bill 18. I don't know how I could have become fixated on Bill 11, especially with closure on Bill 11 today. Maybe that's why: I'm disappointed. But I did say, "Bill 11, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act," Mr. Speaker, and I apologize to the hon. minister. I'm amazed, and I compliment his keen hearing.

In regards to Bill 18, the flat tax has been discussed, Mr. Speaker, in various jurisdictions, not only in this province and in this country but in the United States of America as well. In fact, some presidential candidates have devoted their entire presidential campaigns to this idea of flat tax, and none of those individuals has even come close to the presidency. They've had difficulty even winning primaries.

4:10

When we have a look at this notion of flat tax, we have to look at the thoughts of others. There have certainly been accountants come forward who have reservations. Many groups have come forward. At the moment, the only benefit that I can see in this proposed flat tax of 11 percent is raising the personal exemption to slightly more than \$11,000. This allows some tax relief, and I congratulate the government, in the development of this policy, for looking at this issue of tax relief for stay-at-home parents. That is a very positive thing in this bill, but I don't think it is reason enough that we should devote all our attention to this concept. That tax relief could be done in many ways, and when we discussed this in this Assembly earlier in Motion 506, I was disappointed with the discussion that came about regarding alternatives to the spousal exemption.

When we look at the highlights of Bill 18, Mr. Speaker, the

province will unhook from the federal system by levying provincial tax on taxable income rather than on the basic federal tax as of January 1, 2001. Now, when that occurred, we saw suddenly the comments not only by media people but also, as I said before, from the accountants, and they confirmed what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora had been saying for months, that perhaps this was not as fair as we had thought.

Now, the Treasurer of the day acknowledged that the 11 percent rate would put working couples at a disadvantage. This was back in March, and this is the quote, Mr. Speaker: one-income families do very well, even after the federal government makes these changes, and we will make adjustments that will sweep in for all families. When we look at this, we have to acknowledge what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning said, and that was that this is making taxation legislation on the fly, or words to that effect. The hon. member is absolutely right.

If we go back to December of 1997, federal and provincial finance ministers agreed that provinces should be able to levy tax directly on taxable income. It was also at that time agreed that provinces could choose to move to a tax-on-income structure or remain within the current tax-on-tax structure. Under the agreement reached between the federal minister and the provincial finance ministers, the following elements were applicable, and this is information for all hon. members of the Assembly. Provinces would agree to adopt the federal definition of taxable income as a base upon which to levy provincial income tax. Provinces would also agree to limit the number of provincial tax brackets, and it's interesting to note that this included a zero rate on a narrow first bracket. Provinces would also be permitted to establish a distinct block of provincial nonrefundable tax credits to be multiplied by the lowest nonzero provincial rate. The provincial credits would be based on the federal credits but would add supplemental provincial amounts.

Now, with this agreement provinces would also retain access to existing low-income tax reductions with either individual-based or family-based income testing, Mr. Speaker. Not all provinces would have to move to the tax-on-income system at the same time. Some provinces would levy tax on income while other provinces could continue the current system of levying tax on tax.

When we look at the Alberta Tax Review Committee – this is going back to October of 1998 – the committee recommended that the province of Alberta move to a new system of tax on income from the current system of tax on tax. As we discuss this bill, we need to note the recommendations that were made by the Alberta Tax Review Committee. The recommendations are thus, Mr. Speaker. The province should introduce a single rate of provincial income tax. The single rate perhaps should be set at 11 percent for all taxpayers. The basic personal and spousal exemptions should be increased to \$11,620 and fully indexed to inflation. The temporary deficit elimination tax and the 8 percent Alberta surtax – and this goes back to what has been said in this Assembly and also outside this Assembly at various public forums and what has been said by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora – should be eliminated in conjunction with the implementation of the 11 percent single rate.

Now, the hon. member was talking about the elimination of the flat tax and the Alberta 8 percent surtax, and I want to make that perfectly clear for all hon. members of this Assembly. It is next summer, I believe, that the 8 percent surtax is going to be eliminated. When we look at the studies that have been completed and we look at what has happened, we need to take a moment and point out some – they're not inconsistencies – flaws in this Alberta 11 percent single rate tax. I believe that these are the major inconsistencies or flaws, whatever you want to call them. I believe that fairness and equity are compromised, and the reason for this would

be the distribution of tax cuts under the 11 percent single rate. This can be skewed, and I'm not going to go into any details on that at the moment because I think other hon. members of this Assembly have been very thoughtful in their remarks regarding this whole idea of fairness and equity. That's for everyone, regardless of their income, regardless of whether they're earning \$10,000 or whether they're earning \$100,000.

I would like to see the disposable income of Albertans increased. When we look at the disposable income of Albertans, they're working harder and harder for less. This has been documented at the University of Calgary by an economics professor and his staff. They did a study of three American states and the province of Alberta, and the reason why they chose Oklahoma, Colorado, and Texas in America, Mr. Speaker, was because of the composition of the economy in relation to agriculture and natural resources and activities that are involved in extracting those natural resources. In the last decade the disposable income of workers in this province remained flat while in America, in Colorado, Texas, and Oklahoma, there were significant increases in the disposable income of the workers, in the amount of money they had in their pockets to spend on whatever they wanted to. Whether it be on private health care or not, I'm not going to say, but what they wanted to spend their money on after payday was their business.

4:20

So the notion that Albertans have that they're working harder and harder and harder for less certainly is true. It's unfortunate, but it is true. If people are working hard, then they should be rewarded. I don't think that the tax system is going to be improved by this scheme. There are certainly a number of groups and a number of citizens that think this is ideal – and they certainly are entitled to their opinions – but it is not going to be for the benefit of the majority of Albertans. In fact, I believe it will be a tax grab, Mr. Speaker, on the middle class. The reason why I would say that is because taxpayers who earn less than \$70,000 in taxable income would receive a larger provincial tax cut under the current tax-on-tax system starting in the year 2001.

Now, this gets back to the discussion that we had a little earlier about increasing the disposable income of Albertans. Some hon. members across the way always describe these individuals as severely normal. Well, the severely normal people I believe are earning in that range of income. If we are to have the distribution of the tax cut that is due under the 11 percent single rate, the majority of the benefits or the strongest gain is certainly not going to be made by those in those income levels but in the \$100,000 range and over. This is quite unfortunate. It is quite unfortunate. It is something, I believe, that the majority of Albertans, as they study this issue, are beginning to realize.

We need to talk about taxes certainly, but we don't need to launch political campaigns on one specific idea. We look at what happened whenever some individuals made calculations and discovered "oops." Well, I was there. I was present when the hon. Premier stated that adjustments will have to be made. If it is not the case, then, that we are going to have a substantial tax cut for the individuals as it was described in their targets – we'll see what happens with this whole idea.

We need to be talking to all Albertans whenever we say that we're going to have fair taxation, Mr. Speaker. The middle 39 percent of Alberta tax filers, in the income class between \$30,000 and \$70,000 per year, receive on average a 9 percent cut in provincial taxes under the 11 percent single rate. Nine percent. The top 1 percent of Alberta tax filers, in the income class of \$150,000 and over per year, receive an 18 percent cut in their provincial taxes under the 11 percent single rate. Is that fair?

Perhaps the individuals in the income class of \$150,000, with

closure on Bill 11, are going to be able to go to these private hospitals and have who knows what accomplished in the surgical centres or private hospitals. Who knows what they're going to be able to spend their money on? But the middle 39 percent of Alberta tax filers, in the income class between \$30,000 and \$70,000, receive 26 percent of the total tax cuts under the 11 percent single rate. Now, is this fair? Is this equitable?

The top 4 percent – now, this is very interesting – of Alberta tax filers, in the income class of \$100,000 and over, receive 31 percent of the total tax cuts under the 11 percent single rate. Is this fair? Is this equitable?

The top 1 percent of Alberta tax filers in the income scale – this is \$150,000 and over – get on average an annual tax reduction of \$9,700 under the 11 percent single rate.

MR. HERARD: Yeah, but how much are they paying?

MR. MacDONALD: The top 4 percent of Alberta's tax filers, in the income scale of \$100,000 and over, get an average annual tax reduction of \$4,700 under the 11 percent single rate.

Mr. Speaker, I heard an hon. member over there mumble, "How much are they paying?" The whole idea of fair and equitable taxes belongs in every bracket, no matter where you're at. A government that's only creating taxes and tax breaks for the fortunate few, for the rich and the powerful and the influential, this to me is a signal of a government that's out of touch. Not only is it out of touch with the taxpayers; it's also out of touch with people who are seeking treatment for illness in the public health care system. This is further evidence of a government that's out of touch, whenever we do not have a fair and balanced tax system.

We have to ask ourselves: who is this going to benefit? I know people ask that question with Bill 11 all the time, but I'm asking it here with Bill 18. Who is this going to benefit?

MR. HERARD: The people who've been paying for everything.

MR. MacDONALD: The hon. member across the way said: the people who keep paying for everything. Well, that's an interesting observation from the hon. member, but we have to devise policies, as I said before, that are balanced for everyone, not the fortunate few, not the individuals who are – and I don't want to go there, where there are tax laws for political contributions, because I think I would be a voice in the wilderness there. This whole idea of tax credits and what laws we can make or what laws we can enact – oh, my time is up, Mr. Speaker. I'm disappointed.

With those comments on Bill 18, I would cede the floor to an hon. colleague. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments about Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, at second reading and to speak to some of the principles that are embedded in the bill or that are supported by the bill.

Before I look specifically at those principles, I wanted to talk a little bit about the context in which this bill comes forward in our province at this time. One of the unfortunate things, I think, in talking about tax cuts is the absence of any consideration of why we pay taxes in the first place. Just exactly what is it that we are trying to do through our tax system? I know it's fairly clearly understood by most of us that the tax system is used to pay for government

services that we need and for the administration of those services, but we seem to be long on rhetoric about the need for less tax and very short on rhetoric in terms of the good that those tax dollars that we do pay do for society and for our community. I think that's unfortunate for a number of reasons. First, I think it tends to negate the responsibilities we have as citizens for the well-being of others in our community and the well-being of the community itself. Again, I say that's unfortunate.

4:30

A tax system, for all we rail about it – and it's been railed about since time biblical – is a powerful instrument in terms of community development and support of individuals. So I'm always somewhat I guess reluctant to jump onto the "let's cut taxes" bandwagon without pausing for at least a few minutes and reflecting upon the purposes of those taxes and what we try to do with them. That's an important consideration in this province because we have been, up until recently, one that was very, very dependent on resource revenues, and boom-and-bust cycles have been, I guess, one of the strongest characteristics of our economy in the province.

I guess I would have liked to have seen Bill 18 – and all the other suggestions that we've had from the government – put into the context of some long-term plan for the province. Where are we going, and what is it exactly that we are going to have to pay for, now and in the future? How are we best able to pay for them? How does Bill 18, how does a flat tax proposal fit into that larger scheme?

We've seen a lot of tax changes since I first came to the Legislature in 1993. There have been some changes, some dramatic changes; for instance, in the taxing authority of school boards. They no longer have that ability. The municipalities have been very vocal in their concerns about the lack of tax revenues for them to carry out the obligations that they have. We have seen the machinery and equipment tax abolished, and I recall some of the discussions when that particular tax was deleted. There were promises about new investment that that would bring to the province and new jobs that that would bring to the province, yet I don't recall – and I may have missed it, Mr. Speaker – any report back to ratepayers on those promised benefits. Did the abolition of that particular tax bring the kinds of benefits that were promised by those who supported its abolition?

We've seen a lot of tinkering in terms of gasoline taxes, and there have been a number of announcements. On November 23 of last year the Premier mused about the lowering of the 9 percent per litre gasoline tax. Later that year he mused about a tax rebate for Albertans. Even later, after Christmas of 1999, the Premier was talking about a \$100 tax rebate for Albertans.

Starting at the beginning of the year, on January 7, the Provincial Treasurer started talking about personal income tax cuts for the year 2000. A little later that same month the Treasurer said that the government was talking about eliminating or reducing health care premiums. The very next day the Treasurer indicated that any surplus would be used to pay down debt rather than being used to provide tax cuts in 2000. On January 26 the government's 18-cent reduction in the mill rate for the education property tax applicable to the 2000-2001 fiscal year amounted to about a \$22.50 tax cut for the average homeowner. In February the Treasurer announced – I think at that time it was the eighth time the Treasurer had made this announcement – that there would be an 11 percent flat tax scheme in the provincial budget.

[The Speaker in the chair]

So there's been a whole series of announcements from the

government about taxes – income, personal, gasoline, municipal – and I suspect that a lot of that rhetoric culminates in what we have before us in Bill 18. I think all of those announcements only add to the discomfort many Albertans feel, that the tax changes have not been very carefully thought through and that they are predicated on some questionable economics.

I look at the kind of trickle-down economics that drove the tax cut rhetoric in Thatcher's England and in Reagan's United States, and a lot of that seems to be what we're hearing here, that somehow or other people have more disposable income, that that's going to be spent and that will improve the economy. So we hear some of that same rhetoric here.

I hear, on the other hand, worries from Albertans that the promoters of the tax cuts are forgetting about the very, very dire need our health system finds itself in. They're forgetting about the concerns that parents across the province are raising about schools: the underfunding of schools, the increasing class sizes, and the lack of resources. They're forgetting about children living in poverty. They focus on the tax cut as being a distraction from those very real issues that many Albertans are concerned about.

If you look at the polls, a number of polls have indicated that when you ask Albertans about tax cuts, it will rank third, fourth, or fifth in terms of their fiscal concerns in the province, and the majority of them would still prefer that money be spent on the health care system and on schools prior to tax cuts being undertaken.

I did a short survey in my own constituency, and certainly the overwhelming evidence from what is a very informal and not at all scientific survey from that group of constituents was that tax cuts were very low on the agenda compared to the need for putting more money into health care and into our schools.

The other concern is that there's only one person that pays for public services, and no matter how we cut it, we all end up paying one way or the other. Our history in the last number of years in the province has been to shift that burden to a number of user fees. I think the last total was something like 700-plus user fees in the province. Of course, the government has been forced by the courts to look at those user fees and to ascertain whether they are really fees for service or are really, as many of them are, taxes.

4:40

One of the other concerns is that things will worsen for people at the bottom end of the economic scale. Although there are exemptions for very low income earners, the benefits of this bill will accrue to those people who earn above middle income, and the people at the lower ends are going to actually end up paying more. So there's a continuation of what has become almost a war against low-income families in the province that is again perpetuated through Bill 18 were it to become law.

I wanted to talk about some of the specific principles that we hold important and then to measure those principles against Bill 18. The first principle, of course, is that the tax system should be fair. I think the calculations that other speakers have read into the record show that this proposal, the 11 percent flat tax, is not fair in terms of treating all ratepayers the same. That's an important principle to have violated and I think one that many in this House are going to have difficulty supporting when Bill 18 does come to a vote, because there are enough inequities built into the tax system now that building in more through Bill 18 I think should be the last thing that we are about.

I think one of the other important principles is that the tax system should be progressive, not regressive. Income tax rates rise as taxable sums increase, and that's considered a progressive tax system, while in a regressive system sales tax and GST are consid-

ered regressive. The burden decreases as taxpayer income increases, and that's what is a characteristic of Bill 18, that it's not progressive.

I think my colleague from Lethbridge was able to outline four other principles that are in the bill and are worthy of comment. The first is that we should unlock or unlink ourselves from the federal system. Again, it's a principle that I think would find general support in that it does allow us, then, to be masters in our own house, and it allows those changes to be made unrelated to what is happening on the federal scene.

A second principle the member outlined was that the relationship between wage earners and income tax should be adjusted for family circumstances. Again, that's become the history of our tax system in this country, that we do recognize the value of families and their need for support, and we have made adjustments to the tax system to accommodate families and their particular circumstances, particularly low-income families. So I guess there are two sides to this principle: the adjustments for families, but that is balanced against the proposal being regressive in many ways.

A third principle was that the federal accommodations, the federal tax point system where credits are made available for the province, are left untampered in this legislation. Again, I think most would support that, that there won't be changes made at the federal level to in any way influence what's proposed in Bill 18 or change what Bill 18 would have.

Of course, the fourth principle, that there should be a flat rate, is the one that we are arguing very strongly against in terms of the implications for middle-income and lower income Albertans. That flat rate, as the calculations have shown and as outside independent analysts have indicated, is not fair and is certainly not equitable.

So with those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to more detailed consideration of Bill 18 at the committee level. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to second reading on Bill 11, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Bill 11?

MRS. MacBETH: I did it too. I'm wrong. I'm sorry. It's a Freudian slip, Mr. Speaker. We're just so overcome by the closure thing. In fact, it is Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. Actually, at the end of my remarks I will show how in fact Bill 11 and Bill 18 are quite linked in terms of the way this government views the world. [interjections]

You know, they were really quiet until I stood up. I don't understand it. They were just sort of sitting there doing their work, and suddenly they are awake to the fact that there are some problems with this flat tax they have put into Bill 18.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to a couple of points on this bill. First of all is the whole question of a progressive income tax system and why we have it and why it's important that any tax cuts be done within a progressive structure. Secondly, why the single-rate tax is a bad thing, in our view. Finally, I want to look at the combined effect of the flat tax plus some other pieces of legislation and some other actions this government has put into effect which in their combination create the reality of some very disturbing things in terms of where this government is heading.

First of all, let me then move to the whole issue of progressive tax. Mr. Speaker, when I spoke on Bill 11, I talked about the whole question of values in terms of how Canada had originally been structured. We have built a country; we have built a Constitution.

We have built structures within our country and our Constitution to try and share our commitment to each other. Certainly, when we think about the reality of some provinces having greater fiscal capacity than the others, we've embodied in our Constitution the whole concept of equalization. Equalization, of course, ensures that there are have and have-not provinces, yet fundamentally we are all, first and foremost, Canadians.

The fact is that we are fortunate enough to live in a province with the wealth of resources that exist in Alberta, and high commodity prices for those resources have given Alberta remarkable revenue over most of the last decade. Yet we as Albertans I think are proud to share some of that benefit we've been able to have with others in our country who don't have that level of support, the same way that when commodity prices drop and the price of oil falls to \$10 a barrel, as it did in 1986 in this province, Alberta becomes the benefactor of that whole notion of fiscal sharing or equalization amongst all of the provinces. I think it's an important statement in terms of how we feel we are committed to each other and committed to supporting each other.

4:50

You know, there was a wonderful thing at the rallies that were held on Bill 11 in both Calgary and Edmonton when Kiefer Sutherland, who is the grandson of Tommy Douglas, spoke at that rally, Mr. Speaker. Of course, Kiefer Sutherland's mother was there, and Mr. Sutherland told a wonderful story about going to see his grandfather, who was Tommy Douglas. The story that he told was that he and his family had been living in the United States for several years, and they had returned to their summer home, I guess their grandfather's summer home, in Quebec. The story Kiefer Sutherland told was that he went to his grandfather and was talking about living in the United States and then returning to Canada. He said to his grandfather: what is it that distinguishes us as Canadians? What his grandfather said to him was: well, there are two things that distinguish us as Canadians; the first one is we're able to . . .

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I think there should be a point of order here. Relevance, *Beauchesne* 459. We're really discussing Bill 18, which I believe is what's up for comment this afternoon, not Mr. Kiefer Sutherland or which province you thought he was in or anything else like that.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, it is true that one has to take a great deal of liberty at times with their imagination to see the connections that one hon. member would want to make in terms of their presentation or their discourse in the House. It is also true that there's pretty wide-ranging latitude in second reading when one is recognized to have debate on the floor. The chair is hoping, hoping, hoping that soon the chair will discover the connection the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition said that she would provide with respect to this debate.

So let us be patient. The hon. member has been recognized, and all hon. members could be recognized for participation in this debate as well. Just advise the chair, and we'll be happy to bring you to that point.

Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, please continue.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Anyway, Kiefer Sutherland was talking about this conversation that he had had with his grandfather about what distinguishes us as Canadians, and I think this, with respect to how we built our health care system, is very much a part of the discussion we're having here on Bill 18, very much in keeping with this argument.

Mr. Speaker, Kiefer Sutherland said that his grandfather responded to this question by saying: well, there are two things that distinguish us as Canadians; the first is that we really love the cold weather. He said: all Canadians seem to thrive in cold weather; they like to go out and work; they play; there's no way they stay inside when the winter's cold. Really, that's consistent with the people that came to Canada in the first place. They wanted to settle in this wonderful country with its great resources, and that was one of the features that he thought was really important as a Canadian.

The second feature was our health care system, because, he said, it's sort of the most tangible indication of Canadians' commitment to each other, that we have put in place this health care system that recognizes that every single Canadian will be treated as equally as we possibly can. Certainly the principle of equality is in there. That's one of them.

I would add two more things that distinguish us as Canadians. The third one is the whole issue of our education system, which, like our health care system, says that education and health care are deemed to be a public good, Mr. Speaker.

DR. WEST: A point of order.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer on a point of order. Yes, sir?

Point of Order Relevance

DR. WEST: Under *Beauchesne* 459. I hate to belabour the point about relevance, but the hon. leader of the loyal opposition, when she started the debate, did make reference to Bill 11 instead of Bill 18, and then of course she has proceeded to go on about Kiefer Sutherland and the health care system and his grandfather Tommy Douglas. It escapes me how you could, even with the breadth given to second reading on any bill, jump forward to the connotation that this is a discussion about Bill 18 when indeed she's already referenced Bill 11 and is concentrating more on health care than she is on the taxation system in the province of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: Comments on this point of order? Well, let's just review what *Beauchesne* 459 actually says in its totality. The subject heading is Relevance and Repetition.

Relevance is not easy to define. In borderline cases the Member should be given the benefit of the doubt, although the Speaker has frequently admonished Members who have strayed in debate.

That was point (1) under 459, and point (2) under 459 is:

The presiding officers are directed by Standing Order 11(2) . . .

Now, these deal with the Canadian House of Commons, not this particular parliament.

. . . to call to order members who indulge in persistent repetition.

The rule against repetition is difficult to enforce as the various stages of a bill's progress give ample opportunity and even encouragement for repetition. In practice, wide discretion is used by the Speaker and the rule is not rigidly enforced.

This is one source of information, *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, and there are other citations as well.

Once again, the human spirit is really quite imaginative. There

are some 6 billion of us on planet Earth, and it's absolutely amazing how imaginative we might all be in how we might bring to a conclusion something that all of us who are mere mortals might not have yet discovered to this point in time. Perhaps there is some form of wisdom here that will become so peculiar and so unique in all of history that this will be the day of reckoning in this Assembly.

So, hon. member, please continue your debate and your participation on Bill 18.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, they're getting a little bit antsy over there, kind of like kids. I talked about education, and it's kind of like kids at the end of the school day. I'm building a case, a very solid one with respect to Bill 18 and progressive income tax and how it is contrary to the values that built this country, and I'm intending to do it.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Anyway, we've gone from health care, and now we go to education, both deemed to be a public good, a public good that is available to all. We don't say that because someone has more money – at least we haven't up to this point – they should get better health care or that because somebody has more money, they get better education. The reason for that is because we as a society have said that these both are very much public goods; they deserve to be delivered to all in the fairest way possible. So that would be the third point in terms of what distinguishes us as a society.

I would say that there is a fourth point, Mr. Speaker, and that fourth point is a progressive income tax system. Here we have a structure where we have education being delivered or available to all and health care being available to all, but we know full well that someone in the middle-income group or slightly below middle income, say in the range of \$35,000 to \$65,000, could not afford the quality and the calibre of education and health care that we have been able to give them in this country were it not for a distributive tax system that brings in more dollars from those that have greater ability to pay in order to support those things that we as a society have deemed to be a public good.

MRS. NELSON: It's called socialism.

MRS. MacBETH: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills says that this is socialism. Well, the question I would ask is: what's she been doing in the Progressive Conservative Party for the last 30 years, which of course has built a whole issue around a progressive tax system? It is this government and members like this member who are now taking it towards a whole throwing out of those values of a progressive income system and bringing in this flat tax, and I think it's very much a selling off and a demarcation of a lot of the people who have worked hard for that party and in this government for many, many years.

5:00

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we know that the flat tax is a regressive tax. It's regressive because it says that those in the higher income group will pay less than the ones in the middle-income group. We're seeing this shift by the flat tax proposal of this provincial government, a shift away from those in the higher income group, a rewarding of high income, as if high income weren't enough reward of itself – rewarding those with the high income and putting the marginal tax rate up more for people in the middle-income group and down more for the people in the high-income group. Now, those members over there may well argue and say that's not happening, but of course we know it is. We know that the provincial

marginal tax rate benefit is flowing greater to those in the higher income group than those in the middle-income group. So, in fact, the argument stands.

With respect to it being regressive as well is this whole argument about marginal propensity to consume, because we know that people who have a lower income, or in that lower to middle-income group, have to spend a greater proportion of their income on supplying basic services than does somebody in the higher income group. Yet here comes the government along with their flat tax proposal to make that even greater, even worse. Our tax system until now, the progressive value of it, has reflected the differential ability of individuals to earn money and therefore a differential ability to pay taxes in order to support a public good. Really, as my colleague from Lethbridge-East has pointed out, we are seeing, instead of a sharing of wealth, Mr. Speaker . . .

DR. WEST: Is that because you live under the shelter of a professional corporation at home, Nancy?

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, it's only 2 minutes after 5 on a Monday afternoon. There is time for some opportunity here to listen to hon. members.

The chair counts out the number of members in the House and sees there's approximately 35 to 7. The seven members of the opposition are no threat to the 35 members in the House. Words cannot walk down walls, so let the hon. member go without interjection please.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, up until this government had introduced its flat tax proposal, the whole notion was about sharing the wealth, sharing the wealth as consistent with the Constitution and with the actions that have been taken by this government at least up until now. What's now happening with this legislative proposal is there's now being a concentration of wealth, as my colleague from Lethbridge-East has so eloquently expressed on several occasions.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, that instead of being called the Progressive Conservative Party, we should call them the regressive conservative party for many reasons, one of which is this regressive flat tax which they seem to be proposing, and the notion that the effect of the flat tax is that the rich get richer. You know, that's who they're fighting for. The rich get richer, and the poor and the middle income of course pay for it and pay for the brunt and the shift towards that middle-income group.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would say that there is value in a progressive income tax system. There is value which is consistent with the kind of country we've built where we have our education and our health care access based on our view as a society that this should be something we support for everyone, not just those who can afford to pay, and finally that the whole notion of flat tax is one that's regressive.

Mr. Speaker, the question of why keeps coming up in so much of this government's actions, and the question of why on the flat tax is very, very interesting. You know, the question of why. Certainly we see the Reform or Canadian Alliance or whatever it's now called moving towards this whole notion of flat tax. In fact, it may well be that the reason the Provincial Treasurer brought in the flat tax bill and the flat tax notations before the federal budget was just simply so he could get on with his arguments based on ideology, because certainly there's not benefit to the taxpayers, as I will be able to show in my remarks.

Let's just for a minute go to the United States, where of course

five years ago the federal Republican Party was talking about income tax based on a flat tax rate. Certainly, the majority leader at the time, Dick Armey's flat tax proposal would have resulted in significantly higher taxes for the middle class they said, but in our case the middle-income group. I'm quoting here, Mr. Speaker, from the American Legion magazine of December '95.

Echoing . . . complaints about the scheme, the economic consulting firm of Lehrman, Bell, Mueller and Cannon argues that by eliminating many popular deductions, the plan will end up increasing federal taxes for most workers.

In a letter to key Republicans, they pose the semi-rhetorical question, "Does the Republican Party want to take into 1996 a flat tax proposal that raises taxes on most American workers and worsens the middle-class squeeze?"

Mr. Speaker, the reason why this is so germane to this debate is that even the Republicans in the United States have moved away from talking about flat tax because they realize the shift is onto the middle-income tax group. So even the U.S. Republicans are seeing their way through it and aren't acting like a regressive Conservative Party as they had before they came to that conclusion.

I think it's important as well to go to that good old father of modern capitalist thought on progressive taxation, Adam Smith. Quoting from his *Inquiry into the Nature & Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, written in 1776, he said:

The subjects . . .

That's us.

. . . of every state ought to contribute toward the support of the government, as nearly as possible, in proportion to their respective abilities; that is, in proportion to the revenue which they respectively enjoy under the protection of the state . . . [As Henry Home (Lord Kames) has written, a goal of taxation should be to] "remedy inequality of riches as much as possible, by relieving the poor and burdening the rich."

In other words, the argument is for a progressive income tax system. It makes sense, Mr. Speaker, and it's made sense in this country.

I know there are some people on the government benches who don't want to hear that, but believe me, there are a lot of people in the electorate who do know that, who do value a progressive income tax system. While they may have 35 in here today, these seven that are here now, and more of course available, will be growing as we move towards an election.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important as well – and I just wanted to put a little bit more information about this whole notion of the flat taxers. I want to quote from the distortions that the flat taxers have put forward. This is from an article by Robert S. McIntyre, which I pulled off the web site in recent days. It says:

Having attacked the . . . accomplishments of the Great Society . . . Congressional Republicans . . .

Now, here this is the American argument again.

. . . are preparing to eliminate a reform that stretches even further back into history . . .

This is, in terms of historic, why the Republicans have dropped this notion of flat tax instead of continuing on.

. . . the progressive income tax [that is]. Republicans in both houses of Congress have introduced plans for a flat tax, claiming that its simplicity and fairness . . .

Does this sound familiar in terms of the rhetoric that we've been accosted with in this House?

. . . will be a boon to all. Majority Leader Dick Armey, presenting his plan, states that millions of taxpayers are taken off the rolls entirely, and middle Americans receive a tax cut.

5:10

Well, the first part of that claim is true, as it is here in Alberta where a higher level of people will not be paying any tax at all.

Since Armey's plan does not tax income from interest, dividends, or

capital gains, those taxpayers who live completely off of investment income would be taken off the rolls entirely. The second part of the claim is, by any serious accounting, wrong.

That's the second part that talks about middle Americans receiving a tax cut. They don't. We know that.

Armey's plan has two parts: It replaces the progressive income tax with a flat tax, and it replaces business tax with a consumption tax.

Both elements would dramatically shift the tax burden from the wealthy toward the middle class and the poor.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe in helping those who are less able to help themselves. I believe in making sure that those that are in the higher income pay a higher portion of the tax than those in the low- and middle-income group.

I don't just approach it from an ideological perspective, as the government does. Instead, I think the second point of my remarks is to move to this whole issue of: why is a single income tax rate, a flat tax, bad? Well, the answer is that it shifts the costs onto the middle-income taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, the most interesting thing about this government's flat tax proposal, which of course they jumped and put in at 11 percent before the federal Finance minister had in fact given a tax cut, not just talked about it but given a tax cut to the people of this province and the rest of the provinces – you know, it's interesting, because as soon as it became clear that the 11 percent flat tax was going to mean an increase in taxes for that middle-income group, what did the government respond? They said: well, then we're going to bring the flat tax rate down to 10.5 percent. Well, guess what? An even greater benefit to those in the higher income group who will come from a provincial marginal tax rate of about 12 and a half percent now down to 10 and a half percent, as opposed to 11, whereas the people in the low income that were at 10.5 percent will stay the same or, worse, have their income tax rate rise.

It's one thing to talk about the provincial marginal tax rate, Mr. Speaker, which we know, of course, benefits even greater the higher income group, but let's look at the payment of taxes. Let's even go to the example of the 10.5 percent flat tax, which of course the government then responded to. Let's look at someone at the \$35,000 income level. Let's look at their provincial tax payable. We're not talking about the rate here; we're talking about the tax payable on a tax-on-tax system. In other words, simply flow through the tax cuts which the federal government has announced, which all Canadians will benefit from. So in 2001 the provincial tax payable is \$2,385.49. This is a person with a \$35,000 income. That's the provincial tax payable.

Let's look at the provincial tax payable under a 10.5 percent flat tax rate if this bill goes through. That will mean that instead of \$2,385, that income earner in 2001 will be paying \$2,454. That's an increase. In other words, if the federal tax cuts were simply flowed through at the current rate of provincial income tax, Albertans would be paying less tax at the \$35,000 level.

So what have we got here, Mr. Speaker? Let me be absolutely clear. They're increasing taxes. It's a tax grab. It's an income tax grab. That's what it is. You know they might not like to hear it. In fact, I can well understand why they wouldn't want to hear it, but that's the truth. Not only is the marginal rate benefiting the higher, but the lower income group, some in the \$35,000 and others, will not be gaining but will in fact be paying more tax under the flat tax proposal at some of those income levels.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we believe a far better solution for a tax cut would be to look at lowering the provincial rate and then capitalizing not only on the federal income tax cuts but increasing it, improving it with the actions by this government. But, no. The ideologues have to take over, one of whom is now running for the leadership of a federal party and basing his campaign on it. You

know, I think the people of this country will see through this plan and see that in fact the tax rates will mean an increase in their taxes.

Next, Mr. Speaker, having outlined what the value of a progressive income tax system is, having outlined why we believe the single-tax rate is not part of the public good – in fact, it is contrary to the public good – let me look at the combined effect of several of these actions, as I said I wanted to do. First of all, who is benefiting from the flat tax proposal? Well, the greatest benefit will flow, as we've seen in the concentration of wealth, to those in the highest level group. They will get the best tax break. Their marginal rate will come down the most, and they will end up getting the greatest benefit; i.e., in terms of paying their taxes. So that's an interesting thing to note, that they are the ones that are benefiting the most, not the middle-income group, as we've seen, but the higher income group.

I think it's in fact very important on this second reading to bring forward the issue of Bill 11. Let's look at who benefits from Bill 11. Well, it's either those who can afford to pay or those who can build a business opportunity out of taking away some of the public asset of health care and building a business around it. So who benefits the most? Those who can afford to pay, those who are in the higher income level group.

Let's look at somebody else who has been hit by the actions of this government in terms of user fees, increases in health care premiums. I talked earlier about the marginal propensity to consume. Well, people in the middle-income group are paying higher fees for all of those services. You know, someone at the \$200,000 mark, Mr. Speaker, doesn't really have to concern themselves all that much with paying things like health care premiums. They just pay them, and it's no big deal. But for somebody at the \$50,000 or the \$40,000 income level, where certainly the bulk of Alberta taxpayers find themselves in terms of income, that money they have to spend on health care premiums becomes a much greater proportion of their income than those in the higher level income groups.

So who benefits in terms of user fees? Maybe some of the people in the \$200,000 income bracket. I know a lot of those people enjoy using the parks. Well, the cost for someone at the \$200,000 level using the parks, the proportion of their income, of course is far less than a family who wants to go out and spend some time in the summer and go to the parks and has to pay those kinds of fees.

So, Mr. Speaker, I guess the question becomes: what kind of a society is this government trying to support and trying to build? They're trying to assist in the greatest way those people who have the greatest ability to buy those things that they want anyway. I'm not criticizing people in the high-income level. Why would we? I mean, those people have certainly a differential ability to earn, and so be it. That's fine. The concern is that it's the people at the middle-income level who are being the most hurt by the collective coming together, the comprehensive actions by this government. Those actions are ones that see that the progressive income tax rate is one that should be maintained, in our view, rather than removed and a flat tax used instead.

5:20

You know, Mr. Speaker, there was a famous American President who said that when you involve yourself in politics, you have to decide pretty quickly whose side you're on. In his view, you're either on the side of the people or on the side of the interests. This government has obviously made it very clear that they've decided that they're on the side of the interests, not of the people, the side of the interests who have the greatest benefit from things like private health care and flat taxes.

Really what it results in finally is an assault, a clear assault.

What's happening is that there's really an assault going on by this government on the middle-income group. We know that as the flat tax continues over the next several years, that comparison that I gave that was a \$69 difference – the \$35,000 taxpayer in 2001 would be paying \$69.41 more under this provincial government's flat tax proposal as opposed to a provincial tax payable under tax on tax, but let's project it ahead to 2004. Mr. Speaker, we're not going to know, we have no idea what the price of oil, what the price of commodities will be in 2004, but let's look at that same example of what the provincial tax payable would be in 2004 if this government simply allowed the federal tax cuts to flow through to the taxpayer.

That same \$35,000 taxpayer would be paying provincial income tax in 2004 of \$2,194.60 on the tax-on-tax system, but guess what they'll be paying under this government's flat tax proposal? Well, of course, the difference gets bigger and bigger. This is under a 10.5 percent tax rate, which of course the government has said they're going to think about bringing in. The provincial tax under a flat tax in 2004 for a \$35,000 income would be \$2,402.92; in other words, \$208.32 more under the provincial flat tax than it would have been if they'd simply flowed through and not even cut the rate, you know.

MR. SAPERS: They're tax creeps.

MRS. MacBETH: They are tax creeps. That's exactly right. They're tax creeps.

It just keeps getting worse. You know, the thing is that the government has given us this issue, and our effective work in terms of this issue, lifting out from the excellent papers which have been done in Alberta opposed to the flat tax, has given, between the health care privatization and the flat tax, a very good snapshot of who it is this government is trying to benefit. We've seen it loud and clear in these two areas.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on, but I will save some of my remarks for another time on the bill. Let me simply close by saying that we believe a far better way to deal with the issue of tax cuts would be to preserve the progressive tax system that we have rather than a regressive tax, which this government has decided they want to opt for. I look forward to the continuation of this debate on second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure this afternoon to rise and make a few comments in regards to Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. It comes at a particularly interesting time, because I know that probably most members of this Assembly have either filed their income tax or are in the process of trying to meet a deadline here in short order.

Of course, when we look at this whole idea of Bill 18 and why we want to move to a flat tax, then we have to look at why we would want to change a system which is based right now on a tax-on-tax issue. We also want to question whether or not a tax-on-tax system or a tax-on-income system is the best.

So in looking at this new proposal, Alberta's 11 percent single-rate system, when we look at the major components of this particular bill, we see that in actual fact what it will do is delink us from the federal tax system, which is a tax-on-tax system, and move to a system where we do have tax on income. This new system, of course, will come into effect for Albertans on January 1, 2001, and the basic personal spousal amount and spousal to equivalent exemptions will be established at \$11,620 as of January 1, 2001.

Again, Mr. Speaker, when we do look at it – and it was pointed

out very well by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. It has always been thought that we tax those people who are able to pay, who have the ability to pay. I know that I don't have too much time, so before I get into other parts on the principles of this bill, I want to look at a particular principle, and this is section 46, which deals with Canada pension plan or Quebec pension plan "disability benefits for previous years."

Now, we have a group of people in this province right now who when they are injured, cannot work are paid 90 percent of their net earnings, but in the calculation of those earnings, what is deducted from the gross are such things as employment insurance premiums and Canada pension plan premiums. Those are deducted in determining their net income. However, when those people are injured, those payments do not flow through to the federal counterparts. So when those people are injured, effectively their benefits for employment income, their benefits for Canada pension plan are seriously curtailed for the time of their injury. Now, if they can't get back to work, then from that point on those benefits do not increase.

So particularly looking at section 46 of this bill, I certainly would like to have seen something to address this fact that puts the most

vulnerable in this province, those that because of injury are not allowed to work or cannot work – this should have also addressed a shortcoming in this bill for them.

Now, as others have said here as well, Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill 18 really is politically driven tax reform, and it sounds an awful lot better than it really is. You know, the government doesn't have to delink from a tax-on-tax system. We certainly saw when the federal budget was brought in that true tax cuts across the board occurred under their system. Under this particular system, a flat tax system of 11 percent or even lowering it to 10.5 percent will not result in a tax cut for a certain portion, the middle class of Albertans. If we indeed wanted taxation that would be spread across the board and would be fair to all people, then of course what would have been best would have been simply to reduce . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, the House now stands adjourned until 8 o'clock this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 1, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/05/01

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Good evening. Please be seated, and we'll call the evening session to order.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 18

Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

[Debate adjourned May 1: Mr. Bonner speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would like to continue the debate on Bill 18 this evening, and I would also like to continue with my remarks, particularly along the lines of how this is not going to be a fair and equitable tax.

We have seen that when we deal with taxation – and it's an issue that many Albertans are dealing with right now – that there are federal nonrefundable tax credits; for example, an age amount, a dependant amount, CPP contributions, EI contributions, pension income amount, disability amount, tuition and education amounts, medical expenses, caregiver amount, interest on student loans, and donations and gifts. Many of these, again, Madam Speaker, are nonrefundable tax credits.

We also have other nonrefundable tax credits when we're looking at our income tax, such as medical expenses, education amounts, tuition for students – or the portion they don't use can be transferred to an adult, to a parent – donations and gifts to different organizations. All of these will continue to apply, and they'll be levied at 11 percent of the maximum amount permitted for each credit. As well, when we look at the object of this bill, the basic personal, the personal spousal to equivalent, medical expenses, pension, education, caregiver, and disability credits will be indexed to inflation on a year-to-year basis.

Now, unfortunately, when we look at all this, Madam Speaker, this is not going to be fair and equitable to all people, and it's certainly going to impact the most that percentage of the population which now is the group that is earning between \$30,000 and \$70,000 a year. It was good to see in all this that there will be a zero percent increase on the first tax bracket. Those people who have very limited resources should not pay.

As well, I think it's very important that when we look at all this, Madam Speaker, we look at the background of what has led us to the point where we are today. In December of 1997 federal and provincial finance ministers agreed that the provinces should be able to levy taxes directly on taxable income. It was also agreed that the provinces could choose to move to a tax-on-income structure or remain with the current tax-on-tax structure. What we have seen is that if we'd remained on the tax-on-tax structure, certainly we could have given a tax break that was equitable to all brackets on the tax scale.

However, with this particular tax, when we go on tax on income, we find that the people that are getting the greatest benefit from a straight flat tax are those at the very upper end. Somehow this isn't the way taxes were meant to be. Taxes were based on your ability

to pay, and certainly the people that can pay the most taxes are those earning the most money, and they should be the ones that are paying more. So there seems to be a reversal in our thinking here or in what the outcome of a flat tax would be.

Now, under the agreement reached between the federal Finance minister and the provincial finance ministers, the following elements are applicable. The provinces would agree to adopt the federal definition of taxable income as a base upon which to level provincial income tax. Provinces would agree to limit the number of provincial tax brackets, including a zero rate on a narrow first bracket. We've already mentioned that, and I don't think there are any members in the Assembly that would disagree with that particular statement, that the people who are earning the least amount of money should not be required to pay that type of tax.

Now, as well, the provinces would be permitted to establish a distinct block of provincial nonrefundable tax credits to be multiplied by the lowest non-zero provincial rate. The provincial credits would be based on the federal credits but would add supplemental provincial amounts. The provinces would retain access to existing low-income tax reductions with either individually based or family based income testing. Again, we look at who has the ability to pay and who is going to benefit from any revision in the tax system.

What was agreed between the finance ministers and the federal Finance minister was that not all provinces would have to move to the tax-on-income system at the same time. Some provinces would levy tax on income while other provinces could continue the current tax system of levying tax on tax. As well, Madam Speaker, as we look at other jurisdictions who have attempted or even looked at this particular style of taxing on income rather than tax on tax, we find that all of those people have moved away from that particular system and have found that the best system is of course tax on tax.

Continuing on why we have arrived at this point today, in October 1998 the Alberta Tax Review Committee recommended that the province of Alberta move to a new system of tax on income from the current system of tax on tax. As to the elements of the tax-on-income system in Alberta, the committee made the following recommendations. One of the recommendations here was that the province should introduce a single rate of provincial income tax and that this single rate should be set at 11 percent for all taxpayers. A further recommendation was that the basic personal and spousal exemptions should be increased to \$11,620 and fully indexed to inflation.

Other recommendations here were that the temporary deficit elimination taxes, the .5 percent flat rate tax and the 8 percent Alberta surtax, should be eliminated in conjunction with the implementation of an 11 percent single tax rate. According to the committee the implementation of the 11 percent single rate with personal and spousal exemptions of \$11,620 would have taken an additional 78,000 low-income Albertans off the provincial tax rolls and would have reduced the difference in provincial income taxes paid by double- and single-income families.

In the budget of 1999, Madam Speaker, the Alberta government adopted the recommendations of the Alberta Tax Review Committee. The following were the key elements of the Alberta tax plan presented in Budget '99. Alberta matched the federal increase in the basic and spousal exemptions to \$7,131 and \$6,055 respectively. The 8 percent surtax was to be eliminated by July 1 of 2001. The .5 percent flat rate tax and the selective tax reduction were to be eliminated by January 1 of 2002. The 11 percent single rate on taxable income would apply on January 1 of 2002. The basic and spousal exemptions would be increased to \$11,620 on January 1 of 2002.

The cost of implementing the tax package announced in Budget

1999 was estimated at \$600 million. The revenue recovery from the tax package when fully implemented was established at \$120 million, or 20 percent, in the year 2002-2003. By 2006-2007 it was estimated that there would be a 40 percent revenue recovery from the tax plan, and this would be a .8 percent increase in the real gross domestic product and a 17,000 increase in employment from a base case scenario.

8:10

With higher than anticipated revenues expected over the next three fiscal years, the Alberta government decided to accelerate the implementation of the tax plan in the 2000 budget, and the February 24, 2000, provincial budget announced the following modification of the tax plan.

Now, at this point I'd like to interject on some of these suggestions, Madam Speaker, to outline that here again we are taking higher than anticipated revenue and taking that surplus and putting it into something when we certainly could be using that additional revenue to prop up our public health care system. We certainly could have been using that additional money to cut our pupil/teacher ratio in school. Those are two areas that could certainly use a great amount of our assistance, and instead some of those projected surpluses are going to be going into a tax plan.

As well, the 8 percent surtax will be eliminated effective January 1, 2000. The .5 percent flat tax and the selective tax reduction will be eliminated effective January 1, 2001. The 11 percent single rate and the increase in the basic and spousal exemptions are now slated to take effect on January 1, 2000. As well, Madam Speaker, an additional \$100 million was set aside in the 2000-2001 fiscal year to parallel any federal tax cuts applicable to the 2000 tax year while Albertans remain linked to the federal tax-on-tax system.

On February 28, 2000, Madam Speaker, the federal budget announced a reduction in the middle-class income tax bracket from 26 to 23 percent, an increase in the threshold for the middle-income and high-income tax brackets to at least \$35,000 and \$70,000 respectively as well as full indexation of nonrefundable tax credits, including the basic and spousal exemptions, all to be implemented over a period of five years.

As well, Madam Speaker, in the 2000 tax year alone under the federal government tax plan the middle-income tax bracket will be reduced from 26 to 24 percent effective July 1, and there will be an increase in the threshold of middle- and high-income tax brackets to \$30,004 and \$60,009 respectively, and the basic and spousal exemptions will increase to \$7,231 and \$6,140 respectively. It is estimated that the impact of these tax measures on Alberta will be \$66 million in the 2000 tax year alone.

As a result of all of this, Madam Speaker, the impact of the federal government tax measures through 2004, it was revealed that Alberta taxpayers below \$70,000 in taxable income would be paying more in provincial personal income tax under an 11 percent single rate in the 2001 tax year and in subsequent tax years. They would be paying more under this 11 percent flat tax system than if they had remained on the tax-on-tax system.

My last point here is that on March 15, 2000, it was announced that the government would introduce amendments to Bill 18, Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, to ensure that all federal government tax measures impacting on Albertans would be passed through. Details on those changes are expected to follow the release of the province's first-quarter 2000-2001 results in September 2000.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to Bill 18, Madam Speaker, and I look forward to participating more in Committee of the Whole.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure this evening, on this beautiful spring evening, to rise in debate on Bill 18. You know, when spring comes, I always find that it rejuvenates and gives me some energy, and it's equally pleasing tonight to see that spring appears to have arrived at the Legislature with hundreds of people gathering in anticipation of debate on Bill 11. I think it gives us good reason to pause and reflect on why we're in this Assembly and on the importance of the debates on bills that come before this Chamber.

Regrettably, we won't have long to debate Bill 11, because we're very alert to the fact that the government is closing debate on that particular bill. It's sort of odd that we don't see closure on a bill like Bill 18, Madam Speaker. This is another bill which the government is certainly strongly supportive of. Again, they don't have a lot of evidence that it's going to be effective or to prove that it's going to be even implementable in conjunction with running a broad spectrum of public programs. Much like we have seen with Bill 11, they don't have a great deal of proof, but they're in a position where they're just prepared to go full speed ahead and let the chips fall where they may.

The bill before us, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, is a rather unique bill. It proposes that Alberta is again going to, quote, unquote, lead the country in establishing a flat system of tax, an 11 percent tax rate. Now, for the average Albertan, in terms of all the breakdowns, Madam Speaker, I think quite simply their primary question is: how is it going to affect me, and how will it affect the programs that I expect to be funded from my tax dollars and from provincial revenues?

Well, when we look at the '99-2000 budget, which the government released in February, showcasing this new proposed tax plan, we really don't see a lot of information, Madam Speaker, about how in fact the security of our public programs will be guaranteed. In fact, we see repetitive quotes by the *Globe and Mail*, repetitive quotes by the *National Post*, repetitive quotes by the *Calgary Herald* indicating their pleasure and their glee in the establishment of this tax structure.

Oddly enough, we don't see quotations from groups like the Friends of Medicare or the Alberta Teachers' Association or perhaps even the Taxpayers' Federation, and that is possibly because this government, number one, really hasn't planned or thought through how programs will be affected; number two, haven't communicated that to the sectors or groups that would be impacted; and number three, have taken the easiest route possible to market that bill. That is to rely on media interests like the *Globe and Mail*, like the *National Post*, like the *Calgary Herald*, who are all owned by one media mogul who happens to promote this type of corporatism.

Really, Madam Speaker, it's not of interest federally, nor should it be of interest to some large-scale newspaper owner. The people who this will impact most is Albertans, and the questions are about how education funding will be secured and maintained, about how health care spending will be maintained and secured if we implement an 11 percent flat tax and all of a sudden the revenues don't turn out to be quite what the hon. Member for Red Deer-North so eloquently waxed on about in his budget address this February. What if they fall short and then we take this bill in combination with the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Deficit Elimination Act, which this government has also seen fit to impose on this province, and find ourselves in a position where we don't have enough money to fund?

8:20

Well, perhaps the government has anticipated that, Madam

Speaker. I'm just thinking this through. Perhaps that's why we have a bill like Bill 11. They just may be anticipating that there won't be enough money to fund health care down the road, so we have to have some mechanism by which the taxpayers pay for their own services. Then, lo and behold, isn't it amazing that we have Bill 11 accompanying Bill 18, so if health care funding falls short out of the public purse, Albertans can pay out of pocket for surgical services? It's just part of a master plan that this government hasn't had the political courage to share with their electorate.

Now, just a few more facts. This year the Auditor General – and I know that the minister of energy will be most interested in his remarks – in his report talked about a number of concerns that he had about Treasury and particularly their calculation of budgets and their reporting of budgets. Let me be specific. He recommended that

ministries work with Treasury to develop a strategy to improve the definitions of the components of business plans.

Accompanying that, he made recommendations that ministries clearly reflect the cost of implementing their core businesses. In essence, Madam Speaker, he expressed concern about this government accurately and clearly reflecting the costs of doing business in their ministries. Others might call it the fine art of fudging numbers, but really what the Auditor General was saying is that you must clearly reflect your expenses in your business plans and budgets, and that is not something which this government has chosen to do.

Let me read specifically from recommendation 48.

It is again recommended that the Department of Treasury develop a methodology to allocate all significant costs to the entities responsible for delivering outputs.

Similar to the 1997-98 fiscal year, there are reservations in my auditor's reports on the 1998-99 financial statements of all of the Ministries and all of the departments. The nature of the reservations is described in more detail in the following paragraphs.

The purpose of these audit reservations is to maintain a focus on all of the assets, liabilities, revenues and expenses for which the management of the Ministries are accountable, including performance measurement and financial management responsibilities. The reservations alert readers that the related financial statements are not complete and accurate. Also, where possible, the reservations provide the reader of the financial statements with the supplementary information that was missing . . .

Lo and behold, Madam Speaker, missing.

. . . from the financial statements. Further, they are intended to identify circumstances where decision makers are at risk of arriving at faulty conclusions.

So here we are this evening, Madam Speaker, faced with a government that's been fudging the numbers in their ministries, not accurately and completely sharing information on the costs of doing business, and Bill 18, which proposes that we go to a flat system of tax, with no accompanying information on how ministry programs would be impacted. [interjection] I know that the minister of energy is enjoying this line of debate so much, so I'm going to continue on another area relative to my same points.

The Auditor General pointed out that

ministries and departments contained reservations because they did not report their share of pension liabilities and expenses.

So we have in essence, Madam Speaker, outstanding debts within the ministries for pension liabilities and expenses. They haven't accurately reflected that in the business plans. That money is owing, and at some point in the future, probably in the next 10 to 20 years, when a large component of our public sector retires, that money owed will come due. If we find ourselves in the position of having Bill 18 implemented and the flow of revenues to this province reduced, what exactly are we going to say to the public-sector employees who have retired? Are we going to say that we're not

able to fully fund their pension plans, that they won't receive a full pension?

DR. WEST: That's misleading. You know that the actuarials have been done.

MRS. SLOAN: I know that if the minister of energy has got the mettle, Madam Speaker, to stand up and debate this, he'll have a turn after I've finished. I'm sure I'll have given him ample material upon which to debate this bill.

The question is about adequate funding to public programs, adequate funding to cover off the significant pension liabilities that exist. Where will that money come from, Madam Speaker, if Bill 18 takes us to a future where the provincial tax revenue is reduced?

My third point, arising from the Auditor General's report. On page 275 he talked about the "existence of social programs within the tax collection system." Again, I quote.

There are social programs within the tax collection system the cost of which are reductions of tax revenues on income and consumption. In quantifying the impact of these items in the discussion that follows, the amounts shown are actual revenues foregone. The cost of these social programs typically arises through the use of tax deductions, exemptions, credits, incentives, preferential rates and deferrals. These programs promote social or economic purposes to a specific group.

There is a view that these social programs within the tax collection system are an alternative to direct expenditures as a form of government assistance or subsidy.

And he goes on to provide a bit of education about that.

Then he draws the conclusion that

a preliminary estimate indicates that the cost of these social programs is significant.

A limited review by this Office of 1998-99 financial information indicates that for programs administered solely by the Province, there were disclosed costs of about \$300 million for royalty tax credits and undisclosed social program costs of approximately \$700 million . . . In addition, because the Province's assessments for personal income tax are based on the federal personal income tax collection system, there are effectively other Provincial revenue reductions as a result.

He goes on to say:

However, in none of these instances is there disclosure of performance targets and results.

He gives a suggestion that the Department of Treasury should incorporate those within their annual budget.

Now, I looked at the government's marketing material on this bill that was released with the budget, and I don't find any reference to how those social programs and the component of that revenue would be protected. If I am correct, I think that this would impact seniors, the seniors' health insurance premiums, things in that area, Madam Speaker, where we have developed and implemented a program where there is a . . .

DR. WEST: A point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Acting Provincial Treasurer has risen on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

DR. WEST: Under *Beauchesne* 459, relevance and repetition. The hon. member has strayed away from the principles of the bill, that are discussed in second reading, the principles of Bill 18. The discussion that she's having would be more pertinent to the debate on the budget, which we've had. We've had many, many nights and

many, many hours on the budget and the Auditor General's report and its relevance to the budget. I find tonight we're discussing a specific tax bill, Bill 18, and the hon. member chooses to wander considerably and as well use language, by repetition, that incites the decorum of this House. I heard "fudging." I heard some other comments made in reference to the integrity of the ministers of the Crown, and I feel that she's totally off base for Bill 18.

8:30

MS CARLSON: Madam Speaker, on the point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Yes, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Madam Speaker, one week off and the Minister of Resource Development forgets the rules of this Assembly. I would refer him, please, to *Erskine May*, page 378, where we talk about relevance in debate, rules governing the contents of speeches. He knows that the hon. member has 20 minutes to come to the point. He knows that many times every speaker in this Assembly has followed the rulings outlined on this page where it says:

A Member must direct [their] speech to the question under discussion or to the motion or amendment [they intend] to move, or to a point of order. The precise relevance of an argument may not always be perceptible.

We have seen many speakers on that side of the House take their full 20 minutes to come to the point. In fact, the Member for Calgary-Egmont on the last day of speaking in this Assembly took 12 minutes to speak to Bill 11, at which point in time he never once referenced the subamendment under debate or brought the discussion back there at all. So if he could go 12 minutes without ever even referring to a point, this hon. member, who has several times referred to the bill under question, is completely within order. I understand that you know the rules, but clearly the minister needs to brush up on the rules in this Assembly. There is no point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I would ask that we do look at what is before us. We are in debate in second reading of Bill 18, which is the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. It is often very difficult for a Speaker or someone sitting in the chair to define relevance. As was indicated, sometimes the chair does allow a lot of latitude in the debate and in the discussion that's taking place, but I would ask everyone to keep in mind that we do have before us Bill 18 – and it is the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act – and try to ensure that your debate and your discussion is relevant to the bill under debate at the moment.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I certainly acknowledge that I'm relatively new to this Chamber, and I may be under some false assumptions here, but I always assumed – and the minister of energy may wish to correct me if I'm wrong – that our programs in this province are funded from tax revenues. Would anyone in this House like to correct me that they are not? I believe that our programs are in fact funded . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I would ask that we try not to be confrontational in this debate. We are only in second reading.

MRS. SLOAN: I'm being as personable and jovial as I possibly can. I know the minister of energy finds me particularly personable and in some cases provocative, but if he would just follow my . . .

MS LEBOVICI: You'll get him all excited, Linda.

MRS. SLOAN: Oh, dear. Heaven forbid that I would do that.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: Our programs in this province are funded through our tax revenues, and Bill 18 proposes to fundamentally change the way in which we collect taxes in this province. My point being: how do we continue to fund programs and how do we in an accountable fashion assure citizens that we will be able to continue to fund programs if we fundamentally change the tax system so that it's no longer equitable and fair, contrary again to the government's marketing documents?

In fact, what Bill 18 will do is distribute or skew in some respects, Madam Speaker, the tax system towards the 4 percent of our citizens filing taxes in this province who earn above \$100,000, while the 39 percent of citizens who find themselves in the middle-income bracket, earning between \$30,000 and \$70,000, will pay over 45 percent. So in essence we are in fact creating with Bill 18 an inequitable tax structure that offers no assurance that our public programs will be able to be maintained in the future.

[Disturbance in the gallery]

THE ASSISTANT SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

MRS. SLOAN: With the system now, Madam Speaker, in a pure form, everyone regardless of their income pays the same rate. Under Bill 18 that won't be so. The higher income earners are going to get an advantage. The middle-income earners are going to pay more.

Now, that also brings to mind a similarity. We could say that 18 and 11 are sister bills. With Bill 11 the wealthy in this province most likely won't have concerns about paying extra for health care if in fact private hospitals and a private system of delivery come into play because they have the disposable income to do that. The middle-income people, on the other hand, who do not have as much disposable income, are going to find themselves putting out more money for taxes and putting out, equally so, money for third-party insurance or for the cost to go to get their radiology in the United States, as many people who are trying to access services at the Cross Cancer Institute in my constituency of Edmonton-Riverview are now finding.

While all other provinces are sending people waiting to other provinces or to the States, this province chooses not to. Given the fact that even with the revenue we have now the province is not doing an adequate enough job in ensuring access for Albertans to the health care system, how are they going to assure and guarantee Albertans that they will be able to access health care if our provincial revenues decline under Bill 18?

I'd also just point out that another principle of this bill is that it's going to delink Alberta from the federal tax system, so we can take that on its merit. But at a point earlier this spring, sometime in March, I believe, I think March 11, the Premier in fact said that if the federal government brought in any tax reduction measures subsequent to this taxation year, he would allow those reductions to flow to Albertans, in effect now making a commitment that relinks Alberta to the federal system. That's very confusing, Madam Speaker.

I'm pleased to have had the opportunity this evening to make these debates, and I will now conclude. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The interim leader of the ND opposition.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to have this

opportunity to speak on Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, in its second reading. It is legislation that if passed by this Legislature will, I guess, reflect an interesting legacy that will be left here by the former Treasurer of the province. Bill 18 is legislation that doesn't really pass the test of fairness. If approved by this Assembly, Bill 18 will result in a massive shift of the tax load from high-income Albertans onto middle-income Albertans. Bill 18 represents nothing more or less than an attack on middle-class Albertans.

8:40

Every tax accountant and economist who has independently crunched the numbers on this flat tax proposal has reached the same conclusion. The main beneficiaries of this bill will be those with incomes above \$100,000 a year. Middle-class Albertans with incomes from \$30,000 to under \$100,000 will pay a disproportionately higher share of the tax load.

For instance, University of Alberta economics professor Mel McMillan has this to say about the government's flat tax proposal, and I quote: this would really shift the tax burden to the middle class; the big winners are those in brackets beyond \$150,000 and especially those in the \$250,000-plus income bracket, end of quote. Dale Meister, a senior tax accountant with PricewaterhouseCoopers had the following to say, and I again quote: the higher income earners get proportionately bigger savings than the middle-income earners; the tax savings increase in the higher brackets, unquote.

In addition to not passing the test of fairness, Madam Speaker, Bill 18 also fails the test of transparency and honesty. The provincial government knows that reducing tax rates for higher income earners will result in a massive transfer of the tax load onto middle-income Albertans. That is why, to hide the redistributive effects, the introduction of the proposed flat tax is being combined with an overall tax cut in this bill.

Despite the deep cut in personal income tax revenue, however, some middle-income earners will end up paying more tax, not less, under Bill 18. This was the case even before the recent federal budget. Before the recent federal budget the provincial government's own budget documents show that a single person making \$30,000 per year will actually pay \$28 more under the government's flat tax proposal, under Bill 18, than they would under the current tax system.

The recent federal budget has demolished any remaining questions about the fairness of the flat tax scheme set out in Bill 18. A front page story in the *Edmonton Journal* aptly said, "Air gets let out of flat tax." The *Edmonton Journal* story contained an analysis done by income tax specialist Brad Severin. Severin found that middle-class earners will pay about \$170 more next year than they would have under the existing system. That number rises to \$440 by the time all the federal cuts come into effect by the year 2004. A quote from Mr. Severin: "It only gets worse as time goes by." Severin's analysis emphatically concludes that middle-income Albertans would be better off staying with the existing system rather than moving to the regressive flat tax proposal in Bill 18.

I find it appalling and unacceptable that such a fundamental restructuring of the personal income tax is taking place with virtually no public consultation or debate. The so-called Tax Review, which consisted of handpicked Tory insiders, held a few meetings in the dead of summer a couple of years ago. I also find it incredible that a bill which fundamentally changes the personal income tax system in a very regressive manner is being sponsored by a former Provincial Treasurer and shepherded through this Assembly by a caretaker Treasurer.

In my remaining time I would like to briefly debunk some of the

arguments made in favour of the flat tax proposal contained in Bill 18, Madam Speaker. One of these arguments is that a flat tax would make the income tax system simpler. Nothing could be further from the truth. Should Bill 18 be passed by this Assembly, Alberta's tax system won't be any simpler with a flat tax rate than it currently is. What makes a tax system complicated are the numerous exemptions, deductions, credits, and other loopholes encountered in calculating one's taxable income.

The only way to simplify the tax system is to remove the complexities in calculating one's taxable income. Not only does Bill 18 fail to do this; through section 5 it codifies these complexities into provincial law by using the federal definition of taxable income.

The proposed flat tax does not get rid of a single loophole. All of the existing tax credits and deductions would remain. Your tax return would not shrink at all. In fact, your tax form would actually become more complicated. For instance, taxpayers currently need to do only one calculation to determine their nonrefundable tax credits. Under the flat tax plan proposed in Bill 18, they would need to do not one but two calculations, one to calculate their federal tax credits and a second to calculate their provincial tax credits. Despite having three tax brackets, a single tax table can be used to calculate federal and provincial taxes at present. Moreover, over half of tax filers have taxable incomes of less than \$30,000 per year. They already pay a flat tax, or single tax rate, of 17 percent federal and 7.48 percent provincial on this income.

There are those who argue that there are too many tax brackets. The Mulroney government tax reform of 1987 already significantly flattened the Canadian tax system. There are only three tax brackets now. Before 1988 there were 10 different tax brackets, ranging from 6 percent to 34 percent. Going back even further, in 1970 there were 17 tax brackets.

The United States has a more progressive income tax system at the moment than Canada does, especially for those with higher incomes. At the federal level the U.S. has five tax brackets, ranging from a low of 15 percent to a high of 39.6 percent. By comparison, Canada has only three tax brackets, and the top federal tax rate is only 30.9 percent. Some American states have as many as 10 tax brackets. Only six states out of 51 have implemented a flat tax.

Another argument made by flat tax advocates, like our former Treasurer, is that marginal tax rates are too high and are a disincentive to work harder. Marginal tax rates, Madam Speaker, refer to what's paid on the last dollar of income earned by a taxpayer. Effective tax rates, on the other hand, refer to the average rate paid on every dollar of income earned. Marginal tax rates will and should be higher than effective tax rates in a progressive income tax system. It is misleading to focus on the marginal tax rates to measure the fairness of the income tax system.

Effective tax rates are a much better indicator because they measure the rate of tax paid on every dollar of income earned, not just the last or the top dollar. Effective tax rates tend to be significantly lower than marginal tax rates even for those with high incomes because they, like low-income people, are able to benefit from the lower rates applied to their first dollars of income. Higher income earners are also able to reduce their tax liability by taking advantage of things like credits and deductions. Unlike middle-income earners, those with higher incomes are able to afford to maximize their RRSP contributions, to set up family trusts, and to take advantage of capital gains exemptions.

Under the current system, Alberta has by far the lowest marginal tax rate of any Canadian province. In the year 2000 Alberta's top marginal tax rate is 13.26 percent. The next lowest province, Ontario, has a top marginal tax rate of 17.42 percent, which is almost 25 percent higher than the one in Alberta. Under the proposed bill,

Bill 18, the flat tax plan, Alberta's top marginal tax rate would drop to 11 percent, fully 14 percent below Ontario's rate. It's one thing for this government to try and make Alberta some sort of tax haven for the wealthy. It is another thing entirely to do this at the expense of middle-class Albertans, which Bill 18 does. It is not even true that higher income earners have the highest marginal tax rates. When calculations of marginal tax rates include the impact of refundable tax credits, middle-income earners and not high-income earners are already paying the highest marginal tax rates.

The personal income tax system contains a number of refundable credits including the child tax benefit, the goods and services tax credit, the seniors' credit, as well as provincial credits like the seniors' benefit and Alberta employment tax credit. These credits are recovered by being taxed back as income rises. If calculations of marginal tax rates include the impact of refundable tax credits, middle-class earners, not high-income earners, are already paying the highest marginal tax rates.

Robert Brown, the past chair of PricewaterhouseCoopers, calculates that a single-earner family with three children, making between \$30,000 to \$40,000 annually, faces a top marginal tax rate of over 60 percent. By contrast, the marginal tax rate of a similar-size family making \$110,000 a year is just over 50 percent. That is because a family making \$30,000 gets to keep less than 40 cents of every additional dollar earned as a result of the combined increase in tax payable and the reduction in refundable tax credit payments. By contrast, a family making \$110,000 gets to keep almost 50 cents of every additional dollar earned. If anyone has a distinct disincentive to work, it is the middle-class earners, not high-income earners. Imposition of a flat tax as proposed in Bill 18 will make this inequity even worse by raising the marginal tax rate for the middle-income earners while lowering it for high-income earners.

8:50

Proponents of a flat tax say that a flat tax will end bracket creep. When the Mulroney government got itself into financial difficulty a decade ago, they stopped full indexation of tax brackets and exemptions to inflation. Now adjustments are only made for inflation above 3 percent. As a result, until this year's federal budget there had been no increase in the income threshold for the three federal tax brackets for a number of years. The basic and spousal exemptions were increased, starting in the 1999 federal budget, after a number of years of no adjustments.

The Alberta government has as much as any government in Canada benefited from tax bracket creep. Surely the answer to this phenomenon is not to get rid of tax brackets, thereby undermining fairness, but rather to restore full indexation of both tax brackets and basic spousal exemptions. If it wanted to, the provincial government could cut taxes or user fees without bringing in a regressive flat tax as proposed in Bill 18. Moreover, with the size of the budget surpluses in recent years, the Alberta government clearly has the fiscal capacity to cut taxes, increase spending in priority areas, and keep retiring debt.

The question is not whether Albertans should have a tax cut but rather what kind of tax cut. Tax cuts directed at low- and middle-income earners will generate more economic activity than tax cuts directed at the wealthy. That is because the wealthy will likely invest their tax savings in investments – GICs, mutual funds, including foreign-content ones – while low-income and middle-income earners are likely to spend their savings on things that more directly lead to local job creation; for example, buying goods and services.

Are there alternatives to the Tory flat tax proposed in Bill 18 that are fairer to low- and middle-income Albertans? Absolutely. The

New Democrats advocate phasing out health care premiums as an alternative to the flat tax plan set out in Bill 18. While delivering a comparable amount of tax relief, the New Democrat approach would give each Alberta family an \$860 break and a single person a \$408 break regardless of income.

There are many sound reasons why this approach is better. AHC premiums, Madam Speaker, are the worse kind of regressive tax. A family earning \$20,000 pays exactly the same \$818 per year as a family earning \$2 million. The income levels at which Albertans receive premium subsidies are ridiculously low. To receive a full premium subsidy, families must earn less than \$7,500 and singles less than \$5,000. Furthermore, AHC premiums get rotten tax treatment. They get terrible treatment by Revenue Canada. Unlike premiums paid to private health insurers, AHC premiums paid by individuals are not tax deductible. Middle-income seniors and those working in jobs without benefits are particularly hurt by this. Those working in better jobs are also hurt because any portion of AHC premiums paid by employers is fully taxable at the employee's top marginal tax rate.

AHC premiums, Madam Speaker, are costly to administer as well. Alberta Health wastes enormous time and resources to collect premiums and track down those in arrears. In '96-97 the department spent \$11 million on premium collections, more than it spent on administering the health care insurance plan itself. About half of the \$11 million was paid to external collection agencies to track down those with premium arrears. Despite this, the government still wrote off \$29 million in uncollectable premiums in '98-99 alone.

The last point on AHC premiums, Madam Speaker. AHC premiums are a drain on jobs and the economy. As a payroll tax, employers face substantial compliance costs in deducting and remitting health care premiums to the government. The New Democrats would ensure that the savings resulting from the phasing out of premiums are added to the remuneration of employees, not pocketed by employers.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, Bill 18 does not deserve the support of this Assembly. It's a regressive piece of legislation that benefits only the wealthy at the expense of the middle class. It was the brainchild of a Treasurer that's no longer even in this Assembly to defend it. Instead of blindly moving forward with legislation that's fundamentally unfair and deeply flawed, I urge the Assembly to vote this bill down or, much better, the government to withdraw this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I wanted to enter into the debate at second reading on Bill 18, where we're talking about the principles of tax reform insofar as the personal income tax side is concerned.

I'm sure all hon. members or their constituents have had the pleasure this last few weeks of filling out their tax returns and filing them, as they're due by midnight tonight. I know that I myself had the onerous task of preparing 11 returns this last week and going through the calculation that is required for filing those returns. They ranged everywhere from some returns for seniors to students, to what I call severely normal working Albertans, to people that are living and trying to avoid taxation.

It brought to mind a situation I had a number of years back. I was asked to be on a white paper task force for the federal government on tax reform when the original tax reform program was going to take place in this country. It was under the leadership of the then

newly elected Prime Minister, Mr. Mulroney. However, after a great amount of work on that white paper, the bureaucracy of the federal government didn't have the will or would not co-operate, and the government of the day didn't have the steel to go forward and make tax reform a reality in Canada. As a result, when I was in the private sector, every year there were more complications added to tax returns, to the point where if someone did this for a living, the client base grew and grew and grew because they were so ridiculously out of whack that basically you had to have a road map to figure out what the calculations would be.

There hasn't been much improvement. There have been all kinds of different types of tax credits put in place and RRSPs that then transfer into RRIFs when you're older. There are all kinds of write-offs, but they never have dealt with the real problem. The problem with the tax system is that, number one, it is so cumbersome and so out of whack that it becomes a disadvantage for people to actually operate.

One of the things that I think is a misnomer I wanted to mention before I get into the actual bill. If the hon. member would like to refer back to the budget document, the responses to the Auditor General's comments are in the document. Quite frankly, every one of the recommendations from the Auditor General – and this budget document was debated in the House for 25 days, Madam Speaker. If she would refer to page 167 in the budget document and go through every recommendation from the Auditor General – they're listed in this section of the budget document that we spent 25 days debating – I can say, if the hon. member would not interrupt, that every recommendation that was given by the Auditor General has been accepted by the departments or is in the process of being put in place.

She made reference – and I want to clarify this because I think it's very important – to the liabilities that are not disclosed by this government, and I think the word that was used was “fudging.” All of the liabilities, including the long-term pension obligations of the government and all the pension plans, are disclosed in the financial statements. In fact, if the hon. member would refer to the financial statements . . . [interjections]

9:00

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services has the floor.

Carry on, hon. minister.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. If the hon. members would refer to the financial statements, which are filed, they would clearly see that the pension obligations are in fact shown and disclosed within them. Now, recently there has been a new actuarial value on those pension obligations. I can tell you that when I first sat on the Treasury Board and looked at the pension obligations, they were reassessed, and those obligations, because of the actuarial assessment that was done, dramatically changed the outstanding liability.

She's right that they are not allocated out on a department-by-department basis, but that is not normal public accounting procedure, and they are acceptable accounting procedures for all governments in Canada. In fact, most governments do not include the liability in their financial statements at all. In fact, in Alberta we did not have that disclosure in our financial statements until the 1993 budget came around. That was off balance sheet financing and was not included. It needed to be included. It had to be included.

The other thing that Alberta does on its financial statements – and clearly the hon. member I think needs to look at the financial statements – is that we actually do an accumulated depreciation, an

amortization of assets. We list those in our financial statements. We work on an accrual accounting basis, and we try to have a fully consolidated balance sheet, which you can't completely have in a public sector.

The other thing she mentioned was revenue base. Well, I used to have the job for five and a half years of forecasting revenues. I can tell you right now, on forecasting revenues – if you looked at the last two months, oil revenues went as high as \$34 a barrel. They're now down roughly around the \$25 a barrel mark within probably about a six-week time frame. They fluctuate back and forth. If you had in fact, as a lot of people on the opposite side, Madam Speaker, would have suggested, gone in with a budget number of \$25, \$30 a barrel and budgeted for allocation of funds based on that revenue picture, we could very well be in trouble. As I'll remind hon. members, it is against the law in this province for us to run a deficit budget. That's against the law. So I would remind hon. members that fluctuations occur.

Now, we are fortunate in this province in that we have a strong economy and one that has been successful. It's been successful . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I'm just going to wait, hon. minister, until everyone allows you the opportunity to speak. I've mentioned it a couple of times. We allow everyone in this Assembly to speak when they're recognized. You now have the floor, and I think the people in this Assembly should pay you the due respect and listen to you.

The hon. minister.

Debate Continued

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I guess the point I'm trying to make is that while we went off the track of the bill, I couldn't leave those statements outstanding, because clearly there have been 25 days of debate on the budget. The budget has gone through and has been passed. The appropriation bills have been voted on, and there has been debate on those.

Today we're talking about a change in the system. Yes, as the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry said, there was a Tax Review Committee that was struck by the Provincial Treasurer to look at how we could make Alberta more competitive not only on the business side but on the personal side. We've heard time and time again in this Legislature about what's called brain drain, about how people are leaving, particularly our young people who are graduating from our colleges and our universities and our technical schools, and they're going stateside. Why? Why do they go? If you ask them why, it's because of a tax advantage that occurs when they go across the border. [interjections] The Liberals may laugh at that, but quite frankly it's absolutely true.

When you look at the tax disadvantage that occurs for Canadians today – and Alberta's been part of this; let's be very clear. We have taken taxes and taxes on people when those dollars should be left in their pockets so they can make choices and decisions. One of the reasons I looked at this bill with quite a lot of interest, quite frankly, was the fact that if you give governments money, they'll find ways to spend it. In fact, it may sound like a negative, but I can tell you that there are programs on programs that could in fact be introduced if there were money to pay for them. The worst thing that can happen is to take taxpayers' money and put it into programs that are not necessary. Governments have to focus on what it is they're responsible to deliver, because they are dealing with tax dollars.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview was right. Government's source of revenue is taxation. Let's be very clear about that. That's the only source of revenue a government has. It comes in tax in one form or another. So let's be very clear. The more they have, the more they spend. You don't often see refunds going back to the people who are paying the bills, who are the shareholders, or the taxpayers, of Alberta.

This realignment in this bill I believe does a number of things. We've heard news reports and we've heard people talk about bracket creep, how you move up. The more you earn, the higher you go in your taxation, and you end up just being moved forward, moved forward, moved forward. Sometimes, I can tell you, when you're doing a tax return and you look at how someone has moved above, it's almost: why did they work so hard? Why did they earn that extra \$5,000 or that extra \$10,000 just to be moved up that much higher through bracket creep. By putting in a flat tax, you take away, in essence, that bracket creep. In fact, if you looked at our tax form this year, you'd find that Alberta, like other provinces, had simply just said: well, we're going to take 44 percent of the federal tax payable. Why? Well, because that's the way it was done.

No one can tell me – and I've looked at this for years – where the rationale came from to piggyback onto the federal tax payable system. That affects everybody, but by making a move and saying that Alberta will have a flat tax base, you take away that bracket creep. You take away that bracket creep so you don't have the disincentive of succeeding and moving forward. It's pretty difficult to tell someone to work hard and to keep working hard and work extra time to all of a sudden have it all taxed away. What's the incentive? There isn't an incentive. So you end up with people paying more, working harder, and wondering why.

The flat tax takes a lot of that away. The flat tax helps out people so they can do some planning. It also puts us in a competitive advantage so that we can in fact attract people to this province, and we've been quite successful, I might say, at doing that. If you look at the companies that have moved people to Alberta to help them develop their own corporate sectors, it's amazing the influx of people from all over Canada. In fact, it's amazing to me, when I hear people complaining here about Alberta, and I go home and I look around my own community and constituency and realize that I've had 6,500 new houses built in my constituency in the last three years. Now, these people are coming from somewhere, a lot of them from British Columbia but a lot of them from down east.

Why are they coming to Alberta? Because there are good jobs here, because the economy is healthy, there are good education programs, there are good health programs. They're coming here to Alberta, plus they're looking at what they can do. Now, why are some of our young people leaving Alberta? Because they're going down to take advantage. They're portable. They don't have children in school. They go down from the universities, they go stateside, and they have an advantage down there.

So why not combine the two? Why not attract companies here, bring people here but also keep our young people in Alberta so that we keep the brains in Alberta, so that they don't go out?

9:10

The other thing that I think this bill does, quite frankly, is level the playing field between the two-income family and the one-income family. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Norwood, you don't have the floor. Hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer, you don't have the floor, and Edmonton-Riverview, you don't have the floor. The Minister of Government Services has the floor.

Debate Continued

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm going to give you a real-life example of the discriminatory practices that existed in the tax act between a married couple and a nonmarried couple. I did a tax return – not this year; I didn't do this one – and if this couple had not been married, they would have had an \$8,000 net tax saving between the two of them, but the fact that they were married cost them \$8,000 more in taxation.

This bill levels the playing field. It leaves the choices up to people to make, choices of life: if they want to work, if they don't want to work. It doesn't penalize someone because one family member may stay home or both family members may work. It doesn't penalize them because they're a married couple. This bill brings it into line. This bill brings a level playing field, and it's something that hasn't been there. It's something that has been neglected for a number of years. Now, it doesn't do the whole job. Let's not kid ourselves. It doesn't do the whole job, but it's a good start.

We've also made the commitment that as the federal government revamps their tax scheme, which I hope they do more of, quite frankly, we will make sure that the advantage of that federal tax scheme is passed on to Alberta taxpayers so that Albertans can enjoy every bit of advantage that comes from tax reduction. As you know, we've said time and time again that the only way taxes are going in this province is down. They're not going up. We want to make sure that Albertans have the best tax advantage, not only corporate but also personal. This bill brings this into line.

One of the other things I find is that taxes were used for the wrong reasons. We all saw that, and everybody here knows about it. We had put taxes in place supposedly to eliminate deficits, taxes in place to have economic well-being. That's nonsense. You don't take money from people to solve a problem. You solve the problem and leave the money with the people. It was a reverse effect. The elimination of those flat taxes is absolutely critical from the standpoint that they were used for the wrong reason. For a government to come forward and say that I think is a fundamental statement, that taxation shouldn't be used to eliminate problems. Taxation should be used after the problems have been solved to support the core programs that a government has to deliver, nothing more.

There are statements here about income levels. Again I'll refer hon. members to the budget document. There is an example here listing the single-income family with two children earning \$50,000 and the advantage of this bill, what it means to that family. Under the existing system that family would have an Alberta tax payable of \$2,834. Under the new system that will be reduced to \$1,927. Now, that is a clear advantage for that family. You can go through. There are charts in this document that show how the advantage is there.

Senior citizens. I just finished doing tax returns, and where I find it is unconscionable – a lot of our seniors rely upon dividends as income. They don't necessarily have pension plans; they have dividends. When you have the gross-up of income on a dividend and you put that into income, it affects all of the benefits. The age exemption is reduced because of the gross-up on the dividend because the dividend tax credit doesn't come in until after the fact of the calculation on the tax credit. Then the senior loses the benefit of that age exemption because they have over the years put their dollars into preferred shares or some sort of dividend-bearing instrument that gives them a workable income.

Not only does it hurt them there. I mean, you take the fact that when you go through their tax returns and because they have put dollars away, they not only get a claw-back on their old age security, but they also have a disadvantage for the existing tax credits that are there. It's unconscionable that that can happen to our seniors. This

program starts to help address that. It doesn't do it all, but hopefully if the federal government follows suit and amends and looks back at some of those white papers and realizes that tax reform is critically important in this country if we are going to be competitive and fair to the shareholders, the people of Canada, they will adopt some of those things, some of the instruments in this bill, and put them in place federally so clearly we can have a better tax system that is not cumbersome, that is not burdensome, and doesn't provide a disadvantage for Canadians to live in this country. We're going to be doing that here through this bill in Alberta, and hopefully the rest of them will follow suit.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is my opportunity to speak to the principles of Bill 18 during the second reading stage, and if I had my druthers, I'd druther be outside, where we have hundreds of people making a great deal of sense.

Madam Speaker, in the 11 years I've been here, which counting fall sessions would be close to 20 sessions in all that have been held, I've seen hundreds of bills go through. The two worst bills that I've seen in those 11 years ironically are both happening during this session, those of course being Bill 11 and Bill 18.

The effects of those two bills are dramatic throughout the province in terms of restructuring health care and in terms of restructuring taxation, and when we look at Bill 18 and we equate it to Bill 11, we see some ideology that is very, very similar as to those particular people that will welcome the bill or have least resistance to it because it doesn't impact on them as much. Those, of course, are the wealthy of the province. Those that will have resistance to both bills are those that see financial implications down the road, that being the middle class. When we look at the lower class, there will be some benefit for them in terms of taxation under Bill 18 but very marginally.

In my opinion, the former Treasurer saw that his concept of what he calls a single-rate tax, which has now become known as a sort of flat tax – I think he perceived it as his legacy, and he was so anxious to leave that legacy prior to his departure to the Alliance that he even upped the date of the budget so that he could jump the gun on the federal minister. It was almost like a snooker game.

However, what happened is that he jumped the gun a bit too fast. I think the federal minister outsnookered him, because when the federal minister made his sensible tax reforms, that basically destroyed the benefits that the former Provincial Treasurer had been saying would occur as a result of his concept, and a bit of mathematics determined that quite easily.

As tax reforms continue to occur at the federal level, the impact provincially is going to be more and more dramatic on Alberta taxpayers in terms of the provincial tax. Of course, we hear the Premier saying that they can adjust the 11 percent to 10 percent, to 9 percent, whatever, but I don't see any indication of amendments coming forward that the 11 percent is going to be adjust to, say, 9 percent.

Of course, the new Acting Provincial Treasurer could do the honourable thing and just simply scrap Bill 18, scrap that particular concept and work with the federal ministry rather than fight them or try to outdo them because it's a different political party. Remember, we're in a confederation here. We're not one island unto ourselves so that we can just go off in our own far-fetched direction.

9:20

The previous speaker talked in terms of the number of tax returns

she's done and the complications of the tax return. I have a couple of QuickTax programs myself. On the one at home I do about 15 returns. We also have one I purchased for the constituency office so that we could do tax returns for those on lower incomes. That's one of the things that I paid for out of my own pocket because it's not covered under our budget, but so be it. It helps people out. It's given me a great deal of knowledge as to how the tax situation operates both federally and provincially, and I do agree with the previous speaker that taxation is a very, very complicated situation. Even though there have been attempts to simplify it in terms of the forms and such, really when it comes right down to it, the best change that ever occurred was the computerization that allowed for programs like QuickTax, because that has helped.

It continues to remain complicated at both levels. We see surtaxes, and we see additional surtaxes. We can look at the exemptions, for example, where we have an exemption, but then there's an additional personal exemption depending on what your income is. Again, some of that is the fault of the federal government; I'll acknowledge that. But, again, the way to resolve it, the way to simplify it is not to go off in our own direction, which is going to hurt Albertans but rather to work with the federal government and come up with a system across Canada in terms of sensible tax reform at both the federal and the provincial levels.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to reflect on some of the comments that were made during the last number of months that have led us to the position we are at today. We can go back to July 26, 1999, when Klein mused about accelerating the Alberta single-rate tax scheme in 1999 and 2000 by increasing the basic personal and spousal exemptions to \$11,620, first as a means of providing tax relief to low- and middle-income Albertans. The Premier did not recognize that under the current tax collection agreement the province cannot adjust federally defined amounts of refundable tax credits while remaining linked to the tax-on-tax system.

What occurred at that particular point when there was talk about the single-rate tax scheme being introduced is that somewhere it was flogged out there by the spin doctors on the government side that this would mean provincial tax relief ultimately of up to \$1,500 for any person that was making \$30,000 income or less. In effect, the statement was made that anybody making \$30,000 or less would not pay any provincial income tax. There were people that came to my constituency office and said: "This is great. I could potentially save up to \$1,500. I hope your caucus is not going to oppose it."

So I started to ask some questions and got some research done. Basically, somebody had come up with some type of notion that if you took a certain scenario of a married couple with two dependants, this, this, this, and this, in that one particular category at \$30,000 you wouldn't pay any income tax because of the amounts of exemptions that would apply. We're talking in terms of a married couple with a couple of dependants.

Then we jump ahead to November 23, 1999. The Premier said that the government might lower the 9 cents per litre gasoline tax, and then a few days later, in fact two days later, the Premier mused about a gasoline tax rebate. Then on December 29 the Premier mused about providing Albertans with a \$100 tax rebate; in other words, cheques for \$100 were going to be sent to every taxpayer across Alberta, like the old Social Credit dividends if any of you have been around long enough to actually receive one of those dividends. I certainly haven't been, but I did hear about them. An actual cheque or dividend was mailed out to Albertans, and this was the same concept.

However, on January 7, 2000, just a few days later, the former Provincial Treasurer said that the government was considering a personal income tax cut in the year 2000. Then 10 days later, on

January 17, the same former Provincial Treasurer said that the government was considering a reduction in health care premiums. The next day that former Provincial Treasurer said that the surplus would be used to pay down the debt rather than to provide tax cuts in 2000.

On January 26 the Premier's government stated that an 18 cent reduction in the mill rate for the education property tax would be applicable to the 2000-2001 fiscal year, which amounts to a paltry \$22.50 tax cut for the average homeowner. Now, that was actually implemented; that did provide a \$22.50 tax cut for the average homeowner. There we actually saw a reduction, a benefit of \$22.50 to the average homeowner, and I didn't see a great deal of dancing in the streets over that particular one.

We jump ahead to February 24. The former Treasurer then reannounced the 11 percent flat tax scheme for the eighth time since the 1999 provincial budget, the eighth time that that was announced. We go then to February 27. The former Provincial Treasurer called on the federal government to cut taxes, and he's quoted as saying: what we're saying to Mr. Martin is try it; you'll like it. On February 28 the former Treasurer commented on federal government tax measures. He said that the federal cuts didn't go as far as Alberta's but that they're better than tax increases. On February 28 the former Provincial Treasurer speculated about a reduction in the 11 percent single-rate tax. Quoting him: if it stays up throughout the whole year, maybe we could look at a reduction there and go to 10.5 percent.

I could go on and on and on. The point I'm trying to make here, Madam Speaker, is: where exactly is the provincial government headed in terms of their tax reform? We now, of course, have the former Provincial Treasurer in a position where he is no longer accountable for the various proposals that did come forward, for the actual bills that were introduced. Of course, the Premier has the flexibility, if he chooses to, to simply scrap that and again come out with something that's a bit more feasible.

Madam Speaker, I want to speak for a bit on some of the principles and use some actual figures just to give an indication as to how the mechanics of Bill 18 would work from the research that I've been able to gather. The figures clearly point out to me that Bill 18 is a tax grab on the middle class.

In the year 2001 a taxpayer earning \$35,000 will pay \$2,385.69 in provincial taxes under the current tax system while paying \$2,571.80 in provincial taxes under an 11 percent single rate. That's a tax grab by this government of \$186.11. Now, that's not exactly what we would call tax relief, not to the middle class, not to that particular taxpayer earning \$35,000 a year.

When we look at the year 2004 under the proposed formulas, the same taxpayer earning \$35,000 will pay \$2,194.60 in provincial taxes under the current system while paying \$2,517.36 provincial taxes under the 11 percent single rate. That's a tax grab by the government of \$322.76. So, again, we don't really see what I would call tax relief.

If we look at the year 2004 again, a taxpayer earning \$50,000 a year will pay \$3,787.60 in provincial taxes under the current tax system while paying \$4,167.36 under the 11 percent single-rate tax, a tax grab of \$379.76. Again, very consistent.

9:30

We see one thing occurring as I go through these particular figures, and that thing of course that occurs is a tax grab on the middle class. Now, if we turn around and look at the Alberta marginal rate for taxpayers with taxable incomes in the high-income tax bracket, above \$70,000, comprising 13 percent of the tax filers in Alberta, it would be 13.26 percent under the current tax system

versus 11 percent under the single-rate tax. That means that a taxpayer earning above \$70,000 would have to pay \$110 on each additional thousand dollars earned under the Alberta single-rate system while paying \$132.60 in provincial taxes under the current rate.

The bottom line is that we see as things escalate – and here's where a bit of really simple mathematics comes in. When I do these tax returns, I talk about the same tax returns, but for different people, that the former speaker spoke of. When we talk in terms of the various taxation at the federal level, we can look at – what is it? – the 17 percent and the 29 percent, if I remember right, and then it goes up to about 39 percent, depending on your income. Now, our provincial tax is based on a percentage of that federal tax. If I recall correctly, off the top of my head, the rate has been reduced from a high of 44.5 or 45.5 to 42.5 over the years.

We start looking at 42.5 percent of, let's say, the federal rate. Of course, we're going to see a situation where as the income increases, that flat tax of 11 percent as it applies, because it's not progressive, is going to mean more and more savings. When we talk in terms of a flat tax or a single-rate tax, it takes away that whole concept of the progressive nature of most taxation, even in things like the licensing of a vehicle. Provincial governments across the country, municipalities – you have a progressive tax at the municipal level in the sense that the more your property is worth, the more you pay. If you improve that property, your amount of taxes goes up.

Madam Speaker, as foolish as it may sound, when I was on the municipal council – and I don't know if you experienced the same thing when you were on the municipal council in your particular municipality, when you were in fact Her Worship the mayor – I had people say to me: well, it's a disincentive to increase my assessment when I improve my property; why should I improve it if I'm going to have to pay more? They actually suggested that it should be reversed, that as you improve your property, your taxes would go down. Now, just stop and think about that for a second. It may on the surface sound like it makes a bit of sense because it would provide some incentive for people to improve their property. Those that didn't would be taxed at a higher rate. We actually had one former municipal councillor that agreed with that concept.

Can you imagine a person of very low income being faced with that situation where they've got to pay a higher rate of taxation because they can't afford to fix their property or bring it up to the same standard as somebody a few blocks down the road that has money to build a sauna, has money to put in a fireplace, has money to build an attached garage, whatever, and who for those additional luxuries would get the benefit of an additional tax break? That takes away from the nature of a progressive tax system.

It can be argued that a progressive tax system can contribute to the so-called brain drain. I don't buy that myself. I think there's a great deal more involved with those people that decide to leave Canada and go to the United States or people that leave the United States and come to Canada. I think there's a whole lot more involved than the actual amounts of taxation that may be paid. For example, any Canadian moving down to the United States realizes right off the bat that any tax savings that may occur because they happen to have a lower tax rate are going to be more than offset by the health care costs. Ironically, we could find ourselves in the same type of situation here in Alberta in years to come if we proceed with Bill 11. That could very well happen.

I think when people move, when people relocate to a different country, they do it for several reasons. One may be because of climate. It may be because they see some opportunities in their particular field, like we saw here a number of years ago when we saw the health care system slashed and nurses could no longer get

jobs here in the province of Alberta. Sure, they went to the United States, not necessarily because it was their desire at that particular time to go to Texas and leave their family here, but they were forced to because the opportunity that they had been educated for, that they had trained for was taken away. They had no choice.

So you see, I think there's a great deal more to the whole question of relocation than the matter of taxes being a wee bit lower. In fact, I feel sorry for an individual that would be that motivated by saving a few dollars that they would actually forsake their country, that educated them, to go to another country that they may not particularly care for. They may not particularly care for the environment there and the social programs and such, but they save a few dollars. I would feel sorry for that type of person.

Madam Speaker, when we look at taxation, we look at the amounts of dollars that are achieved. We always talk in terms of tax reform, which we have to do. I hear the Association of Alberta Taxpayers coming out quite often in recent times, in fact very, very aggressively, against this government in terms of some of its proposed tax reforms and such.

Madam Speaker, I would like to go on, but I have to conclude at that point. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity to join in debate on second reading of Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. Second reading is about the principle of the bill, the ideas that are being put forward in it. I'm glad of the opportunity to explore some of the principles that are being set forth here.

The whole idea of taxes, I think, is raised by this. The first thing that comes to mind is: do we need an improvement in the system that we have? I think most people would say: absolutely; you bet. There are lots of flaws. It's difficult. In some cases there are loopholes that are accessible to some and inaccessible to others, so there's an inequity that can be created. I'm not debating that the tax system needs improvement, but do I think that the principles being set forth in Bill 18 are the improvement? No, I do not think so.

Let me set the record straight right here. You know, I don't want to be accused of being someone that wants to charge everybody more taxes just because. I'm one of those people that would love to pay less in taxes, along with many, many other Albertans out there, but I still want the balance. I'd also like to see the good services and programs that are provided that we as Albertans receive in exchange for the taxes we pay.

There's a really interesting ideological principle that is encased in Bill 18. The former Provincial Treasurer - I'm not sure what the exact title is - set it out pretty clearly when he moved first reading of Bill 18. For reference, that is on page 470 of *Hansard*. He talks about the fact that he thinks taxes are punishment, which I find really interesting given that taxes pay for all those things that I think many people in Alberta want. The former Provincial Treasurer has spoken a number of times, in *Hansard* and in the media and other places, so he's well on the record that somehow taxes are punishment.

9:40

That's a really interesting concept to me. I guess what it brings to mind is: when did having a fire service and a police service available when you call 911 become a punishment? When did having roads in the cities and highways in the rural areas become a punishment? What about signage on the highways? When did that become a punishment? When did street lights and sewage systems and having water delivered to your home become a punishment? When did the

availability of health care, such as it is, become a punishment? When did pension plans for civil servants and others that fall under the local authorities pension plans become a punishment? When did monitoring and licensing and evaluation and adherence to standards in safety become a punishment? You know, when did the inspection that we get for pressure vessels or occupational health and safety or building codes become a punishment? When did it become a punishment to get education between K and 12 or a subsidy for postsecondary education?

This whole concept that taxes are somehow punishment I find really puzzling. You know, when did social programs like child welfare become a punishment? I would have thought that was something society wanted to have and was willing to pay for, but somehow that's become a punishment. When did having an Ombudsman as part of our system, the payment for that Ombudsman's office, become a punishment? Or even Elections Alberta. That's paid for out of taxes. That's part of what's paid for from our taxes. When did that become a punishment? How about the subsidies for the seniors' health premiums? When did that become a punishment?

So there are a number of issues that start to roll through your brain when you look at the principles that are in this Bill 18 and this idea, certainly as espoused by the former Provincial Treasurer, that taxes are a punishment. I really struggle with that one.

What's the deal with this flat tax? Goodness knows there are numbers and percentages, and this percent is this amount of money and that percent is that amount of money. I'm going to do you all a favour by not reciting any of those figures, because they are readily available. For anyone listening along, I encourage you to check it out on *Hansard* at www.assembly.ab.ca. The proceedings are also available in real audio for those of you that don't want to read *Hansard*. [interjections] My colleagues are saying hi, and I'll pass that on.

The flat tax I think moves the burden of taxes from those who can afford it most to the middle class. It's moving us from a progressive system to a regressive system in that the progressive system we have is where those who could pay more did pay more. That was the concept our tax system was based on. Certainly when you examine that, you do have people in upper levels of income who use a smaller percentage of their income to cover the basics of housing and food and shelter and clothing and transportation, that sort of thing, and I think that's appropriate. A regressive system means that everyone pays the same amount, the same percentage exactly. That, of course, when you look at what percentage of your income is being used to cover those basics, definitely becomes a disadvantage to the lower class.

Someone suggested to me that the scheme of this flat tax was sort of like a reverse Robin Hood or Robin Hood's evil twin brother in that it's a plan to steal from the middle class to give to the rich. That, I'm sure, was said with a good deal of humour. I think there's something in it, though, because I think it is a tax break. It's disguising a tax break that benefits the wealthiest, the elite, and is put forward as something that is of benefit to all Albertans.

Here's the one set of figures I'll use. This proposed flat tax gives 3.6 percent of Albertans earning more than \$100,000 a 29.1 percent tax cut. Yowza.

AN HON. MEMBER: Good.

MS BLAKEMAN: I hear members opposite saying "good." Well, I'm sure those that are earning more than \$100,000 feel that's so, but if they are gaining that kind of tax cut, where is the, you know, equivalency as it shakes down for the rest of the income earners?

An interesting thing has happened here in the sort of selling of the idea, the principle of this, to Albertans, and I think there were sort of three stages to this. One was that I don't think the middle class, which is the majority of the voting base, would accept the poor being gouged as they would be if a flat tax were put all the way across the board. It truly would disadvantage people. The first thing you do is raise the exemption threshold so that the poor, many of them in fact, will be exempt from paying tax, and that's a bit more acceptable, a bit more palatable to people. So that's the first thing you do in trying to sell this thing.

The second thing is you tell people that it's something else, that it's not so much a flat tax. I mean, we've heard all kinds of discussions tonight about how it's going to benefit people, single-income families over dual-income families. I'll just refer people to *Hansard* to read the comments that have been made previously about what else this bill is supposed to be.

I think this is the real genius of it. The third part of this is that you give the people a tax cut to sell this scheme to begin with, so instead of them understanding or seeing right away that in fact this is going to be them paying more money, especially if you're in the middle class, that sort of \$30,000 to \$80,000 income range, make sure you set the level at such a point that they'll get a tax break the first time out. It's like a sale. You know, it's like a loss leader. So the first year out that's certainly what will happen, and in a lot of cases people will indeed pay less, a little less in some cases and a lot less in other cases. That way you just really get people hook, line, and sinker. It's brilliant marketing, but then again this government has a lot of resources to pull on for marketing of what they would like to institute. Is it \$8 million in the Public Affairs budget? That helps a lot. [interjection] Oh, my goodness; each ministry has a marketing budget. Well, no wonder they do so well.

So here we now have kind of sold this with a loss leader of setting the level at a point where even the middle class, which are the ones that are really going to get soaked in this whole idea, get a tax cut. It's interesting, because for those who understand the microeconomics of all of this, with this flat tax and the exemptions on the bottom for the lower income earners you really do create a ratchet effect, so not if but when the percentage amount on this flat tax is raised, it is really going to torque the middle class the most significantly.

So here we have a state where I think it's fair to say that the elite, those earning substantial amounts of money – and certainly you start looking at the \$250,000 mark a year, but I think for lots of people even \$100,000 and up is a substantial amount of money to be earning in every year – are going to really get good tax cuts. What was the amount I mentioned? About 30 percent? And the lower income are not paying any at all, so who's paying? Well, the middle class is going to be paying, and with this setup you end up with a real ratchet effect, a torquing of it, particularly when the rate starts to rise, and you get a perpetual bias, a leaning towards the lower taxes and the lower spending all the time. That hearkens us back to this whole idea of: well, what do we get for our taxes? I don't think that taxes are punishment. I think they should be a balance. They should be common sense, and it should be a fair exchange for the services that are provided.

So we have a government doing a really good sales job here of getting people to try and accept this flat tax, and then the feds came along and did a better job of it, because they actually did reduce the taxes for the middle class in a meaningful and sustainable and long-term way, and that makes this flat tax idea even worse.

As I think about this, I think: well, how far will the government go? In order to catch up with the position the federal government has now placed them in, the 11 percent I don't think is going to fly.

I suspect there will be an amendment coming forward that actually drops it to 10 percent or 9 percent or something in order to make that happen. Remember my number three, the actual tax cut that people get? In order to make that happen, they're going to have to keep dropping this rate in order to get that sales effect happening here, that loss-leader effect. So I'm just wondering how low the government is willing to go. I mean, are they going to cut it to 9 percent, to 8 percent? Where are they willing to go in order to sell this the first time out to get everyone hooked into it? Then they can start ratcheting it up.

9:50

Right now we're in a very enviable position in Alberta because of the high oil and resource revenue, but as we well know, this is a cyclical economy and oil prices will not stay high forever. It's not as though the present government can actually either create that oil or create the high prices for that oil. They are just able to take advantage of it. So I really do see the principle of this bill as being an ideology that's disguised as an economic policy, and I think there's good reason to question that in the same way as the cuts that were based on the so-called out-of-control spending – and I'll put that in quotes – which was really about some other agenda to do with cuts to the health care system, I think, to bring in private health care.

So I'd like to hear from members of the government: what is the evaluation system that's in place to determine whether this is going to work or not? I'd like to see a bit more of the cost-benefit analysis, the studies that show this is really going to benefit people, because I don't think it will. The things that I've laid out already indicate that it won't. I'd like to know: what are the key performance indicators for the success of this program? I'd like to see those up front, and I'd like to know what the goals are up front before we have something like this bill pass.

I'd also like to know: if this is the plan the government has, then what is the stable funding the government is looking at to be able to pay for these services? Or is the expectation that there wouldn't be any services offered anymore? I mean, are we looking to lottery dollars for the stable funding that we can predict on? Are we perhaps going to look at the price of oil to base everything on? Neither one of those is reliable long term or stable, so I have real concerns about this.

You know, this is the government that had to pass a law to keep itself from having a deficit, which always sort of scares me, when people have to put those kinds of restrictions on themselves. It seems to indicate that they're just bursting to go out and actually do that thing that they have to put those kinds of restrictions on themselves. I did note in that legislation that was passed – and I think it's been mentioned previously by the Minister of Government Services – that there was no real punishment involved in that. Usually when you set something up and say, "This thing shall not happen," then there's a punishment involved that says: if it does, then here's the punishment. While this government was willing to pass a law that said, "We cannot have a deficit; we must stop ourselves from doing that," there was no punishment involved in that legislation. So given past performance, I think I have some reason to be suspect about what is being proposed in Bill 18.

Now, a few other points that I made while I was listening to other people debating. The Minister of Government Services was talking about – and I just found this far too much of a contradiction – on the one hand how people are fleeing the province because of the high taxes. Well, you know, I have never met these people. The people I've met left to get jobs in other places. They left because they honest to goodness really preferred a different lifestyle, an ideology to live under. They preferred the American way of thinking. They

wanted to go there. Okay. Fine. But it wasn't for the taxes. Then in the next breath the minister is saying that all these people are moving to Alberta. I'm sorry. All these people are leaving Alberta; all these people are moving to Alberta. Those two things don't quite go together.

I do agree that people are moving to Alberta, because I have certainly been the beneficiary of that in my riding of Edmonton-Centre. We're trying to revitalize our downtown, so there have been incentive programs there. A lot of new accommodations have been built in my riding, so I know there are people moving to Alberta. We also know that there have been things like the agreements that have been worked out with Calgary for infrastructure dollars, for instance, because of the large population growth there.

When I take a step back and try and say, "Okay, when we look at the principle of this bill, is this a good idea or a bad idea?" I think it's a bad idea, and I'm deeply suspect because of the ideology inherent in this bill that's disguised as economic policy. I've talked about that from this government in other scenarios before. But there are a few things that those wiser than I in economic policy – you know, I don't want to just slam this bill and say that there's not one single good thing in it. I'll try to be fair here and evenhanded. I think people better versed in economic policy than I have indicated that the unhooking from the federal system is something that should be seriously considered. Okay. The relationship between the wage earner and their family circumstances and the taxation system needs

to be reviewed, and I think it does but perhaps not for the reasons people would suspect. I think we still need to seek an equity and a fairness in that whole system so that we are neither rewarding nor punishing people for whatever their family circumstance happens to be, and there are a variety of different family circumstances that do exist in this country and in this province. I'm looking for fairness there, and I don't see it today.

I think it's important that it be clarified very clearly whether the federal tax point system would be left in place, because that's one of the things that's not clear when this is talked about. If we talk about wiping everything out and going to this flat tax system, do we wipe out all those credits that go along with it? [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired]

Well, I'll have to continue this in Committee of the Whole, and I do look forward to it, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As much as I'd love to join this scintillating debate on Bill 18, I will move adjournment.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 9:58 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 2, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/02

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, keep us mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work give us strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Unknown Soldier Ceremony

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, tomorrow morning at 10:30 on the steps of the main entrance to the Legislature Building a ceremony will take place to commemorate the repatriation and interment of the remains of an unknown Canadian soldier who is to represent Canada's war dead and those who have died in the service of peace for this country.

A small quantity of soil taken from the north, south, east, and west of the Alberta Legislature Grounds will be deposited on the grave at the interment of the remains in Ottawa. This action is intended to signify that the province's contribution in war was drawn from all corners of our province. Alberta's soil will be delivered by a Royal Canadian Legion representative.

All provinces have been asked to participate in this project, which will be completed in a ceremony to take place in Ottawa on May 28, 2000.

I invite you all to join us for this important event tomorrow morning.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we seem to have a long list today so a little patience.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to table in the Legislature today a petition signed by 20 residents of Harvie Heights, Banff, and Canmore requesting the Legislative Assembly of Alberta "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present a petition signed by over 200 Albertans, and it is: "we . . . petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to re-instate the front license plate on all vehicles registered in Alberta."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to file a petition signed by 179 constituents from the Wainwright constituency and surrounding areas. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to re-instate the front license plate on all vehicles registered in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to table a petition from 79 residents of the Barrhead and Westlock area who want to urge the government to reinstate the front licence plate on all registered vehicles in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition signed by 221 Albertans from Beaumont, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, Stony Plain, Millet, and Edmonton. They are asking the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd present a petition signed by 220 citizens from Sherwood Park, Tofield, Spruce Grove, St. Albert, Stony Plain, and Edmonton. The petition urges "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 444 people from Wabamun, Drayton Valley, Redwater, Radway, Thorhild, Jasper, Hinton, Grande Cache, Camrose, Thorsby, Olds, Vegreville, and Onoway and another set from Lethbridge, Purple Springs, Taber, Medicine Hat, Redcliff, Grassy Lake, Airdrie, Blairmore, and Coleman. They are all urging the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure today to present a petition signed by 157 Albertans from St. Albert, Stony Plain, Fort Saskatchewan, Sherwood Park, De Winton, and Edmonton, and they are all urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present a petition signed by 219 Albertans from Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Irma, Stony Plain, Beaumont, and Edmonton, and this is urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure to present a petition today on behalf of 187 residents of Alberta from St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, and Edmonton urging the government to stop putting money toward private and more into public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Legislature signed by citizens of Alberta from La

Crete, Worsley, Bear Canyon, Cherry Point, Grande Prairie, Hines Creek, and Fairview. The petition states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly. It is from 221 Albertans from the following communities: Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Stony Plain, and of course Edmonton. This petition reads:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured this afternoon to present a petition signed by 237 fellow Calgarians living in Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-Bow, Calgary-North West, Calgary-Currie, and Calgary-Lougheed constituencies. These Calgarians are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am also pleased today with your permission to table petitions signed by 211 citizens from the communities of Carvel, St. Albert, Morinville, and Edmonton. The citizens are urging the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, with your permission I would like to present to the Assembly the following petition:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

This petition has been signed by 185 residents of Leduc, Niton Junction, Mayerthorpe, Spruce Grove, Sherwood Park, Tofield, and of course Edmonton.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table a petition from over 300 people in Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Fort Saskatchewan, Stony Plain, and Edmonton urging the Legislative Assembly to have the government "stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." Today's total is 3,112, bringing the total of this particular petition to date of almost 68,000 Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition this afternoon. It's signed by 220 Albertans from Sherwood Park, Beaumont, St. Albert, Ponoka, Stony Plain, Leduc, and Edmonton, and they are requesting that the government of Alberta "stop promoting private health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition with 202 signatures of Albertans from Mundare, Leduc, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Ardrossan, Beaumont, and Edmonton urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present two petitions today. The first one is signed by 302 Albertans from Camrose, Canmore, Bluffton, Banff, Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge, and the people signing the petition are requesting the Assembly of Alberta "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

1:40

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by 40 Albertans. They are from Lamont, Calgary, Edmonton, Spruce Grove, Cochrane, Canmore, and Strathmore. The petition reads as follows:

We, the undersigned, ask the assembly to petition the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petitions I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

We, the undersigned, ask the assembly to petition the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I would request that the petition which I presented to the Legislative Assembly on April 20 on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Calder regarding the government's undermining of public health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that at this point the petition I presented on May 1 with respect to opposition to private health care now be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday in the Legislative Assembly urging the government to stop the promotion of private health care and to promote public health care now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented regarding the undermining of public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition with respect to public health care that I put in yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Private Bills has had a certain bill under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that the following private bill proceed: Bill Pr. 3, Westcastle Development Authority Repeal Act. I request the concurrence of the Assembly in this recommendation.

THE SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to

Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 17, 18, 19, and 20.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 29, 31, 32, 36, 37, 38, 41, 42, 43, and 46.

Thank you.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, as required under the Insurance Act, I'd like to table copies of the annual report for the Automobile Insurance Board for the year ended December 31, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five letters from all the police forces in Alberta, being the RCMP, the Edmonton and Calgary city police forces, Camrose, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat. They are all in favour of Motion 509, the reinstatement of front licence plates.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two sets of tablings for today. The first one is a set of five amendments to Bill 11 that I now understand won't be available to the Assembly for debate if the motion for closure is passed today.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a set of three letters, one from Calgary, one from Edmonton, and one from Didsbury, opposing Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today all opposed to Bill 11. For the record I'll read the names of those opposing: Duane Dawson, Jessica Chapman, and Steven Lamoureux.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is correspondence from Brian Fish, a solicitor here in Edmonton. Specifically, Mr. Fish asked for an investigation to occur with respect to special interest groups lobbying this government to create loopholes in our health care law so that they can make private profit out of the public health care system. I have included the response from the Minister of Justice, which did not answer that question.

My second tabling is also correspondence relative to citizens' and constituents' opposition to Bill 11. They are e-mails and letters received from Cristini, Walker, Kohl, MacDonald, Scott, Lindeman, and Anderson.

Thank you.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings for the Assembly today. The first is correspondence written to myself from Janet Boulton of my constituency with the request that it be passed along to

the Premier. Janet, who has been afflicted with multiple sclerosis, writes stating her concerns, as someone who relies on the health care system, regarding Bill 11 and the encouragement of the privatization of our public health care system.

The second letter that I have five copies of for the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, is correspondence from Carol Vander Well also of my constituency. This correspondence was copied to me and sent to the Premier, and it reads in part:

"Trust me", you said, as you reneged on your promise to give regions a morsel of self control through local elections of members of the regional health authority boards. You proclaimed you had to continue to appoint all the board members as the work to reform health care was not yet done. It is so very apparent now what additional controversial measures you had in mind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. The first one is a copy of my correspondence of even date to the Premier that I sent to him this morning requesting that he acknowledge that the two statements he made yesterday are false statements.

The second item is an invoice for \$21.19, which would be added to the total of costs incurred by the opposition around Bill 11, making that total \$29,361.97.

Finally, the very last item is an updated cost/benefit analysis which shows that the government has spent \$69,846 for each percentage point of Bill 11 support. The opposition has spent only \$497.66.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got the appropriate number of copies of a conference that I'm going to be taking part in in Medicine Hat called Confronting Poverty: Making a Difference. It's going to be held in Medicine Hat on May 5 and 6. It says: Taking Action for Stronger Communities.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings this afternoon. The first are copies of the songs that were sung last night at the peaceful rally held in front of the Legislative Assembly.

The second is a copy of the letter from the mayor of the city of Edmonton to the Premier asking that Bill 11 be withdrawn.

The third is a copy of a letter from Mr. and Mrs. White regarding the fact that 24-hour blood pressure cuffs are not covered by Alberta health care.

The fourth is a submission to the Minister of Infrastructure from William Dascavich asking for answers to questions on Bill 11.

The fifth is a letter from Kay and Ross Gould to the Member for Calgary-North West asking for answers to their questions on Bill 11.

The sixth is a letter from Harold Moore to the Premier regarding donations to the Conservative Party.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of an information brochure on a project that has as its community advisory committee Changing Together, the cultural brokers' network, the Vietnamese community, NorQuest College,

and Treaty 7 tribal council among others. The brochure is on A Study of the Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting TB Treatment and Prevention in Immigrant & Aboriginal Populations in Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is on behalf of a Calgarian, Gina Djuff. She is very concerned about the strike at the *Calgary Herald*, and she would like to see a resolution to this strike.

The second tabling is quite interesting, Mr. Speaker. It is a top 10 list of movies in Alberta. Albertans who are not expressing their opinion on Bill 11 can sit in front of their television and, with the convenience of this, watch a movie.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly one of the province's great entrepreneurs. Many years ago he started from the ground up to build one of the largest restaurant chains in Canada. It's my pleasure to introduce Mr. Walter Chan, president and CEO of Smitty's, and his friend Dale Richardson, who traveled from Calgary today to see the Legislature at work. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly some 56 bright and active young students from the Aurora elementary school in Drayton Valley. I have to say that I think they've brought more cameras with them today than any other group I've had in here. I really appreciate them. They're very nice young students. They're accompanied by teachers Mrs. Diane Orr, Mr. Bob Irwin, and Mr. Paul Vickers and parents and helpers Mrs. J. Hartt, Susan Hines, Monica Neilson, Catherine Belva, Donna McQuarrie, and Randall Lynch. I would ask that they rise now and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege and honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the balance of the Assembly 29 energetic students and teachers from Archbishop Jordan high school in Sherwood Park. Miss Yolande Joly and Audrey Gordey have done an excellent job of inspiring interest in the Legislature. I would ask that they rise and that the members of the Assembly welcome them as they stand.

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the team handball players representing Team Alberta. They are from all over central Alberta, several from Strathcona county, and they will be representing Team Alberta in the upcoming national finals team handball competition in Sherbrooke, Quebec, on May 11. I know I speak on behalf of the Legislature when I wish you all the very best. They are accompanied by coaches Megan Henkelman and Ryan Hornbacher. I'd ask that they please now rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first are Lesia Kozak and Evelyn Butler, two terrific

volunteers that offer their services to the Official Opposition on a regular basis. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction is to welcome 25 guests from Parkallen elementary school from Edmonton-Riverview. We have students with us today from grade 6 accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Joseph Ewasiw, and parents Betty Rothwell, Karen Marlin, and Barbara Herrett. I would ask these students to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills I'd like to introduce to you and through you 33 young, energetic students from the Kneehill Christian school in the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills constituency. These young students are accompanied by teachers Miss Terri Miller and Miss Raquel Toews and by parents Mr. and Mrs. Frank Isaac, Mr. and Mrs. Randy Reimer, Mr. and Mrs. Ches Toews, and Mr. and Mrs. Lorrin Baerg. I'd like to ask these visitors to rise and receive our warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Rakhi Pancholi. She is a fourth year political science student, and this year she's going to be working on the politics because she is going to serve in the Edmonton-Centre constituency office as our summer student. I would ask Rakhi to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce two visitors to the Assembly. The first is Pat Cassady, who is my constituency manager in Edmonton-Meadowlark and who keeps the office running and without whom I would be very lost most of the time.

The second is Raechel Carpenter. She keeps us going. She will be a University of Alberta graduate in June of this year in political science. She is originally from Fort McMurray, and she will be helping Pat in keeping the constituency office going during the summertime. So if they can please rise and get the traditional welcome of the House.

Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Closure on Bill 11

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has said that he has cut off elected representatives from speaking on Bill 11 because it's been the longest debate of any bill. The Premier says that 36 hours are more than enough to discuss the implications of legislation that undermines Albertans' and Canadians' most cherished and in fact unifying program, and that is medicare. Albertans want to know exactly what has been learned over the course of those 36 hours of debate, and we're hoping that the Premier might clarify some unanswered questions that remain. Where is the proof that his plan for private health care won't be more expensive?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, this is again another manifestation of the kind of misinformation that is being spread by the Liberals and their new friends, the NDs, backed by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Alberta Federation of Labour, and the Friends of Medicare.

There is no plan for private medicare in this province. There is a plan, Mr. Speaker, to protect the health care system as we know it today. There is a plan to protect health care. That's what the plan is all about.

MRS. MacBETH: Still no answers.

Where is the proof that it won't lengthen waiting lists?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, where has this hon. member been? You know, she seems to forget that when she was minister of health back in the early '90s she allowed 30 private surgical clinics to establish and to operate and to charge facility fees. Now it seems to me that she's saying that they didn't exist, that they've never existed before, that they've just existed in the last two or three months since the introduction of Bill 11, since the introduction of the policy.

Mr. Speaker, these clinics have existed for years and years. All we're doing now is attempting to put some rules and regulations around them, and they oppose that.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, where is the proof that costs won't escalate as private facilities compete with public ones for a limited supply of health care professionals?

MR. KLEIN: I'll answer the question with a question, Mr. Speaker. What was the rationale back in 1990, when this leader of the Liberal opposition was then the minister of health in a Conservative government? What was the proof then and what was the rationale then to establish these clinics and to allow them not only to operate but also to allow them to charge facility fees?

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why won't the Premier open up excess capacity in public hospitals rather than siphon off public dollars to private health care?

MR. KLEIN: Again, we have a perfect example of the Liberals not reading the bill, not reading the policy. If they have read it, they are wilfully misrepresenting it, Mr. Speaker.

Relative to the section of the policy – I can't allude to the bill at this particular time – I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness explain it one more time, slowly.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there is in the legislation before the House in the section dealing with the criteria that has to be considered under the awarding of contracts very specific reference to a regional health authority having to consider the existing capacity within the system and its utilization.

MRS. MacBETH: Why does this Premier refuse to stop the queue-jumping going on today through private MRIs?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, much to the chagrin of the Liberal opposition the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness recently announced an increase in access relative to MRIs in public institutions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Private ones.

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. We announced just recently four more new MRIs in hospitals, and guess what? Guess what? Immediately the Liberals jumped up, and they said: how can you do this? If it's good, they don't like it. If it's bad, they do like it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why wouldn't the Premier create one strong conflict of interest standard that will apply across the province rather than 17 different standards?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if the Liberal opposition would help us with our policy and our legislation, they just might see that happen. Conflict of interest is indeed a matter of great concern for this government, and through legislation and through policy we are trying to address this as it relates to regional health authorities.

Again, I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to both the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the regional health authorities we are working on improving and making more consistent their conflict of interest policies, but contrary to their inference there are conflict of interest policies in place now.

The other thing I have to indicate, Mr. Speaker, is that the premise on which the question was based initially is totally wrong. We announced four publicly funded MRIs for this province on both the capital side and the operational side to be operated directly under the regional health authorities.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why won't the Premier simply tell taxpayers today how much his communications plan for Bill 11 is costing them?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, up until March – and we haven't done the total calculation – it's about \$1.2 million, not the \$2.7 that was recently suggested, not the \$3 million that they threw out about two or three weeks ago.

MRS. MacBETH: How much was your ad on the weekend before you put in closure?

MR. KLEIN: I have no idea how much the ad was, but, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you something about the ad. At least the ad told the truth, unlike this malicious piece of Liberal propaganda that says: understanding Bill 11, Klein's private hospital bill. There is no private hospitals bill before this Legislature. Never has been, never will be, and to put out that kind of advertising at taxpayers' expense is fraudulent. It's an absolute misuse of taxpayers' dollars, and they should be ashamed.

MRS. MacBETH: So where are the 30 censored pages that talk about focus groups and private hospitals policies that this Premier promised to give to Albertans 26 days ago? Where are they?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness indicated, that information is being compiled and will be tabled in this Legislature in the fullness of time. We have given an undertaking to table that information and it will be done, because this is a government that does what it says it's going to do.

MRS. MacBETH: Another broken promise, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, is the Premier's slogan for the next election going to change from "he kept his word" to "he broke the trust?"

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to answer that question. You know, our strategy leading into the 1993 campaign was to eliminate the deficit, to get this province on sound financial footing, and we did it. We did it. We overcame a \$3.4 billion deficit partially due to the negligence of the then minister of health to create a yearly annual surplus in excess of \$2 billion. To have a \$30 billion turnaround is absolutely remarkable.

Mr. Speaker, after we went through that era of reconstruction, of getting our finances in order, we went to the polls again. We went to the polls again, and guess what? We won again with an even larger majority. You know why that happened? Because the people trusted us. And they will trust us again.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: Well, that was sure exciting. I've certainly worked up a good appetite. If we keep this up, we might invite all of you to go down to Smitty's with me for something.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Conflict of Interest Guidelines

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary regional health authority's conflict of interest policy, copies of which I tabled yesterday in this House, says that conflicts are avoided so long as medical officers aren't directly involved in decisions about contracts with private clinics in which they have an ownership involvement. This weak-kneed policy sets up a you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours scenario in which entrepreneurial doctors can be involved in making decisions about any medical contract other than their own. My questions are to the Premier. How can the government justify using the hammer of closure and end debate about how to effectively address conflicts of interest that arise when those in leadership positions financially benefit from contracts with regional health authorities?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's quite obvious. I don't know where this hon. member has been. You know, maybe he's been spending too much time out on the steps of the Legislature with people singing songs and so on to get to the issue of the day. We want to get to the issue, and we want to have a vote on the amendment that specifically addresses conflict of interest, but these people across the way don't want to do it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The College of Physicians and Surgeons does not allow doctors to own drugstores because this is deemed an inherent conflict of interest. Why does the government not impose a similar prohibition on physicians owning private, for-profit facilities that contract with the public system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness explain the situation to the hon. leader of the third party, but virtually every physician, not all physicians – those physicians who are staff doctors with hospitals, of course, have a special and unique position within the system, but those doctors who operate in their offices and operate also in the hospitals have a relationship with the RHAs. My God, if you prevented 4,000 doctors operating out of their offices from operating in the public system because they have a private business, there would be absolute chaos, chaos that even the MDs couldn't even attempt to undo.

DR. PANNU: My last question to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: while

nurses who only earn a professional salary are not allowed to serve on RHA boards of directors, why are physicians allowed to hold senior administrative positions within RHAs while simultaneously holding financial interests in private clinics that contract with that RHA? Why this double standard, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I do not think – and I stand to be corrected, and I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness supplement – that practising physicians or nurses who are engaged in a full-time practice are allowed to sit on regional health authorities. I stand to be corrected, but maybe the hon. minister can help me out with this.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is correct in that nurses practising with a particular RHA are not able to serve on that board, nor is a practising physician in that particular regional health authority.

Secondly, with respect to the Calgary regional health authority's conflict of interest policy, Mr. Speaker, it was clearly stated. One of the physicians that was involved as chief of staff declared his interests under that policy as provided for. It was known to the public, the people of Calgary, and to this point in time I have not had any charges made.

The most important thing, I think, to be recognized by the opposition, which they have not done thus far, is that Bill 11 further strengthens the whole area of openness of contracts, conflict of interest, but they don't want to debate it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

High-speed Internet Access

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our committee on lifelong learning, myself and two hon. members, from Wainwright and Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, have been holding public consultations across the province. One of the needs we have heard is the local ability to access learning services. That means high-bandwidth connectivity. My question is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. What is the government plan for such high-bandwidth connectivity across our province? [interjections]

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We can see that there's considerable interest in the House here.

We have recently concluded an RFP that was put out to provide high-bandwidth, high-speed access right across this province, and it's particularly important to the rural areas and small centres. That will enable them to offer educational services, health care, and all kinds of different advantages, both for the public and the private sector.

So the RFP has been put out. We received I believe it was 10 proposals, and we are now in the process of shortlisting those proposals. Once those proposals are shortlisted, we will have to go back to the shortlist for further information on their proposals, and once we have that information, then we will come to a decision.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is the cost projection to the government and the end user, and if there is no such cost at this time, what is the process to estimate the costs, especially the costs to the end user? The question is to the same minister.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. I obviously haven't seen the proposals, so I can't comment on the costs of the various proposals, but I can say that as part of the RFP one of the issues is cost to the end user in small communities. Typically costs to end users in small communities are much higher actually than costs to end users in large centres like Calgary and Edmonton. So as part of this RFP we said that there had to be a postage stamp rate, that the cost to the end user in rural Alberta and small communities in Alberta had to be exactly the same or no more than the cost to the people in the large urban areas.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplementary question is to the same minister. From my technical knowledge I learned that the low-orbit satellite system is more cost effective than the fibre optics connection in rural areas in Alberta, so my question is: is there any consideration of using the satellite system for the high-bandwidth communication?

DR. TAYLOR: The member has more technical knowledge than I do in this area, I would readily admit, Mr. Speaker. Rather than specifying a type of technology, what we did was specify what we needed at the end. So for school jurisdictions we said 100 megabits, for hospitals 10. What we've done is specify the amount of bandwidth and the speed needed, and then it is up to the various proposals to provide that to the end user. That will certainly consist of some fibre optics, and it may consist of some wireless as well. As I say, it has to be 10 megabits to the schools and hospitals and 100 megabits to the jurisdictions and so on. So that's the way we're handling it.

2:20

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of Albertans from across the province are speaking out against a closed-minded, bullheaded, and arrogant government that appears determined to ram through its private hospitals policy at any cost. Meanwhile, this Premier spends his evenings elsewhere, missing in action here.

MR. HANCOCK: Point of order.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Premier, with all due respect we can all recall that the last time a Premier decided not to listen to Albertans he ended up humiliated by a six-foot stuffed chicken. How many Albertans have to come to the people's Legislature to speak out against the Premier's private health care policy before he accepts the responsibility of facing Albertans one on one: 50,000, 70,000, 100,000, 200,000? At what point do you blink?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, relative to the very rude, obnoxious preamble, I am not close-minded, nor are members of this Conservative caucus close-minded. We're not bullheaded. We're doing what is right: what is right in accordance with the requirements of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, what is right in accordance with the requirements of the federal government relative to compliance with the Canada Health Act.

With respect to the question, Mr. Speaker, we are listening, and we are doing what is right. We are trying to put rules and regulations around surgical facilities that have been in place for years, and for some reason the Liberals find something wrong with that.

I think it goes a lot deeper than that. I think it is politics. I think it is a matter, Mr. Speaker, of the Liberals wanting to drag this on as long as they can so they can prolong their vicious and malicious campaign of propaganda and misinformation.

MR. WICKMAN: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: just how many more health care petitions does the Premier have to receive before he has the moral fortitude to look Albertans in the eye and come clean with the real agenda behind his private hospitals policy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, quite candidly, quite frankly, the real agenda behind the health care policy is protection of the public health care system as we know it today. It's as simple as that.

MR. WICKMAN: My last question, Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: why not simply do the honourable thing? Call an election, and let Albertans decide the future of health care in this province.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you know, how many times have I heard that in this Legislature, not only from this Liberal opposition, but from Grant Mitchell when he was the leader of the Liberal opposition? Whenever he didn't get his own way: call an election; call an election. Well, we finally called an election, and guess what? They got their butts whupped.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

School Lunch Supervision

MR. STEVENS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. There are some 110 parent-operated school lunch programs currently in place in the Calgary board of education. These programs are for students who are not bused to school and otherwise need or want to stay at school for lunch. One hundred and ten schools represent about one-half of the schools in the system. An Alberta Labour Relations Board member has made a recommendation regarding whether certain lunchroom supervisors should be included in the Calgary Board of Education Staff Association bargaining unit. My questions are to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Could the minister advise the Assembly as to why the Labour Relations Board has become involved in this issue?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The understanding I have is that within the Calgary public school system they had divided themselves into what are called collaborative learning communities, and I believe there are eight of them that cover these 110 schools that the hon. member made reference to. If I have my numbers correct, I think there are approximately 220 parents that really were involved in this lunch program, again as described by the hon. member. The Calgary Board of Education Staff Association looked at the situation, and they believed that the parents were being paid but were also being scheduled, so they made an application to the Labour Relations Board asking them to become involved in the situation and to make a determination as to whether or not these parents were in fact employees.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, since the board has become involved, could you advise as to what is happening now?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Upon receipt of the application the Labour Relations Board then made available a member of the board to try to effect a settlement between the parties to this issue; namely, the Calgary board of education, the Calgary Board of Education Staff Association, and of course the parents. There were a number of

meetings that were held. In the determination of those meetings there was going to be no agreement between the parties, so in fact with the authority that the board member was given, she has made a recommendation. In fact, to be technically correct, Mr. Speaker, she has made eight recommendations, one for each of these community areas. That recommendation, of course, is a sealed recommendation, and we are waiting determination from the parties.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister is: how are you prepared to resolve this matter?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, of course, it's a delicate system, and there are other matters that are ongoing currently within the labour relations scene in Alberta where parties have asked me to get involved, even to the point of intervening. It is not the position of the minister of labour to intervene in this situation. In the situation that is involved today, everything is proceeding according to the act and its regulations. The minister at the appropriate time will be advised as to whether or not there is an agreement between the Calgary board of education and the staff association as it relates to this particular matter, and then we'll see where the next steps have to be, based on whether we have an agreement or not.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Bill 11 Publicity

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Official Opposition tabled an additional invoice bringing the total of our campaign to protect medicare – that's to protect medicare – and save democracy in Alberta to \$29,361.97. Unfortunately, the Premier's \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau and his 5 and a half billion dollar Ministry of Health and Wellness either can't add or are under strict instructions to put out deliberate misinformation about the costs of the government's massive propaganda campaign to sell its private health care policy. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier quit ducking and hiding and promise to release all of the invoices, all of the receipts, all of the contracts today so Albertans can find out just how much of their money has been spent on selling this government's private health care policy? Now. Not 10 months from now.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can stand before this Legislative Assembly and say that not one single penny, not one cent has been spent on any advertising campaign to sell a so-called private health policy. Not one penny.

MS OLSEN: Given that the Premier's \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau seems to have lost its pocket calculator, will the Premier just confirm this estimate prepared by the Official Opposition – that's the one that has been tabled here – which shows that the real cost of the taxpayer-funded propaganda campaign to privatize health in Alberta is over \$2.7 million to date?

2:30

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I reiterate: not one single penny, not one single cent, not one nickel has been spent on promoting or advertising a private health care policy.

If the Liberals say that they've only spent somewhere around \$30,000, I will accept that, but what I won't accept is that they have spent that money to maliciously, purposely, and viciously mislead

the public, to put in advertising that there is somehow before this Legislature a private hospitals bill. It's wrong. It's misleading. It's an absolute abuse of taxpayer dollars. I don't know why they haven't been called on this, because it is blatantly false. It is blatantly untrue, it is blatantly fraudulent, and they continue to do it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I accept the fact that they have spent \$30,000 on a campaign of malicious misinformation, but they've been aided and abetted by millions and millions of dollars from the Canadian Union of Public Employees, by the Alberta Federation of Labour, by the United Nurses of Alberta, by the Alberta Teachers' Association, by the Friends of Medicare. Let's not let them fool the Alberta public. There has been a multimillion dollar campaign of misinformation relative to this bill, and the Liberals have been a big part of it.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can Albertans trust one word that this Premier says on health care when he hasn't got the courage to give taxpayers a true cost breakdown of the government's dismantling of public health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you know, they're yittering and yattering that they can't trust me. Well, I'll tell you, as I've told this Legislative Assembly before: they trusted us in 1993, the people trusted us in 1997, and they will trust us again when we go to the polls. Just wait and see. Wait and see.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Day Care

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the hon. Minister of Children's Services. Over the past few weeks a number of my constituents in the child care field have voiced their concern that the quality of day care is being eroded by the inability to recruit and retain trained staff. To the minister: could the minister tell child care workers around the province what is being done to address this very important issue?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am well aware of letters in the last few weeks that MLAs and others across the province may have received about the wage enhancement proposals that have been in front of day care operators.

As of April 1, '99, this Assembly would be aware that we put in a child subsidy program that took the subsidy for day care directly to the parent. It increased the amount of money that parents were able to receive for children, and it also provided an opportunity for parents to make the choice for family day homes.

Mr. Speaker, we have not been in the business of subsidizing businesses. Operating allowances directly to day cares has been contrary to the opportunity that parents have to make choices and deliberate where they themselves wish to have their children placed.

So although we're very sensitive to the issue that has been raised by a number of day care operators, we have evidence that we have ample numbers of workers that will take those positions. We also have evidence that the system where parents are receiving the moneys permits that choice and thereby in fact encourages the standards and day cares that are operating viably.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. There are a number of important issues affecting the quality of our provincial day care programs. Has the elimination of the day care operating allowance affected the ability of day care operators to appropriately compensate employees?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we do not directly intervene between employers and employees on the issues. However, we're well aware that retaining quality caregivers in day cares is an extremely important issue. We have met with representatives from the day cares. We are working with them to look at options that might be available.

As I've identified in this House previously, we have provided some \$371,000 to provide 50 hours for basic training to any person who wishes to be qualified to work in a day care. As a result, we are, at least at the admissions level, providing that support for tutorial. Beyond that, we're looking at an opportunity for these operators and groups, when they have collegially gelled on some of their issues and management, to come forward before the standing policy committee and discuss what the ways and means are that would best and most appropriately meet the needs of the day cares.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done by the government and by the minister's department today to assist child care workers in Alberta?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, indirectly there's assistance provided as the child and family services authorities liaise with the day care operators in the examination and the licensure, in the inspection of day cares. There is significant opportunity for tutorial and advice being provided. In Calgary work done with the Calgary regional health authority and with the Calgary public school board as well as liaison with the university is examining the ways that we can provide assessment tools to families and to teachers and to day care operators in determining what is in the best interests of the child and looking individually at the child to determine whether or not it could be beneficial to provide them other supports.

So we are indirectly and with other partners, Mr. Speaker, through the children's initiative providing other supports to day care operators.

Bill 11 and the Democratic Process

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, the current Prime Minister of Canada has used closure eight times since 1993. In stark contrast, this Premier has used closure 26 times since 1993. To the Acting Premier: why is this government so much more willing to stifle democracy and freedom of speech?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, democracy occurs every day in this Legislature in the afternoon and in the evening. The bill that's before the House that's been talked about for two months, plus a public discussion on policy for several months before that has received more debate at every stage to this point. When you cannot move off a definition amendment onto the substantive discussion of the bill in committee, I would suggest that taxpayers' money would be better spent in continuing the debate, which we are not doing in this Legislature in a meaningful way at this time.

Mr. Speaker, this is the place where the democratic process works.

Closure is a tool of this Legislature, a legitimate tool. The government will only use it when it is absolutely necessary, and that is the case now.

MS CARLSON: Closure is how this government defines democracy.

To the Acting Premier: given that the majority of Albertans believe in free votes, why won't the government allow its members a free vote on health care policy? Why won't you do that?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the members of the government caucus will have the opportunity to vote on this legislation, probably later today, as will the members of the opposition caucus. Frankly, I've not heard from any member of this caucus that they're uncomfortable with their voting ability and their opportunity to vote on this bill. They will, it will happen, and they'll vote freely.

MS CARLSON: To the Acting Premier: given that the Premier of Nova Scotia can go out and safely face thousands of citizens at their provincial parliament, what has this government done that the Premier is so afraid to face Albertans who gather at this Legislature?

2:40

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that question is in order for anyone other than the subject of the question to answer. However, I will say this. Every member of this government caucus has attended meetings either individually or in groups. They have received written submissions, they have talked on the telephone, and they have gathered all of the information that they possibly can on this subject. With that information and with facts that are in this bill, they will make their decision on how to vote.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Youth Employment

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rate of unemployment among youth is twice the national unemployment rate. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Why is youth unemployment higher than that of other segments of the population?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a complex issue. Generally speaking, it seems, as the member has pointed out, that the youth unemployment rate is always twice what the mainstream rate is. Of course, I can point out that in Alberta we have excellent youth employment rates, but our youth unemployment rate is still double our main rate. Basically, it is a lack of work opportunities. At times there is, of course, lack of knowledge and skills. The young people just haven't had enough time to develop some of the work skills that are required.

There's no question that we have a more challenging labour market, and there are some barriers that are preventing youth from getting into the workforce. One of those main barriers, by the way, is leaving school early, and as there are young people in the gallery today, I must encourage them to please, please complete high school and then to take a really good look at what my colleague to my right offers in terms of learning in the postsecondary education system.

MR. JOHNSON: To the same minister: what is this government doing to help Alberta youth overcome these barriers to employment?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, as I've indicated, we're trying to make sure and encourage young people that are currently in the school system to stay in the school system and graduate. For those that qualify we want to see them then move into the postsecondary system, and to that end my colleague the Minister of Learning and ourselves have a youth employment strategy.

I would highlight today, Mr. Speaker, for the hon. members our Youth Connections program. This program started out as a pilot project in both Edmonton and Calgary. It targets 16 to 24 year olds that are either unemployed or would be considered underemployed. The reason for calling it Youth Connections is that we're trying to connect young people to information and to resources that would allow them to explore career opportunities and interests and then allow them, of course, to connect with the workforce.

Now, Alberta is not only a great place to grow up, but it's a great place to work and to develop a career. Of course, it's our responsibility as a government to make sure that we have a climate where the private sector can continue to grow and prosper here in our province and thus create more and more opportunities for our young people.

MR. JOHNSON: My final question is to the same minister. For young people living outside the two major centres of Alberta, how can they become connected to youth employment services?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's always risky when you interrupt a pilot project and start to react to it, but I can say with some assurance that the pilot projects in Calgary and Edmonton were working so well that we said: hey, we think this is a winner that we have here, so let's spread it across the province. So what we've done in our current business plan is increased the funding. Although I might be corrected on the numbers, I believe that we've now been able to extend Youth Connections to 23 other communities within the province, and I'm told that we are currently offering counseling, mentoring, and job shadowing opportunities to something like 28,000 young Albertans. We believe that this has been a tremendous success, and the feedback has just been excellent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary regional health authority has contracts with 17 private surgical clinics performing over 12,000 insured procedures per year, but the Premier and his appointed CRHA board seem unwilling to release evidence to show whether Albertans receive any cost savings from the \$4.7 million in facility fees paid under contract to the private providers. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How can the minister claim that his private health care policy will save money when he won't release the analysis prepared by the CRHA which evaluates the cost-effectiveness of contracted surgical services?

MR. JOHNSON: At this point in time, Mr. Speaker, as members of the Assembly well know, Alberta Health and Wellness has to follow the provisions of our current privacy legislation, legislation which all members of this House approved in this Assembly unanimously, as I recall, and we are following that particular legislation and the procedures and administrative action that follow from it. Therefore, the very specific details of these contracts is not public at this time.

However, should the opposition want to look at all of the very, very good features of Bill 11 and be more co-operative in getting

this very important legislation through this Assembly, there is a section in the legislation which provides for the openness of contracts and would be very satisfactory, evidently, to the hon. member across the way.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. Will the minister confirm that he and his appointed CRHA chair are withholding the evidence from Albertans because it shows that there is actually no cost benefit to contracting surgical services to private providers?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister admit that his private health care policy has nothing to do with saving money or reducing waiting lists and everything to do with pressure from private providers to increase the volume and variety of contracted out surgical services in order to increase their profit margins?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker. In the Capital region I have received no particular pressure from anybody about the alleged firms or groups that she's referring to.

The whole point of our legislation is to protect the public health care system in this province, as the bill is correctly entitled. Secondly, it is to provide for some options in terms of contracting, yes, for surgical services in this province under very strict controls in compliance with the Canada Health Act, and there are a number of provisions in the legislation dealing with the overall protection of the public health care system. That's the legislation which this government has put before this House and wishes to move ahead and get in place for the benefit of Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll call on the first of three hon. members to participate in Members' Statements today, but might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that accommodation. I'd like to introduce two constituents of mine from Calgary-Lougheed. They are John and Irmgard Silchmueller. They are very proud Albertans and very keen watchers of politics in Alberta. John is 69 today and is celebrating his birthday here. I'd ask that they rise – they're in the public gallery – and that we give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

2:50

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Holocaust Remembrance Day

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring attention to one of the world's greatest crimes imposed upon a people by people. Today, May 2, is Holocaust Remembrance Day,

a day in which all humanity is called upon to remember the senseless and systematic annihilation of 6 million innocent European Jews as well as millions of others during the Holocaust of World War II. Out of racism and hatred individuals and entire families perished by the deliberate actions of one's fellow human beings, a disgrace to humanity. The world will never know how many of the world's future leaders, peacemakers, doctors, scientists, writers, artists, mothers, fathers, and siblings died in the death camps.

While the Holocaust is a subject whose gravity may be obvious, we must never let ourselves become indifferent to it. We must use this day to serve as a reminder that we need to be accepting and respectful of others, the true cornerstones of a civilized society. We must dedicate ourselves to the memory of those who perished and continue educating our children about the perils of hatred and racism to ensure that such terrible crimes may never happen again.

I urge all members of this Assembly and all Albertans to pause today and reach out with understanding and compassion to our friends of the Jewish faith as well as all others who were persecuted during World War II. Perhaps we may never fully comprehend or understand your grief, but we extend to you our deepest sorrow and with it our perpetual and sincerest commitment to ensuring that such an event never again darkens the face of this Earth.

THE SPEAKER: To the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, thank you for that statement.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mental Health Week

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week marks the 49th anniversary of Mental Health Week in Canada. During those 49 years the issue of mental health has overcome the negative stigma that has been attached to it and is now widely recognized to be as important to our well-being as our physical health.

The theme of Mental Health Week this year is the workplace stress, with special emphasis on how it can throw each one of us off balance. Workplace stress affects not only our personal lives but also takes a heavy toll on the nation's economic balance sheets. The annual cost of work time lost to stress is approximately \$12 billion, and recent Canadian data suggests that work stress is considered by workers to be much more prevalent than work-related injuries or illness.

While mental health is an important issue for all of us, it is also important to recognize that there are many people among us who suffer from one type of mental problem or another. It is estimated that this year alone 9,000 Canadians will take their own lives or die from complications related to mental illness.

In the past governments resorted to hiding these people in large institutions away from major cities, but today we know better. Today we know that the best approach to mental health is one based on community mental health services. In Alberta 60 percent of mental health patients live within the community. The ability of these people to lead happy and productive lives rests upon the adequate funding of community-based mental health services.

Given these consequences, this government must do more to assist mental health patients through increased support for community-based programs. This year the government committed no new dollars to community mental health programs and has cut funding to several volunteer organizations in central Alberta. With this in mind I would like to know whether the Minister of Health and Wellness will commit to funding more comprehensive systems and community-based services in line with nationally endorsed best practices in mental health service reform.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Calgary-West Constituents

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I think it is very important to recognize personal achievements of our young people as they may well become leaders in the future. I am proud to recognize many special achievers in my constituency of Calgary-West.

Charissa Tomczak, a grade 10 student at Calgary Christian high school, very capably represented Calgary-West at Mr. Speaker's Youth Parliament on April 13 and 14.

A special acknowledgment is due to seven young outstanding constituents who were nominated for the Alberta government's first Great Kids award: Hannah Bruins, Meaghan Dykema, Jackie de Graaf, Brent Kettles, Danielle Lee, Anne Madsen, and Elizabeth Stolte.

I am very pleased to also recognize 19 young athletes and two coaches from Calgary-West who competed with more than 2,000 of the best young Alberta athletes in the 2000 Alberta Winter Games. Congratulations for your skill, commitment, and sportsmanship: Kirsty Blair, cross-country skiing, silver and bronze medals; Lyndi Christofferson, shooting, air pistol; Jason Coke, speed skating, silver medal; Karen Coldham, figure skating, gold medal; Heather Fearon, diving; Kevin Handcock, archery; Matt Henley, biathlon, silver medal and two bronze medals; Amie Hickerty, hockey; Dallas Jones, diving; Andrea Longworth, diving; Eric Murray, speed skating, two gold medals; Kevin Sandau, cross-country skiing, silver medal; Michael Schleppe, archery, bronze medal; Todd Sullivan, alpine skiing, silver medal; Jeffrey Turner, alpine skiing; Wesley Thauvette, diving, silver medal; Jessica Tink, synchronized swimming, gold medal; Zane Westerbeek, speed skating, silver medal; Shannon Wilson, hockey; Donna Millar, coach, synchronized swimming; and Robin Sandau, coach, cross-country skiing.

Congratulations on your achievements. Enjoy the benefits of feeling increased pride in yourself, lasting friendships, and fond memories. I wish you all the very best in your future endeavours.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you to the three hon. members today for their statements.

Now, hon. Government House Leader, you caught my attention for two points of order. The first, please.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on my first point of order under *Beauchesne* 489 and 494 with reference to a tabling that was made by the hon. Opposition House Leader, where he tabled a letter that he purported to have sent earlier to the Premier. Certainly it's well within his right to write letters to the Premier and to table those letters in the House, but in tabling it, he made allegations and used statements – I think the words, if we checked the Blues, would be that the Premier had made “false statements.”

Quite frankly, I take objection to that. I believe it's unparliamentary and contrary to the rules; 489 indicates some expressions which have been ruled unparliamentary, and “false statement” is covered in that context. Of course, we know that statements can be parliamentary at some times and unparliamentary at others.

However, the other citation I gave, 494, indicates that

it has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have had far too many occasions in this House where allegations are tossed back and forth. We've got out of the discussion of ideas and the debate on concepts and into the besmirching of character.

3:00

I think this is an opportunity for me to raise this issue because clearly the Premier indicated yesterday – and I'm not going to go over it, although I could. I have many quotes which could be used to justify the statement, but that was the subject of a point of order yesterday, and you ruled on that point of order yesterday. It is entirely inappropriate, in my humble submission, for the Opposition House Leader to then come in today and attempt to get back into that discussion, in effect to overrule your ruling of yesterday, and to make a statement which is contrary to parliamentary practice and contrary to the rules of this House, saying on the record that the Premier's statements were false.

In fact, I could go on, as I say, to indicate that those statements were not false. I would just want to indicate one occasion, again quoting from *Hansard*, page 1002, April 13, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora:

When we think there's enough support to defeat the package of amendments or at least this amendment, if they can't be further corrected, then I guess we'll allow it to get to a vote. But until then, I don't think any government member should be operating under the impression that debate will be swift on these government amendments.

Well, if that doesn't say that the opposition is going to stand in front of this bill and filibuster this bill until they get their way, if they think that's a democratic process, then I don't know what it does say. It says exactly that, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark went on record as saying:

We are going to be picking up on this particular amendment word by word, line by line if it takes us until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

So that's what our plan is for tonight, and hopefully there's nobody in a rush here, because that's exactly what we are going to be doing.

Over and over again members from the opposition side have indicated that they are prepared to talk forever on this bill.

So to allude to that, to indicate that there are 14 references where the Liberal opposition has indicated that they're going to filibuster the bill, is absolutely correct and not a false statement. But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, it is inappropriate for the member, in tabling his letter, to make that statement in a context when it can't be responded to, even as it might have been responded to in question period. It can't be responded to at all. It's a tabling. It's a bare-faced statement, and it can't go unchallenged.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition on this point of order.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of points to make. Firstly, one looks at *Beauchesne* 486(2). It requires contextual consideration by the Speaker in terms of words that are used. It's a strong word, but yesterday, indeed, the Premier made two statements, and I reference the letter that in fact I tabled this afternoon. I did raise a point of order yesterday, and you heard from the Deputy Government House Leader. As a result, you disposed of it, as you were able to do, and therefore you became functus officio. You rendered your ruling, and that was fine in terms of the points of order.

We still have, however, the fact that the Premier of the province yesterday made a statement that was false. He was given an opportunity to show that it was correct. In fact, you may recall that

I challenged the representative of the government, the Deputy Government House Leader, to provide an example of any hon. colleague who had claimed that the opposition had undertaken a filibuster in regard to Bill 11. She could provide none. We are here 24 hours later, and there's still none.

What we have is this. You dealt with the point of order yesterday, and that exhausted your ability under the rules to provide redress. Therefore, I would respectfully submit that I'm entitled, as any member is entitled, to specifically request that a member do the right thing and acknowledge that what they said was false.

If we look at what the Premier said yesterday, he specifically said twice that the opposition had said certain things, said certain words. He was very, very specific about that. In fact, I'm suggesting that those were clearly false. All of the evidence says that they're false.

Now, I can't ask you to do anything further, Mr. Speaker. I did that yesterday, and you disposed of that. But as a member who is offended by those two false statements, which continue to be republished by the Premier both inside and outside this Chamber, surely I'm entitled to write to the Premier and point out that the appropriate thing for him to do is to acknowledge that those statements are false. He also made those announcements while the cameras were running in question period yesterday. That is highly prejudicial, and I didn't see the Government House Leader rise to his feet or even try to caution the Premier in terms of the kind of misstatement he was making.

So what have we got? I say that in the context my use of the words "false statement" is borne out by the evidence. If you look at the letter I tabled today – and I continue to challenge. If the Government House Leader can point out to me an example where one of my colleagues or this member said, as the Premier asserted, that the opposition is undertaking a filibuster – that's a very specific word; it means something very specific – if he can point that out to me, I will in a moment apologize and I will withdraw my characterization of the word false. His colleague didn't do it yesterday; he hasn't done it today. What am I left to conclude but that there is no evidence that the word filibuster was presented by one of my colleagues.

It's a significant matter. As I say, I'm happy to withdraw the word false if in fact the statements that the Premier made were accurate, but on all the evidence they were not accurate, the ones they've made, and there has still been no correction of that record. I would expect, Mr. Speaker, that you would be as concerned for accuracy of the record on both sides.

Those are the observations that I wanted to make with respect to this point of order. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on this point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker. I hesitated because I thought you might be prepared to rule.

The Government House Leader made allegations in attributing certain motivation to comments that I have made in this Assembly regarding the government's amendment package, and he read out a quote from *Hansard*, every word of which I stand by. He went on to then put words in my mouth, so to speak, by suggesting that my comments would somehow justify the Premier saying that the Official Opposition forced the government's hand to closure. That is wrong, and that is misleading, Mr. Speaker. The Government House Leader knows better.

As someone who has told me himself when we were both House leaders that he believes in debate, that he doesn't believe in closure, I understand how uncomfortable he must feel being the message

carrier on this and having been the one to be tapped on the shoulder by the Premier, I suppose, to introduce the closure procedure on Bill 11. But I don't think his discomfort with the role that he finds himself in is any excuse or any rationale for him to mischaracterize my remarks or to put words in my mouth or to suggest that somehow I have used any words at all that would justify the Premier mischaracterizing what is debate. As unrecognizable as that may be sometimes in this Chamber, what members of the Official Opposition have been doing is engaging the government in debate on a policy which we are fundamentally opposed to, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, this point of order arises as a result of words that were uttered under one aspect of the Routine called tablings. The chair has provided ample comment in the past during this session with respect to tablings. We've now, in terms of this session, surpassed the record number of tablings by quite a quantum leap as to any other tablings before.

This parliament is rather unique in the sense that it does provide through its normal Routine in the early afternoon an opportunity for tabling. The tablings are to be tabled, the name of the subject matter identified and laid down. Every time hon. members decide to add adjectives or descriptions with respect to the comments, there seems to be items that arise from it. That causes quite a consternation, because oftentimes we're spending upwards of 10 minutes a day.

3:10

I repeat again that in most other parliaments there's a way of dealing with this, either by not having tablings permitted other than those which are statutory, which is the norm – in most parliaments only statutory tablings are permitted – or by having another time allocation in a different part of the day when the members can deal with that. If you have such a provision in place in here, then we won't have this kind of point of order, because no private members are then in a position to provide a tabling. That's one alternative to this dilemma, and it's an alternative that the hon. members of the House might want to consider. Periodically there will be a review of Standing Orders, and one might want to deal with that.

Secondly, a matter dealt with yesterday is not going to be raised again in this House today. It has been dealt with. It is not the tradition that once the House has made a decision, we reflect upon the decisions of the House. And there was a decision made with respect to it yesterday.

Thirdly, the use of the word false can be ruled parliamentary at some time and unparliamentary at another time, and much of it has to do with innuendo and suggestive statements and what have you. So what we have here is a situation where an hon. member rises today and says: "Well, an hon. member yesterday said, 'You're filibustering,' and I'm saying that I'm not filibustering, so that was a falsehood, and because you uttered a falsehood yesterday, I'm going to make the claim that you're now making false statements today."

The chair hasn't seen this letter that has been conveyed. Presumably it was tabled here today. The fact of the matter is that there's absolutely nothing inappropriate with the utilization of the word filibuster in this particular Assembly. If hon. members choose to use the word filibuster, they have the right to use the word filibuster. There's nothing wrong with that. If another hon. member feels that somebody else is not engaged in a filibuster, then the other hon. member can stand up as part of the debate and say: well, we're not into a filibuster. So what you've got here is a point of a difference of opinion.

There's been a great embarkation of debate in question period

which violates all of the rules in every parliament. This has been going on from day one. So if it's the decision of the House that they want to see it continue despite all the admonitions, it seems that we're going that way.

It will be interesting when there is finally a debate on this particular thing and a decision has been made in the House with respect to the matter. Should the decision be that a positive decision is made with this Bill 11 – the House will have made a decision. It would be difficult to see, starting tomorrow, if that happens, how questions could then be phrased admonishing the House for the decision that was made the day before. So once you carefully read the rules and understand that in preparation for what might happen in the future – but it's clear. If one wants to use the word closure, they can use the word closure. That's a parliamentary tool. If one wants to use the word filibuster, that's a parliamentary tool. It applies throughout. If someone says, "Well, it's false; we're not using a filibuster; in essence, we're getting down to debate," there's nothing that says it's unparliamentary to use the word false or falsehood. So much depends on the tone of the reading of it.

The hon. Government House Leader is absolutely correct that when used at a certain point in a tabling, there's no opportunity for any hon. member then to stand up and explain, defend, or deal with it. So I think that's a very unfortunate use of the word at the time because it does not allow another hon. member to rise on this point other than the way in which the hon. Government House Leader did, as a point of order, which is after the fact.

Perhaps the biggest problem is the provision of tablings. The chair will ask the House to review the current policy with respect to tablings, should there be a review of Standing Orders in the future.

Second point, the hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

MR. HANCOCK: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My second point of order is with respect to a reference made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford during his question. I'm rising under *Beauchesne* 289(3) and 409 obliquely. Under 289(3) there's an explicit reference to the fact that while members are called to duty in this House and are bound to attend,

the duties of Members have become extremely varied and Members must travel frequently. The discharge of those responsibilities will sometimes take a Member away from the House. This absence from the chamber should not be the subject of comment.

Over the last number of days, specifically today by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, there has been a serious and quite intentional abuse of the rule. I can understand when members slip from time to time, but when there's intentional abuse of a rule of that nature, I think it's time to call the House to order and call the particular member in this case to order.

Mr. Speaker, I absolutely have to concur with your comments with respect to the tabling of documents. Today there was tabled in this House a document called Bill 11 Top 10 Movie List. This was in the same context as the member's allusion to the Premier's absence. What the opposition have attempted to do through shouting things across, through innuendo, and through direct references, such as this member has made, to a member's absence, inappropriately and contrary to rule 289(3) of *Beauchesne*, is to refer to, I think – and if I'm wrong, I'd love to be corrected – a television comment that was made where the Premier indicated that he had seen a demonstration on television. There have been allusions in this House to the Premier watching a movie, and now they've tabled a piece of paper which has no bearing on what we're doing here. It's a self-created document. It's what we would call in the legal business a self-serving document. It's childish and it's a cheap trick.

What has been happening in this House and what I'm going to

continue to raise points of order on from now on, Mr. Speaker, is when we degenerate from debate on issues, from differences of opinion about concept into this inappropriate habit of intentional breaches of the rules, commenting on a member's absence in this case, and the degeneration into casting aspersions on our character, talking about being motivated by political contributions, those sorts of issues that have come up.

Now, on this specific point of order, Mr. Speaker, I think it's time to admonish all members of the House that intentional abuses of the rules will not be tolerated. The occasional slip by a member talking about someone leaving, that happens. The occasional breaches of the rules as we're in the passion of debate, that happens, but the intentional abuse of the rules in the manner that's mentioned in this case is inappropriate.

It's quite appropriate for the opposition members to do as they have been doing, call a standing vote on adjournment so that their attendance at a certain hour of the night can be recorded and then referred to publicly. That's an acceptable parliamentary tool to draw attention to the fact that some or all of their members are here at a particular period of time. That's great. I love to see them here and I love to see them do it, although it does take 10 minutes every time. But an intentional abuse of the rules such as this member has used this afternoon, in the context as well, I might say, of a totally inappropriate preamble to his question, should be ruled out of order, and the member should be called to account.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, did you want the hon. Opposition House Leader to speak on your behalf, or do you both want to?

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I respect what the Government House Leader is saying and the reference he's making to *Beauchesne* and such. However, in this particular situation I would argue that the normal rules would not apply in that the Premier himself has on many, many occasions stated explicitly that debate will take place in this House. He's left the impression that he will participate in that debate, that we will have every opportunity to engage with him in that debate, and it hasn't happened.

I would not have raised that particular reference had the Premier agreed to debate in the public arena with the Leader of the Opposition, for example, which he's refused. The only alternative that we've been left with is to debate the health care reform here in the House, but with the Premier not being here to engage in that debate, it leaves us powerless. So I'm simply making reference to a statement. I'm simply making reference to a fact that the Premier has brought upon himself by his references. I would suggest that in this case the Government House Leader is not correct in his arguments.

MR. DICKSON: I'd just make these comments. I'd say that the Government House Leader stood on one point of order and gave some citation and then attempted, to my hearing, to roll two or three other matters into that. Let me deal specifically with the question, and that's ultimately what we have to deal with. We can spend a lot of time speculating on people's motives, on other plans, on other issues, but surely all we can deal with is what has been said in this Chamber.

If you look at the question, it specifically is focused not on the presence or absence of the Premier in this Assembly. The whole question is about thousands of Albertans, about people outside coming to the Assembly. I myself was in Calgary last night at McDougall Centre. There were over 100 Calgarians, and they wanted to hear from the Premier.

3:20

You know, the Premier may well have dozens of things in any given evening to attend, but surely we have not come to a point where in this place we cannot ask why the most senior elected person in this province is not meeting with people who are concerned about an issue. I'll read what I understand to be the question.

Hundreds of thousands of Albertans from across the province are speaking out against a close-minded, bullheaded, and arrogant government that appears determined to ram through its private hospitals policy at any cost. [Meanwhile, the Premier is missing in action, spending his evenings elsewhere.] Mr. Premier, with all due respect . . .

I'm not sure I can read the rest of the wording, but the question is: "How many Albertans have to come to the people's Legislature to speak out?"

Clearly, that's not talking about what's happening in this Chamber. It's about what's happening in that large public space outside this building. I mean, that's where the thousands of people are. We can only take 200 in here at a time. As I understand the question, it is: why the Premier wasn't at McDougall Centre to hear those Calgarians last night, as I was; why he wasn't outside on one of the nights when Calgarians were there. Now, he may have perfectly good reasons for why he's not there, but surely it's not improper to raise that matter and raise that question.

If you look at the citations that have been used, 289(3) – or the Government House Leader might have referred to 481(c) – that all refers to the absence or presence of members in this Chamber. I take it that the question is not about this Chamber. I take it that it's about being out and talking to Albertans who come. The Premier may have good reasons, but that's not a reason to rule on this point of order in a way that would be in any way supportive of what the Government House Leader is suggesting.

Those are the observations I wanted to make. If you look at the text of the questions, it is all about reaction to other Albertans, those severely ordinary Albertans the Premier talks about so much who don't have the privilege of sitting in one of the 83 chairs in this Chamber.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, let's deal with the actual text. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford says the following:

Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of Albertans from across the province are speaking out against a closed-minded, bullheaded, and arrogant government that appears determined to ram through its private hospitals policy at any cost. Meanwhile, this Premier spends his evenings elsewhere, missing in action here. Mr. Premier, with all due respect, we can all recall that the last time a Premier decided not to listen to Albertans he ended up humiliated by a six-foot stuffed chicken. Mr. Premier, how many Albertans have to come to the people's Legislature to speak out against the Premier's private health care policy before he accepts the responsibility of facing Albertans one on one?

So presumably the question is:

How many Albertans have to come to the people's Legislature to speak out against the Premier's private health care policy before he accepts the responsibility of facing Albertans one on one?

Previous to that it seemed to be a significant amount of preamble. But there is that statement again, and I use it again: "Meanwhile, this Premier spends his evenings elsewhere, missing in action here."

Hon. members, it's one of the basic, basic, basic statements that we don't refer to the absence of hon. members. I mean, of all the multitude of rules that we have in here one is not supposed to do that and one avoids doing it. Examples are perhaps important.

Yesterday afternoon during the question period it was noticed by

many that at the 13th minute in the question period a prominent member of the Assembly departed. Some members made interjections. At about the 45th minute of the question period another prominent member of the Assembly departed, and there was a whole series of interjections, including cluck-clucks, and somebody yelled out "chicken" and what have you.

Well, maybe there are reasons for people to have to go places. There are always reasons, and one of the reasons that we basically follow this tradition of not referring to the absence of a member at a particular time is that there are reasons. They may be very personal reasons, they may be very serious reasons, and they're not reasons that others should take to their advantage to try and humiliate somebody about. There are members missing in this House today because of sad situations in their families, very severe and sad situations. Now, for somebody to basically downplay that and denigrate that would be absolutely, I think, intolerable and totally discourteous.

I don't recall last night that there was a full House here, and I think right now 30 government members and six opposition members are in the House, and one independent member is in the House. I don't know if we should put that statement in here every 12 minutes, 23 minutes, 46 minutes, or what have you. In fact, one member of this Assembly has missed more days so far in this session, and it's not the person that most of you think it is. It is not the person that most of you think it is. But somebody is going to do something with respect to that one of these days, and they're going to be wrong, and they're going to embarrass themselves. There are reasons we don't do these things. They're courteous reasons, also traditional reasons.

I know the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is really proud of himself and his six-foot chicken, and maybe that was the point he was trying to make today, but he also knows better than what he said as well. I think he is an hon. member, and I think he can do better.

Thank you for raising the point of order.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'll call the committee to order. The chair would like to say that we have about a minute and a half, and we are going to have to report.

Bill 206

School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today in Committee of the Whole and just take a couple of brief moments to talk about some of the things that were specific in Bill 206. In second reading there was overall support for the spirit of the principles of the bill, and I'm happy that all hon. members took the bill at face value as a positive initiative for our schools and subsequently pledged their support.

There were a few comments made regarding the particular aspects of Bill 206 which I hope will be alleviated here in the committee. I believe the foundation for this bill is solid as it is a step towards

standardizing and clarifying the rules in Alberta schools, and there is a definite need for this to occur. Not all school boards have codes of conduct. Every single one of them has a policy on rules, but they're not all standardized, and that's why it is so important to have this bill brought forward.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The chair hesitates to interrupt, but the time for this item has now expired.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, we need a motion to rise and report.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I'm sorry. I would move that we rise and report. I didn't notice the hour, Madam Chairman.

[Motion to report progress on Bill 206 carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 206.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Cell Phone Use while Driving

508. Mr. Trynchy moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to examine the results of the study undertaken by the provincial auto insurance Crown corporation of Quebec, Societe d'Assurance Automobile du Quebec, SAAQ, on the dangers of handheld cellular telephone use by drivers of motor vehicles and then consult with Albertans on whether and what restrictions should be imposed on the use of handheld cell phones by operators of motor vehicles while driving.

[Debate adjourned April 18: Mr. Cao speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. There were a couple of observations I wanted to make. You know, I applaud the member for bringing the motion forward. One of the interesting things about the job we have is that you get to talk to an awful lot of Albertans, and they tell you things that irritate them and they're bothered by and things they'd like to see remedied, and I'd have to say that this is a complaint I hear frequently: the use of handheld cell phones while people are operating motor vehicles in the province.

I've had the benefit of talking to some extent with the transportation critic for the opposition, and she's persuaded me that there's some actually very good material that exists and some studies that show that there appears to be a significantly higher risk of motor vehicle accidents that are attributable to the use of handheld cell phones.

I understand that there is some other work being done. I read an

article entitled Association between Cellular-Telephone Calls and Motor Vehicle Collisions, that appeared in volume 336, the February 13, 1997, issue, of *The New England Journal of Medicine*. I thought it made some compelling good sense, that this is something that has to be addressed.

You know, there are lots of causes of accidents. You don't have to spend very long on Crowchild Trail in Calgary or Macleod Trail, for those who live in the south of that city, to find what seems often one out of every three or four motorists operating a cell phone, I suppose as a kind of conceit; that is, we can operate the radio, the cell phone, put on makeup, check ourselves in the mirror, and do all of those things – we see people doing it all the time – and still be able to pay due care and attention to vehicles around us and hazards on the road and that sort of thing. So I think this is an issue that warrants some attention.

The motion has really two elements, I understand: one, to look at the Quebec study and then, secondly, to consult with Albertans on what sorts of restrictions ought to be imposed. I'd just make this observation. I don't disagree with anything in the motion, and in fact I'm going to vote for the motion. But why is it, Madam Speaker, that we'd be so anxious to consult with Albertans on handheld cell phones and we couldn't have public hearings on Bill 40, the Health Information Act, last year? We can't have public hearings on Bill 11, and we run like heck when anybody suggests a plebiscite. You know, at some point in this House don't we have to try and attach values to the things that we talk about?

This is not an argument for a moment in terms of why we should not consult with Albertans on this issue, but if there's such a thing as an objective observer of what goes on in this province, would that observer not be entitled to say, "Why is it that we're all set . . ." I can't presume what private members are going to do, but let's assume this passes, because I think it makes good sense, and I hope all members will support it. But if we were to pass it, how do we reconcile with the fact that we absolutely denied Albertans the right to be consulted on how their health information can be used, which is, I'd suggest, a vastly more important issue?

Madam Speaker, I see that somebody else wants to join the debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. HERARD: Madam Speaker, relevance. The hon. member while supporting the motion uses the opportunity to rattle on about things that were passed in this Legislature in the past – you know, that's over and done with – and things about Bill 11. I mean, it has to be relevant to what we're dealing with.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, my response to the point of order is simply this. We have an authority in this Legislature – and in a moment I'll find the specific time when it was used – that said that you have to allow a speaker an opportunity to develop a line of thought, and it's been acknowledged . . .

DR. TAYLOR: It's impossible to do, Gary, develop a line of thought.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I may be the worst example of trying to develop a coherent argument, and I may have distinguished myself by my inability to persuade, but, Madam Speaker, I think I'm entitled to use examples and illustrations and to be as creative as I

can to try and make a point in terms of why members ought to support or ask questions about it. You know, I'm happy to talk further about the relevance issue, but for somebody to stand up in the first three or four minutes of a member's speech and complain about relevance seems to me to be a bit worrisome.

In fact, I wonder what Calgary-Egmont is frightened of. What is he worried about? What is it about health information, that I should happen to choose that as an example . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Because it's been decided.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I acknowledge it has, but if he were paying more attention to what I was saying, Madam Speaker, he'd understand that I'm using an example, that I'm trying to hold up and give some bigger context to what we're dealing with on the motion.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: This Acting Speaker, as I know my other colleagues that sit in this chair do, allows a lot of latitude in this Assembly on all sides of the House, but we do have before us a motion that is a private member's motion dealing with cellular telephones. I would ask that we try to be succinct and we try to be relevant and we not try to be confrontational. Can we get on with the debate with the time that's left?

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, just to conclude my comments. I in fact was almost finished before the intervention. I suspect we've spent more time on the intervention than we have on the argument. [interjections] I'm not sure when I've seen so much rapt attention paid by members of this Assembly to one little motion, that I'm hopeful most members are going to support. It's fascinating to see. I'm looking forward to the vote.

I just wanted to finish making the observation that everything we do here ought to be able to fit into some kind of a coherent plan. There ought to be some kind of consistency to the way we vote and the bills we pass, and whether it's a private member's bill or a government public bill, is it unrealistic to expect that we be able as legislators to defend to constituents why we would have a public hearing in one case and in so many other cases we shun public hearings? I mark that observation. I'm still going to vote for the motion, but I think that as a legislator I'm entitled to make the query. Maybe some others will have the answer for it.

3:40

Maybe Calgary-Egmont has the answer why, if he's supporting Motion 508, this is something that we can go out and spend money on. We'll take out ads, and maybe we'll send the sponsor of the bill on a trip around the province. Maybe we could have a steering committee, a cell phone steering committee, hopefully that would always maintain close communication. We could send them traveling around the province to find out what Albertans are saying. Maybe at the same time they could solicit the views of Albertans on Bill C-6, on privacy protection in the private sector, something the minister of intergovernmental affairs has been doing some work on but not involving a lot of Albertans. Maybe we could seek some input on Bill 40, and maybe we could seek some input on Bill 11.

Those are my comments. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before the chair calls the vote, I will remind everyone that this afternoon is private members' business and we are dealing with a private member's motion. It is not a government motion. The chair just heard that we're talking about

consultation to do with government bills versus a private member's motion that is before us.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 carried]

Vehicle Front Licence Plates

509. Mr. Lougheed moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to reinstate the requirement to display front licence plates on all vehicles registered in the province.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to lead off discussion of Motion 509, the motion dealing with the reinstatement of front licence plates. This issue came to my attention six or seven years ago when I was invited to the Good Hope hall, a community hall just a few miles down the road in the rural part of Strathcona county. At that time Rural Crime Watch was holding a meeting, and they were discussing the issue of increased break-ins in the community in the rural area.

One of the topics of concern was the absence of front licence plates and the inability of the rural people to identify vehicles in their community. At that time there were probably over a 100 members of Rural Crime Watch there, and they were talking about several issues, including this issue of front licence plates. Bus drivers made comments about their concerns with respect to front plates, and several topics were discussed along those lines.

At that time I suggested that it might be a good idea to write a letter to their MLA, having no idea that a few years after that in fact I would be the recipient of several of those letters and many comments from Rural Crime Watch people in my community that I represent, to suggest to me that this would be a good thing to bring forward, and they still have those concerns. Those concerns have been clearly and consistently expressed over these past few years by these same people, the Rural Crime Watch associations throughout the province. They've been accompanied with rational arguments put forward by these members, stating that the reinstatement of front licence plates would be a good idea for several different reasons.

They include, for example, bus drivers concerned about the safety of the students disembarking or loading on their busses when exposed to the possibility of oncoming traffic or traffic from behind the bus not stopping for their flashing red lights and putting in danger those students that are getting off the bus, especially getting off rather than loading. When a bus driver observes a car coming from the rear passing him, he's able to pick up their rear licence plate, phone it in, and that driver of the car who failed to obey the flashing light signals has the opportunity to correct his behaviour by perhaps either getting a fine or else a warning from the RCMP about his behaviour.

However, when a car approaches from the front, it's really difficult for that bus driver to pick up the plate. He has to try and see it in the rearview mirror or try and look around through the window somehow and pick it up, and it's difficult for him to do so. So that person coming from the front does not have the opportunity to correct his behaviour and some day in the future, not recognizing the danger he's put the students in, may in fact clip one of those young people getting off the bus, and we'll have a death or a serious injury of some young person because of that.

Farm and acreage owners also express very often their concerns in their area when people drive into their lanes. When they see that somebody is home, instead of turning around and driving out, as all

our neighbours would do, these vehicles with people unknown in them back out. They'll back down sometimes quite a long lane to avoid having their rear licence plate seen, again an opportunity missed to report the vehicle. You can only report the vehicle and the type of vehicle it is but not some identifying number that it would have on its front plate.

It's possible those plates may be stolen, that the vehicle may in fact even be stolen, if these people are out there looking to break into rural community homes. That's also a benefit though. If the front plate in fact is stolen and that's reported and doesn't match the vehicle that it was attached to, that's another quick clue for the RCMP that something is amiss here and that they should be out there trying to find that person.

Actually, though, upon investigation we find the concern is much more widespread than just a rural issue. For example, all members and all Albertans are concerned about our wildlife and the situation in the green areas. We know about the situation of poachers backing onto fields or onto cutlines and thereby concealing their rear licence plate, and not having a front licence plate makes it more difficult for people driving by, wondering who that might be in the area and what they are up to. By just taking note of the front plate, they could report it, especially if they hear through the Rural Crime Watch phone lines or some other mechanism, their neighbours reporting some gunshots in the area out of season, that kind of thing, being able to report that these things are happening.

As well, rustlers in some of these areas driving pickups, pulling some trailer – the pickup rear licence plate is covered by the trailer, that may have some old plate on it that is no longer able to be identified, and who knows where it came from. That pickup licence plate being covered by the trailer offers a great deal of anonymity to that person out in that rural community.

Citizens on Patrol is another group, mostly an urban group, that also has expressed concern. One fellow just the other day from Citizens on Patrol in Fort Saskatchewan told me that he was driving by on duty one evening. He was going along, and a car tore out of a laneway. Just as he was coming about even to the laneway, the car turned and went the opposite direction to what he was driving, and of course he had no opportunity to pick up the rear plate. If the car coming out of the lane had its front plate on, he could have read it, identified the vehicle, and called that in right away.

Just this morning I glanced through my e-mail. I had an e-mail from another Citizens on Patrol person. He says here: I'd like to give you just one example. A couple of years ago I was on patrol and saw a small black Ford truck, a couple of young men. It was backed into an unused driveway. A day later we found out that a home was broken into about half a mile away from where the truck was. The culprits were never caught. This is one crime that may have been solved if we had front plates.

Block Parents have also expressed concerns. If front plates were there, it would give them an additional opportunity to identify the vehicles around their communities. Fish and game associations have also expressed concerns going along with those expressed by people concerned about poaching and the Report a Poacher program, those kinds of programs, people concerned about our wildlife. Conservation officers have also expressed the same concern. In fact, I did receive a letter from the conservation students at Lethbridge Community College stating that they fully supported the reinstatement of front licence plates. Last month or perhaps two months ago now the AAMDC voted at their annual meeting to move or push for reinstatement of front licence plates.

3:50

Urban as well as rural police forces are also interested in this

issue. This afternoon I tabled letters from the different police services throughout the province. The Edmonton and Calgary police services sent letters expressing that the single rear plate has made it more difficult for officers to identify stolen motor vehicles, and of course it's particularly true when an officer observes a vehicle in oncoming traffic that matches the general description of a suspicious vehicle. They tell me it can be difficult and unsafe for a police officer to try and read the rear licence plate of a vehicle as it travels by in the opposite direction.

The RCMP have also written a letter expressing support for reinstatement. They say, as a police force concerned about the safety of their clients, that there are many reasons to use two plates. For instance, they cite that front and rear plates would assist citizens who have witnessed a crime in identifying vehicles involved. The Medicine Hat Police Service recently contacted me seconding the RCMP and the Edmonton and Calgary police departments' position that front plates can assist in the identification of stolen vehicles or vehicles committing offences such as dangerous driving and speeding. Also, I received letters from the Lethbridge force and the Camrose force.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to tell you about a particular gentleman who contacted me regarding this issue. This gentleman is a retired detective from the Calgary Police Service with 30 years' experience specializing in fatal traffic accidents. He's testified many times in the field of fatal traffic accident investigation, and he knows what he's talking about. He tells me that in over 80 percent of all hit-and-run accidents the front licence plate, if it exists, is sheared off the front of the vehicle and left at the scene. As you can imagine, this information would greatly assist officers investigating the incident. It would save valuable officer time, tax dollars, and get that information into the hands of the enforcement agencies really quickly so that they would not be trying to find these vehicles. You can imagine the amount of time saved and the concern over those who were involved in that accident and perhaps even killed by a hit-and-run driver. For this reason and for suspicious vehicle identification, this expert in traffic accident investigation believes that front licence plates make a tremendous improvement to law enforcement effectiveness.

Madam Speaker, the majority of provinces in Canada use front licence plates. Most of the Canadian provinces and most of the states in the U.S. use a two-licence-plate system. These jurisdictions believe that the law enforcement benefits of having front licence plates are worth any associated extra cost, and I believe that Alberta should look carefully at these other jurisdictions and see what we can also learn from them.

I believe it's important to consider the experience of Manitoba. In 1987 as a cost-saving measure, much as happened here in Alberta in 1991, they adopted a single rear plate. A decade later, in 1997, they reinstated the front plate use. Their government states many reasons for this reversal, but primarily it was a law enforcement issue. Law enforcement agencies and rural crime watch groups highlighted the need to return to a dual-plate system. Manitoba decided that the extra cost would be well worth it for law enforcement agencies, and because the law enforcement agencies work for the citizens, certainly the citizens of that province also benefit.

According to the Department of Infrastructure here in Alberta, it's estimated that reintroducing a two-plate system would cost from \$1.7 million to \$4.5 million, and the amount would depend, to some extent, on whether the plates were reflectorized or not. It's based on about 2 and a half million vehicles requiring plates. That cost includes the cost of notification, replacement of a pair of plates, and the destruction of the single plates that would be turned in.

Many of the licence plates that are in use currently have deteriorated.

rated to a large extent, and they're soon going to have to be replaced. In fact, sometimes we see front plates on some vehicles and know that those plates have been on for quite a few years. In fact, these plates in Alberta have been the same since 1983, and that's a long time for a plate to be used, perhaps much longer than its intended life span, certainly longer than in most provinces, where they update the look of their plates every few years. Alberta's plates are going to have to be replaced soon. I think that we could use the opportunity to reinstate front plates when a new issue of plates occurs. That would certainly reduce the costs and reduce the inconvenience to Albertans.

Several people have written, once this issue was made known, that in 2005 we've got Alberta's centennial year, and they say that maybe that's a great time to bring in a new plate. I'd propose that if that's the time a new issue of plates is being brought in, it would be a good time to replace the old plates and institute front plates as well. This would give Albertans plenty of notice to prepare for any change that's coming.

Madam Speaker, support for reinstatement of front plates comes from a diverse range of stakeholders. Many petitions have been filed already, and there are many more to come over the next week before the expected vote on this motion in one week's time. They will be tabled in this Legislature. We appreciate the help of groups, especially Rural Crime Watch – and we have some of the members with us today – in getting that word out and getting the message to MLAs, especially in the rural areas, that that's of concern and that they would like to see the reinstatement occur.

We can help law enforcement agencies function at their best by reinstating the front plate, and if we do it when licence plates are replaced, it can be a cost-effective measure as well. The small problems that might be encountered with the reinstatement of front licence plates are insignificant considering the potential increase in security and the opportunity to identify stolen vehicles or suspicious persons in our community, whether it be a rural community or an urban community. This is a small cost to pay to improve the safety and well-being of our children and our communities.

Madam Speaker, I would urge the members of this Legislature to support this motion and to lend a hand to Alberta's law enforcement agencies by asking for the reinstatement of front licence plates.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before we continue, could I ask for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce members of the Rural Crime Watch Association that are here today to listen to the debate on Motion 509. They are Clark and Doris Steele and Lewis Compigla* and Deb Kurylo. Clark Steele has been with the Rural Crime Watch Association and a co-ordinator of the front licence plate initiative for a number of years. I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

(continued)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have a couple of questions with respect to the motion. I'd start off by saying that this has not been a big issue in my constituency. I just finished sending out to constituents I think 27,000 copies of an annual report I do. It's mailed out, and I've got lots of response, lots of feedback from constituents on a range of things. I've not got any specific constituent feedback on this one.

4:00

The motion seems to make such eminent good sense. As a native Albertan I still remember when we eliminated the front licence plate. Was it just about cost? I understand the arguments in terms of hit-and-run drivers and school bus drivers. I mean, that all makes perfectly good sense. You know how I was saying before that what we do here should make some sense in a bigger picture? It must have been during the Getty years – I don't remember exactly; there'd be members who would remember – when this came out. I remember asking the question at the time: what does this do in terms of law enforcement? I didn't have the rapt attention of all these MLAs. I would have asked this question to maybe a co-worker or my family, but I remember asking the question: what's the price in terms of public safety and highway safety in deleting this thing? I never got a satisfactory response.

What I do remember reading and hearing at the time was people saying: "This is done in American states. We've checked with the police, and the police don't think this is a major safety issue." You know, I don't have the text of what I was told at the time, but I remember this being such an obvious question. It just seems to me there were all kinds of assurances from all kinds of different areas that this is no problem, that this is not going to in any way impede the work of law enforcement.

As I understand it, the RCMP – that would be K Division – now supports this. That's what I understood him to say, and he's got some kind of a letter or some kind of communication indicating that the Edmonton Police Service, the Calgary Police Service, and I think he said the Medicine Hat Police Service have all indicated that they support this. I don't know if those documents have been tabled in the Assembly. [interjection] Excellent. Okay. I haven't had a chance to look at those, but I'll be happy to look at those letters because I'm interested in seeing what they have to say about it.

Then I guess my other question is just in terms of the cost of this. As I understood the sponsor – and this is just what I heard, so I'm looking for some clarification – he said that the cost would be somewhere between \$1.7 million and, I thought I heard him say, \$4.5 million, depending on whether there's some luminescent properties or whatever in the licence plate. He said that that cost would also include notification of everybody who is a registered owner now and destruction of old plates, plates being turned in, and so on. I wasn't clear on what the cost was if we didn't go with the fancier licence plate, if we just went back to having a front licence plate which is really no different than the one I've got on the rear of my vehicles now. Is that the \$1.7 million? I don't know that.

I guess the question is: what's the cost thrown away? If we had until 1992 rear and front licence plates, as I'm advised, and we changed, I'm interested in what the estimate is of the taxpayer cost thrown away by having made that decision in 1992. Now, eight years later, really nothing has changed, I take it. We had lots of school buses on the road in 1992. We had police services who were anxious to monitor hit-and-run drivers and all that sort of thing. We had people in rural communities who were anxious to be able to identify vehicles in their area. I'm interested in knowing: what's the cost thrown away? I hope the member understands what I mean when I say that; in other words, in having gone from the system that

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

existed at that point to what would happen if we do this. I'd be interested in that sort of information.

Otherwise, as I say, I don't think I've gotten a single call in my constituency office on the issue, but I respect the fact that there are many Albertans who are concerned about this, particularly people in rural Alberta who have raised that concern. I follow that in the provincial media, so I respect that interest and that concern.

I am interested in some of the cost issues. I am interested in seeing the letters from the different police services that relate to this. I'm interested in terms of that time, and I have to go back – and I confess that I haven't had the chance to do this yet – to look at the *Hansard* at the time the decision was made. Now, I'm not sure whether that was the decision of the Legislative Assembly or whether that was just an administrative decision, done by regulation or whatever, to announce that we're not going to have these. I'm interested in seeing what the representations were that were made at the time, the defence of it.

I'm not sure who the minister was. The current minister of natural resources might have been the Solicitor General at the time. I'm just thinking back, and I'm interested in going back to see the comments he made at that time. I hope he'll be able to join in this debate, because he always speaks with such conviction about everything he does. I'd be interested in having him explain why he was convinced in 1992 that this was of no consequence and no problem to do and why it wouldn't compromise public safety.

Those are just some of the questions I've got. As I said before, my inclination is to support the motion, but I just have to understand how come we're doing this 180-degree turn in the space of just eight short years. There may be some other members who want to participate in the debate, but I might ask the sponsor of the motion if he's got some further information around the costing and particularly the cost thrown away. If he can make that available – and, I expect, not just to me – if that could be tabled in some fashion, I think that would help inform the debate.

Anyway, those are the questions I wanted to ask, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much for your patience.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before we proceed, can I again ask for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

MR. LOUGHEED: Madam Speaker, a name was missed during the introductions before. At least I didn't hear the hon. member mention a lady who's done a great deal to help with the petitions, a lady who lives just east of the constituency I represent. Carol Marko is with us. I'd ask that she rise and be recognized by the Assembly for her hard work with respect to this issue.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

(continued)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased today to have the opportunity to speak in support of Motion 509. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for bringing this important concern forward. As my constituents and most of my colleagues here might know, I've been an advocate of the front licence plate reinstatement for some time now, and I'm most encouraged that this issue is now before us for debate.

Reissuing front licence plates has been in the media a fair bit in the last few days as more people voice their opinion on the potential benefits of this licence plate and the drawbacks of the lack of it. Only last month at the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties a motion was put forward by the reeve of Leduc county, Edward Chubocha, proposing the reinstatement of front licence plates. This motion was adopted by the AAMDC, and law enforcement officials subsequently expressed support for such an initiative.

Why bring back front licence plates, Madam Speaker? There are a variety of reasons. First, it would be easier for police officers to make a positive identification when a vehicle that matches the general description of a suspicious or stolen vehicle is seen in oncoming traffic. In this respect I contacted all four of the RCMP detachments in my constituency of Highwood and asked the officers there if they would support this motion, and they agreed. I asked if there were any officers in any of those detachments who would be opposed to it, and they said absolutely not.

Complaints have been raised with respect to vehicles which illegally pass school buses on the highway. Such infractions are serious as they pose a real danger to young children who cross the road when boarding or disembarking from the school bus. Many Rural Crime Watch groups have maintained that front licence plates would increase the opportunity to identify these vehicles. With that in mind, Madam Speaker, I again checked with the three different school divisions in my area – Christ the Redeemer school division, Foothills school division, and Livingstone Range school division – and in all three the transportation people that I spoke with support this motion and think it would be most valuable in their everyday lives.

Madam Speaker, Alberta's Provincial Rural Crime Watch Association has been lobbying for the return of front licence plates for many years. This association represents over 60,000 Albertans involved in 110 local organizations. Again, I took the opportunity to contact our local range patrol, which covers a fair bit of Highwood, and they strongly support this motion and hope and urge that it be passed.

4:10

A third reason, Madam Speaker, for front licence plate use is a problem that has been experienced by many of my constituents who are on country residential acreages, farms, and ranches. A suspicious vehicle enters their private property, comes up the lane, the driver presumably detecting that someone is at home or out in the yard, and the vehicle backs away instead of coming in, leaving the property and avoiding identification. What are the people who are there to think except that they might have been a victim of burglary or worse? Anyone with lawful purpose coming into the lane would then be expected to continue on up to the house and speak to the people and maybe ask directions or explain their presence. When someone sees you and then backs out, the alarm bells ring. You can't do anything about it. Even with a pair of binoculars you can't spot a licence if it doesn't exist on the front.

Many of my rural constituents have spoken to me of their concerns about passing vehicles that are backed into a farm-field approach. They may belong to Rural Crime Watch or the range patrol, but the car or the truck or the van is backed in, and there appears to be no one there. When that rural resident knows that no one lives within a mile or two of the location where this vehicle has been parked front end out, they can only report that there is a suspicious vehicle or an unfamiliar vehicle at this spot, as was mentioned of course by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. Without a front licence plate, all that local concerned citizens can report, then, is a

suspicious car or truck or van. I believe that positive identification would be much easier if vehicles were required to have a front licence plate. The end result would be that more criminals are apprehended, and rural Albertans would be safer.

Part of life in rural Alberta is when you're driving on a gravel road, it's a little bit muddy, and there's some moisture on the road. The back licence plate invariably gets obscured, but the front almost never does. Of course, we often see in the wintertime as well, on roads that aren't neatly plowed, that a lot of the snow comes up and sticks to the whole back end, again obscuring the back licence plate. There's no front licence plate and no such obstruction even if there was a front-end licence plate, so it is an important consideration.

As has been mentioned, there are concerns about livestock theft in the rural area. This indeed, Madam Speaker, as you know, is a much bigger problem in Alberta than many people realize. It's not just in the old Roy Rogers' movies that we have rustlers. There are lots of them now, and they're highly organized. In many instances pickup trucks pulling a stock trailer and large tractor trailer units are especially difficult to identify without front plates. Two plates would go a long way to identifying and perhaps leading to the punishment of perpetrators.

Rural Crime Watch groups, then, are organized because there is a genuine need for them. When someone lives in an area where the nearest police officer may be 30 or 40 miles away, those residents often do what they can to ensure the safety of their community, and I don't mean a vigilante squad. It's just an observation function that they do. This effort usually takes the form of identifying suspicious and unfamiliar vehicles as just a precautionary tactic. A front licence plate would make their valuable work that much more effective. They need every tool that we can give them.

Not only can front licence plates serve as a means of visually identifying a motor vehicle; the plates themselves may end up at the scene of an accident and thus serve as evidence, Madam Speaker. I've been told that in a significant percentage of hit-and-run accidents the front plate is sheared off. For a police officer investigating such a crime, the presence of such a piece of evidence would be invaluable.

As has been mentioned by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, urban police departments are very supportive of a return to the front licence plates as they would be beneficial to their police officers on patrol, not only from an identification point of view but also from a safety perspective. Two licence plates provide two chances at identification, and police officers feel that this alone speaks to the utility and value of returning the front licence plate to Alberta motor vehicles.

One of the keys to the debate on Motion 509 is balancing the costs of reinstating front licence plates with the benefits of public safety and law enforcement which could be achieved. There's no denying that there's a cost to returning to a two-plate system, Madam Speaker. However, as I will outline, this cost should not pose a barrier. Manitoba's experience with single rear licence plates began in 1987, but 10 years later that province returned to the two-plate system. As in Alberta, many of the voices speaking in support of this move included law enforcement agencies, Rural Crime Watch associations. While there's a cost in reinstatement, it is not substantial, equaling, apparently from the Manitoba example, about \$7 for a pair of licences or \$4 for a single plate. Similar costs, then, would likely result in Alberta. Surely such a small amount, only a few dollars in a onetime user fee, is worth ensuring that our streets and our children are safer. Remember that these licence plates are used for many years.

Madam Speaker, I want to see two licence plates on every vehicle in this province. As I stated earlier, I believe that there's a way to

make this motion before us even better. I believe that Motion 509 should be amended so that reinstatement would happen when a full licence plate reissue is made. This would allow time to complete studies on the effectiveness of front plates and would allow reinstatement to be accomplished in the most economical manner. I would like to propose, then, that we amend Motion 509 so that reinstatement would happen at the same time as the licence plate reissue. Although I'm certainly an advocate of front licence plate use, I believe there is a way we can do this while minimizing expense and hassle. Eventually we're going to have to do a wholesale transfer of licence plates in this province. Waiting for this change would be the most cost-effective and easiest way to put front plates back on Alberta vehicles.

I therefore move the following amendment, with the concurrence of the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. I move that Motion 509 be amended by adding "in conjunction with a licence plate reissue" after the word "province." I believe all hon. members have received a copy.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It's being distributed now.

MR. TANNAS: It would read:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to reinstate the requirement to display front licence plates on all vehicles registered in the province in conjunction with a licence plate reissue.

Madam Speaker, it only makes sense to wait until we have a full reissue. It may be in the year 2005, in Alberta's centennial year, that it might come about. There has been apparently some thought of a special licence being issued for that. If it can be done earlier, it would be a good time to reinstate the front licence plate. Also, many licence plates are currently in a state of severe disrepair and will have to be replaced whatever happens, whether it's in the year 2005 or much earlier.

There's considerable support for reinstatement in our constituencies. I believe, Madam Speaker, that this is not just a rural issue. It's an issue that affects law enforcement agencies across the province. Front plates are an important law enforcement tool, and I hope all of us are committed to putting them back on our vehicles. If we wait for a full reissue, then we can bring back the two-plate system with as few complications and as little expense as possible, without the need for reregistering all of the licences under the present licensing. I think this would be an ideal solution then.

Madam Speaker, I support the two-licence-plate system, and if Motion 509 is amended so that reinstatement will take place in conjunction with the full licence plate reissue, then I think it makes a good motion that much better.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

4:20

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Speaking to the amendment to Motion 509, I was going to stand and support Motion 509 in its entirety. I totally agree with both speakers that have stood and spoken. I am a split urban/rural person. The fact is that my parents owned a school bus business, with a number of school buses. In 1992, while driving in the province and going on holidays, my mother, who is a past bus driver, always commented: how could bus drivers actually nab one of these people or write down the licence plate of a person who is going through when the red lights are flashing and students are already out of the bus and so on?

On Motion 509 all the different points that were actually brought

out are very good. The one thing I did highlight in here was the accommodation of new licence plates and when was it going to be. We are now on the amendment put forward. It is a public safety issue. The fact is that we did take this out in 1992. You know, I don't care how many people are going to deny it – we can go back into *Hansard* and go back to previous members speaking on why and whatever – but it was a cost savings. It was \$700,000 at the same time that there was a major shift in trying to save and react to the overspending over a few years and the bad times in Alberta during the 1980s.

I'm stressing the point that instead of waiting until 2005, we should be coming up with some mechanism to introduce the double licence plates right now. It is – and I'm going to stress over and over again – because of safety, and it is very, very important. I commend the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. Until I saw this on the Order Paper, I wondered how this was ever going to come forward again. You know, why was it to the point where we were one of the very few provinces – and I don't think there are very many states, period. Wherever I've traveled in the United States, I've always seen double licence plates.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I believe that with the presentation of arguments or ideas brought forward by both the members for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and Highwood, the fact is that in the city we have the same concerns. I have a 95 percent rural constituency. I've heard this over and over again. I've heard it as I travel the province as the shadow critic for Municipal Affairs. Without even bringing it up to people when I drive through, this has actually been brought up in meetings. The majority of people that I know would be totally for this, and I thank the people that have come forward that were introduced in the members' gallery.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to speak in favour of the amendment to Motion 509 that would delay the reinstatement to coincide with the full licence plate reissue. I want to commend the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for bringing forward Motion 509, the reinstatement of front licence plates on Alberta vehicles.

I'd like to begin by saying that this issue has been around and has been discussed many times since the removal of front plates in 1991.

DR. TAYLOR: Were you here in '91?

MR. FISCHER: Yes, I was, and I wasn't in favour then either.

The Alberta Provincial Rural Crime Watch Association has played an integral part in promoting and supporting the reinstatement of the front plates. I wish to commend Clark Steele, the provincial co-ordinator of the front licence plate initiative. He's a fellow citizen of the Wainwright community, and I'd like to commend him for his dedication and commitment to getting these plates back on Alberta vehicles.

I strongly support Motion 509 because I believe that anything we can do to assist the police forces in crime prevention is not only beneficial to our communities but contributes to the betterment of all our society. I think it's interesting that they took the front plate off. I mean, we see the front of the car just as often as we see the back of the car, and you make people run around now to the back of the car to see the licence plate. Well, maybe they should have made them run around to the front of the car. To me, by removing the licence

plate, it cut in half the opportunity to identify the vehicle. The front licence plate will definitely help with vehicle identification and could even assist in cases of reporting poachers, child abduction, hit-and-runs, theft of livestock, and instances of stalking. If the transition back to a two-plate system is delayed so that it can be accomplished in the most cost-effective manner possible, as was proposed by the hon. Member for Highwood, then all the better.

The front plate reinstatement is an issue that has generated great interest in my constituency, and I've had numerous constituents come to me with concerns like those already detailed by my colleagues from Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and Highwood. These are people who have seen a vehicle quickly backing out of a driveway when they come to their front window. These are people whose children have almost been hit by vehicles that illegally pass school buses on the highway. These are people who have been victims of hit-and-run accidents who have no way of positively identifying the culprit. I've had constituents come to me with stories about witnessing poaching but being unable to get a look at the rear plate before the offenders realize they've been discovered and take off. I've even been told of people trespassing on posted land and backing into driveways and approaches to avoid having their licence plates noted.

In all of these cases a front licence plate would have substantially increased the possibility of identifying suspicious offending vehicles. By trying to positively identify these vehicles, people are doing what they can to keep our rural community safe, and that is what Motion 509 is all about: supporting community-based crime prevention.

If they say that they need the front plate, then I say that we give it to them, and, Mr. Speaker, they have asked for it. The Alberta Provincial Rural Crime Watch Association has been lobbying for the return of the front licence plate now for nine years. I was pleased to hear that the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties decided at its convention this March to request the province to reinstate front licence plates. For years urban police departments throughout the province have declared their support for reinstatement. Their number one reason is that a front licence plate makes it so much easier to identify vehicles that are involved in or suspected of criminal activity.

Concerns about the lack of a front licence plate were even discussed at the spring meeting of the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police. I'd like to read you a quote from the letter from our assistant commissioner of K Division, Don McDermid.

From a police perspective, front and rear license plates would definitely be beneficial to officers when attempting to identify vehicles approaching them. Also, as a police force concerned about the safety of their clients, which for "K" Division are the residents of Alberta, front and rear license plates would assist citizens who have witnessed a crime in identifying vehicles involved with that crime.

The role of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is to enforce the laws made by our Federal and Provincial governments. The efforts made by the residents of this province to enhance the laws that would benefit any police force must be applauded.

Mr. Speaker, for years . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time allocation for discussion of this matter today has now left us.

4:30

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 23

Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to

move second reading of Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000, standing in the name of my colleague the Minister of Learning.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's apprenticeship and industry training system is known as one of the best in Canada and in fact many people would say the best in the world. One of the things that has made it very strong and continues to make it strong is the strong partnership between government and industry. The amendments in the bill that we have before us today grew out of discussions and consultations with key industry and labour organizations. It has the very broad support of these organizations, which represent hundreds and in some cases thousands of workers and employers in the province of Alberta. These discussions and these consultations have been ongoing since 1996, and the work that has culminated in this bill seeks to make the system more responsive to both employees and employers and, indeed, to the important subjects in this, the apprentices themselves.

Why the amendments in this bill, and what do they contain? The board certainly recognized that there were some specific problems being experienced with the description of some trades and is working with the provincial apprenticeship committees to look for solutions. These amendments will allow the board to address some of these problems. Amending the act will provide for the removal of program and process detail from regulation. This means that program standards will continue to reflect the needs and high standards of industry in Alberta, but the process will be less cumbersome.

We're also seeking to amend the act to provide for a competency-based certification program for designated occupations which brings the focus on individuals' competencies rather than on how these competencies were gained or acquired. This allows the board to be far more responsive to industries' needs, and it's consistent with Alberta's current labour market practices and workforce development strategies.

The bill also contains amendments that will strengthen local and provincial apprenticeship committees, the backbone of Alberta's apprenticeship and industry training system, and provides the board the authority to establish or recognize industry advisory committees in addition to local and provincial apprenticeship committees.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would just say to hon. members that these amendments, as I have indicated, have the broad support of industry and employers and apprentices, I believe, in the province. These amendments will ensure that we continue to have industry as a strong partner, a strong player in Alberta's apprenticeship and industry training system, the best in Canada. I would on behalf of my colleague ask all members to support Bill 23, as it will further improve our apprenticeship system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In rising this afternoon to enter the debate on Bill 23, I would like to thank the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations for her remarks.

I certainly believe that in this province we are educating some of the finest tradespeople in the world. Albertans are working across this globe as we speak. Many of them are involved in trade-related work, not only as tradespeople but as supervisors. This in itself is a testament to our past apprenticeship programs.

Now, I can understand that there has been a lot of consultation involved in the drafting of this legislation. We're going back a few years now; 1996 I believe is when the first consultation started, and

it certainly continued with the discussion paper in January of 1998. The hon. minister and his staff I believe are to be congratulated for this consultation process. In my duty as a critic I circulated this bill, Bill 23, some time ago to various stakeholders across the province. They have reported back to me, some sooner than later, and they have mentioned to me the fine job that was done by the minister and officials from his department in discussing the bill, but I know there need to be changes.

I said earlier that I would be supportive of this legislation, but last week I had the opportunity to have extensive consultations with some individuals, and they brought some concerns forward regarding this bill which I hope are discussed at length in the debate on Bill 23. Perhaps by the time third reading comes around, I will be in full support of Bill 23.

This whole idea, Mr. Speaker, of implementing changes to the operation of the apprenticeship and industry training system in Alberta to make it more responsive to employers, employees, and apprentices is noted. The proposed changes redefine the governance provisions of the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board. As the hon. minister said earlier, the entrance requirements for trades in some cases are going to be removed from regulation, and they're going to be added to the legislation. There are going to be changes made to competency testing, and I don't have any problem with this. Whether a baker learns to bake bread on the job and can pass the test that is provided by the government or whether the baker goes to, say, NAIT or to SAIT or some other recognized school, there are different streams of learning for everyone.

There are other members in this House, I for one, who were disappointed whenever there was a restriction or a limitation put on individuals who had life skills and life training who could challenge an exam. I was delighted to see the government bring that back, but I was not satisfied that in some cases it was a \$450 fee to write this exam if people are trying to improve themselves as a result of passing this test and earn a larger income. I think that was a good idea, but the high fee I was concerned about.

Now, we think of trades in this province, and there's quite a list of trades. Not everyone realizes that there are different kinds of trades. There are designated trades, and there are occupations. There is optional certification of trades, and there is compulsory certification of trades. Now, a cabinetmaker is an optional trade. Perhaps some people would call the Premier of Alberta a cabinetmaker. It could be.

We could look at compulsory certification trades. There's one that comes to mind of a great deal of interest to me, and that's welders. The welding trade is a compulsory trade. You can get a red seal from this province and you can practise this trade, after you test, in other provinces, in other countries. As industry changes and we become more sophisticated in our production of metals and their alloys, welding then becomes much more of an art. We're not just welding in a flat position. We may be welding in a tight spot; we may be welding overhead. You know, there are many, many, many different types of welders.

4:40

Now, a few of us say to ourselves: well, yes, this is true, but the province seems to be functioning very well; welders are doing a very good job in this province. But I would like to note that the Provincial Court of Alberta heard a case between the Crown and Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd. In October of 1996 near Swan Hills there was a significant release into the environment of a substance that causes adverse effects on humans and on wildlife. This release came from the flue gas stack off the transformer furnace at the Swan Hills waste treatment plant. The substances released included PCBs,

dioxins, and furans, and these substances are some of the most toxic known to mankind.

I heard an hon. member across the way say: what does this have to do with Bill 23? Well, the answer is quite simple. When the company, Chem-Security, made changes or repairs to the transformer furnace to repair the flue gas duct, a steel plate, a stainless steel plate in this case, was welded onto the furnace shell to refit the flue gas ducting. This steel plate developed holes in the welds around it, the plate failed, and this caused the PCBs, the dioxins, and the furans to escape, via the flue gas duct, into the surrounding environment, into the atmosphere.

Four mistakes occurred on the part of Chem-Security, and this is where having competent tradespeople comes into play. The first mistake was that there was no insulation placed over the steel plate to protect it from high temperatures. Now, I'm going to get into this in a minute in the Alberta welding regulations, but that was the first mistake.

The second mistake related to the lack of fusion on some of the welds. Lack of fusion, Mr. Speaker, occurs when the welding electrode melts but does not stick to the parent metal, or in this case the plate that it was intended to stick to.

The third mistake was weld cracking. Weld cracking can occur in certain grades of stainless steel as the weld cools and solidifies.

The fourth mistake was stress rupture or creep mechanism, as it's called in the trade. Stress rupture is a failure that occurs when materials are held under stress for a length of time at high temperature.

These mistakes resulted in the release of toxins and other poisons, and I have to remind hon. members of the cleanup that's going to go on up there someday in Swan Hills. As I understand it, incredibly the province is going to pick up the tab.

So we had faulty welding. We're talking about changes in Bill 23 here. We're talking about changes that, well, seem to be above-board, were done under a great deal of consultation, and they were. There are some very, very good aspects to this bill, but I'm thinking to myself: hold on here a minute. The welding repairs were certainly not done properly. Who did these repairs? Were the welders qualified? Who supervised them? Who tested them?

In Alberta regulation 135/94, or the Welder Trade Regulation as it's called, there are many tasks and activities and functions within the trade that occur "when practising or otherwise carrying out work in the trade." These are the words of the regulation, Mr. Speaker. One of these functions – and there are too many to list here – is "identifying metals and performing preparation and assembly tasks prior to welding." I'm thinking this wasn't done in Swan Hills, or we wouldn't have had this leak. Also, there's "sketching and interpreting blueprints." This was obviously not done, because if one could have a look at this blueprint, I'm sure it would say there that insulation goes on after all welding is complete. Or perhaps there's an inspection process, whether it be mag particle or whatever process would be used, to determine that there are no cracks in any of this welding.

We have to ask ourselves: were the workers doing repair work in Swan Hills capable of performing these functions? Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, these concerns are going to go unanswered as we debate Bill 23. It has been recognized that there was a failure to properly supervise and inspect the work. Not only was the welding faulty; the inspection process, as I said, was as well. Needless to say, my confidence in the repair job is not that great. This accident demonstrates, I believe, not only to all hon. members of this House but to all Albertans – particularly those many thousands and thousands of Albertans, as the hon. member has said, who are employed in the trades in this province – how important this bill is to their livelihood.

We will have a discussion here on this bill. Hopefully it will be a lively discussion, but we will determine whether this bill actually improves the delivery of apprenticeship programs in this province, because they have to remain sound. Now, this is why Bill 23, Mr. Speaker, is vital for the smooth operation of this province's economy, attracting and training apprenticeships in all trades and occupations, but also in supplying a skilled, competent workforce for the growing industrial base of this province.

Whenever we're discussing this bill and we see just what can go wrong in the welding trade, we should try to correct it, and would we be able to correct it with this bill? Unfortunately, we cannot even get to the bottom of this problem, because the judge in this case, Judge E.J. Walter, directed that all exhibits attached to this hearing be held with no access to the public, and at a date to be determined later, there would be a discussion or the whole issue of public access with respect to exhibits would be dealt with. Now, this is an unfortunate event, because as a result of this a person can't get a look at this blueprint to see what welding specs were required, what sort of training the welders were to have, what sort of inspection process was to be used. All these things are very necessary to the conduction of a skilled occupation. If you're going to conduct yourself as a skilled worker in this province, these are part of your training, and they were overlooked in this situation.

I'm not convinced as I go through this bill – and I've read it several times – that this incident would not occur again. We look at the tragic explosion in Calgary last summer at Hub Oil. As I understand it, there was repair work going on there. Were the workers qualified? When we look at the details of this bill and we look at the exceptions to compulsory certification trades, welding is a compulsory certification trade. What sort of exceptions were going on up in Swan Hills? What exactly was going on up there, and how are we to find out? Whenever exhibits are sealed, we don't have the opportunity to pursue this. When we look at section 22.1, to follow after section 22, and we're going to have exceptions to compulsory certification of tradespersons, well, this is why I'm questioning the direction of this bill.

We can carry on and go a little further. After section 23, what is going to happen with apprenticeship programs in regards to technical programs and standards, the documentation of the programs or the examinations? I would appreciate answers from the government on this.

4:50

Now, some ironworkers – and ironworkers are a compulsory trade – have some concerns about the repealing clauses that with respect to compulsory certification of trades will allow, as I understand it and as they understand it, the establishment of criteria that will allow an optional certification of a portion of that trade. [interjection] An hon. member said: well, what exactly does that mean? As I understand it, as it was explained to me, I can perhaps take a group of individuals off the street and, in the ironworker trade, just have them doing bolt up, assembling large components of, say, a steel bridge. All they would do is install bolts and tighten them up. Now, can we be confident in the structural integrity of the bridge after this would be done? I don't know. This is one example that has been given to me.

There are also the regulations in here. The Regulations Act is mentioned in here on several occasions, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has some observations on the use of the Regulations Act.

The hon. minister also said earlier in her remarks that there were other committees to be established, and I am questioning why these other committees are necessary in this act. Who are they going to

be? Why can't they work through the existing apprenticeship committees? Why can't they work within the existing structure? Why do we have to have other committees, and who are they going to report to? What is the reporting mechanism? Is this going to be done in secret? These are important questions.

The Regulations Act. Now, I found it here, Mr. Speaker, under the general responsibilities of the minister.

The Regulations Act does not apply in respect of any documentation prepared by or on behalf of the Minister relating to the carrying out of any functions [in this act].

Is this more secrecy in government? What happens? Do we certify a whole group as members or people who are qualified to work in a compulsory trade? Yet we're going to keep that information, because of this, from other industrial sectors.

There are lots and lots of questions that I have, and hopefully, as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, by the time third reading comes around for this bill, I will be able to support it. Maybe my questions will be answered by the minister who introduced this bill or by other members, because certainly there are people who have familiarity with the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity to join in the debate on second reading of Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000. I will admit up front that my qualifications as a tradesperson are limited, but I think I can claim some genetic connection in that most of the other members of my family are involved in the trades, and I'm very proud of that. My father held five different tickets as a journeyman, both of my brothers are journeymen ironworkers, and another whole branch of the family are also involved in the ironworking union.

MR. MacDONALD: What trade certificates did your father hold?

MS BLAKEMAN: I'll check. I'll get back to you and list them and read them into the record, for the benefit of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Therefore, I take an interest in any legislation that is going to be amending and hopefully improving apprenticeship and industry training. I think there's a very large safety aspect that goes along with this that has to be used as a screen as we examine this or as a filter as we examine any changes that are being contemplated in this area, and that screen you have to use twice.

The first screen is about the health and safety of the worker. You know, in the trades they're working with heavy equipment. You can be working with substances that could be dangerous or toxic. You're working with, in some cases, building material which, if it falls or is installed improperly, can cause injury to the worker, and these injuries are lifelong. In many cases that's the end of their working career for a worker, and then we have them dealing with the Workers' Compensation Board, which, as a number of members in this Assembly have brought up, is a whole other kettle of fish. To me the important part of this legislation and other pieces of legislation like it is: is this going to uphold and secure health and safety for the worker?

The second filter that needs to be used around this is the health and safety of the public. It is equally important, and it is the second filter or screen that needs to be used when we look at any possible changes to this act. We are talking about things like bridges, which

can be a fairly minor bridge, but they can be fairly major. I mean, look at the High Level bridge in Edmonton. I for one want to know that every single bolt that's in that bridge is in there well and securely, that there is all of the necessary evaluation that needs to be done as to the qualifications of the person installing every bolt and nut and that that person has been supervised, and that all other technical requirements are being met there, because an industrial accident doesn't hurt just one person. It hurts many, many people, perhaps even thousands.

Just briefly, I'm thinking of that suspended bridge that was in a Hilton or a Hyatt or something in the States, and they were having a tea dance. It collapsed and came down on all of these people that were in the main rotunda of this hotel, and that was a structural problem. So we do have to consider the health and safety of the general population as a result of the actual building that's being used. Again, we're using building material which can be injurious to people, and this stuff is tricky to work with. I'm putting that forward at the beginning of my remarks to give a context for some of my concerns and questions that I'm raising in discussion on this bill.

I have a concern, and I'm looking to the sponsor of the bill or to others that might wish to address it. What I am reading in here – and I'm happy to be corrected on this, so I do invite debate from the members opposite. I am reading in here that there is a movement or an indication of a movement towards a de-skilling of the trade professions that are contemplated under this bill. I want to be sure about that, because I have talked about these health and safety issues, and on those two levels, both for the worker and for the general public, I think we all want to be assured that everything that is possible to be done is being done here.

There are some interesting complexities involved here, because the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had mentioned that there are different streams of learning. Indeed I'm a big proponent of that, and here are a couple of examples.

5:00

When we were looking at making the occupation of midwifery legal, a recognized profession here in Alberta, it was important to me at the time to work along with those that were putting this into place, to make sure that there were a number of different streams by which someone could approach this profession, that it could be based on experience, tested experience but on experience. It could also be based on a university degree and sort of book learning or some combination of the two in order to achieve certification here.

I'm not going to say that every single person has to come through some sort of postsecondary education to achieve this, and indeed part of the long and honourable history of apprenticeship into the trades is that there isn't a postsecondary educational component to it. It has been apprenticeship. You go on the job. You work with a journeyman, and you learn the job from someone that knows it and with careful supervision. It is that time served and the actual hands-on experience of doing it that allows you to achieve that journeyman status. I'm looking for the reassurance around the de-skilling, but I'm also looking for what else is being contemplated here.

Now, the minister that introduced this bill talked about making it less cumbersome and alleviating some of the problems that have arisen in this bill. I'd like, please, to get an elucidation of what exactly were the problems that have been identified in this system. I'm struggling with this bill because there's a lot of vagueness in it, and I'm trying to figure out exactly what's being contemplated here. As a member of this Assembly I should be able to figure this out as well. So I'm looking for the specifics of what was it that was being

considered problematic in the existing legislation. What was it exactly that was being considered cumbersome in the existing legislation? So I look forward to the minister or the minister's designate being able to respond and detail the answer to that question.

The minister also spoke about this being a move to testing or certifying individual competence rather than how that competency was obtained. I've already talked about different streams, different ways to approach a level of competency, but I'm looking for specifically what's being addressed in this bill.

The other reason for my coming up to looking for why this bill is being changed is I'm wondering if there has been a gender analysis done on this. I'm interested in whether this is being contemplated with both eyes open to encouraging more women to enter the trades.

It was interesting. The other day I was at the annual general meeting for the YWCA. One of their main accomplishments has been a program in which the YWCA here in Edmonton had hired a journeyman carpenter who was a woman. She was training a number of other women to learn that trade of carpentry, and the number of successes they were able to detail for us at this annual general meeting as a result of initiating this program and having this one female journeyman carpenter involved in and running this program – I think the trades are a real avenue for a lot of women, and it's something that women are interested in, but it sure hasn't been an easy field to get into.

I'm thinking back to some of the restrictions that were in place that we have slowly discovered over the years weren't really about health and safety. It was about getting a certain kind of person into the job and precluding other kinds of people from the job. The one that springs to mind very quickly was that there used to be a height requirement for transit drivers. You know, did you really have to be more than six feet tall to drive that bus? No, you didn't. You had to have a certain amount of strength and agility and good eye/hand co-ordination and a number of other things, but the height requirement was not necessary. You could be much shorter than six feet and still hit the pedals and properly manage to drive that bus. So that requirement of six feet was not a fair one, and when it was removed, we ended up with a number of females qualifying for this.

So when I look at the principles, which, as I say, are vague, that are I think being set out in this Bill 23, I want to know whether there has been consideration here for inclusion or encouragement of women into these sectors. I've brought this up a number of times in budget debates and in other areas, asking what specifically this government is doing for women, and I'm told: oh, lots of stuff, lots of stuff. But then when I say: "I want to see it specifically. What exactly is the program? What exactly has been done here?" "Ah, well, hmm, ah." There's no specific answer from that. So here's an opportunity for the government to truly shine and stand up and tell us exactly why they have done this, and boy, I'd sure like to hear that something was going to be done to encourage more women into the trades. It's a great work opportunity, and if the women are qualified and if they can do the job properly – and I'm being clear here. I'm expecting that there would be no arbitrary and unreasonable barriers to that, but if they're qualified to it, boy, they should be doing it.

One of the other things that has concerned me aside from the de-skilling – when I see words like competency-based training, the red flags always go up. But as I say, I can think of other examples where that might be quite a reasonable and good idea. So I'm really looking for the detail on this.

The second thing I'm looking for is about access to information. It strikes me, as I've gone through this bill, that there's a lot of sort of: well, it'll be published in some magazine. But it's a running

theme with me, and I've often brought it up here, and I think it applies to this bill as well. This government can make it very difficult for people to access information on what legislation and particularly what regulations exist and particularly where there have been changes in regulations. The Regulations Act turns up over and over again in different clauses in this bill. How is someone, a tradesperson or someone considering a career in the trades, supposed to know about this? How are they supposed to figure it out? How are they supposed to know that there's been a change in this?

I have a real concern that there is a problem with access to information. Both now and particularly if this act passes into law, there would be a further problem with access to information. So I'm inviting members of the government to prove me wrong on that one, to detail how people are supposed to find out what's going on here, because that is not clear to me, and it should be clear to me. I'm an intelligent person with a university education. I'm a member of this Assembly. This should be clear to me when I read this legislation. There has been a commitment from this government to write plain language legislation and regulations, and this is striking me as very vague.

5:10

The third concern I'd like to raise as we consider Bill 23 in principle in second reading is the exceptions to the compulsory certification trades that are being raised. I won't go into detail here in a clause-by-clause consideration, because that of course is what we do in Committee of the Whole, but I get concerned when we start talking about exceptions. If we have a lot of exceptions to the rule, then I start saying: well, then what good was the main rule in the first place? Maybe that's what we should be looking at. So I want to know why that is happening.

That probably feeds back to the original question I was asking. What exactly are the problems? Could those be detailed? What exactly in this process is so cumbersome? But, boy, exceptions I think can be really problematic, because to me that starts signaling that there is more of a concern with the overriding principle or the guiding rules that one is working with.

So those were really the three sections that I wanted to raise: the de-skilling, the access to information, and the exceptions that are being put out. Those are the questions that I'm putting forward in second reading, and I do look forward to having a response from the government that would give me more information and answer the questions that I've put forward.

Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to participate in this debate, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests
(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you a visiting MLA from the Saskatchewan Party who I've gotten to know over the last two years. Her name is Arlene Jule, and she was instrumental in bringing forward the child prostitution legislation in Saskatchewan. She's here watching the proceedings, and I'd ask her to rise and receive a warm welcome from the Assembly.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

Bill 23
Apprenticeship and Industry Training
Amendment Act, 2000
(continued)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today to speak on Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000. I kind of look at this one with a little bit of interest and a lot of back history, because looking at some of the designated trades and occupations, I realize from my years of managing and running different companies and working for companies like Krupp industries, Great West Steel, Edmonton Wire, Metal Fab, and a number of other companies that a lot of these trades fit under what I used to supervise.

As I was listening to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations speak on this, she talked about having the best apprenticeship system there is. Well, I really believe that we still have a very good system, but we did have the best. We had fantastic trainers, educators that came over from Europe in the early 1950s and then again in the 1970s. We had a very, very good program.

I trained in some welding shops under some fantastic tradespeople. By any comparison, whether they were German, Dutch, Czechoslovakian, they were true tradespeople. They came over in the 1950s and were called displaced people. They arrived on the trains in Edmonton and were met by owners of companies like Edmonton Iron & Wire. A gentleman called Lou Gaul could speak seven different languages, and he met them and brought them to work for him. I went to work for him in the late 1960s and worked for a number of years before going back to NAIT to take drafting and then metallurgy and so on. So some of this all fits into place.

I have had a recognition of some failures that we did see in the early 1990s, and some of these things are coming back. We talked earlier about Motion 509 and what happened with the dropping of licence plates in the early 1990s. We see what happened to health. We were all narrowly focused on the fact that we had to control our expenditures.

We also went through the 1980s, and I got crippled just like anybody else in the 1980s with the up and down of the economy, running sheet metal companies, having my own, and watching as the industry fell when the price of oil fell and whatever. In the mid-1990s, prior to having my arm twisted and coming into this particular job, I actually had a number of sheet metal people working for me, plumbers, pipe fitters, and so on. I had trouble hiring people. I interviewed a lot of people before I brought them in to work for us, because, number one, you have to have your best people out there. Nothing is worse than sending somebody else back out to take care of a job that wasn't done properly.

You know, I want to point out a few things. As I talk to a lot of friends that are still in the steel industry and so on, we presently have a shortage of tradespeople in this province, a huge shortage. With all the work going on in Fort McMurray, all the steel fabricating shops where I'm still friends with the owners and so on are talking about how they're backlogged to the point where we were in the 1970s.

My job between '76 and late '78 was going throughout Canada inspecting welding shops, fabricating shops that could do work for us. I worked for Krupp, the largest steel fabricating shop in western Canada. In Alberta we were so backlogged with work that we couldn't even begin to do it here. We had to go to Montreal,

Toronto, Vancouver, Winnipeg, all across. So I would go out and inspect the work that was happening.

After already being successful in quoting for the job in this province – I was in charge of a number of projects, Dow Chemical, Joffre. We had to meet deadlines, and we had to meet them at any point, so people did the fabricating for us. A lot of work came out of Toronto, where I got lots of work galvanized and shipped over. We did have the problems with CN strikes in those days and having to panic at the last minute and get work done on overtime and so on.

We're looking at a major problem of shortage of tradespeople right now. I do know that a number of job finders are out in Europe looking for tradespeople, trying to convince them to come to Alberta, the land of plenty, the land of lots of work right now, and hopefully they're successful. I believe that what is really at fault is the fact that we didn't recognize some of the problems that we were going to hit. If you always ride and budget and plan or not plan on the bad times – different times from 1982. Then '85 was a boom time, '88 was the low time, and in 1992 it started to climb again. Ups and downs. We have to really emphasize that we messed up on how our apprenticeship system went in the early and mid 1990s. Sure it was recognized by 1996, and the consultation started in 1996.

As I read it, several recommendations have been made to improve the apprenticeship and industry training system for employers, employees, and apprentices. Mr. Speaker, that is fine and dandy, but I really hope that we are going to work diligently and recognize how important tradespeople are to us in this province.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar brought up the different types of welding. Well, in welding, anywhere from the welders to B pressure to MIG, overhead bridges, stainless steel – every one of these people is under a red seal type of item. Their certification is compulsory, and they have to go beyond that to be able to challenge, to move on. Some people, because of actually being much better in the trade – I mean, it's like any other job, whether it's accountants, lawyers, or whatever. Those that are very competent move ahead a lot faster, and we cannot hold these people up. We have to be able to move them ahead.

5:20

You know, education in this province has to be recognized and pushed forward, so I am commending and supporting this bill but with some questions that we do have presently. I'm reading from a letter that the International Union of Operating Engineers, local 955, 955B, and 955C, wrote to us.

The fear is that competency based training will find its way into the apprenticeship trades. While there are some positives to competency training, it can, through abuse, lead to the breaking down of high standards that exist at present.

You know, there are some points to that.

Some form of qualifier, for example, written in the Act or in the Regulations that Level Three does not do Level Four work. In other words, we need protection of some sort that protects the Journeyman.

Then I look at different points of interest. Some of these stakeholders are concerned that regulations to be drafted that will tighten up the requirement of new competency training will not allow a high enough standard to be kept. It is absolutely essential that there are uniform standards to protect the professional reputation of current journeymen.

Listening to the minister and what was mentioned to us today, there has been broad support from the industry. Well, the broad support from the industry is in the fact that they didn't want the changes in the first place, and now that they're in desperate need to get trained people, they are going to be totally behind this. And, you know, let's commend the Ministry of Learning that something has

been recognized and that where we've been sitting for the last few years, in a void, has maybe been overcome, and we can move forward.

In phase 1 in the consultation back in October of 1997 six new actions in apprenticeship and industry training were proposed. More options for training: that was to open it up more and let a lot of the tradespeople have easier access to being trained.

Improved financial support for apprenticeship: a major item that was hurting bringing people into the apprenticeship system was when the financial support was actually cut. Who was going to actually hire somebody and then try to force them into getting the first year, second year, and so on apprenticeship, whether it's sheet metal, welding, and so on, if they're not getting some support? A lot of these individuals are young, married, supporting a family, and they just wouldn't leave. You know, if you tried to force them into the fact that you'd be setting them up to go to NAIT the next spring to take their six-week course, boy, you should have heard the excuses when that time came, whether they could afford or could not afford to be there.

Another item was increased promotion of ways to start an apprenticeship and recognizing prior learning. This is a case that we mentioned earlier on, and this is around life challenges. I believe that there are a lot of people who can jump the queue and actually do move ahead on this particular item.

Another item: more training opportunities for youth. Well, we have a case that I know of in my end of town. M.E. LaZerte high school for years was known as a high trades training program, and then with parents pushing to have more IB programs and so on, what happened in that particular school was the actual trades end of it got hurt. When a photography teacher is teaching welding and sheet metal, I do have my concerns with our public education system.

There are a lot of kids in my end of town whose parents are the blue-collar workers. There are the plumbers, welders, and that, and some of these young people are just not geared toward being university students or going into NAIT, especially with the requirements that they have. So we have to have more opportunities for youth whose abilities are more into the trades. It doesn't have to be in the red seal programs. There are lots of them that are optional. A lot of them are compulsory but do not have the red seals that young people can actually go into it. We should be looking at where we're going in the future.

Another item that I notice in here is increased options for certification of workers. Well, that is when you start getting the dual system, where you're getting ironworkers as well as boilermakers. Depending on the time, I've seen different changes in the economy in Alberta. I know I've run crews of 50 ironworkers, and all of a sudden that job is finished, and there is nothing. They go back onto the list, and they wait, and they wait. Then all of a sudden there's a boom in Fort McMurray, a shutdown in Fort McMurray, then they're up there.

Well, I really think that some of the proposals out of 1997 – and

this is going to be brought forward: increased options for certifications for workers. Some of these tradespeople are very, very capable of jumping from millwright to ironworker to boilermaker to whatever, and a lot of them have got the training.

Then I look at another item: strengthen industry advisory committee network. Well, I think this is what the whole bill is about. I really believe that we've got into a position where the industry says: well, we have to get with it, or the cost of not having these tradespeople with the booms that are happening right now – not only Fort McMurray, but we have the Fort Saskatchewan area, where Shell is going to be building. Within the next year in this immediate area I do know that all my friends who have steel companies are already booked and have enough work to go for the next six or eight months. So this is where the free market comes in. There will be more welding shops, but I've also seen a lot of them go under over the last few years.

In 1998 discussions were brought around asking for feedback from Albertans on proposals about a regulatory framework on apprenticeship and industry training and their viewpoints on proposed criteria for design of trades and challenges to designated occupations. As I read through this, there are some awfully good items that actually came out of this one too. Apprenticeship wages will remain in regulation unless changed or removed by the board in consultation with the application of the provincial apprenticeship committee. Now, we do know that there's been a complete sort of freeze on most increases in salaries over the last number of years. This is the result of the low points of our economy and the bust of our booms, but at the same time as we're looking at the peaks, I hope most of the people do realize that there will be more labour problems due to the fact that we're back into the other system.

Apprenticeship boards will ask the provincial apprenticeship committees to examine the need to regulate apprentice wage percentages in their particular trade if wage percentages pose a problem for certain sectors in the industry. We do know that that's going to be a major talk.

Results of this 1998 study: journeyman/apprentice ratios will remain in regulation; the norm will continue to be one journeyman to one apprentice. I hope that that actually does come about, because for an apprentice to have a journeyman that you can actually learn under in a shop, especially when you're getting up into pressure welding and so on – you actually have to have somebody with you all the time. It's something that was always compulsory, and I hope it comes back.

Some of the respondents to the consultation suggested that the ratios do not guarantee suitable supervision.

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member. The Assembly now stands adjourned until 8 o'clock this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 2, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/05/02

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 18

Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

[Adjourned debate May 1: Mr. Magnus]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to speak to Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. I'd start off by saying that every year I typically do an annual report to constituents, and just a few weeks ago I'd sent out about 25,000 copies of this annual report to the residents who live in downtown Calgary. What typically happens is that I highlight some of the legislation being debated and encourage feedback either directly or through the web site at www.garydickson.ab.ca. It's useful because then when I roll into this place to speak to a bill such as Bill 18, the Personal Income Tax Act, you have a sense of at least what some of your constituents are feeling, thinking, believing with respect to that legislation. What I wanted to do was share some of that feedback that I have received with respect to Bill 18.

Now, I'd also asked a series of questions, and I do this every year. It's fascinating because constituents respond. They e-mail and fax and phone. Sometimes they come into the office. They'll tear off part of the annual report and fill it in with some comments, Madam Speaker, in terms of the things they thought were particularly important.

I think I might stop and make the general observation that, you know, in its own way Bill 18 has as much public interest and concern as we've seen registered around Bill 11.

MR. DUNFORD: Crank it up.

MR. DICKSON: I'm receiving some terrific encouragement from the Member for Lethbridge-*West*. He encourages me to "crank it up," Madam Speaker. I was going to make this a very low-key presentation, and in fact I was planning on trying to strip this commentary of as much hyperbole as I can possibly shed and focus on the concerns of residents in Calgary-*Buffalo*. I'm going to continue to do that. As much as I'm encouraged by the Member for Lethbridge-*West* to take off, I'm going to try and focus on those concerns I've heard.

The concerns I've heard from residents in Calgary-*Buffalo* that have chosen to respond are, as is always the case, a variety of perspectives and opinions, but those who have chosen to respond on the flat tax have said, if not unanimously at least in overwhelming numbers, Madam Speaker, that they are very much concerned with the notion of a flat tax. They understand – and this is what they tell me – that what you're doing is shifting the tax burden to lower income Albertans. There are some people at the very bottom end in terms of income who arguably are going to see an increased exemption and some benefit, and that's true. I think of all those middle-income Albertans who stand to get some tax relief, but the tax relief is a fraction of what it would be for somebody in a higher income bracket.

Madam Speaker, I regret that I don't have with me – I'll find it for later debate on this bill – the actual text of the analysis I did for constituents. I went through and said, given different incomes, what your tax saving would be. I think people have responded in a very strong way by saying that with this single-tax system, the flat-tax system, they see there's something about it that is radically different from the system of taxation we've understood in this country. They understand that sometimes in the rush to adopt things that seem to be simpler and in the rush to adopt things that just seem to be less complicated, you sometimes work substantial injustices to significant groups of citizens, and that clearly will be the case, in my opinion, with Bill 18 if it proceeds unchanged.

The bill also tells us a couple of other things. Maybe I'll make this observation now because we are dealing with the principle of the bill and so many of my concerns are going to relate to some of the minutiae and some of the specific sections and subsections in the act. What I'd like to do is recognize that in Bill 18 what we're doing in effect is saying to an awful lot of Albertans, a lot of middle-income Albertans, that you haven't been paying a big enough share, that those wealthy entrepreneurs, the people who are making incomes in excess of \$150,000, need a break, that they've just been carrying too much of the burden. Now, I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but I think this government spends too much time worrying about people who have incomes close to and exceeding \$200,000 a year and far too little time worrying about those Albertans that are managing on incomes somewhere between \$30,000 and \$70,000 a year in terms of family income. [interjections]

Madam Speaker, I see there are some government members that are offering some advice from their seats. I'm always interested in learning more about the machinations of the government caucus in terms of how they review these bills. All I'm left with is the bill that's produced from this process at the end, and when I have questions about it, some of those questions are about the process. You start wondering who had input into this. I mean, who are you listening to? It's a lot like Bill 11. You see a bill that is not going to advantage the vast number of Albertans, and you say: why is this bill coming forward? You say to the government: who are you listening to; who's driving the agenda? There's a suspicion that the same people that would drive the agenda on Bill 11 are now apparently working hard behind the scenes to promote Bill 18, this new flat-tax regime. So I've got those kinds of initial concerns in terms of reviewing this.

What's going to happen is that in the 2000 tax year, under the federal government tax plan – and this is the other thing. I might just digress and say that it appears the former Provincial Treasurer was in such a rush to launch his leadership campaign for the alternative, he moved heaven and earth to be able to move up the date for the provincial budget. Normally the provincial budget comes about two, three weeks after the throne speech, but you'll remember that just a week after the throne speech we had the budget speech. Many of us asked: why is that? What seems apparent, I think, to most of us is that it was a chance for the Provincial Treasurer at that time to show that he'd stolen the march on Ottawa.

Of course, what happened was that as a result of the changes announced in the federal budget, we then discovered that Albertans are having to pay more. What we find out is that the government in its haste and its absolute fixation with trying to score another cheap headline compromised the interests of Albertans, just as they have done on Bill 11. In the 2000 tax year, under the federal government tax plan the middle-income tax bracket will be reduced from 26 to 40 percent effective July 1, 2000. There will be an increase in the threshold of middle- and high-income tax brackets to \$30,000 and \$60,900 respectively, and the basic and spousal exemptions will

increase to \$7,231 and \$6,140 respectively. Now, the impact of those tax measures in Alberta is going to be some \$66 million, and that is just in the 2000 tax year.

8:10

What we find is that Alberta taxpayers below \$70,000 in taxable income will be paying more in provincial personal income taxes under an 11 percent single rate in the 2000 tax year and subsequent tax years than they would under the existing tax system. Madam Speaker, this surely represents some kind of new height in audacity. Our provincial government comes forward and tries to present Albertans with a present – and that's the way they couch it and package it – which means that we would pay more income tax and we will pay more income tax than we would have before Bill 18 came along.

Now, one can only say – and we're getting some terrific body language from the Member for St. Albert, who appears to be signaling her disagreement. Well, I hope she's going to stand up and explain to me how the confluence of the federal budget passed in the last year and Bill 18 will not represent an increase in tax. If that can be shown, let's demonstrate it. Let her stand up after I sit down. She can take us through and explain to us how this is not going to cost Albertans more. I put my calculations on the record, and I'm going to specifically challenge that Member for St. Albert to tell me where she parts company with my analysis and how she comes to any different conclusion. I'm open to learn that, and I'm looking forward to seeing it.

On March 14, 2000, we heard the Provincial Treasurer say: well, maybe we'll then reduce the 11 percent single rate and raise exemption levels in order to flow through federal government tax measures. We might ask: why would we expect that this government will be any more competent in terms of making that adjustment than they were in bringing in the bill in the first place? You know, this is pretty serious stuff when you start changing your tax system. I think it's completely unacceptable that the Provincial Treasurer would not have foreseen how much smarter it would have been to wait and see what was in the federal budget before charging ahead with his flat-tax proposal. [interjections]

The Member for Calgary-Egmont, who seems to profess some expertise in terms of tax law, and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek are offering lots of advice, the two of them. They represent that corner in south Calgary, and there are lots of high-income earners in those areas. In Calgary-Fish Creek you can drive around and see those big, fancy homes. In Calgary-Egmont there are some lovely single-family residential homes. It may be that the constituents in Calgary-Egmont and Calgary-Fish Creek don't care about those people whose incomes are less than \$70,000, whose taxes are going to go up. It may be that that's the position they take, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Calgary-Egmont on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. HERARD: Madam Speaker, section 23. The hon. member is imputing motives to my constituents, and I think he should apologize.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order, Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: My response to the point of order is that it is contrary to the Standing Orders to impute motives to other members of the Assembly. I was doing no such thing, and in fact he sug-

gested that I was imputing motives to his constituents. Well, I'm not imputing motives other than the sense of desperation and fear they may experience in Calgary-Egmont and Calgary-Fish Creek when they understand what's coming forward in Bill 18.

If you want to make a ruling, those are my observations on the point of order, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me. Order please. Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I would ask that we do look at Bill 18 and try to discuss the overall principles of that bill, and let's not try tonight to be confrontational. I think you can make a point without being confrontational.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, can I propose a bargain? If the Member for Calgary-Egmont and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek will not offer commentary during the course of my presentation, I will be happy to follow the absolute guidance I get from the chair and stick on the bill. Without the provocation I'm happy to focus on those things.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It's fine to stand in this House and point fingers and name names, hon. member, but I think the chair sitting up here could say that we will not have anyone do that. There are people on both sides of the House with interjections and interferences. I'm not going to name names here, but it sort of goes back and forth. This isn't totally one sided.

The chair wants to be fair and equitable in all of this.

I would ask that if our remarks pertain to the bill we have in front of us, as you talked about earlier, the principles involved in Bill 18, without naming names, without naming constituencies, and talk about the overall principles of the bill, we'll all be better off.

Go ahead.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, thank you very much for your advice and direction. I take it that what you're not suggesting is that we can't talk about the people who are going to be directly affected. I want to be absolutely clear that what we're talking about is the people who are going to be affected by this bill.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, you're not arguing with the chair, are you?

MR. DICKSON: Of course, I'm not arguing, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Well, then let's get on with the principles of the bill.

MR. DICKSON: I want it to be absolutely clear in terms of what I'm attempting to do.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: So let's spend a moment identifying the major flaws with Bill 18. The first one is the fact that it compromises equity and compromises fairness. What happens is that the whole system is skewed to the top 4 percent of tax filers. The top 4 percent. I thought that at some point our responsibility was to make legislation that's going to advantage most Albertans, not the top 4 percent of tax filers. But doesn't that tell us something about the priority of this government? I mean, whether it's private health care for those that have deep pockets and can afford it or special tax relief for those people who are in the top 4 percent of tax filers – that's fine. That's a priority for this government. But for the vast majority

in this province, the three million people, it's an entirely different story. It's called not so benign neglect. [interjections]

Now, Madam Speaker, if you direct the minister to hold his remarks, I'd be happy to finish mine. You've enjoined me not to respond, so if the member opposite will keep his comments to himself, I'll try real hard to finish the observations I wanted to make.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose on a point of order.

MR. DICKSON: Certainly, Madam Speaker.

Point of Order Reflections on Nonmembers

MR. PHAM: Madam Speaker, I have been listening to the speech from my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo, and I would like to raise a point of order under *Beauchesne* 493(4): "The Speaker has cautioned Members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply."

Your statement earlier referring to the constituents of Calgary-Egmont who do not care about other people was very, very rude. I think you should make an apology to those people who are not in the House and cannot defend themselves.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I really don't think there is a point of order, because we did just deal with that a few minutes ago. May I suggest again that we look at the principles of the bill instead of identifying areas.

MR. DICKSON: Okay. Would it be okay if I refer to Calgarians, Madam Speaker? I represent some of those people too.

8:20

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: In terms of following through on the bill, we've identified that the priority of this government is the top 4 percent of tax filers. The people who receive much smaller cuts are those Albertans who are the 39 percent of middle-income tax filers who earn between \$30,000 and \$70,000. They pay over 45 percent of the personal income taxes in this province. They receive much smaller cuts as a percentage of the current personal income tax that's paid.

Now, the second problem we have with Bill 18 is a major one. This is sort of the end of the progressive tax system as we've known it in this province, because what it provides is that every single taxpayer in this province regardless of taxable income will pay the same 11 percent rate. Now, because 132,000 people at the bottom end are taken off the tax rolls and because there has been an increase in basic and spousal exemptions to some \$16,000 and change, the government would have us believe that this is a way of maintaining fairness. But that's deceitful, Madam Speaker. That's not the reality at all. That's not the reality. You know it and I know it, and I think every taxpayer in this province is soon going to discover that with the bill as we understand it.

The other concern is that the people who are really injured by this are what we'd call middle-class, middle-income Albertans. Those taxpayers who earn less than \$70,000 in taxable income would receive a larger provincial tax cut starting in 2001 if the federal tax measures flowed through than they will under the 11 percent single tax rate. That's a simple fact. It's a consequence of the skewing. The distribution of tax cuts under the 11 percent single rate is skewed towards taxpayers earning over \$100,000.

Now, the other major concern is the marginal rate increases for

low-income earners and middle-income earners. If we assume the elimination of the .5 percent flat tax rate on January 1, 2001, taxpayers in the 17 percent bracket – that's up to \$30,004 – and the 24 percent middle-income bracket – that's \$30,000 to \$60,000, plus or minus – would have a higher marginal rate under the 11 percent single rate than they would under a tax-on-tax system in the 2001 tax year.

My MLA is here. We have an accountant here in the front row on this side from Calgary-North West. Now, here's a guy who's spent his life as a respected member of the chartered accountant profession. I'm looking forward not only as a constituent but as a fellow Calgarian to hearing him develop his analysis. I'd like to attest his proposition.

MR. MELCHIN: I've already spoken.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I haven't been persuaded by anything he's said so far, but I wanted to specifically ask him – I'd like to test with him these assumptions that I'm making. I'd like to know with as much specificity as the Member for Calgary-North West can provide how his analysis would differ from mine, because I want to share that with my constituents.

I think the point to make is that if you'd had a tax reduction package of, say, \$877 million, if you were to do, independent of Bill 11, if we just pretended for a minute . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Bill 18.

MR. DICKSON: Bill 18. I'm sorry. They become interchangeable. I told you they're closely linked.

If you imagine just hypothetically that you had a tax-reduction package under the current progressive system of \$877 million . . .

I think I'm out of time, but I'll pick this up at committee stage. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very happy to be able to speak in principle to Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, the legislation before us this evening. In principle this is a very lousy bill. I have to say that to begin with. There are many reasons for that.

AN HON. MEMBER: Don't hold back. Tell us how you really feel.

MS CARLSON: Well, I could say a lot more than that but it would be unparliamentary, so I will stick with "lousy" for the time being.

Let me tell you what a number of people said about this bill last evening in front of the Legislature. I had the good fortune of speaking to about 2,000 of the people who were gathered outside the Legislature last evening to protest other forms of legislation before this Assembly. It was early in the evening. Later on in the evening about 4,000 people accumulated, but early in the evening I asked those 2,000 assembled people what they thought of the flat tax.

First of all I said: put your hand up if you support the flat tax, because that's what we're debating in the Legislature this evening. Madam Speaker, you'd be surprised to hear this but not a single hand went up, and of course the boos resounded throughout the crowd. Not a single hand went up. So then I said: who opposes this particular flat tax? Everybody's hand went up, the sirens went off, the horns honked. Resoundingly, to a person, there wasn't a single person out there who supported a flat tax. So, once again, the

government hasn't done their homework on legislation that they brought to the floor of this Assembly.

I think the government believed they could just slide one past the people of Alberta. Everybody's concentration is on Bill 11, because it's a hugely important bill that's going to change the nature of our province forever. This government thought they could just slide in Bill 18 when nobody was looking and pass legislation that also would be harmful to the people of this province.

Albertans are a lot smarter than that, and we know that because we've been talking to them, listening to them, seeing them gathered outside, reading the e-mails, meeting them throughout the province, and so on. People aren't fooled by what's going on here. They see that Bill 18 and Bill 11 are companion pieces of legislation that will establish precedents in this province that are harmful to most Albertans, in fact all but 4 percent of high-income earners that my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo referred to.

Definitely a flat tax differentiates between those who have in this province, those who are maintaining a middle-class life style, and those who have not. High-income earners pay proportionately less money with the flat tax. There is no way the facts can be argued on that point. We've had the odd chirping from across the way this evening on that, but I don't see anybody standing on their feet to defend the government's position and to explain how it could be anything else than this particular bill disproportionately benefiting a few people in this society and disproportionately harming the balance of them. That's what this bill does.

Madam Speaker, let's face it. The high-income earners, that 4 percent of people in this province, do not need any more breaks. They have the greatest flexibility in terms of tax planning. They just don't need another break there. They have all kinds of options in terms of how to defer income and do a variety of tax planning. Because they have the cash flow, they have the maximum tools available to them, not like middle-class taxpayers like me and most of my colleagues and most of the people in this province where it's a tough go these days. We don't need to pay any more tax. By the time we get finished with user fees, with school fees, with tuition fees, with all those other costs this government has downloaded on us since 1993, we can't afford to pay any more tax burden. It isn't reasonable for us to expect other people to not pay their fair share.

It isn't that Albertans aren't prepared to pay their fair share, because we are. We know what it's like. When we have extra money, Madam Speaker, we contribute that to a variety of charitable foundations, churches, nonprofits, all kinds of organizations. How do we pay that money? We do it according to the kind of income we're making, the excess disposable income we have. When we have more money, we pay more money. So those who earn more money should pay more money. They should pay their fair share of taxes in this province. We would do that if we were in those high-income brackets. We do that in a volunteer way now in charitable donations and other kinds of giving. We would do that if we were high-income earners. Why should we expect specific breaks for these people in this particular legislation? It is simply unfair.

It is unfair in a global context in terms of what's happening in this province too, Madam Speaker, and it impacts Albertans in the long term in a very, very negative fashion. Because the high-income earners won't be paying their fair share of the tax, in general we will have less tax revenue coming into the Alberta coffers. What does that look like? Less tax revenue coming from tax generated income. We are in a declining position for oil and gas revenues in this province. In spite of what the Minister of Resource Development will tell us every chance he gets, we do not have unlimited oil and gas reserves in this province, and best estimates are 10 years to 25

years in both oil and gas in terms of reserve possibilities. So we're going to have less income coming in through those areas.

8:30

This government, in spite of a 30-year attempt to do so, has not been able to sufficiently stimulate tertiary development in this province so that we have that kind of corporate taxable income coming in. They're still floundering. We're a resource-based economy still. They haven't been able to get it right no matter what they've done, so we don't have that kind of a tax base coming in.

Yes, we have more gambling revenue, Madam Speaker, but what does that mean? For every dollar that we collect in gambling revenue, we pay \$3 out in social costs, so that doesn't mean that there's a net benefit to the tax base of this province.

So we've got less personal tax coming in, less corporate tax coming in, less than what we could have had had we promoted development properly in this province, fewer tourism taxes and dollars coming into our economy because of the way this government has promoted oil and forestry development in the province. We are losing some of our best tourism resources, and we have the gambling revenue that's really sucking dollars out of the system, at a rate of 3 to 1.

So what does that look like long term? It means that this government is going to be in a position where they will be less able to fund basic services like health care and education. That's where we can see that Bill 18 is the companion bill to Bill 11, Madam Speaker, because this government is deliberately forcing a situation in this province where there is no option but to go to private health care and private education. There will not be the tax dollars to adequately fund a basic system. They are setting the stage now for private operators to be able to come in to skim off the cream of the profits in this province, not to the benefit of Albertans, not in terms of service providing, and not in terms of tax revenue, because in both of those areas, health care and education, the best possible service is provided when it's provided in a universal kind of system. We've seen that globally.

This government, in spite of all of the calls for documentation to be tabled in this Legislature to this day, to the date of closure, has been unable to put any proof on the table that in fact what they're proposing to do will be cost-effective or will provide better service. This won't happen. So why are they doing it?

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Ellerslie, the chair will remind you that we are in second reading of Bill 18, and I would ask that you debate the principles of Bill 18.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for that ruling, and definitely in principle these bills are linked because of the long-term effects they have on Albertans. But I will keep your ruling in mind and will explain it in more detail if it's escaping some of their attention spans.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: The fact is that what's happening in this province is not random. It is a deliberate attempt to establish a private system in many venues. If you have no tax base in the province, the only option for providing basic service is privatization, and this bill is a Treasury bill which impacts every single department in this government. Therefore, we can talk about every single department in this government when we're debating it.

It also affects every single person in this province. It is a punitive kind of bill. It will not receive support from us. It does not receive support from Albertans, and once again this government has called the situation wrong in terms of meeting the needs of Albertans. They are playing to a select few, that 4 percent who under this particular scheme will gain a tax benefit.

We say that is wrong, and we will stand for the people of the province who do not want this kind of legislation brought in, in spite of this government trying to divert our attention away by bringing in another major, horribly planned bill in terms of health care. In spite of that, we will fight this bill because it is wrong and it should not be passed.

It isn't even well thought out in terms of the consequences of the federal government's actions. The Provincial Treasurer was very keen to bring this bill in before we saw the federal budget. Why, Madam Speaker? Because for that very short period of time between the introduction of his bill and the introduction of the federal legislation, which he knew was coming, he could truthfully say to taxpayers that middle-income earners were going to receive a tax break. Because of the way the federal legislation came in, which is actually more beneficial than what this bill could have ever been, now that isn't the case. Now middle taxpayers are going to be paying a disproportionately high percentage of taxes. So he was right for about three days, Madam Speaker, but he knew very well that he was going to be wrong for the rest of the life of this bill. Yet he still brought it in.

Why, Madam Speaker? Because he wants to set up a climate for privatization within this province, and that is fundamentally wrong, and because it's fundamentally wrong in principle, I at this time would like to introduce an amendment to this particular bill, and I will have it circulated at this point.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Just wait a few minutes, hon. member, until the other members have them.

Okay. Edmonton-Ellerslie, go ahead.

MS CARLSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Here's what the amendment says: that the motion for second reading be amended by striking out all of the words after "That" and substituting the following:

Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly believes that as a result of the tax reduction measures announced in the 2000 federal budget, the bill would not ensure that all Alberta taxpayers receive a fair tax reduction.

Now, what could be a better amendment than that, Madam Speaker? In fact, all of my colleagues here have said that they support the amendment, and what that means is they'll all be able to speak to it too. So I'm looking forward to what they have to say to it.

I know that they have been out in their constituencies talking to people about the flat tax. See; they're all agreeing with that. I know in my constituency I have had a number of people come in and meet on this particular issue. It is a hot topic in the phone calls and at the doors, and people do not trust this government, that they will be seeing any kind of lowering of tax. I'm not surprised that they don't trust them, Madam Speaker. I don't trust them either, because I haven't seen legislation come through that actually supports what they say they're going to be doing. In fact, they fall short on all of the major pieces of legislation that I have seen in this Assembly since I have been here since 1993. So they're right to question it.

In that regard, it's very important that the amendment be brought in at this stage. This government needs to do what it always does

when it doesn't know what to do, and that's go out and talk to the people, Madam Speaker, be it roundtables or town hall meetings or whatever this government feels would be an effective process. They need to get out there and talk to Albertans and understand how strong the opposition is to a flat tax in this province, not by those few 4 percent who are going to achieve a great benefit through this particular legislation but by the middle-class taxpayers who bear the burden of taxation in this province and who have just had this burden increased by this government with this legislation.

Clearly, once again the government did not think through this process, and they need to do that. What we need to do is have this legislation tabled over the summer, let them get out there, talk to the people, find out what's wrong with it, and I'm sure at that point they're going to do the right thing and withdraw the bill, Madam Speaker, because that's what's required here.

We saw a similar circumstance like that happen last year with Bill 15, the Natural Heritage Act, where the government brought in a very badly flawed piece of legislation. We brought in an amendment like this and ultimately had the government stop discussion on the bill at that stage and put forward a number of meetings and focus groups over the summer, which the Member for Banff-Cochrane chaired and did actually a very good job at, and came back with revised legislation.

8:40

Now, unfortunately, it's hit a stumbling block in their own caucus because the Minister of Resource Development won't support the kinds of changes that need to be made to help protect the environment. However, that process worked quite well up to that point, Madam Speaker, and I'm suggesting a parallel kind of process to happen with this bill, that we not now read this bill a second time, as the amendment says, and that we see a process come forward where this government can get out from under the dome and actually take the time to listen, not just sit in front of the people of Alberta but listen to what they're saying, to assimilate that and to incorporate it into this particular legislation and come back in the fall when we're in our fall session and announce to us that they made a mistake. There's nothing wrong with doing that.

We know that the Premier used to be quite fond of saying that in this Legislature. He'd get up quite often and say: I've made a mistake, and we're going to change direction. On MLA pensions I remember very clearly that he stood up in the Legislature just before he went to the '93 election looking for some kind of a hook for that election, and he said: hey, we made a mistake; there shouldn't be any MLA pensions. He rescinded them. That actually got him elected in 1993, Madam Speaker, so he should remember how important the voice of the people of Alberta is. They want to be listened to. We know that. We're out there at the doors, and we're in the community halls, and we're talking to the people in the coffee shops. We know that this is a very flawed piece of legislation, that it unfairly burdens middle-class taxpayers and that people in this province want it gone. The vast majority of the people want it gone.

There are a couple of small portions of the bill that could be incorporated into new kinds of legislation, like increasing the personal exemptions. That is a good piece of the bill, and I would like to recognize that as a good piece, but it could easily be incorporated into other kinds of legislation. In fact, we would be happy to see that come through miscellaneous statutes with absolutely no debate on it, Madam Speaker, because that would be a good piece of legislation to see in this Assembly. But when you tie it into something that's absolutely abusive to the people of Alberta, like this particular bill, we are never going to support it. So for that reason I think it's very important that members on the opposite side

here review this amendment, that we see them speak to it. The Minister of Resource Development was very eager to get up a few minutes ago and make comments on my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo's comments.

MR. DICKSON: He was shouting from his chair.

MS CARLSON: He was shouting from his chair. He wasn't anxious to get up, but maybe he'd like to get up now. He did speak before on second reading, but I'm sure that he would like to explain to the people of Alberta . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: A point of order. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

**Point of Order
Questioning a Member**

MR. BOUTILIER: I would like to know if the hon. member would entertain a question on the point that she's raising.

MS CARLSON: No. I only have a couple of minutes of speaking time left.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: This is what I would like that particular member to do: get up and speak to this amendment. He can raise all his questions at that point. I will give the notes to one of my colleagues and answer all of his questions in detail, which that person can then read into the record. I challenge the Member for Fort McMurray to get up here and defend his government's legislation, which I know he doesn't like and can't defend. So he has the opportunity to ask his questions of me at that point in time, and I will undertake this evening, before this debate is over, to get back to him with full and detailed answers on this particular amendment. Let's see if he'll do that. He's quite happy to stand and ask a question. Let's see if he's prepared to enter into debate, because I don't think he is. I'm sure that the people of Alberta would like to know what it is that he has to say.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray has risen on a point of order.

**Point of Order
Questioning a Member**

MR. BOUTILIER: I wonder if she will entertain a question?

MS CARLSON: No. I said no for the second time.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Continue on, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Clearly he wasn't listening because I went on to explain how I would not use up my valuable speaking time, which is quickly running to a close, to answer his question but that I would undertake to answer those questions this evening in full detail. In fact, we could circulate those answers to anybody else who would also be interested in looking at them.

Clearly, the government didn't think through the process in this bill, and they need to be asking a lot of questions, Madam Speaker, and we are quite happy to provide the answers. In spite of the fact that they have massive research departments and a lot of resources at their fingertips to do the in-depth kind of study that's required for

this piece of legislation, they didn't do it. On our very limited budget, which consists primarily of the ability to listen to Albertans, we are quite happy to answer their questions on any particular point they raise, including this particular amendment and including this particular regressive bill, at any point in time.

MR. DICKSON: We got elected to ask questions. They got elected to answer.

MS CARLSON: That's true. My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo says that, as members of the Official Opposition of Alberta, we got elected to ask the questions, and they got elected to provide the answers. [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me. Please, could we have some order? Edmonton-Ellerslie has got the floor and only Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: However, Madam Speaker, their point was excellent. Next time we will have the opportunity to answer the questions, and we'll be quite prepared to do that at any point in time, and unlike this government, we will answer the questions. That'll be a change, and it'll be refreshing for the people of the province. We will continue to listen to Albertans, unlike this particular government, who for some reason has become isolated and chooses to speak to the top 4 percent and hear what they have to say and bring in legislation that benefits them but forgets the rest of the people in this province. That is very unfortunate. However, we understand that they are going to pay the price at some short time down the road because people are very upset, and they are upset at a number of pieces of legislation. This particular bill, this flat tax bill, they are nearly as upset at as they are at Bill 11, and I wouldn't take that lightly. There were anywhere between 2,000 and 4,000 people outside the Assembly last night who clearly . . . [interjection]

Well, don't laugh at that. Don't laugh at that. There were 2,000 to 4,000 people out there, and those people are motivated, Madam Speaker, not just to vote but also to work for people. And they will tell the Premier at the end of the day what the answers will be.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Well, Madam Speaker, it's time to rise in this Assembly, address this bill and this amendment at second reading, and set the record straight on a few things. I think we've heard a lot of rhetoric, not a lot of it with detail about what Albertans are expecting from a tax system. I think I'd like to start with a little history of Bill 18, on what we did a few years ago in addressing what Albertans were asking us to do.

This bill, of course, brings us into the 21st century, with Alberta being the destination of choice for many people who wish to raise their families, earn a living, and invest their hard-earned dollars in this province. This is a forward-thinking plan that's in place today, based on the visions of Alberta: a hardworking family that wants and deserves to keep more of what they earn, who strive for fairness, and who desire simplicity in their tax system.

When we put together in February of 1998 a Tax Review Committee that traveled across this province, they came back with the views of Albertans, some 80,000 who mailed in their views on this issue as well as many hundreds who came to the meetings and voiced their opinions. During the debate that took place in 1998, the committee identified four problems with the tax system in Alberta. Bracket creep, also known as the invisible tax, has been an insidious method of tax collection used by all Canadians' governments. Through the simple process of inflation, the salaries of working

people get pushed into higher tax brackets, and they pay higher taxes. This erodes buying power and hits low-income citizens hardest. As politicians we began to look around to see where the bracket creeps were, and as our previous Treasurer said, most of them were in government.

I have known many people who have come to me over the years and said, "You know, I work overtime," or "I go and get some extra money paid to me." And they say, "I turn around and find that I've moved into another bracket, and it's cutting my income down by 30 percent." My own children work in this province, and if they work overtime, whether it's doing CAT scans or MRIs or whether it's nursing, if they come home and they look at their tax notice today, it hardly makes it fair for them to go back and work many hours of overtime on behalf of the people of Alberta.

8:50

The second thing. The Tax Review Committee also reported that Albertans were frustrated with the flat tax and surtax, the so-called temporary deficit elimination taxes of 1987. We, who had brought in taxes – and all governments have done this over the years – to eliminate certain deficits at certain periods of time unfortunately never removed them. When these taxes were introduced a long time ago to reduce the deficit, the deficit continued to rise. When Premier Ralph Klein took over the reins of the government, the deficit finally started to go down. When we finally eliminated the deficit in '94-'95, the taxes, however, stayed. So here in Alberta we have quite rightly been singing the trumpet song of deficit deliverance, but when we got to the verse about deficit tax deliverance, we forgot the words. Well, we are going to address it now, here in this Assembly during this session, and I ask the hon. members opposite to join with the Albertans who want these taxes gone.

Madam Speaker, we also know that families believe we need to level the playing field for how we tax one-income and two-income families. The choice of whether one or two partners work outside the home should be a personal family choice, but the tax scales are tipped in favour of two-income families, making the choice more difficult for those who choose to live on one income. It is evident in this province that one person making \$60,000 a year with a stay-at-home parent pays more tax than people who have a two-parent, two-income family where one member earns \$40,000 and the other earns \$20,000. They want a level playing field put in place for these families.

Finally, the Tax Review Committee said that we should rid ourselves of the cumbersome and burdensome effect of the multibracket system. They suggested that we break away from the federal tax structure as a means of setting our provincial rate and move to a single provincial tax rate on all income and, at the same time, allow for generous personal and spousal credits. Breaking our attachment to the federal rates would give us more flexibility and would make our provincial rate more transparent to our citizens, less prone to the whims of the federal Finance minister.

Now I'll divert from my comments here to one issue that's been brought up over and over again in this debate. Since we were dehooking from the federal tax system and had announced this and had brought forth the announcement of a flat tax, the federal government – and I'm not going to say they did it deliberately – went into the middle-income bracket and changed their rate there, on one of their brackets. We have said in this province – and I stand here tonight, along with the Premier's statements – that we will change this system that we've come to by moving the rates and changing the spousal allowances to ensure that that middle-income bracket is justly served by this flat tax program. [interjection]

One of the hon. members says that you have to bring it in this

bill, but he should know – and you're an understudy of tax laws, are you? You should know that you don't have to change any one of the numbers in this bill for a government to effect its tax program. You know that. You know that rates of taxation are changed constantly without legislation at the time. It is brought into legislation in the future.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Acting Provincial Treasurer, through the chair, please.

AN HON. MEMBER: They're baiting him.

DR. WEST: The individual is de-baiting me; that's correct.

Now, let me repeat it one more time. We have said that if the federal government changes their tax brackets or changes their way of taxation so that it is injurious to any one segment of Albertans, we will change the flat tax to address that so there's no injurious action to the middle income, to the low income, or to the high income.

Now I'm going to go on to talk about what Bill 18 addresses and how it does it. But here's a speech given by one of our leading CEOs at the Summit 2000 meeting in Toronto, Canada, on April 5. He's talking about the liabilities of working in Canada for his company and where they invest their money. It is Mr. Gwyn Morgan, the chief executive officer of Alberta Energy Company. He said:

On the liability side of the ledger, we have one key problem: much higher personal tax rates make it very difficult for us to bring in those experienced international people we need. And, to make matters worse, we have found that when our Canadian workers are assigned to international operations, it's very difficult to get them to come home. They just have a lot of trouble undergoing the double cold shock of moving to after-tax financial realities and to Canadian dollars from U.S. dollar-based wages, and they often find that the quality of life elsewhere is better than they thought it would be.

He goes on to say:

The total tax load of Canadians is simply draining the ability of our economy to provide the investment capital necessary to fuel a strong, free market economy.

I note that the hon. members of the loyal opposition are chattering away here, but when I was a boy being raised, I understood that Liberals did support a free market system, the dignity and self-respect of having jobs, retaining the largest amount of your earned income so that you could raise your families, work hard, deliver self-respect back, build your homes, and accumulate certain evidence of wealth. But when we come and make statements like this, they chatter away, denying the reality that we must lower the taxes in Canada and in Alberta in order to be competitive.

Bill 18 is about making Albertans live better and making the Alberta economy stronger. Bill 18 addresses five general areas of concern identified by Albertans through that tax review: Alberta's competitiveness with similar jurisdictions, the tax plight of low-income earning Albertans, the phenomenon of bracket creep, taxation inequities between one- and two-parent families, and temporary deficit elimination taxes that linger long after the deficit.

People are concerned about Alberta's competitiveness. We compare favourably with other provinces, but Canada does not stack up well against other G-7 countries, and we're not competitive with the U.S. Bright young Canadians are fleeing south, where the before-tax value of each dollar is 50 percent higher and the after-tax value of each dollar is another 20 percent higher.

Albertans with low incomes deserve a tax break. Do you not agree with that? The current basic personal exemption is just too low. Bracket creep means that although people's incomes are not

increasing in a real sense, they're paying more tax. When Canadian salaries increase to keep pace with inflation, they are pushed into higher tax brackets. This means that most Canadians get less than the government when they get a raise. This insidious method of tax collection has given Ottawa a \$10 billion bonus. In fact, coffers in every province have been topped up by bracket creeps. Alberta has led the fight against . . .

MS OLSEN: Madam Speaker, a point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Acting Provincial Treasurer, we have a point of order.

Edmonton-Norwood.

**Point of Order
Questioning a Member**

MS OLSEN: It's under *Beauchesne*, section 333. I just wondered if the minister would entertain a question.

DR. WEST: Absolutely. We're not afraid of questions.

Debate Continued

MS OLSEN: I just wanted to know, Madam Speaker, if the minister could tell us if it's necessary to go to a single-tax system to get rid of bracket creep. Is it necessary to go to a flat tax system to get rid of bracket creep?

DR. WEST: You can change taxes any way you want, but getting rid of bracket creep is the right thing to do. It's not fair for hardworking young Canadians to have to move into different brackets and pay more tax just because they work harder than they did before. I mean, that is unfair. The answer to your question is that it's the right thing to do. [interjections]

Madam Speaker, they have the right to ask a question, but if they don't like the answer, they can sit there and fuss.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Very quickly, Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Under *Beauchesne*, section 333, I have another question for the minister then, if he would entertain another question.

DR. WEST: No. This has gone far enough.

9:00

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The answer is no. The Provincial Treasurer will carry on with debate, and I would ask for decorum in the Assembly, please.

Yes, Calgary-Buffalo.

**Point of Order
Reading a Speech**

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, I would cite *Beauchesne* 495 to 500 and the Speaker's admonition of March 4, 1998, at page 683 that if you're going to read a speech in the course of a debate, you have to table the speech. I don't know whether the speech has been tabled, but would the minister please ensure that the speech is tabled so we can all read it and save the time of the Assembly.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo, I'm sure that the hon. Acting Treasurer will be glad to table the portion that he talked about, the CEO I believe it was, through Alberta Energy in his

speech in Toronto. I'm sure he'll be glad to table that. I think that if we are really going to make any progress tonight, let's quit this and get on with the debate at hand.

Now, the hon. Provincial Treasurer has the floor. The chair is recognizing him. I would ask for decorum in this House, and let's get on with the job at hand.

Debate Continued

DR. WEST: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now I'm going to move on to the new system that we're putting forth here tonight. I want to emphasize one more time. They've spent a great amount of time saying that those people at less than \$70,000 are disenfranchised by this. I'll say one more time that the Premier of this province and the government of this province have said that if the federal government changes any one of their brackets, we will alter the basic exemption as well as a percentage here to make them part of the tax reduction.

Before I start on the new system, I'd just like to point out something to correct an image that's left. You can paint this any way you want, but there were some comments about who pays taxes in the province and who this helps or doesn't help. In Alberta, for example, the top 1 percent of income earners pay 21 percent of all the tax in the province of Alberta. Now, the top 5 percent – they were talking 4 percent over there – pay 40 percent of all the tax. The top 10 percent – now, all of you may know some people in the top 10 percent. A half million plus don't pay any tax, but the other 90 percent pay 48 percent of all the taxes. Those top 10 percent pay 52 percent of all the taxes in this province. To say that they don't fairly pay their share of tax is misleading this House and misleading the people of Alberta. Those statements are unbelievable.

The new plan announced in Budget '99 unhook Alberta from the federal rate structure, moving the province from our tax-on-tax system to a tax-on-income system, and when the plan is fully implemented, Albertans will pay less money to this Provincial Treasurer. Under the new system Alberta will unhook from the federal system by calculating provincial tax as a percentage of the taxable income rather than calculating provincial tax as a percentage of the federal tax. Albertans will see a simpler tax system and will continue to file only one tax return. We will move to a single rate of tax when we unhook from the federal system. A low rate interferes less with the choices people make about how they earn, spend, save, and invest their income. The single rate makes the system easier for Albertans to understand and rids the provincial system of the three federal brackets that until now Alberta has been forced to parallel.

Under the new system, a single nurse in Lloydminster who earns \$40,765 paid Alberta income tax of \$2,665 in 1996 and will pay \$2,475 in the year 2002. A family in Lethbridge with one spouse earning \$50,215 as a law enforcement officer and the other staying at home with three children paid Alberta income tax of \$3,070 in 1996 and will pay \$1,665 in 2002.

A Red Deer family with two children, where one parent is a firefighter earning \$47,345 and the other a teacher earning \$43,205, paid Alberta income tax of \$6,315 in 1996 and will pay \$5,830 in 2002, and remember that that includes inflation and all the other costs.

We will increase the basic exemptions and release an additional 132,000 low-income earners from Alberta's tax rolls. These people will pay no provincial income tax whatsoever. The Liberals' plan that they brought forward would see them still paying some tax. These increases are fully indexed to inflation to pre-empt the possibility of bracket creep for these low-income people. This move will see the basic personal exemption increase by more than inflation for the first time since 1988. I'll repeat it. These basic exemptions

will take off an additional 132,000 low-income earners, and as the population goes over 3 million, this number will be higher.

The level playing field that people talk about. We will level the playing field by raising the spousal deductions to the same level as the personal deduction. Single parents will also get this enhanced deduction by applying it to their first child instead of a spouse. This will address the inequities between one- and two-parent families.

We will wipe out both of the Alberta deficit elimination taxes, the surtax and the flat tax. It just doesn't make sense to tax people for a condition that no longer exists. On January 1, 2000, we eliminated the 8 percent surtax imposed in 1987 when we were battling the deficit. Albertans will have \$144 million more in their pockets as a result. The flat tax goes January 1, 2001, when the whole system switches over. With the population increase that we're seeing today and the changes that will be implemented, we will see a decrease of over \$850 million in taxation, and when we address the federal issue, it could be well over a billion dollars that Albertans will be enhanced in their jeans.

I'm going to repeat it for the fourth time, Madam Speaker. Please bear with me. We will match any federal tax cuts for 2000 pending introduction of our new tax system. We are committed to passing the savings from the federal government on to Albertans. It's important to keep in mind that we have just begun our fiscal year, and we will need time to analyze the figures, but those adjustments we will address through the affordability of the income to the province of Alberta. Let me assure you that we will match any federal tax cuts so that this commitment is held whole to Albertans.

As I say, there are some people outside. I'm not criticizing them. We all have opinions. But if I were to ask many of my constituents the details of the flat tax reduction and that, they wouldn't know without me sitting down with them for coffee and going over the details of this tax plan. So to ask people standing outside the Legislature . . . [Dr. West's speaking time expired]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Treasurer for that enlightening set of remarks. I'm glad you didn't adjourn debate, because I think it might make some sense to be able to reply to some of your comments on the record in real time, as it were.

First of all, there's nobody in this Official Opposition that doesn't stand for fair and equitable taxation. There is nobody in this opposition that doesn't want to move quickly to ensure that there is comprehensive, sustainable tax reform in this province that ensures the adequate funding of all of our core social programs and doesn't pick the pockets of ordinary Albertan workers any more than they have to be. It's this government and the government that that minister is a part of that has chalked up an almost \$10 billion surplus by lowballing revenues, continuing bracket creep, continuing high income tax surtaxes, continuing the flat tax, and then telling people that the cupboards are bare. So let's just express the facts as they are.

9:10

Now, the reason why I support this amendment from my colleague to not see Bill 18 read a second time is because fundamentally there is nothing that I have heard from the government since they introduced their concept of a flat tax that has convinced me or my constituents that this flat tax will treat them fairly. What we hear from the government is ideology that basically boils down to this: it is somehow morally offensive to tax people who earn more money,

because if you do, you are creating a disincentive for those people to work harder. What this government forgets and what they would like to pretend is true is that it is only hard work that equals economic success. Of course, we know that's not true. Madam Speaker, nothing replaces hard work; don't get me wrong. But it is not just hard work. Who you are and where you come from and who your parents are and the luck of the draw sometimes and a whole host of other social and economic conditions will also influence the amount of personal wealth that you may create or that you may be able to maintain.

Now, Madam Speaker, it is also misleading on the part of the Acting Treasurer to suggest that anybody in the Official Opposition – and I say the Official Opposition – is against free markets and the free-market system. Liberalism is all about free enterprise. Liberalism is all about the individual. But it recognizes that not every individual starts off from the same place. We believe very much in equality of opportunity, and that's one of the beauties of the free-market system. Free markets allow for the creation of wealth, and the freer the markets are, the more that wealth can grow and grow and grow again. So when you're dealing with the free market, you also have to understand that the happy result of a free market is this creation of wealth.

As I said, it's not just because of hard work. It may be because of talent or resources, or it may be because of good luck. It may be because those to a greater degree than others were in the right place at the right time, and that means that there are going to be some who didn't have that good fortune. There are going to be some who, no matter how hard they work, may not be able to enjoy that prosperity as well as others, and it is also one of the results of a free market that you have this growing gap between the very wealthy and the rest.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with those individuals who can attain that great wealth. Equally, there is nothing wrong, from a social expectation, with those very wealthy contributing in proportion to their wealth to the economic well-being of the society that allowed them to accumulate that wealth. Part of supporting the free-market system is supporting the kind of society that we all choose to live in, that the free-market system is part of. You can't separate the two, Madam Speaker. No matter how much the Provincial Treasurer and his colleagues in cabinet and his colleagues on the backbench would like to, you can't separate those two facts. It is absolutely the basis of the kind of society, a society that's based on fairness and equity and equality of opportunity, compassion, that you would want to deal with a tax system that doesn't overly burden one sector, particularly when it favours that one sector that is already the most economically advantaged. That just doesn't make sense. There's nothing fair about that.

The Treasurer was talking about who it is that pays the taxes, and he mentioned the 1 percent of Alberta taxpayers. Those are taxpayers that earn over \$150,000 per year. Under the provincial government's tax plan they will receive a 15 percent cut in their provincial taxes. However, the 39 percent, the bulk of taxpayers, who earn between \$30,000 and \$70,000 a year, are going to receive less than 50 percent of that tax cut. They're going to receive a 6 percent tax cut. Now, what's fair about that? What is fair about that? There is absolutely nothing fair about that.

I heard the Treasurer refer to the CEO of an energy company. You know, I just had an opportunity to review the annual earning statements of several CEOs of energy companies. I guess I wasn't surprised to see it, but before bonuses, before stock options, before you factor in the country club memberships and all those other things, it was not unusual to see those CEOs earning in excess of \$1 million. When I have been inside their boardrooms and talked with them, I haven't had one of them tell me that personally they're

thinking that they can't afford to pay their taxes.

So I would wonder what it was that the Provincial Treasurer was getting at when he quoted extensively from that correspondence. Is he trying to have us feel sorry for the oilmen in this province? They pay their fair share. Nobody wants them to pay anything more than that, but we don't want all of the men and women who work in their corporations that help them create that wealth to pay more than their fair share either. We want them to pay exactly what they need to.

I hear members from the government chorusing in, like they are, and talking and calling us names in the Official Opposition, but let me quote for a minute from a paper called *Why Fairness Matters: Progressive Versus Flat Taxes*. It's by Robert Shapiro, April 1996, written by the Progressive Foundation. I don't need to be a front man for Dr. Shapiro. He's a Harvard-trained economist. He's well known, and I'm sure that the people in the Treasurer's department well know Shapiro and his work. Let me quote just briefly. I'd be happy to table this if the government members want it, but let me quote just briefly what Dr. Shapiro has to say.

America's wide-open markets accentuate the impact of all of these factors, so that those with more ambition, self-discipline, and talent can prosper greatly. Bill Gates and his investors, for example, would not have enjoyed as great a success in other advanced countries because their markets and laws would not have provided so hospitable an environment. And once a person or family's economic success is secured, America's open markets allow them to increase the value of their wealth at a greater rate than in most other places. The economic benefits of free markets are large and obvious. But there are social costs, because our open markets and laws also produce harsher economic inequality than in other advanced countries — an urgent issue today when economic inequality is increasing rapidly and for reasons that most working people can do little about.

If the members of the government would like to find fault with the argument about the social justice aspect of tax policy, then I would suggest they do a little bit of research first and bring their reasoned comments to the floor instead of just yelling epithets across the way so as to discredit anybody that wants to stand here and defend the middle-income earner in this province, because it's certainly not the provincial government that's standing up for the middle-income earner in this province.

Now, Madam Speaker, the underlying principle behind graduated income taxes is in itself simply equity. In other words, fairness dictates the amount of tax individuals pay. Those with the greatest disposable incomes pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes. Those with less disposable income pay a lower percentage of their income in taxes. Most citizens accept this principle. Most people recognize that it is this principle that has allowed us to build public education into excellence and public health care into excellence and to provide an infrastructure that is excellent. It is only this government which would attack public institutions, which would underfund public education, which would squeeze and starve public education. It's only this government that doesn't understand that principle of equity that underlies our progressive tax system.

MR. CLEGG: That's just garbage.

MR. SAPERS: I hear the hon. Member for Dunvegan say that that is garbage. If he would like to take to his feet and enter into debate exactly what is wrong with that, I'm sure his constituents would love to hear it, his constituents in Dunvegan, the men and women that farm there that I've had the privilege of getting to know. I would love to hear him explain to them why it's garbage to be arguing for fairness in taxation policy. Maybe that Member for Dunvegan will stand and at some point, instead of just yelling things across the

floor, he'll enter the debate in the way that an honourable member would.

Madam Speaker, the 11 percent rate has already been proven to be grossly unfair. Many tax filers will have to pay more as a result of this rate. The Provincial Treasurer says: "Trust us. It's the feds; they undermined us. They did it on purpose." Talk about paranoia. 9:20

He says, "Trust us; we'll get it right next time." Well, Madam Speaker, we're in the middle of a debate on Bill 11, probably one of the most contentious bills that this Legislature has dealt with. This government spent years preparing that legislation. They spent millions of dollars trying to sell it. They've had focus groups, they've done polls, they've hired outside consultants, and they brought in lawyers. Then they brought in their bill, and they still got it wrong. They brought in 14 amendments. This government says: just trust us; we'll get it right next time. If they can't get it right on that, why should we trust them to get it right on anything?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, we are dealing with an amendment to Bill 18.

MR. SAPERS: I thought I was.

So what we're dealing with is a Provincial Treasurer that says: "Look, don't read the black and white of the bill. Ignore the text of the bill. We really will get the rate right. We really will." Now, if it goes down to 10.5 percent, it's still going to cost middle-income taxpayers more. If it goes down to 10 percent, it's still going to cost middle-income taxpayers more. In fact, if the federal government carries through on its plan — and I will encourage them to do so — up until the year 2004 most taxpayers in Alberta will continue to pay more even if they drop the rate down to 10 percent. If the federal government is able to get more aggressive on tax relief — and they've already outstripped this government in terms of tax relief — then they're going to have to keep on monkeying around with the rate year after year, and we're still going to see a lag. Taxpayers in this province are still going to take it on the chin and in the pocketbook. They're never going to get it right.

The easiest thing for them to do is to follow the lead of the federal government, that has been aggressive on tax reform, and to flow through every penny of those tax benefits by staying linked at least for the time being. Let's make sure we get the maximum benefit of those federal tax reforms.

Now, the Provincial Treasurer says: what about bracket creep? Well, he ought to know all about bracket creep. His government has raked in millions of dollars in bracket creep, all the while pointing the finger elsewhere about people who tax too much. Now, the federal government has figured out a way to get rid of bracket creep. They simply indexed it. They indexed the brackets. You no longer have to worry about bracket creep. This Provincial Treasurer doesn't seem to understand that you can index it, and then you don't have bracket creep. You don't have to go to a single-rate tax.

You know, the single-rate tax was the creation and the baby of the former Provincial Treasurer, who's now out seeking greener pastures someplace else. Now, that Provincial Treasurer had his own reasons for bringing in that rate. He'll say it's because he thinks it's for the good of all the people of Alberta, and I will say that maybe he thought it was for the good of him, but that's an argument we can have in another place at another time. But he brought in that rate.

Now, I would say to this Acting Provincial Treasurer that he doesn't have to babysit. He doesn't have to look after that baby. He can recognize the fact that it was wrong-minded to do it. He can do just like the Republicans have done in the United States and what the

other right-wingers have done around the world: abandon this notion of trying to find the magic to make a single rate fair to everybody, go back to the principle of equity, maintain the progressive system, and take full advantage of the flow-through of the federal rates. Then maybe we could have some all-party support, and we can get on with the job of maintaining an equitable and fair tax system for Alberta, not this piecemeal, incremental kind of tax reform where little carrots are dangled from time to time suspiciously close to elections and not this notion of just ideology that a flat rate must be best because it's simple. You know what they say about complex problems and simple solutions.

This government is making a habit out of lazy thinking and trying to find simple solutions to complex problems. Well, that's not the way it works, and if the government was at least consistent, they would recognize that this is where hard work would pay off. Tax policy is not simple. The answers to the problems cannot be found in simply pulling a number out of the air, applying it across the board, then closing your eyes and crossing your fingers. That's not the way it works.

Now, according to analyses that have been done by individuals who are far smarter than I and far more experienced than I when it comes to tax policy – let's take a look at what the 11 percent rate would do and why again we have to support this reasoned amendment.

The breakpoints – and for those who are not familiar with that term, a breakpoint is the point at which a new tax rate will equal an existing tax rate. In this case the breakpoint for the 11 percent tax rate, where it equals the existing 44 percent rate on federal tax, those breakpoints at the low end of the spectrum are \$18,425, and at the high end of the spectrum, \$68,400. Everyone in between those breakpoints, in other words everybody that earns more than \$18,425 but less than \$68,400 – and I think that would describe, if not most, at least many of our constituents – they would be better off, according to tax experts, with the existing tax system. In other words, even if you just left the rate alone and flowed through the benefits of the federal tax reform, they would be better off.

Now, imagine how increasingly better off they would be if you took the responsible approach, if you took the informed approach, dealt with bracket creep through indexation, and then lowered the rate at which you collect the tax; in other words, lowered the proportion of provincial tax payable as a rate of federal tax. All of those taxpayers, who would be better off even if you just left it alone, would be even better served.

I listened to the Acting Provincial Treasurer, and there is no justification for proceeding with this bill at this time. It doesn't meet any of the fundamental tests. It may have been a politically expedient idea. It may have served the purposes of the former Provincial Treasurer. It may have made for some good headlines right after the budget, but upon careful analysis and careful reflection, it just doesn't hold water.

I would suggest that the government, in order to save itself from embarrassment, in order to prevent itself from having to come back into this Assembly time and time and time again and admit that it was wrong with this bill and keep on tinkering with the rate – in order to save them from all of that, I would hope that all members in a bipartisan way will support this reasoned amendment. Then we can get back to the business of looking at the Tax Review Committee, waiting for the government committee that's looking at corporate and business taxes to report, and we can get back to ensuring that Alberta has a fair and competitive tax regime. We can get away from this chest pounding that the Premier and his colleagues in cabinet want to get into to say: you know, we have the lowest taxes. I see that Ontario just did something with their taxes. You know, it's like little boys in the sandbox. Now we're going to

get into this Premier saying: well, no; ours are really lower than yours.

You know, that is not the kind of stable business environment that Albertans and Alberta businesses want. What they want is a predictable tax environment. They don't want to see all of this politicking around taxes. What they want is fairness, because business knows that that's how business grows: in a fair and stable environment. They know that that's what their employees want, what their investors want, what their customers want.

I would argue very strongly for the Conservative members of this Assembly to put aside their partisan interests, listen to the arguments, listen to their constituents, listen to what the experts have said about this bill, forget about all the things that are going on in that other party's national leadership race, put aside all of that and just focus on these issues at this time and vote according to what would be best for Alberta taxpayers. I think that when they do that, when they make that reasonable assessment, they will come to the conclusion that Bill 18 is flawed, that this 11 percent flat rate is unfair, and that we really should get beyond this notion of trying to impose this arbitrary, simple solution, which just doesn't fit.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to stand and speak to the amendment to Bill 18. First I have to look at the amendment itself. Typically an amendment in second reading is somewhat unusual. It's usually a procedural ploy that is used by oppositions to delay the passage of legislation. We've seen that not only in this bill, but we saw it in Bill 11, and I guess we'll see it some more if more come up.

9:30

It's kind of interesting, I think, when you look at the history of why we have Bill 18 in front of us at the moment. I went back into my files to try and find – I couldn't believe this. Way back in February 1997 is when the hon. Member from Cardston-Taber-Warner joined the Tax Review Committee, and then shortly thereafter I was asked to join the Tax Review Committee. That's in 1997. January of 1998 is when the Tax Review Committee of this province delivered the report and made the recommendation for the bill that we have in front of us today.

So we have to remember that back on January 26 of 1998 the tax situation in this country was nowhere on the radar map, but as a result of the Tax Review Committee's report in this province, the whole country woke up to the fact that we as Canadians were being overtaxed and that bracket creep kept continually eroding and eroding our take-home pay.

I can remember personally that as a young individual trying to raise a family, the only way I could get ahead was to work overtime, but the harder I worked, the less I took home. So we have here a situation where the people across the way are telling us, you know, that we should love that, we should be happy to pay more tax.

I think what we have to do is compare the philosophy of those across the way who want to have a progressive tax system. They're telling us that the tax system that we're proposing in this bill is regressive. They want a progressive tax system. What a progressive tax system does is social engineering on the input side, because it taxes people at different rates. It discourages success. I know that I certainly was not encouraged by having to work a bunch of overtime and then taking home less and less and less. So they want to do their social engineering on the input side. That's what progressive taxation's all about.

Well, I think that this government has shown that social programs

need to be done on the output side, not on the input side, and that's what a flat tax does. What is more fair than everyone paying the same rate of tax? And they're talking to us about fairness?

I think you have to take those things into account and remember that this was back in 1998. In 1998 the debate wasn't about taxation in this country, but it certainly has turned to taxation in this country since this government took the lead, as it has in many other ways.

I remember a presentation from a housewife in Calgary, as a matter of fact. I'm not sure if it was the first presentation that she ever made in her life, but she was there asking: why does the tax system punish single-income families? Why does the tax system punish single-income families? A two-income family pays less than a single-income family earning the same amount. You know, that lady made a huge impact on the committee that sat and listened back in 1997. Today we have the result. We have the result that is equalizing the personal exemptions, the \$11,620 per person, which takes away the discrimination that the tax system had against single-family incomes.

You know, if a family wants to have the mother stay at home and raise the children, why should they be penalized by the tax system? In this province, we've done something about that. We've changed it, we've fixed it, and it's no longer a penalty.

I don't understand the arguments that some people make with respect to who pays for what. Well, it seems to me, Madam Speaker, that the top 10 percent of the earners pretty much pay for everything. Like, who supports our charities? Who supports our arts programs? Who buys the opera tickets and the symphony tickets? Who are those people? The people across the way would want us to tax them more. They're already paying more than their share, and I think they very much deserve a break.

So, Madam Speaker, at this point I would just simply move that we adjourn debate on Bill 18.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 23 Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned May 2: Mr. Gibbons speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. A couple of comments with respect to Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000. Firstly, let me start off on a positive note by acknowledging what I think has been very broad and very positive consultation that has been undertaken by the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board and by advanced education and career development, as it then was.

I can say that all of the information I have is that in fact this has actually been a far-reaching consultation, and the government deserves credit. The government deserves credit, Madam Speaker, for the consultation they've undertaken. I think the government also deserves credit for putting together in Bill 23 a series of positive changes that reflect what industry has identified and required. So there are some very positive elements in Bill 23.

Now, I've had a chance to go through the original act, and it's actually some 39 pages in length. There's a lot of material in it. Although the minister of intergovernmental affairs, I think, who introduced this bill, talked about the consultation, talked about this being something that's responsive to industry requirements and something that people in the respective sectors wanted, I wanted to test that with a couple of specific questions. I'd take the minister

and anyone else who's interested, Madam Speaker, to some of the questions I've got.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I look for example at section 3(c). We have provision there for adding a whole range of new things. These have to do with functions of the board. Now, that's an essential part. Maybe if the minister has answers to these questions – she seemed well versed in the issue when she presented it this afternoon – she could just fire over a note with the answers, and we can save some time. If she looks at page 3 of the bill, we have a provision there that the Regulations Act – this is the new proposed section (3).

The Regulations Act does not apply

- (a) in respect of any documentation prepared by or on behalf of the Board relating to the carrying out of any functions under this section, or
- (b) to orders . . . under subsection (2).

Now, what we find in subsection (2) is “the establishment of standards or requirements.” This is “criteria or requirements for the granting and recognition of trade certificates,” the “establishment of standards or requirements.” These are not one-off things. These are not transitory things. These are standards. One would think, Mr. Speaker – would you not? – that a standard should be able to achieve as much notoriety as possible. It should be quickly referenced and readily referenced by apprentices and by employers and by people in a particular industry who wanted to know what those standards were. But what's interesting here is that in the proposed section 3 the Regulations Act does not apply.

9:40

Now, Mr. Speaker, members may be saying: so why would the Regulations Act not apply? The Regulations Act is not a very long statute. It's only about six pages long. Section 2 has to do with filing the regulation with a registrar. So one might ask: why would it be that if we are going to have standards set in one of these areas that are identified on pages 2 and 3, we not be prepared to have that filed with the registrar? Is there a good reason for that?

The Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations didn't share with us what the reason would be that those regulations wouldn't be subject to the Regulations Act. Why is it that in this long list – and what have we got here? Probably about 20 kinds of orders the board would make. Why wouldn't we make sure that that was as publicly available to anybody who's interested in finding that?

I'm going through the Regulations Act. What it requires is pretty minimal. You file it with the registrar. It's published in the *Alberta Gazette*. Now, there are not a lot of people that read the *Alberta Gazette*, but at least anybody who's interested in information knows that's the place you can go to find these things. There are wonderful librarians. We have one of the finest public library systems anywhere in North American in this province, and whether it's the Marigold library or the Calgary public library, there are people who are trained. They're professionals, and they can assist people to find it very, very easily, very, very quickly.

But if it's not published, if it's not gazetted and it's not filed with the registrar, you know what happens, Mr. Speaker? That tradesperson or that apprentice or that employer now has to go on a where's Waldo sort of exercise to try and find out where this regulation is, where this order is. It's not filed in any public place, and it's not published in the *Gazette*.

Is it section 2 in the filing requirement that the government has a problem with? Is it section 3 of the Regulations Act, which has to do with the gazetting, or is it section 5 perhaps? Section 5 requires

the registrar of regulations to file a monthly report. Can the minister of intergovernmental affairs can tell us which one of these causes the problem? Why is it that these would not apply in this case?

All you need are 20, Madam Minister. All you need are 20 members.

Now, that's about it. It seems to me that that should be a pretty straightforward matter for the government to explain, but that minister has not chosen to do it. While there is still a quorum here in the House, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to ask that question. I don't know what the answer is. I hope the minister of intergovernmental affairs will share with us that explanation because I don't know what it is. Maybe the MLA responsible for the regulations task force has an answer to it, and I'd be happy to accept an answer from that member as well. So I have that question.

Then I go on in the bill to section 8, which appears on page 6. We have the new proposed 13.1(1): "The Minister is responsible for the administration." Then we see subsection (2):

The Regulations Act does not apply in respect of any documentation prepared by or on behalf of the Minister relating to the carrying out of any functions under this section.

So I have to ask in respect of section 8: which element in the Regulations Act causes this government a problem? Is it section 2? Is it section 3? Is it section 5? Will the minister tell us that? Will any other member of the government stand up and tell us why you have to carve that out from under the Regulations Act?

And I go on. If members look at section 16 of this bill, on page 11, we're going to have a new subsection (6), and what does it say? Once again, "The Regulations Act does not apply in respect of any authorization." Now, why would that be, Mr. Speaker? Why would it be that the government would want to take these things and not make them as widely available as possible? Why do we want to closet them away?

At this point, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you of a problem I've experienced in terms of trying to access material. There are sort of three different kinds of subordinate legislation we run into. We've got the regular gazetted regulations under the Regulations Act, and any Albertan can find those that has access to the Internet. You can find those things, and you can find them readily. [interjection] Well, you normally can, Minister of Health and Wellness.

The second kind of subordinate lawmaking is a thing called ministerial regulations, and then the third one is ministerial orders. What happens if I as a citizen want to find those things? Now, maybe in the Department of Health and Wellness it works differently, but here's what you have to do. You have to phone up the minister's office and say that I'd like to see a regulation or a ministerial order. They say: "Well, it's not under the Regulations Act. We have that in our library." I say: "Fine. May I come over? Is that library open to the public?" "Oh, no, no. This is a ministerial library, a departmental library. It's only available to people who have the permission of the minister to access it."

Now, I'm a tenacious guy, and I spend lots of time in Edmonton, so maybe I've got the time to do a little phoning around and show up in that minister's office and ask where that stuff is. But, you know, our job is not just to accommodate MLAs, who have to persevere. Our job is to accommodate individual Albertans who may want to find out something about the apprenticeship program and want to find out what those standards are. Why should you have to go through the hoop and hurdle and do this bureaucratic dance to find out what's in the regulation? All the government had to do was say: we make it subject to the Regulations Act, and anybody can access it through any public library really fast, really easily. Ideal. Now, the government has chosen not to do that, and my question is: why?

You go on and you look at section 17 of this bill, and what have we got there? We've got, lo and behold, on page 12:

The Regulations Act does not apply in respect of any order made or

documentation prepared by or on behalf of the Executive Director relating to the making of an order under this section.

What's to be hidden here? Why not simply gazette it so that people can access it and it's in some standard place? I think it's preposterous that any Albertan who wants to find out what the regulations are, what the standards are with respect to an apprenticeship program, has sort of got to go on bended knee and beg his or her way into a department library and hope that there's some librarian in the department of health – oh, I don't mean to pick on the Department of Health and Wellness – in any department so that they can access it. This is not accessibility. This is not empowering individual citizens to get this material, and it's not good enough.

Then we go to section 23 of this bill. It has to do with regulations again. It's also part of section 20, which makes a further change here to the regulation provision, and it's not clear. It appears these may be subject to the Regulations Act. Here's what we're left with under Bill 23. You have some standards which appear to be gazetted and filed with the registrar, but you've got a whole lot of other standards and things that are not gazetted, and you have to go on a bit of scavenger hunt to find those things. All I'm asking is: why? I don't profess to know very much about the administration of the apprenticeship program, so my question is: give me a reason why those things can't be done in gazetted regulations; give me a reason in terms of why these things have to be such a big secret. I'd be happy to see that.

Now, the other question I've got. If you look at a question-and-answer sheet that was produced entitled Proposed Changes, Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act, produced March 20 of 2000, just a little more than a month ago, there's a question there where they talk about what's going to be done by way of regulation, but it doesn't address this question of why these things have to be a secret. I just find that a curious thing. Now, I expect I have some colleagues that are going to be wanting to join debate on this in three minutes and 32 seconds, and I know that they're going to have an opportunity to further develop some of these themes.

If you were to look at page 6 of this background that's been produced – and I'm not tabling it because my understanding is it's already been tabled. If anybody wishes to see it, I've got a copy, and I'd be happy to have a page take one over. On page 6 of this background that accompanied the changes in the bill, we've got this question: will industry be consulted on proposed changes to the regulations? Now, it doesn't say whether those are the gazetted regulations under the Regulations Act or whether those are the ministerial regulations, which are going to be secreted away in a departmental library. We don't know that.

9:50

Here's the response from the government department: members of the industry advisory committees, key stakeholders, and the public will have an opportunity to review and comment on draft regulations later this year; we hope to complete a review of the regulations by December 2000. Great to have a consultation with stakeholders and people who have been involved, but what happens to the rest of us? You know, why are regulations made only in consultation with those people that government deigns to involve? What about the stakeholder who is not identified by the deputy minister as a stakeholder? What about somebody who's forgotten on the list?

Why wouldn't we publish the regulations, not just for the benefit of so-called stakeholders but publish them on the Internet? It's really easy to do. The government spends that \$8 million. The Public Affairs Bureau produces some wonderful web sites. I'm very much in awe of the Department of Health and Wellness web site. Terrific. I question the accuracy of some of the information on there around Bill 11, but it's a good place to go to be able to find out information. It would be no trouble in the year 2000 to get the web

master to put up the draft regulations. Then everybody who has access to a computer screen anywhere in the province . . . [interjections] I think I have some colleagues that are concerned that I may not be delivering the corporate message here. They may think I'm on a bit of a frolic on my own, Mr. Speaker, but I want you to know that I'm speaking to the things that have sort of attracted my attention on a bill that I think is of some concern.

Those are my questions. I guess I'm open to information from people in the gallery who know more about apprenticeship, from people in the Assembly, from anybody outside who reads *Hansard*. If they've got answers for any of those things, I hope they'll send me a fax or an e-mail so I will have answers to that. I hope we'll have answers to that before we have to vote on Bill 23.

I want to thank my colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar for what I thought was a really excellent analysis he did of the bill the other afternoon. It was helpful to me, and I'd commend that to all members who are trying to figure out whether they should support this bill or not. In the moment I have left, I'd say to the government: here's an opportunity. This could be a win/win bill. You can pass some changes that industry wants and the people affected want, but you can also signal that government is a lot more than just talking to a few selected stakeholders. Whether it's Bill 11, where you take your advice from the appointed regional health authorities – it's sort of akin to drinking your own bathwater – or whether you take a broader consultation to involve Albertans, that's really what we want to hear. It's the same principle, I think, in terms of both bills, and I think we can do so much better.

My inclination when I pick this bill up is to support it, but I could do that with an awful lot more enthusiasm and I could remove that sort of nagging doubt I have if I can get answers to those specific questions I've got.

Those are the questions I've got, and I'm looking forward to other analysis of Bill 23. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: May the Assembly grant consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two concerned citizens who have been outside the last couple of nights concerned about Bill 11 and are here tonight to hear the debate on it. One is from the constituency of St. Albert and has expressed her concerns to her MLA. Her name is Diane Gorman, and the other is a woman from Edmonton-Manning, and her name is Trudy Grebenstein. I believe they're in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 23
Apprenticeship and Industry Training
Amendment Act, 2000
(continued)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On Bill 23, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise this evening to address Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000. I listened very carefully to the comments that were made by my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo, as well I have looked at the Blues of the remarks that were made by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar as well as the Member for Edmonton-Centre and have also looked at the document that was put out by the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board, the questions-and-answers document. In putting together the speeches and some of the comments that have been made, it is a fact that there has been a fair amount of consultation with regards to the proposed amendments to this particular bill, and there are several recommendations that have been made that will improve the apprenticeship and industry training system for employers, employees, and apprentices.

There are still some outstanding questions as to whether the proposed amendments are in fact comprehensive enough or whether in fact there are outstanding concerns still around certain sections of the bill. In particular I understand that there are starting to be expressed some concerns by some of the trades with regards to sections 16 and 17 of the bill, that would amend sections 23 and 24 of the act.

I have had the experience in the past to work with the Member for Medicine Hat with regards to the Health Professions Act, which looked at putting together changes to a large number of bills and putting together a consensus around a long process that had occurred with regards to the consultation around that particular act. I think there are parallels between what happened with the Health Professions Act and what we are perhaps seeing right now with Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act.

The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that when the consultation occurs with different groups and that consultation is synthesized and then put forward into legislation, sometimes some things are missed out, and in fact when I think back again to the Health Professions Act, we had some difficulties that arose out of the drafting of the legislation with regards to what the impact would be on firefighters throughout the province. That impact was unintentional, yet the wording in the legislation made it a potential for there to be huge costs to the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, I believe, and some of the other cities that have firefighters on staff. There were also potential effects on the individuals who do the lifesaving on ski hills, the ski patrol, and that was also an unintentional effect of the drafting of the legislation.

10:00

So here we have something very similar in Bill 23, I believe, where it seems that in the majority the bill has addressed some of the concerns that have been developed and brought forward over a period of four years, yet there is still some fine-tuning that is required to occur. I would hope that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar will have the opportunity to work with the Minister of Learning to work out what some of the glitches are within the act, as addressed by some of the trades at this point in time, to make this piece of legislation reflect exactly what the consultations were that have taken place over a long period of time, because it would be a shame if in fact after four years of work on a particular bill there are some things that are not quite right.

Unfortunately we sometimes see, in the haste of this government to push through legislation, that we have to retroactively go back, whether it's in the fall session or the next year, to amend legislation that could have been amended when it was first introduced. That is, I think, something that needs to be looked at very, very closely.

Specifically where the concerns are is the fear that competency based training will find its way into the apprenticeship trades.

Again, my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar had addressed that issue in looking at the differences between the different kinds of trades, in that there are designated trades and there are occupations, and that there is sometimes optional certification of trades and there is sometimes compulsory certification of trades. In fact, when you look at section 22.1, which follows after section 22, what may well occur is that there are going to be exemptions to the compulsory certification of tradespersons, so that is a huge, huge issue.

If you go on a little bit further to section 23, the question was brought up by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar as to what is going to happen with apprenticeship programs in regards to technical programs and standards, the documentation of the program or the examination.

Now, again to go back specifically to the concerns of at least one of the trades that will be involved, what is indicated is that there's a fear

that competency based training will find its way into the apprenticeship trades. While there are some positives to competency training, it can, through abuse, lead to the breaking down of high standards that exist at present.

This is actually a quote from a letter, as well as that "some form of qualifier, for example, written in the Act or in the Regulations that Level Three does not do Level Four work" is required. In other words, what's needed is "protection of some sort that protects the Journeyman."

So this is a very, very key concern that I'm sure can be addressed quite easily if there is a will to do so. I would hope that within the time available before the Assembly recesses for the summer break, there will be the ability to fix that particular concern within Bill 23 or to hold it over until the fall session so that in fact it can be as good a piece of legislation as it should be after four years of consultation.

Now, some of the questions that I have and that don't seem to be addressed within the bill itself – at least they seem to be still outstanding, from the document put out by the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board on March 20, 2000 – are with regards to the fact that there is some concern around the apprentice wage percentages and that these wage percentages may pose a problem for certain sectors of industry because of the way people are employed. There is a suggestion that the board will ask the appropriate provincial apprenticeship committee to examine the need to regulate apprentice wage percentages in their particular trade. I'm wondering if there was any attempt to address how long that process would take, because if in fact there is some kind of disparity in terms of those wage percentages, people should not have to wait three years for that to be addressed. In fact, there should be some kind of finite time when this issue is addressed.

Another key issue is around the journeyman/apprentice ratios, which are suggested to remain in regulations, and that the norm of one journeyman to one apprentice, as has been suggested through the consultation process by the various groups, may not guarantee suitable supervision and training of apprentices. There's an indication that the board will explore other ways of ensuring the quality of training, and I wonder whether that is in fact a strong enough promise, as it were, to the stakeholders involved and whether or not there should be something outlined as to what those other ways are of ensuring the quality of training.

There are some issues as well that were pointed out with regards to looking at the changes. I had mentioned that one of them could be made to provide for a competency based certification program in designated occupations – and that is still remaining as a key concern – and that there are changes that could be made to allow the board to address and implement solutions to the various problems being experienced with the description of some trades. So it would appear

that in fact that has not occurred in the act and that the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board is still requesting that that occur.

Also, another change that could be made to the act is to strengthen the operation of industry advisory committees. Without sitting at the table with the stakeholders involved, it would be difficult for me to say whether or not these are key changes that should be addressed prior to the passage of the bill. However, it would be useful information for the Official Opposition to find out from the sponsor of the bill, the Minister of Learning, whether or not these in fact have been or will be addressed or what the training board has indicated with regards to these potentially not being addressed in the bill.

The other types of issues that have come forward are in terms of information. One of the questions is: how would apprentices and employers get program and process information? When I was labour critic for the Official Opposition, the issue of apprenticeship and the nonsupport, in a sense, at that time of some of the apprenticeship programs was a very large issue within the labour community.

One of the ideas that was put forward often by the labour groups was to bring programs and program information into high schools so that students who were making their career choices would be able to make a career choice that potentially would guide them into some of the apprenticeships and some of the trades. I don't see that that has been at all addressed in this particular question. Granted, that's not perhaps what it was geared towards, but I would like to see some recognition of the fact that there needs to be more information provided to our youth to make decisions as to what path their life will take after high school, and this is one piece of information that I don't think is always provided even when they do their career days. There could be more focus put on that as well.

10:10

There are a number of other recommendations that have been put forward with regards to this particular piece of legislation, and I know the industry does hope that this legislation will be passed within the year 2000. Again, I think that is not an invalid hope. I think that is something that could well occur, but there are, as I indicated at the outset, some outstanding issues that I believe can be worked out and addressed in terms of where this legislation is going.

There is one other issue the Member for Calgary-Buffalo did talk to, and that's with regards to the use of the Regulations Act and why in fact there is a need to exempt some of these committees from the Regulations Act. There are a number of committees that are going to be established, I understand, under Bill 23. The question is whether these committees do in fact need to be established as separate entities. Who are the participants on the committees going to be? How will the decisions be made as to the choices of the individuals that are going to be appointed to these committees? Why can't the issues, I guess, work through the existing apprenticeship committees and within the existing structure?

There's a whole other stream of questions in terms of accountability. Who is the committee going to report to? What are the interfaces between the various committees that are now being formed? What is the reporting mechanism? Are these going to be open meetings or not? In fact, again when I reflect back to the Health Professions Act, it's very clear as to how individuals were appointed to the boards of the various professions, what the composition of those boards was going to be, what the reporting mechanisms are, whether or not they're going to be held in public. That's laid out in that particular piece of legislation, so the question again is: why is this piece of legislation so different? What makes the requirements of the apprenticeship and industry training sector so very different from what is happening in other sectors in this province?

The Regulations Act, by not having the act applied to any of the documentation prepared by or on behalf of the minister relating to the carrying out of the functions of the act, is also of concern, because in fact a lot of that can be done in secrecy. We know that very often this government does a lot of its business behind closed doors, either through orders in council or through regulations. What we need to ensure is that unless there is some very good reason for any decisions to be made in secrecy, those decisions be made openly and that there's accountability built into this whole process.

So those are some of the comments I have with regards to this particular bill. I would very much appreciate having some of those concerns answered in order to make a decision as to whether or not this bill is supportable in its current form. As indicated, it seems that a lot of the concerns of the industry and the other stakeholders have been addressed, but there still remain some that have not. Again, after four years of consultation I find it hard to believe that those concerns were not brought up, but what I think may have happened is that some of the more particular aspects of a bill that is technical were not well understood so that the drafting in fact has managed to do what the consensus did not indicate should be done.

With those remarks, I will take my place, and hopefully we'll have some answers to those questions coming in the near future. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I look at Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, it brings to mind several things and how very important good legislation is in this case. I think of standards when we have people building our homes, people doing work in our homes, and our place of work. I think I came to appreciate the trades a great deal when we built our home over eight years ago. I would see different skilled people working. I had no idea how much work and how much skill it took to put a home together. I gained a great deal of respect for those people who work very hard and are very proud of the job they do. In that, I also came to realize that those skills aren't just something you get out of a *Reader's Digest* book.

In fact, as an example, we once bought an extra stove to put in our basement. You know, with the mega family do's I could have an extra stove in the basement. My husband grabbed the *Reader's Digest* electrician book. [interjection] Yes, it's a Raymond story. Sure enough, he connected it, and it worked. I was so happy. It worked. The stove in the basement worked. But you know what? The stove upstairs did not. So as I cooked, I was getting into better shape as I went up and down the stairs. But we finally called an electrician, and lo and behold both stoves worked safely.

From that time on, we've agreed that we must do what we do well and call in those to do what we don't do well. So there's just a simple example from home where you can appreciate that people need to be qualified and need to have standards, and those people themselves feel it's very important that that is implemented for them.

Now, from my understanding of this bill there's been quite a bit of consultation, and that's good. I commend the minister and his work on that, but I also know that there are still some outstanding concerns. One of them has to do with section 23 and section 24, and there is a concern expressed that competency-based training will find its way into the apprenticeship trades.

Of course, it's good that we have competency training, but we have to watch that it doesn't lead to the breaking down of high standards that exist at present. "Some form of qualifier, for example" – and I'm sure most of us have this letter that was sent to us –

should be "written in the Act or in the Regulations that Level Three does not do Level Four work." It's the whole issue of de-skilling. I think we have to be very cautious that our legislation does not allow that to happen and that it safeguards that you are qualified to do the job you do.

10:20

The other thing that I have seen concern expressed about is proper inspections of those who do the work within the trades and in the training, that they are properly supervised. I think the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar gave a very good example of what happened at Swan Hills. Regrettably, the way things are now, we may never find out what happened there because of some court order to keep things under wraps for a certain length of time. So we don't know what happened there, and I would hope another fiasco like that does not happen until we find out what went wrong and take steps to improve it. I would say that would be one thing this government would want, to find the answers and to make sure they are improved from there.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

Another section of concern that was expressed was section 15, where exceptions about compulsory certification of a trade . . .

MS BLAKEMAN: What kind of exceptions?

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, it seems that the minister

may make regulations permitting a person who is not otherwise permitted under section 21 to work in that trade to carry out work or perform tasks, activities and functions in respect of one or more specific undertakings or a portion of those undertakings that come within the trade, and for that purpose may . . .

and then it goes for (a), (b), (c), and (d).

Now, I would think that once again we're giving the minister some responsibility he may not want or may not have the expertise to administer. That's nothing personal against the minister. I'm saying a generic minister. A generic minister wouldn't want that responsibility. There's no such thing as a generic minister. I know. But we'll move on.

AN HON. MEMBER: There are junior ministers.

MRS. SOETAERT: There are junior ministers.

I would like to continue with the concerns about the exceptions to the compulsory. One described here, which the minister would have control over the regulation of, would be to

- (a) prescribe the tasks, activities, and functions that a person may perform in respect of those undertakings;
- (b) prescribe or otherwise establish the qualifications or training that a person must have to carry out work or to perform tasks, activities and functions under this section;
- (c) prescribe any terms or conditions that a person is subject to with respect to carrying out any work or performing any tasks, activities or functions permitted under this section;
- (d) provide for any matter that the Board considers to be related, incidental or ancillary to permitting a person to carry out any work or to perform any tasks, activities or functions under this section.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have some concerns that there are regulations that aren't clarified or that are lumped under the Regulations Act, where we're not quite sure where they're going to be accessible. That has to be very, very clear. You know, anybody should be able to access those regulations, not just people within the trades. Certainly they should be able to access it, but certainly anyone out of interest should. It may come just by chance in your life that suddenly you are building a home. You are involved maybe just on

a committee that may be doing renovations to a school. I've seen that happen.

In fact, at Woodhaven school out in my riding – and it was a good move on the board's part, a very good move – they involved parents and businesspeople, builders and students to look at what changes would make that school the very best. They learned a great deal about what it takes. You know, you just can't add a wall here and cut down a wall there. They worked with the tradespeople, with the architect, and I would say that that's one of the most successful projects in a renovated school in Alberta. I know the Minister of Infrastructure was at the grand opening of that new wing, as I was. It was a great event because so many people got involved and learned about what it takes to build something that would accommodate so many people in so many different ways.

So that's an example of how every one of us should care about the qualifications, the standards of the apprenticeship and industry programs and the supervision of them and the evaluation of them. Definitely I think that the people who most want this are the people in the trades themselves. They take great pride in their work and they want those standards. They want to be safe. They want the bridges that they build to be safe, and they want to be proud of them. So they expect that those standards will be set by this government through legislation and implemented and supervised on those standards of safety and accountability, the ability to be inspected and to do quality work that they are proud of.

As you know, I used to teach. I was in a wonderful composite school that had many students geared towards apprenticeship and the trades. They loved the welding class. In fact, they built a horse trailer once and all kinds of things. I don't know why they didn't like my English class as much as their welding class. I tried to make it as interesting as possible. The reality is that the students were very, very talented at other things.

I think we all have to recognize the diversity of our wonderful province and all that these young people are looking at. They're going into these trades, and they have to know that there are expectations of them. People in the trades want to say: "I'll show you how. This is what you have to pass, and this is what to do, and these are the standards we proudly meet."

I would say that this piece of legislation has to do that. It has to ensure that there are standards. It has to ensure that inspections will be properly done, that regulations are available, open to everyone so that everyone knows what they are and people can follow them.

Mr. Speaker, I'm glad this bill is before us. I know my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar has expressed some concerns, and maybe we'll get those answers, maybe in second reading, maybe in Committee of the Whole. Maybe he and the minister will have a chat and some of it will be explained. I look forward to further debate on this. I'm glad the bill is here. I'm not a hundred percent comfortable with it for the reasons I've indicated, especially sections 23 and 24 and also section 15.

Those are the things I am hoping a good piece of legislation will bring forward. I know that the people in apprenticeship programs and training programs and in the trades want this to be a real solid piece of legislation. I think if we work at that, it could be that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 23 at second reading.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the side effects of a healthy and robust economy is often at least a temporary shortage of skilled labour, and we're experiencing that in this province right

now. There are probably lots of reasons. The training programs, the ability of the government to forecast, the reduction in funding for postsecondary training, some uncertainty in terms of other conditions have probably all conspired somewhat to lead to this shortage.

What we've come down to now is where many of the megaprojects, whether it be the plant at Joffre or the pipeline projects, whether it be any of the oil sands projects or even just keeping pace with the commercial, industrial, and residential building boom that's taking place in some centres – many of these projects and initiatives are competing for the same relatively small pool of skilled workers. So there has been a lot of pressure on the apprenticeship board. There's been a lot of pressure to get more people into the workforce more quickly. I'm all in favour of more qualified, competent men and women getting high-paying, skilled jobs as quickly as possible. I think that would be a good thing. I think it would be a net benefit in general. I think it would serve the public good, and of course it would serve a very personal purpose, a very personal good for those men and women who gain the employment based on their skills and their abilities.

10:30

I'm a little bit concerned because of this coming together of all of these forces, which has led to a shortage, to a squeeze when it comes to many skilled workers, that mechanisms are being put in place that are going to be at least potentially compromising confidence and therefore confidence in this workforce just in order to meet some market demand. I think that would be a very short-term solution. I don't think that would serve us well in the long run.

I've had a chance to review Bill 23 and have engaged in some discussion, limited discussion, admittedly, with representatives of unions whose members are these skilled workers as well as with employers who depend on these tradespeople to help them get on with their job, and they share some of these same concerns. While they are clamouring for more workers and while the workers themselves are looking forward to greater remuneration, more job security, enhanced benefits because they're more in demand, they all agree on one thing. They all agree that it doesn't make sense to rush into law a series of reforms that will weaken what has really been something that's very strong in Alberta, and that is a very well trained, well supervised, well prepared, competent, skilled, technical workforce. Both employers and employee groups that I've spoken with don't want to do anything that would diminish this standing that the Alberta workforce has.

Now, I think that in at least two areas Bill 23 has the potential of eroding this high standard. My colleagues have talked a little bit about that in their remarks. I don't want to repeat their comments, but I do want to reinforce a couple of things. This whole question of competency-based training versus apprenticeship screening and training is something that I've thought about from time to time.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, you may not be aware, but for a short period of time – I think it was a period of about eight years – I was on faculty at Grant MacEwan College in the correctional services program, and one of the things we did in that program was gear the course towards instructing and then examining against core competencies. These were competencies that were identified by potential employers. The way the curriculum design and the instruction plan went is that we would go through a relatively rigorous process of meeting with potential employer groups and getting input from them as to what competencies they'd be looking for in potential employees. Then we would develop curriculum and instructional technique that was geared towards ensuring that the men and women, the students, who graduated from the program had these competencies. The diploma,

of course, would be the formal certification that they had these competencies.

While I think that process was well served and many of those individuals found their way into employment, with the provincial government for example, those competencies are very different from the kind of competency training or development that comes from the sort of on-the-job experience. While I'm not going to diminish for a minute the fact that you can pick up many things on the job, and in fact I would say that every person that got elected to this Legislature had to pick up how to do the business of being an MLA on the job – I don't think any of us went to MLA school. I'm not going to diminish for a moment the notion that you can learn by doing while you're doing it, but I will say that there is a huge difference between that and putting somebody into a position where they're going to be called upon to do very precise, very skilled, very technical work and then allowing that to happen just based on the good or bad habits that they may pick up on the job. I think employee safety, colleague safety, public safety demand that in many areas we expect a higher level. We would expect a higher test than this competency that may or may not come.

We all have different capacities to learn, Mr. Speaker. You know what they say about old dogs and new tricks. So it's simply not enough to say that we can run the risk of this competency-based certification without paying close attention to its potential for lowering standards or at least compromising standards.

You know, there is an example given in some of the documentation I've seen of boom truck operators. Maybe they don't need to be certified in the same way, don't need to go through the same training. Maybe utility companies could hire people who gain on-the-job experience, and they can go up in those cherry pickers or in those boom trucks and do the work that they do and it would be safe and it would be okay.

You know, we've just had the National Day of Mourning for workers, and I know when I read the newspapers and I listen to the headlines and the electronic media, it seems that not too much time goes by between reports of people who have lost life because of interference with overhead wires and these boom trucks or people just weren't really all that well trained and well versed in the equipment and the tolerances of that equipment. Unfortunately, that lack of experience and that lack of knowledge resulted in a tragedy.

So I wouldn't want to do anything in law that would in any way accelerate or magnify that potential, no matter how small it may be. I want to pay particularly close attention to the caution that's been raised about competency-based certification or training sort of creeping into the apprenticeship regime as it's applied to our technical trades in this province.

This whole notion is not unrelated to the other major concern that I have. That concern is the one about the exemption from the Regulations Act. The bill before us would exempt many things from the Regulations Act. This means that what's exempted is not published. It's not known in the same way. It's not in the *Alberta Gazette*. So if you have regulations about training, what the bill would now do is rely on industry to publish these things in trade publications, in industry manuals, which may be okay most of the time, but it certainly isn't okay in a changing environment.

It would seem to me that when we're dealing with individuals, particularly individuals who may seek certification in more than one trade, we would want them to be able to go to one place. We would want them to be able to quickly know what it is that's expected of them. We would want the public to quickly be able to go to one place and see what the standards are and not have to have the intimate knowledge of the workings of a particular industry or trade to know where to go to ask for what kind of manual or trade

publication. So I really don't see the justification or the rationale for exempting so much of this key critical information from being published in the way that it's being published today.

You know, I'd like to find ways to streamline the process. I'd like to find ways to clean it up. I'd like to find ways to modernize the process. I'd like to ensure that there's not a lot of red tape and there's not a lot of bureaucracy but not at the expense of the skill set and not at the expense of public awareness and public safety.

10:40

I guess my fear, if I get right down to it, is that there is this link between this potential for the standards to be lower, for somebody's notion of competency-based, on-the-job training to take the place of careful and methodical apprenticeship-based training and that that's why you want to remove the requirement for the regulations to be published. You see, if you don't have to have the regulations published so that they're there in black and white for everybody to see, the regulations can be a little bit more flexible or in flux or a little less knowable, and then it's easier to go with the flow and maybe sort of get away with some things that otherwise you couldn't because the regulations themselves present a challenge. They present a measure, and sometimes that measure might be a disincentive if what you were trying to do was rush people to market perhaps before they really have the knowledge base that they require to do their job well and to do it safely.

So I do see this relationship between the issue of competency training and the move by the government. It's not unique in Bill 23. We've seen it in other places as well. Government reduces public accountability by leaving things either to order in council regulations or, even worse, by exempting things from the Regulations Act.

I want to go on record as saying that along with these comments, Mr. Speaker, I think that Alberta and Albertans are incredibly well served by the apprenticeship and industry training system that is in place in Alberta. I am not for a minute with my comments suggesting that there is some conspiracy or collusion here to somehow damage or weaken or undermine this industry training system. I'm just saying that the way the bill is written, given the current climate, given the economic pressures, given the track record of this government, the potential for these dangers is very real.

I haven't heard from government any soothing words. I haven't read in their press releases and I haven't seen in the bill itself anything that puts my mind at ease on these matters. So I would hope that as we see this bill move from this stage of debate into committee, the sponsor of the bill will take the opportunity to reply to these concerns and to do so with an open mind. These aren't just my concerns or the concerns of the Official Opposition. As I say, these are concerns that have been expressed by those men and women who are closest to the matter. If there are ways to improve the bill to address these concerns, I'd hope that the minister of course would be open to amendments. I want to say that for the most part I find that the bill is supportable, but I do have these concerns that I want addressed before the bill receives this member's vote.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000, at second reading and to make some comments about the principles that underlie the bill. I wanted to start off with some preliminary comments about the context under

which the bill is being presented to the Legislature at this time.

I think it's widely recognized, the need for a competent and skilled workforce at this particular time. There are a number of areas, a number of trades that have really had the pressure on them in terms of needing more workers, more apprentices, more trainees. The government has actually done some specific funding through the access fund to try to accomplish it. There is expanded training in specific trades, including welders. There are expanded opportunities in the electrician field, heavy duty equipment technicians, machinists, millwrights, steamfitters and pipe fitters, bricklayers, roofers, plumbers, painters and decorators, floor covering installers, recreation vehicle service technicians, sheet metal workers, and partsmen trades across the province. That's part of the list of trades that are facing increased pressure to increase the number of tradespeople for the industries in the province that need those skilled technicians and workers.

This has been a constant problem for our province. When times are good, we have that pressure. There's a lot of construction, a lot of projects under way, the economy is growing. We've had this same kind of pressure in the past. I think Bill 23 is in part a good response to making sure that changes as a result of those pressures will be reasoned changes and will fit into an overall plan for apprenticeship and training in the province.

We're also seeing a change in the kind of technology. A number of the professions and a number of the trainee areas and a number of the trades areas are changing because of technology, because of new ways of doing things. The challenge, of course, is to make sure that existing workers have the skills needed to meet new requirements and that those being prepared currently will have the kinds of skills that are needed and that are current and contemporary and useful to them. So there's a change in technology that I think is affecting a wide number of the trades that we rely on in the province.

There are also a wide number of changes in the ways that training programs are being delivered to the kinds of traditional modes that we are used to, with the tradition of a journeyman being responsible for the work of an apprentice and that being a fairly stable relationship over a three-year period.

There's mobile delivery of training now. The boom truck operator program is being delivered in Grande Prairie, Bonnyville, Fort McMurray, and Brooks by NAIT, so instruction out of an institute in this city being delivered mobile in areas remote from this city. The bricklayer training is being delivered by SAIT. So here we have bricklayers in our city being trained by mobile instruction centered out of SAIT in Calgary, the communications and electrician programs delivered in Calgary again by NAIT, and the roofer program in Lethbridge delivered in Calgary by NAIT. The instruction has become much more mobile than it was in the past, when apprentices were tied to institutions or specific locations where instruction was being offered. Another mobile program is the tile setter. The first period is being delivered again in Edmonton by SAIT. So here we have our two largest technical institutes working in each other's home cities and in various smaller communities across the province.

Distance education, of course, has become a fact of life in almost all aspects of education. Our province has a long history through the correspondence school of delivering, I guess, very rudimentary distance education in Athabasca University. But now we have electricians being able to receive their training from NAIT through distance education programs. We have locksmiths being able to receive their programs from Red Deer College through distance education and welders at all periods being able to receive distance instruction by NAIT.

10:50

Even the apprenticeship programs, the way the blocks were traditionally broken up in terms of work and school, have been changed with weekly apprenticeship training available for cabinet-makers and carpenters at Lethbridge Community College; for cooks at SAIT and Lethbridge Community College; for machinists at NAIT; for partsmen at SAIT, NAIT, and Lethbridge Community College; and millwright and welders at NAIT. We have the delivery of that instruction now broken up in periods that differ quite differently from what was traditionally the pattern.

We've seen in the bill a movement to competency-based instruction. Again, the idea behind that is placing the importance on what the trainee knows rather than how the trainee came to that knowledge. So the notion of putting in fixed periods of instruction or experience before certification could be acquired has changed dramatically. The competency-based apprenticeship training is now a fact of life in the carpenter program at SAIT and the carpenter program at Lethbridge Community College; the electrician program at NAIT, Fairview, Lakeland, Lethbridge, and Red Deer colleges; the locksmith program at Red Deer College; and the welder program at Red Deer College, NAIT, and SAIT.

Those are fairly significant advances in terms of how training is delivered, and Bill 23 has in its principles tried to bring that kind of competency-based education or training into focus in that it makes it clearer the context under which that training will take place.

There are a variety of ways now of programs being delivered, so it makes the consideration of changes to the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act really very, very important. It is important that we scrutinize them carefully so that we can assure ourselves that standards that are held to be extremely important in terms of the trades are maintained, that the kinds of certificates that tradespeople acquire during their training are well respected and are certificates that both the public and industry can have great confidence in in terms of the ability of the recipients.

It's important that those standards be maintained, and I think that if there's been a concern raised about Bill 23, it's the concern with standards around competency-based instruction. Competency-based instruction, of course, has been around for a long time. In its early form in grade school and in high school it was seized upon as being a panacea, a way of being able to lay out exactly what a learner should know or understand, to be able to put in place a series of steps that learner would go through and that would ensure that competency was acquired.

Well, it didn't work out quite that simply, Mr. Speaker. One of the downsides of the early competency-based instruction was the fact that what is most easily defined and what is most easily laid out in terms of instruction are very simple tasks, so the competency-based instruction seemed to focus primarily on very simple tasks, and the more complex operations were in many cases abandoned.

That same issue has been raised by some of the trades in terms of this bill. They want to be assured that competency-based instruction and the kinds of standards, the kinds of skills and knowledge that trainees participating in those programs gain are indeed the kinds that are required by the trade and are of a quality that the trade would sanction and that industry and the general public, too, would have confidence in. So I think we may want to look back again and return to the competency-based component of this and really assure ourselves before we proceed with passing the bill that those fears are unfounded.

In concluding my comments, Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't comment on the kind of extensive consultation that went into the proposals that we have before us. There was widespread involvement of employers and employees and apprentices and

journeymen, and I think that consultation over the last number of years serves us well in the bill that we see before us. I'm sure that the kinds of reservations we have are ones that can be easily resolved as the bill proceeds through second reading. So with those comments I look forward to the clause-by-clause discussion of Bill 23 at committee stage.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 23.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

11:00

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

For the benefit of those in the gallery, this is the less formal side of the Legislative Assembly. Members are allowed to sit in various places and indeed may remove their jackets and hopefully will not make loud noises. Members are also allowed to bring juice or coffee in here and to move to other places, so you can see it is not as formal, and the Speaker moves from the chair to the table.

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

17. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that further consideration of any or all of the resolutions, clauses, sections, or titles of Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, shall, when called, be the first business of the committee and shall not be further postponed.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:02 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Herard	Nelson
Broda	Hierath	O'Neill
Cao	Hlady	Paszkowski
Clegg	Jacques	Pham
Doerksen	Jonson	Renner
Dunford	Klapstein	Severtson
Evans	Klein	Smith
Forsyth	Langevin	Stelmach
Friedel	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Fritz	Magnus	Taylor
Graham	Marz	West
Haley	McClellan	Woloshyn
Hancock	Melchin	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers

Carlson
Dickson
Gibbons

MacDonald
Massey
Olsen

Sloan
Soetaert

Totals

For – 39

Against – 14

[Government Motion 17 carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would seek unanimous consent of the House to suspend the operation of Rule 32(2) so that the division bells, if any, tonight in committee on Bill 11 would be such that the next vote would be the usual 10-minute division bell and every vote thereafter would be a one-minute division bell.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE CHAIRMAN: The next vote will be a 10-minute standing vote if one is called. Any that's called after that will be one minute.

The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Chairman, it is a very black evening in this Legislature when this government decides to move closure on a piece of legislation. Probably nothing has more impact on the people of this province and on their sense of being Canadian and Albertan than their health care system. Here is a government which has failed to make a case for the privatization of health care, which they want to now ram through this Legislature, using all the abusive power they have with their majority, ignoring the people out there in our foyer and the people on the grounds of this Legislature who have come to watch this historic night. That vote that we just took, the vote to say that we oppose closure, the vote that every single member sitting in this Legislature for the government side stood up on, is going to be a major legacy for the defeat of this government in the future.

Mr. Chairman, on two occasions this evening I have been able to go out and walk through the crowd that is demonstrating peacefully on the grounds of our Legislature, the families that are there, the senior citizens, the couples, the kids on their bikes, the people who have walked over, the mothers with their strollers. Constituents, people in this province, people who have come, people who are gathering tonight in Calgary at the McDougall Centre, people who gathered in Ponoka this weekend to give a requiem for public health care in the constituency of Ponoka-Rimbey, people who gathered in Lethbridge last week who protested, people who held a public meeting who protested, people all over this province are wondering what has happened to this government, what has happened to the government that said not one word about the privatization for health care when they last sought a mandate in '97.

But you know what Albertans know, Mr. Chairman? They know that when this government goes to seek a mandate the next time, which will be within two years, it's going to be a very different story, for Albertans have lost trust in this government.

Today in the question period when I was able to ask the questions of course surrounding the subamendment, the questions about the whole fundamental purpose of this legislation, which is to provide for the regulation of overnight stays in the province – mind you, Mr. Chairman, the Premier and his government members have never explained why they need this legislation when in fact overnight stays are not allowed now. Why is the purpose of this legislation to control them when the control is obviously there? So the key is that

this government simply wants to allow overnight stays, wants to allow private hospitals to get a foothold in this province. The people of this province know it, even if the government tries to ignore them.

11:20

Mr. Chairman, just to sum up the kind of work that has been done by people across Alberta, and we as an Official Opposition have tried to amplify the voice of concern of the people, let's look at the government's failure to build a case around why they need this bill. I raised the questions today. Interestingly, these questions would have been the subject of the amendments we would have been bringing forward had the government not brought in its closure motion and shut off any further discussion.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, where is the proof that it won't cost more? This is fundamental to this bill, fundamental to the subamendment we're discussing here tonight, fundamental to good fiscal management of the province. Well, guess what? The proof is, the case is, the evidence exists that this in fact will cost more. The government has ignored that and failed to bring forth any evidence that says it's going to do anything but cost more. A shameful display of a government that has lost touch with people and lost touch with the role it has been entrusted to do for governing.

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, where is the proof that this bill won't lengthen waiting lists? Guess what? The proof is that in fact it will lengthen waiting lists, and this government hasn't shown one shred of evidence to allow . . . [interjections]

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, the Leader of the Opposition has the floor, not Calgary-Fish Creek or anyone else, only the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Could we not do the courtesy of listening or hearing her out. We'll have other chances for other people to speak following that.

Hon. leader.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The third question that I asked today was: where is the proof that the costs won't escalate as private facilities compete with public facilities for a limited supply of health care professionals? Speaking to the subamendment, it's clear that in fact the costs will escalate as a pricing war is set up between these new private facilities and public facilities, yet we know that one of the very pressing issues within our province is the lack of health care personnel, probably in part attributable to the fact that so many of them were laid off when the government was in a cutting mode back in the early '90s, a cutting mode that of course resulted in a 30 percent cut in the hospital budgets in this province. [interjection] Thirty percent. They don't like to hear it, Mr. Chairman. That's because they don't like the truth and that is the truth: 30 percent on hospitals. It's very clear. They should check the Canadian Institute for Health Information studies and they'd see the number.

Mr. Chairman, speaking to the subamendment, the next question – and of course these were all very legitimate questions and there were no answers given by this Premier. [interjections]

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Order. Hon. members, we only have 25, 35 minutes to go. Surely to goodness most of you can keep it down so that at least we have a chance to hear the hon. leader.

Hon. leader.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I know they don't like to hear it. But guess what? They're going to have to hear it because it's true. No answers to the questions. They failed to make their case.

Why does this Premier refuse to stop the queue-jumping that is going on right now with private MRIs? In fact, the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert had a call from one of her constituents this evening who found out he needed an MRI and was told tonight that he would not be able to get that MRI for three months. The only choice he has is to go for a private MRI and pay \$600 for that MRI, and this government doesn't even cover it in its Bill 11. This government doesn't even acknowledge it. They've turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to the people of this province.

On the subamendment, Mr. Chairman, let's move on. No answers. No answers to the question: why wouldn't the Premier create one, single conflict-of-interest standard that will apply across the province and show a little bit of leadership in this issue rather than hiding behind the coattails of the 17 regional health authorities that he's appointed?

Mr. Chairman, as we were preparing for this discussion on the subamendment this evening, it was interesting to hear the minister of energy speak. I quote from the *Hansard* when he said that they put together a February 1998 Tax Review Committee that traveled across the province and "came back with the views of Albertans," some 80,000 people, he said, "who mailed in their views on this issue as well as many hundreds who came to the meetings and voiced their opinions." Guess what the result was? The result was the flat tax legislation which we've been discussing here for the past several days. Well, guess what? The government, hearing the message and passing legislation on the flat tax – why do they ignore 80,000 people who have signed a petition, tens of thousands of people who have attended rallies, people who have written letters, spoken to their MLAs? I guess the 80,000 only applies if you're telling the government what the government wants to hear. If you're telling the government to stop privatizing health care, they turn a deaf ear.

Mr. Chairman, let's get back to the steps that have been taken. Speaking to the subamendment on the purpose of this bill being overnight stays, which of course we would remove from the legislation, let's look at the steps that moved this government to moving closure this evening. They knew full well they were going to move closure last week when the House was in recess. But what did they do? They spent another however much, probably by our estimate about \$70,000, putting these big ads in dailies right across the province. The government talks about the truth. They call it fact. You know what it is? It's fiction. It's falsehood, because it says, for example, that Bill 11 is similar – speaking to the subamendment, Mr. Chairman – to legislation already in place in other provinces, including Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Manitoba. What utter nonsense. Saskatchewan, Ontario, Manitoba: none of them have overnight stays, the very amendment that we are talking about here in this Assembly this evening. Not one of them has overnight stays. Not one of them allows enhanced services, uninsured services, to be delivered alongside insured services in private surgical clinics. So it is complete fiction that they would tell that.

Mr. Chairman, this is a government that talks about telling the truth but does anything but. This is the government that talked about the Shouldice clinic. Remember that? That was the example they were going to use. [interjections]

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, we now only have 30 minutes left. Could you please keep the noise down? Those who are helping

their leader, would they mind just listening to their leader? [interjection] I'm saying it to both sides, hon. member. Surely one is no better than the other. They're all noisy. I'm just trying to get them to be quiet in all corners of the committee.

Hon. leader.

11:30

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Another one of the theses in this government piece of propaganda – our tally, of course, is that the government is up on the subamendment. The government has said in their so-called fiction sheet that Bill 11 has absolutely no implications for the health system under the NAFTA agreement. You know what? Not even the government can say that.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader, rising on a point of order. Would you share it with us?

Point of Order Relevance

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Chairman, yes. Under *Beauchesne* 459, relevance. We have had a lot of debate over the last few weeks on this particular bill, and the opposition has kept us on the subamendment to the amendment, overnight stays, for in excess of nine hours. And if I remember correctly, that's where we still are, on the subamendment to the amendment, which deals with overnight stays.

NAFTA has nothing to do with overnight stays. [interjections] I wasn't debating the bill. I was pointing out that the hon. Leader of the Opposition was speaking about NAFTA and speaking about an advertisement in a newspaper on issues other than this subamendment. It's very clear that if they wanted to speak about all of the other amendments, we could have had that opportunity, but they didn't give us that opportunity, Mr. Chairman. So I suggest that the hon. Leader of the Opposition should speak to the subamendment in the few remaining minutes she has left.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: I'll be brief. It seems to me the Government House Leader is now trying to invoke closure on closure, because he's going to use the time talking about points of order.

The point is simply this. I have listened to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition repeatedly reference the subamendment. You've heard that too, Mr. Chairman. You know that she's specifically talking about subamendment SA1 that's in front of us, and I invite you, sir, to allow this member the same kind of latitude you've accorded each one of those many government members that have spoken to the subamendment and let us get on to make the optimal use of the limited time this government affords us before they bring down the heavy hand at midnight.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair would observe that strict adherence to the thoughts of *Beauchesne* under 459 would be true, but the chair has given leeway, and the Speaker commended the two chairs for giving wide leeway to debate this while, strictly speaking, it should be only on the amendment. But both sides have had the benefit of the relaxation of the rules of relevance on this particular bill so that we could have wide-ranging debate even though we were only on a subamendment.

So, hon. leader.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do get a little carried

away when I'm talking about this subamendment to ban overnight stays, because of course this is one of the primary problems with the legislation. Of course the legislation opens up – it doesn't just, as the Premier is fond of saying, put a fence around what exists. Albertans know and anybody in the gallery knows that what it does is in fact open up a whole new cottage industry, with subsidies from the taxpayer, in terms of private, overnight, approved-stay surgical facilities, or what everybody else calls private hospitals, and at the same time ignores, does not include, private diagnostic facilities and others which lead to queue-jumping. The deceptions in the bill are widely known, and the deceptions in advertising it before the government moved on closure on this subamendment on overnight stays are clear and understood.

Finally, in terms of the ad and the government's decision to move on closure and on the subamendment, is the statement that this bill that would permit overnight stays "is one more tool, in compliance with the Canada Health Act, to help reduce waiting lists." What fiction is that supposed to be? We already know that waiting lists have been increased, because in fact there's been a 50 percent increase in the amount of privatization that's gone on in Alberta even without this legislation and the waiting lists are longer. So how can they possibly argue that because of their folly and mismanagement of the health care system over the past seven years, the responsibility for the waiting lists and the mess that's been created doesn't fall squarely on their shoulders, Mr. Chairman?

I think it's important that we look at some of the important insights which have been gained by listening to the people of this province, by being out there and going around in that crowd and hearing the things that are on people's minds. You know, Mr. Chairman, speaking to this subamendment on the overnight stays, people understand that this discussion in here this evening and the actions of the government to close off debate is not just about an issue of health care policy. I know the government would like to think this is just a single issue of health care policy, but in fact it is not. It has grown legs. This has become an issue of distrust in this government and an issue of the kind of relationship that this government has with the people of this province: that they will ignore them, that they won't respond to their questions, that they will ignore petitions, only hear the people they want to hear, and ignore the very people that put them where they are.

Well, guess what, Mr. Chairman. The voters in this province will have the final say when the day of reckoning occurs. And as I have said on many occasions, I am looking forward to when this Premier finally has the courage to come out and debate me on this legislation, because of course he has refused to do that on many, many occasions. He has refused to do it because he's afraid to stand and try to defend this legislation anywhere other than in his safe little office and at his political fund-raising dinners where people have to pay to hear him.

Mr. Chairman, this government has a record on health care. You bet they do. They created the climate. They created the pain. They created the shortage of workers in terms of health care, because of course they laid them all off in the early '90s and created that pain. I believe 8,000 nurses were certainly laid off, and now they're crying foul because there aren't enough. These are the very people they want to bring back, but as the question was put to the government today and they refused to answer: what are they going to do with the cost competition between the private and the public sector with the shortage of nurses? Guess what? The cost is going to go up, not down.

In fact, as some of the members have said, if their only purpose is to break the unions and the organization of nurses in this province, if they do happen to set up private health care and have nurses

outside of the union, where do you suppose the profits from the cost of those nurses will go? Where will that profit go? Do you think it's going to come back to the public sector, as it does with the Shouldice clinic, Mr. Chairman? No, sir. That will go straight into someone's pocket. It will be a shift away from the public sector being the funder of health care and a shift to the cost of health care being on the workers as opposed to on the shareholders, who should be bearing that risk.

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, I have a very dear friend of mine, my friend Jennifer, who actually lives in Calgary but was born and raised on a wonderful farm in this province. I told her that I was going to be talking about Bill 11 probably tonight when this government invoked closure, when it decided that it didn't want to hear any more, and she sent me an e-mail tonight which was just fascinating. I want to read a little excerpt from it, because she's always been someone that's very concerned about our farmers. I'm quoting now from my friend Jennifer.

Our Alberta farmers are also in a terrible and complex failure not of their own making. A Bill 11 solution is the solution that says, "Just sell the Farm." Selling the farm won't increase the price of wheat.

We know that.

It won't raise the water table, return the topsoil or buy equipment or seed or insurance. A Bill 11 solution [in speaking to the subamendment] would have you still make the mortgage payments on the land anyways. A Bill 11 solution leaves nothing for our children or grandchildren. A Bill 11 solution is not a plan for Albertans. Bill 11 is part of someone else's plan [somebody else's benefit]. It's part of an investment plan.

Yet she had always thought and I had always thought that health care was about looking after each other, Mr. Chairman. Well, it appears not. This whole scene that this government has created is a private business plan, subsidized by the taxpayers by the way, under the guise of being something innovative.

11:40

You know, Mr. Chairman, there is real innovation that's needed in health care. This government, after eight years, has lost any sense of direction in health care other than to move towards privatization. This bill really creates a vehicle by which our health care system can be slowly pared away. A little piece of public health care can be given out to the private sector, a private sector that quite frankly doesn't need a subsidy from the public sector in order to make a profit, but this is a government that's giving it over to them and leaving it to them. The legacy of this Premier is going to be a legacy of working to destroy the public health care system.

We will continue to fight for public health care. I've done it all my life; I'm not about to stop now. I will continue, whatever it takes, to fight for public health care, and I am proud to do so.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you. This evening it is probably most appropriate, because I am Minister of Children's Services as well as an MLA, for me to begin by reading a letter sent unsolicited to my office by a mother who's quoted her daughter, reading up on Bill 11 and writing this letter as a grade 7 school project. Mr. Chairman, I would beg your indulgence for the Assembly to listen to this letter, because it does in fact reflect the faith and the considered and informed opinion of a child.

What is the truth on Bill 11? The bill would allow people to open up private health care centers. What's so bad about that? If you think about it, Bill 11 makes a lot of sense! Right now people are always having to wait in long lineups to be admitted into the hospital. If Bill 11 was intact there wouldn't be so many lineups because there would be more places to go for help. Everyone keeps

saying that if we had this Bill poorer people wouldn't get help if they needed it, but that's just not true! You see, even if the private health care centers started to charge more money for people to get help (which they won't because the government promised that wouldn't happen) they would always have the public health care centers to go to, so I think that this Bill is basically asking if you trust your government, and I think you should.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My great disappointment in listening to the debate on this incredibly important issue is that when you look at the subamendments, two thoughts strike you. Number one, the mover has absolutely assured, by putting words around or subtracting words, that the people of Alberta feel suspicion that this government is trying to undermine health care. The second issue is that something is terribly wrong with a challenge to the point of view . . . [interjections] Mr. Chairman, I would like the same courtesy afforded to the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I would like that same courtesy.

I have been in politics for over 20 years, and I can guarantee you of one thing. When you in fact enrage, misinform, engage in fearful debate, people – mothers and strollers, seniors, people who are least capable of gaining that information sometimes for themselves, except through their elected representatives – those people if in fact it is proven that they have trusted somebody blindly and gone in that direction, if at one time they find that that confidence is shaken, they will never turn back.

Mr. Chairman, the kind of misinformation that has gone on in this debate is shameful indeed, because it has engaged a fearful attitude in people who don't deserve to feel that kind of fear. We have people at night who aren't sleeping, who are concerned. They are saying: what is this government doing to us? It's very clear what we are doing. We are trying to protect the public health care system. We are saying no to private hospitals.

One of the things that I've also learned is that if in fact you enrage the public to that extent, then if at some time you are ever responsible yourself to take that governance leadership, they will return in kind the same kind of performance that you have encouraged them to engage in. In other words, Mr. Chairman, it's a very dangerous ploy to engage people in the debate when you know that you are not providing them all of the information and in an honest fashion. In the end, when the history is written of this day, I would suggest that the absolute atrocity that has occurred is that people will have been unnecessarily inflamed about a piece of legislation on the basis of what- ifs or what could happen, a shadow box of mystery that is in fact not the reality of this bill. When that is recognized by a member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition who has in fact spoken, believing this does not engage in a two-tier system, I think the Leader of the Opposition has some real soul searching to do among her own troops.

Mr. Chairman, over this last year of listening to a discussion on health care reform, of having my own forum, I anticipated in January that the tabling of the bill might in fact engage in considerable debate in my community. So with a random selection but not in fact selecting any known Conservative Party members, three names were selected from each page of the phone book in my constituency, and I had . . . [interjection]

THE CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Norwood, it is not incumbent upon you to answer each and every piece of rhetoric that is now being given. Would you please let the hon. minister continue.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, I mailed out 385 surveys with questions asked about their predominant concerns, what was second, third, fourth, fifth, and asked them to rank their concerns and give their

comments. Let me tell you about their number one concern, which was health. Let me tell you what their number one concern boils down to, and I will be pleased tomorrow to table in this House a copy of all of the survey information. Their number one concern is access. When our Premier first spoke to this bill, he said that his number one concern was the long waiting lists and the pain and suffering of Albertans who were waiting for treatment.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to quote from some of the comments that have been made. "Line-ups are very silly especially when we are asked how to spend a surplus. Obviously emergency and hospital service needs." "With . . . empty beds in our hospitals why would you even consider paying private companies to look after our health needs" in a private hospital? "Maintain our health system so it's easily accessible to all and not favoring any one group, whether it is status or wealth."

Both mental and physical health of children, adults and the elderly [are important]. The health and well being of the community and society is directly related to the health and well being of its people.

"Without a health population - not much else matters or can happen."

11:50

They say further: "No two-tiered system - health care should be universal. It is a Canadian right to good health care." "Use facilities that already exist . . . [and] open up empty beds and wards." We are concerned about a "shortage of medical staff." "Hospital stays [are] too short, release of surgical cases too soon with no supplementary care provided." "Health is essential," and "homecare is a fabulous concept which needs to be continued." "Health care needs immediate attention." "Better care for seniors, health related assistance at an affordable cost."

I could go through a litany of the comments here. Most of these comments relate to concerns about many issues involving our health system, and many of these issues, Mr. Chairman, are in fact engaged within the context of Bill 11: no private hospitals, queue-jumping addressed, transparency of contracts.

Many of the concerns that have been brought forward by people who do not want to pay out of their own pockets for health care are addressed in this bill. You hear words like this:

Based on the service to my loved ones - the problem that I encountered is that if a large emergency was to occur no single hospital . . . could handle large numbers of people who would need attention - a large flu epidemic, accident, etc.

Mr. Chairman, during the time of the tornado here in 1987 a huge concern was having the capacity to provide adequate emergency response. I have to believe at one time, a decade or more ago, when surgical facilities were opened in this province, it was because of the frustration of long waiting lists to get in with minor procedures. It was because there wasn't adequate space in public facilities to look after both major surgical needs as well as minor procedures that also were needed by the people that brought them forward.

We have a great challenge in Canada, and that is to get health care right. We have a great challenge in North America, and that is to get health care right. We have a great challenge globally to get health care right and affordable, and we have a great challenge, Mr. Chairman, not to work in isolation of people but to work together on all sides of this House to set the example that we set when we sing *O Canada*. We have that great challenge to commit too in our communities so that we work as one in leadership and in governance to make sure that the people in our province, in Canada are as healthy as they can possibly be.

But, Mr. Chairman, when any one elected person attacks another, I can guarantee you this: when anyone attacks the other, to those people out there we all look the same. So while people in the

opposition think that they have won the great debate, let me tell you that in God's eyes that cannot be true, because we have not dealt fairly with the people and the respect that people should have for their government and, I believe, ultimately will diminish on all sides of this House because of the attitude of people who show no respect in their disagreement.

I have heard repeatedly day after day petitions being tabled in this House that suggest, Mr. Chairman, that people out there feel that they are going to have private health care rammed down their throats. That can't possibly be the truth. That can't possibly be the truth because we already have private surgical facilities. We have over 50 private surgical facilities. Did the 30 some odd facilities in the early '90s come as a great revelation, a great horror story? Did people on all sides of the House yell and scream and barrage and engage in protest? Well, doesn't it make sense that if we've got a legislative gap today in the matter of dealing with surgical facilities that we have to close that? Doesn't it make sense that we should work in co-operation?

The opposition would try and make people believe that there hasn't been a filibuster. Mr. Chairman, when you look at the amount of time we have spent discussing this bill, not only attributed to Bill 11 but attributed to Bill 18, you can hardly believe that we haven't been focused on a very small and very particular part of this bill without looking at this total bill in the context of how it will help Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, we have a responsibility to the health of Albertans, to the other five points of the surgical plan, but what I am hearing in this House to my great disappointment is not the issue of health but the issue of politicization of an issue to the great detriment of the people of Alberta. We have actually managed to make this issue an issue not to unite for the health of the people but to divide for our own political self-interest. We have managed to make this issue an issue that is tearing apart the very fabric of the attitudes within this House that we engaged in at the time of Canadian unity, when I had such hope that this House - Her Majesty's opposition, the third party, and ourselves - would work well together in a spirit of co-operation.

On a personal basis I suppose the one thing that really grabs me - because I have been in a leadership position. Mr. Chairman, it is wonderful when it's quiet. When I have been a leader, it has been most painful to me and to my family to hear motives attributed to what I have done or what I am trying to do that are not my motives. The motives that have been ascribed to our Premier have been unworthy and undeserving. Our Premier like any good leader . . . [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members who are sitting on the front bench . . . [interjection] Premier. Hon. members on both sides, we have but a couple of minutes. May we hear the hon. minister conclude her remarks.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, our Premier deserves respect not only for the man he is but because the majority of Albertans have said that he's our Premier and our leader and have given him the trust and respect that they have shown when they marked their ballot in favour of him and in favour of this party. When he has provided this bill and the opposition has challenged that you can't trust this Premier and this caucus, they are belittling everything that this Premier and this government have done in reducing debt, reducing expenditure, eliminating waste, and in fact promoting the health and the safety and the education and the environmental concerns all for the people of Alberta. There will be a day of reckoning when the people in fact come to the realization that the period in which this government

legislated on behalf of the people was one of the most glorious times in our history. We not only dared to do what was different; we dared to make a difference, not only for our children but for our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren.

For that, Mr. Speaker, I stand with pride with this Premier and caucus and vote for Bill 11.

12:00

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, due notice having been given by the hon. Government House Leader under Standing Order 21 and pursuant to Government Motion 17, agreed to May 2, 2000, under Standing Order 21(2), which states that all questions must be decided in order to conclude the debate on Committee of the Whole consideration of Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, I must now put the question on the subamendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:01 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	

Against the motion:

Boutilier	Hancock	McFarland
Broda	Herard	Melchin
Cao	Hierath	Nelson
Clegg	Hlady	O'Neill
Coutts	Jacques	Paszkowski
Doerksen	Johnson	Pham
Ducharme	Jonson	Renner
Dunford	Klapstein	Severtson
Evans	Klein	Smith
Fischer	Langevin	Stelmach
Forsyth	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Friedel	Lund	Taylor
Fritz	Magnus	West
Graham	Marz	Woloshyn
Haley	McClellan	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For - 14	Against - 45
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[Motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: We next have up for our consideration amendment A1-A, as moved by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:15 a.m.]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, just so we understand, it'll be a

30-second bell, then a one-minute space of time, and then a one-minute bell.

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Hancock	McFarland
Broda	Herard	Melchin
Cao	Hierath	Nelson
Clegg	Hlady	O'Neill
Coutts	Jacques	Paszkowski
Doerksen	Johnson	Pham
Ducharme	Jonson	Renner
Dunford	Klapstein	Severtson
Evans	Klein	Smith
Fischer	Langevin	Stelmach
Forsyth	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Friedel	Lund	Taylor
Fritz	Magnus	West
Graham	Marz	Woloshyn
Haley	McClellan	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	

Totals:	For - 45	Against - 14
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[Motion on amendment A1-A carried]

12:20

THE CHAIRMAN: The next vote is on A1-B, as moved by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:21]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Herard	Melchin
Broda	Hierath	Nelson
Cao	Hlady	O'Neill
Clegg	Jacques	Paszkowski
Coutts	Johnson	Pham
Doerksen	Jonson	Renner
Ducharme	Klapstein	Severtson
Dunford	Klein	Smith
Evans	Langevin	Stelmach
Fischer	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Lund	Taylor
Fritz	Magnus	West
Graham	Marz	Woloshyn
Haley	McClellan	Zwozdesky
Hancock	McFarland	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	

Totals: For – 44 Against – 14

[Motion on amendment A1-B carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: Our next amendment is A1-C, as moved by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:27 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Herard	Melchin
Broda	Hierath	Nelson
Cao	Hlady	O'Neill
Clegg	Jacques	Paszkowski
Coutts	Johnson	Pham
Doerksen	Klapstein	Renner
Ducharme	Klein	Severtson
Dunford	Langevin	Smith
Evans	Lougheed	Stelmach
Fischer	Lund	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Magnus	Taylor
Fritz	Marz	West
Graham	McClellan	Woloshyn
Haley	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Hancock		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	

Totals: For – 43 Against – 14

[Motion on amendment A1-C carried]

12:30

THE CHAIRMAN: The next amendment is A1-D, as moved by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:32 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Herard	Melchin
Broda	Hierath	Nelson

Cao	Hlady	O'Neill
Clegg	Jacques	Paszkowski
Coutts	Johnson	Pham
Doerksen	Jonson	Renner
Ducharme	Klapstein	Severtson
Dunford	Klein	Smith
Evans	Langevin	Stelmach
Fischer	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Lund	Taylor
Fritz	Magnus	West
Graham	Marz	Woloshyn
Haley	McClellan	Zwozdesky
Hancock	McFarland	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	

Totals: For – 44 Against – 14

[Motion on amendment A1-D carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in support of amendment A1-E, as moved by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, please say aye.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:37 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Herard	Melchin
Broda	Hierath	Nelson
Cao	Hlady	O'Neill
Clegg	Jacques	Paszkowski
Coutts	Johnson	Pham
Doerksen	Jonson	Renner
Ducharme	Klapstein	Severtson
Dunford	Klein	Smith
Evans	Langevin	Stelmach
Fischer	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Lund	Taylor
Fritz	Magnus	West
Graham	Marz	Woloshyn
Haley	McClellan	Zwozdesky
Hancock	McFarland	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	

Totals: For – 44 Against – 14

[Motion on amendment A1-E carried]

12:40

THE CHAIRMAN: The next amendment is A1-F, as moved by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:42 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Herard	Melchin
Broda	Hierath	Nelson
Cao	Hlady	O'Neill
Clegg	Jacques	Paszkowski
Coutts	Johnson	Pham
Doerksen	Jonson	Renner
Ducharme	Klapstein	Severtson
Dunford	Klein	Smith
Evans	Langevin	Stelmach
Fischer	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Lund	Taylor
Fritz	Magnus	West
Graham	Marz	Woloshyn
Haley	McClellan	Zwozdesky
Hancock	McFarland	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	
Totals:	For – 44	Against – 14

[Motion on amendment A1-F carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in support of amendment A1-G, as moved by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, please say aye.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:46 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Herard	Melchin
Broda	Hierath	Nelson
Cao	Hlady	O'Neill
Clegg	Jacques	Paszkowski
Coutts	Johnson	Pham
Doerksen	Jonson	Renner
Ducharme	Klapstein	Severtson
Dunford	Klein	Smith
Evans	Langevin	Stelmach

Fischer	Lougheed
Forsyth	Lund
Fritz	Magnus
Graham	Marz
Haley	McClellan
Hancock	McFarland

Tarchuk
Taylor
West
Woloshyn
Zwozdesky

12:50

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	

Totals:	For – 44	Against – 14
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[Motion on amendment A1-G carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in support of amendment A1-H, as moved by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, please say aye.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:52 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Herard	Melchin
Broda	Hierath	Nelson
Cao	Hlady	O'Neill
Clegg	Jacques	Paszkowski
Coutts	Johnson	Pham
Doerksen	Jonson	Renner
Ducharme	Klapstein	Severtson
Dunford	Klein	Smith
Evans	Langevin	Stelmach
Fischer	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Lund	Taylor
Fritz	Magnus	West
Graham	Marz	Woloshyn
Haley	McClellan	Zwozdesky
Hancock	McFarland	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	

Totals	For – 44	Against – 14
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[Motion on amendment A1-H carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in support of amendment A1-I, as moved by the of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, please say aye.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:56 a.m.]

Haley
Hancock

McClellan
McFarland

Zwozdesky

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

Against the motion:

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Blakeman

Leibovici

Pannu

Bonner

MacBeth

Sapers

Carlson

MacDonald

Sloan

Dickson

Massey

Soetaert

Gibbons

Olsen

For the motion:

Boutilier

Herard

Melchin

Broda

Hierath

Nelson

Cao

Hlady

O'Neill

Totals:

For – 44

Against – 14

Clegg

Jacques

Paszkowski

Coutts

Johnson

Pham

[Motion on amendment A1-J carried]

Doerksen

Jonson

Renner

Ducharme

Klapstein

Severtson

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in support of amendment A1-K, as moved by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, please say aye.

Dunford

Klein

Smith

Evans

Langevin

Stelmach

Fischer

Lougheed

Tarchuk

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

Forsyth

Lund

Taylor

Fritz

Magnus

West

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:07 a.m.]

Graham

Marz

Woloshyn

Haley

McClellan

Zwozdesky

Hancock

McFarland

[One minute having elapsed, the Committee divided]

Against the motion:

Blakeman

Leibovici

Pannu

Bonner

MacBeth

Sapers

Carlson

MacDonald

Sloan

Dickson

Massey

Soetaert

Gibbons

Olsen

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier

Herard

Melchin

Broda

Hierath

Nelson

Cao

Hlady

O'Neill

Clegg

Jacques

Paszkowski

Coutts

Johnson

Pham

Doerksen

Jonson

Renner

Ducharme

Klapstein

Severtson

Dunford

Klein

Smith

Evans

Langevin

Stelmach

Fischer

Lougheed

Tarchuk

Forsyth

Lund

Taylor

Fritz

Magnus

West

Graham

Marz

Woloshyn

Haley

McClellan

Zwozdesky

Hancock

McFarland

Totals:

For – 44

Against – 14

[Motion on amendment A1-I carried]

1:00

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in support of amendment A1-J, as moved by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, please say aye.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:02 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Committee divided]

Against the motion:

Blakeman

Leibovici

Pannu

Bonner

MacBeth

Sapers

Carlson

MacDonald

Sloan

Dickson

Massey

Soetaert

Gibbons

Olsen

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier

Herard

Melchin

Broda

Hierath

Nelson

Cao

Hlady

O'Neill

Totals: For – 44 Against – 14

Clegg

Jacques

Paszkowski

[Motion on amendment A1-K carried]

Coutts

Johnson

Pham

1:10

Doerksen

Jonson

Renner

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in support of amendment A1-L, as moved by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, please say aye.

Ducharme

Klapstein

Severtson

Dunford

Klein

Smith

Evans

Langevin

Stelmach

Fischer

Lougheed

Tarchuk

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

Forsyth

Lund

Taylor

Fritz

Magnus

West

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:12 a.m.]

Graham

Marz

Woloshyn

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

Carlson
Dickson
Gibbons

MacDonald
Massey
Olsen

Sloan
Soetaert

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Herard	Melchin
Broda	Hierath	Nelson
Cao	Hlady	O'Neill
Clegg	Jacques	Paszkowski
Coutts	Johnson	Pham
Doerksen	Jonson	Renner
Ducharme	Klapstein	Severtson
Dunford	Klein	Smith
Evans	Langevin	Stelmach
Fischer	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Lund	Taylor
Fritz	Magnus	West
Graham	Marz	Woloshyn
Haley	McClellan	Zwozdesky
Hancock	McFarland	

Totals:

For - 44

Against - 14

[Motion on amendment A1-M carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in support of amendment A1-N, as moved by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, please say aye.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:22 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	

Totals: For - 44 Against - 14

[Motion on amendment A1-L carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of amendment A1-M, as moved by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, please say aye.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:16 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Herard	Melchin
Broda	Hierath	Nelson
Cao	Hlady	O'Neill
Clegg	Jacques	Paszkowski
Coutts	Johnson	Pham
Doerksen	Jonson	Renner
Ducharme	Klapstein	Severtson
Dunford	Klein	Smith
Evans	Langevin	Stelmach
Fischer	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Lund	Taylor
Fritz	Magnus	West
Graham	Marz	Woloshyn
Haley	McClellan	Zwozdesky
Hancock	McFarland	

For the motion:

Boutilier	Herard	Melchin
Broda	Hlady	Nelson
Cao	Jacques	O'Neill
Clegg	Johnson	Paszkowski
Coutts	Jonson	Pham
Doerksen	Klapstein	Renner
Ducharme	Klein	Severtson
Dunford	Langevin	Smith
Evans	Lougheed	Stelmach
Fischer	Lund	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Magnus	Taylor
Fritz	Marz	West
Graham	McClellan	Woloshyn
Haley	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Hancock		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	

Totals:

For - 43

Against - 14

[Motion on amendment A1-N carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: Now, with respect to the bill itself: Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act. On the remaining clauses of the bill, are you agreed?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:26 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers

For the motion:

Boutilier	Herard	Melchin
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1:20

Broda	Hierath	Nelson	[Title and preamble agreed to]		
Cao	Hlady	O'Neill			
Clegg	Jacques	Paszkowski	THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported?		
Coutts	Johnson	Pham			
Doerksen	Jonson	Renner	[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]		
Ducharme	Klapstein	Severtson			
Dunford	Klein	Smith	[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:36 a.m.]		
Evans	Langevin	Stelmach			
Fischer	Lougheed	Tarchuk			
Forsyth	Lund	Taylor	[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]		
Fritz	Magnus	West			
Graham	Marz	Woloshyn	[Mr. Tannas in the chair]		
Haley	McClellan	Zwozdesky			
Hancock	McFarland		For the motion:		
			Boutilier	Herard	Melchin
Against the motion:			Broda	Hierath	Nelson
Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu	Cao	Hlady	O'Neill
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers	Clegg	Jacques	Paszkowski
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan	Coutts	Johnson	Pham
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert	Doerksen	Jonson	Renner
Gibbons	Olsen		Ducharme	Klapstein	Severtson
			Dunford	Klein	Smith
Totals:	For – 44	Against – 14	Evans	Langevin	Stelmach
[The clauses of Bill 11 as amended agreed to]			Fischer	Lougheed	Tarchuk
			Forsyth	Lund	Taylor
THE CHAIRMAN: On the title and preamble, are you agreed?			Fritz	Magnus	West
			Graham	Marz	Woloshyn
[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]			Haley	McClellan	Zwozdesky
			Hancock	McFarland	
[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:30 a.m.]			Against the motion:		
			Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
			Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]			Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
			Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
[Mr. Tannas in the chair]			Gibbons	Olsen	
For the motion:			Totals:	For – 44	Against – 14
Boutilier	Herard	Melchin			
Broda	Hierath	Nelson	[Motion to report Bill 11 carried]		
Cao	Hlady	O'Neill			
Clegg	Jacques	Paszkowski	THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.		
Coutts	Johnson	Pham			
Doerksen	Jonson	Renner	MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 11.		
Ducharme	Klapstein	Severtson			
Dunford	Klein	Smith			
Evans	Langevin	Stelmach	[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]		
Fischer	Lougheed	Tarchuk			
Forsyth	Lund	Taylor	[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:39 a.m.]		
Fritz	Magnus	West			
Graham	Marz	Woloshyn			
Haley	McClellan	Zwozdesky	[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]		
Hancock	McFarland		[Mr. Tannas in the chair]		
Against the motion:			For the motion:		
Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu	Boutilier	Herard	Melchin
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers	Broda	Hierath	Nelson
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan	Cao	Hlady	O'Neill
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert	Clegg	Jacques	Paszkowski
Gibbons	Olsen		Coutts	Johnson	Pham
			Doerksen	Jonson	Renner
Totals:	For – 44	Against – 14	Ducharme	Klapstein	Severtson

Dunford	Langevin	Smith	Fritz	Melchin	Zwozdesky
Evans	Lougheed	Stelmach	Graham	Nelson	
Fischer	Lund	Tarchuk			
Forsyth	Magnus	Taylor	Against the motion:		
Fritz	Marz	West	Blakeman	Leibovici	Olsen
Graham	McClellan	Woloshyn	Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Haley	McFarland	Zwozdesky	Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Hancock			Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
			Gibbons		
Against the motion:					
Blakeman	Leibovici	Olsen	Totals:	For – 35	Against – 13
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers			
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan	[Motion carried]		
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert			
Gibbons			MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, in light of the good work done by this Assembly tonight and the hour, I move that we adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.		
Totals:	For – 43	Against – 13			
[Motion carried]			THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that the Assembly do now adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.		
[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]			SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.		
MR. HERARD: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill and reports the following with some amendments: Bill 11. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.			THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.		
			SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.		
THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?			[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]		
SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.			[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:59 a.m.]		
THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed?			[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]		
SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.			[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]		
[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]			For the motion:		
[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:46 a.m.]			Broda	Hancock	O’Neill
			Cao	Hlady	Paszkowski
THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair would observe that we had a one-minute agreement, but that was only for committee. Committee cannot tell the Assembly what to do, so we’re in the 10 minutes.			Clegg	Jacques	Pham
			Doerksen	Klapstein	Renner
[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]			Ducharme	Lougheed	Severtson
[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]			Dunford	Magnus	Smith
			Evans	Marz	Stelmach
			Fischer	McClellan	Tarchuk
			Forsyth	McFarland	West
			Fritz	Melchin	Woloshyn
			Graham	Nelson	Zwozdesky
			Haley		
			2:10		
For the motion:			Against the motion:		
Broda	Haley	O’Neill	Blakeman	Leibovici	Olsen
Cao	Hancock	Paszkowski	Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Clegg	Hlady	Pham	Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Coutts	Jacques	Renner	Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Doerksen	Klapstein	Severtson	Gibbons		
Ducharme	Lougheed	Smith			
Dunford	Magnus	Stelmach			
Evans	Marz	Tarchuk	Totals	For – 34	Against – 13
Fischer	McClellan	West			
Forsyth	McFarland	Woloshyn	[At 2:12 a.m. on Wednesday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]		

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 3, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/03

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Before recognizing the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, hon. members, I just draw your attention to the Order Paper, the second page. There's a typing error. There are two question marks associated at one point on that page that should not be there.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Her Excellency Daniele Smadja, ambassador and head of the delegation of the European Commission to Canada. Accompanying her is Mr. Peter van den Heuvel, first counselor for the European Commission.

Mr. Speaker, exports from Alberta to Europe total more than \$1 billion each year. With Europe playing such an important and critical role in global trade negotiations, it's very important that we have a strong working relationship with the European Union. This visit of her excellency is an excellent opportunity for us to explore ways to build on our relationship and to discuss areas where we can work together.

This is the ambassador's first official visit to Alberta, and we're pleased to welcome her to this province. I would ask that our honoured guests rise and that the members of this Assembly give them the very traditional warm welcome.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I again have a petition signed by 216 people from Spruce Grove, St. Albert, Wetaskiwin, Vegreville, Onoway, Seba Beach, Leduc, Westlock, Ardrossan, Stony Plain, and Edmonton. Once again, they are hopeful as they "petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present another petition on osteoporosis signed by 59 individuals from Brooks, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Edmonton, Beaumont, Sherwood Park, and Tilley. They're asking the government to support mature women's health and add preventative medications and therapies to Alberta's drug list.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I would like to present to the Assembly a petition from over 60 Calgarians. This petition reads,

We, the undersigned, ask the assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Assembly that states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

It is signed by 225 Albertans from Sherwood Park, Stony Plain, Whitecourt, Vegreville, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, Fort Saskatchewan, and Edmonton.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to present to the Assembly this afternoon a petition signed by 64 Calgarians who "urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald."

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition signed by 4,566 Albertans petitioning this Assembly "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained." This submission brings the total number of signatures on this petition to well over 21,000 today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: A little patience today, hon. members. We have quite a list.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday opposing private health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd request that the petition I presented on May 2 in the Assembly urging the government to stop promoting private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would ask that the petition I presented regarding the undermining of public health care and the concerns about it be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would now ask that the petition I presented signed by 219 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented earlier this week now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MS OLSEN: I, too, request that the petition I presented yesterday signed by 82 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition I presented to the Assembly on May 2 regarding public health care be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point I'd ask if the petition I presented on May 2, 2000, registering opposition to private health care might now be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition I tabled yesterday regarding the government's promotion of private health care, which of course brought the total on the petition so far to 70,000, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I also request that the petition I tabled yesterday regarding the promotion of private health care by this government be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday from a number of citizens opposing privatization of health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petitions I tabled yesterday be now read and received.

1:40

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

We, the undersigned, ask the assembly to petition the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition which I tabled in this Legislative Assembly yesterday regarding the government's plan to privatize health care in Alberta now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman I would like to table five copies of the report of the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices recommending the reappointment of Mr. Peter Valentine as the Auditor for the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give oral notice of the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the recommendation of the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices agreed to on April 19, 2000, to recommend to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor that Mr. Peter Valentine be reappointed as Auditor General for the province of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party on a Standing Order 40 submission.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 40 I'll be asking for the unanimous consent of the Legislative Assembly to debate the following matter of urgent and pressing necessity:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly has no confidence in the government's handling of the escalating labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table the requisite number of copies of the responses to written questions 11, 12, and 13 as ordered by the House.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to table a survey that I have conducted of 385 residents, 85 of which have responded, and these responses are contained in the appropriate number of copies, which I table today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table two letters, one from Red Deer and one from Edmonton, strongly opposing Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter from Merv and Hildegard Prediger from Edmonton-Gold Bar, and they're outlining their opposition to Bill 11.

The second is e-mail I have received from Ken McGoogan. He is a striking *Calgary Herald* journalist, and he would like to "urge the government to use all its legislative powers" to get a settlement in the *Calgary Herald* strike.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of the schedule of approved hospitals from Deputy Minister's Order 4/97.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a one-page report. The report is titled Anonymous Cash, and it confirms that "\$375.66 in cash was received from the Provincial Treasurer's Office and deposited to the General Revenue Fund." This is not anonymous cash. This was \$375.66 which was collected from Albertans who were assembled at the Legislature specifically to pay for damages caused to the property or the Chamber with the Bill 11 demonstrations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today, all letters of opposition to Bill 11. I'll simply read the names into the record: Duane Dawson, Marne St. Claire, Merv and Jean Rogers, and lastly, Stephen Lamoureux.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly students and their family members who are of the community of St. Gabriel's cyberschool in St. Albert. These students hail from the community of Onoway, represented here in the Assembly by the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne; from Lethbridge county, by the Member for Little Bow; from Swan Hills, by our Member for Barrhead-Westlock, yourself, Mr. Speaker; and from Edmonton, by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 11 special guests from the newest school in Little Bow, Providence Christian school, opened last month in Monarch. Today with the nine students who are here on a three-day extended learning experience are their teacher, Mr. Chris Heikoop, and their bus driver, Sjaane Heikoop. Would they please rise in the members' gallery and receive the warm recognition of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two teachers, seven parent helpers, and 46 bright students from St. Hilda Catholic elementary school in Mill Woods. The teachers are Ms Annette Mendiuk and Mrs. Markiana Hryschuk with parent helpers Mrs. Fedun, Mrs. Kovacic, Mrs. Camina, Mrs. Rosales, Mrs. Kurtz, Mrs. Prangle, and Mrs. Villatoro. The class and the teachers and helpers are in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my enthusiasm to introduce the students and families from St. Gabriel's cyberschool, I forgot to introduce the two teachers accompanying them. They are

Miss Kara Zutz and Mr. Bernie Hryciw, and I would ask them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Voting on Bill 11

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thousands of Albertans have gathered peacefully at the doors of this Legislature to call for the protection of public health care in Alberta and for a free vote on the government's private health care policy. This question is to the Premier. How many Albertans have to come to the Legislature demanding a free vote on the government's private health care policy before the Premier listens?

MR. KLEIN: Well, yesterday, Mr. Speaker, as the leader of the Liberal opposition well knows, we had a number of votes on amendments and on the preamble and the title of Bill 11, and there was a free vote.

Mr. Speaker, just to set the record straight, the whole issue of a so-called free vote was discussed in caucus in my absence – in my absence – so that I wouldn't be there to fetter the discretion of members of this great caucus. As I understand it, the vote was unanimous to accept the government's position. That's a free vote.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, what was the Premier so afraid of that he couldn't even attend his own caucus meeting on a discussion of a free vote?

AN HON. MEMBER: He's not a dictator.

MR. KLEIN: Quite true. Unlike the leader of the Liberal opposition, I am not a dictator. I don't stamp my foot and say: this is the way it's going to be. I stayed away from that meeting quite specifically, as I mentioned, so as not to fetter the discretion and the good thinking of this great caucus of ours.

1:50

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, can the Premier confirm that not all members were recorded in the votes taken last night because of a split in his caucus over the free vote?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I recall it, last night on all the points of the bill the vote was quite consistent, 45 to 14 or 44 to 14. All of the members in the House representing the government caucus voted in favour of the amendments, save for the subamendment, which was voted no by all the members of this caucus.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 10, 1994, quite a long time ago, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West stated:

I was impressed with the concept of free vote. I incorporated the free vote into my campaign to win the nomination, and I believe it helped me actually win that nomination.

My questions are to the Premier. Given that the government has now invoked closure on its major health policy, will the Premier at least make a commitment to allow his MLAs, including the MLA for Lethbridge-West, a free vote?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can't speak for the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, who is not in the House unfortunately today, but I'm sure that if he were asked, his reply would be: I voted to vote with the government, and I voted to vote for a policy to protect public health in this province.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Member for Lethbridge-West was nominated on a principle of free votes, why won't the Premier take a stand for that member and allow him to do it again?

MR. KLEIN: I'll go a step further, and with your concurrence, Mr. Speaker, I will ask all members of my caucus here today to register, either vocally or by standing or doing whatever they want: do you feel that you have a free vote?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes. Yeah.

MR. KLEIN: Right. There. [applause] Okay.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, have we got an opportunity for this government. Today I have signed a pledge that says that the members of the Alberta Official Opposition caucus "will be able to reflect the wishes of their constituents through a free vote" in the Legislature "at Third Reading of Bill 11." I've signed mine, and we've got one here for the Premier. Will the Premier sign his?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, that is a caucus decision, and if this caucus decides that they want to have a free vote in third reading, then fine. I'm not about to prevent that.

Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal opposition knows how a Conservative caucus works. Well, it works quite a bit differently now than when she was on Priorities and in Treasury. Basically, we have a very open and a very free caucus. If the caucus members vote to have a free vote, so to speak, then that indeed will be done, but if this caucus votes unanimously to support the government's position and the government's policy and the government's bill as introduced by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, that decision then will prevail. That's democracy.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, if this Premier is allowing free votes, then why was he forced to use closure to get this bill through committee?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we voted to invoke closure to get on with the bill. We voted to invoke closure so that we could ban extra billing. We voted to invoke closure so that we could ban queue-jumping. We voted to invoke closure so that we could ban private hospitals. We voted to invoke closure so that we could limit contracts to minor surgery only. We voted to invoke closure so that we could require contracts to be made public. We voted to invoke closure so that we could leave medical decisions to the physicians. We voted to invoke closure to ensure the efficient use of existing capacity in public hospitals before contracts are let. We voted to invoke closure to strengthen conflict of interest provisions. We voted to invoke closure to remove the profit motive from the sale of enhanced services. And guess what? They voted against all of those motions.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, after that cute little display that the Premier and the caucus had, will this Premier sign the pledge which says that he's going to allow a free vote, and will he explain it to the people of Alberta if he won't?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't need to sign a pledge. My pledge is my oath to this Legislature and to Executive Council. That is my pledge.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: You're losing it. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, now, there was a recognition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you. I'm sorry; I just lost my count there. Mr. Speaker, if this Premier is so committed to his pledge of leadership in this province, will he commit here and now not to invoke closure on third reading?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. Well, yes, maybe I will. I will if the Liberals will stand up and commit right now that they will not filibuster. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Questions on Matters Previously Decided

THE SPEAKER: Please. Please, hon. members. I would like to remind hon. members that matters that have been decided by the House are not . . . [interjections]

Hon. members, while it appears that some members seem to be having fun this afternoon, I would like to advise hon. members what the rules are. Matters that have been decided in this Assembly are not the subject matter of question period. It was a committee of the Assembly of this House that voted to invoke a certain procedure on a division.

2:00

I would like to draw the attention of all hon. members to Standing Orders. These are not *Beauchesne* or *Erskine May*. These are orders of this Assembly, written by the members of this Assembly, agreed to by the members of this Assembly. Standing Order 23 says that a member will be called to order if that member

(c) persists in needless repetition or raises matters which have been decided during the current session . . .

(f) debates any previous vote of the Assembly unless it is that member's intention to move that it be rescinded.

There's no such movement, and it wouldn't be the case during question period to move it anyway.

Now, these are rules written by the members of this House. These are not rules that have been taken out of books.

The leader of the third party.

Private Health Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government may have scored a hollow victory last night. However, the government has lost on every other front. Hundreds of thousands of Albertans have been energized and politicized. Every single opinion poll shows strong and rock-solid opposition to what's being rammed down the throats of Albertans by a government that refuses to listen. My questions are to the Premier. While the government ignored the hundreds of thousands of Albertans who wrote letters, made phone calls, sent e-mails and faxes, and signed petitions, what made the government decide to subsidize a few private health care special interests who can't seem to turn a profit on their own?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I take exception to the hon. member's statement that there's rock-solid opposition. That is not true. My office and all members of this caucus have received literally

thousands and thousands of letters in support of the policy and of the bill. The only difference is that we don't waste the time of this Legislature tabling all of the letters. I indicated once before that if they wanted to get into that game, we could start tabling the letters we've received in support.

This is a very strange relationship indeed that has come together between the Liberals and the NDs. I can understand the NDs and their relationship with the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Alberta Federation of Labour and the United Nurses of Alberta and the Alberta Teachers' Association, but now to marry the NDs with the Liberals makes for a strange but maybe a compatible political relationship, Mr. Speaker. To see the leader of the third party vote, as the Liberals voted, against the principles that the NDs fundamentally uphold was indeed something to behold, and that will live in *Hansard* forever, that the NDs voted with the Liberals to promote extra billing, to promote queue-jumping, to promote . . .

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. I hope all members will avoid continuing the debate in the question period.

The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will continue to speak on behalf of Albertans regardless of what the Premier thinks.

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry. Hon. leader of the third party, it's not the Premier you have to deal with. It's the chairman you have to deal with.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. So I'm going to ask very humbly again: get on with the question.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier confirm that to avoid public outrage and possible electoral defeat, the government plans to put any approvals of private surgical facilities with overnight stays on ice until after the next provincial election?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the policy, of course, that is now the subject of Bill 11 doesn't leave that decision up to us. It simply says that RHAs, under very strict circumstances, may – may, not will. If a surgical clinic meets all the requirements of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, meets all the requirements of the rules of medicare, meets all the requirements of the rules of the Canada Health Act, may, then with the concurrence of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, with the concurrence of the minister a regional health authority under very, very strict circumstances may contract to a surgical clinic that might require a patient to stay overnight. That's what it's all about.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why did the government and its handpicked CRHA administrators close three public hospitals in Calgary, blow one of them up and sell two others to private special interests for cents on the dollar, if not to create the conditions for the establishment of private, for-profit hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that's a very interesting question. The closure of the Bow Valley centre and the Holy Cross hospital was done after numerous reports were prepared vis-a-vis the costs, first of all, the \$182 million dollar cost of totally refitting the General hospital.

MR. DICKSON: You didn't have to do it all. Two buildings could have been kept.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you know, now he's gone from lawyer to pretend politician to town planner. He has no idea. There were numerous reports saying that those hospitals had to be closed so we could reopen hundreds of state-of-the-art beds in hospitals like the Lougheed, the Rockyview, the Foothills. This notion that the Grace hospital was closed is absolutely wrong. It was moved to a state-of-the-art centre for women's health in Calgary. It is indeed the pride of this country as it pertains to women's health.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Children at Risk

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I read with interest the Start Young, Start Now report of the task force on children in crisis. On page 26 reference is made to:

Strong linkages are required among social workers, schools, probation and parole officers, police, and community agencies. Information should be shared among communities, agencies and schools, and additional steps should be taken to expand successful strategies across the province.

My question is to the hon. Minister of Children's Services. Would you please tell us what immediate steps you are taking to implement the expansion of these strategies, which are so desperately needed to protect our children and youth from abuse, violence, bullying, and gang activities?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a very good question. There are two particular areas that I would cite. Number one, two years ago in the business plan of this government the Alberta children's initiative drew all of the departments together and requested and required in the business plan collaborative action that would see strategies at the local level built for incentives to join together in the circle around uniting the child and the family.

The second strategy, Mr. Speaker, was the implementation of the child and family services authorities. Through that and our partnership with education and the local police forces, a student health initiative is one example of things that we believe should be expanded to include other agencies to support the child in need.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Who will take the lead and be responsible for the implementation of these strategies: the school boards, the Justice department, social services, or your department?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the co-ordination role of the Children's Services department is simply that. We are advocates, and we deliver services for children, very special children with needs, but in each of those particular areas from time to time every ministry would have its role in leadership. If it was deemed to be predominantly a justice issue, for example, the Minister of Justice would deliver the program, contain the funding within their budget, and would have the partnership and the agreement of the other partners.

2:10

So it would be at times different leaders for different service delivery. Predominantly, the child and family services authorities deliver to the child already identified at risk and investigate it. Also,

Mr. Speaker, the delivery of family and community support services at the local level does cross over some and all of those boundaries for local delivery.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you. My second supplementary, also to the same minister. Would you be supportive and help to take the necessary steps to implement a course starting at the elementary level as part of the curriculum in all Alberta schools to deal with violent issues?

MS EVANS: Along with my colleague the Minister of Justice, who may wish to supplement this answer, I believe that there is a lot of interest in doing whatever we can to mitigate against family violence and abuse issues. That is but one step that would follow what is already in place, Mr. Speaker, and that is removal of the perpetrator of violence in the home so that in fact the family does not have to relocate while the perpetrator is held elsewhere.

If the Minister of Justice would wish to supplement, certainly we are open to strategies and development of those strategies that can support the child.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

Grain Transportation

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week's announcement by the Canadian Transport Agency increasing freight rates for Alberta farmers by 4 and a half percent could prove catastrophic. In my constituency this will boost freight rates to approximately \$29.25 per tonne and higher in many areas of the province. Only Ottawa can pre-empt the solution by further penalizing farmers. Several months ago we were led to believe a solution was pending at the federal cabinet level on the Estey/Kroeger reports. My questions today are to the minister of agriculture. Can the minister tell me, as a result of his discussions with the federal ministers and their officials, when Alberta's farmers can expect action on grain transportation reform?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has been a very long process. As a matter of fact, well over a year and a half ago the federal government appointed Justice Estey to look at the whole issue of transportation and the movement of grain from the prairies. He reported about a year ago, and immediately the federal government set up a committee under Arthur Kroeger to look at the implementation of the recommendations.

Our Premier has written to the Prime Minister urging the implementation. I went to Ottawa and met with eight cabinet ministers, the Prime Minister's office, the Privy Council, members from Treasury and thought that we had a fairly good understanding about what needed to be done and was very hopeful that we would soon see some changes.

Unfortunately, those changes have not occurred, and of course now we've been hit with another catastrophic expenditure that is totally unnecessary. If in fact the things that we recommended were implemented, we would look at keeping another \$200 million to \$300 million in the pockets of prairie farmers, and those are farmers' dollars, not tax dollars.

We're very hopeful that we will soon hear – and hopefully it'll be

before the new crop year so that these new announced rates won't be implemented – but, Mr. Speaker, it's impossible to predict. We're dealing with Liberals, and as we saw last night, they're totally unpredictable. When the Leader of the Opposition votes against the Canada Health Act, then we . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Questions outside Government Responsibility

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, my great fear was that I would have to interject on the question. Recognizing that the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development is not a member of the federal Privy Council and as the question asked for when a decision might come from the federal cabinet, it certainly would not sit within the competence of a minister of the government of Alberta. As we listened, my worst fears were confirmed.

Now, hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, do you have a specific question that might actually be within the administrative competence of a minister of the government of Alberta?

Grain Transportation (continued)

MR. COUTTS: Is Alberta's policy and position on grain transportation the same as that of the Canadian Wheat Board's chairman, Ken Ritter, who blames the railway solely for increasing freight costs?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if you ever saw a case where the frying pan is calling the kettle black, this has got to be the situation. When you see the chairman of the Canadian Wheat Board blaming the railways for the high cost of moving grain in this country, it's something to behold. The fact is that the railways, of course, made an application to the federal agency to have this increase in freight rates, but if in fact the policies that we have been putting forward were implemented, then this freight rate increase would not go ahead.

MR. COUTTS: My last question to the minister of agriculture: what is Alberta's minimum package of changes out of the Kroeger/Estey process that must be agreed to?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We believe that the Canadian Wheat Board should be moved to the spout, and that's where they would take possession of the grain. We know that they can do a reasonably good job of selling, and that's where they should take possession. We believe that in order to get the grain to the port, there should be contracts and that the Canadian Wheat Board would call those contracts through a third party. We need to have a third party that would administer the contracts. The contract would go to grain companies on the prairies. They would then fulfill the contract by moving the grain out.

The thing that is important in this whole scenario is that the grain would be then pulled to the port as opposed to pushed. What's happening today is that the Wheat Board is pushing grain to the port, filling up the storage there, and we can't move other products through. So that has to change.

We also have to make sure that the Canadian Wheat Board doesn't have control of the rolling stock. Today they have total control of 70

percent of the stock, and as long as that's in place, we cannot get the rolling stock or the storage at the port.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Closure on Bill 11

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year it took the hon. minister of agriculture about 36 hours to fly to Shanghai and back and the Minister of Economic Development 36 hours in traveling time to go to Beijing and back. Including last night's closure motion, only 38 hours have been spent discussing the future of public health care in Alberta. To the Premier: why is this government limiting the time of the Assembly debate on the future of health care in this province to an amount of time less than the 72 hours it took two cabinet ministers to fly to Communist China and back?

Speaker's Ruling Questions on Matters Previously Decided

THE SPEAKER: Before I recognize the hon. leader of the government, can I just refer again to what I referred to earlier in the question period about Standing Orders 23(c) and 23(f). Perhaps I misunderstand something, but there's an answer. Fine.

Hon. member, proceed with your second question.

Closure on Bill 11 (continued)

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, given that this government is ignoring Albertans' wishes, just whose time line is the Premier on? This is a major policy change. Why is it being rammed through with such haste?

MR. KLEIN: I beg to differ. This is not a major policy change. Mr. Speaker, it is not a major policy change to endorse the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. This government caucus last night endorsed the principles of the Canada Health Act. They voted against the principles of the Canada Health Act, and the NDs did as well.

2:20

That is not a major shift in policy. Mr. Speaker, surgical clinics have been operating in this province for many years. Thirty of them were under the watch of the then minister of health, now the leader of the Liberal opposition. Thirty of them not only were allowed to operate but were allowed to charge facility fees. All this policy does is put fences around the operation and the contracting out of surgical facilities by regional health authorities. This is not a major shift in policy.

As a matter of fact, some editorialists and some respected columnists have referred to this as a very benign and a very timid piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's why you spent \$3 million marketing it.

MR. KLEIN: Well, we had to spend some money to market this, Mr. Speaker, to offset the propaganda and the vicious misinformation being put out by the Liberals, the NDs, CUPE, UNA, the Friends of Medicare backed by the Alberta Federation of Labour.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Liberals have agreed not to filibuster, will the Premier commit to not invoking closure on private health care at third reading?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can give the hon. member an honest answer today. The answer is the same as the answer I gave during committee debate on this, and the answer was that if the Liberals don't filibuster, we won't use closure. We don't want to use closure.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, at third reading there could be a reasoned amendment introduced that could be debated by every member of this Legislative Assembly – I understand the rules are up to 20 minutes – and then we're back to the main motion. Every member of this Assembly again can speak to the main motion. That will add to the total debate. Well, do 40 times 84. You know, 40 times 84, that's a lot of speaking; I'll tell you that for sure. That's a lot of talking. Add to that the almost 55 hours now that we have spent on this bill, and that to me represents a lot of talking in this Legislature, more talking than ever before, than ever in the history of this Legislature on a single piece of legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Historic Sites

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Historical Preservation and Re-building Society in Calgary continues to provide leadership on issues regarding the value and significance of our historic sites. Recently they had expressed concerns about the future of three historic schools . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair has recognized the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, and she has every right to be heard in this Assembly. She has every right to be heard uninterrupted in this Assembly. She is a member of this Assembly who has every right to ask a question, and she has been recognized to ask a question. I'm going to ask for your indulgence to be polite enough to allow her to be heard, and I'll invite her to start over again.

Historic Sites (continued)

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Historical Preservation and Re-building Society in Calgary continues to provide leadership on issues regarding the value and significance of historic sites. Recently they have expressed concerns about the future of three historic schools that the Calgary board of education has listed as surplus: Dr. Carl Safran, Victoria, and Bridgeland schools. They have asked the province in conjunction with the city to consider designating these buildings prior to any change in their status with the CBE. My question is to the Minister of Community Development, responsible for historic sites. What opportunities are available to ensure the preservation of these buildings?

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Mr. Speaker, on December 21, 1999, the mayor of Calgary did in fact request through the Alberta Historical Resources Act that the Department of Community Development look at the viability of these three schools, whether or not they merit designation. Currently that evaluation is going on and, I might add, a decision has not been made. However, before the Calgary board of education can dispose of these properties, they have to go through the Department of Infrastructure, and I've apprized the Minister of Infrastructure of the proceedings on this particular issue.

MRS. BURGNER: Could the same minister please answer: what is the status of the old St. Mary's girls school with respect to the notice of intention to designate?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March of this year the department issued a notice of intent to designate St. Mary's school as an historic site under the Historical Resources Act. The separate school board, which is the owner of the school in Calgary, has requested a hearing before the board to determine if in fact it's viable. That hearing will be held on June 1, and the decision by the minister whether or not to designate will be made after that hearing.

MRS. BURGNER: Finally, will the minister be further involved with the preservation of the Loughheed Building in Calgary?

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Loughheed Building, as far as this minister is concerned, a decision has been made not to designate it. However, I might add that the city of Calgary has every opportunity to designate this building if they feel it is significant for the people of Calgary.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

Health Care Facilities

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under section 44(2) of the Hospitals Act this government has been given the authority to "determine which hospitals offer a standard of service that qualifies them as approved hospitals." Given this authority, a list has been prepared under Deputy Minister's Order 4/97 of approved hospitals in this province. I tabled that earlier today. My questions are to the Premier. What criteria is used to determine what is and what is not an approved hospital?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the question is more appropriately put to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this is the second or third time this particular question has been asked. It has certainly been answered before. I would like to point out that in a recent court judgment the legislation and its application were upheld in terms of at least this stage of court proceedings.

The Department of Health and Wellness determines what an approved hospital is in terms of a range of services being available which is appropriate to the particular region of the province which is to be served, Mr. Speaker. They approve it on the basis of there being the appropriate staffing with the appropriate qualifications. They approve it today in terms of being part of a regional health authority's system subject to being included in the business plan, which is subject to ministerial approval. Those are a number of the criteria that are considered when we designate facilities.

MS OLSEN: Can the minister then explain how it is that two hospitals, the Eckville municipal hospital and the Elnora general hospital closed in 1995, and another one, the Calgary general hospital, Bow Valley centre, which was blown up, made it onto the government's approved hospital list? Do empty buildings and piles of rubble qualify for approved hospitals, Mr. Minister?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, those particular facilities met all the requirements when they were in operation many years ago.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the inability of this government to properly monitor the status of approved hospitals in this province, how can Albertans trust this government to effectively regulate the private health care scheme and private health care facilities?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Children's Services

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Recent media reports have talked about a new plan which would put responsibility for some child welfare cases in the Edmonton area into the hands of community agencies. Can the minister tell us about this plan and why it is being proposed?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister for Children's Services.

2:30

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each of the 18 child and family services authorities have been requested to develop service plans that reflect local priorities. In the context of Ma'Môwe Capital region service planning about a third of the staff are staff of the authority, and about two-thirds belong to community agencies like McMan, Catholic Social Services, et cetera.

What has been evolving is a service plan that will see low risk or consultations and counseling and support services for children and families in the home dealt with primarily by contract agencies and the higher risk cases that require intensive child welfare protection officers being dealt with more frequently by social workers that are employed by the CFSA. So those are some of the elements of the planning.

MR. BRODA: My first supplemental is also to the Minister of Children's Services. What impact will this proposed service delivery framework have on child welfare workers?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, there has been extensive consultation with the social workers. One of the things they've identified is that frequently the administrative work and the tasks they're asked to do impede their ability to act in their professional capacity in social welfare. In this service plan we look at enhancing their opportunity to give their full professional attention to the child and to the family and removing some of the administrative duties.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, with the caseload review and the work that's being done by our department in reviewing the very specific impacts to social welfare workers in the delivery of the system, we hope to identify even greater efficiencies and, in consultation with the workers, continue to work on behalf of all the best interests of the parties involved.

MR. BRODA: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what is the time line for this framework, and when will it be implemented?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, last Thursday at a meeting held in my constituency the CEO volunteered to the workers that attended that this consultation would be open ended until they addressed all the concerns. So although there is a desire to get with the process, certainly and clearly there's a desire to be co-operative with the workers involved. What we see is a framework of working through the concerns and satisfying mutually all of the parties that there is work that will address their issues.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I have indicated and will be meeting with members of the association and the workers themselves and talking further about some of their concerns in this process as we consult on their issues.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Private Health Services

(continued)

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 1999 annual report of the Calgary regional health authority points out that two pilot studies were conducted on the contracting out of surgical procedures to private providers. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does the minister know the results of those two pilot studies?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I understand the pilots or the initial projects that were undertaken, they were undertaken with respect to surgical clinics dealing with eye surgery. The valuation was done in terms of performance. They isolated the amount of money that had been previously spent on this particular number of procedures before when it was outside of the system. In fact, we were getting penalized under the Canada Health Act for allowing that to occur.

They isolated that amount of money. They compared it to the money they were spending per case within the contract arrangements and compared it also to the cost that they had incurred in other parts of their system providing these services. They found that they were providing more procedures for the same amount of money as they had been spending before in this particular area.

DR. MASSEY: To the same minister: given, Mr. Minister, that these are the only local studies on the cost-effectiveness of private surgical clinics, what efforts has the minister made to make public those conclusions, given the debate on health care?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would estimate that this is at least the third time the opposition has asked the same question, and I've given the same answer.

DR. MASSEY: To the same minister: will you table those reports?

MR. JONSON: I can provide to them the results that were reported to me, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of my constituents have raised with me concerns about the growing waiting time for MRI services both in Medicine Hat and across the province. Several weeks ago the Minister of Health and Wellness announced a plan to purchase four new publicly funded MRI machines for Alberta, namely two in Calgary and two in Edmonton. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. While these new MRIs will no doubt dramatically reduce waiting times for people living in Calgary and Edmonton, what action is being taken by the minister to increase access to MRI services in the rest of the province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I recall, it was approximately a year

and a half ago that we established an expert committee dealing with the whole area of diagnostic imaging. We looked to them to compile an assessment of our capacity in the province and make recommendations as to how we should proceed to improve our overall diagnostic imaging service. One of the very important components of that committee's work was to look at the MRI situation across the province. The committee did indicate that it was feasible, advisable to look at providing MRI services in our regional hospitals.

Following receipt of that report and due consideration by Alberta Health and Wellness and in government, we authorized regional health authorities to move ahead in the Chinook region with an MRI. It is currently in place and operating. An MRI in the David Thompson area is in place, and also in the Palliser region, Medicine Hat, and Mistahia, the Grande Prairie region.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is moving forward. We want to serve the regions of the province as well as the two major centres, so I think this indicates our commitment in that area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you. Well, given that my constituents feel that it seems a bit unfair that communities like Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and Grande Prairie have been told to undertake public fund-raising so they can acquire MRI facilities and the health authorities are told that they must use ongoing funding from their budgets to fund the operation of the MRIs and the government has helped out Calgary and Edmonton for funding not only for capital but for operational costs, is there going to be an effort to ensure that there is some equity between the allocation of funds to the other regions in the province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to emphasize that we recognize that in our funding of MRI services we need to be fair to all the regions of the province, including those outside of Edmonton and Calgary. It is not, however, quite the case that fund-raising was not involved in the support at least of two of the MRIs that were established in Edmonton and Calgary. In fact, some rather significant funding was provided in one particular case in terms of the capital cost.

But I would like to make two points, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we do realize that we need to provide operational funding for the MRIs, both the ones in the regions and the ones in the Capital and Calgary regions. We intend to do so on a reasonable basis according to the volume they attract and the costs they incur. That will be done in subsequent business plans, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing is that we will examine the whole area of capital costs incurred, and we will look at factoring in a fair amount of money to each of the regions for the purchase of the actual MRI machines.

2:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is really the only one that most Albertans are concerned about. With this additional funding in place or planned for MRI facilities, will we actually see a significant impact on the waiting lists? When will we actually see the waiting lists drop, Mr. Minister?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just make a point A and a point B here. First of all with the expansion. There has been some expansion of MRI services in the province in the Chinook region, and with the additional MRIs in the two cities it's brought them up to, I think, five publicly operated MRIs.

We have seen a marked increase in the number of MRI scans

being done in this province. If I recall correctly, there's been an increase of somewhere around 15,000 MRI scans per year to over 30,000. With these MRI machines coming onstream, we hope that by the end of this year or very early next year we will rank at the top of MRI performance in the country – and that's publicly funded MRI services – right up there with the current leader, Ontario.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, seven hon. members have advised today that they would like to participate in Recognitions, and we will begin that process in a few seconds from now, but prior to doing that, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests
(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly Miss Victoria Gubina, a very talented lawyer and Yeltsin democracy fellow from Saratov, Russia. Miss Gubina is here studying Canadian constitutional corporate and commercial law in Canada for about eight weeks as part of her Yeltsin democracy fellowship, and we're very pleased that three of those precious weeks are being spent right here in our capital city of Edmonton. [remarks in Russian]

Hello, Victoria. It is a pleasure to have you here and to welcome you to Canada and to Alberta. [as submitted]

She has risen, and I would ask all members of the House to please join me in a rousing warm welcome for our special guest.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today a ceremony took place on the steps of the Legislature to commemorate the repatriation and internment of the remains of an unknown Canadian soldier. This unknown soldier, who died in the First World War and was buried in France, represents all the brave Canadian men and women who have died both in war and in the service of peace. All provinces are participating in this event, which will be completed at a ceremony in Ottawa on May 28 of this year.

At that time the remains of an unidentified soldier, who was selected by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission from a cemetery near Vimy Ridge, will be buried in a special tomb in front of the National War Memorial. This site will be known as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and will become a focal point of commemoration for all memorial events at the National War Memorial.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my gratitude and that of this Assembly to the Royal Canadian Legion, who initiated this project as a millennium tribute to all Canadians who have died or may die for their country in all conflicts in the future. Now at last Canadians will have their own fitting memorial to these men and women and their families who have sacrificed so much for Canada.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Gold Bar School

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I would like to recognize one of the finest elementary schools in Alberta. Gold Bar school will be celebrating its 40th anniversary on May 25 this spring.

The school was officially opened on October 30, 1959, by then principal Mr. Norman Lougheed. I am proud to say that the community feels a great sense of pride in the school. In fact, there are many current students whose parents once attended Gold Bar school. Today 161 students from kindergarten to grade 6 in seven classes as well as one special-needs class attend this fine school.

On the occasion of Gold Bar school's 40th anniversary I would like to recognize the current principal, Mr. Terry Terlesky, teachers, volunteers, parents, and students for their accomplishments and contributions to the Edmonton-Gold Bar community. A fine school is a reflection of a fine community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Spinal Health Week

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week, May 1 to May 7, 2000, is Spinal Health Week. This annual recognition by the College of Chiropractors of Alberta brings awareness to the relationship of the spine and a person's overall health. For most adults back pain occurs at some point in their lives and is one of the leading causes of disability in Canada.

Chiropractic treatment is an effective method of health care. It often provides patients with relief from pain and improved health without invasive surgery and the use of drugs. Patient satisfaction continues to be very high, and a growing number of Albertans seek access to chiropractic treatment as a result. Last year over 380,000 Albertans consulted a chiropractor.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Members of the Legislative Assembly join me in recognizing the importance of Spinal Health Week and the contributions of our Alberta chiropractors, members of a team of Alberta health care professionals.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Holocaust Remembrance

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we marked the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day. This day remembers the unimaginable horrors that were inflicted upon 6 million Jews as well as millions of others who perished in the atrocities of the Second World War. Yom Hashoah ensures that their sacrifices will never be forgotten by future generations.

Alberta's Jewish communities, which include second- and third-generation children of survivors of the concentration camps, must be recognized for their efforts to educate others to ensure that these horrors against humanity will never be witnessed again.

We urge this provincial government to consider two initiatives which will provide a living remembrance of the Holocaust. The first would be the passage of legislation similar to what has occurred in seven other provinces to recognize Holocaust memorial day for the province. The second would be to place a memorial on the grounds of this Legislature. These two actions would be a living memorial to ensure that we never forget.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Properties Sports Association

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Properties Sports Association, which is also known as the PSA, is a highly respected athletic organization in northeast Calgary. This Saturday the association will be hosting a gala evening to celebrate its 25th anniversary. This significant event will pay tribute to and honour all the PSA directors, organizers, parent volunteers, and participants. Over the years they've given countless hours of their time and energy to the athletic and personal development of our young people.

The successes of our PSA teams have been very impressive, Mr. Speaker. Many provincial and citywide championships have been won, and numerous individual honours have been achieved. I am very proud to recognize and say thank you to the 400 volunteers who each year coach 5,000 young players in hockey, figure skating, ringette, basketball, soccer, softball, T-ball, and coach-pitch. Along with many others my own children have had their lives enriched through many enjoyable years of playing basketball with the PSA.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of the Assembly to join me in congratulating the Properties Sports Association in celebrating their 25th anniversary.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

2:50

Library Week

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to recognize our public libraries and the librarians and staff members, all of whom run them with exemplary dedication and purpose. It reminds me of what Andrew Carnegie had to say about the importance of public libraries:

There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Public Library, this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration.

It gives me great pleasure, indeed, to be able to add my own thanks to our own Legislature librarians, who are always most prompt and helpful and display the highest standards of service and expertise. Their skills and generosity are noticeable and remarkable. I speak, I hope, on behalf of everyone here and all those who use this library. This staff does a great job, and we thank them for it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Servants Anonymous Society of Calgary

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am very pleased to rise and speak about the Servants Anonymous Society of Calgary. The SAS was formed in May 1989 to serve the desperate needs of youth aged 16 to 25 who are victims of street life. For these street youth who genuinely want to make a change in their lives and who desire to become productive members of the Calgary community SAS provides this opportunity, because SAS works with these youths and their children. It established a long-term program, three to seven years, which includes housing facilities, in-classroom education, on-the-job training, and follow-up support.

SAS, since its inception, has enjoyed a 70 percent success rate. This is defined by the participants who have not returned to a street lifestyle and who are continually progressing in their journey towards wholeness. SAS believes that success is a journey and not the destination and that real success must be based on serving others. In the end every success is attached to a struggle as well as a dream or a vision.

I would like to ask the Assembly to recognize the great contribution of the Servants Anonymous Society of Calgary in making Alberta a better place.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, today is the birthday of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: Now the leader of the third party on a Standing Order 40 application.

Calgary Herald Strike

Dr. Pannu:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly has no confidence in the government's handling of the escalating labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to urgency, Mr. Speaker, yesterday evening the labour troubles at the *Calgary Herald* further escalated. *Herald* management locked out 105 press operators and production workers. This latest lockout brings to three the number of labour disputes plaguing this once proud Calgary newspaper. A hundred editorial staff and 60-some employees who worked in the *Herald* distribution centre have already been on a legal strike for the last 177 days. Long and bitter labour disputes inevitably divide communities.

Speaking to it . . .

Speaker's Ruling Standing Order 40 Motions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the third party, just a little reminder. Remember the last time we did this? Remember that the Speaker invited the hon. member to come and visit, so they had a thorough discussion about what the words "urgent and pressing" mean? You don't have to define or give your argument now. All you have to do now is make the case for a pressing necessity, and if the House agrees to it, then you can give your speech.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly was trying to be very much cognizant of your advice, and I will certainly continue to do that.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: Speaking to urgency, Mr. Speaker. It is imperative that members have an opportunity to debate the government's handling of the disputes at the *Calgary Herald*. That is because there is no evidence that the government is actively seeking a resolution to these bitter disputes. The management of the *Calgary Herald* steadfastly refuses to engage in serious collective bargaining. Was it any surprise, then, when the *Herald's* owner publicly stated that he plans to wait two years and then just decertify the union?

In the face of this intransigence the Minister of Human Resources and Employment doesn't appear to have lifted a finger. Meanwhile, the minister refuses to meet with 30 striking employees who visited the Legislature several weeks ago. At the same time, the Premier appeared to question the right of journalists to even belong to trade unions. Allowing a debate on this motion would provide an opportunity for the minister on behalf of the government to explain what steps he is taking, if any, to bring the prolonged dispute to an end.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we appear to have a recipe consisting of intransigent management, an anti-union owner, an indifferent government, and terrible labour laws. It's imperative that members be given an opportunity to debate a motion the effect of which should be to light a fire under the government. This confidence that

members have in the government's handling of this serious matter should be debated. Members on all sides of the House should urge the government to be more proactive in seeking a fair settlement of the escalating labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*. Therefore, I urge all members respectfully to allow this debate to proceed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the hon. leader of the third party certainly complied with all the rules of bringing notice to the Assembly with respect to this matter in terms of circulating it and rising with the appropriate notice, but it now requires unanimous consent to waive the routine of the day to proceed with it.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it is my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 17, 18, 19, and 20.

[Motion carried]

Housing for Child Welfare Clients

Q17. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

How many children with child welfare status have been housed in hotel rooms in the Edmonton region between February 18, 1999, and April 5, 2000?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond that the government will accept Written Question 17 and will respond following.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that information, as does my colleague.

[Written Question 17 carried]

Housing for Child Welfare Clients

Q18. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

How many children with child welfare status have been housed in jail cells, remand centres, or single men's hostels between February 18, 1999, and April 5, 2000, in the province?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond that the government will accept Written Question 18 as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're on a good roll this afternoon, so I appreciate the hon. minister's reply. Thank you.

[Written Question 18 carried]

Housing for Child Welfare Clients

Q19. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

In which hotels in the Edmonton region were children who were receiving services under the Child Welfare Act housed between February 18, 1999, and April 5, 2000?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, once again I'm pleased to rise and indicate that the government will accept Written Question 19.

MR. DICKSON: I just wanted to make this observation, Mr. Speaker. This information has been sought in the past without success, and it's been a great frustration to members of the opposition. I wanted to specifically acknowledge the fact that this minister has found a way to be able to share the information. I wanted to particularly recognize that this is a departure from the past practice of the government, and that should be signaled.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: You bet. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the minister coming forward with this information.

[Written Question 19 carried]

3:00 Child Welfare Appeals

Q20. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

What are the reasons for appeal and breakdown of decisions reached in the 485 appeals heard by the child welfare citizens' appeal panel during the 1998-99 fiscal year?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond that the government will accept Written Question 20.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a fine day in this Legislature, and I thank the minister for being forthcoming with the information.

[Written Question 20 carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it is my pleasure to move that Motions for Returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 29, 31, 32, 36, 37, 38, 41, 42, 43, and 46.

[Motion carried]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M29. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of handwritten notes of a meeting between Jim Dinning, Allister McPherson, and Nader Ghermezian dated January

28, 1994, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, WEM, as listed on page 9 of the affidavit of records of the WEM corporate defendants, November 30, 1999.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, once again, as this pertains to a situation that is before the courts, we are not able to respond and, therefore, will be rejecting this motion.

I wanted to make a comment. At the beginning the members opposite were delighted with the response from the Minister of Children's Services on written questions, and I said across the House that if the question is written so we can respond, then we are delighted to provide the information. But when we're into a situation of a legal case, court proceedings, hon. members opposite know that we are in a difficult position to get involved because of the fact that there is a court case going on right now. So we will have to reject this motion for a return.

MR. DICKSON: I'm disappointed with that response from the minister. I thought we were making such good progress and that we were going to be able to follow the lead of the Minister of Children's Services, but it appears we're going to have to spend some time this afternoon.

The difficulty with this is that it's a bit of a smokescreen to say that because there's pending litigation and the province is a litigant in a court case, we can't share this document. Let's be really clear. This is not a written question for information. This is a motion for a return. It means we want to see a particular document.

Now, the document is identified in the affidavit of records by Raphael Ghermezian, which has been filed in the action between West Edmonton Mall Property Inc., WEM Holdings Inc., and WEM Management Inc., plaintiffs by counterclaim, and Alberta Treasury Branches. The document is listed on the affidavit of documents. It's tab 113, and it says: "handwritten notes of a meeting between Jim Dinning, Allister McPherson, and Nader Ghermezian."

Mr. Speaker, we know the record exists. We know it was tabled as part of the production in that civil action. So all that we're asking is for the government of the province of Alberta to provide a copy of that document. We're not asking them to make a statement which could in any way compromise their legal position. We're not asking them to do anything which would be prejudicial in any way to the government of the province of Alberta. All we're saying is: the document exists; why wouldn't you share it?

We have to start wondering why they would refuse to turn over that document. The fact that it's part of a pending court case, frankly, is irrelevant. The people also have a right to know.

Thank you very much. Those are the comments I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker.

MR. WICKMAN: To close debate, Mr. Speaker, I won't repeat what the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has said. I anticipated the response. I will close debate by saying that I'm very, very disappointed in the minister's refusal to accept the motion.

[Motion for a Return 29 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M31. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of excerpts of cabinet agenda and attachments dated March 12, 1996, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 34 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, because of the court proceedings that are under way, we have been given advice by our legal advisors that we cannot get involved in this debate. I take exception to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo's comments that we are trying to do something untoward. He knows perfectly well, coming with a legal background, that when there has been litigation commenced, if outsiders or the public get involved in that, the case can be skewed.

That's not to say that the public won't see the end result and see the documentation down the road, but when you're in the middle of a litigation – and he has seen this firsthand in other cases or has been able to read about them, where political parties get involved in decisions before courts and skew the case. We're not prepared to do that. That's why there's a general rule that when something is before the courts, we stay out of it. We don't get involved in that.

We will not be able to accept this motion for a return because, again, it is before the courts. So we'll be rejecting it, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DICKSON: I'd just make this observation. I think the minister confuses somebody making comment about a matter before the courts and producing a simple document. The document speaks for itself. What she says is absolutely correct if we were to be asking a minister for an opinion, advice, that sort of thing. We're not asking for any of those things. We're asking for a single document. It exists. It's been identified.

The minister should have more confidence in the judges of the Court of Queen's Bench of this province. Nothing they do is going to be impaired by sharing with us a document which is already part of the lawsuit, and if she's getting that legal advice, that's pretty scary.

MRS. NELSON: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MRS. NELSON: I have to make it very clear. I don't want the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to in any way interpret that I do not have complete faith in the justice system and the judiciary of this province. They have done a wonderful job, and they serve us well. I think it's wrong for you to twist that around, and I won't tolerate that in this House. I have complete faith in the judiciary system in this province and support it completely and respect the process. So I will not have you play a political game by intimidating me by telling people I don't have faith in the justice system, because that's wrong.

THE SPEAKER: Well, on this point of order, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: The minister's words speak for themselves. Her initial comments are on the record, and others will be the judge of them.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: Again, to close debate, Mr. Speaker, I won't repeat the words of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who has said it very, very wisely. Again, I'm very, very disappointed that the minister uses the courts as an excuse when it's not necessary.

[Motion for a Return 31 lost]

3:10

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M32. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of correspondence from Stockwell Day to Triple Five Group Ltd., Nader Ghermezian, dated June 30, 1998, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 40 of the affidavit of records of West Edmonton Mall, WEM, dated November 30, 1999.

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we will be rejecting this motion as it again pertains to the court cases that are under way, and we will not intrude in that arena. We hear the argument: we just want documents so we can stand there. I've seen so many times when members of the opposition take a document out of context, run around and play a political game with it. There's too much at stake with the province's position in this whole judicial process to have political games played. We've seen them today already. Therefore, we will be rejecting this motion for a return.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, again I must say that I'm very, very disappointed. The minister is beginning to sound like a broken record, and I anticipate we're going to continue to see this time after time. Possibly if we had the Member for Sherwood Park responding, she would at least show some favour.

[Motion for a Return 32 lost]

Electricity Deregulation

M36. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. White that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies and reports prepared by or for the Department of Resource Development between May 25, 1999, and April 3, 2000, evaluating the impact of electricity deregulation on the utility bills of various classes of Alberta consumers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Forestry.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is rejecting Motion for a Return 36.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Calder has repeatedly asked questions in the House on the impact of deregulation on the utility bills. He has made a case that there is reason to be concerned. Copies of all studies and reports give us the opportunity also to confirm that the minister has some direction as to where he's headed and that he's not just doing it blindly. It's very, very disappointing, and it just leaves us in a situation where we continue to be very skeptical of the results of the deregulation of energy in the province.

[Motion for a Return 36 lost]

Mineral Revenue Information System

M37. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. White that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies and reports prepared by or for the Department of Resource Development between January 1, 1999, and April 3, 2000, evaluating the cost-effectiveness of the mineral revenue information system, MRIS.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Forestry.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is rejecting Motion for a Return 37.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, to conclude. I have to conclude myself that the government has simply not done the necessary studies and reports before they plunged ahead. They've done it blindly. They've left us in the dark, they've left the public in the dark, and possibly they're in the dark themselves. Again, very disappointing.

[Motion for a Return 37 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M38. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of excerpts of cabinet agenda and minutes dated February 6, 1996, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 34 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talked about a broken record. Well, I don't know how many hundreds of times now on motions for returns that pertain to this court case we have had to say that we cannot accept these motions for returns while this court case is pending and under way. I don't know how many times you have to tell them that.

This is another question that pertains to affidavits, et cetera, that are pertaining to that case, and we must reject this.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, if it weren't every question that the minister responded to and rejected using the courts as a basis, maybe one could give some credibility that periodically she would be correct. But when the minister blindly uses the same argument for every motion for a return, then it leaves one very skeptical that the courts are simply being used as an excuse.

[Motion for a Return 38 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M41. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of excerpts of minutes dated July 20, 1994, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 33 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again this is another motion for a return that pertains to "the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999." I don't know how much clearer that makes it. This is part of a legal case that is going on. If you would read the questions and ask what you're asking us, you would realize very clearly that we are not able to participate in giving this information out while this case is under way. If you would like to have the same response that was given earlier of accepting written questions, word the question so it's something that we in fact can give you and quit bringing back questions when you know perfectly well we can't file that information. Therefore, we are rejecting this motion for a return.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, let me just make it really clear. There

is no legal impediment to the government of the province of Alberta providing this document. There is no statute law and there is absolutely no regulation that prohibits the production of the document. The only thing that stands between the public of Alberta having access to this document is the fact that the government chooses not to share it.

This is an affidavit of records that is in the court record. This minister and her government have the ability and the power without any legal impediment to share the record, and if they choose not to, well, let them take the heat and have the courage to stand and say: we choose not to share the document. But, for pete's sake, let's not have some suggestion that their hands are tied in some way, that they'd be breaking some law, or that somehow they would be prejudicing the interests of taxpayers by not sharing the information. That is utter nonsense, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close the debate.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has said it very, very well, and I'll leave it at that.

[Motion for a Return 41 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M42. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of excerpts of the agenda and priorities committee agenda, with attachments, dated October 18, 1993, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 34 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, because this pertains to the exact same situation, we will be rejecting Motion for a Return 42.

I want to comment on Calgary-Buffalo. He knows perfectly well that he can go down, if he wants to, to the courthouse and request that information and pay for it to be produced there. What he wants to play is a little political game of doing this, and I'm not going to do that.

So we will be rejecting this motion for a return, and we will not have politicians interfering in the judicial system.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, methinks I've heard that record before. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo does not play political games. He has made good arguments as to why it can be released, and the minister fails to heed it.

[Motion for a Return 42 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M43. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of minutes dated March 21, 1994, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 33 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You talk about political games. The previous motion talked about page 34; this one talks about page 33. I mean, just so you can have a whole slew of motions for returns on the Order Paper. Again the same scenario. This is before the courts, and if people think that the opposition is not playing political games with this, they're not reading the Order Paper, because this goes page by page by page. Naturally we have to again, with the same answer, reject the motion for a return because this is before the courts. But that's an example of the political games that get played on the other side, to list one of these for every page of the affidavit, and that's wrong.

3:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If the minister will read the affidavit of records that's been filed in Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, action number 9903-18469 – now, this is an affidavit of records filed by Robert A. Bhatia of the city of Edmonton, Assistant Deputy Provincial Treasurer. Remember; this gentleman works for us. He works for the people of the province of Alberta, and he has filed an affidavit of records.

Now, here's what's interesting. These are documents which the government does not object to producing for purposes of the lawsuit, and here's the document right here. It's number 007, excerpts of minutes, and we've got the date and so on, so it's all here.

You know, the province would sooner send people scurrying around to courthouses trying to get records. The reality, as this minister well knows . . .

MRS. NELSON: Do you know where the courthouse is, Gary?

MR. DICKSON: I know where the Law Courts is in the city of Edmonton, but I don't have a staff . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Please, please. The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition has the floor.

MR. DICKSON: I remember this is the government that at one time – they've lost their way – talked about making information accessible to Albertans, talked about one-window, one-door access to government services. This was the government that talked about making it easier for citizens of this province to be able to get information on how their tax dollars are spent or, in the case of West Edmonton Mall, misspent.

Now we have the minister saying the most insulting thing I can imagine, because when she says that to us, she says it to Albertans. She's saying it to the 3 million people in this province who want to find out how their tax dollars are being spent. She's effectively saying: you know, you go down to the courthouses, and if you live in Pincher Creek, Alberta, you travel to Edmonton and you wait in line and you pay the money to access the court record. That's the only way you're going to find out what the government of the province of Alberta is filing on their behalf.

You know, if you want to put out hurdles and make it as difficult as possible for Albertans to find out how their tax dollars are being misspent, you're doing an excellent job, Madam Minister, through the Speaker, because that's what this is all about, and that's the obstruction we have seen this afternoon. We can sum it all up together and say: this is a question of obstruction and simply making it as difficult as possible for Albertans to access information.

Thank you very much.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, in closing, let me say that it's with a great deal of disappointment that I have to acknowledge that I

batted 100 percent in the wrong direction, while my colleague over here has batted 100 percent in the right direction. Again I must say that I'm very, very disappointed that not one of the motions for returns was accepted.

THE SPEAKER: Don't feel bad, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I've had those kinds of days too.

[Motion for a Return 43 lost]

Employment Initiatives for AISH Recipients

M46. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of requests for proposals for employment program initiatives designed for assured income for the severely handicapped and assured support program recipients since February 28, 1999.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, it's a good day for playing ball, Mr. Speaker, because I'm on the winning team right now, and Edmonton-Rutherford owes me supper if I bat 100 percent. So we're going for this motion for a return with great hopes, and I hope it's an expensive place for supper.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know. I don't know. Okay. All right. What the heck. Sure, I'll accept.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. Absolutely to close. Since Lent is over, I think I'll even have a glass of wine with that meal, which has nothing to do with the motion. In all seriousness, because I'm sure my colleague will read *Hansard* today, I do appreciate the acceptance of this motion.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: I wish to advise the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert that the victory is not here yet. The House still has to vote.

[Motion for a Return 46 carried]

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. members. This place can work when it wants to. Thank you.

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 206

School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'd like to just finish with a few comments that I started yesterday in Committee of the Whole and beg the indulgence of the committee just to talk about something that came forward into the public since this bill received second reading. That particular document was a report that was released by the Task Force on Children at Risk. It was titled *Start Young, Start Now*, and in this report there are several recommendations that Bill 206 either partly or wholly addresses.

The reason I bring this up is that the task force was created to examine issues facing children at risk, including but not limited to those who are at risk of developing violent behaviour. I think that Bill 206 is broader in focus, dealing with all children in a learning environment, but certainly it deals with those kids who are at risk and who might be prone to violence.

The first step of the recommendations fell under "Developing healthy kids," and in that section recommendation 5 was to "make sure schools are ready when a crisis occurs." This includes implementing "a comprehensive crisis response plan" and training teachers "to identify students who may be at risk" and referring them to "appropriate professionals."

Included in Bill 206 in section 2(3) and (4) are provisions that require schools to "provide counseling for students where appropriate," and to "include penalty options which enable students to continue pursuing their studies."

3:30

Now, with reference to this, it's interesting to note that the Alberta School Boards Association, when it comes to counseling, made a comment to me that there are not enough funds available for counseling and that they're a little worried about this provision. But I'm sure that as this particular report goes through the process, it will identify that more funds be provided for counseling, where appropriate, for students. I see that as something that's being positive and coming down the road and being available for school boards to address in the long term.

This counseling and those school alternatives will ensure that students will get the help when they need it, even if it means an alternative outside a school environment, where possible. As well, a school code of conduct puts in writing which behaviour is and is not tolerated in schools, and this means that situations will be handled swiftly and disruption will be kept to a minimum and students who need help will get it.

The code of conduct that I'm proposing will also directly address recommendation 9 from the task force, which also falls under the section "Developing healthy kids." This states that we must "take steps to prevent and protect children and youth from abuse, violence, bullying and gang activities" in schools and communities. As I stated in second reading of Bill 206, in section 2 boards must have in writing a policy dealing with these activities. This will make it explicitly clear that these activities are not allowed nor tolerated in schools. A code of conduct fosters an atmosphere of mutual respect in which everyone knows what is expected of them. This goes back to the idea that students have the right to a stable learning environment and a safe school but also the responsibility of maintaining that environment by following the rules that they established, not rules that are established for them.

Madam Chairman, those are just a few areas of the task force report that Bill 206 will address. The basic idea is ensuring students are safe at school and that they can also receive help if they need it, and this is really the main thrust of the bill.

Now, Madam Chairman, since drafting the bill, I have received valuable input from constituents, colleagues, and even a few comments from the opposition. As I said before, the foundation of

this bill is solid, and I think the input I have received will add strength to the legislation. My focus is on Alberta schools and students to ensure that they are safe and cared for in a stable and supportive place so that our young people can grow. So I'm welcoming comments or amendments from any hon. members that they wish to put forward.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. At this time I'd like maybe the table officers to distribute an amendment that I had duly authorized by Parliamentary Counsel.

While we do that, I'd like to speak briefly in support of Bill 206, the School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act, 2000. Essentially, I guess part of the reason why I support this is because in today's day and age we seem to be hearing more and more with respect to unacceptable conduct and violence and threats within our school system. Quite frankly, I think that something needs to be done in terms of standardizing, perhaps, suggestions with respect to a code of conduct so that everybody takes it seriously within the province. It's one thing to say, "Well, you know, all of the boards do have some policy," but if you ask them to produce it, sometimes it's difficult to find. Perhaps they have a lot of experience over the years but nothing in writing that really specifies what is to happen.

There is one additional comment that I would like to make, and the mover of the bill might consider this, if he wants to. You know, after submitting my ideas for amendments, I'd feel a whole lot better if in fact there was some way of making it mandatory for schools to notify their boards when an incident occurs. We've had a few examples now of incidents that perhaps for one reason or another the principal may not have known how to handle. In some cases that I am aware of, the incident never does get reported back to the school board itself. So I would be a lot happier if the mover of the bill might consider even a further amendment with respect to that to make it mandatory that at least the school reports the incident back to the board. Because if you don't report it, then how do you know if you have a problem or how do you know whether or not you even have a standard way of looking after the process of handling a problem?

With those additional comments I'm going to now move to the amendments. Madam Chairman, will this amendment be called A1?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, we will deem this amendment A1.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Now, essentially what this does, if we look at section 2, under 44.1(1), "A board shall develop and implement a written policy respecting student conduct which addresses the following activities." What I've done is added "but is not limited to" after "addresses." In other words, it's not only these activities. It's not limited to these activities, although these activities are listed there. Therefore, the first amendment deals with adding the words "but is not limited to" after the word "addresses". It would then read, "A board shall develop and implement a written policy respecting student conduct which addresses, but is not limited to, the following activities." So that's how that first amendment would work.

The second part of that amendment would add section (h), which I believe is an extremely important part that maybe was missed, because we hear so much now about threats and intimidation. You know, it doesn't have to be physically present in the school itself.

It can come from the Internet. It can come through fax machines. It can come through e-mails. It can come through letters. It can come in many different ways. So section (h) would add "threats or intimidation of any kind against another person" to the list that the hon. member has proposed in the bill.

I would ask for your support with respect to these amendments and would also ask the mover of the bill to consider whether or not the reporting of incidents should be mandatory with respect to informing the board that something has taken place. We're hearing these days that some of these threats happen but that the board doesn't know about them.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont for the amendments. I believe that in this particular situation adding "but is not limited to" will relieve some of the concern that the Alberta School Boards Association had about this bill being too restrictive. Adding item (h), "threats or intimidation of any kind against another person" to the list will also add a new dimension to this bill that is very, very important and something that I didn't think about.

3:40

The member's comment regarding notification to the school board by a principal when an action took place in a school is an interesting concept, and I hadn't thought of that. I was mostly thinking about a code of conduct that is developed by a school with the school council, the parent council, principals, staff, and teachers all being involved. In thinking quickly about this, if the principal is going to be involved in developing this grassroots, school-based code of conduct, that's something that could be incorporated within the code of conduct, being reported directly to the school board. So there is some flexibility within this bill at the grassroots level to put those types of things in. In order to keep the momentum of the bill going, I would suggest that principals then look at putting that provision into a code of conduct at the local level for their own protection.

With that, Madam Chairman, I support these amendments and ask all members to support Calgary-Egmont's amendments on Bill 206.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Could I have unanimous consent to recognize the member that I failed to recognize?

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I guess sitting way back here in the corner you don't see me that readily.

Yes, I'm standing to speak, obviously, to the amendments that the hon. member made in adding the clause "threats or intimidation of any kind against another person" after part (g). I do support that wholeheartedly.

I think we have found that a bill like Bill 206, School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act, brought in by the hon. member, is actually very appropriate at this time, when we've seen a lot of tragedies in our schools not only across Canada but across the States as well. I think it does take the involvement of the school boards, obviously, to buy into and support policies that are made with respect to conduct and discipline in our school systems.

The reporting mechanism is absolutely key. We have to have that

open line, whether it be through the Legislative Assembly, whether it be through the school systems, whether it be through the School Act, to implement and do some straightforward planning, whether the planning, unfortunately, be in crisis intervention, perhaps before there is a tragedy, or simply something that gives the school board a source of information with respect to what is happening in their schools that they are the elected officials to represent in the community. If there are tragedies that are occurring, we all have to take responsibility and try to make a safe place for our youth to learn and to go to school and feel safe and learn what is needed to be done.

This bill is also very timely with respect to the task force that was done under the Minister of Children's Services. Start Young, Start Now reflects the crises with children at risk, and I think it's a very, very appropriate title: Start Young. That is where it seems that any violent situations, any bullying, any carrying-ons in schools do start.

I applaud the member for bringing the bill forward, and I applaud the Member for Calgary-Egmont for his amendments. I think they're very timely and very appropriate. So with those few comments I'll take my seat.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Is there anyone else who wishes to speak?

[The clauses of Bill 206 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Are you agreed that the committee now rise and report?

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following with some amendments: Bill 206. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur with this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So carried.

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

Bill 207 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act

[Debate adjourned April 18: Mr. White speaking]

MR. JACQUES: Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure today to rise and

speak on Bill 207, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act, that's been sponsored by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. At the outset I'd like to say that I'm not going to be supporting this bill for various reasons.

As I was looking through the principle of this bill, I was reminded of I think it was a television series called the Jerry Seinfeld show. There was a bunch of characters in the show, and the whole show was about a nothing. There were characters by the names of Elaine and Kramer and some other characters, and it was all formatted on a nothing. There was no substance to it. So when you look at the principle of the bill, one has to look at it: does the principle have some substance, or is it a nothing? Well, unfortunately, Madam Speaker, in this particular case the substance of the bill is nonexistent, so you're left with a nothing.

I reflect on the comments by the Member for Edmonton-Calder, who was speaking to this. He said that it "is not the be-all and end-all." Well, I think we all would concur with that comment because it's a nothing, and if it's a nothing, then it can't do anything. So here we are, ironically, with a bill that's before us that is a nothing.

In fairness, whether our political philosophies are different or our ideologies are different, if a bill comes forward and it has merit, has substance, has some principles, and it's clearly with objectives, then I think most members of this Assembly take a look at it on the basis of: yeah, okay; let me look at it on the basis of what the bill says and what the bill is trying to achieve. In other words, there's some kind of very related outcomes, some benchmarks. So when I read Bill 207, I was trying to go through this process of saying: you know, I'm sorry; I seem to come up here with a nothing. If it's a nothing, then why is the bill in front of us?

3:50

So I then tried to put some tests to it. I said: well, you know, maybe I'm really reading this wrong; maybe I've got the wrong end of the stick on this one. So I said: what is this kind of constituent concern that is being raised by the hon. member to bring forward this debate in the Legislative Assembly as a private member's bill? Now, remember, Madam Speaker, that a private member's bill is not a bill of the opposition. It is not a bill of the opposition. It is a bill of a private member. But the interesting thing is that when you read through *Hansard* and you look at the comments of the leader and I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Manning and the Member for Edmonton-Calder, you quite clearly see it's not a private member's bill. It's a Liberal-sponsored philosophy, principle, and quite clearly. That's fair enough. They've said that it is, and that's fair, although it is, as I said, a private member's bill.

So here we have a Liberal philosophy that is a nothing. Then I went through and said: well, if it's a nothing, then why would the member draft and introduce legislation that lacks any form of either objective or rationale? You then come through and you say: "Well, okay. Again let's put some tests to it. Does it improve the delivery of government services to the citizens of this fair province?" You look at it and say: no, because it's a nothing. So then you say, "Well, does it help clarify something for the people of Alberta?" and again you say: no, because it's a nothing. Then you say: does it remedy something from a legislative gap prospective? Well, again nothing. Then you say: well, does it update and modernize or in some way change an existing act for the benefit of Albertans? No. Nothing. Then you ask the question: well, does it bring forward a new idea, a new concept that's going to keep our province on the leading edge of innovation, that's going to make us be admired throughout Canada, throughout even North America? Again, you answer no because you've got a nothing.

Then you have to come back again and say: well, gee, what's the

motivation here? Then you look at the bill and you look at the specifics of the bill. It says that the Treasurer is going to prepare an annual report, that it's going to be based on an assumption, and that assumption is going to reflect an arbitrary percentage of personal income taxes that would be available to municipalities. Not could be, not will be, but might be, maybe. I don't know. It's an arbitrary percentage. So you come back: you've got a nothing bill with an arbitrary percentage.

Then you look at it and say: well, this arbitrary percentage and this method of talking about it could be selected in one of two ways. The first way is that we would debate and vote on a motion that would be moved by the Provincial Treasurer. The Provincial Treasurer is going to select an arbitrary percentage. He's going to reach out, get an arbitrary percentage, and he's going to introduce it in the Legislature. So we have an arbitrary percentage in a nothing bill. Now, if the Legislative Assembly in its wisdom decides not to deal with this arbitrary percentage by June 15, then the Treasurer would choose an arbitrary percentage. Then he would bring that arbitrary percentage back to the Assembly for endorsement. So, again, what have you got? Nothing.

Again, when you look at it, the interesting thing about the bill is that every year you're going to go through this. Every year you're going to deal with a nothing, and every year you're going to deal with an arbitrary percentage. You know, again you come back and say: okay; let me kind of get a handle on this. Let's say, for example, that personal income taxes were \$4 billion in a year, and let's say that this arbitrary percentage was 10 percent. So 10 percent times \$4 billion. Gee, is that \$400 million? I think so. You know, it doesn't take too much to calculate that, and we know that if it was 20 percent, then it would be \$800 million.

AN HON. MEMBER: Let's go for 5.

MR. JACQUES: A good question. What if it was 5? Well, gee whiz, that might be \$200 million.

So here we have this kind of report and this arbitrary percentage that are going to be debated but can't do anything. It's going to be in legislation requiring this Legislative Assembly to debate and, again, can't do anything. But with the stroke of a pen and in our mind we can say that 10 percent, for example, of \$4 billion is \$400 million. So do we need an act to say that this is how you calculate 10 percent of \$4 billion, for example?

Again, you come back and say: well, what's the purpose? Well, again I'm not sure here. I think we've got a nothing. Not only that, but we're going to produce an annual report that is going to be based on an assumption, and the assumption is going to be arbitrary. So if you have an assumption and the roots of the assumption are arbitrary and it can't do anything, then do you have a nothing? You know, I'm trying to work through the principles of this.

Now, the other interesting thing. If you carry the extension of that, in the bill it says that "the Provincial Treasurer shall assume." He shall assume, not calculate, not based on a formula. He doesn't do it on the basis of consulting. He assumes. It's not even based on the phases of the moon. He assumes. So now we're going to have an assumption of an arbitrary, of a nothing in legislation.

So, again, you come back to the question. You've got the assumption, you've got the arbitrary things, and you've got the nothing. Now, how does this really relate back to something that you would say to the municipalities? Does it really make sense that municipalities could – not will but could – receive, assuming the province allocated it, an arbitrary portion of personal tax revenue? Now, you can't do it. All you can do is assume it. Okay? You can't do it; you can assume it. Again you come back and say: well, gee

whiz, if we're going to assume something on an arbitrary basis, why can't we just calculate that? I mean, I could table a report that says: "Hey, here's the assumption. Here's the calculation. Want some information? Here it is."

Then you get into the real crux of the question: does that report really facilitate some better form of co-operation, some better form of understanding between the provincial and the municipal governments? Does this report, that again is a nothing based on arbitrary percentage and assumptions, help clarify the existing funding streams that we have? Again, I think the answer to that is no. Most importantly, I think, does it help introduce some stability into provincial/municipal funding arrangements, which could very well be the objective that the author of the bill had in mind? Again, you can't answer the question and say yes; you can only answer no to the question. So if you go through all of this and you ask those questions and you quite clearly come up with no, then you're back to the nothing and you're back to the fundamental question: why is this legislation in front of us?

Again you ask the question: does this in some way bring more accountability to the existing funding streams, particularly as it relates to the business planning processes which are recognized by this Legislature and recognized by virtually all provincial governments across Canada as a leading role that Alberta has taken in this regard? Does this somehow complement this leading role? Again, no. Does it in some way bring to the table the municipal concerns that need to be addressed through discussion and consultation with the provincial government? That's a very legitimate question. It's a very legitimate process. But does this help it? No. In no way, shape, or form.

Then we get back to a very critical area and say: does the report, based on these assumptions, based on this arbitrary thing, improve the overall system of municipal grants and funding? Again, I think any rational person working through this on any rational basis would only come up with the conclusion of no.

Of course, the primary example of why this can't happen and why it's a nothing bill is because a money bill cannot be put forward by a private member. That's the bottom line of it. So what you have is a thinly disguised veil of something that is a nothing. Other than bringing, if you like, quote, the issue to the Legislature floor for purposes of debate, although we're not quite sure what we're debating in terms of, if you like, what could have been an objective but can't be an objective because of the restrictions that we place under our Standing Orders on how we conduct our business, then why is it here? I'm not sure.

4:00

I think that in time, Madam Speaker, there will be researchers who are looking at the debate history. They will look at milestones. Educators will look at this body over time and say: where are the meaningful milestones of the debate and the introduction of bills into this Legislature, particularly as it relates to private bills? Well, I'm afraid the example that is going to be put forward as not the best example could very well be this bill. It really goes back to the nothing. It goes back to the assumptions. It goes back to the arbitrary thing. It doesn't meet any of the acid tests that normally we as legislators and I think all citizens in this province would look at from the point of view of saying that it's meaningful to this Legislative Assembly and to the citizens of this province.

The interesting thing is that it can't be a money bill. Even if it were a money bill – and you can't stretch that into debate because it isn't a money bill. It goes back to the principle that if indeed it was, again the basic question would be: do you want this assumption, this arbitrary number that would be applied for purposes of determining funding that would go to municipal governments?

Remember that it is personal income taxes only that this bill is

targeting. If you took the position of taxation on a personal basis, if the people of this province said, "We don't want personal taxes or we want them really down," do we want a funding formula – we can't have the funding formula because this is not a money bill. But if it were, would you really want a funding formula that would be tied to a taxation system that hopefully over time will result in far less funding through this provincial government by taking less money out of the people of this province? That is a very fundamental question that I think is at odds, if you like, with the fundamental principle that isn't in this bill because it can't be in this bill because it's not a money bill. Therefore, you're back to the nothing.

So I would suggest, Madam Speaker, that probably the time has come to put the bill out of its misery. Let's get on with some meaningful business in this Legislature, and let us defeat this bill at the earliest opportunity.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to add my comments on Bill 207, which is the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act. What the bill does is provide the municipalities with access to a portion of the provincial personal income tax base, allocates a percentage of provincial personal income tax revenues to municipalities on a per capita basis beginning in the fiscal year 2000-2001. It allows the province to restructure provincial grant programs. Allocations to municipalities would be population based and determined pursuant to agreements by the AUMA and the AAMDC.

Now, Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity to sit on Edmonton city council for nine years, and I know there are many other members of this House, including yourself, who had the distinct privilege and honour of representing the local taxpayer at the municipal level. I'm not sure about your particular municipality, but when I attended the AUMA conferences and the AAMDC conventions and the Federation of Mayors and Municipalities convention and such, one of the common threads, in fact one of the very first resolutions I ever proposed in attending AUMA, was a revenue-sharing formula based on oil revenues. The reason for that was that common concern that was expressed by municipal leaders across the country.

Grants that were given by the provincial governments were generally done on a sort of conditional basis. In other words, there would be a \$12 per capita base for recreation, social programs, and so on. There would be transportation programs, 75 percent and 25 percent, 90 percent and 10 percent, but all conditional. The 90 percent and 10 percent was conditional upon the roadway being a certain type of roadway. At times we as municipal leaders, elected representatives, felt like we were beggars with our hands out, and the province would throw us crumbs. Some municipal councillors would get the inferiority complex that we were in fact a junior government, that the provincial government was the municipal government.

MRS. SOETAERT: It was insulting.

MR. WICKMAN: It was very, very insulting.

Over the years municipalities have constantly cried to the provincial government: let's form a partnership; let's be a partnership; let's recognize each other as being equal. One of the greatest shortcomings in terms of equality, of course, is access to revenues. The provincial government basically has unlimited access to revenue. For example, when the provincial government decides they

need more money, what do they do? They stick in VLT machines. When they need more money: more VLT machines, slot machines.

MR. DICKSON: We get to talk about that on the next bill, Bill 208.

MR. WICKMAN: On the next bill, that will come up. Exactly.

They stick a fee on liquor, stick user fees on licences, tax this, tax that. But municipalities are very, very limited in the areas that they can tax, and they become very, very dependent on municipal taxation through property taxation, and that creates a problem. That creates a problem in the sense that the other levels of government – and I won't call them senior levels of government, because they're not senior; they're equal levels of government – are in the position, because of the strong economy across the country and here in Alberta, that there are surpluses. The government is able to balance budgets, and the government is able to say: "We have surpluses, and we can put a little bit of money here and a little bit of money there. We can do this. We can do that. We can download onto the municipalities and take away about half of their revenues that were flowing down, thereby saving us all of that money." The federal government as well has a tendency to do the same thing, unfortunately, to the provinces, as in health care, and we continuously cry, recognizing that the federal government has to accept the responsibility as well.

You look at the municipalities. When they come to prepare their budget and they suddenly realize they're going to have a deficit, they can't operate at a deficit. They're not allowed by law to operate at a deficit. They can't turn around and say, "Well, we're going to come up with this new system of taxation to get more revenue by putting VLTs in the hotels and the cafes," or whatever they may do that would be in a sense additional revenue. They can't download. They can't turn around and say: well, we're going to reduce the amounts of money that go to the school boards. They can't do that. That's where the buck stops, and you, Madam Speaker, would realize that fully. I don't have to give you a sermon or preach to you, because you fully understand, having been there.

Now, what this particular bill attempts to do is recognize that residents in the various municipalities pay income tax. I don't have the figures, but if you look, for example, at Edmonton and you look at how much money went from Edmonton into the current provincial coffers in the form of personal income tax – and these are people that live in Edmonton – it would amount to hundreds of millions of dollars. I won't say billions of dollars but hundreds of millions of dollars. Why shouldn't the municipality have a share of that? Why shouldn't they have a certain percentage?

MR. DICKSON: There's no good reason.

MR. WICKMAN: No, there isn't, except there's a disadvantage to the province in that the province can no longer treat them like puppets. In other words, the province can no longer say: "Well, you have to spend it here. You've got to spend it there. You have to do this. You have to do that." It would give the municipalities a little more independence than the provincial government would like to see them actually acquire.

MR. DICKSON: The province would have to negotiate.

MR. WICKMAN: They would have to negotiate. They would have to recognize them as being equal partners. They would have to recognize that they in fact serve the same type of function, that they are accountable to the same people, and so on and so forth.

The government has never made the case why they simply don't

cut the strings loose, recognize that there has to be a formula put in place so that revenue sharing can occur and so the municipalities can direct their own affairs and decide as to how these dollars are going to be spent.

4:10

When comments were made when this bill was dealt with earlier, the minister responded. He made a number of comments that I want to, again, respond to. The minister said:

The descriptive rhetoric used by the hon. member to describe this bill in no way reflects the speculation that appears in the paper. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, there is no resemblance between what's in this paper and what is being needed.

That's what the Minister of Municipal Affairs said on April 12.

However, the Leader of the Official Opposition, making it very clear, had indicated on April 5 in her remarks:

Unfortunately, because Bill 207 is a private member's bill, it is restricted from having a number of important elements, including a mechanism through which the municipalities would be able to access the income tax base. As all members are aware, private members' bills cannot deal specifically with money issues since nongovernment members are unable to introduce a money bill in the Legislature.

The member recognized that there is that shortcoming in the bill, and that shortcoming is in the bill because of the requirements that surround a private member's bill. So the minister should have been aware of that when the minister made his comments.

Also, I want to point out that the Premier of this province said on March 9 in *Alberta Hansard*: "A bill is the most important document that can ever be introduced in the Assembly." So we should never, never make light of a bill, whether it's a private member's bill, whether it's a government bill, whatever. Don't make light of it. It is a very, very important document.

On September 9, 1993, the Speaker of the House – he was not Speaker then; in 1993 I believe he was deputy Premier – made the statement: "There's provision here for the first time for private members to actually see their Bills made into law in the province of Alberta. That's quite remarkable." Those are the words of the present Speaker, who at that time was the deputy Premier.

Now, I can look at examples of private members' bills similar to Bill 207, one being Bill 205, the Debt Retirement Act of 1995, which was introduced at that particular time by Dr. Percy, the member for I believe at that time it was called Edmonton-Parkallen. Recognizing the previous precedent that has been set, we are extremely disappointed that government members would table *Alberta Liberal Caucus News* simply as a means to facilitate a point of order rather than engage in serious discussion on the merits of the proposal.

Then, Madam Speaker, the minister went on to say that very same day, April 12, in response to another comment that had been made: "We're reviewing the education property tax." In response to that, let me point out that despite the government's so-called review of the education property tax, the residential portion of the education property tax is projected to increase from \$651.2 million in 1995 to \$774.7 million in 2002, an increase of \$123.5 million, or 19 percent. Also, the 18 percent mill rate reduction on the residential assessment announced on January 26, 2000, which the government made a great deal about, putting their spin on it, actually amounted to a paltry figure, a \$22.50 reduction in provincial property taxes this year for a ratepayer with a residence assessed at \$125,000. A reduction of \$22.50.

When we talk in terms of the provincial government putting a 5 percent cap on increases and equalized assessment for residential properties, we recognize what's happened. In the city of Edmonton

we're going to see the city of Edmonton taxpayer paying an additional \$7.7 million in provincial property taxes in the year 2000. Now, make note of that. The city of Edmonton taxpayers will pay an additional \$7.7 million because of the 5 percent cap, and that \$7.7 million is used to subsidize other areas of the province where they exceeded that 5 percent cap. In other words, Edmontonians are not only subsidizing the provincial government and being denied their fair share of revenue, but now they have to turn around and subsidize other municipalities. Do you blame Mayor Bill Smith and members of Edmonton city council for mounting a campaign directing this shortcoming, this unfairness in equity to the Edmonton taxpayers? Those ads will be appearing shortly, and those ads will be urging Edmontonians to squawk to the provincial government about the unfairness.

MR. DICKSON: Why don't they just vote differently?

MR. WICKMAN: Why don't they vote differently? Well, in Edmonton they don't have a problem. They know how to vote. I'm sorry to mention this to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but I think the problem is down in your part of the province.

This is an interesting one here. Now, in response to that particular statement, the only long-term solutions the government has publicly suggested for replacing the provincial education property tax are a 4 percent sales tax and a 38 percent increase in provincial income tax. Let me quote now the Minister of Municipal Affairs. "As a matter of fact, they've already shared the information that if we were to put in a sales tax" – you hear that? If we were to put in a sales tax, referring to themselves – "it would be somewhere in the area of 4 percent." Now, I don't think Albertans want to hear about a sales tax, whether it be 4 percent, 7 percent, whatever. Then he goes on to say that they've looked at the area of income tax and that it would mean a 30 percent increase in income tax. I'm sure the government can be a little more sensible, a little more creative than even referring to a 4 percent sales tax or a 38 percent increase in personal income tax.

The Member for Medicine Hat made an interesting concept in his Motion 518, introduced in the Legislative Assembly. Let me quote. This is his actual motion. You would think he was on this side of the House.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to explore alternative means of funding education other than through municipal property taxes and to begin discussions with municipal governments to develop new cost-sharing formulas that could be implemented after the provincial government removes requisitions for school taxes.

Now, there's one member that is headed off in a similar direction to what Bill 207 is attempting to do. So we in fact are not speaking out here in isolation. We in fact not only would see the AUMA and the AAMDC welcome these types of initiatives, but I'm sure there's more than just the Member for Medicine Hat who has a similar type of philosophy.

Interestingly enough, the minister also said that same day – he was very talkative that day, obviously – that

it's important to note that the proportion of education funding derived from education property tax revenues has decreased from 50 percent in '94-95 to 38 percent this year. The facts speak for themselves.

That's what he said. Now, let me say that approximately 6 percent, or \$165 million, of the reduction in the proportion of education funding derived from the education property tax revenues between '94-95 and 2000-2001 is accounted for by the exemption of machinery and equipment, which benefits only a small number of

nonresidential ratepayers. So he was a bit loose with his statements there.

The minister then went on to say:

We've already agreed to work with municipalities as partners in clarifying provincial/municipal roles and responsibilities. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it's in our business plan.

This again is a quote from the Minister of Municipal Affairs on April 12. Let me point out, when we talk in terms of a willingness to work with the municipalities, what has happened. When asked by the Official Opposition what plans the government actually had to work with municipalities, the Premier referred only to the short-term funding proposals being worked on in the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure.

Now, there's a great deal more discussion that has to occur with the municipalities than that one particular statement, Madam Speaker. There has to be a comprehensive discussion, a comprehensive recognition that we do have a level of government there that requires the loosening of legislative strings to allow it the flexibility, the independence that it requires.

Again let me point out some more interesting comments that the minister had to say that very same day. He's quoted as saying: "In fact, from '95 to '99 basic education spending – and that includes K to 12 – increased \$693 million and is continuing to increase." Now, let me just say in response that as a percentage of the GDP, an amount equal to about 4.1 percent of the Alberta GDP was invested in basic education in '92-93. By 2002-03, according to Budget 2000, that investment will just be 2.8 percent; in other words, a reduction from 4.1 percent down to 2.8 percent of the GDP. Now, that is not heading off in the right direction.

4:20

Again another comment the minister made that day in response to the comments from the Official Opposition.

In fact, eliminating grants and relying on a source of income that can be unpredictable and uncertain would create a situation where funding to municipalities would reflect the volatility of this tax base.

Madam Speaker, just listen to these words: "In fact, eliminating grants and relying on a source of income that can be unpredictable and uncertain." How would it be unpredictable and uncertain if there were a formula put into place, a recognition that the municipalities could in fact be dependent on a percentage? While not being able to pin it down to the exact amount of money, I tell you it would certainly be a lot less unpredictable or it would be a lot more predictable – let's put it that way – than some of the sources of revenue that the province has to rely on at the present time, like the oil revenues that we can see fluctuate anywhere from \$11, \$12 a barrel up to a high of \$36 a barrel. A great deal of the revenue of course is dependent on how much money Albertans want to gamble in the various forms of gambling opportunities that are allowed in the province. Certainly there would be some variation in the amounts of personal income tax that may be collected in the province, but nothing close to what we see in the other areas of revenue producing.

He goes on to say:

This government has committed to ensuring that Albertans pay the lowest income taxes in the country and has even speculated about the possibility of eliminating income taxes altogether. Where would that leave the municipalities?

Now, speculation about eliminating income taxes altogether. Let's get with it. This is not the state of Nevada yet. The state of Nevada may have been able to eliminate personal income tax because of their dependency on the megacasinos there that have up to 5,000 rooms and so on and so forth. But I don't think we're anywhere close to

that situation or that we'll ever see that situation in Alberta unless the provincial government has some type of agenda so that they do in fact intend to start replacing portions of the personal income tax with a sales tax and eventually have a sales tax high enough that there would be no need for . . . [interjections] Well, I know there's been that type of discussion, but I'll tell you right now: Albertans have enough of a problem with Bill 11. That would be the crowning touch. Need I say more?

I think I should close at that point.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Yes, hon. member. I hesitate to interrupt you, but under Standing Orders your time was up.

We have approximately six minutes until I will call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to close debate, so I will recognize the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and speak on Bill 207, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act, which is sponsored by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Having served as an elected member of a municipal government for 17 years and appreciating the level of autonomy that municipal governments enjoy as well as being able to look to the provincial government as a full partner in our joint responsibilities to the taxpayer, I found it rather puzzling when reading through Bill 207. Based on some of the debate I've heard, some other members have found it this way as well. This bill does nothing to either enhance that partnership nor to increase the independence of the municipalities. In fact, it has the opposite effect.

Madam Speaker, in my opinion, private members' bills offer MLAs the opportunity to propose innovative legislative solutions to problems that are of great concern to their constituents. Just this past fall two private members' bills, the Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act, sponsored by the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, and the Charitable Donation of Food Act, sponsored by the Member for Calgary-Bow, passed third reading. More recently, in fact only weeks ago, the Member for Red Deer-South successfully shepherded the Marriage Amendment Act through this Legislature.

So I find it very curious, then, in reading Bill 207 to find its topic deals with producing a report that would detail the effect of contributing an arbitrary percentage of an annual income tax revenue directly to the municipalities. If I understand it correctly, Bill 207 proposes to implement a new budget reporting mechanism based on assumption. Under the authority of this bill the Provincial Treasurer would prepare a report detailing the effect that sharing an assumed percentage of provincial income tax revenue with municipalities would have on Alberta's finances. This report would then be made public.

I'm left wondering what the intent of this legislation is. What purpose does it serve? What situation does it attempt to remedy, and how is the operation of government improved by the proposal contained in this bill? For that matter, what does it accomplish to produce a report that tells municipalities that if we decided to give you X percentage of an annual provincial income tax revenue, this is what would be the total? This certainly, in my opinion, is a confrontational approach to working with our municipal partners and an approach that our government rejects. I would suggest that if implemented, an unprecedented level of provincial/municipal discord would result. Does it not make more sense to engage municipalities in a discussion of the realities of how the province provides financial assistance, not hypothetical situations based on speculation?

Madam Speaker, I believe as an MLA we need to be honest, open,

and accountable to all Albertans. Dealing in hypothetical situations with what are essentially arbitrary numbers or producing meaningless reports based on assumptions is not a productive use of anyone's time. It only serves to cause confrontation, disagreement, and endless dispute about these reports to no specific end. What is accomplished by telling municipalities what the government could give them in financial support? I think municipalities are more interested in having the provincial government tell them what kinds of funding they will be receiving.

It's obvious in reading Bill 207 that the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung wanted to put forward a piece of legislation that would direct government expenditure and budgeting processes; in other words, construct a money bill. This of course, as we all know, she cannot do as a private member. Only government can propose money bills, Madam Speaker. So it seems that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has attempted to do a money bill without breaking this rule, through the back door so to speak, by having the government run a report that shows that if we spent the money, this is what impact it would have on the provincial coffers.

One of the serious problems that would be created should Bill 207 become law is entanglement of municipal and provincial tax policies. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, in introducing first reading of the bill, indicated that she felt it would – and I'll quote here from *Hansard*, March 1, page 187 – “move to more of a revenue-sharing model in our province as opposed to a children-of-the-province model.”

Actually, Bill 207 would lessen the independence of municipalities, not increase it, by tying municipal revenue to provincial tax policy decisions and any fluctuations in income tax that may arise. In years to come, when income tax revenues may decrease, the municipal government would be forced into the unenviable position of trying to make up such a shortfall. Interestingly enough, this is a danger that was recognized by the Leader of the Official Opposition as well. On January 26 she stated in an article that – and I quote – in the face of economic slowdown, which we are cautious of right now but we may be facing, the only place to accommodate that is to cut expenditures.

Madam Speaker, this bill contemplates reducing the stability of municipal funding that has been achieved through our present system. If income tax revenues drop, the corresponding reduction in the revenue transferred to municipalities would likewise drop as well. As a result, as the Leader of the Opposition admits, municipalities would be forced to make up the shortfall, most likely by cutting their expenditures. No one benefits from this. The provincial government would look bad because they're not transferring an appropriate amount of funding to municipalities. Municipalities would have to adjust their budgets to account for the reduction in revenue.

4:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to close debate.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would also like to thank all of the Members of the Legislative Assembly who have worked to speak to Bill 207 standing in my name on the Order Paper.

Madam Speaker, in summing up the discussion, the object of Bill 207 has been to provide local governments with access to a portion of provincial personal income tax revenues in order to create a more stable and predictable funding arrangement between the province

and local governments and to provide our municipalities with an enhanced ability to meet their priorities on a medium- and long-term basis in accordance with fulfilling their significant roles and responsibilities, many of which have been increased over the past decade with downloading from the province.

Bill 207 proposes to allocate a percentage of personal income tax revenues to Alberta municipalities on a per capita basis beginning in the fiscal year 2000-2001. This would allow the province to eliminate the very unstable and unpredictable grant programs, which of course have been reduced by about 50 percent over the last eight years. As well, it would provide a framework for an increased accountability, responsiveness, efficiency, fairness, a long-term planning cycle.

In fact, the province has maintained its tradition. Certainly it kept true to the view that the Progressive Conservative Party has had for many years of the municipalities being children of the province. We on this side of the House believe that there is an opportunity to look at a whole new relationship with our municipalities, and that is why we brought forward Bill 207.

Certainly I don't believe this is the only method of stable long-term funding; we think it is one. It is modeled on the experience of the province of Manitoba with its Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act. Bill 207 is just one component of our initiative to create new and sustainable partnerships with our municipalities and predictable funding arrangements so that when the roles, the division of powers if you like, are clarified, then municipalities are given a stable long-term funding arrangement rather than the ad hoc one which they have to operate under now.

Madam Speaker, this is the only forum in which this rather huge issue is being discussed. As much as the government members have spent time criticizing Bill 207 as a solution, we believed it was important to bring the matter forward, and instead of criticizing, they might have been able to open the forum up so we could come to some solutions.

I was interested to note the Minister of Municipal Affairs and today the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti and the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills speaking about this doing nothing to enhance the partnership between the province and the municipalities. Madam Speaker, I thought I would table a letter which I received from Lorne Olsvik, who of course is the AUMA president. The letter is addressed to me. He wrote to us in regard to Bill 207, saying that the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the very municipalities represented by many of the MLAs who have spoken here today,

appreciates the efforts of all Members of the Legislative Assembly through bills such as 207 to help municipalities become and remain more viable and self-sufficient. As you are aware the AUMA has adopted several guiding principles which are used to help us evaluate various Provincial programs, regulations and legislation. Our number one guiding principle is as follows:

Municipal Governments must have the fiscal capacity to fulfill their mandate through:

- primary access to the property tax base; and
- other stable long-term and progressive sources of revenue

The AUMA is pleased with the direction of Bill 207 in that it seeks to implement a component of AUMA's key guiding principle. Providing long-term and progressive sources of revenue for municipalities will go a long way to ensuring the viability of Alberta's communities.

So clearly the AUMA, which we see as a major stakeholder in this province and an important one for developing municipal policy, is certainly onside with the bill as a portion of dealing with the issue.

Madam Speaker, this bill is really a signal to our municipal leaders, one which we look forward to raising with them further.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:35 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Olsen
Bonner	MacBeth	Soetaert
Carlson	MacDonald	Wickman
Dickson		

Against the motion:

Amery	Graham	McFarland
Broda	Haley	Melchin
Burgener	Hierath	Nelson
Calahasen	Hlady	O'Neill
Cao	Jacques	Renner
Cardinal	Johnson	Severtson
Coutts	Klapstein	Shariff
Doerksen	Langevin	Smith
Dunford	Lougheed	Strang
Evans	Mar	Tannas
Fischer	Marz	Thurber
Forsyth	McClellan	Zwozdesky
Fritz		

Totals:	For – 10	Against – 37
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[Motion lost]

Bill 208

Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's quite a pleasure to have both of these bills coming together as they are, Bill 207 and now 208, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2000. It's interesting, because both bills address some of the issues which are at the core of our communities, are at the core of the kinds of communities that we want to have throughout our province, whether they be small urban or huge metropolitan centres. As we know, this whole issue of gaming has taken a very interesting turn in our province and has resulted in some impact on our communities that perhaps members and people of the public didn't have any idea that it would.

4:50

Interestingly, Bill 208, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, is all about looking at our communities, looking at the kind of environment we want to create, the kind of environment we want our children to grow and mature in, and examines the whole issue of gaming and its impact on our values and our family values within the community that we see. Communities truly are the backbone of our province, Madam Speaker. That's certainly something that people have perhaps said without real meaning or at least without associating with the words how important a statement it is.

While we live and work in an environment where we have access to a worldwide web in terms of information, our companies trade and

market their products on a worldwide basis, information is right out there in terms of television and communication, and we have access to incredible information at a moment's notice worldwide, yet where we live in that world is right at home, in our communities. It is that focus which we in the opposition have been working on, have been talking to communities across the province about, and they result in these two bills coming as they do, in concert one with the other. Really Bill 207 and Bill 208, in their two pieces, recognize that Alberta's quality of life comes from the strength within our communities, our neighbourhoods where we live and raise our families.

Madam Speaker, it's perhaps coincidence that you are in the chair today, because we in the Official Opposition very much admired the work that you did as the chair of the task force on gaming, your report that was submitted in December of 1998, and the consultation method which was employed in that effort: the talking to other provinces and coming up with a solution, not just looking at Alberta, not being so sort of self-centred or ingrown to only look at Alberta, but looking at what other provinces had done, what things we could learn from other provinces, before coming to some very sound recommendations which led to the gaming and review report in December of 1998. So in the first instance, I want to compliment you, as the MLA for Lacombe-Stettler, for the very excellent work and contribution you made to this issue in our province.

I think it is important to perhaps look at some of the observations that made up the report of the gaming review. I know the committee that examined the issue learned a great deal from the province of Ontario, who of course had instigated some legislation earlier on this subject to deal with the gambling issues within their province.

I think it's important to note in the overview of illegal gaming and criminal activity that makes up a part of the report the very excellent quote from William Jahods*, who was an organized-crime figure, in testimony before the Chicago Crime Commission when he said – and I quote – there always existed one solid constant. Now, this is from the point of view of organized crime. He said: there always existed one solid constant; any new form of legal gambling always increased our client base. A very telling quote, Madam Speaker. Clearly the issue of gambling, certainly having always attracted issues of organized crime, is one where we have to be very careful and very diligent as legislators to ensure that the controls and the standards and the protection for our citizens and for our communities exist.

Clearly, illegal gambling is a multibillion-dollar industry. Huge financial profits make it most attractive to organized crime. Gambling is not illegal. However, participating in the business unlicensed is illegal. Illegal gambling can, of course, be operated by both traditional and nontraditional organized crime. Thousands of dollars derived from these illegal ventures are often channeled into other illegal activities and often spur other related criminal offences.

The legalization of gambling – and I'm quoting here from the report – has not stopped the illegal activity. Organized crime has historically been involved in trafficking drugs, prostitution, loan-sharking, money laundering, and gambling. We would be very naive – and I'm quoting from the report – to expect criminal organizations to relinquish interest in gambling just because governments became involved in the business. What an excellent statement.

While there is evidence to suggest that people are more willing to tolerate legalization efforts than they were in the past, overwhelming public demand for legalization simply does not exist. Gaming activity is not being pushed by public demand. Rather, it appears that entrepreneurs and governments are predominantly the ones advancing the gaming envelope. So why is it that governments have become so attracted to the new forms of legal gambling that continue to grow? Well, the most obvious answer, Madam Speaker, is the economic benefits, the revenues that flow to the province or to the government.

There is a lot of money to be made in gambling, and we need look no further than our own province to substantiate this statement. The net return to the province of Alberta from lotteries and gambling will far exceed \$800 million this year, above the budgeted amount, and an exceptional return for a government that is not a direct operator but instead is a tax collector.

Does legalized gaming promote an increase in illegal gaming and criminal activity? That's a question raised in the report. Many experts that were spoken to said that absolutely it results in an increase.

Crime is a basic function of opportunity. Criminals go where the big dollars are. They gravitate towards money, and the more that money is fast moving, loosely controlled, and the product line offered lucrative, the more appealing it becomes. Gaming establishments, gambling establishments, and gaming activities are not an exception.

Further on in the report, Madam Speaker, after having examined the experiences in both Ontario, British Columbia, and elsewhere, some excellent recommendations were made. I will quote the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, who said: we must have the political will to put in place good public policy, stringent regulatory controls, and appropriate law enforcement measures above strictly revenue-generating considerations. How right the chairman of that committee was in making that statement.

The recommendations of the gaming task force then go on to make suggestions for some of the steps that could be taken to deal with this issue in Alberta. Obviously the gaming foothold has increased its footprint on our province over the last eight years, and that is a reality. I think what this report did and did so effectively was to say: given that there has been an increase in the gambling and the gaming opportunities over the past decade, what can we do as legislators to put a framework around that gaming initiative and make sure that the protection for our citizens and our communities and the kind of society that we want to ensure prospers in our province does?

For that reason, Madam Speaker, I want to go just quickly to some of the provisions in Bill 208. Frankly, we were surprised that the government hadn't come forward with some of the provisions that we wanted to establish in this legislation, surprised and disappointed. We were disappointed in view of the work done in the city of Calgary under the chairmanship of Mr. Jim Gray, who did some excellent work around a referendum on the lotteries and the provision of lotteries. With all those signs of unrest, signs of concern by leaders in our province that left unfettered the gambling issue could become a huge issue in our province, it was remarkable that the matter was not brought forward in legislation. In fact, we had hoped that the minister of gambling might have seen the opportunity to bring forward some of these suggestions that we are now putting forward, but in view of the fact that he didn't, we decided that we'd help him with his work and bring forward what we think is a very constructive legislative suggestion for dealing with this issue.

5:00

Actually, I must go back to the minister of gambling because he's muttering something over there. You know, one of the things that was established of course was the Gaming Research Institute, but so far we've seen nothing other than the spending of 1 and a half million dollars by the institute, certainly a far cry from the opportunity that was presented in the gaming review report for which we now propose Bill 208.

It's my intention to let the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talk in the limited time that we have available this afternoon, but just to do an overlay of some of the important features of the legislation, let me simply highlight briefly some of the provisions within this Bill 208.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

The first one and probably the most important one is that this bill implements some of the very key recommendations of the gaming review report prepared by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler. For that reason, we are certainly looking forward to support from government MLAs for one of their own who worked so hard and did that important consultative work within our community supplemented by the Medicine Hat gaming summit, all of which came together to form this opportunity. So the first highlight is that this legislation will implement the key recommendations out of the gaming report.

Secondly, one of the most key recommendations is the establishment of a gaming secretariat to advise the minister on gaming policy. This is a very key recommendation, Madam Speaker, because of course the gaming secretariat becomes a vehicle by which the important issue of gaming and its growth and the changes in terms of gambling patterns can be addressed.

The bill also requires that all gaming supplies would be purchased by the gaming commission and be purchased by public tender, a very important issue within the whole area of organized crime.

Finally, it creates what we thought was a very excellent suggestion, and that is an all-party committee on gaming which would review the gaming act on a regular basis, which will report on the separation of the administration and the enforcement functions of the gaming commission. Of course, when the two of them exist together, there can become real questions of conflict of interest, and it's very important to separate the two provisions, administration and enforcement.

Thirdly, the all-party standing committee would review and report on funding police with lottery money to prevent and fight organized crime. We know, for example, that the policing – I apologize, Madam Speaker. I've lost my statistic on policing. Let me simply say that within the bill we believe, as was found in the example of Ontario with the gaming review, that funding the police to give them the resources that they need to ensure that organized crime, dealing with the problems that are clearly there, would be a very helpful opportunity.

MR. SMITH: How do you know they're clearly there?

MRS. MacBETH: Well, they're clearly there because of the points made obviously in the gaming review.

It's important in this review of funding that we note that given the revenue streams that are created by gambling, the current fiscal commitment to fighting organized crime and addictions associated with gambling are in fact minuscule. Gaming addictions are devastating to individuals, to families, and to communities. Any of us who have met with or know families who have been affected by gambling addictions know the toll that this addiction and all others take on a family. Given the amount of money that the government is making on the backs of gaming addicts, a proportion of that money, we believe, must be used to prevent and treat gaming addictions. Currently only \$3.6 million goes from the lottery fund to AADAC to prevent and treat gambling addictions, and that's less than one-half of 1 percent of the government's projected income from gaming of \$820 million forecast for this year.

Here's my reference that I had misplaced when I was speaking earlier. Alberta has one police officer who devotes one-fifth of his time to organized crime and gambling activities. So the combined effect of the organized crime with the impact of the gaming addictions is one that I think we as legislators ought to be very concerned about, and that's really why we've brought forward this bill.

As well, municipalities and the general public need some way to control or influence gaming activities being promoted by the

province within their boundaries. Of course, one of the very important recommendations of our bill in proposing the gaming secretariat is that a licence to grant a gaming operation the right to exist would only be considered after the municipality had put forward an approval for that to establish within their boundaries. So what we have tried to reflect is the fact that some municipalities may well decide that they do not wish to have these kinds of establishments within their borders. We believe that we should respect the views of our municipalities. It's certainly consistent with our view expressed in Bill 207 that the municipalities aren't the children of the province but rather are certainly able to make the best decisions that they can for their areas.

Finally, creating an all-party standing committee on gaming to review and report on funding gambling addictions, funding AADAC properly because we know addictions all take on the same pattern, will make an important discussion for this bill.

I look forward to the debate with members and to their support for an excellent review.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 208, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, as proposed by one of the members opposite. I would say that Bill 208 does raise some interesting points for debate, particularly with respect to the problem gambling intervention in our province. It certainly does offer some comment regarding solutions to these problems, and I have a few comments in that respect that I want to offer as well.

In my role as the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness and more particularly in my role as the minister responsible for AADAC, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, I have some specific comments from that perspective. I want to begin by saying that I'm intending to provide some information about initiatives that have taken place or are currently under way to treat, prevent, and increase everyone's understanding of problem gambling in Alberta. Therefore, I will comment on Bill 208, Madam Speaker, and in particular its call on the establishment of an Alberta gaming secretariat.

5:10

Now, there are components of the bill that involve regulatory controls on gaming which other of my colleagues will likely comment on from their perspective, but let me begin by saying that legalized gambling in Canada is a fairly recent development in our history that has only existed for about three to four decades. Within a very short time it's grown to become a major feature of our entertainment industry. In fact, Alberta has been a pioneer in Canada in introducing some new forms of gaming and in fashioning strict but workable regulatory controls that govern those same practices.

The Alberta government has also established within an equally short time an enviable track record of addressing problem gambling issues. I'd just like to cite some of those examples for the members of the House. The Alberta Lotteries and Gaming Summit, which was held in Medicine Hat in 1998, was the occasion for a healthy dialogue on gaming policy by many citizen participants. It also included 202 public submissions. One of the recommendations of that summit led to the establishment of the Alberta Gaming Research Institute, a consortium of three Alberta universities that sponsors collaborative research into gaming-related topics. The summit itself was in fact the fulfillment, at least in part, of a

recommendation of the 1995 New Directions for Lotteries and Gaming report, as Madam Speaker obviously knows because she led this particular task force. It was the product of a very wide consultation with Albertans and produced some excellent results.

Madam Speaker, actions often do speak louder than words. Therefore, concrete and effective actions have been taken, are being taken, and will continue to be taken to address problem gambling in this province. You may not hear that much about these actions, but these actions do in fact speak for themselves, especially so to those who are the recipients of Alberta's problem gambling treatment and our prevention and information services. However, the debate about Bill 208 provides an important opportunity to discuss this issue a bit further.

Much of the work undertaken in problem gambling is done by the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, an agency within the ministry of health now. AADAC's purpose is to assist Albertans in achieving freedom from the abuse of alcohol, other drugs, and gambling. AADAC positively contributes to the health of Albertans through the provision of a provincewide system of high quality and efficient addictions treatment, prevention, and information services.

I think before I proceed further, I'd like to provide just a brief background on the nature of gambling and, specifically, problem gambling here in Alberta. Here, then, are some recent statistics from research in our province. Overall gambling participation by adults in 1994 was 90 percent, while in 1998 the number had declined to 87 percent. During the same period of time the proportion of adult Albertans who were nongamblers or nonproblem gamblers increased from 94.6 percent to 95.2 percent, despite a climate that has generally seen an increase in the availability of gambling opportunities. For the large majority of adults, gambling is still a form of recreation that poses no problems. There are others for whom it does. However, the proportion of adults identified as problem gamblers, who experience some level of gambling-related harm, actually decreased from 4 percent in 1994 to 2.8 percent in 1998. The proportion of adults identified as probable pathological gamblers increased from 1.4 percent to 2 percent.

I'd like to comment also on the evolution of problem gambling programs here in Alberta. Elucidation of problem gambling issues in Alberta began to take shape back in 1993, when the provincewide research study on the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling among Albertans was conducted.

In January 1994 the government of Alberta addressed the need for problem gambling treatment and prevention by committing multi-year funding for AADAC to take a lead role in addressing the social impacts that accompany gambling. AADAC was given the responsibility, Madam Speaker, to develop and implement programs in the areas of prevention, treatment, research, and training, and this mandate obviously excludes regulatory matters. However, also in 1994 treatment and prevention capacity was developed and community programs were established.

In 1996 the focus on prevention was increased. Training resources were developed, and there was an increase in the number of treatment referrals seeking counseling assistance. In 1997-98, to bring us up to speed, there was a repeat of an earlier gambling research project to determine the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling, and more work was done on developing programs.

So what is the current situation, Madam Speaker? Well, thanks to research that has already taken place, we are gaining a much better and a much deeper understanding of problem gamblers, which is truly important for gambling programming purposes.

Now, with regard to some specific statistics let me offer the following. In 1998-99 there were about 3,100 admissions to

AADAC programs for the treatment of problem gambling, which represents 7.9 percent of total AADAC admissions for that year. However, it's also important to note that 45 percent of current problem gambling treatment admissions are for gambling alone, while 55 percent are combined with an alcohol problem or with some other drug problem.

In 1998-99 there were about 4,100 calls made to the 1-800 Gambling Help Line. This is a free 24-hour service available anywhere in the province. It provides information, crisis intervention, advice and support, and referral services for those seeking them.

We also have several education and prevention initiatives wherein much work is being done to address problem gambling. For example, physicians office posters have been distributed to about 2,500 AMA members to encourage patients to discuss gambling as it relates to their health.

We have server intervention products such as posters, business cards, matchbooks, and so on, which indicate the 1-800 Gambling Help Line number, and these are distributed to gambling venues. We also have advertisements regarding problem gambling services, and these are displayed in and are aired on a variety of locations, including the print media, television, and telephone directories. We also have community project funding which is provided to local education or prevention projects that are conceived, developed, and implemented at the community level.

The outreach by the Canadian Foundation on Compulsive Gambling is actually funded to support the delivery of problem gambling information sessions in junior and senior high schools, communities, and workplaces in the Edmonton area, and that's another important program.

An annual stakeholder meeting also takes place for various concerned groups, including AADAC, the Canadian Foundation on Compulsive Gambling, Gamblers Anonymous, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, the gaming industry, Alberta Learning, mental health, Alberta Justice, the Alberta Hotel Association, and the Alberta Restaurant and Food Services Association. The main purpose of this meeting is to seek input on trends and on services as part of a broader planning process.

I'll conclude this portion, Madam Speaker, just by saying that a wide range of information resources have been made very publicly available, such as pamphlets, posters, classroom materials for elementary, junior, and senior high, handbooks, counseling materials, service information, displays, a newsletter, and at least one theatre project. So there is a lot going on in this area already.

Now, with specific respect to treatment initiatives there is a continuum of problem gambling treatment services available to Albertans. For example, nonresidential intensive day treatment is available where demand and numbers warrant. This program is flexible and can be adjusted to meet specific client needs. As part of this program's flexibility it can be offered as an evening or a weekend program.

5:20

We also have a crisis stabilization pilot project with residential support to stabilize affected persons from the effects of their gambling. This service is provided in Lloydminster and provides appropriate service for clients in need of immediate physical or emotional support due to the effects of their gambling.

Another important example is the enhanced inpatient treatment strategy for dually addicted persons; that is, for persons who may have both a gambling problem and an alcohol- or drug-related problem. In other words, Madam Speaker, this is a strategy for the 20 percent or so of clients with alcohol or drug problems who also report some form of gambling problem.

Three concluding examples of treatment initiatives include the

following, Madam Speaker. One, we have gambling outreach services that are offered to Edmonton's Chinese community by a counselor fluent in their language. Two, we have outpatient counseling services that are provided throughout the province by AADAC. Three, we have residential treatment programs that are available in certain locations.

Madam Speaker, another important feature that we have is training initiatives. We do this because we recognize that it is important to have knowledgeable professionals and stakeholders to provide comprehensive services. Creation of a contingent of trained professionals who are able to work effectively in problem gambling has been the goal of training programs that are provided to a wide variety of stakeholders, including gambling industry employees, casino and VLT operators, concerned members of the public, and numerous others.

Training initiatives have also included an intensive four-day addictions course, an employee assistance conference, training for casino and VLT operators, which helps them take advantage of their unique position by identifying and providing assistance to gamblers who are experiencing difficulty.

Two other important initiatives include a modular training program designed to increase community capacity to address problem gambling concerns and advanced training for those who require more in-depth knowledge and skills.

Now, in addition to all of the aforementioned, we also have numerous research initiatives. In fact, one of the recommendations that the Alberta government adopted from the Alberta Lotteries and Gaming Summit in 1998 was the following.

The provincial government should dedicate more resources to gaming research in areas like the prevention and treatment of problem gambling, the social impacts of lotteries and gaming, aboriginal gaming issues and emergent gaming activities.

Subsequently, there are a number of completed or planned additions to research our knowledge about gambling. They include the following: number one, prevalent studies among adults and adolescents; number two, problem gambling research in Alberta's aboriginal community; number three, a national scoring tool for more consistent population surveys in Canada; number four, a specific study to understand the views of youth, parents, and other people important in youths' lives; number five, research on gambling specific to and among seniors; number six, a study of family impacts that accompany problem gambling among clients in treatment; and finally, number seven, research on gambling and the workplace.

In summary, Madam Speaker, and in response to the proposed Bill 208 before us, our government continues to address the health and wellness of Albertans, including many initiatives regarding the prevention and treatment of alcohol problems, other drug problems, and, of course, gambling problems specifically.

The government of Alberta has acknowledged that legalized gaming is an important recreational activity for some and that there is also a significant economic impact and a significant employment impact in our province. However, our government also has acknowledged its responsibility to assist those who, unfortunately, for

whatever personal reasons, do experience problems with gambling. Key partners in government, the community, and the gaming industry are undertaking several actions to treat, prevent, or minimize the harms associated with problem gambling. This is done while respecting the freedom of individuals to exercise personal responsibility and choice in their entertainment choices and in their gambling activities.

Bill 208 recommends the establishment of a gaming secretariat for "research and public consultation on the social and economic effects of [problem gambling]." However, I feel our government has already established the Alberta Gaming Research Institute and the Alberta Gaming Research Council to work in this area.

The Gaming Research Institute has in fact already developed a research schedule with the involvement of three Alberta universities. The institute is governed by the Gaming Research Council, which is comprised of public and government representatives, including youth, seniors, First Nations, law enforcement, the legal profession, communities and the general public, the Canadian Foundation on Compulsive Gambling, the business community, the gaming industry, AADAC, Alberta Health and Wellness representatives, and others.

Bill 208 also proposes that a gaming secretariat would increase awareness about gambling addiction. Again, our government, as early as 1994, had already mandated to AADAC the responsibility to deal with the effects of problem gambling on families, individuals, and communities. Based on the leadership shown by the province and by AADAC, of whom I am very proud in this area, Madam Speaker, Bill 208 does appear to duplicate existing services and really does not offer anything all that new or all that different or tremendously innovative to Albertans in this regard.

So with those comments and in view of the hour I will conclude my remarks on Bill 208 and would move that we now adjourn debate on Bill 208. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Government House Leader.

MRS. NELSON: Yes, Madam Speaker. I'd like to move that we adjourn the House until 8 o'clock this evening, when we reconvene in committee.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion that we now adjourn until 8 p.m., when we will sit in Committee of the Whole?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: All those opposed? So ordered.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:27 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 3, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/05/03

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order. For those of you who think we live here, we don't. We just spend our nights and mornings and afternoons here.

I'd like to say for the benefit of those in the gallery that this is the informal part of the Legislature. It's called committee. We're able to go through a bill item by item, section by section. People are allowed to take off their jackets and to drink coffee and even to move around, but hopefully not more than one person will talk at a time.

This evening before we commence, I wonder if we might have consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my honour this evening to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly Mr. Ken Allred, who is seated in the members' gallery. Ken is a former alderman in the city of St. Albert and a very fine and upstanding citizen of our community. I would ask the Assembly to give him a warm welcome this evening.

Thank you.

Bill 7

Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few comments to make on Bill 7. The minister responsible there has done a relatively good job of preparing this bill. Quite frankly, I would take a thousand of these for one Bill 11 or 999 of these for one Bill 18. The bill from my point of view, from what I can see – I don't know if I should use the term "centralizes" – creates three agencies that will now fall under the ministry, agencies that formerly consisted of an authority and an institute and a council.

There are some concerns that one can see in the bill even though the bill itself is not bad. There is the concern of the appointments that would be made to these three different institutes. We need a mechanism to ensure that the minister is given a wide range of names from which to make the appointments. We have to have some type of independent consulting or head-hunting company to engage in seeking out names of those appropriate experts for the three different institutes. We don't want to get into the situation where we have political appointments being made to institutes that can do a lot of good but whose potential benefit may be hamstrung by having members appointed that don't have the expertise even though they may have a political connection. We see that happen a bit too often, not just with this government. I've seen it happen with other governments too. Appointments will be made on the basis of who you know, political involvement, and so on and so forth.

What this does is bring the research funding under one organiza-

tion, which can lead to efficiencies and a clear direction with respect to accountability. It can also lead to consistency when it comes to fulfilling the goals that are laid out in the business plan.

We still have to raise a concern. To what extent will this new Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority and the institutes complement business, and to what extent will they be competitive with business? We always hear from the private sector that they don't want government competing with the private sector. The private sector has its place. Not in health care, mind you; let's caution ourselves there. The private sector has its place when it comes to certain types of technology, certain types of expertise and so on. It's a given fact, and we recognize that business is there for a purpose and government is there for another purpose. Government is there to deliver human-type services and to ensure that those are delivered properly.

Now, to what extent will the needs of agricultural research be met? There is some special concern that the new institute may be less sensitive to different regional requirements, and different regional requirements are very important. With agriculture it's very important to retain links with the community so there is good feedback on where research is needed.

We've seen different areas throughout the province where different types of research may be required. The oil sands operators, for example: some of them are concerned that research funds will now be shared with other types of energy. We should welcome that change, because there have to be some innovations. We have to look at other alternatives when it comes to producing energy and such.

Mr. Chairman, as I said in my opening comments, it's not one of those bills that I want to spend a great deal of time speaking on, because there is some merit to the bill, and when there is merit to a bill, this opposition does not like to bog down creative thinking. We want to concentrate on trying to direct the government in those areas where they need some direction, but when they don't need that special direction from us, fine. This particular bill is not that bad.

On that note, I'll conclude.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act, 2000, is one that we've signaled we're going to be supportive of, words I'm not used to. There were some questions raised, though, during earlier debate, and I'd like to reiterate some of those and perhaps add a couple of new ones as we go through section by section, because I'm not satisfied that we've received the answers. I'll underscore this by saying that while these are more than quibbles – these are serious issues – we are generally in favour of the direction this legislation moves, but there are, as I say, some questions.

If you go right to the back of the bill, what you notice is that the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, the Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority, and the forest development research trust fund are all being collapsed into one and their legislation is being repealed. One of the first questions I have is the timing, Mr. Chairman. You'll note that the act comes into force on August 1, 2000, just a few months from now, except for all of the sections dealing with the forest development research trust fund. I haven't heard an explanation from the government as to why there is going to be a delay in applying this legislation to forest development research as well.

Now, in regard to the forest development research trust fund the act comes into force as of April 1, 2001, so I'm assuming that it has something to do with fiscal year timing. But I would like to know what the impact on the trust fund is. I'd like to know what other

transitional arrangements are being made and whether or not there is any particular reason why it has to wait until the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, there are some other questions that I have as well that have to do with the whole issue of intellectual property and ownership. If you look at part 1 of the act, the new section 4, which proposes changes to section 9, you'll see that the definition of ownership is changing, as it is in the new proposed section 9.1 that's in section 5 of Bill 7. After reading this over carefully and after looking at some authorities on intellectual property and ownership, I just have some concerns that this may not be very well crafted. In particular, some of the emerging law and decisions being made dealing with copyright and intellectual property make me suspicious that we could be on a collision course to some dates in court based on the wording in Bill 7.

8:10

Now, it seems to me that you cannot just because you put it in law take away the intellectual property rights of the person who originated the idea or the knowledge, and because of the way that this bill is written and the way that it extends from the existing law, as I said, I'm just not convinced that we've really done our homework.

In particular, if you look at section 5, the proposed section 9.1, it reads:

The Authority may enter into an agreement with a person in whose favour a grant has been or is proposed to be made under this Part providing for the respective rights, obligations and liabilities of the Authority and the person with respect to the ownership of any invention, work, information or material, regardless of form, including any patent, copyright, technological or industrial design process or trademark acquired or produced by the person while engaged in a project funded in whole or in part by a grant under this Part.

Now, that whole sentence leads me to believe that if the authority chooses to, it can enter into an agreement whether it is the sole funder or a partial funder or a minority funder or whether there has even just been a proposal that it be a funder.

I'm just wondering whether or not I understand this correctly. Does this mean that the authority, as a condition of partial funding in a work, very minor funding perhaps, would want to claim for itself the sole intellectual property ownership of whatever the purpose of the grant or the proposal is? That, I think, should be addressed by government before we are asked to vote this bill out of committee.

Also, dealing with the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority, if I look at part 2 under the agricultural institute and I look at what will be proposed section 16.1(6), it talks about the minister designating a Member of the Legislative Assembly as the chair of the ag institute and another member of the agricultural institute as vice-chair. I'm wondering why it is that we would insist that the chair of the institute be a Member of the Legislative Assembly. I believe this matter has been raised by one of my colleagues. I'm not sure that we've had a satisfactory answer.

I can understand there being a requirement that there be a member of the Legislature involved in this institute, but I'm just not sure why that member must be the automatic chair. Most organizations that I'm familiar with allow the organization to determine chairmanship. Sometimes it rotates, and it can certainly accrue to others. I don't think that just by virtue of the fact that the minister has decided to tap one of his or her colleagues on the shoulder, that person should automatically assume the chairmanship.

This becomes perhaps even more important when you look at proposed section 16.11, the section that deals with remuneration. What it says is that all "members of the Agricultural Institute who are not employees of the Government may be paid remuneration and

may receive reasonable traveling and living expenses," et cetera, et cetera, really at the whim of the minister. That means that the Minister of Innovation and Science can not only ask a colleague to come and sit and be the chair but can in fact give that colleague a tidy little raise in salary.

Again, I'm wondering whether that's really the most appropriate thing to do in this day and age. Perhaps what we should see is some legislation, not just regulation, which provides guidance on the expenses and remuneration paid to members of the agricultural institute and then have that chairmanship up for grabs, as it were, by any member who is appointed to the institute.

While I'm on the point of the minister and his discretion, are we satisfied that this matter should be left to ministerial order? It seems to me that that's even a rank below what I usually complain about, which is that it's left to the Lieutenant Governor in Council, that it's left to regulations that will be made by the cabinet. In this case it's the minister sitting all alone in his office late at night figuring out, you know, with a scratch pad and a pocket calculator how much money he wants to spend on these individuals in this institute.

Now, I don't have any evidence to suggest that this minister has been unfair or that somehow there's any suggestion of corruption or anything like that. I just think it's a little inappropriate, if you're going to call on men and women in this province to provide some public service and you're setting that up by statute, that you would then just say: well, it's okay; it's good enough for the minister all alone to be dealing with issues of remuneration. As we all know, it's these kinds of issues which, even though they may not involve significant dollar volumes, tend to gain public attention and generate certainly public distrust of the system, the cries of patronage, et cetera, et cetera. So I would like some comment from the sponsor of that legislation when it comes to his role in determining remuneration.

Still dealing with the agricultural institute, in part 2 – and I could repeat these comments for the other research institutes as well – I note that under the proposed section 16.2(1) and (2) the Regulations Act does not apply to the bylaws of the agricultural institute. Now, probably the biggest effect of that means that those bylaws won't be published in a way that's very readily accessible by anybody that has an interest in the workings of the agricultural institute. I can't for the life of me understand why that would be. Bill 7 and the general government direction in terms of co-ordinating research efforts across government is a good thing. I mean, Mr. Chairman, this is me saying something flattering about the government. It seems that they're going in the right direction.

The government talks a lot about transparency and openness and accountability, and certainly one of the best ways to be transparent and accountable is to also be open and make sure that everything you do that has attached to it somehow the expenditure of public funds, which is what this institute will have attached to it in many ways, is as open as can be. It seems to me that you would want to make sure that the bylaws which regulate the operations of this institute would be as public as they could be as well. So I don't really understand why the Regulations Act wouldn't apply, and I would like the minister to talk to me about that as well.

Now, if we look at part 3, the energy institute, I can make exactly the same comments about proposed section 16.4(1), which deals with remuneration one more time. Again, it's left up to the minister to decide who it is that would be on the board. Again, the same comment and concern, that the minister "must designate a member who is a member of the Legislative Assembly as the chair of the Energy Institute."

You know, in the province of Alberta there are probably more energy sector experts per capita than perhaps anywhere else in the

world, and I'm not sure that a lot of them are Members of the Legislative Assembly. So here we are creating the energy institute, which is going to be doing leading-edge, world-leading research, and we're going to put as its chair always a Member of the Legislative Assembly. Again, I could understand appointing a Member of the Legislative Assembly to serve on the institute board, but I wonder about this prescription that the MLA must also be the chair. The same comments about the role of MLAs and remuneration. Also, I note again that the Regulations Act doesn't apply here either.

A comment that I failed to raise when I was dealing with the agricultural institute I will bring into the debate at this point, and that has to do with the annual report. The annual reports must be submitted to the minister "in a form satisfactory to the Minister." Now, the minister – and I'm not saying this critically – earlier in this legislative session tabled a report in the form of a CD-ROM, and I understand that he was instructed by the Speaker that as nifty as that may be, he was required to submit paper, hard-copy versions of that report. So we have a minister here that's not beyond experimenting with the form of reports.

8:20

In this case we have a situation where the minister is the only one that has to be satisfied with the form of the report. If the report should be made in such a way that it's not accessible to every Albertan on an equal basis, I'm not sure that that serves the public interest. I guess I would suggest that it would be helpful if these annual reports were submitted to the Assembly. We do that with so many other organizations, ones that are truly at arm's length from government. We have ministers of the Crown rising almost every day in tablings and tabling statutorily required annual reports from self-governing professions and from professional organizations. It satisfies a valid public interest. I would suggest that the same arguments could be made for the reports from these research institutes. We have not been told why it is that these reports (a) must be in a form prescribed only by the minister and only to his satisfaction and (b) why the reports are only going to be given to the minister.

You know, with freedom of information legislation, with citizens taking governments to court over broken election promises, in this age of electronic access to information people are getting to the point where they do not tolerate well being kept in the dark. This government I think should recognize that trend and could perhaps exercise a little bit of leadership here and move quickly to ensure that these reports are made public in a standard form and in the most public way possible, and that would be with a tabling in this Assembly.

Now, the forestry institute, which again is the one that's not coming into force until the beginning of the next fiscal year, includes in its legislation many of the same concerns that I've raised for the energy and the agricultural institutes. In other words, again we find that an MLA must be the chair, that remuneration is to be determined by the minister alone, that the annual reports are to be sent to the minister, and that the Regulations Act does not apply.

While I believe that the government is moving in the right direction with Bill 7 and I'm glad to see the co-ordination of research efforts and to see the elimination of duplication and the reduction of bureaucracy and I'm happy to learn of the commitment to focus and to make sure that value is derived, again I have this concern (a) that on the legal side we may not have done our homework as well as we might have as a province when it comes to intellectual property and ownership rights, and (b) I'm concerned about the way the public appears to be excluded from the control and the reporting and the understanding of what these new research institutes are all about.

You know, we're in committee. This is early on in the committee stage of the bill. We've signaled that as an Official Opposition we're not questioning the intent of the bill, but we're certainly hoping that the government will look at these concerns and perhaps suggest some amendments so that we can be assured that the public interest is going to be well served.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: I wonder if the committee would consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the committee in the Legislature a good friend, a member of the council in the city of Red Deer, and someone who has been a friend to many of us for many years, Mr. Bill Hull, who's in the members' gallery. I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Bill 7

Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act, 2000

(*continued*)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It seems like it was only a few scant days ago that we were addressing this bill in second reading. Frankly, I was actually surprised, and I referred back to *Hansard* to see that it was April 17, 2000, when I had a chance to raise some questions around this.

I might start by making the observation that the Minister of Innovation and Science is a fascinating minister to watch. There's been this conversion on the road to Damascus: the minister has developed this enormous enthusiasm for technology and for research. Now, that's a wonderful thing. It's a laudable characteristic that the minister who is charged with Innovation and Science takes such a huge personal commitment and interest in his area. But I must just say that as somebody who has had a chance to watch this government very carefully over a number of years – and it's manifest in the bill, and I'm going to come to some specific sections – I'm struck a little bit by a comment that William Wordsworth, the famous English poet, who lived between 1770 and 1850, offered. He made this observation that is useful to reference as we talk about what's enabled by Bill 7. Wordsworth said:

Science appears but what in truth she is,
Not as our glory and our absolute boast,
But as a succedaneum, and a prop
To our infirmity.

It strikes me sometimes that we think that if we can just immerse ourselves in enough technology, somehow it's a way of bypassing, overriding all of those sorts of challenges that go along as part of the human condition. As valuable as technology is – I have a laptop computer; I enjoy access to be able to do Internet research and send e-mails – I think it's important to remember that technology is supposed to be a facilitating tool and an enabler, but in essence

what's still important is sort of what our primary work and our primary business is.

Now, I'm frankly disappointed, Mr. Chairman. When I rose to speak to this bill on April 17, I indicated that I thought there were some very positive things with Bill 7. I think one of my difficulties was that we've raised, not just me but my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora just a scant couple of moments ago, some legitimate issues and questions. It's useful to consider that on Bill 11, for example, we have government members complain that debate is tedious and nonproductive and so on. Well, here's an example of a bill at second reading where a number of bona fide legitimate questions were asked. We get to the committee stage. We vote for the bill because in principle we support the notion of this kind of management of science and research and technology in the province. Yet we get to this place, and has the minister responded in any way to those questions, issues, and queries that were raised at second reading? I'm sad to report that I haven't seen any attempt. It's not a question of whether it fell short or whatever.

This afternoon we saw the Minister of Children's Services provide an exemplary model of responsive governance in terms of trying hard to share information. There are some other ministers I might single out who are particular favourites of mine who get questions. If you ask questions, you are likely to get responses. You know, our friend from Calgary-Nose Creek, the Minister of Environment, is a minister who works hard in terms of trying to respond to those things. Why is it that the Minister of Innovation and Science has not responded to any of the questions I asked and some of my colleagues asked? You know, April 17, 2000 – that's a few weeks ago – would afford a department, a minister with those kinds of resources to answer some of those questions, but they haven't been answered.

8:30

Now, I'm going to go back to some of those things that still remain questions for me. Before I do that, I just want to note that my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora had talked about the intellectual property provision here. I'm a bit embarrassed. I had been a trademarks agent and had done some copyright work when I practised law, and I frankly am not as astute as my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora. My attention was not immediately drawn to those provisions, but in listening to his commentary and his analysis, I'd just like to say that I think he raised some legitimate questions around this whole issue of ownership of intellectual property, the ownership of the copyright, particularly if it's pursuant to a person's engagement under section 8(1), and if we look at the original bill . . . [interjections] [The chairman waited until the committee came to order]

THE CHAIRMAN: I wonder if we could be this quiet when we're listening to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Unfortunately, what we don't have in the bill is the text of section 8(1), but if you just go and look at the statute, here's what it provides:

The Authority may enter into agreements to engage the services of persons it considers necessary and may prescribe their duties and conditions of employment and pay their fees, salary, remuneration and expenses.

It goes on, but it's the 8(1) part that's relevant. So some of those people may enter into agreements where you often have a collaborative initiative involving two or three different creative forces, whether they're individuals or partnerships or corporations, and it seems to me this may not be sufficiently flexible.

The other thing is if you look at the proposed section 9(2): "The Authority may compensate a person" described in (1). You wonder if there shouldn't be stronger language to ensure that people who

enter into these agreements are not taken advantage of by particular authorities.

I'd just like to take a moment to go back to the specific concerns I had raised the other day. One of the ones I zeroed in on last time was the provision for the appointment of a Member of the Legislative Assembly to these various boards, and I talked about that on April 17. I'm thinking here of sections 7, 16.1(5), 16.1(6) in terms of who's going to be appointed.

I'm reminded of 1991 when Mr. Don Getty, who was then Premier of the province, was defending the appointment of his barber to the Alberta Gaming Commission. You may remember this, Mr. Chairman. You've been here longer than I have. The Premier of the time said, and this is a direct quote: What's wrong with barbers? The answer, of course, is that there's nothing wrong with barbers, and I don't know whether the Member for Calgary-West maybe has some perspective on barbers in elected – no, that takes us in a different direction altogether.

I think the point I was going to make, Mr. Chairman, is simply this. MLAs are competent people. We all represent different kinds of experience and we have different sorts of skills, and hopefully we all got elected for reasons other than just the colour and the party we were running for at the time. I have lots of respect for my colleagues in this Assembly, for all 82 of them, but it's bigger than that. There's an issue of the independence of these various authorities and the extent why you would compromise what may be otherwise excellent work done by the authority by insisting they be – let me be blunt – tainted by having an elected member, an elected representative of the government on these things.

I think of the Calgary Airport Authority and the frustration that airport authority experienced because the federal government came along and said: we're going to appoint X number of people to that authority. When people come as sort of appointees, they often bring a different perspective, and you may say that's not necessarily a bad thing. But maybe what you want are just the best and brightest people involved in new technology in the province sitting on these different authorities. Do you really advantage those authorities? Do you make them any stronger by requiring them to have an MLA on there? Just as Mr. Getty's barber may have been a very knowledgeable person to appoint to the Alberta Gaming Commission back in 1991, I think it was, what does it do in terms of public confidence in terms of these different authorities? I asked that question. I've not seen any answer to it. I'm just referring the Minister of Innovation and Science to page 1056, when I made these comments on April 17, 2000.

I also asked about section 16.12. Why would it be that we would require the authority to report to the minister and advise the minister instead of advising the Legislative Assembly? Now, my ever astute colleague from Glenora also spoke to that.

It seems to me the essence of debate is that we can ask these questions, but after a while I feel like I'm in a bit of a wind tunnel, Mr. Chairman. I'm not getting any answers. I'm looking for some advice from wiser and more experienced legislators than I am. What's an MLA to do to get answers before we move to the next stage and we have to vote on this bill? What can I do? I've asked questions on second reading, and I stand up again and, as I say, it feels a little like being in a wind tunnel. You're closed off and the wind is zipping by and there's nobody paying very much attention. You just have to wonder if this is the way we're going to make the very best use of these authorities. I'm not sure it is. I think we can do better, but I'm still looking for answers to that.

Here's the other problem I've got. I come in and I want to support government bills. When the Government House Leader tells me that we've got some dandy bills here – you know, he's a pretty sharp

fellow. He's a pretty sharp fellow and I'd like to accept that information, and I start off: how can I support this bill? So when I come in and ask questions and there's no response, no answers, it then gets me thinking. I'm not naturally a suspicious guy, Mr. Chairman, but every now and again I start wondering: if they won't give you the answers to legitimate questions asked fairly, then why not? Is it because there are no answers? Is it because they think we're not going to like the answers and we may go from the sort of mild support of a bill to opposition? I don't know, but I can't think of anything faster to move reasonable men and women from a position of neutrality to a position of opposition on a bill when you don't get answers.

What else haven't we got answers to? Well, why is it that the Regulations Act doesn't apply to the bylaws under these authorities? As I said on another bill, is it because of section 2 of the Regulations Act that they don't want to give a copy to the registrar of regulations? Is it section 3 of the Regulations Act that requires the gazetting of a regulation? Is that the problem? I don't know what it is, but I don't hear anybody offering an explanation. We're reasonable people. Even in the opposition we're reasonable people. If we were afforded that kind of explanation, we could at least deal with it and move on.

8:40

The question of an annual report. As my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora had also said, why doesn't the report come to the Legislative Assembly? Why does it go to the minister? This is usually good news. The Minister of Innovation and Science is the guy who'll talk to anybody with great enthusiasm about his portfolio. Well, why wouldn't he share the annual report? Why wouldn't he be insistent, adamant, that that annual report be made available in this place so that it's available to researchers, so that anybody who goes into the excellent Legislature Library can access it or university students and people can access it through the Alberta Library service? I mean, that just makes such good sense. Why would we not do that? I can think of no reason why the annual report wouldn't be tabled here and become a sessional document.

You can look at the ag institute, section 16.3, section 16.4(5), (6), or the energy institute, 16.42, and the same observation would apply.

Those are all questions I've got. I guess I'm expressing some chagrin that I'm not seeing any answers and I'm not seeing any attempt to provide answers. I'm really hopeful that we're going to have some answers before we get to third reading. This is what opposition is supposed to do. We ask those questions, and we're entitled to answers. I sure hope the Minister of Innovation and Science will come across with those answers before we have to get any further along. Those are the comments I wanted to make, and I continue to await not so patiently for those answers, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much.

[The clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Bill 10 Securities Amendment Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again this is one of those pieces of legislation that, I guess, demonstrates that opposition can be very co-operative. Opposition has the ability to look at bills and analyze them and separate those that are good from the bad. This is another one of those bills that a MLA has put some thought into and come up with a relatively good bill. I know at times there is that criticism, that opposition is there to criticize for the sake of criticism, which really isn't true. Now we have two bills in a row where we've made it quite clear that we support the principles of the bills. When we deal with bills like Bill 11 or Bill 18 that are very controversial, which in our opinion are bad bills, we're speaking out on those bills because they are not good bills, but when a bill presents itself that is acceptable, that has been well thought out and serves the purposes of Albertans, then it's a different story.

If we look at Bill 10, the Securities Amendment Act, just looking at the highlights of it, it restores the powers previously available to the Alberta Stock Exchange, the premerger to the Canadian Venture Exchange, the premerger in order to properly govern the conduct of its members and marketing regulation obligations, parallel legislation changes under the B.C. Securities Act. Secondly, it makes the filing of personal information a statutory requirement and, thirdly, gives the Alberta Securities Commission the flexibility to deal with involving alternative trading systems by permitting the commission to deem them an exchange, subject to a higher level of requirements.

Now, if you look a bit at the background of what has led us to this particular moment in history – let's put it that way – in March of last year, March of 1999, the restructuring of Canada's stock exchanges was announced, and upon the restructuring of the Canadian exchanges, the senior equity market was relocated to the Toronto Stock Exchange and the derivatives trading was moved to the Montreal exchange. The existing junior equity market was consolidated into one new national junior exchange, called the Canadian Venture Exchange. When we look at the stock market listings, for example, we now see that listed in the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Sun* under the Canadian Venture Exchange, rather than looking under the Alberta Exchange, as we used to previously.

Again, last year on November 16 we saw the appointment of the former chair and CEO of the Alberta Securities Commission named president and CEO of the Canadian Venture Exchange. His appointment was effective last year.

The goal of the Canadian exchange is to provide venture companies with effective access to capital while protecting investors. That's a very, very important point. From my observations of the stock exchange, watching it and participating in it to a very, very limited degree, both the Alberta and the B.C., the Alberta exchange I never really, really questioned that much, but with the B.C. exchange there were scandals related to it, scandals that, if I recall correctly, even involved one of the former Premiers of the province of B.C. There's always been some skepticism as to what was happening on that Vancouver exchange. By consolidating the two and coming out with a Canadian exchange, I think that's done good.

We saw earlier this year on March 2, for example, a Canadian exchange report a record-setting day, reaching new highs, trades in the value of \$258 million and the number of trades and transactions being over 52,000. I think what that indicates is confidence in the exchange, restoration of that confidence that may have been lost to some degree.

So when we look at the intent of the bill, there is rationale for supporting it. It's not what we would call a contentious bill, and it has been vetted by the regulators and all the affected stockholders, as required. It's not one of those bills where we see hundreds of people in front of the Leg. saying, "Kill that bill." It's a type of bill that you don't see opposition to.

We should take the opportunity at this time to express our appreciation to the Alberta Securities Commission for their efforts to keep us informed as to developments concerning the Canadian Venture Exchange and for providing us with the briefing on the intent of the legislation. It's important, Mr. Chairman, that we have healthy, effective capital markets in Alberta to stimulate the economic growth, the job creation, and the investment opportunities.

Investment potential cannot be underestimated. It goes without saying. The benefit of capital investment is a key requirement for a strong economy. It's important, again, as I said earlier, to have confidence in the exchange. When investors are making their investments, they want to feel like they do have a degree of protection. I think that when we see the consolidation, the merger of the exchanges, we end up with a situation that probably is the better of two worlds.

On that particular basis, Mr. Chairman, I will keep my comments relatively short, as it's not a controversial bill with a great deal of shortcomings and I know the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is quite anxious to have his say on the bill as well. So on that note I'm going to conclude.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The Securities Amendment Act is pretty straightforward in many regards. We've had some co-operation from the sponsoring member and from the government, and for that I want to pass along my thanks. I also had a chance to talk with some folks from both the Securities Commission and the Canadian Venture Exchange. Some concerns have been clarified. Some others, however, endure.

Some of the language that's being cleaned up – for example, substituting the word "salesperson" for "salesman" – I think makes a lot of sense in this day and age. But I'm not sure, for example, under section 2(d) and 2(g), where the definition of "private issuer" has now replaced what was called a "private company" – now, "private issuer" is a term that I believe was used under B.C. legislation before but not in Alberta legislation, and I'm not versed well enough in securities law to fully appreciate the difference, and I haven't seen an explanation. I'm supposing what this means is that any private issuer would include either an individual or a company, but it doesn't say that. So I'm just wondering whether or not the sponsor could comment on that before we get this out of committee.

8:50

There are also some concerns that I have about regulations and rule-making, section 35, which I've raised at second reading. The subordinate lawmaking is a continuing problem in my mind, and the more I see the government move towards various forms of subordinate lawmaking, the more concerned I get, particularly when it comes to something that potentially may be affecting the life savings of Albertans and others, who may be affected by the operations of the junior exchange in Calgary.

Section 19, dealing with seed capital, also raises some red flags for me. Section 19 amends the seed capital exemptions to statutory declaration and substitutes "written acknowledgment" for "statutory declaration." Now, the requirement for a statutory declaration from

investors under certain trade exemptions was reduced to a written acknowledgment through a blanket order back in May of 1987. So we've had more than 10 years' experience, and I'm wondering what that experience has been. Were there some particular problems that arose with this reduced standard? If so, maybe the sponsor of the bill could tell us what those problems were and how specifically moving toward statutory declaration is going to address those problems. Now, again, I recognize that the amendment may reflect current industry practice and it may bring this provision for exemption registration into harmony with other jurisdictions.

When I look at B.C., which seems to have been the model for other changes in this amending act, the requirement is only for written acknowledgment. So again we've got a little bit of a mismatch. If the idea is to harmonize regulations right across the country, why does this difference exist? So if the change wasn't driven by negative experience, what exactly is the change being driven by? [interjection] Mr. Chairman, I see that I have the associate minister of natural resources' rapt attention and interest in the Securities Amendment Act.

The other changes I think are relatively straightforward. I know there is currently no provision permitting the Alberta Securities Commission on its own to designate a person or a company as an exchange for the purposes of the act. Section 12 will correct this deficiency. The amendment in section 12 will give the commission the necessary flexibility to regulate the activities of alternative forms of trading systems that provide service to Alberta investors. As we see the explosion of e-trading and we try to anticipate all the changes that may come in the not-so-distant future, I think this is fairly visionary legislation, and I appreciate it.

There are some consequential amendments. One of them is the application for registration with section 54 being amended. This requires the subsequent amendment for a section to deal with applications for renewal, reinstatements, or amendments of registration themselves. Again, it's fairly benign. I think it's really in the realm of housekeeping.

Overall – and I think I mentioned this in second reading debate – the bill is supportable. It makes sense. It reflects some careful thinking about what we need to do to move forward as we gain experience with the new exchange structure across the country, as we work towards harmonizing interprovincially and then nationally and then maybe even internationally when it comes to dealing with the equities market.

I just wish that the government would show a little bit more leadership in talking to Albertans about these issues. It seems to me that increasingly we're learning of young students in school being given classroom assignments on picking stocks and watching the financial pages in the newspapers. Increasingly we're being bombarded with advertisements telling us to top up our RRSPs, usually in mutual funds. Canadians are being told that their government's sponsored pension plans may no longer be able to provide them the security they were hoping for. So there's a lot of pressure on individuals to look after their own financial destiny, their own financial future.

For many Canadians that means dabbling in securities one way or another, either through e-trading at home on their computer in the middle of the night or by handing over a portion of their pay to somebody for RRSP purposes to purchase mutual funds or whether it be in a more traditional relationship with a stockbroker. But because of that increasing experience of Canadians dabbling and becoming increasingly reliant on the success of those dabbings, I would just like to encourage the government to be far more proactive in providing education and information about the market, about investments, about the regulations and the protections and the risks

of being involved in securities and equities. This bill would have been a good opportunity.

Now, I don't want to be provocative in this next comment, Mr. Chairman, but the government has demonstrated a willingness to go directly to Albertans to discuss or try to explain proposed legislation. Whether it be \$1 million or \$3 million, the government has certainly spent a bunch of money to talk about Bill 11: full-page newspaper ads, radio and TV spots, mail-outs to every household. So it's clear that if the government chooses to, it can commit public funds to the promotion of its legislative agenda. Instead of focusing on spending taxpayers' money to try to sell an idea that Albertans don't particularly seem willing to buy, it may be worth while for the government to ask its Public Affairs Bureau to figure out new and improved ways of communicating with Albertans when it comes to matters that are not really of a political or partisan nature but are really bread-and-butter issues that affect their lives in very real and tangible ways through their pocketbooks.

So I would ask, finally, that the government maybe rethink its priorities for how it uses its Public Affairs Bureau money. It's about an \$8 million budget. Perhaps they should be less inclined to dedicate that money to trying to sell a government idea and therefore be accused of using taxpayers' money to purchase propaganda and, instead, use that same tax funding to provide nonpartisan, nonbiased information about something as fundamental as their ability to gain and to benefit from a healthy securities industry here in Alberta.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to response from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the sponsor of the bill, and I hope to get the answers to some of these concerns before we are finally called to vote on Bill 10 in committee.

9:00

[The clauses of Bill 10 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 7 and Bill 10 as amended.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: Bill 7. The committee reports the following with some amendments: Bill 10.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 23 Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate May 2: Mr. Hancock]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure tonight to rise and speak to Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000. I would like to compliment the sponsor, the Minister of Learning, on this particular bill. It overall is a good piece of legislation, and it certainly isn't anywhere nearly as contentious as Bill 11 or Bill 18. This is a bill that I think overall is very good.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Now, the object of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is to implement changes to the operation of the apprenticeship and industry training systems in Alberta and to make it more responsive to the employers, the employees, and the apprentices. Again, this is an area that does have to be overhauled, and it is an area where there is great concern in industry here in Alberta. A lot of that has to do with the average age of our tradesmen in this province. We have seen in so many instances that because of our cyclical economy, because of feast and famine – and certainly it's good to see that that has been leveled off in recent years – it's extremely hard to train new workers, to put them into the apprenticeship programs and to see them complete that. If there's no work, then certainly it's very difficult for employers to keep these people on. So it's no wonder that employers are very cautious before they do take on young people into the apprenticeship programs.

As well, part of the object of this particular bill is that it will propose changes that will redefine the government's provisions in the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board. One of the things we will see from this is that entrance requirements for trades are removed from regulations and added to the legislation. I think one of the strengths of these proposed changes, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that there was extensive consultation before this bill was drafted. I think it's one of the reasons why the changes to this bill will be limited and it will be a good piece of legislation and one that industry, the employers, the employees, and the apprentices will all look forward to.

There are some concerns, and they are minimal. One of these is that they are concerned that not allowing the regulation that will tighten up the requirements of the new competency training to be drafted will not allow a high enough standard to be kept, and it is absolutely essential that there are uniform standards to protect the professional reputation of current journeymen.

Associated with this as well, Mr. Speaker, is the issue of workplace safety. We have seen in a recent article from the *Calgary Herald* that workplace fatalities are well above average, particularly when we look at it at this time of the year. We have already had 19 fatalities in the workplace here in the province whereas last year, according to the article, we had a total of 34. So even though we haven't reached half the year, there has been quite a rash of fatalities.

We don't know if this is because of a number of reasons: whether it is because we've moved to a system where we are looking at compliance for workplace safety from the employers, whether this

is a result of the tremendous decrease in the number of inspectors in OH and S, or if part of the reason is because we have gone to a new system where we are creating safety associations and in those associations have sort of squeezed out the professionals that we had in safety training in this province. Once we had professionals that looked after, for example, safety management systems in companies. They delivered OH and S programs in the companies, and they also looked at emergency planning and response. So those are all things that certainly have a big impact on workplace safety. Again, when we look at an apprenticeship program, we certainly do have to have standards that are going to deliver employers and graduating apprentices out into the workplace who are very safety conscious, and it will certainly help all people.

Now, I also see here, Mr. Speaker, that the International Union of Operating Engineers supports this new legislation as well. One of their major concerns is that people who are entering the workforce from the apprenticeship program and the industry training program will in fact be quite competent, quite qualified, and certainly that safety for all will be guaranteed.

9:10

Some more specific concerns or comments I'd like to make on Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, are from the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board consultation, A Vision for the Future, phase 2 update. Now, they do have a number of recommendations here as to how they are going to strengthen the apprenticeship program here in the province. One of the first things they wish to do, Mr. Speaker, is to offer more options for training. I touched on that briefly in my opening remarks: how employers are quite reluctant to take on apprentices if they cannot see down the road that they are going to have work for these people and be able to provide them with top-quality experience in the apprenticeship program.

As well, when these apprentices do start in the apprenticeship program, because of their knowledge, because of their abilities, they start at a much lower rate. Certainly that is a discouragement for people entering a particular trade. It is very, very difficult for these people to survive on these low wages, particularly when they have to take time off in the apprenticeship program to go to educational institutions. So some of the recommendations here certainly will address this idea that there will be improved financial support for apprentices.

Now, as well, one of the recommendations is that we will have increased promotions of ways to start an apprenticeship and recognize prior learning so that the whole process of apprenticeship will be compacted. I certainly see that this has been one of the ways of lightening the load and the hardships of young people who are entering an apprenticeship program, but I also think that if we are going to allow a program where people can challenge standards, can challenge exams, then those standards have to be extremely high because of the lack of experience that does come with these types of situations.

As well, I think one of the strengths of this new bill is that there will be more training opportunities for youth. I know that when we look at what is happening in our institutions of higher learning in this province, perhaps one of the biggest expenses for anybody is when they have to leave their home, travel to a different city, and pay for room and board on top of all their tuition fees, their books and whatever. Again, I think it is an extremely strong part of this bill that there will be more opportunities for youth for training, and hopefully this will allow the youth to stay at home and share in the support that families give to people when they are seeking their education.

Another recommendation here is that there be increased options for certification of workers. More opportunities we can give people to be certified in a particular trade certainly is something that would draw people to the apprenticeship program. Again, the more qualified our workers are and the more we have, it will certainly eliminate the problems we do find in these boom times we have now in Alberta, where perhaps some people are being pressed into doing particular types of work that they are not qualified for, that they are not trained for, work they cannot do safely. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that we do have such an increase in workplace fatalities this year as compared to last.

One of the other recommendations that has support from the board is that apprenticeship wage percentages will remain in regulation unless changed or removed by the Board in consultation with the applicable provincial apprenticeship committee.

A second recommendation, Mr. Speaker, is that journeyman/apprentice ratios will remain in regulation. Again, certainly when we look at the overall quality of a program for young apprentices, a very important part of that component is the journeyman/apprentice ratio. It's a case where we don't want to see one journeyman for too many apprentices.

As well, Mr. Speaker, another recommendation that has been recognized is that there are specific . . .

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member, please. The Minister of Forestry was on his way out. This is the House, not committee.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, the board does recognize that there are specific problems being experienced with the description of some trades. The board will work with the provincial apprenticeship committees to look for solutions to this particular problem.

Another very good recommendation by the board in the drafting of this bill was that they recommended criteria for the designation of trades and occupations. When we look at this, there are a certain number of criteria that the board chose, and certainly one of those was the criteria for the description of all trades, both compulsory and optional certification trades. This is certainly a criteria that we would look at, and I certainly look forward in Committee of the Whole to speaking about this in a much broader sense.

Another criteria they looked at was for the designation of compulsory certification trades, and finally, another criteria was for the designation of occupations. So, again, a very, very thorough look at what has happened here with the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act.

I think it's also important that we look at the background for this particular bill. Since late 1996, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board and the Alberta government have consulted on ways to make the apprenticeship and industry training system more responsive to employers, employees, and apprentices. As a result of those consultations, six new actions in apprenticeship and industry training occurred.

The first was more options for training. I think that when we have more options for training, one of the good outcomes is that it certainly gets away from any abuses that can happen in the apprenticeship program; for example, where young people are offered an apprenticeship, they go to work for a particular business, they start out as labourers, and after two years they are still not in the apprenticeship program. So we've lost people when they quit those jobs, probably people that would have been very good tradesman. They had a tremendous interest at one point. Just the sheer frustration of not being able to get into the apprenticeship program would allow them to quit.

One of the other recommendations they did have was improved

financial support for apprentices. Again, when these people are studying, when they are at school, when they are on the job at reduced rates, they certainly are facing a certain number of hardships. For some it's very difficult to get student loans. So I think this is a definite improvement to what is in existence now.

Another recommendation that resulted from the consultation is that there should be increased promotions of ways to start an apprenticeship and recognize prior learning. Again, we've always had this in the trades. If we look historically at this, certainly a good example would be where a blacksmith would take his son on, and he'd have on-the-job training. This certainly continues to this day. It's not uncommon for someone in the trades to take one of their children with them, and they certainly do pick up an awful lot of knowledge even though they aren't in a program. This also fits right in with another conclusion of this group because of consultation, that this would provide more training opportunities for youth.

9:20

When we look at the whole program, we also see that all of these increase the options for the certification of workers. Again, what we want in this province is a very well-qualified body of tradesmen, and with that certification we'd get away from what we find here today, where we do have people entering jobs that are almost forced into those jobs because we do have a lack of skilled tradespeople.

Those are a number of the strengths of this bill, Mr. Speaker, and with that I will conclude my remarks on Bill 23 this evening. I look forward to debating it more in Committee of the Whole. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a second time]

THE SPEAKER: A point of clarification, hon. members. The only people whose votes will be counted are those who are in their rightful places, and if it had been a situation, that would have been the resolution.

THE CLERK: Bill 19, Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000. Adjourned debate, hon. Dr. West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

THE SPEAKER: Please sit down, both hon. members. The Clerk very clearly pointed out Bill 19.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, might we receive unanimous consent to not deal with Bill 19 and move to third reading on Bill 11?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Third Reading

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. JONSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, and in doing so to make just a few comments about this very, very important piece of legislation.

First, Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that this particular piece of legislation has received very extensive debate in this Assembly both at second reading and at committee stage. Indeed, this bill will be

the most debated piece of legislation in the history of the Alberta Legislature by the time we have completed that debate.

The amount of time devoted to this bill is, of course, important, Mr. Speaker, because the topic is important. Health care is in fact probably the most important social issue in the minds of many Albertans and most Canadians today. As a result, not only has Bill 11 been heavily debated in this Legislature, but it has also been extensively discussed outside this building in the public: in meetings, in coffee shops and restaurants, in living rooms and kitchens across this province of Alberta.

That discussion and debate, Mr. Speaker, has sometimes become very heated, very emotional, as occasionally happens with very potentially emotional and important topics such as health care. Sometimes that discussion and debate strayed away from the actual content of the bill – in fact, in many cases it did – and focused on some of the bigger challenges and issues facing health care right across our nation.

What is important, however, is that this government did listen to the discussion with an open mind and an open willingness to adapt and to amend this bill. We heard what Albertans were telling us about this particular piece of legislation and about health care in general in Alberta. We heard what they said in their many calls to our constituency offices, in their calls to the government RITE operators, in the many community meetings and forums that we attended, and in the letters and e-mails that we received. We heard the concerns that Albertans had with Bill 11, the concerns that they had with our health care system, and the priorities that they have for a health system of the future.

We gave serious attention and consideration to their comments and their suggestions, and the result, Mr. Speaker, was the substantial number of amendments that we as a government brought forward to strengthen and improve this legislation, amendments that provide further protection for our publicly funded health care system, amendments that provide even further protection for patients and consumers, and amendments that clarify the overall intent of Bill 11 to build a stronger publicly funded health system for the future. For that, we thank all Albertans who took the time to provide their input. We listened, we considered, and we acted through amendment.

For those suggestions and concerns from stakeholder groups and individual Albertans that fell beyond the scope and mandate of this particular bill, we commit, Mr. Speaker, to take aggressive and timely action to address those overall issues as well with respect to our much-prized health care system.

Mr. Speaker, what we have ended up with is a strong and necessary piece of legislation to preserve publicly funded health care in this province and to retain the flexibility to deal with issues and challenges as they arise in the future.

What we have is a bill that prevents the development of any two-tier, American style health care system in Alberta, a bill that prohibits the two-tier concept supported by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

We have a bill that makes it illegal to operate a private hospital in this province and that makes it illegal to charge a fee to Albertans for medically necessary services.

We have a bill that makes it illegal to jump the queue and get faster access to medically necessary surgery through a payment of any kind and makes it illegal to accept any type of payment to give faster service for a medically necessary surgery.

Mr. Speaker, we have a bill that protects patients from any unethical behaviour or pressure to purchase unnecessary products and services and a bill that limits charges for enhanced goods and services so that there is no profiteering at the expense of a patient in the health system at large.

Mr. Speaker, we have a bill that puts all surgical facilities under

the control of the publicly funded health system so that they operate only where there is a benefit to the publicly funded health system of this province.

We have a bill that requires a health authority to make effective and efficient use of existing hospital space before considering a contract with a surgical facility.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we have a bill that ensures openness and accountability in our health system by requiring that any contract between a health authority and a surgical facility must be available to the public.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 as legislation is fully consistent with the principles of the Canada Health Act and in fact helps to protect and preserve those principles in the operation of Alberta's publicly funded health system.

Bill 11 is legislation that, as I have so often stated, is not the solution to every challenge facing health care in Alberta or in Canada, but it is one important piece of Alberta's six-point plan to build a solid foundation for a publicly funded health care system in this province in the future. It is one important piece in helping ensure the sustainability and accessibility of quality publicly funded health care services in Alberta not only today but into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all members in this Assembly to look at this legislation with an open mind, without political bias and without political rhetoric. Look at its strengths, its protections, its optimism for the future. I encourage all members to support Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act.

9:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last few weeks and even tonight we've heard lots of rhetoric from this government on Bill 11. We've heard half-truths, misinformation, insults, and inflammatory statements, all in an attempt to defend the indefensible, to defend a bill that will promote two-tiered health care in this province, that will open the doors to private, for-profit health care in this province, and that will ensure that our cherished publicly funded health care system will in fact be under attack not only here in Alberta but across Canada.

This government has spent at least \$3 million – \$3 million – to sell a bill to its own citizens. The more Albertans hear, the more information they get, the more they dislike this bill. The e-mails, the faxes, the petitions, the telephone calls, the polls all indicate that opposition to this bill is increasing daily, that the only ones in this province who wish to promote the bill are the government members in this Legislative Assembly and the few who have their ears, and that contrary to the wishes of its own citizens, tens of thousands of Albertans, they are pushing a bill that Albertans do not want.

It's as much an issue of democracy, Mr. Speaker, as much an issue of values as it is of the promotion of private health care in this province. This government has been told that morally, ethically, socially, and economically this bill does not make sense, and that's not only by the members of this Official Opposition. Religious leaders, scholars, economists, doctors, nurses, and health professionals in this province have told government members, I'm sure many to their faces, that this bill is dangerous. What we have instead of facts is government members, the government executive, and the Premier of this province trying to lay blame, trying to say that it's the Official Opposition's fault that Albertans do not believe what they are saying. In this government's arrogance, the only justification we have heard in this Legislative Assembly is that they are right and the tens of thousands of Albertans who have said that they do not want this bill, that they want this bill pulled, are wrong.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this government has insulted Albertans by

saying that they are left-wing nuts, by saying that they do not understand the bill, that it's only a minor adjustment, by sending out truth squads to tell Albertans what the truth is. They continue to insult the intelligence of Albertans by saying that they don't understand the bill, a bill that this government has sent to their homes, a bill that this government believed they would read themselves and understand what the meaning of the words are within the bill and make judgments on their own as to what that bill means. This government has the arrogance and these government members have the arrogance to say that Albertans do not understand what the bill says.

In fact, this disrespect the government members have for constituents is based solely on the fact that the constituents disagree with the government members. The reality is that in fact we have seen government members who don't understand what the bill is about. We've seen government members who say, "Well, this bill isn't about overnight stays," when in fact it is. We've seen disputes between the junior Minister of Health and Wellness and one of the members of the truth squad as to whether the bill is really about private hospitals or about surgical facilities. Then we had recently the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who indicated that this bill was a miracle cure. Just this afternoon the Premier said: well, no; really it's just a minor adjustment to health care in this province. So do you know what you're talking about? Do you know what you're supporting, or is it just pure arrogance that you are voting for something that you have no understanding about?

The amendments that were put forward, Mr. Speaker, do not deal with the key concerns Albertans have with this bill. They do not deal with the issue of overnight stays. They do not deal with the issue of enhanced services. They do not really deal with the issues of conflict of interest that will continue to occur within this province. They do not deal with the contracts and the opening up of contracts that the Alberta Medical Association would see, not only for the surgical facilities but for all contracts. That is not what these amendments deal with, so in fact the amendments do not deal with what some of the issues are that Albertans have identified over and over again in the last few months.

It's easy for the government members to hide behind their desks and hurl insults, because it's impossible for them to substantiate their so-called facts, these half-truths that we see and hear on a daily basis from this government in this Legislative Assembly and outside this Legislative Assembly. So let's go through what some of these so-called facts are that the government indicates the bill will do.

The government says that the bill will support the principles of the Canada Health Act. Well, let's look at some realities. The Premier has been on record over the years saying that he would like to change the principles of the Canada Health Act, that he would like to change the Canada Health Act. Twice government members have voted against the principles of the Canada Health Act, and in fact the federal Minister of Health has recently indicated, as well as another legal opinion, that Bill 11 may well contravene those principles of the Canada Health Act. With regard to the provision of MRI services in this province, the Official Opposition has indicated, as well as now the federal Minister of Health in terms of an investigation, that in fact we think currently the province is contravening the principles of the Canada Health Act. So much for their support of the principles of the Canada Health Act.

Another so-called fact by this government is that this legislation is similar to legislation elsewhere in Canada. The reality is that there is no legislation in Canada which specifically provides for overnight stays, because what that does is open up the provision for private, for-profit hospitals. Their own blue-ribbon panel told them so. Not more than a year, a year and a half ago the government's own blue-ribbon panel said: you're going to have facilities that have

overnight stays; those are private, for-profit hospitals. That's a fact.

Contrary to that being a minor change, as the Premier would on some days like us to think, even though it's a breakthrough, even though it's an innovation – and those are their words – even though this will make a difference in the provision of health care but is just a little minor change, in fact what this bill does is set up private, for-profit hospitals or, as the euphemism is now, surgical facilities.

Another fact, Mr. Speaker, is that Saskatchewan specifically outlaws extra billing, the so-called enhanced services that open the doors to two-tiered health care, which is what this legislation again provides for.

Now, another so-called fact the government talks about over and over again is that the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the federal Minister of Health made them do this, made them bring in the legislation in its current form. The actual fact, Mr. Speaker, is that HRG put forward an application to the College of Physicians and Surgeons to set up overnight stays at their facilities, which are, again – and that's what the blue-ribbon panel said as a result of that request – private, for-profit hospitals. That's why the college came back to this Assembly, to this minister to say: "You know what? We're not in a position to open up the doors for private, for-profit hospitals. Your role is to close those doors, not to open them." You know what? This government doesn't have the guts to do that, doesn't have the guts and the fortitude, doesn't have what it takes to say no to overnight facilities that are private, for-profit hospitals. That's what the bill should have said.

9:40

Now, another fact is that private facilities will only be allowed where there's a benefit to the public and the current beds need to be used more efficiently. This so-called fact is written into the bill, and therefore it will make it so. Well, the reality is that there have been virtually no studies done by this government with regard to the benefits of those 52 clinics that they like to bring up all the time. Any studies that do exist – and there are I think three, to my knowledge, in this province, of which the minister said today he would table two in the Legislative Assembly – in fact indicate that there is no benefit. All those studies have to do specifically with Calgary. Perhaps the members would like to ask the minister for those particular studies, because I think they might be very informative. They might in fact change your vote when it comes to the third reading vote.

So in fact there is no benefit. In reality, the experience in Calgary would bear out the analysis that has been done in other jurisdictions across the world that indicates that where there is a two-tiered health care system, where you have a private, for-profit system sitting alongside a public health care system, in fact what happens is your costs go up and your waiting lists go up and there is no benefit to the public system or to the public. That is borne out by the experience we've seen in Calgary. If you want to do some dot connecting, if in fact those 52 clinics, the majority of which are in Calgary, are so efficient and effective, then why do we have some of the largest waiting lists for services in Calgary? Shouldn't the results that this bill is supposed to provide be evident, then, in Calgary? But they're not. I think members need to ask themselves: why is that? Maybe the reality is that the experiment is not working in Calgary, and it might be better to plan than to experiment.

Conflict-of-interest provisions. In fact, what we are going to have in this province are 17 different conflict-of-interest provisions, and those provisions will have no teeth, much as we see right now in Calgary and specifically with regards to conflict of interest that is occurring there at this particular point in time. Again, the government has done little about it.

The other fact the government keeps saying is that the RHAs are asking for this, that the reason the government is doing this is

because the RHAs are asking for this. Well, the only ones that have asked for this that I am aware of, unless the minister can table something different, are the politically appointed members of the Calgary regional health authority. They are the ones that are on record as saying they would like to have this option. The individuals in the health care professions who are working within the regional health authorities are not asking for this. In fact, they are saying that this bill will not provide them with what is required to ensure a well-run public health care system.

Another fact with regards to the bill and the whole issue around Bill 11 has been that this bill will be debated in the Legislative Assembly. Well, each member of the Official Opposition has sent a request to the members of the government to debate Bill 11, to have a real debate within their constituencies so that their constituents can in fact have an opportunity to ask questions. What occurred? To date, 31 government members have not said one word in this public debate in the Legislative Assembly on Bill 11. What we've also had is debate curtailed in this Assembly twice, through a process of a type of closure in first reading, in second reading, and in Committee of the Whole stage closure as well. We have not had a full and open debate, nor has the government indicated that they are willing to listen to what the real concerns of Albertans are with regards to some of the key issues on the bill. If they were, they would have voted in favour of our subamendment on overnight stays, which is one of the two key, key concerns on Bill 11. So not willing to listen, not willing to make any changes, not willing to have debate: those are what some of the real facts are when it comes to what Bill 11 is about.

Now, I believe a government's role is to hear what people's concerns are and not to diminish their legitimate concerns, because quite frankly to do so would be to sow the seeds of distrust that eventually this government will harvest. It is you who are sowing those seeds of distrust, and it is you who will harvest what the results of it are. The government members can sit and point fingers all they want. They can do that. They can say that it's the Official Opposition. They can say that it's the unions. They can say that it's the special interest groups. The reality is that it's only themselves to blame for not listening to what the concerns of Albertans are on this cherished issue of health care.

In the latest poll 60 percent of Albertans have indicated that they do not support this bill. That's a huge number, and of those 60 percent over 90 percent said that they knew the bill. These are not uninformed Albertans that are saying they don't like the bill. These are informed Albertans who are saying they have serious concerns that this government has not heard.

The government's insults and their half truths and their misinformation have not satisfied Albertans, nor has the \$3 million spent on advertising been enough to buy them off. They know the bill of goods that they're being sold, and they're not buying that bill of goods. Though the government may well say "I'm right" and the government may well say Albertans do not know what they are talking about, the reality is that they do know and they do not agree with what the government has said.

It would do well, I believe, for the government and the government members to take a close look at what is the real story behind Bill 11, what are the real issues behind Bill 11, and to take heed and listen to those concerns and pull the bill. It's as simple as that.

It's the government's third try at it. It's still not right. They are still not protecting the interests of Albertans with regards to the protection of our public health care system, and in fact what needs to happen is that the bill be pulled. We are in third reading stage, and in fact what needs to happen is that the bill be killed.

We are hearing right now outside individuals who have severe

concerns around the bill. We are hearing a representation of Albertans who have indicated that they do not agree with the tack this government has taken, and though the Premier has promised over the years that there is a plan in health care and has promised over the years that things will get better, the reality is that over the last seven years we have seen a worsening of our health care system in this province.

In fact, the promise the Premier made in 1993 that there would be short-term pain for long-term gain has now extended into long-term pain, and there is no end in sight. There is absolutely no end in sight. This proposal that is being put forward to initiate private, for-profit health care in this province will not do anything to alleviate the fact that our health care system needs to have some long-term plans and long-term solutions. With the efforts this government has provided and the money that has been spent on pushing private, for-profit health care, in fact there have been, it seems, no energies left over to defend and maintain and sustain our publicly funded health care system.

Thank you very much.

9:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the first opportunity to speak on Bill 11 that I've had. While many good points and speeches have been made on Bill 11 and questions raised in other venues by very gifted and knowledgeable people, I believe I owe it to my constituents to put some of my thoughts about Bill 11 on the record in the House.

Firstly, I do not believe in a two-tier health system; likely I never will. However, I do not disagree with contracting some work to private providers.

I acknowledge and respect the concerns expressed by some of my constituents and by others outside the constituency who have called and written about Bill 11 and our health care system. Many have quoted one study or another, quoted one expert or another in their comments on our health care system generally or specifically on Bill 11. My experience in the matter of expert opinion, in over 15 years in local government and now as an MLA, has led me to the conclusion that the fact that the experts do not agree makes a layperson's opinion valid. However, I like to be as well informed a layperson as possible.

It has along the way in the debate been alleged that some self-interest is driving this issue or this bill. While it's my view that there is not much that is done that cannot somehow in some way be perceived or construed as being driven by the self-interest of a few or of many, when all is said and done, there is a lot more said than done.

Some questions arise. Why Bill 11, and why now? Right now there is no legislation to control, regulate, govern, or prohibit the operation of a private hospital system in Alberta, so if we do not create legislation to deal with it, I suggest to you that what we will have in the near future is a private hospital system running parallel to the public system. Some contend that it won't happen unless the private system can access publicly paid for, medically necessary insured work. I think otherwise.

The private sector can now do Workers' Compensation Board, military, and RCMP work as well as uninsured work, all of which is outside the Canada Health Act. In addition, they will likely be able to do publicly paid for, insured work coming from other provinces. What we could well have is publicly paid for, insured work from other provinces being done in an Alberta facility to which Albertans would not have access, so it seems reasonable that we should have a method of providing access for Albertans. Bill 11 does this through allowing for contracts between private providers and health

authorities, which leaves both access and payment for insured services within the public system.

Then the question is: why now? It seems to me that for the first time in Alberta we have a private facility that is capable of competing in a significant way with the public system on a basis that heretofore has not existed through the small-scale 50 or so private clinics which are now in operation. So if we are going to do anything in the way of legislation, now is the time, and it is needed now.

The existing clinics demonstrate clearly that publicly paid for, private-provider arrangements can and do work very well. There are in the present health care system many private-provider contracted services. I do not think there are many people that go to work in our health care system that do so without some sort of contract.

My experience with collective bargaining leads me to believe that the employee-provider organizations say to employers that unless you assure us a certain earning, we will not work for you. In like manner, contractors, having calculated their costs and determined what they want in the way of earnings, either negotiate with or tender to employers for the work they want to do. Which method is preferable is largely determined by whose self-interest is being served. A point of view is driven by a viewpoint. The method of service delivery does not determine either access or payment arrangements. Albertans receiving medically necessary services will not have to pay for the medically necessary insured services no matter which delivery method is used.

In Bill 11 which method of service delivery is most desirable is to be determined by the respective health authority in accordance with legislative criteria. Bill 11, while it does deal with private-provider arrangements, is but a small part of the greater health care issue in our province and in our country. The fact is that health care expenditures have increased rapidly, mostly due to the very positive and beneficial developments and increased know-how in what we are able to do in the way of patient care for our citizens. We are truly well blessed in this regard. However, these improvements come at a cost. What we can do in health care in the future will not be limited by increases in knowledge. They will be limited by the fiscal constraints that economic reality will place upon us.

It has been said that some of the problems we face are due to the cuts that were made a few years ago. Well, the budget reductions ended years ago too. If the cuts made in Alberta are the ogre, why do all the provinces face the same problems we in Alberta face?

Many of the waiting lists we daily concern ourselves with are for procedures that were nonexistent a few short years ago. Billions more dollars will be spent to improve and strengthen our public health care system, and I strongly support our public health care system. Allowing some of the work within the public system to be done by private providers is nothing new and does not threaten our public health care system. Bill 11 will spell out the rules that will govern the private-provider arrangements.

Mr. Speaker, health care is a very interesting and complex matter of great concern to our government and to all our citizens. Accordingly, let us recognize that Bill 11 is not intended to deal with all health care issues but is intended to set out the framework under which private providers can participate in the delivery of publicly paid for services provided on an equally accessible basis to all our citizens without charge to any of them, and I believe Bill 11 will do so.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to move that we adjourn debate on third reading of Bill 11.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 9:59 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 4, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/04

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, we thank You for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask You to ensure to us Your guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to file a petition signed by 65 constituents from Wetaskiwin-Camrose and neighbouring constituencies. They are urging "the Government of Alberta to re-instate the front license plate on all vehicles registered in Alberta."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition today signed by 180 Albertans from Edmonton, Onoway, and St. Albert. It reads: we "urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition this afternoon to table as well. It asks the Assembly to "urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald."

Thank you very much.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, today with your permission I'd like to present to the Assembly a petition that has been signed by 171 Albertans. The petition calls upon the Legislative Assembly to maintain Kananaskis Country in a natural state, to deny development approval for projects proposed for that region, and to create a wildland park in the Spray and Kananaskis valleys.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition today signed by 162 Albertans from Sherwood Park, Morinville, Barrhead, Westlock, Beaumont, Fort Saskatchewan, St. Albert, Stony Plain, and Edmonton. They are all urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present today signed by 80 Edmontonians who are reaffirming their support for the five basic principles of medicare and urging the government of Alberta to "uphold the letter and spirit of these principles," opposing two-tier health care, and urging the government of Alberta "to maintain an adequate system of public

hospitals and to not permit the development of private, for-profit hospitals in the province of Alberta."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon a petition signed by Calgarians. These Calgarians are asking "the assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour dispute at the Calgary Herald."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly that states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government . . . to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

It's signed by 160 Albertans from Edson, Niton Junction, Peers, Whitecourt, Hinton, and Carrot Creek.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to table today. The first petition reads as follows:

We, the undersigned, ask the assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald.

This petition is signed by 111 Calgarians.

The second petition reads as follows:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

This petition is signed by 664 Albertans, bringing the total number of signatures on this petition to 21,725.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present 87 signatures from Hanna and the counties of Newell, Wheatland, Vulcan, and Lethbridge urging "the Government of Alberta to re-instate front license plates" on all registered vehicles.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to present a petition on behalf of 46 constituents from rural Calgary, Cayley, Okotoks, High River, Black Diamond, Priddis, and De Winton.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to re-instate the front license plate on all vehicles registered in Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 20 residents from the Innisfail-Sylvan Lake constituency. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to re-instate the front license plate on all vehicles registered in Alberta.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented on May 2 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to re-instate the front license plate on all vehicles registered in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I brought forward yesterday regarding the undermining of public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition on osteoporosis I presented on Wednesday, May 3 now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Alberta Government to take an enlightened preventative approach and add the newer and more effective medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented to the Assembly on Wednesday, May 3 regarding the long, disruptive labour dispute at the *Calgary Herald* now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received. It states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government . . . to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday signed by 4,566 Albertans be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

1:40

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table today a letter that was written to the Prime Minister by our Premier. It's urging the federal government to get on with accepting the Estey/Kroeger report, thereby saving Alberta farmers up to a hundred million dollars.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly eight copies of my response to Motion for a Return 46.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table the requisite number of copies of the list of 52 major health facility infrastructure projects and well over 200 upgrading projects that the province has funded in the last eight years. Since '92-93 that's almost a billion dollars spent on these projects that have been completed, are under construction, or are in the design and planning stage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table a letter from the mayor of Drayton Valley outlining the concern of the council of Drayton Valley about Bill 11 in its present form.

Secondly, I'd like to table a one-page report and interesting reading on the evolution of someone from a staunchly Conservative family to a Bill 11 detester.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a report prepared by the Liberal opposition research titled *Alberta vs Ontario: Who Really Has the Lowest Personal Income Tax Rate?* Attached to this report is a copy of a page from the Treasury business plan for the current year which states that the target for the province of Alberta is to have the lowest personal income tax load in Canada. Of course, the analysis shows that that's no longer the case.

The second, Mr. Speaker, is a summary of the 2000 Ontario budget produced by the Ministry of Finance for that province. It highlights the tax-on-income system that maintains a progressive system, has three different tax brackets, and of course provides fair tax cuts for middle-income earners in that province.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of correspondence from Mr. Scott Kennie. It's a very personal and moving observation on his battle with cancer and his fears about a private health care system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter from Mr. Harold Moore to the hon. Member for Dunvegan asking him not to vote for Bill 11.

The second is the president's update from the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses entitled What's Wrong With Bill 11?

The third is a letter from Mr. Rankin to Mr. Marshall with regards to Professor Levy's memo on the Canada Health Act and Alberta's Bill 11 indicating that it will provide for two-tiered health care and contravene the Canada Health Act.

My last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the summary of five investigative stories which will become available on Calgary Lab Services. It asks: who approved the Calgary Lab Services?

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon with the appropriate number of copies. The first one is a study showing that for-profit hospitals are lower quality than not-for-profit hospitals.

The second is the results of a public inquiry poll that shows 92 percent believe there's sufficient evidence of conflicting interests at the Calgary regional health authority to warrant a public inquiry into its operations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three different letters to table today. Each one of these letters details the reasons why the writer is opposed to Bill 11. The first letter in the form of an e-mail is from David McVean of Calgary. The second letter is from Ruth Vander Wonde in Edmonton. The third letter is from Astrid Blodgett, also of Edmonton.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter from a constituent, Irene Rheinwald, who asked me to table this letter registering her "outrage at Bill 11, its ramifications" and with the Premier's "inability to produce any empirical evidence to support his claims."

The second is a thesis project by Kate Hibbard on The Role of Changing Together: A Centre for Immigrant Women in the Well-being of Its Clientele; A Qualitative Evaluation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings. They are all letters expressing concerns about private health care and Bill 11. They are from Leona Sambor, Linda Harasewich, Tenille Harasewich, Mark Pouliot, and Doug Thomson.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a report compiled by an injured worker. It includes a judge's decision that the Appeals Commission cannot set the terms of reference for an appeal, only the board of directors. It also includes a number of recommendations. It's quite timely in that there is a review of the Appeals Commission at this time.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a copy of a petition bearing 68 signatures of Albertans "expressing their support for the permanent protection of the Spray and Kananaskis Valleys and their opposition to any developments in the Spray Valley." The original copies went to the Premier.

My second tabling is a letter from Kristian Kiml, who is also opposed to having any further development around Spray Lakes.

The third tabling is a letter from Ken Topham, who is also opposed to the proposed development of Spray Lakes by Genesis Land Development Corporation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter I've received from the Minister of Municipal Affairs regarding the \$375,000 raised through the power engineers registration fee. I'm very grateful for that information.

The second tabling this afternoon is five copies of an e-mail from Naomi Lakritz. She is an editorial writer who is currently on strike at the *Calgary Herald*, and she's looking desperately for a way for this dispute to be resolved and leadership from the government.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, it's not very often that I get an opportunity to introduce a class of students all the way from Medicine Hat. It's really quite a major undertaking to bring students up from Medicine Hat. I met with the group at noon today. They will have been on the road for three days by the time they get back to Medicine Hat, after traveling up to Edmonton yesterday, spending today here, and then traveling back to Medicine Hat tomorrow.

It's indeed a real pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of 96 individuals who have traveled from Medicine Hat to join us here this afternoon. They are students from Crestwood elementary school. They are accompanied by teachers Wade Lawson, Kathy Western, Jackie Sehn, Karen Shaw, Gary Ziel and their principal, David George, and teaching assistant Miss Nameth. Also with them are parent helpers Lois Higgins, Glen Smeby, Wayne Schlenker, Deb Gomke, and Guy and Janie Rouse and bus drivers Greg Penner and Vic Nickel. They're in both the members' gallery and the public gallery. I would ask all of them to rise, and I'd ask all members to welcome them.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, my class will be coming in after 2, but I'll be introducing them beforehand. It's a school from my end of town. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly the grade 6 classes of the northeast Edmonton

Christian school. There are 34 students, and they're accompanied by eight parents: Mrs. Hilda VanHaren, Mrs. Carol Gurnett, Mrs. Wilma Binnema, Mrs. Helen VanBoom, Mrs. Audrey Vandeborn, Mrs. Henny Schenk, and Mr. Will Ryks. They're also accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Peter Prinsen and Mr. Greg Gurnett.

I'd like to note that teacher Greg Gurnett and one of the parents, Mrs. Carol Gurnett, will be watching very closely as their daughter, the ever-smiling Erin, one of our pages, will be delivering stuff around the room. They'll be here just after 2, and I'd ask that they receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today, if I may. The first is Mr. and Mrs. Hugh and Esther Rigney. They are from the Bon Accord area and are great community people, involved in a lot of things. Certainly of interest is that Mr. Rigney taught the Member for Redwater and the Member for Edmonton-Manning. Edmonton-Manning tells me he was the favourite, but that remains to be seen. I would ask that Mr. and Mrs. Rigney please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I would also like to introduce two great volunteers who put in countless hours for many of us here. They are Lesia Kozak and Evelyn Butler. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Children's Services I would like to make you aware that there will be a school class joining us sometime after 2 o'clock, and I would like to introduce them. There will be 29 grade 10 students and one adult. The teacher is Mrs. Sherry Rourke. They are from Archbishop Jordan high school. It's a little premature, but if we could have an acceptance of them, I'd appreciate it.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you 39 grade 6 students from Glen Avon school in St. Paul. They're accompanied by four teachers: Mrs. Linda O'Neill, Mrs. Patricia McRae, Mrs. Joan Brodziak, and Mr. Dave Doonanco. Our guests are now touring the Legislature, and they will be here after 2.

Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Voting on Bill 11

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The future of medicare in this province and in fact in Canada will be decided in this Legislature within the next few days. Yesterday I asked this Premier to sign a pledge that he will allow a free vote for his MLAs on this critical issue. My first question to the Premier is: has he taken the pledge?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. I haven't take the Liberal pledge, but I did take an oath of office to represent my constituents and the people of this province both as an MLA and as a member of Executive Council.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, why won't the Premier allow his MLAs to represent the constituents they were elected to serve by offering them a free vote?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we can go through the exercise again. Does anyone here want a free vote?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes. Yes.

MR. KLEIN: Oh, you all want a free vote? Okay. Fine. Do you vote freely to support the government's position? I don't know. [interjections] Right. Absolutely.

MRS. MacBETH: Okay, Mr. Speaker, if they're all ready to take a free vote, then will the Premier think again and sign the free vote pledge? We've got one here made out in his name so that he could.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have no intention of signing a contrived, phony Liberal pledge. I don't pledge myself to that party. That's the last thing on the face of the earth that I would do.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has presented no evidence to refute the fact that his health care policy will cost more and will lengthen waiting lists. In the absence of any evidence Albertans are wondering why the Premier and his government are so determined to proceed with this health care policy. Once again it becomes the central question on everyone's mind: who benefits from the Premier's health care policy? My questions today are to the Premier. Will the Premier confirm that his health care policy is the result of the pressure being put on the Calgary regional health authority by private operators to increase the volume and variety of contracted-out services?

MR. KLEIN: There were two questions there, Mr. Speaker.

Absolutely not. What we're doing relative to policy and law is in the best interest of Albertans and in the best interest of the publicly funded health care system and in the best interest of fulfilling our commitment to the Canada Health Act. That's what it's all about.

MRS. MacBETH: That's interesting, Mr. Speaker. How does the Premier explain the following statement from a November 1998 Calgary regional health authority study on contracted-out services, which I am happy to table? It says:

The Surgical Advisory Committee has been under considerable pressure from private providers to enter into long term agreements for existing contracts, and to contract out greater volumes and additional procedures to them.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to answer that question in a very generic sense and perhaps have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness supplement.

Mr. Speaker, you can well imagine that if we were to put back into the conventional hospitals as we know them all of the surgical facilities that are existing now, performing something like 152 different procedures, some 20,000 procedures a year in 52 clinics, 30 of which were up and operating and approved under the leader of the Liberal opposition's watch when she was minister of health in the

Conservative government – you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out what kind of pressure that would put on the hospitals that we have today.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, how does the Premier explain the following statement from the same study by the Calgary regional health authority revealed today that says, "This pressure has come both from providers with whom there are existing contracts, as well as new providers"?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, all the more reason to support the legislation that is before us, because it simply provides the health authority with the option under very strict circumstances to contract out. For the first time we are putting rules and regulations around the operation of surgical clinics.

Now, the Liberals are opposed to this. They voted against this. Mr. Speaker, if they were really, really concerned, they would be with the government and vote for rules and regulations relative to the contracting of surgical clinics.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, obviously the answer is that the beneficiaries of the Premier's health policy are private providers.

Will the Premier now request that his handpicked Calgary regional health authority release all cost-benefit analyses of its contracted surgical facilities and services before this government's health care policy is rammed through this Legislature?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I find the question to be very strange indeed, because the legislation addresses precisely that point and they voted against it. They don't want it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, what is this Premier so afraid of in those documents that he doesn't want Albertans to see before he passes his legislation?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, all of these questions can be addressed in the legislation. It was quite obvious during the debate during committee stage that they did not want to see these safeguards put in place. They voted against everything we wanted to do to make sure that contracting out is open and transparent, that it's cost efficient, that it will reduce waiting lists, that it will be to the benefit of Albertans and to the benefit of the protection of public health in this province.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, how can Albertans trust anything that this Premier says on health care policy when he is afraid to release existing evidence?

MR. KLEIN: I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness supplement my answer, but when it comes to a matter of trust, Mr. Speaker, Albertans trusted us in 1993 because we did what we said we were going to do. They again enhanced their trust in this government in 1997 because we did what we said we were going to do. Come the next election, I am confident beyond all doubt that once again the people of this great province of ours will enshrine their trust in the Progressive Conservative Party and in this government.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to supplement with two comments. First of all, we are operating in full compliance with legislation as it currently exists with respect to confidentiality and privacy in this province. That was legislation that, if I recall, the members across the way voted for with respect to the protection of privacy. The provisions of Bill 11 make it possible, make it very legal, make it a requirement that the content of contracts be released. That is why we need Bill 11. As has been pointed out already, the members across the way do not support that particular provision.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Public Opinion on Bill 11

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier claims to have received thousands of letters and e-mails in support of the government health care privatization scheme, yet he hasn't provided any evidence to support his claim. This isn't surprising when the government hasn't provided a shred of evidence to back up the claim that its scheme will shorten waiting lists and save money. My question is to the Premier. If the government won't table the letters and e-mails it has received, will it at least provide a detailed accounting indicating the total number as well as a breakdown of what percentage supported Bill 11 and what percentage opposed it? If so, when?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, when this bill is given third reading and when it is given Royal Assent and when it is proclaimed, I'm confident the people of this province will say: what was all the fuss about?

Again, I find it very, very strange that the leader of the third party, just like the Liberals, would be talking about approval processes and what evidence there is. He also voted against the bill in committee, and the bill specifically addressed the fundamental question of health authorities needing to provide evidence beyond reasonable doubt that it will reduce waiting lists, that it will provide efficiencies, that there will be cost savings. This hon. member voted against those requirements, Mr. Speaker, and that's a shame.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why won't the Premier admit that the reason his government refuses to do a detailed accounting of responses is because it would show overwhelming opposition to the health care privatization scheme?

MR. KLEIN: There is no privatization scheme, Mr. Speaker.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Denials won't change the fact.

Why won't the Premier admit that the reason his government is deliberately delaying a detailed accounting of responses is because they will show overwhelming opposition to the health care privatization scheme?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I don't know what kind of responses he's alluding to. If he's talking about the co-ordinated campaign of malicious misinformation and all the postcards that have come in and all the loaded questions that have come in, Mr. Speaker, yes there have been thousands.

But the good-thinking people of this province, you know, the remaining 2.9 some odd million people, are saying: "We're quite satisfied with this government. We like what you have done for this province. We like what you have done for the economy. We like what you have done for taxation. We understand and know that

you're doing your very, very best to address the critical issues of health care, the issues of education, the issues of sustaining an economy, the issues of agriculture, the issues of labour, the issues of justice, the issue of protecting consumers, the issues of providing good solid infrastructure, and the issues of making sure that we have good community facilities and a good quality of life." Mr. Speaker, Albertans are confident that this government is doing a good job to address those issues.

Provincial Tax Regime

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, Budget 2000 committed Alberta to a bold path of tax reform. This bold path includes the introduction of a single rate of tax instead of a progressive system of taxation. Other provincial governments have not followed Alberta's lead. Would the Provincial Treasurer tell this Assembly why we have chosen this taxation route?

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, some time ago we had a Tax Review Committee that asked Albertans through many questions what type of tax system they would like and some of the problems with it, and we had 80,000 responses on that plus all of the other submissions that were made as the review committee went about the province. One of the things with the act and the changes that we're bringing in is that Alberta will delink from the federal income tax system by switching to a tax on income rather than a tax on tax. Tax on income improves Alberta's policy flexibility by allowing the province to have its own brackets and rate structure and varied levels of nonrefundable tax credits to meet its own objectives.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the principles of why we're taking this approach and why it's superior. We believe that low-income Albertans should pay no tax. Our single-rate system allows us to liberate thousands of low-income Albertans. We believe that you should not be punished for being educated, hardworking, and innovative, and that is why Albertans will pay the same proportion of their income after they have deducted their newly enhanced deductions.

The single-rate system removes a complicated . . .

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. minister. Normally we deal with principles of bills in the debate at second reading.

MR. DOERKSEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, could the minister please address the concern that a single rate of tax is not fair to all income levels?

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the other things that came forward, of course, was that families in Alberta were being discriminated against based on their choice of how they raise their children. By making the spousal deductions equal to the personal deduction and by moving to a single rate, the gap in taxes between a two-income family and a one-income family will be drastically reduced.

Now, one of the things that happened recently is that there's been some criticism of our rate of tax coming forward, and the Premier and this government promised that we would address any changes that the federal government made to their tax brackets. One of those was in the middle-income group, where they changed their rate structure, and therefore today I'd like to table a draft amendment that would change the rate from 11 percent to 10 and a half percent and would raise the spousal allowance to \$12,900 from \$11,622.

2:10

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you for that.

Would the Treasurer tell us what this groundbreaking change will mean to the average Albertan?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, this will take another 58,000 low-income people off the tax roll permanently. This change along with the surtax removal in the next two years will leave \$1,320,000,000 in the taxpayers' pockets. That extra 58,000 brings the low-income off the tax rolls to 190,000 Albertans.

One other thing I want to say is that I'll give you a few examples, and then we can sit down and let the debate start.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there is actually a part in the Routine called Ministerial Statements, which hon. members might want to just apprise themselves of.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Peace River Hospital

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Provincial and municipal planning for interchanges to keep the Peace River stretch of highway 2 part of the national highway system has been under way for 10 years. That's good; there's lots of activity. As well, everyone is pleased that a new community health centre is being built for Peace River. Unfortunately, the site chosen for the new Peace River hospital on the west hill across the river means that the interchange plans for the same location have been scuttled. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Why was there no consultation between health, public works, and transportation so that the choice of the hospital site didn't scuttle years of transportation planning and jeopardize the future of several Peace River business owners?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, there was a considerable amount of consultation, and once again the information that's presented today is totally wrong. [interjections]

MRS. SOETAERT: I've hit a nerve, I think.

My second question: why did the government approve the use of the 15-acre west hill site when so many Peace River residents were opposed to that location for the new hospital?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of contributors to the final decision. That includes the regional health authority, the minister of health, previously the minister of public works, and all the staffs. They reviewed all the information and made the decision.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, can the minister confirm that a co-owner of the new hospital land is also a partner with the Premier in the Eagle Point fishing lodge? That's the reason.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, this ministry is responsible for co-ordinating over 52 major projects in the province of Alberta, over 200 minor upgrading projects. I don't have all the information carried here in my head as to who owns every parcel of land there is in Alberta. There are a heck of a lot of people living here, over 3 million, and many of them own property.

If she wants to put some kind of accusation down in writing to me, I'll personally address it, and I'll deliver this information in the House.

Privilege Allegations against a Member

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as much as I hate to rise on a point of personal privilege, I think that I will on this particular issue. First of all, the member has not named this individual. She has made some implications that somehow there is a conflict, that somehow I was involved in the decision relative to the point in question. That is absolutely false. It is irresponsible, and, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask the hon. House leader to speak on my behalf when this matter is raised.

Thank you, sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Cattle Identification Program

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. I've been speaking with a number of producers in my constituency who have some serious reservations about the new cattle identification program. They believe that they haven't been well-informed about how the program will work and why they need to participate. They're concerned about the increasing costs and the potential for increased liability. It is my understanding that Alberta Agriculture is supporting this program. I would like to ask the minister: why does the Alberta government support the new federal cattle ID program?

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe I should give a little history on where this came from. Currently the consumer is becoming more and more concerned that food be safe. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency does a great job of inspecting all our plants, our processes and making sure that food is safe. This is extremely important to foreign buyers, and of course when you talk particularly about beef – and this is the area that it affects – we export anywhere from 70 to 80 percent of that product out of Alberta. So the market is extremely important to us.

The Canadian cattle association in conjunction with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency recognized that it was important to have a mechanism so they could trace back if there was a problem. So the Canadian Food Inspection Agency set up another agency, the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency, that will be administering a program whereby there will be an identification put on a animal where it is raised. Then, of course, that tag, that identification will follow through to the slaughter plant, and currently they have a track-back from the slaughter plant out to the consumer.

Now, it will take some period of time in order for the whole process to be put in place because an animal will change hands maybe four times in the life of the animal, and eventually it needs to be tracked all the way. What this will do is allow, if there is a problem – and mad cow disease is a good example of what it's done in some other jurisdictions and how it has destroyed the industry in the whole country. We need to have some way of getting back as quickly as possible and possibly isolating into a region or area if in fact there's a problem.

So this way, with this identification, the plant knows where the animal came from, so they can go there. If they know where the animal was born, then they can go back and start moving in the other direction, and that way they double the effort.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you. To the same minister: given the cost of the program and the concern about how an incident might affect the producer, can the minister explain how this new program will impact Alberta's cattle industry?

MR. LUND: Certainly any time you implement a major program like this, there is some cost, and there's no denying that. However, I think we have to look at the bigger picture, and that is to look at this implementation as a preventative measure. The fact is that in the countries that have had a major outbreak of disease, their exports have been cut off completely. If we have some way of tracking back really quickly and identifying where the problems lie, then of course we may have a very small area that would be quarantined instead of the whole industry being shut down. So I think that's where the payoff is.

MR. JOHNSON: Finally, I'd like to ask the minister how Alberta producers will be protected under this new legislation.

MR. LUND: In a number of ways. Of course, with a quick track-back not only does it protect to some extent in the marketplace, but also if it is a disease that is quite contagious, you can then very quickly isolate the area where the disease is found and stop the spread of it. So in that forum it would be a protection to the individual farmer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

2:20

Mental Health Services

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association the shortage of psychiatric hospital beds in Calgary is of crisis proportions. Currently there are 56 fewer acute care beds in Calgary than in Edmonton, and as a result patients in Calgary are forced to go over 200 kilometres to Alberta Hospital Ponoka for treatment. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that the Calgary regional health authority's recent budget only calls for an additional 15 short-term acute care beds, what long-term plans does the minister have to address the ongoing critical shortage of inpatient services in Calgary for individuals who are in need of psychiatric help?

MR. JOHNSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like to indicate that one of the joint initiatives of the Calgary regional health authority and the Provincial Mental Health Board has been to work together more closely to have a joint appointment, I think it would be called, in terms of a co-ordinator for overall mental health services in the region, and that seems to be going very well. There are also under consideration plans for implementation with respect to expanding the acute care psychiatric bed component in Calgary.

We should not be given the impression in this House, Mr. Speaker, that there are not acute care psychiatric facilities, though, in Calgary right now serving the people of Calgary. We acknowledge that that number has to be expanded, and action is being taken to do so.

MS LEIBOVICI: So can the minister, then, explain how spending \$95 million on Alberta Hospital Ponoka is going to address the very real requirements in Calgary, where there is an acute care bed crisis right now?

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, with respect to what are in

the language of mental health called emergency or crisis beds, I have acknowledged that we are working on expanding that particular capacity in Calgary.

With respect to mental health treatment beds, yes, those are being planned to be rebuilt in Ponoka. I should point out, Mr. Speaker, that the overall number of beds at the Ponoka facility is, however, being reduced.

I would like to also add, though, that there should be acknowledgment of the fact that there are other programs at the facility in Ponoka, one of which is the brain injury treatment and rehabilitation program, which serves both north and south in this province, Mr. Speaker, and I might say, although I do acknowledge that it's in my constituency, that this particular program is a very good one. There is also an alcohol and drug abuse treatment centre in Ponoka which serves central Alberta. I could go on with some of the other programs, including a psychogeriatric one, et cetera, that is part of that overall complex.

MS LEIBOVICI: Given that a stable home environment with families and a support system are crucial to the recovery of mental health patients, when can mental health patients in Calgary expect to be treated in their own city as opposed to having to travel 200 kilometres away?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think that traveling distances are part of getting specialized care in every part of the health care system. The other thing that I think is important here is that one of the impressions that is sometimes given about mental health treatment and is perhaps particularly pushed inaccurately by certain people is that once you go to a mental health hospital you stay there forever. That is not the case. The period of time that mental health patients on the active treatment side are in hospital has been steadily coming down.

Alberta Hospital Ponoka and Alberta Hospital Edmonton can show the reduction in length of stay as far as individuals are concerned and their transfer back to the community if – and this certainly is not always the case – there are family members or friends that can support and help the individual. Otherwise, transferring them to another location where there is no one there that they know doesn't make a heck of a lot of sense. Mr. Speaker, that is the situation.

Mental health, I think, does not yet get the credit they should for the advances they've made in the treatment of mental health in this province, and that is being pursued.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Royal Alexandra Hospital Neonatal Unit

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Royal Alexandra hospital in Edmonton opened a new neonatal intensive care unit for critically ill newborn babies. A significant portion of the capital costs of this project were raised by the Children's Health Foundation of Northern Alberta and the Royal Alexandra Hospital Foundation. To the Minister of Infrastructure: what if any was the government's contribution to this project?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a great pleasure yesterday to open another new world-class health facility in the province of Alberta. The new neonatal ICU took four years of

intense planning and consultation and construction to incorporate the latest technology. The latest technology they gave us a bit of an example of yesterday was the electronic transmission of diagnostic imaging.

The Capital health authority, the Royal Alex Hospital Foundation, and the children's foundation contributed over \$6 million, and that was for new equipment. Our participation from the province of Alberta was 8 and a half million dollars to completely gut and renovate the fifth floor of the Royal Alex, bringing the total cost of the unit to \$14 and a half million dollars.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: *Maclean's* magazine recently rated the Capital health authority as the best health region in Canada. Will this neonatal unit serve only the residents within the Capital health authority?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alex treats 1,200 babies per year, and about 30 percent of the babies come from other parts of western Canada. Now, the centre itself will be a centre of excellence for northern and central Alberta but will also be servicing the needs of critically ill babies from northern B.C., Northwest Territories, and Saskatchewan. So, really, Albertans are generously sharing their infrastructure with other Canadians.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you. My final question to the same minister: can other regional health authorities expect to receive funds for similar neonatal units?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, one of the great benefits of regionalization of health authorities of course is the ability of the RHAs to make the best use of their resources. There have been a number of centres of excellence created in parts of Alberta: Edmonton and Calgary and some in rural Alberta as well. We will continue to work with the RHAs to ensure that we continue to develop these centres of excellence.

I will say that we've invested about a billion dollars in health facilities throughout the province since '92-93, when this Premier took over. We do have quite an aggressive program, about \$324 million over the next three years in health facilities.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mental Health Services

(continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In December the Alberta Mental Health Board announced the withdrawal of funds from a number of community-based organizations in central Alberta. Due to these cuts, groups such as the assertive outreach program, Red Deer crisis services, the Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter batterers' program, and other programs have seen their funding discontinued. Objections to that decision have come from former patients, family members, community organizations, the United Way, the FCSS board, and Red Deer city council. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is

the policy of the minister regarding the contracting of services with voluntary community organizations?

2:30

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, as far as funding, one of the premises on which this question seems to be based is inaccurate; one might say blatantly false. The commitment of dollars in the David Thompson region – of course, Red Deer is the major population centre, but the service is to the whole area. The overall community mental health funding to that particular area has in fact been increased during this past budget and the budget before.

The second thing here is – and this particular question is kind of very ironic, because we're often accused in the health care system of not doing enough evaluation and providing for enough accountability in terms of the services provided. A procedure or policy of the Alberta Mental Health Board is to do a review of services on a periodic basis, Mr. Speaker, in consultation with their local advisory council from the mental health community. There was a decision made in the interests of improving services and better co-ordinating them to make some changes in terms of the agencies or in terms of the methods by which these services are being provided. So what you have is a situation where there has been, yes, a reconfiguration in terms of the delivery of services, but the region is being served.

As far as funding is concerned, it has in fact increased, Mr. Speaker.

MS BLAKEMAN: To the same minister: given that a stable home environment with families and a support system are crucial to the recovery of a mental health patient, can the minister explain why he has committed no new dollars to community mental health in the 2000-2001 budget?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the statement is inaccurate. In the budget that has been placed before this Assembly by government and has been approved, there are additional dollars for community mental health.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister commit to instituting a plan proposed by the Alberta Alliance for Mental Illness and Mental Health that any funds used to rebuild or refurbish the Alberta hospital be matched on a 2 to 1 ratio with funding for enhanced and new community services?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the question is quite ridiculous actually. When you build a particular hospital – let us talk about the neonatal unit which was recently inquired into, which is incidentally a very good initiative. If she's saying that you spend, let's say, \$30 million on a particular project in Edmonton to meet a capital need and then you have to automatically take that \$30 million and put it into your operational budget so it can be there forever, she knows very well that that doesn't work, and it isn't the way budgets are prepared.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Cancer Treatment

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Some serious concerns have been raised with me this past week about waiting lists in the Capital region for cancer radiation therapy in Edmonton, especially for breast and prostate cancer. My question is to the

Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the situation, and what is being done about it?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there is certainly a very serious situation in terms of waiting times for radiation treatment and other treatments being much longer than acceptable in the province. The Cancer Board is taking action to deal with this particular situation. This is something that unfortunately is not just isolated to one particular location but is almost a national situation. There seems to be a very severe shortage of cancer treatment technicians, particularly radiology specialists.

The Cancer Board has developed a three-point action program. One, of course, is to get concluded and get into effect a recent agreement with the workers there which should make their payment more competitive with, let's say, British Columbia or Ontario. Mr. Speaker, further, they are on a short-term basis bringing staff from Calgary to Edmonton to work here and to provide additional service until additional staff can be recruited.

So it is an issue not unique or specific to Alberta, Mr. Speaker. It is one where the Department of Health and Wellness and the Cancer Board have worked together, developed an action plan, and are following through.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell this House how soon this three-point plan can come into effect?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Cancer Board, as indicated in their news release of yesterday, are putting that plan of action into place right now. They're acting upon their overall three initiatives.

We are still not in a situation that is as serious as other provinces. That's nothing, of course, to be complacent about, and we are working hard on resolving the problem.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While these solutions are being put in place, does the Alberta Cancer Board have any plans to send patients to the United States for radiation treatment?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, while it is the case that other provinces have been sending significant numbers of patients to the United States for treatment, there are no current plans to do so in Alberta. It is our view that with the actions that are being taken, we can deal with this situation in Alberta, and as I've said before, it is a priority of ours to do so.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the United States, with its two-tiered health care system, investor-owned surgical facilities, nursing homes, home care companies – the list goes on and on – an estimated \$100 billion a year is lost in fraud. More and more, whole sections of state departments of health and social services have been created to fight frauds that have developed or are coming from private health care providers attempting to maximize their profits. Since 1993 under this government's master plan hundreds of millions of dollars of public health care assets and

contracts have been handed over to government friends and political contributors who own private health care services. My questions are to the minister of health. Given the proliferation of investor-owned home care, laboratory services, and surgery companies under this government, how many people do the department and the health authorities have employed to root out health fraud and protect public taxpayer dollars?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as has been the case since the beginning of public health care in this province, our system has been made up of three basic components in terms of the delivery system. Part of it is owned and operated directly by the government; secondly, we've had the voluntarily sector, the nonprofit sector, primarily based in the churches of this province, who have provided service, albeit they want to make sure they balance their books and perhaps have a little left over too; and thirdly, we have the private sector. That is the way it has been for decades. It still is today.

We do not have a fraud unit. We've not had any reason to have a fraud unit. The records and documents of the regional health authorities, being part of Alberta Health and Wellness in terms of financial responsibility, are reviewed by approved auditors, in many cases directly by the Auditor General's department. The Auditor General's department has to be satisfied that there are proper financial controls and proper monitoring in place, Mr. Speaker.

We in Alberta Health and Wellness do not have and have not had the need to have what is inferred as being some type of a department to deal with those types of things.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister mentioned a health fraud unit. My next question is: what plans does the minister have for a health fraud unit once the current privatization expansion to investor-owned overnight surgical centres or private hospitals gets under way? What plans do you have for this health fraud unit?

2:40

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I won't go back to the business about this being misnamed and misrepresented by the opposition. The point that's really, really important in response to this question is that we have had a privately owned, private enterprise, if you will, component in health care in this province for a long time. In credit to those people who have provided that service over the last tens of years, I frankly can't quite remember any major case of fraud in the entire system with respect to the private-sector operators. Perhaps there were one or two, but they certainly haven't been on the front line of concerns. I think that's really a good argument for respecting the fact that these people and these businesses and enterprises have a place within the health care system and have been providing good service.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the concerns that have been expressed by the Auditor General in last fall's Auditor General's report regarding fraud or the possible occurrence of fraud in WCB billing by private health care providers, can the minister provide the Assembly with his department's estimate of how much public money is currently being lost to fraudulent billing by unscrupulous private health providers?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I understand the question, he's

posing a question with respect to WCB. [interjection] Perhaps not WCB.

I have no indication that there have been any charges laid or any evidence that there has been any degree of fraud within the system. I will certainly check with the Auditor General's department in case there's something that we have missed in the reporting and documentation that they have provided. I think the question is really quite inappropriate unless there is really hard evidence, which of course we would be concerned about, if there was.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Employment Standards Enforcement

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. According to the statistics released in the 1998-99 annual report from the former department of labour, employment standards complaints have risen from .47 percent to .57 percent. Why is there an increase in the amount of employment standards complaints?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there are likely a number of reasons. The first one, I would think, would be the fact that there are many, many more people employed in Alberta. There's a huge number of new businesses that have been incorporated. Another reason is that we believe that we've certainly educated employees within the province to know about their rights and obligations. Of course, periodically there are companies that do go out of business, and behind them quite often is a trail of complaints.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is an independent workers advocate group needed to justly represent employees' concerns?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I don't believe so, Mr. Speaker. It's our department's responsibility to provide a level playing field between employers and employees, so in a way, of course, our department officials are advocates, then, for both sides.

We work continuously to see that there's compliance. We have educational activities that are ongoing. We want to focus where we see there are particular areas of concern, so we do some targeting in particular sectors. We now have an employment standards hotline where people can call us, and I understand we're getting something like 800 calls, which we're dealing with. So I would think that an independent workers advocate group would just be another level of administration.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is Human Resources and Employment doing about the chronic offenders who violate the Employment Standards Code?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, we're currently targeting sectors that have shown some degree of noncompliance, and a good example that I would provide to the members here today would be the Alberta

Restaurant and Foodservices Association. We're working very closely with them and, in fact, assigning an employment standards officer to work directly out of their office. Now, there's always the odd employer that just won't get the message though, so we'll speed up our investigative process on any complaints that come from that particular area. Hey, if all else fails, we have the legislation in place to prosecute, and we'll do it.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll call upon the first of three hon. members to participate in Members' Statements.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise as a member of this Assembly to speak of a very important conference that will be under way in just a few short days. It is important in that the topic affects each and every one of us. The conference begins Sunday, May 7, and runs through to May 9. It is the annual conference of the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies, or CASHRA. People from across Canada will gather in Banff to discuss human rights and diversity in our country. Fellow members, the hon. Minister of Community Development as well as the Member for Calgary-Montrose will be in Banff to welcome visitors to our province and to encourage their wholehearted participation.

Building a Human Rights Culture: Tools for Transformation is the theme of CASHRA's conference, which is a forum for Canadian human rights commissions to discuss human rights trends and issues that shape Canadian society and culture. This year Alberta is hosting the conference, and participation by the community at large has been encouraged.

The significance of this conference is twofold. First, the conference is a stage to demonstrate Alberta's human rights values and to promote the good work being done in our province. This conference and other educational initiatives are supported through the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund, chaired by the Member for Calgary-Montrose. Through grant-funding government and other sectors are creating partnerships that bring human rights awareness and action to many Albertans within a variety of communities.

Secondly, the conference will explore how we can actually live human rights and what tools and educational initiatives will help create a culture in which human rights are a way of life throughout Canada. Participants will look at strategies and successes in raising awareness and in encouraging positive action on human rights and diversity. It will be a valuable networking and learning experience for those who are already doing important work and leading change in this province and across this country.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

2:50 **Lawrence Grassi Middle School**

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to acknowledge the excellent contribution of grade 8 students at Lawrence Grassi middle school in Canmore. They've made a contribution in raising awareness on environmental issues in their region. Spearheaded by Courtney Dyck and Guy McLintock, the students wrote more than 100 letters to elected officials. They ask for a halt to proposed additional development in the Spray Lakes area. They also

request an end to hunting grizzlies and the recognition of the grizzlies as an endangered species. A petition signed by 550 students supported these requests. As a result of these actions, these students won a competition sponsored by *Outfront*, CBC Radio One. The students will now be preparing a radio play based on the submission.

Mr. Speaker, 56 of those students gave me permission to table their letters in the Legislature. The letters are copies sent to the Premier, to the MLA for Banff-Cochrane, and to the Genesis Land Development Corp. These letters are excellent reading, being both thoughtful and thought provoking. I encourage all MLAs, particularly the Minister of Environment, to take the time to read them. I am tabling the letters along with a copy of their petition, which reads as follows:

We, the undersigned, students at Lawrence Grassi Middle School, 730 4th St., Canmore, AB, would like the government of Alberta to [do five things]:

- 1) Protect Alberta's wildlife.
- 2) Stop giving out hunting licenses for grizzly bears.
- 3) Employ more park wardens.
- 4) Preserve natural habitat.
- 5) Declare the grizzly bear a protected species [in this province].

These students are working hard. They are organized and forward thinking. They will be excellent stewards of our province in the years to come. On behalf of my caucus I thank them and encourage them to continue to voice their concerns on issues of importance to them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Nortel Networks' Westwinds Campus

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, information and communications technology, known as ICT, is the world's strongest and fastest growing economic sector, making innovation more important than ever. It is my privilege today to congratulate one organization that is leading in this kind of innovation.

Nortel Networks, which employs over 3,000 people in Calgary alone, is extremely well respected by leading ICT companies and organizations around the world for being an innovator. I'm really proud to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that yesterday Mr. John Roth, president and CEO of Nortel Networks, in a groundbreaking ceremony announced the expansion of Nortel's Westwinds campus and facilities in northeast Calgary. This significant investment in excess of \$37 million U.S. is located in our area of the city, where development is very welcome. We are so pleased to know that the project at Nortel Networks' Westwinds campus will see the equivalent of 308 full-time, one-year jobs in construction and related activities for the Calgary area.

Mr. Speaker, Nortel Networks' expansion will add another 200,000 square feet to the existing facility. It really is another milestone in the new economy. It signals Calgary's success in attracting, growing, and building a world-class information and communications technology centre.

Thanks in part to companies like Nortel and their commitment to research, to their people, and to the future, we are quickly gaining an international reputation as a leader in ICT. Nortel's presence and commitment to its Calgary operations truly helps to put us and Alberta on the map.

I would ask that members of the Assembly join me in congratulating Nortel Networks on the expansion of their Westwinds campus and facilities in northeast Calgary.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would now ask that the government provide us the projected government business for next week.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Depending on progress from time to time, of course, and as always, on Monday, May 8, 2000, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading in the afternoon, bills 16, 19, and 20; for third reading, Bill 11 and as per the Order Paper.

At 8 p.m. on the same date under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, bills 16 and 19; third reading of Bill 11.

On Tuesday, May 9, at 4:30 p.m. private bills for second reading, Bill Pr. 3; Committee of the Whole, bills Pr. 1, Pr. 2, Pr. 4, Pr. 5, and Pr. 3; for third reading, bills Pr. 1, Pr. 3, Pr. 2, Pr. 4, and Pr. 5; Pr. 3, of course, with the unanimous consent of the House, if granted. Under Government Bills and Orders, Government Motion 18, as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday at 8 p.m. in Committee of the Whole, Bill 17, Bill 3, Bill 13, Bill 15; third reading of Bill 11.

Wednesday, May 10, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of the Whole, based on progress Tuesday; third reading of Bill 11 and as per the Order Paper.

Thursday, May 11, under Government Bills and Orders in the afternoon in Committee of the Whole, based on progress Wednesday; third reading of Bill 11 and as per the Order Paper.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, during the earlier Routine today notice was given to the chair about two items. One was a purported point of order and the other one a point of privilege. As has been the custom with this chair, the priority is given to the matter which is deemed to be of greater significance in the order of the House. Of course, without any doubt, a possible question of privilege takes that precedence.

Government House Leader, you advised with respect to this.

Privilege

Allegations against a Member

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today during question period, after a particularly odious question from the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, the Premier rose and indicated to you, gave oral notice at that time, as soon as it was reasonably possible, of a question of privilege to be raised under section 15 of our Standing Orders. The notice having been given orally, the requirement for written notice is not required under the rules.

It would be appropriate, Mr. Speaker, at this point in time, in our submission, after hearing such debate as you might desire, for you to rule that there is a prima facie case of privilege in this case and to ask the committee – I believe the appropriate committee is the Privileges and Elections Committee – to deal with the matter thoroughly.

A question of privilege, as you have mentioned previously in this House, is one of the most serious questions which can be raised in the House, because the privileges of the House and the privileges of its members are of utmost priority and importance if we are to be able to do our jobs in an appropriate manner. Nothing could be more important to our ability to do our jobs in an appropriate manner than to have the confidence of the public in the integrity of each and every member. There is nothing more important to a member of this House than that member's integrity and the public perception of that integrity.

It is my submission that the question raised by the member this afternoon, although it was directed to the Minister of Infrastructure, very, very clearly was intended to impugn the integrity of the Premier and, therefore, to interfere with his ability to maintain the public trust in his integrity and to maintain his ability to carry out his duties as a member of this House and as a member of Executive Council. I would suggest that it's not too strong to say that by doing so, it impugns the integrity of each and every member of this House.

This is something which is exceedingly important today, Mr. Speaker, because it is not an isolated incident. I am not suggesting that this member has on earlier occasions, and I am not going to cite earlier occasions of impugning the integrity of members, but we have seen in this House on a number of occasions allegations relating to suggestions that people were doing things in this House for reasons other than the representation of their constituents, for reasons of friends or otherwise. At this point that's all I'll say on that statement. I'll go back to the specifics of this particular situation.

I would refer the Speaker and this House to *Beauchesne* 64, which indicates:

The House has occasionally taken notice of attacks on individual Members. Most notably, [a situation where a member] while seated at his desk in the House, referred to a Member . . . as "a cheat and a swindler". Removed from the House, he returned twice more to repeat the charge and finally concluded with a written note to the same effect. For the offence, [the member] was judged guilty of a breach of privilege and was summoned to the Bar to apologize.

Mr. Speaker, I think that's precisely what should happen in this particular case. It is a case of that import. I'm reading from page 19 of *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, and I would advise you and the House that I paraphrased the rule that I read.

3:00

I would also refer you to *Erskine May Parliamentary Practice*:

Other acts besides words spoken or writings published reflecting upon either House or its proceedings which, though they do not tend directly to obstruct or impede either House in the performance of its functions, yet have a tendency to produce this result indirectly by bringing such House into odium, contempt or ridicule or by lowering its authority may constitute contempts.

I cite that not because it directly refers to a member's privilege but because there can be nothing more odious or contemptible than impugning a member's integrity and, particularly, doing it in a manner which does not afford an opportunity in any other legitimate way, I would suggest, than by bringing a question of privilege. A person's integrity, as I have indicated earlier, is the single most important tool that a member of this House can have.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also refer you to the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, edited by Marleau and Montpetit, which you provided to House leaders earlier this session. I'm reading from page 52, the fourth paragraph:

Any conduct which offends the authority or dignity of the House, even though no breach of any specific privilege may have been committed, is referred to as a contempt of the House. Contempt may be an act or an omission; it does not have to actually obstruct or impede the House or a Member, it merely has to have the tendency to produce such results.

Also, on page 53 in the first paragraph:

Either House can apply its rights to new circumstances, thereby in some cases creating new instances of contempt.

I cite that because as we read through it, the whole area of contempt is really an open area. We have in the past referred to the Legislative Assembly Act, where contempt and privilege were dealt with in a similar manner.

What I'm suggesting to you, Mr. Speaker, is that while we will not

necessarily find in any of the rules of order or the books of procedure under which we operate a specific reference which relates to this particular type of situation, I would again indicate that the single most important item that a member of this House has in terms of their ability to represent their constituents is their integrity.

Now, I would go further to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we have purposefully put in place mechanisms and an officer of the Legislature to deal with those situations where it may be appropriate to examine actions or incidents to determine whether anything of any impropriety was undertaken. We have an Ethics Commissioner and we have a Conflicts of Interest Act. If there was ever to be a suggestion by any member of the House or any member of the public that something was done in an inappropriate manner by a member of this House for personal gain or for any personal reasons or reasons other than the reasons for which we were elected, to represent the electors in our constituency, that type of an allegation, because of its serious nature and because of the manner under which we have established the Conflicts of Interest Act and the role of the Ethics Commissioner to investigate those types of situation – there is a procedure in place, and they should be referred for investigation there.

I say that in order to say again that it's a breach of the privileges of a member of this House, then, to raise in an oblique manner in this House in a public context such an allegation, in a context which will leave or tend to leave or could have the possibility of leaving the public with the impression that a member has done an inappropriate act, has been corrupted or bribed or in any other way has done anything for the purposes of self-benefit rather than the benefit of their electors. The appropriate method, as I say, would be to take the allegation, if there was any suggestion that there was any merit to the allegation, to the Ethics Commissioner and ask for an investigation of it, not to make a public statement in the House or outside the House to impugn the integrity or the character of a member.

Now, specifically to the allegation that was made. The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert asked a question of the Minister of Infrastructure. I don't have the Blues, but you will have the exact wording of it. She asked a question to the effect of: was the Minister of Infrastructure aware that one of the co-owners of a piece of property which was purchased for a medical clinic or hospital in Peace River or in the Peace River area was a co-owner of a fishing lodge with the Premier?

Now, the question could be raised for only one purpose, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, and that is to impugn the integrity of the Premier. That could be the only reason for asking that question in that way in this House at this time. If there was any suggestion or any concern by the member that anything inappropriate had been done, it would have been that member's responsibility, that member's duty to bring it to the attention of the Ethics Commissioner and ask for an investigation of it. If there was any evidence of that, it would be that member's responsibility to bring it to the attention of the Ethics Commissioner. The only purpose for raising it in the manner in which it was raised in the House is for the purpose of undermining public trust in our Premier, but it had the effect of impugning the integrity of our Premier, and as I've said on several occasions already, integrity is the most important thing that any member of this House can have. In fact, no member of this House can carry out their duties properly without their personal integrity and without the people's belief in their personal integrity.

One can always disagree with a member on a matter of policy. That is what we're all about: having discussions over matters of policy. But it should not ever come to this House where a member's integrity is called into question, a member's ability to represent their constituency, where there's a direct or indirect allegation that that

member has in some way benefited or in some way accepted a bribe or in any other way has been moved by inappropriate considerations to deal with the matter of government or of the Legislature.

Now, with respect to the specific allegation, the House should also know – and I do not have personal knowledge of this particular information; I've been advised of this information. I understand that the Member for Peace River does have personal knowledge of this information and could be called upon by you, Mr. Speaker, to give this House personal knowledge or to give the committee in due course personal knowledge, should you refer it to the committee. The individual referred to by the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, who owned or was a co-owner or had an ownership interest in the piece of land in Peace River, I'm given to understand, donated the piece of land in question to the local RHA for the purposes of building the hospital. So that individual, as I understand it, received no personal benefit for the transfer of that person's property to the RHA except perhaps in the context of the building of services to that property, which might otherwise assist with the surrounding property.

I'm also given to believe by the Member for Peace River that the person in question donated this land before becoming an owner in the fishing lodge to which the member referred and, in fact, before perhaps even any of the first meetings that he might have had with the hon. the Premier in terms of when they first met or, at least, first went on fishing trips themselves together. So there's no reason to believe that there would have been any benefit at all to the owner of the land other than, as I say, the fact that he owned other land adjacent and would therefore have benefited perhaps from some of the servicing to the new facility when it was built.

Also, it is clear to me from the information that I've received that at the time he made the donation he didn't know the Premier; the Premier didn't know him. In fact, I'm given to believe as well that the site selection for the hospital took place in the fall of 1997, that the purchase of the lodge happened in early 1998, that one of the original partners in the purchase of the lodge then sold their interest, and it was this interest that was sold that was acquired by a group of people including the individual which the member has mentioned.

3:10

So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's clear that we have a situation where the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, in bringing forward a question to this House, has done so with the clear intention of impugning the integrity of the Premier of this province and a member of this House and by impugning the integrity of the Premier of this province and a member of this House has attempted to interfere with that member's ability to do his job, because one cannot do this job if one is not perceived as having integrity, has done so in clear violation of the procedures which we have available and which this House has specifically made available by appointing an officer of this House as Ethics Commissioner and by passing an act called the Conflicts of Interest Act and by having an appropriate framework for dealing with questions of a nature which was raised. By not following that process and by determining to bring that question to this House at this time, she did so clearly with the intention of interfering with the Premier's ability to do his job as Premier and as MLA.

I cannot emphasize more how odious I believe that type of question, that type of conduct to be, how detrimental it is not only to the Premier but to every single member of this House, and I would ask you to find a *prima facie* case that there has been a breach of the privileges of the member, in this case the Member for Calgary-Elbow, the Premier of the province, and that the Privileges and Elections Committee be asked to investigate and bring a recommen-

dation of censure back to this House if in its investigation it is found that there has indeed been such a breach of privilege.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: I have no questions.

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry. I want to hear from the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert why this is being done, please. [interjection] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is not the Opposition House Leader.

MRS. SOETAERT: He is today.

THE SPEAKER: Well, you stand up and tell me that this is the way you want it, because I don't want you to come back later and say that . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I may, I'd ask the Acting Opposition House Leader to speak, and then, if appropriate, I will after.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Very well, and I'll certainly recognize the Acting Opposition House Leader in this regard.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A question of privilege is very serious. It's so serious, indeed, that it is incumbent upon all members of this Assembly to only raise such questions on those rare occasions that the business of the Assembly or the capacity of an individual member has been materially impaired. I don't think that's the case today.

Now, I will review *Hansard* when it's available, and I may have more to say or the Official Opposition House Leader may have more to say at that time, but at this point I do not believe that there is a valid point of order let alone a breach of the privilege of the Member for Calgary-Elbow. The Premier has not been prevented from pursuing his duties, and there has been no interference with the operations of the Assembly. A sensitive question put to a member of Executive Council, which may make the government uncomfortable, is not a breach of privilege.

Now, I did not hear the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert make an accusation. I did not hear that member draw a conclusion. What I heard was a question that required an answer. The question, as I understand it, was words to the effect of: can the minister confirm that a co-owner of the new hospital land is also a partner with the Premier in the Eagle Point fishing lodge?

Now, there was no reference to personal gain. There's no reference to anything fraudulent. There's no reference to anything under the table. There is simply a question asking about a relationship between the Premier and an Albertan.

The Government House Leader made several arguments, but in the course of those arguments he admitted that there is a relationship between the Premier and the former owner of this parcel of land. That was, of course, the object of the question. The Government House Leader may try to ascribe other motivations. He may try to pretend there was more to it than that, but really, Mr. Speaker, that's what it boils down to.

The Government House Leader made reference several times to the ability of all members of this Chamber to be able to carry on their duties based on their standing in the community, their reputation, their integrity. Then he suggested that by asking a question

which doesn't go to the issue of integrity or standing in the community but simply asks about a relationship, the Premier has somehow been diminished. But every day in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, during question period, during debates, hon. members ask pointed questions of one another regarding government policy and the manner in which the government of Alberta operates.

Mr. Speaker, we've had the Premier nearly every day in recent memory stand in this Assembly and accuse the Leader of the Official Opposition of purposely spreading malicious misinformation. Now, if that doesn't impugn reputation and standing . . .

THE SPEAKER: Please, hon. Acting Opposition House Leader. If such be the case, I would entertain a member rising on a point of order or a point of privilege. Right now we have a specific point of privilege before the House, and that is what we will discuss in this very serious matter.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Part, of course, of the argument about privilege, as I review *Beauchesne* and *Erskine May*, is context, and that's simply what I am trying to establish, context.

So what we have in the Assembly every day are members making allegations and suggestions, and no points of privilege are raised, Mr. Speaker. In this case we don't have an allegation or a suggestion; we simply have a question. I believe that a review of *Hansard* will confirm that.

Mr. Speaker, the Government House Leader makes it very clear that the question upset at least him, if not the Premier. But his mere discomfort, I don't believe, is a *prima facie* case of privilege.

I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that you consider whether or not there is a reason to rule today. I would like an opportunity to review not only the question as it is recorded in *Hansard* but also the Premier's comments immediately following the question and, of course, the Government House Leader's submission on this matter. Now, at that time the Official Opposition House Leader may have additional pertinent observations. A ruling of a question of a *prima facie* case will not be impaired by waiting until Monday, and I would appreciate your consideration unless, of course, you are of the opinion that no breach of privilege has in fact occurred.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River on this point of privilege.

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That an attempt is made by the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to invent a controversy or worse yet to suggest some kind of an impropriety is probably typical of what we expect from the opposition and particularly during question period.

THE SPEAKER: Again, hon. member, I want us to deal with the context of this point of privilege. This is not a time for speech-making. This is the time to deal with a very serious matter raised by the Government House Leader.

3:20

MR. FRIEDEL: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Part of the point of privilege is that the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert made a statement against a very respected person in my constituency, who cannot be here to defend himself in this House.

I want to substantiate the statements that the Government House Leader made in respect to the order of events. The site of the Peace River hospital was selected by the regional health board in conjunction with the town of Peace River, surrounding communities, and

considerable input from local residents. After the site selection was made, the person who owned the land, Mr. Lovsin, could easily have sold this property to the health board. Instead, he chose to donate it. Some people would consider that kind of a donation as very commendable rather than to make such a despicable accusation.

I'm personally aware that Mr. Lovsin is a partner with the Premier in a fishing lodge. I'm also personally aware that that partnership occurred at least a year after the land transaction took place, and I would like to suggest that that transaction was very much an open process. The community was involved, the town of Peace River was involved, the Peace regional health authority was involved, and I don't think there's anything in the documents that could be considered underhanded or in any way linked to some impropriety with the owner and certainly not with the Premier.

I am certainly defending a constituent who cannot be here to speak for himself, and also I believe I would make this point on behalf of the Premier, who for no good reason at all is being dragged into some kind of a made-up story, you know, just as a political attempt to besmirch someone's character. I would certainly ask that you take strong steps to censure this member or whatever else could be done to prevent this kind of action in the House in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To me this was an infrastructure plan that was in place, and there were huge expenditures on it, so I asked the question about why the site was changed. I have now received information about that last one. I got that from the House leader's information that he gave us. I do apologize if anyone interpreted the question to mean any more than it was.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, I'm going to ask you to do something more than what you've just done. There are two things that happened here today. I may make a ruling or not make a ruling depending on how the hon. member chooses to deal with the request made from the chair.

Time and time again statements are made in this House by members with respect to individuals outside this House. Now, in this case no name was mentioned. However, because all of us have to file with the Ethics Commissioner on an annual basis a complete disclosure of who our associates are, it's public knowledge who that individual in question would be by simply going down to the Ethics Commissioner and asking. It's public knowledge. So there is the question of the reputation of the individual outside this House that the chair is also concerned about, and it's not the first time the chair has said that.

The second point has to do, then, with – I gather the apology was directed to the member of the House. So I'll sit down and invite you to in fact consider extending your apology.

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Speaker, I most definitely extend that apology to the person outside of this House as well.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, it's my view and it has always been my approach to try and deal with these matters as they come and try and deal with them as quickly as we possibly can and not defer matters and the like.

I'm going to make a number of comments. We've certainly had a point of privilege raised, and quite frankly my conclusion in my head is that it is a valid point of privilege. I'm quite prepared to basically say that under Standing Order 15(6) I'll find this a *prima facie* case of privilege for the following reasons.

Number one is that members have to be responsible for what they say in this House, absolutely responsible, and there's no shirking of that responsibility. I remember a sage old parliamentarian many years ago telling me: you know, it's a lot easier to talk your way out of this House than it is to talk your way into this House. How true that is. The point about dealing with people who are not inside this House is a very serious one for any member to make any aspersions, innuendo, or anything else.

Secondly, the reason why I would come to that conclusion has to do with the very nature of the question itself and the importance of it all in recognizing that. The Government House Leader is absolutely correct with respect to this. It is this Assembly that had a debate in it, passed legislation, and made a decision that there should be an independent office of this Legislature, an office called the Ethics Commissioner, who should deal with any and all questions that members might have about any and all other members with respect to any kind of dealings.

Further to that, there is an all-party committee which governs the performance of the Ethics Commissioner. Members of all parties sit on it. The Ethics Commissioner has the right, incredible legal authority, has all the documents with respect to everybody's associations, and if there's any suggestion of wrongdoing by any member to another member, they have the responsibility to go to the Ethics Commissioner. Why else would the Assembly have taken all this time, made these decisions, passed legislation, put public dollars into this question if not in fact to ensure the integrity of the House?

So the chair has great difficulty – great difficulty – with respect to this matter and doesn't understand the motivation. The Blues are very, very clear. First question, basically after some preamble:

Why was there no consultation between health, public works, and transportation so that the choice of the hospital site didn't scuttle years of transportation planning and jeopardize the future of several Peace River business owners?

Okay; a valid question. Certainly, the future of several Peace River business owners sort of suggests that somebody got hurt financially.

Then going on:

My second question: why did the government approve the use of the 15-acre west hill site when so many Peace River residents were opposed to that location for the new hospital?

Okay; a valid question, but what it has to do with the future of several Peace River business owners – the chair can't find a connection to that one, so fair game.

Third question:

Finally, can the minister confirm that a co-owner of the new hospital land is also a partner with the Premier in the Eagle Point fishing lodge?

Well, again, it's public information who the Premier's associates would be. Nothing secretive about that. Absolutely open to the public. But what's the purpose of the question other than to perhaps create some aspersions? It's on that point that the chair is really, really concerned, because someone now rose on a point of privilege, and it means that it has to be dealt with.

Now, the positive to this is that the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert did rise and extend an apology. Then on a second occasion the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert was given a further opportunity, and the hon. Member did rise and extend an apology. I would hope that in fact the matter would end there.

3:30

Now, the acting House leader of the Official Opposition said in his remarks that it may be that the Official Opposition House Leader would like to make some comments. But he's not here. Of course, I can't say that, but the fact is, reality is, he's not present in the

House at the moment, so I can't hear from him today, which means I cannot possibly hear from him until Monday. So the choice is to deal with this now and wrap it up or delay it until Monday.

Hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, you heard what I said. I really am greatly reluctant to say that I'm going to find a *prima facie* case of privilege. I think there is greater honour if you just do it one more time and extend an apology to the member outside the House and withdraw your comments, and we can move on. I'm giving you the honour to exit with dignity. Your choice.

MRS. SOETAERT: Sure, Mr. Speaker. I apologize. You know what? I apologize to the member in here and to the . . . [interjection] No, no, to the entire House. This is serious. I apologize to the entire House, to the Premier, and to the person outside of this Assembly as well.

THE SPEAKER: That matter has now come to a close.

Now, hon. acting House leader of the Official Opposition, you wanted to rise on a point of order.

Point of Order

Ministerial Statements in Question Period

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to rise under *Beauchesne* 317, which can be found on page 96 of the sixth edition. It reads:

Points of order are questions raised with the view of calling attention to any departure from the Standing Orders or the customary modes of proceeding in debate or in the conduct of legislative business and may be raised at virtually any time by any Member, whether that Member has previously spoken or not.

I am referring to an exchange between the Member for Red Deer-South and the Acting Provincial Treasurer.

I will note, Mr. Speaker, that at some point during that exchange you yourself rose and suggested to the Acting Provincial Treasurer that there is a place in Routine for ministerial statements, because it certainly sounded to this member that that's what was being provoked from the Acting Treasurer, a ministerial statement about tax policy.

Mr. Speaker, in the answer to the question that was put by the Member for Red Deer-South, the Acting Provincial Treasurer made reference to tabling draft amendments to a bill which was on the Order Paper to be discussed at some future point by this Assembly, very irregular and unusual. Not only was it the ministerial statement aspect of the answer that caught my attention but, in fact, the breach of procedure and protocol by introducing the tabling of draft amendments on a bill of such importance during question period.

I will note that if I understand the intent of those amendments, it would lower the tax rate on income tax that Albertans were required to pay, and the purpose expressed was to keep in line with another provincial government's tax regime. Unfortunately, that lowering of that tax rate won't do the job that it was purported to do. My information is that the tax rate would have to be lowered in combination with the personal exemptions being increased to over \$14,000 before we even got close to appreciating the flow through of the federal tax cuts and keeping pace with the government of Ontario.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's really three separate issues here: one, the misinformation that was provided in the context of the answer; two, the obvious device on the part of the Provincial Treasurer to use question period to hijack time from question period to make a ministerial statement when he has ample opportunity to do that. Of course, the only thing I can suggest is that the reason why the minister wouldn't use Ministerial Statements is that the Official Opposition gets an opportunity to respond, and he didn't want that

to happen, I'm sure. Thirdly, of course, is the very inappropriate use of question period to table amendments to pending legislation, to a bill that's before the Assembly.

So I would ask that you formally call the minister to order on this particular set of breaches. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief on this. First of all, the question as to whether the information was good information or misinformation is really in the eye of the beholder. Obviously, the Acting Provincial Treasurer put forward information which he thought was in response to a bona fide question from a member of this House who is known for asking questions about taxes going down, has developed a reputation in this House for asking questions about taxes going down, who has made a point in this House of raising questions about taxes going down, and the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer responded by giving good news in that context. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, as is my wont, I sat quietly and listened to the presentation made by the Acting Opposition House Leader, and I now find that they haven't got the respect for members of this House that we have.

The comment that was made by the Speaker about this being more appropriately a ministerial statement, which has now been picked up by the Acting Opposition House Leader, I would suggest has been taken well out of context. You, Mr. Speaker, on many occasions encourage ministers answering questions to be brief, and I believe your comment relating to this more appropriately being a ministerial statement was more in the context of the length of the answer rather than where it would be appropriate for the minister to give that information. In any event, it is quite appropriate for a minister in this House being called to account for government policy by a private member in this House to give the information which is being requested, which is what the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer was doing.

With respect to tabling amendments, Mr. Speaker, while we've had discussion earlier this year about bills coming before the House and the timing of bills coming before the House and that sort of thing, there is no obvious protocol of that nature relative to amendments. In fact, it's quite appropriate. I've asked as Government House Leader on many occasions for the opposition to bring forward their amendments long prior to them being brought into the House so that they could be appropriately reviewed in context so that we can determine whether or not they can be supported. The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer clearly indicated that what he had was a draft of an amendment that he was proposing to bring forward. The draft of the amendment clearly could have been brought forward if the opposition had not brought forward a motion which I consider to be in the nature of a hoist motion, but I understand that it is being considered to be a reasoned amendment at second reading of Bill 18.

I think it's quite appropriate for the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer to give the House such information as may be helpful to the House in its determinations, particularly when asked specifically about it by a member of this House who makes it his business to ask those questions on an ongoing basis and when that particular item is not on the Order Paper for discussion on that particular day.

Bill 18 is not on the Order Paper, so having the Acting Provincial Treasurer take the opportunity of a good question to provide information to the House which the House can use in doing its further consideration at a later date of a bill before the House is entirely appropriate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South on this point of order.

MR. DOERKSEN: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Because I was the member who asked the question, I think I have an obligation to speak here. I raised the question on behalf of my constituents. In fact, when we're talking about taxes, it's on behalf of all Albertans. It is important for Albertans to know what the flat tax policy really means in its rollout and implications. I, in fact, have had several individuals from Red Deer who have contacted me, given me their personal financial information, and said: please calculate what the impact is going to be under your new tax system. So I consider that it's a member's privilege to be able to ask questions. I can't predict what the minister is going to answer or how he's going to answer.

3:40

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I'm a little perplexed as to why the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora would raise a point of order, because in his tablings today – and I'm reading from the Blues – he made at least two tablings which refer to this tax rate, to the very issue that we were discussing in my question. In fact, if one were to reflect on past behaviour, a tabling of that nature normally would be foregoing to a question that he would probably be raising later. Now, it didn't happen today, but quite often a tabling prompts a question later on in question period. So this question may in fact have been on his mind for him to ask the minister, but I got to it first, and I'm pleased that I did, because it's a very important question to the people of Alberta.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order. The point of order was with reference to the nature of the answer that was received on the question, not to the nature of the questions themselves.

As you, Mr. Speaker, pointed out yourself at the end of that ramble that we heard this afternoon, there is an opportunity for Ministerial Statements on the Order Paper, and we would expect ministers of this government to respect the Order Paper and to adhere to the process that is listed for us every day. If somebody has a problem with following it, they have the Order Paper in front of them every day.

In fact, the answer to that question was at least a ministerial statement if not a complete platform that could have easily been put forward in a news release or other venues. It was not a short answer to a question, which is what you repeatedly ask for in this Assembly. It was nothing more than a full and complete statement, a platform for him to get his point across, and there are far more appropriate venues for the minister to do that in rather than in the limited time in question period, when we do solicit answers to questions that do not have a venue to be asked in a timely fashion in other manners.

So in that particular instance I would say that the points brought forward by the Member for Red Deer-South were not appropriate to this point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, this point of order arises as a result of an exchange between the hon. Member for Red Deer-South and the Acting Provincial Treasurer, and the time frame for those series of questions was five minutes, which is just a few seconds above the norm for the day, so close but not an issue.

There was an intervention from the chair. All hon. members saw the chair rise and caution the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer that the question period was not a time for ministerial statements, nor was it a time to debate principled issues with respect to a particular bill. That having been said, whatever the issue is, whatever the bill

is is totally neutral to the chair. The chair is looking after the process. The appropriate time to table a document is during Routine, not during question period. The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer, however, is not the only person in the House to have violated that. Tablings should be where we have the tablings situation, and we should not be using the time of the question period to debate a section in the bill.

It's a valid point, but we're not going to tar and feather anybody, the same way we didn't tar and feather the previous individual that there was a point of privilege associated with.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 15

Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate April 20: Mrs. Sloan]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have this opportunity to speak to Bill 15, the Business Corporations Amendment Act. It's been a little while since it was on the floor of the Legislature, and it is a bill that for the most part we do support.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For those who don't remember, I will refresh their memories in terms of the object of this bill. It's to remove the requirements for corporations to meet a solvency test before giving financial assistance by means of loans or guarantees to shareholders, directors, and other associated parties while adding the requirement that any financial assistance must be "in the best interest of the corporation," which is in section 42, Mr. Speaker.

This is a technical bill. It addresses a technical issue of concern to a number of organizations, and it has been brought forward by a number of stakeholders, Mr. Speaker, who have been reviewing this issue for a long time, since about the mid-1980s, if I recall correctly.

Stakeholders who have been responsible for the development of the work here have been the Alberta Law Reform Institute. Over time they have issued three different discussion papers, in the mid to late '80s and then again in 1996, which called for changes to section 42. Industry Canada also issued a March 1996 discussion paper on this recommending changes to section 44 of the Canada Business Corporations Act, all parts that have been incorporated into this bill.

Once the bill was written and brought forward to a variety of stakeholders, there were a few more concerns that were brought forward, and a number of other organizations came forward in the development of amendments. That brings me to an issue of concern that I have with this bill and with other bills like it.

Drafting this kind of legislation, which should be relatively minor in nature once the various stakeholders have been approached and advised, should not then subsequently result in additional amendments, Mr. Speaker. What should happen is that a thorough review should be made prior to the tabling of legislation so that all concerns are brought forward and we don't have to see potential changes to the principle of the bill coming forward at other stages. Faith in the government and their ability to bring forward good, strong legislation would be enhanced by making sure that it was good and strong in the first instance and didn't require changes to it. So that is a bit of a concern that I have, that we continually see instances where legislation is brought forward that isn't up to par, but having said

that, what we see at this stage is satisfactory in light of the fact that we'll be seeing amendments coming forward later.

In the object of this bill there's also requirement for full written disclosure to shareholders and creditors within 90 days of financial assistance provided by a corporation to shareholders, directors, and other associated parties. This is very good, Mr. Speaker. We fully support this. It will allow shareholders and creditors to seek existing remedies available under the act, and should it be determined that the corporation, the shareholders, or the directors have entered into a transaction that is inappropriate and not in the best interest of the corporation, then those shareholders will have remedial action. Always important.

You know, we can see in corporations sometimes where there is a necessity for those kinds of transactions to occur or where it's in the best interest of the corporation for those kinds of transactions to occur, but it's the kind of transaction also that lends itself to activities that may not always be in the best interest of the corporation. So who should always have the final answer in a situation like this are the shareholders and the creditors.

In the past, without the 90-day provision, shareholders and creditors may be ultimately advised of what's occurring but not in a timely enough fashion to take any kind of remedial action that would be beneficial. If creditors don't find out the information until the next tax return is filed or the annual return is done, the same being said for shareholders, the kind of action taken by the corporation may have jeopardized their operations to a point where the corporation itself can't recover.

If this kind of information is disclosed in a timely fashion – in this case it's decided that 90 days is a timely fashion – then that's excellent. There's time to recover from transactions that have occurred that may financially harm the viability of the organization. Ninety days, I am assuming, has been the time determined in consultation with the various stakeholders that have been involved here. I know this bill has been run by the Law Society of Alberta, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta, the Canadian Bankers' Association, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. Those stakeholders unanimously approved the proposed legislation with the amendments, and that's excellent, Mr. Speaker. We also would like to thank all of those associated groups for their work on this legislation and subsequent amendments that we'll see after we're out of second reading.

3:50

I am assuming that they also, then, fully approve the 90 days and that they find it a reasonable time frame for shareholders and creditors to be apprised of any kinds of financial assistance provided by the corporations to directly affected parties and enough time to respond to that. To my way of thinking, 90 days is a bit of a long time line, perhaps not in large corporations, but certainly it's an issue for small corporations where a three-month operating time line can make the difference between the viability and the nonviability of an organization.

Should the shareholders or directors or any other associated parties have the intent to profit themselves first and the organization second, a lot of damage can be done in 90 days, Mr. Speaker. I have personally seen instances of this over the course of my 25-year career working with small businesses in this line of work in helping them secure credit and then negotiating different kinds of loans internally, within organizations, and outside of those organizations. In three months a lot can happen. I am hoping that when we get to committee, the Member for Calgary-North West, who sponsored this bill, will be able to give me a little bit of background in terms of that 90-day stipulation.

I would like to hear the kinds of comments and suggestions that

were made by the various stakeholders, with a particular emphasis on small business operators, in terms of the length of time and how it can affect the cash flows in their organizations. It can be an eternity if there isn't enough cash flow in the organization to operate, so I think that is something we need to take a look at. If you withdraw a large chunk of cash or secure loans that have obligations to be met that aren't met by the original shareholder or director or affected party and the organization itself has to come up with the payments or restructure the debt, I would anticipate that that could adversely affect many organizations.

I know that the stakeholders whom you contacted with regard to this do have a fair representation of small businesses and microbusinesses, so I would like to know what those comments were, the discussions that were held, and if there was any consideration given to two different time lines: one for larger organizations, which have a longer turnaround time in terms of how significantly cash flow can be affected and the time it takes to actually apprise shareholders of changes in their operations, but also for those microbusinesses for which a very small change in cash flow can have a significant effect on their operations. If you could answer those questions for me when we get to the committee stage, I would certainly appreciate that.

When we take a look at the Business Corporations Act and the current section 42, it seeks to protect creditors and shareholders by prohibiting corporations from making loans or guarantees to shareholders and related parties subject to a solvency test. This prohibition applies to loans and guarantees made in relation to a related party in share purchase transactions. Related parties, as I see it, are spouses, children, direct relations, other corporations in which the person is a major shareholder, that kind of thing. The current solvency test is, by everybody's observations, unworkable and increases the transaction costs for businesses in order to approve the beneficial transactions designed to improve the financial viability of the corporation. We certainly agree with that. It's a cumbersome process, and it really just doesn't work. The elimination of the solvency test doesn't weaken available remedies to shareholders, in our opinion. In fact, it reduces the transaction costs for businesses, and that's a good thing.

Certainly I know from my experience over the years and since being elected that in listening to these various organizations who were original stakeholders, anything that government can do to reduce regulation and regulation-associated filing costs, the better it is for the business. We hear a number of numbers being tossed around in terms of the hours businesses spend doing just government-related paperwork, and often it's as much as eight hours a week, which is a full working day, not a full working day for a small business owner, generally speaking, but a generally accepted full working day. The costs associated with the variety of hours of labour put into filling out forms and transaction fees and so on are prohibitive, so anything we can do to assist businesses in that regard is a benefit.

In fact, I would like to see a complete review done of the kinds of regulations that affect businesses and see a substantive and committed approach to reducing those kinds of costs. There is an MLA charged with taking a look at the regulations, but that process seems to have stalled and has for regulations in general. Specific to businesses, I think it would be an excellent process to undertake. Perhaps the Member for Calgary-North West could be the person to chair that kind of a process, given that he has done good work on this bill. With his technical background he is certainly in a position to understand how adversely affected organizations can be because of these kinds of costs. It would be a progressive move and something that people on this side of the House would support.

Perhaps we could take a look at an all-party approach to it so that as you go through the process, any concerns could be addressed at that stage. When we brought changes to a variety of forms of legislation that would be required, it could follow a very speedy process here in the Legislature. I think that would certainly be a win/win situation for everybody, a good example of how government and opposition can work co-operatively together. There have been a few in the past, since I was elected in 1993, but certainly not enough. I think for the most part it isn't because we haven't been prepared to work co-operatively on a variety of issues. This would be an excellent issue to bring forward in that regard and to put in a sunset clause in terms of the reporting process so that it isn't the kind of problem that carries on for a long period of time, so that it's got a time line in it, a beginning and an end, so that businesses, organizations, and other stakeholders can see that their time would not be wasted in participating in this kind of review.

Certainly I know that we have seen any number of proposals from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, over at least the last 10 or 15 years that I've been reading their information, suggesting different kinds of regulations that could be eliminated, that could have sunset clauses attached to them or be adapted in a manner that would be more conducive to conducting business, such as this one was here. We still have the kinds of checks and balances in the system that I think we need with these kinds of loan transactions, but definitely by changing the nature of them, we've improved the ability of businesses to operate by reducing their transaction costs, and that's only a good-news story.

4:00

I'm wondering if the Member for Calgary-North West would also comment on that suggestion when this bill gets to committee. I think it certainly merits attention. It would be good for industry to see that we can work co-operatively and that everyone in this Assembly is supportive of business at all levels of activity within the province and that we want to ensure they can get on with providing their product and selling it in the marketplace and contributing in a global marketplace rather than being deskbound by filling out forms and paying registration fees. I think that's something that certainly needs to be looked at in the near future.

There are already a number of remedies available under the act to shareholders and creditors if they feel that a financial transaction approved by directors or some shareholders is not in the best interests of the corporation, but, once again, the elimination of the solvency test doesn't weaken these remedies. It's beneficial to improving the financial viability of the corporation as I read it, and I wouldn't mind having the sponsor of the bill refer to that, too, when he is next able to speak to the bill.

This bill improves disclosure requirements, I think, by requiring the terms and conditions of financial assistance to be provided to all the shareholders within 90 days with the exception of the microbusinesses and very small businesses that I referred to. It may still be a fast enough turnaround, and I'll look forward to comments on this. This is certainly a major improvement over what we had there before, which was disclosure only at year-end in the annual financial statement. I think that was a very poor setup. It set up a system for abuse and didn't benefit anybody, certainly not shareholders, who didn't get the benefit, and certainly not any creditors there.

That just about concludes my remarks. I think I have one more question that I would like the member to address when he speaks, and that is that we'd like to know about the status of the negotiations with the Alberta Securities Commission to extend these provisions to public companies and reporting issues. I think that's a very good idea, and we think you should be moving forward in that regard as

fast as possible. In fact, if there are any public documents, some detail available on that, we would certainly like to see them if not tabled then at least referred to us so that we can take a look at them.

I look forward to hearing the comments from the Member for Calgary-North West when we get into committee, and I look forward to seeing the amendments. I have no doubt at all that we'll be supporting the bill in its amended form when we get to the end of committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and her remarks regarding Bill 15, the Business Corporations Amendment Act. This amendment, as presented by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West, I think is certainly worthy of support. I noticed from the hon. member's remarks that the stakeholders involved in the consultation as the bill was developed, as the amendments were developed were the Alberta Law Reform Institute, the Law Society of Alberta, and the chartered accountants. In my remarks a little later, particularly around the professional groups, the Law Society and the chartered accountants, and the discussions on section 42 and the solvency and asset tests, I will have some questions for the member who brought this bill forward. I'm looking forward, as is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, to hearing from that member regarding this.

Certainly we want to promote an environment in this province that is going to be comfortable for business to operate in and operate efficiently, not only business that's here now but also in the future. Alberta, we all recognize, has had the fastest growing economy in Canada over the past five years, and we're very lucky in this. I hope that this continues, and I hope that Bill 15 in a small way will be a positive contribution to future growth. I'm not so certain that individuals who are contemplating setting up a business in this province are going to have a look at this amendment and that that is going to be the reason for their decision to locate in this province. I would like to hope that perhaps in some small way this will, in effect, make the economy of this province more noticeable for investment.

We all know there is a need for capital investment in this province. We look at northern Alberta. We look at the Fort McMurray area in particular, and we see the investment that's going on in heavy oil. An abundance of natural advantages, one of them being the tar sands and the abundant supply of oil that's captured in them, is the foundation for our flourishing economy, and this positive investment climate has allowed Alberta businesses to compete successfully not only with each other but in the global economy. We look at encouraging the diversification of our economy and what that will do for job creation. This could go on even when the commodity prices for natural resources, whether it be ethane, whether it be heavy oil out in Lloydminster, whether it be synthetic crude, whether it be conventional crude – what will this amendment do whenever conditions are not favourable or there is a downturn in the economy? Will this amendment in a small way encourage enough diversification of the economy so that there are not these dips where there is a great deal of unemployment?

Now, what will this amendment do to help attract corporate headquarters to this province? We see that Calgary already has the second highest number of head offices of any city in Canada. If we look at Toronto, Toronto has approximately five times the population of Calgary, but on a per capita basis Calgary exceeds any city

by far. Where does Edmonton rank in this? Well, unfortunately, if you look at the top 10 in the country, Toronto would have the highest number of corporate offices, Calgary would be second, and Edmonton would be 10th. Now, I'm sure the hon. Member for Calgary-North West had that in mind when he not only went through his extensive consultation on this bill but also as he spoke to the various stakeholders.

The growth in business and in the number of businesses in this province since 1995, Mr. Speaker, has been the fastest of any province in Canada. This tells us something about the Business Corporations Act, and it also tells us about this amendment. Maybe this is the foundation that we need. This is symbolic because it displays to the business community that Members of this Legislative Assembly are listening and are reacting to their concerns. Now, it is interesting to note that in 1999 the number of businesses in Alberta increased by over 4 percent. That is also the strongest among the provinces.

4:10

Earlier I was mentioning section 42 and the solvency and asset testing under section 42. I understand there is no accepted definition of the value of assets. There is also uncertainty as to what should be included as a liability here. Now, this resulted in a certain unwillingness by CAs, or chartered accountants, to give an opinion as to the value of a corporation. They did not want to do this. They felt cautious. Of course, this required companies to hire legal counsel, and these are expensive costs. As I'm told, it could be anywhere between \$3,000 and \$50,000 – and this is per transaction – to ensure that these transactions are in accordance with the requirements of the Business Corporations Act.

Now, the uncertainties created by section 42 raised transaction costs for businesses and prevented them from undertaking transactions beneficial to their shareholders and to their creditors. Word of this is obviously going to get out. We think of the provincial corporate income tax rates in this province. We think of the provincial small business corporation income tax rates everywhere. The Alberta small corporation business income tax rate is competitive. It's 25 percent lower than Ontario's. This amendment will also make businesses more competitive. Will it mean, Mr. Speaker, that there is a greater competitive advantage? I don't know, but certainly it would be one thing that we could look at.

Lower operating costs. Certainly, for some businesses at least, this is going to lower operating costs. We think of lower operating costs for businesses, and we also think of lower operating costs for households. When it comes to the cost of living, Alberta is the place to live. You would think that hon. members across the way would be talking about this, but they're silent. The best ambassadors of this province, Mr. Speaker, are businesses when they travel and are looking for new markets or looking to have product development. We need to talk about the prices of goods and services and our utilities. Oh, I shouldn't have said utilities, I believe, because they're going up.

Alberta is an attractive place to live and to do business. Costs, as I said earlier, are certainly competitive with the rest of Canada and the United States. We look at our combination of taxes, our skilled workforce, and the well-established infrastructure. In some places it needs improvement, and hopefully these improvements are going to be made in a timely and economic fashion.

We look at initial investment costs if, for instance, a business is to locate or relocate. Hopefully we would get our share of relocations. Of the largest cities in Canada for initial investment costs, Edmonton is in the top 10. I believe it's ranked second. Calgary is ranked seventh. This is good news for both cities.

Now, we look at the annual location-sensitive costs. We look at Edmonton and Calgary. They're both ranked in costs. Edmonton is second, and Calgary is fourth. That's good, but what will this bill do to that in the future? Well, it's going to help. We are now going to be on a level playing field with Saskatchewan because similar legislation has already been in force in Saskatchewan since the early 1990s. There are no cities that I can think of, even Saskatoon and Regina, that can compete with investment costs or location-sensitive costs like Edmonton and Calgary can. Ontario has recently introduced amendments to their Business Corporations Act, and the federal government, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie said earlier, is also examining changes to the Canada Corporations Act.

Now, we look at another indicator of how businesses are welcomed in this province: office rental rates. I don't know if many of the businesses that are going to start up are going to have the capital to just buy property. You look at Edmonton and Calgary. They're both well placed. Edmonton has the lowest overall office rents among major Canadian cities, and Calgary's rates are down, as I understand it, from last year. This is going to be further good news for the business community.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, as we look at diversifying the province economically for the future, this is just one small stepping-stone to that. It is going to be a good bill in a small way. As I close, we need to highlight just exactly what we are going to accomplish with this piece of legislation. Certainly there will be the requirement of the written disclosure within 90 days to shareholders of the terms and conditions of any financial assistance between a corporation and its shareholders or directors, the removal of the requirement to meet the solvency testing, which I believe we were concerned about in section 42, before giving financial assistance or loans or guarantees to shareholders, directors, and other associated parties or individuals while adding the requirement that any financial assistance must be "in the best interest of the corporation."

I'm certainly going to support this amendment to the Business Corporations Act. The amendments are designed to enhance legitimate business activities that are deemed to be in the best interests, as I said before, of the shareholders, the directors, and the creditors. This is one more small step in welcoming business and using their expertise to diversify our economy. We are going to no longer have all the spikes that come with commodity prices, not only in petroleum and natural gas prices but also in grain prices and beef prices. We shall see how this works. I'm sure it will. I look forward, as my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie said earlier, to the remarks from the sponsor of this bill.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks at this time on Bill 15. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

4:20

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak this afternoon in favour of Bill 15, the Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000. It's a bill that provides a good example of where government plays a valid role in regulating the free-market economy. We hear much these days about the benefits of a free-market economy, and we hear from the proponents of free markets, some of whom feel that an unfettered market would be the best in terms of future directions. This bill reminds us that that's not true, that unfettered free enterprise would carry with it a great number of difficulties, and we would all suffer for it. It provides a good example of where as a community and through our elected government we step in and say that these are the kinds of rules that will be

used to try to bring order and stability to the marketplace; in this case, the dealings in terms of corporations and the activity of corporations vis-a-vis buyouts and the relationship with shareholders and the board of directors.

It's an interesting set of amendments when it's viewed in the context of what we saw with the behaviour of Onex and Air Canada buying out Canadian Airlines. I think that for a lot of us, who don't spend a lot of time examining the details of those kinds of operations, it provided a bit of insight into the kinds of difficulties corporations can find themselves in when they're looking at buyout bids, when they're looking to sell their assets. We learned in that instance about poison pills, something I hadn't heard of, in terms of a corporation setting in place such staggering future obligations that it could be used as a mechanism for fending off takeover by a competitor.

We've had a look at the system to the south, the American, in recent weeks with the government there trying to regulate or to curtail the interests of the Microsoft Corporation and what the government believes is a company that is not operating in the interests of the public. So it's rather timely that we have this legislation in front of us and have an opportunity to think about corporate behaviour in our province and how those corporations can be helped and can be enabled to operate in the best interests of their shareholders and, of course, in the best interests of the public.

There seem to be at least five major principles that undergird Bill 15. One of those principles, of course, is really self-evident, and it's one of the reasons why the bill is before us. That principle would state that businesses should be able to operate in a timely fashion in the best interests of shareholders and creditors and boards of directors. The legislation that this bill amends had encumbered corporations and tried to fulfill that obligation. It made the solvency test really curtailed and made inflexible a company that was trying to raise money, that was trying to secure funding for buying other businesses.

It wasn't that it was just a provision in the act. It was that that provision was almost impossible to act upon, and proving that a company, a corporation was solvent became a very onerous task. Companies, corporations would have difficulty finding accountants, finding experts who would attest to the solvency of the corporation, in some cases, unless that solvency was so overwhelmingly evident. With corporations, many of which have a variety of assets, this really slowed down their operations or made the kinds of things they often wanted to do almost impossible. So that principle, I think, is supported by Bill 15, and I think it's a valid principle and one that we need to make sure all of our legislative changes support.

A second principle that seems to be endorsed by the bill is that legal restraints should not unfairly curtail the operations of corporations. We've heard this time and time again, that the kinds of regulations, the kinds of laws governing corporations should be those that are fair but certainly not those that are unfair in terms of curtailing their operation. It's a principle I think everyone would endorse. Let's make sure that the regulations and the laws that are put in place don't prevent corporations from doing those things they should logically be able to carry out were it not that they were being constrained by a law governing their operations.

A third principle is the principle of best interest, and this is an interesting one, Mr. Speaker, because the principle that corporations must operate in the best interest of that corporation and the shareholders and the public, for that matter, is one that I think again has general support. Yet we have, I know, coming before us when we get to the committee stage of the bill an amendment, because although the words "best interest" sound good and they're in this version of the bill that we have in front of us, it's been pointed out

by some of the stakeholders that best interest in itself is open to wide interpretation. The bill removes a set of restrictions in terms of solvency, but if we were to include in the bill the words "best interest," the feeling by those stakeholders is that we would then impose another whole set of restrictions and an even more difficult set of restrictions in terms of trying to prove what is in the best interest and what isn't in the best interest.

Again, I understand that the government intends to bring forward an amendment when we get to the committee stage of the bill that will remove that term "best interest." I found it interesting because when I first read the bill, it was a term that I found very attractive, and I was only reminded by one of the stakeholders that the kinds of difficulties involved in trying to prove best interest could really, really work to the detriment of corporations and shareholders.

4:30

I think another principle that this bill supports is that corporations must be able to use a wide range of tools, if you will, to operate successfully in today's financial climate. That again, for those corporations and the shareholders in it, is an important principle, that they are given maximum freedom to use the tools at their disposal to work in the interests of the corporation and the corporation's shareholders. Again, it's a sound principle. It's a principle that operates within our notion of corporations being good corporate citizens, as are most of these principles that underline the bill. We see, with the kind of knowledge-based economy we have and the speed with which assets can be transferred and liabilities undertaken, that corporations really have to be flexible, and they have to be in a position to use a wide variety of tools to be successful in today's climate. It's a good principle. It's a principle that the amendments to Bill 15 support.

I think another principle – and it's a more general one – is that there has to be a legal framework that protects the interests of corporations and shareholders and creditors. We've added to that framework in this province over the years, and it's a framework that is being constantly adjusted to accommodate changing marketplace conditions and changing ways of doing business. It goes back to my opening comments about the need for government to play a role in regulating and making sure that the free-market economy that we have serves all of society and not just special interests or special segments of that society. In that way Bill 15 is, I think, a good move in terms of strengthening that legal framework and strengthening the kind of protection that we provide for those involved in the marketplace.

A further principle that I think Bill 15 supports and that I think is an important one is that there is a public interest in a stable and a disciplined corporate climate. I think that's a principle that we would all defend very, very strongly. Yes, these amendments are directed at corporate behaviour, but let there be no mistake that there is a huge public interest in making sure that that corporate behaviour is such that the marketplace is stable, that it's a marketplace in which people around the world can have confidence they can come and be part of and the rules of fairness and equity will prevail. That public interest is an important principle and, as I said, one that's supported by the bill.

Those are really most of the comments I'd have about the principles of the bill. When the amendments are brought forward, Mr. Speaker, and there's more detailed discussion of the bill at the committee stage as it proceeds through the Legislature, I look forward to supporting it. I think the government has done a good job of consulting and responding to the interests of stakeholders and the marketplace. These kinds of changes to the Business Corporations

Act are changes that are for the better, and I think we'll all profit from them.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise this afternoon to address Bill 15, the Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000, that's been sponsored by the Member for Calgary-North West.

It's my understanding that one of the highlights of this particular bill is to remove the requirement to meet the solvency test before giving financial assistance to shareholders, directors, and associated parties while adding a requirement that any financial assistance must be in the best interest of the corporation.

An additional highlight is that there's a requirement for a written disclosure within 90 days to shareholders of the terms and conditions of any financial assistance between a corporation and its shareholders and directors. This in fact will allow shareholders and creditors to seek existing remedies available under the act should it be determined that the corporation, its shareholders, or directors have entered into a transaction that is inappropriate and not in the best interests of the corporation.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie I think rightly pointed out that this is a technical bill. It's not a very large bill in the number of pages, but it is a technical bill that has come about as a result of a fair amount of consultation with some of those stakeholders that were involved in the development of these amendments to the Business Corporations Amendment Act: the Law Society of Alberta, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta, the Canadian Bankers Association, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and Alberta Chambers of Commerce.

I know that the government is sometimes fond of indicating that the Official Opposition is not in support of private business. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we very much stand on the record as being supportive of industry in our province. We do, however, draw the line when it comes to industry entering the field of the provision of public health care. But in this particular case it is an issue that I will most likely support, in terms of the amendments, because they are designed to enhance legitimate business activities that are considered to be in the best interest of shareholders, directors, and creditors.

From the consultation that was undertaken with the stakeholders, it soon became apparent that the current solvency test under section 42 is unworkable and increases the transaction cost for business in order to approve beneficial transactions designed to improve the financial viability of the corporation. Although there are already remedies under the act available to shareholders and creditors if they feel that a financial transaction approved by the directors or some shareholders is not in the best interests of the corporation, the elimination of the solvency test won't actually weaken any available remedies but will improve the requirements that are within the act.

What I find surprising, however, having been in this Legislative Assembly now for seven years, is that it almost seems to be a habit by the provincial government, in bringing forward legislation, that amendments seem to occur even though there has been a fair amount of work that was provided on a piece of legislation. It's my understanding that when this particular act is passed from second reading into Committee of the Whole, there is already an amendment that will be brought forward to section 42(2), I believe, as well. We just had an example today, where on Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, the Acting Provincial Treasurer tried to bring in his amendment through question period. Even though there are vast resources the government has at its disposal, it seems to be,

as I indicated, almost a habit that legislation is provided in this Assembly and, lo and behold, there are amendments that occur at the Committee of the Whole stage.

4:40

What is even more surprising is what occurs with regards to closure in this Assembly, where bills are rushed through this Legislative Assembly. It has happened 26 times in the last seven years that bills are rushed through. There's not adequate debate. There's not adequate time provided in that Committee of the Whole stage, and lo and behold, sure enough, what occurs is that the government either in the same year or in the following year brings in amendments. I can remember in particular one instance where the amendments were larger than the bill that was passed. I believe it had to do with an education act.

We have in front of us a living example of that with regards to the private health care bill that recently closure was brought in on. What we have in fact is the situation where there were amendments brought in, and I guarantee that if that particular bill is passed and if that bill is not laid aside and withdrawn, we will be back in this Legislative Assembly in the very near future trying to amend the holes that have been created and the problems that have been created by that particular piece of legislation.

Bill 15 is another technical piece of legislation. In listening to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, he indicated that it was very important to the business sectors within our province and that what in fact is required are some amendments to the Business Corporations Act in order to ensure that Alberta is indeed open to business.

Two main issues that have been brought forward by Bill 15 are with regards to the solvency requirements, the solvency test, as well as the requirement of a full written disclosure to shareholders. This is similar to legislation that we see in Saskatchewan and Ontario, and in fact even the federal government is examining some changes to the Corporations Act. As I indicated earlier, this issue has been the topic of extensive review since the mid-1980s, and there were three discussion papers that were issued calling for these changes to section 42, so the issue does seem to have been studied at fair length. I wonder why it did take so long to enact some of the recommendations that have been put forward as a result of these extensive reviews, and I'd be interested in hearing a little bit more as to what the background was and what the holdups were in terms of providing the amendments to the act.

I did hear and would also be interested in finding out – the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie had asked about what the status is of the negotiations with the Alberta Securities Commission to extend these provisions to public companies and reporting issues. That would be interesting to find out as well.

The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods as usual was very succinct in his comments in dealing with the principles of the bill and looking at the fact that the bill appears to support the public interest and is involved in dealing with some of the issues around regulating the market economy.

The issues that we see within this particular bill have been reiterated in terms of the solvency and asset tests that were a difficulty under section 42 and that there is no currently accepted definition of realizable value of assets. There's also uncertainty as to what should be included as liabilities. The result, therefore, is that chartered accountants were often unwilling to give an opinion as to the value of a corporation, and this required companies to hire legal counsel, at a cost of \$3,000 to \$50,000 per transaction, to ensure that these transactions were in accordance with the requirements of the Business Corporations Act. The uncertainties created by section 42 raised transaction costs for businesses and prevented them from

undertaking beneficial transactions for the shareholders and creditors.

We would never want to be accused of standing in the way of having a smooth process whereby transactions could occur and having unnecessary limitations to corporations and companies in terms of additional costs that are a burden and not required. So the amendments that are put forward are considered to be in the best interests of the corporation and, I would assume, also in the best interests of the consumers. In looking at the bill – and I realize it's the Business Corporations Amendment Act – I would appreciate any comments that the mover of the bill has with regards to any potential impacts on consumers.

There is a fair amount of discussion that has occurred with regards to shareholders, directors, and other associated parties, but even in the list of stakeholders that I have here in my notes, it does not appear that the Consumers' Association was involved, and perhaps there is no role for the Consumers' Association. But I would appreciate knowing if in fact there had been any thought given to involving the Consumers' Association and if not, why not, just to be assured that there is no real impact that could in fact be downloaded to any consumers who are partaking in or involved with any of these corporations. Again, because it is a technical bill that seems to deal with a very specific area of business dealings, it may be totally irrelevant in terms of the impact on consumers, and they may not have been considered as part of the other associated parties that are involved in terms of any of the amendments that are put forward. I believe in always looking and seeing whether there is a flip side to a coin and ensuring that there are no unintentional effects as a result of any changes that occur.

From what I understand, the consultation appears to have been fairly thorough. The input seems to have been taken, and what we have is a bill that, as I indicated, is not very long but potentially could have some impacts on businesses within Alberta and hopefully some positive impacts on businesses.

4:50

The only note of caution again is, as I indicated earlier, that we sometimes have bills that are brought forward in this Legislative Assembly that in fact are very complicated. They may be long, they may be short, but what occurs is that somewhere in between – and I have mentioned this before with regards to some of the other bills I have addressed – when we look at some of the issues and the consultation that occurs and then the movement from the consultation process to the wordsmithing, sometimes what ends up occurring is that the words mean something different than what the stakeholders had intended. Perhaps that's why we now see that there will be, as I indicated at the outset, an amendment brought to the Committee of the Whole stage, which, I would assume, we will be moving into in the near future.

The whole issue is one of ensuring that legitimate business activities within this province are enhanced and that individuals are protected in terms of ensuring that the best interests of shareholders, directors, and creditors are met.

So with those few words, I will take my place. If there are any other comments, I would be more than pleased to listen to any of the comments that other members may have. I also look forward to hearing from the mover as to some of the issues that not only I have brought up but the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. There may have been some other members that I missed and didn't quite hear what their comments were. I think we have discussed this issue, as we do issues in our caucus, to try and come to a full understanding, and there are some questions still that, as I indicated,

I would appreciate the mover providing comments on. The comments do not have to be long, but I think it would help to provide a full understanding of what Bill 15, Business Corporations Amendment Act, is attempting to rectify.

I'm just checking to make sure I've covered all of the areas under the bill – I think I have – and the points that I wished to make and will now take my place. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

Bill 17

Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate March 20: Mr. Hancock]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure this afternoon to speak to Bill 17, the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000. I'd like to commend the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for the work he did on this legislation. It is legislation that I can certainly vote for, and I would hope all members of the Assembly would vote for it.

There are certainly a few observations I would like to make on the bill, Mr. Speaker. It is a bit of a housekeeping bill, and the few amendments that will be made certainly will help to strengthen this bill. They will help to clarify the intent of the bill. For those reasons I think these changes are not too controversial, and some of them in fact are very good.

Now then, there are amendments in sections 43(e), 45(3)(b), and section 109(b). I would like to look at these and do a brief analysis by section.

In looking at section 43(e), what we see here is that this is part of the credit and personal reports section of the act. As the legislation currently stands, the reporting agency must furnish "reports for gain or profit or on a reciprocal non-profit basis, and" must be "designated by the regulations." That amendment would change this "and" to an "or," meaning that a reporting agency that fulfills the first set of criteria set out in subsection (i) can be considered an official reporting agency without being designated in the regulations. It also means that the minister can designate a person a reporting agency without having to meet the first set of criteria in subsection (i). So we see by this amendment, Mr. Speaker, that simply by changing the word "and" to "or," we are ensuring that the reporting agencies are covered by the act as soon as they are established.

The second amendment that is included in this particular act is section 45(3)(b). Now, section 45 is also part of the credit and personal reports section of the act. It deals with the information that cannot be included in a report. Subsection (b) deals with the reporting of debts. As it currently stands now, Mr. Speaker, "actions, accounts or debts" cannot be reported if they "cannot be pursued because of the expiration of limitation periods." The amendment clarifies the term "limitation periods" by stating that unfavourable information about a debt cannot be reported if it has been more than 6 years since the last payment on that debt or more than 6 years since the debt was incurred. I understand that this part of the legislation is consistent with other provinces.

Now then, the amended section only mentions "debt" and deletes "actions" and "accounts." Under section 45(3)(b) this would come into effect on March 1, 2000. So all this information on the debtors, Mr. Speaker, will have to be purged from the records of Alberta debtors after two years. This does cause some concerns in that Alberta is changing with this new limit of actions, and in some

respects this will put us out of step with other provincial jurisdictions.

Then the last section that is amended by this act is section 109(b). In section 109(b) this amendment changes the term "a person" to the term "an individual" in the definition of "collector" in the collection practices section of the act. Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, the previous section, section 109(a), defining "collection agency," in which the term "a person" is also used, is not similarly changed. Legally the word "person" includes under the current legislation corporate bodies, which was not the original intent of this legislation. So the amendment to the act will make it clear, Mr. Speaker, that only licensed individuals are to be covered.

5:00

So with those few comments I would like to conclude what I have to say here on Bill 17, and I would urge that all members of the Assembly do support this bill and these amendments. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a few brief comments that I would like to make on Bill 17, the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000. It's interesting to see that this bill is not substantive in nature, in my opinion. We've got a few sections that are being amended and really overall, to me, reflect slight changes and are providing some clarification. The changes that are being affected here in a general sense speak to streamlining the process and addressing some of the concerns that we have heard from businesses and corporations in the past and those associated stakeholders involved with them.

This is an excellent bill to be discussing after Bill 15, because in many respects they have similar overall concerns when we talk about reducing regulations and streamlining processes for businesses doing business in the province of Alberta. This is another good example of the kind of legislation that could be addressed through an all-party committee, because what we really need to do is address the overall concerns that organizations have in this province about the kind of regulation they have and how very small changes in words can make a big difference to the requirements they have to adhere to, sometimes requirements that are excessive, duplicated, or just simply not necessary.

Section 43(e) would fall into that category. As part of the credit and personal reports section of the act as the legislation currently stands, reporting agencies have to furnish "reports for gain or profit or on a reciprocal non-profit basis, and [also be] designated by the regulations." When you change that from an "and" to an "or," then you start to get into a situation that is much fairer for organizations. To have them have that kind of duplication is not reasonable, and definitely we want adequate reporting standards but not excessive ones or requirements that will become a burden for organizations. So this is, in one very small section with one very small word changed, an example of how we can accomplish this and still mean that reporting agencies will fulfill the sets of criteria as set out in the subclause in the appropriate section, Mr. Speaker. That's a good-news story.

These are the kinds of small changes that can make a huge difference to organizations and that we should take a look at doing in a more substantive manner to lots of regulations, not just a few of them. We've seen two before us in the House this session, and it would be my wish that we would see many more than just two, because we need to seriously address the concerns that we're hearing from outside organizations.

What also happens with this change, Mr. Speaker, is that the

minister can designate a person or a reporting agency without having to meet the first set of criteria in subclause (i), which once again makes it a slightly more streamlined process and gets rid of some of that horrible paperwork that organizations not only find tedious and onerous but can't find any relevant use for or applicability to their organization. So, once again, good news. [interjection] It is good news, and it's nice to be able to agree with something that this government has done, however small it is. It's a small change, but it's good.

Section 45 is also part of the credit and personal reports section of the act, and here it deals with information that cannot be included in the report. One of the subsections deals with the reporting of debts, and under the current legislation we find that accounts or debts cannot be reported if they cannot be pursued because the limitation period has expired. This amendment clarifies the term "limitation periods" by stating that unfavourable information about a debt cannot be reported if it has been more than six years since the last payment on that debt or more than six years since the debt was incurred.

The section only mentions debt underneath "actions" and "accounts." This is good news on a number of fronts, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about it just from a tax perspective. If you're listing a debt on your books, it has to be a reasonable time period before you can write that off against your income as something you can never clarify. I have seen some instances in years past where Revenue Canada has deemed it still collectible even though the debt is very old and it's been many years since any collection has been made on it.

So it's excellent to be having a clarification of this ruling for many purposes, not the least of which is income tax purposes. If Revenue Canada decides they don't like a particular company, they can be quite oppressive in terms of their requirements and the meeting of the letter of the law. To them an accounts receivable is an accounts receivable even if the owners of the organization believe it can never be collected. So for us to see an amendment here clarifying the term "limitation periods" is very good from that perspective. It also gives some operating guidelines to businesses new and old who don't know how to handle these things or what they should do or if there is a rule of thumb or a standard practice or some piece of legislation that they are bound to have to follow. This sets this out quite clearly.

I'm not sure what the government's intentions are in terms of the reporting requirements for this. How will they be notifying organizations? Is there some current agreement that stakeholders who are involved in the process of putting this bill through will undertake to talk about these changes in their publications, or has the government undertaken some sort of role in the information-sharing process? It would be nice to have had those answers for us here; we don't have them yet. Perhaps we could have an undertaking by the government to provide those answers, because while these are small changes, they are substantive to some organizations, and they should get to know what it is in terms of what the requirements are going to be for them and once again share the good news about regulations being changed.

5:10

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about the changes happening in section 109(b), where the amendment is changing the term "a person" to the term "an individual" in the definition of "collector" in the collection practices section of the act. This is also good, because to be accurate, it wouldn't always be a person who would fall under the definition of a collector and in fact in most cases it isn't. It's an organization, it's a company, it's a department, or something of that nature. It isn't definitively a person. A small

change, but it makes it more accurate and correct than what we've seen in the past, so that's good.

It's surprising to me though, Mr. Speaker, that we haven't seen the previous subsections defining collection agency also changed to provide some consistency throughout the bill. I would expect that having had this shortfall in the legislation pointed out to them, the government will undertake to make these changes in a miscellaneous statutes act, if not in time for this spring then in the fall sitting. It's a minor change, but it cleans it up a little bit, and if we're going to be doing some work on that, then we should do the work completely. I think that would be a very good idea.

I think that concludes all the remarks I have on Bill 17 at this

time. Once again, minor changes that we can agree to, so good work on the part of the sponsor of this bill. Once again, I would like to see this kind of legislation referred to a more substantive committee that would review these kinds of regulatory changes in a more comprehensive fashion and better address the needs of businesses that operate throughout this province and provide a substantive amount of tax revenue to this government.

So with those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a second time]

[At 5:12 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 8, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/08

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, would you please remain standing after the prayer for the singing of our national anthem.

Fifty-five years ago on, May 8, 1945, the war in Europe ended. As we pray, would you bow your heads in silence as we especially remember those who died in that long and costly struggle.

Almighty God, we give thanks for Your servants who died in defence of peace and freedom. Let us remember them. Amen.

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from 142 residents of Alberta from Spruce Grove, St. Albert, and Edmonton urging “the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care” in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present to the Assembly today. They both state:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

The first one is signed by citizens from Berwyn, Sherwood Park, Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, and Edmonton; the second one from Cochrane and Calgary.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly today on behalf of many Calgarians. These individuals are asking “the assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald.”

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased today to rise and table petitions signed by 151 citizens of the communities of Stony Plain, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, Ardrossan, and Edmonton. These citizens petition “the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.”

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two separate petitions that I would like to present to the Assembly this afternoon.

The first has been signed by residents of Edmonton, and it reads:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta, petition the Legislative assembly to urge the government to stop promoting/implementing Bill 11 and the privatization of public health care.

Mr. Speaker, the second petition I table on behalf of 49 residents of Sherwood Park who attended a church service last weekend.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta and as members of Sherwood Park United Church, petition the Legislative Assembly to add our names to the list of Albertans who oppose the proposal to allow private for-profit hospitals in Alberta. We agree with the health reform but wish it to occur within the existing public system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to present a petition bearing a total of 179 signatures that calls upon the Legislative Assembly to “maintain Kananaskis Country in a natural state,” to “deny development approval” for the projects proposed for that region, and to “create a Wildland . . . Park” in Spray and Kananaskis valleys.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition today. It’s signed by 200 Albertans from Beaumont, Edmonton, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Ardrossan, and Grande Prairie. The petition reads:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

This brings the total number of signatures on this petition up to today to 21,925.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table with the Legislature a petition from 189 Calgarians.

We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of [the province] of Alberta to urge the Government to:

- (1) maintain Kananaskis Country in a natural state . . .
- (2) deny development approval to any intensive recreational developments . . . and
- (3) create a Wildland Provincial Park that protects the Kananaskis and the Spray River Valleys.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before we move on to the next item in the routine, might we revert briefly back to Introduction of Visitors.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I’m honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a distinguished guest who is with us today, the president of the

International Amateur Athletic Federation, Mr. Lamine Diack. As well as being president of the IAAF, Mr. Diack is currently president of the African athletic confederation, a member of the International Olympic Committee, and the president of the National Olympic Committee of Senegal. His role has been as track and field athlete or as coach and as committee member or president. His continuing commitment to amateur athletics has remained constant.

Mr. Diack has now involved the city of Edmonton in that commitment as the city will host the 2001 IAAF World Championships in Athletics. Mr. Speaker, this is significant in that Edmonton will be the first North American city ever to host these prestigious international championships, and of course these games will feature the world's best track and field athletes from over 200 countries. The IAAF World Championships in Athletics is the third largest sporting event in the world with an anticipated international viewing audience of 4 billion people. This makes the championship third in scope only to the Summer Olympic Games and World Cup soccer.

Mr. Speaker, we are pleased Mr. Diack is visiting the city of champions and seeing all it has to offer. Accompanying Mr. Diack are Istvan Gyulai, general secretary of the IAAF, Jack Agrios, chairman of the board of the 2001 championships, and Ed Zemrau, member of the board of directors at this time. I would ask that Mr. Diack and his party seated in your gallery rise and receive the warm welcome of this Legislature.

1:40

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to public health care that I presented last week be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, request the petition I presented in the Assembly on the 4th of May of this year representing 160 signatures from Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Assembly on Thursday, May 4 regarding the disruptive and divisive labour dispute at the *Calgary Herald* be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented last week now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I gives me great pleasure to rise and with your permission seek that the petition I tabled on May 2 in regards to urging the government to stop the promotion of private health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise this afternoon to ask that the petition I presented the other day now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the [Legislative] assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, request that the petition I tabled last week from Albertans opposing private health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I presented two petitions on Thursday, May 4. I now request that those be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned petition the [Legislative] assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*.

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund I would like to table the report of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund for the 1999-2000 fiscal year.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to file with the Assembly today five copies of the 1999 Farmers' Advocate annual report. This Farmers' Advocate is the only such office in North America that offers advice to farmers and helps settle disputes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table *Connecting Voices, Creating Choices*, the second publication of the Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise to table invitations with respect to two very important community events that will be happening this week. The first is for the Support Network of Edmonton, Theresa Comrie's champagne luncheon occurring Friday, May 12 here in Edmonton at the Hotel Macdonald, and also the Girl Guides of Canada, Edmonton area annual area awards and appreciation dinner, which will be occurring May 10 here in Edmonton at the Delta south-side hotel.

My third tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the required number of copies of a policy framework for homelessness issued by the Alberta Department of Community Development, family and special purpose housing, dated January 26, 2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table a letter which I sent to the Prime Minister last Friday urging him to fight for public health care for all Canadians.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings. I'll move quickly through them. The first is a letter from Barb Baker to the hon. Prime Minister of Canada regarding Bill 11 in Alberta and explaining from her perspective why Albertans have lost faith in the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, the second is another update on the VoteAlberta.org web site poll on Bill 11, and what it shows now is that 77 percent of the 3,077 voters at this web site are against Bill 11. That's another erosion in what little support there was for Bill 11.

Mr. Speaker, the next is a copy of the web site guest book for Mr. John Mills of Lethbridge, where several Albertans have expressed their concerns regarding Bill 11 and posted those on the web site.

Mr. Speaker, my next tabling is copies of the government of Alberta Bill 11, Alberta Health Care Protection Act web site, Bill 11 Debate Summary for May 3, 2000, which shows yet another distortion in how the government is communicating with Albertans. It no longer summarizes the debate; it now puts an editorial comment on the debate.

Mr. Speaker, finally, copies of a reply dated May 4 from the Alberta Treasury freedom of information and protection of privacy officer refusing to give any information, in fact suppressing 17 pages of information on the government of Alberta's 11 percent flat tax plan. Even though they said, "Just ask us," they don't want to give the information.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a report by Victor Blanc from the *Cite libre* magazine, spring edition: Is a Two-Tier Health-Care System the Right Answer? He concludes that no, it is not.

The second is a synopsis of a report that was completed by John Yates which indicates that "waiting times for appointments in many NHS specialties are increasing – yet the same consultants can be seen privately within a few days."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three letters for tabling today. Each one of these letters is opposed to Bill 11 and seeks its withdrawal.

The first one is by Michelle Laing-LeClerc of Beaumont. Her letter is addressed to the Premier and expresses grave concerns about the bill and requests him to withdraw the bill.

The second letter is from Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, from the chairperson, Prince Albert district health board, Carol Beck. The letter, addressed to me, is asking me to oppose Bill 11 and seek its withdrawal or defeat in the Assembly.

The last one, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from Carol Larsen from Standard. Her letter is addressed to the Minister of Health and Wellness, and Miss Larsen is also seeking the withdrawal of Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

1:50

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to table a letter this afternoon from Keith Walker to the Premier of the province expressing Keith's disappointment with this government's move to develop the Spray Valley by Genesis Land Development Corp. He would like Kananaskis to stay as it is.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter to the Premier from the grade 6 class at St. Anne school. This is outlining the reasons why they are opposed to Bill 11.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five different letters here. They're all concerned about Bill 11 and their portion of tax dollars going to private health care. They don't approve of that. This is from Gary Comer, Vic Mastronardi, Doug Edwards, P. Lemoine, and Gerald Larson.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a program of a performance I saw on Thursday. This *Mama Mia! Me A Mama?* is at the Varscona theatre. It's written by homegrown talent, Cathleen Rootsart.

Thanks very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter I received from the Premier of Manitoba "regarding the issue of the shortage of health professionals that is facing our health care system" across the entire country.

The second tabling this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is the complete program from The King's University College graduation ceremonies, which occurred Saturday, April 29 at the West End Christian Reformed Church. This is the 14th graduation of the institution. There were 119 graduates. In the first graduation ceremony, it's interesting to note, there were four graduates.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, and it is a letter from the Red Deer Network in Support of Medicare outlining a response to an opinion piece by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South which appeared in the paper on April 26.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you 43 people from Duchess, Alberta. Included are two teachers, Joyce Evans and Colin Butters; 11 adults, Linda Morey, Brenda Scherger, Connie Scheuerman, Faye Wortel, George Berg, Joan Gramlich, Patti Rommens, Sandy Bandura, Jo-Ann Grove, Laurie Creybohm, and Sandra Genovese; and 30 students. I would ask you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and to the members of this Assembly 13 bright, enthusiastic grade 10 students from the Will Sinclair high school, plus their teacher, Doug Daisley. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would now ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege today to be able to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 22 students from the New Norway school located in the Ponoka-Rimbey constituency. They are accompanied by teacher Mr. Ed Martinson and parents Mrs. Laurie Huolt, Mrs. Karen Clark, and Mrs. Sandy Bright. I would ask the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly today some 35 people in total from home schooling in my constituency. They are accompanied by parents and helpers Mrs. Ann Walsh, Mrs. Diane Hagman, Mrs. Alice Aschenbrenner, Kirk and Marilyn McIntyre, and Mr. Andreas Aschenbrenner. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. I guess they won't be there until 2 o'clock, so I'm a little ahead of the game.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce Dr. Malcolm McPhee, who is seated in the public gallery. Dr. McPhee is a professor emeritus of the department of surgery and urology at the University of Alberta. He has worked steadfastly for the prospect of high-quality public health care in our province, and I welcome him on behalf of all members to our Assembly today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Gwyneth Foster-Newell. Gwyneth is a passionate voice for public health care in this province. She has been very active not only in the Edmonton-Gold Bar community but across the province in making people aware of the implications of Bill 11. She's in the public gallery, and I would now ask her to rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly William Amos. He is a special assistant with the federal Minister of the Environment, and he is here for a day and a half in this province talking to people about environmental issues that are very near and dear to the hearts of many of us in this province. I would ask that he now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an introduction to make as well this afternoon. It's to introduce three staunch supporters and defenders of our public health care system. They are Jane Walker, Shirley Armstrong, and Maryann Stepien, and I welcome them to the Legislative Assembly. I know they've been here before, especially to hear the debates around Bill 11. I would request that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you. I've got two introductions. The first is a group of 26 grade 6 students from Mount Royal school located in Edmonton-Highlands. These 26 students are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Colin Woelfle, and their interim teacher, Mr. Chris Enyedy. Mr. Speaker, a word about this school. Mount Royal is only the second school in Canada to organize itself around the principles of micro-society. Micro-society is an innovative school design where children create a microcosm of the real world inside the school. Each student has a role in running that world. I will ask these young students and their teachers to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, there is another one. There are several citizens who were participating in the citizens' vigil rally at noon outside the Legislature today. They are seated, I think, in the public gallery. I will ask all of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to

the Assembly a familiar face: Howard Yeung. He's a former page in this Assembly, and he is now working in the Edmonton-Gold Bar constituency office for the summer. If he would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not so long ago this Premier told Albertans that he listens and he cares. Well, now it seems he no longer cares and continues to ignore the very credible critics from the political, the religious, and the medical world. A respected and the second-longest serving Speaker of this Legislative Assembly, Gerry Amerongen, has urged Albertans to forget the loyalties earned by wiser leaders and to remember this government's health care policy at election time. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier listen to Gerry Amerongen and withdraw his new health care policy?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: The answer to the question relative to withdrawal of the bill is absolutely not, Mr. Speaker.

Relative to the preamble, Mr. Speaker, intelligent Albertans who read the bill know that this is a bill to protect the publicly funded system as we know it today and to put rules and regulations around clinics that have existed for years and years, including the 30 clinics that were up and running and approved by the then minister of health, who happens to now be the leader of the Liberal Party.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, since Alberta's health care plans will impact all Canadians, will the Premier at least listen to the Canadian Council of Churches, that represents Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches across Canada, and place his new plans on hold as they request?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I am astounded as to why they would be concerned about putting rules and regulations relative to the contracting out of surgical services. There are now 52 clinics offering some 152 or 153 different surgical procedures. Some 20,000 procedures are being performed each and every year. They have been operating without rules and regulations relative to contracting out. What this bill does and the policy does is simply put fences around surgical clinics that have been in existence for years in this province.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, since the Premier won't listen to the churches and he won't listen to former members of his party, will he now, having seen the criticism by Dr. Walley Temple and Dr. Malcolm McPhee, both respected surgeons from Edmonton and Calgary, stop ignoring the evidence and hold off on his health care legislation until the Premiers' Conference has had an opportunity to review the implications of it?

MR. KLEIN: The answer is no, Mr. Speaker. We plan to proceed with this legislation. Yes, there are differing opinions within the medical community. On Saturday along with the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill I met with eight doctors who had differing opinions. Earlier in Edmonton I met with a group of about 12 doctors who had differing opinions on this particular piece of legislation: some in favour, some opposed, and some with concerns

that they wanted to see addressed. There are all sides to this debate.

Really I think the amendments that were introduced by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness address most if not all of the concerns that have been raised not only by the medical community but by the public at large.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People continue to ask why the Premier is pushing ahead with his private health care policy when there is evidence to show that it won't work. No regional authority has shown that it won't cost more or lengthen waiting lists, nor have any of them asked for it apparently. My questions are to the Premier. Given that this report going to the Edmonton city council this week shows that the capital regional health authority has not evaluated potential cost benefits, is the government just flying blind on it?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would point out to this Assembly and to you, sir, that the leader of the Liberal opposition and members of her caucus voted against the motion, the part of the bill that quite specifically says that regional health authorities must be satisfied without reasonable doubt about the validity of the contract in terms of the contract creating efficiency, being cost effective, and reducing waiting lists. That does not exist now. That section, Mr. Speaker, is one of the fences, one of the rules, and one of the regulations we're putting around contracting out, and they voted against it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, since the government would undoubtedly release any positive evidence to support their health care plans, why have they not released the cost-benefit study done by the Calgary regional health authority? Is it because it's telling them something they don't want to hear?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can say one thing for sure, and maybe the Liberals have some figures to address this particular situation. What would the scenario be today if we took the 20,000 procedures that are now being done in the 52 surgical clinics and put those back into the public system? Would they be willing to provide us with some information as to the impact that would have on full-scale hospitals as we know them today? No, they don't want to address that.

THE SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is this government pushing ahead with its health care legislation when there is evidence of financial loss and longer waiting lists? Who benefits? Who benefits, Mr. Speaker? Who asked for it?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, I find it so strange that this leader of the Liberal opposition would not have raised those questions when she allowed 30 private surgical clinics to operate under her watch and also allowed them to charge facility fees. She didn't ask those questions then. Why is she asking them now?

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. SAPERS: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier continues

to show his disdain for democracy by refusing to listen to Albertans when they ask him to withdraw his health care policy. It is a shameful record: closure on two occasions, denying his caucus the opportunity of free votes, and refusing to enter into any real public debate with me. As well, this government has a record of developing regulations behind closed doors, yet another blow to democracy. My questions are to this Premier. Will the Premier leave his controversial health care policy on the Order Paper so that Albertans can have input into the regulations that must support his policy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's obvious the leader of the Liberal opposition hasn't read the bill, because there's a regulation section in the bill.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, in other words, no.

Given that the Premier has refused to listen to Albertans, will he now commit to public hearings on the regulations prior to the proclamation of his health care policy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there's been no piece of legislation that has been the subject of as much public discussion and public input as this particular piece of legislation. Just to recap, it all started with Bill 37, which of course was pulled. That culminated in a blue-ribbon panel that made some recommendations relative to the kind of policy and the kind of legislation that should be drafted. This in turn resulted in the development of a policy paper that was released to the public and was out there for months to receive public input. This then resulted of course in the preparation of legislation which was introduced in this Legislature, a piece of legislation that was in an unprecedented move sent out to every household in the province.

2:10

Thus far, as I understand it, there has been something close to 40 hours of debate on this particular piece of legislation in this Legislature. I think there have now been close to 30 hours of questions in question period on this particular piece of legislation. It's unprecedented in the history of this Legislature to have a piece of legislation discussed as much as this piece of legislation has been discussed.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, if he won't commit to public hearings, will the Premier commit to full involvement of the all-party committee, the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, in the drafting of regulations, like every other province in this country does, to ensure that Albertans' views are not ignored and left behind closed doors in the development of regulations?

MR. KLEIN: You know, Mr. Speaker, I find it so totally strange that the leader of the Liberal opposition could be talking about regulations and about public input into regulations. On one hand, they said: scrap the bill; kill the bill; get rid of the bill. Now they're saying: pass the bill, and let's get on with the regulations. Now, which way is it?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite overwhelming opposition from all walks of Alberta life, the government will likely ram its private, for-profit health care initiative through the Legislature this week. All of the available evidence and overwhelming public opposition suggest that this government is on the wrong course and that what we will end up with is a health care system that's both less fair and more costly. My questions are to the Premier. Why do the Premier and this government disregard the

wise counsel of prominent Alberta Conservatives including a former Premier and a former Speaker of the Assembly, who have both called for strengthening public and nonprofit health care rather than making reckless forays into for-profit medicine? Why?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, I find it very, very strange that this hon. member would be asking the question at this particular time when all we're trying to do is put rules and regulations around what has existed for some years. Is this hon. member, the leader of the third party, denying the fact that there are now in existence and have been operating for some time some 52 surgical clinics? Is he denying that? You know, why did he not make an issue out of these clinics operating without rules and regulations? This is what is so bewildering. Why would he be making an issue out of putting rules and regulations around something that has existed without rules and regulations in this province for years? Why would he be doing that?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is the Premier and this government determined to expand private, for-profit health care even though, in the words of Dr. Walley Temple, "it destroys the 'Samaritan' role of the hospital" while making "doctors and nurses into the 'instruments of the investor'" and patients into commodities?

MR. KLEIN: Again, why is the leader of the third party raising the issue at this particular time? Why did he not raise the issue two years ago, a year ago when these clinics were operating and there was no thought – well, there was a thought; it was called Bill 37; he opposed that too – to put rules and regulations around these clinics? This is not an expansion, Mr. Speaker. This is putting on restrictions. This is saying for the first time that RHAs, before they let contracts, which they can do today, by the way – there's nothing to stop them. This is the first time that the government is saying to regional health authorities: before you contract out, you have to meet a number of conditions. And they're opposed to it. That is what's bewildering about all this.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why are this Premier and this government replacing the values of compassion and caring in health care with the profit motive and corporate greed?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely and totally untrue, and this hon. member knows it. That is the kind of vicious and malicious misinformation that does a disservice to both of the opposition parties and to the people of this province. That is untruthful.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Interprovincial Trade

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, who as our trade policy minister is representing Alberta on the committee on internal trade. I understand that the committee recently met. Can the minister tell us what was discussed and what, if any, decisions were made?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the internal trade ministers did meet last week in Toronto, and it was the first meeting that we've

held for two years. Alberta assumes the co-chair position of this committee now.

There were obviously a lot of issues on the table, because it had been some time since we had met. Implementation issues on government procurement were discussed, how we could finalize the energy and agriculture chapters, two which are incredibly important to Alberta. One other very important issue is on addressing the dispute resolution mechanism which is in the agreement now, but some of our companies and individuals who do trade across Canada are finding the process rather cumbersome and want us to try and streamline that process. Those are a few of the issues that we discussed at that meeting.

MR. BRODA: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: can the minister describe the priorities of the committee on internal trade in the year ahead?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly Alberta is an aggressive champion of this agreement and has led, I believe, all of the country in trying to move ahead. Trade is incredibly important to this province. One in three jobs depends on trade.

We would want to focus on the issues around negotiations in the energy and agriculture chapter, certainly to make sure that they are there. We'd like to conclude and do some more work on government procurement, the MASH sector, which all provinces agreed to but which British Columbia is not participating in. Truly, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's goal in being a part of this is to ensure that we eliminate or take down as many barriers as we can to trade so that our companies have every opportunity to trade across this country fairly and without impediment.

MR. BRODA: A final question to the same minister: seeing that there are internal trade barriers, how is this agreement going to benefit Albertans? What are we looking at?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, improvement in the reduction of trade barriers can only assist companies in Alberta to trade more freely, more openly across our borders. Whenever we have barriers to trade, whether they be artificial or real, it causes impediments to the movement of goods and services across this country. Alberta is a trading province. We believe in fair rules, and we believe in fair trading. That will be our role in the next years, and it is a commitment from all of the provinces and territories that are a part of that agreement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Calgary Laboratory Services

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent research by Donna Korchinski, a Calgary journalist with NetNews, has shown that the merging of private and public enterprise into one group called Calgary Lab services occurred despite major government concerns. In fact, NetNews was unable to obtain even through a freedom of information inquiry any evidence that formal ministerial approval was given. My questions are to the Premier. As NetNews was unable to obtain any evidence that ministerial approval was given for the creation of Calgary lab services, can the Premier provide evidence that this approval was given?

MR. KLEIN: I'll refer this to the Minister of Health and Wellness and ask him to respond.

2:20

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in the whole process of the Calgary regional health authority entering into an agreement with this laboratory company, there was, yes, a considerable amount of discussion back and forth between Alberta Health and the Calgary regional health authority and the company. And, yes, in that rather complex process Alberta Health and Wellness officials did raise issues, as it is their responsibility to do. There has been an agreement and a working arrangement developed between the company and the regional health authority. There are still one or two issues outstanding from a legal standpoint in terms of equity positions and risks that both sides would be encountering. It's my expectation that those final parts of the agreement will be wound up fairly shortly.

MS LEIBOVICI: The process has been going on since 1996.

Can the Premier tell us what potential risks were identified in 1996 by Alberta Health in the plans to privatize the Calgary lab services?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that quite a thorough examination was done of the overall process, which, again, I think is the responsible thing to do. One of the examples of the risks that had to be addressed was that of the company running into financial difficulty, going bankrupt. That hasn't happened certainly. It's a very big and effective service. That had to be dealt with in the contract with respect to making sure that the Calgary regional health authority was not going to be on the hook, so to speak, for any of these difficulties should they arise.

MS LEIBOVICI: Given that in this province the use of private facilities in health care is being encouraged, will the Premier commit to releasing uncensored – no blank pages on this one, Mr. Premier – all government documents related to the Calgary lab services from 1995-1996 to now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

But, again, I find it very, very strange that they would be talking about contracts going back to 1994-96 and would not be concerned about future contracts. They voted against the section that would make contracts open and transparent, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has the floor briefly.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, two quick points. First of all, the existence in this province of contracts or agreements between different parts of the health care system as far as laboratory services are concerned should be recognized as being decades and decades old. There were companies such as Kasper – and I can go through a whole list – that existed for a long time under contractual relationships. The other thing, though, is that disclosure is certainly provided under the existing laws with respect to freedom of information and protection of privacy, and when we have in place Bill 11, despite the opposition that the Liberals seem to have to this, we will have an overall structure in legislation whereby these disclosures will be made.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Trans Canada Trail

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This month at various

locations throughout the province Relay 2000, an event which brings together water from the Arctic, Atlantic, and Pacific oceans planned by Participaction, is to take place in various locations on the proposed Trans Canada Trail. This event and others like it that are sure to follow are a concern of adjacent landowners in my constituency because at this time no development permits have been obtained or even applied for on the proposed route, which makes trail use in contravention of local land use bylaws. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Would local authorities have the authority under the Municipal Government Act and their local land use bylaws to issue a stop order to prevent this type of event from taking place on those sections of the trail that do not have a development permit?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The department has advised in the past that the development of formal trails, including such things as gates and signage, fencing, trail bed, and so on, and change in the intensity of use would likely meet the qualifications of the Municipal Government Act's definition of development and would be subject to provisions of the municipal land use bylaw.

The department has also advised that whether or not trail development and a change in use requires a development permit depends on the specific provisions of the land use bylaw of the host municipality. There is a provision in section 645 for development to be stopped if you need a permit or a subdivision approval where it is not in accordance with the reading of the act. Depending on the provisions of the applicable bylaw, a stop order is possible and certainly available to the municipality.

These cases are always very site and fact specific, and a municipality should really seek legal advice on the matter if they're not clear in their minds.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that Trans Canada Trail is the owner of the property and Alberta Trailnet is in their own words only managing the property, who is in fact the party that's responsible for applying for and obtaining the development permit?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The MGA is silent on who may apply for a development permit except to require a land use bylaw that establishes provisions relating to applying for a development permit. Under section 640(2)(c) most municipalities allow an agent to apply on behalf of their owner or on behalf of their lessee or potential owners in the case of a sales agreement, all with the owner's authorization of course. Subject to the provisions of a specific land use bylaw there doesn't appear to be any reason why Alberta Trailnet couldn't submit the required development applications related to land in which they have specific controlling interest.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Community Development. Would the minister consider withholding any further grant money to Alberta Trailnet or Trans Canada Trail until they resolve their issues with respect to obtaining development permits and their outstanding issues with the adjacent landowners?

MR. WOLOSZYN: The short answer is no, but to elaborate

somewhat on that the issue here revolves around the transfer of lands, abandoned right-of-ways, by the CPR to Trailnet. Unfortunately, there wasn't the proper consultation done between adjacent landowners and the CPR prior to Trailnet, which has raised a whole series of issues which need to be resolved.

The government is committed to the concept of Trailnet, which stretches right across Canada and also through Alberta and joins all three oceans together. The concept is very sound. Our commitment is to work with the landowners and with the Trailnet proponents to ensure that they come to a reasonable agreement through consultation on how the trails will be managed and used.

I quite frankly look forward to a lot of progress being made. We have a lot of examples of trails that are very successful currently throughout the province. Some are restricted to snowmobile use. Some are other uses. We have right in this fine city a good example of multi-use trails along the river valley which are done very, very well. So I look forward to a good resolution. We will try to accommodate both sides as best we can.

Long-term Care

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Speaker, this government is separating a 71-year-old woman who is nearly blind from her husband after 53 years of marriage because of the government's failure to plan for long-term care needs of Albertans. After 53 years this frail woman, who has suffered several strokes, will have to make a 130-kilometre round trip from Red Deer to Rimbey to visit and comfort her 73-year-old husband. In the words of the senior involved: it's cruel. Even the health authority admits that the current shortage of long-term care beds in the region is a direct result of cuts in 1995 by this government to Red Deer and regional hospital beds. My questions are to the Premier. Why did this government ever let this kind of thing happen?

2:30

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform this Legislative Assembly that funding to health care generally has increased some 40 percent. For every dollar that was taken out of the system, we have put \$3 back into the system, and over the next three years about a billion dollars more will be going into the system.

Mr. Speaker, as we address health care, I know that there's been a lot of talk about the legislation before the Assembly today as it pertains to health care, but I would point out that that is only one point in the six-point plan. Certainly long-term care has been identified as a priority. It's always been a priority.

What I say to this elderly woman is that I will have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness look into the particular case. If the member will provide him with the details, we'll look into this case. I'm sure he'll have discussions with the health authority in question, Mr. Speaker, and hopefully we can resolve this particular issue.

Certainly restructuring was difficult, but through it all we maintained our commitment to provide as adequately as we possibly could facilities to accommodate those in need of long-term care, and we'll continue to do so.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second question: does Alberta Health or the RHA cover the costs of transporting this woman back and forth to give care and comfort to her husband?

MR. KLEIN: I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness answer this question.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in this particular instance, as I understand it, yes, the capacity of the long-term care facilities in Red Deer are right now full, and it was necessary to transfer this particular individual to Rimbey, which incidentally, despite being some distance from Red Deer, does have a very good long-term care facility. I hope the member across the way was not inferring that the care was not of very good quality and the people in Rimbey were not providing for this individual, because they are. As I understand it, the regional health authority has committed to bringing this individual back to Red Deer as soon as the space is available.

I would like to add further, Mr. Speaker, that in our recent budget and overall business plan we have on the capital side made a very significant contribution to expanding long-term care in this province in terms of accommodation. Red Deer, as I recall, was approved for over 150 new beds in the region.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, in the words of this senior: why is the provincial Conservative government abusing the old folks that have lived and worked hard in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Well, that is an entirely and unnecessary preamble to a question. This government always has been and always will be fully committed to the well-being and the care of our seniors, Mr. Speaker. It's as simple as that.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Point of order on that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. [interjections]

School Lunch Supervision

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East does have the floor.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment. At 110 schools in the Calgary board of education's system there are parent-operated school lunch programs for students who are not bused to school but who stay at school for lunch. I understand that an agreement has been reached on the status of certain lunchroom supervisors employed under these parent-operated lunchroom programs. Could the minister advise the Assembly as to what this agreement will mean for the parent-operated lunch program?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually I am very pleased that the parties involved in this issue, the Calgary board of education and their staff association, have reached an agreement on the status of the school program supervisors employed under the parent-operated lunchroom program.

Now, as I understand it, under the terms of the agreement both parties agree that parent-operated lunchroom programs will continue to operate in the Calgary board of education schools subject to certain conditions being met, and over the next year the Calgary

board of education will consult with all stakeholders and develop a comprehensive lunchtime supervision policy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister advise the Assembly as to why the Labour Relations Board was involved with this issue?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, it was in June of 1999 that the Calgary Board of Education Staff Association asked the Labour Relations Board, as they have a right to do, to determine whether or not these parents were actually in fact Calgary board of education employees. Now, the Labour Relations Board appointed one of its members to try to help the parties reach an informal solution and avoid a perhaps long and divisive formal hearing process. While the board member consulted with the parties and issued recommendations to them, I'm pleased to announce that the parties arrived at an agreement on their own.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what happens next?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, the staff association, of course, has withdrawn its application to the Labour Relations Board, and the parties are now going to work together to look at the situation between now and next April, as I understand it, and try to come to grips, then, with the issue of lunch room supervision. They'll have to determine, Mr. Speaker, on the issue – there's been some indication as to whether or not these parents were volunteers or just what the situation was. I think that clearly we now have to have an understanding that if someone is scheduled and actually receives a set remuneration for the particular work they're performing, then of course bargaining unit work under a collective agreement is going to be up for discussion.

MRS. SLOAN: When are you going to mediate the *Calgary Herald* dispute?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SOETAERT: It was Edmonton-Manning.

THE SPEAKER: Well, I don't know. I kept hearing all these interjections. It's okay with me. It makes no difference to me who I recognize.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Education Property Taxes

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has a history of creating piecemeal policy solutions that do not work. The most current example is health care. Another case in point is its policy on education property tax. At the four regional AUMA meetings over the past month education property tax was the most important issue, yet all this government has come up with is taxpayer-funded propaganda to obscure the truth. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. How much is the government spending to tell Edmontonians that their education property tax is increasing by \$7.7 million this year?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that Albertans have told us and told us very clearly is that education is very critical and very important to them, and one of the things that all Albertans have told us also is that they are prepared to pay for education as long as it is paid for in a fair and equitable manner. Ultimately, that's the objective. Any effort that Alberta Municipal Affairs is expending is to advise Albertans on the process of taxation, and ultimately the process is conceived and developed in as fair and as equitable a manner as possibly can be achieved.

MR. GIBBONS: My second question: will the minister admit that this government's tinkering with the education property tax will adversely affect over 60 municipalities in this province?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out, education is very, very important to our future in this province. As a matter of fact, it's been clearly identified by Albertans that education is their number one priority. It's critical for the growth of this province; it's critical for the development of this province.

What we had in the process in Alberta was a process that indeed dealt with municipalities in a fair way, but when you expanded the process over the whole province, there were some variables. Certain parts of the province were growing more rapidly than others, and when market value assessment was put in place, there were municipalities such as Fort McMurray and Wood Buffalo that would have actually had a spike of over 50 percent in their market value tax increase. Through the process of years – and this has been over a process of three years now – a cap has been put in place to help mitigate those extreme spikes.

Further to that, there was a committee put in place. The committee has made recommendations as to how to deal with the extreme variables that exist today and ultimately made some recommendations, which included averaging, capping, and dropping the mill rate.

Today Edmontonians are actually paying significantly less in education tax than they paid in 1994.

2:40

MR. GIBBONS: Will the Minister of Municipal Affairs instruct his education property tax committee to come up with a long-term solution that will treat all municipalities fairly rather than continuing the tradition of tinkering at the margins?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The committee is actively pursuing all input from all stakeholders. Certainly, if the hon. member has some input and some ideas that would help with this process, it would be very, very useful. We're open to any suggestions from all stakeholders. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods indicated earlier that, indeed, this is not an easy process. He went on to say: I really think that sometimes we have to remind ourselves that our municipal and school board counterparts – that's in this case – perhaps can find a better solution, but it's not an easy one. Ultimately, that's what your hon. colleague has indicated. The committee is studying . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, thank you. We're going to move on.

The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Teacher Remuneration

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some teachers in my constituency are concerned about the calculation of pensions under the Alberta teachers' pension plan with the wage rollback that occurred in 1994. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Can

you please outline whether this rollback will negatively impact these teachers' pensions?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, what happens with the Alberta teachers' retirement fund is that an average of the five highest years that a teacher is currently enrolled is used to determine their pension rate. When an employee actually retires is obviously up to the employee himself. In 2000-2001 we will be putting \$212 million into the teachers' retirement fund.

MRS. O'NEILL: My second question is to the Minister of Learning as well. Can the minister outline how the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund Board works?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, what happens is that there are three employees from Alberta Learning as well as three representatives from the Alberta Teachers' Association. Those six people comprise the board and set the policies and trends for the Alberta teachers' retirement fund.

MRS. O'NEILL: My final question is also to the Minister of Learning. Where do teachers currently stand in terms of salaries since the rollback?

DR. OBERG: The average rollback for teachers was 4.70 percent. The last time that there was a teacher rollback was in '95-96. Mr. Speaker, since that time the teachers' salaries have increased an average – and I must say an average – of 13.53 percent. So 4.7 percent versus a 13.53 percent increase since that time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Income Tax

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite another attempt at tax tinkering last week, it's clear that this government's flat tax policy is designed to shortchange those middle-class, middle-income Albertans who work hard every day to pay their own bills and the bills for this government, the very same Albertans that are hit hard by private health care issues. This government's policies have become synonymous with unfairness and inequity. My questions are to the Provincial Treasurer. Will the Treasurer confirm that under his flat tax scheme the top 1 percent of taxpayers in Alberta will receive a 20 percent cut in their taxes while 39 percent of tax filers, the whole middle-income group, will get just a 13 percent cut?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer, and let's deal with policy.

DR. WEST: No, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SAPERS: Those are the facts, Mr. Speaker.

Well, maybe the Provincial Treasurer knows this. Will he explain why exactly he believes it's fair that his policy gives the top 4 percent of tax filers fully 23 percent of the total tax savings while that same 39 percent, the middle-income Albertans, have to share 26 percent of the tax breaks? Why is that, Mr. Treasurer?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, let's look at some of the facts here in the province of Alberta. First of all, the type of tax that the Liberals

would have recommended would have been a truly regressive tax. The tax notice that we announced the other day will take 190,000 people off the tax rolls completely in the province of Alberta.

From then on it only gets better, because as the middle-income people progressively move forward, they get an opportunity to keep more money of their hard-earned savings in their pockets. The middle income was disenfranchised by the federal government's change to the middle bracket in their last budget. We corrected that in the announcement the other day.

Now, let me give you a few examples so that the individuals across the way might get something right for a change. They keep talking about the middle-income versus the high-income people. Well, I would say that perhaps an individual working on highway maintenance in central Alberta – Phil is his name; his annual salary is \$47,243. The company where Phil works contributed \$1,800 to an employee pension plan, and Phil did not have to contribute into this plan. In 2001 Phil will pay \$3,352 in provincial income tax, \$451 less than he paid in 1999.

Now let's look at Mel, who is an 82-year-old widower living in a seniors' lodge. He makes \$12,000 per year in private pension income and receives old age security. In 1999 Mel paid \$335 in provincial income tax. In 2001 he will not pay any provincial income tax, and of course he will still receive his Alberta seniors' benefit program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Let's maybe compare Mel to a guy named Steve. Maybe the Provincial Treasurer will confirm that those middle-income earners, who pay taxes on between \$35,000 and \$45,000 a year, let's say, are going to receive an average tax reduction of \$554, while those whose income tops \$100,000 are going to get a break from this government that's not one or two or three or four times bigger but 10 times bigger. They're going to be saving over \$5,400 on average. Will the Treasurer confirm that and then explain what's fair about that policy?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, we'll be bringing out hundreds of examples of variables in the province of Alberta as to what income pays what. Depending on the deductions – how many children you have, how many are going to university, what you pay into an RRSP, what you get for deductions as far as your child going to university, whether it's his tuition or whether it's his book expenses, and depending on whether you pay into a pension plan at work, or whether you don't – many variables will take place.

2:50

Now, let's look. Sandy is a legal secretary in Calgary earning \$34,800 per year. She has a 12-year-old son but does not claim any child care costs. In 1999 Sandy paid \$1,785 in provincial income tax, but she will only pay \$608 in 2001, a saving of \$1,177.

Now, Gabrielle is a single parent with a 10-year-old daughter, Rachel. Gabrielle works as a bookkeeper with a small family-owned business, where she earns \$29,000 per year. Gabrielle has a child care expense of \$3,360 per year. As a result of the move to the single-rate tax, Gabrielle will save \$968 a year.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members in a few seconds from now we'll call upon the first of seven members, but please join with me in recognizing this special anniversary of four of our members who were first elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in the general election of May 8, 1986. They include the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer, the real Provincial Treasurer, the hon. Member for Dunvegan, and the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Jerry Selinger

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I stand with great sadness to recognize Jerry Selinger, QC, who passed away at the age of 50 years on May 2, 2000, surrounded by his loving family and friends. Jerry was born in Saskatchewan, received his law degree in 1973, and came to Calgary in 1978, where he became chief Crown prosecutor after 18 years in the Calgary Crown prosecutors' office. I am proud to add that Jerry was also a constituent of Calgary-West.

Jerry will be fondly remembered for his positive energy, honesty, humour, integrity, courage, and also for his numerous contributions to the community, especially as a member of the Alberta Justice working committee on domestic violence and of the steering committee of the national pilot project in developing a domestic violence intake court in Calgary. I can speak personally of Jerry's valued contribution to the establishment of a native court on the Tsuu T'ina reserve.

Jerry will be forever remembered by his loving wife, Terry, and special daughter, Erin, and by family, friends, and colleagues in the legal and law enforcement community.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Super Cities Walk

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May is Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month. Canada has one of the highest rates of MS in the world, with some 50,000 affected, and Alberta has the highest prevalence rate in Canada. Yesterday at Rundle park over 2,700 people gathered to participate in the 10th annual Super Cities Walk for multiple sclerosis. The walk was very well organized and ran smoothly, due in great part to the 400 volunteers who gave their time and energy to make certain the event achieved its goals.

Part of the success of the walk was due to the substantial contribution of the major corporate sponsors, which included Chili's, CFRN, Save-on-Foods, and Mobile Communications. Even though the deadline for the collection of pledges is June 30, \$64,143 has been turned in as of this morning.

On behalf of all members of this Assembly and all Albertans, Mr. Speaker, I extend our congratulations to those who organized, volunteered, walked, or sponsored the Super Cities Walk for multiple sclerosis.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Grande Cache Rockies

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize members of the Grande Cache Rockies hockey team. This senior team very successfully competed in and won the Alberta north-central hockey league championship on May 9. The Grande Cache team was founded by Mr. David Ling in 1992. He believed that there were many good hockey players in Grande Cache and that the community would support the team. This year under the direction of Coach Rick Bentley the team proved they were the best in the league. On April 9 300 fans from Grande Cache traveled to Grande Prairie to cheer their team on to victory. This was a community win.

I also recognize the executive, the coaching staff, the sponsors, and the citizens of Grande Cache for the support and the encourage-

ment they provided to this hockey team. Mr. Speaker, the citizens of West Yellowhead were proud to have Grande Cache Rockies represent our region.

I would ask all members of the Assembly to join me in extending our congratulations and best wishes to this team's members.

International Nursing Week

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, 25,000 registered nurses in Alberta will join with their colleagues across Canada and the world to celebrate and reflect on their profession during International Nursing Week, May 8 to 14, 2000. Initiated in 1985, the purpose of Nursing Week is to increase public awareness about the role of registered nurses and important health care issues.

Under the theme Nursing in the New Millennium registered nurses will celebrate and value our profession through multiple events across the province. As an RN I was honoured to be present last week as the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses honoured the outstanding contributions of registered nurses in the fields of clinical practice, administration, research, lifetime achievement, and partners in health. This week the Alberta registered nurses educational trust will hold Nightingale night galas across Alberta to raise funding for nursing education and to recognize the 180th birthday of Florence Nightingale.

It is our duty as legislators to be alive to the realities that face the profession of registered nursing today and to undertake a leadership role in addressing the issues of the nursing shortage, nursing work life, and lack of true reform of our health care system. May we take the time this week to reflect on these issues and to recognize registered nurses.

Thank you.

Lord Strathcona Statue

MR. LOUGHEED: This past Saturday, May 6, 2000, a monument to Lord Strathcona was unveiled in Sherwood Park. It sits on the corner of Broadmoor and Main boulevards. Lord Strathcona was a great Canadian, and this ceremony and the monument that celebrate his life and accomplishments will do much to help remind residents about how Strathcona county got its name.

Pioneer fur trader, Hudson's Bay Company governor, Member of Parliament, Bank of Montreal president, Lord Strathcona made many contributions to this country. In fact, one of the most enduring images in Canadian history is his driving of the last spike in the CPR intercontinental rail line.

Participating in the unveiling were the Royal Canadian Legion colour party and the commanding officer of Lord Strathcona's Horse regiment. Also present were Lord Strathcona's Horse colour party and mounted troop and armored vehicles.

On behalf of the residents of Strathcona county and their elected representatives who took part in the unveiling I'd like to congratulate the organizers of the very successful event. I'd ask the members assembled to recognize the project co-ordinator, John Ashton, the MLA for part of Strathcona county from '71 to '79, and Dawn McLean, the creator of this unique work of art.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Bill Hunter

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure this afternoon to recognize Bill Hunter, affectionately known by most Edmontonians as Wild Bill Hunter. This Saturday the Jasper Place Arena in my constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark was renamed Bill Hunter Arena.

Bill Hunter stated: this arena is especially close to my heart as

Jasper Place was home to the Edmonton Oil Kings from 1965 to 1967. Mr. Hunter, president and general manager of the club, later helped found the World Hockey Association and the Western Hockey League and laid the groundwork for the National Hockey League to come to Edmonton. He brought the Oilers here in 1972 and doubled as the team's general manager.

For his work as a hockey pioneer he recently received the Order of Canada. Mr. Hunter has also recently been nominated to the Hockey Hall of Fame and will learn in June whether he'll be inducted. These honours that are bestowed upon Mr. Hunter are well deserved and recognize a life dedicated to the betterment of the community.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

3:00

Excellence in Teaching Awards

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday evening I had the opportunity to attend a truly celebratory event honouring 21 teachers from across this province. They were recognized under the excellence in teaching awards banner for their creative, innovative, and certainly effective teaching methods. This was the 12th annual excellence in teaching awards, and these teachers represented a broad spectrum of the teaching skills and the art of teaching in this province.

I would like, most particularly, to recognize Mr. Mark Samuel, who teaches at the St. Albert Storefront school for many of the students in our community who are at risk. He is with the St. Albert Catholic high school and the greater St. Albert Catholic regional division. Mark was honoured for his work and his inspiration to young students, and I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate him and all of the members of the teaching profession who do such a fine job in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood on a point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right as we got into question period, at approximately 2:02 p.m., the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was engaged in heckling and once again heckled a comment: princess. I sent a note to the Speaker last week suggesting that I find this rather offensive, that in fact I find this to be somewhat of a sexist remark.

Section 23(j) talks about a member using "abusive or insulting language." Quite frankly, I find that particular comment abusive and insulting. It's only directed to the Leader of the Official Opposition. The comment has been used several times and is only ever made when the Leader of the Official Opposition is speaking. The provincial government has a policy that, quite frankly, I think members of the Assembly need to abide by. I think this would border on harassment in the workplace if it were outside this Assembly. Not even that, if a male member of this Assembly were to utter those same comments, this would have been dealt with a long time ago in relation to the issue of sexist comments. Quite frankly, I believe that there has been a breach of 23(j), and I find it rather disturbing that this continues to go on. It's one of the comments that I find most offensive, and I would expect some action in relation to this. I would love for this comment to be filed in a drawer somewhere and left there.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on this point of order.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would submit off the top that I don't believe there will be a point of order. However, I'll leave that to your determination.

I think that comments in this House oftentimes do get hurled one way and the other. They seldom, if ever, appear as a matter of record. It is of course unfortunate when that particular type of exchange is heard. Usually it's precipitated by something that one member says about, against, or toward another member. I checked the Blues. I don't see any record of those comments having been made.

I'm well aware, as you are, Mr. Speaker, that heckling is a traditional part of the parliamentary process. Certainly there have been many occasions in this House when heckles have been used to very good advantage, and some of them have been found to be quite humorous and quite playful. In this particular case I find it offensive that someone would actually suggest that a comment was made that was of a sexist nature. In fact, if the comment made was one to do with the word princess – who knows? – maybe it was meant in a complimentary way. Princess is a very nice word.

I did not hear the particular reference that is being referred to. Nonetheless, I think the Speaker has been very clear in reminding all members that they have to be very careful what they say in this House because sometimes those things do get printed. In this particular instance I don't believe that was the case. I would suggest that there may have been some difference of opinion perhaps. Perhaps there was something of a disagreeable nature, but I certainly don't believe there was anything verifiable as such that would constitute a point of order in this case.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on this point of order.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With specific reference to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek's comments that the comment made by Calgary-Fish Creek was not on the record, there are numerous incidents in this Assembly when people have been asked to stand up and apologize for remarks made in a context that was not appropriate, most recently, last week, when the Member for Edmonton-Norwood was asked to withdraw the comment "shame on you," that was made off the record in this Assembly. So I would ask you to strike those comments from Edmonton-Mill Creek's defence of his colleague and find that in fact she is out of order.

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been listening intently to what the Member for Edmonton-Norwood has brought forward. At the same time, when I saw her rise, I thought it might be interesting for me to just keep a running tally of interjections through the process. The hon. Leader of the Opposition interjected 33 times with comments; the Member for Edmonton-Norwood, 22 times. So I find it quite interesting that all of a sudden I'm called on one remark. I was so busy keeping a record of the interjections of Edmonton-Norwood and the Leader of the Opposition that I didn't bother keeping comments in regards to some of the other members. I have heard worse remarks than that. Last week someone called our Premier a chicken, and that was the Leader of the Opposition. So as far as I'm concerned, there is no point of order.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert on this point of order.

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes. My point, Mr. Speaker, is that this is very specific about one issue, and I think that if the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has other issues to bring up, she can bring them under other points of order. This is very specific. The concern has been presented that it is sexist, and I think that's the point of order that should be dealt with. If she has other concerns, she has every right to bring them up under other points of order, but right now this is very specific to this one. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, please, please, please. First of all, the Speaker has checked the Blues. There is no indication that *Hansard* has picked up any of the purported comments today. Number two, there is absolutely no doubt at all that the chair heard a tremendous number of interjections, sometimes when a question was being asked and sometimes when an answer was being given to a question.

The chair has also observed some rather interesting approaches that individual members make when they make their interjections. Some hon. members slide in their chair and hide behind the shoulders of the hon. member sitting beside them so that the chair can't see them do that. Some hon. members have been known to slouch down and bend over in their chair and utter certain things and interjections as they do it. Other hon. members have been noted to actually turn their back to the chair and make interjections. Other hon. members put a piece of paper, blocking their face to the chair, and make interjections, all of which can be viewed as rather childish.

The chair would also like to point out that not one side is innocent and not one side is completely guilty. Oh, there are some sections of the House that are very, very good. The chair has to make it very clear that there are some sections of the House that have exemplary attitude in this Assembly for the most part.

There's one item that the chair must make a comment on, and that's the statement raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. There's absolutely no doubt at all that the chair did interject when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood last week said, "Shame on you," because that criticism was directed to the chair, not to any other member. That violates all the rules of the Assembly – all the rules – and that certainly is not pertinent to this particular point of order today.

3:10

Now, last week the chair received a note from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood with respect to her concern about the use of the word princess, and the chair shared that note with the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was informed by the chair that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood was concerned about the use of the word princess, and the note also said that this might be viewed as a sexist statement.

Hon. members have to appreciate that the chair is of the male gender and the two individuals in question are both of the female gender. Perhaps there's something the chair doesn't understand about this being in the sexist context and doesn't quite understand this, because the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek made it very clear to the chair that she didn't think this was a sexist statement. Now, I don't want to get involved in any of this, quite frankly. I don't want to touch this with a 30-foot pole. There may be something here that I don't understand.

The point is, you know, that a lot fewer interjections would allow those remote interjections to be clearly heard by the chair, would allow *Hansard* to pick it up, and would allow us then to deal with a point of order, but if the interjection is muffled by 10 or 12 or 13 interjections, there is no clear interjection. So the difficulty we have

with this point of order is that I have a great difficulty determining that this is a point of order, but it does allow the opportunity to basically point out that there are way too many interjections.

If hon. members want to convey a thought to the chair on how the word princess is sexist, the chair will wait and in fact will consult with Parliamentary Counsel with respect to this. I might even do an undertaking in other Houses in Canada with respect to this matter. The chair has heard a lot of interesting remarks in this Assembly in recent weeks, from “cluck-cluck” to “chicken” to “princess.”

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me say at the outset that I am going to be referring to a number of authorities. Right off the top I'll talk about the list of words that have been found unparliamentary under *Beauchesne* 492. I will also be referring to Standing Orders and *Erskine May* and perhaps not just Standing Order 23, but at your discretion you may find that this is a more serious point and may in fact constitute a contempt.

What I'm referring to, Mr. Speaker, is another interjection that likely didn't make its way into the Blues. It is an exchange that took place between the second and third main questions put by the Leader of the Official Opposition to the hon. Premier. It was at that point in time, between the second and third questions, that I clearly heard the Minister of Government Services, the Member for Calgary-Foothills, lean forward in her chair and utter the words: you're a liar, Nancy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this whole question about lies and twisting words you've dealt with many times. In fact, this won't be the first time that this whole issue of referring to somebody sort of off the air as a liar has been brought to the attention of the Assembly. You yourself called this member to order for suggesting that the Premier was not telling the truth during an interjection. At that time I took the opportunity to withdraw the remarks. We've had many discussions in this Chamber as well as documents that you have circulated prior to each sitting cautioning members from making such allegations.

Mr. Speaker, nothing could be more important to our ability to do our jobs in an appropriate manner than to have the confidence of the public and the integrity of each and every member. There is nothing more important to a member of this House than a member's integrity and the public perception of that integrity. It is my submission that the comments uttered by the Member for Calgary-Foothills this afternoon very, very clearly were intended to impugn the integrity of the Leader of the Official Opposition and therefore to interfere with her ability to maintain public trust in her integrity and to maintain her ability to carry out her duties as a member of this House. I would suggest that it's not too strong to say that by doing so, it impugns the integrity of each and every member of this House.

I can refer you to *Beauchesne* 64, which indicates that the House has occasionally taken notice of attacks on individual Members. Most notably, [a situation where a member] while seated at his desk in the House, referred to a Member . . . as “a cheat and a swindler.” Removed from the House, he returned twice more to repeat the charge and finally concluded with a written note to the same effect. For that offence, [the member] was judged [to be] guilty of a breach of privilege and was summoned to the Bar to apologize.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest that you could find that such a breach has occurred in this case.

I would also ask you to refer to *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice* where it states:

Other acts besides words spoken or writings published reflecting

upon either House or its proceedings which, though they do not tend directly to obstruct or impede either House in the performance of its functions, yet have a tendency to produce this result indirectly by bringing such House into odium, contempt or ridicule or by lowering its authority may constitute contempts.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on, but I will refer to the comments made by the Government House Leader to be found in *Hansard*, pages 1336 through 1337, on May 4 when the Government House Leader himself was rising on a point of privilege regarding allegations made, in his mind, against the integrity of the Premier. Now, you ruled that in fact such a breach did take place.

At the very least the Minister of Government Services is guilty of using abusive and insulting language. It's not the first time; it's not the second time. It happens almost every day that she utters this phrase or words to similar effect. She's been careful, Mr. Speaker, to try to avoid the microphone but certainly has not avoided the earshot of those in this Assembly or those who may be listening on television. At the very least there has been a breach of the practice of this Assembly, and I would ask that that member withdraw the comment and apologize to the Leader of the Official Opposition and refrain from such behaviour in this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we again have a similar circumstance here as was commented on by you just moments ago with reference to the first point of order. Clearly, again, we have three different types of dynamics that occur in this House. One of them is heckles that go back and forth during question period, which is unfortunate, but it does happen. Another goes on directly between one or two members who bait each other on some particular point or get baited and goaded into something that is perhaps only between one or two of them.

I happen to sit right behind the Member for Calgary-Foothills, and I certainly didn't hear anything of the nature to which the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is referring. I'm not suggesting that they did or didn't get said. I'm simply saying that I did not hear them. It may be proven differently later; who knows?

Again, I checked the Blues, Mr. Speaker, and I don't see any comments of that nature having surfaced during what the Member for Edmonton-Glenora referred to as a point of order that occurred at the outset of the hon. Leader of the Opposition's third main question. No such reference appears to have existed there. There may be some misunderstanding; I don't know. Nonetheless, there is nothing again here that is verifiable.

I think it's unfortunate, if it did happen, that one of the members of the opposition would be caught up debating and heckling during the time that his own leader is asking a question. I think that is unfortunate, but that, too, sometimes happens.

I also am acutely aware, Mr. Speaker, that under our Standing Orders, particularly Standing Order 13(4)(b), the Speaker has the incredible charge of trying to preserve order and decorum in this House, and in enforcing 13 it says:

(1) The Speaker shall preserve order and decorum and shall decide questions of order.

It goes on to say:

(4) When a member is speaking, no person shall . . .

(b) interrupt that member, except to raise a point of order.

I don't recall any interruptions other than the point of order being flagged at that time, and I certainly don't think the Speaker heard any of those comments either. If something existed privately between two members, then perhaps it's best left there.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, I would just say that if we were to raise points of order every time some heckling occurred or every time one or two members disagreed with each other or with what was being said, we would be in this House doing nothing but points of order. We see far too much of that type of stuff happening here, and when it does happen, it's not only unfortunate, but it's usual traceable back to some precipitation. In this particular case, if it did happen, I'm sure that's probably what in fact did occur.

In defence of the previous point of order, our member from Calgary-Fish Creek noted how many interjections had occurred. In fact, having kept some score of those same types of interjections, my numbers are just slightly different but pretty much the same as the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek indicated. I think she indicated something in the order of 55 interjections. I counted at least over 46 to the point at which I stopped counting and said: this is going to go on forever. Clearly, we spent a lot of time looking at and listening to and hearing all kinds of points of view in this House, and this one is another example of that.

Just in summary, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that when falsehoods are uttered or when unkind words are said, particularly when they're hurled to and fro, they usually come about as a result of the manner in which a preamble is crafted or the manner in which a particular question has been drafted, purposely perhaps in some cases at least, to exactly get this type of anticipated response. That's far from the purpose of question period. I've sat here for seven years and listened on numerous occasions to this Speaker and others who have occupied that chair explain to us what the purpose of question period is, and it is not a time to be hurling comments back and forth. Not only are they nonproductive, but they don't form part of the official records of this grand Assembly, in any event.

I would contest that there is in fact no point of order that should be raised here or no point of order that is in fact verifiable and substantiatable, so to speak. As such, I don't think it constitutes a point of order.

The member also made reference to the issue of the word "trust" and how it's used. In that case, I think we could count back numerous occasions when they have used similar words, so I would suggest that there is no point of order here whatsoever. However, I'll leave it to your discretion and perhaps to others who may wish to comment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to comment on the point of order. In the process of question period I got involved in an exchange across the House, and clearly I should not have been baited into it by the preambles and the questions that were put forward. I know better. In fact, under our own *Beauchesne* 492 the term "liar" is not appropriate for parliamentary use in this House, and I would like to withdraw the term. I did use that term, even though it is not in the *Hansard*, and I don't want it left there because it is an inappropriate term, so I would like to withdraw it.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there's absolutely no doubt whatsoever that the word "liar" is inappropriate. If the chair would have heard such, there would have been an immediate interjection, as would have been required.

In a follow through to what was said a little earlier, might I just remind all hon. members of *Beauchesne* 486(4):

Remarks which do not appear on the public record and are therefore private conversations not heard by the Chair do not invite the

intervention of the Speaker, although Members have apologized for hurtful remarks uttered in such circumstances.

In this case there was clearly nothing. The chair did not hear such a thing because of perhaps a variety of things, the items, the circumstances that were referred to earlier. In this case, the hon. Minister of Government Services certainly admitted and withdrew, so methinks the matter is resolved, and now we will move on.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, you were going to withdraw your purported point of order.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

[Adjourned debate May 3: Mr. Klapstein]

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, to date on Bill 11 we have had nearly 2,200 minutes of debate, nearly 36 hours. If everyone in the House now spoke again for 20 minutes, that would represent an additional 1,620 minutes, or another 27 hours, for a total of 63 hours. Therefore, to help that happen, pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) I move that this question be now put.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, the chair was moving some papers. Did the chair understand correctly that the hon. Member for Leduc has moved section 47(1)?

MR. KLAPSTEIN: That's right.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, Standing Order 47 has two sections to it, (1) and (2). I will read into the record what 47 says:

(1) The previous question, until it is decided, shall preclude all amendment of the main question. The previous question shall be in the following words: "That this question be now put," which the hon. Member for Leduc has put forward.

(2) If the previous question is resolved in the affirmative, the original question shall be put forthwith without any amendment or debate.

What this means for the operation of the House is that all hon. members who wish to participate on the third reading of Bill 11 now have that opportunity. That means there are 82 members in this Assembly who can participate, and both leaders under our Standing Orders have up to 90 minutes to participate.

When the list of 82 has been concluded or those members who want to participate, then two votes shall occur. The first of these votes shall be "that this question be now put," and the second vote will be then on Bill 11. That's the process.

Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had some comments that I was prepared to make at third reading, and I was banking on the fact that the Premier said last week that there would be no closure at third reading if the Official Opposition agreed not to filibuster, and of course since the Official Opposition doesn't filibuster, we quickly agreed to that and thought that we would have a full and complete third reading debate. It turns out that on Bill 11 at third reading there has been one speaker from the Official Opposition – just one speaker, 20 minutes – and a couple from the government.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, for a government that seems to know the price of everything and, of course, the value of nothing, it should be no surprise to hear the Member for Leduc stand up and recite in minutes and seconds how much time has been spent on this wrong-minded policy, as though there is a time price tag to democracy. Mr. Speaker, democracy is not fast; it is not quiet. It in fact is messy, but it is what we are all about in this Chamber. For one of the most divisive, hurtful policies that any government of Alberta has ever brought forward, Bill 11, to then try to boil it down to: we've spent enough minutes and seconds talking about it; therefore, we're just going to go ahead and use our electoral clout, our majority in the House, to push this through in spite of overwhelming opposition, in spite of the thousands of Albertans who show up at this Legislature every night, in spite of the tens of thousands of Albertans who have signed petitions and sent letters and e-mails, in spite of the experts, in spite of all of the weight of research against such initiatives – this government would have us believe that what it comes down to is simply the inconvenience of debate. "We've heard enough. We want our way. We're bigger than you are, so we're going to get our way."

3:30

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not why I was sent to this Chamber. That's not my understanding of the democratic process. I must tell you, particularly because of the respect I have for the Member for Leduc, that I am surprised and very, very disheartened that it is that hon. member that was tapped on the shoulder by the government to carry forward this breach of democratic process.

I can think of nothing else that this government could have done today to have actually punctuated the dissatisfaction of Albertans not just about Bill 11 but about the growing discontent regarding the arrogance of this government, a government that prides itself on caring and listening and then refuses to listen and clearly doesn't care about the legitimate arguments. Mr. Speaker, I'm not just talking about one or two Albertans. I'm not talking about a partisan response. I am talking about a broad-based coalition of ordinary Albertans, men and women, young and old, from across this province that have come together for one reason and one reason alone, and that is to be desperate in their attempt to stop this government from doing something which the people know is wrong, which the government doesn't seem to care about, and that is the erosion of our public health care system.

The Premier wants to pretend that those who stand opposed to Bill 11 are left-wing nuts or some special-interest group when nothing could be further from the truth. Card-carrying members of the Premier's own party are imploring him not to go ahead with this bill. I have had private conversations – and I won't breach the trust – with members of the government caucus who have told me that they don't like it either and that they are getting tired of being beat up in their own constituencies. But, you know, it's the government's bill, and they feel they have to support it.

We've had the Premier say that he allows a free vote, but he won't sign a pledge. We've had the Premier say that everybody here can represent the views of their constituents, but because of the mail that I'm getting from St. Albert and Sherwood Park and Fort Saskatchewan and Leduc and other places in the greater Edmonton vicinity, I know, because I'm meeting with those same groups and those same people, that if those government members were really to be listening to the majority of their constituents, they would be standing in this Assembly and speaking and voting against Bill 11 because that's the view of their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, to pretend for one minute that Bill 11 is all about building fences around existing private initiatives is poppycock.

Let's take a look at the evolution of the government's rhetoric about Bill 11. It started off being: we're going to reduce the pain and suffering. The favourite example of the Premier in those days was the example of waiting lists for hip surgery. He accused the Official Opposition of wanting to keep Alberta's senior citizens on painfully long waiting lists for hip surgery. Then the College of Physicians and Surgeons canceled that party. They said: "Do you know what? Hip surgery is not simple surgery. Hip surgery is not a good example." You can't do hip surgery in the way that the Premier would have us believe, so hip surgery is not an example, and it fell out of the government's lexicon.

So we went from relieving the pain and suffering to: well, we're going to make it more efficient; we need flexibility in the system; we don't have the flexibility; we're going to be bankrupt. Then study after study after study, report after report after report, bricks of evidence, brick by brick by brick built an impregnable wall around that argument. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there is no evidence that contracting out surgeries, that creaming off easy surgeries produces greater capacity in the public system. There is no evidence that cherry-picking patients saves money for the public system. There's no evidence at all that these private clinics, who have to pay taxes and who have to ensure profits, can offer medically necessary treatments more efficiently, more cost-effectively than well-managed, properly funded and staffed public hospitals. No evidence whatsoever.

So we went from pain and suffering to flexibility and efficiency. The pain and suffering argument went by the boards. The flexibility and efficiency argument went by the boards. Now we're getting to where the government is saying: oh, it's all about building regulatory fences around the existing clinics. They talk about the three or four dozen existing private clinics as though those clinics do the same thing that they're talking about.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, these private clinics do day surgery, out patient only. These private clinics do low-intensity surgery. They take advantage of the latest technology, and many of these private clinics are efficient. They work in partnership, but they do not perform complex surgeries needing overnight or longer stays. The fact is that there is an existing regulatory framework around these private clinics, even though the Premier and his colleagues would have us believe that there is no existing legal framework to protect Albertans against abuses by private businesses posing as medical businesses.

In fact, there are bylaws made by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. There is the Alberta Hospitals Act. There is the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. Mr. Speaker, there is clearly a set of rules in place. Part of it is the negotiated agreement to do with the fee schedule between the Alberta Medical Association and the government of Alberta. The Minister of Health and Wellness knows full well about the regulatory environment because he's had to face these questions in the past: what would happen if doctors opt out, and what is the impact on the system, and how do certain procedures become classified on the list and other procedures come off the list? It is misleading to the extreme to suggest that there is no regulatory environment which governs the provision of medically necessary services. In fact, it's one of the most layered and complex and detailed regulatory environments in the province. So this is clearly not about simply building regulatory fences.

On the point that the government seems to make about these clinics that popped up on the scene in the late 1990s and somehow saying that it was the former minister of health's fault that these clinics popped up, let's take a look. The abortion clinics became a feature of the Alberta medical system as a result of a Supreme Court of Canada decision. The ophthalmology clinics became a feature of

the Alberta medical environment as a result of a complex series of events that included technology, the relationship between specialists and general practitioners and the Alberta Medical Association, the location of certain practitioners and the relationship they had with specific hospitals. So, Mr. Speaker, it was clearly an accommodation at the time with all kinds of limits being put into place.

In fact, when the Official Opposition leader was minister of health, there was an ambulatory care policy that was prepared for government that would have truly reined in these private operations. But you know what? The government, which has become the government of the current Premier with this current cabinet, that government rejected that ambulatory care policy clearly because they had their eye on some possible future when they could truly pay homage to special-interest groups and provide some kind of financial benefit to those who had their ear and were pushing the government down the path of more and more private care at the expense of our public system.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that this government has been marching down this path since at least 1993. The systematic underfunding of the public system, the squeeze on the public system, the closure of hospital beds from one corner of this province to another, the blowing up of hospitals, the renaming of public hospitals to community health care centres, the laying off of thousands and thousands of nurses and thousands and thousands of other health care professionals, the driving away of doctors by diminishing their role in the system, by questioning their expertise and their motivations: this has clearly been all part of the piece.

I'm going to admit to something at this point. I'm going to admit that I was wrong about this government, because back in 1993 and 1994 and 1995 I stood in this Chamber in my place during health care budget debates and I said: Mr. Speaker, this government doesn't have a plan; this government does not have a plan about health care; they don't have a vision about health care; they seem just to be helter-skelter in their approach to our health care system. But I was wrong. They do have a plan, and we are seeing the evidence of that plan now. Not only was I wrong; this plan is worse than them not having a plan. This was their purposeful dismantling of public health care to create an opportunity for private business to take the place of public good, and this government has been marching toward this end for some time.

3:40

Now, perhaps I should be buoyed by this. Pushing through Bill 11, this policy, at this point in time indicates a couple of things to me, Mr. Speaker. Number one, it indicates to me that this government has lost its moral authority to govern this province, and that should actually buoy my spirits. Number two, it indicates to me that this government is very clearly at the end of its tether – why else would they be rushing to keep promises to those special-interest groups who will benefit and profit by this policy if it wasn't that they thought they were at the end of their rope? – that it's time for them to keep that promise they made behind closed doors to those individuals who will benefit from this policy.

It's clearly not the everyday Albertan that'll benefit from this policy. It's not the hardworking wage earner who'll benefit from this policy. We're not going to get faster care. We're not going to get cheaper care. We're not going to see waiting lists decrease. We're not going to end the pain and suffering. What we are going to do is we're going to take the hard-earned money that is paid to the government in the form of tax dollars, taken out of the pockets of the taxpayers, and put it in the pockets of the investors of these private clinics. That is what we're going to see. That will be the net result of this policy.

Now, the Premier can pretend all he wants that this is about flexibility and innovation. He can pretend all he wants that he has other provinces on board with him, but when you do a careful analysis, Mr. Speaker, the province of Saskatchewan law doesn't allow what Bill 11 allows. The province of Ontario law doesn't allow what Bill 11 in Alberta does. The legislation in British Columbia doesn't allow what Bill 11 does. Only Alberta will have the distinction of being a safe haven for privateers in health care. Only Alberta will be the place where if you want to up sell people, if you want to take advantage of markets, if you want to take advantage of people when they're the most vulnerable, you've got permission from the government to do that. In Alberta you're going to have a law that's going to permit and allow sale of enhanced services and products. In Alberta you're going to have a law that will direct regional health authorities and will expect regional health authorities to have a contractual relationship with a private clinic. Okay?

Now, that's not what happens in Ontario. This government has used the Shouldice Hospital in Ontario as an example. The Shouldice Hospital does not operate with a contract. There is no minimum guarantee of tax dollars transferred for medical procedures to the Shouldice Hospital. It's only in Alberta that this government wants to rush to put taxpayers' money into the form of a subsidy to private enterprise. Mr. Speaker, I don't think that is the future of Alberta's health care system that the taxpayers want. In fact, I know it's not the future of Alberta's health care system that the voters of this province want, and I will say that this government will be mightily surprised, in fact, with what happens in terms of the electoral backlash from Bill 11.

Let me conclude my remarks – because this will be the last opportunity I'm going to be given to speak to Bill 11. I see the Minister of Learning is applauding at that. You know, before politics the Minister of Learning was a medical practitioner. I don't know what he considers himself now, but I know that I've talked to literally hundreds of his former colleagues. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? They don't like Bill 11 either. So he can applaud all he wants. It's not me that he's going to have to be afraid of not listening to again. It's his own constituents that he's going to have to be afraid of hearing from. In fact, that's where I'll conclude, as I was saying. I'll conclude where I began.

It is appalling that the government would curtail debate at every opportunity on Bill 11. It is absolutely appalling, when you talk about a government that ought to be ashamed of itself, a government that is so uncertain and so insecure about its own position, so unwilling to put forward one shred of evidence, that all they can do, Mr. Speaker, is close their eyes, plug their ears, point fingers at other people and then say: we're not going to listen anymore.

Mr. Speaker, this government has found a whole new low when it comes to paying attention to the electorate concerning very, very important social policy, and today marks that low waterline. Today we've seen this government exposed for what it is. They are dismissive of critics. They turn their back on debate. They have disdain for democracy, and I think they clearly don't care about the lot of the men and women who make this province such a wonderful place.

MS HALEY: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. government whip on a point of order.

Point of Order Reflections on Members

MS HALEY: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to rise on a point of order,

referring to members in a debate. *Beauchesne* 484(3) is “to impute to any Member or Members unworthy motives for their actions in a particular case.” I guess I would like to, on this point of order, bring to the awareness of the Liberal opposition that every single member of this Assembly has a chance to speak on third reading. There is no desire to cut off their opportunity to have that conversation. According to the Standing Orders that were moved this afternoon, it was to prevent more amendments from coming in and to find ways to delay, which is all we’ve managed to do on this bill for about two months, the parliamentary process.

The member, just prior to that in his speech, also commented that there must be some untoward motive for us wanting to pass this bill. The motive in passing this bill is to improve access for Albertans, to ensure that the health care system . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: That’s what we’re debating.

MS HALEY: No, it’s not. It’s not debating. You’re implying all kinds of . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on the point of order, which is *Beauchesne* 484.

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m familiar with 484 in *Beauchesne*. The fact is that there are many opportunities at all stages of debate to utilize the precedents of parliamentary practice; for example, to move amendments even at third reading, just as there were opportunities at second reading, at committee.

Now, this government moved to curtail the opportunity for the Official Opposition to do that in committee. We had the word of the Premier that that wouldn’t happen unless something happened at third reading. There may have been an amendment coming at third reading, but because of the moving of a motion pursuant to Standing Order 47, that opportunity has been taken away. So clearly the opportunity for debate until the natural conclusion of debate has been taken away.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is nothing that I have said that violates *Beauchesne* 484. There is everything that the government has done that violates democratic practice.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair would observe that 484 deals with: “It is the custom in the House that no Member should refer to another by name.” We have intervened on a number of occasions, and people have objected to that. In part (2) is designation, and part (3):

. . . will not be permitted by the Speaker to indulge in any reflections on the House itself as a political institution; or to impute to any Member or Members unworthy motives for their actions in a particular case; or to use any profane or indecent language; or to question the acknowledged and undoubted powers of the House in a matter of privilege; or to reflect upon, argue against or in any manner call in question the past acts and proceedings of the House, or to speak in abusive and disrespectful terms of an Act of Parliament.

In this part there is some question as to whether or not in the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora’s comments with regard to the government there was some reflection on the House. I would presume that if there was in any way, unintended or otherwise, a reflection on the House, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora would want to retract that, if there was any.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the gist of my argument is the respect that I have for what happens in this Chamber: the democratic process. So, clearly, there is nothing that

I am saying that diminishes the role of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta or this Chamber.

What I’m saying, Mr. Speaker, very clearly is that this government, in my opinion, does not share that same respect and feeling for what happens in this place, and they have shown that contempt as a government by using every bit of procedure they can to stop debate on a bill that is talked about in every coffee shop in every corner of every town, city, and village in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate very much your guidance in the matter. If that is satisfactory in terms of the point of order, I believe I still have a couple of minutes left of my time in third reading. Is that true?

3:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair would take it, then, that if there was some reflection on the House, you would withdraw that. I haven’t got the Blues nor a perfect memory and recall of all the things that the hon. member was laying forth. That may be reviewed at a later time. In the meantime, it will be taken that there was none intended nor offered.

MR. SAPERS: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: The people of Alberta have made it clear that they don’t want Bill 11 to be passed into law. The government of Alberta has failed at every opportunity to establish credible reasons for this legislation. There can be no other conclusion than that this government knows something it’s not sharing with the rest of us. There can be no other conclusion than that this government has private reasons, that it wishes to keep secret, in terms of its pursuit of Bill 11, and it is determined that Bill 11 will become law.

Even today in question period, Mr. Speaker, we asked one more time. Once Bill 11 does become law, against the wishes of the majority of Albertans, will they agree that it not be proclaimed until first ministers across the country have had a chance to review the implications? Will they agree that no regulations will be done in secret, that the regulation-making process will be open and transparent, that the regulations will be referred to a standing committee of this Assembly? That would be an all-party committee. You know, the answer was no. It was just dismissed. It was cast aside with the same arrogance as all the other concerns and complaints regarding Bill 11 have been cast aside.

Mr. Speaker, I’m convinced that the government of Alberta has something else in mind, that we’ve only just really scratched the surface of the danger of Bill 11. It’s not a matter, as the Premier was saying, that the sun won’t be shining when we wake up the day after they ram this through. Of course the sun will be shining and the skies will be blue in Alberta, but the men and women of this province will be somewhat poorer for this wrong-minded public policy. They’ll be poorer in terms of a loss to the community, and they’ll be poorer in fact because their health care expenditures are going to be going up as a result of this policy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today in this House and express my full support of the government amendments to Bill 11 as well as Bill 11 itself, the Health Care Protection Act.

The amendments to Bill 11, which aim to further protect the

publicly funded health system, include changes recommended by the Alberta Medical Association, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, and other professional groups. The amendments tighten the prohibitions on queue-jumping, making it illegal not only for a person to pay for faster service or to receive a payment to give faster service but also for a person to give faster access to an insured service through the purchase of an enhanced product or service or through the purchase of an uninsured service.

The amendments proposed seek to strengthen the restrictions already in place within the bill. For example, the costs of enhanced medical goods and services must be reasonable. In other words, a public hospital, surgical facility, or physician will be prohibited from charging a patient more than the product cost and a reasonable fee. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We seem to have a debate within a debate. I wonder if the two hon. members on the front benches on either side would retire to the back. They could have their debate at length, and then we would be able to hear the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Debate Continued

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, they will be prohibited from charging a patient more than the product cost and a reasonable fee in connection with the provision of the insured service.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, no person or facility will be able to require a patient receiving a medically necessary procedure to purchase a medical product or service or a nonmedical product or service as a result of the procedure being performed in a surgical facility. Bill 11 also allows the minister to limit the charges for these products and services, whether they're sold in a public hospital or a surgical facility.

In addition, the proposed amendments specify that existing hospital space must be used efficiently and effectively. Health authorities will have to consider the efficient and effective use of existing capacity in their own hospitals before considering a contract with a surgical facility. Currently if the health authority or the minister decides that a particular facility cannot provide services that are of benefit to the public system, there will not be a contract signed with the surgical facility for the provision of services. The amendment enhances this provision by outlining a clear process to be used by the Minister of Health and Wellness in withdrawing the designation of a surgical facility.

I'm proud to support these amendments, Mr. Speaker, because they are a result of effective public consultation. Not every piece of legislation is perfect, so I'm glad we have the opportunity during this process to fine-tune the bill and address the concerns of Albertans. It's important that we look carefully at this bill, because health care is dear to people's hearts, and whenever we are looking at change, however minor that change may be, it's crucial that we take a step back and look at how we can manage that change.

Mr. Speaker, throughout history change has never come easily, whether it be religious, political, or social reform. There are always factions that advocate strongly against change and those who believe there's a better way to do things. This instinct against change is a quality inherent amongst people in all societies. It's a skill that has benefited people since the beginning of time, and it's the instinct that tells us that if we are unsure of where we're going, we should

proceed with caution. It's why I sympathize with Albertans who are concerned about the future of public health care in Alberta. Albertans have seen on their televisions an endless parade of special interest groups suggesting that this government's agenda is to privatize health care. They've heard that this is the start of a slippery slope towards privatized, two-tiered health care or the thin edge of the wedge of American style medicine.

That's where the survival instinct kicks in for most people. That's where people start to fear change regardless of how small or innocuous that change may be. And what a job the members of the Official Opposition have done. By repeating the words "private hospital" and "two-tiered" so often, they seem to have modified Albertans' vernacular. Nowadays these words have become almost as nasty as many other words deemed unparliamentary in this House. Certain words can take on certain meanings beyond that which is found in a dictionary. Fortunately, these often-used words don't apply to the debate that we're engaged in today.

As many of my colleagues in government have outlined, there is nothing in the Health Care Protection Act that suggests that Albertans will have to pay for medically necessary services. There is nothing in the Health Care Protection Act that allows a two-tiered health system. While all people have an instinctual fear of change, the root cause or the source of danger can be different for different people. Some may fear for their freedom and for the quality of life of their children, while others fear for their own financial or professional future.

Mr. Speaker, on Canada Day in 1962 the Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act came into effect. On that day the province's doctors launched a strike that they thought would force the government to repeal the legislation. Two factions were formed in that debate. Against public medicare were all but a few doctors, the Liberal Party, the business community, and the Canadian and the American medical associations. On the pro medicare side were the government of Saskatchewan and a few doctors who chose to break ranks with their colleagues. There was a lot of fear back then, a lot of people looking out for their own best interests, not necessarily those of the citizens of this country. It's striking to see that some of the things they discussed then are being as hotly debated across this country today. They were talking about the skyrocketing cost of patient care. They were talking about who would be responsible for paying for this program.

Mr. Speaker, you've got to hand it to the late hon. Tommy Douglas. He was a true Canadian who badly wanted to make a difference, and he did just that. He helped create a universal health care system that benefits all Canadians and gives us peace of mind. He showed solid leadership in developing a program that was fiercely contested by scores of interest groups, and he did what he knew was right. I think I speak for my constituents when I say that I'm glad he took that step.

4:00

I for one wouldn't want to do anything that threatens that system. This is a system that helps those in need. That's why both the Canada Health Act and Bill 11 entrench the five principles of the Canada Health Act in law. The principles of universality, accessibility, comprehensiveness, portability, and public administration help to maintain the spirit of our publicly funded system. My constituents have made it clear that these principles must be maintained, and that's exactly what Bill 11 does.

Mr. Speaker, there is nothing in this bill that should instill fear in the hearts of Albertans. However, members across the floor have taken those words I mentioned earlier and used them well. They've charged into seniors' homes and extended care facilities and used the

words that arouse the fight-or-flight instinct. One staff member here at the Legislature found a brochure, emblazoned with a photograph of the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that says that we're trying to privatize the entire health care system. He found this brochure on a church pew. Some Bill 11 opponents know where all the hot buttons are and are happy to press them as long as they benefit politically or, in some cases, as long as they gain strength in their next contract negotiations with the province.

MRS. SLOAN: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We have a point of order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MRS. SLOAN: A point of order, Mr. Speaker, under 23(h), (i), and (j). I believe, if I heard the hon. member correctly, he imputed that the opposition was blazing into seniors' homes in this province attempting to incite fear in the hearts of our senior citizens. I would suggest that that is most certainly false. It's most certainly provocative and in fact violates both our Standing Orders and parliamentary procedure.

The reality, in fact, is that in my own . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Once you get into the reality, you're into the debate. You're objecting to his use of this term.

The hon. member on the point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j), as listed.

MR. MAGNUS: Mr. Speaker, there is no point of order. To use the expression about blazing into seniors' homes and being in churches is not a point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the points of order that are raised from time to time, it remains to be seen whether in fact they will be judged a point of order. We've had examples of both sides imputing motives to the other side. Our Standing Orders deal with making "allegations against another member," and I did not hear that, and with imputing "false or unavowed motives to another member." I did not hear that.

Now, the last part, when you describe people blazing in and doing those kinds of things, that may be "language of a nature likely to create disorder." That could be perhaps held. On this bill, it seems to the chair, each side has accused the other side. On the one hand, we talk about the opposition having certain kinds of motives and procedures, and we talk about, on the other hand, the government having unworthy motives and so on. Those are regrettable uttered by either side, but they have been. When we get to specifically naming individuals, then that's where the rules, as the chair would interpret them, kick in.

Abusive language. Certainly there has been some of that on both sides, and when the chair feels it necessary to intervene in those instances is when the other side, the aggrieved party, makes noises and starts yelling back and forth and therefore brings disorder. So far, other than the point of order, we really haven't had disorder. Let's not invite it, please.

We are at third reading. I would invite the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill to continue his debate.

Debate Continued

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The emotions that have

risen to the surface in our province in the frenetic pace of the public debate are over what is in fact a modest piece of legislation. Judging by the rhetoric being thrown around by certain members of the House, I can see why some of my constituents fear that this bill privatizes our health system, and that's the biggest misconception around. It is vitally important today that we take a step away from these tactics and work together for medicare rather than for narrow self-interest.

Bill 11 has a narrow scope and a limited purpose. In fact, when this bill is passed, I don't think that most Albertans will notice much of a change. Perhaps one change people will notice is that they're getting certain services done faster and more conveniently. Hopefully, Albertans might also notice that waiting lists for operating rooms have shortened. I'm sure those in the medical profession will in fact notice the difference.

Once the Health Care Protection Act is passed, it will continue to be business as usual in the province of Alberta. Our health care professionals will carry on helping people with their health, and Albertans will continue to rest comfortably knowing that the health care system is still there for them when things go wrong. The bill is not intended to be a panacea for the health care system. This proposed legislation simply adds another tool for health authorities to work in the public interest. It offers another avenue for administrators to get help to those who need it. Bill 11 gives the regional health authorities the freedom to contract out, in a very limited way, certain surgical services. That simple change gives the stewards of our health care system the flexibility to try different approaches to solving some of the problems facing this system.

I can see nothing wrong with adding flexibility to a system that requires change, and I don't think that even members of the opposition will argue with the assertion that the system needs to evolve. Of course, opposition members don't have solutions. Actually, that's not entirely true, Mr. Speaker. They do propose one thing: throw more money at the problem. It seems to be their answer to simply put more taxpayer dollars into the system in the blind hope that it will remain afloat, and any possible solution besides spending more is a manifestation of some secret agenda to privatize health care and rob Albertans of their most important social institution.

One thing I know for sure, Mr. Speaker, is this. When you have a car that leaks or burns oil, you can keep it on the road by adding oil or you can fix the problem. With regard to health care, I would prefer to introduce some minor reforms and try to improve the system for the future rather than simply funnel more taxpayer dollars into it, and I think that is exactly what Bill 11 proposes to do. I also think that when it comes down to it, Albertans want us to do that as well.

Bill 11 helps by plugging holes that currently exist in our legislative framework. By establishing firm guidelines and defining regulations, Bill 11 provides much-needed controls on the development of private health facilities in Alberta. It does this by prohibiting any private surgical facility from providing insured service unless that facility has a contract with a regional health authority to provide those services on behalf of the health authority and unless the Minister of Health and Wellness has approved that contract. That provision acts like a fence around the contracted surgical facilities, ensuring that they can't operate without the express consent of the government of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, what we're talking about here is a bill that does two simple things. Bill 11 provides a regulatory framework ensuring that Alberta's health system remains in compliance with the five principles of the Canada Health Act, and secondly, it allows the regional health authorities the freedom to be inventive and proactive in their effort to reduce waiting lists. That's why I'm happy to stand

here today and support Bill 11. When the fear recedes and the discourse returns to normal, I think people will see Bill 11 for what it really is, a strengthening of the public health system. It isn't a panacea, nor is it a great reform that changes the course of social policy in Alberta. However, it is nonetheless important. We need to act instead of reacting, we need to stand and be leaders in the area of health care, and we need to show the rest of Canada that there are alternatives. There's room for improvement, and our government will do whatever it takes to ensure that Albertans have access to a reasonable, effective, and universal health care system.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to rise today in this House and speak to the amendments in Bill 11 and to the bill itself. The amendments help improve an already progressive initiative that will contribute in a significant way to helping our health care system address current and future needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

4:10

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to stand and speak against Bill 11 at third reading. Third reading, of course, is our opportunity to return to the principles of the bill and to reflect upon them after having had second reading and Committee of the Whole debate.

I want to preface my remarks with a couple of comments. One, I do applaud the government for sending a copy of this bill to every Albertan. I do that in light of our experience since the bill was introduced, because no matter how you try to explain it, Albertans do not like this bill. I would like to think that as an effective opposition, in working with those interested in public health care, we were able to influence the thinking of Albertans, but I'm afraid that's not the case. Albertans read the bill, and the more often they read it and the more they learned about it, the less they liked it. I think that is the bottom line. That's the truth of the matter.

There have been some comments that those who oppose the bill oppose change. I think that's an argument of convenience and one that's not true. I think all of us, at least for the 15 years that I've been associated with the party on this side of the House, have been looking for better ways of improving public health care. I look back to members like the hon. Bettie Hewes for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who came forward with a number of very positive proposals. We know the system has to change, and we know this isn't the change that we need.

Just one more comment, before looking at some of the specific principles, on the kind of distrust, the kind of climate that has been created by the government. Embodying the principles of the Canada Health Act in the preamble of the bill is something I think we would applaud, but you have to take that inclusion and look at the government's previous record in terms of voting against those very same principles. So it leads one to question what's going on. How can Albertans believe that the government is really committed to those principles given their past behaviour? Again, it leads to the suspicion that the endorsement of the Canada Health Act principles is merely convenience and window dressing to bring in the parts of the bill that Albertans find so reprehensible.

One of the principles that seems to underline the bill, of course, is that private health care will cost less and help make the waiting lists shorter. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the government has not brought in a shred of evidence that would support that premise. I looked at the study the province had commissioned, the Donaldson and Currie study, and at the kinds of comments they made in their

overview of studies. One of their conclusions is that

there are [very] serious issues and questions . . . regarding the Alberta experience with private provision of a publicly funded service, which should be investigated seriously by a government considering further extensions of private provision of insured health services.

That in itself, you'd think, would give the government cause to stop and listen to what is being said. The report doesn't come right out and say that it costs more, but it said: look; there's enough evidence out there that the government should be wary. That's one of the conclusions that the Donaldson and Currie study put forward.

Again, why would a government proceed with a bill that seems to violate such an important premise? You would think that if we were going to move into private health care, it would be, if the government had its way, because it would cost less – well, it doesn't; it costs more – and it would shorten waiting lists. Well, it doesn't. The lists grow longer. Experience elsewhere with similar bills has proven just that, that Albertans will wait longer and pay more. I don't understand how the government can defend that kind of legislation and pretend that they're adhering to and supporting the principles of the Canada Health Act.

There's another premise – and of course this is the one that really has upset Albertans – and that's the assumption or the premise that somehow or other private surgical facilities differ from private hospitals. Albertans just do not see the difference. The bill can make all the claims it wants, the government can make all the claims they want, but the bottom line is that there's no difference. If there is a difference, Albertans and those in the opposition are unable to see that difference. We've had hours of debate, and we heard listed today the minutes of debate. That is, I think, the first time it's happened that we have had the actual minutes that we debated counted. In all of those minutes and seconds, we have not heard the difference between a private hospital and a private surgical facility. It's that premise, that there is somehow a difference, that has Albertans concerned and worried.

The premise that the definition of what is a major surgical procedure and what's a minor surgical procedure can be left to an independent body, an independent body that has some self-interest in those definitions, is again a premise of the bill that's very, very questionable. The vast majority of medical doctors across this province oppose the bill, but there are some of those in that profession, a very few, who will be in a position to further their self-interest, given how those procedures are defined, and again it's a weakness in the bill that that provision is there.

Another assumption or premise in the bill is that pressure on patients to buy enhanced services will not take place because of the provisions of Bill 11. Again, it's a premise that doesn't seem to be borne out in other places. You can imagine yourself, Mr. Speaker, in a private surgical facility and under some duress, because you're there obviously for the remedy of some ailment, and someone presents to you a list of further things that could be done at the same time and suggests that they would be beneficial to your health. The chances are that you're going to say yes. So the practitioners won't have a very hard sell to have patients take them up on those enhanced services, and again that's borne out by experiences elsewhere in the world.

Patients are not customers who have comparison shopped, who move around and evaluate services that they're going to buy. Patients are people usually under some pressure and usually frightened, and the kinds of decisions that they make or that we make under those conditions are quite different from the kinds of decisions we make when we're out shopping for a landscaper for our property or for someone to come and clean the house. Those are

quite different decisions. Again, we seem unable to learn from experience elsewhere. It just doesn't make sense that we are not tapping others' experience, especially on something as precious and as dear to the hearts of Albertans as health care. Why we seem unable to or seem to close our eyes to that other experience I think most of us find very, very difficult to understand.

4:20

I think another premise that seems to underline the bill is that other nonsurgical health services do not need to be regulated. Again, it's hard to understand the distinction that's being made by the government. Diagnostic imaging, fertility clinics, and mental health services are all parts of the system, yet somehow or other the assumption, the premise in the bill is that they don't count, that they don't need to be provided for in this legislation. It's the provision of those very services that has Albertans looking at the specter of a private health care system. When they see that if they go and pay for an MRI at a private clinic, it allows them to go back to their medical doctor and to enter a public hospital and jump the waiting line for surgery – those people in that line are still waiting for that MRI service within the public system – when they see that happening right now, today, without Bill 11, they're even more frightened. So the assumption that those health services somehow or other shouldn't be considered within the context of Bill 11 is one that is really quite astounding and again leads to a distrust, if you will, of Bill 11.

One of the other assumptions or principles that the bill seems to operate on is that health care bracket creep will not be a problem. Yet we know full well that it will be, that the number of procedures is growing at a rapid rate, that technology is adding new and better services at a rapid rate, and that the kinds of things that patients will come to expect to be provided by the system are going to grow. Bill 11 seems to say that the provisions of the bill will account for that, and again it's very difficult to see how.

A further principle of the bill would read that limited access to health care contracts is satisfactory public policy. That's just not true, Mr. Speaker. It's no good waiting two or three years to find out the details of contracts that are being put in place today. A real fear on the part of many is that the kind of access to information provided by private health care providers is not open to the kind of scrutiny that other recipients of public dollars are subjected to. So the provisions within the bill are just not good enough in terms of making public the deals that are being made, and of course there's a great deal of fear across the province. If you look at the increased activity in some of the corporations related to the provision of health care services, the increased activity by those companies in the last six months makes one wonder about this whole notion of things that are being done now that we'll only learn about two or three years down the road. Again, it's a weakness in the bill that makes the bill even more unacceptable.

The assumption in the bill that the guidelines for approving private facilities should be left to the health minister is, again, one that has many Albertans raising questions. The provision that the minister's decisions would not be questioned in court the government of course changed because of the kind of public outcry. They tried to make provision for that in the amendments that were introduced, but there's still a great deal of reservation about leaving in the hands of the health minister the kinds of decision-making that Bill 11 leaves. It makes one wonder how well served Albertans are going to be with that provision in the bill.

A further assumption is that there should be no limit on the size and scope of private facilities. That again is a principle that I think ill serves health care and ill serves Albertans. The bill doesn't limit the procedures that can be performed. It doesn't limit the number of

days they can keep patients, and nothing in the bill restricts private companies from establishing for-profit health facilities that are even bigger than the existing public hospitals. You could have facilities in this city, you could have HRG in Calgary grow to a size larger than any of the public facilities. Again, it's a weakness. It's a principle that doesn't seem to serve Albertans or the public health care system well.

In drawing to conclusion my comments at third reading, Mr. Speaker, I would like to go back to the question, the one haunting question of this whole legislation, and it's the "who benefits?" question. No matter how it's been answered or how the government has tried to answer it, that question remains unanswered to the satisfaction of most Albertans. If waiting lists are not going to be reduced, if it's not going to save the system money, if it's going to place in jeopardy possibly the health care system and open the doors to companies and to private providers outside the borders of the province, if all those things are going to happen, then why is the government pushing forward with Bill 11, and who benefits? Who benefits remains the question.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I think it's unfortunate that this will be the last time I or each member, as they indicate their feelings at third reading, will be able to speak to the bill before it's brought to a vote. It's a bill that deserves much more discussion, and it's a bill that deserves amendment at this stage to try to make it better. Why are we giving up on trying to improve things?

With those comments I would conclude. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I get to the subject matter of Bill 11, I want to comment on our democratic parliamentary system. Our democratic parliamentary system specifies a clear lawmaking process for elected members. We respect the parliamentary process. It may not be perfect, but it is better than any other system, and it has survived the test of time for about 800 years. What I'd like to say is that we use democracy here in the process of debating about our health system. The common-good objective is to sustain the health and wellness of Albertans. Our objective as an accountable government is to create the most public good from the limited and hard-earned taxpayers' dollars. Even though aiming for the same objective of public good, one often gets accused of destroying the objective when one does not follow the way of the accuser.

In the context of representing my Calgary-Fort constituents, I'm very honoured and pleased to speak on Bill 11. From my constituents I have heard many encouraging opinions and many deep concerns about our health care. I have brought forward their issues, concerns, and solutions. I have heard many of my colleagues speaking on Bill 11. I have seen the progress made by the government listening to Albertans reflected in the meaningful amendments to Bill 11. Bill 11 debate is now going into a new stage with the completion of the needed amendments that our responsive government introduced after listening to suggestions from individual Albertans, from stakeholder groups, from myself and my colleagues.

4:30

Yes, Mr. Speaker, health care is very important to myself, my family, to every Albertan, and to all Canadians now and in the future. I treasure and cherish our Canadian public health care system with its legislated principles of universality, comprehensiveness, accessibility, portability, and public administration.

Mr. Speaker, in my own analysis, our health care system has two components. Component number one is the public health care

insurance. It is governed by the Canada Health Act and the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. It's based upon a single public insurance program to cover everyone, rich or poor, young or old. All we need is the health care insurance card to pay for our insured health care services.

Component number two is the delivery of health care services. The services are many, not limited to surgeries, and the deliveries are not limited to the confines of hospitals. They range from local community health centres to ambulance services, from specialist clinics to medical school hospitals. They range from checkups at private doctors' offices to buying drugs at private pharmacies, from lab tests to treatment of skin rash, from stitching cuts to brain surgeries. They also range from physiotherapy rehabilitation to dealing with mental health, and many more. Our public health care insurance is the cornerstone. It remains intact, solid, and as well protected as ever. I shall fight to the best of my ability against any plan or program that dismantles it.

However, there are many ways to deliver the services. Should we insist on delivering all services from hospitals only, or should we allow for some services to be delivered by other means outside the confines of hospitals? That is the question, and Bill 11 provides part of the answer. Bill 11 is all about allowing public health authorities and public hospital management to contract out some less complex surgeries.

I have lived in and have been to many countries. Indeed, many members of my extended family are living in different countries. From my own experience and their experiences I have learned that in other countries they allow many different private health care insurance programs, and the public takes care of those who are not covered by the private health care insurance program. This is where multitier starts. I am against this and so are the majority of my constituents.

Other countries also allow for full-service private hospitals to operate alongside the public hospitals. This is where patients are separated into those who can pay and those who cannot pay for their basic health care services. I'm against this and so are the majority of my constituents.

None of this is allowed in Alberta. It is formally stated clearly in Bill 11. That is why I agree with Bill 11. It is an Alberta-made solution for the needs of Albertans. The original text of Bill 11 and its amendments to address concerns of citizens are clear. Simply, it has two objectives. Number one: putting legal control around what already has existed for years. It means protecting patients. Number two: allowing public health authorities and hospital management to contract out less complex surgeries when it is proven to be beneficial to patients and taxpayers. It means freeing up more costly hospital operating rooms for more complex surgeries.

After Bill 11 and all its government amendments are passed and become law, I see nine positive points for a better future.

Number one, patients are protected from extra billing, extra payment, queue-jumping, and so on. It all remains under one public health care insurance program for all Albertans.

Number two, patients have more access points, more clinics to go to, not just hospitals, for less complex surgeries and can receive quality services without paying, as it all remains covered by one public health insurance program.

Number three, it provides flexibility for health service and public hospital management to contract out less complex surgeries to any qualified service provider, nonprofit or private. It is only an option and with stringent contracting conditions.

Number four, taxpayers are protected in that the contracts and costs are open to the public, free from conflict of interest, subject to improvement in effectiveness and efficiency. Contracts are subject

to being revoked, rejected, renewed like any normal public contracts.

Number five, our health care services via the public hospitals and medical facilities are still growing to meet more advanced and complex treatments. We shall continue the miracle of 20,000 to 30,000 babies born each year. We shall continue the miracle of thousands of organ transplants. We continue to see the progress and advance of research and discoveries. Our lives are maintained more by preventive measures than by treatment measures. Our current health care spending is \$5.6 billion. That is 15 and a half million dollars each day; 32 percent of our total public provincial spending is in health care. In the past four years spending on health care increased \$1.5 billion, an increase of 40 percent.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. CAO: A 40 percent increase in the last four years. This is despite the fact that the federal transfer payment support for health and social programs has fallen by almost 30 percent since 1995, and we have never spent more on health care than we are spending today. Health spending increases will be more than \$1 billion, or 21 percent, over the next three years.

The number of beds has also gone up. In the Calgary region we have more beds open and staffed than in 1994-95. This is despite the closure of the three old hospitals. In 1999-2000 the Edmonton region has opened 100 new permanent acute care beds and 150 new permanent continuing care beds. Today more diagnostic services, more surgeries are being performed than ever before.

Number six, our schools still provide more training spaces for health care professionals such as doctors, nurses, technologists, research scientists, and so on. Last year we targeted hiring an additional 1,000 nurses and frontline health care professionals, and in fact we hired almost 1,200. In the next three years we will be hiring up to 2,400 more. By the end of 1999 we increased the number of doctors by 250 from the previous year, an increase of 400 over two years, and we expect 90 more this year. Also, funding has been increased for 40 more residency doctors and 200 places in nursing schools. Our education budget for 2000-2003 is targeted to increase by 19 percent over the next three years.

Number seven, health care professionals have more choices of where to work right here in Alberta instead of going outside of the province. Employers have to treat the staff well or else they will go to different employers. Surgeons have more operating time and more operating rooms to use, not limited to the confines of the hospitals.

Number eight, all hospitals are public, since Bill 11 states that no private hospital is allowed in Alberta.

Number nine, as a strong Canadian nationalist I find that Bill 11 is not opening wide the health care door to foreign companies under the free trade agreement. NAFTA contains a carve-out reservation clause that allows federal and provincial governments to protect the publicly funded system. Similar contracts already exist in other provinces without any implication under NAFTA.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, I have seen the excerpt from the NAFTA reservation text. Annex II, social services, national treatment, articles 1102 and 1202, cross-border services and investment, reads:

Canada reserves the right to adopt or maintain any measure with respect to the provision of public law enforcement and correctional services, and the following services to the extent that they are social services established or maintained for the public purpose: income security or insurance, social security or insurance, social welfare, public education, public training, health, and child care.

This means our publicly funded health care is carved out of

NAFTA. Also, government procurement is not within the coverage of NAFTA. The contracting out of the government is a type of government procurement. By the way, Mr. Speaker, private hospitals have existed in Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver for a long time, and there has not been any NAFTA challenge.

Before drawing to a conclusion, let me go back to the situation closest to me. I have a brother who recently came out of a life-or-death surgery. His cancerous bladder was taken out and replaced by a part of his small intestine. Also, one of his nonfunctional kidneys was removed. It was a very serious and costly and amazing surgical procedure. His advice to me is that he's not concerned where and by whom his health is restored as long as his health care insurance covers all the costs.

I myself am getting older. My family members and friends include seniors and young ones. Just within that small circle alone we need to protect and sustain quality public health care.

Mr. Speaker, I heard people talking about Bill 11 as a slope. Yes, we are always on a slope. Bill 11 is a step up the slope to the brighter horizon, leaving behind the valley of darkness that we have been through. I've also heard people talking about Bill 11 as a thin-edged wedge. Yes, to right up the leaning tower of our heavy public health care delivery system and to reinforce this foundation, at times we need thin-edged wedges.

Mr. Speaker, these facts and positive future projections have helped me to form my accountable judgment to support Bill 11 with all its amendments introduced by our responsive, accountable, and progressive government. I call on all members of the House to put aside their own political motives and support the reality of Bill 11 for the betterment of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, to our fellow Albertans I suggest two ideas. First, let's look at what our government has helped achieve for Alberta, becoming the envy of other provinces and other countries, an attractive place for many people and a source of pride for Albertans. Second, do not let our political opposition draw us back into the doom and gloom. Just ask what their plans are, what they have done and where they have been.

Mr. Speaker, to our political opponents and those who insist on opposing Bill 11, I would like to propose this. How about after Bill 11 is passed and becomes law, you contact me, say, six months or a year later and see how Bill 11 affects you personally. If Alberta becomes worse, you can vote us out in the next election. However, if Alberta becomes better and not disastrous, like the opposition is saying, you have to vote for us and campaign for us against our opposition. Is that a deal? That's what democracy is all about, with all its everlasting beauty.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on the third reading of Bill 11 and put the position of the New Democrat opposition on record. It's a bill the debate on which has just been choked off by the use of Standing Order 47 by the government, a true act of desperation.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In this third and final stage I will explain why Albertans are not going to like what's at the end of this blind alley that Bill 11 represents. In poll after poll Albertans have told this government that they don't want an expansion of private, for-profit health care. Instead of costly privatization experiments Albertans have told this government time after time after time that they want money put back into the reopening of beds and operating rooms in public hospitals. Over 10,000 Albertans attended public rallies in Edmonton and

Calgary last month. Thousands more have rallied nightly against Bill 11 in front of this Legislature and in small and medium-sized towns across this province. About 100,000 Albertans have signed petitions against Bill 11 which have been read and received in this Legislature. Tens of thousands of letters have been written, phone calls made, and e-mails sent, unfortunately to no avail.

The government is seriously misreading the public mood if it believes its own rhetoric about the opposition to Bill 11 being union inspired. Organizations like the Alberta Federation of Labour, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, district labour councils, the United Nurses of Alberta, and the Health Sciences Association do represent hundreds of thousands of Albertans working in the health care system. They have every right to speak out on behalf of their numbers, and I congratulate them for doing so with dedication and effectiveness. The hostility of this government towards unions is well known. In the latest issue of *Alberta Views*, that hostility has been recorded by a fellow who has just finished his doctorate on the history of the union movement in Alberta. So I'm not surprised that this government has tried to discredit opposition to Bill 11 by way of its reference to unions in this province.

Unions representing health care workers are partners in Friends of Medicare. So are many other groups representing seniors, churches, teachers, students, and many thousands of ordinary Albertans from every walk of life. Friends of Medicare and especially its chair, Christine Burdett, deserve the thanks of all Albertans for exemplary and dedicated leadership in support of public health care.

However, the opposition to Bill 11 has been much more broadly based, from organizations as diverse as the Alberta Medical Association, the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, the Calgary Regional Medical Staff Association, the Capital Region Medical Staff Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Canadian Council of Churches, the Catholic Health Association, the Alberta Council on Aging, the Alberta branch of the Consumers' Association, Bishop Frederick Henry of the Calgary Catholic diocese, and the list goes on and on. Today even Gerry Amerongen, the former respected Speaker of this House, has also spoken out.

These groups and individuals represent the mainstream of society in Alberta. This is a government which, for its own reasons, refuses to listen to its own citizens. While the government is willing to tinker with Bill 11, they are not willing to withdraw it. They are not willing to abandon their blueprint for expanding the private, for-profit delivery of health care in this province. The government was clearly overconfident, perhaps the result of receiving too many awards from the right-wing Fraser Institute. The government believed that with enough high-priced spin doctoring, Albertans would be convinced to support this government's blueprint. Well, guess what? It didn't happen. Public opposition has been loud, swift, unrelenting, and rock solid, and the government is completely frustrated. Poll after public opinion poll has confirmed this. Despite the fact that the government will likely use its majority and in fact has decided to use its majority to force Bill 11 through the Legislature, the government has lost the battle on every front.

Bill 11 has shone an unfavourable spotlight on the private, for-profit health care in this province. The picture that's emerging is not a flattering one. In order to mollify the public in its futile attempts to sell Bill 11, the Conservative government is finally addressing some of the worst abusers of Alberta's existing forays into for-profit medicine. While these abusers have existed for many years, until now the government has turned a blind eye to them. The government recently announced that foldable lenses sold in private clinics would be covered under medicare. While a positive and long overdue move, this is also an act of political desperation and

expediency designed to try to win the public over to accepting Bill 11.

4:50

The debate over Bill 11 highlighted the fact that there is blatant queue-jumping taking place every day of the week at private MRI clinics in this province. While Bill 11 itself does nothing to put a stop to this, the government was shamed into announcing expansion of MRI capacity in the public system, including two additional MRI units for Edmonton and Calgary next year.

The lengths to which this government has gone to try to win public support for an odious bill are remarkable. Crafting a preamble which contains many fine-sounding words about being committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act was a nice touch. However, the fine-sounding words of the preamble, which carry no legal weight, stand in stark contrast to the bitter reality of the actual text of the legislation, which does.

The sincerity of the preamble needs to be placed against this government's actual track record as well. Actions speak louder than words, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government has a knack for being on the wrong side of history when it comes to health care. A previous Alberta government fought medicare and only joined in order to get access to federal government funding dollars. In the '80s the Tory government defended extra billing, claiming it didn't undermine the principles of medicare. Only when the federal government threatened to levy penalties against Alberta did the province do the right thing and end the practice of extra billing.

In the '90s the provincial Conservatives defended the right of private eye clinics to charge facility fees to patients for surgeries that would have been covered by medicare had they been performed in public hospitals. In this instance several millions of dollars in federal fines were levied before the provincial Conservatives put a stop to this particular form of extra billing.

Albertans paid a very high price, Mr. Speaker, for the settlement of the private clinics dispute in 1996. This very high price came in the form of a federal/provincial agreement entitled *Public/Private Health Services: The Alberta Approach*. This agreement lays out 12 key principles for the expansion of private, for-profit health care delivery in Alberta. Principle 4, in particular, pretty much sums up what the Tory government is trying to achieve through Bill 11. Principle 4 reads: "ensure a strong role for the private sector in health care, both within and outside the publicly funded system."

The government cannot deny its commitment to and actual designs for what it's trying to do through Bill 11. This is the backdrop that led to Bill 37 two years ago and to Bill 11 today. In crafting Bill 11, the government masked its true intentions. The purported ban on private hospitals is bogus. In so doing, the government decided to play Albertans for fools. As I said during second reading, the only people who were apparently fooled were the government's own backbenchers. The Premier's steadfast refusal to admit what Albertans know, that approved surgical facilities with overnight patient stays are private, for-profit hospitals in all but name, is dishonest. Albertans didn't buy it, and they won't buy it.

Bill 11 legalizes private, for-profit hospitals by calling them approved surgical facilities. If you look at the definition of facility services contained in this bill, the definition provided is virtually identical, word for word, to the definition of hospital services in the Canada Health Act and to the definition of inpatient hospitalization contained in the provincial Hospitals Act. The facility services that would be allowed under Bill 11 include inpatient beds, foods, drugs, operating rooms, et cetera. No, the government is only playing clever word games to mask its true intention; that is, to expand private health care delivery by legalizing private, for-profit hospitals.

Bill 11 leaves the decision on which surgeries would be allowed in approved surgical facilities to the College of Physicians and Surgeons. The government has justified delegating this responsibility to the college by saying that doctors have the expertise to make the distinction between major and minor surgery. However, the real effect of this inappropriate delegation will be to politicize the college. This legislation will set up a situation where doctors lobby the governing council of the college for permission to designate surgeries as minor so that they can be performed in a private facility in which that doctor may have an ownership interest.

This is not idle speculation, Mr. Speaker; this is already happening. For the past three years Dr. Steve Miller, an orthopedic surgeon, has appeared before the college council on several occasions lobbying for the right to perform hip replacements at the Health Resource Group, a wanna-be private, for-profit hospital in Calgary. Dr. Miller is both a director and shareholder of HRG. That is why I take very little comfort from the words of the college registrar several weeks ago when he said that hip replacements may not be considered minor surgery. I distinctly recall the registrar's active efforts to pressure the college council into reversing a decision to deny HRG's request. In fact, had it not been for the courageous stance of the majority of the council members, especially its public members, hip replacement surgeries would be taking place at the HRG facility today.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons should be regulating the practice of medicine, Mr. Speaker. The college should not be regulating the commercialization of for-profit medicine. Bill 11 will place the college in the untenable situation of having to adjudicate between the business interests of doctors and their professional responsibilities to their patients.

It is also not appropriate for the College of Physicians and Surgeons to be the sole arbiter of standards for so-called approved surgical facilities. Hospitals are by their very nature multidisciplinary environments in which many health professionals contribute to caring for patients, both during surgery and after or during recovery. That is why the Hospitals Act sets out in great detail the governance structures in public hospitals and ensures participation by all health professionals in setting standards of care. After all, nurses spend a lot more time caring for patients in hospitals than doctors do, yet Bill 11 puts the doctors solely in charge. This is definitely a backward move to the bad old days of doctor domination rather than a forward-looking move towards a more multidisciplinary future.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The text of the bill sets out a blueprint for extending private, for-profit health care delivery, Mr. Speaker. One thing the bill does is set up an approval process for private, for-profit hospitals that contract with the public system. It sets up a process whereby taxpaying citizens, without their consent, subsidize the development of private, for-profit hospitals' infrastructure in this province. Almost as scary, the bill also sets out a parallel process for the development of private, for-profit hospitals that do not contract for taxpayer dollars and, I presume, would offer only nonmedical services. Due to the hammer of closure used by this government, this particular aspect of the bill contained in division 2 has received little or no scrutiny in this Assembly.

In many respects private, for-profit hospitals operating outside the public system are even more of a Trojan horse than those within it. One only needs to look at the history of the private day clinics in Alberta to see why. Twenty years ago when the first private clinics were established, they only did nonmedical services like dental surgery and cosmetic surgery. Today there are 52 clinics, and fully

half of them contract for medical services with the public system.

In this House, Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats are the one party that advocates a total ban on private, for-profit hospitals. There should be no private, for-profit hospitals in this province under any circumstances. If we allow private, for-profit hospitals to set up and operate outside the public system, it will only be a matter of time before the owners of these facilities begin aggressive lobbying of the government and regional health authorities for public contracts. The owners of HRG, the wanna-be private, for-profit hospital in Calgary, have been doing exactly this kind of aggressive lobbying, as attested to by the minutes from their board of directors that were released by the New Democrats.

One doesn't have to dig very deep to find the real reason behind Bill 11. Bill 11 is a bailout of private, for-profit health care interests, mainly in Calgary, who can't turn a profit on their own. I take no comfort in the amendment that requires regional health authorities to consider unused capacity in public facilities prior to contracting out. Not long after the Conservative government and their CRHA henchmen closed three public hospitals in the city of Calgary, selling two of them to private business interests and blowing up the third, the Conservative government deliberately shorted Calgary hospital beds and operating rooms to create the conditions for expanding private, for-profit health care delivery in that city. That is why it's no coincidence that the two business groups pushing most strongly for Bill 11 are now located in two former public hospitals.

I've already mentioned HRG, which is located in the former Grace hospital. What has not been as well reported is the sad case of the former Holy Cross hospital, Mr. Speaker. Just prior to the decision to close the Holy four years ago, 35 million public dollars had been spent renovating the Holy, including the development of a state-of-the-art cardiac unit for heart patients. Shortly thereafter, the Holy was closed and then sold to private business interests for \$4.5 million. Why is the Conservative government choosing to use public dollars to bail out failing private business interests who occupy former public hospitals instead of targeting those dollars to the more efficient and accountable public system? It's a reasonable question, and Albertans wait in vain for a satisfactory answer. They will never get it from this government.

The government is using its majority to force Bill 11 through this Legislature and onto an unwilling public. However, if government members think this is the end of the matter, they should think again. While opposition to Bill 11 will take different forms, it will not go away. It will simply shift to new arenas.

5:00

One of those arenas is at the federal level. The Premier has tried very hard to turn the fight over Bill 11 into an anti-Ottawa crusade, but do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Albertans didn't buy it. Poll after poll has shown high levels of support for the federal government to be involved in protecting the public health care system. For example, an Angus Reid poll asked Albertans a very leading question along the lines of, and I quote: the federal government should stop interfering in the Alberta health care debate. Guess what? Fifty-nine percent disagreed, and only 39 percent agreed. This only goes to show that Albertans are a whole lot smarter than their government gives them credit for.

Albertans know that they can't trust their own provincial government with their public health care system. Albertans acknowledge the right of the federal government's role in ensuring that the principles of the Canada Health Act are appropriately applied. In fact, if the federal Liberals can be faulted for anything, it is that they have wimped out. The Prime Minister and the health minister should have told Alberta and all other provinces: no, we are not

prepared to allow the legalization of private, for-profit hospitals in all but name; we are not prepared to allow add-on patient charges, the so-called enhanced medical goods and services, to be codified into provincial law. This is what the feds should have told this government.

Even today I urge the federal Liberals to act. The Canada Health Act should be amended to ban so-called enhanced goods and services. It should be amended to clarify that hospital services, especially those requiring overnight patient stays, must be delivered in public hospitals operated on a nonprofit basis. The federal Liberals would find that such straightforward amendments would enjoy the overwhelming support of Canadians from coast to coast, including Albertans.

Albertans will demand that the RHAs not expand contracting out, especially not before RHAs are fully elected. RHAs have no mandate to expand private, for-profit involvement in health care. The College of Physicians and Surgeons will also likely become a new battleground between the entrepreneurial doctors lobbying for the right to perform complex surgeries like hip replacements in private facilities and Alberta citizens and doctors who will be urging the college not to do so.

The fight over the future of health care will shift to the electoral arena as well. The first judgment will be passed by the constituents of Edmonton-Highlands in a by-election, and I call on the Premier to call the election right away. It will also be fought in the next provincial election. If government members believe that the passage of Bill 11 would put their political troubles behind them, they are sadly mistaken. Hundreds of thousands of Albertans have been energized and politicized in the struggle over Bill 11. You don't put that particular genie back in the bottle that easily, Mr. Speaker.

In conclusion, that the government has now moved to choke off this full debate at third reading and final stage is, I suggest, a shame. It's an embarrassment to all Albertans that the government has done that. Using closure and other procedural tricks to shut down debate, like what was done at the second reading and at the committee stage and now at the third stage, I think is terribly disrespectful to democracy and will betray the interests and trust of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I've never seen a prophylactic motion used before. I've heard of safe sex, but I guess this was an attempt to have safe debate in that it had to be cut off to begin with.

MRS. SOETAERT: This is the Bobbit technique.

MS BLAKEMAN: I'm not going there.

Specifically, this is third reading now on this bill, although there is a bit of confusion for that, because we know that Motion 47, that was put forward earlier this afternoon to call the question, is in fact debatable. Now, I've been caught in this position twice, in that I should be speaking to the motion, but if I do so, I lose my opportunity to give my third reading speech. So I am going to go ahead and give my third reading speech, and I know the Speaker will call me to order if . . .

Speaker's Ruling Third Reading Debate

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, you're expressing the same fears that many other hon. members have. There is kind of a dual nature here: yes, you are speaking at third reading and you can

bring in your comments on the motion. As you have seen this afternoon, some people have wandered at some distance from third reading. Hopefully, they will only momentarily, but you're entitled to speak to both those things: the motion and what you like about it or don't and the third reading, which is, of course, the bill as it is amended and your comments on that.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for your wise words, as always.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: Third reading is intended to be on the effect of the bill or the anticipated effect of the bill. I have to say right at the beginning the new line coming from the government benches this week is something about: Bill 11 is to build restrictions for private hospitals and to build fences around things. I have to be honest with you. I'm a dog owner, and I'm a conscientious dog owner. It means a great deal to me. I take good care of them, and I would not leave my dog in a yard that was fenced with something like this government's version of Bill 11, because it's about what can get into the yard through that fence, not what is being kept in the yard by that fence. As a responsible dog owner I would not leave my dog in that yard. I don't think it would be safe.

So this whole process of Bill 11 I think is going to change our health care system as we know it. The process that has gone along with it, I think, has also made some interesting changes for democracy in Alberta as well, because this bill was based on a want, not on a need, not on demonstrated proof, not on the public clamoring for this bill. It was based on some want of the government's, and I haven't been able to identify what that want was yet or whose want it was exactly, but it certainly wasn't based on any kind of demonstrable, quantifiable research that would tell us why we needed Bill 11. The government has yet to produce any reasonable study that supports what they were doing. I won't exaggerate. I won't say that there has been a mountain of evidence, but there has certainly been about three feet of evidence of studies that have been produced here in Alberta, here in Edmonton, in Canada, in Australia, in the respected medical research universities in the States, in other countries, saying: bad idea; don't go there. But this government without being able to have any kind of backup for what they want to do is going to do it.

When I talk about democracy being changed, I think it has been with this bill. What I get from the government side is that I think we should have had a longer debate, and there are two issues that come out of that. One is we've now had debate cut off three times. We've had closure used, and I guess we've had closure used in that we've had this Standing Order 47 to call the question used. So it's sort of a minor version, a cuter version, if you'd like, of the closure motion. However you want to dress that one up, it still doesn't fly with me. It is about shortening debate in this House. Why did they need to use this Standing Order 47 as a prophylactic on third reading debate here? Why? What on earth are they afraid of? [interjection] Oh, sure it is.

In *Beauchesne* for third reading it tells us that there are motions that can be used as part of the proceedings of this House. So right here in this book that we rely on so much, *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, it gives us those. In fact, what it does is refer us back.

When an Order of the Day for the third reading of a bill is called, the same type of amendments which are permissible at the second reading stage are permissible at the third reading stage with the restriction that cannot deal with any matter which is not contained in the bill.

5:10

What are the ones that are allowed in second reading? Well, lots. We can have a hoist amendment, which sort of takes the bill into thin air so people can work on it and bring it back later or not. We have reasoned amendments, and we have referral of subject matter to a committee. So that's what the government was trying to stop, to avoid, to cut off, to save itself from.

What is the fear here? That there would be additional debate on this bill? Frankly, I think, especially in light of what's happened today, there should have been a recommittal motion. I think we should have gone back into Committee of the Whole, because there are 13 out of the 14 amendments that weren't debated, didn't get any discussion on, none whatsoever. Those motions were called one after another, and there was no debate. So I think there was good cause for a recommittal motion there.

The second thing that keeps coming up, that the government keeps putting forward is: "Oh, my goodness. We've had 36 hours of debate on this bill. Oh, heavens," as though this were some sort of terrible thing, that we would spend time debating, changing the entire medicare system and the health care system in Alberta, that somehow 36 hours - oh, gosh, you know, some terrible flying thing will come out of the sky if we debate one second longer. To make it even more interesting, they keep getting up and giving it to us in - how many minutes? - 2,001 minutes, as though that is going to make the people in Alberta think that's any worse than 36 hours. Well, it isn't. It's exactly the same thing, but again government's spin to make it sound more impressive.

Why is 36 hours some sort of cutoff on the bill? Who decided this? What is the decision? Is there some secret order in council we don't know about here that says that this Alberta Legislature shall not debate a bill any second longer than 37 hours or whatever is their arbitrary time? That's ridiculous. When I looked at B.C., they spent more than a hundred hours debating the Nisga'a land treaty settlement, and that was a huge issue for B.C. It affected everybody there. It was changing their province. More than a hundred hours on that before they brought in closure, and here 36 hours and that's it - no thanks - everybody go home and not another word spoken here.

It really underlines to me the unease that this government has about this bill and the need to make it go away. Get out of the headlines. Get out of this Legislature so we're not giving fuel to those Albertans that gather each night outside this Chamber. What on earth are they scared of? It's democracy, and democracy is time consuming. It is noisy. It is cumbersome, but it's also what put these people in here. I sense a feeling they don't want to be in here anymore because this is somehow too difficult for them to get up and debate. I'm very disappointed and I disagree.

I also remember that during a question I think that was asked last week, the Official Opposition looked for reassurance of some kind that this would not happen to us. The Premier said: if you promise not to filibuster, then I'll promise not to do this. Well, we didn't filibuster. There's been a government member up in between every one of the opposition members that has been up. Frankly, who's had the chance to filibuster? Nobody. We didn't want to filibuster in the first place. We wanted to debate every possible aspect of this bill so Albertans could understand it and we could bring the input, the voices of Albertans, into this Chamber. So I guess that's another broken promise from the Premier.

The effect of all of this is that there are still members, despite what the good Speaker has ruled for us here in the rush to reassure everyone: no, no, no, no, you can speak in third reading; honest, honest, you can - strictly speaking, we should be debating that motion. That is what's supposed to happen here, but everyone is willing to go: no, no; it's okay; you can do your third reading; just

don't, for God's sake, say one more word beyond that. I found the heckling really interesting. The language that was used in the heckling during this debate was very abusive in many cases, very personal, and not what I would have expected from this Legislature, not what I would have expected from members opposite at all.

I'm not a rookie anymore. I'm not naive enough to think that there can be good feelings and jolly-jolly between everybody in this Legislature. I mean, obviously it's divided. There's a huge majority on one side, and they feel that they can use that majority to bully us and yell at us and say abusive things, very personal, cutting comments, which is totally unacceptable to me, but I'm going to rise above that one.

Now, let's look at the effect. In third reading we're talking about the effect of this bill. Well, the amendments did not address a number of things. We did have the opportunity to spend quite a bit of time on the first amendment and the subamendment that the Official Opposition brought forward, which was attempting to limit the overnight stays and to clarify insured versus noninsured services. What the government wanted to do was an administrative thing, changing between a person and detailing that it was physicians and doctors that in fact were covered there. We didn't have a problem with that. We had a big problem with overnight stays. We have a big problem with it not being listed as an insured versus an uninsured service there.

But what were the rest of the amendments that we never heard debate on here? Well, the second one was about no queue-jumping being allowed for the sale of enhanced services and the effect of that is – well, we didn't get rid of the sale of enhanced services. This is what I meant about this fence that lets more things in than it actually is enclosing and stopping from getting out. This bill legalizes the sale of enhanced services. It puts it in place. It tells you how to do it. It tells you the form you're supposed to use and who's supposed to sign where. It sets up the sale of enhanced services.

Now, government starts out by saying, "Oh, we've got to have this legislation to be able to control private clinics," assuming, I think, that they're running out of control or running amok or something and that we needed this legislation. The truth is that there were a lot of things going on out there that people were very uneasy about, and I think the sale of enhanced services was one of them and certainly queue-jumping through the sale of enhanced services.

DR. WEST: The doctors asked for it.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, I see that the interim Treasurer is going to get into the heckling, and I invite him to please avoid heckling during my time up here, because it is precious. I invite him to stand up on his own and debate later.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, if you wish to debate, wait your turn.

Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. So this bill did not get rid of the sale of enhanced services. It in fact legalized it. It entrenched it in legislation. I really disagree with this.

The other thing that's been bandied about is that this legislation is very similar to the legislation that's so popular in Saskatchewan. Wrong. And this is where the two part ways. Saskatchewan specifically banned the sale of enhanced services.

MRS. SOETAERT: And overnight stays.

MS BLAKEMAN: And overnight stays. But specifically this. So

they part ways. I don't know how you can say that they're similar when they part ways on such fundamental core parts of it as this.

The one good thing that this amendment did do is it stopped the queue-jumping through the sale of enhanced services, but it did not stop the queue-jumping that was going on, is going on, and will continue to go on around diagnostic services.

Now, the other point where the Saskatchewan legislation is far superior to this is that it gathered all MRIs, the diagnostic services, under public health care. There are no more private MRIs, and therefore they took away the incentive to queue-jump through use of private diagnostic services. Once again what happens here is that if two people have identical ailments and one of them goes through the public system for their diagnosis and it takes three months to get it and the other person walks out and buys an MRI tomorrow, the second person has their diagnosis the day after that, and they get into the lineup to get their surgery or whatever corrective medical procedure they need. Meanwhile, person A is still waiting in line for three months to get their diagnostic surgery. That is queue-jumping, and that is queue-jumping using diagnostic services, and this bill did not do anything to stop that.

5:20

I still disagree with the sale of enhanced services. If it's medically necessary, it's medically necessary, and the public health care system should be covering it. End of discussion. Why do we have to have this thing where we dangle it in front of people? Well, you could have this extra thing if you wanted to because it's available. Forget it. Why do we need it? If people are desperate to have psychedelic coloured eyeballs or whatever the heck you can purchase through this, then go to another province. Go to the Mayo Clinic. Go somewhere else. Why on earth would we be offering the opportunity to make that kind of profit in a private clinic in Alberta? It's beyond me. I totally disagree with it and always will. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, both sides. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has the floor. We don't need any help on this side nor hindrance on that side. The hon. member is quite capable of carrying on her own debate.

Edmonton-Centre.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, had I time I would have gone through every single one of the amendments that was put forward in an attempt to describe them for my constituents and for people that read *Hansard* or listen to it on live audio at www.assembly.ab.ca, and I highly recommend that by the way. But I don't have time to go through each of them, so I'll just hit the high points here.

It did change the privative clause – I think that was amendment H – which caused a number of people great unease. It appeared that the minister was suffering from hubris, that the minister was put above God, and that his or her word could not be questioned, could not be brought before any kind of judicial review. There has been an amendment made there which makes it clear in fact that the minister's ruling is subject to a judicial review. But certainly as it stood, it was hubris; there's no question whatsoever.

We have a number of changes in the regulations, agreements to consult with the Alberta Dental Association.

Now, a couple of things are not in here, and previous members have alluded to them. One of the members was kind enough even to read out the NAFTA ruling, the Member for Calgary-Fort. The

problem with that is that you line up your experts and the next person will line up their experts across the way. Nobody can declare definitively that opening the door to private health care clinics will not invoke some problems under NAFTA. We've had studies and experts on both sides of this.

I think that basically we're saying: well, let's have faith; let's take the risk; let's assume that it's not going to be a problem. I'm not willing to do that on behalf of other provinces and indeed the federal government in Canada. I think Alberta has a responsibility to be more careful than that, but they choose not to.

Slippery slope. Is this the slippery slope? Well, yeah, it is. We've had a member opposite say that it's the slippery slope upwards, which I find a bit of a twisted metaphor. But okay; let it go. Will the effects of this bill be seen tomorrow? No. Even six months from now? No. I don't think we'll see the effects of this bill before the next election. I think the government will be darn sure that we don't see the effects of this bill before the next election. We won't see anything until after the next election, when they hope that they will be re-elected and everything can be put into place.

We have not seen the shortage of doctors and nurses being addressed through this bill. We haven't seen anything with the problems identified in the other countries where you get higher salaries wooing folks to the private sector, and at the same time you've got de-skilling of some of the lower paid jobs so that they are paid even less.

I think that what's happened around this whole process is that the government has been asking the people of Alberta to trust them: trust us; trust us on NAFTA; trust us that you won't have to pay more; trust us when we say that it will shorten waiting lists; trust us. I think the people in Alberta will not trust this government anymore.

My time is up.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm awfully pleased to rise and join the debate on third reading of Bill 11, Alberta Health Care Protection Act. This year the government will spend over \$5.6 billion on health care. If you are like most Albertans, a figure as large as this is utterly incomprehensible. Questions have been raised on whether we are spending too little, too much, or

maybe just the right amount. Taxpayers as owners of the system need to know what is being spent on health care, where it is being spent, and are we getting the best bang for our buck?

Albertans and Canadians justifiably want to hold on to the last social system that defines and connects them. There is nothing wrong and everything right with this except when health care is put on a pedestal. All the moral platitudes and boastfulness in the world can't keep a complex, multibillion dollar health care system going without changes. The trouble is that everything makes sense when it comes to health care, but there is not enough and never will be enough money to implement everything.

Now, on speaking to Bill 11, when the doctors say that they alone have the training to give you a new heart, of course they have.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, your seatmate is building a nest or tearing up papers or something or other, and the speaker system is picking that up so that we can't hear.

MRS. FORSYTH: When the doctors say that they alone have the training to give you a new heart, of course they're right. When the nurses say that they can expand their role and save doctors' fees, of course they're right. When a chiropractor says that they make people better, of course they're right too. When midwives say that they can provide a better service to expectant moms, of course they're right. When herbalists point to the tremendous support they get which suggests that people benefit from their age-old medicines, they're also right, Mr. Speaker. Practitioners of eastern medicine challenged the monopoly on wisdom claimed by western medicine when they said that by their standards of proof eastern medicine hadn't proved itself. It goes on and on and on. Everybody is right, and no one is wrong.

The health care system has been polarized to the point where slogans, protestors, petitions, and victim-of-the-week stories have taken over reasonable debate. Mr. Speaker, first of all, one must question why the opposition continues to judge the inefficiencies of the system by the number of acute care beds in the community.

Mr. Speaker, due to the time I should adjourn debate, I guess.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:29 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 8, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/05/08

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Welcome to tonight's session. Please be seated.

Before we proceed with the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, I would ask for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

THE ACTING SPEAKER: First, the hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my honour this evening to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly members of the 553 Squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Cadets. They are seated in the members' gallery. There are 24 members of the squadron here, and they are accompanied by group leaders Major James Barnes, Captain Bentley Barr, and Second Lieutenant April Harris and by assistant Mrs. Judy Warford. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair believes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has an introduction.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a young father and his daughter who are here from Drayton Valley. The daughter is a potential political leader who years from now will probably be sitting in one of these chairs right here. If I could ask Russ Hickman and his daughter Leal to please stand.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

Mr. Klapstein moved that pursuant to Standing Order 47 the previous question be now put.

[Adjourned debate May 8: Mrs. Forsyth]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to continue debate on third reading of Bill 11. First of all, one must question why the opposition continues to judge the inefficiencies of the system by the number of acute care beds in the community. Before I go any further, let me make it clear that acute care is a cornerstone of the system, but some day hopefully that will change and preventative medicine will be given the role it deserves. There's a heck of a lot more to the system than acute care. For one thing, preventing people from needing acute care in the first place is pretty darn important.

What is happening today, right now, all over this country is that older people who need care but not acute care are still in acute care beds because there is nowhere else to put them. Interesting how we

hear that from the other side, from the opposition, yet when the opposition leader was health minister, she didn't plan for that problem either.

Madam Speaker, this is a problem that dates back and is certainly not a new problem. One of the enduring hangovers from the acute care bed binge of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s was a shortage of facilities for elective or minor surgery. You might think that a lot of acute care beds would mean lots of operating capacity, but the reverse has happened. Because so many beds were occupied by nonacute care patients who had nowhere else to go, the system has failed. We had the irony of money going into acute care hospitals and not being used for acute care purposes, thus clogging the system. When ministries of health across this country busted their butts to take care of waiting lists for elective/minor surgery, the situation got worse. Ministries threw money at the problem, but it was never enough.

Chances are that there will always be waiting lists and that there will never be enough money in taxpayer pockets to get rid of them. So one must ask what is important here: alleviating the waiting lists or allowing patients to continue to wait and wait and wait? The present mix of services and facilities is clearly out of line with what the community really needs.

Imagine if we built a system that dramatically expanded the chances for patients to become informed and make real choices based on their preferences and their needs. Voila. Then we could really do some definite health care patient planning. In fact, if we let the informed choices of patients and families drive the planning process, then we could simply construct a system based on individual choices. If more patients had the option of dying at a hospice or at a home with home care, then fewer institutional beds would be required. But how would communities create new structures to deliver this kind of care based on informed decisions? Well, first the regional health authorities need the authority and legislation to actually restructure the delivery system.

Madam Speaker, one thing that has continued to frustrate me through the whole process of many hours of debate is the lack of understanding of one word by the opposition. This small word is "no." I thought: well, maybe I just don't get it or understand it. So I went to the dictionary to clarify what I thought might help me understand the word. No: not any, not a, used emphatically in a notice, it is impossible, will not agree to, indicating that the answer to the question is negative, by no amount, denial or refusal. And it goes on and on and on.

So then, Madam Speaker, I thought: okay; I'm going to check one other word. That other word is "negative." Negative: "expressing or implying denial . . . of the opposite nature to a thing regarded as positive."

I thought: now that I understand what no means, I will go back and again review Bill 11. Part 1, section 1, reads, "No person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." Well, there is that simple little word "no" again. Clearly it says no, and no means – and I know I don't have to read the definition again. Obviously no means no.

Section 2(1) reads, "No physician shall provide . . ." I know everyone in the House can read, so I won't go through it all. Well, guess what? There's that darn "no" word again. Section 3. Well, here we go again one more time: "No person shall . . ." And, Madam Speaker, it goes on and on.

So we'll briefly review it again. We have no private hospitals. We have no queue-jumping. We have no one paying for an insured surgical service at a public hospital or a surgical facility. It is amazing to me how when it is the opposition, no means yes.

Well, I could go on and on, but I will tell you this. The people I want to make the decision on who will provide and make the decisions on surgical facilities are in my mind the people who know

the best, and that's the College of Physicians and Surgeons. After all, they truly are the people who know best.

In closing, Madam Speaker – and I have mentioned it before – I am a baby boomer. I will be utilizing the health care system in a few years. I have a 77-year-old mother who has not been well for some time, and she's using her full share of the health care. I have a son who was in a terrible, terrible car accident several months ago, and, yes, he used the health care system also. I have another son whose career continually takes him into high-risk situations, and, yes, God forbid, he at some point will probably use the health care system. My dad took sick in the States. He received excellent medical treatment, and we received pages and pages and pages of bills to a grand total of \$300,000. As an Albertan and Canadian hell will freeze over before I will jeopardize what we hold so dearly to us and cherish: our beloved health care system.

Bill 11 is about reform, nothing more, nothing less, and I believe it's the right thing to do. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm again rising to speak to third reading of Bill 11, a bill which will in fact create two tiers of hospitals in this province, will in fact legalize overnight stays in so-called approved surgical facilities, which everyone knows are private hospitals, a bill that will in fact lead to, if we believe the plethora of research available on it, lengthened waiting lists, and a bill that puts the interests of private, for-profit operators ahead of the public interest.

Madam Speaker, I intend to use the full extent of my ability tonight to try and make the case against this legislation in the hope that the members of this government, who are pushing through this private health care policy, might in fact start to listen to Albertans instead of ignoring them.

Madam Speaker, democracy was dealt a body blow in this Assembly at 3:30 p.m. today. The Member for Leduc raised the motion to end debate after, in fact, one member of this Legislative Assembly had completed speaking. The Member for Leduc had risen to speak to the bill but hadn't completed it. So in fact what this government did was shut off debate after one person had spoken to third reading of this bill.

It's interesting, because I was in fact sitting in the news conference by the Premier.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Madam Speaker, point of order under 23(h)(i) and (j). I think the member opposite is clearly imputing some false motives to our colleague from Leduc. The colleague from Leduc in introducing Standing Order 47 knows, as everyone over there should know if they've read the book, that this particular motion does not shut off debate. What it does is allow every member in this House yet one more opportunity to speak to Bill 11 at third reading, and it guarantees it. That is far from restricting it the way the member opposite is trying to impute, and I would ask that she reconsider her comments in that respect.

Thank you.

8:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order I'm going to recognize Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know that the govern-

ment may be a little sensitive to this, but in reality what Standing Order 47 does is not allow for this opposition or anybody else in here to bring forward any other procedural initiatives. Quite frankly then that cuts off debate. It is a form of closure, if I may. It is not the same as the closure that the hon. House leader introduced last week but is a form of that. It does not allow debate to be continued in any other form. It does not allow amendments to come through on Bill 11 at third reading.

So essentially, yes, it is a procedural motion that did not need to be used in this House. Quite frankly, there is no point of order. You know, this government shouldn't be so sensitive.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Absolutely. Maybe I'll read what the point of order says. It's 47(1) and (2).

(1) The previous question, until it is decided, shall preclude all amendment of the main question. The previous question shall be in the following words: "That this question be now put".

(2) If the previous question is resolved in the affirmative, the original question shall be put forthwith without any amendment or debate.

In other words, Madam Speaker, not only are there no amendments allowed; there is no further debate allowed as well. So there is a curtailment of debate. It's in the Standing Orders. It's in 47(2). If the junior minister wishes to actually look at it, he can see that that's what it says. It very frankly says: without debate.

That is what third reading is supposed to allow. It is for debate in principle on the bill. That is what the Premier announced with much fanfare was going to occur in this Legislative Assembly, and by putting forward this 47(1) motion, in fact he has allowed for this debate to be curtailed.

It is very simple. There can't be a point of order on the truth. That is exactly what we have said, and that is exactly what is occurring in this Legislative Assembly. I am the only member of the Official Opposition to have spoken in third reading. We are now speaking to the amendment, so that is not debate in third reading, it is speaking to 47(1), which indicates that there will be no other amendments or debate occurring and that the question will be put. That is what it is about.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just in rising to support the Deputy Government House Leader's point of order, one of the things that seems to be missing in this discussion is the fact that in speaking to the question of whether you're ready to have the question put, in speaking to the previous question, one has a full range of debating opportunity, because the question is: are you ready for the question? So every single member of this House has an opportunity to speak to the question as to whether they're ready to vote, and obviously in so doing, they would be able to put forward any arguments, if there are any, that they haven't already put forward.

What it does preclude is exactly what the Member for Edmonton-Norwood and the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark indicated, and that is that it precludes bringing forward an amendment in third reading. One of the only amendments allowed for in third reading is referral back to committee. We've already dealt with committee; we spent 18, 19 hours in committee. We spent a ton of time in committee, and the opposition did not allow us to get past section 2 of the act. The other type of amendment which would be allowed in

third reading is to negative the principle. Well, we know that you don't like the principle of the bill, and we know that they're going to vote against it. The question of bringing in an amendment to negative the principle of the bill would have only one purpose, and that is to prolong debate or filibuster. They stood in this House not too long ago and indicated that they didn't intend to filibuster.

So, Madam Speaker, it's absolutely correct for the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, the hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness, to indicate that bringing forward a Standing Order 47 does not cut off debate but, in fact, allows every single member of this House to participate one more time in this important debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Yes, Madam Speaker. Methinks the government doth protest too much on this. After the Premier of this province stated that he would not bring in closure on this particular bill, here we see another form of closure being brought in today.

In fact, the government has done two things by asking that the question now be put. First of all, we are only supposed to be addressing that particular question. While the chair allowed wider ranging debate on the issue this afternoon, the fact is we're only supposed to be debating that the question now be put. Secondly, there are, as the Government House Leader referred to, two other options we could have had on behalf of the people of this province in terms of talking to Bill 11. They were the referral motion and to negate the principle of the bill. Well, we know that a majority of the people of this province do not want the principle of this bill in any shape or form to pass through this Legislature. So it's very important that we have all available opportunities to speak to this bill.

This is not a filibuster, Madam Speaker, when we only have a total potential of three more times to speak to this bill before it is passed out of this Legislature. Those are opportunities to express the concerns of Albertans. In fact I, like many of my colleagues, was not allowed to speak to second reading of this bill because closure was brought in. Now, once again, we get to this stage of the bill and the government is trying to ram this bill down the throats of Albertans without allowing democracy or free speech. Well, they don't like democracy, but the fact is that's the way this province is supposed to run. They either acknowledge democracy now, or they will do so at their own peril at the end of the next election.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on the point of order.

MR. WICKMAN: Madam Speaker, on the point of order I'll keep my comments relatively short. Having sat on a council for nine years and sitting here for almost 12 years, I've come to understand various procedures that can be used. The government members may try and insist that this is not closure. They can use a form of closure which is done in the form of a notice of motion and which then can be acted upon at any time after 24 hours, but it doesn't mean to say that it has to be acted upon after 24 hours. The government could serve notice of closure and allow everyone to speak once, allow everyone to speak twice, whatever they choose. This can be even more restrictive than formal closure in the sense that with the exception of the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Premier of the province, who are allowed to speak for 90 minutes, it restricts everyone to 20 minutes. If that's not a hidden form of closure, I don't know what it's called.

In the 11 and a half years I've been here, Madam Speaker, I have never seen a bill that has gone through the three stages attached to

it, through a form of closure and, let's call it, informal closure, and in all three stages the government has limited debate. They have reduced debate. They have reduced potential for amendments. They have reduced the potential for adjournment. They have, in fact, made it difficult for opposition to speak out on one of the most important bills this province will ever see.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, it is closure in a different cloth, but it is closure.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I wish to thank all members of the Assembly because you've actually helped me with my job. You've actually explained for the sake of the House what Standing Orders 47(1) and (2) are about. Basically, as all members have said, the previous question shall be in the following words: that the question be now put. Well, how do you discuss for 20 minutes that the question should be now put? Obviously the chair has to allow a lot of latitude in the discussion and in the debate that is going to take place in this House. If people found fault with or are pointing a finger at who was in the chair this afternoon – obviously you have to talk on the main motion, which is the moving of third reading of Bill 11, so the chair obviously is going to allow a lot of latitude.

8:20

I have to say that there isn't a point of order. As I've said, both sides of the House have basically explained parliamentary procedure, parliamentary precedent. Within our Standing Orders, which are the Standing Orders of this Assembly, there is a provision called 47(1) and (2). That provision has been made available. It has been used. We have here *Erskine May* and *Beauchesne*, that talk about parliamentary rules, parliamentary practice, and that is exactly what has taken place in this dialogue: an explanation for the members of this Assembly and probably our guests in both galleries to explain exactly what we're doing here.

We will now get on with the debate. We are debating the question that has been put, and we are allowing a lot of latitude to deal with third reading of Bill 11.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's interesting to note how touchy the government is about the description of the rules of order of this House. I can understand it, because of course even in spite of their majority, in spite of spending \$2 million or more on advertising to try and make their case, they failed to do so. It's no wonder they're touchy.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, as I was saying, democracy was delivered a body blow at 3:30 today with the motion to end the debate without amendments being allowed to be put forward after one member of the Legislature had finished speaking. It was interesting, because at the same time, at 3:30 p.m. today, as the motion was being put, I was in fact attending a news conference at which the Premier was speaking. The Premier made an interesting statement at that news conference. Members will recall that previously the Premier had indicated that he would not be putting forth any method of closure unless we in the Official Opposition were attempting to delay debate. Well, it's difficult to see how that circumstance existed when in fact only one member had spoken.

Secondly, at the news conference today the Premier made the incredible statement that if we in the Official Opposition dared to put forward any of the amendments which are in fact provided for in the standing rules of this Assembly, he would invoke a closure-type motion. That is what was said at about 3:15. I returned to the Legislature, Madam Speaker, at about 3:30, only to hear the Member for Leduc in fact proposing the amendment that his Premier had said

in the previous 10 minutes wasn't going to come. So it was very, very interesting and showed, on the one hand, how the left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing but, as well, a government that is afraid to listen to any kind of suggestions for improvement and that is shutting off the discussion on this bill in this Legislature. Albertans know it.

Madam Speaker, tonight I would like to go through several studies that I haven't touched on in my opportunities to speak to this legislation. First of all, maybe I could go through some of the points which the government has made over and over again and which in fact several members of government repeated in the Assembly today.

First off is this whole notion of public consultation. The Premier has so frequently talked about how much public consultation has gone on with respect to this Bill 11. As I was sitting there listening to the Premier's news conference today, I decided that what the Premier understands public consultation to mean is that if people agree with the government or if people refuse to criticize the government, if people go along with the government, then the government feels they've consulted with them. If anyone dares to disagree with this government, to question it, to sign a petition, to send a letter, send a fax, to attend a rally, stand outside the Legislature, come to the Legislature, if anybody dares to do that, well, they're shut off.

They're told that they don't understand the bill. I guess one of the most recurring themes and one of the most blasphemous categorizations of Albertans is this one. How can a government dare say to Albertans that they lack understanding when it comes to this legislation? In fact, Albertans probably understand this legislation better than any other piece of legislation that's ever come before this Legislature, and in fact it is this government that refuses to understand and listen to the people of this province who are trying to send them a message.

Besides the public consultation myth, the second point I want to touch on this evening is that this government wants to have it both ways. This is a government that says – and I heard one of the government members say this in the Legislature today – that groundbreaking change is what is going on with Bill 11, that changes are being put in place that are far-reaching. In fact, the hon. member even went so far as to liken what this government is doing to the change which Tommy Douglas was promoting back in the mid-60s. It was laughable, it was disgusting, and frankly it showed the government's lack of understanding on this bill.

Here we have the government talking about, on the one hand, groundbreaking change – that's the code word, Madam Speaker – but on the other hand, when they are accused of in fact going too far on the legislation, as they are by a majority of the people in this province, they say in fact: "Oh, no, no. It's not big. It's just a tiny little, wee step towards, you know, whatever, towards making the public health care system more efficient." So which is it? You know, they argue out of both sides of their mouth.

The most lamentable thing is that the government has failed to make its case. It has brought forward zero studies to show that it's going to do anything other than increase costs, increase waiting lists, and could, in fact probably will, very much lower patient care. That's not what Albertans want, and that's why they're speaking out.

The third issue, I think, around this bill and the most recent comments that have been made subsequent to my remarks in second reading and my remarks in Committee of the Whole is the manner in which this government is proceeding to ram this legislation through the House. You know, the Premier is very fond of referring to the deficit elimination as an example and a template for what is going on with this. He likens it, you know, by saying that that was one where he didn't blink, where he had to fight demonstrations and

opposition and people writing letters and doing all those kinds of things. He says, in fact, that deficit elimination was the same issue as the one we're dealing with here with private hospitals.

Well, Madam Speaker, they're entirely different. Very few Albertans would have disagreed with eliminating the deficit. What Albertans didn't have the same point of view on was how the deficit was eliminated, the cuts that were made, the ransacking of some pretty important public institutions. How they did it was in fact very much a point of contention, but what was being done in terms of elimination of the deficit was in fact supported by the majority of Albertans, unlike Bill 11 with privatization of health care.

This government has had to use closure or a form of closure on Bill 11 on at least three occasions. Really, the use of closure by this government today, after what they did last Monday to have real closure on Committee of the Whole and then the Standing Order 47, again, on second reading, was clearly an admission of defeat, an admission of defeat by a government with a majority, by a government that spent millions of dollars but still had to use the most draconian source of power and the biggest misuse of power that any government has. It's legal, it's under the act, but only a government as heavy-handed as this one would have chosen to use it on three occasions on this legislation. As a result, Bill 11 is as much about a loss of democracy and democratic practice in this province as it is about a loss of public health care and the entrusted role that is given to a provincial government to handle it in the way that reflects the needs and the wants of its citizens.

8:30

Madam Speaker, the whole issue of gradual privatization – we've described it as privatization by stealth – is very much clearly documented in this government's practices and its actions. Since they took over in 1992, privatization has been growing. The Premier is very fond of saying that privatization isn't anything new. Well, it is new in terms of its growth since the current government took over. Up until 1992, of course, the total spent on health care, private and public, had remained at a constant of about 22 percent. That had been the case since the mid-1960s, when medicare had first come into force. Over the last eight years of the current government's reign, that amount has now risen by 50 percent, to over 31 percent of total public and private spending on health care.

I guess one of the very valid questions, for which there was no answer, of course, in the Assembly, has been: why do they want more privatization? You know, the Premier says that he doesn't want more privatization, but of course he does, because this isn't about just putting the so-called fence around the existing private clinics. This is about opening up a whole new cottage industry in Alberta, a whole new private hospital cottage industry enshrined in legislation. Why do they want more privatization? You know why? Why is it? There's no answer, absolutely no answer, Madam Speaker.

What we've seen, therefore, is a systematic privatization of health care, systematically destroying what in fact is something that we as a society, as a community, as a country, and as a province have worked hard to build. Really what we're seeing under this government is a death by a thousand cuts. Death by a thousand cuts, death by slow bleeding, and what does the government want to do? What is its response to a 50 percent increase in private-sector involvement in health care? More private-sector involvement in health care. That's why Albertans are so concerned about what's going on.

You know, Madam Speaker, it's been very, very interesting to participate every single day that this legislation has been before this Assembly. I applaud all the members of the opposition side of the House, the Official Opposition in particular, who have worked so

hard to reflect the views of the people of this province: the 100,000 that have signed the petition, the 10,000 that have written letters, the tens of thousands that have gone to forums, the thousands that have displayed, all of those people. That is what we deem to be our responsibility, and we deem it to be a privilege.

You know, Madam Speaker, throughout this whole discussion it's been very interesting to hear the name-calling that goes on by the provincial government for anyone who dares to speak out contrary to the position being put forward by the Tory government. They've been called left-wing nuts. They've been called guilty of malicious misinformation. They've been charged with inciting riots. Really, those kinds of names are all a slap in the face to the people of this province. It's basically thumbing their noses at the people of this province, but you know they're all big, grown-up people. They obviously know what they're doing, and so do Albertans. So are Albertans waiting for the final say on this legislation. It's not going to be here. The government might be able to use its power and its heavy-handed majority here, but what the real result will be is at the next election, when Albertans get the final say.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, back to the name-calling. I actually wear it as a badge of honour – and I'm sure most Albertans do – to be named some of the things that we've been named for daring to cross this government. As we all know, one of the weakest forms of argument is name-calling, and it's for those who don't have the evidence, don't have the research, can't make the argument, have failed to convince Albertans. That's when they resort to name-calling, and this is a government that does it on a regular basis.

What I've attempted to do this evening is to bring forward some of the excellent work which has been done by Albertans on Bill 11. Fine reports, fine scholarly review, fine letters, fine e-mails that have been written and sent out by people who are opposed. Fine work by journalists in our province, by members of the media who have worked very hard to reflect what they're hearing Albertans say, which of course, as we know, has resulted in a majority of Albertans being opposed to the legislation, which now this government has invoked closure on, in one form or another, for the third time here today.

Let's go, then, to this whole issue of the systematic dismantling of public health care. I spent some time on that particular issue in my debate at second reading and even more so in Committee of the Whole. But I think one of the areas I didn't talk about as we saw private health care gaining a foothold under the government is that certainly some of its members believe there's nothing the public sector can do that the private sector can't do better. We've heard that from many members of this government, and of course as a result their actions, in increasing private health care involvement by 50 percent, are really a testament to that.

I think one of the things that I would like to touch upon was the subject of an economic overview, from a public interest perspective, on the privatization and the commercialization of public hospital based medical services within the province of Alberta. This was a report written by Dr. Richard Plain at the Department of Economics, University of Alberta, Medicare Economics Group. You know, the Medicare Economics Group, Madam Speaker, is very interesting, because one of the things the Medicare Economics Group has said is that any research carried out by MEG, as it's called,

is carried-out at arms length from any grants or funding received from agencies, corporations, unions, professional associations, governments, individuals or groups. No prior predetermined outcome or support for a particular policy position can be linked with any funding provided to any individual MEG researcher or research team . . . The one constraint is that MEG related health economic policy analysis must be in conformance with the five principles contained within the Canada Health Act.

Interestingly, this report has been done by someone who has provided great leadership in this province, great leadership, in fact, to the party represented by the government in this province. One would think that this report would be one where rather than letting it stay out there without comment, the government would respond to some of the very sound and fundamental criticisms that Dr. Plain has laid on Bill 11. He bases his case on this whole issue of creeping privatization, on the 12 principles that have been adopted by the government of Alberta underlining the Alberta health care system.

8:40

If anybody wants to find a way in which the privatization has become so much more than just a mantra but has in fact become a driving energy in terms of health care restructuring in this province – some would call it dismantling of public health care – one need only refer to these 12 principles underlining the health care system. Of the 12 principles, six, half the principles, refer to things like:

4. Ensure a strong role for the private sector in health care . . .
5. Public and private sector should work together to provide patient choice . . .
8. Maintain the restrictions on the role of private insurance, while introducing measures to expand the opportunities for the private sector . . .
9. Private clinics should have the option of becoming completely private [where the patient pays] . . .

An interesting reference for the government that says the patient won't be paying.

. . . or allowing them to enter into a variety of funding arrangements with the public sector to cover the full costs of insured services [i.e., a taxpayer subsidy].

Another principle, principle 10, says:

10. There is a place for medical training in both public and private settings.

Finally, probably the killer principle and the one which Dr. Plain goes to great length in his study to show how dangerous it is for public health care is this one.

11. The same physician can practice in both the public and private systems if he/she is offering insured services which are fully paid for by the public system and non-insured services which are paid for privately.

Well, Madam Speaker, to students of the Canada Health Act that is blasphemy. That is all about having your foot in both camps. It's all about double-dipping in the public and the private systems, and it is all about making sure that the private system, which couldn't make a profit otherwise, is subsidized with public taxpayer dollars. This government used to say that it was out of the business of being in business. Well, guess what? They're right back in it, with a legislative framework to do it.

I think another point that needs to be made on this systematic dismantling of public health care is reference to another bill that passed through this Legislature, this time in the fall. That was Bill 40, the Health Information Act. Interestingly, that bill was originally called, when the government muffed it the first time, the health information protection act. It was an interesting choice of words. Then it reappeared in the fall as the Health Information Act. I guess maybe they were trying to catch themselves on this whole idea of protection, so they made sure they put the notion of health protection in the current bill even though Albertans know the opposite is the case.

Anyway, I think there are a couple of important things to note on Bill 40. One is the issue of substance. Bill 40 is a breach of the confidentiality provisions which have always governed and safeguarded the patient/physician relationship. Bill 40 allows for other parties, many unnamed parties, including members of the provincial cabinet, to look at the confidential health records of individuals,

things that used to only be available to a physician and entrusted to a physician.

Madam Speaker, there's good reason why physicians are upset about Bill 40 and the way this government has used that trust relationship that physicians have with their patients and exploited it under the name of putting more health information into their hands. It's a sickening tool, actually. It's a sickening use of doublespeak that goes on in this province as it tries to inflict on Albertans its health policy.

There's another reason to bring up Bill 40, Madam Speaker, and that is that of course Bill 40 passed through this Legislature with closure as well. You know, here's the example that all of the government's health care legislation seems to need closure in order to work its way through the legislative process. Closure with a majority. You know, why do they need closure? Why can't they simply listen to the concerns.

So there's yet another issue on Bill 40, which is so similar to this one and it's why people get very nervous, and that is the whole issue of the regulations. The government put in place and pushed closure to get the regulations being developed now behind closed doors on Bill 40, and exactly the same thing is going to happen. The disturbing thing about Bill 40 is that it was step 1, if you like, in the systematic dismantling of public health care, because of course Bill 40 ensures that the private-sector operators in health care do not have to operate with the same standards as those in the public health care system. So here we have this little bit, little bit. Remember that argument the Premier always made when he'd hold up his two fingers and say: we're just taking one more little step. Well, in fact, this is groundbreaking, Madam Speaker, because the pathway through is being mowed by both Bill 40 and now Bill 11.

Then there's a third leg to this little stool, and the third leg to the stool is the flat tax. You know, interestingly, we've noticed in the last three days, Madam Speaker, that "flat tax" are two words that are no longer uttered by the provincial government. Flat tax has been removed from the lexicon of all the members of the Legislature, and this is very much a part of the whole issue of a systematic dismantling of public health care, which I think in fact is very germane to this third reading debate on Bill 11 and the discussion about Standing Order 47.

Of course, the flat tax is yet another piece to the puzzle, because the flat tax ensures that those with a high income will be paying less tax, a good deal less tax, than they were in the past, and the people at the middle income will be paying a little bit less. In fact, the numbers that appeared on the weekend showed 1/13 the amount of tax savings for someone at the \$40,000 income level versus someone at the \$100,000 income level.

So what are all of those people with their reductions in tax going to be doing with all their hard-earned money? Well, as one of the letters to the editor said in recent days: perhaps they're going to use those dollars to purchase private health care. Really, as we see here, the whole issue of the flat tax pushing and increasing the burden onto the middle-income group, away from the high-income group is of greatest benefit to those at the high-income level, as is privatization of health care. The greatest benefit will flow to those who can afford to pay and those who can create a business out of the \$75 billion industry, which is public health care in Canada. So in fact what we have are pieces fitting together, meshing together, as this government pursues its ideological agenda.

So, Madam Speaker, what I would like to do now is turn to some of the works, the Alberta studies that have been done, excellent work, and go through what Albertans do understand about Bill 11, this legislation, and try to give a sense of where we might be heading down the road. The first study I would like to cite is one done by

Laura Shanner, who is a PhD and is part of the John Dossetor Health Ethics Centre and Department of Public Health Sciences at the University of Alberta. Dr. Shanner has gone through some of the very important ethics arguments, which have become of increasing importance in health care, particularly with new technologies, with all the many issues that are being faced in health care. Ethics in health care becomes a very major issue.

8:50

Again, the government has ignored this Alberta work, not just ignored it but has dared to say that the people who criticize the government, who question the bill, who have an excellent paper on ethical concerns to the bill, are – take your pick, Madam Speaker – left-wing nuts, spreading malicious information. I guess it all falls under the category of disagreeing with the government, which I thought in a democracy everyone had the right to do.

Anyway, I do want to review some of the very key points that have been brought forward in the ethical concerns about Bill 11. The paper starts out by talking about the core values in health care and says:

Health care interactions typically arise in the most poignant moments of human lives . . . and this is one of the key issues in ethics

[at] birth, death, illness, injury, pain, and amid the tension between fear and hope. Further, moderately good health is an essential prerequisite to engage in education, productive work, taking care of others, and other important human undertakings. Everybody thus has an interest in good health and in an effective and accessible health care system. We all need respect and genuine caring when we face health problems, as a very great deal of what is important to us may be at stake.

With that introduction, then, Madam Speaker, Dr. Shanner goes through some of the ethical principles which are used to assess actions and are commonly used in a health care setting, and I want to cite some of those.

The first one is the core value of "nonmaleficence: 'above all, do no harm'."

The Hippocratic Oath traditionally taken by physicians (and adopted in principle by most other health care professionals) requires that great care be taken not to leave the patient worse off than they were before.

So then Dr. Shanner poses some questions: "Why would someone have to stay overnight after surgery rather than go home on the same day?" It's a very, very good question, Madam Speaker.

The answer is that the surgery was so invasive or difficult that the patient is at risk of serious complications that may require immediate medical attention. The complications of surgery can affect any part of the body, and may include: neurological problems from the anesthetic; vascular problems such as embolisms . . . or blood clots that may cause a heart attack, stroke or other major organ complication; difficulty breathing; pinched nerves from blood clots pressing on nerves; internal bleeding; allergic reactions to anesthetics or other medications . . .

It does no good [simply] to notice that [the person] is suffering post-surgical complications . . . Any facility that does surgery complicated enough to require an overnight stay – remember, as I addressed in Committee of the Whole on this legislation – is effectively being admitted to the hospital as opposed to being served in an outpatient capacity. So any facility that does surgeries that are complicated enough to require overnight stays will therefore require a full array of health care specialists to address any complication – and all these caregivers must be available 24 hours, 7 days per week.

So what has happened? What happens under Bill 11? Well, effectively, Bill 11 says that these clinics can set up without an emergency, that these so-called clinics, which we all know are

private hospitals, are available for people. So where is the issue of safety? It's fine to say: oh, well, the College of Physicians and Surgeons will make sure that nothing is done that wouldn't be safely done there, but you know that is a complete fallacy. Someone can get into an allergic reaction with anesthetic with a day surgery procedure, with tonsils being taken out, with teeth being removed. Anyway, the whole issue of "Above all, do no harm" is a value that is, in fact, contradictory to what is being proposed under Bill 11.

Bill 11, Dr. Shanner goes on to say,
fails to regulate private health care facilities or providers outside the limited realm of surgery;

We've seen this before.

diagnostic clinics . . . long-term care nursing home facilities, home care services, [lab services], and other outpatient providers such as physiotherapy services.

We've been saying this for some time, Madam Speaker.

All elements of private-sector, contracted care should be regulated according to similar standards and coordinated with the public system.

Bill 11, of course, doesn't do that. It just proliferates the very medical model that one of the members was talking about earlier.

Another value in ethics is called "Beneficence: doing good." Here Bill 11 fails as well. One of the things that Dr. Shanner has said is that

the justification and motivation for any health care system is to promote both public and individual goods by improving health status, relieving illness . . . and improving functional capacities.

No real good can come from a health care system unless it is truly an integrated system that promotes continuity of care. Regulating surgeries as independent, "off the shelf" treatments fails to address the prevention of accidents and illnesses that lead to the need for surgery and . . . fails to account for post-surgical care. Bill 11,

and this is Dr. Shanner's comment,

is thus grossly misnamed: it is not a "Health Care Protection Bill" at all, as it focuses on a single, extremely limited aspect of the health care system.

Madam Speaker, we have of course pointed this out on numerous occasions, that it isn't a health protection bill at all, but of course the government has turned a deaf ear not only to Albertans but to the opposition as well.

"Justice and fairness," key values of ethics in health care. This is what Dr. Shanner says:

Bill 11 offers no assurance that services currently covered by Medicare will not be "delisted" . . . in the future . . .

Bill 11 offers no improvement in services for residents of rural or northern communities. Private, for-profit surgical centres would open only in urban areas with sufficient population to ensure steady patronage and profits. Indeed, residents in non-urban areas may suffer a reduction in services if health care providers, already understaffed in public facilities, jump to the for-profit centres. Since rural and northern residents already have a greatly reduced level of service relative to urban areas, health care expansions should reasonably focus on the areas of greatest need first.

Access to health care services, as we've said on many occasions, doesn't just matter to someone in downtown Calgary or downtown Edmonton. It matters to people living all over this province, whether it be Fairview or Lacombe or Ponoka or Brooks.

Another issue in the bill: "Queue-jumping." We've certainly talked about it. Queue-jumping goes on, as we know, in private MRI clinics, as people will purchase the private MRI and then move to the head of the queue in the public system when they return for their treatment. We know this is happening, and of course Bill 11 does nothing to address this. Members will have heard government members stand up and say: Bill 11 outlaws queue-jumping. Well, what a joke. What a joke, Madam Speaker. It is a complete hoax, because it doesn't do it.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, I could go through the study even more, but I think it's important to just close with this whole issue: "Duration of effect if passed: Informed consent for an experiment." As Dr. Shanner points out, this experiment going on here in Alberta, which the chairman of the regional health authority in Calgary said – what was it? – it's better to experiment than to plan? I think those were his words." The 'experiment' has been tried already in several parts of the world, but the results are not acknowledged by the Government." In fact, the government has ignored any of these studies, which, because they haven't argued against them, presumably means they are in fact right and the government has no case against them, much as they did with *Shredding the Public Interest*, of course an excellent book. They didn't ever refute it, so presumably the record stands, and there are others that will follow.

9:00

The paper goes on to cite untenable conflicts of interest for physicians. In fact, I had an e-mail from a young physician today who has just completed his residency in one of the public hospitals in Alberta. I won't name it in case he gets in trouble. His point, you know, was that he had gone through his premed, done his medical training, done his specialty training, and was now doing his residency work in his specialty. He said, "You know, this Bill 11 is very disturbing, because the discussion amongst medical students is that all our training in trying to deal with patients and provide patients with the best possible care we can possibly provide has now been replaced with this value of: what's wrong with you; why wouldn't you open a private clinic and beg money off health care?"

He said: "You know, as someone who believes very strongly in public health care, I find the argument so disturbing. It's going to result in a whole new crop of medical students and medical practitioners, who feel that's what is expected of them because the government has sanctioned it and enabled it by its legislation." A shocking, shocking, and, as Dr. Shanner says, untenable conflict of interest code for professionals that requires them to consider the interests of the patient paramount, but the lure of profit may draw attention away from the patients' needs and towards the capital gain of the physician. The government members, you know, may well say, "Oh, that's not the case," but Albertans know it is and especially medical students, and the ones who e-mailed me know it is.

There are other values in terms of compensation versus profit, benefiting from others' pain. The point Dr. Shanner makes on this one is: no health care system can be considered ethical or fair if – now, this is an interesting statement – it causes caregiver burnout. Well, what have we seen in this province over the last eight years? So here's one study, an excellent study done by Dr. Laura Shanner, as I say. How dare this government say that Albertans don't understand this legislation. Albertans understand it perfectly. That's the ethical case, Madam Speaker, one example of the work that's been done in the province, one example of the ethical issues, but I think it's a good summary.

That's the ethical case against Bill 11. I want to next turn the argument to the economic case. I want to discuss health care from the point of view of the economic advantage it provides to Canadians. It's true that when asked to identify what distinguishes a Canadian from others, by far the most frequent response from Canadians is our Canadian health care system. Yet the system has many winning features beyond any nationalistic fervor. Our public system is in fact less costly. It ensures that all Canadians are covered. It costs far less to administer. It costs employers far less to insure workers than in the American system, and it is that point that I want to address.

I want to look at the Canadian model of health care from its

economic advantage and then look to see Alberta as a microcosm of the national plan. First, the issues of cost. We've seen these before on many occasions, the comparison of GNP in Canada versus the U.S. Canada is at 9 percent and holding steady while the U.S. has increased to 14 percent of GNP and is now on the rise.

By 1994, interestingly, in the U.S. public health care sector spending alone was \$1,600 U.S. for a system which, we know, leaves 35 million to 45 million Americans with no health care insurance whatsoever. By contrast, in Canada public sector spending was \$150 U.S. less, or \$1,444, for a system that offers universal first dollar coverage for hospital and medical care. As Dr. Bob Evans has said – and I think it was very apt. In fact, I think the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness was there when he said it. Dr. Evans said: Americans thus pay more in taxes for health care than Canadians or almost all other people in the developed world in addition to or despite their massive contributions through the private sector. People find that hard to believe, Madam Speaker. The U.S. spending per capita on health care in the public sector – in other words, what tax dollars are going to be spent for the U.S. system per capita – is \$150 more U.S. than the Canadian system, yet 37 million aren't covered. That's a fact. Sometimes people forget how much the U.S. is in fact spending on health care.

The question obviously becomes: why do the Americans pay more for less coverage? Well, the issue is administration costs. At least that's one of the key factors. The biggest advantage of the Canadian over the American system is the administrative cost savings. Canada's single-payer insurance plan means cost control and lower administration costs. In fact, processing the multitude of private insurance schemes requires four to five times the administrative resources needed with the universal plans.

A study published by the Conference Board of Canada in March of '99 entitled *Corporate Health Care Costs in Canada and the U.S.* confirmed significant cost advantages for Canadian business, something that's often forgotten and certainly something that's not lost on our independent businesses here in Alberta. I quote from the Conference Board. The study showed that in Canadian firms

total health care costs ranged from a low of 3,306 in Canadian dollars to a high of 13,326 dollars per employee in 1996, while in sister sites in the United States, they ranged from 7,493 in Canadian dollars to 27,658 dollars. Total health care expenditures – private and public – averaged 14 per cent of gross payrolls in Canada and 24 per cent in the United States.

The study continues, and I quote:

The key cost differential is that of employer-sponsored health plans. Health plans cost the case study firms more than 9 per cent of payrolls in the United States. In contrast, expenditures for supplemental healthcare plans in Canada cost between 1.4 to 2.1 per cent of payrolls.

So what's going to be the result of more privatization in health care? Higher costs to our businesses, Madam Speaker. Clearly said, the Conference Board of Canada has already told us.

Now, I would imagine that some of the hon. members in the government – well, maybe not; maybe they've turned a completely deaf ear, but let me go on – are saying that they can see that health care costs may be cheaper, but the argument will be that we're paying more in taxes. Well, the truth is that even when taxes are included, Canada has the lowest labour costs of eight major countries: the United Kingdom, Japan, France, Germany, the United States, Austria, and Italy. I know the government doesn't like to think about that, but it's true.

The KPMG study entitled *Competitive Alternatives, a Comparison of Business Costs in North America, Europe, and Japan* was completed in March of 1999. It examined the total annual costs of a typical firm in eight different jurisdictions, how such things as

freight, electricity, lease, interest, depreciation, as well as property transaction and income taxes came about.

Labour costs are the key. Labour represents 58 percent of location-sensitive costs, while taxes represent just 12 percent, Madam Speaker. Overall, Canada has the lowest costs of all countries in the survey. In attaining the lowest overall cost rating, Canada has its biggest advantage in employer-sponsored benefits, with health care insurance being the largest component. In the U.S. 8.2 percent of wages went to hospital, surgical, medical, and major medical insurance premiums. By comparison, 1 percent, at this point, at any rate, of Canadian wages go to health care insurance.

9:10

So looked at from a different perspective, Madam Speaker, a typical 90- to 120-person firm in Canada would have labour and benefit costs of \$3.8 million, measured in U.S. dollars, compared to \$5.6 million in the United States. It costs more, and it's quite a remarkable savings, I'm sure members would agree.

Let's look at the specific example of the automobile industry, Madam Speaker – I think it's a good one to look at – and what's happened in the case of Ontario, which interestingly has not gone down the private health care route yet. Hopefully, they won't, but let's look at the example of the automobile industry.

Scotiabank's latest Canadian Auto Report notes that U.S. automakers have made long-term investments in Ontario plants that have exceeded the money spent in Michigan. In the past five years automakers and parts manufacturers have been spending an average of \$3.8 billion a year on new Canadian assembly and parts plants. Over the same period spending to repair existing assembly and parts plants has averaged \$4.5 billion a year. This investment of \$8.3 billion has given Canada a massive, massive productivity advantage over the United States. Assembly capacity in Ontario has risen 19 percent since 1994. Automakers building in Canada gain from cheaper currency, lower wages and benefit costs, the Scotiabank study says. Perhaps the minister of energy would like to read it.

Health care, interestingly, is one of the biggest advantages. Savings amount between \$1,200 and \$1,500, Canadian versus American, for every vehicle assembled in Canada. Savings of \$1,200 to \$1,500. In terms of overall production that means that automakers that manufacture vehicles in Canada save \$3.5 billion to \$4 billion a year.

Interestingly, Ontario now accounts for 17 percent of the North American vehicle market, up from 13.5 percent in 1994. That's a very interesting increase in market production here in Alberta and for Ontario specifically, and perhaps that explains why they haven't gone the route of private health care. This year Michigan will account for about 17 percent of production, down from 22 percent in 1994. All part of the Scotiabank study, Madam Speaker.

Now, senior Canadian executives recognize this advantage clearly. On April 15 of this past year, 1999, Charles Baillie, who is the chairman and CEO of the Toronto Dominion Bank, spoke to the Vancouver Board of Trade. "Canada's health care system is an economic asset, not a burden," he told the audience, "one that today, more than ever, our country dare not lose." He pointed out the strengths of Canada's medicare system, and though he fully recognized that medicare must adapt to new conditions, Charles Baillie came down strongly in its defense.

While many of his remarks addressed the social value of medicare, some of his most pointed comments concerned the economic efficiency of a public health care system. He said:

It would cost every business, large and small, more if they had to pay for benefits themselves. It would, in a very real sense, constitute a defacto increase in taxation – for employers or for employees or both . . .

In an era of globalization, we need every competitive and comparative advantage we have. And the fundamentals of our health care system are one of those advantages.

So what is it, Madam Speaker? My earlier point. Is it a ground-breaking change in health care policy, or is it a modest proposal? The fundamentals to which Charles Baillie refers are the single payer and the resultant administrative cost savings, as well as the public scrutiny of costs. These two fundamentals give Canadian taxpayers cost control over this essential service that is absent – absent – from the American multipayer system, and it is that road down which this government is heading.

Madam Speaker, the next Alberta study that I think needs to be cited is the work done by Kevin Taft and Gillian Steward, again an excellent study on what's happening in health care. Of course, you know, the government loves to discredit anybody that dares to speak against them. They, of course, have been unable to refute what is in this book, *Clear Answers: The Economics and Politics of For-Profit Medicine*. That reminds me: how dare this government politicize health care to the degree they have?

You know, one of the important points – and it's one that's been raised in the Legislature a couple of times – is that moving to this private/public mixed system which is subsidized by the taxpayers of this province, which the majority don't want, at the end of it the government can go back to the way it was. If the experiment fails, as all the evidence points to, then the government can go back to the way it is right now.

Well, I think it's important to note the part contained in the study *Clear Answers* about what happens in the case of Singapore. Of course the book *Code Blue* talked about this whole issue of Singapore and what was happening in Singapore with their medical savings account and gave a rather one-sided view of the picture. It's interesting to note, in fact, what happened in Singapore, where it moved to a private profit system, which this government wants to move to, and then tried to go back. I want to quote from a couple of points in the study. It says:

It's difficult to judge the success of Singapore's health care system . . . Still, some crude analysis can be done. The wages of doctors in Singapore are on par with those of doctors in the United States and higher than those of doctors in Canada. Diagnostic medical equipment, such as CT and MRI scanners, is more abundant in Singapore than in Canada.

One of the two sources that Dr. Gratzner used in his analysis of Singapore was an article that was published in the *Health Affairs* journal in 1995. Despite the impression Gratzner creates, the article is rather negative in fact about the effects of the medical savings accounts in the markets on health delivery in Singapore. Here is a small portion of what the article actually says.

Singapore's decade-long experience shows that its [medical savings accounts] neither reduced nor controlled health care cost inflation. Instead, cost inflation rates increased . . .

Singapore found that hospitals largely did not compete on price. For example, the average charge of private hospitals for an appendectomy was twice that of the prestigious Singapore General hospital. Hospitals competed instead by offering the latest technology and expensive equipment . . . Ten years after . . . the introduction of [these medical savings accounts] Singapore is saddled with widespread duplication of expensive medical equipment and high-technology services . . .

Under a free market the fees and incomes of private-sector physicians rose at a phenomenal rate, something that needs to be taken note of here in Alberta, which caused experienced physicians to migrate to the private sector. The public sector had to raise compensation for its physicians and other health care workers to retain well-qualified professionals in the public sector. Today the top surgeons employed by the public hospitals receive close to

\$400,000 per year. Top private-sector surgeons earn at least twice that amount. Rapidly rising compensation was another cause of health care cost inflation.

So what's happening on that study, Madam Speaker? Well, what we know will happen, and that is that the public system then chases the costs and the wages in the private sector, especially if it's trying to retain workers in the public sector to work for health.

9:20

There are some other excellent papers done by Albertans, Madam Speaker. Of course, Donna Wilson on regional health planning and delivery in Alberta points out:

Since regionalization was initiated, an increased proportion of health system funds have not been, nor are they now available for direct patient care.

In other words, regionalization has increased administration costs, and the increased costs are not going to help patients. They are going to pay for administration. Something that is completely unbelievable is that this government would try to spend more on administration costs. We would like to see and the majority of Albertans would like to see those dollars going to health care itself.

Concerns have been identified in this paper, again one not refuted by the government, where Donna Wilson has gone through extensive review of the regional health authorities and the increased costs they have caused. She concludes that

these concerns indicate that regionalization should be thoroughly reviewed, with a much more detailed cost-benefit analysis of regionalization undertaken.

This government hasn't done a single cost-benefit analysis, at least not one they've been able to share with the public, and as we well know, if there were any positive reactions to the costs of regionalization, they would be screaming it right across this province and using it as part of their propaganda campaign, their \$2 million propaganda campaign.

And what does the government say? How dare this government say that people like Donna Wilson do not understand the health care system and that if only she would read the bill, as they say to all Albertans, then somehow she would be more intelligent than she is. You know what, Madam Speaker? It's offensive, and it's what they have continued to say when they have refused to respond to studies that I'm outlining here tonight, absolutely refused to respond. In fact, the criticism is always that anybody that dares to criticize lacks an understanding of what's in the bill. I've heard it so many times that even if the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud doesn't want to hear it, he should simply open his ears to his own members when they say it.

Next, Madam Speaker, I turn to the excellent remarks made by Dr. Walley Temple, a surgeon at the Tom Baker cancer centre in Calgary, and the excellent review he had given as to why Bill 11 is the wrong prescription for Alberta. He starts out by saying that he wants to look at the economics of the system and says, "It is a myth that health care costs are out of control." He says that per capita costs have

increased only \$50 in the seven years before the present provincial government. In Canada, the costs haven't changed in 20 years and are only 8.9 percent of our . . . GNP. The cost of our health care is \$2,500 per person and provides us with 100-per-cent coverage.

He then goes on to say that the U.S., of course, spends \$4,000 per person to support a public system.

I know that the government doesn't like to hear these informed Albertans speaking out, educated, intelligent Albertans. They don't like having to listen to it, but in fact I think it's well worth it.

Dr. Temple goes through the incredible work that's been done in our public health care system to innovate and to in fact improve

patient outcomes. He notes that "in Canada, our infant mortality rate is 5.6 per 1,000 and 7.6 per 1,000 in the U.S. Our cancer mortality is 10 percent lower." We live on average "two years longer than Americans. All this at one-third of the cost."

So why would this government want to push ahead with setting up a system that we know is going to end up costing us more and serving us less. How dare this government say that someone like Dr. Walley Temple doesn't understand the health care system because he dares to criticize Bill 11.

Moving off the economic and the innovation and the ethical cases that are made contrary to Bill 11, let's move to the more spiritual side of the equation and look at the excellent principles by which Spiritus suggests that Bill 11 be judged. Now, Spiritus is a grass-roots Catholic organization in Alberta advocating and mobilizing on issues that impact faith and life. Founding members of Spiritus include the Catholic school trustees, the Catholic Women's League, and the Knights of Columbus, who recognize the need for better networking within the Catholic population of Alberta, estimated to be 750,000 people.

Spiritus lists eight principles on which to judge the bill. The first is the principle of human dignity.

Point of Order Decorum

MR. SAPERS: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Yeah. I'm sorry. I'm having a little bit of trouble hearing the remarks from the Leader of the Official Opposition, because the Acting Treasurer keeps persisting with his outbursts. Perhaps he'd like to go outside and tell those assembled at the front steps about Bill 18, or maybe he wants to talk a little bit about defending his flat tax, but I wish he would just listen patiently.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Glenora, you can't kid a kidder. I mean, this is the quietest the Assembly has been for many, many nights. I do know that once in a while the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer does say something rather provocative, but I have noticed that on occasion you say something provocative back.

So let's get on with the debate.

DR. WEST: Madam Speaker, may I comment on that?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: No, no. Let's get on with the debate.
The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Anyway, Madam Speaker, I wanted to go through the eight principles that the Spiritus people have raised questions on. They're excellent points.

The principle of human dignity:

To what extent does Bill 11 ignore this principle by allowing the health of persons to be a means to make money for investors and shareholders?

The principle of participation:

To what extent does Bill 11 shut out the people of Alberta from participating in the final determination of the suitability of this legislation?

Something that's going on right here, right now, Madam Speaker, as this government moves with Standing Order 47 and closes off any opportunity for more amendment of this legislation.

Thirdly, the principle of preferential protection for the poor and the vulnerable. The question is:

To what extent does Bill 11 protect the poor and vulnerable and their families from the inequities of a health system which has to resort to policing in order to insure that those with means do not have improved access to services or to a higher standard of care than those who do not have the capacity or the resources to respond in a manner which meets their needs?

A very, very compelling question, Madam Speaker.

The principle of stewardship:

To what extent does Bill 11 reflect moral responsibility in the use of limited public funds in agreeing to pay facility fees to private operators for 'bricks and mortar'?

Albertans know that that's going to cost more, Madam Speaker, even if this government refuses to admit it.

The principle of subsidiarity:

This principle puts a proper limit on government by insisting that no higher level of organization should perform any function that can be handled efficiently and effectively at a lower level of organization by persons who are closer to the problems.

To what extent does Bill 11 continue to delay on this principle by maintaining government appointed health boards which serve as an extension of the arm of the government rather than an elected group of citizens reflecting the values and the needs of the community?

That's what a democracy is all about. That's what this government is ignoring.

Next, the principle of human equality:

To what extent does Bill 11 weaken the community's sense of trust since the legislation fails to address the relationship of those in positions of power with the opportunities they have for personal or financial gain?

The principle of solidarity:

To what extent does Bill 11 strengthen the capacity of the community to care for our sick within national standards and through a universal health insurance system?

It weakens it, Madam Speaker.

The principle of the common good.

Question: To what extent does Bill 11 foster further division and mistrust within the community, where some health providers will get a greater share of the pie than others, and where the goal of some could very well become the selling of a product rather than reaching out to those who are suffering?

An indictment from the Spiritus, representing 750,000 Catholics in Alberta.

9:30

How dare this government ignore and say that people like the Spiritus group have a lack of understanding of what Bill 11 means, that all they have to do is read the bill? It's utter, utter nonsense, Madam Speaker. Utter, utter nonsense. [interjection] People in St. Albert can definitely see through this bill, and they know what's going on.

Next, Madam Speaker, I have gone through, of course, so many of these studies that have been done by Albertans which this government has ignored and, in so doing, is basically, I assume, agreeing with these studies and has not given any sound evidence to refute them, and that is something that is very much what's causing the concerns.

MS LEIBOVICI: Very legitimate concerns too.

MRS. MacBETH: I think that's right: very legitimate concerns from a wide range of people in this province. And how government members can sit there and ignore this . . .

You know, the government has failed to put forward any of the

people who are supporting this legislation. They talk about it. They say that there are thousands who have written letters, but they have failed to table those. They have failed to document it. As far as we know, the only group that's supporting this legislation is the Alberta Chamber of Commerce, and isn't that an interesting comment on the making of a new business out of public health care?

MR. DICKSON: There are more than 30 government MLAs who haven't spoken to Bill 11.

MRS. MacBETH: Yeah, probably that's why more than 28 or 30 government members have not spoken on this bill.

So I thought it might be useful, Madam Speaker – because we've had at least three independent polls that have been done on health care, and of course the government has done two of its own polls, with taxpayer dollars I might add, and even those show that government opposition to Bill 11 is growing. But the results from the government polls have just a slightly different take than the independent polls, so let's turn to them, the most recent being the Angus Reid worldwide services poll that was done on Albertans' views on Bill 11 in April of 2000.

The results of an Angus Reid/Calgary Herald province-wide Alberta survey shows that a bare majority . . . of Albertans are against the . . . government's controversial Bill 11, however opposition to the proposed legislation is considerably more intense than support.

Hmm. I wonder if those people are going to vote in the next provincial election. What do you think?

Dissent toward the proposal to allow RHAs to "contract-out" certain medical procedures to private healthcare facilities is driven by a variety of fears – stepping too close to the "slippery slope" of two-tiered healthcare; concerns about the implications of the Bill for future "extra fees"; "queue-jumping" and "de-insuring of procedures" . . .

All of the things that Albertans have said they don't like about this legislation.

. . . and concerns about the impact on the quality of healthcare in the province as a whole.

The mid-March survey also finds that government communication efforts on Bill 11 to date have not hit the mark in any significant way.

That is, the at least 2 million of taxpayer dollars spent to put out a propaganda campaign. Hmm. Gee, how many hip replacements would that \$2 million have done? I think it's about 50 of them, as I recall. I think about 50 hip replacements could have been done with that \$2 million.

Only 15 percent of Albertans report reading a government brochure delivered to every household . . . while another 23 percent "skimmed it briefly". Fully 39 percent of those interviewed say they do not remember receiving the Bill 11 supplement . . .

Finally, the survey finds that Albertans are evenly divided in their views about whether or not Medicare is in need of a facelift (50% say it works fine the way it is now vs. 49% who disagree with this view), but a large majority feel that other alternatives are available to the Alberta government.

This is what the majority of Albertans feel, in case the members are listening: that alternatives are available to the Alberta government such as reopening closed facilities or putting more money into the existing public health care system, the health care system, in fact the hospital system, that was cut by close to 30 percent, as we know has been documented in the studies.

Now, this is something that I know from having read polls for a long time. When you've got 36 percent of Albertans strongly, strongly opposed to Bill 11 compared to only 13 percent who strongly favour it, that's where that old 3 to 1 odds comes from, Madam Speaker. It's a clear indicator of how off the mark this

government is on this legislation. Both Edmonton and Calgary citizens are split.

There's one other point that I wanted to make. The poll says that large majorities of Albertans believe that the government should be "cutting waiting lists by re-opening hospitals" or at least halting further closures; 79 percent agree with this statement. The government should be "putting more money into the existing public system" rather than into private medical facilities. In case the government hasn't noticed, Albertans don't like those public dollars being siphoned through regional health authorities and over into private entities. In fact, 72 percent of Albertans would rather see that money that this government has allocated for private health care and private hospitals go to public hospitals, but still they ignore it. Interestingly, Madam Speaker – and this is probably most telling – two thirds, 64 percent of the province, "believes that Bill 11 is moving Alberta toward two-tiered healthcare." So I know we're on the right side of this one.

Madam Speaker, I think I'm coming close . . .

MR. SAPERS: Ten minutes.

MRS. MacBETH: Ten minutes?

. . . to the end of the debate. I think some of the questions obviously still remain. I've said before that I never understood quite why it was called question period until this session. We know that we ask all the questions and there are no answers, so it's clearly question period.

In terms of solutions, of course I outlined the several steps that we think need to be taken instead of going down this route of private health care. Those I outlined in my second reading address to the Legislative Assembly, so I won't go through that again. I think that again the questions, of course, haven't been answered.

I think I'd like to give a commendation to the Friends of Medicare group, who have put forward their 11 reasons to say no to Bill 11, and I think it's well worth repeating those.

There are clearly faulty assumptions on the bill. It's based on an assumption that private health care will cost anything other than more and will help shorten waiting lists. We know that to be faulty. In terms of definition of hospital, another reason to say no to Bill 11. It says that private surgical facilities will now become a second tier of hospitals in this province. Conflicts of interest: while there was a minor, tinkering little amendment made by the government on conflicts of interest, it doesn't in any real way do anything other than window-dress the issues on conflict of interest, as of course the young physician who e-mailed me today noted. The whole issue of lack of public scrutiny and accountability: the government has done nothing, nothing to release the contracts which exist in health care now.

9:40

They say they need Bill 11 to do it, but guess what? Bill 11 doesn't cover private MRI clinics, and we can't get contracts on that. It doesn't cover lab services that are contracted out; can't get the contracts on that. It doesn't cover long-term care nursing services which are contracted out. Those contracts are the use of public dollars for private services. Because they're public dollars, the principles of public administration would say that they should be available to the people of this province. They are not. This government has refused to let those contracts out at all, and Bill 11 doesn't even touch it.

Enhanced services is all about delivering uninsured services in a private hospital that's allowed under Bill 11 which got its client base through insured services. There, another conflict of interest, Madam Speaker.

Lack of comprehensiveness. We know, of course, that diagnostic

imaging like private MRIs, which we think need to be part of a standard control on contracting out in the province – and all private MRIs should be included in that.

Mental health services. Bill 11 ignores important parts of the system.

Health care bracket creep. Bill 11 says that all medically necessary procedures will be covered by medicare, but advances are made every day, so what services are going to become deinsured? What services are deemed to be medically necessary? What are not? No answers. No mechanism to address the problem of bracket creep in health care.

Lack of ministerial accountability. We've talked at length about section 23. The government has refused to listen.

Public access to contracts. Of course they're not available, despite what government says.

Vague guidelines for approving facilities. Essentially, private facilities can be approved at the whim of the minister. There is no absolute shutdown of a private clinic that's found to be negligent or not providing appropriate health care and also no limits on size and scope. This is the whole issue of no control over the quantity of private MRI clinics. You know, do we need any more of them? I don't know, but there's no ability for the government to be able to control those. Bill 11 doesn't go anywhere near it. It doesn't talk about private labs. It doesn't touch them.

While this government likes to mix its rhetoric in and say, "Everything's fine, everybody; don't worry; there's no problem," Albertans understand this legislation and are offended by a government that tells them they lack understanding on how the bill works.

So, Madam Speaker, as we move towards closing off the discussion, I think that Bill 11, as I said at the outset, is as much an issue of a loss of democracy as it is an issue of a loss of public health care and the protection for public health care that this government was elected to uphold. We know full well that this government has no mandate to privatize health care in the way that they have. It wasn't even discussed before the previous election, in 1997. I guess the reason they are wanting to ram this thing so quickly through the Legislature is because they don't want to have to go to the voters and ask them. They want to go to the voters and tell them. That's what they need their mandate for. They like to dictate to people.

You know, the impact of their dictation has been to effectively muzzle the members of the Official Opposition, because of course the use of Standing Order 47 muzzles the Official Opposition. They've certainly muzzled the media by their spin messages that have been out there. They've muzzled 100,000 petitioners that have signed petitions in this province. They have muzzled people who have written letters and have received not a word of response from the government other than, you know, trust them; they're the government, after all.

Finally and probably the most disturbing is the muzzling of their own members. That's what has happened on this. Presumably, if the government and the government powers over there weren't worried that their members might break ranks, they would call a free vote, but they've had to move on closure. They've had to move with their \$2 million advertising campaign. They've had to muzzle their MLAs. They've had to do everything possible in order to try and move this through and snow Albertans on what the impact will be.

Madam Speaker, although many of my colleagues will of course speak very effectively, further to me, on this legislation – and for that I think all Albertans should be grateful – in this closing opportunity to speak, let's look at the people who have come out opposed to Bill 11.

Certainly there are those who have rallied nightly and those 100,000 petitioners, and I've already mentioned them. The Alberta

Medical Association continues to have major concerns about Bill 11 on conflict of interest, the contracting provisions, the overnight stay provisions. There are the Calgary Medical Staff Association, the Edmonton Medical Staff Association, and the Alberta Teachers' Association. Educators and parents in this province know that if Bill 11 goes through, the next place that needs privatization, in this government's view, is probably going to be education, and they don't want any part of it. So that's why they're speaking out, opposed to Bill 11 on health care.

The Alberta Association of Registered Nurses has spoken out against Bill 11, as has the Canadian Council of Churches, the Spiritus group, that I referred to today, the Alberta Council on Aging, and Bishop Henry. A former and second-longest serving Speaker in this Legislature, the former Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, Gerry Amerongen, has spoken out opposed to this legislation. So how dare this government say that Albertans who dare to oppose this legislation are not intelligent enough to understand what's really, really in the bill. In fact, they understand it abundantly well. They see right through it, and they say no to Bill 11.

Madam Speaker, we made a very constructive suggestion today, given that it's now clear that the government wants to ram this legislation through and use closure or a form of closure at every chance, and that was to talk about the potential for leaving the bill on the Order Paper at third reading and calling public hearings on the regulations. Much as with Bill 40 and the regulations on that bill, as I referred to, this would be another opportunity for there to be public hearings on the regulations.

An alternative would be for the government to refer the bill to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations of this Legislature. Of course, that is a process that other governments in this country use and have used frequently to make legislation speak more to individuals in the provinces. They've used that tool of an all-party committee to strengthen legislation, but of course this government is so much self-centred and so much of the view that they don't have to listen to Albertans. You know, after 30 years the arrogance shows through. The arrogance is well evident. I think the fact that they've had to use closure for yet a third time on this bill is ample indication that they are admitting their defeat, admitting that they don't have a health care policy, and they don't care.

Madam Speaker, this is a black day for democracy in this province, and it's an even blacker day for public health care. Albertans will have the final word on health care and on this legislation, and this government and all its members will have to face the people of this province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before the chair recognizes the next speaker, could we just change our mindset for a moment and divert our attention from Bill 11? Could I ask for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

9:50

head: Introduction of Guests

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Actually we don't have to change our train of thought from Bill 11, because these people are in the gallery to listen to the debate tonight. In fact, two just had to leave, I guess, but I would like to introduce some of the

people that are here: Dianne Godkin, a PhD student; Allan Dansy; Marc Perron; Cory Doit; Susan Duncan, another PhD student; Eugenie Verna; Raillinda Ganton; Ron Clarkson – I believe he's the health research administrator from the U of A, who had to leave – and Paul-Andre Gauthier, a doctoral student in health care. I would ask you all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, are you rising to introduce guests?

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, Madam Speaker. I, too, have at this point a member in the public gallery that I would like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly. Barb Swanson is here tonight to listen to the debate on Bill 11. Barb Swanson runs a clinic along with her husband, Dr. Rick Swanson, on the south side of Whyte Avenue in the constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona. She has a very keen insight into not only Bill 11 but the health care delivery system in this province. I would ask her now to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Third Reading

Bill 11
Health Care Protection Act
(continued)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased as well to rise today during third reading of Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act. In doing so, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge a colleague for whom I have a great deal of admiration and respect, and it is the mover of the bill, the hon. minister of health. It is through his insight and wisdom in understanding health and disease that we have a bill that will ultimately lead to an important contribution to the delivery of medicine in Alberta. Also, I'd like to make it very, very clear that my support for this bill, for Bill 11, is strong and also that I'm making it freely.

Madam Speaker, health care has become very politicized in Alberta, so much so that Bill 11 has become a lightning rod for powerful interests, be they political parties wanting power or special interest groups concerned about promoting their own agendas. This is to be expected and applauded, for true debate and the to-and-fro of ideas is what makes ours a free and open society, worthy of our highest and most inspired efforts. But what really is incomprehensible to me is the degree of distortion, the fear, the misinformation that has been promoted by the opposition, that has marred what has been a very important debate.

In fact, only a few days ago, after this bill had received more debate and discussion than any piece of legislation in Alberta's history, I was shocked, if that's still possible, by a letter from Mr. Jake Kuiken, who is a senior child development consultant in the community and social development department in the city of Calgary. Mr. Kuiken wrote, and I quote:

Bill 11's proposal to allow individuals to purchase an enhanced level of care creates a federal and provincial tax credit for better-off Albertans who can afford the enhanced level of care.

How did this individual get it so wrong, Madam Speaker? It is

wrong. I talked to him on Friday about it before I brought it to this Legislature, and I gave him insight.

Madam Speaker, first of all, enhanced services were allowed not by Bill 11 but by Order in Council 211/92, on the recommendation of the then hon. minister of health, who is currently Leader of the Opposition. The hospitalization benefits amendment regulation of April 2, 1992, permitted and in fact mandated the boards of hospitals to charge for enhanced goods or services. There is no provision in that regulation, however, setting out what could be charged for these enhanced services. Under her watch 35 private surgical facilities were operating, and still no regulations were put in place governing the cost of enhanced services or prohibiting people who purchased the enhanced services from getting in a faster line for service. [interjection] It doesn't matter how long ago it was. It happened, hon. member, and that's the point.

[Mr. Renner in the chair]

Nor were they any regulations that would allow private clinics to operate only when there was a clear benefit to the public system and prohibit their operation when there was no benefit to the public system.

Mr. Speaker, it is that overall lack of government regulations that is the precise reason why Bill 11 is before us. It took this government and Bill 11 to close the regulatory gaps, and the profit motive has been taken out of the sale of enhanced goods and services. They cannot cost more to the patient than the cost of the product plus a reasonable amount to recover administrative costs. Of course, there can be no extra fees whatsoever since facility fees that were brought in under the hon. Leader of the Opposition were stopped by this government.

MS LEBOVICI: Point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: There's a point of order.

Point of Order
Imputing Motives

MS LEBOVICI: I can't sit any longer while this misinformation is being spread. The reality of 23(h), (i), and (j): imputing false motives to a member inside of the House and outside of the House in terms of individuals not understanding what this bill is about. I would like to know if the member has the guts to say that Jake Kuiken agrees with her now, because my guess is that he does not. The reality is that the enhanced services that are being provided for in this bill are . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, it's not a point of order. You're entering into debate, and I suggest that if you wish to enter into the debate, you do so.

Hon. member.

Debate Continued

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's amazing how after listening for 90 minutes, it took two minutes for this to happen. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling
Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, it was actually relatively quiet before this chairman assumed the chair, and I hope that's not a reflection on the chair. Could all members please be quiet so we

can hear the member speaking that has the floor? The member that has the floor is Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's amazing to me that we were able to listen for 90 minutes here to some rhetoric a little earlier, and now that we have some facts on the floor – and they do include Order in Council 211/92 – this is happening.

Debate Continued

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I firmly believe as well that it's the overall lack of government regulations which is the precise reason why Bill 11 is before us. As I said, it took this government and Bill 11 to close the regulatory gaps. The profit motive has been taken out of the sale of enhanced goods. As I said and will say again, they cannot cost more to the patient than the cost of the product plus a reasonable amount to recover administrative costs. That's very clear in this legislation and in the amendments that have been before us in Committee of the Whole.

Of course, there can be no extra fees whatsoever since facility fees, as I said earlier, were brought in under the hon. Leader of the Opposition, and they were stopped by this government and are being made illegal in fact by Bill 11. Albertans cannot be charged for any services that are covered by our publicly funded health care system.

I might also add a note about the fears that the opposition has aroused about Americans taking over our health care as a result of Bill 11. Mr. Speaker, if American companies have not come into Alberta when private facilities have been totally unregulated, why would they enter after Bill 11, when private clinics will be highly regulated, in fact will be more regulated than anywhere else in this country?

As the Prime Minister pointed out over the weekend, overnight stays already exist in a number of provinces. In British Columbia overnight stays were allowed as a result of a simple ruling by the B.C. College of Physicians and Surgeons in May of 1997, yet this situation has not inspired any free trade challenges in that province. In fact, I can't help but wonder if we would have seen demonstrations outside the Legislature and other protests if we had done what the government in B.C. did and simply allowed the college to permit overnight stays without introducing any legislation or regulations on the subject.

10:00

Mr. Speaker, these are the realities, and they are the facts that somehow have escaped this debate. The reality is that although most Albertans are happy with the convenient service and care they receive in the 52 private surgical clinics in this province, it's high time that these clinics that are supported by public dollars are regulated so they continue to provide in the future a public benefit, so they don't ever become a detriment to the public health system, so they continue to provide quality service, and most importantly, so they increase access to publicly paid for health services and provide a cost-effective use of public dollars. It's that simple. This is what Bill 11 is all about: regulating the use of public funds going to private surgical facilities so that they are used in a cost-effective manner to provide quality health care.

We've said it before in the Legislature, but I think we should say it again. In Calgary it costs a million dollars to build and equip a single operating room, and to run it costs another million dollars a year. With that kind of outlay of public funds we want to ensure that each OR is functioning as efficiently as possible. Performing abdominal, inguinal, and femoral hernia surgery or minor surgical procedures on tendons, peripheral nerves, muscles, bones, joints, supporting tissues, and many other minor surgeries has been shown

to not be the most efficient use of that million dollar room. We believe that if a few specialized clinics could become centres of excellence for specific minor procedures that have been approved by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, it would free up scarce and expensive operating room time.

There are other benefits, Mr. Speaker. It could prove to be a way of keeping some surgeons in the province, because they will have increased operating room time, which will ultimately increase the level of health and healing for their patients. I think these realities reflect common sense. That has been borne out in practice already. For example, after six months of contracting out cataract surgery, the North Shore region in Vancouver saw a 13 percent drop in surgical waiting times at the region's Lion's Gate hospital, and it reduced the waiting list for cataract surgery by 29 percent and freed up a precious 28 hours of surgical time per week at regional hospitals. Most importantly, it allows health authorities to direct dollars to patient services rather than capital purchases and to alleviate pain and suffering when it is needed, which is now.

Mr. Speaker, in Calgary, contracting out 13,000 procedures yearly has freed up operating room hours for more complex procedures that require all that modern-day medicine can provide. Every hour contracted out for minor surgery is an hour available in the hospital to meet growing demands. These demands, I can tell you, are huge, and they can't be dismissed.

A study done in 1997-98 put the increased demand for surgical services in Calgary at 19 percent by 2003-04. That's 19 percent, and that's only three years from now. By 2003 this government is slated to spend a billion dollars more than we are spending today. That's in three years. A billion dollars more, and that is in our base budget. It's absolutely incredible to me when people dismiss the facts of what the realities are with our budget. We know that health care will be taking a third of the total of our budget, and that's approximately a billion dollars more, Mr. Speaker, than we spent three years ago.

So my vision is that in three years' time I will be able to tell my constituents, who happen to work very, very hard for their money and pay taxes, that we dared to go forward and change conventional thinking, that despite the fact that public funds continue to be spent on private facilities, the health care spending curve started to decline a little instead of going straight through the roof, and that we entered new partnerships, ones that provided convenient, safe, community-based clinics that perform minor elective surgical procedures instead of having to build . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: A point of order.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. *Beauchesne* 333. Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering if at this time the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross would answer a question?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, you only need to say yes or no.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not at this time. We did hear from the hon. Leader of the Opposition for the previous 90 minutes, and I have just a few moments here.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The floor is yours.

Debate Continued

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you. As I said earlier, my vision also is that

we will be providing convenient, safe, community-based clinics that perform minor elective surgical procedures instead of having to build new facilities that unnecessarily add to the upward slant of the curve of spending. Yes, some of these safe procedures require overnight stays, stays of more than 12 hours. Instead of being released from a day clinic after late afternoon surgery, the law was changed to allow patients to get a good night's sleep, which one very experienced OR nurse told me is sometimes all a patient really needs and which I might also add is a principle that the Alberta Medical Association agreed with in writing, and it has been filed with the Legislature. Maybe some surgeries were added to the list, Mr. Speaker, but that was only after the College of Physicians and Surgeons said they could be safely performed on relatively healthy people in safe surroundings by qualified physicians, nurses, and other very caring health care personnel with adequate backup plans.

It is also my hope, Mr. Speaker, that I can tell my constituents that Albertans had better access to publicly funded health care, that queue-jumping through offering enhanced goods and services was made illegal, that the cost of uninsured enhanced services was made fair with no profit for the provider, whether public or private, above a reasonable administrative fee, and that they were consistent no matter where in this province a patient lived.

These are the reasons why I support Bill 11, Mr. Speaker, and why I applaud the courage of this government and of our minister of health as well as our Premier in proceeding with a law that would have been far easier to have left alone but which I am certain will, when it is implemented, serve well the interests of my constituents and all Albertans.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I sit here and listen to some of the arguments made, I find it quite incredible, quite stunning that there are members on the government side that get up and actually believe what they're saying. I think they actually believe what they're saying. It amazes me how they can have such a false concept of what the bill is all about, how they can ignore the dangers that lie in Bill 11.

10:10

We hear discussions about it costing a million dollars for a bed when you're building a medical facility. That's true. That's a figure I wouldn't dispute. Then why does government blow up a whole bunch of these beds in Calgary if they cost a million dollars to build in the first place? Why did they sell off all kinds of beds at a discount rate? What? A penny on the dollar, whatever.

We hear talk about visions. They're not visions; they're nightmares. When we say privatization starts creeping in the health care system, we're not talking about a vision. We're talking about a nightmare.

When I think of Bill 11, it reminds me of a story, Mr. Speaker, and just bear with me and you will see how this story relates to Bill 11. When I was a young fellow growing up outside Port Arthur, Ontario – and the Member for Calgary-Mountain View will relate to this – I lived on the east side of Port Arthur there, just off Lake Superior, which at that time was called Nipigon highway and now is called Scenic highway. About a mile away from our house was the general store, where we'd go and pick up bread and milk and such, and in between the road and the lake were the railway tracks. My younger brother, Gerry – we called him Pee-wee – and I would walk along the tracks because it was a shortcut to the store. One day

we were walking along picking up some bread, whatever, and we get into this argument about candy. My brother Gerry, Pee-wee, is very, very stubborn. He's on the track and we hear a train coming. I said, "Gerry, you've got to get off the track here. The train's coming." But he's stubborn, and he's not going to move because he's upset with me. The train comes closer, and he's not going to move. He's going to let that train run over him before he budes. Finally I had to forcibly remove him from the track.

That reminds me of the opposition to Bill 11 coming down like a train. The Premier of the province is standing on the tracks and refuses to move, refuses to budge, refuses to listen to that outcry that is there, that is plowing down. So just like I had to remove my brother from the tracks, I guess Albertans will have no choice but to remove this government come the next election, because otherwise they're not going to be heard.

I've seen protests in the past. We've seen demonstrations on education and such. We've tabled petitions on education. We've tabled petitions on different things. But in the 11 and a half years I've been here, I have never, ever seen the type of opposition we are now encountering towards any issue, any bill, any piece of legislation, any matter that has been brought before this House.

We've talked about the rallies that have been held where thousands of people have attended. We've talked about the petitions, the 70,000 that we've tabled. The third party has tabled another 15,000 to 20,000, whatever it is. There are others that are waiting to be tabled. We get letters. We get phone calls. We get e-mails. We get protests. Clearly, despite what government members may say, what they may believe when they stand up, they must understand that there is opposition there. You can read the polls, but even forgetting the polls, just the outcries, just the comments that are made not only from Liberals, not only from New Democrats but from Tories, longtime Conservative members, are really questioning what the government is doing with Bill 11.

This opposition that we hear in Alberta is being heard right across Canada. There is no question that people in other provinces are extremely concerned as to what's happening here in Alberta, because they fear that it will become the demise of the health care system, that other provinces will pick up on what Alberta has done, expand upon that. Just like we have Ontario and Alberta trying to fight as to who has the lowest tax, we're going to have the two provinces battling head to head over who can privatize the health care system the fastest.

Now, this bill without question is going to go through. The government has made it very clear. The concerns of the people, the opposition of the people doesn't count. The government's not listening. They don't want to listen.

I remember hearing: he hears, he listens, he cares. Well, obviously on Bill 11 the government is not listening, the government is not hearing, the government is not caring. People cannot be simply written off because they exercise their democratic right to oppose government legislation. They can't be classified as left-wing nuts. We look at the people that are protesting. Neighbours of mine have been out front there protesting, and they're not left-wing nuts. Members of churches that have protested are not left-wing nuts.

One of the things, Mr. Speaker, that people become very, very upset about is Bill 11, yes, but also the process that's being used, the way that people are written off, the closure that has been used now on three attempts. Closure, a form of closure, a hidden form of closure: call it what you want. Government has chosen to choke debate on Bill 11. They know that the protests will continue, that the opposition will continue to build, so they're trying to head it off.

From here what will government do? I would suspect the bill will be passed. There's no question about that now in my mind. The bill

will be passed using closure, something the government has used about 26 times before under the current Premier. We'll see third reading happen before the end of this week, would be my venture. The bill will be proclaimed, and come the fall, when it's all in, I don't think you're going to see a great deal of change in the early stages, Mr. Speaker.

I think we'll see an election come next February or March, and the government will say: "See; was there really any difference? Was there really any change?" But you wait till that election is gone, and if – if – they are fortunate enough to somehow convince Albertans that they deserve to be re-elected, you watch what will happen at that particular point. Then you're going to see, I believe, widespread privatization start to take place and the demise of the health care system.

Members will stand here and criticize what members of the opposition are saying. Government members will do that. They'll criticize the Leader of the Official Opposition. But, Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, nobody, no member in this House, has the same understanding, the same knowledge, the same passion for health care as the Leader of the Official Opposition, bar none, and when she speaks, she should be listened to, because she knows what she's talking about when it comes to health care. So her comments can't simply be dismissed, written off.

I find in my riding of Edmonton-Rutherford and, interestingly enough, the Tory candidate that's going out there door-knocking now, that has now been nominated, is also finding that Bill 11 is the catalyst for people to voice their objection, their concern about what's happened to the health care system in Alberta in recent years. I hear their comments about: we're spending more than we spent before. You don't measure it by how much is spent. It depends on how those dollars are spent, how they're managed. Now we see government saying: well, we're going to allow the private sector to start spending taxpayers' money as well. We can imagine how they're going to spend those dollars.

So the whole health care system has really come under question and Bill 11. The government actually did the people of Alberta a favour in the sense that they finally brought to a head, focused attention on the shortcomings in the health care system. The government has acted as a catalyst for people to become politically involved, for people to start to have a much deeper appreciation for their health care system, which we in the past had tended to take for granted.

We talk in terms of privatization. I pulled something out of the paper the other day. Everybody reads Ann Landers. Now, she's talking about privatization of the health care system in the States, and she invited comments from readers. One of the people that commented is a doctor. He says: "I am a physician looking forward to getting out of this profession. It bothers me when I prescribe medicines . . ." and such. Now the critical part. Listen to this. He says in his letter to Ann Landers: "It pains me to see the HMOs" – we all know what the HMOs in the United States are – "making millions while I can barely afford to give my staff a raise."

Now, that touches on the nature of privatization. Privatization involves businesses getting into a venture not for the good of their people, but they're motivated by making a profit. It's no different than if I in my life after politics decide I want to get a McDonald's franchise, for example, or some other type of business. I'm not going to go in there because I want to necessarily provide a service to people. I'm going to go in there because I'm going to say: this is an opportunity for me to make a good income; this is an opportunity for me to make a 15 percent return, whatever, on my investment. So when we get into privatization, let's not fool ourselves about what the motivation is. The motivation is not necessarily to provide a

good quality of health care to Albertans. It will be to in fact make dollars at the expense of Albertans, at the expense of taxpayers, at the expense of the health care system. We will see what's going to happen with the health care system.

One of the constituents of the member that represents Stony Plain was out at the rally here one night, and I got into a good discussion with him. He gave me a copy of a letter that he had written to the editor of the *Spruce Grove Examiner*, April 20, 2000. He expressed to me that it was unfortunate he was not able to have that letter published in every paper across Canada, so I'm going to take the liberty of reading a few of his comments. It's written by R.W. "Bob" Oldham from Stony Plain. The editors have captioned the letter. They put on a title called: Promising future more promises than future.

10:20

Now, in his letter Mr. Oldham makes a number of references. He refers to the local newspapers containing full page ads, those full page ads that were in the *Calgary Sun*, the *Edmonton Journal*, the *Calgary Herald*, and such. It also went into a lot of the smaller newspapers throughout rural Alberta. We saw those full-page ads run countless times at countless expense. He takes objection to some of the statements made in there. He takes objection to the statement "No one will pay for medically necessary services." Now, that's a quote from the ad: no one will pay for medically necessary services. Mr. Oldham responds:

Wrong! The cost of medical care ultimately comes out of our pockets, one way or another. So, we need to be concerned about how these costs will be arrived at and what they will be.

That stands to reason. You can't possibly say no one pays for medically necessary services. The government gets the money from some place. They get it from the taxpayers. He goes on to say:

When the costs of services go up, the regional health authorities have two alternatives: reduce services (and lengthen waiting lists), or ask taxpayers for more money. Those are the choices and there is nothing in Bill 11 to avoid these economic facts of life.

He then takes objection to another remark in the ad: no one will be able to jump the queue. Now, he makes it very clear.

Suppose you and your neighbour are on a long waiting list for diagnostic services at a public hospital before getting on a waiting list for surgery or curative treatment. What is there in Bill 11 to prevent your neighbour from paying several hundred dollars to get on a shorter list at a private MRI clinic? He will then be in the queue for treatment long before you [even] get your MRI scan.

So that's what we talk about in terms of queue-jumping. That's how queue-jumping can occur when Bill 11 is in place. You jump the line in the initial stages because you can lay out the money for that initial treatment that gets you on the waiting list for surgery a lot sooner than the person that can't afford to lay out the money from their own pockets.

He also goes on to say, "The government has defined a private hospital as an 'approved surgical facility.'" Now, we've heard that statement in here many times. "Perhaps they will replace 'queue jumping' with a kinder, gentler term."

Then he goes on to dispute another reference in that ad that reads: "Everyone will benefit from reduced waiting lists." Now, listen to that: everyone will benefit from reduced waiting lists.

Wrong again! A major reason for long waiting lists is the shortage of doctors and nurses. Why are we [so] short? When the government, in its infinite wisdom, drastically reduced budgets, professional training was cut back and existing medical personnel were forced to leave their profession or leave the country. Some older ones retired and are even older now. Others have established themselves in other lines of work. Many went to jobs south of the border. Are many of them going to be tempted to return to work in

Alberta where a fickle government may, someday, put them out on the street again?

Then he objects to a last statement in there where it says, "Bill 11 will create more choices for Albertans." I like his response to this one. He says:

There is an element of truth in this. In the next election, we will have a choice of re-electing the people who create problems and try to solve them with phony economics or some people who will try to improve a public system that, even now, is better than any other.

Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that Mr. Oldham was not able to get that letter published in every newspaper across Canada because he doesn't have the financial resources this government has by simply tapping into the pockets of the taxpayer and saying: "We're going to run this full page ad here; we're going to run this full page ad there. We're going to run it again. We're going to run it a third time. We're going to run these things on the radio," spending millions and millions of dollars trying to convince Albertans of something that is not good for them, that Albertans already know is not good for them. Albertans are telling this government it is not good for them. We know it's not good for them. We want them to kill this bill, but government chooses not to listen.

Now, when I attend these rallies and I speak to constituents that come into the office and I go to Superstore – people stop me there – everybody wants to talk about Bill 11. Everybody wants to talk about Bill 11. A number of people now want to talk about Bill 18 as well, which is coming up next, but Bill 11 is the hot one now.

AN HON. MEMBER: The flat tax.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah, the flat tax, again a very serious mistake on the part of this government. But when people talk about Bill 11, they tell me what they fear, and many of them can relate stories of how they know somebody in the United States or in New Zealand or in Britain. They themselves may have experienced a situation where they had to pay for enhanced services or they know somebody that went bankrupt or was driven to the poorhouse because of medical procedures that were conducted under a private health care system.

What they see about Bill 11 that they find the most frightening – they recognize now that this government is not prepared to listen. It doesn't matter how they feel, this government is going to do what it is going to do. They fear that Bill 11 in the initial stages is the foot in the door, the crack, the crack towards destroying the health care system in Canada, and I say in Canada because they see the potential of this to spread to other provinces if the government of Alberta gets away with it. So they see this crack in the door allowing some initial privatization, so-called surgical facilities that will have relatively short stays. In time to come we'll see that certain services can be deinsured, more and more services deinsured, where more and more of it is classified, then, as an enhanced service, that you can jump to the front of the line if you've got the dollars to pay for it. So that's their real fear, that this is the crack in the door that can be the demise of the health care system as we've come to know it, as we've come to love it, as we've come to appreciate it, as we've come to accept it, being the best, at one time at least, system in the world, bar none. Even when we look across Canada, Alberta had a certain pride in probably producing the best, if not the best close to the best, health care system in comparison to the other provinces. I've experienced a health care system in some of the other provinces, and Alberta at that particular time, in terms of health care, was a joy.

Ironically, at that time, when the health care system was going along so smoothly and people had such confidence in the health care system, do we all recall who the minister of health was who instilled that confidence in Albertans, who instilled that passion, that

appreciation for a health care system that suited their needs and that was there for them when they needed it?

That crack in the door, that's the first thing.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

The other thing, now, that people will talk about is the so-called definition of surgical facilities, and people will say: why is a surgical facility different than a hospital other than it being for a profit, whereas a hospital is not for-profit? They say: "If I go to a surgical facility, I'm allowed to stay there overnight. I'm allowed to stay there a second night, a third night. They're allowed to do surgery on me, they're allowed to have an operating room, and they're allowed to have recovery beds and such. How is that so much different than a hospital?"

In the initial stages the types of surgical procedures that may be carried out will vary. They may not be as severe as what we see happening, say, at the University hospital, where we see heart transplants occurring and that. But again that foot in the door, that foot in the door that will allow the government to expand the areas of privatization and start including more and more services that will be deinsured and that will then have to be covered by taxpayers out of their own pockets. Certainly under that concept it would sound like the government could save money by transferring it to the public health care system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MS LEIBOVICI: Unanimous consent to continue.

MR. WICKMAN: Oh, I'd love that. Anyhow, I've used my 20 minutes, so I will cede the floor. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to the Health Care Protection Act. You know, over the last several months Bill 11 has generated a great deal of discussion, and I would like to take this opportunity to discuss the bill in response to some of the issues and concerns raised by my constituents. First, I'd like to recognize the important debate that took place in committee and especially the amendments that arose from it. The amendments alleviated some of the concerns that had been raised by my constituents.

10:30

Madam Speaker, Bill 11 in its amended form will provide protection for our publicly funded health system. It will provide protection for Albertans using the system, and I believe it will help to build a stronger foundation for health care in the future. It brings existing private surgical services clearly under the control of the public system and any future surgical services as well.

Let me begin by saying that the 63 other government MLAs and I are fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, grandfathers, and grandmothers. Like our constituents we firmly believe that quality medical care must be available to all Albertans, regardless of the ability to pay. We want to protect our health care system, as everyone does, for future generations.

I've been asked: why do we need legislation like Bill 11? Bill 11 regulates surgical facilities. The first private surgical clinic opened in Alberta in 1984. Today there are 52. These clinics provide services like cataract surgery, dental procedures, plastic surgery, and pregnancy terminations. Albertans are not charged for the insured

services they receive at these private-sector facilities now, and Bill 11 ensures that there will continue to be no charge. That is reassuring to those raising this concern.

The problem, however, is that while these surgical clinics are accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Alberta government has no legal authority to regulate them. Our government was asked by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the blue-ribbon panel, and by federal Minister Allan Rock to bring in legislation that lays out the rules and guidelines under which all surgical facilities must operate in Alberta. Madam Speaker, Bill 11 is that legislation. It puts in place rules that regional health authorities must follow if they wish to contract out services, all within full compliance both in principle and in spirit of the Canada Health Act.

My constituents have asked if American-style private hospitals will now be allowed to operate in the province. The answer to that is no. Bill 11 totally bans private hospitals in Alberta and controls the development of private surgical facilities offering minor procedures as defined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

There are people in my constituency who are worried that under Bill 11 private surgical facilities could start charging patients for insured services. I want to assure them that this is not the case. Albertans are not charged for the insured services they receive at these private-sector facilities now, and Bill 11 ensures that this will continue to be the case for existing facilities and for possible future facilities.

I've been asked if services will be deinsured under Bill 11. Contracting with surgical facilities to deliver services on behalf of the publicly funded system has nothing to do with deinsuring services. This government has no plans to deinsure services, and all contracting will be done in strict adherence to the principles of the Canada Health Act. We are committed to the Canada Health Act, and that commitment is included in Bill 11. The principles are and will continue to be the foundation of the health system in Alberta.

Some of my constituents are worried that under this legislation people will be able to pay to jump the queue. Bill 11 prohibits anyone from making or accepting payments to get faster service and jump ahead in the line. I am happy to tell my constituents that the bill has even been amended to strengthen this section. This will be the law.

People want to know if this bill could open the door for private clinics to perform major surgeries. Bill 11 prohibits major surgeries as defined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons from being done anywhere except in full-service, public hospitals. The college will decide what is done and where. Physicians, not politicians, will decide.

Madam Speaker, Bill 11 was never intended to solve all the health care problems in this province. It's only one part of a much larger plan. This government is increasing our annual health spending by over a billion dollars in the next three years. We are hiring more nurses, recruiting more doctors, and increasing the number of cancer, heart, and neurosurgeries. We are increasing access to home care and continuing care services.

Madam Speaker, the debate on this bill has encompassed a dialogue on our health system that has gone far beyond the purpose in terms of the Health Care Protection Act. That is likely good in that it has alerted all Canadians to the problems facing medicare's sustainability in this country. The bottom line is that Bill 11 would protect our publicly funded health system and would give our regional health authorities wider options to consider when finding new and better ways to meet the challenges facing health care now and in the future.

I want to tell this House tonight that my constituents made it clear in the last election and again throughout this whole process that we

must preserve publicly funded and publicly administered health care. In light of the servicing challenges that could threaten its sustainability, I believe, as so many others do, that we are wise to take action now. We must look to the future and take precautionary measures to protect and improve the system we all hold dear. That is why we need the health protection legislation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The debate on Bill 11 over the last few weeks has been very extensive but not too comprehensive. While many MLAs in here have taken the opportunity to speak to Bill 11, there have been in the neighbourhood of 30 MLAs who have not taken this opportunity to speak at second reading, Committee of the Whole, or to this point at third reading. It's interesting to note that these are government MLAs. Now, certainly, as the hon. member just mentioned, he was elected by the people, but he was elected by the people to represent their views. Certainly with what we've seen here tonight, this is not serving the needs and the wishes of his constituents.

We look at Bill 11 and all that has happened with it. This government took the unprecedented move of mailing this bill out to all Albertans. Now, they didn't only mail out the bill, but they put their own notes in the margins. They also spent in excess of \$2 million on a PR campaign that included ads on TV, full-page ads in newspapers, yet with all of this, Madam Speaker, it has not worked. The majority of Albertans continue to have mistrust with this government, and they do not support this bill. As well, if this PR move were performed in the private industry and had this rate of failure, then those people would be fired. It certainly isn't what Albertans are spending their hard-earned taxpayer dollars for, to pay for PR campaigns rather than putting that much-needed money into our public health care system.

On Bill 11, Madam Speaker, we have seen the presentation of many studies and many reports that all support the Official Opposition's view that Bill 11 is not a bill that will serve the public interest. Many studies have been presented here before, and a number more were presented this evening by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, the Leader of the Official Opposition. We have seen from these studies that there is not one shred of evidence that supports this bill. We look around this room. We have people from all walks of life. We have businesspeople, former teachers, former school board members, and none of them in those areas would undertake something of this nature without one shred of proof. Albertans expect that from us. They expect us to be good custodians of their money.

As well, Madam Speaker, we've seen the government try and defend a bill with half truths, with misinformation, with insults, and inflammatory statements but not with studies, not with information, not with reports, and certainly not with facts. We have unelected regional health authorities in this province that are responsible for over \$5 billion in our health care budget. It is hard to believe they have not done cost analyses. In fact, it's certainly hard to believe that they have not done any studies on the cost of private versus public health care systems. If they have done those studies, then why haven't we seen them here? If I were the minister of health, I would certainly want those studies, and I would certainly want that support before I would ever introduce a bill of this nature into the House. So it is hard to believe that we continue out of control down a slippery slope which will certainly lead to a health care system that is not sustainable because we are funding private companies with taxpayer dollars.

10:40

Now, we also look at the record of this government, and it's another reason why Albertans certainly don't trust this government when it comes to the introduction of this bill. All we have to do is look at the past with our NovAtels, our Swan Hills, MagCan, problems with the ATB, and the list goes on and on, of course. As the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford said, there's certainly no doubt that this Bill 11 will be passed. It will be shoved through by this government. But as bad as all those other examples I have spoken about were, Madam Speaker, this Bill 11 has the potential of spending more taxpayer dollars, which should be spent on a publicly funded health care system, and it will make all the other blunders seem small.

Never in the history of this province has the government spent in excess of \$2 million for an ad campaign to promote a bill and failed. It is something that a former hon. Speaker of this House mentioned today, that he certainly hopes that Albertans do not forget about the lessons they have learned during this terrible attempt at passing legislation.

Now, Madam Speaker, we see that the more Albertans hear, the more informed they become, the more vocal and opposed to this bill they become. Support for the pulling of this bill just continues to grow and grow. We have heard their concerns. We have heard their concerns through various types of correspondence in the form of telephone calls, letters, e-mails, faxes. They just continue to pour in. At the same time, we have tens of thousands of Albertans that have taken the time to sign petitions, and those petitions have been presented on the floor of this Legislature. I can't recall the last time that we had so many public rallies in this province, rallies right here on the steps of the Legislature, where people have had the opportunity to voice their concerns and their displeasure with the bill.

So if the people in this province do not support this bill – and every poll that's been conducted indicates that they don't – who does support this bill? Obviously there are a number of government MLAs that support this bill. There are a number of special-interest groups out there. There's a small number of doctors. There are probably some insurance companies that are waiting for this to pass. So then why does this happen?

My wife went to her doctor here last week, and when he heard what I was doing for a living these days, he said: well, what about this Bill 11? She said: well, what do you think about it? And he said: the only people I can see benefiting from this at this time are a few doctors in this province that are going to get very, very rich. I certainly have no trouble concurring with those views.

Now, this is an issue, Madam Speaker, that is not only an issue of democracy, it's also an issue of private health care. The whole strategy here – and we've seen it here today, where all other business of this House was set aside so that Bill 11 could be discussed, and we see that again at third reading under Standing Order 47(1) we do have closure invoked on this bill.

Now, I've been in this House for only a little over three years, but in speaking with a number of members that have been here a lot longer than I have, none of them can remember any bill that was ever presented on the floor of this Legislature where the government had to invoke closure or a form of closure in three different ways. I think of some words I heard the other night, and I think of them because they are very, very appropriate here. We see a government trying to ram this bill through, and they hope that by passing this bill, by getting it out of this Assembly, that will be the end.

But I don't think that will be the end, Madam Speaker. That will just be the beginning. It will be the beginning of the end of a government that has grown old and has grown arrogant, a government that is failing to listen to the people. When a government stops

listening to the people, then of course the voters have the say in what happens to their future.

Now, voters in this province have told the government that this bill does not make sense from a moral, an ethical, a social, or an economic standpoint. Today we heard from a former Speaker of this Assembly; we also heard from two prominent Alberta surgeons; we've also heard from the Canadian Council of Churches: all opposed to Bill 11. But this government continues not to listen. They are not listening, as well, to many doctors, nurses, health care economists, scholars, religious leaders, and many others in this province who oppose Bill 11. They have all spoken out emphatically on how dangerous this particular bill is.

All of the time the Premier has been quite willing to blame the Official Opposition for spreading misinformation and for fear mongering. The Premier has also been calling those that oppose the bill left-wing nuts. He continues to turn a deaf ear to all those who do not support this legislation. How does this government, Madam Speaker, continue to push the passing of this bill when despite all of their public relations moves to sell this bill, Albertans are not buying it? They want the bill pulled, and Albertans are right in wanting this.

Once Albertans saw this bill, once they saw its contents and its intent, they raised many concerns. Despite perhaps the biggest PR campaign ever put on by a government in this province, Albertans knew this bill would not fly. Next, we saw a desperate attempt by the government to tell Albertans what the real truth was, and truth squads were sent out to explain the bill so that Albertans would understand it. We continue to hear that same rhetoric in the House tonight.

Once again Albertans rejected what the government line was, and as Albertans were telling the government about this bill, two of their own MLAs were telling the public that overnight stays in hospitals would be disallowed by this bill, again misinformation but certainly not by the Official Opposition. Madam Speaker, Albertans realize that this is not correct. The fact that this legislation would allow overnight stays is one of the more contentious parts of the bill.

10:50

The government amendments that were put forward do not deal with the key concerns. There were 14 amendments in all, and unfortunately we did not get to complete debate in this House on 13 of those amendments, which were rammed through this House after closure was invoked at Committee of the Whole stage. To my knowledge, Madam Speaker, no major government bill was so badly flawed that they needed 14 amendments of their own to try and correct it. And this is without even hearing any opposition amendments.

So we had a piece of flawed legislation, yet the opposition did not get any input into the changes in this bill, which would make it a better piece of legislation for all Albertans. What is this government so frightened about, Madam Speaker, when they force closure and stop debate on the remaining 13 amendments? What are they frightened of when they don't allow their own members an opportunity to speak to this bill at second reading or Committee of the Whole?

It would seem to me, Madam Speaker, that the poorest prepared Albertans are the government members. Every government member was given the opportunity to debate a member of the Official Opposition in their own constituency. Precious few took that challenge. I received letters from the hon. members for Calgary-Egmont and West Yellowhead informing me that public debate on Bill 11 will occur in the Legislature. However, the government has effectively curtailed public debate in this Assembly with Standing Order 47(1), closure at Committee of the Whole, and no amend-

ments at third reading. It appears that the government does not want to debate this bill in the Assembly or out in the constituencies. An open debate would have provided the constituents of Edmonton-Glengarry and of course all people of this province with answers to their questions about Bill 11.

This afternoon in the House, Madam Speaker, I tabled a letter from a grade 6 class at St. Anne Catholic elementary school. It is a short letter which reflects their concerns and the concerns of many constituents with this legislation. I would like to read this letter into the record this evening. It's addressed to the Premier.

Dear Mr. Klein:

We are the grade 6 class from St. Anne school. We are studying politics in social studies. We learned about democracy in Ancient Greece, and have compared it in China. We have heard about Bill 11 and how people feel about having private health care. The voices of most Albertans are not being respected. The government isn't listening to the opposition and is limiting debate. You will not allow the members of the conservative party to vote according to the wishes of constituents. We as a class and more than half of Albertans think Democracy is not being practiced in this province. The opinion of most Albertans is against Bill 11. We think that if you keep running the government like a tyrant you will never be re-elected again.

Sincerely,

Gr. 6 Class

That was an excellent letter that those students wrote.

As well, Madam Speaker, other constituents in Edmonton-Glengarry have asked a number of questions of the government, and to date they are still waiting for answers. I have one of those letters right now, from a Mr. Struthers who lives in Edmonton-Glengarry. He wrote this letter to the Minister of Health and Wellness, and as of this evening he was still waiting for a reply to some of the questions he had here. I would like to just make a few comments and read into the record some of his concerns with Bill 11. Mr. Struthers goes on to say:

I wholeheartedly agree that private facilities must be controlled. I am, however, confused by your statement that, "Right now, if a private surgical facility is accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, it could set up shop and there is absolutely nothing the Alberta government could say or do about it."

I am assuming that you mean the College could approve an additional eye clinic and, if they did, the government, in the current circumstance, would have to let its operation proceed. Can you inform me of any problems that have arisen in that regard to this point in time? In other words, do any College approved facilities currently exist despite the wishes of the government?

Is there any chance, under the current regime, that a college could approve a hip replacement or hernia facility that could operate without the blessing of the government? I think not. In fact, I suspect that currently the government could not provide the required blessing because of the overnight constraints.

Again, he goes on to list a number of concerns he has in this regard. His first one.

First, I suspect that within the current public system there are beds and facilities that could alleviate much if not all of the pressure if they were put back into service and the necessary staff was engaged to run [it].

[Mr. Bonner's speaking time expired]

MRS. SOETAERT: Aw, Bill. You didn't get finished.

MR. BONNER: No, I didn't get finished, but I want to thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 11 in third reading.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise tonight to make some final comments on the Health Care Protection Act. The process that we're participating in began more than two years ago with the introduction of Bill 37 and the subsequent blue-ribbon panel on Bill 37, which was a broad public consultation process. [The sound system malfunctioned] I'm getting some feedback here, Madam Speaker. [interjections] Most of the feedback I've got pertaining to this bill has been positive.

As I was saying, the blue-ribbon panel was a broad public consultation process that developed the policy guidelines on private clinics and the text of Bill 11, which we are now debating, the Health Care Protection Act.

Some Albertans have been wondering why Bill 11 is being brought forward. Certainly there are people who would shy away from a debate such as this simply because of the controversy generated so far. Well, Madam Speaker, there are several reasons for bringing in Bill 11, and they point to the fact that Bill 11 is the right thing to do.

The first reason we're doing this is because a legislative gap exists. The Alberta government does not presently have the legislative authority to restrict or prohibit the opening of new clinics. As it stands, so long as a facility is approved by the College of Physicians and Surgeons to do procedures outside a hospital, there is nothing we as government can do to prevent that from happening. To date more than 50 private clinics offering minor surgical procedures have set up in Alberta. More than 30 of these clinics were opened while the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was the then minister of health.

Make no mistake about it, Madam Speaker: this government and Albertans alike value the role that these specialized clinics play in contributing to the well-being of our province and its citizens. At the same time, it is equally important that we have the ability to ensure that these clinics and any new clinics that open in the future always maintain the highest standards and serve the best interests of Albertans in the publicly funded health care system.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons recognized this and asked our government to close the legislative gap and play a leadership role in providing surgical facilities to ensure that all the proper protective guidelines are in place. Moreover, Madam Speaker, the federal Minister of Health, the Hon. Allan Rock, recently wrote a letter to the Minister of Health and Wellness to the same effect, asking that that framework for approval and accreditation of private facilities be developed and enacted as quickly as feasible.

11:00

Well, Madam Speaker, we now have that framework, and it is Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act. Bill 11 places some very strict guidelines on what kind of surgical clinics can be developed within our province and how those clinics can conduct their business. First of all, Bill 11 slams the door on private hospitals and anything that may contribute to a two-tier, American style health care system. Albertans don't want a two-tier, American style health care system. The hon. members of this government don't want a two-tier, American style health care system either. Bill 11 safeguards against this possibility with strong protective mechanisms.

I find it quite ironic that some nine years ago the Leader of the Official Opposition believed in and supported the basic tenets and protections offered in the Health Care Protection Act. In 1991, when she was the minister of health, she brought forward a discussion paper to the government caucus outlining possible legislative options

to regulate nonhospital facilities. The paper states that the “innovations in medical technology are changing the way medical services are . . .” [interjections] I’m getting some interruptions from across the way here, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: We’re just having a real debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: But you don’t have the floor, hon. member. I would ask that we respect the person that does have the floor.

Go ahead, hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, the paper states:

Innovations in medical technology are changing the way medical services are delivered and expanding the range of locations in which they can be provided. Hospital stays are no longer required for many procedures that can now be performed on an ambulatory basis.

The report commissioned by the now Leader of the Opposition and former health minister goes on to say:

Approaches to the development, organization and funding of ambulatory services need to be as innovative as the technologies which make ambulatory care possible . . . As the number and type of ambulatory care services increases, the need arises to develop a method to ensure quality service and patient safety.

Finally, Madam Speaker, comes a call for exactly what Bill 11 proposes. Again, I quote from the same discussion paper.

Appropriate methods of funding ambulatory care services both inside and outside the hospital are needed to facilitate a shift from inpatient to ambulatory services when they are safe, efficacious and cost-effective.

MS LEIBOVICI: Where does it say profit in there?

MR. MARZ: I continue to get some negative feedback from the opposition, Madam Speaker, and continued interruptions. Perhaps they don’t like to hear what their leader was saying in 1991.

I don’t know about you, Madam Speaker, but what I’ve just quoted from the Leader of the Opposition, what she said in 1991, sounds a great deal like Bill 11 to me. The opposition leader suggested and supported the principles of Bill 11 then, so why is she opposed to Bill 11 now? [interjections] Perhaps there are a number of reasons. Perhaps it’s just because a year later the Leader of the Official Opposition began to slide down the slippery slope of supporting a two-tier, American style health care system herself. The thin edge of the wedge, if you will.

In this Assembly she said – and I’m quoting this from *Hansard*, June 10, 1992.

My view is that we don’t have all the answers in the Canadian . . . system. I think we should always be open to learning more, and it may well be that we can learn something from the quality management structures that the Americans have put in place.

Madam Speaker, it would seem that nothing has changed since then. In an Alberta Liberal caucus news release dated November 4, 1999, the Leader of the Opposition committed to banning private hospitals from receiving taxpayer dollars by requiring physicians who practise in private hospitals “to opt out of the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan.” This clearly is not the outright ban on private hospitals as proposed in Bill 11. In fact, this is clearly the slippery slope that the opposition Liberals so often maliciously speak about.

Instead of pointing the finger, they should be chastising them-

selves for not supporting the principles of the Canada Health Act. The Liberal leader’s position is truly what two-tier health care is about, where patients would be able to queue-jump into an opted-out health care sector where they could pay for services out of pocket to an opted-out physician in a facility that would presumably be opted out of the public system as well.

Madam Speaker, contrary to the Liberal leader’s position supporting two-tier health, the Health Care Protection Act absolutely bans private hospitals and ensures that approved surgical facilities provide a net benefit for patients as well as the public health care system in general, since those approved facilities will in essence become part of the public system, where the Alberta health care insurance card will be all you need to pay for your health care services.

If the stringent criteria found in Bill 11 are not met, absolutely no contract will be awarded. The onus is completely on the contract applicant to meet each and every condition outlined in Bill 11.

Madam Speaker, we’re introducing Bill 11 because it is the right thing to do. Albertans recognize that our province is changing; the health care system needs to adapt to our changing needs as well. Our population is growing and aging, and as it does, Albertans will need to access an increasing number of services from our health care system. Moreover, the cost of providing services such as purchasing new technologies, new medicines, and new techniques is also growing.

At present Alberta’s share of contributions towards Alberta health care funding is 76 cents out of every dollar compared to the federal contribution of just 11 cents. This year the province’s share amounts to \$5.65 billion, one-third of the provincial program expenditures, \$14.8 million a day, or \$1,639 per Albertan.

Madam Speaker, this government has increased spending in the area of health to meet increased demands. In fact, since 1994 this government has reinvested \$3 for every \$1 that was taken out of the system when our fiscal house was not in order. At the same time, we have recognized that simply throwing money at the problem is not a solution, nor is it an approach that is acceptable to Albertans.

Again, Madam Speaker, when the Leader of the Official Opposition was health minister in 1992, she is quoted in *Hansard* as saying:

I’m not an advocate for adding on to the existing system . . . That’s why I say, as a planning scenario, freeze the dollars. Don’t add more dollars to the status quo, because if you do so, you merely perpetuate this notion that the status quo has to continue.

She goes on to say:

In my view, the only way we can get to the fundamental reform is to hammer it and not give in to “Let’s put a little more money here,” because that merely continues on in the way we’ve been going.

Well, Madam Speaker, we disagree with that ideology, and it appears that members across the way don’t like to hear what their leader has said in the past or in recent history as well. Perhaps if they listened more closely when she said it, they wouldn’t be arguing so vigorously against Bill 11 today. [interjections]

Speaker’s Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, just a moment. There seems to be an awful lot of speakers speaking on this bill. The chair has only recognized one person. For the last several hours everyone here has been very, very good. Could we ask that over the next little while we maintain some decorum and allow the person that’s standing to speak without interjection?

Go ahead, hon. member.

Debate Continued

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, we

disagree with that ideology. Instead of freezing health care funding, this government has made tremendous investments in public health care. We also have an excellent track record of alleviating pressure points within the system when they do occur.

Madam Speaker, we've hammered nothing in terms of bringing Bill 11 forward.

MS OLSEN: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, there's been a point of order raised by Edmonton-Norwood.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MS OLSEN: *Beauchesne* section 333. I was just wondering if the member would entertain a question about the Didsbury hospital.

MR. MARZ: No, Madam Speaker. My time is precious to get my points across. If the member across the way would have been listening to all the debate so far, she'd probably get all her questions answered.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, yes or no would have sufficed. Go ahead.

MR. MARZ: You can take that as a no, Madam Speaker.

11:10

Debate Continued

MR. MARZ: As I was saying, Madam Speaker, we've hammered nothing in terms of bringing Bill 11 forward. The lengthy consultation process has been well documented both inside and outside this Assembly beginning with Bill 37 and the blue-ribbon panel discussions. The government has listened to the concerns of Albertans, and I am pleased that with the well-thought-out amendments that passed in Committee of the Whole, further strengthening of an already strong piece of legislation now exists.

Madam Speaker, the people of this province and indeed this country have spoken. The status quo is not an option. I believe Bill 11 is a product of innovative and forward thinking. It will give regional health authorities the options and flexibility they need to ensure the continuation of a strong and sustainable publicly funded system. Bill 11 will give regional health authorities the opportunity to effectively use approved surgical facilities to increase access, shorten waiting lists, and serve more patients in need of care. Contracting out minor surgeries will free up valuable hospital operating room space for more complex surgeries which require an entire range of equipment and services found only in a public hospital.

It's been pointed out that Bill 11 won't solve all of the problems the health care system faces. That's true, Madam Speaker. Bill 11 is just one part of a broad six-point plan that this government is working on, and that six-point plan includes such initiatives as increasing the health care budget by more than a billion dollars over the next three years, increasing the number of key and lifesaving surgeries to shorten waiting lists, hiring more doctors, nurses, and frontline staff, and increasing the number of spaces for students in medical schools. This is something that's been asked to be included in Bill 11 by members across the way, but it is part of our six-point plan and more appropriately included as part of that plan than in legislation.

Increasing the number of long-term beds in Alberta and purchasing new and high-tech medical equipment is also part of that plan.

We've heard about increasing the number of MRIs in the province already. Launching a long-term immunization program and developing and implementing screening programs for breast and cervical cancer are also part of that six-point plan.

Madam Speaker, these are important initiatives that will make our health care system stronger and able to meet the challenges of the new millennium. Realigning priorities and relocating resources is a constant challenge that must continue if we're to keep the costs within the capacity of public funding while ensuring accessibility, quality, and accountability. To that end, we'll continue to work with the other provinces and the federal government to find new solutions to national problems in health care.

I'm proud to join my government colleagues in supporting part of a long-term vision for addressing our health care concerns. I certainly appreciate all the feedback that I've received from my constituents on the health care system in general and on Bill 11 specifically. I urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 11 and our public health care system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Seeing the lateness of the night, I can't say that it's a pleasure standing up, but it is very important to stand up to speak to Bill 11. You know, we keep standing and kind of wondering when the next motion for adjournment is, and today we got a motion saying that we could only speak one more time because, typically, they don't want to see any of our amendments.

As I stood in the Assembly on April 10, 2000, my first words were, "This bill does little to protect individuals or Albertans in general." I went on to say that

the government has three choices: scrap the bill, amend it to disallow overnight stays in approved surgical facilities, or ram it through and hope the firestorm dies down.

Well, we know how the story continues, and it's continuing to unravel with all the information being presented from all around the world discounting and questioning why this government is moving ahead with this bill.

Examples are Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, England, and the U.S. We also see that in some of these countries the complete government has been changed because of their first push for privatization. The question that Albertans are asking from the far south and the far north is: why are they doing this? We see cracks forming in the old and new Tory parties, and I say "parties" because they are two totally different parties. Friends of mine who actually sat in this Chamber under past Premier Lougheed can't fathom why or who the members are in this present Premier's kitchen cabinet calling the shots.

As a very normal Albertan I've been questioning the government's motives. I was actually waiting for the Premier to pull the bill when everything that was presented was shot down: the hip operations, the hernias. You know, we get thrown the fact that what's happening in Ontario is the best way to go for hernias. Well, if I were the Ontario government, I would be closing that place down because it's a total rip-off, their three-night stays, their 72 hours. They've created a hotel down there.

You know, the Premier has used everything possible, and everything that he has put out has actually been shut down. So why are we still looking at this? Albertans have very deep feelings and thoughts that the provincial government administration has a secret plan to erode public health care. People are starting to really, really

distrust this government with their health care. I repeat: Albertans do not trust this government with their health care, nor should they.

The Premier has been unclear about his intentions. Not long ago he openly questioned why those people with money shouldn't get faster access. This goes totally against the sense of fairness and equality that Albertans have, and they resent it. It's like skimming cream from the top.

You know, Madam Speaker, Bill 11 allows certain services to be contracted out to private clinics/hospitals, but at what cost to the public system? Does privatization mean that it's cheaper, or does it set up people or companies to profit at our expense? We think of it, we hear of it, and we know that we are actually setting out a bill that is going to be funding private companies with our taxpayer dollars while we've got many, many hospital facilities still available. Why aren't we filling up our own facilities?

You know, the PR campaign around this . . .

MR. HANCOCK: Did you read the amendments?

MR. GIBBONS: Yes, I have. You know, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud sits over there opening his mouth and talking about the amendments, which are a point of disgust. The amendments that were put forward came after the bill was introduced. It was a joke. A bill was put out there that had more amendments than the actual bill.

Do you know what? I really think this government has actually set out under the path of a book by a person from New Zealand, Roger Douglas, called *Unfinished Business*. It has set out so well how they actually went about this over the last years.

Going back to the PR campaign and before I was rudely interrupted by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud – maybe he should look at his own seat and be quiet about it. Remember when our Premier claimed that he and his government were listening? Of course, he failed to explain who he was listening to. Albertans are protesting this bill through their presence at rallies and town hall meetings throughout the province. The Premier just resorts to name-calling. Isn't that interesting? You know, I have friends that work in the AADAC system, and they say that there's something behind all this.

The Premier just resorts to name-calling, and that's really ridiculous. Are we seeing the cracks forming? I would dare the Premier to repeat the comments that were published in the *Edmonton Journal* today by his communications spin-doctor. Watch the cracks become an earthquake, Madam Speaker.

When we recessed for the first break, Madam Speaker, I actually thought the Premier would use this time to pull the bill. My thinking was that this would give the government and the Premier their way out, a whole week of spin-doctoring, and actually coming back in and saying, "You know, I've listened to my wife. I've listened to my father. Let's pull this bill before it gets too far." Then after the April 4, 2000, speeches the Premier failed to sell Albertans on what he's trying to introduce under this bill. You know, this bill is actually not for Albertans. It's for, I would suppose, his kitchen cabinet friends, a bill to protect their attempts to profit from Albertans under the guise that the public clinics will shorten waiting lists, that private will always be cheaper.

11:20

Why did the government continue on this road by pushing this bill through when many, many Albertans are concerned about the health care system, which should be in place to protect our children and our grandchildren. We should always be vigilant about the statements repeated by the Premier many times: trust me; while I am Premier,

there will be no two-tier system in this province. The more I think about this, the more I worry about what these comments might possibly mean. What happens when he isn't the Premier? Is it possible that in this next year this is going to happen? Is he dispensable?

After the spring session and bringing in this act and bringing in the tax bill, Bill 18, is complete, maybe his time will be up. If it is a political game that is being played, that is playing out this particular system, well, I don't believe in this type of playing games, pointing fingers between the feds and the province. Maybe the hon. member will stand up afterwards. There's a direction in politics in this country where the implications of both Bill 11 and Bill 18 are heading, starting in Alberta and soon to be overflowing the boundaries into other provinces. What is wrong with this politics is . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, the chair is going to ask you to move on to what we are in fact debating. It has to do with Bill 11 and whether the question should be put. Let's bring it back to that perspective.

MR. GIBBONS: Madam Speaker, I am speaking about Bill 11 and I am talking about the direction in which it's going, but none of the people here actually really, really care what's happening except they want this night over, tomorrow night over, so Bill 11 is actually out of this House, so they can actually ignore what's happening out there.

Nothing in this bill ensures that contracting out services to private facilities will open up more beds within public systems. Hospital beds, operating theatres, and other services are already available to open up within public hospitals but remain closed because of a shortage of funding or professional staff. It is fundamentally incorrect to think the solution to the problem of scarce resources within the public system is to split the resources between two systems.

Why isn't it better to take the same amount of money that the Premier and his government would hand over to private hospitals and give it to public hospitals which have the capacity to meet the needs? Where's the evidence that giving the same amount of money to private hospitals is going to cost less in the long run or provide a better income? The government has no data to show that this will benefit the health system.

We also read and understand that the city of Edmonton is being given no data that in the Capital region this is going to benefit or make the system cheaper. Perhaps the data is available. Maybe they have lots of data, but nothing will show up in the information this government wants us to see.

Madam Speaker, this is what we are talking about. We're talking about a gentleman like Dr. Walley Temple speaking out and actually stressing that the most significant problem with for-profit care is that it destroys the sacred trust between the patient and physician. It makes the doctors and the nurses into instruments of the investors, and it makes the patients a commodity.

We also think about other items about Bill 11. Bill 11 is not the solution to every challenge in the health system. In some people's minds it is only a tool to help reduce waiting lists. The government has never said which waiting lists are of concern. It has not explained why the minor solutions which it says may not be adopted in the health regions are worth a huge political struggle.

We also look at comments coming out from the churches, writing to Minister Rock to prevent Bill 11. To spin against that we also read that the government is saying that legally the challenge would go against a move from Minister Rock in the federal system against this one.

Teachers, unions, the AMA, doctors, and nurses are all concerned about this. In the last few days the Premier has said that he is going to give us a list of insured services. I'd really like to see that, because that is one thing that should be out there so people can actually gain some trust. You know, I wouldn't like to say that our government has totally lost all trust, but that seems to be what's happened.

Support for the health bill ignores the key issues. First, this government has reduced government spending on health care by shifting the cost to individual Albertans. Second, one of the early actions of the government was to reduce levels of coverage and deinsure several medical services, including eye exams. Third, while Bill 11 prevents private hospitals, it allows private surgical facilities that are equivalent to private hospitals. Fourth, the bill allows the sale of enhanced services – some doctors in Alberta have used the sale of enhanced services to replace facility fees – and it allows patients to queue-jump. Fifth, when complaints were filed with the regulator regarding the conflict of interest and the queue-jumping, no action was taken.

I mentioned in my previous speeches that there are questions in this House. When we bring things forward, all of a sudden 14 amendments pop forward. Well, you know, people ask why we need opposition, but believe me, there are more people saying that we need opposition in this province than anywhere else, and at this time in history I really believe that is totally true. The College of Physicians and Surgeons found that doctors could justify markups from 300 percent to 750 percent due to the increased costs of providing services privately, and the government didn't see fit to investigate the complaints of queue-jumping.

You know, this is a major, major concern. It goes back to: what are private, for-profit hospitals? The introduction of private, for-profit hospitals will open up a variety of cream-skimming opportunities. If surgeons are able to work in both the public and the private system, as they are at present in Alberta, and have equal interests in the private facility, it will be economically advantageous to steer their most straightforward cases and high-paying patients to the private facility. Cost shifting is the effect, as cost reductions improve the bottom line of private, for-profit organizations.

In addition to serving the less complex and costly Canadian patients, we might expect a private facility to market its services to Americans. Indeed, if a private clinic could attract a sufficiently large number of American clientele, it would have no economic incentive to care for Canadians at all, unless they were prepared to pay extra in some form or another. In this case, public-sector shortage and waiting lists allegedly faced by Albertans would be exacerbated not alleviated by private care.

The private hospitals also provide motivations and opportunities to promote additional, uninsured, or not medically necessary services which carry substantial profit margins. These services may appear to be merely offered to patients to choose or reject, but they may be packaged with insured services such that practices are not optional, or the patients who accept and pay for these optional services may be placed in a much shorter queue. The patients will typically have no way of evaluating the real value, let alone the true cost, of the extras.

Going back and looking at what's wrong, the politics of this has actually led us to ask: really where are we going? You know, let us not forget that the protection act might be a major interest to the present head of the Calgary regional health authority and the former Treasurer of this province. He is the person who believes in experimenting with our health system instead of planning. I hope he stays in Calgary and leaves his mess within Calgary and not throughout the rest of our province. We're also hearing that he

might be the person that's going out to bring the fold back into the feeling that this government can be trusted again. Well, after what's happening in Calgary and what he believes in experimenting, I really believe he should stay where he is.

11:30

You know, we have witnessed health care dismantling over the past seven years all across Canada. This problem won't be solved and go away by pointing a finger. We need the federal government to take the leadership role and draw all our provinces and territories to the table. Both the feds and the province have been tinkering and allowing experiments to occur while turning a blind eye. Well, this doesn't show leadership, and I actually hope that if this bill were pulled at the right time, while saving face, this government still could show a leadership role in actually pushing the feds into doing something on this.

As I listen to members from the government benches, I can't believe that they aren't inundated with concerns around Bill 11 from people in their constituencies. Well, Madam Speaker, I am. I don't believe the e-mail is any shorter in their offices than mine or the faxes or the people coming in and asking where they can sign on the dotted lines on petitions.

A week ago Sunday I popped into my office to grab some more stuff because I needed it. I forgot to take it the day before. There was a letter on the fax machine, and I tabled it the next day. It was a fantastic letter by Sheila Hogan. The letter was well put together about her concerns around health, and when I got to the covering letter – I read it last – she actually bawled me out for not being out front fighting this more. Well, I looked for her phone number. She had no phone number on it, so I looked it up in the book. There was nothing. So, Madam Speaker, I drove right to her house at 5:30 in the afternoon. I spent three-quarters of an hour on her step talking about it and talking about what our concerns were about it. I sent some copies of *Hansard* over the next day of how different people spoke on it, and she actually brought a number of people down to the rallies over the next few nights from the Alberta Hospital. Their concern around this was very evident. I don't believe there is a member who hasn't gotten that type of phone calls. I don't believe they can actually not stand up here and put their thoughts on this bill on the record.

You know, we look at this, and we look at what went wrong with the British system, and that is party control. I believe my speeches and the scrutiny by the people in my constituency will stand and hold quite firm that I am totally against this bill. I will oppose it and keep opposing it. It is too vague and it lacks hard facts. To Albertans trying to comprehend this bill, it is not what it's saying; it's what it's not saying.

Well, my second suggestion was to disallow overnight stays in approved surgical facilities. When I introduced an amendment two weeks ago . . .

Oh, I ran out of time. Sorry, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise this evening in third reading of the Health Care Protection Act to speak about this bill and to recommend that we put our arguments to the question. Without a doubt this bill has generated more discussion on the delivery of health care than we could ever have imagined. In fact, I've learned more about the intricacies of our health care system than I ever thought existed. I have learned more about the personal medical condition of many resident Albertans. I have learned about the responsibilities of health care providers like I

didn't know before, and I have learned about the different circumstances in which health care is delivered across this country, and indeed I would say around the globe, because I have taken the time to look at the studies and the circumstances and the situations that have been put in place in Australia, in New Zealand, in Britain, and certainly by our closest neighbour to the south, the United States.

What this bill does is provide for the delivery of an option of health care provided by choice to the regional health authorities that is unlike any other delivery model of health care on the surface of this globe. So when I say that this bill has generated discussion on health care and its delivery, that is, indeed, an understatement. However, when I talk with a number of my constituents, when I have the opportunity to be on a number of panels, and when I listen to those who are so-called critics of the bill, what I find most frequently is that they are speaking in speculation about what is going to happen if Bill 11 does come into play. They are talking about what is happening in other parts of the world. They are talking about what they imagine is going to take place should this bill pass. But when I ask them have they read what is in the bill, many of them are not familiar with what is in the bill.

I'm going to use an example from a panel that I sat on on Friday afternoon. It was a panel that was put in place to talk about Bill 11 by the Canadian Council of Churches. It was hosted out at Providence Centre in Edmonton. On that panel was Kevin Taft. It was moderated by the Reverend David Pfrimmer from the University of Waterloo. There was also on that the reverend from the Robertson-Wesley church here in Edmonton. There was also a professor of nursing at the University of Alberta, Dr. Donna Wilson. No one else on that panel spoke about what is in Bill 11. They all talked about their theory. They all talked about what they thought about our government, and I suffered through their accusations, which were, quite frankly, very untrue.

However, when the moderator of the panel, David Pfrimmer, said that we as the Canadian Council of Churches are going to send a letter to Minister Allan Rock and tell him to tell the provincial government of Alberta to shelve Bill 11, I said to him: what is it in Bill 11 that you object to? He said: well, I object to . . . [interjections]

MS LEIBOVICI: Overnight stays and enhanced services.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Edmonton-Meadowlark, the hon. Member for St. Albert is allowed to speak. If you take exception to it, you can talk with the member after, but don't have this discussion back and forth, please.

Debate Continued

MRS. O'NEILL: Madam Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was not there, so she does not know what the gentleman said. But what he did say was: I object to what it might do. So I said to him: what might it do? He said: well, it might lead to a destabilization of our social system. So I said to him: and what in the bill says that? He paused, and I said: have you read Bill 11? Now, this is a man who is authoring a letter to the federal Minister of Health. I said: have you read the bill? He said: not really. That's absolutely devastating to me, for someone who would want to speak on behalf of the Canadian Council of Churches and who was going to rail against us as a government for not having an understanding and a caring health care system. He was going to write with all

authority and pomposity to the federal Minister of Health and say to him: tell them to put it aside.

11:40

So, quite frankly, I would like to say that I feel there are those elements of the bill that have great merit in order to deliver to the citizens of Alberta a caring, considerate, health care system that will give our regional health authorities the opportunity to get for you and me, our children, our grandchildren, and all of those who come after us, the opportunity to get the surgical services and procedures that they need and want in a more timely fashion, and certainly, in a greater number than the current situation allows.

There is one benign section of Bill 11 that I feel has the strength of what I have heard from many, many people across this province. What I have heard them say is: "We need a debate on the bigger picture. We need a debate on how we are going to sustain our beloved medicare. We need to have an engagement of the federal government, of all of the other nine provinces and three territorial health departments, and we need them to sit down together and say, in effect, that we have to look at how we deliver health care in this country. We have to make sure that we do proper reforms with respect to primary health care. We must evaluate how we are remunerating our physicians in this country. We have to look at how we are going to address the exponentially growing demand for technological services and for pharmaceutical items that we have for all of the illnesses that we are able to identify here."

What we as a government want to do, through Bill 11, is to provide for the establishment of an advisory council on health that would, in my estimation, probably be composed of perhaps an ethicist, a health care policy author, a health care economist, health care providers, and health care consumers so that we can have the big, important, necessary debate, and that is what part 4, sections 27 and 28 identify that we can have when we pass Bill 11. In fact, that's what I heard the Catholic health authority and association and affiliates say, because I attended the meeting with them and that is exactly what they said. They said that we need to have this discussion on the broad scale to look at the breadth and the depth of the delivery of health care and medicare in this country. That's what they want.

That's also what I understand a number of the religious groups want. They want to make sure we have this particular debate, and that's what I say part 4, sections 27 and 28 of Bill 11 do address. That is what I'm hearing when we do as a government listen to what the people are saying, and they are saying: please make sure you do something to give us access in a more timely fashion to the health care surgical provisions that are available in this province or have the potential to be available.

They're also telling us that we must look in conjunction with the federal government and also all of the other provincial governments at how we are going to look after and sustain medicare as we know it. So I would exhort everybody in this room to endorse Bill 11 because it addresses what people want, which is accessibility. It tells us that we as a government are looking after the bigger picture. We want to be engaged in that discussion.

The other thing that it does is give us the element of consumer protection, because, quite frankly, those clinics that are in operation do not have that kind of control that we should regulate from the government. If we don't pass Bill 11, we are going to find ourselves in a situation where we have a private, parallel health care system in this province, which I can't afford and I daresay most other people can't either.

So that's why I welcome, Madam Speaker, the opportunity to speak here today to correct the statements that I have heard from

across the floor in this House that we do not listen and that we do not care. I'm going to tell you that if we are concerned about the health and the provision of health care in this province, then we will be very responsible in voting yes for Bill 11, because it looks after the people instead of looking after the political agenda of those who oppose it.

MS OLSEN: Well, Madam Speaker, I've never seen 16 votes disappear so quickly in all my life. [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Go ahead now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Okay. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, here we are at third reading or what I thought was going to be third reading. We're kind of actually on a motion to shut this debate down. We're at this point because the government chose to do it, and I repeat, chose. The government chose to invoke closure at committee, at second, and at third reading. You know, we are probably the only province in the country where the schoolchildren understand the word closure in a parliamentary context. That's because this government uses it so often.

This is likely the most contentious bill to come before this Legislative Assembly. This government has slowly and methodically worked to tear apart the most valued social program in this country and in this province.

All Canadians are watching as they know the impact this bill could have across the country. The latest Angus Reid poll shows that 60 percent of Albertans, clearly 60 percent of Albertans, are against this bill. In early April the Angus Reid poll showed that 94 percent of Albertans were concerned about the negative byproducts of this bill, and that is something we have to pay attention to. Thousands of Albertans have rallied at provincial buildings and the Legislature. Tens of thousands have mailed letters and sent e-mails and faxes, and over 100,000 signatures will have been added to the petitions during this debate, Madam Speaker.

Now, the Premier has stated that Liberals are responsible for sending out malicious misinformation. Well, let's have a look at a few of these issues, Madam Speaker. I can say that at no time during this debate on this bill has the government met the test. They have not been able to substantiate their claim that this legislation will benefit all Albertans, and I repeat, all Albertans. In fact, the Premier said the other day that he couldn't name one surgery that may require an overnight stay. Fortunately, he passed it off to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, as he should have done in the first place. The College of Physicians and Surgeons have already stated that the long-touted hip replacement waiting list this bill was designed to accommodate will not be considered as minor surgery and therefore not be eligible to be performed in a surgical facility under Bill 11.

The government didn't even offer an explanation as to why they did not consult with the AMA or the College of Physicians and Surgeons before making this blanket statement. I cannot understand why, if this government is wanting to garner the trust of Albertans, they would not have consulted with the college or the AMA prior to bringing this bill forward, not after.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services stated last week that the subamendment put forward by my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Meadowlark will ensure that people of Alberta will feel suspicion around this bill. I want it to be perfectly clear that this government does not need one bit of help from the Official Opposition. Its actions or lack thereof, like not consulting with the Alberta Medical Association, is what's created this climate of distrust, suspicion, and uncertainty, and they ought to be big enough to take the flak that comes with it. They are the government.

11:50

Madam Speaker, the latest propaganda from the Premier states that Bill 11 complies with and supports the principles of the Canada Health Act. Well, I'm not sure about that. You see, the Premier has asked the federal Health minister, Allan Rock, to review the bill and let him know what needs to be changed. The minister sent a letter to the Premier identifying the particular problems as he saw it. But what did the Premier do? He whined, and he kicked, and he said: I don't like the answer. That's what he did. That's our Premier. In fact, Minister Rock stated in his letter, and I quote: "Private clinics or 'surgical facilities,' as proposed under Bill 11, are considered hospitals under the Canada Health Act."

Now let's see what the formal definition is of a hospital as outlined by the former federal Minister of Health, Ms Marleau. She stated that

as a matter of legal interpretation, the definition of [a] 'hospital' set out in the [Canada Health] Act includes any facility which provides acute, rehabilitative or chronic care. This definition covers health care facilities known as 'clinics.'

This issue arose when? Well, when the province allowed facility fees to be charged and the government here was fined \$420,000 a month. Do you remember that? My colleagues remember that. I think the definition is amply clear. It's adequately clear, so it's time that the government opened up their ears.

Now, let's move on to another point. The Premier states that the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the federal Health minister urged the government to bring forward this legislation regulating surgical facilities. Well, let's examine that a little more closely, and I'm going to quote again a letter written by the former federal health minister Diane Marleau. It's a letter that she sent to all the provincial health ministers January 6, 1995. All of the provincial health ministers. She stated:

I indicated earlier in this letter, that while user charges for medically necessary services are my most immediate concern, I am also concerned about the more general issues raised by the proliferation of private clinics. In particular, I am concerned about their potential to restrict access by Canadian residents to medically necessary services by eroding our publicly funded system. These concerns were reflected in the policy statement which resulted from the Halifax meeting. Ministers of Health present, with the exception of the Alberta Minister, agreed to:

- take whatever steps are required to regulate the development of private clinics in Canada, and to maintain a high quality, publicly funded medicare system.
- Private clinics raise several concerns for the federal government, concerns which the provinces share. These relate to:
- weakened public support for the tax funded and publicly administered system;
 - the diminished ability of governments to control costs once they have shifted from the public to the private sector;
 - the possibility, supported by the experience of other jurisdictions, that private facilities will concentrate on easy procedures, leaving public facilities to handle more complicated, costly cases; and [finally]
 - the ability of private facilities to offer financial incentives to health care providers that could draw them away from the public system – resources may be devoted to features which attract consumers, without in any way contributing to the quality of care.

The only way to deal effectively with these concerns is to regulate the operation of private clinics.

Now, it is clear that the intent of the letter was to deal with the proliferation of private facilities. It was to stop it. Of the concerns identified by the federal government and concurred in by the provinces, Bill 11 provides for exactly what the provinces and feds

wanted to stop: weakened public support, diminished ability to control costs, public facilities left with the major and most costly surgeries, and the draw of medical professionals to the private sector by private health care providers. This is what they wanted to stop. Bill 11 does exactly what they wanted to stop.

The legislation that other provinces have passed prohibits further proliferation of private hospitals and clinics and does not allow for enhanced services. It is time for the Premier and this government to quit manipulating data and documents, to quit twisting the words of qualified professionals and start telling the real story, Madam Speaker.

Now let's turn to the potential implications of the North American free trade agreement. This government states that Bill 11 has absolutely no implications for the health system under NAFTA. Well, Madam Speaker, we have heard otherwise. The most compelling argument came from Dr. Michael Rachliss who suggested: given that there appear to be serious NAFTA implications and that an international tribunal would be adjudicating the issue in an international court, it would not be in the best interests of Canadians to put Canada's public health care system at risk.

Barry Appleton, an international trade lawyer, also indicated that Bill 11 will open the door to any private company in the U.S. or Mexico. Given the Americans' lust for racing to the top of the personal wealth ladder and the Mexican government's inability to deal with widespread corruption at all levels within their country, I am not ready to put Canada's health care system up for sale to the cheapest bidder through Bill 11.

Let's also look at a recent example of a decision by the WTO in relation to drug patents as reported in the *Globe and Mail* on May 6. The WTO believed Canada's drug patent protecting name brand pharmaceuticals is insufficient and should be extended. The federal government allows these multinational companies 20 years' protection from the date the patent application is filed. The generic drug companies can then and only then introduce their drugs into the market thereby creating competition.

Now, the intervening companies were from the European Union and the United States, okay? They were from other countries. The federal government will appeal the ruling, but past history shows that although the ruling may vary, it is usually upheld. The ruling is estimated to cost consumers and health care plans in this country about \$200 million over the next few years as the generic drug companies will not be able to market their lower cost drugs to consumers. That is a WTO decision.

Madam Speaker, this is only one example of the impact of an international ruling. Alberta won't even be a player in the big scheme of things if NAFTA or the WTO were to rule in favour of expanding the private health care market in Canada. You see, the legislation has far-reaching effects, and that's why all Canadians, not just Albertans, should be concerned.

The Premier is eagerly attempting to create a fight with the federal government, and I think the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General just alluded to that. I think he's taken his stabs too. This has been demonstrated time and time again by his attempt to pit the Prime Minister against his federal Health minister: the Premier's comments about Minister Rock's attendance at the University of Calgary and not calling to notify the Premier and his latest comments as reported in the *Edmonton Journal* on Sunday, May 7. Here the Premier says that the Prime Minister said: "Ralph, for some reason, they can get away with this in socialist B.C. and socialist Saskatchewan and socialist Manitoba."

MRS. SOETAERT: I don't think the Prime Minister would say that.

MS OLSEN: Boy, oh boy, I don't think the Prime Minister would say that, either. But, boy, oh boy, this Premier likes to be a victim, you see, and this is his way of playing the victim. Poor, poor, pitiful Ralph. Everybody is picking on him, even the federal Health minister. Well, I don't know . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member . . .

MS OLSEN: Yes, I understand what you're going to say, Madam Speaker. Well, I don't know if the Prime Minister said this or not. However, I do know that the Prime Minister advised the Premier to take all the legislation that exists to the health ministers' conference and have it reviewed and compared to all other legislation in this country. We already know that Bill 11 does not meet the test of the other legislation and that Minister Rock has asked the Premier to amend the bill to meet that test, or, in his words: we will have to respond accordingly.

Well, I take Minister Rock at his word, and I believe he will take action when this bill is passed. Let's not forget, he can take no action until after the bill is passed. Section 92 of the British North America Act sets out the division of power in relation to health, and that's that the federal government cannot stop this bill from being passed. It can, however, sanction the provincial government if it violates the Canada Health Act.

12:00

Madam Speaker, federal and provincial leaders have discussed health care reform. They have actually outlined a direction they could agree to. Now, if the Premier of Alberta would only holster his weapon, Albertans might actually reap some benefits from the discussions.

On April 8, 2000, the *Globe and Mail* interviewed federal and provincial officials and determined that the following elements could be configured into a national long-term plan. Home care, a 50-50 split. Economies of scale are achieved with bulk buys on prescription drugs. Increased accountability. It is essential to know where the money is going, how it is being spent, and if that translates into good quality patient care. Primary care reform. This may be more difficult an undertaking given it might require doctors to abandon the current fee-for-service scheme that they are paid on. This is only one aspect of primary care reform but appears the most difficult to address. Long-term care is another area where provinces would like to assist. Affordable beds for those who need care but not hospitalization are in great demand not only throughout Alberta but Canada.

Madam Speaker, my aunt is 72 years old. She lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She pays just over \$200 a month for long-term care insurance so she can have a bed somewhere, wherever that may be. On top of that, her health care insurance is \$246. So my aunt at 72 years old is paying \$446 a month to look after her health care needs, and that's while she's healthy. I'm not sure that I want that system to exist for seniors in this province, thank you.

The province of British Columbia has proposed a hospital relief fund that according to Anne McIlroy, the writer of this *Globe* article would include funding to replace equipment, computers, home support, home care, long-term care, and infrastructure funding. The feds may be loathe to spend money on capital or infrastructure. However, it appears there is some room for negotiations. Health information has been identified as an area where both levels of government could come to some agreement. Bill 40, the Alberta government's health privacy information bill, is one that should not be the template for other provinces. The Canadian Medical Association health information privacy code is rather instructive in this regard. This applies to all health information and to all individuals,

groups, or organizations that collect such information. Alberta's act excludes many health institutions including those who would provide enhanced services under Bill 11.

Human resources is of a great concern to both levels of government. According to the article, the provinces and the federal government have talked about a mutual approach in the past. Addressing the nursing shortage across this country and in this province is of paramount importance along with the shortage of doctors in rural and urban areas. Cost efficiency is another issue that could be jointly addressed, particularly where drug costs are concerned; however, as previously pointed out, the WTO decision does not help this issue. We can only hope Canada is successful in its appeal. One Premier has called for a public inquiry, and where that may be a noble thought, many of these issues are more pressing and require action now or in the very near future. The two or three years it would take to conduct an inquiry will only help to erode the system even further.

And the moment you've been waiting for: in closing, Madam Speaker, I believe the health care system in this country and in this province is at a crossroads. However, the introduction of the private sector, as Bill 11 would do, is not the answer. Health care spending in this province has not spiraled out of control as this government would have us believe. It's been maintained on a level basis for a number of years. It does not need to be fixed with an American plan.

Public health care is the true measure of all things Canadian. It is the true measure of the compassion and caring we have towards each other as Canadians. It is a symbol that differentiates us from the Americans, and as I have said before, we do not have a history of reducing citizens of this country to mere economic units, as Bill 11 would do.

I once again implore this Premier and his government to listen to Albertans and do the right thing, and that is to pull Bill 11. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have been looking forward with a good deal of anticipation to having an opportunity to address Bill 11 at third reading. It's been quite some time since I had an opportunity to speak about the bill. It was very early on in the committee stage. But given the hour and the fact that it's usually better to be the first speaker rather than the last, I would like to adjourn debate and have the opportunity to be the first speaker tomorrow. So I move we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 12:07 a.m. on Tuesday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 9, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/09

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently and the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly His Excellency Dr. Yuri Scherbak, ambassador of Ukraine to Canada. Accompanying him are his wife, Mrs. Maria Scherbak, and Mr. Taras Malyshevskiy, second secretary.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has had a long relationship with Ukraine. People have come to Alberta from Ukraine for over a hundred years. They have helped build our province, making it such a great place to live. Today there are over 250,000 people in Alberta of Ukrainian descent contributing in many ways to the culture and economy of our province. This visit is an excellent opportunity for us to explore ways to build on our relationship with Ukraine and to discuss areas where we can work together.

This is the ambassador's first official visit to Alberta, and I hope the first of many. We're pleased to welcome him to our province. I would ask that our honoured guests please rise in your gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have quite a list this afternoon, so let's be a little patient.

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table petitions from several hundred residents asking for the reinstatement of front licence plates. Many of them are from Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan but from across the province as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to table a petition signed by 210 Albertans urging the government to reinstate front licence plates. They're from Fort Saskatchewan, Vegreville, Boyle, Athabasca, Waskatenau, Tofield, and the Edmonton and area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to present today a petition from over a hundred good citizens from rural Alberta, including Rocky Mountain House, Stony Plain, and Parkland county, asking the government to reinstate front licence plates.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to present a petition that calls for the reinstatement of Alberta licence plates on the front of vehicles. The petition has been signed by 280 Albertans from the town of Beaverlodge, the town of Wembley, the county of Grande Prairie, and other locations throughout Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to present a petition signed by 172 committed and informed Albertans from Spruce Grove, St. Albert, Leduc, Sherwood Park, Alberta Beach, and Edmonton, and they are urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to be able to present this afternoon a petition signed by 140 Albertans residing in Calgary, Okotoks, De Winton, and Black Diamond urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to present a petition this afternoon. It is signed by 141 Albertans from Spruce Grove, Gunn, St. Albert, Onoway, Morinville, Drayton Valley, Cold Lake, Sherwood Park, and Edmonton, and this petition is urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to present a petition on behalf of 223 well-informed Albertans. They want the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." They are from Fort Saskatchewan, Spruce Grove, and Edmonton.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition this afternoon on behalf of 49 individuals from Lethbridge. They are urging the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to table this afternoon containing 135 signatures from Albertans residing in Edmonton, Mundare, Fort Saskatchewan, Stony Plain, Tofield, Leduc, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert. They are urging the Legislative Assembly to "stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have two petitions to present to the Assembly. The first is signed by 76 residents of Edmonton, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that all residents requiring long term care are able to access this service in an equitable manner within the publicly funded system.

Mr. Speaker, the second petition is a petition supporting public health care in Alberta. It's signed by another 37 residents of Edmonton, and it reads:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and table a petition signed by 136 citizens of Alberta from the communities of Sherwood Park, Stony Plain, St. Albert, Calmar, Ardrossan, Devon, and Edmonton. These citizens are petitioning "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition from some 216 Albertans primarily from Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, Beaumont, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, and Stony Plain. They "urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care," sir.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 152 people. They are from Carvel, Spruce Grove, Sturgeon, St. Albert, Stony Plain, Devon, St. Paul, and Edmonton, and they are urging "the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would present a petition signed by 107 citizens from Lamont, Chipman, Bruderheim, Sangudo, Mayerthorpe, and Wetaskiwin urging the "Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to table with the Assembly this afternoon. The first is on behalf of 137 residents of Bruderheim, Ardrossan, Tofield, Beaumont, Leduc, Millet, Fort Saskatchewan, Sherwood Park, and Edmonton. The citizens petition "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to protect, support, and enhance public health care in Alberta and to ban for-profit, private hospitals from receiving public dollars."

The second petition, Mr. Speaker – and I'm very proud to present this to the Assembly – is on behalf of Calgarians. The Calgarians are

asking the Assembly "to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes" that are divisive and disruptive at the *Calgary Herald*.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Assembly that states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

It is signed by 146 citizens of this province from Grande Prairie, Peace River, Grimshaw, St. Isidore, St. Paul, Elk Point, Ashmont, Glendon, Lac La Biche, Iron River, and Wembley.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta. This petition is on behalf of 124 Albertans from Fort Saskatchewan, Bruderheim, Sedgewick, Lamont, and the metropolis of Gibbons.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table petitions from Calgary, Edmonton, Spruce Grove, Leduc, St. Albert, Bon Accord, Egremont, and Stony Plain. That brings today's total of Albertans who have signed the petition opposing the undermining of public health care and the promotion of private health care to 2,518, bringing the total to date to almost 72,000 Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table a petition signed by 201 Albertans who are calling on the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to "disallow further development of the Spray Valley," to "maintain Kananaskis Country in natural state," and to "create a Wildland Provincial Park which protects the whole of the undeveloped parts of the Kananaskis and Spray Valleys."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and with your permission ask that the petition I tabled yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition I had presented the other day be now read and received, please.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the [Legislative] assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name concerning working night hours now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government . . . to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented on the divisive and disruptive labour dispute at the *Calgary Herald* now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the [Legislative] assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday from 156 residents from Calgary and Cochrane requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now read and received.
Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to public health care that I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

I am also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 33, 34, 35, 40, 44, 45, 48, and 49.

Thank you.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to table five copies of a letter and the appropriate amendments to the Prime Minister. The amendments address issues raised by Albertans over the course of discussions on the Health Care Protection Act. Among the amendments approved include a strengthening of the sections prohibiting conflict of interest and queue-jumping. Charges for enhanced services were capped, and the process for withdrawal of approval was clarified. This is a follow-up letter to the letter that was sent by the leader of the Liberal opposition.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and table eight copies in response to government questions to written questions 17, 18, 19 and 20.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

DR. WEST: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table responses to questions raised at the March 6 review of Treasury's 2000-2001 budget estimates by the Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table today a letter responding to Written Question 16.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of Manifesto 2000: For a Culture of Peace and Non-violence. This is crafted by Nobel peace prize laureates on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the declaration of human rights at the United Nations.

THE SPEAKER: The leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to make three tablings today. These are three letters: one from former MLA, Marie Laing, opposing Bill 11; one from Red Deer resident Dorothy Corney opposing Bill 11; and a third from the Seniors' Alpine Ski Club in Calgary opposing the proposed Genesis development in the Spray Valley.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today with the appropriate number of copies from John Olson of Camrose, who is very, very much opposed to Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got four tablings this afternoon. The first is a summary of Donna Korchinski's second installment on Calgary Lab Services, where she indicates that the Calgary regional health authority changed their accounting numbers on the lab services to reflect the increased savings that were supposedly going to occur.

The second is a news release from NetNews wherein it is stated that Calgary Lab Services have been operating since November 1, 1996, without approval.

The third is a news release from Barry Robinson, the Alberta Liberal candidate for Grande Prairie-Smoky, indicating that the health minister is shirking his responsibilities with regards to the long surgery waiting lists in the Mistahia regional health authority.

The fourth is from the *International Express* from England wherein it's indicated that doctors now have to be provided with a £60,000 bonus – that's about \$120,000 – in order to be enticed back into the public health care system from their private practices.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to first of all table a letter from a constituent of Edmonton-McClung, Ms Dorothy Almas, talking about the inhuman waits for cancer treatments because of being on the waiting list. Ms Almas' story is very poignant reading for members of this Assembly who are concerned about public health care in this province.

Secondly, I would like to table a copy of a letter to the editor of the *Edmonton Journal* from David King, a former Member of this Legislative Assembly, beginning with: "Bill #11 is bad law, bad public policy, and bad politics. It should be withdrawn or defeated."

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, another child has died while in the care of this government. I am tabling today a letter I have written to the Ministry of Children's Services, seeking information relative to the ministry and child welfare's actions and omissions in the placement of two-year-old Corvette Crier.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today for the Assembly. The first is a document titled Calculating Your Taxes under the 10.5% Klein Flat Tax, 2004. It refers to an Albertan named Ralph and another Albertan named Steve, both earning over \$100,000 a year and both receiving more than 20 percent tax cuts. Yet another Albertan earning half that salary would only receive a 10 percent tax cut.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, the second is a petition – unfortunately, it's not in the right form – that is signed by 20 residents of Dewberry, Clandonald, and Heinsburg. The petition is opposing privatization of health care in Alberta.

We, the undersigned citizens of Alberta, strongly oppose the privatization of health care services in Alberta. We do not wish to see for-profit services used in our health care because we believe that this will lead to a two-tier system.

Mr. Speaker, the third tabling is titled A Message to Ralph Klein. It reads, "We, as residents of Polo Park, High River, Alberta, protest the content and the intentions to legislate 'Bill 11' by the Klein Government."

And finally, Mr. Speaker, a letter from myself dated today to Mr. Carl Roy, the president of the Caritas Health Group, in which I correct the record regarding the comments made by the Member for

St. Albert at a public meeting and my comments made in *Hansard* on page 779.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have only four tablings this afternoon. The first one is the summary of the poll on Bill 11 at www.misterpoll.com showing 75 percent opposition.

Secondly is an e-mail from Cinda Chavich, formerly of the *Calgary Herald*, urging government action to end that nasty dispute.

The third item is a document entitled Our Chosen Land produced by the Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre talking about the 100 years of development of the Chinese community in this province.

Then the final document is a copy of the principles and policies for the protection of health information. This is an April 1999 publication produced by CIHI, the Canadian Institute for Health Information. It may assist the minister of health in drafting regulations to Bill 40.

Thank you.

MR. WHITE: I have but one tabling today, sir. It is on behalf of some 200 citizens of Edmonton-Calder in response to a questionnaire that their member put out, and it has to do with the health care system in the province of Alberta. I'll recite just one question to you, sir: should the minister of health in the province of Alberta "have the power to approve public funds for private hospitals?" The answer, sir, is 95 percent against and 5 percent for.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would table five copies of a Harvard study entitled Medical Errors Higher at For-Profit than Not-For-Profit Hospitals, Harvard Study Finds.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of the May 2000 edition of the *Asian Times*, featuring citizens from Edmonton-Mill Creek on the steps of the Legislature saying no to Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter from the president of the Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter. She's asking why, despite promises from the minister, the Alberta Mental Health Board has done nothing to assist this organization replace the funding that was cut by the Alberta Mental Health Board.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you, sir, to the Members of the Legislative Assembly on behalf of my colleague the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake 105 grade 8 students from the Roland Michener secondary school in Slave Lake. They are accompanied by two teachers, Miss Tracey Crain and Miss Karen Brace, and nine parent chaperones: Mrs. Smears, Mrs. Savage, Mrs. Olsen, Mrs. Noel, Mrs. Norberg, Mrs. St. Martin, Mrs. Properzi, Mrs. Garon, and Mr. Bohn. They are seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery, and I would ask that they all stand and receive the very welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, my guests aren't coming in until 2 o'clock, and I'd like to do it after if it's okay.

THE SPEAKER: That's fine.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a resident of Calgary-Buffalo. In addition to his other volunteer work John Burgener has recently been named to the Calgary chapter of the United Nations as a youth co-ordinator. John is involved in promoting the Manifesto 2000: For a Culture of Peace and Non-violence in preparation for the general assembly of the United Nations this September. He is seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask my son John to rise and receive the warm recognition of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you and to all the members of the Legislative Assembly Shannon Sampert. Shannon has just completed her master's degree in communications at the University of Calgary and has been awarded over \$53,000 in scholarships and will enter the U of A PhD program in political science this fall. She is currently the vice-president of communications for the Alberta Liberal Party and employed in the Edmonton-Norwood constituency office for the summer. If she would please rise and receive the warm welcome.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Voting on Bill 11

MRS. MacBETH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. So let's see now. First he was a Liberal thinking about the leadership of the Alberta Liberal Party, and then he was a Progressive Conservative federally and provincially, and now he's thrown his hat behind the Canadian Reform Alliance party. Presumably he is taking his provincial party along with him. [interjections] Given the applause, I'd say they're all going along with him. But guess what? The constitution of the Alliance party reads: "We will move to restore democratic accountability in the House of Commons by measures such as allowing free votes." Will the Premier be true to the values of his new party and allow a free vote?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I've answered that question before. Again, I will ask the members of this caucus. Do you support the government's position on Bill 11?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

MR. KLEIN: Could I ask the question, Mr. Speaker? Are there any of you opposed? That is a free vote.

Mr. Speaker, we run a far different caucus than the one that was controlled by the former member of Priorities and Treasury Board in the old Conservative government. This is a free and open caucus where we have good and free and open discussions on matters. I don't run my caucus like a dictatorship like the leader of the Liberal Party. I don't stamp my foot and say: this is the way you're going to vote. That's what's happening over there in the Liberal Party.

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Party Activity

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. members, *Beauchesne* 410(17) says the following: "Ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities."

Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, proceed with your next question.

2:00

Voting on Bill 11

(continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Well, then, Mr. Speaker, I guess the question is: why would the Premier be supporting democracy and free votes for Ottawa, but he appears to be treating it as if it's a nuisance here in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Not a nuisance, Mr. Speaker. I will explain once again. There was a caucus meeting. I didn't attend that caucus meeting. I'm very, very proud of members of the Progressive Conservative caucus who had a good discussion, as I understand it, about how they were going to vote on Bill 11. The decision was – and it was a caucus decision – that they would support the government's position.

MRS. MacBETH: Will the Premier concede that the real reason that he is not allowing his members to reflect the majority position of Albertans in opposition to this bill is that he knows that his private health care bill would go down in flames?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, there is no private health care policy.

Perhaps it's time to take a closer look at the opposition leader's stand on health care, because she's questioned my motives so many times. This hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is on record many times as saying that she supports privately owned, privately operated private hospitals that are opted out of medicare; in other words, a classic for-profit, two-tier health care system.

When this member was a Conservative at one particular time, or a suspected Conservative at least, she did nothing to stop the expansion of private surgical clinics when she was the minister of health. In fact, she allowed them to charge patients a facility fee, something that is against the Canada Health Act. She did absolutely nothing to stop it.

So, Mr. Speaker, one could ask her the same question she has often posed of me: which of her friends or relatives would stand to benefit from a policy that allowed opted-out, for-profit private hospitals that could charge people directly whatever they like and service clients from the U.S. and other jurisdictions?

Limiting Debate on Bill 11

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not just about freedom of voting. This government's flagrant use of closure has set a new low for parliamentary behaviour in Canada. The Premier's reliance on closure betrays his true feelings about this Legislature. For him the Legislature has become an inconvenience and democracy a nuisance. My questions are to the Premier. Why did the Premier break his word that closure would not be used on third reading?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, closure is not being used on third reading. If we were to invoke closure on third reading, the debate would end at midnight tonight. We have introduced a motion, Standing Order 47, which allows every Member of this Legislative

Assembly to debate the bill one more time. That is not closure. That is part of the democratic process.

Now, relative to reaching new lows, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the Liberals have reached a new filibustering low. They have cost the taxpayers thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars through their delaying tactics, and if they want to be critical of closure, then I would ask them to look to their Liberal cousins in Ottawa. This article in the *Calgary Herald* dated May 4 says:

By next Monday, Prime Minister Jean Chretien's Liberals will have stifled parliamentary exchanges on government bills 67 times since January 1994, when the Liberals convened the 35th Parliament.

THE SPEAKER: It would be helpful, hon. the Premier, if you'd table that document as well.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why did this Premier mislead Albertans yesterday afternoon when he promised in his news conference that he wouldn't resort to closing off this debate, yet moments later the Member for Leduc was rising to do just that?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the question was asked: would we use closure? The answer was: no, we would not use closure. And we didn't use closure. The hon. Member for Leduc introduced a Standing Order 47, which basically says that the bill can be debated by all members of the Legislature at third reading. What could be more democratic than that?

I refer, Mr. Speaker, to *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* relative to closure, and basically I don't know what the fuss is about, because when I refer to section 518, "The House has adopted a number of procedures to limit debate, or to preclude the moving of amendments, and to provide for the wise management of its time." The Liberals have no concept whatsoever of the wise management of time. All they can think about is wasting taxpayer dollars.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit that he has had to resort to shutting off debate at every single step of the debate on this legislation because he's afraid that the majority of Albertans oppose him?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the majority of Albertans do not oppose me. As a matter of fact, the latest poll shows that we have about 66, 67 percent support. That's slightly more, if not a significant amount more, than the Liberals have right now or than they will ever have.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Representing the Public

MRS. MacBETH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I want to quote something that I read, and it says:

The little dictator in Edmonton has ignored Albertans' collective cry not to tear the heart out of our health care system and replace it with one that most of us are opposed to and afraid of.

Actually, not my words but the words of the *Fairview Post*. Now, opposition to the Premier's health care policy has also been voiced in the *Coronation Review*, the *Drayton Valley Western Review*, the *Canmore Leader*, the *Lac La Biche Post*, the *Ponoka News*, the *Eckville Echo*, the *Lethbridge Herald*, the *Red Deer Advocate*, the *Grande Prairie Herald-Tribune*, the *Cold Lake Sun*, the *Cochrane Times*, the *Brooks Bulletin*, the *High River Times*, the *Edson Leader*, the *Lloydminster Meridian Booster*, and more. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the Premier ignoring the views and the voices

of these local papers who so accurately reflect the views of their communities?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there has been editorial comment on this issue on both sides of the issue. I just happened to pick up something from May 3, the *Calgary Herald*. It says . . . [interjections] I hear a lot of yipping and yapping over there. Are they saying that the *Calgary Herald* is not a reputable newspaper? [interjections] Will they stand up and say that the *Calgary Herald* is not a reputable newspaper?

The *Calgary Herald* says with Bill 11,

Klein has done something far more important than simply pen a new law. He's activated a national debate on health care that is long overdue. . . . If Klein lost his nerve and killed his health care bill, the national debate would continue but it's doubtful the political will would exist in this province to fully participate.

2:10

I mean, there have been all kinds of comments in all kinds of different newspapers relative to this issue, some against, yes. Right. You know, the Liberals go to great pains to bring out the negative in everything in this province, but there has been a lot of positive comment in editorials in weekly newspapers and in major daily newspapers. I would allude to some of the comments that have been published by Neil Waugh, the columnist for the *Edmonton Sun*. I could table column after column after column. He makes a lot of sense.

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Media Reports

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, *Beauchesne* 428 says that a question must not "inquire whether statements made in a newspaper are true." So what we've really got here is a debate over "My article says this and somebody else's article says that." Let's deal with policy.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Representing the Public (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, first Gerry Amerongen and now Dave King. Is this Premier so arrogant and so out of touch that he doesn't realize that his own party members are opposed to his private health care legislation?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the leader of the Liberal opposition asked that question and alluded to Dave King, because I understand that Dave King said yesterday that Bill 11 shows that the government does not know how to run the public service properly and that it has failed to address the real issues facing health care, such as staff shortages and rising drug costs. He also said that the bill would foster a two-tier health system.

The point I want to make is that, first of all, he has insulted a very strong and very proud public service. The Alberta public service leads the nation in efficiency. In recent years the government's administration has won numerous awards for public service. For instance, they won the silver award for innovative management from the Institute of Public Administration of Canada last fall.

Now, Mr. Speaker, compare that to the time when Dave King was the minister of education, when Alberta had 181 different school jurisdictions and 40 of them didn't even have a school. And he wants to talk about public administration.

Our six-point health plan addresses all of the concerns that were raised by Mr. King, by the way a suspected Liberal now, not a Conservative.

Speaker's Ruling Seeking Opinions

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. The purpose of question period is to basically deal with government policy. If someone wants to introduce a person and then someone else wants to respond regarding the person, this violates all the rules of the question period.

Representing the Public (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier finally come clean and tell Albertans who or what is so important that he has turned a deaf ear to ordinary Albertans, even to members of his own party?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll turn that question around. Why is the leader of the Liberal opposition so intent on defeating a bill that protects public health care? Is it because she wants private, for-profit opted-out hospitals? Again, she has stated on numerous occasions that she supports privately owned, privately operated private hospitals that are opted out of medicare; in other words, a classic two-tiered, for-profit health care system. Who is she trying to protect in terms of the doctors and other medical practitioners or businesspeople who'd really want to profit from medicare? I think that's her real agenda.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Court Referral of Bill 11

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the government's private, for-profit hospitals scheme lurches toward third reading approval aided by the use of closure at all three stages, many questions remain unanswered. Among the most serious are whether the government's approach violates the Canada Health Act and its ramifications under the North American free trade agreement. A referral of Bill 11 to the Alberta Court of Appeal would be a cost-effective, timely, and prudent way to address these outstanding questions. My questions are to the Premier. As president of Executive Council why doesn't the Premier, prior to seeking royal assent and prior to proclamation, use his powers under the Judicature Act to refer Bill 11 to the Court of Appeal to settle once and for all whether it violates the Canada Health Act?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this policy statement and the bill have been sent to the federal Minister of Health – I think they have a bevy of lawyers there in Ottawa, thousands, lots of lawyers – to pore over, and we have received no indication whatsoever from the federal minister or the Prime Minister or any of his officials that the bill in any way, shape, or form violates the Canada Health Act or violates the rules of NAFTA. Nothing.

DR. PANNU: Why is the Premier unwilling to or afraid of letting the Court of Appeal of this province address the ramifications of Bill 11 under NAFTA even in the face of two eminent legal opinions which say that the government is courting NAFTA disaster?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if there is something in Bill 11 or any other act of this Legislature that is deemed to be unconstitutional, there is recourse to the courts. Once the law is passed, if someone

feels that it violates the Canada Health Act or it violates NAFTA or that in some way it violates the principles of health care, then they're free to challenge that act just as any citizen is free to challenge any act of this Legislature or any act of Parliament.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why doesn't the Premier exercise prudence and refer Bill 11 to the Court of Appeal for a determination of its vulnerability to costly challenges under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

MR. KLEIN: I don't see how there could be a challenge under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, especially since the preamble to the bill upholds without question the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. What I find amazing is that this hon. member would like the referral now, after voting against upholding the principles of the Canada Health Act, voting against, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to emphasize that. This hon. member along with his Liberal bedmates voted against upholding the principles of the Canada Health Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Summer Temporary Employment Program

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday's labour force statistics for April 2000 indicated that the number of youth job seekers was higher than the number of new jobs created for youth. My questions today are to the Minister to the Minister of HR and Employment. With the end of the school year at hand what is this government doing to help unemployed Albertans gain some work experience during the summer months?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, of course, we continue to help Albertans with our Youth Connections program all year round, but we also have what is called the summer temporary employment program. It's referred to as STEP. We have this in place to offer work experience to unemployed Albertans, primarily students, from the end of April to the beginning of September. We're contributing 9 and a quarter million dollars to nonprofit and publicly funded community organizations to help them hire students to develop skills and enhance long-term employability.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, can the same minister please explain how the process works when an organization applies for the funding under STEP?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, Mr. Speaker. STEP employment applications are of course sent out at the beginning of the year. They're completed, and then they're returned to our department. We look for those by the end of February. The applications are reviewed, and the employers notified when they're approved.

In this regard, our STEP program is similar to a federal program that is called SKIP. Basically, employers apply, and then of course they're notified if it is approved. Once the employer has been approved for the STEP program, they hire, they pay the employee,

and then they submit a claim to the STEP or SKIP co-ordinator for reimbursement once a month.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. With this process in place can you tell us how many Albertans will be able to participate in the STEP program this year?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, 2,479 community groups actually applied for the STEP program. With the placements through the provincial government partnership we think this will translate into 3,540 full-time equivalent positions for unemployed Albertans between April 25 and September 1 of this year.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Bill 11 Publicity

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I take the Premier in earlier answers today as indicating that he thinks it's important that Albertans have accurate information. Well, the Premier's \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau seems to be under strict instructions to deliberately underestimate the cost of the government's propaganda campaign to sell its private health care policy. Now, despite the government's misguided decision to ram its health care policy through this Legislature, Albertans aren't buying the policy nor the Premier's attempts to minimize the costs of propaganda. My questions are, of course, to the Premier this afternoon. Will the Premier keep his previous promise to release today, before we make a final vote on Bill 11, all the invoices, all the receipts, all the contracts from his \$2.7 million taxpayer-backed propaganda campaign to sell the government's private hospital policy?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member is anticipating a question that is related to Bill 11, which is up for debate this evening, so it's inappropriate.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that silly, dumb, question is quite simple. It is very hard to provide intelligent answers to stupid questions. To exemplify the stupidity of the question, there is no propaganda campaign; there is no private health care policy; therefore, there are no invoices related to what the hon. member alleges. Nothing. Because there's no propaganda campaign, and there is no private health care policy.

[The Speaker in the chair]

MR. DICKSON: Speaking to the policy and certainly not to the bill and speaking to government practices as well, Mr. Speaker, how much of the true cost of the Premier's private health care propaganda campaign is hidden away in the vault of the Public Affairs Bureau, buried in the Ministry of Health and Wellness, or perhaps incinerated in the Premier's \$440 million waste treatment plant?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is, first of all, nothing in any vault anywhere related to a private health care policy or a propaganda campaign. It simply doesn't exist, because this government hasn't been involved in any kind of activity. The only person who has been involved in the promotion of private, for-profit, opted-out, two-tiered health care is the leader of the Liberal opposition.

MR. DICKSON: This is more and more like Alice in Wonderland, Mr. Speaker.

Before the Premier rams his health care policy through the Legislature, will the Premier confirm right now, this afternoon, that the Official Opposition estimate of \$2.7 million is in fact the true cost of the taxpayer-funded propaganda campaign? Will he do that?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no cost associated with a propaganda campaign. There will be some costs associated with a program to mail out a bill that purports to become law, and there's nothing more truthful than the law. There will be some costs associated with that, and there will be some costs associated with telling the truth about a piece of legislation that is now before this Legislative Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Beer Marketing

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Calgary-Fort includes a large industrial park. Alberta's midsize and small brewers have recently expressed concerns to me. According to these brewers, the Gaming and Liquor Commissions's new policy allowing buy/sell agreements and product promotion will benefit the big brewers who already have almost 90 percent of the draft beer market in Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister explain why this new buy/sell policy is not harmful to Alberta's smaller brewers?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the new policy that includes the use of buy/sell agreements is a creation of the industry themselves. It was a group of brewers, distillers, merchants, and liquor store owners that came up with the buy/sell agreements, so it includes all the breweries.

The buy/sell agreements, Mr. Speaker, provide for the normal trade and commerce to take place in an above-the-table, open, transparent manner and one that can be fully disclosed. What has happened in the past we have found to be in violation of regulations at the time. We took actions. Fines were levied. The new policy, if the industry decides to comply – and the onus of responsibility of compliance lies completely with them – will allow all of them to participate in this marketplace that is growing because of population, because of increase in disposable income, because of a healthy growing economy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Can the minister explain why the product promotion aspect of the commission's new policy is not harmful to small brewers?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, we have a competitive marketplace – that's been the foundation of the marketing of spirits and alcohol in this province – and also privatization. Suppliers and manufacturers need to be able to promote their products. It's taught in every business school. It's taught to everybody who goes through the great institutions like SAIT and the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta. Clearly it is not government's role to prevent those types of activities as long as product promotion benefits the

consumer and does not exclude artificially some competitors from the marketplace.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that a smaller brewer, like a small person in the oil industry, as my own experience indicates, always has challenges in the marketplace when we take on the large employers.

I know from experience that for a company with the reputation of Big Rock in Alberta its quality of product, its quality of service and consumer choice will prevail. After all, Mr. Speaker, the quality of good taste lingers long after the price is forgotten.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the same minister. What can the minister do to ensure that small brewers continue to have a fair opportunity in the Alberta market?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the member is concerned and interested because he is in a constituency where Big Rock Brewery is located. In fact, there's one building where they started out as Big Rock, and then a second building that expansion of the marketplace caused, and it became known as Bigger Rock.

Mr. Speaker, the government recognizes that these 84 to 100 jobs are critical to the marketplace, critical to this member's constituency, and in fact over a year ago the government took action and reduced its markup by \$15 million on beer. That reduced annual cost was primarily aimed at benefiting the small and mid-sized brewers.

Remember, Mr. Speaker, that the job of government in the liquor industry is to control the product. We're not there to control the marketplace. We know that all of us are committed to a level playing field. All brewers have equal access to the market, and success or failure is the result of consumer choice, not government intervention.

2:30

Private Health Services

MRS. SLOAN: The greatest legacy of private health care in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, will be the accompanying legacy of deception and deceit. The Premier risks contributing to such a legacy by continuing to withhold the contents of 30 blank pages outlining his government's beliefs on private health care. My questions today are to the Premier. When does the Premier plan to permit Albertans to see the private health care document their tax dollars paid for?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness indicated on a number of occasions in this Legislative Assembly, that information is being prepared as we speak.

But speaking of missing documents, why has the opposition leader put a 15-year prohibition on the public release of 150 boxes of her documents from her time as minister of health?

MR. DICKSON: Point of order.

MR. KLEIN: What has she got to hide, Mr. Speaker? Is she afraid of something? Is there something in those documents that alludes to her promotion of private, for-profit health care? I wonder.

MRS. SLOAN: Let me amend that. A legacy of deception, deceit, and desperation, Mr. Speaker.

Why enact closure, Mr. Premier, before you release your government's own position on private health care policy? Why enact closure before the public has had an opportunity to read those 30 blank pages?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I allude to the 150 boxes of documents that have been secreted away, squirreled away someplace under lock and key because the leader of the Liberal opposition is afraid there might be something in those documents that might put her in contradiction of her position today.

Relative to the question, this government has not invoked closure on third reading. We introduced a motion under Standing Order 47, which allows full and complete debate on third reading. That is not closure. But this is typical of the kind of malicious misinformation that is being spread by the Liberal Party.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, when will the Premier stop his desperation antics and table the documents in this Assembly: pages 31, 34, 41, 44, and 47, all speaking about private health care? When will those documents be tabled in this Assembly so Albertans can read them for themselves?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, they will be tabled in due course, as soon as the documents are prepared. I understand that that work is under way right now.

You know, you might have to wait days or weeks, but the rest of us are going to have to wait 15 years – 15 years – to see the documents that have been secreted away under lock and key by the former minister of health, who is now the leader of the Liberal opposition. What has she got to hide, Mr. Speaker? I thought she said that she would stand up to her record on health any day. Well, we are waiting. What has she got to hide?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Computer Viruses

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week a virus dubbed the Love Bug spread across computers around the world causing many companies and governments to shut down e-mail systems and networks. The virus traveled by e-mail with the subject line I Love You. My question is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. Can the minister please tell us the effect of the I Love You virus on government systems?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say that government takes IT security very seriously. All ministries were affected by the I Love You virus, but it was isolated to the e-mail systems by 9:30 a.m. In spite of what Dave King might say, this was isolated by our excellent public service professionals. We have assessed the impact and cleaned the e-mail system to ensure that the viruses have been removed and any data that was lost has been repaired.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, the reference to an individual outside this House was absolutely inappropriate.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: while the media have reported that several copycat viruses have been released since the I Love You virus first hit, what is the government doing to protect systems from other similar viruses?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, we've been taking proactive steps, Mr. Speaker. Last winter we improved our e-mail security status. We rolled out some antivirus security issues last winter, and we now have the availability of screening incoming e-mail for viruses. With that availability and with that ability we can look at viruses that

might be similar to the I Love You virus, and they will automatically be screened out.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: No, Mr. Speaker. It's been answered.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Private Health Services

(continued)

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A report on a recent Harvard study reaches the conclusion that

patients at for-profit hospitals are two to four times more likely than patients at not-for-profit hospitals to suffer adverse events such as complications following surgery or delays in diagnosing and treating an ailment.

My questions are the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given the Harvard study, why is the government pursuing a policy of health care privatization and placing Albertans at increased medical risk?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the government is not pursuing a policy of private hospitals. We have stated that very clearly. The legislation is very clear with respect to that. Therefore, although I'm not familiar with respect to the Harvard study, it may be very interesting, but it is not relevant to our particular legislation or policy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the study also speculates that adverse medical events may increase as money is redirected to facility shareholders, why has the government chosen private profit over the health of Albertans?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I assume that if the study is from the Harvard source, it must be a credible one. I do note that the questioner is referring to it as speculating, which is hardly scientific basis on which to place a question.

I repeat that we are not promoting private hospitals. We have banned them in the legislation. The research may be quite interesting and quite thorough – I don't know – but it is not in my view relevant to the particular initiative we're taking.

DR. MASSEY: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what liability will the government assume when things go wrong at for-profit surgical clinics?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I have to repeat something that is a fact but that the opposition can't seem to acknowledge, and that is that within our health care system right now we have in various roles a very important private sector, whether we're talking about doctors' offices and clinics or we're talking about, yes, laboratory companies or we're talking about some of the maintenance firms that repair and maintain the equipment in the health care system. I think that overall the record of the whole health care system in terms of major mistakes and faults and liabilities has been very, very good in this province.

If there is something that occurs to which liability can be assigned, there is a judicial process in this country to sue, to recover money, and that does occasionally regrettably happen in the health care system. The process is there.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

2:40

Pigeon Lake Fishery

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've received a number of calls from constituents regarding the opening of the fishing season a month ago, particularly in relation to Pigeon Lake and its commercial fishery. Within the fishing regulations this year there are a number of Alberta lakes that are under pressure related to fish population and that have been closed to fishing during spawning. Since this is the case, can the Minister of Environment tell my constituents why the commercial fishery on Pigeon Lake is allowed to continue once the lake is open to recreational fishing?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I have certainly heard of the piscatory concerns of not only the constituents of this hon. member but of others throughout the province, and I can assure the hon. member that the concerns that are expressed are taken seriously. The decision to close a number of lakes during the spawning season is not one that is lightly taken. I'd like to point out that when we do make such decisions, we work with the best science available. We work with biologists, but we also work with the various advisory committees with lakes to make determinations as to how management plans can be put in place for various lakes throughout the province to manage this valuable resource. I'd like to emphasize that we look at each lake on a lake-by-lake basis to take into account the unique situation in each lake and the pressures that are on those lakes.

In the case of Pigeon Lake, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of different user groups that we had to listen to and work with. It not only supports commercial fishing but also domestic fishing and also, of course, recreational fishing. I wish to assure this House that I am monitoring issues related to the commercial fishing industry, and I want to assure members of this Assembly that immediate steps will be taken by the department if the health of Alberta fisheries is ever threatened.

MR. JOHNSON: More specifically, to the same minister: what is the amount of fish allocated for the commercial fishery on Pigeon Lake, and what is being harvested?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the quota for whitefish for Pigeon Lake is 100,000 kilograms. Over the last 10 years the average harvest of whitefish from that particular lake has been 88,000 kilograms. I would note, though, that for the species of walleye and pike, their tolerance limits were reached before the quota for whitefish was reached. Just to be clear, the fishery is closed whenever the tolerance on any particular species is reached or the quota is met. So the lake is closed to commercial fisherfolk when either the tolerance on a species is reached or the quota is reached.

MR. JOHNSON: My final question is to the same minister. What is the status of the environmental and commercial viability of Pigeon Lake's fishery?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to emphasize that our main priority is to devise mechanisms and strategies to ensure that this valuable resource continues not only for those who are involved in commercial fishing now or for domestic use or for recreational reasons but for the benefit of those in the future as well. Based on public input and sound science, we will make decisions that are necessary to conserve Alberta's fishery.

With respect to Pigeon Lake, Mr. Speaker, that lake has whitefish resources that will support a very important commercial fishery here in this province, but I want to point out that the challenge will be to find the mechanisms and the strategies to sustain this commercial fishery without harming the interests of other users of the lake, specifically recreational and domestic use. We will continue to work on those strategies for Pigeon Lake but also for a great number of other lakes throughout the province for the benefit of all users of Alberta's lakes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Calgary Laboratory Services

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1996 the Calgary regional health authority began a partnership with a private laboratory service with the goal of decreasing the cost of lab services by 40 percent in the Calgary area. While this government claims that the new partnership has meant big savings to taxpayers, Albertans deserve to know what the numbers really are and how the money was spent. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister provide a public explanation as to why the amount spent on laboratory services before the creation of Calgary Laboratory Services was reported as being \$80 million but then later changed to \$97 million?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the increase in the overall contractual payment to the laboratory company in Calgary, I think it is reasonable to expect that the number of tests, the amount of work that is being done – there's actually been the addition of a new spectrum of tests as well as an increase in the volume. It is quite logical to expect that the overall contracted amount according to the volume of work done would increase.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, again, to the same Minister of Health and Wellness. In reality, was this an attempt to create the illusion for Alberta taxpayers that the savings from the Calgary Laboratory Services were greater than they really are?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that the overall contract between the Calgary regional health authority and the laboratory firm is a very comprehensive one. As I've indicated, the contract would, I think, logically provide for the accommodation of an increased volume and increased variation or variety or new tests that come onstream.

In fact, Calgary Laboratory Services, as I understand it, is very sophisticated. It does a very, very wide range of tests, which would compare to any large centre, certainly in Calgary. Mr. Speaker, I think it is unrealistic to think that a contract would not have a provision to be adjusted in terms of payment for increases in volume and in the nature of the tests that are done.

MR. WICKMAN: My final question, Mr. Speaker, is to the same minister. Will the minister provide evidence to Albertans as to why there was a \$17 million discrepancy in the budget prior to the contract being awarded?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the implication of the question in terms of a discrepancy. I've provided the description of the overall way that the contracts operate. I think there has to be an understanding that contracts will be adjusted according to factors which develop in terms of the nature of the services to be provided,

the breadth of the services to be provided, the volume of the services to be provided, and that will occur. Those things will occur.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, three members today will participate in Members' Statements. We'll call on the first of these in about 30 seconds.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

International Year for the Culture of Peace

MRS. BURGNER: The year 2000 has been proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations as the International Year for the Culture of Peace. On the 50th anniversary of the UN universal declaration of human rights a group of Nobel prize laureates drafted a document they call Manifesto 2000. This manifesto will be presented to the General Assembly in September 2000 as part of the International Day of Peace.

It is not an ordinary petition, Mr. Speaker. It is expected that 100 million people from around the world will sign this manifesto. It will represent their personal commitment to the values, attitudes, and behaviour that inspire the culture of peace. So many will sign because they know that a culture of peace is required to permit sustainable development around the world and to enhance environmental protection and the well-being of every person.

2:50

What are the values that so many individuals will be pledging their support to? They're pledging to respect all life and the dignity and worth of every human being. They are pledging to reject violence in all its manifestations, particularly against children, who are the most vulnerable, to share with others their time and resources, to listen and understand without defaming and rejecting others, and to preserve the planet by respecting all life and preserving the balance of nature. They're pledging to rediscover solidarity by contributing to their communities.

Mr. Speaker, it is my hope and the hope of my son, who is here today, and the hope of this Assembly that this manifesto will help transform the culture of war and violence where it exists to a culture of peace and nonviolence, that will benefit all of us.

In order to give us a wide scope of the possibilities of this campaign, the organizers are hoping to spread the word and collect signatures through the Internet. Anyone who wishes to sign on can reach the Internet through www.unesco.org/manifesto2000. By signing your name to the peace manifesto, you will be included with the citizens of the world who are devoted to sharing the culture of peace with others, and you will be participating in an historic and worldwide celebration of peace.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Democracy in Alberta

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about democracy in Alberta. Alberta's democracy has been compared to corporate statism. This government has become, to quote a former columnist at the *Herald*: a government by CEO. The Premier with his business cronies for MLAs believes all Albertans should support legislation like Bill 11, even though it will only help the wealthy in the province. In this province it appears that anyone who dares to question the CEO is in line to be fired or at best derided, branded as a left-wing nut, and personally attacked for not buying the latest of the so-called advantage.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not how democracy is supposed to work. Democracy is supposed to do what's best for all citizens, not just the wealthy elites. Democracy understands that opposition is important and supports alternative points of view. Democracy does not cut off debate, does not artificially invoke closure, and does not denounce people's concerns. Democracy does not paint the oppositional voice in this province with red menace overtones, insulting the people who have worked so hard to build this province.

I've watched every night as people gather at the Legislature to speak out against Bill 11. This government just isn't interested. It has ignored these protests with a top-down managerial view of the world. With a Premier as chairman at the helm this government sneers at the underlings, those who dare to just say no to Bill 11. You know, he should be careful. CEOs have been known to topple, and the people you stepped on on your way up will be waiting for you on your way down.

You can legislate until you're blue in the face, but people have memories, and they're going to remember how this government ignored them, how this government insulted their intelligence and patronized the opposition. They will remember. One day Albertans will stop the Premier and his company and once again embrace democracy in this province.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to recognize this year's inductees to Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame, located in Wetaskiwin. The induction ceremony will be held at the Reynolds-Alberta Museum in Wetaskiwin on Saturday, May 13. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: One of the great traditions in this House is this opportunity for free speech that was brought in a number of years ago, when major amendments were made to the Standing Orders. This section of the Routine is called Members' Statements, and members should have the right to express themselves on any subject they want regardless of the content. The content is their own content, and they may choose to say what it is they want to say. There should be no interjections, and we've ruled out points of order and points of privilege and everything else with respect to this in the past. Those who don't like the message today, well, get ready because there'll be another opportunity in the next number of days for additional members' statements, and it can go back the other way.

Now, hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, I invite you to start at the beginning.

Aviation Hall of Fame

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to recognize this year's inductees to Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame, located in Wetaskiwin. The induction ceremony will be held at the Reynolds-Alberta Museum in Wetaskiwin on Saturday, May 13. Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame was founded in 1973 and pays tribute to men and women who pioneered and advanced aviation in Canada. The hall of fame has 160 members, including this year's five inductees.

Mr. James Tocher Bain will be posthumously inducted at this year's ceremony. Mr. Bain is widely known as the man responsible for the development of the Canadair North Star, and he oversaw

construction of the Air Canada jet base in Dorval, Quebec.

Another inductee, Mr. Albert Baker, earned his pilot's and engineer's licences at the Moose Jaw Flying Club. He's credited with turning around the troubled Fleet Manufacturing Company in Fort Erie, Ontario.

Mr. Paul Bernard Dilworth studied jet engine technologies in the U.K. He went on to set up the cold-weather ground test facility in Winnipeg and conducted the first ever test on a jet engine in Canada in 1943.

Mr. Reginald John Lane joined the RCAF in 1940 and became a distinguished wartime Pathfinder and bomber pilot with three tours of duty over Europe. In 1943 Mr. Lane flew the first Canadian-built Lancaster KB-700, the Ruhr Express, to England.

I'm particularly proud to mention the induction of Ms Vera Elsie Strodl Dowling of Edmonton. Ms Dowling worked extensively in the area of test flying, and after World War II she was a flight instructor with the RAF. She was also the first female flight instructor in Alberta.

This year's Belt of Orion award of excellence will be awarded to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police air division. For over 60 years the air division has performed essential support for the RCMP and service to Canadian citizens.

Congratulations to the air division and the five inductees into Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, earlier today in the routine the chair called on the hon. Member for Wainwright for an introduction, and the hon. Member for Wainwright indicated he wanted to do it a little later. Now is the time, sir.

head: Introduction of Guests (reversion)

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce for the record a group from the Provost school in the Buffalo Trail school division. This group consisted of 36 grade 6 students and 10 adults. They were accompanied by teachers Sherri Smith, Julie Bouma, Vern Tessman, Roxy Reinhart. They were here to visit the Legislature and observe our government in action. Unfortunately they have left now.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Provoking Debate

MR. DICKSON: Actually, Mr. Speaker, I raised two points of order, but they relate to exactly the same comment made twice by the hon. Premier. My authority would be *Beauchesne* 408(2) about the enjoiner against answers "should not provoke debate." I've had some Blues delivered to me, but they haven't caught the question-and-answer exchange in question.

The Premier on two different occasions referenced documents that had been in the possession of the Leader of the Official Opposition when she was minister of health and at the end of her time as minister. What I heard was a clear indication that the Leader of the Opposition was in some fashion trying to withhold documents, delay their publication, their availability to members of the public.

Now, this is nonsense, Mr. Speaker. We have a provincial archivist in this province. Members will appreciate that under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, section 3, the act

- (b) does not affect access to records
 - (i) deposited in the Provincial Archives, or
 - (ii) deposited in the archives . . .
 that were unrestricted before the coming into force of this Act.

The act came into force on October 1, 1995.

Then, further, the act

- (e) does not prohibit the transfer, storage or destruction of a record
 - (i) in accordance with [any other] enactment of Alberta or Canada, or

a bylaw of a local government body. In this province we do have, in fact, a regulation that deals with the destruction of public documents. You will be well familiar with it, all ministers, because those records that a minister has with respect to ministerial function are public property, not personal property.

3:00

Well, we can argue the law, but the point is this. I'm talking about papers that a minister had in the execution of a ministerial function, that those records have been turned over by the Leader of the Official Opposition. She received advice from the provincial archivist in terms of the policy of the provincial government, and she has neither sought nor obtained any special protection, remedy, or treatment with respect to those records. They have been treated, as I understand, no differently than the records when the Member for Wainwright left cabinet or the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne left cabinet. Those records were treated the same way.

For the Premier to suggest, as I heard him do, that in some fashion the Leader of the Opposition was trying to have those records that had been in her possession treated in some different way is more than mischievous. It's inaccurate, and it's just plain wrong. I trust I've not distorted the meaning of the words I heard from the Premier, but it's clearly a concern.

If we have an existing set of policies in terms of the way we deal with ministerial records, let's recognize that that is, in effect, uniform treatment and not something that in this case somebody has tried to have records protected for a longer time period.

You might recognize, sir, if you look at the amendments to the FOIP Act, that there are specific provisions in terms of records like this from this point forward, but I think the insinuation and implication, if not the express comment made by the Premier, is inflammatory as well as inaccurate and in my view offends 408(2). I'd ask the Premier to withdraw the remarks he made and in fact apologize in the House for the insinuation that he made.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate what the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer is rising on, that being a procedural issue under item 408(2), where it says that "answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised, and should not provoke debate." However, if he reads a little further, he will also see under *Beauchesne* 409, where the issue of question period is discussed in greater detail, that *Beauchesne* also says:

A brief question seeking information about an important matter of some urgency which falls within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the specific Minister to whom it is addressed, is in order.

It goes on to say in section 409(2): "The question must be brief." Then the real crux of the matter is 409(8), where it says: "A question that has previously been answered ought not to be asked again."

Now, on this issue of a certain page of documents that is being

sought by the Official Opposition, the Premier has answered this question numerous times in this House and has very openly said that he would bring that forward as soon as it was ready, and he has directed the minister of health to research it and bring it forward. Not only has he said that to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, but he has answered that same question or questions to that same effect, seeking the same information, from other members opposite. Therefore, I would say that there is an issue of redundancy here under 409(8), which may well be another point of order.

Nonetheless, the issue of what the Premier has been asked to provide will be dealt with. There is an undertaking to do that, and that work is in motion as we speak. In view of the openness with which that particular question had first been asked and the openness with which it had been responded, I don't think there is any point of order here, but I'll leave it up to the valuable judgment of the chair to decide.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on the point of order.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I will be brief on the point of order. I would like to clarify my understanding of the issue of ministerial documents. It is my understanding that ministerial documents are the property of the minister and that it is in the minister's purview as to the handling of those documents. Those documents are different from departmental documents or documents that the department of health might hold during a minister's time.

On the issue of the disposal of those documents. You may hold those documents for any period of time as a minister. You may dispose of them as you wish. However, if you choose to dispose of them by providing them to the Provincial Archives, then the rule of closed documents for 15 years comes into effect. In effect, Mr. Speaker, the time when you put those documents in the hands of the Provincial Archives dictates the time and length of closure.

I do want it on the record and I want it clearly understood by members of this Legislature that ministerial documents are the property of the minister, and it is the minister's responsibility as to how he or she wishes those documents handled.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Opposition House Leader, do I take it that the two points of order were then wrapped into one? So this is it, and we're not going to do this again?

MR. DICKSON: That would be my intention, sir. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: There was a concern raised by the hon. Opposition House Leader under *Beauchesne* 408(2): "Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised, and should not provoke debate." Then we went on to discuss the ministerial documents.

What the Hansard Blues say is the following: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview:

The greatest legacy of private health care in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, will be the accompanying legacy of deception and deceit. The Premier risks contributing to such a legacy by continuing to withhold the contents, 30 blank pages, outlining his government's beliefs on private health care. My questions today are to the Premier. When does the Premier plan to permit Albertans to see the private health care document their tax dollars paid for?

Then the hon. the Premier:

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness indicated on a number of occasions in this Legislative Assembly, that information is being prepared as we speak.

But speaking of missing documents, why has the opposition leader put a 15-year prohibition on the public release of 150 boxes of her documents from her time as minister of health?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo: "Point of order."

The hon. the Premier:

What has she got to hide, Mr. Speaker? Is she afraid of something? Is there something in those documents that alludes to her promotion of private, for-profit health care? I wonder.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview:

Let me amend that. A legacy of deception, deceit, and desperation, Mr. Speaker. Why enact closure, Mr. Premier, before you release your government's own positions on private health care policy? Why enact closure before the public has had an opportunity to read those 30 blank pages?

The hon. leader of the government:

Mr. Speaker, again I allude to the 150 boxes of documents that have been secreted away, squirreled away someplace under lock and key because the leader of the Liberal opposition is afraid there might be something in those documents that might put her in contradiction of her position today.

Relative to the question, this government has not invoked closure on third reading. We introduced a motion, Standing Order 47, which allows full and complete debate on third reading. That is not closure. But this is typical of the kind of malicious misinformation that is being spread by the Liberal Party.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview:

Mr. Speaker, when will the Premier stop his desperation antics and table the documents in this Assembly: pages 31, 34, 41, 44, and 47, all speaking about private health care? When will those documents be tabled in this Assembly so Albertans can read them for themselves?

Then the leader of the government goes on:

Mr. Speaker, they will be tabled in due course as soon as the documents are prepared. I understand that that work is under way right now.

You know, you might have to wait days or weeks, but the rest of us are going to have to wait 15 years - 15 years - to see the documents that have been secreted away under lock and key by the former minister of health, who is now the leader of the Liberal opposition. What has she got to hide, Mr. Speaker? I thought she said that she would stand up to her record on health any day. Well, we are waiting. What has she got to hide?

So under *Beauchesne* 408: "Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised, and should not provoke debate." And then 428 says:

A question . . . must not:

- (a) be ironical, rhetorical, offensive, or contain epithet, innuendo, satire, or ridicule.
- (b) be trivial, vague, or meaningless . . .
- (f) contain an expression of opinion . . .
- (h) contain inferences.
- (i) contain imputations.

Then the Deputy Government House Leader basically said to refer to 409, a series of things with respect to this.

3:10

The whole subject matter of the boxes is a rather interesting one, and the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations certainly gave her views with respect to this matter. The fact of the matter is that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was a member of Executive Council at, interestingly enough, the same period of time in which the Speaker was a member of Executive Council. The Speaker has had particular experience with respect to documents, and it is exactly as the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations has said: such records are the property of the minister in question, to be released, disposed of, reviewed, made public in any way or form that the minister of Executive Council at the time so chose to do.

Since that time there have been some modifications to that, but in the time frame which we have at hand, these documents could be made available to anyone at any time, and they are the total responsibility of the minister in question. Quite frankly, that should not be the basis of any point of order or discussion thereof.

The use of inflammatory language from one will bring back inflammatory language from another, and if someone wants to throw out "legacy of deception and deceit" and "withhold," then I guess it comes back: "But speaking of missing documents," why would somebody put a "prohibition on," and what have you. It violates all the rules that we've just talked about under 408 and 409 as much in the question as in the answer, as much in the answer as in the question.

I'm not sure where this comes in on government policy. These are debatable questions that just go on on a daily basis. I guess everybody looks for the bite on TV and is hoping to get it. That's what it's down to. What is that expression, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo? The pot calling the kettle black? Is that what it is?

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 208

Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate May 3: Mr. Zwozdesky]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to make some comments on the private member's bill that was brought forward by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Now, I want to relate this bill in terms of the key recommendations of the report that had been prepared by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler. Madam Speaker, I have to be very careful in my language, I guess, as you're now wearing two hats. In that particular report that I refer to - and I want to talk about the highlights - it proposes the establishment of a gaming secretariat to advise the minister on gaming policy. It requires that all gaming supplies purchased by the gaming commission be purchased via public tender. It creates an all-party standing committee on gaming to review the gaming act on a regular basis, to report the separation of the administrative enforcement functions of the commission, to review and report on funding the police with lottery money to prevent and fight organized crime, to review and report on funding gambling addiction and treatment with gambling revenues, and requires municipal approval for new or the expansion of existing gaming operations. Those highlights relate very, very specifically to the report that was done by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler called *Gaming in Review*.

Let me just say in my opening comments that it surprises me - and I don't want to put you in an awkward position, Madam Speaker - that we have a Member of the Legislative Assembly who takes it upon herself to work very hard and to develop expertise in a particular area, even to the point where the Premier will say: I want you to head up a special task force or a commission to review gambling throughout the province and come forward with recommendations. I go back to the first report that was done by the

Member for Lacombe-Stettler. Many of those recommendations were in fact acted upon. That particular member has a better understanding than I think anybody else on the government side in terms of gambling in this province, the implications of gambling and steps that could be taken to minimize the negative impact of gambling. We accept the fact that gambling is now a part of life in Alberta and throughout Canada, but it doesn't have to escalate out of control.

In the particular report that the member came forward with, Madam Speaker, the government chose to ignore it completely, which really, really surprises me. Every recommendation was ignored. There was no discussion. Nothing came forward, even though the Canada West Foundation in their report that was tabled a few weeks later more or less concurred with the recommendations of the report *Gaming in Review*.

Madam Speaker, the first point I would make is that government has a responsibility to heed advice, to heed advice when it comes from opposition but particularly when it comes from their own members that are asked to create a certain task and then are shut out when that task is completed because, for whatever reason, it interferes with the objectives of the government or the minister, which may very well be to use gambling as a cash cow and forget about the implications, the negative effects that gambling throughout the province may have.

In that report that came down from the Member for Lacombe-Stettler – I want to refer to some of them, because they're directly related to Bill 208. There's no question about that. I don't make any bones about it. It's unusual for opposition to be trying to assist a member of government in implementing recommendations, but in this particular case there is every rationale in the world as to why it should be done. The government has refused to do it. We have a member that has done something good, and the government refuses to act upon it, so the Official Opposition then has a responsibility to try and push government in the proper direction.

Now the recommendations just briefly. The first recommendation in that report was that the Ontario gaming model be studied with emphasis on implementation; secondly, a gaming policy secretariat should be re-established in Alberta; thirdly, a national gaming presence or direction should be considered; fourthly, the province of Ontario did not reinvent the wheel when it came to implementing new strategies on gaming; Alberta did some and so on and so forth; fifth, net lottery dollars should be appropriated to two key priority areas; sixth, gaming is an extremely lucrative industry, it points out; seventh, if serious consideration is given to large destination casinos, many factors must be taken into account. In Ontario it relates to the policy decisions that were made and later rescinded following public discord.

Now, in the actual bill itself, Madam Speaker, when I look through the specific sections, first of all section 2, clause (i.1), the amendment is: "'Gaming Secretariat' means the Alberta Gaming Secretariat established under section 42.01." Then we go to section 3(2), where we would add:

37.1 Prior to the board issuing a gaming licence or a facility licence under section 37,

- (a) the board must, within 30 days of receiving an application, forward the application to the municipality in which the activity prescribed in the licence would occur, and
- (b) that municipality must pass a resolution approving the new facility licence or gaming licence.

The reason that is done, Madam Speaker, is that municipalities know what's best in their particular area. We've seen municipalities throughout this province that have said, "We do not want VLTs," for example, "in the hotels." We've had other municipalities that say that they don't object to them, and they've voted in favour of

allowing them in the bars, as that was one of two options that was given at that particular time. Nevertheless, the municipality must have the right to be part of the decision-making process as to what's good for their community.

Then we go into the next section, where we would add: "All acquisitions of gaming supplies by the Commission must be made by public tender." I think that's self-explanatory. To ensure that we get the best goods at the best price, a public tender is the only way to go.

3:20

Now, the purposes of the Alberta gaming secretariat itself. It would be established

- (a) to advise, report to and to make recommendations to the Minister on matters relating to [gambling],
- (b) to conduct research and public consultation on the social and economic effects of gaming,
- (c) to foster awareness and to encourage public discussion on matters relating to
 - (i) gaming addiction,
 - (ii) organized crime and [gambling],
 - (iii) the effects of gaming on children and families.

- (3) The Gaming Secretariat shall make its recommendations to the Government through the Minister.

We look at those purposes, "gaming addiction" for example. We've had \$1.5 million allocated towards the research institute on addictions. What has come of that \$1.5 million? What has come of this research institute? I know there is a board of directors in place. I know that they've had at least one meeting. I don't know how many after that, and I don't know what's come out of that. We've seen no reports. We've seen absolutely nothing that would justify that \$1.5 million being allocated. Maybe it hasn't been spent yet. But if it hasn't, what is the holdup? Why isn't the government reporting back to this Legislative Assembly as to what activity is going on, if any activity is going on?

We talk in terms of "organized crime and gaming." Now, government has denied any fear of organized crime in gaming. However, again the Canada West Foundation report, the report from the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, numerous reports throughout the United States, throughout Canada, throughout the world state that widespread gambling can encourage organized crime. There is absolutely no question. The potential is there.

What do we have? I think we have one-fifth of a police officer's time that is allocated towards crime that may be associated to gaming in this particular province. [Two members rose] Are they standing for me? Oh, I thought maybe it was a point of order.

Then the third was "the effects of gaming on children and families." Madam Speaker, we've all heard stories – at least we should have heard stories – about the effects of gaming on children and families. As the critic of Gaming in the Liberal caucus, the Official Opposition, I've heard countless ones. I've heard ones where people have felt that suicides were committed because of a gaming addiction, a gambling addiction. Now, there's no way of proving that certainly, but the evidence was there, that the gambling addiction led them to actually take their own life. We've heard about broken marriages. We've heard about people going to jail, stealing money from their employers because they had this gambling addiction and they had to feed these machines. We've heard of people losing their homes, their jobs, their businesses. We've heard of, I think in the Lethbridge area, a businessman losing \$800,000.

The member that was appointed by the minister to the Gaming Research Institute board of directors is himself now a member of the Canada foundation on gambling addiction. He himself is one that was worth \$1 million at one time, who opened up a restaurant in Fort Saskatchewan. He's gone on TV – I'm not saying anything that

hasn't been said publicly before – and he's told his story about how it's cost him virtually everything in life. He's fought that addiction fortunately, but it's cost him everything in life.

But of all the stories I heard, the one that touched me the most was this mother, a grandmother, that phoned me and said that her daughter was so addicted to the VLTs that she would do virtually anything to get money to put into those machines. One Christmas, when the grandmother bought the grandchildren a bunch of gifts and went over to the house and put them under the Christmas tree, the children never got those gifts because the mother, who was addicted to the VLTs, took those gifts down to a pawnshop, pawned them off, took the money and blew it on the VLTs. The grandmother then applied for court action to take custody of those children. The family is in turmoil now. They're not speaking to each other. It has just totally destroyed that family.

So the rationale for an Alberta gaming secretariat to fulfill those purposes outlined speaks for itself.

Now, we talk in terms of this gaming secretariat and how it would function.

42.02(2) At least one member of the Gaming Secretariat shall be . . .

- (a) Members of the Legislative Assembly who are members of the governing party;
- (b) Members of the Legislative Assembly who are members of the Official Opposition;
- (c) [a member of] the general public;
- (d) the Royal Canadian Mounted Police;
- (e) the Alberta Gaming Research Institute;
- (f) the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission;
- (g) the Child and Family Services Secretariat.

Then we talk in terms of how the appointments would take place and such.

We talk in terms of the standing committee on gaming which is recommended in Bill 208. Now, the standing committee on gaming would be

a standing committee of the Legislative Assembly called the "Standing Committee on Gaming" consisting of 9 Members of the Legislative Assembly.

(3) The membership of the Standing Committee shall include 3 Members of the Legislative Assembly who are not members of the governing party, but if there is

- (a) an insufficient number of non-government members to fill the 3 positions on the Standing Committee, or
- (b) an insufficient number of non-government members who are willing to fill the 3 positions on the Standing Committee,

the resulting vacant positions on the Standing Committee may be filled by Members of the Legislative Assembly who are members of the [party in government].

The purposes of that are

- (a) to hold public meetings . . .
- (b) to complete a comprehensive review of this Act within 1 year after the coming into force . . . and every 3 years after that . . .
- (c) to study and make recommendations regarding
 - (i) the separation of the administrative and enforcement functions of the Commission and the creation of an independent body . . .
 - (ii) the introduction of a statutory requirement to provide a proportion of revenues from the Commission or Lottery Fund for the prevention and treatment of gaming addiction.

Again, that gaming addiction. We recognize that there is roughly \$3 million that goes to AADAC, but there is still a very, very serious problem out there.

- (iv) the economic, social, regulatory, enforcement and addictive implications of Internet gaming,

which is spreading and continues to spread and which is very, very difficult to control.

Now, when we look at the rationale for this bill coming forward, for the members of this caucus supporting this type of legislation, let's keep in mind that revenues from gambling businesses are approaching \$1 billion in this province. That's a far cry from 1989, when I was first elected. I think it was in fact a year or two later when the first dollars sort of spit themselves out of VLTs, I believe down in the Medicine Hat or Lethbridge area. When the former minister responsible for gaming, who is now the Speaker of the House, shifted \$25 million into general revenues, that was considered a big, big deal.

Now, that's chicken feed in terms of what the province produces in terms of its cash cow, close to \$1 billion, and there's no indication to believe that figure is going to decrease. There is a freeze under way, yes, until this summer sometime, to review gaming totally, but we don't know what the outcome of that review is going to be. We don't know what direction it's taking. Is it a review to see if electronic gaming should be allowed in the bingo halls, for example? Is the review going to look at the minicasinos that the Hotel Association would like to see? Is it going to allow for what we call the creation of destination casinos in areas possibly like Banff in an attempt to lure dollars from the United States from tourists that may come up and want to gamble in some nice country like Kananaskis? So we don't know the purpose of the review, if it's to better the lives of Albertans in terms of gambling or if it's to look at ways to create more revenue; in other words, to enlarge upon that cash cow.

When we look at the revenue streams being created by gambling, we then have to recognize the possibility that we've got to make a commitment to fight any organized crime or potential organized crime and addiction associated with gambling. That has to be done, and as gambling escalates, as the amount of revenue escalates, of course the addictions and the potential for crime are going to also escalate accordingly. I think that's a given.

I've talked in terms of gaming addiction in the past, about how devastating it is to families, to individuals, to communities. We've seen that happen, and that's why a number of communities who had plebiscites and asked for those machines to be removed don't want the widespread gambling that we see in some of the municipalities at the present time.

We now see \$3.6 million, a rough figure, that goes towards addiction, but when we look in terms of the percentage, that's less than one-half of 1 percent of total net revenues going to addiction. When I studied the model in Texas . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I hesitate to interrupt you, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has expired for today.

3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Vehicle Front Licence Plates

509. Mr. Lougheed moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to reinstate the requirement to display front licence plates on all vehicles registered in the province.

Mr. Tannas moved that the motion be amended by adding "in conjunction with a licence plate reissue" after "province".

[Debate adjourned May 2: Mr. Fischer speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to complete my remarks on the amendment to Motion 509, as last

Tuesday we did run out of time, but my position has not changed any, and I'm still strongly in favour of the amendment and the motion.

It is important to note that many of the petitions that have been filed in the Leg. on this issue are from rural residents from Small Town, Alberta. Many of these residents are good people who work with Rural Crime Watch, Neighbourhood Watch, Citizens on Patrol, and other groups, and these people have experienced firsthand the disappointment of not being able to identify a vehicle because of no front licence plate. Madam Speaker, these people volunteer their time. They expose themselves to substantial danger, sometimes even risking their lives to help keep our communities safe, and I believe we should give them all of the tools that we can to make their job easier.

Passing Motion 509 is something that this Legislature can do to improve the safety and the well-being of our communities, and reverting to the two licence plates concept is a very, very positive step for us here in Alberta. I want to urge all of the members to support this amendment and Motion 509.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to add a few comments. I'd like to congratulate the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for bringing forward this issue.

I remember when licence plates on the front of vehicles were lost. Sometimes policemen are not very complimentary of governments, and it doesn't matter what government. Sometimes they're a little cynical, and I remember a comment, somebody saying: whose stupid idea is this anyway? It really did impede the law enforcement efforts of police officers.

Criminals are not very bright, and sometimes, you know, they'll do things, and they think they're going to get away with something. I recall many times when I apprehended a thug for stealing a vehicle. He would exchange the rear plate on a car, but he forgot about exchanging the front plate on the car, and the front plate was how we were able to determine that the vehicle was stolen as it drove by you or if you found a vehicle in an alley or someplace with two different plates. Of course, it was obvious to you that if the front and rear plates didn't match, there was a problem here.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I know that the removal of the plate was an effort to save about \$700,000 or \$750,000 to the government on a yearly basis. Well, I would suspect that that amount of money was spent investigating crimes that did not likely have a good conclusion as a result of removing the front plate and on insurance costs and insurance investigations as a result of that.

The initiative, I know, came out of Rural Crime Watch groups. I have spoken with them in the past couple of years in relation to this. I think it's a great initiative. I think it's important to bring back the front licence plate. Certainly, with the advent of technology, for those who don't like photo radar, I think this is maybe another way, of course, of getting the most out of your cameras. I suppose we could look at that as well, intersections with red-light cameras, photo radar. Those are just by-products of having a front licence plate, but I think the more pressing issue is the issue of being able to identify vehicles that may or may not be involved in crimes in rural areas and

certainly, as well, in the city. I think it will help police officers and those folks who are on community patrols trying to help police members out in communities.

I urge all members of this Assembly to support this motion. Hopefully we'll see it come back, and we'll have front licence plates back on our vehicles soon.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 509 as amended carried]

Urban Renewal

510. Ms Olsen moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a special task force in conjunction with federal and municipal authorities to examine ways to preserve neighbourhoods affected by school closures and business relocations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One might ask: why does this belong here in the Alberta Legislature, and why would one want the federal authorities involved in this as well? My thought is that we need to be looking at the big picture when it comes to communities, and that doesn't take just one level of government. It takes all three working co-operatively and moving forward. The intent of the motion is to get people thinking about the big picture of neighbourhood denigration and moving forward to some solutions.

We have all of these little pockets of things happening. We have, you know, the policy framework on homelessness. That might be one issue. We have the Safer Cities Task Force and the safer cities initiative, and we have changes that the hon. Minister of Children's Services worked out with myself when she was the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and that's another piece of legislation that's helpful. We have business revitalization zones that council is working on, but we need to bring it all together. Then there's the National Crime Prevention Council, that looks at the big picture and says: well, what can we do here? Let's not see crime prevention just as target-hardening programs, those programs such as Neighbourhood Watch or Stop Thief or Block Parent. It's much bigger than that.

Crime prevention is a very big picture perspective. We talk about safe and affordable housing and the homelessness issue, and we talk about health issues and education issues and safe communities. You know, we've heard lots of that discussion in here. I guess what I'm looking for is some way to have all of those groups that are working together from the municipal, provincial, and federal levels get together and look at how we can preserve some of the neighbourhoods that exist.

Some of the highlights. Schools, in my view, are the heart of a neighbourhood, and once a neighbourhood in a large city such as Edmonton or Calgary or in a smaller rural area starts to lose the schools in older neighbourhoods, it becomes harder if not impossible to retain and attract young people and families and businesses to that area. We've had a number of those things happen in Alberta. We've seen downloading at all levels of government. We now see that it's very difficult for any municipality or any one government on its own to deal with some of these issues. So I think there's a shared responsibility.

I think about a school in my own neighbourhood. You know, part of my constituency is inner city. It's a great community, and it's got great community action, if you will. Those folks really love their community and are trying to make it a better place. Again, I go back

to the Municipal Government Act change that the hon. Member for Sherwood Park assisted to usher in.

3:40

You know, we've had a number of houses, I think somewhere near 40, that were boarded up, declared unsafe, and those kinds of things. They have been knocked down as a result of – I think it was more the threat of the city being able to do something through that new legislation, not because the city actually went out and did something, that finally all these homeowners who had these buildings that needed to either be restored or bulldozed did in fact get rid of them. Now there's a lot there where a new home can be built that new people can move into. So you start to regenerate your community and gentrify that community, and that's okay. Gentrification of a neighbourhood isn't a bad thing, and there are lots of communities that could certainly use that kind of change. So there are those issues.

Businesses don't want to locate in areas without schools, especially in the rural centres. I think that's an issue as well. If your kids are on a school bus ride for, you know, an hour or an hour and a half a day, that's not only a long ride for the kids. But how do you build up your community? How do you attract businesses when they know that there is no school and there are no services in the area?

I think we have to also pay attention to the notion of suburban decay. We've seen that happening. The U.S. is going through that phenomenon right now. What's happening is that all of these areas that people moved out of – they moved out of the inner city because they thought that was denigrated. Then they moved out to the suburban areas. Now they're getting farther and farther out. So what's happening in the suburban areas that they moved out to to offer them sort of the middle-class life is that those areas are now becoming decayed. Those are the areas losing their schools. We haven't paid enough attention to those kinds of issues as well.

We know that construction and servicing costs for new subdivisions are very high, and the infrastructure exists in the inner city in those cities that could make a comeback. One of the things that I am concerned about, I guess, is that we have areas within our constituencies, in the downtown core of, say, Calgary or Edmonton – even Lethbridge and Grande Prairie will experience some of this, some of the growing cities – where we'll see people moving out, as I talked about, sort of that suburban growth. Then what happens is that we only have a few people in the inner city, and oftentimes those people that are living in the inner city don't have a lot of money. They may be people on assistance. They're not always. In fact, I would suggest that my constituency has a number of people who have been there for many, many years and a number of people who have moved to the area because housing is affordable. We also have a group of people who have some high needs or are transitional. They're transient. They're moving more often than others.

What happens is that if you close a school that's offering specific needs to a child whose family is suffering in some way, be it poverty or dysfunction, and the child needs some specific care and is getting it at a school, well, because the utilization rate at that school isn't what the government wants it to be, then the threat of closing down that school becomes a problem. So now where does that kid go? Where does that child go who's already suffering maybe some serious issues at home, suffering from poverty and maybe some other serious behavioral problems or learning disabilities? Now we're going to put that child on a bus – and we see that happen all the time – and the child is now bused to some other school, creating a little more stress for the family and a little more stress for the child. I have some difficulties with that when we have these existing spaces in inner cities. We should be looking at rebuilding those spaces. It

is far more cost-effective to do that than it is to keep on with urban sprawl.

I've visited some great communities throughout North America and, in fact, England. They've gone through these transitions. I remember one community in London. They built these huge, tall 40-storey housing complexes. You know, they built two or three of them side by side. This was all low-income housing. Then they built this great, huge park in the centre. They expected the mom who was 20 storeys up to be watching her kids in the park that was 20 storeys down. This whole concept just didn't work, you know, the stacking. There's this whole notion of public private space, and that whole idea was to feed it in this particular project. So they blew up those buildings. They redesigned the area, and they built it on a crime prevention model. It's a pretty active area now, and it's a pretty vibrant area.

We've seen those in communities in Louisville, Kentucky; Savannah, Georgia; Atlanta; Toronto. Toronto and Vancouver have some great communities and some great co-operation with all three levels of governments, that we should be looking at, tapping into the resources that exist but also having an overall community as well and an overall plan that all three levels of government are involved in.

Edmonton's safer cities initiative is one of the best initiatives in this country, to be quite honest. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora was one of the founding members on that particular committee, and in fact that's where we came to know each other. He's done some tremendous work, and so have all the other players involved in that, but we can't let all of that just die.

I'm looking for at least some thought to examining, as I said, ways to preserve these neighbourhoods. It doesn't come from just this city. It needs to have a big focus. The federal government was in a housing co-op plan at some point. Should we be re-evaluating that? There are all sorts of other initiatives that we could look at. In fact, I think the development community has a role to play and would like to develop safe neighbourhoods and preserve the existing communities. I'm looking for some sort of support in that respect. We have to accept the fact that bigger is not always better. So moving out, just expanding the walls of the cities, isn't always the best thing. Is that sustainable development happening? As I suggested, you know, the whole notion of suburban decay is something that we have to focus on.

We do know that there are programs out there. We do know that all levels of government are working in some way. The National Crime Prevention Council is looking at community projects and safe communities. The business revitalization zones are established in order for business strips to become more sustainable, so it's not just as 118th Avenue – there's some frustration in relation to the prostitution issue and the businesses that tend to pop up on 118th Avenue. They tend to be pawnshops. Let's see; I think there are some triple X movie places up there and all sorts of liquor stores. In order to rebuild, we need goodwill at all levels of government. That doesn't necessarily mean that I'm asking all levels of government to throw a whole pot of money at this. I'm looking at ways to ensure that our neighbourhoods remain active and vital. The communities are generally fighting to keep their neighbourhoods alive, and I'm hoping that we have that kind of will to put together an overall plan as well and look at what we can do.

3:50

I think there are steps, as I say, that have been taken, but there doesn't seem to be one overall strategy. You know, we would even want to look at the whole notion of not just development in terms of housing but certainly in terms of schools and community plans. I know that the city of Edmonton has community plans and ARPs, but how do they feed into what the provincial government is doing, and

how does the provincial government feed into what the federal government is doing? Is there a happy medium in relation to that?

I put together an initiative in relation to prostitution and put it forward to the Minister of Infrastructure and the Justice minister. You know, it was a bylaw within the municipalities at one point that we now figure is just not workable at that level and needs to be moved up to the provincial level. If we can get that bylaw moved to the provincial level, then that's great. However, because it has to do with prostitution, maybe we should find out what the feds are doing in relation to that.

So there are all sorts of things that need to happen, and I feel that it's better to work co-operatively than it is for everybody to just go their own different way. We know that that doesn't work. We know that we need to look at the big picture.

I guess the other thing I look at is that when there's political will and there's an overall strategy that's developed out of that political will, we're doing a couple of things. We are providing safe communities, and we are providing for new development. We are looking at safe housing initiatives, and we are looking at the crime and safety issues. I think that's critical. We've seen at this stage in many communities that it can't happen with just one level of government trying to deal with the issues, so I would like to see the kind of good work that all levels can do.

I know that there are ministers in here who are willing to work towards this type of initiative, and it's a matter of co-operation. It's not a matter of "Well, we can't get involved because we don't have the money," or "We don't want to get involved because we don't want to work with that level of government." We're not very productive when we do those kinds of things, and the people who lose are the citizens of the province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping that we can see some support for this. This is not something that's going to cost money. It's just great to have a number of different-thinking views around a table to come up with a plan.

With that I take my seat. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful for this opportunity to speak to Motion 510. This motion proposes to set up a special task force to consider the decline of neighbourhoods resulting from business relocations and school closures.

I would like to consider, first of all, what Alberta statutes currently say with respect to business relocations and school closures. Under the Municipal Government Act, part 1, section 3(c), one of the purposes of municipalities is "to develop and maintain safe and viable communities."

Furthermore, under section 7 of the act municipalities are given jurisdiction to pass bylaws in matters respecting "businesses, business activities and persons engaged in business." Business relocations, as outlined in Motion 510, are very much within the jurisdiction of our capable municipal governments. For the province to pass this motion and get involved in directing where businesses are to locate would be a violation of not only the statute but also the jurisdiction of our municipal counterparts.

The role of the Alberta government has been to work diligently to ensure a hands-off approach to business activity in the province and to create an economic climate that facilitates the growth and success of businesses. This policy has worked very effectively to foster viable businesses within our local communities and attract new business investment to our province. This government's new

economic development strategy, *Get Ready Alberta: Strengthening the Alberta Advantage*, released in February this year, outlines very specifically the direction of this government in ensuring sustainable economic development and prosperity within our province while promoting the success of our businesses nationally and internationally.

While supporting our businesses through fiscal responsibility, balanced budgets, low taxes, good transportation systems, and balanced economic growth, this government has also determined to get out of the business of being in business. This means that no financial incentives are offered to specific businesses in Alberta. One of the Alberta government's goals is in its business plan, and that is to promote sustainable communities. One of the initiatives that the government indicates will help fulfill this goal is working in partnership with local governments to promote healthy and sustainable communities throughout Alberta.

In order to do this, the government aims to foster self-reliance and self-sufficiency among businesses and municipalities. This is consistent with the fiscal agenda of the Alberta government, which has been to ensure that departments and government agencies live within their means and that the government moves out of the private sector. The Alberta government has maintained this position since 1993 and over the years has worked diligently to create a positive business climate to attract investment and ensure the viability and self-sufficiency of Alberta businesses, making them strong competitors and world leaders in the global economy.

Currently the government is doing a number of things to preserve Alberta communities adversely affected by school closures and business relocations, making the objective of this motion rather redundant. These programs include Alberta Community Development's Alberta Mainstreet program, which helps communities facing challenges resulting from business relocations or closures, and Alberta Economic Development's business counseling and advice services offered through their eight regional offices around the province.

In addition, the Business Link Business Service Centre is the first of its kind in Canada. Located in Edmonton, the centre services clients across the province on a wide range of issues facing businesses including start-up, loan programs, exporting, private- and public-sector programs and services, as well as others. This centre is a tripartite initiative between the federal government through the department of western economic diversification, the provincial government through Alberta Economic Development, and Economic Development Edmonton. The Business Link serves all Albertans both directly and through alliances with other municipal, provincial, and federal networks.

The city of Vancouver also has a tripartite agreement in place between the federal, provincial, and municipal levels of government that focuses on encouraging economic development, addressing housing issues, and reducing crime. With respect to neighbourhood decline specifically, the B.C. government has a unique approach to this issue. They advocate that bureaucracy will never solve the problems facing declining neighbourhoods as it is too inflexible and that therefore private industry must indeed take the lead. In particular, they stress that flexibility is needed in zoning bylaws.

4:00

In Alberta, Alberta Community Development along with Alberta Economic Development and Alberta Municipal Affairs are partners in an initiative with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, or AUMA, called the viable communities initiative. In October 1999 the AUMA passed the viable communities resolution and subsequently resolved to present a proposal that would effectively move

Alberta municipalities in a collaborative manner towards achieving the objectives of the resolution.

Utilizing the definition that a viable municipality is a community which has the will and resources to sustain itself both economically and socially, the intent is to develop a template that will assist communities in self-assessment and identify tools and resources that could be applied in addressing gaps. Alberta Community Development has been approached and has agreed, based on their understanding of the skills needed to strengthen groups and organizations, to assume the co-ordinating role within government. A formal meeting of partners will take place in the very near future.

Alberta Economic Development, or AED, oversees a number of different initiatives that contribute to the preservation of neighbourhoods by facilitating the viability and competitiveness of community businesses and local economic development. These initiatives include the following. By supporting regional partnerships, community economic development is encouraged. AED supports communities in their economic growth through the regional development branch. This branch implements regional initiatives that disseminate information, encourage development opportunities, and facilitate networking within a community.

The regional development branch has played a proactive role in recent months by facilitating a number of regional economic development initiatives focused on communities working together to address economic issues. Examples of regional co-operation include the central Alberta economic partnership, the Peace region economic development alliance, and the emerging northeastern Alberta information hub. These three initiatives represent over 90 Alberta municipalities working together in a regional context. In addition, the Self-Reliant Communities Committee of Alberta Economic Development Authority, or AEDA, has also placed a high priority on supporting and encouraging regional co-operation as a major policy recommendation to the provincial government.

Alberta Economic Development offers a number of business seminars throughout Alberta to provide information to business on current topics. Two seminar series are currently running within the province. Selling Business to Business offers Alberta's small manufacturers and producers an insider's look at how stores make decisions regarding the products they sell. E-commerce information sessions provide information on how to use the Internet as a tool for conducting business.

Finally, Alberta Economic Development is a part of the Business Link. The Business Link Business Service Centre is a joint initiative between the governments of Canada and Alberta and Economic Development Edmonton. The Business Link provides special products and services that help businesses to network, provide better customer focus and service, and develop and implement successful business plans. As part of its new economic strategy, Get Ready Alberta, it is providing every home, business, classroom, library, and municipality in Alberta with access to a high-speed Internet connection. High-speed Internet access can deliver university or college educational programs at home and will open up new business opportunities in the community.

AED also assists communities by promoting the establishment and expansion of businesses in the province. This is accomplished with promotion and advertising activities through networking, publications, studies, seminars, and trade shows. Alberta communities are partners in promoting the Alberta advantage, and AED maintains a full range of community profiles on the department web site. These profiles describe the amenities of each community and include statistics that provide valuable market and business data.

Mr. Speaker, this motion has not been well thought out when we consider the vast number of initiatives that this government is

already doing to foster viable and growing communities in Alberta. The initiatives I have mentioned are only a few that deal specifically with the business relocation issue in the motion.

In addition, the motion states that the task force could be a tripartite initiative between the federal, provincial, and municipal levels of government. First, Mr. Speaker, we already have a very effective tripartite agreement in place to service the business community. Second, as I stated earlier, under the Municipal Government Act it is the jurisdiction of municipalities to pass bylaws regarding businesses. The Alberta government would therefore oppose any initiative to involve the federal government in an area of municipal jurisdiction. In addition, the government could not support a proposal to have a federal presence on a task force examining local issues in areas within exclusive provincial constitutional authority; namely, schools, municipalities, and local economic development.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, duplicating the mechanisms currently in place "to examine ways to preserve neighbourhoods affected by school closures and business relocations" by Alberta government ministries may offset the benefit that might be derived from the establishment of a special task force. Provincially there are currently systems in place to provide a co-ordinated approach to departmental planning. These include the standing policy committee on health and safe communities, the standing policy committee on economic sustainability, the deputy ministers' committee, and the business planning structure. It would be helpful to know what role this proposed task force would fulfill that is not being addressed by the systems that currently exist provincially, municipally, and federally.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, this motion is poorly worded and lacks an understanding of legislated jurisdictional powers of different levels of government. I would encourage all members to vote against this motion.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, we've heard an interesting catalogue of a range of government programs, some targeted to businesses and other areas, but I think the last speaker misses the point of Motion 510. The essence of it, I understand, is one of trying to co-ordinate so that you don't simply deal with businesses over here in this corner and deal with schools over in that corner. It's the idea of trying to integrate things and recognizing that the key building block is really the neighbourhood, a unit smaller than the community.

I just look at this from the perspective of Calgary-Buffalo, and I think of the nine different communities I represent. I think how different they are. There is the Downtown Business Association, which is huge. It represents the largest number of businesses, I expect, of any business association I can imagine in the province. Then you've got a small number of businesses along 11th Street between 11th Avenue and 17th Avenue. There's not even a formal BRZ – they wouldn't have the budget for that – but there's some community identification or some neighbourhood identification, and I think that's really what the mover of the motion was trying to speak to with the motion.

4:10

In Calgary-Buffalo you've got a very active business revitalization zone along 4th Street, another very active one on 17th Avenue east/west, and then you've got the downtown one. Chinatown has got a whole set of different kinds of issues. So if you were to deal with this, as the last speaker suggested, on a community basis, you wouldn't be recognizing the differences and the different kind of challenges that exist in Chinatown or the Downtown Business Association or 17th Avenue and 4th Street. There are certainly some similarities, but they also have some particular challenges and uniqueness.

When I was looking at this motion, I thought of what we'd gone through when the Victoria community used to be part of Calgary-Buffalo. That was before the 1997 election. I remember the concern when they closed the Victoria community school. That was one of the 60 schools that closed. Victoria Park has been a neighbourhood and a community that's had a tough time for a very long time. As the members in the Chamber who've served on Calgary city council will recall, it's a community that has struggled in the shadow of the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede board. They've tried to make that an attractive place to live and a place for people to make homes and raise families, and it's tough. I remember that the loss of the community school was seen by many as a devastating blow, though you still have an active Victoria Community Association.

They say that all politics is local. In seeing the kind of impact on that community when the Victoria school was closed, I think what that certainly taught me is that it was a huge body blow to the community. What was tough was that these decisions were all sort of being made independently. There wasn't a sort of linkage, and what I applaud the mover of this motion, the Member for Edmonton-Norwood, for attempting to do is to link together schools, because that's such an important part of our community, and also what's happening with local businesses. You know, reasonable men and women may think of a host of different ways you might configure this, but all this is is a motion, members. I'd be disappointed if any member thought to vote against this. This isn't about spending money. It's just trying to do a better job in terms of co-ordinating those things.

I take some heart from something done in the city of Calgary, the learning environmental action plan, or LEAP, that's just completed its first year in Calgary communities. It's a program that was created by the Calgary public school board having to do with school closures, and this was after the minister of education at the time said: we're not building any more new schools in Calgary because there are too many schools that aren't currently being utilized. What the Calgary board at the time did was come up with a major process to find ways of involving people in neighbourhoods and communities in that discussion, and I expect that some of my Calgary colleagues here have had the benefit of seeing some of those LEAP projects. You know, the people who are involved in them feel empowered. I mean, I haven't talked to everybody involved in all the LEAP projects, but the people I talked to signal that they think it's a very worthwhile kind of process.

It's a question of looking not just at what classrooms you close but whether there are other uses the school facility can be put to for the benefit of the community. I mean, what would possibly be the matter with that? It's creative, it's resourceful, and I think there's some potential. I don't know how familiar our colleagues outside of Calgary are with LEAP, but I think it has some real potential. I use the example that in the 1999-2000 school year they had what were called pathfinding teams in 10 different Calgary communities, and the focus was on creating quality learning environments for children. Part of it was a recognition that it isn't just the physical facility, Mr. Speaker. There may be alternatives with some creativity that we could find to provide quality learning environments for children that may be outside what we'd thought of before.

I look at the school consolidation in communities like Acadia, Forest Lawn, Forest Heights, Ramsay, and at the French immersion programs south of the Bow River. Pathfinding teams have been working on the concept of minischools in Hidden Valley, Martindale, Taradale, Monterey Park, Signal Hill, and Richmond, all areas where people came together to do a lot of what this motion calls for and suggests, and that is: can we be creative in our communities? It's useful.

Members may say: "Well, why would you need a federal government perspective? Why would you need a provincial government perspective?" You know, it could be done in ways where it would be a more remote kind of involvement, but it seems to me that it starts to look at ways we can look at our neighbourhoods, which is where we live and where we raise our families and where we carry on our businesses and where we do our work. Are there ways of trying to ensure that we just don't treat it as a school closing problem or that we just don't treat it as a business shutting down problem? Can we look to find ways to see how they can reinforce each other so that we don't end up in a situation like in Victoria Park, where the school closed and the businesses are going to take a hit? It makes sense to me to try and do some integration of those kinds of services.

If you look at what the pathfinding teams have done in Calgary, in Renfrew and at the Viscount Bennett Centre, they're continuing to work into the next school year, and there are 12 new teams. What you'll find is that the pathfinding teams have gone beyond a narrow school utilization formula, one that hopefully the Learning minister is going to find a way to change because it's too rigid, too narrow. We have to find a way to take the creativity we're finding in communities. This is the reason I'm supporting this motion.

What's the point in having these good citizens putting all of this energy into trying to find ways to revitalize their community, to ensure a quality learning environment for their children, if you have one level of government or another – and it is not just a question of the municipal government doing something or the provincial government doing something. If any of the three levels of government are doing things that are counterproductive to a strong local community, I think that's a bad thing. I would hope that all members in the Assembly would feel that would be a bad thing and something we'd want to avoid.

I look at the sort of impact that the proposal in terms of minischools has had. That's one of the things that's come out of LEAP in Calgary, the notion of relocatable classrooms, such as a new starter elementary school in the Hidden Valley area in I guess it would probably be the Calgary-Nose Creek constituency. I think that shows us why this motion could work and work very well.

My perspective may be a little different than some because parts of Calgary-Buffalo are very old. You know, my mother, who is 81 now, went to elementary school in the Connaught school, behind my constituency office. The same building is still standing. It's one of those old sandstone treasures. I heard the Member for Calgary-Currie the other day doing a recognition or a private member's statement and talking about some of the great old historical buildings in Calgary. Well, that's a dimension of the problem too. How do you find a win/win, potentially more wins, by looking to protect some of those heritage buildings, and provide quality learning spaces for children where they are?

I can't help but think that the old community school program, when we had 60 of those, was arguably one of the best things we could have done to involve communities and educators and parents and so on in trying to provide services in one place and do some planning in a centralized way. Well, the government, as part of the cost-cutting regime – I never heard a criticism of the model, but I think it was a cost-cutting regime – eliminated that program and eliminated the 60 community schools, and they lost the worker they had to help co-ordinate those things. I lament the loss of that, and I think we all recognize there is a need for something like that. When I see a motion like this come forward, it's a question of trying to do again some of that co-ordinating facility that we lost before.

So I'd say to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that this is not a question that's solved with provincial government

programs that are targeted at cities or provincewide. It's trying to get beyond that to provide some more co-ordinated local response.

4:20

As I say, I think that in Calgary-Buffalo you could find some very good examples where people are, as a matter of need, starting to do informally some of what the motion calls for in perhaps a formal way. I remember that in the communities of Connaught and also Cliff Bungalow and Mission, where my office is involved, we meet with people representing different agencies – the community association and the business revitalization zone board are represented – and we talk about common problems. In the 4th Street BRZ it was panhandling. It was a significant issue. So what happened was that my office and the community association and the BRZ and some other agencies came up with an idea. Instead of just ranting about the problem, why don't we arrange to hire somebody to work with people on the street to let them know where they can go to find a meal or to see if there are some job opportunities?

This actually came out of an initiative initiated by the Calgary Downtown Business Association. Panhandling was a problem, and as a community they tried to find solutions to that. You know, as with a lot of social problems, we haven't fixed the problem, but I think what you saw were some really creative ideas to try and reduce panhandling so that people weren't uncomfortable in some of the prime shopping areas and pedestrian areas in downtown Calgary.

That's the sort of thing that this motion speaks to, at least as I understand it. I think whether you are an MLA in northeast Calgary or downtown Calgary or someplace in Edmonton or in any other community in this province, you'd say: this is something that we can work with. The great thing about a motion is that there's not ever a lot of detail. You talk about or you tease out concepts and general ideas. Why would it not make sense, if you have three levels of government, to have varying levels of involvement? Would it not make sense that they would all have some role? Obviously, the municipal role would be the biggest, because they have the biggest legislative mandate, the biggest area of legislative responsibility. The province's role might be a little smaller, the federal role smaller yet. I think this is worth a try. Why wouldn't we attempt to see if this kind of a focus would pay off? It does go back and speak to some of those things we tried to do around community schools a number of years ago.

Those are the observations I wanted to make. I hope that members would support it. I certainly hope the Calgary members who have seen those communities in action would support it. I suspect that their constituents would like to see this sort of co-ordination promoted at every possible opportunity. So for all those reasons, I'm going to support this motion, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with pleasure that I rise this afternoon to speak in support of Motion 510. I believe that this motion is very timely and concerns an issue that's worthy of this Assembly's consideration and support. In my constituency I have been contacted by constituents concerned with this very issue. Schools in particular are a vital part of any community, and concerns surrounding the closure of our schools need to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, why I will be voting in support of this motion is simply because of the principle behind it. I would like to state that it could benefit from more precise wording and a greater clarification of what this task force would accomplish and to whom it would report.

Mr. Speaker, it is important, as mentioned by my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, to recognize the jurisdictional lines between different levels of government and ensure that municipalities take the lead. If the sponsoring member is proposing, as I think she is, that the federal government provide some sort of financial assistance in addressing these issues, then that should be taken into account and the motion worded accordingly.

Other jurisdictions have developed initiatives involving all three levels of government to address community-based concerns, and I would like to discuss what Manitoba is doing to meet these challenges. In Manitoba a capital region review panel was created by the government in 1998 to study a variety of issues shared by Winnipeg and its 50 surrounding municipalities. The panel was given a mandate to review the effectiveness of existing legislation, policies, and procedures guiding land use, planning, and development as well as the provision of services to municipalities in the capital region. The panel dealt with neighbourhood decline in the context of urban sprawl, similar to what Calgary is facing now, and completed and presented its report in December of 1999. Overall, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is experiencing a low rate of growth. However, the problem facing the urban centres is that people are abandoning older neighbourhoods in favour of new ones.

While Calgary has seen a very fast rate of growth, the problem faced is similar. Schools are located in the older ring of the city, while the school-age children are located in the newer outlying areas and are having to be bused in or are opting to attend private and charter schools rather than public schools.

Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba government has many strategies in place to address inner-city revitalization and community development. The Winnipeg community revitalization program involves a number of agreements between the city of Winnipeg and the province and is concerned with shoulder communities. These are older communities that are beginning to decline but are not inner-city neighbourhoods. This program has been in place since the 1970s and involves a series of five- to six-year agreements between the city and the province involving expenditures of about \$10 million, with each party contributing matching shares.

Mr. Speaker, there is also a tripartite agreement in place between all three levels of government called the core initiative, which targets the inner-city and downtown areas of Winnipeg. There are two programs as part of this initiative, each involving about \$100 million split equally between the three levels of government.

Another agreement, Mr. Speaker, is the Winnipeg development agreement, which is broader than the core initiative, with its focus reaching beyond the city's central core. Each level of government has committed \$25 million. There are about 25 programs in effect under this agreement, and each level of government is able to pick the programs which they are the most interested in funding. Programs have included storefront improvements, small business grants, and the building of an aboriginal centre.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Manitoba is currently developing a Neighbourhoods Alive program, which is a provincial initiative involving the departments of Health, Justice, Housing, Family Services, and Government Services. This is, again, a tripartite initiative involving a bottom-up approach, where the local communities decide what their priorities are and government directs them as to the options available to address these priorities.

Mr. Speaker, Winnipeg has a long history of community development programs.

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-East, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has now lapsed for today.

4:30

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 11
Health Care Protection Act

Mr. Klapstein moved that pursuant to Standing Order 47 the previous question be now put.

[Adjourned debate May 9: Mr. Renner]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the first opportunity that I've had to speak on Bill 11 since early in the debate at the committee stage. At that point I talked about some of the specifics of the bill. I'm not going to get into a lot of the detail on the bill because I think it has more than adequately been discussed by various members in the House.

What I would like to do is talk about the discussions that I've had with constituents from my constituency, the constituency of Medicine Hat. That's the key, frankly, Mr. Speaker, because in the time since I've been an elected official, which is now approaching seven years – time goes very quickly – I've never had to deal with a bill that had so much emotion attached to it. The discussion went far beyond discussion of the specifics of the issue related to what is in the bill, and for the first time I find myself discussing not what's in the bill but what might happen someday, maybe, if. It's the most frustrating discussion I've ever had, and I blame that type of discussion on the malicious misinformation campaign that has been engaged in by the opponents of this bill.

I'll give you a very good example of the type of misinformation that my constituents have. During the Easter break I had occasion to be in my constituency office one morning, and I had a group of Raging Grannies come to visit me at my office. They did their Raging Grannies thing. They sang a number of songs and called me outside. Unfortunately, they didn't tell me that they were coming, and I had already booked appointments for the entire morning, so I had to wait until the constituent who had made arrangements to meet with me had completed the business that we were dealing with. Then I went out onto the sidewalk to talk to the group that had assembled.

Well, my office, Mr. Speaker, is a very small office. It's probably not much wider than this row of four desks that we have here, so the sidewalk in front of my office is not very big. By the time I went outside, there were probably about 25 people who had assembled in front of the office. A number of them were standing on the sidewalk, but some of them were standing on the road. When I walked out, the first thing I said to the group was: "If you could please come in off the road. The last thing we would like is for someone to be hit by a car while we're having this conversation outside of my office." One of the ladies responded: you would like that to happen, because then you could put me into one of your private hospitals, if I got hit by a car.

Well, Mr. Speaker, here we have a group of informed people coming, presumably wanting to have some informed discussion with me about this bill, and one of the spokespersons for this group is saying: if I get hit by a car in front of your office, as a result of Bill 11 I'll have to go to a private hospital and pay for it. She added: I'll have to go to a private hospital and pay. Well, it gets very difficult to have conversations with people when they have that kind of information available to them.

So I've been dealing with a lot of that kind of misinformation, and what concerns me the most, Mr. Speaker, is that when you have an opportunity to sit down with them one on one and actually go

through the bill, except for people who have philosophical differences, the vast majority of the people recognize that the bill is very specific in what it says.

I recognize and I respect people who have a philosophical difference, and frankly, Mr. Speaker, it is their right to have that difference. If we can agree on what the facts are and we can still disagree on whether the bill is the right thing or not, that's fine and dandy. I think that is a legitimate discussion that all of us should engage in. But when people want to engage in the discussion with a bunch of false assumptions that have been fed to them not only by members of the opposition here in the Legislature but by the Friends of Medicare, by all the various unions that have been organized in ensuring that this misinformation goes out to all Albertans, it makes it very difficult to have frank discussions with people.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, I have had numerous contacts, letters, phone calls as late as noon today from constituents of mine who have called specifically to say: Rob, when are you going to get on with it and pass this bill? I talked with a gentleman today. He said: you know, I have read the bill cover to cover, backwards and frontwards, and I cannot figure out what the commotion is all about. This individual is not a longtime Conservative. This individual is someone who has not necessarily been of any political stripe, but he wanted to read the bill. He took the time to read the bill, he called me up, and he said: "Why don't you just get on with it? There must be more things that you can spend your time on in the Legislature of Alberta other than dealing with this bill that has been rehashed and rehashed over and over again." Well, I think that individual speaks for a large number of people in Medicine Hat.

We've heard repeatedly that members in this House should be given the opportunity for a free vote. Mr. Speaker, I want it on the record in black and white: I am supporting this bill, and I am supporting this bill because I truly believe it's the right thing to do. No one told me what to do on this bill. I am supporting this bill because I believe it's the right thing to do, and beyond that, I believe that the majority of my constituents also believe it's the right thing to do; not all of them, by any means, but the majority of them. So when the debate at third reading comes to a conclusion sometime in the next few days, I will be here, standing in my place, supporting this bill and voting yes to this bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to stand and address the bill at third reading, which reflects on the principles of the bill, which in turn is something that gives you a quick overview as to the intent of the bill.

Mr. Speaker, you can imagine that sitting here as a Member of this Legislative Assembly, as a newly independent member and the one and only, of course in my caucus I've had hot and heavy debate. I'm not sure who's winning, whether I'm for the bill or whether I'm against the bill.

I think, Mr. Speaker, what it all comes down to is that health care is a very emotional issue. There are emotions involved on both sides, and there is merit in the case put forward by either opposition members or government members.

I think, Mr. Speaker, we have to recognize that the government did send the bill out to all the residents in the province of Alberta, and the residents in their wisdom – their interpretation of the intent of the bill has been exemplified by what they interpret the bill to mean.

Mr. Speaker, when I am speaking to the bill as an independent, I have to reflect on what my constituents in Edmonton-Castle Downs

have told me. I tabled in the Legislative Assembly quite a few weeks ago the survey I conducted in my riding. It was the Health Care Protection Act survey. It asked three questions, and for the record I'm going to indicate what the questions were.

Question 1:

Have you read Bill 11 since it has been delivered to your [address]?

Yes or No (please circle your response)

Question 2:

Do you favour the passing of this legislation? Yes or No (please circle your response)

If you responded no to question #2 please feel free to express your reasons.

Question 3:

Are you prepared to pay higher taxes for health care? Yes or No (please circle your response)

Then, obviously, a thank you for people that responded.

As well, the survey was conducted with people phoning into the constituency office, and we did contact 200 or 300 people on our own initiative.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, for the record, I have to say that the results of the survey on Bill 11 in the constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs go as follows as of yesterday. The number of people that read the bill, as of yesterday, was 68 percent; 26 people had read the bill. The number of people that have not read the bill was 32 percent, which indicated 12. The number of people in favour of Bill 11: 21 percent, which was 9. The number of people against Bill 11: 79 percent, which in total was 34 people. The number of people that would pay higher taxes for health care: 63 percent said yes. The number of people who would not pay higher taxes for health care: 37 said no.

Mr. Speaker, when you do a survey, of course you incite some sort of conversation, obviously, and a little feedback with respect to the questions that you've asked. One of the reasons that constituents who are opposed to the bill gave to the staff that were doing the survey was that there was no indication that the bill would, in fact, save money to the health care system as it sits now. They were not clear on, did not understand how a private clinic would save money in the public health care system. So that's very simply put; they just don't understand it.

Number two, they had a fear that the passing of the legislation would lead to two-tier health care, and we've heard that. That's been regurgitated many, many times in this Legislative Assembly, that it's going to lead to a two-tier, U.S. health care system. Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that's necessarily the way you interpret the bill, but this is what the constituents of Edmonton-Castle Downs have said. Also, they do not want U.S. involvement in any aspect of the health care system.

Another point, another reason why they do not support the bill: they don't want to pay more for services. They've paid enough for services. They don't feel that there should be any more money put into it. They want the public system to stay the way it is, and, maybe with their heads in the sand, they're saying that it would not cost any more to have the public system the way it is, when in fact that is not the way it's going to work out.

They also have the impression that the bill would leave seniors without health care. I've had a number of seniors who have phoned and said: "Ms Paul, the Alberta health care card is no longer going to be viable. We cannot use our health care card when we go to the hospital. What are we going to do? What are we going to use?" Well, many, many times in this Assembly the Premier has stood up and said that the health care card, the Alberta health care card, is all you need in this province to get attention when you need health care, period, whether that be in the public system or whether that be in a private clinic. That is the key.

Also, Mr. Speaker, in the survey people that opposed the bill were not convinced that it would shorten waiting lists. I'm not sure, in the debates that have gone on in this Legislative Assembly, that it has been proven that yes, it's going to shorten, or has been proven that no, it's not. But I think it's a recommendation and an accomplishment of this government to bring forward a bill that is in fact looking at that solution. Perhaps it is not timely at this point. Maybe the bill is a little premature before we get our house in order. Perhaps in the long run, when the bill is enacted, we will see five years down the road that we do have shorter waiting lists and that we are using our Alberta health care card in our private clinics and in our hospitals.

Also, Mr. Speaker, my constituents felt that they did not want to pay higher taxes for services that are already there or to pay for the extra technology that is required in our health care system. The technology is outpricing our capabilities to pay for what it is we need. Take, for example, the MRI machinery. It's costly. I think a few years ago technology advanced such that we had the bone scan machine. I know a lot of women – and myself in particular, I now have to go for my second bone scan. That machinery is also very expensive, and it is in a private clinic. It is done privately; it is not done through the hospitals. I think we have to be realistic and less emotional about what the intent of the bill is: that perhaps it's going to do this, that perhaps the U.S. is going to come down and swoop us all up in a big umbrella and carry us all off to private hospital land. I, in fact, don't believe that for one minute.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I also have to point out that when the bill was introduced, I think on March 2, there was a flurry of activity in terms of media attention, and a constituent of mine came walking by the office and saw me sitting at the desk. He popped in, shook my hand, and he said: Ms Paul, I want to come in here and talk to you about Bill 11. He had a very heavy British accent. So I said: "Well, by all means. Do sit down, and we'll discuss the bill." He said: you're going to be very surprised as to what I have to say about the bill. Normally you get people in your office that are opposed, rather than people that support, I'm finding out. He said: I wholeheartedly support the bill. I tabled his letter in the Legislative Assembly.

He gave me six good reasons why. His family is still in Great Britain. There is a public system, and there is a private system. He's had three family members who needed health care. They needed it quickly and it was there, and he said that it was in the private system. Now, whether that was a clinic or a hospital, he didn't say. I think that speaks volumes. He said, "Please table my letter," which I did.

He is in full support of the bill, but he has reservations. He thinks perhaps the bill has not gone far enough in defining or maybe in bringing a private hospital fully and completely into Alberta. He fully believes that a private hospital is the way to go. I tried to point out to him in the bill that a private hospital is not going to be allowed in this province. All the bill addresses is private clinics, which will do minor surgeries encompassing overnight stays, which are needed if you have minor surgery. I don't care how you cut the apple; you have to stay in the hospital if you have minor surgery.

Mr. Speaker, getting back to the principle of the bill, I also have to speak about the need for change and the need for the clinics. I think the need for change comes from, as I've alluded to earlier, the costs that are involved in running a hospital. Many times in this Leg. the question has been raised, has been yelled back and forth: what is a private clinic as opposed to a hospital? Well, I asked my neighbours and I asked some people that walked into my office: what do you envision as a private clinic as opposed to a hospital? What is a public hospital? A public hospital is a place where you go for a number of services. You go because you have an emergency. You have a heart attack. You have kidney failure. You have an aneu-

rysm. You have encompassed in that building, in that public building, all the machinery, all the equipment, all the staff to deal with all the emergencies.

When you go to a private clinic, you go for perhaps foot surgery, minor foot surgery that you need to stay overnight for. That private clinic, in my view, will be specialized to do and to address the needs of whatever the clinic has been set up to do. In fact what you have is an alleviation of time and room in a public hospital that can be left for the emergencies while you're dealing with an issue or a health care problem in a clinic. So I think it's rather simple, and to use the KISS philosophy, please keep it simple. I mean, that's how I view the bill. That's how I view the intent of the bill.

4:50

I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to figure out that the bill itself on its merit, if it's going to be carried through the way it is written, with the amendments that have come before the Legislative Assembly – the amendments enhanced the principle of the bill. The amendments I think talk to the concerns that a lot of Albertans have had with respect to the bill. The amendments were absolutely necessary. I know that members of the opposition had a number of excellent amendments they were ready to bring forward, and it's unfortunate that time was not allotted to everybody to bring forward what they felt was needed for a good, fair, democratic debate. I do believe though, Mr. Speaker, that anybody wishing to speak to the bill in the process we went through certainly was given ample opportunity.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat spoke before I did, and I can attest to the comments that he made. I was at a conference in Medicine Hat for two days, a poverty conference, and I was sitting beside a minister at lunchtime. Of course, the famous bill came up because I asked questions. How do your parishioners feel about the bill? Is there any debate going on? Have you heard any rumblings pro or con? He said: "In fairness, I have to tell you that I've heard nothing. I've read a little bit about it in the paper." He said that he's not swayed by party politics. He's not swayed by "I am a Liberal" or "I am a government member." I'm an independent. It made no difference to me what his comments were. In fact, I did ask a few other people, and I got the same response.

Then I went to Camrose to speak at a banquet on Saturday, and I asked the same questions. Now, there were concerns. There were concerns from people at the banquet, and the concerns expressed were exactly what I've addressed about the health care card. They did not understand that your Alberta health care card is what you need to get services still in the province of Alberta. I think, Mr. Speaker, that that really needs to be stressed and really pointed out.

But, and as an independent is allowed to say, there is the good side and there is the bad side. You can imagine, Mr. Speaker, how I've been surveying this bill. I've been wrestling with when and how to approach speaking to the bill. I waited, because I wanted the survey done in my riding to be open and fair. I've left my constituents enough time to phone in if they're in agreement with the principles of the bill or if they're opposed to the principles of the bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those comments, with my reading of the results of what has been found in the survey, and in all fairness to the constituents of Edmonton-Castle Downs, I will not be supporting the bill, because it is their wish. It is their wish that I do not support the bill. As I pointed out, 79 percent of them have said that they oppose the bill, and it is not up to me and my personal opinion to stand in the way of how the constituents want me to vote. I'm not going to be swayed by political agendas. I'm not being swayed by party politics. I am going to do what the constituents of Edmonton-Castle

Downs have told me to do. They have asked me to not support the bill, and in fact that's what I will be doing.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I represent a rural constituency. I'm proud to represent a rural constituency. I'm also a fiscal conservative and proud to be one.

I think before I begin today, because this debate and what I'm going to say today is for the benefit of my constituents, I want to go back a few years to 1966, when the Medical Care Act of 1966 was proposed. It was an arrangement in which the federal government would pay 50 percent of the national per capita cost of insured services. So 50 percent would be paid by the provinces and 50 percent paid by the federal government.

Today we are certainly not anywhere near that original commitment of 50 percent. We're representing something like 13 percent. Back in 1966, \$34 was spent per person, and today that equates to \$1,600. It's been said in this House before that that's a 47 percent increase in 34 years. If this rate of increase were to continue for the next 34 years – and at this point we have no reason to doubt that it wouldn't, that the demand on the system will be there – we could see this increase come in at approximately \$75,000 per person. So for every man, woman, and child in this province, to cover their health care costs as needed, as required, as exists today, that would be the cost. Can we afford that? I don't think so.

We need to sustain in the long term our health care system. In today's world we have new technologies that are rapidly changing as we speak. More doctors are using new technologies – MRIs, CAT scans, et cetera – for diagnosis. People are living longer. People are requiring more help to do with prevention and the curing of diseases, and of course we want to continue what we're doing with research. All this costs money, lots and lots of money. Today we're spending \$15.5 million a day on health care. I don't say that begrudgingly; it's necessary. But we also have to look at new and innovative approaches to managing and to ensuring that our health care in the long term is sustainable, not just for me when I turn 65 and require more help and care than I do today but for my children and possibly grandchildren, if I ever have any.

I want to talk a little bit about why I will support Bill 11 and about a lot of the confusion regarding it. Bill 11 is about one option and one option only: allowing regional health authorities to contract out certain surgeries to private surgical clinics. The goal is straightforward. It's to reduce waiting times and increase overall efficiencies; nothing more, nothing less. If we can achieve this, it will go a long way to helping people move very quickly through procedures and through the system, alleviating a lot of stress on them, on their families, and on their health practitioners.

I am not a professional so that I would know what surgeries could in fact be done in these facilities. I would want to leave those decisions to the people in the know. The people in the know in this province are physicians, are medical practitioners. They will be the people that will decide, and they will be the people that will make sure that the criteria and standards are in place for these facilities. If they say that a procedure isn't minor but is major and shouldn't be done, I'm not going to argue with that nor, I think, would any Albertan or any politician. I'm sure that in today's world, with all the technology and all the expertise they have, they can make a determination on what can be done safely in that type of environment.

We have said that there will be no private hospitals or a parallel health system. One of the biggest concerns of my constituents is the

possibility of a two-tiered health care system. Part of this has come from a lot of debate that has taken place over the last several months. I recall when the discussion paper first came out, and the opposition and the media were making sure that this hit the airwaves and was certainly on the front pages of newspapers. American style health care was talked about. Nothing could be further from the truth. If you take a look at what American health care is, under the American there are two separate routes in which you can go. One is the public system, and one is the private system. We are not suggesting that.

For the sake of argument, quite simply, I see that what we're trying to do is have someone else provide the bricks and mortar. In today's world, in the accounting world, as changed over the last several years, accountants now are telling prospective business entrepreneurs to lease or rent buildings: do not put up the bricks and mortar; over the long term it will be best if you lease or rent space. This is a complete about-turn from the last 20 years, when everyone was encouraged to build a building and possibly to even take leased people into their working partnership.

5:00

But no. This is about contracting for certain surgeries: minor surgeries. We have talked recently in this Legislature about several people that have had a very difficult time getting into the hospital for cancer treatments. I believe that if this bill were put in place and implemented, we would see a number of beds freed up, beds that would allow people that are terminally ill, acutely ill, to utilize those beds and allow those people that need an overnight stay to have that procedure done quickly, efficiently, and effectively by a team of doctors in a private facility that understands and every day does those procedures and does them well.

I just find it rather difficult that we cannot see that competition in the health care field is good and necessary. We already in this province are contracting out a number of procedures in a number of areas within health, and private providers are doing an excellent job. This would just be one more area where they could excel. This does not mean we will have a two-tiered, American style health care system. That is not the Alberta solution. It is not one that I would want. It is not one my family would want, my friends would want, my colleagues would want, or my constituents would want.

Another area we have to look at is that we have to give credit where credit is due. For many, many months and for many, many hours I have sat in this House and listened to negativity. We can be very, very proud in this province of what we've achieved to date as far as our fiscal house, what we want to achieve in the future. We have so many, many exciting things happening in this province. My community, namely my hometown of Lacombe, is growing rapidly. We have several, several new housing starts, and we have so many things that we can look forward to with anticipation, with anticipated growth.

I think we need to put this bill behind us and move on. I believe the proof will be in the pudding. If this bill is passed, which it will be, and it is implemented, I can tell my constituents that they will not be impacted negatively by this bill. They will not be. When I go to the doctor, and if he says he wants me to see a specialist and I don't particularly want to see that individual – because we all know there are some people that you can relate well to, and I'm talking about specialists. If I were to say to my family doctor, "I do not wish to see that doctor," he doesn't send me there. We find a doctor that I will agree to go to. If a patient goes to the doctor and he says, "I'm going to send you to this medical facility that only does hernias," if you need a hernia operation, for instance – if you as the patient and as the consumer do not want to go there, you do not have to. So there is a choice.

Another thing that I think I need to say for the benefit of my constituents, for those people that have a hard time grasping this concept – one confusing word in all of this is insured services. Insured services are strictly medically necessary services that your doctor says you must have, and these services will be paid for by Alberta health care. They're medically necessary; thus, they are covered. When people talk about insured services, some of the elderly believe you have to go out and purchase private health care insurance. This is not so. We have said through this bill that if you're deemed to have this procedure done, in fact it will be paid for through the public system, under the single-payer system.

Also, we talk about queue-jumping. Now, there's some confusion on that too. There's queue-jumping, and then there's a medical doctor prioritizing his patients' needs, and often – often – doctors will prioritize what procedure and when they need it done. Often in emergency situations their patients get priority. That's very, very different than someone jumping the queue.

I think something to consider is that we will see competition in the health care system, and imagine what we can improve in Canadian health care through private competition. Is that a dirty word? Competition where I come from, my background being accounting, has always been healthy. It makes businesses work harder, and it makes people work harder.

Also something else that hasn't been said. I know there are a number of doctors in this province that due to lack of operating rooms are not able to operate. These doctors could well find a place in this type of facility doing something they do well, a procedure they do very, very well.

As well, wages in these facilities will be reduced. We don't need studies, whether they be U.S. studies or anyone else's studies, to know that unionized wages versus non-unionized wages are very, very different. There's no reason why a facility would need to hire doctors on a fee for service. They could well be paid a salary. As well, nurses don't necessarily need to be unionized, nor support staff. These are things that would certainly have to be considered in conjunction with the facility.

Is there proof that using the surgical facilities will save money? I'm asked that time and time again. No, there is no proof. The proof will have to be implementation. The proof will have to be in the evaluation, and time will be the proof.

The key objective of this proposal is to reduce waiting lists, to reduce waiting times. If contracting out certain surgeries remains under the control and within the budgets of the regional health authorities, they will be the people that will decide if it makes good sense to contract this out. Obviously, there's a lot of criteria and some standards that will be put in place that way so that they will have to look at each and every proposal on its own merit.

In speaking with a number of regional health authorities and some of their CEOs around the province, I can't say that we will see a lot of movement in this direction over the next little while. I know that in my own community of Lacombe there's one wing in the hospital that has been sitting vacant for some time, and with our amendments we talked about using some of this unutilized space first. I don't want to see that space in Lacombe hospital go to one of these facilities, because at the rate Lacombe is growing, we will in fact very, very shortly need that as an acute care wing. So I think there are a lot of things that will have to be taken into consideration in the final analysis. However, I think we have to be optimistic as an Assembly. I think we have to be optimistic as Albertans. Health care, if we are to continue with the status quo, is not – not – sustainable in the long term.

Something I found rather strange throughout this entire debate: the many, many hours in this House, with media, forums, et cetera. Two

things: one, some people did not want to talk about this at all. They had their minds made up. That was evident to me in a forum that was held in Lacombe about two and a half months ago. The Minister of Health and Wellness is my nearest MLA colleague neighbour north of me and had volunteered to come down and sit in on that particular forum. There were four of us on the panel, one being the Leader of the Official Opposition. The Minister of Health and Wellness was refused comment. He was not allowed to assist whatsoever in that forum or that debate. It was unbelievable. People came in there with closed minds, and I think that's very, very unfortunate, because if nothing's ventured, nothing's gained.

5:10

Something else I find very, very strange is that all the talk in this Assembly has been no, no, no, but not one solution, nothing that would add to: if we don't do this, what can we do to sustain health care in the long term? Amendments coming forward from the Official Opposition were talked about. Your amendments could have been tabled in the Assembly. Your amendments could have been tabled at second reading. Your amendments could have been tabled very early on in this discussion. Then we could have looked at them, the government could have considered them, and maybe we could have worked together for some type of compromise. But there were no amendments.

I want to say before I sit down that I am a believer in Canada. I'm a believer in Alberta. I believe in medicare, and I thank Tommy Douglas for his insight and for the goal that he achieved. But my understanding is that when Tommy Douglas brought this in, there was a great deal of opposition, and people said that it wouldn't work. I hope, Tommy, that you are watching today and can see what's transpiring in this House, because I believe that a couple of years from now people will say, "I don't know what all that hullabaloo was about. This is working. It hasn't impacted my life a great deal." We will have at that point in time, I hope, come to terms along with the federal government and the other provinces, put together a national debate on health care, and we have in this province committed to paper a long-term plan that the people of this province can see and work with, because that's what my constituents are telling me. This is something that I'm saying here publicly and I stand behind. We don't need short-term solutions; we need a solution in the long term. We need people to put aside their hostilities. We need stakeholders to sit down at the table and address for the future of this province and the future of Canada health care and how it's going to be delivered efficiently, effectively, and with some financial responsibility.

Also, another area that I would like to say publicly: some of my constituents that are against this bill would like to see conflict of interest guidelines put together by the province so they are uniform and so each and every regional health authority is singing from the same songbook. I can go along with that.

I also want to tell my constituents, as a final note, that this is not the slippery slope. It can't be the slippery slope because we are only going to do this one small area, and as we go ahead and implement this, we will have to evaluate it and make sure it is working in accordance with what we wanted. But in the long term I want a commitment from this government and all governments in Canada and Allan Rock and Prime Minister Chretien that we get on with a national debate on health care and put in place something that is sustainable.

I would ask my constituents to keep me informed as to their concerns regarding this even after it's passed, and together we will try to ensure that some of their concerns are looked at. Not all of their concerns with health care have to do with Bill 11. We also

have a long way to go with an exciting and an excellent report by my hon. colleague here from Redwater, the Broda report. Long-term care is something we must address, but for now we need to vote and implement Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege and a pleasure to speak to this bill at third reading. This bill was cut short in committee, and being unable to be in attendance, I was not allowed to speak to some of the many, many amendments that should have and could have been made.

However, this bill is perhaps the most important bill that this Legislature has seen in my time, since 1993, certainly by the response from the public. The public should be our guide, in fact. Those that pooh-pooh that from the other side should take note that they are our masters and we the servants and not the other way about.

All of Canada is looking at and reviewing that which is happening in this Legislature and how it will fall out over the rest of Canada. In fact, it's true that changes must occur, as they always must occur in every piece of legislation as time does evolve. There are changes in society that must be reflected in legislation. Unfortunately, these changes have many, many people in this part of our world very concerned, and rightly so.

The ones that are most concerned are those in this society who have spent a great deal of time on this Earth. I'm talking of people that we normally call seniors, any of those that are over 60 and have had some health problems and had some concerns. Those people will tell you that there are only two really important things in their lives: their family and their health. Everything else is secondary. All the money, all the material goods, all the holidays, all the wonderful things and gadgets and gizmos that they have in their kitchens and their cars and their RVs and all of the rest of that matters very, very little when your family is threatened or your health is threatened.

So this is a piece of legislation that concerns those people, and rightly so. All across Canada, from sea to sea to the Arctic Ocean, these people are concerned and are watching. There is no second-guessing these people. Some of them have made up their minds, and others have not. Most are hoping that this Legislature and other Legislatures deal with this in a reasonable manner and deal with the facts.

The question is always: why this kind of change and this kind of bill? The first argument that is always presented is that health care as we know it in Canada cannot be sustained; we can't afford it; we cannot afford the status quo. Well, if that was the case, then why was the last solution of this government to chop health care? In 1994-95 those funds that were allocated for health care in the budget were cut and cut drastically. Was that a solution? If that was a solution, then the status quo would certainly not be adequate at that point. It was decimated, decimated to the point that it had a great deal of difficulty coming back from where we were on that date.

You recognize that one of the original studies in 1964 by now Justice Emmett Hall, then, I believe, a cabinet minister, estimated the cost relative to the gross domestic product to be considerably greater than it is today, and it would be then still sustainable. He reckoned that it would be 20 percent more than it is actually today. In fact, currently health care expenditures are 10.2 percent of Canada's GDP, gross domestic product, which some may consider high, but certainly not near what the United States is at 14.1 percent. I'll say that the health care delivery in that country is roundly condemned in this. To those that would say that it is better, it is only better if you have the cash and certainly not better for the citizenry.

Canadians are different in that respect. I have personal knowledge of that having a brother and a sister living in the United States, and we compare notes all the time. As a matter of fact, we just did it last week. They concur that the Canadian system is far superior to what they have to deal with even though they're relatively wealthy and have their health care providers and insurance corporations. They seem to do reasonably well for them but certainly don't do well for their neighbours and their staff.

5:20

The second argument that's always put is that health care expenses are out of control. The facts are that health care expenses have never been out of control. They've always, always been relatively well controlled by the relative governments. Yes, the expenses are rising and are drug related. Doctors' salaries are up perhaps as much as 15 percent. The main causes are the salary of professionals and the management of professional systems, which in this province has not dropped one iota and in fact has increased in percentage over the course of the last four years, much to the chagrin of the government, I'm sure. In fact, the prices of the 10 most frequently used drugs are the cause of a great deal of the increased costs in health care.

The third argument that is always put is that the public health care system must be privatized to reduce cost and shorten waiting lists and create a healthier competition. Well, that is the exact definition of the American system, and if that were the case, then the argument would absolutely hold true that the American system is a better system. I think that it's pretty well universally understood inside and outside this Legislature that that is certainly not the case. In fact, the mortality rate for newborns in the United States is considerably higher than it is in Canada and, in fact, a great deal higher than it is in northern Europe, which has a fully functioning and public health care system and has banned private health care systems.

The fourth argument that is always presented, too, is that Canadians are now willing to accept the partial privatization of their health care system. Well, that may be so, but that's a matter of political will. Certainly it's influenced by the first two arguments, which say that we can't afford to pay and that the costs are out of control. The counterargument to that, of course, is that when surveyed, Canadians are willing to spend considerably more. Seventy-three percent in Canada and I think about 65 percent in Alberta are willing to pay more for their health care system, and they're willing to pay more in the way of tax.

The fifth argument that is always being put is that our governments can never achieve efficiency, that government by its very nature is not as efficient as the private sector. That is not the case in all instances. Certainly in a great deal it is. There are a number of areas, contracting and service cleaning and that sort of thing, where the private sector does and should be allowed to compete. In fact, in most of those kinds of service areas the government really has no place being in that business.

But here we're dealing with the deliverance of health care. By and large, there is no more vulnerable time – perhaps there is in the death of a family member and dealing with the funeral services – to have your pocket picked or to have a service rendered that is more expensive than you would normally negotiate than in health care. Health care is the one area that does elicit that response of some immediacy. If you're dealing with the illness of a child and the like, that certainly does require that kind of immediate response, and the wallet falls open.

It's also an area in government-paid health care where there is no point-of-sale contract or transaction that can be made. If you go in to a doctor in a public health care system, the average soul does not

know what the billing is from that private practitioner to the system. In fact, they should not know. That is the wrong place to be dealing with the vagaries of negotiating contracts at that time. That is not the place to do it.

So when you come down to it, that argument holds some water, agreed, but the alternative is a private health care system such as has been experimented with in England, which is an absolute disaster if you ask any of those that are there. New Zealand certainly has had a disaster, and any of the relevant studies by any Canadian or American universities in the health care field will tell you that there is no basis of evidence that public and private health care systems can work side by side efficiently.

The last argument is that we should follow the European experience. Well, that does not hold any water whatever in that the successful operation of a publicly paid for health care system in northern Europe is in fact the example that Canada is using today, and in fact it is most, most efficient. The argument falls short.

Now, the argument that we hear in Alberta is the need to control the current facilities. Well, that is absolute balderdash. This is a contractual arrangement between a health authority and a provider. It is a contract. When you negotiate a contract, you negotiate the terms. If you do have the cash and if those that you're contracting with do not agree with the terms, you don't sign the contract. All of that does not need legislation and should never have needed legislation.

Let's finish with that argument, the need for control. If that were the case, then in the seven years that this member has been here, why was that control not instituted? That's regulation. It needn't have the weight of a bill and certainly not at this late date.

The same can be said for waiting lists. We hear the great hue and cry that waiting lists must be reduced. Well, the fact is that there is a shortage of doctors in this province primarily because of this government's ill-fated attempt to reduce costs by just closing their eyes and chopping budgets. In fact, the same personnel is expected to be used for the operations to reduce those waiting lists, whether it be in the public or the private system.

So how do you reduce waiting lists if you still have the same number of practitioners? In fact, it'll be the same operating theatres. You're not going to invent operating theatres when they are available in the public system now because they are not fully utilized. So the bricks and mortar argument may work some 10 years down the road, but the fact is that there are more hospital beds, more operating theatres in this province that are underutilized than in any province and certainly in any state in the United States.

Queue-jumping. We're saying that this will reduce queue-jumping. Absolute nonsense. Absolutely. When you have two systems working, my personal experience, having my brother in Kentucky, will tell you exactly what it is. When you have a private health care system that you can go to and say, "I want to have this kind of special service," because it's either not insured or a little is added for its service, you don't think that's not going to occur? That's competition. That's the way private enterprise does work and does work in many, many areas exceedingly well, but this particular case is not one of those areas.

There is one argument that does in fact hold water, and that is the reduced costs by way of reducing union staff.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I must regrettably inform you that the time allocated for this matter of business for this afternoon has now elapsed.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 9, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/05/09

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 11

Health Care Protection Act

Mr. Klapstein moved that pursuant to Standing Order 47 the previous question be now put.

[Debate adjourned May 9: Mr. White speaking]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. Continuing along from whence I left off before the break, I was going through the whys and wherefores for Alberta and the arguments put by those in the Legislature here that are in support of this bill. One of the rationales for support of this bill was so as not to have the public purse pay for bricks and mortar, as it were, for the deliverance of health care. That argument holds very, very little water in a province that has an overabundance of hospital beds, an overabundance of useful hours in operating theatres, and a woeful shortage of that which is not bricks and mortar, which is the surgeons, the nursing staff, and the like.

Now, to carry that argument to conclusion, the bricks and mortar should be provided. Perhaps someday way out in the future that may be so, that the private sector may be able to build these highly specialized beds, as it were, or highly specialized facilities, but certainly in the short term that argument does not hold and should not hold.

There is one argument, however, that does hold some water in the argument when speaking in favour of this bill that the government speaks of, and that is that any private-sector operator would not be paying union wages to the staff. Now, that's the upside. The downside is that to get good staff, you have to pay them, and the going rate is the union rate. In fact, in operating theatres those highly specialized staff are in woefully short supply at the moment, and if you ask any of the physicians that also happen to be surgeons in this province, they will tell you that that good help is hard to find.

Now, recovery staff and the ICUs and the like of course are also in very short supply. I suppose that for the cleaning staff, the secondary and tertiary staff, there would be some savings in using the private sector as opposed to public-sector union staff, but personally I believe it would be folly to hang an entire bill on the basis of the secondary and tertiary staff and the differential in their salaries.

The "why" follows also to the political why. There is a major downside and a major fallout, and I'm sure it's not lost on those members of the government and it certainly isn't lost on the members of the opposition that all of a sudden we're popular and there's a speaker speaking in the barber shops of what closure is and what it does. There's an amazing amount of interest in this particular bill and in fact the whole process. The argument has moved a long way in the political capital area from a discussion of Bill 11 to a discussion of arrogance and a feeling that this government, in this member's view, is not listening.

Of course, the government will say that in fact they are listening

and listening very well, but the public is saying that. When that gets down to the old grassroots level and they're talking about it in cabs and they're talking about it in between halves of the kids' soccer games and that sort of thing, when people are standing about just having a chat, that's dangerous for a government. I don't understand how this government would allow themselves to be put in that position and be reduced to those kinds of arguments, having to spend in the order of 2 million, 2 and a half million, 3 million, whatever, dollars of government money to try to sell this bill and coming up very, very short.

Looking at the polls that even we get copies of – even though we don't have the budget to pay for them, we get copies of them – the support for the government on this particular bill is dwindling and dwindling rapidly. I don't see the rationale for it. Then to have the Premier stand day in and day out in this Legislature and instead of presenting an argument in favour of the bill or the policy, as it were, when questioned, the Premier strikes back at all the things that Leader of the Opposition did or didn't do some seven to 10 years ago, in a totally different era of government, a totally different setting, and the government is not saying anything about . . . [Mr. White's speaking time expired]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I know Bill 11 has been thoroughly debated and there's not much left unsaid, I would like to add just a few comments. I have been involved with and had an interest in health care for a number of years, sitting as a health unit board member for five years, chairing a regional health authority for a few years, and now chairing our standing policy committee on health and safe communities. Over the years I've watched health care evolve and marveled at the many exciting advances in the field, but as well I have struggled with some of the issues surrounding sustainability and have come to understand fairly well the challenges facing health care today.

I've witnessed the increasing role that the private sector and private health care providers have played over the last 20 years in our health system, a trend, I believe, that will continue with or without this bill. Our government needs to establish clear rules regarding the circumstances under which contracting may occur and ensure that private surgical facilities do not operate outside the control of the public system.

In some ways I looked forward to the public debate because I thought it could accomplish a number of beneficial objectives over and above determining criteria for regulating private surgical facilities, and to an extent it did. I've always thought that if we truly wanted to experience health reform and not just restructuring in this province, we needed a better understanding of what currently exists. Without that understanding, we can't be clear on where it is we want to go.

While there has been much confusion and misinformation around the motivation and intent of Bill 11, I do think that Albertans for the most part are now more knowledgeable about our current system and some possibilities for the future. The debate has also forced this province and its people to articulate their values with respect to health care, and I think that regardless of perspectives Albertans have clearly affirmed a commitment and a very strong commitment to protecting and improving a quality, publicly funded and administered health system that is accessible to all Albertans when they need it.

Because of the mixed messages sent to the public from a variety of sources with different agendas, we have had a public reaction to far more than Bill 11. Health care is of utmost importance to all of

us, and discussions on issues can get emotionally charged and involve passionate responses. In the midst of debate a number of issues have been raised that have little if anything to do with the bill but are nonetheless extremely important to Albertans. These issues need not be lost, and in fact I think they have given government the opportunity to reaffirm Albertans' priorities and continue to work on other initiatives that will also benefit our health system and impact waiting lists.

Mr. Speaker, with both the policy statement of last fall and subsequently Bill 11 I have encouraged constituents to get involved, read the bill, ask questions, and let me know what they think. As I am sure is the case in every constituency across the province, I have heard from many and from many different perspectives. But when all is said and done, most constituents support the Canada Health Act, they do not want a two-tiered system, they do not want patients being charged for insured services, they do not want queue-jumping, and they do not want the role of private surgical facilities enhanced if there is not a net benefit to the public system. Bill 11 reflects those positions while also allowing us to look at innovative ways of delivering health services so people get the care they need when they need it.

Our job does not end with debate on this bill. We all need to ensure that the Health Care Protection Act does exactly that: protects our public health care system.

8:10

In closing, Mr. Speaker, the challenges facing health care exist from one end of this country to the other. We are not alone. But I do have confidence that Alberta is the province in the best position to successfully meet these challenges. Bill 11 is but one part of our government's plan to meet these challenges. Let's leave the rhetoric and our differences behind us now and work diligently towards the success of that plan.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to spend a few moments speaking to the motion that was brought before us that "the question be now put." That is certainly a form of closure, and it is quite surprising that we would have seen it in this Legislature only days after the Premier told us that that wouldn't be happening. Unfortunately, we saw it and saw it brought in by a surprising member, the Member for Leduc.

Last week I was speaking to some of the Member for Leduc's constituents, and some of them were very upset about the progress on Bill 11. One of the women in the group said that she was sure her MLA would be voting the way the majority of the people in that constituency wanted, and that was against Bill 11. She was quite surprised to find out, then, that that particular member had supported the caucus decision to not have a free vote on the issue and to follow the party decision rather than the constituents' wishes. Then she diligently observed the voting last week, when not a single government member voted against any aspect of the bill at the committee stage when closure was brought in.

Then what happens this week? After only one of our speakers at third reading the Member for Leduc brings in another form of closure by asking that the question be now put. So not only is this particular member not going to be representing his constituents and their wishes, Mr. Speaker, the ones that I talked to at any rate, he is fully supportive of closure on the democratic right of MLAs to speak on behalf of the people of this province. That is quite appalling.

What that means is that we don't have very much time left to speak on Bill 11, so we have to make some choices in terms of which issues we will address.

I still have hundreds of letters and e-mails and questions put to me by people in the constituencies throughout the province and amongst those who have gathered outside the Legislature during this particular debate. To choose who to represent here this evening in terms of actual quotes is tough, Mr. Speaker, but I think I'm going to start with the young people, the students. Many of those students will be voters in the next election and are taking a far greater interest in politics in their 17th and 18th years as grades 11 and 12 students than I ever did at that age. Of course, we didn't have private health care being rammed down our throats either at that time.

I certainly would like to applaud those young people and their interest in the process, and I'm going to share a few of their comments with the government caucus at this late hour on this bill in the hopes that perhaps when MLAs go back to their constituencies and they think about the job they have in representing people and that new crop of voters coming up ready for next year, they will think about how important it is to represent the people first and the party second.

This person's name is Gregory Joseph Trumble, and he attends Holy Trinity high school. He says that he was surprised that the Premier would do such a thing as bring in Bill 11. "Instead of fixing the Public Health Care, he introduces this Private System that is supposed to cost less money." He wants to know, "Where is his 'proof'!" I want to know that, as do people sitting in the gallery and most Albertans. "This bill does not get my support," he says, "and neither does [the Premier] get my support in the next election."

Now, Greg is part of a social 30 classroom at Holy Trinity school that took the householders that the government sent out, went through them line by line, clause by clause, and had a serious debate in their classroom. When they had gone through almost three-quarters of all of the work they were going to do on the bill, they asked me to come in and explain some sections to them. In that class of over 30 students – and over 30 students in a social 30 class is also an issue that we will address when we get to education as being an issue in this province, Mr. Premier. Of those students, there were at the end of the day about four of them who were undecided on the bill and one or two who liked certain parts of it, but the majority of them were opposed.

At that point I asked those students who were interested in it to write me, regardless of their position on the bill, and that I would do my best to reflect those wishes here in the Legislature. These are the letters that I'm speaking from now.

The next person is Angelena Charbonneau, who is also from that school. She says:

I do not support Bill 11 . . . We have a democracy. The majority of the people get their way. Unfortunately, most people support [the Premier] because he promises better health care, better education, etc., to the people who can afford it.

She says that "everyone deserves to get equal health care." I think everybody in this province believes that, Mr. Speaker. "No one should be told they have to wait 6 months" because they have less money than others, who only have to wait two weeks or shorter time periods. She says, "It just is not fair." There she is specifically speaking about the current situations that we have with MRIs, cataract surgeries, and those kinds of surgeries where we now see that people can queue-jump.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has talked about there being no queue-jumping allowed with this bill, but what he's talking about there is people moving in the same line from the back to the front. Of course, there's another form of queue-jumping, and that's when you

move from the long public health care lineup to a much shorter private health care lineup. That also is queue-jumping, and those who can afford to pay get to the front of the line a lot faster than those who can't. That will continue to be a serious concern with this legislation regardless of what this government has tried to convince people of otherwise.

Randy Chua has this to say: "There was no evidence to back their claims up." This is the government. When he couldn't find anything, he became more interested. "Could you please continue to tackle the issue of where they are receiving their evidence from?" You know, Mr. Speaker, we've repeatedly asked for that evidence to be tabled in this Legislature, and unfortunately it has not been forthcoming.

This government has ranted and raved over the past couple of weeks about the number of hours accumulating in debate on this bill. Mr. Speaker, the fact is that in spite of the number of hours accumulating here, we have not seen one shred of evidence yet tabled in this Legislature to prove that private health care will either cost less money for the average taxpayer or will shorten waiting lines or improve our overall service. In fact, the evidence does not exist. That is why this government wants to move off this bill as fast as it possibly can, because they don't have any evidence to support their claims.

Randy then says, "Ask them why they want private hospitals if they are not even certain whether they will benefit the people." Well, that's a very good question, Mr. Speaker, and one, again, that we have not had an answer to through this legislative debate. That's a question I heard from many people, from people outside of the Legislature too. If it won't benefit the people, the question remains: who does it benefit? That's a question that remains outside, looming large, yet to be answered. I guess over time we will see who gets rich out of this scheme, but it certainly isn't going to be the average Albertan taxpayer. There is certainly no indication at this time that they will receive better service as a result of what's happening here.

The next letter is from Olivia Rasa. She says:

If [the Premier] doesn't even believe in the normal health system not designed for the rich, then why would I want to go to the regular hospitals also? If it's not good enough for him, then why would it be good enough for the rest of the Albertans and certainly not good enough for me. I oppose Bill 11, and I speak on the behalf of the people who oppose this bill by saying: no, we don't want it. So get rid of it and just fix up what our problems are right now. Don't just push it aside and replace the problem. Deal with it first. It is the first stepping stone.

I think that's a very good point. Why hasn't the Premier addressed the outstanding issues in the public system right now?

The primary issues facing us are shortages of doctors and nurses. That leads to beds being not opened that are currently available within the hospital system. Why don't they just address that critical problem first? That problem is not going to go away once private hospitals are introduced. In fact, the problem is only going to get worse, Mr. Speaker. They've had an opportunity, since they initiated the cuts and since they saw that first wave of nurses and doctors leaving this province, to address that very real problem.

We are in an absolutely critical shortage in terms of doctors in rural Alberta, and the stress and strain on nurses in this province is unbelievable in this time period. They are dealing with a workload that is practically beyond human capacity to absorb, yet this government refuses to deal with the issue directly and head-on. They're tinkering around the edges. They're in consultations. They're talking to everybody they can think of. But what we don't see are more people being trained, more people being put in the field, or systems being set in place to attract nurses and doctors from other locales.

8:20

It's a critical issue. It's the first issue that they could have tackled in terms of addressing this problem. Let's fix the problems we have first. Let's get those hospital beds open. Let's ensure that they have adequate resources to run them. Let's figure out what that costs. Let's figure out what problems can be eliminated, what efficiencies can be found in the meantime, efficiencies that don't harm people in terms of not providing sufficient resources or doubling workloads on existing staff. Let's address those current issues first and then see where we are in the health care system.

All of those problems will continue to remain regardless of what they do by setting up private clinics, Mr. Speaker. Not a single one of those problems is going to go away. In fact, those problems will all get worse because now the private systems are going to be competing for those same resources. What happens when you have a competition like that? You drive costs up, and that's not what Albertans want to see. They do not want to see health care costs increase. I think that those are very real concerns.

To go on with what Olivia was saying, she says:

I want you to inform [the Premier] that in 2 weeks I will be turning 18, which means when election time comes around I will remember what [the Premier] has done to us and I will refuse to ever vote him back in. We young people are the voice and vote of the future. The true question is: now will you listen to it?

Well, I think that's also an excellent question and one that the Premier needs to discuss.

The next letter is from Jason Doucette, who happens to be the president of the Holy Trinity student council. Mr. Speaker, he sent me a copy of a letter that he had originally sent to the junior minister of health. The junior minister of health refused to respond to it because he did not believe that Jason was from his constituency, because Jason wrote on behalf of the high school, a high school that does certainly service the students who do live in his constituency. He made a mistake in that, because Jason Doucette does in fact live in the junior minister of health's constituency, and Jason is not very happy that he could not get a response from this particular minister.

What he said in this letter to the junior minister was that he's got a few concerns about what's happening.

The bill states that government will support the private facilities and the patient will just pay for upgrades. As a result, won't the budget for the public health care decrease? The people who are not as fortunate as others will have to go to public health care and have a lower standard of treatment because of the decreased budget.

Also, who is going to make sure that the private facilities don't get paid by both the patients and the government? Since it is a private facility, the doctors will turn into salesmen.

A very real concern when they're pushing upgraded services, where the money is for them. It's an issue for people using the system.

They will try to sell the most expensive upgrades for the facilities to make profit.

Finally, the main concern I have is the future compliance with NAFTA. The U.S.A will start introducing their own facilities here. This is a step closer to the American system. Are private facilities worth the risk of opening business up for the U.S.? I believe that private facilities have no place in Alberta and Canada.

I'm sorry; I made a mistake earlier, Mr. Speaker. This letter is actually from Joel Tambaoan, who is the president of Holy Trinity student council. We'll get to Jason's in a minute.

MR. SMITH: Another mix-up.

MS CARLSON: It's not me who made the mix-up, Mr. Minister. It was the junior minister of health, who refused to respond . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order

Referring to Proper Titles

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the member is well aware that there is no junior minister of health in this Legislature. It's the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness, and I'd ask that she simply refer to him by his appropriate title.

Thank you.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order. We've had many occasions when that particular minister has been referred to as the junior minister, and it has been accepted by this Legislative Assembly as a practice.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, the chair does not recall such an occasion, unless it slipped by. We've had, over the years, people refer to members as the hon. member without purpose and that kind of thing. That is not allowable. You know the protocol, hon. member, and it's just a general reminder to you to remember that as opposed to defending what's not defensible.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will keep that in mind.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: When this person sent this letter with very excellent concerns and questions – NAFTA concerns, upgrade concerns, and private facility concerns – tell me why that particular minister wouldn't respond. We're talking about a key person in the community. This is the president of Holy Trinity student council, who is reflecting the concerns of the council and therefore the concerns of the students and of the constituents of Mill Woods, many of whom come from that particular member's riding. Yet what this minister said is:

If your residential address is within the Edmonton Mill Creek area, please complete the following and return your E-mail. Comments, concerns, ideas gathered from this address are used . . . Unfortunately, without an address, constituency status cannot be established.

He won't answer the questions per se, and that's exactly what happened here. They weren't answered. He missed the boat because this is a constituent of his who's not very happy about what happened.

Okay. Jason Doucette. He says that he is going to be voting in the next provincial election and that he has several concerns about Bill 11. "We have several problems with our present day health care system. I also know that it needs work." So people are acknowledging that the system isn't perfect and that that's where the attention should be put first.

He says:

Allowing the government to support the private facilities will not solve our problems. We want everyone to have equal rights even in private facilities, also to have an image of doctors who help us, not as salesmen who will try to sell upgrades to make a maximum amount of profit for the facility.

Another concern. By allowing Bill 11 to pass, we may create a situation for the USA to get involved with our health care system. We would be losing more and more of our Canadian identity. I believe that private facilities have no place anywhere in Canada.

Please reply as soon as possible.

This is from Jason Doucette of Holy Trinity high school. Very real concerns, Mr. Speaker.

Throughout this debate I've been in nearly every grade 6 class-

room and a number of the high school classrooms in my constituency, and I always ask the questions: who knows about Bill 11, and what do you think about it? In the classrooms I'd say about 10 percent of the young people feel that they don't have enough information to make a decision, which is a very fair comment. In all of the classrooms I've been in, less than 10 people support the bill. Most of those people support the bill because they have had someone in their family, generally speaking a grandparent, who has died because they couldn't get fast access in the current system. They think that Bill 11 will solve that problem.

Well, the fact is, Mr. Speaker, I didn't have the heart to tell any of those kids that this bill is not going to solve that problem. In fact, it may increase the problems. Until we have addressed the critical issue of having enough doctors and nurses and opening up an adequate number of hospital beds, any kind of beds to properly service the people in this province, we will continue to see situations occur where people die because they don't get fast enough service.

The rest of the kids that I talked to are very strongly opposed. In fact, one of the young people that we had here at Mr. Speaker's forum left me a note on that particular issue. This young person said the following: "I also would like to wish your party the best of luck in defeating Bill 11." This is a person from rural Alberta, not someone from my constituency.

I know it's unlikely but I know your party will give it your best shot.

I hope that your party will at least be successful in making needed amendments to this bill.

Once again, closure was brought in, so we couldn't bring in the amendments that we had brought forward.

I fear if the bill is passed as it is, it will lead to American style health care, where the rich can afford the best care while the poor suffer.

This is an unsolicited letter from a young person who lives in rural Alberta who wanted somebody in this party to express his concerns. Just a few of the letters I have gotten from young people in the constituency.

The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and I put a posting in the Mill Woods newsletter where we asked people to respond to a number of questions on this. Here are some of their responses. On surgical clinics: do you believe there is a difference between an overnight surgical facility and a private hospital? The comment is: no, it's only a difference in name but with the same nature.

8:30

Do you believe Bill 11 will ban private hospitals? [interjections] No. Comment: actually, Bill 11 is a door which will lead us to private hospitals.

Do you believe that private hospitals will cost less?

Speaker's Ruling

Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, we allow one member to address the Assembly at a time, and we ask the member to speak through the chair. We don't invite other hon. members to chat back and forth or to engage in conversations with the gallery.

Hon. member.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Do you believe that private hospitals will cost less and reduce waiting lists? No. Comments: just think about where the profit of private hospitals comes from, if they cost less; only the rich will have no need to wait; waiting lists for the poor will be longer.

Should decisions of the Alberta minister of health be open to court

challenge? Yes. The impact of the decisions affect us all, so it should be open to the public to debate and not the government only to work on in their own way.

Who benefits from the provisions of Bill 11? It's so obvious; the only parties that will have benefits are not average Albertans.

Do you believe Bill 11 will ban private hospitals? No. It will only encourage them.

Do you believe that private hospitals will cost less and reduce waiting lists? No. Private hospitals will not be able to buy supplies in the large volumes that the public system can to keep the costs down; also, they will be marked up with the goods retailed.

Should decisions of the Alberta minister of health be opened to court challenge? Absolutely. No one or any position is above the law. That would be a dictatorship.

Who benefits from the provisions of Bill 11? The Premier's friends and backers. That's what they said. [Ms Carlson's speaking time expired] I've got a lot to talk to yet; unfortunately my time's gone.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and add my support to Bill 11. Throughout the Bill 11 debate there's been a lot of talking: roughly 2,500 minutes, 43 hours, as a matter of fact, of discussion on this one bill. Despite all that talk we've heard from the opposition, there's little if any evidence of forward thinking, dealing with the problems, dealing with the issues of health care that have come forward as forms of solutions. The ideas on their part as to what needs to be done to meet Albertans' health needs not just today but in the future are totally absent, totally lacking. If there was any sincerity in the opposition's positions, we should be discussing those now, because now is the opportunity to deal with the long-term needs of health care, and that indeed is what Bill 11 is dealing with.

That's the purpose of Bill 11, and ultimately that's what the discussion should have been centering around: the needs of tomorrow and the betterment of health care for tomorrow, not just today. That's what we should be talking about, as I said, and that's what I plan on spending a little time on. Indeed, through the process of the discussion there has been a lot of good come forward, and part of that has allowed us to be involved in dialogue with our constituents. It has allowed us to search out the opportunities of change and the ability to preserve our wonderful health care system and to maintain that health care system for the future.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to spend a few moments now sharing with you some of the thoughts and some of the ideas that constituents have brought about as a result of the discussions that we've had. We did have, as a matter of fact, three open meetings within the constituency where people were able to come forward, discuss their thoughts and their ideas, and bring forward ideas as well on the preservation of the system, the needs for change, and how to better the existing system.

My constituents have told me that we need to improve access and the quality of the publicly funded health care system. That was one of the most critical elements that constituents talked about. Indeed, I've received more calls, Mr. Speaker, from constituents who are caught in lineups, from constituents who are ill, from constituents that are caught with cancer, with heart problems, with pain and have need to be dealt with than I have regarding the concerns of Bill 11 that have been flaunted out there, the fear mongering that's happened. Ultimately the people of my constituency have not bought into the fear mongering and certainly do not believe in that approach as well. I think it's important that we as Albertans and everyone

realize that by and large Albertans are forward-thinking people and that Albertans will deal with the future in a constructive manner rather than in a fear-mongering manner.

What they've also told me, Mr. Speaker, is that we need to improve our management system to enhance the quality of service so that we maintain our high level, our high calibre. Indeed, this is something that's critical, that we provide as efficient a system as we possibly can so that we can allow as much of our efficiency to flow back into the health care system. That in part is what Bill 11 is about as well.

My constituents are adamant that we need to increase our emphasis on wellness and our efforts to promote disease and accident awareness and preventative action. Indeed, this is important as well because being proactive and preventative saves you money, which you can infuse back into the system. Consequently, that's something that my constituents have asked me to work towards as well.

I'm constantly being told to work with my colleagues to foster and develop new ideas on how to improve health care, an effort that my constituents have demonstrated a willingness to become part of and to work with as well. They've also told me to protect the publicly funded health care system, a sentiment that I and all my colleagues totally agree with.

Mr. Speaker, there is only one other issue that the residents of Grande Prairie-Smoky raised with me: to maintain and increase our focus on waiting lists for necessary procedures. Bill 11 in a small part, albeit a significant one, is addressing this ultimate problem in a solving-method process.

In my discussions with my constituents in all parts of the riding, away from the misleading statements of the opposition, it's quite evident that Bill 11 is a critical measure in addressing my constituents' concerns. Bill 11 basically does the following things: pays for all insured medical services; controls and prohibits extra billing; states very clearly that there'll be no private hospitals; allows for surgical clinics for minor procedures, thereby addressing concerns around waiting lists and congested surgery beds; and prohibits queue-jumping. Is there something wrong with that? Is there something that's so wrong that we would spend 43 hours debating that? Is there something wrong, that would hurt Albertans, with those types of initiatives? Obviously, my constituents have not bought into that.

Mr. Speaker, the need to deal with the issues in health care are not unique to Alberta. Pressing needs exist everywhere, not just in Alberta. They exist in Canada, and they exist all over the world. This government has demonstrated its leadership and, in fact, courage to deal with pressing issues facing health care. This government is trying to be creative, to find ways of preserving this outstanding health care system. We will find creative ways of doing it, and we will see that Albertans are well looked after as far as health care is concerned in this province.

Just before closing, I'd like to share with you some articles that are fairly interesting, which I will table after I've completed this. I want to discuss an article from a Norwegian newspaper where the minister for Norway – and by the way, Norway is the bastion of social programming. There is no country in the world that provides greater social programming. Indeed, the delivery of health care services, the minister points out, is something that's very critical to the country, and concerns are clearly identified in the delivery of top-quality health care service. That's what we're trying to do here, and that's what they're trying to achieve in Norway. Indeed, the minister in that social programming country is indicating very clearly in this article that he is looking at private health care delivery as well as the public health care delivery to provide the most efficient type of service and the highest possible quality. I'll be tabling this.

8:40

As well, I want to read from an article regarding the Romanow revolution.

To many minds, including Kiefer Sutherland's, Saskatchewan is the birthplace of medicare, and Alberta is its graveyard. Thus Kiefer et al have joined forces to protest Bill 11, the proposal to formally regulate private health care clinics in Alberta . . .

Don't tell Kiefer, grandson of the legendary Saskatchewan CCF/NDP leader Tommy Douglas, but on Feb. 22, 1999, Saskatchewan proclaimed the Health Facilities Licensing Act. Since then, private, for-profit corporations may perform a wide [variety] of medical procedures in Saskatchewan . . .

The Saskatchewan law is still new, so the number of investors who will accept this invitation is not yet known.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm sorry to interrupt you, hon. minister. There was a debate going on that was informal and unrecognized, and I was standing to say to one of the hon. members who offered to read something in the paper to another hon. member that in fact we only have one person speaking at this time, and that would be you, hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's only fair that every member in this Legislature has an opportunity to speak. They have an opportunity to speak at second reading, committee, third reading, many times in committee; as a matter of fact, 43 hours of speeches so far. So I think that there is no lack of time. Indeed, everyone's had an equal opportunity, and I would appreciate that opportunity, as well, from others.

Debate Continued

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It goes on:

Saskatchewan will continue its practice of sending many patients to private clinics in the U.S.

Unlike Alberta's Bill 11, which permits only minor private surgeries, the Saskatchewan law allows private clinics to perform any "diagnostic or therapeutic medical procedure" normally done in hospitals. Saskatchewan didn't bother to include anything like the reassuring Section 1 of Alberta's Bill 11, which reads "no person shall operate a private hospital."

Under Alberta's bill, the provincial College of Physicians and Surgeons has the final say over which private procedures will be allowed. In free-wheeling Saskatchewan, the health minister need only be convinced that there is a "need" for the private clinic, and that it would be "effective and efficient."

Why did Kiefer and the Bill 11 dissenters – not to mention Allan Rock, the federal minister of health who decried Bill 11 – let Saskatchewan enact its law without a peep of protest? Kiefer has an excuse: Saskatchewan is once again run by the Tommy Douglas party, so he's going easy on his home team.

What is Allan Rock's excuse?

In closing,

Mr. Romanow has some refreshingly honest diagnoses of medicare's problems – and some exciting prescriptions for change. His private clinics act is bolder than Alberta's Bill 11, and more respectful of free enterprise. Let's hope the protesters stay in Alberta and let him get on with this important work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a way, there is so

much to be said and a short 20 minutes to do it, and I think . . . [interjection] I know, and I've heard: oh, we've had 46 hours of debate. Well, you know what? How much is enough when a bill is this bad?

I was looking at this and thought that, in a way, this is a very historical time in Alberta. In a few years social studies books in high schools and classrooms around this province will read about the change in Alberta and what happened to publicly funded health care in Canada. This bill is not just about Alberta. This is affecting changes across Canada, and there have been people expressing concern across Canada. We're changing something here that is not just a little focus on Alberta or Edmonton or Calgary or Spruce Grove or St. Albert. This is affecting everyone across Canada, and that's why so much has been written and so much concern has been expressed about it. We're changing something fundamentally here that changes Canada. They're going to read in social studies books about that historical moment in Alberta when, despite peoples' protests, despite actually thousands of people protesting outside the Legislature – yeah, there were thousands, 2,500 one night. That's historical in Alberta. They may laugh at those people outside . . .

MRS. SLOAN: More than at their last party convention.

MRS. SOETAERT: Certainly more than at their last party convention.

They may laugh at those people outside, Mr. Speaker, but I certainly don't. I have met people who have said: "You know, I have never been involved in politics before. I have never taken a stand. I've never written a letter. I've never signed a petition." Because you know what? In Alberta we're pretty lucky. We have a great economy, we have a beautiful province, and most people have jobs and are busy with their families. At the end of the day they may go and vote every four years, but they don't really get involved because life is pretty good in Alberta.

But this bill has awakened a sleeping giant, and it's the people of Alberta. They said: "You know what? I don't like this bill." They have asked and asked in as many ways as they know of. They've e-mailed, they've faxed, they've written letters, they've phone called, and they've signed petitions. At least 100,000 different people have signed petitions regarding health care in this province. Never before have I seen anything like this. The last I heard about a protest inside the Legislature was the farmers of Alberta. I think it was over 50 years ago, about grain prices or something. I read it somewhere, and I'd forgotten about it. It would be interesting.

So this is an historical moment in Alberta, and we're going to read about it a few years from now. Maybe our grandchildren will read about it, and we'll be there and we'll say: I remember that moment. Chapter 1 will be the destruction of health care in Alberta, and chapter 2 will be the Liberals trying to fix it, because that's what's going to happen. Absolutely that's what's going to happen, and we're going to.

You know, I saw somebody leave this Legislature yesterday when she heard that there was this motion before us that would only allow us an opportunity to each speak once more. She was in tears when she left. She said: "I've never been involved. I've now been in a protest. I've now signed a petition. I've now written a letter." And in tears she told me: "I can't believe they're actually going to go through with this." People over there laugh, but she was in tears. I said: "You know what? You can't let it get to you this much. You can make your mark during election time, and we can work at making it better after that election, because we will."

It's interesting that I've heard from over on the other side saying: oh, they're fear mongering. Now telling the truth is described as

fear mongering. Telling the truth is now called fear mongering, and that's very disappointing.

MRS. SLOAN: It's called delusion.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's delusional on their part, absolutely.

It would be interesting to know – because when I get groceries, when I walk through the mall, when I'm at something in my community, at church, people come up to me and say: "Colleen, you keep fighting them. Don't let them get away with this. Are you going to stop that bill?" I get that all the time, so how can Conservative MLAs not be getting that too? I've honestly had 900 phone calls, e-mails, letters, faxes, and we've documented them all. Sixty-four are in support of this bill, and all the rest are opposed. Now, I don't think my riding is that different than anyone else's, and in fact mine is a good portion of St. Albert. Those are the same people we are talking about in that community, so I fundamentally disagree with the Member for St. Albert in what she has said on this bill.

8:50

You know, it's mainly men sitting around having coffee first thing, and they solve most of the world's problems at 10 o'clock in the morning in a couple of malls in my constituency. They're the ones who say to me – well, actually I can't repeat some of the things they say; they're rather blunt. Even if they support the bill, because there has been the odd person who does, they're very offended by the way it's been pushed through, very offended by the fact that they haven't been heard, that even if the majority of people don't want this, they are pushing ahead with this. One guy said to me, "How is this going to affect those of us who can't pay for those private clinics?" They know what's going on.

This government spent the money to send them the bill and then has the audacity and the arrogance to say: well, they don't understand it if they don't support it. I find that very insulting. They can read the bill. They don't like it, and that's certainly what I have been told. I was sitting there the other night and saying: what if I were a government member and I had to support this? What would I do in my constituency? I know if I wanted my mom and dad to vote for me again, I couldn't support this bill. I couldn't.

It's a time in history that I find distressing for my constituents and for me. I'm disappointed that this is going through. Many things I haven't agreed with. Many things I have agreed with. This is probably the first thing that I'll have a very hard time living with, the passage of this bill.

What does this bill do? It allows overnight stays. We know that. People define that as a private hospital, and I don't care how many times you describe it and how many times you want to call it a private surgical facility, people out there know that it's a private hospital. So don't kid yourselves. They know that. They know that it promotes a two-tiered health care system. They know that. They also know that it won't clear waiting lists, it won't cost less, and it won't lead to a more efficient health care system. They know that. It also puts – and this is what is wrong, most definitely – the interest of private, for-profit operators ahead of the public interest, and that's wrong. That's fundamentally wrong.

What we should see in this Legislature is a piece of legislation that does make things better. For one thing, I would like the MRI issue addressed. I got a call just on Friday from a constituent of the Member for St. Albert, but I got the phone call. This young man is a carpenter. His wife works at a job. They are trying to make mortgage payments. They have two children. They work hard in their community. He needs an MRI, and then he needs surgery. Because he could physically wait three months, because he could –

though he's in pain and he's on pain killers, he isn't as urgent as others on the list – he has to wait three months for a public MRI. Or he could get it done – in fact, I think he got it done today – for 600 bucks at a private clinic, except there was a special advertised in the paper for \$495 at another clinic. Can you believe that? We're now having specials at MRIs.

They were trying to get higher up on the public list because if he doesn't work for three months, they lose their house, but that wasn't a criterion to move up on the list. Your physical well-being is, not your financial well-being. They borrowed the \$600 for the MRI so that he could have it done today so he can get on the surgical list sooner, because he cannot be not working for three months. People can say that you should plan better, et cetera, et cetera. But you know what? That's not the real world, and if we believe that everybody has three or six months planned ahead to pay for their mortgage, then we're pretty naive. Most people don't do that, and most people can't do it. So that did not address the MRI situation for that constituent, who's very upset about the politics behind getting health care.

This did not address long-term care. I had a question in the Legislature the other day about how far away people are from family when they need long-term care. Yes, they may have great physical care, but if you're going to be away from family when you are in your last stages of life, why bother? I want to be near my family, and I want to be near family members in their last stages of life. I can imagine how sad it was for the woman I spoke about, and I know from personal experience how difficult it's been for my family members to drive miles and miles to see their mother because that was the only place their could get for her. This bill did not address the issues. All it did was promote private operators.

Did it promote standards across RHAs? Of course not. Of course it didn't. We're going to have different standards in Calgary and Edmonton, and rural Alberta is losing especially from this bill, absolutely losing. Do you think we're going to be able to keep doctors in rural Alberta when they can get paid more in the private system in some city? Absolutely not. Member for Redwater, you should be worried about that. Absolutely you should be worried about that. You know what? I also worry that in these private clinics there's no backup emergency acute care facility.

Some of the operations that are now going to be allowed there are unsafe. I got a letter just on the weekend from Ellen Tarvis in my riding expressing that very concern, that some of the operations that are going to be allowed now will not be safe. She's just not thinking this out of the top of her hat. This is fact. This has been documented in different studies, that private facilities do not give the same – they're not as safe as public facilities. So this has not been addressed in this bill.

I spoke a bit about the loss of democracy in this bill. I think that's probably as big an issue – no, it's not as big. But in the minds of people they've felt betrayed by a government who didn't listen to them. They don't want this. They've asked time and time again. And if my constituency is like everyone else's, they've asked each MLA in here not to support this, overwhelmingly asked them not to. I don't know what answers Conservative members are giving that they can convince their constituents that really it's good for them. They're saying that they don't want it, and to condescendingly preach to them that "Really, you just don't understand it" is wrong. So I'm disappointed about what this means to democracy.

There's an issue, just an example about private health care and the direction we're going in this province, that I'm very, very concerned about and very, very opposed to. An example was a Mr. Cameron. He was 82 years old and went to Seattle to visit his daughter. Well, he fell and broke his hip there. He had travel insurance, but no bed

was available here. He couldn't be evacuated at the time, so his condition deteriorated. He needed surgery in Seattle, and the cost of the operation was \$55,000 Canadian. Now he has to sue the insurance company, who are reneging on the contract. Alberta health care has written a cheque for \$472 to close the account, and appeals to the minister have fallen on deaf ears. It's solutions to the problems faced by Mr. and Mrs. Cameron and patients across the province today and tomorrow that should be debated in this Legislature, but we're not.

Instead we debate Bill 11, and Bill 11 is not about health care. Bill 11 is about money. The underlying principles in this bill are all about money. Bill 11 is about who gets the money. Who gets the money because of Bill 11? Bill 11 is about who pays the money. Who will be paying for this because of Bill 11? Taxpayers' dollars will be paying for more, and individuals will be paying more. Bill 11 is about how public money is spent. I thought this government was out of the business of being in business. Wrong. Bill 11 is absolutely about being back in the pockets of business. Bill 11 is about diverting public money into private bank accounts. Absolutely. To investors, board members of those private institutions, private surgical facilities: absolutely that's where the money is going.

9:00

And what's missing from the bill? Well, just about everything that would ensure that the Camerons, for example, their children, their grandchildren, and those who follow us will have the public health care system they deserve.

You know what? Bill 11 should be scrapped. And they sit there saying: "Forget it. We're taking a vote tonight or tomorrow night, when everyone can show up, and we're going to push this bill through. We really don't care what you say or what people in Alberta say." It should be scrapped. [interjections] And they say: wrong, wrong. I'm absolutely right. You have not listened to your constituents when you support this bill. Absolutely.

You know what we should be doing? We should be acting on a commitment to prevention. And you know what? The minister talked about that. We should be talking about prevention. Is that addressed in this bill? No, it isn't. We should be supporting healthy children. That's not addressed in this bill. I've often talked about fetal alcohol syndrome and what that could mean. If we addressed that issue in the province, do you know what that alone would do to health care dollars?

Let's build an integrated community health network. Let's create those health care teams who can co-ordinate programs and care. Let's join with other provinces and the federal government and work out a better system, not a private system. That's been proven time and time again not to be the most efficient. Let's activate a best practices network. Let's base health care changes on proven, high-quality research, and we can do that in Alberta. We've proven it. We're leaders in that, yet we ignore that in this bill.

Let's establish appropriate world-class facilities. We can do that. We are pioneers in Alberta, willing to be innovative and creative, and we can do it in health care. We've proven to have done it in health care in several different ways. In cancer treatment, in all kinds of things we are leaders. Yet we have this before us that puts us backwards. It absolutely puts us backwards.

Let's put caring back into home care, and let's take geography out of health care.

I realize that I don't have much time left.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's good.

MRS. SOETAERT: I hear "That's good" from over there. I know it's tough to listen, and I know it's tough to hear concerns, but they're not even my concerns as much as they are concerns of the people I represent.

I've heard people in here say: I'm not a politician; I'm a representative of the people. I am a politician – I think it's the same thing, quite honestly, Mr. Speaker – and I represent my constituents, and they don't want this. I hope every member of this Assembly represents their constituents and votes against this bill.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I was debating whether to talk on this bill at all, but I got a holler from across the way today – he's not in here now – from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry. He asked me why I don't speak. So I thought: well, I will just speak a little bit.

You know, when my dad was living, he always said, "Glen, don't talk too much, because when you're talking, you're not learning anything." I've followed that advice pretty good, and when I sit here and I hear the opposition speak 10 and 12 times on the bill, there's only so much I can absorb. But there isn't too much to absorb, because it's the same repetition over and over again.

Now, let's just take a quick look at the bill, because I don't want to speak very long. There are two main things this bill does. Yes, it does allow overnight stays at surgical clinics. There's no question about that, and what is truly the matter with that? What is truly the matter?

You know, I get about two phone calls a month. [interjections] See. They're laughing already. But just wait a minute; you won't have to laugh long. I get about two phone calls a month from people that have to wait five and six months to get into an active hospital. They get to Edmonton – by the way, it's a six- or seven-hour drive. I drive it every week. They get out here to an active hospital or a public hospital, whatever you want to call it: "Well, didn't somebody phone you? We tried all day yesterday to phone you and tell you that it's been canceled." It's been canceled for a very good reason. It's been canceled because of emergencies. That's what happens in our public hospitals. It happens to many. It's not bad to have something canceled if you live within the radius of a hundred miles of Edmonton or Calgary, but we are 572 kilometres, to be exact, from Edmonton.

The public hospitals have done a wonderful job. Nobody's even arguing about that. I'd be the last one to argue when I have one daughter who is a nurse and another who is the head of medical records in the Mistahia health region. I'd be very foolish to talk about them not running a good show. They are, and all the active hospitals are, but you can see that surgical clinics can do a more efficient job because they can schedule these surgeries . . .

MR. LUND: Without interruption.

MR. CLEGG: Thanks, hon. minister of agriculture. Without interruption from emergencies. The public or the active hospital, whatever, handle them, and they must handle them, and that will never go away. We'd obviously like to never have emergencies, but there always will be.

Where do a lot of the people that come out here to a surgical clinic go? They can't stay overnight. Where do they go? Well, they obviously go to a hotel room, and then they have to go back to the surgical clinic the next day because they can't stay. I see nothing, absolutely nothing the matter with an overnight stay.

The second thing this bill does, which should have been done long

ago, is put some legislation and regulations on our surgical clinics. There is nothing there today. Oh, Ty Lund could probably start up a surgical clinic. Obviously, he couldn't operate.

Speaker's Ruling
Referring to a Member by name

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member we've already had several interventions tonight on this. Here we call each other by our constituency name or by the office that we serve. I know it was a slip of the tongue.

MR. CLEGG: Well, the hon. minister of agriculture and the Member for Rocky Mountain House. I mean, everybody in Alberta knows him. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

MR. CLEGG: Everything beyond that is what's going to happen, what might happen, what may happen. That's the crunch of this bill.

You know, I always give credit where credit is due, and the Liberals and the NDs along with many unions have done a wonderful job of telling Albertans about Bill 11. There is only one problem. They haven't told the truth about it. They have sent out brochures, and I just happen to have a little brochure. I read it so often because I can't believe it. I'm not going to read it out because I'm sure they've read it before. But there's no truth in it. That is what the bill said. You know, everything the Liberals do, they backtrack. I can tell you that Albertans are very, very clever people, and when this bill is passed and they know what this bill is really all about, they will be in favour. There is no doubt in my mind.

9:10

You know, when I ran in the 1997 election, you know that the Liberals did? They talked two doctors in the Dunvegan constituency into going on strike. Ironically, that night there was a candidate's forum in Fairview. Of course, the first question is: "How come the doctors are on strike? You're not treating them right. You're not doing this." Well, the Liberal and the NDP got up and said, "Well, if the government would treat those people right, they wouldn't be on strike." I got up, and I said: "They shouldn't be on strike. It's not ethical to be on strike. We have a signed agreement with the doctors in this province, and they should commit to that agreement we've got." There were about 400 people there. Twenty-five people – that's about all there are that are NDP and Liberals in Dunvegan – got up, and they got a little clap. When I said those words, 375 . . . We are small business in Dunvegan. Let's remember that, just remember that.

My researcher said: don't you want a speech? I said no, because I get mixed up. I also get mixed up when I don't have the words.

You know, it's pitiful when we have people going around Alberta scaring our senior citizens. I'm pretty near scared. I am a senior citizen. I'd be almost scared too if I listened to that kind of stuff. We in the province of Alberta without a doubt – without a doubt – have the best seniors' programs of anywhere in Canada and probably the world. Probably the world. Go to any other province and ask them. We have the best programs. We have wonderful health care.

In closing, I just want to say something that I know is going to happen in the years to come. What we have in health care are many what I call universal programs. I can tell you that we will never, ever afford a universal program at the rate we're going today. In 10 years – and I'll talk federally. If you wanted me to talk provincially, I will do that too. Eighty-five billion dollars federally for our health care in Canada. At the rate we're going, at 10 percent a year – I went to school a long time ago but inside of nine years it'll be at least \$170 billion.

Now, I can't sit here and say that Alberta can't afford this 10 percent. We all know that we can afford that 10 percent, and we also know that the federal government can afford it as we sit here today. But I happened to come here in 1986, and we lost 3 and a half billion dollars from '85 revenue to 1986.

What will happen? And it will happen, people. It will happen. It won't happen tomorrow or next year. I don't know when it'll happen. Then we will not have a health care plan. I talked to our minister of health. I just want every minister of health in Canada to get together with the federal Minister of Health and sit down and make sure that we can cover people's needs when it comes to health care. Not their wants. In a universal program you can never satisfy everybody's wants. Never will. It'll never happen. It'll happen and happen, and all of a sudden the whole thing will fall.

You know, it reminds me of a story. As hard up as we are in the north there, we do it quite often. If I'm in the middle of downtown Fairview and it's 30 above and I'm giving away lemonade, everybody that goes by takes a drink of lemonade, but if I charge them a dollar, all of a sudden nobody is thirsty. It's no different than in our health system. What we've got to do is make sure that we take the abuse out of the system. This bill does not do that. This bill does not do that. [interjections] That's why I say that when she's talking, she's not learning anything. She should be listening. She should be listening.

In closing, I just want to say that the Liberals have a great policy, but their policy changes as the wind blows. They've got a different policy when it's from the south than they have when it's from the north or the east or the west. Well, I'm sorry; Albertans won't buy this stuff. People will not buy it, because people in Alberta are very clever. When this bill is all passed through, well, the whole world isn't – we don't have to pay for anything. It doesn't matter whether we go to a surgical clinic or whether we go to a public hospital, we're not going to pay anything. If you need it, this government will be there. It will be there to protect Albertans' needs – that's what this government is here for – and do it in the most efficient way, because someday it'll have to be done that way.

Thank you.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I'd to ask for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member.

head: Introduction of Guests

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not too often that I get to introduce one or two people from southern Alberta, but we have five guests in the gallery this evening, and two of them happen to be from southern Alberta. The first is Cheryl Lamb, from Lethbridge. The second is Colleen Sinclair, from Taber. They're with their friends from Edmonton, Susan Duncan and Dianne Godkin, and also Don Crisall, from St. Albert. I'd like to ask them to stand in the public gallery.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 11
Health Care Protection Act
(continued)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Then to speak, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to rise this evening to speak in third reading on Bill 11. This has been a bill that has probably brought more discussion to my office, more discussion to the street-side, more discussion to the cafe, more discussion to meetings that have nothing to do with health care than any other issue that we've faced since I began to represent Lethbridge-East in 1993. I think it's even well up on the scale compared to the debates about the cuts in education and in health care in 1994 and '95. This is something that everybody wants to talk about.

Mr. Speaker, I think one of the things that's really unique about the debate that's going on right now with Bill 11 in the community and among the people that I speak to is that a lot of them, with all of the debate, with all of the publications, with all of the advertisements still don't truly understand what the bill really means to their health care system. So they want to know things like: what does it do to queue-jumping? What does it do to two-tiered health care? What's it going to do to access? These are the kinds of things that they don't truly understand in the implications of this bill at this time.

I think the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky a little while ago talked about, you know: one of the things we have to talk about is looking for innovative, new ways to provide health care. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think this is something that Bill 11 tries to do, but it only tackles one very, very small area. The debate goes around how we deal with access to our health care system, how we deal with the waiting lists in our health care system. These are the two issues that really are at the crux of the concerns of most Albertans. They want to know whether or not they're going to get timely and complete health care from the public system. I would suggest that Bill 11 doesn't really go far enough in addressing those kinds of issues. What it does is not really provide the regional health authorities or our health system at a provincial level with a lot of options.

9:20

What it does is say: okay, we're going to define the role for private surgical facilities; we're going to define the relationship between a regional health authority and a private surgical facility. But it also talks about this supposedly giving us a real change in access, a real change in the waiting lists. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest, as I did in my debate at second reading, that the issue here is that unless we have more overall capacity in the system, no matter how we organize the structure of that system, it's not going to reduce waiting lists or improve access. That capacity right now is defined by the number of dollars that are available for regional health authorities to allocate to the provision of particular services.

It doesn't matter if they say: okay, we've got X dollars to provide for a postoperative bed in a public hospital. If we're going to take those exact same dollars and put them into a contract to provide that recovery bed or the operation itself in a private surgical facility, we don't have more capacity. How can we say that this is going to reduce waiting lists, how can we say that it's going to give us greater service, when all we're doing is transferring a dollar out of a budget through a contract to a private operator?

Mr. Speaker, we talk about how this kind of process has to be looked at in the ability it's going to give us to really enhance our services. If we look at how the original bill was defined, it really doesn't talk about how regional health authorities can improve that efficiency. We've heard references to the fact that private operators are not going to be unionized. They're going to be non-union providers of these services, so their labour will be cheaper.

Mr. Speaker, we've seen a number of cases where competing businesses have started in this province, in our country with non-union members, and it doesn't take very long until they're unionized, especially when you get into the areas where the majority of

the providers of that service are members of unions. They have to operate to the same standards of staffing. When we look at that, we're going to see that there's no real chance to get the efficiencies except maybe in a very, very short-run situation.

What we've got to start doing is looking at whether or not we can really rearrange and deal with some of the dollar leakage that exists in our system. We put in restrictions in our education system that talk about how much of the total allocated budget a school board can use in administration. We don't put the same thing into health care. Why not? We hear all kinds of discussions about the inequities that exist in the number of administrative dollars that are being provided to different regional health authorities. Mr. Speaker, service is defined by the frontline dollar, the dollar that's actually there to service a patient when they have a need. We can't have this kind of false expectation created when we say: we're going to give you that greater capacity just by having contracts out. Those contracts are going to cost the same as providing that service through the public system. This bill doesn't provide an increase in service.

Mr. Speaker, from a third reading perspective we also have to look at how we're going to deal with the effectiveness of this bill when it gets operational. What we're going to see is that the government has promised us that this bill is going to get rid of queue-jumping. But when we look at the bill, it doesn't do it completely. We've heard numerous references already to the idea that you can go outside the insured service component and pay for support diagnostic services and get on the queues quicker. That constitutes queue-jumping. By paying, you get in ahead of someone else who doesn't have the money to provide that diagnostic service.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I ended up a couple of weeks ago being the topic of a few headlines by saying that we need to have more clarity in the context of how we talk about this bill. I look at the little packet of amendments that came out, and right in here it says, "no person shall . . . provide an uninsured surgical service . . . for the purpose of" queue-jumping. Yet when we look at the news release that came out with that very same set of amendments, the news release says that you cannot get faster service "to an insured service through the purchase of an enhanced product or service or an uninsured service." They left out surgical. By "uninsured service" this would imply that that would cover the possibility of going out and getting an MRI because that is a noninsured service. So if you read the news release, you believe: wow, they've plugged the hole in this bill. But when you actually look at the bill, they haven't.

So, you know, misinformation doesn't allow us to provide our constituents with the kind of debate that's necessary to conduct a thorough review of their wishes when it comes to how we act on their behalf in this Legislature. This is the kind of thing that we have to start looking at a little more closely, because more and more we're seeing our constituents become actively involved in the processes that we conduct here on their behalf. We see people wanting to have copies of legislation when they come to our office. They want to be able to read the bills. They want to be able to read the relevant news releases, the newspaper articles, the interpretations of them. We have to be able to give them accurate information that has a consistent set of definitions and a consistent set of even connotative interpretations; otherwise, we end up with the kind of debate we've had over this bill, where no matter how many people you talk to, they each have 10 reasons why they can source their information to be right. That's not helpful when it comes to us providing constructive debate here in the Legislature on behalf of our constituents.

Mr. Speaker, this bill in its context, in its ability to provide options I don't think really addresses the issues that we have to look at in the context of our health care system. We have to start looking at how we can deliver those services. Again, the Member for Grande

Prairie-Smoky was up shortly before me, and he talked about some of the things that his constituents are saying. Those are the same things I'm hearing in southern Alberta, in Lethbridge. People want to see us be more proactive, deal with preventative health care, deal with systems that allow for the introduction of vaccines, the introduction of education, and the idea that this is when it's appropriate to use a health care system.

We've never talked about possibly reorganizing some of our emergency wards or some of our health care access systems to where we do a set of education components and possible prescreening so that we're sure that people that come in there really have a functional need. We all saw the article in the paper about three weeks ago where they were tracking some individuals in Alberta. To prevent the disclosure of individual activities, they reported that 25 people in the province had used emergency in the last year to the tune of twice a month on average. It's hard to imagine how anybody could be using an emergency ward at that level: the idea that you are going to have that many emergencies even if it's weekends or evenings. Now, is it possible that these individuals are effectively using the emergency to get after-hours doctor care? Well, if that's the case, then we need to look at longer hours in our physician clinics. We need to start looking at some of these options that will provide us with more cost-effective ways of delivering our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, the thing that I guess I find the most lacking in Bill 11 is the clear definition of the way the minister will determine whether or not the contract is in the public interest. We see the section there that talks about all the different things the minister is going to look at when they decide whether or not they will approve a contract, and they talk about the public benefit. Well, how do you define public benefit in that kind of a context, especially when we look at all of the different innuendos and connotative definitions of that term that have gone out to the public in the last three months since this debate about Bill 11 started? If we take it back to the idea of Bill 37 last year, this kind of thing has been going on. How do we define cost-effectiveness?

9:30

As an economist and a previous faculty member out of a faculty of management, one of the things that we learn in there is that there are a number of different ways of reporting costs. There are a number of different ways of doing the comparative cost analysis. Do you look at it from the short-run perspective or the long-run perspective? You can get a completely different decision whether you look at it in those contexts. How do you handle the concepts of amortized costs? Just using simple little different discount rates can completely change the decision you make. If we're going to talk about this, we've got to be sure we get our definitions and our terms so that we know that the public costs are truly being reflected in the total context.

Mr. Speaker, when I talk about this in Lethbridge, a lot of times I talk about the internal rate of return that comes from a business. Well, even if we use the concepts that a lot of people are talking about now in public accounting where they have to deal with an internal rate of return so that we can deal with cost-effectiveness as public spenders, then what we're doing is transferring that money out of one pocket, say the minister of health, back into general revenue, because we've accounted for the discount on our capital investment.

If we deal with it in the private sector, we take that same volume of dollars and transfer it off to some financial institution. It goes to a bank; it goes to a bunch of shareholders. That's gone from the public use. We don't have the option of taking it back out of general revenue and putting it into an expanded health care system, maybe

even a tax cut, some of these kinds of things that would really give us an effective way of addressing how we spend those public dollars.

This bill, in the section where the minister has to make the decision about cost-effectiveness, doesn't outline any of that. Until we know how the minister is going to do that, how are we ever going to judge whether or not we're getting value for our dollar?

Mr. Speaker, what would be wrong with a public debate before a contract can be let, where the parameters that are being used to reflect these decisions have to be presented and debated in a public meeting in the community or in the health authority region where the contract would be undertaken? If it's going to be for a service that's available on an across-province level, then we should have a full provincial debate on it.

These are the kinds of things that this bill doesn't address. Mr. Speaker, I guess we have to look at how we're going to be able to make the people of Alberta feel comfortable, and at this point this bill does not do that.

Mr. Speaker, we have to look at it also from the perspective of whether or not we've actually been able to look at the power that exists with the government in terms of how they're going to be able to actually implement the bill. There's a lot of power that falls back onto the regional health authorities. We already have had an admission from the government that there is excess capacity in the current system, and I will commend the government at this point for bringing in the amendment that says that they have to use existing capacity. But they always put a whole bunch of adjectives in front of that. So again we're caught with the idea that depending upon how you interpret those adjectives, what we're going to have is a lot of interpretation of whether or not the existing capacity is used.

Mr. Speaker, we heard earlier references to Saskatchewan and how they were sending some of their citizens off to other provinces or to the U.S. There are probably a number of procedures in a small population base like the less than a million people that are in Saskatchewan where they cannot create an effective system to deliver that service themselves, and the most cost-effective way for them to do it is to take public dollars and transfer the patient to where it can be provided efficiently.

This bill doesn't address the idea of specialized surgical facilities under the public health care system. Why can't we have the kind of efficiencies that can be created by specialized surgical facilities operated inside the public system? We keep hearing: well, you know, these surgical facilities can specialize. Why can't we in the public system specialize? These are options that we have to be able to look at.

Mr. Speaker, until we see some of those issues addressed, I have to admit that I'm still going to vote no on this bill.

Thank you, very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Albertans and Canadians we like our health care system. It's evolved to meet changing needs since it was introduced some 35 or 40 years ago. The way it has been funded has changed as well. What was once an equally shared program between the federal and provincial governments has now changed to become mostly a provincially funded program. Thirty percent of Alberta's health care budget goes into health, and 5 percent of the federal budget is dedicated to health care. Put another way, the province pays about 87 percent of the cost of health care, and the federal government pays about 13 percent. It's similar in other provinces as well.

We also like the way it appears to be unique in the world for its

level of service to all citizens of the country, and for its adherence to the five principles of the Canada Health Act. "Universality": all insured Albertans are entitled to all insured services provided in the province. "Comprehensiveness": all medically necessary services are insured. "Accessibility": access to all insured services is provided uniformly, and reasonable compensation is paid for services provided. "Portability": health care services can be utilized in other provinces. "Public administration": health care is publicly administered and publicly funded.

We reject the American-style, two-tier health care system, where citizens can obtain different levels of care based on the kind of money they have or the kind of insurance policy they or their employer has purchased on their behalf. Following the principles of the Canada Health Act, our system is equal and free, but we know it's not a cost-free system. It's paid for through our tax dollars, through resource revenues, and also medicare premiums, which provide about 10 percent of the cost of health care here in Alberta. We know the total cost of health care provided under the Canada Health Act and Alberta health care is about \$6 billion, and that's for about 3 million Albertans. If we do the math, that means that approximately \$2,000 is spent on every man, woman, and child, in this province every year.

Let's consider some aspects of our current health care system. There are about 5,000 different surgical and medical procedures identified and regulated by the medical profession, and most are paid for by medicare. About 150 of these procedures are currently being done in privately owned surgical facilities operating here in our province. There are 52 of these clinics currently operating in Alberta, and that situation is not unique to Alberta, as other provinces also have privately owned surgical clinics.

The doctors are paid by Alberta health care for the operation, say a cataract removal, the same amount of money whether the cataract is removed in the Fort Saskatchewan hospital, the Royal Alex, or the Gimbel eye clinic. The costs of the building and support staff is paid also in both cases by Alberta health care through the local health authority. These costs are called facility fees, and if patients had to pay facility fees in private clinics to pay for the building and staff, then Alberta would lose transfer payments from the federal government.

We know, too, that the private sector plays a large role in the delivery of health care and that the public system pays for some parts but not others. There are chiropractors, opticians, optometrists, dentists, pharmacies, drug companies, ambulances, physiotherapy, child psychologists, walk-in clinics, medicentres, and long-term care facilities for older seniors.

9:40

We recognize, too, that there are challenges in the delivery of health care. Recently the federal minister challenged the provinces to be innovative, to reduce wait lists, to increase the number of doctors and nurses available, and to implement more home care to reduce hospital stays. These challenges are the same in every province, but Alberta is ahead of the other provinces in addressing the issues. Because of our early willingness to address budget problems like deficits and debt and use windfall resource revenues to reduce interest rates by paying down the debt, Alberta is in a much better position than other provinces to be able to pay for ongoing quality health care.

There are several initiatives. Health care spending will increase by about 20 percent, or \$1.1 billion, over the next three years. More doctors, nurses, and specialists will be trained and recruited. Waiting times are targeted for reductions. There will be increased home care support, wellness will be promoted, and the prevention of accidents and diseases will be emphasized.

The government has put forward the following six-point plan to

improve our health care system: first, improving access to publicly funded services; second, improving the management of the health system; third, enhancing the quality of health services; fourth, increasing emphasis on health promotion and disease and accident prevention; fifth, continuing to foster new ideas to improve our health system; and sixth, taking steps to protect the publicly funded health system from external threats.

Bill 11 is one step to help protect our health care system, because there is a lack of legislation to regulate and control any private surgical facility or even a full-fledged private hospital. As it is now, a private hospital could start up and do major surgery, like heart bypass, for a huge fee to the patient, and there is nothing that could be done about it. As has happened before, a clinic could start up and charge a facility fee when you went in for cataract surgery. In these cases, Alberta would be fined under the Canada Health Act, because we as Alberta citizens cannot pay for medically necessary surgeries or services like bypass surgery, hip replacement, back surgery, and so on.

So legislation had to be created. The legislation could have outlawed all surgical clinics, but that would be unlike other provinces and would mean closing down the 52 clinics currently operating and serving Albertans. Instead, the decision is to regulate privately owned clinics so they operate only to benefit Albertans and the publicly funded system that we have.

Let's look at what Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, says. The preamble of the bill states that the government of Alberta is committed to those five principles of the Canada Health Act. All medically necessary services will be paid for by Alberta health care. No one will pay for medically necessary services or pay to get to the front of the line.

Clause 1 outlaws the operation of private hospitals in Alberta. That is, there will be no private hospitals in which Albertans can purchase any of the approximately 5,000 medically necessary services, like setting a broken arm, back surgery, or angioplasty.

Clause 2 states that the surgery can only be done in one of two places. The two locations are either a large public hospital, or if the surgery is not major, it may be done in an approved surgical facility. The College of Physicians and Surgeons will accredit these surgical facilities and determine what procedures can be provided. In addition to the 150 different day-surgeries currently being performed, there is a possibility that some surgeries, like gallbladder removal, small joint and ligament repair, or hernia repair, which require a few days' stay in hospital, may also be performed in these approved facilities.

The third clause prohibits queue-jumping, and fines of up to \$10,000 can be levied if someone pays to get ahead in line or receives a payment to permit someone to do so.

Other clauses prohibit the payment of facility fees by patients and restrict the charges for enhanced goods like bifocal soft lenses for cataract surgery to the actual cost plus some small percentage for carrying charges.

Additional clauses state that before contracts with surgical facilities are made, there must be a demonstrated need for the services and there must be a net benefit to Albertans by way of reduced waiting lists or more cost-effective delivery. Also, the efficient use of existing capacity in public hospitals is to be accomplished prior to any contracting out of surgical procedures.

Although concerns have been expressed that Bill 11 will lead to two-tier health care, private hospitals, or American style HMOs, the bill legislates against queue-jumping, profiting from sale of enhanced goods or services, or patient payment for medically necessary services. For those reasons the bill is rightly called the Health Care Protection Act, and I believe that our health care system will

not be destroyed or less efficient, as some have predicted, but will be better in the future. Therefore, I support this bill.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, to begin this evening I'd just like to share with the Assembly a bit of a nursing assessment that I performed relative to the will within the government caucus on Bill 11. It was particularly provoking to me to sit and watch I believe the last three or four speakers speak from preprepared speeches on this bill, indicating to me that they don't trust themselves to speak from the heart on this bill. They don't trust themselves to speak from the letters, the correspondence, the e-mails and conversations they've had from their constituents. They come forward with this cited and recited rhetoric about why Bill 11 is good for public health care in this province, and 99 percent of citizens don't believe it. It's a sad, sad state.

There are several other things that I've observed in my nursing assessment of the government caucus relative to Bill 11. You know, as a registered nurse over the years your assessment skills go beyond just the external, the physical and the mental characteristics that a patient might exhibit, and you start to develop an instinct. You develop an instinct that tells you when a patient is about to go sour, an instinct that anticipates that a patient perhaps is about to die. One of my instincts in this Assembly as I've watched the debate on Bill 11 is that there is an undercurrent of struggle and discomfort, where individuals are being placed in a position of having to defy their ethics and their principles and their beliefs. You can see it. You can see it in their eyes, you can see it in their postures, and you can see it in their physical frame, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is that politics can sometimes – in today's context, in the context of this bill – be a very destructive thing. My assessment leads me to believe that in fact there are many in this Assembly that do not support this bill, and politics is placing them in a position that they must support it.

On a positive note, I've never seen a bill that has mobilized, galvanized, and energized Albertans like Bill 11. It has been an absolute treat to watch how this bill has politicized this province. For that, Mr. Speaker, I have to stand here today and say that I am grateful. Political democracy in Alberta is alive and well. I have to commend those Albertans, so many, who have written to me, who have called, who have spoken to me in the grocery store aisles and hockey rinks, at private and public functions, at wedding receptions, at community events, and in health care settings about Bill 11. While I can't name all of those individuals and how insightful and wise their reflections and impressions of Bill 11 have been, I would like to share just a few remarks that were made by grade 6 students.

I know members earlier this evening have talked about being in grade 6 classrooms during the course of the debate on this bill. There is something that is so pure about a child's reading and assessment of issues, and I have been astoundingly impressed by the level of understanding that students in this province have of this legislation.

9:50

One grade 6 student, who happens to live in my household, upon my indicating at one point that I was growing very tired of Bill 11, said to me: well, we're all tired of Bill 11, Mom. Her advice to the Premier was that he should just admit he's made a mistake, that we all have to learn in life that if you've made a mistake, it is best to admit it, to take actions to change the mistake you've made, and to move on.

Another grade 6 student said: what can we do? How can we get it through to the government that we don't support this bill? Of course, we respond by saying that they can write letters, which many of the grade 6 students have. They can come out to events, debates on the bill. Then, of course, there's always the election. They're in a position where they're too young to vote, but they can certainly volunteer and take an active part in that process.

My all-time personal favourite, Mr. Speaker, was a grade 6 student in Belgravia-McKernan who said to me: I'm putting my faith in the Lieutenant Governor. I thought: that's amazing. He has the knowledge to understand that this bill will never be proclaimed without the signature of the Lieutenant Governor. He was putting his personal faith in her to stop this bill. Now, I'm not in a position to anticipate or predict what might happen, but I can stand this evening and say that all across this province, regardless of what age groups, in classrooms, in seniors' homes, in all places where Albertans go about their business, people understand this bill well, and they do not support it.

I spoke this afternoon in question period about a web of deceit and deception and of the desperation that's accompanied this bill in its journey across Alberta and through this legislative process. As I think back over my time in health care in this province and my time in this Legislature, really there's been that strong web all along. In 1993 we were told that we needed to cut a quarter of the system's funding because health care expenditures were out of control. Well, we have now clearly had the analysis completed and publicly circulated that that was not the case, but that was the information we were fed, and so it went. The system was cut. Health care professionals were laid off. Hospitals were closed. Beds were closed. Operating room theatres were closed.

And lo and behold, Mr. Speaker, today where we find ourselves is in a position where thousands of Albertans are waiting to access the system and cannot. That's no stroke of magic or stroke of accident. That is a result of the reckless, unplanned, and misguided cuts of the 1990s. It is the legacy of this government, but rest assured that the wool covers our eyes no more. We see with complete clarity the callous disrespect, the resolved arrogance, and the steeled intent to shape our system, our public health care system, into one that incorporates a private tier of care.

Along that theme I cannot refrain from mentioning the large full-page ads that this government has placed in newspapers across this province titled: "Bill 11 – What's the Real Story?" It goes on to list a number of supposed facts, and I'd just like to challenge a couple of them. The second fact in the government ad says, "Bill 11 is similar to legislation already in place in other provinces, including Saskatchewan." I would now like to cite from a release that was issued by the Saskatchewan government specifically on Bill 11: Saskatchewan health legislation touted as similar to Alberta's controversial Bill 11 was designed to discourage private clinics rather than promote them, says a Saskatchewan government official. We passed it with the intention of preventing private clinics from setting up, said Mark Stobbe, communications director for Saskatchewan Health; our intent is to maintain a totally public system.

He added that since the Health Facilities Licensing Act was implemented last year, no private clinics have been licensed to provide for-profit surgical or diagnostic services. Completely the opposite of what Bill 11 will do, but Stobbe said that Saskatchewan's law was passed to try and keep private clinics out. He said that the government was unable to legislate an outright ban on private clinics, so instead it has adopted regulations so strict that no private health care clinic has set up shop in the province. The legislation was passed in '96 but not implemented until last year.

Further, as a contrast, the private clinics that operate in Alberta

will offer publicly funded cataract surgery and abortions to regional health care authorities. In contrast, no private clinics in Saskatchewan offer medically required services funded by medicare, Stobbe said. He said that private eye clinics in the province provide laser surgery, which is not covered by medicare, but unlike Alberta these clinics cannot provide cataract removal, a publicly funded service that is only performed in Saskatchewan hospitals.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, there are no private MRI clinics in Saskatchewan. The proliferation of private MRIs in Alberta has been one of the fastest growing industries in health care. In addition, Saskatchewan hospitals don't charge patients extra for add-ons like fibreglass casts or titanium hips.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, a discrepancy. And how are Albertans to decipher it when the government says it is a fact that Bill 11 is similar to legislation already in other provinces, including Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan government says not so? Is that not deception? Is that not deceitful? Is that not a desperate act? I would suggest that it is.

Now, the other fact that I would like to challenge in this ad is the ninth fact: "Bill 11 has absolutely no implications for the health system under the North American Free Trade Agreement." Again, clear evidence and analysis – I will quote from one such analysis, titled *A Legal Opinion Concerning NAFTA Investment and Services, Disciplines and Bill 11: Proposals by Alberta to Privatize the Delivery of Certain Insured Health Care Services*. This analysis was done by Steven Shrybman, a solicitor from Vancouver, B. C. I would just like to quote the following summary:

We have in this part examined the implications of present Alberta proposals if they are ultimately judged to fall outside the ambit of Annex I and II reservations. But for exceptions concerning government procurement and funding, this would leave all other provincial measures fully exposed to NAFTA The risk here is that the province's experiment with private sector delivery will escape whatever bounds it may have intended. This would allow US and Mexican investors and service providers unrestricted access to the contracts that regional health authorities would be tendering.

Even if there is just one, even if the government just has one legal analysis before it that suggests that the facts are contrary to what is contained in this ad, is it not deceitful? Is it not deceptive? Is it not an act of desperation that they put out in a public ad that there are no implications for the health system under the North American free trade agreement? I suspect they have more than this analysis to suggest that, but because their intent is clear, the article, the ad I'm speaking from this evening clearly chose to mislead, deceive Albertans in Bill 11's intent.

10:00

Now, on this very point I'd also like to cite from *Hansard* comments made by a member of the government side relative to the intent of Bill 11, and I'm speaking from the *Hansard* of May 3, 2000. The hon. Member for Leduc said as follows:

The private sector can now do Workers' Compensation Board, military, and RCMP work as well as uninsured work, all of which is outside the Canada Health Act. In addition, they will likely be able to do publicly paid for, insured work coming from other provinces. What we could well have is publicly paid for, insured work from other provinces being done in an Alberta facility to which Albertans would not have access, so it seems reasonable that we should have a method of providing access for Albertans. Bill 11 does this through allowing for contracts between private providers and health authorities, which leaves both access and payment for insured services within the public system.

Then he goes on to say:

It seems to me that for the first time in Alberta we have a private facility that is capable of competing in a significant way with the

public system on a basis that heretofore has not existed through the small-scale 50 or so private clinics which are now in operation.

What I took him to mean, Mr. Speaker, is that he envisions we're going to have maybe double the number of clinics. He was saying, you know, that we have a small scale of 50 now. Well, what would he consider to be an adequate number? A hundred? Two hundred?

He also envisions, if I'm interpreting his comments correctly, that these clinics could compete amongst themselves or compete across Canada to do a particular type of work. Is that what Albertans want in their health care system? Is that what Canadians want in their health care system? Absolutely not. They do not want the market in their health care system, and I don't know how many times people need to say that before the government hears the message. They do not want for-profit market approaches taken in respect to health care services. But clearly this member – and he may not be alone; he may not have concluded this entirely on his own accord. The conclusions may have been offered to him by someone closer to the inner sanctum, perhaps someone who even has an interest in the field, but they are envisioning this enormous market for contracting, selling health care. It's so abhorrent to me that we would find ourselves in this state.

Now, just to give you a flavour, I want to quote from one more article. This article was written by a former managed care insider, Linda Peeno, and it's titled: *Managed care and the corporate practice of medicine*. She's describing what it's like to work and try and provide care to patients within the managed care system in the U.S.

Under the rubric of managed care, the practice of medicine radically shifts from physicians bound to patient best interest to individuals and organizations bound primarily to corporate best interest.

We have the only health care system in the world in which care is limited or denied systematically by those who stand to financially benefit from its withholding

Statistical norms replace individual patients. Utilization reviewers replace individual physicians. Cookbook guidelines replace complex diagnostic evaluations. Economic rationales replace clinical judgments. Cost savings replace compassion. Add to this the grave lack of ethical, legal, and safety protections for patients subjected to this new kind of practice, and it is little wonder that our country is outraged by managed care.

Speaking about the U.S., Mr. Speaker.

Let me go on further just to describe how it impacts at the bedside and patient level.

Except for rare cases in which a physician has completely rejected managed care, almost every medical decision by a physician is now affected in some way by the changes wrought by managed care. Doctors no longer practice autonomously. Their contracts, financial arrangements, utilization targets, practice structures, medical protocols, and referral and network rules expose their new partners

Even when a physician strongly resists these pressures, his or her practice of medicine is changed fundamentally. The most financially successful plans control medical decisions from beginning to end – from defining the disease to deciding the treatment.

Now, Mr. Speaker, maybe government members think we are not going to have private insurance companies, but if the system evolves to the place where the hon. Member for Leduc envisions it will go, where we will have widespread and open competition between these private companies, whatever we want to call them, approved surgical clinics or private hospitals, we will have private insurance companies. We absolutely will, because we do not have enough wealthy people in this province to afford this type of care otherwise.

I regret this short time is completed, Mr. Speaker. I again state my opposition to Bill 11.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It indeed is a pleasure to rise this evening and speak in support of Bill 11, in support of public health care, and in support of the principles of the Canada Health Act. This is an issue of paramount importance to my constituents and to the citizens of Alberta, and they deserve to know the truth about how the Health Care Protection Act will maintain, protect, strengthen, and sustain the publicly funded and publicly administered health care system in Alberta and how it will respect the five founding principles of medicare that are enshrined in the Canada Health Act.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to begin by outlining what Bill 11 does not allow. It does not violate the Canada Health Act. It does not create a parallel health system. It does not allow for facility fees to be charged for insured services. It does not allow for queue-jumping. It does not necessitate private insurance premiums. It does not permit the contracting of insured surgical services without the facility first being accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons and approved by the Minister of Health and Wellness. It is not a NAFTA Trojan horse that makes Alberta health care vulnerable to American interests. It will not veil agreed-upon contracts in secrecy. It will not harm the public health care system, and most importantly it will not create a two-tiered, American style health system.

Mr. Speaker, that's quite a long list of clarifications, but by no means is it a comprehensive response to the malicious misinformation campaign that has been supported by the Official Opposition and their fear-mongering union backers who have their own private agendas and selfish motives for spreading absolutely false propaganda.

Mr. Speaker, I have the opportunity of speaking to my residents at every opportune time, and I heard the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert say that she has received about 700 letters or e-mails. You know what? I've probably received about maybe 50 since March 2 and maybe about 40 phone calls. Guess what? Of the 40 phone calls, some that have been left on my message centre, there is no name and no phone number. On Easter weekend I thought: oh, my God; here are about 70 e-mails that have come in. Seventy e-mails. You know what? Not one of them was from my constituency.

10:10

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the principles of the bill are really no different than those supported by the Leader of the Official Opposition when she was health minister back in 1991. In that year she brought forward to the government caucus a discussion paper outlining possible legislative options to regulate nonhospital facilities. The paper states, and I quote: it has been suggested that more could and should be done to maximize the benefits of substituting ambulatory for inpatient services, particularly minor diagnostic, medical and surgical procedures under certain clinical and administrative guidelines. End of quote.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know about you, but it sounds a great deal like Bill 11 to me. The opposition leader suggested and supported it then, so why is she spreading such a great deal of misinformation about Bill 11 now? You know, Bill 11 has become not about Bill 11; it's become political. It's political rhetoric and what-ifs. What-ifs. That's all we are hearing from the opposition.

Alberta has long believed that the private sector can play an important role in supporting the publicly funded system as long as it is a publicly funded system that pays for the insured services and administers the overall delivery of health care to Albertans. So here we have Bill 11 before us and the opportunity to retain the valued

service provided by the private sector while responding to a serious gap in our health legislation.

British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario all have similar types of legislation providing an appropriate framework. Now it is the responsibility of this government to establish similar protections found in those jurisdictions.

Earlier I gave a brief outline of what Bill 11 doesn't allow. For the benefit of those who clearly don't understand Bill 11, I would like to, for one last time, explain what the Bill clearly does accomplish. It will prohibit private hospitals in Alberta. It will prohibit major surgeries outside the public hospitals. It will prohibit facility fees for medically necessary surgical and physician services. It will prohibit queue-jumping through payments by individuals to get faster service. It will regulate private surgical facilities. It will set out clear rules and limits for the sale of any enhanced products or services that are not medically necessary. It will prohibit any surgical facility from providing insured services unless that facility has a contract with a regional health authority and unless the Minister of Health and Wellness has approved the contract. It will set out the criteria the minister would consider in approving or rejecting a proposed contract. It will require that any contract be open to the public. It will set significant fines for any person contravening the provisions of the act. It will help reduce waiting lists, and most importantly it will ensure that no harm comes to the public health system as a result of contracting out. Contracts can only be entered into when there is a clear benefit to the public system, such as access to publicly funded services, quality of services, flexibility for the regional health authorities, cost effectiveness, and other economic considerations.

These are some of the bill's many provisions that will serve to maintain, protect, strengthen, and sustain the publicly funded and publicly administered health care system in Alberta, affirming the government of Alberta's commitment to the Canada Health Act and ensuring equitable access to publicly funded health care for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to remind all members of the Assembly that this bill is the result of a well-documented, long-term process that was not only transparent in nature but one that welcomed the input of Albertans, who were always part of the process and who were always given the opportunity to be well informed. So I find it difficult to understand how anyone could suggest that we have not consulted Albertans on this bill, not kept Albertans informed, or for that matter that we have not listened to Albertans on this bill. The simple truth is that we have. From the very beginning and all the way through we have never stopped listening. I am pleased that some of the input we have received over the course of this consultation process has resulted in some of the well-thought-out amendments to the bill during Committee of the Whole, 14 amendments to strengthen the bill, which the opposition voted against, including adhering to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

The amendments reflect the broad and diverse input received from many Albertans: in particular, key groups such as the Alberta Medical Association, the Alberta chambers of commerce, the College of Physician and Surgeons, the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, and the Alberta Dental Association. As well, the college will be involving other health professions such as nurses in developing the standards for inpatient surgical services, and under section 25(2) the college will be consulted in the development of the regulations.

[Dr. Massey in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, we have listened to Albertans, and we have responded. Bill 11 in its amended form will provide strong protection for our publicly funded health system, strong protection for Alberta patients, and will help Alberta build a stronger foundation for our health system of the future.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this legislation, the Health Care Protection Act, is designed to protect and strengthen public health care by building on its solid foundation. In short, there will be no two-tiered American style health system, no American style, for-profit hospitals in Alberta, only one publicly funded health care system that uses every opportunity to serve Albertans better. I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that everybody stop and think and really think hard about this one. Why would I, the Premier, or any of my colleagues want to destroy the system we have? For what gain? Think about that one. You know, I use the system, my family does, and so do my constituents. If we as government can do something for our constituents, for the people of Alberta, I think this particular bill is a bill that must go through.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening and finally get a chance to deal with Bill 11 in this motion. I am disappointed in the fact that we have to have a form of closure or censure on all further discussions on Bill 11.

Now, earlier today we heard one hon. member from this Assembly, I believe the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness, state: at some point you've got to look at what they call redundancy and repetition. This is in relation to the justification for using censorship on this bill. I have to say that no one has had an opportunity to have a look at the amendments to the Hospitals Act that are tucked away conveniently in the back of this bill, the consequential amendments. Now, the glib assurances of the associate minister of health regarding the use of closure on this is similar to a pyromaniac operating a fire truck. It just doesn't make sense.

We look at why nursing homes are now going to be removed from the Hospitals Act. This has not been part of the discussion. Does this mean that there's further privatization of the nursing home industry in this province? Last year I had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to ask the Premier regarding the \$666 million, or 19 percent of the entire health care budget, allocated to these health care service providers. I really didn't get a satisfactory answer. I basically was left with the impression that the regional health authorities were going to look after all this. Well, it's evident in this consequential amendment that the minister of health is washing his hands of this duty or this responsibility in regards to contracts with nursing homes. So this means a further expansion of the private, for-profit providers, and we all know what's going on in America with a lot of these private, for-profit operators. I need to tell all hon. members of this House that they support this bill at their political peril.

10:20

We hear the comments from the hon. Member for Redwater. He's a little bit confused. As I understand his remarks, Mr. Speaker, he can't understand why Albertans would say that they haven't been consulted or that we're not listening to Albertans. Well, excuse me. The front door is locked. The hardwood doors to this Legislative Assembly are locked, so how can you say we're having an open consultation with Albertans or we're listening to Albertans? You're not. You're not.

This bill now, Mr. Speaker, is beyond debate about public health

care. It's a debate about the arrogant use of political power. This is where the debate has gone, and Albertans understand that. They understand, and for the first time in a long time, perhaps in three decades, the veneer or the teflon is off the government of this province. You have been exposed by Bill 11. The symbolism of the two-inch thick hardwood doors and your separation from the people of Alberta will not be forgotten before the next election.

Now, this is an historic bill for another reason. It was mailed to every home in the province. Many people read this bill, and they made up their minds regardless of the propaganda campaign – the first stage, the second stage, and we're now in the third stage of the propaganda campaign, all paid for with taxpayers' dollars. Three million dollars would have purchased an MRI for the hospital in Fort McMurray. That \$3 million would have been better spent; there's no doubt about that.

Everyone made an effort to read this bill. Unfortunately, even some hon. members of this Assembly, if they read it, misunderstood it, because they were confused. This is not about allowing over 12-hour stays, they claimed. Of course it is. Whenever you have a bill that allows a surgical centre to keep someone overnight, it is in reality a hospital.

We can hear all these remarks about how this bill prohibits this, how it prohibits that, but no one, Mr. Speaker, is believing the government members anymore. They can spend taxpayers' dollars and buy newspaper ads; they can buy television ads. It's not working. If all hon. members of this Assembly think that the crowd is going to disperse and forget about what they have seen in the last five months from this government, you are mistaken. You're going to have to have hardwood doors in front of public forums in the next provincial election. You're going to have to have security guards, because people are going to want to ask you questions. They're going to want to ask you: why did you use closure on this bill three times? Mr. Speaker, the people in Rocky Mountain House are just as concerned as the people in Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Dunvegan, I believe, spoke about the health care system and how concerned the government was and how Bill 11 was going to be able to fix it. Well, I'm afraid this government created the mess. The biggest argument this government had whenever they demolished a hospital in Calgary was who was going to get to push the plunger. This was the focal point of the discussion.

Now, we've created this shortage, and we thought we were going to create a lack of confidence in the public health care system, but essentially what we've done is created a lack of confidence in this government's ability to administer and manage a public health care system. Everywhere I go people say: Mr. MacDonald, Hughie, it's time for a change. Three decades in power: it's time for a change. It's time for a change in Calgary-Varsity. It's time for a change in Rocky Mountain House. It's time for a change in Edmonton-Whitemud. Mr. Speaker, it's simply time for a change.

It's also time for a change in St. Albert. Yesterday evening I had the pleasure of listening to the hon. member's comments regarding her public forum that she held. Present at this public forum was Donna Wilson, a professor of nursing from the university, Dr. Kevin Taft, and the Reverend Bruce Miller, I believe. She was talking about how she had to suffer – suffer was the word she used – through their remarks and their defence in the whole discussion around Bill 11.

I think for all hon. members in the House and particularly for nighttime reading for a number of government members, as the debate on this bill winds down and between now and the next election, they should read, as it becomes available in *Hansard*, the 10-point critique of Bill 11 that was developed and presented by

Donna Wilson, professor of nursing. She goes on to discuss this bill, and I agree with her. She says:

The title of the bill is not accurate. The bill only focuses on where surgery can be done. Surgery is only one small part of a wide range of health care needs. And one of the biggest disappointments of this bill, despite what is said on page 4 . . . about queue jumping, is that Bill 11 does not stop worried Albertans from buying an MRI or any other diagnostic test, and then using the information from this private test to jump ahead of other Albertans who are waiting for health care.

Donna Wilson goes on. Her second point:

The preamble . . . indicates the importance of the Canada Health Act as a "foundation" for Alberta's health system, but preambles are meaningless unless they are included in the actual bill. For instance, Bill 11 does not have a section that specifically says the Canada Health Act supersedes Bill 11. Bill 11 thus implies that only a "basic" foundation of health care will be publicly funded, and that private companies will be able to provide more than that basic amount. The Canadian health care system was never intended to be a system where only the basics were provided, instead it was intended to be a system where all medically necessary care would be provided without private charges.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Varsity can take this information – he still has time at the last minute to change his mind and do the right thing and say no to Bill 11. He can be with the crowd outside that says: kill the bill. He can improve his electoral chances. Perhaps after the next election he'll be one of the ones left standing. He could be a leader yet, Mr. Speaker.

Now, professor of nursing Donna Wilson also had some comments about the private hospitals in Alberta and the so-called surgical facilities, which everyone but the government knows are really private hospitals. No one is buying their line, no one but themselves.

I find it quite odd, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 11 has turned into a reflection of the current government. When we finally do have this election and the government members as they campaign are not separated by hardwood doors, are not separated from Albertans, they're going to realize what a mistake they have made. They have made a mistake.

10:30

Now, we look at what the College of Physicians and Surgeons has had to say about this bill. The hon. Member for Redwater said earlier, I think, that it seemed to him it was the narrow vested interests of unions that were against the bill. But we have to mention the College of Physicians and Surgeons. We have to remember various church groups, senior citizens, and former Conservative MLAs. We can't forget them. I believe that when we get to the former Conservative MLAs, we stop and think as to why they would be opposed to Bill 11 and why they would put pen in hand and write letters to the editor. It is because they're not locked behind closed doors. They're not taking a guarded tunnel to and from work. They're talking to people. They're talking to people in grocery stores and gas stations, and they understand that Bill 11 is the wrong bill at the wrong time.

Donna Wilson goes on at great length in her critique of Bill 11. I only have a little time left, and I have a great deal to say, Mr. Speaker, so I'm going to offer to all hon. members of this House a copy of her critique. I think I'm going to e-mail one specifically to the hon. Member for St. Albert.

We all heard earlier the reasons for contracting out. We heard the greater-efficiency reason.

MR. BONNER: Bogus.

MR. MacDONALD: You bet it's bogus. We heard the bricks and

mortar argument. Bogus. We heard that it will relieve the pain and suffering of Albertans. Bogus. What has happened is Albertans have discovered who caused the pain and suffering to start with. The government. The veneer or the teflon has been removed.

That this can just be an experiment, that this is just an experiment: that's another bogus argument. Totally bogus. Now – and this is the last one – there's no two-tiered health care in Alberta. Totally bogus.

We look at the bill. We open it, and here we go. In section 2 is the two-tiered system. We're looking at "a public hospital" or "an approved surgical facility." That is two-tiered. That is two parallel streams.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, there is no cost-benefit analysis that's ever been done to support the arguments of any of the hon. members from across the way, Mr. Speaker. This is flying by the seat of the government's pants, so to speak. I have heard concerns expressed regarding costs, and these concerns relate to the provision of public health care. All Albertans have heard that, and they're not buying the argument from the hon. Member for Dunvegan and the hon. Member for Redwater. They just don't buy it. There is not a shred of evidence that private hospitals will stretch our tax dollars further in providing health services to Albertans. There's no evidence. If there was a cost-benefit analysis, I'm sure the Premier would be proud to stand up in question period and table it, not only for the benefit of all hon. members but for the benefit of Albertans. That evidence is not there.

In fact, all the evidence that has come to light as this debate has progressed indicates just the opposite. Under Bill 11 more of our public health care money will be given to subsidize investor profits and pay for the higher overhead and the administration costs, and this in turn is going to mean less money available for hip replacements, for cataract removals.

This bill just doesn't make sense, because it certainly doesn't benefit the folks of Alberta, the couple that used to be referred to by the Premier himself as Martha and Henry from Rimbey. I'm expecting the letter from Martha and Henry from Rimbey in the *Edmonton Journal* any day, and they're going to say that they're disappointed in their Premier, that they're disappointed in their government. They're going to say: it's time for a change. They're going to encourage not only the citizens from Rimbey but from Breton, from Bentley, from Drayton Valley, from Rocky Mountain House, from Leslieville, from Caroline, from all over Alberta. They're going to say that it's time for a change because the government did not do the right thing.

The hon. Member for Redwater talked about this bill not being a Trojan horse, but this bill is a Trojan horse, and there's another comparison that fits. Bill 11 is just like putting an untreated pine shake on your roof. The government is pushing Bill 11 just like it pushed the manufacture and use of pine shakes. The government's backers stand to make big bucks off Bill 11.

I'm very disappointed, Mr. Speaker, that my time is up.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise in the Legislature today to talk at third reading of Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act. This is a piece of legislation that is important for all Albertans and has attracted attention in my constituency. During the month of March I had the opportunity to meet with constituents of West Yellowhead at community meetings in Edson, Jasper, and Hinton. I heard from them in letters, telephone

calls, and e-mails. These people had a number of concerns about the legislation and how it would affect them personally, their loved ones, and how it would affect their communities. They also told me about how much they appreciate and respect our public health care system. It is a belief that is dear to all Canadians. The residents of West Yellowhead also expressed their thoughts on other issues which, although outside the realm of Bill 11, are nonetheless relevant to the debate on health care.

Mr. Speaker, from one end of the constituency to the other people are asking about plans to recruit more doctors to rural areas. They want to know if they can continue to be looked after in their local hospitals, without having to travel far from home. Most of all, they want to know how Bill 11 will affect them. From the comments I received, it is very clear that Albertans believe in a publicly funded, publicly administered health care system. Many of the citizens of West Yellowhead also believe that our health care system does need attention and that changes are necessary.

10:40

Mr. Speaker, I admit that I have encountered opposition to Bill 11 as it was originally tabled, but I strongly believe that the amendments tabled by the Minister of Health and Wellness will go a long way to address these concerns. Time and time again I have assured the residents of West Yellowhead that Bill 11 bans extra billing and that it will not mean they will have to pay the next time they visit a doctor's office. All you will need is your Alberta health care card. I have and will continue to respond to all of those who ask.

One of the most urgent concerns, particularly by the seniors, is the ability to jump the line to get medical attention. By defining the rules on the purchase of enhanced services, many of these folks believe we are creating a two-tier system. These concerns are addressed by the amendment that strengthens the prohibition against anyone paying to jump the queue by making it also illegal to get faster access to an insured service through the purchase of enhanced product or service or an uninsured service. This is an important amendment.

Cataract services were one of the points most frequently mentioned where queue-jumping could take place. With the foldable lens now paid for by the Alberta health care system, as announced on April 11, people cannot use the system to move themselves to the head of the line or purchase extra as a way to get a standard procedure done.

Mr. Speaker, another issue raised was on the pressure to purchase enhanced or extra services, particularly at vulnerable times, when you or your loved one is a patient facing a medical procedure. I've heard from many people who felt that the sale of extra services is an affront to our public system and is motivated by private, for-profit medical organizations. I am pleased to read the amendment tabled to prohibit a public hospital, a surgical facility, or a physician from charging more than the product cost and a "reasonable allowance for administration" for the sale of enhanced medical goods or services in conjunction with provision of insured service. This effectively eliminates the profit motive.

In the provision of enhanced products this amendment strengthens the requirement already in the bill that patients have the enhanced product explained to them in writing before surgery, then signed . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members that have already spoken need not enter into the debate. At this time we have the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, who wants his turn, not those two

members who are actively engaged in debating one another. Thank you.

West Yellowhead.

Debate Continued

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This effectively eliminates the profit motive in the provision of enhanced products. This amendment strengthens the requirement already in the bill, that patients will have enhanced products explained to them in writing before surgery, then sign approval of any enhanced goods they wish to purchase. They have the opportunity to change their mind.

Mr. Speaker, another comment that I heard loud and clear from West Yellowhead constituents was the need to open existing surgical and medical facilities before looking to contract with the private sector. I have checked with the WestView regional health authority and was told that all operating theatres are open and being utilized. Often the constituents are moved to Edmonton for procedures. These people are familiar with the valuable service that could be available if surgical facilities in the public system were open and available.

I believe that the amendments ensuring that the review of the efficient use of existing capacity in the public hospital be considered as part of the determination of whether we would benefit in contracting out a surgical procedure addressed these comments. This will require all health authorities to ensure that the existing capacity is efficiently used before contracting out surgical services. It means that investments made in the public health system will not stand idle while dollars are put to work in the private sector.

I heard at the meetings and through phone calls that people are concerned about medical professionals and doctors who have their feet in both the public and private systems. They are referring to doctors and medical administrators who operate and serve in the public health system yet have investment and interest in private surgical clinics. Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is addressed by another amendment that strengthens conflict of interest regulations to ensure that provincial standards for physicians are maintained. Conflict of interest regulations for others working in the health system are also tightened. I am pleased to read that extra protection will be placed with an amendment to the Regional Health Authorities Act and to the Cancer Programs Act. Health care authorities will be required to adopt conflict of interest bylaws for board members, agents, senior officers, and employees of the authority. If the bylaws are not followed, the facility could be in jeopardy to the point of losing its designation.

Mr. Speaker, the last concern I'd like to put forth is with regards to NAFTA. There were a number of comments made by constituents that if Bill 11 becomes law, our health care programs all across Canada will be jeopardized, and it will open the door to American style, two-tiered health care system. A well-respected international business lawyer with experience in international law as well as having served on the Canada/U.S. NAFTA trade dispute panel has found that Alberta's and in fact Canada's health care is protected by several carve-outs in the NAFTA agreement. Furthermore, NAFTA obligations do not apply to provincial or state procurement of goods and services. Bill 11 does not alter delivery of public health care services in this province. All medically necessary procedures and services will continue to be delivered by the public system: one health care system where all citizens have equal access to services.

Outside the scope of Bill 11 the election of members of the regional health authorities was and continues to be the concern of citizens of West Yellowhead. I have continued to inform them that

changes have been made in the area and that during the next municipal election the election of two-thirds of the regional health authorities will take place. This is an opportunity for Albertans to exercise their democratic right and elect representatives that will serve the interests of not only their communities but their regions as well.

Mr. Speaker, I heard from a gentleman in Edson who publicly stated that he read the legislation and couldn't find anything wrong with it. He felt that this bill had potential. He stated quite plainly that the government doesn't always run things well and that he didn't know if they do anything great but that this legislation had potential. The point, he said, was to save money and shorten waiting lists.

We have one public system. Let's use it. Ultimately, it's the consumers, the patients, the users, Albertans who use public health care systems that we must protect, and I believe Bill 11 does that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, the Scottish writer, Thomas Carlyle, made an observation. Mr. Carlyle lived between 1795 and 1881, and he made an observation that I'm mindful of as we now get down to the waning hours on Bill 11. He made the observation that "man seldom, or rather never for a length of time and deliberately, rebels against anything that does not deserve rebelling against."

10:50

As I reflect on this and I hear such contradictory statements about this particular bill, I want to spend a couple of minutes making some observations. The first one I'd make is that we've heard some comment about whether closure has been invoked by the government, and this question that the previous question be now put that we're now debating: what does that mean? Let me say this: we don't have to go any further than *Erskine May*, the 22nd edition. It's one of the authorities we use in this Assembly.

If you go to page 410 – and the hon. Government House Leader can confirm this, and if I don't have it absolutely word-for-word accurate, I want him to stand up and set me straight. This is what I read in *Erskine May*. It says: "The 'previous question' may be used to produce the same effect as the closure." It's in chapter 19, and the heading is Methods of Curtailing Debate. It's sandwiched in between sections entitled The Ordinary Closure, page 407, and Allocation of Time Orders, page 410.

If the Government House Leader looks at page 410, he can be absolutely satisfied that what's happened on this third reading is indeed a form of closure, full stop.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the hon. Government House Leader rising on a point of order?

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the hon. member would accept a question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member is reminded that you only have to say yes or no and that you don't have to give reasons.

MR. DICKSON: I would never refuse such a request. Of course.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on your question.

Debate Continued

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, my question is this. While *Erskine*

May is sometimes used in this House as a text of almost last resort, *Beauchesne* is much more pertinent, and 518 of *Beauchesne* says that "the House has adopted a number of procedures to limit debate, or to preclude the moving of amendments, and to provide for the wise management of its time." I'm wondering if the hon. member has read 518 in chapter 12 of *Beauchesne*, which is much more a text of this House.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I've read it, and I prefer the quote in *Erskine May*, thank you very much. I propose to proceed with my comments.

On April 4 of this year I had the privilege of being the seventh speaker at second reading on Bill 11. At that time, Mr. Speaker, I made the observation after hearing the six speakers previous to me, and I said:

Each one of those speakers has argued that this bill either is a wonderful thing, part of a well-intentioned experiment to make our health care system work better, or a very dangerous experiment that will prejudice our public health care system and, ultimately, patient care.

Well, in the intervening time – and the Minister of Justice will have to the minute the amount of time we've spent debating this bill – are we any clearer in terms of what we know about this bill?

We know a lot of things. You get insight in curious places and perhaps unexpected places. Last weekend I had the privilege of going to Banff. I listened to the Member for St. Albert, in fact, on May 4 tell us that there was going to be a very important conference in Banff, the annual conference of the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies. In fact, I attended that Sunday night and Monday afternoon. There were some 300 participants. Forty percent of them were from outside the province of Alberta, so from other provinces and Canada.

Do you know what the discussion was in the hallways and during the coffee breaks and at any time we weren't dealing with items on the agenda? Mr. Speaker, it was Bill 11. It was Canadians saying: why would you go there? There were people who could not understand why a provincial government in this country would be so misdirected, would be prepared to experiment in such a dangerous fashion with such a bedrock service delivery program in Canada.

It was interesting. These were not stupid people. These were people who run a host of agencies. There were university lecturers. There were people who know how to read a piece of legislation. I want to say to any member in this Assembly who suggests that Albertans who oppose Bill 11 are simply too stupid to be able to read a bill and understand it or not smart enough to look at what's going on around the world, to look at the failed experiments in Western Australia and New South Wales, to look at the places where it hasn't worked: that would be preposterous. These people absolutely could not believe it. They were fascinated as I attempted to describe the weak and transparent arguments that have been put forward to try and defend this bill. It was an interesting insight in terms of how people in other parts of Canada view our experiment.

Now, I've received a great deal of feedback from constituents, and I have been absolutely fascinated to hear member after member from the same city I'm from, from different Calgary constituencies, say: oh, you know, this is not a big deal; I've had a few people who phoned, and they just either didn't read the bill or don't understand it. I've heard a great number of attempts to rationalize, to minimize, to denigrate, in some cases, those citizens who have registered their concern.

Well, let me tell you my experience in Calgary-Buffalo. On my web site, www.garydickson.ab.ca, we put out a question for constituents. This is after people had received the bill. I said: do

you support Bill 11? Overwhelmingly, the response was: absolutely no. I put out an annual report that I do every year to constituents. We produced, I think, 26,000 copies. We sent them through Canada Post to every door in Calgary-Buffalo and, the post office tells me, a few in Calgary-Fort because they mixed up one of the address codes. In that annual report I asked a series of questions, and not surprisingly, the first question was that I solicited the feedback from those Calgarians about how they felt about Bill 11. Now, this was post mail-out of the bill and post some of the multimillion dollar media campaign engineered by the government of the province of Alberta.

I must say again how disappointed I am that this province gives a budget of \$8 million – \$8 million – to the Public Affairs Bureau, which then turns around and uses that money on such a spurious campaign as we have seen to distort the truth of Bill 11, to propagate a series of myths. When the Member for St. Albert rose in this Assembly to talk about duplicity, referring to the opposition, I couldn't help but think that it is not the opposition that is spending millions of dollars to try and con Albertans. That's exactly what's going on, Mr. Speaker: trying to con Albertans. How do they do that? What they do is that they use mischievous titles. They offer explanatory notes that are misleading to the point of being wholly inaccurate.

Anyway, I digress. I was talking about some of the feedback I'm getting in Calgary. A lot of the feedback I've been getting is not just from Calgary-Buffalo but from the other 20 constituencies, or many of them. I've had the chance to go the Red & White Club, where Christine Burdett and the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore were talking about the bill. It taught me something else when I was in the Red & White Club in Calgary. Firstly, it's notable to see 800 angry Calgarians on any occasion on any issue in terms of what's happening in the Alberta Legislature. The other thing that was so interesting was that the thing that drew people to their feet was when somebody stood up and challenged the former Provincial Treasurer going to run the CRHA.

What also got people to their feet was when people talked about the refusal of this government to allow elections, as they had promised on March 11, 1997, to allow Albertans to vote for the people who are going to spend their 3 billion tax dollars going through the regional health authorities. What that brought home to me but is not apparent, I think, to all members from their comments is that the public debate has eclipsed Bill 11. We're no longer debating in this province what's in or what's not in Bill 11. Is there anybody who has not yet got it, Mr. Speaker? What has finally come home to roost is the boneheaded decision to blow up the General hospital, when two of those buildings are as modern as the Foothills hospital; the nonsensical proposition that you close the Holy Cross hospital after spending \$32 million in renovations, and you offer it for sale for \$4.5 million; the preposterous notion that we close the Grace hospital, which then reopens as a private facility. The Holy Cross hospital is now reopening as a private surgical facility.

11:00

People understand what's going on, and they don't like it. They are registering their concern. Yes, when people come here night after night after night and stand on the steps of their Legislative Assembly and register their concern and come to our constituency offices, it is true that they're not always talking about specifically what's in Bill 11. But you know something, Mr. Speaker? The message they're delivering is one that any of us ignore at our peril, because they're saying that the bloom is off the rose.

People are now starting to scrutinize this government's record of bad judgment, of poor decisions, of lack of planning. I understand

that government members may not like that, but that's part of the reality, and I say good for Albertans that they're registering their concern, because I think for too long people have been prepared to give the government the benefit of the doubt. Mr. Speaker, I think Albertans, whether its at the rallies at McDougall Centre that have been happening night after night and afternoons or the people standing on the steps of this building, are registering in a most eloquent and the most powerful possible way that they're not prepared to give this government the benefit of the doubt any more, and I say good for them.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Lacombe-Stettler said something interesting today. She talked about fear mongering. You know, I thought to myself: what's fear mongering? I've listened to colleagues in this Assembly, people I have a great deal of respect for. I heard the Member for Calgary-Cross, who is a registered nurse. She has a well-deserved reputation as a very able legislator on Calgary city council. I mean, I can pick a number of people in the government who have come to such a different conclusion than I have in reading the bill, and I start to ask myself: how can it be that people who I respect in this Assembly have such a different view of it?

I end up coming back to a point I'd tried to make when I first spoke at second reading, and it's this. Bill 11 is so vague in so many different areas and there are so many decisions that are going to be made by a minister, that are going to be made by the Lieutenant Governor in Council through regulations that ultimately what you end up with is that the bill can be seen in a lot of different lights. It's a little bit like holding up a prism to a sunbeam. What you see as it comes through the prism – I guess we're looking through different filters, because some of those members who I respect on the government side who have argued that this bill is (a) innocuous or (b) a positive thing have gone as far as the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I found myself shaking my head when I heard her say: this is the miracle solution. Now, Mr. Speaker, even you will agree that that's an overreach which is astonishing in its breadth.

It comes down to this, Mr. Speaker. There are many people in this Assembly – all, I might add, on the government side – who are prepared to write the Minister of Health and Wellness a blank cheque, and they're prepared to write the Premier of this province a blank cheque, because ultimately he decides who is going to have that position of Health and Wellness. They have such a high degree of trust in the cabinet and their cabinet colleague, their government colleague, they have this amazing kind of confidence that he's always going to do the right thing.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I start from a very different point. I think governments live or fall on their record, not by what they say but by what they do. I look at the broken promise in terms of electing regional health authorities. I look at the absolute fiasco in terms of what happened with hospitals in the city of Calgary, the fact that right now we're about 250 to 300 acute hospital beds short in the city of Calgary. That's the best information I'm able to get from people that spend a lot of time worrying about those details.

Mr. Speaker, I think we look at that record, and some of us frankly don't trust this government to do anything other than create a host of opportunities for people who want to make dough at our expense. You know, as one of my constituents said to me: why would we as taxpayers pay the mortgage for a private health provider? That's exactly what Bill 11 allows. Why would we pay their mortgage? Could we possibly be that stupid?

Mr. Speaker, we've heard a lot about amendments. I heard the Member for West Yellowhead, if I heard him correctly, say that he was opposed to the bill when he first saw it. I appreciate his candour and I respect his candour if I heard him correctly. Then I heard him

say that he'd seen the amendments and felt better. Well, I've gone over those 14 amendments, and let's see how much comfort we take from those. Section B dealt with queue-jumping.

MR. SAPERS: No, it didn't.

MR. DICKSON: Well, it was supposed to deal with queue-jumping.

One thing we know about the government members who have spoken is that they really read the marginal notes, and what's more, they believe the marginal notes. Now, Mr. Speaker, it may be just my natural cynicism, but I learned a long time ago that just because somebody writes something in a marginal note, it doesn't count for anything, because all the court looks at is what's in the text of the bill.

If you look at the so-called queue-jumping amendment, you will find two things. It only applies to an insured service. What that tells us is that the government decides by a simple regulation what's going to be an insured service and what is not. It doesn't cover one of the major problems, which is access to MRI and diagnostic services and that sort of thing.

You know, it does cause me to think, because I'm running out of time, if there's anything positive that's come from this whole experience. There have been some things. Does anybody think for a moment that we would have got those four MRI machines if it had not been for the public protest on this? Is there anybody in this province who thinks that foldable lenses would have been covered? Two days before the announcement, Mr. Garth Norris of Alberta Health was on CBC radio in Calgary, saying: you know, we can't cover foldable lenses because the evidence isn't clear; this is a medical decision, not a political decision; we're evaluating the evidence. Two days later the government comes out and announces that foldable lenses are now covered. That was a political decision. When the member for Redwater says that he thinks there's some politics creeping into this, he doesn't have to look any further than the coverage of foldable lenses.

As we go through the amendments, what effectively section C does is pave the way for private health entrepreneurs. If you want to set the rules and make it real attractive for people to invest in private health services, we've done that in section C.

Section E: what cold comfort we take from that. It means that everything rests on the shoulders of the Minister of Health and Wellness. If he's asleep at the switch, if he's not looking out for the interests of public health care, we all lose. We all lose.

Conflicts of interest, sections M and N. These amendments are laughable in their vacuousness. We're now going to have the prospect of 17 different standards of conflict of interest. You tell me, Mr. Speaker, why something would be a conflict of interest in Mistahia and exactly the same thing happening would not then be a conflict of interest in the Calgary regional health authority or the Chinook regional health authority or the Palliser regional health authority? Does anybody think that Albertans are that stupid?

I hear members stand up in this place and say: well, we're now happy because we've seen the amendment package and it deals with conflicts of interest. Well, folks, it does not deal with conflicts of interest. It doesn't deal with it. It's a great big zero.

So much to say and so little time. I wanted to go through some of the comments we've heard. The Member for Lacombe-Stettler tells us that doctors are experts, that it's a great thing that the college is going to make these decisions on what's going to be permitted overnight or not. Where was this member when the doctors said: Bill 40 stinks; we don't want to see that law brought into this province. The government said to doctors: we don't care what you

say; we know better. Mr. Speaker, how is it that doctors' advice will be listened to sometimes and not at others?

Thank you very much.

11:10

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Oh, sorry. There's been a breach here on the part of the chair, and he apologizes. Would hon. members please give consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have been joined during this debate by many special guests, and tonight I would like to recognize another person. We are joined tonight by Dean Margot Zorate, who is the Dean of Nursing at the University Peruana Cayetano Hedredia in Peru. She has been in this country for a mere 24 hours yet has found the time at nearly a quarter past 11 to come here and listen to the debate on privatization of our health care system. So we would like to recognize her this evening. I'd ask her to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 11

Health Care Protection Act

(*continued*)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, you'll get your turn when you're recognized. If you've already spoken, then that ends it, doesn't it? We would appreciate whoever is starting it – it takes two to tango and we have six of them in here. We only have one member at a time standing and speaking, and those that are sitting are not speaking. That member is the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. Let us hear him.

Debate Continued

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More than half a century ago the great Fakir who walked the halls of England in loincloth, the great Mahatma Gandhi, said: an error does not become truth by reason of multiplied propagation, nor does truth become error because nobody will see it.

Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to enter into this debate this evening at third reading of Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act. As many Albertans have correctly noticed, there has already been a great deal of debate on this issue, but so long as the Liberal and the ND oppositions keep up their campaign of misinformation, there needs to be people willing to set the record straight.

So much of the discussion to date has dealt with overnight stays in approved surgical facilities. It seems remarkable to me and to any other reasonable person that we work to fully utilize the wonders of modern medicine to treat as many Albertans as possible in the most efficient manner possible while at the same time freeing up valuable hospital space for more serious procedures that can only be done in public hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for change. Bill 11 capitalizes on opportunities that have become the realities of modern medicine. Who would have thought 20 years ago that even minor surgical procedures like those intended in Bill 11 would have progressed to the point where they are considered not only routine but unnecessary insofar as having them performed in a full-service public hospital? Twenty years ago these operations were considered to be major surgery, where recovery time was estimated in months and the risk to the patient was measurably higher. Now the minor surgeries that are involved in Bill 11 are being done at day-surgery clinics, where the patient is discharged in a fraction of the time with no serious risk to the patient. The overnight stay provision is merely an extension of services that can be performed in approved surgical facilities that require more than a 12-hour stay.

As we move into the 21st century, technological improvements will continue to reduce the impacts of surgery, potentially moving more procedures into the approved surgical clinic settings. In doing so, waiting lists will continually decrease, and as an added benefit the full-service public hospital will be able to further specialize and focus on major surgical procedures and, as such, will continually improve their efficiency. Mr. Speaker, that is what Bill 11 is all about: alleviating the pain and suffering that Albertans, indeed many Canadians, are experiencing with the status quo of Canadian health care.

This government is taking bold new steps to address pressures in health care by strengthening and sustaining the public health system that we all hold dear. Bill 11 accomplishes this by extending the sphere of the publicly funded health system to include approved surgical facilities through approved contracts with the regional health authorities. Even as we are about to take the first bold steps, the federal government and the federal Minister of Health resigned themselves to hollow criticism and empty promises. How frustrating it is, Mr. Speaker, that this legislation was brought forward in part by a request from the Hon. Allan Rock to close a serious legislative gap, only to be condemned for forward-thinking that improves our public health system while respecting all the terms and conditions found in the Canada Health Act.

The opponents of Bill 11 – the Liberals, the NDs, and the Friends of Medicare – advocate the status quo, and Albertans, indeed Canadians across the country, have repeatedly stated that the status quo is not acceptable. Mr. Speaker, our government was elected to find new solutions to old problems. That is what we have done in the past, and that is what we are doing here with Bill 11. This government wants to ensure that our public health system will be there for all Albertans in the 21st century and beyond. To ensure that future becomes reality, we have brought forward the Health Care Protection Act as one of the strengthening measures found in the six-point plan for health.

This evening I sincerely ask that the members across the floor who have argued, complained, fought, and resisted new solutions in health care every step of the way join us in support of a plan that means shorter waiting lists, better patient care, and decreased pain and suffering. Medicare is a system that we all value and cherish as Canadians. It works better when we work together to find solutions and improve it. My friends, this is the right thing to do. Let us be brave and pass this bill.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

11:20

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'm very pleased to speak to Bill 11 and add to the amount of hours we have debated this bill to date. There have been a lot of complaints about MLAs not having enough time to discuss, debate, and question Bill 11, otherwise known as the Health Care Protection Act. I just want to talk about some of those points because I think it's really important.

Let's see. Public policy regarding Bill 11 was released in November of 1999. Bill 11 was introduced on March 2. It was out for public debate for a month. Bill 11 was moved for second reading on April 4: 2,071 minutes, 34.52 hours, debating bill in House plus another 12.5 hours of question period time on Bill 11. Forty-seven hours total combined.

Second reading debate, Mr. Speaker: April 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, and 12. Committee of the Whole: April 12, 13, 17, 18, and 19. In second reading 1,158 minutes, or 19.30 hours; in Committee of the Whole on government amendments 913 minutes, or 15.22 hours; in Committee of the Whole on Liberal subamendment to A and N of government amendment 9.08 hours. Sixty-seven percent of time spent on government legislation this session has been spent on Bill 11.

The opposition has risen to speak to Bill 11 84 separate times. When we look at the total times spoken, the Liberals on the other levels, 77 times; the NDs, seven times. We all have one more opportunity to speak at third reading, which I'm very proud to stand for tonight, Mr. Speaker.

Another issue has been cuts to health, yet it is one of the least amounts cut in our budget. In fact, we have spent vast amounts of dollars . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Point of order, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. MacDONALD: *Beauchesne* 333. Would the hon. member entertain a question?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member only has to say yes or no and does not have to give a reason.

MS CALAHASEN: No. Mr. Speaker, I have limited time, and I want to take my time to be able to argue the points that have been brought forward.

Debate Continued

MS CALAHASEN: In fact, Mr. Speaker, \$5.6 billion to date we're spending on health care and still rising, up to \$6 billion in the year 2000-2001, which translates to over \$15 million a day on health care, and we still are doing more every year.

But health still plagues us, Mr. Speaker, and we need more dollars to be able to ensure that we take care of the needs of the constituents and all Albertans. I suppose that if we have limitless public dollars, medicine would do everything. Money is not limitless, and as Premier Roy Romanow now stated in the ND country: if health costs continue to grow at the current rate in Saskatchewan, our Department of Health is going to absorb the entire provincial budget in 15 to 20 years.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that is possible here also, and we still have not

addressed the issues. We still have problems that plague us in health. We have some options. We could do nothing, which is not an option in my view and my constituents' view. We could totally ban the surgical clinics, 52 of which we would have to rule out, 30 of which the then health minister brought in on her own. And we could have a third option: we could ban private hospitals outright and tightly regulate and control surgical facilities so that they only operate when it is beneficial to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, that's the aim of Bill 11, and tonight I want to state my position as unequivocally as I have to my constituents as to why I support Bill 11. First of all, the constituent concerns which have been brought to my attention. One is the access to health care. We continue to have that problem in my constituency. You've got to realize that I have 90,000 square kilometers. We have two hospitals to be able to serve the 24,000 constituents I have. Access is always an issue, but we can't let that be a problem. We have to find different ways of being able to address the access issue, something which I think needs to be done in a comprehensive way.

MS CARLSON: When are you going to start?

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has spoken, as have a number of other members. People on this side have had an opportunity and either have taken advantage of it or not, but please let us hear hon. members out without all these little yip-yaps that are going on.

Hon. associate minister, if you would continue, hopefully without any interruption.

Debate Continued

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. First of all, access to health care in my constituency. As I was saying, we've only got two hospitals that are able to serve the 24,000 constituents I have. We have 45 communities all over the constituency. We have, if we're lucky, at least eight hours to be able to access a hospital. That's a long way, Mr. Speaker. But in order for us to be able to improve access, we've done a number of things. I'm very proud of this, because it was the then minister of health, my colleague from Drumheller-Chinook, who was able to ensure that we had facilities that would be available to constituents in the northern communities, where we needed people to be able to access the facilities they could not otherwise access. It is an innovative way, something that constituents in my area have looked at to be able to deal with, in a better way, achieving access.

Mr. Speaker, paying for enhanced services or extra charges. This is an issue, mostly because there's been a lot of misinformation that has been given to them. When we're talking about paying for enhanced services or extra charges, the biggest issue people have come up to me with and said was: "Do we have to pay extra for all these services when we have already started in that area? We now pay for a lot of things when we go to the hospital. We're told that we have to pay for these extra services if we want to get some of the things we need." That came in, as my colleague from Calgary-Cross indicated, in an OC in I think 1992. That was brought in by our colleague at that time, the hon. minister of health, Mrs. Betkowski.

Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about extra charges, those are the kinds of things that people remember. They don't forget those. They look at what has already been established, and they're saying to us: "What can we do to make sure it doesn't go down that slippery slope that was started in 1992? How do we, then, contain those?"

Queue-jumping is a big issue. They're saying: "You know, we're not sure whether or not this is going to be able to be contained. We're really concerned about queue-jumping. Is there any way you can stop that? Is there any way this can be done so that it doesn't create problems for us who live in rural Alberta, who are so far away that sometimes we're forgotten when it comes to the line?" Mr. Speaker, they're always concerned about whether or not we can deal with this issue of queue-jumping. Such an important part in the bill was making sure that nobody can queue-jump.

Conflict of interest guidelines, Mr. Speaker. This was a concern from my constituents. They brought that as one of the issues, and we brought those ideas to the table, where we were then able to take care of some of the issues that were brought forward so that those changes could be brought in as amendments.

I commend my constituents for all the work they did and everything they brought forward. When they called, Mr. Speaker, when I asked them if they had read the bill, some of them said yes and some of them said no. Of those who said yes, the biggest question I asked was: how can we improve that bill so that you can be assured of public health care? They brought concerns forward and made some very good suggestions, and those are the suggestions that I think we'd like to continue to see as we are going through the bill. I want to commend them, during Committee of the Whole and through the whole time since November, for coming forward and making those suggestions.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? I received a few phone calls, not as many, I believe, as some in the urban areas. However, I did get, I would say, about 30 calls. That's a good number for my constituency. It's not as great as some of the other issues that I have to deal with. When we're talking about a little old lady who's 75 years old who needs a place to stay and has no home, that is the kind of call that I get. It takes precedence over some of these issues that are being brought forward.

When we're talking about those kinds of things, those are the kinds of things that hit home. Those are the kinds of things that people are concerned about in my constituency. Those are the areas that I begin to look at and say: how do I help those people? How do I make sure they get the house they require when we don't have those kinds of facilities available in those small remote communities? How do I ensure that they can fly out of a community that has no road, that has maybe no way of people getting out if somebody gets hurt in those communities? Those are the kinds of issues that we have to be able to look after.

I want to talk about waiting lists, Mr. Speaker. When I was just a young girl many years ago, I had a problem.

11:30

Many, many years ago, Mr. Speaker, I had a problem. I had a heart problem, and it was identified as a priority. In those years, some 29 years ago – that's a long time – it was identified as a priority that I had to go get open-heart surgery. Being a priority, I thought I'd be able to get in line and be able to get my heart surgery done as quickly as possible. Well, it took a year for me to be on that list when I was a priority. We have moved further away from those lists of a year, even getting better now. We have easier access to some of the facilities where we can have open-heart surgeries.

You know, when I think about that, within a week of my open-heart surgery I was allowed to go home up north, where there was very little availability of health care or even nearness to any hospital. I was allowed to go home after only six days. Think about that: 29 years ago – that's a long time ago – to be able to ensure that my heart was going to be okay if I left from here to go back to High Prairie, to be able to travel those miles and get there safely and then

be safe in order to ensure that I didn't have any kind of problems with my heart surgery.

Those waiting lists are getting smaller. In fact, we are getting better. We are getting even better kinds of open-heart surgeries being done, even organ transplants, which were never thought of at that point. Mr. Speaker, those kinds of things are the kinds of areas that my constituents are concerned about. Whatever we can do, if we can alleviate any of the people in my area and ensure that they're on a waiting list that won't be a year long but shorter, and whatever it is that we're doing, that's the kind of thing they want to see.

That's the real meat of what we're talking about. Those are the kinds of things that I think we have to continue to fight for in health care so that it's flexible, so that it's accessible, so that the waiting lists are not going to be left forever and ever, but that we can reduce those waiting lists.

Mr. Speaker, whatever we do, we always have to remember rural Albertans. They don't have access to hospitals within 10 minutes or five minutes. We have access to hospitals, maybe eight hours, if we're lucky. If we can have planes come in, that's another issue. We have so few of those.

Mr. Speaker, northerners are hardy people, and they know that we have to find ways of looking at how we increase efficiency and reduce costs. They want to make sure that whatever we do, they have a way of getting access to hospitals. They believe that whatever we do, it's got to be intelligent. It's got to be sensitive to their issues, and it's got to be something that can redefine everything that has to happen in the health care system.

We did many things in the constituency of Lesser Slave Lake. The access is there. We're getting better. The people have better health care. We have now reduced the infant mortality rate, which was pretty high. We have now reduced even the mortality rate of the seniors we have. That has dropped to some degree. I know that as we continue to do what we've been doing, we'll continue to make sure that things get done.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is a good bill. It does a number of things. My constituents want to know what those are. Firstly, it puts fences around those existing facilities that we have. Secondly, it will also ensure that we have rules and regulations for any of those private facilities that may want to come into our province. Thirdly, it will ensure that whatever we do, we'll continue to have access to health care and something that we can continue to maintain in a good way so we don't lose it by the costs that are spiraling, and that whatever we do in northern Alberta and in my constituency, they see themselves as being part of anything that has to happen that's innovative.

They've been very supportive, and I thank them for all their phone calls and the letters I've received. I know that the people who have been there have been very consistent in their messages that we have to do something, and we have to do something great.

The Slave Lake hospital was a big issue in 1988. In 1988 we had a flood. In 1988 we were promised a new hospital. You know, the then minister of health and I had quite an argument when it came to whether or not we were going to be getting a new hospital. She refused to give me a new hospital in Slave Lake, Mr. Speaker. That was a horrible, horrible thing for my constituents in Slave Lake, because we had fought very hard to make sure that hospital would be a priority. She refused. She refused to give me that hospital.

It was a very, very contentious issue with me, and it still continues to be a festering sore with my constituents in Slave Lake who have indicated that whatever happens, they remember these things. They won't forget that. I think that's something they will always remember, because it was a tough sell to try to see how I could even begin to let her see that rural Albertans also deserved a facility, that rural Albertans needed capital projects. It was very, very tough, and at the

time I was very upset and very angry about that. But, you know, it's the best thing that has happened because now I can say that that's one thing I have going for me, that the people will never forget that. That was the most horrible thing that could've happened, the her inability to make a decision for me to have that hospital and refusing – refusing – to come to join me and be able to tell my constituents that she had said no to my hospital.

Mr. Speaker, that to me will never be forgotten, and I know my constituents won't forget that. You know, how do you support your fellow MLAs? Well, it really bodes well in my constituency when something like that happens. History follows people, and as they say: history is a set of lies agreed upon. Napoleon Bonaparte said that. I think the set of lies that has been brought forward is going to be very, very interesting as we move into the next election.

I just want to say a few words about the kind of threats we've been getting. It's continual threats. They wanted to talk about the bill, but, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's that continual threat of saying: you're not going to be there next time. I mean, those are the kind of things I've heard in the last 11 years since I've been here. I think those are the kind of areas that these people are going to have to live by as we go through. Threats don't bode well. Rural Albertans don't like threats. They like to see reality. They want to know what the plans are. What are the Liberals' plans for rural Alberta? What are the Liberals' plans for waiting lists? What are the Liberals' plans for making sure that whatever we do is going to sustain health care? We have to look at what their plans are. I don't see any.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very proud to be able to say tonight that I support Bill 11. It is a good bill.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to try and keep my comments down to about seven or eight minutes tonight because it's a timely debate. I'm pleased to not only have had the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole but also to be able to speak in third reading here.

All across this country of ours there are similar discussions occurring at various levels of government in order to determine the best solutions to address the current crisis that Canadians are facing in the health care system. In other provinces the debate over health care and the operation of private surgical facilities has not nearly reached the magnitude that Alberta's has.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 shows that this government is firmly committed to protecting and improving access to the publicly funded system and to maintain the principles of the Canada Health Act. Our government has sought for three years to alleviate the pressure on the current system in this province through legislation governing surgical clinics, and with each year that passes, the imperativeness of finding a solution only becomes more pressing.

Our government has not allowed that pressure to sway it from its course of finding the best possible solution to alleviating the pressures on our current system. Our government has gone back to the drafters and examined the issues with the blue-ribbon panel and considered the practical application of proposed legislative measures. Bill 11 represents the culmination of that hard work. Bill 11 is a comprehensive piece of legislation to address the current crisis in our health care system. It shows that our government is committed to finding solutions while the opposition has shown its intention of hindering viable and progressive solutions to the challenges faced in our health care system.

11:40

Firstly, the amendments that were tabled and passed in this Assembly by all members of the government side tighten the prohibition on queue-jumping, making it illegal not only for persons to pay for faster service or to receive a payment to give faster service but also for a person to give faster access to insured service through the purchase of an enhanced product or service or through the purchase of an uninsured service. That's good news for my constituents, and it should be good news even for the ones that are philosophically opposed to Bill 11. It also states that the costs of enhanced medical services must be reasonable, and that's relief for my senior citizens when they know they're not going to have to pay any more. The amendments also specify that existing hospital space must be used effectively and efficiently and health authorities will have to consider efficient and effective use of existing capacities, and that makes sense to my constituents, Mr. Speaker.

In its amended form, Bill 11 will continue to alleviate waiting lists by providing viable options for regional health authorities to contract out certain services specified by the College of Physicians and Surgeons that can be done by surgical clinics under the umbrella of a publicly funded system while ensuring that these facilities are properly regulated under comprehensive legislation. Bill 11 has always been about options. It provides one more option for health authorities to consider when looking for the best way to deliver publicly funded health care. Funding for health care in the province will continue to be provided by the health authorities, who will then decide whether or not to contract out particular services in order to alleviate the pressures on the system.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to the crux of why I wanted to speak tonight. Instead of reading letters, I have a letter sent to me today from — and I'm proud to table this, as a matter of fact — Teresa Welsch at St. Michael's separate school in Pincher Creek. It's an essay critiquing Bill 11. It was part of a class project. Each student was to write an essay on Bill 11 after they had thoroughly researched it. The article was submitted to the *Pincher Creek Echo* by the school, because they thought she had done a very, very good job in critiquing Bill 11. I'm just going to read the title: Bill 11 is a Necessary Step in Ensuring the Protection of the Public Health Care System in Alberta, and then I'll let members read for themselves the contents of this essay.

The publicly funded system will pay the entire cost of all procedures, making the system equal to all Albertans regardless of their level of income. Furthermore, additional facility fees will be illegal. To the senior citizens of my constituency, that is a relief.

Much has changed since the first real doctor arrived in southern Alberta, Mr. Speaker. That man was an officer, Officer Kitson, of the North West Mounted Police. What did he treat? Whooping cough, gangrene, TB, smallpox, the flu. Most of these things were stomach and respiratory problems. Another thing he had to contend with was the social diseases that were spread during the day. What was he issued with? A standard issue, basically a magic box of medical supplies, called a medicine chest, and he provided those services. Today all of the treatments Officer Kitson did are solved by pharmaceuticals. Later on, the barber in Fort Macleod used to pull teeth. Why? Because he was the one who had the tools. Today we have MRIs.

All Tommy Douglas wanted to do was make sure that everyone could get access to a doctor. He had a compassionate heart for the poor people of southwest Saskatchewan, and when the community responded to help poorer folks get medical attention when required, that's when Tommy Douglas got his idea of socialized medicine. The private doctors, the private facilities didn't like it at first, but they came onstream, and today we have MRIs.

I am confident that Tommy Douglas didn't envision what health care would look like in the year 2000, and I am confident that if he were here today, he would come up with something more than just the status quo, because he would be wise enough to think of the future and affordable access without the negativity the opposition brings us today.

Mr. Speaker, I've had bigger issues in my constituency. The wind power issue, the Westcastle development issue, the '95 flood all come to mind, with over 400 letters and hundreds of phone calls on each issue. Bill 11 has a total of 140 letters and calls coming into my constituency office, and, yes, that is significant. But I would not vote for something that was a threat to my mother, to my father, and to my family gaining access to the system, because we use the system too.

Bill 11 is not a threat. It is here for our protection. It represents a comprehensive piece of legislation that will provide options for dealing with current challenges in the health care system. It is a progressive step forward, as many of the steps that have been taken by our government have been. If our government had not been as determined to eliminate the deficit in 1993, this province would be in worse financial shape today than ever before. Instead, we moved ahead and proved to Albertans that our goals are long-term goals and that they are achievable.

The Health Care Protection Act is not a move to privatize health care or create a two-tier system, as the opposition has stated numerous times. It is an act to do exactly what it is titled to do: protect health care in Alberta. It does this by prohibiting private hospitals and putting in place a proper regulatory framework for the number of private clinics that are currently operating in the province while at the same time relieving the pressures that the current system faces. This is a progressive step, Mr. Speaker, and a necessary one to ensure the continued viability and sustainability of a single system for publicly funded health care in this province.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening and speak in support of Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act.

I'd like to thank all of the constituents who have taken time to participate in this debate, and certainly all those both in favour and those against. I think it's been very positive that we've had an opportunity to have a debate on health care in Alberta, and I certainly want to thank those who have taken that time to supply their comments to me.

We live in an exciting time, and for health care it is one of those times and ages that we probably couldn't pick a better era in which to live. There are more things being changed in health today as a result of the great advances in science and technology and options than ever imagined before. We live longer. There are more life-enhancing and -extending procedures. Science is developing exciting technologies, equipment, drugs, and treatments. All of these things are providing quite a challenge and change for how health will have to be continually delivered and thought of, how it can be delivered for the future. That's going to have to incorporate a chance for change, for inventiveness, for being able to react and adapt quickly to the advances in technology and models of delivery.

Our health care as it was developed in Canada was always developed around the idea that there would be the provision of services both by private providers and public. It never had been solely developed from day one over the past few decades that it

would be just purely a public model. Our doctors and many of the health care providers have operated as independent private operators, whether they're in their own offices, clinics, surgical facilities, and even, for the most part, in many parts in our public hospitals. The bill does acknowledge this fact and addresses the regulation of those services.

I'm pleased to see that health, though some would throw out that this is the issue – it was never intended nor ever thought from its inception nor in its practice over the past few decades that the government would take over a monopoly on the provision of the services or a monopoly on the labour. We would allow and have always allowed for the private operation and provision of services. We have examples all around us in our existing system. We're asked: where is the evidence of its efficiency? Where is the evidence of its cost-effectiveness? It's happened over decades, ever since this model has been determined.

11:50

We have hundreds of clinics. We have over 50 surgical facilities and thousands of doctors who have operated and many other health providers who continue to provide another way, another option, and a quicker and more adaptable service to the public. We already see in our midst every day how effectively that actually works in our

own system. To actually ignore and to say that this has been a destruction of health care is to totally ignore the fact of the service that all of these hardworking, dedicated, well-intentioned, and tremendous working professionals provide.

We have one of the best opportunities of provision of health in Canada. We speak of the problems, yet we live in one of the best areas. We can be pleased to see that the provision of health is at an extremely high standard, and we have to look for even a better standard. But to ignore the reality that the private sector has always had a role and should always continue to have a role in conjunction with the provision of the services is a critical element of how health has been developed in Canada. Certainly Alberta is no exception to that. I am pleased to see that Bill 11 is one small step in the acknowledgment of this fact. We continue to see that health in Canada, in Alberta will have the best provision of service in world for our public.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In light of the time I would like to move adjournment of debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 11:52 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 10, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/10

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a very honourable individual, Mr. Peter Felix, the consul general for Switzerland. He is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. Accompanying him is Mr. Bruno Dobler, honorary consul of Switzerland here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and Switzerland have had a strong relationship for many years. Albertans of Swiss origin helped settle and develop our province, particularly our mountain parks. We are pleased to welcome many Swiss tourists each year. Alberta and Switzerland trade more than \$64 million worth of products in an average year in areas ranging from raw materials to high-tech products. The visit is an excellent opportunity for us to build on this relationship by exploring new areas of co-operation and growth. I had the honour of hosting His Honour the consul general.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that our honoured guests please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to present a petition from 679 Albertans from Calgary, Fort McMurray, Sherwood Park, Bon Accord, Tofield, Fort Saskatchewan, Mundare, Beaumont, Devon, and Edmonton urging this government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]." With the petitions tabled today, we will be at 73,000 petitions opposed to this government's privatization plans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have petitions to table on behalf of 566 Albertans from all over. They are from Stony Plain, Gainford, Spruce Grove, Mayerthorpe, Winterburn, Seba Beach, Sherwood Park, Ryley, Edmonton, Whitecourt, Ardrossan, Carvel, Beaumont, Wetaskiwin, Morinville, Tofield, Leduc, and Alberta Beach. They are all requesting that this government "stop promoting private health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition today calling on the Legislature to introduce legislation which will require two people to be on duty in businesses after hours, after dark.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 766 Albertans from Sherwood Park, Edmonton, Killam, Calgary, Onoway, Spruce Grove, Gunn, and St. Albert, all in opposition to a two-tier health care system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three petitions to table today. The first one is signed by 647 Albertans from Edmonton, Morinville, St. Albert, Calgary, Sherwood Park, Red Deer, Vegreville, Spruce Grove, Cold Lake, Sylvan Lake, Rimbey, Bonnyville, High Prairie, Didsbury, Beaumont, Bon Accord, and Ponoka. They are calling on this Assembly to urge the government to

stop promoting private for-profit health care, within the domain of medically required services, and to ban any existing for-profit operations that are conducting medically required surgical services, as paid for by the Government . . . through any Regional Health Authority.

The second one is signed by 58 Albertans from Athabasca and surrounding areas. This petition reads as follows, Mr. Speaker.

Whereas, a properly funded, public health care system is the most cost-effective way to deliver quality health services

And whereas, public health care is vital to ensure quality [health] care for all Albertans

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

The third one, Mr. Speaker, is signed by 319 Albertans opposed to Bill 11. They are from Calais, Valleyview, Red Deer, Grimshaw, Berwyn, Gibbons, Fort Saskatchewan, Spruce Grove, Camrose, Canyon Creek, Ardrossan, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Duffield, Fort Saskatchewan, Fort McMurray, Morinville, Little Smoky, Sturgeon Lake, Crooked Creek, Fox Creek, Sunset House, DeBolt, and Peace River. This brings the total number of signatures on this petition to 22,244.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to present a petition signed by 45 individuals very concerned about mature women's health. A lot of them are from Brooks, Rolling Hills, and Tilley, Alberta. They're urging the Legislative Assembly to urge the government "to take an enlightened preventative approach" with newer and more effective medications and therapies around osteoporosis.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present to the Assembly today. The first is on behalf of a number of Calgarians. These individuals are asking the Assembly "to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald."

The second petition I have for the Assembly today is from 603 individuals from Vermilion, Marwayne, Bonnyville, Dewberry, Mannville, Wembley, Water Valley, Calgary, Flatbush, Cold Lake, Fort McMurray, Clandonald, Innisfree, Wainwright, and Elk Point. Mr. Speaker, this petition reads:

We, the undersigned citizens of Alberta, strongly oppose the privatization of health care services in Alberta. We do not wish to see for-profit services used in our health care because we believe that this will lead to a two-tier system. We call for funding to be restored by the Provincial Government to public health care to reduce the current long waiting lists.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Assembly. It states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

It is signed by a number of residents from Sherwood Park, Wildwood, and the city.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would ask that the petition I presented on Tuesday, May 9, signed by 172 Albertans requesting that the erosion of . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, it's only required to ask for the petition be read. The Clerk will do the work.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I am asking that that petition be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I request that the petition I presented on May 9 regarding private health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would ask that the petition I presented regarding the concerns about private health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I'd ask that the petition I read into the record yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition I put in yesterday with respect to public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, wish that the petition I presented yesterday signed by 146 Albertans requesting that private health care be stopped be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday, May 9 regarding the divisive and disruptive labour dispute at the *Calgary Herald* be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the [Legislative] assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*.

THE SPEAKER: Do you have a second, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar?

MR. MacDONALD: Sure, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Legislative Assembly yesterday regarding public health care be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to protect, support, and enhance public health care in Alberta and to ban for-profit, private hospitals from receiving public dollars.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday, May 9, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta:

1. To immediately disallow any further development of the Spray Valley of Kananaskis Country, including those proposals currently under consideration;

2. To maintain Kananaskis Country in natural state that provides high quality wildlife habitat and nature-based recreational activities;
3. To create a Wildland Provincial Park which protects the whole of the undeveloped parts of the Kananaskis and Spray Valleys.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, request that the petition I tabled yesterday now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name concerning public health care now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, sir. I'd ask that the petition I had introduced yesterday, May 9, with respect to opposition to private health care might now be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition standing in my name on the Order Paper asking the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care," which combined with the third party and ourselves brings the petitioners to 100,000 in this province . . .

THE SPEAKER: Please. Please have a chair. Clerk, do we have such a petition?

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that the petition I presented yesterday on front licence plates be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to re-instate the front license plate on all vehicles registered in Alberta.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to table with the Assembly five copies of a letter to the editor of the *Edmonton Journal*. The letter was written by John Zaozirny, who is the former minister of energy, expressing his disappointment and puzzlement at some of the opposition to Bill 11, particularly the opposition of two former colleagues, Mr. Amerongen and Mr. King.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish first of all to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Alberta College of Optometrists for the year ended December 31, 1999. Five copies are provided.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of the complete executive summary of the pilot study Evaluation of Contracted Surgical Services completed November 12, 1998. It's from the Calgary regional health authority.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to explain that I realize this was purportedly tabled by the opposition earlier, but they somehow missed out a number of pages, and I wanted to table the entire report, including the conclusion.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table today a copy of a letter I received from a scholar in our city, Dr. Brigham Card. He identifies the Cardston medical contract in 1932 as actually the beginning of Canadian medicare.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would to table the required copies of the annual report of the Edmonton Community Lottery Board for 1999. This document provides a complete listing of all the grant recipients' proof for funding. My sincere thanks go for a job well done to the board members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you. Only two tablings this afternoon, sir, both are opinion poll summaries. The first one is the summary for the month of April 2000 at www.garydickson.ab.ca. There were 2,251 hits, 90 percent opposed to Bill 11.

The second one is 567 hits from May 1 to May 9 at the same web site, 86 percent opposed to the overnight-stay provision in the 14 government amendments.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a petition. The reason I didn't present this during petitions is that these petitioners faxed in their petitions instead of providing the originals. It is a petition in support of public health care in Alberta. It is signed by 677 residents of Alberta from Cochrane,

Anzac, Clearwater, Fort Macleod, Pincher Creek, Edmonton, Calgary, Drumheller, Lac La Biche, Fort McMurray, Calmar, Morinville, Vegreville, Drayton Valley, Hinton, Lamont, Fort Saskatchewan, and Fairview. These undersigned citizens "petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care" in the province of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition I received from third-year nursing students at the University of Calgary who are adamantly opposed to Bill 11. They include Maureen Firmston, Kim Gibb, Suzanne Champoux, Lisa McClelland, Lindsay Bauer, Agnes Antivolla, and Jen Langille. They've asked me to table it in the Assembly, which I am pleased to do on their behalf.

Secondly, I would like to table a petition signed by 160 seniors who are part of the Federal Superannuates National Association who have signed a petition which I'm pleased to table opposing Bill 11 and who were even more concerned after their detailed study of the legislation.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to table a set of letters. These letters are signed by 146 Albertans from Red Deer requesting in a different set of ways and in a number of different examples that they give that the government not promote private, for-profit health care.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is a petition which indicates opposition to Bill 11 and states that it "will have far reaching, destructive consequences for all of us."

The second is a FOIP request to the office of the Premier asking that the total numbers of the correspondence both in support of and against Bill 11 be provided.

The third tabling is the preliminary report of results of a questionnaire in Edmonton-Meadowlark, both the percentage and numeric breakdown, which indicated overwhelming opposition to private, for-profit health care.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is from a constituent of mine, Cecile Hansen, very much opposed to Bill 11.

The other is an article entitled U.S. Doctor Wails over Managed Care, that was sent to me by Mary-ellen Robinson. She states: "In the name of democracy and common sense I beg you to vote against Bill 11 . . . I pray that you will have the strength to vote against Bill 11."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a total of four

tablings today. The first three are letters opposing Bill 11. The first letter is from Harold and Cheri Gerbrandt of Medicine Hat. The second is from Richard Beech of Sherwood Park. The third one is from Shirley Thomas of Red Deer.

Mr. Speaker, the fourth tabling is in the form of a petition. I couldn't table it because it doesn't have the disclaimer. I would like to table requisite copies of this petition and, with your permission, read the petition into the record. "We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the . . ."

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, if it's inappropriate for the Routine, there's no way of getting around it, so please table it, and let's move on.

DR. PANNU: Okay, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

This petition was circulated by the Sisters of Assumption and is signed by 235 Franco-Albertans opposed to the privatization of health care in Alberta. The petition is signed by residents of Plamondon, Lac La Biche, Grassland, St. Lina, and Boyle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd table five copies of a photocopied petition from Edmonton, St. Albert, and Stony Plain signed by 30 citizens opposed to Bill 11.

The second tabling is a petition from 37 citizens in Gleichen and Wheatland county that lacks the privacy regulation and asks for the withdrawal of Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a copy of a petition signed by 565 people from Bonnyville, Glendon, Ardmore, Frog Lake, Mallaig, Cold Lake, and La Corey opposed to Bill 11 and a two-tiered health care system.

I also have a second tabling. It is an article on the front page of the *Western Catholic Reporter* entitled Scrap Bill 11, says the Catholic Women's League.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is 35 letters to the Premier from residents of Canmore who are opposed to the Genesis proposal for the Spray Valley in Kananaskis Country.

The second is 47 more letters, Mr. Speaker, from people from southern Alberta, including Canmore, to the Premier urging him to scrap the development in Kananaskis Country and protect "this wonderful area as a designated Wildland Park."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have but one tabling today. It is from 150 Albertans from Red Deer, Alberta. They wish to register their opposition to "plans for privatization and for-profit hospitals in Alberta." They further say that they "cannot see how creating a for-profit health [care] system can benefit the taxpayers and voters of Alberta."

Thank you, sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition that was not in the proper form signed by 83 residents of Fort Macleod requesting “no special private clinic or special services” in public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table today a notice to all members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts regarding the second meeting cancellation from the Minister of Learning and our lack of ability now to hold his department accountable.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon, and that is a letter I've received from the Premier of Saskatchewan, Roy Romanow, regarding the shortage of health professionals not only in this province but across the country. Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 23 special guests from the northernmost part of the Little Bow constituency in Arrowwood school. Accompanying 18 students that have had a full two days visiting the science centre and the Provincial Museum yesterday as well as the Legislature here today are their teacher, Mrs. Rani Crawford, and their bus driver and teacher, Mr. Dean Truman, along with parent helpers Mrs. Darcy Oberholtzer, Mrs. Peggy Robinson, and Mrs. Linda Garside. They're in the members' gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

DR. WEST: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly some students from the Marwayne Jubilee school. Marwayne is about 150 miles from here in the northeast. These are very intelligent students, great self-discipline. They were in my office earlier. They've been to the Space and Science Centre. They're going to have a tour here, and they're also going to get to go swimming in the city of Edmonton today, and then they're going back home. I would like to introduce with them Mr. Elgin Pawlak, teacher, and Mrs. Arlene Parker, teacher assistant. They're in the members' gallery. I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think the group from Rocky Mountain House is in the House yet, but I want to introduce the group to you. They will be coming in very shortly. There are 15 grade 10 students along with three teachers and two parents. I'd ask that the House give them the usual warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very

pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 13 students and their instructor from the continuing education annex. Their instructor, Ms Nancy Fanjoy, is accompanying them. I didn't get a chance to meet them earlier, but I ask members of the Assembly to please welcome them and give them the usual warm round of applause.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you today on behalf of the Member for Red Deer-North 52 grade 10 students from Lindsay Thurber high school in Red Deer.

I want to note, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations went to Lindsay Thurber high school, as did the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. It's very likely that the Minister of Gaming, because he grew up in Red Deer, went to Lindsay Thurber. The minister of agriculture went to Lindsay Thurber, and the cousins of the minister from Calgary all went to Lindsay Thurber high school, and while the Minister of Learning went to Red Deer College and should've gone to Lindsay Thurber, he didn't. It's obviously an outstanding high school. It has a great impact on our province, and who knows what's going to come from this group of grade 10 students in the future.

I would ask them to rise, along with their teachers, Mr. Carl Malenfant and Mr. Rick Ramsfield, and receive the warm greetings of this Assembly.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions to make today. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Alison Cameron, who will be my summer student this year – she has just completed her first year of nursing at the University of Alberta – and Heather Kuhl, who is a Grade 10 student doing a work experience project in my office. I would ask these two to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Voting on Bill 11

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're down to the eleventh hour and debate has been closed off, but a majority of Albertans are hoping that it's not too late for the Premier to take the whips off of his caucus and let his MLAs represent the wishes of their constituents on private health care. My question is: will the Premier finally change his mind and allow his MLAs a free vote on private health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have explained so many times in this Legislature that my caucus colleagues have the opportunity to vote freely on this particular matter. It was a caucus decision not directed by me – I purposely missed that caucus meeting – a caucus decision to unanimously support the government's position on Bill 11.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, if Bill 11 causes no harm and if it isn't going to be a threat to public health care in this province, why is this Premier so afraid to allow the free vote to occur?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not afraid to have a free vote on this particular matter. There was a free vote in the caucus.

I know that it's very difficult for the leader of the Liberal

opposition to understand a vote in caucus because when I was in caucus with her, Mr. Speaker, there wasn't such a thing as a vote. So I can understand why it's difficult for her to understand that we actually do have votes in our caucus. It was unheard of when she was a senior member of the caucus in the Getty government. They simply did not have votes.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, this is not a comment on free votes; it's a comment on freedom of speech. The chair will recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to raise a question, and there should be a minimal amount of interjections or none. The chair will then recognize a representative of the government to respond, and there will be minimal or few interjections, if any at all. That's called freedom of speech.

The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Voting on Bill 11 (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if the Premier can sign a membership pledge to support his former Treasurer in a leadership bid, why won't he sign a pledge for a free vote for Albertans on health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll explain again. There was a vote in the caucus, and it was a free vote. I wasn't there, but I'm sure that as many members of caucus as wanted to speak on this issue said their piece. At the end of the day, as I understand from the whip, the vote in caucus, something that is so foreign to the leader of the Liberal opposition, was unanimous to support the government's position.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Diagnostic Equipment

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Fairview hospital X-ray machine is 14 years old. Patients and staff of the Mistahia region are very concerned about receiving higher than recommended doses of radiation, as they should be. The faulty X-ray machine can emit radiation levels as high as 19 rad, almost double the provincially set standard of 10 rad. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier commit right now to the people of Mistahia and Alberta to provide regional health authorities with adequate budgets to buy and operate diagnostic equipment that is safe?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, indeed, that is in our six-point health plan, to make sure that we have all of our facilities equipped with up-to-date equipment.

Relative to the situation as it pertains specifically to the hospital in Fairview, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, if the information with respect to the possibility of radiation coming from an X-ray machine is valid, I would certainly expect that those in charge at the hospital would refer that to officials in the regional health authority and that that machine would not be used, period. That is what we would expect of any health authority in this province and those within it in terms of not endangering patient safety.

The other point, though, Mr. Speaker, is that we have in the budget that was tabled before this Legislature and approved

significant additional dollars for capital equipment. We also added capital equipment in last year's budget, and the Mistahia regional health authority got their fair proportion. I assume that they would manage those resources and deal with this situation.

THE SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, they've been turned down for capital funding.

My second question is to the Premier. Is the Premier's underfunding of health authorities for modern diagnostic equipment part of his plan to artificially create a demand for private diagnostic services for Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, obviously the Liberal opposition has not been paying attention. Just recently the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness announced the purchase of four new MRIs to go into hospitals, conventional hospitals, as we know them today. That's in addition to the MRIs that have already been slated for Lethbridge, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, and the Mistahia region in Grande Prairie.

The statement that the leader of the Liberal opposition made relative to there being no capital funding I don't think is a true statement. I'm sure the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness would be very happy to provide the leader of the Liberal opposition with the actual amounts that have been provided to the Mistahia health region for the purchase of capital equipment.

MR. JONSON: If I could just briefly supplement, Mr. Speaker, just possibly the questioner is not portraying this in the right way. There well may be a proposal for renovation in the capital project at the Fairview hospital which has not made its way up the priority list, but if they're honestly talking about an X-ray machine, we have additional capital dollars in the health care budget for the regional health authorities to set their priorities and purchase the needed equipment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Premier. How can this Premier afford a \$3 million communications campaign on private health care, yet he doesn't have the \$400,000 the people of the Mistahia health care region need for a safe X-ray machine?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, not one single cent has been spent on a campaign to promote private health care. Yes, some money has been spent to explain to the public our intentions relative to a piece of legislation to protect the public health care system as we know it today and to abide by the principles of the Canada Health Act, something, by the way, that the Liberals voted against.

Relative to the situation in Fairview with respect to the X-ray machine, if there is an unsafe X-ray machine, then we will look after it. We'll look after it this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I have to ask the question: when did this leader of the Liberal opposition learn about this particular situation? Has she been keeping it under her hat, so to speak? Has she been keeping it under her hat? You know, why can't she act like Sheldon Chumir, who was an honourable person, or like Bettie Hewes, who is an honourable person? When they found out something that might cause danger to life, they would have the decency and the courtesy to go to the minister.

2:10

So their objective is to try to embarrass the government. They have no concern whatsoever over public safety. None whatsoever.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout the debate on private health care policy the Premier has ignored the voices and the concerns of Albertans. He's ignored their phone calls, their letters, their 100,000 petitions signed, their faxes, their e-mails. He's refused to answer the many Albertans who've gathered at the Legislature over the last few weeks. In fact, the Premier has left a trail of unanswered questions, and it is time to get some straight, truthful answers. My question is to the Premier. Where is the evidence to show that your health care policy won't be more expensive?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that's what the policy is all about. For the first time surgical clinics will have to demonstrate to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, to the regional health authorities, to the minister that efficiencies will result, that there will be cost savings, and that it will reduce waiting lists. And they voted against that.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, where is the evidence – evidence – that the health care policy isn't going to increase waiting lists?

MR. KLEIN: Well, maybe, Mr. Speaker, the evidence is contained in documents that have been hidden away for 15 years in the 150 boxes of documents that the leader of the Liberal opposition refuses to make available for the public. Maybe the evidence is contained there. We will never know.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, where is the evidence to show that the new health professionals being trained at public expense won't end up in private health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, this is something that will have to be determined between the RHA, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the minister. This legislation, the policy, is to enhance the protection of the public system as we know it today and to fully commit ourselves to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

What is happening right now? You know, the strange thing and I guess maybe the thing that's not totally honest about this on the part of the Liberal Party is that they're trying to create the impression that this is something new. Perhaps contained in those 150 boxes that have been secreted away is the information relative to the 30 clinics that the leader of the Liberal opposition allowed to be established and allowed to charge facility fees.

Surgical clinics are not new. They have been operating in this province for years and years. This leader of the Liberal opposition knows it because she allowed 30 of them to operate and charge facility fees. So it's not being honest to somehow imply that this is something new. This has been going on in this province for years.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Charles Camsell Hospital

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The likely passage of Bill 11 this evening is the latest example of a government hell-bent on privatizing what's left of Alberta's public health care system. Whether it's hospital services, laboratory services, home care services, or long-term care services, this is a government that places a higher priority on the well-being of corporations than on the well-being of citizens. My questions are to the Premier. Which private,

for-profit health care interests does the government hope to reward by selling the Charles Camsell hospital in Edmonton?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm really not familiar with the details of a sale if indeed it is pending. I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, if I understand the hon. member's question, he's talking about the sale of a hospital. I would like to have that elaborated on. I'm not aware of the sale of any operating hospital.

DR. PANNU: My second question, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: given the severe shortage of long-term care beds, why doesn't the government donate the Charles Camsell site to the publicly owned Capital Care Group instead of selling it to private hospitals or nursing home corporations?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is really a decision that would have to be made by the RHA in consultation with the minister and certainly whatever committees or authorities have been established within the Capital regional health authority to address long-term care needs.

Relative to the specific question, perhaps the minister can answer.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is helpful that the member has now finally identified the building. The Charles Camsell hospital was reduced in terms of its function some years ago, going back into, as I recall, the late '80s. It was eventually phased out and closed down because of the changing role of the hospital. It was, as I recall, operated in a contract relationship with the federal government for our First Nations people for a period of time, and then the service for those individuals was shifted and integrated more with the overall public health care system.

Mr. Speaker, I've not been in the building recently, but I have been through it, and it would require major, major renovations. I don't think that a long-term care proponent would necessarily regard it as a very great gift unless it was supplemented with quite a bit of additional capital money to bring it up to standard and to renovate it.

I'm sure those options are being considered by the capital health authority, but those are some of the background items that would have to be considered.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: what evidence, if any, does the government have that justifies its clear bias towards subsidizing the private, for-profit sector to build and operate long-term care beds as opposed to having those beds built and operated by regional health authorities directly?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've had for decades in this province, as I've said many times – but let's talk particularly about the long-term care area – a mixture of voluntary, private, and directly publicly run and built long-term care centres. We have, yes, as we did with the lodges across this province, provided a financing program whereby the private sector can get involved in building a long-term care centre and operating it just as a volunteer organization such as the Bethany Group can get involved in conducting or completing a capital project and having an operating contract. They've worked well across this province and provided good service, and that is what we're continuing to do.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Grain Transportation

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Transportation of grain to market for Alberta farmers has been very inefficient and has cost Alberta farmers millions of dollars more than it should. The Premier, the minister, and the Minister of Infrastructure have lobbied the federal government for changes. Today we hear of proposed legislation by the federal government to correct this. Can the minister outline the fundamental components of today's announcement and what it will mean for Alberta grain farmers?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for your guidance. I'll try to compress it as much as possible, but this is a major announcement for Alberta and particularly for Alberta farmers.

2:20

First of all, let me say that we didn't get everything we wanted, but it did move a long way toward implementing the Estey report and the recommendations that Arthur Kroeger made. The number one benefit to Alberta farmers that we will realize starting on August 1 of the new crop year is the revenue cap on the railways. There's going to be a cap established that is about \$178 million less than the revenue would be on the movement of 30 million tonnes. That is a reduction of about 18 percent from where it would have been.

Now, we've got to be careful with the math, because the fact is that if you add in first that 4.5 percent increase that was announced some weeks ago, now it's being reduced by 18 percent. So really the true reduction from this current year's freight rates is about 13.5 percent, which means about \$4.47 a tonne reduction. So with the amount of grain that is moving out of the province of Alberta, that will mean a direct reduction of about \$45 million to \$50 million that will stay in the pockets of Alberta farmers. It's important to recognize that this is an annual thing, and it's not tax dollars. Those are farmers' dollars, so it'll stay in their pockets.

The next component that is pretty important to mention is the fact that there's also the injection of \$175 million of new money that will go to infrastructure where we have rail abandonment. Then there are some four or five other points, but we'll deal with those some other time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you. My supplementary to the minister. Mr. Minister, I appreciate what you just told us, but given that Alberta has called for moving the role of the Canadian Wheat Board to spout and this has not been fully implemented, does the government support the proposed legislation?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, we did recommend that in fact the Wheat Board be moved to spout, but actually Kroeger had recommended that port would be good enough. We accept this. It's a move in the right direction.

I think that probably a couple of the other points that are even more important to Alberta than whether spout or terminal is the fact that the federal government has also committed to looking at the rail

situation, the transportation situation, and by law they have to do a review under the Canadian Transportation Agency of the whole rail system starting July 1, 2000.

The minister has committed that in the first six months of that review he wants an answer back on things like open rail, tariffs, and that sort of thing. That could be extremely important to Alberta farmers, particularly in light of the one other component that they announced today, and that is that they will be accepting the 25 percent contract for movement to the terminals from the prairies.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you. That's a step in the right direction, Mr. Minister, but what effects will all these changes have on Alberta's domestic food processing and agricultural value-added industries? Will the funds flow through to Albertans?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, ultimately we believe and it's the position of the Alberta government that we need to move the Canadian Wheat Board out of the domestic market. Until that happens, we still are going to have a problem with some of the added value in the province, because there's an additional administrative cost that adds absolutely no value to the primary producers.

So that would be one of the things that we would be still hoping for, but I have to reiterate again that this is a step in the right direction. Certainly if the Canadian Wheat Board lives up to the rhetoric that they are producing today, then this will be an even better first step.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's return to the unanswered questions on private health care. Why does the Premier continue to allow queue-jumping with private MRIs in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to MRIs, which are not under the jurisdiction of the Canada Health Act, if a perfectly healthy individual simply wants to have an examination, yes, that individual, as I understand it, can go to an MRI clinic and pay to have the procedure. But if a doctor suspects that there is something wrong with the individual and prescribes an MRI, then it is done under the publicly funded system.

I stand to be corrected, and I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, for a number of years, going back to the time of the Leader of the Opposition as minister, it has been possible for a person to pay for certain diagnostic services outside medical health care coverage because they did not require the services of a physician for the actual conducting of the test. That, yes, is happening today.

MRS. MacBETH: Point of order.

MR. JONSON: However, the government has been increasing in a major, major way the MRI capacity in this province. This is for machines that will operate within the public health care system for which there will be coverage, which will reduce waiting lists and will bring Alberta to a top ranking in this country in terms of the number of scans per thousand population.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why does the Premier continue to hide public contracts for laboratory and diagnostic services in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, those contracts, as I understand it, are between the regional health authorities and the various diagnostic clinics.

Relative to the transparency and the openness of contracts as they relate to contracted surgeons, Mr. Speaker, that issue was addressed in Bill 11 as one of the amendments to strengthen the old provision of openness and transparency, but the Liberals voted against it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this Premier refuses to answer the legitimate questions that Albertans have posed, it confirms that by his actions this Premier has broken trust with the people of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: I was waiting for the question. It didn't come.

MR. JONSON: I can respond, Mr. Speaker. In terms of the openness of contracts, this is something that we need to be able to ensure will occur, and we need the legislation, Bill 11, to do it.

But I would like to point out that while the increased capacity is being put in place in Calgary, certain contracts have been made with private providers of MRI services. Some of the proponents of those contracts are well known to members of the opposition. The point here is that even though the legislation is not yet in place, I understand from the Calgary regional health authority that they are going to be publishing the details of the overall contracts for these three short-term times of service on the web site that they operate.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that with the goodwill there we're already moving in the direction of Bill 11.

Driver Licensing

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Infrastructure, who is also responsible for traffic safety. It's been about five or six years since this Legislature started discussing seriously graduated licensing. My first question to the minister is: what are the elements of the currently proposed graduated licensing program?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. The graduated licensing program falls under the Traffic Safety Act, which was passed in the House last year. Before I talk about the elements of the graduated licensing program, I would just like to say that the graduated licence is a process that is intended to give drivers adequate on-road experience within certain conditions in a very controlled environment.

2:30

We are in the process now of beginning a round of public consultations with respect to the proposed program, and the discussion paper we are intending to send out to all Albertans and all of the stakeholders will be centred on a number of points. One of them will be a one-year learner period and a two-year probationary period for new drivers so they can get supervised experience in all season driving conditions, then a ban on new drivers operating a

vehicle between midnight and 5 a.m. – now, this is just for the learner period, the one year – and also the number of passengers in the vehicle not exceeding the number of seat belts.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister would tell us what the implications will be with respect to beginning drivers, learning drivers when it comes to mixing alcohol and driving.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, there will be zero tolerance, of course, for alcohol use while driving. This applies both to the learner and also to the adult that's with the learner in the car. Action will be taken against the driver, and it's important to accentuate again that it's not only the person in the learner status but also the driver that's there to advise the learner in terms of conditions and rules of the road. So both. If there's evidence of alcohol detected on either one, then we'll pursue it under the current law.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, in some of the current newspaper articles the question that comes to mind is: under what circumstances might a second test be required with respect to earning your driver's licence?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the graduated licence program will apply to all new drivers regardless of their age or where they come from. Anyone moving to Alberta from another country who has held a licence for less than two years will have to go through a graduated licence program to make sure that they know Alberta's rules of the road and especially have an opportunity to drive during all the seasons, and of course winter is most important. Our conditions are very different, as you know, from many parts of the world.

Now, experienced drivers from other countries may be asked to take a road test and a written test to ensure that they are familiar with Alberta's roads and conditions with the exception of those countries with which Alberta has reciprocal agreements. Germany, Japan, and Australia come to mind.

Mr. Speaker, this is all in the discussion document. It will go to all Albertans for their input.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Institute for Health Economics Report

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister confirm that the final draft of the government-funded report from the Institute of Health Economics is now complete?

MR. JONSON: I cannot confirm that at this moment, Mr. Speaker, but we are expecting it in short order.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, would it be possible that that could be released before we have to vote on Bill 11 tonight?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as was indicated earlier in terms of the preliminary findings of the institute, that report will be, I think, very similar to the one that was just tabled today on behalf of the Calgary regional health authority. It will point out certain advantages, certain examples which are very cost-effective and very acceptable in the private sector as well as those that are much stronger on the public side.

The point here is that – and it relates to Bill 11. One of the messages that I think will come out of that report in its conclusions

is that there needs to be a thorough analysis of any particular proposal for the operation of a surgical clinic, Mr. Speaker, and that certain criteria have to be met. That's what Bill 11 is all about.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, it still would help if we could get to see it before we have the vote tonight.

Is there something in this report that's not going to support Bill 11?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, my reports and indications are no. In fact, it would be judged to be on the positive side as far as our case for Bill 11 is concerned.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Natural Gas Pricing

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've received inquiries from several constituents about the variation in the price of natural gas. Sometimes the price that one household pays for natural gas varies by as much as 25 percent from the price that a neighbouring household pays even when the usage is basically the same if they are on a different utility system. Can the Minister of Resource Development tell the Assembly how the natural gas price varies across the province?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the issue that the member has brought forward is often related to me from various areas of the province. We have 69 gas co-ops that deliver gas, some 24 municipally owned gas companies, and of course we have the five investor-owned gas companies in the province. So there is a great variance, and it's because of three or four different factors.

One of the main factors, of course, is that we have a fixed gas charge, a fixed delivery charge, a variable delivery charge, and sometimes a municipal fee. Now, these prices vary by utility, each one of these different ones, and they're all outlined on the bill. For example, the fixed delivery charges of the three biggest investor-owned utilities are similar, about \$14 per month for ATCO south and AltaGas Utilities and \$13.80 for ATCO north. There is a spread in the variable delivery charges. They range from \$1.05 a gigajoule to \$1.19 to \$1.29 depending on which utility area you're in. There's also the variation and the cost of the natural gas. That varies from \$3.33 per gigajoule at ATCO south to \$4.26 at ATCO north and \$4.34 at AltaGas.

Now, the other thing is that if you're sitting beside a rural gas co-op, they buy all of their gas, the 69 of them, through a thing called Gas Alberta. They bulk-buy the gas, and then they blend these with the operating costs as the cost of gas. So you can get rates varying from \$2.75 in the Gem Gas Co-op to \$4.73 in the Lobstick Gas Co-op, and it goes on and on.

So there is no way that a brother-in-law can compare from one district to another and come up with the same price.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the minister tell the Assembly why the prices vary so much?

DR. WEST: Well, what I explained the first time I got up was how the costs were made up. Now let's look at what varies some of these costs from one area to another. Let's look at some of the gas distribution costs. The age of the system of the older gas distributors

costs less because they're more depreciated, and the newer systems cost more. Customer density: you can well imagine that in the city of Edmonton or in the city of Calgary the distances between customers and the density makes it cheaper to deliver those costs. There's cross-subsidization. In some utilities urban consumers subsidize deliveries in less populated areas, so you get variance that way. Then there's municipal franchise taxes. Some municipalities put on a franchise tax, and it's right on the bill.

The other cost variance relates to the gas itself. Remember that on gas contracts the price of gas can vary depending on when they've been signed and for how long. If some utilities have gas storage and are competing against somebody that has no storage, of course they can buy cheaper gas and hold it for six months, and it's reflected on their bill. Some of the companies also produce the gas, and of course they may have storage capacity and produce the gas and don't have to buy it off the spot market, and therefore it's cheaper.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These reasons for variance don't explain why the price of natural gas has increased across the board over the last year. Could the Minister of Resource Development explain why the prices have gone up?

DR. WEST: I know that the hon. member wants to ask this on behalf of his constituents, because we're all concerned here. The price of natural gas is going up. It's market driven. There is no disconnect now between pipeline capacity and the United States. When we had more gas than we had pipeline capacity, of course there was cheaper gas back in Alberta. Now with the Alliance pipeline and some of the new pipelines that have been built transborder, we are going to see a North American marketplace, and because of the uptake of natural gas in electrical generation and the conversion from oil in certain industries to gas utilization, we'll see the price go up.

2:40

One thing you should note is that Alberta still has the cheapest gas prices. Remember you pay the cost of gas. Let's look at April 24: in Canadian dollars Calgary was \$3.96 a gigajoule; Vancouver, \$3.88; Toronto, \$4.56; Chicago, \$4.45. Some say that they pay less for gas in the States because we're exporting. They pay more for gas in the United States.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Health Care Funding

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Rockyview hospital in Calgary has one CAT scan that handles 50 procedures a day when it was only meant to handle 20. Quite basically, they just need more equipment. Even Bud McCaig, chairman of the Calgary Health Trust, has said that the private sector is going to have to shoulder a heavier load when it comes to health care expenditures. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the government doing to ensure that all regions have a sustainable plan for providing equipment renewal? Or are they just going to be forced to rely on bottle drives next?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, a very significant additional amount of money is being provided for capital equipment across this province. It is recognized that the CAT scan, of course, is a very important diagnostic tool, and I'm sure that the Calgary health authority would give priority to diagnostic equipment

which needs to be either replaced or added to in terms of capacity.

Mr. Speaker, we also have a special fund particularly for specialized, high-tech equipment that is allocated to health authorities out of our lottery fund, and our overall contributions, as I've said, to capital funding have been increasing rather significantly.

If I could, just for more details on it I would ask the Minister of Infrastructure to perhaps comment further on this.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the plan over the next three years is to continue consulting with regional health authorities in looking at those areas, not only replacing equipment that requires replacement because it's old and has served its usefulness but also in adapting new technologies.

A good example, Mr. Speaker, is of course the newly opened neonatal unit over at the Royal Alex with the digital transmission of all the diagnostic imaging. The specialists now at the Royal Alex can consult with specialists anywhere around the world, with those physicians that are on the same system that we have here in Edmonton. I would say that it is the first in Alberta, right here in Edmonton, to go on an electronic transmission system and, in fact, probably the first of its kind in Canada.

MS LEIBOVICI: As it now appears to be government policy that the private sector begin to shoulder a heavier load when it comes to health care expenditures, is the minister prepared to admit that the quality of health care delivery provided in the community is going to depend on its ability to fund-raise?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is well demonstrated in our budget and in our overall business plan that this government is committed to adding significantly today and in the future, some 21 percent more money over the next three years, rising to well over \$5 billion, comparing well with the expenditures of other provinces. So we're certainly investing in the public health care system of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the other point is that we are very grateful that there are health care foundations, people that want to add to and enhance the capability of our health care system. Those types of organizations have thankfully been there for decades. There's nothing new about this. They've bought equipment; they've bought furniture. They've enhanced the overall situation as far as conditions in hospitals and have done so for years.

MS LEIBOVICI: They're now funding essential services.

Is the underfunding of the Rockyview just another example of this government's attempt to create a demand for private facilities in this province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to visit the Rockyview hospital twice in the fairly recent past, and it's my impression that it is a very, very busy hospital, running to capacity. I would certainly judge that to be the case. I visited with physicians. They're doing a tremendous amount of good work there. I've not had it drawn to my attention that the Rockyview hospital regards itself as being unfairly treated with respect to the overall Calgary regional health authority budget, although, yes, they would like to have an MRI, and that is, I guess, under consideration right now.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Property Taxes

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent called my office

raising a concern about our government refund policy on overassessment of property value. My constituent informed me that the story in the *Calgary Herald* indicates that our government has instituted a new policy that would cost Calgary property owners millions of dollars per year. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why is the government instituting a new assessment refund policy that penalizes Calgary property owners?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that we're not. The matter that the hon. member raises is related to the provincial hardship policy on the loss of assessment base. In the past the provincial policy was that a municipality that suffered a 5 percent or greater loss of its current year assessment base could apply for an education tax adjustment to their municipal requisition and be compensated for the loss of assessment. Beginning in the year . . . [interjection]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, just ignore and please proceed.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Beginning in the 2000 year, the policy changed, reducing the threshold from 5 percent to 2 percent for all municipalities within the province, not just one. Now instead of having to suffer a 5 percent loss on their assessment base before the refund is considered, the municipality can qualify for any loss, and collectively it amounts to 2 percent. That is the new base that has been set.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplement is also to the same minister. Given the minister's comment, how can the city of Calgary claim that they are being discriminated against by this new policy?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, it appears that the city of Calgary is doing this policy in the context of property owner appeals rather than in the significant losses of overall assessments. The overall assessment loss provision was put in place to basically deal with municipalities. This was done in 1994 to deal with issues such as loss of elevators, for example, railroad branchline abandonment, and relocation of industry. That was the purpose of this particular program. This so-called hardship policy of 5 percent refund threshold was made available to all the municipalities within the province. The city of Calgary, it appears, had previously taken a wider view on this policy and used it to mitigate successful property tax appeals. Indeed, this was something that was used to pool provincial dollars to compensate for errors made by city assessors in the evaluation of assessment process.

Mr. Speaker, the city of Calgary and all other municipalities will still qualify for the refund in the amount of 2 percent where there is a total loss in the live assessment. The city, however, will have to be responsible for the first 2 percent in that loss.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Has the city of Calgary made application for a refund for 1999, and what is the amount of the refund they will qualify for?

2:50

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the city of Calgary has made applications for refunds in the past as they dealt

with individual property assessment appeals. These refund requests have been responded to by the Department of Municipal Affairs as they have been received. For the year 1999, in answer to the question of the how much, a total of eight applications have been received, and to date the city has received an approximate amount of \$8 million that has been refunded or will shortly be refunded.

There are two different issues involved here, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's very critical and important that there be a true identification of the issues. One is a hardship appeal process that deals with loss of assessment. The other is a process that deals with reassessment values. Ultimately we want to recognize that that phase was put in place for all municipalities. It is now set at 2 percent rather than 5 percent and will treat all municipalities within this province on an equal and fair basis.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now the chair will recognize the first of several individuals with respect to Recognitions, but before we get to that, please join me in wishing the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane a happy birthday.

DR. TAYLOR: How old is she?

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science is absolutely out of order. If he chooses to stand, he will stand there attentively, and he will echo no voice whatsoever, because where he is right now he totally has no status in this Assembly. None.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Private Member's Motion 511

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'd like to draw your attention to the item Motions other than Government Motions found at page 6 of today's Order Paper. If I could draw your attention to this, please. Members will note under that item that Motion 511, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-West, has been amended, as is allowed under Standing Order 39(1).

The chair would like to note that the hon. member served notice well in advance of the four sitting day period stipulated in that Standing Order. However, due to some internal miscommunication, not the fault of the member, this notice did not appear on the Order Paper until today. While the notice falls slightly short of the four days' notice by several hours, the chair would ask for the indulgence of all the members regarding this matter so that we might proceed in its appropriate order in the number of days from now.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, seven members today have indicated their desire to participate in Recognitions, so we'll proceed in this order: first of all, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Calgary Outriders Soccer Club

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Outriders soccer club was formed in May 1999. The team will travel in the summer of 2000 to the Gothia Cup in Sweden and the Dana Cup in Denmark. These are recognized as the two top European youth

tournaments. The girls are very excited about the prospect of traveling to Europe in July 2000, and I want to wish them the best of luck.

Mr. Speaker, the team members are head coach, Howard McGiffin; assistant coach, Tony Demassi; manager, Chris Phelan; assistant coach, Judy Grigg; trainer, Lesley Scullion. The players are Lois Bennett, Samantha Blood, Christie Buone, Stacey Deiure, Krista Demassi, Gillian Duffy, Kellie Fenton, Kyla Grigg, Stephanie and Michelle Hoogveld, Rachael Lovink, Carley Phelan, Kim Pyra, Diane Reid, my constituent, Michelle Rowe, Gleayne Saliba, Tayah Schreter-Gillespie, Katie Shaw, and Kate Sloan.

We wish them all the best of luck, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Edmonton Downtown Business Association

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand today to recognize the Edmonton Downtown Development Corporation. On May 5, 2000, they held their annual luncheon and awards. The recipients of the awards were the 104th Street Promenade, city of Edmonton; ArtsHab pilot project, Arts Habitat Association of Alberta; CIBC historic restoration and expansion, CIBC Developments; Donna at the Citadel, Donna Rumboldt; On Ninth, Westbank Projects; Railtown, Christenson Developments Ltd.; Stanley A. Milner Library expansion, Edmonton Public Libraries; Union Bank Inn expansion, Diane Kyle Buchanan.

The Downtown Business Association was established as a business revitalization zone in 1985. This year we celebrate the 15th year of their service. The Downtown Business Association is proud to have the responsibility to ensure economic growth and enhancement of all quality of life in the urban centre. The combination of the new and old ensures that we will continue to be a world-class city with a sense of community.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Nightingale Nights Celebration

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 12 more than 24,000 registered nurses in Alberta will recognize the 180th birthday of Ms Florence Nightingale. This special occasion will be honoured through a celebration of Nightingale Nights. The Alberta Registered Nurses Educational Trust will host five Nightingale Night dinners this Friday, to be held in Lethbridge, Calgary, Red Deer, Edmonton, and Grande Prairie. These events will raise funds for continuing nursing education.

Mrs. Betty Gourlay, chair of the Registered Nurses Educational Trust, said, and I quote: this is the inaugural community fund-raising event of the educational trust; we hope that the event promotes the positive roles that registered nurses have played in shaping our communities and their daily contributions that benefit the lives of Albertans.

I strongly agree with Mrs. Gourlay, Mr. Speaker, and I invite all members of this Assembly to join me in wishing the Alberta Registered Nurses Educational Trust the very best with their Nightingale Night celebration.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

International Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Day

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I rise to

recognize May 12 as International Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Day, or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Day. ME is a severe and disabling illness characterized by overwhelming fatigue, cognitive problems, and numerous other symptoms that can last for months, years, or decades, yet many are unaware of its impact. Statistics indicate that only one in four doctors can properly diagnose ME. It is also significant that in Alberta there is only one full-time clinic which treats ME, and the waiting list is more than 1,000. Hopefully ME Awareness Day will not only stimulate the awareness of the government, the public, and the professionals but also expedite the requirement for more funding for research, improved diagnostic techniques, training for doctors, treatments, and even, hopefully, a cure.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Youth Immigrants of Distinction Awards

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak in recognition of the recipients of youth immigrants of distinction awards, given out by the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society: Nilou Davoudi, Susan Doan, Samir Pradhan, Stephen Kung, and Casey Wang.

Their achievements and contributions to our society are amazing. For example, 13-year-old Nilou Davoudi came to Alberta from Iran when she was four. Besides academic achievement, she shows talent in piano, clarinet, landscape painting, writing essays and stories. She's also well known for her aboriginal beadwork art, that was part of an aboriginal artifacts exhibition in Calgary and Vancouver. Last year she was one of the Stampede parade princesses with her own creation of aboriginal headgear.

Susan Doan came from Vietnam when she was four. Nineteen years later she is a student at the Boston school of dental medicine. She was on the dean's list at UBC, a recipient of many awards in natural design engineering and rehabilitation sciences. She is also an award-winning pianist.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

3:00

Norma Zopf

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Saturday, May 6, I attended the United Way labour appreciation night. One of the honourees at the event was Norma Zopf. I would like to extend to her my congratulations on her accomplishments.

Norma began her work career as a city of Edmonton employee and shop steward for her union, CUPE. She then joined Stats Canada and initiated a complete revamping of their health and safety committee. All the while being a dedicated mother and community activist, she managed to facilitate courses on women and aging in the workforce and is a cofounder of the Kaazba Foundation for the purpose of sending children with disabilities to camps, Disneyland, ranches, and farms.

Ms Zopf is truly deserving of the award presented to her by the United Way as she gives freely of her time and has a history of volunteering throughout her life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1885 Calgary Town Hall

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Tuesday, May 9, 2000, I had the pleasure of participating in the grand opening of the 1885

Calgary Town Hall at Heritage Park Historical Village. The successful conclusion of this millennium town hall recreation project makes Calgary one of the few cities in Canada that can boast the existence of all of its city halls. The first mayor of Calgary, His Worship George Murdock, made a very special appearance as master of ceremonies and explained what was happening 115 years ago in the optimistic one-year-old prairie town of Calgary. Such things happen in Canada's premier living historical village.

Special thanks to all three levels of government, the Heritage Park staff and volunteers, the Heritage Park Foundation, and the numerous community business partners and individual donors without whom this project would not have been possible. Congratulations, Heritage Park, on ensuring that yet more of our western heritage comes to life.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Opposition House Leader, you'll deal with the point of order on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition?

MR. DICKSON: Yes.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MS CALAHASEN: Madam Speaker, may we revert to Introduction of Guests prior to the other proceedings?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Yes. Before we deal with the point of order, I would ask for unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests
(reversion)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and to Members of the Legislative Assembly two very handsome men who are sitting in the members' gallery. They are two people who represent various groups. Their names are Gerald Auger, with the wonderful smile, and Chief Jerry Goodswimmer, who is also from Sturgeon Lake. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much. I raise this on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition. I'll come to the authorities in just a second, but the words and conduct that I rise on occurred during the fourth set of questions by the Leader of the Opposition to the Premier. [interjection] The fourth, for those who weren't counting.

Madam Speaker, the question was asked, and then the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development said from his seat: ask your brother. The Leader of the Opposition does indeed have a brother who is a physician and a radiologist. The implication of the intervention by the minister is that the leader's brother in some sense improperly benefited or was improperly advantaged by actions of the leader when she was health minister. Now, it's true that the leader's brother is outside this Assembly and it's true he was not named, but the Speaker dealt with a similar situation last Thursday, May 4, 2000, and that starts at page 1336 and goes on for four pages in *Hansard*.

The two submissions I'd make would be this. Firstly, I'd cite the Speaker's ruling at pages 1339 and 1340. At that time the Speaker required a formal, express, and extensive apology. I'd submit that no less full a remedy would be required here, because this was compounded by the subsequent reference by the Minister of Health and Wellness in terms of actions taken by the leader when she was then minister, once again the implication being somehow advantaging her brother the radiologist.

I'd refer to sessional paper 149/95, dated March 2, 1995, where the government answered Written Question 149 as follows: "Private MRI clinics were not in operation prior to May, 1993. Prior to this access to a MRI was through the publicly funded system in a hospital."

Now, I incorporate by way of authorities the references cited by the Government House Leader on May 4, 2000, at pages 1336, 1337: *Erskine May*; *Beauchesne* 64, page 19; page 52 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* – he did an excellent job in terms of reviewing the authorities – and also page 1337. I would add one, and it's Marleau and Montpetit, their *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 524:

Members are discouraged from referring by name to persons who are not Members of Parliament and who do not enjoy parliamentary immunity, except in extraordinary circumstances where the national interest . . .

Parenthetically, that would presumably be read provincial interest. . . . calls for the naming of an individual. The Speaker has ruled that Members have a responsibility to protect the innocent, not only from outright slander but from any slur directly or indirectly implied, and has stressed that Members should avoid as much as possible mentioning by name people from outside the House who are unable to reply and defend themselves against innuendo.

The Speaker made it abundantly clear last Thursday that by implication, whether you mention the name or not – in that case it was a reference. Somebody said: you go down to the Ethics Commissioner's office and you can unearth the same information. Well, here it's even easier. There would only be one conceivable purpose for the minister of agriculture to have made that comment he did from his seat. I would ask that you require, Madam Speaker, at the very least the same kind of full, complete, and comprehensive apology that the Speaker required last Thursday. To do any less would suggest that we have one set of rules when it's a friend of the Premier involved and another set of rules when it's the relative or a close acquaintance of any other member of the Assembly. I don't believe for a moment that you would countenance that sort of a differential treatment.

Those are my observations, and that's my request. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Madam Speaker, it is, I think, astonishing that the hon. Opposition House Leader would have the temerity to compare the events of last Thursday with the events of today.

The events of last Thursday, to refresh the memory of those in the House and those who read the record, dealt with a member of this House, a member who had been recognized to speak, asking a question and doing something in asking that question where there could be no other interpretation of the asking of the question than an attempt to besmirch the character and the trust and the integrity of a member of this Assembly. That's what the Speaker dealt with in his ruling at that time. [interjection] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora doesn't have the courtesy to even listen to members speaking in the House.

Madam Speaker, that's what happened last Thursday. There was

a serious breach of privilege in this House last Thursday when the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert rose on a question, asked a question which clearly had no other purpose than to besmirch the integrity of our Premier. If a member of this House or anyone else has a question about the dealings of people in this House or the dealings of people associated with people in this House, there's a process that's put in place by this House to deal with those questions. The Speaker at that time agreed with the representations I made, that because we consider that to be of utmost importance, when those sorts of questions come up, if they do, members should avail themselves of that process rather than raise questions inappropriately in the House. That's what happened last Thursday. The apology that was given – no, I'm not going to go there. Sorry.

3:10

To compare that to what happened today is absolutely inappropriate. What happened today is that there was a question on the floor by somebody who had been recognized about diagnostic imaging, and there was an answer being given about diagnostic imaging. If I recall the question correctly – and I don't have the Blues, but you perhaps do – there was a whole question of disclosure of information. When would that information be public?

I would suggest, although not having had the opportunity to discuss with the hon. minister whose comment is being called into question, a comment which was not on the record of the House until it was put on the record by the Opposition House Leader, a comment which may or may not, subject to checking, actually have been said – given that it might have been said, it can clearly be read into the context of the question and answer. The hon. opposition leader was asking for information about contracts, and the member was saying: ask your brother, because he's in that business. [interjections]

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who again doesn't have the courtesy to listen to people in this House and gets emotional about these things rather than dealing with issues instead of personalities, raises the question about timing. The whole question of diagnostic imaging has been changing over time, and I'm not going to answer on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness as to the time frames involved.

The point of order related specifically, as I understand it, to a comment made by someone who was not on the record. Quite frankly, I would agree with the member if he said that such comments ought not to be made. I know the Speaker would agree that we should not be shouting comments back and forth. The provocative nature of this House, being two swords' length apart from each other, and the emotional outbreaks that come from time to time, as has been exhibited clearly this afternoon during this point of order, sometimes provoke people to make comments. We ought not to make those comments.

There was no affront intended by that comment, I would suggest. There was no integrity questioned by that comment, I would suggest. That comment can be clearly read into the context of the question and answer at the time and was clearly not intended to impugn the integrity of any person either inside or outside this House.

MR. LUND: Well, Madam Speaker, this is about as ridiculous as it could get. If the hon. leader – and I don't know their family; I don't know her brother; I don't know her; I don't know their relationship – is so sensitive about whether her brother has a contract or not, if she's so sensitive about his operating a private MRI, then I am sorry that I even brought the issue up. I don't know whether they have that relationship. So if she has great difficulty with admitting that he has an MRI and has a contract, something that I don't know, then I wish that I hadn't touched that little nerve that caused the problem,

if she is so sensitive about his operating a clinic in the province of Alberta.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I participated in the exchange that took place last Thursday that the Government House Leader was referring to and which was referenced by the Official Opposition House Leader. It's very fresh and very clear in my mind what transpired and what the judgment coming from the chair was and then what happened after that judgment.

I would say this. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development only had one purpose in mind, clearly, when he made that interjection. For him to say that this issue is about the Leader of the Official Opposition is malicious. This is about his behaviour, Madam Speaker, and his words, his alone. He should have the ability to stand and clearly distance himself from those inappropriate comments and apologize without trying to slither out that it's somehow an issue about the Leader of the Official Opposition. So I would hope that you are not going to accept those words as an apology, because clearly they will not be acceptable.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I would say that that context wasn't in keeping with what is required, hon. member.

First off, I'm going to deal with two parts of this point of order. I was not in the chair at the time this was supposedly said and did not hear the interjection. However, *Beauchesne* 486(4) states that remarks not on the public record and not heard by the chair do not invite the intervention of the chair. I would however like to remind everyone, though, that members who do refer to people outside this House, outside the Assembly – it is inappropriate as they are not here and they do not have the opportunity to reply. So I would ask that you take that into consideration. There is a big difference between an interjection, a heckle, and something that is on the record, and as far as I can see, this isn't on the record.

The second part was the reference made in the answer by the Minister of Health and Wellness. I think this is more a point of clarification and not a point of order. Given the wording in the Blues and the tone and context in which these statements were made, this doesn't appear to be a point of order. It is not inappropriate for a minister to comment when a particular government policy commenced, and that in my estimation was what the Minister of Health and Wellness was doing.

I would ask that for the remainder of this afternoon and hopefully tonight we do try to keep the tone down and remember that we have to utilize decorum.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 33, 34, 35, 40, 44, 45, 48, and 49.

[Motion carried]

User Fees

M33. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of documents prepared for Alberta Treasury by government departments between November 1, 1998, and April 30, 2000, evaluating the cost of service and revenues associated with user fees, licences, premiums, and charges levied by government departments.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This, as you know, has been a matter of some considerable discussion and interest to the people of Alberta ever since the Eurig decision ruled that user fees which collected revenues in excess of the cost of service were in fact taxes and any Legislature that had user fees of that nature was illegally assessing taxes against its citizens and a move must be made to correct that.

Now, we saw that there was a review undertaken in the province of Alberta as a result of the Eurig estate decision. I will say that it was interesting to me that the province of Alberta intervened in that decision, trying to protect the status quo in maintaining the imposition of user fees even though they very well may exceed the cost of service. Regardless of the province's intervention it failed, and of course the decision was made that these kinds of user fees are illegal taxes.

3:20

As events unfolded, the province asked the hon. Member for St. Albert to head a review, and what is being referred to as the O'Neill report was subsequently compiled. That report, we're told, resulted in some \$60 million being trimmed off user fees. We know, for example, from comments made by the Minister of Government Services that there were some 94 fees in Alberta Registries, which in fact were illegal forms of taxation, which had to be rolled back. So they no doubt make up part of that \$60 million. But the \$60 million is literally a drop in the bucket, because the \$60 million rolled back out of a total collected in excess of \$1.3 billion is over 800 user fees that this government now expects its citizens to pay in addition to all of the forms of taxation that this government expects its citizens to contribute.

What we are asking for in this motion for a return is the evidence that shows that the government evaluated the costs of services so that we can make an independent judgment regarding whether or not this \$60 million of rolled back or trimmed user fees is appropriate or if in fact there should be some further work in that area. So I would hope the government, in keeping with its often stated policy of being open and accountable, would respond in the affirmative to this motion for a return.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Acting Provincial Treasurer I must reject this request. Of course, the fact is that there was no document prepared for Alberta Treasury during this period.

I must add, Madam Speaker, that the cuts that were made were as

a result of the interim report of the Fees and Charges Review Committee.

MR. SAPERS: Well, it's very interesting that there was no document. As a matter of fact, we have information coming from the freedom of information and protection of privacy administrator for Alberta Treasury that there are documents that have been prepared relative to the cost of service between 1998 and April 3, 2000. I'm a little bit confused. We have documents from Alberta Treasury saying that there are documents, but they don't want to give them to Albertans, and now we have the minister on behalf of the Acting Treasurer saying that there aren't any documents.

I'd like to know which is the truth, and I'd like to know, if there was an error made, who was responsible for the error. Clearly, there has been work done by Treasury and work done, probably, in every department that collects user fees. I myself have written to every minister of Executive Council asking for information on their user-fee regime, and most departments complied quite willingly and sent back some information. So it is inconceivable that there aren't documents. The plausible explanation here is that the government wants to keep these documents a secret, and I would then suggest that the reason why they want to keep them a secret is because they reflect poorly on the government's actions subsequent to the compiling of that information.

Now, if the government doesn't want to take responsibility for doing the work or if the work was done poorly, that's one thing, but I would like to request that the minister on behalf of the Acting Treasurer on behalf of the Treasurer go back and review the correspondence record in this matter and as quickly as he possibly can come back to the House and explain the confusion between his statement that there are no documents and the information that we have from Alberta Treasury that in fact there are documents.

Maybe at that point, once that confusion is straightened out, the House will be in a better position to pass a vote on whether or not they would support the government's rejection of this very legitimate and very important information request.

[Motion for a Return 33 lost]

Single-rate Tax Plan

M34. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of base case forecast tables and change in marginal tax rates by income class of taxpayers prepared by or for Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1999, to April 3, 2000, associated with the implementation of the government's 11 percent single-rate tax plan.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, when this motion for a return was put on the Order Paper, the government's official position on their tax plan was to move to a single rate, or a flat tax, of 11 percent. The Acting Treasurer has subsequently tabled in question period and, I may add, quite inappropriately tabled at the wrong point in proceedings, some suggested amendments. So the government's tax plan, we believe, may now be to move to a flat tax of 10 and a half percent, but I would hope that this technicality would not be the basis of the government's rejection of this motion for a return.

Clearly, the intent of this motion for a return is to take a look at the homework done by the government when they came up with their very unfair flat tax plan, and if the government would like

Albertans to believe that it is a fair flat tax plan, well, then they can help build their case by showing us this background information and this homework.

The important part of the motion for a return doesn't hinge around the percentage rate of the flat tax. The heart of the matter is the homework, and of course the model being used you could plug in any number. So while I acknowledge that the flat tax plan of the government may now be 10 and a half percent, the fact is that when this was put on the Order Paper, the government's stated intention and the bill that was before the House was in fact an 11 percent rate.

In any case, the issue is the same. We would like to see the evidence. We'd like to see the base case forecast tables and the change in the marginal tax rates, and we'd like to see it broken down by classes of taxpayers because then Albertans will have a much better idea on the true impact of this flat tax proposal and would no doubt agree with those critics of this flat tax that like every other flat tax this is an unfair one, which shifts the burden to the middle-income taxpayer in the province.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on behalf of the Acting Treasurer.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Acting Treasurer we must reject this motion for a return.

I think it's important to note that the personal income tax forecast resulting from the 11 percent single tax plan was included in the revenue tables in both Budget '99 and Budget 2000. In Budget 2000 the revenue table on page 40 shows the personal income tax forecast for the next three years: \$4.7 billion in 2000-2001, \$4.8 billion in 2001-2002, and \$5.1 billion in 2002-2003.

Budget 2000 also includes the Alberta tax advantage chapter that details the whole tax plan, and since January 1, 1999, Treasury has not prepared any detailed calculations of changes in marginal tax rates by gross income of taxpayers. The marginal tax rate by income depends not only on the tax rate but also on all the credits and deductions claimed by the taxpayer. Under the new tax system the marginal tax rate on taxable income is pretty straightforward. It is 11 percent of taxable income. From that, the taxpayer then deducts the value of their nonrefundable credits, 11 percent of the basic and spousal exemptions of \$11,620 and other credits. The only exception to the 11 percent value of credits is for charitable donations, where the credit is 11 percent on the first \$200 donated and 12.75 percent on the rest. This dual rate maintains the same credit value as the existing system on donations over \$200.

3:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to conclude debate.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, we seem to be witness to some interesting policy development. If I understood the minister speaking on behalf of the Acting Treasurer, who is here on behalf of the Treasurer, what he just read into the record was the suggestion that the government is not moving to lower the flat tax rate from 11 to 10.5 percent and is not increasing the personal exemption. His answer just confirmed that in fact the marginal rates will still be based on an 11 percent flat tax rate and at the previously announced personal exemption level.

Again, I'm very curious to know who's really speaking for tax policy in this province. It seems to change from day to day and from moment to moment. Albertans, I think, would like to know what this government has in mind for them. It should not be a game of

Wheel of Fortune when it comes to predicting tax rates for the tax filers in this province. [interjection]

You know, I find it curious, Madam Speaker, that the hon. Government House Leader is now making interjections from his chair after admonishing me for interjecting while he was speaking. I guess I would just ask him to exhibit the same courtesy that he asked me to exhibit when he was speaking, and I know he will.

What I was saying is that I find it curious, again, that there would be no analysis done at these marginal rates, because without that kind of analysis being done, of course, it's very hard to substantiate the claims that the Premier and others have made in regard to which taxpayers are going to receive what kind of benefit. So if the analysis hasn't been done, then those claims that are being made by members of Executive Council are very suspect, and if the analysis has been done and we're being told it hasn't been done, well, that creates a problem of an entirely different nature; doesn't it, Madam Speaker?

In fact, if I look at December 21, 1999, correspondence from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner regarding request for review 1658, I will learn and, Madam Speaker, so will you that there are "over 300 pages of responsive records" made to an information request of a similar nature. I quote from the summary table that was provided by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Pages 167 to 184 and pages 185 to 202 of that package include the "February base case forecast tables with tax plan" and the "February base case forecast tables without tax plan." So, again, we're being told that the work isn't being done, but under other circumstances we're told the work is being done. We're being told the rate might be one level; then we're being told the rate might be another level. Truly confusion.

I'm beginning to understand why the government is hesitant to share this information with Albertans. They clearly don't know what direction they're heading in, and it doesn't appear that one part of the department knows what another part is doing.

In any case, it's disappointing but not surprising, based on the confusion, that the government would reject this particular request for information. But, you know, the members of this House have the opportunity to hold the government accountable. I note that the members of the Executive Council would be easily outvoted by all of the private members in this House if, in fact, private members decided that what they wanted was to share this kind of very important information with Albertans as we enter into the next round of debate on their unfair flat tax plan.

[Motion for a Return 34 lost]

MR. SAPERS: It's nice to know my record won't be affected by today's voting, Madam Speaker.

Single-rate Tax Plan

M35. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents estimating the revenue impact and economic offset prepared by or for Alberta Treasury for the period June 1, 1999, to April 3, 2000, associated with the implementation of the government's 11 percent single-rate tax plan.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, I'm forever optimistic, and I will hold my comments on this, thinking that perhaps I argued myself out of support. So I'll simply read the request into the record and throw myself at the mercy and understanding of the government and ask them to support this request.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on behalf of the Acting Provincial Treasurer.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Acting Treasurer I must reject this. The silly argument that we just heard and had to bear through – in Motion 34 he specifically asked for information related to the 11 percent single plan. That's what he asked for, and that's what it was.

Now, Madam Speaker, you know, I could simply use the reason that he just simply argued his way out of this Motion 35 by insisting on talking about a plan that the Acting Treasurer has signaled is going to be introduced into the discussion on Bill 18, because he's asking once again for information on the 11 percent flat tax rate. I will read the reasons why, beyond the fact that we should probably just use the fact that he obviously doesn't know what he's really asking for, because, as he claims now, he didn't want information about the 11 percent but wanted information about the 10.5 percent. Anyway, we'll give him this information, the reasons for our rejection, putting aside that argument that he just made.

Details on the elimination of the economic offset were contained in Budget '99. Page 14 of Budget 2000 provides updated estimates of the revenue impact and economic offset of the 11 percent tax rate plan. Albertans' taxes will have been cut by \$852 million in the 2001 tax year relative to 1998 as a result of the tax plan at the 11 percent, Madam Speaker. Of course, that number will change and will go up considerably with the changes that the Provincial Treasurer has signaled will happen in the debate of Bill 18. This is partially offset by \$181 million in additional revenue from stronger economic growth due to the tax plan, reducing the cost to the government to about \$671 million.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair would have you duly note that your motion for a return does specifically talk about 11 percent.

MR. SAPERS: What would exactly be the point of the chair making that comment?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Because, hon. member, obviously the answer has to do with what you have requested and asked for.

MR. SAPERS: I read it into the record. I'm fully familiar with what I was asking for. Thank you for that clarification, Madam Speaker.

The government can't really have it both ways. The fact is that I was anticipating a rather shallow argument from the government suggesting that the motions for returns were somehow inappropriate because the government has moved past the 11 percent flat tax and has gone to this other rate. The motions for returns stand on the Order Paper and are very straightforward. My assumption is still that the work that was done was done in support of the 11 percent rate. It was subsequent to the federal budget, of course, that the provincial government in Alberta had to scramble because the federal government had provided a really substantive tax relief to Albertans, and in order for those Albertans not to be cheated out of that tax relief, the government had to go and remake its tax policy on the fly.

As I said in my earlier comments about Motion for a Return 34, the fact is that the homework, the background work, that would have to be done would still be done. The model would still be an equivalent model. I would say that in Motion for a Return 35 the important issue isn't the number that appears between the word "government's" and the word "single." The important issue is the rest of the motion for a return.

If the government has done this work – and you would expect that they would, of course, since it's such a major part of their platform, and we all know it's become such a major part of the former Treasurer's springboard into his dreams of leadership for another party at the national level – you would expect that that homework is there and that the government would be anxious to share their best case with Albertans. But for some reason known only to the government they're not anxious to share that information or that best case with Albertans, and perhaps it's because this flat tax is more about ideology than it is about good social policy.

3:40

The government makes all kinds of claims in its budget plan regarding the economic impact and, in fact, predicts an astronomical feedback based on its tax plan. It's a feedback that has not been supported in any experience anywhere on the globe. So this is a very important issue. I'm a little surprised that the government is treating it so lightly, particularly since they seem to be desperate to have some political lifeboat to cling to after the debacle with their private health care bill and the loss of trust and the loss of face that the government has suffered as a result of the way they're handling themselves regarding Bill 11. But, you know, I'm not going to pretend to be a strategist for the provincial government. I'll let them be the authors of their own doom.

The disturbing element of all of this, Madam Speaker, is that perhaps the government hasn't done any breakdown. Maybe they haven't prepared any information about the economic impact attributable to various parts of the tax plan. Maybe they have really been driven blindly by their ideology and have decided that they don't need to do any of the number-crunching because they're not going to be responsive to any queries or questions or criticism, that they'll have the same heads-down and damn the torpedoes attitude about their tax plan as they've had about other important pieces of legislation. That would be yet another indication of the level of arrogance which now surrounds government policymaking in Alberta.

This is a very reasonable request. The documents should be a matter of public record. We cannot accept that no work has been done within or on behalf of Treasury. You know, I can only ask once again that private members not be led by the hesitancy of Executive Council to come clean with Albertans. We still have an opportunity to do the right thing and to cast our votes in such a way as we can tell the government to provide the information being requested.

[Motion for a Return 35 lost]

Maintenance Enforcement Technology

M40. Mrs. Sloan moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the maintenance enforcement program, MEP, business process improvement strategy on systems and procedures that are in place to protect and update investments in technology.

MRS. SLOAN: Madam Speaker, the motion arose from repetitive mention of this strategy which was contained in the MLA review of maintenance enforcement and access. I would just like to read into the record specifically recommendations 37 and 38.

Recommendation 37 read: "MEP review the way it deals with information technology to ensure that proper systems and procedures are in place to protect and update its investments in technology." The action from the government within this review report was that "this is part of the business process improvement strategy."

Recommendation 38 read: "MEP ensure that its computer system accommodate the National Data Requirements when they become applicable." The action by government read:

This is part of the business process improvement strategy. An electronic interface to improve contact with Justice Canada on federal garnishees and licences is targeted for November 1998.

Further, Madam Speaker, recommendation 11 contained within the MLA review of maintenance enforcement read: "Alberta Justice consider the implementation of 'real time' technology in the MEP computer . . . to facilitate better and more timely service to clients." Again, the action by government read that it "is included in the redevelopment of mainframe technology projected in [the next] 3 years."

We have not had nor has the public had an opportunity to see the proposed MEP business process improvement strategy, and that is the essence of the question before this House this afternoon.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the House in the past few weeks I've been happy to accept questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre with respect to the maintenance enforcement program. However, today I have to reject this question. But I want to put the rejection in a context. I will certainly be happy to provide information on an ongoing basis to the member relating to the business improvement process.

The problem with the question and accepting the question is that we are undertaking a review of the business processes to plan for replacement of the system, so in the context of the recommendations that the hon. member just read into the record now, we're a little behind in the process, but we are in the process now of developing a plan for the replacement of the maintenance enforcement tracking system.

The strategy to update the technology will be outlined in a document which is to be called the maintenance enforcement program business process review phase. The document has not yet been completed, so a copy of it cannot be provided. We anticipate that the maintenance enforcement program business process review phase, which I believe is the document and the information which the member wants, will be completed by the fall of 2000 or earlier, and subject to any considerations that may arise once I've reviewed that document, I would anticipate that I will be in a position to provide a copy of it to the member at that time.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to conclude debate.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We'll take those comments under advisement.

[Motion for a Return 40 lost]

Special Waste Management Corporation

M44. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of budget and financial reports for the period January 1, 1999, to April 5, 2000, as required pursuant to articles 9.7.1, 9.8.1, and 9.8.2 of the July 12, 1996, agreement between the government of Alberta, the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, Bovar Technology Ltd., Bovar Inc., Bovar (Swan Hills) Limited Partnership, 542936 Alberta Ltd., and Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've gone down this road of the government's relationship with Bovar and the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been put at risk, if not wasted, and the government's moves to get out of this agreement for some time. This financial reporting information is part of the contract, and I think Albertans deserve to see it as part of the government's commitment to accountability and transparency in matters regarding the fiscal operations of the province of Alberta.

MR. MAR: Madam Speaker, I move that Motion for a Return 44 be rejected. This information has been requested previously through FOIP and was not released at that time due to privacy concerns related to harm of business interests, and I'm unable to release it at this time for the same reason.

MR. SAPERS: Well, that's unfortunate. I mean, I would submit that the harm has really been to the public interest, not to the private business interests, and it would seem to me that even the access to information legislation provides for a public interest override, so where the public interest will be served, those selfish third-party interests can be set aside. If the government was truly living up to its commitment about openness, it would accept this information request.

[Motion for a Return 44 lost]

3:50

Special Waste Treatment Centre

M45. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies, reports, memoranda, correspondence, and background documents prepared by or for the Department of Environment or sent to the Department of Environment for the period January 1, 1999, to April 5, 2000, relating to a change in ownership of the Alberta Special Waste Management Treatment Centre, Swan Hills, and the importation of hazardous waste from outside of Canada.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that Motion for a Return 45 be rejected. The information being requested by the hon. member is currently under FOIP review, and I am unable to release it until the decision has been made as to whether such a disclosure is harmful to business interests.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, I understand I have an opportunity to close debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Yes. Do you wish to conclude debate?

MR. SAPERS: Thank you.

The rejection doesn't surprise me, but once again it disappoints me. The Alberta special waste management facility in Swan Hills has already cost Alberta taxpayers about \$440 million in terms of money invested, and recently there's been controversy regarding the reversal of a long-standing understanding that there would not be an importation of hazardous wastes from other jurisdictions. Of course, the government is now trying to do that to provide the feedstock, as it were, to this plant, which has never operated in an economical way.

If I look at the annual financial statement for Bovar in their annual report for 1999, there's one section of it that makes it very specific that the corporation has the right to transfer the treatment centre to the province at any time after December 31, 1998, for a nominal amount. That typically means for a dollar, Madam Speaker. So we're sort of on a hair trigger right now. Any day we could learn that as a result of some of the work that was done by the Government House Leader in his private life before politics or by the Minister of Economic Development in his previous responsibilities, having been asked by the Premier to negotiate the deal with Bovar, as a result of all of that history, at any moment the people of Alberta could have that Swan Hills plant back in their ownership and for the grand sum of maybe a single loonie.

Because of the history, because of the controversy surrounding not just the plant itself but this latest policy initiative to bring in hazardous waste from other jurisdictions, because of the dollar value and the volume of taxpayer money involved with all of this, I would expect that the provincial government would be anxious to show us copies of these studies and memoranda and correspondence regarding the potential transfer of ownership between the province of Alberta and the owners of the Special Waste Treatment Centre.

Again, all I can do is ask members of the Assembly to work with me in holding this government accountable. Private members, we have the opportunity to do what many people are in a state of disbelief about, and that is to have this government live up to its word when it comes to being open and accountable.

[Motion for a Return 45 lost]

Forest Protection Advisory Committee

M48. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. White that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the minutes of each meeting of the Forest Protection Advisory Committee held in the calendar years 1998 and 1999.

MR. MAR: Madam Speaker, I will accept Motion for a Return 48.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to conclude debate?

MR. DICKSON: No. That's fine.

[Motion for a Return 48 carried]

Forest Management Science Council

M49. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. White that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the meeting summaries and council reports of all the meetings of the Alberta Forest Management Science Council held from January 23, 1998, to April 13, 2000.

MR. DICKSON: Quickly, while that same spirit of co-operation seems to be so manifest in the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I regret to say that I must move that Motion for a Return 49 be rejected. I'm rejecting the motion for a return as the specific information that is requested in the form of meeting summaries and council reports was not in fact compiled for the Forest Management Science Council. However, a final statement of account for this council was submitted to me in June of last year, and I will table that statement of account now for

the member's reference. I believe it includes all of the information that has been sought by the member opposite, including recommendations made by the council. So I've done my best to fulfill this request.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf of Edmonton-Calder.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We appreciate what appear to be the best efforts of the minister. We'll review that material, and hopefully that will provide the information that my colleague was looking for.

Thank you very much.

[Motion for a Return 49 lost]

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
head: Third Reading

Bill 206
School (Students' Code of Conduct)
Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise here in third reading of Bill 206, the School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act. I'm going to be brief in my comments. I do want to reiterate, though, what Bill 206 will do for students and for schools and for proper conduct, hopefully, in Alberta. I'm convinced that with the amendments passed in Committee of the Whole, the code of conduct that Bill 206 proposes will be an integral part in making our schools and our school environments safe and productive places for everyone.

As I have stated before, this legislation is not intended to solve all of our school problems, but it does put in place the minimum standards of behaviour and the consequences for violating them. I see a code of conduct being incorporated into an overall strategy in conjunction with positive policies like the Safe and Caring Schools initiative and the input that was put forward by the Task Force on Children at Risk in the task force document entitled Start Young, Start Now. Those two references will help to create a safer and more respectful learning environment, and Bill 206 is very, very close to doing a number of the initiatives that those policies put forward.

Madam Speaker, a code of conduct fosters an atmosphere of mutual respect in which everyone knows what is expected of them. As I have stated before, students have the right to a stable learning environment and a safe school, but also they have the responsibility of maintaining that environment by following the rules that they have helped establish and not rules that are established for them.

Madam Speaker, I have been asked by many people and particularly school principals and some school administrators: what happens if we already have a policy on student behaviour and it's working? I will repeat publicly in this House what I have said to them in private. I can assure you and I want to assure everybody in this Assembly that if a school has a policy on conduct and behaviour which is working well in their school and that has been derived through consultation with community stakeholders, by all means they keep it. The only thing this legislation will be asking them to do is make sure that that policy is in writing, if they already do not have it in writing. The purpose of Bill 206 is not to interfere where

things are working well. It is to make sure that they are working well everywhere.

4:00

Madam Speaker, in reference to the concerns of the Alberta School Boards Association – many members here may have got a copy of some of their concerns about this bill – I think the amendments presented by my colleague from Calgary-Egmont dealt with them head-on. The main amendment to the bill broadens the legislation so that the prescription of behaviours included in the code of conduct are not so rigid. This allows schools to have some leeway in determining what will work best to provide a safe environment. I agree with the Alberta School Boards Association that schools and communities need the ability to create the code of conduct that will work best for them and the unique nature of each and every person in each and every school.

As well, Madam Speaker, the Alberta School Boards Association has said that there are not enough funds available for counseling and are worried about the counseling provision in Bill 206. I understand their concerns and I empathize with their concerns, but as we know, a private member's bill cannot be a money bill. Therefore, I can't ask for funds on this. I think the Alberta School Boards Association will be pleased to know that when it comes time to act on the task force recommendation, I will be an advocate that we should recognize that more funds be provided for counseling for our students where appropriate. This is a positive initiative coming down the road and will be something for school boards to address in the long term.

So with that, Madam Speaker, I would like to end my comments today by thanking every member in this House for listening to the debate and providing excellent feedback. I truly believe that the debate on Bill 206 and the amendments to it have made the legislation stronger, and I thank all of my colleagues in the Legislature for that.

I will finish by urging all of my colleagues to support this modest yet important initiative for Alberta schools and the students in our schools. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a third time]

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

Bill 208
Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned May 9: Mr. Wickman speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Yes. Madam Speaker, in the remaining four minutes that I have to conclude my 20 minutes in speaking to the bill presented by the Leader of the Official Opposition, Bill 208, which is the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2000, I want to go to the report that was prepared by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler on December 19, 1998, called Gaming in Review. I just want to read one portion here that is boxed in. It's acknowledged as being said by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

We must have the political will to put in place good public policy, stringent regulatory controls and appropriate law enforcement measures – above strictly revenue generating considerations!

Now, those are some words of wisdom we should all heed.

We talk in terms of the revenue-generating considerations. That

of course is the cash cow, the amounts of money that the machines and the other various forms of gambling spit out in this province. But that member, possibly the only member on the government side – at least, the others haven't come out publicly stating so – recognizes, as we do in the Liberal opposition, that there has to be political courage to put in place the proper policy controls and enforcement measures to ensure that gambling does not become an extremely negative influence on the community, which it does to a very, very large extent already.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Thus we have Bill 208, which has been brought forward because basically this caucus is saying that we are in agreement with the recommendations that are in the report entitled *Gaming in Review*, done by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Again, to kind of just sum up those particular recommendations, the main recommendations. We would see it proposing the establishment of a gaming secretariat to advise the minister on gaming policies. It would require that all gaming supplies purchased by the gaming commission be purchased by public tender. It would create an all-party standing committee on gaming to review the gaming act on a regular basis, to report on the separation of the administrative and enforcement functions of the commission, to review and report on funding police with lottery money to prevent and fight organized crime, to review and report on funding gambling addiction treatment with a legislated proportion of gambling revenues; in other words, some type of percentage, whatever, an allocation recognizing the total amounts of dollars that are being generated, which is now close to a billion dollars. Also, the requirement of municipal approval for new gaming operations or an expansion of existing gaming operations.

That last one, as I had said earlier in my comments, is recognition of the decision-making rights that municipalities have in matters that affect their community. They do have that right, which is bestowed upon them by the electors that choose to put them in place. At times the provincial government may regard itself as the mother government to the municipalities and at times feel that they know what's best for them, but the municipalities, by and large, know what's best for their particular community.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I don't know really what to say. I think it's very interesting when the opposition takes a report, a government report, and puts it into a bill. I don't know whether that's a form of flattery. I suppose it is. It's a hard one to explain.

I do, for the sake of the record, want to clarify a few things. This report was done and submitted in December of 1998, which the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has indicated. This report was threefold. One section was certainly relevant to the work of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General at the time, and it looked at illegal gaming and criminal activity. The other part had to do with the distribution of lottery funds, and that went to the Minister of Community Development. The first part, that looked at the Ontario gaming model, went to the minister at that time responsible for gaming.

I spent close to a week in Ontario and met with several individuals that have spent a great deal of time on gaming and gaming issues. I think one of the things that I noted with interest and that I felt

needed to be studied and looked at in Alberta was what Ontario had done as far as regulatory functions, separate from operating and separate from policy-making. They basically have split out in their organization chart a ministry that looks after the operation and policy, which is very different than the ministry that looks after the regulation. I heard some very, very good comments, not only from key stakeholders in the industry in Ontario but also from administration. I did meet with the two ministers responsible, and they said that it was working very, very well.

Part of Bill 208, as sponsored by the Leader of the Official Opposition, talks about several of the things that I did make reference to in my report. One was a gaming secretariat. A gaming secretariat is also utilized in Ontario and is responsible for providing leadership and looking at policy development and direction for implementing the government's gaming initiatives. They co-ordinate several aspects to do with the gaming operation through the Ontario Lottery Corporation and the Ontario Casino Corporation. They assess the ongoing performance of gaming activities. As well, I found one thing interesting. They have a team of individuals that work with the secretariat that basically was a liaison with communities.

4:10

Ontario is different in gaming because they have the three large casinos, that basically fall under the Ontario Lottery Corporation. One is at Niagara Falls, which is a beautiful casino overlooking the falls, one is at Windsor, and the other is in Orillia, Ontario. The requests for proposal are put out for managing these casinos. Actually, for two out of the three it is casino companies out of Las Vegas that look after the management of it. Over the last couple of years the Ontario government has looked at our model, the charity model, and decided to look at this in a number of communities. Now, if my memory serves me correctly, they sent out invitations to 44 communities in Ontario to see if they'd be interested in a community charitable model type of casino. Of the 44, only 18 communities were receptive to having that type of casino in their midst.

Getting back to this liaison group that works with the Ontario Gaming Secretariat, their job was to go out and meet with municipal officials, meet with the community at large to see if in fact this would work. I thought that was an interesting approach. But I have to say that since the time of this report, the Alberta government and the Ministry of Gaming have put in place the Gaming Research Institute. Now, I think we will have to wait and see exactly what comes forth from that institute. There is, I think, \$1.5 million going to the operational side of the institute. There are a number of very respected individuals that will be serving on the gaming institute, and I think we will wait and see what the results are.

One thing I found very, very interesting – and basically it was the thrust of my trip – was the illegal gaming and the criminal activity. I do have to say that I was very, very impressed with what has happened in Ontario. Ontario is served by a provincial police force, the Ontario Provincial Police. In 1996 they only had in Ontario two full-time illegal-gaming enforcement units. Since then they have put in place the Ontario illegal-gaming enforcement unit, with its own location, its own members, and its own budget. They work with the Ontario minister of justice, and their budget is \$4.7 million. These gentlemen – at the time I was there, they were all male officers – have spent a great deal of time and study to become very, very knowledgeable about illegal gaming and criminal activities. They're very knowledgeable on illegal video lottery terminals, common gaming houses and social clubs, bookmaking, pyramid schemes, slot

fraud, Internet gaming, and of course the overall regulation and surveillance that goes into casinos.

The gentleman that heads this unit is a detective inspector by the name of Larry Moodie. Actually, a number of law enforcement agencies across Canada and the U.S. do send their people to Ontario – their office is in Barrie, Ontario – where Detective Inspector Larry Moodie and his admin staff put on training courses for other officers. They detailed for me several examples of illegal gaming machines and how they're moved about the province, how they track them down, what they confiscate, how it ends up after it goes to court. They talked about a number of illegal gaming houses and poker clubs that basically they have had to enter and close down and what happened as a result of some of these raids. So it was very, very interesting.

One thing that I should tell you about I found fascinating. At the casino at Niagara Falls there was a young slot technician that had worked there for a couple of years, and he had to maintain the machines. One day he announced to the casino manager that he wanted to turn himself in because he had taken \$185,000 out of the coin-in, coin-out machines. The casino management and the law enforcement and the police that are in the casinos there were absolutely taken aback. To this day they cannot figure out how he did it. They do know he has sold his technique worldwide, but he turned himself in. One of the things that concerned these gentlemen greatly was that with all the new technology, with all the new product line that's available, this could well be the beginning of a new wave of sophisticated crime, one that's very hard to detect, because today they are still trying to figure out how this young fellow did it.

Globally another thing that they're working on – and they do have courses in this as well – is Internet gaming. They believe that global on-line gaming will be a \$7 billion industry within the next two years. Here again, it is very, very difficult to track down in some areas what is going on that's legal, what is going on that's illegal, and they have one unit that works exclusively in that end.

Along with this report, I spent some time with a very, very fine gentleman from Alberta by the name of Sergeant Bob MacDonald, who basically works for K Division, RCMP. Sergeant Bob MacDonald, as far as law enforcement goes, is probably the most knowledgeable individual in this province. In fact, he spends considerable time yearly with Detective Inspector Larry Moodie, and they correspond and dialogue back and forth. Sergeant Bob MacDonald's position is with the RCMP, and about one-fifth of his position is dedicated to criminal activity related to gaming. Under the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, special operations, these are the people that enforce the regulations in Alberta. These are good people. They're multitalented.

I guess the one problem I have is that the responsibilities of these inspectors go far beyond gaming issues. They also go to liquor, tobacco, and fuel. They are good at what they do, but with the changes in technology and the criminals becoming much more sophisticated, both Sergeant Bob MacDonald and I are very, very worried. We hope that Alberta is not an accident looking for a place to happen. We would think it would be better, certainly with the increase we've seen over the last few years in gaming and casinos, if some of these inspectors were dedicated to the one function, which has to do with gaming, and were trained accordingly.

The third thing that I found interesting. Though I know that certainly AADAC is doing an excellent, excellent job and are contracting out to other organizations and are provided yearly with the required amount of money they ask for, one thing that Ontario does is tie their disbursement for addiction programs to the dollars generated, the overall revenue. So if the revenues go up, the dollars

allocated to prevention and addiction also go up, because their theory is that if there are more dollars in revenue, obviously it means that more people are gambling, and more than likely there are more people with problems. So I thought that was interesting.

4:20

As well, as we move ahead in the next few years and probably see an expansion of gaming in Alberta, it is important that we look at another fact. It's mandatory in Ontario to make the casinos and the stakeholders, those involved in providing gaming and gaming product, take some responsibility for prevention and for prevention training courses and intervention training courses for staff. That's just a point to ponder.

Part of my recommendations, as a couple of members have suggested – I am not saying that we need to scrap everything in Alberta and look again. This report, which basically was an internal report, was meant to just point out some of the things that experts in some of these areas in other provinces were telling me. I don't think we need to reinvent the wheel to look at some areas. I think Alberta has been a leader in gaming. We were the first to utilize a gaming secretariat two or three years ago and the first to distribute lottery funds directly to communities and allow municipal taxpayers a say on VLTs. Because of what happened in Alberta with the municipality involvement, with public participation on VLTs, the province of Ontario does not have VLTs.

I would like to see us remain at the forefront. Something else has been said: each and every jurisdiction in Canada has gambling. Gambling, gaming, and betting are not going to go away. We have to continue as a province to ensure that good policy is put in place, that we respect those that possibly end up having a problem because of their involvement. We have to look at the industry's operation and management. I think that we need in this province to work with other jurisdictions so that we can learn and they, too, can learn from us as to what works and doesn't work.

I would like to see Alberta lead the way in this and try to have some type of national roundtable of various jurisdictions across Canada where they in fact could learn from each other. I know that a lot of provinces do talk back and forth. I know that a lot of them would like to just talk about small things that work, things that don't work, where they're going to, how they're going to deal with the expansion of gaming, the expansion of technology, and the expansion of computerization.

Also, the one thing I would like to see us look very seriously at is more of the law enforcement in Alberta having the knowledge and expertise to deal with the criminal side of operations. Criminals don't care what kind of casino it is. They just know it's a casino. There are a lot of things that can take place in that environment, and I think we need a police presence in our casinos as they get bigger.

One thing I have to say is that a great deal of the bill before this House is a result of this report that I did. One thing I didn't say, and I don't want to leave people with the impression that I did. It was not a recommendation of mine for a standing committee on gaming that would involve the entire Assembly. That is obviously a direction from the Leader of the Opposition and the caucus.

I am proud of this report. This report to date has gone out to over 200 individuals and jurisdictions all over Canada and North America. I've had a great deal of feedback from it. As a direct result of my time in Ontario, I do periodically hear from some of the people that I met in Ontario, and we do compare notes.

Anyway, I just want to clarify some of those things. I thank you for your indulgence.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd start off by saying

that I think the Member for Lacombe-Stettler should indeed take it as a compliment that the work she had done and the report she had done now is reflected, at least in part, and was clearly a good part of the genesis of Bill 208, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, and I salute the work she's done on that.

She and I haven't always been of one mind on this. I remember that shortly after being elected, it seems to me perhaps in 1994, there were a series of hearings that were taking place. It was in the early years, anyway, of my time here, in '94-95, and there was a set of hearings in which the Member for Lacombe-Stettler was involved. I remember they announced where they were going to sit and how long, and I remember they were coming to Calgary. I don't remember precisely, but it was for a very short time, and my office was hearing from a lot of people who wanted to make representations. So I remember that what I had done, along with my colleagues from Calgary-West and Calgary-North West, was rented a room at Fort Calgary and had invited people who had not been able to make submissions, Mr. Speaker, to be able to book a time with the government-sponsored committee, whatever it was called at the time, that there were three Liberal opposition MLAs who were interested in hearing their comments.

A good part of our motivation was in hoping that the government would then extend the number of days of hearing time in Calgary. I'm delighted to report that by the time that people finally came to see us, we must have spent I think one day and I'll bet we met with over 20 different organizations that had come forward with concerns. By the time they came to meet with myself and my then two colleagues, I think the government had then formally committed to having some additional days of hearings in Calgary, so I suppose our little exercise achieved what I had hoped it would.

I think certainly it's been since at least that time that the Member for Lacombe-Stettler has been involved in the issue and has acquired a kind of expertise that I'd expect nobody in the Assembly could come close to matching. In fact, I'd start off by quoting a comment that appears in the report entitled *Gaming in Review* from December 1998. The quote appears on page 39, and it is this:

We must have the political will to put in place good public policy, stringent regulatory controls and appropriate law enforcement measures – above strictly revenue generating considerations!

That was a quote from the Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

I think I agree with that. I am certainly no gaming expert. In fact, I have learned more about gaming and gambling in this province since I became an MLA in 1992 than I ever expected to. I was one of those Albertans who always figured that I work too darn hard for my money to enjoy gambling very much. Well, you know, I have relatives who find this is the greatest form of entertainment, and I respect that everybody is entitled to find their entertainment where they will.

I guess what has staggered me in my time as an MLA is the growth of this industry. I mean, I still have difficulty understanding it. I think it's over \$700 million we see in the budget coming in every year for the last couple of years.

MR. STRANG: You've got to go to Vegas.

MR. DICKSON: Well, you know, Vegas is not my favourite place to visit, although I understand lots of my constituents probably enjoy going there. It's too hot to play tennis, so that wouldn't be my idea of a vacation.

Mr. Speaker, the thing that I find so staggering is the dollars involved. My experience on this, frankly, has been talking to community groups who are interested in the funding arrangements and the impact it has on what efforts they make to try and raise

funds, whether it's for a figure skating club or some kind of an organization in Calgary, and also looking at it from the point of view of people who have had gambling problems.

My constituency office, Mr. Speaker – you may not know this – is in the same building as AADAC. One of the things that's been also a real education for me – people are often in for some of the various excellent programs provided by AADAC, and they may take the time to stop in to see the local MLA or to register a concern. So through that kind of chance encounter I think I've been able to understand dimensions of the problem, the gaming problem, at least on a very local basis, far beyond what I would have anticipated before I first got elected as an MLA.

4:30

Anyway, my point is that, as the Member for Lacombe-Stettler and the Leader of the Opposition and my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford said, gaming and gambling have become just a huge component in terms of this province, in terms of the way people live. This has a huge impact on sort of the cultural, social, recreational life. It certainly has a big impact on the provincial treasury.

I remember in 1994 running for the leadership of the provincial Liberal Party and going around with Adam Germain, who was an MLA for Fort McMurray. He had a great line that he used repeatedly. I don't remember all of it, but it was talking about where this government had taken us. It was something like: a liquor store on every corner; a VLT machine on every corner. He went through this litany of things, and you know, what struck me at the time – I mean, he was always, as you'll recall, Mr. Speaker, one of the most entertaining speakers that we've heard in the Assembly. But there was such an element of truth to that, and we've watched this proliferation of gaming opportunities in our communities. They come right into the neighbourhood pub, and they seem to be everywhere.

When the provincial government talked about where we were going to cap the number of VLT machines, they set what seemed to be an awfully high limit. Then we saw some plateauing of VLT machines and then a move into slot machines. All of this I think happened without what one might say would be a really strong public mandate. I think, from the VLT referendum we saw just a couple of years ago, it's an issue that has engaged Albertans like few other things we've dealt with in the Assembly.

In any event, my inclination is to support Bill 208. I think it goes some places where we have to go. I've certainly not had the benefit of studying in any detail what's happened in Ontario and to understand the full dimension of the problems here, but there are a couple of things I look for. One is some independence of governance of gaming from the government of the day, the opportunity to build some expertise. That's why I support section 5 and the notion of creating an Alberta gaming secretariat.

I think there's some real value – and indeed we've seen that with AADAC, for example. Part of AADAC's strength is that at least there's some degree of independence, maybe not a lot, from government, but there's an opportunity to develop some tremendous expertise in terms of problems in that particular area.

I think the notion of setting up a gaming secretariat to do the things identified in the proposed section 42.01(2), including advising “the Minister on matters relating to gaming” and “to foster awareness and to encourage public discussion on matters relating to” gaming addiction, organized crime and gaming, effects of gaming on children and families – I mean, those are all important issues, things that have to be properly addressed. As I look at it, I wish that the gaming secretariat were reporting to the Legislative Assembly and not just to a minister, because I think that's too limiting. I'm always

nervous about appointing a government member to one of these things. I'm not persuaded that there are advantages to that in every case.

Here the suggestion is that you'd have an opposition member as well as a government member. Reasonable men and women may disagree on that, but I think the point is clearly that you would have representation from the general public and from other people who would have expertise in the area. I think that's particularly positive. With the notion of the secretariat there's a requirement in terms of the minimum number of times it must meet, and I think that's very positive.

The one matter that I know the Member for Lacombe-Stettler said that she had not recommended – and she was very clear on that – would be the proposed section 6, the standing committee on gaming. But it seems to me that that committee would provide for a degree of oversight. It would involve the Legislative Assembly in an appropriate way in terms of what's going on, how those processes are being handled and managed, and I think that would be a very positive thing.

If you go through the functions of the standing committee, one of the most important ones is holding public hearings, public meetings. Why is that important? Well, I just suggest that we all go back, in our not so distant memories, to the VLT referendum. I remember going to numerous functions in Calgary and hearing people like Jim Gray and some of the people who provide leadership around that. I remember Mr. Gray one time speaking to a group called the Knights of the Round Table in Calgary. It's a group of business-people, retired judges, newspaper editors, thoughtful people who come together a couple of times a month to talk about issues of public concern. Mr. Gray came and made a presentation, and I remember that one of the themes of his presentation was that, you know, Albertans didn't really vote for this.

I mean, this huge expansion of gaming in this province was never something that was the product of widespread input and consultation. It's interesting that a government that has spent so long consulting on so many other things – you know, there was no consultation when they rolled out the VLT machines in the first place, and then we saw this enormous expansion of VLT machines. That really was, you might view it, an executive decision. One would think that if we were going to do something that would have such a dramatic impact on the fabric of our families and our communities, you'd want to ensure a broader kind of consultation before you went down that road.

Now, Mr. Speaker, next to the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, you're probably the next best thing to an expert in this Assembly in terms of gaming. You've got a long and detailed history in terms of dealing with the very subject matter of this bill. You know, I regret that we lose your voice when we're dealing with this bill, because I expect that you'd have a lot of very important experiences to share with us and perspective and insight. It's one of those times that because you're in the chair and not able to participate in the debate, we regret that. We regret not having that expertise. In the meantime what we're going to have to do is that those of us who are not so knowledgeable are going to have to speak to this bill and react from our own experiences and our own notions and our own views of this.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to hear any compelling argument why we would be better off not to have an Alberta gaming secretariat. If there are those reasons, I hope somebody will tell me, and I think we can deal with those. There seem to be the two key elements: one, having the gaming secretariat, and then the second one, having the standing committee on gaming. I think the secretariat is the key part.

Mr. Speaker, I haven't discussed this with the Minister of Gaming – and he may have some very different views on it – but it seems to me that sometimes when you have a department that has some financial imperative, has some government sorts of imperative, they end up being too narrowly focused, so what happens is there isn't the kind of independence sometimes required to view some of these serious problems. I know we have here in the Assembly – I'm glad, and I hope we're going to see participation in the debate – the Legislature's one voice and member on AADAC. I know that colleague is here in the Assembly and probably could tell us a lot in terms of some of the issues that AADAC deals with in terms of problem gambling. Some of those people I talked about I see come into my office while they're waiting for some of the programs that AADAC offers at 11th Street and 11th Avenue in Calgary.

I think it's sometimes good to set up a degree of healthy tension between perhaps an organization such as an Alberta gaming secretariat and a provincial government and a provincial minister. I think it's good for ministers to be challenged, and I don't mean in a hostile way by a crowd on the street outside the minister's office. I mean by thoughtful people who spend time to develop expertise in an area and who then go to a minister who has the legislative responsibility, the ministerial responsibility and perhaps sort of challenge that minister to do some things that aren't being adequately addressed. The opposition tries as best we can for a few weeks in March when we're dealing with the provincial government budget. We're never sure whether the ministers take any of the advice they get from the opposition, but you know, we make that effort.

There are lots of people who aren't represented in this Assembly who have important things to say about gaming, and I don't think those voices routinely get to be heard. I think if you had a secretariat, the secretariat may end up challenging the Minister of Gaming to do better. It may be able to point out things where the government is letting the people of this province down. To me that would be a very worthwhile sort of experience.

The minister still ultimately controls the purse. The report comes to the minister and recommendations. The notion I like is that with the recommendations that come to the minister, the minister is required to put the recommendations before the Legislative Assembly, so you can see how this kind of constructive tension would be created. You would have a gaming secretariat that would have a modest degree of independence from the government of the day and would be able to formulate recommendations after broad-based public consultation. I mean, it's not dissimilar to the way AADAC works now. What would happen then is that those recommendations would come forward and be shared with the minister. As a courtesy the minister would see them first, but within three days a copy of those recommendations then would come before the Legislative Assembly, so it becomes a public document.

I want to thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for having the wisdom to anticipate that sometimes the Legislature doesn't sit in Alberta – actually that's more often the norm – and in that case the report then would have to be made public. That just makes excellent sense to me, that the report is not going to be buried away and is not something the minister would be able sit on for weeks or months, arguing that it still required some fine-tuning or whatever. The report is out there, and Albertans can read it and can deal with it.

Now, the other point I think I wanted to make – well, I'll have to make it at the committee stage. Hopefully the bill will get that far.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today to speak to Bill 208, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, proposed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. This bill seeks to revamp our existing procedures that relate to the administration of the gaming industry. It proposes to do that by forming a gaming secretariat and an all-party committee on gaming.

I'm not supporting this bill, Mr. Speaker, because it simply adds more layers and is redundant to our existing regulatory system of gaming. Our government has already laid down a framework for administering gaming in this province. That framework is one that includes extensive research, fair and impartial administration, and treatment of problem gambling.

As chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, I have some direct experience with an important function of the regulatory framework. I've had the opportunity to meet and work with outstanding experts and people who are part of an even greater organization. Each year AADAC handles more than 30,000 treatment admissions and 70,000 shelter admissions. In addition, more than 600,000 brochures and pamphlets are distributed to Albertans. I believe public information is one of the most important functions of AADAC. It is relevant to Bill 208 because public information is part of the mandate of the proposed gaming secretariat. I would suggest that AADAC is currently doing a commendable job in that regard, and problem gambling has certainly been part of those efforts.

It was 1994 when problem gambling was added to AADAC's mandate. Gambling has become a priority for the organization. A major part of that mandate and one that is also reflected in Bill 208 is the function of research. In 1998 AADAC completed a report on adult gambling and problem gambling in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, the findings of the report offer some interesting insights into gambling in Alberta. I'd like to point out that gambling has been in relative decline in recent years. The report indicates that this may be due to the awareness there is in our society about the problems related to gambling. There's also an indication that those experiencing gambling addiction often have exposure to gambling early in life. That means that preventing gambling addiction begins with the parents. AADAC endeavours to reach out to those parents and make them aware of issues relating to gambling.

AADAC has adopted a holistic approach to problem gambling. By recognizing that gambling problems often go hand in hand with drugs such as alcohol, AADAC is better able to treat the problem.

AADAC's research initiatives also help us to determine exactly what the extent of problem gambling is in Alberta. The 1998 study shows us that of the people who gamble in the province, 2 percent are pathological gamblers, the most severe category of gambling addiction. The good news is that between 1994 and 1998 there was an overall decrease in the number of problem and pathological gamblers in Alberta. While there is a decrease in problem gambling in the province, Albertans still love gaming. Nearly 83 percent of Albertans enjoy gambling activities of some kind, whether that is going to a fully licensed casino, the horse tracks in Edmonton or Calgary, or the bingo halls that are all over this province. However, in 1998 there were 23,000 fewer problem gamblers in the province than there were in 1994.

Mr. Speaker, gambling addiction can be devastating to those problem gamblers and their families. We all know that. But what we have found at AADAC is that problem gambling is treatable and it is preventable, given timely information and interventions. Our research indicates that when people are made aware of the warning signs, they are able to take control of their lives and avoid the pitfalls of problem gambling.

Mr. Speaker, AADAC is doing an exemplary job, I believe, of spreading awareness about the risks of gambling and researching the causes and effects. That's why I feel that Bill 208 should be defeated in this House. Organizations such as AADAC already meet the objectives put forward in Bill 208.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

MRS. SLOAN: Just a few brief comments this afternoon on Bill 208, Mr. Speaker. I think this bill's intentions are sound, and they certainly offer a contribution to taking this province to the next step, as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

I particularly like the Alberta gaming secretariat. We have had in the province in the past quite a number of reviews undertaken on critical issues. Just in a few short minutes I'd identify the MLA review on WCB, and we've had an MLA review on maintenance enforcement, child welfare, and children at risk. It would seem to me that in an area like gambling there needs to be an ongoing mechanism to monitor the perhaps positive and negative effects of such activity.

Under the purpose of the secretariat there are specifically highlighted a number of areas including the effects of gaming on children and families. We're in the process of reviewing our child welfare caseload at the moment. We have no idea of how many children in that caseload are there in part or wholly because of the fact that their parents are gamblers and have not been able to provide the basic necessities of life. It's these types of things, Mr. Speaker, that I think would be worth while pursuing.

We also do not have statistical information before us that talks about the number of suicides that arise in the province because of gambling addictions, yet in my own professional and personal circle I know of a provincial bureaucrat who committed suicide over gambling, and this year right here in the city of Edmonton within our Edmonton minor hockey association we lost a member who also committed suicide over gambling debts. So I have had at least two exposures to that, and I think the problem is much more systemic than those two examples suggest. But if you look at the statistics relative to deaths that are compiled by the Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research, at least last year's didn't categorize gambling as a cause of death, and I think there should be perhaps a subcategory created that identifies that. If we don't start to do those things, Mr. Speaker, we're not really going to get to the root of the problem.

I respect the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler's comments relative to crime. I think that is an area where we've seen the province set up a whole strategic task force and unit to deal with Hell's Angels. We know Hell's Angels is linked to illegal gambling, gaming activities. But in a widespread context, why not have something like this secretariat that can monitor, anticipate, and plan for the development of criminal activity in this area?

I'm pleased this afternoon to support Bill 208, and I would anticipate there will be many other members of the Assembly that would do the same. I think there have been some reservations named about the standing committee, and certainly I see within the recommendations and functions of that committee some very worthwhile requirements. As an example, "the introduction of a policy requiring a proportion of revenues from the Commission . . . be used to support police services in preventing and fighting organized crime," and "the economic, social, regulatory, enforcement and addictive implications of Internet gaming." Internet gambling crime is predicted to increase substantially. Why not get ahead of that, Mr. Speaker, on a policy and planning standpoint? Why not have a committee that would be able to do that on a

consecutive basis without being subject to turnover such as the roving committees that have been struck in the last little while to deal with other issues?

With those comments, I'm pleased to take my seat and again to voice my support for Bill 208.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to close the debate.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to all of the Members of the Legislative Assembly who have spoken about this bill. I thank government members and members of the opposition who have added their perspective and their interest on this issue. I particularly appreciated the remarks by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, whose work of course led to the excellent gaming review report on which Bill 208 has been based.

I think we know full well that this is an issue that needs to be addressed in Alberta, and some of the recommendations that are key to this legislation that were contained in the Member for Lacombe-Stettler's report are very important issues that need to be addressed. I know several of the members have said that they feel that what is being suggested in this bill is already covered by AADAC. As someone who has been a very strong supporter of AADAC's work in our province, I wish that were the case. In fact, I think AADAC is having difficulty struggling with alcohol and drug abuse issues, let alone gambling addictions, which of course take on the very same characteristics of any addiction.

This is not just a bill about addressing the issues of addiction, Mr. Speaker. This bill is also about issues of crime involved in gaming, of municipalities who see gaming establishments within their boundaries who have attempted to control those and have no mechanism by which that can happen. This bill answers some of those concerns. I also think it's important to say, particularly in closing the debate, that I certainly hope members of the government, as well as others, will carefully consider supporting this legislation.

It's certainly put forward on the basis of us as legislators collectively building on the need to address the issues of gaming that have become so prevalent in Alberta as well as in other provinces. The gaming secretariat, of course, is an opportunity to rise above any kind of partisan political debate and build a framework where legislators can start to enter into this discussion in order that we can provide the kind of control and the kind of leadership that I think Albertans expect from this Legislature.

By pulling together MLAs, one from the government and one from the Official Opposition, members of the general public, a representative of the RCMP, of the Alberta Gaming Research Institute, of AADAC, and of the Child and Family Services Secretariat, we would begin to address some of the very complex problems that arise out of gaming, which go far beyond just addiction, and certainly touch on, as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview so eloquently has stated and in fact has worked on, the issues affecting children and families. The opportunity for reviewing legislation through a filter of its impact on children and the things that we think

are very important in terms of where we head in the future as a province are embodied within this suggested legislation.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Lacombe-Stettler indicated, the next frontier in gambling in this province is clearly going to be that on the Internet. Gambling on-line is a huge issue, and I think we need to come together as legislators to find a solution to that. Bill 208 is an opportunity for us to work together to do that.

There is no question, Mr. Speaker, that some form of legislative framework is needed to address this issue within our province. I'm hoping that members of the government will exercise their belief in finding a better solution and support the legislation. If the legislation comes forward in a different form or a different auspice but embodies these recommendations from the Member for Lacombe-Stettler's report, we will certainly work to support that.

I do think it's an issue that needs to be addressed, and I look forward to hearing how members feel about it.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:02]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Dickson	MacDonald	Sapers
Leibovici	Nicol	Sloan
MacBeth		

Against the motion:

Amery	Hancock	O'Neill
Broda	Havelock	Paszkowski
Calahasen	Hlady	Pham
Cao	Jacques	Renner
Cardinal	Johnson	Severtson
Coutts	Klapstein	Shariff
Doerksen	Kryczka	Stelmach
Ducharme	Langevin	Stevens
Dunford	Lougheed	Strang
Evans	Lund	Tannas
Fischer	Mar	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Marz	Taylor
Friedel	McFarland	Woloshyn
Fritz	Nelson	Zwozdesky
Haley		

Totals:	For - 7	Against - 43
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 208 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:16 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 10, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/05/10

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

Mr. Klapstein moved that pursuant to Standing Order 47 the previous question be now put.

[Adjourned debate May 9: Mr. Melchin]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is indeed a black day not only for Albertans and our precious health care system but also for democracy. The debate on Bill 11 has been controversial, emotional and continues to generate more and more opposition as not only Albertans but also Canadians become aware of its contents.

This bill has been described by the Premier both as a groundbreaking bill in the delivery of health care which will alleviate Albertans' pain and suffering and also as a minor change that will have no impact on wait lists and Albertans' pain and suffering. Besides these contrary messages the Premier and various government members have accused the Official Opposition, unions, health care professionals, religious leaders, scholars, economists, and even their own constituents of being malicious, fraudulent, despicable, un-Albertan, whiners, left-wing nuts and of spreading misinformation and not capable of understanding the intent and the facts of Bill 11.

All these insults have been hurled at Albertans for daring to question the motives of a government that cannot answer the simple question: why? For six months we have been waiting for the answer to that question. Why do this Premier and his government members insist on bringing in a bill which sets the parameters for the introduction of private, for-profit health care in this province?

It is important for the Premier and his members to understand that the Official Opposition's and Albertans' objections are not based on speculation but on a solid understanding of what Bill 11 says and allows. Our objections are not based on conjecture but on solid evidence from around the world that two-tiered health care is more costly, less efficient, and contributes to poor patient outcomes.

As doctor Walley Temple, a renowned oncologist, stated:

Why would we want to experiment with another model, known to be expensive, unreliable, and a bigger gas guzzler?

Why would we want to replicate a problematic system, where there will be no turning back, and where the results will be measured in people's lives?

These are some of the whys this government can't or won't explain, nor could their \$3 million advertising campaign buy the support of Albertans.

What's wrong with the bill? On behalf of the tens of thousands of Albertans who have written, faxed, phoned, e-mailed, signed petitions, and rallied, I will attempt one more time to explain some of the main concerns that have been expressed by Albertans from across this province.

First, I want to make it crystal clear that this government is ignoring the key recommendations of its own blue-ribbon panel on Bill 37, which was the predecessor to this bill. These recommendations said that the distinction between a hospital and a nonhospital

procedure should be based on a recovery time of 12 hours and that any procedure requiring more than a 12-hour stay should be performed in a hospital not a stand-alone surgical facility, which is what this bill provides for.

In addition, the blue-ribbon panel said that should overnight surgeries be permitted in a surgical facility, that facility would in fact be a hospital. This panel further recommended that there was no need for stand-alone legislation, but what was needed were changes to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, the Hospitals Act, and the Medical Profession Act and that this was a response to overtures made by HRG to initiate overnight stays in its facility.

In drafting Bill 11, this government has in fact provided legislation which is unlike any other in Canada. It specifically allows for the provision of overnight stays in surgical facilities, otherwise known as private hospitals, the selling of enhanced services, the establishment of 17 different conflict of interest guidelines, and the guarantee of a profit to these private clinics. By now we all know that surgical facilities is just a code word used by this government to try to mask what they really are: private, for-profit hospitals.

Let me give you an example for those who are saying that it's not true, an example of how enhanced services delivered in these private, for-profit hospitals will extend their product lines, increase prices, and have the guaranteed profit. First, enhanced services are not uninsured services as we know them but are add-ons to medically necessary services. Up to now, when we have had to go to a doctor, we have never had to worry about what would be sold to us. Either it was medically necessary, so we needed it, or it was not. Now when Dr. X suggests that procedure Y is needed, we have to wonder: do we need it, or is it because of the profit motivation?

Recently we saw the government approve soft lenses for cataract surgeries. What the government is probably unaware of is that the next generation of enhanced services in the provision of cataract surgeries is going to be the offering of lenses that have a filter. These lenses are about \$600 an eye, and those are out-of-pocket costs.

Remember, for-profit facilities means that the emphasis needs to be on extending product lines and increasing prices. Furthermore, the government has provided a guaranteed 12 percent profit as part of the administration fee to provide this enhanced service. Well, that's not a bad deal for the private sector, but I don't think and I know Albertans won't think it's a good deal for them.

There is another fact that hasn't received much discussion, and that is the fact that this bill sets up different standards of oversight for different types of surgical procedures. There are – and all the government members can check their bill – insured surgical services, uninsured inpatient surgical services, enhanced surgical services, and uninsured day surgical services. Now, if the government were truly sincere in its attempt to regulate surgical services being provided by the private sector, can someone tell me why all surgical services would not be treated in the same way?

The most frightening statement that the Premier and government members make is that there are no regulations currently in place regarding these surgical facilities. This statement ignores the fact that the Hospitals Act, the Regional Health Authorities Act, the Medical Profession Act have provisions to regulate and control these facilities. In fact I will read once more the provision in the Alberta Hospitals Act, section 62(a), that states – and you can all check that one as well – that the minister has the ability to make regulations relative to contracts with private hospitals. Can't be any clearer. And the College of Physicians and Surgeons has a document outlining the standards for nonhospital surgical facilities. In case the government members have not seen it, this is what it is: College of

Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta Standards for Non-hospital Surgical Facilities. So to say that there are no standards in place and regulations in place is misleading.

So why do we need this bill? That is still a question that has not been answered. Why do we need a bill that promotes private, for-profit health care in this province, and what lies ahead for us?

8:10

For those of us who are pledged to fight for the protection, maintenance, and enhancement of our public health care system, Bill 11 signals the beginning of the fight. It is the call to arms to protect, again to quote Dr. Temple: "the sacred trust between the patient and physician. A trust that not only provides comfort but also healing." Albertans will remember the consultations on Bill 11. They will remember the information that is provided. But, more importantly, I believe what they will remember is the callous turning of this government's back on its citizens' concerns, and that is what will rest in people's minds.

The government has tried to calm troubled Albertans by saying that nothing major will happen when this bill becomes law. Well, those warm words are cold comfort to the people of Alberta who know this government's track record all too well. Give them an inch, and they will take a mile. With this bill in place if ever this government gets another mandate, the floodgates will be open to privatized, for-profit hospitals and the inevitable and irreversible decline of our public health care system. That is something Albertans can see on the horizon. That is what they don't trust, and that is what they will not tolerate.

As Drs. Woolhandler and Himmelstein have said:

Our main objection to investor-owned care is not that it wastes taxpayers' money, nor even that it causes modest decrements in quality. The most serious problem with such care is that it embodies a new value system that severs the communal roots and samaritan traditions of hospitals, makes doctors and nurses the instruments of investors, and views patients as commodities.

In fact, this government has often said that patients are consumers, that health care is a commodity.

In nonprofit settings, avarice vies with beneficence for the soul of medicine; investor ownership marks the triumph of greed. A fiscal conundrum constrains altruism on the part of not-for-profit hospitals. No money, no mission. With for-profit hospitals, the money is the mission; form follows profit.

Now, one of the reasons the government insists we need to have this option is in order to ensure that our health care costs are kept under control. In fact, we have seen that this is not the case and that the myth that has been created by this government that health care costs are out of control is easily disputed. Per capita health care costs in the last seven years had increased only \$50 before the present provincial government cuts.

In Canada the costs haven't changed in 20 years and are only 8.9% of gross national product . . . The costs of our health care is \$2500 per person and it provides us with 100% coverage. In Alberta we spend less than 8 other provinces and our hospital costs per capita are still the 7th lowest and 15% less than in 1992.

So the question is: where are the runaway costs?

Contrast this to the wealthiest nation in the world, the United States, where 2/3 of the population is insured but still pays 20% of the bill and 1/3 is undercovered or has no coverage at all. The US government spends \$4000 per person to support this system and each American pays an additional \$5400 out of his or her own pocket. Is this the system we want to adopt?

All peer-reviewed studies show that non-profit care is less expensive than for-profit care. The belief that for-profit minimizes cost and maximizes care is just not true. American economists calculate that if the money spent in the US was used in Canadian-style health care, there would be enough to cover all the health needs of their country.

Those were statements, again, made by Dr. Walley Temple.

For those of you who do not know who Dr. Walley Temple is, he is an oncologist who is the chief of surgical oncology at the Tom Baker Cancer Centre in Calgary, professor of surgery at the University of Calgary medical school, president of the World Federation of Surgical Oncology Societies, and editor in chief of the international *Journal of Surgical Oncology*. He is another expert who indicates to this government that their plan is the wrong way to go.

Though the government members may scoff, may laugh, may shake their heads in refusal of an undeniable fact, the reality is that when this bill is looked at word by word and clause by clause, it does exactly the opposite of what the government contends it does. The reason it does that is that it starts from the fundamental premise that for-profit health care is okay. When a piece of legislation is drafted and the fundamental basis on which it is drafted is wrong to begin with, the results are what we see here in Bill 11.

If in fact, again, the government members do not wish to believe that, all they need to do is go back to the recommendations of the Bill 37 blue-ribbon panel, which this government established, and look at what their recommendations were and ask the government executive, ask the minister of health, ask the Premier why in fact those recommendations were not followed. I think you will find the answer there. The answer is because those recommendations clearly outlined that for-profit health care does not have a role in Alberta. If in fact the government does wish to establish for-profit health care, what they then need to do is call it what it is, and that is: a surgical facility is a private hospital.

The Official Opposition believes that our health care system is too precious to entrust to market medicine. Not only do we believe that, but in fact the majority of Albertans believe that as well. Poll after poll after poll, even the government's own polls, indicated that that was true, that Albertans do not want to see for-profit health care in this province.

This government has one last chance. It has a chance to step back, to look at the facts, to hear what the concerns are of Albertans, and to make that bold move that they should have made months ago upon introduction of Bill 11, and that is to pull the bill. It is not too late to admit that there is an error in judgment. It is not too late to admit that there is a mistake. It is not too late, if it is one way of saving face for the government, to say: we will not proclaim the bill, but we will send the bill off to the other Premiers across Canada to look at it and see whether or not our bill meets the requirements of the Canada Health Act. It is not too late to do any of those steps, nor is it too late for the government to open those closed doors and at least, if nothing else, allow the public to have input on the many regulations that this bill still needs in order to enact it. In order to put the meat on the bones, regulations will have to be passed and put into place. Now would be an opportune time for the Premier to announce that there will be public hearings on the regulations, if in fact he does not have the guts, if I can call it that, to pull the bill.

The time has come to stop ignoring Albertans. The time has come to listen to their concerns. The time has come to look at the real facts that are presented by Bill 11. The time has come to recognize that Bill 11 opens the door to for-profit health care in this province. The time has come for this government to do the right thing, and the right thing is not to pass the bill. The right thing is to pull the bill and to know that this bill will not provide for the protection of public health in this province.

No, it is not a done deal. The reality is that the fight for public health care in this province is far from a done deal, and it is just beginning. So if the government will not do the right thing, Albertans will ensure that in the next election they will have in place

a government that is committed to public health care and that will do the right thing for the concerns of Albertans in this province.

Thank you very much.

8:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River. [interjections] I'm prepared to hear you, hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this evening to rise and speak on behalf of Bill 11. At this point one has to wonder if there's anything about this bill that hasn't already been said. Certainly we've reached the point where everyone who has been interested has taken a position either for or against the bill, and what I plan on doing in the next few minutes is to outline the events as they unfolded in my constituency of Peace River during the course of the debate on the bill and in the past few months.

This is without doubt one of the most talked about issues in my seven years as an MLA. What intrigued me, however, was how the feedback began and then how it shifted as the bill was circulated and the facts were picked up. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I find it most refreshing that the general public is much more astute about what's going on than we often give them credit for. I found people looking for information, many looking for clarification and then making up their minds about what they want or what they don't want.

In February, Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 was really becoming quite a hot topic. Back then the feedback that I was getting was approximately 60 percent against and 40 percent for the bill. It was obvious that the opposition was based on the fear propaganda that was being circulated at the time. What's interesting or, should I say, sad is that all this information was being spread by the Liberal and the ND opposition and the Friends of Medicare before they ever saw one word of the bill in print. In other words, what they were saying was: it doesn't matter what's in the bill; we're not going to like it. That's how the smear campaign unfolded. They frightened many people unnecessarily, and in fact that's still going on.

You know, even before the bill was printed and mailed out, people were already calling and expressing doubt about what they were hearing, and I can say that they were right. After the bill was mailed out, what I really noticed was the astuteness of the people that were reading it and seeing what was in it. The tone of the calls was now starting to change. The people were starting to say things like: is that all Bill 11 is really about? From there until today the level of support has gradually shifted so that right now, according to all my contacts with my constituents, it stands at approximately two-thirds in favour. It's on this basis that I can stand here this evening and comfortably say that I must vote in favour of Bill 11.

I know that many constituents also expressed their opposition to the bill, and some are likely going to be disappointed in me. It's too bad that we cannot please everyone every time, but I've also learned a long time ago that we don't only get to make the easy decisions in here.

What does this bill mean to the constituents in the area that I represent and in many others like it? That's beside the fact that we as government, along with our regional health authorities, have an obligation to the citizens of this province to obtain the best value for the dollars that we spend on their behalf. I could almost stop there because that would describe the essence of Bill 11: to ensure that we get the best value for Albertans. If we are not good stewards of the finances and the operations of the province of Alberta on behalf of our citizens and our electors, then we have no business being in this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this one step further though. I want to give you a very practical example of how a patient from a small

rural community could be a beneficiary of this bill. It's not likely that the smaller rural hospitals or their RHAs are going to be contracting out surgical services. They do, however, regularly send patients with serious, major medical problems to the larger hospitals, notably in Edmonton and Calgary, and all too often I hear from these patients or from their families that they've traveled to Edmonton for surgery only to be bumped because the operating room was needed for an emergency. So now they're back on the waiting list, and there is now the connection.

All types of surgery compete for the available time and space in the hospitals, everything from removing tonsils and appendix to bypasses and heart transplants. I just have to ask the question: if the operating rooms are being used to capacity, what's so wrong with contracting out some very minor procedures to relieve these pressures and to allow the very expensive facilities to be used for the more serious procedures and reduce those waiting lists as well? More than likely a contract would be with an existing day surgery clinic – many of them are around right now – that with only minor modification could be used for some overnight stays.

I could go on with more details on how this could work, but why does this have to be made so complicated? One of my constituents said a few weeks back after he had read the bill: this sure doesn't sound like rocket surgery. I'm not sure if he intended the pun, but he went on to say: well, what's so bad about it? It isn't, unless you're looking for the imaginary dark side to such an extent that you can't see the benefits in anything.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to work on several aspects of developing Bill 11, and I've had the opportunity to discuss it with hundreds of people, at meetings of all sizes, with many individuals in person and on the phone, through letters and through e-mails. I can't imagine a question that hasn't already been asked or a point of view that was not put forward. The amendments presented by the minister incorporate most of the feedback that we have received. Is it a perfect solution? We'd have to be pretty naive to expect that. In fact, I'd say that we have to keep looking for even more solutions to solve the pressures on our health care system. Is it a step in the right direction? A majority of my constituents think so, and I agree with them. That's why I voted for Bill 11 in the first two stages, and I'll vote for it again tonight in third reading.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased and proud to rise and speak to third reading of Bill 11. Every time I rise to speak, in fact every time I enter this Assembly, this building, I'm reminded of the awesome privilege that it is to be here to represent the people of Edmonton-Whitemud and the people of Alberta. When we talk about health care policy, an issue which is so close to every Albertan because every Albertan is affected by or served by the health care system at some time, we feel the debate to be intense. Bill 11 is no exception, and the responsibility and the privilege are even more pronounced.

Mr. Speaker, the most important aspect of Bill 11, in my view, has been the public debate. This has been almost a unique process. The process was started in November with a policy statement made by our Premier on television to all Albertans, and at that time he invited public discussion, public input, public debate. MLAs went out to constituencies and talked to Albertans about our health care policy, particularly about the policy relating to surgical facilities.

8:30

In Edmonton-Whitemud we circulated a newsletter to all constitu-

ents, enclosing the policy, and in January had a community focus meeting, which was very well attended, where I could get feedback directly face-to-face from constituents. As well, many meetings, phone calls, and e-mails took place.

The results of these discussions were brought back to the Minister of Health and Wellness, brought back to caucus not only by myself but by other MLAs who had done the same types of processes in their constituencies. Bill 11 was drafted with the benefit of that input, input from MLAs and government caucus from all around the province.

Mr. Speaker, I'd make particular reference to section 2 of the bill, inserting in the bill, which wasn't previously in the policy, the fact that major surgery must be done in public hospitals and that the definition of major surgery would be left to the College of Physicians and Surgeons. That's something the people of Alberta asked for when they were consulted by their MLAs. That's something that was drafted into the bill as a result of that consultation.

In section 5 of the bill we talk about enhanced services. Enhanced services weren't mentioned in the original policy. They were included in the bill because the Consumers' Association and Albertans said there needs to be protection for Albertans in the area of enhanced services, and that protection, Mr. Speaker, has been built into the bill. It's been built into the bill not to rule out the use of enhanced services in appropriate cases but to make sure that informed Albertans who are offered these services know what they're being offered, know whether they need them, and know whether they want to buy them.

The bill, with the benefit of that input from Albertans, was drafted and was tabled on March 2, and in an unprecedented step mailed to all Albertans for open and public discussion. Again, this MLA delivered material to every household in his riding, asking Albertans whether they'd received Bill 11, whether they'd read it and asking for feedback, and again hosted a community focus meeting in the constituency to get face-to-face feedback and again had many calls, letters, personal meetings, e-mail, so many in fact that not all of them have been answered, but they all will be answered.

The benefit of that input can be seen in the amendments to the bill, amendments that enhance the provisions relating to queue-jumping, that eliminate any opportunities for profit on enhanced goods and services, contrary to what the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has just said, requiring RHAs to consider the efficient use of existing capacity, clarifying the privative clause, requiring conflict of interest rules by RHAs and the College of Physicians and Surgeons to enhance existing common-law conflict of interest rules.

We've now had 47 hours of debate in the House. In addition, Mr. Speaker, we've also as members of the government caucus had an opportunity to spend many additional hours bringing back the views and concerns of our constituents and to have an open and thorough debate of the amendments as well as many other issues relating to health in the context of Bill 11. I only wish Albertans could have seen and heard that debate as well, because it's that type of debate, with all members working together to improve the bill based on input from constituents, which leads to constructive policymaking.

A very important aspect here is that while many Albertans will see that the government has dealt with their concerns in the bill and in the amendments to the bill, in some cases their concerns were not dealt with in the bill. Bill 11 was not designed to deal with all issues in health, but Albertans should rest assured that they have been heard by this member, by this caucus, by this government. In many cases, Mr. Speaker, those concerns were already being addressed by the Health and Wellness business plan. In other cases the highlighting of service concerns will impact directly on government decisions and decision-making as we move forward. In some cases concerns

were based on broader issues relating to NAFTA, profit, and other issues, where we may have to respectfully agree to disagree.

I don't want to and I don't intend to diminish any Albertan's concerns. I would only say that this member and this government stand foursquare behind the public health care system. We will promote it. We will protect it. We will not diminish it. We will ensure that health care in Alberta continues to be there for Albertans, for our parents, for our children, when they need it and that services will continue to be enhanced and improved and that where there are problems – and yes, Mr. Speaker, there are problems – those problems will be addressed and are being addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to deal briefly as well with the importance of the public debate, because this issue is larger than Bill 11. We've seen improvements in technology. We've seen improvements in drugs and drug protocols, in surgical techniques, in diagnostics. We've greatly increased the pressure on our public system. More can be done for many people than ever before, and more is being done in every area than ever before. This is due in large measure to the members of the health care professions who give yeoman service every day to help Albertans in need of medical help. It's also due to the good work of the many volunteers in Alberta who work hard to ensure that funds are available to enhance and improve the equipment and facilities available. And, of course, the government has made it a priority to ensure that we have the best equipment and facilities possible with the resources available, and those are considerable resources by any measure.

But one of the disappointing elements of the debate has been that every afternoon, every day I've sat here in the Assembly and listened to members of the opposition, the vast majority of whom come from the great city of Edmonton, rise in their place to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care. If you only listened to the Liberals, you would incorrectly assume that this government has not done one single thing for the city of Edmonton or the province to improve the provision of publicly funded health care and publicly administered health care. Well, Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth.

For the benefit of my constituents in Edmonton-Whitemud as well as all Edmontonians and all Albertans, I'd like to highlight some of the recent government initiatives that show that public health care has been improved in this city. Just last month my colleague the Minister of Health and Wellness announced that the Capital health authority will receive two new MRI units in addition to the three units already operating within the public system in Edmonton today.

MRIs are increasingly important in diagnosing a wide range of ailments, and rapid access to an MRI can often make the difference in whether or not a patient can be successfully treated. With the addition of four new MRIs in Edmonton and Calgary and the others already announced in Medicine Hat and Grande Prairie, Alberta will become the province in which publicly funded MRIs are most easily accessible. Over the past five years total MRI scans in Alberta have increased by 138 percent. The new MRI machines will guarantee that the total number of scans will increase further. Mr. Speaker, regardless of what the opposition says, Albertans who need an MRI will receive it quickly through the publicly funded system.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, Alberta Learning has created 26 postsecondary positions to train MRI technicians. [interjection] This announcement will ensure that new MRIs will always be staffed. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora says: what's this got to do with Bill 11? For the last 47 hours I've been listening to many of the opposition members on the other side saying that we don't deal with MRIs in Bill 11. So now I'm advising them why we don't deal with MRIs in Bill 11. Because we've already dealt with MRIs.

My constituents, Mr. Speaker, and all Edmontonians should also

be aware of the new neonatal intensive care unit that recently opened at the Royal Alexandra hospital. The Minister of Infrastructure attended the opening, and I was pleased to be there as well. This \$8.5 million unit will serve the needs of premature infants not just in Alberta but across western Canada. The new intensive care unit will be crucial in ensuring that infirm newborn Albertans are given every chance of survival.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on. Other health care initiatives in our city have made Edmonton the centre of excellence in public health care delivery. They include a world-class adult intensive care and burn unit at the University of Alberta hospital, renovations for the Stollery children's care centre at the University of Alberta hospital, a new emergency department . . . [interjection]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the chair listened very attentively to the courtesy that was extended to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for 20 minutes. There were few, if any, interjections and certainly none that were heard above a murmur, and the chair would request the same degree of courtesy now to be afforded to the hon. Government House Leader.

8:40

Debate Continued

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll soon be opening – this is the truth, and you should hear it – a new emergency department at the University of Alberta hospital. We have an upgraded Norwood continuing care facility. We have a new Northeast Edmonton community health facility and \$16.5 million for new long-term care facilities provided through public/private partnerships. So when the opposition suggests that our government is promoting private health care at the expense of public health care, you only have to look at the city of Edmonton to see that they are wrong.

Bill 11 will not decrease the number of MRIs done in the public system. Will Bill 11 stop the training of new health care professionals at the Alberta universities? No. Will Bill 11 close down the neonatal intensive care unit at the Royal Alex? No. Will Bill 11 halt improvements to the emergency at the Children's intensive care centre at the U of A hospital? No.

Mr. Speaker, as an MLA for Edmonton and for Edmonton-Whitemud I am proud to meet with my constituents to discuss our government's record in health care. We have a proud past and a strong future to look forward to. Health care is an important public trust. This member, this government, and this Premier have demonstrated that the public health care system is our highest priority. Bill 11 is but one small part but an important part of a health care vision. We see healthy Albertans in a healthy Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to speak once again to Bill 11, the Alberta Health Care Protection Act. As has been pointed out, almost half a year ago I went on province-wide television to discuss a proposed new health policy for Alberta relating to the operation of surgical facilities, a policy which an *Edmonton Journal* editorial called a ringing declaration of what is effectively a bill of health care rights. At that time I laid out the five key principles behind that policy, principles that shaped the bill that was to follow. Those five key principles were very simple, very plain, and very straightforward.

The principles are these: all Albertans will have access to ensured

medical services through the publicly funded system; no Albertans will pay for ensured medical services, and nobody will be able to pay to get faster service; regional health authorities will be responsible for all insured surgical services regardless of where they are delivered; private providers of insured services will be able to operate but only under contract to regional health authorities and only within the principles of the Canada Health Act; and health authorities will be allowed to contract with privately operated facilities for surgical services only if it will improve access and efficiency or reduce waiting lists.

Well, Mr. Speaker, very shortly those five key and wonderful principles will be enshrined into law. Those wonderful principles will be enshrined into law, and the Liberals and the NDs will oppose that. Very shortly there will be tight regulatory fences around surgical facilities, fences that weren't there before. Very shortly Bill 11 will be law, and this government will be moving on to deal with other issues in health care, other issues across government.

Mr. Speaker, getting from that television address to this day has been a very interesting process, to say the least. For me and for every member of the Assembly and for every Albertan it has been six months of seemingly uninterrupted debate and discussion, from the floor to the floors of hockey arenas, the food courts of shopping malls, the hallways of business, and of course as we see this evening, even as I speak, the steps of the Legislature. It's been interesting, and it's also been an exceptionally valuable process for this government and this province. I want to sincerely thank all of those who have been a part of it.

Mr. Speaker, whether people agree or disagree with the bill, their involvement has indicated that they care and care deeply about the future of health care in Alberta. As members of the opposition have pointed out and as our members of the government caucus have pointed out, they've cared enough to send letters and e-mails, to make phone calls, to attend public forums and so on. They cared enough to call my office or the offices of other members. Some of them cared enough to stand on the steps of the Legislature and wave placards, blow sirens, and clap cymbals.

I am keenly aware that many Albertans have been troubled by what they see as the long-term impact of Bill 11 on the future of medicare. Well, I want to tell Albertans today that this government has not turned a blind eye to those concerns. Our government has made every effort to ensure that this bill's impact will be a positive one. In coming months this government will do all it can to inspire your confidence in the strength of the health system and demonstrate that everything we do with health care is to improve the public system and the quality of health care that Albertans receive.

So, yes, it has been a valuable experience for all involved in many ways. For one thing, it led to an unprecedented set of initiatives by this government to bring Albertans into the discussion at each step of the legislative process. It gave Albertans, in an unprecedented move, the chance to see a bill developed, debated, and passed, a process many have never seen before. That process of seeing a law take shape began with my television address, as I pointed out, in November, which was followed by the release of a full policy statement. At the same time, phone lines were set up so that people could let us know what they thought of the policy. When the bill was introduced in the Legislature on March 2, it was also sent to every household in Alberta so that Albertans could read word for word the bill their elected legislators were about to debate. A web site was set up to serve as a source of constantly updated information about the bill and its progress through this Legislative Assembly.

When the bill began second reading debate, the first full night of debate was televised live across the province, the first time in the history of this Legislature that there's been a live televised process for an evening debate.

Albertans had the chance to hear all sides of the argument presented by members from all sides of the House. Throughout these six months MLAs have also been constantly speaking to their constituents about the bill. They've been speaking to their constituents in town hall meetings, on the street, in correspondence, and in one-to-one conversations. In short, Mr. Speaker, unprecedented steps were taken to involve all interested Albertans in the debate, and I consider that to have been a most valuable process.

The debate has been valuable for other reasons as well. It has helped to stimulate a much-needed national discussion about the future of the Canadian health care system.

8:50

Mr. Speaker, the easiest thing would have been to do nothing, to let the 52 surgical clinics operate as they're operating today, without rules or regulations surrounding the conditions of contract. Yes, some people said: "Why did you touch that third rail, that electrified third rail? Things were going along smoothly." Well, we had the courage as a government to not only talk about doing something in health care but to actually do it.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we hear all the talk and all the rhetoric. We hear people say that something needs to be done about waiting lists and rising costs and constantly growing demand. We hear the federal Minister of Health say that the status quo is not an option. But it's another thing to go beyond the hand-wringing and attempting to do something to fix these problems. Certainly Alberta's attempt has sparked a debate across Canada, and I don't think that spark will be extinguished until Canadians have been assured that their cherished system will not collapse due to neglect or reluctance to make necessary changes or run the risk of being, as I said, health care bankrupt in a few years down the road.

The debate has also been valuable because by being involved, Albertans and Canadians confronted some tough questions and provided this government with some solid ideas. Their input helped to shape Bill 11. Their input helped shape the amendments brought forward to strengthen the bill, and their input will continue to set the course for continuing improvements to the health system. It was Albertans' input that helped to generate the health policy announced last November. Albertans said that the government must do something to alleviate waiting lists and the attendant human suffering. Albertans said that health spending cannot continue to spiral upwards indefinitely, and they said that whatever is done, it must be done within the spirit of the Canada Health Act and within the umbrella of the publicly funded system.

Albertans do not want a two-tiered system where those with money can get faster or better service. They told us that in no uncertain terms. That initial input shaped Bill 11 and the five principles behind the bill that I mentioned earlier.

Subsequent input from Albertans helped shape the series of amendments that we introduced at the committee stage, amendments to eliminate the profiteering motive in the sale of enhanced services, to strengthen conflict-of-interest guidelines, and to eliminate the opportunity for queue-jumping for insured services through the sale of related noninsured services.

Mr. Speaker, the result is that upon passage and proclamation the Alberta Health Care Protection Act will be one of the strongest pieces of legislation in Canada to protect the Canadian health care system. And when people see that to be the truth, when they see that to be the fact, the sirens will stop howling.

The act gives regional health authorities the option to contract out minor surgical procedures if the College of Physicians and Surgeons approves of this procedure being performed outside of a hospital, if the surgical clinic is fully accredited, if the contract has a demon-

strated cost effectiveness, if the authority is already using its own facilities at maximum efficiency, and if there is a demonstrated net benefit to the health system. If any one of these ifs aren't met, the contract will not go ahead. It's as simple as that, and that will be the law.

The act bans two-tiered health care. It imposes fines of up to \$10,000 any time a patient is charged a user fee, facility fee, or any fee for an insured health service. The act prevents queue-jumping. The act ensures that all health services covered under medicare will be paid for by one source, the medicare system itself. Albertans, all you will need to get medically required services is your Alberta health care card. That's all you will need. Notwithstanding the fear mongering that has unfortunately led some Albertans to believe otherwise, no one – no one – will be denied needed health care in this province because of an inability to pay. If you have your health care card, it will be there for you. No one, Mr. Speaker.

As I've said on previous occasions, it's not a matter of trust, as the opposition has attempted to argue. Under this act it will be a matter of law. It will be the law, a law that they oppose, by the way, and a law that will not be subject to the whim of any elected official or bureaucrat or the political rhetoric that we see coming from the Liberal Party and the NDs.

The act requires that any enhanced services are fully explained to a patient in writing and before the surgery. It requires the patient to sign a written agreement to purchase any or no enhanced services, and it requires that patients have the option to change their mind if they want to. It also limits the price that can be charged for an enhanced service so that clinics or hospitals – by the way, this can take place in a hospital; this is not something that is exclusive to surgical clinics – will not be tempted to sell an enhanced service simply to make a profit. Mr. Speaker, those kinds of restrictions on the sale of enhanced services do not exist today. This act puts those restrictions in place, and I think Albertans should be very pleased with that.

In a nutshell, that's what this bill is all about. Mr. Speaker, during the course of this debate there has been a lot of discussion about things that this bill is not about. Certainly the Alberta Medical Association expressed concern about the shortage of physicians and other health professionals. For example, there have been questions about equity of access between rural and urban communities, especially for long-term care. There have been issues raised around the specter of certain services being deinsured. These are indeed important issues and they're important questions, without a doubt, but they are not germane to Bill 11. They are not part of the debate over the merits of this bill. They are being dealt with nonetheless.

In January the minister introduced a six-point plan to address health care issues including staffing levels, waiting lists, access to long-term care, and other situations on the minds of Albertans. Protecting the public system and regulating surgical facilities was one part of this plan. Bill 11 is one component, one component of this plan, and the passage of Bill 11 achieves that goal. The plan also includes improving access to health services through adequate funding and increasing the number of health professionals working in the system. That is going on now, as we speak.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I had a very productive, a very fruitful meeting with representatives of the Alberta Medical Association to seek their assistance in bringing these programs to fruition, and they've agreed to do that. We will continue to work with health care professionals to improve the management of the health system through innovation and efficiency. We will continue to enhance the quality of health services through reform of primary care delivery – twenty-six pilot projects are now under way – the purchase of new

equipment and other measures; increasing the emphasis on wellness, health promotion, and disease prevention through steps such as immunization programs and helping people receive a wider range of care at home; fostering and welcoming new ideas for health care, innovation.

9:00

In the last few months, while the opposition and others have focused solely on Bill 11, this government has taken many, many steps toward achieving all six components of this plan. To name a few - and I know the hon. House leader mentioned some of them. We announced a funding increase of 21 percent over three years for health. We put in place a plan to hire 2,400 additional health professionals over three years, beginning this year. We added the foldable lens used in some cataract surgeries to the list of insured services. We completed a major review of our long-term care system, which will lead to substantive improvement in care for seniors and which has already led to increased funding for long-term care. Of course, much to the chagrin of the opposition Liberals because it was something that was so good, we announced the purchase of four additional public MRI units, which will give us the highest scan capacity per capita of any province in the country, and they didn't like it. These are just a few of the developments in health care over the last few months, and we know the work isn't done, Mr. Speaker.

Over the next few weeks the Health and Wellness minister will be making further announcements of initiatives aimed at achieving all the goals in the six-point plan. These announcements will further address issues such as long-term care, waiting lists, and equipment demands. They will further respond to Albertans' priorities for health care and further implement what Albertans have told us, what their expectations are with respect to health care delivery.

Included in these announcements will be the full membership of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health, an advisory body I first announced back in January. The council, to be chaired by former Deputy Prime Minister Don Mazankowski, will provide government and all members of this caucus and all Albertans with informed advice and analysis on how to make the health system better. I look forward to receiving its input.

As well, soon the minister will meet with his provincial and federal counterparts from across Canada to continue the national review of the health system and how to improve it. [Disturbance in the gallery]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order! Order! Order in the gallery!

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, please, please.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order! Order!

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, all of these initiatives are essential to sustaining our health system for the future.

As has been pointed out, no one in government pretends that Bill 11 is the magic solution to all of the issues facing the health system. No one in government has ever claimed that once the bill is passed, all the problems would be solved. Solving those problems will require the energies and goodwill of all Albertans. It will require honest, open, rational dialogue - honest, open, and rational dialogue. It will require the input of physicians, nurses, administrators, and other health care professionals. It will require the ideas and perspectives of all Albertans, and it will require that we as legislators

stick to the issues and not turn the debate into political gamesmanship.

By and large, Mr. Speaker, the process worked. From the evening I took to the airwaves last November to this moment this evening, this government has thrown itself and its bill open to an unprecedented level of public scrutiny. The result is a piece of legislation that Albertans can be proud of. They contributed to its development every step of the way, and it reflects their pride in their health system and their earnest desire to sustain it.

It has been a very tough and very emotional battle. It has meant that my colleagues and I have taken a lot of criticism, some of it perhaps warranted, some of it not, a lot of it not. We've all been well reminded that any adjustments to health care are going to be diligently monitored and assessed by all Albertans.

That's why we'll continue to talk to Albertans about health care. We're not going to stop providing them with information, answering their questions, and pondering their ideas. We're not going to stop doing our very best to protect the public health system, a system which, I assure you, every member of this government values as highly as do all Albertans.

You know, an Alberta political scientist, Roger Gibbins actually, was recently quoted as saying that if we retracted this bill, that move could choke off a creative debate on what alternatives to health care we might consider around this country. I believe that to be true. If this government had said no to Bill 11, governments around the country might have looked at Alberta and said: "Well, that proves that it's too risky to attempt meaningful and positive reform of the health system. Let's just keep uttering platitudes. Let's just keep talking about it. Let's not do anything, and let's take the easy way out and just spend copious amounts of money, even if down the road that money has to be borrowed."

But we didn't say no. We said yes: yes to positive change, yes to a measured effort to make things better, yes to a creative response to a very real issue. And we will continue to say yes, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to do whatever we can to build a better public health system for Albertans of this new century.

9:10

We will not back down, we will not give up, and we will not lose faith that Albertans want us to make the tough decisions and take the measured steps that are necessary to achieve that goal we all share, and that is a better, stronger public health system for all Albertans.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:11 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Amery	Havelock	Oberg
Boutilier	Herard	O'Neill
Broda	Hlady	Paszkowski
Calahasen	Jacques	Pham
Cao	Johnson	Renner
Cardinal	Jonson	Severtson
Clegg	Klapstein	Shariff
Coutts	Klein	Stelmach
Doerksen	Kryczka	Stevens
Ducharme	Langevin	Strang
Dunford	Lougheed	Tannas

Evans	Lund	Tarchuk	Doerksen	Kryczka	Stevens
Fischer	Mar	Taylor	Ducharme	Langevin	Strang
Forsyth	Marz	Thurber	Dunford	Lougheed	Tannas
Friedel	McClellan	West	Evans	Lund	Tarchuk
Fritz	McFarland	Woloshyn	Fischer	Mar	Taylor
Haley	Nelson	Zwozdesky	Forsyth	Marz	Thurber
Hancock			Friedel	McClellan	West
			Fritz	McFarland	Woloshyn
			Haley	Nelson	Zwozdesky
			Hancock		
Against the motion:			Against the motion:		
Blakeman	MacBeth	Paul	Blakeman	MacBeth	Paul
Bonner	MacDonald	Sapers	Bonner	MacDonald	Sapers
Carlson	Massey	Sloan	Carlson	Massey	Sloan
Dickson	Nicol	Soetaert	Dickson	Nicol	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	White	Gibbons	Olsen	White
Leibovici	Pannu	Wickman	Leibovici	Pannu	Wickman
Totals:	For - 52	Against - 18			

[Motion carried]

[Disturbance in the gallery]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order! Order in the gallery! Order! Remove that person from the gallery.

THE SPEAKER: Okay, hon. members. Just everybody cool it. We still have one more question to call, when there's attention.

Pursuant to Standing Order 47(2) and *Beauchesne* 521(2) I must now put the question on the original question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:26 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, please. The people in the galleries will remain where they are. They will not approach the bars for fear of accident or anything else. The hon. members will stay on the floor and speak among themselves on the floor or outside. This is not a forum where you speak up.

I want something else in the next 10 minutes. There was an incident in this Assembly a little while ago. Unfortunately, an individual may have fallen down and hurt himself. When that melee was occurring, there were some remarks that the chair did not hear, but a number of members claim they heard them. The chair did not hear them. His attention was focused on some security matters. I want those hon. members who may have said something inappropriately to another hon. member to be big enough and approach that person to whom they directed those comments and apologize. There are 10 minutes in which to do it.

Thank you.

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Amery	Havelock	Oberg
Boutilier	Herard	O'Neill
Broda	Hlady	Paszkowski
Calahasen	Jacques	Pham
Cao	Johnson	Renner
Cardinal	Jonson	Severtson
Clegg	Klapstein	Shariff
Coutts	Klein	Stelmach

Totals: For - 52 Against - 18

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

Bill 16

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate April 3: Mr. Zwozdesky]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to make a few comments on Bill 16, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000. I'll keep my comments relatively short.

I look at Bill 16, and to me the highlights of the bill bring into force the Condominium Property Amendment of 1996, which includes amendments for mandatory reserves, funds, and studies. There's a new section that allows condominium corporations to amend their condo plans. It clarifies voting rights for owners or mortgagees. Amounts of money held back in trust are now tied to the cost of completion. Another highlight, for me at least, is that it allows for condominiums to be built in phases.

Now, this is one of those bills where I'm sort of caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. I recognize the need to bring together a comprehensive revised condominium act, because in the former act, the existing act, there are a lot of shortcomings. There has been a great deal of work put into this bill. There's been consultation in certain directions and such. So like I say, on the one hand I can see merit in the bill; I can see rationale to have the bill approved. However, there is some hesitation on my part.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

When we look at consultation, we see consultation having taken place with the Canadian Condominium Institute, with the Alberta New Home Builders Association, with the Alberta new home warranty program. One of the things that strikes me, even in that consultation process, is that the bill seems to be pro development, pro property owner, property management company, whatever. In other words, support comes from those various organizations that are involved with development, involved with management of rental units or of condo units and so on and so forth.

9:40

However, the one organization that didn't appear to be part of the consultation process, at least not part of that committee that was struck, was the Condominium Advocate Association. They're a nonprofit organization providing free information and services to condominium owners throughout Alberta. They represent the individual condominium owners, not the property developers or those that may own a development and hold title to a number of units in one particular project or spread throughout that project or other projects. So that's one of the concerns I have.

Another concern I have is the question of consumer protection. Is there sufficient consumer protection for the condominium owner, or does the bill strictly pander to the developers? If it does, then that would be unfortunate. Even when I look at the consultation process, the owners seem to have been left out of it.

I look at enforcement, the enforcement of the bill. How is that enforcement going to take place? There always has been lack of enforcement, up to now, when we deal in terms of the existing condominium act.

We look at the provisions for a continual review of the legislation and requirements. Now, we see the existing act having been in place since – what? The last time it underwent major amendments was 1978. We saw the amendments come forward to that bill in 1996. We're now in the year 2000, so technically we're speaking of 22 years since we've had a comprehensive look, where we've seen major changes being done to a very, very important act that affects a lot of Albertans, a great deal of Albertans.

The lifting of the maximum penalties for violations of bylaws in the amendments in the amended act is of concern to me. The question of the language of the bill, whether it's user friendly or it's one of those technical bills that is very difficult to interpret, to read. And it is very difficult to read.

Now, when we look at section 11(b), this is one of those ones where I'm always a little skeptical when they say that the minister may authorize an association or organization to carry out any function or duty under this act. This would seem to give the minister the ability to bestow widespread powers in relation to this act to a particular organization. The enhanced regulation-making powers, the list of what can be done by regulation is increased in this bill. Whenever we talk in terms of increased regulation, of what can be done by regulation, of course it's of concern because it takes away from the authority and the legislative right of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I was involved in a condominium project a few years back with my son, who's an architect. We developed a project on the north side as a result of a competition he entered and won. The stipulation was that the winner had to build it. We actually had to condominiumize the project because of the three units and strike bylaws and set up a condominium association. With three units involved, there were some difficulties, so I saw some of the frustrations of the owners of those three units when they purchased them and formed the association and took over the association.

I can also understand why there are shortcomings in the existing 1978 act and why there had to be this comprehensive review. So that's basically in a nutshell why I use the expression: I'm caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Of course, we're at second reading stage now, which allows us, when it passes this stage, into committee stage and to bring forward amendments that may address some of the concerns. Hopefully, some of the amendments that may be forthcoming by members of either side of the House will enhance the act and make the act acceptable not only to the developers, the property owners, but also to the individual condominium owners. If that can be achieved, that's great.

I would hate to see this bill have to be delayed for further consultation, because of the period of time that has gone by. I'm saying that I'm agreeing with the minister, that I would hate to see that happen because of the four years that have now gone by since 1996. There may be a need for amendments, and when amendments come forward, I would hope that government would give them their full consideration, that the minister would review those amendments and take them very, very seriously.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to conclude my remarks on second reading and speak again at committee stage.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak rather briefly this evening to Bill 16, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000. I'd like to speak to the integrity of the intent of this act. What it does is it will bring into law what so many of my constituents who live in condominiums and who own them have been looking for by way of jurisdictional and organizational ability within law. Whenever any persons or families or individuals own common property, there needs to be that which is in their best interests, and that's what I believe Bill 16 does after great consultation with those who are involved in the organizations and the associations that have been formed to look after the best interests of those who own condominiums.

In particular, as a former realtor when I found anyone who was purchasing a condominium, one of the things I always said to them was, "Let us check out what the reserve fund is," so that they would know what was there for use for common property should major repairs need to be done to the facility, perhaps the roof or the siding or the doors to their respective units, and to the common property as well. Of course, a number of older properties which were designated as condominiums several years ago have either used up their reserve funds or have built, in essence, a strong reserve fund. Because of Bill 16 those who are on the boards for condominium associations will have the surety of knowing that they have laws and regulation within which they must operate.

I also want to speak to the merit that is mentioned here in Bill 16, the requirement that individuals who own respective units must also, whether they be the financial institution or whether they be the owners who perhaps do not reside in that but who subsequently rent it out, must be contacted and must be aware of all that is done that will legally impact upon the ownership and the common ownership of the whole property.

So this bill is needed. I have boards who run the condominium associations in my community who have said that we need the clear direction.

Certainly condominium complexes have grown in number incredibly over the last number of years, and they are growing because it is a lifestyle as well as a place in a unit which people choose to purchase. But with that come responsibilities and from that come the requests from individuals and groups and boards to say: we need clear direction. We need to have the rules and the regulations put in place whereby the boards of these associations can govern as they wish to do.

They have been operating as best they can, and I would like to pay tribute to the members of the condominium boards of the complexes in St. Albert, because I think they have done a very fine job of looking after the interests of the individual unit owners as well as the interests of the common good or the common property as it is legally called.

This bill is needed. It can't be put into law quickly enough from what I hear from those members of the boards of my condominium

associations in St. Albert. I believe that it has addressed the concerns that they have raised. They have been working to the best of their ability without legislation or regulation in some of the more fine-tuned areas of governance of these issues.

9:50

I would urge us as an Assembly to advance this bill through the process as quickly as we can, not because we want to expedite our own proceedings and work here but because my constituents have said: we need this; we need to operate from a point of reference. The intention of this act is to give them clear direction as to how the assets are to be handled, what needs to be in place, and how those who are owners within the complexes wish to operate.

With those brief remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will close, but again I just want to say that Bill 16, when it also has its fine-tuned regulations, I believe will give better direction, clearer direction, and certainly provide purchasers, sellers, and board members with the ability to look after what we like to choose as a lifestyle for ourselves and for others.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak in support of Bill 16, the Condominium Property Act, 2000, at second reading. I should at the outset thank the Minister of Government Services and the officials in her department. A Mr. Wade, I believe. I had some last minute concerns. [interjections] Tim Wade? They were last minute concerns raised by a constituent, and they were most helpful in addressing those concerns and went the extra mile, I think, to alleviate that, and I thank her and her department. I really appreciate that help.

The need for the act, I think, is obvious to everyone who has condominium property in their constituency. Condominium ownership is still a fairly new thing. Historically in our province the legislation dates back to 1966 and then the work that was done in 1996 and the work that is before us in the current bill. It's because it's new that I think we're still trying to work out some of the problems that that kind of living arrangement and business arrangement give rise to.

Condominium ownership, of course, is an attractive living style for many Albertans. If you look at the sides of the river valley in this city, you can see the kind of appeal that condominium living has for individuals. They get spectacular views of the landscape, and they have security. Many of them have in-building security; some have camera security. There's the feeling that you can leave your property with some security that it won't be interfered with. For many individuals, some of whom are professionals, others who travel, others who have multiple residences, that's a very attractive feature of condominium living.

It's that living together, of course, that gives rise to some of the problems that Bill 16 addresses. It's not just residents who like and benefit from condominium-style arrangements. I have in my constituency a number of business condominiums, and they enjoy some of the same benefits as their residential counterparts: the security of having a number of businesses on site that can gather together to hire security services and to monitor the security of their property, the advantage of having a number of businesses on the same location and being able to attract customers and suppliers to that kind of an area. Again, the sharing of common facilities makes it an attractive arrangement for business. It's that grouping of businesses that gives rise to some of the problems that Bill 16 does address.

A very important driver behind this legislation is the kinds of problems that we faced in my own constituency. My first contact with condominium difficulties arose with business condominiums. A new development had a limited number of buyers initially, and those buyers found themselves on the hook for the entire property taxes of the complex before the rest of the complex had been sold. It was, to say the least, a rather devastating blow to some of those novice business owners to find themselves faced with that kind of an obligation and no way out of it in terms of their legal commitments.

I have one of the units where the problem of pine shakes, rotten shakes, has arisen, and again those people are deep into litigation at this point. Bill 16, I think, will help avoid that kind of necessity of people having to retreat to the law to have some of their problems solved.

But the most tragic, I think, happened just recently, Mr. Speaker. I had a call from a constituent who lives in a complex that because of construction difficulties has a mold problem. The problem is of such an extent that the health safety of the people living in the complex has been questioned, and in fact the building is being monitored by the health department.

The constituent that phoned me was really very distressed. She had worked hard and managed to put together a down payment for a condominium in the complex. She had taken out a large mortgage, and now she finds herself faced with repairs that are going to cost her more than what the unit is worth, and she's really, really distressed. Now, they've hired a lawyer to try to recover some of those costs from the developer, because there were, she alleges, some mistakes made in the construction phase.

It's those kinds of stories that I think give rise to the need for really good legislation in this area. That's why this bill is an important bill. It clarifies the kinds of roles and responsibilities of owners, of corporations, of condominium associations, and of developers. It has implications for the kinds of financial arrangements that are undertaken and put in place. I think it will do a great deal to ward off some of the complaints, some of the problems that owners of condominiums and developers and corporations and associations involved in those units face.

It seems to me that as we look at the bill, there are a number of principles. An important principle for me is that owners should have a voice in what happens to their units. That's really clarified, I think, in the bill in a number of places. It reinforces the principle that collectively owners should be able to make decisions on behalf of the unit in the best interests of the owners. It further supports the notion that any moneys handled by corporations or associations have to be handled responsibly and that there are some measures that have to be taken to protect the financial interests of those people involved in either ownership or development, selling or managing those facilities.

10:00

I think the very important principle and the very strength of it is that it provides the kind of protection and delineation and clarification of the rights and responsibilities of those people involved. It makes it very clear how developers are to behave, how owners, condominium associations, and even government will behave in the managing and the addressing of condominium problems. [interjections] Sorry; I've got a little competition from the whip, Mr. Speaker.

I think with those comments, I'll conclude my remarks and look forward to the movement of Bill 16 to Committee of the Whole, where we'll get a chance to look in more detail at some of the specific clauses of the bill.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to make some brief remarks this evening with respect to Bill 16. I recognize that this legislation coming forward has been the summation of, I guess, a long process of review.

MR. DICKSON: Ten years.

MRS. SLOAN: Ten years, in fact, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo points out.

We are aware of the working group that the minister put together in August of 1999, but I don't believe any members of the opposition were part of that working group, to my knowledge.

Certainly we have within our families and we certainly have within our constituencies a number of citizens who have interests in condominiums, and I would say that there is probably not a large majority of them that are completely familiar with what this legislation is proposing to do. As I looked at the attachments, that were graciously provided, there were a number I believe from the Alberta Home Builders' Association and also a letter of support from a Re/Max representative. Those interests in this legislation are very important, and I respect the support that they have provided with respect to Bill 16 and the time they took to put that in the form of a written letter to both government and opposition members.

I received a letter from the Condominium Advocate Association in which they outlined a number of concerns which I don't believe are addressed in Bill 16. They talked a bit about having been part of a group that was formed to review this, and they reached certain conclusions, I guess, if you will, relative to what this bill would contain. If my understanding is correct from the correspondence I've received, there are a number of issues that they don't feel have been embodied in the bill that should have been, and some of those areas are in the areas of things like board meetings and general meetings. They talked about in their correspondence that there are many condominiums where the developer investors are large rental pools, own a large number of condominium units, and at most you were lucky to have a 40 percent turnout at annual meetings. Well, in the nursing community sometimes we were happy if we had 10 percent, so I'd say 40 percent isn't too bad, nonetheless.

Their concern was really about the ability of a small group of shareholders in the condominiums being able to make resolutions – and I believe they're referred to as special resolutions – and what might happen. Certainly those concerns I think have to be taken with some degree of respect and caution by the government. I certainly think that our condominium population is going to grow as more of us release ourselves from the maintenance of a home and the lawns and all of the trappings that come with a fully functional home. So as legislators we have to think about what protections are in fact in place most certainly for the developers and most certainly for the real estate, but also equally important is to consider the interests of owners in the dialogue.

I have a concern that, as usual, we don't know what type of regulatory framework will accompany the bill, what types of things might be done in regulations or what the consultation process might be for the development of those regulations and whether or not the concerns as outlined by the Condominium Advocate Association relative to board meetings, relative to voting rights will be part of those regulations.

I was also sent a copy of a letter from Gordon McIntosh, which I'm assuming most MLAs received. The letter was addressed to the Premier, and it dealt specifically with the Condominium Property

Act. Again, what Mr. McIntosh points out is that in fact when the final copy of the bill came out, he had a number of understandings that there would be certain sections specified, and they have not been. The concerns that he expressed related to the definition of common property, and I listened intently to the hon. Member for St. Albert speak in regards to that. I'm not certain, though, that those protections are contained within the legislation sufficiently.

As well, he raised concerns about section 6. The Condominium Advocate Association was seeking

a statement describing all types of units . . . and the maximum number of units to be built upon the completion . . . [including] a provision which allows for amendments to the initial concept plan upon a special resolution of existing condominium owners . . . [and] a provision that would require a developer to provide some form of security.

He goes on to say:

Our association would like to reiterate that our 29-page report has raised a number of concerns that have not been addressed in any of the Amendment Acts. We are in the process of informing condominium owners, throughout the province, of this legislation and how it will impact them.

I find myself contemplating, just having voted on Bill 11 – we went to great lengths to inform Albertans about the implications of that bill, I would say from both sides of the House. While we didn't agree on the bill and what its intentions were, perhaps it's also a lesson that we should be raising the bar relative to some other types of legislation and truly informing – not to level any disrespect to the organizing bodies or developers or for condominium owners – getting down to the grassroot level and making these types of changes in legislation applicable to those people actually owning the units.

Those conclude my concerns at second reading, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to further debate on this bill.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services to close debate.

MRS. NELSON: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few brief comments, in particular, on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Bow, who is sponsoring this bill. She sponsored the bill originally four years ago, and the process to bring together a Condominium Property Act has been very, very long. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo reminded me that it's well over 10 years, the whole process of coming to this point.

When I became the Minister of Government Services responsible for this act not quite a year ago, one of the groups that was first in to see me was the group that was working on this act. I have to admit that at some point it almost seemed like there had been, when I reviewed their files, the Hatfields and the McCoys trying to come to resolution on things that it didn't seem should be that difficult. However, there were some very definite lines drawn in the sand, and people were not really prepared to budge one way or the other.

10:10

This was a group from the builders and from the owners and the stakeholder groups that got together, and the task that I assigned was: look, we've had three years of arguing back and forth; you have so many days and you're going to have to come to a resolution on the last few items. In fact, they did. They rolled up their sleeves, and they worked together and came to a resolution on the outstanding issues for them. They brought forward a recommendation to my office. I said: well, then, that's the recommendation we will put into the amendment to complete what we had started four years ago with

the Condominium Property Act. So the process worked well. As I say, they rolled up their sleeves and parked their differences at the door and looked at how they could best put forward a comprehensive act.

Is it all there? I don't know that it ever will be. I think that as times change, Mr. Speaker, there will have to be further amendments, but up to this point I think that what we had in the amended act from '96 and what we're adding on here deals with the issues.

The gentleman that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview mentioned – we have been in contact with him. In fact, I have sent him three letters requesting that he come in and sit down and deal with the issues he identified in his letter, and that has not occurred as yet. Our door is open, and if he would like to come in and meet with us and go through those issues – I did share that with Edmonton-Mill Woods because he had also been in contact with him, and I actually gave him the letters that I'd sent to him inviting him to come into the office and go through those issues that he had raised in his letter. So if in fact he would like to do that, the offer is still there. He's more than welcome to come in and sit with my staff. My office door is open at any time.

So I think that we have dealt with the major issues that were outstanding between these two groups, Mr. Speaker, and we've come to a resolution that is acceptable to them.

Edmonton-Riverview also mentioned that opposition members weren't involved in this. Well, in fact, they were, because they received correspondence, the same as members on our side. This was a committee of stakeholder groups. There were not people from either side assigned to run this through other than to encourage the groups to come together for a resolution.

So on those few notes, I look forward to Committee of the Whole. Again, on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Bow I move second reading of Bill 16.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a second time]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 15

Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any further comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to Bill 15? The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-North West I would like to introduce an amendment to Bill 15, and this is a result of some of the comments that came out of second reading by members opposite. We appreciate their comments. They were very well founded. I believe that the amendment has been distributed. This amendment is to section 2. It's amended by striking out the proposed section 42(2) and substituting the following: "A corporation may give financial assistance to any person for any purpose." In part B section 3 is struck out.

In section 2 of Bill 15, 42(2) states that

a corporation may give financial assistance to any person for any purpose if it is in the best interest of the corporation to do so.

The inclusion of the phrase "if it is in the best interest of the corporation to do so" has been found to be problematic. Section 117

of the Business Corporations Act already places an onus on the directors and officers of a corporation to discharge their duties "with a view to the best interests of the corporation." This would include transactions made pursuant to section 42 of the act. The restatement of the best-interest requirements of section 42(2) could be interpreted to mean that there is a separate best-interest test from the one in section 117. This was never the intent of this section. To ensure that there's no ambiguity resulting from the revised section 42, an amendment has been proposed that will remove the phrase "if it is in the best interest of the corporation to do so" from Bill 15, section 2, 42(2). The revised section 42(2) is amended and will read: "A corporation may give financial assistance to any person for any purpose."

10:20

The second portion of the House amendment is in section 3. This section changed references in sections 113(3)(d), 113(5), 113(6)(a), and 113(8) from section 42 to 42(2). Section 113 establishes the liability directors and others face if their actions are contrary to specified requirements. Section 3 tied the specified requirements...

MR. DICKSON: Point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Buffalo.

Point of Order Decorum

MR. DICKSON: I'm trying to listen to the minister, and I simply cannot hear because of the cacophony from the back two rows opposite.

THE CHAIRMAN: I wonder if we could learn to whisper. All of us. All hon. members. There was a group over here and over here and over there. We're not singling you out but together.

The hon. minister.

Debate Continued

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Section 3 tied the specific requirements of the "in the best interest" phrase to section 42(2) of this bill. With the amendment removing the "in the best interest" phrase, it is no longer necessary to make this change to the act. As a result, section 3 of Bill 15 is being removed.

The House amendment I have presented today will not change the nature of Bill 15. The bill removes impediments for Alberta business by eliminating unworkable solvency tests and replacing them with disclosure requirements. I would also like to emphasize that the removal of the phrase "if it is in the best interest of the corporation to do so" from section 42(2) of the bill does not mean that directors of the corporation can give financial assistance that is not in the best interest of the corporation. Section 117(1) requires directors and officers of a corporation to discharge their duties "honestly and in good faith with a view to the best interests of the corporation." That section now and in the future requires directors and officers to act in the best interests of the corporation. I'd like to move that amendment, Mr. Chairman.

I'd also again like to thank the members opposite for some of their suggestions during second reading, which helped identify this area. I do appreciate their support as we move this amendment.

THE CHAIRMAN: This amendment will be called amendment A1. Is it agreeable to deal with the two parts as one? Okay. Good.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to start by thanking the minister for her acknowledgment. You know, this is an example where the opposition plays a constructive role in terms of lawmaking. I wanted to thank my colleague who has been the critic on this bill and who I think has done a good job in terms of ensuring that the thing works. Ultimately, business corporations are a key unit in the economic development of this province, and it makes sense that their enabling legislation be effective and in fact be able to do the job.

I'd just acknowledge, as I look at the two amendments, that this has been the subject of I think three different discussion papers by the Alberta Law Reform Institute. You know, on the last bill that we looked at a moment ago, Bill 16, the Minister of Government Services was talking about a 10-year process to get the condominium legislation straightened away and four years since the last bill was passed. We've had some excellent reports that have been done by the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and I'm happy to see we're moving on those things to make this legislation more effective.

Now, I've got a couple of other comments that I think probably would go to the bill itself rather than the subamendment. I think I would say that the first amendment clearly does respond to a problem in the initial bill. I make the observation that it shows to me the importance of there being detailed scrutiny in this place of legislation. I know from time to time government members view the debate and the process in here as being pretty tedious, and granted, sometimes it is, but I think the House amendment we see in front of us is also a testament to the fact that some good work can be done here. It's incumbent on MLAs to read these things through and read them through carefully. After we deal with the amendment, I'll have a couple of other more general comments on the rest of the bill.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Government Services on amendment A1.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was negligent in not complimenting the Law Society and the Alberta Law Reform Institute for the work they have done in bringing this recommendation forward. Again, this was a stakeholder group driven process of consultation where they gathered people from within their own organizations but also from outside. They brought in the accounting people and the business people to look at this section and deal with it.

Again, it was a long process. When they came to see me in the early fall with the dilemma on this section 42, it was abundantly clear that all groups – the legal profession, the accounting profession, the financial institution group – had come together and decided that they needed to approach the government to make this change because of the difficulty and the costs of compliance that were attached to this kind of a process. I'll agree that there was a flaw, and I very much appreciated the work that they did with this. I did say that I would approach the Legislature to make that change. So I again would like to thank them for coming forward and giving us an opportunity to make a correction on this.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much. Now that we've got the House amendment out of the way, I want to make some more general observations about the rest of it. I was going to make the observation in terms of process. I think that our caucus has received some

really useful input from the legal community in the province, from the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and from the chartered accountants of Alberta, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta being the formal title. I'd like to at least thank Wayne Kauffman, the associate executive director, on behalf of the chartered accountants for the thorough and timely briefing he provided to this MLA and to members of my caucus. It has helped us to prepare for the bill.

I'd like to acknowledge that there have always been problems, it seems to me, around prohibited financial assistance by a corporation. It's one of those things that has challenged all provincial governments in this country. It had to do with the fact that there had been no adequate definition, no generally accepted definition of the realizable value of assets and then questions about what you'd include in with liabilities. Just so we're really clear, the net effect of all this was that you had accountants who were to give opinions on corporations. As anybody who is interested in buying a business knows, the two people you want at your left and right side – you want to make sure you've got a lawyer there, but you also have to have an accountant. To go in without a lawyer and an accountant would be like going into a tennis match without your tennis racket. You know, you need that kind of support.

I think that what was happening was that it was becoming an additional requirement if you were going to sell. Typically businesses are sold in one of two ways. Either you have a sale of assets, or you have a sale of shares. This isn't a problem with the sale of assets, but if you're in fact going to sell shares, then what would happen is that you'd have to have legal counsel. You could be spending thousands of dollars hiring legal counsel just to be able to satisfy the old solvency and assets test under section 42.

10:30

The net effect of all this is that it costs more for businesses in this province to carry on business under the old Business Corporations Act and to enter into transactions with the sale of shares. This should assist that and hopefully will ensure that we don't see those unwarranted additional transaction costs imposed on Alberta businesses.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

I think the other thing I'd just like to say, which I think is very important, is about the 90-day disclosure. It used to be that you would have a requirement in terms of a year-end report. I've always thought that businesses are rarely bought and sold on sort of a year-end basis. More often a business is sold at either the high or low part of the particular business cycle of that business, so why wouldn't you require this kind of provision that if there's financial assistance given to a director or shareholder in a corporation, there should be that kind of disclosure within 90 days? Once again, it's one of those things. I think it's easy to look back and say: it makes such darn good sense; why are we just doing it now? It isn't fair to lay this necessarily at the feet of government. I think it's just that in the complex commercial world we live in, we always find ways of improving the process, and I think this bill goes some distance to doing that.

The other thing the disclosure requirement does, Mr. Chairman, is make it easier to be able to go to court. Ultimately, what will happen is that it'll be shareholders or in some cases directors having to police abuse by going to court to restrain improper actions by company directors. Now there's at least a facility to be able to do that with the bill that we have here in terms of looking at the specific sections.

The other point I wanted to make: I think I'd just say that it's

timely that we do this now. There's a federal business corporations act, the Canada Business Corporations Act, that's currently under review, Mr. Chairman, at the national level. Ontario has recently introduced quite similar amendments to their Business Corporations Act, and Saskatchewan has already moved on it.

Once again, Mr. Chairman, I always marvel at the fact that a province like Saskatchewan, with such a small population, continues to show leadership in so many different ways. I'm no socialist, and I'm certainly no fan of NDP governments, but I must tell you: there's something about growing up or living in Saskatchewan that really imports a degree of creativity. In this province I see more leadership in so many different areas, and the credit cannot be claimed just because you happen to be born there. I mean, I'm not sure I'd go that far. I certainly wanted to make that observation, that Saskatchewan leads the way yet again.

The other point I'd just make is that we've had some other stakeholders I neglected to mention earlier, Mr. Chairman. That would be the Canadian Bankers Association, that have made a number of representations. I know the minister did, but I wanted to acknowledge it. Sometimes people make separate presentations to the opposition.

I've always found a strange thing on bills like this. When people go to make a presentation to the Calgary MLAs, for example, they're told by the Calgary government caucus: no, no; this is for government members only. Groups often tell me that they find it so strange. If they want to make a presentation, they'd like to talk to all of the people elected to represent an area like the city of Calgary.

In any event, I make that observation that people have made separate presentations to us. That's important because we have 83 MLAs in this House, and it's important that (a) all 83 MLAs be conversant with the issues and (b) hopefully supportive of the needs of industry.

The only other concern I might make is looking at 231(b) in terms of the specific provision. Let me just find it so I've got the exact text in front of me. This would be section 4. We have this provision that talks about who can make an application under this part, and I think it's wise to do it. We've identified the complainant for purposes of going to court to seek some redress. This is on page 4 of the bill. It can be "a registered holder or beneficial owner, or a former registered holder or beneficial owner, of a security," so that's obvious. Secondly, it can be a "director or an officer," past or present, or it can be a "creditor," at least in respect of the two elements identified on page 4, or it can be "any other person who, in the discretion of the Court, is a proper person to make an application."

I want to compliment the minister and her legislative drafter for putting in this last part. I know it's been in before. I've heard some suggestion that it should be narrower than it was in 231, and I'm glad that didn't happen; I'm glad we left that. You have to leave a discretionary power in the court to identify certain other people to be able to make the case. They still have to prove they have status. If they can do that, then they're in, so to speak.

Overall, in the grand scheme of things this certainly is never going to attract the attention of people interested in a bill like Bill 11, but for the commercial activity of this province, for many people this will be as significant a bill. We've had some good effort on both sides, and it's a credit to all MLAs that the bill moves forward to continue to make this a province where people can make a good living and an area that's receptive to the creative men and women who create businesses and buy and sell businesses and provide jobs and pay taxes.

Those are the comments that I wanted to make at this stage. I look forward to a speedy passage of Bill 15. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill 15 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

10:40

Bill 17

Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of observations I'd make. I had the chance to speak on this at second reading and indicated, or at least raised, some of the thoughts I had at that point.

In the grand scheme of things this is not the most consequential bill we're going to deal with in this Assembly. I think members recognize that and understand it. There are certainly a couple of observations I wanted to make. If you look at section 3, this is the provision in terms of changing it. Instead of providing for information about actions or prohibiting the collection of information about actions that have been barred by limitation periods, what we've now done is actually provided a six-year cutoff.

It's interesting. The Minister of Justice may appreciate the irony of this. We used to have in our Limitation of Actions Act always a consistent six years for civil debts, and we've moved away from that within the new limitations process and a new limitations statute. What we've done is gone back to that. I suppose it makes it easier because it's a date certain, but I wonder if the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake has considered how we deal with laches.

Laches is an equitable remedy that has the effect of operating like a limitation period except that it is not fixed in the limitations act. Nonetheless, it's a form of limitation. I'm just wondering why we don't address those kinds of actions where the law of equity would prevent somebody seeking a remedy. That could've been caught before. Query the old section 45(3)(b), where it says, "must not include the following information about an individual . . . because of the expiration of limitation periods." That may never have been intended to include laches. It may have never been part of the scheme. But as I think about it, equity is a pretty major factor in collections in this whole area.

The other day I claimed relief from forfeiture on some parking tickets. It was a private lot. You know, one of those lots that's not owned by a city. If you park on the lot and you stay longer than your two-hour ticket, they put a ticket on your windshield. What they then do is send you a note saying: that's 40 bucks. Now, that may be double what the city charges for that. I just make the observation that the position I take with those agencies is that they're entitled to fair compensation, but it's got to be related to what their cost is. Their cost, I can assure you, for issuing a notice is not double what the cost is of the city traffic officers. There's the power under the Judicature Act of the province of Alberta that allows relief from forfeiture.

So if these companies can score the extra money, I guess they can get away with it. You have to send in a cheque. I think you have to

tender an amount. You can tender it in full accord and satisfaction, and if they accept it, then they can't take further steps, and if they don't accept it, at least you can argue, then, that you got an equitable remedy and they can't proceed further.

Anyway, we're not here to talk about my multiple parking tickets, but I just wanted to say that there's a reason why I think we may lose some of that with this amendment. You know, I think in the grand scheme of things it may not affect a lot of folks, it may not affect a lot of cases, but it's one of those things that certainly attracted my attention and perhaps the attention of other members. I hope the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake would offer some clarification around that in terms of whether laches is going to be caught by this provision.

Now, since I don't see him jumping to his feet yet, I just want to make another observation. One would have hoped that we would have picked up section 4 when we were debating the bill – when was it? Two years ago we dealt with Fair Trading. I think it was proclaimed on September 1, 1999. This is something that maybe we all have to take some responsibility for, that we didn't pick up this provision. The provision, of course, has to do with collection agencies. Never the most popular outfit.

I just make this observation while we're looking at it. One of the things I hear a lot about from constituents, Mr. Chairman, has to do with students who are in difficulty over student loans. This is an issue. One of our colleagues, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, has probably talked to a lot of students who had difficulty with collection agencies as a consequence of student loans. It's one of the concerns we have, and while we're going to open up the Fair Trading Act to deal with certain elements of the bill, it's curious to me that we haven't looked at some of the other problems that my colleague who's responsible for the whole Learning section is continually raising with me, some of those concerns about students being pressed in terms of collection difficulties and collection problems. I'm not sure we see anything in Bill 17 that's going to ameliorate that condition. If the critic for Learning has got any thoughts on that, I know he's going to be anxious to share them with us.

Anyway, those are the observations I wanted to make at this point on Bill 17, the Fair Trading Amendment Act. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real pleasure to get up this evening and speak to the aspects of Bill 17 in committee. It's interesting to look at how this bill is now being modified, I guess, to more clearly define the relationship between how individuals work under the aspect of the ability to act as a reporting agency and provide information to the public in terms of the credit and personal report components. What we're in effect having now is a less defined method of determining who can be the agency that will in essence be providing for the ability to report by taking out "and" and replacing it with "or." In essence what we're doing is setting up two sets of criteria that will allow for a person or an individual to be designated as a reporting agency in the aspect of this act.

10:50

I guess the question that we have to think about and have to deal with, then, is: how do we go about determining whether or not the agency will still be fully responsible and fully credible with this new separated definition? It seems now that in fact what you've got are some agencies which can operate on their own by definition of their agreement with other agencies to share information. You have another set of agencies now which will be allowed to deal with reporting of credit materials just because they are identified within

the regulations of the act. So, in essence, the one group will be able to operate outside those regulations by just having an agreement.

What we're going to see, then, is the potential for, say, credit card companies or businesses to get together and share credit information on a reciprocal basis in a nonprofit way, and we won't have any mechanism within the regulations to determine or to identify when and where that's happening, because there doesn't seem to be the case for reporting. We need to have that really clarified. That effectively deals with the issues there that we need to look at in terms of clarifying.

The amendment that is being put in place under section 45(3)(b) I think is quite adequate and quite well described here. What it does is provide for almost a period of nonclaim so that after six years they can no longer report the fact that a debt has been put into abeyance or a noncollection way. What we've got, then, is essentially – if both the creditor and the creditee have not taken any action to effectively bring to conclusion a debt that's outstanding after six years, then both of them probably have assumed that that debt is no longer functional, and probably it's best that it actually not be included in the credit reports because it's not being pursued. The person is obviously not being pursued for payments on it, so that's probably a good amendment.

So with those few comments, Mr. Chairman, I think you can count on my support for these amendments. Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 17 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 15 and Bill 17.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: bills 15 and 17. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 18

Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

Ms Carlson moved that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, be not

now read a second time because the Assembly believes that as a result of the tax reduction measures announced in the 2000 federal budget, the bill would not ensure that all Alberta taxpayers receive a fair tax reduction.

[Adjourned debate May 2: Mr. Herard]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to continue speaking to Bill 18. The Leader of the Official Opposition says that her party mostly agrees with Alberta's new tax plan. She says that they agree with raising the basic and spousal . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MR. HERARD: Well, just wait a minute. She says that they agree with raising the basic and spousal exemptions, and I think that's good. She even agrees with unhooking from their cousins down east, which I think is good. You know, the tax preparation system today is so complex that I'm told that at least 75 percent of all Canadians employ a tax preparer to do their income tax. Now 75 percent of all Canadians have to go to accountants and to tax consultants to prepare their income tax because the system has gotten so far out of hand and is so complicated.

The opposition claims that a single rate makes the tax system regressive and that it puts more pressure on the so-called middle-income group. Well, I don't know, but I think the Member for Edmonton-Glenora should probably consult his own staff, because I understand that one of his staff members over the years has produced a document that's been accepted by most economists as an index of progressivity, and according to that index of progressivity, the new tax system that we are currently proposing is more progressive than the old one. So perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora could talk to his own staff members with respect to that.

They've said things like we're "serving the interests of a select few very wealthy taxpayers." In reality, the biggest tax break in percentage terms is for the 190,000 low-income Albertans who will have their taxes eliminated by the new tax system.

The opposition has also said things like, "I hope that the government will quickly rethink its position on this flat tax and will come to the conclusion that it's not fair [and] that it's an unequal distribution of benefits." As I just said, low-income Albertans will receive the biggest tax breaks, so if the opposition considers this to be unequal distribution of benefits and unfair, then that's really difficult to understand. The government believes in helping those that need it the most, and 190,000 Albertans will now pay no taxes.

And for the opposition to say that Bill 18 "destroys some of the parts of Canadian tax policy which have made this country one of the most desirable places in the world to live" I think is absurd. I highly doubt when most Canadians look at their pay stubs that they're thankful they pay such high taxes.

And the opposition must have their heads on backwards to think that these same taxes make this province "one of the most prosperous places in the world to live and do business." No. It is by lowering taxes, which is part of the Alberta advantage, that we have made this province distinctive.

Again, they say that Bill 18 punishes the middle class and rewards the very wealthy. I'm afraid I can't follow that logic. Everyone is getting a tax cut, including middle-income earners, so where is the pressure on this group? In fact, it is the current system that punishes those who work harder because the more you earn, the more you lose through your taxes.

11:00

If the opposition truly supports a progressive tax system, they should support Bill 18. You see, there are two ways to establish a progressive tax system. One way is to tax high-income earners at a very high level. The other way is to tax low-income earners at a very low level. That is progressive, and that's what we prefer in this province.

We've decided to take the most compassionate approach and not tax the lowest income earners at all. That's right. An additional 190,000 low-income Albertans will not pay any provincial taxes. Half of Alberta income tax payers won't pay Alberta income tax. However, they will still pay federal tax. To be fair, we've also included tax cuts for middle- and high-income earners. We think this is a far better approach than taxing high-income people out of this country.

Here's an example of how progressive our system will still be. A single rate of 10.5 percent would increase basic and spousal exemptions. A two-income, two-child family earning \$40,000 will pay about \$261 in provincial taxes, or .7 percent of their income. The same family at \$100,000 will pay almost 23 times as much in income taxes, or 6 percent of their income. That family at \$250,000 will pay about 83 times as much, or \$21,615, in provincial income taxes, which is more than 8.5 percent of their income. The higher the income, the higher the percentage of income that will go to income tax. So I think that's an example that shows there is progressivity in this system.

Another example. Nearly 200,000 lower income Albertans will not pay a cent of provincial income tax. In fact, some families will be given money through the Alberta family employment tax credit. At the same time, a two-income family with two children earning \$55,000 a year will get a 25 percent tax cut, and if that same family earned \$100,000 a year, they would get a 12 percent tax cut.

Academics have studied the progressivity of a single-rate tax system and a multibracket system. When Dr. Robert Shapiro published his paper *Why Fairness Matters: Progressive Versus Flat Taxes*, he was director of economic studies at the Progressive Foundation and vice-president of the Progress Policy Institute. In fact, the opposition Treasury critic quoted Dr. Shapiro, although the hon. member must have misunderstood the doctor's meaning. Dr. Shapiro outlines three tests of tax reform: increased simplicity, increased economic activity, and increased equity. Alberta's new tax plan accomplishes all three of these.

There are formal ways of measuring what we mean when we say that a tax system is more progressive. Economists use complicated formulas in mathematics, but the matter ultimately comes down to comparing how much income tax low-income earners pay compared to high-income earners. The new Alberta tax system, particularly with its huge personal and spousal deductions, means massive tax cuts for those at the bottom of the income scale. In fact, their tax cut is so much larger than the cut for those at the top of the income scale that Bill 18 actually makes Alberta's tax system more progressive, not less.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Bill 18 introduces a fairer, simpler tax system with a single rate, while maintaining progressivity through the amount of tax paid as a percentage of income.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure this evening to get up and speak to the amendment to Bill 18. When I spoke at second reading on this bill, I spent time talking about the aspects of flat single-rate taxes and progressive multiple-rate taxes

and how those are related back to the issue of the relationship that exists between taxable income and those kinds of issues. The amendment we have on the floor tonight actually deals with the second component, I guess the public consumption part, of Bill 18 in the sense of the tax cut. What Bill 18 is doing is putting in place two significant changes to Alberta's tax collection process under the process of one act, in the sense that it is moving to a two-tiered tax system: the non tax-paying Albertan and the 10 percent or whatever percent of tax-paying Albertans that will be in the other group. What we end up with, then, is having that as a major structural change in the way we are going to be collecting our taxes.

Now, if we were to make that structural change at the same time that we in effect were going to collect for general revenue the exact same number of tax dollars, then what we would be doing is having this debate tonight on the context of what are the relevant merits of two different structures of our Alberta tax system: the two-tiered or two-rate structure versus what we have now, which is effectively a four-rate structure where we take our income tax off the no-tax payer and the three categories at the federal level. So that would in effect be the debate if that was all we were looking at, moving from an effective four-level tax structure down to a two-level: those that don't pay and those that do.

What we've got is in effect a two-tiered structure, as I said. The debate that is being addressed by this amendment is the overlying impact that occurs now, because within that structural debate we are also going to look at how the distribution of a tax cut will occur for Albertans. So the amendment effectively is saying that we should not deal with Bill 18 at this time because the way it is set up is not appropriate in delivering a reasonably fair distribution of that tax cut that is going to be the result of the structural tax change and the reduction in revenues collected by the tax system in conjunction with the introduction of that tax change.

We listened to the Member for Calgary-Egmont talk about the fact that we now in essence are going to have a much more progressive tax reduction system by implementing this. Yes, when you take some people off the tax roll, their tax goes from paying some tax to zero, which gives them a very large tax reduction, all the way from something to nothing. When you divide and do a percentage on that, you end up with, you know, a very large number, because you're trying to divide by a zero. In fact, we do in that way end up with the people who are going off the tax roll getting a very large structural change. But when we look at the people who are still going to be on the tax roll, start at that level and go through all the groups and all the income brackets that will subsequently be still paying taxes under this new structure, we see that in effect the people at the lower end of the scale of recipients of the tax structure change are not going to be getting the same equivalent tax reduction as the people at the upper end.

11:10

Mr. Speaker, that all goes back to the idea of how you define fairness and how you look at fairness in the context of this debate. When we're trying to change the relative burden of taxes, the fairness component becomes a debate about whether or not the revised structure in itself is fair, rather than whether or not the relative change in actual dollars in an individual's pocket is positive or negative. Everybody wants a tax cut, but if you get a tax cut of \$100 compared to a tax cut that is a much larger amount based on a higher income, is it equally fair in the context of your total income and your total obligation in respect of your commitment to support society?

Mr. Speaker, the issue then becomes one of how we deal with trying to put in place a structural change that does what the Member

for Calgary-Egmont suggested we should be looking at: trying to get a system that is simple, that is in effect equitable. This is where we have to look at the impact of this amendment, its challenge to the fairness of this act, and how we look at the relative responsibilities of each of us as Albertans to participate in a contribution to general revenue. Because as we participate in our economic system at a higher level of income, we also get a significantly larger degree of benefit from our social system, from our social structures, and from the general aspects of society than do people who are participating at the very lowest level of taxable income.

Effectively, the people at the lowest ends of our taxable income are getting their infrastructure, they're getting their health care, and they're getting their education. They don't fully participate in a lot of the other aspects of our society. So as we get higher incomes, we should be willing to allow that higher income to be taxed at a higher percentage rate, not a total tax rate taken in terms of a dollar measure. We should be willing and as a society accept the fact that people with a higher income should be willing to pay a proportionately higher but not a significantly higher percentage of tax.

Mr. Speaker, I am probably the first one in the group to admit that the brackets and the tax rates we've had in the past need to be reviewed and need to be altered. That, I think, every Albertan can recognize and most would support. But the idea of moving every individual in the province who is paying taxes, all the way from the person at the very bottom end of the income scale who just exceeds in income the basic exemption calculations up to the top executive/investor, all of the rest that are going to have an income – I don't even have a clue what might be a reasonable range for the top level of income for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I think all Albertans would recognize that as our income increases, we have, if nothing else, a social obligation to be willing to pay a higher percentage of our income in support of our social system and our social structure and society at large. So that's the issue that is being addressed when we start to look at how we have to define whether or not this bill provides us with fairness in the context of the changes in our tax structure. I guess what we want to do, then, is look at it from the perspective of how the changes we're talking about effectively represent economic activity, as the Member for Calgary-Egmont talked about, how it reflects the equity of the tax system and also how it in essence talks about the ease with which we can deal with taxes. As I said earlier in my previous debate, this system as outlined by Bill 18 is much simpler, much more responsive to our provincial wishes, and less likely to be taken off track, if you want to say that, by activities at the federal level.

So the decoupling part from the tax on tax again, I say, is a good move. The tax on income is the right way for us to go at this provincial level, and that in essence gives us both the simplicity of actual administration and the simplicity for Albertans to understand where we as a province are asking them to contribute the base income that we're asking them to contribute off of.

From that perspective, I think Bill 18 does effectively meet the criteria of simplifying our system, but it doesn't meet the criteria of adequately reflecting economic activity. As I said in my earlier debate, we have significant measures or quantities of income that are earned by persons at the upper income levels which are not reported on the base income taxable level in the federal forms. Until we in essence start to measure income as total income of an Albertan, then we have to make sure that the component of economic activity and the reflection of economic activity, the ability of an income to earn a reward for their efforts has been put in place. We have to do it by using a differential rate of taxation unless we're going to go and modify and complicate the reporting of incomes required by the federal government and develop our own new system of effectively measuring income.

I don't think we should justify or we can justify at a provincial level the complexity that would be required in our tax system, the administrative overhead that would be required for our tax system. So why don't we just leave it with the income measured by the federal government and recognize the fact that as we get to the higher income levels, we in essence want to use a higher percentage rate on measured income so that those persons are effectively contributing back to society in a measure that reflects their total income, not their measured income on the tax form?

That's why we should have a progressive step up for the groups at the higher level of income. In effect, a two-tiered system in taxation is not adequate when we have those that don't pay tax as one tier and everybody else being treated exactly equal. The people at the upper end of that scale effectively get more benefits from society, and they also get to have incomes that are not reported in the context of measurement at the federal level.

We should reflect on that. We should make sure society says: those persons should also contribute in a fair way.

So back to the amendment, Mr. Speaker, in the sense that when we want to look at that, we have to decide whether or not that structural change that we're putting in place through Bill 18 is appropriate, but we're also now saying that that structural change is going to be compounded in terms of the overall tax rebates.

As we go through that structural change, obviously if we're not going to tax on a percentage basis individuals at the upper income levels to the same extent or even to a modified extent or an extent above what we do at the lower levels, they are in essence going to get a much more significant tax reduction than will the individuals at the lower level of the current tax system. All the data that's been provided by the Provincial Treasurer originally and now the Acting Provincial Treasurer does show that. It does show that the benefits of the tax cut component within Bill 18 accrue mostly to the individuals who are at the upper levels of income.

11:20

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the concept of relative taxation in our province and relative taxation compared to other jurisdictions, Alberta has the advantage already of having one of the most advantageous tax systems in our economic sphere. That's Canada, North America, where our citizens can search out employment. The majority of the discrepancy in the tax for an Albertan versus an American or versus somewhere else in Canada – when it comes to the inside Canada comparison we, in essence, already have the most advantageous taxation system.

When we start to compare ourselves with the Americans, it's not our provincial taxation that creates the disadvantage and the disincentive for Albertans to stay here, Mr. Speaker. It's the federal taxation. Those numbers need to be revised. Those percentages that are used in calculating tax at the federal level need to be looked at, but we don't necessarily need to remove the total progressivity of it.

Mr. Speaker, it was quite interesting that when I was living in the U.S., the flat tax rate and the single tax rate was a debate down there, and all of a sudden it disappeared. I watched with fascination this week on TV as I saw Mr. Putin being sworn in as the new Premier of the Soviet Union. His only economic platform is to convert Russia into a single tax rate society. He wants to reintroduce the equality of everybody in terms of their obligations to society that was existent under the communist state. You know, he's going back to everybody being equal.

That creates no incentive to help society. That creates no incentive to recognize that as we make more money, we have a social obligation. We should have a willingness to support our society by contributing a smaller percentage increase in our income

than the persons who are struggling at the lower levels of our tax structure. We already recognize that within a social system there are persons who have to have some benefit, and we allow them an exemption from taxation altogether.

So on those bases, Mr. Speaker, I hope we see a lot of people in this Legislature recognizing that we have to look at a further revision to the structure component that we're dealing with in Bill 18 so that when we do have a tax system that is functional in Alberta, that tax system will be fair, it will be equitable, and as we transfer from the current system to that new system, there's a degree of equity in the benefits received in terms of the tax reductions that are coming back to us as Albertans.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, everybody agrees with that and will support this amendment. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel compelled to enter into this debate. I intend to be brief, but I want to discuss this whole issue of a progressive tax system.

The Member from Lethbridge-East has spent some time talking about the lack of progressivity under this proposal for a single rate of taxation. I have to point out that this is a single rate of taxation in theory only. If there was no personal exemption, then it would be true that every taxpayer in Alberta would pay an identical amount of percentage of income for tax, and then it would not be a progressive system.

But what people overlook – and I've had many discussions with a number of my constituents over this issue – is the very significant increase in personal exemptions that go along with the implementation of this system. So I need to point out and all members need to understand that the 11 percent referred to in the bill now, to be amended, as indicated by the Provincial Treasurer, to 10 and a half percent when we get to committee stage on this bill, is not a single rate of taxation. It is, in fact, a maximum rate of taxation. Realistically, unless someone earns an infinite amount of income, no one will pay 10 and a half percent. Everyone will pay some percentage less than that, because everyone gets to deduct the personal exemption off their income before it starts.

Let me give some specific examples. We'll deal with a two-income family with different scenarios of income. If a two-income family with two children has total earnings in that family of \$40,000, under the new plan they will pay about \$261 in provincial income taxes, or .7 percent of their income. So the total tax on that \$40,000 is .7 percent of their income. If the same family, same exemptions, same everything had total earnings of \$100,000, they would pay 23 times as much income tax, or 6 percent of their income. If that same family earned \$250,000, they would pay about 83 times as much tax, or \$21,615 in provincial income taxes, which is a little more than eight and a half percent of total income.

So, Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying is that this is very much a progressive form of taxation. The more an individual or a family unit earns, the more they pay in taxes, and the maximum tax they will pay is 10 and a half percent. But in order to pay that 10 and a half percent, they would have to earn an astronomically high income. I haven't taken the time to figure it out, but it would be well in excess of a million dollars before they would be paying the 10 and a half percent or anything significantly less than that.

So let's not be fooled into thinking that this is a tax system whereby we have some taxpayers that pay nothing and all the rest of the taxpayers paying exactly the same amount. It's not that simple. In fact, if a taxpayer earns a thousand dollars more than their personal exemptions, they only pay tax on that last thousand dollars.

They don't pay any tax in the case of a two-person family where we've got approximately \$26,000 in exemptions. If two people in a family earn \$27,000, they don't pay 10 and a half percent on \$27,000, because they're over that threshold. They only pay 10 and a half percent on \$1,000.

So it is very much a progressive system. It is a system whereby because of the very significant increase in personal exemptions, the effective tax rate goes from zero to 10 and a half and everything in between. It is a single tax rate only from the point of view of determining the maximum tax rate. Everyone who earns less than an infinite amount of income pays somewhat less than 10 and half percent, and it decreases to the point where they pay zero.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. SLOAN: I regret to begin my debate on Bill 18 where I left off on Bill 11, but it would seem to me that some of the delusional tendencies that I saw in the debate in 11 have now carried over into 18. Most likely there will be need for further education within the government's own caucus relative to how this tax rate is going to apply.

In essence, what we're in the uncomfortable position of doing tonight is again having to amend a bill that is, in my opinion, an unsalvageable bill. The premise of Bill 18, to propose a flat tax, is in essence an experiment, another experiment which this government is resolved to press upon Albertans. They have absolutely no evidence, no indication, no proof that this is going to provide a stable tax environment and revenue environment for the province.

11:30

I spoke in second reading about the substantive cautions that the Auditor General made relative to the ministry and business plans. Just to refresh our memory, a section which I did not include is in section 3 of his report where he talks generally about his reservations. This is in the last fiscal year.

Section 19 of the Auditor General Act requires the Auditor General to provide details in his report of reservations of opinion in reports issued on financial statements.

As described in detail in Section 2, on page 265, I reserved my opinion on all 1999 Ministry and department financial statements because of significant departures from generally accepted accounting principles.

Further, my 1999 auditor's reports for the following contained reservations of opinions for the reasons described:

Excluded direct costs.

Put another way, what in fact did these ministries do? They did not enter on the ledger costs that had been incurred by the ministries.

- Fifteen Funds, Foundations and Provincial agencies including Alberta Social Housing Corporation, Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission and Alberta Dairy Control Board
- Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board
- Six Persons with Developmental Disabilities boards
- Excluded direct costs and accuracy of contract costs
- Calgary Rocky View Child and Family Services Authority
- Excluded direct costs, inventories, revenue and capital assets
- Michener Centre Facility Board
- Expensing of capital assets
- Environmental Protection and Enhancement Fund

Valuation of donated artwork,

which, granted, may not be as significant as some of the others identified.

Inappropriate disclosure of related party transactions

- Medicine Hat College . . .

Revenue that could not be audited for completeness

- Northland School Division . . .
- Lethbridge Community College Foundation . . .
- University of Alberta 1991 Foundation

The relevance of that, Mr. Speaker, is that in our last fiscal year

we have this government, in essence, underestimating the cost of doing business in this province and then believing that members of this Assembly would support a proposal for a flat tax possibly reducing revenue to run programs. It seems to me they're fabricating the argument.

They're trying to create the picture that it doesn't cost as much to do business in this province anymore by not entering costs in the ledger, which the Auditor General has pointed out as an error and has made reservations about. On the other hand, on the revenue side they are saying: this is the flat tax structure that we propose, and it will be sufficient to fund the programs that are required by this province.

The further reality, Mr. Speaker, is that I don't believe this government really has done any type of assessment about what the needs of our future citizen population will be, what those needs will be relative to social programs, what they will need with respect to environmental concerns and addressment, what needs will be required to keep abreast with technology advancements. If in fact the government hasn't done an assessment about what the province might need in 10 or 20 years with a population that is much, much older than they are now, how do they propose to change our tax structure and bind us to that tax structure, thereby tying the hands of a future government in terms of its revenue side?

I think a lot about this. This is my assessment, not being a tax expert and by no means being an expert in provincial economies. This is really, Mr. Speaker, a lot about political upstaging. It's about Alberta wanting to be seen on the national stage as the front-runner in the race to go down the road, implement a tax structure – albeit perhaps we are in the best position to take the risk, because we have always been one of the wealthiest provinces and we've always had a significant cushion of resources because of oil and gas revenues. But that may not always be the case. Really, when it's just about maybe old boy competition, does it make good sense in the interests of citizens to impose a tax structure that really hasn't been proven to work anywhere else, hasn't been linked to a needs assessment of what types of provincial concerns and issues there will be in the future in this province and what revenue will be required to meet them?

What if we were to find ourselves someday, Mr. Speaker, actually needing the federal government? Now, I've always felt that we do need them, but I think there are many members on the government side of the House that don't really believe we need the federal government, that believe they can go about their business. They've got sufficient money, sufficient power to run the show. But what if someday we were in a position where we didn't find ourselves quite as comfortable as we find ourselves today on our revenue side and we actually needed to rely on some of the federal government tax revenue, like Newfoundland does, like New Brunswick does, like the Maritime provinces do?

Those provinces have done some amazing things with provincial revenues substantially less than our province's. Nonetheless, they are fundamentally committed to maintaining a healthy federal relationship because that reliance is there. I have seen far more goodwill come out of the eastern provinces towards building a stronger health care system and building stronger social programs than I have seen come out of this province in my term of office. That's regrettable, because we are in a position to be leaders in a whole variety of policy and program areas, but we choose – and maybe, Mr. Speaker, it is really a gender thing. I've heard the analysis offered before that men seem to have a preoccupation with money and it's the women that look after all the other trivial issues. But this really is just about money. It's not giving consideration to anything else.

Let's start with homelessness. We have had a government that has waxed on for at least the last 18 months about the critical nature of homelessness in this province. We have tremendous agencies out there that every day are taking people in: some people who are working and some people who are destitute. We've got good agencies in Calgary who have gone out on a limb and committed to expand their facilities. The Salvation Army is one, as is the drop-in centre. They're committing themselves to millions of dollars. I think between the two it's \$22 million and \$15 million combined, so you're looking at \$37 million. Not a cent of provincial money is yet committed on that, Mr. Speaker. Not a cent.

Similarly, we see the provincial developmental disabilities boards. I've mentioned those arising out of the Auditor General's report, where the government had not accurately reflected the costs. Here we have an area where we've had the junior minister of health go about the province and conduct a review. We have seen a report released from that associate minister, and we've seen a number of recommendations, all of which require resources: human resources and accompanying fiscal resources. Now, where is the government proposing to find those resources? To date we haven't seen any committed, despite the fact that the minister has gone about and held meetings subsequent to his report release. There's no action plan. There's no implementation plan. There are no funding commitments.

11:40

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, we had a children's summit last fall. At the time, I lauded the government for creating a report that contained many of the issues that people in the social services and child welfare areas had talked about needing to have addressed for some time. We will soon be within about three months of having another one. We still have not seen an action plan in that area. We still have not seen a commitment of resources. You know, I've had people in my office and I've had people in the field talk about the restraint in child welfare, in day care, and in SFI. We separate families. We take their children into temporary guardianship or permanent guardianship, fundamentally risking the family relationship and unit, Mr. Speaker. I hear directors out there talking about the fact that they don't have the resources to allow these families to have weekly visits. That causes me grave concern. Why is that? Because we have seen a consistent underfunding of these social program areas for consecutive fiscal years.

Also on the horizon we have a critical shortage of health care professionals that is estimated to continue to grow. We have no provincial action plan to deal with that issue. In fact, the government has . . . [Mr. Day entered the Chamber] Thank you very much for coming in to listen to my speech on Bill 18, Mr. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. SAPERS: Former.

MRS. SLOAN: The former Provincial Treasurer. Whatever the hon. member's ambitions might be, Mr. Speaker, there's relevance in being present in the Assembly for the debate on this bill, and there most certainly was relevance in being in the Assembly earlier this evening in the debate and vote on Bill 11.

Where I was at was on the discussion of how we have a huge public policy issue in the shortage of health care professionals and that we have an aging population and no plan to do anything about that. In fact, we compounded the shortage by the cuts that were made in the '93 to '96 period. Again, how could I in good conscience, as a member of the health care professions, stand and support a tax structure that is going to basically implement an

experimental framework for revenue? I don't find myself in a position of being able to do that.

So there are, as I said, a whole raft of concerns about Bill 18. It is rooted more in politics and upstaging than in good common sense. Again, we see the opposition to this bill and the awareness of this bill rising within our citizens, and no doubt we will see, perhaps not to the same degree as with Bill 11, a substantive amount of feedback on this bill in the weeks to come. I certainly hope though, Mr. Speaker, that we have the good common sense in this Assembly to not place ourselves in a compromised position relative to tax revenues. I don't feel overly confident of that, because I certainly think we placed ourselves in a compromised position in the approval of a private health care tier in our province earlier this evening.

With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, and speaking in support of the amendment but in firm opposition to the bill before us, I will take my seat. Thank you.

MR. DAY: Just a few comments, Mr. Speaker. It's been exciting as I've been able to consult with Canadians from coast to coast and talk to them about a single rate of tax. The excitement is at a very high level that a government is finally recognizing that people, when they want to work harder or become more skilled and more educated, should not be punished at a higher rate because they want to move along and generate more revenue for themselves and for their families. So a single rate of tax is something that is really being looked at, in terms of Alberta, in a very positive way.

I can tell you the importance of Alberta proceeding with this. I know there's some reflection as to the federal position with the budget. As I understand it, the amendment has already been tabled related to moving – has it been tabled? [interjections] There's been a filing and an indication already that the government will be indeed moving from 11 percent to 10.5 percent. Mr. Speaker, that is the ongoing commitment, that this particular plan will continue to benefit Albertans.

From the way this is catching on across the country and the way, as I understand, that the Canadian Alliance is also proposing a single rate of tax at the federal level of 17 percent, this is absolutely in line and in unison and resonating with what is going to be happening. Of course, not too many months from now the greatly anticipated change, not just of the tax situation federally but in fact of the federal government, shows that Alberta is once again in the prime position to be dovetailing a single rate of tax here with the new federal Canadian Alliance government, which will also be bringing in a single rate of tax.

The economic effect of that on not just Alberta but in fact the entire nation is going to be profound. It's going to be very exciting, Mr. Speaker. It has just been such a delight to be right across this country, in every province, every other Canadian seeing Alberta as being a leader, and seeing Canada then moving to this incredibly sensitive jurisdictional approach to a single rate of tax for all of the citizens of Canada, the citizens of Alberta leading the way and the citizens of Canada joining in.

It's going to be an exciting time, and I'm extremely in support of this particular endeavour, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually quite delighted to have had the opportunity to follow the Member for Red Deer-North. In fact, a couple of observations as I get to my primary concern with the amendment we're dealing with.

The first one. I had occasion recently to go to Mount Royal College. My wife and I had a chance to see the *Music Man*, that was

put on by a musical group. The thing I remember most was Robert Preston coming into a new town, and he's going to sell something he's very excited about. When I listen to the Member for Red Deer-North, you can almost hear the people in the musical saying: talk a lot, talk a lot, talk a lot. You almost want to sort of join in the chorus because you really feel like we've got Robert Preston right here in the Assembly.

AN HON. MEMBER: I can't hear you sing.

MR. DICKSON: I can't sing.

The point I was going to make, Mr. Speaker, is that despite all the salesmanship of the Member for Red Deer-North – and he certainly demonstrated his ability as a salesperson – Albertans are not going

to be naive enough. They are not going to be duped by a bill that's passed off as a terrific kind of tax reform just because you lop some people off at the bottom end and just because we make a couple of changes. We've somehow sort of passed off tax cuts as part of this package.

Now, there is so much more I want to say, but I'm thinking that in view of the hour, Mr. Speaker, what I might do at this point is simply move to adjourn debate on Bill 18 and come back and pick this up perhaps tomorrow.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 11:50 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 11, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/11

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O God, grant that we the members of our province's Legislature may fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all our people. Guide our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly Lisa Bobbie Schreiber Hughes, U.S. consul general in Calgary. Mrs. Schreiber Hughes is leaving her post for a new position in Surinam, South America. It is certainly with a sense of sadness that we say farewell but also with a great appreciation for her dedicated hard work over the past three years strengthening Alberta/U.S. relations and for her assistance on many important issues. She has always carried out her duties with admirable skill, enthusiasm, and dedication, and she undoubtedly leaves many friends and associates in Alberta.

We wish her well as she moves on in her career to new challenges and ask that she always remember and keep a small part of her heart for this province and this country.

I would now ask, Mr. Speaker, that our honoured guest rise and receive the very traditional and very warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd present a petition signed by 153 citizens from Fort Saskatchewan, Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert urging the government to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition this afternoon on behalf of a number of Calgary citizens. This petition is concerning the *Calgary Herald* labour dispute. It reads, "We, the undersigned, petition the assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 200 citizens from Edmonton, Barrhead, Calgary, and Sherwood Park who are opposed to Bill 11, for a total of 22,452 Albertans' signatures on this petition opposed to Bill 11 presented by this one member of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the petition in my name about this government not promoting private health care and undermining public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure this afternoon to ask that the petition I placed on the Order Paper yesterday regarding the promotion of private, for-profit health care in this province now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and with your permission ask that the petition I tabled on May 9 with regards to the government's promotion of private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Legislative Assembly on May 10 regarding the divisive and disruptive labour dispute at the *Calgary Herald* now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the [Legislative] assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on Wednesday, May 10 on mature women's health be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Alberta Government to take an enlightened preventative approach and add the newer and more effective medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I request that the three petitions opposing Bill 11 that I tabled yesterday now be read and received. Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to . . . stop promoting private for-profit health care, within the domain of medically required services, and to ban any existing for-profit operations that are conducting medically required surgical services, as paid for by the Government of Alberta through any Regional Health Authority in the Province.

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Introduction of Bills

Bill 24
Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and
Natural Areas Amendment Act, 2000

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act, 2000.

This act will add heritage rangeland as a new category of protected areas in the province of Alberta. It will also allow increased protection under the special places program. This House may be interested to know that to date 7,300 square kilometres have been protected under the special places program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to table the requisite number of copies of a news release on Bill 24, which was just introduced.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a report with regard to wage enhancement for child care professionals in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three tablings in the form of one e-mail letter from Kay and Ross Gould from the riding of Calgary-North West, who are opposed to the passage of Bill 11 and have some excellent questions for the Premier; one e-mail from Fiona Boulet from the riding of the Premier, Calgary-Elbow, who is opposed to Bill 11; and a petition signed by 19 Albertans from Grassland, Lac La Biche, Plamondon, St. Lina, Hylo, Atmore, and Boyle who are opposed to Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I have a single tabling. This is a summary of 128 questions that were raised by Calgaryans who met at McDougall Centre on May 3 in protest over Bill 11.

Thanks very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My tabling today is five copies of an analysis done on the tax-on-income proposals in eight provinces across Canada that are moving to that kind of a scheme. What it shows is that of every other province who has delinked and gone to tax on income, Alberta stands alone in its ideological commitment to a flat tax. All of the other provinces recognized the problems with that.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the only written document I have from a constituent supporting Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon, and that is a letter I've received from the Premier of Newfoundland regarding the shortage of health care professionals not only in his province and this province but across the country.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling this afternoon. It's a copy of a news release from the Friends of Medicare with the title It's Not Over.

Thank you very much.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to invite some 150-plus visitors from the Whitecourt constituency. They consist of 140 grade 6 students from the Percy Baxter school. They're under the leadership of their teacher, Mr. Jim Ferguson. They're accompanied by Mrs. June Harrison-Leier, Ms Elizabeth Shen, Mr. Paul McKay, Mrs. Tammy Lee and teacher assistants Mrs. Lynne Wilson, Mrs. Pat Miles, Mrs. Stacey Perrin along with parents and helpers Mrs. Susan Jaddock, Mrs. Wendy Robertson, Mr. Richard Binkley, Mr. Grant Morton, Mrs. Cathy Hogue, Mrs. Cindy Requa, Mrs. Florance Eigler, and Mrs. Kim McMillan. They're seated, I believe, in both galleries. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm reception of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to do two introductions, but if I could put the second one on hold, they may be here in the House a little later. Still it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly five members of the 15-member aging population study steering committee, and that includes myself and the hon. Member for Leduc. These members have been committed to this study for the past 18 months, and they are in Edmonton today and tomorrow for a meeting on this study. From my left to my right: Carol Blyth of Calgary, Jean Graham from Rocky Mountain House, Noreen Mahoney from Calgary, Donald Jung from Calgary, and Nick Kutash, to my far right, from Willingdon. Before I ask the members to rise, I just want to say a little bit of information. Donald Jung used to take the Hon. Gary Mar to Sunday school. Would the guests please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly approximately 20 relatively new department employees and interns from Economic Development. Their visit has been co-ordinated by Mr. Chris Mack of the department. They are here today to get a better understanding of the relationship and impact their work in the department has with and on the activities of our elected officials. They are seated in both the members' and the public galleries. I ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome from the members of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly my new staff assistant, who's been working in my office since the beginning of winter into January and February of this year, and also my summer student, who joined us at the beginning of May. Mr. Dan Kostka is a graduate of Mount Royal College, obviously a large and important institution in my constituency, and he is joined by his colleague Steven Gallagher. I'd ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mrs. Cheryl Zittlau. She is a member of the bargaining unit for AUPE and is here to have some discussions today along with the president of AUPE, Dan MacLennan. I would ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to the members of this Assembly a constituent, Wendy Gummesen of Peace River. Also, on behalf of the Member for Dunvegan I would like to introduce Denise Simard-Zawacki of Girouxville. They are here, I would expect, as part of the same negotiating team that was just introduced. They are seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a constituent of Edmonton Centre. Dan MacLennan is the president of AUPE, and he's in the members' gallery. I would ask that he please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you Pat Newel. Pat is an LPN and works at the Royal Alex hospital. Pat is also a constituent of Edmonton-Castle Downs. I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you a constituent from the progressive town of Pincher Creek and the breathtaking constituency of Livingstone-Macleod. Myrna Wright is in the city today, I would imagine, for some of the same bargaining talks that will be going on. I'd like her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Gloria Surridge. Gloria is a licensed practical nurse and is a constituent of Edmonton-Whitemud. She is seated in the public gallery, I believe. I'd like to ask Gloria to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly today two of my outstanding constituents seated in the members' gallery. Mr. Allen Gowler, as most members will remember, was the Associate Sergeant-at-Arms for many years here in the Legislative Assembly. He only recently retired after 18 years in that position. Mr. Gowler is accompanied by his very good friend, Mr. Bill Horschuk, who is celebrating his 75th birthday today. I would invite Mr. Gowler and Mr. Horschuk to stand as all members of this Assembly give them a very warm and traditional welcome.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the federal government has finally confirmed what the Official Opposition and Albertans knew all along: surgical facilities under Bill 11 are private hospitals, plain and simple. If it results in queue-jumping, two-tiered medicine, enhanced services, and its profits are subsidized by the Alberta taxpayers, it's a private hospital. Why did the minister of health mislead Albertans and avoid telling the truth that approved surgical facilities are in fact private hospitals?

1:50

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the very important part of the federal minister's statement is what we have maintained all along, and that is that our legislation and our practice in this province is in compliance with the Canada Health Act. We are the first province in Canada that I know of to have made that statement clearly and up front in a piece of legislation. I think that is the very significant message that has come from the federal minister.

Now, with respect to definitions of hospitals in our legislation, Mr. Speaker, I would remind members across the way in particular that we have defined a private hospital in the legislation and banned such hospitals. With respect to full service hospitals versus specialized surgical clinics we have provided further definition in the legislation as to the nature of surgical operations in this province, which I think is very favourable. It goes beyond what Mr. Rock is saying. It is a clearer definition of the various types of services that are being provided.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will this minister finally come clean and admit to Albertans what they have known all along: approved surgical facilities are private hospitals?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we have, for instance, in this province right now the Gimbel eye clinic, which is an approved surgical facility. I do not think any Albertan thinks that's a hospital. That is not deemed to be a hospital by any person in this province.

As I've indicated, in the legislation we have banned private hospitals, we have defined them as such, and we have put a fence around that. We have full service hospitals, which are well understood in this province, and we have specialized surgical clinics.

THE SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Can the minister advise when the road signs are going to be changed to say Approved Surgical Facilities One Kilometre to the Right?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections] Here again the opposition asks a question, she doesn't quite sit down, and then she's yapping back at me and doesn't even give me a chance to answer the question. So please listen, and I'll give you an answer.

Mr. Speaker, for the record, there is a very clear policy that the Department of Health and Wellness follows to determine which locations are hospitals and which locations are health centres. We always follow the current policy.

Thank you.

Bill 11 Regulations

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, everyone knows the devil is in the details, and this government has a tradition of bringing in shell bills and leaving the real substance of the regulations to be developed behind closed doors. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why won't the minister hold public hearings on the creation of regulations under Bill 11?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it's important to note that Bill 11 is a very detailed, very comprehensive piece of legislation. In terms of holding, quote, public hearings or having consultation, the effort and the direction of government in this regard I think has been extremely thorough. It's been unprecedented in terms of the length of time that has been provided, with our policy statement well prior to Christmas of last year. We have put out the bill to every household in this province in its actual form. We have as a government caucus been at dozens and dozens of meetings with respect to this particular issue. Therefore, I think it is evident that the bill itself has had a great deal of background work being done.

Now, with respect to the limited number of regulations that are required, Mr. Speaker, we are going to work methodically on those. We are going to consult with the people that are directly affected by the specific rules that have to be set in legislation and followed through in regulations.

As I said, with respect to the matter of consultation with Albertans and letting them know very clearly what is in the bill as amended, we have been very, very much committed to doing that. Yes, we have spent a significant amount of money on it. They've objected to that consultation, in any case, including the act itself, so I don't know what they want.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister at least refer Bill 11 and its regulations to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations so that Albertans, in fact the public, can have input into something that's going to affect them so directly?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think we have a good record of this. When we have regulations to develop out of legislation approved by this Assembly, in developing them we do meet and consult with the people who are affected by the regulations. That is the approach we will continue to take.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister confirm that Bill 11 and its regulations will be referred to the Premiers and the federal government to ensure that it doesn't violate the social union framework of which this province is a signatory?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the social union framework I'm not quite sure what the relevance of that is given that the health legislation is built upon the social union and is more specific and more detailed than the clauses in the social union agreement.

With respect to the regulations, as I've indicated before, certainly we will make the federal minister aware of the regulation development process and of the regulations, as we have very, very methodically and very, very thoroughly, and very, very frequently kept the federal minister apprized of the policy statement that we initially put out, of the legislation when it came and was tabled before this Assembly. As to the amendments that were posed in this Assembly, all of that has been transferred promptly to the federal minister.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Compliance with Canada Health Act

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 4, 1999, this government agreed to a framework to improve the social union for Canadians. Part of this framework, which the minister obviously doesn't know about, is to respect the principles of medicare and "offer to consult prior to implementing new social policies and programs that are likely to substantially [impact] other provincial governments." My first question is to the minister of intergovernmental affairs. Will the minister initiate the process to avoid a dispute with the other provinces and federal government and refer Bill 11 to the dispute resolution panel?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I think it's been well documented in this Legislature over and over again on a daily basis, an afternoon and evening basis for several weeks now that the consultation on this particular piece of legislation is far more extensive than any other piece of legislation in the history of this province, some 47 or 48 hours.

In regards to the social union framework, I found it interesting when I read all of Mr. Rock's statement, not just select pieces. I find it interesting that he states, "We will continue to work openly and transparently with all provinces, in accordance with our Social Union Framework commitments." I can tell you that as minister responsible for the framework, I certainly welcome that news.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, then, given that the Premier has already indicated that he wishes to discuss Bill 11 with the other provincial

Premiers and the federal government, is the minister now confirming that in fact she will refer to and use the mechanisms of the social union framework in order to ensure consistency in the interpretation of the Canada Health Act principles across this country? Is that what you just said?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that Alberta had a strong commitment to the social union framework, the principles that all governments in Canada signed on to, and that we welcome the federal government showing their commitment to that same agreement that they signed on to. As minister I would certainly welcome the appearance of Mr. Rock at one of the meetings to discuss these issues.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier has outlined very clearly that he has asked the Prime Minister, that he has talked to other Premiers across the country and asked that we have a dialogue, asked that we look at the consistency of legislation. Alberta has said on a consistent basis, hour after hour, some 47, 48 hours, plus all of the hours in question period – I think at least 70 percent of the time has been spent on this issue by our rough calculations – that we uphold the principles of the Canada Health Act.

When I read Mr. Rock's statement, there was no indication, in my view, in this statement that we in any way contravene that act, which would be an item of interest under the social union framework. What he does say – and he really didn't have to say it because they've proven it before – is that if any fees are charged for services at a private surgical clinic, we'll be penalized dollar for dollar. We know that. That has been proven to the detriment of Albertans in the past.

Mr. Speaker, I also note that he is going to spend some several million plus dollars on some more people to make sure it's enforced. I guess all of us would prefer to see Mr. Rock support us in the restoration of the CHST back to 1994 levels and give the other \$4.8 billion dollars to health care in this country. If the opposition want to help the people in this province, they could support that.

MS LEIBOVICI: Let's get back to the question. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: is he prepared to delay proclamation of Bill 11 until a finding of fact by the disputes resolution process has occurred on whether Bill 11 contravenes the principles of the Canada Health Act?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the federal minister has indicated that the legislation does not violate the Canada Health Act, so I fail to see what dispute there is to be resolved with respect to that particular point.

As far as the federal minister's indication that he is putting additional resources, some \$4 million as I understand it, into enforcement or surveillance across this country to provide consistency in the application of the principles of the Canada Health Act, as the previous answer indicated, we are certainly in agreement with that.

The Premier has said many times that he would want to see consistency in the application of the Canada Health Act across the country, and we are certainly committed to that as a government, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Enhanced Medical Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal Health minister

has come around to finally recognizing what Albertans have known right from the start, which is that Bill 11 legalizes private, for-profit hospitals. He also expressed grave concern that queue-jumping will inevitably occur because patients will face direct fees for things like enhanced services and private and semiprivate rooms. My questions are to the minister of health. Why did the government refuse to listen to Albertans' concerns and ban outright direct patient charges for enhanced services?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Bill 11 legislation of this government is very forward thinking in terms of being the only province, I think, in Canada that has in legislation a ban on any type of charge for enhanced services as a way of being able to queue-jump or being forced to pay money for an insured service. That's in the legislation.

With respect to completely banning such charges, I think we should just reflect on the practicality of that. For years in this province it has been understood that there would be a choice available to a patient coming into a hospital if the capacity was there to pay extra for a private room. Surely we are not going to ban that. We do know, for instance, with respect to casts that there are perfectly good plaster casts in terms of aiding the recovery of a patient who's had a fracture. On the other hand, there's the fibre-glass cast, which people may want to pay extra for because it is more convenient. The important thing is that, again, the legislation addresses this whole issue, makes it very clear, including there being penalties in the legislation, that one should not be forced into paying any type of extra fee for an insured service in a facility across this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Enhanced Medical Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that the minister has admitted that he has failed to ban direct charges to patients, will he ensure public consultation in the development of regulations so that the for-profit hospitals do not charge Albertans exorbitant rates for enhanced services and private rooms?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would draw the member's attention to the fact that there are very comprehensive sections of Bill 11 which deal with that very issue. One section sets out the procedure that must be followed with respect to even offering or making information available to a person with respect to enhanced services or appliances. Further, there is another section which refers to a ban in any way on a person being pressured into paying for some type of advancement in the queue or in the waiting list. Those things are in this legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the minister can tell Albertans how much Albertans will have to pay if the federal Liberals ever have the courage to withhold funds from Alberta because of the inevitable violations of the Canada Health Act under Bill 11 that Minister Rock has indicated might occur.

Speaker's Ruling Hypothetical Questions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, that certainly is in the area of speculation, and I have no idea how one can actually deal with that. If you want to give it a kick, go ahead, but pretty brief here.

Enhanced Medical Services

(continued)

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to make two comments. One is that the legislation deals very clearly with that concern. The other thing is that the hon. leader of the third party is asking me a question about something that we don't intend to let happen. He may hope that it will happen, but it is very hypothetical.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the fact that the Minister of Health and Wellness has already explained to this Assembly and to all Albertans that Bill 11 will prevent patients from jumping the queue by purchasing enhanced goods and services beyond those medically necessary items paid for by the public health system, in today's statement the federal Minister of Health and also, I might add, as is evident by today's questions, the opposition here in our Legislature still seem unclear on how the act protects Albertans from queue-jumping in this and other manners. Could the Minister of Health and Wellness elaborate yet one more time on the protections against queue-jumping in Bill 11 in Alberta?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it's important to indicate that all across this country there are enhanced goods and services that are available in the health care systems of the provinces. We have in our legislation actually outlined a set of procedures and requirements with respect to these enhanced goods and services. Bill 11 clearly states that the sale of such products to patients must be clearly explained to individuals, they must not be pressured into purchasing them, there must be an agreement to buy, and you cannot in any way be prevented from having your rightful place in any waiting list that might exist by virtue of offering to pay for these particular devices.

So the bill is very clear on preventing queue-jumping, Mr. Speaker, for any particular purpose or advantage that might come through purchasing one of these services or devices.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

2:10

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can Albertans and Mr. Rock expect to see further safeguards in this regard before the bill is proclaimed?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there are right now in the legislation very strong safeguards in this regard, and of course there is – and I could have mentioned it attached to what I mentioned in answer to the previous question – a process for penalties or fines to be levied for violation of the legislation. So that is the overall situation. With respect to some specific details those will be developed in the regulation development process so that it is very clear and all contingencies are dealt with.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine-Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you. Given that the federal minister also appears to suggest in his statement today that with Bill 11 Alberta is investing public funds in private, for-profit facilities, could the minister explain in fact how public funds are being spent?

MR. JONSON: Well, the legislation is very clear and our policy statement is very clear. With respect to private surgical clinics and with respect to contracts for delivery of diagnostic services and with respect to maintenance contracts, in all cases we are looking at a contractual relationship between the government and the entity getting the contract, Mr. Speaker, where we are paying from public funds for a public service for Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Fees for Services in Private Surgical Facilities

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday Bill 11, the legislation that will open the door to private, for-profit health care, was passed. This morning the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness said on the radio that facility fees would not be part of the contracts between private surgical facilities, otherwise known as private, for-profit hospitals, and regional health authorities. He also stated that the federal Minister of Health was only concerned about insured services not enhanced services. My questions are to the associate minister of health. Will he confirm his statement of this morning that facility fees will not be part of the contract between regional health authorities and surgical facilities?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I was asked some questions with respect to some comments that the federal Health minister had made regarding the application of Bill 11 and when it would come in and so on. What was asked about here was with respect to facility fees, which we know were outlawed some time ago and are no longer allowed to be charged. That is the case, and that will be continued under Bill 11.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's not what you said.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Facility fees. Now, don't get mixed up like you sometimes do between facility fees and facility services. They're very clearly identified here.

Speaker's Ruling

Questions about Media Reports

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, please. It would be really helpful if comments were addressed through the chair.

The chair just about got up. Basically, *Beauchesne* 408(1)(b) says: "Should . . . not inquire whether statements made in a newspaper," meaning radio or the media, "are correct." So the chair was really hoping the associate minister, if he were to deal with the question, would basically deal with policy.

Fees for Services in Private Surgical Facilities

(continued)

MS OLSEN: My second question on this issue: by his comments here is he saying that facility fees now are not part of the pricing scheme in contracts between the Calgary regional health authority and the private eye clinics and the MRI clinics? Is that what you're saying?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Let's be really clear here, Mr. Speaker, because I can see that they need some help. Here are the facts. When contracts are entered into between regional health authorities

and providers of insured surgical services, what we are clearly paying for is a fee for service for that particular service that is enunciated in the contract. I think Bill 11 clarifies some of the guidelines surrounding that and makes it even firmer and makes it even tougher, but more importantly it standardizes that approach right across the province.

One thing that we were committed to doing is putting some fences around those guidelines and making sure that one area of the province is equally treated to another area of the province. We recognize that there were some disparities earlier on, and we have now moved to clean that up, and we will continue to make improvements of that nature as we move on.

MS OLSEN: My final question is to the associate minister of health. Please clarify for us right now if you can that the pricing scheme that exists right now in the contracts between the regional health authorities and the private eye clinics and the MRI clinics do not in any way cover any facility fees. Is that what you're telling us, Mr. Junior Minister?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, perhaps I should have a private chat with that member and take the full time that is required to explain this and maybe even show her some examples.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is very clear in what is and what isn't allowed to be charged for. There will be some regulations developed that will clarify that even further, and we will involve the appropriate parties to make sure that they are clear.

What we are talking about here is the possibility as an option only of allowing certain procedures to be done on a fee-for-service basis. That is what we pay the doctors and the surgeons to do now, and that same procedure will continue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Compliance with Canada Health Act (continued)

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Allan Rock, the federal Minister of Health, has stated some concerns about the government's proposals to protect the publicly funded and publicly administrated health care system. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: has the federal minister conveyed any of the concerns expressed to the government, and has there been a reply?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, we have been very careful and I think also prompt in making sure that the federal government and of course the minister of health federally are informed of the steps that we have gone through and the content, first of all, of our policy paper; secondly, of the initial bill; and thirdly, with respect to the amendments.

With respect to the recent statements from the federal minister he has responded by indicating that the legislation is in compliance with the Canada Health Act. He has some areas where he has indicated that he feels there is some potential, as I understand it, not just in this province, Mr. Speaker, but all across Canada, for there being nonconformity with the Canada Health Act, and he is evidently committing considerable additional resources to monitoring the situation across the country. We think that that is certainly appropriate. The Premier and myself as minister have indicated that we want the consistent application of the Canada Health Act across this country.

With respect to specifics such as the concern raised with respect

to charges being made for additional services or devices, Mr. Speaker, that is something that is common across the country. I know of no province where that option is not available. Provided that it is conducted in a way which protects the individual patient from being pressured into paying for unnecessary costs or in some way gives a patient an advantage in terms of the promptness of treatment, that is also something that I think the federal minister should be reviewing all across Canada. In our legislation we've banned that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: hasn't the federal minister himself asked the Alberta government to pass legislation containing the very principles included in its proposal?

2:20

MR. JONSON: You know, one of the great ironies of this whole debate and particularly of many of the questions and attitudes of members across the way towards the legislation is that the legislation was brought in and passed in large part because the federal government had indicated that we should legislate in this area, and we have. The College of Physicians and Surgeons indicated that we had a need for comprehensive legislation with respect to the whole matter of protecting the public health care system, and we've responded to that. Our own very expert and very capable blue-ribbon panel made the same recommendation, Mr. Speaker. So we've had those messages provided to us. We have acted on them with very comprehensive and thorough legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: That's it. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Do I take it the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is next?

Fees for Services in Private Surgical Facilities (continued)

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness will confirm that contrary to what he just told the Assembly, the physicians, the doctors, the surgeons who work in the private clinics – let's just concentrate on the ophthalmology clinics in Calgary – get paid according to the fee guide that's been negotiated between the province and the AMA and that they don't get paid out of the contract. So that would be contrary to what the associate minister said. If he'd just confirm that.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me just read this to them, and maybe they'll get it. I'm going to quote out of section 4 of Bill 11. It's called Facility Services.

Where a person receives an insured surgical service at a designated surgical facility,

- (a) the operator of the surgical facility shall provide facility services to the person, and
- (b) no person shall charge or collect any amount in respect of the provision of facility services that is in addition to the amount that is payable for the facility services by the health authority under an agreement referred to in section 8.

Now, just to further elucidate here, part 5, Definitions, gives a very clear indication of what facility services are, and the facility services that are to be provided include such items as

- (i) standard ward accommodation, or a semi-private or private room . . .
- (ii) meals;
- (iii) necessary nursing services . . .
- (iv) laboratory, radiological and other diagnostic procedures . . .

Those are clarified, and they go on for several other examples.

Those are facility services, but we do not pay facility fees, and you're not allowed to charge for facility fees over and above. That's the bottom line. So let's be clear in understanding the difference between facility fees versus facility services. Okay?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. I may have to have a private chat with that member, Mr. Speaker.

Would the associate minister please explain what exactly the Calgary regional health authority, for example, pays for in its contract with the private surgical facilities? If it's not facility fees, Mr. Minister, what are they paying for?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: The contracts pay for surgical fees in accordance with the guidelines that are laid out. Let me explain that to you. Okay? Mr. Speaker, there is a schedule of fees for different types of surgical procedures, surgical procedures that are done in public hospitals or surgical procedures that are done in private clinics. They follow a schedule of fees that is negotiated and agreed to and then paid out through the contract. It's very straightforward.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I'll keep trying.

Will the associate minister please inform the Assembly who it is that pays the facility fees, the overhead charge? If it's not the facility fees, maybe the associate minister can reflect back on why it was that the federal government fined the government of Alberta millions of dollars for violating the Canada Health Act. Could you tell us who pays those facility fees and if they're going to be a continuing feature of the contracts?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think Edmonton-Glenora's colleague to the left would really know this one well, and perhaps she'll have a private chat with that member.

I could explain again the difference between facility fees and facility services for the benefit of the Assembly, which I think for the most part everybody understands. There are agreements that are arrived at with the Alberta Medical Association that cover these aspects of surgical procedures, and they're paid out in accordance with the agreed-to fees. Out of those fees that the doctors receive, they cover their overhead.

The fact is that the member is trying to arrive at a difference between facility fees and facility services. Once again, facility fees are forbidden, verboten, and against the law in this province. They've learned that lesson and we have too as a result of other members on the other side.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Trans Canada Trail

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Landowners adjacent to the Trans Canada Trail continue to have serious concerns about the sincerity of Alberta Trailnet's attempts to resolve the issues that impact them. On the one hand, Alberta Trailnet has been conducting meetings with the adjacent landowners to hear their concerns, yet on

the other hand it appears to the adjacent landowners that Alberta Trailnet is attempting to do an end run around addressing those concerns by asking this government to legislatively bypass dealing with them and the local authorities. My question to the Minister of Community Development: could the minister confirm that Alberta Trailnet is requesting that the 2,200 kilometres of Trans Canada Trail in Alberta be designated as a continuous transportation corridor such as highways, pipelines, and utility lines?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct. Alberta will have when it's completed the longest section of trail in Canada, some 2,200 kilometres that will in effect join the Beaufort Sea and the Pacific Ocean via trails all the way to the Atlantic. Currently there's a relay going on, I believe, in central Alberta with water coming from the Arctic Ocean.

With respect to the negotiations there have been some concerns by landowners that are adjacent to proposed parts of the trail. Some parts of the trail are on abandoned rail lines; some of it is proposed along the irrigation right-of-ways; some of it is proposed along public roads. So there are a variety of owners involved in it.

Yes, the member is correct. There has been a suggestion made that perhaps legislation should be looked at to designate a trail.

MR. MARZ: Once again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: could the minister assure my constituents that any proposals brought forward by his department regarding the Trans Canada Trail or Alberta Trailnet would not bypass or restrict any existing local authority control over land use on the issue of trails?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The role that Community Development is playing in this issue and continues to play is to ensure that the concerns of all the people with interests in the trail are met, both the proponents of the trail and the landowners adjacent to it. There are a variety of legislative changes that will have to be made. Certainly this department will not endorse any singular action that would infringe on the rights of either party.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I believe the minister answered it in part, but I'd just like him to assure me that the concerns of the adjacent landowners, being the major stakeholders that they are, would be paramount and that they would have direct input into any proposed changes in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I will continue to support all the efforts made by the people involved to resolve the adjacent landowner concerns along any parts of the trail throughout the province, and I'll continue to encourage full and I stress constructive dialogue between both sides in order that we can have all the stakeholders involved with a high degree of comfort and the trail designated and completed as soon as possible.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Inappropriate Health Care Billing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the

Minister of Health and Wellness dismissed our very valid concerns of fraud in the health care industry. Now the annual report of the Alberta College of Optometrists notes that a member has been suspended because of his failure to "make restitution" to the Alberta health care insurance plan "for claims that were inappropriately billed." All my questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. In this instance, what action is the government taking to collect the money that is owed to Alberta taxpayers?

Thank you.

2:30

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to indicate that the health professionals across this province that claim for various costs and services I think have an exemplary record in terms of adhering to the rules and regulations and being fair in all of their dealings. Of course, where you have thousands of people involved, just as in any other walk of life there are regrettably occasional situations where a person is alleged to be and in due course in some cases proven to be improperly conducting him or herself regarding charging for services.

There are two avenues through which this is dealt with, Mr. Speaker. It is, I think, very consistently dealt with by the professional organizations as being unprofessional conduct, and the hon. member has referred to the action that is taken there. With respect to Alberta Health and Wellness we take the appropriate legal action to recover those moneys and to in some cases lay charges if that is indicated to be necessary.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness tell the House how many more instances of inappropriate billings are occurring under his ministry under his watch?

Thank you.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this, as I've said, is a serious matter, one which is thankfully very, very infrequent. With respect to the number of cases that I have dealt with as minister, I would have to check the records. I know that there has been more than one certainly, and it is followed up through the proper legal channels. It is certainly a very, very minimal number, and I think that is a tribute to the people involved, to the agencies such as the various colleges and professional organizations that help monitor and enforce this matter. It is also, I think, a tribute to the work and the care and the checking that our own finance department does in Health and Wellness. We certainly do act upon cases that come forward where there may be allegations of illegal procedures.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question: what additional resources will the hon. minister commit to monitor and stop any more inappropriate billings to the Alberta health care insurance plan?

Thank you.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I guess it is perhaps the Liberal way. You have one alleged violation, and I suppose they'd spend a million dollars on it, you know, set up a special program, do a royal commission or something.

There is a procedure in place which we use. There are procedures in the professional organizations to follow through, Mr. Speaker.

The mechanisms for dealing with these situations are in place now under the budgets that we currently have for Alberta Health and Wellness and the funds that are in the purview of the professional organizations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Physician Remuneration in Private Surgical Facilities

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had some questions posed to me by my constituents in regard to this government's proposal to allow regional health authorities the option to contract some minor surgical services to private providers. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister tell this Assembly how doctors in these facilities would get paid? Would they be paid on a regular fee-for-service basis, or would they indeed be on salary to the facility?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, these physicians would be paid according to the agreement between Alberta Health and Wellness acting on behalf of the government of Alberta and the Alberta Medical Association. They would be paid on a fee-for-service basis in the majority of cases, or they might be paid on a flat fee or contract basis under one of our primary care innovation projects in the province. But they would be paid under the provisions of the AMA agreement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would physicians be able to work in both public hospitals and private facilities, and if so, would they not be in conflict of interest?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, physicians would be able to work in both venues. As I said, the overall method of payment would be the same; the rates would be the same for the procedures or services for diagnosis that were being provided. That is, I think, very clear in the legislation. It has been the case for years and years in this province with respect to the clinics that we've had existing for many years. People work in their own clinics, whether it is their own doctors' office or some more specialized service, and of course, if they then work in a hospital, they are paid according to the rates.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once more to the Minister of Health and Wellness: didn't Albertans say no to this kind of proposal in last year's health summit and in other forums? Why are you not complying with their wishes?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, with due respect I have to totally disagree with the hon. member's contention as far as the health summit is concerned. The health summit was, first of all, looking for action and leadership from Alberta Health and Wellness in terms of providing for innovation and change within the health care system. That specific issue with respect to a doctor being able to, for instance, function in his own clinic and charge for services there or in a private surgical clinic or in a hospital, the system that we have right now where they are all paid for their professional services through the Alberta Medical Association agreement was never in my view raised at the health care summit as being an issue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Nursing Homes

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, section 32 of Bill 11 has removed nursing homes from the Hospitals Act. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Would the minister please give the reason for this change?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, nursing homes are provided for in the legislation of the province. Their status has not been changed. The rules and policies and legislation applying to them has not been changed. Since we do not deem nursing homes to be a, quote, hospital and Bill 11 deals with clinics and hospitals, it is not specifically dealt with in the legislation except in the definitions section. The way the legislation works is that it applies to surgical facilities, it applies to hospitals, and nursing homes still have the status they've always had.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Is the minister able to reassure that this change has nothing to do with future nursing homes being owned and operated in the private sector?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a little news for the hon. member, and that is that in the nursing homes across this province we have had the presence for decades, as I've said, of three categories of ownership. You have nursing homes which are owned and are the property of the Crown, the government of Alberta. You have nursing homes which are owned and operated by voluntary organizations. The Bethany Group would be an excellent example, the Good Samaritans. That's been going on for decades. We also have nursing homes which are owned by the private sector. One of the well-known names is a company called Extendicare. As I've said many times in this Assembly in answer to other questions, the latter two categories operate under contracts to regional health authorities. Nothing has changed there, Mr. Speaker. It has worked well. You have different perspectives from those three ownership groups, which I think is healthy in the health care system and provides for good service.

2:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Given that the Protection for Persons in Care Act does not apply to private operators, could the minister explain what standards of care or what monitoring and evaluation he would be looking at setting up for more private operators?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the private nursing homes, the voluntary nursing homes, in addition to the directly government-owned nursing homes, as I recall, are all subject to review and inspection by the Health Facilities Review Committee, whichever category you happen to fall under. Also, I'll double check, but I think possibly the member across the way is in error in that the Protection for Persons in Care Act does apply to the whole spectrum of nursing homes. I've looked at hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of reports from the investigative wing of the protection for persons in care committee, and they must be really zealous, because they're certainly going beyond their mandate, if she's correct, in inspecting these places or charges that come up in those sites. So it just does not quite apply.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll call upon the first of two hon. members to participate in Members' Statements today. Prior to doing that, could you all join with me in wishing the Minister of Infrastructure a happy birthday.

Is it also possible, hon. members, that we might revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the Calgary Aquabelles national synchronized swim team. As I was once a synchro mom myself – and I hate to say this – for 14 years as my daughter Kelly was in Aquabelles and eventually an Olympian, I'm very pleased to introduce these swimmers. They are competing at a national competition in Edmonton this weekend as some of the youngest competitors. I would like to mention their names: Marannda Bassaraba, Jordan Church, Andrea Merson, Heather Waldhauser, Madeline Babinec, Kate Millar, Sam LaRose, Caitlin Bowers; also, Billy Debney and Luke Millar, who are loyal supporters and brothers, Coach Jan Debney, whom I've known for many years, and chaperones and of course parents Shaun Bassaraba, Pat Babinec, and Andrea Fugeman-Millar. Would these guests please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly?

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Nursing Week

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is National Nursing Week, an opportunity for all of us to pay tribute to the commitment and dedication of our excellent nurses throughout Alberta.

Albertans tell us that they have deep trust in their nurses, a testament to the high standard of care consistently provided by nurses to their patients. For many nurses the workload is great, the expectations are high, and the hours are long, but the efforts of our nurses are making a difference for the people who rely on the services and programs they provide. On behalf of all Albertans I want to thank nurses for their expertise and dedicated service to Albertans.

The purpose of the week is to increase public awareness of the pivotal role of nurses in our health system, to remind us how well nurses do their job and how they are making a real difference in the lives of Albertans. Our government recognizes the importance of nurses in our health system. Once again, additional resources are being directed to increasing frontline staffing. This will result in an additional 2,400 frontline workers over three years for emergency wards, acute care hospitals, long-term care, and home care. A significant proportion of these new frontline staff will be registered nurses. As well, Alberta Learning announced an additional 195 spaces in postsecondary institutions to train new nurses.

The health system is evolving, creating new and exciting opportunities for nurses. It also poses many challenges as registered nurses adapt and respond to demographic, technological, and service

delivery changes. The future is bright for nurses, who have already contributed so much throughout Alberta and historically.

Initiated in 1985 National Nursing Week coincides with May 12, Florence Nightingale's birthday. A series of simultaneous birthday parties are being planned for Grande Prairie, Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary, and Lethbridge at 6 p.m. on May 12 to mark Florence Nightingale's 180th birthday and International Nursing Week. Hundreds of registered nurses and community leaders are expected to attend these Nightingale Nights being held to raise money for continued nursing education.

I encourage all Albertans to attend an event in their community and to mark this important week by thanking the nurses they know for their dedicated work throughout the year.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Members' Comments during Bill 11 Protest

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past month Albertans denouncing Bill 11 have protested outside the Legislature, and last night that protest was brought inside. Spirited on perhaps by frustration, these individuals made their opposition known inside the public gallery. They were dealt with in a swift and, in my opinion, professional manner.

I have a fundamental problem with the actions last night of certain key members of this government, however, who only exacerbated the situation. In essence, the security staff was instructed to, quote, throw him over, unquote, while a protester hung over the railing from the public gallery. Mr. Speaker, the situation was already tense and this type of behaviour or comment from a minister of the Crown is unacceptable.

Let me make it perfectly clear. I do not condone inappropriate behaviour nor does my caucus, but I also don't condone ministers of the Crown urging the security staff of the Legislative Assembly to commit a criminal act. As Alberta Liberals we will continue to oppose the actions of this government on Bill 11. That is our job. But it is unacceptable for cabinet ministers to suggest that the Leader of the Official Opposition and her colleagues are somehow responsible for inciting this type of civil disobedience.

Mr. Speaker, I've been on the other side of protests and demonstrations, and I would suggest that these kinds of comments only hinder the actions of those responsible for keeping the House in order. It's apparent that this has been a tough session for everyone. It is important that we all pause to remember why we are here; that is, to represent our constituents, who place their faith and trust in us.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier said that once Bill 11 was passed, we would wake up the next day and the sun would be shining. Well, today we have yet to see the sun, and those ministers of the Crown who made those comments last night could perhaps remove that cloud by apologizing to the House for their actions.

Thank you.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After the kind of week we've had, that we're just finishing, I can't wait to hear what the government has in store by way of a sequel for next week. So pursuant to Standing Order 7(5) I'd ask the Deputy Government House Leader to advise us as to what business we might anticipate next week.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly can't wait to advise members of this Legislature what's going to happen next week. On Monday, May 15, in the afternoon we'll be dealing with second reading of bills 18 and 19 and as per the Order Paper. That evening we will be in Committee of the Whole relating to bills 3, 13, and 16, and second reading of bills 18, 19, 24, and as per the Order Paper.

Tuesday afternoon at 4:30 p.m., Mr. Speaker, we'll be dealing with second reading of Bill Pr. 3 and Committee of the Whole on bills Pr. 1, Pr. 3, Pr. 2, Pr. 4, Pr. 5, and hopefully third reading of bills Pr. 1, Pr. 3, Pr. 2, Pr. 4, and Pr. 5. We will also be addressing under Government Bills and Orders government Motion 18, the Auditor General's appointment. That evening we will be in Committee of the Whole addressing Bill 23 and in second reading of bills 20, 18, 19, and as per the Order Paper.

2:50

Wednesday evening we will be in Committee of the Whole, and that will be based on progress achieved on Tuesday in consultation with the opposition, and in third reading. All the bills will hopefully be addressed.

Thursday, May 18, under Government Bills and Orders, again Committee of the Whole, based on progress, and again third reading, based on progress.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a rare occasion, indeed, when I have a group of schoolchildren come all the way up from Calgary, but I do have a group today of 21 very bright and very quiet students. I think it may be the early hour that they had to get on the bus in order to get here today. They are here with their teacher, Mr. Way, and four parent helpers: Pat Robertson, Tony Lauinger, Keeley McMillan*, and Sherri Byron. I would like very much to be able to introduce them to you and through you to members of this Assembly, and I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly – I believe she has arrived. She is a resident of 105th Avenue in Edmonton-Gold Bar, Susan Jossy. She has decided to come by and view firsthand the proceedings here at the Legislative Assembly. She is in the members' gallery. I would ask that she now rise, and if all hon. members could give her the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly, I would be grateful.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on a point of order.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the fact that the opposition was so well behaved after the hon. Leader of the Opposition's first question, I withdraw the point of order.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 18 Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

Ms Carlson moved that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly believes that as a result of the tax reduction measures announced in the 2000 federal budget, the bill would not ensure that all Alberta taxpayers receive a fair tax reduction.

[Adjourned debate May 10: Mr. Dickson]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to pick up hopefully where I left off last night. In speaking to the reasoned amendment that's currently before us, there are a number of comments I wanted to make.

It clearly is true, as Mackenzie King, a former Prime Minister of Canada, said in 1931: the promises of yesterday are the taxes of today. I've gone back to look at the hype around tax cuts in Alberta and the so-called flat tax, and I was going to make the observation, in speaking to the reasoned amendment, that the way the government does this is always a study. I think sometimes somebody ought to write a book called an anatomy of public policy development in the province of Alberta.

We have certain familiar modus operandi in terms of the way things are put forward. For example, in all of the hype around this, it's sort of a selective presentation by government of elements and then sort of an ignoring of those elements that send very different messages. For example, talking about truth in advertising, I go back to the news release that the government had brought out in connection with the budget. I go back and I look at these things and I see the boast of 132,000 people lopped off the tax rolls, but there's absolutely no mention of the elimination of the 8 percent high-income surtax and the \$162 million connected with that. You look at the Budget Backgrounder that came out, and I'm sure all members still have one of these in their desks. This is the thing I've learned not to trust very much, Mr. Speaker, but I suspect there are some Albertans that may wander into a constituency office and pick this up, looking to find out what's going on.

It's interesting that the government will acknowledge: yes, we've eliminated the 8 percent surtax. But I think there are a lot of Albertans that don't understand that that really only applies to high-income filers. It's just a curious thing. As you go through the budget presentation, you see that what's touted are the things that are going to affect people in low-income situations, which of course is the great majority of Albertans – I shouldn't say the great majority; it's certainly going to affect a significant number of Albertans – but the benefits that are going to accrue to wealthy citizens there's almost no mention of.

As you go through this entire two-page news release, you'd think that the impetus to this bill was to provide some relief to the 132,000 poorest Albertans. You'd think that that was what this bill was all about, and you'd say: well, this is great. The Provincial Treasurer heard Desmond Tutu when he came to Alberta a year ago to

celebrate the 50th anniversary of the universal declaration of rights and freedoms and all the wonderful speeches about trying to address poverty, that poverty continues to be one of the huge issues in this nation and the fact that too many children are living in poverty and low-income households. You'd think the government was responding to that and was animated to an overwhelming concern about that disparity between rich and poor in the province.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

But that's not what this bill is all about at all, and that's not what the government's tax reform package is about. If you strip away the benefit to the 132,000 low-income Albertans, what you find is that, yes, there are certainly some benefits there, but the people who ultimately really benefit from Bill 18 as it currently stands are really going to be that much smaller number of people who may see the end of the 8 percent high-income surtax.

The reason for the reasoned amendment is effectively that our Premier has now announced, after the budget announcement and after all of the hoopla and fanfare about the so-called flat-tax proposal, that we now have a de facto relinking of our provincial single-rate system to the federal system. So it's once again one of those things that speaks to a question of competence or lack of competence on the part of this provincial government to be able to manage its budget, to be able run the affairs of this wealthy and prosperous and exciting province.

What's crystal clear to me and I think to many Albertans and increasingly more Albertans, as they study this package and begin to understand that the emperor really has no clothes, is that this entire bill seems to have been little more than a vehicle prepared to showcase the leadership intentions of the former Provincial Treasurer. It does not speak to the real needs of real Albertans.

When you look at the numbers in this thing, those with incomes over \$150,000 a year – that's 1 percent of taxpayers – get a 15 percent cut in provincial taxes; the 39 percent of taxpayers in the \$30,000 to \$70,000 income range will get only a 6 percent cut. I think, once again, it's sort of like Bill 11. If there was any positive thing coming from Bill 11, it was the orientation education of an awful lot of Albertans to the nuances and the complexities of our public health care system. Maybe at the end of Bill 18 we'll reflect back and say that the benefit of this is that we're able to have a widespread, hopefully public debate, and hopefully the government will allow that to happen. Hopefully we're not going to see any of the kind of nonsense we did around Bill 11, with limiting debate through closure or quasi-closure techniques. Maybe what we will be able to have is a debate, and we'll be able to talk about the value of a progressive tax system. The reality with the proposal we've got is that it doesn't live up to the hype. I mean, I think that's the thing that's becoming increasingly apparent to Albertans.

3:00

I know you're waiting anxiously, Mr. Speaker. In another two weeks I'm going to have the results of my web site poll from Albertans. I got, I think, about 2,300 responses to the first Bill 11 question and 576 responses to the second question in just two weeks. I can't wait to see the response to my current question on this. I hope the bill is still going to be around in two weeks so that I'm going to be able to share that with colleagues here in the Assembly.

As it stands now, even with dropping the rate to 10.5 percent, which isn't in the bill, of course, but which is touted by government, we're still going to have middle-income taxpayers in this province paying more. Under this proposal until 2004 Alberta taxpayers are still paying more, even if the rate is dropped as the government

proposes. The problem is that Albertans are not able to get the maximum benefit of Paul Martin's federal income tax reforms.

I think there are more positive things that can be done if we want to do genuine tax reform. One of them certainly was ending bracket creep, but that is not necessarily a corollary to a flat tax, and the federal Finance minister has demonstrated that by eliminating bracket creep by simply indexing tax brackets. So a good move and one which I've heard even grudging acknowledgment from the provincial government about.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I think what Albertans want to see is a flow through of federal rates. But it does point out sometimes how foolish it can be by having the provincial government engaged in what I describe as a political stunt in terms of rushing the budget up so it would come in a week after the throne speech for the sole reason of trying to beat the federal treasurer releasing his budget. At the end of the day we see that the cost of that is to hurt Albertans and cost more. As my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora pointed out in *Hansard*, May 2, 2000, everyone whose earnings are between \$18,425 and \$68,400 will be disadvantaged under Bill 18, would in fact have been better off before Bill 18 came into force.

Now, in the course of researching the bill and looking at it, there's just an excellent article I ran across that I encourage members to look at. It's called *Why Fairness Matters: Progressive Versus Flat Taxes*. It's authored by Dr. Robert J. Shapiro, April 1996. He's a Harvard University professor and a fellow of the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research. He earned his doctorate at Harvard University, holds degrees from LSE, the London School of Economics, and the university of Chicago. So this is no lightweight. This is somebody who presumably knows what he's talking about, and while clearly even smart economists have biases, I think there's something in this article for all of us.

One of the things that I took from the article is the notion, again, that we sort of re-examine what our tax system is there for. What are the key elements we want to see? He identifies three goals: simplicity, growth, and equity. I mean, that makes sense to me. I don't know if there's anybody that has a contrary view of what they want to see their tax system serve, but those seem to me to be three important objectives. I'm just paraphrasing. I'm no economist. I did my best working my way through Dr. Shapiro's article and invite others to read it. They may have different takes on it, different perspectives.

What I took from Dr. Shapiro's thesis is this. Firstly, this whole business of tax reform is based on a pretty shaky foundation. I think what he points out is something that wouldn't maybe be part of what we might describe as conventional wisdom, but it's this. If you want higher growth – and I think that's really what we want to see in this province. We all want for our children and our grandchildren those high-skill, high-pay jobs. We want to make sure that when these pages finish their education, they're going to be able to go out and get those high-skill, high-pay jobs and all of the other young people in that age group.

What Dr. Shapiro points out is that the way you do that by a factor of six to eight times more is through investing firstly in worker skills, in employee skills. That is perhaps the most important thing we can do. This may be a statistic that the Minister of Innovation and Science is familiar with. The other thing you do is invest in technology innovation. In fact, doing either of those two things will pay you really six times more than what you're simply going to get by increasing straight business investment.

I don't have any commerce background, but I look at it in terms

of: the flat tax shifts the burden from the owners of capital to wage earners. It's tough to square that. I mean, that's exactly what happens with a flat tax. It's tough to square that with notions of equity and growth. When I have a Harvard fellow telling me in his article that I cited earlier that we're going down the wrong road, it certainly makes me ask a lot more questions, questions that I haven't heard answers for. I'm hopeful that over the course of the debate on this referral amendment we're going to hear some of those answers, because it's not apparent in anything we've heard so far.

It might be worth while recognizing that in Canada we have a relatively free market. What that means is that there is a greater potential, a significantly greater upside to skilled, talented people to be able to prosper, and there are more opportunities for wealthy people to increase their wealth. So my thesis is that paying progressive taxes is but a kind of price for higher income citizens being able to benefit from those greater market opportunities.

Now, this is different from tax reduction. I mean, I want to pay lower taxes like everybody else. But you know something? That is actually quite a separate issue. Maybe it's once again that \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau, that seems to play such a large role in the machinations of the current government, but what they're working hard to do – and I'm not sure how successful they will be, and maybe this side of the next provincial election we're not going to know that, Madam Speaker. What the Public Affairs Bureau has been trying to spin and trying to sell to Albertans: they've tried to make the notion of tax cuts seem to be the *raison d'être* for Bill 18. People who don't take the time to read the bill and do some of the research analysis, who don't have time to do that, may think that what this bill is all about is tax cuts, when really what it's about is something fundamentally different.

Let's be real clear about that. It can be couched as a tax cut, it can be advertised as a tax cut, but that's not what this is about at all. What it's about is a form of regressive . . . [Mr. Dickson's speaking time expired] You know, I've got some colleagues here who I bet do have some economics background. It can't be time up already, Madam Speaker. Well, I'll pick this up at the next stage.

Thank you very much.

3:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me to be able to get up and address the amendment presented by the opposition on Bill 18, an amendment that would effectively kill the bill if it were to be accepted.

I believe that Bill 18 is good news for all Albertans. I can only imagine the envy that other provinces feel as this debate is going on. A strong fiscal plan has given us the ability to introduce ground-breaking tax reform and tax cuts of over 20 percent. Yes, Madam Speaker, that's what I said: we will take 20 percent, or \$1.3 billion, less from Albertans' bank accounts. Well, we'll do that if we can get past the amendment.

One thing we can all agree on in this Assembly is the benefit to low-income Albertans. Nearly 200,000 Albertans will be removed from the provincial tax rolls. Unfortunately, this only takes care of the provincial taxes. The federal bill still accounts for two-thirds of income tax. A recent article in the *Calgary Herald* said, a comment by Mr. Dale Orr, an economist with an economic think tank, with WEFA, Inc., a group that helped Finance Minister Paul Martin prepare his budget projections: personal income tax collections rose by 34 percent from 1994 primarily due to bracket creep. That was, he notes, well above the 24 percent growth in the economy over the same period of time.

However, there is no denying that low-income Albertans are

winners with this bill. There is a little more difficulty in getting the opposition to acknowledge that middle-income earners are also winners with Bill 18, since they, too, will receive a tax break. I don't see how that makes them losers. I think the biggest problem that the critics have with a single tax rate is that high-income earners will also be winners in this scenario. I have a hard time understanding why anybody would oppose that. Just because someone earns more does not make them a bad person or any less worthy than any other Albertan. Why should they be punished for working hard, for going to school for years, for trying to improve their opportunities, or for taking risks, as so many Albertans do?

High taxes don't create any incentive to work that extra hour of overtime or take the course you need for a promotion. High taxes often deter people from bettering themselves at work because the more you earn the more the government takes in taxes. It is a fact that high taxes stifle individuals' enthusiasm. Contrary to the information the Alberta Teachers' Association recently sent out, Canada ranks 23rd out of 28 OECD countries; in other words, only five countries in the world tax personal income at a higher rate than Canada. Canadians pay approximately 40 percent more taxes than other OECD nations on average, and 20 percent higher than our neighbours, the United States.

We believe in encouraging creativity and enthusiasm in Alberta in a different way. We think government should get out of people's private lives and out of people's bank accounts. We think that if government backs off, then people will have more room to grow and more freedom to choose. Bill 18 will give Albertans that freedom. By removing tax brackets, Albertans will have the freedom to choose to work harder. They will also have the freedom to choose how they will spend the money that they will save on their tax bill. They won't be punished with higher taxes for getting a raise. There's nothing more discouraging for any of us than getting a raise and having it taxed away because your raise put you in a higher tax bracket.

Low taxes are not only good for individuals and families in Alberta; they are good for the economy. When individuals are allowed to grow, the economy grows with them. When individuals are feeling financially confident, the economy reflects that confidence.

The Liberal opposition has suggested that we can't afford the kind of tax cuts that we are giving and that is why they are trying to hoist this tax cut bill for Albertans. I think that the Liberals and the NDs are opposed to tax cuts because they know that if they ever were to form a government here in Alberta, the first thing they would have to do is put taxes up to cover the cost of all the spending that they would do. They like to dream with other people's dollars.

I think we can't afford to not have a tax cut. The \$1.3 billion tax cut that we are returning to Albertans is affordable. Alberta Treasury estimates that the new tax plan will increase economic growth. The Budget 1999 appendix, Economic Impacts of Alberta Tax Review Committee Proposal, shows that five years after the tax plan is implemented, Alberta's gross domestic product is expected to be about 1 percent higher just from this tax cut, or \$1.3 billion larger. Twenty thousand new jobs will be created, and an increasing economic activity will generate enough increased tax revenue to offset 40 percent of the direct cost of this tax cut. It's important to keep in mind that these numbers are based on the initial estimate of a \$500 million tax reduction. Now that we have proposed a \$1.3 billion tax cut for Albertans, the economic impacts will be much greater, and that is good news. It is good news for Alberta, and it is good news for all Albertans.

However, we need to keep in mind the purpose of this bill, which is to introduce tax reform and give every Albertan a tax cut. Do the

Liberals really want to see those who are in the lowest tax bracket, let's say a young couple expecting their first child, struggling to make ends meet with a new baby in their future – they may be inclined to try to earn a little extra money to cover the additional costs of raising a family, but with the current system those extra hours push this family into the middle-income tax bracket with a higher rate. The only result is that one of them is away from home working longer hours without much financial gain. Bill 18 will end that kind of penalty. Even though the Liberals' amendment would hoist Bill 18, I honestly don't think the Liberals want to see this family struggle. Well, I don't think they do.

What about someone who's already in the middle-income tax bracket? What if he or she works hard and gets a raise? Is it all right to tax away that extra money he or she earns? Where does the opposition draw the line? Who do they choose to be the winners and the losers? Bill 18 will not punish these Albertans either.

Another example. An 82-year-old widower living in a seniors' lodge makes \$12,000 per year in private pension income. He receives old age security. In 1999 that senior paid \$335 in provincial income tax. In 2001 he will not pay any provincial income tax, and of course he will still receive the Alberta seniors' benefit.

Another example would be a married seniors couple having a total private pension income of \$54,000 per year and both receiving old age security. Both are in good health and have not claimed any medical expenses. They can make a charitable donation of, say, \$3,000, Madam Speaker. They will pay \$513 less in provincial income tax in 2001 than they did in this year.

Madam Speaker, it is time for some real tax reform. It's time we stopped punishing hardworking Albertans by reducing any incentive to save, to work, and to invest, and it's time we let Albertans keep more of their money. It is time we recognized that for Alberta to keep some of our brightest young people from moving to places like the States, where there's a huge tax advantage, we have to be competitive. I have heard people complain about some of our doctors and our surgeons moving to the U.S.A., where they can in fact earn more money than they do here. This tax cut will help to alleviate some of that pressure.

I urge all members to vote against the Liberal amendment to hoist this bill. Let's get on with returning more of Albertans' hard-earned money to them. It is, after all, their money.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise in support of the amendment this afternoon because in fact the proposal for the flat tax that we see in front of us is anything but fair. One of the first things the Official Opposition would do when we become government is ensure that taxpayer dollars are not spent on private health care in this province and siphoned off to provide a profit for for-profit providers. So that would be the first thing we would do.

I find the concept interesting that if you earn \$100,000 and you have to pay taxes, in fact you are being punished, but those who are earning \$30,000, \$40,000, or \$50,000 are somehow lesser beings in the sight of this government and, in fact, do not deserve the same type of tax break that those in the upper earning levels deserve. I just want to give out some figures to show what the flat tax does to those middle-income earners.

3:20

If someone is earning \$30,000, the amount of tax savings is

\$52.17. If they earn \$30,424, it's \$41.48. If they earn \$40,000, the tax savings is \$95.11. If they earn \$50,000, the tax savings is \$151.11. If you earn \$100,000, however, you do get a tax saving, and that's \$1,292.45. Now, Madam Speaker, is that fair?

In actual fact these figures are from a chartered accountant, Brad Severin. He indicates that, yes, 10.5 percent is marginally better than the 11 percent flat tax, but in actual fact he has found that the top income earners will benefit the most. So I find it rather insulting, Madam Speaker, that government members would indicate that those who are middle-income earners either don't work hard enough, aren't bright enough, or don't deserve a tax break in the equivalent amounts that someone at the higher income level is saving, and that in fact is what they have said over and over and over again.

The flat tax provides for a structural change in the tax system in this province and can in fact be seductive. Many years ago Pam Barrett of the New Democrats at that time indicated that Canada needed a flat tax system. It's interesting that Pam Barrett would have indicated that this is the way to go when we have a large number of right-wing think tanks that say that this is not the way to go.

You know, the parallels between Bill 11 and Bill 18 are just immense. Both bills are not based on fairness. Both are not based on evidence that there will be a benefit to the majority of individuals in this province. Both are not based on anything other than a belief that it is the right thing to do with no substantiation other than it's the right thing to do. Both have been policy-making by the seat of their pants, and both are going to be a burden on the middle-income earner. So what both bills do is promote inequities between the higher income earners and the middle-income earners in this province. You know what? The similarities even go further than that. Both bills have required amendments in this House, and we have yet to see the real amendment tabled by the Acting Treasurer in this House.

The reality is that if the government members were so interested in ensuring that middle-income earners received a tax break, especially those who stay at home, who have a parent who stays at home to care for the children, they would have supported the motion by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Motion 506, that read:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to demonstrate its recognition of the contribution made by parents who stay at home to care for their children by providing support equal to that received by parents choosing other child care options.

That would have been a motion, Madam Speaker, that would have provided for a fairer tax break to that middle-income earner that the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View just spoke about. In fact, it is a motion that would have been supported by organizations such as Kids First, who have for years tried to provide to governments information about the discriminatory tax policies with regards to stay-at-home parents. Yet this government on the one hand says that they agree, but on the other hand their actions do not match their words.

What I find also interesting is that this unfairness has been seen by Albertans across this province. In fact, I tabled in this Legislative Assembly on April 17 a petition that had been signed by 571 students who had studied both Bill 18, the flat tax, and Bill 11. What they found was that these two bills would have an incredible impact on individuals' ways of life. This is what the petition said:

Bill 11 and 18 are currently being proposed that would affect both the health care system and also the tax [system] . . . we have been unable to attain any factual evidence to support the move to a privatized health care system.

Also, at that time it was an 11 percent flat tax rate.

By signing this petition, you are saying that if these two bills are passed and go into effect, then when you are able to vote you will not support the Conservative Party.

You know, students in this province are not fooled by the flat tax. Students in this province are not fooled by the government's protestation that there is no for-profit health care in this province. Students in this province are well aware of the impact that both of these bills are going to have on their lives.

I'd like to quote from another letter that indicates that the flat tax is a huge problem with regards to the middle-income earner. In fact, the Member for Calgary-Cross had read from this letter just a couple of days ago, so I'm sure she must have tabled it. It is a letter from Jake Kuiken, who is president of the Alberta Association of Registered Social Workers. What he indicates is that "the tax inequity created by Bill 11 will be even greater" with the introduction of an 11 percent – again, it was 11 percent at that time – flat tax next year.

Under the current tax system, Albertans who are better off pay their annual taxes at a somewhat higher rate than Albertans with an average or lower income.

The flat tax changes all that. All eligible Albertans will pay their taxes at the 11 percent rate. However, well-off Albertans who can afford an enhanced level of medical services will see their taxes reduced twice over.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, a couple of things. We are dealing with a reasoned amendment, brought in by Edmonton-Ellerslie. The chair certainly recognizes that some latitude needs to be given. However, I would remind the hon. member that we are dealing with a reasoned amendment to Bill 18. Also, when you do read a letter, it should be tabled in the Assembly. I would ask for the remainder of the debate to please remember that we have before us a reasoned amendment and if we could talk about the necessity for that reasoned amendment within the debate.

MS LEBOVICI: Absolutely. The reasoned amendment indicates that

. . . the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly believes that as a result of the tax reduction measures announced in the 2000 federal budget, the bill would not ensure that all Alberta taxpayers receive a fair tax reduction.

I am making the case, hopefully, that this flat tax does not provide for a fair tax reduction to all Albertans. As well, if the member had not tabled that particular letter from Mr. Kuiken, I will table the letter.

Thank you for keeping me on track as always.

Debate Continued

MS LEBOVICI: The reality is that because the tax break is set up as a flat tax, what it in effect does is provide for a tax that is not fair to all Albertans.

Now, if I can just remind the Assembly as to why we're at the point that we are right now with regards to tax reform. [interjection] Okay, I'll stand back. I think it's my mike that's picking it up. I'm not screaming.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, through the chair. Are you having a problem with your mike?

MS LEBOVICI: I think so. I think the mike is amplifying my voice, so that's what the problem is.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: That does sound better.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you. I don't need a lot of amplification, as most of the members know.

3:30

The basis of this tax reform, supposedly, is to provide a fairer tax to all Albertans, but as I indicated earlier, what I think we have is tax policy on the fly, because what we've seen over the last few months are different options being thrown out as trial balloons. I almost see it as the Treasurer at the time and the Premier's own version of a striptease with regards to tax reform in this province. In fact, what we're seeing is a lot of talk, very little action, and it may be satisfying for some but not for all.

If I can just go through a little bit of the scenario in terms of what has happened over the last number of months. On July 26 of 1999 the Premier mused about accelerating Alberta's single-rate tax system in 1999 and 2000 by increasing the basic personal and spousal exemptions. On November 23 of 1999 the Premier said that the government may lower the 9 cent per litre gasoline tax. Further on, two days later, the Premier mused about a gasoline tax rebate. Then on December 29, 1999, he further mused about providing Albertans with a \$100 tax rebate. On January 7, 2000, the Treasurer at the time said that the government is considering a personal income tax cut in the year 2000; January 17, the government is considering a reduction of health care premiums. So a little bit seems to be thrown out at a time, but in fact all it was was teases.

On January 18, 2000, the Treasurer said that there would be a surplus and that the surplus would be used to pay down the debt rather than being used to provide tax cuts in the year 2000. On January 26 of 2000 the government's 18-cent reduction in the mill rate for the education property tax was announced, but it was a \$22.50 tax cut for the average homeowner. On February 24 we had the reannouncement of the flat tax scheme for the eighth time since the 1999 provincial budget. On February 27, 2000, what the Treasurer at the time said, in terms of asking the federal government to cut taxes, which in fact they did, was: what we're saying is try it; you'll like it. I'm sure that was much to the surprise of the Treasurer at the time. Then we saw the Premier on March 14, 2000, say that he would bring in a law to ensure that Albertans will always have the lowest personal income taxes in Canada.

What we're seeing is that there's very little consideration that's been given, it would appear, to the actual impact of the flat tax on Albertans. It has been more, it seems, a rush to try and keep up with perhaps Ontario, to try and keep up with other jurisdictions across Canada who have also been rushing to provide tax cuts.

Now, is there anything wrong with providing a tax cut? Absolutely not. There is no one, I think, in this Assembly or outside this Assembly who would say that they would not like more money in their pocket. However, when Albertans are asked, "What are your priorities? Should the first thing on a government's mind be to cut taxes?" what they say is that the first thing on a government's mind should be health care, education, child poverty, crime and justice, environment. Tax cuts are not at the top of what Albertans' or Canadians' concerns are with regards to government priorities. What we have seen here over the last few months is a fixation on health care, but it's a fixation on private health care, and now what we see is a fixation on tax cuts.

Now, the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View had indicated that one of the reasons for the tax cuts is to ensure that the brain drain would not continue. I don't know if she's had a chance to look at the *CGA Magazine* that came out in May, so just a couple of days ago. What it indicates is that the taxes do not really have a huge effect on whether people decide to either leave Canada or to come back to Canada and that there are other issues that are more important, such

as the high quality of life and the community and proximity to family and friends.

The other issue that's brought forward in this magazine is the fact that though most Canadians welcome tax relief, they're also upset by the way their dollars are being spent, and I would venture to say that the majority of Albertans in this province are very upset with the fact that over \$3 million has been spent by this government in an advertising campaign to promote private, for-profit health care.

The other issue that is brought forward by this particular magazine is the climate in terms of competition between the United States and Canada and businesses and their tax regime. There's an interesting study that has recently been done that suggests that this viewpoint might be not quite correct as well. What was found was that U.S. companies faced tougher economic conditions than their Canadian counterparts. "We didn't really expect to find that," said one of the professors. "But that's how the data came out." So some of the almost myths that are being propagated by the government as to why the tax cut needs to be in a certain format, I believe, when you scratch below the surface, are not quite what they seem to be.

Actually, the Premier has called it Ralph-onomics or Steve-onomics. Perhaps it should have been called Stockwell-onomics. I'm not sure. But the reality is that it's an experiment. It's an experiment that has been shown by the figures to not bear out what in fact the result is that the government wishes it to be. So this amendment provides the opportunity for the government to look at Bill 18 – it doesn't kill the bill; it says that it should not now be read a second time – and ensure that the bill provides a fair tax reduction to all Albertans.

So what we are doing yet again is providing the opportunity for the government to take a deep breath, to look at what they are doing with regards to the flat tax, who they are affecting most seriously, to recognize that it is not punishment when you deal with a progressive tax system, that there should be rewards inherent for the middle-income group as well when they receive an increase in their salary or when they work overtime, that it should not be only those who earn \$70,000 or \$80,000 or \$100,000 that should be rewarded for earning those salary levels.

Again, I think it is very insulting to say that someone who earns \$40,000, who may move into a \$50,000 tax bracket, should not, in fact, have the same percentage ability of tax savings as those in the higher income brackets. Why are they being punished by this government? That, in fact, is what occurs under the flat tax.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. [interjections] I can already hear that there are a number of members really anxious to get on the list and comment on this bill, so I look forward to when they're up to speak.

I am glad of the opportunity to rise at this point and speak in favour of the motion that "Bill 18 . . . be not now read a second time because the Assembly believes that as a result of the tax reduction measures announced in the 2000 federal budget, the bill would not ensure that all Alberta taxpayers receive a fair tax reduction." I think that there's merit in that.

3:40

I've listened with interest to those speakers that I've heard from the government side speaking in favour of Bill 18 and against this reasoned amendment. What I'm sensing is that this bill kind of dovetails into Bill 11, because I certainly see the same attitudes coming from members on the other side, and I question that. I would

think that if it was a good idea and people really believed in it, they'd just get up and argue the case. But why they have to get up and say that members in the opposition have their "heads on backwards," which was the quote that we heard from Calgary-Egmont – and we had another gem from the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, some other kind of disparaging comment. I always find it interesting, because, you know, people that really believe in what they're doing and have a good solid platform to bring forward just bring it forward. They don't have to try and defend it by taking personal attacks against members of the opposition or against anybody, in fact, that disagrees with them. So just an interesting comment as part of the give-and-take on this debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair would ask the hon. member to get on with the bill and the reasoned amendment, please.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much for your kind advice.

Now, I have a few reasons for supporting this reasoned amendment. Just let me stop here. I don't want anyone to misunderstand and believe that I am not in favour of a tax cut. Let me say that again. I have said that in the previous reading, and if the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View was able to supply me with the *Hansard* quotes showing members of the opposition actually saying that they did not believe that Albertans wanted a tax cut, I'd appreciate seeing that. She certainly made that comment, and none of my colleagues here have gotten up and said: no tax cuts for Albertans. So please be accurate in your statements.

If it's possible to give a tax cut, all things considered – when you look at balancing a budget, when you look at what the revenue is, when you look at what the expenses are, when you look at whether there's a deficit or a surplus, I think it's a great idea to give money back to people, and if it's possible to do that by way of a tax cut, then that's a wonderful opportunity and it benefits everyone. Do I think the proposal that the government has put forward at this point is the way to do it? No, I don't. That has been really brought into sharp focus because of the actions of the federal 2000 budget.

So if the current government believes that they'd like to spend \$1.3 billion on a tax cut for Albertans, is this scheme that they're putting forward – I understand an amendment is to come forward reducing the 11 percent flat tax to a 10.5 percent flat tax. If that's the method that they choose, I disagree with it. I think there are fairer and more equitable ways in which to do that. I think this scheme does compromise fairness and equity. There's no question in my mind. There have been all kinds of statistics and percentages already put forward that do show that the people that benefit absolutely the most from this is a very small percentage of elite-income earners at the very top end who get the most tax reductions back. That's an interesting one too.

I look at how we came to be in this position. This government has been in power for 30 years. It's always interesting to me how they pretend that it wasn't them. Certainly, choices that this government made in the '80s led in fact to the debt and the deficit, and as a result of that, choices were made again by this government to establish things like the 8 percent high-income surtax and the .5 percent flat tax deficit reduction tax, so they did in fact go back to the people and work that debt off with money from the people.

The past Treasurer in his estimations of the budget – certainly in retrospect we can see this quite clearly – has had a tendency to estimate the revenue very low and the expenses very high. So there's a built-in, almost guaranteed surplus here, and now we're saying: okay; we want to give this surplus back by way of this 10.5 percent flat tax. I'm always interested to see how the immense marketing and Public Affairs' budget can be used to make all of this

look like they're only responsible for the end point, which is giving the money back, but no recognition that they're the ones that caused it to be given out in the first place.

The moves that the federal government have made really brought what's being proposed and, I think, the failings in the flat tax scheme into very sharp focus in that one day what was being proposed here could be argued quite strongly and by the next day the moves that the federal government had made in their budget really skewed this flat tax scheme and showed it for what it was, I think.

It's interesting to me the number of members of the government that have been saying: this is a wonderful thing for families, and how could we speak against it because it benefits families so much. I have to say, you know, that in the going on four years – I'm in my fourth year now in this House – there were a lot of other things this government could have done if they really and honestly wanted to benefit families. There are still things that could be done by this government if they really wanted to benefit families.

My colleague has already mentioned Motion 506, that was moved by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. That's an excellent example, and the government votes it down. I mean, like flat. Nobody was even interested in contemplating supporting this. So when I see a good idea like this presented that's voted down flat by the government and then I see something like the flat tax coming in and the same excuse being used in reverse to promote it, it makes me think that this isn't about a tax cut so much. It's about implementing a long-term political ideology. It just so happens that at this point in time it's possible to have all the elements in place to do that. What do I mean by that?

Well, if you really as an ideology wanted to put a flat tax in place, if you really believed that was the best way to have things in the world, knowing, of course, that the higher income earners are going to benefit the most from that and it is absolutely going to decimate the low-income earners, how would you do that? I think what I'm seeing is that the first thing you do is call it something else. You don't talk about the fact that it's changing the whole system. You talk about it being a tax break.

Well, if you're going to talk about it being a tax break, then you'd better find the tax break. Sure enough that's been done, and we have the circumstances that allow for that at this very point in time. But then, oops, if you really look at it, what would happen is that the people on the lower end of the income scale would really be hammered. They would be paying a significant portion, and the effect on their lives, given that the costs of basics like rent and food and gas take a much larger chunk out of their available money, you're going to have to do something to sell it to people. So what do you do?

Well, why don't you just raise the personal exemption above, just above, the point where low-income earners show up on the scale as really getting nailed with this new scheme. That would help too, because the people that really have to buy into this new taxing scheme – because that's what this is; it's a taxing scheme – are the middle class. They're the ones that would most likely protest it or not be willing to go along with it or to question it. I think the government is smart enough to know that the middle class isn't going to buy this if they see that low-income earners are getting absolutely smashed by some sort of taxation system. So raising the personal exemption level to just above where low-income earners really get hammered also helps to sell this to the middle class. Then, as I said, you just keep telling people that this is the sale, that this isn't about changing your whole taxation system forevermore in your life, that really what it's about is a tax break, and you keep selling it on that sort of level.

3:50

There's an assumption here that there will always be an opportu-

nity to keep lowering this rate. I would dearly hope that that is true, but what I've studied on the economics of Alberta and what people seem to admit is that Alberta has a very cyclical economic life. Nobody can figure out why we can't seem to hold it on an even keel all the time, but we can't. We rise and fall with alarming regularity over whatever that cycle is, 10 or 12 or 15 years or something. So what's happening here is that it's being sold with the idea that there'll always be a tax break, that that 11 percent, now 10.5 percent, is going to keep going down. Nobody ever talks about what happens when oil prices drop to five bucks a barrel and they're not able to get the oil and gas royalties, that typical downturn that Alberta always experiences.

Then those tax rates are going to have to go up, and certainly this government is no stranger to putting on surtaxes and raising income tax. When that happens, what is going to happen to that essential middle class that is really needed to sell this whole new taxation scheme, the ones that really have to buy this? I think at that time they would see themselves caught in a sort of pincer movement, and their taxes would just shoot up. It would be very, very difficult for people in the middle class.

So the idea of having a fair and equitable tax system is very important to me, and I don't see that in what's being proposed here. I'm more than happy to talk about tax cuts, but I don't think this is about tax cuts. I think this is about instituting a tax system that can and probably will really hurt the middle class and will advantage the very wealthy elite in our province and, depending on the vagaries of the day, may really disadvantage low-income earners, or they may be exempted out of it.

I'm also a believer in the progressive taxation system. I'll admit that up front. I believe in it. I think those who are more willing to and able to pay should pay a little more. I mean, percentage-wise they have much more disposable income to do whatever they want with. Someone said to me, "Well, you know, Laurie, some people take their money and risk it to get into business ventures or perhaps even go back to university to get a different degree and go into a different field, and they shouldn't be penalized for risking that amount of money." That's true, but on the other hand they are also in a position where they can make enormous amounts of money out of that if they so choose.

I do believe in a progressive tax system, and that's not what I'm seeing here. It is inequitable. In treating everybody the same here, you very much disadvantage distinct sectors that are affected by this tax. I'm not in support of that. But would I like to see a tax break in an equitable tax system? You betcha. Absolutely. I'd be the first one in line.

It's interesting, actually, the way this proposed flat tax system would work when you look at the lower income, the middle income, and then the higher income. It sort of reminds me of that magicians' shell game where they have the walnut shells on the desk and you're supposed to figure out which one the pea is under. What always comes to mind when I listen to what's being proposed here is that somehow under the tiniest little shell is the biggest one of those foam-rubber balls, because it is the smallest percentage of people under this scheme that are getting the biggest prize back out of it. Again, I'll underline that it is a tax break now, and I think that's being used to sell a tax scheme, which is a different discussion than I've heard going on here.

I think I'd touched on this briefly before, but I just want to make the point again. I've heard a number of people speaking with great fervour and belief about how much this is going to be of benefit to the low income, but I have to admit that I see a certain amount of discovery, that it's become fashionable to stick up for the lower class and for the lower income earners. But I don't think that that really,

truly is meant. I think, again, that it's being used as part of a sales job here, because there were a lot of other ways to benefit low-income earners that were possible within the powers that this government has than putting in this scheme, which, as I've said, could really hurt them.

At some point one of the members opposite said: this government wants to get out of people's lives. When I just very quickly look at some of the bills that have already gone through in this last year and look at bills like 202 or 212 or at child access enforcement, those are very definitely involved with the most intimate parts of people's lives and regulating them in a very serious way. So I'm having trouble accepting the argument that somehow this bill is getting out of regulating people's lives, because far too often I've seen this government more than willing to jump in and regulate or legislate the most intimate portions of people's lives.

I am in favour of this reasoned amendment. I think I would like to see a better tax plan, a fairer tax plan, a more equitable tax plan, but I'd also like to see a bit more co-operation between the provinces and the feds. Somehow this has turned into a . . . [interjection] I don't think I can use that word here in this Chamber.

MS LEIBOVICI: They've had a match?

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, yes, a match. Thank you. That's well put. I had an image of two little boys, but I'm trying to be delicate here and honour this House.

The truth is that there's only one taxpayer, and this idea that the provinces have all got to have their own system – are they doing that for valid philanthropic reasons? I'm beginning to think not. I'm beginning to think that this is about one individual or small group of individuals being able to say: I gave the tax cut. Because we were linked with the feds before, as we've seen and what this reasoned amendment is about, when the federal government did something, they got the credit for the tax cut because everybody else was just attached to them and it sort of flowed through.

Part of what's still bothering me about all of this is that the provinces – I'm talking about all the provinces – and the federal government don't seem to be able to put aside that testosterone-laden little battle and actually discuss what is the best tax system for people in Canada. I'm a Canadian. I pay Alberta taxes and I pay federal taxes and I pay municipal taxes as well, and I'd like to see a system that is better integrated and fairer to everybody. I, for one, as a taxpayer would like to see some better discussions around all of that and a little less of this match between boys.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

4:00

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am very anxious to participate in the debate this afternoon on the amendment to Bill 18 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. This is going to give all Albertans an opportunity to have a second look at Bill 18.

On the surface one would have to say: "Well, what's the matter? This bill is going to give everyone a tax cut." But we have to look at the fairness of the tax cuts that are proposed in Bill 18. It has been recognized in editorials in some of the major papers in the province and it has been talked about by various chartered accountants and other professionals that this is not the best way to pursue tax reform.

Now, it's interesting to note, Madam Speaker, the words of a gentleman who was the controller general of finances for Louis XIV.

His name is Jean-Baptiste Colbert, and his words – and I'm going to quote them – are relevant in this discussion around fair taxation and Bill 18. The quote is this: the art of taxation consists in so plucking the goose as to get the most feathers with the least hissing. Middle-income earners in this province, when they see the tax implications of Bill 18, are going to do some rather loud hissing. If the hon. members across the way think they heard protest with Bill 11, well, they're also going to hear from Albertans regarding the fairness of this flat-tax proposal.

We've all heard over the years – and this argument certainly goes back almost two decades. One book, for instance, that dealt with this from Stanford, the university in California, was *Low Tax, Simple Tax, Flat Tax*. The discussions around this book from the Stanford economists talked about how a flat-tax proposal or scheme would be a tremendous boon to the fortunate few, as I call them, or in this province the economic elite. A government must listen to all members of a society, not just the fortunate few.

Now, if we are to embrace a flat-tax policy or proposal, we have to give everyone the complete story. It has been discovered in other jurisdictions that politicians who have embraced this concept of flat tax have been less than candid about what the long-term effects of these taxes are. I believe that my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood in a few moments is going to also speak on that issue, and hopefully she's going to be able to convince all hon. members of this Assembly to support the amendment from the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, because there's no sense in rushing into this. Let's have a good look at this and let the Alberta public have a good look at this.

The irony in this province and with the originator, shall I say, of this idea is that the flat tax, Madam Speaker, is coming into political favour or is becoming fashionable in some political circles at a time when many other economists and accountants, as I said earlier, are having second thoughts about it and are doubting the credibility of this whole idea. Now, I think we will see an increase in the inequities across income groups in this province with the flat-tax proposal, and that's why I'm reluctant to support it at this time. Tax reduction and the prudent use of tax dollars is a policy that has to be addressed by everyone.

Later on in my remarks I'm going to caution all hon. members of this House about just exactly what can happen with our economy, an economy that's based on nonrenewable resources, and how delicate this is. We all know what happened in the mid-80s whenever resource revenue fell. We look at the full economic picture in this province, and we look at the middle-income earners. They want things for their families and for their community just like everyone else does. They want to see their economic future sound, and they want to see the economic future of their children sound as well. One of the easiest ways to do this, to build a good, solid economic foundation, is through education. Tuition fees are skyrocketing, and this is a burden that the middle-income individuals or families have to absorb. Is that reflected in this flat-tax proposal? I do not think so, Madam Speaker.

We have to now for a few moments consider how this bill came about. Some individuals have referred to it as making tax policy on the fly, but perhaps it had more to do with blind political ambition. I'm thinking back to the days of Richard Nixon, as the second term of the Nixon presidency crumbled and disintegrated. I'm looking at the second term of Premier Klein's government, and I'm also seeing similarities in this. We look, certainly, at the health legislation, and now we look at this flat-tax policy. It's obvious that the government has not done its homework by analyzing the effects of the 11 percent single rate, as it was proposed, on the various income classes and the family types as it relates to the impact of the federal government's

tax measures once the provinces are delinked from the tax-on-tax system. That is to occur in the next fiscal year.

Now, why would I say that? Well, Madam Speaker, the government has had to amend this bill, Bill 18, in order to reduce the original 11 percent rate to 10.5 percent and increase the exemption level from \$11,620 to \$12,900. Now, as I debated a motion earlier in this session, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre brought it up about making a more balanced and fair playing field for stay-at-home parents regardless of whether it was the mother or the father. My motion was soundly defeated by hon. members of this Assembly, yet not a month later we're increasing that exemption level. That's not something that I disagree with. I think that has been a long time coming.

I believe it has something to do with the initiative that the hon. Member for Wainwright proposed earlier in this term. That is how policy is made. The hon. member put his motion forward. We all talked about it in this Assembly, and two and a half years later the Provincial Treasurer of the time increases the exemption. I think those events are related. At least, I hope they're related. I think that is how policy is made. Obviously this policy, as it was developed, was – shall I use the term? – a little delinquent, because it has to be changed so quickly.

4:10

Now, as I understand it, the argument that was made was that we had to ensure that taxpayers will receive the same benefits in 2004 under the 10.5 single-rate system as they would under the tax-on-tax system. Madam Speaker, we only need to look at the record over the past nine months to see that this government has been making tax policy on the fly. It has to do with personal ambition rather than prudent fiscal management of our tax revenue and the planning that is going to have to go on perhaps for not one decade but two decades in the future, when natural gas royalties and conventional crude oil royalties are going to be significantly depleted.

We look, Madam Speaker, at the current Provincial Treasurer and the tabling of this draft amendment to decrease the rate from 11 percent to 10.5 percent and to increase the exemptions. Now, it was stated that the Treasury Department projections were done over a three-year period, but we need to look at this on a longer term. The Premier later on stated, as the announcements of the amendments to Bill 18 were made, that the promise to flow through federal tax cuts to Alberta had to be kept. This contradicted, of course, the statements of the Acting Treasurer, and that is quite an interesting contradiction. For that reason and that reason alone we would have to support the amendment from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, because this amendment would allow them to get their story straight.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, we look at the total revenue. The total revenue of the province, Mr. Speaker, is going to be over \$19 billion dollars, and this in the current fiscal plan. We look at the two largest sources of that revenue. It's personal income tax, which is close to 25 percent of the total revenue, and nonrenewable resource revenue, which is 21 percent. What would happen – and this is my concern – if we had a significant decline in the commodity prices of natural resources? If hon. members across the way can explain to all members of this House and all Albertans how they're planning on dealing with this if it would occur – I hope it does not. I had direct experience with this resource economy in the mid-80s, and I know how many businesses and I know how many individual families were hurt financially. Not only is prudent spending of our tax resources wise

but also prudent planning into the future. This government has never demonstrated to me any ability to plan into the future.

Hon. members could say: why would the individual be concerned about this? Well, we look at their own revenue forecasts. For instance, resource revenue in the last fiscal year was estimated to be \$4.3 billion. Now, two years down the road that same estimate is to be slightly more than \$3 billion, so that's a significant decline. Tax revenue will grow with tax cuts: that's the argument that is being presented here. I'm not so sure about that. We look at investment income. In the same year, 1999-2000, it was forecast to be \$1.6 billion, Mr. Speaker, and the target two years down the road is to be \$1.3 billion. So there are some flags here, and I would caution hon. members across the way, in their excitement to promote Bill 18, that I do not believe there has been a prudent 10-year or 20-year plan on the implications of this flat tax.

Now, the other hon. members of the Assembly are quite aware of the former leader of the third party and her fascination with the flat-tax system. In January 1996 the former leader of the New Democrat Party said – and I quote – we need a flat-tax system in this country. The hon. member at the time went on to say that she was not promoting the policies of Bob Dole or Newt Gingrich but that we need a flat tax system. It's such a contradiction to what the current policy of the third party is. The third party seems to be wavering back and forth, Mr. Speaker. They certainly have some concerns about the flat tax and how it hammers away at middle-income earners.

They go on to state that Budget 2000 places a heavier tax load on the backs of working Albertans. They also say that there's a fairness of the tax system at stake – I'm not saying that I disagree with these statements, but there's a definite contradiction here – and that a flat tax will massively shift the tax burden to the middle class. Well, that's not what is talked about in this commentary, in this advocacy of a flat tax. Now, I don't know how far the discussions of the former Member for Edmonton-Highlands went with the former Provincial Treasurer, but obviously they had to have some discussions at some time because they both admire this flat tax system. It is amazing, when I think of it, that in the last couple of months this is a considerable shift. This is a real, philosophical shift, Mr. Speaker.

We talk about having fairness, not only for people that have modest incomes, people in the middle-income bracket – members of this party know that tax policy has to be not only for the fortunate few or the economic elite. Whenever you change tax policy, it has to benefit everyone.

It is unfortunate that I have to conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker, because I have a lot more to say on this flat tax system. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

4:20

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to this motion that has been made on this bill. It reads

that Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly believes that as a result of the tax reduction measures announced in the 2000 federal budget, the bill would not ensure that all Alberta taxpayers receive a fair tax reduction.

Once again in this Assembly we've had an announcement that puts the cart before the horse. It was like a big race, part of a leadership race maybe, that the then Treasurer had to leap up and start his campaign by saying: we're going to cut taxes. That's great. Everyone wants to pay less taxes. There's no doubt about that. But

I don't think he had done all of his homework. It's like he had to put it in quickly before the federal budget came down, and then he had to undo it. He had to make this big announcement. Then when he realized that the federal changes to tax rates were fairer and addressed more people and certainly gave a better tax break to the middle income, it was like a big "Oops, I've done something wrong here." Supposedly there's going to be an amendment during Committee of the Whole. We think it was announced one question period. Right? You know, it's always hard to predict what's going to happen in Committee of the Whole. Then we're going to have that change. I would venture to say that not enough homework has been done on this.

I'm ready for a tax break. I think everyone is. [interjection] Absolutely. We see taxes: income taxes, property taxes, education taxes, business and corporation taxes, oil and gas royalties, stumpage fees, user fees. Now, user fees are a flat tax in a way, I'd say. There are a lot of different views on user fees as well. There are all kinds of user fees. We can look at fishing licences; that's a user fee now. We can look at drivers' licences; that's a user fee. There are different views on user fees. The summer is coming. Whoever will use the parks will pay a fee. People's views on user fees are interesting. Then we pay for licences at the municipal and the provincial and the federal levels. We've got the GST, brought in by a Conservative government. For the environment, we've even got tire taxes.

I think people feel that they are taxed quite enough. They are. They balance that out against: what am I paying my taxes for? Then they kind of say: well, if my tax dollars are being properly used, if they are being spent on public health care, if they're being spent on a good education system, if we get decent roads – and by the way, highway 794 is now highway 44. Just so members of the Assembly know that. It's not quite finished yet. It's got about two-thirds to go, but we're ever hopeful that another third will be done this summer. It's now highway 44. I suggested calling it Soetaert Way. That didn't happen, but it was a suggestion.

So back to the bill. You know, as long as we're getting value for our tax dollars, people can live with that. When they find out that certain things are being squandered or wasted or spent in a way the general public doesn't want or when they don't get the services they need or when suddenly they are paying out of pocket for something they thought their taxes covered, then that's when people get upset. So people get upset, and I think in a way that's been happening lately in the province of Alberta. People have felt: "What do you mean? I'm paying taxes and I have to pay for an MRI? What do you mean? I'm paying taxes and this service is going to be de-insured?" There's an unrest about that. If they pay taxes and they get the service, then people can live with that, but now if they don't get the service, they're thinking: well, why am I paying taxes?

Now we have an issue of a government coming out with a tax break, so that should make the general population happy. At first blush I thought: good; a tax break; that's wonderful. But is it a fair tax break? Is it going to give the middle income more of a burden or less of a burden? Because that's the majority of the population, middle income. I think it's good that the lower income will be taken right off. I think that's a very good part of this piece of legislation. I do. However, I think this will put the burden on the middle income, and eventually people are going to understand that.

If we look at this philosophy behind a flat tax, user fees are a product of a flat-tax philosophy. You know, you reduce the basic tax to the lowest possible level to accommodate the wishes of the wealthy. With this philosophy, if that is your philosophy, then user fees are going to end up being increased in order to make up the needed revenue. Now, this disenfranchises the poor even more. As user fees go up, that philosophy of a flat tax disenfranchises the poor

even more because they end up paying a higher percentage of their income than wealthier people do.

A flat tax encourages people to only look at themselves, and I don't think society as a whole fits in with that philosophy. I think that philosophy of a flat tax, of user fees also ties in with private health care and private education, because it's kind of "I'm just looking at me and what it's going to do for me," instead of the collective good, instead of what it will do for society.

MS CARLSON: It's un-Canadian.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's interesting. It's un-Canadian. I heard a lot of that today, actually, at the base at Namao, which is now called Steele Barracks. It was renamed today. I heard a lot of concern about being Canadian. It was cold; it was very cold. Steele was a tough man, and we were tough out there in the wind as the Lieutenant Governor inspected every single troop that has ever lined up in that barracks, I'm sure – heaven bless her – and then the artillery and then the band. She even went through the band.

While we were there – and I know the Member for Redwater was there as well – I even got to borrow a coat from a sergeant major, so I felt quite important for a while and warmer. While there, many of the discussions were on being Canadian and what it means to be Canadian, and in that is how we feel as a society and what we value. I would say that most of us value fairness . . .

MS CARLSON: And taking care of each other.

MRS. SOETAERT: . . . and taking care of each other. Yes, we want to strive to do our best and work hard for our families and hopefully get some extras and enjoy some of the finer things in life. In fact, I think each generation wants more for their children. We do. Most of us live in bigger homes than what we were born in and have two or three vehicles as compared to maybe one family vehicle. Education we value for our children, and we're willing to strive so that our family does as well as it can.

In that view of our family doing as well as it can, I think we extend that to our community – I do – and our province, and when you're sitting in the Legislature, I think we always think provincially as our responsibility. That's why we're elected here. That, of course, makes us stronger Canadians, I believe.

4:30

So while at this wonderful renaming ceremony, many people were talking about what it means to be Canadian, because at that base there of course are people from all over Canada. Many concerns about what's happened with health care being un-Canadian and a real concern that that would happen in Alberta. The joy of talking to those people from all over Canada is that they loved living in Alberta. They just think it's such a wonderful province. I am so proud that we are, I think, one of the choice places that people from all over Canada choose to live because we have so much in this province. But a real concern was: why would we in this province change our values of public health care and focus on private? So that ties in to fairness in taxation and if we think that fairness and equity are going to be compromised with Bill 18.

I am in total support of a tax cut. I just think it has to be fair. If we are going to penalize the middle income by eventually more and more of the burden being on them, then we have not made this bill as fair as it can be. If we look at the distribution of tax cuts under a 10.5 percent single rate, it can't help but be skewed towards the 4 percent of tax filers earning above \$100,000. They have the ability, and fortunately so, because of hard work, because of luck, because

of opportunity, because of how they can land on their feet, because of skill in business, because of education. Because of many factors, there are people who are very wealthy in this province and have worked hard to get so. I have to say that the people in my constituency who understand this – because lots of people just know it's a tax break and that's great – are very concerned about it.

Even the very wealthy would say: "You know what? I am not afraid of saying that I can share more of my tax dollars with those who are less fortunate." [interjection] Right; I am my brother's keeper. And you know what? You can talk about how people aren't working hard enough, they don't do this, and they aren't making enough money. Maybe there are a few like that. There will always be a few like that. In any profession, in any way of life there are the odd people who just kind of slip along. But I would say that certainly in Alberta most people work very hard, are very industrious, love this province, want to make a go of it, want to own a house, want to own a car, and want to do well for their family. I would say that most people in this province are very industrious and proud to be able to work and proud to say, "I work here, and I do this."

So those in the very high income are concerned about this as well, those that think globally and have a real social conscience. I believe they are concerned about this, those 4 percent earning over \$100,000, while the 39 percent of middle-income tax filers – now, that's 39 percent, almost 40 percent of tax filers. Almost half our population, almost 40 percent, between \$30,000 and \$70,000 who pay over 45 percent right now of the provincial personal income taxes in Alberta will receive smaller tax cuts as a percentage.

MS HALEY: That's not true.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, it is true. But you know what? I do welcome the member from Three Hills-Airdrie . . .

MS HALEY: It's not Three Hills.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's not Three Hills anymore. That got changed. Sorry. Airdrie-Rocky View. My apologies.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We've got a couple of things going on here. For one thing, we have somebody on this side speaking to someone on that side, and then the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert begins a discussion with them.

Hon. members, the speaker included, if you talk through the chair and ignore these others, then we can get along a lot better. Hopefully others will take the opportunity to stand and speak when it's their turn. Otherwise, listen or do your work.

Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, through the chair.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. Through the chair I apologize to Airdrie-Rocky View. I should know her proper name after all this time, so I apologize for that. Many people mix up mine, so I know what that's like. And I welcome other people to join the debate, after me of course. After me they can join in the debate; certainly not with me.

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: You know, I can't help but feel that this is just taking a little chunk and changing just a little chunk instead of proper tax reform. I have a feeling it's like a quick fix. We'll make people happy, we'll tell them they're getting a tax cut, and in the long run we haven't really reformed the whole tax system.

I don't claim to be an expert on this at all. It's what I've read. It's

what I've listened to. In fact, I've only had about five calls to my office on this, and they're from people who understand the tax system very well. I've had comments from other people saying: well, it looks pretty good to me. I've said, "Yeah, if it's fair," because everybody appreciates getting money in their pocket, absolutely.

Those who truly understand the tax system and have done a great deal of work with it – in fact, I have an appointment with a gentleman next week to come into my office. He's going to talk about how he sees this affecting middle income, how he sees it affecting seniors on a fixed income. In fact, he actually worked in the Northwest Territories in the treasury department many years ago, so he comes with a real background of an understanding of the tax system. He has grave concerns about this, and because we've been so busy in here, I haven't had the opportunity to actually sit down and make some notes with him that I could bring back to this Legislature. So I in no way claim to be an expert on this, but I do claim to be trying to learn about it, and the more I learn about this, the more I see it as not the fairest tax reform that we could have.

I absolutely believe in a tax cut that is fair, but I don't see this in this piece of legislation. I don't see this as a fair tax cut. I see it as a great tax cut for the wealthy and eventually disadvantaging the middle class, which most of us fall into, which 39 percent of us fall into, so that's the average person in my constituency. I have to tell you that a lot of middle-income people I think at first blush say, "This is good," but they don't realize that eventually it's going to be a tax grab for the middle class. Those people who earn less than \$70,000 in taxable income would receive a larger provincial tax cut under the current tax-on-tax system by the year 2004 if federal tax measures announced in this last federal budget are flowed through than they would under a 10.5 percent single-rate tax system. If the federal budget keeps going the way it is and we keep doing the flat-tax system, by the year 2004 the middle income is going to be disadvantaged.

So I would say that this hasn't been thought out. I would recommend that we have another go at it. I think we need a tax cut in place by January 1 next year. There are several solid suggestions out there, several people with a great deal of knowledge on taxing who are looking for real tax reform, not just a quick fix. I'm afraid this is like a simple quick fix, and it isn't going to do what people need.

I realize my time is almost at an end. I urge all members this weekend to maybe go to people in their community who really understand this and ask their opinion, because that's what I'm going to do. Truly, the focus has all been on Bill 11, and I want my constituents' feedback on this. I want them to give me their honest opinion. I want them to get some knowledge. I look forward to that opportunity to hear from them, people who are very involved in the tax system, and I hope other MLAs will too.

So with that, I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 18.

4:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and talk to our amendment that was put forward by Edmonton-Ellerslie. This is a very important bill, a very important direction to go, and I don't think anybody wants to see that we do not have a tax break. It seems to be the spin throughout the country. It started here. It seems to be flowing over, but it is a major concern. I do want to stress that we should be having something falling into line where it's

more fair and equitable for all Albertans and not the fact that we're looking for a quick fix for a certain bracket and above.

You know, there are lots of questions of: why are we doing that? Why are we looking at only one thing? Dropping off the bottom end is fine because next to the fact that they do need a break, they don't pay taxes. So that's an easy one. That's an easy fix.

The next fix is how to show that you're going to give a tax break without giving very many dollars away. If you really stress the fact that between \$30,000 and \$80,000 is where the big numbers would have to come from, this is where this government would have to spend a major dollar.

The amendment that has been put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is to stop this at second reading and actually for the government to go back and do some major research. As I spoke to this bill before, I stressed that there are other alternatives instead of making policy on the fly. You know, we noticed that on May 4 the new Provincial Treasurer actually introduced a change, a revision to the original bill, reducing it from 11 percent down to 10.5. I did point out that I do believe in tax breaks but I didn't believe in the 11 percent. The 10.5 isn't a figure that I'd back to any degree either, because I believe that we're nonprogressive. We should be looking at something, looking at a number of alternatives. It is important there again that nobody takes any words out of context, with myself saying that tax breaks are not what we need.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

Last year at a media golf tournament it was a ha-ha joke that Ed Gibbons' team was going to win a set of T-shirts and hats that said: tax me; I'm a Canadian. Well, when I went up to get it from the reporter from the Leg. bureau of the *Herald*, I just laughed and said: you're painting me with the same brush. I don't mind wearing that T-shirt, which I did for a number of months at the YMCA, and that actually created a lot of conversation. I gave the hat away to my father-in-law, who would love to wear that hat any day to the racetracks or anywhere. But the T-shirt did create a lot of conversation, and I was actually going to wear it in our caucus meeting the other day and create conversation there.

It is a major, major issue, and what I'd like to point out is that we're getting into the position where we have to come up with a tax break. We have to come up with alternatives of governing in here. So at second reading I'd like to point out that the comparable \$1.33 billion tax reduction package under the current tax-on-tax system, consisting of elimination of the 8 percent surtax, which is \$162 million, and the flat tax rate tax, which is \$325 million, retaining the Alberta and selected tax reduction and the reduction of the basic federal tax-on-tax from the 44 to 36.5 percent, would result in a fairer and more equitable reduction in taxes for all Albertans, including significant tax cuts to the middle income.

Fairness and equality is what I really want to stress and why I think this amendment should be looked at and thought about by this government. The distribution of tax cuts under the 10.5 percent single rate is skewed toward the 4 percent of tax filers earning above \$100,000, while 39 percent, the middle-income tax filers earning between \$30,000 and \$70,000, who pay over 45 percent of the provincial personal income taxes in Alberta, receive a smaller cut as a percentage of current PIT paid.

I want to stress that what we see in the bill is that the progressive nature of the tax system is eroded. All taxpayers, regardless of taxable income, pay the same 11 percent single rate. This is mitigated to some extent by the fact that some 190,000 Albertans are taken off the provincial tax rolls because of the increase in basic and spousal exemptions to \$12,900. As I mentioned before, that's an

easy item for this government to stress and spin, that they've dropped off the people at this income level, because it isn't adding up to a lot of dollars. The tax grab is actually at the middle income, Mr. Speaker. Taxpayers who earn less than \$70,000 in taxable income would receive a larger provincial tax cut under the current tax-on-tax system by 2004, if federal tax measures announced in the 2000 federal budget are flowed through, than they would under a 10.5 percent single-rate system. This is due to the fact that distribution of the tax cuts under the 10.5 percent single rate is skewed toward those taxpayers earning over \$100,000, as I mentioned before.

Higher Alberta margin rates for low- and middle-income earners. Assuming the elimination of .5 percent in the flat rate tax on January 1, 2001, taxpayers in the 17 percent bracket, which is up to \$35,000, will have a higher marginal rate under the 10.5 single rate than under the tax-on-tax system in the 2004 tax year. Taxpayers in the middle-income bracket, between \$35,001 to \$70,000, then would have approximately the same margin rate under the 10.5 single rate as they would under the tax-on-tax system in the 2004 tax year. Meanwhile, taxpayers in the middle-income bracket, above \$70,000, would have a significantly lower Alberta margin rate under the 10.5 percent single-rate tax than under the current tax-on-tax system. So it goes back to: really, why are we doing this?

Alberta will unhook from the federal system by levying the provincial tax on taxable income rather than on the basic federal tax this coming January 2001, Mr. Speaker. We actually have been playing around and tinkering, and we've got to a point: is 10.5 percent the proper amount? I would like to see other alternatives coming forward, and with the major flaws in the 10.5, it's my feeling that maybe there are other things. Maybe we can be looking at and actually going out and talking about the fact that we wouldn't spend a lot of dollars with the under \$12,900, but we would have to spend a major amount of dollars when it came to that bracket between \$35,000 and \$70,000. Maybe the \$70,000 should be \$80,000, and maybe we should be talking of reducing the percentage from 10.5 percent down to somewhere in the high 9s or 10 and going the other way on the higher income. If we are only selecting those taxpayers in the province that are big funders to political campaigns and not looking at the overall item, that goes back to why I'm saying that this amendment is one that we should be actually looking at.

4:50

The plan to make single-rate income tax work by cutting taxes another \$460 million a year on top of the \$800 million already announced does not fit the provincial budget numbers, Mr. Speaker. The government is caught in its own trap, its own money trap. The spin that was supposed to be carrying on and maybe taking the heat off Bill 11 earlier kind of never did happen, because I believe the undercurrent of concern around Bill 11 actually has created everybody being boxed in, whether it's our side or the government side, and talking about one particular bill.

Now we're here, and we're looking at the fact that our economy is growing so fast that I don't believe the forecast for resources to keep booming actually blends into this. Alberta restricts its budget procedure with a variety of laws. One demands that the province run a surplus of at least \$649 million in the 2001-2002 budget year and \$656 million in 2002-2003. Now, by doing this, there are only so many dollars you can actually play with. So this is where the tinkering comes into place, and they're tinkering with figures that are going to fit in with what they've already forecasted. The new tax cut takes big surpluses out of the picture. The current projection would put the surplus at \$446 million in 2001-2002 and \$308 million in 2002-2003.

DR. WEST: Just bump what you've got.

MR. GIBBONS: Why not just lower it?

The government probably lowballed its revenue estimates. There would likely be enough cash around to cover the difference, but you know, I'm getting different comments coming across from the Treasurer. He's saying: just bump it. Well, I'm saying: let's break the wage brackets out on three different levels. You have the low, you have the high, and you have the middle. Let's make a sort of progressive flat tax on each level and forget the name "flat" because it isn't working, isn't selling. It's a spin that I actually even bought into until I started to look at the figures and delve into it.

Honest accounting and living up to the spirit of its own rules requires rewriting of the forecast, and that is rewriting of the budget that was actually set out prior to this minister. The lower tax rate will be announced within the next few days, or maybe the minister will actually talk about how he's going to change the budget that was put forward by the previous Treasurer. Even if the revenues stay up, there will only be enough money if the province keeps growing and resource prices hold.

Now, this goes back to why we need lower taxes, and this is in the scheme of everything that's been happening over the last years. If you drop the tax rate to a point where you're going to attract people, you're attracting industry, which is great. You're attracting people from all over the country, which is great. Now we have the apprenticeship bill in front of us, and we're behind the eight ball on the apprenticeship end. We have to get moving on something.

We seem to be in a catch-up. We're catching up for all the lack of planning that we've had over the last six years while we were playing the one-string guitar and paying down the debt for the last six years. Now we're seeing bills coming forward that should have come forward a long time ago. We wouldn't have been in this predicament. If oil and natural gas prices come in at about 7 to 8 percent lower than expected next year, the rest of the budget assumption produces a deficit, and then where are we going to be? Something would have to happen to give to the spending side. So when we get into pushing a particular line of taxes and the revenue that we totally have to fall back on is from natural gas and oil, then we're back into the loop where we were back in the '80s, when we had the peaks and the valleys.

Balanced-budget laws have turned Alberta finance planning into an artificial experiment, and we keep hearing that it is better to experiment than to plan. Well, I'd rather see the minister sit down and build a plan and, now that he is the new Treasurer, maybe take what was wrong before and actually produce a new budget. Here's another case where there's a lack of real concern, of really wanting to listen to where we want to go, because if you're going to do policy on the fly, it's no different than tinkering.

The government wants to introduce single-rate income tax, but to make the switch acceptable, it wants to make sure that everyone gets a tax cut. This can't be accomplished under the present tax system they're putting forward, and it's only if the government actually spins it out a different way. The actual fact is that working Albertans need this break. Myself, I've got three of my own children going into secondary schooling this coming fall, and that's major, so I would love to have a tax break. But I want to make sure that what we're going to set forward in this legislation is something that is going to honestly be true instead of being tinkered with year after year.

This is actually why the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie put this forward, Mr. Speaker. I hope the new minister is of the belief that he would really love to see this work and will make sure that this is going to sell, because if it doesn't sell, it's another bill that has gone

faulty at this particular time. Sure, they can pass this bill, but it's only by numbers, and if it's not going to sell afterwards, then there's a major problem we have in this province.

The object of the original bill was to establish the rules and the procedures for the implementation and administration of Alberta's single-tax system, which, I really, really want to stress, are not the exact figures. So as I sit and let other people speak, Mr. Speaker, I only want to stress that I believe in a tax cut, but as I said before, I do not believe in 11 percent, and right now I do not believe in 10.5 percent. I do believe that we have to sit down and look at this amendment we've put forward and look at something that's going to build a system that makes Alberta better and makes everybody want to move to Alberta.

Alberta is a fantastic place, and every place we go – last year we went to Quebec for the parliamentary conference. It's nice to see, when you have six MLAs coming from Alberta, all of them sticking up for the fact that Alberta is a great province. I sat one night at a table of MLAs from Quebec, one being a Liberal member and the other one being of the government party, the Quebecois. In the conversation we had, they pointed out: what's it like coming from a have province? This was the sixth night that we were down there, and every night we had been treated very, very well. I looked at him and I said: "You know, if you were in Alberta, we would treat you very, very well. You wouldn't go back thinking that you weren't treated well, but we wouldn't be spending the money that you've spent on us in this past week." I wasn't insulting him. I was just challenging him to a conversation.

I said: what's it going to be like this coming fall when you have to really govern? They looked at me kind of quizzically, and I said: "Well, the fact is that you've been going around touting separation for so many years that that's your only platform. What's it going to be like this fall when all your unions start hitting you between the eyes?" They were actually quite concerned, which brought on more

conversation around the fact that the only way they could get away from the fact of where they are, the way they govern, and the way they overspend on things in Quebec is the fact that other provinces, like ourselves, are have provinces.

Well, we are a have province. We do have the natural gas. We do have the oil. We have had a great run in the '90s, and hopefully the run is going to continue in the 2000s. But the fact is that any of us that were in the industry in the 1980s, construction of any kind, do not want those days coming back. The bottom fell out in 1982. Things started to build. By 1985 things came back. By 1988 the bottom fell out again.

5:00

These are the years we do not want. We want to build. We want to put proper bills forward, and whether it's the apprenticeship bill that has been put forward or other different items, we need good legislation to create a better province and have a legacy to look back on and say: see; I sat in the Legislature in those years when we built good bills.

There are good bills on the table in front of us that should be passed, and I hope we're going to be sitting long enough that they are going to be passed. I was very happy that Bill 15 went through last night into Committee of the Whole and that the condo bill went through, bills that are being thought about, taken back. The condo one is a prime example.

Thank you.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 18.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 5:02 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 15, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. On this day let us be guided by Your eternal wisdom and confidence that You believe in all of us. Amen.

Hon. members, would you please remain standing now for the singing of our national anthem.

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very special group of officials with us today representing provincial and municipal governments of Komi and Karelia and Novgorod Oblast in Russia. The delegation members are visiting Alberta under the Canadian International Development Agency's Canada/Russia parliamentary program. While in Alberta the delegation members are examining the Canadian model of federal/provincial relations in secondary education and health care as well as the roles and responsibilities of municipal governments. These visits and exchanges serve to increase our understanding of Russia as an important partner for Canada and for Alberta and will hopefully lead to greater co-operation in the future. I would like to take this opportunity to wish our visitors a very successful and memorable trip to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask our honoured guests to please rise in your gallery and receive the very warm and hospitable welcome of this Legislature.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege today to stand and present a petition from 2,003 Albertans from Lethbridge, Calgary, Taber, Fort Macleod, Coleman, Airdrie, Magrath, Coaldale, Coalhurst, Medicine Hat, Cardston, and Raymond. This petition is asking for two people on shift during dark to daylight hours in businesses in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to present another petition today urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." This is from 131 residents of Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, and Coaldale.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a

petition signed by 72 Albertans opposed to privatization of health care. This brings the total number of signatures on this petition to 22,524 to date.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Assembly last week be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Legislative Assembly on May 11 regarding the disruptive and divisive labour dispute at the *Calgary Herald* be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the [Legislative] assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented last Thursday, May 11, now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the requisite number of copies, being eight, of my responses to written questions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the required copies of the Schedule of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Benefits from the Alberta health care insurance plan Schedule of Medical Benefits Procedures List. I'm tabling these documents in response to questions raised by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview on April 17, 2000.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is to the Minister of Economic Development asking him what activities have been suspended or canceled due to the murder, if you will, of a Canadian citizen in Vietnam as a result of an execution that

occurred while the Canadian government was still negotiating.

Another one is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations asking what sanctions her department would be undertaking in relation to the same Canadian citizen who was executed while the Canadian government was still undertaking to deal with her issue.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies today of a ceremony we were at last Thursday, May 11 at the military base. It was the Steele barracks dedication ceremonies, and this is named after Major General Sir Samuel Benfield Steele.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table five copies of a document entitled Bridging Downtown and Inner City. I had the privilege of attending the 30th annual general meeting of the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation last Friday. They are celebrating their first 30 years of providing services to the city of Edmonton and particularly to the residents of the inner city. This document, which was prepared by Kathryn Ivany and Beckie Garber-Conrad, is a real testimonial to all of the hard work they have done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table a copy of the report A Summary of the Alberta Suicide Data: Suicide and Self Inflicted Injuries, which highlights the fact that "since 1993, suicide has been . . . the leading cause of injury death among Albertans" with over 2,000 taking their lives between 1993 and 1997.

My second tabling today is the required number of copies of the program and accompanying information about the Alberta registered nurses educational trust. I was pleased to participate in the Edmonton Nightingale gala on Friday evening and to assist in raising money for nursing education and research.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four different tablings today. The first one is a document from 1991 titled Your Views and Experiences Are Critical in the Development of New Environmental Regulations for Alberta, circulated by the then Minister of Environment, the present Premier. So we have those copies.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, I've got three letters. The first two are from Paulette Smith of Claresholm, and the second one is from Aileen Pelzer of Calgary, both of whom are opposed to the Genesis proposal for development of the Spray Lakes area of Kananaskis.

The last document is an e-mail from Jerry Smith of Medicine Hat, who is opposed to Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there were a number of hands that went up, and I'm not sure I got them all. Any additional members?

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I'm very happy to introduce to you and other members of the Legislature two friends of mine from Calgary and also fellow lawyers. They are Janice Bruni of Bruni & Company. For many years in her practice Janice has acted as an agent for Alberta Justice in child welfare matters and also acts on behalf of the directors of child welfare for three First Nations. She's accompanied by Judith Park, also a lawyer but devoting herself to full-time real estate. She's with Re/Max Central in Calgary. They're both in the members' gallery, and I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce 38 students from two grade 6 classes from Pope John XXIII school in Fort Saskatchewan. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Vukovic and Mrs. McDonald. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Ms Melissa VanderLeek. Melissa is a home schooling student in grade 7 from Bon Accord. Her dad, Dave Linden, is the president of the press gallery. I would ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 43 students from Queen Street school in Spruce Grove. They're here with seven adults: their teachers, Mrs. Shannon McGann and Mr. Les Korn, and parent helpers Mrs. Edith Fehr, Mrs. Karina Beaudoin, Mrs. Barb Hawryluk, Mrs. Patricia Hamilton, and Mrs. Darlene Little. They're a great group of students who have had a good tour today, and I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. They are in both galleries.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. It's a fine day in May when I have the distinct honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 15 students from McArthur elementary school that are here for a School at the Legislature week, which is a wonderful opportunity for them to learn about what we do and precisely how it's done. They're here today with their teacher, Nellie Puim, and teacher assistant Terri Schlader, and the helper is Marie Callihoo. They're in the public gallery, sir, if they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, sir.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I have the great pleasure of introducing to you and through you to members of this Assembly Twila Tayfel. Twila is a constituent of Calgary-McCall, a fourth year

University of Calgary anthropology student, who is going to be spending a great deal of time in our office in Calgary. I request Twila to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a good friend of mine from Fort Macleod, a longtime businessman from that community, and now chair of the Chinook health region, Mr. Frank Eden. Accompanying Mr. Eden today is the senior vice-president from the Chinook health authority, Pam Whitnack. They are in the city today for some meetings. They're seated in the members' gallery. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Economics has been often referred to as the dismissal science, and it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly someone who brings light to the dismissal science, and that's a professor of economics at the University of Calgary, Dr. Kenneth McKenzie. Dr. McKenzie's research focuses on all aspects of public finance with an emphasis on tax policy. He has won several prestigious awards for the research, including the Harry Johnson award for best article in *The Canadian Journal of Economics* in 1996 and with co-author Ron Kneebone will be awarded later this year the Douglas Purvis memorial prize for excellence in a Canadian policy publication. As Bismarck once said: those who like sausage and those who like public policy should not watch either being made. I would hope that Dr. MacKenzie has made good sausage out of the public policy works that he's done, and I would ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Edmonton-Highlands By-election

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Edmonton-Highlands have been without a representative in this Assembly since February 2 of this year. Certainly we in the Official Opposition have heard from many of the residents of Edmonton-Highlands, in fact at their doors, about their clear opposition to Bill 11 of this Legislature. My questions are to the Premier. Why has the Premier been afraid to call a by-election in Edmonton-Highlands until he had slammed the door shut on Bill 11 debate?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, June 12 is hopefully going to be a good day for an election. It doesn't matter what issue is before this House or what issue is not before this House. An election is called when it's the right time to call an election. I could have waited until early September. This is two months earlier than the law requires us to call an election. I can't understand what the opposition leader is complaining about.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier explain to the people of Edmonton-Highlands why he felt their voices were unnecessary in the debate on Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as we speak, the campaign has begun, and if there are constituents in Edmonton-Highlands who want to express a view to the Liberal candidate from Leduc or the ND candidate from city council or our candidate, I'm sure that they will express those views.

THE SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the Premier's admission in recent days that Bill 11 could result in higher costs and longer waiting lists, will the Premier come out to the Edmonton-Highlands constituency and debate with me his health policy before he signs a single contract for private operators?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is not the leader of the Liberal opposition's by-election. This is not my by-election. This is not the leader of the third party's by-election. This by-election belongs to the candidates, and I look forward to their debate of that issue and all the other issues, particularly the issue of taxation, where the Liberals do not want to give 192,000 low-income Albertans a tax break. I would like to see them debate that.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Care Facilities Utilization

MRS. MacBETH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current crisis in our public health care system was created by this government, which made its cuts without a plan. Even worse, in the eight years of this government's mandate there has been not a single accurate study on patient capacity in the health care system. In fact, this government admitted that there were no studies at all of patient capacity in the health care system in a letter to the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora in December of last year. My questions are to the Premier. How does the government propose to meet the requirements of their own Bill 11, section (8)(3), that requires full utilization of public facilities, before contracting out to private facilities when they don't have any measure of it?

1:50

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness answer that question, but relative to the preamble, the crisis was created by the leader of the Liberal opposition when she was minister of health. It was this government that had to clean it up and to do all the fundamental reforms, but the crisis was created by a person by the name of Nancy Betkowski when she was the minister of health.

As to the question I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we are able to provide fairly comprehensive data, and if I recall correctly, such data was provided recently in a reply to a letter from a member of the opposition.

We are taking a very major initiative through our utilization commission to get very detailed, very accurate information about our health care system and to be able to project the needs of the health care system very thoroughly, Mr. Speaker. That is one of the areas of work that I think we're probably leading the country in in terms of that overall comprehensive look at utilization.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the government has finally figured out that they need a patient utilization study after we've been arguing for it for years, will this Premier assure Albertans that no existing or new contracts will be signed until a full and

accurate study of patient capacity has been completed and made public and shared with the people of this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, a bill that the Liberals voted against clearly indicates that before any contract is let and I would presume renewed, a number of things have to be shown. One, it has to be shown that the contract will be cost effective, that it will serve to reduce waiting lists, and a number of other conditions. I don't know why they would be so concerned now, because they voted against all those measures that would have to be taken.

THE SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see the Premier still has no answers.

What is the contingency plan to ensure that patients will not suffer if existing private contracts are canceled?

MR. KLEIN: Well, again, I'm somewhat bewildered, Mr. Speaker. Why would she be concerned about existing contracts when the leader of the Liberal opposition has expressed her overall and her global opposition to the whole notion of surgical clinics?

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Income Tax

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are looking forward to a provincial income tax cut. Certainly they need the money for new, higher utility rates, for school user fees, for fundraising, for higher property taxes, and for higher rents. We, of course, believe in tax cuts, but we believe in fair and sustainable tax cuts. Albertans are concerned that the people who will benefit from this government's tax policy changes are the same people who will benefit from this government's health privatization policy; namely, the very few with very high incomes. My first question is to the Premier. Will the Premier confirm that his tax policy means that 1 percent of Albertans with the highest income will get a 20 percent tax cut, while nearly 40 percent of Albertans in the middle-income category will see only a 13 percent tax cut? Will he confirm this?

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. the Premier, before I call on you, I just want to remind all members that we do have an Order Paper, and up for debate on this Order Paper this afternoon for second reading is something called Bill 18. If we're going to use the question period again to continue to debate, this sort of violates all the rules that we have.

I'll recognize the Premier.

Income Tax (continued)

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, relative to policy, first of all, there is no privatization policy in health. There is a protection of health care policy, which the Liberals voted against. They voted against protecting the publicly funded system as we know it today.

I look forward to observing the debate on Bill 18 and the taxation policy of this government. Speaking to the policy, Mr. Speaker, the policy, which again purports to become law, would take about 192,000 low-income Albertans off the tax rolls completely as it pertains to provincial income tax, and they're going to vote against it. Watch them.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier confirm that 1 percent of Albertans earning the highest incomes in this province will get an average tax reduction of nearly \$1,100 while 40 percent of Albertans in the middle-income category will get an average tax saving of only \$550?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer respond, but just before he does, there are so many matrixes involved with this particular situation that it all depends whether the person is single, whether the person is married, depends on the deductions as to how much money will remain in the individual's or the family's pocket.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Yes. I can confirm to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that the top 10 percent wage earners in this province pay 52 percent of all the tax in this province. If they believe over there that the progressivity of a tax system should penalize those aggressive people that started out at the lower incomes and worked themselves up, then they'd better state that to the people of Alberta emphatically.

The other thing I will point out is that they are misleading a bit of the people of Alberta by using total dollars when there are so many factors involved in the single-rate tax. They keep talking about the flat tax bill; it's actually a single rate of taxation. If you look at the categories and those percentages that they talk about, a single individual making \$20,000 would receive a 38 percent tax cut, whereas a dual-income family making \$100,000 will only see a 12 percent tax cut. A single individual making \$55,000 will get a 12 percent tax cut. That's a single individual without any children and that. A single-parent family making \$30,000 will see a whopping 276 percent tax cut. A single-income family making \$55,000 will see a 41 percent tax cut, and a single senior making \$20,000 will see a 62 percent tax cut.

I'm ashamed at where these people are trying to take this massive tax reduction in the province of Alberta.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this question goes back to the Premier. Given that this government's cousins in Ontario's Queen's Park have rejected a flat tax, presumably because they realize it's unfair to middle-income earners and to working families, why does this government persist in pushing an unfair flat tax?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, maybe in Ontario they're waiting to see what we do, because most of their fiscal reforms have all been a page out of our books. So I think that they'll see the flat tax. They'll watch it for a while, and they'll say: "Oh, my gosh, is that ever a good idea; is that ever working well. I think we'll do it too." I enjoy the competition with Ontario, particularly because they keep taking pages out of our books. They keep doing what we're doing relative to fiscal reform, and that's why Ontario and Alberta are the most economically vibrant provinces in Canada. And you know what? They're both Conservative provinces.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Bill 11 Regulations

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Edmonton-Highlands by-election will be the first opportunity Albertans have to express at the ballot box their frustration and anger with this government's

health care privatization agenda. The government's heavy-handed approach is now extending to drafting regulations for Bill 11. Instead of doing a broad public consultation prior to finalizing regulations, the Minister of Health and Wellness said last week that there will only be closed-door consultations with a few affected stakeholders. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier confirm that in developing draft regulations for Bill 11, the government plans to consult only with regional health authorities, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and private health care interests while excluding ordinary Albertans from the process?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the meat of this particular piece of legislation is in the legislation itself. As I understand it from the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, the regulations are in nature mechanical, and that is the mechanics of implementing the legislation.

I'll have him respond.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, as the Premier has indicated, this is very specific and detailed legislation as legislation goes, and yes, in certain sections there will be regulations that need to be established. They deal with, for instance, the College of Physicians and Surgeons and their concerns and the need to make sure the legislation meshes with their bylaws and their policy and decision-making process. Certainly we are committed to discussing the development of the regulations with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. I could go down the list of the four or five other groups that are key to the development of these regulations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm puzzled as to why the Premier is refusing to allow the same kind of broad-based public consultations in developing Bill 11 regulations as he allowed nine years ago when he was Environment minister.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that's a very interesting question, and I'm very happy that the hon. leader of the third party would allude to the Alberta Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. The two pieces of legislation cannot be compared in any way, shape, or form. The environmental legislation that I had the pleasure to introduce and see through when I was minister of the environment involved the consolidation of nine different environmental acts, and those acts were highly regulatory. Unlike Bill 11 the acts set the framework, but really the meat was in the regulations.

In Bill 11 the meat is in the legislation, and the mechanics are in the regulations. So the two pieces of legislation and the regulations associated with them are totally and absolutely different. This is like comparing apples and oranges and grapes and bananas.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While Albertans think Bill 11 will irreversibly damage the health care system, why does the government no longer care to listen to the concerns of Albertans as evidenced by ramming Bill 11 through the Legislature and now the refusal to broadly consult on the drafting of regulations?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I take great exception to that statement, because what the hon. leader of the third party fails to recognize is that there are now 52 surgical clinics operating, as I've pointed out before, performing some 152 different procedures and some 20,000 procedures a year. That has not had the kind of effect on the health

care system to which the hon. member alludes. This has been operating for some time.

I understand completely where this member is coming from. He would like to see and he has stated publicly – and the position is the same, I'm sure, as the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Alberta Federation of Labour, who back the Friends of Medicare. Their position is quite clear. They would like to see the elimination completely of all surgical clinics, including the Morgentaler abortion clinics, and have those clinics put back over a three-year period into conventional full-scale public hospitals. That is their position, and I can understand why he would be concerned.

I don't think the majority of Albertans agree with that position. I don't think the majority of the medical profession agree with that position. As a matter of fact, the Alberta Medical Association has stated quite clearly that there will be always be contracting out. There is contracting out now, and there will always be contracting out. That of course is contrary to the position of the ND Party, and I accept that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Hearing Aid Implants

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent of mine who has severe hearing loss attributed to childhood illness requires a bone-attached hearing aid, also known as the BAH system. Even though he needs this implant to continue his employment effectively, he is looking at a wait of a year or more for an interview and possibly another two- or three-year wait for the implant if he is accepted. Dr. John Di Toppa is the only specialist qualified to do these implants provincially and I understand, in fact, in western Canada. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister explain why Dr. Di Toppa is limited to 22 implants per year?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the bone-anchored hearing aid, or BAH system, is a very new procedure. It involves a hearing aid being connected with a small titanium implant device, and that in turn adheres to bone behind the ear. This has been successful in restoring the hearing of individuals. It is still to some degree in, I guess you'd say, the experimental stage, but there has been a great deal of success. The priority currently for the program is children who have this condition, particularly those who are born with an incomplete ear canal or a congenital deformity.

Limited budget and limited capacity are involved here, Mr. Speaker. We're doing about 20 to 22 implant procedures per year, and over the life of the program thus far there have been about 150 people that have received the operation. We acknowledge that there are waiting lists, but there is a careful look taken at the priorities of individuals who come forward for the procedure, and the physicians manage the list accordingly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister say if he is planning a review of this 22 implant limit?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I understand the history of the program, we have increased the funding for it. It is a procedure which on average costs \$18,000 per case. As I look at the years involved, tracing it back to 1998, there has been a modest increase

in the number of procedures done each year, and I expect that in the coming year's budget there will be more procedures done, although I cannot indicate at this time that every single person that might want or qualify for this procedure will be covered.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister tell this Assembly if there is anything he can do to ensure that a replacement is trained to replace Dr. Di Toppa should he ever choose to leave his practice for whatever reason, leaving Albertans with no BAH system specialists?

2:10

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, Dr. Di Toppa is, of course, a special specialized doctor. We're very fortunate to have him working in this province. We do, however, have vehicles in place for the recruitment of physicians. We work with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the AMA but particularly the college through our overall physician resource plan in this province, the one through which we have been able to recruit doctors very successfully for rural areas and where also we've had considerable success in recruiting people for combined research and patient practices in our major centres. Certainly the structure, the mechanism is in place to go out when we have a need and endeavour to recruit specialists that are needed and in very limited supply.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

School Fund-raising

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In an e-mail to the Premier a Calgary parent wrote in part:

My daughter recently came home with a letter from her school, attached to a Casino Volunteer Worker Application . . . At the bottom . . . was the following . . .

Prizes will be given to each student returning a completed application form from their parents!!

My questions are to the Premier. How widespread is the practice of bribing children to get parents involved in gambling to raise school funds?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as to how widespread it is, I really don't know. I don't believe that it is widespread.

Relative to the specific matter that was raised by the hon. member, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That kind of behaviour, that kind of issue from the school is completely intolerable, and if the hon. member will pass the name of the school and the child on to me, I will certainly take a look at it. I will also get the e-mail from the Premier and take a look at it, because that is not acceptable.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: when can Albertans expect to see an end to user fees, to fund-raising, and to casinos and to have their schools adequately funded?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the fundamentals of education schools are adequately funded. We have a tremendous commitment

in this province to education, both at the secondary level and at the public and primary level.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the nice to haves and the extras it has always been the custom of schools to enter into fund-raising campaigns.

Again, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I raised this exact issue with the Alberta School Boards Association back in the fall, and they assured me at that time that school fees, school fund-raising were also of concern to them. They essentially said: leave it to us; we will come forward with a plan that will stop this. I said that it is completely unacceptable for students in Alberta to fund-raise for textbooks. Consequently what you saw in the last budget was an 8.8 percent increase to the schools. To put that in comparison, the New Democrat government in Manitoba recently increased their budget for education by 4.5 percent. We are a good 4 and a half percent higher than that.

Mr. Speaker, fund-raising is something that I take seriously. I take the issue very seriously when parents are being told that they are fund-raising for textbooks, because that should not be happening at any school board in Alberta today.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, my third question is to the Premier. In spite of the government's claims of adequate funding schools are increasingly turning to gambling. Why?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, basically schools are under a new governance system. We have throughout this province now school councils. Those kinds of decisions relative to raising funds for extracurricular activities are really the responsibility of the school councils. The change in governance was made so that parents and teachers and, yes, the students could have more of a say in how their school is run, particularly as it relates to the optional and the extracurricular activities.

I'll have, again, the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to echo what the Premier has said. When it comes to things such as uniforms for the football teams, when it comes to rock walls, when it comes to the extras that are out there, they can fund-raise for that if they so choose. When it comes to the basics of education, we do not expect, we do not condone parents fund-raising for that. That is our responsibility and a responsibility that we take seriously.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Auxiliary Nurses' Collective Bargaining

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the mediation between the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta and the AUPE on auxiliary nursing adjourned last week. So my question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Could he tell us what is the status of the auxiliary nursing bargaining?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nursing bargain-

ing is taking place. The parties involved in the collective bargaining process are the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta – they represent 17 regional health authorities and eight voluntary organizations – and of course the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. AUPE represents in this particular case 6,700 licensed practical nurses, nursing attendants, and other auxiliary health care staff from across the province.

Yes, in fact the parties met last week with the mediator, and talks adjourned on May 11. Now, I understand that both parties are of course committed to the process, to continue to work with the mediator, and it's my understanding that the mediator will be contacting the parties to set additional dates.

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how long have the parties actually been without a collective agreement?

MR. DUNFORD: The collective agreement expired on March 31 of the year 2000. Bargaining started on February 9, and a mediator was appointed to the dispute on March 17. The parties began meeting with the mediator on March 28. Now, the mediator's recommendations for settlement were rejected, and the parties returned to mediation, and I can provide the dates: April 25, 26, and 27. The mediator then proposed a break in the talks, and mediation resumed May 9, 10, and 11.

MRS. O'NEILL: Also, what role is your department playing, if any, in these negotiations?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, our focus is on continuing to support the parties by making mediation services available without the minister intervening. We believe the best solutions are those made by the parties themselves, and we encourage them to make every effort to resolve their issues at the bargaining table.

Workplace Health and Safety

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, today marks the first day of North American safety and health week, a reminder to all of us that workplace injuries and deaths are unacceptable and preventable. Alberta has already had 19 workplace fatalities in the first four months of 2000, a rate of approximately one per week. In 1998 there were only 34 workplace deaths, and this increased to 54 deaths in 1999. Can the Minister of Human Resources and Employment tell this House why the rate of workplace fatalities in Alberta has increased to approximately 59 percent when the size of the workforce has only increased by 11 percent?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, first of all, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. I appreciate the fact that maybe the health issue might be behind us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. DUNFORD: No? Okay. Well, one can always hope.

THE SPEAKER: Actually it would be really helpful to address the comments through the chair, and then we'll have less debate.

MR. DUNFORD: Okay. All right. Thank you.

There's no question, Mr. Speaker, that we've started out in the year 2000 with a lot of activity in the workforce, and one of the unfortunate aspects of that has been an increase thus far this year in our workplace fatalities.

2:20

As minister I receive a report on each and every fatality that takes place. I, like members of my staff, look to see if there's any pattern. Is there something that we're overlooking? Is there some way in which to approach this? I have to say to the hon. member that certainly we need to extend our sympathy and our empathy to all of the families out there that have been affected by these workplace fatalities. We have a staff that is right at the work site investigating the particular circumstances of the fatality or the injury.

Thus far there are no apparent patterns that have started to evolve, and all we can do is continue to try to enforce as best we can the law and regulations that we have but also to ask everyone within the sound of my voice today to focus on not only their own individual safety but of course the safety of their fellow workers.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, given this alarming trend of increasing workplace fatalities, will the Minister of Human Resources and Employment reallocate the \$4 million a year the government currently spends to subsidize industry-sponsored safety associations to more rigorous enforcement of safety regulations?

MR. DUNFORD: No, I'm not prepared to make that reallocation at the present time. I'm a believer in education. I believe that the record in Alberta since the inception of the partnership program speaks for itself. Since 1992 we've had a steady decrease in the statistics as they relate to workplace incidents and workplace injury. We believe that education is the way to go. I look for our department to be educators, but certainly as a last resort we can be enforcers.

I don't want anyone out there to consider that we're not taking the situation seriously, but in terms of a full-scale policy change at this particular point in time, no, we're not going to do that.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, given that one of the prime goals of unions is to help protect the health and safety of working men and women in Alberta, shouldn't this government be supporting unions instead of trying to break them?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, all I could say to the hon. member is that certainly I've been following the pattern that has been set by ministers responsible for labour before me in the sense that we try to provide as best we can a level playing field here in the province. As far as a jurisdiction, we think that in Alberta unions are free to collectively bargain. They're certainly free to offer advice to the government. I see the Alberta Federation of Labour, who I believe to be the chief spokesperson for the unions within our province, on a regular basis.

Certainly someone like myself who has a background in labour relations knows and appreciates the tremendous opportunities that unions can provide and have provided in our province as far as an exemplary labour relations climate. Alberta doesn't have to take second place to any jurisdiction within this country on the ability of employers and employees through the process of collective bargaining to sit down and resolve their particular issues, Mr. Speaker. This is a tremendous jurisdiction for labour relations, and all of us, including the hon. member, ought to be proud.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Alberta Children's Hospital

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been a great

deal of talk in Calgary about renovating the Alberta Children's hospital and perhaps even building a new facility. It's my understanding that a report on the status of the facility is due to be tabled this week. Could the Minister of Health and Wellness explain what is happening in regard to this facility?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am aware that for some time now there has been work going on in Calgary with respect to the redevelopment or possibly the rebuilding of the Children's hospital. There is, as I understand it, a foundation in place which is raising money to be complementary to this project when it goes forward.

As I understand it, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of different alternatives being considered, and I'm sure they're covered in a comprehensive manner in the report. There's the alternative, as I understand it, of going to a new site, possibly near the existing Foothills hospital. There's the possibility of full development on the current site. There is the possibility of redevelopment on the current site and keeping part of the current building and adding on to it and enhancing it. Certainly there are considerations being given to partnering with the volunteer and the public sectors on some aspects of that particular project.

Mr. Speaker, the report, as I understand it, has come to conclusion, and I'm sure it will be something that, first of all, the supporters of the Children's hospital and the Calgary regional health authority will want to examine in considerable detail before it is presented any further.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister explain his ministry's process for dealing with any recommendations that may come forward from the report?

MR. JONSON: Well, this, Mr. Speaker, is certainly a major and very, very significant project, but we have a standard overall process that we use. When proposals come in for major capital projects, they go through a set of criteria. In other words, they're screened as to the need for the facility: are there waiting time situations; will this help the overall service throughout the region, if not through the whole province? Of course, the Children's hospital in Calgary serves the whole southern part of the province if not the entire province. So we do have a criteria scale that we run our projects against, and then we work from there in terms of allocating dollars when they're available.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister indicate when any decisions may be made as a result of the recommendations in this report?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to, first of all, take note that, as I understand it at least, this report has just been completed and will first of all have to be considered by the Calgary regional health authority. The Calgary regional health authority will have to decide on what their priority for this particular project is. I assume that when they do that, they will submit that along with their other capital priorities to us, and then we will make a decision accordingly.

I cannot, Mr. Speaker, at this particular time predict when a decision will be made at the provincial level. I expect, given that it is such an important project, that the Calgary board will want to carefully consider it, but they will certainly want to get it on to us as soon as possible.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Peter Lougheed Hospital

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgarians are concerned about 14 million tax dollars that have been spent on the new computer system at the Peter Lougheed hospital. Medical professionals have said that the system could compromise patient care, and in many cases professionals refuse to use the system. Health authority staff members are saying that the system is already obsolete, that the system is a dinosaur. That's their word, not mine. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness this afternoon. Why did the minister of health, the Minister of Government Services, the minister of science, and the chief information officer allow the unelected Calgary regional health authority to invest 14 million tax dollars in an obsolete computer operating system?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure that I would agree with the hon. member's assessment. I understand that there was an article in today's paper dealing with statements of this particular type. I would certainly take the topic as being a serious one, but I would certainly not from one newspaper article jump to the conclusion the member across the way has.

I think this needs to be reviewed. We'll certainly look into it and see what the issues are. I take it seriously in that regard, but I don't think it is fair at this point to just automatically agree with what is reported there.

2:30

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, there were lots of sources for information on this problem.

I might follow up and ask the minister: why is the Calgary regional health authority apparently prepared to spend a further million dollars to try and at least partially fix the problem? Isn't this a case of simply throwing good money after bad?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would fully expect that the regional health authority will look at that particular matter, but if we have a \$14 million system and it needs to be upgraded, that is happening with electronic information systems all across this country. The technology, the capacity, the ability in this particular area of our networks is increasing every year, and I expect that systems all across North America are being upgraded every single year. The ratio of a million dollars in improvements to a \$14 million investment is not unusual.

MR. DICKSON: Well, my final question to the Minister of Health and Wellness would be this: what will be the total cost, then, to taxpayers in this province to replace that system with one that is usable, that is safe, and that won't immediately be obsolete?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as sometimes happens from across the way, they take different directions at the same time and in almost the same breath.

If in fact there is a problem with the system – and we will certainly follow up and check on this – or if it is as the first reference seems to indicate, a situation where the system needs to be upgraded at a cost allegedly of a million dollars, I expect that that would be the action the regional health authority will take. As far as I understand it, there is no conclusion that the system needs to be replaced.

In the member's first statement he indicated that that was the case. Now he's on to replacing it. So let's just back up. We'll have our staff have a look at the situation, find out what actually is going on,

and I'm sure the Calgary regional health authority through their administration is already working hard on that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Sleep Apnea Treatment

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today has been brought to my attention by at least three constituents of mine within the last six months, and it's the issue in rural Alberta regarding the government's decision to fund continuous positive airway pressure machines for Albertans who suffer from sleep disorders. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. I wonder if he can tell us why the program is only available to people that live in Calgary and Edmonton.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the program with respect to the treatment of sleep apnea is a provincewide program. The treatment is not just available to those in Edmonton and Calgary. It is funded provincially under the provincewide services section of our budget, and we do have two centres, in Edmonton and Calgary. At this particular point in time this is sensible in terms of the strategic location of sites and the staffing and the various other items that go with the offering of this program.

However, Mr. Speaker, there is a proposal, a plan, as I understand it, in the Chinook region in Lethbridge whereby they are proposing to establish a centre there, and that is being given, as I understand it, serious consideration by the provincewide services committee that administers this and other provincewide programs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same Minister of Health and Wellness. Can he explain why the program is restricted to only level 1 sleep clinics?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this decision in terms of the condition or the nature of the service that is to be provided is something, as I understand it, that has been very, very carefully considered. We are following not just national but international standards with respect to the treatment of sleep apnea. That is why only a certain stage or level of this particular condition is treated under this program with these sleep apnea devices. In this particular case I think what we're doing in Alberta is in keeping with other countries in the world let alone other provinces in Canada.

MR. COUTTS: My final supplemental to the same minister: can he tell us how much has been spent by government on this important program?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I recall, the expenditure is I believe about \$850,000 that is being spent right now with respect to the equipment for this particular program. There is a proposal I know to expand this particular program as the need shows itself in the province. It is a highly specialized program, one that of course is extremely important for the individuals involved. We will continue to try and provide the best level of care and keep operating with the high standards that it has had in the past.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, a few seconds from now we'll call on the first of seven members today to participate in Recognitions.

Before I call on the first member, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of pleasure that I have the opportunity today to introduce a class of 16 students from Will Sinclair high school in Rocky Mountain House. They're accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Bob Walton, and a parent, Mr. Lloyd Hoetmer. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to recognize the remarkable achievement of Scott, a very courageous young man who until nine months ago was a chemically dependent adolescent. On Saturday, May 20, 2000, he will become the 131st graduate of the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, or AARC, program.

When Scott entered the AARC program on August 30, 1999, at the age of 20, he was extremely dependent on alcohol and drugs and was a lonely, confused, angry young man, but Scott knew he needed help and has been committed to the recovery program at AARC and has moved through treatment at a rapid pace. He was willing to do the work to change and has chosen to live his life as an honest, principled man.

Scott is currently upgrading some of his grade 12 courses in order to apply to university. His attitude and work ethic in the AARC learning centre has been excellent. Dr. Dean Vause, executive director, concludes: Scott has gone from loser to leader; I have the utmost respect for him; I have also been impressed with his family's commitment.

I challenge all MLAs to learn more about the success of AARC and to support this nonprofit organization.

Scott, I wish you all the very best in the future. Congratulations. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

2:40

Juvenile Arthritis Week

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I rise to recognize Juvenile Arthritis Week, which is from May 13 to May 19. Juvenile arthritis affects many children under the age of 16. The disease causes joint inflammation, a painful condition that can result in permanent joint damage. Many people think that it's a disease that strikes only the elderly. However, it can and does affect children. It may be a chronic condition. The symptoms may come and go from one day to the next or even the course of one day, and it may go into remission for years only to return again. The cause of juvenile arthritis is still unknown, and there are no fast or simple solutions.

The goal of Juvenile Arthritis Week is to bring about public

awareness to this chronic illness and highlights the need for more research. Hopefully, a cure for this illness will be found in the near future.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Multiple Sclerosis

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The month of May has been proclaimed to promote awareness of multiple sclerosis, which is a lifelong autoimmune disease that affects the brain and spinal cord. MS is probably more prevalent in Alberta than anywhere else in the world. More than one in 500 people are affected, and up to 75 percent of those are women.

Today I'm pleased to recognize the work of Dr. Luanne Metz, who is a prominent University of Calgary neurologist. Dr. Metz was chosen as the only Canadian on the North American steering committee of an international study testing the effectiveness of the first oral medication for multiple sclerosis. This is very good news, and it's welcome because today all four existing medications for multiple sclerosis are taken by injection. Having the option of taking an oral medication will be less painful and far more convenient for patients.

I invite all members of the Assembly to wish Dr. Metz the greatest success in her work with the trial of this new medication as she brings hope to over 6,000 Albertans with multiple sclerosis.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Palliative Care Week

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week marked Palliative Care Week. Palliative care is a unique form of health care, developed to address the needs of those with terminal illness. This specialty focuses on the needs of the patient and the family when a cure for a life-threatening illness such as cancer or AIDS is no longer available.

A primary goal of palliative care is to improve the quality of a person's life as death approaches and to help patients and their families move toward this reality with comfort, reassurance, and strength. Palliative care is not focused on death. It's about specialized care for the living. Palliative care is at the cutting edge of the shift to home-based and community-empowered care, that is central to most health care reform taking place today. In fact, palliative care is critical if our society is to successfully reorient health towards the community.

Today, many terminally ill patients and their families want to be free from the frenzy of the acute care hospital, preferring instead their own home or the personalized setting of a hospice or palliative care unit. We must ensure that an appropriate infrastructure for provision of palliative care services outside the hospital is operational before this shift can take place.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Youth Immigrants of Distinction Awards

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to continue speaking on the recognition of recipients of youth immigrants of distinction awards, given out by the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society.

Samir Pradhan came to Alberta from India. Recently he was a

recipient of the Alberta Great Kids award, among the 16 selected out of 380. He is an informal adviser to the Minister of Children's Services. He volunteers for many community-based organizations. He received many academic awards and trophies from school, science fairs, and Rotary clubs. When in grade nine last year, he created his own web page design company, CyberSpace Services.

Stephen Kung came to Alberta from Hong Kong when he was seven. Currently he's in grade 12, achieving marks in the top 5 percent while enjoying a high profile in track and field and football. He is also very active in many international and local community organizations.

Casey Wang came to Alberta from China in 1996 without any English language knowledge. She is now in grade 12. She is a self-taught achiever, and she is achieving 96 percent in her music class at the Royal Conservatory of Music.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Day of Compassion

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Saturday, May 20, will be recognized as the Day of Compassion, a day dedicated to the treatment and understanding of Alzheimer's disease and other dementia.

Alzheimer's disease will be the biggest health challenges for the 21st century, according to the Alzheimer Association of Alberta. The cost of informal caregiving alone is estimated to be \$5 billion. Over 15,000 Albertans are now affected by Alzheimer's disease, but this number is expected to swell to over 44,000 by 2010, and by 2031 there will be over 750,000 Canadians with Alzheimer's. It directly affects currently one in three Canadian families.

Barbara Biggs, the executive director of the Alzheimer Society of Calgary, had observed that the best way to predict the future is to create it. We've seen some encouraging recommendations in the long-term care review report and also some key findings from professors Fast and Keating at the University of Alberta, but it's going to be necessary to implement those recommendations, including the development of a provincewide plan for meeting the needs of people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

Crime Prevention Awards

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to recognize two very special individuals from my constituency, Constable Laurel Kading from the Morinville RCMP detachment and Trevor Tychkowsky, a concerned citizen from Smoky Lake. These two individuals were selected as Alberta Justice crime prevention award 2000 recipients for excellence in the area of volunteer crime prevention. There were a total of 13 recipients from throughout Alberta. To all, hearty congratulations for your hard work and commitment in providing a valuable service to our communities.

head: Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 18

Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

Ms Carlson moved that the motion for second reading be amended

to read that Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly believes that as a result of the tax reduction measures announced in the 2000 federal budget, the bill would not ensure that all Alberta taxpayers receive a fair tax reduction.

[Adjourned debate May 11: Ms Calahasen]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to the amendment, which would have us look for a second time at Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. I don't quite recall who it was, but there was a sage that said at one time that taxing is the art of plucking the most feathers from a goose with the least amount of hissing. It seems to me that the government with its proposal is going to have the taxpayers hissing at the government and the taxpayers hissing at each other. That's exactly what the impact of Bill 18 will be.

I can recall first hearing about the flat tax in this city when Peter Pocklington was running for the leadership of the Conservative Party. I believe that the flat tax proposal was part of his leadership platform. We also heard Forbes in the United States, an aspirant for the U.S. presidency, expound on the virtues of a flat tax. It makes one question: why would some of the richest people in our society be those that were promoting and favouring a flat tax? It raises a number of suspicions, and those suspicions, of course, are confirmed when you look at the distribution of the benefits that will come about if Bill 18 becomes law in the province.

Essentially, 4 percent of the tax filers in our province, earning over \$100,000, will benefit. The 39 percent of the tax filers earning between \$30,000 and \$70,000, who pay nearly half of the provincial personal income taxes in the province, are going to benefit too but to a much lesser extent. It's this inequality, this unfairness that is at the heart of the objections to Bill 18 and why the opposition believes it's time to step back and take a second look at the proposal and to have the kind of discussion that we think the proposal warrants.

2:50

The notion of a flat tax, the simplicity of it, is one that's very beguiling, Mr. Speaker. I was on the Internet on the weekend, and on one of the sites they had published a poll that indicated that somewhere near 95 percent-plus of the respondents to that poll favoured a flat tax. The reasons that were given for that: the notion of it being fair was one that seemed to attract people, and it was simple. Well, that may be true but not the kind of flat tax that we have before us in this Legislature.

I want to talk for a few minutes about the issue of fairness. The Centre for Social Justice in October of 1998 put out a report entitled *The Growing Gap: A report on growing inequality between the rich and poor in Canada*. That report had a number of interesting observations selected for the kinds of conclusions that it reached. It was based on some fairly solid evidence. One of the things that struck me as I read it was the shape of the income, the shape of the Canadian workforce, and the shape of the taxpaying workforce in particular.

They made some rather telling comments. They indicated that "the top 10 CEOs in Canada each brought home more than \$10 million last year." Now, you think of that: one executive earning \$10 million, and the top 10 in Canada fit into that category. "On average, the top 100 CEOs saw a 56% increase in compensation last year." A 56 percent increase in their compensation. We look at wages on the other hand. "Wages are not keeping up with inflation. Many people have had their pay frozen during the 1990s." And

"even unionized workers" find themselves in this position. In this city at this time the brewery workers are facing a proposal from the company that would, if the press reports are correct, see their wages rolled back 30 percent. That's quite a striking contrast, Mr. Speaker: the chief executive officers gaining 56 percent increases and workers being asked to take a 30 percent rollback. "Federal public servants have had one pay increase in the 1990s." Another indicator of the shape of that taxpaying labour force is that "welfare rates, welfare eligibility and/or shelter allowances have been reduced in almost every province since 1995."

I think one of the things that sort of profile indicates is the unfairness of actions and things that are going on now in the marketplace as a result of government financial policy, and we should pause and reflect before we take any action that adds to that inequality. Why would we want to do anything that would worsen what is already the case?

One of the interesting sidebars that the Centre for Social Justice has in its report is a sidebar entitled: Some people are worth more than others. They go on to indicate that most of us were fairly shocked when we found out that Bill Gates of Microsoft owns as much personally as 40 percent of the United States population. That's an astounding figure. The chief executive officer owns as much as 40 percent of the U.S. population. We dismiss that kind of information because, you know, it's south of the border, it's those Americans, and it couldn't happen here.

Quite the contrary. In Canada the owner of 68 North American newspapers, including the *Globe and Mail*, the *Winnipeg Free Press* and the *Victoria Times-Colonist*, at least until recently, in 1997, according to *Forbes* magazine, had a personal net worth of \$14.4 billion. One individual, one Canadian, has a personal net worth that's the same size as the provincial budget. Imagine that.

They went on to indicate that how wealth is spread out among Canadians – and, again, that's what Bill 18 does, spread wealth among Canadians – is really quite interesting. In 1984 – and that's the most recent evidence. It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that we've stopped keeping track of wealth distribution in this country since 1984. That's the last report, and it's interesting that that's now being resumed. The net worth of all Canadians was estimated to be about \$3 trillion in 1997. So the owner of that newspaper chain has a personal wealth that is more than the collective wealth of a third of Canadians. One individual personally has more money than is the wealth of a third of Canadians. They have Bill Gates in the United States, and we have our own Canadians with situations that are just as unequal.

DR. WEST: Point of order.

THE SPEAKER: A point of order. The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

Point of Order Relevance

DR. WEST: Under *Beauchesne* 459, relevance. I keep hearing the name Bill Gates and the American system. What relevance does that have to Alberta, Canada? We're dealing with a bill that's being presented before this Assembly. I know there's a wide range of debate that can take place in second reading, but I wish they would stick to this country so that we can at least address the laws that we have here and not somewhere in the United States.

MR. DICKSON: Surely the short answer to this is: why would we be so narrowminded and so foolish in this Assembly to ignore evidence that comes from other jurisdictions? It would seem to me

that the only responsible way of debating legislation is to draw lessons. Now, it may be that the government chose to ignore the lessons around Bill 11 from Australia and the United Kingdom and other places. That may be one of the reasons we had a flawed piece of legislation passed last week.

With respect, I'd like to hear more comparisons. I think it's completely and totally relevant that we look at what's happening in other jurisdictions. It would be perilous in the extreme for us to proceed blindly over the cliff. This isn't a buffalo jump we're witnessing. This is a debate about a major, fundamental change in our tax structure. That's what this reasoned amendment is about, and that's the debate I've been hearing.

I think the point of order is completely off base, Mr. Speaker, with respect.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we do have a reasoned amendment before the House. That is what has been recognized. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has been given the floor, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is making his contribution to the debate at hand. He has not restricted his examples, at least to the ear of the chair, to individuals living in another country. He certainly seemed to indicate that there was some individual in Canada who was equal to another individual in the United States, by way of an example. The chair would like to remind hon. members again that the proposal we have in front of us basically is for the reform of the taxation system, and the examples being utilized by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods basically deal with individuals who are taxed under a different proposal than the one before us.

The chair is going to listen very attentively to find the relevance because the chair surely appreciates that there will be relevance.

3:00

Debate Continued

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The case I was trying to make was that we need to pause and look at Bill 18 a second time because I believe that Bill 18 contributes to inequalities that already exist, and I was drawing on examples of inequalities elsewhere and in Canada and trying to use those examples. I would like to use further examples in terms of what's happened in our country and what's happened to families as a result of government fiscal policy and government taxing policy. I apologize to the minister if I was a little slow getting to the point.

I believe firmly and I think the evidence is rather clear that Bill 18 favours high-income earners at the expense of middle-income earners, and it shifts the tax burden from upper-income earners to middle-income earners. I think the evidence supporting that is very clear. When you take that proposal and layer it on top of conditions that already exist in the country, then I think Bill 18 is deserving of a second look.

If you look at the 85 percent of Canadian families, those people that are raising children under 18 – in 1973 the richest 10 percent of families with children under 18 made 21 times more than the poorest 10 percent of Canadian families. So here you have the top 10 percent with children under 18 and the bottom 10 percent with children under 18. That top group made 21 times more than that bottom group. In 1996 the richest 10 percent of families, that top group again, made 314 times more than the poorest 10 percent of Canadian families.

So you take that and you apply it to Alberta. Here you have a group of taxpayers already making hundreds of times more than the lowest taxpayers in the province, and they are going to be given additional benefits if Bill 18 becomes the law. I think that, Mr.

Speaker, should give us pause to take a second look at Bill 18.

If you look at 1973 across the country, 60 percent of families with children under 18 earned between \$24,500 and \$65,000. So 60 percent of the families sat in what was then considered the middle class. By 1996 that same group, that middle class, had shrunk, and only 44 percent of the families with dependent children made between \$24,500 and \$65,000. The middle class has already shrunk dramatically over the last 25 years, and Bill 18 contributes again to a burden on that middle class. I think that's wrong-minded government policy when that happens.

Most of the change that happened in the past 25 years has happened to the middle class. The earning equivalent of between \$37,600 and \$56,000 in 1973 accounted for 40 percent of the population. A generation later only 27 percent of the population found themselves in the middle. So there's been an attack on the middle class, and Bill 18 continues that attack, I believe, Mr. Speaker.

I think we need to look at the kinds of economic principles that Bill 18 seems to support. Again, it seems embedded in those old trickle-down policies which were so widely adopted abroad years ago. The argument goes that if you remove the restrictions on the already wealthy so that they can accumulate more wealth, then they'll make more investments and the wealth in itself will trickle down to those at the bottom. This is supposed to mean that more people will be working and everyone is going to be better off. Well, that kind of economic policy has been questioned, Mr. Speaker, and to have that sort of notion underlying the bill and used as the defence for greater benefits being given to high-income earners seems to be the height of unfairness.

I think there has to be a very deep and thoughtful look at the relationship between equity and economic growth. What happens when a society chooses to open the gap between the rich and the poor, and what is the impact on the economy? Again, we can look outside the borders of our own country and find examples of where that happens. We can also find examples of where that doesn't happen, where there is concern with equality, where there is concern that the gap between income groups is not widened but is in fact lessened.

I'd like to just finish, if I might, Mr. Speaker, with a couple of comments about the shape of the tax system across the country and the kind of context that is out there that Alberta changes will become part of. There's been a marked shift in who pays the bills in Canada from the corporate to the personal income tax, shifting the profile of tax revenues towards more regressive forms of taxation. I think everyone agrees that a flat tax is regressive. For example, corporate contributions to paying for Canada represented 25 percent of all federal revenue in 1955. In 1973 they were paying 17 percent, and in 1996 they accounted for only 12 percent of federal revenues. It's within that context that the changes to Alberta's taxing system are being considered.

So for those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I think we would be wise in this Legislature to pause and take a second look at it. I think that the government itself has to admit that it hadn't thought through the whole situation that carefully. They came out with 11 percent, and that was quickly changed to 10.5. I'm still waiting to see the kinds of predictions down the road to 2004, 2005, and 2007 in terms of its impact on Alberta and the kinds of revenues that will be secured from the taxing system. The whole exercise to this point seems to have been one that was hurriedly put in place and not that carefully thought through, and because of the great impact that it has for Albertans, I believe that the Legislature should support the amendment before the House.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and support this amendment to Bill 18. It's a reasoned amendment, and I think it makes a lot of sense. Basically what the amendment is stating is that given the implications of the federal budget, this bill cannot ensure that Alberta taxpayers will receive a fair tax reduction. I think that's very true. I know that the Treasurer has adjusted his numbers now and dropped down the percentage points and moved up the exemptions, but it becomes a game. It's one government trying to out-tax-cut the other government, and that is not good for Albertans.

3:10

I want to make myself perfectly clear. This is a change in tax structure. It is not the only way that exists for this hon. Acting Treasurer to give Albertans a tax cut. It's a fundamental shift in the structure as it exists, and it's being touted as the only way to give tax relief. That's just simply not true.

I want to point out some of the issues I have with the notion of going to a flat tax. A tax structure should have three goals: simplicity, growth, and equity. The only thing that this government's flat tax structure will achieve is simplicity, and that's not good enough, Mr. Speaker. We need to have growth and equity along with that. The notion of putting more money into the pockets of Albertans is one that we all would like to see. However, this particular tax policy isn't going to do that. This is basically shifting the tax burden. That's what it's designed to do. It's certainly not accompanied by overall tax reform. It is one piece of the puzzle. When you start looking at changing structures piece by piece, they don't become systematic, so Albertans will not see the greatest overall effect of this by going to a flat tax.

It's also an ideology, and it's an ideology that is certainly bought into by some people on the very right side of political issues, but it's not one that has been adopted wholeheartedly by many other political parties, be it one group of Republicans in the U.S. – it certainly hasn't been adopted by the Democrats. It hasn't been adopted by the Conservative government in this country, certainly not by the Liberals. The only people we see actually looking at this as a potential tax reform is a party that's on the most extreme right side of politics in this country, and that would be the Canadian Alliance, or Reform Party. Now, given the meld in this Assembly across the other way, I guess that would fit. But is ideology a reason to make policy? No. Is it the best policy? No. It has to be for the collective good, and this particular tax policy is not for the collective good at all.

Also, in order to achieve the benefits of a flat tax, the taxes have to be kept low and the revenues have to be high. Well, we know the economy in this province. We know that even with the diversification that has occurred, the peak and the wave that we're riding right now is not going to last. At some point it's going to crash. Then I ask the question: is this flat tax structure going to be able to continue to exist for Albertans? No, not likely, not very likely at all. So that's another concern I have.

The whole issue of real income in this province and in the country in general. At the bottom end, the low end, we have seen the real income fall. In the middle we've seen a stalling, or a stagnation, of real income. The only growth we've seen is at the top end on the income scale in this country and in this province. My fear, Mr. Speaker, is that this type of flat tax will only increase the tax burdens that exist already. It will worsen the existing drift of greater economic disparity or equality in this province. What we see happening now, where we have that gap growing in the middle

income, is not necessarily the answer, quite frankly, to bringing that gap closer. This will only serve to make that gap broader. So I think that's something we have to consider. A progressive tax system will do that.

There's no question about the issue of: should Canadians, should Albertans get a tax break? Yes, they should. But do we do that by creating this false structure, if you will, or should we be looking at an overall progressive change? That's not what we see here.

I want to talk about the issue of fairness. We've brought that up several times. My colleagues have brought that up, and I think that's something that's a big part of the system we have now. I'm going to quote a fellow. His name is Dr. Robert Shapiro. Dr. Shapiro is a professor at Harvard. He's been an economic policy adviser to the Clinton campaign, and he has some comments that I think are important to share in relation to the flat tax system. He states:

Fairness in the tax system matters because tax collection depends vitally on voluntary compliance. Paying taxes is also most [Canadians' in this case] chief point of contact with their government, and probably their closest approximation to a common civic experience. Yet, some analysts today dismiss equity issues and, with increasing boldness, insist that regardless of their effects on fairness, all tax cuts are desirable because government's right to tax is less than fully legitimate.

That would be an argument that I could see maybe this Treasurer buying into, you know, that governments don't have a right to tax. Well, if that's the case, then how do we continue in society and provide the services governments are supposed to provide, and how do we look after all of those people in society? That, Mr. Speaker, includes those people who are least able to look after themselves or at least need the government's assistance. That goes to all of those folks who live in poverty. Those folks aren't paying taxes, but they certainly rely on their government through a network of social programs to assist them. That's what governments should be doing. We should not be abandoning those folks who need our help most, and that's what I believe this government would like to do with this type of tax policy and, furthermore, reduce every single Albertan to an economic unit. Well, that's not what we expect from governments, and that's not where I would like to see this government or any government go.

Dr. Shapiro further states – and we'll all agree with this statement:

Without a doubt, most people don't enjoy paying taxes. But in an democracy like ours, people contribute private resources to provide the public goods they deem appropriate as a community, including helping those unable to make their way by themselves. . . . paying taxes embodies a civic relationship of mutual responsibility, and people's obligation to pay them is as legitimate as any other public duty.

So while we may not like paying taxes, we as citizens of a province and of a country do understand that the role of government is to provide for services and to help those who are less fortunate and need the government's help.

3:20

You know, Mr. Speaker, not long ago tax reductions were probably the number one issue, maybe not the number one issue but certainly in the top three, I believe, in terms of top-of-mind issues for Albertans and Canadians. Now we see that has moved dramatically closer to the bottom, if you will. It's not a top-of-mind issue, not like health care – and we've seen how that debate has unfolded in this province – and not like education. That's a top-of-mind issue for Albertans and Canadians. Homelessness trumps tax cuts because Albertans still believe and Canadians still believe that we have to look after those who are less fortunate, and our democratic system allows for that to happen.

If we look at where public opinion is, yes, we all like to see tax

reductions. Yes, we need to look at the overall tax structure. We don't need to look at a flat tax, that is only a purported tax reduction. It becomes a tax-trumping game.

You know, let's face it. The federal government has far more taxes to reduce than does this government, and if you get into that game, this government will lose. We have to remember that Albertans still want a fiscally responsible government, and when you play that kind of game and you lose, you're going to find yourself in a little more trouble with the voters, in a little more trouble than you probably already are.

Progressive taxes are a reasonable price for high-income people to pay, and it's a reasonable price to have a civil society. I find it difficult to understand how the whole notion of a flat tax can be seen as anything but a windfall for the elite. We have a tax structure right now where Canadians essentially believe that people with similar total incomes pay similar amounts of taxes. Higher income people pay more, and the tax burden is shared. So everybody pays their portion of the tax burden based on what they earn. That, Mr. Speaker, is part of having a progressive, sound tax structure.

Now, if you want to talk about where we can make some changes in this province, some real tax changes, let's look at things like user fees, and let's look at things like the Alberta health care premium. That, in fact, is a tax. Let's look at what the government has been doing over a number of years. In fact, the Supreme Court of Canada's *Eurig* decision spoke to the very issue of user fees, premiums, and other fees and said, basically, that if you're collecting more than the cost of service, then you have to call it a tax. So this government has had to drop many of its fees, premiums, and user fees that are associated to some of the services in this province. That came out of a probate issue, but that falls right down the line.

I think that if you recall the earlier debate we had with the previous Treasurer, the wanna-be leader of a party, the absolute only reason that Treasurer undertook a review of the user fees was because of the Supreme Court decision. That is the absolute only reason. He was compelled to do that, and there was no other way out of it for him. So, you know, a few forced tax reductions there by the way of user fees and quite frankly . . .

MR. DUNFORD: How many did it voluntarily?

MS OLSEN: Well, you know, hon. minister from Lethbridge-West, you may think it was voluntary, and so be it. I quite frankly don't think it was voluntary. Without a Supreme Court of Canada decision it would not have happened in this province, and that's the way it is, Mr. Minister. Like it or not, you can stand up and say your piece on this if you wish, but that's the reality of it, and to say anything else is wrong, quite frankly.

Now, another issue, Mr. Speaker, that I'd like to bring forward is – and I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar spoke to this – the issue of the third party supporting a flat tax system. Indeed, there was an article by the previous leader of that party saying that Canada needs a flat tax system and absolutely she supported that notion. I find it very interesting that this is the party that suggests that they support the issues of poverty and they support the issues of lack of equality and those kinds of things, yet they feel that a flat tax system is something that people will benefit from.

Well, I'm not sure that's the case, and I think that probably their party members are glad they're going to be having a leadership race at some point, because it doesn't serve them well to be in support of the flat tax. I suppose they could use the argument: that was then, and this is now. But we haven't heard them use that argument, so it'll be interesting to see what happens down the road.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've made all the points that I'd intended to

make. I absolutely support tax reductions for Albertans. That is a good thing, but I don't support the introduction of a flat tax. I think we need to do an intensive overall review of the tax structure, and I know that's occurred. I think one of the right-wing research groups has suggested, you know, a consumption tax. We've heard actually the Acting Treasurer and the former Treasurer or whatever his position is now – I'm not clear on that – talk about a sales tax.

I believe my time is coming to an end, and I'm sure I'll be able to speak again. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to the amendment on Bill 18 with a particular focus in mind, and that is the positive effect of this new and innovative tax policy on our families. Recently an international credit rating agency reported that the after-tax income of Canadians is the same as residents of Mississippi, the poorest state in the union.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Of the 28 countries that comprise the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, or the OECD, only five tax incomes at a higher rate than Canada. High levels of taxes not only affect the credit rating of a country or a province; they have a profound effect on the families that live and work and raise their children there. It is high personal income taxes that are far more damaging to our economy. For one reason, they reduce the overall standard of living for our families, and when the economy suffers, it is families at the bottom of the income scale who pay the highest price through job loss, lower wages, and lost or shrinking savings.

3:30

Another effect of our personal income tax regime is that it penalizes some families and rewards others. Families who choose to have one parent stay at home are taxed at a higher marginal rate than those with two earners who receive the same total family income. The single-rate tax system proposed by this government would not only reduce the overall tax burden for all families; it would also remove this discrimination in the tax system. This was identified as an issue by the Tax Review Committee in their final report.

Families with one income earner can claim the basic personal exemption, while families with two income earners can each claim the higher basic personal exemption. Not only are single-income families taxed at a higher marginal rate, but their exemptions are lower. Therefore, they are hit sooner and begin paying taxes at a lower level than dual-income families, leaving them with even less money in their pockets after they pay taxes. If two-income families claim a deduction for child care expenses, those two-income families are even further rewarded by the tax system. Mr. Speaker, these are powerful incentives when young families are facing the decision of whether or not one parent should stay at home with their children. This government believes that families should be left to make these decisions on their own without the tax system either rewarding them for both going to work or punishing them if they choose to have one parent stay at home.

So what do we propose? We'll start by treating everyone equally. Under this bill the basic exemption will be raised to \$12,900 and the spousal exemption will be raised to \$12,900. Not only will this end the discrimination between single- and dual-income families. It will also put more money into all families' pockets because of the larger increase in the exemptions. The basic exemption will be increased

by \$5,769 from \$7,131, and the spousal exemption will be increased by \$6,845 from \$6,055. It will be more than doubled, Mr. Speaker. These greatly enhanced personal exemptions will assist those families most in the lower income brackets by putting more income in their pockets.

The tax system also discriminates against single-income families by levying many tax rates which push them up through the tax brackets faster than dual-income families. This is the much talked about bracket creep. Mr. Speaker, we are not only going to end the discrimination against single-income families by equalizing the basic and spousal exemptions. We are also going to end the bracket creep with our single rate of personal income tax.

The proposal of a single tax rate of 10.5 percent will result in lower taxes for all families. While both single- and dual-income families will see their taxes go down, single-income families, including single parents, will have their tax rates reduced by more. For example, a single-income family with two children earning \$55,000 a year paid \$3,349 in provincial taxes in 1999. A dual-income family with two children earning the same paid \$2,479. That's a difference of \$870. When our new system comes into place on January 1, 2001, the single-income family will pay \$1,968, while the two-income family will pay \$1,867. Both families will get a sizable tax break, and the difference in what they pay will be dramatically reduced, from \$870 to about \$100.

Single parents will also be big winners as they will be able to claim the spousal exemption for their first child. This will mean that a single-parent family making \$30,000 a year will receive a 276 percent tax cut, and a single tax rate combined with greatly enhanced personal exemptions will assist most those at the lowest income range. In 2001 families with children who earn less than \$33,500 will pay no provincial income tax whatsoever. This will take approximately 190,000 people off the provincial tax rolls, giving those families more money for food, clothing, and other family needs. We believe this is the way to treat families starting out in life: giving them a break and giving them a choice.

Our single-rate tax system will do something else. It will remove the massive disincentive to work, save, and invest, which is encouraged by the current tax system. Lower taxes will bring people into the workforce by making more entry-level jobs. This will help families, perhaps, who are bringing in a second income. It can also encourage some people to obtain these jobs if it can be demonstrated that they will make more money to take home in their pockets than if they were to receive government assistance. This will also remove the disincentive to work harder, get a raise, or work at a part-time job. Who of us hasn't heard: why should I work overtime when it will just put me in a higher tax bracket?

Mr. Speaker, families have dreams and plans for the future, and Albertans are prepared to plan and work to realize these dreams. These new tax cuts will help many families during the various stages of their lives: as they enter the workforce in their early years, when they have finished their education and perhaps have student loans to repay from jobs that are associated with building a career plan, through to the next stage when they are paying for their young children or when they have to incur child care expenses or the loss of one income, when they are trying to put more savings together for a mortgage, and when they have expenses like hockey, braces, and home renovations – at the very time they are trying to put more money into their family, we are taxing them more and more – and again as they get older, when they are trying to refinance to find a few more dollars each month to help put funding into their RRSP contribution, which they've had to put off while they raised their families. The goal is for discretionary dollars to be met with personal financial obligations. People are willing to put money aside

to meet their own personal obligations, but our current tax regime inhibits that ability.

Remember that two-income family with the two children earning \$55,000 that I talked about who will receive a 25 percent tax break? They will know where to put those extra dollars. And the single-income family with the two children earning \$55,000 that I spoke about? They will have \$1,376 more in their pockets as a result of our tax reforms. That family will know where to put that. They can spend it where their needs will best be met.

Mr. Speaker, our tax reform program will stimulate economic growth and create more and better jobs. This is good news for all Alberta families, and it will increase tax revenues, which will go toward government programs and services that Alberta families want and deserve. This tax reform measure is part of government's platform started in 1993 to reduce the size and shape of government, reduce the tax burden on Alberta families, and put that money where it best can be spent: into the hands of Albertans. That's \$1.3 billion that Albertans will have to spend as they like, a choice of their own.

Since we turned the corner on this deficit, this province has been attracting incredible attention. In fact, we are writing the book with black ink. Still, Mr. Speaker, today taxes for Alberta's families have never been higher largely because of ever increasing federal government tax grabs over the past few years, and thanks largely to this government's responsible fiscal policies over the same few years, projected surpluses have never been bigger. We believe it is time to give some of this money back to the Alberta taxpayers and to eliminate the unequal treatment of families in the tax system.

Mr. Speaker, I am strongly in favour of this legislation, and therefore I will not be supporting this amendment. I look forward to voting on Bill 18.

Thank you.

3:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this amendment on second reading of Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. I want to address the whole issue of the unfairness, which I think is really at the heart of the amendment that's been proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. The whole issue of fairness is one that we think is very much at issue in this debate. The government has tried very hard to make our belief in a progressive system of taxation and tax cuts within a progressive system of taxation as something other than what it is.

It would be interesting if we could hear the government, instead of just talk about the tax cut, which I think most people would say would be a welcome thing, talk about and address the much more fundamental issue of what's going on in Bill 18, which is a restructuring of the tax system away from a progressive income tax system towards a regressive one, where the greatest benefit, of course, falls on those with the highest income. Instead, we believe very strongly in tax cuts within a progressive income tax system. We believe in fair tax cuts, and it is for that reason that we believe that the tax cut as proposed by this government and the restructuring in flat tax needs to be delinked and addressed in a much fairer structure, which we would say was the progressive tax system structure.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's perfectly all right for the government to agree with regressive tax. They have every right to do that and to argue that in the House, but I've heard very little argument on the debate on the bill so far with respect to the flat tax as opposed to a piece of the act, which of course the government brought in as well, which is the tax cut. So let me look at this whole issue of progres-

sive versus regressive and to respect the government for wanting to propose regressive tax cuts and regressive taxation, but we believe in a progressive system for the reasons that I hope to address within the 20 minutes that are available to me.

There have been some excellent discussions. One of the very fine papers that we've quoted from on the opposition benches here is the Robert Shapiro paper. I think the argument for progressive taxation is a very sound one that has been made within an American context, but I think it's very applicable given the free trade and the opening up and globalization of our trade and the impact on markets under free trade.

In the paper Dr. Shapiro says:

Throughout this analysis, we maintain a clear preference for progressive taxation. In our view, progressive taxes are particularly appropriate for a society that cares about free markets. The more free markets there are, the larger the rewards people can secure by leveraging their talents, resources, or just good fortune. America's markets are generally more free than those in other advanced countries. The happy result is that Americans who start with more talent, resources, or luck than others can prosper more here than elsewhere, and to a greater degree than those who start with less. Progressive taxes are a reasonable price to pay for the privilege of prospering more in such free markets, and a way of limiting the burden on the vast majority who have relatively less to leverage. And this is especially so in the present period, when America's markets are producing growing economic inequality.

It is that issue of inequality that we think is so germane to the whole issue of unfairness of the flat tax. We know that the gap between rich and poor is growing in our nation as well as in North America. I think one of the very wonderful things, actually, that Canada has been able to achieve really since we started out as a country back in the mid-1800s was to take the collective wealth of our nation and use it to build systems of public education and public health care, which were available for all.

Under a progressive model of taxation someone who was in the middle-income level, say around the \$50,000 mark, would not be able to purchase on their own, given everything else they have to purchase, the level of education and health care that we as a nation have committed to and that we as a province, or at least the province that I believe in, has always believed was very important. So when the province moves from a progressive tax structure to a regressive tax structure, that notion of sharing, of having those with a higher income pay not just a higher amount of tax but a higher portion of their income in tax, allows us to spread that wealth and to ensure that we are able to support the level of education and health care that I think all Canadians deserve, regardless of their ability to pay as an individual.

What we are seeing with the restructuring which the government has put in place with this flat tax proposal is that the biggest cut, at least in the marginal rates and in the impact on taxes, the greatest cut, the greatest benefit flows to those at the highest income level. We believe that certainly all Albertans should be able to benefit from the tax cut proposed by government. However, those at the highest level should certainly not benefit at a greater rate than those at the middle-income level, and we would like to see a larger tax cut proportionately on the middle-income group than on the higher. Is it a question of perspective on how we view fairness? Yes, absolutely, but we believe that the people in the middle-income group should have a better advantage under a tax cut than has been given to them by the proposal under Bill 18.

Secondly, I think we need to look at the whole issue of education and health costs, as I have mentioned. The need for us as a province and as a country, I would say, is to get on with some of the solid restructuring that is needed in certainly the health care system and

probably the education system but that it be a restructuring that ensures that families in our province aren't worrying about whether or not they can afford to send their kids to postsecondary education, as we know is happening now, as tuition rates go up higher and higher and as government support for public education stays reduced at a level far less than was available in the past. It's interesting that part of the impact of those cuts is what has created the budget surplus in this province, and it is the reallocation of that service, now to the greatest benefit of those at the higher income level, which will in fact exacerbate the gap between rich and poor, which we are trying to improve upon or at least protect the middle-income earner rather than have them have the brunt and the off-loading of the tax cut being given at the high level not onto them.

We have spoken frequently about the need for a full tax review. This, of course, the restructuring and moving to the regressive tax system that the government is proposing, only touches upon the income tax, and the income tax is only one of the taxes paid by Albertans. We of course have the issue of property taxes and business taxes, which are of course levied on property, health care premiums, and many, many user fees substantially increased under the current government. Our view is that not only income tax needs to be looked at but the fees that people pay either through taxes or fees to cover off the services they are provided. Bill 18, of course, does not address that issue.

3:50

Instead, Bill 18 really is a full admission by government that the rich get richer and the burden is shifted onto that middle-income group. I think it's important to look at that middle-income group with the combined effect not only of bills 18 and 19 but also of Bill 11 and Bill 40. If we look at Bill 18, of course we know that Bill 18 gives the greatest reduction in the marginal tax rate to the highest income level group, the group that's paying a 29 percent rate on the federal marginal tax rates, the highest rate. Of course, the Alberta marginal tax rate, the 44 percent of provincial tax on the 29, means that individuals in that high-income group that are paying at the 29 percent level will have their marginal tax rates go from 12.76 percent down to now 10.5 percent.

That is very different than for those people in the middle-income tax group who are paying 26, then 25, then 24, then 23 percent, according to the tax cuts already instituted by the federal government. Their tax rate will either go down slightly or go up slightly as that progresses through the system. We believe, in fact, that that middle-income group, that group with the 26 percent moving down to 23 percent on the marginal tax rates, should get a better break under this tax cut than those at the 29 percent level, as this government is doing.

Let's look at who benefits to the greatest degree: certainly those at the low-income level. No argument on that. No argument with respect to raising the basic and the spousal exemption portions. Relatively little argument about delinking, if the government has made that decision with respect to the federal income tax and not to make it a tax on tax but a tax on income. Even if those are givens, even with that, the new tax on income can still be based on a more progressive model than this government is proposing and one that we would support as a much fairer tax cut than the one that's coming forward.

Let's look, then, at who benefits in Bill 18 at the high-income level. Those who benefit greatly, certainly in terms of the effect on their taxes, are those in the highest income level group. That's who benefits. [interjections] As I said in question period today, 1 percent of Albertans with the highest income . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We seem to have a debate by two people who've already spoken on this amendment. So if the two front bench members on either side would desist or go out to the back chamber and carry on their debate there, we'd like to hear just from the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is difficult to speak over the voice of the minister of energy and resources.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Anyway, as I noted in question period today, the 1 percent of Albertans with the highest income level will be getting a 28 percent tax cut while nearly 40 percent of Albertans, in that middle-income category, see only a 13 percent tax cut. So when you ask the question about who gets the greatest tax cut, well, it's those at the high-income level.

Then let's look at the combined effect of Bill 18 and Bill 19, which will follow on its heels. Of course, Bill 19 gives further benefit to the high-income group. Bill 19 gives an elimination of the 8 percent surtax, which of course only applies to the high-income level group. We will be arguing that the .5 percent deficit elimination tax that's on all taxpayers should be eliminated before yet another benefit to the highest income earners.

Now, I accept that members of the government and the Acting Provincial Treasurer – or whatever it is his office is called. I can understand that he wants to make sure that only the highest level income earners will get the greatest benefit. [interjections] He has every right to argue that, but, Mr. Speaker, what we're saying is that the middle-income group should be able to get at least as great . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer is sharing with us all kinds of information at the same time that someone else has the floor. Should there be an opportunity for you to debate this at a later time, we would certainly welcome it, but debate is not correcting everything that an hon. member is saying. Debate is where an hon. member is allowed to lay out their case, as much as we like it or don't like it, and then other people can stand up and debate that. So, hon. minister, if we could keep that in mind, that would be helpful.

The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will look forward to listening to the minister of energy and Acting Treasurer when it's his turn to speak.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Anyway, on the combined effect of Bill 18 and then Bill 19 coming on its heels with the elimination of the 8 percent surtax – of course, it too only applies to the highest level group.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there's been an interesting development over the past several days. The past several days have seen the Premier of our province make known his new commitment to the Canadian Alliance, and he has indicated that he is going to support the former Provincial Treasurer in his bid for the leadership of the Canadian Alliance. It's interesting, you know. There are many people that I have spoken to since that announcement was made who are people who have been members of the Progressive Conservative

Party of Alberta for some time and who felt hurt by the Premier's decision to now move his allegiance to the Canadian Alliance party. Many of those that I've spoken to over the last several days and who have called me have said: "You know, I may be a Progressive Conservative provincially. I'm reassessing that on the basis of how this government conducted itself on Bill 11 and some other things. But I have never been and will never be a member of the Reform Party or a member of the Canadian Alliance." They find the positions of that party to be inconsistent with the unfairness issue of the tax . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MRS. McCLELLAN: Under *Beauchesne* 459, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening I think quite diligently, and this debate seems to be going off on a tack about political leadership and so on. I think that the debate on Bill 18 is important to everyone in this province, and this Legislature is dealing with it rather than with a federal leadership or who aligns with a federal party. This is a provincial Legislature. So I would simply, with greatest respect, ask the hon. member to contain her comments to Bill 18. I know I am most interested in hearing her debate and her arguments against this bill that would lower taxes for the majority of Albertans.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the point of order.

4:00

MR. DICKSON: I always appreciate hearing the comments from the minister of intergovernmental affairs, who is probably one of the best listeners in the entire Assembly, but I must take issue. What we have seen is a full and robust debate on an important reasoned amendment. [interjections] Well, certainly on the part of my colleagues we've seen a full and robust debate. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to get to the point of order. I keep on getting distracted by the help from colleagues across the Chamber.

Let me make this observation, if I might. I think that an individual . . . [interjections] Well, I'm responding to a point of order. If people don't want to hear that, you might want to consider that when you raise points of order, you provide opportunities for members to talk about the bigger question of relevance. It seems to me, with respect, that the Leader of the Official Opposition is making a number of key points that are directly salient to the question of the reasoned amendment. In fact, if you look at the reasoned amendment, we see a reference to action at the federal level.

It seems to me perfectly appropriate to recognize that we're not making tax policy or purporting to remake tax policy in a vacuum; we do it in the real world. As the former Provincial Treasurer always used to tell us, there's only one taxpayer. That means that it is perfectly relevant to look at what the impact is of federal tax legislation as well as a provincial initiative. As long as we're confronted with a single taxpayer with two tax regimes, it would be foolish of us not to discuss the impact of what's happening federally while we debate this.

I've been enjoying the debate. I look forward to the comments of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations when she has her opportunity, and I'm hopeful we're able to get on with the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Certainly some people had been making signals to me with regard to relevance on this thing, and my invitation is to stand up if they feel that the speaker is straying from what is relevant.

All that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo said would truly be correct. However, what the chair and, presumably, the minister heard was a discussion about the Premier's federal alliance membership and that kind of thing. One begins to wonder how that is in any way what the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo was asserting. To the extent that the federal government is involved – certainly they have the personal income tax – and there's a linkage or a delinkage and all that kind of thing, that's perfectly fine, but the chair was finding some difficulty and wondering what the relevance was about the Premier and whether he belongs to this party or that party federally. Without belabouring that point, perhaps we could return to the debate at hand.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I think the Premier's membership now in the Canadian Alliance is quite germane to the debate, because all of the leadership candidates for that party are talking about a platform of flat tax and private health care. I mean, the issues are out there. I think that while the government has tried very carefully to apportion this debate off in pieces, being Bill 11, Bill 18, Bill 19, and to some extent Bill 40 from the fall, in their totality they show the issue of fairness and the best benefit to those at the highest income level to be something that concerns us. We think that the threads of those work all the way through all of these pieces. Nonetheless, I will take your guidance, and I will just make a couple of other points about the amendment and about how we are in favour of fair tax cuts rather than the flat-tax proposals the government has come forward with.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: I think it was interesting on the weekend, as well, to see the federal Progressive Conservative Party reject the call for a flat tax, as did the province of Ontario. We have asked this government on several occasions, in question period and also earlier in second reading on this bill, for an analysis as to why they came to this conclusion. Again, the same roadblock that we hit on Bill 11, where the government refused to bring forward the reasons as to why they felt that expanding private, for-profit care was going to do anything other than benefit the very same people who will benefit under a flat-tax proposal, with the greatest benefit going to the high-income group. Those answers have not been forthcoming. The government has only talked about the tax cut, presumably because they want to cloud the issue of unfairness that flows from their flat tax. We think the amendment is very, very sound.

Mr. Speaker, I think I'm going to leave my discussion on the amendment there. I would hope that we might see some more discussion as to why the government has decided they want to build a regressive tax system in this province. It certainly isn't clear to the people of this province, nor is it clear – in fact, it's a big question – to people in the Edmonton-Highlands constituency, who have certainly raised this question with me at the doors. Now that the by-election has finally been called, now that the government has got Bill 11 shoved through, I suspect that this will be another issue that will be on the plate then.

Nonetheless, I look forward to the discussions on the bill. We will certainly be bringing forward a proposal which could see a tax cut but one that would still address the issue within a progressive tax system, which we believe is consistent with what most Albertans and

most Canadians want, and that is a sharing of our resources in order that we can continue to uphold and protect and modernize our education and our health systems so they will be available for all.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to speak to this amendment at this stage of this bill. This reasoned amendment does intend to postpone the vote and for a very, very good reason. This particular jurisdiction is, to my knowledge, the only place in the western world where this is being proposed, this massive experiment. It doesn't seem to have the well-founded, documented proof that it could in fact work. I think this massive change is putting particularly the lower income earners, the lower 10 to 30 percent of wage earners, at risk. There doesn't seem to be the kind of debate that should go on across the province on this particular matter.

You'll notice that this particular change does nothing but wonderful things for those that earn \$50,000 or \$70,000 or \$100,000 and up. They're in good stead. The lower portion – that is, the 10 to 30 percent of wage earners that I'm talking about – have an exemption level that is raised, and temporarily, yes, there is some relief, but we're talking about a massive change here, a change for a long, long time to come. There are some benefits, of course, which we'll get into a little later, but I just want to first speak of the timing of this matter.

Certainly it should be no surprise to taxpayers that this government happens to favour those that are well to do, and for a government that's been in office for almost 30 years, it's only natural that those with influence would influence the government. That goes without saying. In fact, that has been the history of elected governments for a long, long time, and it needn't be expressed any further than that. As proof of that, the very first thing the government did that in fact changed the income tax was to drop an 8 percent surcharge on the tax starting in January 1 of 2000, of this year. Who did that affect? The answer simply is those same people that this entire bill affects in a major way and to the affirmative. I mean, they get a massive, massive increase in their after-tax dollars. That's one reason one should suspect the timing of this bill.

4:10

The other reason. Look; here we have just finished, I think in the Premier's words, the largest single political fight that he has ever, ever fought, that being Bill 11. Now we have a good-news story – they're trying to paint it in that way – entirely good news. Well, it isn't all good news. In fact, it is only good news because this province can afford, by reason of higher revenues from oil and gas – it certainly isn't higher revenues from anything other than that. It certainly isn't higher revenues from the agriculture business. That certainly is not the case. It's a struggling business right at the moment. Certainly the only reason we in Alberta have this opportunity to experiment with a tax system – and I say "experiment" unguardedly – is that we do have this right that is coming up out of the ground and, in fact, the royalties that fall from that.

Let's just review, for the moment, the long-held belief that tax cuts were on the way for the citizens of Alberta and why. Back in July of last year, of '99, the Premier mused about accelerating that single-tax rate scheme from '99 to the year 2000 by means of increasing personal exemption and spousal exemption. Well, he mused about that, only mused. There was no movement at all. In November of that same year the Premier then dismissed, or at least spoke of and then dismissed, a 9-cent gasoline tax reduction.

Nothing occurred with it. The carrot is still out there on the gas rebate plan. Three days later he mused again about a reduction of it publicly, and nothing.

This member, by way of note, asked the minister in charge of that particular rebate plan if he was contemplating it. No response. This member even gave him an opportunity to show how it could be reduced, seeing as the owners of the asset, the people of Alberta, are paying. When the value of their asset goes up, the government benefits, and they are penalized at the pump. It doesn't seem to be a reasonable solution. This member offered a solution at that point. It was roundly rejected once more, in December of that year. Then just before the turn of the century our good Premier mused again about a tax reduction, this time a \$100 rebate, a cash rebate, a cash payment, if you will. Did anything come of it? Absolutely nothing. That was the real flat tax. There was no tax. It was so flat that it didn't occur.

In early January the then Treasurer suggested that he as Treasurer would be considering income tax cuts in the year 2000. He must have been, because it appears that with this bill, that's going to occur. On January 17, again another reduction, but this time he was musing about the reduction of health care premiums, another tax of a different form. Then the Premier again, on January 18 of this year when speaking of the surplus, was talking about paying down the debt rather than a tax cut in the year 2000. There seemed to be a lot of changes in position at that time, always talking about a tax cut and reminding the people of Alberta that a tax cut was in the works and that they were going to be the recipients of that.

Then on January 26 there was an 18-cent reduction in the mill rate to the education property tax, a most welcome relief across the province. It sounded like a great deal of money until we found out that it's an average of a \$22.50 tax cut for each homeowner. It did sound like a great deal at the time.

On February 24 the then Treasurer reannounced the 11 percent flat-tax scheme for the eighth time since the 1999 provincial budget. On February 27 the then Treasurer called on the federal government to cut taxes. You'll recall that that was just after Alberta had hurried up to file a budget and just before the federal government filed the budget there. The quote from the newspaper of the day is: "What we're saying to Mr. Martin is 'Try it – you'll like it'." Presumably he was speaking about some tax cuts, which Mr. Martin shortly thereafter did, and of course in the provincial budget for the year 2000 that did not occur. Perhaps it will occur at some time in the future, depending on the passage of this bill, of course.

Then on the same day, February 28, the Treasurer of the day said in two separate statements that the federal tax cuts don't go as far as Alberta's but that they'll be better than no tax increases. Well, that's one way of saying it, I guess. Later on in the day, when he speculated about the reductions in the 11 percent single-rate tax, he said, "Maybe if it stays up throughout the whole year, maybe we could look at an alleviation there and go to 10.5%." Here is a man that is publicly musing about a potential reduction in and a reimposition of an experimental tax rate, and it drops between 2 and 4 in the afternoon by perhaps a half percent. Well, he mused about that. He didn't say anything about it particularly.

Then we have a public story from a senior tax manager at BDO Dunwoody, who disclosed in his study that the 11 percent flat tax, combined with the federal tax cuts of the 2000 budget, would cost middle-income earners more than the current rate, which obviously must have sent the Treasurer scurrying a little, because the very next day the then minister trampled the tax cuts of the federal minister and mused further about some further changes.

It wasn't until about six or seven days later that Mr. Brad Severin showed in a subsequent report that middle-income earners in Alberta

are better off with the existing tax system than they are under the 11 percent flat tax. The then Treasurer questioned those figures and said that at first glance it may appear that the accountant didn't take into account reductions in the Canada pension plan or the registered retirement savings plans. The very next day, of course, was when the minister obviously felt that some changes had to occur and, with a certain amount of bravado, had to be the lowest rate of any province in Canada, and therefore he proposed the reduction from a single rate of 11 percent to 10.5 percent.

That's the short history up to that point and where we have it today. Still all musing about a potential – the bill wasn't then introduced until a couple or three days later, when it was introduced without those changes. It was introduced as is, with the 11 percent inclusion and with the exemption rate being \$11,620, as opposed to the amendments that are now in place to increase the exemption to \$12,900.

4:20

Now, that seems to be a reasonable short history of the coming of this bill, and it all points to but one thing: this is a run-and-gun experiment. It's shoot from the hip. It doesn't seem to be thought out. Certainly there haven't been any documents tabled in this Legislature that would say that this is proven and has been tried and tested under any conditions in any other forum at all. Being the first does have its risks. Therefore, a good deal of time should be taken to study this matter.

Now, one would think that if a province has this kind of disposable income, to the tune of \$1.32 billion, one could at least afford to open some hospital beds, as in the last debate we had, and alleviate all this pain and suffering that we heard so much about in that debate. It doesn't seem to be the case, though, and we're now looking at a massive change in taxation in the province of Alberta.

There are some upsides to this bill, of course, not necessarily the single tax rate, but certainly there's some good news, and Calgary-Currie pointed it out rather well in her description of family finance through a number of different levels. The policy change would penalize less a single-income family that wishes to raise their children on one income and have the other parent stay home and raise children on a full-time basis. That is a good start.

There are, of course, some increases in exemption rates so that the first \$12,900 of income would in fact be tax free, which is a wonderful, wonderful inclusion, but one wonders if that bit of honey and the other bit of honey or the sweetness has to be tied to a single tax rate. You'd think they could be severally put, because certainly a number of the changes in the imposition of income tax in the province of Alberta can and would be supported by this opposition wholeheartedly.

The elimination of the half-percent flat tax surcharge certainly is the right thing to do, because that is the most regressive of all taxes. That's certainly a tax or an addition of a tax that has seen its day and should not be revisited at all.

The larger question, of course – the Leader of the Opposition passed over it rather quickly, but her time did not permit her to go into it a great deal – is a full and complete tax review in the province of Alberta. That would include a full and complete discussion of the relevance of user fees. It would cover the municipal tax, including business tax, which is a horribly regressive tax – you ask any small businessperson that has to live with that tax – the health care tax, and certainly consumption tax, where a ridiculous situation occurs and occurs on a regular basis when the value of an asset increases that we the people of the province of Alberta own, whether it be natural gas or a petroleum product that is made into gasoline products that go into an automobile.

When the value of that goes up, the income stream of the province of Alberta increases, and rightly so, as agent for all Albertans. The difficulty arises when that asset is then resold through the marketing system back to Albertans, and the price is up. Now, here you have the worst of, I guess, the oxymoron of having a valuable asset: the government gets richer and the folks get poorer for an asset they own. It just doesn't seem to be reasonable. When there are some suggestions as to how to equalize that balance or how to reset the balance more in favour of Albertans, we're met with stonewalling and noncommittal answers – well, maybe – even though the Premier did muse about a reduction in one of those consumption taxes more than once.

We don't ever hear of a reduction in the health care tax, and we don't hear the argument anymore, thank goodness, don't hear the argument made at all that this is some kind of a deterrent to use of the health care system. We don't hear the arguments that are made to the effect that these taxes somehow make Albertans aware of the cost of it, for we all know that this health care tax covers but a fraction of the total cost of health care, and it does cost money. It's an increased bureaucracy, and it chases the taxpayer, the lowest of taxpayers, around the country trying to collect from them with collection agencies and the like. All the nasty things that we heard most recently about the federal tax collectors – these are the same kind of folks and the same *raison d'être* to chase the little folks until they can't run any longer. They don't chase the big fellas because, quite frankly, it's nickels and dimes for any tax lawyer or any corporation to pay for these things.

Oh, I'm sorry. I've run out of time, sir. I shall resume this discussion some other time.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:28 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	MacBeth	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Gibbons	Nicol	White
Leibovici	Pannu	

Against the motion:

Broda	Jacques	Renner
Burgener	Johnson	Severtson
Cao	Jonson	Shariff
Coutts	Klapstein	Stelmach
Ducharme	Kryczka	Stevens
Dunford	Lougheed	Strang
Fischer	Lund	Thurber
Forsyth	McClellan	Trynchy
Fritz	McFarland	West
Graham	Melchin	Woloshyn
Haley	Oberg	Yankowsky
Herard	O'Neill	Zwozdesky
Hlady		

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 37
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[Motion on amendment lost]

4:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise in second reading on Bill 18, and I'm quite looking forward to proceeding with the discussion around Bill 18, which is in fact not about fairness and provides a window into this government's vision of our society. In fact, when I look at the parallels between Bill 18 and Bill 11, that we have just come out of, what we have seen is a government that is intent on having its own way, a government that does not recognize the democratic wishes of its citizens, and a government that continues to pick winners and losers. What we see, quite obviously, in the flat-tax structure that has been put forward by this government is a continuation of that picking of winners and losers, and now they are institutionalizing it into a structural change of our tax system that will continue to perpetuate that type of a vision. It's a vision that looks at who can afford a particular service, who can afford to access certain benefits that society presents that they should be able to get, and for those that can't, well, I guess it's tough luck for them.

So what we see institutionalized in Bill 18 is preferential treatment to the higher income earners and punishment to the middle-income earners. Now, to be fair, what we are seeing is the lower income earners being taken off the tax roll, and that in fact is a good thing. Frankly, you wonder why it has taken the government so long to recognize that and to approach that particular issue. But when we look at who is still left on the tax roll and we look at the percentages in the proposed amendment that will at some time in the future be proposed at the 10.5 percent, what we see is that there is a substantial differential between the middle-income earners and the upper-end income earners, and it's not just a few dollars that we're speaking about, Mr. Speaker. What we are looking at is that if an income earner is between the 30 to 50 percent tax rate, in fact their percentage is substantially less than what the percentages are in the 100,000-plus dollars tax rate. So is it fundamentally fair? I think if that question were put to Albertans at all income tax levels, the majority would respond back that, no, it is not fair.

What we also see is that Albertans and Canadians are seeing through the ploy that's being used by this government as well as other governments across Canada in terms of buying their votes. What in fact the governments are saying is: "We will reduce your taxes. We are therefore providing good government, so we hope that when it comes to election time" – and actually today we have a by-election called here in Alberta, so that particular theory will be tested in 28 days – "you will vote for us, because we will lower your taxes." What this government fails to recognize is that for the majority, when polled as to what they consider the job of government to be and what they consider the most important aspect of government provision of services to be, it's not a tax cut but is health care and education.

In fact, a February Angus Reid poll found that nearly three out of four respondents, 72 percent, believed that health care was the number one priority for government to turn their attentions to. Education spending received the support of 58 percent of those surveyed, while tax reductions garnered only 55 percent. So what we have is an ideological push and perhaps a cynical push by this government, as well, to attempt to buy votes and to try and fool Albertans that in fact they are doing this for their own good.

Now, of course Albertans want to see taxes cut in terms of having more money in their pockets, but Albertans also recognize that tax cuts don't occur in isolation and in fact recognize that there are trade-offs when a tax cut occurs. They realize that what has

occurred through Bill 18 and the flat tax is once again government listening to those that have influence with government, listening to those that have access to government, like they did with Bill 11. Thousands and thousands and thousands of Albertans said very clearly: we do not want to see Bill 11. My guess is that on Bill 18 what we have is that for the majority of individuals who will be adversely affected by Bill 18, if you were to ask them on the street, "Do you think this is fair, and is this the kind of tax system you want?" they in fact would say no, and they would say no with a resounding no.

The question again arises: who has the government listened to in terms of pushing this particular bill forward? Is it only the high-income earners? Is it only the business community, not the small business community but the larger business communities? Who is it that they've listened to? My guess is that it's not the citizens in putting it forward.

In fact, over and over again we hear about this government's newfound commitment to families with one income earner. My colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar had put forward Motion 506, that read:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to demonstrate its recognition of the contribution made by parents who stay at home to care for their children by providing support equal to that received by parents choosing other child care options.

Now, if government members who have spoken in favour of Bill 18 have used the argument that it will help those parents who make the decision to have one individual stay at home to take care of their children, you would wonder how in good conscience they then could have voted against this particular motion, if in fact that were the case. My guess is that any member who speaks to the issue of stay-at-home parents and has voted against this particular motion is cynical in their promoting Bill 18 as a way of addressing that particular issue, and their sincerity is in fact to be questioned.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I have for many years kept in touch with as well as followed the Kids First organization and their goals and have followed as well the presentation that was made to the United Nations. I have yet to hear one government member that has ever been actively involved with that particular group, and I would like to know if there were any. So for them to then stand in this Legislative Assembly and say, in fact, that they support stay-at-home parents I think is very contrary to any public positions that they've taken before.

4:50

The issue with recognizing the tinkering that's going on with Bill 18. We've seen it in some other examples. One of the most recent examples – again, picking winners and losers and providing preferential treatment – that we have seen is in fact with some other tax models that have been put forward. One is in terms of the market-based assessments, and what we have now is the city of Edmonton taking out ads to indicate that the government has been unfair in their putting forward preferential tax treatment to eight communities in the province and that this is an issue that needs to be looked at. So that's one way where this government's track record on tax reform has been anything but stellar.

Another way this government could have, if they were really sincere, provided extra cash in people's pockets would have been to deal with the whole issue of user fees, which the government has been taking over a period of seven years, a lot quicker to provide for the extra cash that would've come to individuals. Now, for seven years the Official Opposition has stood in this Legislative Assembly and has said over and over and over again that in fact those user fees were a tax and they were an unfair tax. This government had

refused to listen until there was a court case in Ontario that indicated that, yes, there was a problem.

So that would've been one way to deal with this issue, but now we have in front of us ideology. The Premier has called it Ralph economics, Steve economics. Recently someone said to me that this is voodoo economics because what we see is risky behaviour on the part of the government. We see a plan that's haphazard. With regards to the maintenance of deficit reduction, debt reduction, and the maintenance of essential services, government services in fact are in danger of being attacked through this single tax. Facetiously someone said to me the other day that by ensuring that this tax is not really a fair tax and knowing that it will have an effect on revenues in the next four-plus years, perhaps what this government is really trying to do is bring forward a sales tax, much like what the Canada West Foundation is proposing. I understand they're looking for an opening to put that proposal forward, and perhaps that's what the Acting Treasurer is looking at providing.

We have to ask the question: why this tax cut the way it's being proposed? We need to understand that in fact this tax rate is a roving rate, a moving rate. It's a target that can't really be pinned down because it depends on what will happen in other provinces across this country. The Premier has now made a commitment that we will have the lowest tax rate of any other province. Now, that statement in and of itself sounds very fine, but the reality is that the implications may be disastrous because the tax now won't have any linkages to our actual ability to afford to provide that tax to individuals. So the question is: what happens if at some point in time there's a downturn in the economy, if at some point in time the government projections are not accurate, if at some point in time oil and gas revenues come in at lower than what is expected and we have a deficit in the budget?

Something will have to give. It will either be the taxes or the spending on the government side. So the question the government at that point, if they're still the government at that time, would have to address is: if there has to be a cutback in the budget as projected because of this tying into providing the flat tax, what would get cut first? Would it be these new private hospitals that will be contracted with the government to provide specific services, or will it be an operating room in an existing facility? What will get cut first?

The policy, in fact, appears to be based on someone's ego as opposed to what is best for Albertans, and one of the things that we cannot support, that I cannot support is a policy that's based on some philosophy, some vision of Alberta that ensures that there's not fairness in our tax structure. You know, just to go back to the policy being based on someone's ego, what it seems to be is an ego that's not averse to gambling with our health, education, and social systems.

There are a number of myths that I'd like to dispose of in discussing this flat tax, and I will have the opportunity at some later point to do it. But there is one that I would like to get on the record, and it has to do with the myth of the brain drain. Again, in the *CGA Magazine*, it indicates that

in every case where there have been major movements . . . in strategic sectors, especially like health, education, and basic research,

. . . it's quite clear they are due more to cutbacks in government expenditures than tax rate increases. In other words, if anything pulled the plug from the drain . . .

This is the movement of individuals out of Alberta or Canada.

. . . it was government program cuts, which reduced funding in these sectors in the '90s.

So if in fact this government wants to look at why there is a brain drain out of this province, they can look only at themselves.

Now what I'd like to do is move a motion that is an amendment to Bill 18, and what it reads is that

Bill 18, Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, be not now read a second time but that the order for second reading be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

This is a very good amendment that is being put forward. It is again being put forward in the spirit of ensuring that there is fairness in our tax structure, that this bill be withdrawn, something that the government did not wish to do with Bill 11 even though they knew it would harm our public health care system and harm individuals within who wish to access our public health care system at some point in time, and that the subject matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. This is a committee that is part of the democratic process, contrary to what members would think about it. In fact, this particular committee is one that should be called, and the subject matter could be discussed at length to deal with the issue of fairness in taxes.

I've outlined in the body of my speech that this particular system is a structural change that is anything but fair to the vast majority of Albertans, who are the middle-income earners. This would more than provide the opportunity for the government to look at this bill again, to maybe check their figures, because first we started with 11 percent and now we're at 10.5 percent. Who knows where we might end up in the next couple of months? The Premier himself has indicated that this is a risky venture, that it is not based on solid evidence, it would seem. This would more than provide the time for the government to have that opportunity, so the members should be thanking us for bringing forward this amendment.

I thank you very much for being able to speak to this and hope that everyone will give it some serious consideration, because in fact this is not a matter to be taken frivolously. This is a very important issue that needs some study. The interesting thing to note is that over the last year, in fact, what we have seen is the government wavering on how they would provide a tax break to Albertans. They have moved from one area to another, and what we are noticing is that their studies are anything but complete with regards to this particular area.

5:00

So what we want to know are the reasons, because I hear vociferous arguments from the government members saying that no, this is not something they would wish to support in terms of the amendment, and I find it hard to understand why they would not.

Thank you very much.

Speaker's Ruling Admissibility of Amendment

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Assembly now has before it an amendment, and the chair would like to refer hon. members to *Beauchesne* 666, which certainly indicates that the amendment is in order, that it can be "referral of the subject-matter to a committee." It would further like to refer hon. members to those sections of *Beauchesne* 673 through to 676, dealing with referral of a subject matter to a committee. There's one statement in *Beauchesne* 673, "the advantage of referring the bill to a committee could be explained in the second reading stage," that would be a bit of advice with respect to debate.

Debate Continued

THE SPEAKER: The chair has already recognized the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am

pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this amendment that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark has put forward. I've spoken to this bill before, but I must tell you that over the weekend I chatted with a few people about it. I had the opportunity at different things I was at. You know, generally I got the feeling that, yeah, I'd like to pay less taxes, but secondly, if my tax dollars were wisely spent, I wouldn't have such a problem paying taxes. They'd often comment: you know, I don't want my money going to private health care clinics; I don't want my money going to private hospitals; I want it going into the public system. So it starts a debate on the whole change in a tax system, and that is exactly what we are doing with this bill.

I have even reviewed some of the debates in *Hansard*. I see Calgary-Egmont had a few things to say. I was reading through some of those things, and once again what I gather from the information we have in front of us is that not enough homework has been done, and this once again seems like . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: On the amendment.

MRS. SOETAERT: I am on the amendment. The amendment is the reality that not enough homework has been done, so we should refer this to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. Quite honestly I think it's time they met, and this would be a good bill to start on, because from my understanding I don't know if they've even met before. So here would be a good place to start: right at second reading, do a little bit of homework on it, look at the implications, what regulations it will take, and whether this should continue at this stage.

So while I was speaking to people again this weekend about this tax, some of this change, some were saying: "You know what? I would like to see a fairer system." In fact, some were very wealthy people that I was speaking to. One was a single mom making a livable wage but certainly not a lucrative wage, and she herself said: "You know, I'm tired of worrying about whether I will have to pay health care premiums, whether I will have to pay for an MRI for family members as they need care. I'm tired of the whole juggling act that's being played with us. I would just like to know that my tax dollars are being spent wisely. I would like to know that everyone is being taxed fairly."

Admittedly, some people have a greater ability to pay more, and many of them do. This tax is saying that we all have the same ability to pay, and that's not true. There are some who have a greater ability to pay and are quite glad to do that as long as their tax dollars are being spent wisely, as long as they don't see things like, oh, \$14 million spent on a computer system that is defunct before it's even working. So I think this whole issue of a flat tax has to be rethought, and certainly a good place to start would be at Law and Regulations.

Now, actually it's interesting. Different newspaper articles have said that this flat tax won't work. They've mentioned that it shifts the burden to the middle income, and, you know, the middle income seems to get dinged every time they turn around. The middle income is often a family. When you talk about families, they are certainly using many things more, and as a result they pay user fees more, which, I would say, is of course a form of flat tax, which the courts have already deemed are not fair.

I heard the minister say today in question period that this kind of tax will stop the brain drain. Well, in fact I know there have been studies shown that people move to an area more because of quality of life issues than anything else. They'll move here because they're looking for a strong health system, a strong education system, clean air, a good environment. Those are the reasons people will move to Canada, will move to Alberta: for quality of life issues more than

anything else. So I would venture to say that is the reality, not a brain drain away because of taxes, and certainly as we get unfair taxing, we could well lose a good portion of our people or have people in the middle income slowly but surely slip into the lower income.

In fact, a little bit more on that brain drain is a study done by KPMG that said that the factors that influence high-tech workers to change jobs are a percentage increase in salary, naturally; attractiveness to a different job; "a high quality of life in the community increases its attractiveness by 33%"; proximity to family and friends increases it; a full benefits package increases it; stock options increase it; company stability increases it; and "quality of life and proximity factors account for more than 50% of the motivation to change jobs."

So those are the things that we should be looking at strengthening in this province, and you know what? After-tax income is obviously important. It is for all of us, but the net percentage increase of people who wish to change jobs and move is based on quality of life, so I can even get a copy of this and send it to the minister so it'll help him with the question period tomorrow. He might be able to give a more informed response on a little bit more information that we can send to him.

5:10

Now, people have said to me that this bill is moving towards a two-tiered tax system. Actually, it's been mentioned in the Legislature as well that it's like a two-tiered tax system, and we end up having a major structural change in the way we collect taxes with this piece of legislation. What we've got with this two-tiered system is an issue of unfairness. Because of this, I think we've got to look at: is it all important to say that we've got the lowest taxes? Maybe so. When we say lowest taxes, do we have to also mention highest costs, out-of-pocket for private health care?

The amendment, once again, is a suggestion that the subject be referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. Mr. Speaker, we missed that opportunity to send it with Bill 11. We have another opportunity here to send this to the Committee on Law and Regulations, and I think it would be an exciting time for those members to actually call a meeting and do some work on law and regulations.

I'd like to say that judging by the people I chatted with this weekend, the real concern is that a flat tax is not the fairest way we can do it. They also feel that it's a bit of damage control after Bill 11. After the trouble they have had with Bill 11, maybe if they just told everybody, "Well, we'll give you all 10 bucks or 100 bucks back in your pocket," they'd all be happy and forget Bill 11. So it's like a quick fix instead of proper tax reform.

I would encourage this government that if you want to look at proper tax reform, let's do it right. Let's not do the quick fix for political reasons. Let's do a real proper review of this. Do it properly. I would encourage people to support this amendment. Let's get that Standing Committee on Law and Regulations to work. Let's give them a purpose, because it must be embarrassing to say: yeah, I chair that committee, but we've never met. I think it's a strong point to go forward with this bill to the Law and Regulations Committee.

There's been enough concern expressed. People have said to me: let's do a proper tax reform; let's not do this piecemeal, feel-good kind of stuff. I mean, face it; the federal government came out with their tax changes, and suddenly then: oh, well, we'll change ours to 10.5 percent, then, if 11 percent doesn't work. That should give you a clue that not enough homework has been done on this bill. Not enough people have thought it through. So I look forward to debate

on this. I know that members from the opposite side, including the Acting Treasurer, will want to stand up and maybe voice support of this. Maybe not, likely not, but there's always hope.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those comments about supporting this motion that we discharge it at second reading, send it to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations – a very good amendment by my hon. colleague, well thought out in concern for her constituents and, in fact, all of Albertans – I would like to put my support behind this amendment.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to the amendment that would send the entire bill – lock, stock, and barrel – off to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. With a bill of this magnitude and the effect that this bill would have, it certainly would be reasonable to expect that a committee of this Legislature would study the bill, study the bill not just line by line but study the effect, effect by effect. Certainly with the limited amount of study this bill has apparently been put through in either the government caucus or certainly in the public realm, it would be reasonable to expect that some reasonable debate could be generated in that committee.

If that committee were a committee as many committees in other jurisdictions are, it would hear expert witnesses. They would question. They would probe. They would certainly get an interest up in the public that would be easily translated into better public knowledge through the media. The media would certainly attend such a meeting when we know for absolutely sure that this piece of legislation could and would change the face of this province and how it manages its economy through the contributions of the citizens by way of tax.

Now, having said that, considerations that I would think should be brought to the attention of that committee are the entire tax structure, not just the income tax. Income tax is but one portion of it. I spoke earlier today of business taxes, which are a horrible inhibitor for small business. It's not such a big imposition for large businesses but for small businesses, the genesis of most of the wealth creation in this province. It's an inhibitor that the municipal government applies because they simply cannot manage their budget, as it were, on the basis of property tax and property tax alone.

I recognize that property tax should have and has a reasonable place in an overall tax structure, but it should not be as dominant as it is. In fact, this member would advocate either tax points or a different structure of perhaps revenue sharing in that hill and gully rider of the up and down swings of revenue generation by way of royalties and the like could in fact be shared with the municipality.

The municipality has not a great deal of latitude in expenditures, but they all have a substantive wish list of those things that they'll get to in time. I know there are a number of hon. members in this House that served at that level of government and know that there are a great many very, very worthwhile endeavours that a municipality can and should do, whether it be in environment or whether it be in infrastructure upgrade. All of these things could be managed much better if they had more income to make these judgments, and of course then we wouldn't have the same difficulty of the municipal purse growing and shrinking at such a rate that it is exceedingly difficult to manage. Yes, you'd still have that large purse, but you'd have many more purses in the province that could expand and contract as the economy grew and then shrank over time when we rise and fall as the revenue sources in natural resources increase and decrease.

You have to recognize that the same taxpayer, each individual

Albertan, is the one that this burden falls upon. Quite frankly, it seems to this member that it would be much, much more progressive if we could take that income tax level and modify it only so slightly as to effect these other changes first. I'm thinking of the first element of business, the great unfairness to charge a health care tax. It seems that there is but one other province in the entire dominion of Canada that does charge that rate, and it seems to be totally and completely counterproductive when the entire imposition of the collection of that tax actually pays for but a small portion of the management of the health care system, particularly when there must be 10, maybe 15, maybe even as high as 20 percent of that tax as applied is the bureaucracy to apply it.

5:20

As I said earlier, the imposition of this tax goes on each and every one of us equally, which is a user fee, and it's a regressive tax. It doesn't have anything to do with ability to pay, nor does it have anything to do with the usage of the system, so it's an unattached tax, as it were. It does not have a solid reason for existence. No one certainly in this Chamber has ever been able to explain that easily to this member. Consequently I don't have any success at all explaining to members of the public why they must go through this charade of paying for part of their health care system. It certainly doesn't cut down their usage of the system, nor does it seem to have any effect whatever on expenditure levels, and it certainly doesn't have any attachment to that ability to pay.

Now, that's one element of tax that could and should be eliminated prior to any adjustment, because you still leave the poorest of the poor. Regardless of whether they pay income tax, they still have this albatross around their neck of paying this tax, and they have but another tax collector and another reason for filing again and again. Just as they're about to escape the net of the social services system, they find that now they are in the working poor, as it were, and now they have to pay. Before they pay for any food or lodging, they must pay this tithe, this rate, this imposition of tax for their health care at the same rate as the biggest financier, the hottest lawyer in town, the brain surgeon.

That does not seem to this member to be fair at all, particularly when they get behind two or three payments, and they're threatened with all manner of foul deeds perpetrated upon their financial structure. They're threatened with a bad credit rating. They're threatened with garnishee of wage. They're threatened with all of these things, and to what end? To what end? To pay some bureaucrat to chase them? I think this tax is the worst imposition of all.

We'll move on to another set of taxes that I spoke of earlier that are applied through the municipality. The small businessperson wanting to open up a hairdressing salon or a small business such as that will review the situation as to start-up costs, the first and last month's rent or damage deposit on a small facility, renovating that facility such that they can operate their business, all the signage, all of those kinds of start-up costs. Then they get hit with a tax. Then the municipality comes and says: thank you very much; now we have to apply a tax to your business because we have a need.

Now, that tax has nothing to do with ability to pay. The business right next door pays exactly the same rate presuming they pay the same lease rate, and that business may have been operating for 50 years and may have a wonderful record. It may be that that business next door is a bank, and the bank has no difficulty whatever paying this rate. But start-up costs and the next six months of having to pay that and then not paying it and having a tax imposed upon a tax is so onerous on those businesses that a lot of them go out of business. That is simply not healthy in this economy, and it certainly wouldn't be helpful for any small town to have businesses go in and out of

business, and we all recognize that. The imposition of those kinds of taxes is the worst.

So when we talk about a review of the law and regulations, we talk about a full and complete review of the tax structure. That goes even to the extent of user fees. We would have liked to have had a full and complete review of those prior to the imposition in this last budget debate. That would be a fundamental inclusion, to set a philosophical framework, as it were, around the imposition of user fees.

Now, this member has no difficulty with user fees that do actually reflect the cost of doing business. Government must perform those functions that a society calls upon it for. In extra areas, in areas where special services are required, or in areas where it is not absolutely necessary that the service be provided by government to the citizens – you know, the imposition of those taxes would be reasonable. There are others, of course, that should not and would not in the normal case be applied, nor should they be applied at those rates. Quite frankly, a government is in the business of governing for all of the people, and to apply another tithe, another tax, another fee, another rate to something that should be provided as a matter of course by a government – saving all of that exchange of cash and exchange of all of that paper for billing purposes and the like seems to me to be so much more reasonable than charging every single time, particularly when you look at the administrative costs coupled with the inequity of application, of ability to pay.

We know that there are citizens in this province that do not, cannot, and will not dip into their pocket to pay for those services and do without, and that is certainly not the kind of thing that we want to perpetrate as government in the province of Alberta. There are so, so many of those taxes and the imposition of charges, and the ones that I point to most directly are those that are supplied through the – I think it's the registries that do a lot of these. Now, I recognize that the registries have costs – and they're governed by an act – in order to disseminate the information that they collect, and they also collect a fee that is commensurate with the cost of that, but what doesn't happen and hasn't happened is that the government also . . . [interjections]

Oh, yes, I recognize that. I had a lot of bobbing heads from the opposite side that were trying to indicate something, and I know not what, sir, so the translation could be difficult.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. member, that normally is not a problem. If all hon. members abide by the rules and speak through the chair, they don't see any bobbing of heads elsewhere.

MR. WHITE: I'll try to ignore the bobbing of heads across the way. It's a sign of a loose neck or a poor health care system that cannot keep his neck erect.

Continuing on, sir, with the debate of . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, Standing Order 4(1) indicates that we've now concluded the afternoon's business today. Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, if I understand this correctly, according to the Order Paper, when the House convenes tonight at 8 o'clock, it will reconvene in Committee of the Whole.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: That is correct, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Then, you will now rise till 8 o'clock, and you shall reconvene in Committee of the Whole.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 15, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/05/15

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 16

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to add my comments on Bill 16 to those on the record. This is a bill that we've been able in my constituency to do some fairly extensive consultation on. There are a number of condominium developments in Edmonton-Ellerslie, and there are some proposed in the near future as we see some major development happening right around Ellerslie Road over the next 10 to 15 years. It's something that I always run into at the doors: concerns and questions from condominium owners about their rights and what's happening in their associations. We were able to contact those people and run through the bill with them and get their comments.

Overall, Mr. Chairman, the condominium owners in my constituency felt that there was a need for this act, but they felt that it didn't completely meet their particular needs as owners. One of the points that they talked about was that purchasers want to know all plans concerning construction that would jeopardize their own property value. What we found in the past is that sometimes people have bought the condominiums, particularly prior to construction being completed on the units, and then moved in to find that there were some construction items that hadn't been completed or that were being completed differently than what they had anticipated, and they felt that sometimes those did jeopardize their own property values. They felt that information should be more explicitly available and some sort of contingency which meant that the developers would have to meet all of the criteria.

One of the ideas brought forward was that in fact the developer should have to maintain a bond for three to six months after the last piece of construction on the development so that were there any discrepancies, purchasers felt they had some recourse to have those discrepancies met. That was actually the major concern that we heard about in the area.

They also want the purchaser to be allowed to cancel the purchase agreement if not provided with full and absolute disclosure of all documents and drawings registered or proposed. That seems like common sense, Mr. Chairman. Certainly it would seem to be a possibility when people are having houses built, but it's a problem for these condo owners when things change prior to the full development being done, and then there's no way for them to get out of the arrangements.

Often we've seen cases where continued development means continued costs to the owners. Condominium owners are often first-time homeowners, and they often don't have access to a lot of resources. In some cases they are people who are purchasing the condos with the intent of renting them to other people. They are satisfied with the specs as they were when they went into the

purchase and don't need or want any additional items and can't afford to pay for anything additionally.

Of course having had some experience with condominium associations myself, I know that once you've got the mortgage for the condo, even if there are substantial increases or upgrades within the association, either prior to overall completion of the construction or sometime down the road, it's very hard to go back to the bank and get refinancing at that particular time, Mr. Chairman. The mortgage companies don't seem to look very favourably upon improvements in condominiums even if they're substantive in nature. So it's a problem for them, and it's reasonable for them to want to be able to cancel the purchase agreement if they don't get all the information they need.

Another concern of theirs is that they want to ensure that a purchaser is fully aware of the conditions for canceling the purchase agreement. What they want mostly, Mr. Chairman, is for those agreements to be in plain English. Any of us who have gone through mortgage documents over the years know that they're written in legalese. They require a lawyer to interpret them, and often it's a problem for people purchasing the agreements. They don't have that kind of a background. They don't have access to the kind of dollars required to have a lawyer . . . [The chairman waited until the committee came to order]

THE CHAIRMAN: Very good. If we could keep it at that level, we might be able to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. They want to make sure that they understand what the procedure is for canceling, and that hasn't always been the case in the past.

Also, it's not reasonable to expect the purchaser to examine the entire complex and often certainly not possible, particularly if there are people living in the complex at the time, but it can have an impact on the long-term viability and in fact the market value of the condominium afterwards. Here the people were particularly talking about the rot that's been found in some of the condominiums. First of all, the rot is hard to find. Secondly, it's mostly internal within the condominium units, so while you may have had an extensive investigation of the condominium unit that you're buying, you can't do that for all of the units in the complex. It's a buyer beware kind of situation right now.

We saw that huge scandal occur over condominium rot in British Columbia over the past few years. Of course, the problem is worse there because of the kind of weather they have. Being wet and muggy, the mold that caused all the lawsuits seems to grow a lot faster than what it has in Alberta, but we have that problem here. We have that problem in my constituency.

The condominium owner that I talked to didn't have it in his particular unit, but it was in the complex as a whole, and it substantially increased the costs during renovations on the outside walls of the complex, for which he was partially responsible. Had they had some sort of extensive and complete inspections done on a regular basis, this information would have been available. It should have been a part of a disclosure document. A purchaser should have been fully aware of that kind of condition, and that should be an option for canceling a purchase agreement. So not being able to examine the entire complex is certainly an issue.

Another issue: prohibit a developer from controlling a board outside of elections to the boards. This was an issue particularly in new complexes or those that aren't fully filled and where a developer still owns the title to some of the particular units. As such, they're able to have people nominated or appointed to the condominium boards. That's seen as a degree of control that isn't necessary,

Mr. Chairman, and something that they would like to see prohibited.

Another point: board members names and addresses registered with the land titles office are accurate and up to date between annual general meetings. Of course, this is a problem because sometimes you can't find those board members. If you need to have a decision made about something and you want to call a meeting of the association, then you need to be able to access these people. Often between annual meetings they move. You only have to own the condominium in order to be eligible to be a board member. You don't have to actually be resident within the unit. So we find oftentimes that condominium owners are not residents within the complex; they live elsewhere. They are difficult to track down, particularly if they've moved between annual meetings, and that can be a problem for members at large within the association. So they felt that that would be a very small thing but a necessary item to be addressed.

Another point: the validity of any act performed by a board member should be open to review. Again, it just makes common sense, Mr. Chairman, that this would happen and that the associations would have some provisions that acts performed by board members within the context of their responsibilities as board members should be open to review, but it seems that that isn't often the case. People I've spoken to felt that should be addressed.

They also felt that adequate representation of unit owners on the condominium board is essential, and we find also that that doesn't always happen. It's more than the number of units a particular person may use. What they need is an adequate cross-representation of people who actually live within the complex. Absentee owners cause problems in this instance. People who aren't on the ground all the time to see what's happening on a day-to-day basis within the complex can add to the kinds of problems that occur. I thought this was a valid point and something that could have been addressed within the context of this bill.

8:10

They also wanted to know why they couldn't include that meetings should be held in the municipality in which the units are located. Once again this is a problem, Mr. Chairman. It doesn't always happen that the actual board meetings are held in an area easy to access for general members of the complex. You'd think it would just be common sense that they'd have them in somebody's living room or in a common area if there's a common area within the complex, but it doesn't happen. Often they are outside of the region or the area, and they are difficult for members at large to get to.

They wanted to see a prohibition of developers drafting bylaws that are in their own self-interest. Why developers should be involved in the development of bylaws within a condominium association is a question anyway, Mr. Chairman, but particularly they shouldn't be able to draft them in their own self-interest. Where this particularly becomes a problem is in new complexes where there isn't a fully developed, operating board yet and units are left vacant or haven't been sold. There's that crossover time between when the units are full and the board can operate in the best interests of the unit owners and holders rather than the developers, so that's an issue that needs to be addressed.

I think it's particularly concerning that nearly every condominium owner I talked to had an issue with the developers in terms of how the initial set of bylaws gets drafted for the condominium association. Then often the people who own the units thereafter don't understand the process for revising or deleting bylaws, so those bylaws get left on the books sometimes for a long time, and down the road when large problems occur with the units, they can also become a problem.

They wanted to ensure that all condominium corporations are governed by the same minimum bylaw standards set out in section 27 of the act. It doesn't explicitly say that it's going to happen, and it's an issue. People wanted to see that that was addressed.

They wanted to clarify that capital improvements refer to items other than repairs and replacements to items that do not occur annually. So this again, although not expressed in exactly those terms, Mr. Chairman, was an issue that was raised with me time and time again. Of course, this becomes an issue for financing for the condominium association itself in terms of whether or not these items are paid for annually out of the yearly budget, which can mean a hefty sum in the monthly condominium fees, or whether they're capitalized over time and a reserve fund gets set up or you plan to do these capital items in two to five years' time so that you can establish a reserve fund so that condominium owners aren't hit with a huge bill in any given year, and it's happened often.

We've seen cases with the pine shake roofing issue where suddenly the condominium association realizes that the roofs they've got on all of these condominiums are not adequate, need to be replaced immediately. That's a huge bill, Mr. Chairman. Depending on the size of the units, we're talking close to \$100,000 sometimes. Well, a bank isn't going to give anybody more money on their mortgage in order to do their roof. We've seen that. So what happens is that if there hasn't been a reserve fund set up by the association, they literally go to each unit owner and ask them to pay their share of that repair, anywhere from \$2,500 to \$7,000, and they've got to come up with the money right away. There are no exceptions made. So it's up to the individual owner how they access that cash, and often they simply don't have access to those kinds of resources. That's an example of why you would want to clarify the capital improvements and separate them from ordinary kinds of repairs and replacements.

They wanted to see listed that in the case of termination of the condominium status under section 52 any funds left over are to be distributed to the owners proportional to unit factor. Again, this has been an issue in some cases where there have been dollars left over. For whatever reason the condominium status has been changed, and then the moneys are seen in some people's eyes not to be properly distributed. It'd be quite easy to write that into the act and see that this is done. Now, perhaps this can be done by regulation, whatever, but it needs to be addressed. It's certainly an issue for some people in this province.

They also wanted to see that a purchaser should not be held responsible for a late filing of a notice, that the mortgage of the previous owner should be held responsible for any contributions owing from the previous owner. This gets into detail, but, Mr. Chairman, it can be quite important to these owners. I've seen lots of cases where we have young couples who are buying a property for the very first time. They're not told all of the costs to get into the association and legal fees associated with moving into the complex in the first place, so some of those bills come as a surprise. When a month after they've taken possession of their unit they get another legal bill because the previous owner didn't fully discharge all of their responsibilities prior to moving and somehow it wasn't picked up by the lawyers, it's a big surprise and not one that condominium owners are happy with. So that's something that needs to be addressed too.

Many of the people that I talked to said that the owners should also have the same rights as the mortgagee, and I think that's an interesting debate. Certainly you can see their point of view in terms of rights and obligations. We've heard previously from mortgagees saying that they should always have the first discharge and rights on properties in this case, and we see that they're protecting their

dollars. One is protecting their ownership and the investment they've made, and the other one is protecting the ongoing cash flow that they're expecting to receive as a result of being a mortgage holder. So it's an interesting debate and one that needs to be addressed, I think, in this case.

To a person, everybody I talked to felt that the main purpose of having condominium legislation is for consumer protection. I think that what we see in this bill, Mr. Chairman, primarily is protection for the condominium developers and for the potential for developers in the future to develop condominiums. It doesn't necessarily address the specific rights of the condominium owners from a consumer protection perspective. Once again, I will use the example of pine shakes particularly and the mold or rot that is now being found in some of these condominium units. These people, through absolutely no fault of their own, find themselves in situations where they are facing absolutely massive repairs, repairs that cause some of them to lose their complete investment in the property and the equity that they've got, and they often have trouble discharging the mortgages because they can't find a buyer.

If I knew that a condominium unit had mold in it, for sure I wouldn't be buying a unit there. I wouldn't care if I'd already signed on the dotted line. I'd be backing out of that deal as fast as I could. What you see, then, is that the property values of these units plummet far below their original purchase prices and often far below a value where owners can recover. So you're faced with the situation where you personally cannot raise any more cash, yet you're facing a bill of \$2,500 or \$5,000 or \$10,000 in terms of repairs needed for the facility. You can't sell the unit because people know that it's got mold in it. As a conscientious owner you feel obligated to disclose the things that are wrong with the unit. You haven't got a buyer. You can't sell it for any kind of a price at all. What do you do? Walk away from the mortgage?

Well, if you do that, your credit rating is significantly damaged, and you lose any equity that you had in the property. In addition to that, where are you going to live then? You haven't got anything in terms of equity for purchasing a new home, and you may be in a situation where you can't walk away from the mortgage because of whatever other investments or commitments you have. You're not going to want to live in the unit. To live in a unit with that mold in it is significantly a health risk, particularly a concern for anybody with a chronic health condition, for young children, or for seniors, in fact exactly the kind of individual that we often find living in these condominiums. So, Mr. Chairman, I have the greatest sympathy for these people when they say that who should have the highest degree of protection is the consumer and not necessarily the developer.

Thank you. I believe I am nearly out of time, and I'm happy to have had an opportunity to speak to this act.

8:20

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Just some very brief responses to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. In this bill the concerns that I would say she has raised are addressed, and that's what this bill actually does. Let's be very clear that the bylaws for condominium associations are set by the members of the association, and they vote as to their bylaws. If there are problems with those bylaws, it's up to the owners and members of the condo association to make amendments to those bylaws. That's not a government role, because they in fact are the owners and partners in the condo complex.

Insofar as disclosures, one of the things that is good about this bill is that it does require that there be a capital upgrade or capital

maintenance report done and filed with the condo association every five years. That alleviates surprises for people coming in to purchase a condo and not knowing what lays ahead insofar as capital maintenance that would be required. I think that's important. Now, then it's up to the condo association to do the scheduling and determine how in fact they're going to deal with the short-term and the long-term report as to types of capital maintenance that have to take place. That is addressed in this bill. So when someone does come to buy a condo from someone, they can look at those reports – they must be filed and readily available – and can in fact make some planning and determination as to whether this is a venture they want to enter into.

I think that some of those concerns that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie raised have really been very much addressed in this bill. What was outstanding and asked for by the condominium owners and the condominium builders was a coming together of some of these outstanding issues, and that's what this amendment act is all about. So I think that it's incumbent upon us to move forward with these amendments and get this bill in place and let the condominium associations determine their own bylaws.

The other thing that's important, Mr. Chairman, is that the reserve fund that is put in place by each condominium association is, again, determined by that association as to the amount that they will require to maintain the condominium complex based on the evaluation by a qualified person as to what type of capital will be necessary. They will make that determination, not the government.

I think there is a lot of good disclosure in this bill, and it's one that not only protects the consumer but protects the existing association and takes away the debate on whether the builder should or shouldn't have done something in the longer term, because it's clearly laid out.

So I think those issues that were raised by Edmonton-Ellerslie are in fact dealt with in this amendment, and I would encourage her, if she still has concerns, to call over to our department and go over some of these issues.

This is one of the first times that builders and buyers have come to consensus and conclusions on some of these issues, and I think we should, again, applaud them for their efforts. As the Member for Calgary-Bufferall alluded to in second reading, it's been 10 years of coming together to get to this point, and it's been done through consensus. I think that they have exhausted pretty much all the arguments on either side, and this is the position that they have asked us to put in place. They are in agreement with this program and with this legislation, and I would hope that the members opposite would support it.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bufferall.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A couple of comments I want to make. One of the things I want to observe is that I represent probably one of the most condo-intense constituencies in the province. I have absolutely no doubt that no sooner will the bill be passed than I'm going to have a number of condo corporations showing up at my constituency office asking questions, offering suggestions in terms of amendments.

DR. WEST: They don't do that with the rest of us.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, I'm going to avoid being provoked or baited.

The point I wanted to make is in terms of how I deal with this as a representative for downtown Calgary, not having the benefit of being able to consult with every one of the hundreds and hundreds of condo corporations. I have, I guess, done some extrapolation

from those corporations that have come to me with issues and concerns. I must tell you one of the things that I hear most often. I spoke with a woman this afternoon who lives in a building where there have been a whole series of problems. They are anxious for this legislation. In fact, she said to me: "We are holding off our general meeting. In fact, we're trying to schedule it after the legislation comes into force, because it allows our corporation and our board to do some things we couldn't do before. There's some flexibility in this bill that we need, and as our MLA, Mr. Dickson, we'd like you to do what you can to expedite passage of the bill."

Certainly I've heard from unit holders that are interested in moving forward on this. Now, I've also had the benefit of talking to some developers and some property managers. Really, we have here, if you will, three different communities of interest. You have the unit owners, and we have thousands of those people in downtown Calgary. We've got the developers, and that's an obvious interest that they have. Then we have managers. When we were dealing with this four years ago or so in the House, I'd not realized how well organized the condominium management group is. I learned a lot and I heard a lot from people while we were dealing with that bill some four years ago. So this time around I've made a point of trying to do some broader consultation with managers as well as developers and unit owners.

I think that when I look at the bill, the reason I'm supporting this bill is there are some very positive developments in it. You know, unlike bills 18 and 19, that I had a lot of difficulty with, in this bill I was able to find some really positive provisions. For example, the mandatory reserve study is an important step forward. That's been a major issue in the past when I've talked to people who have gone into buildings. There are a number of older buildings in downtown Calgary that had been condominiumized after they had existed for a while as apartment buildings. Whether it was sloppiness or not a tremendously efficient management outfit, what we had was some of those unit holders being faced with special assessments to cover capital expense. I don't think it was, in anybody's view, the most satisfactory way of dealing with it.

I like the fact that we have some increased disclosure to purchasers, and I think that's an important feature of this bill. It's another reason why I'm inclined to support it. I also like the express incorporation of provision for arbitration and mediation. That's a really important tool and something that's positive to see in this. The new, more flexible process to amend condominium plans is also, I think, a significant step forward.

We've heard a lot of talk that the developers wanted a phase-in provision for new complexes. I know it's important. For example, I had occasion to drive around with a relative recently in the Tuscany area in northwest Calgary, and there are some huge condominium projects. We're talking about projects that have 350 different units and bowling alleys and swimming pools, and as I think we get more and more seniors looking to leave single-family dwellings and move into places where they have more sociability, more amenities, this becomes more and more important. I hold no particular brief for developers, but what I recognize, because I believe in a market system, is that things that can reduce the cost to developers help to ensure that the cost of individual condominium units hopefully continues to be affordable, particularly for our parents or for seniors who are looking for the kind of accommodation that can be offered in larger condominium complexes. So I support the phasing not just because it makes life easier for developers but because I think it helps to streamline the process and it's easier in terms of cash flow for developers. My hope is that that's going to translate into affordable condominium living, particularly for seniors and for those people who are looking for that kind of accommodation.

8:30

Now, one of the things I wanted to make note of is that I've heard from some groups who wanted to see a number of different changes to the Condominium Property Act, and what I've explained to those groups and those constituents is that in a bill like this you just can't go off and bring in amendments to cover anything under the sun. To a large extent we have to deal with the bill that's in front of us, and to go out and address some of the things that people would like to see when they're not addressed in the bill, we can't do. So what I've undertaken to people who have raised that is to spend some time with the Minister of Government Services and the Member for Calgary-Bow, and I'm collecting a cumulative list. As the Minister of Government Services said sagely to me at one point – her phraseology is always more colourful than mine – if I might paraphrase, she made the observation that this is a work in progress, that just as we have seen substantial tinkering with it in the past, we will likely see further adjustment in the future. I believe that to be the case.

I don't know what the total percentage is now, but if you look at the extent to which condominiums have increased in terms of the number of condominium units – in the city of Calgary, for example, we were actually quite slow in terms of moving from getting out of those big single-family dwellings, but now we're doing it in big numbers, and I think that's significant. I think there are going to be some other changes to the legislation. To those people who have raised concerns that cannot properly be incorporated into an amendment in Bill 16, my commitment as the Calgary-Buffalo MLA is to try and find solutions and to attempt to work with the Minister of Government Services and the Member for Calgary-Bow to look for further change down the road.

Now, I had outlined some concerns before. I think at this point, because I may be losing the interest of members, I have an amendment I want to propose, and I advised the Minister of Government Services earlier about this. I forgot to advise the minister of intergovernmental affairs, who looks absolutely shocked that I would have the temerity to bring in an amendment now, but this is an old favourite. This recognizes the fact that I don't . . . [interjections] I think we'll keep members in suspense just a moment longer, Mr. Chairman. This is the one that if you look at Bill 16, what we find is that in section 6 we have a new section 14.1, and what we find there is that we have delegated lawmaking. We have section 9, which deals again with expanded roles for regulations. We've got section 11. [interjections]

I'm being encouraged. I want to specifically thank the Minister of Government Services and the minister of intergovernmental affairs for cheering me on, because a moment ago I thought interest was flagging, but I'm now encouraged and I'm buoyed to carry on right to the end of my 20 minutes and maybe beyond. So thank you, ministers. Thank you very much. My heart soars like a hawk when I see the kind of support we're getting from across the floor, and it may be that on this bill we're seeing some of that cross-Assembly support where people in their respective constituencies can come together and say: we can do a better job for condominium projects in this province.

The point I was going to make is that if you look at section 9 and section 11 and section 6, what do we find there but more regulation? Now, one of the things I find here is that a lot of my constituents, when I point this out to them, say: "So, Dickson, what's the big deal with that? What's the matter with regulations?" And then I explain to them the sorry, the tragic history in this province of how the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations has been allowed to atrophy, atrophy, ladies and gentlemen, to next to nothing. Its only

existence is the fact that in – what is it? – every Thursday *Hansard*, when we look at the back, past the index page, there's a list of the committees, and you know, it's listed there. We have a chairman. We have a very live chairman in the Member for Banff-Cochrane. But beyond that, this is an invisible committee. This is a disappearing committee.

When I pass away and the Speaker of the day stands up in the House, when we have a moment of silence and he reads out the committees that this member served on – I'm going to have to leave a specific note: please, do not read in that I was a charter member from 1992 to the time of my passing of the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, because I just don't want to be associated with a committee that doesn't do anything, Mr. Chairman. [interjections] Well, there may be some others who want that, but for those of you who are here when I'm long gone and you do that little moment of silence, please, please, would you make sure the Speaker knows not to read out my membership on that committee.

MR. HAVELOCK: That's presupposing that he'll read about you.

MR. DICKSON: Well, that's entirely true. That may be the day the Legislature is adjourned.

Mr. Chairman, the point I want to make is this. We've got some laws and regulations here that have gotten away on us in so many statutes. This isn't the fault of the Member for Calgary-Bow. She's certainly tried, and if she had unfettered discretion, if she didn't have a cabinet that was sort of looking over her shoulder, I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts that Member for Calgary-Bow would be the first one to say: yes, Dickson, I agree; the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations should review those regulations.

Now, because she may not feel free to do that, I want to take this moment right now to move an amendment. This has been seen in the past by . . . [interjection]

The original amendment is coming to you, Mr. Chairman, on top of a pile of 89 copies of the amendment. I'm going to ask that it be distributed. Would we call this amendment A, Mr. Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: It's A1.

MR. DICKSON: It's A1. I'm moving this amendment on behalf of and in the name of my colleague from Edmonton-Manning. I'm moving the amendment in the name of the Member for Edmonton-Manning, but here's what the amendment would do. It would add after section 55 a section 55.1. This would add section 73.1 after section 73:

- (1) In this section, "Standing Committee" means the Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly on Law and Regulations.
- (2) Where the Lieutenant Governor in Council proposes to make a regulation pursuant to section 73, the Lieutenant Governor in Council shall cause to be forwarded to the Standing Committee a copy of the proposed regulation.
- (3) On receipt by the Standing Committee of a copy of a proposed regulation pursuant to subsection (2), the Standing Committee shall examine the proposed regulation to ensure that
 - (a) it is consistent with the delegated authority provided in this Act,
 - (b) it is necessarily incidental to the purpose of this Act, and
 - (c) it is reasonable in terms of efficiently achieving the objective of this Act.
- (4) When the proposed regulation has been examined as required under subsection (3), the Standing Committee shall advise the Lieutenant Governor in Council that the proposed regulation

has been so examined and shall indicate any matter referred to in subsection(3)(a),(b) or (c) to which, in the opinion of the Standing Committee, the attention of the Lieutenant Governor in Council should be drawn.

So that's the amendment I'm putting forward.

What I'd hope, Mr. Chairman, is that we recognize on this amendment that there's a new and compelling reason why I put this forward. There may be some members in this Assembly who are tuning me out as I speak, there may be some members who tuned me out 15 minutes ago, but the point is this, Mr. Chairman. There is a really new and fresh reason that the members have not heard before in terms of why we should look carefully at amendment A1. Members may be asking: so what is this new, fresh reason why we should support it?

8:40

Well, it's this. We have a process that started 10 years ago to update our Condominium Property Act, and four years ago the government thought they had it right. We debated that bill, and we passed it. I still clearly remember the bill being passed, and it was sort of paraded out. You know, there was a band in front and fanfare and the rest of it, and we thought this was going to become law.

What we found was that in terms of development of the regulations, the developers and the condominium property managers and the unit holders were not *ad idem*. They did not agree, and there were fundamental disagreements. The point, Mr. Chairman, becomes this: that consultation has demonstrated more impactively than anything else I can think of that the regulation process has got to be open. I say to the Member for Calgary-Bow and I say to the Minister of Government Services that it is not good enough to have a closed consultation around the regulations, and I make the offer I've made before. I mean, this is all we want to see. If we got this amendment, we'd be able to shut this process down and we'd be able to move on, confident that we had done something positive for the people of the province of Alberta.

So, Mr. Chairman, I want to point out with this amendment that you know what this would do? It would allow those three different constituent groups, those three different communities of interest to know that there is an open process, because the process for development of regulations now is not open. There are people in the Department of Government Services that presumably are sitting up there behind me who are shaking their heads and saying: we've done an open, open consultation. But with respect to these very capable people – and I appreciate the excellent briefing we got on this bill when it was first introduced. There were some very capable people in the department working on it. But do you know something? There is always a problem with not everyone being consulted, and I can guarantee you there will always be some stakeholders that are left out and are not included on the list.

I just think it's so important we make sure, Mr. Chairman, that what we do is have a more open process in terms of how those regulations are developed, and I think this would be a really good model to do it on. It's not good enough that we have this committee that just never meets.

I look at it this way. You know, it's great to have the Member for Calgary-Bow in the Assembly and looking particularly healthy, and I just think: what a great tribute to the Member for Calgary-Bow. It's great to have that member in the Assembly tonight, and what better gift to that Member for Calgary-Bow than gift wrapping this amendment? Let's pass it unanimously. Let's present it. I want to be able to go around and collect autographs on the side of the amendment. I want to be able to do that. We'll tie it up in a bow. I want to hand deliver it to that Member for Calgary-Bow. This could be her finest hour in this Assembly since 1989, and who,

ladies and gentlemen, would deprive the Member for Calgary-Bow of that distinction tonight?

So let's work together. We have an amendment. This is not going to hurt anybody. You know, this is not painful at all. We can just as one collective mass support our colleague from Calgary-Bow, celebrate her involvement back in the Chamber this Monday evening, and then move on to the other important business of the Assembly.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman's Ruling Clarification

THE CHAIRMAN: Before we recognize the next speaker, just a clarification. Under the line where it says, "55.1 The following is added after section 73," please note that below that it should read 73.1. It goes then, "(1) In this section 'Standing Committee' means." So if you'd put that in there for greater clarification.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I've heard many things in this Assembly, but I've never heard the proposal of a bill to prescribe to clean your arteries. I suppose anything could happen. I would like to also lend my welcome to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow. I have to disagree with the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I really don't think Bill 16 has quite got it in it to give that particular member her strength back. Perhaps some time out of the Assembly with family, friends, some good food and sleep, all those things, might be just what the doctor ordered, but most certainly it is good to have her back in the Assembly.

The amendment before us this evening on Bill 16, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, in essence directs that after section 55 we would insert a new section that would direct this bill to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. We've seen in recent days a similar amendment proposed actually, I believe, twice. We've seen it proposed on Bill 18, and we've seen also a similar amendment proposed for discussion in this Assembly on Bill 11. It has been certainly a bit of a puzzle to me that the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations of the Legislative Assembly never meets.

What I've concluded is that instead of having this legislative committee meeting, what has happened over time is the government practice to substitute committees comprised solely of government members to review standing policy, to serve in a preliminary way for the review of legislation, to provide feedback and input into budget debates, but specifically when we talk about laws and regulations in this province, there is a parliamentary tradition that suggests that a party comprised of all members should in fact be reviewing laws, particularly those that might be seen to be contentious or where in fact the government is unable to achieve some form of consensus. Yet we see this committee not meeting. Certainly the Condominium Property Amendment Act, quite a young piece of legislation, in essence accompanied by a 10-year consultation period, would be a primary candidate for going before that committee.

It would also, I think, for those people who exist in the category that aren't completely satisfied with the bill, who don't feel that the bill has completely addressed the concerns they've raised or if particular sections they recommended have been excluded – it gives those individuals, those organizations or groups the sense that they have gone the full mile, Mr. Chairman, in undertaking all the possible mechanisms and meeting with all the authoritative groups possible. The sad fact, though, is that while this committee has its

authority in statute, while it has its authority in long parliamentary traditions, in this particular province we have a government that chooses not to activate it, number one, and not to fund it, number two. In fact, this year in the Members' Services Committee we had proposed draft budgets that completely eliminated any mention of this committee from the budget statements. Of course, then when that was raised, it was inputted but with a zero budget balance.

I think the amendment before us most certainly achieves a compromise, if you will, for government. It also respects a tool that is there and that government should use when appropriate.

8:50

Now, in just recent debate I had mentioned that there were a number of outstanding concerns, and I believe the hon. minister for government affairs did respond to that. There are several individuals who have raised concerns with respect to the bill, and there has been a series of correspondence exchanged but no real resolution. Perhaps the government might find it, even as a trial, Mr. Chairman, expeditious to send this particular bill in its current state to the Law and Regulations Committee and have them meet with these individuals and see if a resolution can be achieved.

One of the other trends I've noticed during my short term in this Assembly is the fact that we quite often pass bills in a very fast fashion, and then before you know it – it won't even be a year past – there will be additional amendments brought forward either through amendment acts or through miscellaneous statutes. We find ourselves now looking at a series of amendments to the Health Professions Act, just passed last fall. We see amendments being brought forward in a number of other different areas. Given the growth in the condominium industry, the fact that is looked upon as perhaps something all of us will consider as an option for our homes as we approach retirement, I wonder if we will find ourselves in the same position, Mr. Chairman, where we will have amended the bill only to find it needing substantive amendment at some point just a short time down the road.

There hasn't been with this bill nor is it common practice for government to share in detail the impetus for why such legislation or such amendments are necessary. While to a degree the hon. minister did provide some of that clarification in her remarks, the question has to be asked: if the industry has worked without it for 10 years while we were consulting, how urgent is it that it be passed now? I certainly haven't noticed that there's any shortage of construction or any shortage of demand for condominiums, so obviously the industry is not being restrained in that respect.

One of the primary concerns we've heard repeatedly in the debate on this bill is that the bill seems to favour developers more than owners of condominiums, or perhaps the collective is favoured more than the individual. So, again, why not utilize a legislative tool that exists and refer this to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations? It just makes sense, Mr. Chairman.

I'm not going to recite in detail the concerns that were raised by many speakers around consumer protection, surrounding consultation, surrounding enforcement, concern around how the additional regulations will be drafted and what consultation will occur surrounding that.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: There seems to be a lot of lively discussions that are not too loud, but they're just collectively loud enough to nearly drown out the hon. member. Thank goodness for the modern technology of microphones that can isolate the speakers. I wonder

if we could bring the conversation level to one or two or maybe five notches lower.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I'm not sure if it's my emergency training or the fact that I'm a mother of two children, but I can maintain my focus despite what ruckus might be going on. I know that the hon. members were completely, absolutely and completely intent on my comments on the amendment before us this evening, so I certainly don't take any offence. I know that we've been in here now almost four months, and the tendency is very strong to just need to get on with chatting and other business, et cetera.

In any event, the amendment before us is important. It's an important suggestion to heed and to hear the concerns expressed by condominium property owners and condominium associations. With that, Mr. Chairman, I feel that I've sufficiently provided my rationale for supporting the amendment, and I will take my seat.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow on amendment A1.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the members for their kind comments. [applause] Well, thank you very much, colleagues. I appreciate that.

As it's been said, there is a very strong consensus between the stakeholders of the condominium industry and the owners and the managers, and there is some impatience to get this legislation passed. It has been over 10 years that consultations have been going on. We did the first bill on this in 1996, and at that time there was great concern about getting the consumer protection passed, because that's why there's this growing list of problems that people are meeting. That is still waiting to go, so people are getting impatient. They want to have this bill passed.

They will be independent and they will be able to make their own bylaws, and they will be able to arrange through mediation and other methods to solve their issues, so there is no need to refer it to a third body, which would again be another layer telling them what to do in their own homes. So I don't see that there's a further need for delaying it any more than now. Four years seems to be the amount of time it takes for me to get some of the housing legislation through. If you look at the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act, it took four years for it, so I think it's time. It's four years. I'm ready. That would be my gift, hon. member. So I would appreciate it if the House would defeat the amendment.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

[The clauses of Bill 16 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

9:00

Bill 13

Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to stand this evening and introduce some amendments to Bill 13. I believe the government amendment is being circulated as I speak, and I would like to move the amendment as a package and have it voted on under a single vote.

Speaking to the amendments, Mr. Chairman, under part A, section 1(11), what it says is:

Except as to outstanding debts to the Board or to the account of the orphan fund in respect of suspension or abandonment costs.

That comes in under section 17(3). Really, what this amendment is allowing for is for the orphan fund to collect moneys that would be outstanding, due by the company that was working the well before it was shut in. At the same time, this will allow future companies to continue on and not be burdened by outstanding debts that were created by past companies.

The second section, Mr. Chairman, really is based around the creation of a DAO that would allow the orphan fund to be managed outside and be arm's length from government. Just to give you a couple of points on that, it would be governed and controlled by the industry with nominal government representation. The EUB continues to collect and enforce funding for the orphan fund from the industry and grants the same to the arm's-length entity on an annual basis. The arm's-length entity assumes authority over orphan fund expenditures and operations. Also, the arm's-length entity would be fully accountable and transparent to industry, the EUB, and the government.

Based on those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll sit down and wait for some comments from the other side.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair would just ask if it's agreed that we'll handle this as one amendment, as A1.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Agreed? Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This particular piece of legislation was agreed upon quite some time ago between the member that introduced the bill and the opposition in that we recognized the initiative some 11 years ago by the industry to solve this problem of orphan or abandoned wells, wells that have no means of financial support in order to reclaim the site and put it back into an original condition and/or to refurbish the site to be a producer again. But we were stopped a little short Tuesday last when we found that there were some amendments that were being brought forward. They were not benign by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, two of them are, and they're quite reasonable.

The first, in section 17(3), was a reasonable amendment where a second party or a third party, for that matter, any subsequent parties to the original party that abandoned the site would not be then burdened with any of the previously accumulated debts. That individual corporation would take over that well as is in order to continue on with either production or reclamation of some description.

The second is an addition to section 60(b), which really is an extension of the recovery. Should any funds be recovered by one of

those second or third parties that I was speaking of through either a prosecution or a negotiation or litigation with some earlier owners of the site, if any of that is recovered, then it should be promptly forwarded to the board to add back to the fund, of course, which is all reasonable. That's adjudicated and determined by the board, which is also reasonable.

The third amendment gives the opposition cause to concern itself with the matter. We had a great deal of concern at the outset with the creation of a delegated authority, because, as the House would know, a delegated authority sets the accounting completely away from the Legislature. We thought that perhaps there would be room there to move, to have the matter at least audited and filed in the Legislature under the Auditor General's auspices, and therefore some public scrutiny would be brought to bear on the accounts. Our reason for doing this is twofold. First, we're dead set against delegated authorities. They have a spotted history at best. Notably, some have been abject failures. Some of them have been performing reasonably well. This particular one gives us less concern, of course, because of the participants and the desire, but we'll get to that in a moment.

The concern that the caucus had with the delegated authority is that, setting aside these matters, in other jurisdictions this could not and would not occur. Other jurisdictions take on the reclamation of public or private lands in oil exploration, surface and subsurface, as a government responsibility, and all work would be performed under the auspices of a government either directly or through contract with the private sector. It would be enforced in law to find and prosecute those people that abandoned that well, even to the extent of personally, I'm told, in some states in the United States. However, that is not the case here.

This has been worked on by the industry and the good faith in the industry for so very long. The industry was most convincing to this member in a discussion we had Friday last such that they sought our concurrence to get on with the matter. As I understand the recent history of the fund, it was attached by Treasury in the belief that the AEUB, which was holding the fund as a reserve fund, a fund that was built up to a substantial number – I believe that in the order of \$3 million was set aside as a buffer or an insurance fund, if you will, that was big enough to handle any manner of work that was taken on in that particular year of budgeting. What happened is that under the Financial Administration Act the Treasury decided that that reserve fund was not in fact a reserve fund but a surplus and therefore attached it and reduced the budget accordingly, such that I gather that in the year 1999 there were simply not enough funds available to do the work that was allotted. This, of course, angered and upset the private-sector participants, both CAPP and SEPAC. They came back with a number of solutions, none of which seemed to work out.

On Tuesday last we were instructed that some changes had to occur. Well, it's a little upsetting at the eleventh hour to find that everything we'd spoken of before on the fund was set aside. Further, I find that the Thursday prior to that is when the participants, SEPAC and CAPP, found that the solution that was in the act was not going to be able to perform as they expected. I gathered from some discussions with some members that part of the problem is one element of government having difficulty with the other element. It's the old right hand beating up the left hand, if you will, and this particular piece of legislation got caught in the middle.

Now, in the normal case we would be dead set and dig our heels in really quite deeply with a delegated authority, because we've had the experience of DAOs before and are not overly pleased with them, particularly in dealing with a reclamation matter. However, the participants in this particular DAO have absolutely nothing to gain from bending the rules or from setting the rules lighter than

they might be, if you will, so as to let them off. The fact is that this DAO does not have anyone's interest other than the public good, and that was the intent at the outset of the establishing of this fund. I have been able to convince my members in caucus to be able to swallow a little and understand that this particular DAO is a reasonable compromise, even though the concept of DAOs is something foreign and alien to the wishes of our caucus.

9:10

Mr. Chairman, with that, I have nothing further to add to the amendments, save and except that we shall be supporting them as one would support a mail-order bride. We don't know what is coming. We would dearly like to have some check and balance with the Auditor General being able to review the annual report and then report those through the normal course and review of public accounts. Should that not occur, we still will support these amendments as presented to Bill 13.

Thank you, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Yeah. I had a couple of comments I wanted to make with respect to the amendments. I think a number of industry representatives in Calgary have taken time to offer me some good information on the bill and the purpose of the bill. I've learned more about the orphan fund than I ever thought possible in the last two months. I'm indebted to the industry representatives that have been kind enough to give me some good information about the bill, about the reasons for the bill. I listened to the explanation when the bill was introduced, and I've got some good advice from the Member for Edmonton-Calder, who spoke just moments ago, with respect to the reason for the bill and why it's a bill worthy of support. Now, I certainly indicated that I was prepared to support it at second reading and in fact did support it.

I must say that I experienced some frustration and some concern when I saw the amendments, particularly the one dealing with regulations. You know, I think that one of the most important things for an elected person is to be consistent. I don't think you can sort of take one position when the subject matter is X and then toss that out and then take an entirely different position because the subject matter is Y.

Just a few scant moments ago I was talking about the importance of managing regulations and the way they're made and so on. Now, there's a very large provision. I think the first two parts of the amendment package are not very controversial, but I am certainly troubled by the third element of the amendment package because what it does is it gives, again, the Lieutenant Governor in Council broad, broad regulation-making power.

Mr. Chairman, I agonized over this. I had to weigh my concerns over the way subordinate legislation is made in this province and the fact that on so many bills I've raised basically the same concern and also to recognize that we're dealing with something a little different here. In fact, from the input I received from industry, I guess what makes this quite different is that we're really not dealing with public moneys as such. These aren't tax dollars involved. This is basically an industry-funded fund. In effect, we have been able to see since I think it would have been 1994 – I'm just trying to think. In '96, when we saw the expanded scope of the orphan fund – and I remember debating that at the time – I think I learned then the fact that this is an area where the oil and gas sector in fact has shown some really responsible leadership.

Recognizing what makes this different than some of the other bills where I've opposed because of the way they dealt with regulation –

in this case recognizing that the funding is basically industry-generated funding, that we have a demonstrated record, if you will, in terms of effectiveness in managing orphan wells and then since '96 the expanded scope to include abandonment of pipelines and things like that, I think we've got a meritorious record. I think the other thing is that really it's in the industries self-interest, if you will, to ensure that this thing works and it continues to work, that the orphan fund is monitored and managed carefully through its regulatory agencies.

So, on balance, after agonizing over the amendment – and just so people are clear, it's amendment B(b), which has to do with what the Lieutenant Governor may do by way of regulations. I've decided to support the bill, because I think the other circumstances outweigh it.

I do want to say that it seems to me that it's just too darn easy for government to keep on meting out greater and greater authority by way of regulation, and I keep on thinking to myself that there will come a time when Albertans stand up and say: it is no longer acceptable to make so many major decisions in secret without the benefit of any kind of formal record, to pass regulations in a way where the public has no notice or no opportunity to review them. You know, it just is unacceptable. The government may have lucked out on this one, because the set of amendments relate to an industry-financed, industry-managed fund that works well for the interests of Alberta, but I still have to say how disappointed I am that there isn't better all-party scrutiny of these regulations.

One of the things that I'd refer members to is in the *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, autumn of 1997. My colleague for Edmonton-Norwood excerpted a presentation she had made to, I think, a Canadian parliamentary conference in Regina, Saskatchewan, and it was titled The Delegated Administrative Organization in Alberta. As I read this analysis, once again I get indignant. Maybe I have a low indignant threshold, but I read this, and once again I think of what a poor job we do in this province in terms of subordinate lawmaking.

It goes back to the two companion bills that we looked at in the fall of 1994, when government wanted wholesale authority to create delegated administrative organizations, DAOs, and they wanted a blanket statute. It wasn't even done by sector. We were going to pass this one thing that allowed government to take any particular area of government endeavour and to turn it into a DAO. It's a problem, and I say to the members of the Assembly this evening that I hope people go through and read the problems with that, because what it does is take responsibility for subordinate lawmaking out of this Assembly and squirrels it away someplace where it becomes even less accessible.

I mean, we saw in so many ways with Bill 11 that the process of this Assembly is not seen as being accessible nor responsible to the interests of many Albertans. Yet to take it a further step away, out of this building all together and into a boardroom in a department, there are problems with that, Mr. Chairman.

9:20

Anyway, I didn't intend to go on so long, but I just wanted to advise that I have some real concerns with this. My support on Bill 13 is without prejudice. It's without prejudice to my right to come back on the next bill where I see this kind of regulation-making authority and object, and oppose it and try to amend it and do whatever I can to change it.

I know that there may be some other members that may share some of my concerns with the proposed section 66, but I've explained the reasons why on balance I will be supporting it. I sure encourage the government to do better. I know the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View will be taking that message back that

government has to do better in these areas. I look forward to seeing enlightenment come to the furrowed brows of everybody in the cabinet of the province of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to rise this evening to debate Bill 13, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2000. You know, as a junior legislator I always find the amendment acts and the amendment . . . Mr. Chairman, thank you. I'm definitely speaking to the amendment before us this evening.

When I find myself amending an act, I always find it useful to go to the original act to see in fact what is the breadth and theme of this piece of legislation. What powers does this statute hold in the energy sector?

I was particularly prompted to do that when I saw within the amendments this evening that it would be proposed that the Lieutenant Governor in Council would make regulations "respecting the establishment or designation of delegated authorities" and accompanying that under section 66(1)(b) "delegating to one or more delegated authorities any of the Board's powers, duties or functions under this Act or the regulations."

Now, I went back to the original act, the Oil and Gas Conservation Act. It might be useful for the purposes of our debate this evening, Mr. Chairman, to just summarize the purposes of the original act and in fact what is being delegated to unelected authorities in a variety of capacities. The original purpose of the act is "to effect the conservation of, and to prevent the waste of, the oil and gas resources of Alberta." I am summarizing, Mr. Chairman.

- (b) to secure the observance of safe and efficient practices in locating, spacing, drilling . . . and abandonment of wells and in operations for the production of oil and gas;
- (c) to provide for the economic, orderly and efficient development in the public interest of the oil and gas resources . . .
- (d) to afford each owner the opportunity of obtaining his share of the production of oil and gas from any pool;
- (e) to provide for the recording and the timely and useful dissemination of information regarding the oil and gas resources of Alberta;
- (f) to control pollution above, at or below the surface in the drilling of wells and in operations for the production of oil and gas.

Now, when I read the original amendments and the attached briefer prepared so competently by our opposition research staff, Mr. Chairman, it really changed my sense of what this was about. This is really something where the industry has demonstrated its ability to monitor, to intervene, to enforce, to regulate to a degree.

I'm sure there are Albertans who are in this field that would disagree with me, but for the purposes of debate this evening the industry has done not a bad job. The bill proposes to expand the purpose of the orphan fund to cover abandonment and reclamation of production facilities and licensing of new and existing facilities as well as extending it to other oil and gas facilities such as pipelines, gas plants, batteries, and compressor stations.

So basically from that perspective, I drew that it was going to be on the production side of things, but when you look at the original purpose of the act, it talks very, very much about provincial resources, the public interest, and the need for owners, be they perhaps individual or collective, to obtain a share of the production, to receive timely and useful information on the resources in the province.

That puts this in a bit of a different light, Mr. Chairman, because now what the amendments suggest is that the development of

regulations or the fulfillment of any of the powers of the board could be extended three steps away from government, not a minister, not the cabinet, not an MLA committee, not a parliamentary committee but an unelected authority that is delegated by government to fulfill the essence of this legislation. What I'm struggling with is: how is the public interest achieved through that?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo spoke about some of the pitfalls of delegated authorities, and he mentioned the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood's paper. I'd just like to cite a section from that paper, because it's certainly the best summation of the risks of delegated authorities that I have come across in my tenure so far. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood in her paper presented to the parliamentary conference identified the pitfalls as follows. She said:

As the Auditor General of Alberta said: "Accountability is an obligation to answer for the execution of one's responsibilities." By their very nature, delegated authorities are not directly accountable to the electorate. Yet, as the Auditor General has pointed out "Accountability is necessary when responsibility is assigned or delegated . . . an effective accountability framework is required when central control is reduced or eliminated."

She further went on to identify some of the drawbacks:

- A Minister can enter into a contract or . . . agreement to delegate a . . . responsibility to a private sector corporation through a simple order-in-council.

It doesn't require an engagement of the Legislative Assembly or debate.

"There is no specification of the programs or services that could be delegated to [the] private sector," and this amendment this evening doesn't contain any specifics as to what exact regulations. It just says that a delegated authority could be empowered to make regulations or to fulfill any of the board's powers, duties, or functions.

Further identified as a pitfall: "There is no appeal mechanism" in existence. Here in the context of this proposed change, Mr. Chairman, we are talking about an industry that generates huge revenue. It also generates waste, which the province must contend with. It requires monitoring. All of these things may cause someone or a group of people to find themselves in a position that they need to appeal a decision and there is not, in fact, an appeal mechanism.

9:30

Further, it's pointed out that "the government is not liable for any action taken by a [delegated authority] that causes injury or loss." You get the sense or the spirit of where I'm going with this component of my debate, Mr. Chairman, that I have huge concerns about the further delegation of statutory responsibilities to entities that have no accountability, no mechanisms for engagement of the public, and really no mechanism that requires them on an annual basis to report to the public.

Now, to cite just from the 1999 Auditor General's report, he raised in the report in the cross-government section the fact that there were a number of problems and inconsistencies with delegated authorities. It causes me to wonder: when the government has had it pointed out to them that there's need for improvement in the functioning of delegated authorities in their reporting, in their financial statements, in the thoroughness with which they report on an annual basis, why would we be proposing a further expansion of the use of delegated authorities in the energy sector? It's certainly not a secret that energy provides a very large component of the province's revenues. Is there any risk through the delegation of authority to such entities that that revenue might be compromised at some date in the future? Would we want to compromise the province's overall financial status through some action to that effect? I think not.

The reality is that the Auditor General says:

In reviewing the annual reports of several of these entities I found considerable variation in quality. Also, I found the extent to which guidance had been [offered] by Ministries, on the content of the annual reports, varied considerably. Examples of deficiencies include the lack of comparison of budget to actual for financial information and the lack of non-financial performance information in the annual reports of accountable organizations. In short, published annual reports for some organizations are not as useful as they could be.

Or, I would say, as they should be. So I have huge concerns about the amendments proposed this evening to further remove accountability for a whole range of activities under this statute to a delegated authority.

The final area I wanted to focus on was just in fact around the authorities of the board in the original statute. Part 3, section 7, talks about the general powers of the board under the Oil and Gas Conservation Act.

The Board, with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, may make any just and reasonable orders and directions the Board considers necessary to effect the purposes of this Act and that are not otherwise specifically authorized by this Act.

When I read under the amendment 66(1)(b) that it would be possible to delegate

to one or more delegated authorities any of the Board's powers, duties or functions under this Act or the regulations in respect of suspension, abandonment and reclamation of orphan wells, facilities, facility sites and well sites,

we're talking about way more than orphan wells here. We're talking about the fundamental powers and authorities within the Oil and Gas Conservation Act. Am I wrong? In essence, based on how this is written, how the regulation is written, it talks about the delegation of "the Board's powers, duties or functions under this Act," that it may be delegated to a delegated authority. That to me, Mr. Chairman, represents an engagement of the whole act, because in the original act it says that the board "may make any just and reasonable orders and directions [it] considers necessary to effect the purposes of this Act." So it's not just about orphan wells. It does, in fact, take us into a much broader area, and that I don't find supportable.

Further, the amendments talk about:

- (d) authorizing the Board or a delegated authority to disclose
 - (i) information acquired in the course of or as a result of the operations of the delegated authority,
 - (ii) information respecting the operations of the delegated authority, and
 - (iii) information respecting the officers or employees of the delegated authority.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I think what the public would say to this is: if we have a law that specifies that there would be a legally comprised board and that board would be the governing body that enacts and monitors and controls and evaluates the legislation, why would we want to remove that to delegate that function to an entity that is not known, not comprised, not described before us this evening? I don't think any reasonable Albertan would say that that's good government.

I think Albertans want to see what the hon. member is proposing. They want to see what the composition of that delegated authority is. What are the interests represented on it? How is it more effective either in efficiencies or cost-effective than the statutory board that exists within this original act? Those are the questions that I would put forward this evening as the public's representative.

I'll reserve my position at this stage. It seems to me that there's a bit of a trend happening with respect to delegated authorities. The Auditor General has clearly cautioned the government about their ability to provide accountable, informative reporting that meets their

statutory obligations. So why would we want to risk the energy sector's viability, their profitability, and our own by undertaking this type of delegation, Mr. Chairman?

With those remarks, I will take my seat. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll just speak briefly to some of the comments that I heard across the way. I appreciate and I'm glad to hear that they are going to support these amendments. I'd just like to concisely say: this is the industry's money; this is not government money. That's why this is being presented as such. The industry felt it was very important that they be able to manage the money. By having it set up and structured this way, they will be able to get many more wells done, and none of the money will be rolling inside the general revenue fund, keeping the money outside, at arm's length from the government. That was very important for the industry.

The industry's been very proactive on this whole process and had set it up before and in good faith had run this. This is the legislation to follow and make it all happen and put it in good working order. I have a great deal of confidence in the industry to make this happen effectively and efficiently, and by having this process set up, they will hopefully be able to do it in an even more timely manner than they have scheduled at this time.

Based on those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

[The remaining clauses of Bill 13 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

9:40

Bill 23 Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, it's nice to greet you again. The problem with Bill 23 is that I had participated in the second reading debate on May 2, 2000, and in good faith had identified a number of issues. One of those issues yet again related to regulations, about subordinate law-making. What frustrates me is that that was on May 2, and here we are on May 15 and there's been no response on behalf of the government to the concerns that were raised.

As we go through the bill, section 3(c), and look at the provisions there that the Regulations Act "does not apply," I asked some questions. What part of the Regulations Act was it intended should not apply and why? You know, Mr. Chairman, you go through the list. Was it section 2 of the Regulations Act that requires filing the regulations with the registrar? Is it section 3? Section 3 requires gazetting. Is it section 5? Section 5 requires that the registrar of regulations file a monthly report.

Now, I'd almost forgotten, until I reviewed my notes, that it was

the minister of intergovernmental affairs who had been the minister who spoke to this bill at second reading. Now, she did a fine job that night, and I have to say to her in the absence of anybody else: I haven't got answers to any of the questions I asked. It may be that the minister assumes that I just ask these things without ever expecting a response, but every time I ask one of these questions, raise one of these concerns, I do it genuinely hoping – not always expecting but hoping – that I'm going to get a response. Whether I'm happy with the response is irrelevant, but I want the government or a representative of the government to at least try and meet the issue, the question, the need for clarification.

So here we are 13 days later, and you know I'm sort of like a little kid at Christmas. I rush out every morning to check the fax machine: oh, no faxes. I scroll through my e-mails: "Oh, is there going to be a message from the minister of intergovernmental affairs? Calgary-Buffalo: answers to apprenticeship and industry training." It's not on my e-mail list, and it's not on the fax machine. I check my phone messages: "Is there a message from the minister's office, from an executive assistant, saying: this is the answer to those questions you asked the other day." There are messages on my machine, but none from anybody who is going to impart some wisdom about Bill 23.

So what's a fellow to do, Mr. Chairman? What's a fellow to do? You ask the questions; they're in *Hansard*. Well, I could ask more questions. I could repeat the questions and I could go through, but to save everybody some time, if you look at *Hansard* from May 2, 2000, paged 1264 right through to 1266, I go through and list a whole series of questions. Where are the answers to those questions? Absent responses, how can I in good conscience support a bill which on the face of it appears to have some very positive things, but why would it be that the building trades or any of the other trades in this province would not want that material subjected to some greater scrutiny, some more notoriety, some greater publicity? I can't think of any reasons.

I've not talked to anybody in the affected industries and trades that has a problem with making the Regulations Act apply or submitting regulations to all-party scrutiny. The people in the industry don't have a problem with it. The only people that have a problem with dealing with regulations in an aboveboard and transparent way are the members of this government opposite. It's the people sitting in the front row. It's not an industry-driven concern. Let's be absolutely clear about that. It's sort of shadow-boxing. Then you say to yourself: well, in terms of why regulations that affect in vital and important ways the trades and apprenticeship program in this province, why would the government be opposed to making the Regulations Act apply or to deal with some of those things?

I just thought of one thing while I was going through the litany of no e-mail message answers to me, no phone messages, no correspondence. It may be that my colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar has heard some of those responses. Maybe he's heard some answers to those questions I've asked, so maybe he'll be able to share that with us.

I just say to the minister: go through those questions and tell me why it would be that we would not allow the tradespeople of this province a public record when regulations are being put forward, when they're being considered. It would be of enormous benefit to the tradespeople. I expect, for example, that the government is going out to the people in the constituency in the course of the by-election in – what's that constituency?

MR. SAPERS: Highlands.

MR. DICKSON: How could I forget? Well, the seat has been absent for such a long time that I just haven't heard reference to the seat during that time.

The Premier and his candidate are presumably going to go and talk about the great work being done by the government in this Legislative Assembly, and I suspect there are lots of tradespeople in that constituency that have an interest in what happens with the apprenticeship and industry training program. I think if the government goes out there, they may well be met with questions, people asking: why is it that you want to make changes to the apprenticeship program and do it in secret; why do you pull that big veil of secrecy over all of these programs and all these regulations? I think most people would say: we'd sooner have this information more available, more transparent.

Mr. Chairman, I don't know why government would go on and on about the review of regulations by December 2000 by industry advisory committees and key stakeholders and the public, but what you've got is a poor second in terms of regulation management and so on.

So those are some of the concerns I've got. I just can't tell you how very, very disappointed I am at the fact that the government won't respond to these questions. I just for the life of me can't figure out why government continues to give people like me a chance to talk again and again about unanswered questions. I would have thought that government would have been trying harder, particularly in the run-up to an election. We've got a by-election coming up.

9:50

You know, I remember that in 1993 the current Premier had to go out and promise a much stronger FOIP Act. He was responding to the will of Albertans at that time. They wanted more transparency in government, and it was a big issue. The Minister of Learning will remember that the government brought in Bill 60, which was a weak, weak access to information law. It was modeled on Manitoba. It would have had our ombudsman offering recommendations on FOIP complaints, with no power to make binding orders.

There's a graduate student now doing his PhD thesis on the subject of the development of the FOIP Act, and I met with this fellow the other week. One of his questions was: how did we go from Bill 60 in the spring of 1993 to Bill 18 in 1994? Do you know what the answer was? The public insisted on stronger access provision.

I suspect that in the next provincial general election, whether that comes in the fall of 2000 or the spring of 2001 or the fall of 2001, this is going to be an issue again. This is my gift to the government of the day, Mr. Chairman: they can anticipate that Albertans once again are going to start registering much higher on the demand for access. I think what you're going to find is that Albertans yet again are going to demand a greater degree of transparency and openness. Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing? I put this as positively as I can. Would it not be a wonderful thing for the Minister of Learning to be able to go around speaking in his constituency and go to meetings in Brooks and Bassano and those key communities in his constituency? You know: "This is a government that believes in accessibility, believes in accountability. This is why when we changed the rules around the apprenticeship program, we decided to make it open, we decided to make it subject to all-party review, and we decided to make it subject to the Regulations Act, so those regulations had to be gazetted." Pretty powerful stuff. This could account for another 1,000 votes. I mean, the number of people who are interested as well . . . [interjection] You know, he thinks I'm kidding, Mr. Chairman. He thinks I'm kidding.

There are some smart people in that constituency with a particular interest in secrecy in government. I know that, and I've had a chance to talk to some of them. So here's a gift I make to the

Minister of Learning and to his colleague the minister of intergovernmental affairs, a gift that I hope they're going to accept graciously. The way you accept a gift is that you don't spurn it; you don't throw it out. After the guest gives you a gift, you don't open the door and throw it at them as they're going down the sidewalk to their car. You accept it. You unwrap it. You open it up. You put it out on the coffee table and invite the family in to look at the gift that you've just been given. Well, I'd hoped that it would be in the same spirit of gracious reception that the government would take these suggestions and do something with them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've been listening to the wise remarks from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and I'm anxious to participate in the debate on Bill 23 at committee. Not many individuals across the province may be aware at the moment of the significance of this bill, but for well in excess of 100,000 individuals across this province, Mr. Chairman, this bill is going to have a direct impact on their ability to earn a living. I'm very pleased to see that the debate has entered the committee stage, because there are a number of questions that I have, and hopefully they will be answered in time by the hon. minister.

The Regulations Act and its application in this series of amendments was ably described by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I realize that certainly in section 9 of the current act the Regulations Act does not apply to the by-laws of a local apprenticeship committee, Mr. Chairman. In this amendment particularly the amended act has the Regulations Act not applying in a number of sectors but particularly sections 23 and 24 and 13.1. I believe this is going to allow suspicions, shall I say, to occur as this piece of legislation governs the workplace. People are not going to know, they're not going to be able to have a grasp of exactly how the apprenticeship programs are going to be administered because, simply, the minister is going to be exempt from the Regulations Act. I'm not going to spend too much time on this at the moment, because there are other issues that I want to deal with here.

For instance, in the general responsibilities of the minister, "The Regulations Act does not apply in respect of any documentation prepared by or on behalf of the Minister relating to the carrying out of any functions under this section." I would much prefer, as the hon. member said earlier, that this information be gazetted so that all interested parties, whether they be in industry, whether they be in craft unions, whether they be members of the general public, whether they be a manufacturer, for instance, a competing manufacturer or competing business interest, have access to this. Whenever we have so many exemptions, so to speak, of the Regulations Act, that causes alarm in this camp.

Now, Mr. Chairman, the whole idea of compulsory certification trades in this province is a good idea. We have the optional certification trades. We've come a long way with this process, and many government members over the years who have devised this program and have enhanced it are to be commended, but I cannot see the value of any more exemptions to compulsory certification trades. In the current act section 21 surely should be enough. We've gone along quite well. We've progressed in this province with those exemptions as they already exist, so why open the door even wider with the addition of section 22.1(1)? This is going to provide a wider scope of approval in the case of a compulsory certification trade.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We only have to look at what occurred in Swan Hills with the deficiencies in the welding that went on. This was, oddly enough, withheld from public view by the fact that the judge in this case sealed exhibits, and in the exhibits was the necessary information to determine how these welding errors or deficiencies occurred. This occurred, I remind all hon. members, with the welding trade. That is a compulsory trade, so why do we need section 22, Mr. Chairman, to revise or expand this authority that is going to allow for more deregulation or perhaps more ways for someone who is not adequately qualified to perform a compulsory trade?

10:00

Now, a better way of doing this would be to take, for instance, some of the optional certification trades and move them into the compulsory bracket. If the hon. minister could in due time explain to all members of the House how, for instance, the insurance industry feels about this – the insurance industry is underwriting policies all the time, and they're relying on the skilled craftsmen of this province. We forget about that. We forget about that all the time, and it is something I think we need to be cognizant of.

We see further on another attack on the compulsory certification trades; we see that in the amendments to section 33. Now, we're diluting the trade, and we are making, in my opinion, an error whenever we are allowing for undertakings that are going to be described as optional, that these are optional certification trades, or in essence the trade can be divided up and a group of individuals can do one part of the work. I do not see in here where they have to be qualified. Perhaps I'm wrong, but they don't have to be registered apprentices, they don't have to be individuals with other trade qualifications from other jurisdictions; they can literally be people that are just given this qualification. Now, what does that say to the people who have already worked very hard? They've gone to school. They've gone to NAIT or SAIT, for instance, and they pursued through that avenue a trade. What exactly are we telling them here, Mr. Chairman? We cannot devalue or de-skill the qualifications that people have worked very, very hard to acquire.

My major problem with this bill is that I'm not convinced this has been thought out. I know there has been an extensive consultation process and I know there's a shortage of skilled labour in this province, but this is not the proper way to deal with it, by simply amending an existing act to add more loopholes so that the compulsory certification trades can be practised by anyone.

Now, there are a lot of hon. members in the Assembly this evening, and I'm sure there's not one constituency in this province that doesn't have at least one rig welder living in it. Rig welders are skilled tradesmen, they're entrepreneurs, and above all else they're very hardworking. They will work at 30 above in Medicine Hat, and they'll work at minus 30 in High Level. Now, when they read about the changes to this legislation and what we're attempting to do to the compulsory certified trade of B-pressure welding, what are the rig welders and the pipeliners going to think about this? Are they going to wonder if maybe a pipeline company is going to apply to the minister and the minister is going to grant some sort of behind-closed-doors secret trade qualification to an individual?

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh, stuff it.

MR. MacDONALD: I can see why the hon. member is talking about stuffing it, because that's what will happen to the quality control on a pipeline, for instance, whenever you have unqualified individuals attempting to do a very skilled job.

Now, we look at this, and we look at the past reputation of this province. We look at that reputation, and it's a very fine reputation.

Welders from this province are recruited all around the world, but with this decertification or this attempt to change the qualifications of those individuals, how can we be assured that companies are going to continue to want to employ welders that have been apprenticed and trained and ticketed in this province? The rig welders are an independent lot, and I don't know what they're going to say. I don't know if the hon. minister and the staff that consulted with so many individuals have talked with the rig welders' association about this. I would be quite skeptical if they did.

Mr. Chairman, when we talk about the compulsory certification trades, we also have to talk about the automotive industry. As consumer critic I get a lot of complaints from consumers whenever they have sky-high repair bills. They come to the constituency office and say, "Mr. MacDonald, I'm not sure that auto mechanic was qualified." And I ask: "What do you mean? Please explain this." They say that that was an apprentice and they were employed on piece work. We only have to look at the regulation on automotive service technician, and there are always questions.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Certainly repairs, everyone will acknowledge, can be very costly. We look at the shop rates, and everyone realizes that apprentices need the chance to learn, but is this right? How is this act going to deal with that issue? It can't. Whenever we look at the schedules that are set up in the Employment Standards Code for the compensation of apprentices and they're working at flat rates – perhaps the hon. minister of energy and Acting Provincial Treasurer is going to take a pickup truck, for instance, to one of these individuals. It's fine, maybe, if this apprentice is checking the rad level, tightening the fan belt, maybe rotating the tires if the hon. minister has a lot of miles on his truck. But to do a complicated job – for instance, say this vehicle would have electronic ignition. Now, that individual has to be trained at that, Mr. Chairman, and he has to be trained under the guidance of a journeyman. These issues are not being addressed so far, I believe, in the debate on this bill.

I cannot accept this bill because of a number of issues, but certainly whenever we're trying to water down the compulsory trades in this province, I can't accept that, and it is my view that this is what this Bill 23 is doing. I pointed that out for all hon. members, and if I'm wrong, I will listen with a great deal of interest to members from across the way.

10:10

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to remind all hon. members of this Assembly of what the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo said about regulations. For every reaction there is an action, and in this case I would like to present to the Assembly one amendment to deal with this issue of regulations. I think it is very necessary, after what happened in Swan Hills, that nothing regarding apprenticeship and trade certification in this province be done behind closed doors, whether it's by sealing a file or a court record or whether it's a ministerial decree by whoever is going to be Minister of Learning. This is not only for the current time but also into the future. I feel that this amendment will satisfy not only my colleagues, in particular the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but also other hon. members from the other side of the Assembly.

I'm going to take my seat for a moment, Mr. Chairman, while the amendment is distributed to all my colleagues. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The amendment will be called A1.

Okay. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, if you would like to speak further to your amendment A1.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, Mr. Chairman. At this time I would like to move this amendment to Bill 23, Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act. It reads:

- A. Section 3(c) is amended, in the proposed section 3, by striking out subsection (3).
- B. Section 8 is amended, in the proposed section 13.1, by striking out subsection (2).
- C. Section 16 is amended by striking out clause (b).
- D. Section 17 is struck out.

Now, the reason for this – I will be very quick here, Mr. Chairman – goes back to not only what I said at the initial debate that I started at Committee of the Whole but also what the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo said not only in committee but also at second reading. This series of amendments is going to correct – it will allow in this legislation for the minister to act openly and for all the regulations or the administration of this act to be done in public.

With that, I shall cede the floor to another hon. colleague. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The Hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to just start off by talking in general about the amendment and then move to being a little bit more specific. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has read the bill, and we have communicated back and forth on several occasions. The hon. member has said that he is in favour of the bill in general.

I have a little bit of a problem with some of the wording that was used today in the hon. member's speech in that, as the hon. member knows, the trades unions, the employers, and the employees all are in agreement on this bill. This has been done over three years of consultation, and it's been done over three years of negotiating between the building unions, the trades unions, and the employers. So I really question the hon. member's expertise in bringing forward amendments when you have employers and employees who've been mulling this over for close to three years on what, I'm sure the hon. member will agree, has been a long, extensive and, without blowing my own horn, excellent consultation in the field of apprenticeship. I find his comments a little bit difficult.

However, Mr. Chairman, what I will do is first thing tomorrow relay his comments to the trades unions and to the employers, and I'll give them the chance to take a look at his comments and go from there. If they like his comments, well, they can tell me. If they don't like his comments, I surely will invite them to make representation to the hon. member about his comments, and that will be done.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. member has made an amendment about the Regulations Act, and what I'd like to do is explain a little bit of the rationale. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo had asked about answers to the questions. Typically, what happens is that members speak in second reading, ask questions, and they get answers in committee. This is the first time this bill has been discussed in committee, so that's why the answers are coming tonight.

First of all, on the nonapplication of the Regulations Act. Members may recall that several years ago the government of Alberta identified regulatory reform as a permanent feature of the government's ongoing efforts to improve the Alberta advantage. Government stated that only those regulations necessary to ensure protection of the public interest would be retained. Phase 2 of the industry consultation A Vision for the Future looked at ways to make the apprenticeship and industry training system more responsive to employers, employees and, most importantly, apprentices. It focused on proposals about the regulatory framework for apprenticeship and industry training. It included the board's review of regulations under the government's regulatory review project.

One of the board's – and this is the apprenticeship board I'm

talking about, Mr. Chairman – recommendations coming out of that review was that the program and process detail be removed from regulation as long as the existing authority of the board and the industry advisory committees, the provincial apprenticeship committees and occupational training committees, are able to set standards and requirements that remain in legislation.

Mr. Chairman, the impact of implementing this recommendation is primarily seen in the amendments to sections 3, 33, and 37 of the act. To ensure that this detail is not placed back into regulation – I will repeat that – to ensure that this detail is not placed back into regulation, it is specified that the Regulations Act does not apply. It is referenced again in several places to clarify that the applicable documentation need not be filed as a regulation. This clarification is new, but the fact that the documentation not be filed as a regulation is not new. The board and the minister will continue to operate in the open fashion that currently prevails, and the information will continue to be widely available to all those who are interested.

The second theme raised. I beg the indulgence of the chairman perhaps a little bit on this one in that it does tie back into the amendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had talked about standards. He talked about the high standards, so I'm assuming that some of those are in the amendments he's brought forward. First of all, program standards will continue to be set by the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board on the recommendations of the applicable industry advisory committee, as they are now. This will ensure that program standards continue to reflect industry needs.

There were also questions related to communication; for example, the information in and communication about the regulations that are in the amendment before us. The information currently in regulation and more will be readily available to the public and to employers, apprentices, journeymen, and trainees through a variety of means. Examples include publications containing boards' orders and decisions, brochures available in many government offices and labour market information centres, and electronic means such as the Internet. The Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board newsletter, which has a circulation of 60,000, is published three times a year.

10:20

Mr. Chairman, I believe that by allowing the Regulations Act not to apply, we are giving the industry, the employers, the apprentices, and the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board more authority and more power in putting forward the changes they want when it comes to apprentices.

I will say one other thing, and I think this is very, very important. The existing apprenticeship board is head and shoulders above anything else in Canada. We are by far, by far, Mr. Chairman, the best apprenticeship training province in Canada. Other provinces look to us, to the partnership we have created between employers and employees, between union and non-union shops. All these things apply. To change this act after the consultation we have done and to throw it back in the face of the unions, back in the face of the employers I think is wrong.

I think we have an extremely good act here. I would urge the members not to vote for the amendment. I think there were reasons that the hon. member brought up about the regulations. I hope I provided the answers to him about the regulations. I really feel this is a very important act. It's an act that needs to be passed. It's an act that needs to get better to allow us to get better on a very, very good system in apprenticeship.

I would urge all members to vote for the bill and against this amendment. Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, I'd just be very brief. I was going

to ask for unanimous consent that if there should be a standing vote on the amendment package we're dealing with now, we'd agree that rather than the 10-minute interval provided for by Standing Order 32(2), we would have a single minute between bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:24 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Carlson	Nicol	Sloan
Dickson	Sapers	White
MacDonald		

Against the motion:

Broda	Klapstein	Shariff
Cardinal	Kryczka	Stelmach
Clegg	Laing	Stevens
Coutts	Lund	Strang
Ducharme	Magnus	Thurber
Fischer	McClellan	West
Graham	McFarland	Woloshyn
Havelock	Melchin	Yankowsky
Hlady	Oberg	Zwozdesky
Jonson		

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 28
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

[The clauses of Bill 23 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. I'd like to move that we do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

10:30

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: Bill 16 and Bill 23. The committee reports the following with some amendments: Bill 13. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur with this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 19

Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate April 3: Dr. West]

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

MR. SAPERS: Yeah, I suppose, Mr. Speaker, that the government would like to have absolutely no speakers on their tax plan bill, when I hear that call of question.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, when we last visited Bill 19, as brief as the introduction was by the Acting Provincial Treasurer, he left us with a tantalizing thought. He said in *Hansard*:

It's easy to put in a percent here, an 8 percent surtax on certain [tax] brackets, but it's very hard to remove them once the animal starts to feed on them. That's a good reason never to bring in a sales tax in this province until all the other taxes are gone or lowered.

I thought this was a bill about tax reduction, not about tax replacement, but as we proceed, maybe we will get a clearer picture of what the government has in mind when it comes to income tax reform in the province of Alberta.

The major objective of Bill 19 is to amend section 3.03 of the Alberta Income Tax Act to eliminate the 8 percent provincial surtax after the 1999 taxation year. Now, keep in mind that this was one of two deficit elimination taxes that were brought in by a previous Conservative government or a previous form of this Conservative government.

The 8 percent surtax applies to those Alberta tax filers who earn a taxable income above \$46,450 or pay the Alberta basic tax above \$3,500 annually. There are approximately 390,000 tax filers in Alberta paying this surtax. Mr. Speaker, that's about 25 percent of all taxpayers in this province that pay that surtax.

There are some other changes outlined in Bill 18: the elimination of programs that lapsed in 1986 and '88 such as the renters' assistance credit and the Alberta stock savings plan credit. The bill cleans up corporate references in the Alberta Income Tax Act such as the corporation income tax act, mutual fund corporation refunds, and the small business deduction, that are all leftovers from pre-1981 when Alberta did not collect its own corporate taxes.

Bill 18 will update changes resulting from the establishment of the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, or the CCRA, Mr. Speaker, which just reminds me of another political issue that's going on in this country at this time, in place of Revenue Canada. It will also reinsert a definition of adjusted earned income for the purposes of administering a family employment tax credit.

So there's an interesting mix of housekeeping and substantive change in this bill, and that's a problem with the bill, Mr. Speaker. I've talked on this theme before: how the government always manages to come up with a bill that's maybe largely benign but it has one great big problem in it. In this case, the problem is the removal of the 8 percent provincial surtax before the other so-called

deficit elimination tax is removed, which would be of far greater benefit to most Alberta taxpayers. Keep in mind that only 25 percent pay the 8 percent.

Now, the 8 percent provincial surtax was introduced in 1987 as a means to assist in the elimination of the then chronic provincial budget deficits. The 8 percent provincial surtax is paid by Albertans who are relatively high-income earners. In the 2000 tax year the 8 percent surtax would have generated \$144 million in revenue for the provincial government.

Now, in October of 1998 the Alberta Tax Review Committee recommended the elimination of these temporary deficit elimination taxes, both the 8 percent surtax and that .5 percent flat tax that I referred to just a moment ago. In March of 1999 the Klein government announced that it would eliminate the 8 percent surtax as of July 1, 2001, as a component of a move to, at that time, an 11 percent single-rate system by January 1, 2002. The 8 percent surtax was to be reduced in half on July 1, 2000, and eliminated as of July 1, 2001. The revenue impact from the elimination of this surtax was estimated to be \$36 million for the tax year ending 2001, \$88 million for the tax year ending 2002, and as much as \$105 million for the tax year 2002-2003.

On September 1 of 1999 the government announced that it would accelerate its tax reform plan. On July 1, 2000, the 8 percent surtax was to be cut in half and eliminated as of January 1, 2001.

On October 14, 1999, the Premier announced that the entire 8 percent surtax would now be eliminated as of January 1, 2000. The impact of the elimination of the surtax as of January 1, 2000, is estimated to cost the government \$36 million in 1999-2000 and \$135 million in its first full year, the tax year ending 2001.

Mr. Speaker, by my count this government milked as much mileage as they could out of this tax plan by announcing it eight separate times. It even generated front-page headlines in one of the national newspapers months after it was originally announced as yet another new initiative. This caused the phone to ring in my constituency office with people asking me: "I thought we weren't paying this tax already. Don't tell me they reintroduced it. They snuck it in, and now they're going to cancel it again?" I had to explain that, no, it was just the government playing the game that the government usually does by making not one, not two, not three but as many announcements as they could to try to convince taxpayers that by talking about tax reform and tax relief, they were actually doing something.

All the while, of course, the only real tax relief that Albertans were feeling came as a result of successive federal budgets courtesy of Jean Chretien and Paul Martin. So given that they are living in the shadow of Ottawa in this regard, it's no doubt that they felt they had to at least keep on talking about tax relief so that Albertans might be somehow distracted from the reality that they were all talk and no action.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I can very happily agree that we should be reducing, eliminating in fact, this 8 percent surtax. I understand that the cost is \$144 million. I think the government can well afford that considering the revenue stream and the underestimation of revenues that come in and the fact that this government has managed to chalk up nearly a \$10 billion surplus over the years since they came into power, but the difficulty I have in just giving this a wholehearted endorsement is that there is this other deficit elimination tax, this .5 percent flat tax.

Now, I can't understand why this government wants to reward the top 25 percent of Albertans who earn more than \$46,450 in taxable income and ignore the \$325 million that's being taken out of the pockets of the other taxpayers, the 1,562,000 hardworking Albertans that pay the .5 percent flat tax. Why is it that this government would

want to reward 390,000 high-income Albertans and make the remaining one and a half million Albertans pay for it?

Mr. Speaker, we've got another bill before the House, Bill 18, which does the same thing. It advantages one group of taxpayers at the expense of another group of taxpayers, so we've got something that seems to be a pattern now. We've got a government that wants to support private health care, which of course is really only accessible to the rich. We've got a government that wants to bring in a flat tax which burdens the middle-income taxpayers disproportionately, and now they want to eliminate the 8 percent surtax, which applies only to the highest income, the top 25 percent, and the rest of Albertans will continue to pay. That doesn't make any sense to me, and apparently it didn't make any sense to the provincial government once upon a time either. Now, I would like to know what changed their minds.

10:40

It is interesting to note that when the Alberta government initially came forward with a tax cut plan back in Budget '96, the timetable was to eliminate the .5 percent flat rate tax by January 1, 1999 – well, that didn't happen – before the 8 percent surtax. The 8 percent surtax was originally to be eliminated by January 1, 2001.

Now, if I can quote from page 122 of Budget '96, which was called Reinvestment: The Tax Plan – it sounds like another one of those slasher movies – it said that "the tax plan proposes to reduce the tax burden for all Albertans starting with low to middle income working families." Mr. Speaker, what happened? Why the change of heart? Why the change of mind?

Well, apparently the Premier and his former Provincial Treasurer have forgotten about these hardworking Albertans who pay the majority of the bills in this province, the middle-income Albertans who have to pay these taxes, these deficit elimination taxes. They're the ones that pay the majority of the user fees. They're the ones that are hardest hit by the health care tax that's collected in the form of premiums. It's these hardworking Alberta families in the middle income that this government seems to have forgotten all about.

Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition supports tax cuts, but we support sustainable and fair tax cuts as part of a comprehensive package. We certainly don't support rewarding one group of taxpayers while you're punishing another group. The Official Opposition would like to see 100 percent of Albertans collectively enjoy a tax cut. That's why our submission would be to remove the .5 percent flat tax first. Now, the government seems to support this playing favourites, and that's why, I suppose, they only want to provide this income tax relief to 25 percent of Albertans by removing the 8 percent surtax.

Mr. Speaker, I have struggled to understand why the government has adopted this very strange position and, I will say, internally and consistent position. I've looked at the government's stated position on tax reform over the years. I've read the Treasury papers. I've seen the submissions made in the federal/provincial meetings. I've looked at some of the background papers written and published, for example, by the Fraser Institute or the C.D. Howe Institute, and I can't find the explanation for this.

Now, I will say that this government has a very mixed record when it comes to tax reform. We've heard the former Provincial Treasurer talk for years about tax bracket creep and bemoan the fact that tax bracket creep is not fair, but it wasn't until this year, and again following the lead of the federal government, that this government did anything about indexing brackets and eliminating tax bracket creep. Mr. Speaker, I will remind the House that between 1993 and 2000 the government will have collected in

excess of \$2.4 billion in cumulative personal income tax revenue from Alberta taxpayers through provincial tax bracket creep. By just not indexing to inflation, they have picked the pockets of Alberta taxpayers to the tune of more than \$2.4 billion.

In 1993, the first year this government came to power with its new fiscal agenda, it raked in \$201 million because of tax bracket creep. By 1996 it was up to \$288 million. By 1999 it was a high of \$365 million, and even with the proposed changes, Mr. Speaker, this tax year, year 2000, this government is going to take through tax bracket creep 363 million loonies out of the pockets of Alberta taxpayers. I can't understand the sort of self-righteousness this government has when it comes to its tax plan when they continue to take money in this way.

The government has nothing to brag about when it comes to user fees either, while I'm on the subject. While the government likes to say that the only way taxes are going in this province is down, the reality is that additional user fee revenue has continued to go up. Even during the period of time between that Ontario court decision, the Eurig estate decision, until the end of February of this year, the government collected an estimated \$80 million in user fees that in fact would be considered today as illegal taxes. So, Mr. Speaker, this government has very little to brag about when it comes to its tax policy.

Mr. Speaker, I've asked the former Provincial Treasurer on a number of occasions to explain to me the statements and the claims made in the tax plan. For example, if you would refer to sessional paper 441/2000, which was a response to a written question as amended, not as originally put in but as amended, you will note that the written question talked about

the breakdown of the fiscal impact of the \$600 million provincial income tax cut under the 11% single rate proposal for years 1 through 5 inclusive . . . as cited on page 163 of [the budget document].

It also asked about what parts of the fiscal plan could be

attributed to the components of the elimination of the 8% surtax, the elimination of the 0.5% flat tax, the increase in the personal and spousal exemptions . . . the increase in the personal and spousal exemptions in the 1999 federal budget, and the introduction of the 11% single rate tax.

We asked for this information to be broken down by the categories "personal income tax, corporate income tax, other direct taxes, fuel and indirect taxes, federal transfers, other transfers" and whether or not all of this had an impact on revenue recovery.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you would think any careful, thoughtful tax plan would be based on some solid homework. You would think that at a minimum this is the kind of information that would have been collected. But you would have been wrong had you held that thought in your mind, because in fact what we find from the government – and I quote from sessional paper 441/2000 – is the answer:

No information has been prepared by or for Alberta Treasury on the breakdown of the economic impacts attributable to various components of the tax plan. Thus, the overall fiscal impacts of the various components of the plan on personal income tax, corporate income tax, other direct taxes, fuel and indirect taxes, federal transfers, other transfers cannot be estimated.

Mr. Speaker, if they can't estimate the economic impacts based on these categories by this breakdown, how do they make the claims that they make in the budget document regarding feedback? How do they make the claims in the budget document not knowing whether or not this is affordable, sustainable, or appropriate?

Mr. Speaker, it's not dissimilar to the question in question period that we dealt with earlier today when it was revealed that the provincial government hasn't done capacity studies within the health

care system, yet we now have a bill they've just passed through by the use of closure, Bill 11, which says that health authorities have to use existing capacity before they can contract to private clinics. The reality is that the government doesn't know what the existing capacity is, so it's sort of hollow. In fact, it's very hollow.

Now we find the same thing with their tax plan. We ask: where's the homework; where are the facts? What we get told is: trust us; we didn't do the studies; we didn't crunch the numbers; we didn't run the tests; just trust us. So what we're left with once again, Mr. Speaker, is just ideology. "We want private health care because we want it. We wanted this kind of tax plan because we want to. It doesn't matter what the facts are. Don't confuse us with the facts. They just get in the way."

Sessional paper 440/2000, which was an answer to Written Question 220 as amended, was even a more straightforward information request, Mr. Speaker. It wanted to know what information was prepared by or for Alberta Treasury on

how much of the \$20 million economic offset or revenue recovery projected in 2000-01 as cited on page 17 of Budget '99 . . . results from the reduction of the 8 percent surtax, and how much is from the increase in the personal and spousal exemptions contained in the 1999 federal budget?

Once again, Mr. Speaker, a very straightforward information request. How much of what the government is claiming will be an offset or a revenue recovery for the first full year of the implementation of the tax plan will be due to the elimination of this surtax or the federal tax plan? You would think they would have that, that there would be some justification for removing this 8 percent surtax before the .5 percent flat tax. So once again I waited with bated breath for the government to provide the information, the response to the question, to tell Albertans that in fact they have done the work.

10:50

MS LEIBOVICI: You could turn blue by the time you got an answer.

MR. SAPERS: Well, you're sure right, hon. member. You could hold your breath until you turned blue, but you wouldn't want to do that in the province of Alberta because you might have to pay for the health care and the ambulance ride to get there.

Mr. Speaker, what you find out is that once again the answer is that no information has been prepared by or for Alberta Treasury on how much of the economic offset or revenue recovery in 2000-2001 results from the various components of the tax plan. They haven't done the homework. How can they bring this kind of legislation forward, something that is technical, something that is specific, something that affects every Albertan, something that affects the ability of the government to carry on its core programs – how could they bring this kind of legislation forward and not have done the work? I can think of many hon. members who would never have allowed that to happen had they been the Treasurer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to stand up and speak to Bill 19, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000, and speak to it in terms of the principles of the bill that I simply don't agree with. There are two main principles in this bill that I don't agree with, and both of them are examples of styles of how this government has managed at least since 1993.

The first style is to dangle a carrot on a stick in front of the taxpayers of Alberta by promising them that things are going to get better and that they're going to help them out, to just trust them and everything will be better. This is an example. They say they're now

going to eliminate the 8 percent surtax. Well, in fact we know that carrot only works for a very small percentage of Albertans. In fact, about 25 percent of them will end up benefiting from this, and too bad for the other 75 percent out there who are listening to the promises made by this government but not seeing any substantial follow-through in terms of the delivery of real commitments and promises made repeatedly.

As my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora talked about, they've been promising this tax cut for about a year and a half, it looks like, and it's promises made in the future, because of course it won't actually occur until sometime next year, but it will never occur for 75 percent of taxpayers in this province.

That's a real issue for us, because in fact this government had other options. They could have easily taken a look at the .5 percent flat tax rate and eliminated that. What they did was put the two of them in a hat and picked one as one method of planning, and they picked the one that will assist a few people. If they didn't just pick them out of a hat, then I'm even more concerned, because what that means is that they had a huge interest in selectively benefiting high-income Albertans. I would never attribute that kind of motive to the government, except that we have seen two other examples of that in legislation that has come through this Assembly this spring, where this government has deliberately chosen to advantage a particular segment of our society, that being high-income earners. We've seen that in Bill 18, where the flat tax rate is going to substantially benefit high-income earners as compared to the rest of Albertans, and in Bill 11, where those who can access private health care will have more of a franchise than the rest of Albertans, and those who can access private health care are those with more money, those who can afford private insurance systems.

What we see here, Mr. Speaker, is actually a trilogy of bills through the Legislature this spring that will specifically advantage people who have more money than average Albertans. So 25 percent of Albertans are going to receive a significant benefit under this government's mandate this year and next year in terms of the kind of legislation we've seen come through here, and that's an issue for us. There's just no two ways about it. We'd like to see benefits. We'd like to see good health care. We'd like to see fair taxation, and we'd like to see the elimination of specific surtaxes but for the benefit of all Albertans, Mr. Speaker, not a selective few as we see this government talking about.

When you take a look at this bill, you have to think in terms of: is it really economics they're talking about, or is it politics? When you're only benefiting a select few people, then for sure it isn't economics, Mr. Speaker, unless this government is trying to save more money in the tax coffers, which is what they say they're not trying to do. So it must be politics.

Why would they deliberately be trying to afford a few taxpayers in this province a benefit that others don't get? That's a question I think we should see answered before we get out of second reading on this bill, and I'm hoping that the Acting Treasurer will address these concerns, because they are very legitimate concerns. We need those answers before we can move on, but particularly this is of concern because once again, as we saw with the other two parts of the trilogy of bad bills through the Legislature this spring, we see a bill that cannot be backed up with any substantial evidence. Let's take "substantial" out of that sentence: a bill that can be backed up by any evidence in terms of it being significantly beneficial.

My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora has repeatedly asked for documentation. He started asking for documentation to back up the Provincial Treasurer's claims when the idea for the bill was first introduced back in early 1999, evidence to support why the government would reduce the taxes of a few Albertans before cutting taxes

for all Albertans, but the Treasurer, the Acting Treasurer, and the whole Treasury Department keep telling us that they haven't analyzed those economic effects, Mr. Speaker. So what's that all about? How can you bring in tax legislation when you haven't analyzed the effects?

Well, I think they have analyzed them. I just don't think they want to table them. Clearly you couldn't have a whole department punching out all these numbers on their little pocket calculators, figuring out the tax benefits down the road. It wouldn't be happening. They're analyzing them.

MR. SAPERS: They've got big computers.

MS CARLSON: Well, maybe they do. Maybe they've got very sophisticated machinery. If they have very sophisticated machinery, then for sure they've got these results. So what is it about those results that they don't want to share with Albertans? I think that's an important question to have answered.

Certainly it's a credibility stretch, Mr. Speaker, to say that they haven't done the work, so why can't we see it? Why won't they provide the documentation? We need to know the basis on which the government decided to cut the taxes for a few before cutting taxes for all if it didn't know what the economic benefits would be. I'm hoping that the Acting Provincial Treasurer will answer that question. In fact, I believe that the majority of his constituents are not going to have the benefit of this tax cut, and I'm sure they would like those answers too: why some get it and others don't and how it is that only people with money fall into the right criteria to benefit from any of the kind of legislation that this particular government is getting involved in.

Where were they going with this? What comes next, Mr. Speaker? When we see all this legislation coming forward that talks about benefiting a select few in this province, what's next? Where are they headed in the five, 10, 15 years of strategic planning that we would hope a government would be doing in terms of the direction they're heading? It's taking a look at definitely . . .

DR. OBERG: The extra taxes were put on the select few.

MS CARLSON: We hear some chattering over on the other side. I can see that the minister wants to get into the debate, and if he would like to speak, then definitely I won't be adjourning when I'm done, because we'd like to have them defend some of their positions. I particularly think they are indefensible. So we'd like to see them stand up and defend the reasons for a few getting benefits and the great majority of Albertans not benefiting from it.

11:00

Why didn't they go to the .5 percent tax reduction? They made a commitment, Mr. Speaker, that they would eliminate that debt reduction tax, which was how it was sold to the general public, when the debt was reduced. Well, we saw that happen in this province a long time ago, yet they continue to collect tax dollars off the backs of hardworking middle-income and low-income people in this province, and the first opportunity they get to bring in a tax break, they give the break to their friends. They don't give it to the low-income people and the middle-income people in this province who need it. And why is that, Mr. Speaker? We don't get any answers to that particular question, and I think that's a real problem.

We pointed out that eliminating the flat tax first in conjunction with the plan to restore excellence in all kinds of programs is what this province needs instead of pushing us to a point where we become a user-pay society, which is, I believe, in direct contradiction

with the Canadian Constitution and the identity that Canadians have in terms of how it is that we expect our country to be run. We are not a user-pay society, but that's what this government is driving us to. They only like to support their friends, not support the average person in this province.

Let's take a look at doing the right thing here for a change. Let's see this government take some leadership in maintaining a Canadian identity. If there's going to be tax elimination in this Assembly, we want to see the flat tax eliminated first, not the surcharge tax. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, given those comments, I will continue, because I want the Acting Treasurer to respond to my remarks. If I'm not satisfied with the responses, which I think is quite likely, then I will be back on my feet several times in committee. So with those comments I will adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 11:02 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 16, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/16

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, guide our thoughts, words, and deeds to be worthy of the trust our constituents have placed in us to better serve Thee through service to our province of Alberta and its people. Amen.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't quite used to your voice yet sitting in that chair, but I am pleased to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly His Excellency Colonel Kongpay. He is the high commissioner of Brunei Darussalam. Accompanying him is his wife, Mrs. Lungkau. This is the high commissioner's first official visit to Alberta since being posted to Canada in February 1998 and, in particular, his first visit to Edmonton. We are very pleased to welcome him here today.

Brunei is a 600-year-old kingdom located in south Asia. It has a population of 323,000 people who benefit from a wealth of oil and gas revenues, much like Alberta, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the people of Brunei pay no taxes whatsoever. Several students from Brunei are studying at university in Alberta. There are some at the University of Alberta, some at the University of Calgary, and we are very pleased that they have chosen Alberta for their studies.

I had the opportunity along with my hon. colleague the Minister of Environment to have lunch with the high commissioner and his wife, and it was very enjoyable. He described Brunei to us, and it sounds like it would be a wonderful place to visit. So I would encourage all my colleagues here: if you have the opportunity, by all means take the opportunity to visit Brunei. It's a wonderful country.

I'd ask that our guests arise in your gallery and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the great pleasure to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly two special guests from the Republic of Karelia in northwest Russia. Mr. Shurupov is the Minister of Economics for Karelia, while Mr. Mukhin is the Minister of State Property. The hon. ministers are visiting Alberta under the Yeltsin democracy fellowship program to examine our policies and programs pertaining to regional economic development and the privatization of government assets and services.

We had the opportunity, along with the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, of hosting our special guests at lunch today and found much in common dealing with forestry, agriculture, and of course things like fisheries and minerals.

I want to take this opportunity to once again welcome our guests to Alberta and hope that they have a very successful trip. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a petition to present today, and it's one that's been signed in the last couple of days in my office. There are 44 names from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, Edmonton-Norwood, and Edmonton-Manning.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two petitions today. The first one: another 43 Albertans signing the petition opposed to Bill 11, and the total number of signatures on that petition is 22,567 today.

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by 69 Albertans, and it reads:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta not to institute a flat tax because:

- it will unfairly shift the tax load from high-income earners onto middle-income Albertans;
- it will deepen the divisions between rich and poor in Alberta society; and
- it will do nothing to simplify the tax system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name concerning the working hours after midnight now be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to public health care that I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I tabled yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Notices of Motions

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 21, 23, 24, and 25.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 39, 47, and 50.

Thank you.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two tablings. I am tabling five copies of a response to Written Question 8, as was agreed to by this Assembly on April 5, 2000, and I'm also tabling five copies of a response to Motion for a Return 24, as agreed to by this Assembly on, again, April 5, 2000.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a report titled *On the Classification and Interpretation of Global Progressivity Measures*. This is a report that was prepared for Alberta Treasury by a well-known individual to the members across the way, Mr. Kim Cassady, who is an adviser to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. They developed this report, which demonstrated a measure of progressivity in the so-called single-rate tax, and it was used by the Alberta Tax Review Committee to determine the single rate of tax. I would hope that they would read this report, because it's made by one of their own advisers.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings. The first one is a letter from Claire Goertzen of Lacombe, who like thousands of other Albertans, provides documentation and factual information showing why Bill 11 will not reduce waiting lists and save tax dollars.

MR. SAPERS: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

DR. PANNU: The second one, Mr. Speaker, is an e-mail from Harry Chase of Calgary opposing the flat tax proposal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a document entitled *The Jasper Place Gateway Foundation Community Access Network*, and what it describes is the community access network which has been funded by Industry Canada, which will provide community access to computer terminals and Internet access to six locations in the

constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. I'm very proud of this project. Congratulations to all of those who had a hand in it.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, the second is a letter from Mr. Harry Chase of Calgary regarding Bill 18, and it describes the provincial government's flat tax proposal as: their latest exercise in greed.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a report compiled by two injured workers out of Calgary that was presented to the MLA review panel on the WCB. In this report they outline their concerns and problems with the WCB and also make a number of recommendations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was absolutely thrilled this morning to be part of McHappy Day, assisting Ronald McDonald in the promotion of children's treatment. The Alberta Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society, and the Aaron Moser foundation for spinal cord research, as well as the Alberta cord blood bank are recipients of this year's McHappy funds. I have copies of tablings to that effect.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is a summary of findings from the Protection for Persons in Care Act community consultation held March 15, 2000, by the Alberta Association for Community Living, Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre of Calgary, and FAIRE, Families Allied to Influence Responsible Eldercare.

The second tabling is the news release produced yesterday by physicians on behalf of 150 Calgary physicians who are speaking out on health care and the commercialization of health care in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter from Janice Waddell from the Social Housing Advisory Committee to the hon. Minister of Community Development requesting a meeting.

My second tabling is a response to her letter. It's action request 64788 to Ms Janice Waddell from the hon. Minister of Community Development stating that unfortunately he cannot meet with her to discuss her issues.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Forestry.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like

to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 19 bright grade 5 and grade 6 students from the Grassland school. They are accompanied by their teachers, Julie Genoud and Jeff Semenchuk, parents Casey Bizon and Shirley Nahorney, and bus driver Richard Korb. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 21 students from Alcoma school. These are junior high students from Rainier, Alberta. They have with them teachers Steve Mungall, Connie Waddle, and Sue Chomistek, as well as parent helpers Mike Graham, John Ovinge, Debbie Axelson, Janice Christensen, Debbie Takeda, Diedre Lindsay, Donna Bobinski, Janet Wagner, Laurie Graham, and Lorraine Payne. I would ask the Legislative Assembly to take special interest in three of these people: Mr. Mike Graham, Ms Sue Chomistek, and Ms Laurie Graham, who are son, daughter, and daughter-in-law of someone who is very close to a lot of members in this Assembly, the late Mr. Jim Graham. So I would ask you all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to Members of this Legislative Assembly 36 visitors from Viking school, of course the home of the Sutter family of Viking, Alberta. We have 29 students and seven adults. The group is accompanied by teachers Mrs. Muriel Hill and Mrs. Sharon Whitehead; parents Mrs. Charlene Peterson, Mrs. Shawna Hafso, Mrs. Patricia Bredesen, Mr. Lee Laskosky, and Mr. Brian Albrecht. They are seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you. I've got two introductions, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce Scott Hennig, a student of economics and political science and a resident of Fort Saskatchewan, and also from the school in Fort Saskatchewan, Rudolph Hennig school, named after Scott's great-grandfather, a group of grade 5/6 students accompanied by their teacher, Lynn Marshall. I'd ask Scott and the class and helpers, assistants, and parents to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure today to stand and introduce to you a constituent of Calgary-North West, Dr. Mark Genuis. He's the founder and executive director of the National Foundation for Family Research and Education. It's a privately funded national charitable foundation that works to strengthen families and their children. His research on child and adolescent development, sexual abuse of children, and juvenile delinquency has been published in a number of academic journals and books, and he is a frequent speaker at conferences, public meetings, and symposiums. He's presented his research to the

International Congress of Psychology and the Canadian Psychological Association as well as to parliamentarians, policymakers, school boards, parent groups, and service clubs across Canada. He certainly has been quite a leader in a lot of this research. I'd ask him at this stage to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Proposed WCB Medical Facility

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans and Edmontonians are suspicious about prospective new private health facilities, especially in the wake of Bill 11. We are hoping that perhaps the government can shed some light on a couple of deals that are in the works where public assets are about to be leased or sold. My questions are to the Premier. Since apparently the government has conditionally sold off the Charles Camshell hospital, what are the financial and zoning conditions that have been met before the deal has been closed?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the preamble I don't believe that Albertans and Edmontonians are suspicious. The bill has been out there for some time, and all Albertans have had an opportunity to look at the legislation which simply puts rules and regulations around clinics that already exist, including the 30 that were approved under the leader of the Liberal opposition's watch when she was the minister of health.

Relative to the specific question, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Infrastructure respond.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We currently have a request for proposal out on the table for redeveloping the Charles Camshell site or any other ideas that might come forward with respect to further use of the particular site. As far as conditions, that would be up to the prospective individual that's making a proposal and also to the city, but currently it is zoned residential.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental. The Leader of the opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to get an answer.

This is back to the Premier. Given that the WCB is planning a new health facility at hangar 25 on city-owned property, the airport land, will the health facility be operated by a private health company, or will it be a facility owned and operated by the WCB?

1:50

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's news to me, and the question is a very good one. I'm afraid I don't have the answer, but perhaps the Minister of Health and Wellness does.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of these specific plans, but I think it is extremely important to point out – and I think the Leader of the Opposition should acknowledge this – that the WCB, according to the provisions of the Canada Health Act, which is now being, I understand, overseen more by the Minister of Health, has perfect latitude to establish its own health delivery system for its own specific needs.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Second supplemental to the first question. The Leader of the Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps we can go to the minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Board on the second supplemental. Given that the site is ideal for flying in patients, who else will the new WCB facility be able to contract with: Capital health authority, other health authorities, private business, foreign corporations? Can the minister shed some light on this?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I think, as my colleague the Minister of Health and Wellness just described, the WCB is not under the Canada Health Act, so they have the ability, then, to provide the sort of opportunities and care that their people need. Whatever constraints the board of directors would put on the operation of that particular facility would be a consideration that would be entirely within the WCB. I, of course, would have some legislative responsibilities in terms of the act just to make sure that they were living within the legislative reasons that they're there. I think the board that has been put into place – the public, employer, and employee board – would be capable of looking after the interests of the WCB.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Bill 11 Enforcement

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Behind closed doors seems to be a way of doing business for this government. Not only have they failed to inform Albertans on the sale of public property; they've also hidden details on how to enforce Bill 11. Section 8 of the bill talks about cost-effectiveness and public benefit, but the bill is silent on how such concepts are going to be measured. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the Auditor General's report points out that over half of the regional health authorities have undisclosed expenses associated with payments to private operators, how does the government plan to determine whether there are any cost-effectiveness means in these private facilities?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the issue of the proponent and the RHA determining cost-effectiveness and efficiency, I will have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the basis of this question, I think, has to be challenged a bit, and that is that the Auditor General has certainly indicated and provided advice which Alberta Health and Wellness takes seriously with respect to improving accounting procedures. But it could be implied from the question that there is no accounting with respect to RHA budget money being spent in contracts and other arrangements with private providers. In effect, we have a contract with the Alberta Medical Association, which operates a whole host of facilities such as doctors' offices and associated services. So the situation is not quite the way the hon. member portrays it.

Now, with respect to the legislation there will need to be specifics established in regulations. In terms of the cost-effectiveness they know what their current costs are for particular procedures and services, Mr. Speaker. If the proposal or the bid, so to speak, that comes in or might be put before them is more costly than what they are currently doing and does not offer any advantage in terms of additional or better service, obviously it would not be considered cost-effective by them.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would refer the minister to page 218 of the Auditor General's report, where he talks about noncompliance of facilities.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, can the minister give us any indication of how many government positions are going to be created in order to monitor and regulate these new private facilities? Is it 10 new positions? Is it a hundred? Is it 500 new positions? Is there any indication?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, generally speaking, the regional health authorities across this province have in place administrative staff which currently deal with the clinics that operate in the system. We go back many, many years. It's been well outlined in fact today by the Premier. Those teams, as far as administration and accounting are concerned, would deal with this area of contracting as they deal with contracting the area of food services and laboratory services and arrangements with the 52 surgical clinics that we have currently in the province.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, we seem to have a lively debate going back and forth. The custom of the House is that only one person stands and speaks at a time, and those that are sitting are not invited to engage in debate or in calls across the way.

I believe the Minister of Infrastructure has tried a couple of times to supplement.

Bill 11 Enforcement (continued)

MR. STELMACH: During the second question the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition made a statement that the public is not aware of what public properties are up for sale. I'd like to advise the House and all members here and Albertans that they're posted on the worldwide web. We also have ads in various papers, and we also issued a government news release. So to make an insinuation that the public is not aware of what surplus properties are available is totally wrong.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Second supplemental. Hon. leader.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Getting back to the minister of health and the issue of increased administration, how much will this whole new level of bureaucracy cost the taxpayers of Alberta, dollars that would be far better spent on health care than on administration of the Bill 11 provisions?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition is entitled to her conclusions, however erroneous she wants them to be, and I guess there's no limit to that. I do not see any major so-called layer of bureaucracy being established to let contracts. The vehicle for letting contracts in those regional health authorities – all of them have one type of contract or another – is there. Administrative costs in the regional health authorities across the province run at about 5, 5 and a half percent, which I think compares rather well with other large service organizations, and that is the situation as we see it continuing.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Third main question. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

School Classroom Sizes

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Optimal class sizes for kindergarten to grade 3 is 17 students, as the minister of education has admitted, yet an Official Opposition survey completed by 5,100 teachers in 750 schools in 245 Alberta towns and cities revealed that 81 percent of kindergarten classes were above the recommended size, 95 percent of grade 1 classes were over the limit, 94 percent of grade 2 and 98 percent of grade 3 classes were over the recommended size. The government's Speech from the Throne promises that the Minister of Learning will work with education partners on classroom size. My questions are to the minister. Why has this government reneged and left Alberta students in such overcrowded classrooms?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

2:00

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much for that very important question, Mr. Speaker. First of all, there needs to be a little bit of explanation about the whole class size of 17. As I am sure the hon. member is aware, that study came out, I believe, in Cleveland or Cincinnati. The interesting part about that study was that at about 17 . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Perhaps you would have a question later on Edmonton-Norwood, but right now the question is from the leader.

MS OLSEN: I'll ask my question later on, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I was speaking to you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, suggesting that if you have a question later on, we'll entertain that, but right now we wanted to hear from the Minister of Learning and the Leader of the Opposition.

The hon. Minister of Learning.

School Classroom Sizes

(continued)

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, the study that was done – and again, I believe it was in Cleveland or Cincinnati – stated that with a class size of 17 in the K to 3 age group there were significant improvements. The interesting part about that study was that at a class size of 18, those improvements were not seen. So it seems to me that there is a difficulty when you go from 17 to 18. What is the actual variable that is there?

The other thing that I will say about the hon. Leader of the Opposition's comment that we had put it in the throne speech that we are doing something, Mr. Speaker, is that in January of this year I allocated \$500,000 to the Edmonton public school board to take a look exactly at class size. They are in the midst of their program, and there have been some absolutely fascinating results. They decreased the class size in 10 high-risk schools. They decreased it to 13, 14, and 15, and in some cases 12 students.

What they are seeing is quite literally nothing short of exceptional. They're seeing something that I would never have seen. One of these issues is attendance. They are actually seeing an improved attendance, which leads to the question that someone in grade 1 is actually learning how not to go to school. Instead, because they want to go to school, because there is a decreased class size . . .

[interjections] Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. members are not concerned about the question. The question about class size is very legitimate. It's a very legitimate question.

The other thing that I will say is that there has been \$170 million over three years allocated to a thing called the Alberta initiative for school improvement. The school boards are quite capable of using those dollars to address class size in the K to 3 age group or in any class size. So, Mr. Speaker, \$170 million starting on September 1; \$500,000 as a pilot project starting on January 1.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans have heard a lot of talk from this minister, and given the government's piecemeal and experimental approach to reducing class sizes, when will parents and teachers provincewide be able to expect smaller classes?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, unlike the Liberal opposition we actually look at data. We actually look at studies and base our funding on actual studies that are out there. If they think that Cleveland is the same as Rainier, Alberta, they are sadly mistaken. There are a lot of differences there. The onus is on me as Minister of Learning to ensure that my taxpayers' dollars, that the constituency of Strathmore-Brooks taxpayers' dollars are spent in the best possible fashion. Starting September 1 the school boards have the ability to take a look at class size, so the answer to the question is September 1.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, what response does this minister have for the C.W. Sears school council in Tofield in the Vegreville-Viking riding, wherein they say that

reducing class sizes to a maximum of 17 students . . . would minimize these difficulties and would lay a strong foundation for students to reach their potential and see success in the future,

as does the study which the Alberta Official Opposition worked hard to do. Where's your study?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I'll say exactly the same thing to them as I'll say to the Alcoma school, that is up there today. We are looking at it. We are actually doing scientific studies. A survey of what is happening out there based on a study in Cleveland, Ohio, is not exactly what I would call scientific evidence.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Income Tax

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The threat to shut down debate on a major policy initiative for the second time this session is exactly the kind of thing that is enraging voters in Edmonton-Highlands and throughout the province. This government is increasingly arrogant, antidemocratic, and out of touch with the concerns of ordinary Albertans. The government's regressive flat tax scheme fails the test of fundamental fairness. It represents a massive shift of the tax burden onto the shrinking middle class. My questions are to the hon. Premier. Why has the government decided to undermine fairness by giving huge tax breaks to the already very wealthy leaving only pennies for middle-income Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would hardly say that it's arrogant to introduce tax reform policy and legislation that will take 190,000 low-income Albertans completely off the provincial income tax roll. Sir, that is hardly arrogant. That is respecting and understanding the need for those Albertans to have more disposable income in their pockets rather than in the coffers of the government.

A single-parent family making \$30,000 a year will get a 276

percent tax cut. A 276 percent tax cut. Mr. Speaker, alluding to the wide range of Albertans who are in the middle-income range, a single-income family making \$55,000 a year will get a 41 percent provincial tax cut. That is very significant. A senior couple earning \$40,000 a year will get a 57 percent provincial tax cut. That is hardly being arrogant. That is being fair to Albertans and understanding their needs.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier please tell my constituents where the \$100,000 per year plus jobs are so they can go and apply for them and thereby receive some benefit from the government's flat tax scheme?

MR. KLEIN: I would be very, very happy to. I would suspect that in the riding of Edmonton-Strathcona, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of dual-income wage earners. I would suspect that some of them are university professors, and I would suspect that their combined income would be somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$100,000 to \$120,000, maybe \$130,000. I am sure there are many of them in the hon. member's constituency. Generally speaking, in that tax bracket under the single-rate regime, under the delinking proposal to which Bill 18 alludes, that family would receive a 12 percent cut in provincial income tax.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are in fact university-age students. They can't even afford to go to university to become professors.

My last question to the Premier: is the Premier advising middle-class Albertans to start buying Lotto . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We couldn't hear the question because there seemed to be a lot of noise over on my right. I wonder if we could have the final supplemental asked again without the preamble, hon. member.

2:10 **Income Tax**
(continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you. Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. Is the Premier advising middle-class Albertans to start buying Lotto 6/49 tickets in the hope of striking it rich and thereby being able to take advantage of the government's tax breaks to the wealthy scheme?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, no, I'm not advising. That's a personal choice as to whether people wish to buy 6/49 or 7/47 tickets. All I can say is what I said previously, that a single-income family – and this is just one of the examples – making \$55,000 a year will get a 41 percent provincial tax cut. That is very significant indeed.

Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants to vote against taking 190,000 low-income families off the tax rolls, if he wants to vote against giving an average wage earner of \$55,000 a year a 41 percent tax break, if he wants to deny a senior couple earning \$40,000 a year a 57 percent provincial tax cut, then I would advise him to vote against Bill 18. His record of vote will be well noted.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Kananaskis Development

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, on an ongoing basis my constituency office actually receives more mail and phone calls or e-mail regarding environmental concerns than even health or

education. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Can you please explain the terms of reference that your department has issued to Genesis Land Development for its proposed development in the Spray Valley of Kananaskis Country?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, last year I ordered Genesis to conduct an environmental impact assessment for their proposed project in Kananaskis Country. Perhaps the best way to look at an environmental impact assessment in terms of reference is that it should be thought of as a comprehensive review of environmental and social and economic and cultural consequences that must be addressed prior to a project going ahead. There has been a very strong degree of interest expressed by the public. Over a thousand Albertans expressed their views about Genesis' proposals and made submissions for the terms of reference and their views on what should be reviewed by Genesis.

Mr. Speaker, environmental concerns that had been expressed by the public that must be addressed in the terms of reference include the potential impact of this project on wildlife, transportation routes into the Spray Valley, water quality in the Spray Lakes, and also the appropriateness of large-scale development in Kananaskis Country.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental, Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my second question is also to the same minister. If Genesis decides to proceed with this assessment, what role will it play in the approval process?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the environmental impact assessment, or EIA, must describe the impacts of the proposed project. In the case of the Genesis project they are proposing three things: a heli-skiing operation on Mount Sparrowhawk, a four-season resort on Tent Ridge, and a tour boat operation to operate on Spray Lake. If the EIA report identifies any adverse impacts arising from the Genesis proposal, Genesis must demonstrate how it will either eliminate or mitigate those effects.

When Genesis finishes the EIA report, it will be submitted to the Natural Resources Conservation Board for review. The EIA also requires Genesis to consult the public as part of the assessment process and to include the findings of their public input in their NRCB submission. At that point the NRCB would decide if the proposals put forward by Genesis are in the public interest.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental, Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Minister of Environment. Since the Spray Valley proposals are near the Banff national park boundary, is the federal government involved in the Genesis environmental assessment?

MR. MAR: The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is yes. The federal government has had representatives who have participated in the review of Genesis to this point and have assisted directly in helping develop the final terms of reference for the environmental impact assessment report that my department issued today. I think this has been a very co-operative model that should be used in all cases of federal and provincial joint jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, we have an agreement between the province and the federal government to co-operate in this environmental review, and we certainly intend on living up to that commitment.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Physicians' Concerns over Bill 11

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the recent debate on health care thousands of Albertans from all walks of life and many, many organizations have expressed their opposition to this government's plans for further privatization of our health care system. Yesterday over 150 Calgary physicians added their voices in the fight to defend public health care. My question this afternoon is to the Premier. Given that these doctors view with, quote, grave concern the expanding, for-profit elements in the health care system, close quote, will this government hold off on proclaiming Bill 11 until the concerns of these doctors have been identified and dealt with?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, no. The Minister of Health and Wellness plans to proceed with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and other stakeholders to go ahead and draft the regulations and have the bill proclaimed. I'm sure that he would be happy to talk to representatives of the group of doctors involved.

As I understand it, about six of these doctors attended a news conference in Calgary yesterday, and yes, one of their concerns was this so-called commercialization of health care. Another concern, of course, was that expressed by the Alberta Medical Association, and that is funding for more frontline staff and so on. That has nothing to do with Bill 11. That is a budget item, and it will be addressed in another forum. I can assure you of that.

Mr. Speaker, I have been informed that one of the doctors protesting the so-called commercialization of health care was Dr. Ron Jadusingh. Well, he might want to look in the mirror, because he's a partner with Medical Laboratory Consultants, and that's one of several private providers to the Calgary regional health authority. As a matter of fact, they do about 1 percent of the CRHA lab work. I simply point that out.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental, Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the concerns expressed yesterday in fact reflect the same concerns raised by Dr. Brock Dundas, who is the elected president of the Calgary Regional Medical Staff Association, and given that one of the biggest concerns of these physicians is conflicts of interest that will inevitably arise due to privatization, what specific mechanisms does this government plan to install to regulate and monitor these private facilities for fraud?

MR. KLEIN: One would have to assume that these doctors have not realized that surgical clinics outside of conventional, full-scale hospitals have been operating in this province for many, many years, 30 of which were operating under the watch of the former minister of health who is now the leader of the Liberal Party.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the conflict of interest provisions it is very obvious now that this hon. member has not read the bill. The bill and the amendments to the bill allude specifically to conflict of interest guidelines, and as the regulations are developed, I think you will see very strict conflict of interest guidelines develop relative to contracting out. I will say that those guidelines did not exist before, but they – that is the Liberals – voted against even the notion of putting in conflict of interest guidelines.

2:20

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, this opposition and this caucus recognize a toothless provision when we read it.

The point I'd make is this. Given that these same Calgary physicians have said that "it is vitally important that you, the

taxpaying public, who may also be patients or health care providers, become involved in changes that may seriously affect you or your loved ones," will this Premier commit right now to holding free and open public consultation on the development of all of the 20-odd regulations provided for in Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the meat and really the essence of the law is in the legislation. It's in Bill 11. If these doctors have some concerns with the guidelines as they pertain to conflict of interest, I would suggest that they immediately get in touch with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, their representative body, to discuss their concerns with the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, because this is their opportunity to provide meaningful input to the college so that indeed the guidelines that will be put in place relative to conflict of interest will have lots of teeth.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Income Tax (continued)

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It will come as no surprise to members on this side of the House that thanks to the good policies of this government Albertans enjoy the highest after-tax incomes in Canada. However, being the best in Canada is not enough. As a recent study by Standard and Poor's concluded, the after-tax income enjoyed by Albertans is lower than the after-tax income enjoyed by people living in Alabama. That matters because Alabama is the poorest state in the United States. The richest Canadian province, Alberta, is behind the poorest state, Alabama. Unlike the United States, after-tax incomes in Canada are sliding, not rising. This means that families are finding it harder to make ends meet, harder to buy the things their children and their families need. My first question is to the Acting Provincial Treasurer. Can the Acting Treasurer explain what Alberta has done, is doing, and will be doing for hard-working families in Alberta, families who form the bedrock of our great province, to address this matter?

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, those are sad statistics, indeed to compare Canadians and Albertans to . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Both sides, I think, are anxious to make their points of view known. We'll keep, though, with the tradition of the House that one member gets to speak at a time, and the only member right now that's been recognized to speak is the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

Income Tax (continued)

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, this government has for a long time recognized the unfairness as it relates to taxation of people trying to raise families, whether they be a single-income earning family or a double-income earning family or a family of any combination thereof. Therefore, over the last couple of years and including now we have taken measures to level the playing field for working families as well as to lower their tax burden.

You know, for me to say that would be one thing, but to have the National Foundation for Family Research and Education executive director, Dr. Mark Genuis, say it is another thing. Today at noon he

released a news release which says that there are three specific initiatives in this new tax era in Alberta that "have particular benefit for Alberta families and are cumulative in their positive effect." First, the Alberta family employment tax credit that we brought in a while back is "Canada's first refundable credit to parents of lower income." Secondly, he says that

the increase in the Basic Personal Exemption and the Spousal Exemption provides significant tax relief for younger and lower-income families.

Third, the flat tax will provide real savings for all Alberta families. Now, Mr. Speaker, he says that there at least four specific . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Could you wait for the next question?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those tax reductions don't come cheap. I understand that Alberta is planning to spend \$1.3 billion improving the after-tax incomes of Albertans. My first supplemental is to the Acting Provincial Treasurer. Can you really afford to remove \$1.3 billion from our provincial revenues?

DR. WEST: I want to assure Dr. Mark Genuis of the National Foundation for Family Research and Education that we can. He said that there are four benefits that will come from that \$1.3 billion in savings. He said:

First, low-income families will be provided with a tax refund per child.

Second, lower income families will not pay provincial taxes until their annual family income reaches nearly \$30,000.

Third, the lifestyle options for families are increased as tax discrimination between single and dual income families are reduced.

With that \$1.3 billion we can also say that "Alberta parents will be able to provide better for their children as they will have substantially more of their own money left to them."

I'd like to table this so that everybody gets accurately what was said by the national foundation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental, Calgary-Mountain View, without a preamble.

MR. HLADY: Well, Mr. Speaker, can the Acting Provincial Treasurer explain the policy logic the Liberals and NDs are using to block these tax reductions?

Speaker's Ruling Seeking Opinions

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, as all hon. members well know, you're really asking for an opinion, and what the Acting Provincial Treasurer might think about why someone else – it might then be imputing false motives. I don't know what you could answer, since you've just been asked for an opinion.

Income Tax (continued)

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I definitely wouldn't give a hypothetical answer on their reasoning, but I can say this. The Canadian Taxpayers' Federation has put out a news release that says: Klein's Tax Cuts a Boon to Middle Class; Bill 18 Critics Out to Lunch. They said that "middle class earners are in line for substantial tax savings." I couldn't understand why anybody would be against this.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer I think has made his point.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Justice and the Poor

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the National Council of Welfare, a citizens advisory group, released a report entitled Justice and the Poor. One of the most striking findings of this report is that the highest rate of imprisonment for failure to pay fines is right here in Alberta at 60.7 percent per 10,000 adult residents, or over 18,000 Albertans per year. Now, these are fines. By and large, a good number of these people are the poor, the illiterate, and the mentally ill. Other provinces have social programs; in Alberta they go to debtors' prison. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. Given that we have a fine-options program, can the Minister of Justice explain why Alberta's rates for imprisonment for failure to pay fines is so outrageously high?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a good question indeed. We do have fine-option programs. We do have alternatives for those people who are not able to pay fines, and one would think that they would take more opportunity of those particular programs. But we have to go on to indicate that we need more opportunities to provide for diversion from the court system for minor offences which result in fines so that people can deal with those issues by way of community service and by way of community conferencing issues and other ways of dealing with it.

It is an issue that needs to be dealt with. It's an issue that we need to be cognizant of. I think it also points to the fact that right across this country, particularly in Alberta, we have to do more to deal with the root causes of crime: alcohol addiction, drug addiction, and mental health issues.

2:30

MS OLSEN: My second question is to the same minister. Given that it costs the taxpayers about \$100 a day to keep a person in jail, how long will this government think this incarceration rate is acceptable? When are you going to stop it?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it should be clear that this government doesn't send people to jail. People are prosecuted and they go to court and the courts provide for a penalty. Usually in the case of a fine, a fine option is available. So it's not the government that is sending people to jail.

I did indicate to the hon. member that we do have to do more to find appropriate alternatives, because sending people to jail is not the way to deal with these issues. We have to find ways to get people back into the community better equipped to handle the stresses and the root causes of crime in the first place.

MS OLSEN: Given that actions speak louder than words, when will the minister ensure that the fine-options program works for everyone, including the poor, including the illiterate, and including the mentally ill? When will that happen, Mr. Minister?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're always trying to find better ways to make sure that the public of Alberta understands how the system works and understands how it should work for them. Obviously in circumstances such as are being pointed out, some people are not taking advantage of the programs that are available for them, and we'll have to do more to make sure that they're aware of those options.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Tourism Industry

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With our Canadian climate becoming more conducive to more outdoor activities and Alberta's natural heritage revealing its splendors, once again tourism will be at its peak in the cycle. My question is to the Minister of Economic Development. What are the government policies in terms of economic development with regard to tourism in our province?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We regard tourism as a critical industry within this province. It is our fourth largest sector. That recognition is evidenced by the fact that in Get Ready Alberta, the province's new economic strategy, we would like to see that sector grow from its present level of about 4.2 billion to over 6 billion by the year 2005.

Now, it's easy to say that, Mr. Speaker, but how do we achieve that? One of the ways we are approaching this is to increase the budget with respect to marketing visitor information centres, call centres, et cetera. In fact, the budget from 1998 at \$8 million increased to \$16 million in 1999.

That budget, as I mentioned, includes some marketing dollars. We are aggressively leveraging with the private sector. In fact, at this point in time in leveraging with Alberta-based companies, we're achieving a 2 to 1 ratio, and for companies that are located outside the province, we're actually at a 5 to 1 ratio.

We are also partnering with the private sector with respect to product development. Of course, within this province in order to increase our level of tourism, we need to provide tourists with new levels of product.

Finally, we're trying to develop a stronger relationship with the Canadian Tourism Commission, Mr. Speaker.

The bottom line is that we want Alberta to be a top-of-mind vacation destination, not only for Albertans but for Canadians and international visitors.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Supplemental, Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what are the specific programs that promote tourism among Albertans spending time and money inside Alberta?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have an in-resident marketing program which has a budget of approximately \$2 million. In fact, the question is very timely. Just this past weekend we sent to hundreds of thousands of households a little brochure – and I have one here – called Travel Alberta. It is an excellent brochure, and I'd encourage all members of the House to look at this brochure.

What we're trying to do is use this to increase interest in Albertans in other parts of the province aside from those they traditionally visit. We are also running significant TV and print promotional programs in conjunction with the release of this document. We have a new accommodation guide, a new campground guide. We have a 60-page travel planner out there.

So what we're trying to do, Mr. Speaker, is, again, encourage Albertans to see those parts of the province which they have not previously visited. In that way, we will grow the tourism industry not on a regional basis but throughout the whole province.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental, Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what are the specific government programs to promote tourism to attract visitors from outside our province?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's performance in attracting overseas visitors was considerably better than the national average for the first two-quarters of 1999, and these are the most up-to-date figures that I have. Unfortunately, our performance was significantly lower than the national average in attracting U.S. visitors for the same period.

That's one of the reasons why we recently launched a new Americas campaign. It's an approximately \$4 million TV and print promotional campaign, and we are running that in selected states. We've tried to pick those states where we feel we'll have the greatest impact; for example, Texas, California, the Pacific Northwest. It is the largest campaign in the United States since, I think, 1988. We're trying to ensure that Americans are well aware of all we have to offer.

We are also working with the Canadian Tourism Commission in the United Kingdom and German markets. Our initial figures are very encouraging with respect to leads being generated through our advertising. We have some new initiatives in Japan with two leading travel agencies.

Mr. Speaker, it's not often I get to answer questions in the House. I don't take a lot of time, but I would like to take this opportunity to explain to members what we're doing, because it is important.

Briefly, Mr. Speaker, we have some challenges to overcome, and those challenges relate to the national parks and what the federal government is doing with respect to restricting access. We also have the challenges regarding air service and how that is impacting the availability of direct flights. We are working aggressively with other economic development and tourism ministers from across the country to address those particular issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Homelessness

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Community Development: when is the government's policy framework on homelessness going to be publicly released?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, that policy is available to anybody upon asking for it.

MRS. SLOAN: That answer doesn't explain why the agencies providing services to the homeless haven't seen it, Mr. Speaker.

My second question is: how much will the provincial government contribute to fund the \$37 million in capital projects being initiated by the Calgary Drop In Centre and Salvation Army to address the needs of the homeless?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to let the House know that Alberta is the only province that in fact does have a policy with respect to homelessness. I was very pleased that the member did refer to Calgary, simply because Calgary and Edmonton, for that matter, are being touted in Ottawa by Minister Bradshaw, whom I had the pleasure of meeting with, the minister responsible for the homeless on a national scale, as examples of what should be done across this country. What we are doing is working with the local authorities, with the federal government in a very proactive fashion, and with the smaller agencies within these cities.

We have for the first time allocated a budget line directly at the homeless in my ministry, the idea being that this money will be accessed by the serving agencies via the bigger umbrella agencies, and in the case of Calgary, it's through the Calgary Homeless Foundation.

MRS. SLOAN: My third question, then, is to the Minister of Infrastructure. When will the government be making funding available to the Salvation Army and the Calgary Drop In Centre to fund the capital projects they've initiated for the homeless?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Community Development just answered the question. He's got the budget line in his particular budget allocation to deal and work co-operatively with all of the social housing organizations.

Of course, our Member for Calgary-Bow has done extensive work in this area, and I would encourage the hon. member to have a good look at the report and get some further information and ideas out of it.

head: Members' Statements

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We have three members' statements this afternoon. In 30 seconds we'll start with the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, followed by Edmonton-Glengarry, and finally Peace River.

2:40

Crime Prevention Week

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to rise today and recognize Alberta Crime Prevention Week 2000, which runs May 13 to 19. This is the ninth annual crime prevention awareness campaign that is co-ordinated by Alberta Justice with the Alberta Community Crime Prevention Association.

This past Saturday I had the opportunity to attend the Alberta Justice crime prevention awards, which were presented by the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General. These awards recognize the outstanding contribution of Alberta's volunteer crime fighters in communities across the province. The 13 recipients – seven individuals, three businesses, two police officers, and one community organization – showed that there is a part for all Albertans to play in the province's crime prevention team. By working in their communities, these recipients have created a sense of pride and ownership that has helped to reduce crime. With their community spirit and tireless efforts they have made a difference. Their achievements are proof that crime prevention programs work best when developed and implemented at the local level. In fact, community involvement is one of the best ways to eliminate crime and the social, financial, and emotional costs that go along with it.

Throughout Crime Prevention Week 2000, communities will be holding numerous events and special activities to increase awareness about how Albertans can prevent crime and make our province safer and stronger. From open houses at local police detachments and robbery awareness seminars to demonstrations on children's, seniors', and home safety, Albertans across the province will be out in force to support the week and its theme: Crime prevention – it's in your neighbourhood.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to encourage the members of the Assembly and all Albertans to participate in this special week and to help spread the word about crime prevention in Alberta.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Rendez-vous Canada 2000

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week tourism industry operators from across Canada gathered in Calgary for the industry's annual showcasing of its latest products and plans. Some 1,400 delegates came together for Rendez-vous Canada 2000 at the Round-Up centre in Stampede Park from May 6 to 10. Organizers from the Tourism Industry Association of Canada reported it to be its largest annual gathering ever.

Recognition for this outstanding event must go to dedicated individuals from the Tourism Industry Association of Canada board and the Rendez-vous Canada advisory committee. Their ideas, hard work, and dedication culminated in the creation of an event which proved to be an excellent tool for the tourism business community.

Tourism is Alberta's fourth largest industry. It produces \$4.2 billion annually and employs around 100,000 Albertans. It is also an industry with a tremendous potential for growth. By 2005 tourism is expected to bring in \$6 billion a year in revenue. Yet the tourism industry has been treated as a forgotten child by the Alberta government. Years of inadequate government spending, ineffective marketing by the province, and the disruptive failure of the government's Alberta Tourism Partnership Corporation experiment all took a toll on the tourism industry in this province. To quote a representative of the Calgary Convention & Visitors Bureau, there was a time when provinces around the country considered Alberta to be a leader. That's certainly not evident anymore. Tourism funding is still only a drop in the bucket compared to what competing destination provinces such as British Columbia and Ontario spend on the industry.

Today the industry is battling back from the government's mishandling of tourism and marketing. Through a great deal of hard work on the part of industry and stakeholders Alberta's tourism providers and marketers are now poised to make real inroads into making this beautiful province of ours a tourist destination of choice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Mary Percy Jackson

MR. FRIEDEL: Mr. Speaker, on May 6, 2000, Dr. Mary Percy Jackson passed away in Manning, Alberta, at the age of 95. This was a sad loss for her family and the community, but I cannot imagine a life more fulfilled, more accomplished, and more rewarding than hers.

She came to the Peace country in 1929 from England, expecting to stay for about a year. Instead, she stayed and practised medicine for almost 50 years and raised a family that now includes great-great-grandchildren. Dr. Mary was a pioneer in every sense of the word as she was the only doctor in the vast north Peace for a number of years. She covered an area of more than 100 miles when the only mode of transportation was on horseback because there were no roads. Her patients included homesteaders and natives alike.

I can't possibly do justice to a proper recognition in the short time that I have available, but maybe a partial list of her many awards might help. They include the Centennial Medal of Canada, the Alberta achievement award, an honorary doctorate of laws degree from the University of Alberta, the Alberta Order of Excellence, and in 1990 an officer of the Order of Canada. That's only the short list.

Dr. Mary continued to live in Keg River after her husband died in 1979 and only moved to Manning after she was 90 years old.

I had the privilege of getting good advice from her on a number of occasions. Ironically, our last conversation was about two months ago when she called me in support of Bill 11. She said that she had seen more than 70 years of advances in medicine and health care, and it was important to always look ahead to new and innovative ideas.

In her book, *The Homemade Brass Plate*, she wrote: when I die, I hope I shall be able to quote Robert Louis Stevenson's *Requiem*.

Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

Dr. Mary, that epitaph and this thank you is for you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We have one point of order that I'm aware of. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member Reflections on Nonmembers

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am going to be referring to some words spoken by the Acting Provincial Treasurer during Routine, during tablings. I will be referring to Standing Order 23 and also recent Speaker's rulings regarding referencing people outside the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, during tablings, just minutes after Prayers, the Acting Provincial Treasurer was obviously so eager to exercise what he thought would be a got-you that in a fairly smug and arrogant way, misrepresenting a paper that was co-authored by a gentleman by the name of Kim Cassady and then tabling it in this Assembly, as though it gave some credibility to this government's tax policy, he then sat down and from his seat, carefully avoiding his microphone, pointed directly across the aisle at this hon. member and said: tell the truth. Though he said that off microphone, clearly his voice was loud enough, I think, for all hon. members in this Assembly to hear.

There's only one reason why he would utter that phrase, tell the truth, and that would be to insinuate that this hon. member, myself, had not told the truth about that particular tax policy paper.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask you to call the Acting Provincial Treasurer to order for two reasons. I'm going to ask you to do two things. One, I would ask you to ask the Acting Provincial Treasurer to withdraw the allegation that I was not telling the truth. I take this very seriously. If the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer can put on the record one example of one untrue utterance that I have made in relation to that tax policy paper, I will stand in the Assembly, I will apologize for it, and I will retract it. If he cannot do that, I would ask him to do the honourable thing and withdraw that allegation.

2:50

The second thing that I would ask you to call him to order for, Mr. Speaker, is in relation to the Speaker's rulings of late where the Speaker has gone to great lengths to talk about how we must not take advantage of individuals who are not inside the Assembly by drawing them into this debate and then misrepresenting or abusing their work and their reputation.

Mr. Speaker, the gentleman in question, Mr. Cassady, once upon a time was employed by Alberta Treasury. During that period of time he did a series of very good works for Alberta Treasury. He subsequently left Alberta Treasury. One of the papers that he co-authored found its way into publication in a very esteemed and prestigious academic journal. This happened some 10 years, I understand, give or take a couple of years, several years after it was originally authored. It is a measure of progressivity. It has been misrepresented in this House by the Acting Provincial Treasurer.

The paper in question talks about how tax plans must be revenue neutral if they are to be compared. Bill 18 is not. It talks about comparing tax plans side by side, which Bill 18 does not. And, finally, the third way in which his work has been misrepresented for partisan purposes by the Acting Provincial Treasurer was that it does

not support any particular tax scheme. It certainly does not support Bill 18.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are my arguments. I do take this seriously. I will not tolerate being accused of telling an untruth in this Assembly, and I certainly will not stand by while one of my constituents is maligned in this House by the Acting Provincial Treasurer.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on the point of order.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed unfortunate when comments are tossed across the way from one member to another, usually provoked by some form of attempt at informal discussion. However, in this particular case I'm hoping that the chair will not find that there's a point of order, because I have not been able to track down in *Hansard* any specific comments that were recorded in this respect. I'm not taking away from the fact that there may or may not have been an exchange between the two members being discussed here. However, I certainly didn't hear any of that exchange, and I doubt that the chair would have heard it either.

As we all know, there is an amount of heckling that goes on between members in lead-ups to what would otherwise be a very productive question period that follows. I think that may well be what has happened here. As I understand it, just listening to Edmonton-Glenora, the discussion centred around Bill 18, which is on the Order Paper, as you know, and does provide a number of benefits through a lot of tax cuts that will be forthcoming, which Albertans, we believe, really do want. I would congratulate the member who is not in the House, Mr. Cassady, for the fine work that he did in this regard, that helped lead up to this.

I happen to know Mr. Cassady, and I do judge him to be a very nice gentleman, and I'm sure that he did his best work. However, I don't think that anyone in this House, including the Acting Provincial Treasurer, would have taken any liberties by suggesting any ill work by that gentleman. Simply perhaps a congratulatory thing and perhaps asking the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to reflect on that. However, I did not hear the exact conversation.

What I would tell you, though, Mr. Speaker, is that expressions like "tell the truth" – I have looked through *Beauchesne*, and I haven't found that particular phrase, unless I missed it, to be ruled unparliamentary in previous usages. In fact, under *Beauchesne* 485, titled Unparliamentary Language, it states:

Unparliamentary words may be brought to the attention of the House either by the Speaker or by any Member. When the question is raised by a Member it must be as a point of order and not as a question of privilege.

I'm sure that if the Speaker himself had heard something unparliamentary, he would have acted on the first part of that statement and brought the member to order himself. Not having heard that, I can understand that the chair did not stop the member's discussion at that time, if in fact that's what did occur.

The other point I would raise very quickly is *Beauchesne* 486(4), which reinforces what I said earlier:

Remarks which do not appear on the public record and are therefore private conversations not heard by the Chair do not invite the intervention of the Speaker, although Members have apologized for hurtful remarks uttered in such circumstances.

That having been said, I think we may well have a disagreement here over an interpretation of an allegation about certain words that may or may not have been said. In that instance, if that was the case, I'm sure the two members can sort it out.

However, it's my position that while we may have a disagreement over an allegation, that in itself does not constitute a point of order, and I would ask for your ruling in that respect.

Thank you.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we see the member alleging that there was no comment made on the record, and then he defends it. If we go to either *Beauchesne* or *Erskine May*, we find that it is the interpretation of what is said. "Tell the truth," the tone that that was volleyed across the floor of this Legislative Assembly did have an interpretation that would fall within both of those books in terms of being unparliamentary.

There have been many cases in this Assembly when tapes have been listened to when *Hansard* hasn't picked up miscellaneous statements made within the Assembly, so I would ask the Speaker to review that in that context in terms of making a ruling there.

In terms of the allegations made against a person who is not a member of this Assembly and is not here to defend himself, that person being Kim Cassady, we have had several recent experiences in this Assembly where people have had to retract remarks, apologize for them. Certainly the interpretation that the Treasurer put on those comments he made about Kim Cassady and his work done previously in this province does need to be retracted and taken in that kind of context.

So I'm hoping, Mr. Speaker, that you will find a point of order on both counts, the "tell the truth" statement and the comments made about a person who is not in a position to defend himself in this Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, the chair would agree with the hon. member who did bring up the item in *Beauchesne* 486(4), which indicates that "private conversations not heard by the Chair do not invite the intervention of the Speaker." So I can't get into the detail of what wasn't heard, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora clearly alleged that the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer covered up his microphone when he said whatever he said to the hon. member.

Certainly the chair did hear hon. members back and forth saying a number of things. If there was some question of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora being untruthful, that certainly would be a hurtful comment and would be worthy of retraction, but the chair can hardly intervene in that if the chair didn't hear. Certainly the chair heard noises and will have to look at the Blues, if there was a clear catch of that.

With regard to references to Mr. Cassady, the chair will have to look at the Blues to see if there was an adverse – that seemed to come after the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora made the point of order. I would have to read the Blues to make a comment about that, if there was something untoward.

I think that probably this is much more a point of clarification than a point of order. The hon. member has clarified his point, and the chair will look at those references to Mr. Cassady.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 209
Employment Standards (Parental Leave)
Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to stand before this Assembly and present my private member's Bill 209. This bill is a result of consultation that I have conducted since the spring of 1998 relating to an issue that's close to me.

As the representative for my riding I have witnessed that working parents do not have enough time to nurture their infants, especially when the infants are not well and the parents are demanded to be at work. I also received strong support from many individuals and organizations such as the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre of Calgary, the Calgary family day home agencies, parents as teachers programs, Adoption by Choice, the International Adoption Association, the first steps parent council of Edmonton, early prevention programs, and so on. I want to take this opportunity to table letters of support from those individuals and organizations.

3:00

This bill involves people that are very important to this Assembly and to this government. It involves Alberta's young children. What we have an opportunity to do here is ensure that many of them are better off. Bill 209 is not about benefits to parents. It is about the care for our Alberta infants.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The purpose of Bill 209 is to amend the Employment Standards Code as it relates to maternity and adoptive leave. The bill amends the code to allow for a maximum of 27 weeks of parental leave, which could be taken by either birth parents or adoptive parents. This leave could be taken by one parent or divided between both parents as they see fit. The leave must be taken consecutively and cannot be taken by more than one parent at a time. The amendment would amalgamate current provisions for maternity leave and adoption leave and bring Alberta's parental leave standards in line with other provinces.

In fact, Alberta currently has the lowest maternity and parental leave time sanctioned in the whole country. Mr. Speaker, I believe it is time to revisit the current maternity leave provisions that this province has. In fact, our current maternity leave provisions were established in the old Employment Standards Code in 1976. This is more than 25 years ago. Though many of us have utilized these provisions and they have served a purpose, a lot of time has passed. Many things have changed and so has our knowledge regarding child care and nurturing. These old provisions I speak of granted employees who had been with the same employer for a period of at least one year 18 weeks of maternity leave with at least six of those weeks following the date of delivery.

In 1988 adoptive parents were granted adoption leave as long as the adoptive parents had been with the same employers for a period of at least one year and adopted a child aged three or under, but these parents were only allocated a period of no more than eight weeks of leave from the date of custody, and only one adoptive parent was eligible for the leave.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, in 1991 our current minister of health examined this legislation. Our MLA for Ponoka-Rimbey introduced Bill 291, An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Code. The bill proposed to change the code so that employees could avail themselves of all maternity leave and parental leave available under the federal unemployment insurance program. At that time those benefits were for 27 weeks. My Bill 209 proposes the same amount of time. Another suggestion that is included is that the fathers also be allowed the opportunity to take parental leave following the birth.

Though Bill 291 died on the Order Paper, some very valuable suggestions were made. They included reducing the 18 weeks allowed for the birth mother to 17 weeks, creating an 18 consecutive weeks' parental leave period available to both parents, birth or adoptive, a requirement of four weeks' notice to an employer if an employee wished to return to work following their leave time before

that leave expired, reducing the qualifying period of employment from 12 months to 13 weeks, and removing the age restriction on adoptive children so that all adoptive parents would qualify.

Mr. Speaker, in 1991 the minister of labour petitioned the chair of the social planning cabinet committee to change the code as it applied to parental leave. Changes would have followed the suggestions outlined in Bill 291. However, these recommendations were never carried out, and the issue has not been made since.

Presently, maternity and adoption benefits fall under division 7 of the Employment Standards Code of Alberta. As I have stated, while some other amendments to the code have been made, maternity leave provisions have not changed since 1976. Alberta still limits the parental leave provision to the birth mother and one adoptive parent. Inequities still exist between entitlements for birth mothers and adoptive parents even though the circumstances encountered can be similar. Concerns have been expressed by groups representing adoptive parents that they should receive the same entitlements as birth parents. These groups do not recognize any difference in need between natural and adoptive parents. We should not either, Mr. Speaker. Furthermore, when comparing other provinces to Alberta, while entitlements to maternity leave are similar, Alberta lags behind on those parental leave provisions by failing to grant leave for birth fathers. This should not be the case.

The Employment Insurance Act currently grants payment of employment insurance benefits for maternity and parental leave. The EI provides for 15 weeks of maternity leave benefits and 10 weeks of parental leave benefits, to be split between both parents and taken within the first year of the new child. In addition, it requires a waiting period of two weeks. The total leave covered for the biological mother would be 25 weeks. However, our Alberta Employment Standards Code would not provide protection for the job longer than 18 weeks, whereas a full 27 weeks would be needed to take full advantage of the EI benefit.

Mr. Speaker, that is money made available to Albertans, money that Albertans pay into EI every time they get a paycheque. Not that Albertans are into handouts, but that is money that this old piece of legislation prevents Albertans from receiving. It almost seems as of late that if there is a program that the federal government can fund that excludes Albertans, they will most certainly increase funding in that program. Knowing full well that Alberta doesn't take advantage of maternity leave at a level above 18 weeks, the federal Liberals just recently announced a plan to extend employment insurance parental benefit leave. These benefits will be extended to one year by extending parental leave provisions by 35 days and will take effect on January 1, 2001. That is another program that Albertans pay into but many can't take advantage of.

3:10

On February 28, 2000, the federal government outlined more details on how it intends to increase parental benefits to a maximum of 50 weeks of combined maternity leave, parental leave, and sickness benefits. The federal government intends to amend the Canada Labour Code so that the period for job protection under the parental leave provision will correspond to the extended employment insurance benefit. The program will also be made more accessible by decreasing insured hours required for such leave to 600 hours from 700 hours.

Changes to the federal legislation will have a great impact on what occurs in Alberta, though it certainly widens the gap between current provincial legislation and federal legislation. Mr. Speaker, Bill 209 serves to shorten that gap. I believe that one year of parental leave is excessive, but half a year, as proposed under my bill, is more reasonable, closer to that available in other provinces of Canada.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to get back to the true beneficiaries of this bill. I want to emphasize that the true beneficiaries of this legislation are the young children of Alberta. When we debate this bill, I want all members to be clear about what is meant by parental leave. When we use the term "parental leave," I hope many of you are not thinking to yourselves: parental holiday. We would be mistaken to interpret parental leave that way, and that is not why we allow parental or maternity leave in this province, to begin with.

Parents who take maternity or parental leave are performing a valuable contribution to Alberta by helping to raise happy, well-adjusted Albertans. Many of us here in the Assembly had the benefit of being raised at least in the early years by one parent who stayed at home. That's the way it was for many of us back then. Many of us in this Assembly may believe that it is the best way to bring a child into the world. Now, we may not be authorities in the field of child care, but many of us are parents, and we know that it is a valid observation, an observation that child care experts do agree with. There are many studies and statistics that demonstrate that there is truth in this hypothesis.

Parent advocacy groups across North America have been very active in promoting early childhood involvement by both parents, particularly since dual-income households have increased in prominence. In fact, Mr. Speaker, seven out of 10 families in this country are dual-income families. Their position is supported by this commonly accepted belief that children whose parents take an active role in their early development are more socially adjusted.

Even further arguments have been made regarding the need for fathers to be as active in early parenting as mothers. Among others, Dr. Paul Amatos of the University of Nebraska demonstrated a direct relationship between children's behaviour and the amount of time and support provided not just by mothers but by fathers as well. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there are volumes of social science research that address the issues of early childhood development and the effect of a young child's environment on how the child will function in society as he or she grows up. The findings of the studies are consistent, indicating that the quality of care vis-a-vis a child's development psychologically, emotionally, and intellectually is consistently better when that care is from a parent as opposed to a paid caregiver. No matter what the facility, there is no equal to parental care in a child's formative years.

The president of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Dr. Elliott Barker, has argued that nothing is more important in the world today than the nurturing that children receive in the first three years of life. For it is in these earliest years that the capacity for trust, empathy, and affection originates, and if the emotional needs of the child aren't met during these years, permanent emotional damage can occur.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are hardworking and industrious people. Some argue that this bill will somehow slow down small business in this province. I disagree. The net long-term benefit will be a positive one not just for society but for the economy.

In the year 2010 one in three Albertans are predicted to be senior citizens. This is not a bad thing, but with such a dramatically changing demographic in Alberta, it is time for us to focus on the future. Alberta's children are our future, those who are currently the most underrepresented people in our society. Mr. Speaker, I urge all the members of this Assembly to do something for them and support this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, there is a question that asks, for example: how will this bill affect the workforce availability in Alberta? In 1997-1998 statistics show that there were 36,500 Alberta infants born, along with 217 adoptions. Also, I've seen from statistics that there are over 1.5 million Albertans working. So with the calculation that I

attempted, I can say that in the short term it's very negligible. If all the birth mothers or birth parents take leaves of absence and all the adoptive parents take leaves of absence from work, then the implication of labour availability is less than .4 percent of the labour force in Alberta.

But looking at the long term, there's a multiplying benefit. It's often quoted from the research that \$1 spent in early childhood reduces \$7 in youth correction. Also, looking at the workforce, I would say that because of parental leave, we will have happier and less stressed-out working parents. That means more productivity and less social problems.

Another view of it is that if you look at 27 weeks in a human life, then I can say that relative to the number of months for human conception, which is nine months, or even looking at human life in terms of the formation age, which is 20 years, which is again looking at 1,040 weeks, and if you look at the production stage of human life, which is 45 years of working life, with all of this 27 weeks is relatively very small.

Thank you. I hope I have support from our Legislature.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

3:20

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand this afternoon to make a few observations in support of Bill 209, the Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2000. While supporting the bill, I think we might keep in mind how modest the proposal really is. When you think of this legislation which would increase unpaid adoption leave for an adoptive parent, which would increase unpaid maternity leave to the birth mother to 21 weeks and to an aggregate of 27 weeks of parental leave to the birth parents and contrast that to some European countries who provide a full year of pay for parents who choose to spend the first year at home with their children, then I think it starts to put this proposal in some perspective.

I think the importance of the first years of a child's life has been recognized universally, and again this is a very, very modest proposal. For those of us who have children and who have recently been associated with children . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Like you? Are you a new grandpa?

DR. MASSEY: Yes. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I need some relief from the heckling. I think I'll start again.

The importance of those first years, I think, is abundantly clear. The issue is not just care during the first year or first two years of life. Custodial care we can provide, but it's the formation. It's what happens to those youngsters in those first two years and especially that first year and what happens in terms of, in particular, values formation.

A number of authors and researchers have tried to identify what are the things that happen to children during those early formative years. At least one of them has tried to point out how important those first two years are in terms of a youngster gaining self-control and developing empathy. The literature has been fairly supportive that our values are rooted in those early experiences.

The notion of self-control, being able to use one's faculties and one's energies and to have those faculties and energies under control of the will, is extremely important in later life. I think there is strong support from the academic community that self-control begins right at birth and that learning self-control continues very rapidly thereafter. The notion of empathy, the ability to intellectually or

imaginatively put ourselves in someone else's position, is again one of the two very basic values that are instilled in children starting at birth.

Writers have identified those two characteristics as being so important in later life. We look at the kinds of problems that we deal with in our society and how much easier it would be if we could be assured that all citizens were empathetic, could feel what other citizens feel. We're able to exercise self-control because it's in that loss of self-control that we find rooted so many of the ills that we face today. It's not just parental care, but it's parenting that we want to foster, and Bill 209 moves us a small way in that direction.

One of the other issues, of course, is the issue of child care centres. I think there's good evidence supporting the work in child care centres, but there are some qualifications. Those child care centres have to have personnel that are the very best that we can hire, the very best qualified that we can have in place, and they have to be excellent facilities that provide a physical and an emotional environment in which the kinds of values that we want instilled can be fostered. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that's not always the case today. Many centres are forced for one reason or another to hire less than qualified caregivers, and many centres are driven by motives other than the care of children. In some centres financial motives are paramount, and that's unfortunate for the children that are enrolled in those centres.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think there's almost a universal longing for parents to spend more time with their children when they're first born. The growth is so remarkable that you don't have to be around those youngsters long before you see how important that early learning is and how rapidly that early learning takes place.

I wondered about this bill appearing as part of the employment standards. I assume that's the place where it has to be for legal means, but it seems to me that it points to the need of a family policy in the province or a policy to address the needs of children. In terms of early childhood I think many of us are still quite astounded that the kindergarten programs were cut back as they were. It seems to me that if children were dealt with from birth to early childhood in one department or under one jurisdiction, that kind of sacrificing of children wouldn't occur and the kinds of provisions we find in Bill 209 might be more extensive and might sit in context.

The former member indicated that there was a concern on the part of small businesses that this bill might somehow or other penalize them by having to provide these provisions for new parents, but I don't believe that's true. I think everyone in this society recognizes the importance of those first two years of life and certainly those very first early weeks of a child's life, the importance of having parents or adoptive parents or the individuals that are going to be raising them there full-time.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to, along with my colleagues, support Bill 209.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I know you were concluding, hon. member, but I'm required to interrupt you. The time limit for consideration of this item of business has expired today.

3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Urban Renewal

510. Ms Olsen moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a special task force in conjunction with

federal and municipal authorities to examine ways to preserve neighbourhoods affected by school closures and business relocations.

[Debate adjourned May 9: Mr. Amery speaking]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the short two minutes remaining I would like to encourage everyone to support this motion. Edmonton-Norwood, in fact, has a strong background in the reality of communities and what it means when schools close and businesses relocate. Certainly those of us from rural Alberta are well aware of what happens if a school closes in a community.

In fact, in the community I am from, Villeneuve, many years ago I remember when that school closed and how tough it was for that community to stay alive and revitalize once that centre of focus was gone. Certainly, I know many churches are having difficulties staying open in small rural communities as well. So this motion, I think, is a very solid motion, urging the government to look at it and see what can be done.

I think this is not only an issue in parts of larger cities where communities struggle but most certainly in rural Alberta. The places that are farther away from the main centres, I know, struggle often because of lack of population and because of distance to get programs.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those few words of, I hope, convincing encouragement I am hoping that every member here will support this motion. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 510 lost]

Senior Abuse

511. Ms Kryczka moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to broaden the mandate of the Interdepartmental Committee on Family Violence to include elder abuse so that its functions are to educate and further raise the awareness of Albertans about this serious problem for seniors, support current government and community initiatives and support improvements on them if needed, and identify gaps in legislation and services to seniors in areas where they might be at risk and to ensure the committee has adequate resources to handle its expanded role as advocate for seniors in Alberta.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and begin debate on Motion 511. Through many different facets of my life I have become aware that elder abuse is a serious problem facing seniors. I have heard from many concerned Albertans as MLA for Calgary-West, as chair of the Seniors' Advisory Council for Alberta, and as chair of the steering committee for the governmentwide study on the impact of the aging population on government programs and services. I am also an Albertan who is deeply concerned with the plight of our seniors. What I have come to realize is the severity of this problem and the fact that a lot of Albertans aren't fully aware of the extent of its existence nor of the programs and initiatives in place to deal with it. So it is difficult to find support to improve present programs if government and the public are not fully aware of the problem that exists.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to start by sharing a few facts with everyone in this House, facts that necessitate action on our behalf

now and not later. In November 1999 the long-term care review committee released a report titled *Healthy Aging: New Directions for Care*. In that report the committee made reference to the fact that although today people over 65 years comprise 9.8 percent of the population, by 2016 that number will rise to 14.5 percent and by 2031 to about 25 percent. So in 30 years one in four Albertans will be a senior citizen. For most of us these seniors will be our children. This is a significant number, and we as a government must ensure that we are readying ourselves now for what will be a greater number and proportion of seniors tomorrow.

If certain seniors' programs or initiatives are not working optimally now, what will happen when one in four Albertans is using them? We need to have workable policies and links to the seniors' community today so that when baby boomers, such as almost everyone in this room, become seniors, we are ready.

I think we have been doing our job for Alberta's seniors. We have among the best seniors' benefit program in the country. We have almost every department in our government liaising with seniors to create the best possible programs for them. We have a health care system that is working for our seniors, and we have countless community groups working and supporting seniors at the grassroots level. But, Mr. Speaker, I think that if there's an area where we can do more, it is responding to and fighting elder abuse.

I look at Motion 511 as one step in a much broader path of progress that needs to occur. As I realize that a motion is a good forum to get debate started, get people talking about an important issue, that is why I want to focus more right now on an overview of elder abuse.

Mr. Speaker, a frustrating characteristic about elder abuse is that it is not limited to one place or one group both from a government perspective in trying to formulate good policy and from a professional perspective in trying to educate to prevent it. What I mean is that abuse of seniors can occur in almost any setting, whether in their own home, another person's home, a seniors' lodge, or a nursing home. Abuse can happen to any senior, whether they are rich, poor, healthy, ill, male, or female. Therefore, it is very important in my comments to define as best I can what elder abuse is and to illustrate that it occurs in many forms and in many places, from private homes to public institutions.

Mr. Speaker, a good definition of elder abuse can be found with the U.S. Center for Elder Abuse. They have defined three basic categories: domestic, institutional, and self-neglect. Domestic elder abuse refers to maltreatment of an older person residing in his or her own home or the home of a caregiver. Institutional abuse refers to the maltreatment of an older person residing in a residential facility; for example, a nursing home, board and care home, foster home, or group home. Self-neglect refers to the conduct of an older person living alone which threatens his or her own health or safety.

From those categories elder abuse is also manifested in four general classes: financial, emotional, physical, and neglect. Elder abuse can occur to anyone, although elders who have mental or physical disabilities are at the greatest risk. Unfortunately, we know victims of elder abuse are most often reluctant to report offenders and are not willing to pursue a criminal investigation. That is why it is difficult to obtain reliable statistics on the occurrence of abuse in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I want to spend some time further defining these different forms of abuse because from this you'll see just how varied the abuse can be. Physical abuse is described as any action done intentionally that causes physical discomfort, pain, or injury, such as hitting or slapping or physical confinement. This is the abuse that most people think about. It is almost the classic idea of abuse, but the reality is that abuse occurs in many different forms.

Emotional abuse can range from denying access to grandchildren to not respecting a senior's privacy to words that are hurtful. Often seniors are threatened in this manner and are coerced into doing things they don't want to do.

Neglect is one of the types of abuse hardest to define. It can be on purpose or a case of not caring about a senior's well-being. Neglect can range from not giving a senior proper food or clothing to failing to provide adequate housing or health care to denial of social contacts and outings to failing to prevent physical harm in the case of disabled or physically weakened seniors.

Financial abuse is also difficult to define because it can occur in many different forms. One of the most prevalent forms is fraud. Financial abuse by means of telemarketing fraud and other scams is a very serious, extensive problem for seniors today. In Canada 40 percent of fraud victims are seniors. Losses to each victim can run from hundreds to thousands of dollars and in some cases much more. This is a serious problem that doesn't get the attention it deserves.

It is estimated that in Canada at least 4 percent of persons over the age of 65 have suffered from one or more serious forms of abuse at the hands of family members or other close contacts, such as financial, physical, mental, or even sexual abuse. The general consensus among experts is that elder abuse is largely underreported, so the figure of 4 percent is considered to be too low. Some experts report the percentage of abuse as high as 8 percent. If you take the 290,000 seniors living in Alberta in 1998 and say that 4 to 8 percent are abused, that means that 11,560 seniors to as high as 23,135 seniors are facing one form of abuse or another. Those numbers are very scary. So, Mr. Speaker, this is the situation we face in Alberta.

3:40

In illustrating some basic facts about elder abuse, I have painted a fairly bleak picture, but fortunately that is only one side of this issue. There are many very good programs and initiatives going on in this province with respect to elder abuse that we should be very proud of, with many people at the grassroots level helping countless older Albertans protect and improve their quality of life. There are volunteers and professional staff at Kerby Rotary House, a shelter for abused seniors in Calgary, or the men and women on the elder abuse early intervention team in Edmonton or numerous ministers and employees across government who have a hand in our highly regarded seniors' programs.

A groundbreaking piece of provincial legislation to protect seniors is the Protection for Persons in Care Act. The act, proclaimed January 5, 1998, addresses the abuse of vulnerable persons in government-funded facilities such as nursing homes and senior citizens' lodges. Mr. Speaker, the act makes it mandatory for anyone who has reason to believe that abuse against a client has occurred to report it. Most reports come through the protection for persons in care reporting line operated by Alberta Community Development and are investigated by the department, within whose jurisdiction the act falls.

Mr. Speaker, linked to this act is the long-standing Health Facilities Review Committee, chaired by my colleague from St. Albert, whose main purpose is to routinely review and inspect facilities and observe the manner in which they are operated. The committee also investigates complaints reported through the Protection for Persons in Care Act.

These initiatives are much needed, Mr. Speaker, and it helps ensure that Albertans living in government-funded facilities, many of whom are seniors, receive the protection they need against abuse.

But, Mr. Speaker, in regards to the Protection for Persons in Care Act, this is just a start, as many of those who were involved in the drafting, implementation, and now operation of the act realize. A

multidepartmental working group has been reviewing the act, with the work split into two parts. The first part has resulted in many administrative improvements and has led to the creation of the central investigation unit. The second part, currently being reviewed, will further improve the act and may lead to the recommendation that further education and training of facility staff are necessary.

Mr. Speaker, another concern that has been expressed is that the Protection for Persons in Care Act does not address the abuse of vulnerable persons living in their own homes, in private care or family homes, or in any other facility not funded by the government and listed in the act. There is currently little specific legal protection for vulnerable persons living in private care homes, and there are currently very few specific standards or regulations relating to the care of persons in such homes.

So, Mr. Speaker, if we as a government are to encourage private homes as a viable housing option for seniors, which seems to make sense, especially in rural areas where there may not be the demand or developer interest to build a larger facility, we must ensure that there are the proper regulations and the ability to monitor private homes. Otherwise, we are creating a situation in which abuse can occur with no way to monitor the standards and to sanction those who violate them. I have heard this concern for much-needed regulations by almost all professionals working with seniors, from police officers to social agency workers.

Mr. Speaker, another example of a government initiative that is working well is this Interdepartmental Committee on Family Violence, which is housed in Children's Services. When I started my research on this topic, I was not aware of the existence nor of the excellent work this committee has done advocating for all Albertans, seniors included. I am strongly recommending that this committee be given the added responsibility to be full advocates for seniors and to expand their mandate to include elder abuse. The committee has the network of skilled professionals, well-established links to other provinces, and could be a much more effective and strong voice for seniors in Alberta.

As well, this committee works with the Protection against Family Violence Act. The act, proclaimed June 1, 1999, contains provisions permitting the police to obtain a warrant to enter a home in certain emergency situations. In other cases the most appropriate approach is one involving awareness raising, support, and counseling. Such provisions are regarded as instruments of particular use in the intervention against seniors' abuse. We as a government need to ensure that the Interdepartmental Committee on Family Violence has our full support both in spirit and in dollars.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to spend a moment discussing some of the recommendations that came out of the long-term care review, or Broda report, which I had the honour to vice-chair. Several items mentioned in this report have a direct impact on fighting elder abuse. Recommendation 31 includes introducing a new continuing care act. The new act would, among other things, "establish a mechanism for monitoring the quality of care provided in the home living stream, the supportive living stream, and the facility stream."

Recommendations 44 and 45 include "support informal caregivers" and "expand respite care," two strategies to assist in alleviating problems that can arise. Training and support groups that teach coping skills to informal caregivers and provide flexible amounts of respite care are needed. This makes sense. If caregivers are inadequately trained or lacking in support, it is easy to see how they can get stressed out or burned out and then do something they might otherwise not do, such as commit abuse.

Another very important consideration that pertains to elder abuse is taking steps to explore ethical issues. A crucial ethical imperative

is truly preserving and promoting personal dignity and autonomy for the elderly. This imperative is of vital consideration. We do promote the best interests of our seniors, and we do work to improve their quality of life. Respect for seniors' dignity has to be a sincere part of our governmentwide policies.

It is very easy to sometimes forget that seniors are still vital adults capable of making their own decisions. Many, even family members, see seniors as vulnerable and therefore easy prey, and their actions are done out of disrespect. Others may be frustrated by lack of support or may not have the appropriate training and skills. Seniors themselves need to be reassured that they have the right to stand up for themselves when they are abused.

What we must do as a government, Mr. Speaker, is continue to work to ensure that the many excellent recommendations from the long-term care report are acted upon. I'm happy to say that we have already begun, for example, by adding \$265.8 million to long-term care facilities and dollars for more frontline staff. The 1999-2000 health budget provided our RHAs with new funding to hire at least another additional 1,000 full-time, permanent frontline staff and a total of 2,400 over the next three years.

The Fair Trading Act, housed in Government Services, protects consumers through increased remedies and enforcement tools and tougher penalties that will discourage marketplace fraud. A key program in battling fraud is the Hang Up on Fraud campaign, that has helped consumers identify phone fraud and protect themselves from being taken advantage of by fraudulent telemarketers.

Turning to community-based initiatives, the Kerby Rotary House, which is operated by the Kerby Centre in Calgary, and the Calgary Seniors Resource Society are excellent examples. Kerby Rotary House is a multipurpose facility for abused seniors providing a wide range of counseling and information services and is dedicated to the enhancement of quality of life for older persons and the promotion of independence and dignity.

Kerby Rotary House was opened in May 1999 and is a last-resort haven for seniors in abusive situations, providing them the counseling and support they need to break out of the cycle of abuse. It is seen as a unique shelter model for all of North America. Calgarians and Albertans should be proud of this initiative. However, Kerby Rotary House is presently not funded as a shelter, as are other shelters in the province that provide for women and children. This need must be seriously reviewed by government.

There is a similar community initiative in Edmonton, but it involves a special working relationship between the Edmonton Police Service and the community. Their mission is to prevent and respond to elder abuse by working in partnership with the community, therefore enhancing the safety and well-being of older adults. As I mentioned before, the elder abuse early intervention team is making a definite impact on fighting elder abuse. The team provides outreach, emergency response, short-term counseling, referral, and community education. I can say from personal experience and meeting the team members that they truly care about our seniors and are a valuable resource to the Edmonton seniors' community. They are battling the unwillingness of today's seniors to report abuse through laying a groundwork of trust and security.

Mr. Speaker, we must ensure as a government that these community groups have our fullest support. We pride ourselves on community-based initiatives, and these are examples of some of the best.

So I have presented an outline of elder abuse in Alberta. I won't deny that we have a problem in elder abuse, a problem that has the potential to get proportionately bigger as our population ages. As I have illustrated, many positive initiatives and programs exist that are dealing with this serious problem and must continue in the future.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, I want to wrap up my comments today with a few suggestions on where we can go from here. First and foremost, we must raise public awareness to educate Albertans, including seniors, that this problem exists, creating a climate where seniors will actually seek help for themselves when they need it. Seniors may even have to report a member of their own family. We must also educate and reinforce to people that the most vulnerable people in our society deserve to be treated with the same respect as others. Second, we must promote and support current initiatives at community and government levels. Third, we must better co-ordinate existing government and community initiatives through greater communication. Many good initiatives could be even better. Fourth, we must ensure that input from seniors is included and taken seriously in all of our proposed initiatives. They often know what works best for them, so their input is vital. Finally, we must continue to work to change the attitudes of Albertans in general towards seniors. Seniors are a valued resource to our province.

Mr. Speaker, I look at Motion 511 as one step in a process that needs to be undertaken in order to improve the situation of seniors in Alberta. I can't overemphasize the seriousness of this problem for our seniors today and tomorrow and how important it is that we have a coherent, comprehensive policy platform to address the abuse of seniors.

I thank all of my colleagues for listening to my comments, and I urge everyone to support Motion 511. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My colleague beside me is giving me a hard time about elder abuse. It's because he's older than I am.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to speak to this motion. It's difficult to talk about elder abuse because in many cases it's denied. I think back to about 25 years ago when we actually admitted that there was abuse in homes and that women needed shelters. It was hard for a society to admit and to say, "We need this kind of support in the community," but we did that, and we've made I think great strides in awareness about abuse in families and abuse towards women. Hopefully, someday we won't need shelters because it will be so unacceptable in society to abuse people and to abuse women. We're not at that stage, but we have that reality, and we're working towards it when it comes to abuse against women.

I think we're at the stage in society where we're actually admitting that there is elder abuse. That's a very hard thing for people to talk about. Number one, sometimes it's children who are abusing their parents, and it's hard because a parent doesn't want to say: my child is abusing me. So often it's hidden, I think far more than we realize. I've seen financial abuse in some families, in fact. It makes me angry. Yet I see parents handing over money for all kinds of things, and then they end up unable to stay in their homes, unable to have finer things in their life because they've once again given money to a child who treats that person as if they're an unending supply of money. I see that.

I know that the member mentioned sales campaigns. Actually, one couple that I can think of bought a \$900 vacuum when they had a vacuum system within their house and then, embarrassed to tell about it, just said: no, no; that's what we wanted. That's really sad. To protect elderly people like that is a big, big undertaking. Some seniors, God bless them, are very outspoken and can speak up for themselves and make the world know what's going on in the facility that they're living in. If the food isn't good enough or if they're cold

or if they aren't getting good care, they're very vocal. But there are very many who are not and who feel that if they didn't have this place to stay, they wouldn't be anywhere, so they don't dare to complain. They don't have a lot of family support and are feeling that they're a bit alone in the world and aren't vocal about concerns that they have. I have seen that happen too.

Now, I am glad the member said that this is just a small step, because it is. I mean, I support the motion. Of course I support the motion, but urging the government is a small step. I would like to see so much more done, as the member mentioned, and I'm glad she did.

Maybe the member has seen and maybe other members in this Assembly have seen the letter from the Alberta Association for Community Living, the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre of Calgary, and FAIRE, which stands for Families Allied to Influence Responsible Eldercare. In that letter there are many concerns expressed that we should be addressing when it comes to eldercare, and certainly one of the things they talk about is the act that we have in this province, the Protection for Persons in Care Act. I know this is a motion that will go towards supporting that. Some of the real issues, though, that need to be addressed weren't addressed in the act and can't possibly be addressed in a motion. I think we certainly have to look at some of the things that have to be addressed, at more than just the motion.

Some of the things that could be addressed are the deficiencies regarding client applicability, protection, and rights. There's an issue of clients who need advocates. Nowadays I guess we call it global communication, but families are global as well, and often people do not live near their parents or grandparents. I feel very fortunate in that I live near my parents, near my husband's family, and in fact near my husband's grandparents, who are 91 and 89 and still live in their own home and do very well. But a lot of people don't have that kind of family support, so we are talking about a need for the role of advocates for seniors in different facilities. I think we have to look at the client's right to be represented by his or her family, guardian, or spokesperson.

We also have to address the issue of clients who may not want the alleged incident to be reported and maybe look at the background of why that isn't being reported, why they want it hidden. You know, there are all kinds of issues there. I think we have to address the potential jeopardy facing abused clients following disclosure, because once they do disclose what's happened, I'm sure there are issues surrounding that and feelings of guilt about what they're talking about, who they're talking about. So we have to address those things.

I think we have to require the victim and/or the victim's spokesperson to be informed of the reporting of abuse and of the recommendations made in the investigator's report. We also have to provide the abused person with legal representation, counsel, and other benefits of the law. Often in these cases we're talking about people who do not have money and cannot follow up with legal help.

I think we have to honour the abused client's constitutional right to an appeal process, and we have to articulate the interests of the abused person, which will take precedence over all other interests, and provide an abused person the opportunity to choose an informal means of resolving complaints. I think we've often seen that maybe we can resolve things without going through the court system, and I think we have to look at that.

4:00

I think sometimes we have problems in communication, as indicated by these three groups that I referred to earlier, the AACL, the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre in Calgary, and the

FAIRE organization. One of the things that is not being addressed right now in current legislation and that we should be looking at is to allow for collaborative discussion regarding the allegation or the dismissal of a complaint, the investigative procedure, or its outcome. I've seen this in some institutions, where an elderly person complains about something, feels intimidated by the person they go to with the complaint, and then as a result other people back right off. If it's an issue to all and they want to take it to the director of the institution and one person speaks up and then gets put down, everyone else backs away. We've got to realize that that's a reality, too, that we all have to address.

I think within the act that we do have to work with there's no definition of a criminal act. We also have to differentiate between an abusive act and a criminal act; clarify what is meant by "a reasonable level of safety"; clarify what is meant by "reasonable and probable grounds"; clarify what constitutes an unfounded complaint; clarify what constitutes an investigation; require that the alleged perpetrator, the victim, or the victim's family or spokesperson be informed of the reporting of the alleged abuse, the recommendations made in the investigator's report, or the minister's decision; communicate who may assume the role of investigator and the qualifications that are required; and clarify what constitutes a criminal records check.

We also need to clarify why abusive acts by persons with mental disabilities and abusive acts by persons with demential illness are treated differently under the act and to track the nature of calls received other than those that are reporting an abusive situation. And you know what? We have to monitor private caregivers. I realize that the hon. member mentioned that as well. We need to be looking at that. This motion does not address that, but we should be looking at changes in the act to continue what this small step does. It should identify who is qualified to make the decision whether or not an alleged situation is abusive and therefore will be investigated.

When we're talking about agencies, there are things that are not required yet of agencies, and we have to act upon that. I don't mean to belittle the motion. The motion is good, and it urges the government, but truly action is needed. Certainly I think that people should be aware of what the act does, and some of the suggestions by these three groups are that the act be posted in a conspicuous place in the facility and that abuse protocols, proceedings, and guiding principles be developed. I would venture to say that most agencies would willingly do that and would actually make their residents and their clients well aware of their rights and what tools they have to address issues of concern. I would say that very good agencies would do that and would gladly be an example to others, but we should enact it. We should put it in an act.

We should require agencies to be accountable for the alleged occurrence or cause of the abuse. We have to routinely assess and address risk factors that contribute to the occurrence of abuse and initiate and publicly disclose safeguard mechanisms for preventing or reducing the likelihood of abuse from occurring. Agencies should be subject to repercussions for failing to develop and implement safeguards that address the client's needs and vulnerability, should inform the abused person's family or spokesperson of the alleged incident, and should log incidents of abuse for routine assessment and documentation by the Health Facilities Review Committee. They should protect, counsel, or provide crisis care to an abused client following disclosure, accept responsibility for providing legal counsel to abused residents, and routinely educate clients, families, and staff about the act and the characteristics of an effective safeguard.

We should have policies and procedures regarding disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment of employees

alleged as abusers and follow through on recommendations from the minister and address systemic issues that potentially lead to abuse such as staff ratio – we’ve talked about that often in here – lack of staff training around abuse, and lack of agency policies. Now, I know that many agencies and organizations are getting much better at training staff, but they often find themselves short of staff, so that reality is out there and needs to be addressed as well. We have to maintain a standard level of quality of care that might minimize abusive situations occurring.

I would like to continue on with some deficiencies regarding investigations. When we ask for investigations to occur, these people have to be trained in investigative procedures. I mean, they have to be qualified. What does it take to be a qualified investigator? The investigator should be knowledgeable in the areas of cognitive disability or demential illnesses. We should require the investigator to determine and report the underlying cause of the abuse; require the investigator to engage all involved parties in collaborative discussion; require the investigator to discuss the incident with the victim and the victim’s family; stipulate a deadline for closure of investigations and ministerial decision-making; ensure a fair, thorough, and impartial investigation; and stipulate that all reports of alleged abuse be investigated.

Now, there were other deficiencies that haven’t been addressed regarding consumers. The act is subject to a review process where consumer representation is absent. It fails to ensure ongoing opportunities to educate consumers about what they have at their disposal through the act and to safeguard mechanisms for preventing or reducing the likelihood of abuse occurring. It fails to ensure ongoing community consultations regarding the act’s effectiveness. It fails to provide an opportunity for the presence of consumer advocacy in the life of persons in care and fails to provide consumers a mechanism to access the names of agencies involved in abuse allegations and the number of allegations reported under any given agency.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have indicated just a few of the many areas that need to be addressed when talking about persons in care, when talking about elder abuse. I know that this motion was made with the best intentions. It is a very small step. There’s an opportunity to put words into action, I think, by addressing the Protection of Persons in Care Act, which to me would do far more in addressing elder abuse.

I will support the motion, but it doesn’t nearly address the issues that are out there. I have suggested several things that could be changed to address that. I would encourage all members of the Assembly that when they are looking at legislation over the next however many days we sit or the next time we meet, certainly this is one act that could be addressed, that could be brought in with really strong amendments and with the ability to implement it. That would be real action put to words.

I support the motion, but I encourage action. Rather than just speaking to an issue, I think it’s incumbent upon us to act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure for me to rise and speak to Motion 511, addressing the issue of elder abuse. Elder abuse is, in my view, a very serious issue, a very serious concern in our province and one that we do need to bring out from behind closed doors and talk about in public and start to deal with. In my past life as a solicitor – that’s practising law, I should

add – I had occasion to deal with situations where elder abuse was a significant concern. I don’t often find myself agreeing with Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, but it’s a concern that we do need to discuss, that we do need to bring out in the open, that we do need to have people understand happens to our neighbours, happens in our communities, happens to people that we know, and that they are scared to talk about it. They are reluctant to talk about it because in many cases it happens at the hands of family members.

We have to be careful though. Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert suggests that we should be bringing in legislation. I’m not averse to the concept that we need to strengthen some of the legislation that we have, but more important and the gist of the motion that is before the House today is the concept that we should have a working committee looking at the issue, that we should be using that mechanism to raise the profile of the issue, and that we should be using that mechanism to make it an important and a discussed issue in our communities. Legislation by itself is not the answer to everything. We may need the force of legislation at some point. We may need to improve the legislation we already have at some point.

The most important thing we could do to deal with the problem of elder abuse today, as I think we are trying to do with the issue of domestic violence today, is to bring it out into the open, to shine a light on it, to show people that it’s there, that it exists, that it’s not something we can pretend happens in other parts of the world or to other people. It happens now. It happens in our community. It happens to our friends and our neighbours. It’s something that’s insidious. It’s something that doesn’t get discussed and doesn’t get brought out into the light of day. So I would like to congratulate the Member for Calgary-West for bringing forward this motion and for suggesting that it’s an area that needs more attention. I think she’s raised it in the appropriate manner, that we should “broaden the mandate of the Interdepartmental Committee on Family Violence,” because elder abuse is family violence, whether it’s emotional abuse or financial abuse or physical abuse, and all three of those happen in our communities today.

As an MLA and as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, the Member for Calgary-West has worked hard on behalf of Alberta seniors and has helped to bring their concerns and issues to the attention of this Legislature and to the government. Again, in this manner, by bringing forward this motion, I think she is showing real leadership in bringing out an issue, Mr. Speaker, that most people don’t want to talk about. They don’t want to talk about it because it’s something we should be ashamed of when it happens in our communities and to our friends and to our relatives.

I’m interested in this motion and in exploring increased collaboration with other departments to address elder abuse. As our Premier mentioned in his annual televised address to Albertans earlier this year, seniors are a very important part of this province. Through their wisdom and dedication and community spirit they make valuable contributions to the province, and it’s indisputable that today’s seniors helped to build the province and establish the wonderful quality of life that Albertans enjoy today. That’s why it’s such a crime when we have seniors who are scared in their own homes, seniors who are unable to let people know that they’re being abused, who in some cases perhaps are even unaware of the fact that they’re being abused. So we do need to find ways to deal with that issue, and the first step is really one of discussion, one of communication, one of education, one of bringing it out into the open and making sure that we talk about it and find ways to deal with it as a community.

Elder abuse, Mr. Speaker, whether it’s physical, emotional, or financial, is simply unacceptable. Alberta Justice has and will continue to work with other departments to prevent elder abuse, to

provide support and information to victims of elder abuse, and to prosecute where possible those who commit this terrible crime.

The whole issue of awareness and of victims' needs. We have many programs now available to help victims of violence or victims of crime, but in many cases we don't have. A question came up in question period today on an unrelated matter but in a similar context, where the programs are in place, where the programs that we need are there, but the people who need them don't take advantage of those programs. So to a great extent, again it's a question of education but also a question of providing the forum and the mechanism so that the people who need the program can take advantage of the program, because in many cases people are living in personal residences or even in institutions and are afraid to step out and let somebody know that they need that kind of help.

The current business plan for Alberta Justice and Attorney General reflects the commitment of this government to protecting, supporting, and providing information to victims of crime, and I think we have to look at that in the context of elder abuse to see how we can do a better job in that area. So again I think that the concept of making it part of the mandate of the interdepartmental committee is a very, very important one.

It's important to make Alberta seniors aware that help is available to them when they need it. As I say, we have programs right across this province for victims of crime to help victims and their families, but unfortunately in many cases we don't provide the access that's necessary to enable those who need it to be able to access the programs easily and in a manner which perhaps would calm or assuage their fear that they might have retribution if they were to take advantage of those programs.

We have a couple of very important pieces of legislation already, Mr. Speaker, and again I respond to Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, who said that we need more legislation. The Victims of Crime Act is guided by key principles that focus on the needs of the victim, principles that describe the importance of treating victims with courtesy, compassion, and respect for their privacy concerns. For victims of elder abuse or any other crime, the legislation protects them from further abuse and considers their best interests during the criminal justice process. But, again, although that legislation is there with good intention, with the tools that are necessary at that end of the program, we don't have the process which would encourage a victim of elder abuse to step forward, to come out and say: I'm being abused, and I want to use this process. We don't yet have processes in place which make many of those elders who are being abused comfortable that they can come out and access that and get that protection, so there's still work to be done.

The Protection against Family Violence Act, which came into force on June 1, 1999, is a law that gives police the power to move quickly when seniors are at risk of violence in their own home from a family member. It gives Albertans immediate protection with respect to an emergency protection order, which allows police to temporarily remove an abuser from the home. For seniors the law helps eliminate the fear that they'll have to leave their home because a family member is abusing them, and it also gives the authorities certain rights to investigate and go into a home where there's a real apprehension that there is a problem.

Again, we need to do more work to make sure that seniors and other family members are aware of these laws and are aware of the ability to use these laws when either they are being abused or when they know of someone who's being abused and who is not able to come forward and identify that they are being abused and take steps to remedy that. So we do need to make better use of that law, and we need to make better use of that law by making sure that Albertans are aware of the fact that that law is there for protection not just in

domestic family violence situations but certainly in the area of elder abuse as well.

4:20

I'm quite proud of the support that the department gives to community agencies that provide crime prevention programs. The provincial crime prevention strategy announced December 1, 1999, introduced a new grant fund to further support development of community-based crime prevention initiatives. This is an area where we could get Albertans involved to find ways to do more work in the area of crime prevention, and certainly preventing elder abuse is, in my view, a very important crime prevention program. So I'm pleased that these crime prevention programs are available. I think that we have some very excellent legislation available to assist, particularly the Protection against Family Violence Act, but I am concerned that we don't go far enough in making certain that our seniors are protected from abuse, whether that abuse happens to them in an institution or whether it happens to them in their own home.

We've tried very hard to make sure that there are mechanisms in place to allow the reporting of abuse, crime prevention programs in place to encourage the reporting of abuse, and programs which would steer away from abuse. We have victims of violence programs and victims of crime programs which could be utilized. We have the Protection against Family Violence Act which could be utilized. We have many pieces of legislation in place. What we really need, Mr. Speaker, is a greater awareness, a greater understanding in our community that elder abuse is real, that it's insidious, that it's a horrendous thing to be happening. It need no longer be hidden under a bushel basket. It should be brought out into the light. It should be exposed for what it is, and we should be educating our community as to the availability of resources to deal with it. Yes, if we need to have better legislation or if we need to have better programming, if the programming that we have doesn't deal with the issues directly, then we need to examine that and come up with better ways of dealing with it.

That's not the first order of business, Mr. Speaker. It's the order of business that we need to take on after we have addressed the issue of community awareness and raised the level of intolerance in the community in the area where intolerance is appropriate, and that is in the area of elder abuse. We cannot, we should not tolerate abuse of anyone in the community, but particularly some of the types of abuse that some elders have to put up with are not acceptable.

I think that the hon. Member for Calgary-West, by bringing forward this motion at this time to encourage specifically the interdepartmental committee dealing with this issue and by leading the way to bring this out into the open and encourage that discussion, is making exactly the right move, and I would urge members to support the motion.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to vote in support of Motion 511, and that's because I think this is an area that needs to be pursued by this government. The difficulty I have with the motion is not with the subject matter, that being one of elder abuse. The only hesitation I would have in terms of voting in support of it is this. The Interdepartmental Committee on Family Violence really started out from an initiative of the office for the prevention of family violence. Before that, within the once department of the solicitor general there was a working committee looking at domestic violence issues, particularly focusing on violence against

women and children, particularly violence against women and children at the hands of men.

While I acknowledge that there are several forms of violence and abuse that take place within families and that there is no form that is more or less acceptable than any other form, I must say that from my own experience working within the criminal justice system, the predominant form of violence is violence against women and children, primarily where men are the perpetrators. So I was a little disappointed when I saw the focus moving away from dealing seriously in a cross-government fashion, in a pan-government fashion, with that particular form of violence.

By now making the mandate of the Interdepartmental Committee on Family Violence include all forms of elder abuse, I'm afraid it may just serve as a means for the government to say, "Oh, yeah, we're dealing with the issue; look; we've now expanded the mandate of this particular committee," instead of being able to say: "Well, we are serious about the issue because we have committed new funding, because we have created new programs, because we have made it a core part of the business of the ministry responsible for seniors' programs. You can tell we're serious about this issue because it does in fact have a legislative framework around it."

I am very mindful of the legislation that the Minister of Justice just reiterated for the House, and I think the government is moving in the right direction in some of its crime prevention initiatives. But the problem still remains that by simply expanding the mandate of an existing interdepartmental committee, you will not be demonstrating any real, serious commitment to eradicating elder abuse. The interdepartmental committee is already well challenged and well burdened with its existing mandate.

Government programs have already been criticized for dealing inadequately with other forms of domestic violence situations. We are only slowly beginning to see government action in terms of resolving long-standing family law matters. We have not seen any real commitment in terms of expanding the role of children's service authorities or the Children's Advocate in terms of dealing with children who are at risk. We still wake up to headlines, Mr. Speaker, which in very tragic large type tell us of new tragedies dealing with women who have been abused. So I think we need to do more than simply refer this to a committee.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time given to debate this motion has now concluded, and I must put the question on Motion 511.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 511 as amended carried unanimously]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: May we have unanimous consent to go to the next order of business rather than try and do it in one minute?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Private Bills
head: Second Reading

Bill Pr. 3

Westcastle Development Authority Repeal Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move second reading of Bill Pr. 3, the Westcastle Development Authority Repeal Act. The original act was put in place in about 1985 for the MD of

Pincher Creek and the town of Pincher Creek to develop and go out and promote a skiing experience in the Westcastle Valley known as Westcastle ski hill. With operating the ski hill for a number of years by themselves, they have since developed an arrangement with a private corporation. The private corporation has purchased the assets of the ski hill from the Westcastle Development Authority, and they are expanding the facilities and operating the facilities as a private venture. Thus the Westcastle Development Authority no longer needs to be in place, and therefore their desire is to have it dissolved. Bill Pr. 3 gives that authority.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know we don't often speak to the private bills in the Assembly, but if I may for a few short moments just bring to light some of the things that have come up during the discussion of this bill. Some questions were asked during the committee meeting which were answered. Research was done, and in fact we had statutory declarations from two people, Mr. Norris Graham and Mr. Douglas Evans. They requested the petitioner's counsel to provide a statutory declaration from the appropriate official representing Westcastle Development Authority to confirm the status of the authority's outstanding liabilities. To their knowledge, there were none, and they signed statutory declarations to indicate that.

One thing that was not mentioned in the committee that I raise for people to consider is the now issue with the Siksika Nation, who are expressing concern about the Westcastle development and concerns around the issue of the transfer of land and their involvement in that. So I just bring that to your attention. Actually, it was an article in the *Calgary Herald* that brought to our attention that – in fact, the headline is "Natives threaten to seize Castle Mountain" and "Band wants traditional lands returned."

It could be a whole different area? Is that what you're indicating? Then that would give me cause for relief. I just wanted that brought up. I'm sorry; I didn't know that that wasn't a part of it. I'm glad it's not, because that would certainly be cause for concern.

With that, I appreciate the clarification from the nod by the chair. Then the concerns that were addressed had been met, so I thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a second time]

head: Private Bills
head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Bill Pr. 1

Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the Province of Alberta Repeal Act

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I move that the question on Bill Pr. 1, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the Province of Alberta Repeal Act, be put.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill Pr. 2
William Roper Hull Child and Family
Services Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you. I know that this is going to occupy the minds of everyone here for a long time to come, and we should study each paragraph and clause in detail and each word, the spelling and the like. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Glenmore I would move that the question be put on Bill Pr. 2, the William Roper Hull Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 2000.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill Pr. 3
Westcastle Development Authority Repeal Act

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to offer a quick comment before calling the question on this, and it deals with an item that was brought up in second reading on Bill Pr. 3 by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. The Westcastle Development Authority Act was originally set up, as I said, to look for developers in the Westcastle ski hill. The Westcastle ski hill is not at this point in time under their authority any longer. It's in private hands, and that particular transaction went through all of the government discussions of the day here a couple of years ago.

The situation around land claims from First Nations people does not apply to this particular piece of property, but it does apply to the Special Places 2000 program. In the special places special management area that is surrounding the ski hill, there were some areas where there were some native concerns and some significant areas they were involved in, but I just want to reassure the hon. member that this particular area, where the development is and the ski hill itself is, does not include any of those concerns that were involved in the special places component.

So with that, I'd like to just say that I'd like to move that the question now be put on Bill Pr. 3, the Westcastle Development Authority Repeal Act.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

4:40

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few questions with regard to this bill that I'm hoping can be answered before we take the final vote on it here in committee, and I think this is the appropriate time to ask them. I've followed the development of the Westcastle ski hill and the impact it's had on the surrounding area for some time. Certainly since I have been elected, it's been an ongoing issue in the region, as the member knows, and I have some questions that perhaps you could answer for me today.

What's being done in terms of the transition between the authority and the new operators in terms of environmental impact studies or cumulative impact studies with regard to environmental issues, particularly land use and migration of species?

Before the question is called, I'm hoping that at least some preliminary answers can be put to those two questions, and upon receiving those answers, I might I have some follow-up questions, Mr. Chairman.

MR. COUTTS: I just want to make it really, really clear here that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is asking questions about the private-sector corporation development when they purchased the property and set up their development plans and expanded on the ski hill. She's asking questions about that particular property as it applies today. I think the question that she's put forward is better served as maybe a question to the Minister of Environment at another time, because her question does not involve the transaction between the Westcastle Development Authority and the MD of Pincher Creek as they set up for the private sector to take over.

This act does not monitor anything that is going on presently. That is presently being monitored by the Department of Environment and the MD of Pincher Creek. What this act does is basically just gets rid of the development authority because the property is in the hands of the private sector at this point in time.

I think her questions are better served in another venue at another time in the Assembly. Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I certainly respect the comments that the member has made with regard to my questions, but I think it is always appropriate in this Assembly for us to question any change in direction in terms of lands that provide critical habitat for species in this province. Particularly when we see an authority which is at least a quasi-public body handing over any kind of control or authority to the private sector, then these are issues that do need to be flagged and identified.

Certainly I will pursue these questions with the Minister of Environment, but I think it's important for them to be on the record at this time in terms of the significance of this area. It's in a very environmentally fragile region, and it does provide critical habitat for species at risk in this province. It is a major stumbling block to providing wildlife corridors from Yellowstone to Yukon, which is an initiative that I know the Minister of Environment is looking at supporting.

You know, we're not just talking about a ski hill here. We're talking about a massively expanded ski hill. We're talking about at least one 18-hole golf course, if not two of them, and the corresponding widening of roads and improving of roads. We're talking about significant requests being made for hotels and other kinds of accommodation in the area, including camping. We're talking about concerns that have been raised in the past about off-road vehicles in the vicinity.

This is a hugely potentially contentious environmental issue in the region. I don't think I would be doing my duty as the Environment critic in this Assembly if I didn't flag this as an issue. We're seeing this move completely into private hands. We saw a lot of the decision-making and development in that particular region happen behind closed doors in this province. It is going to be an ongoing issue. There is no doubt that it has been flagged as a contentious problem for the future in terms of environmental regions. I know that the member who introduced this bill lives in the region and has worked hard with the people who live in the area to find satisfactory resolution to some of the issues that have occurred there. However, having said that, it has addressed primarily the issues concerning development, not the issues concerning environment, in terms of what I've seen.

So I think it's very important to put these concerns on the record. We will undertake to follow them up with the Minister of Environment, but I will say on the record that every time this development touches something that happens in this Assembly, we will be speaking to it.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill Pr. 4
Calgary Municipal Heritage Properties
Authority Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the question be put now on Bill Pr. 4, Calgary Municipal Heritage Properties Authority Amendment Act, 2000.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill Pr. 5
Calgary Foundation Act

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Currie I now move that the question be put on Bill Pr. 5.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report bills Pr. 1, Pr. 2, Pr. 3, Pr. 4, and Pr. 5.

[Motion carried]

4:50

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: bills Pr. 1, Pr. 2, Pr. 3, Pr. 4, and Pr. 5.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Private Bills
head: Third Reading

[The members indicated below moved that the following Bills be read a third time, and the motions were carried]

Pr. 1	Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the Province of Alberta Repeal Act	Coutts
Pr. 2	William Roper Hull Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 2000	Melchin (for Stevens)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I am seeking the unanimous consent of the Assembly for the following motion in my capacity as chairman of the Private Bills Committee. The motion is as follows: Be it resolved that the Assembly waive Standing Order 73(1) in order to now give consideration to third reading of Bill Pr. 3.

[Unanimous consent granted]

[The members indicated below moved that the following Bills be read a third time, and the motions were carried]

Pr. 3	Westcastle Development Authority Repeal Act	Coutts
Pr. 4	Calgary Municipal Heritage Properties Authority Amendment Act, 2000	Laing
Pr. 5	Calgary Foundation Act	Graham (for Burgener)

head: Government Motions

Reappointment of Auditor General

18. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the recommendation of the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices agreed to on April 19, 2000, to recommend to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor that Mr. Peter Valentine be reappointed as Auditor General for the province of Alberta.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did want to make a couple of comments on the reappointment of the Auditor General, partly because I was a member of the Legislative Offices Committee when the current Auditor General was first appointed and partly because I think the Auditor General has served the province well. I think there can be general agreement that the reports we have received have been fair and that the Auditor General has gone out of his way to make sure that any criticisms his reports contain are clear and that some direction is given in terms of solving the kinds of problems he has identified.

I think it's a difficult task that the Auditor General has, and in particular I think it's going to be even more difficult with the reorganization of the government; for instance, the incorporation of education and advanced education now into one department. As that has proceeded, trying to keep a paper trail that is easily followed is, I think, going to be a challenge for the Auditor General, and it's important of course that the Auditor General do that job well.

If there are any reservations, Mr. Speaker, I suspect they would be surrounding two incidents. One was the purchase of some new furniture when this province was undergoing the first very severe budget cuts in the early '90s, and I wondered at the wisdom of that action by the Auditor General in terms of providing leadership within government. But that aside, I guess the only other incident that comes to mind is the more recent one with the use of promotional items. I realize that that's part and parcel of some government activity, but again the wisdom of being engaged in that kind of activity, given the Auditor General's job to ride as watchdog on government spending, I think is something that could be questioned. I'm sure the Auditor General is wiser now in hindsight in terms of being involved in that kind of activity.

There's one task that the Auditor General has not undertaken, and I guess I remain curious as to why not. That is any sort of critical analysis of the management schemes adopted by the government and government departments, and I'm thinking in particular of the management scheme employed in Learning that depends on the use of key performance indicators.

It's a scheme that I don't believe the Auditor General has commented upon other than to question whether or not departments and institutions are fulfilling the mandate of such a management scheme. Given his perspective and the kind of controversy that surrounds management by objectives, which is what the key performance indicator scheme is really predicated on, I find it rather puzzling that he hasn't found it necessary to at least evaluate the usefulness of that scheme as a way of the government managing its financial affairs and having made them such an important part of the business plan. So it's a curiosity.

I suspect I should put pen to paper and ask the Auditor General directly why he hasn't found cause to comment and to analyze and

maybe to point out some alternative management schemes that if the government were to adopt they might find useful.

So with those few comments I'm delighted to support the reappointment, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

5:00

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had an opportunity to serve on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices as well as participate in the Public Accounts Committee, so I've had many involvements with the Auditor General. Of course, I've also made it my business to read carefully his reports every year and particularly some of his special duty reports. One that I'm intimately familiar with, of course, is the review of the circumstances surrounding the refinancing with tax backstopped dollars for West Edmonton Mall. So when I learned that the current Auditor General, Mr. Peter Valentine, was being recommended for reappointment, I thought about whether that would be a good or a bad thing.

Mr. Speaker, I have utmost respect for the office of the Auditor General and the men and women that staff it. I do share some of the quibbles of my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, who spoke of perhaps some questionable decisions made about expenditures, but on the other hand to the best of my knowledge the Auditor General has run his office within budget in or under the line each and every year and makes spending decisions I suppose like any of us would in running an office such as that with an eye on the bottom line and trying to tease the best value out of every dollar spent.

Certainly I may not have joined him in some of the individual decisions that he made, but at the end of the day he's accountable for those, and I guess the proof is in the pudding. The committee to which he is accountable has recommended him for reappointment, and I'm sure that decision was not taken lightly. The Auditor General appointment is usually for a relatively long period of time. I understand that it could be for as long as eight years and typically five years in terms of appointment. This report, which recommends Mr. Valentine's reappointment, I believe calls for the term to be two years, and I question the wisdom of that.

The Auditor General needs to be focused on the task, not on maintaining his job, and I'm not suggesting for a minute that Mr. Valentine is not focused on his task, but this two-year appointment just makes me wonder why the change. I would like to see an Auditor General there for a long enough period of time to become intimately familiar with the breadth and the scope of government service and would like to see that any reappointment be consistent in terms of making sure that the auditor of record for the people's business is somebody who isn't going to be at some point quickly looking to move on to something else. It could be that Mr. Valentine has other plans maybe that he shared with the committee, that aren't in the report, that would explain his relatively short period of reappointment. I'm not familiar with any reasons why. I just wonder why it is that his reappointment is for such a limited period of time.

Now, on the one hand I could argue that it's a bad thing to reappoint the Auditor General for just a couple of years, but on the other hand I could argue that within two years there will no doubt be a general election, and of course I'm hoping there will be a change of government, Mr. Speaker. The new government would then have an opportunity to meet with the Auditor General. It would be at that point in time when a new government with that Auditor General would be able to make the decision whether or not Mr. Valentine

was to continue, and it would be in the normal cycle of things, given that it's only a two-year reappointment. So maybe it'll be fortuitous that it's a limited reappointment.

In any case, I would hope that the Auditor General is able to pursue his work, particularly when it comes to convincing the government in regard to the need to move to consolidated budgeting. It is an ongoing and a long-standing dispute between the office of the Auditor General and government departments. I agree with the Auditor General's position. I think the government books should reflect the totality of public money expenditures, particularly since the areas that are excluded from the consolidated budgets at this point are areas that have to do with health care, K to 12 education, postsecondary education.

I don't buy the government's arguments that they would somehow be accused of micromanaging or meddling in the affairs of health authorities or school boards or postsecondary institution boards. I mean, the Minister of Learning just recently micromanaged the decision to do with French immersion in Spruce Grove and Stony Plain. So if they can reach inside those other organizations and provide the kind of direction that was apparently provided in that case, it really sounds hollow when the government says that they can't move to consolidated budgeting because they're afraid of being accused of micromanaging.

So in summary, Mr. Speaker, I support the office of the Auditor General being an independent legislative office. I have been pleased with the work that Mr. Valentine has done and the work done in his office under his direction. I would encourage the Legislative Offices Committee to carefully think about the terms of appointment, and I would encourage Mr. Valentine to continue his work in regard to consolidated budgeting and helping the government accept what I think is very sound judgment and a very sound recommendation in that regard. So I will be supporting Government Motion 18.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Clarification

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair hesitates to correct the hon. member. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora did refer that the government will have to review the Auditor General's appointment or something to that effect yet later on went back and made mention of the fact that the Auditor General is in fact an officer of the Legislative Assembly and not an officer of the government. Just so that no hon. members would be confused by that.

[Government Motion 18 carried]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 5 Land Titles Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move for third reading Bill 5, Land Titles Amendment Act, 2000.

It's had some discussion over the course of its passage through second reading and in committee, but again, for the benefit of members, it's an act which brings up to date certain items relative to the land titles system. In particular, now that we have the benefit of electronics and computers, there's no longer a need for both a north Alberta land registration district and a south Alberta land registration district. It also has the benefit, then, of changing that to a land titles

office and changes the seal of office and does some other relatively administrative things.

It's a bill which will bring things up to date. It's a useful bill, and I would urge the Assembly to pass it.

5:10

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak to the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2000, at third reading. In fact, this bill has had very little debate in this Assembly in part because we support it. Just because we support a bill doesn't mean that we shouldn't have had our questions answered throughout the course of debate. When I was reviewing what was said here in second reading and in committee, in fact we had a number of questions that never got answered. So I would like to put those questions back on the record, and I hope that someone on the government side would undertake to answer them, because they are legitimate questions and issues that we have concerns about.

One of those questions was: where's the office going to be? In what city? Now that there's only going to be one office, will it be in Edmonton or Calgary? If we could get that answered.

The question that we'd like to have some clarity on is on section 122(9).

Is this by a civil action, when a person being filed against can't borrow money or is registered from buying property because of the lien? Is there any compensation for wrongs [done] against [people]?

Another question not answered is with regard to:

Issue might be taken with the continued extension of decision-making power and further development of the bureaucracy. This person is equivalent to administration in this province. Where is the pressure coming from to extend this position? Is it from the federal level? Why is this position introduced? Is it that the deputy of administration can't handle it himself? Who has the decision-making [power]? Is this just further diluting the present position?

So those were questions that should have been answered in this particular bill. I would refer government members to page 687 in *Hansard* on April 3, 2000, where there is a whole series of questions that never got answered.

Now, April 3 was a long time ago, Mr. Speaker, and certainly the government had ample time to undertake finding at least some of these answers. When I talked to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Manning, who put these comments and questions and concerns on the record, and asked him if he'd had a response outside of the Legislature, he said no.

So, you know, while we're happy to support legislation that at first blush looks like good legislation, when in fact our questions are never answered during the course of debate, we find that interesting, certainly annoying, and not what we would expect in a good faith kind of ability that we would work towards in this House.

We could stall on every single bill, Mr. Speaker, until we got the questions answered. That would certainly be a tactic that could be employed as opposition. We undertake not to do that. I hear laughter at that comment, but in fact if you take a look at the number of minutes spent on debate on this bill, in spite of the number of questions we had, they were very few in number. We are not trying to stall what looks like good legislation. We are trying to get questions answered. We are trying to pass legislation through this Assembly in a speedy fashion whenever possible and save our concerns for that legislation which we find to be quite appalling and detrimental to the people of this province.

So I am hoping that in the very near future, Mr. Speaker, we will have the answers to all of those questions previously asked by my colleague. If we don't, certainly we will be undertaking to pursue the answers to those questions in all fashions and formats available to us in this Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:16 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 16, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/05/16

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 24

Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act, 2000 for second reading and would be happy to move the same.

This government made a commitment to Albertans in 1995 to protect representative samples of Alberta's six natural regions under the special places program. This amendment will allow us to designate three heritage rangelands temporarily designated as natural areas under the special places program: first of all, Black Creek heritage rangeland natural area in the Whaleback, designated in May of 1999; secondly, Twin River heritage rangeland natural area on the Milk River, designated in December of 1999; and finally, Beaverhill heritage rangeland natural area east of Edmonton, designated in November of 1999. This amendment also will allow the designation of several other grassland candidate sites currently under review.

The amendment act before you today supports this government's commitment to local committees in Alberta's grassland region to create the heritage rangeland class. This class will enable the designation of special places in areas with grazing leases. The heritage rangeland classification will preserve and protect representative areas of Alberta's grasslands through legislation specifically designed to meet the unique management needs of these areas.

Grazing bison shaped Alberta's grasslands. Cattle have now replaced the bison in this role. In heritage rangelands cattle grazing will continue to be used as a management tool to preserve ecological integrity.

Heritage rangelands will be designated under the wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas and heritage rangelands act. Grazing leases will continue to be managed under the Public Lands Act by Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. It is important to know that the rights and responsibilities of lessees under the Public Lands Act will not be affected by this amendment.

Existing industrial commitments will be honoured in heritage rangelands. However, new dispositions will only be sold with a no-surface-rights, no-surface-access addendum to prevent future surface disturbance.

Recreational use of off-highway vehicles and snowmobiles will not be permitted. OHV and snowmobile use will be permitted for management activities associated with dispositions only. Hunting and fishing will be permitted on agricultural leases with permission from the leaseholder. Hunting and fishing will continue to be managed under the Wildlife Act and Alberta fishery regulations.

Parks and protected areas are a priority for my department. I am studying the recommendations of the MLA review committee that conducted public consultations on the previous draft of the legislation. This amendment is an interim measure only. I will introduce a new parks and protected areas act, an amalgamation of two other

acts and this one, in the House when the bill is complete.

Mr. Speaker, I ask members for their support for this amendment that will allow the heritage rangeland class to be created under existing legislation. This amendment will fulfill this government's commitment to leaseholders who agreed to include land under grazing leases in the special places program. It will also fulfill a promise to Albertans to preserve land from all six of Alberta's natural regions under the special places program. I ask members for support for this amendment.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real opportunity this evening to stand and speak to the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act. This, I guess, is a start or part of what we tried to do last year with the Natural Heritage Act, but this is going to effectively carve out one part of that, from what I understand, and put it into place under our current act. I think the action by the government and the minister to actually undertake to recognize that we have heritage rangelands in Alberta is a good move. The whole special areas program was designed to make sure that all of the unique ecosystems that we have in our province are recognized and protected in as close to their natural form as possible, and what we're seeing here now, the heritage range inclusion into this act, is a good step in getting that started.

The minister mentioned that the process to designate three areas as heritage rangelands has already been completed, with potentially three or four others still to come. This is, I guess, a good start. The areas they spoke about – the Black Creek, Twin River, and Beaverhill areas – do represent very unique kinds of rangelands in our province.

As I was listening to the minister, there was a question that came up. He continually referred to the idea that all of these lands were currently under grazing leases, and I would just like to have clarification on that. Is there no private property lands included in these areas at all? Also, a question is: would there be in any of the future ones? What we have to do there is look at how this kind of designation and the negotiation that has to go on with the landholders would affect the concept of private property, property rights, title, ownership, and title power or title authority as it reflects under our Land Titles Act, but if they're all grazing leases, then effectively what we can do is deal with these under the specific provisions of the government's power to renegotiate leases and to deal with the leases that are, in effect, on our public lands. So without that kind of clarification that would be something we have to look at in the sense that it might affect some of the lands that are being brought into the ones that are being considered in the future.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I think the next thing we have to look at is how the management of these areas will be applied or controlled and regulated. One of the common concerns that we hear from a number of the grazing leaseholders is that cattle do not necessarily graze in the same way that the bison, that the minister spoke about, did during historic times, when they were running across our province in potentially the millions, and the thing that comes up there is the issue of brush control.

We've had a number of grazing lease operators, you know, in the areas along the fringe of the greenbelt talk about how the brush and the small trees are gradually encroaching onto the prairie, into the grassland areas. Historically the buffalo would winter in those fringe areas along the forested edge, the edge between the forest and the grassland, and effectively would keep the young brush and the young trees from continuing to encroach onto the grassland areas.

A number of the grazing leaseholders in those areas now have indicated that in the time that they've managed the lease, because they are not allowed to do brush control, what they're seeing are a number of areas where the small bushes, you know, the wilderness bush, and some of the smaller, more invasive trees are starting to take over their grassland areas or areas that were grassland when they began to manage those leases. So I would hope the minister would look at these kinds of broad-based control options that effectively would control and would deal with the management of that species invasion that occurs at the fringe areas between the grasslands and the tree line or the brush line.

The other thing I would like to just kind of raise as a start here in the beginning of the debate on this is that we have to look at how this is going to fit into some of the issues that are coming up. You know, last year we debated Bill 31, the Agricultural Dispositions Statutes Amendment Act, and what we saw there was a lot of discussion about the length of leases, the ability of the government to modify leases, whether or not those leases were contracts, what concept of title or ownership and control they gave to the leaseholder. It was good to hear the minister say that in these heritage rangeland areas the grazing leaseholder would be the individual that would kind of be the gatekeeper for anyone wanting to hunt or fish or use them for other approved uses or have approved access.

8:10

One of the parts of the bill that does tie in to this is the fact that some of these grazing leases are going to be extended from 20 years to 30 years. I guess the question that I would put in that connection is: is it just the leases that are going to be associated with the heritage rangelands that will be extended to the 30-year time frame, or will it be a possibility now that we'll see all grazing leases again be a 30-year lease type negotiation? The issue there, you know, comes up in terms of, again, the debate we had last year on Bill 31.

Mr. Speaker, I can see some real merit here in trying to encourage farmers to develop heritage management systems for these rangelands, and they need to have a long enough planning horizon to put in place the appropriate grazing patterns, the appropriate management stocking rates, so what they effectively want to see is a degree of certainty that's associated with them.

The question then comes up in terms of how they'd be handled within the context of transfers. Are they going to be handled the same as the regular grazing leases, or would the heritage rangeland leases be handled differently than the regular grazing lease, both in terms of transferability and all of the accounting or the calculations that have to go along with dealing with how the leases are transferred?

I guess looking at it more from the protection perspective, as well, we see that in the bill there's a lot of discussion about how certain uses will be prohibited or else only allowed after approval of the minister, and I would like to suggest to the minister that this is a very good idea because we've got to set the outer parameters on what is required to protect these areas. Then as we look at the specific uses that a leaseholder might want to apply to that, they can look at special permission to do things a little differently. I understood the Minister of Environment saying that that would be managed under Alberta Agriculture, so for that to occur, then, I think the minister of agriculture would have to have the power and the set of guidelines to really look at any request for deviation from the restrictions on use that might arise so that the overall concept of the heritage wilderness area or the heritage rangeland concept is kept in place.

Similarly, though, Mr. Speaker, we have to look at the idea that some things did occur naturally, and we have to be in a position to accept those. I guess the one question that would come up in some

of these areas is: how do you control or how would the leaseholder be able to deal with natural hazards in these areas? We see a number of cases where insects or fungus or bacterial infection of plants starts in. A normal rancher would be using some kinds of sprays to control those. Would that be permitted here to manage that? Even such things, you know, as a grassland fire: would that become a natural phenomenon, and would the fire departments be allowed to go in and fight the fire there to prevent it from spreading beyond the boundaries of the natural rangeland, or would they actually go into the rangeland and get involved in actually controlling and extinguishing a fire so that, effectively, you take away that natural perspective?

I guess these kinds of management issues have to be addressed as we look at the freedom that the leaseholder would have to manage their livestock operation within the context of those heritage rangeland areas. In the historic perspective, if a lightning strike or something started a fire in one of these areas, it would burn off, the buffalo would move off somewhere else, and so would the deer and the other wildlife, if they survived the fire. What we would end up seeing, then, is that over a period of two or three years there probably would be very little use of that area as the plant material re-established itself in the roots or from seeds that were activated by the heat or by disposition by birds that were flying over. These are the kinds of things that would start the grasslands growing in that area again.

I guess in the context of the overall management plan we have to understand how much of the natural phenomenon would be allowed to occur. You know, there was the idea that we saw in Waterton park when the federal government decided that that was going to be allowed to be a natural area, and there were two or three occasions in the last four or five years when natural events have really, if you want to call it that, laid havoc in a natural way to certain parts of the park. The visitors to the park afterwards said: "Well, this is not what we came to see. We came to see the growing, vibrant lifeblood of a natural area, not to look over and see where nature itself has devastated part of that natural area." They didn't want to see the devastation of nature. They didn't want to see the impact of infestations of insects or beetles or even the impact of fire that caught in Waterton park a couple of times. The tendency was to let the fires burn themselves out instead of trying to get in there and control them, so it ended up that they probably burned over a larger area than they would have had they been actively fought and actively managed and controlled.

So, Mr. Speaker, from that perspective I'd like to congratulate the minister for bringing this forward. It's going to alleviate some uncertainty in these areas, the three areas that have been designated – Black Creek, Twin River, and the Beaverhill area – so this, I think, is good. They do reflect very significantly different types of rangeland in our province. We see the Black Creek area down there being very able to reflect the fringe area between the green area and the prairie. Also, the area around Milk River is a very unique rangeland, where we have part of the Milk River ridge and the altitude-affected types of grasses that are growing there. Then we get out here to Beaverhill, east of Edmonton, where we see a northern type of grassland area, and this again reflects the transition between the dry prairie grasslands and the northern forested grassland area.

What we see now is that the other areas that still have to be looked at are the really dry eastern Alberta grasslands. The minister made a comment that he was looking at dealing with some designations out in the special areas, again lands that are all under public management at this time. So these are things that we have to consider and look at.

I want to say thank you to the minister for bringing this forward,

because it's sure going to help to have our heritage-type ecosystems maintained so that future generations can go out into Alberta and have a view of what our province actually looked like, the kind of rangeland, the kind of ecosystem that faced our ancestors when they first came to Alberta. I guess the eventual hope would be that as these areas do become heritage, potentially some of our endangered species might be reintroduced. These are the kinds of things like the burrowing owl, that they've tried to reintroduce, and some of the others that are being removed or are being lost from Alberta's ecosystem. It would be great if we could see these kinds of species reintroduced in these natural areas where they existed in the historic, predevelopment, preintensive agriculture use of our grasslands.

So with those few comments I'd just again like to congratulate the minister and hope that we can expedite this to get it put in place.

Thank you.

8:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to make a few comments on Bill 24 on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I can tell you that I'll not do the justice to the bill that she would, I'm sure.

Just a couple of comments. I'm in support, as is my hon. colleague, of this piece of legislation and what we know it to do. It takes a modified definition of the heritage rangeland from the Natural Heritage Act, that was at one point on the table, and amends it into this particular act, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act. It increases the amount of land in the eastern part of the Whaleback and the Rocky Mountains forest reserve and increases the terms for grazing leases from 20 to 30 years.

I have to be clear about my concern in bringing in small portions of an overall framework, such as Bill 15 was. I think that the Natural Heritage Act was last session. That didn't get passed. The bill was shelved, so now we have a very small portion of that bill being brought through.

I understand there are some issues that the two ministers have to work out that they appear to be at loggerheads on. I'm sure that'll be forthcoming, but it always raises some concern when we take little snippets and don't look at a systematic approach to what we're doing. I'm not quite sure what the urgency is for this particular section. I do raise that concern, and I think it is a very legitimate concern, one that not only I have but that I know my colleagues and some of the folks in the environmental world that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie works with have. I need to put that on the record.

Bill 15 aimed to give more protection to Alberta's natural environment, and this is kind of a modified version of the definition of heritage grasslands. I'm wondering if this is going to be included, if there's going to be a broader approach in the new bill, the heritage act, when it comes forward, whenever that may be. I'm hoping that at some point through this particular process the minister can enlighten us as to that.

We did have discussions through the last session as well on the grazing leases. This particular act makes it quite clear that the heritage rangelands are to be maintained by grazing, and to facilitate this, ranchers will be traveling other than on foot. Although there are going to be restrictions on the types of vehicles that they can use, nonetheless they'll still be using motorized vehicles in these sensitive areas.

I'm wondering if these areas will be part of greenbelts for wild animals and waterways that are going to pass through them. I'm

wondering, when we get to that point, if the minister can enlighten us there.

In this bill, in I believe it's section 8, when we talk about vehicles, we talk about the need for restrictions on those. Vehicles can do a lot of permanent damage to land. We've seen that in any number of backwoods areas where there's been a lot of travel. In fact, I guess over time packhorses and the like on the same trails can do damage as well. I don't know if you've been cycling out in Banff or Jasper, Mr. Speaker, but you know some of those trails get packed and get broken up or so packed and firm that they're difficult to travel on. You know, the area has been damaged by that kind of activity, and albeit I like to do that, to go out and ride in the backwoods, you can always tell the kind of damage that has occurred, and that's from a nonmotorized vehicle. [interjection] No, a bicycle. A bicycle is a vehicle, hon. member, and it's powered by legs. It has no motor, but it still does damage.

I guess what I'm getting at is that while the vehicles are supposed to stay on the roadways, I would suggest that if you have a bunch of 16, 17, 18 year olds loose on motorized vehicles and even mountain bikes, there's no way they're going to stay on the roadways. If you have older people, middle-aged people such as myself – I would stay on the roadways.

MS BLAKEMAN: You're admitting to be middle-aged?

MS OLSEN: I'm admitting to be middle-aged. I would stay on the roadways, but I know that my young son would be tempted to take on a path that may offer him a little bit more excitement than the one that he's supposed to be on.

MR. CLEGG: Bad boy.

MS OLSEN: He would be a bad boy, hon. member.

That kind of thing concerns me. I guess what I'm wondering is: what type of enforcement will be available in these areas? Is it going to be the environmental protection officers? We know that the staff there has been reduced over time. What is the availability of those particular enforcement officers that are out there looking after the parks and this particular area, the Whaleback, and that kind of thing?

It's great for us to say that you can't do something, but if we don't send the message home through some sort of enforcement tool, then the words in the act would be meaningless. So I'm wondering if the Minister of Environment is going to deal with the necessary enforcement issues in this area. I think we just have to look at the complaints we get in the parks over the summer and the young people that go out and call partying in a campsite camping, creating all sorts of excess problems for other campers and folks in the area. What we now see is having to increase the level of enforcement in the parks. I think that's an important issue, because in order to give meaningful consequences under this act and in order to have restrictions, we ought to be able to enforce those particular sections of the act.

We hear that there's the potential for no people on private property from the grazing aspect of it, the leases. Given that there was such a huge problem with the grazing leases – and if I recall, we were talking there about some of the ranchers not wanting the public accessing the grazing leases. I think the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East asked that question, and we should probably be informed by the minister if that's going to be the case. Again, I think that there are a number of issues with grazing leases and potential liabilities that exist for a rancher by having other people access the land, but I'm not sure, given that it is public land, what the consequences of the public/private fight are or will be as a result of that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I don't think I have much more to say, and hopefully when we move on to committee, we will be able to look at this bill in a little more detail.

Thank you.

8:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 24, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act, 2000, at second reading. Of course, at second reading we're concerned with the principles that sit beneath the bill itself and try to make sure that we understand exactly what those principles are that the bill is supporting.

I think there is fairly wide agreement that the principles embedded in Bill 24 are really worthy principles and ones that this government and other governments are struggling hard to maintain in the face of development and in the face of the assault by a variety of human forces on the environment. In particular, this bill addresses heritage rangelands and grasslands. It's interesting because the grasslands of the world are rather unique, being areas that won't support higher forms of vegetation, and obviously it's an area in this province that we have decided needs to be protected.

The first principle is that heritage rangelands and grasslands are a specific ecological type that must be protected. That principle is developed throughout the bill in a variety of ways: by restricting the kinds of activity that can take place, by restricting the kinds of human activity that can take place surrounding it and in general making sure that the areas come under a microscope in terms of the use that's made of them, and the use is severely limited.

A second principle that not only this bill but previous bills have supported is that the unique ecosystems in the province should be preserved, and of course they've identified six of them that are worthy of preservation. Again, this is consistent with worldwide efforts to preserve unique ecological areas. It's a movement that is supported by a number of special interest groups, but I think that generally the public is very supportive of the efforts to make sure those unique ecosystems are preserved and are there for future generations.

A third principle that the bill seems to rest on is that these heritage grasslands and rangelands can be protected while still being used for some human activity, in this case by ranchers. That's a principle that has been hotly debated in this province and elsewhere. Allowing any kind of human activity in some of these areas would be objected to by some citizens, but this bill takes, I think, a more realistic approach and tries to lay out the ground rules for that activity so that it can be conducted and still act in the interests of the environment by maintaining the area.

A fourth principle that is supported in the bill is that representative samples is a satisfactory method of preserving Alberta's six major natural regions. That's a rather interesting principle. It's one again that I think could be debated, that you take representative samples and instead of trying to have a general very strong environmental protection law, you ensure that specific areas continue to exist by choosing representative samples. I guess the danger in that is that the treatment of areas outside those samples might somehow or other be neglected, that it might lead to the development of an attitude that because the ecosystem is a protected area, when you encounter those characteristics outside the sample, you don't need to be as protective. I think that would be a negative in terms of choosing this method of preserving natural regions. Hopefully that won't happen, Mr. Speaker.

The context of the bill is really rather interesting. Our environment critic from Edmonton-Ellerslie has been very, very meticulous in terms of keeping track of the government's record in terms of the environment and environmental protection and has to go great lengths to make sure that the members of our caucus are apprised of what's happening. I should mention that she's recommended to us that we support and make sure this bill proceeds through the House as expeditiously as possible, and we don't in any way want to delay the bill.

She did point out in some of our discussions that it really has been hived off from the Natural Heritage Act, Bill 15. In some ways that's unfortunate. We all recall that when Bill 15 was introduced, it was heralded as the introduction of a comprehensive plan to protect the environment, and it was also heralded as a very comprehensive piece of legislation that was able to take a variety of interest groups and bring them together, that there was general agreement from those interest groups that what was being proposed in Bill 15 had been agreed upon and was going to do the job in terms of protecting the environment. Again, it's unfortunate, because I think that when you start to piecemeal it like this, you lose some of the attention that we had when Bill 15 was before the House. But whether we have a comprehensive bill or we have good pieces like this, I suppose in the end it doesn't make much difference, Mr. Speaker.

In concluding, I do support the bill and look forward to it being passed as quickly as possible. Thanks very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment to close the debate.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I've listened carefully to the comments made by members of the Assembly. I'm happy to hear the kind of positive feedback that I did, and I wish to move second reading of this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

8:40

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 7

Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. I'm prepared to move this and listen to my colleague's concerns, and then I will certainly make some comments on closing debate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is what happens when you generally support a bill. You don't get a lot of feedback after you say: Mr. Speaker, representing the opposition, I'm here to tell you we're going to support the bill. Then you don't hear a lot, although we did ask some questions about Bill 7 in earlier forums of debate, and I hope that the minister, now that he has reserved for himself the privilege of closing debate with some pithy comments, will include within those comments some responses to questions raised in both second reading and committee.

We've talked a lot about the principle of the act and the substance of it in terms of amalgamating some various research authorities into one, but there were some specific issues to do with timing, particu-

larly with forestry research. There were some issues about subordinate lawmaking and regulations. There were some questions regarding the role of MLAs as chairs of these committees. Nobody was questioning whether or not MLAs should be representatives on the committees, but we were wondering why the MLAs must be inserted as chairs.

Of course, this is the kind of thing that makes the public very suspicious, because of course usually with these chairmanship positions comes some extra pay, and if we're finding good, qualified, hardworking Albertans to be on these committees, maybe one of them would be in line for that kind of a stipend. In any case, Mr. Speaker, there are these questions about the role of MLAs on the committees.

I want to go back to this question of subordinate lawmaking, the regulations section, which is very broad in the bill, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say that as usual the Official Opposition always has difficulties when we see regulation sections that aren't well defined.

I hope that the minister will take the opportunity to put our minds at ease about what's going on with the regulations under the act, the timing issues, and particularly the role of MLAs. I must say that I also raised some rather technical concerns regarding intellectual property, wondering whether or not the law as amended is equal to the challenges of today's society and today's environment when it comes to intellectual property rights.

IPR is becoming very controversial, and it seems the jurisprudence changes day to day. We've got all kinds of national and international agreements and treaties. We have multinational companies funding research. We have co-operatives now between private corporations, public Crown corporations, universities, and research authorities, not just in this province but across the country and around the world, and we know there are always heated negotiations these days around who will retain the ongoing rights to the intellectual property and also really what are the definitions of intellectual property in terms of those things that are developed as a direct result of the substantive grant or the project and those things that happen sort of by the way, those eureka moments where you discover something or come across something that wasn't intended or that wasn't really the aim of the initiative to begin with.

To close my comments, Mr. Speaker, Bill 7, which deals with the forestry research institute, the energy research institute, the Alberta agricultural research institute, and the government's plan to consolidate research and to get better co-ordination is supported by the Official Opposition, but we do have these nagging concerns. We would very much appreciate the minister addressing them before we give it third and final reading.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real opportunity to stand and comment on third reading of Bill 7, the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Amendment Act. This is an act that puts in place the administrative unit to support the newly established heritage fund for science and technology, and this effectively will give Alberta a chance to move even farther into the forefront of advanced research and science-based research than we already are. The idea that we're going to have one authority that stands for the science-based research activities is quite an achievement.

I guess the question that comes up in the end is the allocation of priorities between the different areas. In agriculture we had the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute operating before. I was just looking today at a news release that came out from Alberta Agricul-

ture. They were outlining about \$7.4 million in research allocations for agriculture initiatives. I guess the question that would come is: as the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority allocates the moneys out of the endowment that's been created, will agriculture, will the Alberta oil sands research authority be getting something near the same amount of money, or will it hopefully even be higher? How will those priorities be developed within the authority? How will we be sure that the issues of agriculture continue to be addressed?

In the last budget there was about \$11 million allocated for expenditure by the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute. In essence, what potentially would happen is that a fifth of the potential income on an expected basis from the fund that's been endowed would be directed to agriculture just so we could keep the agriculture initiatives and the agricultural research at about the same level as we had under the annual budget funding from general revenues for the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute. So we have to look at maintaining that broad base of research in the agriculture area and in the energy area when we see the oil sands research component also rolled into the science and technology authority. These are the kind of things that I guess we'll see over the next couple of years.

I know as I've traveled around the province that the agriculture community and the energy community are really excited about this. They see it as broad based. Never mind the activities and the discussions that are going on now at Alberta's universities, where the more concept or theory based research is usually undertaken. They are really looking at this as a step that will continue to allow them to take a lead in Canada and North America and, in some cases in some science areas, around the world in being identified and recognized as some of the leading research areas. As I said, they're now really excited about the potential they'll have to deal with continuing these research areas, further focusing and concentrating their centres of excellence and dealing with the kind of base research that in the next 10 to 15 years could lead to some very exciting potential applications in the spin-off economic growth that could accrue if we can encourage those developments and those spin-off activities to take place here in Alberta.

8:50

Mr. Speaker, I guess one of the things that I hope the Minister of Economic Development is working on with the minister of science and technology is looking at how we can encourage and make sure those kinds of commercialization activities do actually get established and that we do get our fair share of them here in Alberta. I'm not going to try and encourage them to undertake activities that would make sure we get everything here; that's not reasonable. But the creation of an environment for risk capital accumulation, whether it's equity funds or some other kind of method of developing start-up capital for these ventures, needs to be looked at. Whether or not the western Canadian Venture Exchange is going to facilitate that, these are the kind of things we have to look beyond in the next stage of capturing a lot of the benefits that are going to come from the research activity that's generated through the dollars that are managed by the Science, Research and Technology Authority.

So we have to look at that from the perspective of: where do we go? You know, it's great to say that we've got one of the best world-based research programs and research funding systems here. We have to also look, then, at how we can make that commercial and become an active part of commercialization and contribute to the economic growth of the province.

Mr. Speaker, with those few comments, I again would just like to congratulate the government on this initiative. It's put Alberta on the world map in science and technology research. It will provide

us with the opportunity to attract centres of excellence research teams that are potentially world leaders. It'll also give us the chance, then, to work through and be able to develop some commercialization of these activities, which will then provide us with the diversified economy and the spin-off growth into some of the other areas as potentially our energy sector becomes less and less of a contributor to our Alberta economy over the next 20 or 30 years.

So congratulations to the minister, and congratulations to the government. Good job done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a couple of comments at third reading as we re-examine the principles underlying Bill 7. Bill 7, of course, is an effort to integrate and to consolidate research initiatives, the science policy development, and to co-ordinate research funding in the province. I think it's being widely applauded both in and out of the Legislature as a very good move for the sciences and engineering in this province. I think all Albertans will applaud the effort and will await with interest the results of organizing research and policy development in this manner.

It was, of course, patterned after the medical research model that drew upon heritage trust funds for research in the medical sciences, again a very successful model. It means that some other patterns then aren't followed. It means that this kind of research effort isn't centered at a particular university or centre across the province, and that has implications for the existing institutions and research entities. It's a pattern, of course, that's being used elsewhere, although I believe it often has been used but has been housed in a specific institution, a specific university. That's different in this case. It's going to be interesting to watch how this develops.

One of the comments I would like to leave with the government, if not with this particular minister, is that there is a need, which I think has been expressed by a number of people across the province, for a similar fund in terms of the humanities and the social sciences. While everyone is applauding the move in medicine and in science and engineering, wouldn't it be exciting if we had the same research funds and policy development money available to promote philosophy and the arts and music and even drama in this province? It would be exciting.

I would conclude with that observation, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted that the bill has proceeded as quickly as it has and, as I said, will look forward, with others, to chart its progress and success.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science to close the debate.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. I would just like to take a few minutes and answer some of the questions and comments. The members across suggested I say something pithy, but every time I try and say something pithy, the Speaker always corrects me, so I'll stay away from pithy comments and just go forward with some answers to questions.

I'd like to talk first briefly on Lethbridge-East's comments regarding agricultural research. I fully expect that we will not just maintain the status quo for agricultural research, but as we move into what I'm calling life sciences strategy, I believe there will be more money for agricultural research. There needs to be more money for agricultural research.

I see this coming from a couple of sources. I see an increase coming from out of the Innovation and Science budget. I see an

increase from other private-sector companies that are interested in what's happening in Alberta. I also see it coming from the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research.

If you look at that, one of the functions of that is to support agricultural research. In fact, we have placed an agrologist on the board of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research. We have several people from rural Alberta on that board who understand agriculture, so agriculture will be an important part of that new funding board. Treasury tells me that we can spend roughly 5 percent of the endowment and maintain the value of the endowment, so we should be able to see \$25 million spent this year, and as that endowment grows towards \$1 billion, then we should be able to see that fund grow even higher and more money for agricultural research.

I'd like to thank the members opposite for their support of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research. It will be governed by a separate board, just as HFMR is, and it will be through the same process. That group will be funding excellence in science, and so there will obviously be in most cases more demands for money than exist. Certainly, as long as the agricultural projects go forward and the agricultural scientists go forward evidencing excellence in science, then I don't see that there will be any problem with more money going to this whole area of agriculture.

9:00

You also made some comments about commercialization of products that come out of research. We recognize this as very important, and quite frankly I have been unhappy with some of the results of the commercialization efforts in Alberta, so we have a number of independent groups trying to do this. The three main groups in Alberta are UTI, ILO, and ARC. Because all of these groups get some money from the budget of Innovation and Science, what we've encouraged them to do is to meet together and come up with policies that they can go forward with with other agencies in the province, such as Joe Lukacs' group in Calgary – and I've forgotten the name of his company that does commercialization – such as Olds College and other groups that do commercialization so that we can have a unified approach to commercialization in this province, a strategy for commercialization in this province so that these other groups don't contradict each other and work against each other.

I'd just like to comment briefly about forestry research. I've got to go quickly. I've just been told that I only have five minutes.

Forestry research was just added, and yes, we need to do more. We recognize forestry research is important, and we will be developing a strategy for forestry research just as we developed a strategy for the ICT research that we're doing in this province. I don't have time, but I can give you a number of concrete developments that have happened in this province, including the fact that Nortel announced a \$55 million R and D facility in Calgary just last week as a direct result of what's happening in this province. So if we develop research strategies for the whole energy research institute, for the forestry research institute, if we do that in a strategic sense as we work through this process, then I believe that we could have similar results.

There were some comments regarding regulations. As you know, regulations are always done after the bill. I'm more than willing to work with my colleagues in the opposition on these regulations and show the regulations to them and say: what do you think? I don't have a problem with that. Colleagues on both sides have been supportive, and I intend to reciprocate in that. So regulations will be forthcoming, and I am willing to work with colleagues on both sides of the House.

There was a comment about MLAs being chairs. For MLAs we in fact were working towards co-chairs with a private-sector individual. Yes, certainly there is some stipend involved with MLAs being chairs, but there's also a stipend available to the private individuals that sit on these boards. I'm not sure what the exact figure is, but they are eligible for a stipend as well. So I don't think there's any inconsistency there with an MLA or a private-sector individual being paid some form of stipend.

Another comment on intellectual property. The intellectual property is a huge issue as we work forward into this. Right now most of the intellectual property is generated at the universities, and universities are struggling with this themselves. For instance, if you're a university professor and write a textbook, you usually don't have to pay any kind of royalties to the university. If you develop some invention or some technology that comes out of your lab, then there's some kind of discussion that happens. I'm not sure what the form of the discussion is, but there's some kind of discussion that happens that has to do with royalties or licensing fees, and the policy is not constant. It seems to be, just from watching it from the outside, that if you're a very strong negotiator as the inventor or as the developer of the technology, you come out in a better position with the university. That is, you give the university less than if you're a weak negotiator.

So intellectual property is a huge issue both in Alberta and right across the world, actually, where research is being done. We really don't have a solution to that at the present time, but there are a number of models that universities are looking at. I believe as we get this Alberta commercialization and technology network working in Alberta, then a logical flow of that will be to look more seriously at the intellectual properties.

I'd just like to say that as we go forward in the future, when all of us are finished with our political careers, whenever that might be, I think we can look back at the legacy of this Assembly and all members can be proud as they see what their children and grandchildren are doing, in my case grandchildren. All members can be proud of the accomplishments of this Assembly when it comes to both Bill 1 and this Bill 7 that we will pass tonight.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

Bill 10 Securities Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll move third reading of Bill 10.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Bill 10 is another bill that the Official Opposition has reviewed, has met with industry stakeholders on, and has agreed that the government is doing the right thing in bringing this bill forward. I'm glad that we've had a couple of these bills back-to-back in this Assembly, because I know there's been lots of grumbling lately. We heard some derisive comments earlier this afternoon when one of my colleagues said that, you know, the Official Opposition doesn't just try to be obstructionist, that we support the government when the government deserves support. We even in those cases of course will work to hold the government accountable for doing what it says it's going to do, and of course we will do that in this bill. But just to note that here we have a couple

of examples of some good policy initiatives being supported, even with some questions, by the Official Opposition.

Of all the issues that I've raised, I'm hoping that when the sponsoring member moves to close debate, he'll respond to a couple of the issues that were outstanding. He did address a couple during committee, but I think he may have some more to say. But of all the issues that have been raised and are of concern, I want to go back to this theme of subordinate rule-making, regulations. It's section 35 in the bill, which changes section 196 of the existing act, to do with regulations that can be made by the Lieutenant Government in Council.

Now, we understand the flexibility that is needed by the commission, and we understand the flexibility that's needed in terms of responding quickly to the market and how the exchange has to be open to response as well. But I must say that when you have an area of law that affects so many people in such a very basic way – it affects them in their pocketbook and in their cheque book – I'd like to see more effort made, first of all, to put details in the legislation and, second of all, to have the regulations developed in the most public of all ways.

I'd quote a quick example, Mr. Speaker, of what could happen when you have subordinate lawmaking, either by ministerial order or by regulation or by delegated authority. We saw that today in question period when the Premier was questioned about 150 doctors in Calgary who were protesting the government's policies to commercialize medicine. The Premier took that opportunity to make direct reference to a Dr. Ron Jadusingh, who's a pathologist in the city of Calgary. Now, he I think in a rather uncharitable way spoke about Dr. Jadusingh and may have even suggested that Dr. Jadusingh was being hypocritical. I believe he said that he should look at himself in a mirror or words to that effect.

The point, Mr. Speaker, is that here we have an individual Albertan, a private citizen and a physician of this province, who not by his own choosing found the circumstances of his profession changed. It was government policy to eliminate fee-for-service pathologists. It was government policy that fundamentally changed Dr. Jadusingh's ability to carry on his profession. That policy was done by a combination of delegated authority through the college and the Alberta Medical Association and by ministerial order, and in doing so, they went even further. The health minister at the time issued a memo stating that private-sector pathologists must have a place in this new private/public partnership when it comes to the practice of pathology and the provision of laboratory services.

So here we have an individual Albertan who's trying to do his job. I must say, by the way, that Dr. Jadusingh is a very senior practitioner who has achieved some stature and standing in the medical profession, particularly in his specialty area. So here we have this expert Albertan whose ability to carry on his expert practice was severely curtailed by government policy. To add insult to injury, when he complains about that policy, he's ridiculed in the Assembly by none other than the Premier.

9:10

This is part of my concern when it comes to subordinate rule-making and the role of regulations in law. I fully realize that the example of a pathologist being criticized by the Premier has little to do with the regulations that may be developed under Bill 10, but it's just the most current example, Mr. Speaker, of what happens when you make these regulations and make these policy changes in secret and behind closed doors: people tend to get caught in that cross fire. I would hate to be standing in this Assembly six months or a year from now and saying: look, here we have Albertans who have lost money, who have lost their life savings, whose pensions have been

put in jeopardy because there was a lack of clarity or understanding about the regulatory framework that had to do with the buying and selling of securities in this province. And I want to save the Premier the embarrassment of having to apologize for ridiculing another ordinary or extraordinary Albertan in the way that he did today.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is my concern. With all of these comments, I don't want to take away the support of myself personally and of every member of the Official Opposition for what's going on with the securities business in this province and the Canadian Venture Exchange and the leadership the Alberta Securities Commission has shown.

At the risk of this sounding almost too nice, I will once again thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for keeping me apprised of the progress of this initiative, as he has done in the past for other initiatives he's been responsible for. He and I may never agree about tax policy, Mr. Speaker, but I will say this. I do think he has the best interests of Albertans in mind, although his views on taxation may be a little misguided. But I do think he does have their best interests in mind, and he holds those beliefs sincerely. When it comes to securities, we're much more like-minded, so I want to thank him. I want to thank him for his earlier answers, and I hope he will help put my mind at ease a little bit about the very broad regulation section in Bill 10.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to close the debate.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. I would agree with him that the example he used around health care to deal with the Securities Amendment Act is definitely a little far-fetched. I also hear the comments the member has made in regards to concerns about the regulations, and if there is ever a concern that the member has, I know the new chairman will be as open as the past chairman of securities. Anything he needs or questions raised in regards to changes, we'll make sure that we get him those answers.

I'd move the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

Bill 15

Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move Bill 15, the Business Corporations Amendment Act, for third reading.

Bill 15 is a long-overdue piece of legislation which deals with the problematic section 42 of the Business Corporations Act and removes one of the long-standing tests which has caused a problem for lawyers, accountants, and businesspeople ever since the Business Corporations Act was brought in.

I would commend the House to deal with this quickly and improve the business processes in this province by doing so.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise tonight in the Assembly to speak to Bill 15, the Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000, at third reading. I really think this is a very good bill, and all the way through it has been presented very well.

The intent of the act is to amend one specific section, section 42,

of the existing Business Corporations Act. The amendment in particular will rectify a number of problems existing with the section that are unworkable and cause Alberta business unnecessary expense and delays on certain transactions.

As I talked to friends that are lawyers, and as we did review and meet and talk with a number of people with the Alberta Law Reform Institute, the Law Society of Alberta, the Institute of Chartered Accountants, and the Canadian Bar Association in both Edmonton and Calgary, we were brought up to speed very quickly on this. Thanks to the Member for Calgary-North West and the department.

I feel that we have gone through this one very speedily. Actually, a couple of times I did mention to the member that this should have been a bill that was presented on some of those nights that we were in here so long on Bill 11, and we would have shown how fast a bill could actually go through.

We did point out in second reading, Mr. Speaker, concerns we had in section 42(2), and at a follow-up meeting with the hon. Member for Calgary-North West and Bob Foord from the government department, we agreed to amendments before they even came in here. I'd like to thank the stakeholders who reviewed the amendments and spoke very freely with the Official Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, this is a solution that will be workable for businesses. As I mentioned before, just because it's a business-proposed amendment doesn't mean that we'll be against it if it's presented and it's a good amendment. So at this time the Official Opposition are happy to vote with the government in the passage of this bill at third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

Bill 13

Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

MR. HLADY: I move third reading of Bill 13.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora ceding to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. We have a little power in the back row here. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I feel good about that now.

I rise tonight to speak to this bill. I have yet to be able to add any comments. I want to make it clear from the outset that I am supporting this bill, but I do have some concerns. I think they were registered by some of my colleagues at Committee of the Whole, but given my strong belief that delegated administrative organizations have to have a very strong framework, I feel that I need to speak to that issue.

9:20

From the outset we know that this particular bill extends the orphan well program to include other oil and gas facilities such as pipeline, gas plants, batteries, or compressor stations. I had the opportunity to work for a large Alberta energy company from '89 to '92, and I must say that knowing there is a reclamation process in place is very important given that some of these sites are just tremendously large and the environment is vulnerable as a result of these particular sites, as is in some areas the safety of Albertans.

It expands the purpose of the orphan fund to cover the abandonment and reclamation of most production facilities and provides for licensing of all new and existing facilities. It imposes responsibilities for abandonment on parties responsible for facilities and pipelines, and it regulates the transfer of licences for facilities and

pipelines to prevent dumping and to collect security deposits if licences are transferred to high-risk companies. Now, from the outset we also know that the industry feels they have a need to be able to use these funds and have some form of control over them. As it stands right now, they don't have that direct access to the funds. So I think this is a good step.

It's not to say that I don't support delegated administrative organizations, but I want to talk a little bit about the framework that I see as necessary. I recognize that this offers up a very narrow portion of what the industry does and how they're governed and regulated under this particular act. I also recognize that this is the industry's money. The funding sources come from an annual levy paid by the industry, and that's based on the number of inactive wells that each operator has. It is the main revenue source for the orphan well fund. There's also a substantial fee of \$10,000 for first-time licensees, and of course the other revenue generated is through interest on this fund. We know that the industry would like to be able to use the surplus from this fund as well in their particular industry.

Just to outline a couple of things I would like to see. I bring this into this debate, recognizing the narrowness of this particular amendment and recognizing that if there were other ways, the industry may have opted for avenues other than a delegated administrative organization. What I view as a good, sound framework is the preparation of a delegated administrative profile to assess whether a particular program, service, or activity is a candidate for delegation to an NGO. Well, we already know that the EUB is arm's length. This is going to take it, I guess, one arm further, if you will. Nonetheless, we need to look at the profile to be able to say that this fits with the expectations we have.

The profile would examine such issues as market strength – well, that's not necessarily an issue here when we're talking about abandoned well sites – political resistance, cost efficiency, quality of service, legal barriers, risk, resource monitoring and control. Those I think are still components of a DAO particular to this piece of legislation.

Conducting a detailed cost-benefit analysis outlining the cost savings and benefits that would be achieved by delegating the program and a clear rationale as to how delivery could be improved through the delegation – I think that particular issue is still top of the mind here. We do know that the industry looks after their own wells, that they are looking at reclamation in other areas, but we have to again be clear that we're providing rationale as to how delivery could be improved through this delegation. So is the orphan well fund going to operate better as a result of this particular legislation?

Once we make a decision, is that decision in support of the delegated administrative organization, a particular program, service, or activity based on economic criteria? The implementation of a full public tender process is required to encourage competition. Well, we're not really doing that here, because, like I say, this is very narrow, but we do know that the monopoly over the money exists within the industry. It's there. It's essentially their money, but again we need to clearly state performance standards and allow for effective follow-up monitoring by the government and the Legislature. That's the more particular issue that I would be concerned about.

As well, the notion of performance requirements and follow-up monitoring procedures. We need to be looking at the annual reports, one of which I happen to have here, business plans, and audits. The Auditor General has often made comments on the lack of monitoring. Because DAOs are one step further away from government, the entity can operate as it wishes. I know there was consideration for this, and I'm hoping that we can see this down the road, that the

Auditor General's office has some way to deal with the DAOs in terms of monitoring what's going on. That's the process of accountability that I would like to see with this particular bill. I don't think that's out of line with the needs of Albertans. Albertans need to know that a cleanup has occurred and that there are no environmental risks, that there's no cost cutting on the cleanup as a result of trying to save money on a reclamation, and that it's done with the intent of having an environmentally friendly area afterwards. I think that's an issue.

I guess the other thing that would help this is that CAPP, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, supports this bill, and certainly, as I said, we do, but I think they've got a lot of work to do in terms of the education process for Albertans. Many people would not know that there is an abandoned well program that would allow and ensure their site cleanup and that they don't have toxic chemicals sitting in old abandoned pipelines, those kinds of things. The industry really is attempting to take some control and ensure that these sites are meeting the needs of Albertans in the cleanup.

9:30

I would like to see more work done in the education of Albertans in this regard. I think it would serve the industry very well. It certainly would enlighten us and give us some understanding of exactly what they're doing. I know that the oil and gas industry is participating and attempting to participate in making the environment and any environmental decisions they have to make in the best interests of Albertans. They're trying to reduce the environmental impact that their industry causes in special places areas and protected areas.

We see that conflict going on right now between the Environment minister and the energy minister. I think there is a balance. It's not all one or all the other. There is a way to come to the middle and resolve this. I know that the hon. Minister of Justice would be a great mediator and that he could help that process out a bit, because he's a great promoter of mediation. I think there is a middle ground that he could come to between these two ministers. In fact, the industry is looking for some direction and guidance and says: "Yeah, we'll get out of these protected areas. It may not be overnight, but let's work on some guidelines to do that." They're attempting to move forward in good faith. So maybe we can dig the energy minister's heels out of the ground and come to some form of compromise.

What happens when you see that kind of conflict is that it's actually a bad image for the industry, because the industry's message is not getting out. I think that if we're to say there's a balance, then let's reach that balance and let's show Albertans we're capable of doing that. Certainly as this government moves forward, it absolutely must assure Albertans that they're looking after and taking environmental protection very seriously. I'm expecting some leadership to happen from the government in that respect.

As I say, I support this bill. Kudos to the industry for expanding their actual program. It's not just orphaned wells now, as I said.

AN HON. MEMBER: Orson Welles?

MS OLSEN: Not Orson Welles. Orphaned wells. I'm getting some help, Mr. Speaker, from one of my colleagues. I know they shouldn't be helping me. It's been a war of words.

I was going to make this one comment. I was going to give the industry full marks for the use of acronyms. When we look at the orphan fund annual report, we see that there's FAC, CAPP, EUB, SEPAC, AFRD, AENV, and so on. They're great for acronyms. I thought we were bad in policing, but they've got us beat, Mr.

Speaker. We have an English teacher here who maybe can give them a hand. That would be the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

As I say, I support this bill, but I have reservations about delegated administrative organizations. I know we have addressed that issue, and industry is sensitive to that. I think that if there were a way other than a DAO, they would go down that path. With that I'll take my seat and see if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora can master some acronyms.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. This bill troubles me really only for the reason of the amendments that were brought in. My colleague for Edmonton-Norwood just spoke at some length regarding the fears of delegated administration, and I must say that when I first read the bill and understood the intent behind the bill and heard from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, amongst others, about their urging for the bill, I was immediately in favour of it. Then when I saw the amendments, I thought: why are they going down this road again; why is the government doing this?

We've just had some discussion, as you know, about subordinate lawmaking and regulations, and this is in many regards even worse, because you're one step further removed, and you've got all the concerns about the role of the legislative officers – the Ombudsman, the Privacy Commissioner, the Ethics Commissioner, and the Auditor General – as it pertains to meeting Albertans' expectations to the same extent that they would be met were these same functions not delegated to another authority. So I will incorporate by reference those comments and concerns that Edmonton-Norwood just presented to the Assembly.

I don't want to take much time speaking to Bill 13, Mr. Speaker, but I do want to acknowledge the oil and gas industry for their diligence in pursuing this particular initiative over the last few years and for their fortitude, because really it was industry that led the government on this matter, not the other way around. Earlier today we gave second reading to what was described as an interim environmental protection bill, a bill that would deal with the protection of some heritage grasslands. The government seems to be ever so cautious when it comes to environmental issues. I would be happy to see the government be a little more bold and take a little bit more leadership in this regard, but as we are dealing with Bill 13 at the moment, it is the industry that demonstrated the leadership. The government demonstrated its ability and willingness to follow, and I suppose they should be commended for that.

I will be supporting Bill 13 at this stage and again pass along my thanks to the industry for identifying this issue, identifying some means to deal with it, and convincing the government to put the solution into law.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, to close the debate.

MR. HLADY: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a third time]

Bill 16 Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 16 will provide much-needed legislation for the rapidly growing condominium industry. It provides commonsense guidelines which go a long way to meet the needs of the industry and also provide much-needed consumer protection.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments in Bill 16 were developed through consensus by a very dedicated group of stakeholders, and I would like to express my appreciation for the work done by these stakeholders, who are very interested in seeing this become law. I would also like to thank Frances Cruden from the Department of Government Services, who has played a major role in the drafting and refining of the legislation. She also made herself available to answer questions of Albertans and to discuss it with our loyal opposition.

Thanks also to the Minister of Government Services for her assistance in taking the bill through second reading and Committee of the Whole. Last but not least, I would like to thank the Liberal critics who deserve much thanks for their co-operation in the support of Bill 16.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move third reading of Bill 16, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

9:40

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 16, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000, in third reading. I hope I have this quote right, but I'm pretty sure I remember it as: politics is the art of compromise. I think this particularly applies to . . .

MS OLSEN: Except on Bill 11.

MS BLAKEMAN: I've just been upstaged by one of my colleagues. I'll try to carry on.

I think that really applies to Bill 16. I mean, we have four very specific interest groups or stakeholders. Stakeholders is probably the best choice of words, because they have significant financial interests in how this legislation lays out the rules and regulations of how condominiums operate, the developing, the purchasing, and the living in them. The four groups, of course, would be the developers; the property management companies, which in many cases are hired by the boards to take care of business around the condominium – and often a property management company will act as the local resident managers rather than having a local resident manager – the board of directors, or the corporation as it often appears in the legal language; and the owners themselves.

There can be and have been conflicting interests around this act. I make no secret of the concerns I have brought forward on behalf of the owners, because frankly, as far as I know, it's mostly the owners that I'm representing in Edmonton-Centre. We have a very large number of condominiums there, mostly because they're in high-rises, so you've got a high concentration of people in a very small area.

It's been interesting as we've gone through the process of this legislation. I've talked to a lot of people now in Edmonton-Centre that live in condominiums, and one of the points that was raised is that when there's a difficulty that arises out of the legislation that causes conflict in the condominium, the owners are very reluctant – and this is what I sensed over and over again – to make a big deal, to start a fight, to make a big ballyhoo about something, because as one fellow put it: it creates disharmony in my home. And he's right. I can imagine that if you're having an argument with somebody on the board of directors and then you have to get on the elevator every morning and look at this person, it does create an uncomfortable attitude. I'm very sympathetic to that.

We all understand what the rules are for single-property ownership. You're responsible for everything. You're responsible to save money to fix your roof or not, as you choose. But we don't have enough history with condominiums and with that kind of communal but separate living to have ironed out all the possible situations that arise that affect people.

It certainly was high time that we had an update of legislation. I think the act that we're operating under currently is from 1980. There was consultation and a bill brought forward and indeed passed, an amendment act, in 1996 which was never proclaimed, and then we have this amendment act 2000, which is in fact amending the '96 act, which in turn amended the 1980 act.

This has been a long time in coming, and while I have the opportunity, I'll put in a plug for a regular sunset clause. Given the number of new issues that come up fairly quickly in today's world, I think it would have been a good idea to put a sunset clause into this legislation. It's not there, but perhaps I can get the recorders of all this to diarize and maybe in five years' time or even three years' time have another look at the legislation.

My concern about this act is that it be as balanced, as fair, and as equitable to all those parties as possible. I am not able to overcome my belief that this is still not balanced for the owners, so we will keep working on this.

I note that the Member for Calgary-Bow mentioned the consultation and thanked all those that were involved. When I first spoke to this bill, I was perhaps a bit harsh on the Condominium Institute group, which had in fact been invited by the minister and had participated in consultations prior to the legislation being introduced. They were very quick to contact me and come in and meet with me and give me their briefing book and try and reassure me about some of the issues I had raised. A number of the issues I had raised had come through an association called the Condominium Advocate Association, which, I think, only represents owners. The other groups have represented a combination of developers, property managers, board members, and some owners, and I was concerned that this group in fact hadn't been consulted before the legislation. Happily, they have finally been able to meet with a department representative.

I just want to set the record straight here. I know there were comments made in the Assembly that the Condominium Advocate Association had been approached and had refused to come in and meet with departmental staff. In fact, I think the very day that was being said, they had finalized a meeting date with the ministerial staff, so to say that they were not interested in coming in to meet is unfair. In fact, they were negotiating to do that. They did meet with the ministerial staff today. Unfortunately, that was after Committee of the Whole was past, and therefore their suggestions were not able to be incorporated or brought forward through an amendment. That's certainly disappointing to that group.

Also, in working with them, we discovered, as we know in this Assembly, that when an amendment act comes forward, we're really only free to be discussing and proposing further amendments to the sections in the original bill that have been opened up by the amending act. A number of the concerns that were brought forward by the Condominium Advocate Association were on sections from the '96 act that were not being amended, so they were sort of out of luck on that.

Now, the outcome of the meeting, as I understand it – and I have to admit that I didn't get a very lengthy briefing on it – was that a lot of their concerns, they were told, would be dealt with in regulations. As always, I have a deep concern about that. From my experience in this Assembly there's an awful lot that is put over. Important decisions and definitions and how things are going to operate are put

into regulations. Well, those regulations are developed behind closed doors. They don't have the scrutiny of the Assembly. They're not recorded in *Hansard* for easier access for people to read the debate and understand the various sides of the argument that are being put forward.

I have also had both personal experience and have heard from community members that it's very hard to find regulations to things. Where do you start looking? I don't know if they're available through www.assembly.ab.ca, but in some cases they're not. So in this case may I urge the government to please post those regulations on the web site and not make it difficult for people to get hold of these, because this is the nitty-gritty, this is the how of how the whole piece of legislation is supposed to work. To somehow be tricky about it and say, "Oh, well, phone the Queen's Printer" or "You have to go there directly" or "No cheques, no Visa; it's got to be a money order or cash" – I mean, there are all these obstacles put in the way of people trying to get information that really affects their most intimate daily lives. This is how they live and where they live.

9:50

I know that the opposition brought forward what has become our standard amendment, to refer the regulations to the all-party Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, and in what has become a common occurrence, it was defeated. Nonetheless, I still think that is a very useful parliamentary process that is not taken advantage of by this Assembly. Again, that would put the comments in *Hansard*. It would give time for people to circulate the information back to their constituents and get feedback and bring that forward, and it makes it wide open to any stakeholder that's interested rather than just those that are invited.

I just wanted to put a couple of things on the record, unresolved issues. I think there is still an issue around the "common property" definition. It does appear exclusively in section 11, not at the front of the bill, which would make it apply to the entire bill. I'm still not clear about why that choice was made, but it was made. We have examples of where that is causing problems now, and that's why I'm interested in the sunset clause as well or at least an agreed-upon or committed-to review within a few years to see whether this has in fact turned out that way. Some of the examples around the common property are a number of the condominiums or the developers that set them up. In fact, there is no common property. Any common property like a party room or something like that is often designated as belonging to the corporation, and therefore it's not common property anymore.

When you get to things like municipal property taxes, transfer leasing, insurance coverage, exclusive use, you're out of luck, because what's in there designated for the way common property is to be dealt with, what the common property is, what people would generally assume it to be, has been called something else, and therefore none of these things apply. So I think we really need to work on that and tighten that one up.

You know, the developers risk their money in the beginning to build the condominiums or convert them, and thank God for that. They deserve the credit for taking the risk. The Alberta economy runs on that sort of entrepreneurship, and I applaud it. But in the end the owners and the boards of directors are left, and 10, 15, 20 years down the line that's who's dealing with the issues that arise around this. That's why I am so adamant that the legislation work for those owners and for the boards of directors, because that's who deals with it. Once the developer has pulled up stakes and has completed their part of the bargain, they're gone. They have no more involvement with this, but the owners certainly do, which is why I keep raising their issues.

I have heard stories and haven't been able to confirm them – and I'll admit that on the record – around the issue of the trust money being set aside. Now, if the owners have to set aside money, why aren't the developers having to set aside money? Again, that's something I want watched over the next three years or five years. I think three years is a more suitable time for it. As I say, I have heard but have not been able to confirm that developers in fact have walked away from completing the common areas, and there doesn't seem to be any way to reach back and deal with that for the developers.

Another issue that I think is ineffective in the way the legislation has passed and in the form it is in is around condominium fees. I know that even members of this Assembly are condominium owners, most of them in my riding of Edmonton-Centre.

MRS. SOETAERT: They have a good MLA.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes, they do.

You know, the way this is set up is that the developers write the first set of bylaws to get the whole condominium corporation going, and at this point the condominium fees are going to be set by bylaw, so we have the developers, in effect, setting those condo fees. I think that's an area we're going to have to watch. Further down the line I think the effect of it will be that the board of directors of the condominium corporation, who administer and enforce those bylaws, can pick and choose who pays what. That may well lead to quite a few problems if you've got a family with six kids and a single senior. Are you going to start charging them different rates for garbage pickup? Well, I can tell you that in the city of Edmonton we've gone that route and it's misery, so I think that's something we really have to watch for.

Once again, user-friendly language. As I've said before, this is a bill that people really need to be able to understand easily. They need to be able to understand the regulations easily. They've got to have fast access to both these things, and they've got to be easy to understand. There's some wild and wonderful legalese that comes out of this document. I know it's complicated, and I know we're dealing with very fine details of law on this, but boy, we have to get average people to be able to understand this. We will alleviate a lot of the problems that arise, because it is misunderstandings that cause a lot of this.

As I've pointed out a number of times in this third reading, I think we really have to be vigilant to ensure protection for the owners. As I said, they're the people that are left with the final effect of the changes that are being instituted in this amendment act, 2000. I want to see this be the best bill, and if we have to bring it back again in another couple of years, I'm more than willing to do that and to work with the government – in a few years I suppose I might be on the other side; I'd be working with myself – to make this the best possible legislation and protection for all those stakeholders that are involved in this. So a somewhat disappointing process, but hopefully there have been some things improved. I appreciate the Member for Calgary-Bow's kind words and was impressed with her acknowledging the people and staff that she worked with on the bill.

I've come to almost the end of my time. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to third reading of the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2000. I'm not sure if others wish to speak to it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise at third reading to speak to the Condominium Property Amendment Act.

Over the last little while I've had some correspondence from constituents who have concerns with regard to this particular piece of legislation. Though I recognize it has been long in the making and that in fact it is an amendment to a piece of legislation that perhaps is becoming old in terms of the way it deals with condominiums across this province, the reality still remains that there is a group called the Condominium Advocate Association which has prepared significant amendments to Bill 16 in its current form. It is disturbing to hear that the meeting was held this morning, and here we are at third reading. So, in effect, their concerns were not really taken into account.

10:00

Now, in my particular constituency I have a large number of condominiums that are appearing. It seems that almost daily there's a new building that goes up. So for my constituents this is a major concern. In fact, when we look at what some of the movement is of the government with regards to aging in place and assisted living concepts, what we are seeing now are condominium projects that are geared exactly towards a population that becomes more vulnerable as they become sicker.

I can think of one letter on my desk right now where the family was promised that there would be a long-term care centre attached to the condominium. Due to lack of funding by the regional health authority the long-term care beds have not materialized. The reason that the condominium was purchased was because there would be very little upheaval to the parents as they required more and more nursing care. Now we have a situation with a couple who are in their 80s. The wife is blind, and the husband has advanced dementia, and there's no place for them to go. They've been waiting for three years as the situation has gotten progressively worse, and still there is no spot for this particular couple to stay together and to follow through with a promise that had been made to them when they purchased their condominium.

So we know that things are moving in this province in a direction that I don't necessarily agree with. If there is going to be more and more onus put on individuals, then there has to be more consumer protection provided within the pieces of legislation that we see in front of us, consumer protection with regards to private health care, profiteers who will be knocking on the doors to ensure that they can have their profit margins looked after but not necessarily the needs of the individuals who are spending their hard-earned dollars on promises that may not materialize.

I think, too, of another case of an individual in my riding who has had a paper bag hanging from his ceiling in his condominium unit for over two and a half years now because it leaks. So he's brought the pictures to me, and he's gone to his association. He was actually on the board of the association at one point, and he could not get this fixed.

If we are looking at ensuring that there are needs addressed for condominium owners, then that is what I believe the thrust of this particular amendment should have been. When I looked through the Condominium Advocate Association report, that does not seem to be the direction that was taken with regards to putting forward the amendments.

Now, we have the promise waved in front of us that, yes, the regulations will take care of some of the issues, and perhaps that is possible. What disturbs me is that when I look at some of the letters in support of the bill, there seems to be a misunderstanding that government bills are looked at every two years. I don't know if there's been a promise made by the department to certain individuals to gain their support, that what is required is for the bill to be passed in its current form and we'll take care of any concerns you have in

the next year or so, because that is what the government policy is, that in fact acts are reviewed every two years. That is not the case. I wish to put on the public record that there are no sunset provisions in this legislation that I am aware of.

When we look at the regulations, this in fact would be a prime area to have that committee we keep talking about that every other jurisdiction across Canada has put in place, has recognized is part of the democratic process, and is not running scared: an all-party committee to look at laws and regulations. When we have organizations that are not satisfied and have a list of 29 pages – this was not a one- or two-page analysis that the Condominium Advocate Association put forward – of issues that were outstanding and I understand have not been addressed fully, to be patted on the head by the government and told that it will be taken care of at some point in the future I quite frankly don't think is good enough.

So on behalf of the constituents that have taken the time to let me know of their concerns and on behalf of the Condominium Advocate Association, which has also copied all the MLAs, as a matter of fact, on their concerns, I would like to state that I will keep a close eye on the regulation-making process and would advise all members who have condominiums within their constituencies to also watch whether those particular concerns of condominium owners are being addressed through the regulation process. I would hope that the government does have the courage to put forward the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations so we can ensure that in fact we have an open process of the development of regulations with regards to the Condominium Property Amendment Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to address some of those concerns.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow to close the debate.

MRS. LAING: I'd like to thank all members for their participation in the debate. As you know, regulations are also going to be done with stakeholders having a large part in the consultation, and they will be shared so that people have an opportunity to look at them. So I'd like to encourage all of you to support the bill.

Thank you. Call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

Bill 17

Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move Bill 17, Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000, for third reading.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a chance to just conclude on the options that are available by changing the laws under the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000. This bill effectively is one of the cases where we've seen legislation that has come before the House, been passed, and then we go back and just try and clarify it and make sure that it does what we wanted, where we have to make kind of grammatical changes in the bill as we find out that the actual interpretation of sections when we try to implement them doesn't really carry through with what was intended. I think what we need to do is just recognize the fact that all of us, as we begin to work hard on these, read them and read them and read them, and finally we're reading what we want to be written there even though

it's not quite what shows up when the words are read by somebody else. I think that's the case that we're seeing here.

So it's great that the government brought forward this amendment, and we'll clarify how this really is going to work and how the relationship between the different entities that are going to be required to report will be reflected either by designation through the regulations or through co-operative agreements between data collection and data holding agencies. I think this will be welcomed by all of those that are involved in the credit reporting and will clarify what they can and cannot do as they work with each other and as they work with arm's-length agencies.

I think the government is making this bill more operational, and we should all support this amendment. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a third time]

10:10

Bill 23

Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move third reading of Bill 23.

This bill quite simply will make apprenticeship and industry training much easier. It'll simplify it, and it will make it much more effective. An already good system will become that much better.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to raise a few other continuing concerns around Bill 23. Now, we're in third reading, so really I'm limited to speaking about the anticipated effect of the legislation. I understand that there was a motion put forward by the Official Opposition last night which was defeated. The effect of the bill would have been stronger with that amendment, but I will accept that it was defeated.

My concern around the effect of Bill 23, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2000, is that this is what really protects the workers and also protects the public. We need our workers to be working in an atmosphere that is safe to them and is cognizant of the difficulties that can arise.

[Mr. Friedel in the chair]

We've all had workers in our offices or from our life previous to being elected who, you know, were asked to work and the conditions weren't safe but would they lose their job? All of those kinds of things. That's why it's important to have a really strong apprenticeship program where you do have a journeyman or a master working with the apprentice to train them on exactly how to do things, to be aware of all the other components of the job and the occupational health and safety parts of it.

It's also important that we have our apprentices well trained because they build buildings and bridges and important parts of the world around us which we as the public need to know are well built. We can all think of those examples where a bolt was loose in a bridge. Those great big concrete siding panels were on a building at the university when I was there, and they kept sort of falling off. You know, it's that kind of thing that's of concern to the public, and we want to know that our workers are trained to do the work properly and safely. So it really affects both of those parties.

Part of what I understand is now possible to put in place – and

there are the usual ins and outs and provisos in the legislation. I understand that this would most likely come into play in areas outside of major urban centres, and that's a situation where you have someone who is a journeyman in a trade who can now be allowed through what's proposed in this act to also do other trades. Certainly I can see where that might be wished for sometimes in rural areas where you may not have access to a steamfitter and a boilermaker and a plumber and a gas fitter and a welder, and all different ones. If you had a journeyman gas fitter, well, you know if he could weld, then why can't we just call him a welder as well and let him do the welding stuff out there?

MRS. SOETAERT: And do it very well.

MS BLAKEMAN: Some of them I'm sure can, but there's a concern there. My concern is always for the safety of the worker and the safety of the public.

I'm recalling that during second reading my colleague from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert told of a little lesson she'd learned.

MRS. SOETAERT: My husband learned it too.

MS BLAKEMAN: And her husband learned it too. They were trying to do something themselves and ended up with . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: One stove not working.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes.

. . . one stove not working, one stove working, and had to bring in a real professional to figure it all out.

That is my concern with this. I believe in being flexible and anticipating the modern world we live in, but I still have concerns about this. I'm worried about what kind of tests or what kind of proof a tradesperson could be asked to put forward if they're going to be asking for this sort of general description or be allowed to work in a second trade when they hold journeyman status in a different trade.

[The Speaker in the chair]

As I mentioned during the debate on the condominium act, I think it's important in this rapidly changing world for us to be willing to monitor things really carefully, changes that we're putting into legislation. I hope that the ministry is looking to monitor that change in particular very carefully, because I don't know that it's appropriate. I'm choosing my words carefully here because it may well turn out that this was a great idea, but it doesn't ring true to me. It doesn't make easy sense to me that because you're a journeyman certified in one trade, gosh, you can be okayed by the minister or his designate to do it in another trade. That's simplifying what's being put forward in this bill, but essentially that is it, and I think that subverts the apprenticeship formula we've worked under for a long, long time, and not only here in Alberta. I mean, the whole idea of learning a trade and coming up as an apprentice to someone goes back to the Middle Ages and beyond. So it's a caution I'm putting forward when I look to the effect of this bill, but it is a real caution that I do have.

There's nothing to stop individuals, if they want to hold a ticket in more than one trade, from getting it in more than one trade. As I said, my father had tickets in five trades, and he was a master in three of them. My brother is a journeyman ironworker and is now working on his welding ticket as well, so it certainly can be done.

It does require effort from the individual, but I don't see that that's any different than someone getting a bachelor of arts and then going back and getting their master's in arts. If you're really interested, you know, go and get your BEd or your bachelor of science or whatever else.

I believe in that education and I really believe in the value of that training. I have real reservations about being able to say, "Well, it's convenient, so we'll just wave the magic wand and say, 'Go ahead.' We'll call you the additional trade as well as the one that you've actually apprenticed in and come up through."

That was the point that I wanted to raise in this bill. I know that my colleagues have spoken long and often on this, people with more experience in this area than I have. I know that in fact my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar is a tradesperson, and I hope he's going to be able to give us a few words on this bill. [interjection] Yes, he is quite a wise man, and I know he would give us more wisdom.

I'm just quickly reviewing my notes. That's right. When I had spoken on second reading, I was talking about a de-skilling of the workforce, and it was my suspicion that that's what this bill was about. I was heckled loudly for wondering aloud about that sort of thing, but in fact when you consider the remarks that I just made about certifying someone in a second trade, that is de-skilling because it's saying that you don't have to go through that apprenticeship stream and do the time and walk the talk to get that distinction.

10:20

I know there were concerns that were brought forward by some of the unions. I've read through the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board backgrounders with sort of a question-and-answer thing about were people consulted, and they seem to have been. I always find when this legislation comes forward here – I know the government feels legislation doesn't move through quickly enough, but I've got to tell you that in my office I get people phoning up, often after the bill is passed or when it's in third reading, and going: well, why didn't I know about this, and why can't I get a chance to speak to it? That is about consultation, and it's about the widest possible dissemination of information that these changes are being considered. You can learn a lot by test-driving ideas on people that you know up front are not going to like them. I've often taken proposals and ideas to people that I know are going to object to them, because I get really good information and usually straight from the hip, which is often the most helpful way and certainly gets rid of any misunderstandings.

So those are the remarks that I – oh, sorry. There was one more thing, about crane operators, because I have a friend – now, you'll all chuckle, because he's an old snowmobiling buddy. I'm sorry; he's not old. We have snowmobiled together for a long time. It was in this Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board question-and-answer document, and I know that they – yeah, it's about boom trucks, working on boom trucks.

DR. MASSEY: I think you're making this hard on *Hansard*.

MS BLAKEMAN: I'm sorry. I'm making it hard on *Hansard*.

You know, there was a perfect example of how important – I'm looping back to where I started here, so it's a nice closer. He was one of the best crane operators in western Canada, I think, and was severely injured in operating a crane and will never work in that industry again. So there's a worker injured, and I'm not clear on the whole story because I just heard it very briefly, but I think there was also injury to property. Those were the two things I was talking about, where equipment malfunctions or where buildings that have been built by trades workers could come apart and injure other people. Those are the things we should be most concerned about

here as legislators. We're the ones that are supposed to be making sure that the best possible guidelines are laid out for this.

Sorry to make this so difficult for *Hansard* as I mused aloud, but I did want to acknowledge that that had certainly been the experience of my friend, and I wanted to bring it up and underline how important safety is to all of us.

With those few words I will take my seat, having spoken in third reading. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm anxious to rise at third reading. I have a few remarks, reluctantly, at this time regarding Bill 23 and what it doesn't and what it does do. After hearing various voices from all across this province regarding this initiative, I can certainly see where some individuals are excited about supporting this legislation, but I can also see where there are many reasons for reservations and many reasons for caution, and I cannot in all conscience support this legislative proposal.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

At the same time, I would like to congratulate the hon. minister and his staff. They have had a wide-ranging consultation process, but I'm not convinced, if I look at the history of this province, that this is a good piece of legislation. I can only think, for instance, of the tower crane in Calgary. In the downtown section of Calgary unfortunately a counterweight plummeted off the back of that crane right to 4th Avenue I think. It narrowly missed a mother and her child in a pram, and that was the fortunate part of this incident, that there was no loss of life involved.

Whenever we consider this and we consider the time and attention to detail that's necessary whenever the tower crane is initially set up or erected, we have to have full confidence in the individuals who are not only doing those operations but also guiding them. That is one incident, Mr. Speaker, that tells me that we have to hold on here, and we cannot allow any dilution or watering down of our trades, whether they be compulsory trades or whether they be optional trades. In fact, I would like to see a lot of the optional trades moved into the compulsory certification column. Certainly I would like to see carpenters, for one, moved into the category of a compulsory trade, but who's to say if that will ever happen?

Also, in Calgary two years ago I questioned the minister of advanced education at that time regarding this specific issue. That was that unqualified individuals were employed in fabrication shops in the steel industry in Calgary, and they had welding tickets, tickets to be fitters. It didn't say for what, whether it was pipes or plate or structural, but they were fitters, and this was brought to my attention. I brought this forward to question period, and the answer I received was that these tickets were used simply as a means of identification, but all hon. members of this Assembly know that there was work going on in that shop and someone was doing it. I don't know how the client or the purchaser of the steel products in that shop felt when they realized that unqualified workers were involved in the process.

This is a very, very serious issue, and there are no amendments to the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act that are specifically going to deal with an issue such as this. What this bill does in section 22 and further on, unfortunately, in section 33 of the amendments is allow this sort of activity not only to continue but in my view to continue on a grander scale. We have to ask ourselves the question: who benefits? Who is going to benefit from this activity? In the long run it is my view that no one will.

Now, we look at some of the compulsory trades. I spoke about welding last evening, and I realize that many of the rig welders

across the province when they get word of this are not going to be happy. I don't have any view or vision of them coming and circling the Assembly, but they are going to be very concerned when they realize that their trade – and Alberta welders are famous for their proficiency and their expertise – is being watered down.

10:30

Now, at this time I would like to speak about the electricians and how this legislation will affect them. The electrical industry certainly has changed. There are industrial plants, there are companies, there are corporations that feel that they should have their own electrician, an exclusive company electrician, not accredited by the province or by the Minister of Learning's department but by their own department of learning, if I can use that term, Mr. Speaker. But if we were to allow corporations to regulate or monitor their own training programs for electricians, well, that would be fine if it was specific to occupational health and safety training or upgrading on specific equipment, for instance, that was to be used in part of their process or their process stream and it was unique equipment, but there have to be, I believe, provincewide standards.

Now, if we allow corporations to train, for instance, their own electricians and if that person, he or she, is working there for 10 years and has, for instance, an ABC refining company electrical certification in their pocket and if for corporate downsizing or any other reason they decide to leave that company, leave that job, that trade certificate is not worth the paper it's printed on. This is one of the concerns I have.

Now, the electrical trade is always changing. It's changing very rapidly. I acknowledge that. There always has to be upgrading. But whenever we look at the development of, for instance, tech cable and we look at oil installations and industrial installations across the province, this is also very much like Meccano. There are a whole series of trays erected. They're going in this direction, and they're going in that direction, and they are to hold – I'm sure all hon. members are familiar with this – the black cables that are in various diameters. With the development of these tech cables, they're very flexible and they're fireproof. They're very safe. Some of them can be designed for underground use. They save a lot of installation time.

What companies have done in the past, Mr. Speaker, is take young people off the street and employ them to be cable-pullers. They're gathering their hours for their apprenticeship in this way. Let's say that we pay them \$10 an hour, and then these young people get enough time and their schooling in, and they go to second year. They're second-year apprentices now. Companies have been known to hire another group of first-year apprentices, and the individuals who are in second year, because they're going to make maybe \$12 per hour, for instance, are unemployed because they have been replaced by a cheaper supply of labour. They have difficulty getting their apprenticeships and training completed. For instance, some people can become journeymen and have great difficulty terminating a junction box because they have all their specific training on one task, and that is distributing tech cable in these trays.

If we look at the amendments to section 33 here and we look at "with respect to a compulsory certification trade, [and the establishment of] one or more specific undertakings or a portion of those undertakings," this is where this whole idea of an optional certification trade comes into play. What's to stop a large electrical contractor from requesting this? Perhaps we're going to have trade-specific details relating to termination at junction boxes. It could be any number of things, but I do not believe that this is in the best interests of the electrical contractors or the electricians.

Now, that is a specific example, Mr. Speaker, but we need to ensure – and there's a price involved in this; there's a shortage of

skilled tradesmen in this province as there is – that there are always young people entering the trade or the profession. We need to ensure that standards are there. This bill erodes those standards in my view.

When we look at the age of the workforce, we need to encourage young people to enter the trades. Many people do not realize that they can make a very good living for themselves in the trades, and we need to encourage people. They need to have the confidence that if they make the time and the effort and the commitment to attend either NAIT or SAIT or whether they want to learn on the job and write their ticket off, that ticket is going to mean something.

It is going to mean something not only the day that they proudly get it with the hon. Minister of Learning's signature on it, but five and six years down the road that that certificate's value is not going to be eroded because of some ministerial decree or a company over here now that is permitted to operate outside the board, to have input with the minister or other organizations or associations or persons. This could be Merit Contractors, Christian Labour Association of Canada contractors who believe that this whole idea of a union contract with different crafts having different organizations or multicraft sites is not efficient. It's not the way they would like to see a workplace organized. They have the view that one hon. member, for instance, could maybe do carpenter work in the morning and do electrical work in the afternoon. Maybe the next day the cement truck is coming in, and he or she could possibly be the cement finisher. This concept is not in the best interests of this province or the industries that we're so proud of.

We look at the governments of this province in the past and what they did to enhance and promote the trades and apprenticeships and the regulations, the whole governance. All hon. members of this Assembly will acknowledge that part of this so-called Alberta advantage is that many individuals, thousands upon thousands, can pull out of their pocket a ticket with the hon. Minister of Learning's signature on it and probably get a job in a foreign country because it will say Alberta on that ticket. I'm not convinced that this will be the way of the future, because there are just too many loopholes in this legislation to allow for the erosion of our trade programs. If it's good enough for one group of individuals that they should attend school or they should work in a specific shop to learn the scale, then it should be good enough for everyone. There should be no shortcuts.

10:40

We look at some of the things that have happened in this province with faulty workmanship. I will bring to the attention of all hon. members of this Assembly again the accident that happened in Swan Hills. As a result of that accident, there are PCBs, furans, dioxins all scattered for who knows how far in a radius around the plant and into the food chain. This was caused by faulty welding on a repair job. Unfortunately, we can't get to the bottom of this because the exhibits have been sealed from public view by the judge. If we could only look at the blueprints, if we could only look and find out who the contractor was, who the welders were, what certification they held, what sort of testing was conducted before, during, and after the job, we could get to the bottom of this and ensure that it doesn't happen again. The tower crane accident in Calgary. Hub Oil, the unfortunate accident last summer, which I understand is still under investigation.

We look at the province and the further development of the tar sands and what that means to people who hold trade certificates. It's a future for them. We need to ensure that the training they receive is going to be protected so that, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview would say, not every Tom, Dick, and Harry can suddenly become a B welder or an electrician or an autobody mechanic.

I spoke a little bit about that last night and the frustration that people have whenever they come into the constituency office and say: I paid the journeyman rate, and it was an apprentice at piece-work working on my car. They were disappointed in that. They said: what can you do? There's basically very little that can be done, because there is no enforcement of what we have already, and I think we're diluting it even further.

When we look at steamfitters, when we look at plumbers, we never think of how much work they do and what it means to society or the community. We look at operators of cranes. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre brought this up. We must ensure that we have a well-scaled, adequately trained workforce. We cannot do it by eroding away the standards that already exist and have been put in place by previous governments, and I believe that's what we're doing with this Bill 23. That is the reason why I cannot support this bill. I hope over time, Mr. Speaker, that I'm proven wrong and that my concerns about this bill are not justified. But at this time, after consulting with many individuals, unfortunately I cannot support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I thank all hon. members of this Assembly for listening to my remarks, and once again I would in closing like to commend the hon. Minister of Learning and his department, but I cannot accept this. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning to close debate.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to say that this bill has been the result of three years of consultation. It has been the result of a truce between the employers and the employees, and realistically I feel and the employers and employees, the unions, and the apprentices all feel that this will lead to positive results for the apprenticeship and training industry.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the question be called.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:43 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Gibbons	Paszkowski
Broda	Graham	Renner
Cao	Hancock	Severtson
Clegg	Hlady	Shariff
Doerksen	Johnson	Stelmach
Dunford	Kryczka	Stevens
Evans	Langevin	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Marz	Taylor
Friedel	McFarland	Woloshyn
Fritz	Oberg	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Massey	Sapers
Leibovici	Nicol	Soetaert
MacDonald	Olsen	

Totals:	For – 30	Against – 8
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[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 19
Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate May 15: Ms Carlson]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to participate in the debate at second reading of Bill 19, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act. This bill has a very simple and straightforward premise: lowering taxes for Albertans. The backbone of this bill is to remove the surtax which was placed on Albertans some number of years ago to deal with the then deficit, and as has been pointed out many times over the last five years, the deficit is gone. We've dealt with the net debt. We're now paying off the supported debt of the province, and it's long overdue that the surtax be removed.

The bill is as simple as that, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't require a lot of debate, but we hear again that the Liberal opposition is opposed to lowering taxes for Albertans, is opposed to Bill 18, is opposed to Bill 19, and that they will be standing in front of those bills and doing everything they can to stop passage of those bills on a timely basis so that Albertans can be secure in the knowledge that their taxes are going to go down.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 19 should be debated and should be debated fully. However, I don't believe that the people of Alberta will be well served by reasoned amendments or referral amendments or those sorts of amendments, so I would move that pursuant to Standing Order 47(1) the question now be put.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and speak to Bill 19, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000, even if Standing Order 47(1) has been put forward.

As the Acting Treasurer presented this Bill 19 on April 3, 2000, he started out by saying that it's a milestone as a net debt is disappearing. He also alluded that it leads to elimination of the 8 percent deficit elimination surtax. This tax was imposed by the same government that he came into in 1986. The day this was brought forward in 1987, he actually sat with the government of the day when this was involved. It was brought forward as a temporary measure – and we are now sitting in May 2000 – for Albertans with incomes greater than \$44,000. In today's dollars that's equivalent to \$47,000.

11:00

Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition believes in tax reduction. They absolutely do. If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud wants to reflect or wants to have the spin out there that we don't, it is an absolute falsehood. I believe in tax reduction, but I personally believe there should be a fair and equitable tax reduction so that all Albertans are involved in this. You know, we look at this, and all Albertans made a sacrifice to eliminate the government's deficit. That started in 1987. Then in 1992 all Albertans were involved in this debt reduction to the point where a lot of people were really quite hurt in their jobs, whether they had had the job for years or whatever. They deserve to have a little bit more communication on this one. Why should many Albertan families have to wait in line while a select few chosen by the Premier of this government get the

benefit first? On the issues of tax cuts, fairness, and equity, as I mentioned before, this government has failed to deliver the goods.

Our caucus, the Official Opposition, has proposed that Albertans receive a tax cut simultaneously. This is why we have been calling for elimination of the .5 percent flat tax first, which would provide tax relief to all Albertans, before the elimination of the surtax, which provides tax relief to only a select few Albertans. This government has shortchanged Albertan families by its decision to eliminate the 8 percent surtax first. Two-income families with children and earning \$75,000 or less per year receive little or no tax relief under the government's tax scheme.

The government's tax scheme is nothing more than a political game of picking and choosing those Albertans who should benefit from tax cuts first. Government shouldn't be involved in the business of picking winners with the tax system. We are seeing this in all the bills that have actually been put forward in the last while, and this is anywhere from Bill 40 to Bill 11, Bill 18, and Bill 19. The politics that are being played out on these are really concerning. As a person who has always stood on my own and never actually been pushed by any political swing, I find the politics of this really, really concerning. I would like everybody to remember the history. There have been many skirmishes and wars when the church and state throughout the world have gotten involved in politics. That's why it's a major thing that I really think we should be looking at.

You know, the 8 percent surtax applies to taxpayers with a taxable income of \$46,450 and above. Of nearly 835,000 one-income and two-income families in Alberta, 685,000, or 82 percent, are two-income earners. According to Statistics Canada, 72 percent of families in Alberta earned less than \$75,000 in income during 1997. The average income of Albertan families was \$58,562 in 1997. Calculations prepared by ourselves, the Official Opposition, show that a two-income family earning \$75,000, with two children, with an income split of 50-50 or 60-40 would receive no tax reductions under this provincial government scheme. A two-income family at \$75,000 with two children and with an income split of 70-30 would receive a tax cut of just \$13 per year, or 4 cents per day, from elimination of the surtax.

Mr. Speaker, remember that this goes back to a temporary tax at a time right after the second major crash that happened in this province in Alberta's economy due to the fact of the oil prices dropping out in the 1982 crash. Things started to build toward 1985, and then the crash came in late 1987. Remember that this came as a result of the Treasurer's party, that he was with. They just couldn't get around the fact that they couldn't buy themselves out of recession. But, you know, they weren't the only ones. This happened all over the world. Everybody tried to buy themselves out of the problems of spending, and really we have lived to see the day when 1992 came.

You know, in the 1990s things were progressively getting better in the economy, but it's taken till 2000 to eliminate this tax. We're fortunate that we live in such a great province with revenue coming in from energy production, especially when the world prices are high. When it's high, we can spend and should be able to invest towards our health, education, infrastructure, and social services. [interjections] I know that I'm getting comments about agriculture, and I'm not discounting the fact that agriculture is a very big part of this province. I will not say anything bad at all about agriculture. It is part of our economy.

When the price dropped in oil and gas and when we saw what happened a year ago at \$10 to \$12 a barrel, how did we respond? I want to note that the time to plan properly is when times are good. We should be planning now, not experimenting, and I don't mean only by putting money back in at the time of elections, as in the past,

for example. We're looking at infrastructure and building hospitals throughout the province. I also am hearing rumours and some comments that were made at Capital health a week ago from people within this Chamber saying that there's going to be big money spent in the next while on infrastructure toward health and education. Well, let's go a little bit slower. Let's plan this time. Let's make sure everything is going to be working right.

It goes back to the comments saying that the Official Opposition doesn't believe in tax breaks. Well, we do. It's interesting that this one would be beneficial if instead of going at the surtax, we looked at the .5 percent. It's interesting listening to the Treasurer about all the breaks offered now. For example, families' employment tax credits, which give breaks of up to \$1,000 to low- and middle-income families; cutting tax rates from 45 and a half percent to 44 percent; a 65 percent cut for single-income families having two children and earning \$30,000 per year.

I can remember in 1992-93 when this government started playing a one-string guitar. I keep commenting about that, because when all you're doing is looking at reducing and cutting and dismantling, is that governing? Outside of the fact that it has spread through the western world to point fingers at health as being a major problem and pointing fingers at government as being the other major problem with overspending, I think you have to reflect on what has actually happened. Yes, we've reduced the debt, but by reducing the debt, we also let 10,000 people go from our health system.

The Municipal Affairs department, where I'm the shadow critic, went from 2,200 or 2,400 employees down to 700. Then there are the rumours out there – I have a lot of government workers that live in my constituency – about the new corporation board. A month ago a number of concerned people in my constituency talked about it. Now all of a sudden the rumour coming back to them is that there is going to be no reduction when this comes in, not until after the next election anyway.

Why is the government only looking at the top 25 percent of Albertans, earning above \$46,450 in taxable income? In 1987 this same government brought in the surtax against the same percentage of Albertans. Why the double standard? Mr. Speaker, as we look at this, I question why the government chose to eliminate the 8 percent surtax, which applies to only 390,000 Alberta taxpayers, ahead of the .5 percent flat tax, which applies to over 1,562,000 taxpayers.

11:10

It's interesting to note that when the Alberta government originally came forward with the tax cut plan in the 1996 budget, the timetable was to eliminate the .5 percent flat tax by January 1, 1999, before this 8 percent surtax, which was going to be eliminated by January 1, 2001. I'd like to support our solution that a tax cut be directed to 100 percent of Albertans, while the Premier's government supports a tax cut for only 25 percent of Albertans, using the 8 percent surtax.

The elimination of the 8 percent surtax is typical of this government's incremental approach to tax policy. The government had a choice to do what was fair and equitable – eliminate the .5 percent flat tax, which was paid by nearly all Albertans – or do what was politically expedient by giving a tax cut to a select few Albertans, eliminating the 8 percent surtax. We talked about it politically, and as I mentioned before, the politics of this are really making me scratch my head.

The Premier and the former Provincial Treasurer broke their promise to provide tax cuts for all in the event of a higher than anticipated surplus in 1999-2000. "What we want to do is make sure that those who can least afford to pay . . . get the first break": this was an actual quote in the *Calgary Herald* from the Premier.

"Certainly our priority is for low-income earners, and there are ways that can be addressed": this was another quote in the *Calgary Herald*, July 28, 1999, by the former Treasurer.

Of the nearly 835,000 one- and two-income earning families in Alberta, 685,000, or 82 percent, are two-income earners. This is according to Statistics Canada. Who benefits from the elimination of the 8 percent surtax? Well, the real issue is: who does not benefit from the elimination of the 8 percent surtax?

A family of four who are headed by two public servants, one earning \$60,000 and the other earning \$40,000, will save \$56, or 15 cents per day, from the elimination of the surtax. They don't benefit from this. A two-income family earning \$75,000 and with two children, where the income is split 50-50, will save zero dollars per year from the elimination of the surtax. Is that a savings to them? A single nurse in Lloydminster who earns \$40,000 will save zero percent per year from the elimination of the surtax. Well, I wonder if the Treasurer is actually looking at his own constituency and the people who work there.

We could go down and talk about seniors and the normal Albertans. We as the Official Opposition believe that all Albertans deserve a tax cut now. Done the way that is presented by this particular Bill 19, it is not fair and equitable to all Albertans. It's no different than the comments on what we're trying to get at in Bill 18. If it's not fair and equitable, why are we doing it? If we're doing it just for those that we know can put into the slush fund of the next election, that is not fair to the biggest percentage of Albertans.

Albertans really want to trust the bills that are coming out. As a normal Albertan reads the papers, I hope they do read beyond the headlines of the clippings. There are a few reporters that are actually reporting this right. The fact is that few Albertans are involved in this. All Albertans made sacrifices to eliminate the government's deficit, as I mentioned before, and that is really, really an interesting item. The same Albertans that did tighten the belt and did sacrifice are not being listened to.

We can talk about Bill 11 and the amount of phone calls we all had. Now, I'm maybe a little bit different. I do mix and shake with a lot of people that are probably in the tax bracket where they would love it if this would go through. They also would love to see Bill 18 go through, but as I talk to them and start talking different percentages and different ways we can present this – and hopefully the government is listening to some of the concerns we do have and some of the statements – we will be going a lot further than we are right now with it.

Mr. Speaker, this is probably an interesting one to throw out there and have in *Hansard*. A single senior earning \$40,000 receives no tax reduction from the elimination of the 8 percent surtax in 2000 but would have received a \$184 tax cut from the elimination of the .5 percent flat-rate tax. Now, if we're saying that we haven't been putting different bills forward and everything that was going on against the seniors, maybe this should actually be thought out and brought out, because if this is going to be leading into the next provincial election and this gets to the doors, my constituency probably isn't any different from the rest of the people in here, and there are a number of people that are seniors.

I love knocking on doors when it comes to seniors because I talk their language. Whether they're a staunch Reform or Alliance person or a staunch Conservative for a number of years, they actually are well deserving of a good debate. Last night alone in the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands it was fun knocking on doors. That's a great constituency if you want to get out on a nice evening and really talk about what's been happening.

You know, I could go on for quite a while, but I know there are a

lot of members in here that would like to speak on it, so I'm going to sit down and listen to other members.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, I don't for one minute profess to be any kind of tax wizard. In fact, I have probably as much difficulty as many Canadians and certainly Albertans understanding the tax process. So I buy a tax program and plug in my numbers, and it's really easy for me to come up with my tax return. It's probably done in about an hour and a half. It's great.

I guess I have some concerns about this whole issue of visiting or looking at changing the tax structure and looking at these little incremental things that the government's doing and calling it tax reform. It's kind of scary that that's what we're hearing, because tax reform is going to take a long time. It's going to take a lot of discussion on how we reach an equitable system for all Canadians. I'm not talking about the flat tax, because I don't for one minute believe that's fair and equitable.

Taxpayers deserve a tax cut and should get a tax cut. So I have no problem eliminating the 8 percent surtax, Mr. Speaker. It's a great start, but as I said, it should be a full process, a follow-through process on tax reform. If we're only talking about giving a little bit of a tax break, then I can support this.

What about the flat tax? As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has said, the .5 percent flat tax is the real tax break, because that would be for all Albertans, not just 25 percent of Albertans. Wouldn't it have been nice for the hon. Treasurer to have said: "Hey, you know what? We said that we want all Albertans to have a tax break, not just those in excess of \$45,000" or whatever that threshold is. It would have been really great if he had said: "So what I'm going to do is eliminate the .5 percent flat tax rate." That was a rate that was brought in as a deficit reduction rate, a rate that was brought in to assist the government in achieving some economics at the time.

11:20

Year after year we have budget surpluses, and we have the Premier and the Treasurer beating their chests about the great job they've done and that now it's time to give Albertans a bit of a break. Well, we've got a great economy right now, and I guess what scares me about this step in a tax reduction package is that because of the volatility of our economy, Mr. Speaker, we can afford to give a little bit of a tax break right now, but taking away the 8 percent, which would have been better if it had been the .5 percent flat tax rate, for all Albertans, not just those in the upper income brackets, is acceptable. I would call it a treat right now because I don't see it as a big tax break. In fact, this government is very good at tax tinkering. They're the tinkers of tax, if you will.

We know that when you build a house, you don't build it by: "Well, let's see, we'll put the roof up; well, we've got no walls. Let me see. We're going to tinker a little bit with putting in half the basement." You know, the house just wouldn't work. In fact, it would collapse if you could even get the walls up. So we need a systematic approach to what we're doing, and that's not what I see here. I see kind of like the goody bag. We're just going to reach in the goody bag: oops, here's the tax reduction. But it's just a small amount, and it means little to those people in tax brackets under \$40,000.

Now, the hon. Treasurer will stand up and say to me: yeah, but we've given a tax break to all Albertans with our flat tax.

MR. DICKSON: Is that the Acting Treasurer or the old Treasurer?

MS OLSEN: That's the older guy, the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, I think it is. The older Treasurer. I thought he would have some wisdom, you know, being an older fellow, but we're not quite there yet.

However, as I've said before, Mr. Speaker, three goals to a tax system. Simplicity: we could achieve that. Fairness and equity can't be achieved by the way this government is reducing taxes. It just isn't in the cards. Growth: there isn't a whole lot of, I guess, disposable income freed up as a result of this government's tax reductions. I think my colleague had made some comments about some of the particular reductions. We see that some people are getting nothing in their pocket, others are getting a wee, wee bit of a tax break, and then those in the upper-income bracket are getting a little bit more but really not that significant. In fact, I would venture to say that with the current system we have right now – and in fact I can speak to this. With the number of deductions that are actually available in the system right now, many people can get a bit of a tax return that's a little more substantial than the tinkering dollars they're getting out of this type of tax break.

So while I say very clearly, Mr. Speaker, that I'm not opposed to tax breaks, or if you will, I'm not opposed to the Provincial Treasurer stopping tax creeps . . . [interjection] I didn't say, hon. member, that he was a tax creep. I said: stopping tax creeps. I guess the government would be considered tax creeps, wouldn't they?

I guess my issue is that if you're going to have a break, if you want to have a change in the structure, then do that. Look at the entire structure, because if you bring in, say, a flat tax – the only thing we're doing with this current Treasurer, the old guy, and then the middle-aged fellow that's left the Treasurer's post is giving a portion of a flat tax change here. If we were to have a true flat tax system, then we would have no other deductions available to us, and that's not what we're seeing here. If we were to have a true flat tax system, business and corporate taxes would be included in that process, and if they had to pay – what is it? – that 10 percent, would they kind of jump out of their skin at that? Would they think that might be a little bit too much? So I think that's not fair. There's no fairness in this whole flat tax process, and I would strongly suggest that Canadians and Albertans do deserve a change or at least a tax reduction.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the federal government in its wisdom was able to give all of us a bit of tax break, in fact a bigger tax break, and we play the tax catch-up game here. That's tax catch-up, not tax ketchup. I get a little worried that the provincial government is going to run out of taxes to cut in playing this game. [interjection]

Well, then, you know, I would wonder how goods and services are paid for in a fair and equitable system. In a fair and equitable and progressive system, we have a vertical and horizontal tax structure, and that allows for citizens to be taxed in a fair and equitable way. So we'll end up with this big tax fight, and the next thing you know, we're going to have to be careful about the economy, because you can only have these . . . [interjection]

The hon. minister over there, that chap from Cypress-Medicine Hat, says: we'll never have to worry about the economy. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? It's pretty volatile, and you know what? We don't want the government to be tax creeps. I wouldn't want that hon. minister to be a tax creep. I want him to be able to give tax cuts. So if we don't keep our eye on the economy and watch how the revenue is generated and how it's coming into the province, at some point we may end up having to take that tax break away.

You know, this government has been in that trouble before. In the late '80s and the early '90s we know what trouble this government

was in. We don't want to see that happen again, Mr. Speaker, so good, prudent fiscal management would be a part of that but also not offering the world without knowing what's going to happen down the road and being able to save for that rainy day, because we know that there isn't a stabilization fund that exists in this government's economic policy. Then, you know, I'm not so sure that we have that room to move for that rainy day.

There are a number of considerations. This is not an easy discussion. It's not an easy debate. I'm going to support, of course, the removal of the 8 percent tax rate for those in the upper-income bracket. What I don't want to see, Mr. Speaker, is an increase in user fees. Just because we have this 8 percent surtax gone and then fairly quickly, I hope, the .5 percent flat tax rate going, I don't want to see an increase in user fees to make it up on the other side, because then I think the government would be cheating Albertans. I don't want to see this government cheating, and I don't want to see this government being called tax creeps.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the floor to my colleagues.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have never heard so many specious arguments about giving Albertans tax cuts. To prevent us hearing any more of this foolishness at this time of night, I would like to move that we adjourn debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I debated long and hard as to whether we should go home, but no standing vote, so I couldn't change our mind on that. I would move that we now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[At 11:30 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 17, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/17

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Dear God, author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask Thy guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition on behalf of Albertans from the following communities: Calmar, Stony Plain, St. Albert, Edmonton, Legal, Fort McMurray, Leduc, Lac La Biche, Calgary, De Winton, Okotoks, and Rocky Mountain House. The citizens are concerned. They write:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to be able to present to the Assembly this afternoon a petition signed by 94 Albertans residing in Calgary and Edmonton. These 94 Albertans petition the Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and present a petition signed by 120 Calgarians who are asking the Assembly "to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MR. GIBBONS: I'd ask that the petition with respect to public health care that I presented yesterday from Edmonton-Manning, Edmonton-Clareview, and Edmonton-Norwood be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and request that the petitions I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning

private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta not to institute a flat tax because:

- it will unfairly shift the tax load from high-income earners onto middle-income Albertans;
- it will deepen the divisions between rich and poor in Alberta society; and
- it will do nothing to simplify the tax system.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm giving oral notice today of a motion to stop the opposition filibuster on a significant tax cut for Albertans. The motion reads: "Be it resolved that debate on second reading of Bill 18, Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, shall not be further adjourned."

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of the Alberta government's mission report from my participation in last year's Team Canada mission to Japan and my subsequent visit to China.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I would like to table today the required copies of Dr. Robert Shapiro's report titled Why Fairness Matters: Progressive Versus Flat Taxes. It amazes me that the Liberals always refer to this report in antagonism to the single-rate tax. After reading this report, it follows three tests that we used: increased simplicity, increased economic growth, and increased equity, and it meets all those tests.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like also to table a news release from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, a federation that looks at all taxes across Canada. It's headed up by saying: Klein's Tax Cuts a Boon to Middle-Class; Bill 18 Critics Out to Lunch.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, in Shapiro's paper his conclusion is progressivity wins. But that's okay.

I would like to table the appropriate number of copies to the hon. Member from Calgary-Egmont from Mr. Kim Cassady in which Mr. Cassady calls upon the Member for Calgary-Egmont to apologize for his mischaracterization of the work that he did when he was an employee of Alberta Treasury. Mr. Speaker, I'm certain a similar letter will come to the Provincial Treasurer if he keeps this up.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a document that I would suggest is required reading for every Canadian legislator. It's the annual report for 1999-2000 that was released yesterday by Mr. Bruce Phillips, the Canadian Privacy Commissioner, with some terrific commentary on Bill 40 and a host of other provincial government initiatives.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of a letter and a comprehensive review of the Genesis Spray Lakes area development done by Robin White. As a result of this review, Robin is totally opposed to the project.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the program for a very significant event that occurred right here on the Legislature Grounds this morning. It was a statue unveiling ceremony of Lord Strathcona by Her Excellency the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three tablings, three documents. The first is a note from *Ontario Hansard*, Finance Committee's Pre-Budget Hearings, February 1, 2000, where Mr. Ernie Eves gives reasons why a flat tax is the route that they want to reject in favour of progressivity.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from Alison Longson of Calgary expressing concern over the Genesis Land Corporation proposal for Spray Lakes.

The third is an e-mail letter from Trevor Nickel of Sherwood Park, and it's critical of the government's health care policy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Allan Shenfield, who is seated in your gallery this afternoon.

Mr. Shenfield was first appointed as returning officer for the electoral division of Stony Plain in 1973 and has served in that position for six consecutive elections. He has also been the municipal returning officer for Parkland county for 35 years. Mr. Shenfield initiated a farm family award in this province, and he is an honorary life director for the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies. He is also very active in the 4-H movement and has been inducted into the 4-H Hall of Fame. The Shenfield Civic Centre in Spruce Grove is named after Allan for his contribution to the community. He has served on numerous provincial and local boards and committees, and he resides within the Hon. Stan Woloshyn's constituency of Stony Plain. Stan would have had lunch with him today, but he was welcoming the Governor General at the Provincial Museum at noon.

Today Allan is accompanied by our Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Brian Fjeldheim. I would like to ask them both to please rise and receive a warm welcome from the Assembly.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions this afternoon. First, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 35 individuals from Idylwyld elementary school. The group visiting

today is comprised of three adults, including Mrs. Cooper, the teacher, accompanied by Miss Sauer and Mrs. Voaklander. The 32 students who are visiting today are in one of the schools that has in combination with another school from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's constituency the concept of sharing a principal. They are visiting the Legislative Assembly as part of their course. They're in the public gallery. I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly this afternoon is of two individuals that I'm proud to represent in this Assembly. They are Al and Edna Sempovich. They are constituents, of course, of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They are very active not only in their retirement years, but they were owners of a grocery store, the Gold Bar IGA in Edmonton-Gold Bar. I would now ask them to rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly 23 grade 5 and 6 students from Rutherford school in my constituency. They are accompanied by Mrs. Kathleen Maser, their teacher, and by Mrs. Patricia Hage and Mrs. Joan Popp. I had the pleasure of reading to this group several months ago, and I found these students very, very attentive and able listeners. I would ask all of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 18 visitors from the Round Hill school. They are seated in the members' gallery. The group includes teachers Mrs. Maxine Sych and Mr. Dan Adrian. I would ask the Assembly to extend to them a traditional warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you 52 bright, enthusiastic young students from the Lacombe Christian school in Lacombe in my constituency. Accompanying the students are teachers Mr. VanDoesburg and Miss Vande Kraats, with parent helpers Mrs. Ekkel, Mrs. Steeneveld, Mrs. Vanderwekken, Mrs. Stikker-Breemhaar, Mrs. Brink, Mrs. Vink, Mrs. Kamps, Mrs. Weenink, Mrs. Schakel, and Mrs. Dereg. They're seated in both galleries. I would ask the students if they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you a group of students that will be here between 2 and 2:30. I would like people to know that I have 34 visitors from Millgrove school in Spruce Grove. They are with their teachers, Mrs. Pat O'Callaghan and Mrs. Deb Schellenberger, and parent helpers Mrs. Donna Fillion and Mrs. Susan Park. They've had a wonderful tour, and they will see us later in the Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to

introduce to you and through you to the other members of the Legislature a young student from John Paul II school in Stony Plain. She was here today on a job shadow, and part of her responsibilities was to help me welcome Her Excellency the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson to the Provincial Museum to view the Lord Strathcona regiment exhibit at the museum. I'd now ask Katlin-Kit Haley to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you today a constituent of mine but also a true friend of the city of Lethbridge and of course a true friend of the Member for Lethbridge-East and myself. We would like to introduce Mayor David Carpenter, city of Lethbridge. I believe he's in the public gallery.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The St. Albert Kinsmen Rainmaker Rodeo is coming to town, and today the Kinsmen had the media kickoff. We have two members, Kinsman Greg Amyotte and K-40 member Bill Hite. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Medical Diagnostic Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For the first time in Alberta's history people will be able to jump the queue by paying for a CAT scan at the Meadowlark MRI centre. CAT or CT scans are used in diagnosing cancer, tumors, osteoporosis, and heart disease. In their letter to doctors advertising their new services, which I'm pleased to table, the private operators advertise that pricing is structured to promote affordability:

Brain	\$200
Spine	\$300
Body or Chest	\$325.

Visa, MasterCard welcome. My questions are to the Premier. Given that Albertans can wait for up to three months for a CAT scan in the public system but can pay out-of-pocket to have one done the next day at the Meadowlark MRI centre, can the Premier please explain the reason for the queue-jumping that he's allowing?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is hardly queue-jumping. I think it applies to all diagnostic services, as it relates to MRIs, as it relates to CAT scans. If something is prescribed by a physician and is deemed to be medically necessary, that person will get the necessary diagnosis, whether it be a CAT scan or an MRI or an X ray or whatever other diagnostic procedure is required. If a person is perfectly healthy and says to a group of diagnostic experts, technicians, and physicians, "Lookit; I just want to come in and get my head checked out or my leg or my arm," then why would the system pay for it? Why would the system pay for it if there's nothing medically wrong. They would have the public pay for a procedure that is not medically necessary.

If the leader of the Liberal opposition wants any further clarification, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Premier would like to explain for someone awaiting a brain scan, a CT scan, why they have to wait as long as they do and that it's not medically necessary.

You know, this is the little health care insurance card. Can the Premier . . .

THE SPEAKER: I recognized the hon. leader for a question.

MRS. MacBETH: Okay. Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain why an Alberta health care insurance card is now not fully covering medically necessary CT and MRI scans?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, if it isn't right now, I'm really quite surprised, because if it's medically necessary and it's prescribed by a doctor, then it is covered.

1:50

I know that anytime I've had an X ray or when I had pneumonia some years ago and it was prescribed, I had the CAT scan. You know, this was before I was the Premier, just to make sure that there was no preference, but it was necessary because I had very serious pneumonia, and I got a CAT scan. It was medically prescribed.

Again, I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly this diagnostic technique is covered, is paid for by Alberta health care. The health card works for medically required diagnostic services.

I would also like to remind the members across the way that through our specific announcement with respect to a major, major expansion of MRI capacity in this province along with very significant dollars that we have put into purchasing additional equipment, we are responding to the need for additional diagnostic equipment across this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When a patient receives a medically necessary service in the private sector, why do they now have to take their Visa or their Interac card along with them?

MR. KLEIN: That statement is totally, absolutely false, untrue, fraudulent, and misleading. Mr. Speaker, this is what the Liberals have been up to all along. I will explain one more time to the people of this province. No use explaining to the Liberals because they either don't know, won't understand, refuse to understand, or are intent on continuing with their malicious campaign of misinformation. To all Albertans: all you need for any medically necessary and required diagnostic procedure is your Alberta health care card.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Protection of Privacy

MRS. MacBETH: We'll send him the bills, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Canada's Privacy Commissioner in his latest report is very critical of the creation of a data profile by the federal government department of Human Resources Development Canada. This appears to fly in the face of past promises to Canadians that government would not gather and organize different kinds of information about citizens without their knowledge and without their consent. My questions are to the Premier. Does this province

provide personal information to the federal government about Albertans without their consent?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, before I answer, the leader of the Liberal opposition said that she'll send me the bill. Well, I challenge her that if she goes in for a diagnostic service that is medically prescribed and she sends the bill, I'll tell you that that is something I'll be taking up with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. So I challenge her. If she has a medically required procedure and it's prescribed, then I challenge her to send me the bill. She won't, because there won't be a bill.

Relative to the question, which by the way is a good question, as a matter of fact I was going to ask the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs whether or not we are required to be part of that insidious federal Liberal government scheme.

THE SPEAKER: I take it now that the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs is supplementing the answer?

MR. KLEIN: Yes.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, the freedom of information and privacy bill is one that has been debated and discussed at some length. As a matter of fact, all parties were part of the process, the discussion and the development of this particular bill.

I think it's important that in the discussion and development of this bill there were some exceptions, there were some rules that indeed allowed for exceptions for releasing information. I think it's critical that we understand that mandatory exceptions prevent the release of information that would harm the business interests of third parties. There is a mandatory exception that stops the release of personal information that would cause an unreasonable invasion of personal privacy. Mandatory exceptions protect cabinet deliberations where the policy is still in the formative stage. This discretionary exception protects advice from officials. Indeed, discretionary exceptions recognize legal privilege and protect confidentially between lawyers and their clients.

These were all exceptions that were put in place with approval and agreement actually. The Liberals agreed with this, so I find it strange that if there were any consequential discussions regarding this, the Liberals find difficulty with this overall process.

MRS. MacBETH: So I take it that the answer is yes, it does provide information to the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, what conditions has this government put on the pass-through of information from Alberta to the federal government on things like student loans, social assistance, and maintenance enforcement? What conditions?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, here is a good question. It's a discussion I wanted to have with the hon. minister. Maybe he has the answer now, and I'll ask him to reply.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I've laid out the exceptions. Indeed, we need to know the exact details of what it is that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is voicing, but we do have the exceptions and other than those exceptions information is of course made accessible. I've laid out the details of the exceptions. If it's the pleasure of the House for me to repeat them, I will do that. But unless it fits under the exceptions of this particular area, that information is available.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this minister is the custodian of that

personal information. How will this minister assure Albertans that their personal information will not be used without their consent?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's important to recognize that we abide by the legislation, the legislation that was built in this House, and ultimately it was at the agreement of all of the participants in this Legislature that this legislation was developed. Consequently, it is our fullest intention to abide by the legislation as it was presented unless there are amendments, and if there are amendments to this legislation, then there will be changes made.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Homelessness

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The book *No Fixed Address* profiles the deplorable condition of the homeless in Calgary. People in Calgary are living in shanties built in public parks with no food and are eating by trapping wildlife and pets. Calgary is a tragic tale of two cities in one, for the prosperous and for the poor. My questions are to the Premier. Given that this government claims to have a policy on homelessness, what is this policy doing to put the Calgary homeless into homes and food in their stomachs?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, in society there are those who fall through the cracks. That is unfortunate. I'm sure that if the Calgary Homeless Foundation and all of the wonderful agencies that are working to accommodate the homeless in Calgary were made aware of the situation, they would certainly be there to help.

I think it's shameful, quite frankly it's disgraceful that the leader of the Liberal opposition would allude to the situation and the efforts that are being made in Calgary in such a derogatory way, Mr. Speaker. This is probably one of the most aggressive municipalities in the country relative to addressing the needs and the plight of the homeless.

The Calgary Homeless Foundation, as I understand it, was one of the first agencies and might still be one of the first agencies of its kind to co-ordinate all of the activities of the homeless in Calgary. They've got In from the Cold, where I understand that something like 53 churches now have opened their church basements to accommodate those on an overnight stay, and they're fed a good breakfast and a good lunch. As well, we have agencies like the Mustard Seed society. We have agencies like the Calgary Drop-In Centre, Mr. Speaker.

2:00

There are numerous agencies doing a wonderful job to address the needs of the homeless in the city of Calgary, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that those agencies, along with the Calgary Homeless Foundation, are now looking at the situation to which the leader of the Liberal opposition alludes.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, *No Fixed Address* is a fund-raising project of the Calgary Drop-In Centre. The question is: what is the government doing? What funds is the government giving to commit to the very critical shortage of housing for the homeless in Calgary?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Minister of Community Development respond, but I can tell you that the Calgary Homeless Foundation got off the ground with a very substantial amount of seed money from the government of the province of Alberta. I'll have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to point out that there are the homeless ones which our policy addresses. There's also another category of homeless which are in transition from not being able to have a roof over their head immediately to being able to have, if you will, some ongoing shelter.

With respect to the homeless situation in Calgary there are currently meetings going on between the provincial government, the federal government, the city government, and about 100 agencies within that to address the plan in a concerted effort. This is not a new knee-jerk reaction. It has been going on.

I might add, Mr. Speaker, that both in Edmonton and in Calgary throughout the past winter we monitored the situation very, very closely. There were not any people left out in the cold. Everybody was provided with shelter when needed. We'll continue to do so.

We will continue to work and to provide funds for the homeless both in Calgary and Edmonton and any other area of the province that so requires. However, we will do it with a concerted plan, not chucking money in every willy-nilly direction. We're going to ensure that it goes to where it goes.

AN HON. MEMBER: Where's your policy?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Well, if you would read it, you would know what's in it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, would the Premier agree that his government has compounded the homelessness issue by failing to provide adequate programs to address mental illness and people being discharged from mental institutions, addictions support through AADAC, and family violence issues?

MR. KLEIN: The answer to that question, Mr. Speaker, is no.

Since the leader of the Liberal opposition raised the issue, I will have the appropriate ministers respond as to what we are doing to address these situations.

MR. JONSON: First of all, very succinctly, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the mentally ill we have added significantly to the funding for community mental health services in Calgary. We have strengthened the crisis intervention capability and will be doing more work there. Action is being taken in that particular area of the member's question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an excellent opportunity to address what the Alberta lottery fund does with respect to the questions from the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, if the member would go to www.aglc.gov.ab.ca, she would see that last year the Calgary Homeless Foundation received over \$2 million from the Alberta lottery fund. If you would look under Children's Services in the Alberta lottery fund, which is fully disclosed in the financial statement, you would see that in 2000-2001 the fetal alcohol initiative is \$1 million; 1999-2000, \$1 million; permanency planning for children in care, \$200,000.

Mr. Speaker, over 60 percent of the Alberta lottery fund is dictated towards health, education, and infrastructure. It's very clear that this government supports the initiatives that Albertans find important to them at the time they want to have the money to solve the issues that are in question.

THE SPEAKER: The Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Yes, I'd like to supplement this too. Bill 18 brings in an increased personal exemption which will take many of the working poor off the tax rolls completely. Minimum wage earners in the province of Alberta, those working 2,000 hours a year or less, will pay no income tax in the province of Alberta, but they still have to pay federal tax.

THE SPEAKER: We'll have one more. The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the homeless in Calgary but also here in Edmonton, I think it would be important for especially the opposition to be aware that we've actually upped it to \$10 million.

THE SPEAKER: A question was asked. A response has been recognized. The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment to sum up.

MR. DUNFORD: What we've done to address this issue, Mr. Speaker, is to up the funding for homelessness from our department to \$10 million this current fiscal year.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much.
The hon. leader of the third party.

Income Tax

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whatever one thinks of the Mike Harris Tories in Ontario – and I'm definitely not a fan – at least when it comes to tax cutting, they are fair to all income groups, unlike the Tory government here in Alberta. I quote briefly from an *Ontario Hansard* document tabled earlier. In it Treasurer Ernie Eves explained why Ontario rejected a flat tax. He said, "It's not a very progressive way of taxing people. Obviously, those people who make more in society should pay more in terms of a higher rate." My questions are to the Premier. In developing its own personal income tax policy why doesn't the government of Alberta accept and emulate Mr. Eves' position that people who make more money should pay tax at a higher rate than people who make less money?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, they do. It will always be that way, whether it's under a progressive tax system that promotes bracket creep – that's the most insidious way, that's where you start to absolutely pay an unfair share because of working hard and striving to earn more.

Mr. Speaker, a single-rate system still will require people in higher income brackets to pay more taxes. It's as simple as that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the government justify imposing an unfair flat tax of 10.5 percent while their Ontario cousins are maintaining progressivity by bringing in five tax brackets ranging from six to 17 percent?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, after Bill 18 is passed and once the tax is implemented, I would be more than happy as the Premier of this province to stand up along with my colleagues and compare any day the personal taxes being paid across the board by the citizens of Alberta and the citizens of Ontario.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, in Ontario with their five brackets the poor people are still paying taxes. We're going to take 190,000 off. This hon. member misleads Albertans by standing up and taking small snapshots of one tax plan versus another. The other day he said that a person making \$1.9 million was going to save \$70,000, but he forgot to tell the people that that individual pays \$773,000 in income tax.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Now Albertans are finding out what this bill is about.

THE SPEAKER: The floor has been given to the hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the government refusing to back away from its unfair and regressive flat tax policy because doing so would be politically damaging to the Reform Alliance leadership candidate endorsed by the Premier? If not, what other explanation could there be?

THE SPEAKER: Party politics doesn't come into the question period.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

2:10 Public-sector Workplace Stress

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent study of 1,500 people including 140 in Alberta found that 68 percent of Alberta's public-sector workers feel stressed, listing workload and the ability to meet their financial needs as the primary causes. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. What is the minister going to do about this?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've received some information about the survey, but it's difficult for me to comment right now on its accuracy. The member in his preamble did point out that out of a survey of 1,500 with only 140 from Alberta – there really is quite a large margin of error in that kind of documentation. As I understand it, the margin of error would be in the order of 8 percent, so I suppose it's questionable.

The one thing, of course, that we don't know is: of the 140 people that were interviewed from Alberta, how many were actually public-sector workers? I understand that there are roughly 183,000 public-sector workers in Alberta. This, of course, includes federal, provincial, municipal, health care, education, and advanced education. I think we would need a number within that survey of more than a thousand before I start to knee-jerk to any results that are indicated.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: does the minister have any other studies that would refute or substantiate the findings of this study?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, it's always dangerous to get involved in dueling studies; I understand that. But we recently did a survey of 3,585 government workers, so we believe we have some statistical credibility with that type of survey. This was done last November and also again in January, and we were showing an employee satisfaction level of something like 80 percent. By the way, Mr.

Speaker, this was a dramatic increase from a survey of 1997. In fact, we went from a satisfaction level of 67 percent up to 80. The *Globe and Mail* recently reported on Edmonton-based PCL contractors as one of the best of 35 companies in Canada to work for, and their survey found again an 80 percent satisfaction level. So we have a pretty good track record, but we want to do better.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental to the same minister: would the minister please respond to the causes of stress in the workplace?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I think the survey probably indicated some of those. Of course, we have workload; we have concerns about the relationship between work and family.

Mr. Speaker, if public-sector workers in Alberta are actually feeling more stressed, maybe it's because there's more going on in Alberta. We've talked at length in this Assembly about the Alberta advantage. We know that our economy leads the nation. We know that there are all kinds of people coming to our province. Of course, they're not bringing the roads with them; they're not bringing their hospitals and their schools. So I suspect there is a higher workload.

I noticed that a representative of the United Nurses of Alberta said that at least in their area people were dissatisfied with the incredible workload and the failure of things to change. Well, I would point out that Bill 11 was an attempt to do that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Income Tax

(continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that this government loves to experiment rather than plan. First it was with health care, and now it's with tax collection. Can the Premier explain how the government knows there will be a benefit to Albertans from its planned flat tax when the real Treasurer admitted in answers to written questions to the opposition that there has been no study to confirm the spin-off benefits boasted in the 2000 budget?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal opposition is insulting the intelligence of many public service professionals who work in the department of Treasury, one of whom now works for the Liberal Party and was one of the authors of one of the reports that laid the foundation for the introduction of the single-rate tax system. There was a tremendous amount of work done on this particular proposal, which now is in the form of legislation, by literally hundreds of dedicated, educated, and committed public service employees in the department of Treasury. This hon. member should know all about that, because at one time she was the executive assistant to the Provincial Treasurer.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, how does the Premier explain the government's failure to study the impact of its tax plan as revealed in the answers to written questions 217, 218, 220, 226, 227, 231, and 232, which said that there was no information available? Is it arrogance, or is it indifference?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we do not try to confuse the issue with bafflegab like the Liberals. If the hon. member wants to know the

impact in simple terms, terms that even she can understand, I'll have the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer explain.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is the real reason the Premier has invoked closure on Bill 18 and Bill 19 because they can't defend their flat tax policy?

MR. KLEIN: Oh, no. Oh, no, Mr. Speaker. The media asked me if we can end the debate on this issue, and I indicated that we do indeed have the technology, and we're not afraid to use it in this particular case. Not afraid at all. No hesitation whatsoever. I think it is the right thing to do, to get 192,000 low-income Albertans off the provincial tax roll altogether, to give very, very significant tax breaks on a provincial basis to mid-income wage earners, to give tax breaks to seniors.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this province want to see that kind of legislation go through, and they don't want to see senseless filibustering by the Liberal Party to keep the money out of their pockets. They should be ashamed of themselves.

Speaker's Ruling Improper Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. May I refer you please to *Beauchesne* 428(r): "A question . . . must not . . . refer to debate or answers to questions of the current Session."

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

National Parks Policy

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been questioned by numerous tourism operators in Jasper national park about what is happening in the park with their industry on the ever changing policies. My first question is to the Minister of Economic Development. In light of the fact that the federal government has recently introduced a new National Parks Act which has many residents and business owners in my constituency concerned, what are the government's concerns with regards to this specific legislation called Bill C-27?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is concerned from two perspectives, the first being the content of the legislation itself and the second the manner of imposition of the legislation. I'd like to deal with the content, if I might.

The legislation itself creates a great deal of uncertainty not only for business owners but for residents within the parks by virtue of the fact that the legislation is significantly increasing the authority of the federal minister and the federal cabinet to, for example, terminate leases without due process or compensation.

2:20

We also have the issue regarding self-determination. For the past number of years there has been some movement on the part of the federal government to allow communities within the national parks to have some degree of autonomy and local government. Unfortunately, the legislation is taking a step back, and we're looking at there being some very significant restrictions in that regard.

Another issue for us is the lack of a balanced approach, Mr. Speaker. For us ecological integrity is very important, but what is also important for us is that there is access and use of those parks for

the taxpayer and for tourists. We don't see that balance being maintained.

Mr. Speaker, the national parks in Alberta comprise about 60 percent of the national parks in the country, and therefore for us it is a very important issue. In fact the majority of national park visitation takes place in Alberta.

So I guess to sum it up, it's a concern not only for this government; it's also a concern for tourism operators both nationally and within Alberta, for the residents living within those parks, and also for the general public at large. We feel there has not been meaningful consultation on this particular issue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question: given that these are reasonable concerns, can the Minister of Economic Development please tell us what this government is doing to address its concerns with regards to Bill C-27?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I just indicated, this government believes in a balanced approach with respect to the national parks. That is why we recently adopted four principles pertaining to those parks. Those principles relate to the parks being affordable and accessible, not only again to Albertans but to Canadians and international visitors, also that the ecological vitality of those parks be maintained, that the parks continue to be the cornerstone of the tourism industry, which they are at this point in time, and, as I indicated earlier, that those Albertans living within the parks have some degree of self-determination.

Mr. Speaker, I have during the past month asked the federal minister, Ms Copps, repeatedly for meetings not only to discuss Bill C-27 but also to try and develop an approach which would facilitate meaningful input on this bill from not only Albertans but also the tourism sector and this government. We're also quite prepared to discuss opportunities to develop co-operative research on the impact that human use and access is having on the parks.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we recently had a federal/provincial/territorial meeting in Calgary on May 8 and 9. The national parks issue was discussed at length. In fact, I'm happy to say that the ministers from across the country unanimously endorsed Alberta's position with respect to the national parks. Really all we're trying to do at this point in time is get to the table and have some legitimate input and have an opportunity for input into what is happening in Ottawa with respect to the legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question: in light of what the Minister of Economic Development has told us, how will federal Bill C-27 impact tourism in the national parks?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's going to have a very significant impact, and I'd like to briefly outline for the House how important the national parks are and tourism is generally to this province.

As many of you know, tourism is the fourth largest sector in this province. It generates approximately \$4 billion per year in revenues. We are attempting through the new economic strategy which was released by this government, entitled *Get Ready Alberta*, to see those revenues increase to \$6 billion by our centenary in 2005.

The mountain national parks themselves, Mr. Speaker, account for about 20 percent of our total tourism revenues. In fact, the expenditures by visitors to our national parks were about \$950 million in 1999, and when you add in the spin-off benefits to the rest of the province, they exceed one billion dollars. For the ski areas themselves this amount is about \$329 million.

Part of our strategy in working with the federal government is trying to promote the national parks as all-season parks. We're very concerned that some of the restrictions and regulations being proposed by the federal government will have a very significant impact on seasons beyond the traditional summer season.

So our concern, Mr. Speaker, is that while we want to, as I indicated earlier, maintain the ecological viability and vitality of those parks, we nevertheless have to recognize that there are businesses there, that there are people living there, that there are facilities there which people from not only Canada but throughout the world use and appreciate. So we're trying to again find that balanced approach to ensure that we do not unduly impact what is a very vibrant sector of our economy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Medical Diagnostic Services (continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 12 of this year the Premier said:

I can guarantee you . . . if a doctor prescribes an MRI, that will be paid for by the publicly funded health care system whether it's in a hospital . . . or whether it's in a private clinic. It will be paid for if it is prescribed.

This afternoon we heard the Premier say that in fact he would pay for any MRIs that were performed in private clinics and that the Official Opposition should send him the bill. I have in front of me a letter from a Mrs. Hooper actually to the Member for St. Albert requesting \$475 from this government for her husband's MRI test. My questions are to the minister of health. Will he confirm the statements made by the Premier this afternoon and on April 12 that he will pay for that MRI?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I will certainly confirm that an MRI that is prescribed as being medically necessary, Mr. Speaker, will be provided and paid for through the publicly owned and operated MRIs, which I've mentioned we are expanding in number considerably, or in those cases where there is an MRI under contract to a regional health authority, it will be paid for there too. Physicians that I'm aware of do indicate that MRIs are required, and they do direct them to those publicly funded and supported sources.

MS LEIBOVICI: I'll ask the question again, Mr. Speaker. If a patient has a referral from a doctor in this province, will the Alberta health care insurance plan pay for a medically required MRI whether it is in the public sector or in one of the private clinics?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's the same question, so I will give the same answer. I think that's probably appropriate.

The physician of course selects and recommends the proper diagnostic procedure, and if it is an MRI which is within a hospital setting, publicly owned, publicly operated, it will of course be paid for. If it is an MRI that is under contract to provide services to a regional health authority, it will certainly be paid for there too.

MS LEIBOVICI: As there are only two MRIs in this province that

are under contract with a regional health authority, is the minister of health now contradicting the Premier of this province, who said this afternoon as well as on April 12:

I can guarantee you . . . if a doctor prescribes an MRI, that will be paid for by the publicly funded health care system whether it's in a hospital or . . . in a private clinic.

The Premier put no conditions on that statement whatsoever.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I have outlined the situation. I think it parallels and is exactly what the Premier said.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Beverage Container Recycling

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's beverage manufacturers, consumers, and retailers have shown great support and responsibility for beverage container recycling as evidenced by the success of container recycling programs throughout this province. The recycling system is user pay. Consumers are encouraged to return their containers through a deposit and refund system, but the actual cost of recycling is borne by manufacturers, retailers, and consumers. It is my understanding, however, that there is still an area where government and therefore all taxpayers are subsidizing the cost of bottle recycling. My question is to the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister indicate, if indeed his department continues to subsidize the cost of recycling liquor bottles?

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's this kind of keen scrutiny of costs and spending by governments that would make this individual member an ideal candidate for the national presence, so you can see that there's certainly that kind of emphasis there. As a matter of fact, she would represent my constituency, so I would support her.

With respect to the question cost savings always continue in a good government. In fact, we continue to look at cost efficiencies, a continuous improvement program.

The member is absolutely correct. The AGLC is currently and has been for some time subsidizing the cost of recycling wine, spirit, cooler, and cider containers. As the previous Minister of Environment and the present Minister of Environment have done – they say that this in fact is not a correct practice, that in fact those who use the product should pay for the product. I think that's a reasonable philosophy to follow, and for that reason we are going to save 3.3 million Canadian dollars each year in changing this program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister indicate if he has plans to end this taxpayer subsidy of bottle recycling and have liquor and wine bottle recycling paid for by those who sell and consume the product, as is the case with other beverage containers?

MR. SMITH: Well, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I mean, any taxpayer subsidies where taxpayer's subsidies don't belong has always been a watchword of this government, and it continues. In fact, we will announce today that this subsidy will end June 30 of this year. After that date, recycling costs for spirit, wine, cider, and cooler containers will be managed like beer and other beverage containers. The cost

of recycling the container will be included in the wholesale price of the product. This will save more than \$3 million per year for taxpayers and will ensure that those who manufacture and those who sell and consume alcohol products are paying the cost of recycling the containers as opposed to the cost being covered by taxpayers on a broad cycle base.

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, my third question to the same minister. My constituents are very supportive of recycling. Can the minister please indicate how this change in policy can be expected to affect consumers?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact I grew up collecting bottles. It's something that I think young people across Alberta have done, I'm sure at Barrhead-Westlock. I know I started collecting bottles in Swan Hills. As a matter of fact, I was able to buy my first share of stock. This practice is going to continue in Alberta. Albertans will have the responsibility of being able to collect and return.

For example, the cost of what we used to know as a 26, 750 millilitres, will increase by about 6 cents, and the wholesale price of a plastic liquor container will increase by about 3 cents. Then it will be up to manufacturers, retailers, and those in the private sector, just as there are private liquor stores, to determine how the small increases in cost will be incorporated into the price of their products.

Pricing, marketing practices, business practices are not the issue of the regulator. The regulator regulates the substance.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Long-term Care

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Broda report on long-term care was due to the minister in November of 1999. Almost half a year later we are still waiting for all its recommendations to be approved. In the meantime, seniors like those in Shepherd's Care Kensington Village wait for long-term care beds. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister explain the delays in approving the requests for Shepherd's Care in having their temporarily funded 19 long-term care beds changed to permanent?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd just like to comment on the preamble to the member's question. We have certainly taken a number of initiatives with respect to long-term care and assisted living and the overall home care and aging in place initiatives that are outlined in the Broda report. The member across the way may recall that we committed significant capital dollars sometime ago, in this case to the Capital regional health authority, to enter into plans and arrangements for expanding long-term care capacity in this province. Prior to that, the Capital regional health authority had also received financial assistance in terms of opening about 200 beds in long-term care in the General hospital.

Now, with respect to the additional 200 beds that they are planning plus some assisted living accommodation in the Capital region, this was done through a process of requesting proposals, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding that after looking over a number of excellent proposals, the Capital regional health authority has approved at least two or three projects, as I recall, and those projects are going ahead. There's a very significant follow-up on that aspect of the Broda report in the capital plan of Alberta Health and Wellness and the capital plan of the regional health authority here in Edmonton.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, in that the minister has answered all the questions as to capital needs of long-term care, I must remind the

minister that this is not capital. This is operating. These beds exist. I will ask the minister again: will the temporarily funded beds, the 19 beds that exist today, be funded permanently in the Shepherd's Care centre?

MR. JONSON: I would like to add to the member's question. As he well knows, the Capital regional health authority is in charge of administering long-term care within the region. They did receive a significant global increase in funding this year in their budget, and there was additional money targeted to the long-term care area. If I recall correctly, it was some 15 million or 20 millions of dollars across the province, which would work out to probably about \$6 million here in Edmonton. That goes into the operating base on top of the general increase in funding for the Capital region. I expect that as they have in the past, the Capital region will use that money wisely in the area intended. In terms of the specific allocations across their region, Mr. Speaker, that is something that is managed by the Capital health authority.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. Given that the budget as outlined will not cover all of the current needs, how is the minister going to answer those seniors like the seniors in the Shepherd's Care centre now waiting for beds who are waiting for additional beds that are not available today?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the answer is very simply that Alberta Health and Wellness on behalf of the provincial government and the people of Alberta is making very significant additional commitments of funds to the whole area of long-term care both in operational terms and in capital terms. We are following through on the majority of recommendations of the Broda report particularly as it applies to getting the needed long-term beds in place and also, as the Broda report recommends, promoting and fostering through support of home care and contracts the development and expansion of assisted living facilities. That is going, I think, very well. There are many projects under way there, and we're acting upon the need that is there.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds we'll call upon the first of seven members to participate in Recognitions today. Before that, I would just like to advise all members of the House that the applause and the recognition they gave a little earlier to a school group introduced by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert — they are now in the House.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

2:40

2000 Ship for World Youth

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the generosity of the government of Japan nine young Canadians will participate in the 2000 Ship for World Youth program. For two full months this fall 120 Japanese and 146 youths from 16 nations around the world will live together on the *Nippon Maru* as she sails through the Pacific Ocean. Sailing from Tokyo, its ports of call will include Vladivostok, Honolulu, Tahiti, Fiji, New Zealand, and Singapore.

The Ship for World Youth is sponsored by the Japanese government to promote international understanding and friendship between youths from Japan and around the world. On board the delegates

will attend seminars and lectures by Japanese university professors, and they will also have a chance to lead seminars on topics related to their own country. Young people from across Canada are now being recruited by the Canadian Federation of Students on behalf of the departments of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

I would like to thank the Japanese government for this wonderful opportunity for Canadian youth. Information about previous trips can be viewed on the Internet at www.swytravels.com. Applications must be received by June 16, and they are available at www.swap.ca. This is a wonderful opportunity for our Alberta youth to consider.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: I can't resist. I sincerely hope I'm not too old.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Al and Edna Sempovich

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to recognize Al and Edna Sempovich of Edmonton-Gold Bar this afternoon. Mr. Sempovich was born and raised in Alberta, and he and Edna have lived in Edmonton since 1960. Al was the owner/manager of Gold Bar IGA for 12 years. He was a scoutmaster of the 3rd Oilfield troop and is a lifetime member of the Leduc/Devon Oilfield Historical Society.

I would like to emphasize that Al and Edna are also vigorous supporters of a strong public health care system in this province. They have written letters to both the Prime Minister and the Premier and attended rallies and town hall meetings to fight the looming demise of our health care system. Al and Edna, who have three children, three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, are fighting not only for the future of everyone in the province regarding health care, but they're also fighting for the future of their own family.

I would like to recognize their efforts and commend them to all hon. members of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Calgary and District Heritage Fair

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our country's heritage is one of our most important assets. It tells us who we are, where we came from, and what influences shaped our development as a nation. It ties one generation to another. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to recognize the Calgary and District Heritage Fair, held last Saturday in Calgary. This fair was organized to help students in grades 4 to 9 learn more about their Canadian heritage.

Students participating in the event presented to a panel of judges an individual heritage project which was based on discovery and celebration of their ancestry, diversity, and culture. Judges included politicians from all levels of government, including many of my Calgary colleagues, as well as community members and heritage officials. I'm pleased to recognize the many volunteers who gave freely of their time and to acknowledge the many students who worked so hard to present such outstanding displays. They are to be congratulated for their efforts.

I encourage all members of this Assembly to participate in future heritage activities with their constituents and to recognize the strength that our heritage brings to this province and to our nation.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

One Child, Our Future

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in the Legislature and recognize the efforts of Eastwood elementary school, the choir, and its remarkable principal, Linda Love-Walsh.

The Edmonton school district was looking for ways to commemorate the millennium, and Linda came up with the idea of writing a song for her students to sing. The song, called *One Child, Our Future*, talks about the fact that no matter what circumstances a child is born under, he or she has the potential to be a world leader. Linda says that's why all children need to be nurtured.

The music teacher at Kirkness school, Johan Brinkman, arranged the music, and a group of public school teachers formed a band called Men in Black and A Lady. The band along with the school choir will record a CD of the song next week, and the CD will go on sale at the school for a minimum price. This, Mr. Speaker, is an example of how hard our school professionals work, and I want to congratulate Linda, her colleagues, and her choir for a great job.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Fort McMurray Oil Barons

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise as MLA for Fort McMurray, the oil sands capital of the world, and offer my congratulations to the Fort McMurray Oil Barons junior A hockey team on winning the Royal Bank Cup – in a storybook ending in front of thousands of hometown fans they defeated the Ontario Sabre Cats 2 to 1 – to the players, coaches, staff, directors, and 650 volunteers, corporate and local sponsors, the AJHL, and CHA. The Fort McMurray team truly does live up to our slogan. We do have the energy. Congratulations to all involved.

To conclude, as CFRN sports anchor Peter Loubardias appropriately said on national television: not only did Fort McMurray host a national championship; they won it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Riaz Choudhry

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize a former city of Edmonton public servant and now a prominent businessman, Riaz Choudhry. Mr. Choudhry's personal integrity and his commitment to public service, professionalism, and primacy of public interest are exemplary.

He helped the Edmonton taxpayers save \$5 million when in July '91 he advised the city council and the media that a \$17 million sewer tunnel was not needed. The project was stopped but not before \$12 million had already been spent. Nevertheless, for blowing the whistle, he was fired from his job as a senior drainage engineer, embroiling him in a lengthy and costly legal battle with the city. As a result, Mr. Choudhry was forced to spend his time and thousands of dollars to clear his name. Recently Mr. Choudhry was finally vindicated in a settlement reached between him and the city of Edmonton.

I applaud Mr. Choudhry for his courage to speak out in support of the public interest and for faithfully serving Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

2001 World Championships in Athletics

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton is the first

city in North America to host the World Championships in Athletics. The event is expected to bring more than 3,000 athletes, coaches, and officials from more than 200 countries to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, to compete in 24 men's and 22 women's athletic events. Hundreds of thousands of spectators will watch the events live at Commonwealth Stadium.

I'm proud to say that running concurrently with the athletics competition will be the Festival of the Worlds, an arts and cultural celebration which will feature local, national, and international artists performing throughout the capital region.

As a board member of the 2001 World Championships in Athletics I'm very pleased to say that on May 14 young Canadian athletes competed in Calgary and joined hundreds of thousands of youngsters from over 150 countries competing for a chance to attend the eighth IAAF World Championships in Athletics in Edmonton on August 3 through 12, 2001. The fifth edition of this will bring youngsters together, and I'm pleased to say that this is the way that the IAA wants to encourage young amateur athletes.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on a point of order.

Point of Order Reflections on Nonmembers

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is the second time in as many days that I've had to rise on a similar point of order, and I'm rising under Standing Order 23, particularly 23(1), and also your ruling regarding referring to people outside the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, during question period the Premier, the leader of the government, mentioned without directly referencing him by name – certainly the implication was clear because he was speaking about a paper co-authored by Cassady, Ruggeri, and Van Wart, a paper titled *On the Classification and Interpretation of Global Progressivity Measures*, a paper which is now marked as sessional paper 957/2000. It was tabled by the Acting Provincial Treasurer yesterday. In referencing that paper and the work done by one of the three authors, Mr. Cassady, the Premier said that he, Mr. Cassady, “now works for the Liberal Party.”

Of course, this is the second time, as I've said, that a member of Executive Council has been requested to apologize and to be called to order for misrepresenting both the work and the deeds of Mr. Cassady, who of course is not a member of this Assembly and cannot defend himself.

2:50

Mr. Cassady – and you'll be particularly interested in this, Mr. Speaker – is an employee of the Legislative Assembly as he is employed working in my constituency office. He's not an employee of the Liberal Party in Alberta and, to the best of my knowledge, has never been an employee of the Liberal Party.

Yesterday the Speaker made a point of clarification when I was speaking to a government motion regarding the reappointment of the Auditor General and inadvertently said that the Auditor General was hired by the government. Of course, the Auditor General is a legislative officer, and the Speaker quite correctly straightened that out for me. I would expect that the same should happen here.

What was more troubling than the Premier's misrepresentation of Mr. Cassady and his place of employment was when the Minister of Government Services – and I've heard other members of Executive Council subsequently – then said, “Well, what's the difference?” as though it was the same thing to work for a political party in this

province and to work for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Certainly members of the Liberal Party and the Official Opposition don't confuse the two. We know, of course, that the government has pressed civil servants into service during campaigns. We've had that discussion before, Mr. Speaker, but we understand the distinction and think it's important. I expect that you would think it would be important, and I would ask you to call the Premier to order.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, hardly a point of order. I think the hon. member doth protest too much. Clearly, people who work within our constituency offices are employed by the Legislature and not employed by a political party. That's clear, and we appreciate that and certainly appreciate the clarification from the hon. member across the way as to what the exact employment status of the individual referred to is. It's clear as well, of course, that the people who support us in our constituency offices work for us as members and work to get our messages out to our constituents and to hear messages from our constituents, and to that extent they're not anywhere nearly as nonpartisan as perhaps an officer of the Legislature like the Auditor General might be.

But even that being the case, I had a brief discussion with the hon. Premier earlier this afternoon, and he's authorized me to say that if in any way the suggestion that the character of the individual referred to was besmirched or his integrity called into question by alleging that he worked for the Liberal Party, we sincerely apologize to that member for any acrimony that he might suffer publicly by having been associated with the Liberal Party in that context, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, the chair believes he heard a withdrawal of the statement.

The statement itself. The hon. leader of the government said:

Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal opposition is insulting the intelligence of many public service professionals who work in the department of Treasury, one of whom now works for the Liberal Party and was one of the authors of one of the reports that laid the foundation for the introduction of the single-rate tax system.

Needless to say, it would be unknown to the chair whom these individuals were referring to, and now it seems that in this exchange that has happened.

Clearly, there was no attack or criticism of any individual with respect to that, and certainly care has now been given to indicate that the individual in question, whose name has now been identified, is under contract to the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta and as such must be nonpartisan. Must be nonpartisan. The chair would take great, great, great governance with hon. members if the chair, who happens to be the Speaker and the key administrator for the Legislative Assembly Office, were to find that employees in constituency offices were anything but nonpartisan. Great care should be taken by hon. members in ensuring that their employees are nonpartisan.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move that Written Questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 21, 23, 24, and 25.

[Motion carried]

Hospital Closures

Q21. Ms Leibovici moved that the following question be accepted.

How many hospital beds have been closed in the province from January 1, 1993, to January 1, 2000, how many nurses have lost their jobs due to those closures, and how many doctors have lost their jobs due to those closures?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason for this written question is very simple. We have over the last number of years heard conflicting figures as to what the number of hospital beds were in the province at a certain point in time and are right now. There has been much controversy around the fact that the amount of hospital beds per 1,000 population is insufficient to meet the needs.

In addition, we have heard much about there not being enough nurses and doctors available to provide services. One of the questions that has never really been answered by this government is: how many nurses directly lost their positions as a result of the closures that we saw in '93, '94, and over a period of time, actually, and how many of the doctors either lost their jobs or, perhaps, have left as a result of the closures and the disregard that this government has had for the health care professionals?

So that is some of the reasoning behind the written question, and I hope for a favourable response.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness I'm pleased to indicate that we'll accept the question.

In providing my own comments and not the minister's comments with respect to the acceptance of the question, I would be certain to assure Albertans and the members opposite that many hospital beds have been closed in this province not due to government cutbacks, as has been alleged over and over again by members of the opposition, but because of changes in health care service delivery.

I know from my experience as a member of the University of Alberta hospitals board that when we were moving many surgeries from inpatient surgeries and inpatient procedures, which sometimes required three, four, five, or six days of stay, to a day-surgery basis, wards were closed, and nurses were laid off as a result of that.

So just to put the question and answer into context, the Minister of Health and Wellness has indicated that he will be accepting the question and will provide the response requested, but one should not expect, then, the Liberal opposition to bring forward the numbers in the responses that are being given and to use that as a suggestion that that all happened as a result of changes in funding. Technology, changes in service delivery, changes in drugs, and many, many other things have impacted the health care system over the last 10 years.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to speak. In fact, I had not intended to do so until I heard the provocative comments of the Government House Leader, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. You know, if he thinks that the government of the province of Alberta, with which I completely disassociate myself, chopped those beds in the Calgary health region because of new technology, that is nonsense.

3:00

You know, it would do for all members to remember that the city

of Calgary, or Calgary region 4, has grown by 116,000 new people – 116,000 new people – since this government started closing hospitals.

MR. DOERKSEN: Good economic policy.

MR. DICKSON: No, but here's what we have. We now have, by the government's own numbers, 68 more acute care beds, they argue. In fact, if members look at the Calgary regional health authority business plan, 2000-2003, what you will find is that the region now claims that we have 1,816 staffed hospital beds. In 1994-1995 we had 1,748 staffed hospital beds. So we've got an increase, by my math, of 68 beds. If you looked at any statistics in terms of beds per 1,000 population, what you'd find is that in Calgary the bed supply is critically deficient. This is a sure rebuttal, I guess. If the Minister of Justice thinks that Albertans should not read anything, if they think this was all just a question of new technology and less invasive kinds of surgery that accounted for this, it's just not so.

In fact, while I'm speaking about the loss of hospital beds, members might also refer to page 32 in the same document. What you find referenced there is that we have 30 people on any given day waiting for access to acute care hospitals. We have 300 people in the community waiting for a bed. We've got 30 people in the community urgently requiring a long-term care bed. So, I mean, we have major concerns.

If you look at page 37 of the report, Mr. Speaker – and I'll be happy to table the report, but I assume the government has access to it because it's their stepchild, the CRHA. We talk about on page 37, and I quote: the extremely high occupancy rate in medical beds means that some medical patients are cared for in surgical beds. Close quote. It goes on to say: the utilization of improvement projects will help to move the number of postponements due to capacity problems towards zero by 2003.

So it's interesting that the CRHA doesn't have a lot of historical information. There's material there they don't like to talk about, so we simply talk about where things are now. I mean, the point is that by their own report we've got some serious problems in these areas. I think that a standard acute care hospital would have normally about 350 hospital beds, plus or minus. Then we lost the Grace hospital. We lost the Holy Cross in beautiful downtown Calgary-Buffalo.

MRS. NELSON: I was born there.

MR. DICKSON: My daughter was born there as well, Minister of Government Services.

Then, in fact, it seems to me that we lost – I think we had about 800; the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View would know better than I – 700 or 800 beds in the General hospital. [interjection] I think the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View is giving me some advice, but I can't hear all of it. She may want to participate in this discussion.

I think the point is this: we had three hospitals that closed, a substantial number of beds lost, this huge population growth. All in all, just a major problem. We need the statistics, Mr. Speaker, to get at the full dimensions of the problems. [interjections] I'm cautioned by members opposite that I will be talking us out of a positive response to the written question.

As I say again in my own defence, if the Minister of Justice had not made his observation, I would have been happy to move to the vote, but I wanted to clarify those comments and encourage all members, every member, to read the 2000-2003 business plan for the CRHA. The statistics in there are scary.

Thank you.

MRS. GORDON: I'm looking at this written question, and I find it rather strange that this question would be asked going back to January 1 of 1993. I concur with the remarks made by the Government House Leader that you cannot look independently at some of these questions without looking at health care totally. I think the Minister of Health and Wellness is very gracious in saying yes to you, because I don't know whether I would.

I think the question has to be asked: what happened to those nurses and doctors? Where are they today? I guarantee you that most of them are employed in very good jobs. I've yet to find a doctor that I could say is unemployed. I have never met a doctor that can tell me he's unemployed. So I don't really know what you want this information for. Again, we can talk about misinformation.

Going back to nurses, I want you to know that every month I hear from young nurses that are trying desperately to get involved in the profession. We have to think about going back to 1993, when nurses that had been in the system for a long time bumped younger, enthusiastic nurses. These young girls had to leave the profession, while the people that had been in it a long time stayed. Jobs were lost, and young people were not allowed to enter this profession.

So I think there's more than just this written question here. I have yet to see an unemployed doctor. I hope you could certainly tell me there are some, because any doctors I know are employed and very employable.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to close the debate.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister of Health and Wellness for providing the information. Quite frankly, to the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, whom I have a lot of respect for, it's not a matter of the minister being gracious in providing that information. This is public information that is the government's as well as the minister's duty to provide. It's not a matter of graciousness in terms of providing information that's being asked for.

The question with regards to doctors being unemployed was: how many have lost their jobs due to the closures that have occurred in the last seven years, particularly in the 1993 cutbacks, when the health care system sustained cuts of somewhere between, I think it was, 13 and 15 percent, whereas the hospital system itself sustained cuts of between 27 and 30 percent? So in actual fact you would have had some doctors having lost their jobs as a result of the so-called reform in the health care system.

The issue around bumping. Well, obviously there was going to be bumping occurring if nursing positions were lost in the thousands. The question is: how many nurses lost their jobs over the period of 1993 to January 1, 2000, as a result of the cutbacks originally? I agree with the Minister of Justice that, yes, some of the shifts in positions have been as a result of changes in technology and drug therapies, also a movement towards more outpatient facility care as opposed to inpatient facility care. The reality is that the positions were not in fact perhaps shifted so much as cut out of the system.

3:10

If I were to take the Member for Lacombe-Stettler's argument on the face of it, then it would belie everything that the minister of health has said with regards to shortages in our health care system and the fact that there are not enough doctors and not enough nurses in the system. So you can't have it both ways.

I do thank the Minister of Health and Wellness for the information and look forward to it in order to look at the trends. Numbers are very interesting and informative, so thank you very much.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:11 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Bonner	Leibovici	Soetaert
Dickson	Nicol	White

Against the motion:

Amery	Havelock	O'Neill
Boutilier	Herard	Paszkowski
Broda	Hierath	Pham
Burgener	Hlady	Renner
Coutts	Klapstein	Shariff
Day	Kryczka	Smith
Doerksen	Laing	Stelmach
Ducharme	Lund	Stevens
Forsyth	Magnus	Strang
Friedel	Marz	Tarchuk
Gordon	McClellan	Taylor
Graham	McFarland	Thurber
Haley	Melchin	Trynchy
Hancock	Nelson	Yankowsky

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 42
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[Written Question 21 lost]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, having had experience as a Government House Leader, not experience as an Opposition House Leader, the chair can now look back fondly on those days and recognize the very tenuous position that the Government House Leader was always in. This clearly is a case today, where the hon. Government House Leader has moved acceptance of a question and there's been overwhelming rejection of the position taken. It is indeed a very tenuous position.

Aboriginal Adoptions

Q23. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

What is the number of aboriginal children who moved from permanent guardianship status to adoption in the fiscal year of 1998-99?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In keeping with this government's openness and accountability, on behalf of the minister responsible for Children's Services the government will accept.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I normally would say nothing at this stage, but on the last written question we had the representative of the government stand up and say exactly the same thing, and then we saw his colleagues vote against it. [interjections] Well, I would have thought some clarification of why the thing was required would have been persuasive, not a deterrent to members to vote.

My colleague for Edmonton-Riverview had asked me, Mr. Speaker, to offer some explanation in terms of why the information is required, and because we cannot be sure that the representation

made by the minister in fact reflects the wishes of his colleagues, we are going to have to have some explanation in terms of why this is important.

The issue is one of "the number of aboriginal children . . . from permanent guardianship status to adoption in the fiscal year of 1998-1999." There had been a policy review report on aboriginal adoptions due in February of 1998. There had been, in fact, some excellent questions asked by Calgary-Glenmore in May of 1999 to, I think it was, the then minister of family and social services around the adoption process and then also some questions asked in the House on May 11, 1999, with respect to that. There has been work done in and around the First Nations children discussion paper on permanency planning, which was released in May of 1999.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

That's some of the background that my colleague for Edmonton-Riverview had asked me to impart to the Assembly. I wanted to make those observations, as she had asked me to do. So those are the comments I wanted to make on this Written Question 23.

Thank you very much.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:27 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	Leibovici	Nicol
Dickson	Lund	Soetaert
Hancock	Marz	Trynchy
Havelock	McClellan	White

Against the motion:

Amery	Hierath	Renner
Broda	Hlady	Shariff
Burgener	Klapstein	Smith
Coutts	Kryczka	Stevens
Doerksen	Magnus	Strang
Ducharme	Melchin	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Nelson	Taylor
Friedel	O'Neill	Thurber
Graham	Paszkowski	Yankowsky
Haley	Pham	

Totals:	For – 12	Against – 29
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[Written Question 23 lost]

Student Loan Defaults

Q24. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

What is the breakdown of student loan default rates for each calendar year from January 1, 1993, to December 31, 1999, broken down according to learning institution?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. Madam Speaker, you know, I am one of great hope. Last week I had such luck with these written questions and written motions that I'm ever so hopeful today as I move the Member for Edmonton-Riverview's question, which I think is a very credible written question.

You know what? The only thing that concerns me in this question is that I heard the government whip from the other side say: I'm not going to give them anything today. But that would be petty and childish when we are talking about very credible questions from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

In fact, why shouldn't we be tracking performance records of student loans? Are there delinquent payments? Have we got trouble out there? What institutions have the biggest problems? Are banks having problems collecting, and are students having problems paying? This kind of information is something that would be appreciated by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, especially since a great deal of the university activity belongs to her constituency. So I look forward to a positive response to this question.

Thank you.

3:40

MR. SMITH: I'm rising to speak against acceptance of the question, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I think you're just one moment premature there, hon. minister. We have to make a determination. Thank you.

MR. HANCOCK: With some trepidation about it, Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Learning I would like to accept the question. Before there's any further debate from members opposite or from members on our side, perhaps I could indicate that I have the answers to the questions here and would be more than happy to table them on behalf of the Minister of Learning once the House has dealt with the question.

The only thing I would indicate in accepting the question is that the question asks for the "loan default rates for each calendar year from January 1, 1993, to December 31, 1999." Of course, the rates are based on school years rather than calendar years. It should be pointed out that you only get a default rate two years after a person has graduated, so there are no default rates for the '97-98 and '98-99 periods. But subject to those qualifications and not moving an amendment, because I think those are fairly clear, the Minister of Learning is prepared to accept the question and has provided me with the answers.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair would just want to mention, hon. House leader, that you should table that after the vote has been taken.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's interesting that the House leader is indicating acceptance, yet at that same time the minister of lotteries has indicated that there is just the opposite opinion coming. So we know, given the history of the last two written questions that have come forward, that there is some kind of a game happening here right now. I'm not quite sure what it is, but the net effect of the game is that because of the petulance of the government members, in fact, one of their own members will not have the opportunity this afternoon to have his private member's bill debated. It is a shame that's going to occur, and I'm really heartbroken, because it's a really good bill in that that particular bill is one that I put forward in this Legislative Assembly in '93-94.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, we're dealing with Written Question 24.

MS LEIBOVICI: Absolutely. I'm just, you know, indicating how unfortunate it is that we won't be able to get to that private member's bill and all because of government members' petulance.

Now, this is a very, very good written question that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview has put forward, and because of all the turmoil that was occurring, I couldn't quite catch everything that the Government House Leader had indicated, but it sounds to me as if one of his reasons for not providing the information was because the default period will occur much later.

I am assuming, given what the minister of lotteries has indicated, that this will not be accepted, but one of the pieces of information that I think is quite useful for everyone is to see what has happened from the time when the banking institutions took over this particular program. That is the reason the question is being asked, specifically with regards to '97-98 to this point in time.

We know that the burden on university students is quite high with regards to student loans, and the default rates are something that would be of use to see what the impact of the student loan program right now is on students throughout this province.

So I am very hopeful, as the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert had indicated at the beginning of her request for this written question, that we will hear and receive the information. However, given the situation, the tone of this afternoon, it seems to be quite up in the air, Madam Speaker, as to what will and will not occur. So it's very important that the Official Opposition put their reasons out as to why in fact these written questions are very important for public information. It will be interesting to hear the minister's reasons for not providing this information to the public, and I'm looking forward to hearing those reasons with great anticipation.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you so much, Madam Speaker. Usually when I hear questions or debates about ministrations of government, particularly from the Leader of the Opposition, I am not convinced, but when I hear the person who finished close to the top three in the leadership campaign, her articulate and persuasive arguments of why people should do this and why people should do that, I think they, of course, would have been much better served by making a different choice of a leader. If I were to have been so unfortunate as to have owned a Liberal membership during that time, I would have voted for that member, and I think it's important that that should go on record.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I'd like to remind you, too, that we are dealing with a written question here.

MR. SMITH: With respect to Written Question 24, which is an important question, because I am very fortunate and privileged to represent the University of Calgary in the constituency of Calgary-Varsity. Because this is a party of free votes and because this is a party of individual opinion and because it's a party responsible to their constituents, I think it's important that I stand and speak against this question for the very reasons that the member put forward as to acceptance. In fact, it is these written questions that do waste the time of the House, that prevent private members from expressing their feelings.

If, in fact, they would have written a letter to the Minister of

Learning and just said, "You know what? We need this information. It's public information. Can you help us assemble it? Can we create a feeling of accord and bonhomie?" then we'd be able to do this. Instead, Madam Speaker, they take valuable, valuable time of the House. They put forward questions that are of a political bent, designed to ferret out information that is already a matter of public record.

In fact, as the Minister of Learning has pointed out very, very clearly, the issue in Alberta is a question not of tuition but of debt. When I look at my own personal experiences at the University of Calgary, which I'm fortunate enough to be a graduate of, my student loan bill in 1971 was equivalent to what starting salaries are today. So, in fact, they've done a good job in managing this.

In fact, the default rate is of concern. You know, banks handle the issue at 5 percent over prime. There have been a number of monetary discussions around this.

This evidence is clearly in the public record. The question is nothing more than vexatious, frivolous, and designed to waste the time of this House and this government, as the Liberals proved so very adept at in the filibustering of Bill 11, in the wasteful time of Bill 11 debate, and in fact now they're going forward in Bill 18.

Madam Speaker, I think we have no alternative, and I'm appealing to my members here, the people here, to reject this question and move forward to the private members' business of the day.

3:50

MRS. McCLELLAN: Madam Speaker, my comments will be brief, but I do want to support my colleague who just spoke. Frankly, I'm very disappointed in some comments that are coming from the other side, because I think the problem with the responses in these arises from the debate or the discussion, which shouldn't be a debate, or when the opposition are trying to make their case for acceptance. I think they can be made in a way that isn't provocative and that doesn't cause people to be inflamed by their discussions. When you talk about petulance and behaviour, I think a mirror would be in order for some of the members.

When you talk about the time that written questions such as this one, which is an important question, take away from private members' debate, I would remind members that a simple letter to a minister will afford that information. I can speak with, I think, some certainty in this area. I don't believe that a member from the opposite benches has ever requested information from my office in a dozen years and not received all of the information that I could possibly provide for them and as promptly as I could. I think that is a courteous way to behave towards members of the Legislature in this House, and maybe the opposition could take that into mind rather than having the opportunity to stand up and make what I thought were rather insulting comments.

I would want to accept this question because I think the information is important. However, I can't because of a procedural matter. One, I think that the member who asked this question with that much interest in the question should have understood that these are not calendar years. They are school years. Most people understand that a university student goes to school on a year, and if you've ever applied for a student loan or assisted one of your constituents with their application, which I think every one of us has, you understand that it is on a school year or a term that they're attending.

The second thing is that as there is not information for the latter part of it because, as most people do understand as well if they've ever had somebody associated with a student loan, default does not occur, cannot even occur till after two years, it is my view that this question possibly should have been amended. I would leave that to the better minds in this House. In my experience, questions that are

accepted in their form are accepted in totality, and if there is something that has to be changed in the question, it's done in the form of an amended question.

I think the Minister of Learning has offered the information in a good spirit, but because of the comments and the arguments I've made, I'm afraid I'll have to ask, maybe implore my colleagues not to accept this question.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm ever the hopeful one, because I always ask politely and nicely. [interjection] The minister said that he has the answers right there. You know, in rural Alberta we wouldn't call it a spitting contest, but it'd be darn close. I guess what this government wants – now, I've heard that different ministers reply promptly and give us all the information. You know what? Some do. Some do not.

AN HON. MEMBER: Name them.

MRS. SOETAERT: Be careful, because I may name them.

Interestingly enough, Madam Speaker, there are times when we don't get that information, so we go this legitimate, parliamentary route and ask these very legitimate questions. But unless we grovel nicely, oh, that great big government in the sky won't give us what we want. So you know what? We may be in a spitting contest this afternoon, which is very childish. It's very childish on their part. I'm very disappointed in a childish government who just, you know, can't give a decent answer to a very decent question. Very humbly, humbly groveling – no, I can't grovel to this government. I'm sorry; I can't.

MS LEIBOVICI: Nor will we be blackmailed.

MRS. SOETAERT: And you know what? I won't be blackmailed into groveling either.

This is a legitimate question. The minister is waving the answers, but you know what? He's going to table them anyway, because he's promised that to the Speaker. [interjections] Oh, yes, he did. It's in *Hansard*. But broken promises, well, we're used to that from this government.

Madam Speaker, I am so glad that they accepted this question, and I wait with great anticipation . . . [interjections] Oh, one person said that they'd accept, but the rest have now encouraged the others to not accept. So we are in a spitting contest. Isn't that childish? Well, I'm disappointed in a childish government. [interjections] Well, actually they're spitting between themselves, because some are saying, "I have the information, and I'm going to give it to you," and some say, "Don't give it to them." Well, those schoolyard days should be long gone in this Assembly, but they're not.

Madam Speaker, I'm sorry that the government is acting so childish today, but I am hopeful – I am a person of great hope – that we will get the answers to those questions, because the minister said that we would. I have faith in him once in a while.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:56 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	Havelock	Nicol
Dickson	Leibovici	O'Neill
Doerksen	Lund	Soetaert
Ducharme	Marz	White
Hancock		

Against the motion:

Amery	Klapstein	Shariff
Burgener	Kryczka	Smith
Coutts	Magnus	Stevens
Forsyth	McClellan	Strang
Friedel	Melchin	Taylor
Graham	Nelson	Thurber
Haley	Paszkowski	Trynchy
Herard	Pham	Yankowsky
Hlady	Renner	

Totals:	For – 13	Against – 26
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[Written Question 24 lost]

Aboriginal Adoptions

Q25. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

What negotiations has the government been involved in regarding the status of aboriginal adoptions, and what reasons have been identified as a result of these negotiations for the lack of placements approved by aboriginal bands in the fiscal year 1999-2000?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. There are perhaps a number of observations I wanted to make, but I think I will wait until I see what response we get from the government first.

Thank you.

4:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I will call on a respondent, who's going to be the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I guess we'll take another try at this. On behalf of the Minister of Children's Services the government will accept this written question.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd just like members of this Assembly to know that this is really important information to me personally. I have four nieces and nephews who are of aboriginal descent, and they are part of our family because of adoption. So this is a huge issue for a lot of people, and I truly appreciate the information coming from the member.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close debate.

MR. DICKSON: Well, you know, what I wanted to say firstly was that a minute ago I felt like it was my mother speaking to me. When we heard the minister of intergovernmental affairs, I felt like I was

sort of getting tuned up by my mother, but as always, it was done very nicely and done very gently.

The observation I wanted to make is this. We try and evaluate now, when a minister stands up, whether in fact he speaks for his caucus or for the other minister or only for himself. You know, I'd say to the minister of intergovernmental affairs that if you go back to the second question, Written Question 23, I thought I'd asked for it pretty nicely. I thought I'd avoided provocation, avoided hyperbole, avoided rhetoric, and I thought I'd made it clear. I'd undertaken to put some things on the record on behalf of a colleague, and I was discharging that responsibility. So I can only conclude that some of us have a reputation for being provocative, and when we stand in our place, regardless of what words we utter, the designation attaches.

But there's another important principle involved here, and it simply comes down to this, Madam Speaker. There may be members who think that when opposition people ask these questions, we're not respectful enough, not polite enough. You know, I think the point we sometimes miss is that it's Albertans who deserve the information. We're simply the agent for a lot of men and women and groups and sectors in this province.

MR. SMITH: You're not though.

MR. DICKSON: Well, we think there's an agency relationship, and we take that responsibility seriously. When we ask for information, for the most part it's because groups have raised it with us, and it's typically in response.

You know, the minister of intergovernmental affairs has set a stellar example for her colleagues in terms of her responsiveness.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Careful. They'll all hate me.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I don't want to besmirch your reputation, but I want to acknowledge that there are some government . . . [interjections] Well, in the next provincial general election I'll write a little endorsement on her election brochure: former Drumheller native says this is . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Gary, control yourself.

MR. DICKSON: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm being reined in.

Anyway, the point I simply wanted to make, in as nonprovocative a fashion as I could possibly do it, is that Albertans often look for information. They don't always get it from departments. This is a forum to do it where you don't have to pay the \$25 FOIP application fee. You don't have to go through a 30-day process.

In our caucus – and I think I speak for my caucus when I say this – we think it's important that we should be able to make some comments in terms of supporting a written question or a motion for a return. We're now in the position, of course, where we can't take a minister as speaking for his caucus because we've seen on a number of these that the caucus votes one way and the minister represents a different course of conduct.

So those are the points I wanted to make with respect to the written question that's before us, Madam Speaker. I don't think I've been provocative, and I think I've been neutral. I'd fight to the death – if not to the death, at least to the end of the session – for the right to be able to make observations like that, and I think my colleagues would feel the same.

Thank you very much.

[Written Question 25 carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions 39, 47, and 50.

[Motion carried]

Treasury Branches Report

M39. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the October 31, 1997, document prepared by or for Alberta Treasury entitled Alberta Treasury Branches: Process, Environmental Scan, Possible Government Objectives, and Alternative Business Outcomes.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Madam Speaker, I'm responding on behalf of the Acting Treasurer, and it is with regret that we have to reject this motion. I don't think it is a big surprise to the opposition that this motion is being rejected, because it requests information that Treasury did not release under a freedom of information request on the grounds that it contained advice from officials and information that could cause commercial harm to Alberta Treasury Branches.

Further, it's to my surprise that the opposition is pursuing this when Treasury's position was upheld by the Information and Privacy Commissioner, an officer of this Assembly. Why would there be an expectation that this material would be available when it was rejected on those very sound grounds in the first place? Alberta Treasury Branch is an important financial institution in Alberta, and we certainly cannot risk their financial position simply to satisfy the curiosity of the opposition.

So it is with those comments, Madam Speaker, that I regret that we must reject this motion.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close debate.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, I'm not sure. As I listened closely to the minister of intergovernmental affairs, it sounded to me like there were two different exceptions under the FOIP Act. She was talking about section 23 as advice from officials, and if that's the one she was referring to – and that's what it sounded like – that is a discretionary exception. What that means is that the department is not statutorily bound to withhold or forbear from responding to our request. The minister can say yea or nay, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs can confirm that section 23 is a discretionary exception, that it is not mandatory. What that means is simply this. It's not good enough and simply does not wash to say that because the FOIP Act wouldn't require the release, therefore we're not giving it.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Come on, Gary. I gave the reasons.

MR. DICKSON: Well, what we heard was first a mention of section 23. Now, if it's section 15, that wasn't mentioned, but it would be helpful if the minister would tell us specifically what the provision is, because I didn't see the original FOIP request and I don't remember the commissioner's order on this. Section 15 just talks about "disclosure harmful to business interests of a third party." Now, that's mandatory, and I don't know if that's the basis on which

the matter was provided. The matter might be this, though, that section 15 does not apply if the third party consents to the disclosure.

4:20

As Mr. Justice Cairns of the Court of Queen's Bench said in the inquiry that took place in the spring of 1996-97, if the third party consents to the disclosure, then section 15 doesn't apply. What that presupposes is that the department would go to the third party and would say: "We have got a request for information from the opposition. Do you consent or object to the release of the information?" If the third party said, "We object," then the government could reasonably – and I hope the Minister of Municipal Affairs will correct me if I misrepresent what the provision of the FOIP Act is. In that case, that would be the end of it. But I listened carefully and I did not hear the minister say that the third party was asked, pursuant to section 15(3)(a), whether they would consent to the disclosure and what the response was.

So here's what we're left with. I come back and say again that if within all of the elements of section 15 you can't bring yourself – the only other reason I heard was section 23. Section 23 is discretionary, so then the minister would somehow have to make the case that there's some compelling public reason why this wouldn't happen. I don't know what that compelling public reason would be, so I'm hoping the Minister of Municipal Affairs can clarify this, because it seems to me that there's a significant issue there.

I'd just address for a moment the public policy perspective. Why would we ask for this? Because there continues to be a great deal of concern, particularly in rural Alberta, in small communities around this province, in terms of the future of the Treasury Branches. There has been so much discussion. It may even be an issue in Calgary-Varsity. There has been so much discussion around this, and I think some of the source documents should be made available to Albertans. You know, too often they're not. So, Madam Speaker, we'd like some explanation in terms of why we couldn't access it.

That's the public policy reason. Those are the reasons why I think the FOIP Act would not apply. I think we need some further explanation, because on the face of it Albertans are being denied access to some information which I think (a) they're interested in and (b) they're entitled to have. I think before government withholds information, we should have a high threshold test.

I guess the other thing that I'd just say is . . .

MR. SMITH: Gary, we're rejecting it. Sit down. It's over. You're not going to win big. Let it go.

MR. DICKSON: You know, I don't remember the minister being as persuasive in the Tuxis and Older Boys Parliament in 1966. He may have been just as persuasive then, and I've just got a short memory and don't remember it. I marvel at the persuasive abilities he brings to the floor of the Assembly, but I'm just a particularly thick member and I don't always get the nuances. [interjections] But now I'm going to sit down because I'm getting some motherly advice, and I've finished saying what I was going to say.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. minister, but the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo did close debate, so I can't recognize you. [interjections] Once he's closed debate, I have to now ask the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:25 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	Nicol	White
Dickson	Soetaert	

Against the motion:

Amery	Haley	O'Neill
Boutilier	Hancock	Paszkowski
Burgener	Havelock	Pham
Cao	Herard	Renner
Coutts	Hlady	Shariff
Doerksen	Klapstein	Smith
Ducharme	Lund	Stevens
Fischer	Marz	Strang
Forsyth	McClellan	Taylor
Friedel	Melchin	Thurber
Graham	Nelson	Yankowsky

Totals:	For - 5	Against - 33
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[Motion for a Return 39 lost]

Capital Planning by Government Departments

M47. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports, studies, and background documents prepared by or for Alberta Treasury for the period March 1, 1999, to April 13, 2000, concerning corporate capital plans developed by government departments.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the Acting Treasurer. Again, I don't think the opposition will be surprised that the government has to reject this motion. It requests information that Treasury did not release under a freedom of information request on the grounds that it contained cabinet and Treasury Board confidences, advice from officials, and information that could cause harm to a public body. Treasury's decision was not in this case appealed.

The corporate planning initiative resulted from a review, with assistance from the private sector, of how to strengthen the priority-setting process for infrastructure spending. The capital spending priorities of government departments are assessed using consistent criteria to ensure that available dollars are allocated appropriately. The final decisions by the government on capital priorities are reflected in the three-year business and budget plans that are published each year.

So, again, with regret we have to reject this motion.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo wish to conclude debate?

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm disappointed to hear it, but let me start off by saying that I appreciate the identification of the specific exceptions, because the minister has identified some mandatory exceptions and that's clarification we didn't have in one of the earlier ones. That's helpful.

Let me make this observation though. As the Premier said in that

memorable video he did when the FOIP Act first came out on October 1, 1995 – he did that voice-over thing to welcome Albertans to the new age of accessibility in the province. In that spirit I'd think that creative people in government would be able to take a request like this and say: yes, some of the information can't be disclosed because there are some prohibitions in the FOIP Act, but there's some of that information that can be taken out. I mean, if the specific document cannot be done, you could do a summary of the document. You could do a summary of the document that's not going to disclose deep, dark cabinet secrets.

4:40

I think there's a host of ways that creative men and women could find to be able to provide some of this information. If I were to see that, firstly I would be encouraged because it showed my government was creative, and it would show that they're trying as hard as they can to share information with Albertans.

The die is cast on Motion for a Return 47, but I make the observation and I guess extend the challenge to all cabinet ministers that it would be a wonderful and maybe a wondrous thing to see cabinet ministers say, "You know, we can't give you the specific document you've requested, but with a little imagination we think probably the kinds of materials, statistics, options you're looking for we can put together, and here's a summary," or whatever. I'm trying to remember the Harry Truman quote about doing the right thing, that half the people will be impressed and the other people would just be so astonished that they'd be speechless. I can't remember the rest of it. That might well happen, and after this afternoon maybe that would be a worthwhile result. The government might like to see a speechless opposition.

So I extend that challenge and hope that some cabinet ministers will choose to try and meet the challenge. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:43 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	Nicol	White
Dickson	Soetaert	

Against the motion:

Amery	Hancock	O'Neill
Boutilier	Havelock	Paszkowski
Burgener	Herard	Pham
Cao	Hlady	Renner
Coutts	Klapstein	Shariff
Doerksen	Kryczka	Smith
Ducharme	Lund	Stevens
Fischer	Magnus	Strang
Forsyth	Marz	Taylor
Friedel	McClellan	Thurber
Graham	Nelson	Yankowsky
Haley		

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 34
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[Motion for a Return 47 lost]

Maintenance Enforcement Program

M50. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of any document for the redevelopment of mainframe technology for the maintenance enforcement program.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre I would like to very persuasively move Motion for a Return 50. I know that everyone in this Assembly certainly deals with maintenance enforcement in their constituency offices, and the more efficient we can be, the better we serve many, many families in this province. So I am hoping for a positive response to that motion.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader as respondent.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would be pleased to accept the motion if it were amended and thus am moving an amendment that Motion for a Return 50 be amended by striking out "any document for the redevelopment of mainframe technology for the maintenance enforcement program" and substituting "the request for quotation for preparation of a business plan for the redevelopment of mainframe technology for the maintenance enforcement program." So the amended Motion for a Return 50 will read as follows:

... that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the request for quotation for preparation of a business plan for the redevelopment of mainframe technology for the maintenance enforcement program.

Easy for me to say.

Basically, the member who sponsored the motion has been advised by my office of the proposed amendment. I'm not sure if she was also advised, though she should have been, of the reason for the amendment. The reason for the amendment is that the current mainframe technology is about 14 years old, I am advised. It's unlikely the program would be able to locate all documentation that dealt in any way with system redevelopment over the 14-year period. In addition, most of the documentation would not be helpful.

We're in the process, as I've responded in terms of previous requests relating to information on the maintenance enforcement program, of redeveloping the mainframe technology, with a target date of 2003. Preliminary to redevelopment, we've undertaken a review of the business processes. Currently available is the request for quotation for this review. The strategy to update the mainframe technology will be outlined in a document called maintenance enforcement program: business process review phase, which has not yet been completed but which was asked for by another name in an earlier written question. At that time I believe I indicated to the hon. member that when that document was ready, it would be made available.

The question in the format that it's asked would require research of a lot of old documents which wouldn't, in our view, be relevant to the information she is seeking. But we're more than happy to share the information relating to the development of the processes and improvement of the business technology and therefore at this time would be more than happy to provide copies of the documents which we believe are relevant. If that doesn't satisfy the question, I'd be more than happy to meet with the member or have her raise issues relating to what types of information she needs in that regard and see if we can provide it.

MR. DICKSON: You know, the minister cannot be faulted for his response. It was full, he gave us lots of information, and I believe he's trying to set this thing up, but I have to ask the question. On October 6, 1998, we had government responding to the MLA review on maintenance enforcement and access. I think it was the Member for Calgary-Lougheed who did some work on that, did an excellent report. We've got the response of October 6, 1998, and I take it that what the minister is saying – unfortunately, he has to carry the can for his predecessor. Maybe it's fortuitous that both of those gentlemen are in the Assembly.

If we look back to October 6, 1998, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed and her group said and identified the need to review current communication technology and what had to be done. It's all set out in the report. Recommendations 36, 10, 11, 37, and 38 all relate to this. How can it be that in a period of 19 months we're only now doing a request for proposal? I mean, I thank the minister for giving us what he can provide, but for all of those people who phoned my office and I expect every MLA's office concerned about delays and inefficiencies with maintenance enforcement, how can it be that we're still fiddling with this now and are only at the request for proposal stage? One would hope, given the importance of the issue and the excellent report from Calgary-Lougheed, that we'd be a lot further down the road.

5:00

I know some of my colleagues share that concern. This is a huge issue with people trying to get the maintenance enforcement program working for them. In too many cases it is not, and now to find out that the only document that exists is a request for a quotation sounds to me like: what have we been doing? Surely it doesn't take 19 months to develop a request for a proposal; does it? So I think there's a heck of a lot of women in this province and children, for that matter, who have got a huge interest in this, and I think there has to be some further explanation in terms of why we're not further along.

I hope that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed is going to stand up and enter this debate and share some of her observations in terms of the importance. In that powerful report written by that review, there was some urgency – was there not? – around fixing some of these problems. In Calgary-Fish Creek I know there are people that want to see responses in terms of maintenance enforcement too.

Anyway, those are those questions I wanted to ask, and I hope we're going to get some answers to that, because so far we haven't heard an explanation around that.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, it's unusual for me to respond to a cheap shot; nevertheless, I think I'm going to in this case, Madam Speaker. I know it's really out of character for me to do so, just as it's out of character for the hon. member to say such a thing. Nevertheless, I'm well aware of this issue. In fact, the hon. member, never having been in government, really doesn't appreciate that you advance projects on the basis of the resources that may be available at any particular given time. I know that my successor the Minister of Justice has been pushing this project forward, just as we pushed it forward as much as we could when I happened to occupy that position.

It shouldn't be surprising, though, to the hon. member that it does take a significant period of time to develop an RFP for something as complex as a new mainframe system. This is a challenge that government encounters all the time, because of course technology is advancing and changing so rapidly that you want to make sure you don't bring in something that, quite frankly, a year or two later happens to be out of date.

I guess what I'd also like to mention, though, is that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed did bring forward a very good report, and I can remember very specifically our government enacting a number of those recommendations quite quickly. The hon. member should be fully aware of that. So this one happened to be one that took a little bit longer and, again, I know that the hon. member meant nothing by the statement that he made, because he is usually honourable.

In any event, I felt compelled to at least respond to that, because I didn't feel it was entirely fair or warranted. Thank you.

DR. NICOL: Madam Speaker, just a question on the comments just made by the minister, in the sense that as I read the amendment, what they're providing is actually a copy of a request for quotation for preparation of a business plan, not even a request for a proposal for the redevelopment of the mainframe. So this is actually even one step earlier, further into the infancy of this project than what would appear by saying that it was a request for a quotation. Is that the actual document that you're planning to deliver, the request for quotation for preparation of a business plan? So you're just now starting to develop a program that would in essence put in place the definition of the needs for a computer system and the kind of process that would be undertaken to actually develop and implement the purchase, upgrade, and redevelopment of that mainframe. I would like to have that clarified.

Thank you.

MRS. NELSON: Well, Madam Speaker, let's be abundantly clear. When you're looking at a system redesign and one that is as large as this one, the project has to be scoped out well in advance before any kind of RFP process can take place.

We have gone into a process of co-ordination of technology development in this government, and we co-ordinate it now through one central area so we have compatibility between the various systems that are in place. It's very important to have a business plan on how we bring a critical path together for the scoping out of that technology. This amendment is clearly looking at the business plan relative to the mainframe for this particular project. [interjections] The minister was telling me about other things, but my focus is on the co-ordinated planning for the IT development for the government, and we all know that in the past that hasn't been the case. There's been incompatibility between systems, and that has to be put forward in a business plan. My colleague the Minister of Innovation and Science leads the department that does that co-ordination, and they're doing a fine job. That's part of the reorganization process that we went through last year when we reorganized government to make sure we do have that.

Now, insofar as the maintenance enforcement program that we know today, it has been upgraded and it has been improved upon, because as most of us know from the calls we've had in the office, there has been some satisfaction that has come through that system in doing some tracking. But quite clearly I would be very opposed if a minister came to the Treasury Board table that I sit at and asked for funds to do a project where there wasn't a full scoping out of the plan laid out on the table and a business planning process in place that would come forward. I would reject that as a member of Treasury Board because you're buying a pig in a poke, and I'd like to see the plan scoped out fully and a business planning process with a critical path attached to it before I would accept it at the Treasury Board table.

So I think the amendment that the hon. minister has put forward is very clear and is the right type of amendment to have. I would hope that the opposition would accept that.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Actually, they just confirmed what the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East asked: where are you at? They're only at the business plan stage. We're not even at the tendering process. We haven't got the technology up. You're still looking at a business plan to go forward on this.

So this is really, really backwards. It's quite a long while in the making, over 19 months just to say, "We're going to give you a business plan," which is fine. I'm glad the process is there, and they're going to take the proper steps so we don't end up with some technology like the Calgary regional health authority who just blew millions of dollars.

MR. BONNER: Fourteen, I think.

MRS. SOETAERT: Fourteen million dollars.

MRS. NELSON: Colleen, did you listen?

MRS. SOETAERT: I was listening to you. The reality is that you're at the business plan stage. That's great, but it's a long time in coming, especially when we realize how important this is to our constituents.

The former Minister of Justice said that it takes a long time and it's a matter of priorities and money. Well, I would venture to say that families and children should be a priority, and if this will help make their lives better and children avoid living in poverty in some cases and some families getting back on their feet, then I would venture to say that this should be a priority. I appreciate the amendment because you can only give us the information you have. I guess we assumed that you would be further along in the process, and you're not. So we will accept what you have.

You know, people wonder why we do these written questions. I bet now this might get the wheels turning a little faster, because they don't want to see this written question next time we sit in here: "What? You haven't gone any further than getting the business plan?" So I thank the minister for his ability to give the information that he does have, but hopefully the wheels will get turning and we can have a little bit more action on this.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion on amendment carried]

MR. DICKSON: Do I get a chance to speak on the amended motion?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, you had the opportunity to rise, and you didn't.

MR. DICKSON: We voted on the amendment, with respect.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Now we do go back to the motion as amended.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much. All I wanted to do was

apologize to the minister of tourism, because when I made my reference earlier, I didn't know what the explanation was in terms of why there'd been no progress. I appreciate his candour in terms of telling us that it was a government decision and a resource allocation decision, and that's why they haven't moved on it. We didn't know that before. It's still a completely disappointing result, but I appreciate the clarification.

5:10

I didn't want to suggest in any way that the former Minister of Justice had done something untoward except that he was the minister at the time and the one with responsibility. In fact, it's ironic that he should be involved in the discussion this afternoon because of the very substantial role he played and the leadership he provided in the freedom of information and protection of privacy law we have in the province.

I want all of his 63 colleagues to know that when the fate of FOIP was hanging in the balance, it was the Member for Calgary-Shaw and now minister who was able to persuade the Premier's office that we had to follow the B.C. model. I gave a speech just last week, in fact, where I singled out the Member for Calgary-Shaw, the minister, as probably the father of the very act that the Minister of Municipal Affairs now has the pleasure of administering in the province. So I'm happy to have the chance to apologize to that minister and look forward to the vote on the amended motion.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Are you ready for the question?

MR. HANCOCK: Just a second.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair has asked for clarification. Unfortunately, you were the mover of the amendment, so you are not able to speak.

Does the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert wish to close the debate?

MRS. SOETAERT: No. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 50 as amended carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: I think, given the hectic pace of the afternoon, that it might be appropriate to ask for the House to consider calling it 5:30 and that when we reconvene at 8 p.m., we do so in committee.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:13 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 17, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/05/17

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order, please.

Bill 24

Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's a real privilege again this evening to speak to Bill 24, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act. This bill, as I said last night, is very timely in the sense that it's going to provide us an opportunity to protect the affected heritage rangelands in Alberta. As the minister explained, there are going to be three of them done currently, and there will be three others that will be negotiated and designated. As I understand it, these are all going to be developed and put in place in the context of lands that are currently under public management, so there will be no impact on private titleholders.

What we've got is a real opportunity to participate in our commitment as a province to the concept of the special areas preservation of natural and heritage ecological systems. This does fit in very well in the context of that commitment that we made a few years ago. We have to keep progressing on it, and I congratulate the government for taking this step now to incorporate our heritage rangelands into this program.

The interesting part of it is that I think the three areas they've already designated, as I said last night, are really quite unique, quite identifiable only in Alberta in the context of what is being done about the rangelands. The main issue here again, as I said, is to get the three current areas in. The Black Creek area is out in the Whaleback. This is a really unique kind of grazing area that was run mostly, as I understand it, as a winter grazing area for bison, buffalo, and pre-European involvement. The Twin River area is, from what I understand, near the Milk River ridge or part of the Milk River ridge, which again is a very unique kind of ecosystem because of the altitude and being kind of encompassed by a lowland area. So we've got a very unique, quite productive grazing area that's in that area around Milk River. The third one the minister notified us yesterday was going to be designated is the Beaverhill area east of Edmonton. Here we've got, as I said, the transition area between prairie grasslands and the grazing areas that were put in as we move into the forested and the treed part of the province.

What in essence we have are really two wintering areas for the bison and one summer grazing area. What is left now and that I hope does show up in the three other areas that are to be designated would be the true shortgrass prairie that's in eastern and southern Alberta and then kind of the transition grassland areas that are more in the dark brown soil zone areas. So those kind of divide it up.

Some specific comments on the bill and how it is going to be applied. I think what we need to do is look at some of the conditions that are being put on the particular operation of these heritage

rangelands in the sense that what we're going to see is as close as possible a management situation that will provide that ecology the opportunity to respond as much as possible to the natural or presettlement way it was operated.

So we see some really good controls on the access by motorized vehicles, the access for non livestock type activities, nongrazing activities. The idea that we see in sections of the bill, like in section 8, where they're talking about the limitations that are being put on that, will control the kind of thing that can be conducted there. I guess it would be an addition to section 8, what is now section 9 in Bill 24, where we look at the idea that there's going to be a really strict control on off-road travel.

The minister also retains within this context the right to, under special circumstances or for special conditions, allow for the off right-of-way type of travel by motor vehicles. You know, this reflects the need that we have for appropriate management of those grazing areas within the context of a modern grazing management scenario. We wouldn't want to have a rancher, a leaseholder with their cattle out there and needing to have access to those animals and no way to get to them with a motor vehicle. So with the idea that the minister can make special provisions for extenuating circumstances, we can see that what we'll have is a chance for the leaseholder, within the context of that good management scenario, be able to effectively get access to the areas where their animals are.

I didn't see anywhere in the bill where there would be a provision for any kind of water management within the heritage rangeland area. Would the grazing leaseholder be able to, effectively, put in dugouts, put in wells, do things that would allow their animals to have access to water? Madam Chairman, I say that in the context as much for the areas that haven't been designated yet as for the areas that have been. You know, the area of the Whaleback and the area of the Milk River ridge have natural water areas, natural seeps, but if we get up into the area that we were talking about east of Edmonton or into some of the shortgrass areas that have yet to be designated and have yet to be picked out, what we're going to find is that these areas probably are not going to be large enough in size to allow for the presettlement type grazing patterns that went on where the animals effectively moved through them as they moved from one river to another in east-central Alberta to water at the rivers, and in the meantime they went between.

I don't see in the bill where any kind of designation for these water areas might be appropriate. I know that even in the special areas parts of Alberta where there are grazing leaseholders, they are allowed, effectively, to create dugouts or to put in wells to pump water for animals on either the community pastures or on their direct grazing lease. So I guess what we'd have to do is watch and see, as these management plans are developed, whether or not we can actually have this kind of activity defined. How will we be able to go about preventing the damage that would occur from the animals constantly coming to that one part of the heritage area where we're going to see the concentration that wouldn't have occurred in those rangeland areas in a presettlement type grazing pattern, where the bison, as I said, except in a rainy season or spring, would move right through and graze on their way between water sources? So what we have to do is make sure that those kinds of things are there.

8:10

The other thing that's interesting is the restrictions that are noted in the context of the bill, where there are limitations on hunting and fishing, that kind of thing, that would go on there, the normal recreation type activities. The minister last night said that hunting and fishing would be done by permission of the grazing leaseholder, yet from that perspective we'd have to be able to make sure that

certain methods are developed to prevent the development of a common right-of-way to a hunting or a fishing facility. The whole idea that they're talking about fishing facilities or fishing opportunities would indicate that in some of these areas the natural water systems would be available. I guess the thing is that we want to make sure that we look at these in the context of how the bill will be able to provide a management system.

I don't see within the context of the bill, at least not in the part that we see in Bill 24, a true outline of how those management plans will be developed. The idea that these would probably be part of any grazing lease agreement that would be drawn up between a leaseholder and the Crown, as representing the public, would have to be handled a little bit differently than our normal grazing lease procedures in the sense that we'd have to make sure that these kinds of management plans and the kind of controlled-grazing status of that lease area would have to be managed.

I think we want to make sure that that gets more clearly defined here in the sense that the farmer or the grazing leaseholder has to be sure that they understand what they're getting themselves involved in, what they're going to be dealing with in the context of being able to operate a competitive cattle operation in the sense that if there are going to be restrictions put on it, then we'll have to see a lower lease/rental rate, or if they're going to be allowed to be commercially competitive, then the same kind of rental agreements can be developed that are there for the standard leaseholders.

I guess the other thing that we don't see in here is the option for any kind of nongrazing development. I hope that within the context of this bill the fact that it's not mentioned means that it's not going to be allowed in these areas. Will we be able to be in a position to make sure, even if there are current activities going on, how they will be handled or how they will be phased out so that we can have a true heritage rangeland environment created?

I guess the last comments that I'd like to make would relate to the issues that are outlined in section 15(2)(b)(1.1) in the sense that here the minister is going to be able to develop a lease that, effectively, will run "not exceeding 30 years." This creates a long-term stability, but it also creates a situation where the only option we have to make sure that the management plans are being followed, that any changes that we see being relevant and being important to the management of that heritage rangeland – they can only be renegotiated on a 30-year basis. I would like to see that when they get down to the option under subclause 1.1 (b), where they say "to include other terms and conditions," a clear definition be included there that will allow the public and the grazing leaseholder to fully understand what options are available to alter the lease, to change the lease, and whether or not that's going to require any kind of payment in lieu of lost productivity so the operation of that grazing lease can be handled in a well-managed and a direct-managed way.

We don't want to have to see the kind of debate, the kind of uncertainty, and the kind of hostility, in some ways, that was created last year when we had the debate going on on Bill 31, which effectively saw the government legislating changes in contracts that didn't have to happen. We could have been dealing with those changes in contract by dealing with them at the appropriate time, when the termination of that lease occurred or when conditions in the lease were such that they triggered or warranted a renegotiation and a redefinition, like the kind of activities that would be available, to allow for changing the relationship between the public and that leaseholder.

So this is the issue that I think we want to look at. The thing that I guess is most important, Madam Chairman, is that within these operating conditions and the regulations that are going to be developed by the minister we end up with a sound management plan

where the public feels that, yes, they are going to have a heritage rangeland protected by this act, yet the individuals or the businesses that have participated in this program by taking out the leases to graze these rangelands will feel that they're being treated fairly and that they're being given an opportunity to provide both for their own economic well-being but also to contribute to the heritage of our province and to allow our future generations to see the kind of Alberta that was here when, for a lot of us, our parents or grandparents chose to settle here in this province.

Madam Chairman, with those few comments I'll reserve anything else that I have to say until we have the specific amendments that may be brought forward or else when we get to third reading. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Having had an opportunity last evening to speak to the principles of Bill 24, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act, 2000, I'm pleased to have an opportunity at the Committee of the Whole stage to look at some of the sections of the bill in more depth.

What I took the opportunity to do, Madam Chairman, was to take Bill 24 and compare the provisions we have in Bill 24 with provisions that other governments across the country have in similar acts. In particular, I looked at the British Columbia act and the act in Newfoundland, which are different in a number of ways from what we do in Alberta in the act before us now.

The Committee of the Whole of course is a chance where we get to look at the individual provisions of the bill, and I thought I would just go through some of them rather quickly. Some of them are rather obvious and don't deserve that much attention.

8:20

Section 1 states, obviously, that this is an amendment to the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act. Section 2 changes the name of the act, and those are sort of house-keeping items.

Section 3 is an important part of the act, and that's the section that now has a "whereas" clause and gives us a bit of a preamble about the desirability to protect heritage rangelands and their grassland ecology. We've had occasion to comment on prior legislation, Madam Chairman, about the need for solid preambles. Preambles I think are important to lay readers and to people who are generally interested but may be unsophisticated in a particular area of interest. This is an area where I think there is broad public interest, the preservation of our natural heritage. It's a bill that demands a preamble that explains in fairly succinct language what the provisions of the bill are all about, so I'm pleased that there is a preamble, a "whereas" clause that sets out the goal of the bill in straightforward language.

It's important, because grasslands are not just valued here. I was looking at some of the material on world grasslands, and I recall from some of my high school and early university geography the notion that there are three major types of grassland in the world: the tropical or savanna grasslands, which are really very, very long grasses, three and a half to 12 feet high, found in South America and other parts of the world; the prairie grasslands, as we know them, which are deep-rooted grasses; and then the steppe grasslands, of course the most famous being the steppes of Russia, and we have some of those grasslands, too, in North America. The grasslands are of great economic value to the people where they are located. In

Alberta's case they are of both economic and ecological interest, and it's very appropriate that this act is here and addressed specifically to the preservation of our grasslands.

Section 4 is a necessary part of the act, where it adds the heritage rangeland to the definitions and gives us a full definition under 3.2. Heritage rangeland means land designated as a heritage rangeland under section 3.2. So the definitions I think are again a necessary part of a bill like this.

Section 5 is housekeeping. It strikes a reference to a previously repealed section.

Section 6 states that the Lieutenant Governor may designate the kind of activity that can be used to maintain the grassland ecology. It's an important section because this is a provision in the bill that allows economic activity to continue on a heritage rangeland. That's a provision that is different than some of the acts elsewhere on the continent, although Colorado, I note, has a similar provision where the grasslands there are used for similar kinds of activities as we use them for here. But there are jurisdictions where once an area has been designated, all kinds of economic activity are discontinued and disallowed by law.

Section 7 again is cleaning up the act to make provision for heritage rangeland.

Section 8 gives some fairly definitive restrictions, and it includes our heritage rangelands in those areas where people are not allowed to deposit litter except in places that are provided for that litter. Animal and plant life cannot be removed unless there is a prior approval by the minister. There can be no construction or improvements made upon the land without, again, the approval of the minister. And then a general provision that nothing will be done or should be undertaken by an individual that will alter or disturb the surface of the area.

Those are important provisions in the act, Madam Chairman, and it's interesting that in our act and in our province we have chosen to make the authority over this land the minister, and the minister is responsible for the enforcing of these restrictions. In other areas there have been committees or commissions or multiperson bodies appointed that not only help monitor the use of designated reserves such as these but are also bodies that citizens can approach to have new areas designated. As I read through the details of the bill, it was one of the things that I wondered if the minister and his department had considered as the bill was being crafted, the mechanism by which new areas could be designated. It seemed to me that having a body that is somewhat independent of the minister and the department itself that could monitor these areas and would be available for proposals for new areas is an idea that's worth exploring.

Section 8 also makes it clear that the heritage rangelands are not included in areas that have restrictions where you can't travel on foot, where you can't hunt or trap, where you can't fish, where you can't land an aircraft, where you can't use a pack animal or motorized vehicle or light or maintain an open fire. It's quite clear by these provisions that the rangelands are to be maintained by grazing. To facilitate this, those individuals involved in grazing activity obviously are going to have to be able to move around on the landscape. So the kinds of restrictions that might otherwise apply or apply to other ecological areas are not seen to be appropriate here. That's the provisions in this section of the bill. Section 8 makes this clear. Waterways are obviously going to pass through them, and there are going to be greenbelts for animals. There have to be exceptions, of course, for hunting and fishing activity that would occur in these areas, and that's what section 8 of the bill enables.

8:30

Again going back to those individuals, ranchers, who are actually using the rangeland for economic purposes, they're going to have to be able to graze animals, horses and pack animals, to move around to conduct the activity that they're involved in.

Section 9 of the bill gives the restrictions, specifically those that will apply to heritage rangelands. The roads that are rights-of-way or allowances and which are bordered continuously or discontinuously on both sides of a heritage rangeland are included in this section. The minister, of course, again in this section may by order make any restrictions on fires in a rangeland. Those fire restrictions are normally put in place, of course, during high-risk times of the year, when dry seasons are being experienced.

It's in section 8 that we also have the restrictions on off-highway vehicles and motorized vehicles that are not to be operated in the heritage rangelands except on the right-of-way or undeveloped road allowances. It's recognized in this section that vehicles do the most permanent damage to the grassland area, Madam Chairman. Even though vehicles are supposed to stay on the road, it would be interesting to know what kind of enforcement will be available in these areas, and that question I think applies to a number of the other restrictions in the act. These are vast areas in many cases, and the monitoring of them is going to be an interesting exercise. Some of the ranching operations of course do require the use of aircraft. Again, it would be only possible to operate those aircraft with the minister's approval.

Section 10 is an amendment to section 9 and gives exceptions to the limits from section 8. It really exempts equipment or transportation that is owned by the Crown if it has ministerial approval, or if it's owned by the owner of a disposition or a fur-trapping licence, then this section allows for equipment and transportation to be used by those individuals.

Section 11 adds "heritage rangeland" to the list. If a person damages by an action and that action doesn't have approval of the minister, then that person is guilty of an offence.

The following section, section 12, adds "heritage rangeland" to the areas in which the minister may restrict travel.

Section 13, references sections.

Section 14 includes "heritage rangelands" now in areas in which the Lieutenant Governor in Council "may make regulations respecting the administration, management, operation and utilization." It's really a section that allows the government to make the rules and regulations governing the administration and how the activity in the rangelands will be monitored and conducted. It's that section that we, I think in the past, have always believed should be the section where the Committee on Law and Regulations could make a contribution to the improvement of legislation in the province and would, I think, provide valuable advice to the government in determining the kinds of rules and regulations that will govern rangeland operations.

Section 15 is an amendment that amends the Forest Reserves Act to include more land in the eastern Whaleback of the Rocky Mountain forest reserve. It expands that area. Section 15 also talks about the permits to be issued by the government for the grazing of livestock in forest reserves, and interestingly the word "annual" has been removed, so one assumes that they are now going to be multiyear permits, not yearly. The section also increases the lease on public lands in heritage rangeland from "a term not exceeding 20 years" to "a term not exceeding 30 years." So I guess some questions in terms of section 15. Why have these two provisions in terms of permits and leases been changed? What was the rationale for making the changes? It would be interesting to hear from the

government before the bill passes out of the committee stage exactly why those changes were made.

I've gone quickly through some of the specific provisions of the bill, Madam Chairman. I'm sure there's much more that could be said about it, but I look forward as the issues that have been raised are addressed by the government.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It's a pleasure this evening to rise and make a few comments on Bill 24, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act, 2000. This is a bill that I certainly support, and I would urge all members of this Assembly to support this bill.

This is a bill that does voice the broad public concerns of our grassland ecosystems here in the province. What it also does is add lands to the eastern part of the Whaleback. Again, as we see with the great influx of people into our province, the demands on the wilderness areas in this province continue to grow, and as we have encroachment into these areas, whether it be by four-wheel drives, all-terrain vehicles, off-highway vehicles, just the fact that people are getting out into the wilderness more, we do require some type of protection for these areas.

Again, Madam Chairman, when we talk about the ecosystems in these particular areas, we have to realize that these are very, very sensitive areas as well. Right now they are very productive areas as far as grasslands go, and we certainly hope that these grasslands will be protected, that these grasslands will be available not only for wild game in the area but also for grazing of cattle and for the ranching industry here in the province.

What this act does, Madam Chairman, is that for the first time the heritage of Alberta's grasslands will be protected by legislation specifically designed to meet the unique management needs of this particular ecosystem.

8:40

As well, what we find in this legislation is that the classification finalizes the Alberta government's commitment to the Black Creek heritage rangeland in the eastern half of the Whaleback and that this new category will provide for the specific management requirements of grasslands. Historically in the province, Madam Chairman, grazing bison helped to shape Alberta's grasslands. Of course, it is because of these huge herds that once roamed a large portion of the province that we did have our prairies remaining as they were, as grasslands. The heritage rangeland classification provides for the continued use of cattle grazing to preserve the ecological integrity of these areas.

Now, again, another reason that I think it's vitally important that we do look at how sensitive these areas are is because of the changing conditions that we do have in Alberta. It was just this past week that we did have a report where it was felt that many of the major glaciers in the province are receding at such a rate that they will be gone in the next 20 to 50 years. When we look at this particular bill, it does make provisions for the leases to ranchers, to people that wish to graze their cattle in these areas. These would be extended from 20 years to 30 years. I think that when we are looking at the impact of our freshwater supply from the runoff of the glaciers, particularly in all those areas that rely on that runoff on the east of the Rockies, then it is a very good thing that we do have a provision whereby in another 30 years, when these leases do expire, we will be able to have a look at what the impact of our receding

glaciers has been and how the supply of freshwater from these glaciers is going to impact these particular sensitive areas in our province.

Now, the act is quite clear that the heritage rangelands are to be maintained by grazing, and to facilitate this, Madam Chairman, ranchers would have restrictions on how they can travel. These restrictions are outlined extremely well in section 9. What it says here is that vehicles are going to be restricted because they can do permanent damage to a grassland area. I look particularly at what has happened in Jasper national park.

Now, up until the '60s and '70s residents of the park had a tremendous amount of freedom in the park in which they could drive their vehicles in these areas, Madam Chairman. With those rules that they created then, the damage that they did to the system there is still there, so I think that when we start looking here at this particular bill and the restrictions that they have put on the vehicles traveling in these grassland areas, this is a very strong part of this bill, and it is good to see.

So in section 8.1(3) I do like the fact that vehicles have been restricted and that there will be enforcement on people who do not observe the rules governing these areas. As well, I would wait to see if in fact in this particular act there are going to be penalties for those that do not follow these restrictions.

I also see in here under 8.1(4) that people will not have the right to take off or land aircraft in a heritage rangeland except, of course, in the case of "an emergency or as authorized by the Minister." I think this is another strong part of this particular act and one that will definitely help in strengthening the act.

Now, then, as well, Madam Chairman, when we look at other sections of this act, we see that there are areas that have been set aside that would likely be part of greenbelts for wild animals, and waterways are going to pass through them, so that does explain the exceptions to hunting and fishing in those areas. When we do look at particularly the hunting in these areas, this does not appear to be supported by the general public. Certainly these types of activities do lead to reduced opportunities for the public to have wildlife viewing opportunities. So again this would be a major addition to the bill. As well, what would happen here is that this would avoid the conflicts with other recreational activities in that public safety and protection in the protected areas are very good reasons and the reasons cited as to why hunting should not be allowed.

There certainly is some opposition to this particular part, but in the stakeholder consultations I do see that one of the recommendations was that the committee felt that on balance the proposed policy position in respect to recreational hunting was reasonable and should continue.

As we look through the bill, I think another section that is a very good part of this bill is section 10, and this section, Madam Chairman, gives exemption to the limits from section 8 in that "equipment or means of transportation" that is owned by the Crown is exempt as is the ministerially approved equipment which is owned by the holder of a disposition or a fur-trapping licence.

Under section 11 heritage rangeland is included in the listed areas where if a person damages by an action and the action does not have ministerial authorization, that person is guilty of an offence. Again, Madam Chairman, under this section if somebody is guilty of that offence, I would like to see how the penalties for that violation would be spelled out at some point.

Under section 12, Madam Chairman, heritage rangeland is part of the list of areas in which the minister may restrict travel. Again what I do like is that we have identified a person who is going to be responsible and will be able to limit the amount of travel through these areas.

Under section 14 heritage rangeland is included in the list of areas in which “the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations respecting the administration, management, operation and utilization” in these areas. Again, this is another piece of the act that does make this a good act. It does put in the provisions that we would like to see to protect Alberta’s grassland heritage. As the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East said, certainly we do want to protect these areas. They are areas that are sensitive. They are areas that are very vulnerable. Therefore, Madam Chairman, I certainly would like to see these continue.

I recall what my mother told me about when she arrived in this province in 1902 and they homesteaded in the Viking area, where I’m sure the hon. Minister of Gaming has spent much time in oil exploration and whatever. Unfortunately, they chose a piece of property where there wasn’t any oil or gas. My mother told me a very interesting story when I took her back. She was in her late 80’s at this particular point, and we went back to Viking and went to find the homestead. One of her big complaints at that time was that she couldn’t recognize where it was. I said: “Well, what has changed so much since the time you first homesteaded here in the early 1900’s?” and she said, “There are so many trees now. When we homesteaded here in the early 1900s, there were no trees.”

8:50

I do like the provisions that have been put in here. I do like the fact that these provisions will protect our heritage grasslands. With those few comments, Madam Chairman, I would like to cede my position to some other member here in the Assembly and listen to further debate on Bill 24.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, thank you very much for acknowledging this member. I think I’ve made the observation before in speaking to different elements of environmental protection, different statutes, different bills, that I’ve always been struck in my constituency with the very high level of concern, attention, and awareness around environmental issues. I’ve often thought Calgary-Buffalo, which is perhaps the most inner city and the most urban of all 83 constituencies, is one where environment and environmental concerns consistently rank in the top three areas about which I receive letters, phone calls, visits, and that sort of thing.

It may be that so many Calgarians have the opportunity of checking out the mountains every morning when we drive to work. Is this not a Calgary thing to do? The observation you make to whomever is in the car with you is whether there is more snow or less snow on the mountains. I don’t know whether it makes any sense, but I find myself doing it, and I know lots of other people do it. Anyway, it’s that proximity to the spectacular beauty of the mountains that makes it so important.

You know, Barry Commoner, the American biologist and educator, said one time:

Both the environmental and population crises are the largely unintended result of the exploitation of technological, economic, and political power. Their solutions must also be found in the same difficult arena. This task is unprecedented in human history, in its size, complexity and urgency.

I think what Mr. Commoner said probably resonates with all of us. Whether you’re in Calgary-Varsity or whether you’re in Duchess or Bassano or Drumheller or Hanna, Alberta, I think this is something that just people intuitively know and understand.

I was very interested when I saw Bill 24 in terms of the difference between Bill 15 and Bill 24. I give full credit to the Minister of Environment, who apparently went through a very arduous process within his caucus and his cabinet in the bill review process to be able to bring this very modest piece of proposed legislation forward. And it is modest. It certainly doesn’t have the breadth of Bill 15. Neither does it have so many of the problems that we’d identified in Bill 15, the areas that were left to ministerial discretion, left to regulation, and that sort of thing.

I think Barry Commoner, that American environmentalist and biologist, would probably vote yes to Bill 24, and Calgary-Buffalo is going to vote yes to Bill 24 as well.

I do want to say, though: what happened to the rest of Bill 15? Although we were unhappy with a number of elements and certainly much of the bigger community was concerned about that, Madam Chairman, why is it that we don’t see a more ambitious bill than this one?

Sometimes our criticism is that the bills are too ambitious, but sometimes we see a bill like this one, and we’d say that we could have done a lot more. So we wonder what sort of problems there are. You know, when my relatives in Medicine Hat and down in the Cypress Hills registered their concern around the environment and environmental protection, I think they were hoping that government would be able to bring in something that was more ambitious.

Now, what we’ve got with respect to Bill 24 is something that’s focused really – I mean, there are two parts of the province that are directly affected. We’ve got the eastern part of the Whaleback, and goodness knows it is important, and it’s a wonderful thing to see additional land added to that. The other thing it does – and let’s be very clear about this Madam Chairman, very clear indeed – is provide more protection for the grassland ecosystem. You know, that’s a concern as we start getting out particularly into the eastern part of the province. That’s the entire Palliser Triangle, the area explored by John Palliser more than 100 years ago. That is an important ecosystem, and it’s significant that government is moving to deal with it and providing a degree of protection.

I think it’s interesting that in section 8 the heritage rangeland is included in the areas that have the restrictions about depositing litter, about removing plant or animal life or constructing or adding improvements or doing anything, Madam Chairman, as I understand it, that would alter or disturb the surface in those grassland ecosystems.

We’ve got some exceptions to hunting and fishing. I was listening carefully to my colleague for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who always shows me the dazzling breadth of his knowledge and his experience. I don’t know when he found time to read and learn as much when he was writing all those books, but every time he offers commentary in this House . . .

MRS. McCLELLAN: When he was teaching all those students.

MR. DICKSON: And teaching those students, minister of intergovernmental affairs.

Every time that member speaks, I find it illuminating. I find that he provides all of us with information and perspective we didn’t have before.

MR. SMITH: If only we could say the same thing about you, Gary. If we could just say the same thing about you. I’d love to. Make we say that.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, the Minister of Gaming makes an offer that he knows I couldn’t possibly comply with. He imposes an impossible condition, so I want to move on.

I'm almost, unless I'm provoked, about to wind up uncharacteristically brief comments, and that's simply because this is a good bill. It's a bill I support. I'm encouraging my caucus colleagues to support it, and I know they've received some excellent advice from Edmonton-Ellerslie to the same effect. I think this is a bill we can put forward.

You know, I must say that I'm always sort of fascinated with the process of things, and I wonder if the Minister of Gaming at some point would tell us, you know, the proverbial fly on the wall, about those cabinet meetings when we saw the rustling of the titans of absolute unfettered free enterprise exploitation of the wilds and the Minister of Environment, that Minister of Environment whom I will always remember. I have this mental picture. He'd only been Minister of Environment for a scant couple of weeks, and there he was in hip waders on the front page of all the newspapers and on all the TV stations. He was standing in a stream. I think the mayor was there too, but I always remember the Minister of Environment standing there in his hip waders in this stream somewhere in the Nose Creek area. He just looked so joyful. I haven't seen him looking so happy since he was doing his Elvis Presley imitation at the Chinese New Year's banquet. He was obviously enjoying his portfolio, and I think he's demonstrated a really keen concern to do what is possible with that important portfolio.

9:00

I wish that minister well. I congratulate him on bringing Bill 24 through. I express my disappointment that it's not more ambitious. Finally, I want to challenge him to address some of those other issues we were teased with in Bill 15 but to bring them back in a way that respects the substantial feedback he's received from conservation groups, from environmental groups. Those people have a tremendous body of knowledge and some wonderful commentary, expertise, and perspective to share with all of us.

I hope all members are going to support Bill 24 and we'll see its speedy passage through this Legislative Assembly. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. I wasn't going to speak to this bill actually, because I think my colleagues have done a good job of doing the clause-by-clause commentary, but then I remembered that I had a letter from a constituent who had asked me to bring up his concerns if we saw environmental legislation brought forward in this session.

Now, it's interesting that in my riding of Edmonton-Centre, which, as you know, is an urban riding, in the centre of the city, environment consistently comes in as the number four concern of residents. They're talking about environmental protection, protection of the parks and the wilderness areas, and they're very supportive of any protection the government is willing to offer through legislation for the areas we have and also additional designation of areas that would fall under protection. The flip side of that is that I often get commentary about the need to work very carefully in partnership with forestry companies and oil and gas leasing activities and other activities that might be taking place in designated areas.

I note, with some disappointment but with understanding, that snowmobiling will not be allowed in these rangeland areas. As a snowmobiler I'm able to ride on less and less of the areas in Alberta, but I understand the need for this here. I understand that the recommendation has come forward from environmental groups and professors and experts in the area of environmental protection, and I will respect that. I'm a responsible snowmobiler.

I have just one quick question to ask. Was there any consultation at all with any established snowmobiling associations like the Alberta Snowmobile Association? Perhaps the minister can make note of that question and respond to me at some time.

Now, what this constituent, Rob Stefaniuk, had contacted me about. If new legislation was brought in around wilderness protection areas or a new version of the environmental protection bill we had last year, he was most concerned that serious consideration be given to allowing the inclusion of paragliding and hang gliding. He's quite specific there in that he is speaking about nonmotorized, foot-launched flight, which is pretty specific. I think it's really clear what he's looking for. I did notice in this bill that it was talking about aviation being restricted but that the minister could make allowances or allow certain people to do so, by permit I presume. So this is a question being put to the minister: if there has been consideration given to whether paragliding and hang gliding would be allowed in these rangeland heritage preservation areas.

I notice there's not a lot being allowed in these areas. I understand from the visits I've made to southern Alberta how ecologically fragile this kind of land can be and that not a lot is being allowed here, but I do note that hunting and fishing are. As a sidebar, I'm sure that my father, the hunter and fisherman, will be very glad to hear that, as he does participate in those activities in the areas that are being mentioned here. I would be interested in whether the hang gliding and paragliding are going to be allowed in that they don't have that much of an impact. They are foot propelled, and certainly my constituent, Mr. Stefaniuk, does feel that the aviation restrictions are excessively wide. Now, he was speaking specifically about the Alberta Provincial Parks Act, and he recognizes that they're designed to control the operation of motorized aircraft. Well, his is not motorized. His question is: why can't they allow this? He's really looking for very specific language to be used, because in some of the existing legislation the language is broad enough, he feels – and I agree – that they restrict the relatively low-impact activities of his sport.

I'm glad that I was able to have this opportunity to just put the concerns of my constituent on the record and put them forward to the minister for an answer and also for consideration. It may well not be appropriate given that we are speaking specifically about rangeland heritage areas. Certainly when we do have an environmental protection bill back in front of us at some point, perhaps in a fall sitting, we would be able to look into this in more depth.

So that was the one issue I wanted to raise around this bill at this time, and I appreciate the opportunity to get those comments on the record. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. During my period of time here as a representative of the riding of, first, Edmonton-Whitemud and then Edmonton-Rutherford, an area of the city where we have people that are very informed, citizens that are very, very aware, over the years I've had a great number of people come to me and talk to me about various environmental concerns. There is a real, real passion amongst most people to preserve our wilderness areas, to preserve the beauty of the province. Let's put it that way. We saw what happened in Ontario with Premier Harris, and it was very unusual in the province of Ontario. It wasn't expected to be done by that Premier, but it was done. When he laid down the designations of a number of areas, it was extremely well received.

Now, we had some difficulties when Bill 15 was coming forward. The environmentalists had some difficulties with it. This caucus had

some difficulties with it. It was very, very wide in scope, much wider of course than Bill 24. When I remember Bill 15, the environmentalists were speaking out. They were communicating with us. They were making it very clear that the bill was not acceptable to them. I know that in the past there has been reference made to them or some of them have been labeled as tree huggers, and I don't regard them as tree huggers. I regard them as activists, to a degree, but they're activists with a conscience. They're environmentally concerned. They are concerned about the quality of land, air, and water not only for ourselves but are concerned about the type of environment we leave behind for our children, our grandchildren, for future generations.

9:10

When we talk in terms of the benefit of Bill 24, we see it as a positive bill. We see it as one of those bills that this caucus has no hesitation in supporting because it is to the benefit of Albertans. One may argue that it's not as wide in scope as it should be, but hopefully the Minister of Environment and the minister responsible for energy can sort of get their act together and come to some agreement as to where environmental protection is going to end up in this particular province.

I recognize the economic benefits from the position of the one minister, but I recognize, too, the overall importance of protection of the environment. Once the environment is allowed to be destroyed, you can't redo it. If you look at Edmonton, for example, if we were to allow massive development throughout the entire river valley or allow a freeway through the MacKinnon ravine, once it's done, you can't take it away. You can't say: well, we've changed our mind, and we're going to convert it back to its original area. In very few cases can that be done.

I'd just make reference here to the committee that had been established, the MLA review committee, if I recall correctly, and to some of the concerns and recommendations that were raised at that particular time on the balance in terms of hunting in parks and protected areas. If most Albertans were asked if hunting should be allowed in parks and protected areas, my feeling would be such that the majority would say no, that we have to allow that wilderness to remain in the state it's in. But you've got to find that balance. You have to recognize certain realities in life. I know I've heard the argument on countless occasions that you shouldn't touch these natural areas at all, that you shouldn't touch green areas, that they should be left as is. The difficulty is that if you can't incorporate a balance of recreational opportunities along with the preservation of those designated areas, you in effect can deprive a lot of people of having the opportunity to use those particular areas.

For somebody like myself having to use a wheelchair, in some of these areas like the river valley, for example, if there were no trails, concrete or asphalt trails, whatever, that are deliberately constructed to provide access for persons on bicycles, persons in wheelchairs and such, it would deny those people the opportunity of using that protected green area. The same holds true for the use of recreational vehicles. Again, most Albertans would say: well, recreational vehicles in those areas is not desirable. I think the thing we have to look at is: is there a balance? Is there some limited use of recreational vehicles that in fact can allow some Albertans to utilize those green areas even further?

Madam Chairman, one of my great experiences that I can recall a number of years ago was in Kananaskis Country. Probably most of us have visited Kananaskis Country at one time or another. One of the things the government did, quite a remarkable, positive thing the government did, in the development of Kananaskis Park was to develop, if I remember right, the William Watson Lodge. It's a

special facility for persons with disabilities. It allowed me and my spouse, my son, my daughter-in-law, and our three grandchildren to all occupy accessible facilities for a period of time at a very, very reasonable cost. In fact, the price was bargain basement. It was three bucks a night, if you want to know. Now, that's pretty good for a whole group of us. In any case, they had trails there that were poured asphalt. It really gave us the opportunity to utilize, to see that beautiful, magnificent country we have down there. In any case, I'm going to . . . [interjection] I'm speaking. Please.

In any case, Madam Chairman, I'm going to conclude, and I'm going to conclude on the note that I do support this bill. I would hope all Members of the Legislative Assembly would support this bill because it is a good bill, it's a positive bill. It's a very, very good bill.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 24.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: Bill 24.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.
9:20

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

Bill 19

Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000

Mr. Hancock moved that pursuant to Standing Order 47 the previous question be now put.

[Adjourned debate May 16: Dr. Taylor]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to speak in principle in second reading for Bill 19, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000. Off the top, I'd like to say that in principle I am in favour of what's being proposed in

this bill, although I'm aware that after only two speakers we had the near-closure guillotine use of Standing Order 47(1) to preclude us bringing in any motions in second reading on this bill. But I am in favour of what's being proposed here. There are a lot of numbers being bandied about these days – 8 percent, .5 percent, 11 percent, 10 and a half percent – but essentially we're talking about a tax break or a removal of a surtax for Albertans. I just have two concerns that I'd like to briefly discuss here while we're in the stage of second reading.

My first concern is the omission that has occurred with this bill in that it is reducing the high-income surtax, which really does not apply to all Albertans that are paying a surtax. It applies to about 25 percent of the taxpayers who, indeed, had been levied with this high-income surtax back in the mid-80s when the deficit and the corresponding debt were mounting. You know, there's always a hitch in this. Nothing's ever straightforward here. As I considered Bill 19 and reviewed it and did some research on it, you know, I have to say – and I'll come back to this later. But I do see Bill 19 and Bill 18 going hand in hand, because I think it's about an overall policy, an economic policy and an ideology that's being put forward by the government.

What I noticed specifically is that when the government originally came forward with this tax cut plan in '96, the timetable was to eliminate the .5 percent, the half-percent surtax that had been levied on all taxpayers. Now, the timetable was to eliminate that half a percent surtax prior to eliminating the 8 percent on high-income earners, yet when it actually came forward, that's been reversed. We've heard nothing about the half a percent surtax, which would really put money back in everybody's pockets. No sign of that, no talk of that, but we do have the high-income surtax being withdrawn with this Bill 19. There's even a quote from Budget '96, Reinvestment: The Tax Plan, that says that "the tax plan proposes to reduce the tax burden for all Albertans starting with low to middle income working families." Great.

So there seems to have been a plan put forward in '96, and here we are, four years later, and I don't know what's happened to that plan. Now we have the order of things reversed without an explanation coming from the government about why that plan that was put forward in '96 is not being followed. I, of course, would always prefer to see a more equitable arrangement. I would prefer to see all taxpaying Albertans being acknowledged for their contribution to reducing the deficit and the debt in this province. I'd prefer to see them all being acknowledged prior to any specified group. So I do have a question about what happened to the plan. I have listened, I have reviewed *Hansard*, but I haven't seen an explanation for why the plan that was put forward in '96 isn't being followed. And I do make the point that the half-percent flat rate would be more equitable to all Albertans.

In understanding and reviewing how this government has dealt with their economic policy, I search for an overall and understandable plan to be able to explain to my constituents why these choices are being made, and I am constantly thwarted in my attempts to do that because there isn't a logical flow to what is going on here.

I note that the Premier in a *Calgary Herald* article in the summer of '99 said: what we want to do is make sure that those who can least afford to pay tax get the first break. So as recently as less than a year ago there was obviously still an intent to remove the .5 percent surtax first. What happened in the intervening 10 months? Another quote, also from the summer of '99, from the then Provincial Treasurer: certainly our priority is for low-income earners, and there are ways that that can be addressed. So what happened in the intervening time?

I think every taxpayer did make sacrifices to reduce the debt, and

I'm wondering why only a chosen few winners get the payoff, the payday when it comes to this. I've often spoken of the number of senior citizens that live in Edmonton-Centre, and I have to point out that most of those seniors would be on the loser list if we are following the government's picking winners and losers scenario here, because those seniors, most of them, have incomes under the magic \$46,450. Now, that \$46,450 was the level above which individuals were paying the 8 percent and below which they weren't, but they would have been paying the .5 percent. Who has a pension or fixed income that's under \$46,000? Well, a lot of the people that live in Edmonton-Centre. These are retired nurses, retired teachers, administrators. Interestingly, a number of people that worked on the railroad have pensions that are below that level. They're not benefiting from the removal of this 8 percent high-income surtax, so I guess they could be considered on the losing side of this.

So that's my first and primary concern about what's being proposed here, and as I said, I do support in principle what's being done. I think it's perfectly appropriate that since the government, certainly with enormous help from the people, has gotten rid of the deficit and is reducing the debt, those people should have these surtaxes removed.

My second concern is the larger ideology that is behind these changes in the tax structure, the changes in the economic policy and ideology that I see the government playing with. I spoke before about the plan and then not seeing the plan implemented, so is there a plan?

Essentially we collect taxes to pay for programs and services that the government offers. I have to admit that in Edmonton-Centre I have not received any correspondence from anyone demanding that they get a tax cut, and I've reviewed sort of the last six months' worth of correspondence from people. Sorry; the one exception to that is the senior citizens who are quite adamant in continuing to raise the point that they have never recouped the 5 percent cut they endured through the cuts to their programs and services. That 5 percent, they feel, has never been restored to them. So that's the only kind of feedback I'm getting from constituents about a tax cut or restoring funding to somebody.

Let me go back to the idea that we collect taxes to pay for programs and services, and do we have enough money to offer the programs and services that the people are wanting? Certainly we have in Alberta a cyclical economy. Where is the plan? I'm looking for the plan that shows that we are coping with and we are expecting that rise and fall.

9:30

We hear talk about removal of this 8 percent high-income surtax. As I mentioned, there was talk in the '96 plan and since then of removing the half-percent flat tax that was a debt reduction tax. We're hearing about an entirely new tax scheme which is a flat tax scheme at 11 percent, or I gather the government is now going to propose 10 and a half percent.

How does this all work into adequate provision of programs and services? We're hearing from the education sector that there is a need for consistent, sustainable long-term funding there. We're hearing in health care that there is a need for sustainable, understandable, long-term funding there. We've heard a lot of talk recently about the lack of funding for maintenance in infrastructure. What about the funding that's required for the seniors where they're able to do it?

You know, I have a seniors' centre in my constituency that is offering great work to the community and is now facing a real problem because their rent has gone from \$1,100 to \$4,300 a month. They do a lot of work for the Capital health authority with referrals.

They don't get paid to do that, and they don't get any funding to provide this service, which is a wellness, prevention service.

MS LEIBOVICI: It keeps people out of the hospital.

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, there's no question that it keeps people out of the hospital.

Where are we with programs and services for social and low-income housing? What about child poverty?

You see, when we talk about tax cuts, it's really not a spending issue. It is, as has been pointed out to me most adamantly today, a matter of not collecting that money. If we're not collecting it, then how do we expect to be able to put these moneys that are being requested from these different sectors back in?

You know, when we're into the theory and practice of taxation and spending, I'm not seeing the energy and the commitment from this government. I'm not seeing that willingness and that energy and that commitment to plan. I'm not seeing it to invest in designated sectors like youth or seniors. I'm not seeing it to be that commitment to prevention, whether it be for poverty or homelessness or disease or ill health. You know, the government has made it very clear that they don't want to be in this Legislature. I'm speaking now with that guillotine of Standing Order 47(1) over my head. It seems they want to do as little as possible and do it behind closed doors at their own time.

For these problems that we see before us that I hear from people in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre, we're not seeing the plan. We're not seeing the energy. We're not seeing the political will to move this forward. When you do see something coming forward like this idea in Bill 19, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000, of withdrawing that 8 percent high-income surtax, it doesn't follow with any other plan that we've had put before us. We don't see the plan.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

What we do see is short-term sort of patches. Even the language that the government is using is about short-term fixes. They talk about pressure points and addressing pressure points. Well, that doesn't bring to mind any image of a long-range flow with the milestones that they're going to hit at every point to move things forward. That talks about: "Oh, oh. This water main has burst over here, so we'll run over, and we'll slap something on it. Maybe we'll have to cut a section out of the pipe and reweld it, and that'll fix that pressure point. Oh, this one's starting to bulge over here. We'll rush over here and deal with that." So I'm looking and failing to see, because the government is not providing it, quite frankly.

It is piecemeal. It is jumping around. There is no explanation for the choices that are being made here. When we ask questions in this Chamber, what we often see back is a rebuke, is abusiveness, is name calling. Well, frankly, sticks and bones can break my bones, but names are never going to harm me. I can stand here and take the abuse and heckling that happens, but I am still looking for the plan, and I'm not seeing it. We're all looking for it.

So those were the comments, the two concerns that I wanted to raise around this bill. I'll make it clear one more time. In principle I am in favour of this bill. I think it's perfectly appropriate if the deficit has been addressed. If the very reason for instituting this high-income surtax was a deficit reduction surtax and that deficit has been addressed, it is exactly right that it should be removed. My concern is that this is not following the plan the government put forward with much touting, much paperwork, and much spending of the famous Public Affairs budget, and there's been no explanation

as to why that plan is now abandoned or not being followed through with.

My second concern is the larger economic policy or, to be more specific, ideology that I see not being put forward by this government. Those are the two concerns that I wanted to raise around this bill. I'm very glad to have had the opportunity to get my few words in before that guillotine falls on our heads again over here. The government seems in an awful rush to get out of here without providing very much explanation about why. So I'm glad I got this opportunity to speak tonight, and I will cede the floor to one of my colleagues who I know wants to speak to second reading.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I've been given the opportunity to make some comments on Bill 19, which of course in a way is a companion bill to Bill 18. I use the term companion bill because if you look at the basic principle behind Bill 19 as well as Bill 18, the main principle is to provide a tax benefit, but in both cases the greatest, the most significant tax benefit is to those people that make the most dollars.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when we talk in terms of taxation, people are sick and tired of having to pay the increasing tax that has occurred over the years in several provinces. Maybe B.C. is an exception. It doesn't seem to have come to grips with dealing with its budget in terms of trying to balance it. What happened here in Alberta is not so different from what we saw happen in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan and Ontario. We see it happening in the federal government, where the current federal Treasurer, the Hon. Paul Martin, has also recognized that Canadians are crying out for some form of tax relief.

I think we all accept the fact that Albertans deserve to get – I shouldn't say get some of their tax dollars back, because we're not really giving it back.

MS BLAKEMAN: Just not taking it anymore.

MR. WICKMAN: Exactly. It's not ours to just take as we see fit.

In other words, what we're saying is that we have to find a mechanism to reduce the burden on Albertans when it comes to paying tax. So it's not an expenditure in that sense. One could argue that it's a loss of revenue. I tend to see it as providing a benefit to Albertans; in other words, recognizing that Albertans have gone through some hardships and seen the deficit fought and seen the accumulated debt go down over a period of time. We've seen provincial employee and private sector cutbacks in salaries and such, and we saw a period of time in the '70s and the early '80s of dramatic increases in taxation with all levels of government.

9:40

So the basic question, I guess, that has to be addressed right off the bat: would I as an elected representative oppose a tax reduction? No, certainly not. I'd have to be foolish to go to my constituents and say, "Sorry; there's an opportunity to reduce the burden on you, but I'm going to oppose it because I don't believe in tax cuts." They wouldn't even wait until the next election. They'd get a petition and throw me out right now.

MS LEIBOVICI: Where do I sign?

MR. WICKMAN: My colleague here from Edmonton-Meadowlark wants to be the first one to sign that petition.

MS LEIBOVICI: No, not that. I like you. I want it clear on the record: I think you're a wonderful MLA.

MR. WICKMAN: So, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that Albertans are entitled to that tax reduction. Call it a break. Call it whatever. It's a question of how it's done. Let's talk in terms of fair is fair. Let's talk in terms of who deserves the greatest benefit.

I recognize some of the arguments that will be put forward by proponents of Bill 19 and also Bill 18. Let's talk about Bill 19 in particular. It is a start. There is no question about it. It's the very, very first indication of recognizing the need for less pressure on taxpayers to foot the programs that are currently being footed, and this of course is retroactive to January 1, 2000, whereas Bill 18 doesn't kick in until next year. So this becomes the first significant tax reform that will be of benefit to some Albertans. You see, that's the key: of benefit to some Albertans. It's not widespread. It's just to those selected few in a category that represents possibly 25 percent of the income earners throughout the province.

Now, when we talk in terms of fair being fair, there are two surcharges on provincial taxation. One is the 8 percent that kicks in over the \$46,460, I believe it is, or maybe \$46,450; somewhere in that ballpark between \$46,000 and \$47,000. One is taxed 8 percent provincially on any income over that. However, there's the other surtax, the .5 percent that applies virtually to all Albertans. There are some exceptions. The very, very low income, of course, don't have to pay that surtax because when you do, if your income is low enough, the Alberta portion of your tax return is offset by that particular credit that you get.

So it doesn't apply to all Albertans, but the elimination of the .5 percent surtax would benefit the vast majority of Albertans. The vast majority. Maybe it's 90 percent, maybe 85 percent; I'm not sure of the actual percentage. But it would benefit, I would say, at least three times as many people as the elimination of the 8 percent surtax. The thing is that it would benefit those people that are in a position that they're in the greatest need of that benefit because, of course, they're the lower income and they don't have that disposable income that those earning \$50,000 or \$70,000 a year or more will have.

So the question I would have to pose, that I would ask the minister to respond to when we have this particular bill go into committee stage is: why not first eliminate the .5 percent surtax? Eliminate that first. Make that retroactive to January 1, 2000. Then 85 percent of Albertans would be saying: "Great; the government is giving us some benefit right off the bat. They're recognizing that we're the ones that need the benefit right off the bat." But no, they've chosen to go in the other direction. We could eliminate the 8 percent at a further time, stage it in.

I recognize that the 8 percent surtax was put into place, I believe in 1987, with the understanding that it was there to fight the deficit. But the deficit was eliminated quite some time ago. The argument can no longer be used that during the last two or three years or whatever that 8 percent was used to offset the deficit, because the deficit was eliminated. One could argue that it goes towards the accumulated debt. Nevertheless, the reduction in taxation we see in terms of dollars is – what? – \$130 million roughly. I believe it's in that ballpark, that benefit, that portion of Albertans.

Now, one of the arguments that the proponents of this scheme may put forward is that, well, it's going to reduce the so-called brain drain into the states. In other words, if those at the higher end of the income earning potential get the bigger break, then of course there is going to be an enticement for them to stay here in Alberta, stay here in Canada, whatever the case may be. But I think there's a lot more involved than an 8 percent surtax when a person makes a decision whether they want to remain in Canada or go to the United States.

There are aspects of the United States that are not nearly as conducive to quality of life as here in Canada. I've always held that the United States is a nice place to visit, but my roots are here in Canada, and there's no way that I would ever, ever consider leaving Canada to move to the United States, even if there were no taxes there, even if taxes were eliminated totally. So I kind of reject that argument.

Now, there may be a small number of people that are so motivated by the dollar that just for the sake of saving some dollars in taxation, they're prepared to give up the lifestyle that they would have here in the province of Alberta. Some will do it. I feel sorry for those people, Mr. Speaker. I feel sorry for people who will give up the lifestyle we have here to move to some American city for the sake of having a few extra dollars in their pocket. I could not do that myself.

Let's take a look at some stats here, some background. The 8 percent provincial surtax was introduced by the government, as I mentioned earlier, in the budget of '87 as a means to assist in the elimination of the provincial budget deficit. Now, if we look at the figures, the 8 percent, yeah, it does apply to Albertans earnings \$46,450 in taxable income or paying Alberta's basic tax of above \$3,500. Those are the two options or the two categories on the Alberta portion of your tax return.

When we look at the year 2000, the 8 percent surtax generates \$144 million in revenue for the provincial government. Again that term "generates revenue" is used. I don't see it sort of as revenue; I see it as \$144 million of money in Albertans' pockets that was not taken from them, that we're not forcing them to pay over.

When we look at October 1998, when we had the Alberta Tax Review Committee come up with its recommendations, they did in fact recommend the elimination of the temporary deficit elimination tax, the surtax, to be followed by the .5 percent flat rate tax, it's called. Yeah, that did occur.

We saw a number of government statements that followed that certain things were going to happen at a certain given time, but the world price of oil – we all know what the world price of oil is. I stopped at the gas pumps on the way here. They jumped it 4 cents a litre overnight. That's because of the world price.

MS LEIBOVICI: Because of the long weekend.

MR. WICKMAN: The long weekend coming up too, yeah.

So the money just keeps pouring in, pouring in as far as the government is concerned.

The Premier has had the opportunity to take some initiatives and say: we're going to advance this whole tax reform structure; we're going to put things in place a lot sooner than we originally had anticipated. That's good that they did that. However, in terms of the priorities I still don't understand for the life of me why they chose as a priority to give the immediate benefit, the first benefit to the highest earners in the province. I don't understand that.

I know that in my constituency, a middle-class neighbourhood, a good number of the people will benefit in fact by Bill 19. I recognize that. Despite that I still have to say: fair is fair. To me Bill 19 is not fair. I know it's going to benefit my neighbors. I do their income tax for them; I know it's going to benefit them. They're going to say: "You're my representative. Why can't you support this particular bill?" Well, I have to respond, and say: well, it may benefit you, but three blocks down from where I live, where we have a subsidized housing project, is it going to benefit those people? Who needs the greater benefit? The people living in that subsidized housing project or my neighbour who has a cottage out at the lake, who has a trailer, who has a truck, and all those little toys in life that a lot of people can't afford?

9:50

So I can justify my decision not to support this bill on the basis that it is not a fair bill. I don't oppose a tax cut, and I make that very clear. I want that recorded in *Hansard* in capital letters: I do not oppose a tax break. In fact I support a tax break. Again I would think every member in this House would support a reduction in the amount of burden that we impose on those people that chose to put us here in the Legislative Assembly.

Let's look at some of the references that have been made in the past. On July 27, 1999, in the *Calgary Herald* the Premier of the province is quoted as saying: what we want to do is make sure that those who can least afford to pay tax get the first break. You see, that's exactly what I'm saying, and that's what the Premier said on July 27, 1999. What changed between now and then I don't know, but I agree fully with that statement. What we want to do is make sure that those who can least afford to pay tax get the first break.

Then we go to a statement by the former Provincial Treasurer, who of course we know has some other priorities right now that he's dealing with. He was talking in terms of priorities on July 28, 1999, a day after the Premier made his statement. The former Treasurer states: certainly our priority is for low-income earners, and there are ways that can be addressed. Well, to me when we talk in terms of priority for low-income earners, it's not the elimination of the surtax that benefits the 25 percent of Albertans who make the most money. Those are not the low-income earners. The low-income earners of course are the other 75 percent and starting to go down from there.

But the government took the expedient way by eliminating the 8 percent surtax. We saw the different scenarios, the concept of a tax rebate like Premier Mike Harris did in Ontario, which doesn't have annual implications. It's a one-shot implication. That was talked about. It never happened. There were comments made that it would be too complicated to provide some benefit to Albertans in that fashion. However, the province of Ontario I guess didn't find it that complicated. I'm not sure if they're better at their organizational skills or exactly what it is, but obviously Ontario has shown that that could have worked.

Now, we also saw kicked around the idea of the reduction or elimination of the tax at the pumps, the gasoline tax. For a while Albertans were expecting some immediate relief, seeing a reduction in the tax imposed on gas. However, the Acting Provincial Treasurer, who was at that time responding as the minister of energy said: we'll do it; as long as the federal government commits to doing it, we'll match them. Because the federal government decides they're going to do something or not isn't a sound basis for the provincial government making a decision. If it were, the government would not be considering Bill 18, for example, because I'm sure that in Ottawa the masters down there do not endorse what is happening with the delinking of taxation by the province of Alberta.

Although I agree with the concept of delinking, I'm sure that the federal government would not support the concept of a flat tax. If the government were to listen and follow the federal government, well, they wouldn't be proceeding with this type of taxation reform. They would be sitting down with their federal counterparts and working out a strategy. Paul Martin would be the man to do it with, because Paul Martin has a different view of tax reform than we see this government having. So that's the way it should have been done.

Now, what amount of money would the elimination of the .5 percent flat tax cost? If I recall, off the top of my head the loss of dollars coming into the coffers would be a bit more than the elimination of the surtax.

I want to give now some specific examples in terms of who benefits from Bill 19 and who doesn't benefit. Let's look here, for example. A typical cabinet minister earning roughly \$75,000 in

taxable income would save \$249 a year as a result of Bill 19. A cabinet minister earning \$75,000 in a one-income family with two children would save \$206 a year. A deputy minister earning \$100,000 a year in taxable income would save \$495 per year because of the elimination of the 8 percent surtax, or the approval of Bill 19.

Let's look at some of the people who don't benefit. Let's look at the – I won't say the real people of Alberta. I'll say the average person, the blue-collar workers who go out and work hour after hour. They work overtime, whatever, to try and make ends meet, just to provide a reasonable standard of living for their family. Even an extra \$25 a month may mean a lot to those people. A family of four, headed by two public servants, one earning \$60,000 and the other earning \$40,000 – in other words, two incomes in that one family – will save \$56 per year, or 15 cents a day, because the income supports are considered as separate.

A two-income family earning \$75,000 with two children where the income is split 50-50 will save zero per year. A single nurse in a place like Lloydminster, for example, who earns \$40,000 will save zero percent as a result of the elimination of the surtax. We can look at a farmer in Lethbridge, for example, where my colleague to the right comes from. A family in Lethbridge with one spouse earning \$55,000 as, let's say, a law enforcement officer and the other staying home with their three children, a priority in that particular household, would save just \$16 per year, or 4 cents per day. Four cents per day would be their savings.

A senior citizen in Calgary who has \$30,000 of taxable income coming in will save zero dollars per year. A senior couple in Edmonton earning \$55,000 will save just \$48 a year.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege again to rise and speak to Bill 19, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000. This is an interesting bill in the sense that it combines a couple of housekeeping things with a major change in taxation that's going to be applied in a retroactive way to the first of January 2000. At least if I read the words in the act correctly, they say that at the end of the 1999 tax year the 8 percent surtax will be removed.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of the bills now that we've had to handle in context with a whole series of different kinds of debates that are going on, different kinds of relationships, and I guess what we need to do is make sure that when we talk about how we're going to deal with adjusting and balancing the surplus that's in the Alberta budget, the way we have to approach it is how to look at what we're doing and who the recipients are of the benefits from what we're going to do in that.

We've already heard tonight a number of members talk about how this is a change in priority for tax relief for Albertans in the sense that a year ago they were promising tax relief to be spread equally among all Albertans to start with and then they would deal with the specific taxes. Well, what they've done with this bill now is they've effectively transferred the initial tax relief to those that are subject to the 8 percent surtax; in other words, Albertans that are making an income over \$46,450. So this effectively has given the tax break to about 25 percent of Albertans as opposed to the potential to be applied to all tax filers if they would have gone to the original plan of the government and eliminated the .5 percent surtax before they went to the 8 percent high-income surtax.

I guess when I try to discuss this with constituents, one of the things that comes up is: well, you know, we hear this, or we've read that. What we've got to start doing is recognizing that we are here as legislators representing our community to try and put in place a

set of rules that will govern how we on behalf of our constituents, on behalf of Albertans, put in place programs that will provide the services those Albertans want. What we have to look at are some of the definitional problems and some of the issues that come up when we start talking about things that mean something a little bit different to other people, depending upon who they've heard it from or how they've heard it or in what context they've heard it.

10:00

One of the things that struck me when we started this debate the other day: one of the members stood and said that we're going to spend \$1.4 billion on tax relief. Mr. Speaker, I would challenge that to be an inappropriate statement in the sense that we do not spend money in the form of tax relief. If we want to balance a budget, what we effectively do is ask Albertans not to contribute quite as much to our general revenue fund, so we then have less to allocate to the decisions we're making on their behalf. This is kind of an issue of: what constitutes the ownership? How do we define the ownership of the dollars that are in the general revenue fund? I guess in my mind those dollars belong to Albertans. We don't get to take those dollars and spend them by giving them back to them. What we're doing is saying: we're not going to collect that many dollars from you next year or this year.

So essentially we are failing to justify to them the concept that each year, when we do the budget process, we effectively go through a process of saying: you as Albertans have asked for a certain level of service from the public, and it's going to cost this much; that means we're going to ask you to pay these taxes. Now, that's how I believe the tax system should work. As legislators on their behalf we should be making sure those dollars are spent as effectively and efficiently and as equitably as possible. We shouldn't be asking Albertans to contribute any more to our general revenue fund than what they effectively see as the appropriate level of service they require.

What I'm getting at in that discussion is the fact that I challenge this idea that we can spend money out of general revenue on a tax cut. What we do is give up asking for money into the general revenue when we give a tax cut. These dollars belong to Albertans; they don't belong to us. We can't spend them. What we do is give them the opportunity not to have to contribute in tax. So that's one of the things a number of my constituents have raised and we have to deal with when we try and talk about when they hear somebody say: hey, we're going to spend \$1.4 billion on tax cuts. No, no. What we're doing is giving relief from asking Albertans for \$1.4 billion. Essentially these are their dollars. They're not our dollars.

The other thing we have to deal with is this multiple jurisdiction kind of issue that comes up. I think we saw an example of that this afternoon in the sense that we as legislators in this House are only responsible for the taxes that are collected and distributed under the jurisdiction of our constitutional mandate. What happens at the federal level and what happens at the local municipal level: Albertans have to take those issues up with their respective elected officials at those levels. We cannot set tax policy at the federal level. We cannot set tax policy at the local level. That is up to the elected officials at those levels.

So what we have to do when we're talking about how changes in our tax structure or tax rate and tax level affect Albertans or ask Albertans to contribute, we have to deal with only the part of the tax that we are responsible for. The fact is that we have had in the past a linked taxing system with the federal government, so if the federal government changed their tax process or their tax rates so they were collecting a different level of tax, it automatically passed through and changed our level of revenue.

Well, the good thing about this whole discussion we're having on tax reform right now, including Bill 18 and Bill 19, is that Bill 18 is going to get rid of that kind of federal interference in our taxation system and our revenue collection in Alberta. We're going to be able to establish a direct link between Albertans and the decisions we make here in this House. We're not going to have to be at the mercy, if we might say it, of actions taken at the federal level, and this creates a much better taxation system, a much more accountable taxation system, where we can go out to Albertans and say: this was the decision we made; it was directly made on your behalf, and this is how it's going to work. We don't have to deal with: well, gee, the federal government changed taxes, so now we have to make decisions differently because they've affected our revenue.

What we've got to do is be accountable in those ways in the sense that we're going to look at making sure the definition we use in our discussion about taxation is consistent and is pointed in the sense that it deals with the issues we have under our control and that we can help Albertans to understand why we're making the decisions the way we are.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

Now, Mr. Speaker, I went through that just to deal with some of the problems that come up when we try to talk about the concepts or the change in revenue collection that's reflected in Bill 19 in the sense that, as I said at the start, only about 25 percent of Albertans are going to be affected by the elimination of the 8 percent high-income surtax. Yet when we're talking about how we deal with the issues of equity and fairness within our taxation system, we should be able to have information that we can take out to Albertans and say: look, this is why we're making the decision to create a tax change that affects only some Albertans. What we've got now is Bill 19 effectively only providing a 1999 tax year change for persons with incomes over – what did I say it was? – \$46,540.

What we're going to have to do is go out to our constituents and say: this is the reason why we chose on your behalf to change the relative weights of taxation, the relative burden of taxation, the relative share of taxation, however you want to interpret what we're doing when we ask Albertans to contribute through their taxes. We have to be able to justify to them that this is effectively creating an equitable affair and an adequate taxation system to provide the services they see fit for their perception of the province of Alberta.

As I look at the whole idea of the transition we've been through, bringing fiscal responsibility to the province, I guess what we've done is really changed some of the economic opportunity and economic burden faced by Albertans by eliminating a number of the support programs, the programs that provide assistance to persons with lower incomes. Effectively, if we were going to come to a situation where we had surplus dollars that we didn't need to contribute to our expenditures, then we should go back and say: who is it that we should allow not to contribute quite so much?

The idea that we are going to make a choice and say that only persons with incomes over \$46,000 will be the ones who get a tax benefit I think essentially creates a real distribution issue in terms of the beneficiaries of that tax cut in the sense of what we see in the context of the shift in burden that we've created, the shift in the cost of living that we've created by cutting back on government programs. A number of those cutbacks were very justifiable, others not so. The issue we have to deal with, then, is that if we're going to provide economic opportunity to Albertans, which group should get it?

10:10

I guess in my context and that of the constituents I talk to, a lot of them, even some with incomes that are at a level where the 8 percent surtax actually takes some of their money, feel we have to be looking at: how are we helping Albertans at the lower income levels? We should be dealing with making sure they get a fair chance in our province before we really deal with tax cuts at the upper end of the income level. I use "upper end" only in the context, you know, that this was defined as a high-income surtax and applicable only to the persons at what was to be defined as a high income in the context of that taxation policy.

We have to kind of question: what would have been more appropriate? That, Mr. Speaker, is why, as I started the discussion, I suggested I was much more impressed by the decision that was made a couple of years ago when we said that when the time comes that we don't need the revenues, the first priority has to be to make sure everybody gets a little bit of tax relief. In those discussions on the business plan, we were talking at the time about making sure that the .5 percent surtax would be the one that would be reduced first, and then we would deal with the 8 percent high-income surtax later.

AN HON. MEMBER: Everybody is getting some.

DR. NICOL: The member across the way says everybody is going to get a tax cut. Yes, that's true, Mr. Speaker, in the context of Bill 18 and Bill 19 put together. In the context of what we're talking about tonight in Bill 19, only the persons who are paying into the 8 percent surtax are going to get a tax cut. So not everybody is getting a tax cut out of the process of this bill. Only the people who are being asked to contribute to our general revenue through the imposition of the 8 percent high-income surtax are affected by this piece of legislation. If we put it with Bill 18, then we're talking about a whole different scenario.

I think this is one of the things I started my discussion with in the sense that when we're talking about the legislative responsibilities we have in this House, we've got to make sure that when we're talking about one piece of legislation, we're not trying to confuse Albertans by superimposing on top of it something else. If the government wanted these two handled together, they should have introduced them as one piece of legislation and dealt with an overall review of our taxation. It would have been just as easy to put Bill 19's conditions into Bill 18 and make it retroactive, just like they have it here in this piece of legislation. Then we could deal with this as a package, not as individual pieces of legislation.

We have to look at it from that perspective when we start talking about: how is it we want to present our information to Albertans? I think if we're going to talk only about Bill 19 – and that's what we're doing tonight – we have to talk about it in the context of: what is the impact of this piece of legislation in the context of the criteria of fairness and equity and adequate revenue generation for Albertans so that we can provide as their legislators the services Albertans need?

Now, Mr. Speaker, just in conclusion, I think I want to reiterate some of the things we said at the start. It's our responsibility as legislators to make sure that we consult with Albertans about the kind of services we are going to provide on their behalf, whether it's health care, whether it's education, whether it's infrastructure, whether it's social programs, whether it's any kind of program they want. We then have to figure out the most effective way to provide that, effective being quality of service at as reasonable and cost-effective means as possible. Then what we have to do is go back and say: all right; now, what is the appropriate way to collect the dollars that are needed to fund that?

If we're going to say that the reason we want to go and look at implementing Bill 19 before we do Bill 18 – which is effectively what we're doing by having this one effective in the 2000 tax year and Bill 18 effective for the 2001 tax year – is because we're saying that this has to be our priority, that we're choosing to make sure that the people with incomes over \$46,000 get the tax break before all Albertans do, then this is the kind of legislation we want to support. But if we feel that all Albertans should have gotten the tax break at the same time, then what we should be doing is looking at potential modifications to Bill 18 so we can deal with an appropriate and fair level of taxation for all Albertans in a way that they contribute to the services provided in a way that's socially fair, and then we should drop this bill.

Mr. Speaker, on that basis I think I've kind of covered the issues I wanted to talk about. I think I've clarified my point in the sense that because this only deals with a tax break for what are defined by the bill to be high-income Albertans, then I don't think it's the kind of decision we want to make on behalf of Albertans at this point in our adjustment of fiscal responsibility and accountability to those citizens. So I would like to say that I don't plan to support this bill.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to see you in the chair. I know this is of particular interest to you.

There's been some confusion put about – and I would be tempted to say it might be malicious misinformation spread by the government – that the Alberta Liberal opposition is opposed to tax cuts. One of the things the government has been saying is that we're opposed to tax cuts because we have been debating with some vigour both the bill before us, Bill 19, and Bill 18, even to the extent that the Premier seems to be unaware of his own promises made in previous budget documents, particularly Budget 1996, where the government made it very clear that they were going to remove both of the so-called deficit elimination taxes.

Now, since this government has been in power, there has been \$9.5 billion, more or less, accumulated in surpluses. [interjection] Absolutely, Minister of Gaming, you should applaud for that. So we've got this \$9.5 billion of accumulated surpluses, if you total it up at the end of every year, yet the government has continued to collect these so-called deficit elimination taxes for all these years. They keep on reaching into taxpayers' pockets and pulling out one loonie at a time and justify it by calling it a deficit elimination tax, and on the other hand they've been chalking up these huge surpluses.

So if there is any political party represented in this Legislative Assembly that seems to be opposed to tax cuts, it would have to be the political party that forms the government, Mr. Speaker, because while they have been talking a lot about tax cuts, all they've been doing is talking and not delivering. Meanwhile, it's been the Official Opposition that's been saying since the 1993 election: let's get serious about meaningful and sustainable and fair tax reform, delivering tax cuts across the board, and making sure we get value for every tax dollar that's spent. I remember the late Laurence Decore standing and talking about value-for-money audits, a concept this government still will not endorse. Clearly, just to set the record straight, there is in fact a group of MLAs in this Assembly who are opposed to meaningful tax cuts, and they all belong to the governing caucus.

10:20

So, Mr. Speaker, why is it that we are questioning Bill 19? Well,

we're questioning Bill 19 because it is again an example of how this government picks winners and losers within the tax system. It again is an example of the government playing favourites with taxpayers' money. In 1996 in the budget document the government said that we're going to make sure we provide tax relief to low-income and middle-income Albertans first. They pledged to remove the deficit elimination tax that's paid by over one and a half million taxpayers first, but when it actually comes to crunch time, what does the government do? They remove the deficit elimination tax that caters to only those at the higher income level. They go to eliminate the tax which, when you compound it with the tax cut to the high-income earners that would be found in Bill 18, represents an embarrassing windfall for the wealthy at the expense of the middle-income earners.

Mr. Speaker, that is why we are questioning Bill 19. It's not because we are opposed to tax cuts. It is because we're opposed to this government picking favourites. We think that while the government may be comfortable in the oak-paneled inner sanctum of the corporate elite of this province and promising favours and tax relief to the men and women who populate those corridors, the Liberal opposition would like to make sure that tax relief is, first and foremost, fundamentally fair. This of course means that we would provide tax relief to the whole spectrum of Alberta taxpayers, not just those at the very top end, and we wouldn't try any game of smoke and mirrors by talking about those who pay hardly any tax, if any at all, on the low end. What we would be doing is guaranteeing that all the taxpayers right across the spectrum receive fair and sustainable tax relief. It's very clear that that is what the difficulty is with Bill 19.

Now, maybe the government would like to accept some helpful suggestions. Maybe they would like to go back to keeping their 1996 pledge, and maybe they want to remove that other deficit elimination tax first. Maybe they will go back to their pledge and they will provide meaningful and sustainable tax relief to low-income and middle-income Albertans first. You know, if they want some suggestions, maybe when this bill gets into committee, we can provide them with those suggestions. Of course, we would do that in a way that is linked to Bill 18, because these are sisters. These bills are joined at the hip, certainly not at the head. Because these bills are joined at the hip, you have to read them together to understand the implications for the distribution of effects on both the economy of Alberta and the tax filers in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I know that you've read a recent academic paper on the distributive effects of various forms of progressive income tax systems, so I think you'll agree with me that the major conclusion in that paper was that you cannot take a single simple measure and then extrapolate from that its impact across the board. You have to look at the interaction effect of all these measures, particularly if you're not dealing with any particular tax regime that would be revenue neutral. I know you derive that from your reading of the paper.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So I would argue that what we are faced with is a government that kind of got caught in a squeeze. When the hardworking men and women in Alberta Treasury were given the task of finding some solutions to the tax problem the government found itself in, they came up with the flat tax, probably under direct instruction from political masters. They then came up with a plan that they thought they could afford. The only reasonable explanation I can find is that the government felt it couldn't afford to follow through on its commitment to remove the deficit elimination tax for the one and a half million Alberta tax filers, where the government collects over

\$340 million. They only thought they could afford to remove the high-income surtax, which affects less than 400,000 Albertans, because it only generates about \$140 million or \$145 million worth of tax revenue.

They probably just made a cold, calculated decision that because we're not confident in our own budget projections and because we don't want to get boxed in by what Ottawa might do and because we might want to have a tax goodie to throw out at the last minute on the eve of another election, I think we'll just forget about our commitment and just flip it around and reduce the cheaper tax first. That's a pretty cynical policy for the government to adopt, Mr. Speaker, and that's another reason why I find it very difficult to support the government in this particular initiative.

Mr. Speaker, another point I want to raise – and to me it gives evidence of the fact that the government is finding it very, very difficult to defend their tax policy – is that we had, to my memory, the unprecedented experience of the government using a time allocation device, a guillotine on debate, after only two speakers from the Official Opposition. You had the spectacle of the Government House Leader rising last night at around 11 o'clock and saying that the government is impatient with debate, that we don't want to hear anything about our tax plan, that we don't want to hear how to make it better, so we're going to move that the motion not be further adjourned. I think this is other evidence of how defensive the government is and what shaky ground they're on when it comes to their tax policy.

Clearly, they are not equal to the task of defending their own initiative, and I guess I have to give them credit for that. At least they've recognized it for what it is, a house of cards. Of course, rather than defend it, they want to try to run away from it. Well, as the Official Opposition, part of our job is to make the government accountable for its actions and for its policies, so we will be here to ensure that we do make them accountable. We will continue the debate on these ill-conceived tax bills until the government listens. Of course, there are many Albertans out there who say, "Well, the government is simply too arrogant to listen," and the evidence they point to, of course, is what's just happened with Bill 11.

I have talked to dozens and dozens of constituents just over the last couple of days about tax policy, and they all say: well, wouldn't it just be a waste of effort and energy to try to get a positive message into the head of, between the ears of this government? I mean, look at how they just were dismissive about all the debate and discussion and evidence on Bill 11. All they did was ridiculed, called names, pointed fingers, had tantrums. They did everything but act like a responsive and caring, compassionate government. So what makes you think, they said to me, that they would listen to you or to us when it comes to tax policy? I said: well, you know, I am a Liberal, so that means I'm forever optimistic. I said that I will carry their message into this Assembly and deliver that message. I will stand with my colleagues to keep delivering that message, with the slim hope that it will begin to get through, that it will sink in.

Even though with their smugness and their arrogance the government may look like they're resisting the message, I know that they listen. I know that when they go back to their offices and reflect on the debate and read the *Hansard* and listen to their bureaucrats, those messages get in. They kind of slump their shoulders and hang their heads and say: "Yeah, I know, but what can we do about it? We've already invested a whole bunch of political capital going in this direction, so wouldn't we just look foolish, like we were losing face?" Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you right now that no member of the Official Opposition will lord it over them at all. We won't hold it over their heads. We won't rub their faces in it if they back down. We will be gracious. We will accept their admission that they were

incorrect and their willingness to change course as a sign of strength, not as a sign of weakness. That's, again, why we will continue to carry the debate on this tax policy.

Mr. Speaker, what we have with Bill 19 is a bill that could be very good. It could have been a bill that this government brought forward and said: "We're going to stop picking your pockets, taxpayers. We've eliminated that deficit. We no longer need the deficit elimination taxes, and we're going to get rid of them posthaste. We're going to get rid of them both, we're going to get rid of them now, and we're going to say that we're sorry we've been wrongfully collecting them for these past few years." Instead, what they did was decide to cater to very few at the expense of very many, and that is something a Liberal will never support.

So I would ask the government to take a good, long look at their policy, to consider that there are ways to fix this. They can get out of it, and the way to get out of it is to provide the broad-based tax relief they've been promising but not delivering. They can start doing that.

10:30

In fact, I won't even rush to introduce an amendment. I will wait in committee for the government, for the Acting Provincial Treasurer – I know it's only a part-time job for him – to stand in this Assembly and bring in the amendment himself. Mr. Speaker, we won't even try to take credit. We'll just quietly nod and get on with the debate. That would be a way of this government providing some evidence that they are willing to keep their word when it comes to their tax pledges.

Bill 19 is one of those bills that the government would love to sell out there as the Official Opposition being opposed to because we're opposed to tax cuts. Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. Any member who says that is telling an untruth. It's as clear as that. I know that outside the Assembly I could say that they were lying; inside the Assembly I can't. But it's very clear that the Official Opposition is not opposed to tax cuts. What we are in favour of are fair and sustainable tax cuts as part of a comprehensive plan.

We've talked about what the elements of that comprehensive plan would be, and it starts with fairness to all taxpayers and starts with eliminating both of these deficit elimination taxes. Then we can get on to talking about how to maintain progressivity in an income tax system that is delinked and indexed and fair and sustainable, Mr. Speaker. Then we can get on with the corporate tax review, we can get on with the user fee review, and we can provide some real relief to Albertans because, after all, they deserve it.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will keep my comments quite brief. I was a little surprised with the comments from Edmonton-Centre and Lethbridge-East as to concerns over the reduction of taxes for Albertans. The concept of reducing taxes has been one that this government has had in place since 1993. We made that commitment as a result of a fiscal plan that we took to the people. We said that once we start to eliminate the deficit and pay off our debt, we would like to see taxes go only in one direction, and that is down. We've kept that promise. We've been careful, because we recognized that there were core programs that governments were responsible for. We've changed our government, restructured it and remodeled it to deliver what we thought were the core programs of government.

I would refer hon. members to the budget document that was passed in this Legislature, in particular to page 11 of the fiscal plan, which clearly shows, Mr. Speaker, that in the last six years by sticking to a fiscal plan – albeit one that has been difficult for all Albertans, and all Albertans had to commit to the plan – we were able to pay off enough debt to free up from our debt servicing costs over \$700 million on an annual basis. Part of that fiscal plan we laid out was that as we paid off the debt, the interest expense that was saved from paying down debt would go back into Albertans' hands. We've kept that commitment. I would refer hon. members to the previous page, where we talked about what was called net debt and how it was important to pay that off quickly and get it out of the way, along with clearing off the deficit.

It gave me some concern, Mr. Speaker, to hear the Member for Edmonton-Glenora talk about surpluses. I've said this in this House many times: you cannot have a surplus when you have a debt. You can have additional operating revenues that come in, but you can't have surplus when you have debt. That is a misnomer that is quite often used and mixed. So I would ask . . . [interjections] If you would quit interrupting, you might learn something.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, debate is through the chair, not across the aisle.

Hon. Minister.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to also refer the hon. member to another section in the budget document, again on page 38, that clearly shows how by sticking to this fiscal plan, our debt servicing costs have been able to be decreased over a number of years. It's critically important that we pay attention to that line to see the decrease in that debt servicing cost, because that frees up those dollars that would be going into an almost unconscionable place for a government, into debt servicing.

There is a diagram in the budget document that is also very, very important for all members to use, and I hope you distribute it to your constituents, because I think it's a picture that is easily read and viewed by anyone which clearly shows that the fourth largest expenditure of the government is interest expense on debt. That's pretty frightening when you think of the core responsibilities of government, to think that we had got into a position where we were having to have our fourth largest expenditure go to debt servicing. With the fiscal plan that's been laid out, we're able to bring that down. That's critically important not only for us as we sit in this Legislature and debate but, more importantly, for the generation coming up. I'm sure a lot of you in this Assembly came in here to do a job so that our kids would not have to bear the burden of the past and would not have to carry around their neck the albatross of paying for fiscal mistakes that were made by the government which would not give them the opportunity to make clear choices and have the ability to make those choices.

Now, the first step in Bill 19 is to remove what we can afford to do this year and still keep in mind that debt repayment and lowering that interest expense we have to do in a systematic way. It's easy for the opposition to say: well, do it all. Well, great. They would. They don't have to stand up and back up a fiscal plan. We passed this fiscal plan in this House, and I have to say, Mr. Speaker, a \$16 billion budget that question period after question period after question period I heard very little about. And \$16 billion for a population of less than 3 million people is a lot of money. It's a lot of money.

So when we get into a position like in Bill 19, where we are actually giving the people back their money and not asking them to contribute this money any longer because we have reworked the

framework of what are core programs of government and what are not, I can't imagine why anyone on either side of this House could be in a negative position on this bill. Bill 18 goes the next step. It gives the other balance of the flat tax. So why would anybody be objecting to this? Why? Because they don't read the budget documents, Mr. Speaker. They don't read the budget documents, and they don't care. If we were to go and try to do all of this in one year, then (a) we would not be able to pay down the debt requirements we have, (b) we would have to choose whether we pull it out of the programming, and (c) would we have to hold off paying it off and freeing up interest expense? Where would the money come from?

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important, and I'm just a little disappointed, quite frankly, in the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who has been one of the finance critics, to not pick up on the fact that this fiscal plan has been clearly laid out step by step. Personally, and speaking for any MLA in here, I'd like to see it all gone at once, all of the tax burden that's been put on, all of the tax burden that was put on, some of it in 1986 and '87, to attack the deficit which, quite frankly, kept growing. This fiscal plan that our government has put in place is to deal with that. It is to deal with that, and it is to deal with it always keeping in mind the core programs that government has to service.

Those things such as health and education and social programs have to be dealt with. They can't be left aside, so you can't do it all in one year. You can't take the chance. Remember always that when we're dealing with our budget, we have to come up with quarterly reports. We have to make sure that we have the dollars to service those core programs throughout the year. That's why we do quarterly reviews. I think, quite frankly, that this is really one part of the tax reduction.

10:40

The second part comes in Bill 18. You have the 8 percent coming off here, the .5 percent coming off in Bill 18 under section 4, so if hon. members want to deal with them at the same time, that's fine. But clearly I think it's a misnomer to say that we're not dealing with getting rid of the flat tax and the surtax that was put in place for deficit elimination, because in fact we are. It may be in two different bills and it may be a year apart, but we're doing it according to the fiscal plans that we were able to lay out, the fiscal plans that see the interest expense that we're paying coming down and being freed up to provide extra program spending plus reductions in taxes.

It's not a difficult thing to deal with. It's quite straightforward, so I really wish they would focus on that. Actually, when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora says that we're spreading rumors that the Liberals don't like tax reductions, well, quite frankly, to fight against this bill, that's the case. That is the case. If you can't take the heat, then support the bill, get onside with it, and get involved in this.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. [interjections] Be gentlemanly. In reply to the member opposite, it was a stunning dissertation of why it wasn't good to be Liberal. Look. Here it is. She went on endlessly about . . . [interjection] Speaking through you, sir. Yes, of course.

She went on endlessly about how this wonderful government did all this budgeting. It was this government in 1996 – this government, not previous governments but this government – that said: we will eliminate this flat tax of half a percent. That was then. This is

now. Now they've put it off for another couple of years. This particular elimination eliminates a tax on 1.5 million Albertans. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I know the night is young, but the sound is not beautiful when we have a whole bunch of people who are trying to enter into the debate at the same time. We're trying to orchestrate this so that only one hon. member speaks at a time. So those other people who are so eager to get into the debate, please send me your names and I'll put you down on the list, but right now we have Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I must compliment the Minister of Government Services, though, because she did exactly as you wished, sir. She did stand in her place and enter debate, unlike many of the others opposite that just grumble and make all kinds of noise and do not add to the debate one iota.

DR. TAYLOR: You're standing up, and you're not adding to the debate.

MR. WHITE: I can't let that go by at all, sir. To call a member standing in place not adding to debate when that member hasn't got off his cheeks for years . . . He's sitting down there playing . . . He's the only guy who has to have extra trousers on the butt because he wears them out.

Sir, I will continue in my debate. [interjections] Yes, of course. He's making noises from the bottom of his seat. Yes. However, sir, I shall continue on with lively debate on the elimination of the flat tax.

Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: Yes, this member supports the elimination of the flat tax. The member supported the elimination of the flat tax back in '96, because the reason for the imposition of the tax was clear. It was to reduce the deficit. There was no deficit in '96, and now what do they want to do? They want . . . [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, you're obviously just really stirring up quite a few people on this side as well as on your own side. I wonder if we could just cool it, hon. Minister of Government Services, Edmonton-Glenora, and others, please.

Edmonton-Calder, through the chair.

MR. WHITE: Through the chair, sir. I shall do my best. I seem to be stirring a lot of concern over there, but my colleague to the right here is taking it all in and dutifully recording it on his electronic device here, you see. He's such a good fellow. He'll come back and retort with equal fervour in a while, I'm sure.

But the elimination of this was managed and stage-managed, and it really does not look good on this government when you have the amount of money that's rolling in in revenue resources and you continue to punish Albertans with this flat tax right from the lowest of the low, those that do not pay tax today, to the highest. This flat tax covers all bases and should have been eliminated the day this government went into a surplus position after a great deal of the debt had been worked down.

MR. BONNER: Lance, it's a surtax, not a flat tax.

MR. WHITE: Oh, it's a flat tax. It's clearly a .5 flat tax.

This .5 percent flat tax should be eliminated and should be eliminated first. The surtax is on those wealthy of us that can afford these things. Now, elimination of that tax because of the way it's imposed is a reasonable position too, but as my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora was pointing out, you cannot have an elimination of one tax. You can't examine one part of an income tax act without examining the whole act, because the effect on the taxpayer is compounded by these two acts, and you can't read them in isolation. The difficulty with eliminating the surtax first is that it gives the largesse of the province of Alberta to all of those that, in this member's view, do not need it first. There are a great many of others that need it first, and the elimination of the .5 flat tax would be the right thing to do and the right thing to do first.

Now, managing an economy is not an easy task. This member certainly would agree with that. It does take a certain amount of foresight, shall we say, in order to understand that income is not flat in this province. Our income varies as the wind. The price of conventional crude oil is back up to pretty close to \$30 U.S. today. How can one predict those kinds of increases? There is a difficulty in dealing with Bills 18 and 19 together in that you cannot really, truly plan for what could happen eight or 10 years down the road.

I would think that a government should be looking at the potential of a major loss of this oil revenue and plan for that day such that it wouldn't be quite so easily – if you're dealing with the elimination of a surtax and the imposition of a flat tax, you're putting a major burden on the lower and middle-income, generators of most of the tax revenue in this province. To deal with them in isolation is folly. If you do have a downturn, where is the problem going to occur? You're not going to be able to instantly revert to a proper progressive tax, which is a reasonable position, but certainly you should be able to put these elements together in order to deal with them at one time.

10:50

The elimination of this tax is a reasonable position but not in isolation, and this member would like to see it held over until such time as the benefits have reached all. The elements of this bill are relatively simple. Unfortunately, they should all be combined in one proper examination of the entire taxation. This member believes that municipal taxation is woefully overcharged to this point, and it would be much, much better to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words about Bill 19, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000. I looked back at some of the comments made by the Provincial Treasurer in Budget 2000, *New Century: Bold Plans*. This was presented in the Assembly on February 24. In that document the Provincial Treasurer established a number of principles that he thought should govern tax changes in the province. I think some of the principles that he enunciated at that time were sound principles, and I think it's disappointing that the government has chosen not to follow the principles the Provincial Treasurer set out at that time.

One of the very first things the Treasurer said in speaking about taxes was: "Albertans insisted that a new tax plan must be sensitive to the needs of low-income Albertans, those who were struggling to get their start in the world." I think that's the disappointment with Bill 19. It ignores those very Albertans that the Provincial Treasurer

was talking about. The low-income Albertans are the ones that Bill 19 is choosing not to deal with, and I think that's unfortunate.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

The second principle the Provincial Treasurer indicated in that speech was that "the next thing Albertans said was there had to be fairness in the system." I think fairness in the system is what all of the debate on Bill 19 and certainly the debate on Bill 18 has been around. It's been around that whole principle that the Provincial Treasurer set forth in that document, that principle of fairness. It's a characteristic identified not just by the Provincial Treasurer, but I think in almost any treatise on taxes the principle of fairness is one that's reiterated time and time again. The tax system has to be fair.

It's that unfairness in Bill 19 to low-income Albertans when the government clearly had other choices that it could have made that I think is at the root of some of the dissatisfaction with the bill and why it's being criticized so roundly. Fairness would have meant that all Albertans would have received a tax break. Bill 19 has chosen to select a group of Albertans who financially are already in a favoured position and give them some additional income, give them back some of their income. That is unfair. If you're looking at any kind of justice, the notion that all Albertans should be treated the same I think would be paramount in that kind of consideration. So it's the fairness issue that has the opposition, in particular, upset about Bill 19.

Another principle. I thought it was a curious one for the Provincial Treasurer to outline. He indicated that "Albertans said that a new taxation system had to be honest." Well, I find that a curious statement to come from a Provincial Treasurer. It never occurred to me that we would have anything else but an honest system. Yet you have to ask the question: is it the best action to remove the 8 percent surcharge on those high-income Albertans and ignore the lower income Albertans? Now, that may not be dishonest, but again I think it's certainly questionable.

A further premise that the Provincial Treasurer outlined was that "Albertans also reflected what's in their nature when telling us that a tax system needs to be not only honest, but also transparent, and understandable." That's a good premise on which to build tax reform. I think it's going to be abundantly apparent from what is before us that one group of Albertans is being favoured over another. Again, it seems to contradict the kinds of principles that the Provincial Treasurer set forth.

I want to spend a few minutes, if I might, Mr. Speaker, looking at some of the reasoning behind the tax cuts. One of the things that has always disturbed me about the tax cut rhetoric is that it's always taken out of context of what the tax system is attempting to do. It was brought home to me in the health care debate when my constituents, when surveyed and asked if they would rather have a tax cut or have the health care system improved, chose the health care system by a vast majority. I think that's been consistent in surveys taken across the province. When asked what the government should do and to rank support for education, support for health care, or introduction of a tax cut, Albertans have chosen to have more investment in services.

I've always been curious. It seemed to me that the government was on this tax route regardless of what was happening in the province and that this is what was going to occur. I looked at the reasons given for the cuts before us, and none of the reasons seem to talk about our common goals as citizens in terms of looking after each other, our common goals as citizens in terms of creating the kind of community that would be a rich community in which our children would be raised. Instead, I heard most of the arguments

being economic arguments. One, I thought, had been dismissed years ago, the Thatcher/Reagan theory of trickle-down economics. I thought it had been discredited. Lo and behold, it's used as part of the rhetoric to support Bill 19 and Bill 18. It's really quite astounding, I find, Mr. Speaker, that that would be the reason put forth.

Now, there were others. Some of the others were that it would attract more people to the province – well, attracting others to the province I guess is a good goal – and that it would stop the brain drain. Really, again I find that an argument that seems so baseless. I look at the opportunities for the graduate students that I worked with at the University of Alberta, and when they were seeking positions upon graduation, they looked for communities, first of all, where there was a strong academic climate, universities and colleges and institutes with strong research bases. They looked for communities where there were good schools for their children and their families, and they looked to communities where there was health care. They looked to communities where there were amenities, where the cultural climate was one that was supported through the arts. They looked for communities where there were recreational opportunities for themselves and their families.

11:00

AN HON. MEMBER: Environmental concerns.

DR. MASSEY: Yes, they looked for communities that were environmentally attractive and communities that were safe.

Certainly I think taxes may have entered into their decision, but I think it would have been ranked very low. That action of my graduate students was confirmed by a former governor of Utah a number of years ago when he spoke in this city and indicated that what they had used to attract people to that state had been the cultural amenities, the kind of educational facilities that they had there. Those were the factors in people relocating. So I find the brain drain arguments rather spurious.

Some of the reasons behind the action the government has taken don't seem to make sense. Bill 19 is predicated on the notion, again, that tax reform can take place in a piecemeal, tinkering fashion rather than a comprehensive look. I think the Member for Lethbridge-East indicated that at least bills 18 and 19 should have been combined in one bill if that was the intent. The premise seems to be that wealthy Albertans are the most deserving of an immediate tax break. It seems that this is one of those bills that ends up, again, picking winners and losers in the province, and the losers are those middle-income taxpayers.

I think that's unfortunate, because this was a great opportunity, Mr. Speaker, for tax reform in this province to be done from the ground up and done right, and the government finds itself in a position where that kind of planning and that kind of follow-up legislation would have been possible. It was an opportunity to look at the entire tax system and make sure that the entire system, because we're only dealing with one portion of the taxes that Albertans are required to pay, was fair, that the proposals that were put forward were equitable, that Albertans could rest assured that they were all being treated the same by their government. Again, one of the arguments – and I agree – was an opportunity to simplify, to make easy the tax system, and that is an opportunity lost, I think, Mr. Speaker, with the introduction of bills 19 and 18.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude and look forward to the comments of other members. The notion, again, of not collecting from Albertans more than is required for the kinds of services we want to provide I think is a sane notion and it's one that all Albertans would support and certainly one that the opposition would support.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening to talk to Bill 19, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act.

MR. DICKSON: It's a pleasure to listen to you.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you for those kind words.

One of the things that I find most interesting in listening to the discussions that we've had here tonight and in fact on other nights as well when Bill 19 was dealt with and its companion bill, Bill 18, is the attempt by the government to say that Official Opposition members are against the tax cut, even though we are very clearly on the record as saying that it would be foolhardy for us to be against a tax cut. But it would be just as foolhardy for us to give a rubber stamp to a tax cut that is unfair, and in fact that is what we're seeing in both Bill 18 and Bill 19.

I listened with interest to the Minister of Government Services to try and understand what her logic was with regards to the argument that there is no surplus if we have a debt. I guess the converse of that, then, is that there is no debt, and therefore there is a surplus. Yet when I look at the same document that she had referred to, which was Budget 2000: New Century, Bold Plans – this is an official government of Alberta document, so there is no need to table it. On pages 10 and 11 it very clearly says, "Repaying debt and investing in the future." It says, "Net debt paid off in 1999" and that paying off the remaining debt is going to occur by the year 2025. So in fact, hon. members, we do have, in accordance with the government's own plan, an "accumulated debt retirement schedule" that will take us to the next 25 years.

It's also my understanding that because of the surplus – and perhaps the government has another word for it; perhaps it's the interest savings on the debt servicing costs; perhaps that's what they would prefer to call it – there has been additional moneys provided for health and education and some of the other services. The reality is that a government in the collection of taxes from its taxpayers then makes a decision. It makes a decision as to how much to collect. It makes a decision as to how to collect, and it also then makes a decision as to what to spend if in fact they collect too much. So the decision that this government has made is to therefore slow down the debt repayment schedule in order to provide a tax break, and they have in fact reversed a stand that they took in 1987, which was the 8 percent provincial surtax which was introduced by this government.

I know we've heard lots of stories about: that was then, and this is now. Well then the government of the time appeared to believe that in fact it was the higher income earners that should bear the burden of helping to eliminate the deficit. Now what the government appears to believe is that the elimination of that – it's a higher priority to provide a tax break to the higher income earner while all those other people who helped to eliminate the deficit through cutbacks, through rollbacks, through layoffs now will not get a tax cut. That, to my mind, is unfair.

It is unfair to the public servants in this province. It is unfair to all of those individuals in this province who are lower wage earners, is unfair to the individuals in this province who've had to for many years live with a minimum wage that was below the minimum wage of any province in this country. It is unfair to those individuals . . .

MR. SMITH: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much. Under 23(h),(i), and (j), imputes false motives. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the minimum wage at the time that the member refers to was not the lowest in Canada on a net basis, and at no time did anybody in Alberta pay tax on earning the minimum wage, like they did in other Liberal government provinces.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, I don't think that's a point of order because I did not hear any motives being attributed to any particular member. I think the hon. minister has clarified something, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark can now continue.

Thank you.

11:10

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you very much. In fact, at \$5 an hour I believe we were the lowest per hour wage in the country.

MR. SMITH: Not after tax. You know that.

MS LEIBOVICI: I said the minimum wage per hour, and that was at \$5.

AN HON. MEMBER: After tax.

MS LEIBOVICI: I never said after tax. That's what you said, and in fact the hon. minister wishes to engage in debate . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: That's exactly what happens when debate happens across the aisle, so please speak through the chair. Thank you.

MS LEIBOVICI: Absolutely. Thank you, and I will look forward to the rationalization by the minister, especially about the individual who was at that \$5 an hour minimum wage, part-time, no benefits and how it would make a whole lot of difference to him whether that \$5 was before tax or after tax. The actual fact was that at \$5 an hour any of those individuals had a hard time making ends meet.

So the reality is that we are looking at a government that has changed its philosophy, where it recognized that those who are at the higher income tax brackets could in fact undertake the burden, if we want to call it that, of an 8 percent surtax a lot easier than those who were at the lower tax brackets.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, the question, then, is: why has the government chosen to eliminate the 8 percent provincial surtax first? The question is: who benefits from the elimination of the 8 percent surtax? The issue, as well, is why in fact should lower income earners have to wait a year for a tax break?

There are judgments that are made on a decision such as that. It is the government that decides the policy. It is the government that decides the impact of its legislation and should know what the impact of its legislation is. It's the government that decides the issue of fairness and equity in the structure of a new tax policy, which is what we are seeing put before us in both Bill 19 and Bill 18.

So the government has made some clear choices in terms of when they're cutting taxes and who will benefit initially from those tax cuts. You almost wonder cynically if this government has been

looking at an election later on this year. They might have looked at the voter turnout and made a determination who to provide the tax break to based on who generally comes out to vote and decided at that point who would benefit from a tax break.

Now, one of the interesting things, as well, that we've heard over and over again is that the surtax will in fact benefit income earners over \$46,450, I believe it is, but as we indicated, it benefits unequally, because the more you earn, the more you have to have the surtax eliminated from.

Now, one of the interesting things is that high-income earners can shelter their dollars a whole lot easier than middle to lower income earners. There are numerous ways that high-income earners can shelter their dollars, so in fact they may not be taxed on the actual amount they earn. So that's a very interesting distinction to make, to show how, in fact, it becomes even more unfair.

We do know that when the government originally came forward with its tax plan in '96, the timetable was to eliminate the .5 percent flat tax rate by January 1, 1999, before the 8 percent surtax, which was to be eliminated by January 1, 2001. In the words of Budget '96: Reinvestment, "The tax plan proposes to reduce the tax burden for all Albertans starting with low to middle income working families." So that was the original intent of the government.

Somehow between 1996 and the year 2000 what we are in fact seeing is a shift away from that, a shift towards more of a seat-of-the-pants approach to tax policy-making. Even as late as 1999 what the Premier had said is: what we want to do is make sure that those who can least afford to pay tax get the first break. So the question is: why do those individuals who are below the \$46,000 mark or just marginally above – let's say between the \$46,000 mark and the \$60,000 mark – not get the same kinds of benefits as someone who's earning \$100,000?

Again, as we had in the Bill 11 debate, as we've had in a lot of debates in this Legislative Assembly over the last little while, the biggest question that never gets answered is: who benefits and why? Why are these decisions being made? Who has the ear of government? Where are the studies and the evidence that say that this is the way to go, that this in fact will promote economic growth, that this in fact will bring more prosperity to the province? Where is that evidence? Other than some confusing statements by the Minister of Government Services and interjections by the Minister of Gaming to try and substantiate a position, there is no evidence.

Now, when we look at the benefits question in dealing with tax structure, it's very easy to plug in the figures and figure out who benefits and who does not benefit. As the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford indicated, when you look at an individual who earns \$100,000 a year in taxable income, what that individual will save per year from the elimination of the 8 percent surtax is \$495. However, when you look at a single senior in Calgary who has \$30,000 in income, that individual will save a big, fat doughnut hole; in other words, zero. The senior in Calgary who has \$30,000 in income gets zero from this plan this year. A senior couple in Edmonton who has income of \$55,000 will receive \$48 for the year. That's 13 cents per day from the elimination of this surtax.

I know the Acting Provincial Treasurer is very fond of throwing out figures of how in fact people will be saving lots of money from their dollars. I for one support the fact that individuals will never say no to having more dollars in their pocket. In fact, I for one would like it put on the record that I'm very upset about the way our gas prices have increased in the last week just to take advantage of the long weekend. I think that that is wrong, and if this government were sincerely interested in looking at out-of-pocket costs to Albertans, one of the ways they would do that is to look at what is happening with gasoline prices in this province right now just to take advantage of the long weekend.

Now, if we look at the elimination of the surtax again and what will occur and who benefits, let's look at Calgary teachers. You have a family of two, two Calgary teachers. Most people in this room would think: ah, they're in the high-income earning brackets. Well, let's say that each teacher earns about \$40,000 a year, even \$45,000 a year. Do you know how much they will get from the elimination of the surtax? You got it. A big, fat doughnut hole again. Zero. They will get zero.

So do we believe that all Albertans deserve a tax cut? Sure. We also know that there will be trade-offs as a result of all Albertans receiving a tax cut, but we also believe that there needs to be fairness and equity in the tax policy, and we need to stop picking and choosing and dividing Albertans in this province. We have seen that for the last seven years. We continue to see it entrenched now in policy and in structural policy that deals with issues like taxes. What is happening is that the systems are changing so that there are systemic changes that will be very, very hard to reverse. We're seeing that in health. We're seeing it in education. We're seeing it in the tax structure. We've seen it in social services.

11:20

These are systemic changes that have long-term effects on Albertans, and by those systemic changes what is happening is that some people will have advantages and some will not. The winners and losers in this province will become very clear, and they're becoming clearer daily. An example in Calgary – we brought it up in question period – are the homeless who had set up a shantytown, something that would have been unheard of seven years ago. A shantytown in Alberta would have been unheard of. Having individuals eating dogs and cats in this province would have been unheard of seven years ago, and now it seems to be accepted. If that's not a systemic change in our social structures, I don't know what is. That is what has happened as a result of the policies of this government over the last seven years.

Here we're being asked, in a sense blackmailed, by being told: well, the Official Opposition doesn't believe in a tax cut. Well, that's not true. What is and should be on the record is that we believe in fairness and equity in the tax structures, that we don't believe in picking and choosing, and that if there is going to be a tax cut for individuals, it should be across the board and it should be for everyone this year. If you can't do it for everyone this year, then you might have to wait. But the reality is: why should you exclude individuals below the \$46,000 mark? That includes a lot of individuals in this province.

Actually, I can give you the actual figure of how many people will be excluded and how many will benefit from the 8 percent surtax. I think it's somewhere around 395,000 Albertans – I'm just finding it here. Three hundred and ninety thousand Alberta taxpayers will benefit as a result of eliminating the 8 percent surtax. Had the government gone along with their original proposal of eliminating the .5 percent flat tax rate, it would have applied to 1,562,000 Albertans. That's a whole lot of difference, Mr. Speaker.

The question is: why is that not being eliminated this year? If in fact, as I indicated, there are trade-offs to occur, if in fact a trade-off is that the government cannot afford the tax break this year, because that's what the Minister of Government Services seems to be indicating, then perhaps they should not have accelerated their tax program – the promise had not been for this year; it had been for next year – and not provided the tax cut. That perhaps just provides fuel to my argument that this tax cut is a cynical tax cut to set up for an election this fall, and that is the reason we're seeing the 8 percent surtax elimination as opposed to a fair tax cut that would be equitable across all sectors so that in fact you could do it.

I am very clear in the position that the Official Opposition has, which says that we support the idea of a tax cut but that it needs to be fair, it needs to be equitable, and, yes, it needs to be affordable. If the minister is now suggesting that it is not affordable, then perhaps the minister and the cabinet need to rethink their position on this, and it is a good thing that we as the Official Opposition have indicated that this bill could potentially be a problem.

With those words I thank you very much for the opportunity of being able to explain what the position is.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 19, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000. I do look forward to this opportunity to make a few comments on this particular bill, particularly in light of all the debate that has occurred here this evening. I've enjoyed many, many of the comments that have been made, but there is no doubt that this is a companion bill to Bill 18.

It seems to me that what this bill does in so many ways is reflect the corporate agenda of this particular province. When we look at taxes, we've always thought that taxes were levied on those who had the ability to pay. Certainly those people in the lower income brackets do not have that ability to pay. When we are introducing a bill into this Assembly, why are those people that don't have the ability to pay the last ones to receive benefits from this particular bill?

The words that we've heard constantly this evening as we've debated this bill are those principles of fairness and equity. These are principles that should favour all Albertans when we are looking at tax breaks, not those who are in the upper 25 percent.

As was pointed out earlier, as well, Mr. Speaker, we are the custodians in this particular place of taxpayer dollars. We are the ones that were given the responsibility of how to spend those dollars. We were the ones, those members who were in this House, that were not good custodians of those dollars, and that deficit and debt were run up and up and up. When we look at those things, then certainly the people that paid the biggest price were those lower income earners. What we hope will happen now that we are in a favourable financial situation is that we will spend their money wisely. Those people did pay a price. All Albertans paid a price to get our financial business in order. We do have to look at what is happening.

Now, then, when we look at the people that are going to be hit hardest again by not receiving a tax break, these are the people who see that today because of inflation the prime rate has risen. As of today they are paying half of a percent higher on any loans they have.

Earlier this year when we had the great debate on Bill 11, many Albertans indicated in polls that they would rather see money go into providing proper publicly funded health care for all Albertans than have a tax break. Again, this is one of those areas, Mr. Speaker, where all Albertans do benefit.

As well, as was just mentioned by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, again we have this constant problem where we have holiday weekends coming up throughout the year and we can be guaranteed of a jump in the price of gasoline. Now, this isn't the only jump in the price of gasoline. It wasn't too many months ago when we were paying 45 cents a litre for gasoline. Certainly the jump in prices at the pumps impacts those people in the lower income brackets.

I look forward, Mr. Speaker, to what is going to happen this

summer, when we have deregulation in the power industry. Every indication is that those prices are going to rise too. Therefore, the expenses for all Albertans are again going to increase, but they are going to impact those lower wage income earners more than they will those at the other end.

When we do look as well, Mr. Speaker, at who in this rich province of ours has the greatest ability to use the resources that we do have in this province, it certainly is those at the upper end. They are the ones that make the financial gains by using so many of the riches that we have here. One of the ways we can benefit those lower income people is to give them their tax break first, and we are saving that to the last.

Those are a number of the points that I want to make in my introductory remarks here.

11:30

Now, as well I think it's important at this time, when we're discussing and debating Bill 19 here, that we look at the background. How did we get to this point? To start that off, the 8 percent provincial surtax was introduced by the government in Budget '87 as a means to assist in the elimination of the provincial budget deficit. Again, that was a time, Mr. Speaker, when we had a very cyclical type of economy. We still do, but we certainly haven't had the price of Texas crude drop to \$10 a barrel. I think if that were to happen today, we wouldn't be seeing Bill 18 and Bill 19. We would be in a position where we would not be looking at this type of taxation policy.

As well, when we look at the history of what happened with these two, the surtax and the flat tax, the 8 percent provincial surtax is paid by Albertans earning over \$46,450 in taxable income or paying Alberta basic tax of above \$3,500. Again, these are the top 25 percent of those paying taxes here in the province. In the 2000 tax year, Mr. Speaker, the 8 percent surtax would have generated \$144 million in revenues for the provincial government. When we are looking at a surplus in the neighbourhood of \$3 billion, it does make you ask the question: are we in fact collecting too many tax dollars?

Now, even with that surplus, we have to realize that we are servicing our debt. We are paying the interest, and we are paying down this debt. So how quickly do we want to do that? Do we equate this to a home mortgage where we shove all our resources into that home mortgage and don't think about things like food for the table, clothes, whatever else? Of course not. All of this has to be done. It has to be balanced, and it has to be balanced in time. Again, I don't think we have done the proper job here over time in handling taxpayers' money.

As well, when we look at the background here, Mr. Speaker, in March of 1999 this government announced it would eliminate the 8 percent surtax as of July 1, 2001, as a component of the move to an 11 percent single-rate system by January 1, 2002. The 8 percent surtax was to be reduced by half on July 1, 2000, and eliminated as of July 1, 2001. The revenue impact from the elimination of the 8 percent surtax was estimated at \$36 million in 2000-2001, \$88 million in 2001-2002, and \$105 million in 2002-2003. Again, we did have the figures here, so there was no reason why we had to do this flip-flop where we had not told all Albertans, who had had a .5 percent flat tax rate placed on them, why that was not given back to them first before the 8 percent surtax was given to the top 25 percent of the income earners here in this province.

Now, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford said, I certainly don't want anyone to misconstrue that I don't support tax breaks for people in this province. I certainly do, and I certainly think that as of right now we are in a position where we can give Albertans a tax break. But I also support and strongly support the

other members of my caucus, who have indicated that that tax break should go to the lower income bracket.

MR. DICKSON: Solidarity.

MR. BONNER: Definitely. Solidarity.

Now, then, we do have to question the government as to why they would choose to eliminate this 8 percent surtax, which applies to only 390,000 Albertans, ahead of the .5 flat tax rate, which applies to over a million and a half taxpayers in this province. So, again, we do want to support those Albertans who need this money most.

It is also interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that when the Alberta government originally came forward with a tax cut plan in Budget '96, the timetable was to eliminate the .5 percent flat tax rate by January 1 of 1999, before the 8 percent surtax, which was to be eliminated by January 1, 2001. Now all of this has been pushed up. Again, it has been reversed, and it is very difficult, I think, for most Albertans to understand why this would happen in this particular way.

That brings us now to the point where we find ourselves with this bill. This bill, Mr. Speaker, combines some housekeeping with this major change, and we will be giving the 8 percent surtax back to the top 25 percent before we remove the .5 percent flat tax. As was very well pointed out by the Member for Lethbridge-East, what we have to do here is balance this surplus. We are certainly gathering far too much money for what our needs are right now, and that money should be put back into the hands of Albertans. As well, our priority right now is that we would be putting these surtaxes and these flat taxes in to certainly help eliminate the deficit, and that has been done for some time. What we have done here is effectively given the greatest tax break again to those people who have the ability to pay, and that is certainly not the order in which I would have liked to have seen this legislation go.

Now, then, as well, when we go back to our constituencies – and I know that when I go back to Edmonton-Glengarry, the majority of my constituents certainly are not going to fit into that 25 percent. There are not going to be too many people in Edmonton-Glengarry that have a taxable income which is over \$46,450. We will have some of course, but the majority of people don't.

We have quite a number of seniors in Edmonton-Glengarry as well, Mr. Speaker, and those are people that retired on a fixed income. They retired at a time when this government treated Alberta's seniors very well. When we look at the number of universal programs that have been wiped out in this province that were in favour of seniors, they again are people that are going to be hurt most by this particular bill. [interjection] Well, certainly, because these people are not going to get that little bit of tax break they would have gotten by removing that .5 percent flat tax first. So they are going to have to wait for their money again, and they're going to wait for these empty promises.

It reminds me very much, as well, of how the Premier promised Alberta seniors that because of changes in federal income tax, the \$14 million they were going to be taxed extra would be returned to them. Now, then, we've been waiting over four years for this, and these people now have in the neighbourhood of \$56 million, which had been promised to them by the Premier, yet they have not had that money returned to them. So, again, I think we're going to be looking here, Mr. Speaker, at the same situation where maybe this .5 percent flat tax is one of those that's going to be forgotten for the average Albertan as well.

11:40

I certainly did enjoy this opportunity this evening to make a few

comments on this bill. I certainly would hope that as we move down the line, the government, whoever it may be, would certainly do a better job of balancing its budget, that we will sort out what our needs are and adjust the budget the way it should be, that we would be collecting those dollars that are necessary and certainly not extra dollars, because as has been pointed out by many different speakers this evening, those dollars do belong to Albertans. If we are going to be giving relief to Albertans, let's give it to those Albertans that deserve it the most. I will rephrase that, Mr. Speaker. All Albertans deserve a break, but some of them need it more than others, so let's give it to those that need it the most. I want to reiterate that all Albertans do deserve a tax break.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that what I don't like about this particular bill is that it is not a fair and equitable bill. It does not deal with those principles that favour all Albertans. It favours a few Albertans. It, again, is picking winners and losers. I would certainly have liked to have seen the .5 percent flat tax removed first, before the 8 percent surtax.

I thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to Bill 19, and I look forward to other comments of the members of this Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, it's with some trepidation that I stand to speak. I know that I'm the only thing standing between all these weary members and being able to go home. I understand that we are close to the vote, but also there's a significant responsibility that goes with that. Now, there may be government members who are going to participate in the debate, and I'm sure we'll hear some good analysis from them, but if there were not, I guess I'm going to have the chance to make the last opposition observations on it.

Now, I thought about just incorporating by reference all the excellent analysis we've heard from my colleagues tonight. I thought of doing that, but then it struck me that there are a couple of points I want to add, I guess, in terms of my own perspective and my own constituency.

I'm mindful of Edmund Burke, the Irish-born British statesman, who wrote in 1774 . . . [interjections] I'm glad we have members that are interested in what Edmund Burke had to say. He made an observation, and I'm mindful of this when we wrestle with these difficult bills 18 and 19. This is actually in sympathy to the Acting Provincial Treasurer. His comment was: "To tax and to please, no more than to love and to be wise, is not given to men." It does strike me that we should have some sympathy for the Provincial Treasurer because there will always be somebody unhappy with any tax system we devise. I recognize there may be some on the government side who say that we expect too much of government, that we impose too high or too onerous a standard when government starts tinkering with the tax system. So I'm mindful of that, but not to the point where I'd be dissuaded from offering some commentary.

In my constituency of Calgary-Buffalo, you know, Mr. Speaker, there are 19,000 constituents who live in low-income households, many of them seniors, a lot of single mothers, a lot of recent immigrants who are coping with lots of challenges in terms of language barriers and cultural barriers and all those kinds of things. I always start off, when I see a bill, wondering how it's going to impact my constituents. The reality is that Bill 19 is not going to make life significantly different or better for any of my constituents.

One thing I want to deal with straight off, though, is that there are some beneficial things in the bill, and I've not heard very much attention paid to that. Now, it may have been because we saw a form of closure brought in after only two speakers at second reading. I just want to say that as much respect as I have for the Government House Leader and his judicious use of the arsenal of powerful tools

that a majority government can have – I want to make a specific reference to the Deputy Government House Leader.

There may be some in the Assembly who were not here this afternoon when not only did I apologize to the member for a comment I made – I want to say now to members who weren't here this afternoon that that minister responsible for tourism, that Deputy Government House Leader, and I want the Minister of Municipal Affairs to remember this, is the one responsible for the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act we have in this province. It is terrific. So I'm glad he's here and participating in the debate. I hope I've said enough that he'll allow me to move on now to deal with the bill at hand.

I was talking about my 19,000 low-income constituents who are not going to benefit by this bill. There are some positive things in here. I think the elimination of programs that had lapsed in 1986 to 1988, the renter's assistance credit and the stock savings plan credit, makes sense. Take those out. Cleaning up corporate references, whether it's mutual fund corporation refunds, a small business deduction. This relates to a time Alberta didn't collect its own corporate taxes. So it makes sense. That's the nature of cleaning up, and that's a positive thing to do.

Updating changes in terms of Canada Customs, some of the changes that have happened there. I mean, that's important. That's being done. Putting in the definition of adjusted earned income was necessary for the family employment tax credit, and it's good to see that in there.

I have some other concerns. Really what we deal with in this bill is the 8 percent surtax being eliminated for the benefit of 25 percent of Albertans, and those of course are those Albertans earning in excess of \$46,450. As I understand it, the best estimate is that about 390,000 Albertans would benefit from the elimination of the 8 percent surtax. As I've listened, I'm not sure I've heard anybody say that shouldn't happen. I'm not sure I've heard anybody say that they are going to be voting against the bill, that they have a problem.

I heard a lot of concern around the sequencing, a lot of concern about how we establish a kind of fairness. As I look at 18 and 19, I've actually been in the process of posting to my web site my comments on the bill because you get constituents that always want more information and sometimes it's not available. [interjections] Well, the wonderful thing about the public library system is that even my low-income constituents can go down to the Castell library. They have a wonderful facility there for people who don't have their own computer to be able to access. Whether it's my web site or the government web site, they're able to do those things. [interjections]

I think the gaming minister is getting cranky, Mr. Speaker, and I think he's urging me to get to the gist of my message. I'm trying hard to do that.

MR. MAGNUS: Is there a point, Gary?

MR. DICKSON: Well, that may be in the eye of the beholder, Calgary-North Hill. You may never be satisfied that there's an adequate point to this.

I want to offer constructive commentary. We have two bills that are in front of us, 18 and 19, and they really are a package. What I'm typing on my web site, what I'm going to post to it is that I think I have a responsibility as an MLA to offer a constructive suggestion, a change in terms of what things can be done differently. My proposal is this. I think there's some benefit in looking at tax reduction, but it's clear to me that what's in front of us in the 18 and 19 package doesn't do the job. So I've got a proposal to the government members.

11:50

What if we were to say that what we'd do is take taxpayers earning up to \$13,569 and, say, zero provincial income tax, recognizing, as the government has done, that you've got a pool of people at the bottom who ought to be exempted? That makes sense. My suggestion would be similar. We take those earning \$13,569 or less and pay zero provincial income tax. Then what my suggestion would be: you take those people in the category between . . . [interjection] Well, hang on, Minister of Government Services. I always hear government members saying, "Tell us what your alternatives are," and I'm trying to put forward an alternative. So you take those people between \$13,569 and \$99,999 and assess a 10 percent rate, and you take those people with incomes in excess of \$100,000 and say: let's have a 12 percent tax rate.

Now, what's interesting is that in terms of all these rates, what it starts to do is recognize that progressive taxation is an important element of our system historically, but what we're suggesting is a thing that provides tax . . . [interjection] No; my suggestion provides, in fact, proportionate tax relief. So those people who aren't over \$100,000, who aren't high-income earners, also would get a substantial benefit. I put that forward as a suggestion, and I'm soliciting feedback from constituents.

I think it's much fairer than what the bills 18 and 19 package gives us. It has the advantage of preserving a kind of progressive, graduated system, and it provides fairer treatment to middle-income Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the problem I've got with the 18 and 19 package is that this looks like something that was written by my constituents who live in the half million dollar condominiums in Eau Claire. It doesn't look like something that was written by the much bigger majority of my constituents who are living in the belt line in those walk-up apartments. I think we have to come up with a system that's going to be fair to those people too.

So my proposal – and I'm no tax expert, but in terms of the material I've read through and looked at . . . [interjection] Well, okay, and I don't know how many people in this Assembly are tax experts, but I do take seriously the responsibility, if I don't like something the government is doing, to offer a better alternative. I'm hoping we will hear some commentary. I hope people will tell me if there's a better way of doing this than that. I think this is a better system, and I think it's one that's much fairer.

What's interesting with that is that if you went with a zero, 10, 12 kind of structure, what you have are the greatest cuts for middle-income taxpayers. Anyway, I think it will be for others to judge whether that has merit, but I wish the Acting Provincial Treasurer would take a look at that proposal.

The other thing I find a bit confusing in the way government has approached this is that if you go back to March of 1999, we had the announcement that the government was going to eliminate the 8 percent surtax as of July 1, 2001; then on September 1, 1999, the announcement that we were going to see an acceleration of the tax reform plan, and then it was going to have a bifurcated impact. On July 1, 2000, it was going to be cut in half, the balance on January 1, 2001. We were going to see a proposal at one point to eliminate the .5 percent flat rate of tax by January 1, 1999. That was going to be two years before the 8 percent surtax was eliminated. Now what's happened . . .

It's great to get waves of encouragement. Thank you very much. I think we should have a charades tournament. I think what we'll do is we'll pick a team from the opposition, a team from the government, and I want to nominate the Minister of Gaming and the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations for the government team, because . . . Okay, Mr. Speaker. I'm just trying to wind up. I think we've got a sequencing problem with this.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, in your encouragements to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to hurry up, you in fact spread out the process even longer. The reason for the intervention is that it's impolite and unparliamentary to keep yattering on while the hon. member is giving us his words of wisdom. Could we have a pleasant listening group while the hon. member concludes his remarks?

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. It is all my fault. I accept full responsibility for the act of intervention opposite.

I do want to put on the record my concern that we had the Premier and the former Provincial Treasurer tell us, when they were talking about tax cuts in the event of a higher than anticipated surplus in 1999-2000, that, quote, what we want to do is make sure that those who can least afford to pay tax get the first break, close quote. That was the Premier on July 27, 1999, in the *Calgary Herald*. We had the former Provincial Treasurer, now on leave of absence, say on July 20, 1999, in the *Calgary Herald* that, quote, certainly our priority is for low-income earners, and there are ways that can be addressed, close quote. Well, I think with this bill we see that in fact low-income earners have not been a priority of the government. In terms of the sequencing, that has not been the priority, and in fact it's a much lower priority for the government.

There is no benefit under this bill to a Calgary senior who is living in Calgary-Buffalo who earns \$30,000 a year. There's no benefit to a family of four if you've got both parents who are, say, teachers each earning \$40,000, no benefit to them. You know, I'm sorry that the government moved from what they had talked about before in terms of the proper sequencing.

Is that reason to vote against the bill? No, I don't think so. I have misgivings with the way the government has approached this. I'd like the government to consider the alternative I put forward and, if not, to come back and tell us why not. There may be some members who try and suggest that this is a question of the Liberals being opposed to tax cuts and that the Liberals are somehow impeding or standing in the way of Albertans being able to get that kind of relief. That would be nonsense, Mr. Speaker. You know that, and I think Albertans understand that as well. We've certainly heard this evening constructive suggestions from the opposition that would also provide tax relief to Albertans but do it in a way that's fair to middle-income filers. Wouldn't that be the Alberta way? Wouldn't that be the way this government should move?

So I hope the cabinet ministers are going to share that with the Acting Provincial Treasurer, the former Provincial Treasurer, and the Premier so they can take a look at how we can fine-tune this bill and how we can make the adjustments. I think the Treasury Department, the last time I looked, had about 760 employees. I don't have the benefit of that sort of research, so when I do my . . .

MRS. McCLELLAN: Allan Rock's got 6,000, and it doesn't help him.

12:00

MR. DICKSON: You know, Mr. Speaker, every time I go to wind up and I want to conclude, then the minister opposite wants to take me off on another side path.

My observation is this. I don't have access to the 730 calculators and 767 employees, so I'd like to challenge any members who have an accounting background and my MLA from Calgary-North West

to tell me why that proposal that I've posited would not be fair, would not be more equitable, would not be a tax cut that makes more sense. We have here an experienced and well-respected member of the accounting profession, who also happens to moonlight here as a member of the Assembly. He's got that kind of expertise. He would be able to share that with us. I want to specifically encourage him to look at that analysis, and maybe we'd be able to table it in the Assembly so members can see it. If this thing doesn't work, then let's tell it.

This is like an auctioneer. Hearing no more interventions from the minister of intergovernmental affairs, I'm going to wrap up my comments and look forward to what's coming at the next stage.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are you ready for the question on the motion that the question be now put as proposed by the hon. Government House Leader?

[Motion carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pursuant to Standing Order 47(2) and *Beauchesne* 521(2) I must now put the question on the original question.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

[At 12:03 a.m. on Thursday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 18, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/18

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Lord, renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service of the people of this great province. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 105 Albertans from Rocky Mountain House, Eckville, Westlock, Red Deer, Calgary, Sherwood Park, Stony Plain, Bon Accord, Edmonton, including the constituency of Beverly-Clareview, all urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I now request that the petition regarding saving public health care that I presented yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MR. DICKSON: May I ask that the petition I presented the other day be now read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again with regret I'm compelled by the fact that the opposition continues to object to the passage of tax reductions for Albertans to give notice that I will move:

Be it resolved that further consideration of any or all of the resolutions, clauses, sections, or titles of Bill 19, Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000, shall, when called, be the first business of the committee and shall not be further postponed.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In continuation of the support of the tax cuts that we have brought in, I would like to table copies

of a news release by the chartered accountants of Alberta that supports tax bill amendments and bills 18 and 19 in the province of Alberta. I do believe there are close to 7,000 chartered accountants in the province of Alberta. I think that's pretty remarkable support.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file with the Assembly today a document submitted to the co-chairs of the Ministerial Council on Social Policy Reform and Renewal entitled A Framework to Improve the Social Union for Canadians: Mobility Provisions. This meets our commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to table responses to written questions 23 and 25 with the appropriate number of copies. They address, first of all, the number of aboriginal children who moved from permanent guardianship status to adoption in the fiscal year '98-99 and also relative to negotiations the government has been involved in regarding the status of aboriginal adoptions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table at this stage a summary of debate times on Bill 11 broken down by each of the reading stages and indication of different caucuses and the amount of time speaking in debate.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table the draft homelessness framework, the only draft that I believe has been in circulation, released by Alberta Community Development, family and special purpose housing, provided to the charette here in Edmonton yesterday.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a copy of a very substantial academic work by Professor Mel McMillan from the department of economics at the University of Alberta titled Alberta's Single Rate Tax: Implications and Alternatives, which of course finds fault with this unfair flat tax and proposes several progressive alternatives.

Mr. Speaker, the second tabling I have is a single page report really for the benefit of the Minister of Government Services. It's titled Acting Provincial Treasurer, Steve West on the Budget Surplus. It reads: "'The Budget 2000 came out showing a surplus of \$713 million. Let's just say that (figure . . .) will be low.' (May 17, 2000)." I hope the minister was paying attention.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of correspondence from Dr. Ron Jadusingh to the Premier of Alberta in which Dr. Jadusingh demands that the Premier withdraw his comments, apologize for maligning his reputation, and stop confusing Albertans about the differences between private, for-profit, and commercialized health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Yes. Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'm pleased to table, first of all, a news release by the Official Opposition which

provides a model for a fair and progressive tax plan and gives a fair tax cut to all Albertans, a 0-10-12 plan as opposed to a 10.5 plan.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter which I have been asked to table from a gentleman, Corey Anderson, from Barrhead, Alberta, with regard to Bill 11 in which he asks for an explanation as to "why the government is not listening to the people and is forcing this issue through even though there is a strong voice of opposition."

My third tabling is from a woman by the name of Charlene Hooper from St. Albert, Alberta, who describes a billing for an MRI privately provided to her husband even though she has in fact a doctor's prescription for such an MRI and encloses the bill which she has sent along to the Premier and the MLA for St. Albert to pay following the Premier's words yesterday.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I have a report to submit to the Minister of Learning. It's a report on schools in Edmonton-Meadowlark outlining the results of meetings that I've had with 11 schools within my constituency. I've documented the concerns and hopes of administrators, teachers, and parents with regard to a wide range of issues including class size, funding, special-needs children, school resources, professional development, school facilities, and teaching.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling in the form of copies of a letter by Bryan Quinn from St. Albert. Mr. Quinn argues that the government's tax reduction proposal will shift the relative burden of taxation to middle-class and upper middle-class Albertans, and he is seeking a postponement of the final decision of the Assembly on this bill so that Albertans have a chance to debate it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the requisite number of copies of my responses to questions raised at the supply subcommittee on Environment, which took place on 20 March year 2000.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of the Joint Recommendations on Issues of Curriculum Change from the Capital region school boards, April 2000. In this particular document the district recommends that the approval of the TI-89 and TI-92 graphing calculators be rescinded because of the advantage it offers those students in that horrid math program they go through.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly nine STEP students who are working with the Legislative Assembly for the summer months. Seated in your gallery this afternoon, Mr.

Speaker, are Susan Karpa, Helen Park, Brian Storseth, Tiffany Ferguson, Terris Schultz, Ana Velado-Quezada, Adam Kozakiewicz, Mai Dong, and Isabelle Guay. I'd ask them to please rise now and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Chairman of Committees.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you two Lacombe residents that I have had the privilege of knowing for a very long time. They have a very special interest in being with us today as they are related to our very capable David Gillies, executive assistant to the Government House Leader. I would proudly ask Jean Stock and her husband, Noel, seated in your gallery, to stand. We will give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have a very pleasurable job today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two individuals that are visiting our province and have been here for some time. They're Rotary exchange students, one in Lloydminster. Jacob Eliasson is a grade 12 student. He was eight months at the comprehensive high school in Lloydminster, and he's heading back to Sweden in July. The other is Mel Hall. She's a grade 12 student from New Zealand. She's been four months at J.R. Robson in Vermilion, but she'll be staying through till January 2001. She was excited with the snow we had here, so she wanted to stay right through and see some more of it. Both are very intelligent, very respectable people. You can tell that they have all the pins of Canada on their Rotary vests. I would ask them to stand in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have a distinct pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Fay Turpin's class from NorQuest College west. They are English as a Second Language students. There are 13 of them from all over the world. They've come to this country to enjoy the freedoms and learn the language and our culture here. I would like to invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly to Alberta and to Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to be able to introduce on behalf of my colleague from Calgary-North Hill a group of 33 students from Webber Academy and their teachers, Miss Janice Chan, Ms Janis Bekar, and parent helpers Mr. Ed Chwyl, Mrs. Sheila Cook, Ms Janet Gamble, and Mr. Wes Goretsky. I believe they're seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mrs. Margaret Doige, Mrs. Kim Currington, and 10 home schooled students from the Parkland home educators. They are in the public gallery. With permission I would ask that they stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Medical Diagnostic Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier said that for diagnostic services delivered privately, and I quote, what would be totally unfair is if a person paid and then used that diagnostic material to get earlier treatment in the public sector. Well, it's time for this government to open its eyes, because of course that is exactly what has been happening in Alberta for several years now. Albertans are able to pay privately for medically necessary MRIs and now CT scans in order to jump to the head of the queue in the public system. My questions are to the Acting Premier. Can the Acting Premier explain to Albertans why this government is allowing queue-jumping to occur for medically necessary diagnostic services like CT and MRI scans?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health may wish to supplement my answer, but I would just remind the members of this House and all Albertans that are tuned in to our question period that we in fact spent several weeks and hours debating a bill called Bill 11. One of the specifics of Bill 11 was to stop queue-jumping, and I hope everyone in this House and everyone watching remembers that the Liberals voted against that bill.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that queue-jumping for medically necessary diagnostic services has been occurring for several years, MRIs and now CAT scans, can the Acting Premier tell Albertans why they didn't include that queue-jumping in Bill 11? It's not included.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way has a great deal, in fact a vast amount of information on private clinics because of course she was the minister of health when some 30 of them were in place. I have asked myself that question many times: why were guidelines not put in place at that time? However, what this government did do in consultation with provinces across this country, with the federal government, and with the College of Physicians and Surgeons is ensure that Bill 11 did in fact include queue-jumping.

In the area of diagnostics, Mr. Speaker – and again the associate minister of health may wish to comment on this – and the area of MRIs I think the hon. member is fully aware that if a physician prescribes an MRI, it is paid for under the system through the services that are provided in the system to cover that. If a person chooses to go outside the system to have a private MRI, it is not currently paid for.

The Premier has stated unequivocally, Mr. Speaker, that he is very concerned about this issue, and he has indeed asked the Minister and the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness to review this and to ensure that people are not receiving faster treatment through purchasing diagnostic or any other services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to table an indication about the private MRIs not being in operation prior to May of 1993.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier said yesterday that

paying for medically necessary diagnostic services such as MRIs and CT scans was, quote, unfair if delivered in the private sector – we've now got the third version from the Acting Premier – will the Acting Premier now provide instructions to Albertans as to how they might be reimbursed for the medically necessary MRIs and CT scans that they have paid for out of their own pockets?

1:50

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I could take far more time than this question period allows getting into the debate on the preamble to that question. Suffice it to say that the die was cast, and it took this government to put some regulations and guidelines around the operation of private clinics.

However, that was then and this is now. I think that if the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition would listen, she would hear one more time that if a person chooses to take their prescription for an MRI outside of the public system and pay for it, that I guess is their prerogative. If they take their prescription for an MRI and have it provided under the public system, they do not pay for that today.

What we are concerned about, Mr. Speaker – and the Premier has indicated this – is that if someone is taking that prescription outside to a private clinic, it then affords them the opportunity to receive faster service. That is the concern.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Care Facility Fees

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, there seem to be some major contradictions on the front bench. Let's go to some more contradictions between ministers. On May 11 the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness said, and I quote: we are not paying out of the public purse any facility fees; those are disallowed, end quote. However, on November 19 of last year, 1999, the minister of health said in regard to who pays for facility fees that, quote, the public system does, the regional health authority funded by the provincial government, end quote. Can the minister give a simple answer to a simple question? Are facility fees included in the contracts between private operators and regional health authorities?

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to speak to this so that we can perhaps try and once again clear this up. The term "facility fees" has to be first of all distinguished from and differentiated from "facility services." Now, there are no facility fees that are being charged to Alberta patients for insured surgical services, whether they are delivered inside a public hospital or they are delivered inside a private clinic. Those were outlawed, and as a result facility fees are no longer allowed to be charged and neither do we reimburse for that.

However, what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is trying to get at, I think, is what are called facility services, which are spelled out and defined in Bill 11. I could give you the entire list of facility services; it would take several minutes. They are defined in Bill 11, and they exist under separate contracts.

There are two types of contracts, Mr. Speaker. The one that covers any kind of facility services exists between an RHA and the particular facility providing those facility services. There are other services, fee-for-schedules, for example, that are negotiated with the Alberta Medical Association, which is between Alberta Health and Wellness and the doctors directly, in conjunction with all of these other negotiations that I've mentioned.

So the physician performing insured surgical services will continue to be paid the set amount for each surgery, and that amount will be the same if it's provided in a public hospital or if it's provided in a surgical setting. I hope that clears that up for the hon. Leader of the Opposition. We do not have those facility fees; we have facility services.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister could answer this question. What percentage of the existing contracts, say, for the ophthalmology clinics that were taken over by the province – the province picked up the facility fees – is being paid by the provincial government?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I'll have to take that question under advisement because I do not have the exact statistics. If she had told me she wanted some specific numbers, I would happily have looked them up for her. If she'll accept, I will provide a written response when I get the information.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, now that the minister has admitted that there is in fact payment of facility fees in private facilities by the regional health authorities, can he please tell us why he's contradicting the minister of health? [interjections]

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I'm sorry; there was so much interference from her own members that I didn't quite get the question.

I don't believe I admitted to anything. I said that I would look up the information, and I'd be happy to provide it. If such information exists, I'll be happy to provide it. I quite frankly do not know, and that's why I've taken it under advisement.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Income Tax

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta is all alone in its push for a flat tax that disadvantages the middle-income group. Will the Acting Provincial Treasurer explain why he remains so bullheaded in his efforts to push through a flat tax in Alberta when every other province in Canada has abandoned the idea?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, that's not true. In fact, there are individuals in Paul Martin's office working on a study right now and certain recommendations to Mr. Martin, and as soon as I have the fullness of that information, I'll put it here in the Assembly. Newfoundland is looking at this right now, and a graduated type similar tax in Saskatchewan is being looked at.

The reason we're putting it in is because it's a progressive type of tax which does not penalize people for working harder in this province. It takes 190,000 people off the tax roll completely. Those 190,000 will still pay federal tax, and a lot of those people can't afford to pay that tax.

This stops the brain drain. It is an attempt at all the studies that said that if you tax people with a disincentive the more money they make, they'll go to the United States or someplace else where they can work hard and not pay that type of devastation.

It also stops bracket creep. This single tax sets it up so that indexed against inflation, people's growth in their incomes will not be destroyed by inflation.

One other thing they're missing is that the single rate of tax cannot

be discussed without discussing what we've done with the spousal allowances. We've increased the personal deduction and spousal allowance to \$12,900 and inflation-proofed them. Coupled with the single rate of tax, that makes it the most progressive tax in Canada.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that a flat tax is not the only way to remove low-income Albertans from the tax rolls, why does the Acting Treasurer insist on imposing an unfair burden and transferring that burden to middle-income taxpayers?

DR. WEST: Well, that's just not true. I just tabled the chartered accountants news release that has done studies on this. With the changes that we made to the percentage from 11 to 10 and a half and raising the spousal allowance and personal deduction to \$12,900, it does not disadvantage the middle-income earners.

Once again, I don't know why the opposition wants to tax those people not making very much money. They want to tax those 190,000 to 200,000 people that we're taking off the rolls.

Number one, we just don't stand here and brag about what we would do in the future; we do it. In 1997 and '98 we passed an employment tax credit that went through to people working hard that had families, and some people are getting those cheques in the mail today. When this plan comes in, many, many of those that are right around the \$30,000 or \$26,500 trying to support two children, married with one income will be getting a cheque back from the government instead of paying some \$300 or \$400 tax.

2:00

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's try it again. Will the Acting Provincial Treasurer explain why he wants a regressive and unfair flat tax and not a progressive and fair tax cut, as we have proposed, giving the same benefit to the lower income families and individuals as this minister? Why won't he listen to the Liberals' fair tax cut for the reallocation of his tax cut dollars?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, now, this is very, very entertaining for the people of Alberta, because when we introduced Bill 18, they didn't come forth with some funny graph that they've just put out mimicking the one we have by just changing some of the figures. They said that we should lower the 44 percent tax down to 40 percent and mark time with the three different brackets that the federal government had. Now they've changed their mind completely, and they've come in with this mug's game of trying to jump on our bandwagon.

Let's look at another remarkable hypocrisy. Last week they were saying that people making over \$70,000 were the wealthy people that were getting a break. Now in theirs they take it up to a \$100,000. I wish they'd get their facts straight and their principles straight.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Health Care Funding

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The timing of today's announcement of extra money that the government has always had in its pocket to address waiting lists is suspicious to say the least, coming as it does in the aftermath of Bill 11's approval. The government is obviously eager to demonstrate the success of its foolish privatization experiments. However, Albertans said loud and clear during the Bill 11 debate that they want extra funding dollars used to strengthen the public health care system. My questions are to the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister give a clear undertaking to this House that every single cent of the extra funding will be used to strengthen the public health care

system rather than being drained away by commercial interests looking to cash in on the Bill 11 gold rush?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for that question. I want to make it very clear that today's announcement by the hon. minister of health is actually part of our overall six-point plan that was released way back in January or February of this year. That's number one.

Number two, I think it has to be pointed out that the bulk of the announcements coming out today and tomorrow and perhaps over the next couple of days result partly from the injection of money from the federal government through the Canada health and social transfer payment and their budget, which actually came out after our budget. We didn't know how much exactly we'd be getting from the feds at the time of concluding our budget. We had some approximate numbers that we were hoping for, but now that we know there are a significant number of dollars, approximately 98 million coming from the Canada health and social transfer through their budget, we're announcing a number of procedures that will help reduce waiting times for things like heart surgeries, joint replacements, and cancer treatments. It will reduce waiting lists for MRIs and other procedures. We're also going to be looking at including in that a number of other recruitment procedures that will help get us the diagnostic technicians, the therapists, the doctors, the nurses, and so on that all make our health care system work.

In answer to his question about the money that is coming, yes, whatever moneys we get specifically for health care do go specifically to health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the government plan to increase MRI capacity by hiring additional staff and extending service hours in public hospitals or by contracting out to more expensive, less efficient, private-sector MRI clinics?

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just before I get into the specifics there, I want to point out that at the moment we have approximately seven of these machines; in fact, it's exactly seven. We have four more coming onstream, which will take us up to 11 over the next little while, and that will give us the highest per capita MRI capacity anywhere in Canada. Part of that will come out of this money. We need to remember that we're doing about 33,000 of these MRI type scans at the moment.

With the additional 26 placements at the postsecondary level we will be training more people to look after these machines, but I think the hon. member has to recognize that technicians that are required for operating MRIs do have to have a prior degree before they go on to the special training. They would require an RN degree or a related MRI type of diagnostic degree to go on to receive the extra training. So it's a two-step process that is required here, Mr. Speaker.

I do know that with the addition of the four new machines we announced a short while ago, we hope to increase our capacity by a further 28,000 procedures over and above the 33,000 we currently do, and that should significantly alleviate the waiting lists and bring about the needed changes that we're looking for. I know that a lot of that will be done right within our public hospitals system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister categorically refuses to answer my question. Let me try once again. What good does it do to put more funding into health care in the name of reducing wait lists when the minister refuses to guarantee that these precious dollars won't be siphoned into the back pockets of investors rather than going into frontline staffing?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that of the new MRIs we've just announced, two are for Edmonton. They will go into the centres that need them, and I expect those to be public hospitals. The same will happen in Calgary. Those will go into centres where they are needed there. That's over and above the other ones that are contemplated for Grande Prairie and Medicine Hat, over and above the one that already exists in Red Deer.

Along with that, there will obviously have to be additional money for the start-up costs, for the room facilitation. You don't just buy an MRI, and then drop it at the front door. You have to prepare a special room for it. Soundproofing is important. These are very complicated, state-of-the-art pieces of equipment that take a lot of ingenuity to install and equally so to operate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Income Tax (continued)

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government believes that lowering taxes will immediately increase the standard of living for all Albertans and will also attract investment and economic activity into the province, which will further raise the standard of living of Albertans. This has been the agenda of this government since day one, yet our critics continue to accuse us of having no plan. My first question is to the Acting Provincial Treasurer. Can he explain what studies exist that support this government's tax plan?

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, I understand that some of the debate on Bill 19 has taken the course that we were flying by the whims of our pants as far as forming tax policy, but I would like to say that over the many years that we've been here, we have been doing a tremendous amount of studies. We've brought them forth in various documents, and we also have a lot of support on the outside. I have studies done by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business that support this, by Dr. Ken McKenzie, the University of Calgary paper. I tabled yesterday the Shapiro paper which supports that. Kim Cassady, one of their advisers, had done a report for the department of Treasury.

Mr. Speaker, we have a committee that went throughout the province, and this is the final report and recommendations of the Alberta Tax Review Committee. It's for their perusal; they can look at it. Some 80,000 Albertans sent in their recommendations as well as those that attended it.

I would also like to point out that we talked about this ad nauseam when we did the new tax plan for Albertans in Budget '99, and I would like them to take this forward and look at it. I would also like to table Budget: New Century, Bold Plans, 2000, the Alberta Tax Advantage, and in this are a tremendous amount of tables and talk about the tax plan.

I can continue and will continue as we move forward this session to bring all the material I can so that those people across the way can

understand that removing \$1.3 billion off the tax rolls in this province, 20 percent of the personal income tax, is something that Albertans are demanding and want.

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, do these studies indicate that when profits increase as a result of general, across-the-board tax reductions so do real wages and economic activity?

2:10

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the commonly asked questions. How do you know that if you lower taxes, there's any benefit to a society? We have done a study that I'd like to table again today: Economic Impacts of Alberta Tax Review Committee Proposal. It demonstrated that when we were at the 11 percent and the \$11,600 personal deduction, we would probably see about 1,700 new jobs over five years and about .8 percent growth in our GDP. Since we have gone to 10 and a half and we are now at \$12,900 in personal and spousal deductions, that will raise to about 1 and a half percent GDP growth in five years as well as about 30,000 new jobs.

I would also like to point out that there isn't anybody who does a study that doesn't know that taxes are devastating. In fact, just today it was said that the Chretien Liberals came to power in '93, and the average family taxes have ballooned from \$13,937 to \$18,146.

The unfortunate thing, as I hear the chatter from across the way, is that the only legislative experience of the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition in this House was raising taxes. She never had any legislative experience deducting them. [interjections] Now, Mr. Speaker, she points her finger and says: well, you were there when the taxes were raised. But at least I stuck around long enough to lower them.

Mr. Speaker, I would like the Minister of Economic Development to supplement on the advantages of a tax reduction if he wants to.

THE SPEAKER: It's okay. We're going to move on here. We've spent a lot of time on this one series of questions.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we have heard a lot in the past few days about middle-income earners carrying an unfair burden vis-a-vis rich Albertans, can the Acting Provincial Treasurer explain to my constituents how this plan is fair to lower income, middle-income, and even upper income Albertans?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I mean, the facts are on the table. If it's for lower income people, we're going to take 190,000 off the rolls, and as the population increases and this program goes through, it'll be more than 190,000 over the next five years. As far as middle-income, there's one thing about it. It is a progressive tax, but everybody is treated fairly, depending on the incentive to work hard, do better, get an education, and go forward.

Counter to what was said yesterday by the second party that's in this room, from the Ontario budget and Mr. Eves, that under our tax system – you do; the more you make the more you pay. But, in fact, the more you make the higher percentage you pay because you do not pay any tax on the first \$12,900. So it is a progressive tax, number one.

To indicate how those middle income and upper income would be treated, a single individual earning \$20,000 will pay 3.1 percent of his income on tax, a single individual earning \$30,000 will pay 5 percent of his income on tax, a single individual earning \$55,000 will pay 6.2 percent of his income on tax, and a single individual earning \$100,000 will pay 7 and a half percent of his income on tax. No matter how you define that, that's progressivity. That is not a

flat tax. That's a single rate of tax applied against different rates of income without a penalty.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Protection of Privacy

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this Assembly I tabled the 1999-2000 annual report for Canada's Privacy Commissioner, Mr. Bruce Phillips. That Privacy Commissioner had been very critical of Bill 40, the Alberta Health Information Act, and he noted in his report that Bill 40

allows any custodian to develop a family or genetic history for any purpose at all, without asking patients for their consent or even informing them of this practice.

Further, he goes on to say, "This sort of unbridled tracking of personal information is particularly disturbing." My questions are to the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness this afternoon. What steps will this minister take to respond to the forceful criticisms of Mr. Phillips, Canada's Privacy Commissioner?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we've all been somewhat alarmed by what it is that's going on in Ottawa with respect to concerns we all have regarding our personal privacy and the guarding of information. That's why when we released Bill 40 here – that's our Health Information Act – and discussed and debated it and so on last fall, we were very clear in what we wanted included within Bill 40 that would put in place very strong, very clear guidelines that protect the personal health information of our Alberta citizens.

Among the key features, just for the members' review, we know now under Bill 40 that individuals must give consent before identifiable health information can be used for purposes other than that for which it was collected. So if anyone is using that information for a purpose other than that for which it was collected and if anyone is using that information without the express written consent of Albertans, I think we do have a concern, and I think we'll have to talk to Ottawa very strongly about those concerns.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I want to encourage the minister to look in the mirror, Mr. Speaker.

I want to ask this minister: will he confirm that the serious problems that have been identified by Canada's Privacy Commissioner in his latest annual report will be addressed by this government either through amendment of Bill 40 – bring it back in, and let's try again to fix it – or through substantial changes to the regulations now being circulated?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I don't have nor have I seen the particular document the member is referring to. If there is some report out there, then he could perhaps send it across, and I'd be very happy to review it.

There will be an opportunity for this kind of discussion when the provincial health ministers and the territorial health ministers next meet with the federal Health minister. I can assure the member that I will raise this concern and this question to find out exactly what Ottawa is getting to here: how can we better protect the provision and the protection of sensitive health information here; how can we ensure that it's only being used and collected for the purposes for which it was designed and ensure that that consent is there in writing from the patients providing it?

Nonetheless, if the member would kindly provide me with that document, I'll respond to it when I next meet with my federal counterparts.

MR. DICKSON: Well, my final question is this Mr. Speaker: given that the criticism of Mr. Phillips, the national Privacy Commissioner, parallels the concerns raised by this caucus when we were fighting against closure on Bill 40 last December, will this minister commit that the Liberal opposition will be consulted on those regulations under Bill 40 before they become law?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what new concerns the Official Opposition has, but I'd be quite pleased and I'd be quite open to receiving any comments that the member has. I can promise him that I will take those into the discussions.

I believe that we also have a Privacy Commissioner here that would be concerned about some of those comments and some of those allegations that are being made, and perhaps we should have him do a second review of that bill to ensure that everything is the way it's supposed to be and that there are no abuses taking place. If there are, I certainly will be concerned as will the minister of health, and I'm sure, too, others will.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I still have quite a list of hon. members who would like to raise a question today, so might I just ask for a little more brevity, please?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Foster Parent Program

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not so long ago some Metis children committed suicide because they could not overcome the linguistic and cultural problems faced while under foster care. Since then, we have tried to improve our child welfare system to ensure that we can provide a real family environment for those children who are in the custody of our government. However, as I speak, some of the native and ethnic children who are under government care continue to face the same problems that occurred 40 years ago. My questions today are to the Minister of Children's Services. When ethnic and native children who are under the temporary guardianship of your department talk to their biological parents on the phone, are they permitted to speak in their mother tongue?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am always pleased when members in this House demonstrate concern about children who are in the child welfare system.

Mr. Speaker, it would be useful to review the terms of a temporary guardianship order. When a temporary guardianship order is obtained, the child welfare director or their designates have appealed to the court and obtained a judgment for that order, and the best interests of the child are paramount. So in almost every instance we have an opportunity to provide that continuing communication based on that order. There may be extenuating circumstances when the judge will order differently, but overall under the temporary guardianship order every effort is made to make sure that the best interests of the child are obtained.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental question is also to the same minister. Does your department have a policy which forces the children and their biological parents to communicate only in English even though they don't have sufficient knowledge of that language?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. May I stress again the importance of the best interests of the child.

The purpose of a temporary guardianship order is to enable ultimately family reunification. So there is again, considering carefully each individual case, an opportunity for the child welfare worker, for those that are in direct contact with the family workers to consider all aspects of the situation and to work very carefully to make sure that culture is respected, language is respected, and all other circumstances.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is the best interests of the child.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. I'm glad to hear that you don't have such a policy, but if in fact evidence proved that any staff in your department had followed such a policy, what disciplinary action would you take against them?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, should in fact an hon. member or any member of the community feel that there has been some miscommunication, some impediment that is certainly undue, they can petition the minister to conduct some investigation.

Recently, as the hon. member is aware, I have conducted two investigations on the same circumstance on his behalf. He could go further to the Human Rights Commission and have a review conducted there. But, Mr. Speaker, in the matter of a recent discussion the investigator that had been selected and approved by the hon. member found that the intervention of the child and family services authority has been outstanding, is in compliance with all policies which reflect the very high standard of social work practice, and provides culturally appropriate services to the parents.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Wainwright.

Private Health Care Facility Fees

(continued)

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 19, 1999, the minister of health said in regards to who pays for facility fees that the public system does; the regional health authority is funded by the provincial government. My question is to the minister of health. Can he confirm once and for all whether facility fees – and we're not talking about facility services – are part of the contracts with private surgical clinics?

MR. JONSON: Well, first of all, I think we need to remember the history of this particular issue. You would recall, Mr. Speaker, that going back a number of years to the time that the hon. Leader of the Opposition was minister of health, private clinics operated in this province. Let's take the example of eye clinics, which were allowed for a period of time to charge facility fees – that was the terminology

that was used at that particular time – directly to patients for their services. That went on for a while.

We as a province were penalized by the federal government eventually for allowing those facility fees to be charged directly to patients and the government moved to provide that insured services had to be provided under contract with regional health authorities, Mr. Speaker. Under those arrangements which we have in place today, the physician is paid according to the Alberta Medical Association agreement for his particular professional services, and the regional health authority contracts with the provider for certain facility services. An amount is arrived at. That is the amount paid under the contract.

That is the way the system operates today, Mr. Speaker, and that's the history of the use of these terms.

MS LEIBOVICI: That would hold for facility services.

Can the minister, then, tell us what is the percentage of the payment of the existing contracts for those facility fees/facility services?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member posing the question well knows, it depends of course upon the particular procedure or procedures and services that are being contracted for. It would vary from perhaps surgery dealing with removal of lesions and external bodies, so to speak, to cataract surgery, and there would be a variable amount arrived at according to the agreement between the regional health authority which would be negotiated and would be agreed to by each side for the provision of those facility services.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, the minister still doesn't get it. What is the extra amount that the public purse is paying to the private facilities for performing surgical services? Those are the facility fees. Your associate minister indicated that he would table it. Will you back that up and table what the extra amount is, what the facility fee is that is being paid?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there is no extra amount being paid in that sense. This is a contractual relationship just as the regional health authorities have contractual relationships for food services, for diagnostic services. An amount as far as what is provided and paid to the contractor for facility services is arrived at, and our indication across the system is that they are very comparable to costs elsewhere.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Gas Pipeline Crossing Rights

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. In the early 1980s the Federation of Alberta Gas Co-ops negotiated master crossing agreements with the two national railways. Lump sum consideration was paid in return for crossing rights in perpetuity. Now that some of the lines have been sold to short line operators, these lines fall under provincial jurisdiction. Can the minister explain why it is that some gas co-ops have been invoiced for crossing rights, which is contrary to the master agreement signed years ago?

MR. STELMACH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is referring to master agreements that were signed by the two major railways a number of years ago in perpetuity. However, since some of those rail lines were of course sold to other companies, those companies

weren't aware of those agreements that were signed by the two railway companies.

Since the Railway Act now is in our jurisdiction and since the two national railways sold some of their rail lines to smaller, independent companies, all of the regulations will be developed by our department. We will take into consideration the position of the Federation of Gas Co-ops in not only developing those regulations but communicating all of those regulations to all of the other co-ops that might have to cross right-of-ways in the province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you. Can the minister confirm that the regulations that he is developing for the new Railway Act will prevent compensation being paid to the new short lines by the gas co-ops where there are no costs incurred by the railways?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, it makes sense to me. If there are no costs incurred by the railway company, why should the gas co-op have to pay additional fees? That's the premise on which I'm going to be approaching the formation of these regulations.

MR. FISCHER: Will the Federation of Gas Co-ops be consulted on the development of these regulations?

2:30

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we definitely will be consulting with the Federation of Gas Co-ops. In fact, we'll be meeting with them very shortly to discuss a number of topics that the federation has put forward. Certainly one of them is railway crossings, and we definitely will be consulting with them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Alberta Hospital Sewage Lagoon

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In July of last year construction began on a sewage lagoon at Alberta Hospital Ponoka. That lagoon was located on the site of a previous garbage dump on the banks of the Battle River upstream from the town of Ponoka. When the contractor requested the results of the environmental impact assessment, he was told that it was not prepared and that he should proceed with work and that he would be given it later. The contractor then shut down the work on the site for a number of reasons including health and environmental concerns and then was ordered back to work or held in breach of contract by the department. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness in his position as minister and not his position as MLA, sir. When the department of health was made aware of the health and environmental concerns of the garbage dump, why did it order the contractor to keep working rather than stop work and consult the Department of Environment?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm aware of the construction of the lagoon, much needed in terms of ensuring proper services to the hospital and provision for the safe disposal of wastewater. I'm also aware that there is a contractual dispute, but beyond that I'm not party to it. I could request that perhaps the Minister of Infrastructure may want to comment on this, because it does fall under his administration.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I'll take that question under advisement and get the full details. I'm not quite sure where the

dispute may be at this particular point, and I don't want to make any statements with respect to the dispute without having all the information at hand.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. Why did the department of health order the garbage that was buried to another site on hospital grounds instead of following the advice of a professional or, as is lawful, the Department of Environment's recommendations?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to just put on record that certainly I will review the matter with the Minister of Infrastructure. I do not, however, knowing the record of questions across the way, accept the contentions that the hon. member is making. We will certainly review the matter and check on those allegations, but I do not think they should be accepted as fact at this point in time.

MR. WHITE: Will either minister commit to a full environmental assessment that'll be made public for an approved garbage dump at Alberta Hospital Ponoka to ensure the public health of all Ponoka and area residents so that the waste can be treated in a proper facility?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Health and Wellness I certainly commit to making sure that environmental safety standards are followed. Once again I'm certainly making a commitment to what is very important here, and that is that sites be properly handled. But again I would reserve my comments in the sense that I do think the nature of the statements in the question have to also be checked as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Forest Management

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Associate Minister of Forestry. Alberta's forests are very important to our province's economy. They provide revenue, jobs, economic development in many communities, a number of them in my own riding. Yesterday evening I caught the end of an economic development workshop pertaining to the forestry industry but unfortunately not enough of it to hear all of the feedback. I was wondering if the minister could tell us briefly either from the workshop or from existing strategy what the ministry is doing specifically to ensure that our forest resources meet the demand of long-term development.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, that's a good question. Forestry does continue to play a very important role in our overall diversification plan in Alberta. In fact, next to the oil and gas industry and agriculture it creates most jobs. Over 50,000 jobs are created directly, indirectly, and induced in that industry with a revenue of over \$8.4 billion.

Mr. Speaker, the roundtable we had yesterday was attended by 10 major forestry companies that are very active in Alberta plus representatives from various departments of our government including Economic Development, Environment, International and Intergovernmental Relations, Innovation and Science, Community Development, Treasury, and also Resource Development. These issues and many other issues were discussed by the participants at the conference. One thing that was a common theme from the industry stakeholders was that Alberta definitely is a great place to do business in the forestry industry. In fact, the participants

encouraged us to continue building on the Alberta advantage, and we sure will.

The participants also, of course, recognized the need for a long-term strategy in forestry. This group will partner with Resource Development in developing a new framework policy in the development of the industry for Alberta. So, Mr. Speaker, we are definitely on the right track, a very positive meeting.

MR. FRIEDEL: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Since the existing forestry operations have increased efficiency and could use more timber supply along with new interests also competing for these limited resources, I wonder if the minister could tell us: is there an allocation strategy to ensure long-term supply sustainability?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Forestry.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As most of you are aware I believe, Alberta is nearing full allocation of its resource that's available totally on an annual allowable cut. The demands from industry and the capacity always exceed what we have to offer, but we have a sustained-yield policy that will never, never allow cutting beyond what the forests will grow. Therefore, we are very safe in ensuring that there is long-term viability in that industry.

In fact, our government is presently doing an analysis of the forest resource out there. Once this review is completed later on this year, we will be in a better position to be able to determine how we'll handle future allocations. There are strong indications that if there is a resource that becomes available, we may look at reallocating that resource to existing industries, which would enhance their operations and create more jobs.

MR. FRIEDEL: Again to the Associate Minister of Forestry, Mr. Speaker: does Alberta Resource Development have any plans to actively – and I emphasize the word “actively” – encourage value-added processes and secondary manufacturing in the wood products industry?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Forestry.

MR. CARDINAL: Yes, Mr. Speaker. This was another topic that was discussed quite thoroughly at the roundtable discussions with the forest industry representatives. They are interested in partnering with our government in various ways, involving again Economic Development, the Alberta Forest Products Association, the private industry, and government, to ensure that we move towards value adding. I believe the policy of our government in the overall diversification plan is to go into value adding as part of our overall plan. In fact, in the recent reallocation of timber resources that came available in north-central Alberta, the two major companies that were successful in accessing the timber were in the area of value added, so it's a good move.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll call upon the first of three hon. members to participate in Members' Statements, but in the interim might we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

2:40

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Yes. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce a group of people from the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta who have been and are very instrumental in helping the government of Alberta with their tax plans. They have provided government with valuable input on tax policies through the Alberta Tax Review Committee, and we're looking forward to their additional expert opinions with the Business Tax Review Committee, that's in process now. They have shown their support for Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. I would like them to stand as I indicate their names. They're in the members' gallery, and I'll introduce them to the Assembly: Steve Glover, executive director; Bob Young, president; Brad Severin, member; and Marie Iwanow, communications director. They are standing now, and I would ask them to receive the warm welcome of this House.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

First Lutheran Church 100th Anniversary

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The First Lutheran church in Calgary-West, known as a community of joy, is celebrating 100 years of Christian ministry this year. Recently I was involved in a weekend of special events. Hundreds of enthusiastic families, relatives, friends, and special guests participated in celebrating the great heritage of First Lutheran church in Calgary.

Officially organized in 1900 with a confirmed membership of 10, they purchased for \$1,000 from the First Baptist church a little white wooden church on the corner of 6th Avenue and 2nd Street. In 1950 First Lutheran observed their 50th anniversary. To everyone's surprise Premier Ernest Manning accepted an invitation to speak from the pulpit and used John 2:5 as his text: whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

First Lutheran church has been in its third and present location since 1982 in the Strathcona community of Calgary-West. During the 1990s First Lutheran embarked on an important three-year fund-raising campaign, called Vision 2000: Imagine Tomorrow. The goal was achieved, evidenced by the completion of an extensive, approximately three-quarters of a million dollar expansion in 1998. The new sanctuary seats approximately 450 people.

I was honoured to bring greetings from the province at the Sunday services to recognize this great institution, which serves so well the spiritual and personal needs of its community members with programs for all ages, from young children to seniors. It is so important that we take time from our very busy lives to appreciate our history, to reminisce, and to value our achievements. That weekend was a truly joyful time.

To Pastor Remo Madsen and the congregation of First Lutheran church, the challenge now will be tomorrow, to carry on, reaching beyond 100. My congratulations to you for being such a strength and helping to build a stronger spiritual community in Calgary-West.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Protection of Privacy

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the opportunity to table in this Assembly a copy of the 1999-2000 annual report of Mr. Bruce Phillips, Canada's Privacy Commissioner. The report is voluminous, but there is revealing and important information in the 150 pages.

Much of the media focus in the last two days has been on the now

infamous longitudinal labour force file kept by HRDC in Ottawa. You know, I encourage people to read the many other concerns that certainly deserve our attention and remedial action. The Privacy Commissioner documents the misuse of the social insurance number, which has become, in his words, an "internal passport" without which we are nobody."

Now, there is some good advice here for members of this Assembly and for Albertans as we contemplate section 21 of Bill 40, the Health Information Act, and the requirement to produce our personal health number to anybody authorized by regulation. We know how regulations are made in secret in this province. There is no prohibition. There is no sanction. This was one of the concerns that Mr. Phillips identified in his report.

In the health sector he notes: "Patients' privacy is steadily eroding in the name of health research, ready access to personal information and administrative efficiency." Have we not seen that borne out in the debate around Bill 40?

In his report he highlights problems with surveillance in public places and work sites, actually a problem that a Liberal private member's bill twice introduced in this Assembly would have remedied: "The 1999 study [confirms] that Canadians are also becoming more sophisticated" in the area of privacy protection. Fifty-five percent of Canadians "believe that governments collect more information than they need to provide services."

I want to thank Mr. Phillips for his national leadership. This report ought to be required reading for every Alberta legislator.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Native and Ethnic Foster Children

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not long ago many native children were taken from their families and put in foster homes where the language and culture were totally different. Most of these children were forced to westernize. Some were successful; others were not. Some even committed suicide because they could not overcome the language and cultural barriers they were living with.

Many studies have been done on this issue. We have all learned from this painful experience. As a society we pledged to never repeat these mistakes. Unfortunately, as we speak, some of the native and ethnic children who are in our child welfare system still face the same problems which occurred 40 years ago. They are still being placed in foster homes which have a totally different language and culture. Some of the child welfare authorities still believe that they need to westernize these children. They force the children and their biological parents to communicate with each other in English only, even though they do not have sufficient knowledge of the language to communicate effectively. This concerns me, and it should concern all of us.

When official reviews are launched, these bureaucrats can hide behind the Child Welfare Act and cover their improper actions under the mask of confidentiality, but they should know that Alberta today is totally different than Alberta 40 years ago. The mistakes of the past cannot and must not be repeated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 7(5) I'd ask the Government House Leader to outline the course of business we might anticipate commencing Tuesday, May 23, please.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday, May 23, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for third reading, Bill 24, if necessary; for second reading, Bill 20 and Bill 22; and in Committee of the Whole, Bill 3 and Bill 19. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, Bill 20 and Bill 22; Committee of the Whole, Bill 3, Bill 20, Bill 22, Bill 18, Bill 19, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday under Government Bills and Orders at 8 p.m. in Committee of the Whole, Bill 3, Bill 20, Bill 22, and Bill 18; for third reading, Bill 18 and Bill 19 and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, May 25, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for third reading, Bill 3, Bill 20, Bill 22, Bill 18, Bill 19, and as per the Order Paper.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'll call the committee to order. Just for the people that are seated in the gallery, the committee stage is more informal than the other stages of the bill. This particular stage is to look at the bill clause by clause, hopefully, section by section. People are allowed to move about freely and also have a beverage.

2:50

Bill 19

Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The government has used closure now at both stages of Bill 19. That really surprises me, because when I review the *Hansard* of the comments made by members of the Liberal opposition, what I see is almost in every case – well, I think without exception every member of the Liberal opposition is talking about why it is important to provide fair and sustainable tax cuts to Albertans and is questioning the government about why it has backtracked, reneged on its 1996 budget commitment to remove first the flat tax, which affects the majority of Albertans, instead of moving on the 8 percent surtax, which only affects a minority of tax filers.

It is really quite astounding that the government would try to twist that kind of commentary into a suggestion that members of the Liberal opposition are against providing tax cuts. In fact, we've been saying for quite some time, Madam Chairman, that the government of Alberta ought to get on with cutting the flat tax and providing some relief. I will mention at this point that that's in stark contrast to the New Democrats. Their former leader had published an article in the *Edmonton Sun* on January 27, 1996, where she was calling for the creation of yet a new flat tax. I guess that's for another debate at another time.

I will remind the House that on July 27, 1999, the Alberta Liberal opposition caucus issued a press release that was titled Albertans Want Tax Relief Now, Not Trial Balloons. What it talked about was the fact that this government and the Treasurer of the day were using the weasel words "maybe" and "possibly" there would be some tax reform. What we were suggesting back in July of 1999 was that the government should quickly move on the recommendations that it had received and eliminate both the 8 percent surtax and the .5

percent flat tax. The government had said that it was going to eliminate that .5 percent tax first. We think that it could have been done this year. We think the plan can be accelerated. We think that's affordable.

Madam Chairman, if you take a look at the numbers, what you find is that what we're really talking about is making a decision between saving some 390,000 tax filers the equivalent of around \$144 million or saving some 1.5 thousand, 1.6 thousand tax filers the equivalent of about \$325 million or \$330 million. Because the government has said that it "possibly" might, "maybe" could accelerate the removal of the .5 percent flat tax anyway, possibly by moving it up by six months, we may only be talking about that change representing about half of that \$340 million or \$350 million figure. We may only be talking about a timing issue of about six months. Of course, by doing that, we would be able to hold the government to its often repeated commitment to provide tax cuts to low-income Albertans and middle-income Albertans first.

If I can refer you to July 27, 1999, where the Premier was quoted in response to the press release from the Official Opposition that I just referenced: "What we want to do is make sure that those who can least afford to pay tax get the first break." That would be consistent with the pledge made in 1996 but inconsistent with Bill 19.

The former Treasurer – I'm referring to the one that's still a member of the Assembly – said on July 28, 1999, one day later: "Certainly our priority is for low-income earners, and there are ways that can be addressed." Now, that would again be keeping with the commitment made in 1996 but contrary to Bill 19.

Then once again, the Premier, speaking yet a day later, still trying to do some damage control as to why the government was not putting action behind its words on tax relief, was quoted in the *Calgary Herald*. On July 29, 1999, the Premier made the following comment:

Certainly, there are two components I would like to accelerate. Certainly, the raising of the basic [exemption] for lower-income families . . . But, certainly, if there's anything that can be accelerated, we can accelerate the surtax that was put on back in the 1980s to eliminate the deficit.

So, Madam Chairman, the government has this legacy of making promises about tax relief and then failing to carry them through, and the Official Opposition has been trying for some time to get the government to keep its word and provide the often talked about tax relief.

Now, Bill 19, as we have heard in second reading, is a bill where the principle is to eliminate at least one of the deficit elimination taxes. We think it would be better if the bill eliminated if not the tax that is broad-based first, then certainly both at the same time. This is no longer a question of whether it should happen. It's really a matter of when it will happen.

I note from reading today's newspaper that the Acting Provincial Treasurer was speculating on the size of the surplus. Contrary to the comments of the Minister of Government Services where she denied that there's any surplus – and I don't know how she can make that statement and keep a straight face, but she did deny that there was a surplus – today we find that the Acting Provincial Treasurer is talking that the surplus will certainly exceed the \$713 million that was in the budget. Of course, we think it will exceed that by several times. With the state of the economy, with the diversification, with the oil and gas sector being as robust as it is, and with other sectors of our economy clicking along, it's clear that the revenue projections in Budget 2000 are low. It's clear that the gaming revenues projected are low. It's clear that the income tax and corporate tax projections are low. So the surplus at the end of the year is going to

be many, many times the \$713 million that's in the budget.

So with all of that in mind, Madam Chairman, with all of the government's faults and criticism in mind about what it is that the Official Opposition has been opposing or supporting, with the government's own misinformation about the state of the economy and the lowballing of the budget in Budget 2000, and with the government's oft-stated commitments to remove the deficit elimination taxes and provide tax benefits to the low- and middle-income earners first, what I would like to do at this point in time is move an amendment to Bill 19. What I'll do is have this circulated and pause for just a moment while the pages are handing out the amendment.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you rising, hon. member?

MR. HANCOCK: I am.

MR. SAPERS: I'm only pausing.

MR. HANCOCK: You're only pausing? Oh.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes. We're just allowing a few minutes for the pages to distribute the amendment.

Go ahead, hon. member.

3:00

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very, very much, Madam Chairman. What I will do now is move my amendment and read it formally into the record. I move that Bill 19 be amended as follows. Section 5 is struck out and the following is substituted:

5 Section 3.03 is amended by adding the following after subsection (2):

(3) This section applies to the 1987 and subsequent taxation years, up to and including the final taxation year to which section 3.04 applies prior to its repeal.

The object of this amendment is to ensure that when this government moves to eliminate the 8 percent surtax, which will provide a tax benefit to all those tax filers that have taxable income of approximately over \$49,000 a year – when they go to eliminate that, at the very same time they will be eliminating the .5 percent flat tax that . . . [interjection] Well, Madam Chairman, across the floor we're having some chatter from the Government House Leader that is suggesting that that is not what this says.

If the Government House Leader will go back and read the bill, I think what he'll find is that there are some procedural idiosyncracies, that I know you're aware of. The Official Opposition is not permitted to amend a section of an existing statute that isn't on the table in the form of an amending bill. You see, we can't amend the section directly. We have to amend it by reference. Of course we've worked closely with Parliamentary Counsel to ensure that the wording of this amendment will achieve the object, which is to tie the two deficit elimination taxes together and make sure that they are both eliminated at the same time. The amendment is very clear: "up to and including the final taxation year to which section 3.04 applies." Section 3.04 is the section . . . [interjection] No, no, no.

Madam Chairman, I apologize that I'm not speaking through you. So I will make my comments to you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, I would suggest you do that, hon. member.

MR. SAPERS: The object of this amendment is very clear. Because it's this current taxation year which is the final year that the government intends to have the collection of the 8 percent surtax, we

would have this also be the final taxation year that the government would be able to pick the pockets of Alberta taxpayers for that .5 percent flat tax as well.

As I was saying earlier, Madam Chairman, the acceleration of the plan the government has spoken of – they've speculated about it. They have suggested that perhaps Alberta taxpayers will get this kind of a break, but they have never followed through. So if the government is serious about its words, that they want to provide this tax relief to Albertans, and if they are serious in their comments that they can no longer justify having the deficit elimination taxes, then I think it's about time that they quickly put, I guess, taxpayers' money where the government's mouth is and accept this amendment.

If the Government House Leader suggests that the wording doesn't achieve the purpose, then I would expect the Government House Leader to suggest a subamendment. I would hate to see the Government House Leader take advantage of the rules which prevent us from directly amending a section to argue against an amendment when the intent and the purpose are clear. I am very confident in the amendment, as I am confident in Parliamentary Counsel.

I can anticipate what the Government House Leader's argument may be, but I think he will do a great disservice to this debate if he should try to argue that there is a wording issue here. It is the intent which merits the debate, Madam Chairman, and if the Government House Leader wants to suggest wording that would be even clearer, then he's certainly welcome to do that.

I would like the discussion to be centred around the notion of eliminating the deficit elimination taxes because they can no longer be justified and, in the government's own words, they will deliver much-needed tax relief to Alberta taxpayers.

With those comments, Madam Chairman, I look forward to hearing the government's response to see whether or not they are willing to do as they've always claimed they would do; that is, provide this immediate tax relief to all Alberta taxpayers.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. When I was rising before, it was going to be my simple purpose to adjourn debate in committee for the moment and ask that we rise and report progress, but I'm delighted, before I do that, to comment on this wonderful amendment that's being brought forward. In fact, I think we should probably adjourn the session completely and go home so that we have the summer to explain to Albertans what the Liberal opposition is about and how the Liberal opposition wants to help them leave their money with the government for yet another year. That is the effect of the amendment that's being brought forward.

The amendment says:

This section applies to the 1987 and subsequent taxation years, up to and including the final taxation year to which section 3.04 applies prior to its repeal.

Of course, one of the main purposes of Bill 19 is the current section as it's in the bill, unamended, which is to say that the surtax would end in the 1999 tax year. It wouldn't apply past the 1999 tax year so that in the year 2000 Albertans are enjoying tax relief. This 8 percent surtax is off in the year 2000. That's what was announced and that's what is happening, and Albertans are enjoying that tax relief as we speak, Madam Chairman. Albertans are currently enjoying it. [interjection]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HANCOCK: Edmonton-Glenora doesn't understand.

Albertans are enjoying the tax relief which has been announced by

this government and which is to be given legislative sanction by Bill 19 and which this government is very eager to pass so that it can be in law what is already in policy and already in effect, that Albertans get to enjoy their own money for a year because we were able to accelerate the relief from the 8 percent surtax for the full 2000 tax year, which, I should remind the hon. member, was brought in back in the days when there was a deficit, was brought in to tackle the deficit.

Those members opposite are so keen to talk about the progressive tax system and people paying their share, but what they fail to realize is that the surtax was tacked on to higher income earners. I'm not going to say high-income earners, because it started, as I understand it, at around the \$42,000 level, which is not by any measure a high-income earner these days. People earning over \$40,000 were paying this extra 8 percent so that Alberta could get out of the deficit. That was Albertans pulling together to defeat the insidious deficit, which was caused, I might say, by the Liberal federal government bringing in a national energy policy and destroying the oil industry and destroying our royalty revenue stream.

So that's what happened. It drove the price of oil down, destroyed Alberta's energy sector for a period of time, and resulted in a huge deficit. Turning that around was a very, very massive job, which had to be undertaken and was undertaken with the support of Albertans saying that, yes, that was the priority. Albertans were asked and Albertans did participate and gave to deal with the deficit dog and the debt. This government said: Albertans are overtaxed. [interjections] Edmonton-Mill Woods says that they're overtaxed, and he's right. This government is trying to do something about it this year.

Then what happens? Madam Chairman, this is just too priceless. Edmonton-Glenora brings in an amendment that says: we don't want to take the surtax off this year; we want to take it off next year.

3:10

MR. SAPERS: That's not what it says.

MR. HANCOCK: That's exactly what it says. It says: "the final taxation year to which section 3.04 applies prior to its repeal." Well, when is 3.04 going to be repealed? Bill 18 repeals section 3.04 effective the taxation year 2001, next year. So what this amendment has the effect of doing is postponing to next year the reduction in taxes to Albertans. That's exactly what it does.

The only thing in Bill 19, Madam Chairman, which takes the tax section off is section 5 of Bill 19, which says that "section 3.03 is amended . . . applies to the 1987 and subsequent taxation years, up to and including the 1999 taxation year." Okay? [interjections]

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order. There's one person and one person only that has the floor. We still have approximately two hours and 15 minutes here, and we are going to see some decorum.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Debate Continued

MR. HANCOCK: What they have done is said that they want section 3.03 to be extended to the year in which 3.04 is repealed. Well, the year in which 3.04 is repealed is in Bill 18. It's next year. They don't want the surtax to come off until that's repealed. They don't want the surtax to come off until next year.

MR. WICKMAN: David, you're so wrong.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, I'd love to hear where I'm wrong on this.

MR. SAPERS: Are you adjourning debate?

MR. HANCOCK: I am.

You'll have all weekend to research it. It's pretty clear to me on a straight reading of it. If I'm wrong, I'll apologize. I don't want Albertans to have to wait an extra year for their 8 percent surtax to come off. I don't think Albertans want to wait. None of the members of our caucus want Albertans to have to wait until next year. So if I'm wrong on this interpretation, I'd love to hear the explanation, and I'll look forward to it after they've done their research over the weekend.

Madam Chairman, I would move that we now adjourn debate and the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 19. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It's so ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 24

Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Madam Speaker, I do believe that it would be in order to have the bill on the table for debate, so I would like to move on behalf of the Minister of Environment that Bill 24, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act, 2000, be read a third time.

It's a very important bill, Madam Speaker. As we've discussed in second reading and in committee, it brings the heritage rangeland concept into the sphere so that we can move ahead with the designation of heritage rangelands which have been identified for that designation in an appropriate manner.

I think those in the House that have spoken to date have agreed that that's an appropriate thing to do and that it should be done on a timely basis. Regardless of what might come down the road, this isn't something that's necessary to move on now. The people of Alberta will know that heritage rangelands will be part of and appropriately designated under the special areas process, and we can move ahead with those designations without waiting for any other or future discussion as to the appropriate statutory arrangements.

With those words I would ask the House for support at third reading of Bill 24.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to add my comments at third reading of Bill 24, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act, 2000. There is no doubt that we will be supporting this bill, as small as the amendment is, in terms of addressing some of the environmental needs and concerns in this province, but I think it's important to put on the record that this bill would have never seen the light of day had the government supported environmental protection as a cornerstone of their policies.

It's interesting to have the Government House Leader at this particular point in time stand up and move third reading and talk about how important this bill is and how all of the debate has been in support of it, when in fact during second reading and in the committee stage the only people commenting on this bill were Official Opposition members. The environmental protection minister made a few very short opening comments on the bill during those other two stages. In fact, not a single government member got up and spoke for or against this bill. Interestingly enough, none of the very legitimate questions and concerns that some of my colleagues had with regard to this piece of legislation have been addressed in any capacity. So it's interesting to note that the Government House Leader would now state that this is an important bill.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Madam Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), (j). The hon. member indicated that no government member got up and spoke to the bill. Of course the only way you get a bill on the floor of the House is to have it moved, and it was moved by the hon. Minister of Environment for first reading, which of course doesn't have debate attached to it but does have a short introduction which outlines the importance of the bill. Then in second reading the hon. minister put his reasons on the table.

It would be important to point out to the House, because it hasn't been pointed out in the past, that members on this side don't feel the necessity for successive numbers of people to get up and say the same things. When you have a bill of this nature, which is self-explanatory on the face of it, and the Minister of Environment puts the case for it, there is not a need for a large number of subsequent members to get up.

3:20

My point of order is that there has been support for the bill from the government side in debate. The Minister of Environment moved it and made an eloquent speech, as I recall, when he did so. So it wouldn't be appropriate to say that no government member participated in debate. In fact, I just participated in the debate not that long ago and said what an important bill it is. Now, I didn't feel the need to get into specifics, because of course there were no amendments in committee and we're talking about the principle of the bill. The principle of the bill is very sound, and I think I expressed that. So two government members spoke in favour of this bill.

It's unfortunate the hon. member hasn't had responses to her questions, but I'm sure that if she had sincere questions, she could

call the Minister of Environment, who, I know, would have been pleased to discuss them with her and probably will discuss them with her, notwithstanding that we're in third reading at this stage.

I thought it important to rise on the point of order and point out that two members had spoken to the bill. With a bill of this nature, which everybody has agreed so far is necessary, that's an allegation which shouldn't be left unchallenged.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order.

MS CARLSON: On the point of order, Madam Speaker. Once again it's very unfortunate that the Government House Leader was not paying attention, because had he been paying attention, he would have heard that what I said was: except for a few short introductory remarks by both himself and the Minister of Environment. So there is no point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair will say that I have noted this afternoon that we're getting very much on a personal basis in some of this debate and discussion. I think it behooves us to rise above that. I realize that this is Thursday afternoon at 3:20. It's been a long week. However, we have before us third reading of Bill 24. I don't think we need to discuss at length who has or hasn't been up debating this bill. The intent of third reading is to debate the overall principles involved in the bill, and I would ask that we get to the bill, not to individuals, not to who's done what. Let's talk about what is before us, and that is Bill 24. I would say that for the rest of the afternoon, please.

Go ahead, hon. member, on the bill.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On the bill and speaking in general to the principles of it. If it were in fact, as has been alleged, an important bill, we would have seen great support coming forward, so I think that is . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Don't test my patience, hon. member. On the bill.

MS CARLSON: I am on the bill, Madam Speaker, and I am on the principle of the bill and how important this bill should be to Albertans. [interjection] It is not out of order to make those comments.

On the bill. We should have seen legislation brought back into this Legislature that addressed the overall issues, needs, and concerns of Albertans with regard to the environment. Instead, what we see here is a very small piecemeal type of legislation addressing a very selected need in this province, not at all the comprehensive legislation that was committed to in terms of the reintroduction of Bill 15, the Natural Heritage Act. Why didn't we see that legislation in this Assembly, Madam Speaker?

The first bill as it came in was poorly written, was immensely flawed. The Minister of Environment then spent nearly a year with the MLA committee in consultation with a number of groups – environmentalists, industry, citizens at large – and they made a number of excellent recommendations that the Minister of Environment committed to bring back into this Legislature to be discussed and debated. Instead, what we see is some sort of a fight happening over on the government side, where that legislation was stalled. It did not come back into this Legislature, and that's a real pity, Madam Speaker, because that would have been excellent legislation to discuss. It certainly would have brought in a number of issues

that were important to be debated. Instead, we see piecemeal legislation once again, which tells you what kind of a priority this government pays to environmental protection in this province.

We see only one small piece of legislation being brought in, the very bare minimum of what the Department of Environment needs at this point in time to be able to carry on with their work. We're happy to support this very small piece, but it calls into question all of those other issues that weren't addressed.

Also, I have to put on the record that when the government knows going in on a piece of legislation that we are going to support it, when we're up front with them, when we come in here – we support it even before our questions are answered – then we ask the questions in debate on the floor of the Legislature, Madam Speaker, we would expect those questions to be answered, and we expect them to be answered on the floor of the Legislature, because that's the format in which they are asked.

We heard some earlier comments today that I could write letters, that the answers are sure to be forthcoming, but in fact that was not the request that was made. Those questions easily could have been answered during the course of the different stages of debate. I have waited until third reading to find out what kind of a response we were going to get, and what we got was absolutely no response, Madam Speaker. That, in my belief, is a disrespect for this Assembly and a disrespect for the hard work that's gone into taking a look at this legislation, talking to a variety of user groups around the province and finding out what it is that should be addressed before the legislation passes. Now we're going to see the legislation pass this afternoon, and we don't have those very important questions answered.

So for the record, Madam Speaker, I'm going to go through the debate and group the questions in such a way that it will be very easy for the Minister of Environment to answer them, and we expect answers on this legislation. That is the bare minimum of what should have been provided and which has not.

I will start with the Member for Lethbridge-East, who asked a question about private property lands not being included in this particular legislation as compared to the grazing leases that are. He's wanting to know if there would be any future private property lands included in this. So I think that's an important question. The Member for Lethbridge-East is the agriculture critic, is in contact with those grazing leaseholders at all times, and they want to know if this legislation only deals with them or people at large, so if we could get an answer to that question.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I have someone standing, I would assume, on a point of order. The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

MRS. NELSON: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). I've been listening intently to the hon. member opposite asserting that questions haven't been answered, and I'll reflect back. This seems to be a standard from this hon. member. On Tuesday of this week in the third reading discussions of Bill 5, the Land Titles Amendment Act, the same hue and cry speech was given, and as a matter of fact what was said was not accurate. The questions that had been raised by the members opposite had in fact been fully answered and sent to those members directly after the debate at committee and had been answered by the sponsor of the bill. So I would caution the hon. member to please check and find out, because I can tell you, just having had four bills go through this Legislature, that questions have indeed been answered, and I believe my colleagues in cabinet have

been moving questions and answers to them very quickly, albeit she may not have received them from her colleagues. I would suggest she check that before she makes the assertion that questions have not been answered on these bills before they've been moved forward.

MS CARLSON: Madam Speaker, on the point of order. The questions asked here have not been answered either in *Hansard* or in written form by the Minister of Environment between Tuesday evening and Wednesday evening of this week, when this bill was up for debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Well, hon. member, I go back to what I just said a few minutes ago. If we could talk about what is actually within the bill, the bill that I have here, the bill that each of you has at your desk. If you wish to question the ministry, I would suggest that you do so. However, we are at the third reading stage. We are proceeding with the overall principles of the bill, having come through second reading and Committee of the Whole. I would ask that you take those concerns and possibly write a letter or make a telephone call, or that is something you can utilize question period for, but I would ask now that we get on with what we have in front of us: what is included, what we have been concerned about during the last two stages of this bill. Let's talk about that, please.

3:30

MS CARLSON: A point of clarification, Madam Speaker. Are you telling me, then, that in third reading, the final stage of this bill, the last opportunity we have to ask questions affecting the principle of the bill that haven't been answered, questions are not specifically allowed?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: What I'm saying, hon. member, is that I've listened to your debate. The first part was focusing on who hadn't stood up in the various stages of this bill to debate it, and now we're into asking questions that are over and above, or go beyond, what exactly is involved in Bill 24. As chairman of this particular stage, sitting here in the chair, I'm trying to focus you back to what I have in front of me here, Bill 24, so that we can proceed in a timely fashion with some good debate.

Now, let's get back on Bill 24.

Point of Order Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MS CARLSON: A point of clarification, Madam Speaker, with respect.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: There's no more clarification, member. Let's just get on with the debate.

MS CARLSON: I stand on Standing Order 13(2) and ask for a ruling from the chair.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me?

MS CARLSON: Under Standing Order 13(2) I believe it's allowable for me to stand and ask a question of the chair.

MRS. NELSON: Are you challenging the chair?

MS CARLSON: I'm not challenging the chair. I'm respectfully asking a question of clarification.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: That's fine, hon. member. Go ahead.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My question would be this. The questions that I have are not outside the scope of this bill. They're specifically asking for clarification in terms of the interpretation of how this bill will be applied. That is the extent that I am pursuing here. I'm certainly not trying to go outside the mandate of the bill. We do have a number of very legitimate questions that a very legitimate number of users are wanting answers to.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair just listened intently a few minutes ago when an hon. minister of the Crown rose and suggested that you seek answers to those questions and that possibly those answers have come your way. I'm not here to debate whether in fact that is so.

This is Thursday afternoon. It has been a long week. I would ask that we look at what is before us in the debate and the various sections and that we talk on what is being changed in this act as far as the amendments.

I certainly know, hon. member, that you are very, very capable of seeking answers to questions that go above and beyond what is in this piece of legislation. I'm not sitting here trying to give you a rough time. I'm trying to do what I think is best, and that's get on with the debate that is at hand.

Now, the first part of your debate, as I said, was talking about who had or hadn't been up to speak to this bill. Now we are talking about questions that you want answers for that go above and beyond what is written in this piece of legislation. So I would ask if you could please ensure that your remarks in the remaining few minutes that you have left in your time deal with the amendment as presented in Bill 24 in the third reading stage. This is not second reading. This is not first reading. This is not committee. We are in third reading.

I would also say that we have a lot of business to deal with this afternoon. I think we should try to focus on what we are supposed to do in this House, and that is, we are debating an amendment that is contained in legislation being Bill 24. Possibly, hon. member, if you were to finish your debate, there might be other members of this Assembly that would get up and answer your questions.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I certainly hope so. I will continue with the questions that hopefully fall specifically within your very narrow definition of those that are applicable to this particular bill. I certainly hope that my questions will be answered, given the co-operation on this side of the House with regard to this particular bill.

This is my first opportunity to speak to this bill, and I'm quite happy to be speaking to the principles of this particular legislation.

MRS. NELSON: Where were you?

MS CARLSON: Well, you can be guaranteed that the next time one of these bills comes up, you won't be getting that kind of co-operation.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, through the chair, please.

MS CARLSON: Sorry, Madam Speaker. I was provoked by the minister.

We have, still, a number of outstanding questions with regard to this bill, and some of them are with regard to the grazing leaseholders, which are directly affected in this particular instance, Madam Speaker, and I am hoping that those questions get answered. Some

of those are talking about how natural hazards will be dealt with in the areas with grazing leaseholders.

Another one that hasn't been addressed yet, which I think is important to talk about, is: with the restrictions for the vehicles and horses on these grazing leases, should a grazing leaseholder have a problem with their cattle where they need to bring a veterinarian out or they have to remove some of the cattle from the lease and take them someplace else, is there some sort of a permitting process that they can go through in order to remove the affected livestock? This restriction is somewhat restrictive in that area too. While we are glad to see these restrictions come in these wilderness areas and specifically are very supportive of the list that is in the bill in terms of limited access, I think there are occasions when exceptions need to be made, and I would think that access to livestock and maintaining the health of those livestock for these grazing leaseholders would be of importance. So we would like to see how that is addressed.

Interestingly enough, in the restrictions that are listed, Madam Speaker, we don't see any restrictions here specifically for mountain bikes. How is that going to be dealt with in this regard? We know that one or two mountain bikes in an area don't do much ecological damage, but a number of them in a repetitive fashion certainly do. They can certainly do as much damage as horses, as a comparison, so we want to know why those weren't included in this list and if there's some specific address that's going to be made to the wilderness areas.

Another question I have is with regard to the education process, Madam Speaker. This hasn't been addressed anywhere in the comments. We would like to know how this information from this particular bill will be passed on to both general users of these grazing leases and specifically to the leaseholders. As we heard comments this afternoon, this is an interim measure prior to more comprehensive legislation coming through, which we certainly hope comes through in the spring, but in the short term people need to know what the rules are, because there are some pretty significant changes in terms of restrictions. So how are they going to let people know how they're going to access those areas?

My colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford in his comments yesterday talked about access for people with disabilities. I think that's a very interesting point that was brought up, and I would certainly like to see if the Minister of Environment has any works in place with that.

My colleague from Edmonton-Norwood talked about the enforcement. Given the restrictions, what are they going to do with enforcement? She probably didn't realize that the number of conservation officers is being increased both this year and next year, and we'd like to applaud the department in that regard. Certainly if I've heard one complaint since the cutbacks happened in '93 in Environment, it's been that the number of staff on the ground have been cut back far too far, and certainly the wildlife officers and park rangers come under that mandate. While we're not completely supportive of their conversion to conservation officers, it is a step in the right direction to see those numbers increased. Are we going to see a heavier concentration in these wilderness areas to begin with? As we're coming into the busy season in these areas now, we would like to know specifically how these restrictions are going to be enforced and applied in this regard. So if we could have those comments, I would appreciate that.

3:40

Given that we haven't seen Bill 15, the Natural Heritage Act, it is good to see at least this amendment come forward, where the three heritage rangelands are designated as natural areas. Since Bill 15 was introduced, we've heard feedback from the community and

particularly from those people who work within the department about the necessity of some kind of protection occurring for these heritage rangelands. There's no doubt that the department couldn't go forward in terms of completing their tasks and properly taking care of these areas without some kind of protection. So while it's very unfortunate that we don't see more comprehensive legislation, it is at least nice to see that we've got a temporary stopgap measure that can be put in place until we can get legislation passed, which is important.

The minister in his opening comments talked about the new dispositions only being sold with the nonsurface rights, no service access addendum to prevent future surface disturbances. Certainly we support that for any new dispositions. It's a step in the right direction, and we hope that this is fleshed out in a little more detail and a little more comprehensively in the new bill that we see in the spring.

He talked about existing industrial commitments being honoured in these rangelands. I would like to know if there was ever any discussion here in terms of phasing out those dispositions over time. Some information about that, the pros and cons of it as seen from his department's perspective, would be important for us to know. Once again, we understand that this is the basis of the most contentious issue stalling the original bill from coming back now. We don't need to know about that debate going on, but certainly in terms of the department's position on phasing out, we would like to have a little bit more information on this. I would like that in writing as soon as possible, if the minister could address that.

We're happy to see that in these wilderness areas the recreational use of highway vehicles and snowmobiles will not be permitted except in special circumstances, where they'll be needed to conduct the business, enforcement, or whatever within the department. So that's a good move. We would like to see that extended to areas beyond wilderness areas. I would certainly be interested in the minister's comments in terms of how that is progressing.

It's good to see that hunting and fishing will continue to be managed under the Wildlife Act and Alberta fisheries regulations. We would expect nothing less there. We would like to know what specific steps are being taken in fisheries in these particular areas. We all know that fisheries is in a great deal of trouble in this province at this particular time. The steps that the department has taken to revitalize fisheries and fishing as an industry in the province haven't worked very well. We would like to know specifically what they're going to be doing in these particular areas.

The minister then talked about the parks and protected areas being a priority for his department. We need to see it as more than that, Madam Speaker. We need to see it as being a priority of the entire cabinet, as a pillar of this government's policies. I would like him to address that.

We know that he's been studying the recommendations of the MLA review committee. He said in his comments that now he's conducting public consultations on the previous draft of the legislation. We'd like to know what that's about, because we understood that review was done and completed. Does this mean new consultations are occurring? If so, what's the format they're going forward in, and how are people and directly affected groups going to be included in that process? So if he could comment on that in accordance with the comments he made in his initial remarks. We would like to know what's happening with that.

You know, people in the province thought the process was over with once the MLA recommendations came out, yet in this particular bill we see only two pages of those recommendations being addressed, which is unfortunate because they were pretty good recommendations. I thought the committee did a pretty good job of

bringing together a diverse number of views and finding some common ground that we could move forward on in terms of environmental protection.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the committee for their hard work. I know that they spent the summer and the fall working pretty hard on this and came up with excellent recommendations. It's a tough job to do. You have environmentalists who want to see complete protection of areas, and you have industries who want to have access to the grounds. Even though, as I see in this province, industry is becoming much more environmentally aware and conscious over time – and that's excellent – and they're willing to come to the table and find solutions, it's still not that easy to find common ground, Madam Speaker. The committee did a pretty good job of that, and they need to be thanked for that.

I certainly hope that every recommendation that was in this report is addressed soon. The few that were addressed in this particular bill are a step in the right direction, but they're a baby step, Madam Speaker, and this government has a long way to go in order to do what the minister in his opening comments said, and that is fulfill their promise to Albertans to preserve land from all of Alberta's natural regions under the special places program.

So, you know, it's a step in the right direction, but there's still a long way to go, and there are all kinds of outstanding issues in environment, not the least of which is the size of these lands that are being protected in terms of them being large enough to preserve the integrity of the biodiversity in the regions. That is a question that isn't addressed in this particular bill in terms of the grasslands, which is what the bill specifically addresses. There aren't many grasslands left in this province that would be suitable for protection that aren't already under cultivation, so the question still remains: are they big enough to provide the kind of diversity that is required here?

There was also the issue brought up by the Member for Lethbridge-East in terms of brush control, that I think is a very interesting question. In order to maintain grasslands in a traditional sense, the buffalo were very helpful in terms of keeping the small trees and saplings broken down and maintaining the integrity of the grasslands. We don't have that kind of ability now. Cattle don't have the same impact on the land, and if that isn't controlled or maintained in some fashion, we will see those grasslands eventually evolving into more wooded areas. So in terms of the mandate of this bill and the focus on maintaining the grasslands, I'm wondering if the minister could address those questions?

Thank you for the opportunity to comment at third reading. As far as this bill goes, it's a good bill.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Madam Speaker, thank you for your permission to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 24, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act. I have just a few comments with respect to the bill this afternoon. The first is with respect to the definition of "heritage rangeland." As I was reading the past debates on this bill and then perusing the bill itself, I actually saw that that definition was a key part of this amendment bill. When I looked, then, for the definition, I found it puzzling that it said that "heritage rangeland" means land designated as a heritage rangeland under section 3.2." That really doesn't describe what a heritage rangeland is or what it is comprised of or what qualifications it must meet to achieve that designation.

I suppose we could say for purposes of debate that rangeland might be assumed to be grassland. I know there's rangeland in

Alberta that isn't entirely comprised of grassland, so it puzzled me that that definition was so vaguely described and that in fact it really only incorporated the designation by the ministry. It did not provide what criteria or what qualifications an area of land must meet in order to be considered heritage rangeland. For the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, having been raised on the farm and being very familiar with different types of land utilized in the agriculture process, I think it's a fair question to say that we should be embodying in legislation exactly what type of land falls under this type of designation, not simply that it is receiving that designation from the ministry.

3:50

Now, the other points that I would like to raise this afternoon, Madam Speaker, relate to the issues of protection. This bill falls, as do a number of bills, under the jurisdiction of the minister of environmental protection. We in the Official Opposition are most supportive of having our special places areas in Alberta that have particular environmental importance achieve designation, but it goes beyond that. It also goes to the heart of what that designation means and what that designation entitles those lands to receive in the way of protection from the minister and from the ministry of environmental protection.

I raise this point because I have had cause in this session to review in detail the Auditor General's remarks relative to the department of environmental protection. This year he contained four reservations in his report on the ministry of environmental protection, and they were quite serious concerns, Madam Speaker. In a general sense are we assured that we are actually protecting not only heritage rangelands but the other aspects of Alberta that have environmental significance? Are we actually able to assure Albertans that those areas are receiving protection, given the reservations the Auditor General made?

I would just like to cite from his report. On page 265 he contains a general reservation that speaks to the fact that there were many ministries with

assets, liabilities, revenues and expenses for which the management of the Ministries are accountable, including performance measurement and financial management responsibilities. The reservations alert readers that the related financial statements are not complete and accurate.

That applied to the department of environmental protection.

Further, on page 263 he talks about associated risks including "business decisions being made based on incomplete and/or incorrect financial information," thereby saying that in fact the ministry had not accurately accounted for the cost of doing business, the cost of providing environmental protection. That concern flows through the entire section on environmental protection contained in the Auditor General's report this year, and it is particularly highlighted in the area of fire fighting. Now, if we want to achieve protection for heritage rangelands, Madam Speaker, it would seem to me that we need to be providing more than a simple designation.

Given the substantive reservations that the Auditor General raised with respect to the province's ability to be at the ready and provide fire-fighting capabilities across the province, I'm not sure, Madam Speaker, that the designation of being a heritage rangeland really achieves any type of protection at all. What the Auditor General said was that given the lessons of the 1998 fire, which, he acknowledged, was one of the most extreme in our history, that season tested all aspects of the ministry of environmental protection's operations and highlighted several areas that could be improved. For example, the 1998 fire season was expected to be severe, yet fire stations were not fully manned before major fires broke out. Fire fighting teams were not manned and ready at the beginning of the season. Arrange-

ments for infrastructure such as transportation, base camps, and equipment were not in place at the beginning of the fire year.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the chair is hoping here that in dealing with the Auditor General's report, you are somehow very quickly going to tie it into third reading of Bill 24. I mean, I did chastise another member speaking here a few minutes ago, and I would have to say that we are not dealing today with the Auditor General's report but in fact third reading of Bill 24.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: I'll work harder to make it clearer, Madam Speaker. In a nutshell, it really is: why provide the designation if you are not ensuring that all of the ministry's programs are at the ready to guarantee that protection? What in fact does the protection of being designated a heritage rangeland actually mean? Certainly, given the reservations in the Auditor General's report, it doesn't mean that we're ready to protect those rangelands from fire. That is clear. It is so clear that last year we lost, according to his calculations, 734,815 hectares of Alberta's timber. That's from 1998.

My point, Madam Speaker, is that the designation doesn't achieve protection. Albertans should not be assuming or confident or secure that because the part of the Whaleback which is carved out and mentioned for this designation in the bill and which is so important to Alberta's environment and so special – really it's not afforded the security and protection that perhaps some might think it is because it has received a designation as a heritage rangeland.

I'd just like to complete my arguments on that particular point by saying that one of the other concerns is that the department consistently has underbudgeted fire-fighting costs. As an example, prior to '94 the budget was at approximately \$12 million per year. At that time the average fire season cost was about \$50 million, so four times more than what the department was budgeting. That started a practice where the department would adopt special warrants to cover that overexpenditure. Well, the recommendations, the suggestions that have been made, the concerns that have been pointed out to them are that in fact it is not financially prudent to be doing that and that the Legislative Assembly should be engaged in approving the budgets for fire fighting.

Now, I may have missed that in the budget this year, Madam Speaker. I may stand to be corrected, but I don't recall that we substantially debated fire-fighting costs. I do recall, in fact, that because of the way in which the budget debates were structured this year, I had to be in the Children's Services estimates when those for environmental protection were occurring. Despite the fact that I wanted to be at that debate, I could not be because I was the primary critic responsible for Children's Services.

4:00

Bill 24, in my mind, is a step, but it is a token step. It gives a designation, but in no way does it guarantee that Environment is at the ready with comprehensive and funded programs to ensure protection. That's my second main point and concern this afternoon, Madam Speaker, with this bill. Perhaps, though, in good faith the minister has, in anticipation of this bill being passed, in fact given the priority designations and given the direction that the concerns I'm raising this afternoon will be addressed in detail. I want to believe that he views these issues and the protection of these areas as being as important as I do and that he in fact has undertaken those steps.

This is my final point of concern with respect to the bill, Madam Speaker. How will the minister guarantee that all of those individuals, those citizens who have a relationship with these designated areas or heritage rangelands, will be treated fairly and equitably with respect to the application of this legislation? Now, that could apply in a number of circumstances, whether they're private landowners, whether they hold a government grazing lease, but the general principle behind my point this afternoon is: how will the minister guarantee that they are fairly and equitably treated under the application of this law? I hope that that will be provided for at some point in the further debate of this bill.

Just one further point. I have a concern about the carving out of the Whaleback. The designation and protection required for that area have been debated in this House on previous occasions. I don't understand the rationale of why we would choose to carve out a piece of that special environmental place for protection. There may be drilling and energy concerns that have caused that to occur. I haven't heard that or read that in the previous debates. I would very much like to hear why the minister felt it acceptable to carve out protection in the section that is referenced, section 15(1)(a)(2) of the bill.

With those comments, Madam Speaker, I'm satisfied that the minister will respond accordingly and completely to those areas, and I look forward to hearing his comments and remarks this afternoon.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd just like to spend a minute or so on Bill 24 and hopefully add some positive news to all the work that's being done on the heritage rangelands concept and as it is now applied officially in legislation.

First of all, I'd like to congratulate the minister for bringing this forward. It's very timely. We've been waiting for heritage rangeland to be put into legislation for almost four years now, and I'd like to congratulate the minister for bringing it forward and making the amendments in the proper place.

These amendments and the heritage rangeland concept will allow certain species – and I hope the opposition members that were speaking are listening, because all of their questions can be wrapped up into a couple of little phrases here. What this will allow is for certain species of grass and certain unique landscapes that are in our public lands and in our grasslands areas to be set aside under special management plans. These special management plans will be developed by people within the public lands department and in co-operation with our environmental protection stakeholders, and the leaseholders will also be involved in helping to put together these management plans along with some municipal representatives and members at large.

These local committees have been working for quite some time, and they've been working together diligently. Some of them have come up with the concept of heritage rangeland, and they have put a lot of volunteer work into the whole idea that good stewardship of unique landscapes and species of grass deserves to be rewarded, deserves to be put into place so that generations from now we can see cattle as part of the management system of these particular areas. This legislation will allow us to make sure that that will definitely be in place.

I just want to be specific here. The two specific areas that have come up that are ready for this legislation and ready for the management teams to be put in place are the Bob Creek ranch area and the Twin River area. To those folks that have been working on this

heritage rangeland concept and have been very, very patient with us, I want to say thank you for that patience and thank you for trusting this government to come forward with legislation that will allow the heritage rangeland to be put in place. I am going to say to those folks that we won't let you down when it comes to putting in the management teams and the management plans. As a matter of fact, public lands and environmental protection people are already working on this to make sure that their particular species of grass and their unique landscapes will be preserved.

I also want to say that there are some local committees out there who have put a lot of work into the heritage rangeland concept and have come up with their own ideas of how heritage rangeland can apply to their specific needs. They have put their whole plan in abeyance based on the fact that they would like to see what the legislation looks like before they move on. They're eager to get on to working with their management plans, but they just wanted to see what the legislation looks like. Now that this legislation will get third reading today, under the special places program I can go out there confidently to those folks that are waiting to see something specific, put this legislation in front of them, and say, "Okay, folks; here's where we're going with this," and allow them to get on with putting forward their management plans for their areas.

So, Madam Speaker, I would just like to say to the Official Opposition – they're looking for details. Well, the details will come in the management plans that will be developed by department people from agriculture and environmental protection, from the leaseholders themselves, the grass roots, the people that have operated these lands so efficiently and so effectively for the last hundred years, plus from municipal representatives and members of the community at large. Not only will these management plans be worked on, but they will be updated for years to come to make sure that these lands are kept preserved for good agricultural production.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'd again just like to congratulate the minister of environmental protection for bringing this forward so that we can move on and do some really good things for our public lands in this province.

4:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment to close debate.

MR. MAR: Madam Speaker, thank you very much. I wish to thank all hon. members for their engagement on this particular matter. I've not yet had the opportunity to review *Hansard* for all of the questions that were asked both at the committee stage, last evening, and also this afternoon. However, it is my undertaking to review those and respond to questions which were asked.

I wish to move third reading of this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 18

Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

Ms Leibovici moved that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, be not now read a second time but that the order for second reading be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

[Debate adjourned May 15: Mr. White speaking]

19. Mrs. Nelson on behalf of Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that debate on second reading of Bill 18, Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, shall not be further adjourned.

[Government Motion 19 carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 18. I do think it's a mistake for the government to invoke closure on this tax bill. I've had many questions, and I actually have to say that I've quite enjoyed researching the variety of opinions surrounding the tax system and the flat tax concept. Of course, we know it has been alive in many jurisdictions for many years, but Alberta is really the first jurisdiction to proceed with its implementation. It's regretful that we have to do so before we've had a full course of debate on this bill.

I also have to, at the outset, give credit and acknowledgment to the Legislature Library staff, who have compiled quite an extraordinary reference document surrounding tax reform and flat tax. I found that document of tremendous benefit to me in reviewing it, and there will be a number of citations I make this afternoon that actually come from that Legislature Library reference document.

I don't profess to be a taxation expert. I most certainly pay my taxes every year, as required. Some of the basic questions that come to mind and that citizens have asked me with respect to this bill are: does it mean we're going to have to file two income taxes, and if we delink ourselves from the federal system, does it mean that we will have to file a second tax return to the provincial government? I had not had a chance to raise that, and I don't believe it has been raised as a question in the debate thus far. I can tell you that . . .

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Just one moment, hon. member, if you don't mind. I would draw to your attention as well as to the attention of the other members of the Assembly that basically before us right now we are dealing with an amendment as brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark in second reading proposing that the bill be withdrawn and to refer the subject matter to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. We are back on that particular debate within this bill.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you for that clarification, Madam Speaker.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: I believe that the referral of the bill to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations is a prudent one for consideration. I think there are implications with respect to the imposition of a flat tax structure that the public needs to have an opportunity to be engaged in and debate. Of course, we know that we've had significant focus and concern raised around Bill 11 and the province's reforms to the health care system. That has distracted people, to a degree, from what is being now proposed for changes to the tax system, so I think that having an opportunity for the bill to go to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations would be very prudent, because citizens want to have an opportunity to go forward and to provide that input.

I would say, from my reading of the literature, that the opinions on a flat tax are as varied as they are on private health care, and I'd like to provide a sampling of those this afternoon, starting with a Gallup poll titled *Canadians Divided on Merits of Flat Tax*. I'm just

summarizing, Madam Speaker, the findings of this Gallup poll.

A new Gallup Poll on the idea of a flat tax indicates that Canadians are quite evenly divided on its merits. Forty-three percent (43%) favour the idea of a 20% flat tax . . .

Of course, that is much higher than the provincial designation of 11 percent.

. . . compared to 49% who are opposed and 9% who hold no opinion . . .

Among Canadians aged 40 to 49, support for the idea of a flat tax stands at 52%, the highest level for any age group. This support falls off to roughly 42% among Canadians under the age of 40 and those between 50 and 64, and drops off further to 33% among Canadians age 65 and over.

One half (50%) of Canadians with annual household incomes of \$40,000 and over would favour a flat tax regime, significantly higher than any other income group.

Finally and perhaps not surprisingly, 49 percent of male Canadians are in favour of a flat tax system, which is higher, quite significantly higher, than the 37 percent of female Canadians who hold that view. Quite interesting findings and by no means a unanimous endorsement or unanimous support for this type of regime, and that's why I think this afternoon we should be engaging in and permitting a full process of debate on this proposal.

Further, I found an article written by Bob Dale in the *Briar Patch* quite interesting. The article is titled "Flat Tax Primer: a flat tax is great – if you're a millionaire or a bank. But what about the rest of us?" He points out the following flaws with the flat tax regime.

With respect to tax fairness the author says:

Large corporations, higher-income earners, and particular types of income such as capital gains and dividends get special treatment under the Income Tax Act. Flat tax supporters say that under their system, there will be far fairer treatment for everyone . . . They even promise fairer treatment for lower-income earners, through exempting income below a certain level from the tax.

Sounds good? In reality, the flat tax would be even more unfair than the current system in several ways.

1. Avoiding "double taxation"

According to supporters of the flat tax, when an investor buys stock in a company, his or her income is taxed twice, once at the time it is earned . . . and secondly at the time the person earns income from the stock . . . Some flat tax supporters even say that there is also a third tax: on the capital gain when the stock is sold . . .

This argument is based on the proposition that certain types of income just shouldn't be taxed at all. As such, it carries the preferential tax provisions inherent in our current tax system – where certain types of income are taxed at lower rates (and which, at last count, deprived federal and provincial treasuries of some \$3 billion per year) – to the extreme.

Think about this: Just who earns the vast majority of the interest, dividend and capital gain income that would no longer be taxed under a flat tax system?

A very good question.

4:20

He also points out the fact that flat tax promoters say that it will put money in our pockets.

Flat tax supporters say taxes are too high as a result of government spending. They say this creates a powerful disincentive for individuals and businesses, who are discouraged from working as hard as they might (individuals) or operating as effectively as they could (businesses). They also say this encourages people to participate in the so-called "underground economy" to hide their earnings . . .

In short, flat tax supporters play on people's desire to keep more of their hard-earned money, without giving fair recognition to the importance of the programs and services governments provide

to all citizens, or to the role governments have in increasing Canadians' standard of living.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, the chair is going to interrupt you again. As I said a few minutes ago, we have an amendment before us. We are dealing with an amendment moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. It is referred to as a referral amendment, whereby it proposes that this bill be withdrawn and the subject matter referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. That is the amendment that is before the House.

MRS. SLOAN: I am completely mindful of that, Madam Speaker. What I am trying to demonstrate is that our population is completely divided on the proposition of a flat tax, and therefore the amendment is most certainly in order and most certainly should be passed to allow Albertans the opportunity to really scrutinize what benefits will be there. What I'm trying to provide this afternoon is a cross section, both pros and cons, of how the flat tax regime is viewed. As I've been citing from the article written by Bob Dale, he feels that there are many flaws and raises many cautions. I think it's prudent to enter those into the debate and on the record this afternoon to inform Albertans about what risks are held with a flat tax proposal.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: So in terms of just completing the section on putting more money into our pockets, the author says:

A 1995 study by the National Union of Public and General Employees found that although our tax system is generally progressive, it would be a lot more progressive if those with higher incomes weren't eligible for all the tax breaks they currently get on particular types of income. If this happened, up to \$4 billion in additional annual income taxes would be generated [at the federal level].

He goes on to two other points, Madam Speaker. I leave it to interested citizens or members that are interested to further explore the "proportionate, not progressive" arguments and the "cutting off the undeserving" sections of Mr. Dale's article.

I also want to cite from an article that I also found quite informative. It was published in the *Fraser Forum* in February of 1999, and the author was Mary-Anne Sillamaa, who has a PhD in economics from McMaster University. Madam Speaker, I will just briefly cite from this article evaluating Alberta's flat tax proposal titled Flatten the Tax, Fatten the Revenues? She starts out by giving a summation of Alberta's proposal and then says:

This looks very appealing. But is there a downside from a loss of government programs due to reduced tax revenues for the provincial government? The Tax Review Committee estimates a revenue loss of \$500 million.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, does that particular article refer to the amendment that we're dealing with now, where you want the subject matter referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations?

MRS. SLOAN: Well, I most certainly think, Madam Speaker, that if the *Fraser Forum* is pointing out that there are some contradictions in terms of the benefits of a flat tax proposal, perhaps the Law and Regulations Committee might be able to further evaluate the merits of it being implemented.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair must deal with what is before the Assembly. We have an amendment, referred to as a referral amendment, that specifically talks about this bill being withdrawn and referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. The debate, in accordance with that amendment as brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, should reflect that particular subject matter.

MRS. SLOAN: I'm mindful, Madam Speaker, that the government has also introduced closure on this bill, so we are not going to get an opportunity again to debate it in this House past this point.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I would point out to you that if this amendment is dealt with, then debate continues on the motion for second reading.

MRS. SLOAN: Right.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: So let us deal with the amendment that's before us.

MRS. SLOAN: I'm not disagreeing with you, and I won't read further from that article if it's aggravating to the Assembly to hear it. In any event, I've read into the record the title and author, and I know that interested citizens might also find that one of interest.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has also lent some analysis to the proposal of a flat tax. We have, I think, the benefit of having such an institution in our country, and in their July and August issue in 1999 in an article titled None of the Arguments for a Flat Tax Can Be Supported, they talked about the fact that

if a flat tax reduces the rates paid by the rich, and exempts the very poor . . . the relative percentage of taxes paid by the middle class must go up, even if taxes are reduced. This is elementary mathematics.

Flat taxes have political appeal only because flat-taxers misleadingly [make] the case for flat taxes with the case for broadening the tax base, reducing taxes, simplifying the tax system, and closing loopholes . . . so that the rich pay at least some tax. In all of these respects, the rhetorical appeal of flat taxes is misleading.

In selling flat taxes as if it were a populist idea that deserves the support of the middle-class, and in attempting to capitalize on populist discontent with the tax system, flat-taxers are being deceitful.

They make a number of . . . claims. First, they argue that a flat tax rate will greatly simplify the income tax by making it easier to understand, more convenient . . . and less expensive . . . They also argue that a flat tax rate will substantially reduce tax avoidance and evasion.

They go through and make a number of other observations with respect to the flat taxers' marketing regime. They go on further to say:

In spite of the apparent urgency of simplifying the tax system, however, the proposition that flattening the tax rates will do so is patent nonsense. None of the difficulties of understanding the Act, the mistakes that professionals make in filing returns, the wrong answers that Revenue Canada agents give in answering taxpayers' questions over the telephone, or the headaches involved in filling out a tax return, has to do with the applying the tax rates.

One of the things the government didn't bring forward in the budget nor have brought forward in any aspect of this debate is what administrative enhancements will be required in Treasury to incorporate this changeover. We are going to have to have our own

fully staffed department for the filing of provincial returns. Perhaps they'd like to make that submission and proposal to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. That way the public would clearly know how much it is going to cost us to file our tax returns provincially, Madam Speaker.

That is what we are going to be doing with the flat tax proposal, and most certainly there are public implications to that. There are budget implications and there are policy implications, all of which should go to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations for review so we fully disclose to Albertans exactly what are the benefits, what are the costs, and what are the shortfalls that a flat tax regime will result in in Alberta. That is key, and it's key to the amendment this afternoon.

[Mr. Renner in the chair]

I'd like to summarize by just further citing from the policy alternatives article a citation relative to the myth of reduced tax evasion.

A claim frequently made to justify flat tax rates is that lowering income rates will lead to less tax evasion. This argument is particularly popular in the business press. In the heady days of supply-side economics, it was often suggested that cutting marginal tax rates could be revenue neutral, partly because lower marginal rates would lead to greater reporting of income.

The argument has a particularly peculiar ring to it when it is made by the rich themselves or their representatives. It hints of political blackmail. In effect, they are arguing that their taxes should be reduced because, if they are required to pay the [same] amount the democratic majority deem to be their fair share, they will subvert the political will by engaging in criminal activity.

A very valid point.

In any event, even accepting that the argument is made in good faith, the claim that evasion can be reduced by flattening the tax rate is clearly [false].

Again, an excellent article for those interested in truly examining this regime, Madam Speaker, which can be read and accessed through the Legislature Library.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Now, there are a number of other studies, and the final one I'd like to refer to this afternoon – well, actually there are a couple that I'll mention. I was particularly interested in the book published by an elected member of our federal House, Dennis Mills, who has really gone to quite extraordinary efforts to advance the single tax proposal system. I did have an opportunity to look at both his book and report titled *The Single Tax*, a proposal for tax reform. The book was published in 1990, I guess I would say, Mr. Speaker, and while I'm certainly not an advocate nor am I convinced that the flat tax proposal is a prudent one for Alberta to proceed with, I was quite impressed by the efforts that this hon. member has gone to to advance this concept.

4:30

I can't say that I have seen this kind of documentation on another issue perhaps to this degree from an hon. member of the federal House, and really he's to be commended. He obviously believes very strongly in reform and in the flat tax system, and while I don't agree with him on its benefits, I think his efforts are to be commended. For those that want further ammunition about why a flat tax system is good, then certainly Dennis Mills' publications are good reading.

The last sort of section of comments, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to make – and I did raise these earlier in debate – are with

respect to the Auditor General's concerns surrounding a number of miscalculations or an underrepresentation of expenditures that occurred across quite a number of ministries. It probably would even be safe to say that a majority of ministries in the last fiscal year that was audited had underestimated revenues and therefore received from the Auditor General reservations about that. Now, I haven't seen any accounting by the government as to what the impact of this regime will be on revenues. I'd be most encouraging to the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer to provide that. I think there have been some different variations, because what has been provided in the Fraser Institute study says \$500 million, and I'm not sure if the Acting Provincial Treasurer's estimates were in fact that high. But in that earlier citation that I read, the estimates were around \$500 million.

That may be very straightforward, and certainly in the era of this government having surpluses that reach the degree of \$3 billion or \$4 billion, that can be accommodated, but that may not be the case in the future, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, I state my reservations and opposition to Bill 18 and my support for the amendment before us.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're sort of operating under the gun here, all too familiar in this Assembly, as this section of the debate is under the gun of closure. We're dealing with an amendment that would refer Bill 18 to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, and I would like to have my comments heard and recorded in *Hansard* as evidence for that referral motion. There is tremendous controversy surrounding the content of Bill 18 and the merits or the lack of merits of a single-rate or a flat tax. I will be making some reference to that controversy, all, as I say, in support of the amendment, which I will ultimately be voting in favour of.

Earlier today we had an example of some of the controversy. The Acting Provincial Treasurer tabled a report that says that Bill 18 and the flat tax would be a good thing. Then I had an opportunity to table a report by Professor McMillan that says that the single-rate tax wouldn't be such a good thing. We have dueling experts and expertise on this matter, Mr. Speaker. It's very clear that there is one thing that's agreed on by all parties, and that is that the effects of a flat tax are always to disproportionately affect taxpayers at the margins, at both ends, and to then clump up taxes paid into the middle. Another thing that's agreed to by people on both sides of the flat tax argument is that unless you modify a flat tax by some form of exemptions or other limitations, it will always reinforce unfairness.

Now, I have found it very interesting in this debate as it has progressed that the government is no longer referring to Bill 18 as a flat tax bill. The language that was used early on by the then Treasurer, by the Acting Treasurer, by the Premier, and by others was that there is a flat tax. There's a certain ideology that's attached to a flat tax, and it seems that that ideology has been adopted by the newest federal political party on the scene, as they are pursuing still the language and the rhetoric of a flat tax. Interestingly, the government of Alberta has stopped talking about Bill 18 and defending a flat tax and has started talking about Bill 18 by saying that it's progressive.

In fact, I think I heard the words from the Acting Provincial Treasurer today – and I can always review *Hansard* – to the effect that it's the most progressive of all. I find that very interesting, because of course what it is sort of a halfway flat tax. I will admit that it's probably better described as a single-rate tax. That being said, it still has many of the dangers that have been pointed out and,

I would say, most properly pointed out by my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview in many of the studies that she cited.

Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that the government itself is somehow apprehensive about going down this path. When the Acting Provincial Treasurer stood in the Assembly earlier and said that the Official Opposition didn't have a clear picture of its own taxation policy and referred to something that frankly I wasn't aware of, it struck me that the Acting Provincial Treasurer could very well have been speaking about the provincial government in not being clear about its tax policy.

If we go back to Budget '96, we see some very clear statements. We see statements made about how the deficit elimination taxes are going to be handled. We see statements about delinking, and as we progress through budget years '97, '98, '99, we see that elements of the tax plan continue to be reintroduced and massaged. But the bottom line is that the government has flip-flopped in terms of the deficit elimination taxes, where they were going to remove the .5 percent flat tax or the 8 percent surcharge first. The government has flip-flopped and changed its mind on where the personal exemption levels should be set. The government has changed its mind in terms of whether it should be an 11 percent flat tax or a 10.5 percent flat tax. The government keeps on changing its mind on whether it's going to issue rebate cheques or whether it's going to do something about the fuel taxes that Albertans pay at the gas pumps.

4:40

So if there has been any flip-flopping and casting about for exactly the right thing to say and do according to the wind, it would be on the part of the government, which seems to be very uncertain about the direction it wants to take its tax policy. That disturbs me, because we would expect far more certainty from the government. I'll say this, Mr. Speaker: tax policy is very complicated. Sometimes a mistake will be made in a calculation here or there, or you'll take a look at one set of numbers and be able to come up with several different interpretations, but clearly the government has had this in mind as one of its objectives for long enough that you would expect them to get it right.

There was another issue that came up earlier today that I think is relevant to the referral motion on Bill 18, Mr. Speaker, and that's this. Earlier in this session Written Question 219 was debated and then eventually responded to in the House. What Written Question 219 asked for was:

What information has been prepared by or for Alberta Treasury on how much of the \$35 million economic offset or revenue recovery projected in 2001-02, as cited on page 17 of Budget 1999: Government of Alberta Fiscal Plan, results from the reduction of the 8% surtax, from the increase in the personal and spousal exemptions in the 1999 federal budget, from the reduction of the 0.5% flat tax, from the increase in the personal and spousal exemptions to \$11,620, and from the introduction of the 11 percent single rate tax?

That was all a direct quote from sessional paper 439/2000.

Mr. Speaker, the answer starts off with the words:

No information has been prepared by or for Alberta Treasury on how much of the economic offset or revenue recovery in 2001-02 results from the various components of the tax plan.

As striking as that admission may be, it was further heightened in my mind because the Acting Treasurer tabled a paper today that he said was a study of the economic offset prepared as a result of the work done by the Alberta Tax Review Commission. Now, if I've missed something, I would invite the Acting Provincial Treasurer to stand up and let me know.

DR. WEST: Time frame. What was the time frame?

MR. SAPERS: The Treasurer is inappropriately interjecting, Mr. Speaker, but what he's saying is: what was the time frame? Well, the written question is very clear. It simply says: what information has been prepared regarding the economic offset? It's not limited to a time frame, and the answer is equally clear. It says that "no information has been prepared by or for Alberta Treasury."

I would like to know, when that question was answered, why we weren't advised of the paper which the Acting Provincial Treasurer tabled today. If he's going to say, "Well, it's because it's a brand-new paper; we didn't know about it, and we didn't have it before," I guess that's an argument he can make, but it would seem to me that that's an argument that would hold much water, Mr. Speaker.

Here we have another example of not being able to get straight answers to straightforward questions, of the government withholding information that's relevant to the debate and to this proposed restructuring of the tax plan of Alberta. Again, it's more information, more evidence, Mr. Speaker, as to why Bill 18 should not be read a second time and why the whole subject matter ought to be referred to a standing committee, an all-party committee of the Legislature that can take a look at all of these matters and hold the government accountable for how it deals with information requests, particularly regarding tax plans, which affect every Albertan in their pocketbook.

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of other areas I would appreciate the government clearing up. Also earlier today the Acting Provincial Treasurer, in response to a question asked by one of his colleagues about what reports would bolster the government's arguments about a flat tax, said that one of the reports that would support the government was a report written by Robert Shapiro in 1996 titled *Why Fairness Matters: Progressive Versus Flat Taxes*. The Acting Provincial Treasurer has not once but now twice indicated that Shapiro's work would lend credibility to the government's arguments that a single-rate tax would be the right way to go. But what Shapiro argues in his paper is for progressivity, and in fact on page 14 he makes the very simple statement that "ultimately, progressive taxation has the better of the argument." It goes on to say that flat taxers may make a moral argument, but progressive taxers are right.

So here we have again the Acting Provincial Treasurer standing up and arguing that this study, the Shapiro study, would support the government, when it doesn't. It's not the first time that we've seen reports – I remember the then minister of education, who's now the Minister of Health and Wellness, standing up and tabling a whole series of kindergarten reports and saying that they would support the government. Of course, when we reviewed those reports, they didn't. So this isn't the first time the government has done this.

Mr. Speaker, again the Treasurer also talked about the Cassidy/Ruggeri/Van Wart report. It doesn't add any support to the government's argument whatsoever. The report done by three people who at the time were employed by Alberta Treasury very clearly says that the only basis of comparison is if they're revenue neutral, and Bill 18 does not propose a revenue-neutral tax plan. The only basis of comparison would be if all elements were the same, and even then it's only qualified in terms of what they were doing, because what their study was trying to accomplish was to provide an index for measures of progressivity.

So, Mr. Speaker, they don't support a single-rate tax. In fact, they go out of their way to say that they would not be supporting any one particular kind of tax scheme over another. All you have to do is look at the conclusion, where it says – and I quote – that it is not obvious that a measure that attempts to isolate the distributional implications of a tax function independently of income distribution provides a meaningful index of the impact of the tax function on social welfare. End quote.

Mr. Speaker, all you have to do is read the conclusion. Again, I just question why the government would rather offhandedly reference this report and that report and other reports and give the impression that their position is being supported when in fact there are different conclusions being drawn in the studies.

Mr. Speaker, I would hope there has been enough discussion on Bill 18 in the Assembly at this point that it's very clear that Alberta Liberals are not opposed to tax cuts nor are Alberta Liberals opposed to tax reform.

MR. LUND: Your leader has never, ever, ever, ever put one in.

MR. SAPERS: I just thought I'd wait, Mr. Speaker, because I didn't know whether the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development was going to rise on a point of order or why he was making noise.

Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that members of the Official Opposition are not opposed to changing the tax system and are not opposed to tax cuts. In fact, we've been arguing for several years that there should be tax relief. It was Alberta Liberals who first raised the issue of removing the so-called deficit elimination taxes. It was Alberta Liberals who talked about the problems with bracket creep and urged this government to index brackets long before they took up the battle cry of bracket creep and indexation.

We have been searching for alternatives that would allow us to maintain a progressive system that would allow tax fairness, would allow a distribution of tax cuts across all categories of income earners in this province. Yes, we had looked at what would happen if you changed the rate but stayed linked to Ottawa. We looked at what the effect would be if you delinked and didn't change the rates. We looked at moving to a five- or a six-rate system. Mr. Speaker, we also wanted to include in our tax plan some simplicity, some predictability. We did not want to be sort of at the end of the line once Ottawa decided to do something, so we believe that the unlinking process is a good one to go through. Of course, any Alberta Liberal tax plan would be indexed to protect taxpayers against bracket creep.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we finally came up with is an alternative to this government's version of a flat tax. That would be a tax that is progressive, that still eliminates the lowest income earners from the tax rolls, that has a zero rate for those income earners, and that maintains the high personal exemption, but it has two or three very important differences from the government plans.

4:50

Number one, it is a truly progressive system. It would call for a 10 percent rate for the majority of income earners and tax filers in Alberta and then a 12 percent rate for those very few at the very top of the scale, who would get the benefit of the 10 percent rate on the first approximately \$100,000 of their income anyway, Mr. Speaker.

Another major difference between our plan and the government's plan is that it does not shift the burden in a disproportionate way to the middle-income earners. It would also allow Alberta to stay competitive, to be able to still claim that it has a very attractive low tax environment, but it gets rid of the lack of fairness that's in the government's proposal.

Mr. Speaker, there are many, many reasons why we would want to see Bill 18 referred out of this debate and into the committee. One is because of the confusion that's been created in the minds of Albertans because of the government's misinformation and misrepresentation of academic work.

Number two is because there are alternatives that are not being well examined. There's the Alberta Liberal fair tax alternative

proposal, which was released today. There are the alternatives suggested by Professor McMillan in his paper which I tabled today titled *Alberta's Single Rate Tax: Implications and Alternatives*.

Another reason why, Mr. Speaker, is because ultimately a flat tax policy is an unfair policy. We believe that the more the public has a chance to become familiar with the government's plans for taxation, the more they will realize that it's an unfair policy, and the government will be convinced as well that it has been going down the wrong path. There would be no harm in the government recognizing that they need to now put their words of support for progressivity into action, and they could certainly amend Bill 18, because it's very comprehensive, to institute a middle rate for the middle-income bracket.

Mr. Speaker, just before I conclude, let me say that we've had the experience here of having both the government's tax bills, 19 and 18, under closure. I have introduced an amendment to Bill 19 which would cause both deficit elimination taxes to be removed at the same time in the current taxation year. Because of the fact that we're under closure on Bill 19 and we would have no other opportunity, that amendment had to be brought in. If Bill 18 progresses through the Assembly, if this referral motion should fail, then of course we'll be looking at subsequent amendments to Bill 18, because there is a section in Bill 18 which directly relates to the amendments in Bill 19. But it's simply a matter of procedure, a matter of timing, and a matter of sequencing in terms of how these amendments have to be brought in.

I hope the government won't use the quirks of the House and their own scheduling as any way to sidetrack the argument and to suggest that the Liberal opposition wants Alberta taxpayers to keep on paying those deficit elimination taxes, because we don't – it's clear that we want to put an end to that now – or that somehow they're going to suggest that we want to be unfair to one group of taxpayers or another. Of course, Mr. Speaker, obviously our proposal seeks, as its very purpose, fairness in the tax system.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I look forward to the rest of the debate. I hope that all members now recognize the dangers of proceeding with Bill 18 as it has been put forward by the government and will support this referral motion so that we can have more study, so that we can come to the place and time when we can put forward a tax plan that will be fair, that can be unanimously supported, and that would be the best social policy for Alberta and the best fiscal policy for all taxpayers.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of the referral motion, which is asking that Bill 18 be withdrawn and the subject matter reviewed by the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. There's no doubt that the existing taxation system, the personal income tax system, needs improvement. There's lots of room to improve it. There's room to provide relief from tax to low-income Albertans, and there's a need to make sure that indexation to inflation is in place. So I'm simply arguing that the particular change they propose in Bill 18 is not the way to go. This is not to say that changes in the income tax system are not needed or required.

If we refer the bill to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, it provides Albertans an opportunity to engage each other in debate more thoroughly on a bill that will have serious and long-range ramifications for income distribution in this province, for the structure of income equality in the province, and for the revenues of the province. So certainly the bill is important. It's very, very important. It deserves more attention than has been received at this

stage in the current session, so it would indeed be advisable to refer it for more thorough study, as this referral motion suggests. Such a referral is obviously justified for all kinds of reasons, including because the principles underlying the bill are fundamentally and fatally flawed, as many citizens tell us.

I'll put on record the thoughts of one ordinary citizen, whose letter I tabled in the House this afternoon, his arguments as to why he thinks that we, this Assembly, and Albertans need more time to consider this bill. There's no opportunity at this point to review these principles at second reading, particularly with the hammer of closure hanging over our heads.

Bill 18 is seen by Albertans as unfair. The unfairness of the flat tax contained in Bill 18 is summed up well in the following quote from Professor Melville McMillan of the department of economics at the University of Alberta. Dr. McMillan was writing in an article which appeared earlier this year in the *Parkland Post*. I quote:

Alberta's proposed single rate tax will shift a greater share of the tax burden to the middle income groups. This consequence is not advertised by the Alberta government, nor by its Tax Review Committee report. Indeed, this result is masked by the plans for a simultaneous reduction in incomes taxes. As a result, the significant shift in tax structure [as opposed to amounts of tax] has not been well recognized or debated.

While this expert, Dr. McMillan, makes this observation, we of course had the other day Dr. McKenzie visiting here from the University of Calgary, who holds the opposite view but not quite. Even Dr. McKenzie has not denied that a flat tax shifts the tax load onto middle-class income earners. He just tried to justify why this shift is justifiable, rather than saying it won't happen. In spite of this difference of opinion among experts and concern among Albertans, the government continues to deny that this shift is taking place.

More recently, as a matter of fact yesterday, I received another paper, also prepared by Dr. McMillan, and its title is Alberta's Single Rate Tax: Implications and Alternatives. The numerous graphs and tables in this paper all show the same thing, that tax relief to those with higher incomes comes at the expense of middle-income earners. It's a lengthy paper, carefully researched, with about 10 different tables presenting convincing data to this effect.

In selling Bill 18, the government has made much of the fact that the increase in basic exemptions would take a large number of low-income Albertans off the tax rolls completely. That may well be true – and we would certainly be happy to see that happen – but other questions remain. Why would you help low-income earners, hurt middle-income earners, and give entirely unjustified gifts from the public purse to those who are already the most wealthy?

5:00

The other day the Acting Provincial Treasurer took exception when I pointed out that a certain well-known citizen of this province who made \$1.9 million in salary and bonuses last year would pay \$71,000 less provincial income tax should the government's flat tax scheme be implemented. I want to make it very clear that I'm not in any way casting aspersions on this individual. This is an example of the unfairness of the tax system that's being proposed.

However, I really question the fairness of someone with a \$1.9 million taxable income having their provincial income tax bill cut by 26 percent while the typical middle-income family in Alberta will see at best a 10 percent tax cut and a typical middle-income single Albertan may see a tax cut of only 4 percent.

Last week the government announced some changes to supposedly ensure that all Albertans, regardless of income, at least saved a few dollars on taxes. That's exactly what we are talking about: a few pennies, maybe a dollar or two a day for singles or families in the middle-income groups, whereas those with incomes above \$100,000 reap multi-thousand dollar tax savings.

The flat tax set out in Bill 18 is unfair to middle-income Albertans no matter what the rate is or what the level of personal exemption is. You only need to do some simple arithmetic to determine why this is the case. Under the existing income tax system the provincial tax rate on the first \$30,000 of taxable income is 7.48 percent. This is 37 percent lower than the 10.5 percent flat tax as proposed in Bill 18.

The 2000 federal budget was not particularly progressive when it comes to taxation; however, the tax reduction in the federal budget was at least more evenly directed to all income groups, exposing once and for all the aggressive nature of the changes to the personal income tax system contained in Bill 18. The tax reductions announced in this year's federal budget were across the board, unlike the tax relief in Bill 18, which focuses tax relief exclusively on those with yearly incomes above \$100,000 and provides little or at best token relief to middle-income earners.

In light of these facts it should surprise no one that those with annual incomes between \$30,000 and \$100,000 per year would be much better off under the existing progressive tax system than they would be under the radical neoconservative changes proposed in Bill 18.

I want to briefly quote from a March 15, 2000, *Edmonton Journal* editorial that aptly sums up the dilemma the Conservative government finds itself in.

Paul Martin didn't set out to expose Alberta's flat tax as the shallow and regressive idea it is, but he has.

With his new budget, the federal finance minister has underlined the fundamental flaw of the idea – that it shifts the tax burden away from the high-income people and onto middle-income people . . .

Paul Martin has stolen all the good that might have been delivered by Treasurer Stockwell Day's plan, and discarded the bad. His federal budget provides tax cuts and ends bracket creep, but it leaves in place the three-bracket tax system, so the tax system remains progressive.

If Alberta had left its provincial income tax rate pegged to the federal rate, our provincial taxes would be diving in tandem with that federal tax cut. Instead, we have a government scrambling to find a flat-tax rate that will camouflage the fact that the new system hurts middle-income people.

How much does a flat tax hurt middle-class people, Mr. Speaker? The answer is a whole lot. For example, a single income earner making \$30,000 per year will save only \$106. A single income earner making \$250,000 will save almost \$8,000 under the flat tax scheme. Even worse, a single income earner making \$30,000 will save only 6 percent on their taxes, whereas someone making \$250,000 will save 24 percent.

The situation with families isn't much better. A middle-income family making \$75,000 will save about \$400 on their provincial income tax bill. A high-income family making \$250,000 will save \$6,300. In percentage terms the middle-income family will save about 8 percent on their income tax bill, whereas the high-income family saves about 21 percent.

Prior to reducing the provincial tax rate to 10.5 percent, some middle-income Albertans would have actually ended up paying more under the government's flat tax proposal. It must be pointed out that in order for middle-income earners to get even a few pennies in tax relief, the government had to cut personal income taxes by 25 percent. This translates into \$1.3 billion of government revenues. Can Alberta really afford a tax cut of this magnitude without threatening health care, education, and other important government services, especially in the event of an economic downturn? These are serious questions, and they must be addressed by this committee if this House votes to support the referral motion before it. I really wonder whether the move to further tax cuts was carefully studied and considered or whether it was simply a knee-jerk reaction to the

fact that the flat tax will hurt middle-income Albertans in the absence of huge tax cuts.

The Conservative government should admit the obvious: the former Treasurer's looney flat tax idea deserves to be consigned to the political graveyard of dumb ideas. However, true to form, the government is choosing to whistle in the graveyard instead. The Tories have come up with an even loonier idea of hitching both our tax rate and our personal exemption levels to track tax changes by the federal government, a kind of floating flat tax. That appears to be the logic behind the announced increase of the basic exemptions and the reduction in the tax rate. There is no logic other than this.

I thought the whole idea of delinking from the federal tax system was to free ourselves from the vagaries of tax changes in Ottawa. Now we seem to be reversing course and hitching ourselves back onto the federal tax system. What's missing is the obvious solution of scrapping the former Treasurer's looney flat tax and ensuring that Alberta's personal income tax system is at least as progressive as the current system.

There are a number of provinces across the country that are planning to move toward tax on income; however, not one other than Alberta is bringing in a flat tax. Even in Mike Harris's Ontario there's no flat tax. In fact, Ontario will have five tax brackets, ranging from 6.2 percent for those with low taxable incomes all the way up to 17.4 percent for those with very high incomes, and this is a recognition of the progressive model of taxation that has been prevalent in this country for the last 50 years.

No wonder the government has brought down the hammer of closure on Bill 18. It's only a matter of time before middle-class Albertans wake up to the fact that they are not being treated fairly by the changes proposed in Bill 18. One of those middle-class Albertans from whose letter I want to quote, Mr. Speaker, is Bryan Quinn of St. Albert. Mr. Quinn says:

I'm strongly opposed to your flat tax proposal because it is a grossly unfair way to redistribute \$1.3 billion. Unequivocally, it increases the relative burden of taxation for the middle and upper-middle class [that is] (individuals earning, say, between \$30,000 to \$90,000). It is the excessive benefits bestowed upon the most wealthy in Alberta that clearly brands this a vulgarly regressive scheme! Yes, raise the threshold amount: indeed, the poorest and most needy among us should not pay any provincial tax whatsoever; but please scrap the flat tax element of Bill 18! Instead, a better formula must be devised primarily to lessen the squeeze on the middle class (the backbone of our tax base).

Whatever you do: don't rush this by ramming it through the Legislature! Can't you see the benefit of allowing true and real involvement and input from all levels of society so we all can share in its ownership? [And here he says] Mrs. O'Neill and Mr. Klein, don't sell out your constituents again! Can't you see you are being duped once more by certain greedy, self-serving Alberta millionaires who have your ear? These people are advising you poorly! Why do you "hear" only them? You are losing touch with the average citizen!

I think Mr. Quinn does indeed speak for the average Alberta citizen. With that, Mr. Speaker, I close. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: A point of order?

Point of Order Referring to Members by Name

MS HALEY: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It was just that he is referring to the Premier and a member of this caucus by their name. I think that's inappropriate.

AN HON. MEMBER: But he was quoting.

MS HALEY: Well, when you're in here, I believe the rules are that you do not refer to them by their names but in fact by their constituencies, hon. member. The last time I checked, that was the rule.

MS CARLSON: Your citation?

MS HALEY: I can't remember.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party on this point of order.

5:10

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I was reading a letter, and I was simply quoting from the letter, but I'm certainly open to your advice on the matter. As I understand it, quoting is permissible, addressing members by name is not.

Thank you.

MRS. O'NEILL: I'd like to speak to the point of order, because the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is quoting from a letter, but he did not say: quote, unquote. So quite frankly I think there is a very valid point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the third party, you have the document in front of you. Would you do the appropriate thing?

DR. PANNU: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I did start by using the word "quote." I may have missed concluding it with "unquote." I tried to close in response to the Government House Leader or the whip making the point. So I do apologize for not saying "unquote."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Thank you. That ends that point of order, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has also concluded his debate.

Do I now recognize the hon. Minister of Gaming?

Debate Continued

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise today to speak to the amendment on Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, and also I guess to stand and have an opportunity to debunk much of the socialist hack that we've heard throughout this debate and throughout other debates.

I have long since been proud to be born in this province and to be part of a province that values the entrepreneurial spirit, values a government that is a noninterventionist government, values a government that tries to eliminate regulations and is a government that is transparent, that is open, and that has actually made tremendous progress since 1993, but in particular, Mr. Speaker, since 1995, when we were the first government of any substance, of any size to run a deficit-free budget. I think that's critical, because from that platform we were able to move forward with repaying debt, which then gives you the strength to manage not only your finances but then start to eliminate your revenue side from the very taxpayers that give it to you; in other words, to start to be noninterventionist in their tax lives.

I think we have seen in this province, more than any other province in Canada, more than any other jurisdiction in North America a real commitment to people to do a couple of things. One is to pay less money for the amount of government they're getting. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I think it was Will Rogers, a famous American philosopher, who once said: just be thankful

you're not getting all the government you're paying for.

Well, what we're trying to do in this administration is to deliver value and to deliver more government for less money, more government of what people talk about is important to them: the ability to understand how their government works; the ability to interact with their government; the ability to have fewer and fewer regulations; a government that wants to talk specifically in time frames such as Bill 19 points out, that the amendment as forwarded does not point out. The amendment that's here talks to a final taxation year to which section 3.04 applies prior to its repeal.

We've said in the bill, Mr. Speaker, that this is the 1999 taxation year, so we're giving rock-solid commitments. We're able to put together through a long process of good consultation from across Alberta, talking to people who get up every morning after 5 o'clock and are putting on everything from coveralls to blue suits to go out and earn money, because generally there's an economic maxim that everybody works to maximize profits to work in their own economic self-interest. What we want to be able to do is to allow them to maximize those profits by getting out of their pocket more and more, not having tax day being some day in July or the end of June but to try to move it up to reasonable times and to be able to let people take those dollars that used to be required to run a more expensive government, a more interventionist government but, through savings and through good fortune and through participation by Albertans, an ability to have a government that is cheaper. That's exactly the genesis of the Income Tax Amendment Act, and that's the genesis of the whole flat tax or single-rate tax proposal.

I've always felt, Mr. Speaker, that in the economy of Canada, in the rules and regulations of Canada you should be able to fill out your own income tax. It should not have to go to a professional, to an accountant, to somewhere where you have to pay somebody to give money to the government. I mean, if the government wants this form of taxation, why doesn't it make it easy? Why doesn't it make it understandable? Why doesn't it make it as simple as calculating a handicap or a golf score? I know it would be absolutely as straightforward and transparent and honest as any good golf handicap would be.

Why should a bricklayer have to pay an accountant to fill out income tax? Why can't a bricklayer who has worked hard and made \$60,000, \$70,000, \$80,000, or \$40,000, whatever the salary range may be, Mr. Speaker – why isn't that individual able to take his or her own tax form and fill it out in a reasonable fashion? Something that's facile, that's easy to understand, that's quick to complete, and where he doesn't have to worry about those famous words: the government is trying to cheat me out of something, quote, unquote. This government is not trying to cheat anybody out of anything. This government wants to deliver good, good government for the least cost, and I think that's a very good and strong objective.

We have to continue to change. There are external pressures that you can see with the development of the act or the development of Bill 18, and you can even see with the futility of the amendment that we're responding to external forces. You know, no man is an island, as is commonly said, and Alberta is not alone in trying to vie and compete for the best brains, the best businesses, the best citizens. Through a single-rate tax act those people who have those kinds of skills, lend those faculties to Alberta, are the people that have said, "I would like to be able to understand my own income tax act. I would like to be able to fill that document out by myself without having to worry about interference from an accountant or another individual that will cost me even more money to do something that should be simply done and quickly completed."

That's why, Mr. Speaker, I think that to respond to the dynamics of the international marketplace, now when you see the *Financial*

Times in London, when you see the *Wall Street Journal* and they talk about Alberta, they talk about Alberta as being at the vanguard, being at the leading and the cutting edge of delivering a government that is conducive to attracting the best brains, that is conducive to keeping the best brains, that is conducive to maximizing its industrial strength and competitiveness, and for us actually to be an island of entrepreneurialism in a sea of socialism.

I think that's one of the great difficulties working as a provincial jurisdiction in this country, because with the malaise that the federal Liberals – and you can see so much similarity between the federal Liberal's mind-set and what we're hearing from the opposition. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's really, really a hard effort to continue to break through the socialist bonds that sit and fetter the tremendous potential in the economy of Alberta today. I think that we've got to continue to set the stage by putting forward these symbols, these opportunities, and this ability for people to capitalize on the very strengths that sit here in this great province today.

5:20

One of the major tax concessions delivered in the period from 1993 to '97, Mr. Speaker, was the provincial portion of the machinery and equipment tax. That tax amounted to about \$160 million. There was great concern at the time that there would not be an opportunity to recoup those gains through facility expansion, through plant expansion, through building at the Carolines of the world, through building at the Joffres of the world, to be building the Syncrudes and the Suncors in Fort McMurray, the plants in Grande Prairie, the potato plants, the bud the spuds down in Taber. I mean, I think it's an absolutely terrific story what's happened.

So there was great fear and trepidation as we again walked into unexplored territory. At that time, the government struck a challenge to industry that said: we'll deliver if you deliver. At that point, as we know from all the studies that you see from the learned individuals from the University of Calgary, an excellent institution, to other work done by notaries around Alberta, there is really one fundamental fuel for economic growth. It's a four-letter word, Mr. Speaker. In the socialist world they don't like these kinds of four-letter words. That four-letter word is cash, money, long green. Without money nothing happens. Governments don't manufacture money; governments spend money. The only wise thing Pierre Elliott Trudeau ever said that I can remember was that governments don't have money; people have money. That's where governments get the money, from the people.

So by reducing this taxation, Mr. Speaker, and by eliminating the machinery and equipment tax, as a percentage of the investment that was gained in Alberta, today, one, there is no machinery and equipment tax for the provincial portion in Alberta. Secondly, there has been for the last five years anywhere from \$30 billion to \$45 billion worth of capital projects in play, ready to go, being invested, money being deployed in the province of Alberta, not in the city of Calgary, which doesn't produce one barrel of oil, doesn't have one cow, doesn't do anything with respect to the agricultural market, not in Edmonton, which is the seat of the capital of government. In fact, that investment is taking place Alberta-wide. As I've just recounted, it's taking place from Grande Prairie, Paddle Prairie, Rainbow Lake to Empress, Manyberries, Rocky Mountain House. I mean, the names and the level of investment are really endless. The McCain's investment in Taber is a wonderful story.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that what you see occurring throughout Alberta is a very strong message to all Albertans that, one, you can go to a world-class educational institution in this province after you've finished high school – a NAIT, a SAIT, a University of Calgary, a University of Alberta, a University of Lethbridge, one of

the 26 postsecondary institutions in this land – and you can get a world-class education. Then you can return to Wabasca, to Smoky Lake, and then, Mr. Speaker, you can get world-class wages using your world-class education in a world-class industry.

It's this type of world-class income tax administration, it's this kind of world-class Bill 18, Bill 19, it's this kind of world-class government that allows that to occur. We've always said that we are not the initiators, but we do try very, very diligently to create the environment that allows people to succeed. Also, it allows people to fail. But they get the choice. It's not like a Liberal administration; it's not like an NDP administration, where you don't have choices, where government by taking so much money away from you starts to eliminate choice.

MR. LUND: Look at B.C.

MR. SMITH: I think a number of people from B.C. are looking at us. They're looking at us with envy, Mr. Speaker, because this is a government, this is an administration that has said clearly in a three-year business plan, goal 6, "Alberta will have a prosperous economy." That's why, Mr. Speaker, you have a Bill 18 and a Bill 19, the Income Tax Amendment Act. We will continue to promote the Alberta advantage, Mr. Speaker.

It says that we will undertake a business tax review to ensure business taxes are competitive. That's being done, and this single rate of taxation is a manifestation of good-thinking Albertans coming together in an Alberta tax review scenario and environment and being able to speak their minds and being able to say: "I believe very strongly in the Alberta advantage. I want to participate in it. I want to be able to help." By saying that, they want us to deliver a single rate of taxation that is easy to understand, reasonable, takes 192,000 people off the tax roll, and delivers \$1.3 billion in taxation savings.

I can appreciate, Mr. Speaker, how members of the Liberal opposition and in fact the leader of the Liberal opposition would be opposed to this and would spend a great deal of House time debating this issue and being unsure and not wanting to take a step and saying: "Well, what will happen? We don't know. We're not sure." But, you know, there isn't one individual over there – and I'm particularly addressing this to the leader of the opposition party – that has any experience lowering taxes. That individual's total political experience has been focused on raising taxation, on increasing government spending. That paradigm is gone. The series of assumptions are changing. We are on the move.

It was Will Rogers, that very same Will Rogers, who said: even a dead man can keep up if you're going downriver. Well, they're trying hard to be either dead people or to keep on going downriver. But I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when you make the turn and you go upriver, that's when the oaring gets hard.

I think this has done a very, very laudable job of listening to Albertans' very concerns, of continuing to create the environment that attracts good people. As a matter of fact, when I think of the good people that are here looking at the amendment of Bill 19, looking at Bill 18, looking at the single rate of taxation, they are very much reflective of the Alberta advantage: trained professionals from all walks of life who have given up substantial amounts of money and in fact will be giving up more money to stay in here and serve Albertans in the Legislature. For that reason alone, I think you can see the commitment and the forthright, open, transparent approach that this government has taken to deliver a single rate of taxation to Albertans to be the first of so many things in this great dominion, Mr. Speaker.

Let's hope that this idea of single-rate taxation catches fire like a prairie grass wildfire, not one that is preset, like in Los Alamos,

Mexico, by government but one that catches its own spark and one that grows its own direction by spreading the entrepreneurial spirit throughout Canada, to realize that Canada trades and has fabulous opportunities with the largest economic engine in the world. For us to be able to take advantage of that, this is but one component in the building block matrix of the Alberta advantage that starts to deliver real benefits to real Albertans.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we'll stay here until 12, 1 a.m., 2 a.m., 3 a.m. We'll see protesters fall from the walls. Close. We'll see opposition go. But, you know, Mr. Speaker, this is something that has to be done for the benefit of all Albertans, whether they're making minimum wage or whether they're making \$100,000. It has to be done at a commitment level that can only be supported by Albertans. We want the opportunity to be able to leave this area and go out, speak with Albertans and talk about the real benefits of single-rate taxation and to take those chances and see a world-class educated individual working in a world-class industry making a world-class salary.

You know, Mr. Speaker, that might be at a banknote company in Barrhead. That might be at a plant in Leduc. It might be in Fort Saskatchewan. It can be just about anywhere in this great province, because this province is robust and bursting at the seams with opportunity. We need to give people the tools that allow them to succeed. That is why a single rate of taxation, Bill 18 and Bill 19, the parlance of this Assembly, has to be passed, has to be put forward.

5:30

We have to and we're obligated to, Mr. Speaker, go up and deliver that message and deliver it with conviction, with promise, with faith. The hope for a better tomorrow, the hope for more money in your pay packet, the hope for opportunity: that is what makes Albertans drill, that's what makes Albertans perform to an absolute maximum participation rate in the labour force. In fact, taking a look at the unemployment rate, we have continually had the first or second or third highest disposable level of income in Canada. We have had the most people participating in the labour force. In fact, the most number of men and women available for work are working in Alberta, the highest level of participation rate. We continually deliver in Alberta the highest employment rate.

Now I know the people want me to go on, but I can only stop and wish to go forward and support this bill for all Albertans, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, with unanimous consent. I'll ask the question. Is unanimous consent being provided by the members to the hon. Minister of Gaming to continue?

[Unanimous consent denied]

THE SPEAKER: That's very clear.

Due notice having been given by the hon. Government House Leader under Standing Order 21 and pursuant to Government Motion 19, agreed to earlier this afternoon, under Standing Order 21(2) I must now put the question on the amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, to withdraw the bill and refer the subject matter to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:32 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Blakeman	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	Massey	Sloan
Gibbons	Pannu	Wickman
Leibovici		

Against the motion:

Amery	Graham	Melchin
Boutilier	Haley	Nelson
Broda	Hlady	O'Neill
Burgener	Jacques	Pham
Cardinal	Johnson	Renner
Coutts	Klapstein	Severtson
Doerksen	Kryczka	Smith
Ducharme	Laing	Stelmach
Evans	Langevin	Stevens
Fischer	Lund	Thurber
Forsyth	Mar	West
Fritz	Marz	

Totals:	For – 10	Against – 35
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[Motion on amendment lost]

THE SPEAKER: On the motion for second reading of Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, as proposed by the hon. Provincial Treasurer.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:45 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Amery	Graham	Marz
Boutilier	Haley	Melchin
Broda	Hlady	Nelson
Burgener	Jacques	O'Neill
Cardinal	Johnson	Pham
Coutts	Jonson	Renner
Doerksen	Klapstein	Severtson
Ducharme	Kryczka	Smith
Evans	Laing	Stelmach
Fischer	Langevin	Stevens
Forsyth	Lund	Thurber
Fritz	Mar	West

Against the motion:

Blakeman	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	Massey	Sloan
Gibbons	Pannu	Wickman
Leibovici		

Totals	For – 36	Against – 10
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[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a second time]

[At 5:58 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 23, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/23

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Hon. members, would you please remain standing at the conclusion of the prayer for the singing of our national anthem.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask You, Father, to renew and strengthen in us the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of this Legislature. We ask You also in Your divine providence to bless and protect the Assembly and the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to table today containing quite a number of names from Calgary and Edmonton, including the riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. The petition urges "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining the public health care system."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege today to submit a petition on behalf of 1,242 Albertans. This petition is asking the government to look at the possibility of requiring "a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight." This brings a total of about 6,000 that we've submitted in this form, and there have been about 7,000 or so compiled that were in a form that was not presentable to the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Assembly today on behalf of 182 Albertans. They are from Calgary, Winfield, Leduc, Fort Saskatchewan, Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Kinuso, and Driftpile. These Albertans "urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition today signed by 253 Albertans opposed to the proposed development of the Spray Valley and asking that a wildland provincial park be created which protects all of the undeveloped parts of Kananaskis and Spray valleys.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled last week now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and request that the petition I presented on May 17, Wednesday of last week, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the [Legislative] assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give notice of the following motion:

Be it resolved that further consideration of any or all of the resolutions, clauses, sections, or titles of Bill 18, Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, shall, when called, be the first business of the committee and shall not be further postponed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that Written Question 22, which is the last written question appearing on the Order Paper, be called.

I'm also giving notice that there are no motions for returns left appearing on the Order Paper.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

Bill 25

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, I beg leave to introduce a bill being the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table today five copies of a news release dated today regarding amendments to Bill 18 which will lower the single rate of tax to 10 and a half percent and raise the basic spousal exemptions to \$12,900. Included also in this is a comparison between the interprovincial tax and health care insurance premiums across Canada. It shows a distinct Alberta advantage in all categories, and this one outlines fuel tax, payroll

tax, tobacco taxes, provincial income tax, and a sales tax. I'd like to table that today so hon. members may peruse that.

The other thing I'd like to table is a letter put out by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business supporting the single rate of tax. It says:

A reduced rate, combined with higher personal and spousal [exemption thresholds] will ensure that all taxpayers receive a reduction in their personal income tax burden.

With it is a chart showing that when they surveyed Canadian Federation of Independent Business members across Canada, 80.6 percent agreed with the single rate of tax.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to table five copies of answers to Written Question 24. This is a little bit out of the ordinary as Written Question 24 was voted down because 1997-98 and '98-99 figures are not available due to the fact that students do not default for two years. However, in keeping with the open and honest government we are, I will give them the information that we have.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased also to table the requisite five copies of Motion for a Return 10. This was backup information that was reflected in the budget with the \$54 million reduction in fees and services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table five copies of You Bet I Care, a Canadian-wide study on wages, working conditions, and practices in child care centres, the most comprehensive study undertaken on the status of employees and centres offering child care in our country's history. It notably points out that Alberta leads the country with the highest turnover rate of all provinces at 44.8 percent of their employees choosing to leave this sector.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I have four tablings this afternoon. The first is an Official Opposition amendment to Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. The effect of this amendment would be to put into law that whenever the federal tax rate changed, Albertans would have to get the full impact and the full benefit of that federal tax reduction.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, the second amendment I have is also a Liberal opposition amendment to Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. The effect of this amendment would be to ensure that the many, many, many regulations, the fine print, the detail in that tax act get referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations as soon as possible.

Finally, the third amendment that I have is a Liberal opposition amendment to Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. It is dated April 3, 2000, and it amends section 89(3) of the act to ensure that both the so-called deficit elimination taxes are removed in the same year, that being at the end of the 1999 taxation year.

My last tabling is the appropriate number of copies of a letter to Premier Klein from Jeanette Blond, who is very upset with the government's move towards private health care.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege today to table five copies of a letter from Deborah Dore. She's the lady that's behind the petitions dealing with workplace safety and staffing after hours. In the letter she points out the facts that if panic buttons are put in place, this just encourages robbers to be more aggressive, if security cameras are in place, all it does is encourage them to cover up, but if there are two or more people on staff, they usually walk by and try someplace else for a hold-up. So I'd like to table this letter where she reveals that information.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is from KIDSAFE Connection. It's a letter as well as a report asking for continued advocacy for strong childhood injury prevention and the implementation of bike helmet legislation in Alberta.

The second is an additional 74 responses to the Meadowlark Memo I sent out. The questionnaire responses that I received back indicated that 90.5 percent were against for-profit hospitals in the province of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's a letter from Helen Connolly, a grade 9 student in Lethbridge, asking that the government protect public health care and not allow businesses to make profit from health care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of two tablings today. The first is from George Dlak of Canmore, and the second is from Richard Collier of Calgary. Both of them are opposed to the proposed Genesis development in the Spray Lakes area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the Canadian Hockey Association's 83rd annual general meeting, which was hosted this past weekend here in Edmonton.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

MRS. SLOAN: I am pleased, Mr. Speaker, to rise this afternoon to introduce Mr. Raymond Gariepy, who is seated in the Speaker's gallery. Mr. Gariepy is the father of Antoine Gariepy, a legislative page in our Assembly and a Edmonton-Riverview constituent. He is the editor of the Alberta Teachers' Association newspaper and magazine, one of the most informative and interesting publications I've had occasion to read in my term of office as an MLA. I would

ask Mr. Garipey to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted today to introduce a group of 20 students from the Parkland Immanuel school in the constituency of Edmonton-McClung. The students are accompanied by their principal, Mr. Rainier Van Delft, and Ms Marjorie Helder, their teacher. As well, Sandra Dykstra is the bus driver for the group. I would ask them to rise and receive the customary welcome of the Alberta Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure today to introduce to you and to the Assembly a majority of the Grande Cache council that were here with their administrator to speak with ministers about Grande Cache. As I introduce them today I would like them to stand, and then I would like the Assembly to give them a great welcome. The first one is Deputy Mayor Rene Moulun, councillor Gerry Verstraten, Gordon Frentz, Bernard Zeller, Gerry LeBlanc, and the administrator, Duane Dukart.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. Klapstein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 49 students from Caledonia Park school in Leduc. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Paula Foley and Mrs. Brenda Schwer and by parent helpers, Mrs. Tracy Fitzner and Mrs. Dawn Lackie. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure today that I introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Laurena Byciuk. Laurena is a summer student in my office of Calgary-West, and she's also a constituent of mine. Laurena has just completed her first year of Mount Royal College, and she's in the interior design program. I would ask my guest to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to our Assembly members Ms Camille Ries. Camille has just joined my constituency office for the summer months through an excellent program, the STEP students' program of the government. Camille is a Calgarian, graduated from Mount Royal College, and is also studying at the U of C in political science. She has been very active in community-oriented work. I would like to ask Camille to rise and receive the warm welcome from the members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to stand and introduce Aaron Roth. Aaron is a fourth-year student at the University of Lethbridge in political science, and he's also spending the summer as my STEP student in the office. This is the second year he's worked in my office in the summer, and it's a real

reflection of the good quality students that come out of the University of Lethbridge.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two guests in the gallery today, and it's my pleasure to introduce them to you and through you to all members of the Assembly. The first guest is Mr. Jean-Marc Tremblay, who is joining my constituency office for the second summer in a row. He came back, and I appreciate that more than he'll know. He's employed under the STEP program, and he's bringing his considerable expertise and skills to the job.

With Mr. Tremblay is Mr. Kim Cassady, a former employee of Alberta Treasury, who is currently employed with the Legislative Assembly and manages the constituency office of Edmonton-Glenora. I think Mr. Cassady is still waiting to hear from Calgary-Egmont about those remarks.

In any case I would have Mr. Cassady and Mr. Tremblay please rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly David Linden and Anita vanderLeek and their six children: Lacey, Dania, Melissa, Brenton, Jevin, and Keisha. They are seated in the members' gallery and are my constituents from Bon Accord. It was Mr. Linden's last day with CKUA on Friday, May 19, and I would like to wish Dave good luck and best wishes in his new endeavours. At this time I would like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two guests to introduce this afternoon. Mrs. Edith Rafter, who is from Surrey, B.C., is the proud grandmother of Jason Cassady, who will be graduating from Ross Shep high school this week. She's accompanied by her daughter Pat Cassady, who is my constituency manager. So if they would both please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Andrew Hymes of Camrose. Andrew is working as an assistant in my constituency office in Camrose for the summer, and he is taking the day to become more familiar with the work of an MLA here at the Legislature. He is a graduate of the U of A in political science. He's in the members' gallery, and I'd like to ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Workforce Labour Dispute

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here we go again. This government has inflicted needless suffering and uncertainty and upheaval on Albertans and their families through mismanagement of

public health care: unplanned slashing and cutting, underfunded regional health authorities, narrowly averted strikes in 1997 and 1999, Bill 37, Bill 11 rammed through. And now this: 10,000 health care workers who feel they have few choices left. Surgeries have been canceled, patients discharged prematurely, psychiatric patients sent home without needed support, and once again the government has thrown our health care system into chaos. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What contingency plans has the government put in place to avoid more uncertainty and upheaval for Albertans and their families?

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to point out, contrary to the impression that the Leader of the Official Opposition leaves, that the government of Alberta has funded the health care system of this province very well. We are ranked in the country as the highest per capita on an age-adjusted basis, and we are following up with placing funds that are available into high-priority areas.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the bargaining process, which I believe is being referred to, that is proceeding according to the bargaining structures of this province. We of course want very, very much to avoid any job action which would disrupt the system. Alberta Health and Wellness has been working with the regional health authorities and the Provincial Mental Health Board to every degree possible to put in place measures which will put the priority of the patient first and to provide continuing care as well as is possible.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that this crisis was foreseeable and avoidable since the 1999 health workforce study clearly warned of the crisis in workforce members, what discussions and real negotiations have taken place over the past year before government decided to roll the dice with our health care system?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of initiatives of government which relate to this particular area. We made announcements a year and a half ago with respect to our focus and resources being placed in terms of adding individuals to the health workforce in this province. In credit to the health care system those targets have been met today.

Also, in conjunction with Alberta Learning we have been expanding places in terms of preparation programs for health professionals and health workers, Mr. Speaker.

Overall, as I've indicated, we have been directing considerable additional funding to the health care system, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that this government hand-picks and underfunds the regional health authorities as it sets health policy for this province, when will the government admit that its own mismanagement exists and assume a leadership role in addressing the multitude of issues in the health workforce?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, we have a strategy. We have worked on the preparation of health care workers on that particular side of the needs of the system, and along with that we have been focusing on the importance of adding health care workers and professionals to the workforce. To the end of the last budget year over 1,200 additional nurses and LPNs and other workers in the system were added. That target was met.

With respect to looking to the future, of course we are preparing further. In this year's current budget and business plan we've added, for instance, internships with respect to the medical faculty. Alberta Learning has just recently announced additional places for the years ahead with respect to the health workforce.

Mr. Speaker, I think the record would show that in the negotiations that have taken place with other unions in the health sector – for instance, the United Nurses of Alberta – we were able to work through with the leadership of the regional health authorities doing the actually bargaining of course to a successful settlement there. Before that, the agreement with the Alberta Medical Association was reached.

I think that their agreements compare very favourably with other parts of Canada, and it shows the priority we're putting on health care.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Diagnostic Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On April 12 the Premier said in this Assembly:

If a doctor prescribes an MRI, that will be paid for by the publicly funded health care system whether it's in a hospital, Mr. Speaker, or whether it's in a private clinic.

He repeated a similar message in this Assembly on May 17, but, lo and behold, on May 18 the Acting Premier admitted: "If a person chooses to go outside the system to have a private MRI, it is not currently paid for." This sort of double-talk leaves Albertans wondering just how much they can do to stop the queue-jumping that this government allows in Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given the Premier's promise that medically necessary MRIs would be paid for whether done in private clinics or public hospitals, why are people paying privately for medically necessary diagnostic services in this province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to indicate once again to the hon. leader across the way that the situation is that an individual recommended for an MRI in this province has that MRI available to them either through an MRI machine and team which is owned directly and operated directly by a regional health authority or through an MRI service which is under contract to a regional health authority in the province.

I would also like to indicate that once again we've put a considerable priority on expanding our diagnostic capacity in the province. We have added or will be adding MRIs in the Calgary regional health authority, the Capital health authority, the Chinook health authority, the Palliser health authority, the Red Deer regional health authority, the Mistahia health authority, and when our overall plan is implemented, we will have the highest rate of MRI scans available per person in this country. Further, Mr. Speaker, recently we announced a considerable amount of additional money for capital equipment, and this will certainly address other areas of the diagnostic system such as the high volume of CAT scans that we have needed in this province.

So I think the policy is quite clear, and certainly the government's commitment on a financial basis to this area of service is very well demonstrated.

2:00

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, in case anyone missed it, the minister just contradicted the Premier.

Given that the Premier has said, "If it's medically necessary and it's prescribed by a doctor, then it is covered," can the minister please explain why on this request form from the Meadowlark MRI and CT centre, a doctor's referral and a signature are needed for a CAT scan, yet Albertans are still required to pay out of their pocket for that service?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the service is provided, as I said, directly through diagnostic treatment or services which are owned and operated directly by the regional health authorities and also in those cases in which the regional health authority has a contract with a private provider. With respect to those particular services all a person has to do is use their health care card, and the service is paid for and provided.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will this minister commit today to stopping citizens from having to jump the queue by paying privately for medically necessary diagnostic services? What part of it doesn't he understand?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is quite interesting, because the hon. leader is reverting to her policy which has been somewhat submerged recently whereby you would allow a completely parallel private health care system to exist in this province.

With respect to diagnostic services, the MRIs for instance, I have outlined the approach that is taken there. They are paid for either in the public system that operates it directly or through the public system under contract to MRI services.

Timber Permit Bidding Process

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, a group of wood products companies has been charged, pleaded guilty, and convicted of rigging bids to buy timber lots. One of the companies was Shake Masters Manufacturing Inc., a rather familiar name for thousands of Alberta families with rotting pine shake roofs. During the course of a 1996 timber permit auction this government accepted bids of 63 cents per cubic metre for timber permits worth an average of \$20.55 per cubic metre. My first question is to the minister of environmental protection. Why did the Alberta land and forest service accept bids for public resources at 3 cents on the dollar?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'll be happy to review that particular circumstance and take this question under advice.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Was it just negligence that the land and forest service gave away public resources at fire sale prices, or was it government policy to intentionally subsidize these companies by accepting low bids?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, my response is the same.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government lost over \$316,000 in this one auction alone, can the minister advise the House exactly how much was lost or given away through these fixed auctions?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, my response remains the same.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week for the first time our Premier popped his head out of the sand long enough to finally recognize what the rest of us have known for years: Albertans aren't paying \$500 or more for a private MRI to get a cheap thrill;

Albertans are paying big bucks for private MRIs to get a faster diagnosis and thereby to jump the treatment queue. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why has the government allowed a private MRI industry to develop which mainly exists to allow patients who can afford to pay for MRIs to receive medically required surgery or treatment ahead of those who can't?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. leader of the third party well knows, the matter of diagnostic services where the actual service or scan, if I can use that term, is being provided by a team of technicians – and we're talking about a particular specific procedure. This is outside the parameters and controls of the Canada Health Act. It is possible all across this country for those types of facilities to be operated. That is the situation in the country, and that does exist in other locations besides Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Queue-breaking is also a normal situation in the province. That's why I asked the question.

My second question to the minister: what monitoring does the government do to ensure that those who pay privately for MRIs don't use the diagnoses to get faster access to medically required surgery or treatment?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the control or the management with respect to waiting lists for any particular treatment or service in this province is primarily by physicians in conjunction with the administration of regional health authorities. Doctors make those decisions in a professional manner, as I understand it, and of course, physicians overall in the province are responsible with respect to ethical practices to the College of Physicians and Surgeons and their legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: if the government has no criteria to determine which MRIs are medically required, how will the minister be able to determine whether the CRHA is only paying for medically required MRIs in its contracts with the two Calgary private MRI clinics?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, government does not establish the criteria by which physicians practise medicine from a professional standpoint. Certainly government has a responsibility for the overall health care system, and I think that in keeping with what is generally the practice across this country, a great deal of the decision-making with respect to setting the priority for patients within the system is determined by the physicians in charge. As I've said before, the legislative structure that we have in the province which allows for that is the legislation which establishes and provides for various responsibilities being taken by the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Health Workforce Training

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our health care system has been experiencing an increased demand for nurses and other health care professionals. Those training in Alberta to become nurses can take the one-year licensed practical nurse, LPN, program,

or the diploma or the degree registered nurse, RN, programs. However, nursing students who wish to transfer from the LPN to the RN programs find that they receive little or no credit towards the RN programs, which means that it takes longer for them to graduate and start contributing to the health care system. My first question is to the Minister of Learning. Why are there restrictions on transferability?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue that the LPN association has brought up with me on several occasions. As you look back on the history of LPNs and RNs, what you find is that the two training programs were significantly different. As you see the sphere of procedures that each one can do starting to become closer and closer, I think this is something that we have to look at, that we have to change. We have to get LPN and RN to have at least some degree of transferability.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

2:10

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the minister doing to address the issue of transferability?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I alluded to in the first part of my answer, I feel that this is something that's very important. We are certainly looking at it. As a matter of fact, in Grande Prairie there was recently a bridging program between LPNs and RNs. This, unfortunately, was discontinued because of lack of numbers.

We are now sitting down in Alberta Learning with the associations as well as with Grant MacEwan College to see if we can come up with something that can improve the transferability between LPN and RN. Will the transferability be one year for one year? I don't think so, Mr. Speaker, but certainly we can get it a lot better than it is right now.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the Minister of Learning: what is the Alberta government doing to address the demand for more health care professionals?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government takes the health care workers and health care professionals extremely importantly. As I've stated a couple of other times in this Assembly, health care professionals and health care workers are the number one priority for the access fund in the year 2001. We have put a lot more spaces out there. There are roughly 200 to 300 more that are coming in, and it is something that we are continually looking at.

I will comment, though, specifically on one issue, and that is the issue of physicians. Earlier on in this session the opposition tabled reports from the famous Barer/Stoddart health care economists. Well, Barer/Stoddart were the ones who recommended that there be a 10 percent decrease in the number of physicians across Canada. Mr. Speaker, we have now learned, we have now seen the craziness of that, and indeed we are suffering the consequences of that. Yet these are the health care economists that the opposition chooses to use.

Mr. Speaker, we take health care professionals extremely importantly, and we are looking at putting significantly more out, and we'll be doing that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Timber Permit Bidding Process

(continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A July 4, 1994, report called A Review of the Timber Permit Program was prepared for the Northern Alberta Development Council. On page 33 the report recommends that

rates charged for Crown timber permit sales should be comparable to that charged for other dispositions in Alberta.

Severely restricting the available bidders on permits will result in cooperation (collusion) amongst the bidders and consequently in a poor return to the province on the sale of permits.

My questions are to the minister of environmental protection. Why did the province persist in a bidding system that invited collusion even when the province had been warned against such a system?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, in answer to a previous question asked by the hon. leader of the opposition, I gave a response that I would take this question under notice, and I intend on doing the same.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that one of the objectives of the commercial use of the permit program was to prepare and "provide a fair return to the province on the sale of timber," is receiving 63 cents for something that is worth over \$20 what this government considers a fair return for Alberta taxpayers?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the question remains the same; the response remains the same.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another question for the minister of environmental protection: did this government ignore the recommendations of its own report because a policy decision had been made by this government that they would use public money and assets to prop up, subsidize, and promote pine shake manufacturers?

MR. MAR: The response is the same, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Career and Technology Studies Funding

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently had the opportunity to visit McCoy high school in Medicine Hat and observe their CTS classes. For those of us who didn't go to school in the last five years, CTS is career and technology studies, and it's what we used to refer to in my day in high school as home economics and shop classes and typing and business skills, those types of classes, although they're significantly different in this day and age. One of the issues that was discussed between myself, the teacher, and the principal was the difficulty that CTS classes pose from an administration point of view because they are completed in modules and funded only after students have completed individual modules. My questions today are to the Minister of Learning. Why is this course funded significantly differently than every other course that's offered in high schools?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The reason CTS courses are funded on a per credit enrollment is that these courses are taken over a period of time. You have some students that have the ability to take the course very, very quickly. You have some students that will take it over perhaps one year or even two years. The school jurisdictions are given an advance based on last year's credit enrollment.

Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, I as well have heard a lot of negativity about this type of funding, but we did do a funding review back in the spring of 1999, and at that time the people from around the province said that they wanted the CEUs on the CTS to stay the same. It is something that we do need to take a look at though.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the statement of the minister, would the minister, then, explain some of the alternatives that have been proposed to replace this type of funding?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the learning system it is very hard to look at one aspect of the learning system in isolation. We are presently undertaking to look at all the funding in education. We are attempting to make it as easy as possible and as simple as possible. We do not want teachers, we do not want administrators spending a lot of time filling out paperwork when their jobs are actually to be in the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, we are currently undertaking a review of the funding formula, and we will be looking at the outcomes. CTS and the whole CEU issue will certainly be one that is looked at under this new committee.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I had a good conversation with the teacher and the principal that day in the school, they had some pretty good ideas for alternatives. My question is: would the minister be prepared to entertain alternatives at this point?

DR. OBERG: Yes, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. We are constantly looking at ways to improve the education system, to improve the learning environment for the student, and it would be absolutely ludicrous of me if a good idea came forward not to listen to it. So I would invite the hon. member to pass on to the teacher and principal that if they have ideas, bring them forward, and we certainly will look at them, because if we can find a better way we will institute it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Highwood.

Protection of Privacy

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier was critical of the federal government for building a national data bank without the consent of individual Canadians. He went so far as to call it an "insidious . . . scheme." But even as the Premier attacks Ottawa over that particular issue of privacy, we see in this province the Department of Government Services developing with seven other departments a, quote, gateway to a wide range of government services including consumer information, registration information, licensing information, and other government services,

close quote. This will involve linking other government bodies that provide registration/licensing information services, and it will keep a log on every single call made by a citizen to a department of the government of the province of Alberta. To the minister responsible in this province for the protection of our privacy, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what steps has this minister taken to ensure that the data collection project of the Department of Government Services will not mean a centralized data bank with all kinds of personal information about individual Albertans?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. member is referring to the central data bank that the federal government has in place. We have no process whatsoever that leads to this type of process, and at this stage there is none contemplated. Ultimately, we do not have any intention of setting up a central database.

It's interesting to note that the agreements, Mr. Speaker, with the federal government are largely there to help people. They're there to expedite those people who may be in need. Ultimately, the process has to be designed so it is there and available to those people that are in need, and to deny those people the information would hardly be right and hardly be the proper thing to do.

2:20

MR. DICKSON: I thought I just heard Jane Stewart speaking, Mr. Speaker.

My follow-up question will go to the Minister of Government Services. My question is this: will the data from the single centralized call centre be linked in any way to the registration data bank?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The gateway project is one that is to provide services to Albertans so that when they inquire about information on government programs, they in fact have somebody that actually picks up the phone and answers the question for them. The way this project is envisioned and has been recommended is that general information, which is probably about 80 percent of the calls that come through to government offices – where do I get to get a health care card from; where do I get a fishing licence from; how do I access tourism information? That kind of data that comes through is answered immediately, and people in the province of Alberta have access to information from government readily available to them.

Now, the key to this project that I think is fundamental – and maybe the hon. member opposite didn't quite understand that – is that if the person requires information that pertains to them on a personal or confidential level, the linkage will be right back to the various departments. We will not be moving people from 19 departments into one central area. They will be linked, and the person is transferred immediately into that area so that their information and the confidentiality is there. The information on that . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, the yapping that's going on next door is unbelievable.

We're trying to explain that we do not have a comparable database as has been explained by the federal government. Personal information that goes back to the various departments will in fact stay there. It will not be part of a call centre environment. The people using the call centre will be asking for information from the government in a general sense. They may even be relieved to know that there'll actually be a person that will pick up the phone and give

them the information when they call in. So I'd ask the hon. member not to confuse the two areas.

Other information that we do have in various departments: of course we are subject to the FOIP legislation that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is abundantly knowledgeable on.

MR. DICKSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, my follow-up question is right back to the same minister. Why should Albertans be any more comfortable with your Department of Government Services controlling large amounts of data about them – remember, we're talking about 12 million registry transactions every single year – than they are with what we discovered with the federal government and the department of HRDC?

MRS. NELSON: Because, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the information that we have has been very, very clearly identified in the various aspects. In land titles we have people's names and addresses and the legal descriptions of the property involved. You could access information as to who holds the mortgage on a piece of property. That is available through our land registries. Under our vital statistics we have, naturally, people's names and addresses, place of birth, marital status. We have under motor vehicles, again, names and addresses, date of birth, height, weight, phone numbers.

This type of information is not the type of information that has been criticized for being available, like income tax information, health information. Those are not part of this system at all. There is not a central database in this government. The information that is on taxation information is in a different area. The information that is on health is in a different area. It is not part of this system.

Always keep in mind that we are governed under the most rigorous freedom of information and privacy act in this country, and you know that, Calgary-Buffalo. You know that. You were part of the team that put that together. It has been reviewed by our Ethics Commissioner and Privacy Commissioner, and he has assured us that our FOIP legislation is intact and is securing Alberta's information.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Food Regulations Review

MR. TANNAS: Thank you. My questions today are to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. The department's current food regulations review seems to have looked at the farmers' markets in Alberta and is considering regulatory changes which may require prepared foods to be done only out of approved kitchens. Mr. Speaker, through you to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness: will these proposed changes adversely impact the traditional church tea and bake sales, pie sales, and other food-related church activities, all of these items being prepared in the kitchens of congregational members?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that in the whole matter of food inspection/farmers' markets we need to just review for a moment a bit of the background to farmers' markets in this province. As I recall, they began in the 1970s. The whole concept of the farmers' market was one whereby locally grown and developed or processed food products would be sold in a farmers' market. They would come from the immediate area. They would be provided by the farms and community members. That is the way the whole farmers' market movement, if you can call it that, in the province began.

The number of farmers' markets has gone from the initial number of 16 to I think today we have well over a hundred farmers' markets

operating across the province. The whole idea was to provide a retail outlet from the farms directly to the consumer, and there were seen to be many advantages with that. When sold, the fresh produce of course provided an additional source of income to farm families across the province. This has been the situation for a number of years, Mr. Speaker.

The process that is in place is that there are certain basic requirements that farmers' markets have to meet when they're established under the auspices of Alberta Agriculture, and upon meeting those basic requirements established by Alberta Health and Wellness, approval is given to the market.

Now, the situation we have today . . .

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. minister, but brevity is very important here too.

The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the proposed changes adversely impact the turkey suppers that are major fundraisers for many communities all across this province and for the churches across the province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there are issues with respect to farmers' markets particularly as they apply to the regional farmers' market now changing rather dramatically to being in some cases markets which have, you might say, traveling food suppliers both in terms of immediate consumption and in terms of purchase going around the province. It's become in many cases a much more provincewide commercial operation, and the current discussion about regulations deals with that particular development as far as farmers' markets and possibly the need for more regulation of farmers' markets with respect to that new expansion of the farmers' market concept.

With respect to the teas and the suppers, Mr. Speaker, I do not anticipate that there'll be any major change with respect to regulations in that area, and in fact that is not our focus whenever it is that we change regulations in this particular area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary is again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. While I'm encouraged by his last comments, I wonder if the proposed changes will adversely impact school councils, lodges, fish and game associations, Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, churches, and so on that have potluck suppers which are again prepared in nonapproved kitchens.

2:30

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker, at least as far as one can predict the discussion in this area. There are some emerging issues with respect to regulation of farmers' markets. I've tried to indicate that they are focusing, in my judgment, at this particular point in time on what might be called the commercial, the larger, as I said, moving food outlets that are becoming a part of farmers' markets across the province but not the local types of events that the member is referring to.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Fairview Hospital X-ray Machine

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 10, when the Official Opposition asked about the high levels of radiation that the

X-ray machine in Fairview was emitting, the Premier said:

When did this leader of the Liberal opposition learn about this situation? Has she been keeping it under her hat . . . They have no concern whatsoever [about] public safety.

Now, what I find extremely odd is that the Mistahia health region made a request to this government which was turned down in March for special funds in order to replace their X-ray machine. So this government has known for a long time about the problems with the X-ray machine in Fairview. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that the X-ray machine in Fairview has been emitting harmful levels of radiation for over four years, can the minister explain to those patients why he has exposed them to this health risk for such a long period of time?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, funds have been provided at an increased rate for the purchase of capital equipment to regional health authorities across the province. The regional health authorities make decisions as to what pieces of equipment need to be replaced within their region, whether it's an X-ray machine or a fluoro machine or some other piece of needed equipment. The health authority of the Mistahia region has had funds on a fair and equitable basis compared to other regional health authorities in the province.

Now, with respect to the X-ray machine in Fairview, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the machine has been tested or examined with respect to emissions. To this particular point in time the emissions from the machine have been within acceptable levels. As with these situations the regional health authorities do monitor the situation, and as I understand it, at the moment they have shut down the machine for repairs or for replacement.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, can the minister explain why he turned down the request from the Mistahia regional health authority for special funds to replace the X-ray machine in March, and why he continues to drag his heels at the expense of the health of people in that region?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been committing millions of dollars to health care equipment in this province. Certainly the regional health authority and its administration are in the best position to judge the needs of the region. It is not a case where you apply, particularly when we're dealing with fairly basic equipment, above and beyond the money you're already getting for a particular machine.

Yes, we do fund directly for diagnostic tools such as an MRI because this is an extremely expensive diagnostic tool, often requiring renovations to a building, but in terms of the overall funding of equipment, the Mistahia region has been fairly dealt with according to our overall formula for providing equipment. Alberta Health and Wellness does not buy every, you know, wheelchair and every X-ray machine and every fluoro machine and every dialysis unit.

MS LEIBOVICI: Given that both patient safety as well as worker safety is at risk, will the minister make a commitment right here and now that he will provide the funding to replace that X-ray machine in Fairview immediately?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, it's my understanding that the regional health authority has been carefully monitoring the emissions and the performance of that particular machine, and given that within the last few days an announcement of tens of millions of dollars in addition to our current commitment to capital equipment

across this province has been added, I think the health authority in the Mistahia region has the resources if it is deemed to be needed to replace this X-ray machine.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

North/South Trade Corridor

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canamex highway corridor is a major commitment of this government and is essential for the future economic prosperity of our province as we manufacture and trade more and more goods internationally, particularly into the United States. To the Minister of Infrastructure: what is the status of the construction on this massive project, and is his department on schedule?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canamex highway, as the hon. member refers to, is the north/south trade corridor that will be four-laned from just north of Grande Prairie all the way down to the Coutts/Montana border. It's about a 1,200 kilometre stretch of highway, roughly \$1.4 billion, \$1.5 billion in budget, and it's currently on schedule to be completed in 2007.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Given that I think everyone in this province has noticed the substantial increase in the volumes of traffic on that road, being the north/south corridor, is the minister looking at any measures that would alleviate traffic congestion on those routes?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we are. We're looking at a number of different options. One, of course, is reviewing the report that's looking at productivity safety and also different vehicle combination widths and dimensions. We're awaiting the results. That may be one way of reducing the total number of vehicles on the highway.

There is, I admit, some concern about larger vehicles. Some of the public may be concerned with the size of those vehicles, so we're keeping all of those various opinions, looking at and assessing them, and we'll be bringing forward to the standing policy committee our recommendations soon.

MR. COUTTS: My final supplemental. The Pacific Northwest Economic Region has been dealing with harmonization for quite some time, particularly using the Alberta model. What is the minister doing on behalf of Alberta's trucking industry to achieve consistent size and weight limits between all states along the corridor?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, trying to streamline the regulations with respect to vehicle weight and dimensions has been a long-standing goal of both the ministries of Infrastructure and also of Agriculture. The maximum size of load limit, of course, becomes the common denominator. If I recall correctly, California is about 80,000 pounds. We're at 125,000 licenced pounds. If we're going to be trucking any of our goods down to California, we can only load at 80,000 pounds. As a result, that greatly increases the cost of getting the goods there.

We're working with the governors of the western states, especially along the interstates, and trying to streamline those regulations as quickly as possible. As well, we're going to have visitations here this week from a mission from Idaho, and that's a very important topic of discussion.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Pine Shake Roofs on Schools

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Greater St. Albert Catholic school board will be forced to spend a quarter of a million dollars replacing the roofs on l'ecole Marguerite d'Youville, and l'ecole Marie Poburan schools. These schools have pine shake roofs that are now rotting. My questions are to the Minister of Infrastructure. Given that the pine shakes were developed, approved, and promoted by the government, will the Greater St. Albert Catholic board be granted an extra \$250,000 to replace these rotting pine shake roofs?

2:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite sure the hon. member across is well aware of the funding formulas for not only school modernization and rejuvenation but also the building quality restoration program.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the Minister of Learning. When this government claims that as much money should go to instruction as possible, why is it forcing the St. Albert Catholic board to divert funds away from the classroom to correct a problem created by this government?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I will defer that one to the Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member across the way knows, there are very specific formulas in place as to how much money can be diverted from instruction over to capital needs. However, in this particular case all boards are fully aware of the funding structure in place. There's over \$40 million in building quality restoration. There's another \$70 million in modernization and building rejuvenation, plus another \$40 million to possibly as high as \$50 million in new capital construction.

DR. MASSEY: I'll try again. Mr. Speaker, this question is to the Minister of Gaming. Given that community halls are eligible for lottery dollars to replace their rotting pine shake roofs, can school fund-raising councils apply for lottery funds to do the same?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, the details of the community facility enhancement program are clear. The member himself uses those agreements. As this House well knows, the decisions of the community lottery boards, the sum of \$50 million this year and 52 and a half million dollars, are up to the individuals, those good community members, unlike those represented by the interests of the opposition, those members representing community interests to make those community-based decisions.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll

call upon the first of three hon. members to participate in Members' Statements today, but in the interim will you join me in wishing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre a happy birthday.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Trans Canada Trail

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With distinct pleasure I rise to speak about an historic event that I attended in my home city of Calgary on Saturday, May 13. It is also an historic event for our province, when the water from the Arctic north met the water from the Pacific west. The water is now being brought east to Ottawa to join with the water from the Atlantic.

I want to congratulate the Alberta Trailnet organization, the national relay team, the Trans Canada Trail Foundation, and especially the local organizers of the Calgary 2000 society and the Sien Lok Society. I would like to ask the Assembly to recognize all volunteers, sponsors, and participants, just to name a few: Darryl Barber, Carol and Larry Ryder, Carol Dougall, Ray Lee, Debra Wong, Olympic gold medalist Ken Read, Paralympics gold medalist Renee Del Colle, Lois Budgeon, Norma Wilson, Joanne Paulenko, Betty Ann Graves, Stew Senger, and so on.

It is an honour to play a role in the world's longest relay. The Trans Canada Trail of over 16,000 kilometres symbolizes a spirit of unity for Albertans and our Canadian communities.

The government of Alberta through our Minister of Community Development has contributed about \$1.1 million to the Trans Canada Trail building effort inside Alberta and an operating grant of \$50,000 annually for the Alberta Trailnet organization. Albertans will continue to measure their quality of life and the strength of their community in terms of clean air and water, outdoor activity, diversity of land and species as well as economic prosperity. The Trans Canada Trail offers Albertans another source of outdoor activity that will allow us to see more of our beautiful country. I'm very pleased to note that the Alberta government continues to ensure the opportunity for Albertans to enjoy our unique natural environment. Budget 2000 provided \$14.4 million additional funding to help ensure that our natural environment can continue to be a source of pride and enjoyment for Albertans for generations to come.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Organic Egg Farming

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week while I was in the Legislative Assembly, my constituency office was literally inundated with calls from concerned constituents with respect to the possible destruction and loss of a number of organic eggs that are sold through a health food store in Calgary-Buffalo. Since that time I've had a chance to do some investigation with respect to some of the problems that are confronting one producer in Alberta in particular who produces free-range eggs.

Poplar Bluff Farm, a small organic operation, it turns out, has something like double the quota of 300 laying hens and therefore runs afoul of the existing regulations. That would be the egg producing and marketing regulation under the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act. One of the things that my office has determined in the course of our investigation is that there is a strong argument that has been made that organic egg farming, because it appeals to a very distinct and separate market from the balance of the market for eggs, should be regulated separately from conventional farming with a separate quota under the control of the Canadian Organic Advisory Board.

Now, there are some delays, apparently, in doing this, and I

wanted to challenge the minister of agricultural services in terms of what leadership he and his department can provide to ensure that those Calgarians, those Albertans, indeed, who particularly seek out organic eggs will be able to do so without impaired access. I think this can be done, from what I'm told, without interfering with the very elaborate marketing structure that we otherwise currently have for eggs. It's been a concern, and I simply want to relay this message to the minister of agricultural services, and I look forward to his response.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Hull Child and Family Services

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to rise to recognize the very important work of Hull Child and Family Services, located in my constituency of Calgary-Lougheed. Hull Child and Family Services is an intensive, comprehensive treatment centre that provides specialized therapy, counseling, and education to many of the most needy children and their families in southern Alberta. These children need help for the most serious of disorders, including extreme emotional disturbances and behavioural disorders. For most of these children Hull home represents their last chance.

Hull home was created because William Roper Hull, a very successful Calgary businessman and philanthropist who died in 1925, left the bulk of his estate to create a home for needy children. A private act, the William Roper Hull act, was passed in 1954, and Hull home opened in 1962. For more than 40 years Hull home has served children in need not only in Calgary but right across Alberta. Through the years Hull home has changed and grown to meet the changing needs of children and families.

It evolved from two cottages in 1962, which provided residential care to 17 boys, and it now provides a broad spectrum of specialized services to over 500 troubled children and families at any given time in a number of different settings, from residential treatment to group homes to foster care homes to in-home treatment programs to schools and other community-based programs in an endeavour to bring its individualized support programs directly to children and families. This past February 1 I was pleased to attend the opening of the newly expanded and renovated secure treatment facility, which is the only one of its kind in southern Alberta and serves those children who are at extreme risk.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members of this Assembly to join me in paying tribute to the important work that Hull Child and Family Services provides.

2:50

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 209 Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned May 16: Dr. Massey speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have a few comments that I'd like to make before concluding my comments about Bill 209, and those comments focus on a concern I had as I read the

bill. In particular it was reinforced when I read the communication put out by the Member for Calgary-Fort, and that is my concern about the balance of input into Bill 209.

The member, I think, has put out what was intended to be information in a question-and-answer form, and I think it's a good form for information of this type, but as I went through the publication and did a rough tally, eight of the 14 questions are used to try to allay fears from the business community. Certainly, the business community has a large stake in the provisions of Bill 209, but this seems to me to be an inordinate amount of influence for one of the stakeholder groups to have in the formation of a bill such as 209.

So eight of them are focusing on assuring businesses, and it indicates especially that small business employer groups' views were taken into account when the bill was crafted. There are words used throughout those questions that are addressed to the business community that minimize the impact of the bill, that try to assure them that it will only come into effect if the employee exercises it. The whole language of those eight questions is designed to tell business that this is really a small move, that it's not important, and I wonder if that should be the focus.

I looked again at those questions and answers, and two more of the 14 focus on government in terms of revisions of the code and whether Bill 209 is consistent with other actions and recommendations from other reports that the government had commissioned or been involved in.

So here we have 10 of the 14 questions and answers focusing on things other than what is central about Bill 209, and that is the formative years in a child's life. I would have felt much more comfortable that all of the stakeholders had been heard and that all of the stakeholders were really represented in the provisions of Bill 209 if the same kind of assurance that the business community got was offered to those in the community who work in the interests of young children.

I don't see that balance here. I don't see the assurances to those people who work with young children in terms of provisions of day care. I don't see the assurance in this bill in terms of what kinds of things are happening to children zero to two years of age. I think that's unfortunate, and it really does cause me some unease. While I intend to support the bill, it's not without some misgivings that there is still a large group who has not been heard from, and had they had more of an influence, this bill might be quite different.

I go back to the comments that I made in the previous debate on 209. When we compare this bill and what is happening in terms of public policy in this area elsewhere in the world, it is a very, very modest piece of legislation, and I think we want to keep that in mind, Mr. Speaker, that this is not earthshaking. It's needed, but it is very modest, and one would hope that it might be followed by a more comprehensive look and something that addresses the needs of these young children even to a greater extent than the provisions of Bill 209.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd conclude. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to rise and speak in favour of private member's Bill 209. As a father I find it very critical that this government does what it has in its power to help families and improve the well-being of children in this province. Private member's Bill 209, presented by my colleague from Calgary-Fort, is a small step toward improving the lives of many of Alberta's children. By allowing a parent or both parents just a little more time with their children, we will help ensure that these children grow up to be well-adjusted adults.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, longer leaves are in line with this government's intervention programs that would see mothers spending more time with a newborn. There is currently a volume of scientific evidence that suggests that children who have more direct contact with parents in their early years turn out to be better adjusted and healthier adults.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Madam Speaker, parental advocacy groups across North America have been very active in promoting early childhood involvement by both parents, particularly since dual-income households have increased in prominence. Their position is supported by the commonly accepted belief that children whose parents take an active role in their early development are more socially adjusted. Even further arguments have been made regarding the need for fathers to be as active in early parenting as mothers. Some studies have demonstrated a direct relationship between children's behaviour and the amount of time and support provided by not just mothers but fathers as well. In fact, there are volumes of social science research that address the issue of early childhood development and the effect of a young child's environment on how that child will function in society as he or she grows up.

The findings of these studies are consistent, indicating that the quality of a child's development psychologically, emotionally, and intellectually is consistently better when that care is from a parent as opposed to a paid caregiver. Madam Speaker, research indicates that no matter what the facility, there is no equal for parental care in a child's formative years.

The president of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Dr. Elliott Barker, has argued that nothing is more important in the world today than the nurturing that children receive in the first three years of life, for it is in these earliest years that the capacity for trust, empathy, and affection originate, and if the emotional needs of the child are not met during these years, permanent emotional damage can occur.

It seems from the evidence that extending parental leave is a desirable option for this province. The question is: will the cost of this program be passed on to small employers in this province? Of course not, Madam Speaker. There will be no added cost to employers in the province of Alberta. The only sacrifice employers will face is that they will be required to hold an employee's position for an additional length of time. In some cases this could be up to nine weeks more than the current 18 weeks granted by the Alberta labour code. This is not paid leave. Any payment an employee receives will be from the federal government employment insurance program, a program that Albertans have already paid into, a program that every other jurisdiction in this country allows their parents to take advantage of for at least 25 weeks. In utilizing this program, Albertans will simply be reclaiming what is their own.

3:00

Madam Speaker, other jurisdictions in Canada have more generous leave time for parents. This legislation aims to bring Alberta in line with the national average. New Brunswick, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon offer 17 weeks of maternity leave, which must be scheduled prior to the expected date of delivery. In addition, 12 weeks of parental or adoptive leave are subsequently provided. This is leave which may be used by either parent so long as both parents are not away from work at the same time. Ontario offers 17 weeks of maternity leave and 18 weeks of parental or adoptive leave.

Quebec has the most generous leave of all jurisdictions. They

offer 18 weeks of maternity leave and up to 52 weeks of parental leave. Quebec was the first province to introduce maternity and parental leave provisions into their employment standards act. Moreover, Madam Speaker, the province has been successful in pressuring the federal government to extend EI coverage beyond the current 27 weeks.

It is clear that these provisions provide greater support for families in Canada than the provisions in this province. In Alberta employees who have been with the same employer for a period of at least one year receive 18 weeks of maternity leave with at least six weeks of those weeks following the date of delivery.

Madam Speaker, the other day I came across an article on a report by Save the Children. The report concluded that the rich countries may not be the best at taking care of their mothers and, in turn, their children. The report ranked Canada ninth in the world when it came to the well-being of the children. I looked into this and found that many of the countries that outranked Canada had longer leaves for new parents. Many of these countries were European countries. In Europe women generally receive a well-paid leave. In Norway, for example, mothers can take 42 weeks parental leave at full wage or 52 weeks at 80 percent of their wage.

Madam Speaker, in a recent report by the Canadian Policy Research Networks Canada was found to lag in support of families. Canadian children entering the 21st century are at risk of falling further behind their European counterparts in terms of outside support for the family. According to this new international study, an Ottawa-based think tank calls for a revolution in government and private-sector assistance in areas such as parental leave, child care allowances, tax breaks, and income support. The report recommended that Canada adopt policies similar to France, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, and Norway.

To sum up, private member's Bill 209 is not recommending that we extend maternity/paternity leave for parents to one year. That in my view would be excessive, but, Madam Speaker, it is asking that we extend leave for parents to bring it in line with the national average, and it is asking that we do that for the welfare of our children.

Furthermore, the amendment would amalgamate current provisions for maternity leave and adoption leave; that is, it would provide adoptive parents with the same amount of parental leave as a biological parent. This is certainly a positive initiative that would reinforce the notion that the parenting responsibility of adopted parents is equal to that of biological parents.

I urge all my colleagues to support this bill. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased this afternoon to rise in the debate of Bill 209, Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act. I have several questions with respect to the provisos in this bill. The proposal, as I read it, would be that under the Employment Standards Code any employee in the province who had been employed for at least 12 consecutive months could apply to their employer for parental leave without pay. Regrettably, the act does not stipulate whether this coverage would apply to those employees that are employed on a part-time contract or a casual basis. In this respect, 12 consecutive months, they may very well be in the capacity of a part-time employee or a contract employee or a casual employee but not in fact have worked consecutively in each month. So that application in this bill, in my mind, is in question.

The other matter that I would like to raise is that there are no provisos as to how this would apply to or assist those parents in the province who are single parents. In essence, if it is an unpaid leave, I would suspect that most single parents in the province would not be able to access it, nor would there be any benefit per se in accessing it, if they had to sacrifice their salary in order to do so. If they stay home with their child but are forced to go on social assistance for that period of time, how much further ahead is the child and the family unit? I would suggest, Madam Speaker, not much.

In essence, what this bill proposes to do is to create a contradictory double standard, that dual-parent families in this province would in essence be able to access this parental leave provision in supplement to the maternity leave provisions that exist today but single parents most likely would not.

Also, the proposal this afternoon flies in the face of the current policies and programs that exist in this government relative to the treatment of new mothers and new infants in the social welfare program. We continue to have it as a practice that mothers who are receiving social assistance are forced to return to work when their child is two months of age, and in essence if we're saying on one hand as a government that we should provide a 27-week leave for parenting of children, why is that same program and accessibility of leave not accessible to those individuals who are parents and receiving social assistance?

My other questions relate to the period of time, particularly to clause 47, where it says:

Either or both parents may take parental leave with respect to the birth or adoption of a child, but the aggregate amount of leave . . . from employment that may be taken by 2 parents shall not exceed 27 weeks.

In essence, we're saying that the maximum leave would be just over six months and that two parents could not plan so that perhaps the mother takes the first six and the father applies to take the second six months. In my mind, Madam Speaker, it completely flies in the face of all the documented research and findings that we should be placing emphasis on, creating stability and creating routine and continuity for at least the first three years of a child's life, yet the bill that is before us this afternoon says that simply 27 weeks is good enough and that if one parent applies under the Employment Standards Code, even if the other parent is employed by a completely different firm or public-sector institution, that parent can't apply for leave. I'm wondering if that's even verging on discriminatory, because in my mind each of those individuals is a parent. Each should have equal status and equal treatment under the law. They should be treated no differently.

So I don't find clause 47 understandable or supportable or defensible under the laws that we have, under the research and documentation that has been compiled across the globe on the first three years of a child's life, and in the context of government practice in this province elsewhere. It's just simply not supportable and does not make sense.

The other reality that we face with this bill is that while in principle it may be attempting to implement a particularly supportable concept, it doesn't address the underfunding of children and family services that exists in this province and has existed in this province for some time. Even in my term of office we have seen huge cuts to the social services sector. Those have impacted most certainly single parents, most certainly families, and most certainly children receiving services under child welfare or social assistance.

3:10

We have seen a complete elimination of the operating allowance for day cares and, in the face of several documentations being tabled

in the House this session, Madam Speaker, no actions to address the enormous inequities: the workload, the deplorable wages that people who are in the service of caring for children in this province receive. We see no government action in those particular areas, so it's very hard to take with any degree of seriousness a private bill for parental leave when such realities exist.

We are also mindful, reading from the government's own children's summit report, that what people in the field, the stakeholders, what families and parents told this government is that you need a comprehensive plan for the future of Alberta's children. It needs to be multifaceted. It needs to address a number of theme areas, which were identified in the report that was released, the Children's Forum being held in October of 1999, the forum report being released in February of this year. Albertans said that it's not a piecemeal approach that's required here, Madam Speaker. It's a comprehensive, multifaceted, long-term plan of action that's necessary.

I think it's warranted this afternoon to actually read into the record some of the key areas that were raised in the themes relative to the Children's Forum to put this bill in context. One particular theme spoke about actively leading in health and wellness promotion and the identification of four categories of health concerns: healthy families, mental health, sexual health, and nutrition. There was mentioned in that discussion the use or implementation of a particular children's screening tool. It was recommended quite broadly that that screening tool be implemented by government – and I'm just attempting to find that exact recommendation in the report – to examine all of the program and service areas providing services to children, Madam Speaker.

Let me just read from the particular section on health promotion. This is page 12 of the Children's Forum report.

A major gap in current services for children exists in the identification of children-at-risk in . . . early years, before they arrive at school. It was acknowledged that the identification of risks and funding for the treatment of their causes are much more effective, cost-efficient, and less traumatic emotionally, when performed at an early age as opposed to later in . . . life.

On the same page, Madam Speaker, it was identified that there were three funding-related issues that required addressment.

1) the need for long-term, sustained funding for community-based agencies; 2) the need for equitable funding among rural areas and urban centres; 3) the need for appropriate funding levels to ensure all the needs of children are met, i.e. prevention and early intervention.

So while there is obviously some credit warranted to the hon. member who has sponsored this as a private member's bill, it just in no way, shape, or form, Madam Speaker, goes far enough to address the multitude of issues and the multitude of problems that have arisen from government cuts to social welfare programs in this province over the last decade. That is simply the reality.

Just getting back to my points. The Children's Forum report talked specifically about the health issues facing children and talked about wanting to ensure that there was a program for comprehensive early intervention. Now, while parental leave might contribute in some form to that, again it seems that the patchwork system that is proposed with this bill really wouldn't be equitably applied. Again reading from the Children's Forum report, it was recommended on page 39

that assessment techniques and prevention programs be implemented to assess and address risk factors that are related to drug abuse. Prevention and early intervention programs will be designed for parents to teach their children about substances and decision making.

It was further recommended

that government commit to an early intervention focus in all service areas/ministries, and still maintain and build on existing early intervention programs.

It was further recommended that

- eligibility for day care subsidy and compliance be expanded;
- there be enforcement of minimum standards for day care;
- there be more Head Start Programs in more communities;
- parental leave provisions be increased.

In a small respect, Madam Speaker, the bill may give some rise to addressing that recommendation. However, as I pointed out, it is selective in its design, because single parents most certainly would not in my mind be able to access this type of leave and actually be in a position economically to care for their children.

As well, I wanted to point out to the hon. member that in reading the bill, I think there was a bit of a misprint on page 1 of the explanatory notes under section 4, which is citing sections 45 to 50. As they presently read, section 46(1) does not appear to have been fully transcribed in the bill. In fact, there's an obvious gap in the bill at 46(1), where it reads, "The maternity leave to which a pregnant employee is entitled is," and then that's not continued. On the next page it goes on to a completely new section. That, I think, could serve to misinform or mislead Albertans about what provisions actually exist. I'm not sure we're in a position to make any changes, but the hon. member may wish to in fact copy that page and send it around to hon. members so that we actually have an accurate reflection of what the original provisions say.

I think that personally, in my experience as a parent, the concept of parental leave is a good one. It is certainly something that the government should consider as one aspect of a plan or vision relative to the provision of services to children and families in this province. It has to warrant more priority, though, than a private member's bill, in my opinion. We heard in the 2000 Speech from the Throne and in the budget debates and we're currently hearing in this Assembly in question period that children are a priority of this government. We have not seen, in reality, a comprehensive action plan on the children's summit report. Since that report was released, we've had the Task Force on Children at Risk report released, and that has not been accompanied by any commitments of funding. So as I stand here this afternoon, as much as I would like to sincerely support this private member's bill, it just does not compensate, Madam Speaker, for the lack of action in a wide range of other government areas.

3:20

I have had parents, as well, of handicapped and disabled children, quite a number of them, come and talk to me about the inequities in the provision of services to their children relative to both the provision of services in schools as well as provision of service in the health care system. Long ago – I think it's going on two years ago – we had the promise of this government that there was going to be a comprehensive approach to the provision of services to children. We had the student health initiative announced. We had the ministerial task force on children's services. I'm not sure if I have the title completely accurate on that. It was intended to bring together the ministries of Education, Health, Children's Services, and Justice, providing for maintenance enforcement – I think I'm naming the majority of them – and try to provide a concrete approach to reduce the number of hoops, if you will, the maze that parents and families needing services from these ministries would have to go through to access them.

The reality, Madam Speaker, is that really the system hasn't changed. The barriers and hoops that parents of disabled children and handicapped children in this province must go through to access comprehensive, acceptable levels of support for their children are extensive. It's exhausting for them, and it's exhausting for those of us that are attempting to advocate on their behalf to see them through that maze. The reality is that children don't wait. We often talk in this province about the future. In fact, the government sold its whole deficit

elimination and debt reduction plan on not wanting to cast off our debt onto our grandchildren. Well, the reality is that we are in the process of creating a human deficit in this province that far exceeds the fiscal one this government purports to have eliminated.

That is occurring because we have also deemed that tax reduction and tax reform are the two top priorities for implementation in this session and in this government's term of office. We don't see an accompanying emphasis, despite the Premier waxing on about this in the Speech from the Throne – he said that children were the first priority. We have seen nowhere near the commitments in principle or in funding coming to children that the government has made on tax reform.

So, Madam Speaker, the bill before us this afternoon is a token one. I respect the hon. member's sponsoring it, but I cannot support it. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to stand in the Assembly and participate in this debate. I would first of all like to congratulate the Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing this legislation forward.

Recently I had the honour of sitting on the Premier's Task Force on Children at Risk. The role of the task force was to take a look at issues facing children at risk, including but not limited to those who are at risk of developing violent behaviour. Our task was to search for ways of working together to make sure that Alberta's children are healthy, happy, safe, secure, and ready for whatever their futures might hold. The report, appropriately titled *Start Young, Start Now*, emphasized the importance of starting before problems become apparent. The recommendations recognize that first and foremost parents have responsibility for their children and for ensuring that they have a healthy, safe, and positive start in their lives. In other words, parents come first.

Madam Speaker, to that end I agree with this bill in principle, but I do have some concerns about the effect of this legislation. There are more stakeholders in this debate than parents and children. The vital stakeholders that seem to be missing in this debate are the small businesses of Alberta. One of the issues that needs to be addressed is what impact this legislation will have on small business, a sector that is vital to the economy in this province and a sector that is vital to the Alberta advantage. My main difficulty with this private member's bill is that we have yet to see any comments from the business community in Alberta. We need more consultation before we enact legislation that could affect the business community in this way. We must truly take into consideration all the viewpoints of businesses in this province. Should such a consultation occur and should the business sector support it, then I would be happy to vote for this bill. However, until that occurs, we must put this bill aside. I encourage the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort to initiate such a consultation and include all those who are affected and impacted by such a bill.

I also want to commend him for bringing forward a bill that would have helped parents spend more time with their children. It is certainly a noble intent. However, Madam Speaker, at this particular point in time I am not willing to lend my support to the bill. I look forward to more consultation with the Alberta business sector, and at that point in time I would be willing to lend my support to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. I hope he goes through with the consultation. I hope he takes this as a major initiative to include as many stakeholders as possible. When the results are in and I see the outcome, I may be convinced. I hope that at that point, with the new

information that will be presented to us, we will all be able to make a much more informed decision.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll take my chair. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks. I realize I only have a few minutes before we hit the cutoff for debate in this area today. I've listened to the debate thus far on this, and what strikes me is that it's the old argument: is the glass half full or half empty? Is this bill going far enough? Is a little step a good step and should be followed through, or is it so deficient, taken in the context of all the other things, that it should be dropped? We've just heard from another member saying that the businesses haven't been consulted. Well, I don't know that, but I'll take his word for it.

You know, I do see this as a small token, a small step forward, but it is to me significant that this is coming forward as a private member's bill, which is a traditional sort of finger-in-the-air testing ground for ideas the government might want to consider. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview spoke at some length and brought forward a number of other issues that have been suggested as part of a larger, sustainable program for children in this province, and I have to agree. Over and over again I see this kind of hit-and-miss, piecemeal approach to dealing with a group of people or part of a life stage where we as legislators need to be looking at whether we can offer assistance or not to uphold it. I mean, as an activist I have to say that I really like the concept of balance and fairness that's being introduced here, particularly around the inclusion of adoptive parents.

I see that the Speaker is rising and I'm about to be cut off. I look forward to continuing this debate the next time it's up.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. I hesitate to interrupt you, but the time limit for consideration of this item has expired.

3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Low-cost Housing

512. Mrs. Laing moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to encourage municipal governments to investigate ways of adding low-cost housing units through changes in zoning bylaws to allow alternate housing units such as secondary suites and room-and-board housing in residential neighbourhoods.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My reason for bringing forward this motion is simple: within many rural and urban centres low-cost rental accommodation is becoming very scarce. The economic success that Alberta has enjoyed over the past few years has produced many rewards. We are fortunate to have a strong and healthy economy. Our real GDP growth in 1999 is estimated to have been 2.9 percent. This growth is expected to reach 4.5 percent in 2000, which is higher than the expected national average of 3.1 percent. Our diversified economy is more stable and less reliant on one sector, which minimizes the impact that fluctuating commodity prices have on our economic well-being. People are moving to Alberta from across Canada in search of jobs, and they are finding them. In 1999 Alberta's employment rate was one of the lowest in Canada, and we saw the creation of 35,000 new jobs. Currently 1.5

million Albertans are employed, which is the highest employment rate in Canada. But this success has brought a few challenges, one of which is the availability of suitable low-cost rental accommodation.

Across Alberta vacancy rates have dropped significantly in the past few years. In 1993 Calgary had a 5.9 percent apartment vacancy rate. In 1999 that rate had dropped to 2.8 percent. Calgary is not alone. In 1992 Grande Prairie had a 9.4 percent vacancy rate, and we've seen that rate drop to 3.6 percent during this last year. Fort McMurray has also seen a similar trend, dropping from 17.2 percent in 1990 to .7 percent in 1999. Lethbridge has experienced a vacancy rate of .9 percent, and Medicine Hat has a 1.1 percent rate. Red Deer has a .9 percent rate, and Brooks has a 1.8 percent rate. Madam Speaker, these are just a few examples, but they serve to illustrate the point that rental accommodation is becoming difficult to find in Alberta.

A lack in supply has caused rents to increase, often beyond affordability. While it enjoyed the lowest vacancy rate in Canada in 1998, Calgary's rents have also increased by 12 percent, with a one-bedroom apartment averaging \$574 per month, which may not sound like much unless you're a single person, a single parent, or a senior on a fixed income. Many low-income Albertans must look for rental rates from \$250 to \$350 per month.

In Calgary homeless shelters are housing people who have jobs but cannot find an apartment or cannot afford the going rate. Compounding this problem is the fact that municipally owned social housing units are having a difficult time accommodating the number of people in need of housing. This situation poses a whole series of difficult and complex questions. It is not the role of the homeless shelter to provide accommodation for low-income Albertans. Madam Speaker, this would not be the best use of this limited and valuable resource. At present the homeless shelters are stretched to the limit in their attempt to aid the street people who are either abused, mentally ill, drug dependent, or destitute.

I do not want to sound too negative. The increased demand for rental accommodation has brought with it many positive benefits. It has ignited an urban renewal in downtown Calgary that's seen centrally located areas redeveloped with upscale apartments and condominiums. We are seeing loft apartments. These districts are now safer than they once were. They contribute in a positive way to the municipal tax base and have injected vitality and community spirit into the inner city, but the unfortunate by-product has been that this revitalization has displaced many lower income renters and reduced the amount of available low-income rental housing. Where, then, do these displaced individuals go? Somehow provision must be made to ensure that they have reasonable access to housing that fits within their budget.

Madam Speaker, Motion 512 is an attempt to address this challenge. Our government can help by proactively working with the municipal governments to find solutions to the shortage of low-cost rental accommodation. Governments can help create the environment where the construction of housing and low-cost housing alternatives such as secondary suites is encouraged. This is the key. All levels of government must work together on this issue, and it's not the exclusive domain or responsibility of only one level of government.

Thankfully, Madam Speaker, those of us in this Chamber have never experienced homelessness. Having said this, I would also suggest that many of us have experienced times in our lives when we had to live on a low income and had to struggle to make ends meet. Imagine how each of us would have felt if we were forced to move from our accommodation solely because the landlord had decided that he was going to make it into an upscale condominium and we

could no longer afford the rent. Add to this a zero vacancy rate, and I think you would agree that it would be a very unwelcome and unpleasant experience to have to move.

We want people to move to Alberta to find jobs, to find a place to live, to pay taxes, and to become contributors to the Alberta advantage. We do not want some Albertans to have to leave because they cannot find a place to live. This type of departure would soon have a negative effect on our buoyant economy. Shelter is not only a basic human need; it's a basic human right. No able-bodied person who's a productive member of our society should be left homeless due to a lack of available rental accommodation.

Madam Speaker, I know that this is a difficult problem, one in which there are no easy answers, but I believe that secondary suites and boarding houses could help to form part of the solution, and that's why I've brought forth this motion. Some of us probably know someone with a basement suite, or a secondary suite as they're now called, in their home. In renting out their suite, homeowners are able to earn extra income towards their own mortgage, and in doing so, they also provide an affordable, low-cost alternative rental accommodation to lower income Albertans.

Many of us at one period of time in our lives have had the experience of renting a secondary suite, either as a university or college student or after leaving our parental home to enter the workforce and start a new life. Even today the basement suite is a common form of accommodation for many university students. But the reality, Madam Speaker, is that many of these basement or secondary suites are now illegal. Over the years implementation of municipal bylaws and changes to the Alberta building code have placed more and more stringent rules on secondary suites. While these changes were well intentioned and directed towards ensuring the safety and well-being of all occupants in a residential building, they have made many suites illegal.

To be considered legal in Edmonton, for example, a secondary suite must be constructed with a separate entrance, a separate forced-air heating system, additional fire wall separation, meet a specific basement ceiling height, and provide for one on-site parking stall. These restrictions make the development of a secondary suite costly for the homeowner and, as a result, difficult to justify economically. While ensuring that a suite meets the minimum height seems reasonable, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation estimates that it can cost upwards of \$40,000 to achieve the proper ceiling height in many of our post World War II homes. As a result, the added cost of developing a secondary suite means that the homeowner often decides that meeting the stringent requirements is too costly.

In cases where they decide to go ahead with the development, the costs associated are passed on to the tenants, which impacts on the affordability of the suite. Alternatively, a homeowner may choose to go ahead with developing the suite illegally, potentially placing the safety and health of all occupants of the house in jeopardy. Regardless of the outcome, the net result is that there is no net positive benefit for the rental market. Either the potential rental suite is not developed, or it is developed but is too costly to rent, or it is developed illegally and could be a potential health hazard.

Madam Speaker, existing suites are also subject to the same conditions. If existing suites are found to be illegal, the homeowner has the option of correcting it until it conforms or be faced with the prospect of being forced to remove the suite altogether. As a result, the illegal suites remain illegal, the potential suites are not developed, and the demand for affordable rental accommodation remains high. I believe that ensuring that health and safety are maintained is paramount for any community, but I also believe that secondary

suites can play a very positive role in addressing the critical lack of affordable rental accommodation across Alberta.

3:40

In Calgary estimates suggest that roughly 183,000 properties zoned as either R1 or R2 could be easily developed into suites. Just think: if only 1 percent of these properties were developed, that would put 1,830 low-cost rental units on the market. In my mind, this would be a good beginning and go a long way to help alleviate some of the pressures Calgary is currently experiencing.

How do we make this a reality? Where do we have to start? Well, in 1998 the city of St. Albert and the towns of Gibbons, Devon, and Morinville undertook a study of the issue of secondary suites within their communities. In their findings or recommendations they found that municipalities, if serious about introducing secondary suites into the rental mix within their communities, have a wide array of options that they could consider. In conjunction with revisiting their bylaws on secondary suite development, municipalities and the provincial government need to work together to re-examine the Alberta building code so that it makes sense. Strict adherence to the building code requirements in Alberta makes secondary suite development, especially in older, single-family homes, difficult and expensive. Municipalities and the Alberta government need to identify more pragmatic safety standards for secondary suites.

One particular option should be to try to better balance the goal of providing affordable housing through the legalization of secondary suites with ensuring that a lower but still acceptable standard of health and safety requirements is met. Another option would be to streamline the permit approval and the inspection and enforcement process, thereby making it less costly and easier for a homeowner to legalize their suite. Finally, municipalities could examine the possibility of providing an incentive to homeowners in the form of a special property tax exemption in exchange for registration and legalization of the suite. One thing is clear. Restrictions and regulations of secondary suites must be eased so that suites can be introduced into the rental market in as inexpensive, equitable, and simple a fashion as possible for the homeowner and the municipality.

Madam Speaker, in the course of preparing this motion, I researched how other jurisdictions regulate secondary suites. I found that in many jurisdictions they play a productive part in the rental market. Probably the best example is British Columbia. In conjunction with the British Columbia government amending the B.C. building code, the cities of Vancouver, New Westminster, and North Vancouver altered their municipal bylaws to permit the existence of secondary suites.

More specifically, the city of Vancouver regulates suites through conditional use. This means that they are permitted only in certain communities, and it also allows illegal suites to be phased out over a limited period of time. The city of New Westminster allows suites in all low-density residential areas through a density bonus system. This system allows a homeowner to construct an additional dwelling unit in exchange for adhering to detailed design and landscaping guidelines in conjunction with applying a restrictive covenant to the title of the property. Finally, the district of North Vancouver, while requiring certain criteria to be met – it must not be larger than 40 percent of the primary dwelling, must provide an off-street parking stall, and must meet provincial building code standards – is the least restrictive and allows suites in all low-density residential districts as a permitted use. These jurisdictions show that an inexpensive, equitable, and simple method based on certainty for both the homeowner and the municipality can be achieved, allowing secondary suites to become part of the rental marketplace.

At this point I'd like to acknowledge that some innovative work

is being done in Alberta on a pilot project basis. In McKenzie Towne in Calgary and Terwillegar Towne in Edmonton a special zoning bylaw has been implemented to allow new homeowners the opportunity to build suites above their garage. These suites can then be used by the homeowner as a granny flat for their parents, as a guest suite, or as rental accommodation. Unfortunately, the costs of developing these upscale suites, in addition to the cost of developing a new home, have deterred many homeowners from using the special bylaw exemption.

More needs to be done, and Motion 512 is an attempt at the beginning. The provincial government needs to work with all levels of government to encourage municipalities to find low-cost housing alternatives for low-income Albertans. Secondary suites offer a good inventory of potential rental accommodation. It's a quick, easy, and abundant solution. I personally know of many seniors who would love to rent their basement suite to a young couple or to a young person. The benefits to both are numerous. Perhaps in exchange for performing various duties and chores around the yard or the house, the seniors could offer their renters a lower rent. The senior homeowner benefits by being able to stay in their home and feeling secure, and they are also out of the long-term care system. The renter benefits by having access to a safe, clean, and affordable rental accommodation.

Secondary suites could also allow seniors who want to be close to their families that option. While maintaining some of their independence through their own apartment, seniors would be able to be close to their loved ones and enjoy their golden years, confident that the love, support, and care they need is nearby. Families could also benefit greatly. With their grandparents very close by, grandchildren would grow up benefiting from the wisdom and knowledge that only age can bring.

Madam Speaker, secondary suites and room-and-board housing are excellent resources to help meet the housing needs of many Albertans, and I would urge all members of this Assembly to support Motion 512.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This Motion 512 raises and addresses a really important issue. I've said to my colleagues numerous times that in Calgary-Buffalo, which is really the heart of that city, right downtown – those nine communities make up the inner-city part of Calgary – access to safe, affordable housing is the single biggest issue. I hear more about that from constituents than any other single issue, and that's been constant. That's been for at least the last three years. That continues to be . . . [interjection] Even more than organic eggs, hon. member.

It is a really significant problem, and I think it's clear that the Member for Calgary-Bow has decided that rather than address this huge range of challenges, issues, and problems, she's going to sever out one item and focus on that. I have great respect for the Member for Calgary-Bow. I get to as many of the conferences and sessions dealing with homelessness in Calgary as I can, and the Member for Calgary-Bow is at almost every one of these and often in a leadership position, so I acknowledge her work not just currently but over a period of time in terms of dealing with social housing. Having said that, I must say that I experience some frustration when I look at the motion. [interjections] Madam Speaker, I think I'm starting to lose. It shows you how fragile cross-party support is. In a minute and a half it starts dissipating.

Here is my concern. Madam Speaker, the concern I have is this. When I go to something like the Homelessness in Calgary search

conference 2, which was held March 24 and March 25 in the city of Calgary – and the Member for Calgary-Bow was there – or to the one that I think was two years ago, looking at solutions, and I look at the list of identified problems and those long lists of prospective solutions, you know what happens? You go to one of these conferences, and they sort of identify a range of issues. They get people identifying which are the priority areas, and they go off and work in those areas. I think of the issues that are identified. To focus on this one seems curious, because it's not anywhere near the top of the list. In fact, it's well, well down the list.

The other thing. I look at the reports from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Municipal Government Perspective on Housing, which I'd tabled a couple of months ago. I look at the report, actually, under that member's name, Community Action Plan, that was produced May 25, 1998. I look at the range of strategies and solutions. Why is it that the member has picked the one we have no legislative competence to deal with? You know, if you look at the motion, what it talks about is: "encourage municipal governments to investigate ways of adding low-cost housing units through changes in zoning bylaws." Well, you know that's the one thing we are not legislatively competent to deal with. That's the municipalities. As a result of changes to the Municipal Government Act, the municipalities have even more latitude, flexibility, and scope than they had before. So why would we focus our time in this Assembly on telling municipalities how to do their handling of the zoning differently?

3:50

I can tell you that not only the Member for Calgary-Bow has been at many of these meetings. Bob Hawkesworth, an alderman, co-chairs many of these things and is also at these conferences. I sat beside Joe Ceci, another alderman, at the last conference in Calgary in March. There's plenty of representation. Judy Bader from the city of Calgary attends these things, and Kay Wong. I mean, there's huge involvement by the city. Why don't we let the people from the municipal level of government solve the municipal jurisdictional issues? Why wouldn't we focus in this Assembly on the kinds of things that only the province can deal with?

I don't disagree that there's potential in terms of converting some of those single-family dwellings into multiple-family dwellings. I will concede that it might help to ameliorate the acute housing condition in cities like Calgary if we were able to have some secondary suites and room-and-board housing, but I'm going to suggest that maybe what we do is focus on what we have exclusive legislative competence to deal with.

You know, when you go through one of these sessions, like the Member for Calgary-Bow and I have been able to do, and you go through a needs analysis and identification of issues, what you quickly find out – people come up with action plans. What do we talk about? We talk about creating legislation, regulations, and policies supportive in developing low-cost rental housing. Certainly an element of this is municipal regulations, and that's exactly what the Member for Calgary-Bow has identified.

But if we go on a little further, why don't we talk about the things that only the provincial Legislature can deal with? The Alberta building code is something that we have authority to deal with. Although it was mentioned by the member, it's not what she has identified in her motion. She's still talking about zoning bylaws. I fully support looking at the Alberta building code to see how we can accommodate that.

These are the items identified in the Community Action Plan developed by the Homeless Initiative Ad Hoc Steering Committee in Calgary, May 25, 1998. I think the Member for Calgary-Bow

would agree that when we attended that one in March, many of the same themes continued. It's not like we're developing new perspectives on the problems so much; it's a question of trying to focus on some of the ones that have been often mentioned.

Some of the other things we need are to "establish funding mechanisms/resources for development of low cost rental housing." This has to do with property tax reductions for multi-residential complexes; GST credits; interest subsidies to reduce mortgage costs; Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation, AMFC, financing; capital sharing programs.

One of the great ironies is that this province, in their cost-cutting mode, savagely laid off every piece of publicly owned property they could find in the city of Calgary to sell, divest, dispose of. You know, when I went to a housing conference in Edmonton – I think it was two years ago . . .

MRS. SLOAN: Symposium.

MR. DICKSON: Symposium. Thank you, Edmonton-Riverview.

The interesting thing is that that was the time there was an outright crisis in Calgary. Edmonton was a long way from that, but this is where the provincial government, the then Minister of Municipal Affairs, decided to hold the housing conference, here. What I remember at the time was a lot of talk about joint ventures, and the minister will remember that. But, you know, the question is: what does the province put in as a partner? Well, one of the things they could put in is raw land, one of the things the province had owned. If we hadn't been so darn preoccupied with divesting this land and putting some dollars in the general revenue fund, we might have thought a little further and said, "Why don't we retain some of this land?" and then been able to enter into creative kinds of joint venture agreements with developers, that would help boost the supply of affordable land. I've never understood that.

We've got other kinds of things that have been identified. You know, the federal government came along. Claudette Bradshaw, after her two trips to Alberta and her report, did exactly what Art Smith and John Currie and the Calgary Housing Authority wanted: to come up with a funding envelope with \$750 million and, most importantly, to allow local creativity to determine how that funding was going to be applied. We're still waiting, Madam Speaker, to know exactly what the provincial contribution to that is going to be. Somebody suggested to me the last time we talked about this that we still haven't heard about federal government money in terms of federal government cheques being cut. I acknowledge that that may be a problem as well, but I think there's a lack of leadership we continue to see from the province, and most of the energy that I see around addressing homelessness is coming from the municipalities.

There's no municipality in Canada that's more proactive than the city of Calgary is. You know, it's not elected government that's providing the leadership. It's the Salvation Army. It's the Mustard Seed. It's Derm Baldwin, the drop-in centre. It's those agencies and that enormous synergy that's coming together that's frankly, I think, challenging governments to try and keep up, and I want to tell you, Madam Speaker, that I don't think we're doing that.

If you go through and look at the priority things we ought to be dealing with and have legislative competence to deal with, why wouldn't we consider one of the things that always comes up when I go to one of these sessions? People want to talk about what are generally identified as inadequate support systems. Supports for independence doesn't adequately meet the cost for that young single mother with two children trying to find an affordable place to live in Calgary. People on AISH in downtown Calgary have an enormous problem trying to live on the AISH pension, the assured income for

the severely handicapped. Mental health issues: we don't have enough mental health beds, never mind mental health community placements. Who has responsibility for that? The province of Alberta does, one hundred percent.

You know, I say to the Member for Calgary-Bow, through the chair: this member is, I think, universally respected in this Chamber, and I regret that she has not brought forward a motion that would allow us to trade on her goodwill and start addressing some of those issues about mental health dollars, mental health beds, mental health services. Why aren't we debating instead about increases to supports for independence for that young mother who comes totting a couple of children to my constituency office on a Friday afternoon, desperate for a place to live because she's been evicted in a mix-up with her landlord in the last place, so that this sort of crisis doesn't have to happen as frequently as it does in Calgary?

I think as you go through the list of things that are identified in terms of addictions programs, AADAC is a provincially funded agency. We have responsibility for that. We're talking about what AADAC would do differently.

Why aren't we addressing the fact that the 8th & 8th clinic in downtown Calgary went almost two years before we started to see the mental health services that had been promised as part of the initial package when the people in the inner city were presented with a proposal to shut down the excellent psychiatric facilities at both the Holy Cross and then the forensic mental health centre at the General hospital and the mental health beds there? We lost those, and there was inadequate access downtown.

What people talk about at these conferences, and this represents not just – you've got a couple of MLAs, a couple of aldermen. You've got people from serving agencies. You also have people who are part of the homeless community or the housing-in-crisis community, and they talk about meaningful education and training opportunities. Those of us who have the opportunity to work in inner-city areas – I suspect my colleague from Edmonton-Centre has similar experience – have lots of problems with people who are told that there are retraining and employment opportunities. They go down and they go through the government-sanctioned programs and spend the better part of a week learning how to write a resume when really what they're looking for is some marketable job skills. So we're not adequately addressing that need. That's provincially financed. That's one hundred percent the responsibility of provincial legislators.

4:00

The whole notion of supports for independence. Here's page 46 of the Strategic Direction from the Community Action Plan. This was the one that the Member for Calgary-Bow was co-chair of. We need to

- establish higher rates for Supports for Independence (SFI) and Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH).

- Link benefit rates to cost of living changes.

- Develop a set of regional allowances that reflect market rates for decent, safe, suitable housing on the open market.

- Designate additional facilities for hard-to-house individuals who would then receive additional support benefits . . .

- Increase earnings exemptions for benefit recipients from \$115 to \$225 per month per household.

- Implement a more flexible policy for allocation of employment related expenses.

- Promote incentives which create employment opportunities.

Transportation is a huge issue in terms of those people who are in a housing crisis. Now what we have – if you happen to know aldermen in the city of Calgary, they get a batch of free transit passes and they'll share those, but the transit passes go to only a

fraction of the people that need transportation to be able to get to job interviews and try to find employment.

I know the Member for Calgary-Bow – this isn't for her benefit because she knows all this stuff. She authored the report. My question is why we have arguably the weakest residential tenancy legislation in the country. You know, I've had so many workshops in my constituency. I've gone to more apartment buildings than I can think of to meet with residents when they're upset about a rent increase. Many of these people come from other jurisdictions, and I'm trying to explain to them that in Alberta, as long as you don't raise the rent more than twice in a calendar year, you can raise it 40 percent each time.

We've seen in Calgary, with a huge number of units being condominiumized and a lot of units just being taken out of circulation, lots of people being displaced. We don't have, at least in my view, adequate tenancy protection. Now, that's a provincial responsibility. We're the only ones that can change that. The city council can't do anything about that. The federal government can't do anything about it. Why aren't we talking about that? Why aren't we addressing that? You know, I look through the government's legislative program. We're getting to the end of the spring session, maybe not as early as some would like and maybe too early for some of us, but we're getting to the end. I'm looking through the program, and I'm not seeing a lot of legislative initiative. I don't see any legislative initiative that's going to address the housing problem for people living in my constituency.

Part of the problem now is seniors, because our income threshold levels are too low for the Alberta seniors' benefit program. That's been apparent since the program first came in, and the government's answer is: you put a little more dough in the special assistance fund. You know, Madam Speaker, that's not working. It's not working. What happens is that the cutoff point where we start to see the peel back on the Alberta seniors' benefit is just unrealistically low, and that becomes a really significant problem.

Now, Madam Speaker, I could go on. The reports I've got in front of me are voluminous, but I'd refer members – if you look, there's a particularly good one, the municipal government perspective on housing put out by the Federation of Calgary – of Canadian Municipalities. Calgary has not yet taken over the country; it's only a notion some of us have.

The Community Action Plan put out by an ad hoc steering committee in Calgary is excellent. I encourage people to read the government of Canada news release that came out December 17, 1999, that talks about a number of the things that Claudette Bradshaw has identified as things that have to be done. There are some excellent Community Action Plan bulletins put out by the city of Calgary and the Calgary Homeless Foundation. Most of all, I encourage members to go down and talk to John Currie, the chair of the Calgary Homeless Foundation, and look at *A Vision for Calgary: Social Housing*, the plan prepared by the Calgary Regional Planning Committee, January 2000, because we have in this material a host of things that we can do that would provide more information.

Then we have the most curious document of all, and that's the government of Alberta report of Community Development on family and special purpose housing. This is a report called *Policy Framework: Homelessness*. In contrast to the other ones that are meaty, that are detailed, that are substantial, this thing is light in weight and it's empty in content. This is not my idea of leadership.

So can we not redirect the energy, the excellent efforts of the Member for Calgary-Bow in the areas where we're actually going to be able to make a meaningful difference, within the legislative competence of the province?

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have to respond most specifically to the previous speaker from Calgary-Buffalo. Contrary to what he thinks, there's more to Alberta than Calgary, and many of us have some interest in how programs are delivered. As he was berating the initiative proposed here by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow with respect to this motion, I was reminded of a situation that happened when I was teaching years ago.

A student came into my class and said that she was interested in collecting some toiletries for a women's shelter downtown in the city where I was teaching. She took the suggestion to her homeroom teacher, and her homeroom teacher berated her for not looking after the needs that were within the jurisdiction of the school, so by the time she was finished, she was most discouraged about any initiative that she had proposed. I daresay that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has done just exactly that with his derision of this motion, because I think it is an initiative that has great value. I had to say that, simply because while his concerns are legitimate about other issues, I feel that this particular motion does address a particular issue that I find in my own community as well. So I'm pleased to rise this afternoon, Madam Speaker, and to speak in support of Motion 512, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

The intention of Motion 512 is "to encourage municipal governments to investigate ways of adding low-cost housing units . . . such as secondary suites and room-and-board housing in residential neighbourhoods." I emphasize the words "to encourage municipalities," because I believe our role from the provincial perspective is to work in partnership with municipalities in the work they are engaged in. We have the same constituents whom we are here to serve.

Madam Speaker, this is an excellent idea, one that I wholeheartedly support. It is also a timely motion that raises several important issues for our government, for municipal governments, and I say for the people of Alberta. Shelter is a fundamental human need. For lower income Albertans, finding adequate low-cost housing that fits within their limited budget has become increasingly more of a challenge in recent years. While our economy is strong and unemployment is the lowest it has been in many, many years, more and more people are moving to Alberta every year. Some have their jobs transferred from other parts of Canada, and others come in search of work or a better life for their families. These positive benefits are what our strong economy has produced.

As more and more people have moved to Alberta and entered the workforce, rental vacancies across the province have dropped significantly in the past few years. Cities like Fort McMurray, Sylvan Lake, Lethbridge, High River, Brooks, Red Deer, and Canmore have next to zero vacancy rates. Calgary and Edmonton are experiencing some of the lowest vacancy rates in the past 10 years. Once affordable housing has become unaffordable for some. Rents have increased in areas that were traditionally considered to be low-cost housing in Calgary, with much of it being converted to higher income, upscale housing. In the process lower income renters have been displaced and because of the low vacancy rates have had a difficult time finding housing.

4:10

This past January I had the opportunity to review some of the information put together by the city of St. Albert on poverty within our community. The data, among many other things, provides insight into the challenges that many lower income Albertans face. For example, in 1996 the average Alberta income was \$58,000, and the average income for low-income or poor families was \$14,500.

In St. Albert the average family income was \$70,000, while the average income among poor families was \$16,697. The average shelter cost for poor people in Alberta was found to be about \$555, while it was found to be \$675, or \$8,100 per year, in St. Albert. So after paying rent in St. Albert, a lone-parent family earning minimum wage has \$534 left over to spend on food, clothing, and other necessities. The study also found that 66 percent of renters spent 30 percent or more of household income on shelter costs.

Madam Speaker, clearly, access to alternative low-cost housing would make a difference to these low-income families. I see Motion 512 as a positive first step, an initial attempt to address the present lack of affordable housing in Alberta. I hope the discussion that we have in this House can help contribute towards that situation.

Having said this, I know a solution to this problem will not be easy. All levels of government – federal, provincial, and municipal – need to work together if progress is to be made. We will need to work with municipalities to find ways to remove impediments to development and unnecessary regulation that restricts the ability of a homeowner to convert home spaces into suites. Above all else, municipalities must ensure that their zoning bylaws permit a full range of housing alternatives that make economic sense from one end of the spectrum to the other.

I, too, receive phone calls in my constituency office from individuals who want to address this issue of housing and in particular low-income housing. I don't know about others, but certainly the information, the data, and the anecdotal situations that are relayed to me in my constituency office I share with my local municipality.

Currently within Alberta, municipal bylaws make it next to impossible for homeowners to develop a secondary suite within their dwellings. Minimum and maximum size and height restrictions often exceed most typical post World War II homes. Estimates by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation suggest that bringing the ceiling height in a post World War II home into compliance can cost upwards of \$40,000. As a result, the cost of compliance to municipal bylaws either causes a homeowner not to develop a secondary suite, or if they proceed with the development, all associated costs are then passed on to the renter, thereby reducing the affordability of the accommodation.

Madam Speaker, municipalities need to examine their zoning bylaws to ensure that they make sense and reflect the realities of the rental market. With the knowledge that it costs upward of \$40,000 to bring a ceiling height into compliance, perhaps we should rethink that height restriction and enact a height restriction that is more in line with average ceiling height in most postwar homes. To do so would not only make it easier to develop new suites, but it would make it easier for existing illegal suites to be legalized.

In the face of rental pressures such as those we're experiencing in our province today, people should not have to worry about whether they are breaking the law when they could be making a positive contribution by making their suite available to someone in need of adequate shelter. There are many examples of how secondary suites can play a positive role in the rental market. They offer young Albertans an affordable low-cost alternative. Young families could utilize them as nanny suites, allowing their childcare provider to live with them full-time. First-time homeowners could use rental income to meet their mortgage payments, perhaps in the process paying their mortgage down quicker.

I also remember a time when secondary suites, or granny flats as we used to call them, were a common feature in most houses in my neighbourhood. Granny flats provided seniors the chance to live close to family and loved ones in a safe and secure environment while maintaining a degree of their personal independence. With their families close by in case of emergency, seniors were also

afforded the chance to see their grandchildren on a daily basis and to play a more active role in their lives. Over the years this kind of housing situation has faded, but with Motion 512, which I believe is an excellent initiative, we have a chance to revisit the usefulness of a granny-flat type situation. As we look at the demographics of our population, it becomes evident that it may be a housing alternative that may gain popular appeal, prompted by desire or necessity.

MRS. SLOAN: Granny?

MRS. O'NEILL: We did call them granny flats, and in fact in the real estate industry we still refer to them as that, although the demographics and the sandwich-family situation we encounter is something that we are speaking about, certainly for those who are legitimately concerned about how to find low-cost affordable housing.

As is widely known, over the next 20 or 30 years the total population and the age composition of Albertans will change dramatically. By 2028 our population will be almost 4 million people, and the baby-boom generation will range between 62 to 82 years of age. To accommodate this population, estimates suggest that an additional 600,000 dwellings will need to be added to Alberta's housing inventory. Apartments will need to increase by 59 percent, or roughly 110,000 units, of which 49 percent will be rentals.

Since low-income Albertans are more likely to rent and with the baby-boom generation making the transition to a fixed income while moving out of their homes into retirement accommodation, secondary suites would make a positive contribution to ensuring that adequate and I'd say cost-efficient housing is available. Instead of building new housing, existing structures could be converted to accommodate these needs and the needs of individuals who are looking for independent living within the context of a larger household. Instead of vacating their homes, baby boomers could convert their basement into a secondary suite either for themselves, for their children, for individual students, or for individual adults who wish to maintain their own accommodation. Lower income Albertans would also have access to safe, affordable housing that is centrally located and accessible.

Motion 512 offers us this opportunity to meet some of the many challenges – granted, the very legitimate challenges – that we're facing today in the rental housing market. It does not address all of them, but it does respond to what I hear in my constituency from a number of people who want to live in suites and to live in legitimate suites within current households. It's also, I believe, a very forward-thinking proposal that provides us with the added flexibility to meet probable future needs. As the demographics of our population change, we will be able to meet these changes.

Madam Speaker, I support Motion 512. It is one initiative meant to address ways in which we can look to accommodating, literally in our current housing, that kind of accommodation that individuals are looking for. I would suggest that the negative attitude I am hearing from across the floor be tempered, because quite frankly this is a very positive initiative that is being taken by the Member for Calgary-Bow.

Thank you.

4:20

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Madam Speaker. Once again I'm just under the time line here, and I'm aware that Edmonton-Riverview very much wanted to say a few words, so I will try and condense my

20 minutes down to 10. I'm speaking to Motion 512, which, paraphrasing it, is essentially recommending that municipal governments allow for additional low-cost housing units by changing municipal zoning bylaws to allow things like nanny suites and basement suites and other kinds of alternate low-cost housing.

Certainly housing is a real issue in Edmonton-Centre. We have mostly apartments there, and a lot of them have been converted to condominiums, which has taken a large number of units out of the rental market. With the rental market in Alberta heating up overall, there has now been a move by owners of apartment buildings to upgrade and put some money into them and then re-rent their apartments at a higher rate. They've spent a lot of years bidding their time with the lower rates. Now they're able to charge higher rents and of course would like to do so, but that has caused a lot of hardship. We have fewer units available both through the converting to condominiums and also with the rising rental market.

Also, the issues of individuals. I mean, we have some people working at minimum wage here, and as we know, unless you're working two or three minimum-wage jobs, you're not making enough money to keep body and soul together. There are a number of people in Edmonton-Centre on social assistance or AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, or on disability pensions from workers' compensation. By far the largest group of individuals is seniors who are on fixed incomes, many of them at the minimum level, with old age security and the guaranteed income supplement and in some cases the Alberta seniors' benefit, because many of them in fact didn't have an opportunity to contribute to the Canada pension plan and therefore can't pull from it or don't get very much coming back from it. So homelessness is a real issue in Edmonton-Centre.

How can that be addressed? There's one project I want to highlight very briefly, and that's the Arts Habitat project in downtown Edmonton. Now, the city of Edmonton really took strong initiatives here in trying to create more housing units in downtown Edmonton some time ago and offered a variety of initiatives, including a cash incentive to developers that were creating new units. Now, I'll admit up front that those are mostly units that were sold, condominiums in essence, but there also was at the same time a project called ArtsHab, which is a partnership between the provincial government, the business sector, and the municipality, with a lot of other support agencies lending support around this.

What they did was use a building that was owned by the private sector that they were having trouble renting. It had been empty for a long time, and nothing much was happening with it. Working with some grants they received from the provincial government and assistance through zoning bylaws and I think a bit of money from the municipal government plus a lot of donated goods and services from the retail sector, they were able to take the entire top floor of a warehouse-type building and create 12 live/work spaces for artists right in downtown Edmonton. That was 12 new spaces, and that's definitely low-cost housing. Artists, as many in here should know, do not make a large income.

This was a really innovative partnership and one I'd like to see continue and develop more spaces. I think that kind of three-way or more than three-way partnership between levels of government, the private sector, and the voluntary sector can address a lot of problems and bring a lot of expertise into the arena that is dealing with issues of low vacancy rates, homelessness, how much money people have to pay, a thriving economy. All of those issues have to be dealt with. You can't just hive off one little section of it.

So I recommend strongly that this government take seriously the issue of housing, the availability of low-cost and social housing, particularly as it applies to seniors who wish to be independent. I

understand exactly what the Member for Calgary-Bow has done in recommending that the municipalities look – it's a very specific thing that she's recommending. I know it would be of assistance if it's carried through.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on the motion under consideration.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:26 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Haley	Severtson
Blakeman	Herard	Shariff
Broda	Hlady	Stelmach
Calahasen	Jacques	Stevens
Cao	Klapstein	Strang
Cardinal	Kryczka	Tannas
Coutts	Laing	Taylor
Dickson	Lougheed	Thurber
Ducharme	Magnus	Trynchy
Fischer	Massey	West
Forsyth	McFarland	Woloshyn
Friedel	Melchin	Yankowsky
Fritz	O'Neill	Zwozdesky
Graham	Renner	

Against the motion:

Sapers	Sloan	White
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Totals	For – 41	Against – 3
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 512 carried]

4:40

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 73(1) regarding bills receiving three separate readings on different days to accommodate second reading consideration for Bill 25 on the same day as its introduction.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Bill 25

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice it's my pleasure to move Bill 25, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000, for second reading.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Madam Speaker. A couple of observations. Bill 25 by convention is a bill that's dealt with in a unique fashion in the sense that the bill is put to the opposition in draft form with the invitation to review it, and if there are any matters in it that we take issue with, those items are excised, or removed, from the bill. We followed that protocol again this year.

The criteria used by the opposition have been whether it's contentious, whether it's opposed by anybody who would be affected by the legislation. This year we've actually done better than past years in the sense that government ministers have provided – I'm not sure I can say in each and every case but in most of the major cases the opposition appreciates that we've had more opportunity to review the elements of the miscellaneous statutes bill than has typically been the case before. I want to specifically thank the Minister of Justice, the Government House Leader, and those cabinet ministers who in fact shared with us in a very timely way what they're proposing to do by way of miscellaneous statutes.

Now, there are some items that are not going forward in the bill, and I'd simply say to those people interested in those amendments that are not included in here that it doesn't always mean that the opposition would oppose them coming forward in a stand-alone bill but that some things are more appropriately dealt with in a separate bill and not lumped in. One of the problems with miscellaneous statutes is that a lot of Albertans don't pay any attention to this. The problem is that when you have a dozen different elements to it, it doesn't attract the attention that it does when it comes in with a separate bill title and so on. So I wanted to make that observation.

I want to specifically thank Peter Pagano, the Chief Legislative Counsel for the Department of Justice, who once again in his usual courteous and competent fashion has worked with the opposition in terms of identifying issues and concerns and taking steps to find answers where we have had questions and to address the concerns that Albertans have raised and reflected through the opposition. I say, as I do every year when I look at miscellaneous statutes, that this comes closer to being a model of constructive lawmaking. You know, it wouldn't hurt to extend some of this sense of co-operation, the early viewing in draft form, with the opposition. It can work. Every year miscellaneous statutes is an example of that.

The only other thing I'd just like to do on behalf of my colleagues is thank the stakeholders, the people directly affected – for example, the Law Society; the different health organizations, health disciplines, and health professions that have provided some great briefings to members of my caucus; the Alberta College of Art & Design – groups that have gone to some lengths to ensure that all legislators in both the government caucus and the opposition caucus were informed in terms of what was proposed and why. It made it easy, I think, for my colleagues to support those changes.

So with that I look forward to the vote on Bill 25, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I also would like to make just a few comments with respect to the miscellaneous statutes this year, particularly in relation to two sections, the sections relating to the Child and Family Services Authorities Act and the Health Professions Act.

The proposed amendments to the Child and Family Services Authorities Act relate to the provision of financial assistance for the

care of children who are not living with their parents or guardians and who are not in need of protective services under the Child Welfare Act. In the discussions which I had with the Ministry of Children's Services relative to this change, the commitment was given that the provision of this program in a comprehensive and accessible form would be maintained by the child and family services authorities, as this amendment in essence delegates that responsibility to the services authorities to provide.

Utilization of this program or authorization of access to this program has been declining in recent years under this government's tenure. We have not been able to identify completely the reasons for that, whether they are policy reasons. From indications in other levels it would seem that the number of children that may be in a position to require this assistance is on the increase. In this respect I am taking the authorities at their word that these programs will continue to be offered to children in need and am therefore supporting the incorporation of this amendment in the act.

My comments relative to the Health Professions Act. As all members will recall, we just debated this legislation not even a year ago in this Assembly. I find it frustrating and to a degree insulting that legislation that is of such a substantive nature would be brought forward, crammed through a session of debate, and then subsequent to that, Madam Speaker, we find ourselves with quite extensive changes being brought forward in miscellaneous statutes. Now, at the same time, we're having regulations being written for that particular piece of legislation. It's quite a large process, requiring the commitment and efforts and resources from a number of organizations to do that.

Really, I think the public in a large part is kept in the dark when the construction of regulations and legislation is approached in such a fragmented way. So I would encourage and support the government to attempt to be more comprehensive to reduce their utilization of miscellaneous statutes and try, when legislation is in its initial stages of construction, to incorporate as many of the provisions required as possible.

With those thoughts, Madam Speaker, I'm prepared to conclude my comments. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, do you wish to conclude debate?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Yeah, I would agree with calling the question at this stage. I have no concluding comments.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a second time]

4:50

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 18

Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill?

The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Yes, Madam Chairman. I'd like to make a few comments to the committee on Bill 18, a bill that will certainly be

well received by the people of Alberta over the next couple of years.

It's time, Madam Chairman, to stop posturing. It's time to stop punishing Albertans for having a good education, for getting a better job, for taking the initiative to get ahead. It's time to stop taxing thousands and thousands of Albertans on lower incomes that shouldn't be taxed. It's time to stop cheating working single parents with a family or double-parent incomes, time to stop punishing them for making choices on how they raise their children. It's time to delink from the federal government. It's time to stop bracket creep. It's time to stop the brain drain and get on with building Alberta. It's time to make Bill 18 law.

There's no downside to this bill. There are no trade-offs. There's no bad with this good. It's all upside, all good news for everyone. Albertans at every income level will pay less personal income tax under Bill 18. Just as the Liberals suspected, there are a few exceptions, 190,000 of them to be exact; 190,000 Albertans will not pay provincial income tax. That will grow. That's the estimate on the '99 census, but as the province grows, those numbers will go up. Because of Bill 18 approximately 190,000 lower income Albertans will not have their personal provincial income tax reduced; their taxes will be eliminated altogether.

In Alberta we believe that there is enough of a burden on people with modest incomes who are working so hard to provide for themselves and their families. They don't need the burden of income tax on top of everything else. Unfortunately, this concept is still relatively foreign at the federal level. Albertans, like all Canadians, must pay about two-thirds, 62 percent, of their taxes to the federal government.

On the bright side Bill 18 will mean a lot to all kinds of Alberta families. All families will be taxed equitably, regardless of whether one or both parents work. Under the current system the spousal exemption is far lower than the basic personal exemption, and the effect is that one-worker families pay more tax. That's not fair. Bill 18 raises the spousal exemption to the same level as the basic personal exemption, so two families with the same income will be taxed approximately the same amount, even though family A has only one income earner and family B has two. The playing field will be leveled.

MRS. SLOAN: For single parents too?

DR. WEST: Single parents, as somebody said over here, will be able to use their first child as their spousal deduction.

Switching from brackets to a single rate and indexing the system adds full inflation-proofing. Cost-of-living raises, which are used to offset inflation, will no longer push people into higher brackets, where the extra cash is taxed at a higher rate. So the cost-of-living raise can finally be used to its fullest extent in fighting inflation. Indexing the basic and spousal exemptions will be particularly beneficial to low- and middle-income earners such as seniors on fixed incomes. The savings from inflation-proofing account for a greater proportion of their income than those with higher incomes, but higher income earners will also benefit.

As you know, Bill 18 means a single rate, no brackets, and without brackets there can be no bracket creep. All taxpayers, including higher income earners, will be taxed by Alberta at the same rate. They will no longer have to worry about the shrinking value of their next dollar. The Alberta tax man won't be taking more and more of every dollar they earn.

In Ontario they've made tax changes, too, but instead of eliminating brackets, they've just played around with them. They still have five brackets. Once Bill 18 becomes law, the same senior manager making \$90,300 will pay about \$540 less in taxes if he works in

Alberta than he would if he worked in Ontario. So it's safe to say that they won't be leaving Alberta to go to Ontario. Far from losing people here, you must understand, Alberta's population has grown a great deal. Last year enough people moved to Alberta from other provinces to fill a city the size of Spruce Grove. This is how the Alberta advantage works in Canada, and now Bill 18 will also help us plug the brain drain, those people that are going to the United States to escape the heavy taxation in Canada.

The single rate means that those who work harder will be allowed to get ahead, and they won't have to go to the States to do that, as I said. When workers and businesspeople get the rewards they deserve, they work harder. When they work harder, they stimulate the economy, and when the economy is stimulated, it creates more opportunities for hard workers. It's the upward spiral to prosperity. The benefits seem to grow exponentially at a certain point. That is good news for Alberta's economy, and what is good news for the economy is good news for everybody else. Remember that the studies showed that by bringing in this single rate and removing \$1.3 billion from the tax levels, we will see probably in the next five years 30,000 new jobs with this economic growth and probably 1 and a half percent in GDP growth just because of this tax cut.

Madam Chairman, I'd like to introduce at this time some amendments to Bill 18. I would like those distributed at the present time. These amendments I would like considered as a package. There are two parts. I would like them considered as a package, A and B put together. As these are being distributed, I'll continue. These are simple amendments. They will remove the 11 percent single rate and replace it with 10 and a half percent and will also take the allowances, the spousal allowance and the individual allowance, from \$11,620 to \$12,900.

At a single rate of 10.5 with increased basic and spousal exemptions, a two-income, two-children family earning \$40,000 will pay about \$261 in provincial tax, or .7 percent of their income. These examples I'm going to use show the progressivity of this tax rather than, as some have said in this House, that it's regressive. The same family that I just talked about, a two-income, two-children family earning \$100,000, will pay almost 23 times as much in income taxes, or 6 percent of their income, 23 times that of the lower income person. The family at \$250,000 will pay about 83 times as much, or \$21,615, in provincial income taxes, which is 8 and a half percent of their income. Those that say that this is not a progressive tax are out to lunch.

Now, we've made two adjustments in these amendments. We lowered the single rate to 10 and a half from 11 percent, and we increased the exemptions further, from \$11,620 to \$12,900. What does this mean? This represents a 78 percent increase from the current basic exemption of \$7,231 – can you imagine: a 78 percent increase – and a whopping 110 percent increase over the current spousal exemption of \$6,140. As in the original plan, with these amendments the exemptions are indexed so that taxable income doesn't grow faster than inflation.

Everyone will save on this. It will no longer be a tax on tax. It's a tax on income. Senior citizens, single-parent families, two-parent families, single Albertans, businesspeople, and workers in every section of the economy will benefit from this. These savings will also cut across all levels of income. Low-income earners will save, high-income earners will save, and the middle class will also see significant savings. Remember, of course, that 72 percent of the people in the province of Alberta live in a family environment, raising children and working to the end of seeing a better life; single people in the province paying taxes, about 22 percent. Altogether we will cut \$1.3 billion in savings for Albertans. That's a lot of money, no matter what you say.

5:00

There are two ways that this will come into place. The first will be in the '99-2000 budget. Right now a part of this is the 8 percent surtax being dealt with, the deficit elimination tax, which accounts for about \$852 million. The additional \$431 million is money not spent yet or even earmarked for other purposes. We're confident that we don't need this fund for ongoing programming, but it will kick in January 1, 2000. At that same time the .5 percent surtax that was in before will be incorporated in the \$1.3 billion. This year, right now, about \$144 million, or the 8 percent surtax that was put in place for deficit elimination, is being removed as we speak.

Now, I think there will be a lot of debate on this over the period of time, but what I would like to do now, if the House will indulge, is to give you some living examples of how people are going to save under this program. I would like, as I go through them, for people to reflect on their own families and people that they know throughout the province, whether they be seniors or whether they be low-income families. Just perhaps close your eyes and start dreaming of what this actually means to somebody that's not making the salaries that are being made by people in this Assembly but people that are on low-income supporting two children.

Ron has been working as a staff reporter for the *Edmonton Journal* for the past eight years. He earns \$50,816 in salary and taxable benefits and contributes \$1,560 to the company's pension plan. His wife, Elaine, is a part-time cashier at Safeway making \$12,000 a year. Together they have a three-year-old daughter, Erin, and claim \$5,400 in child care expenses. This family will see their taxes reduced by over \$1,100 between '99 and the year 2001.

Doug and Shannon are married with two children. Shannon stays at home with the kids. Doug works as a manual labourer in Grande Prairie. He is struggling to support his family on \$26,700 per year. In 1999 Doug paid \$1,065 in provincial income tax. This government did not think this was fair, so I'm proud to say that Doug and Shannon will not pay any provincial income tax in 2001. In fact, as a result of the Alberta family employment tax credit, that was brought in in 1997, they will receive a cheque of \$932 from this government. That's a net position change of \$1,932.

Jordan just graduated from college, and he is now a risk management software developer with a major Calgary company. Jordan's starting salary was \$46,000 per year, but he also earned a \$5,000 bonus for his work on an important project. The company where Jordan works gives all of their employees a full-benefits package. In 2001 Jordan will pay \$3,851 in provincial income tax, a total savings of \$563.

Alex is a 75-year-old who earns \$3,000 per year from his art hobby, \$16,000 in a private pension income, and receives old age security. Alex also has a medical expense of \$3,500 per year. As a result of moving to a single-rate tax, Alex will pay \$460 less in 2001 than he paid in 1999.

Reuben is an accountant at a Medicine Hat accounting firm earning \$54,000 per year. He has a 17-year-old daughter. He earned \$2,600 from his investments and contributed \$10,000 to his RRSPs and had half his Alberta health insurance premiums paid by the company where he works. In 1999 Reuben paid \$3,342 in provincial income tax. In 2001 Reuben will pay only \$1,972 in provincial income tax. He saves \$1,370.

Hal is a manager at a data service company. He earns \$74,000 a year and contributes \$870 per month towards an RRSP. His wife, Linda, stays at home with their two children: Matt, who is 17, and Jodie, who is 19 and attends the University of Calgary. Jodie transfers his tuition and his education amounts to his father. In 1999 Hal paid \$5,178 in provincial income tax, but in 2001 Hal will pay only \$3,290, a savings of \$1,888. If you don't think that's signifi-

cant when you're trying to send two children to university, then you don't know much about economy.

Ely is assistant manager at a farm equipment distribution company earning \$36,000 per year. He contributes \$170 per month to the pension plan where he works. In 1999 Ely paid \$2,221 in provincial income tax. In 2001 this will be reduced by \$247.

Tasha is a single parent. Here you are. You asked about a single parent. Listen up. She has \$400 per year in child care expenses for her nine-year-old son, Tim. Tasha is a librarian in Red Deer earning \$41,000 per year and contributes \$1,917 to the pension fund of the library where she works. In addition, the library pays half of her Alberta health care premium. In 1999 Tasha paid \$2,397 in provincial income tax. In 2001 she will pay only \$1,256, a savings – and here's a single mother raising her nine-year-old son – of \$1,141.

Caroline works as an agricultural loans officer in Lethbridge. Her husband, George, is an assistant warden at the local correctional facility. Their combined income is \$111,305, including \$1,305 in taxable benefits. He contributes \$4,200 to a government pension plan and supplements with an \$800 annual RRSP contribution. She contributes a total of \$5,900 in pensions and RRSPs. They have three children, aged 10, 12, and 13, and claim \$2,800 in child care expenses. In 1999 this family paid \$8,016 in provincial income tax. In 2001 they will pay \$7,031, a savings of \$985. That is significantly less savings than the single parent with her nine-year-old son. You don't think this is a progressive-type tax? Then you're not reading the facts.

Now, I have a couple more minutes. I would like to go to some senior examples, some new ones that we have. Gordon is an 86 year old living in a house in Onoway. He makes \$18,500 per year in a private pension income and receives old age security. In 1999 Gordon paid \$1,033 in provincial income tax. In 2001 he'll pay \$644, a savings of \$380. Many seniors used to write me and complain if there was a cheque difference of \$3 between our supplement and when we deducted off the feds, so \$380 is a lot to Gordon.

Andreas is an 84-year-old senior living in a seniors' home in Banff. It is very expensive in Banff. He has a private pension income of \$28,000 per year and receives old age security. Andreas has medical expenses of \$2,440. In 1999 Andreas paid \$1,897 in provincial income tax. He will only pay \$1,590 in 2001.

Doreen is a 78-year-old senior living in her own house in Fairview. Doreen has \$24,000 in private pension income and receives old age security. She makes \$500 in donations and has a \$1,500 medical expense. In 2001 Doreen will pay \$1,134 in provincial tax, a total of \$272 less than she paid in 1999. These are significant savings for people who are on these types of fixed incomes.

Now, Madam Chairman, I could go on. There are hundreds of examples, but I want to say that in a little while we'll be putting up on the web site of Treasury a calculator that can be used by Albertans if they come in on our web site. They'll be able to punch in all their own figures, their contributions, and their deductions, and then they'll be able to figure out for themselves their own tax. I'm looking forward to what Albertans think once they see that.

5:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I welcome debate from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, we will deem this amendment A1.

Go ahead, Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It certainly is time indeed that there was some really meaningful tax reform in this province, that we stopped posturing, that we stopped

pretending, that we stopped simply talking about tax reform and got on with it.

Madam Chairman, during second reading debate on Bill 18 many members of the Official Opposition put on record in some detail the difficulties with the flat tax, with the single-rate tax. It is just self-evident that if you have a single-rate tax, you will provide some relief to people at the bottom end of the taxpaying scale. You will provide considerable relief to the people at the top end of the taxpaying scale, and as a result of providing that benefit to those individuals at the end points, you must, by definition, be shifting the burden into the middle. We made many, many examples and put that on the record many times.

Madam Chairman, what I find remarkable about what we just heard is that this government is no longer talking about the miracle that a single-rate tax is in their own minds. Instead of them defending their flat tax, which we believe of course is not defensible, they have now been saying that this is absolutely a progressive tax. Talk about through-the-looking-glass tax policy. They've turned around, changed their tune, because they know that their arguments about the flat tax are built on a house of cards. They are trying to borrow the language and the arguments of progressivity to sell what is essentially a bad deal for middle-income Albertans.

Now, with all of the other examples that the Provincial Treasurer just provided, he didn't, for example, talk about a cabinet minister named Steve, who's earning \$101,943 a year, who will get by the year 2004 a 20.1 percent tax cut. However, a clerk working in that cabinet minister's department, who may be earning \$45,000 a year, will receive a tax cut of only 10.6 percent. So Steve saves over \$2,300 on his \$101,000 income, but those employees who slaved for Steve will save barely \$400, Madam Chairman. So that is what we have as a difference, as a stark contrast in this government.

This government's definition of fair is that those who make the most should also save the most, and they're doing it, not only through their flat tax but through their selective tax reduction on the deficit elimination taxes. They're doing it on the fuel rebate calculation based on property value taxes. So, Madam Chairman, they've certainly made their choices that this government wants to make friends with the wealthiest Albertans. Those of us who live in the day-to-day world will have to go elsewhere looking for tax relief.

Even the news release, Madam Chairman, that the government handed out earlier today, where they bragged that there is some considerable benefit to the amendments that were just tabled, if you read the small print – and it's always about small print with this government – you read that the calculations are based on information available as of May 16, they claim. So I wonder whether or not these calculations presented are as accurate as some of the defences made in Bill 11. Do the calculations presented in today's news release, for example, fully factor in the changes in Saskatchewan? I don't think they do on my initial calculation.

Many other provinces have gone through the exercise of getting rid of bracket creep and of delinking. You don't have to impose a single rate which hurts the middle-income taxpayer in order to do that. Ontario was able to delink and index. Saskatchewan has as well.

For example, in Saskatchewan the 2000 budget calls for tax brackets of \$35,000, between \$35,000 and \$100,000, and over \$100,000 with rates of 11, 13, and 15 percent respectively. The personal exemptions and spousal exemptions are increased, and they are also introducing a new child exemption credit at 11 percent of up to \$2,500 per child. All of that is being done, Madam Chairman, to accomplish the same purposes that this government claims they can only accomplish with a single rate, and I ask again whether or not the information in this press release tells the whole story or whether it shaves the truth, as we so often see from this particular government.

There are other alternatives, Madam Chairman. For example, the Alberta Liberals put out an alternative model showing that you can have multiple progressive rates with a high personal exemption and give a much flatter tax saving distribution, and you could change those rates. For example, if you take a look at an alternative that was proposed by Professor McMillan from the University of Alberta, he suggests, for example, that with increased personal exemptions and income tax bracket rates set at \$37,146 and \$74,305, by the year 2001 you could have tax rates in Alberta set out at 7.07 percent, 9.98 percent, and 12.05 percent and provide, once again, a much fairer distribution of those tax savings. So it is very clear that there are a number of alternatives, and we don't have to buy into this flat tax or this single-rate rhetoric that we hear coming from the government.

I'm happy to see that the government has taken some action to take full advantage of the federal tax reforms. It's clearly not enough, but Albertans will at least get some benefit from the federal tax cuts as a result of what this government is proposing, but there is a better way to provide these same benefits, Madam Chairman.

Before I move on in my debate, I have to ask the Acting Provincial Treasurer another question. In his rather grand style while he was introducing his amendments, he mentioned studies. He said that studies will indicate that there will be some 30,000 jobs created as a result of these tax cuts and, I believe he said, a 1.5 percent growth in the GDP attributed solely to this tax policy package. Well, I would like to challenge that Provincial Treasurer to table those studies in the Assembly. We'd like to see all of the evidence. [interjections] Now, he is saying that he did, but of course when you read those studies, that's not what they say. That's not what they say at all.

So, Madam Chairman, I would like to see this Acting Treasurer table the studies, bring them into the House, or stop referring to them. What we do know is that after answering written question after written question after written question after written question, the government answered all of these tax inquiry questions with the same phrase: Alberta Treasury did not do the studies. They haven't done the homework, and we've already made that point in debate on both Bill 18 and Bill 19. So I wish the Acting Treasurer would stop making these references to studies without producing the evidence, because it certainly provides a weak argument on his behalf.

Fundamental tax reform involves three separate questions: what should the tax base be; how should tax rates be structured; and to what extent should social policy be managed through the tax system? Now, the answer to each of these questions, Madam Chairman, runs along a continuum or a spectrum with progressive income taxes at one end of that spectrum and a flat tax at the other end, and it's clear that this government has put ideology ahead of any kind of thoughtful analysis of how to structure taxes for the maximum benefit of the taxpayers.

Madam Chairman, what I am concerned about in Bill 18 and with the amendment that is before us is that it provides a disproportionate benefit to higher income Albertans. Now, before any member of the government caucus jumps to their feet and says, "Well, that's because the Official Opposition somehow aren't in favour of Albertans creating wealth or amassing personal wealth" or before any of them stand on their feet and say, "Oh, well, the Alberta Liberals are against tax cuts," let me take care of those two concerns right now. The Alberta Liberal Party is the only party that consistently has stood for individual achievement and for fairness in how our society receives a benefit from that achievement. This is not just my analysis, but it's the analysis of those who have studied politics in this province for at least the last three decades.

5:20

There is not a single member of this opposition caucus who is against individual enterprise and all of the benefits of the free

enterprise system. There is not a single member of this caucus who is against meaningful tax reform. We just want it to be fundamentally fair as its very root value.

The difficulty with the government's analysis is that it has totally forgotten that there are the poor amongst us. In the midst of all of this plenty, in the midst of all of the wealth, in the midst of all of the economic achievement in this province there are still the poor, and there are the working poor. There are families living in conditions that are abhorrent, and, Madam Chairman, this tax policy does very little.

Those Albertans who are at the very bottom end of the scale can be given a benefit without imposing this single rate. First of all, you can do selective tax reduction on their behalf. Second of all, they already pay very little income tax. Thirdly, they can receive a benefit from having income thresholds at the bottom of the lowest tax bracket set accordingly. So there are many ways to deal with the plight of the working poor in terms of where this government says it would like to take them, which is to remove them from the tax rolls entirely.

I'm afraid that that's not really their goal. I'm afraid that they're using that as a smoke screen to achieve what they really want to achieve, and that is providing this huge windfall for the wealthiest Albertans, not really the benefit that they're claiming it's providing to those who are at the bottom end of the income curve.

That bottom end does exist. If you take a look at the percentage of poor Canadians, it's higher today than it was 20 years ago. It was at 16 percent in the year 1980. It's at 17 and a half percent this year. Madam Chairman, the number of low-income persons in Canada has grown to more than 5.2 million Canadians who now live below the low-income line. That's a figure that's more than ever before. Even in the depths of recessions in this country, we have never seen numbers of those living in poverty as we do today.

The six-year average percentage of the population below the United Nations income poverty line has grown in Canada to the point where it's 11.7 percent. Madam Chairman, that is more living below the poverty line in Canada than in Poland or Spain or Hungary or Italy, a rather staggering comparison. Yet we have a government that wants to craft tax policy to cater to the rich and not address this inequality.

Before anybody starts pointing their finger and yelling, "Oh, that's just socialism," let me say this: any tax policy is about the redistribution of wealth, whether it be a single-rate tax or any other kind of tax. This government like every other government is into this redistribution of wealth, and it really, then, becomes a matter of deciding how fair you want to make that redistribution and who it is that you are going to favour.

Tax policy does by definition cater to some more than it does to others. I submit that the fairest decision to make given that calculation is to make sure you provide the majority of benefit to the majority of people. That to me makes a lot more sense than imposing a flat tax that picks winners at the highest end.

The incidence of low family income has grown to 13.8 percent amongst Canadian households as of 1997. Family poverty rates actually fell between the years '84 and '89, but they've climbed back to levels higher than even 20 years ago. In the city of Calgary let's take a look at the number of poor families living in very poor neighbourhoods. In Calgary in 1980 6.4 percent of families were living in neighbourhoods considered very poor. That number by '95 had grown to 8.7 percent.

In Edmonton it's a much more dramatic difference. In 1980 4.1 percent of families were living in neighbourhoods considered very poor. By 1995 unbelievably that figure has grown to 18.8 percent, yet this government wants to continue picking favourites at the high end instead of addressing some of these very fundamental issues of

people living in poverty right in our midst, just blocks from this legislative Chamber.

The National Council of Welfare has listed the number of poor families living in Canada. Looking at their annual figures, in 1980 it was less than 850,000, about 830,000 Canadian families coast to coast; by 1997 that figure had grown to over a million, 1,175,160 families living in poverty.

The policy analyst Richard Shillington of Ottawa has taken a look at some of the rhetoric which has been supporting ideologies of flat tax and trickle-down economics. One of the things that he said, as quoted by Mel Hurtig in his book called *Pay the Rent or Feed the Kids*, is as follows:

A close look at how the Fraser Institute assesses "basic needs" is chilling. A chapter devoted to costing the body's minimum caloric requirements estimates the weekly cost of food for an elderly woman at about \$22, including 14 servings of fruit assumed to cost about \$2.60.

Nothing is allocated for children's toys, books, writing materials or anything not considered to be a physical necessity . . . No money is provided for school supplies.

Then Shillington goes on to make a judgment as to why the Fraser Institute and those others who embrace this rigid, right-wing ideology come to these kinds of conclusions. They say, as referred to in Hurtig's book:

The debate over the measurement of poverty is part of the attack of the right on the social programs that have defined us as Canadians and distinguished us from the Darwinian country to the south. The measure of poverty is a measure of society and of ourselves.

Poverty in a wealthy society calls for a response; a call that the siren voices of the Fraser Institute for lower taxes and less government don't want to hear.

Madam Chairman, I think this government would like to make sure that this debate gets as little airtime as possible. We have been under closure at every stage of this bill, and I expect it to be under closure in the remaining stage as well. We have seen the government manipulate the time clock so that it's brought in at committee for the first time with government amendments on the floor, no other time to debate clause by clause until this amendment is dealt with, until after 5 o'clock, when we are forced by the clock to adjourn by 5:30 p.m., just a couple of minutes from now.

There is no doubt this government will continue to use time allocation and other manipulation to limit debate so that Albertans will not learn the true impact and the true problems with this policy until it is too late. This government would like to pretend that just because there aren't hundreds, if not thousands of Albertans clamouring on the steps of the Legislature to get in, somehow this issue hasn't captured the public's attention. But I can tell you, Madam Chairman, that this issue has captured the public's attention. Their interest is continuing to grow, and they're becoming increasingly disturbed by what they find out about this government's tax plans for them.

Let's take a look at child poverty rates since the federal government decided that it wanted to eliminate child poverty, when they made that decision back in 1989. Child poverty rates, by the way, since 1989 have grown in this country from 15.3 percent to 19.8 percent. Those children living in poverty of course live in families that are living in poverty with mostly people marginally employed or only seasonally employed. Between 1989 and 1997 the number of poor children in Canada has increased by over 37 percent while the total number of children in Canada increased by only 6 percent. This is an indictment of government tax policy, Madam Chairman.

In 1996 there were 730,000 poor children in two-parent families compared with 673,000 poor children in single-parent families headed by women.

[The committee adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 23, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/05/23

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 18

Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further questions, comments, amendments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: You saw me out of the corner of your eye, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: I surely did.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just before the clock ran out prior to 5:30 this afternoon, I was making comment about children and families living in poverty and relating the picture in the face of poverty to the rationale for fair tax policy. The argument, of course, is that Bill 18 is not fair tax policy, in fact very unfair, very biased towards one category of income tax filers and against another and that it's not saved, it's not rescued by the amendments that are before us.

The amendment bringing the rate down to 10.5 percent and increasing the personal exemption to \$12,900 is really just the government's attempt to diminish the negative impact that it felt from being quite frankly outdone by the federal government in its last budget and the tax reforms that have come courtesy of the federal Liberal government in Ottawa. If the government had stuck to its original flat tax plan, many categories of income tax payers in Alberta would have ended up paying much more under the Klein proposal than they would have if they had just left things alone.

So what we now have is a not too well camouflaged attempt on the part of the provincial government to save face and try to pretend that its goal all along was to bring tax relief when really all it wanted to do was bring about a change in the structure and how it collected tax. So this amendment, as I say, really doesn't do much. It's fairly transparent; you can see right through it. You can see that what the government was trying to do was just make themselves look better as they play catch-up with the federal government.

I think where I left off in my comments this afternoon was just making the point that even though there is a myth or it's popular to believe that most impoverished children are living in single-parent households, most particularly those households where a mother is the single parent, the reality is that there are nearly three-quarters of a million poor children living in two-parent families, 730,000 living in two-parent families as opposed to about 673,000 living in families where the head of the household is a single woman. So most of the children living in poverty, in fact, are living in two-parent families. Again, Mr. Chairman, the tax policy that's being proposed by this government will do nothing to bring relief to that particular situation.

Mr. Chairman, the working poor in this country have not been the beneficiaries of a coherent tax policy, and this is not just at the provincial level. I will say that the federal government over the last couple of decades has some making up to do as well. It was particularly bad for families and poor children during the Mulroney

era, and the federal Liberals, I think, could be more aggressive, but that notwithstanding it is the provincial government policy which is really the focus of our discussion tonight.

I will say that great claims have been made about job creation and unemployment in Alberta. It's interesting to note that the unemployment rate continues to go down but that child poverty remains relatively constant. In Canada, for example, in 1994 the child poverty rate stood at 19.5 percent of all children, one in five approximately. The unemployment rate was about 10.4 percent.

Now, the unemployment rate has come down. By 1997 the unemployment rate had dropped more than a full point – it was down to 9.2 percent – but child poverty, Mr. Chairman, had remained relatively constant. It did go up a little bit; it was at 19.8 percent. In fact, if you look at the distribution between 1991 and 1997, the child poverty rate barely fluctuated at all whereas the unemployment rate, as I've said, has continued to go right down.

Mr. Chairman, as you begin to delve a little deeper into the reasons why this government based on its ideology may be favouring the wealthy with tax policy and ignoring the rest, I think you have to understand that this government has worshiped at the idol of a couple of other trickle-down theorists, in particular in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America. What we know is that many of the Reagan and Thatcher policies have been reversed by their respective governments that are currently in place. Nonetheless, it seems that this particular government of Alberta is stuck a little bit in the past and wants to try to repeat some of the experimentation that was done in those other jurisdictions.

John Kettle, in the *Globe and Mail* on November 9, 1998, put it this way. He said:

Since the Reagan and Thatcher years, the ideal of a more equitable economy – one that spreads wealth more evenly throughout society – has lost its popularity. We live in an age of economic Darwinism, where the survival of the financially fittest is the religion.

Mr. Chairman, I don't think that describes the kind of society that a responsible government would want to try to build. However, it seems to describe the kind of society that a government that's more concerned about power than policy would be interested in pursuing.

Mr. Chairman, well-known economist John Kenneth Galbraith in his most recent book entitled *The Good Society* wrote the following:

The good society does not seek equality in the distribution of income. Equality is not consistent with either human nature or the character and motivation of the modern economic system. As all know, people differ radically in their commitment to making money and also in their competence in doing so . . . However, this does not lessen the need for a clear view of the forces controlling the distribution of income and of factors forming attitudes thereon.

Mr. Chairman, the government in Alberta seems to have not paid any attention to that last caution as written by Galbraith. This government doesn't have a clear view of the forces controlling the distribution of income, and they seem to care less. It seems to me that what this government focuses on is how to maintain the status quo. Putting it in a popular way, it seems that the government of Alberta would be very happy to see the rich getting richer and the poor staying that way.

I think that tax policy, as I've said before, at its very heart must be fair, and since all tax policy does talk about the redistribution of wealth, why would we continue to reinforce inequities and inequalities when we have an opportunity to make positive changes in the lives of the vast majority of people instead of only paying attention of the needs of the very few?

Every year the United Nations compiles a report called the Human Development Report. The 1997 edition of that report looked at the richest 20 percent and the poorest 20 percent of the population in all developed nations. As Mel Hurtig writes in his book *Pay the Rent or Feed the Kids*:

In terms of the gap between the two, Canada has a worse record in distribution of income than, among others, France, Norway, Netherlands, Japan, Finland, New Zealand, Sweden, Spain, Belgium, Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, Italy, and Israel. Only in the United States and Switzerland was there a wider gap.

Mr. Chairman, when I read that, I didn't believe it, and I went and pulled a copy of the UN report, and I confirmed their findings in my own mind. I find it to be quite shocking that not only is this distribution between the rich and the poor, the gap, tremendously broad; the chasm is growing wider almost day by day.

8:10

It's immediately apparent in Alberta, Mr. Chairman, when you look at some of the expansion in the local economies in places like Grande Prairie or Fort McMurray or even Calgary and Edmonton. You don't have to drive very far, you don't have to walk very far through neighbourhoods to see examples of great wealth, almost bordering on lavish wealth, and then you can just look over your shoulder, and you can see staggering poverty.

I say staggering poverty quite on purpose. I was amazed at my last visit in Calgary in particular, Mr. Chairman, to actually see a scene that the last time I saw it was walking about eight blocks away from the White House in Washington, D.C., where I saw a young couple and a child who couldn't have been more than two years old actually sleeping under plastic in sleeping bags on the air vent of a building. I never thought that I would see that in Calgary, and on my last visit to Calgary as I was walking between some downtown buildings, I saw a young couple – now, they didn't have a baby with them; they had a dog – in what looked like almost a semipermanent residence in a little space between two buildings and one of those dumpsters, and there was a piece of plastic that had been spread across so that they actually had a bit of a windbreak as well. I thought I wouldn't see that. In any case, Mr. Chairman, it exists.

The UN report that I referenced just a minute ago in commenting on this disparity in wealth and the economic theory which suggested – I think it was Kennedy who said, “A rising tide lifts all the boats.” Well, the UN report in commenting on that said:

A rising tide of wealth is supposed to lift all boats. The yachts and ocean liners are indeed rising . . . but the rafts and rowboats are taking on water and some are sinking fast.

I think that describes the worry that I have as well.

Over the past two decades Canada's GDP has tripled. Despite this growth in our real economic output, during this same period child, individual, and family poverty have increased substantially.

There is an economist by the name of Ross Finnie at the Queen's University school of social policy. He completed a study in July of 1997 on the subject of poverty for Human Resources Development Canada. He found in his study:

There is now substantial empirical evidence that suggests that there has been an increase in earnings inequality in Canada . . . Those at the upper end of the earnings distribution [are] doing relatively better than before, those at the bottom faring more poorly, and [there has been] a general “hollowing out” of the middle.

Furthermore, the widening of the distribution of earnings has occurred as average earnings levels have remained effectively stagnant, meaning that those in the lowest reaches of the distribution appear not only to be doing relatively worse than previously, but have in some cases experienced absolute declines as well.

Mr. Chairman, to relate that back to the amendment that's before us, if you read any of the studies, even the ones that have been tabled by the Acting Provincial Treasurer, for example the Shapiro study, all the credible work that's been done on single-rate or flat taxes leads to one conclusion. These are the studies that are either for or against single-rate tax schemes. They lead to the same conclusion,

that any single-rate pushes the tax burden into the middle.

Now, some economists will say, “Well, that's okay,” and other economists will say that it's not. I tend to agree with that second group. But no matter what, those for and those against the single-rate or flat taxes make that same observation. Of course, when you know that the tax burden gets pushed into the middle and then you match that up with this finding that those in the middle have had their earnings, in the words of this author, “hollowed out” or become stagnant, then you know that you're doing a great disservice to the bulk of income earners and taxpayers in this province.

Mr. Chairman, another study in terms of determining the gap between the rich and the poor is to look at income before transfers and payments and the income share that is shared out across the population distribution. If you break that distribution into quintiles, what you find is that as of 1996 the top 20 percent of income earners received over 71 times the market income of the lowest 20 percent, a staggering distribution again lending credibility to the finding of the United Nations that ranked Canada so poorly in terms of the income distribution gap.

Over the time period between 1980 and 1996, 80 percent of Canadian families lost market income in real terms, if you adjust for 1996 dollars, while the top 20 percent gained. Mr. Chairman, what we're seeing is a picture of wealthy Canadians doing quite well, thank you very much, and getting wealthier as time goes on. This is in spite of some of the rhetoric we have heard that there must be tax relief for the rich or else their capital will take flight, that there must be tax relief for the rich or else they will stop investing, that there must be tax relief for the wealthiest or else they won't be productive. That just doesn't seem to be the case at all, at least not according to any of the credible statistics that we've seen. I'll just repeat this. The 20 percent, those in the top quintile of income earning in terms of families, not just individuals but families, actually had a gain in terms of market income and market share, and the other 80 percent of Canadians had a decline over the same time period. It would be responsible, I think, of the Acting Provincial Treasurer to try to back up some of his claims about brain drain and productivity and capital flight and investment, because what we can see is that there is another picture.

Mr. Chairman, I have, I guess, just a couple of minutes left this time around, and I'm going to take an opportunity, obviously, to come back and talk more about the nature of poverty, the distribution of wealth, and the impact that tax policy has. Maybe I'll end with this particular point. It was made by an employee of Stats Canada who in a 1997 article wrote:

The real earnings of lower-paid males fell by 13 per cent over the 1980s and by 9 per cent between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, while the earnings of higher-paid males rose over the same period.

That was an article published by Garnett Picot in *Canadian Business Economics*, in the fall 1997 edition. I think that article has summed up well the point I'm making about the growing gap in income distribution.

Mr. Chairman, I know that you're about to ring the bell. I will try to make one further point while we're still on the clock.

According to Statistics Canada in the following year, in 1998, the poorest of the poor, the lowest decile, the lowest 10 percent, lost the most, while the top earners gained the most. In fact, there was an 11.4 percent decrease in terms of real annual earnings in the lowest decile while there was a real gain of 5.5 percent in the top.

Mr. Chairman, the statistics are almost endless in terms of making the point that in spite of everything we've heard about the damage that tax policy has done to the real income and earning potentials of wealthy Canadians, the facts are that they continue to do very well. Now, I'm not arguing for the status quo. I'm not suggesting there

shouldn't be tax reform. In fact, I think I've made it very clear in my earlier comments on both this bill and on its sister bill, Bill 19, that I am all in favour of meaningful and sustainable tax reform and tax relief. I just don't want to see that relief come only to those who are already doing very well in this economy and at the expense of the hopes and dreams and the opportunities of those who are not gaining the same advantages. This familiar pattern of the rich getting richer and the poor staying the same is something we should be trying to do something about instead of trying to entrench even deeper.

So I will pass the floor at that point, and when I have an opportunity to rise again, I will continue dealing with income distribution and the effect that it has on the life of Canadians and the impact that tax policy can have to help address some of these inequalities.

Thank you.

8:20

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford . . . Sorry. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I just had three people standing there, which is the point that we've made before. When you have a bunch of people standing, it is hard to find someone who may be wishing to speak. So my apologies, Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've spoken time and time again about the Alberta advantage. We have promoted it. We have gone to great lengths to create an economic climate that would attract the best and the brightest minds, industries, and individuals that will contribute to that advantage. In fact, we are attracting people from higher tax provinces all over Canada. However, the problem is that we are in the global economy. We cannot afford to stay put within our province, our borders. We are in competition with places like the United States for these people. High taxes and bracket creep are things that are not only punishing these people but punishing Canada as a whole, because we're losing these talented people to places like the United States of America. We can't do anything about the two-thirds of income taxes that go to the federal government, but we can do something about the Alberta income taxes.

You know, in my constituency there's a fellow who has really done well for himself in his life despite the fact that he came from very poor roots. I mean, scraping up a coin for a telephone call would be an issue to him, but he worked hard and opened a business. He had his fair share of tough times and close calls, as anyone who has started a business probably knows. But now things are really taking off, and he's making a lot of money for himself and his family. On top of his success, his wife has had a raise, and now they have extra cash to do things they haven't been able to afford before.

So, as you can imagine, this man came to me after tax season last year with quite a bit to say about what he's paying. His concern is, I'm sure, the same as we've heard from a lot of people, that a huge chunk of what they've worked hard for goes straight to the federal and the provincial governments, and a lot of this is because bracket creep pushed him into a higher tax bracket. He wonders why he would bother to stay here when he can go to places like Texas and keep more of the money he actually makes.

A common argument is that people should stay in Canada because of the quality of life here. You know, the extra money that knowledgeable workers saved in taxes in the United States can go a long way to buying the quality of life they enjoy there. That's the reality. When you lose a huge amount of money that you pay directly to the government, you consider your quality of life in terms of money that you'd be able to keep in your pocket and what you could do with all that extra cash.

So Bill 18 will do a lot not only to attract people to this province but to keep them here. It unhooks from the federal system to a single-tax rate at 10.5 percent.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. CAO: At 10.5 percent, a low one. It eliminates bracket creep. That's the most important thing. Now, I know that the argument across the way is that it benefits those at higher income tax levels. Well, it doesn't benefit this income group exclusively, but I don't see why we would make sure we exclude them. Tax expressed as a percentage of income is not the whole picture. The amount of tax payment is the bottom line.

The fact is that the highest earning 1 percent of tax filers pay 21 percent of the total taxes. The highest earning 5 percent of tax filers pay 40 percent of the total taxes. The highest earning 10 percent of tax filers pay 52 percent of total taxes. Those are some pretty eye-opening numbers. What's more, these are often the people who have the greatest ability to find jobs south of the border if they find that it works better for them financially.

So these people pay all this money in taxes, and on top of it all the current system punishes them for their hard work by pushing them into higher tax brackets. The more they make, whether it's because they get a raise for their hard work or earn more because their business is finally taking off or have to work a whole bunch of overtime to please their new boss, the fact is that the tax man comes in and takes more.

So what happens in our global economy freedom? People leave. Why stay in a country where government actually prevents you from getting ahead in life? Why do this when right south of the border is a country where they can take home more of their hard-earned cash to their families? This is the brain drain we've been trying hard to stem. We pay to train these people, educate them, create a mass of skilled and intelligent people who can help to create a strong and vibrant economy, and then we put them into a tax system which drives them to the United States or to other countries. So we never actually reap the benefits of the training skills we've provided for them.

Bill 18 is going to create a tax climate that will really be an incentive to keep these people here as well as attract other highly skilled people to this province. That's the Alberta advantage we're really trying to create, and for that I thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have the amendment in front of us that deals with the two aspects relating to Bill 18, the increase in the personal exemption and the reduction in the flat tax from 11 percent to 10.5 percent. Let's take a look at the two components of that amendment.

The increase in the personal exemption to \$12,900: that's good. I applaud that. I applaud any increase in the personal exemption because what it does is give benefit to the people that need the greatest benefit of all. When we talk in terms of the various income categories in Alberta, nobody deserves a bigger break than those at the lower end. The increase in the personal exemption in itself, of course, does benefit those people, and the federal treasurer, Paul Martin, in his budget recognized that. He increased the personal exemption and eliminated the sin of bracket-creep taxation. So in effect the provincial government really had no alternative but to make the adjustments to Bill 18 because of what the federal government had done when Paul Martin brought down his budget.

If we go back to February of this year, when the federal treasurer

announced when he was going to be bringing down the budget, of course there was a scramble on the government side. They wanted to get out their so-called good news first, so they wanted to jump the gun. Well, they jumped the gun. They made their announcement, but in the process they ended up kind of looking a little foolish in the sense that suddenly they realized, after Paul Martin did his thing, that they had not gone far enough, so they were forced to take measures. In effect, as much as I applaud the increase in the personal exemption, if the government is insistent on a flat tax – and it appears obvious that they're going to ram this through – then I guess the lower that flat tax is, the better it is for Albertans from that point of view, but it's still wrong. It still makes it very, very wrong. It makes it wrong because the whole principle behind Bill 18 is so unfair.

8:30

When we look at fairness and we look at what the amendments as applied in Bill 18 accomplish in terms of the 10.5 percent flat tax in particular, we look at those that are going to gain the greatest benefit. Now, the former speaker brought some stats to our attention about a certain percentage of income earners paying a certain percentage of the overall tax burden, and that's true. It's very true. It's no different than when you own a half-million-dollar house; you're going to pay a great deal more property tax than the guy who owns a \$100,000 house, and that's only fair. You know, we're in this society, we're in this system where we recognize we have an obligation, a responsibility to share the wealth, to spread the wealth out somewhat because we can't allow a small number of people to control a growing amount of that wealth that is there. That is happening now.

By using those same stats, I guess we can turn them around. We can turn around and say: well, Bill 18 with the amendments is going to benefit to the greatest extent 1 percent of the population, that 1 percent, of course, that pay the highest level of taxation in the province because of the amount of income they receive, some of it because they have worked hard, some of it because they've been a student, some of it because they've had opportunities that a lot of other Albertans unfortunately didn't have. I know we can preach and say that in Alberta everybody has the opportunity to achieve the greatest of success, but everybody can't be out there making an income of \$200,000, \$300,000 a year because you have to have the middle-income people. You have to have your firefighters, you have to have your policemen, you have to have your health care workers, you have to have your teachers. These are the middle-income earners. This is the bulk of the population in terms of the majority.

We see the struggles that are going on at the present time in terms of the process of collective bargaining. Why do we see the possibility of a strike pending that could possibly be considered illegal? It's because we have a group of people, thousands of people who feel they are not getting their fair share of the wealth, that they are not getting their fair share in terms of the amounts they pay in taxation and such. Bill 18 does very, very little for them. Bill 18 does very little in terms of increasing their disposable income.

When we talk in terms of the Alberta advantage, certainly there are advantages in Alberta to some people, particularly those that have a great deal of wealth, those that run the industries, those that have businesses and such with the lower levels of taxation. Of course that's an advantage to them, but the Alberta government has a tendency to cater to an extremely large extent to providing that so-called Alberta advantage to a select few, almost a chosen few. Unfortunately, all Albertans don't get to share in that prosperity of what's being called the Alberta advantage.

We can look at the increased disposable incomes that result from

Bill 18 and Bill 19. We can look at the increased disposable incomes that result from any reduction in taxation, and that part of it is good, because the less money that government is taking out of the pockets of taxpayers, the more disposable income there is for those that do pay the taxes. But why should that increased disposable income under Bill 18, even with the amendments, be so disproportionate in the sense that those who already have a great deal of disposable income end up having a great deal more disposable income than somebody making \$35,000, \$40,000, \$45,000 a year who is trying to get by meeting their monthly mortgage payments, possibly a car payment, raising children that are involved in sporting activities, who have very little in terms of a disposable income, very little that isn't committed towards monthly obligations in the form of mortgage payments, rents, and other payments, putting bread on the table, and so on and so forth?

So a tax break of a substantial nature to those of middle income would increase the disposable income in that category substantially, and they in effect would turn around like any other group and spend those dollars, creating a spin-off in terms of enhancing the economy. That's the benefit of any reduction in taxation. That's the benefit of leaving more dollars in the pockets of the taxpayers. That's the benefit of doing it.

In fairness to the majority of Albertans it's important that we look first of all at providing the greatest benefit to the lowest income, who are crying for a break, who desperately need a break. Next to that we can look at middle income, where we recognize that they may have sufficient dollars in most cases, with some struggling, to meet their monthly obligations or responsibilities but not have the disposable income to take a vacation throughout Alberta even, the case may be, taking a couple of weeks off work and just traveling throughout the province. Those people would love to have an increased disposable income that they could turn around and inject back into the economy by buying some of the things in life that make life just a bit more pleasant.

So the government is right in taking initiatives that would reduce the amount of taxation that we expect Albertans to pay, to increase the amount of disposable income that is available to Albertans, generally speaking. The last speaker again made some references to people saying: "Well, I've achieved success. I make a good income. I run a business. If I'm going to be taxed at that level, why should I stay in this country? Why should I stay here when there are greener pastures just south of the border?" Well, I've said this before and I'll say it again: I don't believe that simply because you might get a lower level of taxation in the United States, that makes those pastures that much greener.

I've had the opportunity in the past to travel the east coast: New York City, Philadelphia, Atlantic City, that whole area. In Washington, D.C., touring the White House was great, but we also drove in a part of even Washington, D.C. where, when we looked at the houses in there, it was unbelievable that people have to live in those kind of conditions.

We looked in New York. You'd have one section of New York, and I don't know if the Donald Trumps lived there or who lived there, but limousines were parked all over, illegally parked wherever. Three blocks away you saw slum housing that was so deplorable it appeared it was a city that was bombed out. That's the type of income distribution you tend to have in the States. That's the type of lifestyle that one has to look at and say: do I want to exchange the lifestyle I have here in the province of Alberta, without question the best province in Canada, Canada of course being the most desirable country, and do I want to give that up to go and live in a city like New York, like Washington or Los Angeles, where you have that quality of life that some people have to experience? And

the fear. In New York City and in Washington I have to admit there were times I actually feared for my safety.

I remember a former alderman, councillor Ron Hayter, in Washington. He's walking down the street, he turns around, and a fellow has a gun poked in his back: give me your wallet. Certainly that can happen here in Edmonton, but not to the same degree. Never in Edmonton have I ever feared for my safety when I've been out on the streets. In the United States it's a different story.

So I reject the argument that money in itself contributes to the brain drain. I think there are other things. Possibly some people are so caught up in the dollar that nothing else matters to them except how many dollars they can accumulate.

8:40

When we talk in terms of and look at the amendments and we look at how it affects Bill 18 and the whole principles behind Bill 18, what it lacks is fairness. It lacks equity in terms of recognizing that there are the lower income, there are the middle income, and there are the higher income, the wealthy. It fails to recognize that. If it does recognize it, it just blatantly ignores the fact that there is a middle class out there. Statements are made that, well, it's a tax cut for everybody. Certainly it's a tax cut for everybody, but the tax cut for the middle income is so insignificant in terms of the others that it's deplorable, from my point of view.

In terms of trying to sell what government is doing, government actually has a very, very easy job in putting their spin on it. You know, it's very easy to go out there and say, "Well, we're going to give everybody a tax break," without going into details, just "Everybody's going to get a tax break." That to a degree is true, making that statement, if you just say: we're going to give everybody a tax break. When you talk in terms of the flat tax, to a lot of people the flat tax sounds like almost a romantic method of taxation in the sense that people have the perception that what a flat tax does is it allows you to just fill out one form, maybe four lines when it comes to income tax: gross income, deduct a flat tax of 10.5 percent, whatever, net taxable at a certain rate, and, bango, your return is done. Of course, we know that's not the case.

We know that, if anything, the end result of these changes will make taxation more complex to the average Albertan in the sense that you'll be delinked. You'll be delinked from the feds, so you'll be filing two returns. You'll be filing your return to the federal government and you'll be filing your return to the provincial government like a corporation or a business does now, and at the same time you're still going to have all those deductions to take into consideration, your charitable deduction and so on and so forth. So it doesn't make it simpler, but in selling it from the government's point of view certainly it appears to be a lot easier to put a spin on than, say, their Bill 11 was.

In this caucus we look at it from the point of view that our position may be harder to sell to the public, it may be tougher to put that so-called political spin on, but let's forget the spin for a minute. Let's forget the political implications. Let's look at what's right. Let's look at what's fair to Albertans. And there I have to say, Mr. Chairman, that in terms of taxation the amendments the Member for Edmonton-Glenora will be bringing forward that have been tabled – at least some of them have now been tabled – will demonstrate how the Liberal way is that much fairer to all taxpayers in that it recognizes that the bulk of the population, the bulk of those who pay our salaries, for example, come from that middle income. There's absolutely no question about that.

So the amendments as proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, which put the tax cuts in a system that is progressive, provides that fairness that is lacking in Bill 18 even with these

amendments. If the amendments proposed by the Liberal caucus were incorporated into Bill 18, Albertans would have cause to rejoice. Even those of that so-called higher income, the 1 percent or 5 percent of the population, whatever stats were used, a lot of those people wouldn't begrudge the fact that they're not getting the type of break they would get under the existing Bill 18. They would recognize that the Liberal proposal that puts more disposable income in the hands of . . .

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member. Hon. member, just so that we're all on the same wavelength, we are discussing the amendment that is proposed by the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer, not by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. We've not yet had his amendments.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: Yes. I simply referred to his amendment – and thank you for the opportunity of clearing that up – because he did table it this afternoon. And for all of you in the House here that want to see them, he did table them this afternoon. He tabled them this afternoon, so they are now part of the record. I use that, Mr. Chairman, as a comparison of this way of doing it versus that way of doing it, because as I've tried to state all along, the idea of having a progressive series of taxation percentages with an increased personal exemption is fairer to most Albertans.

Now, I want to look at some comparisons here under the 10.5 percent flat tax, taking us to the year 2004, but most of this will be achieved before the year 2004, of course, because of the government's announcement that they're stepping up all the action on that. I should also mention that when we look at Bill 18 and the amendment, the reduction to 10.5 percent in the flat tax, the benefit that I've spoken of that the higher income get: couple that with the vast benefit they're going to get from the passage of Bill 19, which appears is going to be passed because closure has been moved and so on and so forth. Those in those income brackets get the double bonanza.

When you're over \$46,500 a year of taxable income, you get double the windfall. You get the windfall of getting the greatest benefit from the flat tax plus the elimination of the 8 percent surtax. So they've got it both ways. Certainly that category of taxpayers will be very, very beholden to this government, and maybe that's what this government is looking at. Maybe they're saying: these are the people that have money in their pockets and that can afford to give us consideration come fund-raising time.

When I talk in terms of the advantage of having increased disposable income for those in the middle income, that even benefits, Mr. Chairman, a vast majority of those with the higher income because a vast majority of those with the higher income are businesspeople. A lot of them derive their revenue from businesses that they have. The previous speaker spoke of a constituent of his who had set up a business and worked hard in that. They benefit because the middle income now with this additional disposable income are going to go out and spend it. They're going to go out and buy maybe a different car, creating more wealth for that higher income person that owns that dealership, or they may go out and buy an RV, a recreational vehicle, a snowmobile. In any case, when they turn around and spend these disposable dollars, they are benefiting the people that own those particular companies, who see increased profits. They, of course, with increased profits have increased revenue.

Now, I want to do a comparison on the calculation under the 10.5

percent amendment that we have in front of us. Let's take, for example, a person earning approximately \$115,000 a year. Their break will be \$2,812 dollars, or a 21 percent cut in provincial taxes. Let's look at somebody making roughly \$100,000. [Mr. Wickman's speaking time expired] Is that it already? I'm just starting to roll.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to discuss some of the issues relating to Bill 18 this evening, particularly the consultation process for this bill, which will lay the foundation for the bold new tax system that Albertans have long been waiting for.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Good speech.

MR. HLADY: Thank you to the members, who I know will be supporting this bill when we do get a chance to vote on it.

Bill 18 answers a call from Albertans for lower taxes. In fact, the demand for tax cuts is a call that politicians have been hearing all over the country. People have begun to see more and more of their hard-earned money being paid out in a complex tax system that is used to finance government waste, overspending, and mismanagement. Mr. Chairman, now we have the opportunity to move to a single-rate tax system. This system benefits those who desire simplicity in their tax system. It is a relief for those who want their tax system to be fair, and it will benefit all those Albertans who have the foresight to see that marginal tax rates are an essential part of our ability to attract and retain skilled labour.

This new tax plan is the result of one of the widest consultation processes we've seen in this province. We wanted our plan to be truly responsive to the needs of Albertans, and we knew that the only way to do that was to ask them what they thought. In February of 1998 we started the process with the creation of the Tax Review Committee. As you know, Mr. Chairman, this committee went through the province getting the views of Albertans firsthand. They took the time to really sift through all the rhetoric so that they could figure out what was at the root of the issue.

8:50

They figured out that there were four issues that needed to be addressed here. One, bracket creep, or the invisible tax that creates a greater burden on taxpayers through inflation by pushing people into a higher tax bracket. Two, the deficit elimination taxes, which understandably frustrated Albertans. They were instituted as a temporary measure. Albertans paid them even though they kept seeing the deficit rise, and once we eliminated the deficit, the taxes remained. Three, taxation of one- and two-income families. Many people felt it was unfair that the tax system favoured two-income families and that it actually was a disservice to those who chose to have one parent stay at home. This issue, incidentally, is one that we're addressing by unhooking from the federal system. Four, and finally, the burden of the multibracket system. Albertans said they wanted us to undo our ties to the federal tax rate structure and move to a single rate.

So we asked the committee to dig through the dirt and to find out what we needed to do about our taxes, and they came up with this report. After this process we wanted to make sure that these tax concerns were representative of the majority of Albertans, so we asked them. A survey went out to every Alberta household, Mr. Chairman, not just any multiple choice kind of survey but one where Albertans had to take the time to write what they really thought.

Well over 80,000 Albertans told us exactly what they thought.

They wanted lower taxes. They wanted a fair tax system, and they wanted to eliminate bracket creep. They wanted us to reform the system so that it works better for them. This new tax plan was the result of these consultations and the efforts of numerous MLAs and tax experts. We studied the results, analyzed the numbers, and designed an effective and efficient new system.

So here we are with a bill in place which will address those concerns Albertans have had about their taxes. Not only that, but it's a sustainable, long-term solution that will benefit Albertans directly by allowing them to keep more of their money. This is especially true for those 190,000 low-income earners, who will pay no provincial income tax, though they still pay the taxes demanded by the federal government. That extra money means a great deal to them, Mr. Chairman.

You know, it was once said that we ought to have a tax system which looks like someone designed it on purpose. We've come up with a design, and our purpose is to let Albertans lead us in what they want their tax structure to look like and to make sure that they pay low taxes.

Now, as we all know, we're going to keep reviewing these numbers to make sure that one of the basic intents behind Bill 18, to ensure that Albertans pay low taxes, is carried through. We have said that we will pass the federal savings on to Albertans when the new single-rate system is implemented next year. So we consulted, planned, and designed a new tax plan, which we now see here before us in Bill 18. This is a groundbreaking plan, Mr. Chairman, and it has been a model for the rest of this country. I think it will give Albertans what they have asked for in terms of a simple, fair, and understandable tax plan that will ultimately see their taxes lowered.

I think another group, Mr. Chairman, that certainly is going to enjoy the lower taxes are students and graduates, and I'd like to spend a little time talking about that. Our students certainly want to stay in this province, and they want to be able to grow and have their families here as their families before them were. There's no question that we will grow. Our economy will continue to diversify. We will start more businesses, a lot in the technology sector, the economy of the future. We will find ways to make new and existing Alberta businesses and industry more productive, and we will make the most of new technologies. We will undertake a variety of other activities, all aimed at making the future a good place for everyone who lives here.

When I say "we," I mean we as Albertans, and that includes us as politicians. It even includes the Liberals. It also includes corporate Alberta, the oil patch, all our educational institutions, and many others too. But much of the responsibility for the future rests on the shoulders of our young people. It's an awesome responsibility, and we as politicians believe that they should get as much support as possible to be effective in the future. They are, after all, building our future as well as their own.

Mr. Chairman, I'm proud to say that Bill 18 is designed to help all Albertans, including our young people. You don't have to just take my word to believe it. Everyone is starting to sit up and take notice of what we're doing here. For example, tax watchdog Mitchel Gray from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation is on record as saying, "This is a tax cut for all Albertans. Everyone will get a break: rich, poor, and middle class alike." And it's true. From this we want young people with entry-level incomes to see that even though they don't yet make the big salaries of more established professionals, they are just as important. We don't want to wait until they make the big bucks before we recognize them. Bill 18 will remove traditional tax disincentives so that these people can get on with building a future for themselves that we can all enjoy.

When it becomes law, Bill 18 will increase the basic personal

exemptions by 78 percent, to \$12,900 from the current \$7,231. That means that these young people as well as everyone else will pay no personal provincial income tax at all on the first \$12,900 they make. This makes a big difference to the new graduate just starting out or the student who works part-time to offset the costs of education, Mr. Chairman. In fact, even those who work full-time, earning minimum wage – that's 2,000 hours a year – simply won't pay any Alberta income taxes at all. However, they'd still owe the federal government about \$650.

Most of the people here today can probably still remember what it's like when you're getting started, just getting your feet wet, when you've landed the job but all you've got in your closet is the suit that you wore to your high school graduation and you've come to think about Kraft dinner as two of the four major food groups. Even a bit of extra cash is going to make a difference in these folks' lives. I do remember the peanut butter and crackers days, Lipton's chicken noodle soup. They were good times. So Bill 18 certainly helps them in the beginning.

Then, as they progress, the new tax system makes it easier for them to go forward. As we have all heard, Bill 18 introduces the single-rate tax, and that means no tax brackets. So raises and increments will not push new workers into higher brackets, where they pay a greater proportion of what they make to the tax man. Instead, they will be allowed to keep more of what they earn. I have seen how a little extra can make a big difference, not just in terms of its purchasing power but also as an incentive to work harder and to stay in Alberta, which is the basic of what we want to achieve. If they get both the breaks and the opportunities here, the States won't look nearly so attractive to these young workers who have the opportunity to move in the new economy anywhere they want in the world.

All this extra work gives the province momentum and bodes well for our economy, very well. By 2006 Alberta's GDP is expected to increase 1.5 percentage points more than it would have without Bill 18, Mr. Chairman. That translates into almost \$2 billion more in our economy than we could have expected without any changes to our personal income tax system, and those are conservative figures. By no coincidence the increased economic activity will mean more jobs in the province, about 30,000 more jobs by 2006, based on just doing what we're doing in Bill 18. So young people graduating from high school, college, and university will find more opportunities to put their hard work to use.

It only makes sense, Mr. Chairman. If we're banking on these people to use their smarts to build us a great future, shouldn't we give them the opportunity to hit the ground running? I don't think there's a person in the House today who would dream of holding them back. Why should we have a tax system that does? Bill 18 is designed to take them forward, so let's get on with it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm delighted to be able to rise. In fact, I'm glad to follow our friend for Calgary-Mountain View because he's brought some things to mind that I'd not been thinking of. I'm going to come back to those in a moment, but I want to start off by saying that I'm glad that we've finally seen the amendment package A1. The reason is that I feel so often like we're engaged in a form of shadowboxing. You know, the government doesn't actually put in front of us what they say they're going to take us to. They sort of tease us by telling us there may be some things coming. So I'm glad that finally the Acting Provincial Treasurer has brought in those amendments, amendments A1-A and

A1-B. Now that we've got it, we see that, yes, finally the government has acknowledged that they have to back up.

9:00

It just shows again how foolish it was for the government to rush ahead to bring in the budget but a mere week after the throne speech. At the time we said: well, is it that big a deal to try and scoop Paul Martin? Well, they thought so at the time. The Provincial Treasurer thought so at the time.

So it perhaps goes to demonstrate that although alacrity is not always in the lexicon of elected people and Mackenzie King showed that you can be successful by being anything but, there are some problems with moving too quickly, Mr. Chairman, and when you're dealing with something as important as taxes, it makes some sense to spend time understanding what the impact is going to be of prospective federal changes and to factor those in. We didn't do that, and that's why we've seen the fumbling and scrambling that now brings us here to deal with these amendments.

How much neater it would have been if the government could have held off, waited for the federal government budget, and then we would have known exactly what we were dealing with. It just goes to show, Mr. Chairman, that the notion that my tax cuts are bigger than your tax cuts is really pretty juvenile and not something that we'd want our Provincial Treasurer to aspire to.

I wanted to make another point. I'm delighted that we had a long weekend, because I had a chance to post a new section to my web site. It's an analysis of Bills 18 and 19, the government flat tax proposal. I was anxious to do that, because as members may recall, I have a question that I put on the web site every two weeks, and the question that's been on there since we saw the end of Bill 11 is: what do people think about a flat tax? We're polling people, and hopefully by Thursday I'll be able to have the updated results of people who visit the poll site.

I'd also posted something of an analysis I've done. I think I saw some members wincing when I said that, and I acknowledge that I'm no economist. One economics course in university hardly qualifies me to do comprehensive tax analysis, but you know the good thing is that thanks to the great folks in the Legislature Library and the good work done by Liberal researchers and our colleague here for Edmonton-Glenora, I was able to bring together some information that I thought my constituents would want to see and want to have.

The other thing I just wanted to share, Mr. Chairman, is that between 5:30 and 8 o'clock, I had a chance to do some door-knocking. I had a chance to go into the Edmonton-Highlands constituency, and it was actually quite overwhelming. I guess I was there about 45, 50 minutes on the doors in that constituency, and certainly there were some who wanted to talk about health care and Bill 11, but there were a surprising number of people who wanted to talk about tax reform. They wanted to talk about: what's this government's flat taxing all about? I think it's fair to say that to a man or a woman when I put to them the government's notion of a flat tax – and I did some comparison and contrast with the Alberta Liberal fair tax proposal. You know what? In every single case people preferred the fair tax to the flat tax.

You might say that that was a prompted survey, and there would be some truth to that, Mr. Chairman. But these were insightful people I was talking to in the Edmonton-Highlands constituency, and they seemed actually quite conversant with the problems with the flat tax. It didn't take very much clarification to have them understand the value of a zero, 10, 12 fair tax Liberal alternative to the one that we see in Bill 18 with the amendment in front of us.

I'd just share with members that I encourage others to go into Edmonton-Highlands. It's a great opportunity to field-test it. If this

government thinks they've got a winner going into the next provincial general election, I invite them and indeed I challenge them to field-test their proposal at the doors of Edmonton-Highlands, because I think they may be in for quite a surprise. You know that \$8 million budget that the provincial Public Affairs Bureau has? It's not going to be enough to convince these good people that the flat tax is fair. It doesn't in any way advantage the people living in Edmonton-Highlands.

The concern I continue to have – and some of this I had highlighted the other day. This was before we'd seen the amendment. Now that we have the amendment in front of us, A1-A and A1-B, it confirms for all time – and Edmonton-Glenora may have a different thought on this. This was probably the last chance for the government to recognize that we have to move to a progressive tax system and one with some additional levels.

I sort of thought that maybe with this amendment what we'd see would be something that would pick up on the Liberal fair tax alternative. It would pick up on the, I think, insightful analysis that's been done by Edmonton-Glenora and the Leader of the Opposition and others. It was with an enormous sense of disappointment when with trembling hands I turned over the amendment as it was delivered efficiently by the page and realized that we're still stuck with this funny tax masquerading as a flat tax. It's not even in any pure sense a flat tax.

The other comment I wanted to make is that as we listened to the Acting Provincial Treasurer in his proselytizing mode, he now is starting to use the language of the opposition. When have we seen this before? We have the Acting Provincial Treasurer, who complicit with his government has been touting a flat tax. That's what they've talked about. That's what they've boasted about. That's what the Premier, I think, talked about probably in his fireside chat. We go back and look at budget process. We're talking about a single-rate system and colloquially refer to it as a flat tax.

Well, what the government does is discover as they get into this that Albertans don't like a flat tax. The more they find out about the flat tax, the more they don't like it. So what happens is that the government decides that we have to start shifting ground here. You wish they would use this sort of flexibility when it comes to Bill 11, when it comes to other things, but the flexibility really only goes to how they remassage the message and how they adjust, adapt, change, reframe the message. They don't change the substance one iota, but the message changes in some fashion.

So now what we've got is Bill 18. With this amendment, A1, both parts, we're not so much dealing with a flat tax. If people had a chance to read Dennis Mills' book – Dennis Mills is the Ontario Liberal Member of Parliament who in fact had written a book a number of years ago about a flat tax, a single-rate tax system. Bills 18 and 19 represent something very different from all of those proposals. It means that now we start to see the ground shifting, the government trying to change the message. The next thing is: when will they start changing the substance, or will they at all? Will we end up as we saw on Bill 11, where they refused to do that all together?

What one woman said at the doors in the by-election this evening was: why is the government so concerned with people who make over \$100,000 a year? In fact, her comment to me was: most everybody who lives in this area earns between \$30,000 and \$70,000. Now, I'd mentioned that frame to her earlier, and she thought that most of her neighbours were in that particular frame. I think that what she liked about the Liberal alternative in terms of moving to a 10 percent tax rate for those middle-income earners is that it represents a significantly fair break for them. It means a larger tax cut for them. And you know what? Those people think that that's a fair and appropriate way to go.

9:10

As I look at the two amendments, I go back to what the Premier is quoted as saying in a July 27, 1999, *Calgary Herald* story: "What we want to do is make sure that those who can least afford to pay tax get the first break." We heard the former Provincial Treasurer say, "Certainly our priority is for low-income earners, and there are ways that can be addressed." That was the *Calgary Herald*, July 28, 1999.

Well, Mr. Chairman, what happened? What happened to those comments? What happened to those implicit promises, those representations made by the former Provincial Treasurer and by the Premier on, you know, July 27 and July 28, 1999? What's changed? Why has government lost its focus on moving in those respects? It's very disappointing that we don't see that.

It's interesting to me also when I look at the amendment package that the Mike Harris government that has been so quick to clone and replicate a number of the things that have happened in Alberta – and we can argue about why they would be dumb enough in Ontario to make some of the same mistakes we have in Alberta, but that's another question, Mr. Chairman. Surely what's interesting is that when Mike Eves, the Provincial Treasurer in the province of Ontario, who, for a Conservative, is actually quite a wiley politician . . .

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. DUNFORD: It's Ernie. Mike Eaves is a hockey player.

MR. DICKSON: Ernie Eves. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Mike Eaves is the hockey player. Well, I understand Ernie Eves is a pretty good puck-handler too, Mr. Chairman, and does really well with the heavy traffic in the crease. I'm indebted to the minister of human resources for setting me straight on that.

You know, I think Mr. Eves is a pretty savvy guy. He's been around for a long time. He's been a provincial legislator. He's well respected inside and outside Queen's Park and environs, and Ernie Eves decided that the flat tax wouldn't work in Ontario and chose not to go down that road. I know that this government likes to cast itself as a trailblazer, but you would think that from time to time you'd check the rear view mirror; wouldn't you, Mr. Chairman? Wouldn't you want to just sort of look over your shoulder and see whether anybody's following you? In some caucuses it's necessary to look over your shoulder as a matter of personal safety.

Anyway, the point, Mr. Chairman, I was just making is that I think there may be something constructive there in terms of seeing that Ontario isn't going down there. So what happens is that when I hear this government say, "Well, you know we're on the right course," then I say: well, why is it that the only other people who want to go down this road are the Republican Party in the United States, and Steve Forbes, the former Republican president-wannabe? Why are those the people championing this, and government after government after government that's looked at it has decided that this is not the road they want to pursue?

The other comment I'd want to make is that when I heard the Provincial Treasurer – and this might seem to be off track, Mr. Chairman; I'll caution you now. In fact, it was the Acting Provincial Treasurer who raised it when he was speaking in introducing his amendment. He talked about the Robert Shapiro article. This is the one entitled *Why Fairness Matters: Progressive Versus Flat Taxes*. I go back and refer to Dr. Shapiro's test for a tax system promoting three goals: simplicity, growth, and equity.

I think what you find as you look at this bill – if this amendment goes through, here's what we've got. Simplicity is not afforded by this change in terms of a change from where we are right now. This

is not in fact a true flat tax. You still have a host of exemptions and provisions that undermine any notion of simplicity.

I think it was Dr. Shapiro who made the point that in a country like Canada and certainly in a province like Alberta there is more opportunity here for people, smart people, capable people, with substantial capital than many other jurisdictions to be able to take some seed capital and prosper. There are a lot of nations where you wouldn't have that opportunity, either because of excessive regulation or because of a host of other constraints and considerations. The concern, though, is that in a province like this you would have terrific, terrific opportunity to expand your initial capital, your seed money. Part of the quid pro quo we pay for that is a progressive tax system, and I've always been proud of a progressive tax system, like I used to be proud of a strong public health care system.

Mr. Chairman, the feedback I'm getting in my constituency office – I've had a couple of people who have opposed my stand on Bill 18 and Bill 19, but those are the same people that opposed my stand on Bill 11. The vast majority of people have expressed opposition to bills 18 and 19 in their current form. Everybody would like to see a tax break, but they'll be darned if they want to see people at the top income end enjoying a differential advantage in terms of a tax break, and that's really what this package is going to provide.

Mr. Chairman, I know there are others that will want to participate in the debate. I'm looking forward to being able to table in the Legislature the response I get to my web site. In the first week of May I think there were 570-odd responses to the Bill 11 question, and in the month of April we had about 2,500 responses on the web site to another question on Bill 11.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: This is Bill 18.

MR. DICKSON: Right, but I'm venturing a suggestion, Mr. Minister of Municipal Affairs, that we're going to see some big numbers posted on the web site in terms of people registering their comments on bills 18 and 19. I want that Minister of Municipal Affairs to be the first one. In fact, when I get that, I'm going to get it printed off the computer. We're going to get it polished up. Maybe we can put it in something with a bit of a border and with a big seal on the bottom, and I want to come in and specifically present that certificate showing what those Calgary Buffalos think about bills 18 and 19, and I want to share it with the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: We're going to do that after the election.

MR. DICKSON: Well, that's right. We'll be too busy in the by-election, but after June 12 I want to bring it.

If one MLA can do that kind of a survey on an issue like 18 and 19, why doesn't the provincial government do it? Why doesn't the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Minister of Innovation and Science, using the expertise of the chief information counsel and the chief information officer, come out with a proposal so that citizens will be able to register their concerns? [Mr. Dickson's speaking time expired] And I hadn't even got to Calgary-Mountain View's comments, but I'll get to that later.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a great pleasure to rise again, because Bill 18 has so many great news stories in it. You just can't say it all in 20 minutes. There is so much good news out of this, and Albertans are so happy that we're doing this.

Mr. Chairman, the reason I've been looking forward to this is that

really Bill 18 does something for low-income Albertans, and I think it's important to acknowledge that. There is much talk from the opposition that Alberta's new tax plan benefits high-income earners. Well, this is true. This government won't deny or apologize for that, but the Liberals always seem to stop right there.

9:20

This bill will also benefit middle-income earners. We're talking benefits to the tune of \$612 in savings for a two-income family earning \$55,000 with two children or a savings of \$1,206 for a one-income family earning \$40,000 with two children. But the fact is: Alberta's new tax plan goes even further, and that's something the critics don't like to mention, Mr. Chairman. Bill 18 frees 190,000 low-income Albertans from provincial taxes completely. I'll say that again. Mr. Chairman, 190,000 low-income Albertans off the provincial tax rolls. That's something the federal Liberals can't boast about, but given their record, it may be something they'll copy in their next budget and try to take the credit for inventing. For the sake of other Canadians I hope they can actually do that. Low-income Albertans deserve a break. They may be students trying to get through school. They may be young and just entering the workforce. They may be single parents, and Bill 18 will help them all.

Let's look at a part-time student, Mr. Chairman. With Alberta's new tax plan even if a student is working full-time at McDonald's earning minimum wage, she won't pay any provincial tax. Now let's look at an Albertan entering the workforce. If she earned \$20,000, she would save \$386 from 1999. However, her federal tax bill would look scary. In 2001 families with two children who earn less than \$33,400 will pay no provincial income tax at all. For these families the refundable Alberta family employment tax credit will exceed Alberta tax payable. Unfortunately, the federal Liberal taxes account for two-thirds of the tax bill. We would love to be able to announce that these low-income Albertans won't be paying any income tax at all, but we will have to wait until the federal Liberals find room in their budget to help the families the same way we are trying to help them here in Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, the opposition has suggested that health care premiums should be eliminated instead of moving to a single tax rate. They suggest that that would provide greater relief to low-income Albertans. However, there are several problems with this approach. First, low-income Albertans already receive a generous subsidy to help pay for health care premiums. Many of these Albertans would receive no benefit from the elimination of the premium.

Seniors also receive generous relief on premiums. In fact, Mr. Chairman, less than one-third of seniors pay full premiums, and seniors start paying income tax at a lower income level than they start paying health premiums. Therefore, low-income seniors would benefit more from tax reductions.

Finally, the benefit for many working Albertans would be minimal. Many employers pay part or all of their employees' health care premiums. A reduction or elimination of premiums would not be completely reflected in Albertans' pay stubs, but it would contribute nicely to a company's bottom line.

So that's why getting rid of health care premiums is not the best solution. Bill 18 is the best way to help ease financial burdens on Albertans.

With Alberta's new tax plan a single person making \$20,000 will get a 38 percent tax cut. A single senior making \$20,000 will receive a 62 percent tax cut. With those kinds of tax cuts a single person could have some car repairs done or purchase a couple of month's worth of groceries, and a senior could pay a month's rent and buy an annual bus pass or have some house repairs done or, just

imagine, not have to worry about where their money will come from in case an emergency arises, Mr. Chairman. As I said, Alberta's new tax plan helps middle- and high-income earners, but most importantly it helps the people who need it the most, and that's why we should be supporting Bill 18.

Another area that I'd like work on, Mr. Chairman – and it's very important to mention all of the wonderful, good things that will come out of passing Bill 18 – is dealing with and around overtime and people who've been working really hard. I can only imagine the envy that other provinces feel as this debate is going on here in Alberta, but a strong fiscal plan has given us the ability to introduce groundbreaking tax reform and tax cuts of over 20 percent. Yes, that's what I said. We'll take 20 percent, or \$1.3 billion, less from Albertans' bank accounts next year.

I think one thing that we can all agree on is the benefit to low-income Albertans. Nearly 200,000 Albertans will be removed from the rolls, but I think the biggest problem that the critics have with the single tax rate is that high-income earners will also be winners. I have a hard time seeing why they oppose this though, Mr. Chairman. Just because someone earns more than their neighbour doesn't mean that he or she is a bad person. Why should they be punished for working harder?

High taxes don't create any incentive to work that extra hour of overtime or take that course you need for a promotion. High taxes often defer people from bettering themselves at work, because the more you earn, the more government takes in taxes. It is a fact that high taxes stifle an individual's enthusiasm.

Mr. Chairman, I know that when my wife is working at the hospital in Calgary, the natural practice for all of the nurses that were needed and were putting in overtime hours – rather than taking the money in pay, because it moved them into a higher tax bracket, they would take the time off. It made no sense for them to take the money because of the high taxes they'd have to pay. This will allow them to work hard, take their money, and enjoy the extra hard work they've had rather than just taking the time off and at least give them a healthy alternative.

We believe in encouraging creativity and enthusiasm in a different way here in Alberta, Mr. Chairman. We think government should get out of people's private lives and out of people's bank accounts. We think that if government backs off, then people will have more room to grow and more freedom to choose. Bill 18 will give Albertans more freedom. By removing tax brackets, Albertans will have the freedom to choose to work harder. They will also have the freedom to choose how they will spend the money that they will save by not paying the same amount of taxes. They won't be punished with higher taxes for getting a raise. There's nothing more discouraging than getting a raise and having it taxed away because your raise puts you in a higher tax bracket.

Low taxes are not only good for individuals and families, Mr. Chairman; they're also good for the economy. When individuals are allowed to grow, the economy grows with them. When individuals are feeling financially confident, the economy reflects that confidence. The Liberal opposition has suggested that we can't afford the kind of tax cuts that we are giving. Well, I think we can't afford not to give them.

The \$1.3 billion tax cut that we are giving to Albertans is affordable. Alberta Treasury estimates the new tax plan will increase economic growth. With the new tax cuts five years after the tax plan is implemented, Alberta's gross domestic product is expected to increase by about 1 and a half percent, or \$1.9 billion larger. Roughly 30,000 new jobs will be created, and increased economic activity will generate enough increased tax revenue to offset the 40 percent of the direct cost of the tax cut.

It's important to keep in mind that these numbers are based on the initial estimate of a \$500 million tax reduction. Now that we are giving a \$1.3 billion tax cut to Albertans, the economic impact will be much greater. This is good news. However, we need to always keep in mind the purpose of this bill: to introduce tax reform and give every Albertan a tax cut. Do the Liberals really want to see those who are in the lowest tax bracket – let's say a young couple expecting their first child – struggle to make ends meet? I know about that. With a new baby in their future they may be inclined to try to earn a little extra money to cover the additional costs of raising a family, but with the current system those extra hours push this family into the middle tax bracket with a higher rate. The only result is that one of them is away from home working longer hours without much financial gain. Bill 18 will end this penalty, Mr. Chairman. I honestly think the Liberals don't want to see that.

What about someone who is already in the middle income tax bracket? What if he or she works hard and gets a raise? Is it all right to tax away the extra money he or she earns? Where do the critics draw the line? Who do they choose to be winners and losers? Bill 18 will not punish these Albertans either.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Mr. Chairman, it's time for some real tax reform. It's time we stop punishing hardworking Albertans by reducing any incentive to work, save, and invest, and it's time we let Albertans keep more of their own money.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure to stand this evening and make a few comments in regards to amendment package A1 in regards to Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. Again we have a bill that's being presented here in the Legislature, a bill that requires amendments. Again it's a bill that was certainly brought in with great haste. The whole idea of our budget being brought in was because we wanted to get ahead of the federal Liberals, and without realizing that whatever changes they had in their tax system, it would certainly impact everything that we did here.

9:30

So here we are, looking at two amendments, one to reduce the flat tax from 11 percent to 10.5 percent and a second to increase the personal exemption from \$11,620 to \$12,900. When I look at this, Mr. Chairman, I certainly could never oppose a tax break for Albertans, and I think it is a great benefit for those 190,000 low-income Albertans that won't pay any provincial tax. This is a break that is going to those that need it most, but they are not the only ones receiving a great tax break in this whole scheme of things.

It was quite interesting this evening. Before I came down, I attended the by-election forum that was put on by three social studies students at Eastglen composite high school. I was amazed, as I was meeting and greeting people coming to the forum, at just how well informed they are in regards to Bill 18 and Bill 19. It was amazing how they sought out the MLAs that were there and got their points of view on it.

I know many of them had expressed an interest in speaking to some government MLAs, and they were very disappointed when they didn't get this opportunity. Certainly we didn't see one there, and if there was one there, then I would apologize to that person. But here we are, in a by-election where of course the record of this

particular government is going to be examined. We're into a by-election where they are going to be looking at Bill 18 and the amendments made to it here, and people didn't have the opportunity to quiz those government members on it. So the real test of this legislation is certainly going to be reflected to some degree in the by-election.

Now, then, we look at what happened with the federal budget. There was such a rush here to bring this in, to bring in changes in Alberta, to bring in this flat tax system that no thought was given to what would happen if indeed the feds altered theirs, and they did. They brought in a tax reduction. They brought in a tax reduction that was certainly fair to all segments of society, to all taxpayers, and I must commend them for that. I think what became evident very, very clearly, when we looked at Bill 18 and Bill 19, is that other people as well got tremendous benefits from these two bills, and those were the people at the upper end. So again we had the tax burden being placed on the middle class.

Now, I was certainly very happy to see that there was a great deal of consultation that went into this particular bill and these amendments. Certainly all Canadians, not only Albertans but all Canadians, have been waiting for some type of tax reform in this country, a tax reform that is fair and equitable. We are elected here to represent the views of our constituents, and certainly in all these consultations I don't think there would have been any Albertans in the other two groups, the middle income and the lower income, that told this government: well, let's give the biggest tax break to those people who can afford to pay it most.

I think that somewhere between those consultations and the drafting of this bill something went awry. I also think we saw the same thing with Bill 19, when of course the flat tax, the .5 percent, was scheduled to be eliminated before the 8 percent surtax. Once again – surprise, surprise – when the bill came out, it was not reflected in the bill, but the 8 percent surtax they were going to be wiping out of that was going to be implemented first, once again a benefit to those people who have the greatest ability to pay.

Now, then, this bill and its amendments certainly don't meet the wishes of the majority of taxpayers in this province. Again, I like the fact that it does give a break to those people who are on the lower end and who will certainly benefit from those. I also think back to a visit we made to the Mennonite Centre, Mr. Chairman. They do a tremendous amount of work with new Canadians. They gave us an example of where two new Canadians, man and wife, were working at minimum wage, and even with those dollars those people were living below the poverty line. So certainly they need every break they can get, but they need a tax system in this province that is going to be fair and equitable.

It seems to me, when I read Bill 18 and the amendments here, that this is not a bill that's going to be fulfilling the public good, but it fulfills the corporate agenda of this province. When we look at that, we do see the implications of what has happened. Where we have – and all studies indicate that we have – a greater spread between the wealthy and the poor in this province, we also find that both those divisions are increasing in size and we are getting a shrinking middle class, yet the middle class by this bill are being asked to carry the load of tax reform. Once again, this is not legislation that is for the people's good. It is legislation which will benefit the haves more than the have-nots. So what we have to do here in this province, Mr. Chairman, is certainly look at this whole idea. We don't have any trouble generating wealth in this rich province. What we have to do is redistribute that wealth, and this bill will certainly not aid the middle class in that regard.

We have certainly talked about the expansion of our economy here in Alberta. It is a very good economy, it is a strong economy,

and it is growing. We have to hope this economy will continue to grow, but we do have a cyclical economy in this particular province, and we do have times when of course we have to put more burden on the taxpayer. We saw that before, when we had the implementation of the .5 percent flat tax as well as the 8 percent surtax. But what has happened here in these booming times? The poor in this province have not benefited. We do have a tremendous number of homeless people, particularly in our urban centres and our major cities of Calgary and Edmonton, and there is staggering poverty.

When I toured the Mustard Seed centre in Calgary and other places in Calgary where the homeless were, I was quite amazed at how similar this situation was to one I witnessed down in California about 10 years ago. We were down in the inner city of Los Angeles on a beautiful summer day with many homeless around. We saw people walk down the sidewalk, and there was a sardine can sitting on the stone fence. One of the homeless picked it up and drank the juice out of it. This is a can that had been sitting out in the sun, and I would imagine that person had food poisoning from that experience.

9:40

Every report here in Alberta, Mr. Chairman, indicates that the amount of poverty for children and families in this province is also on the rise, and certainly this particular bill will be a little bit of a break for them initially. But also when I look at this particular bill, we have to look down the road and say: what is going to happen when this great economy that we have going in this province right now hits hard times? We know that's going to happen. So if we project what impact this is going to have down the road . . . [interjections]

MR. SMITH: Billy, you're doing a great job.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Member for Calgary-Varsity. I just have a few more comments I'd like to make.

MR. SMITH: They'd better be better than the last ones.

MR. BONNER: They're excellent comments.

MR. SMITH: Well, we'll be the judge of that.

MR. BONNER: They would even fit in with your philosophy of things.

MR. SMITH: Oh, so you're saying you're ready to convert, take the pledge?

THE CHAIRMAN: Order.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Chairman, just finishing off my comments here. When our economy falls on hard times, as it will and it always has in the history of this province, then who is initially going to be impacted the most when we do have tax changes? Of course, this is going to be the middle class, upon whom the burden of the tax load was placed with this particular bill.

So, Mr. Chairman, in closing I must say that I cannot support these amendments at this time, and I look forward to further debate by other members of the Assembly. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's such a good-

news story again that I just had to stand up and cover a few more points on this particular bill, because it is such a great bill. There are some aspects of Bill 18 that make Alberta's tax system different than any other in Canada. It's true. The most obvious one is the introduction of the single-rate tax, but I'd like to focus on something that doesn't get much attention. I'd like to focus on the fairness to families that the changes to our tax system will bring.

Bill 18 dramatically reduces the difference in the way one-income and two-income families are treated by the tax system. [interjections] You bet, and having the lower tax rate that's being introduced in the amendment makes this even a better bill.

You see, Mr. Chairman, under the current system there are different amounts for the basic and spousal exemptions. Right now the basic personal exemption is \$7,231 and the spousal exemption is \$6,140. This doesn't make much difference to a dual-income family because both earners claim the basic exemption. However, it does make a difference to a single-income family – and this is where the unfairness is – because the one earner claims the personal exemption and the lower amount of the spousal exemption. Another reason one-income families pay more is that their incomes get pushed into higher tax brackets sooner, so more of their incomes are taxed at higher rates.

When we move to the new system, both the basic and spousal exemptions will be the same, \$12,900. Also, with a single-rate system there is no higher bracket to be pushed into. It doesn't matter whether it is the income of a single-income family or a dual-income family; income is taxed at 10 and a half percent, not the 11 percent that was in the original. So under the current system a single-income family with two children and earning \$55,000 a year paid \$3,349 in provincial taxes in 1999, while a two-income family with two children and earning the same amount paid \$2,479. That's a difference of \$870. Now, Mr. Chairman, when our new system comes into place in eight months, a single-income family will pay \$1,968, while the two-income family will pay \$1,867. That's a difference of about \$100. Both families get a sizable tax break, and the difference in what they pay is dramatically reduced.

Just as we believe that Albertans should not be punished for choosing to work harder, we also believe that the family shouldn't be punished for choosing to have one parent stay at home. While this is a step in the right direction in reducing the income tax difference between one- and two-income families, Mr. Chairman, it only applies to the provincial portion. Again, federal taxes account for over 60 percent of the income tax bill.

There is something else to consider. According to a paper done by the C.D. Howe Institute, in many cases one-income families make less than two-income families. This makes sense since families with two income earners can make a lot more money. Their figures show that 80 percent of high-income families were dual income earners, and over half of all low-income families had one income earner.

Mr. Chairman, this is a fairer tax system because it provides great relief to low-income Albertans. By addressing this issue, we've also made sure that the new tax system helps those who are often the most vulnerable: single-parent families. Single parents can claim the spousal exemption for one of their children, providing the same level of savings enjoyed by a two-parent single-income family. A single-parent family making \$30,000 will receive a 276 percent tax cut. How can they get a 276 percent tax cut, Mr. Chairman? Well, it happens because this family that used to pay \$397 will now have their taxes reduced to zero and then get more through the Alberta family employment tax credit. These single parents are among the 190,000 Albertans who no longer have to pay provincial income taxes. As I mentioned earlier, this unfortunately doesn't apply to the federal income taxes.

However, Mr. Chairman, with Bill 18 a single-income family with two kids earning \$30,000 will save \$1,096 from 1999, and \$1,096 can go pretty far if you think about it. They could replace their hot-water tank, buy some new shoes for the kids, order some pizzas, rent a couple of movies, have a good time. It's a lot of money for a family with a low income. But the best thing is that they can spend it on whatever they want, and it's their own priorities. It's not for us to decide.

This government believes that the best way to help families is to leave more money in their hands at the end of the day. That's why we've been cutting taxes for years. Alberta is well ahead of most of the provinces in providing tax relief. The early elimination of the surtax on January 1 this year is great news for middle- and upper-income Albertans, but it is not the first tax break given to Albertans. In 1997, Mr. Chairman, we introduced the Alberta family employment tax credit, which gives tax breaks to low- and middle-income earners. In 1998 we cut the tax rate from 45.5 percent of federal tax to 44 percent, and we doubled the Alberta family employment tax credit.

MR. FISCHER: Is this a Conservative government?

MR. HLADY: Cutting taxes. Pretty good, huh?

In Budget '99 we introduced this new tax plan. Bill 18, Mr. Chairman, is important for Alberta's ongoing tax reform. It's important that we unhook from the federal system so that we can change the basic and spousal exemption amounts. If we hadn't unhooked from the federal system, we would not have been able to address the fairness issues such as the difference paid by one- and two-income families. In fact, these families would be worse off if we simply passed through the federal reductions. With Bill 18 all single-earner and single-parent families, whether they make \$30,000 or \$100,000, are substantially better off under the single tax rate.

One other area that's really important as well, Mr. Chairman, is bracket creep. I mentioned it a little bit earlier, but I'd like to get into a little more detail on bracket creep here. Everywhere in this province Albertans are trying to get ahead, working hard trying to create wealth for themselves and for their families, hoping to have more cash available to spend and maybe even a bit to save for a rainy day. They've worked to take part in the Alberta advantage that we speak so often about. With the amendment that we having coming in here, going from the 11 percent to the 10.5 percent, they're going to save even more.

The problem is that since 1986 our tax system has not kept up with inflation. This problem, otherwise known as bracket creep, has meant that the tax system has not contributed to that advantage. Before 1986 our tax system was fully indexed to inflation. If the cost of living went up, the tax system reflected those changes, for example by increasing basic exemptions. But the federal government decided it needed more cash, and rather than legislating a tax hike, they took the side door. They decided that in the future they would only index the tax system if prices rose by more than 3 percent. This is called partial indexation.

9:50

Say you've got a guy who tries to make a better life for himself. He wants more money so he can maybe buy a house, save a little for his future, do something for his children, do things he's always wanted to do. So he finds a job where he works harder than he's ever worked until he finally gets a raise. Logically, Mr. Chairman, you'd think he'd be better off. I mean, he's making more money, so theoretically you'd assume he'd have more to spend on groceries or to pay off his bills or whatever. The fact is that the tax man takes the better part of that extra money.

On top of all this, when his wages have gone up just to reflect the

fact that things cost more, a cost of living adjustment, the result is that he ends up getting pushed into a higher tax bracket even though his wages only went up enough to cover the increasing costs of things that he had to buy anyway. So really it's possible that this man is not much better off or possibly even worse. It's crazy. It's as if the government is saying: "You've got a lot of extra cash. You're going to have to give us more because you can afford it now."

Forget that everything costs more and that he's been working hard to get more income so that he can afford those things and maybe set a little aside for the future. None of that matters under the old system. We've been punishing those who work hard trying to get ahead and create more wealth for themselves with a tax system that creeps into their pockets and steals their hard-earned money when they're not looking. It's not only regressive; it's downright dishonest. It's about time we did something about it.

When you design policies as a government, the true test is to figure out a way to create systems that will benefit the most people as well as benefit those who need it the most. The great thing about the system we've created under Bill 18 is that it will do both, Mr. Chairman. Everyone will pay fewer taxes with this new amendment, which sets the flat tax at 10.5 percent and raises the spousal exemptions from \$6,140 to \$12,900 and the personal exemptions from \$7,231 to \$12,900. An additional 190,000 low-income Albertans will pay absolutely no provincial income tax under this new system. Now half of Albertans who file personal income tax returns will not pay Alberta income tax.

That's a wonderful thing. How can you beat that? Everyone has more cash in their pockets, and almost 200,000 of the people who need it the most won't have to pay any provincial taxes. That's a really important point because lower income Canadians are punished the worst with bracket creep. The value of the credits these people rely on erodes because of inflation so that they end up paying more money to the government. Many low-income Canadians have moved from a situation of paying no tax to paying tax even though the only increases they have seen have been to keep up with inflation.

It's just not fair, and that's why we are not only indexing our tax system but massively increasing personal and spousal deductions to make up for lost ground. We thought it was wrong that low-income Albertans were paying taxes, and we fixed the problem. Often it's money that could go towards rent, food, bills, new shoes, or whatever else they need. Money is tight at these lower incomes and every penny counts for them. Not only does bracket creep rob the rich; it takes money from the pockets of some of the Albertans who need it the most.

Bill 18 and its new amendments will make the system fair. It will relieve a huge amount of tax pressure from the people of this province and will make sure we're actually contributing to the Alberta advantage that we've always been talking about. This is a tax plan that has become the model for the rest of the country. I should point out that it's really great to see that Ottawa has finally opened their eyes to this problem and decided to follow our lead in eliminating bracket creep.

I really think we're doing a lot to create advantage for Albertans through Bill 18, Mr. Chairman, and I'm proud to be a part of the Assembly that has had the opportunity to do it. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really appreciate the vigour with which Calgary-Mountain View is engaging in debate tonight. I think this has to represent a personal best on his part: three

separate efforts in committee on the same bill. I'm not talking about in the same legislative session; I'm just talking on the same bill, on the same amendment. It's got to represent a personal best. Very impressive.

One of the concerns I have is that the amendment talks about how the government wants to collect taxes based on a single rate of 10.5 percent, but to listen to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, you would think the government really believes that all taxes, all taxation is a form of punishment. I'm going to go way out on a limb here and take a real political risk and say that I don't think all taxation is punishment.

You know, I don't know anybody that's particularly glad to turn over part of their hard-earned income to the tax man, but I do know lots of people that enjoy public education and public health care. They enjoy those public institutions that give us peace and security and justice. They enjoy the roads, they enjoy the parks, and they enjoy environmental protection. Mr. Chairman, generally speaking, I think most Canadians agree that taxes are the price you pay for the kind of society you want to build and you want to live in, so I don't think all taxation is punishment, and I don't think most Albertans or most Canadians are opposed to paying fair taxes.

You know, I've seen those bumper stickers that say: all taxes are theft. Now, I suppose there might be one or two people out there that believe that all taxes are theft, and they're probably the same people that don't put their money in the bank, because they don't trust it, so they keep it in a sock under their pillow. They're probably the same people that have another bumper sticker that says: this truck protected by Smith & Wesson. They probably have another sign on the door that talks about all the people they never want to see visit them, and they probably don't mind living that kind of imprisoned life. For the most part, Mr. Chairman, I think Canadians are far more fair-minded about taxation policy than Calgary-Mountain View would have us believe.

Earlier I was talking about the difference between the rich and the poor in this country and the growing gap, particularly here in Alberta. What we know is that this gap can be measured in so many different ways. If you take a look at chief executive officer compensation, for example, there was a survey done in 1977. It looked at 100 CEOs. Pay particular attention to this: the average compensation in 1997 for this group of 100 CEOs of large corporations was \$3.45 million annually. That was the average compensation. For comparison purposes, just to put that in perspective, according to Stats Canada, for 1997, the same year the average CEO compensation was almost three and a half million, the average Canadian worker earned \$31,100, less than one one-hundredth of the CEOs' average.

Now, CEO compensation also has grown by an alarming rate, while year over year the average worker's income in this country has only grown by about 2 percent since 1996. So again, Mr. Chairman, the argument of some who would have us believe that all the wealthy are packing their bags and going elsewhere because they're not doing very well in this country would be misinforming us.

Let's take a look at the argument that we have to provide greater tax advantages to the wealthy than to anybody else because if we don't, they will take their capital and go elsewhere. Well, I would like to know where all these very fine businessmen and businesswomen would go, because in fact if you take a look at the average percentage of return on capital between 1970 and 1979, do you know that Canada is second only to Japan in terms of the average rate of return on capital for that period of time? Fifteen percent compared to 17.9 percent. The United States was only at 14 percent. Investments made in this country did better than almost anywhere else in the world during that time period.

If that's the case, then why is it that there are those out there trying to get us to believe that tax policy is the only way we can stop this capital flight? Mr. Chairman, it doesn't make any sense to me. I would hope that the next time Calgary-Mountain View stands in his place, maybe he will tell us what studies he has to back up his assertion that Bill 18 is the answer to this problem which we haven't been able to nail down yet.

If we take a look at the rates of return on capital for the period between 1980 to 1998, again we see the same experience as what happened in the '70s. If you take a look, first of all, at the '80s, you find that the total return for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, countries, the rate of capital on average in let's say 1985 was 14.2 percent. By 1989 it was 15.5 percent. Not bad, but take a look at Canada's history: 19.2 percent in '85, 19.3 percent in '89, again leading most of the developed world. This is contrary to the cry that we hear so much that corporate Canada has not been doing very well. Corporate Canada can always do better; there's always room for improvement. Yes, carefully crafted policy can help, but they have been doing very well.

10:00

Let's take a look at the 1990s. Again, let's compare Canada to the United States. In 1990 the rate of return was 17.1 percent in the United States. For the G-7 it was 15.5 percent. In Canada it was 17.8, leading the G-7, leading the United States. In 1995 18.3 percent was the rate of return for the United States, 16.1 percent for the G-7, 19.3 percent for Canada, leading once again. By 1998 the United States had managed to attract a rate of return of 18 and a half percent, the G-7 countries 16.4 percent. Canada's performance continued to be stable and above the average at 19.2 percent, Mr. Chairman. These are figures that we don't hear much from the disciples of Reagan and Thatcher economics, not a headline that we're likely to see in any of the Hollinger papers or in the headline of the *National Post* either. The fact is that the numbers don't lie.

In 1996 15 OECD countries had a higher percentage of tax revenue compared to GDP than Canada. By 1999 Canada will have dropped even further down the list, and because of the strength of the federal economy, the management of the federal budget, and the surplus that is projected over the next decade, that ranking will even become greater, Mr. Chairman. It will have dropped even further down the list.

Tax revenue as a percentage of GDP in Canada right now is about 38 percent, and we expect that to fall by at least a full third. Now, Canada is in the middle of the pack on that measure. It doesn't lead, but it certainly doesn't follow. Again, it's comparable to Germany, the United Kingdom, Hungary. The economies of Greece, Norway, Poland, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Luxembourg, France, Belgium, et cetera, all do far worse on that measure, and really we're not dramatically different from other economies that we're often compared to such as Australia or even once again the United States.

So, Mr. Chairman, it's clear that tax policy has a huge impact on the individual lives of wage-earning Canadians. We know from the statistics, we know from the evidence that there is this growing gap, and we know or we should know that when we have an opportunity through tax policy to do something about ameliorating the conditions of the very poor, we should make that a priority instead of first paying our attention to the circumstances of the very rich. That's not socialism; that's just fairness. That's not saying that we don't want to make sure that everybody can do as well as possible and leverage everybody's advantage to the maximum. It just means that we don't want to pick winners and losers. We believe fundamentally on this side of the House in equality of opportunity, not of outcome, making sure that people get the same breaks at the same time. We don't

want to keep on reinforcing all of the distortions that are currently in our system.

Mr. Chairman, earlier today during the Routine I had an opportunity to table three amendments in the Assembly. I tabled one amendment which, as I said during tabling, would refer the detail of this bill to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. I tabled another amendment which would ensure that there was complete flow through to the Alberta taxpayer for any of the benefits of federal tax reform, because in this delinking we're afraid that the provincial government won't rush to pass along tax savings to Albertans as a result of the very aggressive tax reform and tax reductions being done at the federal level.

The third amendment that I tabled is one that I was hoping we would be able to get to in debate, Mr. Chairman. I've been informed that that's likely not to happen, and I don't know why it is that the government would want to stop debate on this. While we were dealing with Bill 19, there's an amendment currently that's on the floor to be debated. The idea behind the amendment is to synchronize the removal of both the deficit elimination taxes, but in order for that amendment to be effective, we would have to further amend Bill 18 to amend section 89(3) to ensure that the deficit elimination tax is removed in the 1999 taxation year not the year 2000 taxation year.

Now, the government seems to be wanting to frustrate our attempt to get this amendment onto the floor of the Assembly so we can debate it. All I can think is that this government wants to maintain this .5 percent flat tax that over one and a half income tax payers have to pay for an extra year. Why they want to continue to pick the pockets of taxpayers to the tune of some \$350 million is beyond me, particularly when we listen to the arguments put forward by Calgary-Mountain View about how this government wants to rush to remove these hurtful and regressive forms of taxation.

So we're in a real quandary here because the government is really controlling the agenda. They're watching the clock, and they're sort of manipulating things around the fact that they would like not to have an opportunity for the House to vote on these Liberal amendments which are needed in order to synchronize the changes in Bill 19.

At some point we'll have to vote on the government amendment, and I think what's likely after that is that the government will probably not bring back Bill 18 until they can control the clock again through the use of closure. So Albertans may never have the benefit of this amendment proposed by the Liberal opposition. So when we get to Bill 19, the government wants to continue gloating that somehow it has found an error in the logic of what it is the Official Opposition is trying to do.

I just hope that the government doesn't continue to think so little of Albertans that they won't be able to quickly see through that kind of tactic and understand it for the cynical bit of politics that it is, Mr. Chairman. It seems to me that what we have is a striking example of this government being petty and playing politics while at the same time they want to put themselves up on this tax-cut pedestal and pretend that what they're really doing is in the best interest of everyone. Of course, all they're trying to accomplish now is something that's in the best interests of themselves. Their policy will not well serve Albertans, and this particular strategy about trying to block debate will not well serve Albertans otherwise.

Mr. Chairman, I fear that if I were to yield the floor and allow this government amendment to come to a vote, the result would be that immediately the government would adjourn, and we would never be able to move on. So I'm not inclined to do that at this point. I think I will just simply continue describing the difficulties I have with the current government policy even as the proposed amendments would have impact on it.

There was a paper presented in 1998 by The Urban Institute in Washington, D.C. and authored by Eugene Steuerle. The title of his paper is *The Simple Arithmetic of Flat Taxes*. The title of that paper really struck me, because I've always been frankly a little bit intimidated by tax policy. You know, when you read all the tax acts and you sit down with your accountants and you sit down with lawyers and you try to understand the whole myriad of Revenue Canada rulings and all the interpretation bulletins, I've always found it to be very complex. I have to clear my mind. I have to focus. I have to have, you know, the lights on high and the music down low, and I have to be able to really pay attention. I have to really be able to focus in to make sure that I understand it and that I get everything lined up properly.

Then it struck me that when this government comes through with a flat tax proposal, what they're trying to do is find a very simple solution to a very complex problem. There's a saying I heard once. You know, it's like one of those Murphy's laws: for every complex problem there is a simple solution, and it's always wrong. I think that's what we've got here.

10:10

We've got a very complex situation with tax policy. We've spent hours so far in debate explaining the interaction of tax policy on social policy and on the economy and the fiscal dividends and the economic dividends. You know that if you change one variable it affects so many other variables, so there's nothing simple about tax policy. So when I read this, *The Simple Arithmetic of Flat Taxes*, I thought: that describes this government to a tee. You know, simple thought, a simple process; let's try to boil this down to something that's so simple that it becomes almost meaningless.

So instead of working hard, rolling up their sleeves, you know, breaking a sweat on their brows, really paying attention to the detail, what this government has done instead is say: "Well, you know what? We'll just package up a simple idea with some political rhetoric, and we'll try to sell it to Albertans because we don't have much respect for Albertans." Now, this is what I imagine was going on in the government's mind, simply saying: well, you know, I think that Albertans won't question us, because after all we're the government.

What we know, Mr. Chairman, particularly with the experience on Bill 11 is that the government doesn't have that kind of trust or support from Albertans. Albertans are far more sophisticated than this government has given them credit for. Albertans are far more on the ball when it comes to the harmful impacts of social policy, in particular tax policy.

So this government may think that they can pull the wool over the eyes of the voters in this province, and they may be arrogant enough to think that they can get away with it because of the way they ramrodded through Bill 11, but I'm here to tell you along with my colleagues in the Liberal opposition that that's not the message that we're getting. It's not the message we're getting on the doorsteps in the Edmonton-Highlands by-election. It's certainly not the message we're getting on our fax machines and in our phone calls and in our letters. It just makes me want to scream out sometimes, Mr. Chairman, when I think that this government is really that out of touch, yet they still think they have the moral authority to continue to govern and just to push through whatever initiative they want.

In any case, all of that sort of came to mind when I read this title *The Simple Arithmetic of Flat Taxes*. But the Steuerle article has an interesting quote, and I'd like to share it with you, Mr. Chairman. What he says is:

The simple arithmetic of tax reform reveals that there is no free ride. Improvements in fairness and simplification are possible, but they require not a wave of the hand, but step by step examination of

almost every government program in the tax code or in the expenditure system. This is very hard work, it doesn't promise that everyone will be a winner when the legislation is finally drafted, and it can't be done without employing some basic arithmetic.

Mr. Chairman, this government has been trying to use the approach of simple answers to complex problems since 1993, when the Treasurer of the day, Jim Dinning, said in a public forum in Red Deer that there's a smart way and a dumb way to cut budgets, and he prefers the dumb way: just cut. You know, he wasn't kidding, and it set the tone for what this government has done. That very same individual, who is now the chairman of the Calgary regional health authority, talking about what's gone wrong in health, said: we'd rather experiment than plan. It's unbelievable. So when he's Provincial Treasurer in 1993 to when he's the servant of the government in the year 2000 in the Calgary regional health authority, the same attitude is prevalent.

There is no reward for that kind of simple thinking, for that kind of laziness. There is a reward for hard work. There is a reward for paying attention. There is a reward for planning. We should not let this government get away with that kind of laissez-faire attitude particularly when it comes to the hard-earned money of the men and the women we were elected to represent. I think that this government should be embarrassed by the direction they're going with tax reform, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to my next opportunity to pursue that particular thought.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think we've heard a number of comments tonight about government not allowing things to come to the table and rambling debate on things that aren't on the table. The fact of the matter is that we're on an amendment to Bill 18, and that amendment is a very good amendment. Bill 18, as it was brought forward, dealt with the circumstances that we had planned for, fully anticipating that the federal government might bring some amendments to their budget based on the input which has been made by Alberta from time to time and over the years that they should reindex, that they should be cutting taxes, that they should do a number of things. It was anticipated that if they did in fact cut taxes, there would need to be amendments to this bill in order to make sure that those tax cuts were passed through.

So the amendment is a good amendment. It moves from the 11 percent rate, which was originally proposed in the policy, to 10.5 percent, and it raises the personal exemption that was proposed from \$11,620 to \$12,900. And those are important. The dual change is very important, because what it does, as has been said in this House before, is remove 195,000 Albertans from the tax rolls. There can be nothing fairer, Mr. Chairman, than removing low-income Albertans from the tax rolls, and this amendment does that.

It's a very fair process, because what it does as well is lower the single rate to 10.5 percent. Now, I like to talk about this as a two-rate tax system. There is zero percent tax for those who earn at a rate at which they wouldn't be taxed because of the personal exemption. We shouldn't forget in this discussion that of course spousal exemptions are going up significantly, so both a taxpayer and a taxpayer's spouse, if they're not an income earner, have the same exemptions. So this is a very fair process to families. All of the existing tax credits remain, so income earners in the middle-income range have the benefit of all of the tax exemptions and the tax credits that they've had before.

It's a very, very fair process, and coupled with the progressive tax rate system that the federal government still maintains in terms of the multirate structure, the combination of the two gives Alberta the

best possible tax position for small business to operate, for the economy to operate, for money to be returned to taxpayers' pockets so that it can be recirculated through the economy, and in general it makes a very, very strong Alberta advantage gain. So, Mr. Chairman, I think this is a very, very good amendment.

Now, Edmonton-Glenora was purporting to speak to this amendment but in fact tried to speak to other amendments which they haven't brought forward yet but tabled in the House today. What they're trying to do is suggest that by amending Bill 19, which comes up for debate later on, we can move to next year the removal of the surtax that comes off this year under Bill 19 and then amend Bill 18 to bring it back into this year. Well, that's about as ad hoc tax planning as any that they accuse the government of doing.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Chairman, that over a year ago Albertans were promised that the surtax would come off this year and that the delinking would happen next year. That's when we can delink; that's when we will delink at the earliest possible opportunity. That's what's appropriate. That's good planning. That's not the ad hockery that the Liberals would have us engage in now, by a simple twist of the wrist move it back a tax year, which can't be done because you can't bring this in without delinking from the federal government. So it's just inappropriate for the Liberals to suggest that we have kept them off the debate floor when they could have allowed a vote at any time on this.

Mr. Chairman, at this point in time we do have to debate other business of the House, so I would move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

10:20

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of the Whole

(continued)

Bill 19

Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000

20. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that further consideration of any or all of the resolutions, clauses, sections, or titles of Bill 19, Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000, shall, when called, be the first business of the committee and shall not be further postponed.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:22 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Fischer	Paszkowski
Boutilier	Fritz	Shariff
Broda	Graham	Smith
Calahasen	Hancock	Stevens
Clegg	Hlady	Strang
Coutts	Klapstein	Taylor
Ducharme	Magnus	Woloshyn
Dunford	McFarland	Yankowsky
Evans	Melchin	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Bonner	Leibovici	Sapers
Carlson	Nicol	Soetaert
Dickson	Olsen	

Totals:	For – 27	Against – 8
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[Government Motion 20 carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would at this time ask for unanimous consent of the House to abridge the Standing Orders such that if any other votes are taken on Bill 19 before the committee adjourns that the bells ring for the normal 10 minutes for the first vote and thereafter be abridged to one minute.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. We have Bill 19, then, under way, and we have amendment A1, as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Chairman, thank you. We had a very interesting circumstance last week, before the May long weekend, when I'm sure the government was hoping that the minds of Albertans would be paid to the burgeoning spring and the warmth of the sun and the blue skies that most of us enjoyed in this province. I think the government was hoping that nobody would notice what stunt the government pulled. You know what? They noticed, and I heard about it. People were actually outraged that the government would take the opportunity to pull the kind of stunt that they did in terms of the time allocation on these tax bills.

We have Bill 18 and we have Bill 19. Really, this is a total restructuring of the way taxes are collected in this province. There's really no reason why bills 18 and 19 couldn't have been done together in one bill except the government wasn't sure what it wanted to do in terms of tax strategy when it came to the fine details.

See, in 1996 the government had said that they were going to eliminate the .5 percent tax that all Alberta taxpayers pay. Then they changed their mind because they thought they couldn't afford it. So in 1999, when they published the budget for 2000, they did a full reversal, and they said: no; we're only going to get rid of the high-income surtax, the 8 percent that about 390,000 Albertans pay, and maybe nobody will notice. So because they did that reversal of

policy, they really had to do two separate bills, because Bill 18, which totally redrafts the tax act for Alberta – it's called the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act – has in it a section that talks specifically about one of the deficit elimination taxes. Bill 19 amends one of the sections that would be in Bill 18.

As I was describing before, because of the intricacies of parliamentary procedure in the opposition we're not allowed to amend a section of a bill that's not in the original bill. So this is why we come to an amendment such as the amendment before us, which is amending section 3.03, to talk about the flat tax being withdrawn in the same year as to which section 3.04 applies, which of course is the section 3.04 that's in Bill 18.

Now, when I moved this, I made it very clear that the intent of this and the only reason why we couldn't do it directly was because, as I say, of these intricacies of parliamentary procedure, but the intent clearly is to ensure that the government can't pick winners and losers with their tax reforms, that they would remove both of these so-called deficit elimination taxes at the same time next year; in other words, for the 2000 tax year.

Now, the Government House Leader, like a kid trapped in a candy store, ringing his hands and jumping with glee, went: "My goodness, my goodness," or words to that effect. I think he said: this is delicious, so exactly like a child in a candy store. He said: this is delicious; the Official Opposition has made a mistake. Now, I can understand his delight, because of course the Official Opposition does not make mistakes. So I can understand his delight when he thought he had found an error. He couldn't contain himself. In fact, I have never seen the Government House Leader more animated.

My colleague the Official Opposition House Leader, who wasn't present to see the performance, read *Hansard* this morning and called me and said: Sapers, what did you do to Hancock? That's what he said. It's a quote, Mr. Chairman. "What did you do to him? He was so animated, it literally jumped off the page at me." He could tell. He could see the gleam in his eye. His cheeks got rosy. He was light on his feet, and the reason why is because, again, he thought he had found a mistake.

Now, the mistake, of course, is his. The issue is that the government controls the timing on when bills are introduced, and they can control that in a thousand different ways, as we've seen over the course of just this very day, so the timing is not of the Official Opposition's choosing. What we can do is bring honest and accountable opposition into this Legislative Assembly to make sure that the government can't just run roughshod over the people of this province. So we introduced an amendment to Bill 19, this amendment which will see to it that the .5 percent flat tax is removed at the same time so that average Albertans don't take it in the neck, Mr. Chairman, because this government wants to play favourites.

Now, of course, you have to read this together with one of those amendments that I tabled earlier today during the Routine, particularly the amendment on Bill 18 that would amend section 89(3).

10:40

MR. DICKSON: That's the Liberal fair tax tax?

MR. SAPERS: It is in fact, Calgary-Buffalo, all part of the Liberal fair tax package, in fact truly for the first time since 1993 what would really be an Alberta advantage. The Liberal opposition has come forward with the beginnings of tax reform that will be fair, will be fundamental, will be focused, will be comprehensive, and will be sustainable, all admirable goals, none of which the government initiatives can achieve.

MR. DICKSON: You should be selling this in West Edmonton Mall gift shops.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I fully expect the Harris Conservatives to pick up on this Liberal package and bring it into Ontario, and then maybe once Mr. Harris adopts our plan, the current Premier will see that, since he's always so nervous about what it is that Ontario is doing. He'll look back there across the Canadian Shield, and he'll see what it is that's going on in Ontario and say: well, we can't let Harris out tax reform us. He'll bring the Liberal package back into Alberta – and that would be okay with me if that happened, Mr. Chairman – and then they would implement what would be truly fundamental and fair and comprehensive and sustainable tax reform. If that's the way it has to go, you know, maybe what I'll do is air express this package of amendments over to Mike Harris.

Maybe I should send it to Tom Long too, because, you see, when he puts it on the agenda for the Canadian Alliance, maybe the former Provincial Treasurer will see it as well and think: oh, my goodness, somebody else has a better idea; I'd better appropriate it for myself. Then maybe we'll see it fed back into the system that way as well, because we know full well that those characters don't have any qualms at all about appropriating the good ideas of others. So we would give them this good idea because we know it's the right thing to do.

The bottom line here, Mr. Chairman, is that contrary to what the Government House Leader would have Albertans believe, that the Bill 19 amendment that's before us is out of sequence or prolonging the collection of this so-called deficit elimination tax, this tax that was brought in in 1987 – and I believe the deficit was gone by '94 or '95. Budget '96 was the first budget without a deficit. Actually, I believe that was about a year after Saskatchewan eliminated theirs. So the Alberta claims about, you know, whose budget was balanced first are probably a little exaggerated, but that's okay. I'm still proud to be an Albertan. It's just the government I take issue with, Mr. Chairman.

In any case, we have the budget balanced, the deficit gone, but this government has for years and years and years proceeded to collect these so-called deficit elimination taxes, which were only supposed to be temporary. What we want to do is eliminate them both, and we want to eliminate them both as soon as possible. The soonest we can do that, of course, would be the very next taxation year. So that's the impact of these amendments.

I want the hundreds of Albertans in the galleries with us tonight and I want all of the men and women who will be reading *Hansard* and those tuned in on the worldwide web on real-time audio, listening right now, because I know my son is – and, Jeremy, it's time for bed – to all understand that these two amendments have to be read together. You have to take a look at this, because, as I said, Bill 18 is a comprehensive rewrite of the Alberta tax legislation. It has a section in it that relates to one of the deficit elimination taxes. Bill 19, which is really an amending act to the new Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, talks to another deficit elimination tax. You have to read them both together. It's been approved by Parliamentary Counsel, and it's the only way that we can bring this measure of fairness to Albertans.

So if I have to say it again so it's crystal clear, I will. What this will do, in effect, is make sure that at the very next opportunity, the next taxation year, when Albertans sit down to fill out their tax returns for the income they've earned this year, they will be able to save themselves from paying not just that 8 percent surcharge that the government wants to just forgive for the highest income earners in the province; they would also be saved from paying the .5 percent flat tax, which generates about \$340 million worth of revenue, projected on an annual basis, and which is paid by over 1.5 million tax filers. That's over \$340 million and probably closer to \$350 million this year, and with the growth in this province it might even be closer to 1.6 million Alberta tax filers.

In any case, the majority of taxpayers, almost every single one of them, will pay the .5 percent. Only those at the higher income level pay the surcharge. We don't think that's fair. We don't think the wealthy deserve yet another break on top of all of the goodies that this government already provides for them. We want to make sure that this tax reform advantages the widest variety of Albertans. That's why we brought in this amendment. That's why I would urge this government to vote in favour of it.

Please, I would say to my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly, don't take notice of the gleeful musings of the Government House Leader when he suggests that the Official Opposition would have Albertans paying this tax for an extra year. That is nonsense. In fact, it's more than nonsense. It's bull droppings, Mr. Chairman. Of course, the evidence of that is that amendment A1 to 19 is the companion or, as my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo says, the Siamese twin to this amendment for Bill 18, which I have already spoken to.

It could not have been made simpler. This is deadly simple. This could not have been made simpler. The only way it could have been made simpler is if the government had kept its word in 1996 and eliminated that .5 percent tax first so that when they rewrote the tax act in Bill 18, we wouldn't have had this mismatch between which deficit elimination tax was going to go first. It would have been made simpler if the government hadn't broken its promise. But since, you know, this government has a habit of not keeping its word, we have to do what we can, given the rules of procedure, to hold this government accountable. So here we have these two amendments, which really must be read side by side so that all Albertans will get the full appreciation that it is the goal of the Official Opposition to remove not just the 8 percent surcharge but the .5 percent flat tax as well and to do that as quickly as possible.

I don't know, Mr. Chairman, how much more needs to be said at this point in time. It seems to me that it couldn't be clearer; it couldn't be simpler; it couldn't be more fair or fundamental. I will yield momentarily to see whether or not my arguments have caused a tax epiphany on the part of government members, and they will quickly accept this amendment as the one that makes sense. Of course, if they haven't come to that realization, Mr. Chairman . . .

Chairman's Ruling Speaking Twice in a Debate

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. member made reference to something that's not possible. Once the closure motion is on, you get to speak once; okay?

MR. SAPERS: You're right. Thanks. My colleagues, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay; fair enough. Good. I just didn't want you to sit down thinking that you were going to be able to come up, and you're not.

10:50

MR. SAPERS: No. And of course it's sad that we're under that duress at this point in the debate, Mr. Chairman. I was inspired by Calgary-Mountain View rising not once, not twice, but three times during the amendment on Bill 18, and I would have appreciated being able to speak as many times at least on my own amendment on this very important matter. But because the government is using the heavy hand of closure and clubbing democratic debate once again to a close in the Chamber, I won't be able to do that. But I know my colleagues will carry on the debate.

The thought that I was trying to complete was that I would yield

the floor to the government to see whether or not they had seen the error of their ways. Of course, I don't expect an apology or any act of contrition from the Government House Leader, but you know I would expect him at least to be silent while his colleagues stand and say: well, gee, you know, this amendment to Bill 19 really does make sense. Then, as I say, we'll hear from my colleagues as well.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: So, Mr. Chairman, thank you for making sure that I was correct in the impact of closure. As I conclude, I will simply reiterate that the government's plan is to remove the 8 percent surcharge first. This is a surcharge that's paid by less than 400,000 high-income Albertans. The Liberal amendment would cause the removal of the .5 percent flat tax, which is paid by all Alberta tax filers. We don't think it's fair to reward the wealthy first, particularly at the expense of those who aren't, so we would like to see both of these deficit elimination taxes gone, gone, gone, and our amendments, read together, would accomplish exactly that.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to speak to Bill 19 and to the amendments before us. In effect, you know, the amendment is literally just repealing the opportunity for the government to accomplish its purpose in Bill 19 of repealing the 8 percent surtax. [interjections] Would you like that more clearly?

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes, please.

MR. MELCHIN: Okay. Let me say that again. This amendment would defeat the main purpose of Bill 19 by preventing the opportunity of getting rid of the 8 percent surtax.

Certainly I can't see anybody around here that would be thrilled to see that we leave an 8 percent surtax in place. I don't hear anyone saying that there was any complaining or worry on behalf of the wealthy that this temporary measure in 1987 was introduced as a surtax to fight the deficit, a deficit elimination tax. I don't ever hear the complaint that it's easy enough to put on this temporary measure with the promise that it be temporary and that at some stage when deficits were eliminated, the 8 percent surtax would be eliminated. I can't see that we would have anything but an obligation as a government. That's why this bill has been brought before us. Now that the deficits have been eliminated, we also must honour the obligation and promise that was made in previous years that this surtax would be eliminated.

It's a great thing for all Albertans that we would be able to demonstrate to them not just who benefits but certainly that we show that we fulfill obligations and promises of the past governments. The wealthy, too, will not then be said to be fighting a surtax or deficit which no longer exists. The province has had already a few years in which we've had opportunity to apply our annual surpluses towards that debt, the net debt now being eliminated and therefore no deficit or debt remaining as obligations or as rationale for retaining this.

Section 3(3), if it were amended, literally would just leave the rest of the bill to housekeeping amendments. Even those remaining housekeeping amendments are important as they are since this act will continue forward. Even with the introduction of Bill 18 and with the acceptance of that act this bill doesn't end with the new income tax act being put in place. This act will have to remain in force for years to come. As you know, when anyone files an income

tax return, they go back for a period of years through assessments, up to seven years. When they go back and audit the returns of the past years, this act will still be in force and apply to those applicable years. So as we go forward, there will be a number of things in this act, in cleaning up, that no longer apply in the old act as minor amendments. Certainly the renters' assistance tax credit, one of those, has not been in place since 1986.

Another amendment we're seeing that will be brought forward in this bill that continues forward with it is the repeal of the reference to the liability of corporations for Alberta income tax. Most of these things I guess could continue, but since this act will have a life for years yet to come, we may as well see that clarification is brought to it. The foreign tax credit likewise removes reference to corporations in the calculation of the Alberta foreign tax credit. It's no longer needed since this is dealing with personal income tax, and the corporate reference no longer has application.

The critical part of this, the elimination of the surtax of 8 percent, the basic tax in excess of \$3,500 is the main element and purpose for which this act is being brought forward at this stage. Now, we have certainly heard arguments to the effect that it will only benefit a certain portion of the public, and it is true that this surtax does apply to incomes above a threshold of \$47,000 today, but it's not true that there hasn't already been an application or introductions in the existing Income Tax Act that would benefit all Albertans.

In 1997 there was the introduction of the Alberta family employment tax credit. This credit gives a tax break of up to \$1,000 to lower and middle-income families. So already we see that not just the wealthy have benefited in this regard, but certainly to the lower and the middle-income families the enrichment of the Alberta family employment tax credit has already been introduced back in 1997. That was the first one that was chosen to be changed and improved prior to any removal of surtaxes.

They talk about maybe choosing the flat tax at a half percent, and that certainly is an important part of our revisions in the new Alberta Income Tax Act. It's in Bill 18 that that surtax will be eliminated also in 2001. Yet all Albertans benefited in 1998, when we cut the tax rate from 45 and a half percent to 44 percent. All Albertans benefited from this: the low certainly, the middle-income class – they are the greatest numbers of Albertans paying income tax, so as a class in itself they have benefited substantially – and certainly so would the wealthy. The combined impact of those moves meant a 65 percent cut for a single-income family with two children earning \$30,000 per year.

Now, personal income tax will be paid under the new Alberta Personal Income Tax Act beginning in 2001. However, as I'd mentioned previously, the Alberta Income Tax Act is going to remain in place for seven to 10 years for administrative purposes.

In 1999 because our existing income tax was tied to the federal, we did match all the federal increases in the basic and spousal exemptions. Those enriched exemptions have benefited all classes of taxpayers, not just the wealthy. We have seen three different measures that have benefited the low and middle and all income taxpayers prior to even removing the supposed advantage for just the wealthy.

We do see at this stage even with the recent federal income tax announcements for this year that those savings have been passed on. As the federal rates have come down and the indexation has improved, those get matched automatically for 1999 and the year 2000 with our existing income tax system.

So all Albertans have benefited substantially and will continue to do so. We would have liked to have and could have potentially introduced the new act earlier, but to delink from the federal government, there is a time requirement to adjust and change

methodologies and systems and for notice periods that we were required to give to the federal government. In that light, 2001 was the first year that we were able to make the broad, sweeping changes in our Income Tax Act. But with the opportunity to remove them and, I would say, to go back to the original promise to Albertans, we said that when the time came, when the deficit was eliminated, these surtaxes would be eliminated, that they, too, would be taken off the books.

11:00

As a symbolic gesture to even the lowest income taxpayers, those that may not even be on the tax rolls, I think it's critical that they see they have a government that when there's a promise given, when there's a tax raised for the purposes intended and that purpose is accomplished, when that date arrives, the end of that tax also happens. It's too easy for governments to lay in place income taxes or any other forms of revenue collection with a stated purpose or for a period of time. We've already, just by the discussion here, found out how difficult it is to remove such a temporary measure.

We all know that income taxes were introduced in this country as a temporary measure back in World War I to pay for the war measures and those expenditures for the war, and we also find that we fight a different battle today with the surtax. It was implemented for a different purpose, a different cause, and that certainly was to pay for the debts and the accumulated expenditures we hadn't paid for in previous years. We had to find a means to pay for those services which we received. Yet now when the day has come that we try to eliminate such a surtax or such a tax, we find nothing but complaint that maybe not all Albertans but maybe those who are in the wealthy class for whom this was just a temporary measure – it is not harming anybody by removing the tax, but it certainly is benefiting those to whom the promise was made, and that applies to all Albertans.

In fact, in 1986 and '87, when that was applied, there were many Albertans who would have been in the low-income stages at that time in their life and who could be and probably are in the upper-income aspects of it today, so it was never intended that you wouldn't have an opportunity to become one of the wealthy. In Canada this isn't exactly a wealthy measure; we're only talking \$47,000. If this is the wealthy class, the average income in my own constituency I know is certainly well above that measure, so I've got to look to all the people of my constituency whom I represent. The average family household incomes are above that measure. That's the average. So we have certain members here even in this whom I represent. For his own purposes we have to see that this is given for his benefit, and for that aspect I'm pleased to see that we can deliver on that promise. I would say that not just in my area but throughout Alberta the average family income is above this threshold, and there are a substantial number that will benefit by it.

No one has ever said that you shouldn't seek to benefit, to work hard to improve your industry and opportunity to earn greater income. This would only be a better incentive to show to the rest of Albertans that though they may not be in that income tax bracket today, they too would have the opportunity to retain more of their dollars, that that extra incremental time they spend, the effort they push, the risk they might take might be rewarded, that they might have an opportunity to keep it in their own pockets.

I'm pleased to see not that we would support the amendment to get rid of that but that we would deliver on a promise that the surtax, this 8 percent surtax, be eliminated effective January 1, 2000, this year. Also, it will be, I would say, an exciting day in January of 2001 when we can eliminate the other surtax and completely modify the Income Tax Act.

For this purpose, Mr. Chairman, I would certainly plead with all

my colleagues and those in the opposition that they give serious reconsideration to supporting Bill 19 in its present form, that the surtax along with the minor amendments to it be fully accepted as implemented, and that we fulfill the promises made back in the previous years.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise tonight to speak in favour of the amendment, and listening to the speaker before me, it almost sounded as if he, too, were speaking in favour of the amendment, so it will be interesting to see where he stands when it comes to the standing vote.

The reality is that we are talking about a government plan which will, in removing the 8 percent surcharge, affect about 400,000 Albertans. Our amendment, when looked at in conjunction with Bill 18, will look at positively affecting all taxpayers within this province, so there's a real difference as to what we have put forward with regards to amendments to the tax system within this province. We believe that the system needs to be a whole lot fairer, and that is one of the reasons this amendment is now on the floor of this Assembly, to ensure that in fact that will happen.

You know, right now I'm looking at a letter I've received from a constituent with regards to PDD and the unfairness in the way that individual is being requested to look after her son and pay substantial out-of-pocket costs for ensuring that her son receives the kind of support he could not receive from an agency. Those costs that she's looking at paying out of pocket are over \$1,000 a month. That's just one instance of where I look at what the real concerns of Albertans are with regards to a whole host of programs. Whether it is within PDD, whether it is the out-of-pocket costs they're paying for MRIs and now CAT scans, whether it is the so-called new initiative by the government with regards to aging in place, the fact is that what we are going to see is increased out-of-pocket costs to Albertans.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We have in front of us a tax plan that in effect will differentially reward people in different income brackets within Alberta, so what we see again is a government that very much plays favourites and very much ensures that those who have the ability to pay out of pocket for different support services will have better access to those services and better treatment than those who cannot. So it's almost a double whammy that people in the middle to lower income brackets are going to be dealt when Bill 18 and Bill 19 are passed.

I say "when" because in fact this government has brought closure in on Bill 18 and is bringing closure in on Bill 19, and whether Bill 19 is passed in the spring session or in perhaps the upcoming fall session of this Legislative Assembly, it seems this government is bound and determined to pass it. If in fact they don't pass Bill 19 in the spring session, then perhaps there's a message there that the Liberal opposition has been right in terms of what they have been saying with regards to the discrepancies in the effects of Bill 19.

You know, I look at what's happened over the last seven years and many, many years ago – many years ago: just six or seven years ago – when the government talked about the fact that their cuts were going to do wonderful things for this province. They were going to improve the health care system, improve the education system, and improve the delivery of social services and the social services net. I said at that point that the emperor had no clothes and that in fact the Klein-speak we were hearing from the government and the government members was nothing but that in effect when they said one thing, in actual fact something else happened.

We saw a lot of that occur in the Bill 11 debate. When it became very clear that what they were talking about was private, for-profit hospitals, the government would say: no, that is not the case; they are surgical clinics. Well, the only people that were being fooled were the government members, who in actual fact seemed to have undertaken Klein-speak as part of their lingo. They must have a dictionary somewhere in their back pocket that indicates what exactly is meant when the Premier says one thing but in fact it's something else.

11:10

Lately we've had the Premier talk about Bill 18 and Bill 19 in terms of Ralph economics, and in fact what we have in front of us is Ralph economics. Again we see a black-is-white scenario where the government members come into the Legislative Assembly – and now it's more of an Alice in Wonderland experience, I find, in here – they sit in their seats, and all of a sudden reality seems to disappear. We're in a topsy-turvy world where the figures that are in front of the government members mean absolutely nothing. The fact that the tax breaks that are provided are much less for the lower income and middle-income levels than the upper-income levels doesn't seem to have any impact. In fact, the government members will stand in their places and say that that is not the case.

Though sometimes figures can lie and we see that on some occasions, in this particular case when we look for the so-called benefits to the middle- and low-income earners, we see that they are not there. They are in fact an adverse benefit, if we want to call it that, when you look at all the other out-of-pocket costs that are provided for by various Albertans as a result of varying needs in providing for themselves and their families.

So what we have is the amendment that will attempt again, as the Official Opposition tried to on a number of occasions – there's an old saying about trying to make lemonade out of lemons. This is one such situation, where we are trying to amend a particular bill that is in fact an amending act to another bill that substantially changes the tax structure. We'd try to incorporate a measure of fairness within both those bills so that all income earners can in fact appreciate the same kinds of savings and benefits that at this point only the higher income earners will be able to appreciate.

Now, in the by-election that is occurring at this point in time, this is an issue that is brought up at the doors as well as the Bill 11 issue. I had the opportunity to go out just prior to the session at 8 o'clock tonight and do a little bit of door-knocking, and I intend to do some more over the next few days. People understand this issue much as they understood the issue of private, for-profit hospitals. Even though this government with the Klein-speak didn't understand, they understood. Albertans and the people in Edmonton-Highlands understood that that in fact was happening. In the Ralph economics people just as much understand that they are going to feel the brunt of a tax policy that does not look at what their real needs are and does not take into account the number of hours, the hard work, all the effort they have put into their workweek.

So I would hope that it isn't a deep tunnel government members enter into when they come through the portals of this Legislative Assembly and that they don't think of this Assembly as a wonderland where realities do not come into play but that in fact they keep their minds open to what the facts are, and the facts are in front of them. The Treasury critic at any point in time I'm sure would be more than willing to sit down with any of the government members and go over, tax point by tax point and income level by income level, what the tax breaks are that are provided in our proposal versus what the proposal is by the Acting Treasurer. There is in fact no real rush to push either one of these bills forward at this point in

time, because if the department were looking at implementing, which I understand they are, for the next tax year some of this new tax policy, they would have enough lead time to do it in August or September or October, which, again, would coincide with the fall session, which would allow the government and the Acting Treasurer time to really get a good grasp of his portfolio.

I think that's probably what's required right now to see the folly of the suggestion that was put, you know, perhaps in haste by the former Treasurer as he was heading out on the campaign trail. We know that he has used this flat tax policy as part of the campaign for the CCRA party, but unfortunately I don't think he had quite enough time to really look at the full implication. As the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has so aptly pointed out, as he often does during my debates, the former Treasurer was just so busy packing his bags and thinking about that new place in Ottawa that he was going to be moving into, he really didn't have the time to spend, as is required, to ensure that this would in fact be of benefit to everyone in Alberta.

So we're looking at a tax policy that is a fundamental shift and change, perhaps not a change with regards to government policy, that has in the past shown that this government is not averse to exposing and exploiting the differences amongst people within this province and has set in place actually a systemic change – and I talked about that a little bit in my discussion on Bill 18 – in the role of government and in the way government approaches social and policy changes in this province and has shifted the whole viewpoint of society from a more collective one to a more individualistic one, where survival of the fittest is almost the mode of operating. That I think is a discussion that needs to be much broader not only within this Assembly but perhaps on a campaign trail.

Perhaps a general election is what we are also looking at in the fall. That would be a good idea in terms of putting forward this tax policy as well as Bill 11, which hopefully will not be proclaimed before that general election so that in fact people can have that broader discussion as to what is the viewpoint of society, that is required in this province. For sure the Edmonton-Highlands by-election is the one that is the field test, where some of this will be tested out. I think it's very important that everyone has the full benefit of the discussion outside the confines of these four walls.

Again, if I can urge all the government members to come out of that wonderland hole, which they seem to be submerged in within this Assembly, to look at the actual facts and figures that are in front of them, to make sure they are representing the wishes of their constituents. It's not just good enough to say that you are getting a tax break. I think you need to explain what exactly that tax break means and what the premise of it is. In fact, I think you need to almost go back one step to the fact that this is not a savings that's being provided by the government to its citizens. It's actually a noncollection that needs to occur, and that's where the savings I guess are generated from in actual fact. It is a government policy decision that's made as to how much to collect and then in effect what services not to provide.

11:20

Those are some of the parameters I think the discussion has to be formulated and based upon, and that's a broader discussion that needs to be put out to Albertans at large. Again, I don't know that there has been a lot of consultation. It would be interesting to hear what consultation has occurred by the government members that has led them to this decision that this is in fact the structural change that is most advantageous to all Albertans and would be supported by most Albertans. My guess is much as I am finding in Edmonton-Highlands and with others I speak with, that in actual fact people are very aware of the disadvantages provided by this particular tax

scheme and that given a choice, they would probably look at a progressive tax system that is much fairer and more along the lines of what we have presented as a potential solution to the unfairness within the current flat tax scheme proposed by this government, that that is something that needs to be discussed.

I think that hand in hand with that discussion, however, before we rush headlong into how much can we give away in terms of taxes, what needs to be looked at is: what exactly are the services that Albertans would like to have, and what are the services that government should be providing? That is a part of the discussion that we have not heard, so we do not know what the impact will be if in fact there is a downturn in the economy and what ends up happening is that there are not sufficient dollars provided in the budget for some of the essential services we have decided should be provided, like health care and education. In fact, what may well happen is that some of those essential services might not be provided because there have been some contractual obligations entered into with private contractors that need to be provided before some essential services.

I just wanted to do a quote about Aberhart, that someone had asked me to quote a while ago, and it is as follows:

If we stood in a pulpit, and there, with our hand on the Bible, solemnly declared that ours were the only party which had a "plan" for the political and economic ills of our province; that our plan alone and none other would work; that our plan was the "economy of God"; that it was "absolutely guaranteed"; and then after stalling around for eighteen months doing nothing, we confessed that we had never had a plan at all, would you say that we were honest and sincere or "crazy in the head"?

When I look at some of what the government has done over the last few years, especially with regards to health care, where they have over and over again said they had a plan and then they had no plan, I think that some of the politics that were occurring around the time of Aberhart in fact may be seen again in Alberta right now. I thought that was an interesting quote given that it was done almost to the day, May 28, 1937. So that was about 63 years ago, that particular quote. Sometimes history does repeat itself in terms of some of the situations that occur. We will, I guess, see whether history will bear itself out in terms of the upcoming election as to whether people will forget some of the actions of this government or whether in fact they will remember. My guess is that at this point they will remember.

There was one other item I wanted to bring forward in my discussion, and that was with regards to the argument of the brain drain. Again, I had mentioned it a little bit earlier. In fact that brain drain was caused by the cutbacks by this government.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I know this is in committee, so a number of us will get a chance to speak to this yet. I'll be brief because I know my colleague for Lethbridge-East wanted to chat as well.

I'm just going to make the observation that I listened to the Member for Calgary-North West when he spoke, and two things struck me about his comments. The first one is that he certainly has some professional expertise that most of the rest of us do not bring to this Assembly. The second one: it's always refreshing to see a government member stand up without notes and simply talk about what he believes and what he knows and what he understands, that sort of thing. It's actually quite refreshing. When you see people reading speeches, you never know who's written the speech, and you assume it's some gnome. There are 700 people, I think, working for the Provincial Treasurer, 713 employees. How many of them are cranking out speeches for government members to use in debate?

Anyway, my only observation was that the Member for Calgary-North West clearly knew what he was talking about in making his points.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

The thing I listened for, though, because I always pay careful attention to what the Member for Calgary-North West says, was some explanation in terms of why we couldn't deal with the 1.6 million tax filers and why we only focus on the 390,000 tax filers who will benefit from the elimination of the 8 percent high-income surtax. By my calculations I think about 1.6 million tax filers would benefit from the .5 flat tax. So it just strikes me as really problematic that when the Member for Calgary-North West had a chance to make the case and explain why this amendment that's being introduced by my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora wouldn't work, he didn't explain, at least to my recollection and my hearing, why we couldn't and shouldn't do both at the same time.

There are some questions in terms of parity and some questions in terms of fairness and questions in terms of equity. There is a cost difference. It would be about \$325 million, I'm advised by Edmonton-Glenora, to provide the elimination of the .5 flat tax, whereas it's only \$144 million for the 390,000 tax filers who would benefit from the elimination of the 8 percent surtax. You know, I think the Member for Calgary-North West believes strongly in commitments being honoured and undertakings being discharged. I'd say to that member: I agree, and that's why I'm puzzled why we're not doing what the Premier said he would do. I had a note; gosh, I must have misplaced it yet again. Oh, here it is. [interjections] Well, I wanted to make sure I quoted the Premier correctly. I didn't want to do an ad libing.

Here's the Premier, July 27, 1999, in the *Calgary Herald*: "What we want to do is make sure that those who can least afford to pay tax get the first break." Not the second break, not the sequential break, not the last break, but the first break. Then we have the former Provincial Treasurer saying on July 28, 1999, in the *Calgary Herald*: "Certainly our priority is for low-income earners, and there are ways that can be addressed."

So what happened between those comments in the summer of 1999 and the bills we see in front of us? In fact what the amendment introduced by my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora does is simply honour the pledge that the Premier made, that the former Provincial Treasurer made on July 27 and July 28, 1999, respectively. Who would oppose that? [interjections] No. In fact, members, I'm insisting that we do what the Premier said he wanted to do in July of 1999 and what the Provincial Treasurer said he wanted to do in July of 1999. I'm sure the people in Calgary-Varsity would like to see this government deliver on what the Premier and the former Provincial Treasurer promised. Isn't that the point of the exercise? I think so, Mr. Chairman. The Minister of Gaming may have some other explanation to offer.

11:30

If the government cannot afford the \$325 million that would be lost by moving immediately to eliminate the .5 percent flat tax, let's see that case. Let's have the case laid out for Albertans to see, to review, to analyze, and to assess. I have not heard that argument being made. Frankly, I suspect that with respect to the oil and gas prices being high, the kind of revenues we're seeing, the Minister of Gaming is bringing money in by the Brinks truck. You imagine sort of a cavalcade of armored trucks from Calgary to Edmonton bringing in the gaming revenue. It continues to flow. The dough continues to come, and maybe the Minister of Gaming is going to take credit for the fact that we're awash in gaming revenue.

It seems to me that the money is there to in fact be able to

accomplish this. To those who say, "Well, it's easy for the opposition to talk about this additional sum of \$325 million," it's true. We don't have the 700-odd employees from the Treasury Department to run a gazillion projections and estimates, so we put forward suggestions and challenge the government to offer concrete reasons why we couldn't do those things. Absent those kinds of concrete, compelling reasons, we have to assume that the opposition idea is probably a pretty good one.

As I say, I know that I have colleagues who want to speak to it as well, but I'd just make the observation that I think this amendment is important. I think it's a positive one. I'd like to see the commitment made by the Premier kept. I think my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora explained very well the question raised by the Government House Leader the other day and established that this is not some kind of reverse sequence thing, that 18 and 19 are the Siamese twins of legislation, and that one has to look at the amendments put forward by the opposition on both bills to be able to understand the cumulative impact. I thought that was explained well by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

On this one, Mr. Chairman – and I say this quite sincerely – I'm looking for support from government members for this amendment, because to vote against this surely leaves the Premier and our Canadian Alliance leader wanna-be way out at the end of the plank and sawing it off behind them, and I can't believe that members of the government caucus would want to do that. I think they'd want to ensure that the promises made and the undertakings given by those two gentlemen would in fact be honoured by the government.

As I say, I'm going to be happy to report when I get some more response to my web site on the question posed around the government's tax proposal, on whether Albertans favour the government flat tax proposal and package over the Alberta Liberal fair tax proposal.

So those are the comments I wanted to make, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real pleasure to get up this evening and speak to the amendment on the floor to Bill 19. This is, effectively, going to change the direction or change the ordering of the operation of the bill with its impact on the relationship between the 8 percent surtax and the .5 percent flat tax. What it'll do, effectively, is tie together some of the actions of bills 18 and 19 in a little different way than they have been under the government proposal.

Mr. Chairman, we see on so many occasions the debate that comes up around these bills dealing with what's fair, what's equitable, what's right, and how the product that we're going to end up with, a different taxation structure and a different taxation regime, relates to the relative fairness and the relative change from the taxation levels that we see with today's current mix of different taxes in terms of the income tax, the flat tax, the surtax, the exemptions, and all of those kinds of things added together. I guess the thing we have to look at that when we put all of these taxes together is: what is the impact that that has on the individuals in Alberta that are paying the tax, that are paying their money into the general revenue fund to support the legislative programs that the citizens of the province are asking for from their government? I think we have to look at differentiating the concept of the taxpayers and the citizens, because it's kind of two different functions. In one they're representing the funding agency for public programs, and as citizens they're representing the consumers of those public programs. We have to have that balance between the two of them.

We keep hearing the discussion about how there's going to be a significant change under the combined new program that will effectively make sure that there's an increased number of Albertans that are not subject to any taxation at all by increasing the basic level of exemption to the \$13,560 range, this kind of approach. We're also seeing within the combination of these two bills a structural change from a program which has historically been a taxation on individuals to where we're now going to see a movement towards more of a taxation structure based on family status. Basically, instead of becoming an individual taxation system, this is now becoming a family taxation system, because we're increasing the exemptions for spousal exemptions as well to try and compensate for the idea of a stay-at-home spouse that is not bringing an income into the household.

So essentially what we're seeing there is that kind of a structural change, and this amendment effectively says: let's look at how that is put together and how it's phased in and structured as we move from the current system to this proposed new absolute level of taxation over that two-year period of the two bills and the two different focuses. What we'll see, then, is effectively some kind of change in that obligation as taxpayers to fund the programs of our citizens.

Then what we're going to see also is a relative change in the weights of those taxations within the context of the group of Albertans who are going to be asked to pay and who fund our programs. The current program essentially has a phased-in, linked program with the federal government. I don't think anybody is arguing with the idea that we need to move away from that tax-on-tax system to a tax-on-income system. That, I think, has to be looked at in this whole package as being a very positive step, but as we look at it from the perspective of Bill 19 and the amendment that we're dealing with, it looks at how that .5 percent flat tax relates to the 8 percent surtax and the relative timing of the citizens receiving benefits from our legislative change.

11:40

Mr. Chairman, even prior to getting elected to this House, I was among some of the more fortunate in the province to have an income that was significantly above the average of the province. You know, I always felt that that created in me not only a very privileged situation where I had a lot of public input into my education, but because of my parents' commitment, because of this provincial commitment to fund such great universities, I was given the opportunity to go out and effectively create for myself an opportunity to earn an above-average income. That in itself also creates a sense of obligation to make sure that what I give back to society is in proportion to the commitment that society has made to me. By that means I see nothing wrong with someone in my position, who is earning a higher income, being asked to pay a proportionately higher rate of taxation on that higher level of income.

Now, we all recognize that when we have that stepped-rate taxation system, on the first part of the taxable income I pay the same as every Albertan. On the second group I pay the same as every Albertan in there. So the higher rate of taxation only occurs on the marginal level of taxation, above the step points. We hear all kinds of debate about whether or not this in essence is fair in the sense of bracket creep. As inflation pushes our wages up to keep our spending power in line with our income, is it fair that we have bracket creep? Is the way to get rid of that to do away with the steps? No, Mr. Chairman. The way to get rid of that is to index the steps.

This is the approach that the federal government has taken, and that in essence eliminates the concept of bracket creep as well so that

you don't get faced with this whole concept that you get an increase in income and that income is only enough to cover the amount of cost of living that you have to spend to stay at the same point. Well, we can do away with that by having indexed values on the brackets that we use to reflect the relative rates of tax payable.

Now, in the end, Mr. Chairman, when we look at how we put that whole new package together, effectively the government with the combination of bills 18 and 19 has defined a totally different type of structure. How do we get there? The amendment that's on the floor right now basically is saying that it's more important for us, within the context of public decision-makers, to make sure that the broad spectrum of all Albertans who are paying taxes get some benefit; in other words, the elimination of the .5 percent flat tax before we eliminate the 8 percent surtax on the top taxed Albertans.

I think that one thing we have to look at is: how do we go about reflecting our commitment as Albertans to make sure that the people who could use those dollars the wisest to support themselves, to increase their well-being, get those dollars first? I think that by supporting this amendment, we're effectively saying, "Let's make sure it is every Albertan," because every Albertan is subject to the .5 percent flat tax and because every Albertan, no matter which bracket their income puts them into, is paying that .5 percent on each of those dollars that is taxable. If we support this amendment, what we're going to say is that it's important that they all get that benefit before we give it just to the people who are being taxed the 8 percent surtax. I think that what we have to do is look at that from the perspective of what's fair and what's equitable.

Now, Mr. Chairman, just as a comment before we kind of close time on this. The Government House Leader challenged me a minute ago: can't you say something positive about this bill? Well, Mr. Chairman, I think one of the things is that we can look at this bill and say: yes, there are some positive things in it. If we look at section 2, effectively it brings the language of the tax act in line with the changes in the structure of the federal government by eliminating the deputy minister of national revenue and taxation and substituting that with the commissioner of Customs and Revenue. This brings it in line with the new chief administrator of the federal taxation system. So what we're doing in essence is creating the same kind of terminology in both of our tax acts. Again, another very positive thing about this.

I just want to remind the Government House Leader that I've now said that there are two things that are really good about these tax packages, so I'm not totally negative about it. It's just a matter of whether or not we deal with it from the perspective of what's fair, how it works, who we give the benefits to, and in what order those benefits are provided to Albertans.

In that overall context I think it's important that we look at how to measure that fairness. We've heard some of the members previously talk about the whole idea of how to kind of make Albertans feel that their additional income isn't being taxed to the point that they are not getting ahead. Well, because of the fact that each of our steps is taxed at the common level, when you're dealing with a percentage tax increase, Mr. Chairman, it's not feasible or not possible under that kind of a calculation to in essence have to pay more in increased taxes when you earn more money. That just doesn't work, because we're only paying the increased rate on the dollars that are included in the income range that fall into that higher bracket.

Even if we do end up with an inflationary loss of purchasing power because the next year we're spending our higher income, unless we're falling behind the raise income being less than the consumer price index, then what we'll see is that every Albertan, no matter how it works, will have more dollars to spend as long as their

income is rising faster than that consumer price index.

So it doesn't matter how they fit into these tax brackets, because they're all treated the same, their purchasing power is the same, and we end up dealing in the context of the purchasing power of those dollars being a factor of that consumer price index change and the new bracket that we're falling into in terms of the bracket and the change that occurs there. It just doesn't work out in any way that you could put those together where you'll actually end up with reduced take-home pay.

So the effect here is then to make sure that we do have equity in the system. We've heard a number of comments from some of my colleagues tonight already that have talked about the Premier's earlier commitments to make sure that the initial tax breaks are enjoyed by all Albertans. We want to make sure that that follows through when we're dealing with the additional debt or deficit elimination taxes that were imposed in conjunction with the focus of the taxes that were now to end in the 1999 tax year and that were originally imposed, I think it was, in 1987.

That's the kind of time frame that we're looking at. We want to make sure as we start to eliminate those that they're done in the same spirit with which they were put in, in the sense that the broad-based benefit goes to all Albertans before the specific benefit goes just to the high-income Albertans.

So if we can look at it from the perspective of that kind of a relationship with the amendment that we have on the floor to Bill 19, it's a matter of making sure that we end up with a degree of directional fairness and targeted tax benefit going to the Albertans, Mr. Chairman, that I sense a lot of people feel should be given the ability to increase their spending power before those of us that fall into the very fortunate categories of being included in the higher income categories of Albertans and not having to deal with the issue of: what are the implications of this in the context of changes in social responsibility and the changes that may have to be incorporated to make sure that all Albertans have a base level of economic well-being, that whole concept of economic well-being and how it relates to social justice? I think the taxation system has to become a real important part of our decision-making there, because as we look at what constitutes social justice for all, it's a matter of: how do we deal with making sure that that fairness exists?

11:50

One of the things that I haven't mentioned yet tonight, Mr. Chairman, is the fact that as we increase our incomes, we get to take more and more of those incomes in value and in measure that are not included in the taxable income calculation on our tax forms. So, in essence, the higher income that we earn the less of the total income we actually get taxed on. By having a higher taxation rate with those higher income levels, what we're saying is: in order to create consistency in the calculation of our taxable income, we know that the people at the higher end are not reporting some of those incomes. Because of the way we measure it, we will in effect use the higher rate to get a little bit of tax off those incomes that we didn't ask them to disclose. I've talked about those previously, Mr. Chairman, things like stock option incomes, equity earnings, and we've talked about some of the profit share systems that are out there. Those kinds of things don't all get reported when we fill out our federal income tax and report that taxable income, which our new tax-on-income calculation is going to use.

We have to look at it from the perspective of: do we call it fair when we say that because you've got a higher income, you don't have to pay any tax on some of your income, but if you're at a low income and all you've got is a wage income and possibly a savings account that gives you an interest income, then you have to pay tax

on all of that income? That, in essence, creates an inequity in the system, which in my perspective and under my measurement of social justice is less fair than trying to say that we've got to do away with the concept of bracket creep and the idea of how that relates to the whole system of taxation and that fairness in that whole system.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, before we have to be called to vote on this, I think it's important that we recognize that Albertans need tax relief. We have to provide more money back to the citizens and the taxpayers of Alberta so they can in essence have more money in their pockets to spend. We've consistently run a surplus in the budgets of this province over the last three or four years, and it's time now that we recognize that some of that should fall back to the citizens of this province so that they can make decisions on their own how their dollars are spent rather than us making those decisions on how their dollars are spent because they've given it to the general revenue fund through taxation. If we want to talk about how that relates back to some concept of social justice as well, we have to say, you know: "What is the relevant benefit of paying off the debt, giving tax relief? Who are the beneficiaries if we pay off the debt, and who are the beneficiaries if we give tax relief?"

Mr. Chairman, economists all know that when you fund programs on borrowing, what you're doing is you're living today off tomorrow's income. In essence, what we're asking is for the future generations to pay for us to have a good living today. I could put together a really strong argument that instead of giving tax relief right now, what we should be doing is paying down the debt so that the next generations don't have to fund the benefits that we're getting this generation. Well, I also think it's very fair at this point, because of the rate that we have and the surplus that we have, that we do get a balance here so that a lot of us can also enjoy some of the tax relief and can create the fairness that's necessary to have Alberta the best place to live in this country.

THE CHAIRMAN: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise to offer a few comments in support of Bill 19. While I realize that we are on the amendment as provided by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I realize too that a wide range of latitude has been offered to previous speakers. In that respect, I just want to make a couple of brief comments that I think should be reiterated.

First of all, for people who will be reading this later, I just want to make it very clear that Bill 19 ushers in the elimination of the 8 percent deficit elimination surtax. As I was reading up on the history of this particular surtax, which we are now attempting to eliminate through Bill 19, I noted that it was brought in as a temporary tax approximately 12 or 13 years ago. I was reminded, in conversation with the hon. Minister of Innovation and Science here beside me, that back when income taxes first started in this country, they were in fact tied to that issue of being supposedly temporary, surrounding the war effort almost a century ago, and we still have them. However, in this case, what we're talking about is the 8 percent deficit elimination surtax, that was only brought in about 13 or so years ago. It's time now for us to remove that particular tax.

I think it responds well to what Albertans have requested and demanded, and I fail to see how the amendment that has been proposed by Edmonton-Glenora helps further that particular aim. I've read this amendment through as it applies to section 3.04, and I don't think that in all good conscience it helps accomplish the purpose for which the bulk of the bill is actually designed.

We're often told that there's not enough being done, Mr. Chairman, to provide breaks to the middle class. Well, this particular deficit elimination surtax will in fact do that. It will benefit the

middle-income earners, and I think all members of the House know that. We know that the broader picture of deficits is that they were eliminated several years ago. We know that we have a law that prohibits further deficits from ever starting up. Our net debt has been retired. We're on a good track toward reducing the matured or the secured debt, perhaps in record time as well. All things being equal, with the economy being as buoyant as it is – and we have no reason to see any immediate downturn in that – I think we will see a much quicker retirement of the matured debt as well. That leaves more money in Albertans' pockets, and at the same time it also allows us to look at more important investments in other areas.

So while the economy is strong, it's nice to know that we are leading the nation yet again. A lot of different provinces are talking about eliminating taxes or reducing them, and for many provinces unfortunately that is nothing more than a wish list. In this province we are making good on that commitment. I think all of us, particularly during 1993 through 1997, did a lot of talking about how to get rid of deficits. We all certainly campaigned on it, and we all supported the need for the elimination of the deficit. Now we're getting rid of part two, you might say, which is the 8 percent deficit elimination surtax as it applies particularly to the middle class.

Mr. Chairman, this bill should be read in tandem with Bill 18, of course, which talks a great deal about the single-rate tax, which is also of benefit to Albertans. We're reducing taxes in many ways, and I think you'll continue to see that kind of strong reinforcement of Albertans' wishes by our government. I cannot support the amendment as brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. I'm sure he put a lot of thought into it, and I'm sure that his researcher did as well, but I fail to see how it would actually accomplish the main purpose that is behind this bill.

So with those few comments, Mr. Chairman, I would urge our members to look carefully at this bill and to find it in their good wisdom to support Bill 19. I will take my chair.

12:00

THE CHAIRMAN: Due notice having been given by the hon. Government House Leader under Standing Order 21 and pursuant to Government Motion 20, agreed to May 23, 2000, under Standing Order 21(2), which states that all questions must be decided in order to conclude the debate on Committee of the Whole consideration of Bill 19, Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000, I must now put the question, first of all, on the amendment A1.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:00 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	Massey	Sapers
Carlson	Nicol	Soetaert
Dickson	Olsen	White
Leibovici		

Against the motion:

Amery	Fritz	Shariff
Broda	Graham	Smith
Calahasen	Hancock	Stelmach
Clegg	Hlady	Stevens
Coutts	Klapstein	Strang
Ducharme	Magnus	Taylor
Dunford	McFarland	Woloshyn
Evans	Melchin	Yankowsky
Fischer	Paszkowski	Zwozdesky

Totals: For – 10 Against – 27

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

[The clauses of Bill 19 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 19.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following: Bill 19. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: So ordered.

[At 12:14 a.m. on Wednesday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 24, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/24

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature Mrs. Guadalupe Albert, Mexican consul general for western Canada based in Vancouver. This is the consul general's first official visit to our province, and we're pleased to welcome her here today.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's relationship with Mexico has grown tremendously in recent years in areas ranging from trade to educational partnerships. We have watched with great interest the impressive growth of the Mexican economy in the last few years. This visit is an excellent opportunity for us to explore ways to build on our relationship and to discuss areas where we can work together.

The consul general is seated in the Speaker's gallery. I would ask that she now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Governor Dirk Kempthorne of the state of Idaho and his wife, Patricia Kempthorne. They are leading a delegation from the beautiful state of Idaho and are meeting with various members of government throughout this province. Accompanying the governor is Mr. Pat Takasugi, director of the Idaho state Department of Agriculture. The governor and his delegation are traveling across western Canada this week, and we're pleased to have the opportunity of welcoming them to Alberta.

The meetings that we had this morning were an excellent time for learning more about each other and discussing ways of building a lasting friendship between Alberta and Idaho. Later this week the governor will be signing a co-operation agreement with our Premier, committing Alberta and Idaho to work together in many areas.

At this time I'm very honoured to ask the guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a visitor to our province here today, Senator Ray Powers of the U.S. state of Colorado. Senator Powers is the president of the Council of State Governments-West, known as CSG-West, a fine organization of which the province of Alberta has just become a member. Senator Powers is here to take a look at Alberta as an opportunity for future

meetings for this great organization of the Council of State Governments. He is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege today to present two petitions to the House. The first is from 1,173 people from Lethbridge, Nanton, High River, Fort Macleod, Pincher Creek, Cardston, Taber, Coaldale, Medicine Hat, Coalhurst, and Raymond. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to make sure that the government of Alberta has two people on duty after hours to protect employees.

The second petition is in a similar vein. It's 377 from Lethbridge, Coaldale, Calgary, Fort Macleod, Cardston, and Stand Off. This is a petition also asking for two people to be working after hours. I submit those on behalf of them.

Mr. Speaker, that makes 12,605 total submitted to date.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly today. It reads:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Assembly opposing Bill 11 and the privatization of health care, 24 signatures. This brings the total number of signatures on this petition to 22,591.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, I'd request that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name from yesterday now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request

that the petition I presented to the Assembly on Tuesday, May 23 regarding the dismantling of our precious health care system be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta:

- (1) To immediately disallow any further development of the Spray Valley of Kananaskis Country, including those proposals currently under consideration;
- (2) To maintain Kananaskis Country in natural state that provides high quality wildlife habitat and nature-based recreational activities;
- (3) To create a Wildland Provincial Park which protects the whole of the undeveloped parts of the Kananaskis and Spray Valleys.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm giving oral notice today of the following motion: "Be it resolved that debate on third reading of Bill 18, Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, shall not be further adjourned."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After the daily Routine today I will move the following Standing Order 30 motion standing in my name on the Order Paper:

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, what steps must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system resulting from the strike of over 10,000 health care providers.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to table five copies of an article that ran in the *Edmonton Journal* today called Nobel Economist Supports Flat Tax. Robert Mundell is a 1999 Nobel laureate, and he is a world-recognized economist. He said that the single-rate income tax is a very good idea that makes the economy more efficient. I would like to also table with this five copies of his bio. This will show that he is an extraordinary Canadian, and his work is very, very impressive.

1:40

I'd like to table six copies of the 1999 annual report for the provincial judges and masters in chambers pension plan as required by section 5 of the provincial judges and masters in chambers pension plan regulation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table with the House today six copies of my response to the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods regarding his question raised during the Committee of Supply meeting dealing with the 2000-2001 estimates for Alberta Economic Development.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table five copies of the annual report of the Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, April 1999 to March 2000. This is the first annual report published by the CISA. It has some very interesting information, statistics, and data about organized crime and serious crime in the province of Alberta and what the government is doing about it with the co-operation of police services in the province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had opportunity to review *Hansard* and review the questions asked yesterday by the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I table five copies of my response to the questions related to timber auctions that were taken under advice yesterday. The two members opposite insinuated that my department staff were somehow involved in unlawful activity, and the record will show that those allegations are unfounded. If I were them, I'd feel like a schlemiel.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, today it is my privilege to table a letter being sent to Ronald Joyce, chair of the Tim Horton Children's Foundation, with special thanks to Tony Mardel of the Tim Horton store in Sherwood Park. Six thousand underprivileged, economically disadvantaged children went to the Tim Horton camp last year as a result of \$2.75 million worth of contributions by Canadians to this most worthwhile cause. I'm sure colleagues on both sides of the House are participating today as we honour their efforts.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the Acting Provincial Treasurer and in keeping with your ruling I won't be tabling any newspaper articles, but I will be tabling an article written by Mr. Bill Daly, BCom, MBA. It's an analysis of Alberta's flat tax for the year 2001. Of course, it's saying that Alberta's flat tax doesn't start until 2001 and big savings will only come to those who earn over \$70,000 a year. I'll stack up that Albertan's credentials against yours anytime.

Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of other tablings. First, letters from Mr. Gordon Inglis and Mr. E. Faszler, both of my constituency. They're writing the Prime Minister of Canada imploring him to please assist in the fight of Albertans to save public health care in this province.

Finally, I just had the opportunity to attend the annual general meeting of the Edmonton Community Foundation. I table the appropriate copies of their report. They are celebrating this year the disbursement after 10 years of \$20 million in community funding.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a single tabling. This is a letter from the Alberta Historical Preservation & Re-

building Society to all Calgary MLAs urging us to push the government to reconsider its decision regarding the Lougheed Building/Grand Theatre and designate it as an historic site under the provincial Historical Resources Act.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of two tablings today. The first is from Aileen Pelzer of Calgary. The second is from Donna Brunsdale of Calgary. Both of these people are opposed to the proposed Genesis land corporation development in the Spray Valley in Kananaskis.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly representatives of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Alberta, May being MS awareness month. Seated in your gallery I would like to introduce Howard Riddel, executive director, Edmonton chapter; Jane Styles, board member, Edmonton chapter; Pam Seto, vice-president of development, Alberta division; Glen Lavold, board member, Alberta division; Josee Pinsonneault, special projects co-ordinator, Alberta division; and David Kravinchuk, events co-ordinator, Alberta division. I would ask them to rise so that we can give them the traditional warm welcome of this Chamber and thank them for the carnations that we're wearing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my esteemed pleasure to introduce to you and through you this afternoon to the members of this Assembly Kim Hoang, vivacious wife of our colleague representing Calgary-Fort – she's able to be here today because now she's embarking on a new phase in her life, I understand, which is retirement – and Marie Martin, the very capable and gracious Edmonton leg. assistant to both the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort and myself. Would these honourable guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege of having two introductions today. My first is an individual who is seated in your gallery, Representative Max Black of the great state of Idaho. Representative Black is also the president of an organization that this Assembly really knows a tremendous amount about, and that's the Pacific Northwest Economic Region. He is the president and is doing a tremendous job of continuing cross-border relations and regional collaboration. We appreciate Representative Black for everything he's doing for that organization and for trade in the Pacific northwest. I ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

My second introduction. I'd like to introduce Deborah Daoust. She's a deputy program manager and political and economic relations and public affairs officer for the Canadian consulate general's office in Seattle. She is seated in the members' gallery. I ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all of my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly two guests that are joining us, I believe, for the first time. First I would like to introduce friend and neighbour Sabine MacLeod, who is visiting to see why it is that I'm away from home so much so she can report to my wife, Shannon. Accompanying Sabine is Tina Vogt. Now, Tina is completing a year of studies at Jasper Place high school. She is doing a year of studies and visiting from Germany. She decided that the best way to learn English was to come and immerse herself in it, and she's doing an outstanding job. Unfortunately, we'll be bidding her farewell all too soon. I would invite all members to welcome them in the Chamber. I'd ask them to stand and receive that welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly some more good friends. They've all been coming in from the United States on different airplanes, and the different airplanes have been arriving at different times. We're certainly glad that they're here to be introduced in the Legislature today. I'd like to introduce Representative Jeff Morris from the United States, from Washington. Jeff is an executive member of the Pacific Northwest Region and vice-president of the organization. He has been involved with that organization since 1993, and because of PNWER he has ended up being a good friend to Alberta. They're here for some meetings today. I would ask Jeff to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

Also seated in your gallery today is the executive director of the Pacific Northwest Economic Region, Mr. Matt Morrison, who is no stranger to Alberta and to this Assembly. Matt, I wonder if you would please rise and receive that same welcome.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Debra Lozinski from Lac La Biche. Debra is the reeve of Lakeland county. She's seated in the visitors' gallery today. I'd like to ask Debra to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Workforce Labour Dispute

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appears that the upheaval and uncertainty in our health care system is never-ending. First Bill 11 was rammed through this Legislature, and now over 10,000 health care workers have walked off the job across Alberta. According to recent reports licensed practical nurses in Alberta are amongst the lowest paid in Canada. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given the sacrifices made by health care workers over the past eight years, how does this government justify paying them the seventh lowest wages in the country?

MR. JONSON: With respect to the question, as the hon. leader across the way knows, we are at a very critical point in ongoing negotiations. We have a strike occurring currently. The regional health authorities and the provincial Mental Health Board have been bargaining diligently, Mr. Speaker. We hope that the parties will come together to bargain further. There are, as published, very significant dollars being offered by the employers.

This question is really not appropriate at this time, Mr. Speaker, when we want the two sides to come back together and negotiate a settlement.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the inflation rate in Alberta is expected to be over 3 percent a year, how does this minister justify offering wage increases that can't even keep pace with inflation?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, my mathematics in terms of what is reported as being the last offer of the employer does go somewhat higher than the rate of inflation.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that this government has recently rewarded pay raises of 8 percent to executive assistants of ministers, how can this minister justify offering raises of only 3 percent to auxiliary care nurses?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm personally not aware of any raises that are 8 percent, and that is a process not handled by the Minister of Health and Wellness.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just one year ago a massive strike by nurses in this province was narrowly averted. At that time the Official Opposition calculated that the cost to the taxpayer of airlifting patients would have been at least \$2.4 million per day, or about \$35 million for a two week strike. My questions are again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell us which provinces or states the government plans to airlift patients to for medical care?

MR. JONSON: When one has a labour dispute, Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of Alberta Health and Wellness and the minister, along with the regional health authorities and in this case the provincial Mental Health Board, to make sure that every possible effort is provided for the care and safety and treatment of people in the care of the health care system.

There has been contingency planning done. In terms of this particular situation there are no plans to fly people to the United States or out of province, but if it comes to a situation where an individual's life and health is in danger, we will do it.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, fine, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister please provide us with an estimate on how much the government's contingency plan for the strike might cost Albertans?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows, we have no way of knowing how long this labour dispute, this strike, will continue. We have no solid indication as to what workers will or will not cross picket lines. We have organized ourselves so that we are monitoring the situation very, very carefully. Our top priority is the health and safety of patients in the care of the system.

We will take appropriate action in terms of the cost, Mr. Speaker.

There is obviously no way of quoting an exact figure at this particular point in time.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that licensed practical nurses in Alberta rank seventh in the country in wages, wouldn't that money and human energy be better spent at the negotiating table bringing an end to this strike?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think there are a couple of things to point out. First of all, the labour dispute certainly has two sides to it. There's some responsibility with respect to the leadership of the unions involved.

In terms of the process we as Alberta Health and Wellness are certainly wanting, and I'm sure more directly the Department of Human Resources and Employment, to bring the parties back together to arrive at a settlement. That is what we have as our overall goal.

I do not quite gather what the position of the members across the way is, but it seems to me that they do not really respect the bargaining process, the fact that there are two sides that have to come together here, Mr. Speaker. They want to come down on one side.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Calgary Laboratory Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The University of Calgary recently announced plans to build a research transition facility on their education reserve land. Although the university is calling it a research transition facility, almost 85 percent of the building is being leased to a commercial venture, Calgary Lab Services. While upgraded laboratory facilities are long overdue, residents in the area such as those from the University Heights Community Association are concerned that public land intended for the University of Calgary expansion is being used for a commercial facility. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister explain why a facility, 85 percent of which is going to be used for commercial purposes, is being built with public money?

MR. JONSON: As I understand it, Mr. Speaker – and I can only speak generally of the specific plans of the Calgary regional health authority – it is on public land held by the regional health authority. It is a building that will be owned by the regional health authority. It may have a tenant that is the lab services which operate under the publicly funded, publicly administered system of the Calgary health authority under contract. The proximity to what is probably the largest facility in Calgary which provides service to Calgarians would seem to be a logical advantage of locating the lab there. I understand that they will be negotiating as part of their contract reasonable income to the regional health authority for the use of that property. Also, it should not be missed that the regional health authority is in conjunction with the university going to be developing quite a bit of needed research space.

2:00

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given the very vigorous opposition to this proposal within the community, is the government going to deal with those serious concerns or ignore them and push ahead?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have not heard of any vigorous opposition. I will certainly look into it, but I don't just automatically

accept the contention in the leader's question. They have been misleading before, and I would want to check on it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that according to the University Heights Community Association web site, and I quote, a multinational medical services company, MDS, has expressed interest in buying out the CRHA, end quote, what assurances can this minister give that once the laboratory has been set up, it won't simply be turned over to private companies for pennies on the dollar as happened with the Holy Cross hospital?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again it appears that with respect to this particular question one individual with a concern is being quoted; so be it. The disposal of land which is the property of the regional health authority requires government approval. Certainly we would want that property to stay as part of the overall holdings of the Calgary regional health authority.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Health Workforce Labour Dispute (continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The *Calgary Herald*, then Brewers' Distributor, and now health care workers. Alberta's unfair labour laws are the political equivalent of a loaded gun pointed at the heads of Alberta workers. So is Bill 11, which is a framework for contracting out and privatizing our public health care system. My question is to the minister of human resources, who is responsible for labour relations as well. When is the government going to realize that its own unfair labour laws are directly responsible for the growing crisis in labour relations in this province?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we probably need to bring this into perspective just a little bit in the sense that even the other night at a standing policy committee we had a presentation from the Alberta Federation of Labour, and even they talked about the excellent record of labour relations in this particular province. Now, we can show the member the numbers if we want, but in Alberta we have an excellent, excellent record. We have an environment where employers and representatives of employees can sit at a table and can negotiate agreements. We have a playing field that we believe is level.

Yes, at various times we have pressures from employer groups and employee groups for changes to the particular labour legislation, but to me, as we talk in this Assembly time after time, the proof is in the eating of the pudding, and the fact is that the statistics are very, very good.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is it going to take for this government to recognize that legislating away the collective bargaining rights of health care workers does nothing, solves nothing, and instead contributes to a bitter and acrimonious labour relations atmosphere within the health care sector?

MR. DUNFORD: You know, we just went through a session both inside this Assembly and outside of this building with some folks called the Friends of Medicare, and I believe that the party that the hon. member represents had something to do with that particular issue. Now to raise a question like that in this Assembly today,

entirely forgetting about the innocent third party in all of this situation – Mr. Speaker, let me remind you of who the innocent . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The floor has been given to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Continue.

MR. DUNFORD: And let me remind you, Mr. Speaker, who the innocent third party is: the patients that are in care and of course their families that are trying to provide for them.

Here we have a situation where these people require essential services, and I believe that it was proper for the government of the day to establish, then, that those services were in fact essential and thus remove the legal right to strike. Mr. Speaker, let me remind all of the people here today that this is an illegal strike that is under way.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why doesn't the government abandon contracting out our public health care system through reckless legislation like Bill 11 and instead focus on improving working conditions and job security in public hospitals and facilities?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, contractual relationships have been a part of the health care system of this province and other provinces throughout history, certainly since the time that we have as governments across Canada taken over the provision of public health care services. I'm sure that the member across the way, if he would move from his doctrinaire philosophy to reality – I don't think he would want to suggest that we should cancel the contracts with the Bethany Group, that we should cancel the contracts for long-term care with the Good Samaritans. I don't think he would suggest that we should cancel the contracts, eliminate them with respect to the laboratory services across this province, which are in a good part provided very well by the private sector, unless he really, really is tied to an absolute doctrine that says that nothing in the health care system can be owned or operated under contract by the private sector.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Domestic Abuse in the Military

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 9 a study entitled Report on the Canadian Forces' Response to Woman Abuse in Military Families was released to the public. The study does not claim that domestic violence is more prevalent in the military than in the civilian communities but does state that it is a serious problem handled in a manner unique to the military way of life. There is little doubt that the military culture as well as factors such as posttraumatic stress play a significant role in domestic abuse in the military. According to the report, victims are reluctant to seek assistance from military support services and may not be aware of resources available within their immediate communities. Further, domestic abuse is processed by the civilian court. The report indicates that if charges are laid through the civil police, the military may not be informed and that if the military police respond, the civilian police may not be called in. My first question is to the Minister of Justice. Will the minister encourage the police departments in areas adjacent to military bases to develop a policy of

communication regarding incidents of domestic abuse so that all relevant authorities, civilian and military, are informed when charges are laid?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.
2:10

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we do have a policy of encouraging police forces to work together in this province. I tabled today the annual report of the CISA, which is one area in which police forces across the province have been co-operating and sharing information on a very effective basis.

It's certainly the policy of this government that police forces combating crime, whether it's organized crime or domestic violence, should be sharing information when it's appropriate to do so.

MS PAUL: My first supplementary is to the Minister of Children's Services. In view of the chronic shortage of funds in women's shelters will the minister make immediate funding available earmarked specifically to advertise shelters in the vicinity of Canadian forces bases so that victims of abuse can be aware that help is available?

MS EVANS: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the need for women's shelters that the hon. member opposite has identified is an important one. In light of the comments I will take a very careful look at how one advertises shelters. For the protection of those involved, those who have been recipients of abuse, there are some real questions about how you promote that service, but we will make sure that if there are services available, the law enforcement authorities and others who would provide guidance to women to seek that type of shelter with their children would be aware of those opportunities.

MS PAUL: My second supplementary is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Would the minister advise us of any specialized support services that are available to members of the Canadian forces reserves and their families to deal with posttraumatic stress following extended peacekeeping deployments in war zones once these reservists are released from active duty?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in the Capital region I am pleased to say that there is a good working relationship between the Namao base personnel and their medical staff and the Capital regional health authority. In fact, we're fortunate enough to have doctors, for instance, that work at the St. Albert hospital and keep up their skills, and they're providing a co-operative arrangement or service to the Capital region. That, as I understand it, would apply with respect to other services such as situations which involve a stressful situation that has been reported.

However, Mr. Speaker, I do think there's one point to be emphasized here, and that is that given the nature of the armed forces, the mandate under which they operate, and their necessary independence or separation governance-wise from the province, I think we do have to keep in mind that the initiative and leadership to make sure these types of co-operative arrangements are arrived at and the services are available to their personnel does have to come from the armed forces themselves.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Diabetes Research

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was

reported this week across Canada, the United States, and for that matter the world that the University of Alberta research team made a major breakthrough in the fight against diabetes. Dr. James Shapiro and his team of researchers are to be commended when they injected insulin-producing cells from donor pancreases into eight patients and put them on this immune suppressing drug. These eight Canadians with chronic type 1 diabetes are now reported to be living free of having to use insulin. My question is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. What does this medical research breakthrough mean for Albertans who have this chronic disease and use our health care system?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, it means that these scientists are doing some of the best research in the world in diabetes. It also means that we will go down in history not just for our fiscal agenda in Alberta but also for our excellent scientific research. Alberta is the place to do science.

It also points out the importance of partnerships, Mr. Speaker, between universities, the private sector, and the government. It also means that we have eight individuals in Alberta, some of whom were taking up to 15 shots of insulin a day, who no longer have to do that. This gives hope to the 200,000 diabetics in Canada alone, plus there are over 15 million diabetics in the world.

If I could just say a personal note, Mr. Speaker, we have a person in our family who we consider our daughter and who lived with us for a number of years. In her late teenage years she came down with type 1 diabetes, and this provides hope for Jennifer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister advise members of this Assembly as to whether any research dollars were provided by this government to support this medical breakthrough at the University of Alberta?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, as you know, Mr. Speaker, and the Assembly knows, we have a fund, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, which is now over a billion dollars. It supports research off the interest from the trust fund. In this area alone over the last number of years it has provided over \$18 million for diabetic research.

We have to recognize that when we do that, the \$18 million, that brings in at least \$2 and up to \$4 for every dollar that's invested from Alberta. If you take even the minimum figure, that means that over the last number of years over \$30 million has been invested in Alberta based on our investment in the HFMR.

It shows again, Mr. Speaker, that if the government takes the lead and steps up to the table, exciting things can happen.

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, my final supplemental to the same minister: are there any other government programs and research funds available for science and research of this important initiative to help expedite this type of brilliant science that's going on in Alberta?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, there are a number of programs. In fact, we announced this weekend a combination of two programs inside my department that will result in a \$30 million investment in a couple of areas: in research infrastructure, in technology transfer, and in science and technology promotion and awareness.

Also, Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, we've announced a \$500 million trust fund that is available. We expect the interest from that could be up to \$25 million this year alone to invest in science and

research. That fund will grow to a billion dollars by 2005 and perhaps, if I'm lucky with my budget, even earlier.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Health Workforce Labour Dispute

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to this government's cutbacks, mismanagement, and lack of planning in health care, we now have the largest strike of health care workers in this province. Two of the issues on the bargaining table are inappropriate staffing levels and contracting out. Yet in 1999 an Alberta Health report indicated that workforce issues were serious and that there were serious problems with regards to training, recruitment, and retention of health care professionals in this province. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. My first question is: given that health workforce shortages are both a national issue as well as a key issue in this strike, can the minister tell us whether the Premier has put the issue of workforce shortages in health care on the table at the Premiers' Conference? [interjections]

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think the members across the way are just jealous because on this side of the House we have a very strong leader who represents the interests of the province.

Mr. Speaker, as I understand the proceedings at the Premiers' Conference, there are a number of topics to be covered. Certainly the matter of health care is one of the major ones. I understand that the Premier and I expect other Premiers will be putting forward a very strong case for the restoration of Canada health and social transfer moneys to the provinces across this country. That is certainly going to be one of the major priorities.

2:20

Within that context I know that the Premiers have discussed prior to this, quite frankly, the needs within the health care system, the need for hiring additional frontline staff, which we have done in this province with the significant dollars we've reinvested, the need to look at adding to the overall health workforce, be we talking about nurses or radiation technologists, as examples. This is certainly a priority, and we have already acted in that area, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Learning may want to supplement, but we have added to our capacity in that particular area.

Under the leadership of our Premier, Mr. Speaker, we have already taken major steps to address this issue, and I'm sure that the Premier is sharing our experiences with other Premiers.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, Mr. Speaker, strong leaders take responsibility, so can the minister or anyone on the front benches indicate why the Premier isn't here to deal with the issue at hand, a real crisis in health care in this province today?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know members on this side of the House know and I can assure the members on the other side that the Premier is very much concerned by the situation here. He is in regular contact with his office.

He has a very important task, as I've said, to represent this province at that conference, particularly as it applies to health, particularly as it applies to their Liberal cousins in Ottawa coming through with their proper share of funding for health care in this country.

MS LEIBOVICI: Nothing like an absentee Premier.

Given that Bill 11 will encourage greater contracting out in our health care system, what assurances . . .

Speaker's Ruling

Referring to the Absence of a Member

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members and hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, I mean, it's nationally known that there's a conference of the leaders of government in another place. To refer to members absent from the House is inappropriate under our rules. I don't know why you'd do that. Why don't you just get on with the question?

Health Workforce Labour Dispute

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Given that Bill 11 will encourage greater contracting out in our health care system, what assurances will the minister give health care workers with respect to job security?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I have . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I don't know about you, but I always found it rather interesting to listen to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, due to the strength of the economy and due to, I think, the sound financial management of the government, we do have increased funds available. Health has been given a priority by this government, and within that overall health funding the training and engagement of health care workers is a priority. That's demonstrated in the increased number of physicians, the increased number of nurses, the increased number of LPNs, the increased number of other frontline workers, support workers in this province. It's through having the resources, managing them well, directing them to the front line that job security is assured to individuals.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Tax Policy for Seniors

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my work with seniors some of the most frequently asked questions are around our tax policy for seniors. My first question is to the Minister of Community Development. Why do seniors, most of whom live on fixed incomes, even though the majority are at the middle and higher income levels, have to pay taxes, especially education tax?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to education tax it's historically been the case in this province that property taxes do support education, and I think that's the proper way to go. Whether or not you have children in the schools at a particular time that you're paying tax is not relevant.

With respect to the overall picture of senior support I might point out that in 1994 this government took the initiative to streamline seniors' benefits and to focus them on the people in need. So to be quite specific, seniors who are needy do get a cash allowance under Alberta's seniors' benefit program that is directed to help them with their overall expenses. To give you an example of how this works, Alberta has the highest threshold for this support, which means that

seniors in this province get the support quicker than anywhere else.

We have a variety of categories to ensure that their needs are met. For example, with respect to a homeowner senior who is under the threshold or a senior couple who are under the threshold of the \$26,000, depending on where they are, they could receive a maximum benefit of some \$3,200 annually. So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate that although it's not earmarked as a specific program, their needs are taken into consideration.

Also, we do have something called a special needs program, which people who are in dire straits could apply for, and this could help. That program goes to a maximum of some \$5,000 per year in addition to anything that the ASB would provide to the seniors.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the hon. Acting Treasurer. Can you explain this government's new tax policy with regard to low- and middle-income seniors?

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. They will benefit from this new tax plan, the single-rate plan. For example, an individual senior that makes \$12,000 from a private pension plan and also receives the old age security would have paid in 1999 roughly \$335 in tax. With the new plan, the single-rate tax, that senior will not pay any tax in the year 2001 and also will still receive the seniors' benefit package from Alberta.

They're also going to benefit from sharing in the elimination of bracket creep. They will benefit from indexing the basic and spousal exemptions to the Alberta consumer price index, and they will also benefit from indexing the age amount and the pension amount.

Finally, they are going to benefit from the increase to the age and pension credits, which will take the amount multiplied by 10.5 percent instead of 7.5 percent, and they will be indexed for inflation. So provincial participation in both these credits will increase by 30 percent.

I might also add that a great deal of the seniors will be in those 190,000-plus Albertans that won't be paying any provincial income tax.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, a significant portion of a senior's income can come through dividends on investments. The dividend tax credit is therefore important to seniors. My last question is again to the Acting Treasurer. Will this credit disappear under the new system?

DR. WEST: The simple answer is no. The province will continue to provide a dividend tax credit. In fact, the value of the credit will increase slightly under this new policy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Timber Permit Bidding Process

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we revealed that the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench had found one of this government's business partners guilty of bid-rigging and collusion, with timber permits worth up to \$30 per cubic metre being sold for 63 cents per cubic metre. This government as a matter of policy has propped up and subsidized the pine shake industry and specific firms like Shake Masters Manufacturing Inc. In fact, our

freedom of information request contained a January 1994 Economic Development and Tourism, forest industry development branch memo discussing Shake Masters that reads, "When we provide financial assistance, we should perhaps have a basic criteria that the mill have a sustainable wood supply." My first question is to the minister of environmental protection. Did the government turn a blind eye to timber permit bid-rigging to ensure a sustainable wood supply?

2:30

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, first, by way of correction the proper name of the department is the Ministry of Environment, not environmental protection, and the short answer to his question is no.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question, then, is to the Minister of Economic Development. Given that Shake Masters had received \$59,000 in Department of Economic Development grants and at least \$630,000 in Alberta Opportunity Company loans and loan guarantees, did the government turn a blind eye to timber permit bid-rigging so that Shake Masters could keep servicing its taxpayer backed loans?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, the department did not turn a blind eye to anything, and I'd like to clarify for the House that any loan or grant coming from AOC is made independent of this government and after a thorough examination of the application.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, finally to the Minister of Justice. Given that this document tabled earlier in the Assembly said that, quote, land and forest service was the victim of a crime, has the minister attempted to recover any of the money owed to taxpayers of this province because of this bid-rigging, and has he ordered an investigation into other possible cases of collusion in the forest permit auctions? Does he have any idea how far this rot has spread?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's absolutely ludicrous for that member to suggest that any department in this government or any member of this government would turn a blind eye to any criminal activity, and I can categorically say that this government does not turn a blind eye to criminal activity of any sort in this province.

MR. CARDINAL: As the Associate Minister of Forestry, I'd like to — the three questions impact the forest industry in Alberta, and we wouldn't want to leave a negativity toward that industry, because it is a major industry. It's over \$8.3 billion and has over 50,000 jobs, and a lot of them are in your riding, Mr. Speaker.

In relation to the dues, there are a number of ways timber is allocated. There is the forest management agreement process. There is the quota process. There is the miscellaneous timber use program, which handles commercial timber permits, local timber permits, and farmers' permits. So there are a number of ways of allocating the timber, and all the processes are above board.

In relation to the province receiving income from timber dues, et cetera, Mr. Speaker, \$3.4 billion of the \$8.4 billion is included in, for example, stumpage charges at \$92 million, property taxes to

municipalities of \$81 million, provide provincial income tax of \$224 million and provincial corporate income tax at \$166 million. So the province is recovering the dollars that are required. We have one of the best forest industry programs in North America, and it's something to be proud of, not run down.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Maintenance Enforcement Program

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In June of 1998 the MLA review of the maintenance enforcement program presented its report to the Minister of Justice. The report contained 41 recommendations to improve all aspects of the maintenance enforcement program. I chaired that review along with the members from Bonnyville-Cold Lake and Red Deer-South. We were very pleased that the government accepted all of our recommendations and that many of those were implemented early on. In fact, legislation was passed last spring giving the program many more enforcement options. However, not all of the recommendations required legislation, and I am hoping that there is a will in Justice to continue implementing the recommendations of the report. My questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Justice. Mr. Minister, what, if any, recent changes have been made to the maintenance enforcement program to increase the effectiveness of the program as called for by our report?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very good question, because of course maintenance enforcement remains a priority for Justice. Improving the program in terms of both its ability to collect on behalf of Albertans who need that assistance as well as providing customer service to both the debtors and those who are entitled to receive the collection is an important priority.

Recent additions to the program have been the new Justice web site, which became available in April of this year. As part of the site, clients and employees have access to program forms and information on various topics including collection forms and various collection actions on the web site.

Other changes recently made include amendments that allow the program to request debtor locations, asset and employment from employers, trade unions, and financial institutions. Advertising for debtors is now possible. The program can cancel drivers' licences. There's more power to get collections when debtors hide assets in third party locations. Debtors can be reported to the credit bureau. All of this is very important, Mr. Speaker.

I should mention that a member of the opposition recently asked for a response on the mainframe program. When I indicated that the new mainframe for the computer system for the program was in the process of development, the suggestion was made in this House that the program isn't working. I want to assure all members of this House that the program is working very well.

The improvements that have been put in place as a result of the MLA task force have been very effective. For example, there were 43,250 active files last year. This year there are 42,000 clients on file. Collections last year were in the amount of \$122 million. This year they're up to \$126 million. The program is working. It's working for Albertans, and it's getting money into the hands of people who are taking care of children in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that both customer service and customer satisfaction were a major focus of the report recommendations, I'm wondering what changes from a customer service perspective are being planned, if any, and when can we expect to see them?

THE SPEAKER: The Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that we're seeing those changes as we speak. It's certainly been one of our priorities to make the program more customer service oriented, to make sure that there's good interaction between those who need to have service and those who are giving the service. They've been asked to be a lot more customer friendly and are being a lot more customer friendly.

It's a difficult job, Mr. Speaker, that the people involved in maintenance enforcement have, because they're dealing always with either people who don't want to pay or people who are not getting the money they're entitled to. In both cases, the people that they're dealing with can have a great deal of anxiety, and that can be a great problem.

So we have improved staff training. We've increased staff for customer service. We have new and revamped information registration application forms and educational material. We have a new 24-hour interactive voice response phone system. We have dedicated complaint and troubleshooting specialists. We have increased staff training. [interjections] The one thing we don't have is brevity. We take as much time as is necessary to deal with customer complaints and customer service in maintenance enforcement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Another focus of the report recommendations was the need to deal with chronic defaulters and others that are difficult to collect from. I'm wondering what the department is doing to solve these cases.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we did form a special investigation unit within the maintenance enforcement program, and that unit is starting to produce results. In fact, in a recent story in the *Edmonton Sun* a lady was profiled who just received a cheque from her ex-husband for over \$20,000. This chronic defaulter had evaded the collection process for over 12 years. Thanks to Bill 16 of last year, the recommendations of the MLA committee, and dedicated staff, we were able to help this family with financial help.

The special investigations unit, Mr. Speaker, is currently working on 224 out of 480 cases that have been red-flagged for their review, and I hope to be able to report significant results in the near future.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Sleep Apnea Treatment in Lethbridge

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The administration and staff at the Lethbridge sleep disorder clinic truly believe that they have a level 1 clinic. Their technicians are trained to the level of all other clinics in Alberta. The administrators and staff have the background and training. The physicians have the residency requirements. Their communication with Alberta Health and Wellness has indicated that

they've met all the criteria for level 1 clinic status. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is it that's holding up the funding for this clinic so southern Alberta residents can get access to sleep disorder diagnosis?

2:40

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I must give a brief history with respect to sleep apnea treatment in the province. It is certainly not a new condition, but it's fairly new in terms of our ability to diagnose it and to treat it and to categorize the different levels, as they refer to them, of people suffering from sleep apnea. Up to this point in time the overall approach of the province in terms of evaluation and categorization of cases and determination of what treatment should be provided, through our discussions with the medical fraternity and to some degree with our provincewide services committee, has been at the centre in Calgary.

With respect to the manner in which other centres might be approved, Mr. Speaker, we want to consult with that clinic and we want to consult with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. We do not accredit these types of clinics without the leadership and involvement of the college.

This is something, I know, that is being pursued by the Lethbridge regional health authority and the physicians there. I know it is being given consideration, but I do not have a specific date or time that I can give the hon. member as to that being done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The pilot project that the minister talked about began in Edmonton and Calgary. It's expanded now to the point where there are three centres in Calgary, the Children's hospital and also in a private clinic. Why is it that this private clinic is being funded when the Lethbridge publicly funded, publicly administered system cannot get authorization?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member is quite aware, the development of the team of sleep apnea professionals in Lethbridge is quite a new development as far as Lethbridge is concerned. It does mean that it has to go through a review process. It has to be accredited.

With respect to funding, the Lethbridge regional health authority has received a significant increase in funding this year. They will have to make decisions about how they allocate the resources. But, quite frankly, if it is deemed to be in the interests of the people in the area and if it's viable and accredited to the proper standards, certainly it is something that should be considered for approval.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, when the people in Lethbridge or southern Alberta go to this clinic and get their diagnosis, they have to pay for their machine themselves. The people going to the clinics in Calgary or Edmonton get it paid for by the government through Alberta Aids to Daily Living. Why is it that we don't have the same treatment for southern Alberta residents that the rest of Albertans get when they go to a clinic that has all of the same standards, the same technicians, the same physicians, the same qualifications. They're not treated the same. Why is it?

MR. JONSON: Well, on that particular point, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the clinics across this province that are accredited and approved as sleep apnea clinics do provide what are referred to as level 1 machines. Coverage, however, is not provided should a patient be using these machines for the other degrees of sleep apnea. That is the way that I understand the system operates in the province.

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of seven hon. members to participate in Recognitions today.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Multiple Sclerosis Society

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada has one of the highest rates of multiple sclerosis in the world. Alberta has the highest prevalence in all of Canada. This debilitating, chronic disorder attacks the central nervous system. MS causes a range of symptoms: from speech impairment, vision loss, numbness, loss of balance to extreme fatigue and sometimes paralysis. The cause is unknown, its course unpredictable, and its cure is as yet undiscovered, although great strides have been made recently in regards to some exciting new drug therapies.

The MS Society of Alberta is strong. Many individuals willingly volunteer their time and energy towards service programs, fund-raising events, and public awareness campaigns. Many such events have been held across the province this month: bike tours, walking tours, and of course the annual MS Carnation Campaign, where dollars raised could well blossom into a cure.

I encourage members of this Assembly and indeed, Mr. Speaker, all Albertans to support the good work and activities of the MS Society of Alberta. Only by working together can needed research continue and a cause and cure be found.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Oliver School Centre for Children

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize the 20th anniversary of the Oliver School Centre for Children in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Currently serving children from 13 months to six years of age, OSCC also offers a Head Start program for 64 families free of charge and also offers the same program to others for a reasonable fee. Early intervention services for an additional 16 at-risk children and their families in a satellite program is offered in Calder, and the classroom on wheels, the COW, goes into four low-income housing areas to set up a classroom and reaches out to those families traditionally more difficult to draw out.

We've often heard in this House how important schools and children are to the community, and Oliver school and the Centre for Children is located in the centre of the constituency of Edmonton-Centre. This is entirely apt given the centre's long and very active advocacy role and their work to embrace the ethnic, physical, and economic diversity of the families they serve.

I first heard of the centre when I was with the Advisory Council on Women's Issues, and I'd like to thank Avril Pike and the centre staff for information, explanation, and insight into services for children.

Twenty years. Very well done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Northeast Calgary Culture of Co-operation

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to recognize our northeast Calgary communities which have commemorated the International Year for the Culture of Peace by sponsoring a culture of co-operation event. Students from 12 northeast Calgary

schools and a number of youth groups showed their pride in our communities by submitting posters and commercials that highlight what co-operation means to them.

The awards and prizes will be presented this Saturday, May 27, during a community festival at Sunridge Mall, and the poster winners will have their work displayed in a 2001 calendar with proceeds from sales going toward student fund-raising. Other community participation will also be recognized, including a community day of co-operation which promoted environmental cleanup in our area.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity as well to thank the city of Calgary's community and neighbourhood services branch and our northeast businesses and community groups that made the culture of co-operation event possible. It is their goodwill that has recognized and promoted the spirit and pride of our young people living and working in northeast Calgary.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

2:50 **Edmonton-Meadowlark Education Issues**

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize the teachers, administrators, and parents of schools in my constituency. Over the past eight months I surveyed 11 schools, spoke with administrators, teachers, and parents, and learned a great deal. I took note of their dedication and tenacity as they strived to do their best and their frustration by the lack of resources to make it happen. They all expressed concern about a wide range of issues, including class size, funding, special-needs children, school resources, professional development for teachers, school facilities, and teaching.

We all know that education is the key to the future of our children and that this key should never be lost or misplaced. The report I presented in the Legislative Assembly highlights those concerns and presents some of the observations and conclusions that were made during the process. I hope that this report is informative and helps to address some of the issues with regards to education in Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mary Selby

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize Calgary philanthropist Mary Selby, who passed away March 24 at the age of 62. Mary, who described herself as a professional volunteer, served as a member of the University of Calgary senate for six years, as representative from the senate to the board of governors since 1997, and recently as vice-chair of the senate's executive committee.

I knew Mary as a senate colleague prior to my becoming an MLA and heartily agree that she had many special qualities, as expressed recently by Chancellor Jack Perraton and the university president, Terry White. Mary was truly a very special person who was a great friend to the University of Calgary. For Terry White, Mary Selby made a difference for many on campus, and she will be missed.

Mary was exceptionally active in the Calgary community, such as with the Junior League, the Boys and Girls Clubs, the Avenue 15 society, the Alberta Children's hospital aid society, the Fort Calgary Preservation Society, and Christ Church in Elbow Park.

Although Mary left this life and her loving family much too early, she has left them, her friends at the University of Calgary, and the

Calgary community a remarkable legacy of great achievements and memories.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Shane and Evan Chrapko

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to recognize today two brothers from Two Hills, Alberta, who have recently received international recognition for their development of the software known as DocSpace. The software is a unique technology that permits movement of gigantic files with ultratight security.

Shane and Evan Chrapko developed DocSpace using basic skills learned from their parents, working with them on the farm they grew up on. Their parents, Elizabeth and Victor Chrapko, who farm in the Two Hills area, are to be recognized as well for providing their children with those skills. Evan, Shane, and their parents will be celebrating their remarkable accomplishments in a Chrapko homecoming event in Two Hills this June.

I'm honoured to recognize Evan and Shane for their hard work, commitment, enterprise, and success and their parents, Elizabeth and Victor, for raising them with the particular strengths which have made their achievements possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Leonard Blumenthal

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure today to recognize Leonard Blumenthal on the awarding of his honorary degree, doctor of laws, by the University of Lethbridge this Saturday. Leonard Blumenthal is the former CEO of AADAC. He worked in the addiction field for 32 years with AADAC, and his innovative leadership brought many changes in treatment of addiction throughout Canada. Under Leonard's leadership AADAC won 25 national and international awards of excellence. Leonard was instrumental in the formation of aboriginal-staffed addiction counseling, training, and programming. Leonard represented Alberta and Canada on many international bodies and also at the United Nations. Retired now, he is a member of the Capital health authority, once again lending his expertise to the improvement of community health.

On behalf of the present chair for AADAC, the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, myself, and the members of this Assembly congratulations to Leonard Blumenthal for this well-deserved honour and recognition of the significant contribution he has made to all Albertans.

Thank you.

head: Emergency Debate

Health Workforce Labour Dispute

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on an application for a Standing Order 30 request. Hon. members, just please refer to your Standing Orders 30(1) and 30(2). Standing Order 30(2) says:

The member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate and shall then rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MACBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your office was given

notice pursuant to Standing Order 30(1) of my intention to "request leave to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance." Earlier this afternoon I gave notice of my intention to move the following motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, what steps must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system resulting from the strike of 10,000 health care providers.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to briefly state the arguments in favour of my request for leave. I know that several of my colleagues have a couple of minutes of discussion as well that they wish to put forward to speak to this matter of urgent public importance.

This morning at 7 Albertans awoke to the reality of an illegal strike in our province. Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear in our position on this matter, that we don't condone an illegal strike. However, we believe that government as the employer has to accept some responsibility for having pushed these people to the breaking point and the urgency which that creates within our public health care system.

The labour action that we are seeing today is the result of a very poisoned environment, a work atmosphere that has been created by the government certainly over the last eight years but most specifically in the last four, which I wish to speak to on the urgency issue. First of all, this is the fourth time in four years that the government has brought the health care system to the brink. At each point in the last four years it seems to have become a spring ritual in this province. We have our health care providers, either our nurses or our auxiliary health care providers, at the point of a stressful work environment for which this government must take the majority of the responsibility. It is indeed urgent, Mr. Speaker.

After years of unplanned cuts to budget and staff, the majority of whom or at least a fair component of which are women; avoidance of the real issues that plague the workplace in our health care system, issues which were identified last March in Alberta Health's Current and Emerging Health Workforce Issues, an Alberta questionnaire findings final report, issues that identified the three top issues overall affecting the health workforce and overall . . .

Speaker's Ruling Speaking to Urgency

THE SPEAKER: Please, hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Some suggestions provided by the chair with respect to this. We're talking about urgency, the need for urgency. It's not a time to debate, pending a resolution of this question, but why? What's the urgency? That's the key.

Debate Continued

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the urgency of the matter is that government has not acted and has led us to the point where we are today facing an illegal strike and walkout by 10,000 health care workers in this province.

The government talks a good story, but they don't act even on their own words and recommendations of their own reports. In terms of their own words, words which workers took to heart and thought there may well be some action from this government, if we look to Strengthening the Alberta Advantage, it said, "In Alberta and across Canada, some of our best and brightest young talents are moving out of the country for better jobs and better advantages." Mr. Speaker, that includes our health care workers. Promises like the one contained in the throne speech, where it says, "Developing a well-trained and highly educated workforce," and

the government will continue to create a positive and stable labour climate that fosters one of the highest productivity rates and most impressive workplace safety records in Canada.

Here we are with 10,000 of our health care workers out on strike illegally, but with reason, because of the level of frustration that they have been led to by the government.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, the urgency of the question and the one that is on Albertans' minds today is: what is this government going to do in order to resolve the issues that are at the bargaining table in this strike and the issues that this government has ignored that have led to workers in this province walking off the job? It is not a time for the flexing of muscles and entrenching of positions. It is not about threats of back-to-work legislation and compulsory arbitration, both of which incite argument and anger. What is needed, what is urgent is a signal from this government, as the employer, of what they are going to do to get resolution to the issues that are on that table. It's not just words. It's not just making promises and fancy government documents. It is in fact action that we seek. Enough is enough is the message of this strike, and Albertans need to know what this government's plan is to get the system under control, to get the issues before the bargaining table resolved, and to get our health care workers paid and working at a level that respects their competence in the workplace.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment on the Standing Order 30 application.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, and briefly to urgency. As the hon. member herself indicated to you, Mr. Speaker, the strike is illegal. Therefore, there are a couple of fields, then, that come into play. One, of course, is from the labour relations side, and the other of course is then on the legal side.

I would want to have the Speaker know and understand prior to making a decision on this, as to the matter of urgency, that from the labour relations side as we speak this afternoon, mediators are in place and are continuing to try to get the parties back together at the table to get them into collective bargaining negotiations once again with the hope that what we will have at the end of the day is a signed memorandum of agreement between the two parties.

As far as the other matters are concerned, in respect to the illegality of the strike, it is my understanding, again as we speak and as has been continuing through the day, that the employer groups that are represented in this particular dispute have been exercising their particular rights under current legislation and regulation in the courts to deal with the matter of the illegality.

So my submission to you, Mr. Speaker, is that on the matter of urgency those things that can be done and should be done during the time of an illegal strike are in fact being done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on this Standing Order 30 application. Urgency is the key.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to impress upon you the validity of the Standing Order 30 under the name of the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. I'm asking that you rule that the matter is indeed urgent and that it is consistent with the requirements of the Standing Order rules.

For the record I would like to read this into the debate of the Assembly at this time: "Be it resolved that the Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss . . ."

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please sit down. All hon. members have the Standing Orders. It's not required to read them into the record. They're public.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Thank you. Excuse me, Mr. Speaker.

I'm guided today in my remarks about the urgency of this motion by two very important authorities that govern the proceedings of this House. I'm referring in my arguments to *Beauchesne* 387, 389, and 390 and, of course, our own Standing Order 30. *Beauchesne* 390 states:

"Urgency" within this rule does not apply to the matter itself, but means "urgency of debate", when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules . . . do not permit the subject to be brought on [earlier].

Of course, Standing Order 30 spends a great deal of time dealing with the issue.

Now, when we think of urgency, we think of an emergency debate, but does an emergency debate not entail any or all decisions that have occurred in any number of years with the Assembly? The question itself is specific, but this question requires urgent debate.

There are two issues that come out whenever we think about and talk about the question of urgency. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung spoke earlier that we have over 10,000 health care workers in this province in at least 159 facilities all across this province. There is not a constituency in this Assembly. Every MLA should be concerned about this, because this job action affects everyone in this province. These 10,000 workers are licensed practical nurses, nursing attendants, personal caregivers, psychiatric nurses, support staff. This is a matter of great urgency.

We look at the Labour Relations Code. There are questions outstanding to the whole job action that has occurred. This needs to be discussed this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Does the government intend to exercise particular remedies that are available under Alberta's Labour Relations Code? If so, what remedies and when?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes?

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, may I draw your attention again to the motion put forward by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. It says: "What steps must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system resulting from the strike of 10,000 health care providers?" The operative words are "what steps must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system." It's nothing to do with any other administrative body, legislative body, tribunal, or anything else. That's the motion.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is going to be considerable harm done when we consider what's going on at the Ponoka hospital, for instance. Plans are to make room for 45 of the patients in Edmonton, here in the city, but this will not work. This will not work because there is no room in the city. How are we going to be able to safely discharge these individuals? All of these matters relate to the urgency of this motion. Not only does it affect, for instance, the constituency of Edmonton-Manning; it also affects the constituency of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Sure, some hon. members of this House can shrug their shoulders and say that this is not an urgent debate. It certainly is, Mr. Speaker. We think of what's happened since 7 o'clock this morning, how this

job action has progressed, how this job action has progressed since 1:30, whenever we resumed sitting this afternoon.

We think of Calgary. Emergency wards are screening admissions and having to turn away 25 percent of the people. This is a crisis. It is a crisis. In Calgary the regional health authority is already planning to move patients to facilities outside the province. Families and patients that have planned with their health care providers for months to access the specialized services that are only available in Calgary and Edmonton are now throwing months of planning out the window. These families come from Little Bow. They come from Peace River. They come from Cold Lake. They come from Whitecourt. They come from Sangudo. They come from Medicine Hat. They come from Bonnyville and Barrhead. All of these families are affected by this job action.

Now, whenever we are talking about urgency, we must deal within the administrative competence of this government. The government appoints the regional health authorities and the mental health boards. The government provides the funds. The government shapes labour climate and codes . . .

3:10

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. member. [interjection] Please. That's enough.

I'll recognize one additional hon. member from the opposition side on this point after I hear from the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness on this point.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to briefly comment with respect to this particular motion. I think it is essential that the bargaining process be re-established and proceed. I do not think it is necessary to comment on what is an established process, one which the employers and the Department of Human Resources and Employment are working very hard to resolve.

I would like to just indicate that there are a number of important initiatives related to the concerns that have been raised across the way, Mr. Speaker, already under way and already showing results. First of all, the government has reinvested significant dollars in health, but specifically we have targeted with those dollars the hiring of additional frontline staff, which complements the needs of the system and particularly the working situation as far as employees are concerned.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we have worked with Professions and Occupations through our overall health workforce planning activity to make sure that they are involved, that they are consulted in terms of planning for the needs and the numbers in our health workforce.

Thirdly, I think very important to this issue, a great deal of work, Mr. Speaker, has gone on with respect to the development and the passage in this House of the health professions legislation, which has been a tremendous accomplishment in terms of bringing into one legislative framework on a more or less equal basis the different professions and occupations and defining their professional responsibilities. That has been, I think, a great achievement in terms of recognizing the talents and the capabilities of the various occupations and professions.

The health workforce is increasingly involved in our planning activities, our consultative activities in this province. So that recognition of our health workforce and its valuing is something that is being attended to, Mr. Speaker, and I think we need to recognize that, and we have a bargaining situation in which there is the mechanism in place to settle it and to deal with it.

THE SPEAKER: I'm going to consult with the House leader of the Official Opposition. We've heard two members from the Official

Opposition with respect to this. It is a motion of the Leader of the Official Opposition, and I said that I would only recognize one more. I take it the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is choosing not to participate in this?

MR. DICKSON: That's quite correct, sir. I'd ask if my colleague would be able to participate. She's prepared to do so.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark with the condition already provided by the chair in terms of the brevity and urgency. It's not a debate.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, believe that the matter before us is in fact a matter of clear urgency and meets all the requirements set out in the sections which have been outlined by the leader and by the labour critic. In accordance with *Beauchesne* 387, the question of what steps must be taken to prevent further harm to the citizens of this province by the government's mismanagement of the public health care system is specific, requires . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please sit down. You know, this is driving me nuts. That's not what your hon. leader's motion says. [interjection] No, it doesn't.

MS LEIBOVICI: It's specific and requires urgent consideration. It is within the administrative competence of the government and is needed because there's been no other reasonable opportunity for debate in this Legislative Assembly. What we are saying is that there's a requirement for debate in this Assembly because there have been no other opportunities to deal with the substance of the problem; that is, "what steps must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system." What we have not heard, even in the responses from either the minister of human resources or the minister of health . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please. You're dealing with the chair. Nobody else is responding. This is a decision of the chair. That's who will make the decision. So stay on brevity and urgency.

MS LEIBOVICI: In fact, what is required is a debate around the issues of "what steps must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system," steps such as looking at a fair, level playing field with regards to negotiations, issues of fair compensation, issues of contracting out, issues of training and retention. These are steps that must be taken with regards to the strike that is now occurring by the 10,000 health care providers within this province.

We need to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss this matter. The reason that it is of urgent public importance should be obvious to all Members of this Legislative Assembly. We have numerous patients and prospective patients who have been either discharged early from health care facilities or not admitted for planned operations that were to occur. We have in fact numerous cases of individuals who have been affected by the impending strike as well as now by the strike. The issue of urgent public importance should be self-evident to everyone within this Legislative Assembly.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion is neither urgent nor appropriate at this point in time. It's not appropriate because we're in the middle of some very significant and tenuous negotiations. When I say we, I'm not talking about the government.

I'm talking about the employers, and the employers are the 17 health regions across the province. They're at the table. The mediators are . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, please. The purpose of a Standing Order 30 recognition is to convince the chair of the merit of the vote. [interjection] Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: You're recognized.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: For what?

MR. MacDONALD: I can continue with . . .

THE SPEAKER: No. Please sit down. You know, what is really amazing about this place is that it's easier to talk your way out of it than ever talk your way into it.

Standing Order 30 deals with urgency and brevity, and the chair will do the right thing according to the rules.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you can talk your way right out of this place with no great difficulty.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question of the illegal strike which is in place is no doubt important to Albertans. The question is: is it urgent that we have a debate about it in the House today? Is it an urgent issue which would suggest that we adjourn the business of the House to deal with that issue? I would suggest to you that it's not urgent for these reasons. We've spent the last six months talking about health care policy, which is within the administrative competence of the provincial government. We have talked about health over the course of the month of April almost to the exclusion of all other topics. We've talked about health care and health care policy in question period for the last two months that this House has been in session.

What's happened today is that there has been an illegal strike. Others may want to call it a job action or try and ride the fence, but it is an illegal strike. The reason why it's inappropriate for us to discuss that in the House this afternoon is because it's important that the employers and the employees get together and come together to a reasonable conclusion of this, a reasonable settlement of the issue, and get back to work. That's not the government of Alberta. The employers are the 17 health regions. There are court actions in place both by the unions and by the employers to deal with various aspects of this issue. Those are in front of the courts today.

3:20

On the whole question of whether we should be discussing the possible resolution of the strike, we should not be engaging in collective bargaining in this House. We should be leaving the collective bargaining to the people at the table. We should be dealing with and trying to resolve this matter rather than trying to make political statements out of an unfortunate situation. The health authorities across the province have contingency plans in place to deal with the innocent third parties who are suffering because of this illegal job action, and it needs to be dealt with in that context.

Mr. Speaker, is it urgent for us to have a debate in this House today? No, it's not urgent for us to have a debate in this House

today. It's not because the issue isn't important and not because it isn't of public interest but because it would have the possibility of disrupting the normal conclusion and the immediate and speedy conclusion of collective bargaining so that we can get this issue dealt with in an appropriate manner.

THE SPEAKER: The Standing Order 30 application is a very serious application in the sense that it basically says that the ordinary business of the House, which is announced days before, should now be abandoned. It means that in its place a certain other order of business should take place. In the case of the agenda for Wednesday afternoon, there's considerable private members' business that has been scheduled, announced. It is not taken lightly by this chairperson. Under 30(3) it says, "Shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?" If in essence the chair basically suggests that the debate will go forward, it means that a number of private members who've worked very, very hard in putting business before this Assembly will find that their efforts will be postponed. That's why it is not taken lightly. The chair has indicated time and time again that he would always, always fall back in support of the private member and ensure that his or her motivations and desires and objectives are met.

Now, the chair has listened very carefully to the arguments put forward with respect to this issue of urgency of debate on this application, which basically says to adjourn the ordinary business of the House, brought forward by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Firstly, I would like to indicate that the chair did receive notice that this application was made earlier this morning, received in the Speaker's office at 10 a.m. In essence, notice was given, and it certainly has met the requirements of Standing Order 30(1). A particular version arrived at 11 o'clock. Consultation was then provided with the House leader of the Official Opposition with respect to certain wordings, and when the Routine was addressed this afternoon, the motion that was actually addressed in the House by the Leader of the Official Opposition was significantly different from the proposed motion earlier this morning, but that still meets the requirements and meets the conditions that the chair had asked with respect to this matter.

On the issue of the urgency of debate. Very simply, there is only one argument: is there another opportunity to debate this issue? Quite frankly, according to the Order Paper there is no other opportunity for this matter to be debated. The chair indicated a little earlier that it's easier to talk your way out of this place than to talk your way into it. In essence, if one would look at the rules and look at the precedents and come up with a one-line argument, that's all that's really required. It's not a debate with respect to this matter.

In the chair's view the criteria for the matter constituting "a genuine emergency," as required under section 30(7)(a), are met. While the chair is not bound by previous decisions on these applications, it is worth noting that on April 30, 1990, the former Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Mrs. Hewes, brought an application under the Standing Order with respect to a threatened strike by social workers. It was ruled out of order on that day as being hypothetical. The next day, after the strike had started, she brought a similar application, which was found to be in order, and the question was put to the Assembly.

The chair would also note that there may be comments that will be made, subject to the ruling that will come up within a minute or two, that some of these matters are sub judice. There are some aspects of this issue that may be subject to this rule, but the wording of the motion is "what steps must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system resulting from the strike of 10,000 health care providers," which would not necessarily violate the sub judice rule.

I want to reiterate that while the chair is not bound by previous

rulings with respect to these applications, in the brief time available the chair did come across a 1980 ruling by Speaker Amerongen on an application under what was then Standing Order 29 on a request by the late Mr. Notley on April 23 of that year relating to a strike involving the United Nurses of Alberta. In ruling that the request for leave was in order, Speaker Amerongen cautioned members that certain aspects of the issue were before the courts, and he stated at page 534 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day:

I would respectfully ask all hon. members to try to keep in mind the question which is before the courts and to stay away from that question completely in discussing the topic under debate.

He also said:

There is one other aspect to it which I think is also not generally understood. It applies not only to this resolution but to other motions for emergency debate. It's this: in discussing the motion, I hear hon. members – especially the hon. Member for Spirit River-Fairview – saying there should be some initiative taken in this Assembly; that it should accept fully its responsibility. I'm sure all members agree those are two desirable things.

I'm going to give a ruling on this. The ruling is that the request for leave to adjourn the ordinary business of this Assembly to discuss a matter of public importance is in order. Before putting it to a vote pursuant to subsection (3), the chair would remind members that the debate under Standing Order 30 "does not entail any decision of the Assembly."

The chair now puts the question. Shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed? All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

[Several members rose]

THE SPEAKER: Please remain standing.

Hon. members, Standing Order 30(4) says:

If objection is taken to the question, "shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?" the Speaker shall request those members who support the motion to rise in their places, and

(a) if 15 or more members rise accordingly, the Speaker shall call upon the member who asked for leave.

More than 15 did rise, and the Speaker will very shortly call on the Leader of the Official Opposition, who will abide by Standing Order 30(5):

If the Assembly determines to set aside the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss the matter of urgent public importance, each member who wishes to speak in the discussion shall be limited to 10 minutes . . .

Ten minutes. That applies to all members.

. . . and the debate will conclude

(a) when all members who wish to take part have spoken, or
(b) at the normal hour of adjournment in the afternoon on that day, whichever is first.

The normal hour of adjournment this afternoon is 5:30.

(6) An emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly.

The motion, again, is the following:

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, what steps must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system resulting from the strike of 10,000 health care providers.

The operative words for this debate are "what steps must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system resulting."

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your guidance and your decision here today. I would like to address the issue of what steps must be taken to prevent harm. I come to this debate with some experience in the area of strikes in the public health care sector. While I was never a minister of health while a strike took place in the public health care system in this province, for which I am very grateful, I was a minister who followed up on a strike, one of the most crippling public health care strikes in the province, which took place in 1988 with respect to nurses in the province.

Mr. Speaker, when I took over as minister of health, it was clear that the atmosphere was poisoned in the province with respect to issues which nurses felt were essential to be addressed, issues which flowed from the government's decision in 1982 to remove the right of nurses to strike. It was exceedingly important to set up an environment in which the issues could be addressed and where nurses would feel that their value and their important role, in fact their essential role in protecting public health care were addressed. There were some very concrete steps taken at that time, and I think it's important to put some of those on the record, because it is some of those steps, which were later dropped, which have led us to this environment here today on May 24, 2000, in this province.

3:30

First of all, one of the biggest issues on the table was the issue of stress within the workplace. What was undertaken first and foremost as part of a plan was to create what was called the nursing initiative, which was to bring together representatives of the professional body of nurses in our province, the AARN, and other professional bodies as well as the labour and union representatives of nurses, UNA and SNA, which existed at that time, together with people from the public health care sector to look at what were the things that needed to be done to address the issues confronting nurses in their daily workplace. It was an unprecedented step, Mr. Speaker, and a very important combining of both the labour and the professional representation of nurses to address issues of public policy, a model which has been lost in this province over the last several years.

Another very concrete step that was taken was to have a nursing consultant brought in as a new position within the department of health. There had always been a medical consultant in the department of health; however, there had never been a nursing consultant. That, too, was one of the recommendations arising out of the strike and consultations with nurses subsequent to that strike.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Thirdly, one of the major factors of stress within the workplace for nurses was the lack of opportunity to upgrade their educational knowledge, their educational support for new technologies that were coming onstream, new treatments, new clarification for procedures, something which is a reality in health care. There needs to be an opportunity for nurses and other health care professionals to stay current. So educational leave days were clearly part of that.

Those were just some of the opportunities, Mr. Speaker, that were built into this poisoned poststrike atmosphere which led to some very constructive suggestions as the nursing initiative got under way. I can tell members that really for the first two years of the nursing initiative it was about people beginning to trust that there would in fact be some positive results if recommendations were made. It took two years to establish that trust, and the subsequent two years were an opportunity to put some of those recommendations into action. The process was as important as any response or action that came subsequent to that process.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, many of those initiatives, in fact I

believe all of the three that I have now spoken to, were removed during the cuts of both budget and staff in the early 1990s under this government when it took over. So when we talk about the germ of today's action being seeded or being put in place early in the '90s as the cuts took hold, it is in fact a very real example of what did happen. As we come to today, what are the concrete steps that need to be taking place?

In the meantime, the government appointed regional health authorities, their own agents within the health care system. So for the Government House Leader to stand and say: we're not talking about the government here; we're talking about the employer – the two are in fact the same when we have regional health authorities appointed by this government. They cannot, as they appear to be trying to do, distance themselves from the strike as if it's taking place on some outside planet rather than accept the responsibility for having drawn workers, pushed workers to the point where they will leave the most important thing they have to do, and that is to provide care for the very patients that they have trained for and worked for all their lives.

The issues here are what steps need to be taken by this government to get a resolution to this strike, which is in fact in the greatest public interest and the most urgent public interest in the province. I would say that the first step that needs to be taken is that the government needs to assume the leadership role, assume the responsibility which they have been given, having been elected as the government in this province, but also the responsibility for having made themselves the employer in this case.

I think there are many issues on the wage side, some of which were raised today in question period. I won't repeat them, but there are issues far beyond simply the issue of wages which need to be addressed. The first is: what steps has the government taken to address the quality of the workplace issues which they identified in their own report last spring? Last spring there was a threatened job action by our nurses. Last spring there was a report outlining all of the issues, which I referred to in making the motion this afternoon. Here we are one spring later, the fourth spring in a row where these alternating years of job actions have come up. I think workers are finally saying: "We've had it. We need to have this government listen to the issues that we have been trying to express for so long, and we continue to be ignored."

No one condones an illegal strike. That's why this is such an urgent issue, Mr. Speaker. Certainly we in the Official Opposition do not condone an illegal strike, but what's missing is the government taking some responsibility for the strike having come to this point and for the issues behind the reasons that it's become so heated.

In addition to addressing quality of workplace issues, the second issue is to address the question of concrete steps that are being taken on the recruitment and the retention and supply of nursing personnel: RNs, LPNs, auxiliary help workers, and others. What steps are being taken to address those shortages? We asked a question today in question period, because of the Premier being in attendance at the Western Premiers' Conference, whether or not these issues of workplace retention and recruitment were being addressed by other western Premiers, who are obviously facing the same issues. We didn't get an answer to that question, Mr. Speaker. We asked it as a very responsible one and one that we think Albertans need some answers on.

Mr. Speaker, what step needs to be taken is that this government needs to signal that they are prepared to start addressing some of the issues that have been identified by nurses. Those are the key issues within this strike, and we will look forward to hearing what steps government intends to take.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In speaking to the motion and particularly to the steps that "must be taken to prevent harm," which is part of the motion, I think it's imperative that again we all understand and acknowledge that the strike of the 10,000 health care providers is an illegal strike. Now, 24 hours ago there was a table, as we refer to it, an employer, and a group of employees that actually did have the right to strike, but it was the view of the government and of this minister that it was prudent and necessary to establish a disputes inquiry board so that we could try to effect a settlement at that particular table, which, for the benefit of the members, was the mental health group.

3:40

Now, unfortunately for the situation, the disputes inquiry board never had an opportunity to engage with either the employer or the employees group. Under the particular rules, even though the employees involved had an opportunity to go on a legal strike and actually had given notice, once a disputes inquiry board is put into place, a strike or lockout cannot occur. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, what happened this morning at 7 o'clock was that when that group decided to participate in this job action, they in fact no longer had a legal basis. They were now out on strike on an illegal basis. So there should be no confusion here in this Assembly or amongst the citizens of Alberta that all workers that are currently out on strike are participating in an illegal strike.

So it would seem to me that the most important step we could take, then, in trying to prevent harm to the public health care system is of course to get the people back to work. What is being forgotten here, it seems, in the debate that I've heard this afternoon from opposition members – not once has there been any indication of concern raised about the innocent third party to this particular situation. Mr. Speaker, the innocent third parties here are those people and of course their families who in fact need the care and attention of the health care providers in this province.

In any discussion of the steps, opposition members can go on and on and on about what should have been or could have been, but the key here is: what is best right now, today, for that health care system? That, of course, is for the union to cease and desist immediately their participation in an illegal strike. It's now just before 4 o'clock. I don't know the particular shift schedules that are involved, but if the afternoon shift would show up for work, then the urgency and a lot of the concern about harm to the public health care system of course would be taken care of. Now, this would not remove the responsibility of the employer or the union to arrive at a negotiated settlement. To that end it is the hope of this government that that will be the final result, that there will be a negotiated settlement between the parties involved in these disputes at these four particular tables.

I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, as a person that has spent some 25 years involved, quite intimately at times, in the field of labour relations, that the best settlements are the ones that are arrived at by the parties negotiating with each other at the particular table. Settlements imposed by an outside force – and in this case, of course, it would have to be the government through its implementation of arbitration proceedings – are satisfactory in the sense that it resolves the particular situation, that there is now a contract in place, but people have to live with that particular contract, then, for the period of whatever that agreement is. The particular one we're talking about here today is two years, so for two years people would have to live with an imposed settlement.

Now, one of the steps, if we have to somewhere down the line through the means that we have in current legislation and regulations, would be to have an imposed settlement. But my wish today, Mr. Speaker – and I'm speaking, I believe, on behalf of all the government members – is that it is our desire that the parties take the step of returning to the bargaining table, with the support of mediators provided by this government, and that we in fact arrive at a settlement. If it is too naive to think that the afternoon shift can show up for work, certainly the coming night shift would be able to, and we would have this situation behind us.

Again, I want to use what portion of time I have and say that the innocent third party here has to be taken into consideration. It is and should be the first priority of this government. It should be the first priority of the employers involved in this dispute, and it should be the first priority of the union that's involved in this dispute. It has to be the first priority of those wonderful health care providers that provide for the care and attention of our loved ones that happen to be in a situation where they do need our support and our care. Mr. Speaker, there's one step that resolves that immediately, and that is of course the return to work.

The employer, of course, is doing what they can, given the tools that they have in their tool kit, through current legislation and regulation. They have gone to the Labour Relations Board, as required. They've asked for, applied for a cease and desist order. They received approval on that cease and desist order. They have taken that order, and they've gone to the courts. The courts have approved that cease and desist order to the point of even serving notice on the president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, who of course is the bargaining agent involved in all four tables that are currently under way. So the employer in this particular case, given the illegal strike that is currently taking place, is taking the steps that they have to in order to bring resolution and an end to this illegal strike.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk to the motion, when we talk about steps to prevent harm to the public health care system, just once today – just once – I would like to hear a member of the opposition stand up, rather than saying mealymouthed and wishy-washy, "We don't condone an illegal strike, however, but, whatever," and in clear terms just have the courage to say that your number one concern is the innocent third parties that are involved here and that you along with the government call upon this union to immediately cease and desist this illegal work action. Do you have the courage to do that? I hope so.

MRS. SLOAN: I'm more than happy this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, to rise and assume the challenge that the minister of human resources has put out. Let me clearly state for the record that I am in this House because as a registered nurse in the system between 1993 and 1997 I saw the degree to which this government was prepared to sacrifice public safety in waging their war on reducing the deficit. That is what drove me to be in this Assembly.

Now, let's also be clear this afternoon that LPNs and other health workforce employees do not want to strike, nor do they as a profession defy the law lightly. But nurses, technicians, aides, and support staff are committed first and foremost to their patients, Mr. Speaker, to the public that they serve on a daily basis. The reality that they have lived with since at least 1993 is that they cannot provide safe care that is in compliance with their standards of practice and their code of ethics. We need a plan in this province, a comprehensive plan, and we need steps to achieve that. That has been dramatically and starkly absent in this government's agenda as long as I've been in this Assembly.

3:50

These employees work every day in an understaffed environment where the acuity of patients has risen dramatically. They have more responsibilities with less supports, and most of all, Mr. Speaker, they work in an environment where they are undervalued and not respected. And this government, by ignoring and ducking these issues not only at this table with AUPE but at previous tables with registered nurses and with laundry workers in this province in the health care system, have compounded the problem that we face today.

The public will ask: what is the government's plan, what is their agenda, and why do we seem to have this repetitive cycle of strikes?

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, I thought you were setting up for getting to the steps. The Speaker has indicated on a number of occasions and I will repeat that what we're talking about is the motion of the hon. member's own leader: "what steps must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system resulting from the strike." That's what we're on, if we could remember that.

Edmonton-Riverview.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: Well, let's start, Mr. Speaker, by stopping posturing. Let's stop posturing on the government side of the House. Let's stop posturing with the appointed regional health authorities. The posturing is absolutely intolerable. In response the union postures, and meanwhile the public is not receiving care. They are not receiving care because we do not have an overall comprehensive plan for the delivery of safe health care in this province. We do not.

As referenced by the Leader of the Official Opposition this afternoon, in 1999 the minister of health, his department, commissioned a report conducted by regional health authorities on what the issues were in the health workforce. They came back with a comprehensive report containing recommendations and summaries of what needed to be addressed, and we have not seen a stitch of action on that report in over a year's time, despite the fact that in repetitive government documents and the Speech from the Throne we hear again and again how committed this government is to the health workforce.

Well, these employees and the public are looking for concrete action, Mr. Speaker, and not at a time of crisis. They're looking for a government that's prepared to take on this challenge and put out a plan, commit themselves to it, and get it working. We need strategies in the workforce in the healthcare system that will rebuild relationships that have been damaged over the last eight years, strategies that will instill value and respect for these professionals and the job that they do on a daily basis. The public unquestionably values these employees, yet when it comes time to negotiate their collective agreement, they come to a table where they are scorned and ridiculed, and their proposals are dismissed by the government's appointed authorities. That is just not acceptable. What it is is a misstep.

As I indicated earlier, the time for posturing and the old traditional confrontational collective bargaining is long since past. The public recognizes that we have issues in the public health care system. The last thing we need is job action, yet the government seems to want to resort to letting that happen every time, and the public keep asking: why is that the case? Well, what I have seen, what has been demonstrated to me is that this government has a desire to de-skill, to ratchet down the health workforce, and in essence what they have

done over the course of the last eight years has stimulated that happening.

The health workforce rebalancing project and the health professions legislation were all constructed to create a melting pot, if you will, to remove the definitions of work. What does that achieve? Well, it achieves a reason for the government to collapse bargaining units under the Labour Relations Code. And what does that achieve, Mr. Speaker? It allows, then, a collapsing of the collective agreements and a collapsing of the gap and a reducing of the salaries paid. It's common knowledge that there is a variance between the hourly wage of a registered nurse and a licensed practical nurse of somewhere around \$8 to \$10. If the bargaining units are collapsed, what does that allow the government or its appointed authorities to do? It allows them to try and amalgamate those collective agreements and achieve savings.

We know that the Department of Learning has been in discussions with previously the provincial Council of Licensed Practical Nurses, now called the College of Licensed Practical Nurses, and they have been discussing increasing the curriculum seats for licensed practical nurses at a rate of approximately 400 new seats. This is in contrast with the request made by the faculties of nursing for approximately a 60-seat increase in their curriculums, which to this point in time has been refused by government. So on one hand we have the government all the while acknowledging that LPNs are a cheaper form of classification. They're willing to contemplate increasing their seats in the colleges and training facilities across the province by about 400 and thereby reshift, if you will, the provision of nursing care in this province to a classification which at this point in time is less costly. That, Mr. Speaker, really speaks to what the agenda in fact is, a way of de-skilling and reducing costs in the health care system.

To summarize, we need a comprehensive plan in this province to address the critical and growing nursing shortage, addressing both licensed practical nurses and registered nurses and psychiatric nurses, something that has been raised multiple times, but we have yet to see any concrete action to address it. Most certainly, this strike that the province is now facing is another symptom of problems that riddle the system, and the only way in which we're going to get on with addressing them is for the government to assume their leadership role.

The other step that the government might contemplate taking sooner rather than later is instituting accountable and responsible governance in the health care system. We've seen reports this spring where some regional health authorities are now spending up to 40 percent of their budgets on administrative costs, and there is nothing, Mr. Speaker, that outrages frontline employees more than to see exorbitant amounts of money spent on bureaucracy while they're existing at the front line on a shoestring. If this government truly values the delivery of safe patient care in this province, they would re-examine where they're putting their money. That clearly is out of step at the moment with the principles and the policies that the hon. minister of health and the minister of human resources have continually spoken about. The front line is dramatically underfunded, while increasing amounts of money are being poured into the bureaucracy, 17 unelected bureaucracies that were created by this government around the province.

We also know that as a result of all of these things, the work environments in health care have not become healthy at all, and that has contributed to the government and their authorities paying out increasing amounts of money for sick leave and stress leave for the health workforce. That was clearly known when I was in the field in 1997, yet we again do not see any concrete steps to address that problem. Those are the types of things that need to be done.

A strike unquestionably is risky for the public, for the government, for the system as a whole. Also, Mr. Speaker, it wastes valuable time and money, both of which should be focused on strengthening the system for the future. The public health care system in this province needs strong leadership from its government, and, most importantly, it needs the collective energy and commitment of government and health care professionals to construct its future. The government has a responsibility to configure and facilitate the environment to achieve that, and I would be most supportive of efforts and steps that would construct that reality.

Thank you very much.

4:00

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to first of all just outline, I think, the very significant steps, processes, and activities that the government does have in place with respect to recognizing and involving the professions and occupations in this province that participate in delivering health care. I think I touched on it briefly in my earlier remarks, but one of the major, major initiatives – and the government provided leadership here, particularly the work of the Member for Medicine Hat as chair of the committee that worked long and hard on providing the health professions legislation in this province.

One of the most important challenges that we have in the health care system is to bring understanding and respect and similar rules and similar privileges to the professions and occupations within their various scopes of practice. This has been a major, major initiative, I think, in terms of recognizing not just the doctors and not just the nurses but the licensed practical nurses, the dietitians, the other people who are part of the health care team in this province. I think that as that legislation is more fully implemented, it will have major benefits for the health care system, something that as far as I know has not been undertaken or moved this far in any other province in Canada.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we have an initiative under way and have in place an overall approach to workforce planning in terms of the numbers and the locations with respect to the overall health care workforce. There is representation in that overall planning activity at Alberta Health and Wellness from those people who are representative of those in the field, so to speak, as frontline staff. Here we are looking at the future needs of the health care system in terms of, first of all, education and training opportunities and of course also relating those to the projected needs of the system. As well, when we're doing that, we look at the professional development needs, a term we use in education, with respect to our overall approach to workforce planning.

Connected to the workforce planning initiative, Mr. Speaker, it's been demonstrated now in two consecutive budgets and government business plans through Alberta Learning that we are significantly following up on our workforce planning, that we are significantly increasing the education opportunities in our postsecondary institutions for the health workforce in this province. Yes, certainly we need to plan for the future. We need to plan for the added numbers, and we also need to plan for the retirements which will no doubt occur. But this is a recognition, I think, of the value of the people in the workforce: the need to plan for proper training opportunities there.

Then in the last budgets, Mr. Speaker, we do recognize that as our population grows, as the province through its good financial management and its strong economy is able to reinvest significantly in health care – we've put a priority on hiring more frontline staff. In the last business plan that was completed, we in fact exceeded our target of adding, as I recall we said, 1,200. The number was

somewhere in the neighbourhood of 1,300 or 1,400. Those people who came into the workforce were in different categories, different occupations and professions, but certainly they included, for instance, the licensed practical nurses that have been referred to here this afternoon. So we do recognize the need there, we are taking action on it, and we are producing results.

With respect to the overall area of professional development opportunities within the regional health authorities – and I think I'm somewhat familiar with all of them now – there is a dedication of time for different professional development activities. Certainly when it's a matter of new equipment, new procedures, and in some cases new drugs, there is the flexibility and the opportunity within the system to prepare people to use them, whether it's new equipment or a new treatment procedure. That is something that certainly we as a provincial government, through Alberta Health and Wellness, recognize has to be there.

While the health care system I recognize is a very complex one and there's a great deal of meeting and planning and this sort of thing, I really challenge the statement from across the way that our overall administrative costs have risen compared to the overall dedication of money to the health care system. Our figures show consistently over the last three or four years that the administrative costs of regional health authorities are typically 5.5 percent, a little higher in smaller regional health authorities where you don't have the same economy of scale. Nevertheless, that is, I think, a reasonable proportion and does not indicate that administration is taking away from resources going to overall staffing.

In addition to formal training, in addition to broad professional development opportunities and those which are specific to certain changes within the system, we also have to recognize that all of our workers should have those types of opportunities, particularly when we are talking about changes which are occurring in the system. I think a good example is that, as has recently been announced, we have reinvested significant dollars into the whole area of long-term care. We do need and have dedicated some of those funds to upgrading, if you can use that term – I would term it occupational professional development – and providing time and opportunities at the long-term care centres or at the community colleges, whatever works out in particular parts of the province, for additional education and updating on the best approaches and practices with respect to the care of our seniors, Mr. Speaker.

So I think it is demonstrated that we do value our health workforce. We are, as resources are available, expanding it, Mr. Speaker. We do recognize the need for opportunities for professional and occupational education and improvement. That, I think, is very much part of our priorities in terms of the health workforce.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that overall we've demonstrated that we are making health care a priority for this government, because it is a priority with Albertans. The budget recognizes that we want to improve and expand the health care system, but we want it to go into the services that are needed for the population of this province.

I certainly respect the bargaining process, Mr. Speaker. I think it should be followed through on in the way it is set up to and intended to. We certainly are taking very, very seriously our responsibility to provide for the proper climate and the proper resources in the health care system. Nevertheless, there is legislation which provides a legal process by which collective agreements can be arrived at. I have had experience on both sides of the overall collective bargaining process. It does work. There is a process here, and the fact of the matter is that that process should be used and adhered to and we should not be faced with illegal job action.

4:10

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak to the motion before us. Earlier today, during the question period, I did draw the attention of the House and the minister of health and the minister of labour to the real crisis that we find ourselves in. I'm gratified that the Speaker this afternoon recognized the gravity of the situation, the urgent public importance of the crisis, and the steps we need to take to ensure that for not just one group but for the health care system altogether, with all the participants involved in it – patients, families, health care workers, and the system as a whole – the harm that could result as a result of this strike is prevented.

It is true that 10,000 health care workers in this province are on strike. It is true that the strike is illegal. In fact, that very fact, recognizing that 10,000 Albertans – and these are not rich and powerful Albertans. These are mostly women. I was at the University hospital site at noon today, and about 99 percent of these workers who are on strike are women. The fact that they have taken such a huge risk to go on strike shows the degree and the depth of the frustration and discontent that is there at their place of work, discontent and frustration that they experience on a daily basis. That is why they have decided to go on this illegal strike. All the consequences that can follow from this are well known to them, yet they have made their decision.

That's why this Assembly needs to pay special attention to the conditions that prevail in our hospitals, in our health care facilities and how those conditions need to be addressed if we are to fully and successfully address the issue of what steps need to be taken. Steps that need to be taken have to be in relation to the conditions that created the situation that we find ourselves in, conditions which result in actions which could irretrievably damage the health care system.

So rather than putting the blame, as I found in a news release that just came to me this afternoon from the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta – it's a news release that is strident, that is intransigent in tone. It's a news release that tries to place blame on the workers, on the employees, the representatives of whom this association is trying to bargain with. I think it's that poisoned environment, this polarized work situation in the health care workplaces that has to be addressed if the system is to be protected from the harm that may result from the strike that started this morning at 7 o'clock. So the conditions at the workplace, the ability of the professional workers to respect both their professional ethics and obligations to the patient as well as their obligations to the contract to which they're a party can be maintained, those are the kinds of conditions we need to address.

The health care workplace is not an ordinary workplace. It's a workplace where the health interests of real human beings are taken care of, where care is provided, and the quality of that care must be as high as we possibly can guarantee. We all know that it cannot happen if you have a workforce that's overworked, if you have a workplace that's understaffed, if you have employees who are discontented, who are unhappy with the way they're being treated, with the way they're being rewarded, with the way they're being recognized for the value of the work that they provide.

It's not enough to say that these are essential workers. That's a legal definition. Sure, they're essential workers, and because they are essential, therefore, according to the laws of this province – and this is one of the few provinces, by the way, Mr. Speaker, which has this complete ban on essential workers' ability to strike. Although I heard the minister of health talking about how he respects collective bargaining, at the same time I didn't hear him say that he regrets the fact that in this province we have a law which bans completely, under any circumstances, health care workers from going on strike. In fact, taking away the right to strike is striking at the very roots of the collective bargaining process.

We know that this law which bans essential workers, health care workers from striking hasn't worked. From '89 on we have fairly good cumulative experience which shows that it doesn't work. In fact, it polarizes the situation. It leads to illegal strikes. This is the fourth time that this has happened in this province, so why don't we learn something from it?

I was accused by the minister of health this afternoon of being doctrinaire. Now, I want to ask the Assembly, I want to ask you, Mr. Speaker: who is being doctrinaire? Doctrinaires are people who don't learn from their own experience, who don't respect the actual results of their policies and actions, learn from those actions, and change those actions if necessary. So what we need to do is to focus on taking measures now that will help us protect the system from any further wrong.

What kind of harm will result, Mr. Speaker, if we don't deal with the strike effectively now? If we don't resolve it amicably, if we don't bring about some sort of conciliation among parties, the first harm that will result to the system is in the form of disaffected workers who will have no commitment to the workplace. They will at the earliest opportunity want to leave the place. The so-called brain drain, workers running away from our hospitals and from our health care facilities, is a problem already. This is happening under conditions in which already there is a nursing shortage, a health care worker shortage in the province.

The most serious harm to the system could result from workers who are dissatisfied, workers who are not valued for what they do, workers who are banned from striking, workers who are threatened with their rights being taken away. That will result in further harm to the system. So what we need to do as an Assembly is make sure that those conditions don't prevail, conditions that create that kind of discontent and disaffection with the work situation.

We also, Mr. Speaker, in the longer run need to do something to repeal this law which takes away the right to strike of these workers. It doesn't work. Let's find some other ways. Let's put our heads together and see if we can find some way that will help us deal with situations or stalemates in bargaining in places where health care is provided. Banning strikes is not the answer. It doesn't work. It has failed completely. Let's learn from this evidence.

What we know in the short run, Mr. Speaker, is to ask the minister of health and the minister of labour to take the responsibility for the conditions that prevail in the workplace in our health care system. This government's own policies, own actions have created those conditions. Unless that responsibility is first acknowledged – that, yes, we are responsible for part of the problem, for most of the problem – no action will follow. The first action is for the government to recognize that it is responsible for the conditions of crisis that presently we find occurring in the system. Having done that, then of course the two ministers must say: "From today on we'll take a proactive role. We won't just let labour relations apparatus kick in. We won't let courts decide. That will not decide the matter. What's needed is a concerted political action." That action is missing. That will be missing at the moment.

So what we need to hear from the minister of labour and from the minister of health to resolve this strike so that the system is prevented from being harmed is the following. They will call on both parties today, now, to come to the table. Two ministers will be available; they will make sure that the negotiations go on and the parties don't leave the table until a settlement is reached. That's what's needed, a proactive government committed to defusing this very, very difficult and conflictual situation. That's the only way we can prevent the harm that may result to the system if this strike goes on.

I was listening to the minister of health. He talks about profes-

sional development opportunities that RHAs are beginning to provide. To me, that doesn't hold any water. The real issues are of job security, of wages, of casualization of work. So I say: let's take both the short-term action and long-term action.

Thank you.

4:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take a little bit of time this afternoon to respond to the resolution that is before the House. First of all, though, I would like to preface my remarks by commenting on the fact that I believe and I know my colleagues believe that the professionalism and the attention to task and the skills that licensed practical nurses are capable of performing and indeed do perform on their jobsite and in their workplace are very much appreciated. I'd also like to take this opportunity to commend the upgrading, the increased skill sets they have received, the further depth of their training that has most recently given them the opportunity to expand their scope of practice.

However, that's not what we are talking about today. In fact, I think the time that we spend here in the Legislature is not an issue of looking back in the past to see what people did that they thought was best, what people think they could have done in the past, nor of chastising government or those responsible in the health regions for actions that have been taken. Instead, we have in front of us a resolution that says that we should discuss and be discussing "what steps must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system resulting from the strike," this illegal strike which we are indeed in the midst of.

This illegal strike is the result of a labour dispute, and if we are going to speak to the urgency of the issue, because we have suspended the regular Orders of the Day in this Assembly, then I feel we speak directly to what is the point at hand. If we are to say what steps are going to be taken, I cannot stress more accurately and more directly what the minister has spoken of with respect to how we should look to the parties getting back to the table. That is the best way, the only way that this illegal strike action can be terminated.

I believe that you respond to a direct situation at hand by suggesting what can be done immediately, and for that reason I think that we here in the Assembly are not in a position to address a labour dispute. We either respect the process or we don't respect the process, and the process that is before us is that we have two parties in a situation of dispute . . .

MRS. SLOAN: A 5 percent rollback didn't respect the process.

MR. SMITH: Negotiated. Negotiated.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, hon. Minister of Gaming, if you wish an opportunity, one has already taken it and doesn't get a second opportunity; the other has yet to do so. Right now we do have the hon. Member for St. Albert, and following that, other hon. members will have their chance.

St. Albert.

Debate Continued

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I do believe there is a process we should be respecting. The process is that there have been negotiations going on, and what we see right now are those people who are responsible for their own actions and

have therefore chosen to go on strike, and that we have to hold them accountable for. If people choose to go on strike, on an illegal strike, then we here in this Legislature have the responsibility to suggest that they do what the process warrants they are able to do, and that is to have them come back to the table and to discuss the issue.

We are not here to resolve a labour dispute. This Chamber is not meant to do that, nor are we mandated to do that. Instead, we have laws. We have a situation in place where we have mandated those who are responsible to represent their organizations, if you will, or the employer and the employees' associations in this case, and we should be looking for them to return to engage in the action that the system has designated they should be doing.

I'd also like to take a moment here to reflect on the fact that I have never believed that responsible people use other innocent people to achieve their own end. However admirable it is that individuals who are employees in these various groups and who are represented at the table by their negotiating . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We're on the resolution.

MRS. O'NEILL: Okay: taking steps. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize.

The steps that we are looking for them to take and we would hope they would take and we would use the opportunity in this Chamber to encourage them to take would be to return to the table so that they can specifically address and negotiate across the table the agreement that they so desire. However, in taking those steps, I do not feel that others should use innocent third parties, particularly in this case those individuals who are fragile, who are sick, who are vulnerable within our community, use them or put them at risk by therefore engaging in an illegal strike.

So the steps that have to be taken are for their leaders to return to the table. I've said it often. I'd like to say it one more time. Unless we here in this Chamber respect the agreed upon process, then we, in suggesting that other steps be taken, are stepping outside of what was originally agreed to.

Therefore, I make my case, finally, in repetition by saying that our voice should only be to say: let those parties who are engaged in the negotiations return for the benefit of those who are the employees, for the benefit of those who are the employers, but, most importantly, with respect for those who are the individuals who we trust are to be cared for within the health facilities in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief, but I'll be to the point. I have a lot of different facilities in my constituency that are being affected by this today. We have St. Michael's extended care. I have the Alberta Hospital Edmonton, and I have lots of constituents that work in the hospitals in Edmonton.

This is a very concerning thing. I'm not saying that I condone illegal strikes, but I do feel that there is a negotiation that should be done here. We've been witnessing over the last week or so that there's been a lot of finger-pointing. There's been a lot of playing games in the media, and the fact is that both sides should be negotiating with the responsibilities they carry forward to the table. This government is passing the buck to the 17 health regions, and we should be doing it right here out of Alberta Health.

This government has the responsibility as the employer to these people out on strike today. Whether we want to keep saying that it's an illegal strike, it is that they are not working today, and we have

people in our facilities that we should have back working, taking care of patients.

We have people that really have lost hope. They have no other recourse but to walk out to show that they should be able to negotiate at the table. We have a government in place that for the last many years has just totally had no concern and wants to union break.

I have never had a union back me up; I've always been out there on my own. But the fact is that I do know that we'd be still back in the 1974 dark ages in the health system if there weren't unions. They have supported their people. There are negotiations that have been done over the years on bad working conditions, bad management skills of the people being put in charge of them. At the same time, without saying that I'm totally a huge union supporter, I do believe that there's a place for them.

4:30

What we seem to have lost, in all these years of downloading and trying to point the finger at health as being the only problem why the provinces and the country have gone into debt, is the fact that health is the major thing. We brought it up in Bill 11. Very important debates were put forward on how important the workers are, how important the health system is, and how there's been a void in the system over the last number of years, a void of lack of training, a void of lack of people. We should be looking at the LPNs and their training system of cross-training, going in and being the OR techs working in the ORs today. There's been lots of good training toward a system. But at the same time, how do we regain the void that we've had of the lack of nurses, the lack of staff: 10,000 health workers let go in a matter of three and a half, four years, 8,200 nurses.

They're out there for a reason. They're out there because they have in desperation depended on their union to bring something forward to them. I feel that this is a very important motion that we should be looking at, pointing out that we as governing representatives of this province have to recognize that we have to get them back to the table, that we have to get them back to negotiating. We have to let a system play out that does not have the dollars and cents and the power that we have behind our public affairs in this province to defeat people's will so that they're going to accept anything.

So for those constituents I have, with St. Michael's and Alberta Hospital Edmonton in my constituency, this is such an important issue that I do hope that every representative in this Assembly will talk of the importance of this today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important to talk about what steps could be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system resulting from the strike of 10,000 health care providers, and I think it's been pointed out by some of my colleagues that the most important step that could be taken is for the illegal strike to end and to end now.

In saying that, I'm not putting any blame or pointing any fingers at anybody in terms of who's at fault. I'm just re-emphasizing that there's a reason it's illegal to strike in certain essential occupations and certain essential places. Providing health care services to Albertans is a very, very important business, a very, very important service, and it's something which has been deemed essential. There are innocent third parties who get hurt in the process, so it's been determined in the past that having strikes in this particular area of

service is not appropriate. That's why strikes are illegal. To condone illegal strikes by using any other title such as "job action" or any other euphemism to soften it or to use any statement that says, "I don't condone illegal strikes but," is gilding the lily.

The bottom line is that the best thing anyone can do to prevent harm to the health care system resulting from this strike is for the illegal strikers to go back to work, to solve the problems at the bargaining table in good faith when negotiating between employer and employee, and if they need outside help, to call upon the Minister of Human Resources and Employment to appoint mediators or to provide for arbitrators or to provide for that outside assistance so that the people who are involved in this illegal job action, this illegal strike, can get back to serving Albertans in the way in which that service is so necessary. That is the single most important step which could be taken to prevent any harm to the public health care system.

One of the things that's been left out but is implicit in this motion is what steps need to be taken to prevent harm to individual Albertans who are in need of quality health care from service providers when those health care workers withdraw their services. So it's concomitant to say that they need to go back to work now, provide services, and let the bargaining agents, the union and the employers, go to the table and do their job and get a settlement in place that makes this system work. The government is not at the table. The government is not the employer in this case, but the government could play a role, if necessary, in providing mediation or arbitration at appropriate times.

I've listened to some of the comments that have been made this afternoon; for example, Edmonton-Riverview talking about a desire to de-skill or to ratchet down. That's absolutely opposite to what this government promotes. What this government has been promoting is more education for doctors, more educational opportunities for nurses, more educational opportunities for technicians, more educational opportunities for health care workers. That's what this government has been supporting. That's what the Minister of Health and Wellness has announced additional resources for, and that's where we're going here.

There's a more important discussion which should be happening which we don't seem to get to because we deal with health care discussions on an emotional level rather than getting down and talking about the real issues. This is something that I think the Member for Edmonton-Riverview would agree with me on.

MRS. SLOAN: I wouldn't go that far, David. Don't be too sure.

MR. HANCOCK: I think she would.

Health care workers should be allowed to work to the level of their education and their expertise. That would really help the health care system. In this discussion about health care, if we could go above and beyond, think outside the box a little bit and start talking about how every player in the system can maximize their potential, can use the skills that they have, use the education and resources that they have, use the experience that they have, and take responsibility for the work that they're doing, we could really do some good work in the health care system. We need to be working together, Mr. Speaker. We need to be taking those steps to work together as health care professionals, as health care workers, as government, as health authorities to achieve that kind of an end. True health care reform: that's what we need to achieve, and we'll build that by health care workers and employers and government sitting down in a spirit of goodwill, working together to achieve that kind of reform.

MRS. SLOAN: I had to run for election before you listened to me.

MR. HANCOCK: I'm not listening to you now.

Edmonton-Riverview thinks I'm listening to her. I listen to my constituents, and I bring their views to the attention of this House, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair really shouldn't have to remind the hon. Government House Leader that all his comments and so on should be addressed through the chair.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I try to do that to make sure that the views of Edmonton-Whitemud are represented in this constituency and through the chair to the members of this House.

I'm talking about how we deal with the necessary steps to prevent harm to the health care system from this type of illegal action. It's not pointing fingers. It's not suggesting that people aren't doing their job to say that we have determined in this province that it's important that health care services be delivered to those who need them, that health care workers provide those services, that if there's job action that needs to be taken, that job action should be taken in an appropriate and legal manner. The dispute should be resolved at the bargaining table, and the dispute should be resolved by working in co-operation.

One of my experiences, Mr. Speaker, was as a member of the University Hospitals Board before I was elected to this House. During the time I was there, we were involved in a reorganization project. It was a massive project; it was a very interesting project. It took a couple of years to do. One of the most interesting aspects of that project was that we had committees which examined every single thing that happened in that hospital to determine whether it needed to be done; whether it needed to be done there; if so, who it should be done by; and what sort of resource pool was needed.

MRS. SLOAN: Led by an American consultant.

MR. HANCOCK: Edmonton-Riverview says that it was led by an American consultant, Mr. Speaker, but in fact it wasn't. There was an American consultant who did some of the data gathering for us, but it was led by people in the hospital. It was led by a board champion and an executive champion and some of the workers there. In fact, there were over 600 workers at the University hospital involved in various committees doing that examination.

I was getting to the point, Mr. Speaker, before I was so rudely interrupted by Edmonton-Riverview, to say that it was a very, very worthwhile experience because everybody sat down at the same table, whether it was a heart surgeon or a nurse or a plumber or a member of the board or a member of the executive team, and talked about how we could do health care reform within the context of the service delivery in that hospital.

That's the type of co-operation, the type of work that needs to happen to develop the health care system of the future. That's the type of thing that we need to do, not de-skilling – nobody's into de-skilling; certainly this government's not into de-skilling – but letting health care workers work to the level of their skill and encouraging the breakdown of the barriers which prohibit that, to get the professions to the table and say: we don't need to protect our areas of practice and be limited in terms of what we allow people to do. What we should do is look at what they can do, what they're equipped to do, what they're trained to do, what services they can provide to the system and let them work to that level and let them take responsibility for working to that level. If we did that, there would be a whole lot more job satisfaction at every level in the system, and we wouldn't have issues of money taking such a high priority in people's level of concern.

4:40

So, Mr. Speaker, there are some steps that can be taken over the long term to make sure that the jobs that our professional health care deliverers in this province do are respected, are recognized as being important. In fact, they're recognized as being essential. We know that they do good work. We know that they're working very, very hard for Albertans, but we also know that it's inappropriate to have illegal action. We as a House should be encouraging them to go back to work, to go back to the table and have full and complete discussions and resolve the issues there for the benefit of all Albertans, certainly for the benefit of those Albertans who are sick and in need of care.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the short time available to each member to participate, I wanted to make a couple of points. It seems to me that in terms of steps that must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system, we have two kinds of relief. We have some long-term strategies, and we have some immediate questions that have to be resolved. Let me deal with some of the immediate questions initially. I guess I'm struck by the fact that here we are in the fourth kind of crisis like this when it comes to health care workers in this province.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

I understand that in Calgary, although obviously I haven't been there today, we've got the Peter Lougheed, the Rockyview, the Colonel Belcher veterans care centre in my constituency, the Fanning centre, and the Bethany care centre that are all affected. All of the patients and residents of those different facilities are presumably hugely interested in what this government is doing in terms of immediate steps.

I guess one of the things I'd like to know and haven't heard – I want to know that there is a concrete plan on the part of the government to deal with this. I want to know whether the government has the current intention of invoking division 18 of the Labour Relations Code. Sections 110 and 111 set out a range of remedies for the government of the province of Alberta. Is there a current plan to invoke either of those sections under division 18 emergencies? When the minister of human resources and the minister of health spoke very defensively, I didn't hear them offer crisp, specific indications in terms of what kinds of remedies the government is currently contemplating to protect the health of my constituents and Calgarians in the city of Calgary. So is division 18 going to be invoked by the government? Is there a current contemplation of that?

Division 19 of the Labour Relations Code . . . [interjection] I'm interested in asking public policy questions, and since the Speaker has shown the wisdom of (a) acknowledging that there's a crisis in terms of the provision of health care in this province and (b) that it is important to be able to have this sort of debate . . .

MR. HANCOCK: A point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Mr. Speaker, under 23(h), (i), and (j). The hon. member just indicated that the Speaker acknowledged that there

was a crisis in health care in this province. In fact, anyone who was here in the House would know that the Speaker came nowhere close to doing that. His ruling was that this was a question which allowed for an urgent debate because, as he put it, as I recall, there was no other opportunity for debate of this issue. It would be a total mischaracterization of the Speaker's comments to suggest that he indicated that there was a crisis in health care in this province. In fact, he said no such thing, and the hon. Opposition House Leader should be asked to correct himself on that point because he would clearly be putting the Speaker in a position of taking a public policy position instead of being a referee in the House.

MR. DICKSON: I very much appreciate the intervention of the Government House Leader. I should have made it much clearer that it was a paraphrase and my interpretation of the ruling of the Speaker. Clearly, the Speaker did not indicate that there was a crisis, so I stand corrected, and I appreciate the Government House Leader drawing that to my attention.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: The concern I wanted to raise while we're dealing with specific steps that could be taken, that ought to be taken – we have division 18 of the Labour Relations Code dealing with emergencies. We have division 19, sections 112, 113, and 114, dealing with measures during illegal strike or illegal lockout. I'd like to know the current contemplation of the government with respect to that array of remedies, what the government has proposed to do with respect to using those remedies under the Labour Relations Code.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I'm having some difficulty following this, because it would seem to me that the questions you're asking are in the nature of speculation rather than debating the question we have before us.

It seems to me that when parties are involved in negotiation, it probably is not appropriate to speculate on sections of the labour code when in fact we don't know what may be taking place in those negotiations. I think those kinds of questions are completely hypothetical, and we should stick to what we're dealing with here, which is: how do we deal with this question?

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I know that you certainly wouldn't want to enter into debate on the motion that's in front of us, and certainly I always take the chair's direction with respect to the Standing Orders. But with the greatest respect, it seems to me that when we're talking about "what steps must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system," how could those steps not include the existing labour legislation?

There is an element of hypothesis to everything we debate, because without knowing what the action plan of the government is, we can only offer suggestions and ask questions. I know that you want to avoid entering into debate, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I guess if you phrase it in a way that says: here, based on what I see in the labour code, this is what I suggest we could do. But if you're standing there asking the government, "Are you going to invoke section this or section that?" I'm sorry, but that to me is out of order.

MR. DICKSON: Under 13(2), Mr. Speaker, if you might advise on

what basis and what the authority is that a question posed as I posed it, in rhetorical fashion, would be out of order under the Standing Orders, I invite your clarification on that.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Okay. Steps that "must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system resulting from the strike of 10,000 health care providers" is what we're talking about. This is my view, but I think if in fact you're asking questions of the government with respect to, "Are you going to invoke this section?" – I believe you quoted 18 and maybe 19; I'm not sure which at this point – that's entirely different than standing in your place and saying: I think you should do that. That in fact is something that could be taken as a step, as you suggest. To me, asking the question gets dangerously close to getting involved in the process.

So I would just caution you to try and avoid getting involved in the process of labour negotiations, because that's happening somewhere, I suppose, in this city or some other city in this province right now. I'm just very concerned that we get involved in that process.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you, of course, for your intervention. It was good to hear your concerns about what might happen with those kinds of questions. I'll try and couch my comments in a way that is satisfactory to the chair.

4:50

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: I would think there is a kind of imbalance that exists in the House always, in every debate. I don't have available to me the resources of the minister of human resources. I'm not a member of cabinet. So when we talk about what the steps are that "must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system," that would presumably involve a full and robust consideration of the complete range of remedies. I'm mindful that the Speaker earlier cautioned us that there are some matters that may be before the courts, and certainly it would be important to avoid speaking on those matters. [interjection] I want to, but I've just got lots of comments.

Part of my debate, Mr. Speaker, is going to be in the nature of asking some questions, because that's typically the way I debate in this Assembly. I'm happy to offer suggestions when I can, but I'm not going to suggest that I've got all the answers, because there are lots of people far more knowledgeable than I am. As an elected representative part of my job is to amplify questions and concerns I hear from constituents, and that's what I'm trying to do to the best of my ability.

In any event, I've identified some sections in the provincial statute, the Labour Relations Code. I've asked the question, and perhaps in the course of debate we'll hear other reasons. You may, when you leave the chair, Mr. Speaker, be able to offer some comments in your other capacity in terms of what steps you think should be taken.

In the meantime, I'd go on and say that I understand that at 2:30 this afternoon there was a media availability at the University of Alberta hospital here in Edmonton. Just in terms of showing the size of the steps that must be taken, it's useful to recognize – and this is what's at risk in Edmonton, I'm advised – that 250 patients are affected across the Capital region's six hospitals, with a few urgent or emergency cases proceeding at each site if necessary. All patients in the Capital health region scheduled for surgery on Thursday are now being notified that those procedures are canceled. The only exceptions are urgent cardiac, cancer, and transplant surgeries and special cases such as patients already in transit. So what we've got

at risk there are some 1,400 patients in Capital region hospitals, which is a significant number out of the 1,911 hospital beds in the entire region.

I understand that some CUPE support staff joined the AUPE strike this morning at the Misericordia, at the Sturgeon community hospital and health centre, and the Leduc community hospital and health centre. Then I understand that this afternoon CUPE staff returned to the Misericordia, Sturgeon, and Leduc hospitals. So we have a great deal of activity going on, and one would have hoped that the most basic step would be the government of the province of Alberta coming out and outlining with some specificity the plan they have to deal with the immediate crisis. We don't hear that.

It's of particular concern to me that the government has taken very much a hands-off position, and this brings us to one of the great ironies here. We have these 17 regional health authorities with what I'd describe as questionable legitimacy. You know, the regional health authority boards are not elected; they're not elected by anyone. These are the people that are negotiating presumably on behalf of the interests of the people in my hometown of Calgary or in Edmonton or Leduc or any other city, but they have no elected mandate, and it strikes me that that's a huge difficulty right off the bat.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to add my few thoughts on the motion that's in front of us, and I see what's in front of us broken down into three components. Let me say first of all that I'm very, very pleased with the recognition by the Speaker that he did in fact deem this motion worthy of emergency debate this afternoon, because I could not agree with him more on that particular ruling. I see this broken down . . . [interjection] She's gone to beat your candidate in Edmonton-Highlands, and three to one she waxes her.

Mr. Speaker, I see this motion broken down into three components. First of all – and pardon me, Member for Edmonton-Whitemud – we have to ask ourselves: why this job action? Why has this job action been taken? Secondly, what's the impact of this job action? What are the consequences? Thirdly, what steps have to be taken to prevent this type of scenario from happening in the first place or happening again in the future? Those are the three components I feel have to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, just a bit of my background when it comes to union involvement. Back in the early '70s when I worked for the University of Alberta Students' Union, because we were distinct from the academic and nonacademic staff, we organized and formed a union, the students' union staff, 40 of us, under CUPE, and I became its first president. I realized at that particular time just how difficult it was from the employee's point of view, the upper hand that the employer had when it came to negotiations. Under our collective agreement and the authority given to us, we did have the right to take strike action, something that we don't see in this current situation. So I do have some feel for labour negotiations and such.

Now, why has this particular job action been taken? Well, I guess we could go back and one could say that the whole question of the restructuring that took place with the health care system when we turned over the authority of the health care system to nonelected people – the government gave up its responsibility and said: we no longer want to be responsible for administering . . .

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I'm sorry to interrupt. I listened very carefully. You mentioned there were three issues that you wanted to deal with. However, we really only have one before us, and that is: "what steps must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system resulting from [this] strike." I don't see the other two, but I'm hearing you go through a number of things that have been debated before. I would like you to stay with the steps, please.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, thank you for your excellent guidance there. I was simply trying to sort of paint a picture as to the frustration being felt by those that are participating in what is happening out there so that I can point out the urgency of the situation, how critical it is, and what steps have to be taken to try and correct the situation.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, let me just say from my experience, having been in the hospital for 10 weeks a couple of years ago, that I saw the frustration these health care workers underwent. I saw just how hard they had to work, and I saw the frustration they faced. I saw their need to have respect, to have dignity, and to be given fair compensation. The lack of those three components is what has driven us to the situation we're in today, what I call a very, very critical situation, that is in fact very harmful, that has great potential harm to the public at large.

Just how large is that potential harm? First of all, we're looking at a total of 10,000 health care workers that are involved potentially, the largest strike in the history of the AUPE, the largest union in Alberta. We're looking at 5,700 licensed practical nurses and nursing aides at 120 hospitals that are potentially affected. We're looking at 1,900 psychiatric aides and support staff at Alberta Mental Health Board facilities. We're looking at 1,300 LPNs, nursing attendants, and personal support workers at 11 long-term continuing care centres including the Capital Care Group, St. Michael's in Edmonton, at Dr. Vernon Fanning Centre and Bethany Care Centre in Calgary.

5:00

We're looking at 1,800 technicians, housekeeping, and maintenance staff at the University and Glenrose hospitals. We're looking at 159 health care facilities potentially involved including approved hospitals, 70 clinics, long-term care facilities, and Alberta Hospital Edmonton and Alberta Hospital Ponoka. We're looking at those affected in this particular area: the University hospital, the Royal Alex, the Misericordia, the Mill Woods centre, the Northeast centre, the long-term Capital Care Group, St. Michael's. In Calgary we're looking at the Peter Lougheed, the Rockyview, the Colonel Belcher Veteran's Care Centre, the Dr. Vernon Fanning Centre, the Bethany Care Centre.

We can see the potential in terms of harm that this can have to the health care system in this province, the impact it can have in terms of harm to patients, to hundreds, thousands of Albertans that are affected by what's happening out there. We're going to see postponement of surgery that would otherwise go ahead. Now, if that is not creating a harmful situation, I don't know what is.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The government has to recognize that we're into a critical situation. It's a desperate situation. There's absolutely no question

about that. How is that dispute resolved at this particular point? Well, one of the difficulties that those workers face is that it's a one-sided coin in that the negotiating process, the negotiating tools weigh in favour of the employer. Once employees are denied that basic right to withdraw their services – and when they withdraw their services, it's deemed by some as being illegal, but they're driven to that particular situation because the recourses that should be there aren't there for those workers, Mr. Speaker.

So that's the difficulty. That's the frustration they face, and they recognize it's one-sided. They recognize that they have the disadvantage when it comes to that whole negotiating process. If we go back in history to the 1989-1993 term, the leader of the Liberal opposition at that time introduced a bill that would give health care workers with the exception of essential services the right to withdraw their services. If the health care workers had that tool, the negotiations would be a lot more meaningful.

I would venture to say, Mr. Speaker, that if they were given that right when they deserved to be given that right, we would not be in the situation we're in today. We're in the situation we're in today because of desperation by over 10,000 workers that are crying out for respect, that are crying out for dignity, that are crying out for fair treatment. They look at the various mechanisms that are available to them to try and achieve those objectives. All they have to do is look at what's happening in Ontario, look at what's happening in B.C., where their counterparts are paid over \$20 an hour, 33 and a third percent more than they're paid here. They look at the fact that they're the seventh lowest paid in terms of any province throughout Canada. They look at what they're offered, a 3 percent increase in the immediate, which – what? – meets inflation, barely meets inflation, doesn't meet inflation? It's an insult to them. It's an insult to their dignity. It's an insult to their respect, and it's an insult to their cry for fair treatment.

Mr. Speaker, we have an obligation as elected representatives to protect Alberta workers, and these are Alberta workers. These are Alberta workers that are now driven to the point where they have to negotiate with a body of nonelected people that should be elected. At least one-third should be elected and should have been some time ago. They're driven to that point of negotiating with nonelected people that find themselves being nonaccountable to the electorate, being nonaccountable to Albertans.

If the power, if the final decision-making was in the hands of the Legislative Assembly, was in the hands of the minister – and he does have some steps he can take; there's no question about that – I think it would be a different story. I think we would be flooded with dozens of calls, hundreds of calls, and suddenly the elected representatives would stop and say: "Hey, we have a problem here. We have our constituents asking for our help."

How can an Albertan phone a member of the Edmonton regional health authority, the Calgary regional health authority, any regional health authority, and say: "Look; I'm insisting that you do right. I'm insisting that you do this"? What leverage do they have? They can't turn around and say, "You don't get my vote next time if you don't do that; you have an obligation to represent me," because we don't, technically speaking, have that particular obligation laid out.

Mr. Speaker, because I know there are others in this caucus that want to speak, I'm going to conclude.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The steps that need to be taken are those necessary to get the negotiation teams back to the table. The participants need to be encouraged to resume talking. It

is only through meeting face to face and addressing the issues that a resolution can be found. This is the process that currently is in place.

I can vouch personally that contrary to some people's view, our health system is providing excellent care in the acute care system through the skilled professionals who are employed in that system. Today there are more provincewide services such as heart surgeries, more renal dialysis, more orthopedic procedures being done.

The Minister of Health and Wellness has announced more resources to purchase additional and newer technology to provide even better health care. The Minister of Learning has taken the step of announcing an increase in the number of health care professional spaces through the opening for training and education. The Broda committee recommendations for long-term care are now being put into place, and the minister announced \$20 million yesterday to expand long-term care and home care. This brings to \$40 million over the last two years dedicated to enhancing the services provided to our most vulnerable citizens in long-term care and home care.

Last November \$265.8 million was placed in the system for an additional 658 long-term beds and 1,325 replacement beds. Another step was the \$4 million put in place to provide the drug Aricept for the growing number of persons suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Another step will be the implementation of a health services utilization commission, which will monitor and assess the system's performance and recommend improvements. Recently both the Calgary regional health authority and the Capital health authority have set up local utilization units dedicated to improvements in their systems with an emphasis on continuous improvement.

Another important step in continuous improvement is through the use of pilot projects to investigate new ways of doing things and to test innovative ideas. For example, a primary care model to improve access to physicians and to help reduce pressure on emergency wards has been developed in Calgary and is showing much promise. It also relies very heavily on interpersonal co-operation and skill, building a team.

The access to MRI procedures is being expanded to reduce the waiting lists, as the role for this technology has grown considerably in the past few years.

These are just some of the steps undertaken by the government to meet the needs of an ever evolving health care system. As one of the few persons in this Assembly who has truly been in a legal strike, I can testify that any strike causes deep wounds that take many years to heal. I would recommend very strongly to the bargaining team to resume their negotiations and to find the solutions which address the needs of the workers and those under their care.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

5:10

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon. I, too, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, would like to recognize the wisdom of the chair in permitting this emergency debate this afternoon, because it truly is an emergency.

MR. SMITH: So what are you going to do about it?

MR. MacDONALD: Now, we've had in the last four years a strike . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister has not yet had his

chance to speak, although he all too often enters into debate when it's not really his turn. It is right now the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and if the hon. member would speak through the chair and not to anyone who inappropriately makes comments, that would be helpful to the process.

Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I realize that with this emergency the mismanagement of the government has been front and centre. In 1998, when this job action occurred, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity in question period said to this Assembly that, yes, this is a good idea, and the idea was to streamline the bargaining process. This would be the first step, but unfortunately we're in the situation we are this afternoon because the bargaining process was not streamlined.

The hon. member in his capacity as minister of labour failed to streamline the process. This was recognized by the minister of health in March of last year in the Current and Emerging Health Workforce Issues in Alberta. We're asking what steps can be taken to protect our public health care system. Well, the first step would be for the hon. members across the way to read their own reports.

We talk about current shortages of licensed practical nurses. This is a crisis in this province. It's a crisis across the country. We're not looking at the factors here. If we want to take a step in protecting our public health care system from job action, we have to recognize that a shortage exists. We have to recognize that we have to have compensation packages. We just can't throw pennies and expect people to work. These individuals that are currently getting dust on their shoes in 159 different locations across the province are the people who held the system together up until now, despite all odds. Through their efforts and through their hard work they have kept the system together, and what do we do? We have a collective bargaining process that obviously does not work.

Now, the object of collective bargaining is a collective agreement between the union and the employer. The best collective agreement that can be reached is one that's agreed to freely and without hesitation by both parties. When we have this idea of compulsory arbitration, when we have this idea that there's no balance in the system – and that exists in the entire labour movement in this province. [interjections] People can aah and they can ooh, Mr. Speaker, but we've had four disruptions in the last four years. Something is not working here, and it just astonishes me that we continue with the same rhetoric from the hon. members across the way.

The government appoints the regional health authorities and the Mental Health Board. These appointments are selective. They're not elected, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo stated. The government is providing the funds. The government shapes the labour climate and the code. I can't get into the code at this time, but one more step that we could take to prevent harm to the public health care system is to explore why the shortage in health care professionals exists in this province. We could look at the poor practice of labour relations in this province.

There's almost a contemptuous attitude. We look at what the selected regional health authorities have to say about the increasing labour relations difficulties. Well, today it's come to a boil. We have other unions that are willing to stand beside AUPE, and this certainly is a crisis.

The regional health authorities would like their government to do the following: identify or consult with the department of labour to streamline certificates and bargaining processes. This gets back to

what I said earlier in the exchange in question period going back two years. I'm convinced that if the streamlining in the bargaining process had taken place, we wouldn't be having this emergency debate this afternoon. That's one step.

Another step would be – and this is from the selected regional health authorities – to partner with other health authorities and other government agencies to facilitate changes to labour relations legislation. Well, to me that is an admittance that the current system is not working. That's another step that can be taken to protect our public health care system.

Another step, interestingly, would be the lobbying of the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta Act. Now, that is interesting. That's an interesting concept. Eight regional health authorities of the 17, Mr. Speaker, think that there should be changes to the labour relations legislation. They know that this system is not working, and they're getting blamed for this while the government claims they're an innocent party or they're bystanders. We all know that that is not true.

Now, we look at other steps that could be taken, and, Mr. Speaker, we have to look at stabilizing the workforce. After all the cuts that have been made and all the accusations that have been made, when we're looking at steps that can be taken to protect the public health care system, the first thing we have to do is recognize the contributions that the people who are getting dust on their shoes this afternoon make to the public health care system in this province. That is not being done. We need to recognize that last year, in 1999, the average collective bargaining agreement negotiated in this province was a 4 percent increase in wages. Now, perhaps we need to look at this. It's fine for other individuals including ourselves to receive wage increases. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity is smiling over there, and I'm sure he's contemplating ways that he's going to spend his increase.

Mr. Speaker, we have to stabilize the workforce, and that is one of the most important steps that this government can take. They can provide adequate compensation to all the groups that are out on strike. Now, none other than the *Calgary Herald*, which has its own labour troubles, is talking of early intervention in agreements concerning the number of issues subject to binding arbitration. Well, this is one of their comments going back to '97, and I think I should make this available reading to all hon. members across the House, because this could be another step. This could be a small step taken. There are a series of steps we can take. There are baby steps, there are tiny steps, there are small steps, and then there are strides. Binding arbitration would be a small step.

Now, I'm very disappointed that my time is out, Mr. Speaker, because I had a lot to say on this issue. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

5:20

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, normally when we stand in our places and start a speech here, we say that we're very pleased to speak to an issue or whatever. On this issue in particular I would have to say that that certainly isn't the case. The seriousness of this issue itself: when we're talking about essential workers who have walked out of the job, the only word that comes to my mind is reckless.

We're talking about an awful lot of issues here that deal with a great many different aspects of health care. Specifically today, though, we're here to debate an illegal strike and the steps that must be taken to prevent harm to the public health care system. Unfortunately, this illegal strike not only harms the patients; it harms the employees specifically. And it harms the system for a whole variety

of reasons that we've heard about for the last two hours in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

It is not this Assembly's job or responsibility to negotiate contracts, to point fingers, as we've seen here today. There is a time and a place for negotiation, and this is simply not it. If we began to do that in this Assembly, we would in fact have to do it for every profession in Alberta, and the minister of human resources would probably stick up for me if I said that there were probably a thousand different professions in this province that are negotiating throughout any given year. The provincial government is certainly part and parcel of that process, and as I say, it's just not possible for us to do the negotiations in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue itself and talking about preventing harm to the system, this government has brought in a very comprehensive six-point plan over the last year to in fact help the system: to get rid of waiting lists, to do a variety of things. In fact, our budget from 1998-99, at \$4.83 billion, to this year, '00 to '01, is \$5.65 billion. It's about an \$849 million increase. Over the next couple of years to the year '02-03, in fact our budget is forecast to be 6 and a quarter billion dollars. At a certain point in time it just can't keep running out of control. It is not a bottomless pit when we're talking about taxpayers' money.

Very, very recently – I think it was just earlier this week, actually within about the last 10 days – this government announced a plan to in fact help the health care system in a variety of ways that we're doing in consultation with and with the participation of the federal government. It was just announced that 178 million more dollars that was not in the budget and the numbers I just mentioned would be spent on a variety of things to in fact help the public system. We're talking about joint replacements, heart surgeries, radiation therapies for cancer, increasing the capacity, if you like, for dialysis patients, which is very important and frankly is personally very close to my heart. We're talking about another \$54 million of that \$178 million that will be used to replace aging medical equipment and purchase new technology.

We're talking about – and I believe the announcements have been made over about the past three months – eight new MRIs, I believe the number is: four for the two major centres of Edmonton and Calgary at a cost, I might add, of 2 and a half million dollars a machine, as well as another four that have been announced for some of the smaller centres like Red Deer, like Grande Prairie. We're bringing them in as fast as we can. They are a very expensive piece of equipment, and quite simply put, it will help the system somewhat.

We're increasing the access to the MRIs and a variety of other diagnostic tools within the system. In point of fact, within the budget announcements that were made at the start of this session, we talked about hiring 2,500 more health care workers. As I understand it, some 1,300 of those health care workers have in fact been hired. These are nurses, doctors, LPNs, a variety of professions that work within our health care system.

Our budgets simply keep going up day by day but with a purpose, and that purpose is of course to increase the capacity of the system. I might add that increasing the capacity will decrease the workload on those people that are currently doing the various jobs within the hospital. I mean, the system is a very complex system, Mr. Speaker, and there are no simple solutions. There are no simple answers to our difficulties in the health care system.

I feel sorry for the workers, Mr. Speaker. A very good friend of mine is currently in the Foothills hospital in Calgary. Not only is he in the Foothills hospital for very serious surgery, which he just had a few days ago – I most recently talked to him after 1 o'clock this afternoon – but interestingly this gentleman is a 30-year LPN within the same hospital where he's had his surgery in the last little while. You know, I've known this gentleman for a very long time; as I said, he's a very close friend. They don't in fact as LPNs, or auxiliary nurses if you want to use that term, make an awful lot of money, but again the negotiation should not happen within the public forum. It should happen in a legal fashion.

I spent about 20 years of my life as an air traffic controller and frankly was deemed an essential employee for most of that period of time. There were periods of time within the system when we didn't like the negotiations as they were proceeding, when we wanted more money, and I think this argument is simply about money.

As I say, we've done an awful lot of things to improve the system, and most of them are very, very recent, and talking to my friend who happens to be in the hospital and will be there for at least another few days as far as I know, it strikes me that as an LPN – I asked him the question: would you walk out on an illegal strike? He had a great deal of difficulty answering that question, Mr. Speaker, for the very simple reason that he hasn't got a lot of money, and he's never had a lot of money. But when you look at the system itself and what we're doing to promote good health care in this province – and as I say, part of the overall plan is the six-point plan, including Bill 11 – I think that we're making progress and we're headed in the right direction.

For a worker to walk out on an illegal strike and to ignore the law of the land, whether they like it or not – I mean, nobody likes to get a speeding ticket. Nobody likes to do anything that is in fact going to break the law, and I'm sure that these workers don't either. What this whole thing has done, through the advice of the executive on the various unions, is take the workers right out of the system, and it has impacted patients, as I said before, to a very great extent. I heard a story this morning about a particular patient who, if they had their surgery today as opposed to six months from now, would not in fact need a colostomy bag. Now, I'm not a doctor, and I don't understand exactly what that means, but as a patient I would be very, very concerned.

Patients within our hospital system, Mr. Speaker, have got to feel a little bit of angst when they're going into a hospital. All the uncertainty that this illegal strike – and I keep mentioning "illegal" – has caused has created a great deal of angst for those people. The question, then, when you're trying to make the system follow along in various steps, if you like, to prevent the public health care system from falling apart becomes – frankly we need these workers. We can't simply just turn our heads, and the workers can't, no more than I could as an air traffic controller, walk out on the system that pays their salaries and that depends on them to provide good support and good health care to a patient.

Within the steps that we have taken over the last period of time – as I say, we've gone up from \$4.83 billion to \$6.25 billion over a very short period of time. It's time these people simply got back to work and provided a good health care system.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 24, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/05/24

[Mr. Renner in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Please be seated.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: I'm hoping, Mr. Speaker, that I could ask for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

MRS. GORDON: Thank you. I would like to introduce to you and through you some distinguished guests that are with us tonight that are related to a person who spends a great deal of time in this Assembly, and that is our senior Parliamentary Counsel, Rob Reynolds. I would like to introduce his wife, Ritu Khullar, his son, Samir Reynolds, and his sister who's visiting from Burnaby, B.C., Valerie Wehrle. Samir is two years old and very pleased to see his dad tonight. They are seated in the public gallery so they can see daddy better. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 25

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

MR. DICKSON: I think it would be a bad precedent if we had a bill go through that nobody said anything to, so I just wanted to acknowledge once again the terrific co-operation we received from the various departments that put forward legislative amendments and indicate my wholehearted support for miscellaneous statutes. It's always a treat to be part of a bill where you think everybody is going to vote with you, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to sort of be on the record that I was voting that way too.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. I just wanted to comment on the one section in which the Motion Picture Development Act is repealed. I had been in touch with some very active members of the film industry in Alberta to double-check as to whether they had strong feelings about this, and the response was no. The people I spoke to weren't that interested in returning to this, so they didn't object to the AMPDC being disbanded. They were quite happy with being housed under the Alberta Foundation for the Arts with the grants program there and just wanted to underline with me the importance of that program to them and that they didn't want to be moved around anywhere else at this point. It is working fine for them.

That's really the part of the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment

Act, 2000, appearing before us as Bill 25, that was of most interest to my portfolio and to the sector groups that I represent. So I just wanted to go on record with that, and having made those few remarks, I will resume my seat.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 25 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 25.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: Bill 25.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 19

Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Provincial Treasurer and all those seeking lower taxes in the province of Alberta, I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 19.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise at third reading to debate Bill 19, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000, a bill which in effect proposes to eliminate the 8 percent surtax effective at the end of the 1999 taxation year. I find myself at this stage of the debate perhaps to a degree repeating comments previously made but questions which with all due respect haven't been answered.

One of my questions really relates to how a government can implement the elimination of any kind of statutory obligation before they've changed the legislation. I think that in principle this bill really sets a precedent to that effect. The surtax was a legislated, statutory obligation that this government made and committed itself

to in 1987. I found myself as I was preparing for the debate wanting to look back at what rationale was presented at that point in time for the surtax, and I got quite a surprise when I looked at *Hansard* for March 20, 1987, because what I read – and I'd like to read a bit of it into the record from that debate – is very, very repetitious of what I've been hearing in the House over the course of the last month or so as we've debated bills 18 and 19.

We've come over a decade; 1987 is the year in which this surtax was originally introduced. It's now over a decade later, and the government is still professing to need to undertake these types of tax reforms for the very same reasons the government used a decade ago. So reading from *Hansard* on March 20, 1987 – and at that time the hon. Treasurer was Mr. Dick Johnston, and he said the following in the context of the budget that year:

This year's budget will require adjustments not only to expenditures but also to revenue. Our objective is to provide a balance between expenditure reduction and taxation increases. Over the last several years Albertans have enjoyed by far the lowest overall tax rate of any province.

This province was boasting of that over a decade ago.

8:10

Further, he went on to say:

We are now in a situation where our current revenue sources and tax rates are not generating enough revenue to fund even our reduced expenditure base. In this budget, Mr. Speaker, I'm asking Albertans to pay more through taxes so that we can maintain the quality of our programs . . . First, Alberta's tax load should remain the lowest of any province; second, the burden of tax increases should be shared between businesses and individuals; and third, low-income groups should be protected.

Really no different than the arguments being made today for the proposed flat tax and the elimination of the surtax contained within bills 18 and 19.

Mr. Johnston went on to say:

For more than a decade Alberta has had the lowest personal income tax rate of all the provinces. Given this available tax room, we will increase the rate by three points to 46.5 percent of basic federal tax effective the 1987 taxation year. This will remain the lowest basic tax rate of any province. As well, we are introducing a temporary high-income surtax of 8 percent to ensure that Albertans with the ability to pay will make a relatively greater contribution.

Now, there's a bit of a contradiction, I think, in principles. We still have the same party in power, but the philosophy of the Conservative Party at that point in time was that the higher income earners have an inherent ability to make a greater contribution. The premise that exists today with the proposed elimination of this tax and the combined proposal by government to implement a flat tax is that in fact the higher income earners should get a bigger break; that's really what it comes down to. The higher income earners are going to get a double whammy, a very nice fat Christmas present from this government, Madam Speaker, Christmas in July perhaps, with the combined effects of the elimination of the surtax and the implementation of the flat tax.

Now, I just want to conclude from Mr. Johnston's debate by citing the following, which was the conclusion of his remarks for the budget that year:

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I have outlined for this Legislative Assembly and for Alberta a fiscal plan which will set us on a new course towards the opportunities ahead. Alberta faces many new challenges, and we must all rise to the occasion. We must discard many of the solutions from the past and think anew and act anew. We must be determined in our resolve to eliminate the deficit in an orderly way over the next four years.

I'd just make the following observation. This government has

taken and marketed it that the elimination of the deficit was their idea, and in fact under the leadership of Don Getty the previous government was talking about that in 1987.

To quote again from Mr. Johnston's remarks:

Fiscal responsibility means making tough choices, and this government is prepared to act . . . Our overall expenditure plan for '87-88 will provide Albertans with the most comprehensive services available in Canada at levels of funding still among the highest of any province.

Now, in contrast, Madam Speaker, we have not seen in this debate any discussion or willingness by this government to talk about the impacts on revenue through the proposed elimination of the surtax or the piggybacking of the flat tax bill, and that troubles me a great deal. Yes, Alberta is in a very healthy economic and fiscal position at this point in time, but we really have no way of predicting what lies ahead for the province. Economically, in terms of our public programs, our population, and the needs of that population, even what sorts of disasters, whether they be stock market or environmentally based, natural in origin, we have no way of predicting revenue. Yes, it's perhaps very, very easy as legislators to say in times of plenty that we should forge ahead with what are viewed by some as risky proposals to reconstruct, to modify, to fundamentally change the system of tax collection, to eliminate a surtax which, granted, has had a life span of over a decade. In anyone's mind, in a logical mind, is it really a good time to be thinking of making these reforms when we're rolling in the dough, Madam Speaker? Would we be as confident if we were in a position of oil and gas prices perhaps not being as strong, the economy not being quite as brisk, and Alberta exports not being strong? Would we be as confident that these types of reforms are in the best interests of the province? Would we not see a government bringing forward more analysis and more concrete demonstration that these changes will not negatively impact the revenue side of government's finances and their accompanying responsibility to provide comprehensive, accessible programs for all Albertans regardless of what their income status may be?

The cynical and paranoid might say: well, maybe the government is actually planning that there's going to be a day when they're not going to be able to provide. In fact, maybe they even want to construct a day when they will be in a fiscal position where they cannot provide as much funding for public programs, because that fits very well with their ideology that the private sector, that the market has a role to play in absolutely every facet of the society and provincial business.

We've seen almost all of our core public programs subjected to some degree of contracting out, to privatization. Social services was first on the list with huge cuts in the early '90s, followed by health care, followed by the education sector. If you look at these things on a macro scale and you accompany those changes, Bill 11 amongst them, to allow the private sector now a formal, legal foothold in the delivery of health care, bills 18 and 19 really make a lot of sense. Now what the government is able to say, perhaps not today but at some point in the future, is that they will not have the same degree of taxation flexibility. If it impacts the revenues to the degree that they do not have the same amount of money to provide provincial programs, it'll be a case, Madam Speaker, of saying: well, that's why the private sector is there; that's why the reforms were made in the '90s to allow the private sector to deliver that responsibility.

To a degree we see the same theme in the increasing responsibilities placed on communities, placed on municipalities, and placed on citizens, Madam Speaker. I have spoken in this Assembly before about the level of fund-raising expected now in our education system. I have dutifully worked the casinos, worked the bingos, all of these things, to subsidize provincial funding. That in my mind is

only going to become worse as this government proceeds with their reforms of the tax system and perhaps a sad day when the province is not in quite so healthy an economic position.

The reality is that I've been out at the doors in Edmonton-Riverview. I can tell this government directly that from the conversations I have had with my constituents, tax relief and tax cuts are not a priority, clearly not a priority. I can tell you what's a priority. People are very concerned about the state of our public health care system. They are equally concerned about the state of our public education system, and they don't particularly have a high degree of trust in what this government's agenda is relative to tax reform. They see too much politicking, too much posturing, too readily willing to condemn the federal government.

8:20

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that the constituents in Edmonton-Riverview have a high degree of respect for the federal government, the institution that it is, and the function it serves in binding us as a democratic country that is very well respected around the world for the multiple roles we play. So this government need be mindful that when they pounce on the federal government or condemn the federal government in a multitude of ways, the public hears those condemnations, and many of them don't appreciate it. They see that there's a lot more at stake. There's a lot more at stake.

Now, the other thing that I've had some fun contemplating is how this is going to be implemented. It's really difficult to not discuss bills 18 and 19 together, because they're going to be occurring simultaneously. I as a middle-income earner, Madam Speaker, wonder how it is that those of us that find ourselves in the middle-income bracket don't get the same degree of a break that the high-income earners will. The elimination of the surtax, from my particular vantage point or income standpoint, isn't going to mean a thing, because I'm not really in a bracket that it would apply to.

Further to that, I'd like to come right back to what I said in the beginning, and that is that I would like to be assured that the government has a plan, some type of stabilization plan, so that when the annual budget surplus is not in the neighbourhood of \$800 million or whatever it currently is sitting at, they have a way for making up the shortfall. Now, in fact, the Official Opposition has long advocated for – and this was way before my time in this Assembly – a stabilization fund that should be introduced and implemented in a healthy fiscal time such as we are in now. That stabilization fund would act as a buffer, Madam Speaker, so that in years when oil prices are not quite as healthy and the government isn't rolling in a multimillion-dollar surplus, the stabilization fund would be there as a safety net, if you will. So we have a plan. To those members who scoff and say, "Well, you don't have a vision," we've been advocating that for some time.

The other question that we need to ask is: why is it that the government chose to eliminate the surtax instead of eliminating Alberta health care premiums? If they truly wanted to provide to Albertans a reform that would benefit across the board, why would we not have considered eliminating the health care premiums? I think it's a logical question, and I'd invite the government members to stand up and give me an answer to that question. To me that's far more fair, far more equitable, and in essence has the ability to touch people of all walks of life and of all professions. But that is not before us in the form of legislation this evening. Regrettably, that's not the case. We find ourselves in a difficult position.

One of the other questions that I have asked myself with the elimination of the surtax is: what options really exist for the government when revenues fall? Well, given the Deficit Elimination Act and the Fiscal Responsibility Act and now the elimination of the

surtax, really the only option the government has is to cut programs. Am I wrong? [interjection] Well, I would invite the hon. member across the way to tell me what the other options are. I don't see any. Perhaps they might be contemplating at some future stage the introduction of a sales tax as something the Conservatives want to support. I mean, really, where are they taking us with this proposed elimination?

We've seen a lot of reforms instituted over the course of the last few years, Madam Speaker. It seems to me that the alternatives for future governments in this province are getting less and less, and that's a concern. I have tremendous faith, given all the interjections this evening, that there are government members on the other side that are really chomping at the bit, if you will, to get up and answer some of these questions and to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact this will have on revenue and how they propose to compensate for that. I will look forward very much to seeing those things.

Just as I conclude, Madam Speaker, I must mention again the fact that the Auditor General has said in his report this year that almost every ministry has underaccounted the cost of doing business in their ministry; in essence, the fudging of numbers. [interjection] I can refer the hon. Minister of Justice exactly to the pages in the Auditor General's report where he makes those – in fact, I referred to them in earlier stages of the debates on bills 18 and 19. If this government is in fact fudging the financial cost of doing business, how am I as an elected representative in a position to truly be able to know what revenue is required in order to provide comprehensive programs? That is my dilemma.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a few words on Bill 19. I've spoken on Bill 19 before and just wanted to get on the record again by indicating that while a number of members of the opposition seem to be concerned about the plan, there has been a very clearly enunciated plan over time. That plan involves leaving some Albertans' money in their own pockets, a very essential part of the plan. As the economy of this great province improves and grows and as we find that the economic situation of this province is the best in the country and as people have some certainty about their job situation and look forward with confidence to the future, one of the elements of the government's plan is to make sure that they get to keep some of the rewards, some of the profits of their own labours. So the reduction of taxes is an important part of an overall plan.

Yes, we have to fund those essential public services of health care and education, and we have to fund them at appropriate levels, and we're doing that. Yes, we have to build infrastructure, because as the economy of this province grows, more and more people come to this province, and the population growth, the business growth require more infrastructure. So we have to build schools, and we have to build hospitals, and we have to build roads, and there's a plan for that.

But part of the plan is to leave some of Albertans' money in their own pockets, and they deserve it. After all the years of fighting that deficit, they deserve to have a break. Removing the surtax is a good first step this year and, companioned with Bill 18, changing the process next year so that every Albertan will have the benefit of a strong tax break and will be able to participate in the rewards offered by a strong economy with strong jobs. So that's very, very important.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview strayed off onto the Auditor General's report and started talking about fudging numbers.

Of course, she's absolutely erroneous in that. There's been no question of fudging numbers. There's obvious disagreement in terms of how you account, but what she's talking about is that Infrastructure accounts for the accommodation provided to most departments of government, rather than it being accounted for in the books of the government. It is being accounted for. It's being accounted for to the public. It's being accounted for in Infrastructure and not necessarily in the departments. That's the ongoing discussion that is being had with the Auditor General in that respect. [interjections] Edmonton-Riverview seems to not realize that her time is up, Madam Speaker, and her time is indeed up. Rather than belabour some of these points, because she's clearly not listening, I would move that pursuant to Standing Order 47 the question now be put.

8:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, listening to the Government House Leader make his observations, I'm starting to feel a little nostalgic. We're now at the tail end of the spring session of 2000.

AN HON. MEMBER: No. No, we're not.

MR. DICKSON: Well, there may be some that are planning on staying longer, but the writing is on the wall and we start to wind down. Somehow as we wander off to our summer retreats and our backyards and pick up those things like barbecuing and lawn mowing, some of us may miss the advice we get from across the hall. You know, it's just not the same thing, having somebody in your family offering advice, as it is to hear commentary from the members opposite. I'm already starting to grieve that a little bit. So let me dry my eyes and soldier on to make the following observations.

As we start to see the end of an old friend – and that's really what Bill 19 has been – a couple of observations. There's been a lot of talk about, you know, too much talk on this bill. Of course we heard just a moment ago the Government House Leader, even before we've heard very much commentary at third reading – I've got lots of colleagues that have come tonight prepared to speak to third reading and looking forward to it. Some of them may want to move considered amendments. That opportunity is being foreclosed now by the action of the minister of justice.

How much time have we spent on this bill? By my calculation the Liberal opposition for about four hours of debate has raised questions about the sequencing of the elimination of the 8 percent high-income surtax, why that would happen before the .5 percent flat tax would come off, I think pretty good questions.

I've heard no opposition members quibble about the housecleaning elements of Bill 19. I think there's darn near unanimity in terms of the need to change the reference to the renter's assistance tax credit, and certainly the repeal of the reference to the liability of corporations for Alberta income tax is appropriate, and removing reference to corporations in the calculation of foreign tax credit: those are things that to the best of my hearing the opposition has supported. Our focus has been on the inappropriateness of giving a break to high-income earners before you give it to low-income earners when the Premier and the former Provincial Treasurer told us the low-income earners were going to be first. When my MLA for Calgary-North West the other day made his presentation, he talked at page 1,744 of *Hansard* – this has been a long session, Madam Speaker. Imagine; almost 1,750 pages of pearls of wisdom that have been presented in the Assembly night after night.

AN HON. MEMBER: Not exactly.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I guess it's in the eye of the beholder, member.

My MLA for Calgary-North West was talking about honouring "the obligation and promise that was made in previous years that this surtax would be eliminated." Well, I'm all for honouring promises, but I'm also concerned about the promise made by the Premier in July of 1999, the promise made by the Provincial Treasurer in 1999. Those promises have not been honoured. If they had, we wouldn't be dealing with the elimination of the high-income surtax first.

In any event, in terms of debate we've had four hours of debate on this bill by the Liberal opposition, plus or minus, and some of the government members to their credit – I mentioned Calgary-North West – have gotten up and shared some elements of debate. We've had about three-quarters of an hour from government members. I guess I'd just say: is there anybody that thinks that's excessive? We could poll people this evening – well, Madam Speaker, you wouldn't want us to do that, but maybe we could do it sort of figuratively if not literally – whether people really think that four and three-quarter hours is too much debate. So I want to raise that concern.

Now, the other thing is that I've had some good advice in preparing for debate on this bill. I posted a question on my web site on May 18, www.garydickson.ab.ca, and I asked my constituents whether they support (a) "a progressive tax system with high income earners paying at a higher rate" or (b) "a flat tax system with all taxpayers paying at the same rate regardless of income." Do you know what's interesting? The result: 63 percent supported a progressive tax system and 38 percent supported the flat tax system propounded by the government. Do you know what's interesting? That was 324 visits to the web site between May 18 and May 23.

Now, I suspect they weren't all Calgary-Buffalo residents. I suspect some of them may be in Calgary-Lougheed or perhaps Calgary-Foothills or Calgary-Nose Creek. Some of those people may live there. You don't know exactly where people are from when they visit your web site. It's interesting that 63 percent of those 324 presumably Albertans registered that they support a progressive tax system. So that was, I thought, powerful instruction at least to me to find some way of reflecting that in debate.

Here we are at third reading on a bill which is part of a package. I make the observation Edmonton-Riverview just did a few minutes ago, that the government had alternatives in terms of if you want to do good fiscal planning, why wouldn't you go with the Liberal idea of establishing a stabilization fund so that in years when oil and gas revenues are high, there would be an accrual of dollars? Then when times are leaner, there would be a means of flattening out and mitigating some of the volatility on our income side. I'm not sure that I've ever heard a good reason why the government has never accepted that Liberal suggestion.

We've made a suggestion in terms of eliminating health care insurance premiums. You want to give a \$700 million break to Albertans? You know, that's a very effective way of doing it in a way that's going to help people in low-income and middle-income situations. But the government hasn't done that. They've decided to do this. So I do have that concern in terms of the sequencing.

You know, I regret that the Government House Leader has taken steps to close off debate yet again. Every time, it seems to me, the Government House Leader protests that he doesn't like doing it, yet he has developed a wicked habit of simply cutting off debate. You know, I don't think the Government House Leader wants that to be his legacy in this place when he's done a lot of other positive things. [interjection] Miscellaneous statutes: how would we have that without the work of the minister?

In any event, I think I've made the other points on numerous occasions, and I suppose I'll be listening carefully to probably protracted debate.

The one other comment I might make for constituents who may wonder why I would consider supporting Bill 19 even with my objections and concerns and my position in terms of Bill 18 is that I'm very concerned with the issue of sufficiency of dollars for our core programs. It seems to me that all this business in terms of tax cuts has to be very clearly predicated on having surplus dollars.

8:40

The other point – and I make this as a question to anybody in government that can provide me with an answer. The other day the former Provincial Treasurer, and I guess we can call him that, said in front of a national audience several times that he thinks people attending private schools are in some fashion – this is a kind of double taxation, and he thinks tax dollars should go to pay for all private schooling. You know, you have to ask: if Bill 19 and Bill 18 go through, where the heck is the money coming from?

If that's a view that's shared by government members – and I can't fairly present it as such, but here is a man who had the trust of the Premier. He was made Treasurer, and he presumably has the continuing trust of all those members who have rushed out to buy Alliance memberships and are zipping down to Ottawa to attend conventions and supporting the cause there. It's a pretty scary prospect that we would see full funding of religious schools. It's just a breathtaking kind of statement. Presumably he thought about it before he said it, so I have to speculate that if he's unsuccessful in the federal arena and he comes back to this place . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming on a point of order.

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

MR. SMITH: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. Under *Beauchesne* 333. The member is sounding so completely aghast at the concept of funding private schools fully, and I'd like to ask him if he is in fact opposed to the funding of private schools.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: He'd like to ask the hon. member a question. Will you entertain a question?

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: I would never refuse a question in debate. I am absolutely opposed to full taxpayer funding of private schools. I've always been opposed, long before I became an MLA, and as long as I'm a taxpayer, I'm opposed. The reasons are many. Public schools are something that all of us in the community have a stake in, and that's the absolute best forum where we teach young people how to get along. That's in fact the currency of a civil society, of a democratic society. The kind of balkanization, fragmentation that would result from full funding of private schools would take us a huge way backwards.

Surely the Minister of Gaming knows that we're currently the only province in Canada that provides the high level of support that we do. So I oppose the report of your caucus committee, chaired by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, and will continue to oppose it. What's more, I'll put that up on my web site when the House ends. That's a good question. I'm going to invite the people in Calgary-Varsity to tune in and tell me what they think, because the people I talk to there are as opposed to full government funding for private schools as I am.

So those are the comments I wanted to make. I'm looking forward to what I expect will be a long evening of vigorous debate, and we'll see what other commentary is offered.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, the chair was just going to interject a few minutes ago and ask if we could come back to what's before the Assembly, and that's Bill 19, which is the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act.

Hon. Minister of Gaming, do you wish to conclude debate on behalf of the hon. Acting Treasurer?

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I can only say that it's actually another flagship day in Alberta. There have been so many of these since June 15, 1993, and I think this ability to be able to deliver to taxpayers a substantial savings in the tax roles which then increases disposable income – certainly from the perspective of my portfolio when I look at the Calgary Flames and the Edmonton Oilers, professional franchises that are struggling, with \$1.3 billion more in the disposal income, Madam Speaker, through the passage of Bill 19 and Bill 18, then perhaps Albertans can make choices through the individual use of those dollars that they will have at their disposal, and that in turn can help stimulate the economy to even greater levels of economic development, job creation, and a real sign of government that delivers maximum value for the dollars received.

So with those very few and short and concise closing remarks, it's been a privilege to be able to stand on bills that save taxpayers money.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a third time]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

(continued)

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'll call the committee to order, and I'll call upon the Government House Leader.

Bill 18

Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

21. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that further consideration of any or all of the resolutions, clauses, sections, or titles of Bill 18, Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, shall, when called, be the first business of the committee and shall not be further postponed.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:47 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Hancock	Marz
Broda	Herard	McFarland
Cardinal	Johnson	Nelson
Clegg	Jonson	Pham
Coutts	Klapstein	Renner
Dunford	Laing	Severtson

Evans	Langevin	Smith
Fischer	Lougheed	Stelmach
Fritz	Mar	Tarchuk
Graham		
Against the motion:		
Blakeman	Massey	Sloan
Dickson	Nicol	Wickman
Totals:	For – 28	Against – 6

[Government Motion 21 carried]

9:00

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will now resume debate on the amendment in committee.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I sort of want to take off from where I left the other day. I was trying to make the point at that particular time what welcome news it is, in terms of having a tax cut. All Albertans welcome a tax cut. Well, most Albertans. [interjection] No. You're right. I'm correcting myself. There are some.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview raises a valid point, because in my constituency I would find some people, too, that would say, "Well, we're prepared to bypass, to forgo a tax cut provided we're assured that those dollars will go to beef up the health care system, beef up the educational system, and beef up social service programs and such." But assuming that I'm now speaking on behalf of my constituents that do welcome a tax cut, they welcome a tax cut, but they welcome a tax cut from the point of view of having a tax cut that is fair, that is based on fairness.

I was trying to point out the other day that we have a situation where now, with the passage of Bill 19, we sort of have a double whammy in terms of the greatest benefit being to those people that make the greatest amounts of money. I want to give some examples. I had just started to give some examples the other night when my time ran out.

Let's say the lower income. We all concede right off the bat that there is a benefit to them. It's a welcome benefit to them, and I truly, truly welcome that benefit because they're the ones that really deserve it. But let's go up from there.

Let's start at a level of \$35,000. With a taxable income of \$35,000 we would see a reduction in the provincial tax under the 10.5 percent Klein flat tax, and in the year 2004 we would see a savings of \$248.78, which percentage-wise amounts to 10 percent.

Now, if we look at \$60,000, we see a savings of \$755.34, which is the same as a 13.4 percent reduction, so it becomes consistent already that you notice those figures going up.

When we go to \$80,000, there's a savings of \$1,511.50, or a reduction of 17.8 percent. In other words, the reduction certainly is greater, but at the same time the corresponding percentage in terms of the reduction becomes very, very noticeable.

Let's look at \$100,000. At \$100,000 the savings is \$2,267.52, or a reduction of 20 percent in provincial tax.

We go to \$150,000 and it becomes \$4,158.06, or 22.5 percent.

We then go to \$200,000. Note this figure. The reduction becomes \$12,450.47, or a reduction percentage-wise of 38.9 percent.

The highest example I'm going to give you is a quarter million dollars, and we do have a substantial number of people in this province that have a taxable income of a quarter million dollars. Now, these figures are going to show in the provincial tax in the year

2004 under the 10.5 percent scheme – and this isn't counting the little additional benefits under Bill 19 a person would receive – a savings of \$19,093.57, or 43.5 percentage-wise in terms of a reduction.

So I've taken it from a taxable income of \$35,000 with a reduction of 10 percent to a quarter million dollars with a reduction of 43.5 percent. That clearly illustrates where the government priority is in terms of tax reduction and which income levels of people they are attempting to cater to. And that's been the point, Madam Chairman, that this caucus has attempted to make all along, right from the very start. We understand the pressures the government faces in terms of a tax reduction. We've tried to argue that the tax reduction is one thing, but the fairness of the tax reduction becomes another thing.

The government likes to throw that spin out there that everybody gets a cut; everybody gets a tax cut. Certainly everybody gets a tax cut, but would you prefer a tax cut of 10 percent as opposed to 43.5 percent? Wouldn't we all love to see a tax reduction of 43.5 percent in our provincial income tax by the year 2004? I'm certain we would, and I have to stress again that that is the argument we've been making and that's the reason we've been consistently opposing Bill 18 and why we under no circumstances can find Bill 18 acceptable in its present form. Now, there are amendments that are forthcoming, when our Member for Edmonton-Glenora gets here, that will make Bill 18 a passable bill, an acceptable bill, a bill that most Albertans, those Albertans that do want to see a bit of a tax cut, would then rejoice about.

Okay. I've presented the arguments on the question of the inequality or the unfairness – let's put it that way – of the spread in the benefits of the tax cut. I want to now take us to some of the other provinces, and let's look at what's happening in some of the other provinces in terms of the basic principle of taxation done on a progressive basis. It's a basic principle: taxation on a progressive basis. Look at B.C. You have a zero to \$30,000 income; you have a tax rate of 8.4 percent on the income. Over \$85,000, when you go to that extreme, you're at 19.7 percent. So you see that it's roughly 240 percent higher percentage-wise in that particular category than for somebody making \$30,000 a year.

Now, the member on the other side here, the hon. minister, is giving me those little comments that B.C. is not the appropriate government to go to because of course it is a New Democrat government, and I can understand that from her point of view she may feel that's a very, very unfair comparison.

So let me go to Ontario. Ontario is the opposite, of course, of a provincial government governed by a New Democratic Party. They're a party governed by the Conservatives, very much like the government here in the province of Alberta. But even in the province of Ontario in their wisdom, compared to the province of Alberta, their tax structure for up to \$30,000 a year is 6.2 percent. That's 6.2 percent. From \$30,000 to \$60,000 it's 9.24 percent, and at \$60,000 and over it's 11.16 percent. So there again we're seeing close to a 200 percent difference in terms of the percentage; in other words, a doubling. Because you're making \$60,000 as opposed to \$30,000, your percentage rate of taxation is doubled. That is a progressive tax, and that's a government that prides themselves on being Progressive Conservatives, like the government of Alberta, yet the government of Alberta chooses not to go for a progressive type of taxation.

We can look at New Brunswick. Again a similar scenario. In New Brunswick, if I recall correctly, we have a young fellow there governing that province by the name of Lord, a very young fellow, a Conservative. There we see a progressive rate going from \$30,000 at 10.2 percent to over \$59,180 at 17.4 percent. Again, pretty close to double that percentage rate.

I can look at Saskatchewan: the same thing. I can look at Manitoba: the same thing. The one that sticks out like a sore thumb is Alberta, which will then read: all income classes at 10.5 percent. So you see that the provincial government here is going totally against the grain from what all other provinces have done. Why have they chosen to provide such a substantial benefit to fewer than 25 percent of the population at the expense of 75 percent? I don't understand that.

9:10

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview made some good points here about door-knocking and how not everybody favours a tax cut. The government, of course, likes to talk about their great tax cut and what they've achieved, but let's also look at some figures here. On growth in taxes under the premiership of the current Premier and — well, you can't say the Acting Provincial Treasurer because he's only been acting for a period of time. But let's just say that under this particular government we see here — now, this is between '92-93 and the current year; in other words, in that period of time that the current Premier has been leading the Conservative Party.

Here we're going to see tax increases. Increases from user fees and charges amount to \$26 million. The increase in the health care premiums amounts to \$248 million. The personal income tax, the bracket creep in that cumulative period of time amounts to \$2.044 billion. The education property tax increase is \$42 million. The Alberta .5 percent flat rate tax creep is \$95 million, and the 8 percent surtax creep, which of course is being eliminated, is \$79 million. So in that period of time of eight years we have seen total increases of \$2.534 billion in revenue through taxation, whether you call it a user fee or direct taxation or an education tax or a health care premium or whatever. That's a little over 2 and a quarter billion dollars.

Now we look at tax cuts. The reduction in the personal income tax rate, when one does their income tax return, from 45.5 percent to 44 percent has netted a reduction or a cut of \$123 million. The Alberta family employment tax credit: a benefit of \$78 million. The provincial property tax on residential and farm property: \$87 million. The provincial property tax on business properties: \$50 million. The machinery and equipment tax: \$178 million. Aviation fuel tax: \$29 million. Railway fuel tax: \$13 million. The elimination of the 8 percent surtax will amount to \$162 million, and then elimination of the .5 percent flat rate tax, when that takes place next year, will be \$325 million. The move to the flat rate tax is another \$300 million. That's a total cut of \$1.345 billion, or a real tax increase of \$1.189 billion over that period of time. So it's a fallacy to feel that Albertans have more dollars in their pockets, talking on a global or cumulative basis including the total population.

Looking at a study here that was done by Brad Severin, BDO Dunwoody, using the 10.5 percent flat tax as compared to the federal system — this is now talking in the immediate; this isn't the year 2004 — it points out that at \$15,000 you have a savings of \$430. The optimum disadvantage — let's put it that way — is at \$30,424; your tax saving is \$41.48. At \$100,000 your tax saving is \$1,292.45. Now, this is not done by the caucus research staff. This is done by a very, very credible chartered accounting firm, and it points out very clearly that the middle income, at that \$30,000 level, gets the very, very least benefit. So the government is correct when the government says that everybody gets a tax cut. Certainly everybody gets a tax cut, but under this flat tax proposal it's clear from the documentation and from the studies that have been done that the benefit is going to favour those who have the higher incomes.

Now, we look at the proposals that have been tabled in the House here that we saw the Member for Edmonton-Glenora table the other day and which hopefully will be given the opportunity to be

introduced as amendments. We're dealing now with the current amendments, of course: the reduction of the 11 percent to 10.5 percent and the increase in the personal exemption to \$12,900. Under the proposal put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, we're going to see a progressive tax reduction program, and it's going to be delinked from the federal government. I believe most members, if not all members, in the House do believe in delinking.

The current Acting Treasurer has taken objection to some of the figures and questioned the calculations of the Liberal opposition. We're not saying that this thing is carved in stone the way it is. We recognize being in opposition that we can't implement it. We can just hope that the government has the wisdom to take the good ideas that come from this side of the House and incorporate them in proper form in a piece of legislation, but this is just to sort of present a model.

The model, of course, is what we call a progressive tax reduction program, where we see taxpayers earning up to a certain level paying zero percent provincial income tax. That's consistent with what the provincial government is proposing because of the increase in the personal exemption and such. Up to a certain level, \$13,600 roughly, there will be no provincial tax payable. I guess all members of the House here sort of nod their heads in agreement that that part of it is acceptable, even to those that earn a lot of money. They say: well, the people at the lower end of it do deserve a break. So that's a break that I think we can all applaud.

We then go to the next category that would take it up to just under \$100,000 and see a percentage of 10 percent and then those earning over \$100,000 paying 12 percent. Even at those particular rates of 10 and 12 percent there are still substantial savings and substantial reductions to those people that do make over \$100,000 a year. What it does, because of the 2 percent additional amount in the percentage basis over those in the middle, is it allows some of those savings or reductions that otherwise would be shifted from the higher income to the middle class, and it would present, I think, a much, much more fair picture. Albertans would say, "This is great that the government is recognizing that those of us in the middle income have been hit over the years" and seem to be constantly hit.

For middle-income earners their income is high enough that they don't qualify for programs that may be out there. Seniors that may be middle income, because of their income, no longer get the universal benefits provincially that they once used to get. So clearly in recent years we have seen the direction taken where more and more of the burden is placed on the middle income, and we see the lower income, and rightfully so, see more and more programs coming their way, like the employment tax. That's fine, but there are still a lot of areas that should be beefed up as well for people in those income levels.

Again, then, we see that those that have the higher incomes have the advantage of being able to take advantage of tax shelters, are able to set up corporations, businesses where income can be split with spouses and such. In other words, they're in a position where they can afford to hire the expertise, the most knowledgeable as to how to minimize or reduce your tax that you'd otherwise find that one has to pay, that's payable against yourself. We've all heard the stories of people making \$100,000, \$200,000, or a quarter million dollars a year that haven't had to pay income tax because they've been able to utilize write-offs by hiring the necessary expertise. That's the higher income category of people, Madam Chairman, that Bill 18, along with Bill 19 of course, is going to favour. That's where I have the real, real difficulty with it.

I don't really question the motives of the former Treasurer, because I'm not really sure when he had sort of made up his mind

that he was going to head off to greener pastures. But it's sort of ironic, I guess – maybe one could call it a coincidence in timing – that under his ministry as the Provincial Treasurer that the talk of the various types of tax reductions started to come forward, like the reduction in the gas tax, the \$100 rebate, this and this and this, and then finally settling on what we call the flat tax.

9:20

It is so similar from what I can understand – and I can't say that I'm an expert on the policies of the former Reform Party, which is now called the Alliance Party, but it's a bit of a coincidence that we see the philosophy of that particular party, from what I can gather, being very, very similar to what the Provincial Treasurer was proposing in this House at that particular time and managed to convince his colleagues to go ahead with even though he'd no longer be here.

On that note I'll conclude then, Madam Chairman. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It is a pleasure for me to join the debate on the amendment to Bill 18 that is in front of us. This amendment is a very simple amendment. It proposes to reduce the flat tax rate from 11 percent to 10.5 percent and to also bring in the flat tax so that all Albertans can benefit from it.

Let me begin by saying that the flat tax system that we're bringing in already builds in protection for the poor and the people who have low incomes. We have already raised the personal exemption to the point where thousands of Albertans who are paying tax today will not have to pay provincial tax anymore, 190,000 people to be exact.

Not only that, Madam Chairman; I have heard so many arguments today coming from the opposition about the need to tax the wealthy, the rich people. This is the same argument that I have heard from many Communist countries before. The socialist point of view, you know, always assumes that somehow by destroying the rich, the wealthy, the most hardworking individuals in our society, we can achieve equality, and that's the wrong way to achieve equality.

You have two ways of achieving equality. One is to bring all the people up and try to give them the opportunity to become the best that they can be. The other way is to drag everybody down through the mud and make sure everybody suffers equally. I come from a society where it was a crime to work hard, where it was a crime to build something for your family and for yourself, and the people that are speaking on the opposition side do not know how lucky they are, because they never had to go through that. To see this kind of social engineering, to see this kind of idealism sneaking into this Legislature and becoming, you know, something that we are trying to achieve, I think, is incredible.

On the other hand, looking back on the situation like we have here in Canada, a lot of people have complained lately about a brain drain that's happening to Canada. Many of our brightest, most intelligent, most capable people are going down south, because the tax system down there is more competitive. That is the reality, and if we are losing these people, very soon we will lose the competitive edge of our technology, of our industry, and then there goes the high lifestyle that we enjoy today.

Somehow people think that the rich people or the hardworking people will just roll over and play dead when you impose taxes that unfairly penalize them for working hard. I'll tell you that those people will move, and very soon we will be left with industry that doesn't have the kind of competent people to run it, and that's why I don't know why we attack or try to bring some kind of aggressive

tax on the people who are hardworking individuals, who are trying to build something for themselves and their families.

Let me set the facts straight. This proposal will cut the total amount of taxable money by over \$1 billion. That money will be left in the pockets of Albertans, and that's the kind of money that people can do a lot of things with. They can build their house. They can save for their children's education. All of those nice things can happen tomorrow. It can happen starting January 1, but these people are standing between the people and that tax cut of over a billion dollars.

No matter how you spin it, I don't think their constituents are going to be very happy about it. Why? Because this is the first opportunity that this government is able to bring a real meaningful tax cut to the people, and what do the opposition say? The first thing they do is try to stop us from doing that. Sometimes I think the opposition ends up in a difficult position. They have to criticize everything the government does, but I cannot see how they can win when they fight the government's attempt to reduce the tax burden on Albertans. I really encourage all of you to take a hard look at the proposal that we have in front of us and vote for your constituents, vote for the kind of tax break that your constituents have been asking for for many years.

Also, some of the opposition members say that the motive of this government is to reward the rich friends that we have. How do you define rich? Is a family making \$100,000 rich? Is that a rich family by your definition?

My daughter just turned one year old, and I intend to do everything I can to make sure that she obtains a university education. I will do everything I can to ensure that she has a bright future in front of her. Those people over there somehow think that is a crime, that when people work hard and when people improve themselves and are able to get a good education, they should be penalized. I don't think so. [interjection]

I see the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is trying to debate from her chair. You know, with this kind of philosophy I'm not surprised at all that when you ran for the leadership of the opposition, you could only bring out less than 600 people in the entire province to vote for you. You know, that was a shame. I brought out 985 to vote for me just in the nomination in my riding. Okay? You had the entire province to play with, and then you brought out less than 600 people. I'm not surprised at all, Madam Chairman.

The people of Alberta are very intelligent. They are capable of telling black from white, and no matter how you spin it, you are dragging your feet on meaningful tax reform. Not only can the average Albertan see the logic, but this is the kind of tax system that encourages people to strive for the best that they can, to achieve the dreams that they want to achieve.

For people to say, "Wow, the middle-income people are the people who are paying the price for this proposal" is totally wrong. This proposal that we have also gives the family with one income earner the choice. It equalizes the playing field. It allows the people to make the choice of whether they want to have a double income or a single income, and that's very meaningful. That is very significant, because we are living in a society where the government has been intruding enough in people's lives, and it's time we give the people that choice, the choice that they can make for themselves and their families.

Now, going to the middle-income family, I challenge anybody over there who can present a calculation that those sort of people are worse off under our proposal today compared to the way we used to do it. It is very, very simple. The Premier already made the commitment in this House that we are committed to making sure that Alberta's tax system remains the lowest in Canada. There's nothing

that can be more simple and nothing that can be more straightforward than that, and that's a very, very honourable commitment, and this proposal is doing exactly that.

9:30

Now, we are given a choice. We can stay here and listen to the opposition and debate this thing until midnight and maybe come back tomorrow and come back next week and waste thousands and thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money. Or we can say: let's vote for a tax system that does not penalize hardworking people, a tax system that inspires Albertans to strive for their best, a tax system that will stop the brain drain to the U.S., a tax system that will bring back hope, a tax system that will give our children a fighting chance in an increasingly competitive global market. Then vote for this amendment. Vote for this bill, because that's the right thing to do.

People are asking: how do I know this? Well, you can look at Alberta. For the last seven years, despite the opposition trying to paint a negative picture of this province, we didn't attract many people moving from the U.S. to Canada, but within Canada you can see a net flow of people coming from all parts of Canada to Alberta. Every year we attract hundreds of thousands more people from all over the country to Alberta.

Why is it? You know, the first thing that comes to mind when you ask those people is that they think Alberta has the best environment in terms of taxation. We have the lowest taxes in the country, and young people can find jobs here in Alberta. Businesses want to move to Alberta because they can set up shop, and they don't have to pay the heavy tax that they have to pay in other jurisdictions. With jobs to attract young people, you will attract the educated people to come to Alberta to raise families, to have children, and just to enjoy our province.

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair is just going to interrupt a minute. We're in committee stage, and we do have an amendment before the house. It is deemed A1. The first part amends from 11 percent to 10.5 percent. The next part of the amendment deals with the \$11,620 to \$12,900. Can we talk a little bit about this?

MR. PHAM: Madam Chairman, I'm right on top of it. I'm trying to explain to the opposition why these amendments are so important, why we have to reduce it from 11 percent to 10.5 percent. Somehow I keep hearing them oppose this amendment. This is so frustrating to me, because I cannot figure out why. Maybe after my speech tonight, they can change their minds. I am hoping. I'm counting on that.

I understand that it may be frustrating to you because you agree with me, but some of the opposition members do not. So give me some time, and maybe I can convince them to vote for this thing before midnight. You never know.

Debate Continued

MR. PHAM: Anyway, coming back to this amendment. You can see that it was very, very clear. It is an honest attempt. It is the reward that all Albertans have been waiting for for the past seven years. Since we were elected in 1993, we have asked Albertans to make a lot of sacrifices. We have done a lot to control our spending, and we got our financial house in order. Now is the time to allow Albertans to enjoy some of the benefits that we have all worked together to achieve.

So don't stand in the way of progress. Don't stand in the way of

a massive tax cut for Albertans. Vote for this bill. Vote for the future of all our children.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Madam Chairman, thank you very much. It's a real pleasure to get up this evening again to speak to the issues of what constitutes fair taxation and what constitutes an appropriate level of taxation.

We're looking at an amendment to Bill 18 that's going to effectively try to redistribute the benefits of the tax breaks that are given from Bill 18 to fit in with the promises made by the Premier prior to the federal budget. So they're now going to change the exemption rate and the base level of taxation from 11 percent to 10.5 percent so they can continue to carry through with the commitment that under their structural change in taxation, they're going to be able to offer every Albertan a reduction in tax.

Madam Chairman, we keep hearing references to what constitutes fair, what constitutes the idea of a competitive tax structure. We heard the previous speaker talk about progressive taxes being a disincentive. One of the most interesting things that has happened today was the Acting Provincial Treasurer's tabling in the procedure early in the afternoon. He tabled a document that was a news article carried through whatever INF is and put into the *Edmonton Journal*. What it is is a commentary by Nobel prize winning economist Robert Mundell where he's talking about the relative effects of taxation and the income distribution effects of taxation.

At that time the Acting Provincial Treasurer made a comment that Dr. Mundell thinks the flat tax rates are a very good idea. Well, Madam Chairman, that, in essence, when you read the document and read what he's saying, basically is the end point in his argument. If you read the biography of Dr. Mundell – I will as an economist recognize Dr. Mundell also as a very knowledgeable person, a person who deserved the Nobel prize that he won. He's probably one of the fathers of the open economy on a worldwide basis that we're moving to.

His whole premise is based around the idea that in order to have a functioning open economy you have to have four different components. The first of them is the idea of perfect capital mobility. Okay. That I think we have now basically achieved with a lot of our international trade agreements. Very few people really consider that to be advantageous to Alberta, because we are a resource-rich province where those resources in their primary state are not mobile. We have to create the environment that will provide investors with the incentive to put their dollars here in Alberta, develop those resources here in Alberta, and export final product.

The second component of that Mundell model that he's talking about when he was relating to this competitive position is the idea that we have to have floating exchange rates. This, in essence, controls the movement of money and the relative pricing of money when we do our investments between different countries.

The next part of his model, which, Madam Chairman, is probably the least well developed to date in our open economy initiatives, is labour mobility. We already have a very serious problem even within countries to promote and to encourage labour mobility to fit the type of model that Dr. Mundell proposed.

The final component of his model is the fact that we have to also have the ability for our resources to move so that our goods and factors can be available where the production combination can be best put together.

So the idea, then, is we look at this model that Dr. Mundell has

put together – it has been on numerous different occasions referred to as the Mundell-Fleming model for open economies. What it basically boils down to is that it is based on the concept of relative advantage and the marginal theories of economics.

What we heard previously from the member opposite, from Calgary-Montrose I think it was – he was talking about a system of economics and a system of decision-making that is totally based on average calculations. Madam Chairman, that kind of economic analysis and that kind of economic thought died in the 1800s. The concepts of marginal decision-making are the standard concepts of economic theory now, and we have to look at it in the context of how Dr. Mundell talks about the single tax, the appropriate tax rate, and the advantages of the lowered level of progressivity, and that's how he talks about this report as he gets further into it.

9:40

Almost everybody starts off their presentations with kind of the end point in their discussion, and then they build up to it. Well, in this article Dr. Mundell is quoted as saying that

a progressive tax system is put on for redistributing income from rich people to poor people and if you go too far in that direction, you chase the rich . . . out.

Everybody recognizes that. Individuals look at their ability to earn an income based on their social decision-making and their ability to earn an income. Family, environment, opportunity create a balance, which, when put with your ability to earn an income, makes your choice as to whether or not you're going to move to a different area on the basis of tax rates.

What happens is that further down in his interview, he talks about the real issue being the movement in the direction of less progressivity, not necessarily the establishment of an absolute flat tax rate. His comparison is that in the U.S. the top tax rate used to be 70 percent. Reagan reduced that to about 28 percent. Under Clinton it's now been pushed back up to about 40 percent. He talks about the state taxes then adding as much as 8 percent more to it. So the marginal tax rate in the U.S. at the top level is about 48 percent.

He also then talks about the top federal tax rate in Canada being 30 percent with provincial income taxes adding 15 percent for a 45 percent marginal tax rate. According to Mundell, we already have the most competitive marginal tax rate in North America, and Alberta has a lower than average Canadian tax rate, so we're actually below that.

In essence, we already have all of the advantages that Mundell was talking about in his article. We don't have to go farther, and we do get the advantages that he talks about in this article of the ability to use the tax rate and the tax system to redistribute income to promote social and cultural identity. These are the kinds of things that he's talking about here, and it is inappropriate for the issues that come about when we talk about how to deal with the interpretation of these articles. They have to be dealt with in totality.

Madam Chairman, what we're ending up with here is the issue of who gets the benefit from a tax cut. Bill 18 is promoting a total structural change in tax, and what we've talked about here on a number of occasions is whether or not income, even as reported by Mundell, is effectively a tax on the kind of reward for labour, if you want to put it that way, or whether it's a tax on the total return on your decision-making activities.

Now, if we're going to deal with it from the perspective of the second type of model, where we're looking at the economics of making decisions on our taxation based on that, then we would have to dissociate from the federal government, because we couldn't use the taxable income component that's calculated in that federal government tax form because it doesn't represent the total return of an individual from their participation in that open economy that

Mundell is talking about. He's talking about the ability of an economy to generate income flows and create wealth as the capitalized value of those income flows.

We have to make sure that if we're going to deal with the kind of relative advantage that Dr. Mundell is talking about, we use the same definitions, and to do that, we have to make sure that when we're talking about these kinds of marginal issues, we don't confuse them with the average decision-making criteria that we heard espoused previously. That kind of thing is not the way economic theory is moving. It's not consistent discussion with the open economic systems that I think everybody who now believes in a progressive economy actually supports. It's just a matter of how you define the relative effects and the relative role of government.

We talk also about the idea of: how do we deal with taxation, and what is the role of taxation? In the context of a true open economy government would play a very minimal role in how we deal with the control of and the interference with the economic system. Madam Chairman, we as a society have chosen that not to be the kind of economic system we want. We already have a whole cupboard full of legislation that influences how that economic system works.

We create laws that effectively create a capitalized value. We create laws that prohibit uses. We create laws that in essence create an add-on cost. We create other laws that effectively alter the ownership of and the right to use those kinds of resources. As we get to those, we have to look at how that income that we generate through those tax revenues contributes to our ability to compete in the other legal jurisdictions within that open economy. According to Mundell, the person the Acting Provincial Treasurer said was describing the kind of economic system we should have in this province, we already are at a position where our economic decision factors give Alberta a competitive advantage. We don't have to deal with it from the perspective of moving farther, moving to an absolute, which he defined as a single-rate tax.

The idea that we've also heard discussed on a number of occasions is: well, a single-rate tax is still a progressive tax because you have the initial exemption rate, which we'll now, I think, be establishing at about \$13,560, so that if you're below that, you won't be paying any provincial tax and that as you start to pay more, you gradually have a marginal tax rate that approaches 10 percent. But as we generate more income, we also begin to exclude income from the taxable income calculation on that tax form. So in essence what we're doing is hiding income as we get to a level of income that we don't have to have a report made of that income. What we're doing is having a declining tax rate.

This proposal that we're talking about tonight in this amendment is going to move that declining tax rate farther down in the tax scale so that individuals who are subject to taxation will effectively be given an advantage at a lower level of income, where their tax rate on their total resource earnings will be declining. Effectively what we're saying here is that our tax system is not a tax system on total resource earnings. What it is is a tax system on reportable earnings.

I guess we have to look, then, at whether or not that's the kind of tax system that's valid within the context of our comparative advantage when we deal with the open economy. Well, Madam Chairman, we cannot – and I emphasize cannot – develop a tax system that measures and adds into taxable income all of the nonreportable incomes to create a true flat tax. The administrative cost of that, the amount of Big Brother looking over your shoulder attitude or requirements that would be needed to enforce it, just creates a society that I don't think anybody supports.

In essence what we need to do, then, is build in a proxy system. Many of our economic systems are based on the idea of legislation to create proxy systems in lieu of the marketplace operating. What

we do is create a proxy system to have tax contributions that reflect the hidden incomes of persons with the ability to get a greater resource return. So in essence what we're doing, then, is having a stepped-up tax rate.

9:50

Canada has one of the lowest step-tax rates in the world. I think we're second. The U.S. has two. We have three. Well, if you want to include the zero tax rate at the bottom, we have four. So in essence what we've got, then, is a four-step system. Those steps are probably not set at the appropriate level yet, but that's because we've not had them indexed for the last number of years, and earnings have accelerated and we've ended up with bracket creep.

What we need to do is readjust those brackets in line with an appropriate level of targeted income redistribution and then let them be put in place. I would suggest possibly two brackets plus the zero; no more than three brackets plus the zero. We could probably account for all of the options that are associated with increasing income resource earnings and the ability to contribute and support the kind of society we want through a progressive tax system.

So what we want to do, then, is look at it from the point of view of: is it fair? Is it 11 percent, or is it 10 and a half percent? That is kind of covering up the true aspect of the debate that has to go on when we're changing the fundamental structure of our tax system. We talk about fairness. We talk about the disadvantage to earn. As long as we are in a competitive advantage situation, if our tax system is the lowest, even at the marginal rates, we are the area that has the competitive advantage and we won't have to worry about the brain drain and the exodus and the transfer of high-value labour out of our province.

Those are the kinds of issues that we have to start addressing here instead of some of the debate that we've heard, where we're talking about: well, you don't support a tax break. Everybody deserves to pay the lowest amount of tax possible, and that level is determined by the kind of social programs, the kind of income transfer programs that we as a society collectively decide we want to operate through our legislative process.

We have seen a large number of legislative initiatives come through this House sponsored by the government that would in essence and do create wealth initiatives and wealth concentration factors for persons with certain resources or certain wealth-holding activities. We don't have those same kinds of debates about those in terms of whether or not they're equitable or whether or not they're fair. They are judged in terms of their competitiveness with other jurisdictions, and we have to look at them from the perspective of whether or not our legislation creates, maintains, and supports our competitive advantage. I would suggest that moving to this flat tax at either 11 or 10 and a half percent is a significant overreaction to the concepts that are talked about by Mundell and his colleagues when they talk about the advantages of an open-economy model.

Madam Chairman, I support the open-economy model, but I also support an economic system in our province that has a social conscience. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. I'm rising to speak on the amendment – I'm assuming it's called A1 – which is changing it from an 11 percent flat tax to a 10 and a half percent flat tax and raising the personal exemption to \$12,900. It's always interesting following the Member for Lethbridge-East. I always learn something new about economics.

You know, when I look at whether this amendment is going to make a difference as to whether I support Bill 18 or not, I don't think

so, but let me work through some of the issues that have come up for me. Part of my concern is around this government's practice of mushroom economics. I mean, we've heard of trickle-down economics and Reaganomics and voodoo economics. This is mushroom economics, because it seems that everything is developed behind closed doors in the dark, and the support for it is never to see the light of day.

[Mr. Renner in the chair]

I note that the opposition put forward a number of written questions in this spring session asking about the background information or what kind of information was prepared by or for Alberta Treasury on the economic impact, on revenue recovery: all kinds of questions about what was behind the development of this. The answers keep coming back: no information has been prepared by or for Alberta Treasury. Here's another one: no information has been prepared by or for Alberta Treasury on how much of the economic offset or revenue recovery results from various components of the tax plan. There's another one and another one and another one and another one. Yeah, there's about half a dozen of them here.

So every time we asked for information about what would have made them decide on this, there was no answer. I guess it leads me to believe that there was no work done there. When we ask to see their calculations on how they're coming up with all of the stories that are being put forward by the Acting Provincial Treasurer about so-and-so and their lovely family getting such and such of a tax break, those calculations are not forthcoming either. So I think it is mushroom economics.

Now, while this debate has been before the House, I have had the opportunity to listen to people in Edmonton-Centre, and I have to say that very, very few – I think there are two – have been asking, clamoring for a tax break. Most people are pretty frank in saying that they're willing to pay taxes for services. Certainly people's memories here are casting back and going: look, just a few years ago we were asked to tighten our belt and pay surtaxes and cut back on all kinds of things in order to maintain our services. Well, as we know, the services weren't maintained; they were cut. People are saying to me: well, you know, for the \$100 or \$200 I'm going to get back out of this, I'd rather that money was invested into the system, particularly into the health care system. That's the one that comes up the most often.

So people are not asking for a tax break. They are asking for adequate and sustainable funding for education. You know, we're still looking for enough funding dollars for mild and moderate special needs, for example. We only have the high special needs that are funded. And, yes, the cap has been lifted there, but people are still really affected by this, particularly in my constituency, because as it was explained to me, there tends to be a fringe of people. When there are special needs offered, for example, then you get a number of other people that are moving into the neighbourhood to take advantage of that, but they're not covered by the funding.

So, you know, are people saying to me, "Oh, we desperately want a tax break here"? No. They're talking to me about funding for a mild and moderate special need. They're talking about funding for the health care system. Right now we're dealing with a strike with health care workers who are asking for a raise, and the reason they're out on a strike right now is, no, there isn't the money to give it to them. Well, people that are talking to me are saying: we'd rather see that money going into the health care system or into social services.

I have a lot of people with mental health illness in Edmonton-Centre or who are on AISH because of a physical disability. Given the housing allowance rates that are offered under those programs,

it's impossible for them to find a reasonable place to stay, a safe place, a place with some dignity to it. We all hear about the downloading on the municipalities. Well, maybe the money should be going to the municipalities rather than downloading on them. I just don't have people phoning me demanding a tax break. I do have them phoning me and asking when these areas are going to be adequately funded and on a sustainable level. People don't want to be on this trampoline of good times and bad times. In the good times they get a tax break, and in the bad times they get their programs and services taken away.

10:00

People are also asking about the impact on the revenues and the management of the budget in the province. We do have a cyclical economy here. We don't seem to be able to not have it, and everyone else recognizes that. Why is there no discussion of addressing that, of having a cushion in place, or as the opposition has suggested, a stabilization plan or a stabilization fund to carry us through those times when the economy has a downturn?

Certainly one of the things we noticed from having programs cut in a downturn is the impact that has on the infrastructure, on the maintenance. Those are the first things that get cut, that kind of ongoing regular attention being paid. That gets taken away, and then we have a huge problem with roads and buildings and all kinds of infrastructure. Will this amendment, which is cutting the flat tax from 11 percent to 10.5, make any difference on that? No. I still maintain that this is like Robin Hood's evil twin brother. We have robbery from the middle class to pay for the wealthy. That just strikes me as bizarre, but it doesn't seem to strike the hon. members opposite in the same way.

It's interesting. This government isn't motivated by any other small percentage group to bring in special laws. What we're talking about is that the people that are really going to benefit from this are the top 1 to 3 percent of the income earners in Alberta. They're the ones that are really going to benefit from this. But, you know, could we get the government to do legislation on behalf of the 52 percent of the population that are women? No. Could we get the government to bring in legislation for children in poverty? No. But here we have a flat tax scheme being brought in to benefit the top 1 to 2 percent. For no other sector of individuals in Alberta would we have the government willing to go to such lengths to satisfy a very small percentage of people, but that's exactly what's going on here.

The whole concept that I hear discussed, that somehow people who save money on taxes will reinvest it into the economy and this fires up the economy, that the money circulates around – well, I think that's probably true for those in the middle and even lower income. Their money does circulate around; it does stay here. But I don't see that happening for the wealthy elite. Their money doesn't stay here. Certainly the investment of money goes offshore. It doesn't stay in Alberta. It's not invested here. It leaves the province. So that money is not recirculated through this economy.

Even when we look at purchasing, I think the purchasing from that group goes elsewhere. Certainly they're not stampeding around Alberta or using passport Alberta or vacationing at Sylvan Lake. They're taking their vacations well outside of Alberta, so there goes that tourism money. It's not being spent here; it's leaving the province.

You know, they're looking at special purchases. That isn't happening here in Alberta. Those special purchases are being made in other places. Maybe the goods are actually being brought here, and some money might be made through a custom or import tax, but that isn't coming into the province. So I don't see how that argument goes around here. That money is not circulated in Alberta. It's

not spent here; it doesn't stay here. It scoots out of this province as fast as its little legs will carry it.

There's also the argument: well, you know, we need to leave more money in people's pockets. Well, if that were true, then we'd be looking at cutting user fees, which are coming out of everybody's pockets. That would make a real immediate contribution to the change that people had in their pockets. What have we still got here? Eleven hundred or thirteen hundred different user fees, which this government was promising to do away with or at least look at. We haven't heard anything about that. They're pretty fond of their user fees.

Now I hear there's speculation from the Acting Provincial Treasurer about a sales tax. Well, there's another regressive tax that impacts more harshly on the middle and lower income earners and has much less effect on the higher income earners.

How about getting rid of health care premiums? Boy, that would put some cash back in people's pockets. That would be a real meaningful thing to do, but I don't hear any talk about that. Now, there is something that would have benefited a lot of people right across income levels, but no talk about getting rid of health care premiums. No. We want to do a flat tax, which is going to far and away benefit the higher income earners.

Here's another way to look at this: time is money. A lot of people today would far prefer to have the time. So if we had more money being invested in health care or education, then maybe families would have more time because they'd be working fewer bingos to raise money for their school. Or maybe families would have more time because they'd be doing fewer casinos in support of whatever health agency is important to them, or raising money for the northern Alberta children's hospital or the Stollery centre or any of those various charities that you hear are desperately trying to raise money for health research or health purposes in this day and age.

Maybe if some of this investment was going on and these programs were being adequately funded through funds raised through taxes rather than trying to cut them, we'd have people that could spend less of their time selling raffle tickets to pay for their kids to learn leadership and team skills through sports or culture. How about support for the libraries and the museums? So time is also money here, and that's another way that people in Alberta could really be benefiting, but there's no discussion of that.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

One of the things I think about the flat tax is that a true flat tax presumes that no other taxes or credits or deductions are in play. In fact, we pay a lot of different taxes. We pay municipal property taxes, education tax, business or corporate taxes, oil and gas royalties, stumpage fees in forestry. We pay gas taxes. We pay licences, all kinds of them. There are municipal licences, provincial licences, federal licences. All kinds of money is being paid out in licences. We've got import duties and customs. We've got machinery taxes. We've even got environmental taxes, like the bottle deposits and the tire deposits. So it's interesting that they want to bring this scheme in called the flat tax, but they're not getting rid of any of the other taxes that people are paying, and they're now talking about a sales tax on top of everything.

Right from the beginning I've maintained that this Bill 18 and its companion piece, Bill 19, is about a flat tax scheme which really benefits the highest income earners in Alberta, but this has to be sold to the voter base, which is the middle-income people. How does this happen? How do you convince people to accept a new tax scheme, an entirely different tax scheme? Well, I think the first thing you do is call it something else. You don't talk about the fact that it's an

entirely new tax scheme. You talk about it as a tax cut. You just call it something else and keep selling it as something else. The second thing you do is take the poor off the tax rolls so that the government isn't seen as taking advantage of the poor and really slamming them.

The third thing you do is set the tax rate low enough so there is an initial tax cut. It's like a loss leader in the store. You know, in order to get people to come into the store, you set the price of something really cheap so lots of people come in to buy it. Then they're in the store and you've got them. They'll spend money on other things while they're in the store. That's exactly what's happening here. That's what all this dickering is about. That's exactly what this amendment is about. It's about setting that tax rate low enough that people will actually get a tax cut. Given that the people on the higher end, the highest income earners, are the ones that are benefiting the most, you've got to keep dropping that rate so that actually the folks in the middle class are going to get some kind of tax cut, period.

So that's what's really happening here. It's a whole different tax scheme, but it's being sold as a tax cut. But that tax cut may not be there forever. Next year we could have a downturn, and that tax rate starts to just go right back up again. And who is really going to pay? Who's the one that's really going to be hit on that? It's the middle-income earners.

10:10

I think that whether this is 11 percent or 10 and a half percent, it's still a flat tax scheme. I think it will harm Albertans. It will particularly harm the people I represent, who are mostly middle-income earners and working low income, and I can't support that. Could I support a fair tax cut that has an accountability factor in it for some sort of stabilization for the downturns in the economy? Yes, indeed, I could. Do I think there should be a fairer tax cut, that the taxes should be as low as possible and still be able to sustain the economy and the programs and services that we want? Absolutely. Do I object to raising the personal exemption? No, I'm fine with that. I think that's perfectly fair, especially to those that are lower-income earners.

So it's not that I'm against anything this government is ever going to propose. I look at the different pieces. I break it down and try and think: is this going to work the best for the people in Edmonton-Centre? There's very little in this scheme that is being put forward by the government that's going to work for the folks in Edmonton-Centre. Can I be tagged with: well, I don't want any kind of tax break for people? No, I've never said that. If it's fair and if it's going to allow the budget to work on a sustainable level, it's fine by me. It's more than fine by me; I'd support it. But that's not what's being contemplated here.

I still find it really interesting that most of this scheme is being brought in to benefit a very small percentage of high-income earners. This government would not bring in any other kind of legislation, no matter how desperately needed, if we were talking about that low a percentage of people in any other group for any other reason.

So with those comments, I appreciate the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole to this amendment on Bill 18, and I look forward to continued debate on it.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The proposed amendment to Bill 18 is good news for all Albertans. I can only imagine the envy that other provinces feel as this debate is going on,

but a strong fiscal plan has given us the ability to introduce groundbreaking tax reform and tax cuts of over 20 percent. Yes, that's what I said. We'll take 20 percent, or \$1.3 billion, less from Albertans' bank accounts.

I think one thing we can all agree on is the benefit to low-income Albertans. Nearly 200,000 Albertans will be removed from the provincial tax rolls. Unfortunately, this only takes care of the provincial taxes. The federal bill still accounts for two-thirds of income taxes. However, there's no denying that low-income Albertans are winners with this bill. There's a little more difficulty getting the opposition to acknowledge that middle-income earners are also winners. Since they, too, will receive a tax break, I don't see how they are losing.

I think the biggest problem the critics have with the single tax rate is that high-income earners will also be winners. I have a hard time seeing why they oppose this. Just because someone earns more than his neighbour doesn't mean that he or she is a bad person. Why should they be punished for working harder?

High taxes don't create any incentive to work that extra hour of overtime or take that course you need for a promotion. High taxes often deter people from bettering themselves at work, because the more you earn, the more the government takes in taxes. It is a fact that high taxes stifle an individual's enthusiasm.

We believe in encouraging creativity and enthusiasm in a different way here in Alberta. We think government should get out of people's private lives and out of people's bank accounts. We think that if government backs off, then people will have more room to grow and more freedom to choose. Bill 18 will give Albertans more freedom. By removing tax brackets, Albertans will have the freedom to choose to work harder. They will also have the freedom to choose how they will spend the money they will save on taxes. They won't be punished with higher taxes for getting a raise. There's nothing more discouraging than getting a raise and having it taxed away because your raise puts you in a higher tax bracket.

Low taxes are not only good for individuals and families in Alberta; they are good for the economy. When individuals are allowed to grow, the economy grows with them. When individuals are feeling financially confident, the economy reflects that confidence. The opposition has suggested that we can't afford the kind of tax cuts we are giving. I think we can't afford not to give them. The \$1.3 billion tax cut that we are giving to Albertans is affordable. Alberta Treasury estimates the new tax plan will increase economic growth. With the new tax cuts, five years after the tax plan is implemented, Alberta's gross domestic product is expected to be about 1.5 percent, or \$1.9 billion, larger. Roughly 30,000 new jobs will be created, and increased economic activity will generate enough increased tax revenue to offset 40 percent of the direct cost of the tax cut.

It's important to keep in mind that these numbers are based on the initial estimate of a \$500 million tax reduction. Now that we are giving a \$1.3 billion tax cut to Albertans, the economic impact will be much greater. This is good news. However, we need to always keep in mind the purpose of this bill: to introduce tax reform and give every Albertan a tax cut. Does the opposition really want to see those who are in the lowest tax bracket – let's say a young couple expecting their first child – struggle to make ends meet? With a new baby in their future they may be inclined to try to earn a little extra money to cover the additional costs of raising a family, but with the current system those extra hours push this family into the middle tax bracket with a higher rate, and the only result is that one of them is away from home working longer hours without much financial gain. Bill 18 and the proposed amendment will end this penalty. I honestly don't think the opposition wants to see that.

What about someone who is already in the middle-income tax bracket? What if he or she works hard and gets a raise? Is it all right to tax away the extra money he or she earns? Where do the critics draw the line? Why do they choose to be winners or losers? The bill and the amendment that is proposed for us will not punish these Albertans either.

Madam Chairman, it's time for some real tax reform. It's time we stop punishing hardworking Albertans by reducing any incentive to work, save, and invest, and it's time we let Albertans keep more of their own money.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words about the government amendment to Bill 18, which proposes to strike out the 11 percent and to substitute 10.5 percent and to strike out \$11,620 and substitute \$12,900 when those amounts appear in the legislation.

It was Voltaire, Madam Chairman, who said that "in general, the art of government consists in taking as much money as possible from one class of citizens to give to the other." That's what Bill 18, regardless of the amendments, does: it takes money from one group of citizens and puts it in the hands of another group. That quote from Voltaire was in the mid-1700s. It was true then and is true today and is exemplified by the impact Bill 18 is going to have on the tax system in this province.

10:20

In looking at the amendments, the question has to be asked: do the amendments change Bill 18 in any substantial way? The answer to that is found in re-examining the principles, the big three principles that are usually expected to govern the tax system. Of course, the first and probably one of the most important principles is tax equity. The amendments are such that the same kind of criticisms that were leveled at the original bill remain: that the amendments in no way make a difference in terms of the inequities that were found in the original bill. In fact, they probably make them a little worse.

The foundation of a tax system is supposed to be its progressivity. In spite of the claims of the Acting Provincial Treasurer, the flat tax scheme in front of us moves Alberta towards a less progressive tax system, and that's a violation of the equity principle. It's long been recognized that the tax system is a mechanism for the fair and equitable redistribution of wealth. The provisions in Bill 18 add to the unfairness in terms of the distribution of wealth in the province, favouring those people who already enjoy a favored position in the province. So the notion of the violation of the equity principle embedded in Bill 18 is in no way changed by bringing forward these amendments.

The principle of neutrality is another principle that has been questioned in terms of Bill 18. Neutrality is wrapped up in the notion that tax incentives or tax changes should in no way cause individuals to modify their behaviour and that a neutral tax change would not affect existing relationships. Well, that neutrality principle has been violated in Bill 18 because existing relationships are changed. The middle class will pick up a larger burden of the tax bill in the province, and those in the upper-income brackets will have their tax burden reduced. So it does change the relationship between groups, and that was a relationship that was already strained in many ways.

The attack on the middle class is one that I think has been chronicled elsewhere, but there's a feeling by middle-class Albertans

that they are under attack, that they're being asked to pay more and more of the tax load, that they're being asked to take more of the burden of keeping our institutions and government services operating than is really their fair share. Even though they get a cut, even though their total tax bill will be reduced in some instances, that ratio is disturbed, and again they are left paying more than they might otherwise have were a different tax scheme put forward by the government.

One of the sort of side effects of this kind of scheme put forward by the government is one I heard from one of my constituents who, in talking about the proposal, said: "What would you expect? The middle class always gets shafted in any kind of change." Really, one of the side effects of this legislation is that it's going to add to that cynicism at a time when I think that's unfortunate. There was an opportunity, when the government found itself in a desirable financial system, to put forward real tax reform that would lead to fairness and that could leave all Albertans feeling like they were treated fairly. The claims by government members that the middle class should be thankful because they got a tax cut too, even though it wasn't as big as for those who are earning high incomes, and that somehow or other they should be pleased because they got some money is quite an astounding claim to be heard in this Legislature.

So for two of the three huge tax principles, equity and neutrality, the violation of those principles remains unchanged by the amendments before us. The third principle, which is the principle the government has promoted most heartily, is simplicity. Certainly the movement to a flat tax is simple. It makes calculations easier but comes to us in this bill at quite a price, and it's a price some Albertans are unwilling to pay. The tension between those principles I think is still here in Bill 18. I suspect in many ways almost any tax proposal registers some tension among those principles, but this flat tax is clearly one that on principle alone should be closely questioned.

One of the other comments I wanted to make, Madam Chairman, was on the reasons that have been given by the government for this particular tax reduction. Again, the amendments have done nothing to change those reasons or to make them any stronger, but the reasons we hear in the Chamber continue to be similar. When those flat tax proposals in the States were first made public, one of the political leaders there labeled the proposals as voodoo economics, and that label has stuck and has been associated with the kinds of economics of the Reagan era and the Thatcher era in Britain and the notion of trickle-down economics.

We've heard this time and time again in this Legislature in spite of it being discredited everywhere else, and I guess it's not surprising, given this tax proposal, that we would hear that kind of argument. The notion that citizens with more money in their pockets, even the small amounts this tax break will make available, are going to invest more and spend more, thereby creating more wealth and more jobs, has pretty well been discredited. That was south of the border and in Britain, and it's probably even more so in this country and in our province, where so much of income is placed into equity. That whole notion, as I indicated, is one that upon being investigated just does not hold water, although it's one we hear time and time again from government members.

One of the other arguments – and I mentioned this before in talking about the bill because I heard it again from a government member this evening – is that this tax scheme is going to prevent the brain drain. I find it quite astounding that we have government members truly believing that it's this kind of a tax measure that's going to keep Albertans and Canadians here and prevent the movement of citizens south of the border. That's just not true.

10:30

Any kind of in-depth look at the brain drain indicates that people move to a new community for a lot of reasons. Scholars and researchers looking for places to establish themselves are lured to those places for a variety of reasons, and offering the modest tax break to the middle incomes that this amendment puts forward is not going to attract them. They are attracted by the kind of research facility, the kind of research climate. They're attracted by the amenities that are available in a community for their families: the kind of recreation, the kind of cultural and educational facilities that are available for them and their families. They're attracted by safe communities. They're attracted by housing that's readily available. Certainly taxes are a part of the mix that goes into their decision-making, but to claim that somehow or other this Bill 18 and the amendments are going to halt the brain drain I think is really stretching it and pushing it to its limits.

The other myth I heard perpetuated this evening is that this amendment will give the rich the tax break they need so they'll work harder. Again, I think that's just what I called it. It's a myth. I don't recall being able to read any studies that indicated that that was the truth, that somehow or other the more money you had the harder you worked. I just don't believe that's true, and I think it would be a hard sell for some of the very hardworking, low-income constituents that I serve to indicate to them that that was the reason why they work hard. So it's a myth, and it's one that I find quite astounding that we have perpetuated in the Assembly.

One of the other comments that I would like to make, Madam Chairman, is that the Acting Provincial Treasurer has drawn on some legitimization in the last number of days, in particular the chartered accountants in the province. He purported to have a letter from them endorsing the tax bill. He had filed the work of a scholar who indicated, he purported, that he supported his tax proposal and these amendments.

I find it curious, to say the least, that he would draw upon those two groups and their support and yet was so brutally dismissive of the 100,000 Albertans who signed petitions opposing Bill 11. They were cast aside as special interest groups, as belonging to unions, as being people who are only interested in protecting their jobs, that same kind of dismissal of the 25,000 parents across the province who signed petitions in support of extra funding for school. They, too, were dismissed.

So the Provincial Treasurer draws on a very narrow group and seems to give them great credence when that group supports the government's position and seems very willing to dismiss the hundreds of thousands of Albertans who let their voice be known on issues when it's contrary to government policy and legislation.

The results of this legislation I think the Member for Lethbridge-East has already indicated this evening, that it's a movement towards less progressivity in the tax system, and I think he made the arguments fairly strongly earlier this evening in support of that proposition.

Bill 18 and these amendments are really a Trojan horse bill under the guise of a tax cut, under the pretense that people – well, not a pretense. They will get a tax cut. There is a major shift in terms of tax liability to the middle class. Some calculations have been made that by 2004 under the current system, the middle class would be in a much similar position as they are under the proposal before us. We'll look back at these changes in the future, Madam Chairman, and realize just what has been done to the tax system. I'm sure there's going to be a government down the road that will take the needed action to rectify the errors that are being made and the unfair changes to the tax system that will be a result of the provisions of Bill 18.

So with those comments, Madam Chairman, I'd like to conclude and look forward to further debate on Bill 18.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Madam Chairman. On the amendments to Bill 18. In the discussions about our future and the future of our economy we talk a lot about how as a province we want to grow, and there is no question that we will grow. Our economy will continue to diversify. We will start more businesses. We will find ways to make new and existing Alberta businesses and industry more productive. We will make the most of the new technologies, and we will undertake a variety of other activities, all aimed at making the future a good place for everyone who lives here.

When I say we, I mean Albertans, and that includes us as politicians. It also includes corporate Alberta, the oil patch, all of our educational institutions, and many others too, but much of the responsibility for the future rests on the shoulders of our young people. It's an awesome responsibility, and we as politicians believe they should get as much support as possible. They are after all building our future as well as their own.

Madam Chairman, I'm proud to say that Bill 18 is designed to help all Albertans, including our young people, and you don't have just my word on it. Everyone is starting to sit up and take notice. For example, tax watchdog Mitchel Gray from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation is on record as saying: this is a tax cut for all Albertans; everyone will get a break: rich, poor, and the middle-class alike. And it's true.

From this, we want our young people with entry-level incomes to see that even though they don't make the big salaries of more established professionals, they are just as important. We don't wait until they make the big bucks before recognizing them. Bill 18 will remove traditional tax disincentives so that these people can get on with building a future we can all enjoy.

When it becomes law, Bill 18 will increase the basic personal exemption by 78 percent, to \$12,900 from the current \$7,231. That means that these young people as well as everyone else will pay no personal provincial income tax at all on the first \$12,900 they make. This makes a big difference to the new graduate just starting out or the student who works part-time to offset the costs of education. In fact, even those who work full-time earning minimum wage – and that's about 2,000 hours a year – simply won't pay any Alberta income taxes at all. However, they'd still owe the federal government about \$650. Most of the people here today can probably still remember what it's like when you're getting started or getting your feet wet, when you've landed a job but all you've got in your closet is the suit that you wore to your high school graduation and you've come to think about Kraft dinner as two of the four major food groups. Even a bit of extra cash is going to make a difference in the lives of these folks. So Bill 18 helps them in the beginning. Then as they progress, the new tax system makes it easier for them to go forward.

10:40

As we have all heard, Bill 18 introduces a single tax rate, and that means no tax brackets, so raises and increments will not push new workers into higher brackets where they pay a greater proportion of what they make to the tax man. Instead, they will be allowed to keep more of what they earn, and I have seen how a little extra can make a big difference, not just in terms of its purchasing power but also as an incentive to work harder and to stay in Alberta. If they get both the breaks and the opportunities here, the States won't look nearly so attractive to these young workers.

All this extra work gives the province momentum and bodes well for our economy. Very well, I might say. By 2006 Alberta's GDP is expected to increase by 1.5 percentage points more than it would have without Bill 18. That translates into almost \$2 billion more in our economy than we would expect without any changes to our personal income tax system. By no coincidence the increased economic activity will mean more jobs in the province, about 30,000 more by the year 2006 than we could have expected otherwise. So young people graduating from high school, college, and university will find more opportunities to put their hard work to use.

It only makes sense, Madam Chairman, that if we're banking on these people to use their smarts to build us a great future, shouldn't we give them the opportunity to hit the ground running? I don't think there's a person in the House today who would dream of holding them back, and I would also say probably the opposition as well. Why should we have a tax system that does? Bill 18 is designed to take them forward, so let's get on with it and support Bill 18.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: I'm here. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Once again it's a pleasure to address this August body, particularly when some of them are listening. [interjection] A flat tax, not a single tax: that's just for sales, and we all know that, so let's deal with what we have in this Bill 18.

It is clearly a flat tax, and there are a lot of myths surrounding it. But let's ask some fundamental questions, the whys and the wheres. Where are we going with this flat tax? I read with interest the Alberta Tax Review Committee's report, such as it is, and it wasn't hard to figure out where they were going, when they plainly were stopping at a flat tax as an interim measure so that we can go from a tax on tax, which our current system is in relation to the federal tax, to a tax on income, which this bill goes to, to a final destination as a tax-on-consumption, which would be a new VAT, as it is described in England, a value-added tax, or a PST, as it is described in so many other provinces, and to eliminate the income tax.

Now, in theory that sounds to be a reasonable objective, because it's clear that leaving hard-earned funds in the pocket of a consumer regardless of what income rate they are has some attractions in that you can say to a citizen at whatever income level: we're going to leave the cash you've earned in your jeans until such time as you decide to expend that, and then we're going to tax you on that. Well, in theory it works rather well for all income groups if all of those funds that were income were expended. That, of course, is certainly not the case, because a good deal of those that have their staples covered, their barbell, their nut, the amount that it costs them to live, rather early, those in the high-income brackets, have a great deal left over then to invest, if you will, or to further cause more income generation.

For that group and for the middle income that are striving for that and the higher income, it works quite well. Unfortunately, it does not work all that well for a great deal of our society, those that are expending all of their funds just to keep their wheels turning. So they end up in a neutral position, or at the very end of the lower scale they end up in a negative position, because all of their funds are expended for those fundamental elements that now cost them considerably more. Those people are in fact pushed through the cracks, and we end up with this horrible social problem at the lower end of the scale, which all of the trickle-down theories will not and cannot account for.

Now, I would assume that these people that wrote this report were of good intention, but they're all from the higher end of the scale. Regardless of how you cut it, if you're designing a system which you live in, you have some kind of fiduciary interest in this. Although you try to set that aside as much as you can, you still do. If these people assume that if you take care of those that are the generators of capital investment, do in fact do that, and that those at the bottom end of the scale will always be there, as many of these people assume, then I suppose you do and should come up with these conclusions.

I would move on to the second question. Why are we going to this? Now, you'll hear the proponents of the flat tax talk about it being simpler, being much more fair. You'll hear them talk about the potential reduction in evasion and illegal avoidance of tax, and you'll hear them speak of that all-encompassing phrase of economic prosperity, that it will foster that.

Well, let's deal with simpler first. True, it would be simple if in fact the flat tax did away with all exemptions, with the personal exemption or spousal exemptions or RSPs or any kind of tax incentive such as we have in the oil and gas business, which have in most cases served this province rather well. Yes, if you did away with all of that lot, it could be simpler. I mean, wouldn't it be wonderful, an ideal situation to be able to file a two-sentence income statement and be able to have your tax calculated by long multiplication, if you will, and be able to say: okay; that's my commitment to society.

Well, of course, we know that is not about to occur for all of the complexities of the society that have been built since 1917, when income tax was instigated. There are so many social concerns and business concerns. That kind of simple formula would work if in fact we were dealing with an entire income generation from the province totally and completely unrelated to the federal scene. Now, this is but one province with 10 percent of the population. This tail is not going to wag the dog sufficiently to change all that there is in the federal government. So for two reasons: one, is that all of those other incentives that are rightfully included currently in the tax system are there for a good reason, and secondly, the federal scene is not going to be changed by one province. So let's dispel that argument of it being simple.

10:50

Fairness. I dealt with fairness, and the same arguments apply as when I dealt earlier with moving through the flat tax into a PST or a VST, and those arguments still apply. These cuts would and could be fair quite easily. This province is currently fat with cash and could have given, even with the current tax system, just the elimination of that which was eliminated currently in Bill 19, the 8 percent surtax and the pure flat tax that's applied for elimination of deficit of .5 tax over all income. If you eliminate those two, that's a good start. Then just take that which is currently being filed and the current method as being filed with the tax on tax and lower that. But, no, this bill goes beyond that. It moves and shifts the burden of the tax from the high income to the middle income. It certainly does move some of the lower income off the tax rolls, which is a very, very good end into and unto itself, but it doesn't mask the major shift.

Those that are proposing this flat tax are arguing that it's a break for everyone. Well, that being the case, there's no argument there. Of course, we can see that. But in that tax break for everyone we've got this massive shift going on that doesn't seem to hit the street well. It certainly hasn't been through the entire business community as yet. I spent some time in the last couple of days asking, and it certainly hasn't and will not and may never get to really where the

folks are. That comes from some discussions earlier in the evening at the doors in Edmonton-Highlands.

People are not terribly keen on listening to politicians a great deal, and they certainly only read that which is printed in the newspaper in sort of a catch it if you can and read between the lines or read the headlines and understand what's going on here. They certainly aren't aware that the shift is occurring.

Let's for a moment assume that the expenditures of this government were fixed and that this government had already taken the current tax-on-tax rate down from 44 and a half percent to 38 or 39 or 36 percent, and then applied this flat tax over the course of maybe two years. It would be painfully obvious, then, that with the move from one tax system to another the burden would be shifted. It would clearly be shown very easily that the tax burden for the middle income would be increased. Because this government happens to be in the unique position of having this large bucket of cash, it's able to give everyone this break. It's unfortunate from my point of view but it's fortunate from the government's point of view that the middle income will not really recognize that the higher income are getting the lion's share of the largesse of the government, and it's a shame.

I should quote a very good line from a journal article that was repeated by the good offices of the library. It was in November of '98, and it is a report on the Alberta Tax Review Committee and their recommendations. There's one chap there, a Mr. Donald, from Parkland Industries.

In North America, flat tax proposals have foundered for decades on the popular belief that the rich should pay a bigger percentage of their fortunes toward the public good. This argument is not so much wrong as oversimplified, says Mr. Donald.

He goes on to say in another quote:

The fairness of our plan lies in raising the personal exemption. The lower your income, the more that exemption means to you as a percentage of your income. For the wealthy, it's almost no help at all.

Well, that gives you one of the mind-sets that does two things. One, it totally and completely ignores that middle income that pays the bulk of the tax. Now, an exemption for those people, as the gentleman clearly pointed out – at the higher income it means much less than at the middle income. But in a flat tax rate that person's income and their expenditure rate versus a higher income and their expenditure rate to function in this world and do all of the necessities of eating and housing and transportation and all of that lot are a much greater percentage. If that's taxed at the same rate, it's clearly obvious to anyone that the burden is going to be shifted there, and therefore in this member's view it's woefully unfair.

Moving on to another popular misconception that's touted by a lot of flat tax proposers, that evasion of tax or cheating, if you will, is less likely to occur on this simple application of tax. Well, in writing after writing after writing there is no substantiated proof of that at all, although quite frankly I don't know how you would substantiate that. But it is clearly the opinion of most economists that that does not occur, because the evasion is based on an assumption that that which is paid by an individual in the way of tax to further the coffers of the government is misspent. Those funds are expended rather poorly.

Now, it matters little whether you're paying a little or a lot if you're of that opinion that then evasion comes rather easily or if it's easy to convince oneself that cheating is a reasonable thing to do because the money is going to this big black hole or is being expended in a manner that certainly doesn't help that person in their life trying to further their ends, as it were. So let's set that one aside. We're dealing with only a provincial tax, and we're not dealing with the overall big nut of the federal income tax. Let's set that argument

aside as being mostly a federal argument, but it certainly doesn't hold water in the provincial scene.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

The last argument that you hear all the time and you hear in this Chamber particularly is economic prosperity, the theory that all wealth is created by this trickle down: if you have the higher end of the income levels that have these extra funds, they invest. Now, I don't know how a brand-new Mercedes every year is investing. I fail to see how the purchase of another three vacations on a yacht furthers the ends of Albertans. I don't know how that end of the expenditure works out. So let's assume that that's a very small percentage of that high end of the income scale that does expend that way. Just set that one aside for awhile.

11:00

How does it fit that investing from that group is any better than investing from the middle-income group? I for one don't understand it at all, because the middle-income group, as most of those that are assembled here and certainly the staff are – that's their end too. I mean, they're looking to as early as possible pay off their mortgage and set their children off on a decent course by paying for their education and all that lot and get a position where they can take the disposable income that they do have after covering all the expenses of the day and say: "Now, how do I build my nest-egg beyond that RRSP that I've been contributing to, beyond the company plan? How do I do that?"

Their end is the same as the higher end except that their urgency is a little more – well, I shouldn't say that their urgency is a little more urgent, but I guess that's what it is. They're now at this end of the boomers, and they're looking at that retirement out there. So they really, really do want to put this money to good use and do a fairly good job of investing and managing it such that it will cause growth for themselves and therefore for the economy.

The higher end of course don't have that concern so much. Why should they be concerned about retirement? Their retirement was covered long, long ago. They have that kind of an income that it certainly doesn't concern them, the waning of the later years when their income level from active employment will drop dramatically. So why would we want to put those funds out there? That leaves me a little bit dry.

There are a number of quotes which I can't quite locate at the moment, but I should like to come back a little later to speak of those quotes. John Kenneth Galbraith, of course, delivered a great number of them that specifically related to the trickle-down theory, and a number of others really did not subscribe to that theory, that sort of the supply side of the economy.

Here we are. John Kenneth Galbraith said: it's a relatively sophisticated form of fraud. That's from an article that *Hansard* will undoubtedly ask me about, so I should probably quote the author right off the top. It's Neil Brooks in an article in the July-August 1999 issue of the *CCP Monitor*. I should also like to read into the record a Nobel laureate for economics, James Tobin, that termed it, and I quote: snake oil. It's an easy way of selling the flat tax. There's another quote, too, by the famous George Bush, when he referred to this variation of the supply side theory as voodoo economics.

No, don't tell me that the time allotted for the speech has come and gone. It's unfortunate. I'll have to resume my dissertations on the economic prosperities a little later, the voodoo economics of this government.

Thank you kindly for the time allotted, Mr. Chairman. I will take my seat now.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a good opportunity to spend a little bit of time talking about Bill 18 here. We find ourselves at third reading. I spoke briefly to this bill earlier and talked about my view of the continuing progressivity of the bill, so I'm not going to get into that kind of detail. I would like to spend just a little bit of time talking in general terms about tax policy, what I think should be reflected in tax policy and how this bill in fact fits my idea of what tax policy is all about.

We've got before us Bill 18 and an amendment to that bill that deals with the specific rates. I think it's important that we talk about the specific rates, but I also think that it's important that we have the context in which those rates are going to be applied. When any government is talking about collecting taxes, the reason that taxes are collected is because there are a number of services that the public expects government to provide, so the only way that governments have to provide those services is through some form of taxation.

We in Alberta and in most of the western world have various forms of taxation. Some of it is in the form of corporate tax. Some of it is in the form of personal income tax. We also in Alberta are very fortunate to have a significant revenue stream from royalties on natural resources. So government, I think, has to constantly keep in mind that we want to be as equitable as possible. We want to ensure that we collect only the amount of taxes that are necessary to provide the services that we see as being core services of government.

Tonight we're discussing the whole area of personal income taxes. Traditionally what has taken place not only in Alberta but across Canada is that the federal government has for all intents and purposes established the tax policies for the entire country. The federal government brings down a budget, establishes a tax rate, and then the provinces have traditionally added their taxes onto the established policies of the federal government in the form of provincial taxes being a percentage of the federal tax.

So what this bill does is significant in two ways. First of all, we split ourselves off. We remove ourselves from the necessity of being dependent upon the policy of the federal government. Instead of having a tax on tax, we have the fortunate position of being able to determine our own tax policy within this province.

The other thing that we do, probably the most significant change that Albertans will see, is that we have discussed repeatedly ways of having a more equitable tax, because traditionally in Alberta and in fact in Canada, Mr. Chairman, we have had multiple rates of taxation. After an individual calculates his or her taxable income, then there are graduating rates of tax, some of which apply to lower incomes, and then as your income passes one point, you get into another tax bracket, and so on. That is what all of us have experienced who have been in a position of working for wages or perhaps even being self-employed, working hard, working extra hard, either working overtime or receiving some kind of a bonus from a client or from an employer.

I know all of us have been in that situation where you feel so good about what you have been able to accomplish. You've received a bonus, be it a \$100 bonus or a \$500 bonus or a \$1,000 bonus, and lo and behold at the end of the month, when you get your final paycheque, you look at it and you find out it's hardly any larger than what it had been the previous month. You wonder: "What's going on here? How can this be that I worked all these hours of overtime or became eligible and received a fairly significant bonus, and then it all seems to be headed down the pipe to the tax man in Ottawa?"

Well, the reason for that is that by receiving that particular overtime or that bonus, in many cases we have crossed that threshold into another tax bracket. So instead of paying 20 percent of our income in taxes, that one extra few hours of overtime has taken us

into the next tax bracket, and that tax bracket may well be 30 or 40 percent. I don't want to get into all of the specific numbers, but we've all been there, and I know that you've been there, Mr. Chairman. How disappointing it is to work so hard to earn additional dollars and then at the end of the month find that they've all found their way to places other than your own pocket.

11:10

Well, what Bill 18 is proposing to do and what this amendment will accomplish is that rather than having all of that money heading down to Ottawa, a significant portion of that money is going to stay in my pocket, is going to stay in your pocket, Mr. Chairman, and it's going to stay in the pockets of Albertans. In fact, \$1.3 billion in the next tax year is going to be staying in the pockets of Albertans. It's not going into the Provincial Treasurer's domain. It's going to be staying within the pockets of Albertans.

The reason it's going to be doing that, Mr. Chairman, is that instead of having progressively larger and larger tax bites coming out of everyone's paycheque, we are going to be establishing a single rate of taxation. We will know from this time forward that the taxes that we pay when we get that \$100 bonus will be, as is determined by the amendment that is before us, 10 and a half percent. So if I get that \$100 bonus, I know that I'm going to have to pay \$10.50 in taxes and the other \$89.50 is going into my pocket. There will be no surprises, no surprises at all, except of course that we don't have control in this province over what the federal government will continue to do.

Although there has been some movement in Ottawa recently, the \$10.50 that goes to the Provincial Treasurer in Alberta will also be augmented by a significant amount of taxes that go to Ottawa. We'll deal with that as citizens of Canada when we next get involved in federal elections, because I'm sure that federal politicians will see what has gone on in Alberta and I'm sure will be able to offer the citizens of Alberta and the citizens of Canada some choice when it comes to taxation policy. All we can deal with here tonight is the taxation policy with respect to Alberta.

So what we have done now is established a single rate, and that single rate is 10 and a half percent. But we've taken it one step further. I talked about the fact that taxation policy needs to be fair. It needs to be equitable, but it also needs to be fair. It also has to recognize that there is some reality in this world. The reality is that like running a business, where you have fixed costs and variable costs depending upon the nature of your business, as individuals we have a certain amount of fixed costs and a certain amount of variable costs. We have tried to establish an amount of money that would relatively equate to fixed costs. It depends upon the size of your family, and it depends upon your economic circumstances.

What this bill does - and it's also included in the amendment that's before the House right now, Mr. Chairman - is establish a baseline. It says that if your income is less than \$12,900, then you will pay no tax. So it says, in essence, that we recognize that there are some fixed costs that should be recognized, and for an individual it's \$12,900. If you have a household, two adults living in the home, you would have double that, \$25,800. We also recognize that if there are children involved in your household, there needs to be some additional personal exemptions for those.

So with a process of personal exemptions in place, a family of four - be it traditional, a husband, wife, and two kids, or be it a single mother and three kids - essentially will have the first 30,000-plus dollars tax free for provincial tax purposes. Those are the fixed costs that I talked about. What this government is recognizing is that there are some costs associated with maintaining a household in this province, and we have said that the government should not be drawing its pound of flesh out of those fixed costs that are involved

in the household. But after that, then, we all recognize that it's necessary for those individuals who have the wherewithal, who can afford it, to contribute to the well-being of society in general. We all feel that we've been elected to come here to the Legislature in Edmonton to approve spending and establish policies that are for the good of all Albertans. In order to do that, one of the sources of revenue that we have is personal income tax.

We said that as of the proclamation of this legislation before us taking effect in the tax year 2001, all income will be subject to a provincial tax of 10 and a half percent. So when I get that bonus or when you get that bonus, Mr. Chairman, or my constituents back in Medicine Hat, where there's a lot of work to be had right now and a lot of overtime to be had – when the weather is good and when the sun is shining, there's a lot of work that can be done – that money is not being taken away in an unfair, inequitable way. There will be one flat tax and one single rate of taxation, and that will be 10 and a half percent.

As a result of that, the bottom line of all of this is not only will we have a fairer system of taxation, not only will there be approximately \$1.3 billion left in the pockets of Albertans so that they can determine how best to spend it and not leave it up to the politicians here in the Legislature, but there will be approximately 190,000 Albertans removed from the tax rolls because of the increase in personal exemptions. The most important thing is that every Albertan will share to some degree in the savings.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Whenever you redesign a tax system or any way of divvying up something that is based on some kind of a formula – after all, income taxes are simply a series of formulas – if you're going to redesign how you collect those taxes or how you allocate that revenue stream to government, one would often assume that if you're going to take something that is not equitable and create something that is more equitable, one would almost come to the natural assumption that some people are going to end up paying less and other people are going to end up paying more. That's how averages work. But the beautiful thing about what we're discussing here tonight is that as a result of reducing the single rate of taxation to 10 and a half percent, as a result of establishing a personal exemption at \$12,900, every taxpayer in the province of Alberta benefits. I think that's the key. That's what Albertans elected us to do. That's certainly what the people in Medicine Hat elected this member to do: to ensure that taxes are reduced in a fair and equitable manner and that the savings from those taxes can be shared by all Albertans.

So, Madam Chairman, I think that that pretty much concludes my comments on this bill. I encourage all members to support this amendment, and I look forward to further discussion as we proceed into third reading.

11:20

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. We will be dealing with the amendments. We deemed the amendment A1 yesterday, and there are parts A and B. Do you wish to deal with it as one amendment, or do you wish to deal with it separately?

HON. MEMBERS: As one.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman, and with apologies to the Government House Leader. I appreciate the opportunity, as limited as it is, to continue my debate on Bill 18 in committee.

I think that it's important for the record to show what's happened. Because of the use of closure the Official Opposition are limited in terms of how many times they can speak in committee. Normally, of course, in committee you can have a real debate. You can go back and forth. You can ask questions. You can expect responses. It's the time, really, when a lot of the work of this Assembly gets done. In other Legislatures and other parliaments what happens is there is usually all-party prestudy of a bill. The committee process works in a much different way. We've even had some examples in this Legislature where, depending on the cabinet minister involved, they've actually engaged their counterpart critic, their shadow minister, in a real debate. I've had the opportunity to work with a couple of ministers on that basis where you can put real input into a bill and help craft a good piece of legislation.

Now, let's contrast that to what's gone on with Bill 18. When it comes to tax policy, this government doesn't want any dissent, they don't want any criticism, and they don't want any real debate. What they do is bring in closure and introduce their own amendment, which they needed to do because they messed up with the original drafting of the bill because they were too anxious to score brownie points ahead of the federal budget. Then they try to manipulate the clock so that we can't have this normal discourse, this normal back and forth, and they really shortchange taxpayers. That's particularly important at this point in time, because this is, after all, a tax bill, and this is going to make a fundamental change in the way that taxes are collected. It's going to make a fundamental change in who pays the taxes, and as we've said so many times, it's going to be fundamentally unfair.

One of the things that's particularly unfair about the government's whole tax initiative is the way that time after time after time it rewards the wealthy. Now, earlier in debate I pointed out both in Bill 18 and Bill 19 this disparity between the rich and the poor, and I have to continue to scratch my head as to why this government wants to continue to exacerbate that disparity. In Bill 19 debate this government actually, unbelievably, defeated the first amendment, which would have led to the synchronized elimination of both of the so-called deficit elimination taxes. This government actually wants to continue to pick the pockets of Alberta taxpayers by collecting these deficit elimination taxes, which of course aren't needed to correct the deficit anymore because we don't have a deficit. We haven't had one in the province since '96.

I know that the Acting Provincial Treasurer and the Minister of Government Services have a disagreement about whether or not there's still a debt in the province. The Minister of Government Services says that there can't be a surplus because we still have this net debt, but the Acting Provincial Treasurer was talking to the media the other day and bragging that the projected surplus in the budget is going to be even higher than the \$713 million that was projected. So I would hope that they'll have a cabinet meeting one of these days and will actually sit down and decide whether or not there's a debt or a surplus or what it is. I think Albertans would be very interested to know if in fact this government is no longer projecting a surplus. I wonder what that would mean in terms of the economic cushion that was built into the budget. It could just be a matter of convenience, you know. Never let the facts get in the way of government initiative; right?

While the government moved against the amendment on Bill 19, they used the artifice, they used the construct, they used the excuse that the reason they weren't going to support the amendment on Bill

19 was because, in their minds, it would somehow extend the powers of the province to continue to collect this so-called deficit elimination tax. Well, there is a section in Bill 18 which has to be amended to make our amendment on Bill 19 fully implementable. To operationalize the amendment to Bill 19, you would have to also deal with the proposed section 89(3) in Bill 18. The current tax act talks about a "flat rate tax payable under this Act for a taxation year by an individual," and for the years 1988 and subsequent that flat tax is .5 percent. Now, we've talked about this flat tax for a fair bit. We know that all Alberta tax filers have to pay this flat tax. It doesn't matter where you are in the income spectrum. The government of Alberta wanted to reach once more into your pocket, take some of your hard-earned cash out of your pocket, and pay off the debt.

In 1996 the government promised they were going to eliminate that tax, but then they changed their mind in 1999. In fact, they broke their promise. Now, we want to help the government keep their word, so in order to help them keep their word, we'd like to put them back on track. In order to do that, we have to now move a subsequent amendment to Bill 18. So wait for it, hon. Government House Leader and Minister of Justice and Attorney General for all of Alberta. I want you to hear this first, and I want you to be absolutely clear what's happening here.

Bill 18 as currently worded refers to that .5 percent flat tax in a section that reads as follows: Section 3.04(1)(b) and 2(d) are amended by striking out "and subsequent taxation years" and substituting "to 2000 taxation years." We would like to see that changed. What all of that means is that this government would continue collecting that tax. We don't want to see Albertans have to pay one more penny of that unfair tax for one extra day, so we would like to see it removed now so that they don't have to pay it starting in the current taxation year. In order to accomplish that, as I said, in spite of the government voting against the required amendment in Bill 19, we can give them one more shot to do the right thing.

So I would like to move that Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, be amended as follows: that section 89(3) be amended by striking out "to 2000 taxation years" and substituting "to 1999 taxation years." That's my amendment. I understand it's being distributed right now. Should I continue or should I pause, Madam Chairman? I'm seeking your direction.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will deem this amendment A2.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I think it's actually A1, but I know for the record we have to call it A2, so that would be okay. We can call this amendment A2. So number two and trying harder.

Madam Chairman, it was very difficult for me to explain what it was that the Government House Leader was on about. You know, I had the opportunity earlier tonight to do some campaigning in the Edmonton-Highlands area. We're in the middle of this by-election. You know, people want to talk about lots of things during this by-election. They want to talk about the government's dismal record when it comes to health care, of course. They want to talk about the mismanagement of our public institutions, whether it be public education or other public institutions.

They are also very alive to this government's plans for their tax dollars and how the government plans to extract those tax dollars. I kind of test drove the government's position with a few voters up in Edmonton-Highlands earlier today. I said: so how do you feel about continuing to pay that .5 percent flat tax, that surcharge that you get hit with? They said: well, I'm not sure what you mean; could you explain a little bit? I said: you know when you fill out your Alberta tax payable calculation, when you fill out that form and right at the end of it you have to multiply whatever it is you owe to

the Provincial Treasurer by .5 percent. They said: yeah. I said: well, you know, that was supposed to be a temporary tax, a surcharge. They said: yeah. I said: it was brought in in 1987 by then Premier Getty. They said: yeah, and we had a big deficit then. I said: right, but we don't have a deficit now. And they seemed to know what the Minister of Government Services doesn't know. They answered by saying: well, that's right; we have a big surplus now.

11:30

I said: that's right; we have a big surplus, so how do you feel about paying that tax? They said: okay; now we understand the question. We, of course, don't feel very good about paying that tax. We think it's sort of highway robbery. Why would we have to pay this extra tax?

I said: well, I can't answer that question. Do you know that there's another surtax? They said: what's that one all about? I said: well, if you earned taxable income that was a little bit higher, you'd have to pay an 8 percent tax on top of it all, another surcharge. They said: really? I said: yeah. They said: well, good news that we're not in that income tax bracket. I said: yeah, but you know what? For the people that are in that income tax bracket, the government has decided they're going to remove that special tax. They're going to stop picking their pockets.

They said: well, why would they do that? Why would they do favours for the rich? Why would they do that? Why aren't they going to do me a favour? What has this government done for me? I said: I can't answer that question. I can't explain the government's strategy.

Earlier today in question period we had some puffball question asked to the Acting Provincial Treasurer allowing him an opportunity to stand up once again and try to sell the government's flat tax plan. He talked again about how this government wants to bring real relief to low- and middle-income Albertans, and I'm scratching my head because there's such a gap between words and deeds. We have the Acting Provincial Treasurer saying we want to do something for low- and middle-income Albertans, but we have the government voting against amendments that would remove this unjustifiable, this unsupportable so-called deficit elimination tax.

The government can't argue that they can't afford it. This amendment would in essence accelerate their tax plan by about six months. It might mean a loss of \$100 million to \$150 million to the provincial Treasury, but that pales in comparison to the fact that oil is still so much higher and gas is still so much higher than what we had predicted it to be. For every dollar of increase in oil, we're up \$130 million or \$140 million in the provincial Treasury, so we've already taken care of the offset. It certainly would be affordable to remove this deficit elimination tax now, and it is indefensible to say that we're going to remove the one for the wealthiest Albertans first and leave the one that the rest of us have to pay.

I hope the Minister of Justice and Attorney General is now crystal clear what the intent of the Official Opposition is. It is Alberta Liberals who want to bring some tax relief to low- and middle-income Albertans. It is Alberta Liberals who would like to hold the government accountable for their 1996 election pledge and their 1996 budget promise. It is Alberta Liberals who are actually trying to keep the government's feet to the fire on their pledges to do something meaningful when it comes to the pocketbook and the bank account of those Albertans who, quite frankly, struggle between paycheques and sometimes find themselves with a little bit of month left over when the paycheque has run out.

It may not sound like a lot of money to this government that likes to talk in terms of lots of zeros and billions and millions and all their

wealthy friends in the boardrooms. It may not seem like a lot of money, but from my perspective I think of the voters I met tonight in Edmonton-Highlands; I think of the men and women I spoke to on the picket lines around a couple of health care institutions. I can say to them: "Would you rather save a few dollars? Would you rather have that money back, or would you rather put that money in the pockets of the Acting Provincial Treasurer?" And they look at me in disbelief that I don't know the answer to that question. Of course they would like to have that money back in their own pockets. They would like to be able to use that money to help feed their family and to help pay for their mortgage or their rent. They'd like to have that money back so maybe they could even enjoy a little bit of recreation or leisure, and they don't think they have to give that money to the Provincial Treasurer.

I am asking my colleagues in this Assembly to take a good look at this amendment to clearly understand what it will accomplish, and for those of you who are my Conservative colleagues I would say this. Your government has made the pledge. Your government has taken this pledge to deliver some relief to low- and middle-income Albertans. They've said they were going to do it. They've said they were going to do it in this House. They've said they were going to do it in their budget documents. They've said they were going to do it in speeches. They've said they were going to do it in press releases. This will give you an opportunity to tell the government, to tell the cabinet that you would like them to keep that pledge, that you'd like them to keep that promise.

So I would ask for some nonpartisan consideration of this amendment. It is clear what it tries to do. It does not fundamentally alter the intent or the principles behind Bill 18. We still have lots of arguments in terms of the flat tax. We still have lots of arguments in terms of how this government has confused tax reform with tax relief. We still have lots of other issues with government tax policy, but on this one little narrow issue we can certainly join together and bring some needed relief to low- and middle-income Albertans.

Madam Chairman, I need to ask your advice about something. My amendment is on the floor. It's a motion that's on the floor. I'm anticipating that even though my arguments have been as persuasive and as powerful as I know how to make them, they may not carry the day. We may be faced with having to have a recorded vote. Standing Orders of course provide for a recorded vote requiring a 10-minute division, 10-minute bells. We could, by unanimous consent, reduce that time. Is it possible to ask for unanimous consent prior to calling the question on my amendment?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Certainly.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I would make this request then. If there's not clearly unanimous support to bring this kind of tax relief to Albertans, if there's a necessity to go to a recorded vote, I would ask unanimous consent that the time between bells be reduced to one minute.

[Unanimous consent granted]

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much. I'm hoping we won't have to go there. I appreciate the co-operation, but just in case.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: One clarification, hon. member, that the chair should ask. Will that be division bells all the way through?

MR. SAPERS: Well, just on this. We may have to seek unanimous consent again.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You were just speaking about the amendment?

MR. SAPERS: Just on this amendment.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. I should clarify that. That was on the amendment.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. Thanks for that clarification.

Madam Chairman, I don't have a lot to add. I think the amendment speaks for itself, the intent speaks for itself. I don't want to repeat myself. I don't appreciate redundancy in the Chamber. There may be other speakers on this amendment; we'll see. But I'll let those comments stand, and I look forward to the vote.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Well, thank you, Madam Chairman. I don't intend to speak very long on this, but I would like to know if in fact I can get some clarification on this amendment, because one of the issues that had to be dealt with was the fact that many of the tax changes that were being proposed were being done in the time frame they were being done because the federal government required up to a year to program the changes in their computer. So to me the obvious question with respect to this amendment is: is it even possible to do this with respect to what may be possible to do on the federal side with respect to the year that it takes to do this? It's just really a question of clarification more than anything.

11:40

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. I appreciate the opportunity to just clarify that.

Well, you know, I understand there are several agreements. There's the master TCA, the tax collection agreement, and there are the ongoing negotiations in terms of delinking and the printing of the new forms and all that. But to the hon. member who just asked the question, it's a legitimate concern. However, it's easily addressed. You see, the government of Alberta has already moved to accelerate parts of their tax plan. They've already moved to accelerate the part that removes the 8 percent surtax that the higher income earners pay. Certainly if they could move to do that, it would be a simple matter of just putting in one more line of code or one more calculation in the cell of the spreadsheet to also make a similar amendment in any of the computer programs for the .5 percent flat tax as well. If they could accelerate one without incurring those technical difficulties, it is beyond a doubt a fact that they could accelerate the other and bypass the same technical difficulties. So I'm certain it doesn't really pose much of a serious problem for all the good minds that work in the federal and provincial revenue departments.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:41 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	White
Gibbons	Sapers	

Against the motion:

Boutilier	Hancock	Marz
Broda	Herard	McFarland
Cardinal	Hlady	Nelson
Clegg	Johnson	Pham
Coutts	Jonson	Renner
Dunford	Klapstein	Severtson
Evans	Langevin	Smith
Fischer	Lougheed	Stelmach
Fritz	Mar	Tarchuk
Graham		

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 28
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I really appreciate that. Now, we're back just talking on the bill; right? There is nothing else on here? There are no amendments? Thank you.

Madam Chairman, I did want to talk a fair bit about seniors this evening. Our deputy whips know how important it is that seniors are benefitting from Bill 18 as well.

AN HON. MEMBER: They built this country.

MR. HLADY: They built this country and they built this province, hon. member.

Before I get into that, I just want to mention a little history in regards to the Leader of the Official Opposition and some comments that have been mentioned. It was a few years ago. There were some comments made in regard to the need to reduce taxes. I'm quoting from the *Edmonton Journal*. She mentioned: if we are going to reduce taxes, we have to reduce spending first. That was the comment the Leader of the Official Opposition had made a few years ago. When she made those comments, that was fair.

Today where would we be looking at doing those cuts from our spending? Where would she suggest we cut today? Would she suggest that we cut in the area of health or education? Why would you possibly want to see us doing that? Madam Chairman, over the last number of years we've gone through a process. We've got our spending under control, and now we're getting our taxes under control by reducing taxes and making it a much more friendly environment for all people to enjoy a health tax environment.

Getting back to seniors, Madam Chairman, we've been hearing a great deal in this Assembly about all the different groups of Albertans who see changes under Bill 18 – the high-income earners, the low-income Albertans, those who are single, those families where one parent stays at home or both work – but I really think it's important to address how these changes will affect the seniors that we were just speaking about. The seniors did build this province. They made it what we have today, and we should be respecting them by allowing them to have more free income to make things happen for themselves.

More than any other group of Albertans, I'd say seniors have a unique perspective on this province and the way it's run. They've

helped Alberta grow into the vibrant province we enjoy today. They've seen its challenges and changes over the years, and they've seen how the various policies, various governments have created and affected things. That includes the high taxes we've been subject to. I'm sure seniors would agree that it is time they tasted some of the rewards for their hard work over the many years. Bill 18 and the new single-rate tax will do this for them.

11:50

You know, Madam Chairman, seniors, too, have paid a lot of taxes over the years. No one can deny that they've contributed, so there is no reason why they shouldn't see a break now. They should have some of their hard-earned cash back in their pockets today. Seniors will no longer be penalized by bracket creep. They will benefit from indexing the basic and spousal exemptions to the Alberta consumer price index like other Albertans, but they will also benefit from indexing the age amount and the pension amount. This means that seniors won't see their taxes increase over time simply because their fixed incomes increase by the amount of inflation.

Under Bill 18, with the new amendment that will move the single rate to 10 and a half percent, Madam Chairman, and raise the basic and spousal exemption to \$12,900, seniors are going to save in all income brackets just as all Albertans will save under this plan. For example, a single senior making \$20,000 will see a 62 percent tax cut. A senior couple earning \$40,000 will see a 57 percent tax cut. These are just a couple of examples, but you can see that we're not talking about small numbers here. We're not talking about pennies. These people are going to save some pretty significant amounts of money.

This is especially important for most seniors, many of whom are on fixed incomes. Any amount of money they can save is money they need for their priorities in their lives today, whether it's fixing up their homes they've lived in for many, many years or whether it's being able to buy more food, fixing up their car. They may want to go on a trip somewhere. Whatever they need, Madam Chairman, this allows them to have more flexibility to take that money.

I'd say that most of the people in this Assembly today still have their parents and grandparents around and have a chance to experience the wonderful thing it is to have that family. Family is a very, very important part of life in Alberta. Giving our family members, our friends, and our friends' family members a chance to have more and do more is the thing that we should be doing. It's the right thing to do, Madam Chairman.

You know, last year the United Nations declared the year as the International Year of Older Persons. The theme they chose was Towards a Society for All Ages. Of course, 1999 is now over, but I think this theme is something we should really continue to try and foster in this province. We should work towards a society that benefits all ages and all age groups, just as we should work towards a tax system that benefits all age groups and income levels.

You know, as a government we are well aware of the contributions our seniors have made, and we have really done some great things in terms of seniors' programs, especially lower income seniors. We've done what we can to make sure seniors have a comfortable life, and it especially applies to seniors who need the extra help. We introduced the Alberta seniors' benefit, with increased benefits for low-income seniors, and the special needs assistance programs for times of extreme need. In Budget 2000 we added a 10 percent cost of living adjustment for seniors' benefits. This is something that we heard when we were out talking to the seniors. We knew what they were looking for, they needed some more, and therefore we increased the benefit.

Now, Madam Chairman, we've recreated our tax system through Bill 18 so that all Albertans will benefit, including seniors. For a

long time there has been talk about what more we can do for seniors, especially considering our aging population. I really think this is going to be a great benefit for seniors because it puts more money back into the pockets of Albertans, including each and every senior citizen.

Governments around the country have been receiving the call for lower taxes. We're doing something about it here, Madam Chairman. We know the pressures that we're seeing happening as we see a wonderful leadership race happening across this country. It's going to be exciting because I think we're seeing the pressure put on the federal government in Ottawa that there is a demand from Canadians across this country to see lower taxes.

This pressure will only continue over time, and as we see the changing economy happening and things moving along, I think that by the fall, with the predictions of a potential federal election, there's going to be a real race, a race between the federal Liberals and the future parties that are chasing this. It will be an economic picture, pushing for lower taxes across this country.

AN HON. MEMBER: Is this relevant?

MR. HLADY: Sure it is. This is relevant, Madam Chairman, and the reason it is relevant is because we're talking about lowering taxes, lowering taxes in this province and lowering taxes in this country. Taxes need to be lowered in this country because in this bill the most we can affect is about a third of the tax position for Albertans. The federal government controls two-thirds of that. Hopefully Ottawa is listening to the debate that's going on here in Alberta and realizing the importance of lower taxes to be fair to the rest of Canadians across the country. We're doing the best we can for Albertans here.

MR. SAPERS: But, Mark, you don't want to be fair with the flat tax, and you don't want to be fair with the surcharge.

MR. HLADY: The flat tax is the fairest form of tax, Madam Chairman, and it's a wonderful thing. It's the best thing we could possibly have out there. The opposition continues to come at it and say that it's not fair. It's the fairest form of tax because the harder you work and the more money you make, the more taxes you pay, but you aren't penalized incrementally for working harder and making it not worthwhile.

In the examples I used yesterday when I spoke to this, Madam Chairman, were nurses working inside our hospitals today. They're putting time in and overtime in. What they're doing is making more money, but they're not making more money because they get moved up into higher tax brackets. That's the wrong thing to be doing. It's no reason to take their money. What they end up doing is having to take time off because it doesn't make sense to take the money and use it for their families. It's the wrong way to be doing things. The flat tax makes it fair. It allows them to keep more money, decide what they want to do, and have more money in their pockets at the end of the day. That's why this is the way to go.

Madam Chairman, governments around the country have been receiving the call for the lower taxes, as I was just explaining. Here in Alberta we've not only heard this call; we've taken decisive action to do something about it. We've created a new tax plan that the rest of the country has definitely taken notice of. When Ottawa followed our lead – partially; we'd like to see them go a lot further – we re-examined that plan to make sure every single Albertan is still receiving the benefits.

We had originally set our flat tax plan at 11 percent, but when Ottawa came out with their new budget, and they had looked at it and had changed their tax plan, it was important that we brought our tax plan down a little lower so that it would be fairer for all Alber-

tans. We didn't want to see anyone not receiving a good benefit from the changes.

Madam Chairman, again coming back to some comments that I hear around the room, I think in the race between certain parties out there federally we're going to see more pressure coming and pushing down the level of taxes at a federal level. That will benefit not only Albertans but all Canadians. Speaking for Albertans, that will only allow this economy to be stimulated more. We'll see more jobs created here. We'll see more wonderful things happening in every sector of the economy.

The technology sector is very acutely aware of the need to have lower taxes. We see the brain drain happening. We see people going down to the U.S. We know that they'd be moving this way if we saw the lower tax rates, making it more advantageous for these workers to be here. To continue on in regards to that, I know that the Minister of Innovation and Science has been working very hard on creating a technology sector that would be very willing to see the lower tax rates, because they know that we can see this part of the economy be what it can be. In the past year we've seen \$135 million invested in technology in this province. That's a very, very small number as an industry. The industry needs to be looking at a billion dollars a year in this province, and that's something we've been working towards. With the lower tax rates we're going to be able to see this sector grow, and we're going to see people attracted from all over North America.

Madam Chairman, I'm looking forward to seeing this bill come into effect because I know that all Albertans are going to benefit from it. Even the Liberals are going to benefit from it, so this is a really great thing.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

12:00

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It is after midnight, so due notice having been given by the hon. Government House Leader under Standing Order 21 and pursuant to Government Motion 21, agreed to May 24, 2000, under Standing Order 21(2), which states that all questions must be decided in order to conclude the debate on Committee of the Whole consideration of Bill 18, Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, I must now put the following questions to you.

[The clauses of Bill 18 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:01 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Boutilier	Hancock	Marz
Broda	Herard	McFarland
Cardinal	Hlady	Nelson

Clegg	Johnson	Pham
Coutts	Jonson	Renner
Dunford	Klapstein	Severtson
Evans	Langevin	Smith
Fischer	Lougheed	Stelmach
Fritz	Mar	Tarchuk
Graham		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	White
Gibbons	Sapers	

Totals:	For – 28	Against – 8
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[Motion carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Madam Chairman, it's my honour and privilege to move that the committee now rise and report Bill 18.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following: Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

(continued)

Bill 18 Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is certainly a privilege to be able to move Bill 18 for third reading on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer.

With this step, with this third reading of the bill and hopefully final passage, perhaps even tonight . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: A valiant try.

MR. HANCOCK: Madam Speaker, you're always thinking I'm joking about these things. With the possibility of passing Bill 18 into law very soon, Albertans are taking one step closer to tax freedom, one step closer to being delinked from the insidious federal

tax process, one step closer to really having some tax relief finally in Alberta.

What I would really like to know but I guess I'll never know is whether if this House in committee had supported the amendment brought forward by Edmonton-Glenora, that would have been enough to bring the Liberals onside to supporting true tax reform or after supporting that amendment and adding that amendment to the bill, whether that would have been the lever which would put them over the top and into tax reform and into supporting Albertans' tax freedom, moving up our tax freedom day so that Albertans can keep money in their pockets, so that Albertans can continue to grow with the economy, can continue to improve with the economic growth of this province.

Madam Speaker, as has been said in this House – and I don't want to belabour it, but it bears saying at least one more time – with Bill 18 every person in this province will benefit. Albertans at every income level will pay less income tax because of Bill 18. One hundred and ninety thousand Albertans will be relieved from the burden of paying a provincial tax.

Bill 18 is a long and complex bill, but it boils down to some very important concepts. One hundred and ninety thousand Albertans will no longer pay provincial tax. Why? Because the personal exemption is being raised to \$12,900. As important as that, the spousal exemption is being raised to the same amount as the personal exemption, which is very important for families in this province. It's very high. It's going to take 190,000 Albertans – did I say that already? – off the tax rolls.

So it's hard to believe that the Alberta Liberals would oppose such an important bill. It's hard to believe that the Alberta Liberals would want Albertans to pay more tax. It proves once again that they share the same skin as their federal cousins. The idea is to tax Albertans to death. [interjections] I'm being encouraged to continue.

Madam Speaker, I just wanted to say one more time what an important bill this is. Originally the personal exemption level was to go to \$11,620, but with the amendment passed in committee, \$12,900 is the personal exemption, \$12,900 as a spousal exemption. Can you imagine what that will mean to single-income families in this province, to low-income earners in this province? That is going to mean a huge and immediate tax break.

So in combination with Bill 19, which passed third reading earlier this evening, and now with Bill 18 coming into effect, Albertans at low income, middle income, and high income are going to have the real advantage, the Alberta advantage. They're going to be in the best position of anybody in this country with respect to tax. They are going to maintain that tax advantage. They're going to have the benefits of their hard work. They're going to have the benefits of the economic activity that's happened in this province. The brain drain is in reverse. The brains are going to be coming back, because this is and it's going to be and remain the best province in the best country in the world to live.

So, Madam Speaker, I think every member in this House should support Bill 18. I can't understand why the Liberals would oppose it. They should be onboard with it. They should vote for it tonight, but I know they don't want to vote for it tonight. They want to have one last opportunity to show Albertans they're not in favour of tax cuts. They want to speak on it longer to tell Albertans why they shouldn't get tax breaks and why they shouldn't have the best tax advantage in the world.

So, Madam Speaker, in order to accommodate that, I'm going to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 18.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 12:19 a.m. on Thursday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 25, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/25

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue our work under Your guidance. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to rise today to introduce some members seated in your gallery who are visiting Edmonton and Alberta as part of a countrywide visit to Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Councillor Domenico Marozzi of the General Council of Italians Abroad is seated in your gallery, as well as Mr. Valter Esposito, a representative of the Italian Consulate office of Edmonton; Mr. Leopoldo Sorgiovanni, a representative of the Committee of Italians Abroad and director of Italian radio programming at CKER here in Edmonton; Mr. Arnaldo Zanon, who is a representative of the Committee of Italians Abroad and president of the Italian Seniors Association. They are all accompanying Senator Massimo Villone of Italy, who is visiting the Italian communities of Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver in order to deal with the issues of Italian citizens living abroad and seeking their representation in Italy and their rights as Italian citizens.

I've had a wonderful visit with the group. We welcome them to Edmonton and to Alberta.

They are accompanied by the assistant to Mr. Gibbons, our MLA for Edmonton-Manning, Mrs. Loreen Kabanuk. I would ask that the Senator and the honoured guests in your gallery please rise and receive the customary warm welcome of the Alberta Legislature.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 154 people from Grande Prairie, Sexsmith, Fairview, Didsbury, and Edmonton. This will bring the total to almost 74,000 people who have signed a similar petition saying:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling a petition bearing a total of 330 signatures calling upon the Legislative Assembly to maintain Kananaskis Country in a natural state, to deny development approval for the projects proposed for that region, and to create a wildland park in the Spray and Kananaskis valleys.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would present a petition signed by 162 citizens from Edmonton, Spruce Grove, St. Albert, Calgary, Turner Valley, Red Deer, Cold Lake, Sherwood Park, Vegreville, and Millet urging the government to allocate funding "specifically to Speech-Language Pathology and Occupational Therapies based on children's needs."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the *Calgary Herald* strike is 200 days old, and on this day I'm pleased to present a petition to the Assembly signed by 394 Albertans. The petition reads as follows: "We, the undersigned, petition the assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table the requisite number of copies of a document entitled Maintenance Enforcement Program and Tracking System Assessment: Requests for Quotations in response, I believe, to Written Question 50.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table copies of the *Status Report*, the quarterly newsletter of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and also *Status Alert*, which is a progress report on the Alberta disability strategy being developed by the Premier's Council. Anybody interested in obtaining copies can obtain them by calling 422-1095.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table the requisite number of copies, being five, of information on the compliance inspection program developed by Alberta Environment to ensure that companies comply with our environmental legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague for Calgary-West I would like to table five copies of 13 letters and e-mail from constituents of Calgary-West regarding the need to

address low wages of child care workers in day care centres in Calgary.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table my letter to the Prime Minister of Canada reflecting concerns for my Vietnam-born constituents and expressing my strong feelings against the deplorable hasty execution of a Vietnam-born Canadian citizen sentenced and held in a Vietnamese prison, especially in light of an amnesty granted a few days later on the 25th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam war. In the letter I also strongly object to any kind of illegal activity inside, between countries, and any business operation that would bring social harm to Canada, Vietnam, or any other country.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a spreadsheet which compares the Tory flat tax proposal with the Liberal tax proposal, which almost looks like a flat tax, with a truly progressive tax proposal that's prepared by the New Democrats.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the required number of copies of two letters today. The first is from Robbin Yager of Calgary; the second, from Evelyn Otte of Calgary. Both parties are opposed to the proposed Spray Lakes development by Genesis Land Development Corporation.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, with permission I table five copies of the fee schedule that students and schools must pay to access practice copies of the achievement and diploma exams by the Department of Learning.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a statement regarding judicial independence and the role that MLAs ought not to play in relation to interfering in court decisions.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter written by Mr. Paul Cetinski to the Premier regarding his questioning of the credibility of certain comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview regarding his position on Bill 11. It goes on to question the government's position on free votes and the protection of public health care.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

1:40

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I am pleased to table a report from the web master of www.garydickson.ab.ca that shows that in the period of May 18 to May 23 there were 324 visits, and 63 percent registered their support for a progressive tax system and not a flat tax system.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an article here from the *Sunday Times*, a British newspaper, sent to me by Senator Nick Taylor, which outlines again the dangers towards one's health care in terms of a private health care system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of Health Matters, a negotiations update issued today, May 25, 2000, by AUPE. These employees are Alberta's working people, and they are the salt of the earth and deserve a fair settlement from this government.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is from the *British Medical Journal* entitled Decentralised Health Care in Canada. It indicates that "the rise of for-profit organizations . . . may further threaten access to care and service . . . as money goes to profit-taking rather than health services."

The second is an article also out of the journal. It's entitled Quality of Care in Investor-Owned vs Not-for-Profit HMOs. It indicates that "compared with not-for-profit HMOs, investor-owned plans had lower rates for all 14 quality-of-care indicators."

My third is a compilation of three documents put out by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, Health Matters and On the Line, indicating the inequities in pay as well as the reasons for the current strike.

Thank you very much.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members two gentlemen who have given long and loyal service to this Assembly who are retiring from their service to you and to all who enter this Chamber. After lengthy careers in the Edmonton Police Service Mr. Cliff Tetzlaff and Mr. Cliff Chapman came to the Legislative Assembly security staff in 1990. Both have demonstrated diplomacy, tact, and good humour, coupled with a smile and a fair but firm approach, which has made them liked and respected by all members and staff.

Mr. Speaker, on this their last day with us we thank them for their devoted service to this parliament and wish them well in their retirement. Cliff Tetzlaff and Cliff Chapman are seated in your gallery. I'd now ask them to rise and receive the grateful thanks of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a great thrill to introduce students that come and visit the Legislature. I don't very often have that pleasure and that thrill, but today I'm absolutely delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 41 students from Isabelle Sellon school in the beautiful Crowsnest Pass. These students are here today to observe and to participate in Alberta's government. They are accompanied on this long trip by two teachers, Mrs. Gail Ancelet and Miss Debbie

McKinlay, along with five parent helpers: Mrs. Bonnie Dingreville, Mrs. Elaine Zaitsoff, Mrs. Anna Oliveri, Mrs. Sonya Coccioloni, and Miss Chelsea Somerville. They are seated in the members' gallery. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the ESL 3000 group from my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. With us today are 14 students and their supervisor, Penny Deonarain. These students are in the international program at the University of Alberta and are here as part of a study program to learn English as a second language. Many already have degrees in their particular field of study. They come to Alberta and Edmonton from Mexico, Japan, Korea, and many other countries. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. First, I'd like to introduce a person seated in the members' gallery, a person that's very well known to the agriculture community in the province of Alberta, Mr. Phil Hyde. He's the person working for Agricore in the corporate affairs division and traveling extensively throughout the province of Alberta. I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Speaker, the second group of visitors that I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly are 24 visitors from Two Hills high school. The grade 10 students are accompanied today by Ms April Dery, bus driver Bill, and most importantly, perhaps his last visit to this Assembly as principal of Two Hills high school, Mr. Ron Rudkowsky, who will be retiring at the end of this school term, leaving behind him a tremendous legacy of not only good principalship but also an excellent person in both communities of Willingdon and Two Hills. We wish him all the best from the Assembly. I'd ask them to rise in the public gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My last introduction, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two constituents who are seated in the members' gallery, Mrs. Bev Homeniuk and Shauna Bennett. Shauna is a second-year business administration student at NAIT and will be spending the summer in our constituency office as our STEP student. Shauna is very fortunate to have as her mentor and role model Bev Homeniuk. Bev has been managing our Vegreville-Viking constituency office since I entered politics in 1993. She's a very valuable member of our team and provides a tremendous service to my constituents and, quite frankly, no doubt makes me look better than I actually am. I would ask Shauna and Bev to please rise in the members' gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Dr. Eugene Meehan, QC, president of the Canadian Bar Association. Dr. Meehan's time here in Alberta was spent from 1978 through 1986 as a professor of law at the University of Alberta, where I attended and took classes from him. I am most grateful for

the instruction that he has given me in the past and continues to give me now. I ask that he now rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly today a group of hardworking members of AUPE local 42, mental health therapists and support staff, all of whom provide much-valued service to people in their care with exceptional commitment and skill. They're all seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Workforce Labour Dispute

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's words to the other western first ministers were: go home; mind your own business; look at your own legislation and stay out of ours. [interjections] It's interesting to see the government members respond and clap for that. Apparently the Premier wants the same level of input from first ministers that he wanted from Albertans. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell us exactly what is so important in Manitoba that the Premier is not dealing with the largest single strike in the history of this province?

1:50

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Premier of this province is fulfilling his duties as leader of this government at an important conference with other Premiers. I can assure you that he has been in very regular contact with both Alberta Health and Wellness and Human Resources and Employment. Both of us as ministers have been in regular contact with his office. He is certainly concerned about the bargaining and labour action and is working in concert with everyone to bring this labour dispute to a successful conclusion.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the reason the Premier has apparently washed his hands of this strike because he has given up on public health care in this province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think this is hardly the case. The Premier has led in terms of making health a priority of this government. We have committed a great deal of additional funding to the health care system. Most recently we have made a number of additional announcements. We have matched basically the money that came in a very disappointing amount from the federal government and added that to the funding for the health care system to address waiting lists and other issues within the health care system. The government is, as I said, making health care its top priority, and it's demonstrating that through the commitment of resources and through the taking of major initiatives to continue to improve the system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. I'd just like to supplement. Certainly the negotiations have been going on almost steadily since Monday. The

parties to the dispute have been basically on 24-hour shifts, but more importantly so have the mediators and the staff from Human Resources and Employment.

I want to assure everyone that the Premier and the Premier's office have been kept up to date and current on all matters, and we have had discussions with the Premier at numerous times about this particular issue. Under the government system powers are delegated to ministers. It's our responsibility to take care of these situations and of course to keep the Premier advised.

THE SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the real reason why this Premier ignored Albertans' input on Bill 11 because he's decided to now promote private health care throughout this province?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker. We very clearly stand for a publicly funded and publicly administered health care system in this province. We are providing resources, putting more focus on the overall welfare of that particular system than I think any other province in Canada at this point in time. We are certainly committed to having the best possible health care system in the country, and that is being demonstrated by action.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: My questions are also to the Minister of Health and Wellness, Mr. Speaker. Given that some of the Albertans affected by the strike have been working for 10 to 15 years and are still receiving entry-level wages, where is the incentive for these people to stay in this profession and for others to even enter it?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the course of negotiations the relative position of different occupational groups in the health care system is being addressed in terms of the negotiations. The health authorities have been open to reasonable adjustments in that particular area, and as the Leader of the Opposition across the way certainly knows having been involved in wage settlements and so forth, it is impossible for me to get into the details of those negotiations and not advisable here in the Assembly. So those types of questions, I suppose, can be answered.

But quite clearly, Mr. Speaker, we have made the area of health care a priority. We want to be fair to the people working within the health care system, and we are. There is a process of negotiation that has to be respected.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that this minister said yesterday that "we are significantly increasing the education opportunities in our postsecondary institutions for the health workforce in this province," why would these newly trained workers stay in Alberta when they can receive better wages and more respect in other provinces and countries?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I will use an example which is not under negotiations currently but was not that long ago in negotiations. Let's take the nursing profession in this province. We have not that long ago concluded a comprehensive agreement with nurses in this province. Their ranking in terms of pay scale, as I recall, is about second in this country only to Ontario.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the other costs that people have to pay, such as taxes, I think you'd find that the take-home pay

of, for instance, nurses is right at the top of the remuneration in this country. So that hardly, I think, indicates that we are not providing an attractive environment from a financial standpoint here in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can this minister explain what the government's rationale is for LPNs, licensed practical nurses, in long-term care being offered less than licensed practical nurses in acute care?

MR. JONSON: Well, the provincial government is not the direct negotiator here, as the member well knows. I can recall back at the time that she was minister of health in this province her making statements to the health authorities or their equivalent at that time that they could not expect any additional funding; they would have to work out their own labour agreements with nurses and other practitioners. That's on the record, Mr. Speaker. I can certainly prove that.

So I think, Mr. Speaker, that there is a process of negotiation that has to be respected. It's my understanding that the whole issue of differentials relative to the positions on the grid is being addressed.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

School Classroom Sizes

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to my questions on May 16 the Minister of Learning claimed that schools could address their class size problems through the Alberta initiative for school improvement program. Teachers and administrators have expressed concern about the minister's response. While over \$170 million available through the initiative for school improvement program sounds like a lot, when distributed over three years and the total student population in this province, school board officials and principals will end up with maybe \$130 per student per year extra. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Will the minister confirm that under the Alberta initiative for school improvement program a school would have to have a population of at least 400 students to add just one new teaching position to that school?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta initiative for school improvement is a program that will be putting \$66 million per year into the school boards. It is up to the school boards to make a decision as to where this money is spent. This is not money that is spent equally in every school. It is up to the school boards as to where the importance of that particular school board lies. It's up to the school boards to put that money where they feel it is important.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, when I became minister, flexibility was something that the school boards wanted. They wanted the ability to address funds, to put money where they felt the important needs were. This is a program that has been universally accepted and that has been universally met with great approval from all school boards and teachers.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, how are smaller schools, especially elementary schools, most of which are well under the 400 mark, to reduce their class sizes given that the initiative for school improvement program clearly is inadequate for these smaller schools? Where is their flexibility?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. Leader of the Opposition is not listening. The funding is given to the school boards so that the school boards can allocate the funding where they feel it is important in their school jurisdiction. A lot of the school boards feel that it is important to put this money in one particular area. Sixty-six million dollars, \$170 million over three years is a lot of dollars.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, since giving private schools money from the Alberta initiative for school improvement would mean even less money for the public school system to reduce their class sizes, will the government be giving the private schools the benefit of the Alberta initiative for school improvement funds?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, again, it is very unfortunate that the hon. Leader of the Opposition does not read press releases, does not read any of these things. If she did, if she had the privilege to read the actual communique, she would realize that \$66 million was given to the public school system and an extra \$2 million was given to the private schools so that they, too, could take a look at pilot projects that would improve education in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Health Workforce Labour Dispute (continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last few days this government's policy to completely ban the strikes in Alberta hospitals has once again been shown to accomplish nothing other than to add to the bitterness and acrimony in health care labour relations. You can demonize trade unions, which this government does as often as it can, and trivialize their efforts to seek fairness for workers, but you cannot change the fact that this government's policies are to blame for the current state of affairs in the health care sector. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister please explain how or why it is fair that low-paid health care providers like LPNs and psychiatric care aides have seen their pay go up by a minuscule 5 percent over the last eight years, while the pay of senior officials in the minister's department has gone up by at least 40 percent, eight times as much? Would you please explain that?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, we are in a position right now where negotiations, I expect, will resume with respect to the overall labour issue facing the province. I would like to refer the question to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment in terms of the particular stage that the bargaining is at. But we do have a set of labour laws which I think are as fair and reasonable as any province. We are following through as a government on bargaining in the context of that structure.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how can the government, on one hand, claim that it's doing all it can to resolve the current labour dispute while simultaneously preparing to proclaim Bill 11, which sets out a blueprint for contracting out more health care services to non-union private-sector providers and employers?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think, first of all, that with respect to collective bargaining this has taken place in this province

last year and the year before in the different sectors of health care and education and industry. It goes on every year in this province, and this is another very important round of bargaining that is taking place. It has no particular relationship to Bill 11, although the member is trying to drag this in.

I would remind the hon. member that the provisions of Bill 11 set out some very important criteria for regional health authorities to consider when they are looking at awarding contracts. One of them is that there be an overall cost benefit to the system. I don't think that can be argued with. We do want an efficient system.

Secondly, there are a number of other criteria with respect to the openness of contracts and so forth, Mr. Speaker, which provide I think a very open and criteria-based system for awarding contracts.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Will the minister commit to repealing section 94 of the Labour Relations Code, which creates an unhealthy labour relations atmosphere in the health care sector, and instead appoint a representative and independent panel to review the circumstances under which health care workers should be allowed to legally strike?

MR. DUNFORD: Absolutely not will I repeal the section that the member has advised. Again in this Assembly today we have yet to hear about the innocent third party. There is no concern being expressed on the part of any of the opposition members. We have people that are in care that need attention. Their families are being put through a series of situations. They are worried about their loved ones.

This is an illegal strike. The people that are involved in providing these services are important to the system. They are not only important to the system, they have been deemed to be essential to the system. As an essential service they do not have the right to strike. The strike that is ongoing at the present time is an illegal strike.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I wanted to supplement the answers that have been given to questions raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition and the third party. There was reference made as to . . .

Speaker's Ruling **Supplementary Responses**

THE SPEAKER: Please, hon. minister. Right now we have a question that is a supplemental question from the hon. leader of the third party. We've missed the time to supplement another question. Please proceed.

Health Workforce Labour Dispute (continued)

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the context of the question raised by the leader of the third party I wanted to clarify one thing as to this government's concern over the situation right now. Our Premier, unlike what was mentioned earlier, is in fact still at the Premiers' meetings in Manitoba. The Premiers have been meeting today. In fact, they've just broken. They've been meeting today with governors from the United States and will be staying there for the rest of the day to do a commemorative ceremony.

I want to make sure that this Assembly is very much aware that our Premier has been in constant contact with our ministers on this issue and has sent out a message to encourage everyone back to the

bargaining table. So please rest assured that our Premier is very much involved in this and is encouraging people to get to the table quickly.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Francophone Education in Calgary

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A new Francophone education authority will be in place in Calgary in September 2000. Catholic Francophone parents in Calgary wish to remain under the Calgary separate school board's jurisdiction to ensure that a curriculum reflecting their beliefs is offered to their children. Currently there are 501 Francophone children enrolled for September 2000 with the Catholic board in Calgary. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Why can't these parents' wishes be met under the new regional Francophone board's mandate?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that excellent question. What the parents in the Calgary Catholic school board are asking for is both Francophone and Catholic education.

2:10

Mr. Speaker, what I'd like to do today is quote from canon law, which Bishop Henry from Calgary sent to me.

1 A catholic school is understood to be one which is under the control of the competent ecclesiastical authority or a public ecclesiastical juridical person, or one which in a written document is acknowledged as catholic by the ecclesiastical authority.

2 Formation and education in a catholic school must be based on the principles of a catholic doctrine, and teachers must be outstanding in true doctrine and uprightness of life.

And 3, which is probably the most important, is

No school, even if it is in fact catholic, may bear the title 'catholic school' except by the consent of the local ecclesiastical authority.

That is canon 803.

Mr. Speaker, what this means is that unless the bishop in Calgary, the ecclesiastical authority, authorizes the Francophone school to indeed be a Catholic school, these children cannot have a Catholic education unless they are under the Calgary Catholic school authority.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the minister again. Why hasn't the Calgary separate board, as it represents a large number of Francophone families, been part of the consultation process to develop the new Francophone curriculum for this September?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, this is the interesting enigma about this issue. I will now quote from the Constitution. Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that

the right of citizens of Canada under subsections (1) and (2) to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in the language of the English or French linguistic minority population of a province

- (a) applies wherever in the province the number of children of citizens who have such a right is sufficient to warrant the provision to them out of public funds of minority language instruction; and
- (b) includes, where the number of those children so warrants, the

right to have them receive that instruction in minority language educational facilities provided out of public funds.

Mr. Speaker, more important is that section 23 has been interpreted by the Supreme Court of Canada on three occasions. The key to this interpretation in Alberta is that when a Francophone authority is established to serve an attendance area, as it has been for Calgary, the responsibility to offer a Francophone program that satisfies section 23 of the Charter of Rights can be exercised only by that authority, because it is the board elected by Francophone electors. So according to the interpretation of the Supreme Court only the Francophone authority in southern Alberta can supply a Francophone education. The Calgary Catholic can supply a French language education but not a Francophone education.

MRS. LAING: My last supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is also to the Minister of Learning. Is it possible to allocate one of the newly identified surplus Calgary public school board schools for the regional Francophone board to use?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Certainly it is possible to do that. As a matter of fact, in Calgary the Calgary public has successfully negotiated a transfer of one school to the new Francophone authority. This is the Francophone school that the Calgary public was running before, and that has been transferred over.

The issue in this debate is over the Francophone and catholicity of the school jurisdictions. As in my response to the previous two questions, the issue is around catholicity of these schools and whether or not the Francophone authority can adequately provide a Catholic education to its students.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Student Achievement Practice Tests

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much importance is accorded by the government to student performance on achievement and diploma examinations. Access to old exams for practice purposes was available free on the Internet until recently, when a user fee was imposed. My question to the Learning minister: what additional funding will be provided to schools to cover the cost of accessing the practice achievement examinations?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The practice achievement tests are available on the Internet. If the teachers want the practice tests, they are available for a cost of roughly \$3 to \$4, which covers the copyright costs of those practice achievement tests.

DR. MASSEY: How is the government ensuring that these exams are available to all Albertans, not just parents and schools with money?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I believe I just said that they are available over the Internet and that the majority of areas in this province have the ability to access the Internet. If the teachers do not have the ability to access the Internet, it is available in hard copy, as I stated, for \$3 to \$4, which does cover the copyright costs.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, given that the exam questions are created and compiled by the government of Alberta and licensed to a private company, how much is the government going to make on the new user fees?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, absolutely nothing. It covers the copyright costs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Air Canada/Canadian Airlines Merger

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the recent merger of Air Canada and Canadian Airlines I'm hearing and reading more and more about problems with regards to access to airlines, capacity, reduced flights, and increased fares. In light of this very apparent problem, especially in the high tourism season in Alberta, my question is to the Minister of Economic Development. Can the minister explain if this merger is having a direct impact on the economy of our province?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to move from a discussion of both canon and copyright laws to the laws of aeronautics.

My answer to the hon. member is simply yes, this merger is having a very negative impact on Alberta as it is elsewhere across the country. Overall capacity has been reduced, making it difficult for passengers to book both inbound and outbound flights from and to Alberta. This is not the message we want to be delivering to both the business community and certainly the tourists who are looking at booking flights during our upcoming high season.

I'd like to very quickly provide the House with some numbers from April, the first month the two airlines operated on a combined schedule. Air Canada's traffic jumped by 23 percent, but concurrent with that it added only 15 percent capacity. In Calgary, Mr. Speaker, Vancouver to Calgary flights, for example, are down to 10 from 22 per day, and Toronto to Calgary flights are down from 20 a day to 15, and for Calgary and Edmonton there's been a reduction in capacity of 23 percent and 14 percent respectively.

We have concerns in the long run, Mr. Speaker, that reduced competition and reduced capacity will lead to higher fares and certainly have a negative impact on our economy not only from a business perspective but also from a tourism perspective.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given this negative impact, what does the Minister of Economic Development plan to do now in this near-monopoly situation?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, at the recent provincial/territorial meeting there was unanimous agreement that competition within and access to airline services on a regional, national, and international basis in the short term was critical to not only providing but improving levels of service to tourists and international business travelers. All ministers will be having follow-up discussions in the near future and will be conveying that position to the relevant federal ministers.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we're going to hold the federal government to its word. It has created an airline ombudsman, and that individual is to report to the Minister of Transport regularly regarding difficulties and questions that arise as a result of the consolidation that has taken place in the industry. Also, the federal Competition Bureau is to have increased power to prevent anticompetitive behaviour when

it suspects Air Canada of acting as a monopoly, and we will certainly be monitoring the activities of that bureau very closely.

Just the other day I had the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Industry, Mr. John Manley, and we expressed our concern regarding the present status of airline services in this country at that time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the federal Minister of Transport has suggested that if significant competition doesn't emerge within Canada itself, he'll look at allowing foreign carriers to compete domestically, does the minister endorse this concept?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, if it would result in increased capacity and lower fares for both tourists, international travelers, in fact all travelers, then certainly, yes, we would endorse that. Alberta is an open and free market, and we encourage competition in all sectors.

2:20

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, we are already hearing complaints from some international carriers who feel the merger and the corresponding federal legislation will cost them passengers and result in increased fares from reduced competition. For example, Air Canada recently increased its charge to one international carrier for the Halifax-Toronto portion of a Halifax-Toronto-London flight from \$793 to \$2,323.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, no.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, it did happen. That's an increase of \$1,530.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that laws exist in virtually every other country that require local carriers to offer passengers of their international competitors fares comparable to those they offer their own customers. Now, I'm not suggesting that we put in place that legislation at this point in time. Nevertheless, if this trend does continue, perhaps the better solution is to simply open up the field to international competition, and let them compete on a fair and equal basis with Air Canada.

Personal Income Tax

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, in 1996 in the budget the government promised to get rid of one of two deficit elimination taxes: the .5 percent personal income flat tax that it had originally imposed on Albertan taxpayers back in 1987 to help eliminate the deficit. Well, the deficit is gone. Thanks to strong petrochemical markets, the innovation and the hard work of Alberta's private sector, and windfall gambling profits, this province hasn't had a deficit for several years now, yet all Albertans remain burdened with the .5 percent personal income flat tax that seems to be favoured by this government even though the government has rushed to remove the high-income surtax, an action that'll benefit so very few. My questions are to the Acting Treasurer. Will the Acting Treasurer explain to the low- and middle-income taxpayers of this province why the removal of the provincial surtax, which benefits just high-income earners, was more important than removing the provincial income flat tax, which would have benefited all Albertans?

DR. WEST: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we had a challenge back in '92-'93 to remove \$3.4 billion from overspending in this government, and we worked hard to do that. During that

period of time, we had made a commitment that this 8 percent surtax, which was for deficit elimination, would be removed. So in due course, after we had balanced the budget, paid off the net debt, and now are working on our first mortgage in the province of Alberta – and I would say that when the figures come out in a month or so, we will take the next part of the mortgage down significantly, probably making a five-year payment in one.

As we looked at our budgets going from the time that we had come in with seven balanced budgets plus surpluses, we said: first of all, let's look at the social programs that we have in the province. So we brought in a budget last year that acknowledged a 21 percent increase in health care, and since then we've also acknowledged that we will be putting back some \$178 million into up-front needs in waiting lists and in retraining people and in doing other things.

In education we said that we would work on 2,500 new teaching positions and assistants as well as increasing the budget there. I think it's some 18 percent over three years. At the same time, we looked at children's services. We looked at the law and order programs, protecting the environment. Agriculture: we brought out a program because the federal government stopped at our border.

After we got through all of that we said: now that we've got our house in order and we've addressed the services, we're going to start taking out the commitment in those taxes. First, the 8 percent surtax . . .

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me try to focus the Acting Provincial Treasurer's attention. Why has the government rejected Alberta Liberal amendments to both bills 18 and 19 that would have eliminated this extra tax on Albertans, especially in light of the huge budget surplus which the Treasurer is already talking about? Why did you eliminate the high-income tax first?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, what they've done here the last couple of weeks is try to insinuate to Albertans that there is something wrong with a single rate of tax. They have also come in and said: we'd do a better job by bringing the .5 percent out first, then taking the 8 percent surtax out. Well, Mr. Speaker, that's just a mug's game.

The other thing that has become evident in this whole process is that they don't understand the tax system. They've misled Albertans. They do know that the .5 percent is part of the \$1.3 billion and starts falling off on January 1, 2001. The 8 percent surtax they know is coming off this year. The blended between the 8 percent, the .5 percent, and going to a single rate will take \$1.3 billion out of the tax system. They don't even like the single rate of tax.

Now, here's a glowing irregularity in their projections so that people understand what they do know about taxation. They had come out and said: you know, what we would do is that people up to \$100,000 would have a 10 percent single tax, and anybody making \$100,000 would be taxed 12 percent on all of it. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has said: yes, we would tax the first \$100,000 at 10 percent and anything over that at 12 percent.

Speaker's Ruling Brevity Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer. This only begets a problem. Brevity is important. The purpose of question period is not to extend the debate. This afternoon on the Order Paper I do believe there is third reading of a particular personal income tax bill, and we're now involved in a

debate in the question period. The dilemma here is that I have a whole series of private members who still have questions.

So if you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, have a very brief question which leads to a very brief response from, I presume, the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer, then we'll allow the next one. But anything more than that, I'm cutting the questioner off before the question ever gets to the responder, because I've got other private members who have important business too.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm with you.

Personal Income Tax (continued)

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, why does the government still want the money generated from the .5 percent personal income flat tax to be in the pockets of the Acting Provincial Treasurer instead of in the pocketbooks of Albertans? Why is that?

DR. WEST: Well, all I can continue is the answer I was giving about how they do not understand the tax system to start with.

Now, I was saying that the person from Edmonton-Glenora here had said at one point in time in *Hansard*: no, no, we didn't mean to take 12 percent on the whole \$100,000; we were going to take 10 percent on the first and 12 percent after. But that's not what the Leader of the Opposition had said in bringing forth their tax plan.

So what that means, assuming that this is really the way the Liberals intend the system to work, is that a tax filer with a \$99,999 income would pay \$8,643 in tax while a filer with an income of \$100,000 – that's \$1 more of income – would pay \$10,372. So by making \$1 more, that poor taxpayer would pay \$1,729 more in tax. One dollar more. Do they understand this tax system at all?

THE SPEAKER: I'd really do a courtesy to both the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora and the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer. I'm actually going to send you copies of the Blues in anticipation of further debate on this matter later on in the afternoon.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Midwifery Services

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. I am told, Mr. Minister, that registered midwives are frustrated. Ontario and British Columbia midwifery services are publicly funded. Alberta midwives are leaving this province to practise where their client base does not have to pay out of pocket for midwifery services. Why is Alberta dragging their heels? When is Alberta going to ensure that we thus fund midwifery services?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I'd just like to point out – and this goes back to the point at which we worked to have midwifery licensed in this province. I remember a presentation being made to the health standing policy committee. It was a public presentation as I recall. The question was asked of the spokesperson for the midwives: do you expect to be established on a fee-for-service basis such as doctors are? The answer was a categorical no. She said: we're here to make the case for the licensing of midwives. And that has occurred.

2:30

The second point I'd like to make is that birthing services are covered, Mr. Speaker, through the physicians and through the

hospitals and regional health authorities of this province. So it should be very clear that we are honouring the public nature and public funding of those services.

We have, however, as a department taken the lead, and we have over the past two or three years put over a million dollars into projects across the province where we are encouraging RHAs to look at and to work with midwives and to integrate their services into those of the regional health authorities and their hospitals and other facilities.

So we are encouraging this to become part of the system, but we're doing it through a process of projects showing that the relationships can be developed and that it will in fact work.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, in light of what you just said, is it not a two-tiered system when physician-attended child birth services are funded, yet midwife-attended services are paid for by the client?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, we're not looking for opinions here.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to point out, as I did, I think, in my first answer, and just emphasize that birthing services to mother and child are covered, are insured in accordance with the Canada Health Act. The delivery approach for those particular services is through the physicians and through the regional health authorities and public health services of this province. So that is certainly provided.

The issue here is the need – and we are working on this, and we are committing dollars to this – to work the midwives into the overall health care team within the health care system through the regional health authorities. We have pilot projects going. We have made awards through the innovation fund to projects across the province to show that this will in fact work.

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Minister, are you or is the Alberta government aware of the number of registered midwives that are indeed leaving this province? What can be done to halt this trend?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not have any specific figures. As I've indicated, we are both through direct funding by Alberta Health to regional health authorities and through recent awards that have been made, one for the whole area of northern Alberta, another in the WestView regional health authority, through the innovation fund – pilot projects where the use of midwife services will be integrated into regional health authorities are going forward, and it is our hope that these projects will prove to be successful and will be copied in other parts of the province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mental Health Services

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The crisis in mental health care caused by this government began long before the strike of the provincial Mental Health Board workers. With Alberta's growing population there is and there will continue to be a growing demand for mental health services, yet numerous mental health advocates' reports point to the fact that this government's community support for mental patients is either inadequate or nonexistent.

To the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that community mental health services are just as important as institutional resources, why have so many resources gone to the institutions while community mental health services and agencies go without?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, that is about the third time the hon. members across the way have asked the same question, so I'll have to give the same answer.

First of all, over the last three to four years – and it's illustrated in the budget figures going back to I think about '95, '96 – we have doubled our overall commitment in the budget to the whole area of community mental health in this province. We have certainly increased institutional care by a very, very small percentage compared to that.

The other thing is that I maintain and I think it is still a valid point that we do need hospital care for the mentally ill in this province, and that has to be maintained. But there has been no bed expansion as far as the hospitals are concerned. In fact, there's been somewhat of a reduction.

Now, the other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that there are a number of additional initiatives under way with respect to community-based mental health care. We have worked very closely with the school health initiative. A very important component of that particular initiative through Alberta Learning is to provide mental health services as well as physical health services. We have recently announced an expansion of the overall sleep apnea treatment program. I could go on through a list of other initiatives where we are demonstrating our expansion and improvement of community-based mental health.

MR. GIBBONS: To the same minister: given that this government failed to increase support for community mental health services, will the demonstration project for community mental health at the Edmonton Northeast health centre have the resources it needs to continue?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the basis for the hon. member's question is inaccurate, but I would like to point out that as far as I know, the mental health services that are associated with the Northeast primary care clinic and project are continuing.

MR. GIBBONS: They end at the end of May.

Given that the existing community mental health services were insufficient to cope with the prestrike demand, who is looking after the patients being discharged from provincial Mental Health Board facilities during the strike?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Human Resources and Employment I think stated so directly, we do have a strike situation, and there are innocent third parties involved in this overall action. The regional health authorities and the provincial Mental Health Board are coping with the situation as best they can. But the fact of the matter is that the people are not on the job doing the work as far as community mental health is concerned in many cases, and that is the reality of this type of bargaining situation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Environmental Laws Compliance

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard about Alberta's tough environmental standards and laws, but recently

we've heard allegations of lack of enforcement. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister inform the House about what actions he is taking to ensure industry, municipalities, and others comply with the environmental protection and enhancement legislation?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of the Environment. [interjections] The hon. Minister of Environment has been recognized.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last year we've undertaken a number of different initiatives that will improve Environment's ability to both monitor and enforce compliance. Earlier this afternoon I tabled a brochure on the compliance inspection program. This program is helping to ensure that our facilities are meeting the requirements of their approvals under the legislation.

The focus of the program is on unannounced inspections, which can include all the aspects of a facility's approval. The inspections concentrate on ensuring that the holders of environmental approvals are operating within their approvals and also within the law, and areas of noncompliance are subject to strict enforcement actions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Can he give us some idea of how successful the compliance inspection program has been?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, during the fiscal year ended 31 March 2000 we conducted over 800 proactive compliance inspections. These covered industrial facilities, municipal facilities, and also waste management facilities in the province. To date over 90 percent of areas of noncompliance that we identified had been corrected quickly and effectively. I'd like to point out that many consisted simply of minor administrative issues that might relate to things such as record-keeping and proper signage. These matters were identified in writing for the industries and facilities involved and in most cases were corrected within 30 days of being identified.

2:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is also to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister describe for the House how effective he has been in following up areas of significant noncompliance?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, for more serious issues such as waste storage limits or storage methods and improper operation of pollution control equipment, they do require further action and investigation. But I believe our program has been well received by the majority of facilities that have been inspected and is a good indication of the commitment that industry and local government have to this notion of shared responsibility.

Investigations and the resulting enforcement actions have been enhanced under the act. In the past fiscal year actions that have been taken range from things as simple as a warning letter to administrative penalties, enforcement actions, environmental protection orders, tickets, and in the most serious of cases prosecutions. Mr. Speaker, these numbers of enforcement actions indicate that we are being vigorous in applying our compliance program, and the numbers confirm this government's commitment to active protection of the environment of the province.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we will call upon the first of three hon. members to participate in Members' Statements today.

Responsible Citizenship in Calgary-McCall

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I left my home in Tanzania, East Africa, and immigrated to Canada some 25 years ago to become a Canadian. I came to respect what this country offered me and my family. I've always believed that Canada is the best place in the world to live, and this has been confirmed by the United Nations for the past six years.

In my earlier days I was involved with a group called Society for Promoting Responsible Citizenship. The society's primary goal was to help new Canadians understand the value of being responsible Canadians. Since my election in 1995 I've always promoted initiatives that help diverse ethnic communities live side by side as responsible citizens.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, my riding is one of the most diverse constituencies in Alberta. Many refer to it as the United Nations of Alberta. Regrettably, on February 12, 2000, my constituency was subjected to the worst kind of Third World tactic, denying people the opportunity to exercise their democratic rights by such actions as intimidation, blocking access, personal threats, et cetera. For a moment I thought I was living in Little India. Unfortunately, I was the victim and lost my nomination.

Today may be the last opportunity I can have in this Assembly to recognize and thank the residents of Calgary-McCall for their support and for giving me the opportunity to serve them. I also want to thank my colleagues, staff, and yourself for your continued support. In particular, I want to thank those who stood by me and who did not condone the unfortunate Third World tactics used on February 12, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, I will always reject, resist, and speak against those who attempt to turn northeast Calgary into Little India.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Spring Session Overview

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As this session comes to a close, I rise today to make a few closing comments on the results of our deliberations. Never before has it become so apparent that a government has completely lost touch with the citizens it claims to represent. When a government must resort to the heavy and authoritarian hand of closure to push through legislation that is overwhelmingly opposed by the population, the government has lost touch with its citizens. When a government must again resort to closure to push through unfair and expensive tax reforms, it has lost touch with its citizens.

As I was campaigning on the doorsteps of Edmonton-Highlands, I noticed two things. First, Albertans are feeling frustrated that their government is just not listening, despite the fact that the citizens have raised loud voices. Second, Albertans value the unique and principled positions put forward by me and my party. It's been a great privilege to take over from Pam Barrett and lead the New Democrats in this Legislature and to put forward the distinct positions of Alberta New Democrats.

Where the Tories have come up with a flat tax, Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has come up with an almost flat tax that's more expensive, more confusing, and riddled with mistakes. Where the

Tories have allowed private, for-profit hospitals to dip into the public system, the Liberals have advocated allowing private, for-profit hospitals to exist alongside public ones. Where we have argued that schools and hospitals need more attention than do tax cuts, the Liberals have put forward a private member's bill that would threaten stable funding for social programs by subjecting tax increases to a provincewide referendum. The New Democrats have real alternatives, consistent alternatives, and effective alternatives for the concerns Albertans have today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Representation in St. Albert

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recognition of the opportunity accorded to me as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, I rise to speak today of my understanding of the trust that the voters of the constituency of St. Albert placed in me. It is a trust that I hold as sacred. It is also a trust that I take seriously. I believe it is my responsibility to listen carefully to the voice of my electorate.

The challenge in that latter sentence lies in the recognition that not all my constituents want the same legislation. That is where the challenge exists. I believe it is my responsibility to reconcile many viewpoints into what is the best for all. When the situation is such that public opinion is polarized, the challenge requires even more serious discernment. As a government member of this Assembly I believe I have been entrusted with the responsibility to shape, to evaluate, and to strengthen the legislative position that is most appropriate in the interests of Albertans.

While I am speaking of trust, I want to take this opportunity to say openly that while others can say what they think, they cannot tell me what they think I think. So I wish to conclude my few remarks today by saying this. I trust that the people of St. Albert do know that their government MLA represents their best interests. This representation is informed and solid. It is neither blind nor weak.

head: Projected Government Business

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed with a heavy, heavy heart that I stand to ask, perhaps for the last time, pursuant to Standing Order 7(5) what we might anticipate for next week.

Thanks very much.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I think the anticipation of the hon. member is correct. By way of notice to the Assembly I wish to advise that when the Assembly adjourns past the anticipated hour of 5:30 p.m. today, dealing with third reading of Bill 18, it's the government's intention to adjourn pursuant to Government Motion 5, agreed to by this House on March 7, 2000.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 25

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move Bill 25, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000, for third reading.

I would only add by way of comment in so moving that I appreci-

ate the comments made by the members of the opposition in second reading and Committee of the Whole, wherein they acknowledged the sincere effort that's been made by members of this government to discuss those items which are included in the statute, and that we've had a very productive way of dealing with those issues and getting the miscellaneous statutes before the House.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is the last opportunity to comment on the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, and I wanted to get up quickly before one of my colleagues did, frankly, simply to confirm the support of the Liberal caucus for the miscellaneous statutes and to acknowledge the changes in terms of children's services and the changes to the Colleges Act. This is a positive thing.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Alberta College of Art and Design is one of only four institutions in Canada providing the kind of instruction that it does. It now will have the opportunity to confer not only a bachelor of fine arts, which was the case before, but will be able to confer a degree of design. This is something that the Alberta College of Art and Design has looked for for some time. The college is excited about being able to confer a degree that appropriately designates the kind of instruction, the kind of training and education that its graduates have had. It will likely enhance the employment prospects for graduates, so the Liberal opposition was happy to support that.

There are changes to the Election Act which hopefully will facilitate the provision of data and information in anticipation of provincial elections.

The Legal Profession Act represents a number of changes that have had substantial input from the self-governing profession, the Law Society of Alberta. Those changes for the most part give the governance and those charged with the governance of the Law Society of Alberta some additional flexibility.

One of the things I might mark is that I'm proud of the legal profession. Whenever there has been conflict in terms of the changes between the interests of an individual practitioner and the interests of the community, the Law Society has very clearly decided in a way that's reflected in the statute to put a higher emphasis on the protection of the public. That's a significant type of decision to have been made by the Law Society benchers. I think it's significant that self-governing professions recognize that first and foremost their responsibility is not to further the interests of their individual members, but when it comes certainly to the legal profession, it is to enhance the public interest. So I'm proud of the stand taken by the legal profession in that respect.

The changes to the Pharmaceutical Profession Act are minor indeed.

The Motion Picture Development Act section repeals the act, when the corporation ceased to exist January 1.

The Social Work Profession Act recognizes the Alberta College of Social Workers. This is something the social workers in the province have wanted.

The Health Professions Act. Although the changes are numerous, for the most part it clarifies wording, corrects and updates references.

The Child and Family Services Authorities Act. There's been certainly significant input from agencies and professionals involved in the field, and that represents a salutary step as well.

So for all of those reasons I know that every one of my colleagues,

as far afield as Edmonton-Meadowlark and as close as Edmonton-Glenora, is happy to support the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act. [interjection] While I have this mandate and this express authority from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, I want to say again that we're happy to vote in support of the miscellaneous statutes. We only look forward to the time when legislation is designed so darned efficiently that we can reduce the multiple subsequent amendments.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a third time]

Bill 18 Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

[Adjourned debate May 24: Mr. Hancock]

22. Mrs. Nelson moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that debate on third reading of Bill 18, Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, shall not be further adjourned.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:56 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Hierath	Oberg
Boutilier	Hlady	O'Neill
Broda	Jacques	Shariff
Cardinal	Johnson	Smith
Coutts	Laing	Stevens
Day	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Ducharme	Lund	Taylor
Dunford	Magnus	Thurber
Friedel	Mar	Trynchy
Graham	Marz	West
Haley	McFarland	Yankowsky
Hancock	Nelson	Zwozdesky
Herard		

Against the motion:

Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	MacDonald	Sloan
Dickson	Massey	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	White
Leibovici	Pannu	

Totals:	For – 37	Against – 14
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[Government Motion 22 carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members are quite aware that there are things that happen outside this House and Assembly, and in a few hours we're all going to reacquaint ourselves with that fact. There are some things that are happening in Canada, and it may change the membership that is in this House. So I'd like to call on the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. This may be my last time as Speaker to call on him.

3:10

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much for the opportunity to spend a few moments to address Bill 18, and also in the context of what you were saying, that should events unfold the way that I hope they do, this in fact may be my last time in this hallowed Assembly, and I say that with sincerity.

Just taking the next couple of minutes to address, first of all, Bill 18 itself. I can tell you that across the country, not just in this province, everywhere I go people are talking about a sense that there is going to be a new age of respect for taxpayers and for hardworking people. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, they are looking forward to that possibility at the federal level with great anticipation, and Alberta has set the tone for that level of respect. We are going to see the possibility of ushering in at the federal level as well as the provincial level a brand-new approach of respect to hardworking people. So it's with great satisfaction that I can give my unquestionable support to Bill 18, to seeing it become a reality.

Over the last 10 years we have seen in Canada, when we look at personal income taxes, that Canadians have a sense that they're not getting ahead, and this would include Albertans at times. In fact, they have not been. In the United States the after-tax real income growth in the last 10 years has been on average 18 percent, and in Canada it has been minus 2. Those who feel they've been spinning their wheels have indeed been spinning their wheels.

A presentation to the federal government, related to some of the principles that we're talking about with Bill 18, indicated very clearly that an average family making approximately \$40,000 a year with two dependents, taking the average cost of living, weighing that in across the country and averaging it out, would in fact at the end of the year have to borrow \$640 to be able to make ends meet, and that is not the way that governments should be treating hardworking families and hardworking individuals. So all the concepts and principles that are articulated so clearly in Bill 18 are heartily endorsed not just by myself but I believe by a majority of Albertans and by Canadians from coast to coast.

We are ushering in a new era in the 21st century, Mr. Speaker, a new era of respect that is going to see an invigorated economy, that is going to see the ability of our young people, should they want to stay in Alberta, should they want to stay in Canada – they will be able to. If our young people want to go anywhere in the world to pursue their hopes and their dreams, they should be able to do that, but the fact is that young people and entrepreneurs and hardworking people today as I speak are feeling compelled to leave because of excessive taxation. That is a shame, and that is a national tragedy. This bill and this approach and the principles in this bill will address that and will allow for Canadians to see this country to be the great beacon of hope and the great beacon of opportunity that it has been through most of the 20th century, moving into the 21st century. So I can give my hearty endorsement to this bill and to the principles endorsed here.

I might say, Mr. Speaker, before I sit down, that after 14 years in this Assembly I think I share the reflections of a person of a far greater stature than myself, one Winston Churchill, who commented on democracy and reflected that it is not always a pretty business, that it has its problems and it has its difficulties. Certainly as we think back over time and the deliberations in this Chamber, we know it has not always been pretty and it has not always been without its difficulties, but democracy is of prime consideration in my heart and in the hearts of Albertans, and in this place democracy has been served over the years and will continue to be.

I'm so honoured to have had the opportunity to work with colleagues of the stature of the people that are in this particular Assembly, with the people who serve us in this Assembly, and I can

even say with the opposition, who serve well as critics. They serve the role well and from time to time have offered advice which has been taken by this member and by others. The people of Alberta will continue to be served as long as we recognize that with all its shortcomings, with all its difficulties and challenges, with all the times when we temporarily lose respect for one another in our deliberations, sometimes verbally, we will continue to fly that flag of democracy, a flag which will be flown with pride, a flag which we will continue to rally to protect if it ever comes under duress and one under which I have been honoured and proud to have been a member for the last 14 years.

With that, I conclude my remarks on this sunny Thursday afternoon. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and we thank you for your patience.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SMITH: Is this your exit speech?

MR. DICKSON: I'm encouraged to deliver my final speech in the Assembly as well, but no. Hon. members will simply have to reserve that treat for perhaps a later date.

Let me start off by wishing the Member for Red Deer-North every success in his chase for the leadership of the hard right in the dominion of Canada. We're all watching with keen interest, because there clearly are a number of Albertans and there clearly are a number of Canadians that subscribe to the views that this member genuinely believes and I think has been quite consistent to during his time in the Legislative Assembly. So we'll all be watching with keen fascination as he progresses.

I want to right now offer to this Member for Red Deer-North whatever assistance he would like in learning the opportunities of serving as an opposition legislator. On behalf of a party that for 74 years has honed its skills in opposition, has developed its technique in terms of penetrating examination in question period and rigorous scrutiny in the tough challenge of budget estimates, I want to be able to share whatever expertise we've been able to acquire collectively, and I say this on behalf of my caucus. There are opportunities that this member has never been able to have in opposition. He will revel. I am confident that he will revel, as we revel, in the excitement of serving in the role of Official Opposition.

Now, let me make this observation, Mr. Speaker. It was rich with irony that the Member for Red Deer-North stood up and made his ode to democracy. He may not have been listening when his seatmate just moments before stood up to invoke closure yet again in this Legislative Assembly. It's interesting to be able to invoke Winston Churchill and his leadership and support and promotion of debate in the House of Commons in Westminster – you know, the use of closure there has been treated sparingly. It's been treated as the absolutely massive weapon that it is. But in this Legislative Assembly in the course of just the last three months at least four times closure has been invoked, and as many times we've seen a form of closure in terms of: that the previous question be now put.

I'd have to say that the last three months have witnessed probably the most sustained and ferocious assault on democracy that we've ever seen in the province of Alberta. We've seen it in this Assembly. We've seen it in the attempt with that \$8 million budget Public Affairs Bureau to influence public opinion, to close off public debate. I think what we have seen is an anatomy of a kind of thought control. Sometimes I think of the movie *Stepford Wives*, you know, that a government would want to program its citizens, as

we saw in that classic movie, to be able to accept uncritically the things that that \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau churns out.

Albertans are smarter than that. In fact, when our colleague from Red Deer-North talks about what Albertans support, I'm not sure he's checked in at www.garydickson.ab.ca recently. I know he has a web site, and I know he would be interested in visiting mine. In fact, maybe we could establish hot links. We probably appeal to different constituencies, but if he checks my web site, he'd find that there's a bit of an explanation about the tax issue that "is very much in the news." I've asked people visiting my web site to identify whether they support (a) "a progressive tax system with high income earners paying at a higher rate" or (b) "a flat tax system with all taxpayers paying at the same rate regardless of income."

Now, there were 324 visits to that web site between May 18 and May 23, 2000. You know what's interesting? Of 324 visits 63 percent of the people who visited the web site opted not for the flat tax but for the progressive tax. Of the 324 63 percent identified an interest in and support for a progressive tax system. For all I know, these are all people in Red Deer that are visiting the web site to register their concern. They may be from other Calgary constituencies. I don't know exactly where they're from. But it's interesting that in that short period of time, from the 18th to the 23rd, 63 percent in fact disagree with the former Provincial Treasurer, the Member for Red Deer-North, and say: he doesn't speak for us.

3:20

I'd like to say that far beyond that small sampling of opinion, I as a native Albertan think most Albertans intuitively understand that a flat tax system is an unfair tax system. I'm proud to be part of a caucus that at least joined debate on the issue of tax reform and came forward with a constructive alternative. I've always had some misgivings when people talk about tax reform, because it seems to me that it's sometimes code for starting to reduce your support for a strong public health care system or support for public education or support for necessary social services, the kinds of things that make our communities strong and vital, that recognize that everybody doesn't start at an equal place. That's the mythology of the hard right. That's the mythology that everybody starts in exactly the same position and that if you just work hard enough, you too can be a millionaire and be paying the high-income surtax. Well, the reality, Mr. Speaker, as you well know, is that it's something far, far different than that.

When I talk to constituents, it's on the basis that tax cuts only make sense if there's adequate funding of your public health care system, of your public education system, of postsecondary education institutions. I remind people again that if you rank the 25 largest universities in Canada, salaries at the University of Calgary, in the city that many of us here are from, place that institution about 23 out of 25. There continues to be a disconnection where the mission of the Minister of Innovation and Science is to have those high-skill, high-tech, high-paying jobs in the province, yet we continue to see underfunding of postsecondary education, underfunding of public education, and the evidence on the streets of the cities of this province tells us there is clearly underfunding in public health care. You know, tax cuts have to be in the context of adequate funding in those other areas.

My difficulty is: is it not sort of a huge paradox that we have 10,000 health care workers, some of the lowest paid anywhere in Canada for the work they do, who have taken to the streets of this province as we debate giving more dough back to people who are already high-income earners? It just seems to me that every sort of fairness bone in my body starts quivering when I start thinking that we're not reflecting some of the reality that we deal with in our

communities and in our constituencies and right around this province.

I preface my comments about Bill 18 with the very strong caveat that any kind of tax reform has to assume adequate funding of core services and cannot be used and must not be used as an excuse to then start further cutting funding or restricting funding to those core services with the view that we just develop more private alternatives. That's not the answer Albertans want. If this government thinks that they are onto something hot, something flashy and important with this bill, I think they are as sadly mistaken as they were on Bill 11. They will find, when they run into that brick wall, that somewhere along the way the political antennae of the current government has become kind of frayed and fuzzy and is just not picking up the vibrations, not picking up that undercurrent of tension that most of my colleagues see when we go to meetings and talk to folks and read the e-mails. Members in government may be able to discount that and say that those people just don't understand. I mean, it's the same message as with Bill 11 – right? – that people just don't understand the bill: just read the bill and you'll find the answer. Well, the more people find out about these things, the more unhappy they are.

If there was any advantage, I suppose, to Bill 11, it was that it forced people to stand up and fight for public health care. In the same way, I predict that with Bill 18, with somewhat of a delayed impact because we didn't have the four-month run-up to it like we did on private health care, you're going to see Albertans vote yet again with their feet, with their voices, with their ability to communicate. They're going to stand up and they're going to register their opposition to a flat tax that supports and buys into that mythology that everybody starts from an equal place. Most Albertans, at least in my experience, are fair, and the fairness becomes an ethic, becomes a principle which they think is more important than just about anything else. Bill 18 is not about fairness. It's about differential advantage to people who already start off with a significant advantage.

It amazes me that members of the Canadian Alliance and the hard right, as I call that group of Canadians, are able to mesmerize themselves with their own mythology. I guess if you construct a bit of a cocoon and you ensure that you're simply getting magnified back your own image, it's easy to delude yourself, but my prediction is that it is a delusion and that most Albertans don't want to go where this government is forcing them to go and where it is coercively taking them.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, I've got a lot of colleagues who want to speak this afternoon, and I'm just going to wrap up my comments. There has been, I think, lots of detailed assessment looking at the impacts and the numbers if you are going to have tax reform. I think the Liberal opposition has addressed that. We've put forward a fair tax alternative to the flat tax. It's one that recognizes progressivity as an essential element of tax.

It strikes me that the Official Opposition does not have the benefit of the 700-odd employees in Treasury. It's fine for the Provincial Treasurer to rhapsodically jump up and down and point out things he may quibble over in the opposition alternative. I haven't seen the studies, Mr. Speaker, done by the Treasury Department because that's the sort of thing that's never shared with legislators. Heck, we only represent the 3 million people in this province; let's keep it a closely held cabinet secret. We've not seen those alternative studies that look at what sort of impacts it would have if you were going to do a tax cut that mirrored the kind of zero, 10, 12 Liberal alternative.

It's too bad, because I think those 700-odd employees in the Treasury Department work for all Albertans, not just for the government of the day and the hard right philosophy that infuses this whole Bill 18 and Bill 19 package.

The case for progressive taxation has been argued, I think, so well by my colleagues. I'm proud of the comments I've read on the part of my colleagues. As we've discussed before, you look at Robert Shapiro's article *Why Fairness Matters: Progressive versus Flat Tax*. If there's any member that has not availed himself or herself of the Legislature Library bibliography – and credit to the people in our library system. My colleague from Edmonton-Riverview alerted me to that amazing array of studies, analyses, textbooks. I certainly haven't read them all. I've skimmed a few, and it confirms again, just as we saw in the case of Bill 11, that the overwhelming body of empirical data, evidence, and learned literature makes the case that public health care is more efficient, more effective, less costly, and more comprehensive. In the same way is there not the same kind of overwhelming preponderance of evidence in this case that shows that a progressive tax system is fairer, more effective, and so on? You know, we have an interesting parallel in terms of the way we've seen these two government initiatives treated.

3:30

I guess I'd just make this comment. You never know. This may be my last time in the Legislature if in fact there's an election before the next sitting of the Legislature. That's a possibility. You never know who the electors are going to favour and who they will not. It seems to me that in that election Albertans are going to be presented with a very, very stark choice, a very clear alternative. In fact, I've done for my own amusement, Mr. Speaker, a little bar graph that shows speaking times of what's gone on with the 24 bills that we've dealt with in the Legislative Assembly. You see the big spikes. You know, it's bills 11, 18, and 19. I think that here are two issues where you have this absolute collision between, in this case, the Liberal opposition in its support for a strong, adequately financed public health care system and the government, and we know what their alternative is: private clinics, private hospitals, and a pile of dough going to the shareholders and directors of private health corporations.

When it comes to tax, we have a stark alternative. We have a government that thinks a flat tax is absolutely the ultimate model, the one that they salivate over and can't wait to see in place. The Liberal alternative is one that respects a progressive tax formula, that recognizes that people who start off with substantial capital have the opportunity to prosper in this province more perhaps than anywhere else in Canada and that part of the cost of that opportunity is paying a surcharge, if you will, paying tax at a higher rate.

I know lots of high-income earners who recognize the merit and the value in that and who don't begrudge paying tax at a higher rate. I mean, none of us particularly likes paying tax, but as Reverend Bill Phipps, the moderator of the United Church and a constituent of mine in Calgary-*Buffalo*, has said publicly, taxes are never necessarily a pleasant thing, but they serve an absolutely essential purpose. I mean, it's through taxes that we fund our public systems. It's through taxes that we ensure that the gap between the rich and the poor is not aggravated and doesn't become exaggerated. You know, to any of us who've had the chance to go into those nations where they don't have the kind of social support networks and who've seen the huge contrast between those that have and those that do not, you know that it makes for the most unstable kind of nation. The most stable countries in the world are those that find ways with strong social programs to be able to moderate those differences.

DR. MASSEY: What about compassion?

MR. DICKSON: My colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods talks about compassion. Well, compassion is part of the Canadian character. It's certainly part of the Alberta character. Look at Alberta history. It was all about compassion. It was all about a spirit of community. It was all about a sense of sharing. That's been sorely tested with Bill 11. Bill 11 did it, but Bill 18 is doing it as well.

So when we vote on this, let's be really clear what we're voting on. This is one of those defining and dividing issues. I vote with my colleagues with great enthusiasm because I'm proud of the position that my caucus has taken, and it's one, I think, that's reflective of where most Albertans are. Those who think otherwise will have their time of reckoning in front of the electors of this province, and I look forward to that with a sense of confidence. I think that on this issue, as with Bill 11, the gap between the governed and the governors has become a chasm, and I think that's going to be evident when the votes are counted after that next election.

Those are the comments I wanted to make at this time on this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and make a few comments with respect to Bill 18 in third reading. I've talked to a large number of people with respect to tax since coming to this Assembly in '97, and all of those people, to a person, have indicated that they feel they pay too much tax, excessive tax. I have talked to people with respect to Bill 18 specifically, and every person I have talked to has been supportive of this bill and what it accomplishes, which is a tax reduction for all Albertans.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has indicated that the Liberal opposition criticism of this bill has had a delayed impact. I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that in fact it has no impact whatsoever, for as of this morning my office had received no criticism of any form whatsoever with respect to this government's proposals with respect to the reduction of income tax as reflected in Bill 18. In fact, I can go further and say that I've had no discussion with anyone about a so-called Liberal tax policy, and perhaps that's because it's newly minted and hasn't had an opportunity to be fairly tested in the public. But the fact is that I have had no such discussion, so I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has some significant work ahead of him, notwithstanding his web site.

MR. DICKSON: At www.garydickson.ab.ca.

MR. STEVENS: Well, thank you very much, member. We wanted to get that on there again to assist you, and that's why I responded.

In this particular seat I've had an opportunity to listen more closely to the Liberals, and what I've heard generally is a lot of criticism: criticism that health is underfunded and mismanaged and in crisis, criticism that education is underfunded, mismanaged, and in crisis, criticism that social services are underfunded, mismanaged, and in crisis. In fact, I'd say that one can go through each and every department or ministry of this government and have the same criticism heaped upon that department by these Liberals. It's a litany of complaint, a litany of negativity, so it should be no surprise to anyone that the opposition in this particular case has decided to be critical of Bill 18 and this government's initiative to reduce the income tax that is paid by all Albertans.

It makes you wonder, given the complaints and criticism of mismanagement, underfunding, and whatnot across the board, why some 55,000 new Albertans migrated to this province in the past year or so, which is about the largest migration to a province since

Statistics Canada has been keeping these records. Now, I don't know why they did that. Perhaps they weren't listening to the Liberals.

MR. SMITH: They made a point of not listening to the Liberals.

MR. STEVENS: They made a point of not listening to the Liberals. That could be it.

What Bill 18 does, Mr. Speaker, is provide 190,000 low-income Albertans with the incredible advantage of no longer paying any income tax. Now, in questions and debates the opposition often says: what, government, are you doing to address the issue of poverty? Well, the fact is that this government does a lot of things. It has initiatives in Community Development and Learning and Children's Services and Health and in other areas, but what we have here is an addition to that list, and that is ensuring that 190,000 low-income Albertans will no longer be paying income tax. In other words, it will leave more money in their pockets.

3:40

Now, I think what's interesting is to compare how this tax policy as reflected in Bill 18 compares to that of other provinces, in particular our socialist neighbours. I think it would be also of interest to see how this tax policy as reflected in Bill 18 compares to the Liberal federal government tax policy. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 18 will reflect very well indeed.

Dealing firstly with the provincial comparison. Two days ago, on May 23, the Acting Provincial Treasurer tabled a document in this Assembly which set out some comparisons. It was titled *Interprovincial Tax and Health Care Insurance Premium Comparison, 2001*. There were certain assumptions in there and certain numbers provided, and I think it's worth while underscoring what some of those comparisons indicate.

Taking a one-income family with two children that has \$30,000 of employment income and taking into account the family tax credit here in Alberta, there in fact is a payment of \$699 to that particular family. When looking at B.C., we have a provincial income tax payment of \$272. In Saskatchewan there is an income tax payment of \$876 and in Manitoba a tax payment of some \$575. When one takes into account the list of taxes and premiums which are considered in the comparison, the differential between Alberta and B.C. is \$1,901, between Alberta and Saskatchewan \$1,727, and between Alberta and Manitoba \$1,980. Those differentials, of course, all reflect the Alberta advantage from a tax perspective. So when we're talking about low-income people and comparing that issue relative to the provinces immediately around us, Alberta does very well indeed, as reflected in the policy in Bill 18.

Now, looking for a moment at the federal side of things, we have a situation where many, indeed probably most of the 190,000 low-income Albertans will continue to pay federal income tax when they will not be paying provincial income tax. I'd like to give you some examples, but before I do, what I want to mention is that there's always some reluctance to give out federal income tax numbers, because the feds base things on assumptions. Some of the assumptions that have to be used here are as follows: an inflation rate of 1.8 percent; a Canada pension plan rate of 4.3 percent, with an upper threshold of \$38,100 and a lower threshold of \$3,500; and an employment insurance rate of 2.9 percent, with an upper threshold of \$39,000.

Now, using these assumptions, in the year 2001 we have the following examples. A single-income earner with \$12,500 in income will pay Alberta provincial income tax of . . .

MR. HIERATH: Zero.

MR. STEVENS: Zero. You're absolutely right. And federal income tax of \$757.

A single-income family with \$27,000 in income and two children will pay Alberta provincial income tax of zero and federal income tax of \$1,999.

The next example is a two-income family with \$27,000 in income. That family will pay Alberta provincial income tax of zero and federal income tax of \$1,831.

The next example is a single senior with \$17,130 in old age security and private pension income. They will pay Alberta provincial income tax of zero but federal income tax of \$880.

Now, I think these particular examples and facts should be remembered by all members of this Assembly and in fact by all Albertans when they are engaging in a discussion regarding tax fairness as reflected in tax policy.

Now, I'd like to make a few comments with respect to the importance of Bill 18 for all Albertans, and that particular discussion centres around the debate regarding the problems of brain drain, standard of living, and productivity as reflected in Canada as a whole and necessarily impacting on Alberta.

It's important to provide some of the factual background with respect to that. According to Industry Canada, Canada's standard of living has increased by 7 percent since 1987, while the United States' standard of living has increased by 17 percent. However, Canada has not always lagged so distant behind the Americans. In the immediate postwar period Canada had the second highest productivity level to the United States within the OECD. The OECD claims that if Canada continues on the growth trend that it is now on, our per capita GDP will drop from 10 percent above the OECD average – that's 10 percent above the average – to 15 percent below the average within 20 years. It has been predicted that within that same period five of the G-7 nations will be from Asia, despite the economic turmoil of 1998.

It's also important to note that within Canada, Alberta and Ontario have the highest productivity, well above the national average, but these two provinces are considerably below the U.S. average. On a measurement scale with the Canadian average productivity at 100, the U.S. measures on that scale at 118.4 while Alberta and Ontario are at 107.6 and 105.8 respectively. In other words, Alberta, which does the best of all provinces, is still 10 points below the American average.

The last factor that I wish to refer to is that if Canada's productivity had grown at the same rate as the United States' since 1979, then Canadians' real income today would be more than \$7,000 a year higher per person. That's since 1979, over the last 20 years or so.

So the issue with respect to the problem is: what direction should this government take to improve our standard of living, to stop the brain drain, and to increase our productivity? Now, admittedly this is a complex issue. Tax cuts alone cannot stimulate the economy and improve productivity. There are other issues that are as important or perhaps more important in certain circumstances such as investment in human capital, research and development, and increased trade, all of which must be part of the standard of living solution. But tax cuts play a significant role. For example, John Roth, who is the CEO of Nortel Networks, believes that the key is to cut personal income taxes so that the number of high-tech jobs being created in Canada will not shrink and in fact will increase.

Obviously this government wants to improve the standard of living of Albertans, and to date we have created jobs, full-time ones, that are predominantly concentrated in growing economic sectors. This government has allowed for the right economic environment by allowing small and medium-sized businesses to keep more of what they make so that they have the resources to grow and hire more

staff and produce more goods, but this challenge is an ongoing one because this challenge is a global challenge.

3:50

What Bill 18 does in relation to the issues of standard of living and productivity is as follows. It will improve the standard of living of all Albertans. Why is that? Each and every Albertan will have more money in their pocket because each and every Albertan will be paying less Alberta income tax. Secondly, it will improve the rewards for hardworking Albertans. It will create incentive. Thirdly, it will improve the ability of small business to grow and hire more staff and produce more goods, which will address in part the productivity issue, and it is an important part of the policy to retain and attract talented and knowledgeable people to Alberta.

At the beginning of this new century and this new millennium, Alberta is on a strong foundation. We have a balanced budget, a top education system, probably the best health system in Canada, an economy growing in the right direction, and, with Bill 18, a personal tax system that benefits all Albertans and which strengthens the Alberta advantage.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 18 is in its third reading, but debating a bill which fundamentally structures Alberta's personal income tax system with the hammer of closure looming over our heads is an irresponsible way to develop public policy. It is irresponsible, and it is undemocratic. It's unfortunately all too typical of a government which during this entire spring session has shown itself to be increasingly remote from Albertans.

Bill 18, as amended, increases personal and spousal exemptions to \$12,900, and I support that. It also lowers the tax rate by half a point, to 10.5 percent. However, even these changes, while sacrificing yet another half-billion dollars in personal income tax revenue, do nothing to address the fundamental unfairness of the flat tax proposal and now the bill, which will become law within an hour or so.

Bill 18, as amended, will have the combined effect to reduce personal income taxes by some 25 percent, or \$1.3 billion. That is personal income tax revenue. After years of earning billions of dollars in surpluses with little or no tax relief, the government suddenly decided to forgo \$1.3 billion in revenues in one fell swoop. The question that must be posed is whether we can afford to forgo this amount of revenue without risking the province's financial bottom line or risking the sustainability of funding for vital services like health care and education.

It's not many years ago, Mr. Speaker, that the former Treasurer of this province made an assertion that Alberta doesn't have a revenue problem; it has a spending problem. With these cuts, without asking serious questions, it will put us again in a situation where we indeed may have a revenue problem. With revenues cut and our health care and education requiring increased spending to make up the shortfalls and the damage that has been done to those institutions over the years because of thoughtless cuts, what we need to do is to ask serious questions before proceeding down this road, but there's no evidence that that's been done. Where are the studies to back up the proposition that we can prudently forgo such large revenue amounts? Can we always count on \$30 per barrel oil or sky-high natural gas prices? Should we solely be focusing on reducing personal income taxes, or are there other alternatives for government revenue sources that should be reduced? For example, health care premiums or user fees of all sorts.

I'm disappointed that such major changes to tax policy are being made without any answers to these questions. We appear to be basing our tax policy on the political needs of this government and on the political aspirations of our Provincial Treasurer, on leave, and not on solid analysis and solid evidence. These massive personal income tax cuts appear designed to curry favour with the voters at election time with little thought to their long-term consequences for popular institutions such as health and education.

There's also no reason why the personal and spousal exemptions could not be increased, thereby helping low-income earners while keeping the rest of the tax system progressive, thereby not providing unjustified tax breaks to only the wealthiest Albertans. That's what this proposal does.

The alternative to the proposal, presented by the Official Opposition party, does certainly introduce another tax bracket, the 10 and 12 model, but there again this proposal is flawed. It has some incredible anomalies there that cannot be explained as we apply this model to people who move from the \$99,999 to just \$100,000 income bracket. So whichever plan you take, the first or the second, there are problems with them which must be addressed before we really move towards passing a bill like this one.

We New Democrats are not opposed to increasing personal and spousal exemptions, as I said before, as a way of getting low-income Albertans off the provincial tax rolls. Let there be no doubt about this. However, there's no good reason why the rest of the tax system can't stay progressive, with those making higher incomes paying tax at a higher rate. For example, instead of having a 10.5 percent tax rate for all taxpayers, why not have three tax brackets? Say, 7 percent on the first \$30,000 of taxable income, 10.5 percent on the next \$30,000, and 14 percent thereafter. This approach would generate roughly the same amount of revenue but much more fairly than will be the case under the government's single-rate system or the Official Opposition's proposal.

Every single taxpayer would save money under this three tax bracket approach when their 2001 tax bill is compared to their tax bill in '99. Even the wealthiest Albertans would benefit by having their top marginal tax rate cut from 14.28 percent, which is presently the case, to a straight 14 percent. However, a progressive tax structure such as the one I'm proposing would prevent a situation whereby the wealthiest Albertans receive tens of thousand of dollars in tax cuts while middle-income Albertans save only a few dollars on their tax bill.

Contrary to the claims being made by the government or by their soul mates, such as right-wing think tanks like the Fraser Institute, there's no evidence to support the contention that flat taxes such as those set out in the government's Bill 18 make the tax system either simpler or more efficient. Complexity in the tax system results from the deductions and credits that go into the calculation of taxable income, not from having more than one tax bracket.

4:00

In terms of efficiency there's no evidence that unfair flat tax systems are any more economically efficient than multibracket, progressive tax systems. For example, despite its costly and inefficient health care system, on the whole the United States is considered by some to have the most efficient economy in the world. However, on average the United States has a more progressive tax system structure than Canada does. For example, at the federal level the U.S. has five tax brackets, ranging from 15 to 39.6 percent, compared to three federal tax brackets in Canada, ranging from 17 to 29 percent. At the state level California, which is anything but an economic basket case, has six tax brackets. The state of Montana on our southern border – some of the officials from this state were

introduced to us yesterday from your gallery, Mr. Speaker – has 10 tax brackets.

The government has provided little or no evidence that directing tax cuts at high-income earners will generate any more economic activity than directing tax cuts towards middle-income Albertans. In fact, there is much evidence to suggest the opposite to be the case. Tax cuts directed at low- and middle-income earners will generate more economic activity than tax cuts directed at the wealthy. That's because the wealthy will likely invest their tax savings in GICs or mutual funds, including foreign content ones, offshore investments, and offshore vacations in interesting places. Meanwhile, middle-income earners are likely to spend their savings on things at home that more directly lead to local job creation; that is, buying goods and services. In other words, our economy is likely to get a bigger bang for the buck by directing tax cuts at lower and middle-income earners than at high-income earners.

Prior to the implementation of a 10.5 percent tax rate, as the amended Bill 18 proposes to do, Alberta already had the lowest top marginal tax rates in Canada. The approval of the government's Bill 18 will turn this gap into a gulf. What possible justification can there be for the province of Alberta having a top tax rate of 10.5 percent when the next lowest province, Ontario, has a top tax rate of 17.4 percent?

Bill 18 will truly turn this province into a tax haven for the wealthy. However, by the same token, the shifting of the tax load may well result in the flight of middle-class taxpayers like tradespeople, nurses, and high-tech workers, who are much better off under the progressive tax systems of Ontario or the U.S. than they will be under this province's flat tax.

The so-called flight of these workers has been I think wrongly and erroneously attributed to taxes alone, I must add. An exceedingly well-researched, book-length study published last year by David Livingstone of the University of Toronto draws attention to the growing gap between the educational qualifications, on the one hand, and the kinds of jobs that young Canadians can get. That growing gap between educational qualifications and the kinds of jobs people can get is what may be driving many young Canadians and Albertans across the border, where they can find jobs that match their excellent qualifications. We haven't paid any attention to that side before, simply assuming that it's the tax rate that drives people in or out of our province and following this foolish line of unexamined argument.

In fact, the government's flat tax rate as set out in Bill 18 is such a bad idea that it leads me to question the real agenda behind it. Today I read in the newspapers again a reference to Dr. Ken McKenzie, a U of C professor of economics who is serving as an adviser, I guess, to the government of Alberta on taxation policy. He seems to be endorsing moving to a sales tax model and abandoning taxing personal incomes as a model to generate public revenues. So is that the agenda? Will the government, as soon as we pass this bill here today – or when we vote on it and it is passed – begin to in fact shift towards a policy which introduces a sales tax as an alternative to income tax? Is that how Albertans are going to stop paying any income tax in the next few years, as the former Treasurer suggested is likely to happen? I think the government needs to come clean on this and tell Albertans what its real agenda is.

I find it most interesting that some of the strongest advocates of the flat tax on personal income advocate the eventual replacement of personal income taxes with a broadly based sales tax. After Albertans get used to paying a single rate of tax on their personal income, it is not as big a step to get Albertans to accept a single-rate consumption tax.

I point, in addition to the statements made by Dr. McKenzie, to an

article that recently appeared in the *Edmonton Journal*. The article points out that the Canada West Foundation, which has worked closely with the Conservative government on a number of sensitive issues, is studying the possibility of a sales tax as an alternative to income tax. The foundation's executive director, Dr. Roger Gibbins, is quoted as saying that the flat tax paves the way for a debate on sales tax. Gibbins is quoted as saying: we are going to suggest that a consumption tax may replace a flat tax altogether; end of quote.

In summing up the reasons why he strongly opposed Bill 11, I will quote from an excellent paper written by Dr. Melville McMillan of the department of economics at the University of Alberta. This paper, entitled *Alberta's Single Rate Tax: Implications and Alternatives*, was tabled earlier in this Assembly. Dr. McMillan writes:

Alberta taxpayers' disposable income will benefit from the planned income tax reductions. Few would argue with the merits of focusing significant gains on low income taxpayers. Questionable, however, is the planned single rate which will afford absolutely and relatively large tax reductions to high income taxpayers. Middle income taxpayers gain less from the tax reduction and end up paying a larger share of the Alberta tax burden. Nor is there evidence of offsetting gains unavailable from a more distributional neutral tax reduction. Interestingly, in contrast to the Alberta move to advantage high income earners, the Federal and Ontario governments' efforts towards tax reduction have not moved nearly so much in that direction . . . Unfortunately, the shift of the Alberta income tax burden to the large middle class has been obscured by the Provincial Government which has emphasized tax reductions instead. Consequently, the question of the change in the distribution of the tax burden is not being debated as thoroughly as the issue deserves.

The government's move to force this seriously flawed and wrongheaded bill through this Legislature with the heavy hammer of closure is ill advised. Even at this 11th hour I urge the government to reconsider this foolish and regressive plan which favours the wealthy at the expense of the large middle class. In fact, as I look across the way at my colleagues on the other side of the House, I ask myself the question: why is the Conservative government championing a discredited flat tax that benefits mainly the wealthy when every other government in the country is focusing tax relief on the middle class? After all, it was middle-class taxpayers who bore the brunt of the tax increases that were used to balance budgets.

First Bill 11 and now Bill 18: two pieces of legislation forced through this Assembly that benefit the very few at the expense of the many. This government appears to be losing touch with the concerns of grassroots Albertans. As I campaign in the Edmonton-Highlands by-election, the anger directed against this government and against the Premier is palpable. Albertans see this government and the Premier as increasingly arrogant and out of touch with their concerns. No wonder the Premier dare not knock on doors in the Edmonton-Highlands by-election.

Through the passage of Bill 18 the government is shafting middle-class workers, especially single people and two-income families. Last time I checked the stats, there were three times as many two-parent families where both parents work compared to two-parent families where only one of the parents works.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I urge the government members to carefully consider what they are about to do. Maybe the tax cuts embedded in Bill 18 are deep enough to hide the fundamental unfairness of the flat tax. Then, again, maybe they won't. I for one look forward to taking the debate over the flat tax out from under the dome and to the taxpayers of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to close by drawing the attention of your end of the House to a statement taken from a paper presented by Trevor Harrison at the University of Alberta. He is addressing

questions as to the reason for reducing taxes. I quote him here. He says: it's highly questionable that people move here to Alberta only because of lower taxes. Taxes are the only stable source of funds the provincial government has, because royalties are cyclical, and the cyclical nature of the economy is as certain as the sunrise every morning. The government is really living on the knife-edge by giving up tax room. If public health care and education are going to be maintained, you are going to have to come to terms with where you're going to get the money.

That's the money that's being risked by this tax cut, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

4:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to speak one more time on this bill at third reading. I want to start off by making a couple of corrections to the hon. leader of the third party. He talked about an agenda where there may be the introduction of the concept of a sales tax in this province, and I'd like to refer him to the agenda that is here from this government.

We actually passed – and I'll remind him – the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Act so that any government in the future would have to go to the people and ask under referendum if they wanted their provincial government to in fact put in place a sales tax. I daresay that the answer quite clearly would be no. I would ask hon. members to refer to that act, because the position of our government has been that there will not be a sales tax in this province, and that has been made abundantly clear a number of times. So, please, refer to that act. We haven't talked about it for a while, but it is the law, so we have to always remind ourselves of what protection is in place.

Mr. Speaker, taxes are not nice, not at any stage. Nobody enjoys paying taxes. Whether it's a provincial tax, a municipal tax, an education tax, or a federal government tax, no one enjoys paying taxes. Typically we all complain when we file our tax returns, because it's a shock when you get to the end of April and you realize what has been taken out of your disposable income to support programs by the local municipality, the province, or the federal government. We all value those programs, we all say we want to have those programs, but the shock comes when we realize how much those programs actually cost. And all members are quite right: taxation dollars are a major source of revenue for any government at any level. Believe you me, the more dollars that come in, the more governments will spend. It's just the culture. It's the Canadian way.

I think what we have tried to do in our government and under our Premier's leadership is to identify what the government should be doing, where the government should be spending and, more importantly, where it should not, and what kind of a scheme we can put in a fiscal framework that allows for the government to do the core programs it should be doing and to leave the things it shouldn't be doing to other sources.

We've heard some talk today about the concern that tax reductions could lead to a shortage of funds because of the vulnerability of resource revenues. We've all seen those vulnerabilities, and we've gone through some pretty rough times in the past when we've seen as much as \$10 per barrel shifts in crude oil and the impact it's had. You know, sometimes what happens – and I remember the 1980s. I was in the oil patch when things dropped 50 percent overnight, from \$30 a barrel to \$15 and all the way down to \$9, and I saw what happened. It's amazing how the industry has learned an awful lot of things from that experience.

Also, the government has learned. The government back in the '80s had a theory that government should be involved in diversifying

the economy. Well, that's not really the role of government. What the role of the government probably should have been – and you learn through hindsight. Hindsight is always 20/20 vision. What the government should have learned was that it was really a framework that was necessary so that the private sector could diversify the economy if it made sense.

Fortunately, we have been through a process for the last seven years where the private sector has taken that up. Yes, we are reliant upon the oil and gas revenues, but we also have a diversified economy that the private sector made. The private sector came in and became a partner in providing an economic stability in this province that has not ever been found before. In fact, you can't find it across Canada or anywhere else. I think Albertans should be very proud of that diversification and economic development that occurred by the private sector, not by the government but by the private sector, and that came as a result of a framework that was conducive to that kind of development and diversification taking place.

The other thing I heard was that there is a vulnerability with tax revenues. If in fact the economy is not healthy, if people are not corporately making a profit, taxes are not paid. You only pay a tax on profit, and if people are not employed, they're not paying tax. You must have a framework that is working together, where you have economic prosperity, economic development, high employment rates, new creativity, new capital investment. That provides the cycle of flow of dollars through the system.

So what does that all mean to Bill 18? Well, Bill 18 from my view is dealing with the reality of – we were stuck in a groove in Alberta where we were piggybacking on a federal tax system. We had tax on tax, and to delink ourselves from that system, we had to come forward with another framework that would not penalize Albertans again with tax on tax, where you had a thing that was called bracket creep, where you had shifts from a federal government that would penalize the Alberta provincial tax base.

Bill 18 does the delinking. It puts us into a position where we have a single tax rate, and by having a single tax rate, we are able to look at our personal exemption side of the equation also. By moving the personal exemption side to be equal between a spouse and a person, we have in fact recognized that there were some discriminatory practices in place between married couples, quite frankly. So that is dealt with. By going to a single tax rate, we have been able to move away from the tax-on-tax system to a more tax-on-income system, which is a purer tax base.

The amendments that were brought forward recognizing the shift down to the single tax rate of 10.5 percent ensure that Albertans will have a tax relief in the year 2001. I want to just use a couple of examples. I know the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore used some. For a single person we have an example of a lady who is a janitor in Strathmore earning \$27,650 a year. Half of her health care premiums are paid by her company, and in 2002 she will pay \$1,391 in provincial tax. That's \$208 less than what she paid in 1999. So here is a single person earning money, having tax premiums, and she will see a reduction.

Ted is a journeyman who is an autobody mechanic working in rural Alberta. He earns \$38,000 a year and has half of his health care premiums paid by his company. In 1999 Ted paid \$2,720 in provincial income tax. In the year 2001 he will pay \$2,405, a savings of \$315. These are actual real-life examples of where people had peculiarities.

Single-income families. Shelley is an occupational therapist in Calgary, while her husband stays at home with her son, Jeff. Shelley earns \$41,400 a year. In 1999 Shelley paid \$2,672 in provincial

income tax. In the year 2001 under the single tax rate she will pay \$1,384, a saving of over \$1,280.

Carlos is a construction superintendent working in Edmonton. His wife, Natalie, is a homemaker. Carlos earns \$60,500 in salary and taxable benefits. In addition, Carlos earns \$750 from his investment income and makes an RRSP contribution of \$4,500. In 1999 Carlos paid \$4,563 in provincial taxes. In the year 2001 he will pay \$2,995, a provincial tax saving of \$1,568.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, the point of this is to indicate that Albertans will receive a benefit from a single tax rate. The Member for Calgary-Glenmore talked about the people that will pay no tax at all. The way that calculation comes about, if you refer to your tax return, is that the tax is based on taxable income on the tax return, line 260; that times 10.5 percent. You go down then to the tax credit area, you take line 338, and you multiply that by 10.5 percent. You subtract that from line 260, and you end up with a number as to what your taxable income will be. Now, with the increase in the personal exemptions you have the opportunity to have your income come down to zero taxable income, because you combine the two exemptions and take the 10.5 percent.

This tax act is long overdue. There's been a fair bit of debate on it, talking about what it means to Albertans, but quite frankly I think it's time that we had a delinking from the federal system so that we are able to give back to Albertans some of their money. Yes, we have to be careful to ensure that the core programs of government are still funded and affordable. Quite frankly, if we could do more, I think everyone in this House would applaud that, but we also have to be careful. Even your own leader recognized that if we're going to reduce taxes, we have to reduce spending first. You can't do both. You can't do it all.

It would be nice to say that we could be, like some jurisdictions, tax free. That's not reality. It's not feasible. Because we have programs that are offered for the public good, we have to make sure that the core programs that are essential to Albertans, such as our health and education and social programs and our infrastructure, are maintained and can be afforded by the government they elect. So this act I believe is positive for people.

I'll leave people with this thought. I've talked with my constituents, and if you think back – and all of us in here are old enough to think back to the early 1980s. You ask people: how much disposable income did you have back in 1980 or '81 compared to what you have today? And it's amazing, Mr. Speaker, when you really add it up, when you think of how costs have spiraled and how people have worked very hard. Their taxes have gone up, but their purchasing power has gone down. This is one way to give money back to the people who put it in the pot, the taxpayers, the shareholders whom we work for, so that they can make decisions as to what they're going to do with their money. Moving it through the economy is healthy for the economy. We can go through all kinds of economic studies to talk about the impact when it takes basic economics 201 to figure out that dollars flowing through the economy is a healthy environment. Even the opposition can understand that.

So I would ask the opposition: let's not play politics with people's funds. Let's make sure we join together and support this bill and give back to Albertans their money, because they deserve it and we are now in a fiscal position in this province where we are able to move forward with some of these tax cuts. We can't do it all.

MRS. SLOAN: You can't pay our health care workers a fair wage?

MRS. NELSON: We can't do it all, Mr. Speaker, but there is a right

balance there, and this whole concept is striking that balance.

The hon. member from Riverbend is yapping about health care workers. They will receive . . .

MR. HANCOCK: Riverview.

MRS. NELSON: Well, whatever. Edmonton-Riverview, not Riverbend.

They will benefit from this tax bill the same as everyone else, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, I'm sure they will be delighted to see this bill go forward, and I would hope that the opposition would not play politics on this and would do the right thing and support Albertans receiving some of their money back.

Those are my comments. Thank you.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Introductions of School Groups

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie in just a moment, but I'm going to take extraordinary leave to deal with the privilege, essentially, of members and the privilege of the House. Just bear with me for a moment or two.

An hon. member has advised that a regrettable incident occurred in the Assembly earlier today, and I want to have these comments placed in the record for the integrity of the Assembly and the integrity of the hon. member. Earlier this afternoon a group of schoolchildren from Paddle Prairie was in the Legislative Assembly for a field trip, and the hon. member, in this case the hon. Member for Peace River, had originally planned to meet the group at noon for a photo. Unfortunately, because of parliamentary responsibility he had to send regrets at the last moment.

The group of children was not scheduled to be in the Assembly, but as does happen periodically, some of these changes do occur with tour guides, and the group was admitted into the gallery during the question period. The hon. Member for Peace River constituency unfortunately was not informed that they were in the Assembly. Of course, other members of the Assembly were introducing school groups, and needless to say, the hon. member felt a little embarrassed by the fact that he had no notice that his group was there. That is unfortunate and should not have happened.

The correct procedure, of course, is that the tour guides associated with the Office of the Legislative Assembly should have provided a normal notice to be placed on the desk of the hon. member so that the hon. member would have been in a position to introduce these children.

I raise this now because it has happened in the past that an hon. member may be away or out of the Assembly at a certain time when his school group does come in, and the office of the Speaker does receive letters from those individuals, who are teachers and educators and others, saying: wow, how is it that one group gets introduced and another group does not?

There's absolutely no reason for the hon. Member for Peace River to feel embarrassed about this today. He may feel angry, and he should take out his anger on the Speaker for failing to fulfill the proper mandates which are associated with this. But the Speaker would like to convey to the hon. Member for Peace River that this should not have happened, that this was an oversight, and that the chair itself will convey a letter of information to the teacher and the school group in Paddle Prairie saying that it was regrettable and that hopefully sometime soon they will be able to see the smiling face of the hon. Member for Peace River and they will continue forward in a good, harmonious relationship.

So there is an apology extended to the hon. Member for Peace

River, as there will be an apology extended to the teacher and the school group from Paddle Prairie.

MR. FRIEDEL: May I just say thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 18

Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

(continued)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to take this opportunity to address Bill 18, the flat tax bill, in its final stage of third reading, when we have a last chance to review the bill in its final form before it's passed, unfortunately under the threat of closure, the reality of closure, which will be occurring one hour from this point in time. The government has once again thrown about its weight in deciding that it knows what's best for Albertans, in fact stifling debate on this particular bill, one that is very important to the future of Albertans, I believe, and one that will be changing the entire basis of how democratic decisions are made in this province and the reasons why we make those decisions.

Initially I would like to refer to the comments made by the Provincial Treasurer earlier this afternoon when he talked about this bill. He introduced it by saying that this would be bringing about a new age of "respect for taxpayers and hardworking people" and that Alberta "has set the tone" for establishing that respect. I don't think "respect" would be the correct word to use here, Mr. Speaker. The manner in which this legislation is being approached in not respectful of the Canadian identity or Canadian process. A flat tax shows disrespect for what has historically been the essence of being Canadian, Mr. Speaker. So I am deeply concerned about his comments and the context in which he is promoting his own personal ideology.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

He talked about the hopes and dreams of young people being enhanced by the flat tax. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. The hopes and dreams of young Albertans is enhanced by those young people having an equal opportunity to succeed, by choosing to provide the kinds of benefits they need to have, equal representation or the closest thing to equal representation that we can provide to them in this society. We need to present to these young people a kind of society that is rich in more than just money. This government has been obsessed with the ideology of money, when in fact what makes us rich are the kinds of services, the kinds of integrity we have, and the kind of equal opportunity we provide to everyone in this society.

4:30

How do we do that? We do that through a progressive tax base, Mr. Speaker, one that is representative in terms of providing for the needs of the people, and by not unduly burdening one sector of society with an inordinate burden of tax. In this case, this particular bill will place a heavier burden on middle-class taxpayers than it does on anybody else, not on those who have already succeeded in our society and who don't need a helping hand but on those particular people who are trying to provide an environment that is better for their children and for their grandchildren in the future.

We provide equality by providing high levels of services, by doing

things like Head Start programs, by providing a high level of access to education and a high level of education itself, and by providing health care. Those things are funded through a progressive tax base in a way that is fair, based on each individual's ability to pay, Mr. Speaker. I would like to talk about that in terms of the Canadian identity that we have established within the framework of comments made on April 13 of this year by John Ralston Saul, who is a well-known author in Canada and a philosopher who has addressed this issue I think quite deliberately and in a manner which bears paying attention to by all of us, particularly by those legislators who would want to now change the manner in which we approach providing services in this society.

He talks about how our culture and our society and our country and therefore our provinces

became rich because we chose to make ourselves a certain kind of society. And that kind of society has to do with egalitarianism and democracy and out of that came the conscious ability to construct prosperity.

That's by giving people equal opportunities and chances to move forward.

The opposite of that kind of society, which people who have built this country and legislators who came after those initial builders made a conscious choice to follow the path of, is a society that focuses on self-interest. Self-interest would dictate that those who want services pay for them as they need them and there is no extra money for anybody else, that in essence they're paying for only themselves and there's nothing to share around. That would be a self-serving kind of society that we would move to, and it's one that we have deliberately moved away from.

Other societies have pursued that. We see that very much in the American style of democracy, where it's each for his own and very little is provided in the way of public services. We can see that. Tax rates are uniformly lower there, and a great deal of attention is placed on financial success and not other kinds of success, things like giving a helping hand to those who don't start out as fortunate as some of the rest of us.

If we take a look at the history of Canada, Mr. Speaker, we will see that the founders of this country were highly concerned about providing an egalitarian kind of society where the wealth was shared amongst all, not in terms of money but in terms of the kinds of opportunities and services that were provided. If we were to look back at what Robert Baldwin had to say in the early 1800s, we would see that one of the things he stated was that we're "so fortunate as to belong to the favoured class," those of us who have money, that we "could not be so narrowminded and so blind to [our] own interests as to object to being taxed to effect great and important projects." I think that's an interesting statement that stands today, Mr. Speaker, and one that we need to examine.

It is not what was being promoted by either the Provincial Treasurer this afternoon or the Acting Provincial Treasurer in terms of his response to questions. They clearly came out on the side of the individual, that those who are so gifted in life through their own talents or through place and birth should also be gifted in terms of lower tax rates. I don't understand the logic in that when you compare that to helping society out on their own. This country was not built on that narrowminded kind of thinking, and I think this is a time for us to reflect on that.

If we take a look at Louis LaFontaine, also in the 1850s, he also supported social equality as a binding cornerstone of the kind of Constitution and equality and windows for opportunity for Canadians in this country, Mr. Speaker. It's time for us to take a look back at that, because a flat tax changes those dynamics. It's something

for us to reflect on at the very final stages of this particular legislation.

Do we want a privileged caste in this society, Mr. Speaker, or do we want opportunities for all? Do we sacrifice political liberty if we give unfair advantage to a specific class in our society that can in fact afford to pay and who I believe and who many of these original founders of Canada as a country believed had a responsibility to pay their fair share? A progressive tax means that those who can afford to pay do pay their fair share. The kind of progressive system that we have had enhances and reinforces our sense of community in terms of our responsibilities for our neighbours rather than taking the point of view that this government has taken, where you pit one group against the other, one neighbour against the other, one class of people against the other, those who are high-income earners and those who are not.

It's a completely different perspective that we're taking a look at. We're taking a look at ensuring the maintenance of a sense of a community, the sense that basic education, basic health care rights, basic access to other kinds of services this government provides are fundamental rights of Canadians, and they're paid for by somebody. In this case they're paid for on a proportionate basis in a progressive tax form.

Do we need tax reform? Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. There isn't a person in this Legislature that wouldn't agree with that. We need fair taxation. That means an end to such things as user fees, which are arbitrary and regressive taxes. It means an overhaul of the tax system in a manner that treats everybody in a fair manner.

A good start to that is the Alberta Liberals' proposal of a zero, 10, and 12 tax base, where low-income earners don't pay any provincial tax, middle-income earners pay a 10 percent fee, and high-income earners pay a 12 percent fee. I have yet to meet a single person in that high-income bracket who does not think that that is a fair burden for them to take on. They have more disposable income. They are prepared to take their fair share of that burden. I think this government is selling that group of people short by thinking that they do not have that kind of responsibility and that they do not endorse the Canadian philosophy in terms of how we want to manage our country and provide services.

4:40

This government would promote individualism, where people simply have the right to walk away and go wherever they choose and not help out their neighbour. That's not how this country was built, and it is not what gave many of their ancestors the opportunities to move forward in terms of the place they had in society and their countries of origin. I think it's important that people reflect on that kind of a background and think that if we were in the kind of society that only promoted individualism and former caste systems in terms of those who have and those who have not, we would see that many of the people in this room here today would not be here, Mr. Speaker, if we lived in a different country with a different system.

I don't see anything wrong with the kind of system that we had where there is a belief in inclusiveness and the idea that it's important to promote ideas that are not based on self-interest. We have to remember those kinds of things. If we were to take a look back through Macdonald's and Cartier's statements made as founding members of this country, we would see that they also supported an egalitarian kind of system.

We do hear arguments against paying for public services. If you take a look at those historically, Mr. Speaker, you will see that they're based on antidemocratic, colonial beliefs, where the caste system was important. I don't think that that's what Canadians are all about. We can see from my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo's

survey that he took off the Internet that 63 percent of Albertans who responded also do not think that antidemocratic, colonial beliefs are the way we want to go in this particular society when we talk about a fair tax system.

I would like to quote from John Ralston Saul's paper where he said that "there has always been and there will always be opposition from those who can pay; it's perfectly normal." He says that with money in his pockets he has "no desire to take it out of his pocket. It's nothing wrong; there's nothing evil about not wanting to hand over [your] money." We've seen this government enforce that. He says that it's just always been that way but that if you're conscious about it, you realize that you don't want to hand over the money. He says that you have to convince those who have the money that it's their duty to pay, and you have to have regulations to make sure they do that. He also says that inevitably people with money will prefer a two-tiered system because it's easier and it's cheaper for them and it costs them less and that they'll just pay for their own kids' services and needs and look after themselves.

There's nothing surprising in that. In fact, we've heard that exact argument from this government at every stage of debate on this bill. That's the kind of government and taxation policy that they would support, where they just want to look after their own and nobody else.

Mr. Speaker, he says that "the public good demands more from us." I agree with that statement, and 63 percent of the people who responded to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo's question also believe that the public good demands more from us. It demands even more financially from those who are able to pay a larger part. People who are able to pay a larger part support that belief. They are perfectly willing to pay their part, provided they understand the role that they're playing in society.

Something we have to reflect on at this point in time when we're talking about changing the kind of tax base that we have had in this province is: do people want to provide for the public good? It is the Canadian way to do that, Mr. Speaker. It is the Canadian way to ensure that we have a basic level of public services, more than a basic level of public services when it comes to education and health care.

We've seen that in more aspects than just tax dollars in this particular province, Mr. Speaker. We see it in the kinds of charitable contributions people make. We see it in the kinds of volunteer time that people contribute throughout this province, and we see large portions of that time coming from people who are in a higher tax bracket and who can afford to pay more. On the whole, when people think about the common good and the greater good of our society, they are quite prepared to pay for that privilege, and that's what happens in a progressive tax system. We can ensure that we provide a fair level of service or a better level of service, one that can be globally competitive for all, where we don't unfairly give a tax advantage to a particular class of people who do not need the advantage. I think that's something that's important to see.

Those who are high-income earners do have an advantage in this society in terms of influencing legislation. Because they have more disposable income, they can influence legislation at many different kinds of levels: direct donations, lobbying. They have time to hire people to lobby or directly influence. We've seen a lot of that happen here. The middle class have a hard time just surviving: getting the kids through school, getting a little retirement money put aside, paying off the mortgage, taking care of the neighbours. They don't have the same kinds of access to lobbying efforts that we see from those who have wealth, yet we see that most of those who have wealth do not unfairly use that privilege, Mr. Speaker. We see that

most who have that wealth are quite prepared to work for the greater good.

But not this government. They want to support those people who have already got that benefit in society, and that's the choice they've made: not to support a real sense of community, not to support the traditions of this country, not to support an egalitarian society, and not to support those young people that the Provincial Treasurer spoke about earlier in his comments in terms of having equal opportunity. If we don't ensure that we have an adequate tax base in this province to provide essential services like kindergarten programs, which this government felt were disposable, like Head Start programs, like access to public education and to advanced education, then we are not providing any kind of an egalitarian society for those young people who are coming up. That is a real shame, Mr. Speaker, and it's where we're headed with this particular bill.

A flat tax bill is more than just the introduction of a new tax system. It's an introduction of a new way of thinking for this province, one where we focus on the needs of the individual – of me, myself, and I – and forget about the responsibility we have to take care of our neighbour, to provide a helping hand when necessary and a hand up whenever we can. We forget about those kinds of principles. We move into a conquer and divide kind of society, and I do not want to be a part of it.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to be able to rise in the Assembly and address Bill 18 in third reading. I have listened carefully to the opposition protest both Bill 18 and Bill 19, both of which will see Albertans pay less provincial income tax in the future. I admit to some surprise that the Liberals would have protested this tax cut. I do sometimes forget, however, the fundamental philosophical difference between Conservative, Liberal, and ND minds. Conservatives actually believe that the money belongs to the people and that government has a responsibility to return that which is taken in excess of what is needed to deliver the programs the people have asked us to deliver.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I should not be surprised about how provincial Liberals feel about tax cuts in light of what their federal cousins have done to Albertans and, indeed, to all Canadians over the years. Since the Chretien Liberals came to power in 1993, the average family taxes have ballooned from \$13,937 a year to \$18,146. [interjection]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood is invited to join the debate at the appropriate time, and this is not the appropriate time. We have recognized Airdrie-Rocky View.

4:50

Debate Continued

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 1989 the amount of money individuals paid to government, including income taxes, Canada pension plan, and employment insurance premiums, has climbed by 54 percent. Over the same period pretax income has risen only 32 percent. Thus the burden is growing 1.7 times faster than the ability of the payer to pay.

There is no surprise that low-income families find themselves sinking into debt. This fact was reported to the federal cabinet prior

to their throne speech this year. While I am pleased that the federal government has responded even in a small way to the growing tax burden that we all find ourselves under with some movement on bracket creep over the next four to five years, the federal progressive tax will see low-income families paying taxes while borrowing money to make it through the year. That, Mr. Speaker, is unacceptable.

In response to that, Bill 18 has been developed. It will see over 190,000 low-income families and individuals come right off the Alberta provincial tax rolls. I call that a good thing, Mr. Speaker, truly part of the Alberta advantage, an Alberta advantage that extends to all people of this province no matter their age, their income, or their status.

The federal Liberal cousins to our own Liberals here claim that their government policy helps low-income families, yet according to news reports done by the family institutes, this is not true. Federal income tax policy in fact pushes people into debt, and the benefits from government policy won't change that.

MS OLSEN: That is Stockwell's statement.

MS HALEY: Actually, no, Edmonton-Norwood. It's my speech. I just wrote it. If you don't like it, you can get up and refute it later; okay?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the chair, please.

MS HALEY: Well, I'm trying, Mr. Speaker.

Proof of this is in the growth of household debt. The Vanier Institute of the Family says that we have more household debt than disposable income. In the mid-1960s in Canada total liabilities were 72 percent of disposable income. In 1993 it saw us as a nation pass the 100 percent mark, so more than 100 percent of our annual disposable income is now owed. Today, in the year 2000, we are at 114 percent of our disposable income. Mr. Speaker, is this because Canadians and Albertans don't work hard enough? Is it because we just blow off our paycheques on frivolous things? Actually, I don't think we do. I think the problem is that we're being severely overtaxed by all three levels of government.

Here in Alberta we're trying to recognize the reality that Albertans deserve to keep more of their own income. Bill 18 allows Albertans to do just that. The opposition would have you believe that having a single rate of tax is a bad thing, yet here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. Back in the 1960s right here in Canada, across the entire country, the tax rate was 8 percent, 8 percent for everybody regardless of their income level. It was good enough back when John Diefenbaker was the Prime Minister of this very great nation, and since then we could have used a few more John Diefenbakers. Governments here and all across Canada, wanting to be all things to all people all of the time, started creating programs and more programs and more programs. And what do you know? These programs all have to be paid for.

So how do you pay for them? Well, you pay for them with more and more taxes, more and higher taxes that have to be collected. The 8 percent tax applied to everyone, not just to one group of people. So how do you get more money, Mr. Speaker? Well, you slide the rates up. But you could have done it at just 8 percent or 10 percent or 12 percent for everybody. No. There was a whole new insidious method that was developed because the higher income people here are less than the majority of people in the country.

So you split the tax rates. You go into progressive tax systems. Here for this group you have a high rate of 27 percent. Then for this group over here you've got a high rate of 51 percent. Then provincial governments all across the country just latched onto whatever

that rate was and said: "We'll take 40, 50, or 52 percent of whatever they're getting. Oh, that's not enough. Let's slap some surtaxes on top."

All the while that's not enough. Taxes go up and up and up, and it's not enough. Let's spend more money than we have. That was the next great theme for 25 years in this country, spending more than we had. So on top of having almost the highest taxes in the world – only five countries have higher taxes than we do – we spent more money than we had even at the high tax rates.

So we go along with this, and here are some interesting numbers. In 1970 as a nation we owed \$17 billion. In 1993, just 23 years later, we owed \$466 billion. Today, in the year 2000, our country is \$584 billion in debt. Interest has grown from \$1.8 billion in 1970 to \$39 billion in 1993 to \$45 billion in 1998, or \$1,500 for every man, woman, and child that live in this country. That's just interest. That's not the debt. This interest has to be paid each and every year without fail. You can defer the bulk of your payment on your total debt, but you cannot defer your interest. Twenty-seven percent of federal revenues goes to pay interest. So here we are as Albertans paying federal income tax, and 27 percent of it is not creating one job, not creating one program. It is only going to interest, and the majority of that isn't even being paid inside our own country because we borrowed off international markets. So we're getting it coming and we're getting it going.

Meanwhile, the same federal government has cut transfer payments. Here in Alberta we're trying to make things work. We've managed through the Alberta advantage to increase the size of our economy, which has benefited all Albertans, including the federal government, who have managed to increase their take of what they get out of Alberta, but all of this was done at the cost of an onerous tax system. We're accused by the Liberals of doing this on the backs of middle-income people or of favouring one group over another. Mr. Speaker, we're working very hard to treat everyone the same, everyone except the low-income earners in this province, who will pay nothing in provincial taxes.

I don't understand why the Liberals are not standing up and criticizing the federal government, who does nothing but take more from us and give less and less back on an annual basis. Well, from a philosophical base, Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are now saying that we are driven by the hard right, yet they sit there and vote against a tax cut for Albertans in a country that is the fifth-highest taxed country in the world. How much tax is enough?

Thirty years ago in Canada we were a prosperous nation. We had low taxes and an excellent standard of living, and the federal government – by the way, massively Liberal for the last 30 years – has borrowed us into one of the highest taxed nations in the world. Their share of the interest bill is killing our low or middle income, and you guys sit there and cheer. Sounds about right.

Which brings us back, Mr. Speaker – Alberta was at some point following that lead, and the Alberta government was spending 20 percent more than they had in revenues each and every year for years. You'd know about this because your leader was one of the people that helped do this.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The tax-and-spend philosophy was deeply entrenched in all governments in this entire country, and in 1993 we broke that mold here in Alberta. Alberta has no more deficits. We have our debt coming down and under control. We have very good programs for the people of this province, and, where possible, money is spent on onetime programs to improve the infrastructure of our province and continue to build on the Alberta advantage.

It's time for Albertans as individuals to reap some of the benefits of our growing and very dynamic economy, and by next year, when the new tax bill finally takes hold and Albertans get a chance to take advantage of this – for example, if you earn an employment income of \$30,000 or are a one-income family with two children, in Alberta your total provincial tax bill, including income tax, health care premium, payroll taxes, fuel taxes, tobacco/alcohol taxes, will be \$533. You might want to compare that to people who live in Newfoundland, who will be paying \$3,911. It's fairly steep for a low-income family.

An employment income of \$55,000 for a two-income family with two children in the same basket of taxes will be \$3,234 here in Alberta. It will be \$6,583 in Newfoundland, \$6,906 in Quebec, and \$5,396 in Manitoba. On an employment income of \$100,000 for a two-income family with two children, in Alberta your total tax bill will be \$7,347, compared to Newfoundland at the other end of the country at \$13,294, \$17,574 in Quebec, \$10,851 in Nova Scotia, \$12,465 in Manitoba. It doesn't sound like a real bad deal for Albertans to me.

On top of that, we now have the Canadian Federation of Independent Business saying that this is a good thing; 80 percent of them are supporting it. We've got places like the National Foundation for Family Research and Education supporting it. We've actually got real-live constituents supporting it.

5:00

You know, when I ran in 1993, there were a few things that I wanted to do. I wanted our deficit to be gone. I wanted our debt to come down and be paid off, and I wanted taxes to be fair for everybody. This bill goes a long way towards making the tax system fair for all Albertans.

I am, for one, truly excited by the changes that we are making. I believe it will benefit all of us and not only through lower taxes but also in our ability to attract and keep some of our very mobile, very well educated, very much in demand population. I want Alberta to be a place to come to for people like doctors, people who are involved in our knowledge-based industries, which is truly the place where we want to position Alberta. We don't want it to be a place that people leave because we are no longer tax competitive with the rest of the world. We pay 20 percent more in income taxes in Canada than they do in the United States, and this is not that far across that border.

I know a lot of young people who have left my constituency and this province to work in the United States. I don't blame them for going, but I think it's a terrible loss for all of us, and one of the reasons that they don't come back is because they have a superior tax system. They feel they're overtaxed in the United States; well, we're taxed a 20 percent difference, Bill. You might want to keep that number in mind.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I'm absolutely delighted to support Bill 18, and I truly look forward to its full implementation next year.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member who was just speaking, the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, was absolutely right: there are some fundamental differences between the way that Liberals think and Conservatives think. I guess Conservatives confuse fairness with saneness, and Liberals know that fairness is all about equality and equity. You know, those are pretty important philosophical differences, pretty important differences in terms of philosophy.

As I was listening to the government supporters support this bill over this debate that's been under the gun of closure all the way through, including these dying minutes of the debate, it occurred to me that listening to the government trying to sell their flat tax plan is like when you go into a discount clothing store and somebody tries to sell you a one-size-fits-all T-shirt. We all know the problem with one size fits all is that really one size fits none, and that's exactly what we have with this flat tax. We have a simple approach, somebody trying to sell the idea of one size fits all when really what we need is some tailored tax policy so that it will truly fit people at various levels of income throughout our society.

You can try and point fingers at the federal government and you can try to pretend that you're disassociated from previous provincial governments, but the reality is that in the last number of years certain things have taken place. Over 30 years of Conservative governance – and I use that word advisedly; it is more like Conservative dominance – in the province of Alberta we went from a province with no debt to a province with a huge debt. We went from a province that was spending as it went to a province that was spending 20 percent more every year than it took in in revenue. This all happened under a Conservative government, Mr. Speaker.

Then in 1993 we had an election where the province was taken from tax-and-spend Tories to tax-and-cut Tories, and then they made a big deal out of balancing the budget, meanwhile trying to pretend that they were responsible for the economic diversification and for the robust economy that Alberta has enjoyed, particularly as a result of what's been going on in technology and in the petrochemical sectors.

Now, at the same time that was happening, for several years we had a Conservative government in Ottawa. We had a Conservative government that ballooned the debt – and I hear the Minister of Justice applauding the federal government of Brian Mulroney that ballooned the debt – that brought in GST, that taxed Canadians like they've never been taxed before, that left an incredible mess that thank goodness the federal Liberals under Jean Chretien have been equal to the task of managing. Then, to add insult to injury, we have people standing up in this Assembly on the one hand, like the Minister of Government Services, saying, "Let's stop playing politics," and then you have individuals like the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View saying that PCs, Progressive Conservatives, believe that tax money belongs to people. But of course what she forgets is that this government has the legacy of saying no, that the money must belong to shopping malls and the money must belong to waste management disposal plants and the money must belong to MagCan and to billions of dollars worth of handouts to corporations that have failed.

So, really, when you talk about rhetoric, I agree with the Minister of Government Services. We should put politics aside, and we should get rid of the rhetoric. We certainly don't need to listen to the self-serving commentary about who it is that believes who controls the money. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, the money belongs to the taxpayers, and we are their servants when we go to spend the money.

But I am getting a little bit tired of the hypocrisy. I'm getting tired of listening to the New Democrats say, "Oh, we can't have a flat tax," when the former leader of the New Democrats wrote an article that was published in the *Edmonton Sun* back in January of 1996 where she said: you know, what Canada needs is a flat tax. The New Democrats say, "Oh, we want tax fairness," but they are the party that said: let's triple the deficit elimination tax that the high-income earners pay. They wanted to bring it up to, I think, over 20 percent at one point in time.

So we've got hypocrisy coming at us from the left. We've got

hypocrisy coming at us from the right. The government is saying, "We want to do the right thing for low- and middle-income taxpayers," but they've had an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to eliminate the .5 percent flat tax that would bring \$360 million worth of tax relief to every Alberta taxpayer, shared savings all the way across the spectrum. You know what? They say: "No, we can't do it. We can't do it because we can't afford it."

They can't afford to bring that level of relief in, but on the other hand they're talking about how they want to be thanked for bringing in \$1.3 billion worth of tax cuts on the other side. Talk about a mixed message and confusion. It must happen when you have part-time people in the job, Mr. Speaker. We've got this hypocrisy coming at us from the right. We've gone from tax creeps to tax hypocrites, and I don't think Albertans are being very well served by that.

Now, earlier today we heard a very moderate – and I'm pleased to acknowledge it – presentation by the former Provincial Treasurer, who dropped in to say hi and to let us know how things are going. I appreciated the opportunity to see him, and I appreciated the opportunity to listen to him. Obviously, I think the experience that he is gaining on the national stage has tempered him in his approach, and it was a pleasure, actually, to listen to him making comments. Frankly, I disagreed with his conclusions, but I must say that I thought well of the manner in which he presented those arguments. So while his ideology I still think is just way off-kilter and leaning far too far to the right, I must say that he's found a more palatable way of presenting it.

During that presentation it made me think of a recent Stats Canada study which found – and this is unbelievable, Mr. Speaker. Statistics Canada found that, contrary to popular belief, if you take a look at the middle of the middle-income earners in this country and the middle of the middle-income earners in the United States of America and you control for things like health care expenses – in other words, you look at total family income and you look at all the measures of central tendency to determine who's really in the middle in terms of family income on this side of the border and on the south side of the border – and you control for health care expenses so that you don't even have health care expenses to throw the argument off-kilter one way or the other, because we know of course that in the United States health care takes up a far greater degree of individuals' disposable income than it does in Canada, unbelievably what this very scientific study found is that those middle-income families in Canada had more disposable income. In spite of all the rhetoric we hear about the tax disadvantage, Canadians actually had more money in their jeans at the end of the day.

Now, this is something that you don't hear coming from the right wing, that's trying to sell this nonsense that it's just taxes that have caused the brain drain. It's not just taxes, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we've got an example going on in this province right at this very minute of what really causes the brain drain, and if you read the same newspapers that I read this morning, you saw the stories about the medical professionals, the nurses and the doctors, who are leaving this country in increasing numbers. The reason why is because, particularly in this province, those men and women aren't respected for the contributions that they make. Their working conditions are abysmal and getting worse, and the pay scale for many of them is at or near the bottom of the rung. Those are the kinds of issues that drive people away from this province and this country. It's not just this simple straight-line logic that the government would have us buy into, which says: oh, well, we taxed them too much. That doesn't seem to hold up very well in the light of day.

5:10

The provincial Premier, in between his arguments that he gets into with his colleague Premiers, has gone on record as saying that

Albertans are going to be saving on average \$1,500 in income tax as a result of Bill 18. You know, Mr. Speaker, that's simply not the case, because the average Albertan doesn't make a taxable income of \$125,000. That's how much you'd have to make in order to get the benefit at the level that the Premier has been talking about, and that's if you factor in the spousal exemption and you factor in the average tax credits that Albertans typically take advantage of. So there have been some very misleading statements made about who it is that's going to save what.

Now, the Alberta tax changes won't take effect until next January, yet for two years in a row this government has been announcing and reannouncing – and I think it was up to 14 separate announcements – tax relief and tax changes, but for 24 months they took no action. Then they start taking some action, and then they only take action with a combination of the flat tax and the removal of the 8 percent surcharge, action that basically only caters to the wealthy.

You know, they say that these are temporary taxes and they're anxious to see them removed, but it reminds me of a quote by C.D. Howe – who I'm sure isn't a philosophical hero of several members of the government – when he was minister of trade and commerce in the '50s. He said, "There is nothing more permanent than a temporary government building – unless it's a temporary tax." That must be a sentiment that the Acting Provincial Treasurer ascribes to, because he stood not once but twice in this Assembly in the past couple of days to protect the government's ability to keep on collecting that .5 percent flat tax so he can continue to take out of the pockets of Albertans over \$300 million and put it into his pockets, Mr. Speaker, metaphorically speaking of course: not into his own pockets but shared on behalf of his colleagues in cabinet.

Now, federal tax changes for the year 2000 will reduce the amount of tax payable for a spectrum of Albertans, and I do applaud that; that is good. But it's the distribution that's the problem. Now, the federal government seemed to be able to figure it out. They went to the middle bracket and decreased the middle bracket . . .

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

DR. WEST: Yes. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), on trying to inflame this Assembly with some of his rhetoric. He has insinuated by his comments that I as Acting Treasurer stood in this Assembly to defend the right to keep the .5 percent flat tax, that was put in some years ago. He said on two occasions that I defended it, yet I've stood up here and defended Bill 18 that incorporates .5 percent and its removal January 1, 2001. Then he comes and insinuates in his debate the opposite. I think he should retract that, because he's famous for dropping innuendos in here to send out there to the public of Alberta something that was not the intention of another hon. member in this Assembly.

MR. SAPERS: I'd be happy just to hear your ruling so that I can carry on with my debate, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. member, if one hon. member says that another hon. member said something and the hon. member who is the subject of it stands up and says, "No, I never said that," then it's really incumbent on the person who first threw the ball to make a response.

So the ruling is what? I have to accept the word of an hon. member, and in this case if the hon. member says, "I never said that," I have to accept that word. That certainly takes precedence

over somebody else who says: well, no; you said that. The only person who knows what they said is the author. So in this case I have to accept the word of the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer. I would ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to be careful to not give statements to other hon. members when they stand up and say: no, I never said that.

I don't know if that clarifies anything, but please proceed.

MR. SAPERS: It's as clear as the government's tax policy, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: I just don't want to waste any time. You know, I sat and I listened to the rhetorical statements from so many government members today without interfering, but you know, when the Acting Provincial Treasurer gets his skin a little bit ruffled, he has to stand up and try to disrupt debate. Well, that's fine. He can go ahead and do that. The record will show, Mr. Speaker, how he voted on the amendments that would have removed the .5 percent tax. The record clearly shows that he voted twice against Liberal amendments that would have saved Alberta taxpayers real money, would have put money back in their pockets in this next tax year, and he voted to keep that money coming out of their pockets and into his treasury. So that's what the record shows, and if he wants to say that's a distortion, he can try to sell that outside the Chamber, because the reality is that this government talks a good game about tax reform, but all it is is talk.

Now, the federal government, as I said, managed to figure it out right. They attacked those middle tax brackets and they brought them down. The Ontario government seems to have figured it out right. Look at what the Ontario government did, their philosophical cousins. They said: look; we're going to reject the flat tax because it doesn't work for people. What they said is: we're going to have a progressive system; we're going to have rates at 6.2 percent, 9.24 percent, 11.16 percent. It's still deindexed, it's still delinked, and it's fair, Mr. Speaker. They understand it. They've done the same thing in Saskatchewan.

So if the folks in Ontario, who this province loves to emulate so much, have figured it out and if even those socialists in Saskatchewan have figured it out – and I know that some members of this government actually have roots back there and have spoken proudly of them – if they figured it out, why is it that this government can't figure it out?

Why is it that British Columbia, which wants to go to tax on income and delink, stays with a progressive rate? Why is it that Saskatchewan, which is delinked and wants to go to tax on income, has opted for a progressive system? Why is it that Manitoba, which wants to delink, stays with a progressive system? Why is it in Ontario? Why is it in New Brunswick? Why is it in Prince Edward Island? Why is it in Nova Scotia? Why has every one of these jurisdictions made the decision to delink, to index, to protect from bracket creep? Yet they figured out a way to keep the system progressive and fair. Why is it that those governments have figured it out and our government hasn't? It's just ideology. They're blinded by their own ideology, and it's not good enough for Alberta. It's not good enough for the taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, the actual CPI increase for the year ended September 30, 1999, was 2.7 percent. That's almost twice the rate that's used in several clauses of the government's legislation. Why is it that they've made that miscalculation? What is it that they're trying to manipulate? Why is it that when the federal government has said that the most important thing is to take a look at both moderating the

tax rates for the middle income and then providing incentives for investment through reducing the dividend tax payable, this government says: what we have to do to stimulate the same kind of supposed growth in the economy is only provide major relief at the top end?

Mr. Speaker, why is it that there are different calculations? Why is it that Albertans at the \$30,000 level overall may only receive savings of about \$40 or \$45 and at the \$40,000 level maybe about \$95 dollars? Why is that? Why is it that this government continues to favour those who give political donations in the province but not to other charities?

If they're talking about meaningful tax reform, there is so much more that they could have done. In fact, this tax budget reminds me very much of a former Prime Minister when he made the following statement. He . . .

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), and (j). It's unfortunate that in the dying minutes of this portion of the session I have to rise to ask the hon. member to retract the comment that he just made. This government and these members do not favour people who give political contributions. It's a mean and unrealistic and unfair slur on the character of every member of this House to make those kinds of allegations in a speech, and he should be asked to withdraw that allegation.

MR. SAPERS: I have no idea what he's referring to. I'm talking about the tax credit you get for political contributions. Now, if he's feeling that sensitive, you know, maybe he doth protest too much. I wasn't suggesting that the government pays more attention to those who give them political donations. That would be the party, Mr. Speaker. I clearly said government.

5:20

I don't know what that Government House Leader is on about. I'm talking about tax policy. I'm talking about the government. Government tax policy clearly provides a maximum tax advantage to people who give a \$100 political donation. You get a far better tax advantage than if you give \$100 to the United Way. That's the point I'm making. So if he can't understand the difference between the Progressive Conservative Party, of which he is a proud member, and the government of Alberta, then that's his problem, but I certainly don't have anything to apologize for, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: So I take it, hon. member, that you are saying that you did not provide any slur on any hon. member with respect to advocating favours for contributions.

MR. SAPERS: No. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

You know, these childish interruptions from the members of the government's front bench are getting to be very, very annoying.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: What I was getting on to, Mr. Speaker, is that this government's defence of its tax policy does remind me of a former Prime Minister of Canada when he said, "I think it really was a mukluk budget – it was luck for the privileged few and muck for the rest of us." Those are the words of the Right Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau when he was Leader of the Official Opposition campaigning against the Conservative budget of John Crosbie. Of course, that

was the budget back in 1980 that paved the way for so many of the problems that the federal Liberals eventually had to go and clean up.

As a result of Bill 18 Alberta tax filers in the lowest 52 percent of the income scale, those earning between zero and \$30,000, will get an average annual tax reduction of \$673 under this government's tax plan. Six hundred and seventy-three dollars. Alberta tax filers in the middle 39 percent of the income scale, between \$30,000 and \$70,000, will get an average annual tax reduction of \$554. But wait for it. The top 4 percent of Alberta tax filers, in the income scale of \$100,000 and over, those six-figure income earners, will get an average tax reduction of \$5,404 under the government's tax plan. The very top 1 percent, the wealthiest Albertans, those tax filers whose income is above \$150,000, will get an average tax reduction of nearly \$11,000. Nearly \$11,000. And this government confuses that with fairness. That is something that I will never support.

Mr. Speaker, not only did this government vote against an amendment which would have saved Alberta taxpayers that \$344 million to \$355 million in terms of the .5 percent flat tax; this government also once again, on one of the most comprehensive tax reforms that this province has ever seen, Bill 18, totally redoing the Alberta personal income tax regime, voted against referring the regulations of that very complicated area of law to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. They still want to be able to meet behind closed doors in cabinet, in secret, with no sunshine creeping in because the blinds on the windows will be drawn, and they want to be able to come up with their secretive tax plans as to how they're going to continue to be able to pick the pockets of these hardworking Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, at least the former Provincial Treasurer had it right when he used to wear that lapel pin about the sweat-soaked loonies. At least he seemed to be knowledgeable and seemed to be aware of the fact that it's real Albertans that provide real money, and it's the sweat of their brow that funds this government's proclivities.

Now, they want to keep it secret. Because of their time allocation manipulation, because we now have a Government House Leader who I think holds the record for closure, the new captain of closure, because of that kind of manipulation, we couldn't even get that amendment on the floor. They were careful to make sure that we couldn't even get that amendment on the floor.

Not only wouldn't they allow that amendment, Mr. Speaker – this is the one that should really, really irritate Albertans, and I know that it will. We've heard all the rhetoric about pointing fingers at the federal government. Because of the federal government's projected surpluses, because it's used 42 percent of its economic surplus for tax relief where this government's only used 12, because of its aggressive moves on tax reform, the federal government is going to continue to bring real tax relief – real tax relief – to the middle-income Canadians and the middle-income Albertans.

Now, Mr. Speaker . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, I take it this is a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

MR. HANCOCK: It is indeed. I deliberated before raising it, Mr. Speaker, but I can't let it go unchallenged. Under 23 (h), (i), and (j), a definite attempt to besmirch this individual member's character by calling this member the king of closure or whatever the term was he used. In fact, it is a matter of public record that the federal Liberal government passed the record for closure by invoking closure and time allocations 67 times. On some occasions – and I can provide the information if the House would like to have it – they invoked

closure and had a vote before there had been any more than one hour of discussion on the bill, and I don't believe that's ever happened in this House.

So they should look in the skin of their federal cousins for who's using closure the most, and the record will clearly show that closure has been used in the federal House by the federal Liberal government much, much more often, with more frequency and with less ability to debate bills than ever in this House.

MR. SAPERS: On this point of order, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry. I didn't call him the king; I called him the captain. But, of course, if he says that he's not the king, then he's just the prince of closure. He's number two but trying harder. So I withdraw that.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: Now, let me please continue, Mr. Speaker, because we are under the threat of closure in the princely way in which it's been brought upon us, and I think I have less than four minutes left before the clock will expire and Albertans will be the recipients of this ill-conceived, unfair, biased, and bad law. So I hope that members of the government, as sensitive as they are, as much as their bubbles have been burst, as much as their thin skins have been irritated, will let me continue in the next couple of minutes uninterrupted.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the provincial Liberals under the leadership of the Member for Edmonton-McClung . . . Mr. Speaker, that can't be my time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to Bill 18. I have certainly been looking forward to speaking on Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. The reason I've been looking forward to this is because this bill really does something to help my low-income constituents and Albertans, and I think it's important to acknowledge this.

There is much talk from the opposition that Alberta's new tax plan benefits high-income earners. This is true. This government won't deny or apologize for that. But the Liberals always seem to stop there. This bill will also benefit middle-income earners. They are talking benefits to the tune of \$612 in savings for a two-income family earning \$55,000 with two children or savings of \$1,206 for a one-income family earning \$40,000 with two children, and I have many such families in my constituency, Mr. Speaker.

The fact is that Alberta's new tax plan goes even further, and that's something the critics don't like to mention. Bill 18 frees 190,000 low-income Albertans from provincial taxes. I'll say that again, Mr. Speaker: 190,000 low-income Albertans freed from provincial taxes. But given their record, it may be something they copy in their next budget and try to take credit for inventing, and for the sake of other Canadians, I can only hope they do so.

Low-income Albertans deserve a break. They may be students trying to get through school. They may be young or just entering the workforce. They may be single parents. Bill 18 will benefit each and every one of them.

Let's look at a part-time student. With Alberta's new tax plan, even if a student is working full-time at McDonald's earning minimum wage, he or she won't pay any provincial tax. Now, let's look at an Albertan entering the workforce. If he or she earned \$20,000, they would save \$386 from 1999. However, this federal tax bill will look . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, we now have a point of order from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Point of Order
Questioning a Member**

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, under *Beauchesne* 333 would the member entertain a short question?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you need only say yes or no.

MR. YANKOWSKY: No, I will not at this time.

Debate Continued

MR. YANKOWSKY: In 2001, families with two children who earn less than \$33,400 will pay no provincial income tax. For these families the refundable Alberta family employment tax credit will exceed Alberta tax payable. Unfortunately, the federal Liberal taxes account for two-thirds of the tax bill. We would love to be able to announce that these low-income Albertans won't be paying any income tax at all, but we will have to wait until the federal Liberals find room in their budget to help these families.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, the opposition has suggested that health care premiums should be eliminated instead of moving to a single-rate tax. They suggest that would provide greater relief to low-income Albertans. However, there are several problems with this approach. First, low-income Albertans already receive generous subsidies to help pay for health care premiums. Many of these Albertans would receive no benefit from the elimination of this premium.

Seniors also receive generous relief on premiums. In fact, less than one-third of seniors pay full premiums. Seniors start paying income tax at a lower income level than they start paying health care premiums. Therefore, low-income seniors would benefit more from tax reductions.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on, but I just want to say that Alberta's new tax plan helps middle- and high-income Albertans, but most importantly it helps those that need it most. That's why we should all support Bill 18.

THE SPEAKER: Due notice having been given by the hon.

Government House Leader under Standing Order 21 and pursuant to Government Motion 22, agreed to earlier this afternoon, under Standing Order 21(2) I must now put the question on the motion for third reading of Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:31 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Smith
Broda	Jonson	Stelmach
Cao	Laing	Stevens
Cardinal	Lougheed	Tannas
Coutts	Lund	Tarchuk
Ducharme	Mar	Taylor
Dunford	Marz	Thurber
Friedel	McFarland	Trynchy
Graham	Nelson	West
Haley	Oberg	Woloshyn
Hancock	O'Neill	Yankowsky
Herard	Pham	Zwozdesky
Jacques	Shariff	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Pannu
Bonner	MacBeth	Sapers
Carlson	Massey	Sloan
Gibbons	Olsen	White

Totals:	For – 38	Against – 12
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[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a third time]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 5 as agreed to on March 7, 2000, this House now stands adjourned. Have a good, safe summer, and I'll think of you all.

[Pursuant to Government Motion 5 the Assembly adjourned at 5:44 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 14, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/11/14

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon and welcome back.

I would ask members to remain standing after prayers so that we may pay tribute to our former colleagues who passed away since we were last in this Assembly.

As we commence proceedings today in this Assembly, we ask for divine guidance so that our words and deeds may bring to all people of this great province hope, prosperity, and a vision for the future. Amen.

Dr. John Walter Grant MacEwan August 12, 1902, to June 15, 2000

THE SPEAKER: Former member the Hon. Dr. John Walter Grant MacEwan passed away on Thursday, June 15, 2000. Dr. MacEwan was first elected as leader of the Liberal Party on November 1, 1958, and served until 1960. He was elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in the election held June 29, 1955, and served until June 18, 1959, representing the constituency of Calgary for the Liberal Party.

During his years in the Legislature Dr. MacEwan served on the select standing committees on Railways, Telephones and Irrigation; Public Accounts; Private Bills; Municipal Law; and Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education. Dr. MacEwan became Lieutenant Governor of Alberta on January 6, 1966, and served until July 2, 1974.

Eric Charles Musgreave July 21, 1921, to June 16, 2000

THE SPEAKER: On Friday, June 16, 2000, Eric C. Musgreave passed away. Mr. Musgreave represented the constituency of Calgary-McKnight for the Progressive Conservative Party. He was first elected in the election held on March 26, 1975, and served until March 20, 1989.

During his years of service he served on the select standing committees on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act; Law and Regulations; Legislative Offices; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; Public Accounts; Private Bills; and during the 21st Legislature served as deputy chairman and served as chairman of Public Affairs. During the 18th Legislature Mr. Musgreave also served on the Special Committee on Surface Rights.

Bryce Coleman Stringam February 8, 1920, to June 2, 2000

THE SPEAKER: On Friday, June 2, 2000, Mr. Bryce Stringam passed away. Mr. Stringam was first elected on June 29, 1955, and served until June 18, 1959, for the constituency of Bow Valley-Empress as an independent member.

During his years in the Legislature Mr. Stringam served on the select standing committees on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Municipal Law; Private Bills; Railways, Telephones and Irrigation; Public Accounts; and Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers

are with them. In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember the hon. members, Dr. Grant MacEwan, Mr. Eric Musgreave, and Mr. Bryce Stringam, as you have known them.

Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Hon. members, it's now my pleasure to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Please join in in the language of your choice.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

Presentation to the Assembly of Mr. Brian Mason Member for Edmonton-Highlands

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I would now invite the hon. leader of the New Democrats to proceed to the bar of the Chamber.

Hon. members, I have received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta the report of the returning officer for the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands containing the results of the by-election that was conducted on June 12, 2000. The report states that a by-election was conducted in the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands, and the said report further shows that Brian Mason was duly elected as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Sergeant-at-Arms.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Dr. Pannu escorted Mr. Mason to the Mace]

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to you Brian Mason, the new Member for Edmonton-Highlands, who has taken the oath as member of this House, has inscribed the roll, and now claims the right to take his seat.

THE SPEAKER: Let the hon. member take his seat.

Presentation to the Assembly of Mrs. Mary Anne Jablonski Member for Red-Deer North

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I would now invite the hon. Premier to proceed to the bar of the Chamber.

Hon. members, I have also received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta the report of the returning officer for the constituency of Red Deer-North containing the results of the by-election conducted on September 25, 2000, which states that a by-election was conducted in the constituency of Red Deer-North. The said report further shows that Mary Anne Jablonski was duly elected as the Member for Red Deer-North.

Sergeant-at-Arms.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Klein escorted Mrs. Jablonski to the Mace]

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to you Mary Anne Jablonski, the new Member for Red Deer-North, who has

taken the oath as a member of this House, has inscribed the roll, and now claims the right to take her seat.

THE SPEAKER: Let the hon. member take her seat.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Jorge Sobisch, governor of the province of Neuquen in Argentina, and his wife, Liliana Planas de Sobisch. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery. Welcome also to Pedro Salvatore, the former governor of Neuquen, and to the other members of the governor's delegation who are seated in the members' gallery.

1:40

The governor and his delegation have come to our province to explore areas where Alberta and Neuquen can work together. The governor signed co-operation agreements this morning with the government of Alberta and yesterday with the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. During his stay he'll also meet with Calgary business leaders and visit the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology. With our shared interests in oil and gas, education, agriculture, cattle, forestry, and paleontology there are a number of excellent opportunities for co-operation between Alberta and Neuquen. I'm looking forward to discussing these opportunities and to furthering the friendship between our two provinces when I meet with the governor later this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that our honoured guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition from citizens concerned with mature women's health and osteoporosis in particular. These are citizens of Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present today. The first is 1,060 signatures from individuals in Calgary and Lethbridge. This petition is asking that the Legislature pass a Tara McDonald law that will require two people on shift from dark to daylight.

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, is from 9,390 Albertans from Calgary, Lethbridge, Taber, a number of other points in southern Alberta, and from Edmonton, Leduc, High Prairie, and Fort McMurray. So you can see this one comes from a broad spectrum across the province. This one is also in connection with the employer's responsibility for employee safety, and it petitions the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight. Employers must be responsible for their employees' safety!

They are seeking to ask the Legislature to pass a Tara McDonald law to protect employees' lives.

Mr. Speaker, that's a total of 10,450 signatures from Albertans that are concerned about the safety of individuals working after hours.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that the sole written question appearing on today's Order Paper, that being Written Question 22, be addressed.

Tomorrow I will also be moving that written questions and motions for returns appearing on Wednesday's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I propose to present the following motion to the Assembly today at the conclusion of the daily business of the House. That motion says:

Be it resolved that the Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of this Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the government's mismanagement of the deregulation of electricity markets in Alberta resulting in inadequate supply to meet the rising demand and skyrocketing prices for consumers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that pursuant to Standing Order 40 I will move the following emergency resolution.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly, in light of skyrocketing electricity costs which are punishing consumers and disrupting the Alberta economy, urges the government to call an independent public inquiry into why the deregulation process has failed so badly and put all electricity deregulation on hold until the inquiry reports.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like today to provide five copies of a document entitled Working Alone Safely. I'd like to point out that this report has been prepared for Tara McDonald and other workers who have died or been injured on the job.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to file a number of documents associated with the restructuring of the Alberta electricity industry. To start with, one is the independent Market Surveillance Administrator Report on Power Pool of Alberta Prices for summer 2000, released October 13, 2000. It tells Albertans about the record-high natural gas prices, high demand for electricity in other jurisdictions and at home, and other factors which led to rate increases in electricity last summer.

The second report I'd like to file, Mr. Speaker, is Alberta Connects, and that is appearing in a newspaper across Alberta this week. It tells Albertans about the government's proactive steps to shield Albertans from rising energy costs through the energy tax refund and electricity auction rebate.

The third item I'd like to file, Mr. Speaker, is the government's 10-point action plan announced on November 3, 2000. It will ensure a reliable electricity supply and competitive marketplace until the full benefits of restructuring are felt in the market.

The fourth item is the U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission report of November 1, 2000, on California's wholesale electricity market structure. It identifies problems due to the rules under which trading takes place in the jurisdiction and offers suggestions for correcting them.

The fifth is the 10 electricity documents and brochures which reflect the government's diligent efforts to inform Albertans about how to make informed decisions in Alberta's competitive electricity marketplace. The documents, Mr. Speaker, are, one, Helping You Plug into Alberta's New Electric Industry; two, How to Shop for Electricity; three, Alberta's New Electric Industry, Opportunities for Small Industrial & Commercial Consumers; four, Alberta's New Electric Industry, Opportunities for Rural Electrification Associations; five, New Power Generation in Alberta, a guide to bringing new electric generation on stream; six, Power of Competition, a guide to Alberta's new competitive electric industry structure; seven, Power of Choice, a guide to help consumers better understand customer choice in Alberta's new restructured, competitive electricity industry; eight, A Vision for Alberta's Electric Industry, Looking Ahead to 2005; nine, Generation of Electric Power from Solution Gas Otherwise Flared; and a fact sheet about Alberta's electrical industry.

I would like to also table two letters of October 15 and November 9, 2000, from Mr. John Davies of the Lethbridge Iron Works Company Limited raising some concerns about electricity deregulation, which are being addressed through the government's 10-point plan.

Finally, the Industrial Association of Southern Alberta letter of November 4, 2000, commends the government for allowing industries to bid on unsold power purchase arrangements and for the 10-point plan.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table six copies each of three reports that I've brought forward today, the second quarter reports showing the results of the Alberta economy. The first is the fiscal update, the second is the activity report for the second quarter, and the third is the heritage fund second quarter report. This report, again, puts in place the 4 and a half billion dollar debt payment in the province of Alberta, which will release and bring down our interest payments to \$700 million. It also ensures within there priority spending that will be discussed here during this session as well as a return to Albertans of some \$485 million through tax concessions, rebates, and property tax reductions, Alberta crop insurance premiums for farmer reductions. Of course, starting on January 1 a reduction to 10 and a half percent single rate of tax will see another 190,000 Albertans off the tax rolls to go along with the 1 million tax filers in the province of Alberta that don't pay any provincial income tax.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rather than the hidden agenda which this government has about more two-tiered health care in Alberta, I want to share with Albertans a preview of the first bill that we will present to this Legislature as the government that we will form after the next provincial election. There's a clear commitment in this bill to repeal and scrap Bill 11 and replace it with legislation that truly protects and strengthens and sustains our public health care system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first one is a document published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy entitled Flat and Dual Tax Plans Not Likely to Have the Desired Effect on the Tax System or the Economy.

The second document I'm pleased to table is the latest report on the question on this MLA's web site; 12,712 people responded. Absolutely nobody thought Alberta should proceed with deregulation, 62 percent of the respondents thought it was important to freeze the process until we take steps to better protect the consumer, and 38 percent felt Alberta should return to a regulated electrical utility system.

Thanks very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings today. The first is from a senior in Calgary who has written to me about the effect rising rent and utility increases have on her and her husband's ability to live on a fixed income. They are receiving AISH and Canada pension plan.

My second tabling is copies of a profile piece entitled Painting Peace, which I received at the youth forum held by the government in Edmonton and other communities last week. It profiles a poster project that is being conducted in partnership by people from Alberta, Change for Children, which is an Edmonton-based organization, and groups in El Salvador and Nicaragua. They are attempting to draw attention through their art to issues of human rights, social justice, peace, and sustainable development.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon. It's a letter from the federal Minister of Health to the provincial minister of health indicating that the practice of insured persons purchasing medically necessary MRI services is a Canada Health Act concern which can result in queue-jumping not only for this service but for follow-up treatment in the public health system.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table five copies of a letter from an Edmonton ophthalmologist. The letter was written October 1 to the Minister of Health and Wellness and protests the decision of the minister to approve the expansion of contracting out of cataract surgeries in the Capital health region.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would table five copies of Sharing Knowledge, Shaping the Future, an occasional publication of the Alberta Graduate Council, indicating that tuition in Alberta has risen over 208 percent since 1990 and that Alberta is near the bottom of the list in provincial funding of postsecondary students.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of copies of a letter that I received from Versacold. This is a company that has operations in Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge. They are very concerned that their electric bill has gone from \$2.7 million to over \$5.5 million, and they're afraid that the so-called Alberta advantage no longer exists in this province.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, as required by section 35(1.1) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, I table in the House a list of the registered candidates for the Edmonton-Highlands by-election of June 12, 2000, together with their chief financial officers, who failed to file a financial statement with the office of the Chief Electoral Officer on or before October 12, 2000. This report is submitted pursuant to section 35(1.1) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act.

As well, pursuant to section 44(1) of the Conflicts of Interest Act, chapter C-22.1 of the 1991 *Statutes of Alberta*, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Ethics Commissioner. This report covers the period April 1, 1999, to March 31, 2000.

I'm also pleased to table copies of the financial statements as at March 31, 1999, of the office of the Ethics Commissioner. A copy of these reports was distributed to members on October 30, 2000.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to the Assembly on your behalf the family of the late former member Mr. Bryce Stringam. His daughter Mrs. Ann Tingle is accompanied by Mr. Morgan Tingle, grandson. They are seated in your gallery, and I would ask them both to rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly a very dedicated, hardworking woman from Lethbridge. Her name is Deb Dore. For the information of all of the people here in the Assembly Deb is the mother of Tara Anne McDonald. It is through her efforts and, I think, her efforts alone that the Working Alone Safely examination was undertaken, which culminated in the reports that were filed earlier today. So I'd ask Deb Dore to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and to other members of the Assembly the council of the M.D. of Greenview: a very special person and a very visionary reeve, Tony Yelenik; his fellow councillors Wayne Drysdale, Charlie Cramer; and the CEO of Greenview, Gordon Frank. They're seated in the members' and public galleries, and I'd ask them now to rise and receive the usual warm and cordial welcome of this Assembly.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a wonderful group of young people from the Independent Order of Foresters Youth Club in Calgary. Through IOOF these young people are getting to see the

value and the importance of community involvement and community service. They've all been involved in some form of community service or another. They raised funds throughout the summer so that they could visit us here in the Legislature and see the various sights around the city. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask you to join me in offering them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you a group of grade 6 students from Grasmere school in Alberta Beach. They're here to study the workings of the Legislature. I made a commitment to them that when they get back home to write me a letter, which I'll respond to, and tell me what they thought and ask the questions that they have no answers for. They're seated in the public gallery. They're here with their teacher, Mrs. Sharon Hansen; the bus driver, Jim Hansen; and some parents. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: That's very nice, hon. member, but you forgot to introduce the most important person in your life, your very distinguished wife, the honourable Mrs. Lorraine Trynchy, who happens to be sitting in the Speaker's gallery.

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, she advised me not to introduce her. She wanted you to do it, so thank you.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Robert David Jablonski. Mr. Jablonski is the owner of a fibreglass manufacturing company in Red Deer. He's the proud father of three children and the proud grandfather of one granddaughter, but more importantly he's the proud husband of my new colleague for Red Deer-North, who has joined us in the Assembly today. I would ask Mr. Jablonski to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly somebody that has been very special in my life for the last 14 years as a secretary and one most dedicated and loyal individual in my constituency, both in Vermillion-Viking and Vermillion-Lloydminster. Mrs. Lynne Little has served with distinction. Perhaps we don't have too much longer to serve together, but I wanted to take this opportunity publicly to thank her for that tremendous work. Would you please stand in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly and a thanks for dedication to democracy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have three introductions to do today. The first is a group of students, 72 of them, from Bertha Kennedy school in my constituency. They're here with their teachers, Miss Michelle Terrasi, Mrs. Fiona McManus, Mrs. Colleen Diedrichs, and parent helpers Mrs. Sheryl Lobsinger, Mrs. Marie Waters, Mrs. Sandy Deleeuw, Mr. Ron Kreski, Mrs. Karen Fowler, Mrs. Susan Manchak, and Mr. Charles Tutty. They, I believe, are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

I also have the introduction of a group of students who are in the education program at Yellowhead Tribal Council. They are people here from the Sunchild reserve, the Alexander and Enoch bands, and they are here with their director, Anna Demchuk. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the next group is about to come in, and I won't have an opportunity to introduce them after. So if I may, I would like to introduce 56 students from Archbishop MacDonald high school, and they are here with their teachers, Mrs. Jane Warren and Mrs. Phyllis Schumacher. They will read their introduction in *Hansard*, and they are looking forward to a great question period.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 45 students and five adults from Fraser elementary school in the constituency of Edmonton-Manning. Accompanying the two grade 6 classes are their teachers, Mr. Dennis Hennig and Mr. Hiob. The parents accompanying them are Mrs. Steel, Mrs. Robinson, and Staff Sergeant Ewatski. Staff Sergeant Ewatski also doubles as their DARE instructor, and he just came back from instructing a DARE program in New Brunswick. They're going to be in the public gallery just as I speak, and with your permission I'd like them to be introduced and welcomed to the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure of introducing to you and to all members of the Assembly two individuals who represent the community of mobility disability. The major disability, of course, is that they are not mobile. In spite of their own disability, being in wheelchairs, Donna Martyn and Larry Pempeit are examples of persons with disabilities who spend numerous hours in encouraging and inspiring others to make Alberta a better place to live for all of us and advocating on behalf of those Albertans who suffer from this disability. They are seated in the public gallery. I would ask all members of the Assembly to give them a warm welcome.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all my new colleagues in the Legislative Assembly three very important people in my life. They are my wife, Karin Olson; my father, Robert Mason; and my stepmother, Kay Guthrie. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a lady that has worked very hard in my constituency office for the last seven and a half years in Taber. She is seated in the members' gallery. I would like Angela Wolgen to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Electric Utilities Deregulation

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the spring session of this Legislature this Premier rammed through private health care legislation despite being opposed by the majority of Albertans, who will be living with the consequences of that legislation for years to come unless, of course, there is a change in government. In much the same way, five years ago this Premier rammed through his electricity deregulation scheme over the voices of opposition from both inside and outside this Legislature. Albertans are now living with the consequences of higher prices and threatened supply. On May 12, 1999, this Premier said, and I quote, that competition in electricity markets always means lower prices for consumers, end quote. My question is: why did this Premier deliberately misinform Albertans when he said that prices would go down under his deregulation scheme when in fact they have risen and will continue to rise for the foreseeable future?

MR. KLEIN: Well, you know, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal opposition is living in two futures. One will never come to fruition, and that is the future of a Liberal government in this province. It will never happen. That's one future. She's also living in another future that hasn't arrived yet. She's living in the future of a deregulated electricity environment. It has not happened. We are still, as we sit here today in this Legislative Assembly, under a regulated environment, and the price of electricity is going up. Under a deregulated scenario when those 1,400 megawatts of power come onstream, when there's additional transportation capacity, the prices will come down.

Mr. Speaker, this hon. member, the leader of the Liberal opposition, I'm sure is a proponent of competitiveness, of free enterprise. If she's not, then stand up and say so now. Tell all Albertans. Is she a socialist, or is she a free enterpriser? If she's a free enterpriser, then she will agree wholeheartedly with our plan to bring about competition and fair pricing in the electrical market scenario.

If the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition wants to know more factual information, I'll have the hon. Minister of Resource Development respond.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: I think that's okay, sir. We've now spent three minutes on that one.

Supplemental, please.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, there's no competition when three producers are protected.

What plan does this government have to deal with the anger that Alberta consumers are feeling towards this government over rising prices, whether they be residential, commercial, or industrial users?

MR. KLEIN: We have done as no other jurisdiction has done. We have put in place relative to rising gasoline and home heating fuel costs a \$300 rebate. Now, Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert . . . [interjections] Well, you can't help but hear her.

Talking about this rebate, I asked her very politely: if she doesn't like the rebate, will she return it? She says: "No. I'm going to spend it." Right? A \$300 rebate, Mr. Speaker. Twenty dollars per month will come off everyone's electricity bill starting January 1. Plus almost \$800 million has gone to businesses, farm communities, schools, hospitals, institutions to help offset the rising cost of electricity.

That, Mr. Speaker, is what we have done. We have done more than any other jurisdiction perhaps in North America, and they don't like it. They don't like it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that a key component of the Alberta advantage is access to cheap, reliable electricity supply, why is this Premier squandering this key benefit to Alberta citizens and businesses?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the statement made by the leader of the Liberal opposition relative to “cheap” couldn’t be further from the truth. That is false, false, false, false. That is a false statement, because the price of electricity throughout North America, throughout the world is at an all-time high. This is not a situation that is peculiar to Alberta.

If the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition wants some facts, some real facts rather than pulling cheap political rhetoric, I’ll have the hon. Minister of Resource Development respond.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In relation to the whole issue of electrical deregulation and pricing, I think it’s only fair to Albertans that we clarify the issue of some of the processes that are in place. For example, when deregulation kicks in starting January 1, 2001 – 85 percent of the people connected to the Alberta electrical system are residential and residential farm consumers. That’s over 1 million people. Those individuals will not have to make any changes for up to five years. They will remain under the regulated system. That’s 1 million residents who will remain under the regulated system for five years. In addition to that, they’ll have a choice if they want to change.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. minister, for that brief supplemental to that.

Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Klein electricity program – and actually interestingly it can be shortened to the KEP – comes into effect in 47 days, but already Albertans know that they have fewer dollars in their jeans as a result. Wholesale prices for electricity have risen from an average of \$14 per megawatt hour in 1996, before the KEP, to \$118 per megawatt hour so far this year, in 2000. My question is to the Premier. What guarantee can the Premier give that this eightfold increase won’t be passed on to consumers?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again the leader of the Liberal opposition is living in the future, and she’s talking about something that has not yet occurred. These price increases have all occurred over the past year in a totally one hundred percent regulated environment. I would ask this leader of the Liberal opposition to be honest with Albertans and tell them that we are still in a regulated environment. Quite clearly and very deliberately and very maliciously, I might add, this leader of the Liberal opposition is trying to imply that we are in a deregulated environment at this particular point and that deregulation, which has not occurred, is somehow contributing to rising electricity prices. I will say again just to set the record straight and to be truthful that we are in a regulated environment as I speak today, and the price of electricity is going up under a regulated environment.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit that Albertans are facing higher electricity prices today because of his own bungling and mismanagement that led to uncertainty in the marketplace and a resultant short supply of power today?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, no. There has been no bungling on my part or on the part of the former minister of energy or the current

Minister of Resource Development. I would invite the leader of the Liberal opposition to talk to the president of TransAlta Utilities. [interjections] Well, any other utility. Right here in the city of Edmonton I would invite the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition to state to the president of EPCOR, a good Edmonton company whereby the city of Edmonton reaps the profits under a regulated environment, and any of those people, the experts – we’re not talking about people in the Liberal caucus because they sure are not experts; we’re talking about experts in the electricity industry – will tell the hon. member about the anomalies that are now taking place that are contributing to an increase in power rates under a regulated environment.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the cost of producing power remains virtually identical to the cost in the pre-KEP days yet the wholesale selling price has increased eightfold, can this Premier explain to this House and to Albertans how his electricity scheme has allowed this exorbitant overcharging for our power to occur?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there has been an examination of this particular matter. It was done by the market surveillance administrator. The hon. Minister of Resource Development tabled his report today. I would invite the leader of the Liberal opposition to read that report, and she might learn something from that report as to what is really contributing to high power rates not only in Alberta but indeed in virtually every jurisdiction on the North American continent and perhaps throughout the world.

Mr. Speaker, I’ll have the hon. minister supplement if he wishes.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In relation to the power rates and natural gas rates to the consumer we did a review of the November 1999 to April 2000 natural gas and electricity rates and found that the average rate on a monthly bill in Alberta was \$151. During November 2000 to April 2001 we’re expecting that price to go up to \$251 per month, but when you consider the rebates provided at this time – they amount to \$100. Therefore, the bill actually will be less this coming winter to the consumer out there than it was last year.

Now, we’ve always said that we’ll keep monitoring the situation and making adjustments accordingly.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

2:20

Private MRI Clinics

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Actually, Mr. Speaker, we’ve got lots more questions on electricity, but since the Premier appears to be shorting out, we’ll switch topics here.

Last May the Premier . . . [interjections] They’re touchy. We know it.

Last May, Mr. Speaker, the Premier wouldn’t admit that it was possible to jump the queue in Alberta by paying for a medically necessary MRI at a private clinic. My questions are back to the Premier. Will the Premier confirm that one of his first acts as Premier of this province was to approve and introduce and allow private MRI clinics?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I’m going to put it right back across the alley. The first private MRI clinic that was licensed in this province was licensed by the leader of the Liberal opposition when she was minister of health.

MRS. MacBETH: Point of order.

MR. KLEIN: The name of that clinic was Elliott Fong Wallace, EFW Radiology. Mr. Speaker, this leader of the Liberal opposition was the person who licensed the very first private MRI clinic in this province.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, either this Premier isn't telling the truth or his former minister isn't, because MRI clinics were not in operation in this province prior to May of 1993.

THE SPEAKER: I've recognized a point of order. We'll deal with the point of order at the conclusion of question period. Right now the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor to deal with a supplemental to her third question.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier confirm that he has in fact shortchanged the public system in order to create a climate where Albertans are either forced to or can go to a private MRI clinic and jump the queue for medical treatment in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond, but before I do that, I want to point out that this province leads all other provinces in Canada in terms of publicly funded MRIs. We now have seven in hospitals. Six more are on their way. And, yes, private MRIs are used under very special circumstances to even further alleviate waiting lists.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this Legislative Assembly is steeped in history, and one of the historical notes that I wish to point out is that this desk was previously occupied by the former minister of health who is now the Leader of the Opposition. I find many things in this desk from time to time. I quote from *Hansard*, July 2, 1992, page 1746.

The private sector does in fact have a role if it can prove that it is efficient, that it's operating fairly, and that it's meeting the responsibility of our health sector to provide access to health services.

Not my words, the words of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, we have done tremendous things with respect to MRIs. As the Premier indicated, we have seven MRIs in the public system currently. We are bringing six more on board. We will have the highest per capita capacity in MRIs in this country. Those are publicly funded.

Two years ago, Mr. Speaker, we did 23,000 MRIs in this province. Last year we did approximately 30,000 MRIs. This year we are projected to do over 40,000 MRIs. I might point out that this was with no help from the federal government. This is a contribution made by this province.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the records in fact showing that prior to May of 1993 there were no private MRI clinics in this province.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, will this Premier confirm that he plans to do nothing to stop the queue-jumping and the two-tiered health care already in place in this province right now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the documentation with me. Whether they were up and running or not is a very moot point. The fact is that the first private MRI to be licensed in this province was licensed by the leader of the Liberal opposition when she was minister of health.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Cataract Surgery

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is hell-bent on privatizing the health care system. You can't pass legislation which encourages the growth of private clinics and private hospitals run for profit and expect to maintain a universal, single-tier health care system for very long. Two tier is here. My questions are to the Premier. Why does the government refuse to accept the advice of Edmonton ophthalmologists who are urging better use of existing operating theatres at the Royal Alex eye centre and who oppose public funds being wasted on contracts with private eye clinics?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness elaborate, but jurisdictions are quite different relative to how they treat various kinds of procedures, including ophthalmology procedures. I understand that about 70 percent of cataract removals in the city of Edmonton are done in public hospitals, about 30 percent are privately contracted. In Calgary I believe 100 percent are privately contracted. In other jurisdictions there's again a mixture of private contracts and cataracts done in public facilities.

I'll have the hon. minister go into further detail.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, two tier is not here, and if it doesn't fit, you better quit. That label does not fit the description of the provincial health care system that exists within this province today.

Our Health Care Protection Act specifically says that it prohibits private hospitals. The leader of the third party indicated that we were creating the environment for it. The fact is that these contracts are privately delivered but paid for by the public system. It is a public system that is privately delivered through contracts with regional health authorities. If you add up the sum total of all of those contracts, it comes to about \$50 million.* That is roughly one-sixteenth of 1 percent of our \$5.8 billion budget. We have a public health care system in this province.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier again: how can the Premier justify breaching section 8(b)(iv) of his own private health care law by allowing additional cataract eye surgery to be contracted out in the Capital health region given the unused capacity of the public Royal Alex eye centre? Answer that.

MR. KLEIN: Yes, I will answer that. Mr. Speaker, although we differ tremendously philosophically from the New Democrats, at least they have been honest and forthright in their approach, unlike the Liberal Party. They have been honest and forthright. I am therefore disappointed to read the news release that I have before me in my hand where it appears that the leader of the ND opposition is resorting to the same tactics of innuendo that have become so predominant, so prevalent from the leader of the Liberal opposition. It says:

New Democrat Leader Raj Pannu questioned the government on the apparent violation . . .

Apparent violation.

. . . of sections of Bill 11. He also released a letter from an Edmonton ophthalmologist who indicates that there is ample unused capacity at the public Royal Alexandra Regional Eye Care Centre.

Mr. Speaker, what I want to point out is that Bill 11 is no longer Bill 11. It is an act of this Legislature. It has been proclaimed. If someone is violating the act, then that person is breaking the law. If the leader of the ND opposition has evidence that that person is

*See page 1843, right col., para. 5

breaking the law, then he has a duty to bring that evidence to the minister in charge, and the person who is breaking the law will be prosecuted.

2:30

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, let me remind the Premier that I brought this to the attention of this House right here.

My supplemental to him is again: how can he justify breaching that section that I just referred to of his own health care law – I am talking about law here now – by allowing cataract surgeries in the Capital health region to be contracted out at higher costs when those surgeries could be performed at the Royal Alex eye centre at a lower cost, as the letter from the ophthalmologist clearly indicates?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is raising an allegation. He is suggesting that someone has broken the law. If he has evidence that someone is breaking the law, I would ask him now to take that evidence to the Minister of Health and Wellness and perhaps to the Justice minister, and Attorney General, and we'll have an investigation into it. If the hon. member is wrong in raising this innuendo, in raising these allegations, I would expect him to stand up in this Legislature and apologize.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, all of these contracts are approved through a process. We ask the regional health authorities to satisfy themselves that this is the best value that they can get for the performing of a certain type of procedure; in this case, cataracts. There is a lengthy process that the regional health authorities apply to these contracts before they are brought for the approval of the minister of health. I am satisfied that all of the contracts that have been approved have gone through this rigorous process.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that the regional health authorities do have flexibility to contract out certain services so long as they can be done safely within the guidelines set out by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Those services, from the information I have, are being done well, they're being done safely, and they're being done cost effectively.

Provincial Debt

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, at the recent annual general meeting of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Association a resolution was passed which called for the provincial government to work toward the elimination of provincial personal income tax within five years. Given that sound fiscal policy continues to be a high priority of Albertans, can the Provincial Treasurer advise the Assembly if it remains the priority of government as Albertans have clearly identified to pay down and eliminate Alberta's debt?

Speaker's Ruling

Questions about Political Party Activity

THE SPEAKER: Just a second, hon. Provincial Treasurer, please. One of the areas that is not to be questioned in question period is political party matters, so I presume this question has to do with the government policy and nothing to do with the political party.

MRS. BURGNER: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Debt

(continued)

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, it indeed does have to do with government policy. If I go back to a questionnaire sent out to Albertans, Talk It

Up: Talk It Out, a survey of 1999, they said by 74.8 percent to pay down the debt. That's what Albertans said. That is their priority.

It is a priority of this government inasmuch as we've put it into law. We have an act that says that we must retire the debt in the province of Alberta. We put it into a 25-year mortgage payment cycle so that the average person in the province of Alberta could understand it. They have 25-year mortgages on their businesses, on their homes.

Well, fortunately, we've been blessed in the province with onetime revenue increases due to the cyclical nature of oil and gas, and we've been able to pay that debt down to \$8 billion in about six years. We will eliminate that debt on these types of projections in another two to three years. That given, that will set us in a position where we're not paying interest on that money, interest which in 1994-95 was \$1.7 billion on a 22 and a half billion dollar debt.

So I'm pleased to re-emphasize: our main priority as stated by Albertans is to pay down the debt and get rid of the interest burden.

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, how can we be sure that the province will have the economic growth and projected revenues needed to either reduce personal income tax, eliminate health care premiums, eliminate the education portion of the property tax, reduce gasoline tax, or indeed eliminate any taxes which Albertans may identify as we move to a debt-free Alberta?

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I appreciate about my job is that I have hundreds and hundreds of people within Alberta and in other jurisdictions commenting on the state of the Alberta economy and our fiscal plan. Today I noticed with interest that the Toronto-Dominion Bank of Canada said, "I think Alberta will remain the low-tax jurisdiction in all of North America." The story confirms that the top financial houses like TD have recognized Alberta and its government's work in setting its fiscal framework.

A little while ago Moody's stood notice that in three months they will take us to a triple A rating, the highest in this country, higher than the sovereign, which is unheard of. A part of a sovereign country, one of the provinces of Canada, will have a higher rating than the government of Canada on a domestic basis. That is unheard of.

On another note we have put in place by law three-year business plans, debt retirement plans, and we have had other people look at this and say: "If you follow that pattern, if you remove your debt and you start lowering taxes, you will drive your gross domestic product under these plans. You will create more jobs, and in so doing, you will return moneys back to the government which can be used to sustain the tax cuts as well as the lowering of fees, property taxes, and business taxes."

Not long ago we had a report from the Business Tax Review Committee in the province of Alberta that indicated that if we took \$955 million out in business taxes, small business and corporate, that it would drive the economy of Alberta in four years out by 1.8 percent gross domestic product and create the equivalent of 30-some thousand jobs. That coupled with the lowering of personal income tax starting on January 1 by \$1.3 billion will drive another percentage point in gross domestic product and create another 10,000 jobs. The combined effect of those tax cuts alone will create 40,000 jobs in four years and a 2 and a half percent increase in gross domestic product. That will sustain the concerns of the hon. member that we can continue to keep low taxes, low fees and ensure that Alberta is a place to invest and do business.

Speaker's Ruling

Brevity in Question Period

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I'm dutifully trying to make sure

that we have a time allocation here for questions and answers that really balances, so I think I must tell you that because of the rather lengthy explanation provided by your colleague, we're now going to move on to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Electric Utilities Deregulation (continued)

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's electricity deregulation has turned into an Alberta disadvantage for many businesses across this province. Lethbridge Iron Works, an iron foundry established in 1898, is facing a 250 percent increase in its electricity costs in 2001 under the Premier's deregulation system. The company says that it would have to raise its prices by 12 and a half percent in 2001 just to break even and is now faced with three options in the future: close its doors or face massive layoffs or possible bankruptcy. My questions are to the minister of resources. How can the government claim that this electricity deregulation will result in lower prices when companies such as Lethbridge Iron Works are faced with a massive 250 percent increase in their electricity costs in 2001?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I have to be reasonably careful in this particular matter because one of the 10-point action plans that I announced recently covers the issue of the Lethbridge situation in relation to electricity costs. The surveillance administrator will be specifically looking at the Lethbridge situation in relation to the pricing of electricity. That report should be due at the end of November of this year.

2:40

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier that there are a number of businesses out there that have different ways of obtaining electricity, that to start with, over a million residential individuals including residential farms won't have to make a choice for five years.

I go on further. In relation to industrial consumers those industrial consumers that use less than 250,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity also have up to three years before they have to choose if they want to get out of the regulated system.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker – and this may address some of the issues in relation to the Lethbridge situation – a number of major industrial customers have already signed long-term contracts with the power purchase holders and other suppliers in that particular area. Some companies may not have chosen to do that and may be interested to participate in the new sale that's coming on.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, how are they supposed to sign long-term contracts when the companies that are selling the electricity do not even know at this point what the cost is going to be for their electricity? How can they get those long-term contracts?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, the power purchase arrangement holders, which hold, you know, over 60 percent of the electricity in Alberta, know what the prices are and therefore can sit down with the people that are interested in obtaining electricity. Again, I'd just like to say that after the market surveillance report is completed, which will happen within a month, I'm looking forward to seeing if there are some discrepancies in the pricing structure for that particular area. In the meantime, at the end of this month we will be selling another 2,000 megawatts of electricity in small blocks of two-megawatt packages, which allow companies like the Lethbridge company to be able to purchase their electricity requirements directly from the power pool. Therefore, the option is there.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, could the minister explain how that two-megawatt option is going to help a company that's consuming electricity at the rate that the Lethbridge Iron Works is? Two megawatts is insignificant in terms of their total cost.

MR. CARDINAL: There will be 2,000 megawatts of electricity sold, Mr. Speaker, at the end of November. The smaller packages were requested by working with individual consumers out there to determine how the packages may be sold, and the recommendation was to have minimum two-megawatt packages, but the packages can be a lot larger than that. Therefore, the company can purchase a number of packages like that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Anno Domini Exhibit

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. Would the minister explain why he did not remove all references, visual and verbal, to Robert Latimer in the Anno Domini exhibit at the Provincial Museum when it became apparent that the inclusion of this person in the context of the beatitudes presentation was, in fact, communicating the wrong message?

THE SPEAKER: The Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we have to put the issue in context. The display, Anno Domini: Jesus through the Centuries, is a very, very significant display. It's been put together by people all around the world. We've had curators from various museums involved, also a 35-member advisory committee. Of this whole display the written and video portion dealing with the beatitudes is very, very small. There was concern, yes, brought to me in a way which I won't go over. I did not agree with the misinterpretation placed on this particular piece of the display.

However, in fairness to the folks who had the concern, I sat down with the directors of the museum and asked them to review it and see if they could in any way take away the possibility of this particular misinterpretation. The result was that the curator – and I think it's important to note: the curator and not the minister – put together a new news clip which only referred to Latimer by name once, removed the picture from it, and the final comments are from the prosecutor that stated very clearly that murder is murder is murder. The intention was not at any time to take sides or to present a particular view.

The new clip – and I would suggest that all members have a look at this again – that is being run there is very good, very neutral. As a matter of fact, it sides more on the side of what the AACL would like. I would have to say that the province and the government in no way, shape, or form condone murder in any way. I would say that the references to him are taken out sufficiently to where there is no possibility of misinterpretation at this point.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Electric Utilities Deregulation (continued)

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just like with Bill 11 this government is indulging in a massive propaganda campaign to misinform and to distort and to cover up its responsibility in the

skyrocketing electricity prices in this province. The spin campaign is designed to cover up this government's five years of bungling of this electricity deregulation and is costing Albertans millions and perhaps billions over the next 10 years. My questions today are for the Acting Premier and perhaps his fall guy, the Minister of Resource Development. Why are the Premier, this minister, and the former minister misleading Albertans by claiming that the cost of natural gas is responsible for higher electricity prices when this government's own market surveillance administrator says that "the increase in electricity prices is not adequately explained by [high natural] gas cost"?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, we're not, but I'll have the Minister of Resource Development answer that.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd just like to indicate, you know, that in the March 17, 1998, debate on the Electric Utilities Amendment Act, which laid out how the electrical deregulation would take place and even identifies dates and time lines including 2001 for full deregulation, the member asked me the question and at the time said, "I must say on behalf of myself and at least a good deal of my caucus that we intend to look upon this bill favourably." Today he comes out with such remarks. It's funny how things change.

Of course high electricity prices are across North America; it's not only in Alberta. Now, in relation to the issue of generation itself today 50 percent of generation is done by coal, which costs about \$30 a megawatt, and about 34 percent by natural gas. This is where the increased costs come in as a natural gas issue. The old generation plants that were put in place – actually some of them took up to 10 years to approve. Genesee is one plant.

So the old process, the regulated process, had difficulties also. In fact, by the time that plant was completed, the overrun on the cost was \$600 million. That \$600 million, Mr. Speaker, was added to the consumers, so we are paying for it. Therefore, there are a number of issues that caused that.

MR. WHITE: Why do this Premier and his government and this minister continue to mislead Albertans by claiming that this government's mismanagement is not responsible for higher prices when his own market surveillance administrator says that the five years of uncertainty has caused "reluctance on the part of suppliers to invest in new supply"?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, since I was included in that question, I will answer some of it.

The minister is quite correct when he said that there is a changing dynamic to electricity production in North America, not just here in Alberta. By the time the next 2,700 megawatts comes on by the year 2003, the amount of power produced by coal, which was a cheap power source that we had, will be around 50 to 56 percent of the province's grid.

2:50

Over the last three years there have been some great changes made in technology, technology as it relates to gas turbines that are going into many of the plants in the province, in cogeneration plants and new combined-cycle gas turbine plants that are going in freestanding, like the one that's going in next to Calgary. There have also been small microturbines put on flares, which has been part of our environmental progress in this province to get rid of natural gas flares that are out there on the horizon. There's also been wind power come on. You look at Vision Quest and some of the

companies that are going in on Cowley Ridge with major wind turbines. Those power plants that are going to be onstream are going to be high-cost producers.

You know that Enmax and some of the rest have contracted that high-cost production to go into their mix because people have said: we believe in elements of the climate change issue; we want this new technology to come on, and we're willing to pay for it. Is the opposition saying that they're not interested in the new technology which will help CO₂ emissions and that may be a cost of higher power? Are they saying that they're against climate change? Why don't they stand up and say that?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, again, brevity is very important. I'm coming to the conclusion that this Assembly actually wants a debate later on this afternoon on this matter.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is this Premier, the current minister, and the former minister continually misleading Albertans by claiming – they probably mislead their government too – that there's a significant new generation coming onstream when his own market surveillance administrator says, "The numbers quoted in regard to new supply are . . . gross numbers, which overstate the net capacity brought to the system"?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, in relation to supply, the peak demand for this winter is projected to be 7,748 megawatts, but the total supply is over 9,400 megawatts. That leaves 1,650 megawatts. The Provincial Treasurer, of course, mentioned that in the last three years the new generation onstream brought in another 1,400 megawatts, and in addition to that we expect another 1,600 megawatts to come onstream in the next little while. In fact, the Joffre plant, I just found out today, will probably come onstream before the end of November.

When you go back to 1995, Mr. Speaker, there were 15 individual units generating electricity. Today you have over 30. That shows you how the system can work.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Working Alone Regulation

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring the tragic death of Tara Anne McDonald at a fast-food outlet in my constituency reminded us all of the importance of doing all we can to ensure that our workplaces are safe. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Can the minister please tell us what has been done to protect workers who may be required to work alone?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After the tragic death of Tara Anne McDonald I think most if not all Albertans were deeply affected. I talked earlier about the role of Tara Anne's mother in moving this along.

We already had a general safety regulation task force that was out conducting hearings, and we added, then, a working alone safely component to some of the things that they were looking at. We also put together a committee that would look at best practices as they

could be found not only here in the province but throughout the rest of North America.

The working-alone regulation that's now been put into place, Mr. Speaker, obligates employers in this province to do three very practical things. The first is that they must assess the hazards in their particular workplace. Second, they must – and we know they'll work with their employees in doing this – take appropriate safety measures to reduce those hazards if they are unable to actually eliminate them. The third and perhaps important as anything we have done is that there must be a communication system in place so that if the employee who is working alone runs into some particular difficulty, they will have a means to be able to respond so that someone can then react in an emergency situation.

We believe, Mr. Speaker, that the new regulation is practical, we believe it's a responsible reaction to the situation, and most of all we believe that it's enforceable.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the new working-alone regulation affects many small employers who may not know how to conduct a hazard assessment and that a written hazard assessment creates more paperwork for them, can the minister please tell us how his department is helping employers meet these new requirements?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, I'd be pleased to, Mr. Speaker. Again, earlier today I tabled a document that was called Working Alone Safely, and this is a best practices document that attempts, then, to cut through perhaps some of the paperwork that might be required. The handbook provides the opportunity for employers to use it as a checklist. We provide in that particular document scenarios that should be developed for five different situations where employees can be found working alone.

So with this checklist we believe that employers, especially small employers, would be able to quite rapidly work through the situation and with very little inconvenience be able to come up with a safety regulation that would apply to their particular workplace.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell us why he did not consider making it mandatory for two people to work these night shifts?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to indicate that what we have in front of us now in the new regulation and in the best practices points out the power of one, points out the power that one person can have when they become energized over a situation and become committed to that situation.

Once again, I want to acknowledge the efforts of Deb Dore, the mother of the slain worker. Through her efforts the safety of people working alone has a higher profile now within our department than any other workplace health and safety issue. Companies that had never before considered looking at the particular hazards that might exist in their workplace are now conducting these hazard assessments, and of course with that we know that more employers are looking at their overall health and safety programs.

As it relates to legislation directed to working alone, it was my understanding, based on the information that was provided to us and a review of the particular research that was made available to me through this committee, that it was in the best interest of employees working alone and also of those employers who employ people in these kinds of situations to develop sound safety practices and provide, then, emergency communication and that this was the way in which it could appropriately be dealt with. We looked at other jurisdictions across this country and of course the States, and we

found that there was no jurisdiction that prohibits working alone. It was my decision then – and I accept the responsibility for it – to move forward with the regulation and with the best-practices document that was submitted earlier.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness wishes to clarify a response.

MR. MAR: Correct myself, sir.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, correct yourself, please.

Cataract Surgery

(continued)

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this is to the best of my recollection in responding to a question. I referred to the value of contracted services under the Health Care Protection Act. I believe I cited the figure of \$50 million. I was not correct. It is closer to \$9 million, which, as I correctly said, is .16 of 1 percent of a \$5.6 billion budget.*

3:00

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of three hon. members to participate in Members' Statements.

We'll proceed, first of all, with the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Alberta Dress Tartan

MR. STEVENS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I think it's appropriate this afternoon to report progress on Alberta's newest provincial emblem, the Alberta dress tartan. Bill 205, the Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000, became law this past July 1, and then just a few days later the Alberta dress tartan was officially introduced to Albertans at the opening ceremonies of the ScotDance Canada Championship Series. The event was held at the Ice Palace in West Edmonton Mall, where 40 dancers from across the province showcased a special dance on a stage skirted with the Alberta dress tartan to commemorate the unveiling.

During this special performance dancers re-created the weaving of the new tartan culminating in a finale featuring a stage flooded with dancers wearing the Alberta dress tartan. The high-energy performance received a standing ovation and set the tone for the largest highland dancing event ever staged, with 1,185 dancing competitors from Canada, the United States, Australia, England, and Scotland.

Also over the summer two highland dancers from Calgary were accepted to compete in front of the royal family at the Braemar Highland Games in Scotland. One of the dancers was Ashley Stowkowy, who together with her highland dance instructor, Gail Danysk, approached me with the Alberta dress tartan proposal.

This invitation was quite an honour and one not extended to many dancers. To have two dancers from Calgary's Gillie Callum Highland Dance school perform at this prestigious event was special in itself, but even more thrilling was that they were able to wear their formal Alberta dress tartans as representatives of this province.

I am also able to report this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, that the Alberta dress tartan was officially registered just last week in the registry of all publicly known tartans.

Mr. Speaker, it's with great pleasure that I say that Albertans are proudly wearing the Alberta dress tartan both at home and abroad as a symbol of their Alberta pride. Thank you.

*See page 1839, right col., para. 6

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MRI Services

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans take the level and accessibility of their health care seriously and will never agree to a system of health care delivery that makes a profit from someone's illness. In 1994 this Premier's health care cuts resulted in a very real crisis in Alberta's health care system that is still unresolved. These actions set the stage for the growth of private, two-tier health care in this province and allowed private MRI clinics to profit at the expense of Albertans' health.

The Premier continually uses the word choice, but the reality is that the choice is only for those that can afford it. In the provision of MRI services the Premier has manufactured an environment where Albertans are left with only two choices: they can either pay about \$700 per MRI scan in a private clinic to get faster service, or they can wait months to have the public system provide the service.

The Premier has said that the only people who will pay for an MRI service are those who are healthy and just want to have their head or leg or arm checked out. On May 17 he also, however, said that if an MRI is necessary and prescribed by a doctor, it will be covered by the public system. In a recent letter to the provincial minister of health Allan Rock, the federal Minister of Health, wrote that "medically necessary MRI scans are insured health services" and that "the practice of insured persons purchasing medically necessary MRI services is a [Canada Health Act] concern."

The question remains: why does the Premier and his minister of health insist on contravening the Canada Health Act by refusing to pay for medically necessary MRIs? Are they waiting for the federal government to fine this province yet again to ensure that this government complies with the Canada Health Act principles?

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Camrose Continuing Care Project

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak on the \$25.8 million Camrose continuing care capital project announced November 3 by the ministers of Health and Wellness and Infrastructure. This project means construction of five new facilities on four sites in Camrose and will increase the number of care choices for current and future continuing-care clients. The new facilities will replace spaces at the Rosehaven care centre and the Bethany long-term care centre.

By focusing on new and innovative ways to provide care and housing, this project will be the flagship for the future of continuing-care services across Alberta. It was developed using the Broda report as a planning guide. Emphasis will be placed on smaller facilities, on providing more privacy and personal choice in service delivery, and on maintaining client independence.

This is a giant step forward for continuing care and supportive housing in Camrose. The city faces a relatively unique situation of having 20 percent of its population over the age of 65. I hope this continuing-care project will serve as a model for other communities as they, too, face the challenges of an aging population in the years ahead.

This leading-edge project wouldn't have been possible without the partnership between this government, the East Central regional health authority, and the Bethany Group. I'm proud to take this opportunity to recognize the Bethany Group for their hard work and dedication over the years, culminating in this very important

development. The group has a 78-year history of providing excellent continuing-care services in Camrose.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members on a point of order.

The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order

Oral Question Period Rules

MR. DICKSON: Yes. With your leave, Mr. Speaker, I was going to address the point of order raised by my colleague the Leader of the Opposition. The authority would be *Beauchesne* 408(2). The question that attracts a point of order or the response would be the third set of questions asked by the Leader of the Official Opposition. The first question in that third set and the response of the Premier was to this effect. Now, I don't have the Blues yet, but what I heard the Premier say was that the first private MRI clinic in this province was approved by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

What is particularly frustrating about this is that this is not the first time this issue has come up. There's ample authority, Mr. Speaker, that when a member in this Assembly stands and asserts a particular fact, it's accepted by members that in fact that was the member's intention and that member's knowledge. I recall over a year ago standing on a similar point of order. If members refer to sessional paper 149/95, that was tabled in this Assembly before, it was a response to Written Question 149. This is the answer from the government of the province of Alberta, and it says, "Private MRI clinics were not in operation prior to May, 1993." I could go on, but that's the relevant portion.

What we've got is a fact that there were no private MRI clinics prior to May of 1993, and I'm advised by the Leader of the Opposition that she did not approve any private MRI clinic during her time as minister of health.

So those are the facts, and it's the government's own document, this response to Written Question 149. This has been raised before. Surely the Premier has been advised in terms of what relevant documents have been tabled in the House. For him to persist in initially the publication but now the republication of what is a defamatory statement is completely unacceptable. It doesn't meet the standard that we expect of any member, never mind the Premier of the province.

3:10

This is not simply a question of an error, and it can't, in my respectful view, simply be dismissed as the Premier not having paid attention to detail. I think this is the second time that this error has been pointed out, and I think it requires a direct intervention from you, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that this inaccuracy is not republished again and again. It certainly has the effect, I assure you, of violating 408(2), which talks about answers that "should not provoke debate." What could be more provocative than the persistent repetition of a completely false and inaccurate statement?

Those are the observations I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again the opposition uses miscues and misdirection to try and take the public's attention away from the facts. The sessional paper, which the hon. member refers to, speaks specifically about when MRIs are in operation. It doesn't say anything, at least not as was quoted. I haven't had the opportunity to read it today, but I'm sure that if it

said anything about when they were approved, he would have read it. The indication that was made this afternoon in question period, as I heard it, was a question of when they were approved.

Now, I don't think it's provoking debate at all to point out historical information in terms of who were previous ministers' of health in this province and what happened under their watch and whether it was approved or not approved at that particular time, although the hon. member has not really addressed the question of when it was approved. Whether or not it was or it wasn't, the bottom line is that we have had MRIs in this province only for some 10 years, and we are the province that has moved up rather rapidly in terms of the number of MRIs and the number of scans that are being provided to the people of Alberta. As the Minister of Health and Wellness indicated today, it is projected that some 40,000 MRI scans will occur in this province this year, and with the six new MRIs that have been brought on in the private sector, we will have the largest number per capita of MRI scans in this province.

The issue that the Official Opposition House Leader raised has not addressed the question of approval, when they were approved, but obviously if they were in operation in May of '93, it stands to reason that they must have been approved some time previous to that. It takes some period of time to install and get operational MRI machines, as we well know, having approved the money for the purchase of six new MRIs in the public system last May, which will be operational in this province within the early part of the year 2001. It stands to reason that there's a period of time prior to operation for approval.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, one of the pieces of research that the chair does not have in front of him, of course, is the historical knowledge of exactly what day a particular event occurred. One hon. member says: well, certain things were in effect on a certain date. Another hon. member says that another hon. member had approved something before that time. The chair is not in a position to ascertain that at the moment.

This certainly is a dispute about facts, and the hon. Opposition House Leader was certainly in a position to stand and correct what the hon. member believes was a misrepresentation of fact with respect to a colleague of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo's with respect to this.

Now, the chair of course can dutifully leave the Assembly and go to his office and find all kinds of documents with respect to this matter, but perhaps there's a better judge at the moment for something like this if it deals with misrepresentation of facts. If there are many of our colleagues up above me in the press gallery, I'll invite them to in fact do a little bit of investigation and ascertain who did in fact put into effect a certain thing at a certain date, and that would probably lead to somebody writing an article or something with respect to that.

In this particular Assembly, in terms of where he says that all hon. members have a chance to clarify it, I'm sure we'll hear more about this in the ensuing days to come. This definitely is a matter of a dispute, and all hon. members might want to read the House of Commons book that we have and particularly refer to the text on page 433 on how it's dealt with in terms of a parliament.

There were a number of other strange things that happened here today as well. I want to repeat to all members again particularly that section in *Beauchesne* dealing with questions and asking for legal interpretations. On one or two occasions the chair did hear one hon. member say to another hon. member, "You are breaking the law," or alluding to something like that. If an hon. member in this Assembly is being accused of breaking the law, as I understand the system of organization that we operate under, we have a free and independent

police that must be advised of any lawbreakers and wrongdoings, and suitable investigations must occur. Of course, then the police would be in a position to lay charges against anybody who is breaking the law. So that certainly is the manner in which we operate.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Motions under Standing Orders 30 and 40

THE SPEAKER: Now, we have to deal with a Standing Order 30 application and a Standing Order 40 application. The chair would just like to point out to the author of the Standing Order 30 application at this point in time what the chair is going to do today with respect to that Standing Order 30 application. This may come up in the future, and should it ever occur in the future, one has to be very, very cognizant and careful of the procedure in place.

The Speaker received in his office at 3:26 p.m. on November 6 notice from the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that it was her plan to come forward with a Standing Order 30 to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss an urgent matter of business, but the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition did not identify to the Speaker what that Standing Order 30 would be. Under Standing Order 30 the rule is very, very clear in what it says. Should another standing order application have arrived in the Speaker's office with identification of the text of what that Standing Order 30 would have been, the Speaker would have been dealing with the second one first today because it would have completely abided by the rules of this Assembly.

Now, we received a Standing Order 30 application, as I indicated, at 3:26 p.m., November 6, and then today on November 14 at 9:20 a.m. the text of the Standing Order 30 did arrive. So it abides by that. However, one or two hon. members have also raised the situation of: which standing order would you deal with first, the Standing Order 30 application or the Standing Order 40 application that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands submitted? That arrived in the Speaker's office at 11:15 a.m. on November 9, and it certainly did complete the text and abided by all of the conditions laid out in our Standing Orders. However, as Standing Order 30 requires an intervention and decision by the Speaker with respect to the matter whereas a Standing Order 40 requires a decision of the House, it would appear to be more appropriate that we deal first of all with the Standing Order 30 application, which will provide for a decision from the chair and not involve the members of the House.

head: Request for Emergency Debate

THE SPEAKER: So we're now going to proceed with the Standing Order 30 application. One more time and once again to draw it to all members' attention, the Standing Order 30 application has to do with a member requesting leave

to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance of which written notice has been given to the Speaker at least two hours prior to the sitting of the Assembly.

The operative word is "urgent."

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

3:20

Electric Utilities Deregulation

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to impress upon you the validity of this motion under Standing Order 30. I am asking that you rule that the matter is indeed urgent and that it is consistent with the requirements of Standing Orders rules. For the record I

would like to read into the debate of this Legislature the motion which I propose.

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the government's mismanagement of the deregulation of electricity markets in Alberta resulting in inadequate supply to meet rising demand and skyrocketing prices for consumers.

Mr. Speaker, I am guided today in my arguments by two very important authorities that govern the proceedings of this House. I'll be referring in my arguments to *Beauchesne* 387, 389, 390, and our own Standing Order 30.

Beauchesne 387, in the section entitled Motions to Adjourn the House under Standing Order 52 to Discuss an Important Matter, says:

The Standing Order is clear that the question [must] be specific and must require urgent consideration. It must deal with a matter within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate.

Beauchesne 389 goes on to say:

The "specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration" . . . must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention.

Beauchesne 390 says:

"Urgency" within this rule does not apply to the matter itself, but means "urgency of debate," when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules . . . do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough.

Of course, Standing Order 30 spends a good deal of time dealing with the issue. Section 30(1) says that

any member may request leave to move to adjourn the ordinary business . . . to discuss a matter of urgent public importance of which written notice has been given to the Speaker at least two hours prior to the sitting.

That, of course, has been done.

Under section 30(6) "an emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly." It goes on to say in 30(7) that

- (a) the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration . . .
- (c) not more than one matter may be discussed on the same motion;
- (d) the motion must not revive discussion on a matter which has been discussed in the same session . . .
- (e) the motion must not be based on a question of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the matter before us is in fact a matter of clear urgency and meets all the requirements set out in the sections that I have outlined. In accordance with *Beauchesne* 387 the government's mismanagement of electricity market deregulation in Alberta is "specific," requires "urgent consideration," is "within the administrative competence of the Government," and is needed because there has been no other reasonable opportunity to debate. The question is specific: be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, mismanagement of deregulation, rising costs, and skyrocketing prices for consumers.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we are not asking for a decision. We are asking for a debate. We're being very specific. The question requires urgent debate. There are two issues that come out of these authorities on the question of urgency. One is the distinction in *Beauchesne* between the urgency of debate and the urgency of the substance. The two are not unrelated, of course. There is an urgency of debate, as I have outlined, because we have no other opportunities – this is the earliest possible time – and because of the substance of the problem.

The substance of the issue is the second feature of the urgency argument. Mr. Speaker, all Albertans are affected by this problem

of rising electricity prices: all homeowners, all home renters, all businesses, all industries, senior citizens, young families, students, major manufacturing companies, small businesses. The list of affected Albertans is immense, and it affects people at home and at work. People with low incomes are choosing whether to heat or eat. Businesses are being hurt, and the government's mismanagement is destroying the Alberta advantage.

The question deals with a matter clearly within the administrative competence of the government, although the use of the word "competence" is questionable there. The plan to deregulate the electricity market has been pursued by this government for five years now, despite the warnings of the Official Opposition. The problem is the direct product of this government. It is within the administrative competence to pursue deregulation, and it is within the same administrative competence to debate it now.

Mr. Speaker, the question posed does not have any other reasonable opportunity for debate. There have been no other opportunities to debate this issue. The results of deregulation have been seen coming for a long time by this side of the House, but while they finally became apparent over the summer and the fall, there has been no opportunity to debate them until now. We have only one question period to question the government, but if question period was sufficient to deny a Standing Order 30, then there would be no need for Standing Order 30s, period. But question period is not sufficient, and that is why we have Standing Order 30 for issues like this. Therefore, in accordance with *Beauchesne* 387 I submit to this Assembly that this is the most appropriate time and place to deal with the issue.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, and in accordance with *Beauchesne* 389, the urgent matter is "so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention." Again, this is an issue affecting all Albertans. Skyrocketing prices affect everyone in their pocketbook. Some are being hit to the point that they must choose, as I've said, to heat or eat. An opportunity is needed to address the plight facing Alberta citizens and business.

Mr. Speaker, I believe we have already addressed the issue of urgency further clarified in *Beauchesne* 390. If electricity is not debated here and now, there will not be an opportunity to debate it in this Assembly prior to its full implementation on January 1, 2001, 47 days from now. This province may be facing unscheduled interruptions in power supply and the closure and exodus of business. This is a policy that will affect the lives of Albertans for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, in closing and in accordance with your own Standing Orders, I want to re-emphasize the urgency of this question. I challenge the Premier and his government to agree to an emergency debate on this issue, an issue of importance to every single Albertan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Just one clarification. These are not my Standing Orders. These are the Standing Orders of this Assembly.

The hon. Minister of Resource Development on this point of order. We're dealing with the application under the point of order.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The opposition's motion under Standing Orders to put aside the regular business of the Assembly to debate the issue of this government's management of the deregulation of Alberta's electricity industry is not in order and should be denied on several grounds.

Mr. Speaker, no emergency exists today. Therefore, urgent debate is not needed, and there will be other reasonable opportunities to address the matter over the next few weeks during question period. I would be pleased to respond to any of the hon. members'

accusations at that time. The government has been pursuing a steady and deliberate course towards deregulation since 1993. The opposition has had years to discuss the issue of this government's approach to deregulation in the House. In fact, the original introduction of the legislation came in 1995. The opposition then participated in the discussions, and with the amendment in 1998 the opposition members again participated in discussions. From reading the *Hansard*, there was general support for deregulation and competition at the time from a number of the members, so they are aware of the process of deregulation.

3:30

As well, Mr. Speaker, the government intends to introduce personal income tax amendments during this fall session, and that directly relates to energy rebates. Therefore, there will also be an opportunity to debate energy matters at the time.

Mr. Speaker, we have had and continue to see investment in generation in Alberta. In fact, there are double the number of generators out there at this time compared to 1995. Deregulation is not the cause of rising prices. In fact, deregulation will put a downward pressure on the energy prices.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE SPEAKER: I think, hon. minister, what we're doing now is debating a possible motion. We're going to determine whether or not it's going to be debated. It's now dealing with the urgency of a Standing Order 30 application to waive all the business of the day. You just deal with this one.

Debate Continued

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned a number of issues in relation to the urgency. Through this deregulation process, when January 1, 2001, takes place, when full deregulation kicks in, to start with, 85 percent of Albertans connected to the electrical system – that's over one million residential units, residential homes, and residential farms – have up to five years, have up to 2005, before they have to make a decision to change. Within that five years they can also change. Over 124,000 customers, who are commercial, industrial, and municipal users that use less than 250,000 kilowatt hours of electricity, can also remain with their present regulated supplier up to three years. Therefore, the urgency in those two areas sure isn't there.

In addition to that, I know that a lot of the major industrial users of electricity have already signed long-term contracts with existing suppliers. In fact, a lot of long-term contracts were done and signed before the bidding process took place. The industries and also the bidders knew how much they could bid on the projects, and therefore the urgency definitely is not there.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we also have a sale of additional electricity that is going to come shortly before the end of this month. Another 2,000 megawatts in packages as small as two megawatts will be put up for sale, and it will give the opportunities for larger industries that didn't bid through the initial process or smaller industries or commercial or municipalities even to bid on that, so they would definitely have a supply.

The other one I'd like to mention briefly, Mr. Speaker, is in relation to the actual prices of electricity and natural gas, for an example.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE SPEAKER: I take it, hon. minister, that what you're basically

doing is saying that you're not concerned about having a debate, that as far as you're concerned, let's have a debate. You're participating in one now. We are on a Standing Order 30 application. I've heard from the Leader of the Official Opposition, and again the same kind of suggestion was made there through body language. So that's it. We've heard your input now.

Anybody else on the opposition side? We're talking about Standing Order 30, and I'm going with the rules of Standing Order 30. Then I'm prepared to hear – does someone else on the government side want to participate in the Standing Order 30 application?

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

THE SPEAKER: Well, there's no question. This is the dilemma with a Standing Order 30 application, hon. member. There is no question.

So, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, you want to participate on Standing Order 30? Okay. But remember, Standing Order 30.

MR. WHITE: Urgency. Yes. Your admonishments are quite correct, sir. As I understand, Standing Order 30 speaks to the urgency of the matter. Well, sir, the urgency of this is of utmost importance to Albertans. Every single soul in this province relies on this energy.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me. Thank you very much, but the Standing Order 30 application has to do with the urgency of this Assembly waiving all other of its agenda items to deny all other members an opportunity to deal with the business that's already been advertised for them to deal with, not with the question of the motion. Just tell me where it's impossible for anybody, another member, ever to raise the question of this issue again. That's all I want to know.

Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: Well, sir, there doesn't seem to be any other forum, and the debate that did occur nine months ago was truncated by closure. There were less than 90 minutes of debate on the entire matter. It's so important to the people of Alberta that there must be a forum, and this is the forum.

The member opposite cites question period. Well, question period is not debate. It does not allow the give-and-take. It does not speak of the philosophical elements of whether it's free enterprise or whether it's under a regulated market. Those are some fundamentals that have to be decided. The government opposite says that there have been many, many changes since the time this government started working on this project, and it is true that we have yet to have a debate.

Therefore, sir, I think it's of utmost importance that this House adjourn the business of the day in that we have other days to deal with these elements of business, but this element of business is so important and so important today in that it is less than 47 days until this takes effect. If that occurs, contracts are signed, sealed, and delivered, and then there's no turning back. There are elements in this society, some major elements, that believe there are adequate reasons to say: stop, halt, and take assessment of the situation in that it can be stopped now. All contracts can be made null and void, whereas they cannot be the closer we get.

Sir, 37 percent of the energy is yet to be sold. That could be stopped today. Businesses are leaving Alberta, and there is an expectation . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please work with me on this one; okay? These are the rules of the House: Standing Order 30. I mean, three or four of the things you just finished saying are not in the motion, so I don't follow this.

Okay. I'm going to hear two more, and that's it. We're going to be here all afternoon. We're coming to a head on this.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, then followed by the Government House Leader.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the motion of the hon. Leader of the Opposition should be ruled in order, and I have a number of reasons for saying that. The main reason why the Assembly should debate this at this time is that there are certain irrevocable decisions that are going to be made between the time of this sitting of the Legislature and the next election or the next sitting of the Legislature.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member. Now, I appreciate what the hon. member is saying, but when you have a Standing Order 30 application, it has to do with the unavailability of any other opportunity in the Assembly to deal with the matter, not the importance of the question. That's the difficulty with the acuity of the arguments under a Standing Order 30 application.

Debate Continued

THE SPEAKER: The Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, you're absolutely correct. In order to set aside the ordinary business of the day, to set aside the opportunity for private members to have their bills, which have been carefully considered, put on the Order Paper, to set aside private members' motions this afternoon on issues that have been researched and where members have brought forward their time, to set aside at 4:30 the bringing in of letters from the Lieutenant Governor so that the supplementary estimates can be considered, to set aside the ordinary business of the day, which is the business of this House, for an emergency debate, Standing Order 30 does require something that is urgent and pressing and has no other opportunity for debate.

3:40

Now, if you look at the Order Paper, Mr. Speaker, no member of the opposition or any other member that I can see has put on a written question or a motion for a return requiring information. There's nothing under Motions Other than Government Motions, although, as the Opposition House Leader has mentioned, this issue of deregulation has been extant for some five years. There's been no motion other than government motion put on the Order Paper. No member of the opposition has taken the opportunity of any of the ordinary methods of bringing things to the attention of the House, and now they're bringing a Standing Order 30 asking that the very important business of the private members of this House be set aside and the very important business of bringing forward supplementary supply be set aside.

With respect to supplementary supply, of course, that goes to Committee of Supply, and there are opportunities in Committee of Supply to discuss a wide range of issues and concerns about how government should spend the people of Alberta's resources. There may well be an opportunity in Committee of Supply or under the Appropriation Act debate to raise issues regarding how government revenues are raised and spent. So there may well be opportunities

for members during this session. In fact, if we can get on with the business of the session, get supplementary supply on the table, they'll have an opportunity to debate a wide range of issues relative to how government spends and raises resources that belong to the Alberta government.

So the question of urgency has been eloquently addressed by my colleague the minister of natural resources insofar as he has pointed out that this process is not something that's happened overnight. It's a process that's happened over a period of time. The opposition has acknowledged that that process has happened over a period of time. The question of whether we should adjourn debate in the House really boils down to: is it sufficiently important that there be a debate in this House on this issue today, to set aside all of the work that private members have done to bring their issues to the table and the supplementary supply that the government is bringing to the table this afternoon? I respectfully suggest, Mr. Speaker, that no case for urgency of that nature has been made.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have to address this today. We've heard the Government House Leader speak about the fact that this can be brought up in the budget. That is not true. The budget deals with the financial allocations and the expenditures of this government. This motion is asking for a debate about the management processes. There is no provision in the rest of this session to deal with any kind of policy or management process that deals with how this government is conducting and putting in place the deregulation system. This is our only opportunity to be able to deal with that kind of question in this House.

If we want to start talking about how they're going to deal with the allocation of the rebates, how they're going to deal with the return to Albertans of their money from the auction sales, that kind of thing can be dealt with in the budget. The policy issues cannot. This is the legislative session, this is the House that deals with the policy issues, and we must debate them now in this House before they make any more decisions that will further complicate and confuse Albertans as to what the end result of this process is going to be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, you have one kick at the cat. You had it.

Hon. members, there is no doubt whatsoever in the mind of the chair that this is an important matter and that this may very well be a very controversial matter. The difficulty the chair has is that the chair must abide by the rules of this Assembly and enforce the rules of this Assembly in terms of the basis of the documents that we have followed in the past. So, first of all, I'll just comment on the requirement in terms of the notice under the Standing Order 30 application, although I've already talked about this. I certainly viewed it to be adequate in terms of the prescribed times and in order.

For the Speaker to grant a request for leave, the matter certainly must relate to a genuine emergency requiring an urgent debate. If one takes a look at the wording of the motion, the motion itself suggests that the matter of urgent public importance is – and I'm going to quote directly from this – “the government's mismanagement of the deregulation of electricity markets in Alberta.” That in itself does not meet the criteria for an application under the standing order. I would like to draw members' attention to *Beauchesne* 394: “a general question of the maladministration of a department cannot be considered for debate under this Standing Order.” One could

look at this motion and basically view it as a motion of nonconfidence or censure.

As well, the chair would like to draw members' attention to the book *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, the one that we have here in this Assembly. I would ask you to review and refer to the sections on pages 587 and 588 of that book, the criteria used in the Canadian House of Commons for similar applications.

Then I would go one step further. If somehow the chair were to take the subject of urgent public matter to be increased electricity costs, the ongoing nature of that does not necessarily make it a genuine emergency, although it is very important and most controversial. Today 25 minutes of the 50 minutes in question period surrounded this particular matter, and the chair would suspect that in the days to come a fair chunk of question period will be associated with this.

Accordingly, the chair finds that the request for leave is not in order, and the question shall not be put.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MR. DICKSON: Can I stand under 13(2), please, in request of clarification with respect to something you just said?

THE SPEAKER: Yes.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, we've heard argument just moments ago that question period amounts to debate, and I thought I heard you in fact confirm that moments ago. I'd ask if you could help me with this. On March 8, 2000, in *Hansard*, page 309, and on April 17, 2000, page 1010, I took your comments then to be that question period is something very different than debate. Since from time to time I expect we will see other Standing Order 30s, I wonder, sir, if you would just help me understand whether you in fact are saying that what happens in that 50 minutes of question period amounts to debate, which is in fact one of the elements of a Standing Order 30. If I could have that clarified, I'd be grateful.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, in clarifying the whole thing, the Speaker would also like to point the attention of the hon. Opposition House Leader to *Beauchesne* 398 and to read it in context in terms of the discussion we're having right now.

Question period is not a debating time. The only thing that the chair did was just point out that in today's question period 25 minutes out of the 50 minutes were devoted to the whole question of electricity. The way questions are framed by certain people and the way questions are answered by other people may lead to some people suggesting that it is debate, but that's not the intent of question period and never has been the intent of question period. The intent of question period is to seek out answers to very specific questions, and if we actually went back to that kind of procedure and had a very specific question seeking out a very specific answer and had a very specific answer to a very specific question, whoa, we would have the true, ultimate question period, but as we're dealing with human beings, all of whom have very determined approaches of their own, sometimes we seem to waive and violate that and move away from that.

So let me just make it very, very clear again, hon. Opposition House Leader. Nothing that was said here this afternoon in terms of coming to this conclusion on this particular Standing Order 30 application would lead anyone to suggest that question period will be turned into a debating Assembly. The reasons were given by the chair, and the chair would repeat again: *Beauchesne* 398.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands on a Standing Order 40 application.

Electric Utilities Deregulation

Mr. Mason:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly, in light of skyrocketing electricity costs which are punishing consumers and disrupting the Alberta economy, urges the government to call an independent public inquiry into why the deregulation process has failed so badly and put all electricity deregulation on hold until the inquiry reports.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the Legislative Assembly allow me to introduce the motion which I gave notice of earlier. Standing Order 40 requires two things: that it be urgent and pressing. I would argue, first of all, that it is urgent because we are faced with a very serious situation in this province with respect to electricity costs. We have businesses who are writing to the government and writing to the opposition saying that they will no longer be able to carry on their business in this province and are looking at relocating to other provinces. So that indeed is a very pressing and urgent situation.

In terms of dealing with it now and the arguments for dealing with it now rather than later – I tried to allude to that in my previous comments – there are some things that are going to happen between now and the beginning of the new year that will create a very dangerous situation, and this is our only chance to deal with them. The first thing is that there is a second auction, following the failed first auction, that is scheduled for just shortly after this Legislature is supposed to rise. Secondly, the implementation of the deregulation regime takes place on January 1, 2001. After that, by all accounts it will be very, very expensive and very difficult if not impossible to go back if we find we've made a mistake. So that, I think, speaks to the urgency of this question.

3:50

I want to also raise the question that there have been some statements made, some of the answers that were given in the question period, that's been referred to, that are clearly requiring some debate. The opposition has not had an opportunity to respond and cannot respond except in a debate. That is the statement that deregulation is not the cause of the present spike in electricity prices, which both the Premier and the minister have stated. That needs debate, and I think that's putting it mildly, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I would just appeal to members of the House, as well, that in terms of preserving the Alberta advantage, which this government is so fond of talking about, it is essential that low input costs for manufacturing be a part of that. Everything you've worked for, as much as we on this side have disagreed with the method, can go up in smoke if you don't deal with this and deal with it now. This is your last chance, Mr. Speaker, the last chance of the members of this Assembly to deal with this situation.

So I would ask those opposite to give unanimous consent so that we can debate this and have this debate which is very much on Albertans' minds.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the process for a Standing Order 40 application is much simpler than the process for a Standing Order 30 application. This simply requires unanimous consent of the House.

[Unanimous consent denied]

THE SPEAKER: Before proceeding to Orders of the Day, hon. members, I must point out to you something with respect to the Order Paper. Hon. members may have noted some slight modifications to the early Order Paper circulated November 9. One such modification is the withdrawal of Motion Other than Government Motion 548 to reflect the resignation of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

As well, Bill 14, the Alberta Treasury Branches Amendment Act, 2000, and Bill 22, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2000, both now at second reading stage on the Order Paper and introduced under the sponsorship of the Provincial Treasurer, thus not designating a particular individual, now show the name of the current Provincial Treasurer, the hon. Dr. West.

Government Motion 15, proposing the approval in general of the business plans and fiscal policies of the government, will remain as shown in view of the fact that the Order Paper reflects the actual mover of the motion on February 24, 2000.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Labour Legislation Review

513. Mr. Fischer moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to re-examine Alberta's existing Labour Relations Code and Public Service Employee Relations Act and propose recommendations for their improvement, particularly with respect to collective bargaining agreements.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and begin debate on Motion 513. The intent of Motion 513 is to get debate started on collective bargaining practices in our province and to show that the current process is outdated and seriously flawed.

Confrontational bargaining began half a century ago, when workers had virtually no basic fundamental rights and were forced to become hostile, even militant, to obtain those rights. Over the years, many of these fundamental rights have been enshrined in our Canadian Constitution or have been addressed in our provincial labour statutes. So we have come a long way, and I believe that in today's society there is absolutely no need to use this outdated, hostile bargaining process to arrive at a collective bargaining agreement.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

It is time for a change. You may ask why the need to change when the majority of collective bargaining agreements get ratified without work stoppage and in due time. Here is a letter that I had written to me that describes what a very respected schoolteacher and principal of an elementary school in the Buffalo Trail school division thinks of the process. This letter was written during a long-drawn-out and bitter negotiation of their collective agreement that degraded to a strike vote and lockout situation. He said:

As a teacher in [the Buffalo Trail regional division], I just wanted to let you know that I am truly disheartened by the situation occurring in [the school division] between the trustees and the professional staff of the schools. This seems to be a particular trouble spot for labour relations in our province. Since the beginning of the amalgamation of school boards, we have had difficulty coming up with any reasonable process for establishing a comparatively reasonable contract. The initial years, we spent a great deal

of time and energy trying to put the four former boards on an even playing field in terms of wages and working conditions. The last two settlements have been reached with a great deal of difficulty. We were in an eleventh hour settlement situation in January of this year to reach agreement for a two year contract that was in fact in place for only 8 months! This year we have yet another unique situation with a "lock out" of teachers before giving any real time to allow the negotiations to progress once lock out and strike votes were taken.

As a teacher, I think that we do have a problem [in this division]. I do not think that it is a "money issue," I think that it is a "trust issue." I submit that before any two parties can come to an agreement, they need to be able to "trust" each other. I personally do not feel that that trust exists between the two sides in [this division]. No one is willing to give an inch for fear that the other side might take advantage of their genuine desire to negotiate. Hence, we are miles apart in terms of our relative positions. I also feel that this labour situation will pass, however the bigger problem of "trust" will force us yet [again] into conflict after conflict. As adults fight and continue to fight, the children are the ones who will pay the price and will continue to pay the price, not only through pointless job action, but through a disintegrating employer-employee relationship.

I personally feel that we need help to resolve this problem. The deep seated lack of trust is too ingrained to heal on its own. Someone needs to help us look at this and ask "is this what education in the province of Alberta is all about?" I feel that this needs to be someone outside of our organization who can help all of the partners . . . to focus on the "education of its children as a unified team."

I also have another letter from a teacher parent who expressed her frustration over the long-drawn-out process and her fear that her daughter's education would be hurt.

The dispute ended November 9 with the minister of labour appointing a disputes inquiry board, who very skillfully brought the parties together and an agreement to their contracts. Yes, the dispute was settled, but the damage will not go away for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, during this past year, as bargaining took place, reports from both sides would come from people close to the negotiations about all the things that the other side would not agree to. Sometimes the truth is stretched a little; sometimes it's misinterpreted or distorted and then passed on from one neighbourhood to the other. Statements, sometimes accusations become very personal, even mean-spirited, causing huge hurt within the whole community. Since I've been an MLA, I have personally gone through strikes, lockouts, mediation, arbitration with teachers, nurses, and CUPE employees. They all have one thing in common, that everyone loses, in this case the school boards, the teachers, and the students. This has provided for an unhappy workplace.

4:00

Our government prides itself on listening to Albertans, and my motion is the result of this. My constituents raised their concerns about the collective bargaining process, and I'm acting on those concerns as well as some of my own. Mr. Speaker, I propose to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment that an extensive consultation with stakeholders such as employers, unions, and industry associations take place before any significant changes to the legislation. This consultation, hopefully, will be the basis of a lasting and effective labour climate in our province for years to come. So I also see Motion 513 as the starter for the consultation process that will take place down the road, and I'm sure that some of the ideas and comments from others will be brought forward and could be used.

Mr. Speaker, the primary piece of legislation which governs collective bargaining is the Labour Relations Code. The code

applies to all employers but does not apply to all employees. For example, practising members of the legal, dental, medical, engineering, and architectural professions or persons in managerial positions are not governed by the code. The Labour Relations Code covers processes governing collective bargaining, collective agreements, dispute resolution, strikes, and lockouts. It also governs the rights of parties, unfair labour practices, and establishes the Labour Relations Board. In Alberta 90 percent of the collective bargaining agreements and 79 percent of the unionized workforce are covered by the Labour Relations Code. The remainder are covered under the Public Service Employee Relations Act, Universities Act, Technical Institutes Act, Banff Centre Act, Police Act, and the Canadian Labour Code for Alberta employees.

Mr. Speaker, one alternative may be to revisit the existing legislation and put in some rules that disallow any contact with members from either side. Negotiating in the public and through the media is causing many serious problems. Disallowing contact certainly would alleviate many of these negative communication problems and prevent further conflict. As well, there are other methods of collective bargaining that may be more beneficial to both labour and management, but too often the participants in contract negotiations come away from the process describing the stressful conditions and results as leaving both sides feeling the other side is the enemy. Moreover, the damaged and fragmented relationships that were the byproduct of these sessions do not leave a viable framework to work from in the future.

We must ask ourselves how this is affecting our workers, our businesses, and the economy as a whole. It has been proven time and time again that a peaceful and happy workplace will provide the maximum productivity. People will go beyond the call of duty to help others and to improve efficiency. Therefore, a peaceful labour climate is essential to the betterment of this province.

One alternative that I'd like to propose to you is called interest-based bargaining. Interest-based bargaining has worked well on several occasions in the U.S. in diverse industrial sectors. Interest-based bargaining focuses on negotiators addressing issues on their merits rather than haggling and taking hard stands. This method suggests mutual gains wherever possible and, where interests conflict, insistence that the result be based on fair standards, independent of the forced will of either side. The wanted result of this approach is to create a spirit of co-operation that works beyond the bargaining process.

In Arizona the Salt River Project, a public electricity and water company, used interest-based bargaining after facing a growing stalemate with the union representing its 4,300 employees. The new approach led to a productive contract negotiation and a dramatic decrease in the number of grievances. All grievances had been settled without going to arbitration through prompt meetings between labour and management to solve the problem on a nonprecedent-setting basis.

As well, the Missouri state legislature passed legislation in 1999 that put interest-based bargaining into law, covering all collective bargaining done by school districts in the state. The law has been well received and garnered a great deal of support from the teachers and the administrators alike in the state. Here are some comments from a local superintendent.

Teachers teach and kids learn from the first day of bargaining until the last with interest-based bargaining. The result is remarkably better, leading to solutions that are quite out of the ordinary. In districts that already enjoy good relationships between the school boards and the teachers, interest-based bargaining strengthens the relationships and gives you a new set of skills to work with. You can continue to use the skills throughout the year, long after the bargaining process itself is over.

A comment from a parent: interest-based bargaining is a problem-solving process that tries to meet the needs of all parties; it gives school boards a reason to listen to teachers more.

As well, the Wisconsin State Employees Union recently concluded negotiations using this method.

These are fine examples of interest-based bargaining working. When both labour and management went to the table aware that decisions would not be reached easily but were willing to negotiate in a spirit of goodwill rather than hostility, things got done, and the labour climate benefited. I'm not trying to say that interest-based bargaining is the answer to all our labour issues, but if we can start a process where some agreements are made using interest-based bargaining methods, then we have made some progress. To me this would be a step in the right direction.

So let's consider, folks, what I've said today. I'm asking you to look at our labour relations process and recognize that there is a great need to make changes. It is not in any way intended to take away any bargaining power from either side; it is about finding a better way. Yes, we as legislators have a duty to respect and listen to what Albertans are saying, and they are asking us to please find a better way.

So I ask all members to support Motion 513. It's a step into the 21st century, a step towards a more peaceful labour climate.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Wainwright, just for the record, a clarification: Mr. Speaker is not in the chair.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

4:10

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is with interest that I rise to address the Assembly this afternoon regarding the motion that the hon. Member for Wainwright has presented to the Assembly. Listening to his remarks, I need further clarification, but I believe what he is proposing here is, once again, right-to-work legislation for this province.

I understand he's using the example, Madam Speaker, of the labour negotiations that were going on between the teachers and the officials in the Buffalo Trail school division. I would like to remind the hon. member that last week I attended an induction ceremony for teachers who were becoming members of local 37 in the public school system. Local 37, of course, is one of the larger locals of the Alberta Teachers' Association. I may not have the year correct, but the moderator of that event said that the teachers of this province have had one strike in recent history, and I believe it was in 1972. So to bring forward this argument that there's no stability in labour relations between Alberta teachers and the various school boards across this fine province I don't think is quite sound.

Now, we're blessed this afternoon to have the presence in the Assembly of the hon. minister in charge of our Labour Relations Code, and I'm sure that he is very interested in participating in this discussion or debate this afternoon. Certainly we need balanced labour relations. The hon. minister has used the disputes inquiry board. It is one of the mechanisms that's available to him. Not only this hon. minister but an hon. minister before him in that portfolio used it. It was a mechanism that already existed, and it settled an issue in Calgary. It settled the issue.

The best collective agreement that can be reached is an agreement that's reached without any sort of arbitration. The best agreement is the one that's freely reached by both parties and that both parties are going to benefit from. If we're going to discuss balanced labour relations in this province, we have to look at the whole issue of fairness and the whole issue of equitable treatment in the workplace of all Alberta workers, not just teachers. We have to understand that

workers in this province must be valued and treated with respect. Alberta workers are not a commodity. They are a resource to be valued and cherished.

I believe, Madam Speaker – and the hon. member can correct me if I'm wrong – that he described it as interest-based bargaining. I would have to question whose interest is going to be served here. Because we look at the whole arbitration process in this province, whether it's the public-sector unions or the private-sector unions, and they do not have confidence in the current system.

How do we improve it? That is a very, very good question. The first way to improve it is to restore confidence in the entire process. We have to restore confidence by looking at the Labour Relations Board. We have to look at the turnaround times in hearings. They're different for employers than they are for employees. Is that balanced, Madam Speaker? I don't think so. That would be the first thing that I would do to ensure that we have a balanced labour relations climate in this province.

We need to ensure that high standards are maintained in the entire workforce. We know that in the past there has been confrontation in the workforce, and when we look at the percentage of Albertans who are unionized and we look at the percentage of the workforce that is unionized yet does not have the right to strike and we look at the number of workers who have the right to strike, then the hon. Member for Wainwright would be correct in his assessment that we have an unstable framework, because we have a very low rate of the workforce which can actually withdraw their labour from the work site.

We look at situations that have developed in the recent past. We look at Dynamic Furniture. We look at what happened there. The situation at Dynamic Furniture went on and on and on. It divided entire communities. The reason why this occurred, Madam Speaker, was because of the imbalance in our labour climate in this province. There was the use of replacement workers. There were security guards hired. There were dogs hired. There were light plants employed. It was like a war zone in Calgary. I feel that the easiest way to fix the entire problem would be that after a first contract is signed or a site is certified by a respected union, if there is no contract agreed to by both parties after a six-month period, then binding arbitration be applied and help them both settle their differences. This is not done in this province, and we see the result in Dynamic Furniture.

We look at the unfortunate situation at the *Calgary Herald*, where individuals expressed their democratic right to not only join a union but to have a union represent them with their employer. This, unfortunately, didn't work out for the employees. The situation went on and on and on. I can't understand in this province where at one time the hon. minister could take such an active role – and in this case I'm referring to the fines that were imposed when the Alberta union of public employees had job action earlier this year – why there was not the same regard for the Labour Relations Code when there were long-drawn-out strikes at the *Calgary Herald* and long-drawn-out strikes at Dynamic Furniture and, if we want to go back to a previous time, at Canada Safeway when over 10,000 Albertans were on a legal strike.

Now, we have to be committed, certainly, to improving labour relations in Alberta, particularly in the health care sector. We can do this, Madam Speaker, by simply asking the health care professionals, whether they're in an association or whether they're in a union, to come to the table. By the table I mean between negotiation periods. I believe these organizations should have representatives on the respective health authorities. If we want to talk and we're sincere about improving labour relations in this province, that is one

direction we should go until we agree to elect the regional health authorities.

I am becoming suspicious, like a lot of Albertans, because I don't think the government is too anxious to allow the directors of our regional health authorities to be elected. I read earlier that some hon. members were concerned about political instability not only if members of the general public were elected to the regional health authorities but if, say, Heather Smith, who is an excellent union leader, were to be, for instance, on the board of directors of the Capital health authority. This would be a step in the right direction, as I said, if we're sincere about balanced labour relations, because that way there could be a continuous dialogue between the employer and the employee.

Now, in the past we have discussed this in this very Assembly, and a former minister of labour, when the labour department was a stand-alone department, agreed with me and thought that, yes, there should be a continuous dialogue between the health care professionals, their unions, and the regional health authorities.

4:20

If we're to have a balance between labour's interest in gaining respect from this government, one of the first things that I would suggest be done is a complete inquiry into the whole process of appointments to the labour board. The hon. member did not speak of that when he proposed his motion in respect to collective bargaining agreements, but they're the ones that essentially administer the act, and there are individuals from other jurisdictions who question, unfortunately, the integrity of our system.

Now, I believe we should implement legislation to restore to health care workers the right to strike. Yes, we should have an essential services act in this province. The current system is not working. Every time there is a series of negotiations, the system is held hostage. We hear each side explain their case to the public, and essentially it becomes a public relations exercise. If we were to allow, before the negotiations start, both sides to sit down and determine any number of health care professionals that are going to remain behind or alternate if there is, unfortunately, a picket line, they can alternate so that there are always personnel on hand. This occurs now. Contrary to what a lot of people say, this goes on now, but it would be set up so that the system is never held hostage. Hon. members are astonished at this, but you have to look at the record. You have to look at this record of removing the rights of workers. It is simply not working.

We need also to have a look at the use of replacement workers in job actions and this practice.

MR. SMITH: You support that, eh, Hugh?

MR. MacDONALD: I hear the former minister of labour, the current Minister of Gaming, talking about his support for this.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I would like all hon. members across the way to examine the record. I know it's a sensitive record. I know that whenever we look at the three-year plan or we look at the five-year plan or we look at the business plan or we look at a key performance measure, we always take out, Mr. Speaker, the parts that we don't like. In this case I am looking at the Canada Safeway strike. It simply drove the time lost to job action or to strikes way up in this province, so it was removed. We put a star beside that strike and had it removed. That does not tell the true picture, because that was a divisive strike. It still is divisive. It's almost three years. In fact, it is three years, and

people still talk about it. It left an impression on all Albertans. We think we have stable labour relations, but in reality we do not.

I have to caution all members because the hon. member initially, whenever he spoke, said that it's a time for change, but I don't believe it's a step in the right direction. A Time for Change may be a slogan that's used by certain political parties at certain times, but we must have a long look at the Labour Relations Code in this province. If we are to look at solutions that are coming from Arizona in this interest-based bargaining, negotiating on merit, spirit of compromise, this sounds very much like what the unions of convenience, which are growing at a rapid rate in this province, are espousing. I can only ask: who's the dialogue going to be between? Is it going to be between selected, as the government likes to call them, stakeholders, or is it going to include all members of the labour relations community? I would welcome more information on this interest-based bargaining. If I'm wrong, fine, but my first view of this is that it is simply another word for right to work in disguise. We hear the slogan from the Reform Party, A Time for Change – the hon. Member for Wainwright uses this – and that party advocates right-to-work legislation. So I want to caution all hon. members of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, to be very, very careful.

We're talking about teachers. We're talking about health care professionals. We're talking about Albertans who are working in this province, and they're proud to work under a collective agreement. You ask each and every one of them; they will tell you that it improves not only their standard of living but also their family's. There has to be an equal share for all Albertans, and I'm not convinced that any sort of debate on right-to-work legislation or interest-based bargaining, or whatever you want to call it, is in the interests of Alberta employees or their employers.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to note that in 10 years the disposable income of Albertans has risen very little. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre is listening, and she may be interested to know that in the last 10 years the gap in wages between men and women has opened up so there's a 26 percent wage gap between female Albertans employed in the workforce and male Albertans employed in the workforce.

If the hon. member would – oh, my time is up. I'm very disappointed, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak on Motion 513, sponsored by my hon. colleague from Wainwright. I want to thank him for bringing forth a motion on collective bargaining in Alberta.

It's a type of a motion, Mr. Speaker, that I . . .

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business for today has concluded.

4:30

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have received a message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

THE SPEAKER: The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary

estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

head: Government Motions

Referral of Supplementary Supply Estimates

23. Dr. West moved:

Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2000-01 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith, be referred to the Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to my understanding of Standing Order 18(1), this would be a debatable motion, and there are a couple of observations I wanted to make straight off. You know, we used to talk about the current leader of the Alliance as the king of supplementary supply. He's not here now, but we find that he has a successor. It strikes me as of more than passing interest that in a province where the provincial government loves to tout itself as a champion of business, in a province where the government likes to portray itself as having some expertise in terms of the market economy and having some particular kind of insight and sensitivity to how we're going to create those high-skill, high-paid jobs for the young people in this province, we see that every supplementary supply time we have a process that I would think would be fairly embarrassing.

What this really tells us is that we have some serious structural flaws in the process, Mr. Speaker, by which we deal with budgets in this province. We look at provinces like Ontario that have identified this being of particular issue. What the province of Ontario has been able to do – I think they stole a page from the late Laurence Decore, who back in 1993 had proposed a new process for dealing with provincial budgets. It was in a document called Mandate for Change, and but for four percentage points in the popular vote the current Provincial Treasurer might be sitting over here having a critic position and asking the kinds of questions that I am.

One of the things that Mr. Decore had proposed was to develop a much stronger kind of budget scrutiny, a much stronger budget review process. Instead of having the government gnomes in the Treasury Department and I guess however many Conservative MLAs who are involved in that internal secret, invisible process sit around and decide what numbers go in what column, the proposal of Mr. Decore would be to open that up and not start in March, when the estimates are brought in, but in fact start far, far earlier. The Ontario budget model in fact picks up many of the elements of what I call the Decore proposal. You have a powerful all-party committee that picks a number of departments every year. They meet with the ministers of those specified departments long, long in advance.

In Alberta terms, if we were to translate it into the Alberta budget process, this all-party budget committee might start meeting in June, July, or August because that, we know, is when the provincial government starts assembling the disparate pieces that are then welded into some form of a budget process.

It's interesting to me that Mike Harris, who seems to parrot a lot of the things that are said in Alberta and imitate a lot of the things that are done here, has shown a degree of leadership which frankly has gone far beyond what his soul brother and counterpart government in Alberta has chosen to do. Why is it that Ontario has said that there's a better way of dealing with the budget, a way that gets . . . [interjection] I'm talking, Mr. Speaker, about a process. Now, I've got lots to say about the numbers, but, you know, the

Provincial Treasurer ought to turn off his pocket calculator because I'm not going to start getting to the numbers yet. I'm still trying to talk about a philosophical approach to the way we deal with budgets in this province so that we don't get in what I regard as the embarrassing situation of having supplementary estimates come forward with the kinds of numbers that we see being put in front of us here in this particular question then.

I know all members are going to want to take their chairs to hear the further comments that I'm going to make in the next few minutes. Usually, Mr. Speaker, people have been around a little longer before they're walking out on my speeches.

The comment I think I was trying to make is this: we do need a process, a process whereby we have all-party scrutiny, aggressive all-party scrutiny, and a chance to be able to reflect the priorities, the needs, and the issues for all Albertans, not just those Albertans who happen to be represented by the much smaller number of Conservative MLAs that happen to be on whatever standing policy committee or budget review process the government has internally. The fact that year after year after year you see a billion dollar plus supplementary supply tells me that something is not working right. Is it because I don't want money for new schools? Of course not. Is it because I don't want to see additional money going to health care? Of course not. But I do want to see this as some kind of a program.

You know, we've put substantial amounts of additional money into health care in the last couple of years, substantial amounts. If the Minister of Health and Wellness had the floor right now, he'd be telling us and talking about that huge amount, those big infusions of cash. But you know something? [interjection] Well, that minister will have his time, as will the Government House Leader.

The point is that the wait lists don't seem to be getting any shorter in the city of Calgary. The classroom sizes in Calgary-Buffalo aren't shrinking. The number of university professors who choose not to stay at the University of Calgary because the pay rate there puts that university at about number 22 out of the largest 25 universities in Canada – it's not making a difference there.

So we see government talking about additional money going in, but where the rubber hits the road in terms of impact on my constituents and your constituents – we don't see big changes. I believe that's because what we have is money being thrown into areas where there are identified problems but not in thoughtful, strategic ways, not in a form that leads to identifiable, positive outcomes.

We'll be able to come back and talk about some of the specifics, but I'd just say: is government to have us believe that everything in supplementary estimates could not have generally been foreseen? Is the Provincial Treasurer about to tell us that there were just all kinds of emerging things that happened in the five or six months since last spring that there was no way of identifying in advance?

Well, I think that's nonsense. It may be that from time to time we have forest fires, so that requires some additional money, or we may have flooding in Medicine Hat, and that requires some additional assistance. But, Mr. Speaker, that's not what this is about. I mean, if you look through this fat package of supplementary estimates – and we'll be able to do that when that gets referred to Committee of Supply – what you see for the most part are things that we knew last spring required attention and required additional funding.

So the question then becomes: why is it that it takes the government six months longer than the rest of us in this Assembly to find out the shortfalls that require urgent attention? The Provincial Treasurer presumably has a heck of a lot more people giving him advice than this MLA does, and I know there are some real smart people in that department. I know that they talk to people in the cities of this province, they talk to people in the regional health authorities, they talk to people on the school boards, and they talk to

people in the postsecondary institutions. So the needs and the demand for additional resources have been known for a long time, and they were certainly known when we wrestled with the budget estimates in February and March and into April of 2000.

4:40

I want to welcome the two new members of the Assembly. Some of us are on our way out, and I hope that the new members in the Assembly recognize that this is an area that requires enormous attention, and I hope they're more persuasive than I've been able to be in terms of opening up the budget process. You know, people come here from municipal councils, and they can't understand this arcane process that we use to develop a budget, because in those cases many of the municipalities do actually a far more open and transparent kind of budget scrutiny than we see in this Assembly. I mean, we could do so much better. We could just have a vastly better process.

Why wouldn't we do what Ontario has done and have that sort of powerful all-party committee which identifies five or six departments every year, that spends months doing an in-depth kind of analysis to see if we could get it right? Well, let me suggest some of the reasons why maybe government doesn't wish to do it. The first one is that once you pull away the cloak of secrecy, it means that people start looking over your shoulder and they start telling you at an early stage which budget allocation choices are good and which ones they don't agree with. That may mean that you have to more often, more frequently, defend the choices you make, and you have to defend why we can't find money to reduce classroom size but we can find money for a lot of other things.

You know, we have a province where our royalty structure and the kinds of moneys that the province receives, that the people of Alberta receive from the sale of our natural resources is significantly lower than rates charged in each of the other big natural resource provinces in Canada. If you look at Quebec and Ontario and British Columbia and you look at the kinds of rates that exist in terms of royalties, whether we're talking about lumber, whether we're talking about oil and gas, or whether we're talking about mining activity, what you find is a significant difference. And what you'd like to think . . . [interjection] Well, this was my authority, my former colleague Mike Percy, now dean of the business school at the University of Alberta and a fellow with very strong academic credentials. He had coauthored an article with another fellow at the university that identified the gap that exists between what other provinces charge and recover for their citizens compared to what happens in Alberta.

Well, that would be one of the issues that might be dealt with if we had a more open kind of budget process. There are lots of benefits that accrue, and I'm not going to have time to go through and identify all of them.

I just look forward to an explanation from each one of the ministers and from the Provincial Treasurer in terms of why the items in this supplementary supply request could not have been identified and could not have been foreseen. So when I ask questions and when some of my colleagues ask questions, I hope we're not going to be met with nonsensical calls that we don't support money for this, we don't support money for that, or we're opposed to additional funding. Well, that misses the point completely, Provincial Treasurer, through the Speaker. That misses the point completely. What we're trying to do is develop a more responsive process, a more transparent process, a more thorough process than anything we have now, and in an ideal Legislature we would not see these gargantuan supplementary estimate requests. It's as simple as that.

I know that some of my colleagues have observations they want to make as well to the process before we get into dealing with some of the detail, but I just think we have to get off this bandwagon. It's one of the problems with huge, powerful, majority governments. You know, they can always sort of clean up their mistakes after the fact because they have the numbers. But why wouldn't we aspire to a higher standard, members? Why wouldn't we try more diligently to do a better job of the budget analysis process?

I'll say to the new members that you may find, as I have, that one of the most frustrating things is when it comes time to deal with the budget. What you will find is that you have maybe seniors in your constituency and you have university students. What will happen is that in order to save time - and this government wants to turn the lights off in this building as quickly as they can - we split into two committees. If you're lucky enough to be in the committee upstairs, you're able to review the budget dealing with seniors, and if you're downstairs, you can only deal with the budget for postsecondary students. If you happen to have constituents who have issues in both of those budget areas, then you miss out. You can ask your questions down here, and you can tear upstairs. You can wave your hand furiously and try and get the chairman's attention, but tough; too late. There are nine other people already on the list, and they're going to turn the lights off upstairs at 10 o'clock, so you're not going to have time to be able to ask those questions there.

That's what's happening in this province, and we have seen the steady erosion of parliamentary democracy, the progressive diminution of the role and importance of individual MLAs. And probably the most eloquent testament to the dismantling of democracy in this province, if you'll forgive the hyperbole, is right here in the 2000-2001 supplementary estimates, general revenue fund. This is exhibit A. This is what tells us what's wrong with our budgetary process.

Mr. Speaker, those are the points I wanted to make, and I'm looking forward to further debate on this very important motion. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak on Government Motion 23 dealing with supplementary estimates.

I notice that the government has already committed close to a billion dollars over the budget that it presented just six, seven months ago. It's money that has been committed by the government without prior scrutiny by this Legislature. The supplementary budget estimates come to us as an afterthought, as something that has already happened, and the Legislature has absolutely no capacity to change either the numbers or the commitments that the government has made. This speaks to the low value that this government places on the debates that occur in this Legislature, and it's a sad commentary on a democratic body and the value that's associated with it by the government in power.

The billion dollar extra expenditures that are presented to us in this booklet show clearly that either the government didn't know what it was doing when it was presenting the budget to us or that it didn't listen to its civil service, who are expensive. We've been paying them quite a bit of money. I trust they're doing their job, but the decisions have to be made by the cabinet, by the Treasurer, and by the elected members on the government side.

4:50

Why there was no recognition in the budget that there will be upcoming expenditures - I can see some justification for spending more money in the area of Agriculture, Food and Rural

Development, as the drought perhaps could not have been predicted at the right time. But I also find that Infrastructure has got \$419 million extra. Why was there a problem with anticipating and with government in fact making commitments to spending this money when it was preparing the spring budget? There's no explanation for it. The money has been allocated. Similarly, in Health and Wellness we have known in this province for many years the chronic underfunding of health care . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, you're rising on something?

Point of Order Relevance

MR. HANCOCK: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. *Beauchesne* 459, Relevance and Repetition. The motion is a motion to refer the estimates to Committee of Supply, and while the debate is interesting, it's more appropriate in Committee of Supply to talk about whether the numbers could have been brought forward earlier or those sorts of things. Really what we're debating is whether the estimates should be referred to Committee of Supply, which I think would call for a rather narrower discussion of the concept. Either the estimates should go to Committee of Supply or they shouldn't go to Committee of Supply for some reason. It's not that here's a whole bunch of estimates that are on the table now that shouldn't have been on the table or that the government shouldn't be spending or that the numbers are wrong.

Those are all issues to be debated in the Committee of Supply and when the appropriation act is brought forward. The motion before us is: should the estimates be referred to Committee of Supply? I think relevant discussion should be on that point.

THE SPEAKER: The point put forward by the hon. Government House Leader is certainly a valid one. This is a recommittal motion. The chair has been listening very attentively to the leader of the ND opposition, and I'm sure that before too long we'll reach that fork in the road where he'll tie it all together to make the argument to refer it to committee.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to come to the point. I'm glad that the hon. House leader did pose the statement in the form of a question. I'm trying to decide whether to support this motion or not, and I beg your permission to be able to state my reasons and make my observations before I come to a conclusion. I'm sure the hon. House leader on the government side doesn't want to stop debate in this Assembly or observations which are legitimate, which is our right to be able to make in the Assembly in representing our constituents. I'm not attributing to him any motives that he's trying to stop the debate, but it would appear that the consequence of what he is saying is to stop me from saying what my constituents certainly want me to be able to convey to my colleagues in the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, to return to my observations, to speak on the motion whether to refer it. I think we have to, of course, look at what the motion is about. In order to talk about the motion, whether it should be referred, you have to ask yourself: what is the motion about? The substance of the motion is something that we are able to speak to, and that's why I was referring to some of these numbers here. So if I may proceed.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, interestingly, Health and Wellness certainly won't have the ability, as I said, during this Assembly to

tell the government that its expenditures are being misspent because they're already spent. It comes to us after the fact. So why we are talking about the motion is that we've got to be able to say: well, look, what's this money about? They're contracting out. There's lots of money being spent on getting some of the medical procedures done at costs which are much higher than we would incur if we were to keep these surgeries and these medical procedures inside the public system. Clearly, it seems to me, the \$293 million of the \$500 million being spent now in supplementary estimates on health is designed to I guess repair some damage that the government might have concluded it sustained during the Bill 11 debate.

So I'm just raising these issues. We have, I think, two days to debate this, and we'll certainly go into this in more detail at that time. We'll have the opportunity at that time to ask more specific and detailed questions, but general observations I'm sure are in order.

This scale of overexpenditure appearing here in the form of supplementary estimates just three or four months before the next provincial election again suggests that it's not something that the government couldn't predict when it did. That is to say that these estimates are designed to achieve certain other political ends, and I guess that might be why the hon. House leader didn't want me to go into any details on why it is that I have some questions about whether or not I will support this motion.

I notice that again education is completely absent. If the government was really interested in fixing things, it knows that our students at postsecondary institutions are protesting about the ever increasing tuition fees and the debt burden as a result of this government's policies on this. There's no money in here. There's no afterthought. There's no attempt to be sensitive to the concerns and the demands that students are making, to put some money in here so the universities and colleges could be given some more money so that they could then go to the students and say, "Well, we are freezing tuition fees, and indeed we are ready to roll them back." If this government sees the significance of young Albertans being able to go to university and college and prepare for the 21st century, prepare for the information economy, prepare for entering a world in which we will be competitive and will make a statement that we as a society are behind our young people who are willing to take part in this competitive economy as they prepare through our schools and universities, there's no such indication here.

Similarly, there's lots of lip service paid to how we need to protect our children, how we need to support them when they're young, how important it is to spend money on them, that every \$1 spent is returned seven times over if we spend that money now. Is there any indication here that there's any attempt to spend any money to reduce class size? No, none at all. It really is not only what's there but also what's not there that speaks to how this government thinks about these crucial issues and concerns that Albertans have about their future, about their children's future, and about their institutions.

So in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, to be handed this document this afternoon, to say that all you have to do is say yes to it – we have spent the money. You go back to your constituents and tell them, "Well, I couldn't do anything about this." If they say, "Well, government is wasting money; what have you done for us?" what am I supposed to say when I go back to them? That I can't do anything? There is no opportunity for us to speak to these estimates at a point where we could convince this government to change its mind, so it's a fait accompli. It's simply an exercise in nothing.

We had the Legislature receive this bill with \$1 billion of Alberta citizens' money to spend, but we can't do anything to alter the government's mind on this, and that's what I find regrettable in this situation. So I certainly will be participating in the debate that will

take place over the next two days and make comments in more detail, but I do want to say on behalf of my constituents that this is not the right way to spend public money. Public funds must be spent in a way that's accountable. They must be committed so that the commitment itself is accountable to the Legislature and does not let us spend this money and then come back and say: "What can we do? We need the money now."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would rise to reinforce the point I was trying to make on a point of order, that the motion before us right now is to commit the estimates to Committee of Supply, and all of the talk that we've heard from the leader of the third party is presumably to suggest that we should not commit this to Committee of Supply. Committee of Supply is exactly where we examine the estimates in detail, exactly where he has the opportunity to raise questions and concerns of his constituents, exactly the place to examine in detail and to ask questions, exactly the place to get the information he's talking about. He's delaying the democratic process, delaying our opportunity to get to that process by debating whether they should be even committed.

5:00

Presumably, if he doesn't wish to send the estimates to Committee of Supply, he thinks we should pass them without that examination. Well, the members on this side of the House don't want to do that. The members on this side of the House want to get to Committee of Supply so that we can examine in detail whether these appropriations are appropriate, whether these estimates are the right way to spend the money, and to justify the need for this additional amount of Albertans' money being spent on these important priorities. So I fail to see why the members opposite would debate a motion to send this to the committee where the very examination they called for is allowed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have been listening with interest to the debate this afternoon on Government Motion 23 as proposed to the Assembly by the hon. Dr. West.

Now, we have to look, Mr. Speaker, at the whole process, and we have to look at the whole process as to how this quiet, comfortably coloured document has arrived on this hon. member's desk. I could look at the blue-gray colour – some people would describe it as gun-barrel blue – and this document is to have an impact on all Albertans.

What part of the process have the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar been denied? Many people – many people – come to the constituency office to discuss important issues of public policy. Some individuals even surprise me with their attendance at the constituency office, but others come and say to me: Mr. MacDonald, what's going on with all this sugar-daddy politics? This, Mr. Speaker, is what they're referring to: sugar-daddy politics. There's an election coming up, Mr. MacDonald, and you have no influence on where this money's being spent. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo talked about this. He came up with sound suggestions, and I feel that before this is presented to me by the pages, I should as an elected representative have some input into this.

I have constituents who are very concerned about the state of the health care system. I see in this document there are many government MLAs – I counted them before, and it almost looked like a

make-work project – a lot of them in there. I believe there are six, Mr. Speaker, six. I cannot understand why I cannot have as other jurisdictions have – as a member of the loyal opposition – some input into this. As I said earlier, constituents have observations on health care. They have observations on schools. But do we get a chance? No, we do not. We do not get a chance to discuss this. It is just presented to us. It's a take it or leave it procedure.

Now, I could leave this Assembly in 25 minutes, and I could say to my constituents – and they would not believe this – the government has essentially brought forward a motion to spend a million dollars to improve the office of the Auditor General. Incredibly, Mr. Speaker, in my years in this Assembly I have seen four copies of the Auditor General's report. It is becoming one of my favourite reads. I like Truman Capote, but I'm beginning to like Peter Valentine a lot as well, because he is exposing what this government is mismanaging. I see that in here Peter Valentine is getting another million dollars. I see Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: \$100 million.

If I was to explain to the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar that in the last hour this afternoon this document was presented to the Assembly – we are going to spend a lot of money. We only have to think, I believe, of the pop group the Barenaked Ladies and If I Had a Million Dollars, their hit song. It seems that is the only song the government is listening to, and they're practising sugar-daddy politics and throwing money at every problem. They're not thinking about this.

I'm looking forward to Committee of the Whole, because as I review this document, I see lots and lots of questions that I can ask on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. I can leave this Assembly and can say that there was a 39 percent increase in the last four years in government spending. We look at the total here that's close to a billion dollars in unscheduled spending that is going to allow for even more mismanagement by this government. I cannot understand why so many hon. members of this Assembly do not at this time want to have any further discussion on the proposed motion by the hon. Dr. West, because this is taxpayers' money, and we cannot have a complacent accounting system.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, I shall cede the floor to another colleague. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't going to participate in this discussion this afternoon, but it appears that members of the opposition are bound and determined that we're going to have a debate on this debatable motion, so I thought I might as well participate.

I listened with interest to the last speaker. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, at the conclusion of the individual's comments, I'm not sure whether he's for or against the motion before us, because he was urging the members to participate in the discussion on supplementary estimates, and I thought that's what this motion was all about. This motion is a request of the Assembly to approve the referral of all of the things that the member was talking about to Committee of the Whole, to Committee of Supply so that we can get into that very detailed discussion that the hon. member was talking about. So, frankly, it would seem to me, although I may have misunderstood him, that he was in fact speaking in favour of the motion that's before us at this point in time. That being the case, I can't understand why, if the government members are in favour of the motion and obviously the opposition members are in favour of the motion, why we don't just get on with it, pass the motion, and then get into Committee of

Supply and have this wonderful discussion that everyone is so looking forward to.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes I don't understand a lot of the intricate rules of this House, but this one is a very specific, very easy rule to understand. We have before us a very simple motion. The Provincial Treasurer has tabled supplementary estimates. He's introduced a motion that says: members of this House, there are some details, there's some discussion that needs to take place on these supplementary estimates. I propose that we send them off to Committee of Supply so that we can have that detailed discussion, and I ask that the members concur in this recommendation. Very simple, very straightforward. I think that we've had more than enough discussion on the issue, and, as I said, it appears that the opposition members are even now arguing in favour of the motion, so I would like to suggest that we get on with it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

5:10

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate what the Member for Medicine Hat said, but I think my issue, more than the money that has gone to areas that are, I would say, for the most part needed, is with the process, that needs to be changed and addressed. This is one of the opportunities to speak to that.

As the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona said, it comes here, and we're to vote on it. At no point is there a chance for us to be a part of that decision-making process unless I send a letter to the Minister of Learning and the Minister of Infrastructure and say: "Queen Street school is more than 55 years old. It's in desperate need of repair. It's been ignored forever. When are you going to act on it?" That's a letter, but that's hardly part of the decision-making process that goes . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: That's the school board's job.

MRS. SOETAERT: I'm glad the member brought it up. Queen Street school was priority 1 for the Parkland school board. They got priority 11 or 7 from Infrastructure. So don't say: talk to the school board. They've made it a priority, but it didn't happen.

Now, one might say that it's political posturing at certain points and places all over the province. If that's the truth, why aren't priorities considered when municipalities send them in and when school boards send them in? That should be the way it's done. An all-party committee could look at the budget requests and needs across this province. We have seen some areas get, maybe, overpasses where they didn't need them as desperately as other areas.

Of course this will eventually pass into committee. These moneys are spent. We have to pass it through this process. In fact, if we didn't have the supplementary budget, we probably wouldn't have a fall session in this Legislature, because it seems government members don't even want to be here. Fortunately, we at least have to be here for supplementary estimates. So we'll get to, oh, probably an hour's discussion on each one of these. That's a maybe.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Where are your members? Where are your members?

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that at some times I may have to speak for some members on that side. In fact, in this budget maybe an overpass at Brooks has been needed. Has that member had a chance to put in their priorities? They need an

overpass at highway 38 and highway 1. People are dying there. [interjection] Sorry; highway 36. Thank you for the correction. I'm glad you know where it is.

Highway 36 and highway 1: a dangerous intersection that the people of Brooks have been asking for. Did their member put this into the budget somewhere? Did you have input to this? Did you have a chance? He says: absolutely. I don't see it here.

So how do we deal with priorities? How about that Catholic school in Brooks? A crowded school. In fact, try passing someone on the stairwell in that school. It's dangerous. Two people can't fit on that stairwell going from one level of the school to the other. They need a new facility. They're terribly overcrowded. They've been offered the building next to them, which is an older county building and which is second choice at best. They really need a new school, a proper facility, but they'll have to make do with a second choice, where the kids won't have a track, won't have a gymnasium for who knows how long. So I'm wondering: did the Member for Strathmore-Brooks have input into this? It's not in here. How about the water quality in Gleichen? It's not in here. Those issues haven't been addressed. Certainly Queen Street school hasn't been addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I feel a level of frustration, and obviously priorities from different members' constituencies are not being addressed. So how does this process work? Do you look at: gee whiz; which MLA might be in political trouble? Do we build a school there? Is that what we do? Is that how it happens? [interjection] They say: you know better than that, Colleen. I'd like it to be proven. Regretfully, I don't see that happening.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo talked about an all-party budget committee. That's what this Legislature should look at, but when they have a strong majority government, they don't think it's worth listening to the opposition. But you know what? That's then a sign of not caring. I know I shouldn't use the word arrogant, but that would symbolize that to me. So I would venture to say that we're missing the boat on this process.

If it isn't sugar-daddy politics, if it isn't vote-buying, then I think this process should be cleared up and changed, because it certainly looks that way. One person said to me, in fact in Brooks: "You know my 300 bucks that I'm getting back from the government? I'd much rather see my money go to that overpass, because I know someone who died there. If that intersection were safer, there would be fewer deaths." You know what? I know that's an issue in many places across our province.

So how do the priorities get to the table? Municipalities have sent in their priorities, and they get ignored. School boards have sent in their priorities, and they get ignored. Obviously MLAs send in their priorities. Do they get ignored? How does that happen? Where do the dollars get spent in that supplementary budget? Is it about vote-buying? Because if it's not about vote-buying, then this process isn't good. This process encourages the idea that we vote buy.

MR. DICKSON: It encourages sloppy administration.

MRS. SOETAERT: It encourages sloppy administration. In fact, it's interesting. I'm hoping, when we get to the Infrastructure debates, that we will have a list of what was actually done. I'm hoping that the minister will provide that for us, because it says: so much on school buildings. Which ones and where? Were they the school boards' priorities? That's what I'd like to see.

Quite honestly, it shouldn't be done this way. These priorities should be set long in advance, and they should be fairly and equitably done across the province. You shouldn't buy votes with pavements and school buildings and hospitals. What we should do

is govern well enough to provide for the needs of all Albertans, not based on where you live or who you vote for but on the needs of a community. You know what? It could happen under a different budget process. It absolutely could. I don't see that happening here. I just don't.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've covered most of the things I wanted to mention. I also wanted to mention that, interestingly enough, I haven't seen in Justice—does the minister not realize that we're very desperately short of police across this province? I've heard complaints from municipalities across the province that they have the same amount of police force now they had in 1986, and their population has doubled. That isn't being addressed. So I would suggest that that issue isn't even addressed in this, and it should well be.

I will probably support it going to committee because the money is spent. So in order to at least ask questions and hopefully get some answers—I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, I don't like this process. You know, when you're in here, those are the rules for now. We can always work at changing those rules, and that's why I'm speaking to this motion. I'd like to see the rules changed on the way we go about this whole budget process. I would urge all members to have a rethink about this process, because I will have to hold my nose to vote to support to move this into supply because the whole process is wrong.

I will support the spending of most of this if it's clearly explained to me. Some ministers are very good about explaining where the money has gone and how the priorities were set up. From some, on the other hand, you don't get that kind of explanation. I would suggest that members on both sides of the House should have a little problem with that. I would suggest that they all should have a look at that.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the time to speak to the motion, and hopefully the budget process will change. It certainly will under the next Liberal government. So with those comments, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

5:20

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad for these few minutes I'm going to get to speak to Motion 23, which is to refer the 2000-01 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund and all matters connected therewith to the Committee of Supply. Interestingly, there's actually been some debate this afternoon, some input from both sides, which is a good thing to happen in this Assembly and one that I'm pleased to participate in and encourage.

In the four years that I've been here, every year there's a supplementary supply budget that's bigger than the one before. I think this is a question of process, and that's why I'm taking this opportunity to stand up and debate during this referral motion, Government Motion 23. This seems to be the only opportunity that I'm going to get to be able to talk about the process that this government chooses to use in how they have input. My colleague from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert talked a lot about who actually gets input on this. Where does the information go? How do we know that it was considered or not considered? It is very much a closed process, and I don't think that's appropriate when we're talking about the resources, the tax money, even the oil and gas royalties. They belong to all Albertans, and I think this needs to be a more open process so that they understand and frankly could have some input into how that money is being designated.

I believe that supplementary supply should be unexpected, unforeseen—let me put it that way—expenses. I heard my colleague

from Calgary-Buffalo allude to this before as well. It would certainly make sense to me if there were a supplementary supply on costs incurred for fighting forest fires that could not be anticipated in advance. Now, we know that every summer there are going to be forest fires. There should be some money in the budget to cover a reasonable expenditure, an average expenditure for forest fires. But if it was an extraordinary year, then I would expect to see a supplementary supply estimate for that.

MRS. SOETAERT: Or a drought.

MS BLAKEMAN: A drought is another suggestion. Or floods or any other kind of calamity that was unforeseen. But it stretches believability to think that money going into health care, given the crisis that's developed there, is unforeseen. It stretches credulity to believe that there isn't money in infrastructure given the state of our roads, our buildings, our schools, highways, provincial buildings. I mean, come on; of course there's supposed to be money spent there. Why is it now unforeseen money?

Now, probably what's really going on here is that it's bonanza money. Other people have talked about sugar-daddy money and vote-buying money and all of that sort of thing. I'm not saying that I'm not pleased to see that there is additional money coming into this government's coffers in this fiscal year. Of course I'm just as delighted as everyone else to see it. But the point is: why was it so unforeseen? Why did we have the previous Provincial Treasurer being the king of supplementary supply? Why would he want to earn that title?

I come from the nonprofit sector, and we're expected to produce one-, three-, and five-year budgets in the nonprofit sector. There's a clear expectation that the figures you come up with are based on what you expect to spend based on what your projects are – and that requires planning ahead – and also what you expect to bring in from revenue. Again, you've got to be as close to the mark as you can be. But that just doesn't seem to apply in this case. So what the government enforces on every nonprofit that applies to it for funding, it doesn't apply to itself. This seems to be: well, whatever; what the heck. It's a totally different set of rules. I won't go into what percentage point the previous Treasurer was out by, but it was something astronomical.

So why are we debating this motion at this time? Because I don't have any other time to talk about the process. When we're actually debating supplementary supply, I'm supposed to be talking about the numbers. I'm supposed to be questioning whether it was good value spent here, if it should have been spent there, or why wasn't it spent on something else? I don't have another opportunity to question the way this government develops its budget and particularly the way this government develops its supplementary supply estimates. I don't get another opportunity to do that.

You know, this afternoon the Speaker in his usual wise way ruled on a Standing Order 30 and a Standing Order 40 in which there was an attempt to debate electrical deregulation in this province. People were frustrated. This was the only chance we had. That's why we wanted to do it. Well, it's the same situation for us here today. What other instance do I get? As a member representing 38,000 people in Edmonton-Centre, what other opportunity do I get to come forward and question this process, to say: where do I get input on this? You explain to me the choices you've made here and why you make them this way so I can explain them to the people that live in Edmonton-Centre and are asking me these questions. This is my opportunity to debate the whys and the wherefores and the nickels

and the dimes, although in this case we'll soon be talking about the millions and the billions.

You know, there's a level of frustration from this government that I see over and over again whenever anyone wants to question the process, but do you know what? This is the place to question the process. This is what democracy is about. Democracy is cumbersome, sometimes it's noisy, and it's certainly time consuming. That's okay. That's what it's supposed to be to keep an even balance. We don't have an even balance. We don't have a give-and-take in this province right now. We have a government that manages to set a process that is behind closed doors.

AN HON. MEMBER: Smug.

MS BLAKEMAN: Smug. Thank you.

Now, they're supposedly wanting to increase the role of the private member: more for the private member to do, more input from the private member. Do you know what? Private members exist on both sides of the House, and what we have here is private members that are all assigned to committees for which they are paid additional remuneration as well, and they get to go behind closed doors and develop whatever these little processes are that the rest of us don't get to be involved in. Well, all of us were elected here. There should be respect for everyone being elected here, and all of us should be involved in that process.

You know, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has raised over and over again in this House a more democratic, more legislatively honourable way to go about this process, and that is, frankly, by having a legislative committee, an all-party committee that starts to work on this budget from way back. But do you know what? All those questions that we have to raise by using motions like Motion 23 to get the discussion out there could have been dealt with in a committee in a much more informal way, but the time still has to be put in. So it either happens there or it happens here. Right now it's happening here.

MRS. SOETAERT: You've got two minutes.

MS BLAKEMAN: Good. I've still got two minutes. I have more points to make.

I think it's important that we do take the opportunity to question what's going on particularly around these supplementary supply budgets, which have now become the norm, a way of life with this government. I had an opportunity to attend a private members' conference this summer. I didn't want to go originally, but I'm really glad I did because it put me in touch with a number of other private members from other provinces across Canada. I learned a lot about how narrowly focused this Legislative Assembly is. I can see the Speaker getting ready to rise. Just a few more minutes. Okay; good.

When I talked to other private members from other provinces in Canada and from the federal government and from our three territories now, it really drove home for me how restricted this all is.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before adjourning the Assembly this afternoon, might I draw to your attention, please, in the members' gallery Mrs. Sharon Lougheed and Allison Lougheed. Allison is the daughter of the distinguished Member for Clover-Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, and Sharon is the wife.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 14, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/11/14

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Motions

Referral of Supplementary Supply Estimates

23. Dr. West moved:

Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2000-01 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith, be referred to the Committee of Supply.

[Debate adjourned November 14: Ms Blakeman speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to make a few comments about Motion 23 and the request in that motion to consider the supplementary estimates that are before us and then to move on with them to Committee of Supply.

When you look through *Beauchesne*, *Beauchesne* outlines the conditions under which supplementary estimates are to be presented, and the conditions there laid out are five. One is "for a further grant to an existing service, in addition to the sum already appropriated." So the intent is that a program has for some reason or other expanded or the moneys originally voted for were insufficient, and there's need for adjustment. One would hope, Mr. Speaker, that given the kind of assurance we've had from the government in terms of the development of the business plans and the kind of attention that has been supposedly devoted to the budgeting process, the instances of this first condition occurring would be rare, that with the kind of planning we're assured goes on, there would be few instances where the government had to come back to the Assembly or had to make additional expenditures because of not being able to plan adequately in the first place.

The second condition that *Beauchesne* lists is "for a new expenditure on behalf of a newly-enacted statute," and if you look through these supplementary estimates that are before us, I don't believe any of the requests that we see meet that condition. Now, I may be wrong, but from a cursory glance through them, I haven't seen that reason given for any of the supplementary estimates that we find before us.

Beauchesne 946(3) indicates that supplementary estimates are appropriate "to meet the cost created by an unexpected emergency," and I think that in at least one case the increase in money required for fire fighting in the province under the Department of Environment is a legitimate sum that comes before this Assembly for ratification. It is something that is very difficult to predict, and one would expect that there would be occasions when that kind of contingency arises and has to be accommodated in budgeting through supplementary requisitions. So the odd instances in the estimates where this happens, I think, are worthy of support and one can understand, and I'm sure that ratepayers would understand.

The fourth condition that *Beauchesne* puts on supplementary estimates is that they may be used "to transfer funds from one Vote to another." Again, given the kind of planning that we expect goes on through the business plans, one would expect that we wouldn't find those kinds of adjustments in the supplementary estimates before us this evening.

The fifth condition that *Beauchesne* lists for supplementary estimates is "to extend the purposes of a Vote."

The reasons for supplementary estimates are laid out fairly carefully in *Beauchesne*. They do give a fair amount of latitude, but in general you get the feeling in reading *Beauchesne* that they are there and designed to cover the unexpected and to cover unexpected housekeeping difficulties that arise during the budgeting year, Mr. Speaker, and not for major program expansion.

It's for that reason I find it quite incredible that, for instance, in Infrastructure we find a request for almost half a billion dollars, an extraordinary amount of money being asked for in terms of Infrastructure. When you read the reasons, the need seems to be more than justified. Who could argue against money for health care facilities? Who could argue against money for school facilities? But the government had that information when the budget was made up. This is a no-brainer. They didn't have to come with this estimate. They had audited school facilities across the province. They'd sent out an MLA committee across the province. They had been told that there was a backlog of \$750 million worth of expenditures needed in the area. They ignored that advice at budget time and, lo and behold, came back with a supplementary estimate for \$419,000.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that really tests the outline in *Beauchesne* for supplementary estimates and really makes a bit of a mockery of the budgeting process itself. What sense does it make for this Assembly to spend the amount of time that we do examining the budget at budget time to have sums of this amount excluded from those budgeting plans and then to appear at this time as a supplementary requisition? It just does not seem to make sense or to be prudent planning when you come this late in the game with this kind of request.

As we go through the estimates – and we will in the next couple of days – I think that will be repeated again and again. We're going to find money included in these estimates that should have been part of the regular budgeting process, and I think that the government in many instances is going to be hard pressed to explain why that money appears now as a supplementary estimate and wasn't part of the original budget.

I go back to Infrastructure again, because the way that has unfolded over the past number of months has been rather disconcerting. We've had a series of announcements. In the last year there have been \$237 million in school infrastructure announcements alone, and the distribution of those amounts, I think, is open to question, not only the distribution but the priorities that were followed in allocating those amounts. I've heard from school jurisdictions across the province that their priorities have been ignored and that in some cases they're hard pressed to understand why they've received the money that they did and also hard pressed to explain why projects that they and their local communities have deemed very important have been ignored by the Department of Infrastructure. So there are problems in this particular area with the amounts and the distribution of those amounts.

8:10

For instance, of the \$237 million announced, Edmonton Catholic schools and Edmonton public schools, which educate about 19 percent of the children in this province, received \$6 million, or a little less than 3 percent of the moneys that were distributed. So one starts to look at this supplementary estimate with a bit of a jaundiced eye, raising some questions about whether it's good planning that has brought these estimates before us or if there aren't some other factors that are playing high in the government's mind that are responsible for the decisions that are being made.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, of course, we'll end up supporting the

motion, because the money that is being put in place is money that we argued for at budget time and prior to budget time, is money that was required, and we're glad to see it here. But the bottom line is that it makes a mockery of the business plans and the kind of long-range planning that this government pretends to reflect in that budget they present to us in the spring. [interjection] I hear the minister from somewhere over there saying, "Not true," and I'll be delighted when he joins in debate and explains half a billion dollars worth of infrastructure money that they just neglected to include in budgets.

I think that with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude and look forward to the debate on the individual department budgets. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to speak in favour of Motion 23, although I have a number of remarks before giving up the floor, having this opportunity to chide the government for their budget practices or lack thereof. Any government that has more spending in a supplementary budget in any particular area than they have in the original budget is doing something wrong somewhere.

Certainly it is difficult in this province that has to rely on indeterminate estimates of income to lay out a total and complete plan to decide what has to be spent in any one area, but it does not mean to say that the expenditures could not be expanded and could not be laid out properly so that all those that rely on public funding would know from whence it came, and it wouldn't be a big surprise to them that suddenly there's money available for infrastructure that is so sorely needed. There has been many a proposal to spread that income, which I'll get to a little later.

If you listen to the Auditor General year after year after year, he would much prefer that a budget be laid out in increments such that it could be easily understood by those of the public that are interested to find where the government intends to spend the income at various levels of income. That does not seem to be the case in this government. This government is a seat-of-the-pants expenditures government, and it's quite obvious. There's been more money spent in supplementary estimates . . . [interjections] There seems to be a great deal of chirping from a minister or two on the other side. If the other members are so willing to engage in debate, I wonder if perhaps they'd stand in their places and do so and defend this supplementary estimates package either in its entirety or even in part, but of course they will not do so, because chirping is so much easier to do from the sidelines as opposed to engaging in debate that they're not very good at.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE SPEAKER: Please remember that the matter under discussion before the House now is a committal motion to put it before a committee. This is not a time to defend anybody's estimates. We haven't got to the point yet where the Assembly would even deal with them.

MR. WHITE: That's true, sir. The admonishment comes from both sides. Thank you, sir.

Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: It is true that it matters little what the debate is if the chirping from the other side is unfocused, and of course it always is, because it's never on record. It matters little what they say, and they just interrupt debate.

A budget should be open for review and scrutiny by the public and should be understood to be a document that they can rely upon. Certainly last spring's budget could not be relied upon, and some X billions of dollars are readjusted in this supplementary estimate package, which will be more fully debated in detail in each element. Suffice to say that this is not a document that could and should be looked at with any great deal of joy by those who would like to know that a government is dealing with their funds in a competent manner. To spend as you go may do well if you are running a paper route, but this is a province of some note and distinction and deserves the consideration of some expenditures.

This government doesn't seem to believe that any amount of debate on any subject is worth while, notably the number of sitting days that we sit – actually, I think P.E.I. sits marginally less than the province of Alberta – to hear about the estimates. We double up on the estimates debate, which is in many cases hardly a debate in any event at all. The opposition or any members of the public are excluded from the decisions as they relate to individual expenditures. I wonder why the people of Alberta don't express themselves in the way of votes now and again and say: look; we'd like to have a little more information than this. But I suppose we will be doing that early next year to find out whether in fact they do want to know more or not.

The income in this province and its fluctuation from year to year is the point of difficulty, and this member certainly recognizes that and knows that it cannot be accurately predicted. But it can be predicted as to the various levels of expenditures that could move up with the income level, and certainly a better estimate could be made of the income if the government didn't lowball the income estimate, as it has done for the last six years.

Then when dealing with the income, it might be a little creative to share that income with the municipal levels of government and perhaps the school boards such that there would be some elasticity in all of their budgets and being able to budget and plan for some capital expenditures, perhaps, that might be on a wish list that each and every one of those levels of government is quite capable of preparing and debating in their own circles. One would think that might be an answer to deal with this stop-and-go budgeting that seems to be prevalent in this Legislature. Of course, there's one debate that would be good to have in a budget debate, not a supplementary budget debate but a full and open debate – if it had to be in a supplementary debate, so be it – and it is the rate at which the extraction of natural resources takes place in this province. The resources are finite, particularly the resources that relate to oil and gas and conventional and synthetic crude. Certainly there's a learning curve that members of the public could and would like to go through. After all, the Legislature is, in the government's own words, a mere steward of the resources, and the ownership rests with all Albertans.

8:20

Quite frankly, the debate is long overdue. It should in fact start in schools, in junior high schools and high schools, and should continue with the public, because the resource runs out at some point, and whether it runs out in the lifetime of those members that are here, in the lifetime of the children of those that are here or their children's children, it will run out. Some kind of planning and knowledge in that area by the owners of the resource – the knowledge base should be up there such that proper budgeting can take place so that there is something left over for them in their pursuit of life and happiness.

The other area that could and should be explored is the ramifications of further development of renewable resources. I'm

thinking of a wide-ranging debate on the forestry industry and how the longevity of that business should be debated fully and to what extent tourism and ecotourism and the like can supplant some of that income and to the extent at which there should be a much longer horizon on the cropping of those resources. Currently, as members will know, management agreements on Crown land, owned by all the members present as well as all the members of the province of Alberta – it is their resource – are being managed but on a very short-term basis, when long-term considerations for the leaseholder should be in the works. Quite frankly, that debate does not occur in this Legislature. You'd think it would, because it is fundamental to the foundation of a budget, and it certainly isn't something that can be structured quickly. It has to be an ongoing debate such that all Albertans would understand.

There is, of course, the other consideration on income. As the income level of the general revenue fund through the various forms of royalties rises, the owners of that resource end up paying more for it. To explain that simply for natural gas, a year ago natural gas was at A rate, and with the advent of the Chicago price being applied to Alberta with the increased take-away capacity, or the capacity of taking the gas out of the province – without any debate we might end up with volumes on that, but that being said, at the rate at which that's going out, the income level is substantially higher. Of course, the price is substantially higher, too, so that the average citizen – while their government pocket is being filled up with all the extra revenue, their individual pocket is being depleted rapidly. There is no offsetting compensation there, and this member would think that it would only be reasonable that every time the price of a resource that is owned by the citizens of Alberta went up, then the price they paid for that resource through their rate would be commensurately reduced or at least held in check so that particularly those who are on fixed incomes don't end up lesser for the experience of owning a resource that has an increased value.

Likewise, it happens in pumped gasoline too. Every time the price of conventional crude goes up, the provincial coffers get filled to the brim, and the average soul out there gets told: oh, no, no; that's a good thing for you because your government is making money at it. Unfortunately, it hits the old pocketbook every time you have to put some money in that tank, particularly if you're living out of the cities, where you have to do a lot of driving just to live. I mean, it's a fact of life that one has to put money in the tank just to survive. That is a deterrent from being a good citizen of Alberta, when you cannot rely on your government to give back some of that money that they're putting in the provincial coffers at your expense.

Now, there are a number of areas on this that I could and should cover, but those are the ones that I wanted to cover most importantly now in supplementary estimates. It is simply not reasonable to come to the Legislature and in two days or less decide that the expenditures are in order simply by putting through a buffed blue book or – what colour do you call that? – a bad buffed book and describe it as good spending and is certainly not the way this member would like to see estimates and the expenditures in the province of Alberta. Certainly the citizenry should be able to count on a little better method of determining what expenditures are reasonable in a province of this magnitude without having to wait till the very last minute to figure out what it's going to be expended upon.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, the only other major comment and complaint one has is that these expenditures, while being presented in the Legislature, are being presented on an ad hoc basis throughout the calendar year and don't seem to take any form of measure and any

forethought at all. It just seems to be governing by the seat of their pants and doing the best you can with the dollars that flow in at any moment and in the time that you can get a caucus meeting together in order to expend those funds.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the members for their time and leave some more time on this matter for others. Thank you, sir.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to respond to the committee motion we see before us this evening that will bring in, once again, more supplementary estimates by this particular government, a government that tries to, it apparently appears, outdo itself each time new supplementary estimates come in to see how much money they can spend in that particular manner.

Earlier this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, I heard, I believe it was, the Member for Medicine Hat complaining that we were debating what is in fact a debatable motion in this House. He didn't think it was necessary to do so. In fact, it's very necessary to do so, and it would be frivolous and irresponsible on behalf of the Official Opposition if they did not seriously undertake their role as the watchdog of government in terms of watching what comes forward from this government, reporting it to the people of the province, and then responding back to the government in terms of the kinds of responses we get, and that is what we're doing this evening. If this government didn't try to rush through agendas in a fashion that gets them in and out of the Legislature as soon as possible, we would have much more opportunity to gather feedback from Albertans and be able to share that with the government. My understanding is that government doesn't necessarily want to hear that feedback because it isn't always positive, and it certainly isn't positive when we talk about supplementary estimates and that particular process.

Mr. Speaker, here we have a government who has, since my stay in this Assembly, which is more than seven years now, prided themselves on their ability to copy or model business models in terms of the way that they process information and the way they assemble their budgets and spend their money. They like to brag about that all the time, and we hear about it constantly, but in fact when you take the time to examine the processes, it isn't the case at all. What they've taken is an abridged form of business practices and manipulated them to a point where they can say that this is what they're doing, but they don't follow any best practices at all that I've been able to discern over these particular years.

In fact, I have paid close scrutiny to this because it is my area of expertise, Mr. Speaker. Long-term strategic planning, budgeting, management budgeting are areas that I do have some knowledge of. This government does not follow any of those processes and in that case are not responsible in the management practices that they do follow.

8:30

I would like to say that this is definitely something that has to be promoted by political agenda as opposed to expertise within government departments, because it is my experience that the government employees working in the various departments are very competent people. They certainly know how to benchmark, how to do strategic planning, how to meet budgetary line items, how to manage within the systems they have. They know best practices, and they honour those practices when they are allowed to do so, Mr. Speaker. So we have what should be an excellent business model that this government could follow in terms of estimates, revenue projections, and spending given the kind of competence there is

available within the various departments. On one side we have that, and on the other side we have the political agenda that drives this government and at the final end those decision-makers who decide how the money will be spent, when it will be spent, and how it will be accounted for.

Well, there is a deep valley between these two thought processes and management practices, Mr. Speaker, because what the government actually does is not in fact a competent business model that they have the capabilities to perform by. You would think that they would be able to bridge that big valley and be able to marry their political agenda with a best practices kind of mandate and go forward in a very responsible manner, but they don't.

It does take real vision to be able to do that, and we don't see that kind of vision from this government. We don't see a five-year, 10-year, 15-year, 20-year kind of profile from this government where we are looking forward to a future that really benefits Albertans. What we see here is the kind of planning that gets us from election to election. This is gerrymandering of a type that is absolutely appalling to witness every year. You take the money and you adapt it to the kind of manner that you wish, which meets a political agenda, Mr. Speaker, rather than management practices. It isn't the Liberal way in this province. That's for sure. This is the Tory way that we have seen certainly in practice for all of the years that I have been in this Legislature. What that means is that several times a year we get supplementary estimates in here that are asking for huge amounts of dollars, millions and millions, billions over the course of the years, that we see being asked for in a practice that rewards and punishes groups in areas in this province.

Why would they do that, Mr. Speaker? Well, we can easily see why if you take a look at it from a political agenda perspective. People know that they can be rewarded. Areas know that they will be rewarded for a variety of activities, for the performance of certain kinds of criteria, and that they will not be rewarded if they don't follow through with the kind of performance that the government is expecting. We hear that from municipalities all the time. I was out not that long ago a couple of hundred miles west of Edmonton visiting a few towns, who said that they would never again elect an opposition member because the flow of funds stopped to their counties and to their municipalities.

Well, those are grave concerns that these areas have. Why is that? Because what we see happening here – and we see it in this supplementary estimates when you take a look at it on a page-by-page basis. If you take a look at Infrastructure, if you take a look at some of the other areas that we see in here, Health and Wellness particularly, we see spending coming forward that easily could have been incorporated into any kind of minimal long-term strategic planning, and it didn't happen. You can't tell me that overnight you know that you need another road or another bridge or another hospital or another form of infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. Those needs don't occur overnight. They don't occur in six months. They build up over a series of years, and if you're doing strategic planning in any kind of responsible fashion, you know that, you work it into your budget, and you project the need, not like what happens here where the money just gets dumped to address whatever particular pressure point, to use the Premier's phrase, that happens to pop up in that particular quarter of that particular year.

MRS. NELSON: The forest fires are kind of important.

MS CARLSON: Well, one of the hon. members is talking about forest fires, Mr. Speaker, and I was waiting to address that particular issue until we get to the Environment estimates, because while on occasion you will have the requirement that we see in *Beauchesne*,

which says, "to meet the cost created by an unexpected emergency," which can be forest fires, for the most part the dollars spent on forest fires this year could have been projected and could have been planned for.

AN HON. MEMBER: That is not correct.

MS CARLSON: That is correct, Mr. Speaker, and I would direct that particular minister's attention to the estimates where they talk about the dollars that were spent. This particular time I believe it was "to support forestry companies' efforts to improve forest management practices related to fire risk."

Now, fire risk didn't occur overnight. Companies have known for years and have been requesting and wanting to have improved forest management practices. Many of them have undertaken improved management practices on their own. It's commendable that the government would support . . . [interjection]

AN HON. MEMBER: Why don't you join in the debate? [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, hon. minister. The tradition is that we have one person, one hon. member, speaking at a time. Right now we've got two or three engaging in lively debate back and forth, and neither of those two or more individuals was recognized. Hon. Minister of Gaming, we only have one member recognized, and that is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

While I'm on my feet, just if you could engage the chair as opposed to addressing several of the ministers who are inappropriately making comments, hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try not to allow them to further provoke me, although I have to tell you that it's a little tough.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Just to settle the fire question, which seems to be a highly contentious issue – and I understand that the former Minister of Environment is particularly touchy about this because he happened to be the minister at the time. I am not saying that you can 100 percent predict what the forest costs are going to be in any given year in terms of fires. However, Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that the department does have models they follow that give them a range within the forest fires, and certainly in bad years, like we've had for the past couple of years, they are going to have to come back in here, undoubtedly, and ask for supplementary moneys. I have no problem with that. What I have problems with on the fire side is that they didn't do enough planning to understand that the best thing they could be doing in this province is helping forest companies' efforts to improve forest management practices and budget for that.

Why do they have to come back for more money for that? We're talking a lot of money here. We're talking \$2 million that they've asked particularly for that. That exactly can be budgeted. There's no way you can tell me that it's impossible to project what they might have put in the budget in terms of that area, a very necessary area. Perhaps if they had spent those dollars in previous years instead of gutting this department, like they have in the past, we wouldn't be having all of the kinds of problems we have right now with fires. So that is something that I think could be addressed.

In addition to that, when we take a particular look at forest dollars

this year, they talk about \$1.2 million “to fund higher than budgeted cost of improvements made to forest airstrips used in fire fighting.” Well, why are we waiting to upgrade those strips until we’re in the middle of a fire? Once again, Mr. Speaker, a little forethought, a little strategic planning on the government’s side and we could be addressing those issues.

Now, you and I both know that when you’re spending infrastructure dollars, it’s a lot more to spend when you have to react on the spot than when you can step back from the situation and do some planning. Weather conditions, availability of suppliers and supplies, all of those conditions create additional costs when you have to spend the money right now rather than being able to plan for it.

So what I’m saying is: why isn’t this government responsible in that kind of manner? When they talk about following best practices, as industries do, then why aren’t they following best practices themselves, Mr. Speaker? Those are exactly the kinds of reasons why we need to be able to debate the introduction of supplementary estimates into this Assembly, because this government mismanages the dollars of this province, and it is appalling that it happens. People need to know that it happens, and people need to know that when they come in with a thick book like this asking for more dollars at this time of the year, what they’re doing, I say and many people in this province say, is buying votes. That is not a responsible way to govern.

Almost to the dollar everything that they’re asking for in these supplementary estimates could have been forecasted and budgeted for properly. If they were in fact any kind of a company, particularly a publicly traded company, the whole front bench would have been fired this year, Mr. Speaker, because nobody in private industry would allow the kinds of cost overruns that we’re seeing in here or the lack of strategic planning. [interjections]

8:40

You know, Mr. Speaker, I hear more chirping from the other side from people who are refusing to engage in debate in a legitimate fashion in this House, but I’m happy to respond to those requests for information. They want to know: what about revenues?

Well, in fact, they have windfall revenues. This government is hardly responsible for windfall revenues. They cannot take the credit for what drops right out of the sky into their lap, no matter how much they try to. So what should they be doing with that money? I say they should be following their own legislation, which would be demanding them to pay down the debt, because that’s the legislation they brought in. Rather than coming back for supplementary estimates like this, put it all back. Put your money where your mouth was. That’s not what this government does, and it’s once again irresponsible on their side not to do that.

Another thing that we have talked about time and time again in this Legislature when we talk about supplementary estimates is bringing in adjusted budgets every quarter. Industry does that. If industry sees windfall profits falling in their lap, they adjust their budgets. Does this government do that? No, because they want to have these windfall dollars that they can dump back on areas within the province that people are complaining about or where they created a need where there was not one before because of chronic underspending or improper spending in the past.

So, Mr. Speaker, if we had a government that was responsible in those kinds of areas, we would have no need for supplementary estimates like this. There was a time in this province when supplementary estimates were one page long, where really, truly the only dollars they came back for were emergency kinds of situations like floods or fires or what we’re seeing here, some extra dollars going to farm income programs. Those were the only kinds of

dollars that were asked for. What we have now are new budgets being brought in, budgets that haven’t been debated in this Legislature, budgets that do not give any kind of thought to the long-term kind of planning that is sustainable in this province.

These are election-to-election spending dollars that we’re seeing here. This does not do the people of the province any good at all. It may ensure that this government continues to get re-elected, because people know how they have to play the game to get what they want in this province, but it isn’t responsible government. It isn’t a government that works for the best efforts of the people.

We are very lucky in this province that we have experienced several years now of windfall profits from oil and gas, but those days will be over in another 25 or 30 years. What are our children going to do then? If this government continues or if any government follows the kinds of practices that we’ve seen occur in these years in terms of budgeting, this is going to be a very sorry province.

You know, some of the ministers don’t care because they say they’re going to be dead. No one could complain about that. But in fact many of us will have children and grandchildren who will still be around, and I care about what happens to this province. This is a great place to live. I want to ensure that it’s a great place for my children and my grandchildren to live in and that they want to stay in this province because the jobs are here, that the environment is conducive to them living good, happy lives here. It’s not going to happen if we see governments continue to mismanage in the way that this one has, and supplementary estimates is the prime example of how this mismanagement occurs.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that those ministers that we’ve heard from will get up and defend their actions at this particular point in time. They certainly had a lot to say to what I have said so far. Let them respond. Let them respond on the record in a manner where we can send their speeches out to people who are concerned about how this government spends their dollars and when this government spends their dollars and see what they have to say.

I want the hon. Treasurer to stand up in this Legislature and tell us exactly why he doesn’t bring in adjusted budgets when the revenues of this province change. Why doesn’t he do that? That is a best practice done by every successful company in this country and in fact around the globe in this particular environment that we’re working in. They bring in adjusted budgets all the time as conditions change. We have conditions changing dramatically in this province from month to month, week to week, sometimes day to day, but this government just absolutely ignores that so that they can build up these huge slush funds and dump money where they want to when they want to do it.

You know, the day is going to come when the people of this province understand completely what it is that they are doing. They won’t tolerate it anymore, because it isn’t a responsible way to spend the dollars that we see. Let’s see the Treasurer stand up and defend that particular provision. Let’s see the rest of these ministers, who have been so critical of what I’ve had to say here tonight, stand up and defend the reasons why they need to be spending millions and millions of dollars at this particular point in time. How is it that they don’t have the vision to be able to plan what they need just for 12 months? Let’s not talk about three years or five years or 10 or 15; let’s talk about the next 12 months. How is it that they cannot manage their own budgets to project what it is they’re going to need for those months? Give us the reasons for this. Let us examine them. Let us see where the shortfalls are. What we’re going to find in some of those areas, Mr. Speaker, is that where there has been chronic underfunding, we are now seeing increased pressure.

Particularly, I would like people to take a look at child welfare in that particular instance. Even in the descriptions that they put here

in Children's Services, we see absolutely critical problems occurring in this particular department. Why? Because in their rush to the bottom, to be able to bring in huge surpluses, they haven't properly funded areas that are critical to the future of this province. A critical area, Mr. Speaker, I would put to you, is children: the lives of children, their ability to cope, to grow, to be educated, to be the best that they can be. We have a responsibility to those children.

When we take a look at this page and the list of reasons why this government is saying they need supplementary estimates in this particular department, we know that this government has forgotten about children and has refused to make them a priority. What we are seeing here are areas of funding that are particularly required because this department is in crisis, Mr. Speaker. I certainly intend to take my full 20 minutes, when that particular program comes up, to speak about the issues that I've seen in my constituency and that we're seeing falling through for children in that particular area.

This is one department where this government seriously needs to sit down and think through what it is they are trying to accomplish, what it is they need to accomplish, and how they're going to fund that. We have critical problems in this particular area. You know, if you don't maintain a building properly, it'll eventually crumble and deteriorate. Well, when you don't maintain children properly, we pay a much higher price, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Your 20 minutes are up, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this evening to speak to Motion 23 as well, the supplementary estimates. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods had outlined, in *Beauchesne* there are a number of conditions that we must follow in dealing with supplementary estimates.

Now then, as well, when I look at this – and I see that today the government announced that our surplus is in excess of \$5 billion, yet here we are, just after a budget was presented in this House six or seven months ago, asking for \$1 billion extra in supplementary estimates – something tells me that something here is wrong. Have there been extraordinary circumstances that have arisen since that budget? I think not. Could it be that the plan that was presented to us back in the spring session was not very good? I think that is a distinct possibility.

I also want to say that it is no secret to any of us that an election is fast approaching in the spring. We have a tremendous mess on our hands with electricity and the price of electricity in this province, and this government has to do something to look good to the people. So in many areas here I realize, as do all my colleagues, that money is required, but it would seem to me that after that announcement today, Mr. Speaker, that we do have a surplus in excess of \$5 billion, our problem in this province right now is certainly not in the generation of wealth but in the distribution of that wealth and making sure that wealth gets down to the levels where it affects everyday Albertans, not only everyday Albertans but Albertans that need it most.

8:50

So what we have here is a very embarrassing situation. I looked at the city of Edmonton when they were doing their budgeting for the 2001 World Championships. They were \$2 million over budget in one particular area. There was a public outcry. But here we are in this rich province, where we are coming back asking for 1 billion extra dollars, and there's no public outcry. All I can say is that the people of this province certainly cannot be aware of the shoddy budgeting practices that occur. I think that we do have to have more

input from more people here. If this was a onetime event, Mr. Speaker, it would also allow us to say that this is an abnormality, but this is something that happens each and every year when we get to this time of the year.

When we look at the supplementary estimates, yes, we do need new schools in this province, we do need health care, and we have to shorten waiting lists. We do have upkeep on our schools, but it's also a little strange to me that we have public school boards in this province and part of their job is to set a priority list of what they need in the way of new schools, which schools have to have maintenance and whatever. Yet far too often, when moneys are allotted to these school boards, those priority lists are thrown out the window, so we get schools being built where there isn't a priority.

I think that we do have to look very, very seriously here at this whole process and say: let's give Albertans a very clear picture of where their dollars are being spent. It certainly isn't too hard. I know that this government here is in touch with many focus groups. They have direct dealings with our regional health authorities. I know that the constituents of Edmonton-Glengarry certainly don't have any problem in phoning me or stopping me in the street or sending me e-mails or whatever and giving me their views on these types of things.

I also think that when we are looking at the supplementary estimates and we do require more money in certain areas, then it should be imperative that we see those dollars going where we are going to be able to deliver a much better service to Albertans. I look at the case of us having hospital wards now that cannot be opened because we don't have enough trained nurses in this province. We see a situation where we've had many teachers leave the province because of opportunity in the United States, and I say: why are we not making those opportunities for our people here in this rich province? Why are we not stopping the brain drain by keeping our best educated, by keeping our talented people here at home?

I had the opportunity to talk to an oncologist from the Cross cancer clinic, and he indicated that for him to work here in Alberta, he took a \$40,000 cut in pay. He could make \$40,000 more if he was working in British Columbia, \$40,000 more if he was working in Saskatchewan. So here we are with a \$5 billion surplus here, and we can't even afford to pay oncologists over at the Cross cancer clinic the same rate of pay that they would get if they were in Saskatchewan or if they were in British Columbia.

So we have a three-year business plan, yet are the goals of those business plans being met? Obviously not. When we don't get it right here, what do we do? Well, we come back for supplementary estimates. It reminds me a little bit of the Speaker's golf tournament. There, Mr. Speaker, you can buy mulligans. So if you hit your golf shot and you don't hit a good golf shot, well, you can take out your mulligan and you can try it again. That's exactly what this process seems to be. When you don't get it right the first time, well, we'll try again. We'll throw more money at it. So the process is flawed. Do these people need the money? Do these different departments need the money? They certainly do, yes.

In looking at this and looking at all of those conditions that are set out here under Supplementary Estimates in *Beauchesne*, section 946, I would have to say that many of these five conditions are not met here today.

Certainly we can see a need for supplementary estimates for those issues that we can't predict, and it seems that the favourite term tonight is fire fighting. Certainly some years are going to be worse than others, and some fires are going to be bigger than others, but we certainly know that the trend with our weather pattern over the last few years has been for drier and drier summers and certainly conditions that would enhance the number of forest fires and the

expanse of those fires. So, yes, let's make that budgetary request in the spring to cover those conditions. If we do need more, yes, but let's not lowball that figure so that we have to be back in here time after time asking for this amount of money. Certainly these funds are justified for such things as health care, for education, but the whole idea of us coming back here for a billion dollars in supplementary estimates makes a whole mockery of this budgetary process.

So with those few words, Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude my remarks on Motion 23. I would have to say that I do support this because there are many of these departments that do require money. Hopefully this money will get down to the service level where each and every Albertan can see an improvement in their life.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for letting us stand up and talk about this, but you know, it just seems like a short few months ago that we were in here and a short few months ago that we were talking about the normal budget. I think it's leading up to an election coming up pretty soon.

When we look at the number of missed performance measures that this province has actually had over the last few months, this government has missed 62 performance targets in 1999-2000, bringing an accumulated total of missed government performance measures up to 264 in just four years.

If we go through this, under health: Albertans' overall rating of health care systems as good or excellent was 63 percent, below the target of 75 percent established by this government. Now we see money going in. You know, it sounds good, the money going back in, but actually without a plan, Mr. Speaker, it does bring a lot to mind.

As the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about, what is the purpose of supplementary estimates? "Supplementary Estimates may be presented . . . for a further grant to an existing service, in addition to the sum already appropriated."

Well, when the past Treasurer came out with the budget this spring – why are we underestimating budgets year after year and coming back in the fall to bring these forward? In some cases the only reason we ever come back into fall session in this province is to come for the supplementary, because the bills that were left on the table sure weren't big enough that they were going to force this government to come back in.

9:00

We look at what has happened since 1993 in the dismantling of health, education, transportation, infrastructure, and especially human infrastructure in this great province we have. It goes back to: why do we actually have supplementary estimates?

Another one was "for a new expenditure on behalf of a newly-enacted statute." Well, have we had very many of those? Or have we just had ones that have been put on the back shelf, like all the studies we have and all the different symposiums we have that just go back on the shelves and collect dust until you want to bring one or two items out and talk about them and make it sound good to all Albertans that you've actually done a study?

Another one is "to transfer funds from one Vote to another" – well, that's probably the truest extent of the whole thing – and "to extend the purposes of a Vote."

Mr. Speaker, going back to the failed performances in health, ease of access to health services was 64 percent below the targeted 75 percent estimated by this government. The percentage of Albertans

reporting failures to receive needed care was 10 percent above the targeted 7 percent established by this government. Under education, high school completion rates within six years of entering grade 9 remained at 70 percent below the targeted 75 percent estimated by this government. Parents' satisfaction that students are learning what they need to know declined by 77 percent in 1999-2000. Parents' satisfaction with the value for money spent on the ECS to 12 schools in their communities was 71 percent in 1999-2000, below the 80 percent target estimated by this government. We've also already heard about Children's Services, and there are many others.

Yesterday, as the AAMDC convention started, they came out with a slogan, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs actually started off in his speech yesterday, Facing the Future, talking about everybody tightening their belts over the last few years and looking at the future. Well, talking to many members coming in from all over the province, infrastructure is still the largest. It doesn't matter how much you put in there. The big push on today was the fact of how many dollars went back in, and now we're going into dollars and cents going out to all the 420 municipalities throughout Alberta. Well, with that, it sounds great. You know, we talk about telephones coming in in the 1900s; now we're getting fibre going out all over the province in the 21st century.

The actual dollars that are going out are very needed. The timing of it stinks. The planning could have been over the last three years, after the debt was actually taken care of, but the thing is, it's coming out now. Now we're talking about all the money going out in supplementary estimates. Why are we in here? The \$8 million that was announced by the Treasurer this morning is about all that's left that you can actually spend at this present time leading up to the next election. To supplement, if you don't regain more money by more oil royalties and so on, is something you have to maybe – you know, are we going to gain more money? Are we going to spend the full \$8 million over the next few months?

Mr. Speaker, I feel that education, agriculture, the infrastructure, and municipal transfers and all that are fine and dandy, but the fact is that we have to work with the three levels of government. We have to look at what we brought out as a bill this past spring as revenue sharing. Instead of bashing it and bashing what the feds did or didn't do, the fact is that we've got three levels of government that should be working together. I hope that as the years come, we're not looking at supplementaries with this amount of dollars coming forward every time we come back in the fall session.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Government Motion 23 carried]

24. Mr. Hancock moved on behalf of Dr. West:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(6) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2000-01 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund shall be two days.

[Government Motion 24 carried]

Adjournment of Session

25. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the current sitting of the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, this is the normal procedural

motion, which we introduce very early on the first opportunity in each session, which provides for the normal process of arriving at an adjournment when the business of the session has been achieved. We will probably be subjected to the usual discussion and argument from members opposite that we're coming into session and already wanting to adjourn it. That, of course, is balderdash. It's not the case. This is simply a procedural motion. We have every full intent of spending the full amount of time allotted to Committee of Supply and to passing the appropriation bills and to dealing with the remaining legislative agenda of the government in this fall session.

So it would be remiss of me if I did as I have on other occasions: just simply introduce the motion and then let others say that we were trying to stop a session before it was started. That, Mr. Speaker, is not the case. This is simply a procedural motion which allows us to do an orderly conduct of government business in the Legislature, and when the business agenda is completed and the members have been satisfied with their opportunity to speak to bills, we can adjourn the session at that time.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, methinks the Government House Leader protests too much. It's interesting he should be so defensive in introducing this motion. If indeed the motion were as innocuous as the hon. minister would have us believe, then . . . [interjection]

Mr. Speaker, this is, in fact, a serious motion. When we saw the government introduce electrical deregulation and costs started to soar for consumers, I'm sure one of the things that crossed the minds of many Albertans was: ah, another excuse for our provincial government to turn the lights off in the Legislative Assembly sooner than ever, yet another excuse to abridge the legislative session. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have a Government House Leader who suggested that perhaps we not debate this too long, yet we have a whole bunch of people on the front bench who are prepared to debate. It remains a perplexity.

In any event, we still have the convention that goes that only one member is standing and speaking at a time, and the only person that has been recognized by the chair at this moment is the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, it may just be that it's tougher for a lame duck legislator to gain any respect, but I'm going to try harder. I'm absolutely going to try harder in the few moments I have left.

It seems to me again that if this government focused half as much energy on trying to deal with the top-of-mind issues for our constituents, wherever they may live in this province, as they do with closing the doors, winding up the session, and hightailing it back to their diverse constituency offices, we would have a vastly more responsive scheme of government, Mr. Speaker. It strikes me that if this Legislature were to sit for a little longer than two or three weeks, you know what the bonus would be for the 3 million men, women, and children that live in this province? What it would mean is that in this Legislature we would be dealing not with the unimaginative list of bills that the Government House Leader has proffered on the Order Paper; we would be dealing with the top-of-mind issues of the people that live in this province. What might those be? Well, I can only reflect what from the perspective of downtown Calgary seems to be important, and other members can supplement.

9:10

I particularly welcome new members in the Assembly who may wish to follow up and perhaps talk about some of the issues that may be particularly important to their constituency. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View I can see is poised because he's going to join this debate as well. I look forward with great anticipation to what those members are going to add to the debate.

If we were in fact to sit not a matter of a few days and a couple of weeks but a long enough time, here's the bonus to Albertans. Number one, we'd be able to address an absolutely abysmal shortage of mental health beds in this province. We'd be able to identify why it is that the Calgary regional health authority has been talking about somewhere in the order of 30 to 40 new mental health beds and they've been talking about that for over a year. Do you know what's happened? Because we can't get nurses to staff those beds, we're not opening the beds that the CRHA had promised six months ago, four months ago, two months ago. People come into my constituency office in downtown Calgary, and the last was a fellow who ended up assaulting an individual specifically because it was the only way he could access a psychiatric bed in a city hospital in the city of Calgary. That's what's happening.

You know, I think the government's plan is that we're going to go through two or three weeks in this Assembly and they don't want to talk about those things. We'll deal with miscellaneous statutes, we'll tinker a little bit with the justice system, and we'll try to fix up some of the problems in the child prostitution bill, but you're not going to see a response to those top-of-mind issues.

What other kinds of issues? Well, I went to get my teeth cleaned the other week, and the dental hygienist and I were busy chatting. You know what she talked about? She has two children, one in grade 8 and one in grade 10, and she's taken both those children out of public education, out of public schools. This was of interest to me because she lives in the same community I do, and I know those schools to be excellent schools. My daughter was a product of those, and I was involved in the parent advisory councils. I queried: "Why would you take your children out? These are excellent schools; lots of parental involvement." You know what her response to me was, Mr. Speaker? She said: "My children are not getting the quality of education that my husband and I think is important when there are 34 children in one classroom and 28 in the other. I don't think that's a learning experience. I've taken my children out, and they're currently in a private school."

You know, I would be interested to hear the comments of the Minister of Learning if we had a chance to be able to address this in this all too brief legislative session. I'd like to hear what his solution is, because what's happening – and I find this continually – is that we have more and more parents voting with their feet for an alternative to the public education system. The reason is because they feel there are too many pressures, too few resources in the public education system, and they do what all parents do. We all are motivated to advantage our children, philosophy aside. I mean, I don't blame parents for seeking to advantage their children if they're able to put their children in an alternative or a private school, but I certainly fault the people responsible for public education for creating that situation.

I remember being in a debate with Ted Byfield at a forum with a bunch of independent school principals, not what you might think would be a crowd naturally sympathetic to somebody promoting public education. We spent some time talking. They were saying that they have huge enrollments; they have waiting lists for their private schools. We went around and we polled most of the principals who were there. You know, what they said in most cases is that parents are coming to seek out a private school because of

their frustration at classroom sizes and impaired access. Whether it's speech pathologists, language specialists, behavioural specialists, they can't find a lot of those resources in the public system. You, Mr. Speaker, with a long history in public education, know better than anybody how important it is to be able to make sure that system is able to deal with that wide variety of needs. The Minister of Learning, I think, knows that. Why aren't we talking about that in this fall legislative session?

You know, the SPEAK group, Support Public Education – Act for Kids, held a meeting in Calgary last week at Central memorial high school, and I had a chance to go and listen to parents from I'd say probably 30, 35 different school councils scattered throughout the city, all four quadrants. They came, and they made presentations. I don't think there were any members of the government caucus there. There may have been. I didn't see any. I don't know whether there was anybody there from the Department of Learning listening to those parents. But you know what they talked about? As parent after parent got up, they talked about their frustration with a public education system that doesn't meet their needs, and they talked about the disconnect.

We have a Minister of Innovation and Science that travels around the province. I mean, he's clearly found religion. He speaks with a passion.

MR. SMITH: He found it before he got elected.

MR. DICKSON: It's a metaphor, Mr. Minister.

He speaks with a passion about innovation and science, and that is wonderful, and it is exciting to see, and I love to see that kind of enthusiasm. But when he talks about this information age and the glorious opportunity that's in front of Albertans, the disconnect is that we're not doing the job in K to 12. We're not doing the job in basic education to be able to train those young people, to be able to provide them with the kinds of supports to be able to realize that rosy, exciting dream that the Minister of Innovation and Science paints for us. I want that dream to materialize. I think all of us want that dream to materialize, but we're not getting the job done in ECS to grade 12.

We still have an abysmal situation with ESL instruction in the city of Calgary. We still have a high school dropout rate for ESL students which is in excess of 60 percent, and that's not acceptable to me. I don't think it's acceptable to the Minister of Learning. Should we not be talking about that, and is this not the forum and the time to do it?

Mr. Speaker, the University of Calgary is supposed to be one of the foremost learning institutions in the country. It's something we're all very proud of in Calgary, but what continues to happen is that we are not competitive in terms of the salaries we pay our professors. The University of Calgary has gone from – I think it used to be about 23rd of the top 25 universities in Canada in terms of staff salaries. I stand to be corrected by the Minister of Learning if he disagrees. My understanding is that some additional money has gone in. We've now inched our way up, so I think we're now about 20th at the University of Calgary. Well, Mr. Minister, in my respectful opinion and, I suggest, in the opinion of many Calgarians it's not good enough. That's the sort of thing we should be talking about, and where else do we do it? In what more appropriate place do we do it than this forum, and we do it here in November or December of 2000.

If we were sitting longer, one of the things we might talk about is Rotary House. This is at the Kerby Centre. This is a unique shelter. I suspect some ministers have visited this facility. Maybe the Minister of Community Development has been there. This is a

facility for seniors who have been abused, and since it opened on June 1, 1999, there have been 76 seniors that have been able to seek shelter in this place away from places where they were being abused. They have a funding crunch now. They have a serious funding crunch. [interjection] Well, maybe it's been resolved by the intervention of the Minister of Community Development. If that's the case, I thank him. But the last time I spoke to the folks at the Kerby Centre, there was a shortage of funds.

VLTs. The Minister of Gaming is with us tonight, and you know, we have so many questions we could put to this minister that in itself could occupy two weeks. Six thousand machines in a province that were never approved, never sanctioned, never asked for by Albertans, brought in by our government and the current Provincial Treasurer, who was interested in generating some – well, for whatever reason he brought them in. We've got 6,000 machines, and you know what my constituents would like to debate? Not raising the limit as the Minister of Gaming had suggested a couple of months ago . . .

9:20

MR. SMITH: I never suggested that. No, I didn't.

MR. DICKSON: Well, inaccurately reported in the media then in terms of speculating on an increase in the 6,000 machine limit.

You know, I think most Albertans and most Calgarians – in that so-called referendum a couple of years ago the question was: do they go, or do they stay? What was missing was the question that I put on my www.garydickson.ab.ca web site. We gave people an option there. You know what they told us, Mr. Speaker, about that? What they told us was in fact so prophetic that I can't put my finger on it right at the moment, but I want you to know that I'm going to get that, and I'm going to table it like I have all the other web site question responses.

AN HON. MEMBER: You've tabled half the world already.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I want to share it. People in Calgary-Buffalo are animated, and they're engaged in debate. They deserve to have their views reflected in this Assembly, and I'm trying hard to do that.

MR. SMITH: It'll be better next April.

MR. DICKSON: Well, your hope may be that the next MLA for Calgary-Buffalo may be a little quieter.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's going to be a cop. It'll be a cop.

MR. DICKSON: Well, we'll see about that.

Electrical deregulation. You know, Don Getty got beat up and tossed out of office because he cost Albertans over \$1.2 billion in failed, misguided, stupid adventures in terms of MagCan, trying to build a magnesium plant in High River, NovAtel, and the list goes on and on.

This minister of natural resources said yes to a power auction where we took an asset valued by a professional independent at over \$4 billion and participated in an auction, and we got a little more than \$1 billion. And instead of doing what he had the power to do, which was say: no, unacceptable, I will not preside over kissing off, passing off over \$2 billion in taxpayer value; I'm not going to just let that go up into the ether – he didn't do that. Do you know what he said? Because he had to shore up a government's misguided, mismanaged electrical deregulation system, he said: we will accept the bids.

Let's realize what's happened here. We have taken \$2 billion in assets in this province, and they have gone up in smoke. This

government thinks that by giving the citizens of this province \$20 a month off their electricity bills for one year – that doesn't help 70 percent of my constituents who are tenants, by the way – by giving that kind of refund and by giving a couple of \$150 cheques, people will forgive and forget. Mr. Speaker, wrong. Wrong because Albertans are not that foolish. They're not that short-sighted. They're a darn sight smarter, I'd like to think, than the people that designed this electrical deregulation system.

I want to be able to talk about that. My constituents want that discussed, and I suspect there are some people in Calgary, whether in Calgary-North or in Calgary-Foothills – there are constituents who also have concerns, and they want to see those things expressed, and this is the place to do it.

We haven't even got to the flat tax yet. You know, I think we need to give Mr. Day a DNA test. The putative father of the flat tax in this province is denying paternity. The man who was here to vote once for closure on the flat tax and the second time to jam through the flat tax bill has now gone to Ottawa, and it's like he never heard of it before. He wants nothing to do with the flat tax. It was good enough for Albertans, but apparently it's not good enough in terms of the next step in trying to sell this to Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pretty concerned about that. My constituents are pretty concerned. Most of my constituents fall in that middle-income range, and those are the people who want to demand some accountability from these ministers opposite. How is that going to happen?

I can see that there has to be some supporting information here. At www.garydickson.ab.ca over three weeks we had 12,712 hits, and this is what they said. Sixty-two percent felt that Alberta should freeze the deregulation process until January 1, 2002, and take steps to better protect the consumer. Thirty-eight percent of those people wanted to return to the regulated electrical utility system. How many out of 12,712 wanted to proceed with deregulation of electrical power? Zero.

Now, it is fair to say . . . [interjection] The Minister of Justice, always on the bit, immediately realizes I have no idea that those 12,712 people actually reside in Calgary-Buffalo, and it's true. I have found out that there is a prolific writing professor at the University of Arkansas with the same name as this member, and there are probably people visiting my site thinking they're going to find out something about archeology.

MR. SMITH: Well, they are.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, you can't keep up with the Minister of Gaming when he's on a roll, and he's hot tonight.

Mr. Speaker, when I asked my constituents about Bill 18, I had 2,013 hits over three weeks. Fifty-nine percent, or 1,187, said that they supported a progressive tax system with high-income earners paying at a higher rate. Forty-one percent, 825 people, supported a flat tax system with taxpayers paying the same rate.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

There are so many good questions here. I asked people about what they thought of HRDC and the Alberta version, which is the Department of Government Services. You know, we have the Minister of Government Services here. With all this focus on Jane Stewart what we didn't realize is that right here in the front row in this Chamber we have a minister who is collating personal information on eight different government departments.

Ah, it's gone so quickly. I'll leave it to others to carry on.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was interested in the comments by the Government House Leader when he introduced Motion 25 and indicated that this is a housekeeping motion and one that appears at this time during the proceedings at least twice a year. That's true, but that in no way, I think, makes unnecessary or unneeded comments about that motion because of the context, the short period that has been allotted for this session, calling it as late in the fall as it has been called and running up against the holiday season. So whether we like it or not, there is a limit on the debate time, and that's unfortunate because I think there are things going on in the province that won't be addressed during this session and that need to be addressed.

My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo has talked about one that is first and foremost on many constituents' minds, and that's energy deregulation. No matter how the problem is explained to people, they still feel that the increased power costs they are facing are a direct result, first, of government's inaction over five years in creating a climate of uncertainty in the market and that it's going to be a long time – I think the Premier said earlier today that it would be at least three years – before there could be more power on-line. Constituents are holding the government directly responsible for it. The attempt to have an emergency debate on it today that failed I think was unfortunate. Certainly there are opportunities in question period to raise the issue, but the kind of thorough discussion, wide-ranging discussion that's needed on that particular matter is not scheduled to happen unless it happens as it's dragged into debates on other issues. So energy deregulation I think is one reason not to limit this session and not to be looking at adjournment.

I think that if you look at schools – I've held a couple of town hall meetings where parents with children with special needs came to express their concerns. They're having great difficulty. They're having difficulty accessing the kind of speech pathology services they need. They're having difficulty accessing the occupational therapy they need. I guess the underlying problem that they're having is accessing the programs that they need for their children. Nowhere do I see on the Order Paper or in the plans for this contracted session an opportunity where that problem can be addressed in but a cursory or perfunctory manner, and that's unfortunate, because it's a group of parents and their children who deserve better.

9:30

I think the climate that many seniors in this province find themselves in right now is more than unfortunate. I had a senior call me several weeks ago when she received the third notice of increases for power from her condominium association. Those increases had gone from \$43 a month to \$65 a month to \$103.50 a month. Her comment at that time, Mr. Speaker, was: it's becoming a choice for me because I'm on a limited income; I either heat or I eat. In a province that is as rich as this province is at this particular moment in history, that seems to be almost tragic.

I think seniors are living in a climate of uncertainty brought on by costs in the health care system. I was working with a senior with a parent in a long-term care facility in another jurisdiction and trying to help her get her parents together. They were informed that it would take at least two years before there could be a transfer from one of the health regions to another. Those kinds of fears about health care, about long-term care, about costs rising out of their control I think are causing seniors to really be worried, and again I think it's an opportunity and an obligation of this Assembly to stand

back and to address those kinds of problems. Again, given the kind of Order Paper that we have and the kind of business before us, I don't see that opportunity in a session that is scheduled to adjourn within two or three weeks.

I think the impact of school closures, the whole infrastructure concerns that are being faced by communities and school boards across the province and the way they're being resolved certainly should be open for debate. There'll be an opportunity to do that when we look at the budget estimates, fortunately, but not the in-depth kind of examination of that problem and the concerns about priorities for projects, how those priorities are arrived at, the concern about the impact of school closures on rural communities and on urban communities. The position that the Department of Infrastructure puts school boards and communities in I think is really very, very unfortunate, to say the least. Again, it's something that this Legislature should be addressing.

The previous speaker mentioned mental health, and there are huge, huge questions surrounding the provision of mental health care in this province. The kind of advice that has come from professionals in the field and the kind of direction that the province has taken seem to be exactly opposite. We have yet to have that kind of a debate in this Legislature: the whole notion of community-based treatment versus centralized treatment. The uses that are being made of the facility in Ponoka I think really have raised a number of questions in people's minds. Again, it's unfortunate that they won't be the subject of a wide-ranging debate, at least not in this session.

Health care, of course, still remains the number one concern in people's minds. In the door-knocking that I've done in the last number of weeks, the same question comes up time and time again, the same topic. Bill 11 has now become code for all of the ills of the health care system in this province. People are still concerned about the directions we're taking, the lack of care when care is needed, and the long waiting lists that they are faced with when they do indeed need care. So the health care debate rages in the province. Again, I don't see the opportunity in this short legislative session for those very serious questions to be addressed or plans by the government to do anything but what they have done so far, and that's to try to defend the indefensible.

The deferred maintenance at postsecondary institutions. The Auditor General has commented about the health and safety concerns, the risks that that deferred maintenance may possibly raise, and the need for a long-term plan to make sure that those risks are mitigated. Again, that won't be part and parcel of this session.

There is the whole Swan Hills fiasco and the details around the winding down or the continued operation of that plant. Again, the opportunities for public airing of those concerns are going to be limited in a short two-week or two-and-a-half-week session.

We have thousands of students across the province protesting tuition and the rising costs, the rising fees at postsecondary institutions. We have the eighth lowest student funding for postsecondary education in the country. One of the richest if not the richest province decides that we could be number 8 in terms of funding young people into postsecondary institutions. We have the fastest growing tuition rates in all of the 10 provinces: 208 percent, 210 percent over the last 10 years. Again, the kind of serious discussion that the students who will appear here tomorrow from the University of Alberta and the students that will appear here later in the session think this Legislature should be dealing with regarding those concerns are not likely to be addressed in a short two-week or a two-and-a-half-week period.

There are many reasons, Mr. Speaker, why this adjournment is a bit of an affront appearing on the Order Paper, housekeeping or not. With Albertans concerned with everything from health care to

school closures to the state of the Swan Hills facility, I think that people will see this motion for what it is, not merely a housekeeping motion but a motion that allows the government to escape the kind of scrutiny that the issues that I've just outlined deserve.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I conclude. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to get a few words in this evening in debate regarding Government Motion 25.

We seem to have at the least, Mr. Speaker, not enough respect for democracy in this province. We seem to think that all activities should happen outside this Assembly. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods was discussing issues that I believe cannot be discussed in the time that we have allocated to us.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

When you think of issues such as electrical deregulation, the impact of that, the impact it's going to have on residential users, light industrial users, hospitals, schools, and the impact it's going to have on heavy industry in this province, which uses the majority of electric power, when this whole idea came forward – and all hon. members of the Assembly know the haste in which Bill 27 was debated. Closure was used. We didn't have time in the Assembly to debate that issue. Look at the cost of this now, Mr. Speaker.

9:40

I have to think to myself that we need to have a more thorough examination of all the initiatives that are being proposed by this government in this Assembly. By cutting short the time, we are doing a disservice to Albertans. I know there are people in this Assembly that say – and I disagree with them – that the less time this Legislative Assembly is in session, the less time there is to make laws and therefore there are less restrictions on Albertans. But when Albertans go to bed at night, they want to know that when they wake up, they can flick a switch and there's going to be electricity. They want to know that there's going to be a source of natural gas for their furnaces. Industrial leaders in this province want to know that there's a reliable and cheap source of feedstock for their industrial processes.

Now, I know there are some members of the general public who approach me and talk about the sugar-daddy politics of the current government and how they resent that. There are other people who come forward and say to me: this is crony capitalism in this province. There are the winners and the losers. We have a major lawsuit happening in this province where citizens – Mr. Speaker, it's incredible – have rallied together and are suing their very own provincial government for compensation for untreated pine shakes. Now, it's always a serious matter when citizens band together to sue their government, and this type of lawsuit involving thousands of consumers from across the province is very, very unusual in this province. What are we doing? Are we going to have time to discuss this, discuss what happened? Certainly not, and I think we should. At least we can prevent this from happening again. We can find out what went wrong and when it went wrong.

Mr. Speaker, political careers are at stake here. My gosh, the leaders of the government are going to have to wonder about this individual or that individual. Exactly how able are they with all this going on? Thousands of documents, I'm proud to say, have been

released or obtained by the Official Opposition through freedom of information. Now, freedom of information is one of the very, very best tools that the opposition has to keep the government accountable. We're just trying to do our job, but if this session is only going to last a few days, I have a lot of questions to ask. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the hon. Minister of Justice, is as interested in this issue as I am.

We have untreated pine shakes all over the province. We have the issue of treated pine shakes now coming up. There were tests done on this product. Everyone was assured that Alberta taxpayers, who were financing the tests, were not receiving the information in a timely fashion. We have to get to the bottom of this issue. Albertans paid for these tests, yet they were denied the information. I'm sure many of them, as they went to the lumber store, would have been very grateful if they could have been provided this information. By closing the doors on this Assembly, Albertans are going to be denied a chance to question their very own government. We have letters flying between this company and that company and going to the government suggesting that perhaps this is going to reflect on the product, that it is not a good reflection on this product. Consumers, if they get this information, are going to lose confidence in the product. Now, what we're looking at, as a result of that, is probably another lawsuit by Albertans against their government. A person can stand up in question period, and the slogan can be: it's before the courts; I can't answer that.

Another fight that has come to light is the whole issue, Mr. Speaker, of timber permits in the province. Incredibly I have only so much time, and I have so many questions to ask regarding that issue. Am I going to get the chance? No, not with this motion. I will not. We have a lot of questions. Now, I believe that in the time between now and 1993 whenever this government tried to convince Albertans that there were limited funds, very limited funds for core programs like health care, education, in some areas of the province we were giving away wood fibre at fire sale prices. We put a new definition of free in the words "free enterprise." And here we go; we're not going to get a chance to hold the government accountable on this. I found out all of this with a FOIP request, that the government wants to ask for \$624,000 to allow me and a researcher to obtain this information. Will I get a chance to question the government on this? I don't think so.

I have other questions, Mr. Speaker, that I regretfully will probably not get an opportunity to ask, and they relate to another FOIP request. The government wanted to charge me \$54,000 for information relating to the Canada-Alberta labour agreement. I got a list here just the other day. I was astonished to find out that \$3.5 million of this money had gone to the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce, of all things. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, again we just have one hon. member who's been recognized, and we can certainly hear a number of people over on this side wanting to enter debate. If you could wait until the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar concludes his remarks, then you are free to enter into debate, Minister of Gaming, but right now we have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now the FOIP request. There was \$300 million provided to this province from the federal government, and we all hear how there has

to be this devolution of power from the federal government and the provinces can look after themselves. They can look after themselves, and they want all this power. They want an increase of power. So I thought: let's find out how prudently this money was spent. I didn't have to wait too long before the Auditor General wrote about this. The Auditor General in his last report talked about overpayments, sloppy accounting, and I thought that in order to do my job, I'd better check into this, and I did.

9:50

Now, we have over a three-year period roughly \$100 million coming into this province for programs to train citizens of this province to enter or re-enter the workforce. Let's have a good, thorough examination of this program to see if it should be expanded, because what we're doing, Mr. Speaker, is talking about increasing provincial control over programs, but at the same time we are not monitoring to see if they're working, if this money is being well spent. Will this be a topic that will be debated in this Assembly? I think not. We won't have time.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned Red Deer a little earlier, the city of Red Deer and the Chamber of Commerce and the money that they are receiving and will receive in the future relating to this Canada-Alberta labour agreement. I visited the city of Red Deer in September. Yes. I found a lot of houses down there where people were very upset with these pine shakes. Wow. There were a lot of pine shakes. I was in Red Deer-North, the north end of the constituency. As my honourable colleague from Lethbridge-East would say: they were as mad as hornets.

At this time I would like to congratulate the new Member for Red Deer-North. I understand, of course, that this is her first evening session, and I wish her well in her job as representative from Red Deer-North. The former member certainly had a lot to say in this Assembly, and I'm anxious to hear how she is going to represent her constituents.

However, Mr. Speaker, I also hear from the hon. minister of community services here. I doubt if I will get the chance in question period to find out if the building that's going to be named after this individual has pine shakes on its roof, because I'm sure it's going to need to be repaired. That's going to be a problem. In Spruce Grove, I believe it is. You know, the government will have to pay for a new roof for that place as well. They'll probably try to convince the public that they put the wrong kind of nails on, like what occurred at Grant MacEwan.

There are lots and lots of issues that, unfortunately, we do not get to discuss in this Assembly. We look, Mr. Speaker, and we listen to the comments from the other side of the House. We go to classrooms in our constituency, and students ask about government, they ask about the role of opposition, they ask about the role of government members. They ask me about the confrontational nature of this Assembly. I tell them that it is part of question period. The most vital part of the opposition's role is question period and holding the government accountable. I think this is one of the most effective oppositions in Canada. The reason I can say that with confidence is because the government wants to keep the number of days down to the bare minimum where they can sit there and have us hold them accountable. They can run and they can hide, but we have so few sitting days in this Assembly that it is a tribute to our diligence in holding them accountable. They simply do not want to be here. They simply do not want to be in this Assembly, because they know they cannot answer the questions.

We are looking at an economic boom here. We're looking at large surpluses. But we have a health care system that doesn't work. We have elementary schools where the rain is pouring in on the blackboard.

AN HON. MEMBER: The sky is falling.

MR. MacDONALD: They can say: the roof is falling in; the roof is falling in. You bet the roof is falling in.

It is incredible that we have such a narrow focus. We have resources that are dwindling. We have a problem with our electrical system. As I said before, health care: we have people waiting far too long, and we have a shortage of health care professionals. And as I said, we have schools that are simply not adequate. Yet I'll turn on the evening news some night after the session is over, and I'll hear one of the hon. members from the government side talking about how we have to have a well-educated workforce to compete in the global economy. I have to question their sincerity in that statement, because it is simply not being provided adequately.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to remind all hon. members of this Assembly that we cannot take for granted this Legislature. We all stood somewhere in this province in the last week with our heads bowed for those who were willing to sacrifice their lives so we could stand in here and have the protection that comes with freedom of speech. I feel that I'm being denied my rights as a Member of this Legislative Assembly by this government not providing adequate time to debate many, many important issues.

Thank you.

[Government Motion 25 carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 38 regarding notice to allow for Official Opposition and third-party opposition changes to standing committees of the House.

[Unanimous consent granted]

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move Government Motion 26 as follows:

Be it resolved that the following changes to the following committees be approved by the Assembly: on the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts that Mr. Mason replace Dr. Pannu and that Dr. Massey be appointed, on the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices that Mr. Sapers be appointed, and on the Select Standing Committee on Law and Regulations that Mrs. Soetaert be appointed.

[Government Motion 26 carried]

[At 10:01 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 15, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/11/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently and the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Colleagues, as many of you know, our colleague from Edmonton-Castle Downs, hon. member Pamela Paul, has been absent from the House. You'll be glad to know that she has recovered from her eye surgery this past week and is now at home recuperating. I'm sure all of you will join with me in wishing her well in her recovery.

You might also want to congratulate the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, who is now a proud new grandfather, and it would be quite appropriate to do the normal thing. [applause]

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition from citizens concerned with mature and aging women's health, particularly osteoporosis.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition today. It is signed by 370 students, the students for environmental and social action, who were responding to the concerns in Kananaskis Country, students who are now very happy with the government's decision in that regard.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I'm pleased to introduce a petition signed by 311 Albertans from Edmonton, Calgary, Spruce Grove, Legal, Fort Saskatchewan, Blairmore, and Sherwood Park. They are petitioning the Assembly "to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you very much.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday on mature women's health and osteoporosis now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Alberta Government to take an enlightened preventative approach and add the newer and more effective medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented on the promotion of private health care by this government be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition I presented on Thursday, May 25 requesting the government to maintain Kananaskis in a natural state now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta:

1. To immediately disallow any further development of the Spray Valley of Kananaskis Country, including those proposals currently under consideration;
2. To maintain Kananaskis Country in a natural state that provides high quality wildlife habitat and nature-based recreational activities;
3. To create a Wildland Provincial Park which protects the whole of the undeveloped parts of the Kananaskis and Spray Valleys.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition I tabled last spring regarding private health care be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table with the House today five copies of the Alberta Economic Development Authority's Positioning Alberta for Continuing Success Activity Report 1999-2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly three reports today: the year 2000 annual report of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta, the 1999 annual report of the Workers' Compensation Board of Alberta, and the 1999 annual report for the Appeals Commission for Alberta's Workers' Compensation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have the honour of tabling the Alberta Justice annual report 1999-2000,

the Alberta Law Enforcement Review Board's 1999 annual report for information purposes, and the annual reports of the Alberta Law Foundation and the Law Society of Alberta.

As our annual report shows, Alberta Justice is responding to the concerns of Albertans raised at the 1999 justice summit, which I might say was the brainchild of my predecessor and my colleague . . .

MR. HAVELOCK: Jon Havelock.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, I can't use that name; can I? And I don't know where you're from.

In 1999-2000 we enhanced community partnerships, increased the role of the victims. We've clarified accountability, increased funding for crime prevention initiatives, and I'm glad to report that our efforts appear to be paying off. Crime rates continue to fall in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of the annual report on the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. This report outlines the work for the past year as the council has moved to develop an Alberta disability strategy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a letter that I have today sent to the Premier in reference to his statements in this Legislature yesterday, when he said, "This leader of the Liberal opposition was the person who licensed the very first private MRI clinic in this province." In the letter I state:

This statement is a lie.

During my term as Minister of Health, I did not license, nor approve, nor in any way encourage private MRI clinics.

In addition, it is the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta that would license a private MRI clinic, not the Government of Alberta nor the Minister of Health.

I resigned as Minister of Health . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader, thank you very much. This is Tabling Returns and Reports.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of letters from eight dedicated board members from the Youth Dance Unlimited company urging the government to have more "support for the Arts in Alberta recognizing the lasting social, educational and economic benefits to the community," five copies of eight letters.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a large number of questionnaires that I'd like to table. They outline the concerns that victims of brain injury have in this province.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of letters that are specifically directed for the benefit of the hon.

minister of health and the associate minister dealing with concerns and shortcomings expressed by Alberta victims of brain injury and outlining difficulties with medical coverage, home care, employment, recreation, income, and so on and so forth.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table a number of items, the first being an agenda from the External Advisory Board of the Graduate Students' Association of the University of Alberta. I have been privileged to attend this session, and I have, accompanying that agenda, enclosed two postcards which the undergraduates and the graduate students are providing and hoping people will send to the government. The postcards state, "Tuition in Alberta has risen over 208% . . ."

THE SPEAKER: Please, hon. member, let's get on with the tablings.
1:40

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I will table those with the Assembly.

I also have today five copies of a Discussion Paper on the Attributes of a National Framework for Injury Prevention and Control. This was shared in October at a national conference on injury prevention that was held in Kananaskis.

Accompanying that, Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to table today five copies of the annual report of the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research, an outstanding centre which is doing vital work and deserves additional support from government.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I have but one tabling, and this is Canada's Annual Survey of Emergency Food Programs prepared for the Canadian Association of Food Banks, October 2000.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is from the Bragg Creek Environmental Coalition, who are requesting a "moratorium on all resource developments in Kananaskis Country until a watershed assessment" is conducted and its recommendations are implemented.

The second is a letter from Paul and Jean Greig, who are also concerned about Kananaskis Country.

The third is the third quarter results as reported by Bovar where they tell us how they lost \$1 million and their subsequent plans to return this plant to the government of Alberta and the people.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, the first of which is a letter from Mr. Roy Kramar. He's a constituent of mine, and he is asking that the Capital health authority reimburse him some \$1,500 for three MRIs that were required for his neck, his back, and his head in March of this year, sir.

The second tabling, so that the government does not miss some of the important items and misinterpret a number of the statements of the market surveillance administrator, is a report filed by him to the Power Pool of Alberta on prices in the summer of 2000, sir. The five copies are herein contained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would file five copies of What Students Have Said, excerpts from the 25,000 postcards delivered to the Minister of Learning earlier today by student representatives of institutions across the province asking that tuition be limited to 2 percent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is a letter from St. Albert Protestant schools expressing their concerns over boundary changes.

The other issue is from St. Albert Protestant schools as well, expressing their concerns that unless there is stable and consistent funding for the DARE program, it will no longer be available to as many students as have been fortunate enough to get this program offered to them so far.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. Both of them are documents which I have received through freedom of information. They are relating to the treated pine shake. The first one is entitled Shake Treat Protocol. It is recommendations for pressure preservative treatment.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is Treated Pine Shake Inspection Report from the manufacturers, Skyline, Majestic, Shakemaster, and Cowley. This is not a very good record, I'm afraid, to announce to all members of the Assembly.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Miss Clair Sparrius of East London, South Africa. Clair is an exchange student with the Rotary Club of High River. She is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask her now to rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of the Assembly.

And the second introduction, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly councillors from the MD of Willow Creek: Councillor Brian Dahl from the constituency of Highwood and councillors Dave Claypool and Kelly Donahue from the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you today to the members of the Assembly Manuella Peel from Onoway, Alberta. Mrs. Peel is the mother of Dwight Peel, a young man who was killed in a workplace incident on June 27, 1998, just two days after his 17th birthday. I met with Mrs. Peel earlier today to discuss how we can educate employers and young people on the importance of ongoing safety in the workplace. We must educate and protect our young and inexperienced workers. With Mrs. Peel today is her sister Mary Anne Munn from Calahoo. I would ask Mrs. Peel and her sister to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly two classes from James Mowat elementary school in Fort Saskatchewan. They're accompanied by teachers Ted Fellows and George Sebest and also parents Mrs. Cunningham, Mrs. Prochinsky, Mrs. Lequire, Mr. Arnott, Mrs. DeBruyn, Mrs. Regush and by Mr. Fluker, the bus driver. If they'd please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a great group of students from Archbishop MacDonald high school in Edmonton. There are 57 visitors here. They are with their teachers, Mrs. Jane Warren and Mrs. Phyllis Schumacher, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three very special ladies from the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency. We have Mrs. Helen Broadbent and Mrs. Judy Thompson. They are here today because their husbands are councillors for Lakeland county, and they are at the AAMD and C convention in Edmonton. They are accompanied today by my wife, Juliette. I would like to ask all the ladies to stand and be recognized by the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 13 special guests from Vulcan county. We've got five guests in the members' gallery and eight in the public gallery, and I would ask if they would rise as I introduce them. In the members' gallery are the administrator, Robert Strauss, Councillor Ian Donovan, Councillor Grant Lahd, Councillor Merle Wyatt, who's also one of the newest councillors elected, and the public works supervisor, Nick Zubach. In our public gallery are Reeve Wayne Davey, another new councillor, Charlene Shearer, Glenn Logan, Councillor Darryl McDonald, Councillor Doug McIntyre, and Councillor Rod Ruark. Along with them are two spouses, Brenda McIntyre and Mr. Wayne Shearer. I'm pleased to introduce them to the Assembly. Please give them a warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Later this afternoon we will be joined by 41 guests from Our Lady of Victories school here in the City of Edmonton. I had the pleasure last week of visiting with these 35 students. They are accompanied today in this Assembly by their teachers, Mr. Dave King and Mrs. Margaret Petruk, as well as parents Sandy Fitzgerald, Shelley Hunt, and Caren Pierchajlo. I would ask that all members provide these students with a warm welcome this afternoon.

Thank you.

1:50

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, I have two long-term residents of Red Deer to introduce to you and members of the Assembly today. The first is Shirley Alford, who is a former principal of Mount View elementary school as well as an educator at Red Deer College. The second person I'd like to introduce is Burns Peacock. This is actually his first visit to the Legislature, but he is one of six brothers to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 21 students and two teachers that will be joining us shortly I suspect. They are from McArthur elementary school, and they were brought today to the Assembly for a tour and a photograph by their teachers and group leaders, Ms Sas and Mr. Jerry Bernard. I hope that the Assembly will welcome them warmly when they do arrive.

Thank you, sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly one individual very important to me, my daughter Susan. She's a nurse officer on a Norwegian cruise ship, and she works in the Caribbean and is leaving in the next couple of weeks to go back there again. She is seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three Edmonton members of the Alberta College and Technical Institute Students' Executive Council, the Alberta Graduate Council, the Council of Alberta University Students. They are Leslie Church, chair of the Council of Alberta University Students; Naomi Agard, vice-president external of the University of Alberta Students' Union; and Brad Wuetherick, executive vice-president of the Graduate Students' Association at the University of Alberta. They are here today representing over 100,000 students in the province and delivered earlier in the day 25,000 postcards to the Minister of Learning asking that tuition be limited to a 2 percent increase in the coming year. With your permission I would ask them to rise and to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Chairman of Committees.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce some guests from the Lacombe-Stettler constituency. With us today are 10 hard-working members of the Eagles youth council, a self-advocacy group mandated under the auspices of the Lacombe Action Group for the Handicapped. With them are helpers Ms Shara Hargreaves, Mrs. Sharon Dilworth, Mrs. Lynne Kilpatrick, and Ms Marisa Jackson. I had the opportunity recently to attend one of their council meetings and was most impressed. I would ask that they rise in the members' gallery and receive the warm, traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Electric Utilities Deregulation

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Utilicorp Networks Canada has just applied to the Energy and Utilities Board for a 31.6 percent increase in the delivery charge for its residential customers in southern Alberta for 2001, this on top of an earlier increase that was pulled back. Enmax and EPCOR have already increased their electricity rates for residential customers this year. It's now clear to everyone except this government that the Klein energy policy, or the KEP, the made-in-Klein Alberta price for electricity, is hitting consumers and businesses hard in the pocketbook. My questions are to the Premier. Why does the Premier continue to misinform Albertans when he says that electricity rates will be going down in 2001 under the Klein electricity policy when clearly prices are going up for consumers, whether they be residential, industrial, or commercial?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I explained yesterday, this is a situation that is not peculiar to Alberta. Electricity prices are increasing, indeed, worldwide. The good thing is that because of our prudent fiscal management and because of the electricity pool, we are able to reduce every household electricity bill by \$20 starting January 1. So this increase to which the leader of the Liberal opposition alludes would result in about a \$10 a month increase. That is a cash increase on the average household bill. With the \$20 rebate the consumer is still about \$10 ahead.

If the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition requires further clarification relative to this very generous rebate, I will have him expand.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier confirm that the increase in electricity rates for southern Alberta residential consumers in 2001 will in fact eat up and consume more than his paltry onetime credit on their utility bills?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition construes to be paltry, but \$840 on average to the average householder in Alberta is not paltry. It's not paltry to me: \$840. Maybe she's in a different income bracket than many of us, and maybe it's paltry to her, but to most Albertans \$840 on average is not a paltry sum and will go a long way – a long way – to alleviating the rising costs of electricity.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier then stand up in this Legislature and guarantee residential customers served by Utilicorp that electricity prices will not go up by 15 percent in 2001 because of the Klein electricity policy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, nothing in life is guaranteed, and what I would like to point out is that these electricity rate increases have occurred under a totally regulated environment, a totally regulated environment. We are not yet in deregulation. Quite simply, when that power comes onstream – we know that there are two cogen plants about to come on stream, one at Joffre and the other at Suncor. There are proposals now to bring more coal generation power onstream, about 1,400 megawatts of new power plus additional transmission capacity.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, as I pointed out, it's a situation that is not peculiar to Alberta, and secondly, this is a manifestation of the

tremendous economic growth that we are experiencing in this province. It's estimated that there are something like \$50 billion – \$50 billion – worth of new projects onstream. There are people moving to this province in droves, as the hon. Provincial Treasurer pointed out. They don't bring their roads and their hospitals and other facilities with them. We have to accommodate this growth, and rising electricity costs are one of the consequences of meeting the demands of growth. It's that simple.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, about two hours ago the state of California declared a crisis in their state. This state also had done deregulation, and they're now paying as much as \$200 per megawatt hour off the grid to supply the residents and businesses of the state of California. Yesterday the Premier claimed and has repeated here today that deregulation of electricity had not occurred and that Albertans are apparently still living in some regulated environment under the Klein energy policy. This Premier and his government are so desperate to avoid taking responsibility for skyrocketing electricity bills that they are now trying to deny the impact of their own legislation. My question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Premier.

THE SPEAKER: There's a bit of preamble in there. We're coming to the question? Please, finish the question.

2:00

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Is the Premier telling Albertans that his government has deliberately allowed the price of electricity to increase by 700 percent at the wholesale level in four years under his government-regulated environment?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is a function of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board relative to the regulation and approval of rate increases. The leader of the Liberal opposition knows that as well as anyone else. This government, the Executive Council, or the caucus of this government, does not set power rates, and she knows that. To stand up there and try to imply that this government sets power rates is false. It is absolutely false. It is untrue, and the leader of the Liberal opposition should stand up and apologize for making a false statement.

Relative to the situation in California as it compares to Alberta, I'll have the hon. Minister of Resource Development respond. But I would like to point out before I ask him to respond, Mr. Speaker – and I'll use the case of my own condominium here in Edmonton. My last power bill, I think, with the rate increase was about \$26. Now, as of January 1, with a \$20 rebate, I'll be paying \$6 a month. That is not a lot to pay for power. Because of prudent fiscal management we were able to do that. Now, if she thinks there's something wrong with that, stand up and say so.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. Minister of Resource Development, events in California are not within the administrative competence of the Minister of Resource Development. Supplementary.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier is apparently contradicting himself. Can he tell this Assembly what are we in right now, a regulated or deregulated or re-regulated market?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely astounded by the lack of knowledge displayed by the leader of the Liberal opposition. You

know, the whole program of deregulation has been ongoing now – for what? – three, four, five years, and it's been stated time and time and time again that a deregulated environment for those who want to be deregulated takes place January 1, the year 2001. For those who want to remain in a regulated environment, they have the option of doing so, I believe, for five years.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much. I think that what we need to clarify, Mr. Speaker, is that over a million residential homes and residential farms have the option to stay under the regulated system for five years. In addition to that, over 124,000 customers who are commercial, industrial, and municipal and who use less than 250,000 kilowatt hours of electricity also have an option to stay up to three years. So the system is working well.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that electricity rates have gone up under regulation and are going up under deregulation, will the Premier admit that the Klein energy policy means higher electricity rates for consumers?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm so very flattered that she would allude to this policy as the Klein energy policy, because when people get their electricity bills, when the households throughout this province get their electricity bills as of January 1 and they see a \$20 reduction – as I said, in my own case relative to my condominium here, when my bill goes from \$26 down to \$6, I would be very, very happy to say: this is all the result of the Klein energy policy.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Seniors' Benefits

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, many condominium owners are senior citizens, and under the recently proclaimed condominium act thousands of owners are making extra payments on top of their condominium fees to meet the condo reserve requirements. On top of that, they're being hit with huge increases in their electricity and natural gas bills. My first questions are to the Minister of Resource Development. Given that unlike the government seniors like to plan ahead, exactly how are they to pay their bills when the electricity rebate program ends 13 months from now?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, what I've indicated is that we will continue monitoring the situation and make adjustments accordingly. I don't want to predict today what will happen a year from now. I don't think that is a wise move. Electricity rates could come down, or they may go up some. In order to make a wise decision when we're spending taxpayers' dollars, it has to be done properly. You can be guaranteed that this ministry will continue monitoring the situation and making adjustments accordingly.

In relation to seniors, Mr. Speaker, there are programs right now under Community Development that can address these issues. They're under the special-needs assistance program. The appropriate minister may want to make additional comments.

THE SPEAKER: Well, actually we're going to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but, you know, it's almost impossible for anybody to look down 13 months. *Beauchesne* 428 covers these things and a whole series of exemptions. Please proceed with your supplemental.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. To this same Minister of Resource Development: will a high-rise condominium that is not individually metered be treated as a high-rise apartment and receive the commercial rebate?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, the rebate will be received. In addition to that, the department staff are also working with a group to ensure that individuals who need the rebate will get it, so we'll continue working on that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question was to be to the Minister of Community Development. Perhaps I could address it instead to the Premier. Could the Premier answer this? In helping seniors cope with these rising utility rates, will this government now eliminate health care insurance premiums for seniors and index the Alberta seniors' cash benefit to the inflation rate to help them pay these utility bills, as suggested by the minister?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to health care premiums as those premiums relate to seniors, I would point out that the threshold at which seniors are required to pay health care premiums is fairly high indeed. In other words, this government's policy was to assess health care premiums on those seniors who could afford to pay. I would remind the hon. member that most seniors in this province are below that threshold, pay very little in health care premiums, and many, I would venture to say most, pay no premiums whatsoever.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. deputy leader of the third party. [applause]

Electric Utilities Deregulation (continued)

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, but I hope you're not going to thump on that side when I'm done.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier claimed that the recent dramatic increases in power rates were taking place due to a regulated system. Until April of this year I was a shareholder representative in one of the three largest power companies in Alberta, and I saw firsthand how the uncertainty created over the last five years by this government interfered with decisions to invest in new power generation. My question is to the Premier. Has the government done any research at all into the effects of their misguided deregulation scheme on electricity rates, supply, or reliability?

2:10

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I must say that I'm disappointed. I'm disappointed that the hon. member doesn't know the amount of time and effort that has gone into this. As confirmed by the Liberal opposition, indeed this has been going on now for five years, tremendous consultation with the energy industry, including the corporation to which the hon. member belonged – and I believe that was EPCOR – tremendous consultation with EPCOR, with Trans-Alta, with ATCO, with numerous companies that were interested in cogeneration, with wind power generators, with cities like Medicine Hat that also use gas to generate electricity, with the stakeholder groups, a tremendous amount of research. Five years' worth of research has gone into the program to deregulate the energy industry in this province.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, the Premier did not answer the

question, which was: has the government done any research at all into their plan? He simply said that they've taken five years. Well, if they'd taken 10 years, the lights would be out all over the province.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the lights are on.

Again, I have to repeat that, yes, there are rising electricity costs. Those costs would have risen in a deregulated or a regulated environment. As I pointed out earlier, this is a manifestation of tremendous economic growth unparalleled in this country.

I would remind the hon. member that the corporation to which he belonged, EPCOR, was one of the strongest proponents of deregulation.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has also claimed that electricity prices are rising all over the world, but in our two neighbouring provinces, British Columbia and Saskatchewan, prices are frozen and will remain frozen next year, as well. So why did the Premier then claim . . . [interjections] I'm sort of accustomed to being allowed to ask questions with some silence. Am I not entitled to that here, Mr. Speaker?

Speaker's Ruling **Oral Question Period Rules**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, not only have you been recognized; you are most certainly entitled to raise a question. But I would like to remind the hon. member that he cannot initiate debate without proper notice of motion. This is called the question period.

Please proceed.

Electric Utilities Deregulation (continued)

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Why, then, doesn't the Premier admit that in adjacent provinces, who are making a killing selling power to us now, there are stable and low electricity prices? It's called the NDP advantage.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no NDP advantage; I'll tell you that.

Here's the CIBC report which says that they lay much of the blame for B.C.'s economic performance on the feet of the province's New Democratic government, which instituted economic policies that often stand in contrast to those of Alberta. This report by the CIBC says that it's unlikely now that B.C., with a population of 1 million people more than Alberta, will ever, ever surpass Alberta again as long as an NDP government is in power.

Mr. Speaker, power in British Columbia I understand – I stand to be corrected – was doubled, then frozen. The B.C. government has nothing to do with power in B.C. The simple fact is that they have water, tonnes and tonnes of water that flows and flushes down the west slope and is able to generate cheap power, unlike a landlocked Alberta, which is dependent upon primarily coal and to some degree natural gas and to some degree wind. Very little power in this province is generated by water. The same is true for Manitoba.

I'm going to talk about one other ND province that is facing the same situation as Alberta, and indeed the rates are going higher and higher and higher and higher in NDP Saskatchewan.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North. [applause]

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, many of Alberta's postsecondary

students are facing rising tuition costs. My questions are for the Minister of Learning. Given the ongoing concerns raised by students, will the Minister of Learning consider a freeze on tuition?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is an excellent question. Over the past two to three months I've been talking with ACTISEC, I've been talking with CAUS, I've been talking with the Graduate Students' Association as well as the chairmen of the boards of governors of the universities and colleges to come up with a consensus on the tuition fee issue. Tuition fees have been projected to increase. That is directly related to the amount of dollars that we give to the universities. I feel that the best way to approach this issue is to work with the universities, with the colleges and allow them, by giving them more money for their budgets, to decrease the amount of tuition fees.

Mr. Speaker, in some universities and some colleges in this province the tuition increase has been zero percent. I don't want to change that.

The other point that I will make, Mr. Speaker, is that in a newspaper article last week there was announced a potential 5.7 percent increase at the University of Alberta. That is unacceptable. I have talked to the University of Alberta officials at this time, and we will come up with an agreement on this.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, what is the minister's response to students who say that Alberta students now pay more than the national average?

DR. OBERG: Another excellent question. If I may, I'll refer to a document called the Scholarship Consultants of North America, which is a nonprofit organization. On the 25th of July it put out the Guide to University Costs in Canada. Mr. Speaker, if you'll give me a little bit of time I'll talk about the three things that it says.

First of all, they're absolutely right on the tuition and fees. What it states is that in Alberta we are third highest in the country when it comes to tuition and fees. Mr. Speaker, to say tuition alone is not indicative of what is actually paid. The other interesting point is that when you add in tuition and fees, room and board, and books and supplies, or the total cost of a student going to university, all of a sudden we're down to fifth in provincial average. The University of Alberta is 21st out of 42 universities. The University of Calgary is 22nd. The University of Lethbridge is 23rd out of 42 universities in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, we do have the third highest provincial average, but again I say that tuition is but one aspect, one element of student debt, and we are working very actively to decrease student debt.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, what is the minister doing to ensure that all students have access to postsecondary education?

2:20

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, I could go on on this topic for the next half an hour, but I know you wouldn't want to do that.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to infrastructure, the hon. Minister of Infrastructure just put in \$210 million to expand the physical access for students in Alberta. The access fund provides for an extra 1,200 students per year each year on the student loan side in this budget. In this budget this year we increased the student loans by 22 percent. We will increase them by 50 percent over the

next three years. Those are huge increases. Access is the thing that is most important when it comes to university, because we want our students going to university, and as a government we follow through on that promise.

Child Welfare

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Children's Services. Does the minister believe that the principles enunciated in the Victims of Crime Act, section 2, that "victims should be treated with courtesy and compassion and with respect for their dignity and privacy," applies to proceedings involving child welfare?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, that is not a piece of legislation that I'm familiar with, but I can say that we believe that in every case dealing with children and child welfare, we treat them with dignity and respect, and we similarly treat their families with dignity and respect.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, can the minister defend the departmental stance that forces victims of abuse to testify in public proceedings even when such testimony is harmful to the victim's well-being?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it is our obligation to protect victims. We do that through the Child Welfare Act. We do our utmost to protect victims of any type of abuse. In terms of presenting their case in court, there are times when the child will have an opportunity to challenge the fact that the child welfare director may not have illustrated cause – I give you the example of the illustration with PCHIP – should they choose to represent themselves.

MRS. SLOAN: Can the minister confirm how many statements of claim have been filed citing that the department of child welfare and the government of Alberta have failed to act on allegations of child abuse?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, if such record exists – and I am very confident that we can determine what information is available – I will table that in the House forthwith. I do not have that information with me today.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, last year the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness undertook a comprehensive review of the programs and services available in Alberta for persons with developmental disabilities. This review was prompted by parents and family members, by PDD recipients, and by community agencies who are very concerned about issues related to funding, mandate, eligibility criteria, wage compensation, and numerous other issues. Recently I had the privilege of attending a well-run meeting of the Eagles council, a self-advocacy group made up of PDD recipients. My questions are to the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. Mr. Minister, what specifications have been taken in response to the many concerns that were expressed regarding the provision of services for PDD recipients?

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there are a number of initiatives that have occurred as a result of the extensive and very comprehensive provincewide review that I was pleased to undertake last year. For example, with respect to stabilizing the funding base, I'm very pleased to tell everyone that we have

increased funding to this area of PDD from \$283 million a year ago to over \$321 million this year.

Secondly, in September of this year I was very pleased to announce the Alberta brain injury initiative, which includes a provincewide consultation and a forum. That, by the way, is guided by a group of community-based coalition action members who will develop a policy framework for us very shortly. They'll bring that forward in the form of a concrete action plan very early in the new year, and we will enact what we can to assist adults with an acquired brain injury from there.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would add that perhaps the most significant thing in relation to one specific recommendation on workforce retention and wages is that on October 30 of this year I was very pleased to announce an increase of \$24 million, which will go to the frontline workers that are employed by community agencies in this province. That is going to tremendously help. That will help to stabilize the workforce that is engaged in providing services and programs for persons with developmental disabilities, and I sincerely hope it will also attract new people into that profession, because it's very important. The end recipients of PDD programs will be the primary beneficiaries along with their families.

MRS. GORDON: How will you ensure that the recently announced wage increases for community agencies will indeed reach the frontline caregivers as you intended?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, that's a very, very good question. Let me just explain that each jurisdiction has a legal contract or some type of grant with conditions or some form of other legal agreement which allows funding to flow from our PDD boards to the community agencies who are the actual employers of the PDD workers. In order to ensure that those PDD funds flow to the intended frontline workers, we do have a monitoring process that is in accordance with those legal agreements through which we track those particular types of expenditures.

For example, the PDD program requires and then it also reviews audited financial statements from each of these community contracted agencies. We also have under the individual funding arrangements the ability for PDD boards to perform audits on salary records with respect to local service providers. So we feel confident that by following these procedures, these mechanisms, those particular increases will reach the frontline workers as intended.

I just want to stress that those frontline workers are not government employees. They are employees of the contracted agencies. We have a good spirit of co-operation in working with them in that regard.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you. When I attended the Eagles meeting, the general membership indicated that transportation is an issue. Thus, Mr. Minister, will your department and our government consider undertaking a comprehensive review of all transportation requirements needed by PDD recipients?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, accessing adequate and appropriate transportation is obviously a very important issue to our PDD recipients and to all members of the disability community, particularly so for those who live in areas where public transportation may not be as readily accessible and available as elsewhere. However, when someone specifically needs

transportation to access a PDD-funded service or to access some form of employment support or whatever it is they wish to access, transportation costs can be covered through our PDD funding support program. Our PDD community boards at the very moment, in fact, are working with local authorities on transportation issues such as have been identified.

I would just quickly add, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is also reviewing this matter. In fact, they're reviewing it as we speak. The results of that review, which is being carried out on a very comprehensive study basis, of personal supports will be available as an interim report within a few weeks, and I'll be very happy to bring it back and share it with the member and with her guests who are here from the Lacombe-Stettler area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

(continued)

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nine thousand dollars in private debt, \$3,000 in government student loans, two jobs in the summer, two years in university: this is a quote from one of the postcards that was delivered to the Minister of Learning earlier today, and my questions are to that minister. Why in an era of billion dollar surpluses does the government continue to pursue a tuition cap policy that leaves students debt ridden?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that in my reply to the previous question I was asked, I outlined the issue as to where we stand in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, quite frankly this government believes that we in Alberta have a responsibility to ourselves for our postsecondary education as well. Presently the taxpayer foots the bill for roughly 75 percent of the actual costs of going to university. Seventy-five percent is a lot of dollars. As I stated earlier, we are ranked third in the country when it comes to tuition fees, but our universities are ranked 21, 22, and 23 out of 42 universities in the country when it comes to actual costs.

2:30

Mr. Speaker, we've increased the student loan programs by 22 percent this year. We've increased it by 50 percent over the last three years. That is a tremendous amount of dollars that are going to those kids that really need the help.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the same minister. Why does the government continue to offload debt onto Alberta students? That's what this is.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, we do not offload debt. As a matter of fact, the amount of debt has gone down significantly within the last year. The average debt for any student last year was \$12,500. It has decreased to \$11,500.

When there are people out there who cannot afford to go to university, we help them significantly. Under our student loan program, Mr. Speaker, a person can benefit from over \$40,000 in student loans and only pay back \$20,000 for a four-year program. That \$20,000 is the Canadian government's student loan, which has

no remission program. That's their Liberal cousins that do not give any remission. We're the ones who give remission to students.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Given that the student loan program accounts for only a portion – only a portion – of many students' indebtedness, when will the government and this minister stop promoting the myth that the remission program adequately caps student debt? It's a myth.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, again, I will quote from the study by the nonprofit organization that looks at actual costs. In Alberta at the University of Alberta it's \$10,196 per year. That includes tuition and fees, room and board, and books and supplies. Our student loan program provides more than \$10,000 per year for these students. Again, I say the obvious. We give remission in Alberta. The Canadian federal government gives no remission on their student loans. When someone takes out \$40,000 in student loans, \$20,000 of it is remitted from the province of Alberta, not the federal Liberal government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Workers' Compensation Review

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Now, I understand that the minister has received the final reports from two separate WCB review committees. Would the minister share when he plans on releasing these reports to the participants and to the general public?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, in fact, in the interest of trying to ensure that injured workers were dealt with in a fair and expeditious manner, I did set up two committees to report on WCB claims. The first one, chaired by the Member for Red Deer-South, was what we called the MLA/WCB service review committee. What we wanted there was to have a look at the actual service that was being provided by the workers' compensation organization.

The second one, of course, was to look at the Appeals Commission as it related to the Workers' Compensation Board. You might remember that this was chaired by a retired judge, Samuel Friedman.

I have received both of those reports. We're currently reviewing the recommendations, and on Monday next, November 20, we'll be releasing both reports in their entirety.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: would the minister outline the process that he plans to use for approval and implementation of the significant policy and legislative changes that are being recommended in those reports?

MR. DUNFORD: What we'll do, Mr. Speaker, upon the release of the reports, first of all, is to ensure that as many people in Alberta that want to avail themselves of the report will have an opportunity

to do that. While I'm not going to go into a full consultation process, because I think that has been done with the two committees, certainly as the minister responsible for the legislation, I'll then accept feedback on those reports. I'd anticipate providing until the end of this year or early into next year to hear that type of feedback.

MR. HERARD: My last question to the same minister: since all hon. members on both sides of the House continue to hear from injured workers with serious problems with respect to their dealings with the WCB, when can these workers expect to hear something encouraging, something positive, some good news with respect to these reports?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I think that'll happen in a couple of ways, Mr. Speaker. First of all, with the public release of the reports there'll be some encouragement on the part of all Albertans but particularly injured workers in terms of the recommendations that have been forthcoming. Of course, certainly I'm available, then, to hear their particular comments on that. Then as we move forward, while I don't have any direct responsibility in terms of the day-to-day operation as the act currently stands, if there are recommendations that are to be accepted that lead to legislative or regulatory change, of course we will use the processes of this government and this House to deal with that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Labour Market Development Program

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General in his 1999-2000 report on the Alberta Department of Human Resources and Employment revealed that a pilot audit of 10 percent of educational institutions that provide basic education, upgrading, postsecondary, and apprenticeship instruction under the skills development program showed significant overpayments by the department. I received, through freedom of information a list of these contracts. My questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Can the minister tell this House how much of that money went to the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, indeed, is correct in the sense that the Auditor General did make comments on the labour market development program, especially as it led to skills development programs. We have undertaken an audit internally based on that particular advice we received from the Auditor General.

Then there was a request from the hon. member under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and when we calculated what it would take to comply with that particular request, then I think in a spirit of willingness to examine the situation, we offered an opportunity for the member to receive the list of contracts that we had had and to make a choice of those that he wanted to look into.

This is the first notice I've had since that agreement was made with the hon. member that there are any particular cases that he wishes to examine further. He's now put the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce on the map, so we'll have to look at that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the Minister

of Human Resources and Employment: can the minister tell this House exactly how much money was given to the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce and what programs it was spent on? This is money from your department. Are you telling the House you have no control over your department?

MR. DUNFORD: So here we have the hon. member playing the political game. He asks us for some information, and we supply that information to him. It was my understanding under the agreement that he would provide us with a list of contracts that he wanted to see, and we would in fact supply those contracts, and I stand here today still committed to that particular agreement.

What we find now is that the hon. member has decided that — there is a list of I think over a thousand contracts that were provided to him, and now there is one which he wishes to have further examined. I want to make the commitment to the hon. member. We, of course, will in fact examine that contract, but we also provided him the opportunity to name 225 contracts, so I would expect to hear of the other 224 whenever you find it convenient. If you wish to use question period to do it, that'll be just fine with me.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:40

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment: considering that this list was compiled on August 10 of this year, why won't you release this information this afternoon for everyone in the Assembly?

MR. DUNFORD: That was not part of the request, Mr. Speaker. I find it very interesting that the hon. member would be taking this tack. We, of course, believe that the . . . Hon. member, I'm talking to you. I'm trying to answer your question.

MR. MacDONALD: And I'm listening.

MR. DUNFORD: That's good.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, we all talk through the Speaker.

MR. DUNFORD: Sorry.

The information that we have provided to the hon. member is considered by me to be public information. We believed that the hon. member was acting either on his own behalf or perhaps even on behalf of the Liberal caucus. It doesn't make any difference to us. We believed that he was serious and was concerned about what he was doing. We find out today that maybe there were other motives afoot, and that's fine. We understand him to be a politician, and we are starting to understand just what kind of politician he really is.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Irrigation Canal Drowning in Calgary

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently there was a tragic accident when two very young Albertans drowned in the irrigation canal in Calgary. On behalf of the Legislature I visited the family and expressed our condolences. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Environment. Can the minister provide insight into this tragic situation?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there are no easy answers when a tragic event such as this occurs. However, staff of Alberta Environ-

ment have done a thorough review of the situation and the circumstances as near as can be determined up to this incident occurring. As the people in Calgary of course are aware and others might be apprised, the western irrigation canal runs through several kilometres of eastern and southern Calgary. It is a canal which is there to facilitate drainage and water supply in Calgary. It's paralleled by a riding path for bicycles or for walking, and also on one side is one of the mainline railways. There is a fence, but the fence has many openings in it for intersections and so forth, so there was the opportunity for access by two young people. Unfortunately, they may have entered through one of those natural openings or through a hole that seemed to have been cut in the fence on one side.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, the department is investigating this thoroughly. We do take it seriously and are doing everything we can to make recommendations to prevent such an event occurring in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is also to the same minister. What action is Alberta Environment taking to avoid such tragedies occurring in the future?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, there has been an overall investigation of the situation, which involved looking at the physical characteristics of the area including the canal, the fence, the access to the canal that is available there. Alberta Environment will, after completing its consultation and contacts with the city of Calgary and with others directly affected, be coming forward with a report and recommendations. It's my understanding that that report is now in draft form and will be double-checked with the people who have provided information and so forth and will be considered for release in the near future.

MR. CAO: My second supplementary is also to the minister. The minister said that there's an audit report in the near future. When would we expect that then?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, it's my information that a draft report will be available shortly. I expect that it will be available next week, and we will review that particular report. I with my officials will look at it and examine it as to whether we feel that there should be further follow-up, whether there are questions that possibly could be answered that haven't been answered. Once that review has taken place, following that, there will certainly be an announcement of the results of the report.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I've noticed that today there'll be four hon. members participating in Recognitions, and we will proceed to this particular part of the Routine 30 seconds from now.

Hon. members, before calling on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to participate in Recognitions, let me just provide some recognitions as well in terms of kudos to a number of members here today who participated in Oral Question Period. The documents and the books we have of course are filled with all the rules that we have and the guides that we have, but I would like to point out by way of kudo today the exchange between the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the hon. Minister of Children's Services. All the rules were followed. Three questions and three responses were given in two minutes.

To the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont and the hon. Minister of

Human Resources and Employment, all the rules were followed. Three questions and three responses were provided in four minutes. At that particular pace we would have almost a doubling of the number of questions and answers that we have in the Assembly. So there is some good reading that people might want to look at tonight and tomorrow.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Osteoporosis

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize November as Osteoporosis Month. Osteoporosis is a degenerative disease that affects more than 200,000 Alberta taxpayers, 150,000 of which are women. In fact, few people are aware that more women die from osteoporotic fractures than from breast and all other gynecological cancers combined. As the percentage of our population which are seniors increases in this province, osteoporosis is going to become more and more relevant as a public health concern.

Osteoporosis is not a normal part of aging. It is a preventable disease. Identifying those people most at risk is actually relatively simple if the proper measures are in place. While the majority of money spent on osteoporosis is dedicated to short- and long-term treatment, prevention is really the cornerstone to managing this disease.

2:50

As Osteoporosis Month proceeds, this is an opportunity for us to educate ourselves and others about this serious disease and to reassess how we address its prevention and treatment.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to recognize the mature women's health network at the Grey Nuns hospital and in particular Dr. Patricia Bayne and Shelly Haugen for continuing to raise awareness and for helping to keep me on top of this issue.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Vanderwell Heritage Place

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta held their most creative Senior Citizens' Week event contest for 2000, and as chair of the council I'm very pleased to announce to this House today that the winner is the Vanderwell Heritage Place lodge in Slave Lake.

Slave Lake held not just one creative event but a whole week's worth. The event was nonstop: a stew and bannock supper cooked by the Native Counseling Services of Alberta; a hotdog and ice cream lunch with a local grade 4 class; local celebrities coming daily to serve lunch at the lodge, including the Slave Lake mayor, staff sergeant, and local officials; students competing for lunch with the seniors by drawing pictures, writing letters, or making handicrafts; and the kids' dance studio transporting seniors by van to a studio recital and home again. Since then celebrities have joined the seniors in a ruckathon to raise funds for a handicraft supplies cabinet at the lodge.

Slave Lake, you are truly a winning community through appreciation of your seniors. Congratulations.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Capilano Elementary School

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I

would like to recognize Capilano elementary school, Earth school 2000. Capilano achieved Earth school status in 1996, the first Edmonton public school to do so. It meant that the school, staff, parents, and community completed 1,000 environmental projects. This was a remarkable accomplishment for a very small school, less than 150 students.

Capilano school has now successfully become an Earth 2000 school. Everyone undertook projects: individual students, small groups, classrooms, and staff members. The alpha students, as part of their life skills program, gathered recycling boxes around the school and sorted materials. Within the community families challenged other families to meet or beat their total number of recycling activities. One family even had a birthday party at which children created space costumes from recycled materials. By October 13 the school had more than met its goal.

Capilano is only the third school in Canada to have accomplished this double Earth feat. A globe is symbolic, Mr. Speaker, of double Earth school status. The students of Capilano school challenge all Alberta students to join them in their concern and care for the environment.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Health Care Privatization

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize November 15, 2000, as the day of action initiated by the Council of Canadians over the threat of privatization and commercialization of our health care system in Canada. Their aim is to focus on the gradual privatization of our Canadian health care system, which is happening across the country. Large numbers of Canadians will kick off this day of action with rallies in Victoria, Calgary, Toronto, Montreal, and four other cities across the country. Last night the Edmonton chapter of the Council of Canadians held a public forum on Canada's health care system, which was attended by well over 250 concerned Albertans.

I congratulate the council and its chapters for their dedicated work in keeping Albertans and Canadians involved in and informed about this most crucial issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have provision on Wednesdays for up to seven recognitions. We've had four, and I'm now going to call on the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Spruce Grove Saints Soccer Team

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Little has been written about a soccer team from Spruce Grove, the indoor soccer U-13 boys, the Saints, and they dominated last year's indoor soccer season. They were coached by Rob Dean, Dave Howard, and managed by Boris Iwashkiw. This team remained undefeated with an outstanding record of 14 wins and one tie.

They won the Edmonton Minor Soccer Association gold medal for the '99-2000 indoor season, and at the end of the outdoor season in 1999 the same team won the gold medal in the top division of EMSA, and they won the gold at the Belvedere tournament and the gold at the Vermilion tournament.

On that team are Trevor Dean, Dave Fenske, Jeff Kaiser, Jeremy Iwashkiw, Kyle Pagnucco, Aaron Peddie, Steve Toporowsky, Craig Lerner, Tyler Van Brabant, Steven Nachtigal, Daniel Howard, Myles Van Kuelen, Jason Oulton, Alex Hawkins, Trevor Plumb, and Matthew Astle. They are a wonderful team that Spruce Grove is

very, very proud of, and they won the gold, the provincial championship, this past season.

Thank you very much.

head: Statement by the Speaker

November Events

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, Recognitions is an important aspect of our Routine. Periodically, however, my office does receive contact from individual groups in the province who say: gee, a number of recognitions were given to a number of groups, but ours was unfortunately forgotten. So I just want to advise all members that November is CPR Month, Crohn's and Colitis Awareness Month, Diabetes Awareness Month, Family Violence Prevention Month, National Community Safety and Crime Prevention Month, Osteoporosis Month, Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month, Christmas Chocolate Campaign Month, Bone China Tea month on behalf of the Osteoporosis Society of Canada, the Luge for Liver activity in Calgary, United Way Fund Raising Campaign, Christmas Seal Campaign, March of Dimes Campaign, Girl Guides Mint Cookie Weeks, Adoption Week from November 12 to 19, National Addictions Awareness Week from November 12 to 18, the National Marfan Awareness Week from November 12 to 18, the International Day for Tolerance on November 16, and the Christmas Kettles Appeal begins on November 17 and goes through to December 24.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it is certainly my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 22.

[Motion carried]

Community Mental Health Grants

Q22. Ms Blakeman moved that the following question be accepted.
What were the application process and the criteria used for determining successful applicants for the community mental health grants for the 1997-1998 fiscal year?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I accept Written Question 22.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. I'm very pleased to hear that from the Minister of Health and Wellness. This has been an issue of some concern to a constituent of mine, who even had the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark write to the previous minister on his behalf looking for clarification and then came to me. He is looking for the community mental health grants that were distributed in the '97-98 fiscal year over and above the usual operating grants given out to community and nonprofit groups.

I'm delighted to hear that in fact the minister will be providing me with that information. I will then be able to pass it on to my constituent. One more step in Alberta towards open and accountable government and sharing of information.

[Written Question 22 carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it is my pleasure once again to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 209

Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned May 23: Ms Blakeman speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. I've waited a long time to be able to debate this bill. I think I was able to do my first two minutes about six months ago, so I'd like to complete the last 18 of them at this point.

3:00

Bill 209 is proposed by the Member for Calgary-Fort. On the face of it, I really like what's being proposed here in that our current situation of leave is narrowly focused, restricted to maternal leave, and the longest possible leave, unpaid of course, that is sanctioned under the employment standards act here in Alberta is 18 weeks. The member is proposing that any references to maternal leave be widened and the terminology changed to that of paternal leave and that a possible total of 27 weeks could be taken by either parent but not simultaneously, one parent at a time.

I appreciate that this is a private member's bill. It's not a government bill, so perhaps this is an idea that's being sort of tried out or run up the flag pole to see if anybody salutes. I hope that if that is the case, the government will follow through on that. If not, my compliments to the member for forging ahead with what he believes is a good idea.

Now, there are wider implications in this bill. Every action has a consequence to it, and I don't think that we can look at this bill in isolation of all of the other programs, benefits, remedies, and in some cases drawbacks to what's available to people. What struck me when I looked at this bill is that it's a very middle-class bill. I would venture to say that it will be mostly the middle class that could possibly take advantage of it. I don't know if that's what the member intended, but I wish there were ways of having those that would benefit from this program captured in this net, that the net could be cast wider.

Essentially what the bill is dealing with is job security. The 18 weeks that's current or the 27 weeks that's being proposed under this bill is about whether your job will be held open for you, when you can return to your job. There's no payment that's coming along with this. I've already had some people contact me about this. I've received some e-mails on it, and a lot of people don't understand that that's what is being proposed here. The only payment that is possible at this point with either maternal or paternal benefits comes through the EI program, so the 27 weeks that are being proposed here – some people have also talked about the federal government expanding their similar program to 52 weeks – that's about job

security. That means you can take that time unpaid, and when you come back at the end of that period of time, the same job should be there or a job that's very similar to it.

Therefore, it's mostly the middle class that would be able to benefit from this program because they're the only ones that are going to be likely to have earned enough money to have enough savings in the bank to tide them over this period. When you look at who is qualifying for EI benefits in this day and age, I'm afraid I'm not smiling happily at the current federal government, because the changes in the EI program . . . [interjection] Well, I'm so glad that the member agrees with me that we should have better parental leave programs, and I'm looking forward to his input on this debate.

The point is that it is members of that middle class that would be most likely to be able to access the current EI program in that the program is now based on the number of hours that have been worked over a specific period of time. What we have is an increasing participation in the workforce by women but also by men, which is part-time people working several part-time jobs. Well, their EI benefits and eligibility are much lower as a result of that and more and more people working on contract which has no EI benefits attached to it whatsoever. I mean, if you're a real high flyer that's able to command a very large contract fee, good on you. But I hope the individual would have incorporated into that fee things like holiday pay and in this instance some money tucked away for parental leave, because they're not going to be able to access any funding through the current EI program.

This program as proposed by the Member for Calgary-Fort, while obviously intended to be open to everyone—I don't know how many will actually be able to enjoy it, if the bill indeed passes, simply because they can't afford to. I look at this again, and I say that you can't look at this issue in isolation. I know that the government has a tendency to sort of behave or develop policies as though children were somehow hatched, that they don't come from families. Well, you have poor children, and they come from poor families. You have to look at these things in context. If this government was really interested in supporting families with children, I have a couple of suggestions to make, and maybe there's a way that the member can tie this into his bill or work along with it as ancillary programs, but I don't know that the bill is going to be as useful as it could have been without the context that I'm about to describe.

For example, there's been a long period of lobbying for midwifery services. Women don't really have any choice in how they have their baby in this day and age. Parental leave aside, whether it's paid or unpaid or how long it is, right now they don't even have a choice about how they are going to birth their child. So there's an issue that the government can be working on. I've been lobbying the government for over 10 years now. This is not a difficult thing to do, and it certainly does give families more choice and makes a number of people much, much more secure in that choice.

Child care. A number of years ago the government cut direct subsidies to the child care centres themselves. The subsidies are only directly available to the parents, which, as we know—it's been brought up in this Assembly before—has really reduced the flexibility of these child care centres. They're supposed to be available to cater to 40 children in one day. Well, they've got to keep the staff on, and the staff have to be trained, et cetera, et cetera. But they might only get 10 kids showing up. They don't have any kind of subsidy that is covering all of those children that they are going to have to cater to in a whole year, so it's on their dime, and frankly they're nonprofit societies, most of them, and can't afford that dime. We have a reduced number of spaces for child care that are available in Alberta because the nonprofit societies simply can't

afford to keep their doors open or keep them open at the level they were before.

Midwifery, child care: two issues that this government could work on if we're really interested in the context of parents spending time with their children and making sure that their children have a quality experience.

Let's look at schools. When parents are deciding whether or not they're going to have children, they're going to take all of this into their decision-making, and they should. I'm sure that most parents are really conscientious about that. Are there going to be schools available for their children? Will there be schools available in the vicinity, or are they going to be living in one of these areas where the ground is there, the empty space is there, but: no, gosh, sorry, you're supposed to have a school; yeah, yeah, we thought it would be built 20 years ago, but it's just not on the list. So your child will be in university by the time they actually build the school a block away from your house.

I mean, that's a consideration here if you are going to talk about children and families in Alberta. So is there even access to a school? Are you going to put the kids on a bus? Maybe the parent has to consider taking the time to drive the child to school. That's also a consideration as to whether they are going to have children. How many children are they going to have, and what quality of life are we talking about here? Is the school system going to be funded adequately, or is that child going to be sitting in a classroom with 35 other kids? It's a consideration for a parent, and I'm sure that a conscientious parent is considering choices like that.

Let's assume that we got this child all the way through school in some kind of quality education. Now we're looking at university tuition. Already today we've had representatives from colleges and institutes of technology and universities here. I mean, can these parents afford to support their child or to put money aside or to cosign the loans, frankly?

So when we're looking at a bill that starts out by talking about parental leave, all of this has to be in context. You can't make these decisions and I don't think parents do make these decisions in isolation. I don't think somebody jumps up one morning and goes: "Hee-haw, the government of Alberta has extended the parental leave to 18 weeks. That's it, boy; we're going to fire up here. Let's have a kid because of that one."

3:10

I think most people are going: "Hmm, is it the right time of my life? Am I in good health to do this? What sorts of resources are available to my family to carry this through? Can I afford the time off work? Is there a possibility of putting enough money aside in our working lives for this kind of education?" So all of these things have to be taken into context.

A more difficult side to look at for this government when we're looking at the issue of children in families is the 60 percent increase in children in custody. That's a really stunning, horrible figure for all of us legislators in this Assembly to be working with. I'm sure that those parents, when they had those kids, when they contemplated whether that leave would be useful to them or not, didn't contemplate being so poor that they'd have to put their children in care, in the care and custody of the government.

I'm not saying that I don't appreciate what the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort has brought here. I do. But I think you have to look at it along with a number of other issues. As I said, I think parents today, prospective parents, do have to look at it. I mean, if we want to be economical about it, they essentially have to do a risk assessment. Can they afford this and all of the other things that are going to add up to that? I've talked about some of the bills that they know they're going to have to face.

I have to say that I am startled when I look around at people I

know who don't have children and who I thought would have had children, who I expected to become parents. You know, without prying, but you do, you say: so you decided never to have kids. One couple flat out said to me: "Well, Laurie, you know that we're Alliance/Reform supporters and that we're very comfortable with the current government. We believe there shouldn't be any maternity benefits at all, that you should pay the whole shot yourself. That's what we believe. We like you, Laurie. You're still our friend, but we're not going to vote for you." Okay. Fine. They're still my friends. They looked at all of these costs, and they decided not to have children. I hope that's isolated. I really hope that's isolated, but I don't think it is anymore. I think more and more people are doing that risk assessment and going: uh-uh, it's not adding up here. It's particularly not adding up in Alberta.

I would like to support this bill. I do like the idea that parental leave is extending what's available now, that it does allow fathers to be more involved in the early years of their children's or their adoptive children's lives. I think that's really important. You know, I've campaigned for women's rights and equal rights for a long, long time, and part of that package is encouraging men to get more involved in their children's lives. I think this is a really concrete way to do that, and it is showing leadership. There is an expectation or a hope that indeed fathers were being taking advantage of having a parental leave program, so I really like that.

I think the additional time that's being proposed is also helpful, but I would urge the member to work in conjunction with members of his own government and perhaps look at talking, as well, with the federal government. In this day and age for a one-income family it's very, very difficult to get along. I think you have to have a number of other things in place. It's not enough to just say: "Great. You know, you can take more time off, and your job will still be there." I think there are lots of other things that are coming into play in this day and age.

When I talk about the one-earner family, this is partly what's got me a little confused about the mover of this motion. When we were discussing Motion 506, which was put forward by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, that was a motion that was to value in a very concrete way the value of a stay-at-home parent in a one-income earner household. I've looked at the *Hansard*, and in fact the hon. member that's proposing this bill spoke against that motion. So I don't quite understand what the deal here is. Yes, giving unpaid leave or extended unpaid leave to one group of people is good, but we don't want to value the stay-at-home. I don't understand what's being said by that. Do we want them to just stay home for 18 weeks, then get back into the workforce? In speaking against and, I'm assuming, voting against Edmonton-Gold Bar's Motion 506, there was no support for those families that choose or are financially able to have one income earner and the other parent staying at home. To vote against what was being proposed in that motion and then to come forward with this bill is, I'll admit, giving me two messages, so I'm not sure exactly what this all stands for and what the support of the government is for all of this.

Those are the comments that I wanted to bring forward in this debate. I just want to quickly reference some of the e-mails and mail that I've received on this issue, and in particular they're pointing out the same inconsistency that I just pointed out. It doesn't seem clear on what kind of parents they're willing to support and for how long, again raising the concerns about the very low welfare rates causing parents to have to put their children into care with the government and what that really says about a commitment to children. This one person in particular was most annoyed with having the 52 weeks of unpaid leave put forward by the federal government and was looking to see what the provincial government was proposing.

I look forward to the continued debate and the responses to my questions from the mover of the bill, and I wish him all the best with this bill. I think it deserves some support, but it also deserves more action from the government.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to rise today and to speak in favour of private member's Bill 209. As a parent myself and now a grandparent many times over I believe it is critical that this government does everything in its power to help families and improve the well-being of children in this province. Bill 209, proposed by my colleague from Calgary-Fort, represents a small but important step toward improving the lives of many of Alberta's children.

Since we've all been away for a while, I'll begin by refreshing the memories of my fellow members as to what Bill 209 would entail. This legislation would amend the Employment Standards Code to allow for a maximum of 27 weeks of parental leave, which could be taken by one parent or divided between both parents as they see fit. The intent of the bill is to permit new parents to spend as much time as possible with their child in the all-important first few months of the newborn's life. The bill also amalgamates current provisions for maternity leave and adoption leave, giving adoptive parents the same opportunity to form a lasting bond with their new child.

Mr. Speaker, I support Bill 209 because I firmly believe that allowing a parent or both parents to spend just a little more time with their new children can have a significant impact on the future of the child. In fact, it is one of the more important factors in ensuring that children grow up to be caring, responsible, and well-adjusted adults.

3:20

Longer periods of parental leave are in line with this government's other intervention programs that encourage mothers to spend more time with their newborns. Furthermore, there is currently an extensive volume of scientific evidence that suggests that children who have more direct contact with parents in their early months and years turn out to be better adjusted and healthier adults. As a result, Mr. Speaker, parental advocacy groups across North America have been very active in promoting early childhood involvement by both parents, particularly since dual-income households have become the norm in our society. In other words, the commonly accepted belief that children whose parents take an active role in their early development are more socially adjusted is supported both by scientific evidence and by experts in the field of child development.

Even further arguments have been made regarding the need for fathers to be as active in early parenting as mothers are. Some studies have demonstrated a direct relationship between children's behaviour and the amount of time and support provided by not just mothers but fathers as well. This bill would address that factor by allowing the parents themselves to determine which of them would take the leave and when, rather than restricting them to a few short weeks of maternity leave.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, there are volumes of social science research that address the issue of early childhood development and the effect of a young child's environment on how that child will function in society as he or she grows up. I won't bore my colleagues by enumerating them all in detail, but I will point out that the findings of these studies are consistent and unequivocal. They indicate that the quality of a child's psychological, emotional, and intellectual development is significantly better when care is received from a

parent as opposed to a paid caregiver or other relative.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the president of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Dr. Elliott Barker, has argued very persuasively that nothing is more important in the world today than the nurturing that children receive in the first three years of life, for it is in these earliest years that the capacity for trust, empathy, and affection originates. However, if the emotional needs of the child are not met during these years, permanent emotional damage can occur.

Mr. Speaker, it seems obvious from the evidence that extending parental leave is a desirable option for this province. The question then becomes: will the cost of this program be passed on to small employers? The answer is: of course not. This legislation will involve no added cost to employers in the province of Alberta. The only sacrifice employers will face is that they will be required to hold an employee's position for an additional period of time. In some cases this could be up to nine weeks more than the 18 weeks currently granted by the Alberta labour code, or it could be less if both parents choose to split the 27 weeks unpaid leave that would be allowed, assuming they have different employers.

However, I must emphasize that this is not paid leave. The 27 weeks proposed in Bill 209 simply refer to the amount of time an employer must hold a position open for an employee on leave. Any payment an employee receives will be from the federal government employee insurance program, not the employer. This is a program that Albertans already pay into, a program that every other jurisdiction in this country allows their parents to take advantage of for at least 25 weeks. In other words, Mr. Speaker, by making use of this federal program, Albertans will simply be reclaiming what is their own.

I should also mention here that other jurisdictions in Canada permit much more generous leave time for parents. This legislation merely aims to bring Alberta in line with the national average. New Brunswick, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon all offer 17 weeks of maternity leave which must be scheduled prior to the expected date of delivery. These jurisdictions also provide a subsequent 12 weeks of parental or adoptive leave, a potential total of 29 weeks' leave. This is leave which may be used by either parent as long as both parents are not away from work at the same time.

The province of Ontario offers 17 weeks of maternity leave and 18 weeks of parental or adoptive leave, while Quebec has the most generous leave of all jurisdictions. They offer 18 weeks of maternity leave and up to 52 weeks of parental leave. In fact, Quebec was the first province to introduce maternity and parental leave provisions into its employment standards act. Moreover, that province was instrumental in pressuring the federal government to extend EI coverage to parental leave beyond the current 27 weeks.

As of January 1, 2001, Mr. Speaker, the federal government will provide EI coverage for maternity and parental leave for a period of 50 weeks. British Columbia and Nova Scotia have already announced that they will extend their leave provisions to one year as well.

Mr. Speaker, it should by now be evident that the leave provisions offered elsewhere in Canada provide greater support for families than the provisions offered in this province. In Alberta employees who have been with the same employer for at least a period of one year receive only 18 weeks of maternity leave. Currently adoptive parents receive just eight weeks of leave. Clearly, Alberta is being left behind, and we must act soon to give our families the support they need and deserve.

I'm sorry to say, Mr. Speaker, that this support is perhaps more forthcoming even in other countries. A recent report published by Save the Children concluded that rich countries may not be the best

at taking care of their mothers and, in turn, their children. The report ranked Canada ninth in the world when it came to the well-being of children. I looked into this and found that many of the countries that outranked Canada have longer leaves for new parents. Actually, many of these were European countries. In Europe women generally receive a well-paid leave. In Norway, for example, mothers can take 42 weeks parental leave at full wage or 52 weeks at 80 percent.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

What Bill 209 proposes is not so drastic a measure. Rather, it strikes a wise balance between the needs of children and families and the economic realities faced by Alberta employers. Madam Speaker, private member's Bill 209 is not even recommending that we extend parental leave to one full year. In my view and that of many employers, such a move would be excessive in our economic climate. This bill is proposing that we extend leave for parents to bring it in line with the national average, and it is asking that we do take meaningful action to enhance the welfare of our children.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, this amendment to the Employment Standards Code would amalgamate current provisions for maternity leave and adoption leave; that is, it would provide adoptive parents with the same amount of parental leave as a biological parent. This is certainly a positive initiative that would reinforce the notion that the rights and responsibilities of adoptive parents are equal to those of biological parents.

For these reasons I would urge my colleagues to support Bill 209. It offers us a rare opportunity to make a significant difference in the lives of Alberta children, and we should not pass it up.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This government, when it comes to family values, likes to talk the talk, but they don't always walk the walk. Bill 209 is a step in the right direction when we look at family values and we look at those components of quality of life that lead towards family values. When we look at Bill 209 and we look at the current legislation, the Employment Standards Act and the 18 weeks of maternal leave that is allowed, the extension to 27 weeks is certainly a step in the right direction. It falls short, of course, of the federal legislation. The extension to 27 weeks is a benefit, and of course the application to parents who adopt is particularly good.

Society has changed during my lifetime dramatically, and attitudes have changed. We talk about the old school, and we talk about the way it was. It is changing, and it will continue to change. That change is, generally speaking, good because it does recognize that life is a whole lot more complicated and becomes more complicated and more stressful as time goes on. There used to be a time when you went to school and got a grade 12 education. You went out and got a job as a mechanic's helper, whatever. But there's a whole new emphasis on lifestyle. There's a whole new emphasis on recognition of family values, of doing what is best for one's child or children.

3:30

The member from what I call the triple S riding likes to hear some of my stories about my younger days, and I'm going to talk just a bit about the way it used to be – what? – 35 years ago. I recall when my son was born. My son – she's not even listening.

MRS. SOETAERT: I am.

MR. WICKMAN: I'm telling a story that will interest you.

Now, it involves my son when he was born about 35 years ago; you know, my son the architect. Back in those days, when Silvia was pregnant and in the morning had her labour pains, I was a milkman working for the Northern Alberta Dairy Pool. She had her labour pains. We got up. I drove her to the hospital, dropped her off. I didn't even walk her in. I dropped her off, and I went on to work. I finished my milk route that day. Afterwards I went to the Grand Hotel, bought a round of beer, and passed out cigars. That's the way it was back then. You know, it may sound shocking to newer parents here, but that was par for the course. If I wanted to go into the delivery room, of course, they wouldn't have allowed it.

Now, I compare that to 10 years ago. Some of you may remember me sitting here so anxious. I had this communication network set up when my daughter-in-law was in the University hospital and we were in anticipation of my first grandchild, who turned out to be a very sweet granddaughter, Ceira. Now, when I got the message to get outside there and make a quick call, I called my son. He said: Dad, you get down here in 20 minutes; otherwise it will be too late. We got down there. Of course, he was in the delivery room.

MRS. SOETAERT: You weren't though.

MR. WICKMAN: No, I wasn't. I got there a bit too late.

The other grandparents were there. My wife was there. There were brothers-in-law there. It was like family there. It was a really, really happy occasion, and that is the reality of today. I imagine we're going to see further changes.

Now, my next story involves 1971. This will brighten the heart of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. I worked for the students' union at the University of Alberta, hired by David Leadbeater. We were not part of the academic staff or the nonacademic staff. We were a group of about 40 employees. One of the first things we did was formed a union. We unionized the student union staff, and we were allowed to do it. We became a local of CUPE, and we joined the Edmonton and District Labour Council. Now, in our very first contract that we negotiated with the students' union management and executive – and this is almost 30 years ago – we got paternal leave. That's almost unheard of, and we rejoiced, thinking that other unions would follow and this would become par for the course. It didn't happen, because we had the advantage of dealing with a very, very enlightened employer and being students, who tend to be a bit more idealistic and at times a bit more, maybe, realistic to the changing times. So there are examples that we can look back to where there is some recognition that there have to be changes.

Now, we look at what is happening federally. We have changes in the employment standards there that allow for I believe it's an additional six months of leave shared by both spouses or both parents, 27 weeks apiece. Of course, that's without pay. We look at the current EI Act that allows up to six months with pay, and as far as I can recall – and I stand to be corrected here – that only applies to the mother. I don't believe that the father has that option of staying at home and the mother continuing to work, whatever the case may be, or going back to work or them sharing it. I don't believe it applies to parents who adopt, but again I could be wrong.

Many, many years ago I remember seeing a movie with Michael Keaton; was it? It was called *Mr. Mom*. Some of you may have seen that movie. It was considered a comedy, but it was a concept that has become more and more par for the course in today's society. That is where the father stayed at home and the mother went to work. Of course, in the movie the father is mocked, because they refer to him as Mr. Mom. He goes shopping with the other moms, and he goes to the park with the other moms. He's the only one.

He's the only father who stays at home. Now it has changed. There is recognition that the father wants the same role in raising a child – not in the birth of a baby, of course, but in raising a child – being there in the early days as the mother in many, many instances. In many instances now the father will be the one that will stay home and raise that child as the mother goes to further her career.

In fact, my wife has a cousin in Germany that has gone to the extreme that he has not only stayed at home as the caregiver for that child, but he has taken her name. Now, I know that is very, very unusual, and I know that many of the female members of the House here will probably applaud that particular move. Ten years from now we may see many, many husbands doing the same thing when they get married: taking the spouse's name. Apparently in Germany they're not allowed to put the two names together, so you have to pick one or the other.

What it does is demonstrate that attitudes have changed. Attitudes have changed in most countries around the world. Attitudes have changed such that we recognize there is a much greater role for fathers in raising their children than we saw in the past. We have to take the appropriate courses of action to ensure that there is recognition. Of course, Bill 209 is a step in the right direction. We see some positive direction in that recognition of the family values that this government likes to talk about so much.

When I think back to my early days – and we all have pleasant memories of our children and grandchildren. The Member for Livingstone-Macleod, if I remember right, became a grandfather for the first time. What a thrill, eh? Wouldn't you like to be there right now with that grandchild? Exactly. That's one of the reasons that some of us sort of see that there's life after politics, because we have the opportunity to spend time with those grandchildren.

So the role of a parent, the role of a father, the role of a mother becomes very, very important, and the role of a grandparent becomes equally important. I'm not sure if this government has ever fully addressed an issue that is indirectly related, and that's the rights of the grandparent. Have we ever dealt with that one, the rights of the grandparent? In other words, if something were to happen that my son and daughter-in-law were to separate for whatever reason – let's say it was bitter – could I be denied further access to my grandchildren, who love me dearly? I thought we did deal with a bill.

MRS. SOETAERT: No. You can go to court.

MR. WICKMAN: We can go to court. Okay. Well, that's very, very positive too.

When we talk in terms of family values, when we talk in terms of a family model, we talk in terms of course of the mother, the father, the grandmothers, the grandfathers, and it's all one big unit. We have to respect that it's one large component that consists of a number of subcomponents. It's very, very important that all members of that particular family have the opportunity to participate in those experiences that are so joyful.

I imagine I could sit down with my departing member the Provincial Treasurer. I imagine I could sit down with the Provincial Treasurer, and we may have some differences on this in terms of family values. Nevertheless, I am glad that there is some recognition on that side of the House of the importance of this particular bill. It has come from a member of the government side, and that to me is an indication that we may see a vast majority of this House support Bill 209 at this particular stage so it can advance and can be given royal assent and we actually see it proclaimed.

3:40

So I do congratulate the member for bringing the bill forward. If

it was my particular bill, I probably would have gone a bit further even, but I recognize that you sometimes have to take baby steps. Sometimes you can't achieve everything overnight, so being a realist, I think the member realizes that possibly even he would like to have seen an expanded bill. But sometimes you try and sell too much, and you end up with nothing. Sometimes it's better to take a little bit here, and in a year from now you take a little bit more. Then eventually you achieve your own goals.

Now, there may be one or two others that might want to speak on this bill. I know we're down to just a few minutes, so just in case there's any last-minute thought – and I know the Member for Calgary-Buffalo can never resist the opportunity to stand up there and speak – I will give up the floor.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very glad to have this opportunity to participate in the debate surrounding Bill 209, the employment standards amendment act. Many people may not be aware that Alberta currently allows the lowest amount of sanctioned maternity and parental leave time of any jurisdiction in the whole country. For this reason I believe it is long past time to revisit our current maternity leave provisions. In fact, our current maternity leave provisions were established in the old Employment Standards Code of 1976, almost 25 years ago. Though many of us have benefited from these provisions and they have served a very useful purpose, much time has passed and many things have changed, including our knowledge about the best child care and nurturing.

In light of the knowledge that good parental care is so critical in the first months and years of a child's life, I strongly support the principle of Bill 209. Just to clarify, Madam Speaker, that principle is that the true beneficiaries of this legislation and of parental leave will be the children of Alberta. How will they derive that benefit? By being around the most important people in their lives, their mom or dad, for as much time as possible in the very critical early stages of life. It is true that parents will also derive some benefit from having access to 27 weeks of leave. However, parents who take maternity or paternal leave are performing a valuable contribution to Alberta and helping to raise happy, well-adjusted Albertans for the future.

Turning from the future to the past for a moment, I know that many of us here in the Assembly had the benefit of being raised, at least in the early years, by one parent who stayed at home. I also know that many of us in this Assembly may believe that is the best way to raise a child. Now, we may not be authorities in the field of child care, but many of us are parents and grandparents with a lot of subjective evidence on which to base the conclusion that a child raised with the love and care of its parents has a great start in life. In this case, Madam Speaker, it is a conclusion that the child care experts agree with. Those who preceded me in this debate have cited studies and statistics that demonstrate there is considerable truth to this hypothesis.

One might be tempted to ask, though, why we need legislation to create something called parental leave rather than just extending maternity leave. Well, parental advocacy groups across North America have been very active in promoting early childhood involvement by both parents, particularly since dual-income households are increasingly the norm. In fact, Madam Speaker, seven out of 10 families in this country are dual-income families.

Arguments have been made regarding the need for fathers to be as active in early parenting as mothers. Among others, Dr. Paul Amatos of the University of Nebraska has demonstrated a direct

relationship between children's behaviour and the amount of time and support provided by not just mothers but fathers as well. Now, it seems only sensible that as a government we should leave it up to these families to sort out their own hectic schedules and determine on their own which parent will take leave and for how long. Bill 209 allows parents this freedom of choice, another reason I support it. However, Madam Speaker, despite supporting Bill 209 and its basic intent, I must also note one potential problem with the legislation.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, but unfortunately under Standing Order 8(5)(a), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would now invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort to close debate on Bill 209.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me begin by saying that I'm very grateful to all of my colleagues who have contributed to the debate on my private member's bill and the many Albertans who called and sent e-mail to indicate their support. I was pleased to see a number of members of this House rise in support of the Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act. I have also taken note of the concerns raised by some of my other colleagues. Despite these minor concerns, I still believe that Bill 209 is a positive initiative that could make a profound difference in the early development of young Albertans.

In fact, Madam Speaker, that was my perspective in designing this bill. I approached the situation not from the point of view of the mother or the father or the employer. I considered the issue from the perspective of a newborn, of a recently adopted child. From the perspective of that child the very best thing possible is without a doubt to spend as much time as possible with a loving and nurturing parent.

Bill 209 does several things in order to achieve this highly desirable goal. First, it raises the permitted amount of unpaid leave from 18 weeks to 27 weeks, bringing it in line with the national average. Secondly, Bill 209 amalgamates maternity leave and parental leave, thus allowing parents the freedom to determine which one of them will stay home with the child and for how long. Thirdly, Bill 209 extends this new parental leave provision to adoptive parents as well, giving them the same rights as other new mothers and fathers.

Madam Speaker, I think the potential benefits of Bill 209 are clear. As we have heard in this House, study after study shows that the early relationship between parent and child is one of the most critical factors in determining the future health and happiness and success of a child.

Now, Madam Speaker, there are just a couple of additional points I would like to emphasize as we conclude the debate on Bill 209. I know that some of my colleagues have expressed concern about the effect that this legislation will have on businesses in Alberta. However, given the recent extension of the federal employment insurance benefit to cover parental leave for the entire year, Bill 209 is unlikely to cause Alberta businesses to incur any significant additional cost. It may cause some temporary reduction in staff availability, but with 1.5 million Albertans in the workforce and only 37,000 births per year the impact is likely to be quite minimal. It is even possible that productivity could improve as employees return to work energized and refocused after 27 weeks rather than tired and distracted after just 18 weeks.

So, Madam Speaker, since my bill's impact on Alberta's tremendous prosperity is likely to be minimal and the potential impact on the future of our children is so great, I would urge all my colleagues to support the bill. If there remains any minor or technical problems

with the legislation, they can surely be worked out at the future stages of this legislative process, but the principle behind the bill is unquestionably sound.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, this bill represents a momentous opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of Alberta children and families. We cannot afford to pass up this chance. Please think and feel for the Alberta infants when you vote on this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:49 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Gibbons	Marz
Blakeman	Haley	Mason
Bonner	Hancock	McClellan
Broda	Hlady	Pannu
Cao	Jablonski	Smith
Cardinal	Jacques	Soetaert
Coutts	Johnson	Strang
Dickson	Jonson	Tarchuk
Doerksen	Kryczka	Thurber
Evans	Laing	Trynchy
Forsyth	Leibovici	Wickman
Fritz		

4:00

Against the motion:

Friedel	McFarland	Renner
Magnus		
Totals:	For – 34	Against – 4

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a second time]

Bill 210

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and present my private member's bill, Bill 210, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, to the Assembly today.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to dedicate Bill 210 to Ben and Darlene Keuben, Susan and Gordon Smith, Jean and Doug Powell in loving memory of their children Amber and Brandy Keuben, Amber's boyfriend Craig Powell, and Brandy's friend Stephanie Smith.

It's over four years since the tragic day that these young people lost their lives. In an instant on June 23, 1996, near Morley, Alberta, the lives of three families were shattered. Four young people returning home to Calgary, returning to their families following a weekend camping trip, were killed instantly in a head-on collision. The lives of these four young people were ended by a convicted impaired driver. He was drunk, and these young people paid the ultimate price.

If I may, Madam Speaker, I would like again to read to the

members of the Assembly an excerpt from the letter written to me shortly after by the parents of two of these girls.

Two of these young people were our daughters – Amber who was 20 and Brandy who was 15. The other two were very close friends of our girls. Not only did we lose our family that day, but our life as we've known it has changed forever. As parents you work and dream for a future for your children. Our dreams also died. We are left mad. We are left angry. We are left frustrated. Most of the time we are numb, and most of the time we are sick. How do you walk away and rebuild your life? We are now at a point where we need to see some changes made. How many more innocent people have to die before we realize that the impaired drinking laws are not working?

Madam Speaker, the alleged drunk driver in this case was charged with four counts of criminal negligence, one count of criminal negligence causing injury, and four counts of impaired driving causing death. This man did not even possess a valid driver's licence.

By the time the preliminary hearings were concluded and a court date was set for the accused, a year and a half had passed since that tragic day. This extended period of time was extremely difficult on the family. How do these three families pick up the pieces of their shattered lives following such a tragic event? Furthermore, outrage and disgust followed the sentencing, which was a five-year jail term for killing four young people. The driver will be eligible for parole in 20 months. To this family and many other Albertans, murder is murder, whether it's by a gun or by a car.

Madam Speaker, Alberta has the fifth highest rate of people charged with impaired driving of all the jurisdictions in Canada and almost two times as many as Ontario and British Columbia. In 1998 one out of five drivers involved in fatal collisions had consumed alcohol. As the involvement of alcohol increased, so did the severity of the accidents. In 1998 there were 17,345 casualty collisions in Alberta. In 1,586 of them, or 9.1 percent, the drivers had either been drinking or judged to have been impaired. In the same year 22.6 percent of fatal collisions involved drivers that had been drinking or impaired. Across Canada among fatally injured drivers who had alcohol in their blood system, 62 percent of the fatalities had a BAC over 150 milligrams, 22 percent of fatalities had a BAC of 81 to 150 milligrams, 16 percent of fatalities had a BAC of 1 to 80 milligrams.

Madam Speaker, although Criminal Code impaired driving convictions can give rise to significant consequences, an accused person routinely faces the possibility of additional sanctions. Most of the provinces and territories have instituted administrative penalties or controls to mandate action against the suspected and convicted impaired drivers, some of which may be effective immediately and independently of any Criminal Code conviction.

It is clear that more can be done to address this problem and stop unnecessarily placing the lives of Albertans at risk. If this were Utopia, the federal government would have invoked a zero tolerance in the Criminal Code long ago. In Canada every eight hours someone is killed by an impaired driver.

Statistics like this have prompted me to take action. This Assembly cannot change the Criminal Code. It is out of our jurisdiction. What we can do is write our own traffic laws in the interest of public safety. This is what my bill does. It prevents drivers who blow over .05 BAC to the legal limit from driving for 24 hours. It is very simple. It is a reasonable request, and it is the right thing to do.

Clearly we must continue to educate and raise awareness to put an end to these tragedies, to save the lives of these people. In fact, this legislation is driven by the tragic death of my constituents in my constituency and across the province due to impaired motorists. We should be moving to make it harder for drunk drivers to offend and

to get drivers whose judgment is impaired by alcohol off the road. This is what my bill intends to do.

Most provinces have legislated brief periods of licence suspension for persons whose BAC is over 50 milligrams of alcohol but less than the criminal legal limit of 80 milligrams. The purpose of such action is to allow the police to suspend drivers at the roadside for up to 24 hours in the hope of preventing an impaired driving offence, to give them one more mechanism for prevention.

Madam Speaker, many studies and interest groups have expressed the view that despite the fact that a BAC of .08 percent is the legal point of criminal impairment, a driver is actually impaired at much lower levels. For example, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, AADAC, notes that even with a BAC below .08 percent, thoughts, judgment, and ability to estimate distance can be impaired and reaction time decreased. AADAC states that at a .06 percent BAC, judgment is somewhat impaired, there is some loss of physical co-ordination, and a person is less able to make rational decisions about their capabilities.

Madam Speaker, these are drivers that police have at their own discretion the ability to suspend for 24 hours. These are drivers that are often let go at a check stop. This should not be the case if these drivers are a threat to the public. Moving to .05 may be more of a deterrent to people who do not want to break the law. I hope this bill will start the process to move to a .05 legal limit, help educate people that their judgment slows down when you drink, and put pressure on the federal government to get their act together.

Madam Speaker, all Canadian jurisdictions except Alberta have legislation to address a .05 BAC. In British Columbia if a driver is caught driving with a BAC of .05 to .08 percent, the driver is subject to a 24-hour suspension, which is recorded on his or her driver's licence. Saskatchewan uses a points system to assess drivers and their infractions. If drivers are caught a second time with a blood alcohol level within the warning range, a BAC of .05 to .08, they receive an automatic 24-hour roadside licence suspension, and more points are applied to their licence. If an experienced driver is caught a third time with a blood alcohol level within the range, they receive an automatic 24-hour roadside licence suspension and must attend addiction screening. Newer, probation drivers face a much stiffer penalty and extension of the driver probationary period of one to two years.

In Manitoba a driver caught with a BAC between .05 and .08 receives an automatic 24-hour licence suspension and pays a \$40 surcharge when they renew their licence. Already touted as having the toughest drinking and driving laws in the country, Manitoba has recently made them even tougher by automatically impounding the vehicles of impaired drivers for 30 days and 90 days for repeat offenders. They expect that this could cut impaired driving fatalities by half.

4:10

Ontario legislation states that if a driver is caught with a blood alcohol level between .05 and .08, a peace officer can require the suspension of his or her driver's licence for a period of 12 hours. Drivers in Ontario's graduated licensing system – that's new drivers – must maintain a BAC of zero or be subject to a 30-day licence suspension and fine.

Newfoundland drivers caught with a BAC between .05 and .08 are subject to an automatic 24-hour roadside suspension plus a \$100 licence reinstatement fee to be paid within 30 days. If the fine is not paid, the driver's suspension continues until the payment is made. If a driver is caught three times within two years, that driver is then subject to a two-month suspension and must take a Think First alcohol education program.

If caught driving in Prince Edward Island with a BAC between .05 and .08, the driver is subject to a 24-hour licence suspension. Drivers under the age of 19 who are caught with a BAC within the range are subject to an administrative driving prohibition, which causes a suspension of 90 days in addition to the regular 24-hour suspension.

The Northwest Territories currently does not deal with the BAC of between .05 and .08. However, public consultations are currently under way to possibly introduce legislation which would impose administrative penalties upon drivers caught driving with a BAC of over .04 percent. These consultations are expected to be completed, but as of this date no legislation has been passed, and the legislation proposals have just been recently submitted.

Madam Speaker, Bill 210 is not going to take drivers with a BAC of .05 to .08 and lock them away and throw away the key. It simply takes a driver who is a danger to public safety and removes his or her driving privileges for 24 hours. What Bill 210 is saying is that drinking and driving hurts everyone involved, so just don't do it. Having a 24-hour suspension is certainly going to make anyone think about it before they drive having had a couple, because in fact many impaired driving accidents happen after only a couple. This legislation will work in keeping drinking drivers off the road, making our roads safer for all Albertans. Having a licence suspension for 24 hours for drivers in that range is a small initiative that will pay huge dividends by saving the lives of Albertans.

Bill 210 is supported by the Calgary and the Edmonton police; the RCMP; AADAC; the Alberta Motor Association; PAID, which is People Against Impaired Driving; MADD, which is Mothers Against Drinking Drivers; the McCauley seniors action group; SADD, which is Students against Drunk Drivers; and many, many other Albertans. A majority of Canadians want their elected officials to introduce tougher laws and stiffer penalties to halt incidents of impaired driving. A random poll of 1,200 Canadians revealed that 9 out of every 10 Canadians believe that impaired driving is a problem that governments should fight. Three of every four Canadians surveyed believe that federal and provincial governments are not doing enough to reduce the blood alcohol concentration levels from 80 to 50.

Madam Speaker, Bill 210 could have saved the lives of Amber and Brandy, Craig and Stephanie, and countless other Albertans.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to speak to Bill 210, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000. I can appreciate where the member is coming from. I've listened intently, and I guess from this I'm trying to figure out: would making this law have saved those lives?

I had a cousin. She was in her mid-30s with four children, owned a Wendy's in Grande Prairie. Locked it up late one night, and on her way home she was killed by an impaired driver. Would this type of legislation have saved her life? I don't know, and I don't know if making the net bigger and catching more people at a certain blood alcohol level is how we achieve that. Is it addressing those people who drive impaired? Is that not the issue we should get at? That's what I want to see in legislation. I want to be tough on those people who drive impaired.

I haven't decided how I'm going to vote on this bill. I am going to listen to everything. What I really want to weigh out is: is that the prevention that we're looking for?

Our youth group has had a speaker from Mothers Against

Drinking Drivers, a powerful, passionate speech. Every time my kids drive to a party or go somewhere, especially Friday and Saturday nights, I always say, "Drive carefully." I always say a prayer that they come home safely. So that's what we need to be looking for. I would venture to say that some of our young people are far better than we are. In fact, just the other night my daughter was going to a party, and she phoned me – she's 18 – and said: "Mom, I'm going to have a couple of drinks. Would you mind picking me up at midnight?" So like a good mother of course I said: sure, that's no problem. Now, fortunately she was at a party next door to my mom's, and Grandma said: well, you just crawl into bed here. So that's what she did. And do you know what? A lot of kids do that. They'll stay overnight at somebody's place. They'll have a designated driver. To me that's where we should focus our energy, on education and prevention.

I know many of us have seen kids from our communities be fortunate enough to be part of the PARTY program, where they take kids to the hospital and there they set up a program so that kids know what it's like to try to eat with limited capabilities, to try to do things when they're unable to see or unable to walk. It's a powerful program for young teens. Every young person I've talked to who's gone through that PARTY program has benefited from it and has realized that that's not where they want to be. They are very conscientious about safe driving and drinking and driving.

I want safer roads. I think all of us know of someone or know of a family or have someone in our family who's lost their life because of an impaired driver. I don't think there's anyone here who wouldn't say: "You know what? That's criminal, and it can't be allowed."

4:20

Now, going to .05 instead of .08, I don't know if that's the answer. I really don't. I will tell you that one of the answers – and I don't think there's anybody who is informed about the DARE program who would disagree with this – is prevention programs like the DARE program. That's the drug and alcohol resistance education program that is offered to grade 6. In some places they're trying to get it offered to grade 8, and that would be key, because you've started a good train of thinking, kids on their way to being able to handle peer pressure, which I think is more intense in junior high than at any other level. Then to catch them in the middle of junior high, to have access to that program again in grade 8, I think would be an excellent, excellent thing for us to do.

You know what? That does take a commitment of money because you're going to have to hire a larger police force because it is a program delivered by policemen and policewomen. It's important that it's delivered by them because then those kids see those police in the community, not just the guy giving Mom or Dad a ticket when they go too fast or the bad guy on TV. They see them as real people who care about them. Though the dollars put into that would seem significant, the dollars we would save by doing that would be far more significant, far more. If we can prevent one child from being involved in drugs and alcohol, then we've achieved with every bit of money what employing a larger police force would do. So I would say that that's where the focus should be, on prevention. I don't know if it's making that net bigger, but focusing on the people who continually drive impaired.

I don't see how this legislation would have saved my cousin; I really don't. Maybe if one young person somewhere had been aware of a designated driver program or the Red Nose campaign that happens at Christmastime – those kinds of things we should be encouraging and supporting because that's where we get to the root of the problem, and that's where I'd like to see our focus.

So I'm reserving how I'm voting on this. I'm not sure. I'm one of the strongest voices about people having a drink and driving. I'm opposed to that, and I'm sure everyone in here is. But the reality is how we educate people. Is that not the key? If education isn't the key, then I think we've missed the boat, because education is prevention, and that saves lives. When people don't drink and drive, that saves lives. If we don't deal with that – I mean, one thing is punishment, but the other thing is prevention. Even if the person who killed my cousin is in jail, she can't come back. So that's the key that I would like to see addressed: the prevention issues with drinking and driving.

So with those comments, Madam Speaker, I'm not sure how I'm voting. I'm strongly opposed to impaired driving, as everyone is. I don't think there's any debate in this Legislature about that, but the debate is: how do we best approach that? I'm not sure that this is the right tool to use, but I am going to listen to some of the debate, and I'll make up my mind as the debate progresses.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand in this Assembly and participate in this debate. First of all, I'd like to congratulate the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this legislation forward. I know that she's been working hard and carrying out consultations on this legislation for some time now, and the final product is certain to stimulate debate in this Assembly. The member especially deserves congratulations for proposing legislation that will help make Alberta a safer place, where tragedies resulting from drunk driving will no longer touch Alberta families and their loved ones.

Madam Speaker, impaired drivers kill an average of 4.5 people and injure 125 people in Canada every 24 hours. The tragic loss of loved ones by drunk driving is horrifying and unacceptable. I believe that any legislation that could stop, slow, or limit the number of impaired drivers on Alberta's roads should be seriously considered by this Legislature.

Madam Speaker, as many in this Assembly may know, I take a zero tolerance approach to impaired driving, and that's why I believe this legislation needs to be examined. The fact is that many Albertans still drink and drive. Nationally in 1996 there were 78,894 persons charged with impaired driving offences. In other words, for every 100,000 persons aged 16 years and over, 335 were charged with impaired driving. Although this rate represents a 6 percent decrease from 1995, we cannot afford to claim victory against the problem and become complacent when deaths and injuries are still attributed to impaired drivers in this province.

Alberta's rate of persons charged with impaired driving offences has been gradually decreasing since 1981, falling from 1,431 in 1981 to 486 in 1996, nearly a threefold decline. Historically, however, Alberta's rate, while steadily declining, has been consistently higher than the national rate. This trend needs to be addressed. Any death due to impaired driving is an unacceptable death.

Madam Speaker, I wish to add to this debate by outlining some of the initiatives undertaken by government organizations and commissions, particularly the efforts undertaken by the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. I feel that it is important to outline their position on impaired driving and the sort of work that is being done in relation to prevention. AADAC strives to make a difference in people's lives by leading them to an addiction-free future. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission recognizes that impaired driving remains a complex issue of concern despite the

progress that has been made in recent years. Currently AADAC is focusing on the addiction factors related to impaired driving and is committed to working in partnership with Alberta government departments, agencies, and other stakeholders to address this very important issue. AADAC believes that a variety of strategies, including prevention, education, as was mentioned, harm reduction, enforcement, and treatment, are required in order to further reduce impaired driving in this province.

As we can see from the declining rates of people charged with impaired driving, there is some good news in the battle against impaired driving. In the last few years society has grown more aware and less tolerant of impaired driving than it once was. Impaired driving is now viewed almost universally as a serious offence and a behaviour that is socially unacceptable.

There's been marked reduction in the magnitude of the impaired driving problem over the past decade. In Alberta licence suspension as a result of an impaired driving conviction has declined 54 percent, from 17,160 in 1988-89 to 7,835 in 1997-98. Madam Speaker, although this is a positive trend, Alberta continues to have one of the highest offence rates for impaired driving, ranking fourth among provinces and territories in 1997.

Recently many Canadians and Albertans have been calling for a reduction in the Criminal Code blood alcohol level. Groups like Mothers Against Drinking Drivers, MADD, have been spearheading this effort and calling for a move from the current .08 blood alcohol content to .05 blood alcohol content. This lobby has been successful in many Canadian jurisdictions. The rationale behind this is due to evidence that people suffer impaired judgment and control at levels way before the current .08 BAC.

4:30

Madam Speaker, we know more now about the effects of alcohol consumption than we did when the original .08 BAC was enacted. The physical effects of alcohol consumption vary depending upon the levels of alcohol consumed. These symptoms, as some of us may know, can occur for different people at varying levels of consumption based on such factors as tolerance, size, age, and so on. Studies done by the Addictions Research Foundation of Ontario concluded that impairment occurs at a much lower level than previously thought.

Madam Speaker, at a BAC of .03 to .08 the physical effects of consumption are cited as including euphoria, diminution of attention, judgment, and control. It also marks the beginning of sensory motor impairment and loss of efficiency in finer motor performance. We have all seen bad drivers, but a driver suffering from these symptoms does not sound like a driver that I would want to share the road with. It is for this reason that groups ranging from prominent medical associations to Mothers Against Drinking Drivers call for the use of .05 as the point of legal impairment, as Bill 210 helps us move towards.

It is refreshing, Madam Speaker, to see that a wide spectrum of groups has become involved in addressing the impaired driving issue. Health agencies, law enforcement, the insurance industry, and community action advocacy groups have all contributed towards reducing the problem. Although a variety of strategies have been developed to combat impaired driving, the emphasis has tended to be on legislation and law enforcement. Other approaches, such as public education, hospitality employee training, and the designated driver programs, have proved to be important.

Madam Speaker, AADAC will continue to develop and deliver quality prevention and education programs that assist individuals, families, and communities to develop healthy approaches and attitudes towards the use of alcohol. AADAC's prevention mes-

sages contribute to increased responsibility with respect to the use of alcohol and other drugs and can therefore help reduce the incidence of impaired driving.

Madam Speaker, the commission also supports the development and implementation of prevention initiatives that focus specifically on those segments of the population that disproportionately contribute to the impaired driving problems, such as repeat impaired drivers. AADAC is committed to reducing harm and promoting health recovery amongst those people affected by alcohol problems. Concern goes beyond high-risk behaviours and heavy drinkers to include the majority of Albertans who drink in moderation but may find themselves in a situation where they or someone else has consumed an excess amount of alcohol.

While the commission supports such initiatives as designated driver and server intervention programs, AADAC opposes any availability of alcohol marketing practices that would be expected to increase the risk of harmful consequences such as impaired driving. AADAC does not deliver programs specifically for impaired drivers. Rather, counseling and treatment services are available to all Albertans who need them. Within AADAC individuals have access to a range of treatment options and will be actively involved in defining their treatment goals and the most appropriate methods for achieving them.

Legislation and regulation should be aimed at promoting the health and well-being of society and discouraging drinking and driving amongst all age groups. Regulatory strategies must be multidimensional and should include measures such as better enforcement of existing laws, graduated licensing, and public education.

Madam Speaker, AADAC will continue in its efforts to work with individuals, government agencies, communities, and other stakeholders to promote responsible alcohol use, reduce the adverse consequences associated with inappropriate consumption, provide effective prevention and treatment services, and conduct research. Well-conceived and executed research into the prevalence, causes, prevention, and treatment of alcohol problems and consequences such as impaired driving should be conducted on an ongoing basis. The results of such research should be communicated to advance public and professional knowledge and to improve service delivery. We hope that these preventative measures reduce the number of impaired drivers on Alberta's roadways, but as stated earlier, that is not the only answer. We must become more effective at enforcing the laws we already have.

Madam Speaker, recently the Department of Infrastructure initiated a new plan to deal with this problem. While I support Bill 210 as an initiative to get drunks off the road, I am looking forward to seeing what sort of impact recent initiatives have made on impaired driving in Alberta. In November two changes were initiated, a 10- year window instead of five for monitoring repeat drinking and driving offences and the administrative licence suspension; that is, the ALS program. The result will be harsher consequences for drivers caught drinking and driving. This new initiative will monitor repeat offenders for 10 years instead of five. A first, second, and third conviction within a 10-year period will receive a one, three, or five-year suspension and associated intervention.

The ALS program brings an immediate suspension to the accused's driver's licence, an automatic three-month driver's licence suspension, or disqualification for drivers charged with providing a breath or blood sample more than .08 or refusing to give a breath or blood sample. This new initiative also includes an automatic six-month driver's licence suspension or disqualification if the offence results in bodily harm or death.

Madam Speaker, Bill 210 then may complement these initiatives by adding a mandatory 24-hour suspension for drivers at .05 BAC and above. Many jurisdictions in this country have moved to a 24-hour suspension for .05 and above. Due to the recent evidence about where the actual level of impairment occurs, I conclude that Bill 210 should be seriously considered by this House.

Madam Speaker, this Assembly can't change the Criminal Code of Canada; it's not in our jurisdiction. But what it can do is enact a 24-hour suspension for drivers between .05 and .08 BAC in the interests of public safety.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I hadn't initially planned on speaking to the bill, but, you know, in the eight years that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and I have both been in this Assembly, she has established a very impressive record of taking private members' bills that in fact earn the support of a majority of members in this Assembly. One of the things I've learned – it may have taken me a few years – is that when the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek speaks and introduces a bill, you'd better pay attention because there's an excellent chance that the next time we see it, it's going to be a government bill or it's going to become law. So it's because of my respect for that member's proficiency and facility for being able to make law that I want to offer some observations.

[Mr. Renner in the chair]

I'd just make this comment first. I don't think there's anybody in this Assembly that is not concerned about the carnage on our highways. I don't think there's anybody who is not concerned about the impact that drinking has when impaired drivers get behind the wheel, and I don't think there's anybody in this Assembly who would not want to see a reduction in the injuries and fatalities on Alberta highways. For me, though, it's a question – and I've often talked in the Assembly before about making a distinction between things that sort of make us feel good or that sound like you're doing something about a problem and things that have a direct connection with achieving the decided outcome.

You know, I heard the member. She spoke eloquently in terms of her motivation for bringing the bill, and I accept that very genuine motivation. But my question to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek would be – and I never heard her say that – if we had a roadside screening limit of .05, would these fatalities that she talked about with such impact have been avoided? Well, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek believes that is so.

4:40

I've spent a little time looking around at what we know. We've done a lot of work in this country in particular, not just through AADAC but through different organizations. It seems to me that we've learned a few things about what the impact of drunk driving is and what's going on on our roads.

I notice that you always see the researchers in here, the ones I run into Sunday or Monday night when I roll into the Annex who have been working hard. I don't know whether the government researchers have seen this, but there was a 1998 study done in Vancouver by the Vancouver police and the Vancouver transportation lobby group, SENSE, that came up with some information which in fact has been replicated in other studies in Alberta, and I'll talk about some Edmonton studies in a moment. One of the things they found and

that was also in an Ottawa 1995 Traffic Injury Research Foundation report is that in the majority of cases Canadian drivers involved in alcohol-related accidents leading to injury or death have blood alcohol levels well in excess of .08, well in excess. I'll mention some Edmonton stats in a moment too.

It seems to me that the person who is killing on Alberta highways is not the woman of petite stature who has a half-glass of wine and happens to register because of her metabolic rate and her size and weight and so on. After a half-glass of wine she may be over .05. Statistically, the person who is more likely to maim, kill, and do injury is a person with double, with 130, 140, twice the legal limit. Those are the people statistically, on an evidential basis – the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek may have seen some of those studies – who are doing the injury on our highways.

The average blood alcohol content among drivers in the Ottawa study was more than twice the legal limit. That same study found that there were two categories of drivers who really present the major problems on Alberta highways. The first group are the habitual hard-core drinkers who repeatedly drive after drinking with high blood alcohol concentrations – that's well over 80 milligrams – and they're very resistant to behaviour change. That group represents less than 1 percent of Canada's population, but it accounts for more than one-third of the fatal accidents in which alcohol is a factor. Now, the other group of drivers are the young, thrill-seeking males aged 20 to 25. It's interesting here that if we're trying to make a road safer, the evidence suggests we would be focusing on the very serious repeat offenders who drive with way over 80 milligrams and then focus on those young drivers.

It's interesting to note that I think Quebec is the only other province in Canada that has an age of majority, an age to be able to drink, of under 19. I think every other province in Canada is 19 or higher. I think Quebec and Alberta are the only ones with an 18 age.

So the two things that suggest to me that you'd consider if we want to make our roads safer are, number one, raising the age to be able to access alcohol to at least the level of other provinces, 19, and the second thing that I'd want to do would be to say: how do we do a better job of making sure that we get those people who are so absolutely intoxicated it's a wonder they can get the key in the ignition, never mind out of the parking lot and onto the highway? So that's a concern.

You know, there was a story I noticed in *Alberta Report* that talked about one study, and of every 100 road fatalities caused by legally impaired drivers, more than 75 percent had a blood alcohol concentration in excess of .15. Think about that: 75 percent in this group were nearly double the current legal limit of .08.

Now, at this point this brings in one of my other concerns. It's about fairness of law, and it has to do with this. Sometimes I think we get a bit bamboozled and buffaloes by science. We've got to remember that blood alcohol and blood alcohol absorption is uniquely a personal experience. If you take somebody who is 190 pounds and somebody who is 90 pounds, what you will find is that depending on metabolic rates, we all take alcohol into our bloodstream at different rates. [interjection] Yeah, of course referring to my friend from Edmonton-Meadowlark down the way.

I've practised law long enough to remember when .08 was brought in, and it was a question of looking at a rate at which most people began to show some evident impairment. But there are lots of studies that show that if you're talking about who can't drive safely, whose ability to be able to turn, to accelerate, to brake is somehow adversely affected, it varies. Point zero eight sort of caught most people, and that's why that was settled on. To go with .05 – and I know we're not talking a Criminal Code offence; it's about a roadside suspension. I'd give this with more vigour and

more passion if I thought this was an amendment to the Criminal Code. Still, the point should be made. I think the point is that what we should be recognizing is that what you do is you expand the net.

Now, we know that we don't currently have enough police officers in this province to do the job. You talk to the Calgary city police force. You talk to the Edmonton city police force. What they tell you is that they are so darn busy, they are overrun with so many demands that they're not able to focus on some of those hard-core repeat offenders that are causing all of the problems. I think that's part of the reality.

I wish I could hear from the Minister of Justice on this thing because I'd feel a lot more comfortable if I knew that there were more resources going into getting those people who are driving at twice the legal limit and prosecuting them to the full extent afforded by the Criminal Code. This would make more sense to me, but here's the problem I have, Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, through the Speaker. We now have police officers doing more roadside suspensions of people such as that woman who has had a half-glass of wine and is driving back to the office from lunch or the MLA or the cabinet minister who has just finished a meeting with the hotel association and is driving back to his or her office. I specifically did not focus on any given member. This is a hypothetical member. Bear with me: hypothetical.

Let's recognize that you take finite police resources, so we've got more police officers now administering roadside suspensions to people who are driving back to the office after that half-glass of wine. If we had an infinite number of police officers, great, but that's one fewer police officer or reduced police resources to be trying to hammer the people that are creating the problem.

4:50

One of the things I found really interesting – I'll just see if I can quickly find it. I had seen a study that talked about why wouldn't we be saying that we'd have much tougher sentences for repeat offenders. Although I can't find the quote as quickly as I'd like to, I think the point I'm trying to make is this. In this province there was a survey done in the city of Edmonton. I stand to be corrected, and I invite the former Solicitor General, who I know has an encyclopedic memory of everything he saw as Solicitor General years back, to set me straight, and I encourage the former Attorney General to advise me if I'm wrong. There was an Edmonton study, and what the Edmonton study found is that police officers are too busy, that a lot of people who should be charged with impaired driving are not being charged with impaired driving. And why is that? Because they find they don't have enough time to invest in the court process. They don't have enough time to do the work that's involved in putting together an impaired driving prosecution. So it seems to me that what we've got, Mr. Speaker, is an obvious way of trying to make our streets safer, which would be to make some changes in terms of the resources available through the police service and through the Ministry of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other things that we know makes a big difference is public education. We've seen some of the impact of that, and we all know that when we go to a party now we see – and I'm really proud of young people. I see young people that impress me with their maturity, and they typically have a designated driver. I see more young people driving far more responsibly than was the case when I grew up. I mean, all of that public education is having a significant, positive impact. There's more we can do around that.

Mr. Speaker, I forgot to set my timer, so I'm hoping I may get a signal from the table in terms of how close I am to the end. This is where in the script it's supposed to say, "Move to finish with a flourish," but since my notes are a bit scattered, it's not going to be quite as clear as I would want it to be.

I was talking about an Edmonton study, and I do want to share

this with members because I think this is significant. There was a study done in Edmonton, and what they found was that the highest blood alcohol content by an Edmonton Police Service handheld Alcosure device and digital intoxilizer that year, in 1997, had been five times the legal limit of 80. The report went on to say that on average the 2,000 drivers, 90 percent of whom were male, who were charged with impaired driving blew double the limit, and one-third were repeat offenders.

Just to come back to a point I'm making, not very precisely but hopefully it's there in the course of my argument, what we should be doing is ensuring that we have enough police resources – and that's a provincial responsibility – to ensure that we invest the time to make sure that those people who are driving with a serious level of impairment literally have the Criminal Code thrown at them. I don't want to hear about Crown prosecutors having to cut deals because they're too busy, because their caseload is too big. I mean, that's where we start making a change.

You know, maybe the former Attorney General and Minister of Justice will tell us, through the Speaker, why it is that if you go into the main remand courtrooms in Edmonton and Calgary, you find Crown prosecutors that aren't using all of the tools available in the Criminal Code. The Criminal Code has got at least five different offences that can be used. You've got serious penalties. You've got provision for compounding penalties for repeat offenders. But do you know what happens? Too often we don't ask for them. Too often we have plea bargains that mean that something is passed for a sentence . . .

DR. WEST: Well, that's your profession. Your profession does that.

MR. DICKSON: My profession, which I'm proud of, ensures that the guilty people go to jail and the innocent people are not punished unduly. I'm proud of that, former Solicitor General. You know, Mr. Speaker, there was a slur on a profession which I am very proud of, and I shouldn't allow myself to be baited.

I sometimes wish at a time like this that the government took the kind of good advice they get from the Canadian Bar Association, that they get from groups that have a lot of practical experience in terms of dealing with impaired driving, because there are a host of things we can do.

I'd refer members to some studies. There's *The Role of Alcohol in Fatal Traffic Crashes in British Columbia* over a four-year period, that I cite in support of the point I'm trying to make. There is an Edmonton study done by the University of Alberta, *Factors Antecedent to Impaired Driving*, January, 1988, which is good reading.

AN HON. MEMBER: In 1988?

MR. DICKSON: Well, you know something? Impaired driving isn't a brand-new phenomenon, and some of the research that's been done in 1988 is as valid and as useful in 2000 as it was at the time it was written.

[The Speaker in the chair]

There is a further report on beverage alcohol concentration and traffic safety which was done in Ottawa in I think 1990.

Much more to be said, but by somebody else, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member

that preceded me said, he enjoys standing in the Legislature and speaking after the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Well, I likewise always look forward to speaking after the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Calgary-*Buffalo*, I would want to say as I begin here that I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek's intentions and the principle of the bill have to do with drunk driving, intoxication, and we aren't dealing presently within this bill with the resources available to police departments or police services. That certainly is an issue and can be talked about under other circumstances.

I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward Bill 210, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act. I know that she has spent considerable time and effort over a long period of time gathering information, talking to informed groups and associations so that she could bring this forward. Her intent is sincere, and she is speaking from the heart when she talks about individuals in her constituency that have lost loved ones due to drunken driving, so I thank her for that.

I think it is also timely that this is before us today because we are moving very, very soon to a time of year when drinking and driving does become an issue. You just need to talk to any law enforcement official, who will tell you that during the next month to month and a half they have more incidents that they have to deal with than at any other time of year.

5:00

As has been mentioned by former speakers, over the last 20 years awareness about the dangers of drinking and driving has certainly increased. In the old days a lot of people didn't see drinking and driving as a major concern for Albertans. There are probably many of us in this room that when we went to high school, college, or university didn't think twice about drinking and driving. I, like a couple of other speakers before me, want to congratulate some of the young people today for their commitment to taking very seriously the responsibility for drinking and driving. Most of us that have older teenagers or young adults can tell you that they very much rely on designated drivers or taxis or some other means to get them home. We know that they are responsible, and we as adults and our generation could actually take some very serious lessons from them as to how you do this and manage it well.

Another thing that has happened over a period of time is that the roads in this province have become busier. There are more people and more cars. Cars are moving faster, and people are all in a hurry. The reality on today's highway is very different than it was for many past generations. With these developments one would think that alcohol-related driving accidents would be on the decline. However, over the last 40 years the rates of most crimes have declined except alcohol-related driving accidents. You would think that today, with everything that is being done – all the groups that are actively making people aware, the public education, the prevention, the ad campaigns – people would be terrified of the consequences of drinking and driving and would make a continuous effort to stop doing so. However, we still see people that are intoxicated, that still get in a car and continue to drive.

During the past year Edmonton police arrested a near record number of people who were driving under the influence. I think this is a clear indication that drinking and driving is still a huge problem in this province. In fact, Alberta has the fifth highest rate of people arrested for drinking and driving among the provinces. Twice as many people are arrested for drunk driving in Alberta than in Ontario and British Columbia. Of course, as we all know, British Columbia and Ontario certainly have greater populations than Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I feel this is a shameful statistic, one that needs to be

addressed, and that's why I support Bill 210 as sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Bill 210 creates an administrative penalty for drivers who have a blood alcohol level between .05 and .08. That means that the driver who is found to have alcohol in his blood will not be permitted to drive a vehicle for 24 hours. The advantages of this suspension are clear. A driver whose licence is revoked for 24 hours will not be able to get back into his or her vehicle and cause harm to other people. That is the immediate benefit, and there are still greater longer term benefits.

What exactly is .05? How much alcohol does that amount to? Regardless of how many drinks it amounts to, people who have a blood alcohol level of .05 are impaired. Their nervous system and their ability to react quickly to emergencies are diminished, so getting these people off the road makes it a safer place for all of us.

I know it has been said many times, but people do not have the right to drive. Driving is a privilege. We've talked about driving as a privilege in this Assembly before when we discussed the hon. Member for Red Deer-South's private member's bill on graduated licencing. Indeed, it is a privilege, and it isn't a privilege that each and every country in this world has. Driving in many countries in Europe and Asia is taken very seriously, and impaired driving is taken more seriously, when even body parts such as arms and hands are cut off if you're caught as a repeat offender for impaired driving.

One of the biggest reasons I like this proposal is probably the hardest to measure and verify. What I'm referring to is the symbolic importance to the offenders of receiving this form of sanction, the 24-hour suspension. Almost all Albertans are indeed good, law-abiding citizens, who would never intentionally harm others. There are thousands upon thousands of drivers out there, both young and old, who will have a couple of drinks at the football game or go for a beer at the local pub after work. These are people who have been doing these types of things for years without hurting anybody or getting in an accident, but this, Mr. Speaker, is where the false sense of security comes into play. People think they've had a couple of drinks and then drive home countless times, and they can continue to do so without incident.

What they aren't thinking about is that they are indeed impaired. Their judgment is slow, inaccurate. Their reflexes are slightly numb. As well, with defensive driving you have to think at all times what other people are doing on the road, how other people are driving. Are they, in fact, impaired? I'm afraid that is all it takes to cause thousands and thousands of pounds of steel and glass to collide, lives to be lost, loved ones to be maimed.

Under the provisions of Bill 210 some of these casual drinkers will be given a stern warning and the inconvenience of losing their driving privileges for a mere 24 hours. It's my hope that many of these people will see this as such an unpleasant experience that next time they'll take the LRT, they'll find a designated driver, or they'll take a taxi.

Unfortunately, there's another kind of Alberta driver out there. I think this bill will help to stop them before they kill someone. These are problem drinkers, people who do not realize that they have a problem. They are the men and women who consider themselves weekend warriors. They like to go out, get intoxicated with friends, celebrate, and have a good time. These people have the potential to develop a more serious drinking problem and then take that problem on the road. For many this 24-hour suspension could be a warning sign.

If we speak of warning signs, I know one that has worked very, very well in my area has been the Denver Boot. When you live in a small community and you happen to know everyone in town and where they live, when you see a car parked alongside that house with that Denver Boot on, you know that everyone will be talking

about it in the coffee shop, around the dinner table, and it definitely impacts the person. They are very mortified. Their neighbours are mortified, and their family is mortified. So it is a warning. I think when the Denver Boot was introduced, there were probably many that felt it would not have an impact on this whole area of drinking and driving, but I can tell you that in a small community, when you know the recipient, it has made a big difference.

For someone who has never broken the law, having your licence suspended for blood alcohol concentration would send a strong message. It would send a strong message to other members of the family, to employers, employees, and friends. I, again, say very strongly: this would be a stern warning and an inconvenience.

I would also like to commend the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert in talking about what has been done in many of our high schools and with many of the programs in the province. I concur with her and think that there is a lot more that can be done with public education, with working towards greater prevention, and ongoing awareness. I know that in today's world more and more the local police are involved with many programs within the high schools, and I know that they continually work with the young people to keep them aware of many of the statistics that we've heard today. I don't think that this bill would preclude any of those programs that are ongoing, and we must ensure that they continue to be ongoing, but this bill today is dealing with a completely different matter.

5:10

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose talked at length about his role and the role of AADAC. I would like to commend AADAC. I think they have done a tremendous job over the last few years with some of their ad campaigns. One that really stands out in my mind – I think it was last year's – showed an horrific, horrible accident involving some teenagers. This young girl died in the accident, and her boyfriend had to go and tell her parents. The caption was Don't Be a Bloody Idiot: Don't Drink and Drive. I really think that particular ad campaign really was significant.

The one they're using this year I would ask you to pay attention to. They're comparing the wine glass in the gentleman's hand to a lethal weapon. As we move along in the ad, the glass does turn from a glass to a gun, and it talks about him having a lethal weapon.

I think these are powerful ads, Wetaskiwin-Camrose, and if you'd take that back to AADAC – I think they are doing an excellent job of really making you aware. They're the types of ads that you will pay attention to, and they do get your attention and those of our young people. So I thank you.

I would ask all members of this Assembly to please pay special attention to what the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is trying to achieve. I think it's just another tool that we'd be allowing law enforcement agencies in their fight against drinking and driving. It levies a small but firm penalty for those who push the limits of alcohol consumption and then drive. At the same time, the bill does not permanently affect a first-time offender. It does not mark a person for life for making an error in judgment, but it does serve as a stern warning that when a person pushes the legal limits of alcohol consumption, he is endangering his life and the lives of many, many others.

I personally would like to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for proposing this bill and inviting such stimulating debate on such an important issue. I think Bill 210 is a timely and important piece of legislation, and it deserves the ongoing attention of members of this House.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and that we reconvene at 8 p.m. in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion put forward by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, would all hon. members in favour please say aye?

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The motion is carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:14 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 15, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/11/15

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

For the benefit of those that have gathered this evening, we're going to be going over some of the supplementary estimates for the year 2000-2001. The committee is the informal stage of the Legislature in which people are able to sit in their own places or indeed move around. They may take off their jackets. They may have coffee. We only have one person standing and talking at a time though. That's a general rule.

head: Supplementary Estimates 2000-01
General Revenue Fund

Children's Services

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll now call upon the Minister of Children's Services for opening comments.

MS EVANS: Thank you very much. Children's Services ministry is requesting a supplementary estimate of \$46,372,000 for its 2000-01 budget. The base budget currently is \$536 million, and the additional funding I will briefly summarize in the following areas.

Twelve point nine million dollars will be used to fund higher than budgeted increases in child welfare caseloads. The average monthly child welfare caseloads have risen from 12 and a half thousand approximately in September 1999 to 13,836 in September of 2000. The average monthly caseloads have almost doubled since 1993, when the figure was 7,980. The average cost per child welfare case was \$1,807 in '99-2000, up from \$1,721 in '93-94. These cost increases are due in part to the rise in complex cases such as children with fetal alcohol syndrome currently being more frequently diagnosed, mental illness, and severe behavioural disorders. The age breakdown for children in care: 30 percent of caseloads are ages zero to six, 34 percent ages seven to 12, and 36 percent ages 13 to 17.

A recent report dealing with child welfare caseload growth was presented to government. The internal document, which is now publicly available, has provided valuable advice from stakeholders, which we're currently reviewing with partnering ministries and community stakeholders, and we'll continue to explore improvements in that area.

Handicapped children's services. There will be \$10.2 million allocated toward higher than budgeted increases in handicapped children's services. Caseloads and higher average cost per case are the reasons for this increase. The number of families supported through HCS increased from a monthly average of 8,289 in '98-99 to an average of 8,462 in '99-2000. HCS helps families meet extraordinary expenses that arise because of their children's special needs. We now fund intensive behavioural programs for children diagnosed with autism, and other cases include children with cerebral palsy or mental disorders. The average cost of an intensive behavioural intervention is between \$40,000 and \$60,000, and our average cost per caseload for handicapped children's services in 2000 is \$5,826.

Six million dollars will be spent on the early implementation of recommendations from the Children's Forum and task force which

will continue to build on the results from the Children's Forum and the Task Force on Children at Risk reports. I must stress that other ministries are absorbing significant numbers of cost, not the least of which are the \$45 million in additional funds currently for education, for hours recommended for kindergarten. So this adds to those recommendations from other ministries which support the task force recommendations.

The risk assessment and reduction model which is now being used is a \$2.1 million expenditure which is also helping us with permanency planning for children in the care of child and family service authorities. The model addresses child protection and safety with a particular emphasis on the risk of future abuse and neglect. As child neglect in Alberta does not diminish, we are as a government trying to fill the gaps through agencies, both private and public sector. The other focus is on our permanency planning.

We have additional funds for contracted agencies recently announced, \$8.7 million that will provide increases to contracted agencies. This should be no surprise. It was indicated some three years ago that over a three-year period there would be every attempt by our government to assist those contract agencies in delivery of special services to individuals with special needs.

For employee compensation there's an additional \$5.5 million to fund higher than budgeted employee compensation costs primarily for staff working with child and family service authorities.

Youth in transition from care: \$938,000 will be allocated to assist youth in transition from government care to independent living. These funds are part of the national child benefit, a federal/provincial partnership designed to reduce child poverty and help parents work their way toward independence. Our goal is to help young people in care to enter adulthood on solid ground thereby preparing them for future success.

I ask for your support of this supplementary estimate. Our mission is to work with our partners to enhance the ability of families and communities to develop nurturing and safe environments for children, youth, and individuals. You've heard about some of the important strategies we are undertaking to achieve that goal. You know that our work has just begun, but we're committed to our vision.

I'd now be pleased, Mr. Chairman, to hear any comments and respond to questions following.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Children's Services is a relatively new entity that manages a complex population with an equally complex system. These evident complexities have been further compounded by the government's move to regionalize this system in the last five years. In reality, this evening I find it hard to criticize any cash allocations to such an underfunded system.

The minister and all staff, bureaucratic and front line, must be commended for working under extremely difficult and demanding circumstances where the stakes are high and human. That being said, their goodwill would benefit from cabinet support from this government to the degrees that tax reform and debt reduction have achieved, and I certainly hope, Mr. Chairman, that the hon. Treasurer is listening.

There is a cost for ignoring or choosing to underfund such a vital system. That cost was clearly magnified by the Auditor General in his 1999-2000 annual report. It is further magnified by a most compelling report titled Child Welfare Caseload Growth in Alberta: Connecting the Dots. I will refer to it at a point just a bit later in my remarks.

What the Auditor General magnified in his report this year of this

department, Mr. Chairman, is that the regional entities formulated by this government were by and large ill equipped to manage or fund the responsibilities that they had been given by government. The Auditor General found financial statements that did not fully report the cost of providing required services, that did not follow generally accepted accounting principles, that had poor or nonexistent processes for the provision of services and billing of services between regions. He found accounting officers that had potential conflicts of interest accompanied by a general inability in the department to determine if almost \$32 million that had been spent on support services was economically spent.

Further, the Auditor General found in this department just several months ago that a letter which had been written by the former minister had informed regional child service authorities that surpluses might not be available or carried over to the subsequent year. It was his finding that financial statements of the authorities were prepared on a premise that these moneys would be available, but it had never actually been clarified that surpluses would remain with the authority, and unless I'm mistaken, Mr. Chairman, that confusion continues to exist.

There was further confusion about surpluses that had been achieved by agencies. This confusion arose from different interpretations as to whether those surpluses were revenue of the authority or the department. In one case the authority wanted to account their surplus as a receivable, and they were told by the department they could not.

8:10

In the Auditor General's report on page 69 is perhaps the clearest message that the hon. Treasurer and other cabinet colleagues need to hear this evening. He recommends that Children's Services "review the funding formula to ensure that the allocation of resources is consistent" to meet the expected needs of each Children's Services authority. To paraphrase, Mr. Chairman, it is a compelling statement that the Auditor General needs to give direction to this cabinet that they should adequately fund the provision of services to vulnerable children in this province and account for them clearly and consistently in their financial statements.

We have heard the hon. minister tonight speak to the allocation requested, \$46,372,000. In fact, Mr. Chairman, the reality is that the budget of this ministry was underestimated, was underreported, and as a result of that we now find ourselves in a position where the minister must come through supplementary estimates to ask for that kind of additional allocation.

Now, there are other ministries that are responsible for these increased costs, and I think it would be misleading tonight to speak only to these issues from the perspective of Children's Services.

I would like to move now to the report on child welfare caseload growth published in August of 2000. One of the issues that was highlighted in that report was the impact of low social assistance rates in Alberta and the cuts made to social assistance rates by this government in the early '90s on child welfare caseloads. I quote from the report.

The largest group of people receiving public assistance in Alberta is single mothers of dependent children. The pressure on these women to find work once their babies are six months old suggests that caring for children is undervalued when compared with the ability to be independent of public assistance.

Further, it was cited that

families on welfare [in Alberta] do not benefit from the increase in the Canada Child Tax Benefit launched in 1998. Most provinces claw back the increase in federal funds from families with children on welfare and spend the money on other programs . . . Only two provinces [in Canada], Newfoundland and New Brunswick, allowed families with children on welfare to keep the money and use it to

improve living conditions.

Now, I should summarize, Mr. Chairman, that I'm making these remarks and recognize that it won't be perhaps until next year's budget that the cabinet will in fact make the right choice and adequately fund this department. I think they have the evidence within these reports to do so, and in highlighting these areas this evening, I hope that it will provide the additional impetus they require to make services for children, particularly vulnerable children and families, a priority.

This is also citing from the report:

In 1998, the estimated welfare income for a single mother with one child [in Alberta] received \$11,088 annually. That income includes basic social assistance, additional benefits, Federal Child Tax Benefit and Federal GST credit,

as recorded by the National Council of Welfare. Eleven thousand dollars. Now, I don't know about you, Mr. Chairman, but I know that I could not raise my two children on \$11,000 and have them grow up to be healthy, productive, and functional individuals.

In the report on pages 45 and 46 there were a number of examples that the authors used to highlight the difficult realities people face in trying to access welfare, and I will highlight just a couple.

A mother on welfare [in Alberta] told [the researchers] that she did not have a telephone, as it was not a benefit covered under welfare. In order to have contact with his children, her ex-husband covered the . . . cost of phone. Welfare defines this as child support, so it is deducted from her monthly cheque.

How does that make sense? Why are these types of areas not being reformed to make it more supportive for families in this province?

Another example.

A First Nations agency paid the damage deposit for a single mother who was moving to the city. The welfare worker considered the value of the damage deposit as income and deducted it from the welfare cheque.

These types of examples are rampant in the system, and they need to be addressed.

I want to turn to some of the other issues. I am cognizant of the fact that there are allocations this evening for staff compensation, but with due respect to the minister, Mr. Chairman, I don't think they go far enough. That is because, again in the caseload growth report, one of the most significant causative factors in caseload growth was attributed to the fact that we have largely unqualified staff and an enormous rate of turnover in Alberta in child welfare.

It may be of interest to our guests in the gallery this evening that Alberta is the only province in Canada that hires child welfare staff with less than a bachelor of social work. The rate of turnover within our staff in Alberta is very high. Since 1993 over 900 child welfare workers have terminated or transferred out of the province, while combined with the hiring of new staff and responding to growing caseloads, recruiting to these vacant positions results in chronic, significant inexperience in the front line. Currently 43 percent of child welfare workers in Alberta have less than two years' experience.

Again, the report through a variety of pages talks about the degree of the problem that we have in human resources in child welfare. As I say, with due respect, I don't think the allocations this evening, when spread across the departmental staff, the agency staff, and contracted staff, go nearly far enough. I would encourage the minister and like-minded members in the government caucus to continue to educate those members of cabinet that have doubts about making allocations in this area. We seem to have the belief, Mr. Chairman, that debt and Alberta are not synonymous, and we have gone to great lengths in this province to eliminate our financial debt. Well, if you agree with that stance, then I think any member that takes that approach should read this report, because this report

magnifies the depth of the human debt in this province. Unless we do something about it, we are going to pay the price in the future.

We've lost some of our best professionals in this department, and as is the case in health care, in nursing, in medicine, we're going to have to spend some money to get those people back. Again, the allocations this evening are talking about current staff, but we don't have enough staff, and the staff that we have are not qualified enough. Those that are qualified are not receiving the supports they require to deal with the very complex high-needs population.

If that overview and explanation with respect to human resources is not sufficient, Mr. Chairman, I'm most certainly available to reinforce it at any time should the government require that.

Just to finish off in the area of staff, in human resources, I mentioned that 43 percent of all current frontline child welfare staff have less than two years' experience. In addition to that, of the current staff without a bachelor of science or a master's of social work degree, more than half have less than two years' experience. We've deprofessionalized the care and the service delivery in child welfare.

8:20

I'd like to just move to another area for examination that is not directly spoken about in the allocations this evening but is definitely evident, and that is the needs within our aboriginal population, which comprises approximately 50 percent or thereabouts of the child welfare caseload. When it comes to this population, it is of no surprise, perhaps, to any member of this Assembly or to most First Nations bands that their population is growing at almost double the rate of the general population, and within that there are many children and individuals who have complex social, physical, and mental needs.

The caseload report highlighted some of those, and I'd just like to summarize them this evening. The rate of suicide is cited among First Nations adolescents as being up to seven times the national rate. There is a high incidence of alcohol and substance abuse, a high accompanying incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome. We have approximately 24 percent of aboriginal families being headed by lone parents.

This leads to one of the recommendations made by Allen De-Leary, the Assembly of First Nations health director, who was quoted in 1999 as saying:

A comprehensive child health policy framework does not exist at this point and there is a great deal of work to be done in examining (First Nation) children's health issues. We can begin by addressing the socio-economic, environmental and housing situations of First Nations families. Overall, there is a lack of programming and support for children between seven and twelve, there's an urgent need for a suicide prevention strategy among children and youth, and there's a lack of recreation opportunities for . . . youth [as well].

Now, at a later point in this session, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to be releasing a report that I have completed on youth suicide in Alberta that addresses both the aboriginal and nonaboriginal population, and I will speak, I am hopeful, about the incidence of suicide in Alberta at some later point. I have had the opportunity to speak with the Minister of Children's Services and the Minister of Justice and the minister of health about the lack of a co-ordinated suicide prevention strategy in this province and our continuing high rates of suicide in young people and in the general population. That, again, is something. When you calculate the lost hours, the lost potential, the loss in terms of family and society, this government should be concerned about the high incidence of suicide, and to date we have not had any co-ordinated program or any acknowledged leadership entity to deliver suicide prevention services in this province.

In that same vein, as long as I've been in this Assembly, as long as there have been Children's Advocate reports in this province, they have cited the lack of services for 16 year olds and 17 year olds. There is a huge gap, it appears, if a child for whatever reason finds themselves independent before they are of legal age in this province. There is this big, black hole that they fall into. One of the reasons – well, it's as crystal as this. What the caseload report says is that older teens are seen as less of a priority for service. The major finding of this report was on the need for a coordinated approach to providing services to 16 and 17 year olds to prevent [them] from falling through the [cracks] . . . This concern was echoed by staff from the Youth Secretariat, "Adolescents are seen to be the most expendable. As caseloads increase, services to youth are reduced or closed and expectations are increased."

As I said, this has been mentioned on numerous occasions by the Children's Advocates. It relates to social services. It relates to SFIs. It relates to the provision of child welfare services, and it relates to the provision of services through our department of health. This particular population could be one of the reasons why, particularly in the male population, our highest incidence of suicide is in males between the ages of 10 and 40. If in fact we were able to detect and intervene with some of these youth at this age, perhaps we might be able to make an impact that would prevent them from taking their lives or being involved in the justice system at a later time.

I want to just quickly summarize as well. In the annual report of Children's Services this year it was cited that the department was a defendant in 45 legal claims. In 1999 there were 49.

Forty of these claims have specified amounts totaling [approximately \$70 million] and the remaining five have not specified any amount . . .

Included in the total legal claims are thirty-nine claims amounting to [\$63 million] in which the [department] has been jointly named with other entities.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview will have another opportunity perhaps later, but Edmonton-Centre would like to make a comment before the minister replies.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes, I would. Just a very brief issue or question I'd like to raise that could probably be captured in the minister's answer. The minister is aware that for some time I've been bringing forward the issue of employees in the nonprofit sector that are doing work similar to that done by department employees. There is a tremendous wage gap there. I notice in here that there's "\$8,734,000 for increased funding to contracted agencies and service providers to support employee compensation adjustments." From what I have been asked in talking to people in the community doing this kind of service provision, they haven't been given any indication of how this money is to be spent, what sector it's being spent in. They've been told handicapped services, but they don't know exactly whether they're allowed to do that. When would the minister anticipate being able to give a clear explanation to these service providers?

Second to that, this is onetime funding. Is there an expectation, then, that this increase for employee compensation will be continued forward in other budgets, or are they somehow supposed to give their employees a raise and then take it all back on the 1st of April? How is that expected to continue on into the future?

The third question is: does this in fact address the wage gap, and will it keep up with the increase that the public-sector employees are experiencing? What's happened before is they got a little bit of extra money, and they raised their wages. Then the public sector raised their wages, and the gap was even wider. So if the minister could talk a bit about that, I would appreciate it, and I can be sure to get the minister's answers out to those agencies that have been speaking to me.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to raise that.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, did you wish . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: It's not what I wish. I'm just serving the hon. minister.

MS EVANS: I was wondering if the hon. opposition have tabled all their questions and then I could respond.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview had more.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I did want to raise actually what I consider to be a very serious issue, and that is the issue relating to the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. We have had an investigation conducted by this committee very recently that has found in the instance of a man dying within an inner-city shelter in Edmonton that the contributing factors to that man's death, who had suffered a grand mal seizure and had related physical and mental problems, that the facility was understaffed, that the staff in the facility did not have adequate first aid or CPR training, and that there were not policies and protocols in place that would have facilitated them acting to have the man medically assessed. He was in the facility for six days before he died, had not been referred to the medical clinic on-site, nor did he have a medical assessment during the last 24 hours of his life when he suffered the seizure in the shelter.

8:30

Now this committee has been largely inactive and not utilized by government. In fact, there have been numerous instances where these types of situations have occurred in social facilities in this province, but there has been a subliminal movement to direct actions internal to the department so that there was no public accounting, no public investigation, no public reporting.

When the committee was compelled by the provincial Ombudsman to investigate this man's death, the committee itself did not understand that it had the legislative and statutory mandate to conduct investigations into social care facilities. They did not have policies about investigations. They were not trained in investigation procedures. They have in fact, I am told, raised the fact that they as a committee are not adequately funded to conduct investigations into instances of unsafe practice or care or instances of people being harmed or dying in these facilities.

I do not see a supplementary estimate before us this evening for this committee. It's a statutory entity. It falls under the minister's portfolio. I'm very, very concerned, Mr. Chairman, that the government is by de facto reducing the role this committee could play by insufficiently funding them to fulfill their responsibilities. That is not here, and I would look to the minister for some confirmation as to when that committee might see an enhancement of their resources to enable them to provide a more accountable system of reporting and investigation to the public of Alberta.

Now, just accompanying that concern, in the annual report for Children's Services, which heightens where I fear this committee is going, the committee was only referenced on page 41 and it was referenced only in the context that they were responsible to inspect day cares, when in fact the Social Care Facilities Review Committee has the responsibility to investigate any facility that is providing services in the social service sector: group homes, any inner-city shelters, women's shelters, the Yellowhead Youth Centre, any facility, whether it be a foster home or a facility of a larger nature. This committee has the statutory responsibility to inspect them and to investigate them if a complaint is received, and the government,

number one, is not reporting that responsibility. Number two, they're not funding that responsibility. I would ask the minister this evening when the government plans to concretely make the funding of that committee a priority.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you. I will endeavour to summarize or highlight some of the areas the hon. members opposite have raised, and then supplementary to this, Mr. Chairman, I will come back and further provide a tabling to address additional concerns.

In the very first instance, in discussion about the supplementary estimates the hon. member has noted the caseload growth, the transition to regional authorities. As we all know, we have had some growing pains with those. However, there's been some significant benefit which has accrued even since the Auditor General reported. In other words, at the time of the formation, if I could take you back to May of 1999 to the formation of this ministry, we had an acting deputy minister. We did not have our finance officials. We did not have so many of the core services within the department itself coalesced in a fashion that was going to make sense and be able to interface quickly in this transition period with the children's authorities.

Although on the face of it the report from the Auditor General and other criticisms might appear that we have not done the work, actually other indicators will show that we have forged ahead. For example, on the matter of interauthority protocol the CEO forum of June 12 of 2000 actually confirmed a protocol that will see funds transferred in a fashion that will address many of the Auditor's concerns, particularly those in the financial management and reporting areas. The authorities, even since March of this year, with the guidance of our ministry executive team have made significant improvements in accounting for its transitions through the regional service centres. There are indications that the authorities today are following the protocol, as the charges recorded as receivables and payables now do match, something that the Auditor General had criticized.

Probably the most significant thing for me to comment on is the confusion that seems to have arisen over surpluses left with the authorities, and I think it's most appropriate to deal with this as one would a family where the incomes are different with each family member. If it's a husband and wife and groceries go up or the cost of fuel goes up and one budget is covering what another is not, then we see some transfers that have to be made. Similarly, too, the authorities originally had predicted population needs-based formulas, which did not reflect the actual needs within communities. An illustration in the northern communities was that foster families were less of a premium than they are in the surrounding urban areas.

So ultimately we have looked at the 18 authorities. Those that yielded total surpluses of \$5.6 million have been looking at ways with our department of retaining at least a portion of the surpluses and then applying these funds to meet their responsibilities. However, we are one department, and it would be irresponsible of us to have some with surpluses and some with deficits, as we are a one-service delivery agency to the assurance of all the authorities in Alberta, and we're working to make progress to make sure each child is well served, no matter where they are. So we will provide more, and I will be tabling very shortly the response that we have to the Auditor General's report relative to all the matters he raised.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the comments made by the hon. member on workload standards. That report has implications for many of the ministries that are attending here, quite specifically

Human Resources and Employment in the manner of welfare rates, and other members of the government who are addressing many of those concerns by not only examining the workload standards report, the caseload report, but seeing whether or not, with the work we've done this year improving standards, we've made considerable strides.

Mr. Chairman, no doubt the hon. members are aware that we added 200 staff this year to serve the needs of child and family services authorities, and although there is criticism about the amount of money staffing has received, this is a North American phenomenon, that we have not only a shortage of qualified degreed professionals for social services. We have a need – and it was agreed to by the association – largely because of some remote areas to include two-year educated professionals, who with team leaders have performed remarkably in the field. However, we continue to strive with our staff training to improve the experience of the staff, and we do recognize that we have a need for further staffing.

I'd like to comment about the First Nations and the Metis progress. The hon. member has highlighted suicide prevention as an important strategy. We have the additional capacity now of additional service workers in the field. Just yesterday at the child service conference in Banff . . .

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members of the committee, if you could talk without us hearing you, that would be very helpful. The noise is just slowly rising, not yet to a crescendo, but we're hoping not to reach that point. I wonder if we could engage in our conversations in a much quieter tone so that we can hear the minister and other members who are speaking.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Debate Continued

MS EVANS: Thank you. We would have added additional members to serve not only on reserves but in Metis settlements to try and determine what the causal circumstances are of depression, of those types of frustrations and situations that lead to suicide and other traumas within the family.

8:40

I'd like to comment a little bit and just briefly on the hon. member's highlight of liabilities within the department. We do recognize that there are some long-term debts associated with litigation that has been brought to bear on our department. There is a plan, working with the Minister of Justice, to try and reconcile those liabilities, and we will report further on that.

Further, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre talked about the employees in non-profit organizations. As the hon. member is no doubt aware, a number of the activities undertaken by the deputies of the respective departments who received some of the funding for contracted services have defined how those service dollars are to be released. The comments about it being a onetime funding and what is the future of the formula – I'd like to give the assurance to the hon. member that we have considered what the formula should be so that there is always a seamlessness once the contracts have been managed within government, so that we don't have gaps of people in contract managed positions. We have been working with the authorities to see how we can responsibly manage that as well. Some of the contracts we have dissolved and have moved to a fee-for-service basis, but the very illustration the hon. member brings forward of the needs of those staff to be compensated in a way that's comparable so that they retain staff is something that I would suggest my hon. colleagues in health and others are also very keenly

aware that we try and manage this within a framework that works. So I will provide that along with your indulgence of some of the comments that will come from the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, who actually led and managed the review of that particular issue.

I comment on and will be tabling later in this session the Social Care Facilities Review Committee report. Clearly, the issues the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview raises about what has been seemingly a less active committee are things which I think I can say categorically have been changed. We are working to make this committee a viable, well-resourced committee. The addition of Vice-Chairman Jean Wilkinson recently to help serve the committee's needs and the internal review of that committee itself and its own practices and policies has been considered. I would also confide that I have approached the Minister of Infrastructure about the possibility of having a member of his staff become a part of the review so that we not only look at those things that are qualitative in the social services facility reviews but look at those things that could address some of the facility issues.

Mr. Chairman, with your indulgence I will more thoroughly respond to the criticisms and comments and concerns raised by the hon. members opposite and provide that tabling in the House.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates for the Department of Children's Services, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating expense	\$46,372,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Would hon. members please give consideration to reverting to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

The hon. leader of the third party.

head: Introduction of Guests

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House a large number of guests who are visiting tonight. They are sitting in the public gallery and also, I guess, in the members' gallery. These are citizens who were opposed to Bill 11. They were last night present in very large numbers, close to 300 strong, at the Council of Canadians meeting to organize, to make sure that public health care in Canada is protected. So I'll ask all the visitors to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Supplementary

Estimates 2000-01

General Revenue Fund

(continued)

Infrastructure

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call upon the minister to make some opening comments and then invite questions and further comments.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to move supplementary estimates this evening of \$419 million for our department, Alberta Infrastructure. It'll be allocated as follows: \$170 million for health care facilities; \$235 million for the school facilities program, K to 12; \$6 million for postsecondary facilities; and \$8 million for the infrastructure Canada/Alberta program, otherwise known as ICAP. I'd be pleased to answer any questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real privilege to get up this evening and raise some questions and talk about the supplementary estimates for the Department of Infrastructure.

I guess the recognition is that in the past number of years infrastructure quality, upgrading, and maintenance and the development of new facilities across the province has kind of lagged behind as we've acted to balance budgets and that. There's a lot of questions that come up when new programs are funded. We recognize that the government has added quite a number of dollars to the different facility groups in terms of health care, education, and basic infrastructure for local governments, but what comes back a lot of times when we talk about these is exactly how that decision-making process is implemented and what kind of priorities are put on it.

On behalf of the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, who's had a couple of tours around the province talking to people about infrastructure, I wanted to raise a couple of issues that she was made aware of in those tours that effectively relate to how the priorities are set and how the decisions are made in terms of the actual request by a local government or a local authority to the government and then the actual decision-making that's made within the government. For example, the Brooks separate school board has been asking for a school to replace their crowded facility in terms of St. Joseph's Collegiate, yet the government is not acting on their requests. So how do they get a feel for how the priorities are put in place?

They've given the government basically a couple of different alternatives, the option of a new facility or an upgrade revision of a county building that's there that can be turned into a school, but then they have to have some of the support facilities, like gymnasiums, that go with it. So these are the kinds of issues they raised.

You also see issues coming up in terms of some of the priorities that are given to other activities, especially with respect to safety within some of the communities in terms of how do they get upgrades on intersections or how do they get new bridges. These come from some of the areas when they have to look at how they deal with bridges over major rivers. For example, the county of Newell wants a new upgraded bridge over the Bow River. They want to know why these kinds of requests are not getting the priority that they feel they express when they talk to the government.

I guess some of the others don't show up – maybe they'll come under the Canada/Alberta infrastructure program – but communities like Gleichen have been asking for an upgraded water treatment plant so they can have fresh potable water in the community. Most everybody in that community now has to use bottled water, and they want to know how the priorities are put on in making the decision to upgrade that. I think there might be some complications there in the context of this First Nations community because there would have to be some federal participation in those kinds of decisions. Still, we have a responsibility to make sure that all our citizens in Alberta do have access to potable water and the kind of infrastructure that's possible to deal with those kinds of things and the needs of the communities.

8:50

I guess the other area that some of the counties were asking about was how they deal with getting priority put on the commitment that's there from the irrigation districts to maintain the bridges across the irrigation canals. It gets to be a kind of nonresponsive negotiation process when they have to deal with the irrigation district, and what role can the government play in doing that?

So in many ways, Mr. Chairman, what we're kind of asking for is clarification here, very much like we heard in Children's Services, in terms of how the formulas work to put the priorities on so that the bodies in those communities responsible are actually making requests. When the response comes back, it doesn't have the same kind of prioritization that they sent in. So that's kind of the issue.

We look at it in the context also of some of the issues of safety that have come up. You know, we're hearing a lot about the intersection of highway 36 and highway 1 outside Brooks. There were a number of accidents there in the last couple of years. Why is it that this intersection has not received priority for upgrading? We've seen another one at 22X and 24 just east of Calgary, where in the last two or three weeks there have been a number of serious accidents.

Here it's a matter of how the government goes about making users of those intersections aware that all of a sudden we've gone from a straight-through highway to now having a stop sign on it. People are running that stop sign. What is it that has to be done, or what kind of information can be conveyed in terms of warning signals? We see that a lot of the cities, when they change an intersection, will have a whole series of signs up along the street coming up to it talking about new signals or a new stop sign or this kind of thing. I drive that highway 24 outside Calgary quite frequently, and all they did was put in a few rumble strips, but some of the highways are such that rumble strips just sound like normal wear on the road.

So we want to have some signs put up to kind of warn people that there has been a change in that intersection, that there is a stop sign coming and that they need to be aware of that and start slowing down so they can actually do what the sign says when they get there and prevent these accidents that occur, because those deaths are really unfortunate. Mr. Chairman, we not only need to look at making these kinds of changes; we also need to talk about an awareness campaign or education programs for a period of time where people can become aware of the fact that we've had some changes.

Some other issues have come up in terms of how the \$235 million has been allocated for school infrastructure, new construction and upgrades on facilities. How do these upgrades get justified in the context of the school utilization formula? Now, there are a number of communities – and this has been especially critical in Calgary, with all their new development. We see that the school board or the school division in its entirety has a utilization factor that doesn't justify, from a provincial context, saying: we need to have new construction. Yet when you go out and look at the growth that's occurring in kind of the peripheral communities, the new subdivisions that are going in, there are no schools out there to serve these communities.

We were aware the other day of the comments made by the Minister of Learning on the attractiveness of some of these minischools, basically kindergarten to grade 3, that are being put up on a temporary basis. What we need to do also, if we're going to start doing that, is look at the possibilities of giving the school boards notification of what they mean by temporary. I look at some of the facilities that I've had to deal with, and the temporary buildings now are probably just about as old as I am, Mr. Chairman, and, you know, I'm beginning to show a little bit.

What we have to do is start looking at what are the requirements in terms of expectations so that they can build these time-sensitive planning processes into their budgeting and their decision-making. So if we're going to give you a temporary building, we'll say, well, that's got to last you for 10 years, or until a growth pattern is established or until some other condition occurs. They need to have that kind of information conveyed to them so that as they go through their own prioritization and their requests to the Minister of Infrastructure for new facilities or an upgrade on a facility, these kinds of things can actually become part of the constructive decision-making that these school boards go through and also in terms of the health authorities.

That's the kind of thing we have to start looking at in terms of clarifying some of the issues that come out. I know the \$419 million that now has been allocated will go some way to help the shortage, but we are still hearing from a lot of the health authorities and the school divisions that their facilities need to have upgrades to make sure they serve the needs the authority has been given, the mandate to provide to Albertans. I guess in a primary way safety has to be looked at and then the issue of capacity and the how to deal with expansion kinds of issues that go on as well.

So those are some of the questions that are being asked of my colleague as she travels around Alberta to deal with infrastructure.

I've got a couple of points that I'd also like to raise in terms of, say, the school formula in terms of how they look at defining the space allocations. We're hearing from some of the schools in my area that they're considering the stage in the auditorium as a classroom. Well, does that mean they're going to have to move desks in there for the day and then take them out during the drama class so that the students can have access to it? Or is it the sense that they figure the school should be providing enough utilization so that the stage is used at all times, so that the classroom the students came out of while they were taking their drama or their speech or maybe their music or whatever and using the stage can have somebody else in it taking history, math, or English, those kinds of courses?

This is the kind of clarification that we need to look at. We've heard an awful lot about hallway medicine. Well, we don't want to start dealing with stage-based education. This is not the kind of thing we want to start moving toward.

I guess the other issue I wanted to raise was a comment that was made at one of the standing policy committees in terms of a presentation made by the Alberta Irrigation Projects Association. When they were requesting some clarification on the infrastructure dollars for their canal rehabilitation, there were some suggestions made that they should be applying for money under the Canada/Alberta infrastructure program.

I guess the question there is: how do these extra levels of government apply for the infrastructure grants when they cross over a number of identified jurisdictions within the programs, say a number of counties and municipal districts? Or when they get into serving the water delivery needs of some of the local towns and villages in southern Alberta, how do we get the joint action so that the irrigation district has some authority to actually put forward a request for some of those Canada/Alberta infrastructure dollars? Assuming that was the implication of that comment when they said they had to get joint funding through the Canada/Alberta program in the federal government's infrastructure commitment, will the provincial government help the irrigation districts lobby the federal government to get them classified as an identity that can apply for some of these infrastructure dollars?

It has normally only been done between the three levels of government, but in Alberta now we're putting together a number of what are effectively cross-jurisdiction, quasi-governmental bodies

like the regional irrigation districts, the health authorities, the children's services authorities. You know, some of our school divisions now cross local boundaries as we've gone through the amalgamation. How does that cross-identified municipal government level work when we're trying to deal with what has been defined as a three-level program, yet we're now effectively having four levels of government?

9:00

Those are some of the questions that we wanted to raise. I know some of my other colleagues have questions, and I'll cede the floor to allow them to have a chance. It's important that we recognize that even though the \$419 million that's been allocated above the allocation of the spring budget go quite a ways towards addressing the issues of infrastructure, what we really need to do as we allocate these extra dollars is make sure that the decision-making process is transparent and that the partner groups – whether it's the health authorities, the school divisions, the local counties, municipalities, urban municipalities as well, or, even in the case that I brought up, the irrigation districts – understand how these infrastructure dollar decisions are made and that they feel they've been listened to and that they've been heard as they make their requests and find out that the actual dollars being allocated don't follow that request, don't follow the same priorities.

It seems strange to me to be sitting in Edmonton and saying that I have a better view of the priorities of a school division or a health authority when they're asking for dollars for infrastructure. They're the people on the ground. They're the people mandated to provide the service, and we should be respecting their own priorities and their own decisions in terms of which requests they make.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I'll cede the floor and let some of the other members raise their concerns about the infrastructure area as well.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, we have a few more questions before you answer. Is that agreeable?

MR. STELMACH: Sure.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have a few questions this evening for the hon. minister. Whenever we consider the grand sum of \$419 million, we cannot take that lightly, particularly in regard to what the Auditor General wrote in his recent report regarding the Infrastructure department.

Now, I believe, Mr. Chairman, that I'll start with the smallest sum this evening and go to the largest for the hon. minister. For the \$8 million that's Alberta's share of the Canada/Alberta infrastructure program for the year 2000-2001 I have the following questions. What programs will be targeted? Will municipalities submit proposals for money, or will the government choose programs from its own priority list? Also, will municipalities be permitted to pool funds for a joint project? For instance, let's say waterworks or an irrigation canal.

The next amount is \$6 million. This amount is to assist, as I understand it, with the construction of the information and communications technology, ICT, centre at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. This, as I understand it, is going to permit an increase in student enrollment by up to a thousand students. The students are going to be educated in the high-demand information technology fields. Now, this is only a small part of the total cost of that project. As I understand, Mr. Chairman, it's in the range of \$52 million in total costs. That figure comes to mind.

However, in light of what's written in this year's Auditor Gen-

eral's report regarding the University of Calgary and the problem they're having with construction contracts there – and last year in the Auditor General's report there were significant flags raised regarding the University of Alberta. This is money that belongs to the taxpayers of this province, and I would like to know from the hon. minister what accounting procedures his department has in place to ensure that contract administration on this project is adequate and the mistakes that were pointed out at both the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta are not repeated. A sign of a complacent government is one that is careless with the bottom line. History, I'm afraid, has a tendency to repeat itself, and after what happened and after it was reported here, we have to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

Now, my hon. colleague from Lethbridge-East was talking about the school facilities evaluation project, and all hon. members of this Assembly realize the work that was done in the past by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, ably assisted by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow. They went about the province. They surveyed the entire school system for mechanical and structural deficiencies. I would then like to know from the hon. minister exactly what recommendations the department is planning on taking from that report and spending a portion of the \$235 million on.

We realize that there are growth pressures. Renovation and modernization backlogs need to be taken care of. There are schools in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar – Kenilworth junior high comes to mind. I was visiting there earlier this month, and incredibly, Mr. Chairman, you could see through the cinder block wall from the principal's office to the corridor. It wasn't a little beam of light. You could actually see through the wall. Their criteria, how this money is to be spent, on what schools and where, are very, very important.

We have schools, not only in my constituency, where the rain enters the roof and channels off the edge of the blackboard. Mr. Chairman, some hon. members may think this may reduce house-keeping costs because there's going to be less chalk dust, but I'm afraid this is a problem. Whether we want to realize it or not, that's up to the hon. members across the way. This is a problem. It's a backlog, and it has to be taken care of, but it has to be taken care of in a manner that's fair to all areas of the province. I'm not convinced that this money is going to be shared equally. Whether a constituency votes for an hon. member of the opposition or whether they vote for a member of the government, this has to be dealt with.

The sum of

\$170,000,000 for health care facilities capital projects to address waiting list pressures, new capital projects to improve access to acute care, and for priority infrastructure maintenance and upgrade needs.

Well, is this going to improve health care for Albertans? As one of my constituents addressed to me: Mr. MacDonald, this is the government's blink money, and this blink money is not going to fool me. I said to this individual: are you sure about this? "Yes." Mr. Chairman, I can only assume that some of this money – and the hon. minister can correct me if I'm wrong – is going to the expansion of the Royal Alex. This individual went on to say to me: "It's not until the next election cycle. The government is planning to make a big announcement now, but they're not going to open this facility until before the next election in 2005. This, Mr. MacDonald, is simply blink money, because the government realizes they had to blink."

9:10

The citizens, whether they're in the galleries tonight or whether they're going to read *Hansard* tomorrow, know exactly what's going on. They know what has happened to our health care system. Will \$170 million restore confidence in this system? I question that, Mr. Chairman, but it is welcome.

We need to ensure that the north half of the province has an adequate children's hospital. Is this going to be addressed in this sum of money? We need to consider many, many ways to improve the health care system. During the health care privatization act debate that went on – pardon me; the Health Care Protection Act – there was a lot of discussion about the number of beds that were available in the Capital health authority. The Capital health authority officials themselves said: don't worry; we have bed capacity to last until the year 2008 at current population projections. We have the beds. We don't have the personnel to stand beside them and tend to the sick. Who are we to believe: the people who are running the regional health authority or this document?

We're suddenly before an election. Health care is the number one concern of Albertans. I'm afraid that I do not think this amount of money, Mr. Chairman, is going to restore the trust of Albertans in this current government to deliver publicly funded, accessible health care for all its citizens.

Mr. Chairman, before I conclude my remarks, there's one little point that I would like to make regarding the school facilities and the upgrading. Two years ago my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods was determined to see education funding improve, not only for the students but to restore the structural integrity of the schools. Question after question was asked, and members from across the way would stand up and say: "\$600 million" – it was really \$200 million each year for a three-year period – "is enough. What do you want?" Well, when I see this figure, I have to conclude that it is a silent acceptance that that \$600 million was wrong. That figure was wrong. Hon. member after hon. member stood up and said: "What do you want? It's \$600 million." Well, obviously, this is an admittance that that was wrong. When I see these figures, I have to think that this is, as one of my hon. colleagues calls it, planning by the seat of your pants before an election.

With those comments I will anxiously await the minister's response, but I will cede the floor to my colleague from Edmonton-Centre. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Yes, I understand the need to be brief.

There's one issue that I wanted to . . . [interjection] Oh, my goodness. Well, we really needed more time to go through this amount of money. A billion dollars we are trying to get through in four hours or something. It's just not enough time for scrutiny and questions to be asked.

Nonetheless, we're spending \$235 million for school facilities under the Infrastructure program "to address growth pressures and renovation and modernization backlog as identified through the School Facilities Evaluation Project."

Now, I am the MLA for a downtown area in a metropolitan area, so most of my schools are classified as inner city. They're older schools, and I don't have as large a population of children as many of my colleagues in here do. We have few kids but great diversity, which brings its own pressures. I go into my schools as often as possible, and one of the things that I'm hearing perhaps is this: the school facilities evaluation project has different criteria than the criteria that's used by the school boards to determine who's next on the list or who gets what kind of money or what priority rating they're getting.

As one principal put it to me, "You know, it's the engineers deciding what's going on here," and that may not necessarily be the way the school or the school board wants to approach it. So somehow with this money going in here, we've now got, I guess, not

dueling criteria, because obviously in this case the Department of Infrastructure is the piper and they get to call the tune, but I think that I'm questioning that. Certainly I'm questioning it on behalf of some of my schools.

These are all older schools. They were all built very close to the turn of the last century, and almost none of them have had any kind of really serious renovation since then. I have schools that have floors that are badly in need of repair and upgrading. I have schools that had carpets put in in the '60s and '70s, and they're still in there. I have schools with lots of chalkboards, lots of chalk, and all of that is still in the air, and with the carpets and the flooring it's all still hanging in the air. These schools have old air circulation, so it's not moving all of this respiratory debris out of the schools. So when we're looking at a standard of what is healthy and safe for our kids to be learning in, somehow that criteria isn't coming into place here with these school buildings.

In particular, I have a concern about St. Catherine community school, they call it, in Edmonton-Centre. Now, that school is certainly experiencing all of those difficulties, and it really is creating a respiratory crisis, if you want to call it that, for the students who are going there. I'm sure the minister has heard of the boiler that sometimes works and sometimes doesn't, and the principal was trying to be fair with me and said, "Well, what was in the paper in September, you know, maybe was a bit worse than in fact it was," but the truth is this is a school with a boiler that truly sometimes works and sometimes doesn't. We just can't have that there.

I don't understand why we ended up with these competing criteria. Why wasn't what Infrastructure was doing worked in as well with the criteria that have already been established by the school boards? Every time I've asked questions about this, I've been told by the members opposite that they just go from the list that the school board or the school division provides. Well, that doesn't seem to be what's happening here, and I'm getting some schools left out. I'm pleading my case on behalf of that school in particular, but I'm asking the question about why it's happening. That's the issue that I most wanted to raise under this.

Given that we're talking about almost half a billion dollars being expended in this department, it's very frustrating not to be able to have a full and open debate on this. I mean, there are a number of recommendations that were brought forward by the Auditor General that haven't been addressed, and I didn't even have a chance to look at how the money that's being spent here relates to the key performance measurements that were put forward by the department in the budget from this spring.

Having said that, thank you.

MR. STELMACH: Okay. Very briefly to try and answer all of the questions that came up with respect to the three major components of the Infrastructure department. With respect to roads, bridges, and above-ground interchanges, there's quite a process that's followed involving not only the municipalities but also a review of major categories, that of safety of course.

The second is the review of the traffic warrants, the counts, and also to try and project into the future where some of the future growth will take place. There have been quite significant changes in traffic patterns in the province over the last three, four years, only because there had been unexpected growth in some key areas in the province. I'll give you examples: along the highway 2 corridor, Edmonton to Calgary, huge growth in Grande Prairie and some towards the south in Alberta, around the Lethbridge area and along highway 3.

9:20

Now, all the municipalities put together their priorities. We look at those priorities very carefully, and the individual priorities from the municipalities are then prioritized, go into the hopper, and are looked at for the overall provincial ranking for priorities.

One issue raised today was with respect to interchanges. There are a number of interchanges that will be going in over the next three years and a number of bridges. Now, with the bridges it will be over 85 bridge structures, and we're working very closely with the contractors, the engineers, and also the bridge suppliers, because as a result of that much growth in that particular area, we have to be very careful that we don't start creating inflation, especially on the span material.

Now, bridges are not only those over irrigation canals, over the rivers and creeks, but also a bridge structure is an interchange structure as well. The most significant number of structures will be in the north/south trade corridor, on Deerfoot, and the two major ones here. The biggest one will be where Cheapo Joe's is on Calgary Trail South. That will be part of the Anthony Henday, and the Ellerslie one is a little farther. The reason for two interchanges is that at Cheapo Joe's it'll be a California-style flyover, and it'll be the original in Alberta, quite frankly.

Now, on secondary highways we're still following all of the input from municipalities. They rank their priorities. In fact, today we had a number of meetings at AAMDC, and a number of municipalities are coming with shared priority lists, which greatly enhances moving their projects forward, because they're now tying two regions together and linking them with a good road.

On the schools there are a couple of things here. With respect to the audit, I would say that Alberta without a doubt is the only jurisdiction in Canada that completed such a very comprehensive condition audit of all the existing 1,460 schools. The audit was done by professionals, engineers and architects that followed a set of criteria that was put together by the professional community involving the school boards as well as the Alberta School Boards Association. They applied that same criteria to all the schools. The comment was made: well, why don't we use the criteria established by school boards? Well, what happened then was we didn't have the same criteria, so we had mixed information coming from school boards saying: well, this school in our jurisdiction is definitely the worst. But compared on a provincial basis, it wasn't as bad as some other school in another jurisdiction.

They rated in points, I believe, of up to about 1,200 and then down. We've covered off, I believe, the schools from 1,000 to 1,200. Those modernizations have been awarded. We're chiseling away at the 800 to 900. We've also given all school boards an additional \$40 million in BQRP to deal with the smaller modernizations, those on the condition audit of roughly 700 points and down, because these would be small maintenance projects. Now, that's with modernization. Some school boards, now that they have pretty well an idea of the cost of modernization of some of the schools, are now wondering if all of the schools in their jurisdiction should remain open or if should they rationalize some of the schools in a particular subdivision. Let's say that there are five schools. Could we work with three schools and have three good, very well modernized schools with all the amenities, including the best technology? Especially if we have five schools and most of the students are bused in, it doesn't make sense to of course modernize all of them if students are coming from different areas.

On the new school construction, we're in the midst now of a fairly extensive subcommittee review, which is chaired by Mr. George Nicholson, who was the chair of the Edmonton public. There are a number of recommendations coming forward. The report has been

put in draft form. It's now with the school boards to look at. One of the changes that we're looking at is maybe a sectoral utilization formula. You would take a large grid like the city of Calgary or Edmonton and say: well, it's not reasonable to take a student from Mill Woods all the way to Castle Downs, so why don't we maybe break it down to quadrants and then look at the utilization rate in those quadrants?

As well, they're looking at how utilization was calculated before. I mean, do we use cafeterias for instruction? No. School gymnasiums? No. Gymnasium stages? No. So we're going through all of that. The comment I want to make is that it's coming from the bottom up. It's not coming from the top down. The school boards are working out the differences amongst themselves to see where they can come to an agreement on a lot of these points, because they also understand that policy for rural may be slightly different than for urban as well. We certainly don't want to bus students three hours one way in a rural community. It just doesn't make sense. So some of those schools will definitely have to remain open. That will be coming forward for further review. Once the boards have their stab at it, then it's going to come through the standing policy committee. Then it will become a policy that we will then follow in further evaluation of new school projects.

There was a comment made here: are we making all of these monetary infrastructure decisions by putting projects into only government ridings? We've got to kind of smirk at it, because we have the School Buildings Board that makes all these decisions. They are people appointed by statute to a committee, and they look at the evidence that's presented by various school boards in terms of accessing the funds available for modernization and for new school construction. So if their school is high on the list in the audit, it's going to be modernized. If it hasn't been modernized today, it's on the list, and it will be done.

The ICAP. There are three categories. It's about \$106 million that's going to go through the RTG, the rural transportation grant, to municipalities. That's going to top up with dollars they have available to date. That's about \$106 million. There's a pool of funds of \$30 million and \$21 million. The first priority, and again as agreed to by AUMA and AAMDC, is that these go into green projects, be it water or wastewater related. The \$21 million is an amount there that could be for projects that are nominated by either the federal government or the province.

There was a comment raised about: can an irrigation district apply, or can maybe some other organization apply? Yes, they can. If they work with a municipality or if they're not even involved in a municipality but are, like, an irrigation district, they can actually apply for the money as long as they pay their third, because it's going to be one-third/one-third/one-third. The problem is that our money will be over three years because we can't forecast out six years. The federal money will be doled out over a period of six years, so there's going to be a gap, and somebody is going to be carrying part of those projects. I suspect it will be the municipalities or whoever applies for the money.

I think that as quickly I can answers the questions raised, but I'll check *Hansard*. There may be something there that I've missed, and I'll get back to you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates for the Department of Infrastructure, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$419,000,000

9:30

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Development.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to present these estimates here tonight. The \$98 million requested in the supplementary estimate will provide partial funding for the \$233 million farm income support package announced last month. Farmers are being hit by continued income and cash flow problems, and this onetime funding will provide emergency support to Alberta farmers and ranchers. The support package consists of a \$180 million farm income assistance program supplement payment of \$6 per acre for all cultivated acres. This is in addition to the \$4.29 paid in March of 2000. New program components totaling \$51 million will provide \$3 per acre on native pasture and payments to beekeepers of \$3 per registered colony in the year 2000.

The income support package also provides low-interest loans with payment deferral to eligible farming operations under the Alberta farm income disaster loan program. The cost of this initiative is \$2 million. The department is reallocating \$135 million from other ministry programs to fund the balance of the income support package. The two major sources of this reallocated funding are reduced payments to the Agriculture Financial Services Corp. for the farm income disaster program and for crop insurance. AFSC will need less money from the department than was originally budgeted for several reasons. One, the new federal/provincial agreement regarding cost sharing of FIDP was not finalized prior to the completion of the 2000-2001 budget. Therefore, the budget included the full cost of funding FIDP without any federal contribution. The new cost-sharing arrangement results in a lower provincial requirement for FIDP than was originally budgeted.

FIDP claims for previous tax years are lower than originally forecast. The resulting unused funds will be reallocated to partially fund the new program that we announced in March.

Also, the \$131 million farm income assistance program acreage payment in March of 2000 reduced the farm income disaster program liability for this tax year and thus has freed up budget dollars for the new program. Funding flowing from these new programs during the calendar year will also help reduce the farm income disaster program liability for the taxation year 2000.

Fourth and finally, crop insurance payments from the department to AFSC represent the province's share of crop insurance premiums. Lower participation and reduced value of crops insured has resulted in the province's share of crop insurance premiums being lower than was budgeted. The unused budget money will also be applied to the new program.

I would also like to mention that the support package provided an advance of up to 50 percent of the estimated eligible payment under FIDP for the 2000 crop year where there is an extreme reduction in farm income. Except for some minor administrative costs, there is no extra cost associated with this advance payment.

Even with the current safety net programs such as FIDP, crop insurance, and the net income stabilization account producers across the province have said that they will be hard pressed to meet 50

percent of their cash costs this year. It is important, Mr. Chairman, to point out that FIDP, crop insurance, and NISA are programs that are designed to help farmers through short-term drops in income. The new program funding is required because we have experienced a prolonged period of reduced income in the agricultural sector. This new program along with the advancement of FIDP payments puts much-needed money in farmers' hands. The majority of the money will be paid to farmers before the end of the calendar year.

Mr. Chairman, the supplementary estimates send a message that the agriculture sector remains a high priority for this government, so I would certainly encourage all members to support this request for some \$98 million.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Yes. We support the supplementary request, Mr. Chairman. This is something that farmers have said on a number of occasions they needed, and basically it shows that the programs that have been in place have not been adequate to cover the needs, as the minister said, of long-term downturns in price, downturns in the economic well-being of the agriculture community. A lot of this is caused by the unwarranted subsidies that are going on from the U.S. and the European Community that depress world prices. We don't have the treasury in Canada that the Americans or the Europeans do to provide that, so we have to provide programs that work to support farmers on a need basis and keep them sustainable while we can deal with the negotiations that are necessary to bring about some kind of rational approach to the world agriculture situation.

But with those kinds of positive comments on the side of the support that's out there, there are a couple of questions that still come up in terms of how the effectiveness of the programs work and the farmers that are actually receiving the benefit from these programs. We recognize that FIDP combined with the acreage payment program works kind of in tandem as well as with the NISA program that supports through the federal programs. What happens, then, is that we end up with a situation, especially the way it worked out this year, where the government made their initial payment in the spring, based on the – what do you want to call it? – registered farmer for the different acres eligible, based on the 1999 permit books or application and proof of farming activity as substantiated through the process.

The fall payment, the \$6 additional payment, was made based on the same acreage identification that occurred in the spring. In other words, a farmer that farmed land in 1999 was asked to identify their acres in the spring of 2000, and they were given a payment to supplement their income from the '99 year. I've had a number of phone calls from farmers who have transferred the title of some of those acres by sale or through new lease agreements on operational ownership of those lands. What's happening now is because they were not the registered owner in the spring, they're not getting the money to help them through this year's low commodity prices, low rainfall, high rainfall in the north that prevented them from harvesting, or the high energy prices that effectively drove their costs of production up. They're asking why this happened.

As I listened to the minister just now make the explanation, he's talking about these dollars being paid based on that, and then he's also talking about making a long-term commitment to the agriculture community. Does that long-term commitment mean that effectively in the next fiscal year, the next tax year for farmers, the next crop year for farmers they'll be getting payments to cover the higher costs and the lower prices and the weather uncertainties for the 2000 crop year? I guess the question the farmers are raising is this: if they farm the land this year, they are the ones that have to pay the

expenses this year, they're the ones that are receiving the low prices or the low yields because of the disasters, then why is it that they're not the ones getting the \$6 payment when it comes out this fall? This is a real issue for some of them.

Now, the minister in his comment said that this is a long-term program, that they'll be dealing with it until the long-term situation improves. Does that mean that farmers who had a difficult time this year will be getting the payment next year? Will they be going through a different acreage identification program for next year so that farmers who are actually farming the land this year are getting the money to support that activity? This has really caused a concern in the agriculture community, because what's happening is that they can't go back to the previous owner and say: "Oops. Sorry. We bought the land. Now they're paying you for farming the land, but we're actually farming it. Give us the money." It doesn't happen, Mr. Chairman. Nobody passes that on.

9:40

Maybe this is what we need to do: start an education program for farmers and for the legal community saying that starting as of this time, if anybody transfers agriculture land either through sale or through lease agreement, there had better be a contingency clause written into that, that if there are any new government payments that come after this date, even though they're based on the ownership or the operational characteristics prior to this date, they accrue to the individual who actually farmed the land after this date. Maybe we should be putting forward an education program for all the lawyers out there saying that this needs to be put into any sale agreement from now on so that money actually gets to the individuals, to the farmers who have lost money this year because of farming circumstances.

I guess the other issue that was raised on a number of occasions was the adequacy of the farm income disaster program and the crop insurance combination. In dealing with the situations that came up because of the drought in southern Alberta, we saw that the crop insurance this year was not available for pastureland, hay land, forages. Farmers were saying: "What happened? In previous years we had the option of crop insurance on our forage lands. This year it's gone." The minister now, in his announcement of this program, said that they would be making sure there was a program available for next year, so we've got one year in between the \$3 acreage payment that came out that again may not go to the actual operator for this year. How do we deal with that in the context of getting the money in the hands of those basically livestock operators that were grazing those lands this year when they didn't have the option of crop insurance and they're not getting the \$3 payment as well for the native pasture issue? So these are the kinds of questions that come up as we look at basically the fairness of these programs and/or the timeliness of them.

If this is truly a program dedicated and directed to the income losses of the '99 crop/tax year for farmers and there will be a corresponding program next year for the 2000 crop/tax year, then we need to make farmers aware of that so they can go to their banker and say: "Look, we know there's a program coming for us next year because we had a bad year this year. Hold us over." Because right now bankers are telling people that based on this year's income received from the cropping activities or the agricultural activities plus the support from government, it's not enough to justify carrying them another year. Farmers are making those decisions and bankers are making those decisions on behalf of farmers. But if this is going to be something we need to be able to say is ongoing, it's long term until we see some kind of resolution in the international situation, then farmers need to be made aware of that.

I'm encouraged by the minister's comments tonight when he talked about this being a program that has to reflect the long-term needs of farmers. I hope what he's saying is that this kind of support will be available. If it's going to be available on a year-to-year basis, what we need to do is make some kind of provision so that it's more timely; in other words, the people who farm this year get it this year. That can be done by using the acreage identification list we already have and allow a window of opportunity for individuals to file a dispute of acreage claim or whatever you want to call it, a change of acreage claim. When the announcement was made by the minister this fall about the new \$6 payment, there could have been a two- or three-week period where individuals were required to notify Ag Financial Services as the administering agency for this of a request to have acres changed on that list. Then any of those acres could be put into a verification process. The rest of the acres in the province, which basically amount to probably 80 to 85 percent of the acres, would be paid in the same way they are now. So the other 15 percent, because it was requested by a farmer, would be given the option for review of ownership.

That's the only real concern that we have about the way this money is being allocated. It's really needed by the farmers, and we have to make sure that when we do put these programs in place, it's going to the farmer who needs the money, who was the farmer of record during the year to which the money is allocated.

Thank you very much.

MR. LUND: Mr. Chairman, I must make a few comments relative to the comments of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. He talked about the problem where land has changed hands from 1999 to the year 2000. I can assure you that we wrestled with this problem.

But let me tell the other side of the story. The fact is that when I toured the province – and I spent four days touring the drought areas – I was asked the question: when would you be able to come out with a program? My response was that I would aim to try to do something by the middle of October. Farmers consistently said to me: "That's not fast enough. We have a cash problem now, and we need the money by the 1st of October because that's when the bills start flowing in."

So we went back and looked at: how can we design this program to get the money out quickly? If we were to go with the individual that farmed in the year 2000, that meant that we would have to ask everybody – everybody – to put in a new application form. That meant no money in the year 2000. So we looked at what that means versus the 1 percent or less that changed hands. Do we penalize the 99 percent – they wouldn't get money – for the sake of the less than 1 percent that are changed? [interjection] Well, hon. member, you might not like the truth, but that's a fact. If you're going to pay to a different person, we've got no way of knowing who that person is without having everybody apply. So the fact is that that was the consideration.

Now, as far as this payment, another situation that plays into this is that the federal government owes us, owes Alberta farmers, about \$180 million, and that is based on 1999. If you multiply six times the 30 million acres, that's \$180 million, and it works out to \$6 per acre. So that's the amount of money the federal government owes us. They have offered us \$10 million. Basically that works out to 30 cents an acre. That's what the federal government has offered us. We don't expect that the federal government is going to pay the money, so the Alberta government on behalf of the federal government is paying the money. So those were the two reasons we went with 1999.

Hon. member, there is forage insurance. It's just pasture insurance that was discontinued. There is forage insurance. The pasture

insurance was discontinued for many reasons. Number one, it actuarially was not sound, so we either had to do something with the premiums or else continue to cross subsidize, and that wasn't acceptable.

Secondly, we constantly heard people complaining about the program. Farmers were not happy. It's a difficult one. We have not committed that we are going to have a pasture program next year. What it looks like we will probably be doing, because as you know, we're doing a complete review of the all-risk crop insurance – we may run some pilot projects because we've got to find a different way of assessing. This is just not working, what we had out there before. So we will be looking at possibly using a weather derivative. There are a number of things that we might be doing on a pilot project. But it's also interesting to note that even with pasture insurance, many farmers, many ranchers will get as much money out of the \$3 per acre as they would had they had pasture insurance. So it's not a complete wash, but at least it certainly goes a long way to cover the fact that they didn't have the pasture insurance.

9:50

I guess I find it rather frustrating, because it's been our objective all along to come up with some kind of programs that in fact would cover the risk, cover the disasters, and have them ongoing so we don't have to come back with these ad hoc – the hon. member's absolutely right. We're into a major problem with subsidies in the United States and the European Common Market. The treasuries in Canada can't and won't be able to match those subsidies, so we need to find a way, programs that will take the farmers through these very difficult times. The current crop insurance program doesn't do it. The NISA program without some modifications doesn't cut it. It's more of a retirement program as opposed to a risk management program. FIDP, while it works well for one or two years' disaster, doesn't work well over the longer period. We're working hard, and I invite the hon. member, if he's got some ideas on how we can design these programs so that they will work better for the farmer, we're only too happy to hear them and would encourage that kind of input.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to just ask a few questions. I've been made the agriculture critic for the third party, even though I can't even grow dandelions, but there was a 50 percent chance that I would be the agriculture critic, so I am. I just have a couple of questions for the minister.

I note that the government is complaining about being excluded from federal farm assistance, and I would like to know why the government did not pursue alongside the governments of Saskatchewan and Manitoba the farm assistance, particularly not co-operating with those two provinces as vigorously as they might have done, and how much the minister feels this may have cost Alberta farmers, which is now being made up in part from the \$98 million additional subsidy.

I would also ask another question, Mr. Chairman, and that is why the supplemental payment to farmers is being given to all farmers based on their acreage and not depending on need.

MR. LUND: Quickly. On the issue about the lobby that occurred in Ottawa, the fact is that I was there ahead of them. I was ahead of those two Premiers. I met with the federal minister of agriculture ahead of those two Premiers. We were there. We did what we could. It's got nothing to do with the presentations. It's all got to do with two federal Liberal cabinet ministers. Those two Premiers

didn't do anything; it all had to do with two federal cabinet ministers, Goodale and Axworthy. Those are the people that got that money for Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

As far as paying everybody, one of the things we have great difficulty with is that when you try to target, the process gets extremely long. You've got to fill out a lot of forms, and the administration cost goes up. As well, we have already two, actually three major programs that are targeted. The FIDP program, the crop insurance program, and the NISA program are all targeted programs. So it just really didn't make any sense that we would design another program, spend a whole bunch of time – incidentally, there would still be no money out there if in fact we had gone that route. With the route we took, 90 percent of the money is already in the hands of the farmers.

THE CHAIRMAN: Having heard the supplementary estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$98,000,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Community Development

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister will make a few comments to begin, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm requesting \$63,588,000 in total extra funding for the following. The first request is for \$775,000 for a grant under the nominal sum disposal policy. This is for the Northern Lights regional library headquarters. This increase is surplus neutral and has no impact on the province's bottom line.

The second request is for \$483,000 for amortization expenses related to the Western Heritage Centre. This is a case where the amortization does not increase the spending target for the ministry, but for the current year authorization for increased spending on an expense base is required.

The third one is a request for \$50 million for centennial legacy projects, which I'm sure all members are duly familiar with by now.

The fourth request is for \$10 million, targeted onetime funding for seniors supportive housing incentive program.

The final request is for \$2.33 million to fund new and existing units in the rent supplement program.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. [interjection] No, thank you. I've got way too many issues I want to raise.

The first issue I'd like to look at is the \$483,000 for the amortization expense related to the Western Heritage Centre. Now, I've raised this issue a number of times with the minister. In fact, it was

raised before my time, and I'll just bring up a couple of examples of that.

Questions asked in question period on Wednesday, March 16 of '94 to the deputy Premier, and the response from the then deputy Premier was:

There are dollars in the current fiscal year, which will end March 31, 1994, and there are no dollars committed thereafter.

The issue was raised again with myself asking the question on Monday, February 28, 2000, in which the Minister of Community Development says that

the programming [is] still the responsibility of the centre. They will be funding it all. There isn't any Community Development money going in there . . . [and any] maintenance is looked after through Infrastructure.

Those are the minister's own words, and that was around the budget debates in this fiscal year.

So all of these assurances that there's no money coming from Community Development, certainly no money for programming, and if there's any infrastructure money or maintenance money, it would come through Infrastructure, and here I am in a supplementary supply where there's \$483,000 coming out of Community Development. Did the minister not anticipate this in February of 2000 when the budget was brought forward? If not, then why all these other assurances that there's no additional money going into the Western Heritage Centre?

Let's look at another one. Tuesday, February 29, 2000:

We now own the building. The people look after the programming, so there is no money allocated in this budget for the Western Heritage Centre, period,

says the minister. And here we are, money going to the Western Heritage Centre. So exactly what is this money for, why wasn't it anticipated, and why is it contravening many, many reassurances from the minister, past and previous, that no money would come from the Alberta government going into the Western Heritage Centre?

10:00

Let me be clear. I like the Western Heritage Centre. I've been there. It's a great place. But what's the deal here? The government says that they're not going to put money into it, and then there's money going into it. So where's the plan? Where's the justification? What's going on here? That's the Western Heritage Centre.

Okay. Let's look at the \$10 million that's going into seniors' housing. Now, I try hard to keep up with all these spending announcements that come out of the government, but frankly, at the rate we're going here, since May 6 until November, there have been about four pages that I have notes on of different announcements. So my question is: is the seniors' housing and lodge accommodations of \$10 million that was announced on August 31, 2000, the same money or different money than the seniors' supportive housing incentive program that was announced two weeks later, on September 12, 2000, also for \$10 million? Is it the same money that was announced twice in two different press releases, or is it two different sets of money for \$10 million? If it's two different sets of money for \$10 million, where's the other \$10 million? I only see 10 coming out of Community Development, who is responsible for seniors' housing. So if there's an extra \$10 million, where is it and which department?

MR. DICKSON: It's the old coin on a string trick.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yeah. It's a good one. Or maybe you just keep announcing it over and over again, and eventually people think you've spent \$10 billion on this. I don't know.

When we're looking at seniors' housing, exactly how many projects are going to be funded? Which projects or partnerships will be funded out of this? Is the minister able to give us the number of beds or rooms or suites or mats on the floor that are going to be created from this one-time-only funding? In which housing markets are we expecting to see this? Is the seniors' supportive housing incentive program a private-sector partnership? Is this money going to the private sector to provide these, or is this being done by the government? Well, the minister will have time to respond to me.

I'm also interested in knowing how this announcement of the money – and please don't misunderstand me. Let me be very clear here. We need housing for seniors. We need affordable housing for seniors. We need low-income housing for seniors. But I'd like to know where the plan is. When I look at the key performance measures in the government and lottery fund estimates of 2000-2001, which is the year that we're in, and I look under seniors, Effectiveness of Information and Benefits Provided to Seniors, we're not even talking about housing in here. So when I look at the goals and the major strategies, the major strategies in relation to seniors are the study on the impact of aging. I'm reading this very quickly. There's nothing in here. I'm sorry; "efficient delivery of programs that meet the social housing needs of Albertans." Is that the strategy that's being met by this seniors' housing?

There's another item in here that's about "\$2,330,000 to fund new and existing units in the Rent Supplement program." Which of these is it? How is this fitting into the plan that's already been put forward by the government? Or, in fact, do we not have a plan? Do we just kind of chuck money at programs?

One of the things I'm seeing happen is that groups are identifying ongoing needs. They're saying, "This is how much money is needed for this." The government comes back and says: "You're not going to get that much money. You're going to get half or 25 percent of that or whatever." So the group tries to make do with that half or 25 percent or whatever it is. Then three months before the year-end the government comes along and says, "Oh, we are going to give you all of it." Well, at that point it's not that they can go back and do the salary increases or the long-term planning or any of the other things that they needed time to do. They end up going: "Oh, my God. How do we use up all this money in three months?" You buy things, which isn't what they really needed. They wanted to be able to run the programs. So I'm really frustrated with this throwing money at it, big chunks of money in a short period of time. It's not part of a plan. I can't see where this was in your plan from February of 2000, when that budget came forward. So how does that all work?

Let's look at the \$50 million for the Alberta centennial legacy projects. Now, this is one that's near and dear to my heart, and I have to say that certainly with two of the projects that received funding under this, I'm personally very pleased to see them get funding. We're aware that \$38 million – certainly I've seen the press release – out of that \$50 million has already been allocated, but I haven't been able to determine what were the criteria, what was the application process for groups to be able to get some of this money. It appears that the money was given out before any process was in place. So what about all those other groups that would like to have a chance at this pot of money? Thirty-eight million out of the \$50 million is already gone. So an interesting process was involved there.

Again, I'm very happy to see a number of projects that did get the money, but I say: what about all the rest of the projects? What about the projects that could've been done in Dunvegan, Calgary-Buffalo, Calgary-Fort, or Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan? None of those people even knew that this program was in place or that there was an application process, so how do they get in on this one? I think

I've even got a letter to the minister on that, asking how that all worked, and I haven't had a response yet.

So those very quickly were the major points that I wanted to raise around this, about that money for the Western Heritage Centre, the criteria and application process for the Alberta centennial legacy projects, the \$10 million for seniors' housing. Exactly what is it, and how many times has it been announced?

I've been at a meeting for the SHAC group where the minister was in attendance, and I know that he learned some things. It was good for him to get out from underneath the dome. A number of points were raised by that group. Have they been addressed in this funding to create new and existing units in the rent supplement program?

I'm sorry; I'm just going to go backwards briefly. When we look at the seniors' housing, did you consider any of the studies that have been brought forward from across Canada of seniors' housing needs? I did read the press release, and I have to admit to you that it was kind of confusing what exactly was being contemplated there. It was a lot of language and not very clear on what exactly was going to happen and how much was going to be put where.

We've got the Urban Futures Institute's report, Housing Alberta's Seniors in the Next 30 Years, by David Baxter and Andrew Ramlo. Was that sort of thing considered in this \$10 million? Because one-time-only funding for housing at \$10 million isn't going to take us very far. How far did you think you were going to get with it?

So very briefly in not enough time – and I apologize to Albertans out there that I haven't had enough time to really be able to scrutinize this and bring forward all the questions that I'd like to bring forward. But I'm aware of the press of time here and the other people that would like to speak to the issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring those questions forward, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to the responses either given now by the minister or I'll happily accept them in writing at a future date.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates of the Department of Community Development, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$63,588,000
10:10	

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Environment

THE CHAIRMAN: I wonder if we might have the Minister of Environment make his opening comments.

MR. JONSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wish to put before the committee the supplementary estimates of my department. I wish to indicate that our forest responsibilities account for the supplementary estimate I'm bringing forward to the committee. It comprises increased fire-fighting demands, improvements to airstrips used in fire fighting, and also the financial support that's needed to support the companies' efforts to manage the overall fire-fighting risk.

I think, in providing the background on the support for this particular supplementary estimate, it's important to note, Mr. Chairman, that our forest protection is based on a fast initial attack to minimize the size, damage, and impact of fires. This is especially important as communities and industrial and recreational activities increase in forested areas, and it's important to protect not only the forests but also those particular sites.

The 2000 forest fire season started with a continuation of the drying trend across the province which was experienced in both the 1998 and 1999 fire seasons. With precipitation in Alberta early in the year 2000 fire season, the fire hazard levels reached and surpassed those levels experienced in 1998 and 1999. Conditions were monitored daily as the beginning of the fire season approached. On October 23, actually, we made the decision to begin preparations for the fire season one month earlier than usual, commencing on March 1. From January to April 2000 there were more fires reported and a larger area burned in the protection area than in the same period for either of the previous two fire seasons. Dry conditions continued in certain parts of the province, particularly in the south and in certain spots in northern Alberta, and it was necessary to be prepared and to work to put out those fires and also to address some of the conditions which could have led to their spreading to larger areas.

Mr. Chairman, my department incurred heavy, extensive fire costs across the province over the year. This was further impacted by continued dry conditions in southwestern Alberta throughout the season. A very significant factor in all of this in terms of locations and fires was the very, very sizable late-summer fires near Blairmore, which were very serious and required a major effort in terms of overall forestry fire fighting.

Mr. Chairman, we're putting before you a supplementary estimate. Part of it is an increased funding requirement of \$29.8 million, and this is required to cover these unfunded costs that I've been referring to. As I think members of the Assembly are quite aware, the use of airplanes is increasingly deemed to be effective and provides very rapid response in terms of our fire-fighting effort. In the supplementary estimate there is a provision for \$1.2 million that was needed to upgrade airstrips used in the fire-fighting season. I think all in the Assembly would agree, Mr. Chairman, that we have to maintain safe airstrips and meet Transport Canada and Alberta Environment safety and environmental standards as we operate our water bombers and surveillance planes in this overall effort.

Mr. Chairman, before I conclude, I'd just like to mention that there's one other area of increased cost that is reflected in this overall estimate. This was for reimbursement of the increased holding and protection charges some forestry companies paid related to amendments to their forest management agreements. The companies involved here agreed to this increase but with the understanding that there would be reimbursement of a portion of these charges for the eligible expenditures actually made by the company in carrying out approved forest protection activities.

While this is not perhaps the ideal solution in terms of overall fire protection, it is, I think, a very important thing to note. That is, if we can get the co-operation of industry to work with us in terms of overall fire suppression, fire prevention matters, it will be of benefit to the overall forest industry and the overall situation in the province. So this partnership with the private sector, I think, is a very important one, and we have to recognize, Mr. Chairman, the extraordinary costs that were incurred there. Finally, I think that we also have in those proposed supplementary estimates, as I said, the proposal to reimburse companies for the efforts and the planning and the work they've done on their own to help with preventing and putting out forest fires of \$2 million.

Overall, Mr. Chairman, it is always a difficult task for government

to predict exactly what the needs are going to be in a given year for fire fighting. During this year they were higher than what was provided for in the overall budget. On the other hand, I think due to some very effective measures that were taken, they are lower, if I could put it that way, Mr. Chairman, than would have been the case if we hadn't been improving our overall efficiency as a department and our overall efficiency in this particular area of fire fighting.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to respond to the Environment estimates this evening and the additional program funding requirements as requested.

Mr. Chairman, there is no doubt that we support fire protection and forest protection based on a fast initial attack, which is the process this government has undertaken. However, we do have some concerns with some of the ways that the moneys are forecasted and managed in that regard. I would take us back a couple of years to when we saw the gutting of this particular department, particularly around protection areas, where we lost a great deal of the experience we had within the government in forest fire fighting. That loss came at a cost to us that I would suggest we are still paying today, that we see reflected sometimes in these increased costs.

I agree with the minister that it's very difficult to predict what the fire suppression costs are going to be for the year, and I agree with the minister when he says that it's important to have a fast attack and to maintain the necessary supplies and equipment associated with that. But we have to recognize that we are in a situation in this province for not one year or two years but for three years now – and it looks like we're going into our fourth year – where we have a high fire hazard. The water tables are low in the province. Weather conditions are indicating that there is a potential for this high fire hazard to continue. So I would expect, Mr. Chairman, that when we see the budget for next year, we're going to see a budget forecast in there that could reasonably anticipate these kinds of increased costs so that we don't see the government coming back for another \$30 million for costs in fire fighting activity. It's hard to predict, but there are models, and we would expect them to come in closer to the dollars.

10:20

When we talk about another item where additional funding is asked for here, the \$1.2 million for "higher than budgeted cost of improvements made to forest airstrips used in fire fighting," once again upgrading those strips and maintaining safe airstrips is of critical importance. No doubt about that. But that is infrastructure, Mr. Chairman. I asked this question last night, and I'm surprised that I didn't get an answer to it tonight: how is it that we can't predict from year to year what the infrastructure maintenance costs are going to be? How is it that somebody can't go out and look at those airstrips before we get into fire season and see what kind of improvements are going to be required and build those into the budget? I think it is irresponsible not to have done that, and I would expect once again that to be addressed in next year's budget.

Then there is the \$2 million "to support forestry companies' efforts to improve forest management practices related to fire risk." Good idea, Mr. Chairman. Partnerships like that I think we can fully support at any given time. But once again, these partnerships didn't happen overnight, and the cost could have been anticipated and projected in the budgets. We would expect to see that again next year. If there are partnerships that they're going to go into with companies on improving forest management – and I would hope there are – we're going to see those outlined in the budget in the new year so that they don't come in supplementary estimates. Let's do

a little strategic thinking on the government side. Let's be proactive in some of these instances and be a step ahead of the game instead of two steps behind.

Those are my concerns about these supplementary estimates, Mr. Chairman. I will close on one additional concern I have, and once again that's the process that we undergo this evening. So much money in supplementary estimates and so many departments have to be crammed into a very limited time span. Look at how many large budgets we had to talk about this evening and huge dollars being expended in supplementary estimates, additional moneys the government is coming back for at this late time in the year, and we are going to in total spend two and a half hours talking about them. That is an appalling state and is something that needs to be addressed. With that I will close.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the comments of the member across the way, and I'm quite prepared to sit down and discuss the specifics of them with her. I think we are in a general sense in agreement that this is an important area that needs attention and it's not always as predictable as we would like, so thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates of the Department of Environment, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating expense and capital investment	\$33,000,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Offices of the Legislative Assembly

THE CHAIRMAN: To speak to this, we'll call upon the chairman of the Legislative Offices Committee, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On the Auditor General's supplementary estimate you'll realize if you look in your booklet that the regular budget this year was \$14,639,000, and the supplementary estimate is for \$1,045,000.

There are two reasons why the Auditor General needs extra funding in this year's budget. The first reason is that there's a severe shortage of qualified or professional accountants in Alberta. Also, because we're experiencing a very fast economic expansion in our province, private enterprise is prepared to pay much higher wages for accountants. So the office of the Auditor General is operating understaffed, and they were forced to farm out quite a bit of work this year to private-sector firms. This farming out to private firms is much, much more costly than our own staff.

The second reason, Mr. Chairman, is that the Auditor General is required to do more and more work every year, and the reason for that is that we're forming new boards that are responsible to government. We just formed 18 new children's services boards and also nine PDD boards across the province. There are a lot of accounting procedures in the first year or two of operation. These new boards are starting with new staff, and they have growing pains, so it requires a lot more hours for the Auditor General's office to do the accounting of these boards at the end of the year.

These are the two reasons the supplementary estimate is needed this year.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. You know, this is one of those areas where what's not said on pages 9, 10, and 11 of the estimates book is more instructive than in fact the text that appears. I'm a member of the Legislative Offices Committee and recall the Auditor General coming forward and asking for the additional requisition. I think what has to be marked and noted is that a significant reason for the cost is the fact that there have been serious problems with the management and governance in the child and family services authorities.

One need look no further than the 1999-2000 annual report of the Auditor General. One sees as one goes through there that in the province's haste to create these authorities – Calgary was the first one, and then a number of authorities followed. What happened is that we just had a number of defects in terms of the kinds of governance, the kind of accountability systems and mechanisms that aren't there. One has only to look at the Auditor General's report on pages 72, 73, 74, and 75. You find comments that "the majority of Authorities have not adopted formal procedures to ensure" compliance with "section 9 of the Child and Family Services Authorities Act." There was a need for "further instruction [on] legislative and regulatory requirements." Many of the child and family services authorities did not have a formal evaluation process for the CEO.

I guess one of the things I'm always struck by is – we've seen government in this province talk about deregulation and setting up boards that are closer to the people. I mean, we know the sort of lexicon and the language that goes along with that. But what we find in practice is something often very different than the theory. Just as we've seen with the regional health authorities, while we talk a lot about decentralization, we find enormous kinds of centralization that go on with those. To the extent that the boards aren't as effective as they could be, you continue to have an environment where you have some strong centralizing forces.

You have the comment on page 73 by the Auditor General that "most of the Authority co-chairs indicated that their boards do not have a formal self-evaluation process either for individual board members or the board as a whole." We have vacancies on authority boards which are "proving difficult to fill," and on and on. You've got the Keystone child and family services authority. That's a wonderful label, isn't it? The Keystone authority. The financial statements contain "an adverse opinion resulting from significant departures from generally accepted accounting principles."

Well, it seems to me it's important that the Auditor General have the resources to be able to administer the kind of rigorous scrutiny necessary to ensure not just that dollars are being well spent but that children are being adequately protected. But it has to be marked and noted that largely the reason we are here looking at the supplementary supply is because some things were not done properly within the management of the child and family services authorities. I think that while that wasn't the sole and exclusive reason for the additional funding, it certainly was a substantial part of the cost. That has to be pointed out because that's not apparent. The explanatory note on page 10 says:

The increase is due to a continuing shortage of professional accounting staff that has extended reliance on temporary staff, and a significant increase in private sector public accounting firm chargeout rates.

10:30

Well, what I heard the Auditor General tell us is that there have also been significant – significant – problems in doing the audit work on those child and family services authorities. That has increased the demand on the Auditor General, and as a direct consequence of that he's looking for additional money. So there are the other factors, but let's not gloss over, let's not conceal from Albertans the fact that there are serious management, governance, and accountability issues in those child and family services authorities, and that's why we have the additional resource.

If we extrapolate, if we have those concerns about the governance of child and family services authorities from a question of managerial efficacy and efficiency, then what kinds of risks are we running, Mr. Chairman, in terms of the purpose of those authorities, the protection of children? It's maybe a disquieting comment to end the evening, but it needs to be said.

Those are the observations I wanted to make. I'm certainly going to vote for and support this, because the Auditor General is an important check on big, powerful governments that proceed to make ill-advised plans, execute them poorly, and then don't put in place the systems to evaluate where they've fallen short of the mark. We need the Auditor General to be able to provide that important function, and that's why I'm supporting the supplementary estimates in that area.

Thanks very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates of the office of the Auditor General, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$1,045,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote on the office of the Auditor General be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. I move that the committee rise and report progress and request leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the 2000-2001 supplementary estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports the approval of the following estimates, and requests leave to sit again.

Children's Services: \$46,372,000 for operating expense.

Infrastructure: \$419,000,000 for operating expense and capital investment.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: \$98,000,000 for operating expense and capital investment.

Community Development: \$63,588,000 for operating expense and capital investment.

Environment: \$33,000,000 for operating expense and capital investment.

Office of the Auditor General: \$1,045,000 for operating expense and capital investment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:37 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, November 16, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/11/16

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

In a moment of silent contemplation let each of us remember those taken before their time and all those who have suffered as innocent victims of violent tragedy. We resolve to comfort the families, friends, and communities who have keenly felt the loss of loved ones through acts of violence and the disregard for the sanctity of that which is most precious: life itself. May God provide them eternal peace. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you members of the Korean Veterans Association who are seated in your gallery this afternoon. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the start of the Korean War. Many Canadians fought valiantly in the Korean War, and their contributions to preserve a free and independent South Korea cannot be forgotten. On Alberta government missions to Korea we have made a personal effort to visit the Canadian war memorial at Kapyong in remembrance of the sacrifices of Canadians for democracy in Korea.

I am honoured today to introduce from the Korean Veterans Association, unit 21, from Edmonton – and I will ask our guests to rise and remain standing as I introduce them – first, Mr. John Kolanchey, padre; Mr. Levi Power, president; Mr. Roy Brand, first vice-president; Mr. Jean Pierre Van Eck, second vice-president; and Mr. Hurbert Whitford, treasurer. Unfortunately, Mr. Roly Soper, the president of the Korean Veterans Association prairie region in Calgary, could not be with us today. I ask all of the Members of the Legislative Assembly to give our guests the most warm welcome and our appreciation.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Bill 26 Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, Bill 26, being the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act.

This legislation will create a day of remembrance recognizing and commemorating the Holocaust and other instances of genocide.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 26 be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, today I table a response to the question

raised by the member from the opposition yesterday relative to confirming statements of claim filed about abuse.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to file two documents today, one relating to the restructuring of Alberta's electricity industry and the second to natural gas prices. An Ipsos-Reid poll indicated that a full majority of Albertans heavily endorsed the move towards competition in the provincial electricity industry and, second, a provincial comparison of Canadian natural gas prices from the October and November 2000 issues of the *Canadian Gas Price Reporter*. These show that Alberta has the lowest natural gas prices in Canada.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would table with the Assembly five copies of the Department of Environment's response to Written Question 7.

As well, I would like to table five copies of the Department of Environment's response to motions for returns 14 and 15.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I wish to table today five copies of the environmental protection security fund annual report from April 1, 1999, to March 31, 2000.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I have two tablings today. Firstly, I would like to table five copies of the annual report of the Auditor General of Alberta for the year '99-2000, which is submitted pursuant to section 19(4) of the Auditor General Act. Copies were distributed to all members on October 12, 2000.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of the annual report of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, again for the year '99-2000, which is submitted pursuant to section 61(1) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Copies will be distributed today to members.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a audit performed by the Auditor General on our contracts.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I have four separate tablings this afternoon. These are documents that I've received through freedom of information from the Department of Municipal Affairs. The first one is a letter dated June 24, 1998, to the Hon. Murray Smith from Calgarians complaining of roof rot.

The second is a letter dated June 10, 1998, addressed to the hon. Member from Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, and it is also complaining of roof rot.

The third document is dated Monday, June 15, 1998, and it is an e-mail to the Premier of our province complaining about roof rot in Sherwood Park.

The fourth and final document is dated June 14, 1998, and is also addressed to the hon. Premier. It is from the Terwilligar Hill Estates

Home Owners Association, 150 households, complaining about roof rot.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would file five copies of Caught in the Middle: Graduate Students and Rising Tuition Levels in Alberta, an executive summary done by Arthur Arruda at the University of Alberta for the University of Alberta Graduate Students' Association detailing the very difficult position that the government's policy of allowing tuitions to rise has placed students in.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first one is a letter from Brian Callinan. Mr. Callinan says that "the government's electricity rebate is unfair to and discriminates against renters who have their utilities included in their rent."

The second letter is from Carol Rauf, who complains about the extraordinary delay in getting a response from the Alberta health care office, 25 minutes on the phone waiting on the line.

The third one is a letter from Darlene Zloklikovits, an Alberta Injured Worker's Society representative. She takes exception to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment's words that are printed in *Alberta Venture*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table five copies of a draft private member's bill called the Bill 11 Repeal Act, 2000, which I will be introducing at the first opportunity that becomes available for me to do so. This bill is a commitment I made to the people of Edmonton-Highlands.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table two letters this afternoon. One is to the Hon. Halvar Jonson; the other is to the Hon. Gary Mar. In the letter to Minister Jonson the request is that the payment of \$695 for a private MRI be reimbursed to Karen Rodway.

In the letter to Gary Mar the request is that the payment of \$920 for a private MRI be paid to Carole Parent, as well as an apology for the tremendous stress that she was placed under.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table in this Assembly the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing community plan on homelessness 2000-2003 executive summary report, which was prepared through a community consultation process by the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to table the 1999-2000 annual report of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, which presents its work in providing

alcohol, other drug, and gambling problem prevention, treatment, and information services to the people of Alberta. AADAC is a Crown agency within the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table today the requisite number of copies of a story outlining how the Prime Minister jumped the queue in order to get surgery from a private surgical facility not available to the public.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair would like to table five copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort requesting that Bill 209, Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2000, be brought to the Committee of the Whole on Tuesday, November 21, 2000.

head: Introduction of Guests

MS HALEY: Mr. Speaker, I'm so pleased to be able to rise today in this Assembly and introduce two residents of my constituency. It doesn't happen very often that I have people here, so it's a real honour to be able to host them and to introduce them to you and through you to our Assembly. The first lady is Heather Davies, who works very hard in the town of Chestermere and is also the chairman of the Chestermere Weed and Water Committee, which is a huge issue in our area. The lady accompanying her is Captain Sherrie Webster of the Royal Canadian Air Cadet squadron in Strathmore, number 903. She is working very hard to set up a cadet squadron in the Chestermere area as well, only to do with the Navy. I'm just absolutely delighted to have them both here. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to the members of this Assembly 120 grade 6 students from the Fox Run school in Sylvan Lake. They're accompanied by teachers Ms Robin Irvine, Mr. John Fielder, Mrs. Karen Adair, Mr. Teplyske, and Miss Michelle Doz along with 14 parents. They're here to observe a whole hour of this Legislature. I know the grade 6 students will be on their best behaviour. I just ask my colleagues also to be on their best behaviour. At this time I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an introduction this afternoon as well. It's an individual that's well known within this Assembly because she was a frequent visitor during the Bill 11 debates. This afternoon she has brought her grandson to enjoy the festivities in the House. The individual is Shirley Armstrong. If she would stand with her grandson to be recognized and receive the warm welcome.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two sets of introductions today. Let me start with the first one. I have the pleasure of introducing 43 young people visiting from Mexico. They've been in Alberta since September, and they'll return home on December 15. They are seated in the members' gallery. They're all here to learn about our politics and society as well as to bone up on their English. They're accompanied by two instructors, Mr. Helmut

Nikolai and Mr. Alex Peralta. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is of a colleague of mine and of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, Dr. Bernard Schwartz, who is sitting in the public gallery. I ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Electric Utilities Deregulation

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About three hours ago the Premier addressed the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties at the closing session of their convention here in Edmonton. Many were surprised that the Premier didn't address the concern that has certainly been top of mind for those councillors, particularly that issue of the high cost of electricity in Alberta. The Premier did say, however, that the AAMD and C was the backbone of his government's support in this province. So my question to the Premier is: what does the Premier say to the virtually unanimously passed resolution at the convention where the members expressed their great concern about the forecasted rate increases under the Klein deregulation scheme?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I did address the question of deregulation. I indicated to the AAMD and C that we will continue to work with them. I also pointed out that if any person or corporate entity wants to stay in a regulated environment, they have the option of doing so for five years. I also explained that high electricity costs are due to a great extent in part to the phenomenal development that is going on in this province as I speak. It's simply a supply/demand situation. It has nothing to do with regulation or deregulation. It simply happens to be that this province is in the midst of one of the most significant economic booms of the last century and perhaps this century. We don't know what the future holds.

What I will say to the AAMD and C is that we have put in place almost \$800 million to offset the rising costs of electricity as it relates to municipalities, as it relates to government infrastructure within those municipalities, as it relates to businesses, as it relates to farm operations. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, of course, starting January 1, there will be a \$20 reduction in the bills of each and every householder in this province, and that should go a long way toward alleviating the rising cost of electricity.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, it doesn't, in fact.

So what does the Premier say to those AAMD and C councillors who have grave concerns that deregulation is leading to price instability because of inadequate supply under his watch?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the situation has occurred under a regulated environment. It is simply a case of being able to bring power onstream, and you just can't snap your fingers and create generation.

1:50

It's like everything else in this province. You know, we have to deal with the pressures and the challenges of growth. That's one of the downsides, unfortunately, to economic growth and prosperity. Whether it's electricity, whether it's infrastructure, we have to deal with these pressures, and we are dealing with these pressures. No other jurisdiction in this country, Mr. Speaker, has been able to do

as we have been able to do, and that is to provide very significant rebates to alleviate the high cost of energy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What about the councillors' concern that the rising cost of electricity is leading to higher input costs for our agriculture industry resulting in inflation and cost increases for consumers down the road?

MR. KLEIN: Quite true. Quite true, Mr. Speaker. It's a concern I heard when I traveled the province about a month ago, and I indicated that as well to the delegates of the AAMD and C. Hopefully when the 1,400 megawatts comes onstream, prices will go down. There will be more electricity, more transmission capacity. In the interim to help the farmers offset the higher costs of input relative to farm production, we have introduced an \$800 million program that will hopefully alleviate to some extent the higher costs of electricity and the higher costs of input.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Versacold is an Edmonton-based company that is involved in the food and beverage industry. It is in fact facing a 136 percent increase in its electricity costs under the Klein deregulation scheme. The options that are being considered by Versacold today are going out of business or moving its Alberta operations to another Canadian province where electricity is cheaper. How can this Premier claim that Alberta has low electricity costs when Versacold will pay 12 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity in 2001 in Alberta compared to 4.5 cents in British Columbia, 6.6 cents in Saskatchewan, 3.7 cents in Manitoba, and 5.5 cents in Quebec?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt about it; electricity costs are going up. It's happening under a regulated environment. It could happen under a deregulated environment. It would happen in any event because it's a supply/demand situation. What I would say to this company is that, yes, we're doing our best through a rebate program to offset the rising cost of electricity. When you take that rebate into account, I think the company will find that our prices are comparable to those in the provinces just mentioned.

I would also remind the company that this is the lowest taxed province of any jurisdiction in Canada, Mr. Speaker, that we have a highly educated work force, and the only way taxes are going in this province are down. So I would say: weigh all the costs before considering a move to another jurisdiction, because there will be an adjustment in the marketplace vis-a-vis regulations. I can tell you that the taxes in those ND jurisdictions, those socialist jurisdictions, are guaranteed to go only one way, and that is up.

MRS. MacBETH: So, Mr. Speaker, what is the Premier doing to see that supply is increased in order that the prices will go down before the five- to seven-year predicted scenario at best in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. Minister of Resource Development respond to set the record absolutely straight as it relates to electricity prices.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll just supplement on this. As far as the winter supply, the total demand for this winter for electricity is going to be 7,700 megawatts or so. The

total capacity we have as far as supply is 9,400 megawatts. So that leaves over 1,600 megawatts that will be available. In addition to that, through the process from 1998 to 2000 1,400 megawatts of electricity came onstream, and in the next couple of years we expect another 1,600 megawatts to come onstream. So the process is moving.

What I've done also is just recently announce a 10-point plan. That will definitely deal with the issues that the opposition member has addressed in the House. [interjections] Well, Mr. Speaker, I could go through the 10-point plan.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Economic Development: what does this minister say to a company that has realized that there is an Alberta disadvantage, not an advantage, when it comes to electricity rates in this province?

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, hon. Leader of the Opposition. What I say is simply what the Premier has said, that when you take into account the overall tax structure, when you take into account the infrastructure, the availability of a highly talented and educated workforce, Alberta is simply the place to be. As the Minister of Resource Development indicated, we are going to be addressing this issue over the next couple of years. In fact, our department is working very closely with his department with respect to the issue.

I'd also like to point out that when you look at what Alberta has done the past few years, from '94 to '99 we have led this country in growth, 3.9 percent. We are forecast to actually lead the country in the year 2000 by over 6 percent. So we are addressing the issue. The problem the Liberals have, Mr. Speaker, is that we're too successful. They don't like it.

THE SPEAKER: You want to supplement, Provincial Treasurer? Briefly, now.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the question was about the Alberta disadvantage. I would like to point out the advantage that has taken place since 1994. When they're looking at electrical rates and considering moving, they must consider all the other advantages that there are in the province of Alberta. Since 1994 we have cut \$3 billion in either personal income taxes, business taxes, fees, property taxes in the province of Alberta. In fact, all taxes were cut. Besides going to a single rate of tax and a \$1.3 billion discount in personal tax, plus the \$955 million taken out of small business tax and corporate tax, other taxes taken since 1994, our reducing user fees and charges by 60 million, we have reduced residential and farm education property tax. We've eliminated the provincial machinery and equipment tax. We've implemented the Alberta family employment tax credit for low- and middle-income working families. We've reduced the aviation fuel tax, 5 cents to 1 and a half cents a litre. We've dropped the railway fuel tax, 9 cents to 3 cents. We . . .

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. Provincial Treasurer. [interjection] Thank you, hon. Provincial Treasurer. I have 13 additional private members who would like to participate in addition to the two leaders. We'll now move forward to the third main question from the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private MRI Clinics

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier confirm that Albertans who have enough money can and do jump the queue in order to get access to public health care systems in this province with private MRIs?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, there are 30 cases that are under investigation as it relates to diagnostic services, I think specifically MRIs. Relative to where that is at this particular point, I will have the hon. minister respond.

2:00

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this has been the subject matter of some discussion with the Minister of Health, my federal counterpart for at least, I guess, the next 10 days. A number of cases were brought forward to the attention of the Minister of Health, Allan Rock. The Hon. Mr. Rock and I have talked about this. I have indicated to him that in accordance with our Health Care Protection Act we will comply with the Canada Health Act. These cases were brought to his attention. I indicated to him that we would fully co-operate with any investigation that he would make and provide the information required and that if there was a conclusion that we're offside the Canada Health Act, we would move to rectify it.

I point out, Mr. Speaker, that these types of facilities exist across Canada. These are in other parts of the country. We have worked very hard at increasing our MRI capacity. We currently have seven MRIs in the health care system. Two years ago we did 23,000. Last year we did 31,000. This year for the first quarter we did over 10,000. We're projected to go over 40,000 for this year. We will have on board, in addition to the seven publicly funded MRIs that we have right now, an additional six by the end of April, which will give us the highest MRI capacity per capita in the country.

Mr. Speaker, these are important issues to discuss on a national basis. It is not just in Alberta that these types of facilities exist but in other parts of Canada as well, and that is the reason why Minister Rock has made his commitment to me that we will work together to help resolve this.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, let me just give them a simple question, and the question is to the Premier. I think it's the Premier's responsibility to answer this because he's been around the map on it so many times. Will his government pay for all medically necessary MRIs in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we do. If a doctor prescribes an MRI or a CAT scan or an X ray, that person will get that X ray, that CAT scan, that MRI, or any other diagnostic service under Alberta health care. It's as simple as that. There is a simple answer to a very simple question.

MRS. MacBETH: That applies as long as they wait, Mr. Speaker.

The question is: when someone receives a private MRI that is medically necessary and pays for it out of their own pocket, will this Premier ensure that the public health care system will cover the cost of that medically necessary MRI?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I am not all over the map on this. As I said before, there are 30 such cases, precisely the kind of cases to which the leader of the Liberal opposition alludes, that are now under investigation. Once again I will have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness explain exactly what is taking place.

MR. MAR: Just to be very brief, I have indicated again to Minister Rock that we will co-operate fully with his investigation of cases involving MRIs and that if we are offside the Canada Health Act, which we have committed by legislation to comply with, we will move to rectify it. But at this point, Mr. Speaker, the investigation is not complete. There has been no conclusion drawn that we are offside the Canada Health Act.

THE SPEAKER: The deputy leader of the third party.

Electric Utilities Deregulation

(continued)

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the government's deregulation is driving costs of electricity through the roof, the Premier is trying to dodge criticism by saying that power prices are rising everywhere and that it has nothing to do with deregulation. He claimed yesterday that even in NDP Saskatchewan the rates are going higher and higher and higher. The Premier is wrong, and we've confirmed that with the minister responsible in Saskatchewan. My question to the Premier: why did the Premier falsely claim that electricity rates in Saskatchewan are going higher when in fact skyrocketing electricity rates are unique to Alberta and caused by this government's own deregulation scheme?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, in fact, electricity rates in Saskatchewan increased significantly then the government in its typical socialistic fashion capped them.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, if five years of research has gone into electricity deregulation by this government, why did the Premier not realize that rates have been frozen for four years in the regulated market in neighbouring Saskatchewan?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we have had and we still are in a regulated environment.

You know, Mr. Speaker, this hon. member more than any other person in this legislative Chamber should know about electricity rates and how those rates are set, because he served on the board of one of the major electricity producers and distributors in the province, a company by the name of EPCOR. This hon. member was involved in setting rates and getting approval from Edmonton city council to confirm those rates. This hon. member knows all about the procedure to hike rates, because he's been part of it.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: You have been recognized, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good one, Mr. Premier.

If five years of research has gone into electricity deregulation in Alberta, will the Premier undertake to table in this House all studies that the government has done or has had done on the effects of deregulation on electricity prices and supply or reliability of electricity supply in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, certainly no offence to the hon. member, but in this Legislative Assembly there have been countless documents tabled, both in favour, in support of deregulation and from the opposition, I'm sure, opposing deregulation. There's been a tremendous amount of documentation already tabled in this Legislature. If the hon. member can be specific as to the type of documentation he might require, I'm sure that the hon. Minister of Resource Development will do his best to make sure that that information is made available.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Labour Market Development Program

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, the Red Deer Chamber of Com-

merce is an important and respected organization in the city of Red Deer, and in fact this year their executive director, Ms Jan Fisher, was recognized by the Canadian chamber as the executive director of the year. Yesterday the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar used pleonastic questioning to create suspicion about a labour market development agreement awarded to the Red Deer chamber. Well, Red Deer is concerned about openness and accountability. My questions today are to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Would the minister please assure this Assembly that the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce contract followed acceptable procedures?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, I certainly can, Mr. Speaker. Under the labour market development agreement we contract agencies and service providers to deliver job training and labour market programs to eligible Albertans. It might be of interest to people here in the House today that we have over 1,770 LMDA contracts and 3,000 training on the job contracts awarded through a tendering process. So the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce competed – and I'd like to make sure we highlight that: competed – to provide integrated employment services for youth on an open tender call in 1998, and they were successful in this particular bid. The contract was initially for one year, and based on successful performance, it was amended to the three-year maximum permitted under that tender call. The total cost of that contract was \$3,095,910.

MR. DOERKSEN: To the same minister: what assurances can the minister give the Assembly that AHRE, Alberta Human Resources and Employment, is accountable for other funding provided for the range of job training and labour market programs?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, we do have policies and standards in place, Mr. Speaker. This is public money that we're talking about here, so we have to make sure that we manage it as effectively as we can. This is the reason we are a jurisdiction that uses a tendering process to select contractors. We believe that this assures us, then, of good value for money.

2:10

Now, our staff monitor those particular contracts and the services that then are provided again to ensure that we receive the deliverables that were contracted for. We have clear and reasonable expectations and results that we measure on the progress of those contracts, and as everyone here knows, through annual reporting we do report on our performance.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, one more to the same minister: how do you know whether the money spent on job training and labour market development is in fact used appropriately?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we had Alberta Learning conduct three audits on behalf of our department, and also the Auditor General conducted two audits of our programs, and the findings, of course, from those audits are followed up with managers and, where needed, agreed upon corrective action then is taken. As a matter of fact, I tabled one of those audits here today.

When we took over these programs from Human Resource Development Canada there were some issues regarding contract management. These audits demonstrate that we have improved management of these contracts.

Coal-fired Power Production

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, Alberta companies are responding to the Klein energy crisis in a number of ways. Some companies are

leaving the province, some are being forced to lay off staff, and others, those who cannot leave because of significant investments in their plants and factories, are beginning to convert from natural gas to coal to power their operations. Clearly, these conversions are a direct result of the government's mismanagement of our abundant supply of natural gas. My questions today are to the Minister of Environment. Will the minister confirm that the government, through caucus or its committees, has been asked to approve the conversion from natural gas to coal for large-scale cement plants in Alberta?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is the case that I have been informed that there are at least two firms in the province who are contemplating making an application through the proper regulatory process to convert from natural gas to coal. I would like to assure the hon. member that they will have to go through the proper regulatory review and that they will have to have a review and an examination which is thorough with respect to meeting emission requirements.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, when was the government planning to tell Albertans about these applications, and what is the appeal process for those who do not agree with the application?

MR. JONSON: Well, I would like to perhaps make my first answer a little bit clearer for the hon. member. That is, I indicated that I am aware that there are at least two firms in the province who are contemplating this particular move or this particular application, Mr. Speaker. At this point in time I am not aware of any formal, comprehensive application that has been made through the regulatory process for this particular purpose. Certainly if and when that occurs – and I expect that it will – we will then be able to report on the nature of their application and the timing of the process of review.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development to supplement.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to make a couple of points. We shouldn't interpret this conversion as being something that is negative. In fact, my understanding is that there are many environmentally safe processes in place now where coal can be used for the generation of power.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, at a time when our coal companies in Alberta are struggling due to the international price for coal, I think this type of expansion, this type of creativity and entrepreneurship is actually welcome within the province. It's supporting a strong local industry. Certainly, I've had some discussions with some companies from the economic development perspective and have encouraged them when it makes sense to do so to invest in this type of process.

MS CARLSON: But the issue, Mr. Speaker, is: can either minister guarantee Albertans that our health and well-being as well as the quality of our air and our water will not be compromised by a government decision to allow an increase in the industrial burning of coal? They absolutely cannot do it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. JONSON: If I could, Mr. Speaker. I realize that the question is probably not in order, but I do want to indicate that the emission standards that we set as a province, whether it is from the petroleum industry or from the coal industry in this province, are among the

highest in the world in terms of the requirements that they put in place to protect the environment. There will be no exceptions made outside of those requirements and those standards as far as these applications are concerned.

As the previous responder indicated, we have an abundance of coal in this province. It is a very valuable resource, one that providing it can be done in an environmentally responsible way should be developed and used in this province. It's one of our many resources that should be utilized in an effective way.

THE SPEAKER: Well, I was going to rule the question out of order because it was argumentative and it had its own answer in it, so we don't need a whole series of supplements with respect to that.

The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Cancer Treatment

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government says that it has heard Albertans concerns over waiting lists for health services and is taking steps to address that concern. We all know that when someone is diagnosed with cancer, then time is of the essence. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell us what the status is for cancer waiting lists?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to give this response today to convey to this Assembly the report that has been given to me from the Alberta Cancer Board, and that report is this. First of all, the time that it takes from the time a patient is referred by his doctor to see an oncologist: that person will see an oncologist in one week or less. Secondly, when an oncologist prescribes chemotherapy, the average time for waiting for that chemotherapy will be seven days. The third piece of information given to me by the Alberta Cancer Board is that when an oncologist prescribes radiation for either breast or prostate cancers, the average time until that radiation treatment is given is four weeks, and in the case of other tumors it's even less time. So that's great news from the Alberta Cancer Board.

MR. BRODA: Mr. Speaker, my second question is also to the same minister. Can the minister explain why waiting lists are on target now when earlier in the year we heard from some Albertans who had to travel to the United States for treatment?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it is true that in March of this year waiting lists, particularly radiation treatment for breast and prostate cancers, were very long at the Cross Cancer Institute here in Edmonton. It was some 11 weeks, and in Calgary at the Tom Baker cancer centre it was four to four and a half weeks. In large part those waiting lists were created by a shortage of specialized cancer treatment staff, especially radiation therapists, and there is a national, indeed perhaps even an international shortage of these types of specialists.

What we did, Mr. Speaker, in response to that was we gave the Alberta Cancer Board an additional \$9 million in May of this year to hire more radiation therapists and expand cancer outreach services. That \$9 million was part of an overall package of some \$55 million that would reduce wait lists in a number of other areas.

Mr. Speaker, again, there are a number of different inputs that will help us reduce waiting lists: the people – that is, radiation therapists in this case – equipment, and of course places for these people to work. People, plant, and equipment are the three inputs that have helped reduce waiting lists in this province.

2:20

MR. BRODA: My final question to the same minister: what action is the minister taking over the long term to address waiting lists for cancer treatments and other health services?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think that in looking at surveys of Albertans who use our health care system, the overwhelming majority of them, some 89 percent of them, say that the service they receive is good or very good. Having said that, I think that from time to time people have expressed concerns about access. Access is, of course, the first thing we want to improve in our six-point plan for health delivered earlier this year.

As I said in my answer to the first supplementary, there are really three things that help to address the issue of access, and that is people, plant, and equipment. First of all, Mr. Speaker, we have committed to increasing the number of positions in our postsecondary institutions in the health professions by 850 new spaces this year. There are now 5,650 people training in our postsecondaries in health professions. Also, we are funding an additional 2,400 new frontline staff over the next three years. Of course, many of those will be nurses.

We are also building new facilities and upgrading existing facilities for the expansion of both acute and long-term care beds, expanding our capacity for surgery, emergency, dialysis, and other medical procedures. This commitment was in the magnitude of \$793 million.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to point out the importance of equipment, and I want to congratulate the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton on today's announcement of a revolutionary new device to be installed next September. The Cross expects that this device, which is called a helical tomotherapy unit, will provide more accurate radiation treatment and will reduce the number of treatments per patient, which will of course also make the treatment less expensive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

Private MRI Clinics

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans in this province continue to pay out of their own pockets for medically necessary services like MRIs. Yesterday the Premier said during his news conference that the Canada Health Act would have to change in order to make MRIs an insured medical service. Even this afternoon we heard from both the Premier and the minister of health that they are skirting behind the issue by waiting for the investigation to be completed by the federal Minister of Health. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier today, right now, instruct his minister of health to include all medically necessary MRIs, whether they're performed within a hospital or outside of a hospital, as an insured service under the Alberta health care plan?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it seems that I've already answered that question. It's my understanding that if a doctor prescribes an MRI or a CAT scan or an X ray or any other diagnostic service, if a doctor prescribes it and that person goes and has the diagnostic procedure done, then it's covered under Alberta health care. It's as simple as that.

MS LEIBOVICI: Let's try this again. When an MRI, which is always prescribed, is performed outside of a hospital and is not

contracted through the regional health authority, will the Premier instruct his minister of health to pick up the cost of that MRI? Mr. Premier, I think you know what I'm talking about, I know the minister of health does, and the former ministers of health do as well.

MR. KLEIN: I know exactly what the hon. member is talking about. If it's prescribed by a physician and that referral is made to have certain diagnostic services, that will be covered under health care.

Mr. Speaker, if a person gains access to an MRI or to a CAT scan or to an X ray and if there is no demonstrable medical reason to have the diagnostic service performed, then it stands to reason that that person should pay for it.

MS LEIBOVICI: As Mrs. Karen Rodway of Edmonton paid out of pocket \$695 for an MRI that was prescribed by a doctor and as Mrs. Carol Parent of Sherwood Park paid \$920 out of her pocket for a medically prescribed MRI, by what the Premier has just said this afternoon, you should be refunding those two individuals their dollars. Will you be doing it? Yes or no?

MR. KLEIN: Thank you for that. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to answer a question. I don't know precisely what the answer is. [interjection] No, I don't know. I can only guess that in this particular case the doctor prescribed an MRI.

You know, I'm blue-skying this. The doctor says to the patient: "Yes, you need an MRI, but it's not urgent. Therefore, we can schedule you in, say, in a couple of months." Right? That person then says: I don't want to wait a couple of months, and I'll just dig into my own pocket and go get it done tomorrow. Right? Those are among the 30 cases now that I understand are being investigated to make the determination that in fact they were medically prescribed procedures and that everything was done in accordance with the Canada Health Act and with Alberta health care standards.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the best way to explain this is to use an example from our emergency wards. I've traveled to many hospitals throughout Alberta, and what you'll find in many hospital emergency wards is a sign that says: the patient in most need of urgent care will be treated first. So we rely upon physicians to determine the need or the urgency that a person has for an MRI. Where you are in the line does not depend upon when you arrived at the line, but it depends in accordance with your need. In the case of emergencies, the waiting list is zero. The waiting list is zero.

Mr. Speaker, we rely upon physicians to determine whether an individual should have one immediately or in a week or in two weeks. There is a priority listing, and if an individual whose need is not as urgent as the emergency case that I outlined, then they will have to wait. In our system if that individual wishes to pay for one privately, our system allows that. Now, that is the subject matter of our current discussion with the Minister of Health, Allan Rock. That is exactly what we will work towards to resolve.

Again, Mr. Speaker, these facilities exist across Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

High-speed Internet Access

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About a year and a half ago the technology support people from the Elk Island public school board expressed their concern about the difficulties students in communities outside Sherwood Park had in accessing the Internet

for educational purposes. A question for the Minister of Innovation and Science: how will the Internet access change as a result of the announcement made recently at an Elk Island public school in Sherwood Park?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, this is an important question. It was raised at the AAMDC this morning at their open session with the ministers, and it is an important question for rural Alberta. As of today only about 30 communities have access to some kind of high-speed bandwidth. What this will mean is that 420 communities will have full access to full high-speed and full bandwidth right across this province.

In regards to the Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan area in particular, there are 31 sites eligible to be hooked up into this high-speed bandwidth system. Of those, 17 are educational institutions. So there will no longer be a situation, as I saw two weeks ago in that area, that when students are hooked up to the Internet, the computers in the office have to be turned off and that when the office computers are on, the students can no longer be on the Internet. That will no longer happen, and it will certainly be effective for the Elk Island school district as well.

2:30

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister explain why the contract was awarded to Bell instead of to Telus?

MR. HAVELOCK: In one minute.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, in one minute or less I'll try, Mr. Speaker.

Essentially this was very clearly a business decision. We brought in communications consultants from outside of Canada to look at proposals. We also used several firms inside Canada to look at the business cases as well as the numbers involved. It was very clear that on a business case the Bell consortia was the best bid.

I might point out, Mr. Speaker, that that Bell consortia consists of Cisco Systems, Microsoft, Nortel, and 360networks. As well, there are a number of Alberta companies involved with that, and they include Axia Netmedia, Total Telcom, Wi-Lan, and Netcom. So this will benefit all Alberta business.

If I might, I have one quick quote from an article entitled "Alberta Supernet already paying dividends." The president and chief executive officer of Tecsor says:

"Microsoft is now approaching us to do a joint project. I don't think we would have showed up on this sphere in years gone by . . . When I asked Cisco and Microsoft why they wanted to be involved in Alberta, they said this will be the only place in the world that is going into this level of integration and this level of complexity for high-speed Internet."

Another Alberta advantage of the 21st century.

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, could the minister let us know if he'll be posting on the Internet the two requests for proposal?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, the requests for proposal were posted on the Internet, but we will not be posting the bids. Both of these companies, Telus and Bell, provided private, proprietary information, so we cannot post those detailed bids on the Internet.

I would add, Mr. Speaker, that this is a win/win for Telus as well because Telus already has most of the optical networks underground in the province of Alberta, and certainly Bell will be working with Telus to light up those optical networks.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Private MRI Clinics

(continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Bill Young*, an 80-year-old senior in Edmonton, paid \$725 for a medically necessary MRI. My questions are to the Premier. How can the Premier claim that there is no two-tiered queue-jumping in this province when Mr. Young paid \$725 of his own sweat-soaked loonies for a medically necessary, doctor-prescribed MRI?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I don't know the details of this particular case. Did this particular patient wait the prescribed time? This is all conjecture and it's all hypothetical, but if the doctor said, "Yes, I can get you an MRI. You should have one. It's not urgent. It'll take a couple of months," and if the gentleman in question said, "Well, I want it, I'm willing to pay for it, and I'll go get it on my own time and pay for it," then that does not come under the rules vis-a-vis access to MRIs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Again to the Premier: will the Premier be sending Mr. Young and other Albertans a rebate cheque to refund the cost they paid out of their own pocket for an MRI, a medically prescribed, doctor-approved, necessary MRI?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member obviously doesn't believe in or respect in any way, shape, or form the process. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has said that these cases – and I understand there are about 30 – will be investigated completely in accordance with a request that he received from the hon. federal Minister of Health, Allan Rock. So if in fact all the rules were followed and if in fact these gentlemen and others are entitled to receive the rebate, they will. That investigation is now taking place.

Once again I will have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that all MRIs are ordered by doctors, whether they are through the public system or through a private facility. Again I wish to remind the hon. member that the use of these types of tests should be done on the basis of who is in need of it most critically, that you don't get it just because you want it, that you get it in accordance with a priority need established by your physician.

Now, we think, Mr. Speaker, that it is important that those that are critically in need of it get it right away. Obviously the Prime Minister doesn't believe that, having used a facility to go to the front of the queue himself. But the fact is that we believe we rely on physicians to determine what the need of an individual happens to be.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Will the Premier instruct his minister today to have all medically necessary, doctor-prescribed MRIs insured as a service under the Alberta health care plan? Will you do it, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what is going on over there? I mean, do they not get together? Do they not trust one another to ask a question? I mean, I think there have been about three or four of

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

them asking the same question to get the same answer. What do they do in their caucus? They're saying . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Answer the question.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know that the question has been answered about three or four times already. You know, it is beyond me. My God, it is beyond me that these people would sit around their caucus table and say: well, I'll ask this question, but you re-ask it and then you re-ask it and then you re-ask it, and that way we can consume all our time during question period, because we can't think of any other questions to ask.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to sum up.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, not a summary but perhaps an additional bit of information.

Just to reiterate: this year we are projected to do over 40,000 MRIs – those are 40,000 MRIs – in the public system and paid for by public money, and the number of cases that have been brought to the attention of Minister Rock amount to 30. So I'd have to conclude, Mr. Speaker, that if you've got 40,000 cases where the right service was delivered at the right time and you only find 30 that were not, you're doing pretty darn good.

Speaker's Ruling Referring to a Member by Name

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, just a brief comment about a practice that seems to have grown in some degree of popularity this week, and that is actually using the name of an individual member in the Assembly. We all know that the time-honoured traditions in this Assembly are such that we refer to an hon. member by the name of their constituency or by the name of the portfolio they might have if they are a member of Executive Council.

In watching this procedure this week, the chair has come to the conclusion that perhaps the chair has added to some of the confusion with respect to this, because on one occasion this week the chair did get up and make mention of an hon. member who was not here and did make mention of the hon. member's name herself, which is not in the same context that would be in the combativeness of question and answer period. As well, the table officers, certainly on Wednesdays when we deal with written questions and motions for returns, will call on the hon. member by name only. We will look at that, and I will instruct them to no longer start naming the hon. member with respect to that.

I want to make it very clear that starting on Monday, nobody's name is going to be referred to specifically, directly or indirectly. It will not be the Klein energy program. In the same way, I have now received about 15 acronyms referring to virtually every member of the Official Opposition, and I'm not going to allow those to come to the floor either.

So it will be the Premier's or the minister's or what have you, but it will not be the individual name of the individual minister or any other member in this particular Assembly. That's a form of dignity that is extremely important.

2:40

Now, hon. Minister of Environment, you sent me a note requesting a hope to revert to tablings. Is this something that you inadvertently forgot to do during tablings, or is this as a result of something that occurred in question period? This part I will not deal with today. If it's something you wanted to do during tablings . . .

MR. JONSON: It was something that arose from question period, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Might we revert, then, to tablings?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports (reversion)

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of an item of information which references the procedure to be followed by the firm Inland Cement in applying for conversion from natural gas.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Metis Week

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge the commemoration of Metis Week in the province of Alberta. For the Metis people of this province and the Alberta government this week is an event-filled one. On Tuesday we opened a two-day workshop in Edmonton with the Metis Settlements General Council to prepare for the dissolution of the Metis Settlements Transition Commission in March 2002. Dissolving the commission is part of the overall plan agreed to by the Alberta government and the settlements towards the goals of self-reliance and self-regulation for this unique Metis land base here in Alberta.

Yesterday at Government House Premier Klein and Mr. Randy Parenteau, the president of the Metis Settlements General Council, signed a memorandum of understanding in part to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Metis settlements legislation. This memorandum of understanding will help the Metis Settlements General Council with the Alberta government to review our future financial arrangements as well as the economic viability of the eight settlements that make up Canada's only Metis land base.

Earlier this morning I had the privilege of greeting members of the Metis Nation of Alberta Association, led by their president, Audrey Poitras, as they held their Louis Riel commemoration ceremony here at the Legislature. This evening, also here in Edmonton, my hon. colleague and Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Pearl Calahasen, will attend the first annual Louis Riel banquet, hosted by the Edmonton Metis Cultural Dance Society. At that event she will officially announce the Alberta government's cosponsorship of two Metis cultural scholarships in commemoration of two well-known Metis Albertans. Minister Calahasen and myself will also be attending the Delia Gray memorial gala tonight, hosted by the Metis Nation of Alberta Association. Delia Gray was one of Alberta's most recognized Metis elders.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government is clearly committed to its partnership with Metis people in this province. As partners we share a mutual goal to improve socioeconomic opportunities for Metis people. The government of Alberta will continue to work both on and off-settlement with other governments in the private sector toward our common goal of improving these opportunities for Metis people.

On behalf of this Assembly I send best wishes to all Metis people living in Alberta. May they always stand proud of their heritage and their part in the making of western Canada.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold

Lake. I do know that once again I may have added to some confusion with respect to this by saying that starting effective Monday I would do this, but the fact of the matter is that the rule is applicable today as well.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, no notice had been given to me, but we'll recognize you, please.

Provincial Treasurer

MR. WHITE: Sorry, sir, but I will promise not to name names. How's that? A good start?

Today I'd like to recognize the contribution of a true Alberta patriot, a democrat, sometimes diplomat, an overseer of a government-owned bank, a recent convert to the virtues of climate change, none other than Alberta's current Provincial Treasurer, for his retirement later, perhaps this year or next.

Mr. Speaker, the record of the Provincial Treasurer over the past years has been overwhelming: \$262 million dollars in losses and disposal of assets of the Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation, \$56 million in estimates of loss of the disposal of ALCB properties, \$2.7 million in estimated losses of the divestiture of the CKUA radio station, \$447 million in the disposal of transportation and utilities assets, and an estimated \$2.3 billion in residual value of the auction of the generating capacity in the province of Alberta's electricity plants. Sir, that is over \$3 billion of estimated losses in this member's privatization and deregulation schemes.

On the fiscal side our record is equally overwhelming, sir. A proponent of small government, Mr. Speaker? I think not. The Provincial Treasurer has increased the base budget spending over 8 percent over the past years. That's over \$1 billion in unbudgeted spending in this year alone. A city the size of Calgary would have to be added to the province of Alberta to keep up with this member's spending. He's rapidly closing in on the previous Provincial Treasurer's supremacy as the king of supplementary supply.

Mr. Speaker, we'll all miss the Provincial Treasurer when he does leave this Assembly, but we think perhaps the one that'll most miss the member is the Auditor General. The Auditor General is now asking for an additional \$1 million in order to keep up to the spending habits of this particular member.

Thanks.

Speaker's Ruling Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Provincial Treasurer, when the chair in his capacity as the Government House Leader negotiated with the former Leader of the Official Opposition in his position as the Official Opposition House Leader – a provision in Standing Orders and the changes in Standing Orders will allow for members' statements – it was always anticipated that members would be able to provide those statements without interruption. It was never anticipated in the mind of this particular person nor, I do know, in the mind of the individual I had arrived at agreement with on these members' statements that in fact hon. members in this Assembly would rise and attack for two minutes another member in this Assembly. That was never envisaged to be the purpose of Members' Statements.

In the past members have interrupted on points of order during an hon. member giving a statement, and the chair has said: no, that would be inappropriate. Hon. Provincial Treasurer, you might take the weekend now to determine the content of this statement, and if you wish to pursue a point of privilege, that is certainly one of the options available to you as a member of this Assembly.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 7(5) I'd invite the Government House Leader to advise us as to the business that will be before the Assembly next week.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We anticipate that on Monday, November 20, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading we will be dealing with Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000; Bill 22, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2000; with the possibility of Committee of the Whole on Bill 20 and Bill 22; and as per the Order Paper.

On Monday evening at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, supplementary supply, day 2 of 2, considering the estimates of Health and Wellness, Government Services, Environment, Municipal Affairs, and Justice. Should the Assembly permit, we would intend to revert to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of Bill 28, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000, (No. 2), and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, November 21, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 22, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2000; in Committee of the Whole Bill 3, Statute Revision Act; and as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of the Whole Bill 3, Statute Revision Act; Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000; and Bill 22, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2000; for second reading Bill 28, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2), and Bill 29, Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000.

On Wednesday, November 22, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 29; under Committee of the Whole bills 3, 20, 22, and 28; third reading based on progress; and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, November 23, in the afternoon under Government Motions Government Motion 15, approval in general of the fiscal policies of the government, the maiden speeches of the two new members of the House from Red Deer-North and Edmonton-Highlands; under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 29, Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000; third reading of bills 3, 20, 22, 28; and as per the Order Paper.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before proceeding to call Orders of the Day, might we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to other members of the Assembly 57 Calgarians who traveled here today by bus to witness the debate with respect to Bill 26, the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act. Among them are 30 survivors of the Holocaust, including five who have received

citations from the government of Canada for their outstanding contributions to Canadian life.

Our guests here this afternoon include Jack Adler, Dora Aftergood, Cynthia Aizenman, Rosette Azran, Lauren Bell, Jeanette Berger, Rudy Berger, Bronia Cyngiser, Sidney Cyngiser, Aron Eichler, Ofer Eliezer, Shoshana Eliezer, Maxine Fishbein, Lily Fixler, Charlie Feher, Benny Freitag, Tzvia Gersten, Charles Groner, Terry Groner, Alex Halpern, Riki Heilik, Eva Hoffman, Lotti Iuni, Harvey Kane, Benny Katz, Faigee Kifer, Louise Kirschner, Oscar Kirschner, Bill Kohn, Esther Krygier, Fanny Lewin, Ralph Lewin, Max Lipsman, Sid Macklin, Sahbra Marcus, Reverend Clint Mooney, Henri Mydlarski, Dave Pertman, Peter Pivtorak, Slava Pivtorak, Freda Plucer, Rabbi Moshe Saks, Brian Sander, Alyse Schwartz, Susan Schwartz, William Schwartz, Dora Segal, Harold Segal, Judy Shapiro, Alex Shkolnik, Sigmund Sobolewski, Efran Sturwind, Dr. Bob Thomson, Fanny Wedro, Jaye Yarrow, Elliott Zuckier, Minnie Zuckier. At this time I would ask our guests, who are seated in the members' gallery, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with humbleness and great honour this afternoon that I, too, rise to introduce some special guests from Edmonton. They are survivors and second generation as well. Amongst the survivors and the second-generation individuals are Alvin Goldsman, who is president of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton and also an officer with the Canadian Jewish Congress and national vice-president of the Jewish National Fund; Gillian Horwitz, chairperson, Holocaust Education Committee of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton and national vice-president of Hadassah-WIZO; and Gayle Tallman, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton.

They, too, are here this afternoon to watch a very special event as we pass the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act, an act which commemorates Yom ha-Shoah, wherein the annihilation of 6 million Jewish men, women, and children occurred. If they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House as well.

Thank you.

head: Orders of the Day

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 73(1) to allow second reading debate on Bill 26 on the same day as it received first reading.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 26
Holocaust Memorial Day
and Genocide Remembrance Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Premier on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to move on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore second reading of

the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act.

I would like to open my remarks with a brief excerpt from the memoirs of Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor and a Nobel prize winning writer. The passage recalls the day that Mr. Wiesel and his family were seized and sent to Auschwitz. He writes:

Our turn came on Tuesday, May 16. "All Jews out!" the gendarmes screamed, and we found ourselves in the street. My little sister was thirsty, and my grandmother too. They didn't complain, but I did, not openly, but it amounted to the same thing . . . As in the presence of death, I didn't dare raise my voice. This was where my childhood and adolescence, my prayers, studies and fasting had led. These moments would remain forever etched within me. Wherever life took me, a part of me would always remain in that street, in front of my empty house, awaiting the order to depart.

I see my little sister, I see her with her rucksack, so cumbersome, so heavy. I see her and immense tenderness sweeps over me. Never will her innocent smile fade from my soul. Never will her glance cease to sear me. Never will the sound of her voice leave my heart. She was thirsty, my little sister was thirsty.

Mr. Speaker, the images evoked by this brief passage are unforgettable. For the survivors of the Holocaust such as Elie Wiesel, even to speak of what they endured has always been very painful, more painful than most of us can imagine. I had my imagination enlightened in such a realistic fashion when I had the opportunity to visit Israel about five years ago to visit the Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial. Even more vivid and more stark and more dramatic an example of man's inhumanity toward man was the memorial that was dedicated to the children who perished in the Holocaust. But speak of it they do, with courage and thoughtfulness, and across the world many people have heard these voices and learned the somber lessons these survivors can teach.

On one day every spring in countries around the world these voices come together as one, on Yom ha-Shoah; that is, Holocaust Memorial Day. The voices join with other voices, the voices of survivors of other acts of violence, hatred, and genocide. Together these voices ask all people to remember the victims, whom writer William Styron so vividly describes as "the beaten and butchered and betrayed and martyred children of the earth." These voices do more than help us remember. They remind us that respect for one another and respect for the diversity of human life can never be taken for granted. They compel us to resolve even more strongly to be vigilant in the protection of human life and dignity. They urge us to speak out whenever a person or a people is persecuted or abused.

3:00

In Alberta and across Canada people are rightfully proud of the traditions of diversity and respect that underpin society. Freedom of thought and freedom of worship are a hallmark of the province and the nation, but that does not mean that Albertans should stop listening to the voices of those who have witnessed the horrors of persecution and genocide. Just last month cowardly attacks on two Edmonton synagogues demonstrated that there are still lessons to be learned. Importantly, these lessons do not apply only to one historical incident or to one cultural group. Sadly, human history is littered with episodes of horrific persecution. Virtually no continent has escaped the scourge of persecution and abuse. Virtually no people are without painful memories of suffering at the hands of others.

The Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act will ensure that Albertans do keep listening to all voices and all people who have lessons to teach us about how fragile human rights can sometimes be. It is the government's hope that the act will heighten the awareness of Yom ha-Shoah among Albertans and give greater profile to the work of Alberta's Jewish community and other

cultural groups who bring their collective wisdom to the commemorations on that day.

It is also the government's hope that with the passage of this act Albertans will be encouraged to learn more about other acts of persecution, whether they be episodes of so-called ethnic cleansing or of genocide masked as civil war. Albertans are caring and compassionate people, and it is also our hope that the act will stimulate Albertans to express their compassion to those who have lived through the violence of persecution.

Above all, Mr. Speaker, it is our hope that this act will serve to strengthen Albertans' resolve to speak out in the face of persecution and to help those people who need their help. We hope the act will help to make the voices of survivors of all forms of persecution ring even more loudly and eloquently across the province. If the act can help achieve these goals, then perhaps the millions of victims will not have perished in vain.

Thank you. [applause]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud and I am honoured to rise in this Assembly to affirm the support of the Official Opposition for Bill 26, the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act. On May 3 of this year I spoke in the Assembly to mark the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day. This day has been set aside internationally for remembering the victims and the survivors of the Holocaust and for reminding us of what can happen to an apparently civilized people when bigotry, hatred, and indifference reign.

I have been honoured to represent two constituencies in Alberta in this Legislature. The first constituency I represented was the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, in which the Talmud Torah school was located, a school where I knew students, and we went to school together when those students moved on into junior high schools in the public system. I am now honoured to represent the constituency of Edmonton-McClung, where the Talmud Torah school has come along as well. I feel it a great honour to be a representative of this great province and of this great city and to have had the opportunity to learn a great deal about people of the Jewish faith.

In my remarks on May 3 in this Legislature I urged this provincial government to consider two initiatives which would provide a living remembrance of the Holocaust. The first was the passage of legislation similar to that in several other provinces, in fact seven in this country, to recognize a Holocaust Memorial Day, Yom ha-Shoah. The second was to place a memorial on the grounds of the Legislature. These two actions would be a living memorial to ensure that we never forget. I am very pleased, and I thank the Premier and his government for acting now to see that Alberta will join with the seven other provinces in Canada by formally recognizing Holocaust Memorial Day. The Holocaust was a state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of over 6 million men, women, and children solely because of their Jewish faith. For this reason the legislation is overdue and is welcome.

Mr. Speaker, there is another reason why this Legislature must recognize and mark the issue of the Holocaust. It is because the denial of the Holocaust has reared its ugly head in our province. The revelation of teachers in the classroom teaching denial has been dealt with by the courts and dealt with by a committee of this Legislature, the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding, led by a former member for the constituency of Calgary-Buffalo, Mr. Ron Ghitter.

As a former minister of education I had a responsibility for ensuring that public school curriculum and school materials

accurately reflected the significance of the Holocaust, building on those court decisions and the legislative committee. For this reason, I believed that stand-alone legislation would have been appropriate, as I had outlined in May. Nonetheless, I support this legislation before us today in respect for all concerned.

While Jews were certainly the primary victims, Mr. Speaker, Gypsies, the handicapped, and Slavs were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, homosexuals, and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death. The Holocaust itself speaks to the very essence of humanity. Other genocides in Armenia, Cambodia, Yugoslavia, and Rwanda clearly demonstrate that genocide is not a European phenomenon but a human one repeated too often throughout the 20th century.

Remembrance of the terrible events of the Holocaust offers an opportunity to reflect on the moral responsibilities of individuals, of societies, and of governments. We must always remain vigilant against hatred, persecution, and tyranny. Alberta's communities, which include survivors of concentration camps, their children and their grandchildren, many of whom I am privileged to know, must be recognized for their efforts to educate all of us to ensure that the unspeakable horrors against humanity will never happen again.

Those of us privileged to know survivors of genocide and their rescuers and their liberators have a special obligation to carry forward their legacy of remembrance and of education. Yom ha-Shoah, Hebrew for Holocaust, ensures that their sacrifices will never be forgotten by succeeding generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [applause]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party in the House.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am honoured to rise on behalf of the New Democratic opposition and my colleague Brian Mason to support Bill 26, Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act.

Alberta becomes the eighth Canadian province to set aside a special day to remember the victims of the Holocaust and of other genocides that have plagued humanity. I commend the government and in particular the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing this long-overdue bill forward. This bill sends a powerful message that we as elected legislators will not tolerate the hatred that lays the seeds for genocide. The Holocaust stands out in modern human history as a particularly horrific genocide. The state-sponsored attempt by Nazi Germany to systematically exterminate the entire Jewish population of Europe is unparalleled in its barbarism and sheer cruelty.

3:10

The fact that the bill's preamble specifically recognizes that the Nazis and their collaborators murdered 6 million Jewish men, women, and children is extremely important. This legislation, once proclaimed into law, will send a message to the Holocaust deniers who are still among us. Despite the irrefutable evidence for the Holocaust and the searing images of the death camps that should leave no one unmoved, there are unfortunately still those among us who either deny that the Holocaust occurred or who claim that the number of those who died is vastly exaggerated.

Not too many years ago a well-known Holocaust denier, Jim Keegstra, was infecting the minds of Alberta schoolchildren with his hatred and intolerance towards the Jewish people. Only the persistent and courageous efforts of students and parents led to the eventual removal of Mr. Keegstra from the classroom. While Mr.

Keegstra was eventually charged with hate crimes, the best antidote to the Jim Keegstras and Ernst Zundels of the world is positive legislation such as Bill 26.

I'm pleased that the bill recognizes that there were other groups who were also systemically murdered at the hands of the Nazis and others. These groups included Russians, Ukrainians, Gypsies, the mentally and physically disabled, gays and lesbians, and Germans themselves who dared to oppose Nazism and Hitler's horrific designs.

This is an appropriate occasion for each one of us to search our own hearts and to root out the hatred and racial or religious intolerance that lays the seeds for genocide. We can never afford to become complacent. The Holocaust and genocide perpetrated by Nazi Germany originated in the xenophobic mind of Adolf Hitler. Who could have predicted that the warped mind that authored *Mein Kampf* in the early '20s would a decade later become the leader of a powerful state that subsequently went on a murderous rampage across Europe and Africa?

In making the point that we can never afford to become complacent, I'll briefly quote from a speech given by South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu during a visit to Edmonton two years ago. In talking about racial hatred and intolerance, Archbishop Tutu said and I briefly quote:

Racism ends up in the xenophobia that we see of the neo-Nazi in Germany, that we see in the National Front in France and in England. Racism is not nice. It is not respectable. I hope that we can become more tolerant, but there is one intolerance that I would like to promote: that we will have zero tolerance for racism because this pernicious evil sprouts other ugly things such as homophobia. Racism is often a breeding ground for other prejudices as against women, as against old people, against immigrants.

Nor should we consign the Holocaust and the other genocides perpetrated by Nazis to history as something that happened before and will never happen again. In 1994 the genocide in the African country of Rwanda led to the death of hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of people in several weeks of carefully executed madness and murder. Just four years ago genocide returned to Europe in the mass murder of thousands of Bosnian Muslims in the supposedly safe haven of Srebrenica. Here in Canada in a few weeks' time we'll mark the 11th anniversary of 14 women at the Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal. These women were murdered for no other reason than that they were women.

Again, by passing this important bill today, we as legislators are sending an important and a clear message countering the hatred and intolerance that all too often consumes our world, our country, and sometimes our own province. But passing this bill today is not enough. As legislators we have a responsibility to ensure that the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act achieves the noble statements made in the bill's preamble, which I paraphrase as follows: to look within ourselves and reflect on the enduring lessons of the Holocaust, of other incidents of systematic genocide, racism, and hatred, and to reaffirm our commitment to uphold the human rights of all and to value diversity and the multicultural richness of Alberta society.

We need to reflect carefully on the words of Archbishop Tutu before following the advice of those who so flippantly talk about setting aside important rights and freedoms enunciated by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Unless we respect the human rights of all, including minorities, no one's human rights are safe, Mr. Speaker. As legislators we need to make sure that Holocaust and genocide remembrance becomes part of the curriculum in our schools. We need to provide leadership and not leave it only up to community organizations to organize activities and events that mark this special day.

I just want, Mr. Speaker, to draw attention to a book recently published by the University of Alberta, by two University of Alberta academics, one of whom I had the honour of introducing to the House earlier today, Dr. Bernie Schwartz, who is sitting here in the members' gallery this afternoon. The title of the book is *The Holocaust's Ghost: Writings on Art, Politics, Law and Education*, and just a brief description of the book:

The Holocaust is history, an event now past, of unparalleled barbarity and cruelty, but the Holocaust is not consumed nor is it contained by historical fact. In *Holocaust's Ghost* it is hoped that memory will forge vigilance, a moral and political watchfulness for Holocaust, whether in the form of proposals or accomplished political arrangements.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, it's only if we remember the lessons of the past that we'll avoid having these tragic events repeated in the present and in the future. Only if instilled in our children the absolute necessity of respect for the human rights and dignity of all persons will we stamp out the evil seeds that lead to holocaust and genocide.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am very honoured today to rise in support of second reading of the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act. We all know that the Holocaust was one of the world's most horrible crimes. Today we are called upon to reflect and remember the senseless and systematic annihilation of 6 million innocent Jewish people from 23 European countries, from Austria to Yugoslavia, during the dark days of World War II. In addition, atrocities were also committed against millions of others who were targeted for their level of physical or mental ability, race, other religious denominations, and sexual orientation. Out of racism and hatred individuals and entire families perished by the deliberate actions of one's fellow human beings, an event so horrific that it can never be forgotten or erased from our past. If the world fails to recognize, remember, and learn from it, it could happen again.

Today in this House history will show that in Alberta we not only talked about remembrance; we legislated it into law. The passing of this bill reaffirms the Alberta government's commitment to uphold human rights and to value the diversity of multiculturalism in this province while reaffirming our commitment to fight against racism, violence, hatred, and persecution. This government is involved in various initiatives which not only support and address human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism, but it also recognizes the efforts of those who fight against tyranny and oppression.

Let me give you just a couple of examples. Through our community initiative programs 46 grants amounting to almost a million dollars were awarded this year in support of fostering and promoting human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism. Included was a grant to the Calgary Jewish Centre to hold a Holocaust education symposium for 1,800 grade 12 students. Last year the Edmonton Jewish centre received a grant to hold a symposium called Facing Hate, which also focused on the Holocaust. In addition, the Canadian Arab Friendship Association received a grant for a project called Alberta Arab: A Visual Exhibition.

Let us not forget that during World War II, Alberta sent mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters to bravely serve as members of the Canadian armed forces. Many Albertans paid the ultimate price with their life to prevent the world from falling into the hands of evil.

I recently had the privilege and honour of being a part of a ceremony in which this government dedicated the Ex Coelis range

of Alberta mountains in honour of the First Canadian Parachute battalion. These brave soldiers were the first to land behind enemy lines on D day. What I remember most about meeting and talking with this group was that they were first and foremost proud Canadians and many of them proud Albertans. Their will to succeed was surpassed only by their resolute commitment to ending a regime that had caused such destruction and evil in our world. It is this kind of spirit and culture which is the strength of our province, a testimony to the rich diversity of Alberta that allows us to walk together with a common concern for each other.

3:20

While it is a relatively easy process to enact this legislation, it is far more difficult to achieve. Although I believe that as a society we are more aware of the presence of hatred, racism, and persecution, it is still amongst us. But by committing ourselves each and every day to have respect for one another, we start to challenge the seeds of injustice that are based on evils of hatred and racism. In this country and around the globe we must always stand on guard, on guard for ourselves and those who are unable to speak out against behaviour and attitudes that extinguish and choke the rights of citizens and individuals.

Perhaps we may never fully comprehend or understand the grief endured by the survivors and their families, but we can extend our deepest sorrow and with it our perpetual and sincerest commitment to reflect on the enduring lessons of the Holocaust with a vision to educate ourselves and our children on the perils of hatred and war, to consider and speak out against other times and incidents of genocide and persecution, to uphold the human rights of all citizens, and to value diversity and the multicultural richness of Alberta society.

At this time I would like to acknowledge the support of so many members of this Legislature for embracing and supporting this initiative. The fact that we can proceed as one sends a very powerful message that although we may disagree at times, we are united in continuing to work together for the common good, a true symbol of hope in the battle against racism with a vision to ensuring that a Holocaust never again darkens the face of this Earth.*

Mr. Speaker, I consider it to be a great honour to have had the privilege to address the Assembly today on this very important piece of legislation. It is a very significant and proud moment for this Legislature and for our province. I hope for all of us that as time passes by, this day and the passing of this bill are remembered as something which eases the pain for the victims and survivors of the Holocaust and, in doing so, it becomes one of the most moving, memorable, and significant events in the life of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fifty-five years ago World War II came to an end, and with that end came a truth that could no longer be ignored, a truth that political and religious leaders could no longer deny, that fellow human beings could no longer dispute. That truth was that the Nazis' final solution to the Jewish problem had led to the systematic murder of 6 million Jews in death camps.

These death camps were concentration camps with special apparatus specifically designed for systematic mass murders. Six such camps existed: Auschwitz/Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmo, Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka. Each day as many as 12,000 people were gassed at Auschwitz alone. To put those figures in perspective, each day the population of a town like Wetaskiwin would disappear overnight. In 14 months at the death camp Treblinka, a population

the size of Edmonton, 900,000 Jews, disappeared. As one survivor remembers:

How does one describe walking into Auschwitz, the smell? And someone pointing out to you that those are gas chambers, that your parents went up in smoke. When I asked, "When will I see my mother?" several hours after I came into the camp, I was shown the smoke. This is how I found out where she went.

The history of the Holocaust, the 6 million Jews, of which almost 1 and a half million were children, who were rounded up and slaughtered, of those who survived the camps and were used as slave labour, is not told today to shock or horrify but to ensure that we never forget. We must not forget the others that were murdered as well: Gypsies, the mentally and physically disabled, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, political enemies. But we must acknowledge and can never deny that Hitler's final solution was directed at the Jewish people solely because of their faith, their parents' faith, and their grandparents' faith. This fact makes the Holocaust unique.

As a veteran prisoner in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp would tell new arrivals: "I have told you this story not to weaken you but to strengthen you. Now it is up to you!" And so the story of the Holocaust must continue to be told.

The word "Holocaust" brings different images to people's minds, and I warn you that these images are graphic and are told not to weaken you but to strengthen our resolve. There were images such as those that met the American soldiers on entering the concentration camp.

We went outside into the yard. In front of me I could see human hair. There were piles of boots, shoes, suitcases, eyeglasses, to my left was four-wheel hay wagons and two-wheel push carts. Only those wagons contained nude bodies of men, women and children, even babies. All nude, all dead, all piled as high as they basically could pile them.

There are the images of those transported in mobile gas vans.

The back of the van would open, the Jews were made to get inside the van . . . the driver then switched on the engine, crawled under the van and connected a pipe from the exhaust to the inside of the van. The exhaust fumes now poured into the inside of the truck so that the people inside were suffocated. After about ten minutes when there were no further signs of life, the van set off toward the camp where the bodies were burned.

There are the images of the selection process, which determined those who lived and, in most cases, those who died a slower death and those who died within hours of reaching the death camps.

"Selection" – We needed to get undressed every day. We needed to run – not walk – in front of S.S. Officers. We needed to show that we still had strength left . . . If one had a scar, a pimple, if one didn't run fast enough, if one didn't look right for whatever reason to the particular person that was doing the selection . . . they would stand there with a stick . . . to the right or to the left . . . one never knew if they were in the good line or the bad line . . . one line would go to the gas chambers, the other line would go back to the camp . . . to live another day.

The images of children who lost their lives and others who lost their childhood is perhaps the most vivid.

I remember one set of twins in particular; Guido and Inga aged about four. One day Mengele took them away. When they returned they were in a terrible state; they had been sewn together, back to back, like Siamese twins. Their wounds were infected and oozing pus. They screamed day and night, then their parents managed to get some morphine and they killed the children in order to end their suffering.

These images are real-life experiences that horrify, sicken, repulse, yet they are images that cannot be swept away, cannot be rationalized. They are images that cannot be denied or diminished.

The Holocaust Memorial Day – Yom ha-Shoah Act, to be commemorated on the 27th day of Nisan, is one way to ensure that

*Paragraphs 3 and 4 were part of the member's speech but not delivered. Inserted with the approval of the Speaker.

the memory of those who died and those who survived is never forgotten. It will be from this day forward a time to ensure that the indifference, ignorance, and denial of the Holocaust is erased. It will be a time to educate, remember, and challenge all here to ensure that not only our future but also our present constantly upholds dignity, individual freedoms, social justice, core human values, and reminds us of the fragility of our democracy.

We cannot really explain the Holocaust, nor can we explain how civilized men and women could engage in these horrors, how world leaders and citizens around the world could close their hearts and doors to the hundreds of thousands of Jews who tried to escape before it became too late. But we must remember the Holocaust to prevent it from ever happening again.

3:30

It needs to be remembered that Canada was one of those countries who closed the doors. When Canada was asked at the 1938 Avian conference of world leaders how many Jews would Canada accept, the answer was: none was too many. As a result of that conference the German foreign office was able to say:

Since in many countries it was recently regarded as wholly incomprehensible why Germany did not wish to preserve in its population an element like the Jews . . . it appears astonishing that countries seem in no way anxious to make use of these elements themselves now that the opportunity offers.

It would be so easy to blame, yet I believe that the silence of the survivors has been broken not to blame, but as a survivor has said:

I know I cannot bring back my family, my little brother, the million and a half children that were destroyed . . . but maybe I could reach some people and make them understand that this did happen and it can happen again.

The survivors that are here today are no different than you and I, than our parents or our grandparents. You would pass them by on the street and not know their history. Some of you here today in the Assembly may be first-generation Canadian, as I and my husband are. Some of you are second or third generation. Many of you have family, parents who immigrated to Canada because of persecution in their homeland. Yet never in human history has the persecution of a single race been so systematic and calculated, aided by state-of-the-art technology which allowed for these mass exterminations.

Human beings, Jews, were seen as replaceable waste products. Even in death their dignity was raped. Their ashes and bones from the ovens of the crematoria were crushed with wooden mortars and used as fill and fertilizer. Human fat from the burned bodies was collected in ditches near the incineration site and used as fuel for the fires that burned the bodies. Dental gold from the mouths of prisoners was melted and recast into gold ingots. Human hair was used to stuff mattresses and be processed into felt to be used in industry and manufactured into felt stockings.

Yet "I have told you the story not to weaken you but to strengthen you. Now it is up to you."

Generation to generation, *l'dor v'dor* is a concept in Judaism that ensures that the passage of the teachings of the Torah, of knowledge and faith, occurs from generation to generation. Holocaust Memorial Day follows that tradition, as generation to generation the life experiences of the survivors and the death experiences of the victims will be retold and remembered by all Albertans.

There is another Jewish concept, the concept of *mitzvot*, good deed. For every good deed we do, the world becomes a little brighter as ignorance and hatred are pushed further away. All human beings can perform *mitzvot*, and during the Holocaust there were many examples of righteous Gentiles. With the passage of the bill today we, too, in here are engaging in a *mitzvot* to bring to life the inhumanity of humans to other human beings so that this inhumanity cannot occur again.

There is so much more to say, so much more to leave unsaid. There is so much more to remember and much more to forget. There remains much to learn, to look forward to, and to caution against. As Gillian Horwitz, chairperson of the Holocaust Education Committee of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton, has stated: this day will give all Albertans the opportunity to reflect on the horrors of racism and human rights issues.

This designated day makes it possible for Albertans to join with all Canadians across the country to observe Holocaust Memorial Day every year when it falls on the 27th day of Nisan, the date of the lunar Jewish calendar which is designated the International Yom ha-Shoah Day. This will be a time to reflect on the consequences of persecution and genocide. The world must learn from the past, and it is our responsibility to eradicate all forms of racism and religious persecution. Today is yet another step to ensure, as an individual on the March of the Living indicated:

As the children of the future,

As the hope our mothers bore,

We must learn of the horrors past to prevent the world from more.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak in support of second reading of the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act.

After the Second World War, when the world began to learn the true nature and extent of the Holocaust and other atrocities committed by the Nazis, Pastor Martin Niemöller wrote this familiar quote:

First they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Finally they came for me, but there was no one left to speak up.

Mr. Speaker, it's been my privilege to work with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and, in fact, to join with others to speak on behalf of the disability community. In conversations with individual members of the disability community they often convey to me that safety issues are their primary concern. In reality, before those referred to by Pastor Niemöller, the first to be taken away to be killed were people with disabilities. No one knows how many were killed, but at a conservative estimate 250,000 men, women, and children with disabilities were murdered. Many others perished in forced labour camps. The perpetrators of the Holocaust practised their barbarous techniques of mass killing on persons with mental and physical disabilities. The gas chamber was developed in the winter of '39-40 and was first used to kill people with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, we know what happened in Germany and then in occupied Europe between 1933 and the end of the Second World War. We know evil people following an evil leader did evil things. We know that bad people co-operated and collaborated with them to do their evil deeds, and we know, as Pastor Niemöller reminds us, that evil things happened, indeed could only have happened, because good people, the majority of people in Germany, in occupied Europe, and in the rest of the world did nothing. The Holocaust began and the Holocaust continued because too many good people did nothing and said nothing.

I take it as a privilege and an honour to stand in this Legislature today to speak in support of the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act. Annual observance of Yom ha-Shoah will give me and all Albertans the opportunity and the occasion to acknowledge our individual responsibility for the defence of human

freedom and dignity and to rededicate ourselves to that cause.

We cannot change history. Much as we might want to, we cannot rewind the tape and replay a happier scenario. What is done cannot be taken back or denied. If we cannot change history, we can remember it truthfully, faithfully, and honestly. We can reflect on the meaning of the events of history and the suffering and death that were too often part of those events. We can respect the memory of those who suffered and died for no reason other than they were who they were and could not change. By remembering and reflecting with respect, we can learn from history, and finally, we can teach the lessons of history to our children and our grandchildren.

We cannot change the past, Mr. Speaker, but we can change ourselves. We can change our understanding of history and people. We can change our attitudes. We can change the way we behave, and if enough of us do that, we can change the world.

That is the lesson I take from Pastor Niemoller's reflection on the Holocaust. It's a lesson we can all share by taking a day each spring to remember and reflect on the hard lessons of the Holocaust.

I am pleased to speak in support of this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, also, am honoured to be able to participate in this debate at second reading on this particular bill as the human rights spokesperson for the Alberta Liberal caucus.

We have heard, since debate started at second reading, some powerful, powerful speeches that have addressed the horror and the significance of the Holocaust. Rather than reinforce some of those messages, I intend to discuss the kinds of challenge that confront us as Albertans, as Canadians in late 2000, with some suggestions in terms of how we attempt to meet that challenge.

I don't know whether everyone knows that the Simon Wiesenthal centre, that tracks on a worldwide basis far right extremism, estimates and calculates that at the time of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 there was one identified neo-Nazi web site. In 1999 it's now estimated there are 1,900 neo-Nazi web sites.

We see survey after survey that identify Canada as being the best place to live. One of the things that people identify as being such a wonderful place to live is themes of tolerance and themes of acceptance and an embracing and a reveling in our diversity. Canada is that, and we know Alberta is that, but we also know that in our communities and in our province and in our nation we are not immune to the kinds of intolerance and the kinds of bigotry and the kinds of hatred that surface from time to time. We're not immune to the kinds of influences that contribute to a Joerg Haider of the Freedom Party, a Holocaust denier like David Irving, or the several hundred neo-Nazis that marched through the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin just a few months ago to celebrate the 67th anniversary of the Nazis' ascension to power.

Yes, Albertans are tolerant, and we celebrate differences, but we have elements of our history that we can't be proud of. It was in this province that Jim Keegstra at Eckville high school preached his particular kind of hatred. When we look to the leaders in Canada's hate movement, I regret to say, I really regret to say that Alberta is well represented among those people who provide the leadership. And this isn't going back decades. It's not going back to the time of the Second World War. We talk about the world in which we live today. Jim Keegstra, Ernst Zundel, Terry Long, Malcolm Ross: they have their followers in this province.

You know, at the Canadian Association of Statutory Human

Rights Agencies that met in Banff in May of 2000, Warren Kinsella was there. Warren Kinsella is the author of a book that I hope everybody reads, if they haven't yet, called *Web of Hate*. In his book he documents what for many of us was the surprising growth of the purveyors of hate, and we find that these people have infiltrated institutions.

Going back to 1993, the Canadian Airborne regiment we found had been infiltrated by purveyors of hate. We had a federal political party just a scant few years ago – I won't identify the party because that's not important – and we had a candidate in the York Centre constituency who said in a speech, and I quote, that if an immigrant comes into Canada and gets a job for \$150,000, he is taking jobs away from us, the Gentile people, the white people; close quote. Well, that person was expelled from that party, but the point is that here was somebody who was aspiring to elected office, to be a leader.

I think there are powerful things we can do, and we don't have to look very far for solutions and strategies in terms of how we deal with purveyors of hate. I think we have provisions in our Criminal Code, but we have to ensure that our Human Rights Commission is aggressive, we have to ensure it's independent, we have to ensure it's effective, and that's something we're responsible for. We pass the budget for that.

One of the most powerful documents we've seen in this province was authored by the Select Special Committee of the Legislative Assembly on Tolerance and Understanding. It was chaired by a former MLA for Calgary-Buffalo, Ron Ghitter, and what he talks about in the report is that the single most effective way to deal with purveyors of hate is through a strong public education system. Far beyond any type of prosecution mechanism, the single most effective way of counteracting hate is to ensure that a public education system teaches our children how to get along, how to respect each other in spite of our differences, whether they're religious or racial or whatever those differences might be. There is no better way of guaranteeing that the Holocaust never happens again and that genocide never happens again.

We could do a lot more. One of the key recommendations was that every three years there should be a survey of grade 8 and grade 11 students to determine their attitudes around tolerance and understanding. We did it one time, and some of the responses were a bit scary. We identified in some grade 8 classes that there were attitudes that contribute to the very kind of evil we're identifying and talking about today. We haven't followed through on some of those things.

I think of my predecessor and late friend, Sheldon Chumir, the former MLA for Calgary-Buffalo, and the work he did in terms of trying to promote a strong public education system.

So we have the challenge right here, beyond the powerful speeches we've heard today. We're the ones that fix the budget for our Department of Learning. We're the ones that have input in terms of the curriculum that's taught in Alberta schools. I hope that in addition to the powerful message we've heard resonating in here this afternoon, we take that sort of commitment that's so apparent this afternoon and convert it into action, convert it into action in terms of the allocation of resources.

I guess the other thing I'd just say is that I think there's an enormous role for leadership in elected people at every level of government. We all have a leadership role. Whenever we hear the propagation of hate and whenever we hear jokes and stories, we all have a responsibility to speak up, because that's the only way you root out the kind of evil that has led to tragedy such as we deal with today.

So I think we have an enormous challenge, and there's a great deal

we can do in very practical ways. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore to close the debate.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are voices calling out to us from history, and they have much to teach us if we listen. These voices come from the Holocaust, the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1944. Those forces of tyranny murdered 6 million Jewish people and millions of others because of their race, religion, disabilities, or sexual orientation, including 1 and one-half million children, and they brutalized so many, many more.

The Holocaust voices teach us about a singular tragedy, about what human beings did and can do to other human beings. They teach us what can happen to civilized society when bigotry and hatred rule. They teach us about the dangers of simply being bystanders and of remaining silent. They teach us about the black and painful side of human nature.

3:50

When the full horror of the Nazi atrocities became public knowledge towards the end of World War II, Winston Churchill stated that the world was being confronted with a crime that has no name, and so it was that the term genocide came into being. Contemporary events tell us that genocide is a phenomenon, one that has been tragically repeated throughout the 20th century and, indeed, repeated so very recently. The voices of history teach us the need to commit to a legacy of remembrance, education, and conscience.

Mr. Speaker, it's easy to pass legislation. It's harder to stand vigilant, to do our part to ensure that such atrocities do not happen again. Passing this legislation is the beginning of a process. It is the things we do tomorrow and next week and next year that count. The people in this room, from honoured guests to my fellow colleagues in this Legislature, have important roles to play to help carry the message about Yom ha-Shoah, Holocaust Memorial Day.

We must remember the men, women, and children who died during the Holocaust. We must also remember and honour those who survived this time of persecution, and we must not forget other terrible instances of injustice and genocide. We must learn from these terrible examples. We must teach ourselves, teach one another, teach our children, for each generation must learn anew. We must look within ourselves. We are obligated as human beings to walk this path together. We can draw hope from each other.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to conclude by acknowledging with thanks Mr. Aron Eichler and Mrs. Riki Heilik, who brought the idea for this bill to my attention. I also wish to thank the Premier and the Minister of Community Development and indeed all hon. members for their support.

Mr. Speaker, on Holocaust Memorial Day, Yom ha-Shoah, we will remember, for we must never forget.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 26 read a second time]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order.

**Bill 26
Holocaust Memorial Day
and Genocide Remembrance Act**

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

[The clauses of Bill 26 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 26.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: Bill 26.

THE SPEAKER: Do all members concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request unanimous consent of the Legislature to waive Standing Order 73(1) to allow third reading debate on Bill 26 on the same day as it received second reading.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

**Bill 26
Holocaust Memorial Day
and Genocide Remembrance Act**

MR. STEVENS: I move Bill 26, Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act, for third reading.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, I take it that you're moving third reading and there are no further speakers.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 26 read a third time]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, one of the unique things about a democracy is that on any given day on any given occasion all members in the Assembly can rise to the highest level possible. On this day this Assembly has done very, very good work, and all members should be proud of what has been accomplished here.

We have a *Hansard*. The *Hansard* will record all the speeches

given by those who participated here today, but one thing our *Hansard* does not include is a copy of the bill. And as we go forward into history, history will not know exactly what has been in the bill unless the hon. members permit me to read the context of the bill into the *Hansard*.

4:00

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Bill 26, Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act:

Whereas the Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewish men, women and children by the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945, and this horrific act is part of our common history as citizens on this earth;

Whereas the Nazis and their collaborators murdered 6 million Jewish people, including more than a million children, during that time of persecution and death;

Whereas the Nazis and their collaborators also persecuted and murdered millions of other people because of their race, religion, level of physical or mental ability or sexual orientation;

Whereas during World War II, Albertans bravely served as members of the Canadian Armed Forces, and many Albertans paid the ultimate price, their lives, to protect and preserve freedom and democracy;

Whereas "Shoah" is the Hebrew term for "Holocaust";

Whereas it is fitting and right to observe Yom ha-Shoah, the Day of the Holocaust, as a day to remember the victims and survivors of the Holocaust and to honour those who fought to defeat tyranny and genocide;

Whereas this day provides Albertans with the opportunity:

- to look within themselves, reflect on the enduring lessons of the Holocaust and educate their children, their colleagues and their fellow citizens on the perils of hatred,
- to consider other times and incidents of systematic violence, genocide, persecution, racism and hatred that call out to us from the past or continue today, and
- to reaffirm their commitment to uphold the human rights of all and to value diversity and the multicultural richness of Alberta society;

Whereas on Yom ha-Shoah we will remember, for we must never forget;

Therefore her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, enacts as follows:

Yom ha-Shoah, the Day of the Holocaust as determined in each year by the Jewish lunar calendar, is proclaimed as Holocaust Memorial Day – Yom ha-Shoah.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the memorable events of today I would move that we call it 5:30 p.m.

[At 4:03 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, November 20, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/11/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Dear God, author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask Thy guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Hon. members, would you please remain standing as we ask Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly His Excellency Dr. Yuri Scherbak, ambassador of Ukraine to Canada, who actually first visited our Assembly earlier this past May. The ambassador is here today to mark the official inauguration of the Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations. The council's first meeting will be this afternoon, and the ambassador will join the MLA from Redwater and myself at this very special event. Our Premier and the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations will join us later this evening. This council will be made up of 12 members representing Alberta's Ukrainian community, and its mandate is to explore ways to strengthen ties between Alberta and Ukraine, particularly in light of Ukraine's proclamation of independence a few short years ago.

As the ambassador knows, Alberta has a very long and proud relationship with Ukraine, and people have been coming to Alberta from Ukraine for over 100 years now, such that we have nearly 300,000 people of Ukrainian descent living in Alberta who contribute to our province in every way possible.

His Excellency Ambassador Scherbak is accompanied by Mr. Dave Sereda, who is the president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress for the Alberta provincial council. [remarks in Ukrainian]

We welcome you very sincerely on the occasion of this important and historic day. We are anticipating much success with this initiative. [as submitted]

They have risen, Mr. Speaker, and I would now ask this Assembly to sincerely extend the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table petitions containing 22 names from Airdrie-Rocky View constituency, 17 names from Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency, 283 names from Calgary-Nose Creek and Calgary-Shaw constituencies, 12 names from Lesser Slave Lake constituency, and 673 names from the constituencies of Cypress-Medicine Hat and Medicine Hat. The petitioners are urging the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Alberta human rights act to allow "health professionals to opt out of those . . . procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present two petitions today on behalf of the constituents of Highwood. The first petition regarding building a Catholic kindergarten to grade 5 school in the Black Diamond-Turner Valley area is signed by 127 constituents.

The second petition, with 63 names, is supporting amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have a petition signed by 445 Albertans from Camrose, Wetaskiwin, Millet, Ponoka, Hobbema, Bashaw, Vegreville, Mundare, Ryley, and other nearby towns urging

the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition signed by 60 Albertans from Edmonton, St. Albert, Sherwood Park petitioning

the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on May 25, 2000, urging the government of Alberta to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour dispute at the *Calgary Herald* be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark on a Standing Order 40 application.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that at the appropriate time this afternoon I will make application under Standing Order 40 to deal with the following motion: "Be it resolved that this Assembly address the crisis in access to emergency care in Calgary hospitals."

Thank you.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two reports that I would like to table today. The first is the MLA Workers' Compensation Board Service Review Input Committee report, and the second one is the report of the Review Committee of the Workers' Compensation Board Appeal Systems.

MR. CAO: I'd like to table the letter from my constituents regarding the drowning of the children in the city canal.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. First is the report released today by the Official Opposition, Lost Promise and Potential: Alberta's Statistics on Youth Suicides Programs and Challenges.

Accompanying that report, Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to table the ministerial briefing and agenda for that ministers' briefing which occurred on November 8 with ministers Evans, Hancock, and Mar. At that time the status of programs and the incidence of suicide in young Albertans was shared with those ministers.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three documents to table this afternoon. The first one is an MRI bill of \$499. This bill was paid by Rose Senio. She is a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar. It was for a medically necessary procedure.

The next two documents that I have to table, Mr. Speaker, I've received through FOIP. The first one is a letter to the hon. Minister of Justice. It is regarding the rotting roofs in Heritage Mansion East near Heritage Mall in southwest Edmonton.

The next document is also concerning the rotting roofs in Alberta, and it is to the Cobblestone Court Condominium Association in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta, and it is signed by the Hon. Murray Smith.

Thank you.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: Okay, hon. members. The other day I made it very, very clear. We're not going to be using individual names in this Assembly. We're going to be using titles; two violations today. Now, no more.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table some information on how the increased electrical rates are affecting condominiums and condominium boards resulting in significant increases in condominium fees. Some good information.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd file five copies of a document entitled The Education Dividend: Why Education Spending Is a Good Investment for BC, prepared by Robert Allen for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. It indicates the social value of having completed a university degree.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies to file with the Assembly, and it's an invitation to attend the ASET convention this spring. It's titled Alberta Unplugged. It's ostensibly to explain the deregulation of the utility industries, and I suspect a good number here would do well to attend.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling, and it's a press release relative to Bill 20. I'll just read the title of the press release: Alberta Government to Pass Law This Week to Drastically Reduce Families' Rights in Fatality Claims Including Drunk Driving and Murder of Children. The group spokesman is Rick J. Mallett of James H. Brown & Associates.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table a letter written on behalf of ATCO Electric which is an amendment to its regulated rate option tariff. Hearings begin today, actually, before the Energy and Utilities Board. The reason for the amendment is because the ATCO original price forecast was at \$70.82 per megawatt hour. Because of the forward market price in the 103- to 110-megawatt range, the company has had to file an application to raise that rate.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. One tabling consists of the appropriate number of questionnaires that have been responded to by Alberta victims of brain injury dealing with the issues of concern to them such as housing, transportation, and so on.

Secondly, I'm tabling five copies of a letter addressed to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and to the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness which have been hand delivered to their offices last week. Again it's asking for some follow-up action in terms of those that are victims of brain injuries in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: Today, as well, hon. members, I'm tabling five copies of a package of information regarding the School at the Legislature program, which was launched today in co-operation with corporate partners Shaw Communications Inc., Capital City Savings and Credit Union, and Quality Colour Press Inc.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to my colleagues in the Legislature a very accomplished young woman who is with us today in the members' gallery. Ms Adelle Peterson is an 18-year-old University of Calgary

student and this year's recipient of the 4-H Premier's award, the highest honour given through the 4-H program. She received this honour thanks to her outstanding efforts and achievements during her eight-year membership in 4-H. She has proven abilities in leadership and effective communications as well as a strong record of accomplishment in school and in other activities. During her year as the 4-H Premier's award recipient, Adelle will travel the province serving as a 4-H ambassador and promoting the 4-H program. It's important to note that Alberta now has the largest 4-H membership in Canada. Accompanying her today is her father, Brian; her mother, Colleen; and her brother Bryce. I now invite Adelle and her family to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Nadezda Petrova, deputy head of the Economics and Planning Committee in Russia's Primorsky region. She has come to Alberta as part of the Yeltsin democracy fellowship, a program which brings Russian leaders to Canada to study the country's legislative, judicial, and economic systems. Her focus is to learn about regional development strategies, and she is looking at Alberta as a solid example of a province that has successfully achieved economic diversification and stable growth. She is also interested in Alberta's natural resources sector and exploring possible private-sector linkages. My colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-East and I had the privilege of meeting with Ms Petrova last Friday at McDougall Centre in Calgary. There is certainly much we can learn from each other and many areas of common interest to discuss. I would ask that our honoured guest please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly students from Lago Lindo elementary school in Edmonton-Glengarry. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Mr. Doug Sprake, and their principal, Mr. John Eshenko, along with Mrs. Marilyn Ghering and Mrs. Pat Wandler. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask with your permission that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Mr. Sam Friedman, or Judge Sam as we affectionately know him. Judge Sam was the chair of the appeal systems committee, whose report I tabled just a few minutes ago. With him today is Fred Clarke, a member of that committee who represents the business community here in the province. I would ask the two of them to rise and receive the warm greetings of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to introduce two leaders within our province who are seated in the public gallery. Louise Rogers is the president of the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, and Jane Walker is a nursing management consultant well known throughout the province. I

would ask both to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly my pleasure today to introduce you to two classes from J.J. Nearing in St. Albert. They are here with their excellent teachers, Mrs. Sonia Reid and Mrs. Christine Sowinski, and parent helpers Mr. Rick Kulak, Mrs. Bernice Grenier, Mr. Tony Gull, and Mrs. Madeleine Bertschi. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a special day, and I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 20 very hardworking, very diligent, very excellent students from John A. McDougall elementary school, one of the schools in my riding. They've had a big day today because they're here participating in the School at the Legislature program, which Mr. Speaker has inaugurated today. I would like to also introduce the teachers that are accompanying them: Mrs. Leticia Carter, Mrs. Heather Parliament, student teacher Mr. Tom Stewart, and vice-principal, Mrs. Nancy Weber. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three staff members from Alberta's maintenance enforcement program. Although members of the Assembly may not have met these three people, I can assure you that the many requests that come through my office with respect to maintenance enforcement are ably handled by these individuals. With us today are the program director, Manuel da Costa; senior manager of collections, Kevin Quail; and the manager of the program's special investigations unit, Shauna Curtin. As minister responsible for the program I'm proud of the work that's done by these individuals and by all members of the staff of the maintenance enforcement program. Last year the program collected more than \$127 million on behalf of Alberta families and children. These individuals are seated in the members' gallery. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Calgary Medical Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Revelation of a tragedy has once again forced Calgarians and all Albertans to ask questions and face the inadequacies in our health care system. Over the weekend Albertans first learned of the tragic death of an individual in an emergency department some months ago. Despite much-needed public dollars being put in health care, despite the hard work of physicians and health care professionals in the system, the core problems are left unsolved by this government. My question is to

the Premier. Can the Premier provide an explanation to all Albertans and in particular to the citizens of Calgary as to why the health care system failed an individual and their family in this case?

MR. KLEIN: As I understand it, Mr. Speaker, Calgary health officials unveiled plans today to deal with emergency room handling. I understand that the Calgary regional health authority's critical incident committee has unveiled a six-point plan to deal with backlogs in the emergency department.

Relative to the details, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I must say, first of all, that this is a very unfortunate and regrettable incident that took place, but I'm pleased to see that the Leader of the Opposition has acknowledged a great deal of the effort in terms of the work being done by the staff of our hospital systems in this province and also the significant amount of money that has gone into the system.

I can confirm, Mr. Speaker, that this individual was seen in the emergency room of the Rockyview hospital and that he was assessed by the staff there. As a result of his death the regional health authority conducted a critical incident review. That review precipitated in some 31 recommendations for improvement in the system on how emergencies are treated in Calgary. Physicians and staff were involved in making the recommendations. Many of those recommendations have already been implemented, and a number of them are going to continue to be implemented over the months to come, but I am confident that the regional health authority has dealt with the situation properly.

I would perhaps in closing comment that there are some 250,000 people that go through the emergency system in Calgary at least as at last year. That is a tremendous volume to deal with. If I could say one thing, it would be that if we could say that 95, 97, 99 percent of the people got the right treatment at the right time, we'd have to say that was a good system, but it is not perfect, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier tell this Legislature why Calgary still does not have enough beds to meet the needs of a predictably growing population in the Calgary area?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know that statement to be true. As I understand it, with the closure of the Holy Cross and the Bow Valley centre, the old General hospital, we were able to open up, indeed, hundreds of new state-of-the-art beds.

Relative to the bed situation in Calgary, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it is not simply a question, of course, of opening up beds; it is also a question of having the appropriate equipment and the appropriate staff. We know that across Canada, indeed in other parts of North America, there is a critical need for staff of all sorts, health care professionals. We have responded by increasing the number of people that are trained in our post-secondary system. We increased it by 850 this year so that there are now 5,650 people in our postsecondary system training in health care professions. The Minister of Infrastructure may wish to outline some of the important infrastructure investments that have been made and announced this year. Also, with respect to equipment, of course members would be well familiar with investments in the area of renal dialysis equipment and MRIs and so on.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, few provinces, in fact no provinces,

have the fiscal resources of this one, so why will this Premier not commit to long-term, sustainable health care funding instead of the one-shot injections which even the Auditor General of this province has criticized his government for?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we are doing perhaps more than any other province in terms of our commitment to long-term sustainability. The one-time cash infusion was for capital. The opposition has complained about not enough MRIs. We have now equipped our hospitals with seven MRIs. Six more are on the way. We've done significant upgrades. We were able to allot to the city of Calgary some \$190 million for a new children's hospital. This is on top of countless millions of dollars that were allocated to various regional health authorities for capital upgrades.

On top of that, the sustainability of the system is something that we're going to have to work with on a national basis with the Prime Minister, with the national Minister of Health, with all the ministers of health across the country. I can tell you that the way health care spending is going – and I think Lorne Gunter alluded to it in an editorial in the *Edmonton Journal* yesterday – these costs are rising each and every year as they relate to operating.

Mr. Speaker, when the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition was the minister of health, she was faced with the very same problem, and that was the problem of sustainability. How do you address operating costs? We're able to address through one-time spending the capital problems facing the health care system, but the big challenge in the future – and I would seek the help of the Liberal opposition – is the sustainability of operating costs. Really we're heading to something like 40 percent of the total operating budget in operating costs, and this is not peculiar to Alberta. This is happening across the country, and indeed it's happening around the world.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Electric Utilities Deregulation

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's move to another area of mismanagement, and that's electricity deregulation. The evidence keeps mounting against the Premier's electricity deregulation scheme, which has resulted in inadequate supply and skyrocketing prices for consumers right across this province. The Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties passed a near unanimous resolution calling on reconsideration of the deregulation scheme. The Premier's own market surveillance administrator said that uncertainty has caused "reluctance on the part of suppliers to invest in new supply" in Alberta. Now a former minister of utilities and telephones, the hon. Dr. Warrack, says that investors have been reluctant to invest in new supply because of uncertainty and financial risk. To quote Dr. Warrack: uncertainty and risk kills investment. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the Premier ignoring the mounting evidence that proves conclusively that the government's deregulation scheme is responsible for inadequate supply and skyrocketing electricity prices for our farmers, our consumers, our industries, and our businesses?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: No doubt about it, Mr. Speaker, the prices are going up. Admittedly there was some uncertainty, but with the pooling and the opportunity now to source alternative forms of energy, we are very confident that through a deregulated environment those prices will come down.

Mr. Speaker, because of our prudent fiscal policies we were able to provide two rebates, well, actually three rebates: one for business,

farm communities, and so on, which should go some distance over this interim period to bring down rates. Certainly as of January 1 each householder in this province will see a \$20 per month reduction in his or her power bill, and of course in about one week's time Albertans over the age of 16, tax filers, will be receiving the first installment of a \$300 rebate of \$150.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is very important to have Albertans understand the impact of the one rebate, and that is the \$20 reduction. Right now in Winnipeg the average householder using 750 kilowatt hours pays \$49.26. In Vancouver it's \$50. In Montreal it's \$50.79. In Medicine Hat it's \$53.45. In Manitoba for those who use Manitoba Hydro, it's \$60.08. In Edmonton it's \$61.34. If the consumer uses TransAlta Utilities, it's \$67.38. These are all October prices. Regina is \$68.32. In Calgary it's \$68.50, Toronto \$69.71, Kalispell, Montana – these are in Canadian dollars – \$69.61, SaskPower rural \$70.43, St. John's, Newfoundland, \$72.12, ATCO \$73.19 – that's mostly the northern customers – Salt Lake City, Utah, \$76.70, Halifax \$78.98, Portland, Oregon, \$79.93, Denver, Colorado, \$84.01.

Mr. Speaker, the point I'm trying to make . . .

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the average price at the pool was \$14 per megawatt hour back in 1996, can the Premier explain the jump to now over a hundred dollars according to the ATCO reapplication on the regulated rate option?

MR. KLEIN: A lot of it has to do with supply and demand, but, Mr. Speaker, I'm more concerned as to how the ordinary householder is going to be affected.

Now, I'm going to come back to Edmonton, Alberta. As of January 1 that \$61.34 will come down to \$41.34. Mr. Speaker, those TransAlta utility customers will come down from \$67.38 to \$47.38. In Calgary it will come down from \$68.50 to \$48.50, and those consumers using ATCO will come down from \$73.19 to \$53.19. Alberta consumers, the ordinary person, the household consumer, will be paying among the lowest rates in the country.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, just as Mr. Justice Friedman spoke about a "culture of denial" in his WCB report, why is this Premier washing his hands of the rising electricity costs that consumers are having to bear in this province because of his government's mess that he created in deregulation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is not a culture of denial. These are facts. You know, the Alberta taxpayer pays the Liberal Party to have researchers as they do for the Conservative Party. If you don't believe these facts, get your researchers and check them out. Check them out. I'm just saying that in Edmonton as of January 1, power rates will go . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Denial.

MR. KLEIN: This is not denial, Mr. Speaker. This is fact: January 1 from \$61.34 to \$41.34, TransAlta Utilities customers from \$67.38 to \$47.38, Calgary from \$68.50 to \$48.50. That is fact.

In addition, we now go to the other major issue, and that is natural gas, and I would like to offer some comparisons there as well. In Edmonton it's \$5.80 a gigajoule. In Calgary it's \$6.16. In Saskatchewan it's \$6.25. In B.C. it's \$7.57. So much for the ND advantage. In Manitoba it's \$6.37. In Ontario it's \$7.84, and in good old Quebec it's only \$11.08 a gigajoule.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, while the Premier can try and paper it over, Alberta consumers are extremely concerned about increases in their monthly electricity bills. Back on March 23, 1998, the then minister of energy promised residential consumers that they would see stable electricity rates for a long period of time into the future. This week the tariffs established by ATCO and EPCOR for consumers under the regulated rate option, which is the option the Premier has talked about – if Albertans don't like deregulation, they can stay with his regulation – will be presented to the government regulator, the Energy and Utilities Board, for approval. As a well-known columnist has said: impatient consumers can translate into unhappy voters. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier confirm that under the regulated rate option residential consumers in Alberta will be exposed to market prices for electricity, meaning higher electricity bills?

MR. KLEIN: If they wish to stay in a regulated environment, of course they won't for at least five years. If they wish to go into a deregulated environment, they'll have the opportunity of shopping around. It's not going to happen overnight, but in the interim – and I say this to the leader of the Liberal opposition – because of prudent fiscal management we've been able to offset rising prices. [interjections]

Well, the next election. I'm sort of looking forward to the next election. Oh, I am looking forward with great delight to the next election, Mr. Speaker. And you know why they're trying to make as much hay now by raising fears, unfounded fears through innuendo? They're trying to raise these fears now because they know darned well as of January 1, when the ordinary householder receives his or her electricity bill and sees that bill drop from \$61.34 on average to \$41.34, from \$67.38 to \$47.38, from \$68.50 to \$48.50, from \$73.19 to \$53.19, well, of course they're going to vote for us.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, getting back to the question, will the Premier acknowledge that since ATCO is revising its projections for the regulated rate option with new prices that are up from \$70 to \$103 per megawatt hour, this is going to be passed on in higher prices to the consumer?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that's very much a possibility. It probably will happen. But in the interim we are able to offset on average per household the rising cost of electricity by something like \$840 a year. The leader of the Liberal opposition only talks about the increase in electricity prices. She doesn't talk whatsoever about the very generous and energetic program of this government to offset those rising costs, and I think that that's inherently unfair.

2:10

MRS. MacBETH: Well, let's talk about the offset, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier confirm that the increase in the wholesale price under ATCO's application could mean an increase in the average monthly residential bill from \$59 currently to over \$100; in other words, a \$41 difference under the regulated rate option?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I really don't think that will happen. Right now, ATCO is \$73.19, will be \$53.19 on average for the average household. Relative to anticipated increases over and above that, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. CARDINAL: Well, Mr. Speaker, this process is before the

board now, and it would be unfair to comment on it until later on this week once a decision is made.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Hip and Knee Replacement Surgery

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, the director of surgical services for the Calgary regional health authority reported that 719 people are waiting for up to a year for hip and knee replacement in Calgary. In other words, there are almost twice as many people waiting for hip and knee replacements in Calgary today as were waiting two years ago. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier please explain why waiting times for hip and knee replacements in Calgary have climbed by more than 80 percent given government claims that hundreds of millions of dollars are being provided to reduce waiting times for these procedures?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that detail in front of me, but I will ask the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the numbers cited by the hon. member are correct, and the fact of the matter is that there is a greater demand for hip and knee replacement surgery that is a function of our aging and growing population. So although we have made great improvements in surgical procedures and the numbers of procedures being done, they are not keeping pace with the demand for it. The CRHA had indicated to me that they have improved the number of surgeries that they do by 20 percent this year to 1,445.

Mr. Speaker, we are working on this particular area. I wanted to note that Alberta is a partner in the western Canada waiting list project, and this project is studying waiting lists for joint replacements and other procedures and is trying to look at ways that we can change the way that waiting lists are compiled, making them fairer to patients and ranking them based on a patient's pain and prognosis for recovery.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the Premier will give his word to this House that waiting times for hip and knee replacements will be reduced by adding capacity to the public health care system rather than by contracting out these procedures to private, for-profit hospitals like HRG.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know of any hip or knee replacement procedures, defined as probably major surgery, that are contracted out. Indeed, some other minor surgeries are contracted out to alleviate pressure on the public system so that these procedures can be performed. We're constantly working to alleviate those waiting lists.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think that it's an interesting point to make that the contracting out of cataract surgeries, as an example, to private surgical facilities, that are paid for by the public system by the way, do allow hospitals to use their surgical facilities in hospitals for more critical surgeries like hip and joint replacements. So the purpose of the Health Care Protection Act to allow a regime that permits this type of contracting out under rigid circumstances and standards will actually help provide exactly what the hon. member is asking for; that is to say, greater capacity within the public system in a public hospital for the doing of things like hips and knees.

Mr. Speaker, specifically on the issue of hip and knee surgery the regional health authority in Calgary was given some \$2 million to improve access to this particular kind of surgery. That was part of a package of some \$54 million that was announced earlier this year for improvements to access in a number of different areas across the province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the minister of health. Will the minister assure the House that the reason that waiting times for hip and knee replacements are being allowed to skyrocket in Calgary is not to make it easier for the CRHA to contract out total joint replacements to the HRG private, for-profit hospital once the provincial election is over? Will you please give that assurance?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we have in fact put more resources, as I've indicated, into dealing with these types of surgical procedures within the public health care system. I've not heard of any plan being brought forward by anyone for doing these kinds of surgical procedures in private surgical facilities.

I note that the College of Physicians and Surgeons will determine whether such things could be safely done in such facilities, but to this point no such determination has been made that I'm aware of, because nobody's come forward with a proposal to do these types of services under a contract under our Health Care Protection Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Maintenance Enforcement Program

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As members of this Assembly we often receive questions from constituents regarding the maintenance enforcement program. I often hear from both parents and children having difficulty making ends meet because of parents who default on their court-ordered maintenance payments. My question today is to the Minister of Justice. What has this minister done to ensure court-ordered maintenance orders are indeed obeyed?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1998 the MLA review of the maintenance enforcement program and child access concluded that the program did not have the tools to collect maintenance in situations where debtors were able to pay but refused to co-operate with the program to fulfill their court-ordered obligations. In response the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act was passed in November of 1999 to strengthen the ability of the maintenance enforcement program to collect support from those who can afford to pay.

Over the past year the program's ability to take action against defaulting debtors has been expanded. Staff now have the ability to cancel a debtor's driver's licence, to report defaulting debtors to the credit bureau, to place garnishees in a more timely manner, to seek a court order for collection when corporations or other people are used to shelter a debtor's income or assets. Over the past year the act has enhanced the program's ability to collect court-ordered payments and to ensure that Alberta families receive the financial support to which they are entitled.

Mr. Speaker, the maintenance enforcement program is about helping children receive the support that they need from parents in

situations where there's family breakdown. It's an important way to enhance the quality of life of children and the opportunity of children to achieve in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary to the same minister: what's the maintenance enforcement program doing for cases involving debtors who can afford to pay but constantly neglect their obligations?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, while there are many families in this province where maintenance payments are made on a voluntary basis, as they should, there are unfortunately those situations where parents don't voluntarily step forward to take care of their parental obligations. Under the maintenance enforcement program we've initiated a special investigations unit that was initiated last November to handle their most challenging collections. The unit assesses files for further action when a default hearing order or maintenance enforcement program standard collection procedures do not result in payment. The unit has collected over the course of this year \$4.3 million, Mr. Speaker. It's been very successful. [interjections] Four point three million dollars which previously was not being collected on behalf of children in this province.

Keep in mind that these cases represent only a small fraction of the 43,000 files that the program deals with. The program, Mr. Speaker, over the past year has collected more than \$127 million on behalf of children in this province. It is making a difference.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

2:20

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Another common complaint is the long wait time in trying to get through to maintenance enforcement program offices. What's Alberta Justice doing or has done to improve the information services available to the clients?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, with more than 43,000 files it's essential for us to find new and more efficient ways for people to get information and get service. During the past year we've expanded the client services centre by increasing the number of complaint and troubleshooting specialists. Staff on the phone lines field an average of a thousand calls per day.

Last year we also implemented a new MEP info line. This is a computerized, interactive phone system that allows clients to hear and update file information 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This system receives more than 3,300 calls a day.

I recently announced the launch of the MEP accounts-on-line initiative. From the comfort of their home, public library, or office MEP clients can now access and update account information privately and securely over the Internet.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's if they can afford the computer.

MR. HANCOCK: They can go to the public library if they don't have a computer at home.

The system also provides clients with the ability to submit a question to our staff and receive an electronic response. It's hoped that the system will free up staff to deal with more complex issues or concerns. Currently the average call wait time to speak with a client service representative is about five minutes. In the past that was up to half an hour.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we announced publicly the Help Us Find program, where we're publishing the pictures and names and information that we have about chronic debtors who have defaulted and whom we cannot find through any of the other tools available to us to ask the public to help us find these people and help them to live up to their obligations to their families.

Youth Suicide

MRS. SLOAN: Twenty-five percent of fatality inquiries conducted on the deaths of children in care indicated that these children had died by suicide or under suspicious circumstances. In the report *Lost Promise and Potential*, released today in this Assembly, a survey shows that there are serious gaps in the provision of suicide prevention programs for children by health and children's services authorities. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why the incidence of suicide amongst children in care is so high?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, any suicide, especially the suicide of a young person, is a terrible and tragic loss. I can tell the hon. member that the ministry does recognize that youth suicide is a serious concern, and each youth lost is indeed a tragedy, as I said. There are some initiatives as I understand it. Unfortunately the minister responsible is not here to respond to this, but perhaps she can offer the hon. member a written response.

I understand that relative to training in suicide prevention, two days are devoted to suicide intervention training during the four-week child protective services training – these are the staff people within the hon. minister's department – which is mandatory for all new child welfare workers in the province. All foster parents are required to take suicide awareness training. The Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families' standards specify that all contracted child welfare service providers must have suicide training.

Children's mental health within the Alberta children's initiative: a project is in the developmental stages to address children's mental health, including youth suicide, led by the Alberta Mental Health Board.

In response to recommendations from the Children's Forum – and the hon. member was part of that forum – and the Task Force on Children at Risk, Children's Services will be implementing community response teams for children at risk in three locations across the province. I understand that is a pilot program, Mr. Speaker.

I could go on and on. There are a number of initiatives here that are being undertaken, and I'm sure that the hon. minister or my office would be very happy to provide the hon. member with the information she requires.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Premier, if the government's response has been so comprehensive, why is it that we have 24 to 51 children every year committing suicide in this province and have had so since 1990?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, according to the information I have, Canadian youth aged 15 to 19 had the third highest suicide rate out of 23 countries. This is Canadian youth in the country. New Zealand and Finland have higher rates. This is sourced from the Suicide Information and Education Centre based on the United Nations' report *The Progress of Nations 1994*. This is the same organization that produced this document that was tabled I believe earlier today.

Over the last 10 years an average of 26 youths 15 to 19 years of age have committed suicide each year, but the rates are falling. This

is as it pertains to the province of Alberta. I understand the peak for male youth suicide rates ages 15 to 19 was 1977 at 40.2 deaths per 100,000. The most recent data for 1998 shows 25.1 deaths per 100,000. It's tragic that we even have that many deaths through suicide, Mr. Speaker, but the rate is falling.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, we have a model of suicide prevention that was developed in our own backyard by the Suicide Information and Education Centre. It was proposed to this government to be implemented in 1997, has been implemented by the United Nations, Finland, Norway, and Australia, and we today in Alberta continue to not have a provincial program for the prevention of suicide. Why is that, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that statement is not entirely true. I just went through a number of initiatives that have been taken and are currently being undertaken by the Department of Children's Services. I only went to about the fifth or sixth point, but I can tell the hon. member that all child and family services authorities have early intervention programs that provide services based on the needs of the community. These services relate in part to the whole problem of children at risk and the suicide problem.

Many child and family services authorities have developed transitional supports for youth who are reaching the age where they are no longer eligible for child welfare supports, and the ministry is now examining options for expanding these transitional programs, particularly by providing more time with a mentor or a caring adult to help support these youths through the transition to adulthood, and this is, as I understand it, the most difficult period in a young person's life. We are working in particular with aboriginal groups, where the suicide rate unfortunately is high, and government is to promote capacity building to help aboriginal communities respond to community needs, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Electric Utilities Deregulation (continued)

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are regarding rising electricity costs. Earlier this year Alberta's independent market surveillance administrator looked at the reasons for jumps in prices over the summer. To the Minister of Resource Development: did the report find any inappropriate behaviour in activities in the marketplace that might help explain price increases?

MR. CARDINAL: No. Mr. Speaker, the market surveillance administrator, also known as the MSA, was very clear in his report. In fact, in a press release he emphasized that there was no particular activity to warrant a sanction against generators. In addition to that, of course we are following up on the recommendations that have been made in that report by the market surveillance administrator. In addition, there is a lot more to come from the MSA. This is, in fact, only the first report, and it's a first stab at collecting data. The MSA himself recognized that further analysis has to be done and staff put in place to make sure that the handling of reporting is done properly in the future.

In addition to that, of course one of the major areas that was reported by the MSA was the issue of the lack of retail competition in the city of Lethbridge area, and the MSA will be completing this report and forwarding it to us in the near future.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. In part the report addresses short supply putting pressure on prices. Is this in some way a result of deregulation?

2:30

MR. CARDINAL: No, Mr. Speaker, definitely not. Full deregulation does not start until January 1 of 2001. Of course, you know, the reason for the high prices is driven by the high demand as far as economic activity. As you're aware, there are over \$33 billion worth of economic initiatives, and with the population growth in Alberta the increased demand for electricity is over 6 percent.

In relation to the supply itself, Mr. Speaker, the whole process has already doubled the number of generators in the province since it came in. In fact, in the last three days I've met with three different organizations. One was a lumber company in northern Alberta that was in the process of developing a cogen plan using waste wood. Although they're only generating 20 megawatts, they will use 10 megawatts, which will mean taking out 10 megawatts from the existing generation system but in addition to that adding 10 megawatts to our system. Now, that's only one company. This deregulation has allowed that to happen.

Today I talked to an organization that's interested in hydrogeneration in northern Alberta. Again, this is another company that's looking at a number of options, and I'm willing to meet with that company.

I was in Pincher Creek today and saw the opening of Vision Quest, which has, I believe, 14 new windmill generators set up which will be generating enough electricity to supply 6,000 households, and this is green power, clean, safe, the cleanest, in fact, in the country. They indicated themselves that without deregulation this would not have been possible. So it is working, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the minister provide us with an update as far as what the province has done with the issues identified through the MSA report?

MR. CARDINAL: Well, Mr. Speaker, the 10-point plan is basically what has come out of part of the MSA report. One of the areas we're looking at . . . [interjections] Supply seems to be the concern from the opposition.

One of the areas we're looking at, of course, is looking at all angles in getting more supply into our system. One is supply from B.C. and Saskatchewan and also local industrial load. The other one we're looking at is increased transmission between Edmonton and Calgary to ensure that any of the economic activity that's in cogen, in particular in industrial development in the north half of the province — we'll be able to transfer electricity to the southern part of Alberta. The other one, of course, is for us to move forward in selling the balance of the unsold electricity in smaller packages. This will all happen during the month of November.

Electricity Rebates for Condominium Residents

MS BLAKEMAN: Mr. Speaker, last week, recognizing that the growing number of seniors and new families living in condominium complexes are facing huge increases in their utility bills, we asked how the government's electricity rebate program would apply to them. The Minister of Resource Development didn't seem clear as to whether condominium units where units were not individually metered would receive the commercial rate electrical rebate, like the high-rise apartments, or just the flat \$20 rate, like the single

residents. Alberta condominium owners facing steep hikes in their condominium fees as a direct result of higher heating and electricity bills need this information. My questions are all to the Minister of Resource Development. First question: will the minister confirm that condominium owners whose units are not separately metered will be receiving the commercial electricity rebate?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Yes. That's a good question Mr. Speaker. Because they're not metered individually, they will not be getting the \$20 rebate, but the condominium project will receive the industrial rate, 1.8 cents per kilowatt hour off. That's over \$760 million again being returned to Albertans as part of the \$1.6 billion rebate program we've provided. I believe most condominium owners, the board, will probably return that money to the individuals in one form or another.

MS BLAKEMAN: I'm sure they'll be delighted to hear they're getting the industrial rebate.

Given that most condominium boards are not aware that they're entitled to this rebate, whether it's commercial or industrial, what has this government done to inform condominium boards and condominium owners of the rebate amounts and the methods, and what will they be doing?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, we, of course, have advised already and will be advising the condominium owners.

Just remember that seniors will also be eligible for the \$300 rebate, and if there happen to be two in the household, they will be receiving \$600. So they are eligible. Now, in addition to that, seniors, we feel, are very high needs sometimes, and there are also other support programs provided through Community Development that can offset any additional expenditures that were not projected as part of their budget.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. For clarification, then, would the minister please clearly state whether the condominiums will be treated under the industrial rebate or the commercial rebate – the minister has said both things thus far – and how exactly the government will be informing the condominium boards which is applying to them? Nobody has told them anything right now. That's why all the confusion.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, they will be receiving the industrial rate starting January 1, 2001. The industrial rate will no doubt be more than the \$20 rebate at this time, because that \$20 rebate can change also. At this time the industrial rate is no doubt higher than the \$20 rebate that's going to be provided. So, yes, they will.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, you have to realize is that the renters of the condominium select the board of directors. They have voting authority. They will be advised. We will be advising the public out there as to how to access these rebates, and they in turn as a board can determine how that money is refunded to the owners.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Diabetes Treatment and Prevention

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are

raising concerns regarding coverage of diabetic supplies. These supplies are important in the management of the disease and in avoiding the costly complications associated with diabetes. Since this government places an emphasis upon wellness and prevention of illness, it seems appropriate to provide coverage of diabetes medication and supplies. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the coverage be expanded as part of the provincial diabetes strategy?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I should say at the outset that many of the costs associated with diabetes monitoring and management are already covered by Alberta Health and Wellness. I should outline those things before I go on to answering the question: should there be more that's done?

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta monitoring for health program covers a portion of costs related to supplies for adults who are insulin dependent and have no other insurance coverage. Eligible adult Albertans are covered for \$350 in costs annually, and there's an additional subsidy that can be applied for for an additional \$200. In aggregate this results in an annual budget of \$2.3 million. Costs of supplies for children with diabetes are covered under the child health benefit program of the Human Resources and Employment department.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, an important thing to note here is that the development of a diabetes prevention strategy is an initiative that's included currently in our Alberta Health and Wellness three-year business plan for 2000-2003. It will look at these needs and issues surrounding this particular disease.

MR. JOHNSON: The final question then is: when is the implementation of this provincial diabetes strategy expected to start?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the diabetes prevention strategy, as I said, is contemplated for the Department of Health and Wellness in our three-year business plan for 2000-2003. Right now that strategy is in a preliminary stage of development. It will look at the needs and issues that surround the disease, including the issue of such things as test strips, blood sugar test strips, pumps and injection supplies, and also urine-test agents.

There are some 90,000 Albertans who are affected by this disease. Some of them do not know it. However, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work with the Canadian Diabetes Association, the Alberta clinical guidelines unit of the Alberta Medical Association, and the Alberta Research Council in holding a provincial forum and releasing a report on its findings.

head: Statement by the Speaker

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before proceeding to the next item, the chair would like to make a statement. The chair would like to follow up on an intervention made last Thursday, November 16, 2000, after the member's statement by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. The chair intervened at that time because in the chair's view the statement by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder could be construed as an unparliamentary attack upon another member. Therefore, this seems like an appropriate time to review the rules as they apply to Members' Statements so that all members are clear.

The chair indicated on page 1928 of last Thursday's *Hansard* that when the Standing Orders were amended in 1993 to provide for

Members' Statements, it was intended they would proceed "without interruption." In fact the chair ruled on June 5, 1997, on page 1056 of *Hansard* for that day that a point of order would not be entertained during a member's statement. To be clear, the chair has never meant to imply that all the rules about parliamentary language and order and decorum in this Assembly could be abandoned during Members' Statements.

Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j) still apply to Members' Statements as they do to all proceedings in the Assembly. It is a tribute to members of this Assembly that we have gone for over seven years without the chair having to address the content of members' statements. All members should be aware of the rules for the Canadian House of Commons and statements by members. When those rules were established in 1983, Speaker Sauve noted that "personal attacks are not permitted." This rule has continued according to the book *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* from pages 363 to 364. Certainly, as one of the authors of the 1993 amendments to Standing Orders, the chair wants to stress that it was intended that this and similar rules about decorum would apply to Members' Statements.

This chair wants to ensure that the greatest leeway possible is given to members during Members' Statements. Those statements must conform to the general rules of decorum that we follow in the Assembly. Last Thursday the chair believes this line was crossed in the remarks by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, especially his concluding remark about "the spending habits of this particular member" in speaking of the Provincial Treasurer.

The chair believes this clarifies the matter and sincerely hopes we will not have to revisit the subject of the content of a member's statement again.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much. Pursuant to Standing Order 13(2), while you're clarifying this for our further information, do I take it, then, that the same rules that apply in debate in any other area of activity of this Assembly also then apply? In other words, things that would be permissible in terms of criticism of somebody's performance as a minister of the Crown, which is permissible in question period and in debate on any bill, also would be available, as it is, Mr. Speaker, in the province of Ontario with private Members' Statements, in the House of Commons, and I've got a long list of samples of what passes in those other areas.

If you might confirm, sir, that it's not a different set of rules for private members' statements and recognitions than apply for the kind of debate that would happen in any other aspect of the activity of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, the uniqueness of members' statements is that the chair has never, ever allowed interventions during members' statements. That makes them very special. The chair recalls the discussions, the honourable discussions that occurred between this particular individual, when he served as the Government House Leader, and the honour and the integrity given to this discussion by the former House leader of the Official Opposition. It was always intended that in this Assembly should the members of this Assembly want to proceed with members' statements, then hon. members would be provided two minutes to provide and present a case in terms of virtually any subject they wanted, but never was it ever intended, in terms of the integrity displayed to this individual when these rules were being determined

by the former House leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition, that one would ever venture into an area of which former Canadian House of Commons Speaker Sauve has eloquently said, "Personal attacks are not permitted."

Now, personal attacks are not permitted, period, in this Assembly at any time, but in the case of members' statements this chair has always ruled that there would never be provision provided for a point of order or a point of privilege, whereas in virtually all other activities in this Assembly, for an hon. member who feels that the subject matter that is being discussed and debated would afford an affront to them, that hon. member is always given the option of rising and rising immediately on a point of order or on a point of privilege. But the one occasion when the chair has said that it would not intervene would be during the time frame of Members' Statements. That was to be a special opportunity afforded to members to make their own statements in any way or shape they wanted.

Now, if there's any further clarity that's really required for that, the chair would invite a visitation from the House leader of the Official Opposition to further analyze what it is that the hon. member is struggling with. But let us just repeat very, very clearly again. Members' statements were to be dealt with as a special opportunity for members uninterrupted. Uninterrupted. At virtually any other time in this Assembly if one hon. member is speaking and another hon. member feels that there is something incorrect, an affront, that hon. member has an opportunity to rise. They can do it during question period. They can do it during a debate on the estimates. They can do it during the debate of any bill. The one time there would be no interventions would be allocated to the period of Members' Statements, and at all times – at all times – decorum and honour should be the mainstay in which members in this Assembly might want to conduct their activities.

Now, let us proceed to Recognitions. There will be five today that will be recognized, and in 30 seconds from now the chair will call on the hon. Member for St. Albert.

I'm sorry. Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. I'm very pleased to be able to introduce some guests. I don't often get guests from Cypress-Medicine Hat, and I'm pleased to have in the members' gallery today Len Mitzel, who is the reeve of the county of Forty Mile; Harold Halvorson, a producer, rancher, and farmer in that area; and Jim Holofs from Lethbridge. This group was in a meeting with the hon. Minister of Infrastructure today about a pipeline, the South East Alberta Water Co-op, that will drought-proof all of southern Alberta. Will they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

2:50

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Steward Centre for Personal and Physical Achievement

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday the Rick Hansen Centre, which is a centre for body-working at the University

of Alberta for disabled persons, was renamed the Bob Steadward Centre. Bob founded the centre in 1978, and he was also instrumental in developing the International Paralympic Games, in which disabled athletes compete. Earlier this year he was named a director of the International Olympic Committee, the IOC.

It is fitting that this centre would be named after Bob Steadward, who has dedicated his life to providing opportunities and challenges, particularly in the field of athletics, to persons with disabilities. The centre was previously named after Rick Hansen after his world tour in 1987. However, he has given his blessing to the new name, and I wish to extend my best wishes to Bob and to all members of the Bob Steadward centre to continue the work that they provide.

Youth Suicide

MRS. SLOAN: As we nationally acknowledge today as National Child Day, let us do more than mouth platitudes about the value of our children and their worth to our province. Instead, Mr. Speaker, let us seek to understand the challenges and problems lived by Alberta youth and seek to address them. Lost Promise and Potential, Alberta Statistics on Youth Suicides Programs and Challenges, released today in this Assembly, seeks to acknowledge National Child Day in such a way.

Suicide is responsible for 25 percent of the deaths of children and youth between the ages of one and 24. In 1999, 37 children between the ages of zero and 19 committed suicide, according to vital statistics. Lost Promise and Potential confirms that 24 to 51 children annually in Alberta have committed suicide since 1990. For children in government care one-quarter of the deaths reviewed by a fatality inquiry also highlighted this issue.

Despite the severity of these statistics, the Alberta government has refused to implement a provincial program for the prevention of suicides. Concerns exist that the government is leaning towards the development of a prevention framework by the Alberta Mental Health Board. This is simply re-creation of the wheel. Our children are important and deserve the best model and program for suicide prevention that exists. On National Child Day and every day our children deserve nothing less.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Rotary Clubs Polio Plus Project

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to recognize the important efforts of Alberta Rotary Clubs. Nearly a hundred Rotary Clubs meet in many constituencies in our province, and all are partners in a worldwide Rotary fund-raising program to end the scourge of polio among children.

In the early 1980s Rotarians were looking for a suitable project to celebrate their 100th anniversary as a service club, and in 1985 Rotary Clubs in Alberta joined with clubs around the world to launch Polio Plus, a plan to distribute polio vaccine free of charge to children of 125 countries where polio was endemic.

In the last five years nearly 2 billion children have been immunized. By the beginning of this year only 30 polio-endemic countries remain, and within a year this will be reduced to only 10 countries. By joining with UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and the national health departments of these countries, the world's children will be free of polio before the 100th anniversary of Rotary in 2005. Then, thanks to Rotarians in Alberta and Rotarians all over the world, this crippling disease will no longer be a threat to our children.

Chief Justice Kenneth Moore

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, on October 19, 2000, some 1,300 friends and supporters of Chief Justice Ken Moore gathered at the Roundup Centre in Calgary. The purpose was to pay tribute to a wonderful leader in this province on his retirement. Chief Justice Moore provided thoughtful and fair direction as he co-ordinated and supervised the administration of justice throughout this province through the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta. In fact, he provided that key leadership pretty much from the time that we merged the district court and trial division of the Alberta Supreme Court to create the new Court of Queen's Bench. His door was always open and not just to this young lawyer, who showed up needing some guidance and direction.

At the event in October colleagues and speakers celebrated his commitment to his family, his profession, his city, and his province. Chief Justice Moore was instrumental in the creation of Calgary Legal Guidance and instrumental in the creation of the Legal Archives Society. We salute this remarkable man and thank him for his huge contribution to the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Snack in the Shack Program

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is the difference between June 30 and July 1? To some Edmonton children it is the difference between having a hot lunch one day and going hungry the next. Today I'd like to recognize an outstanding program that has made a big difference in the lives of many children. The program is called Snack in the Shack, and it provides lunches for children during the summer months, when they no longer have access to the school lunch programs.

The founders of Snack in the Shack, Teresa Androschuk and Candice Furneaux, have turned a small idea into a big success. It operates out of city park green shacks and serves 500 to 600 kids daily. An impressive 95 percent of the food is donated, and the program runs almost entirely on hardworking community volunteers.

This program helps prevent the obvious developmental and physical side effects of poor nutrition, which put children at greater risk for many degenerative diseases. Snack in the Shack is also a big help to families on fixed incomes who often find that their monthly income leaves little left over for food, making things like fresh fruit a luxury item.

Most importantly, Snack in the Shack is an example of a preventative program that works. The long-term benefits of these kinds of programs are shared by all of us. We owe all the volunteers of programs such as Snack in the Shack our gratitude for helping to contribute to the well-being of our children.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, on Monday we have allocation time for seven recognitions. Will there be additional government members who want to participate today? That being the case, we'll proceed, then, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Victims of Brain Injuries

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to recognize Albertans who are the victims or have a family member who is a victim of a brain injury. To me it appears like these are the forgotten ones, the ones that are sort of lost in the medical system

and out there on their own, struggling, fighting. Between myself and the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark we tabled a good number of questionnaires in the past week, some this morning. We tabled a number of letters pointing out the concerns they have.

Just to briefly go over those concerns. Home care is critical to them. It is capped at a different level. Prescriptions are a problem to them: income, AISH, CPP. Some of them have to use some of their dollars to buy extra drugs and such. Employment opportunities are very limited. Retraining can become a problem. Transportation: there's a shortage of trauma centres for victims of brain injuries. There are a great deal of concerns there, and I would hope that the minister and the associate minister of health can address those concerns, will meet with the individuals, and will get something done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Villeneuve Historical Society

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to just take the opportunity to recognize the Villeneuve Historical Society, a group of hardworking people headed by Monique Altman, that did an amazing job over the last three years on a history book made for the Villeneuve community called *A View to the Past*. It's based on the early settlers, the Metis, many of the Belgian community, French and German. Originally the church was St. Pierre's and then eventually St. Peter's. There are stories about the hall, the original store, the ball teams, pioneer families of Soetaerts, Bokenfohrs, Belangers, Borles, Sheehans, and Kremers. It is an absolute tribute to those early pioneers. It also has a special tribute to the young men sent to war. Articles on politicians, if you can believe it, are quite good, I must say.

A special congratulation to Monique and her team for a job well done. They have certainly given our community a treasure.

THE SPEAKER: I wish to advise, as all hon. members are aware, that a special *Hansard* is being prepared to cover the events of Thursday last, dealing with Bill 26, the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act, which covers all the passage through readings one through three, and the text of it will be available shortly.

3:00

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark with respect to a Standing Order 40 application.

Emergency Medical Services in Calgary

Ms Leibovici:

Be it resolved that this Assembly address the crisis in access to emergency care in Calgary hospitals.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I gave notice that I would make application under Standing Order 40. The subject of Albertans' health is always an important one, but recent tragic events in Calgary have turned an important matter into a pressing and urgent one that has to be dealt with now.

Health officials in Calgary have blamed the tragic death of a patient in that city on the overcrowded waiting room of the Rocky-view hospital. Calgarians, either directly through experience or indirectly, have been aware of the serious hospital bed shortage problem plaguing their city's three acute care facilities for years.

Similarly, health care workers, those working directly in the system, know of these problems intimately and have expressed growing concerns over bed shortages and overcrowded waiting rooms in Calgary's emergency departments. These bed shortages have created no end of discomfort for Calgarians in emergency situations, but only this past summer has the level of overcrowding and the number of hospital bed shortages reached the stage where Calgarians' health and Calgarians' lives are at risk, and it may get worse unless this matter is debated immediately.

The Calgary regional health authority's own document indicates that some 4,000 people this year have spent the night in emergency waiting rooms because no beds were available. These people are waiting for hours in emergency department waiting rooms for the simple reason that there are not enough beds in the hospital. A level of risk to patient health and patient life shows no sign of diminishing.

In January 2000 the average number of people spending the night waiting in Calgary's three acute care facilities was 10 people per night. Ten people per night were spending the night in emergency department waiting rooms because of the lack of beds. Today the average number of people spending the night waiting in emergency department waiting rooms because there are no beds available in Calgary is 20 people per night, and it could get worse. This is a 100 percent increase since January. The number of people having to wait in emergency department waiting rooms for a whole night because there are no beds has in fact doubled since January.

As we head into the winter flu season, the ever increasing number of people spending the night in emergency department waiting rooms will only get larger. If we don't address immediately the bed shortages and the overcrowding problems in Calgary, we will fail Calgarians requiring emergency situations. Calgarians' health and Calgarians' lives may be put at risk.

This is clearly an emergent matter demanding the immediate attention of this Assembly in emergency debate. Calgarians are facing a crisis in their emergency rooms, a crisis that will only get worse unless this Assembly gives this serious issue the weight it deserves.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, under a Standing Order 40 application certain matters have to be dealt with. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has correctly followed all the rules, and the only decision now is one of the Assembly to choose to waive what we've scheduled to do this afternoon to move to this particular application. So one question will be asked, and the question is: is any hon. member opposed to adjourning the regular Routine for the day and moving to a Standing Order 40 application?

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate April 28: Mrs. McClellan]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, you adjourned the debate. Do you wish to continue?

MRS. MCCLELLAN: No.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I could take a few minutes to speak about the Justice Statutes Amendment Act. It is quite a lengthy piece of legislation, and I realize that as a statute it has several parts to it. What's been pointed out to me and one of the things that I have noted is 5(a): the Lieutenant Governor in Council will be able to make regulations outlining situations in which court fees can be waived. Currently there are no provisions. That is certainly a thing that I think will serve us well. We've all seen situations where court fees should be waived, and this will give that possibility to people who cannot afford that.

This has come to the minister's attention. I haven't been part of the negotiations back and forth about this legislation, but certainly one of the things that we've received correspondence on is section 74. In that, the bill amends the Survival of Actions Act. Currently, as a result of several decisions by the Court of Appeal of Alberta, if an individual is killed in, for instance, a motor vehicle accident, the estate has the right to claim for damages in relation to what that individual would have earned had their life expectancy not been cut short by the accident. The amendment of the Survival of Actions Act eliminates this claim of damages. However, this does not prevent a deceased's children from being able to maintain a court action for their dependency claim. The amendment of the Survival of Actions Act does not eliminate a valid dependency claim.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Now, I know there are different views on this, and even I know that lots of individuals from groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving are raising concerns about this. I realize it's controversial, and because of that maybe it deserves a bit more discussion. Of course, there's a provision that if a spouse is killed in an accident by a drunk driver, then there is compensation that can be . . .

DR. TAYLOR: Sit down.

MRS. SOETAERT: No. I'm not sitting down. I have the right for 20 minutes, and you just might make me go that long now. [interjection] Thirty. It's a statute. Oh, let's go over each one of these, Madam Speaker.

Actually I'd like to express some of the concerns I've heard, and I am glad they will be in the amendments. Had those been sent over, I might have had a peek at them, but I guess they haven't been sent over yet. [interjection] Oh, we got a note. Isn't that thorough? I hope *Hansard* can record sarcasm.

Anyway, I would like to mention that this has come to our concern. I realize that in an accident . . .

MR. HANCOCK: Of course, you never called me about it until today.

MRS. SOETAERT: Interestingly, the minister says: I never told you about it until today. I actually have some correspondence here from the former Member for Edmonton-Norwood in which she sent a letter to you the minister on June 29 expressing concerns in the controversy over section 74. So, hmm, I guess you got the note prior to today, Mr. Minister, but I would never question you on that, understanding all the correspondence that comes across your desk. I know you do the best you can with remembering every piece of paper that comes across that. Just so we know, the former Justice critic did a marvelous job, and she was doing her homework and sent

information to the minister. I'm not sure if she got a response from that letter, but it's getting there, I'm sure. That's only four or five months ago.

Madam Speaker, of course through the chair, as I like to keep it. I was pointing out that we realize that when a spouse or a parent is killed in a tragic accident, for example when a drunk driver is killed, that is handled, and that is covered. This whole question, though, of compensation for a child who has been killed tragically does need more discussion, and I'm sure we're all of maybe two minds on that because there is no amount of money that could replace a child. Just no amount of money. We sometimes forget that even when adult children die, that's a terrible blow to families. I think of, you know, elderly parents who, for the most part, get support from their adult children who are in their midyears – I like to call them mid-50s now, since I'm still on this side of that – and expect that kind of support.

3:10

I'm not talking financial support but that emotional support, that actual physical support that when the furnace breaks down or the water leaks, someone in their family is available to come over and fix it. You know what? When you're elderly, when you're in your 80s and 90s, those kinds of things are very disturbing, and often they don't think to call the plumber. They will call their son or their daughter and hope that they can fix those kinds of things.

Until I see the amendments, I just don't think section 74 has been adequately discussed. People may also know that there was a court case on this, in fact. You know, with all the different decisions on this, I don't think we've got the proper legislation to deal with it yet. So that's one of my concerns about Bill 20.

Within these statutes there is one of the other amendments, to the Provincial Offences Procedure Act. That raises two issues. The first is that the maximum fine able to be imposed with respect to an offence will increase from \$400 to \$1,000 and, second, that the Lieutenant Governor in Council will be able to make regulations allowing a person acting as an agent of the court to receive payment for offences, most commonly speeding tickets, which are sections 67, 68, and 70. These agents will be allowed to charge a surcharge for providing this service. This means that a speeding ticket for \$50 would actually cost the offender \$50 plus the service charge. I'm wondering: will there be job losses for those who currently collect these fines, or is that going to affect that at all? Has the minister thought about that? Is it the intention of the ministry to appoint current private registries as agents of the court for collection of these fines? Is that part of the intent of that statute? I know the minister is listening intently.

MR. HANCOCK: One more way for people to pay.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's what? One more way for people to pay.

You know, the thing that really bugs me about speeding tickets is you can only blame yourself. You can't blame it on anyone but yourself. I know that if I'm speeding and I'm actually going to pay a surcharge on top of the fine, maybe that will make my foot be a little less heavy. You know what, Madam Speaker? I have said that it is only the driver's fault when you get a speeding ticket. What I resent the most, not that I've had to do it often, is writing a cheque to the Provincial Treasurer. That really hurts. That really, really hurts when that happens to me. I usually pay it quickly so others members in my family don't find out. However, the transportation critic: that doesn't happen often to her. I appreciate the opportunity to point that out to the minister.

A few other points. These are quite the statutes here, a lot of them. The Contributory Negligence Act is also amended, and the

amendment is simply to reflect that the last clear chance rule is not applicable in determining liability of a party. This reflects the common law, which eliminated the last clear chance rule many years ago and therefore doesn't alter the law as it is applied currently.

You know, these acts truly are interesting, Madam Speaker. The average person – I consider myself average – does have difficulty going through this and slugging through it to see what it changes from one act to another, and there are many acts within this. How many actual acts have been addressed by this? One, two, three, I believe: the Provincial Court Judges Act, the Provincial Court Act, a few others. It's quite a big piece of legislation, so if I point out a few other changes, well, that's the joy of an act this big. There are so many different angles to it.

The Alberta Civil Trial Lawyers Association has, I know, sent correspondence to the minister and has sent us correspondence as well as we asked for some of their input. Of course, they as well are concerned about section 74, so I'm anxious to see the changes on that.

I guess, Madam Speaker, that I hope all members have had a chance to look at this in full detail. Certainly it is huge, and it is a lot to go through. I guess what I hope comes out of this is that people are served better in our province, that the courts aren't such a scary place. Now, I know that maybe there are lawyers in here who make it – I mean, it's their everyday place of work. But I think for a lot of people the court system is quite intimidating. I think it is.

When the former Justice minister set up tours for anyone in the Legislature who was interested in seeing the remand centre and the young offender centre, I really appreciated that. As I journeyed through the day, one of the things I noted in the young offenders court was the young, young children who were there. The other thing I noticed: with the maybe 60 young people who were in that room, there might have been eight or 10 parents. That was indicative to me of the long way we have to go in this province toward addressing family issues. You know, if you see a young person in trouble with the law and no guardian or parent with them, then you kind of know that there's lots of trouble elsewhere in their lives, that the action is just a result of maybe a lot of troubles in their background. So that was quite telling for me.

When I visit especially grade 6, the grade that takes government, I often describe the young offender centre to them. Especially around election time I say that there are a couple of reasons you don't wreck those signs. They are expensive, they're advertisement, it's against the law, and I don't want to see you in the young offender centre. I tell them about going to the classroom and talking to the teacher and saying to the teacher: "You know, I bet these kids are kind of tough to teach. These are some pretty tough kids." That teacher said to me: "Colleen, this is one of the easiest classes I have ever taught. Not easy, but discipline is not an issue, because if they're not behaving, if they don't want to learn, they just go back to their cell." Then I tell the young students in the class: "Do you know what's in their cell? A window and a bed. No TV, no stereo, and probably worst of all no telephone." That kind of wakes up a few kids, and they say: "You know, I don't want to be there. It's not a fun place to be."

I guess, coming back to the statutes, the reality is I hope this serves our people better. To say that I'm aware of every single statute and exactly the repercussions of it and how it will apply wouldn't be true, but I have indicated some of the areas of concern that have been brought to us, and I assume those will be addressed in the amendments. So I look forward to that stage.

I am sure that other of my colleagues, who are probably more knowledgeable about the justice system than I, have had maybe a

better opportunity to interpret what these statutes will mean to the people of Alberta and to the people who have to deliver them, to the lawyers and to the judges who are given this legislation to work with.

So that is my hope for this Justice Statutes Amendment Act, and I look forward to further debate on it. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

3:20

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. After receiving input from groups representing victims, the Alberta government will be bringing forward an amendment to the Justice Statutes Amendment Act that section 74 be put aside for the time being. Section 74 proposed an amendment to the Survival of Actions Act, and this amendment came about following a ruling by the Court of Appeal. The Court of Appeal ruled that the loss of future income can survive a person's death. In other words, a person's estate could sue for the person's potential income if they had not died. The government does not believe that was what was intended in law. It should also be noted that the Law Reform Institute of Alberta proposed that the law be reversed to indicate that financial loss could be determined only for a person's living years.

Madam Speaker, the province consulted with the legal community before this particular amendment was proposed. However, we now understand that groups such as MADD, or Mothers Against Drunk Driving, are concerned about this proposed amendment. Our concern, conversely, is not to have them unduly concerned about it. They argue that the amendment would affect many Alberta families in addition to the crime that has already been committed against them by an impaired driver. MADD, or, as I said, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, is concerned the proposed change would effectively eliminate any recovery by the estate of a deceased person in relation to their future loss of earnings.

So, Madam Speaker, the Alberta government has heard what this group representing victims has to say. I suggest that the second reading on the other proposed amendments should continue in light of the fact that the government will be proposing a House amendment to delete the proposed amendment to section 74. The Alberta government will only bring forward another amendment to section 74 after it has consulted with these specific victims' groups.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to focus my debate this afternoon on two specific sections in this bill which, I believe, are not supportable, and I will provide the rationale for that position.

Section 21.21, which is titled "Inability of judge to complete proceedings," and section 21.42, "Judge's residence", I believe, Madam Speaker, have been cleverly designed to address an embarrassing situation that this government found itself in arising out of an investigation, which was court ordered, into the Stoney Indian reserve. In 1997 Justice John Reilly ordered an investigation into the Stoney Indian reserve and specifically cited a concern that he had received

information that \$50,000,000 worth of timber . . . had been taken off the reserve in 1995, and yet none of that money was paid to the tribal government, and none was available for badly needed programs.

Specifically, the concern arose when in response to this order the

then Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Alberta was reported to say that the matter was not in his jurisdiction but was in the jurisdiction of Indian Affairs. The judge said:

If he said this, he was incorrect to the extent that criminal activity anywhere in the province is [within] the jurisdiction of the Provincial Minister of Justice.

What arose further, Madam Speaker, with respect to this order was the fact that resources on the reserve were acknowledged to be the common property of all members of the community, yet \$50 million worth of these resources were apparently removed with no accounting and no distribution to the general population, none of it being available for education, health, welfare, or economic development. It was the view of Justice Reilly that this was a crime against the Stoney people, including, I might add, Sherman Labelle, who was the young man who committed suicide at 17 years of age that I mentioned this afternoon.

What section 21 speaks to is the inability for a judge to complete proceedings. Now, most people who are in the know about this case, Madam Speaker, will know that the government and Justice Reilly have been engaged in lengthy court proceedings arising from this matter, and during those proceedings on at least one occasion Justice Reilly became ill. It would be my proposal this afternoon that this section has been specifically designed to allow the Justice minister to intervene if he does not like the direction that a Provincial Court judge is taking relative to his applications and rulings.

Further, section 21.42, which speaks about the judge's residence, is exactly what this province attempted to enact to remove Justice Reilly from his division in the Cochrane and Morley areas. They made an application suggesting that this justice should be moved to Calgary. We know that that was in fact reviewed by the courts, and the province lost their position.

Now, the plot even gets thicker, Madam Speaker. We also know that over a year ago the province of Alberta was ordered by the court to pay the court fees incurred by Justice John Reilly and to date have not paid that bill. That is in contempt of court. Yet we find ourselves today debating in this Assembly an act and amendments which directly relate to that very case and most likely would have been enacted had they been in effect at the time Justice Reilly made his decision on the Stoney Indian reserve in 1997.

The injustice of all of this, Madam Speaker, is not only for the Stoney Indian people and not only for Justice Reilly, but it directly relates to the socioeconomic status of the Stoney Indian people, of which Sherman Labelle was one. I'm reading from a fatality inquiry that was written subsequent to Sherman Labelle's death in May of 1998, a year after Justice Reilly ordered the investigation into the conditions on the Stoney reserve. In the fatality inquiry recommendations surrounding Sherman Labelle's death, he made a number of other recommendations, which we find no evidence this government has responded to.

One of them was that he recommended

the Provincial Department of Justice establish a Special Prosecutions Branch for the Prosecution of Crimes Against Aboriginal People.

We are almost two years since this report was written. We have a bill before us that could have incorporated that recommendation, Madam Speaker, and it does not. Justice Reilly proposed that such a branch

should employ investigators from each of the aboriginal language groups in Alberta so that investigations can be done in the language spoken by victims and accused persons.

He suggested that

it should be given a mandate to prosecute all matters from domestic assaults to racketeering, and the mandate should specifically include investigating and prosecuting any allegations of criminal activity

within Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, and tribal governments.

Just on that specific point, Madam Speaker, in the 1996 report of the federal Auditor General he said that there was \$100 million unaccounted for in the Department of Indian Affairs. It was Justice Reilly's belief – and it is a belief I share – that

when large amounts of money are poorly accounted for, there is a very high risk of theft and fraud. If the Minister of Justice [either past or current] takes the position that this is not his responsibility this will create a fertile field for corruption.

I am assuming, Madam Speaker, given the fact that we do not see these recommendations incorporated in this statute and have not seen anything with respect to the ministry publicizing that they will be enacted, we are prepared as a government to bear whatever fruit this field of corruption produces.

3:30

The other recommendation that arose from Sherman Labelle's fatality inquiry was that

the provincial government enact a statute that makes it an offence for any person who holds an elected [office], or who is employed in the public sector, to make a false statement.

I can attest that when I swore my oath of office, I was astounded that it did not contain anything about honesty or telling the truth. Not a word. It primarily spoke to swearing your allegiance to the Queen and to her successors but had absolutely nothing about taking an oath that required you to tell the truth. The province continues not to have a statute that requires that, Madam Speaker, despite what the hon. ministers might attest this afternoon.

It was suggested that if such a statute was enacted, penalties should be included

that include removal from office or employment, and fines in any amount deemed appropriate by a court, and that the court may direct payment of all or a portion of such fines to informants who bring [forward] the action.

The lunacy, Madam Speaker, is that we don't see that this government is alive to any of those recommendations. None of them are incorporated. What we see are cleverly drafted amendments in Bill 20 before us this afternoon that are directly geared to taking people like Justice Reilly out of the system. In my mind – and anyone who wants to can stand up and tell this Assembly otherwise – when I look at the facts, the facts are that the court has heard out this case, that they have ordered this government to pay damages to this individual, and that the province is in contempt of that order and has been in contempt of that order for a year. How are we to be led to believe that this government is sincerely concerned about achieving justice, about achieving fairness, about respecting our judiciary? This is manipulation at its finest. So those two sections, unless the minister would like to provide rationale that they are intended for some other purpose, in my opinion are directly intended to eliminate the problem which this government sees as Justice John Reilly.

I want to spend a bit of time also on several other recommendations that came about through Sherman Labelle's fatality inquiry. It's important to make the point this afternoon that fatality inquiry recommendations on the deaths of children in care, regardless of their age or origin or race, are not publicly acknowledged by any ministry. There's no accounting for how those recommendations have been implemented or funded by government: not in the Children's Advocate report, not in the ministry of health's report, not in the Ministry of Justice's report, and not in Children's Services' annual report. For no other reason than to publicly acknowledge the value of a human life, in this case the life of Sherman Labelle, I think it's important this afternoon that we give air to some of these recommendations. I would invite any minister of the Crown

to stand this afternoon and tell me why that is the case, why we do not see fatality inquiry recommendations publicly accounted for and funded.

Further recommendations in Sherman Labelle's fatality inquiry, just completing the statement about telling the truth. When the investigation into the Stoney band was ordered in 1997, there were many public statements made by politicians, officials of the INAC, and others denying that there was a problem in the Stoney band or indicating that if there was a problem, it was an exceptional one. Now, we know that clearly that's not the case. We have allegations of corruption and problems in Hobbema, we have well-documented problems within the Stoney Indian reserve, and there are others.

Accompanying that, Madam Speaker, we also have statistics that confirm for us that these aboriginal populations are also suffering a high incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome, a high incidence of disabilities, a high incidence of suicide. There's no money for programs on reserves to address these issues. Why is that? Because the province is failing to deal with the corruption that exists. The Stoney band in that order was a direct example of that.

Just to not entirely cast the blame on the Ministry of Justice, Madam Speaker, I think it's important to point out as well that recommendations were made to the department of health and social services, now human resources, that unilaterally those ministries should

provide health care workers to reserve communities, and that all non-aboriginal workers be required to have an aboriginal person in training for their position with a deadline for that aboriginal person to take over the position.

Justice Reilly provided statements that were made in the royal commission relative to this recommendation which I will not cite into the record this afternoon but which most certainly give justification for that recommendation. He said that

the problems of physical and mental health in reserve communities are approaching what will be a national disaster. Whether this is the responsibility of the federal or provincial government should not slow immediate steps to reverse the downward spiral that is occurring.

Again, Madam Speaker, at least during my term of office, when this fatality inquiry was written and the Stoney Indian band proceedings and investigation occurred, I have not heard the ministry of health or the ministry of human resources respond to that recommendation.

Further, it was recommended that an aboriginal education system be developed. It was recommended that the provincial government should

unilaterally provide teachers and support staff to reserve schools to insure that the standards of education in those schools are equivalent to provincial standards.

Witnesses testified to a number of students transferred from the reserve school to off reserve schools who were found to be functioning much below the grade level they were said to be.

I have not heard the Learning minister respond to that matter.

I would appreciate and welcome clarification from the government side relative to the statements I've made this afternoon. While I acknowledge that there are some very positive amendments within this statute, I believe that the amendments proposed under section 21, specifically section 21.21 and section 21.42, cannot be supported, Madam Speaker.

With those remarks this afternoon I will conclude. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I've listened with interest to the debate so far this afternoon regarding Bill 20, and I have not only questions this afternoon, but I believe

that during committee I will have a better chance of perhaps getting some answers.

Now, as I understand it, under this bill there will be a significant consolidation in the Provincial Court. There will no longer be the divisions that we now see with the Criminal Division, the Youth Division, the Family Division, and the Civil Division. But when we talk at any time about the judicial system, one thing has to be certain, and that is that the public has confidence and respect in the judicial system. We have to examine appointments to the Provincial Court system in this province, the appointment of judges.

3:40

As I listened to the remarks of all hon. colleagues of the House, I can't help but think – and perhaps the hon. Minister of Justice at some time will answer this for me – that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of female law students graduating from law school. In the last generation there's been a dramatic increase. I think it's over 40 percent, and correct me, please, if I'm wrong. It could be that close to 50 percent of all students graduating are female. I would like to know what comparisons there are for judges as far as gender balance in our Provincial Court system.

I would like to know if there has been any consideration by the hon. minister to, say, alternate the post of Chief Judge between a female judge and a male judge. I'm just curious if there has been any consideration to that as this bill was developed and drafted. Certainly I think that we need to have gender balance in the court system. This is a province that's come a long way and is noted across the country. This is the province that's the home of the Famous Five. So I'm just curious if any discussion took place of that nature in the development of this bill, Madam Speaker.

Now, as I read this – and I would understand it to be a reason of security – we're talking in section 21 of a judge's residence: "designate the place at which the judge is to reside." If the hon. minister in due course could explain the reason for this, I would be very grateful.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview talked about the situation down west of Calgary with Judge Reilly, and we have to look at conflict of interest legislation. Here we have a very modest approach to conflict of interest for members of the judiciary, that "a judge does not have jurisdiction to hear any matter in which the judge has or has had an interest." Well, who's to know? Who is to know if there was to be a conflict there? If the hon. minister in the process of this debate could explain that, I would be very, very grateful.

Now, this is an issue that is of great importance to me and a lot of other Albertans as well, the whole idea of exhibits. In here in section 21 we deal with the control of exhibits in a court case. I would like to know what studies have been done in other provinces, for instance. How do other jurisdictions handle exhibits that are before a court? Are they or are they not public information? The pillars of the judiciary are openness and accountability. If people are to have faith in their justice system, you have to have those two items, openness and accountability.

I have to bring one case in particular to the attention of all members of this House, Madam Speaker, and that is the case of the province versus Bovar in Swan Hills, where there was a leak of PCBs, furans, dioxins into the air going back to 1996. This case went before the Provincial Court. Of course, Bovar was fined 600 and some odd thousand dollars. That was the global fine, and it was to be a creative sentence. Now, the exhibits – and there were many in that particular case – were withheld from public view. When these exhibits were withheld from public view, a lot of questions have gone unanswered, and they have gone unanswered to this day.

There are questions relating to the blueprints. There was, Madam Speaker, a repair done on a furnace in Swan Hills, and the repair was done inadequately. There was a lack of inspection. There was a lack of inspection regarding the quality of the welding. There was a lack of inspection regarding the lack – the complete lack – of insulation that was to protect the steel in that furnace from extreme heat, and as a result of those two occurrences, two instances of the lack of inspection, the furnace developed a leak and the pollutants did not burn at a high rate of temperature. They simply escaped through the cracks in the steel and went up the flue gas into the surrounding atmosphere in Swan Hills.

The Liberal researchers and myself thought we could get to the bottom of this, but we went to the courthouse in St. Albert and were denied access to these exhibits. These exhibits would have told us a great deal about how and why this accident happened. It would have told us who the contractor was, probably, that did the welding and installed this plate inadequately. It would have told us if there was any testing done. It would have told us the welding procedure. It would have told us so many things, but we were denied access to those exhibits, and I cannot understand why, Madam Speaker, if we're going to have an open and accountable judicial system.

Now, I had enough interest in this case that I went to Swan Hills myself. I drove up there on the day there was to be a hearing regarding how this 600-plus thousand dollars was to be spent with the creative sentencing. I got to the courthouse. Both parties were arguing before the judge – I believe the judge's name was Chief Judge E.J. Walter at this time – and I listened with interest, along with, I believe, individuals who were associated with the Sucker Creek Indian band. We sat and we listened to arguments and how they were presented.

Incredibly, there was an argument presented to take half the money, as I recall – I don't have the notes before me, Madam Speaker, but I believe it was half the money. Close to \$300,000 was to be used to construct a chain-link fence around the Swan Hills waste treatment plant. This chain-link fence was to be in all directions 1.5 kilometres from the centre of the plant. The first thing that had to be done, of course, was that a cut line was to be cut through the bush, and this chain-link fence was to be installed in the middle of the cut line so that the larger mammals, the moose in particular, could not graze close to the Swan Hills waste treatment plant. The idea behind this, of course, was that the top end of the food chain wouldn't be eating contaminated plants. So this was one place for the money to be spent.

I believe there were to be also graduate students hired to do some long-term studies on the effects of the pollution in the immediate area. Regardless, Madam Speaker, this information was important then, and it is equally important now that the Swan Hills waste treatment plant has come back into the hands of the taxpayers. The cleanup costs, I have to remind the Assembly, were always going to be paid by the taxpayers. But when we look at the exhibits, as is determined in Bill 20, we have to be very, very careful about what we're doing here whenever we're setting up a law to govern exhibits in our Provincial Court system. It's very important that the public always has access to those exhibits because of what I, myself, and the Liberal research team experienced in St. Albert. This information is vital, yet we did not have any access to it after the Chief Judge ordered that all exhibits be sealed from public view.

3:50

Now, the cleanup costs before, Madam Speaker: I can't imagine how high they are. They're obviously in the millions and millions of dollars. Is anyone else liable for those cleanup costs, or is the taxpayer going to foot the bill after this faulty repair work was done in the plant? Perhaps we will never know.

When we think of creative sentencing, we usually don't think of

a global fine of over \$600,000 and what it's to be spent on, like we do in Swan Hills. We're going to build a chain-link fence around an industrial facility, a chain-link fence that's 1.5 metres high, and we're going to do some studies. Now, I don't know the conclusion of this: what happened with this proposal for the chain-link fence. I've inquired. I've been persistent in my inquiries, and I have received no answers, Madam Speaker. The exhibits, to my knowledge, are still sealed from public view. There's this lack of confidence in Alberta towards the safety code system. Now, perhaps if these exhibits were made available, we could find out the whole inspection process, what happened up in Swan Hills and what did not happen. I don't think that's going to happen, and I would ask all hon. members of this Assembly that when we are considering passing a law discussing the exhibits before the Provincial Court, we're very, very careful that the public always has some form of access to these exhibits.

Now, Madam Speaker, I was of the opinion – and obviously I was wrong – that I could go to a courthouse anywhere or anytime and ask to see those exhibits and I could expect a temporary delay because they would be in a warehouse somewhere. They would be catalogued somewhere, and perhaps it would be three or four days before they could be assembled. But that is not the case. I think that when we look at the number of tax dollars that are going to have to go into the cleanup of Swan Hills and the timing of this unfortunate release, we need now more than ever to have access to all exhibits.

It is an issue that I don't believe is going to go away, because certainly there's going to be a debate about the future of Swan Hills. There's going to be a debate on the pollution that has occurred there and just how far or how wide an area the pollution has occurred in. Certainly it's greater than 1.5 kilometres in any direction around the Swan Hills waste treatment plant. One of the experts that was in Swan Hills in the courtroom said that this pollution could drift as far away as the Arctic.

When we look at that simple case – it may seem simple to some people, but it's actually quite complex. The simple fact is that there was inadequate inspection, and look what it caused. We cannot think for one minute that exhibits in the courtrooms of this province should be sealed from public examination at any time.

With those remarks, Madam Speaker, I would cede the floor to any of my colleagues who would like to participate in this debate. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On June 29, 2000, my former colleague Sue Olsen, who was then the Member for Edmonton-Norwood proudly serving her constituents as their MLA and our caucus as the Justice critic, wrote the Minister of Justice, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, regarding section 74 of the . . .

DR. WEST: Point of Order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Point of Order Referring to a Member by Name

DR. WEST: There has been a lot said recently about using personal names in the Assembly, and it doesn't seem to be getting through to some members of the opposition.

MR. SAPERS: You know, it's nice to see the Provincial Treasurer paying attention to the rules for a change.

Sue Olsen is a former member of this Assembly, and I think we could all say Sue Olsen as many times as we wanted without offending any of the Standing Orders. So I would hope that the Provincial Treasurer would pay close attention to the rules now that he's discovered that some exist to cover debate. If I could continue.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Actually we did hear last week from the Speaker of the Assembly, who talked about using constituency names instead of proper names. However, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is right. The member is a former Member of the Legislative Assembly, so proper names can be used, but I think it is worth while to say that we are going to try, as the Speaker mentioned last week, to make reference to the people that are in the Assembly presently by constituency.

Thank you.

DR. WEST: My apologies for that.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I note the Provincial Treasurer's apologies, and I appreciate that.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: The point that I'm making, Madam Speaker, is that when Sue Olsen was in fact the Justice critic and responsible for reviewing Bill 20 as put forward by the government, a letter was written to the Minister of Justice suggesting that section 74 was problematic and citing many good reasons for that.

Now, we hadn't heard back until the Member for St. Albert rose earlier in the Assembly today to say that the government had changed its mind on section 74 and talked specifically about wanting to consult with victims groups. Well, we'll have much more to say about that when we actually see the form of the amendment. Of course, the time to have introduced an amendment would have been in committee, but since the Member for St. Albert spoke about the proposed amendment and it didn't offend the chair at the time, I'll take the opportunity to refer to it as well.

It is very strange to have the government put forward a bill over such a length of time, to have the feedback that is received, to have the correspondence early in the summer and to have no response to that correspondence, and then today during the second reading stage of the bill to be told: oh, don't worry; an amendment is coming. It's sort of like when a government tells you that the cheque's in the mail. Of course, this government does that too, Madam Speaker. They make the same sort of promises.

The issue with section 74 of the Survival of Actions Act, of course, is that it limits the ability of survivors to make claims particularly against the loss of future earnings. I couldn't help but wonder whether or not the government was trying to insulate itself from lawsuits. All we had to do was reference the headlines with the tragedy in Calgary. Of course, we see that the government has itself been sued many times and will continue to be sued as a result of its mishandling of health care. If there should be a tragic loss of life that is attributable to a government policy, as appears to have been the case in a Calgary hospital, this section 74 could have limited the government's liability, or at least it could have limited the penalty assessed to the government.

This is not just idle speculation, Madam Speaker. I mean, this is the same government that brought in Bill 26 in the last session, which would have denied the constitutional rights of those individuals who were forcibly sexually sterilized. The government saw no problem in denying those individuals the legal right to court, to sue the government for compensation. They saw no problem with that.

So it doesn't take much effort to connect the dots between the government being named in lawsuits as a result of deficient policy and then trying to protect themselves by sneaking in through the back door, really, in a very complex bill, an omnibus bill, this section, which has been quite rightfully targeted by many members of the legal community as obnoxious. Of course, we hear today that the government intends, so we're told, to bring in an amendment to correct it.

4:00

You know, I really do worry about what's going on with the government when they continually bring in these obnoxious bits of legislation which tend to totally ignore that individual citizens need every opportunity they can to go to court. The government should be searching for ways to increase access to justice. When I saw Bill 20, I opened it up eagerly because I was looking to see whether or not we've learned anything from the centre of excellence project at the University of Alberta regarding access to civil justice. I wanted to see whether or not the government had learned anything from the very successful experiments in other jurisdictions regarding the unification of courts or mediation or alternative dispute resolution.

I looked at Bill 20, and unfortunately – you know, I do see some good things. There are some positive changes in Bill 20, and I'll give this Minister of Justice credit where credit is due. The provincial board is in dire need of reorganization. The way in which we appoint judges to that court is in need of improvement. Dealing with the collection of court fees and fines, there are better ways to do it, although I'll be coming back to that point in a minute. So it's not that this bill is totally problematic.

The Minister of Justice has put forward some competent ideas in this bill. But as is so often the case and what makes it so difficult for a member of the opposition who truly wants to see the best things come out of this Assembly, because the work we do here is supposed to benefit all of the citizens of this province, is that within a bill that could have had some very straightforward, positive elements, there are these nasty bits secreted away. It also does make me wonder why some of these weren't in a miscellaneous statutes act and why some of them, like the proposed changes to the Survival of Actions Act, didn't come forward as a stand-alone piece of legislation, because they are that significant that they deserve that level of debate and scrutiny and public awareness.

It will never be adequately explained to me how this government makes its decisions about how they're going to queue these things up, so I am left to my speculation that it is done quite on purpose; that is, to make sure that the nasty bits, as I refer to them, are hidden and aren't immediately apparent except upon close scrutiny.

Madam Speaker, I referred a minute ago to the issue about the payment and the collection of fines. I think it was my colleague from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert that first raised this issue that private registry agents are now going to be given the ability to collect fines under the Provincial Offences Procedure Act. So under the act that is referred to as POPA, the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, the fines – typically traffic fines, motor vehicle fines – are to be paid. Now these private registries will be agents, and they will be allowed to do this. This is business expansion.

I don't know if the Minister of Government Services wants to get into this debate or not, but I'd be very curious to know whether this business growth was something that was negotiated as a result of the investigation. I think it was about a year ago when there were some difficulties with the private registries and there was some discovery of some breaches of privacy and confidentiality. I think there was also some suggestion that there was not uniform pricing, and the minister at the time then had to enforce some pricing changes to do

with the services that were provided by these registries. So I'm wondering whether or not what we're seeing before us in Bill 20 is now an outgrowth of all of that. Was there some deal arranged with the private registries? If there was, I'm not saying that that would be a bad thing, but I would just like to know whether there's a quid pro quo going on here and if there's going to be any kind of ceiling put on the service charges.

In a way, you know, I find it a little offensive, no pun intended, that for a fine of \$100, \$50, or \$75, particularly if I'm in a remote or rural community and I would normally access government services, registry-type services, and I'm now being told I have the opportunity to pay this fine, that I would have to pay a surcharge to satisfy the fine. [interjection] I hear the Minister of Justice saying that you can go to the courthouse, but perhaps he wasn't paying careful attention when I said, "in a remote or rural community."

Somebody who has access to a courthouse in one place could get away with paying just the fine, whereas another Albertan would have to pay the surcharge. It just seems to me that you are creating sort of a second tier here. Now, I know this government's really fond of multiple tiers when it comes to accessing what otherwise would be public services. But why in heaven's name would there be a surcharge on a fine?

Then I also think about this government's record of incarcerating those who've been unable to pay fines and the fact that we have in Alberta a very high proportion of offenders in provincial jails who are there simply because they can't afford to pay their fine. Is this in any way going to ameliorate that? Well, of course not. It's an additional financial burden on individuals who already find themselves facing incarceration because they don't have the cash to pay a fine. I'm not sure that this has been very well thought out, and I'm not sure that I support the notion of a private registry agent being able to levy a surcharge at their whim on a fine that's imposed by law. That seems to me to be sort of a double penalty.

Another question that I have is a question about what Bill 20 does under the Public Trustee Act. Under the Public Trustee Act as it currently is constituted there is the direction that there be a common fund and special funds and that interest moneys earned when this money is being held by the Public Trustee is forwarded or credited to the common fund. Now, there are other examples. The Alberta Law Foundation, for example, receives its income stream from the pooled interest income on trust funds held by Alberta lawyers. In the same case the Public Trustee certainly has this interest as a source of income.

Now, nowhere in the government briefing notes, nowhere in the government debate to date has it been made clear what impact this change will have, because if Bill 20 is passed without amending this section, there will no longer be the interest revenue flowing to the Public Trustee, to that common fund. Now, is this going to have impact on the operations of the office of the Public Trustee? Is this going to have impact on the Albertans who utilize or depend upon the Public Trustee?

Again, I know that the members of the government are going to say that I'm just a cynic, but we've just had one of the largest transfers of money from the Treasury to the Public Trustee, money being held in trust on behalf of those very same sexual sterilization victims that the government wanted to deny legal rights to under Bill 26. In fact, I think it was part of the settlement agreement that the money that was paid to the sexual sterilization survivors was to be held by the Public Trustee and administered by the Public Trustee. I believe that that was an article of the agreement. So you have this money, which I'm presuming is being set up in special accounts individually for those Albertans, a huge transfer, millions of dollars being held, and now we're being told, right after that transfer of

dollars from one pocket of the government to the Public Trustee on behalf of these Albertans, that interest money will no longer go into the common fund, into the pool fund.

I just wonder if there's a relationship, and I'd like to hear from maybe the Minister of Justice or the Minister of Human Resources or any of the government departments that would like to perhaps address this issue and either acknowledge that, yes, there is a relationship between these two occurrences and that it's a big sum of money and that it's going to be a real cost or a burden to the government somehow, or tell me that, no, there isn't a relationship, and explain how it is that the office of the Public Trustee and those Albertans who utilize the office of the Public Trustee will be affected, and settle my concerns that they'll be affected negatively by this change.

4:10

Now, the bill substantially reorganizes the Provincial Court. There's good and bad here. Right across the country there's an increasing awareness of the need to specialize when it comes to the administration of justice, yet with this notion of specialization sometimes you tend to segment people. So you have this real push and pull: do you specialize and run the risk of segmenting people and not dealing with all of the issues in as holistic a way as you can, or do you have a very broad-based approach so that you can capture all of the issues that an individual may be bringing to court but run the risk of the specialization, of the ability to be precise and to have particular knowledge and awareness and experience in a very narrow area?

What I'm worried about, particularly, is how this reorganization is going to impact on the administration of youth courts and youth justice. I remember having almost to the point of arm-wrestling matches with members of the Crown over the years for the need to have specialized youth prosecutors, as the police would have specialized youth policing units and as probation would have specialized youth probation officers and as we began to build and then staff young offenders' halfway houses and youth custody facilities. It was a real battle to get the courts to recognize that it wasn't just a career killer to be a youth prosecutor, that in fact it was important and necessary work.

So there's been tremendous expertise built up in Alberta courts amongst Crown prosecutors, and there are some very dedicated people. In fact, we've had some wonderful experiences in Alberta, you know, with the young offenders project, the adjudicate project for pre-young offenders, and the provincial government is to be congratulated for being a participant and a funder of that. The youth courts themselves have evolved along the way. Now with this reorganization I'm just wondering whether or not we're going to see an erosion of the courts' ability to have a particular sensitivity to youth and young offender issues.

This troubles me because of all the rhetoric around young offenders, and right now we're seeing it just coming into full bloom. You know, we've got Stockwell Day, another former member of this House who's now aspiring to higher office, running around spreading the notion that youth crime is out of control and that something ought to be done about it. Of course we all know – and I think our Minister of Justice again is to be commended for pointing it out – that in fact youth crime across the country and in Alberta is down, that violent crime is down, that we've had some tremendous success with some alternative programs. So you've got all of this rhetoric coming from the leader of the Reform/Alliance about crime and how horrible things are, you've got the reality that isn't nearly so bad, and now somewhere in the middle we have a provincial government initiative which I think at least has the potential to be a step back-

wards in how it is we address youth crime in the province of Alberta.

You know, Alberta once had the unfortunate distinction of being the jurisdiction that incarcerated the most youth on a per capita basis for the longest periods of custody. One of the real ironies is that when many Canadians are asked about youth crime and the youth justice system, they have the mistaken impression that actually the adult system would be tougher, whereas we know that in the adult system there are conditional release provisions that don't exist in the youth system. Actually, young people serve more real time, flatter sentences, on a proportional basis than they would if they had been processed through ordinary or adult court. So this is a real irony, and I would hope that the Minister of Justice would . . . [interjection] You know, I hear the Provincial Treasurer saying something under his breath there about the John Howard Society, which of course I used to work for. I remember that when the Provincial Treasurer was the Solicitor General, he used to fund the John Howard Society millions of dollars a year. Of course, those were the days, eh?

The reality is that this bill, Bill 20, does have the potential to be a step backwards, and I would hope that that step isn't taken. I am anxious to hear the current provincial Minister of Justice make some comments about how reorganization of the Provincial Court will not erode the expertise that has been created within Alberta youth courts and to make sure that we are still going to be able to do the best for both the accused and, of course, their victims and make sure not just that that court process is as efficient as it can be but of course that the outcome is as just as it can be. I haven't heard from the government anything that would make my level of caution or concern go down.

Madam Speaker, Bill 20 is a mixed bag. We see, first of all, that one of the most controversial sections, the one that deals with limitation of claims for survivors, may or may not be amended in a way that may or may not address the concerns put forward by the Official Opposition and by members of the legal community. We also have a section that reorganizes the Provincial Court in some ways that'll be helpful but in other ways could be very problematic.

We have this notion of business expansion for private registries in the province. We already have seen difficulties with private registries, so we don't know what the outcome there is going to be. We certainly have concerns around the fairness of a surcharge on a legally imposed fine. We also of course have these questions, which haven't been addressed, about the Public Trustee and how the operations of the Public Trustee may or may not be impacted.

This is early enough in the proceedings on Bill 20 that there is plenty of time for the government to address these concerns. Maybe the Member for St. Albert will do so during committee. Maybe we'll hear directly from the Minister of Justice, or maybe the former Solicitor General would like to dip his oar back into those waters and enlighten us once again. You know, it was certainly the highlight of my career, Madam Speaker, when the former Solicitor General came to visit me in my offices in the old McLeod Building and told me about his plans for the justice system in Alberta. Little did I dream in those days that I'd be sitting across the floor in this legislative Chamber still fundamentally disagreeing with him in almost every substantial area of the administration of justice.

In any case, I know that there are others who are anxious to speak to Bill 20. I would hope that the specific concerns regarding young offenders are addressed by the government, and I think it's timely for the government to do so because of all this inflamed rhetoric coming out of the Reform/Alliance party during the federal election campaign. The government of Alberta can do a service not just to Albertans but to all Canadians, I think, by trying to introduce some honesty and some truthfulness into the discussion of youth and youth

crime and the administration of the youth justice process at this point in Canada's history.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I, too, rise this afternoon to address Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act. I've listened intently to the commentary on Bill 20, that it is, as my esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Glenora indicated, a bit of a mixed bag in that there are a number of changes that have been introduced to the bill, some of which are not as substantive as other changes.

The main one, that has been an issue for a number of months now, deals specifically with section 74 of the act. It's my understanding that there will be an amendment brought forward into this Legislative Assembly to address some of the concerns that have been put forward by individuals as well as by the Alberta Civil Trial Lawyers Association as well as by some other legal counsel who represent individuals who have lost loved ones due to the negligence of others.

4:20

It is interesting that when one reviews the course of this particular bill, yet again one sees that the consultation by government has been incomplete. In order for this bill to have been drafted and brought forward in this particular fashion and then subsequent to that have input from some of the stakeholders, it is obvious that once again the consultation was not as complete as it could have been. The principle at stake under section 74 is very significant. The full impact of the passage of the bill as it stands right now, without the amendment – and, again, it would have been helpful to see the amendment prior to the passage in second reading to ensure that this is an amendment that would address the concerns of all the interested parties.

If the amendment is not clear in its intent, the actual impact of Bill 20 could still be that it would be very difficult to claim for wrongful death in Alberta. In fact, wrongful death claims could well be restricted to the amounts stated in section 8 of the Fatal Accidents Act, which is \$40,000 for the spouse of the deceased, \$40,000 for the parents of the deceased if the deceased is under 26, and \$25,000 for the children of the deceased. [interjection] I've just been informed verbally by the Minister of Justice that in fact what the amendment will do is delete the proposal under the bill as it now stands so that it would revert to the status quo. If that in fact is the case, then I would be able to support that particular change wholeheartedly. So I look forward to Committee of the Whole stage of the bill to ensure that that will occur, and I will reserve any further comments with regard to section 74 and the impact it would have had for the Committee of the Whole stage.

There is another area under Bill 20, which again some of my colleagues have referred to, that might in fact be problematic, and that is the amendment to the Provincial Offences Procedure Act which allows for the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations allowing a person acting as an agent of the court to receive payment for offences such as speeding tickets. These agents will be allowed to charge a surcharge for providing the service, which means that the speeding ticket – for instance, if you had a \$50 speeding ticket – would in fact cost you \$50 plus the service charge.

Now, we've had several rulings, both within this province as well as across the country, that talk about the fact that user fees are potentially service charges or vice versa. Even though this would then be provided through the registries, it is my understanding, the

question is: is that in fact a user fee that has been tacked onto the speeding ticket? I don't know if that has been addressed, if there is a possibility of it being looked at in that particular fashion.

The other issue, of course, is the whole issue around privacy and whether the private registries are in fact the place to go to pay for some of these fines. That, I think, is an issue that needs to be looked at. Through my constituency office I get on occasion remarks from individuals that indicate that perhaps the registries are not as tightly supervised with regards to the provision of certain services. That is an issue that some of my constituents have brought to my attention. Again, this whole issue of the ability to pay for some of these offences at a registry as opposed to the current system is one that I think needs to be looked at closely with regards to the implication of doing this particular change.

The other question is: what is the contingency plan, if any, for the individuals who may well lose their jobs with regards to a change in the method of payment? If it is no longer a public agency that will be administering these fines but a private agency, one would think that there may be some layoffs, as we have seen in the past when services are moved from the public sector into the private sector. I would be curious to know how many individuals may well be affected and laid off as a result of that particular change in the legislation and what the cost impact would be to government with regards to severance pay and other payments that might be forthcoming as a result of that.

So those are some of my basic comments with regards to Bill 20. Bill 20 does go into some other areas as well with regards to changes that are made, but I think those are two of the more substantive changes. I do look forward to the Committee of the Whole stage.

I will take the opportunity at this point to congratulate the minister for listening to the concerns of all involved with regards to section 74, if in fact the deletion of that particular clause within the bill is going to occur in the Committee of the Whole stage, and on behalf of those individuals thank the minister for listening to those particular concerns.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Apart from the urgings of the hon. member next to me here, I do have a few observations that I'd like to make on Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000. I think it is very critical at this time that we do look at this particular bill, particularly when we look at our judicial system. In some regards it parallels what we do in this Legislature. It's an area in our society today where there isn't much confidence, certainly not as much confidence as we would like to have. So when do look at this, I look at this specifically from the point of view of many of the constituents of Edmonton-Glengarry, many of whom have to access the judicial system, whether it be in family court, whether it be in divorce court or, in some cases, other matters dealing with the courts. I know that even though this bill is quite technical and tough to get through, the implications of what we do in this Assembly certainly will impact their decisions and the way that they are dealt with by the courts and how they view the courts.

I do have some questions here. In particular, these again are some of the concerns that I've had through my constituency office, and when we get down to that level of people, the everyday citizen in Alberta who has to deal with the court system, one of their major concerns is certainly the long waits. Like everything else, they see fees going up. This not only impacts them in what happens, but

certainly these costs they experience are costs that many of them cannot afford.

4:30

I do have some questions for the minister. One of those is: if we do go with a unified family court, what further changes would we have to expect with this particular bill to handle that?

MR. DICKSON: Excellent question. Excellent question.

MR. BONNER: Well, thank you.

When we look at this, as well, if we do go with a unified family court, then of course we're going to have to have many more judges to staff this particular . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Female judges.

MR. BONNER: Yes. I certainly see an excellent opportunity here where we could increase the ratio of judges, male to female. We could certainly increase the number of female judges. Particularly when I look at things like family court and divorce court, it would give us a much more balanced approach from that perspective. It certainly would give us a balanced approach to judgments coming out of the courts.

Now, as I'd mentioned, it's certainly going to require many more judges to staff a unified family court. So what I'd also like to know from the minister is what estimates he would have to indicate how much more this is going to cost for staff, not only for judges but for additional staff that will be required by those courts. As well, I'd like to know what share Albertans can expect they would have to pay and how much the increase is going to be there. I'm certain that they would like to know what the federal share would be as well, because we really only have one taxpayer in this country, whether it be at the federal, provincial, or municipal level.

Then in looking at the review of Bill 20 here, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000, I think it is an excellent suggestion that the Provincial Court will no longer be divided into a Criminal Division, a Youth Division, a Family Division, and a Civil Division. This consolidation will certainly be of benefit to all.

Another excellent suggestion in here is that the Lieutenant Governor in Council will be able to make regulations outlining situations in which court fees can be waived. Again an excellent suggestion, because under the present system many of our people of low income or who are caught up in the social safety net that we have certainly don't feel that the courts are accessible to them. So with the waiving of fees, Madam Speaker, I think this will be an opportunity where these people will see that the courts are accessible, that they are participants in a system where there is fairness, where there is accountability, and where all Albertans are treated fairly by a system not because of how much money they have and what they can afford but by what is right and wrong.

As well, I look here and I see that the Lieutenant Governor in Council, Madam Speaker, will be able to make regulations allowing claims of up to \$25,000 to be heard in the Provincial Court. Again, this will require more judges at this level. It is a good suggestion, but what would be the cost in this particular system if we were to look at increasing that rate to \$25,000?

Earlier today we had some statements made here by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and these were in regards to provisions which would be in place governing the management of exhibits in the court's possession. Earlier today as well, Madam Speaker, the minister responsible for the WCB tabled two reports in this Legislature. Again, some excellent suggestions in there where the appeal

process would be more open, would be more accountable to those people that have to utilize those services. Even in the appeal process as it now stands, the injured worker does not have control of that information that goes to the Appeals Commission. That information is supplied by the WCB, and it is a situation where the injured worker does not get to determine what information he or she can put in there.

As well, when we look at the Swan Hills waste treatment plant, Albertans have \$400 million invested in that plant.

MR. DICKSON: And counting.

MR. BONNER: "And counting" is absolutely right.

Yet when requests have been made to look at the exhibits surrounding some of the activities that have occurred there, these people, Albertans, that have put out to date \$400 million – and it's increasing – don't have the opportunity to examine all those exhibits. As something that is so critical to the health of particularly those people in the region, then we certainly feel that they should have that opportunity to examine exhibits and whatever.

As well here, we have seen certainly a change since the '93 election where we've gone to more privatization in this province and certainly less and less influence in providing service to Albertans from the government perspective. It's now being taken over by private enterprises, and one of these is our private registries. I certainly, along with many of my colleagues, am against the expansion of private registries to the point where they would be given the opportunity or be appointed to collect fines on behalf of the judicial system. So in looking at this, again we see a situation where costs for this particular type of service in our system are being downloaded onto the everyday citizen here in Alberta, one that certainly they were not looking at before under the old system and certainly one that we'd be opposed to at this particular point in time.

As well, in dealing with this bill, Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, and looking at section 74 amending the Survival of Actions Act, it was certainly good to see today that the hon. Member for St. Albert discussed changes to this problematic area, certainly ones that I support, ones that I support because, in consultation with victims groups, the consultation process was incomplete. Definitely when we are dealing with something such as the Survival of Actions Act, we do require a great deal of feedback from Albertans, and I think this is something that the government should be commended on at this time, for holding back on this particular section. When I look at this, I also can draw parallels in the reports which the minister tabled today regarding the WCB all-MLA review committee, as well as Justice Friedman's Appeals Commission review.

4:40

In all cases the one thing that Albertans want more than anything else is their rights under any changes. They have to not only have their rights, but the system that's put in place also has to be open and accountable.

So, Madam Speaker, those are a few of my observations in dealing with Bill 20. At this time I'd like to conclude those comments, and I'd also like to adjourn debate on Bill 20.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 3

Statute Revision Act

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in regards to this bill?

The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you. Madam Chairman, I'd like to move some amendments to Bill 3, Statute Revision Act.

As you may recall, the Statute Revision Act was introduced during the spring sitting. There were some concerns raised at that time about the drafting of it, and we wanted to make it abundantly clear that the Statute Revision Act is an act which is proposed simply to provide for the facility and ease of Albertans to be able to consult their statutes on a regular basis. The revision act allows the consolidation of statutes on an official basis. It does not allow any substantive revision of those acts, but in order to be abundantly clear, we have worked to try and arrive at some wording which we think will satisfy the concerns that were raised.

With those comments, Madam Chairman, I would move the amendments, which are currently being distributed, as amendment A1.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, we'll refer to this as amendment A1, and they are being circulated right now.

The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, thank you very much. In one of these I guess uncharacteristic moments, I want to spend a few moments praising the government of the province of Alberta and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. [interjection] I want to assure the Minister of Municipal Affairs that I would have been happy to make exactly the same observation had I been looking forward with as much excitement as many of my colleagues to the next provincial general election.

So why would I heap praise on the Minister of Justice, as the Justice critic for the opposition? Well, I think what we've seen with Bill 3 is that some legitimate questions were raised. I also want to acknowledge the role played by Sue Olsen, my esteemed former colleague and Justice critic, whose tenaciousness and feistiness no doubt led to some of the changes that we see now in terms of this amendment, A1.

There are not a lot of ministers, in my experience in the Assembly, who are as open as the Minister of Justice. You know, to have the minister phone you up as critic or as Opposition House Leader and say, "Come on over; we've got some people from the department here; we're taking a look at some draft amendments; we'd like some input from you" – in fact, we didn't have draft amendments then. My colleague and I met with the Minister of Justice. We parked our political baggage and our party labels at the door, and we sat down as a group of people determined to discuss what we thought were problems with the bill and how we could make it better.

In some respects it's a shame that this is such a small bill and it affects in many ways such a tiny, tiny sliver of the business of the province of Alberta. But the lessons I took from it as we sat down and explained some of the concerns that we had – and I hope I'm not breaching any without prejudice sort of conversation because I'm talking not about the substance of what was said but the tenor of the discussions. Concerns were raised by the opposition that we felt that Bill 3, as it initially was presented, went beyond what government said it was going to do. We thought there was a potential – and I

underscore that it was only a potential – for people involved in doing revised statutes also to make changes that perhaps went further than they should. So we asked how we could make sure that it was clear in the bill that this was only to prepare a set of revised statutes, and for minor amendments and so on, who decides what's a minor amendment?

I might just go to the specific things that the opposition had raised. If you look at section 3(h), this is what it says the Chief Legislative Counsel may do: "make minor amendments to clarify what is considered to be the intention of the Legislature." Well, you know something? When I sit in the Legislature, I'm not sure what the intention of the Legislature is. I hear the Minister of Community Development, who may get up and make a spirited speech and say something, and the Member for Edmonton-Centre may be saying something very different. Maybe we vote on some things, but who among us would be bold and brave enough to say, "I knew precisely what the Legislature meant"?

It's not uncommon that in Charter challenges, challenges under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, those words that we utter sometimes seriously and sometimes thoughtlessly in *Hansard* come in front of a judge, who scrutinizes them to try and decide what the heck the Legislature meant, and it's not always clear. It's not at all always clear. [interjection] Yeah, I dread that too. I'm embarrassed sometimes that some of my less thoughtful, more poorly researched comments might be the basis of somebody trying to discern the will of the Legislature. So imagine how we would then have the Chief Legislative Counsel making these kinds of decisions. Do we not put that fellow in an awfully impossible position?

We're very fortunate in Alberta that we have a fellow like Peter Pagano who does this work. In my experience, when I think of a list of people who I've enjoyed working with, Peter Pagano would be close to the top of the list, just a gentleman in every sense of the word, a genuine professional and somebody who is the ideal person to be doing the kind of work he does. But, you know, if he moves on to become the deputy minister of justice in some province that needs his skills, what about the next person that comes along? I'm not sure that I have as much confidence, so I ask that question.

4:50

The other question we asked was about 3(i), "make changes to reconcile apparently inconsistent provisions." Well, Madam Chairman, every day in this Legislature I see what I think are apparently inconsistent provisions. I may not be able to persuade you. My friend from Calgary-Glenmore is sometimes a bit of a tough challenge to persuade in these apparently inconsistent provisions. I see them all the time. It may be that my glasses aren't clean enough and my reading skills not proficient enough, but, you know, if you think about it, it's not as clear cut as you might think.

The other concern that my colleague Sue Olsen and I had raised was in 3(n).

Make minor amendments to other enactments not being revised that are required to reconcile them with a revised enactment as if the minor amendments were amendments consequential to the revised enactment.

Well, once again that admits of some contention, some ambiguity, and we wanted to make it clear that the power of Legislative Counsel is clearly constrained by this Assembly.

So those were the changes, 3(h),(i), and (n), that my colleague Sue Olsen had asked for some clarification on.

Now, what has happened is that the government has brought forward amendment A1. What we see immediately is that they've gone to 3(f) and they've added the words "but not so as to change the sense of any enactment." That's important, and it may be argued that that was always clear in the first place. If you go to sections

(1)(h) and (i), we see changes there. It now provides for "change any outdated reference to an organization, a person or an enactment of Alberta or of another jurisdiction so as to make the reference current and accurate," and that replaces (h) and (i). So that takes out the two problems that the Liberal opposition had with Bill 3. It resolves them completely.

Then what we had was a new provision, (n), and here are the key words. I know members are following closely at their desks as I speak, and I just want to make sure everybody can see and I want to make sure that everybody knows. The words here are "minor consequential changes," and I know that in Calgary-North there are people, men and women, who will sleep better tonight knowing that the government of the province of Alberta has made it clear that it is only "minor consequential changes," not some other kinds of minor changes where somebody in the drafting section of the Department of Justice after the fact thinks: I think we should do something different; this should say something different.

So that's an excellent change, and in fact the Minister of Justice has gone one further by adding a new subsection (2). This is very comforting also: "no change may be made under subsection (1) that has the effect of changing the intent of any enactment." You may say: well, that was always implicit; that was always the belief. But now we don't have to worry about somebody's good judgment. It now specifically expresses what the government says was its intention all along.

You know, there was a Hindu philosopher named Kabīr, who lived from 1400 till about 1499, who may have been thinking of the Liberal opposition when he made this observation.

Men have always looked before and after, and rebelled against the existing order. But for their divine discontent men would not have been men, and there would have been no progress in human affairs.

Well, maybe a bit of a pompous quote for three or four minor changes in a bill, but I think nonetheless it shows that the work of the Legislature is for opposition to ask questions. That shouldn't be the end of the dialogue, but then have the minister, as this Minister of Justice has done, take those concerns and respond by bringing in a set of amendments that in fact clarify. That's exactly the way the legislative process should work.

I might ask an old, wily veteran like the Minister of Government Services: how many times does that play out in this House? Not often enough. You know, when questions are raised in the opposition, we have a runaway train locomotive so often on the part of government public bills, and they won't be changed for love or money. But we could do more of this, members of government and members of the government caucus. In any event, that was a very long and torturous path to say that I support the amendments that are in front of us. I encourage all members to vote in support of amendment A1.

I may go back and put this up on my wall, and when I see those new Liberal MLAs coming in by the dozens – by the dozens, ladies and gentlemen – I figure I can maybe get 40 Liberal MLAs in my office, whoever is occupying it after the next election. They will be lined up in the hallway, and I want to point out to them – I want to have Bill 3 festooned on the wall of my office, and I want to be able to explain to them how government ought to work. And when they work with the opposition and when they see the Minister of Justice as the Justice critic after that next election, I want them to remember that here was an act of leadership on his part, and I hope that they will accord him the same respect that we have been accorded in this Legislature.

I may have some other comments I want to make after I see how the amendment vote goes, but I'll defer my comments until that

point. I'm looking forward to the question on A1, Madam Chairman.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

MR. DICKSON: Now, Madam Chairman, there's something else I'm going to say to those 40 or 50 Liberal MLAs after the next election when they sort of gather down there, while we're waiting for the renovations to be done to sort of break up those offices so we can get more members in on the second and third floors in the Annex. There's another thing that I want say, if they'll let me back in the building without my security card. I'm going to want to come back in, and I'm also going to want to tell them something else. I'm going to encourage them to look at a wonderful book. You know, the Speaker of this Assembly has brought to our attention a terrific book. It's called *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and it's edited by Robert Marleau and Camille Montpetit. This is a terrific book. It's 1,052 pages long, and when you have papers that are kind of crumpled, you put this book on top of them, and in five or 10 minutes the paper is pressed out and those creases are gone.

What I'm going to say to all of those eager young Liberal MLAs in a new Liberal government is that we should look specifically at chapter 17, because there's a section there on delegated legislation. If they looked, the chapter goes from page 685 to page 696, and it won't take very long to read. It is a wondrous, wondrous story, members. It talks about a decision in 1964 by something in Ottawa called the Special Committee on Procedure and Organization that recommended . . . Now, you can imagine what this is, so just wait for this. The recommendation was for a parliamentary committee to review regulations made as a result of delegated legislative power and to report to Parliament any regulations or instruments which the committee believed exceeded the authority delegated by statute. Doesn't that make everybody feel kind of warm, as you hear that expression?

5:00

There are people in Calgary-Fish Creek who would be saying: "Right on. That's exactly what we think should be happening." There would be people in Calgary-Mountain View taking to the streets and saying: yes, that's exactly what should happen. People in Calgary-Fort are saying: "Is that not what happens now? It happens in Ottawa." The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek or the Member for Calgary-Fort or the Member for Calgary-North Hill or Calgary-Mountain View or Calgary-Glenmore or Calgary-North West – my own MLA of Calgary-North West – would have to go back to their constituents and say that in Ottawa there is a committee, Madam Chairman, and you know what it does? It reviews every single statutory instrument referred to it on the basis of 13 criteria. It provides the criteria to both Houses of Parliament at the beginning of each session.

So here are some of the things that this all-party committee – and we probably have some Alliance supporters in the Assembly, hopefully not many. [interjections] We've got a few people who are being outed here this afternoon as we speak. There will be a time when members will regret volunteering, but that's fine. We appreciate the Minister of Government Services' volunteerism now.

What those members will be part of, if they are Alliance Members of Parliament elected from this province to go to Ottawa, is they will have the benefit of sitting on a committee that reviews every regulation, every statutory instrument, every piece of delegated legislation that's dealt with at the federal level. They will have a chance to scrutinize it. What can they do when they scrutinize it?

They will find out whether the regulation in question is authorized by the terms of the enabling legislation. They will note whether it has complied with any condition set forth in the legislation. They will look at whether it's in conformity with the Charter. They will note if it has any retroactive effect without express authority. You can make a long list, but I don't want to take the time of members now, because I know they're focused and studying their dinner menus and their speeches for this evening. That's going to be exciting, because I know people are going to have as many tough questions when we're dealing with the Department of Health and Wellness supplementary supply as my colleagues have got from their constituents, and we're looking forward to that.

My point is simply this. In Ottawa they have a committee that gives those Alliance opposition members a kind of power that opposition members don't have in this Assembly. They get to oversee regulations, and they get to oversee subordinate lawmaking. We're being denied that in this Assembly, and I hope none of you would be complicit when your friends in the Alliance party go out and start talking about the death of democracy in Ottawa. I hope no member in this Assembly has put himself or herself in the embarrassing position of supporting that, because that would mean that they'd be also supporting dramatic changes in this Assembly such as the Liberal opposition has pushed for since the election of 1993.

So why am I going through this long parade of what's going on in the House of Commons? Madam Chairman, you have been too courteous and too polite by half because you've not challenged me on that, and I thank you for that. I think that was because you were confident that before I finished my 20 minutes, I would loop back, that I would pick up Bill 3 and say that the one thing we're missing in this bill, despite all of the great, positive changes the Minister of Justice has done, is not being able to review those regulations.

If you look at section 10, "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations." But we might as well be saying: "Government, go out there and start signing a blank cheque. You go out there and start signing a blank cheque, because when it comes to regulation-making in Alberta, the sky is the limit. The sky is the limit."

You know what's interesting? We've had some people who have been in this Assembly and are now running for Parliament – in one case I can think of, as leader of the Alliance – and every time I hear this member talking about the importance of democracy and the importance of the role of the private member and the role of the individual member, I ask myself, Madam Chairman: where was that member's sense of indignation when time after time we have brought forward an amendment to refer regulations to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations? Did that member join with the opposition a single time?

I'll bet we have moved that amendment 30, 40, 60 times in this House. We've tried hard to get it in on every single bill where there was an abuse of the regulation power. Did the current leader of the Alliance, on any single occasion, not only rise and support it but ever utter a word in support? So now we see that the purported champion of parliamentary democracy, the ostensible hero of the role of the individual member, has suddenly got religion, and he's pounding the political pulpit in terms of propounding a new way of doing things.

You know something? The issue is not what you say you're going to do in the future, and we all know that in this Assembly because we've all gone through an election. What counts is what you've done when you had the power and the opportunity to make a difference. So don't tell us what you're going to do down the road. Show us you did it differently, and it may be, depending on what the election outcome is next Monday night, that maybe we'll find suddenly a bit of a rebirth in the government caucus as they prepare

to take the armor out of the armory and start, you know, hitching up the horses to the wagons and preparing for that next election. Maybe the government may start realizing that Canadians do want a Parliament that works, a Parliament that's responsive, and individual members that can take responsibility for what they do here and the laws that are passed, whether it's in the statute or whether it's in one of those 500 to 600 regulations we pass every year.

Madam Chairman, that's the point I wanted to make with respect to this, and I'm thinking that there may be some people who will want to read that section in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, because it works. It works. You know, we have good representation at all these Canadian parliamentary conferences. I think we had the Speaker, sometimes the Clerk – almost always a delegation of MLAs go to conferences around the country. We talk to other Members of Parliament, members of the provincial parliament, MNAs, MLAs.

We've all had that experience of people looking at us strangely when we tell them this aberrant way we deal with subordinate lawmaking in Alberta, and I'm embarrassed. Somewhere between the bun and the soup course I sit there and say: "Oh, please don't let that member from Ontario ask me how we deal with regulations, because I would be so embarrassed. I hope I can get to dessert." It's holding my breath almost through the whole meal, just hoping that nobody will expose the frailty of democracy in Alberta. Sometimes, you know, people think I'm rude, because I'm just eating as fast as I can, because I'm hoping that nobody will make eye contact and ask me that penetrating question which will ruin my digestion, disturb my meal, embarrass me, and make me report that maybe I'm an MLA from Saskatchewan or B.C., so that I don't have to answer that awfully embarrassing question: how can it be that you pass this legislation in a province like Alberta, with the best-educated workforce in Canada, and you do it in such a darn undemocratic way?

5:10

Madam Chairman, the opportunities for me to make this case are diminishing. They shrink before my eyes. My parliamentary life is expiring. The sand is running out of the hourglass, and that may be a cause of celebration for *Hansard*, and it may be a cause of celebration from members opposite. But, you know, if I get that chance to speak to that host, those dozens of new Liberal MLAs – I have a darned good feeling that the veteran MLAs should come back, that my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora is going to be championing that, and my other colleagues who come back are going to be championing that. I know those smart, new candidates will immediately see without any hesitation at all the frailty in the system we have now. They will immediately respond, and I will be so proud.

I want to come back in this Assembly. I'm going to see if I can get at least a back row seat. I'll wear my nose and glasses. I will come in disguise, Madam Chairman, and I will sit in the back row, and I will wait for that wonderful moment when a Liberal government says: we're taking these regulations, and we're committing them to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. That will be perhaps the most wonderful moment I could imagine in this Legislative Assembly Chamber. It makes me sentimental just to even contemplate that happy outcome.

Madam Chairman, you know, we don't have to wait until the next election. I mean, the Liberals will be proud to make that change, but every member here this afternoon has a chance. You don't have to wait until then. You could take on Bill 3, and you can say: "We're going to reinvent democracy. We're going to do it right now in this

Assembly." People in St. Albert will appreciate their member, and people in Edson and Hinton will with one voice thank their member. People in St. Paul and Crowsnest Pass and people in Drumheller understand the importance of a Legislature that works and MLAs that are truly accountable. They will all be thanking you, members, and that Minister of Justice will be . . . [interjection]

Madam Chairman, I want to just digress for one brief moment. The Minister of Government Services, I think, feels that somehow her contribution to democracy has not been marked here this afternoon, and maybe we could spend a moment commenting on the contribution that the Minister of Government Services has made to parliamentary democracy.

Madam Chairman, when I came into this place as a rookie, much like the Member for Edmonton-Highlands did just a few days ago, I looked across and there were some people from Calgary who I knew of before, didn't know personally, and I looked to them for some direction. I looked to them for some leadership, because we didn't have a lot of MLAs from Calgary at the time on my side. So I viewed the Minister of Government Services as a sort of big sister, you know, because she was always very kind.

MRS. NELSON: How big?

MR. DICKSON: My older sister. She was very kind. [interjections] Madam Chairman, she asked for some special attention. I mean this only in the sense of parliamentary experience, and all members understand that.

You know, I tried to take some cues from that member. Madam Chairman, we are talking about the underpinning of parliamentary democracy, and I'm not really intending to be humorous. This is a serious subject, and I'm trying to give it the weighty kind of attention that it warrants.

I looked to that current Minister of Government Services, and I was trying to take some cues from her. I was trying to take some signals. She was probably one of those people that sent me a congratulatory note when I first got appointed to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. I'm not sure I kept it, but I'm sure she probably said: congratulations, Gary; you'll do a great job on this committee. You know, I probably phoned my wife that night I was so darned excited: "Guess what? The Minister of Government Services thinks I'm going to do a great job on the Committee on Law and Regulations." You know, I probably made a few speeches. I probably rushed back to Calgary-Buffalo: "I've been appointed to the Committee on Law and Regulations, and boy, I'm sure darned excited about that. I can't wait to swing into action."

I think I probably lined up some old law books I had not used since first-year law school on the role of administrative law, had them dusted off, and I probably brought two boxes up to my office in Edmonton. That was largely because I guess I misread the hint I got from the Minister of Government Services. I'm sure it was my fault, not the message we got, and I'm sure she was sincere in wishing me good luck on this exciting new committee assignment.

You know, having made a fool of myself by rushing back to Calgary-Buffalo and giving speeches about my new assignment, can anybody imagine the acute disappointment I then experienced to find that I'd been neutered in the parliamentary sense. There had been an operation, and I was leaving this Chamber in a radically altered state than when I arrived.

AN HON. MEMBER: Was it a sharp knife?

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, it was a painfully dull knife,

and it was a procedure that pains me even now to recount.

I think my time on this bill runs out. I hope members are going to be able to support Bill 3, because it's a darn good bill. We made some changes here. And Sue Olsen: wherever she is out on the campaign trail tonight, I know all members join with me in wishing her every success in carrying the campaign there. I look forward to a positive vote.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill 3 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports Bill 3 with some amendments. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official record of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:20 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, November 20, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/11/20

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please be seated.

[On motion the Assembly resolved itself into Committee of Supply]

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: Supplementary Estimates 2000-01
General Revenue Fund

Health and Wellness

THE CHAIRMAN: We call on the minister to make his opening comments with respect to the supplementary estimates.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to present the supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Alberta Health and Wellness and its associated provincial authorities for 2000-2001. I present these supplementary estimates on behalf of my colleague the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness and Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek and our colleagues the Member for St. Albert, who chairs the Alberta Health Facilities Review Committee; the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, who is the chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities; and the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, who is the chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, also known as AADAC.

Now, it may seem a bit unusual to refer to introducing supplementary estimates as a pleasure, but for me, Mr. Chairman, it is because this additional funding will help us address Albertans' health priorities, such as improving access and reducing waiting lists, buying replacement or additional equipment, meeting the long-term care needs for our seniors, implementing new programs to protect Albertans' health, and providing fair compensation to our valued health care workers.

Meeting these priorities in this way does not imply a failure in our budget planning process. Rather, this additional investment is the direct result of this government's responsible approach to fiscal planning. We cannot and do not base our provincial or Health and Wellness budget on fluctuating prices of energy. That would be like an individual taking out a mortgage for a house on the basis of hoping to win a lottery. Instead, we can and do base our annual budget on a reasonable, sustainable, and conservative estimate of this province's projected revenues. That is responsible budgeting.

However, situations can arise that are not expected and therefore not planned for. New needs can emerge, and if we do realize unexpectedly higher revenues, then that is like winning the lottery, and we can look at addressing needs over and above our budget. But we do that after we know we have the money and not before.

I would also remind hon. members that every payment we make against our debt frees up funds that we no longer have to pay in interest. That provides ongoing funding that is available for program, operating, and other health costs. Again, we do not plan on this income before we have it, which is why it is not part of our original budget. So coming before you today with our supplement-

tary estimates does not indicate a failure in our fiscal planning. Rather, it shows an unqualified success.

I would now like to present the amounts I'm requesting by priority, starting with Albertans' highest priority, waiting lists. Waiting lists are a reality of health care, and the types of procedures for which people are waiting speak volumes about the reality of our society. Waiting lists for heart surgeries, major joint replacements, and cancer treatments are all symptoms of an aging population.

The onetime commitment of \$5 million for open-heart surgery and angioplasties and \$7 million for hip and knee and joint replacements will help shorten the waiting lists for these procedures. Already we are seeing the results. At the end of June of 2000 waiting lists for open-heart surgery were down 14 percent from the same time in 1999.

We're just beginning to feel the impact of our aging population on cancer rates. The new head of the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton, Dr. Brent Zanke, has already warned us that cancer rates will continue to climb as the baby boomers reach the age of highest risk, and new drugs will further increase the cost.

The \$9 million supplementary estimate for cancer treatment and drugs will pay for precious weeks saved in providing these life-sustaining treatments. Already our commitment to cancer treatments and drugs have brought waiting lists for chemotherapy down to one week and radiation treatment for breast and prostate cancer from 11 weeks to four weeks.

If waiting lists for joints, hearts, and cancer largely are a product of an aging population, then waiting lists for general surgeries are a symptom of our growing population, and so is the need for more physicians in acute care. People from across this country and around the world are coming to be part of the Alberta advantage. Statistics Canada numbers from the year ended June 30, 2000, show that our province welcomed almost 12,000 other Canadians to Alberta and almost 13,000 immigrants from other countries while only 7,000 Albertans left our province. Sadly, Mr. Chairman, 18,000 Albertans passed away in the past year, but almost 38,000 new babies were born here. In all, we had a net gain of 37,000 new Albertans last year alone.

The \$15 million supplementary estimate for general surgery will help reduce waiting lists for these necessary procedures. This is an investment in Albertan's health and quality of life and is also the price we pay for economic success and our high quality of life. Another \$6 million annually will help reduce waiting lists for equally important renal dialysis services for those with kidney disease.

The \$8 million for acute care physicians is another symptom of our growing population and its health needs. Health authorities will use these funds to provide physicians, nurses, and other staff for expanded or new programs to address shortages for inpatient services in acute care hospitals.

I want to note here that our health authorities are doing a remarkable job in attracting physicians to this province, especially when we understand that a shortage of health professionals is an issue shared by every jurisdiction in North America. Over the last five years the number of physicians in our province has grown by 11 percent compared to only 3.6 percent nationally. However, as physician numbers go up so will the amounts that we must pay in physicians' fees.

The other major item under waiting lists is MRI scans and MRI equipment. These have been the subject of some debate in this session, and I do understand the concern. The demand for MRI services is rising exponentially, 33 percent between 1998 and 1999 and a 59 percent increase in just the first quarter of this year compared to the same period last year.

Since we announced our budget, higher revenues have permitted

us to allocate \$14 million in onetime funding to buy six more MRI units for Alberta's public health system. That amount is part of these supplementary estimates. In addition, I congratulate the Calgary and Capital health authorities for finding the funds to buy an additional MRI each. These two units, added to the six that we are funding and the seven already in place, mean that next year we will have 15 MRI units operating in our public health system, and Alberta will have the highest per capita MRI capacity in the nation. In the meantime, until those additional machines come on-line, this government has authorized health authorities to reduce current waiting lists by contracting the needed MRIs.

I ask for \$2.4 million in onetime funding to pay for these unexpected but necessary expenses and an additional \$2 million to provide ongoing operating support for these new machines. Machines without operators serve no one.

8:10

To provide trained professionals to operate these machines, NAIT has recognized the need and is offering a new Alberta MRI training program with input from the regional health authorities. The first class began in October, and the 15 students will graduate in June of 2001, when the eight new MRIs have been installed.

MRIs are not the only equipment our provincial health authorities require. Aging equipment needs to be replaced, and the pressures of a growing and aging population require additional capacity. These estimates include \$50 million for equipment like dialysis machines, ultrasound units, and echocardiogram equipment. Just like waiting lists these estimates for equipment amounts are symptoms of our changing society, specifically our technological advancement. As our society continues to advance its technology and that technology proves itself effective, the demand will continue to grow and so will the cost.

In total the supplementary estimates include \$112.7 million for equipment: the \$14 million for MRIs, \$50 million from higher than expected provincial revenues, and \$48.7 million from federal government transfer funds. Operations for equipment are an ongoing expense, but the initial purchase is well suited to onetime spending. When funding becomes available, we will take advantage of that to go beyond the base to meet additional equipment needs, and you will see that reflected in these estimates.

Waiting lists may be the top priority for Albertans, but they are certainly not the only priority. As we continued to assess Albertans' health needs, we took action where it was needed and as provincial revenues allowed. These estimates include \$13 million for the Alberta Mental Health Board. Ten million dollars of that is to enhance community programs so people suffering from a mental illness can get the help that they need to stay in their homes, neighbourhoods, and workplaces.

I'm pleased to note that this government has almost doubled the funding for community health services over the last five years to keep pace with a doubling of the number of Albertans receiving services over the same period of time. Over that period of time, the number of institutional beds is down only slightly, so we can continue to provide for those who need facility-based care.

The other \$3 million to the Alberta Mental Health Board is to implement a new eating disorders program. Bulimia and anorexia nervosa are particularly insidious because they affect so many young people, even children. This funding is an investment in their health, their life, and their future.

These estimates also include another \$3.4 million for our children: \$2 million for the children's mental health initiative and \$1.4 for youth substance abuse programs being delivered through AADAC. These initiatives are part of my ministry's much bigger role in the

Alberta children's initiative. That role includes action on fetal alcohol syndrome and the student health partnership initiative, which provides in-school support for students with special health needs.

Seniors are at the other end of the age spectrum, and their needs are growing along with their numbers. These estimates include \$20 million for long-term care and home care to help our seniors age in place so that they can continue to enjoy the independence and comfort of living in their homes and communities.

Seniors are also the largest single group of prescription drug users. Eighty percent of all drug benefits we pay are for seniors. New, more effective drugs are a boon to the people who are helped by them, but they are also expensive for governments that have to pay for them. These estimates include \$10 million to cover the increased cost of prescription drugs.

By constantly reviewing procedures and listening to Albertans, we are able to identify which procedures or medical goods are proven necessary and effective. We decided to cover the cost of medically necessary, high-cost dental treatments that are a prerequisite before surgery and can correct congenital deformities or address the impact of trauma, cancer, or other conditions.

We also decided to cover the cost of fibreglass casts. Given the proven quality of fibreglass casts, it is reasonable to cover them as a standard item. These supplementary estimates include \$3 million to cover the cost of extending public insurance coverage to include these and other procedures.

Some life-saving procedures require more aggressive intervention in the form of transplant surgery. These estimates include \$1 million for the early research stages of a new organ and tissue donation and transplantation initiative. The work is based on an advisory committee review that resulted in 99 recommendations. Many of those recommendations require public input before we can act. I expect a report on this fall's public consultation some time early next year.

The backbone of any health system is the skills of the dedicated people who deliver the services. These estimates include \$39 million to cover the cost of recently negotiated salary settlements, \$10 million for a nursing development initiative, and \$15.2 million to adjust compensation levels for employees and community agencies that provide services to Albertans with special needs. Those agencies operate under the leadership of AADAC and the persons with developmental disabilities boards, or PDD boards. The adjusted compensation brings the salaries and benefits of these employees into line with other health care workers. That will help reduce turnover and bring greater stability to service delivery.

The largest portion of the amounts for compensation adjustments, over \$14 million, is for the about 10,000 PDD workers who provide frontline support to clients. The Building Better Bridges report identified higher wages for PDD caregivers as a priority. This commitment recognizes and acts on that priority. For AADAC the \$426,000 total increase in wages will affect up to 350 workers to provide direct support or management for addiction services. The full compensation is \$26.5 million over two years. These amounts for next year will be included in our base budget.

The \$10 million for the nursing development initiative will upgrade the skills of our nursing workforce, and the \$39 million for negotiated settlements simply enables us to meet this new level of commitment to health care workers' higher salaries and benefits. These estimates include \$8.9 million to eliminate operating deficits for voluntary organizations like the Bonnyville health centre, St. Joseph's general hospital, and the Caritas Health Group, that operate acute care facilities in the Capital and Lakeland regions. These organizations did not benefit when we provided funding to eliminate health authority deficits last year. This supplementary estimate corrects that situation.

To conclude, the onetime total of these supplementary estimates is \$146 million, and the amount that will be annualized is another \$147.6 million, for a total supplementary estimate for Alberta Health and Wellness of \$293.59 million. I come before this Assembly and ask for funds that will reduce waiting lists, introduce new health programs, and buy new cancer drugs and new equipment like MRI machines. I ask for money that will provide comfort and care to seniors and pay our health care workers what they deserve. I ask for your support. I ask that you support the care, service, and programs that these estimates represent and that you provide your approval for meeting these pressing needs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before recognizing the Health and Wellness critic, I wonder if we might have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to take the opportunity tonight to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly an individual that has served this province with distinction for I believe it was 17 years, give or take, as the MLA for Medicine Hat. He also was Attorney General, minister of advanced education, minister of intergovernmental affairs, and also Deputy Premier. I was proud to serve with this individual, who has gone forth into the private sector and has made a way outside this Assembly, proving that when I leave here, there's a chance. I would appreciate it if we would extend a warm welcome to – and I say the honourable – Jim Horsman from Medicine Hat, who's in the Speaker's gallery. Please give it up for a member of this Assembly.

Health and Wellness *(continued)*

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, it was interesting listening to the minister of health run down the list of expenditures that have been outside of the regularly budgeted period of expenditures. The thought that came across my mind was that spending taxpayers' dollars and more of it doesn't necessarily mean that there is better management or accountability of our health care system or in fact that those are the areas that the extra dollars are required for.

It reminded me that since the health budget estimates, which were held on March 17 and March 20, 2000, on April 17 of this year I also submitted a list of questions to the Department of Health and Wellness asking for an accountability as to how our almost \$5 billion health care budget is being spent. To this day, Mr. Chairman, I have not received a reply, and unless it is somewhere in the mail, I think it is rather astounding that in fact there has not been a reply from the Department of Health and Wellness with regards to the questions that were put forward by the Official Opposition.

When I look at the report, which was in fact a rather damning report, from the Auditor General's office on the Department of Health and Wellness, it too indicated that there are problems within that department in terms of accounting for the expenditure of a major portion of this province's funds. I'm sure that the Provincial Treasurer would be more than willing to look after that, because in fact it is a huge issue that this department has not been able to reply

to some very specific questions about the expenditure of public funds.

8:20

There are a number of issues that are outstanding, that still remain, and keep cropping up with regards to issues in health care, and the minister actually touched on some of those issues but, again, seems to miss the boat in terms of how to address the vast problems that we have in health care. I'd like to go to the one issue that he did spend some time on, and that was the expenditure of health care dollars providing for new MRI equipment. The minister and, quite frankly, the Premier in his response to questions that we have put forward in the Legislative Assembly don't understand the issue.

The issue is very simple: an MRI which is medically required is no different than if you or anyone else in this Legislative Assembly, for instance, broke their foot and needed an ultrasound. You can have it done within a hospital environment, or you can have it done within a laboratory environment, a private laboratory that is contracted to a hospital. That has been the process for years and years and years, yet this government insists on saying that medically required MRIs that are had outside of a hospital environment in fact will not be covered by this government. It quite frankly boggles the mind to know how the rationale is made that differentiates whether I with a prescription in my hand need to wait eight months for an MRI . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, I wonder if we can contain the volume of our voices in discussing lively and important topics. You may not realize that in doing so, you're drowning out the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: An individual who has a doctor's prescription can either wait for eight months for an MRI within a public hospital or go and pay out of pocket for an MRI outside of that facility. The reality is that all this government has to do is cover the prescribed MRIs under Alberta health care rather than hiding behind the investigation that's going on at the federal level, rather than hiding behind the fact that the Canada Health Act may or may not cover MRIs that are taken outside of a hospital setting. That's all this government has to do, include it under the Alberta health care insurance plan, and – you know what? – the controversy is over. It's as simple as that. So I provide you with that solution yet again, but for whatever reason the government is refusing to take that on.

Shortages. Again, the minister wrings his hands and bemoans the fact that this province has shortages with regards to doctors, with regards to nurses, with regards to other professionals in health. Yet when he looks at the fact that there are foreign doctors within this province right now who are able – they have passed the exams, and they would be able to practise within the province if in fact some internships were opened, if residencies were opened. The government has refused to provide those extra positions. I believe it was 26 positions that were provided for this year for foreign doctors, and when the foreign doctors phone the department to find out what the processes are, they are told: we don't know what it is. There is no clear answer as to how in fact foreign doctors who have the qualifications are able to obtain the positions in order to intern.

There's still the issue of nurses being offered part-time positions. The minister wrings his hands yet again and says: oh, we can't find any nurses to fill positions within this province. Well, if there were some kind of directive, perhaps, from the minister to say that positions should be full-time positions, then perhaps we would have a very different situation with regards to the ability to recruit nurses in this province.

When you look at other health care professionals – pharmacists, physios, some of the complementary health care professions – again the minister has dragged his heels. It's my understanding that the facility at the University of Alberta that trains pharmacists in this province and has a Canada-wide reputation for being number one – in North America, I believe, as well as one of the top facilities in this country – is antiquated: the labs are old; the ceiling is leaking. And this is where we are trying to recruit and train pharmacists, that are well needed across this whole province.

The issue of chiropractors and the levels that chiropractors are provided, whether or not they're adequate for individuals to go and get chiropractic services, is a question that has not been answered by this minister as well and is one of those complementary health professions that may in fact save costs to the health care system in the long run.

There is a whole host of other issues with regards to prevention and early diagnosis that this minister has skirted around. There was a question in the Assembly this afternoon with regards to diabetes, yet the minister refused to answer whether or not the test strips to test the sugar levels for diabetics will in fact be paid for, will in fact be provided by the government. The minister stood in this Assembly and refused to answer that very simple question, even though it was a recommendation that came forward under the committee that had been set up. The question is: why? Where are the priorities, and how are those priorities decided? In actual fact there does not seem to be a coherent plan to say that this is where we are moving as a department and this is where we are going to put our priorities.

The whole issue of sleep apnea. I as well as other members of the Official Opposition and, I know, members of the government have received queries with regards to why in certain areas sleep apnea and the tests for sleep apnea are covered and why there are others that are again paid out of pocket. So again we have set up a two-tier system within this province. The waiting lists are incredibly high for testing for sleep apnea.

The Calgary lab is a disgrace. I know that those members who have actually taken the time to tour the Calgary lab, the regional lab, know that that is true as well. It is a fire hazard, and it is a disgrace that a province with this richness would have a lab that would be in the dismal state that it is physically in. I give full credit to the workers within the Calgary lab, who are working in conditions that are almost close to Third World with regards to the conditions and do not meet any standards that are set by any accreditation body in this country. That is an area that the minister has closed his eyes to and pretended does not exist.

The whole issue of environmental health and the impact of the environment on health. We have seen what happened in Walkerton with regards to water quality. We know that feedlots and the effluent from those feedlots is of huge concern to the surrounding communities, yet again it is questionable whether the minister of health has had any input into that process. And if that minister has had input, that input has obviously been so minimal that there has not been much seen on the impact of the environment on health. That, in effect, is a huge issue as well.

8:30

So what we see is that we have a department that knows how to spend money, that knows how to spend a lot of money but doesn't know whether it's spending its money wisely or not. The accountability is not there, the follow-through is not there, and the overall view is not there of what is important to ensure that some of the huge issues in health – the waiting lists, the waits in the emergency rooms, the fact that we have shortages of various health care professionals, the stresses and strains between administration and

professional staff, as we saw in the Mistahia health region – are dealt with in a manner that is in fact coherent.

When we look at the issue of the regional health authorities and whether or not in fact those regional health authorities are working, it's my understanding that there is a study that has now been put forward to try and assess - this is seven years after the regional health authorities were developed - whether or not the regional health authority administrative structure is working.

The question that now the government has to face and this minister will have to face is what to do now that there are going to be elections. The minister has made a commitment that in October this year there will be elections. I believe the reason that we don't know what the rules are for those elections as yet is that the regional health authority boundaries will be changed. In order to make those rules, it's much easier to do that once these changes occur, and that change will not occur prior to a provincial election because of the disruption we will see within the regional health authorities. If it is not the case, as one of the former ministers of health seems to be indicating, then I would like to have this minister of health put on the record, once and for all, that the 17 regional health authorities and the Mental Health Board and the Cancer Board will remain as is, untouched. And you know what? I don't think that's going to happen. But if it does, so much the better.

The issues around funding and sustainable funding. You know, I, as we all are, have been watching the federal election, and what I found quite interesting is that the former Provincial Treasurer of this province has the unmitigated gall to stand up and say that the sixth principle of the Canada Health Act is going to be sustainable long-term health care funding. Yet when we ask this minister of health whether or not in fact we are going to see sustainable long-term health care funding for regional health authorities throughout this province, we get no reply. There had been no long-term sustainable health care funding when we had the former Provincial Treasurer, who could in fact have done that in one of his last budgets. He didn't do it. He's not going to do it on the federal scene. Neither has this government ever put forward long-term sustainable funding for health care. It is not happening.

What we see are these ad hoc bits and pieces that seem to rain down from on high to the regional health authorities, who of course are not going to say no to additional funds. But I think that if anyone here sat down one on one with those regional health authorities, had no mikes, no pieces of paper in hand, the reality is that they would say: "We'd prefer not to have targeted funding. We'd prefer to be able to have a budget that's long-term over three years, that actually covers our needs and requirements, and not have to guess as to what we're going to get money for, whether we're going to get money that's designated for an MRI or we're going to get money that's designated for angioplasty or we're going to get money that's designated for something else." The reality is that that's not the way to budget. If in fact the regional health authorities are set up as independent bodies, then they need to be given the ability to budget without Big Brother looking over their shoulder. So that is a huge, huge issue in what we've seen.

Mental health is another area where this government has failed dismally over the last number of years. We have had over and over and over again presentations from community mental health groups. There's now the alliance on mental health that is headed by a former Conservative cabinet minister, who very clearly has outlined what the issues are in mental health: the fact that the dollars are not being spent wisely, that we have people continually falling through the cracks when it comes to mental health. The impact on the general health system is that it affects the delivery of acute care and emergency health care systems when the mental health system does not match the needs of individuals within the population.

Again, it's a lack of understanding of how the different issues of health interrelate and what the necessary conditions are in order to really provide primary health care, in order to really provide community-based health care, in order to really provide preventative health care, in order to really understand what the issues are around knowing and dealing with the determinants of population health. These are all issues, quite frankly, that when I listen to the minister of health, either he doesn't understand or he doesn't want to understand. But the reality is that if we are to see movement in our health care system, if we are to see some of the drastic concerns of Albertans addressed, they cannot be addressed unless one looks at the totality of what health is and what the determinants of health are. That, unfortunately, is not occurring.

One of the other issues I'd like to bring up with mental health is the fact that the mental health ombudsman has very little teeth. I had written to the mental health ombudsman to ask him to investigate something that he had brought up in one of his reports – that would be a couple of years ago now, because he's usually a year behind – wherein he indicated that there was a shortage of facilities in the Calgary regional health authority and there was a lack of mental health beds. According to his mandate, it appeared to me that he would have not only the ability to investigate but also the ability to make some recommendations. When I brought that to his attention, the reply was that no, that is not within that mandate, and thank you very much. No one will probably do that.

The other area is the Health Facilities Review Committee. They've had an increase of \$50,000 to their budget, yet when they are asked to review certain situations, their mandate is also limited. Again, the whole issue of accountability is a huge issue, and the question of "Are our public taxpayer dollars being used appropriately?" has yet to be answered by this minister and by this department.

I do look forward to some responses to the comments I have made this evening. As well, I would like to have the responses, unless they are in the mail, to the questions that were brought up at the designated supply subcommittee as well as those that I tabled on April 17. If the minister or his department doesn't have either of those, I'd be more than willing to provide those questions again to the minister. I look forward to the responses that will be brought forward.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

8:40

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

AN HON. MEMBER: What about ambulances?

MR. DICKSON: Well, there are a number of concerns with respect to ambulance services, and I know my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark is looking for some answers there.

Uncharacteristically, there are two things I wanted to focus on tonight. I know there are many of my colleagues with other questions and I may think of some others later, but there are two matters I wanted to deal with, firstly health information and rules to protect the privacy of patient information.

I want to inform all members, in case they didn't know, that the December 15 deadline for the proclamation of Bill 40, the Health Information Act, is going to come and go and we're not going to have a piece of legislation. On the one hand, that's not a bad thing, because Bill 40 was a badly flawed piece of legislation. But it's interesting, if you talk to people in the Calgary and Capital regional

health authorities, that they have committed enormous resources, programming, in-service training, all those things keyed to what they had been told by Alberta Health and Wellness would be a December 15 implementation date. Now what's happening is that people in the regions are asking me what's going to happen. They're asking my colleagues: where are we going with this thing? So, Mr. Chairman, I say through you to the minister that we need some indication.

Now, I know that the Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta branch, has made common cause with a B.C. freedom of information association and other groups. They have been pushing for change, but the change isn't going to be in the regulations. It would require a structural change, as I understand it, to the legislation.

So my question, Mr. Chairman, would be this. Is the Minister of Health and Wellness contemplating bringing Bill 40 back in so that we can address some of the problems that we tried to identify as an opposition last December? Maybe we'll have a chance to deal with the other 40-odd Liberal amendments that we had prepared last year and never had an opportunity to move because the government invoked closure.

Let's recognize what's happening with the indecision around Bill 40. We've got a great deal of what might be costs thrown away by the bigger regions trying to prepare to embrace this whole new regime in terms of health information, and what we've got is not very much certainty in terms of what's happening. What's the specific reason for the delay?

The government seemed to think they had all the answers when they invoked closure time after time after time. In December of 1999 they had the answers: we're not going to deal with those Liberal amendments. Well, if they had all the darn answers, why is it that the bill hasn't been proclaimed?

Now, as I say, my first preference is to bring it back in and let's speedily start fixing the flaws and the problems in that bill, but let's have some explanation in terms of what's happened to it. One of my questions would be: does it have anything to do with the fact that in the U.S. the White House is now preparing a whole set of new rules on medical data privacy? The scope of the U.S. federal legislation is going to go much further because it's going to limit the use of disclosure of data by insurance companies, not covered by Bill 40. It's going to cover nursing homes, medical laboratories, services that will not be covered for the most part under Bill 40. Is there some attempt to achieve some level of congruency with respect to the new U.S. rules?

Mr. Chairman, you will remember, of course, that in November of 1999, when President Clinton put forward his rules for public comment, there was a concern then that they didn't go far enough, and that was partly because of the limited jurisdiction of the U.S. federal government dealing with health information. They also have a federal system, and as a consequence they have some challenges around homogeneous compatible rules also.

So, in any event, I'm most anxious to find out what the status is. Let us remember, members, that in 1995 the FOIP Act came into force on October 1, and on October 1, 1997, it was to apply to a whole range of information statutes, in fact virtually all Alberta statutes. I think it was in September of 1997, about a week before the deadline, that the government exempted all the major health statutes from the scope of FOIP. So just a reminder that the Hospitals Act and I think the Nursing Homes Act have been carved out from FOIP. They have remained out here on an island, an island of information vulnerability, Mr. Chairman, because there are no rules on this island. This is the . . . What was that?

MR. WHITE: Jurassic Park.

MR. DICKSON: Jurassic Park. Thanks very much, Edmonton-Calder.

Just stretch your imaginations a little bit, members and Mr. Chairman, and imagine that we have this sort of Jurassic Park island, and we've taken our health information and sort of parked it over here on this Jurassic Park island. The rest of the mainland is all protected. We have rules that deal with health information and what information can be collected and what information can be shared, but in Jurassic Park it is truly the law of the jungle. There are no rules other than the paltry protection available under the Hospitals Act, the meager minimums that we might find through the professional association bylaws of the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, but we don't have any comprehensive laws like we do for all other kinds of personal information held by other government departments.

In the Jurassic Park of health information it's Dodge City, to mix my metaphors. It's the law of the jungle, and I don't think that's good enough. Mr. Chairman, I think we're entitled to some certainty. This is your health information and my health information. I don't think you're satisfied to see it out there in limbo, unprotected as it were, but that's exactly where we're at right now. So that's a major concern.

Now, the other point I wanted to make, Mr. Chairman, would be this. We've talked today about a crisis in emergency wards in Calgary hospitals. You know, I'm going to suggest that we have an even bigger problem in the Calgary region, and it's access to mental health beds and access to mental health services. The delivery of mental health services continues to be in a woeful state of governance. We have major, major problems in terms of allowing people to be able to access psychiatrists and psychiatric beds in a timely way, and it just is not acceptable. We surely don't have to wait until people die or throw themselves out windows or take their own lives to know that in this big, wealthy, prosperous province we are doing a lamentable job in terms of delivering mental health care. I guess my question is: where in these estimates is the provision of resources and answers to fix some of these major problems?

Anyway, those are the points I wanted to raise, and I may have others later. I'd just challenge the minister, through you, Mr. Chairman, and all members: let's bring that health information off Jurassic Park island, let's bring that health information over to the mainland, where it can be protected, sheltered, and accessed when appropriate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

8:50

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity to speak to these estimates tonight, not very happy, though, that we have to talk about the additional dollars that have been required and asked for this year in health. Regardless of how much money this government has asked for, this system is still broken when it comes to health care, and no matter how much money has been thrown back at all the Premier's pressure points, there still are a lot of unresolved issues within the health system.

The inefficiency that we see in the system is becoming increasingly frustrating for the people of the province when they have to access that system. I would like to talk about an experience I had with the health care system this summer that outlines some of those frustrations. At the end of this discussion, I will have a number of questions that I'm hoping the minister of health will answer for me with regard to the additional moneys that were asked for in health authorities. Perhaps even the overlap comes in eliminating the

deficits in some of these capital regions as we see the dollars being allocated here in the budget.

Mr. Chairman, as often happens in my constituency when people find themselves in crisis at the hospital and feel like they are getting the runaround or are not getting timely service from the system or they don't understand the process, they'll give me a call and ask me to come down to the hospital and just check on the process of how things are going. Well, this summer it was my sister who gave me a call, because her husband had been taken to the hospital.

He was hurt in an accident in his business. A large piece of equipment was dropped on the baby finger of his left hand, and it was smashed quite badly, broken in a few places and quite badly twisted. Because their business is in Mill Woods, he went to the Grey Nuns hospital. He was in quite a bit of pain, and there was quite a bit of blood. What they did at that hospital was X ray it and find out that it was broken in a few places and that probably he would need the services of a plastic surgeon. So for several hours they hemmed and hawed there trying to decide what to do.

Well, the Grey Nuns no longer has access to plastic surgeons, Mr. Chairman, so what has to happen then is that he has to go to a hospital where those services are available. After seven hours – this happened around noon. About suppertime they decided they're going to ship him over to the U of A, tell my sister that it'll be about another three hours before the transport is ready to take him over there, and then he may or may not see a doctor that evening, and they'll see what's happened.

In the meantime, he can't drink anything, he can't eat anything, hasn't been given any painkillers even though his finger is quite badly damaged with the bones hanging out and things of that nature. She says: well, I'm just going to put him in the car and take him over there because that's going to be faster. So off they go to the university.

It's at that stage – that's now about 8 o'clock at night – that they give me a call and say: is this standard practice? Well, Mr. Chairman, you would think that in a country like Canada in a province like Alberta, where we have the kinds of surpluses and people like to brag about the health care system, that that wouldn't be the case, that that wouldn't be standard practice, but in fact it is. So that's the first on my list of questions that I hope the minister answers. How can it be more efficient to have to transport patients around from hospital to hospital as opposed to the way things were done in the past, when you had specialties in hospitals or else if the specialties were only in one hospital, this was well known? People who thought they were going to be requiring those kinds of services would go directly to the hospital that could serve them.

Of course, what happens when they get to the University hospital is that it's 8 o'clock at night and the plastic surgeon has gone home. So my brother-in-law and his wife are sitting in an examining room waiting for some kind of doctor to come and see them. In the meantime I get there, Mr. Chairman, and go to the reception desk only to find out that they can't find my brother-in-law.

They search all over the emergency ward. The security guard there tells me that he isn't at the hospital. I insist, and after a few more forays around he finds him, finds him not in the emergency ward but in the hall across from that in the plastic surgery ward. Well, he's there in an examining room down a long hallway where there are no lights, no doctors, no nurses, no support staff. There's just him and his family in this examining room with the bloody gauze all over and the blood dripping on the floor, and he's sitting in a chair. Now it's 9 o'clock at night, and he's had no water to drink since noon, nothing to eat and no painkillers.

Well, I go and round up the resident, who hadn't seen them yet. They had been there for over an hour. They had been placed

originally in this particular room by a nurse. The resident comes in and says that he's not quite sure what he is supposed to do with him because the plastic surgeon has gone home. So we have a bit of a discussion about that, and he goes back to speak to the plastic surgeon again, trying to decide what to do. Well, it's another hour and a half, Mr. Chairman, before he comes back. He says that he has talked to the plastic surgeon. This is a Tuesday night, and they're not going to do any more surgeries until Friday. So what he's going to do is temporarily try and splint his finger and sew the skin up, because it is split open on both sides, and send him home.

Now we're talking 10:30 at night. He leaves again. He leaves the room. When he comes back in, he's pushing a hospital bed into this examining room, where apparently he's going to be doing this surgery. He can't get it in the door, Mr. Chairman. This examining room is really not built for an operating bed to come into. So I help him bring that in and set it up in the middle of the room. Now his kids are there too, and the family is sitting around watching this happen.

The doctor, who is a resident, brings in a kit of the supplies he's going to need to do this little bit of sewing up and splinting before he sends my brother-in-law home. The fact is, Mr. Chairman, that there is no one assisting him. This higher priced doctor is doing all this work in terms of bringing in the bed and setting up the supplies. He says to me: "I can't do this surgery alone. Can you assist me with it?" I go: "Well, sure. Like, I don't what I'm doing, but I'm quite happy to help if that gets us out of here any faster." I said, "Where are the nurses?" He goes: "Well, there are no nurses; we're understaffed in the hospital." I said, "Isn't there another doctor who can help you, an intern or another resident or something like that?" So he says: "Well, I put in a call. There is another resident around, and maybe he'll show up."

So he opens up the pack and tells me what he's going to do and what he needs me to assist in doing, Mr. Chairman. He puts on the sterile gloves and promptly drops the first needle. Well, he hadn't brought a spare. Now he has his gloves on, and he needs to go and get more equipment, so he takes me with him through the hallway with all these sick people, into the other emergency ward to the dispensary and gets the nurse in the dispensary to hand me the needle, and back we go. I open up the package. He takes it with his gloved hands and starts the process of freezing my brother-in-law's fingers. It was like a circus. It was unbelievable what had to happen there, the tearing open of all these sterile packs, disinfecting all the stuff that he was using.

In the meantime another resident comes in, a resident who is an even younger doctor than the one who is working on my brother-in-law, and says that he is there to help. So the resident who is doing this sewing up tells him to pick up a specific piece of equipment. He goes: I don't know what that is. He looks at me and he says: do you know what it is? I pick it up and hand it to him. He says to the other doctor: well, you can leave because she's helping me. So there I am. Now it's midnight. I am assisting this doctor. I don't have any medical training. The other resident that they sent in knew even less than I did, Mr. Chairman. Now, how can that be? This is a guy who is supposed to have gone through medical practice.

There are still no nurses in sight. There are still not even any lights on in the common room just outside the examining room. This doctor doesn't have enough of some of the gauze and stuff he needs, so he sends me out to one of the trolleys to pick it up and bring it back in. He makes a huge mess all over the floor with all this stuff. There was nobody there to clean it up. He tries to splint the finger. It's not working. It's wobbling all over the place, so he gets me to put on gloves and hold the bone while he splints it and then hold it again while he sews it up. He runs out of sutures. So

back I go again through to the other emergency while he's standing there sewing up my brother-in-law's finger. I go back by myself and say: I need another package of sutures for this doctor. The nurse just gives it to me. I go back through emergency and open up the pack, and he takes it, and he finishes sewing up my brother-in-law's finger.

9:00

Now it's 1:30 in the morning, Mr. Chairman, in this crazy zoolike instance that we're in. He's bandaged up. He writes us out a prescription and says, "Okay; you can go home now." I said: "Well, what about the prescription? He still hasn't had any painkillers. When the freezing comes out of this finger, it's going to hurt a lot." The doctor says, "Well, there's a 24-hour pharmacy around the block on the corner. Just go in there and pick it up." I said: "No way. That isn't happening. This guy has been here since noon today. You haven't given him a single painkiller for the whole time he's been here. Now you're telling us to go and spend another hour in the pharmacy to pick up a prescription before anybody can go to bed. Everybody has to go to work in the morning. This guy is going to be in pain. You have to give him at least enough medication to get him home until someone can get up in the morning and go to the pharmacy and get the painkillers." So with a great deal of reluctance, because that isn't hospital policy, he gives him enough drugs to get through to lunch the next day. However, it seems like hospital policy at the University of Alberta these days is having anybody who happens to be in the room assist in medical procedures. I wonder when this happened and how this changed.

I completely understand people's frustrations with this system. They're not understanding how it can be that with all the money going back into health care, we could have a system where somebody off the street has to assist the doctors in their procedures because there isn't enough staff. How did that happen, Mr. Chairman? How is it that we do not have enough qualified staff in the hospitals, be they doctors, be they support staff, be they nurses, be they aides, whatever? There is not enough staff in that hospital, and that's an absolute joke in terms of process and how that was managed.

He wasn't the only person in that situation. There were lots of people, when we left there after 1 o'clock in the morning, who had been sitting there when I came in. From the first instance, when they lost him as a patient in that hospital, when they sent him over there when they knew darn well that there would not be plastic surgeons who could attend to him at that time, to not having qualified staff looking at him, to not having qualified support staff to aid in their procedures, to the policy of sending people home without any pain medication who've sat there for over 12 hours with no food or water and no pain medication – the process is an absolute joke. However much money they're spending, it isn't being spent properly.

I would request that the minister of health take a look at that process, have some sort of an audit process. Perhaps this is something the Auditor General can take a look at, a review of how the hospitals are being managed at this time, where the real needs are. I think the real needs are in understaffing and in their being able to efficiently organize services. There are no efficiencies in transporting people back and forth like that and having long lag times in the transportation end and in the time that they're being seen by doctors. How can long waits be cost-effective, even for the medical staff, when you have trained medical staff who have to come back and constantly reassess these people?

There is never an instance in any kind of a business where a long wait is more cost-productive than getting the services to the people or to the need as soon as possible. So I want the minister of health to tell us how, with all of this money being put back into the system,

those long waits are more efficient than what we had before and how they can be managing staff in that regard, because it's wasted time when you have to come back and re-evaluate the same person three or four times.

You run the risk, Mr. Chairman, the very risk that we heard about in question period today, where someone had gone to emergency, had been not properly assessed or had too long of a time period between their assessments, and ultimately died of a heart attack right there in emergency. We're going to see this happening more and more often. How can we be anything but judged as a Third World country when we see those kinds of processes happening?

How efficient can it be to temporarily bandage people up and then bring them back a few days later for their surgery? There's a cost involved in that, Mr. Chairman, and it isn't just the cost of the hospital supplies and services and staff. There is a cost to that individual who is the patient and to their families. There's the stress and the strain for the patients and their families during that time period, and there's the downtime for the patient.

You don't talk about the pain that that person is in, and in this case my brother-in-law was in quite a bit of pain for three days before he got into surgery. What about the downtime for work? Who's supposed to run his business in the meantime? We're not even talking recovery time now, after he has the surgery. We're talking about the lead-up time to when the accident occurred, a disruption in the business, to the point in time when he has the surgery, to the point in time when he can come back to work. That is downtime for people that is a real economic multiplier in terms of lost production in this province, and I think that's something that this government should be taking a serious look at. This economic multiplier effect we are seeing by not having an efficient health care system costs us in many other ways than just in health care.

Mr. Chairman, I think the minister of health should be taking some responsibility for taking a look at that and understanding the total costs. If he isn't, then I would charge the Auditor General to take a look at that in his assessments. When you have people who are out of work for long periods of time, when they are waiting for assessment or they're waiting for surgery, then there is an economic cost to that for employers, for business owners, and for everyone associated with that person.

Clearly his wife couldn't work at capacity during that time period because she had to take care of him and had to make arrangements and had to take him back to the hospital. The stress on the family – the kids suffered during that time period.

It is an abysmal kind of situation we see occurring in our hospitals, and it is not by any stretch of the imagination an efficient way to run hospitals. This transporting the patients back and forth, Mr. Chairman, has been going on for a long time, and it is a completely irresponsible way to manage a system, even in terms of the plastic surgeons that are operating out of the U of A. He was not back there until Friday, not because he took Wednesday and Thursday off. He was not back at the U of A until Friday because those other two days he was scheduled at the Misericordia.

Now, how can this be? When doctors are not given any kind of consistency in terms of where it is they can practise – two days here, two days there, two days back there – there's no stability in that for them. They don't have time to establish relationships with the other working staff in the hospital. I don't think it's the best kind of situation that we can present for those doctors to be working in and is a contributing factor to why we're losing very good medical staff in this province.

You know, soon after this occurred, I had the occasion to talk to a young doctor who had done his training partially in the States and partially in India and whose parents own a hospital in India. He

couldn't believe this was an Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, hospital that I was talking about. In fact, I took him, then, to see this hospital where he could see what looks like a state-of-the-art facility, Mr. Chairman, and see for himself what it looks like, because he stated to me that in all of the Third World countries he's been in – he's been in a few of them and certainly definitely in India – you would not get this kind of inferior service.

So when we take a look at these supplementary estimates where we see the minister of health asking for approval for all these dollars going to health authorities and to reduce waiting times for major diagnoses and treatments, I tell you, it's a joke, because it hasn't improved one iota in this province. It's gotten worse. Year after year we hear more and more of these kinds of stories. These are not horror stories, Mr. Chairman. These are the realities that people are facing day in and day out in what should be a state-of-the-art facility not just in appearance but in service delivery, and we don't have that.

You know, the resident that was doing the sewing up was very frustrated with the system. He's a local Alberta boy, grew up in Camrose, trained at the U of A, is hoping to spend his whole life practising here in Alberta but is completely frustrated by the conditions that he's working in. He was literally run off his feet that night, Mr. Chairman, and absolutely no support or assistance.

Now, you tell me that it's cost-effective to have a doctor pushing beds around in a hospital. It isn't. You tell me that it's cost-efficient to have these doctors running around putting together their packs and finding boards. He had to find a board from somewhere that he could prop under the mattress on this bed so that my brother-in-law could lay his arm on it so that he could operate on his finger. It was triage medicine at its worst in a state-of-the-art facility.

How can the dollars that we see being asked for here have been effectively spent when this is the kind of medicine that people are having to put up with on a day-in and day-out basis? How can we expect that young doctor to spend the next 30 or 40 years practising in this province in those kinds of conditions? I think it's an unrealistic expectation, Mr. Chairman. There are many, many facilities that he can go to throughout the world that will provide the kind of support to him and to patients so that he doesn't have people wildly upset with him. This is an appalling situation we have in this province.

9:10

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Chairman, thank you. I'm going to be supporting the Minister of Health and Wellness in his request for this additional close to \$300 million worth of funding. It makes me reflect to a time in this Legislature after the '93 election when I was the health critic for the Official Opposition, and the hon. Member for Drumheller-Chinook was the minister of health. I was thinking to myself: boy, you know, what we could have done with an extra \$300 million back there in '93 and '94 and '95. It would have changed our relationship in a very fundamental way, I think, between myself and that hon. member. Because, you know, in those days what we were doing, of course, is that we were warning of the consequences of the cuts.

We were talking about how it would be safe to cut three-quarters of a billion dollars almost, more than \$700 million, out of the health care system so quickly. We were talking about how the system would have to contract so quickly that the ripple effects would be felt for years and years and years and that we would be faced with having to rebuild at additional cost.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We were told at the time – and, you know, I’m sure the minister of the day was given the advice of her officials, and I know that there was a political will to reduce expenditures – that this was thought out, that we were simply causing panic, and that we were simply misunderstanding what the government’s intent was, that the system would be intact, that it would be safe, that this was all part of a grand plan. It’s not worked out quite that way.

You know, there have been some changes in the health care system that have worked out, and I think it would be irresponsible for anybody to say that everything that’s happened in Alberta health care as a result of government initiative has been a failure. But not even car manufacturers accept the degree of recalls that we’ve seen in our health care system in Alberta. It’s not a matter of making an absolute statement that it’s all been good or it’s all been bad, but on balance a lot of those dire warnings that came from the Official Opposition, from the medical staffs, from the professional associations, from the nurses, from the academics, from the other observers have proven to be bang on.

There is no clear evidence of that in this supplemental estimate request that we see before us today. If you go through the list repairing some of the damage that has been done to our acute care system, repairing some of the damage that was done to our mental health system, putting more money into preventative programs finally, respecting reports that have been commissioned by the government in terms of dealing with children at risk, it’s a shopping list, really, that represents so many of those predictions which unfortunately have been proven to be so accurate.

Mr. Chairman, there was one thing that caught my eye when the Minister of Health and Wellness was talking about I think it was a \$3 million allocation for an eating disorder program. I support that. I’ve seen some of the work that’s been done, particularly in the Capital health authority, on eating disorders primarily amongst youth and particularly amongst young women. I can tell you that as the father of a 15-year-old daughter, the pressure and the images and the messages that young women receive these days about what’s fashionable and what isn’t, you know, are sometimes so hard to cope with, and I’m happy to see this money going in there.

But when the minister was talking about bulimia and anorexia nervosa, it made me think that is exactly the kind of disorder that the whole health care system has, and it’s been forced into this kind of sickness because of provincial funding patterns. You know, it’s either feast or famine. It’s cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, and then all of a sudden it’s binge, binge, binge, binge, binge, binge eat.

This is a significantly disordered system not because of the men and the women that work in it, who are trying to keep it stable and on balance and keep its weight at an even keel, but because of government policy. It’s squeeze it and squeeze it and squeeze it and take all of the money out of it that you can, force people to make silly, drastic cuts and bad management decisions because they’re given no choice: balance the budget; get rid of the costs; eliminate staff; close down programs. Then when it suits the government, they unlock the freezer, turn on the oven, and they throw in the feast and serve the funding buffet once again to the health care system. Then they wonder why it is that the system is sick. Well, you know, it’s because of this eating disorder. It is not a good way to run a system; it’s not a balanced way or a healthy way to run a system.

I can’t even begin to imagine the person-hours that have been spent in the last seven years planning and replanning, budgeting and rebudgeting, forecasting and reforecasting because of the change in government funding. Since 1998 I believe we have seen something like two dozen onetime spending announcements. In the last couple of years we’ve seen I believe the number is 24 or 25 – I stand to be corrected – new announcements outside of the budget process for health care. So that would be the equivalent of about one a month.

Can you imagine being the administrator of one of the regional health authorities and being told, “Okay; well, you have to meet this deadline. Get your budget in to the minister so it can be approved.” You have to ask yourself: “Well, why should I bother? It’s not going to be my budget. By the time I finish working on it, there’s going to be another budget announcement.”

It’s no wonder that the Auditor General reveals that in fact there is no consistency in the health regions as to whose budgets have been submitted, submitted and approved, approved by the minister, or just simply received by the department. It’s no wonder that there’s no consistency, because the health authorities, quite frankly, have learned that whatever the state of affairs is today may not necessarily be the state of affairs tomorrow because this government isn’t planning. It’s simply reacting.

So you see all these onetime spending announcements based on a reaction. Sometimes the reaction is right on and it’s necessary, and sometimes it’s simply a political reaction to sort of make the bad headlines go away. Of course, they’re not going away, Mr. Chairman. Unfortunately we’ve got the tragedy of the patient in the emergency room in the Rockyview in Calgary. We’ve got headline stories in major daily newspapers right across this province talking about shortages of equipment, of physicians, of nurses, of technicians. These aren’t just the story of the day, but these are stories that have shown up from time to time over the seven years that this government has been experimenting with Alberta’s health care system. So it’s very disconcerting.

As I said, I will support this request because I believe this \$293.6 million will be well spent. As I look through the list, I don’t see one expenditure which is necessarily wrong-minded, but I see within the context of this a total abdication of responsibility for planning and managing the system in a competent way that makes this system predictable and stable and accessible to people when they need it and for the reasons that they need it.

Mr. Chairman, the mental health care system is a great example of this. We’ve got a system that has been self-described by people within the system as a system ranging from one that’s in flux to a system that’s in chaos. Most recently at a meeting it was described as being a system in shambles. These are the people that work in the system and that manage the system that are using these words to describe it. Now we see that the government is putting some more money into the mental health system. The Alberta Mental Health Board is going to receive an additional \$13 million. Now, I’m certain that that money will be well spent, but the difficulty is that it has to be done as an article of faith that that money will be well spent.

9:20

Based on the experiences that I’ve had as an MLA and as the health critic and as the Treasury critic, my opportunities to travel around the province and to meet health care workers in mental health from one part of this province to another, I know of the need. I’ve been impressed by the statements of need, so I would like to thank the government for also recognizing the need and for making the funds available. But, you know, there’s another part of me that takes a look at the sort of hard, cold facts as they’re presented in the Auditor General’s report, which tells us that there is a lack of accountability throughout the health care system, that there aren’t outcomes tied to funding decisions, that we don’t see a good audit trail on all the dollars that are spent, particularly those dollars that are contracted to private agencies. Then I just have to wonder whether Albertans are getting the best value for every one of the health care dollars being spent.

Mr. Chairman, the Alberta health care system has been fragile for

some time, and I think that it is the responsibility of the men and women in this Legislature to try to do something about that fragility. If this supplementary estimate is a step towards doing the right thing, then we should get on with it, but we should also make sure that we get on with so many of the other necessary steps that have to follow: putting in the accountability structures, making sure that the funding is stable and predictable, ensuring that Albertans get access when they need it, admitting when mistakes have been made, not just rejecting out of hand the appropriate and legitimate concerns that are brought forward not just by members of the Official Opposition but also by the professionals in the system, not painting those who question government initiative as enemies or nuts or whatever other name they're being called but, instead, listening carefully to what's being said and analyzing it and then making a careful and judicious decision as to whether or not the information being provided is information that has legitimacy and currency.

The government has been far too defensive about its health care plans. It has been far too quick to point fingers of blame at others. This latest finger-pointing at the federal government is a great example. I mean, you have a provincial government that after winning a mandate in '93 set about changing health care funding and its original plans to the tune of about a billion dollars. The health care funding went down; the health care premiums were increased. We were told that it was okay to slash this program. I remember the Treasurer of the day, Jim Dinning, when he was asked, "Why is it okay to take this much money out of health care?" responded: it's because what I've learned is that you've got to hunt where the ducks are. I guess what he was saying is that because we know we spend a lot of money on health care, it must be okay that we can take a lot of money out of health care. There was really no greater analysis than that.

Then for the same government to turn around and say, "Oh well, you know, our system is really in trouble" – you know, it depends on what day of the week. On some days everything's fine, but when a real problem does emerge and you can't hide it from public view, then of course the government doesn't want to take responsibility for it. They blame it on the feds because the federal government, of course, was under fiscal pressure and cut transfer payments. So all of a sudden the fact that the provincial government cut \$700 million and caused thousands and thousands of health care professionals to lose their jobs and the system had to shrink so quickly – all of that is conveniently forgotten, and it simply becomes the federal government's responsibility. Well, of course, that's just poppycock. I think the provincial government knows that. I'm sure the Premier was aware of that when he was writing his poison-pen letters to the Prime Minister. It just doesn't serve Albertans very well.

What would serve Albertans well is to own up to the mistakes that were made, to realize that damage has been done, and then to work diligently to correct it and not do it with this binge and purge kind of spending and to get away from this earmarked or enveloped onetime only. I am encouraged that some of this money in today's supplementary estimate will be annualized, that it will become part of the base budget, particularly the money that's being spent to top up the employee compensation for contracted agencies.

I know that this isn't specific to the Department of Health and Wellness, but maybe those other cabinet ministers that are with us today could reflect on this. I just wonder whether or not this commitment will be made governmentwide. You know, there are contracted agencies in Human Resources and contracted agencies in Justice and contracted agencies in Learning that are all, I think, fighting the same battle, the battle being that the so-called voluntary sector agencies are really underpaying their staff right across the board. This has been a longtime problem, and it's really quite damaging to these agencies, especially in a tight employment

market, as we find ourselves now. It's very difficult to recruit and retain competent staff, and it's good to see that some acknowledgment of that has been made when it comes to working with persons with developmental disabilities and some of the people in the treatment centres in the voluntary sector, but it would be nice to see this commitment being made governmentwide.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

In any case, Mr. Chairman, I guess this would make spending announcement 25 or 26. The saga continues. I'm certain it will continue until we have a general election, and perhaps at that point the Minister of Health and Wellness will have an opportunity to see what life is like from the other side of the coin. Of course, I know that when my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark is occupying the office of the Minister of Health and Wellness, she would look forward to your insightful queries and criticisms, because of course as members of the Official Opposition, once we're on the government side, we will be respectful of the input that you can provide and we'll recognize that at least we can learn from the mistakes that have been made in the past.

I want to thank the minister for his opening comments. I hope he'll take an opportunity to respond to some of the questions that have been raised, and I look forward to the continuing debate.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will try to be brief in that tonight's moving awfully quickly and there are a number of other departments that need to be heard from.

My queries and questions and concerns centre around mostly the lack of planning in this department and the unbudgeted expenditures, not the planning for the supplementary estimates unto themselves but the overall planning. Quite frankly, in this day and age when information systems are such as they are, one would think that some reasonable expenditure planning would be set out such that the government would decide the level of service that they want to attain for the citizenry, estimate the number of persons that are in the province currently from count and estimate the growth, I gather at some 37,000 annually, and plan on that. But quite frankly it doesn't seem to be the case. It seems to be catch as catch can. It just seems to be an ad hocery at every stage. To spend another \$300 million through the course of a year simply because you have it seems to be less than reasonably good planning.

Quite frankly, I'd think you would want to start off with the right budget. I know the citizens that I represent, all they want to know is that all the funds are being expended as best as they possibly can be, and you certainly don't do that, as the previous speaker said, by binge and tight, squeaky budgeting. You just can't do that and attain any kind of efficiencies at all. I think you'd want the right budget. You'd want to establish what in fact is actually needed. The citizens of Edmonton-Calder, although not the most affluent of any in the province, would certainly say that whatever it takes, spend it and spend it wisely, but start out with a plan. Don't start just throwing money at it and deciding after the fact whether you have enough or not. I mean, any fool can build a house at any cost, but it takes a good planner to make those adjustments and those decisions early on in the game so as to have the plumber follow the carpenter and not have them falling over each other. That appears to be what is happening in this budget.

9:30

Another area that concerns me a great deal is the lack of planning

in long-term care. I represent a great number of seniors and those that are getting to the state where they need higher levels of care than that which home care can give them. A number of years ago there were a number of models developed in maintaining the highest state of wellness of a senior. That is to say that any senior's wellness wanes and comes back. A senior might be 85 and living in their own accommodations either in their home or in a self-contained living unit, a senior's apartment or such, and have a fall and break a hip and have to be moved out of that accommodation for a good deal of time because she simply can't manage. She can't afford to have both that place and another place, so she's in a much higher level of care.

Well, the wellness model dwells on getting that person back to the highest state of wellness, where she could in fact be back into a self-contained living unit. But the present system does not allow that. So now she has this broken hip and she's off to active treatment care, and from active treatment care she's bumped down to hopelessly long-term care where there is a severe shortage, so what happens is that she gets caught in a longer stay in active treatment than she actually should and then goes from there to a nursing accommodation. Well before she should be back on her own, she goes from a nursing accommodation back to her own accommodation. It simply is not a good model. It's dysfunctional all the way down the line. We simply don't have any slack in the system at all to be able to put these people in and bring them back out. Maintaining that senior at the highest level of wellness throughout the entire process would be the best model. Of course, that would be perfection and you would need a great deal of capital expenditures, but we don't hear enough about heading towards that at all.

Another area that concerns me a great deal is the state of the mental health facilities and the deliverance of mental health care. It's been thrown to the wind. After renovation in Ponoka there are fewer beds now than there were in the '50s, '60s, '70s, and '80s. Alberta Hospital has fewer beds in it now. There are fewer beds in all of the active treatment hospitals in the city of Edmonton and I suspect in Calgary also. Quite frankly, we've taken those people that are on the margin, on the edge as it were, and said to them: "You are on your own. You're out there." There are very few support systems. Quite frankly, if you go down to the east end of our city now and go into the places that accommodate the quasi homeless, that's where you'll find a great deal of these people that were at one time being at least partly cared for in these institutions and were working towards moving out as opposed to just being pushed off the edge and dumped.

The final area of concern is this government's insistence on laying the blame anywhere at all other than at their own doorstep. I can't recall, quite frankly, admission of an error ever by this government. Whoever one is and whatever the endeavour, there are errors and they do occur, and the way to deal with them is to admit them and move on. But to say that the state of the health care system today is because of the federal government cuts is absolutely ludicrous. The cuts that occurred in '93-94 and '94-95 in the provincial realm were followed by the cuts in '96 and '97 by the federal government. It's totally unimaginable that one can now look back and say that that's why the system is such as it is today.

We're pretty well agreed, at least in the public – not in this Chamber they wouldn't be – that the cuts that were made in those years were too fast and too far without any planning at all. It caused bumping in the ranks of those salaried union employees, notably nurses and all those that were in the nursing field from RNs to LPNs and to other registered practitioners, such that all of their lives were disjointed. Many of them just threw up their hands and quit. Many left. Today we're left with a horrible shortage of staff and people that are in positions that they're really quite frankly not very happy with and a myriad of strange working conditions: three days a week

here and another two days over somewhere else. Quite frankly, it's not the way to run any kind of an outfit, and this member is not overly pleased with it.

Mr. Chairman, I've taken longer than I expected given that we have to get on with some other areas of expenditure and we have to do so before 11:30 tonight, so I'll cede the floor to others. Thank you, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Health care is an extremely interesting program, Health and Wellness. When we look here at the supplementary estimates, we see a figure of \$293,593,000. It's so much it's hard to comprehend, and that's just supplementary. What I find so amazing about the whole procedure is that we're spending considerably more now in terms of actual expenditures in health care than we were some time back before we had all these significant changes, yet the complaints that we get, the evidence that is clearly pointed out in terms of shortcomings in the health care system continue to build. It seems that the system isn't getting better; it just continues to get worse, with more problems that keep being added: shortages of doctors, shortages of professional health caregivers like nurses and so on and so forth. What the solutions are I don't know. If I had the solutions, I would certainly give them. I'm sure the minister of health doesn't have them at his fingertips, but there has to be a way that the whole area of health care can be explored.

One of the problems, I believe, Mr. Chairman, is going back a few years ago, when basically the health authorities were set up and basically they were cut by something like 17 percent. A lot of the boards had no expertise in terms of health care. They were good, community-minded people, but they didn't have that health care background. They didn't have that experience. They were given a short period of time to draft new budgets and deal with cuts of something like 17 percent, if I recall correctly. It was a very difficult task. It was an impossible task. We saw the health care system dismantled. We saw facilities close. We saw facilities blown up. It was a terrible, terrible state that the health authorities were put into. It was because they were told to do a task, a task that government had done before, but the health care authorities were going to do it with a lot less money.

9:40

I guess it's comparable – and some of you may already know this. If you were to take a \$20,000 car, strip her down and throw away the parts, and rebuild that car part for part, rebuild the entire car by buying each part at a time, that \$20,000 car would end up costing you \$180,000. I think that's what's happened with the health care system. It was dismantled. Equipment ended up who knows where. We saw the operating room at the Grey Nuns close down. We saw what happened at the Misericordia: floors were converted for normal office space. Then when the government started to pour money in, they had to come up with new equipment to replace the equipment they had previously. They were starting to rebuild the health care system bit by bit.

But we've dwelled on that many, many times in the past. I just want to dwell on a couple of specific areas of concern, the most recent areas of concern that I seem to have been flooded with for some reason in my constituency office – maybe it's because people know that I'm retiring, and they figure they can get that one last big hurrah out of me – is the victims of brain injury. I've tabled questionnaires. I've tabled letters. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has done the same. We have clearly pointed out that

there is a deep problem in this area that has not been addressed, and we can't see any attempts to properly address it.

We see a disparity between the home care capping under that particular program as compared to the PDD program. On the one hand people are able to access under home care self-management up to \$3,000 a month. Then we see these other areas where the need may be just as great, but they're restricted to \$1,800 a month. Obviously that creates a real hardship. Between the Minister and the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness the two of them do have enough information. Now, if they want to act on it, they do have a starting point. There are many associations that deal with victims of brain injury, and they are eager to work with government in this province. They will work, and they will try and find solutions as long as the government takes the initiative and says, "Yes, we want to make your life better."

Another area that I've gotten flooded with letters on in the last while is chiropractic services, where they have to pay a surcharge on top of what's paid, and the limitations in the whole system when people go to see their chiropractor. To a lot of people that's the logical alternative. To a lot of people that's the program, that's the medical service that keeps them out of the hospitals. Some people regard it as a quick fix. Sometimes it may be a quick fix, but that quick fix does the trick, and it does probably eliminate the need for a lot of surgery. There are a lot of people who don't like the idea of going under the knife. Some of us have done it several times and we're accustomed to it, but there are a lot of people that don't. So that has to be looked at. The limitations on it right now discourage people from going to their chiropractor.

Another area that I think is equally important – and I'm sure the minister is aware of this – is physiotherapy. Now, physiotherapy is interesting because it doesn't involve institutions. It doesn't involve hospital stays. It involves going to a clinic, going to an office, or whatever. You get physiotherapy, which can prevent some very, very serious consequences. At the same time they can teach you exercises that are necessary to eliminate problems that may occur, but there are limitations on that.

Now, I'm going to give you an example, and that was me this summer with some arthritis in my arm, rotator cuff problems and all that, a lot of problems up here. My doctor sent me to a physiotherapist: nine visits under Alberta health care. In my case nine visits did the trick along with the exercises I do twice daily on a regular basis, and I guess I'll do that for the rest of my life to prevent the problem from getting worse. But a lot of people may need 20 visits to correct the problem, and after nine the funding is cut off. If people don't have the income to pay out of their own pocket, they have to throw in the towel. The condition deteriorates, and eventually they'll end up in the hospital undergoing expensive surgery, undergoing expensive hospital stays. So when we talk in terms of a portfolio that talks about health and wellness, wellness to me is sort of defined as preventing bad health; in other words, we take steps when people are well. In fact, some provinces actually reward people for being well. But the emphasis should be on the wellness, not just necessarily on health.

When we start making life difficult for people to live in the community, to avoid the institutions, the health care facilities, we're working against a whole system. We're working against the whole concept of the betterment of health care. When we restrict home care, for example, to the degree that the person isn't being properly attended to, again the resource there is hospitalization. We all know what the cost of hospitalization is. We all know the problems that go with hospitalization.

Mr. Chairman, there are a number of departments we have to deal with tonight, and I'm looking eagerly forward to talking a bit about the Department of Municipal Affairs, under the retiring minister.

I'm sure there are many others that have similar backgrounds; the Member for West-Yellowhead, for example – I know that he has a municipal background – and the Member for Edmonton-Calder. There are lots. Even the Premier has a background in municipal politics. So I'm going to conclude on that note because I want to make sure we can get into municipal government.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of comments that I want to raise on the supplementary estimates for health care. This is the kind of program we see that has raised a number of issues that both address some of the critical needs in the health care system and also in some ways that raise questions in terms of the funding and the funding process.

As I've traveled a lot of rural Alberta and I listen to concerns from individuals that are involved directly or as employees or as deliverers or as administrators or sometimes also as patients, we end up kind of talking about what can be done to improve the health care system and what is needed in order to provide the kind of solutions to the issues that get raised in our discussions. A lot of them are saying, "Well, yes, we do need more funding," but they're also talking about the kinds of structural changes in administration and direction that they would like to see in terms of the relationship between the local community and Alberta Health at the central level.

In terms of the funding that has been given out in the appropriate subsections in terms of the dollars that we are dealing with here in our appropriation, we see dollars that are targeted towards reducing waiting lists and towards capital improvements, towards long-term care, capacity alleviation. These get kind of distributed out, and the question that always comes up in terms of some of these regions is that they want to know why it is that certain formulas, if you want to call it that, are used in distributing some of these funds where in other cases they don't seem to see any rational reason to it. Also, a lot of times these dollars are distributed effectively with strings attached in terms of what they can use it for and how they can actually build it into their service delivery.

What they want to see is the flexibility allowed for them to make the decisions in terms of where those dollars are directed. Even when we start talking about allocations for long-term care, when they want to get into the issue of needing more capital versus operating dollars or more kind of specific services or support services or how they balance long-term care with home care, that kind of flexibility is best determined by the local health authorities rather than by a distant administrative unit when they allocate these dollars.

So I guess what I would like to see in terms of responding to some of these issues on behalf of these constituents and administrators that have raised these questions is a little more leeway, a little more flexibility provided as the dollars go out, you know, even the trade-off between capital and operating dollars. Sometimes some of the regions need to have that kind of flexibility to best address their particular need in the structure that they want to approach.

9:50

Mr. Chairman, the issue of dealing with internal provision of service versus contract provision of service – that kind of decision-making should be done at the local level rather than through the way the dollars are provided by, you know, the central Alberta Health allocation of those dollars. Some of these communities have the structure within their public administration system to handle additional capacity, additional service provision. Others don't, and if they want to provide it, they have an option to go out into a

contract situation. So they're asking for that flexibility and that trade-off. As they talk about it with other administrators across the province, this is one of the things that they're giving back to me as a major concern of a lot of these administrators and health care providers that are out there.

We also have to look at how they handle the dual administrative charges when there's a contract-out provision in the sense of how they deal with this in the context of getting that critical mass that allows them to have a specialist, allows them to have a specialized service provision under the public umbrella. If they have to start dealing with a number of different agencies in their contract situations, they don't have that ability to provide central expertise. Then sometimes those contract agents don't have it either because of the fact that they're dealing with small units of delivery.

The option there has to be provided so that the major provider in the context of the health region can develop that critical mass in terms of service delivery to provide the efficiencies that are there associated with some degree of scale economies so that they can have, say, a specialist out there that does provide one service, one focus that they can use dealing with all of the individuals in need of that service in their region as opposed as to trying to deal with it on a contract basis when each one of these contracts, then, has to provide a specific type of geographic service.

This is especially critical when we deal with the rural communities, where geography and access and timeliness of access become a much greater issue than what we're talking about, say, when we're dealing with the Capital or the Calgary health authorities. What we've got there is a geographical area where a critical mass is part of the definition of those regions, you know, in the sense that Edmonton has a population that's large enough, Calgary has a population that's large enough to deal with a number of specialists. But if we're starting to talk about some of the smaller regional health authorities, for them to bring in, say, a specialist in geriatric services and they have to do it through three or four different contracts with subagents or providers of those services, none of them have the capacity to fund properly that geriatric specialist. So what we need to do, then, is provide provisions within this contract and delivery system where the health authority can have a broad-based delivery of those systems but also the specialist that's necessary to provide the very specific needs to the individuals across the whole region.

This comes out especially when we're starting to deal with some of the specialized needs of seniors. We move them into the transition to a nursing home through assisted living models or through some kind of home care/lodge system, and if we don't have that specialist there to deal with them at every one of those levels, what we have to do, then, is look for outside agents that cover the delivery of health care at all of those different levels of treatment or levels of need. In many cases that's not what we see. We have some outside agents that want to focus on the idea of a nursing home concept where, you know, RN/medical needs are a major part of it. Others want to deal with the concepts at a partial need basis where medical needs are not as critical to the client or the patient as are the personal care needs. So we end up with that kind of a mix, and we have to have these specialists that are able to deal with the patients at all those different levels.

This is, I guess, the flexibility that a number of individuals that I've had a chance to discuss health funding with are looking for, that flexibility being provided to them rather than the rigidity we see, that when the extra dollars come down they're specifically defined to be used in a certain way and in the context of a certain type of delivery system. So what I would like to see, I guess, is those kinds of issues addressed where we can provide that flexibility so that the regional health authorities can use their administrative expertise and put

together kind of out-of-the-box delivery mechanisms where the design of that delivery of service is specific to the needs of the community rather than directed from above in the context of the label or the envelope that those dollars are provided in.

So with those few comments, Mr. Chairman, I think that's kind of the way I'd like to see some of the future adjustments made here, but in the context of providing these additional dollars, I think the health care system unquestionably needs that support. It needs the commitment that the funding will be there to deal with the needs at all levels in the care spectrum and that we'll also be able to work closely with the deliverers of lodging and the deliverers of personal care in the context of joint funding programs so that we can have an effort provided to support these individuals so that they can live in a degree of dignity as they age.

The other issue is funding for waiting list reductions. This is the kind of thing where we need to have better estimates developed of the demand changes, the demographic implications on those demand changes, and I think it would be appropriate to have that kind of information provided with the funding so that we can better understand where the targets are and what are acceptable levels of priority setting and the mechanisms for that priority setting as well.

With those few comments, Mr. Chairman, I think it's appropriate that we're going to be increasing the money, especially for the health care area, and we'll wait until later to debate some of the others. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I have a couple more issues that I didn't have a chance to address in my original remarks. I started off my comments at the beginning of this debate indicating that basically just because we're spending more doesn't mean we're spending more effectively. A Canada West Foundation document, *Primary Care Reform in Canada: An Overview*, substantiates that statement as well. What it states is that

organizational reforms alone are not sufficient to improve health outcomes, cost for care, and other dimensions of health services. Other critical factors are a high level of commitment to values inherent in the reformed service delivery and funding models and changes in attitudes and behaviour among physicians, other providers, and patients. This change is cultural, measured by quality assurance and evaluation, and is critical to successful outcomes and attainment of objectives.

It also indicates that reform of the health care system "should promote one or more of efficiency, effectiveness, equity and quality of service" and outlines some of the important criteria for measuring whether the reform has been successful.

10:00

Now, for seven years we have heard in this Legislative Assembly that the health care system has in fact been reformed. We know there have been some drastic changes in health care over the last seven years, but whether that has been a process that has bettered the health care system, has made it more efficient, has made it more effective, has made it more able to meet the needs of a changing and growing population I think is more than debatable. When we see stories on a daily basis that indicate that individuals have died waiting for services, that individuals have not been provided with the service they deserve and they need in a timely manner, then we know that in fact there have been and are still severe problems within the delivery of our health care service.

Some of the issues that still need to be addressed and are long-standing are in regards to ambulance services, perhaps more so in the rural areas than in the urban areas. In fact, yet again we see

where this government had set up a committee, which this government likes to do, and there were recommendations that were put forward by the Judy Gordon committee on ambulance services within this province that have yet to be addressed. In fact, what we see are articles such as the one in an October 30 Red Deer newspaper, which I believe is where this one is from, where it says, "Province passing ambulance buck?" Darren Sandbeck, who is chairman of the Alberta Ambulance Operators Association, which gathered in Red Deer, said that the government didn't consult operators before it established its billing structure, which shortchanges municipalities. He said that if it takes more than one trip to move a crew and a patient, then that is what the government should pay. Ted Hickey, deputy chief with the Red Deer Emergency Services, indicated that the government's refusal to discuss fair compensation is risky.

This is a long-standing issue that has continued over a number of years with regards to the provision of ambulance services throughout this province. Ambulance services are an essential service, yet we see the government refusing to acknowledge that fact. As a result, we also have the situation in Calgary with the paramedics there and the disputes inquiry board that had to be employed to ensure that those services would not be interrupted.

There's another issue that is growing in its importance in this province that I believe needs to be discussed, and that's the role of fund-raising within the health care system. More and more we are finding that well-intentioned groups are fund-raising for essential hospital services, for essential hospital equipment. That, in fact, I do not believe should be the role of not-for-profit groups. To engage in fund-raising for essential services is part and parcel of what the government should be providing. We start to tread a very fine line between what can be provided for and what can be expected by a regional health authority in terms of the budget and what the regional health authority has to add into their budget as a component based on fund-raising or the charity of the citizens who live within that health authority region.

The ethics of that particular method of budgeting and that particular method of providing dollars to regional health authorities is one that needs to be discussed more broadly. It needs to be discussed in public, and it needs to be addressed as part of a larger issue of what is the role of government, especially in the delivery of public health care services. So that is an issue that I don't think the government can hide from anymore as it becomes more and more obvious that we have now gone back to a system of lotteries for funding essential health care services, and that, quite frankly, is wrong.

Another issue that has been brought to my attention that I would like more information on is the whole area of vaccinations. We have recently seen in the Edmonton area where a whole group of children between the ages of two and 18 have been vaccinated for meningitis. It is my understanding that there is now some research and evidence that is beginning to crop up that in fact vaccinations and wholesale vaccinations may have a detrimental effect on the resistance individuals have to certain diseases. I am not by any long shot a medical professional, and that is why I am asking for some information from the minister with regards to what long-term studies have been done on population groups that have been vaccinated, what the effects have been, what dangers are inherent in vaccinations being provided.

Also, what kind of up-front information is provided through the public health boards to parents so that they can make their decisions as to whether or not they wish to have their children vaccinated, and what are the potential effects, both positive and negative, of vaccinations on children? Again, so the parents can make informed decisions, is that information that is provided up front? It has been

a long time since I have taken my son for a vaccination, so I'd like to know what the procedures are that are currently in place.

With regards to any research that is being done, what are the departmental guidelines with regards to potential conflicts of interest between the professionals who are conducting the research and the results and the impact of that research? I would appreciate any information the department can provide on that as well, as that particular issue seems to be gaining some momentum.

There is one other area that I would be interested in other, of course, than those other unanswered questions. Again, if the questions have been answered and they are somewhere in my in-basket, then I will indicate that I will look forward to reading them and would like to see the answers. If not, I look forward to receiving the answers.

The issue of enhanced medical services as a Pandora's box that this government has now opened under Bill 11. Hopefully with a MacBeth government Bill 11 will be repealed, but until such time, the whole issue of enhanced medical services is now something that needs to be addressed. We saw a recent example where an ophthalmologist was put in the position of not being able to provide a service, and obviously it appears that the rules are very unclear as to how the approval process is provided for charging for an enhanced medical service. I see no reason that the policies and procedures for that should not be made public so that everyone is made aware of how a service is deemed to be enhanced, how the costings are provided for that enhanced service, and what are the criteria for the provision of the enhanced services. As I indicated, this is a Pandora's box that I do not believe the government will be able to close.

The whole issue of contracting and Bill 11 is an issue that has not been satisfied to any degree. The reality is, unless the department can provide some answers to the questions I asked, that I do not believe they have the information available in order to be able to approve the contracts that they have and that the minister has approved in the last month, month and a half. If, in fact, the information is available as to the potential benefits of providing private contracts, the cost-effectiveness of those contracts, the conditions under section 8 that are required to be met, then I believe it behooves the minister to make all that information available.

10:10

In addition, I would like to have answered the question as to how a contract could be approved under the Capital health region with a provider of ophthalmology services when in fact there was no ophthalmologist on staff and that particular centre did not provide ophthalmology services in the Edmonton area. I would like to know on what basis the minister signed that particular contract that indicated that it was effective to have a new player in the provision of ophthalmology services in the Edmonton area and how, in fact, it was determined that that would be of benefit to the Edmonton region, especially given the fact that the regional eye centre at the Royal Alexandra hospital is not working at anywhere close to full capacity and could do all the current cataract procedures that are now being done in the private clinics quite comfortably within the public setting. So my question, very directly to the minister, is: how could he have then signed any of those contracts when in fact the criteria as outlined under section 8 of Bill 11 were not met?

I believe that is a very serious issue that the minister needs to respond to, and to respond in generalities, as we have seen in the past with consultants' reports, quite frankly doesn't cut it. What we need to know are the actual specifics on which those contracts have been signed. Unless the minister can provide that information up front, I believe that accountability is an issue that needs to be addressed in the delivery of our health care services.

So those are some of the additional remarks that I have to make.

I would like to close by saying that on a continual basis, on a daily basis I still in my office, as the official health care critic, receive letters, telephone calls, faxes, e-mails from individuals across this province in many different regional health authorities who are not receiving the services they need. These are individuals who are in pain. These are either individuals who have gone through the health care system and have found it lacking and are still in pain or individuals who cannot get their needs met and are looking for some kind of resolution. They are caught, quite frankly, in a system that does not work and that does not address what their requirements are. Given the state of this province's budget, of its ability to address some of those needs but its inability to actually want to address those needs, it is quite distressing for all, especially those who are in need and who have a real requirement to have their needs met.

I would hope that the government looks very sincerely at some of the issues that have been brought up within these discussions and attempts to address them and to address the real underlying issues. They may not make headlines. To address the real underlying issues of the environment, to address the issues of poverty, to address the impact of a lack of education, which have health impacts later down the road, don't make the kinds of headlines that providing two MRIs for the Edmonton region do, but those are where the real reforms have to occur and can occur if there's a commitment on behalf of this government. Unfortunately, that commitment is not there, and as a result we are all suffering from that lack of commitment.

So I look forward to the minister's reply, and thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Actually, in listening to my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark, it put me in mind of some other questions that I hadn't heard answers to yet this evening. You know, I know that the Minister of Health and Wellness has been dutifully recording all of these, and I'm looking forward to a blockbuster presentation from the minister before we vote on his estimates. I know he won't disappoint us.

Just a couple of things I might start off with. As somebody that from time to time attends CRHA meetings, a number of questions come up, and since the meetings in the Calgary region really don't provide any opportunity for people like me or any interested Calgarians to pose questions, how refreshing if we had a bit of a question period at the outset or maybe at the conclusion of every CRHA board meeting. It doesn't exist, so I have to take advantage of the opportunities when I get them here.

My understanding is that Dr. Jivraj reported to the Calgary region board that \$9.6 million of the \$38.9 million allocated to the CRHA would be directed to wait lists and diagnostic issues, but I was a bit surprised to find that wait lists would be reduced by between 10 and 12 percent. That's Dr. Jivraj's estimate of the impact on wait lists with the additional funding. I'm saying to myself that 10 or 12 percent is better than zero percent, but when you look at the disparity between what the AMA has published in terms of optimum or ideal wait times for various procedures and then what the actual experience is in the Calgary region, I don't think a 10 to 12 percent reduction in wait lists is sufficient, Mr. Chairman. I don't think it's good enough, and I suspect there are 800,000 Calgarians that want to find out why this government is prepared, presumably, to accept a 10 or 12 percent reduction in wait lists.

Cardiac surgeons had requested a dedicated theatre at the Foothills medical centre. Is that going to happen, and if so, when?

The wait for an MRI in Calgary, according to Dr. Jivraj, used to be 190 days, and the plan is that with increased capacity it's been

reduced to 110 days. So my question is: would the Minister of Health and Wellness tell us what he believes to be an optimal time? I mean, does he view 110 days as an acceptable wait, Mr. Chairman, for an MRI?

My other comment. You know, one of the worst-kept secrets in the province is the Calgary regional health authority budget. It was approved on September 19, 2000, by the Calgary regional board and sent off. In fact, this is what the minutes say: "As requested, the document has been sent to Alberta Health, in draft form, for their approval." Now, every time I see this, I ask myself: what is the point of having a regional health authority if they don't have the power to decide on the budget to meet the needs for their region?

Just think about this for a minute: the budget as requested. Well, who requested it? Presumably Calgarians would like to see the budget. Calgarians would like to measure to determine if this budget reflects their priorities in terms of wait lists, in terms of access to a psychiatric bed or a psychiatrist or any of those things. But no, it's not Albertans who requested the delay. It presumably is the Minister of Health and Wellness. I'm still looking for some explanation in terms of why we gussy this up and describe it as decentralized decision-making power when right here on page 3 of the agenda of the September 19 minutes from the CRHA what's abundantly – abundantly – clear is that this is a mechanism with no power and presumably not much influence.

10:20

The other thing I'd ask. We have continuing problems with mental health services in the Calgary region, and you know, it seems to me that as long as I've been in this Legislative Assembly, we've been identifying issues and problems on mental health services. The initial Provincial Mental Health Advisory Board, when my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora and the former Leader of the Opposition were involved with the health critic area, was a major issue. Then we went to the Provincial Mental Health Board, and what we saw was more money being spent in terms of sort of macromanagement alignment, reorganization, but what psychiatrists will tell you and what nurses and physicians will tell you is that there is no significant enhancement improvement in access to mental health services. How can that be? It just can't continue in that fashion.

At that same September 19 CRHA board meeting, we had Mr. Waldner indicating that they're looking at augmented staffing in emergency. Well, perhaps the minister can tell us what that augmented staff looks like in emergency at the three adult sites right now at the end of November 2000.

There was to be provision of a temporary unit in place in the Peter Lougheed centre by February 2001. Is that the earliest we can do it? I mean, we've been waiting. The Mental Health Consumers Network in Calgary has identified a critical shortage going back for at least the last two years, and we still talk about having to wait until February to see some action. Not good enough. Completion of a permanent unit which will be available in the fall of 2001: you know, this is thin gruel to people with serious mental health challenges that are looking for help and can't access it.

Dr. Jivraj reported in September that we have a net gain of 58 physicians, which is a 3 percent increase. Well, we've had a bigger than 3 percent increase in Calgary's population, so I want to know what the minister's plans are. Where in this supplementary supply request are there the resources to significantly impact that problem of new people in the city of Calgary that can't access a family physician?

Now, just quickly moving on, a June survey was done of nurses in the Calgary regional health authority. More than 500 nurses took the time and effort to fill out a nursing survey. I'd like to know if

the minister will tell us, as we evaluate his estimates here: what did those nurses identify? It was interesting that there was a 46 percent response rate, which is unusually high for these kinds of surveys. I'm most curious in terms of what the nurses told the Calgary regional health authority was required. Will the minister share with us that kind of information, tell us what kind of responses were provided in what you euphemistically described as the nursing workplace satisfaction survey steering committee, the NWSSSC? Would the minister share with us what the results were of that survey, because the last nursing workforce satisfaction survey conducted in November of 1997 provided, I think, some really good benchmarks.

Every time I look over my shoulder, I'm reminded of one of those excellent nurses in the Calgary health region who has moved on to another career. How many other nurses are going to aspire to run as candidates in the next election? Goodness knows, it may be a more satisfying career to be here in the Legislative Assembly on a Monday evening than to be working those late night shifts at the Foothills hospital. So our friend from Calgary-Cross in fact may have started a bit of a trend where we have the politicization of nurses who have seen these ongoing shortages and frustrations and decided they're going to raise their voices. We know that nobody works harder than nurses do, a very formidable force in the Assembly if they were to mobilize.

One of the problems – and I ask specifically the minister of health. When they fiddled with the priority list to move the Alberta Children's Hospital up – you remember that it was about fourth or fifth on the list, and then they created a parallel list to be able to move it up. What's happening is we have a Calgary laboratory facility that can't meet accreditation standards. In fact, you might be interested, Mr. Chairman, because I expect that from time to time you may have some lab results that are going to be processed not in beautiful downtown Okotoks but perhaps in the Calgary region, in downtown Calgary.

You know, one of the things that was said by the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons – and I commend this injunction specially to the Minister of Health and Wellness: the greatest concern of inspectors on the committee is the inadequacy of physical facilities at both the main laboratory and Foothills medical centre sites; workplaces are generally cramped and noisy; cramped quarters and a lack of proper storage space create an unsafe work environment for laboratory personnel. These are pretty strong words from the accrediting body.

I had a chance to tour the Calgary region facility with, I think, Elisabeth Ballermann of the Health Sciences Association maybe a couple of years ago. At that time it was identified as a major, major problem. You know, if you think about it, we have this network of couriers that are running health samples from laboratories down to a facility, part of which is two trailers parked behind this little building on 10th Avenue in Calgary. They're not well heated. They're not well lit. I sometimes think when we watch the Olympics and see the enormous concern around the environment in which the drug testing goes on – well, this isn't for a few elite Olympic athletes. We're talking about the place where our family's tissue samples go for testing and blood goes to be tested. Decisions are made on the basis of those laboratory tests to operate or not to operate and how long to wait, and the doctor's diagnosis is dependent on work being done.

When you think about it, the laboratory in so many respects in modern medicine is the very heart of your medical system. It doesn't matter how many people you've got in hospital beds. If you can't readily access the laboratory tests, it doesn't matter. So we

have a very, very significant problem, and I don't know what's being done to fix it.

You know, we've had a critical shortage of pathologists, a major, major problem coming. We don't have enough pathologists, and what's happening is you're now seeing advertising by the big health centres in Toronto and American places for pathologists. We don't have enough pathologists. We don't have a competent, adequate, safe laboratory facility for the 800,000 people in the Calgary region, and I don't see that addressed anywhere in these estimates. Minister of Health and Wellness, please point out to me where it is on page 46 or page 47 that we're going to see some changes to that laboratory facility. That's a concern.

I have a constituent that assaulted somebody, and this may be of interest to the Minister of Justice. He assaulted somebody because it's the only way he could get a bed in a psychiatric facility in the city of Calgary. He had been to my office, has made numerous trips looking for help. This fellow needed assistance. We sent him to the west-side clinic and the east-side clinic, and we made whatever sort of recommendations we could to diagnostic services, but what he needed was a hospital bed. He's got that now, but he committed an assault, knowing that that was what would happen, that the police would pick him up and he would at least get a psychiatric bed. Is that what we've come to in Calgary in 2000? The most prosperous place in Canada, and we've got people who have to commit a criminal assault to be able to get a psychiatric bed, because they know you cannot get one for love or money right now in the city of Calgary. Not good enough, Mr. Chairman, not good enough at all.

10:30

There were supposed to be 20 crisis stabilization beds established at the Holy Cross hospital; now that initiative has been stalled. Why has it been stalled? When are those 20 crisis stabilization beds going to be available to people who desperately need them, Mr. Minister? When is that going to happen? Those are some of the concerns that I wanted addressed while we're dealing with this.

The other matter that gives me some real concern has to do with standards in terms of nursing homes and the whole issue of long-term care centre standards. I may have been out of the room briefly filling my water glass when my colleague the Health and Wellness critic was into that area, but maybe I could just supplement and indicate that we have seen other provinces move so far ahead of us. What they have done in the province of Ontario is understand that our seniors that require long-term care don't deserve second-class care. That too often is what we're having.

We don't have enough facilities in this province to be able to deal with people with serious forms of dementia and Alzheimer's. I know what the challenges are in Calgary. I can only imagine what happens in Drumheller where you have a smaller number of people, I would assume, with dementia, so it's tougher to have a dedicated wing or a unit in a facility for people with dementia issues. I can only imagine what kinds of problems we're having there.

My question is, Mr. Chairman, specifically to you and through you to that Minister of Health and Wellness. Where do I see reflected on pages 46 and 47 of this Supplementary Estimates: General Revenue Fund booklet an allocation that's going to significantly improve the quality – the unsatisfactory quality, I might add – of nursing homes and long-term care facilities right now in Alberta?

Is there anybody who thinks that we can't do any better? Is there anybody who thinks that right now we're doing just as good a job as we're capable of in this province in terms of long-term care? I invite you to put your hands up. I mean, is there anybody in this Assembly tonight that thinks we're doing an adequate job in terms of long-term

care needs? Mr. Chairman, I hope *Hansard* reflects through my comment that I saw not a single hand raised except for the Member for Lethbridge-West. I suspect that he may have been sending a friendly greeting to me rather than registering a vote in the poll we're doing this evening. I hope *Hansard* is going to note that not a single hand was raised when I put that question on whether people were satisfied.

So we are in agreement then – Calgary-Fort, I see, nods in agreement – that we're not doing an adequate job in terms of long-term care. Let us all, then, ask the Minister of Health and Wellness perhaps with a single, strong, united voice: where's the funding here that's going to make a difference in long-term care? Where is that? Where is that funding? I don't see it here. I need to help the members because I know they also will be concerned, and they also will want some answers to that. It may be that those government members are asking the same questions in quiet voices, in hallways, in private meeting rooms, and so on. I'd like to think that's what's happening. There's clearly a role for that, Mr. Chairman, but there's also a role when we are here in the year 2000 and we still see some of the same problems.

You know, when I see the hardworking Member for Calgary-Bow over there – one of the biggest losses this Chamber is going to have is that she's not going to be back after the next election. Why that's a loss to this Legislature is that she has done a lot of work around the homeless situation in Calgary, and she's been to those meetings where people have identified the large number of homeless people who need to access a mental health bed and mental health services. She knows that I think it's something like 38 percent of the people in Calgary who are part of that identified homeless population have a mental health issue. We must do much better, and I don't see that reflected in this supplementary supply estimate.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates for the Department of Health and Wellness for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$293,593,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Municipal Affairs

THE CHAIRMAN: We could begin our deliberations on this with comments by the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Municipal Affairs is requesting a supplementary estimate of \$21,773,000 to be used in the following ways: \$10 million is required to automate the collection of property tax assessment and building permit data. A new automated system will standardize the information collected and improve stakeholder access to provincial assessment and building permit data. The new system will also make the assessment equalization and education tax requisition process more efficient by

using current information instead of information that's a year old. This will result in a system that municipalities, the province, and the taxpaying public will find simpler and easier to understand.

As well, the new system will address the need municipalities have for greater access to assessment information when reviewing their own equalized assessment for accuracy, fairness, and quality control. It will make it easier and cheaper for municipalities to access sales and assessment data from neighbouring municipalities so they can compare results.

The building permit component of the new system will address the need for greater uniformity in administering the Safety Codes Act through the province. Standardized, timely data will make it easier to monitor compliance and safety code inspections and share information.

The new system will also give municipalities an important tool for improving the effectiveness of their permitting and inspection services, and permitting data in the new system will improve our ability to monitor assessment growth and predict changes in assessment bases. This will result in more timely information to support provincial and municipal decision-making. The new automated system for assessment and building permit data will be implemented partly through partnership grants with the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties.

Moving on: \$400,000 is required for a grant to the Alberta Fire Training School to improve fire and emergency training. This grant will enable the Alberta Fire Training School, which is affiliated with Lakeland College in Vermilion, to provide better access to fire and emergency response training. Currently training for some fire and emergency procedures is not available in Alberta. This grant will facilitate a made-in-Alberta solution to meet our current and future training needs.

Still on the topic of serving Albertans in emergencies, \$1.85 million is required to expand Alberta's emergency public warning system. A provincewide emergency warning system will enhance public safety by quickly delivering emergency warning messages through the broadcast media. Systems are currently in place in the Edmonton and Calgary areas that allow municipalities as well as provincial and federal government departments to warn Albertans of impending emergencies, such as tornadoes. The enhancements will include technological improvements to the existing systems and extend the coverage to about 95 percent of the Alberta population. Timely warnings through a provincewide system are expected to reduce personal injury and property loss following these provincial emergencies.

As we are aware, Pine Lake experienced a devastating tornado this past spring, and \$9.5 million is required to provide assistance following this tornado disaster. Approximately \$2.8 million of this amount, pending an audit, will be recovered from the federal government under the provincial/federal cost-sharing agreement.

10:40

As I said, the total cost of all of these initiatives is \$21,773,000. Overall these funds will help Albertans in a very significant way. They'll provide for better property tax assessment and building permitting. They will lead to improved training for fire and emergency personnel. They'll provide more Albertans with warnings when disasters threaten, and they'll provide assistance to those who suffered losses during the terrible Pine Lake tornado.

I urge that you support these requests for supplementary funding, and we will attempt to respond to all of the questions that may be raised regarding the supplementary requirements for Municipal Affairs.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the minister for the summary to support his request for supplementary supply. I do have some questions, and I'll go through them really as quickly as I can.

I note that there is almost \$22 million in total being requested, and it has been somewhat broken down in the estimates book. I made note of your comments just now, but I have some questions particularly around the \$10 million amount that's being asked for in terms of capital equipment and financial support to local authorities. Mr. Minister, this is in relation to your comments about building a better assessment process and building permit data collection process. I'm wondering if you can tell me what capital assets were purchased or are contemplated being purchased for the \$2 million, and who will own them? Are these provincial assets or are these municipal assets? Which local authorities are there that received the \$8 million worth of support, and was there a priority list? I mean, was it at \$8 million and that was the total amount of money that was needed, or was there some picking and choosing that went on? [interjection] Okay. I think you anticipated my next question, so *Hansard* should note that the minister, through the Chairman of course, is indicating that it was a provincewide program, so it wasn't a matter of picking some local authorities over others.

I also have some questions about the Alberta Fire Training School. I must say that I have been very impressed that the Fire Training School has been making considerable efforts to inform members of the Legislature about their activities and their operations, and I for one have appreciated finding out more about the FTS. But I'm a little confused right now because the Fire Training School used to be part of Alberta labour, as I understand it, and now it's operating more as a subsidiary of Lakeland College. Again, well, through the chair... [interjection] Yeah. The Fire Training School, I thought, was operating as a corporation that was a subsidiary of the college, so if I'm wrong in that understanding, then perhaps the minister could supplement that. In any case, part of the supplementary request is for a \$400,000 grant to assist in its development strategy. Was this primarily for marketing its services so they can sell its training services, or is this growth for the school? I wouldn't mind just a little bit more detail about that.

There is nearly \$2 million being requested for the expansion of the Alberta emergency public warning system. About 1 and a half million dollars is capital investment, and about \$300,000 is for operating expenses. This would just be for my own benefit, Mr. Chairman, my own education. I'm not sure what areas in the province are now covered by the public warning system, so when I see a request saying, "Well, we want to expand," I don't know what the expansion covers. I would just be interested in knowing: does this give us 10 percent more coverage, 20 percent more coverage? Does it pick up new population areas? Does it pick up new hazards, or again is there a priority list in terms of expanding the system and this hits some of those priorities?

I would also like to know about the type of equipment and when it was installed and by whom. Were these tendered contracts? Are these assets that have now become Crown assets? Are there multiple vendors out there that were involved in this work? Just some information about I guess how the 1 and half million dollars was spent particularly and whether or not there are ongoing costs now. Are there increased maintenance costs, or were maintenance and contracts part of the tendering initially?

The Pine Lake disaster recovery program request is also of interest to me, because I haven't seen a report, Mr. Minister, on the number of claims that have been processed. Were there claims that were

denied? How much has actually been paid out both in terms of the dollar volume but also the number of claims that were paid? Are there some that are in dispute or appeal? It seemed to me that there was some confusion, which is understandable. I mean, the relief program was announced just on the heels of the disaster itself, and I'm not sure that there was a lot of time to work out all the details, so it is understandable if there would be some confusion.

Time has now passed, so I'm just wondering if we had a situation where the coverage now that we've had the benefit of hindsight was seen as being too broad or too narrow? What lessons have we learned should we ever have to face this kind of a natural disaster again? What lessons have we learned that we could apply to providing appropriate relief in a timely manner? I'm wondering if there was a separate pool of money that was therefore made available after the individual claims were settled to local authorities, to municipalities, what number of claims came in and what their dollar value was.

Finally, Mr. Minister, my question, not specific to the Pine Lake disaster recovery program but to disaster recovery initiatives more in general. It seems that we have in this Assembly for several years in a row now come back with supplementary requests based on tornadoes, floods, fires. Of course, these things aren't predictable. I mean, we don't know what natural disaster is going to happen where next. But I think we have a pretty clear sense that given the nature of this province and the geography and its location and the weather patterns, et cetera, we are unfortunately going to be facing these kinds of natural events. So have you thought more – we've talked about this in the past – about building a pool of funds for disaster relief on a more ongoing basis that would be more adequate so that we're not always coming back and looking in terms of supplemental supply?

As I ask you that question, you know, the thought is going through my mind: how would I feel as an opposition member knowing that you as the minister had this pool of money out there that you could use at your discretion without bringing it back to the Legislature for approval? I'm not sure that that would be the best process either. In terms of ensuring that there's adequate protection and ensuring that the province has the ability to respond rapidly to these natural disasters, I'm just wondering what efforts you've made through your department to put this kind of expense more into your plan and build the appropriate constraints around it so that we know there's a good accountability trail.

Those are my queries, Mr. Minister, through you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate you listening so carefully. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

10:50

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of questions that I'd like to raise. The minister spoke about the additional allocation to kind of improve and standardize the provincial assessment type work that's going on. I guess in that context I would like to relay a concern that was raised to me the other day and ask the minister if this kind of situation is going to be addressed in this provincial standardization it gets into in terms of assessments and how they're handled.

Basically, about a week or 10 days ago now I was called by an individual from north central Alberta who's living in a small community. I don't want to put his name on the public record because I don't have that permission. He bought a home that had previously been assessed at a \$9,000 level. It was a kind of small community. What happened was that when he paid for the home, he paid \$23,000. The end result was that his taxes went way up in excess of what the two neighbouring houses were taxed.

When he appealed it, he was told: "Well, yours have gone up

because we're on market value assessment. You paid that for the house, so now we multiply the mill rate times the new value." He said: "Well, what about the neighbours? They've got bigger houses, bigger lots, more services in their houses. Those houses should be worth at least what mine was." The response back from the local assessment appeal officer was: well, those houses haven't sold yet, so we don't know what they're worth.

The end result was that he lost his appeal, and he's now paying much higher taxes on his house than either of the neighbours who have both bigger lots and bigger homes and potentially within the market structure of that community have a higher potential market value even though they haven't been realized because the houses have not actually transferred title.

This is even further complicated because he went back to his real estate agent and said: "Well, why didn't you warn me that my taxes were going to go up by a factor of almost three times? When we talked about my ability to afford this house, we talked about the tax payable based on the historic assessment." What this individual is asking is that part of the promotion or the adoption of this new market value assessment for small rural municipalities, not municipal districts and counties but urban municipalities in the small areas – the real estate agents need to be brought up to speed in the context that when the market value is determined by a sale, what they do is that market value that now becomes the assessment gets multiplied times the mill rate to give the new tax base.

So what in essence he was talking about was that there was a lack of information there for him to make a proper decision, and when he started asking questions about it, even through his real estate agents, they didn't know the answer. Obviously, the assessment appeal officer for that small town didn't have the appropriate answers either, because he was telling him that these other properties would not have a new assessed value until they actually were sold. Well, I think the general process at least in a lot of them is that any sale in a particular community could potentially affect the assessed market value of almost any home or dwelling within that adjacent area with similar characteristics.

These are the kinds of issues that I hope the minister is talking about when he is talking about trying to get some more information out there and funding this better provincial assessment process as people become aware of it. I also do intend on behalf of this individual to write a letter to the real estate board in the province and ask them to check and make sure that their individuals are providing appropriate information to potential buyers when they look at the cost of living in their home as they move into a new purchase.

Those are a couple of the issues that kind of got raised in terms of the minister's reference to the new assessment improvements that he's increased money for. I hope it will address some of these issues that were raised. If not, we'll pursue it some other way with the minister.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DICKSON: Actually one question for the minister, something that puzzles me a little bit in terms of the additional money for "collection of assessment and building permit data." The Inner City Coalition in Calgary is made up of probably about 13 communities in the heart of the city, and there has been an exceedingly high level of frustration over difficulty accessing assessment information in the city of Calgary.

I understand that we have a municipal government that's primarily responsible for property taxation, but given the fact that the city is a creature of the province, that they have no plenary jurisdiction – the only jurisdiction the city of Calgary has is what the provincial legislation permits it. I'd ask the minister if he has used his office

to raise with the city of Calgary the concerns that a number of inner-city communities have had with respect to being able to access in a timely way a lot of the assessment information. It seems to me that there's not a lot of what the city does that is more basic than their property tax system, and the assessment information, it seems to me, ought to be not a closely held secret but something that ratepayers should be able to get without the kind of difficulty that these groups have experienced in Calgary.

I expect, Mr. Minister, that you meet with mayors and chief commissioners for certainly the larger centres, and you might want to put this on the list. We often get a bit of a whipsaw effect here, with people arguing that they're bound, their hands are tied because of some provincial directive, and then the province goes back and says: "Well, no. It's a city policy decision how accessible this information's going to be." I haven't made an exhaustive study of the issue, but I'm sharing with you the feedback I get from a lot of concerned Albertans that think they should not have such a difficult time getting key assessment information so that they're able to challenge their assessment in a meaningful way, in an intelligent way.

At the end of the day, Mr. Chairman, it saves time. To have citizens and groups and community associations like Sunalta having to spend – I see the Member from Calgary-Fort. Maybe he has some perspective to share with the Assembly on this. Certainly the communities the Member for Calgary-Fort represents and Calgary-Buffalo and Calgary-Currie, maybe even Calgary-Bow – those people have a lot of issues around this thing. I haven't heard it raised yet, but it's something that you might want to look into, Mr. Minister.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Well, thank you for the questions. They were all good questions and all very genuine, and I'll try and respond to them. If there's something lacking, please get back to me, and we'll fill in more details.

The \$10 million is basically to try and capture the requisitioning the same year as the live assessment. At the present time we're requisitioned on the basis of last year's information, and rather than do it on the one year, which we're not able to do because we don't have the information in time, we requisition on the basis of last year's assessment and actually aren't able to capture the information in time.

So what this will do is bring the two together. We'll be able to capture the growth in the same year and actually requisition on the basis of current growth rather than being a year behind. That's really what it's about. We're working through AUMA. In conjunction with AUMA we'll be a central clearing agency as well as within our own department. Most of this is going to go into the software programs throughout the province so that it can all be fed into one central agency. We're going to be able to be more current with the information.

11:00

MR. SAPERS: One software company?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: No, it probably won't be one software company, but we're going to try and make it as limiting as we possibly can so that the information is as concise as possible. We're in the process of developing this, so it's not that it's been done.

Fire training. The purpose of the fire training is primarily to develop an industrial fire training, which we don't have at present in

the province. At the present time for the large industrial operations, for their fire training they're sending their people to Houston, Texas, and Denver, and we'd like to be able to do that here in Alberta. The fire training school works in conjunction with Lakeland College; they're not part of Lakeland College. It's simply to better utilize and be more efficient in the operation, so what we've got are two groups that really utilize one set of equipment. It's far more efficient to do it that way, through that type of process.

The number of claims. I don't have the number of claims that have been paid on the tornado at Pine Lake. I can get that for you, and we will get that for you. We'll also get the ones that have been denied and the ones that are still being negotiated.

Expanding the early warning system. We want to cover southern Alberta, which we're not able to do at the present time. We're wanting to cover the northern part of the province, which we're not able to do. At the present time we're really covering the broad Edmonton and broad Calgary areas, and this new expansion will cover 95 percent of the province. So I think that's significant, and I think it's fair that all Albertans should have access to the early warning system, which is what this is about, to warn you that there is indeed some potential danger out there as far as weather is concerned.

Pine Lake was actually a textbook case of dealing with emergencies. I was there at 11:30 the same night of that tornado, and by that time everything was firmly in place. The whole process was operating and functioning. To my mind, to have had the process in its entirety functioning and going full out within such a short period of time: the roadways were cleared; they were able to access all the devastation; the halls were all functioning and operating; the power plants were all operating and running—it was the middle of the night by that time. It was truly, truly an impressive sight from that aspect. It was a terrible devastation, a terrible unforeseen development.

Indeed, I think under the circumstances I really, really have to compliment the county of Red Deer for their organization, for their preparedness. The whole community came together very, very willingly, and certainly if we were ever going to do a textbook on dealing with a tornado, that would be as good an example as we could ever get. So I compliment the people that were involved because they did an exceptional job of coming together very, very rapidly and dealing with a terrible, terrible emergency.

Preparing for emergencies budgeting. Last year we didn't have any; this year we had three disasters. I have absolutely no way of knowing what you could prepare for. I have no way of anticipating and I don't think anyone would really want to be able to anticipate just what the emergencies would be. I don't know how we could possibly budget. The key is to be able to be there when it's necessary. We've always made that commitment, and we have always fulfilled that commitment. I think that's all that Albertans really want and Albertans really should be confident in receiving. When there is a disaster, we will be there. That's what Albertans are asking for, and that's our objective to fulfill.

Market value assessment. Market value really works on comparables, and I don't know the community. I don't know the size of the community. I don't know the details. If you were willing to share more of the details with me, I'd be quite prepared to look into it. If it's a very small community, perhaps there haven't been any sales there for a while either. Without the details I'm not in a position to make any comments.

As far as Calgary, we are working with the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary because they are the most advanced in this program. Indeed, the idea is to be able to access information more readily so that it can be available, so that it can be useful, so that it can be of benefit to everyone. That's the intent of this: so that we

can have actual information at our fingertips when it's needed, when it can be useful. Certainly that's something that we found we really need with the education tax, for example. We're always a year behind, and we're not able to capture that live assessment on the growth. That's really why we're trying to move towards.

So I hope I've been able to answer your questions. If there are others . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Minister. First I should just clarify. The confusion that I referred to was in terms of applying for the cash compensation or benefit, not about the response on-site immediately following the tornado, in the couple of days following. It was quite remarkable. I do a lot of camping in the Gull Lake, Pine Lake, Bentley areas, and it really was remarkable. Those folks are to be congratulated. So I just wanted to make that clear. That was the confusion I was talking about; it was not what the emergency response was on-site.

You may not be able to provide me with the answers right now. It would be all right if you could undertake to get back to me later. I'm just a little intrigued about the discussion about the software development for the assessment process. I'm assuming that that's not an in-house project, that it's in fact something that's being developed by one or more vendors external to government. I guess I would like to know: who actually owns the intellectual property that's being developed? Will it be the government of Alberta? Will it be the individual municipalities, municipal authorities? Will it be something that will become in effect a project of the AUMA, or are the software developer/providers going to maintain the ownership and license it back to either the government of Alberta or the municipal authorities? Or is it a combination of all the above? So those details, when they're available, would be interesting.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: For example, Edmonton and Calgary have different systems, but they're well into it, so why reinvent the wheel when there's information out there. They operate on slightly different systems, but nevertheless we're going to be able to utilize the systems that both Edmonton and Calgary have. So rather than try and put a lot more resources to get one common system, we're going to utilize what's out there and also impact with new in areas that don't have that type. Really, Edmonton and Calgary are the most advanced as far as providing that type of information.

Who's going to have this information? It's going to be AUMA; it's going to be the government; it's going to be the municipalities. It's going to be accessible to everyone really. That's the intent.

Now, as far as Pine Lake is concerned, we actually had a record of all the people that were involved in the tornado. I should point out that in identifying the path of the tornado, Environment Canada really is the one that identified where the tornado was actually located, and we used Environment Canada's information to identify which part was inside the tornado belt and which part was outside the tornado belt. Once they have drawn the lines, we don't have any flexibility because we don't have the capability to determine weather, which Environment Canada does. That's their responsibility. That's part of the agreement, and in some cases that's been part of the issue, where people have taken issue: are they in or outside the tornado? We don't get involved in that as a province. That is determined by Environment Canada.

11:10

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. I must be having some difficulty in being precise with my question. Access to the data or the product of this assessment software was one issue, but it's the actual intellectual property, the ownership of the actual software itself that I was interested in. Again, is it going to be licensed? The systems that are in place in the cities of Calgary and Edmonton: are they large-scale, integrated systems, you know, SAP-type systems, or are they being developed specifically for this real time assessment project? If so, is that going to multiple vendors, like that's going to be developed outside the department? If that information isn't at your fingertips, I would just appreciate maybe some correspondence later on about the ownership, the intellectual property issues involved.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates for the Department of Municipal Affairs, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Okay. Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expenses and Capital Investment	\$21,773,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Justice

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Justice to make his comments.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Department of Justice is asking for supplementary supply in the amount of \$1,450,000. It's really a very straightforward request. One million dollars in additional funding will be used to enhance mental health services for young offenders in custody under supervision in the community. The money will be used to enhance the department's ability to safely house young people with mental health problems. This will reduce the risk of harm to staff and to the offenders themselves. The initiative will allow custody facilities the ability to more effectively manage young offenders with mental health problems. It's extremely important, Mr. Chairman, that we deal with some of the mental health issues that we have, particularly with a focus on young offenders.

The funding will also enable us to put in place programs that respond to unique and special mental health needs of female young offenders and aboriginal young offenders. The department will be partnering with the Alberta Mental Health Board to design appropriate mental health programs for young offenders in custody or on community supervision. We'll provide increased assessment and counseling support at the young offender centres in Calgary and Edmonton and for young offenders on probation in group homes and in camp programs. Funding will also allow us to provide more culturally sensitive responses to aboriginal offenders.

So the bottom line is that the million dollars is part of our children-at-risk program and part of Justice's response to issues of children at risk, focusing on one of the main areas of concern, one of my main areas of concern, particularly, in the Justice system, where we have to deal more with root causes of crime, in particular,

if we want youth – if we want any offender – to go back into the community more able to handle the pressures and the causes that got them into trouble. In the first place, we need to deal with mental health issues.

I'm pleased that we've been able to ask for and hopefully receive approval from this Legislature for an additional million dollars, which will assist us in this year in that program and will help us to continue dealing in the long term with some of the root causes of youth in crime. There are certainly other root causes such as drug and alcohol addictions, but the mental health issues are very important, and we want to be able to address those.

The other \$450,000, Mr. Chairman, will answer the concerns raised by Edmonton-Glenora when he earlier commented on the need for wages for contracted-out services to be dealt with on a broader basis than just health and PDD boards. Of course, in Justice we have contracted out services, and we have people who are supplying those services, staff employed by service agencies, who need to be brought up in terms of their pay. The \$450,000 that's being requested for the Justice budget will assist us in improving the pay packet for contracted out services of that nature.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, I can't help reflecting about how refreshing it is to hear a Minister of Justice in this province talk about making safer communities by making an investment in terms of social development and an investment in terms of children. It's a perspective that many of us on this side have accepted and subscribed to for a very long time, but it's been a little lonely in this Assembly, I might say, as we've dealt with Justice budgets for the last number of years, because my colleagues didn't hear very much resonance on the other side around some of those really basic needs and trying to match resources to them. So it's encouraging to hear that tonight.

Two things. Firstly, having recently become Justice critic again, I probably missed this, but is there a detailed list of the specific recommendations in the Children's Forum that are going to benefit as a result of the \$1 billion in additional funding? One million dollars. It's a good thing I'm not the Treasury critic, hon. Minister of Justice, through the chair. It seems to me that there were a host of recommendations that came out of the Children's Forum and the Children at Risk Task Force report. Our job, my job is to try and assess what progress we're making on them. It would be a whole lot easier if the minister could tell us: these are the recommendations that are going to be funded by this supplementary grant. Perhaps he could just confirm that nothing like that has been tabled to date.

So we have \$1 million that is being spent with two lines on page 60. That's not to say that it's not appropriate that we spend on children's services, but I just say that a million dollars is a million dollars. I expect that when people come asking for money, we'd apply the same rigorous standard to supplementary supply that we do at budget time, which is that we find out exactly where those dollars are going, so that when those members who are lucky enough to come back in February deal with the next budget, there'll be some tough questions around to find out if those dollars have made any significant improvement.

There are a couple of areas where I can suggest the minister may want to pay some particular attention. Just today, November 20, a UN agency report came out on the sexual commercialization of children. This is a worldwide analysis of what's been done by various nations that had agreed to participate in a program to try and deal in an aggressive fashion with the sexual exploitation of children. It came out of the Stockholm declaration, August 31, 1996, entitled the Stockholm declaration and agenda for action against the commercial and sexual exploitation of children. Canada

is a signatory. I note when I go through this a couple of things that are significant, and I'm sure the Minister of Justice probably has not had time to go through all 171 pages of this report. When he looks at it, one of the things he might be drawn to would be the note on page 47 that "there are . . . accounts of Chinese children being trafficked into Western Canada" for purposes of prostitution. He might advise us if in fact that's been an identified issue in the province of Alberta.

11:20

As a former minister of intergovernmental affairs, he will understand the opportunity that provinces have to prod the national government and fellow ministers of Justice in other provinces. He might want to address page 50, where it talks about the failure of Canada to adopt a national plan of action. In fact, I quote from page 50.

The failure of Canada to develop a National Plan is disconcerting, however in contrast to the USA, at least a follow up strategy to the Stockholm World Congress has been developed.

There is some indication that some things are being done, but I'd like to know what the Minister of Justice is doing in terms of lobbying his counterparts across Canada to come up with that national strategy that Canada had undertaken in Stockholm in terms of dealing with the commercial and sexual exploitation of children. I don't know what role the province has had, and maybe the minister can tell us. One project is called Out From the Shadows and Into the Light and the other one is called Stolen Innocence. These are projects set up by Save the Children-Canada dealing with prevention, rehabilitation, and recovery. It seems to me that in a province that prides itself on being attentive to the issue of teen prostitution, child sexual abuse through prostitution – and tomorrow we're going to be dealing with a Bill 29, which is going to be dealing specifically with some changes – I'd be interested in the minister's comments with respect to this UN instrument and where we're going to go with that.

The other thing I take the minister to is a report that was tabled by my colleague for Edmonton-Riverview. The report is entitled Lost Promise and Potential: Alberta's Statistics on Youth Suicides Programs and Challenges. When the government talks about children at risk, there are no children more at risk than those who have been in care and then the subject of a fatality inquiry. These are children who have died by suicide or by circumstances of some suspicious nature.

You know, I'm indebted to my colleague for Edmonton-Riverview, who has gone through and done an analysis of these different fatality inquiry files. Do you know what you find, Mr. Chairman, when you read through? Some repetitive recommendations. I think those of us responsible – everybody in this Assembly in a form is a kind of guardian for the children of this province; aren't we? We all have a responsibility to the children of this province. One can reasonably ask: why is it that we haven't done more in terms of acting on the recommendations in these fatality inquiries?

In fact, if we go through the reports, you know, we have a nine-year-old male whose name I can't mention because of a publication ban in Hobbema who died; a 15 year old, Donald Robert LeClaire, in 1994; John Ross McKinnon in 1995; Cynthia May Elliot in 1995; Jackie Beauregard in 1995; Olivia Rae Calfo in November 5, 1995; Isaac Gerard Mercer in January 1997; Sherman Laron Labelle on May 21, 1998. We look at each one of these fatality inquiry reports. What we see are thoughtful recommendations that I think require government action. Who else would we look to for leadership in this? You might say the Ministry of Children's Services.

You might say some other ministries. I would like to think that some of the leadership in fact would be coming from this Minister of Justice. I think one of the proposals would be that the Justice department should be co-ordinating statistics on child and youth suicide on an annual basis.

I think it's hugely important that recommendations from fatality inquiry reports be assessed, perhaps as recommended by my colleague for Edmonton-Riverview, by a joint committee of Children's Services, health, education, and Justice, the youth sector, on a quarterly basis.

So my question to the Minister of Justice: in the absence of a detailed breakdown of which recommendations from the children's summit are going to be funded and which recommendations from the Children at Risk Task Force report are going to be funded, would he go through and address the specific recommendations which appear on page 30 of that report tabled today by my colleague called Lost Promise and Potential and tell us what his position is with respect to each one of those? There is no more important business in this province than looking after children in care, and every child that takes his or her life while in care I think warrants the most serious attention, not by a single ministry but by a number of ministries. So here's a good concrete proposal from Edmonton-Riverview. I want to know from the Minister of Justice whether he will do that.

Should he choose not to follow these recommendations, will he tell us in precise details what his alternate proposal is to get a handle on what I think is an unacceptable number of suicides of children in care? These aren't children living with their parents. These are children in care of the province of Alberta. The *parens patriae* jurisdiction we've got imposes a very high jurisdiction indeed.

The only other comment I'd make with respect to the estimates is that, you know, we heard some comments earlier today about the role of agencies like the John Howard Society, and my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora takes some ribbing from a former solicitor general about that, but the reality is that one of the strengths in this province is that we have had, I think, some marvelous leadership provided by a range of community agencies. I don't mean just John Howard, because I'm proud to have been associated with that too, but Elizabeth Fry and Native Counseling. There are a range of organizations in this province. I look at PLENA, the Public Legal Education Network, and the leadership provided by the Alberta Law Foundation. I mean, some of the best things to do with Justice in this province have happened really almost in spite of the provincial government, sometimes on a contracted basis but quite independent of government.

So this is a time where I might make common cause with the Minister of Innovation and Science. Here's an area where in fact it's not the government that's being the real innovator. In many respects it's been these nonprofit, community-based agencies. I'm sorry if I mischaracterized the Minister of Innovation and Science. If he prefers the way government does it by blunder and trial and error, that's fine, but I quite appreciate the leadership we found from those nonprofit agencies, and I think it's a good thing that we're providing some additional employee compensation. I might say that this is the sort of thing I think could have been dealt with in the budget last March, and I'm disappointed it wasn't. But I'm certainly happy to see some funding adjustment there because that's a vital part of the matrix, the network of services that help make our community stronger and safer.

Anyway, those are the comments I wanted to make at this stage, and I know I have some colleagues that wish to speak as well. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the minister, I appreciate his opening comments. He said his one and a half million dollar request was very straightforward, and we've got some questions. It is relatively straightforward. I'd like to start on the additional funding being requested for employee compensation of agencies under contract. This is a long time coming.

I recall a report written for this provincial government – oh, this must be now going back close to 20 years, 15 at least – the Goldstein report, which looked at social agencies under contract with the government. At that time it was identified that there was an average of about a 20 or 22 percent difference in the salary that was being paid to employees of contracted agencies and those employees of government doing similar work at similar classifications. I know that when the lobby effort was launched by those involved in providing services to those with developmental and other disabilities, they were talking once again about this 20 percent differential.

11:30

I'm just wondering how this \$450,000 is going to be allocated and how much it addresses that perhaps 20 percent or more differential or shortfall in the salary structure of these contracted agencies? Is the department going to be telling the agencies that they can give fixed percent raises, or is there a classification system that has been developed that'll determine how this money is going to be allocated? Is this onetime funding in terms of adjustment, or is it going to become part of the base contracts for future-year negotiations between the minister and these agencies?

My advice to the minister would be that he make it multiyear, that he build it into the base, and that he give these agencies some stability. Many of these organizations have been partners with the provincial government for decades and decades and decades, yet they have to go through the administrative trouble of every year renewing their contracts and starting from zero, which just eats up a lot of time in terms of the agencies, their volunteers, and of course the minister's own departmental staff. So I would hope that could be made clear in terms of how this money is going to be allocated and whether it's multiyear and whether it gets built into the base and how much control the agencies will have on how it is ultimately spent.

The million dollars for housing and custody of young offenders, particularly those with mental health services, is welcome indeed. I'm wondering, though, because it says that this is partial year funding, whether I can safely make the assumption that we will see in the departmental estimates in the next annualized budget for the minister that this is now part of the base, that there's new program development, and that it's going to be annualized. Mr. Chairman, I think it's important for the *Hansard* record to show that the minister is nodding in agreement, that yeah, that will in fact be the case.

Will this money be spent in terms of providing additional staff resources in existing custody environments, or in fact are we looking at the creation of new open-custody houses, a potential for more actual bed space in different facilities? If so, where would those be located? If it's more staff, are we doing anything to address capacity? I know that the minister made reference in particular to female and aboriginal youth. Maybe the minister could let me know whether female young offenders sentenced to open custody will now have truly open-custody resources to serve their sentence in or if they will still be using a cell at, in the case of northern Alberta, the Edmonton Young Offender Centre, which of course, as the minister

knows, is built as a high-security, closed-custody facility. It's always been a bone of contention between myself and the department that young women sentenced to open custody because of a lack of resources find themselves doing time in a secure-custody facility. I believe that's inappropriate, and I'd like to know whether or not this funding will address that.

So, Mr. Chairman, my queries are relatively few. I'd just ask, of course, for some clarification from the minister. I must say that it is refreshing indeed to hear a minister talk about investment in youth in terms of prevention of criminal activity or the prevention of recidivism and the understanding that these interventions if done properly can have tremendous and dramatic results. It's always nice to have an opportunity in the Assembly to reflect on the good work done by the voluntary and the nongovernment sector in the provision of criminal and social justice services.

There's a proud history and a tradition in this province of involving groups, ranging from the Salvation Army to the Elizabeth Fry Society to the John Howard Society to St. Leonard's Seven Steps Society, Mennonite Central, just a whole host of first-class agencies that have worked to achieve justice in this province for a very long time. It always puzzles me when I hear either the Provincial Treasurer or some of his other colleagues speak disparagingly of these community-based, volunteer-driven, not-for-profit organizations as though the work that they do is somehow not deserving of public support. It's nice to see that they in fact do get public support and that in fact some of that public support is going to be increased as a result of tonight's discussions.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates for the Department of Justice, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$1,450,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Hon. Government House Leader.

Government Services

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the Minister of Government Services I'm pleased to present the supplementary estimates for Government Services in the amount of \$1,500,000. As set out in the estimates, \$280,000 is being requested for compensation to the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council, \$700,000 for information systems enhancement, \$520,000 for landlord and tenant advisory services in Calgary.

With respect to the \$700,000 in information systems enhancements, suffice it to say that the system is being overtaxed by an expanding economy, an expanding number of people utilizing the services in this province. The overtaxed information systems need to be sustained. They need to build immediate system capacity and enhance their infrastructure in order to maintain response times. There's a need to stabilize systems by expanding computing capacity, specifically upgrading Calgary and Edmonton local area networks as well as the servers used by external clients to access the systems.

Government Services is moving to new technology to meet governmentwide standards. Infrastructure investments will help support the one-window gateway initiative, which will be a cross-ministry administrative priority. The funding will also be used to respond to client requests for e-commerce relating to land titles services. Specifically, it will add services to the SPIN program, which allows clients to search and order survey plans over the Internet. In the past the digital survey plans were only available in paper form. The SPIN service has been referenced in recent newspaper articles about the best-in-class Canadian information productivity award. Government Services also received the innovative service delivery award at a major technology conference in Hull, Quebec. In addition to the increased convenience that this initiative has meant to customers, Government Services has also been able to secure aging land title documents that were in danger of serious deterioration and possible loss.

The \$280,000 in support of AMVIC is in support of a policy change for a delegated regulatory organization that licenses businesses to sell and repair motor vehicles. The organization is called the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council. Regulations stipulated that all existing licences would expire early in order to facilitate and fund the formation of the council. The motor vehicle industry, which is spread throughout rural as well as urban Alberta, was opposed to the early expiry, and Government Services agreed that the policy change was unfair and would cause undue financial hardship to the industry. It therefore amended the regulations to allow licences to terminate on their original expiry date, thus the loss of revenue on the renewal fees.

11:40

The third amount, the \$520,000, is to provide continued landlord and tenant advisory services to the residents of Calgary. The city of Calgary currently provides the services, but they're under no legislative requirement to do so. They recently advised Government Services that they would be terminating the services as of December 31 of 2000, which was unanticipated, so an additional funding of \$520,000 to provide the services through our consumer information centre and to handle the additional 70,000 inquiries per year is necessary. The services include communicating with landlords and tenants on their rights and helping to resolve landlord and tenant issues. It's disappointing that Calgary will not continue the service from Calgary, because trying to do the same through the Edmonton offices will not be as effective as a council that had formerly operated in Calgary, where they knew the marketplace. However, it's necessary that those services be provided, and if the city of Calgary is no longer going to provide them, it's incumbent on Government Services to do so.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of questions, firstly on the \$700,000 for information systems enhancements. There was a peculiar kind of timing in that we saw the Minister of Government Services this last spring, in estimates on the main budget, going on about the call centre that her department was organizing, and also her excitement at the fact that we were going to take personal information about individual Albertans from eight different government departments and start networking that information. At the very same time, Jane Stewart was being pilloried daily in question period in the House of Commons, and some of us said: Mr. Chairman, how is it that this is happening in Alberta with so little attention?

We've asked some questions and I've got some FOIP applications outstanding, but I want to register a concern on behalf of the opposition that the plan that had been developed by the Minister of Government Services seems not to have been adequately tested. I suspect that most Albertans would be astonished to find out that their own government plans to take their information in one of eight different government departments and start mixing and matching it for purposes the individual Albertan won't know, all without, as best I know, any consent required from the individual Albertan.

This is all about internal planning, so I want to register that very strong concern with respect to the \$700,000 and say that we want a lot more information in terms of those issues that had been expressed at the time we were doing the main budget. I'm not sure why this couldn't have been foreseen. What's new now that we didn't know in March and April of this year? I've listened carefully – and I know that the Justice minister is doing his best filling in for his colleague – but I didn't hear an explanation.

Now, on the landlord and tenant advisory services in Calgary, it's interesting that this has been in effect a freebie that's been provided by the city of Calgary. It seems to me that if this were a little bigger priority – and you're listening to an MLA where over 70 percent of my constituents live in rented accommodations, so probably nowhere else in Alberta is this kind of a service more important. I guess I'm a bit surprised that there isn't some more formal arrangement between the city and the province so that the city can't just sort of casually say, "Well, we're not going to cover this anymore," and the province is going to pick it up.

That brings me to the question, then, of wondering, just before the time runs out on me, Mr. Chairman, that at one point the Municipal Affairs department . . .

Vote on Supplementary Estimates

THE CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but pursuant to Standing Order 59(3) and Government Motion 24 agreed to November 14 in the year 2000, I must now put the following question. Those members in favour of each of the resolutions not yet voted upon relating to the 2000-2001 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no. Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At this time I would move that we rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports as follows.

All resolutions relating to the 2000-2001 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund have been approved. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table a list of those resolutions voted upon by the Committee of Supply pursuant to Standing Orders.

Supplementary supply estimates, 2000-2001, for the general revenue fund for the year ending March 31, 2001: Government Services, operating expense and capital investment, \$1,500,000; Justice, operating expense and capital investment, \$1,450,000;

Municipal Affairs, operating expense and capital investment, \$21,773,000; Health and Wellness, operating expense and capital investment, \$293,593,000.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request unanimous consent of the Assembly to revert to Introduction of Bills to allow for the first reading of Bill 28, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2).

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Bills

Bill 28
Appropriation (Supplementary
Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2)

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce Bill 28, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2). This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a first time]

[At 11:49 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 21, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/11/21

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Lord, renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service of the people of this great province. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the newly elected board of directors of the Alberta Long Term Care Association. Seated in your gallery are President Greer Black, Vice-president Helen Lantz, Vice-president Wayne McKendrick, Vice-president Phil Gaudet, and directors Nora Kirkham, Greg Ulveland, and John Pray. Past President David Martin and executive director and former member of this Assembly Dianne Mirosh are also in the Speaker's gallery. I would ask that these guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, I present in the Assembly today a petition signed by 56 St. Albertans, a total of 178 names of individuals who are advocating that Alberta health professionals be able "to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition of 38 people of Calgary and surrounding area in support of Bill 212, the human rights conscience legislation for health care workers.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table petitions containing 219 names from Athabasca-Wabasca constituency, 87 names from Calgary-Elbow constituency, 127 names from Calgary-Varsity constituency, 112 names from Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky constituencies, 261 names from Lethbridge-West constituency, 175 names from Sherwood Park constituency, and 413 names from Wainwright constituency. The petitioners are urging the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Alberta human rights act to allow health professionals "to opt out of those . . . procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table today petitions bearing 406 names, mostly from Coaldale, Picture Butte, Hays, Vauxhall, Enchant, Iron Springs, Stirling, Coalhurst, Lomond, Nobleford, Diamond City, Monarch, county of Lethbridge, and eight

other communities outside the Little Bow riding supporting the move under Bill 212.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition signed by 89 Albertans, including 13 from Calgary-Glenmore, urging

the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition this afternoon from 51 residents of Lethbridge-East. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government

to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health [care] professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief

in the life of humans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Assembly in which the signatories are requesting that the Assembly "pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to ask that the petitions I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will rise again and move that written questions and motions for returns appearing on Wednesday's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Bill 29
Protection of Children Involved
in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, being the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000.

It's important to note that the legislation framework will be maintained. The act is solid, and it is working well. With it we have effectively provided support to many sexually exploited and abused Alberta children. These amendments are simply designed to strengthen this important legislation and enhance its effectiveness.

The amendments have two purposes: to enable children to obtain additional care and to ensure that children's rights are protected. Some of the amendments are based upon recommendations made by police, social workers, and service providers. They suggested several changes that would enable them to provide additional care to these victimized children. In keeping with the recommendations the amendments propose extending the initial confinement period from 72 hours to a maximum of five days. They also allow a protection-of-children-involved-in-prostitution director to apply for a maximum of two additional confinement periods of up to 21 days each. This additional time will enable social workers to stabilize the child, keep the child, break this cycle of abuse, and begin the recovery process in a safe and secure environment. The remaining amendments ensure that children's rights are protected.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 29 be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Bill 221
Public Health Care Protection Statutes
Amendment Act, 2000

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce Bill 221, the Public Health Care Protection Statutes Amendment Act.

This bill amends several health statutes to protect our public health care system. The major focus of this bill is the repeal of Bill 11, ensuring that overnight patient stays must be performed in a public hospital and strengthening conflict of interest provisions. I look forward to the debate on this bill as the occasion arises.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 221 read a first time]

1:40

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today the appropriate number of copies of a letter addressed to me from Students Against Drinking and Driving in Medicine Hat and area, congratulating the government on recent changes to legislation to reduce the number of impaired drivers on our roads. They also presented me with a banner which I will be discussing in Members' Statements later on.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'll move quickly. I have seven different tablings. The first one is a copy of the reasons for judgment of Provincial Court Judge Karen Jordan, dated July 28, 2000, and her judicial determination that the current child prostitution law lacked procedural safeguards for children; secondly, a copy of the British Columbia Secure Care Act, passed by that Legislature on July 6, 2000.

Since Bill 29 deals only with the abuse of young people, I'll be tabling some documents dealing with the larger challenge posed by street prostitution in Calgary: firstly, A Community Resources Handbook on Prostitution Issues, prepared by the Calgary Police Service vice unit and CAAPI, Communities for Awareness & Action on Prostitution Issues; a two-page description of CAAPI activities since it was created in September of 1997; a three-page summary of community volunteer hours donated to CAAPI, totaling \$300,567; the Community Strategies Report to the SPC on Community and Protective Services of the city of Calgary; and finally, a report presented to the Calgary Police Commission entitled Overview of Prostitution Activity in Calgary.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one document. It's double sided, and I'll refer to both sides. It's based on information that has been prepared by Brad Severin, the senior tax manager of BDO Dunwoody, as well as some reports in the *Edmonton Journal* with an analysis of the so-called Day/Klein Alberta Flat Tax – that was their characterization – as well as information prepared in an article titled Shifting the Burden, by Greg Flanagan. The material has been condensed and consolidated by Mr. Bill Daly, B.Com, MBA. What it demonstrates in both the text and the chart is the effect of the flat tax on Albertans and, as a result of the Paul Martin mini-budget, it indicates that the 37 percent . . .

THE SPEAKER: Well, thank you very much. We'll accept the tabling, hon. member. Please, please, would you also refer to *Hansard*, my comments last Thursday and Monday in terms of naming names.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to present two separate tablings. They are from the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities and the Alberta Association for Community Living. They are addressed to the Minister of Community Development as well as to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and they're with regards to the controversy around the Anno Domini exhibit.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: And to the hon. Member for Edmonton-

Meadowlark, congratulations, this day being your 25th wedding anniversary.

The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings this afternoon. The first one is copies of a report called Child Poverty in Canada, Report Card 2000. This report concludes that one in five children in Canada still lives in poverty, an increase of 402,000 since 1989.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter that I received from the president of the Alberta College of Social Workers, asking the Members of the Legislative Assembly to increase Alberta's welfare rates and recognize that "irrespective of any definition, poverty has a profound and sustained adverse impact on the overall health and well-being of Albertans including young children."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of an excellent article from *Alberta Views* magazine entitled Born in Alberta: Midwives Struggle to Bring a Healthy New Attitude into the Birthing World.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would file five copies of Paid in Full: Who Pays for University Education in BC? by Robert Allen, who makes the argument in the paper that university students actually pay for their tuition and their education in full.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have a number of tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter to the Premier dated October 9, 1998, wherein an injured worker identified 10 problem areas with WCB. Seven of these were included in the Appeals Commission report in the review of the Appeals Commission by Justice Friedman yesterday.

The second is a follow-up letter dated October 13, 1998, again to the Premier from an injured worker, regarding representation on the board of directors of WCB wherein he recommended that there be two injured workers, one representing the northern part of the province and the other representing the south.

A third letter: the Premier's response to his letters, dated November 25, 1998.

Finally, another letter to an injured Calgary worker from the Minister of Human Resources and Employment outlining the procedure for handling the reports on the WCB when they are completed.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table this afternoon. Both these documents I received from Municipal Affairs in a FOIP request. The first document is from a homeowner in Nottingham district in Sherwood Park, very concerned about the rotting pine shakes on the roof.

The second document is also from a couple who were very concerned about their dream home; they cannot afford to put a new roof on it. The original roof was pine shakes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you very much. I have five reports to table today. The first is the 1999-2000 annual report for the Alberta Registered Professional Foresters Association; also the Alberta Dental Association, January 1, '99, to December 31, 1999; the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, November 1, 1998, to October 31, 1999; the College of Chiropractors of Alberta, April 1, 1999, to March 31, 2000; and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, April 1, 1999, to March 31, 2000.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the November 20, 2000, report from the United Nations on the sexual commercialization of children.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to acknowledge on behalf of all members that today, November 21, is the 21st anniversary of the hon. Speaker of this House, who was first elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for the Barrhead-Westlock constituency in the by-election of November 21, 1979. I'd ask all members to join me in showing our congratulations on this occasion.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon guests who are seated in the members' gallery: Florence Burette from Belgium, who is with the Rotary International youth exchange hosted by the Westlock Rotary Club; Henricke Marsman from Holland, who is with the ASSE international exchange; and Liesa Barens from Germany, who is staying with farming relatives. These students are continuing their high school studies at R.F. Staples school in Westlock and are accompanied by Les Dunford, publisher of the *Town & Country*, a local weekly news publication. On your behalf I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 45 grade 6 students and their teachers Mrs. Esteves and Miss Ewald along with parent helpers Mrs. Adams and Mrs. Schramm from the Brander Gardens elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're here today to observe question period and to visit the Legislature, and they're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a pleasure for me to introduce 47 students who will be joining us at 2 o'clock. They were particularly interested in hearing the Premier respond to questions that will be asked. They are from Ekota elementary

school, and today they will be accompanied by Mrs. Andrea Cooper, Miss Colleen Reeder, and Mr. Donald Auch, all teachers at that school, and by parent Mrs. Heather Pollock. So I'm hoping that the Assembly will welcome them in absentia, because they will be following the transcript in *Hansard*.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two groups of students that I would like introduced to the Assembly this afternoon. The first group is from Terrace Heights school. There are two classes. There are 49 pleasant and polite students. They are accompanied today by their teacher Mr. Tom Jaques, also another teacher, Jennifer Bruns, and aid Toni Smith. Also joining the group are parent helpers Chris Hardeman, Dorothy Janetzki, Audrey Bliss, Lorna Doan, and Julie Green. Some of the students are in the public gallery, and if they would now rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly, I would be grateful.

Mr. Speaker, the second group that I would like to introduce this afternoon to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly is a group of 10 students. They are accompanied by their teacher Daiana Andreoli. They are from the Learning Store on Whyte, and I would like to say that one of these students has visited the Gold Bar constituency office to discuss issues of concern with me, and I was delighted that she took time from her schedule to come and visit. I would like to introduce Katey Brisson, Daemon Bordian, Craig Doran, Joel Byggdin, Amber Jacobs, Miranda Jacobs, Samantha Carter, Jodi Mandick, Jaime Mandick, and Ryan Cyr to all hon. members of the Assembly. They're in the public gallery, and if they would now rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly, I would be grateful.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly, seated in the public gallery, three visitors: Mr. Bill Brown and Ms Sheelagh Weslosky, accompanied by Mr. Thomas Lukaszuk, whose face will be a little more familiar in this Assembly in the very near future. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't sure that I'd be able to do this, but thank you very much. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly again my school. McDougall elementary/junior high school is here participating in the School at the Legislature program, and today they are watching the proceedings from the members' gallery. I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon I introduced to you and members of the Assembly some of the newly elected board of directors of the Alberta Long Term Care Association. I also note in the gallery today some other members of the Alberta Long Term Care Association who are attending the association's annual general meetings here in the city of Edmonton. They

are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they, too, rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and to introduce to you and through you to members of this Legislature the Team Alberta that looks after children who need protection from child abuse in the form of prostitution. They are from both Calgary and Edmonton and are seated in the public gallery. From the city of Edmonton police, Detective Guy Pilon and Detective Brian Robertson; from Wood's Homes in Calgary, Madelyn MacDonald, manager of the Safe House; from Calgary Rocky View child and family service authority, Ruth Copot, the executive manager, and Julia Casey, a prostitution worker; from Calgary as well, a volunteer protective worker, Karen Prosiak; from the Metis Child and Family Services, the executive director, Don Langford; Richard Ouelett, the manager of child and family services crisis unit from Ma'Mowe, and Kim Harboway, also from the Ma'Mowe region; Bev Oldham, the program manager of child and youth services from Catholic Social Services; Kevin Hood, manager of the protection of children involved in prostitution initiative; and from the city of Edmonton, police communications, Anette Bidniak. They are in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly representatives of CAUS, which is the Council of Alberta University Students. I met with three of them today, and I recognize one other one. They are Naomi Agard of the U of A, Leslie Church from the U of A, Dezmond Belzeck from U of Lethbridge, and Duncan Wojtaszek from U of C. They are meeting with MLAs to discuss two very important items: tuition and fees and student loans and learners' assistance. They are in the public gallery, and I would like them to now stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take an opportunity to introduce through you to members of the Assembly 27 students and their teacher. They're currently on their tour of the Assembly building and will be joining us shortly, but I would like it noted that they were visiting. They're visiting us from St. Martin's Catholic school: teacher Natalie Harasymiw and her 27 very, very dedicated students in the Ukrainian bilingual program. They'll be watching the proceedings shortly, and I'm sure that they will have many, many questions when they get back to their classroom.

Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Electric Utilities Deregulation

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier claimed that the electricity bills for residential consumers would go down in 2001 under his botched electricity deregulation scheme, more infamously known as the KEP.

Mr. Speaker, a September 15, 2000, information request filed by

ATCO Utilities to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board on the regulated rate option shows clearly that electricity rates will go up between 57 and 80 percent at least for residential customers in the year 2001. I'd like to table that document now. So either the Premier is being misinformed by the Ministry of Resource Development or he doesn't understand how electricity prices are set in Alberta or he's out of touch with the reality of skyrocketing electricity prices for residences, for seniors, for renters, for farmers, and for small businesses across Alberta.

My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier stand up in this Assembly and apologize to Albertans for spreading misinformation on electricity rates when the facts clearly show that electricity rates are going up under his deregulation scheme?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker, but I would suggest that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition should be apologizing to Albertans for the malicious scare tactics she's trying to use.

2:00

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why would the Premier deliberately misinform Albertans when he claimed that the electricity bill for an ATCO residential customer would go down by \$20 per month next year when the evidence from ATCO, which I have just tabled, shows it will go up by \$36.48 per month, a 45 percent increase including his infamous rebate?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this matter is now before the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. I don't know. Does this member assume or presume to prejudge what the board might or might not do? You know, this is a quasi-judicial board that is set up to hear applications for rate increases. We don't know what is going to happen. Is she suggesting now that perhaps she would like to direct the board to bring in a judgment that might coincide with her statements? I think that's very presumptuous of her.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Yes, and on the first assumption that the hon. Leader of the Opposition made, the rates regardless of what they are will go down \$20 a month starting January 1. So to tell somebody that the rates are not going to go down by \$20 is misleading the public. Again I reiterate that as the minister responsible for the balancing pool and what's going out, the rates that we're going to subtract the \$20 from will be determined by the EUB, which hasn't taken place yet, and therefore no matter what the letter is or what the assumption is from ATCO Electric, they do not have their rates set yet.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you. In fact, the ATCO numbers show that the rate would go up by 71 percent without the rebate, and we negative it down to 45 percent with the rebate, so my question is back to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. Does this Premier have one shred of evidence from his own researchers or from his own office which shows that electricity rates will do anything but go up, or is he simply trying to bury his own personal responsibility for skyrocketing electricity prices in Alberta come 2001?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, yes. Electricity rates are increasing. That is a fact. I would point out that the government is providing very generous shielding from rising electricity rates. In some cases, including the rebate and the \$20 monthly reduction in power rates, some households will benefit to the tune of some \$840. That's a

very significant amount of money.

We're doing all we can to try to encourage new energy to come onstream as quickly as possible. The demand is growing above the forecasted rate due to the outstanding economic conditions in this province, Mr. Speaker, but the main point here is that while electricity rates are going up, we've been able, because of prudent fiscal management, to provide very generous rebates and power rate reductions.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

THE SPEAKER: Before recognizing the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for her second main question, just a comment coming out of *Beauchesne* with respect to language. While this chair would certainly encourage vigorous, pointed questions and answers in the question period, it would like to point out that in the rules that we do follow, in *Beauchesne* 489 there are a number of phrases that have been ruled unparliamentary. There are a number of such phrases beginning with the word "deliberate:"

deliberate distortion, deliberate malignity, deliberate falsehood, deliberately distorted, deliberately misstated the truth, deliberately misled, deliberately misleading.

In 490, "since 1958" a few certain words, with respect, have been used in certain contexts, but *Beauchesne* 492 clearly looks at the phrase "deliberately misinforming," and it basically indicated that it has "caused intervention," and "deliberately misleading" is in there following "deliberately misinforming."

So look, let's be vigorous, let's be aggressive, and all of that, but let's also have some decorum.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. The second main question.

Electric Utilities Deregulation (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. EPCOR has also filed an information request with the Energy and Utilities Board comparing rates for residential and other customers in 2000 and 2001 for its southern Alberta customers, and I am happy to table that information for members of the House. My questions are again to the Premier. Will the Premier confirm that an average residential consumer in southern Alberta under EPCOR will see at least a 25 percent increase in their electricity bill next year under his deregulation scheme, not the decrease he wrongly claimed yesterday?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can't confirm anything that is before a regulatory agency. You know, they could go in and ask for a 300 or 400 percent increase. We don't know what is going to happen. This is a quasi-judicial board.

I can tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker. This government on behalf of the people of this province will be intervening in all of these cases where power companies are seeking rate increases. In the spirit of co-operation, rather than fear mongering, I would invite the Liberals to join with us in that intervention, because it is not in any one's political interest to see high power rates and to erode the Alberta advantage.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier confirm, then, that an average commercial customer in southern Alberta, according to EPCOR and the information that they have filed with the EUB, will see at least a 33 percent increase in their electricity bill in 2001 under his deregulation scheme?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, it would be highly inappropriate for anyone to really comment on a situation that is now before a regulatory agency. I have indicated that there are a number of applications for rate increases, and this government will be intervening to protect as much as we possibly can the interests of Albertans.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, will the Premier confirm that an average farmer in southern Alberta, under the EPCOR rules and the EPCOR filing, will see a 57 percent increase in their electricity bills according to the EPCOR documents filed with the EUB?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, I can't confirm anything because this is now before a regulatory agency, a quasi-judicial process.

Mr. Speaker, I can confirm, however, that we have put in place for the farm community, for the business community, for the institutional community a program that is close to \$800 million to alleviate the rising costs of electricity. I can confirm that.

THE SPEAKER: Third question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Electric Utility Costs

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta classrooms are overcrowded and are lacking adequate resources to deal with special education needs of our students. Parents continue to work casinos and fund-raisers to pay for basic education needs. The government's own numbers indicate that an average elementary school with 175 students will see its monthly electricity bill increase by \$1,474 – these are the government's own numbers – while receiving a rebate of \$393 per month, leaving a shortfall of nearly \$1,100 per month to our typical elementary school. My questions are to this Premier. What part of the school budget is the government advising elementary school principals to take the money out of to pay for an extra \$1,100 to buy the electricity they need to light the school?

MR. KLEIN: This is pure speculation, and the member's statements are not entirely true, because what she fails to mention is the \$800 million rebate program that we have put in place to help institutions such as schools.

2:10

Relative to this particular case, Mr. Speaker, some work is being done in conjunction with the Treasurer and the hon. Minister of Learning, and I'll have both these ministers respond.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, we are working with Learning through Treasury to look at how we can mitigate some of the cost of the energy, natural gas and electricity, and the amount of rise in the fuel cost used in buses and otherwise. We'll be looking at that between the two departments. Out of a \$4 and a half billion budget that we have involved in Learning, we're probably looking at something between \$12 million and \$30 million for Learning if we could find it either internally or through operation and maintenance, working with Infrastructure. This will not be directed only to Learning, but we'll also be looking at health care and other public buildings in the province of Alberta.

I believe that on a percentage basis they're trying to scare the public and the parents and the schools into thinking that something is totally out of control, but I would suggest that \$15 million, plus or minus, to address electricity out of a \$17 and a half billion budget is not something to alarm Albertans about.

THE SPEAKER: Short? Okay.

DR. OBERG: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was just going to add one point, and that is that the school boards together with the universities and the public sector are looking through their organization called PICA to enter the upcoming energy auction to attempt to get lower prices. I believe that this is a very good way for the schools and the universities to purchase lower priced energy, and they are presently in the process of doing that.

MRS. MacBETH: So, in other words, school boards have to hire a market analyst in electricity, and maybe they'll pay for that too.

My question is back to the Premier. With Alberta Learning's last annual budget recording that 26 of the provincial school boards ran operating deficits last year, how many more school boards are going to be forced into a deficit position because of this government's skyrocketing electricity prices?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I will have the hon. Minister of Learning respond, followed by the Provincial Treasurer.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The reason that 26 boards ran deficits is quite simply that they dipped into their operating reserves. By dipping into their operating reserves, they showed a deficit in their operating budget. This was a planned expense, and these boards did not have a deficit.

DR. WEST: And, Mr. Speaker, on top of that last year we put 158 some million dollars into picking up some deficits in this province, and besides picking up deficits, like with the Calgary school board, we also applied those dollars through to the other boards and some of them are running surpluses today. I would suggest that in the three-year business plans we also put another 19 percent increase over the three years into the Department of Learning.

I would think that if we can't accommodate some of the ups and downs of a budget of that largesse, then we're not very good managers. I would suggest that the hon. member of the Liberal opposition stop fear mongering out there to the general public. Indeed, most of these administrative changes are internal to any organization and not just to education or to health or to running law courts or to running your individual homes or businesses. I believe that time and records will show that this type of direction by the opposition . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, please proceed with your next question.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the Provincial Treasurer and the Premier would love to blame the utility companies, but the responsibility for this is squarely with the provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, given that grants for grades 1 through 9 were scheduled to increase by \$123 per student next year but now electricity bills, according to ATCO and EPCOR and the government's own numbers, could increase by \$75 per student, will this government commit to increasing student grants so that our children won't be penalized for the mismanagement of electricity deregulation in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that question has been answered, but I would point out that there has been absolutely no mismanagement, and, yes, we will ensure that our children, the children of this province, are well educated in accordance with the rules and regulations set down by a very competent Minister of Learning.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. deputy leader of the third party.

Natural Gas Pricing

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's policy has supported the wholesale export of Alberta natural gas into the American market forcing Albertans to pay California prices for natural gas. Yesterday the price of natural gas crossed the threshold of \$8 Canadian per gigajoule, an all-time high. Royalty revenue from natural gas prices is pouring into the provincial treasury at a record rate, yet Albertans are being threatened with bankruptcy and cutbacks in school programs because they can't afford to pay for basic utilities. To the Premier: given record high prices for natural gas, what does the government plan to assist school boards, universities, health authorities, municipalities as well as average Alberta households with skyrocketing utility prices?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to natural gas, yes, we're very fortunate to be the gas producer of the nation, and, yes, the price of gas is contributing significantly to provincial government coffers. That's why we've been able to provide a \$300 rebate to every individual over the age of 16. That's why we're able, in conjunction with the Provincial Treasurer and the Minister of Resource Development, to look at what we can do to further assist in the area of public institutions, including schools and universities and hospitals.

I would remind the hon. member that in Alberta the price of gas per gigajoule is \$5.80. That's the November price. In Calgary it's \$6.16. In Regina it's \$6.25. In Manitoba it's \$6.37. In British Columbia it's \$7.57. That's Vancouver. In Toronto it's \$7.84, and, Mr. Speaker, in Montreal it's \$11.08. We're still the lowest.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I hope the Premier's numbers check out a little better than the ones he gave yesterday in the House.

Given the huge benefit of record high natural gas prices to the provincial treasury and the energy industry, why will the government not commit to a plan that will directly assist public institutions with rising utility costs?

MR. KLEIN: We have, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to comment on a comment that was made by the hon. member. The prices that I have quoted, Mr. Speaker, are accurate prices. The source is the *Canadian Gas Price Reporter*, and it comes from the October and November 2000 issues.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier say that the government has done all that it can to address skyrocketing utility costs when school boards, universities, health authorities, municipalities, and average Alberta households clearly can't afford to keep paying more and more for their gas and electricity?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have never said that we're doing all that we can. If there's more that needs to be done, we will do it, but let's talk about what we have done: three rebate programs, one in the order of \$800 million, to alleviate the rising costs of electricity as it relates to businesses, farm communities, public institutions; a \$20 a month rebate or reduction in everyone's electricity bill, starting January 1; and a \$300 cash rebate to every Albertan over the age of 16, the first installment of which will be going out, I think, within the week.

2:20

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, could I just add one thing to what the Premier just said? Rising gas prices and that do return quite a bit of royalties to the province, but we're forgetting one thing. In the

province of Alberta, besides the rebates that the Premier is talking about, we have been able, starting January 1, to lower personal income taxes by 20 percent in this province. We have been able to lower the education portion of the property taxes on residential properties. We are able to start rolling back small business taxes and corporate taxes. All of these will help these individual residences, buildings, businesses to pay their increase in electrical and their increase in gas costs. As we go forward, since '94 till now, because of the buoyancy in the oil and gas industry, we have been able to lower our debt to \$8 billion, releasing \$1 billion in interest. As well, we have been able to address individual needs . . .

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Child Prostitution

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a few weeks ago the president of a community association in my riding came to my office to raise issues on prostitution activities – these activities threaten the health and the safety of the residents and the young people, especially those involved – my question is to the hon. Minister of Children's Services. In light of the pending decision on the judicial review, what are you going to do to protect the youth against prostitution?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it's well known by yourself that there has been a tabling today. I will not reference that. Rather, I will talk about the fact that since Judge Jordan provided a ruling that raised questions about the PCHIP Act, we have gone to court with two pieces of legislation: the PCHIP Act as well as the Child Welfare Act. We have taken the time to do our best to provide all of that legislative support when an apprehension takes place. We have in fact taken the time to evaluate and discuss with the members of the street teams, members that I've introduced here today, what the options are in which we could deploy to provide strength and even greater program delivery to those children who are in fact sexually abused by the predators and pimps that have been among them in this society.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. What specific action are you proposing?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, in a summary, and more to come later, we are proposing an extension of an opportunity for confinement, and we are proposing an opportunity for additional treatments in a situation where the director would bring that forward towards the courts as a valued and responsible thing to do for the child. We are proposing to make those kinds of treatments available for a longer period of time and in fact an extension beyond a first extension to enable the child to be free from abuse and to get whatever corrective action is possible for any substance abuse that might have occurred during the time prior to their apprehension.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is to the same minister. What is the government doing to help children at risk in the interim?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, regrettably there was a delay of some of

the apprehensions in that period first following Judge Jordan's ruling, but since that time at least 23 children have been apprehended using either the PCHIP Act or the new policy directives under the Child Welfare Act. I'm very confident that the work that has been done to try and protect these exploited children has been maintaining its consistency in the last few weeks. We've had such rigorous support of the legislation that may come forward later that we are very pleased that we can report that we are working as well as we possibly can.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

School Infrastructure Grants

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With a three-quarter billion dollar backlog of needed school repairs and construction the government has announced the new century schools fund. Edmonton public and Edmonton Catholic schools received \$6.6 million, or about 2.8 percent of the \$238 million in grants. My questions are to the Minister of Infrastructure. Does the minister deem this grant to the Edmonton boards fair given the age of their current school building stock and the need for schools in suburbs?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to inform this House that the criteria that have been established for new school construction, modernization, and renovation is fully transparent, and all school boards know what they have to do to meet the current criteria.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How then did the minister determine the allocation of these moneys when the Auditor General has indicated that the goals of his department and the goals of the Department of Learning don't necessarily match? So how do you come up with the allocation?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the hon. member is coming from in terms of the goals. [interjections] No, he's the one that said that, not the Auditor General. He's the one that made that statement here in the House.

One of the things that we have in the Department of Infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, is a very close working relationship with a number of ministries. One is the Minister of Learning, the other is the minister of health. We also work with the Minister of Community Development. What happens is that the programming is decided upon by those various ministries. Then they come to us in terms of infrastructure and ask us to find the funds necessary to put those facilities in place.

Now, with respect to the dollars that were given, I repeat: there are very clear criteria established by the School Boards Association of this province. If you don't like those criteria, go back and get them changed with the authority.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can the minister explain to this Assembly why local school board priorities are not honoured when school building grants are determined and allocated? Why don't you honour those priorities?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, again the hon. member is saying, "not honoured." We put \$235 million in additional funds this year that have to be expended before the end of this budget year, March 31, 2001, and a further \$400 million in the budget year 2001-2002. This morning I even told all of the school boards that were in attendance today that we know that all of that construction cannot occur. Over a billion dollars worth of construction and renovation in this province cannot occur in one year. It may take three years to do it all, and we will partner with them. We'll park the money with them. They can draw interest on it and plan all of their construction in a very co-ordinated way and get the best value for their tax dollars.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Hormones in Meat Exports

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. There's a preliminary report out by the European Commission that questions Canada's control of chemical residues, including hormones, in live animals and animal products. It goes on to recommend that the European Commission ensure that Canada food commodities of animal origin not be imported until these deficiencies have been rectified. As Alberta is an exporter of beef and animal products to the European Community, would the minister please update this House as to what is taking place and what the minister is doing about it?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is happening is protectionism at its very worst. It's true that there is a mechanism in the WTO's systems where sanitary and phytosanitary items can be identified, but to say that Canada is outside of those is really a stretch. The fact is that we have some of the safest processing and the best protocol in the world in Canada, and Alberta, of course, has extremely good and tight regulations relative to the safety of food.

Now, it's an interesting situation, because in Canada we restrict the sale of drugs and the sale of certain hormones, whereas in the European Union they just restrict the use. So, of course, there is much more danger in the European Union, in fact, of products getting into the food chain that should not be there.

It's also quite interesting to note that the European Union has great difficulty with disease. I believe that probably a lot of this is to draw attention away from their problems and focus it on another area. But I can assure the people of Alberta and the people of Canada that the meat in this province and in this country is extremely safe. The protocol is there, and it's adhered to.

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the minister indicate what the next steps are, and how will Alberta insist in ensuring that this decision is overturned?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, another interesting thing to note is that in fact the Europeans have not found any contaminants in the samples that they have conducted, but the process is one where they do an audit, and that is what's happened. This is a draft report. The audit is sent to Canada, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Health Canada will be responding to it. It then goes back, and the

final report out of the EU should be available sometime in the latter part of December.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how significant to Alberta's economy is our export of meat products to the European Community?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, out of Alberta there's only about \$1 million worth of product that goes to the EU. Really that's only about .04 percent of our total exports, so it's not large. I guess what we are really concerned about is that in fact the European Union would indicate that there is a problem with the safety of our meat products in Canada, and that is just simply not the case. We will be working very closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Health Canada to prove that it's not the case.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Workers' Compensation Review

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, who's responsible for the Workers' Compensation Board, released two separate reports condemning the Workers' Compensation Board as unfair and unaccountable. The first report on the appeal system, chaired by retired Justice Friedman, found that workers, employers, and advocates had an overall dissatisfaction rate of 70 percent with the effectiveness of the system. The report states:

Each Committee member has expressed concern about what seems to be a well-entrenched culture of denial within the [Workers' Compensation Board] and one which treats many long-term disability claimants with suspicion.

Further, the report states that "the greatest and most immediate need is to bring accountability into the appeals process." My questions are for the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. In response to a question from the media yesterday, I heard the minister say that he was not surprised by the findings of the reports, and if that is the case, why did he not act before now?

MR. DUNFORD: I would just like to remind the hon. member of the process that we went through. There had been a number of letters that had been received by the ministry and of course we were aware of certain activities that were taking place on the streets here in Edmonton. Clearly, action was required, and I believe that I accepted the responsibility of that action. I put together two committees to look into the situation, and we released those reports the other day.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit to this House that he will make every effort to implement the majority of the excellent recommendations contained in the two reports, as he indicated in his letter dated June 20, 2000, to Mr. Allan Jobson, an injured worker in Calgary, where the minister said:

Later in the fall when the review process is complete, I will forward the committees' findings to Rick Lelacheur, Chair, the Board of Directors and Mary Cameron, CEO and President of [the Workers' Compensation Board] for implementation.

MR. DUNFORD: That in fact has been done in the sense that copies of the report, as they were released to the public yesterday, were forwarded to the Workers' Compensation Board, and I've asked for a response and a plan of action as to how they plan to deal with the recommendations.

In the meantime, of course, there are other stakeholders in the province that have to have an opportunity now to react to the recommendations, and of course, Mr. Speaker, we will be allowing an opportunity for that to happen. The time frame that's been set is that they have until January 31 of 2001 to respond.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, in a WCB news release today it states, "The recommendations will be incorporated into the WCB's service consultation review." Does this mean that the minister has transferred the implementation of these recommendations of the two reports to the Workers' Compensation Board?

MR. DUNFORD: Not at all, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member should know – and I assume that he does – the recommendations covered not only legislation and regulation but also policy. As the hon. member is also aware, my responsibility as far as it relates to Workers' Compensation is for the administration of the act, and of course I accept that responsibility. As he knows, within the act there is a board of directors that is then responsible for the day-to-day operation of Workers' Compensation. So I would expect them to look very closely at those recommendations that call for policy changes, and I'll make the commitment. I'll accept what responsibility I have as to whether or not there will be changes in legislation and regulation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Fraudulent Telemarketing

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fraudulent telemarketers and mail-order swindlers will steal millions of dollars this year from Albertans. These professional con artists peddle everything and anything. These scam artists are very inventive and persuasive. Telephone calls and colourful mailers offering products at greatly reduced rates and free prizes can sound very exciting, but simply they are lies. My questions are all to the Minister of Government Services. Given the recent telephone scam where people are being contacted and told that someone in their family is ill or in trouble and are being asked to call a number with an 890 area code, which creates long-distance charges, what is your department doing about this?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Telephone marketing scams are becoming a way of life today as we have more electronic transfers, I guess, and the high-tech industry is moving into some of the marketing schemes. The hon. member is quite right. We have seen an increase in some of these scams in the province of Alberta. In fact, this last year we've had over \$600,000 worth of complaints that have come through to the consumer side of our ministry.

I will say at the very beginning that if you're offered something that sounds too good to be true, it probably is. So consumers need to be aware that they should not be conned into thinking they're getting something for nothing or getting a special deal without fully investigating it.

In this particular case of people phoning with regard to this 890

area code, the RCMP and the local police were on to this scam very quickly and issued a full alert to consumers and to regulators throughout the province and across Canada.

What we are able to do is to work with the authorities to help warn people against some of these scam artists. We have a consumer information line that we have put in place this year – it actually has had over 80,000 calls to it – where we ask people to call in before you make the commitment. Call in even if you have, and if you need help, we will help you out. It's a toll-free number.

We've been trying to launch more awareness on, again, trying not to be suckered into the deal of: have I got a deal for you. These freebies just are not that. They are scams.

We're working with the authorities, the police – the local police and the RCMP – and other jurisdictions to make awareness out there for consumers.

2:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most of my second question has been answered by the minister, so I'll go to my third one, please. Given that these fly-by-night or boiler room operations, as they are commonly known, are using leased office space and can pack up in a flash, what laws are in effect to protect Albertans?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, again we worked hard this last year. As most members will remember, we brought in place a new Fair Trading Act in the province, which puts some meat into the penalties and provided for some protection for consumers. This act has penalties of up to \$100,000 and/or two years in jail.

This first year of operation we have actually completed 1,600 investigations under this act under consumer protection, so it is working. We are going to continue to be tough but fair as far as our consumer protection legislation goes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

School Board Finances

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the government pretends that public education is adequately funded. In fact, they've repeated this fallacy so often that they've actually begun to believe it. While the government's ministers are off touring Poland and Mexico, parents, students, and teachers are left behind back home selling entertainment books and working casinos to try to pay for school basics or just fighting to keep their community school open. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Why is the Peace River school board being forced to consider closing up to 10 community schools, including Whitelaw and Nampa, while the government has a \$5 billion surplus and enough money for cabinet ministers to tour all over the world at taxpayers' expense?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To start this off, I would just like to say that the hon. member was recently in the Strathmore-Brooks constituency to hear some issues. She stood up here in the Legislature and talked about highway 1 and highway 38. There is no highway 38, and that wasn't even where the intersection was where there were problems. I think this hon. member should take a look around when she is traveling around the province at taxpayers' expense and at least find out what the issues are before she talks about it in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member has talked about is the issue in Peace River. In Peace River they have some schools where the attendance is down. They are looking at what to do with them. They are looking at possible different explanations as to how they can group their students to give the students the most learning opportunities that they can.

The Department of Learning is about learning opportunities. We have increased the budget this year alone 8.8 percent, and that is money that has gone directly to the school boards. In our business plan, as the hon. member knows, there's a 19 percent increase over the next three years.

Mr. Speaker, I would invite the minister for intergovernmental affairs to comment on travel around the world.

THE SPEAKER: No. We're going to go on.

The hon. member.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Learning. How is it that after waiting nine months for a dyslexia diagnosis at the Glenrose, a Grande Cache family's nine-year-old daughter is placed in a classroom with 33 other students and no special help, yet this government has a \$5 billion surplus and a team of ministerial globe-trotters?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I just wonder what the hon. member's constituents would say when she comes down to Brooks and she doesn't know what is going on. Perhaps she should actually listen when she comes to a meeting. The people in my constituency were asking, "When are we going to be getting highway 38?" because it hasn't been there before.

What the hon. member has asked the question about has to do with the flexibility of the school boards. The school boards are given a grant at this moment for X number of dollars per student. It is up to the school board then how that grant is dished out, how it is done. Mr. Speaker, that is the way it is done. The school board receives the grants. The school board then allocates it out. A class of 33; again, I don't know the individual circumstances, but I'd be more than happy to talk about class size at any time with this hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. Will the minister explain, then, how it is that a school in Claresholm has no proper music or physical education programs, a shortage of classrooms, and grades 2 and 6 classes with over 30 students while your government has a \$5 billion surplus and enough money for cabinet to take trips to Asia and Europe?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I simply have to comment, and I'll stand on the record of priorities for education and health in this province. I am disappointed in the hon. member opposite, and frankly I am surprised by her comments, because as a person who has sat in this Legislature, as a citizen and a well-educated person, she must understand that 1 in 3 jobs in this province depends on international travel. She must understand that about 80 percent of what we produce in this province is exported. She must understand that the livelihood, the education, the health care of every citizen in this province depends on international trade.

To suggest that any minister travels for any other reason than to sell Alberta and the Alberta advantage does this hon. member disservice. As I said, I am disappointed and certainly expected more knowledge of the importance of international trade in this area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Classroom Sizes

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know teachers play a very important role in the success and development of our children. They strive to ensure that every child is safe, motivated, and challenged. Teachers and parents continue to share with me their concerns about the size of some of the classrooms in local schools, especially in the younger grades. My question is for the Minister of Learning. If we know that smaller class sizes help teachers in delivering the highest quality of education, why do we not set a maximum limit on class sizes?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, that's an absolutely excellent question, and it's great to get such a good question. I have looked at the issue of class size backwards and forwards and every way within. [interjections] If the hon. members across the way would like to hear the answer, perhaps they could be quiet.

I recently received what is called a small-class project which deals with the whole issue of class size. This was the project that was done in Edmonton, and it was dealt with with the \$500,000 that we gave to the Edmonton public school system. I will just comment on some of the statements that they have made in this. First of all, what they did is they reviewed the literature around the world. They reviewed the literature on class size. The first comment they make is that in 1998 Jeremy Finn, who had reviewed all the literature, says that he believes that the issues around class size persist because of the, and I quote: powerful commonsense appeal of small classes to alleviate problems indigenous to our classrooms.

They go on further, and they talk about the STAR project. The STAR one was a project in Tennessee that realistically set the tone for what is happening in class size. Upon critiquing the STAR project, a Mr. Hanushek says: the net benefit to achievement was a onetime one-quarter standard deviation improvement in test scores for those kindergarten or first grade children in small classes; although the initial gain was maintained, scores did not continue to improve.

I will go to the Calgary board of education. I believe this is very important. Lytton and Pyryt in 1998 did a study on the Calgary board of education. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I know that they don't believe Calgary has anything to do with Alberta, but it is extremely important to us. Lytton and Pyryt found that one variable that appeared to have no practical effect on achievement was class size.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, I trust you have copies to table.

2:50

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is to the same minister. What is the government doing to reduce class sizes in high-needs schools?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I alluded, we gave \$500,000 to the Edmonton public school system to identify this exact issue. To decrease the class size in high-needs schools in grade 1, \$500,000 was put into the Edmonton public school system. The results of that were very, very positive.

The bottom line is that when it comes to class size funding, school boards must have the flexibility. They must have the flexibility to do one-on-one teaching. They must have the flexibility to indeed, in some cases, decrease class size. They must have that flexibility.

As a matter of fact, I've spent over the last five days with the

School Boards Association and the various school boards around the province, and almost to a T, when posed with that question, they said that they would opt for flexibility as opposed to me enveloping funds and forcing a class size upon them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is the minister's response to parents and teachers who say that current class sizes are affecting the performance of Alberta students?

DR. OBERG: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, when you take a look at our achievement tests, when you take a look at our standings around the world, when you take a look at any parameter that we are measured with with students around the world, what we see is that everything . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Aren't you going to do anything about class size?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert has asked about class size. Obviously she is not listening to what I'm saying, so perhaps she just could be listening.

Our students have increased significantly over the past three and four years in all aspects of achievement tests. Mr. Speaker, our diploma exams are down slightly this year, but our students in Alberta are getting excellent education and are only improving.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: In 30 seconds, hon. members, I'll call upon the first of three members today to participate in Members' Statements.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Students Against Drinking and Driving

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity today to congratulate a group of people in my community who believe that youth leadership and a positive attitude are the best methods for saving lives and preventing injuries caused by drinking and driving.

Dedicated to addressing the issues of impaired driving, Students Against Drinking and Driving, or SADD, encourages student awareness of the consequences of driving while under the influence of alcohol. Promoting alternatives to drinking and driving, SADD encourages students not to participate in activities that may end with destructive and often fatal consequences. Instead, SADD chapters work with students all over Canada in an effort to build their confidence and learn how to manage their behaviour in ways that result in safer choices.

Mr. Speaker, recently I had the pleasure of receiving a banner from Students Against Drinking and Driving chapters in the Medicine Hat area. There are currently chapters active at Crescent Heights high school in Medicine Hat and Eagle Butte high school in Dunmore. They presented me with a banner signed by hundreds of students from throughout southeastern Alberta, along with a letter congratulating the government on recent legislative changes. They also encouraged us to continue to support programs aimed at reducing impaired driving.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the use of props in the Legislative Assembly is prohibited by our Standing Orders, so I am unable to display the banner at this time. I would, however, like to thank you and your staff for assisting me in having the banner displayed in an appropriate place in the Legislature Building. This morning I was

pleased to have you join me as a photograph was taken. It is my intention to return the banner as well as copies of the photograph to the students at Crescent Heights high school.

I ask all members to join me in extending congratulations to these outstanding students.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Persons with Disabilities

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things I want to do before I leave this distinguished room, the Legislative Assembly, is get on record the priorities for persons with disabilities, as I see them. This should be of particular interest to the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, the chairman of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and to the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

Parking. The parking situation has become ridiculous, with a sevenfold increase in placards in recent years. There is a solution that's a no-brainer. The solution is that you have a two-tiered system: wider stalls for wheelchair use only – they would be identified maybe with a red placard – and then family parking for the elderly, expectant mothers, and people with small children, that would be identified with a different-coloured placard, possibly blue.

The building code. The building code has to be revamped. We still have architects and planners in this city who build a wheelchair ramp in front of a handicap parking stall. When you park, you can't get on the sidewalk. Or they design a nice cubicle in the washroom, but the door goes inside instead of out, so when you get in there, you can't close the door behind you. It has to be spelled out in detail for some of them.

Education. What the Minister of Learning did at NorQuest, the learning centre, is good. I toured that the other day, and that concept should be pushed even further.

AISH. I think the minister is reviewing AISH. At least, I hope he is. There is a need for an ongoing review of regulations. Home care: we need sufficient funds for home care because disabled persons, like anybody else, prefer to live in the community instead of an institution.

Employment. There's always a shortage of employment, particularly for persons with very severe disabilities. For somebody like myself, it's not too difficult, but for somebody with a real severe difficulty, it's very difficult.

In that short period of time of two minutes I've spelled out those five as the priorities that have been relayed to me by persons with disabilities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Affordable Housing

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. November 22 is national housing strategy day to mark the second anniversary of the meeting of big-city mayors and the caucus of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which declared homelessness to be a national disaster.

In Calgary the number of homeless people continues to increase. The city of Calgary census of the homeless in May showed an increase of 800 people in spite of the excellent work being done by the Calgary Homeless Foundation, the drop-in centre, the Salvation Army, the Mustard Seed, the Inn from the Cold, and other frontline agencies.

Many people are drawn to Alberta in search of a new way of life due to our vibrant economy and our high employment rate. Mr.

Speaker, they find jobs. What they cannot find are affordable homes. The buildings today being done consist of high-scale condominiums and costly suburban family housing. There's a great need for affordable housing for single men and women, young couples starting out, and low-income families. Today there is an ever increasing number of families and children on the street.

When I attended the national symposium on homelessness held in Toronto, there was a consensus that strong action is necessary by three levels of government and the whole community to address this growing problem. Many initiatives were put forward as possible ways to increase affordable housing. Some suggestions included tax credits for developers and builders, a GST exemption on affordable housing building material, and an easement of municipal zoning bylaws to encourage the creation of secondary suites.

Measures to keep people in their homes once they have found affordable housing would include a range of support services to meet their needs and prevent eviction. This support service could be as simple as a loan of \$38 to make up a shortage in their rent or perhaps directing a person to the appropriate agency for assistance with their problems.

Emergency shelters are only stopgaps. They provide a mat to sleep on and a roof over your head, but they're not an adequate form of housing, and when it's time to leave, where do you go?

Homelessness is a growing problem which affects all of us, and an important solution is affordable housing, which requires the efforts of everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a point of order.

Point of Order

Questions outside Ministerial Responsibility

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The point of order arises from the first set of questions by the Leader of the Official Opposition to the hon. Premier. I think it was the first answer to the first question. There was a surprising intervention by the Provincial Treasurer. Now, the authorities I would cite would be *Beauchesne* 409(6) and then also, if we look at *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 427. We talk about questions that should not "address a Minister's former portfolio or any other presumed functions."

3:00

I was looking at this grand new seating plan for the Legislative Assembly – I think this has just been redone – and as I look at the list for the bench opposite, I see we have somebody described as the Member for Athabasca-Wabasca, Minister of Resource Development. Then I look down and I see that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster is designated Provincial Treasurer. Now, I listened carefully, and although I haven't seen the Blues, the question did not relate to anything within the responsibility of the Provincial Treasurer. The response, more surprisingly, would have been perfectly appropriate coming from somebody who was responsible for Resource Development, but what we heard was the Provincial Treasurer speaking about the energy program and the energy policy of the province of Alberta.

I guess my question is this, Mr. Speaker. You've been encouraging us in the short life so far of this fall session to make sure we refer to members by their proper title, but you'll understand if members opposite are a little puzzled, because we're not sure, now, who is going to answer questions for the energy policy of the government of the province of Alberta, if not the Premier. I'm sure that quite

apart from whatever embarrassment may be done to the minister who has that responsibility by having his overeager colleague spring to action, it does make it a bit puzzling. I suppose if we're going to allow the Provincial Treasurer to answer and supplement those kinds of questions, then I trust that you will permit me and my colleagues to put questions to such members as we choose rather than those that fall simply within their narrow departmental and portfolio responsibility.

Thank you very much.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Opposition House Leader obviously didn't listen very clearly to the answer of the Provincial Treasurer. He very clearly said, when he got to his feet – I heard him; mind you, I'm sitting quite close – that he was the minister responsible for the power balancing pool. He has responsibility in this area. When the members of the opposition want to raise questions about how Albertans are affected by power rates, that clearly falls into the area of the power balancing pool and very clearly falls into the competence of the Provincial Treasurer to comment on it.

As well, however, members opposite have been straying into other areas relative to that context of energy and how it relates to learning and how it relates to other areas. One of the areas that clearly he had talked about was the effect on Albertans of the government's fiscal policies relative to energy and other areas. The Treasurer is certainly competent to talk about the benefit that Albertans get, the Alberta advantage, which comes from the prudent fiscal management of this province resulting in moneys available to provide for tax relief and for energy tax rebates, which are clearly within the purview and competence of the Provincial Treasurer.

Specifically with respect to that particular question, the Provincial Treasurer provided his grounds of competence to answer the question in his answer to the question.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the point of order raised today by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo was an interesting one, but clearly the response is found in the various rules of the books that we generally follow, *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo did refer to *Beauchesne* 409(6).

A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government. The Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his or her present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio.

Generally that's viewed to mean the following: that when a question comes along to the minister asking the minister to review something that's happened in Switzerland, there would be an intervention because that clearly is not within the administrative competence of the government, of this government anyway, in terms of something afar. Generally that's the way we've dealt with it.

Now, more interestingly, though, perhaps it's prudent once in a while to review some of these things. Under "Replies to Oral Questions" in *Beauchesne* 416:

(1) A Minister may decline to answer a question without stating the reason for refusing, and insistence on an answer is out of order, with no debate being allowed. A refusal to answer cannot be raised as a question of privilege, nor is it regular to comment upon such a refusal. A Member may put a question but has no right to insist upon an answer.

(2) An answer to a question cannot be insisted upon if the answer be refused by the Minister on the ground of the public interest; nor can the question be replaced on the Notice Paper. The refusal of a Minister to answer on this ground cannot be raised as a matter of privilege.

417. Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate. I like that rule.

418. The Speaker has stated, "Hon. Members may not realize it but questions are actually put to the Government. The Government decides who will answer."

Questions do not go to ministers. They go to ministers as members of a government.

419. The Prime Minister answers for the government as a whole and is entitled to answer any question relating to any ministerial portfolio and matter of policy. Likewise, the Prime Minister is entitled to delegate this responsibility to the Deputy Prime Minister even when the Prime Minister is present in the House.

420. The Speaker has stated, "Of course, the Chair will allow a question to be put to a certain Minister; but it cannot insist that that Minister rather than another should answer it."

Then, interestingly enough, in that excellent book called *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which certainly both House leaders have and which the chair would like to advise both House leaders that the chair regularly spends Saturday mornings reviewing, the chair would simply like to draw to the attention of all hon. members – I believe this is on page 432:

Questions, although customarily addressed to specific Ministers, are directed to the Ministry as a whole. It is the prerogative of the government to designate which Minister responds to which question. The Prime Minister (or the Deputy Prime Minister or any other Minister acting on behalf of the Prime Minister) may respond to any or all questions posed during Question Period. Only one Minister may respond to a question, and it need not be the one to whom the question is addressed who actually answers it. A different Minister may, under certain circumstances, reply to a supplementary question. The Speaker has no authority to compel a particular Minister to respond to a question.

Okay. The bottom line is this. In the order of precedence that we have in this House – and this has been utilized before – it's the chair's understanding that the Provincial Treasurer in fact acts first in the order of precedence after the Premier. So that would, in essence, be akin to something coming out of *Beauchesne* and the Canadian House of Commons saying that one would be the Prime Minister, i.e. the first minister, and the other one would be the Deputy Prime Minister, or the second minister. Clearly, in the order of precedence that would provide the hon. Provincial Treasurer to supplement an answer.

Secondly, in hearing the first question – and the chair did pay particular attention to it – one could almost argue that because it had to do with electricity, had to do with the fiscal side, the economic side, it would be rather normal for the Provincial Treasurer to supplement if there was something worthy to supplement or add to the question at hand.

Now, very specifically to you, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Should the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo or any other member in this House choose to direct a question to any member of Executive Council and it is not within the administrative purview of the particular minister – as an example, if an hon. member wanted to address a question with respect to education but directed it to the Minister of Community Development as a kind of a pesky, you know, testy little thing to be mischievous, well, it would be quickly reported by all the media in the world that the hon. member who had directed the question had not done their homework and was unable to ascertain which particular minister of Executive Council was responsible particularly.

So it's a sharp-edged sword that cuts both ways. The bottom line is: if we address the questions to who is normally the minister of the department responsible for it, other ministers from time to time are

in a position to supplement. In the case of the order of precedence that we all follow in this particular House, it would not be uncommon for the Provincial Treasurer, who is first on the list in the order of precedence after the Premier, to be in a position to supplement, if we in fact abide by the rules found in other parliaments in the country of Canada. So it was worthy of discussion today, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Thank you very much.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 210

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate November 20: Mrs. Gordon]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to rise and speak in second reading on Bill 210, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000. I carefully read *Hansard* of the member who proposed the bill as well as *Hansard* of the several members who have spoken since then.

This is an interesting bill, because I think people, myself included, have a varied reaction to what's being proposed. When I first thought of this in my personal experience, certainly drunk drivers cause fatalities, but they also cause life-changing, lifelong injury. The fatality has a terrible effect on the members of their families and their friends who are left behind: perhaps office workers, business associates, friends at school, et cetera. But to me, certainly where my personal experience is, injuries caused by drunk drivers that don't result in fatalities also have a lifelong effect on family and friends and neighbours and coworkers and friends at school.

3:10

There is a story like that in my family. We had a family member who was driving from Regina to Saskatoon late at night. They were still feeling pretty good after a day of meetings and thought they'd drive back that evening. The roads should be fairly empty. A young person, who was well over the limit for blood alcohol and was driving the wrong way down one way of the dual carriageway, plowed into my family member and left them with lifelong injuries, multiple leg fractures which resulted in the person having to walk with a cane for the rest of their life. Essentially the side mirror came through and hit them in the face, as a result of the driver hitting them. Their jaw was rearranged and all of their teeth – there were extensive multiple operations to try and rebuild the teeth and the jaw – and they lost an eye.

I think drunk drivers have an effect on everybody in our society. Certainly the groups like MADD and PAID – and I think there's a student version of this as well – have been absolutely right and quite successful in publicizing the effects of drunk driving on our society. Those campaigns are often referred to by people as being successful, and I think the reduction that we can see in the fatalities and injuries caused by impaired drivers is obvious. They have contributed to this being less acceptable. Drinking and driving is less acceptable in society.

Just to return briefly to finishing this story, I think certainly the effect it had on my family member and on the rest of the family is that this person used to drive a lot. They really liked to get in the car and drive to Montana or drive down east, and with those kinds of

injuries they sustained, that just isn't a possibility anymore. I think flying is not in a budgetary realm of possibilities, so that's pretty much curtailed that sort of traveling. This person was very active, did a lot of volunteering, very active with the church, continued to work a number of different consulting positions, and this has really affected their ability to do that. You know, when you're not steady on your pins because of an injury, you don't really like to be out at night when it's dark. We live in a northern climate here, so we are dealing with icy roads and icy sidewalks. It's scary for somebody that has suffered that kind of an injury.

As I said, they were dealing with Saskatchewan insurance laws, which I frankly don't understand, and I gather that this young driver had been arrested before for impaired driving, in fact had lost their licence and was driving that night without a licence. Something happened with the insurance, something about a fund that's set aside for uninsured drivers, and you know, by the time the smoke cleared, this injury cost my family a lot of money because the amount of money that came out of that pool nowhere near covered the trips of family members from Alberta into Saskatchewan to be with this person in the hospital, and there had to be several of them. They were in the hospital for about three months, and that tells you the extent of their injuries.

So it's a terrible blight on our society. I really, truly detest drunks, and I detest drunken drivers. I just have no time or patience. There is no reason for anybody to be truly impaired and to get behind the wheel of a vehicle. There just isn't. Frankly, they deserve everything they get.

Now, I look at the member's own figures that I took from *Hansard*, and I've noticed something. Maybe the member will have time to answer what's going on here. In her own figures she notes that of the fatalities caused by drunk drivers, 62 percent were over 15 percent, or .15, we would call it, 22 percent were between .081 and .15, and 16 percent were somewhere between .001 and .08. So somehow in there the percentage of fatalities that are created by lowering the acceptable blood alcohol content from .08 to .05 is a little hazy. It looks like it's less than 16 percent.

What else could society be doing or could we be doing as legislators to cut down on the amount of fatalities and injuries from impaired drivers? Leaving aside the responsibility of the impaired driver, let's look at what else we could be doing to discourage that and to make roadways safer.

I think there's still work that could be done around highway and road maintenance and highway and road design. I'm sure we all have our piece of highway – I'm sorry; I don't. But many of the members that have ridings outside of the metropolitan areas most likely have a little stretch of highway that's a killer. Everybody in the area knows it, and they refer to it with some sort of nickname that indicates that. So there are things that we could be doing to improve highway maintenance and design that would cut down on some of those injuries. I've also had it pointed out that in some cases highway signage would reduce this.

Now, what else could we be doing? How could we be affecting people more to not even consider drinking and driving? I look at funding for the DARE programs. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and at least one of my other colleagues have lobbied the Minister of Justice for increased funds to pay for the training of DARE officers. That budget hasn't increased by that much. There's some astronomical waiting list of schools and of grade 6 classes in Alberta that really want to have a DARE program, and there aren't enough people trained in Alberta to be able to go around and fill that demand. So there's another area where we could be doing something very constructive by putting enough funding into that program to train enough police officers to, in fact, be going

out and giving those DARE programs to every grade 6 class in Alberta. What's wrong with that?

I also think we should look at the funding for AADAC. They've been reducing the amount of money available for AADAC, and that's a rate of recidivism that we're worried about there. If people have already acknowledged that they have an alcohol abuse problem, then what are we doing to get them out of that permanently? I would say that we should look for funding for AADAC and please quit cutting it.

When I look at the province's own traffic safety in Alberta statistics, I note that "of all drivers involved in fatal collisions 22.8% had consumed alcohol before the crash." It doesn't give us the level of their blood alcohol content. "Of all drivers involved in injury collisions 5.6% had consumed alcohol before the crash." This opens another whole discussion. I do wonder sometimes. We've made it so easy to get alcohol. I think there is personal responsibility to be . . . [interjection] Yeah, I hear what the Member for Edmonton-Highlands is saying, and that's why I'm struggling with it. This government certainly leads the way in sort of putting intrusive legislation on people to stop them from having that leeway to make their own bad decision.

I guess because I grew up in an Alberta society that was heavily permeated by Social Credit doctrine and where everything was very carefully regulated - but why do we have to buy alcohol at 2 o'clock in the morning? Why do we have to buy alcohol on Sunday? I guess that's just personal responsibility. It's not for me to say that other people shouldn't be buying it. They can buy it if they want to. I guess I just would choose not to.

3:20

Part of what concerns me about this legislation - and I've talked a lot about the positive sides of it. What essentially bothers me about the legislation is that I think we run the risk of making criminals out of decent Albertans. We all understand what .08 is, where the impaired level is for ourselves. I know that that's one drink and no more for me, that I'm well under. I don't know what the blood alcohol content would be for me if it was lowered to .05. I might be a criminal. Are we then saying, "Don't drink and drive, period, ever," that no alcohol passes your lips even if it's five hours later?

I looked at the factors, and this is again from some great, long paper. To estimate blood alcohol content,

knowledge of certain factors is required. These may include: sex; age; height; weight; consumption start time and stop time; pattern of drinking; type of alcohol consumed including number of drinks, size and alcohol content; time for which [the blood alcohol content] is being calculated (or BAC value(s) detected if a retrograde or antero-grade extrapolation is required); times meals eaten; disease states; any medications that were taken.

That's a whole whack of stuff to try and figure out.

So I'm wondering if what the member is trying to propose here is that no one should ever drink and get behind the wheel of a car, and if that's what being suggested, then is there a sort of time line that goes along with this? I don't want to see a regulation come in that is hard for Albertans to figure out and as a result we criminalize average Albertans unnecessarily.

Again, I started out by saying that I've got no patience for truly impaired people, for drunks that kill or hurt people on the road. I just don't have any time for it. But I found that with the work of groups like MADD and PAID, understanding societally was improving and that everybody sort of knew where .08 was. I don't think they know where .05 is. I don't want to see that done to average Albertans.

I'm looking forward to the rest of the debate on this bill because

I really am undecided about whether to support it or not. I think the intent behind it's really good. I think that a lot of work has been done by the member to come to that point, but I think there are a lot of things to consider there: whether in fact this is the right level to set, what educational campaigns will be put in place for people, whether they get the kind of education about that list of stuff that they're supposed to keep in mind that I read into the record, whether we are really going to make a significant reduction in the numbers of fatalities and injuries when we're dealing with the fairly narrow band of percentages that I went over earlier. Somewhere under 16 percent of the people that have had impaired accidents in the past would be captured by this legislation. So a number of questions and concerns there.

I'm sure everybody in here has got a personal experience with this. Everybody is uneasy about the amount of drinking and driving that goes on and, I think, frankly, about the amount of wildly impaired driving that goes on still. I look forward to the rest of the debate, because I haven't made up my mind on this one yet.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise the points that I did raise.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, there are individuals who are listening to this debate outside of the Assembly. I want to assure them that I will try to speak slowly and clearly and articulate my phrases, but should I get carried away and go on too quickly, they should know that they can always read the remarks in *Hansard*, that they will be put into the record that way, and I would encourage them to do that.

Also, Mr. Speaker, referring to your earlier comments, I just wanted to pass on a remark to you about when you were ruling on the previous point of order. That certainly was a magniloquent speech. That was a magniloquent speech. You see, in our household we try to increase our vocabulary. My kids will want to know that I used that word in the speech today, so I can show them in *Hansard* that in fact I used it. The other day I used another term, "pleonastic questioning."

It is a pleasure today to stand in the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and to add to the debate on private member's Bill 210, presented by my colleague representing Calgary-Fish Creek. I want to commend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek because I think she understands the importance of private members' bills in our Legislature. Alberta in the last years has actually had quite a number of private members' bills pass through all the stages and in fact become incorporated into legislation. I think that's a significant improvement to the parliamentary tradition that has kind of evolved here in Alberta.

She's also recognized one other very important point in drafting a private member's bill, and that is that you have to keep it short and specific and to the point to advance a particular cause. That is exactly what she has done. The previous speaker referred to a number of different suggestions that would be helpful in terms of addressing the whole problem with drinking and driving and too much consumption and access and the DARE program, but, Mr. Speaker, that is not what this bill is all about. If you would incorporate all of those suggestions into a private member's bill, the possibility of it actually passing through this Assembly would be greatly diminished.

In fact, what the member has suggested - and I'm reading right out of the bill - is that

if a peace officer, by reason of an analysis of the breath or blood of the driver of a motor vehicle, has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that the driver has consumed alcohol in such a quantity that the concentration of alcohol in that person's blood exceeds 50 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood, the peace officer shall require the driver to surrender the driver's operator's licence to the peace officer.

Mr. Speaker, I think that's pretty clear in terms of what the intention here is.

For a long time in this Assembly I have been an advocate of taking preventative measures to eliminate or to reduce motor vehicle accidents. Some members will recall that in 1995, in fact, Bill 212, the Motor Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, proposed that Alberta institute a form of graduated licensing to allow new drivers to gain driving experience under the safest possible conditions. I'm proud that that initiative passed, received royal assent, and in fact will become part of the Traffic Safety Act. The purpose of that initiative was to save lives in Alberta, and the initiative from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has the same goal. Bill 210 proposes to take action and to be proactive on an issue that poses a great threat to the safety and health of Albertans, and that is accidents that are caused by impaired drivers.

Mr. Speaker, our police need tools to protect society from impaired drivers and especially hard-core drinkers who are resistant to change. Statistics indicate that it is not the younger people now who are the repeat offenders of our impaired driving laws. It is the older drivers, who are into a lifestyle, a bad habit, and are finding it difficult to change.

My colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek shares my concern for traffic safety in Alberta and rightfully so when one considers the statistics. In 1998, 1 in 5 drivers involved in fatal collisions had consumed alcohol. To make matters worse, as the severity of the collision increased, from nonfatal to fatal, the involvement of alcohol also dramatically increased.

Mr. Speaker, I see my time is up, and I will be glad to continue my debate on the morrow.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South has interrupted himself. It is now 3:30. We must move on to the other remaining business we have scheduled for today.

3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Labour Legislation Review

513. Mr. Fischer moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to re-examine Alberta's existing Labour Relations Code and Public Service Employee Relations Act and propose recommendations for their improvement, particularly with respect to collective bargaining agreements.

[Debate adjourned November 14: Mr. Severtson speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak on Motion 513, sponsored by my hon. colleague from Wainwright. I want to thank him for bringing forth a motion on collective bargaining in Alberta.

This can be a controversial issue to discuss in this Legislature, but it doesn't mean we shouldn't talk about it. By engaging in a reasoned discussion of issues surrounding collective bargaining and labour relations, we further our understanding, and from this we may be laying a solid foundation for policy down the road. I think, as well, that the fact the hon. Member for Wainwright is bringing forward a motion at this time shows his willingness to support labour and a good labour relationship climate in Alberta during this time of prosperity. As the member stated, we are always looking at ways of doing things better, and if there are better methods for collective bargaining in Alberta, then we're willing to discuss them and potentially implement them.

Mr. Speaker, we also want to discuss any changes we are making with the relevant stakeholders involved. We want to hear what employers, unions, and workers are saying about the possible changes. It's through this consultation that good policy benefiting all Albertans is made. I respect the message that he's conveying to the House, that collective bargaining does not have to be a lose/lose or does not have to be a win/lose but in fact can be a win/win situation.

I'd like to spend a few moments replying to the comments by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, because I really think that he's confused on a few points. First and foremost, this motion is about strengthening the collective bargaining process and the labour climate in Alberta, and if you read the comments by my colleague from Wainwright, you'll see this. Mr. Speaker, this motion applies equally to all workers in the province. It asks the government to look for alternatives that will improve the collective bargaining process for everyone in Alberta.

I'd also like to mention that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar stated that there had been only one strike involving teachers since 1972. Well, I'd like to clarify for him – I have a list – that from 1971 to 2000 there were about 25 strikes or lockouts and then mention a few of them: Sherwood Park in 1990, Calgary in 1980, '91, and '92, and Battle River in '92. I find it humorous that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would skew the intention of the motion for this political purpose. It's almost like he didn't listen to what my colleagues had to say, because if he had listened, he would know that Motion 513 is balanced and is in the interests of all Albertans, all employees and employers. We have a good system in place right now and a fair, stable relationship climate. There are areas that need to be examined, and that is what we have done in this debate.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to discuss the positives of our system, because there are many. You wouldn't know it from listening to the opposition, but things are going all right in Alberta. In 1999 Alberta lost 1.23 person-days per 10,000 person-days of work due to strikes and lockouts. This is the second lowest rate in Canada, after Prince Edward Island. This very low rate was accomplished through relationship building with key industry stakeholders. Again, who better to consult about a fair workplace than those people involved in it every day? This means asking both sides of the workplace, employers and workers, what they think is good and what they think could be changed. A balanced approach has led to stability and a low work-stoppage rate, which is good for all Albertans. We are committed to a safe, fair, productive, and innovative workplace in Alberta, and by and large we have laid the groundwork for this.

I think the Minister of Human Resources and Employment should take a lot of credit for creating this environment. Under his leadership Alberta has seen a stable and growing workforce. In this time of growth and expansion in our economy a productive, harmonized labour climate is vital. With 1.5 million Albertans currently employed and 33,600 new jobs created over the first nine months of 2000 alone, it is something we have to keep striving for.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It should be noted that Alberta enjoys the strongest productivity growth in Canada, the highest level of productivity of all the provinces, but, Mr. Speaker, there are many areas where we can do things better. I'm committed to the collective bargaining process. At all times it is better for the parties to come to some settlement at the table themselves as a community-based solution. Bargaining in good faith is always better for the labour relationship climate than imposing settlements. When settlements are imposed, both sides

come away from the process feeling cheated, even if that was not the case.

Mr. Speaker, I think every member of this Assembly has had at one time or another a potential for work stoppage in his constituency, and I also bet you that the vast majority of those potential work stoppages were resolved before a strike or lockout occurred. So there was the potential, but it was avoided. Now, the point I think my colleague wanted to make and one that I wholeheartedly agree with is that even though there was no work stoppage, the damage was already done. Both sides participating in contract negotiations came away from the process feeling stressed out, feeling pushed around, and feeling ripped off. The zero-sum nature of contract negotiation creates an environment of mistrust and stress. Tell me: is it the basis for a peaceful and productive work climate in the future when you have employees feeling disempowered by the process? Are they going to be happy, efficient members of a team down the road? No, of course not.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is not the case in every contract negotiation that occurs in Alberta, but it is the case in some. So if we can somehow improve the process of these high-stress negotiations and create a more productive environment, one that's positive and that labour relations can be built from, isn't that an improvement and isn't it good for the province? I think it is.

A reasonable solution to bargaining is what workers in this province want, and on the part of this government we are committed to the collective bargaining process. We respect that process, and we support agreements reached at local levels as opposed to anything forced. The interest-based bargaining method my colleague discussed may be one such solution for certain cases that arise. As my colleague stated, the most important aspect of interest-based bargaining is that both sides share information about their interests and concerns. They create a menu of possible solutions to their concerns and work to achieve solutions that best meet everybody's needs.

Brainstorming is an important tool in creating an environment of free-flowing exchange. Participants are encouraged to consider each other's ideas and to build on each other's thoughts. This builds a positive environment from which negotiations can flow. Now, to me this sounds like a much better premise to build a contract and a viable future than a high-stress, winner-take-all environment.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, it may be asking too much to believe that negotiators from both sides during bargaining would all play fair and share each other's secrets and agenda. In my opinion, interest-based bargaining is not a panacea for unhealthy labour/management relationships, and it shouldn't be viewed as a replacement for the adversarial bargaining which all parties must embrace, but there are times when it can work. I know for a fact that interest-based bargaining is being successfully used across the United States, in states with diverse labour relations environments like Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Arizona, to name a few. In the Iowa public school system, where there are three counties with historically strained labour/management relationships, interest-based bargaining has led to a new environment of trust and a new way of dealing with grievances. In the words of one Iowa teacher: "People used to fear the adversarial approach. With the interest-based approach, it's much easier."

I know, as well, that interest-based bargaining was used during a contract negotiation by the Ottawa *Citizen* newspaper and its employees to come to a successful agreement. The guild, one of Canada's largest media unions, with more than 7,000 members in television, radio, and print, represented the employees. The union

newsletter reported: interest-based bargaining produces speedy pact in Ottawa. They also reported that negotiators still had to tread carefully, but there was no question there was less stress and tension during the bargaining. As well, the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents of Saskatchewan have expressed interest in using this process. Large companies like Intel and IBM have adopted some form of open-door dispute resolution and have reported an improved labour climate.

Mr. Speaker, the alternatives my colleague from Wainwright has proposed are not just theoretical. They have worked in the real world. What has worked so well for people in other parts of North America may work here, and we should be open to this possibility.

I want to close by reiterating that we have a pretty good system currently in place in Alberta. We know this from statistics I mentioned earlier: having the second lowest person-day loss due to work stoppages in this country and having the highest level of productivity in Canada; the fact that we have an employment standards call centre that has sent information to more than 150,000 employers and employees across the province on the interpretation and application of the Employment Standards Code each year; the youth employment strategy, offering young people the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge for career planning. All these initiatives have created a skilled, productive, and knowledgeable workforce, which in my opinion is also vital to labour relations. Having a top-notch, informed labour force means that good decisions have been made by negotiators in resolving disputes.

As I stated in my comments today, there have been cases where the process has broken down, and the outcome in these cases was less than optimal. The labour relations climate was damaged, and it has taken years, in some cases, to repair it and get back to the viable framework of peace. Mr. Speaker, we have seen cases where using an alternative like the interest-based bargaining method has produced positive results. I say to my colleagues, in asking them to support this motion, that we should put two and two together and realize that there are cases where the process has broken down and that if there's a method that may be used to avoid a breakdown, why shouldn't we use it in Alberta? That is what this motion is about: looking at alternatives and making the process work better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands in the few minutes remaining.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was trained for 11 years in city council to speak in five-minute periods, so this may be my opportunity, and perhaps other members could learn from this example as well.

I appreciate the hon. member's motion that he's put forward calling for a review. I guess I would say first of all, Mr. Speaker, that there's nothing that is wrong per se with looking at interest-based bargaining, but I also feel that given the government's record in this matter, there's cause for some concern since the motion is not worded in a way that deals strictly with an examination of interest-based bargaining but is designed to have a complete, open, and unencumbered review of our labour legislation in this province. The previous times that the government has looked at labour legislation, we've always ended up, at least from the point of view of workers, with a worse situation than when we started. That is, I guess, what the concern is on my part.

It may interest one of the ministers to know that not only was I involved in a power company making decisions but also involved on the management side in a number of labour discussions and negotiations. I found that one of the things that happens most often

is that one of the parties loses patience with the adversarial collective bargaining system, and they begin to believe that it won't produce results in the end. We saw that, I think, a couple of times.

Once I was involved on the Library Board when we were dealing with our employees there in a negotiation. They were difficult negotiations, Mr. Speaker, and they went on for some time. It was clear on the part of some members of the administration of the library and indeed some members of the Library Board that they lost patience and gave up and just believed that there was no alternative to either a strike or a lockout. Those of us who believed in the collective bargaining system persevered and went the extra mile to review the various demands in the negotiations again and again, and we eventually came to an agreement that was beneficial to both parties, and that was using the existing system that we have here.

I had a similar experience in the city of Edmonton when we dealt with negotiations around our DATS drivers, our disabled adult transportation system drivers. They were difficult again, Mr. Speaker, and again there were people that wanted to give up on the collective bargaining system and not see it through to produce the results that it's completely capable of reaching. In the end, those of us who insisted that we continue the negotiations succeeded in getting an agreement that gave those drivers their first collective agreement at considerably less cost to the city than was originally projected by our administration. So I think the first thing I'd like to say is that it can work.

The second thing that I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, is that there are a number of things I would like to see from the government in terms of improving collective bargaining legislation before I'm willing to support a motion like this that could in fact open the door to right-to-work legislation right after the next provincial election. That's what the fear is. It definitely is the fear I have.

There's no recognition of the right to strike in this province. There's no protection against the use of replacement workers. Mr. Speaker, I think we should be extending prorated benefits to part-time and casual workers, equivalent to those that are provided to full-time workers. We should be extending employment standards, health and safety, and workers' compensation legislation to farms and ranches employing three or more workers. If the government is willing to do those kinds of things, then I think we would be prepared to look at some sort of review, but the kinds of reviews that have been done in the past have certainly prejudiced workers' rights.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on the motion.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:50 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Dunford	Marz
Boutilier	Evans	McFarland
Broda	Friedel	Melchin
Burgener	Haley	Nelson
Calahasen	Herard	Renner
Cao	Hierath	Severtson
Cardinal	Hlady	Strang

Coutts	Jablonski	Taylor
Doerksen	Langevin	West
Ducharme	Magnus	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Mar	Pannu
Bonner	Mason	Soetaert
Carlson	Nicol	Woloshyn
Dickson	O'Neill	Yankowsky
MacDonald		

Totals:	For – 29	Against – 13
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 513 carried]

Pension Reform

514. Mr. Hlady moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to examine its future in the Canada pension plan or explore other options, including a made-in-Alberta pension plan or a mandatory personal retirement savings plan.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to bring forward Motion 514 for the consideration of the Legislative Assembly. I would like to begin today, Mr. Speaker, by explaining the rationale behind this motion. I must emphasize that this motion does not call for Alberta to opt out of the Canada pension plan immediately. It does not necessarily call for Alberta to opt out of the Canada pension plan at all. What it does do is acknowledge that the current state of the CPP represents an extremely urgent issue that warrants a high level of preparedness on the part of our government.

To give some sense of the magnitude of the problem, I can tell you that one 1999 survey revealed that fully 76 percent of all Canadians believe they will receive either a smaller Canada pension than those retiring today or else no Canada pension at all. I happen to share that concern, and I know that many of my colleagues do as well, if not for themselves then certainly for their children and grandchildren.

Now, I don't think it comes as a surprise to anyone in this House that the future stability of the Canada pension plan is in serious doubt, but to really understand why the security of our retirement savings is so precarious, we must understand the nature of the CPP. The CPP was established in 1966 as a mandatory, earnings-related pension plan. Unfortunately, it was also established according to a pay-as-you-go, or pay-go, formula. Under this formula the CPP is largely unfunded because the benefits paid to current retirees are financed not by the permanent assets of the plan but by the contributions of current employees. This means that the CPP is currently liable for an estimated \$465 billion in future benefit payments.

MR. MAGNUS: How much?

MR. HLADY: An estimated \$465 billion, while it actually only has \$36.5 billion in assets on hand. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it does not take a genius or even an economist to figure out that a pay-go system is only viable as long as the funds entering the system in contributions are greater than or equal to those being paid out in benefits.

Unfortunately, this has not been the case for the CPP since 1992. As a result of changing demographics, the gradual expansion of

survivor and disability benefits, and the indexing of the plan to changes in the annual cost of living, the Canada pension plan now pays out far more than it takes in. For example, in 1996, 10 million working Canadians contributed approximately \$11 billion to the CPP. However, that same year 3 million Canadians drew almost \$17 billion in benefits. It's plainly obvious that this type of situation will not be sustainable for very long.

The CPP was designed to have a small reserve fund on hand to cover two years' worth of benefit payments, but this has not been sufficient to avert the imminent collapse of the system. In 1995 the person responsible for overseeing the CPP, the chief actuary of the office of the superintendent of financial institutions, issued a stern and sobering warning. He predicted that unless substantial changes to the CPP were made, the plan would be completely exhausted by the year 2015. That's just over 14 years from now.

In response to the chief actuary's dire prediction a series of reforms to the CPP were enacted in 1997. The CPP reserve fund was expanded to provide five years of protection, and an independent investment board was established to manage the reserve and invest it in market instruments other than low-yield provincial bonds. In addition, it is planned that premium deductions will be increased from their '97 levels of 5.6 percent to a new fixed rate of 9.9 percent by 2003. At the same time, the basic annual exemption for CPP contributions has been frozen at \$3,500. Finally, the formula for calculating pensions was changed in order to make them more comparable to earnings at the time of retirement.

However, it is quite possible that these 1997 reforms to the Canada pension plan will not be sufficient to avert the impending disaster. For instance, William Robson, a senior policy analyst with the C.D. Howe Institute, has seriously questioned whether the new 9.9 percent contribution rate can be sustained. He has concluded that better funding, sound investments by the CPP investment board, and a mixture of good luck and good management may – I say may – allow the 9.9 percent rate to be maintained. However, it could go much higher. To quote Mr. Robson: even the best outcome in these areas will leave a substantial share of CPP premiums for younger workers. This is effectively a tax on the younger workers today. That's the fundamental of it. He goes on to point out that even this admittedly grim best case scenario is not likely to occur.

4:10

So with the future of the Canada pension plan increasingly in doubt, it seems only prudent to explore the possibility of opting out while there is still time. Whatever form a new pension plan or a mandatory RSP might take, it would have numerous and significant advantages over the current system. Mr. Speaker, while in my next few pages I speak mainly in regards to an Alberta pension plan, a lot of this would also affect an MRSP.

First, the new plan would maintain many of the positive features of the Canada pension plan while abandoning many of its liabilities. The new plan would still be universal, applying to all Alberta workers. It would still be portable, with contributions able to be retained whether a worker changes employers or even moves to another province. However, the new plan would be far more actuarially sound than the old CPP with its legacy of inefficiency and financial mismanagement.

This government already has a proven record of fiscal responsibility and appropriate delegation of authority to independent entities. These methods of governance would surely serve an Alberta pension plan very well. It is also likely that the benefits provided by an Alberta pension plan could be designed more accurately to reflect the unique needs and demographic circumstances of Albertans.

These benefits would also be much more responsive to changing economic trends and priorities.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, an Alberta pension plan would be much more fair to Alberta contributors. In 1996 residents of this province contributed over \$2 billion to the Canada pension plan while drawing only \$1.6 billion in benefits. Alberta is the only province in this country where contributions exceed the benefits that they receive back. In other words, people in the rest of the country pay an average of 92 cents for every dollar of benefits received, while Albertans pay \$1.27. University of Calgary political scientist Tom Flanagan has described the situation in somewhat more colourful terms. He said: Alberta is getting hosed. I'll leave it up to the Members of the Legislative Assembly to do the math for themselves, and I'm sure they'll agree.

We should also not overlook the important sense of ownership that an Alberta pension plan would bring to the citizens of this province. In poll after poll Canadians indicate that they feel a great deal of frustration and resentment when making CPP contributions because they are perceived as nothing more than another tax. The inner workings and management of the plan in Ottawa are so complex and obscure that many people do not think of CPP contributions as an investment in their future quality of life. They view it as an encumbrance or duty, and therefore it undermines the core value of trying to plan for one's future financial independence. That's the whole purpose of doing this in the first place. However, if Albertans felt that the pension plan was run by and for them, it could make a huge difference in their attitude towards making contributions and their feelings about having a successful future.

Our government has always had a strong commitment to openness and accountability in these matters. This positive record would only increase the level of public confidence in the plan. In short, an Alberta pension plan could potentially be seen as more legitimate and reliable than the current CPP.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of additional reasons why an independent, made-in-Alberta plan or MRSP should at least be considered. It is true that opting out of the CPP would not be easy. If substantive changes were to be made, the move would require the approval of two-thirds of the provinces in Canada representing two-thirds of the population of the country. However, despite the difficulty of opting out, it might be easier now than at any point in the future.

There are two reasons for this. First, it is unlikely that the current Ontario government would oppose the move, given its traditional ideological affinity with our government. There is no guarantee that this would be the case under future Ontario governments and certainly isn't today, which would essentially have a veto on this issue by virtue of Ontario's large population.

Secondly, it is now relatively clear what Alberta's share of current CPP assets are. This is because any cash surpluses contributed by Albertans are now invested in provincial bonds. However, with the CPP intending to expand its reserve fund in the next few years and invest it in the open market, it will soon become quite unclear which of these investments belong to Alberta and which do not. If Alberta is to opt out of the CPP, we should consider doing it now or very soon, when assets and obligations are relatively clear, rather than later, when they may not be.

There's one last reason why I believe that the government of Alberta should consider opting out of the Canada pension plan. It is a very intriguing reason. If Alberta is seen to be vigorously pursuing a credible, realistic alternative to the CPP, it is possible that this would spur the federal government into implementing meaningful and effective reforms to the CPP.

In 1998 the then Provincial Treasurer, Stockwell Day, developed

and released a set of seven reasonable principles upon which such reforms could be based, which we put forward as a provincial government to the federal government. The first principle was to preserve the universality and full portability of the CPP. That is an objective that I think we can all agree with.

The second was to establish a reliable base for CPP funding that would minimize the intergenerational transfer of debt. To me this would seem to suggest the desirability of some kind of fully funded pension system. Under this type of system retirement benefits would be paid out of an individual's own lifetime savings rather than draining the savings of current contributors.

Third, the Provincial Treasurer proposed that there should be a readily discernible relationship between what contributors pay into the plan and what they take out in the end. Once again, this seems to me to be very fair, Mr. Speaker, a commonsense proposition.

Fourth, it was suggested that mandatory contribution rates should leave room for individual private savings initiatives. This is a clear recognition of the fact that while it is necessary to have a universal mandatory pension plan, each individual is really in the best position to determine his or her own retirement needs. Should one invest in bonds, stocks, mutual funds, or GICs? How many risks should one take? What would be an adequate retirement income? These are all decisions best left to the individual, and any well-designed government pension plan should not impinge upon the ability to make those decisions.

The fifth principle is that individuals and employers should have the ability, where appropriate, to develop equivalent or superior benefit packages.

Sixth, all generations should in some way share in the costs of dealing with the current CPP's problems. Other jurisdictions have undertaken a similar approach when dealing with the transition from one pension system to another. This often involves the issue of some kind of recognition bonds that acknowledge contributions under the old plan and can be invested into the new one.

The seventh and final principle proposed by Alberta was that the Canada pension plan's governance should be made more cohesive and accountable. Once again, this is simply common sense, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, it seems to me, as I'm sure it does to many of my colleagues, that these seven principles would be an excellent foundation on which to build a stable, secure retirement savings plan here in Alberta. If the exploration and examination suggested in this motion cause the federal government to reform the existing CPP along these lines, I'm sure that most of us would be completely satisfied. However, if Ottawa does not respond to our investigation in a responsible manner, these same principles could be used to form the basis of an Alberta pension plan.

In other words, the motion I am sponsoring here today does not advocate the abandonment of existing government policy, nor does it necessarily propose the abandonment of the CPP. It simply recognizes that the strongest position for Alberta to be in is to have fully considered all of our options and to be fully prepared to take any course of action necessary to preserve the retirement savings of our citizens.

I hope I've made it clear by now that the Canada pension plan is in serious trouble. I hope that I've also made the case that some type of Alberta pension plan or a mandatory RSP would have certain advantages over the current system. These advantages would include better management, more secure investments, more individual control, and a genuine sense of ownership. Our serious consideration of opting out might even convince the federal government to reform the existing CPP in line with Alberta's proposals.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge all of my col-

leagues to support Motion 514. We must take action now to preserve both our retirement savings and those of the future generations.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have the opportunity to speak to Motion 514, a made-in-Alberta pension plan. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View may be a decent fellow, but he keeps coming up with these harebrained schemes that he brings into the Legislature that are completely unsupportable when you take a look at them in detail. [interjection] Well, maybe not harebrained. [interjection] Well, let's talk about that alleged Liberal scheme in Ottawa.

In fact, if you take a look at when the CPP got into the greatest degree of difficulty in this country, it was under a Conservative government. In the last few years the federal government has taken some significant steps in terms of rectifying the issues that are there in a process of reform for the CPP in order to ensure that there is a future sustainability and to stabilize contribution rates. [interjections] In fact, all this chirping that we hear right now, Mr. Speaker, does not speak to the position that their own government has taken.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, the long and true tradition of the House is that only one member is speaking at a time, and right now the only member that's been recognized is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. If you don't like what she's saying, then you have in your turn an opportunity to get up and refute whatever arguments she might put forward.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

4:20

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member who introduced this particular motion likes on occasion to engage in fear mongering, which is what we have with this motion that has come to the floor of the Legislature. That's exactly what has happened. On the one hand, he's saying how bad the plan is and how it's going to crash and burn. On the other hand, his own Provincial Treasurer since 1997 has been working with the federal government along with the rest of the provinces in terms of coming forward with plans that are addressing the situation. It's in progress, and it's working quite well.

What this member wants in addition to the fear mongering and in addition to just sending up trial balloons, that are really unsustainable when you take a look at them, are three layers of pension plans in this province. He just finished saying that his discussion is not about abandoning the CPP, but what it is about for sure is a double kind of system, where they talk about a mandatory retirement savings plan, a mandatory retirement savings plan from a government who says that they don't force anything on Albertans and that this is a province of options and choice and free will. Well, that's not what this pension plan says. It talks about mandatory plans and then goes on in that mandatory plan to talk about the kinds of investment risk that would be placed on individual contributors.

Well, I think people should have flexibility and choice in the kinds of options they're taking a look at, and that's not what he's talking about. With the mandatory plan we're going to see higher administrative costs. We're going to see the impact on women, which is

going to be significant because of their higher life expectancy. In addition to no kind of opting-out clause, like the CPP has, for women who take a break from their out-of-home work life to stay home and raise their children, which is quite surprising to me given the stance this government allegedly takes on that position on many other issues, it doesn't talk about Alberta's share of the unfunded liability of CPP, and it doesn't talk about transitional provisions that have to be adopted. And that's just on their mandatory retirement plan.

Then when you talk about their Alberta pension plan, when you take a look once again . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, these are private members' motions, and these are not government motions. These are private members' motions.

MS CARLSON: I have figured that out, not like this member says.

In fact, what we see in his comments is a position that he has supported, a stance the government has taken, and this is the debate that I'm bringing to the floor here. I would hope that some of his colleagues would rise to his defence, other than chirping comments like that, hon. minister across the floor.

If you take a look at the Alberta pension plan that he's proposing, there are lots of added risks built into that particular system when you take a look at the smaller population base we're talking about in Alberta, including economic volatility and the portability of benefits, which he didn't really significantly address.

I'm wondering if this hon. member would be prepared to comment on the status of the negotiations that are happening now at the federal Liberal government level in terms of rectifying this position. Does he support those changes or not? If he's saying that there shouldn't be an abandonment of the CPP, does he believe that the steps the federal government, in conjunction with this provincial government, is taking are going to work or in fact are going to crash and burn? This is what it appears he is alleging in his comments. So if he could comment on that, I would appreciate it.

There are many, many questions that he did not answer when he went through the options that he's got here in terms of the MRSPs. Particularly I'd like to focus, because we don't have very much time, on the issue of women in this particular instance. If this proposal were brought forward without special legislation, then what we see happening is that women retire with lower retirement income than men for identical work and contribution records because of higher female life expectancy, so we see that they would over their lifetime have less pension income available to them. If he could explain that.

He also said that the burden of CPP now falls to the younger generation to pay. I don't disagree with that, but I don't see how that is different under his plan. It would seem to me that under the plan he's got for the mandatory, self-directed RSPs, that's also an issue. They're going to have to pay for the benefits owing under the current system and build their own retirement savings plan. So what kind of percentages is he talking about under an MRSP that young people would have to be contributing? He complained about the percentages in his comments, but we can see that those would be significantly higher.

How does he plan to address administration costs, Mr. Speaker? They can be significant. [interjection] Yes, those are good questions, too, that I hope he has an opportunity to answer. Definitely administration costs are a serious issue that needs to be talked about.

There's been lots of talk over the years about a separate Alberta pension plan, and it has the same essential structure, as we hear it coming from him, as the CPP. In the short term it looks like it

would be a good idea, because of course we have favourable demographics and high employment rates in this province. It is a great province to live in; there's no doubt about it. [interjections] It is a great province to live in. That's why I'm here. That's why I'm happy to support my constituents.

But we have to be ever wary, Mr. Speaker, of these kinds of ideas that are floated that can harm the good life that we have in this province. We have to be ever vigilant to these kinds of trial balloons that are floated that have hidden risks in them, that people may not know or understand at first glance. So I think it's very important for us to take a look at those issues.

We didn't hear the member who introduced this motion talking about administration costs and economies of scale in terms of the collection of those dollars. He didn't at all, I believe, address that in any kind of a satisfactory function, so I would like to see what his answers are to that. Perhaps he could put them in writing, Mr. Speaker, as I don't believe he'll have another opportunity to speak to this, because I know that we have a lot of people who are very concerned about it.

He didn't talk, I don't think, about how we would administratively measure, monitor, administer the three kinds of plans that he's now talking about. This government and this member as a private member have supported positions that talk about less regulation, less administrative cost, less duplication, but that isn't what I see coming forward in this particular motion, Mr. Speaker. So I wonder how he intends to address that.

What happens with their mandatory plan when the market falls? We've seen phenomenal growth over the past few years in many of the different kinds of investment plans that people have had when they talk about RSPs, but what happens when the market falls, Mr. Speaker? What do we see then for those people who have been forced into this mandatory plan that he's talking about? I think those are the kinds of debates that we have to have. I think they take a lot more time than we have available to us in motions.

I would like to recognize the work that the Alberta chamber has done on this issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

4:30

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

[Adjourned debate November 20: Mr. Bonner]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have an opportunity here to speak to Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000. We've recently seen – in fact, today they hit my desk – amendments that have been brought in by this government. First of all, I would like to talk about those for a moment.

How can it be that with this government, who has lots of time to draft this legislation and to bring it forward into this Legislature and to run it by various groups who have a vested interest in the legislation being brought forward, we see time after time amendments being brought into legislation that are in fact at least as substantial as the bills themselves if not even bigger than the bills? This is what we see again, a series of literally pages of amendments

having been brought in on a bill that was originally introduced. You know, we don't see other Legislatures across Canada having this kind of difficulty.

Amendments should be minor in nature, Mr. Speaker. They shouldn't be substantive in nature, because if the government had done their groundwork to begin with, they wouldn't be necessary. How do other jurisdictions handle legislation when it's brought forward? Before they draft the legislation, they send it out for a vigorous review and debate to groups that are interested in the proposals. Those people can kick it around, talk about it, get together with government members and fine-tune the legislation, talk about options, and find compromises where necessary so that when the legislation in fact hits the floor of an Assembly, it's well drafted, well thought out, and is the best possible legislation that can be brought forward.

Unfortunately, since I have been in this Legislature, since 1993, that doesn't seem to be the case. We see shoddy drafting, many groups unsatisfied when the legislation first hits the floor. Often we see the government bring forward amendments to this legislation after they go out and consult with groups. That's what has happened in this case, Mr. Speaker. A very well-respected group, MADD, Mothers Against Drinking Drivers, had some concerns with this legislation. Why this government and the minister responsible for bringing in this legislation didn't go to them in the first place and iron out any concerns or difficulties is of keen interest to me, but clearly they didn't think it was necessary at the time.

So what happens? Barely after having the legislation introduced, we have amendments brought into it. So that speaks, I think, to the arrogance that this government has in terms of the regard . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, talking about amendments, I'm just curious. Is this not second reading, which is on the principle of the bill, as opposed to amendments that may be coming from some other side?

MS CARLSON: Absolutely, and it's in principle that I'm speaking against the need for amendments to a bill, Mr. Speaker, so I hope that addresses any concerns that we may see from members across the way. In principle we should be having a bill that is very clean, that has met the needs of most groups in this province, and that isn't what we see here. I'm speaking in principle to the legislation. We can speak in principle about how it's drafted, about the content of it, clause by clause if we wish to, and any overriding principles, and that's exactly what I'm speaking to here. [interjection] If the minister doesn't like it, I suggest that he get up and talk about that. In seven years I certainly do know how to talk in principle about legislation, about the problems involved in drafting it. We have seen a number of concerns that have come out of this legislation but also some good work.

So now you've been chastised. Now I will talk about one of the things that have been good with this, and that is the co-operation that we saw between the Minister of Justice and our Justice critic. I think it's commendable when we see that, Mr. Speaker. Certainly I've had the opportunity to work in co-operation with government members over my duration here in the Legislature, and it can be very helpful when we see ministers who are prepared to sit down and hear concerns that we have had and to take them seriously and to work them into the drafting. So while a component of this bill was deemed to be not acceptable by groups, certainly some things were drafted and changed beforehand.

I would like to thank the minister for the co-operation that he gave in listening to and working with our Liberal Justice critic. I think those things enhance legislation. Mr. Speaker, it isn't always just

our role to oppose what comes to the floor of this Legislature. Often we can work with the appropriate ministers to talk about the kinds of improvements that can be made, therefore limiting the kind of debate time we see on bills and limiting the number of amendments that come from this side of the floor.

I do have a couple of concerns about this bill. One of them is the provisions that are put in place governing the management of exhibits in the court's possession. We've seen a number of examples in the past, particularly the past couple of years, where it looks like the management of the exhibits in the court's possession created a problem for us.

I'm thinking particularly of Bovar and what's happened with the Bovar waste treatment plant in Swan Hills. A number of the records were not made available to us that were really contentious in nature and should have been made public to the people of this province. So there are some concerns around that issue, and I'm hoping we see that cleaned up before this legislation gets passed, Mr. Speaker. They can be substantive in nature. I think the public have a right to know when their health is placed at risk or potentially at risk. They have a right to know, when we're dealing with hazardous waste, what companies have done in the past in dealing with those. We have a right to know what kinds of negotiations they've made with the government when the government is funding some or all or part of the operations of companies like that. It hasn't always been the case where you've had accessibility to that.

Also, there are some problems in the management of exhibits for the appeal process for WCB. So I would hope that we would be talking about that in this Legislature. I'm hoping the minister will address that.

I think some of the parts we see in here are good. Where it talks about in the bill where the Lieutenant Governor in Council will be able to make regulations outlining situations in which court fees can be waived – because currently there are no provisions – this is a good provision I think. We talk about openness, fairness, and accountability in that regard, and the process for people to be involved in a court system in a manner in which they can afford it. So I actually quite support that particular provision that's going to be brought in.

I think there are a number of other questions that we have. When you take a look at the amendments that are going to be coming into the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, there are two issues that we have to talk about. The first is that the maximum fine able to be imposed with respect to an offence will increase from \$400 to \$1,000. I think that's good. I think that there should be a sunset clause reviewing all of those kinds of limits on an ongoing basis, because times change and it's something that needs to be brought to the minister's attention and dealt with according to severity and cost issues; you know, cost of living. A slight wrap on the knuckles is not always satisfactory. We need to make sure that there are some teeth in some of this legislation, so we welcome that.

Secondly with regard to this particular amendment, the Lieutenant Governor in Council will be able to make regulations now allowing a person acting as an agent of the court to receive payment for offences; most commonly, speeding tickets. I see it as the intention of the ministry to appoint current private registries as agents of the court for the collection of these fines. This is an expansion of private registries as we see it, and they will then be charging a surcharge for providing this service.

This is more downloading that we see. This is another user fee being imposed on the people of the province. While I know we want to make it easy and accessible for people to pay tickets and fines on time, Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering at the added cost that goes in when we talk about another layer of user fees. Many people would

argue that it's fine to do that, that the people broke the law, by the kind of ticket they got, so they should be fined for that. Well, they are. The user fee charge is a different issue, and it's one that we've seen before this Legislature any number of times in terms of another way of taxing the people of this province. I do have concerns about that, and I hope that the minister will be able to speak to those for us.

I think at this time in second reading, Mr. Speaker, those are the comments that I have. It's quite a lengthy bill. I haven't had a chance to get through all of it yet, so I am definitely looking forward to the time in committee when I can discuss this bill in greater depth.

Thank you.

4:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. You know, there are times when I really wish I had a law degree, and this is one of them.

MR. DICKSON: You're the next best thing. You're an MLA, the next best thing.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I'm being encouraged that being an MLA is the next best thing, I guess in that we can actually create the laws.

I've often stood in this House and said that we should do the best job possible with the most consideration, and I'm working hard to understand everything that's in here. I'm also cognizant that the process for this bill coming before us today has been a bit of a climb in that the bill was originally presented in the spring, and there was such a fervor of reaction to it that the government spent some time, I guess over the summer, putting together amendments. I understand that there will be significant amendments brought forward while this bill is in Committee of the Whole.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Actually, that's a good sign for the process: that if it's recognized and understood that mistakes have been made or not enough consultation happened or perhaps the government was being a little too hasty in some areas, they would recognize that it just wasn't going to sit well with the people, and that in fact they did have the strength, the stamina, to take it back and try and come forward with some improvements.

I think all of us would prefer that the time was put in on the front end and that we had a nice sort of clean bill to work with. That's one of the reasons that I'm struggling, because I'm having to look between the bill and the amendments and correspondence that has been received from stakeholders and go back and forth and try and figure out what's being talked about, whether it's still there or whether it might be amended. It gets a little confusing. So, yes, I guess I wish it had come forward in better shape, but I will give all credit to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General for having realized that there were some issues, and he has taken it back and evidently will bring forward amendments on it.

One of the things that I've noticed, particularly when I talk to colleagues across the country, is that we haven't been very good in Alberta about reviewing our statutes and our laws to make sure that they are up to date and that we don't have some sort of dusty ones sitting up on the shelves there that don't really pertain and are not really used anymore.

One of the ones that's come to my attention is the fire code, which doesn't ever seem to really be reviewed, and the old stuff that doesn't pertain anymore is never expunged from it. We just keep

adding more onto it. Certainly I've heard from businesspeople in my constituency that frankly that's a real pain for them because they just have to keep paying out more money to do more stuff to conform to the code, but they're still having to conform to everything else that's in that code from when it was first put forward much earlier in the previous century.

So if this is a good attempt by the government to go back and re-examine and remove things that don't work well anymore or don't pertain anymore and try and streamline the process while always, of course, remaining on guard for citizens' access to the justice system, then I think this is a good bill, and the Minister of Justice gets brownie points for that. I think it's important to do a top-to-bottom, bottom-to-top review . . .

MR. DICKSON: Side to side.

MS BLAKEMAN: . . . side to side, as well, and back to front, of all of our legislation, especially the large codes that we all live by that just tend to keep adding on and adding on without ever going back.

Now, one of the things that I wanted to talk about – a couple of things I noticed in here. I noticed, if I'm reading this right, that the Lieutenant Governor in Council will be able to make regulations that could waive court fees. It's my understanding that that hasn't existed previously, and certainly with a lot of the issues I deal with that would fall under this, I welcome that, because I think in many cases that is prohibiting people from accessing justice. So if that is the case, I'm glad to see that.

In another section – I'm mindful that I'm in second reading and I'm speaking to the intent of the bill, but in speaking to the intent that I see in some of these sections . . .

The payment hearings, the Lieutenant Governor in Council being able to make regulations governing payment hearings. I hope that this will have some positive effect on the gridlock we can get into with maintenance enforcement payments because that's an area where I find things slow to an absolute crawl, where you have a debtor who has defaulted repeatedly on a maintenance order and the creditor can't seem to shake any money loose from them. But if in fact circumstances have changed for the debtor – they lost their job, or they went back to school – if something has changed where they really can't afford to be making those kinds of payments and they need them reduced, they need to go back into court and change that so that there's some payment forthcoming to that court order, rather than just not paying anything at all because their circumstances have changed.

So I'm hoping that these payment hearings, which I think are to determine a person's ability to pay the money under a judgment and to be able to set forward some sort of schedule or method of payment for the debtor – if I'm reading this correctly, this should really help with maintenance enforcement. We all get these cases in our offices. They're heartbreaking, and I think they're particularly heartbreaking because this is about a court-ordered payment for children. This is not about adults squabbling. It is about a court-ordered payment for children, and that money is needed for those kids to have a decent life. Very rarely are we talking, you know, really high payments, where it's gold-plated skateboards and that kind of thing. For most of these kids these court-ordered payments are to make sure that they have a decent diet, that they have enough money to pay their school fees, that maybe they could participate in some sort of extracurricular activity, that they have decent clothing and warm clothes in the winter. This is not extravagant stuff.

What I have seen too much of is that the debtor simply won't pay for whatever reason, and despite much work on the part of the creditor they just can't get the money out of them. This would allow

them, if I'm reading this right, to be able to get some sort of reasoning as to why the debtor isn't paying and set up a schedule for them to pay.

4:50

When I first started working with maintenance enforcement cases, I was dealing with people that had arrears of \$80,000, \$110,000. Just imagine how long someone has not been making a court-ordered payment to rack up \$110,000 worth of arrears. That must have been most of a kid's life, between zero and 18, that they didn't get that money, and they should be getting it.

I know that the minister has been working on improving the maintenance enforcement program. Certainly this member is not going to stop urging the minister to make improvements to the maintenance enforcement program, because I think it's a great tool for us and a very important component of a modern society that we're able to get these payments made. So I hope that's what's possible under this section that is talking about payment hearings, that we could get debtors into court. We could say: "Let's see. What are your assets, and what's your ability to pay? All right then; let's pay." Then get some payment schedules worked out and get the money coming in.

I mean, I understand that if somebody really wants to flaunt the law, it doesn't matter how many times you drag him into court and hand him a piece of paper that says that you must do this. If they're bound and determined they're not going to do it, they just ignore the piece of paper. I think there's a good section of society that will do something wrong if they think they can get away with it. Frankly, if they're brought before court on something like this payment hearing, that would be enough to have them straighten up and fly right, as my mother would have said. So I hope that's a possibility there.

Now, one concern that I do have in working my way through all of this – and I heard my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie comment on it briefly – is that I'm just not comfortable with what's going on with these private registries. It sounds to me like there are sections in this bill that are about allowing the appointment of a third party to collect fines that are levied through the court system, and then that third party would also be allowed to put a charge on top of the fine to pay for their services.

Those private registries: I'm never going to be comfortable with them. I think there are real issues around privacy. We've already seen problems with personal information getting out through the private registries that has to do with the information they currently have access to, which are things like drivers' licences and birth and marriage certificates. We've already had trouble with privacy around that, and here's just another area where a private company, a third party, gets access to very personal information about people and then gets to make money off it. I am never going to be comfortable with that. So if the minister is making notes about responding to any of the issues that we're raising, I'd sure like to hear some reassurances about this. To be frank, I don't think that I'm going to be much reassured. Given the examples we've got before us from other private registry examples, there's not much you could tell me that would reassure me around this one. I think we'd be cruisin' for a bruising' on that one, and I think it's because it's around privacy.

You know, I've often spoken in this Assembly about the need for us as legislators to be the stewards, to show the leadership and to protect the people that live in Alberta, to provide legislation for them to protect them from an invasion of their privacy, from personal information about them being used for some reason that they, one, didn't know about and, two, didn't have an opportunity to give their permission or approval for. In the four short years I've been in this Assembly, we've seen an increasing amount of violation

of that, and we have not shown leadership in this Assembly as far as protecting that personal information on behalf of people. So we really have to work much, much harder on that one.

Another issue I want to talk about sort of globally is the question of access of women to the judicial system. What I see and what I hear from women that come to me – and as the women's issues critic for the opposition I hear from people all over Alberta: e-mails, letters, phone calls, people coming to my office. I think I can safely say that this is a fair selection from across the province. Actually, there's a project being done in Calgary. It would be really interesting to have a look and see whether they were finished yet because it would pertain to what's being proposed in Bill 20. It was around women's access to the law, to the judicial system, and I think it was being done by the Calgary Legal Guidance centre. [interjection] Well, they assist with restraining orders, but I think this project may be done in conjunction with Women Looking Forward, which is an excellent organization in Calgary that has been a good, strong advocate for women and has done a lot of very useful research on that as well.

What I see is that women can get beat up by the system, whereas someone with more money or more familiarity with the justice system can keep dragging women into court to defend themselves against accusations that are being brought forward under various family law matters. We've got the access enforcement law that this government brought forward, and there are a couple of other ones where there's a demand that women appear and basically have to justify or defend themselves. This can be used to really impact them economically as well, because many women are working in minimum wage jobs or lower wage jobs where they're paid by the hour. So if they have to go to their boss at Kentucky Fried Chicken or Revy or the janitor service and say, "Sorry; I have to get the afternoon off to appear in court to answer this," they don't get paid for those hours. That's not included in their salary, so they've lost the wages. Then there's ancillary costs of actually appearing in court that they've got to pay.

This may not be a big deal for many of the members in here, but for the women that I've talked to, parking downtown to go to the courthouse becomes a major obstacle when you're looking at a \$10 bill, a \$12 bill for all-day parking. [interjection] But it's not about paying their . . . The minister is aiding in my debate here.

The point is that if they have to appear in court, in most courts you're told to show up when your docket number blah, blah, blah. Well, they don't tell you what time that's going to happen. You're just supposed to come at 8 o'clock, you wait your turn in line, and you don't know when that turn is. So you start paying that parking at a quarter to 8 in the morning, and if your case isn't heard until 4 in the afternoon, you've racked up 12 bucks' worth of parking. And if you don't get heard, come back tomorrow; you can start it all over again. So that kind of cost is a factor for women.

When I look at Bill 20, I'm searching for what's in that bill that would alleviate some of this financial battery that happens here. I mean, besides the parking costs or bus fare – it could also be bus fare – if they're from out of town, then they're paying travel and accommodation costs as well, which really can raise the costs. Again, if they're having to travel from out of town, they may well have to be paying someone for child care. Well, all of this just to defend themselves against something that's pretty frivolous or often appears to be frivolous or a challenge to a custody hearing over and over and over again. I mean, I've had women who have just given up and said: I can't do this anymore; I can't afford to do it anymore. There's something really wrong with our justice system if that's how women are feeling, that they get beat up by the justice system.

MR. MacDONALD: Maybe they could have more of an active role in the justice system.

5:00

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, yes. Thank you. That's a nice segue, because I think it's important that we also look for a gender balance in the appointment of judges. I don't think I've seen that in Bill 20, but hey, there are amendments coming forward, so sh'boom, sh'boom, it may show up.

You see, part of what we've learned in jury systems – wherever you see juries that are set up for granting of moneys and things, representations on agencies, boards, and commissions, and certainly in the judiciary – is it's really important to have that representation that mirrors what our society is, and our society is 52 percent women. It's important that we have a much better representation of women in the judiciary, because they bring with them a life experience that may not be shared or understood by men. I've got all kinds of examples of where that was pooh-pooed: "No, no. You're not saying that men can't understand women's experience." Blah, blah, blah.

Well, in fact when we were able to get the representation on the committees, you know, on Canada Council, it was a huge thing to get gender representation on Canada Council. It was argued for years that this was not fair and that it should be based on the merit and that good art was good art, blah, blah, blah. Yeah, well, good art by some women may not catch men's imaginations, but it's still good art. When we got the representation balanced on the Canada Council, we started to see the number of grants that were being given and support being given to female artists going up. Before that, there had been an inequity about how the grants were actually given out. So it's really important that we do our very best to achieve a gender balance in appointment of judges.

I know that this Justice minister is concerned about issues like that, and I look to him to show leadership in that area. He is certainly in a position to exercise that and to address some of that imbalance, and I'm sure he could do it if he worked at it. So I encourage him to do that. I understand that it's not covered in this legislation, but, as I say, maybe it could come forward in an amendment or at least be aware of the need for this, you know, as he moves forward. He has been a pretty good Justice minister. I think I'd still prefer somebody from the opposition to be Justice minister, but he's been a pretty good one. That's okay. We'll be on that side soon.

So just to wrap up that section, the whole issue of women's access to justice is still an important one. I know people like to say: "Oh, you know, we've achieved gender parity. What's your problem? What are you bellyaching about now?" But we haven't. I mean, there are certain things that we have managed to achieve, a certain balance that we have even enshrined in law and certainly in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but we don't have women making wage parity with men, not by a long shot. The higher the education of the woman, the more likely that she would be achieving closer – I think, the gap closes to about 91 cents if she's got a degree or advanced degree, but that's closing the wage gap from 65 cents on the dollar. So this is a real issue. It's not true. We like to say that every person will be treated equally under the law, but it's not.

The effect that that law has upon women can often be very different, and usually it's tied to what their economic status is to begin with. If you're bringing someone in that's making minimum wage or 6 bucks an hour or \$6.05 an hour and they're losing four hours' worth of work, plus they're having to fork out, you know, for meals and travel and parking and child care, this appearance in court could cost them a whole bunch of money. I'm not saying that it's

inappropriate that they be called to court, but I think we have to look really carefully at what the setup is that's enabling the judicial system to be used as a battering ram, a financial battering ram on women. There's something wrong there, and it needs to be addressed.

MR. DICKSON: They're excellent points.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much.

I know that a number of groups were concerned about the section on Survival of Actions, which enables a family member to sue for lost earnings essentially. I'm aware that it's being proposed that that section be removed, that that section in the amended form be struck out. I mean, in some ways that may well be an antiquated idea, but in other ways I don't think it is. You know, we have a middle generation of people here who may well not end up with the retirement earnings that they expected. In fact, their children may well have contributed financially to their retirement, and that may be a key factor in whether people are able to enjoy a secure retirement as compared to a struggling, impoverished retirement.

I think certainly that legislation was also a big part of the campaign of several groups including MADD and PAID to drive home the point of drunk drivers killing young people on our highways and what a loss that is to the families. That was the only route that the family had to go through in order to make that point or ask for that restitution, that recognition of a loss, and that includes the financial loss to the family.

MR. DICKSON: Wrongdoers have to be held accountable.

MS BLAKEMAN: Wrongdoers have to be held accountable. It's interesting we're talking about that, because earlier in the day we were on a different discussion about what more could be done to catch and punish drunk drivers. So I wasn't inclined to be too concerned about that when I first heard about it, but the more I've thought about it, the more I think it was right of those groups to come forward and say: this is a piece of law that is important to us and allows us access to the judicial system. That is what I've been talking about in every point that I've raised along here. It is about access to the judicial system. It's about the court fees being waived. That's access to the judicial system.

I've talked about the payment hearings for maintenance enforcement. That's access to the judicial system. I talked about women's access in particular and how the courts can be used by some to batter them or economically punish them, and I talked about the need for a gender balance.

So this is an interesting piece of legislation. We're in second reading, so I've got lots of time to watch these amendments and see if perhaps there's an opportunity to get in a few of the other issues that I was concerned about. Essentially, I'm looking for improvements in Albertans' access to the judicial system.

Thanks very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an opportunity to stand this afternoon and speak to the issues of Bill 20 and the Justice Statutes Amendment Act. As we look at the structure of this bill, it leaves one with the idea that the government is trying to amend a whole series of different acts and, in doing that, is trying to bring some degree of continuity or uniqueness or oneness, I guess is a better term, to the concept of what we have in terms of our justice in

the sense that the different acts being pulled together now are going to fit better within each other.

5:10

One of the things that we don't really see associated with this, even in terms of some of the information that was put out, is a reflection in terms of the role that the government sees in the context of how they envision the judicial system interacting or being responsive to individuals. Trying to put all of this together with a whole series of amendments to a number of different bills doesn't really explain to us how they intend to pull these together and make for a better judicial system, because we don't really know what their end objective is when they have a system that's finally operating so that we could say: "Yes, that's the target we're going to. Will this amendment really get us there or not?" That kind of background and that kind of principle that should be here as we look at this bill and look at the amendments that are in it to a number of different statutes don't give us that vision.

So what we have to do is kind of look at the provisions of the bill and see whether or not they do develop any kind of a visionary view or visionary expectation in terms of a new justice system, a new way that the justice system would work, a new way that the justice system would effectively provide better service. It's kind of like what we're trying to do here is just the old concept of you fix whatever part is most likely to break down and you don't worry about the rest of it, rather than going back and seeing whether or not there's any fault in the design at all. So what we end up trying to do here is see whether or not the system is effective and the system can provide better service for us as we move to a future justice system that's going to operate under the guidelines as outlined in Bill 20.

I guess the first thing they talk about and that comes to mind in terms of the structure of the courts is the amalgamation that they're proposing, which would basically do away with the separate divisions – the Criminal Division, the Youth Division, the Family Division, and the Civil Division – as entities within that court system. They're going to come together. Now, I guess the question there is: how does the government see this as creating efficiencies? Why is it that they want to try and pull these together? What are they trying to get out of it? I guess when you start to bring together groups under functional areas, you try to do this from an organizational point of view when you see some efficiencies that might result from bringing them together.

I guess the issue that we want to look at here is trying to bring all of these under one judge so that, as I read this in my limited knowledge of the judicial system, on any given day a judge can be in a courtroom and any one of these different kinds of cases could come before that judge. Now, I guess if we're relying on the judge solely to deal with the technical aspects of the law, they have to apply it in the same way in each one of these kinds of cases. But what if an individual asks for the case to be heard by a judge? What if the issues that become specific to the way lawyers interact with the client, the way the prosecutor interacts with the defendant – what if these kinds of issues come out and they're different as we look at the different legal procedures that are allowed, say, in a civil case or in a criminal case or a family court case?

I think most of the concerns that come here have to deal with how we want to have ease or facility of access, especially for our family courts, because so many of the issues that we've heard discussed already this afternoon come out in trying to guarantee effectiveness, guarantee a degree of compassion through the system. I don't mean compassion in the context of the outcome of the proceeding but compassion in the sense of the ease of the proceeding to facilitate the people who are involved in it. We don't want to see those kinds of

procedures being developed that create the rigidity that has to be held for different kinds of court cases.

So I guess we look at that: what are the expected efficiencies that we'll gain by having this? I would hope that as the government proceeds to get into the next sections of debate on this, as we go into amendments – or it would even be great if some of them would stand up and respond a little bit as we talk about those principles so that we can better prepare our debate and our suggestions when it comes time to amend this bill in committee. If we can understand what the end objective might be, then we can understand better how to evaluate whether or not these amendments will actually give us the kind of outcome in our judicial system that my constituents or constituents from any one of the other representatives here see as being beneficial.

So I guess that, Mr. Speaker, has to be the first thing I want to raise in terms of how this is going to be effective when we bring these together. What are the efficiencies that we're going to see there? How can we measure the cost-effectiveness of this in terms of its relationship to both the speed and the effectiveness or the legality of a proceeding? Does it work through and follow the appropriate sets of laws and still have that little bit of participant compassion that I was talking about?

The other thing that I kind of looked at in terms of some of the issues that come with combining these departments is the rural aspect of it. A lot of times, you know, some of the rural courts are quite able to handle a lot of the issues that come up with some of the different kinds of prosecutions or defences or legal actions, but we also see situations where the associated services may not be available in a rural community, and they have to go to a different area. Rather than having the courts located in an area where there is sufficient volume to deal with both the surrounding services that are needed to make sure that that works right, that the hearing proceeds along, that the support systems are there, whether they're, you know, lab systems that are necessary for a criminal prosecution or the human support systems that are there, say, for a family court action – how do we make sure that happens?

In order to have those kinds of things be cost-effective both for society as a whole and the individuals involved, we've got to have critical mass there so that there's a volume of use that will give the participants some perception or some expectation of a reasonable income. It wouldn't do to have certain kinds of courts located in areas or available in areas where they didn't have that efficiency that they could build up. So that's the kind of thing that came to my mind as I looked at how this might affect rural areas.

The other side of that might be that in a rural area, because there isn't a volume, a judge should be able to do a little bit of everything. Well, that's getting back to the idea of how much the judge has to be involved in the technical aspects of the case as opposed to the technicalities of the legal procedures of the case. If we want to have the judge involved in being able to evaluate some degree of, say the process in a family law case or a civil case or a criminal case, there's a degree of expectation in technical knowledge that should be there in that judge to deal with it. Can we have that in a kind of broad-based universal type court system?

5:20

The other thing that comes up in terms of some of the issues that are associated with the rural areas – and I guess many of the rural community members would be quite supportive of the idea of being able to just run into the registry and pay their fine, but then the question comes up in terms of when the surcharge gets added on. What we're doing – and this applies to anybody who would use that registry – is we're saying that the fine effectively gets increased by

the markup that's associated with that service fee that the registry agent charges. So fines are not effectively going to be equal for individuals who have committed the same crime in the sense that if you got a speeding ticket with a \$50 fine on it, if you pay it through the court system, you get it for \$50; if you pay it through a registry, you may have to pay \$55.

What you're going to do is almost get into a situation, Mr. Speaker – so many people now say: "Well, you know, I live in Lethbridge. I was traveling outside Leduc. I happened to go through a radar trap, got a ticket. I know I wasn't speeding, and I want to challenge this." You've got to go back to Leduc or you've got to come to Edmonton or you've got to come somewhere else to say: I want to plead innocent. It costs you more to come from . . .

MR. MAR: You were probably speeding.

DR. NICOL: Well, we won't debate the accuracy of my accusation.

It's easier for me just to say, "Okay. I'm guilty. I'm going to let that go," rather than undertake that whole expense of coming from Lethbridge up to, say, Leduc to plead my case.

Well, we're going to have the same thing here essentially in the sense that the penalty of the law is not equal for everybody who is subjected to the rule of law. I think what we need to look at here, then, is a provision for the agents, however they're going to be defined, whether they're registry agents or not, to collect the \$50 fine so that the actual penalty for the infraction is the same no matter where you have this infraction. They take a little bit out of the fine, whether it's the same percentage or whatever, so they can still get their \$5. They send the \$45 into the respective collector of those dollars, whether it's the city, the rural municipality, or whatever, and the impact, then, and the penalty paid by an individual for a court-leveled fine is equal no matter how you choose to pay it.

Mr. Speaker, the issue that comes up is: are we fining people to encourage them not to commit an unlawful activity, or are we fining individuals to collect revenue? My suggestion and my belief in the judicial system is that the reason we have fines is to encourage individuals not to commit an unlawful activity, not to generate revenue. If we're trying to generate revenue with this, then what we have to do is look at it from the perspective of how we can make sure there's a fixed revenue coming, and adding on the service charge depending upon where the individual pays is a legitimate aspect. I don't think it is in the context of my perception of what a judicially imposed penalty is; that is, an equal penalty for every person to try and provide them with an incentive not to recommit that same kind of unlawful activity.

I think that what we should do is make the fine payable at a whole series of different places, provide convenience for the individuals to make payments, but do not in essence create a differential cost associated with how you choose to make the payment, because this

in effect, then, puts in place a different penalty for individuals based on how they make that payment as opposed to the same penalty to deal with the breaking of a law.

Mr. Speaker, another thing that stands out in the context of the bill as it's being put together is how to deal with some of the things that come out in the context of, say, section 19. I know we're not supposed to talk about the specific sections, but as we look at the application of this bill to make the judicial system more open and more flexible, I take it that what we're seeing in that section is basically a legitimization or a legislative approval of some of the things that we're now seeing happening through the family court sections, where individuals can petition to have a hearing on payment ability without having to have legal counsel or have direct infringement, you know, in the normal process. They can go straight to the family court judge and have their hearing without having to go through all of the rigamarole that's associated with a petition from a lawyer.

Now, I guess what we want to look at here is how fair and how equitable that kind of structure and access system works in the sense that there are a lot of other aspects that come into play here in terms of having fairness developed in those kinds of surprise hearings, you might want to call them. When they do in essence have this petition for a payment hearing, we have to make sure that that kind of a process provides for fair and just notification to everybody who may be impacted by any decisions that are there. You want to make sure that the individual or the parties that are potentially going to have their receipted dollars reduced should be provided with an opportunity to be there as well. So that kind of balance has to come into effect so that in the context, say, of a family court action the custodial parent, who is receiving money in support of a child, is notified if the noncustodial parent applies to have a reduction, and the custodial parent then has the option to come and question the legitimacy of the information that's being provided in that context of a hearing. The need of that, I think, stands out as we look at how the process works out.

Another aspect in the provisions here is the amendments that will make sure that the Chief Judges are not subject to frivolous court action in terms of the execution of their duties. I think this is again a good way to make sure that the court system is provided with some degree of integrity, but we also have to make sure that there is a process in place for scrutiny so that the judicial process doesn't get to be careless. I guess that's where we rely on the aspect of procedural appeals through a superior court, whichever level we're at. The next level of court then gets to make the judgments on the accuracy and integrity of the judicial process as it was executed in the context of a particular court case.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 21, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/11/21

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned November 21: Dr. Nicol speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The leader of the ND opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to speak on Bill 20 in its second reading. This bill is extensive and complex. The Justice Statutes Amendment Act attempts to amend four different, complex statutes. It's divided into four parts. The first part deals with, of course, the amendments to the Provincial Court Act. The second part deals with Surrogate Court matters. Part 3 deals with the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, and the last part is sort of miscellaneous other amendments.

It's a bill that covers a whole lot of very complex existing statutes and acts and attempts to change them, I presume, to modernize these acts to some extent, to make changes in them so that the technologies that may be available now to courts and the judicial system can be used in the court procedures. So one of its intentions seems to be to sort of modernize the existing statutes, and I suppose it's also supposed to make our justice system and judicial system accessible to Albertans, more accessible than it might have been up to this point.

The justice system is an extremely important and significant aspect of modern democratic societies and democratic governments. It's important because it provides legitimacy and credibility to the decisions made by institutions, such as the one in which I stand, that make laws. The laws of course have to be enforced and implemented and interpreted, and the judicial system and the judiciary play a very important role in then mediating the relationship between citizens who may find themselves in conflict with laws or in trouble with the existing laws, which are represented by state institutions, and themselves as individuals.

So the justice system is an extremely important element of our democratic governance, the three branches of government being the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary. Each has its own degree of autonomy, independence, and at the same time they are inter-linked. The job of the justice system and the judicial system is to deliver justice to citizens while maintaining the integrity of the state institutions and its laws.

The act, as I said, is very, very broad ranging, and not being a lawyer, I find, obviously, dealing with this act somewhat challenging because of its legal technicalities and the procedural complexity that are associated with the judicial system. Nevertheless, there are some general principles, I guess. As I said, one of them is accessibility. The system of justice, for it to be one that has the support of citizens, must be accessible to them. It must be open. It must be seen to be just. It must be affordable. So in my comments I'm trying to see if some of these principles, some of these basic expectations of a good judicial system are reflected and embodied in the amendments that are being proposed here.

I'll start with the very last part of this act, which is part 4, Other Amendments. The one that I find most important here is the one on page 38 which deals with the recovery of damages. I'm starting with this because I received a call in my office from Medicine Hat the other day, and the caller expressed some concerns about the manner in which this recovery of damages section of this proposed bill will limit the damages that can be pursued through the courts by members of the family of the deceased. So there is clearly a concern there among ordinary Albertans about how this bill might in fact make justice perhaps somewhat less accessible to them, what they see as just to be less accessible if this part of the bill is passed.

Similarly, going back to part 3, which deals with the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, the part of the bill that appears on pages 36 and 37 in particular, which deals with the use of third parties to collect fines and money owed from ticket violations and what have you, this is a sort of arrangement whereby, I guess, private registries will be allowed or empowered to receive these moneys on behalf of the court.

8:10

In addition to some of the comments I've made on it, which pertain to the privacy issues that this arrangement raises, there's also, of course, the question of some service charges that these collection agencies may be able to levy on people who go there to pay the fines related to ticket offences and whatnot. These service charges, at least from my reading of the bill – the scale of it, the amount of it, how much it will cost on top of the fine that is to be paid – is a matter that seems to be left to be dealt with or negotiated, say, between the person who's going to pay the fine and the collecting agency. So it's another area where I hope the Minister of Justice will be able to answer some of these questions as to why it is that this arrangement is necessary, how it will make the justice system more accessible, how it will add to the convenience of Albertans in their ability to pay the fines at locations where they may be across this province.

Particularly, I guess, those who possibly live in big cities can avoid going to the registries and certainly can go to the courts and pay directly without therefore having to also pay on top of the fine a service charge that we would owe if we were to use a local private registry. In small communities, away from big cities, where citizens are already at some degree of disadvantage in their access to the courts because of distance and the expenses that they have to undertake in order to seek justice when they find themselves having to go to court, they are the ones that will be using these registries and will be liable to these service charge payments, which I think is unfair. I think it makes access to justice more difficult for them. It makes it more expensive for them. It adds to the already existing geographically generated disadvantage to them. So that's part of the proposed bill that I again find not addressing in principle the question of accessibility, affordability, and convenience to Albertans. This was the section under the Provincial Offences Procedure Act that I was commenting on.

One of the other sections of the act that I would like to just briefly comment on – the Survival of Actions Act part is the one that I guess I already referred to. That certainly is a matter that was brought to our attention by some citizens, and I would certainly like the minister to address that perhaps in the House to see whether or not the concerns that have been expressed to us can be allayed by his explanations.

The first part of the act deals with, of course, the Provincial Court Act. There the section that caught my attention – and I must say that I haven't had the opportunity to study thoroughly every part or section of this proposed bill – is the one that falls under Provincial

Court judges. I guess, again, one of the principles that I'm trying to see if it's addressed, if it's respected, if it's observed in the development of these amendments to the existing statutes, is the independence of the judiciary, which, as we all know and we all agree, is one of the fundamental principles of a good judicial system like the one that we do have. So any changes that we make to the Provincial Court Act, particularly changes that may affect Provincial Court judges and their independence, are the changes that I think must be most closely scrutinized by this House.

I'm curious about the changes that are being proposed on pages 3 and 4. I'm sure the minister would like to address those, to provide us with some explanation as to whether the changes proposed here indeed bolster or reinforce the principle of judicial independence, not only by way of independence of the judiciary vis-a-vis the executive or the Legislature but the independence of the judges within the administrative system of the judiciary itself. From my reading of this section, I get the feeling that the powers of the Chief Judge as written up here would seem to make that power so great, so central to the court system that individual judges might find that in the exercise of their best judgment they either have to risk their independence or autonomy or risk earning the wrath of their superior judges in the judicial system.

I'm using my words very carefully here because I don't by any means want to convey to the House and to members in the House the sense that there's something seriously wrong being done here. I'm raising some questions here which I think must be answered, must be addressed by all of us in all seriousness in order to make sure that this principle of judicial independence, both inside the judicial system and in relations between the judicial system on one hand and the other bodies of the government on the other, is preserved, is respected and, if possible, further strengthened. The independence of the judiciary is absolutely critical to the integrity of the system, to the credibility of the system of justice, and to the ability of citizens to have faith that the system works for them, that it is there for them and is there to serve their collective interests.

On page 4, section 21.1(7):

Where the chief judge makes any decision or takes any action with respect to a matter referred to in subsection (5) or (6) or any other matter relating to the administration of the Court, that decision or action is not subject to any type of judicial review by a superior court unless that decision or action is, in the opinion of a superior court, patently unreasonable or not within the powers, duties or jurisdiction of the chief judge.

I wish I could recall the details of a recent case in which a judge challenged, in fact, the decision of the Chief Judge in this province and was able to, I guess, persuade the court that his concerns and his objections were genuine and serious, and the court took them into account. Now, I wonder if this change that's being proposed here will in fact make it difficult for another judge in a similar situation tomorrow or once this bill is passed and proclaimed to be able to seek redress to a decision that he or she might consider to be patently wrong. So I have concerns about the amendments proposed here along those lines, and I would like the Minister of Justice later on perhaps to address some of these concerns and assure me and the House that the proposed changes will in fact not lead to what I fear will be the consequences if these amendments are approved by the House.

8:20

I guess these are my general concerns about this. Other than that, I think the bill seems to have certainly been carefully crafted. Much of it merits our support. It's a good bill, and the minister is to be commended, I guess, for the work that he and his staff have done and the care that they've shown in drafting the various amendments,

but there are some sections of it which I find have raised some questions and which I find potentially troubling.

So with those comments, Madam Speaker, I will close my remarks. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to make some short comments this evening in support of Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000. The court system, of course, is of vital interest to all citizens, and you just have to witness the heat around the debate over the last number of years on the Young Offenders Act and those claiming that it's too lenient and those claiming that it's too harsh to get a bit of a feel for the passion with which citizens in our country approach the justice system.

In this Legislature we've had private members' bills that would have made changes to the justice system. One was to elect judges. So the justice system is a source of constant comment, criticism, and renewal, and I view the bill before us as part of that renewal.

Having said that there's a great deal of citizen interest in justice matters, I did put out a householder four weeks ago now, and in that householder I listed all the bills that were before the Assembly during the 24th Legislature and a brief summary of those bills. On this particular bill I received only one phone call. That phone call really wasn't about the bill; it was to bad-mouth lawyers. So I'm not sure, at least in my part of Alberta, that that interest is quite as strong as I thought it was.

I think the principles that underlie the bill and that we're to be addressing at this stage in discussion are principles that, of course, surround the administration of law and the means by which law is applied. It's those general principles that are being modified in the bill. Then there seems to be a set of subprinciples. I think most speakers who have spoken to the bill agree, too, that the justice system has to be made more user friendly and that the system has to be more accessible. I think that those guiding principles are sound and ones worthy of support and are reflected in the legislation with the specifics of the bill.

I also noted that the impetus for the change came out of the justice summit that was held. I guess I'm pleased to see that that was the root of these changes. The number of summits that were held in the last five or six years and the amount of direct legislation that came out of those summits I think is rather small, so it's good to see before us action being taken by the government that is a direct outgrowth of that justice summit.

Commenting on accessibility, I think it's something that we all run into in our positions as MLAs. I have a group of condo owners who look at the justice system with some dismay in terms of it helping them to resolve the current problems they face. Part of that surrounds the whole notion of accessibility and being user friendly. They feel removed from the system, and they are more than skeptical that the relief they seek can be found in the system or, at least if it is going to be found in the system, that it's going to be a very lengthy and protracted process. I think they'll take heart at some of the changes that are embodied in this particular bill.

The extent of the justice system in the province was a surprise to me. I knew generally about the justice system, but I didn't realize that there were Provincial Court locations in 74 communities across the province and that 23 of these are run on a full-time basis while the other 51 sit on specified days – it's much more extensive than I'd believed it to be – and that there are 106 Provincial Court judges. That's a substantial body.

Some of the changes are designed to enhance the role of those 106

Provincial Court judges and the ability of those courts to deal directly with breaches of its orders as a court. They'll be able to deal with items like tenancy agreements, they'll be able to order the return of property, and they'll be able to conduct payment hearings in civil matters. I think this is going to be important. They increased the limit for Provincial Court civil matters, and that makes sense.

One of the innovations in the changes proposed is that it enshrines the civil claims mediation process and the pretrial conference process in law. That was a pilot that was undertaken in 1998 and '99 and was a great success. I think the record, if the minister's information is as we have received it, is that they handled 1,074 mediations in 1999 with an average success rate of close to 70 percent. That's a very impressive record, and to be able to incorporate that process that brings people together and seeks to come to a solution through mediation into the act, I think, is very sound indeed. I think that if you put that in context with the fact that in 1998-99 there were 28,865 actions filed in the Provincial Court of Alberta, you start to get a feeling for the significance or the kind of impact that that mediation process can have on the justice system.

Madam Speaker, I'm not sure that I have a lot more to say. I appreciated the comparison chart that the minister provided us. I understand that section 74, which has been rather controversial, is going to be amended by the government before we finish dealing with this bill. I think it's supported by a number of individuals and groups that that should be removed, although I notice that the minister's comment was that it was really a misinterpretation that led to the difficulty being raised with that section. Nevertheless, I think it's appropriate that it not be part of this bill.

With those few comments, Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to support the Justice Statutes Amendment Act. Thank you.

8:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure, standing in this Assembly on the eve of the upcoming election, to enter into the debate on second reading of Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000.

As the Minister of Justice has illustrated and voiced his keen interest in getting this bill through, I do wonder if Bill 20 is his only hiccup in holding his members in this Assembly. You know, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Justice has put forward some competent ideas in this bill, but as so often is the case, it makes it so difficult for members of the opposition, who truly want to see the best things coming out of this Assembly, to show Albertans why we're here, because we work for them as the elected people of this province.

The bill that we see put forward has actually got some substantial information in it. Under the different things that we look at, I'm wondering: could we not ask the Minister of Government Services and her department whether or not the questions have any parallels with her department? It was about a year ago when some of the difficulties with private registries came out and it was discovered that there were breaches in privacy and confidentiality. There were also some suggestions in the minister's department at the time that there was not a uniform pricing, which then had to be enforced through pricing changes, to do with the services that were provided by the registries. Was Bill 20 derived from this actual concern? I do wonder about some of the things.

You know, when we look at other things, it's interesting to hear that the provincial Minister of Justice made some comments about how reorganization of the Provincial Court will erode the expertise

that has been created within the Alberta youth courts. To make sure that we are still going to be able to do the best for both the accused and of course their victims and make sure not just that the court process is as efficient as it can be but that the outcome is as just as it can be, I haven't heard from the government anything that would make my level of caution or concern go down.

Madam Speaker, Bill 20 has contradictions. We see first of all that one of the most controversial sections, the one that deals with the limitations of claim for survivors, may or may not be amended in ways that may address the concerns put forward by the Official Opposition and by the members of the legal community. We also have sections that reorganize the Provincial Court in some ways that are helpful but in other ways could be very problematic. I also understand, going through and perusing *Hansard*, that at this stage there have been some changes already in section 74, so that type of item is very well received. I think the legal community will be looking at that with great interest.

I think it's very critical at this time that we do look at this particular bill, particularly when we look at our judicial system. It is an area in our society today where there isn't much confidence, certainly not as much confidence as we'd like there to be.

I look at this especially from the point of view of many constituents of Edmonton-Manning, many of whom have accessed the judicial system, whether it's been family court, whether it's been divorce court or, in some cases, other matters dealing with courts. As they come into the constituency office and voice their concerns to me, they state that it's the expense on their part, that the system's too complicated, and accessibility is always a problem as they present their case to me. They're concerned around the unified family court system. The question that must be asked in our law system is that it's becoming too expensive. The major concerns are certainly the long waits, accessibility, and the cost. This not only impacts them in what happens, but certainly these costs they experience are costs that many of them cannot afford.

A question that has come to mind is: how many more judges will be required? We have an excellent opportunity here; we could increase the ratio of judges male to female. So what I'd also like to know from the minister is what estimates he would have indicating how much more it's going to cost for staff, not only for judges but for additional staff that will be required by those courts.

In looking at the review of Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000, I think it is an excellent suggestion that the Provincial Court will no longer be divided into the criminal division, the youth division, the family division, and the civil division. This consolidation will certainly be of benefit to all.

Another excellent suggestion here is that the Lieutenant Governor will be able to make regulations outlining situations in which the court fees can be waived. An excellent suggestion, because under the present system many of our people of low income or who are caught in a social safety net don't feel that the courts are accessible to them. So with the waiving of the fees, Madam Speaker, this will be an opportunity where these people will see that the courts are accessible and that they're participants in a system where there's fairness, where there's accountability, and where Albertans are treated fairly by a system not because of how much money they have and what they can afford but because of what is right and what is wrong.

You know, in looking at correspondence that has been sent to us – it was pointed out while I was perusing the bill – the Lieutenant Governor in Council will be able to make regulations allowing a claim of up to \$25,000 to be heard in the Provincial Court. The current system is \$10,000, although the regulation is currently set at \$7,500. The Lieutenant Governor in Council will be able to make

regulations governing payment hearings. These payment hearings are for the purpose of determining a person's ability to pay the money owing under the judgment in the court by an estimate schedule and other methods under which the amount owing is to be paid.

The Lieutenant Governor in Council will be able to make regulations with respect to pretrial conferences and mediation. The clerk of the Provincial Court will determine which matters must go through the process of a pretrial conference prior to proceeding to trial, and the powers of the pretrial conference are set out in Bill 20. Now, this can be "giving directions with respect to matters raised or otherwise considered during pre-trial conference" or "setting out the results of the pre-trial conference." This can be done by "amending pleadings" and "striking out pleadings by reason of the failure of a party to attend a pre-trial conference" or other directions the court considers appropriate.

You know, as we look at this bill, it has a lot of substantive effects as opposed to being merely a housekeeping bill. As I mentioned before, it has substantive importance to the minister. I know that my House leader says that I can speak for 30 minutes, and by prolonging this, maybe we can get another couple of weeks of question period out of this, Madam Speaker. But I do want to set out the main points of this bill and that I am for the bill.

I would like to say, in saying that I will be backing this bill, Madam Speaker, that the main highlights that are really making this bill worth while are that it consolidates the Provincial Court Judges Act into the Provincial Court Act, repeals the Surrogate Court Act, expands the jurisdiction of the Provincial Court to encompass matters that previously could only be brought before the Court of Queen's Bench but can now be dealt with in the Provincial Court, and, finally, limits the grounds for review of a Chief Judge in an administrative decision, as in the case that was brought up by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the Judge Reilly case.

So, Madam Speaker, I will take my leave, and hopefully as I sit down, many members from the government side will stand up and carry this debate on so we can carry on this evening as we are.

Thank you.

8:40

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to admit that up until the last few moments I was entirely puzzled by what we were seeing, because the Justice Statutes Amendment Act was introduced in this House on Tuesday, April 18, almost exactly seven months ago, and until yesterday it suffered in a din of silence. Then we've had, of course, all this wonderful input in the House in the last day and a half and, I must say, such wonderful input it is.

I'm so pleased that at least one member of the opposition is doing his research. I have to commend Edmonton-Mill Woods for having gone back and read *Hansard* and the comments that were made when the act was introduced and referring to some of the information that was provided at that time as to the purpose of the act. So many of the other opposition members failed to do their research, and while I appreciated the positive comments that were made – and I don't wish to sound defensive – it would have been so much more elucidating if some research had been done on the information.

I do want to deal with some of the issues that have been raised because this is an important act, notwithstanding the fact that we've discovered that the real purpose of most of the speeches was to waste time and arrive at more question periods rather than to actually deal with the issues in the act. But there are important issues, and

some of those important issues have been raised. Spruce Grove-St. Albert started it off with discussion about the Survival of Actions Act. And I must say that it is a bit disappointing because, as I always try to do in introducing an act, I met with the Justice critic, then the Member for Edmonton-Norwood, and I believe the Opposition House Leader, and I outlined exactly what was going into the act and why. So I am a bit disappointed to have people come back and tell me that they weren't communicated with.

It would have made for good reading and research if any of the members of the opposition had read the final report, no. 76, of the Law Reform Institute with respect to section 74.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's right there.

MR. HANCOCK: Is that the copy that I sent over yesterday afternoon for your members to read? It would have been, because it sets out quite clearly the reason why section 74 was included in the Justice Statutes Amendment Act. The report clearly indicates the process which the Law Reform Institute went through in order to arrive at their conclusions. While it will be my intention in committee to introduce an amendment – and I'll get to the reasons why – to take that section out of the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, I want to be clear that section 74 was included for a very, very good reason.

First of all, I am of the belief that when the Alberta Law Reform Institute delves into an issue of law and makes a report, those reports should not sit on the shelf. Those reports should be acted upon. The issues, the recommendations where appropriate, where possible should be brought forward and embodied in our law. So I wanted to put that out, and the Law Reform Institute made some very good comments on the whole question of the interpretation of section 5 of the Survival of Actions Act and the interpretation that came forward in the case known as *Duncan and Baddeley*. They have referred to a number of the reasons why the law should be clarified and why it is necessary to have a section like section 74.

Now, the reason why we're going to be proposing an amendment I'll deal with when we get to Committee of the Whole, but I just wanted to put on the record that we do not do these statutes by stealth. We do not slip sections in.

Section 74 is in fact the recommendations from the Law Reform Institute, a 61-page report, a very well-researched and briefed report, which I would commend to the opposition members and members of government to read, because we will be wanting to discuss this issue over the course of the next few months. It is one which should come back to this House in the future after consultation with members of MADD and PAID and other organizations. I must say that I did have a lot of input from the plaintiff's bar as well on this issue. It does behoove us to have some discussion. I'm so pleased that people are now attuned to that particular issue and that we can have a meaningful discussion on it in the future.

There has been a lot of issue made of the Provincial Offences Procedure Act and particularly the question of registry agents being able to accept the payment of fines. For the benefit of Lethbridge-East and Edmonton-Strathcona, who talked about the principles of the act – and I appreciate them delving into the principles and objectives of the act – what the Justice Statutes Amendment Act is all about is easier access to the system, easier access to the courts, better opportunities to resolve disputes, encouragement to resolve disputes through mediation and through other processes. One of the ways in which we can make the system more accessible to the public is providing more avenues for them to access it.

Now, it may be a small thing, but the payment of fines is one area where the more outlets, the more availability there is, the more

accessible it is to the public. Nobody is forcing anyone to go to a registry agent to pay a fine or to pay a surcharge for the purpose of paying that fine. They can pay the fine in the old way. They can take it down to the courthouse. They can send it in by mail. They can do any one of a number of things to avoid the surcharge. But if they happen to be in a registry agent renewing their insurance or renewing their licence and they would like to pay their fine at that location, is there any good reason why they shouldn't be able to do that, have the convenience of that, and yes, if they wish, pay the surcharge in order to have that convenience? They don't have to. They can put it in an envelope, put a stamp on the envelope, mail it in on a timely basis, and it'll certainly be accepted.

I hope that in the future, Madam Speaker, we'll be able to afford people the opportunity to go to our web site and to log in on the web site and make payments of their fine through electronic funds transfer on the web site. I hope that that will be offered in the very near future.

That issue has been raised by a number of members opposite, and I did want to address it. I don't anticipate, as a couple of members do – I think Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert indicated, for one, that she was concerned about the number of people that would be put out of work. Well, it was clear in my introductory remarks and it's clear now that this is an expansion of availability, of accessibility. We won't be closing any of the clerk's offices because all of a sudden everybody's paying their tickets through another venue.

Edmonton-Riverview raised concerns about what could be encapsulated in the words "judicial independence" and referred to a specific case. Quite frankly, I guess I expected that that might be raised. What I want to assure Edmonton-Riverview and what I want to assure again Edmonton-Strathcona in his comments about the sections on pages 4 and 5 of the bill is that what we're attempting to do . . . [interjections] Well, Edmonton-Riverview made comments yesterday, and Edmonton-Strathcona did today, and I want to address them both at the same time. The purpose is not to detract from judicial independence but certainly to improve the efficiency in the operation of the court in allowing the Chief Judge, not the Minister of Justice but the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court, to order the resources of the court in a manner which makes most effective use and provides, again, best access to the public of Alberta.

If the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court determines that he needs more judges in a particular area to handle a particular workload, then he should be able to order the resources of his court in order to accomplish that, whether that would mean moving judges temporarily or permanently in terms of the area that they sit in or whether that would mean moving judges temporarily or permanently in terms of the division in which they sit. That's the purpose of the section. It allows the Chief Judge the opportunity to organize his court in a manner which deals with and provides the best access to Albertans who need it and to deal with time to trial and those sorts of issues by reordering the resources that he has at his behest.

8:50

There is provision made in the bill and there is further provision which will be introduced in the amendments, which I hope to get to at some point in time . . . [interjection] Soon. My own member is admonishing me: soon. We will introduce those amendments, which will provide a process for a judge who doesn't like the decision or the ordering of the Chief Judge to appeal to the Judicial Council and have their grievances heard. But it is unseemly for judges to be going to court and particularly unseemly for judges to be going to court at the expense of the provincial government for both sides of the case and having the province bear all the expenses of both sides

of the argument, taking it through the processes of appeal, when there is a more appropriate forum readily available to them. That's the intent. It's not an intent to in any way interfere with independence of individual judges or of the judiciary at all, but to allow the Chief Judge to utilize those resources to do what is the most important issue here, and that is to provide better access by Albertans to the Provincial Court.

Many, many other comments were raised, but most of them fell in those categories. I cannot let the opportunity pass, though, to deal with some of the comments that were raised by Edmonton-Glenora, because quite truly they hurt. They do. They're very hurtful comments. In the middle of debate Edmonton-Glenora referred to "nasty bits," that in a bill that could have some very straightforward, positive elements, there are these nasty bits secreted away. He says:

I am left to my speculation that it is done quite on purpose; that is, to make sure that the nasty bits, as I refer to them, are hidden and aren't immediately apparent except on close scrutiny.

Madam Speaker, that strikes so very close to the heart.

When I engage in this process of drafting and bringing forward legislation to improve the judicial system for Albertans, one of the processes that this minister engages in is sharing with his opposition critic exactly what's going to be in the bill. Not the direct wording of the bill, not a draft of the bill, because it would be quite inappropriate to give the actual draft of the bill before it's tabled in the House, but the concepts that are going to be in the bill, including the nasty bits, and pointing out – in fact, I think his colleague the Opposition House Leader might confirm for him that I even point out some of the areas that I think might be particularly controversial. Rather than hide them, I want to highlight them so that we can have a good debate on them. To come back and accuse – and I think it is an accusation – of secreting nasty bits in a bill is very hurtful and quite inappropriate. I think it would be appropriate for him to rise in his place at an appropriate time and direct an apology on that particular issue.

I think that deals with most of the issues that have been raised by members of the opposition speaking in the session on this issue.

Edmonton-Glenarry referred to the unified family court and whether this is somehow synchronized with the work that we're doing with respect to a unified family court. There is a Unified Family Court Task Force. I'm looking forward to a report from them. But I must indicate to the House that we have to work on two planes. We have to continually improve the existing structure so that Albertans can have greater access and better access to the courts and timely resolution of their disputes while we're working on what the long term might be and what the big picture might be for the courts. So while it may be appropriate to refer to the unified family court in this context – and I think I did refer to it in my opening remarks – we must continually do work to improve our legislation to improve the courts as we now know them while we're planning the future of the courts. That would be the only comment I'd make on the Unified Family Court Task Force.

Edmonton-Glenora did refer, again very cynically, to the parts of the act which deal with the Public Trustee Act, and all I can do at this point in time is assure him that there is no intent in this bill to in any way harm Albertans whose affairs are being taken care of by the Public Trustee. Albertans protected by the Public Trustee will not be affected negatively by the changes to the act, but I will get Edmonton-Glenora some more detailed information, because he has such a lack of trust for me, some additional information to show why this is not a nefarious, nasty bit secreted away but is an important change to be made at this time.

I do want to thank members of the House for allowing an omnibus bill – it's not an omnibus bill but a bill which deals with so many

acts. As was quite frankly and quite rightly pointed out by Edmonton-Strathcona, this all comes together into a package which makes sense when you read it in the context of what our provincial courts are doing, what our courts are doing, and what the judicial system is doing to provide a good opportunity for Albertans to resolve their disputes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'll call the committee to order.

Bill 20 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned November 21: Dr. Nicol speaking]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It seems like only moments ago we were dealing with this very bill. I'm delighted to rise in committee to deal with some of the issues that we've just been talking about and to move an amendment, which I believe will be called A1, to Bill 20 and to ask that it be dealt with as a package.

Madam Chairman, Bill 20 is designed to enhance the court system, to provide improved access to the courts in Alberta, and the legislation deals with a wide variety of changes to speed up the court process, particularly in regard to civil cases. As a result of the bill sitting over from the spring session and in fact having been sitting out there for public discussion and consumption for a matter of seven months, we've had an opportunity to receive further input from members, from the public, from the Provincial Court, and we're proposing amendments now to take into account some of the feedback and input that we've had.

The hon. opposition Justice critic himself, of course, as the House will remember, called Bill 20 good news and was able to point out only a few things that could be done better. Well, Madam Chairman, we're now tabling the amendments to the Justice Statutes Amendment Act to do just that.

I want to just highlight a few key points. The amendments that are being presented now would increase the maximum limit for small claims cases in Provincial Court. After the proposed House amendments the maximum limit that could be established would increase from \$10,000 to \$50,000 instead of the previous \$25,000 that was proposed in the bill. The reason for that is that after having some consultation – I thought we were pushing the envelope a little at \$25,000 but discovered that there was quite an appetite, actually, for increasing the levels available to the Provincial Court, civil claims division, to a higher limit.

Now, of course, we're not able to go to that higher limit immediately. Members will remember that the small claims limit, the actual limit, is set by regulation within the confines of the upper limit that's set in the act. So while we set it at \$50,000 in the act with this amendment, it will remain at \$7,500 until we have satisfied ourselves that the resources are available to allow the gradual move up, but we would hope to do that on a timely basis.

9:00

Provincial Court provides a simpler process than the Court of Queen's Bench, and parties are able to represent themselves more easily. It's not very cost-effective to take a claim of less than \$50,000 to Court of Queen's Bench. The Provincial Court, to the extent that we've been able to consult with them, has indicated that they don't have any concerns with raising the limit to this amount, so it seems appropriate to put the amount up to a reasonable level, the \$50,000 level, and try to work as diligently as we can to achieve that level.

The opposition also expressed concern about proposed amendments regarding Provincial Court judges' powers regarding contempt. The legislation ensures that contempt orders are issued only to ensure compliance and not punishment, and the amendments, I think, serve to clarify that.

We have also addressed the hon. Justice critic's concerns dealing with the privative clause and how complaints against judges would be dealt with. The amendments provide for a clear process of taking the matters to the Judicial Council and outlining some of the concerns around that. The Judicature Act would be amended so that complaints by Provincial Court judges and justices of the peace about decisions of supervisory judges would be dealt with by the Judicial Council rather than by a judicial review in the courts. The legislation also amends the Judicature Act to review remuneration and benefits for judges, masters, and justices of the peace every four years instead of every three years. Currently, you will recall, we have to have a Judicial Compensation Commission every three years. Federally they have them every four years, and this amendment will allow us to align with the federal practice. This will reduce the costs associated with the process itself.

Another amendment allows the minister to establish a tariff of fees and expenses that will establish the amount paid by the government to parties involved in a complaint by a judge against a supervisory judge to reimburse them for their costs of legal representation. Let's be clear about this. We're not intending in any way, shape, or form to interfere with an individual's ability to select the counsel of their choice. All we're attempting to do here is to make sure that the cost that's borne by the public for those sorts of disputes are paid for at the normal government rates rather than allowing participants to go out and hire the most expensive lawyers available.

The Jury Act is proposed to be amended to provide for confidentiality of juror addresses. Another amendment provides that the monetary threshold for jury trials should be set by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The current limit of \$10,000 is generally recognized as being too low. Enabling the limit to be set by regulation will now allow a new limit to be set after adequate consultation with stakeholders. This is consistent with the approach for the small claims limit.

The Court of Appeal Act will provide powers to the registrar, deputy registrar, and case management officers to assist the court with case management and other initiatives. That is important because it allows us to take and use judicial time for judicial purposes and take administrative procedures out of the hands of judges, if the court decides they want to do it that way, and allow administrative officers to handle those. It makes for a more efficient use of the resources and better use of judicial time.

Finally, there is an amendment included to deal with the Legal Profession Act to provide that the Legal Aid Society will operate the legal aid plan in accordance with an agreement with the Legal Aid Society, the provincial government, and the Law Society of Alberta. This is good news, Madam Chairman. It puts the legislative framework in place, and of course this section will not be proclaimed until all the i's are dotted and the t's are crossed. We've been in negotiations for some five years with respect to the proper model of

governance and process for the Legal Aid Society, and we now have an agreement which all parties have signed, and now we have to look to ensure that it can be implemented. When we're satisfied that it can be implemented, we need the legislative framework to allow us to do it, and that's the purpose of this amendment.

That leaves me only with section 74, the Survival of Actions Act. I did deal with it in second reading briefly. The proposed amendments delete section 74 of the bill and remove the proposed amendment to section 5 of the Survival of Actions Act. Madam Chairman, that proposed amendment was a good amendment. It was consistent certainly with what the Alberta Law Reform Institute had suggested should be done. We had requested the Alberta Law Reform Institute to canvass and consult on it, and they did. But I must be clear. There were not a lot of people who participated in that consultation process. In fact, until this weekend there were not a great number of people who were interested in section 74 of the Justice Statutes Amendment Act or, to put it another way, were interested in what we were proposing to do with respect to section 5 of the Survival of Actions Act. It did not become a major issue until this weekend.

Now, I will say that I have received quite a number of letters from plaintiffs' bar lawyers. They made very good arguments in those letters, but they were arguments which had previously been made and considered by the Law Reform Institute. So on reviewing those letters and submissions, which were very good – I met with a number of plaintiffs' bar lawyers, in fact, on that particular issue, but in the final analysis I was satisfied that the better view of the law was that which was being proposed by the Law Reform Institute.

Having said that, this is a significant issue to be dealt with. The Court of Appeal has expanded the law in Alberta, has created essentially a new head of damages in Alberta by its interpretation of the Survival of Actions Act. There certainly are some cases which are proceeding based on that, and there is an issue to be discussed. I do not believe that the Survival of Actions Act and the compensation that's provided in that matter is where most members of MADD, PAID, and others should be looking, in fact. If there is a problem to be reviewed, it probably is in the Fatal Accidents Act, in the limit set out in there, the \$43,000 limit, I believe it is.

The Law Reform Institute I think quite rightly says that justice does not require that a wrongdoer be punished by award of damages. That's not the purpose of civil court. Justice does not require an award to be made to an estate of a deceased person on the sole grounds that an award would have been made to a living plaintiff.

In other words, again I would commend to members of the Legislature that they review the institute's report. It's a good report. I think it's sound law. It's something we should be considering and something that hopefully we will consider again in the future, once more public discussion has been had on this particular issue.

Madam Chairman, those would be my comments with respect to the introduction of the amendments tonight. I would ask the House to consider them favourably and get on with passing Bill 20 so that we can improve the service of justice and the administration of justice in this province and provide better and greater access to the public of Alberta to the courts of Alberta.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. An interesting turn of events in the debate on this bill. We've just had a quick transition from second reading to committee, and while we were concluding second reading, the minister took it upon himself to take the opportunity to make I think some gratuitous comments, leading into the introduction of the amendments as well, regarding the length

of time that this bill has been before the people of Alberta and then suggesting that it wasn't creating much interest and then furthermore suggesting that there was no legitimate reason for prolonged debate, or at least he couldn't understand it.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

He makes the point that there were seven months and then all of a sudden this flurry of activity and then suggests that the Official Opposition has some cynical reasons for wanting to prolong debate. Then he turns around and he tables 13 pages – 13 pages – of amendments. With my quick count it looks like some 21 different sections of several different bills are being proposed to be amended. The minister stretches credulity by stating that he can't understand why there is some spirited debate.

Mr. Chairman, the minister felt pierced, hurt, I believe he said, that there was a suggestion that some nasty bits were being secreted away within this bill. Of course, some of the nasty bits are now being amended, particularly those dealing with the Survival of Actions Act and those sections dealing with judicial independence. I would say that the minister should review the history of the government that he's a part of before he worries about the cynicism on the part of the Official Opposition. I would suggest that the Official Opposition is being realistic when it makes the observation that the government hides things which would not receive widespread support within bills.

9:10

Mr. Chairman, there are several examples of this. We've got Bill 26, of course, which would have taken away the legal rights of some Albertans. We've got the privative section of Bill 11, which would have protected the government from legal action. We had a proposed environmental protection act which would have allowed the minister to make side deals for development on otherwise protected land. We've got numerous bills where the real guts, the real substance, of the bills are left to regulation sections, and of course the regulations are never debated before the standing committee which was created just for the purpose of debating and reviewing such regulations. So this government has a track record, a history, in fact has perfected the science of secreting away nasty bits within proposed legislation.

So I would say, as the minister has asked me to apologize for making this observation, that perhaps he should dry his crocodile tears and he should apologize to this member for his bad acting and his overstatement of the facts.

Now, I will say that near the end of the minister's rather defensive response to the second reading debate, he did say that he would be providing some details of the impact of this legislation on the operations of the Public Trustee and those Albertans that depend on the work of the Public Trustee. I look forward to receiving those details prior to the passage of this bill, because I think this group of Albertans who are vulnerable deserve that respect. Certainly we have an obligation as members of this Assembly, Mr. Chairman, to provide the scrutiny that this section requires before we give the government permission to change the operations of the Public Trustee.

I would once again say, Mr. Chairman, that the Justice Statutes Amendment Act as an omnibus bill does contain many bits which are troubling and even nasty. Some of them are being saved now by these amendments amongst these 13 pages of amendments. I would just ask the Minister of Justice to carefully consider whether or not things like section 74, which has now been removed, would have been better served in a discussion as a stand-alone bill.

The Alberta Law Reform Institute has written an excellent report, and it deserves to be studied. It deserves to be considered. I was

intrigued by the minister's statement that when that body provides the government with these reports, it's incumbent upon the government to act quickly. I note that, of course, this is report 76 from that August body, and I'm just wondering if the minister would like to give us a rundown of how quickly they've acted on the other 75 of those reports, including of course the ones on a unified family court.

That being said, Mr. Chairman, I will listen to the minister's response as we continue the committee process, as we review these amendments, and I suggest that we could even see these – did I say 13 pages? I believe it's 10 pages; I don't want to misstate myself. I perceive that we may see these 10 pages of amendments now even grow in size as committee proceeds.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't want to belabour this too much, but I think it does need to be said that I didn't indicate at all that the government had any policy with respect to these. I indicated that I as Justice minister felt it was appropriate to look at, and I think it's my role as Justice minister to look at the Institute of Law Research and Reform reports and bring them forward where appropriate and not leave them on the shelf. I wanted just to clarify that.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. member has quite rightly pointed out that the amendments were tabled tonight, notwithstanding the fact that in my usual form I shared the concepts earlier with my critic. I think it would make for better debate if opposition members and other members of the House had a chance to peruse the amendments, and therefore I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee now rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on Bill 20. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur with the report? All in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 28
Appropriation (Supplementary
Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move for the consideration of the Assembly Bill 28, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2).

The contents of the bill having been considered by Committee of Supply for two full days with vigorous debate and exchange of viewpoint, I would request that the Assembly consider passing this and letting us go home at a reasonable time tonight.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. You know, that's so disrespectful of Albertans, who are actually footing the bill for this supplementary supply request. It's not enough for this government to miss their budget estimates and their targets by billions of dollars every year. They have the audacity, then, to come into the Assembly and try to make a joke out of asking for nearly a billion dollars worth of supplemental estimates, a requisition just so shortly into the fiscal year. It really does show their arrogance.

It does remind me of that quote that's attributed to a banker, I believe, in the States: you know, a billion here, a billion there, and pretty soon you're talking real money. That's the kind of arrogance and disrespect that this government has for the taxpayers of this province. Every budget we've seen is just sort of a preliminary first guess. I mean, it's as bad as the Justice Statutes Amendment Act. You know, we see 10 pages of amendments to that bill. We see supplementary request after supplementary request.

9:20

Mr. Speaker, since 1993 we've had six supplemental supply requests brought in by Jim Dinning, one former Treasurer, another seven supplemental supply requests brought in by Stockwell Day, another Provincial Treasurer, and now we have a supplemental supply request for \$979.321 million, this particular bill, brought in by the current Provincial Treasurer. It just makes me wonder how long he's going to keep his job, because there's a horrible track record of Treasurers being able to keep their job in this province.

The Alberta Liberals have a tremendous amount of difficulty continuing to support this government, particularly in this latest installment of its spin the giant wheel and see where the budget lands today. These latest budget estimates represent I believe the 26th separate onetime spending announcement for health care in the last two years. Now, that is managerial incompetence writ large, paid for of course out of somebody else's pocket.

It's interesting to me that when Stockwell Day was Treasurer, he made a lot of noise about accountability and fiscal responsibility and transparency and openness, and then he went along and brought in nearly \$3 billion worth of supplemental supply estimates. Now this current Provincial Treasurer is well on his way, with his first supplemental supply estimate, of eclipsing even that inglorious record. It took Stockwell Day I believe it was his first three or four supplemental requests to top a billion dollars, and of course the current Provincial Treasurer will be able to do that with his very next blink of an eye.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're really left on this side of the House scratching our heads. What is it that these folks do around their agendas and priorities and budgeting committees? Do they simply just have nap time and wait until the oil revenues come in and then say, "Oh, golly, let's spend some more money because we underbudgeted in so many areas"? This supplemental request covers the Ministry of Health and Wellness, Ministry of Government Services, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Community Development, Ministry of Infrastructure, Ministry of Justice,

Ministry of Municipal Affairs. It provides new money to the Auditor General. I mean, it's a real shopping list.

You would think, Mr. Speaker, that they would be better at it after 30 years. You would think they've had enough practice and that they would be better at it, but I guess you just can't teach some old dogs new tricks.

Now, I want to take a look at what this means in the context of the overall budget and financial integrity of the province of Alberta. Let's take a look at this supplemental supply bill and relate it to the second-quarter fiscal update, which the Treasurer just released on November 14, far earlier than it's ever been released before. We can only conclude that the reason why the Treasurer was so anxious to rush this report into the public domain was to try to deflect attention away from those issues that are really troubling Albertans right now: the waits for health care, the overcrowded classrooms that their children are facing, how thin their wallets are getting when they have to fill up their car at the gas pumps, their rising, skyrocketing electricity bills, their fuel heating costs, which are going through the roof.

Those are the issues that Albertans from right across this province are talking to the Official Opposition about, and they see it as hypocrisy, frankly, that the government would say: "Oh no, no, no. Everything's fine. Everything's fine. Just trust us. Look; we have a quarterly update for you." Well, you know that you can't put this quarterly update in the bank, Mr. Speaker, and Albertans know that.

Now, let's see what this quarterly update really means, and let's put this in the context of this little spending splurge that the Provincial Treasurer wants to take us all on. We have revenue projected now in this province of \$23,555,000,000. That's an all-time record, I believe, for the province of Alberta. They are telling us that this will generate nearly a \$6 billion surplus at this point in time. Certainly a \$6 billion surplus gives us lots of flexibility to do some things which we should have done long ago, and that is fund appropriately those core services that Albertans depend on.

Let's look at what the program expense size is. In the same quarterly forecast we see that a total expense of \$18,726,000,000 is being projected. Okay. Nearly \$19 billion. Of that, nearly a billion, \$945 million, is debt servicing costs. This leaves a net program expense of \$17,781,000,000, nearly \$18 billion.

Well, let's just compare that \$17.7 billion back to the revenue forecast. Now, if we take a look at the revenue forecast and you see that . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. HANCOCK: Under 482 *Beauchesne* would the hon. member entertain a question?

MR. SAPERS: Yes.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: He said yes.

Debate Continued

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I realize that we've gone a bit past that point in the debate, but it took me a moment to find the rule. I'm wondering whether the hon. member, in raising questions about the Provincial Treasurer's tabling of the quarterly report on November 14, a full two weeks earlier than one might normally have anticipated, in order for members of this House to have the full

benefit of that report during the full period of time that the House was sitting, feels that members should not have had access to that information for that period of time while this House was sitting.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I think there was a question there.

MR. SAPERS: Well, I'll take that as a precedent and expect full disclosure of the finances prior to any sitting and the answer to all of our questions prior to the passage of any bills. That would be a great standard to set, Mr. Minister. Thank you for committing to it.

Now, as I was saying, what we see here is a total revenue projection of \$23.5 billion, but just for the sake of argument let's project into the future. Let's be good prudent fiscal managers in this Assembly, something that's uncommon, and let's see if we can bring the government along and take them down this path of being prudent and careful and actually having a vision and a sense of the future.

Now, at some point, Mr. Speaker, I think you'll agree with me that our nonrenewable resource revenue is going to begin to diminish and eventually disappear. If we take a look at the \$23.5 billion in projected revenue right now, we see that crude oil royalty revenue accounts for nearly \$1.4 billion. It's \$1,365,000,000. You take that away from the revenue projection, and what you're left with is \$22,190,000,000, still enough to pay for the program expense of nearly \$18 billion.

But now let's take away the royalty revenues that come from synthetic oils. That's nearly a billion dollars. That's \$930 million. That leaves a revenue stream of \$21,260,000,000, still enough to meet those \$18 billion worth of program expenses. But then let's take away the natural gas revenue as well, the revenue that flows because of the gas resources in this province, and that's \$5,318,000,000, nearly 5 and a half billion dollars. You take that away, and you're left with a revenue stream now of \$15,942,000,000.

Now, that \$15,942,000,000 actually means that you're going to have a net deficit, if that royalty revenue wasn't there, of \$1.8 billion, \$1,839,000,000. You've got \$15.9 billion in revenue. You've got program expenses of \$17.8 billion. So you've got this deficit net of the nonrenewable resource revenues.

When is this government going to realize that it has to start planning for that eventual future? The conventional crude is drying up. The rate of exploration and the rate of extraction in terms of gas is at such a rapid pace that it's not going to be there for all that much longer. I'm told that even the newest of the oil sands projects are looking at maybe 30 years' worth of mineable reserves. Thirty years, Mr. Speaker. That's not all that long in the future. So when is this government going to get serious about creating baseline accountable budgets that adequately fund core programs and then planning for the future in such a way that we're not on this roller coaster, this roller coaster of lowballing revenues and budgets at one point, setting them ridiculously high at other points, going on spending sprees when it suits the government politically, as we get ever closer to the election, and then ratchetting back all of that funding and being so disrespectful to all of the partners that the government is involved with, conveniently after another mandate has been provided.

9:30

It really is an unethical, unprofessional, irresponsible way of managing the affairs of this province, and it's gone on far too long. I would ask, I would plead with members of the front bench of the government to think carefully about the next time that they come to this Assembly hat in hand saying: "Oh, gee. Really we didn't mean it. We just made a little bit of a mistake in our budget, so would you

please give us a supplementary supply?" I would ask them to fight at that cabinet table to do what it is that they've promised to do, and that is to take their responsibility for providing truthful and honest estimates of program expense and revenue, bring forward a budget for the scrutiny and the approval of Albertans, put it out there in a form and at a time when it can be carefully reviewed, debated, when we can have genuine citizen input, not input trumped up through these mail-outs and these glossy brochures but genuine input.

Let's take a look at reforming the process by which we do budgets in this province. Let's take a look at reforming the process by which the Legislature gives its seal of approval to those budgets. Let's make sure that all members are treated as equals in that review process, that all Albertans, regardless of who they voted for or which party their member happens to represent, have a chance to have their input heard and respected, Mr. Speaker. Then we will have a process with integrity that's been promised, that has the transparency and the openness and the accountability that the new leader of the Reform/Alliance, or whatever they call themselves, speaks of.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I just have to say that it makes me shake my head when I hear that leader of that party talking about the need for more accountability and more openness in the federal government, knowing full well what it was that we had to endure in this House during his term as Provincial Treasurer. Apparently that shadow over openness and accountability continues to fall over the Legislature in the person of the current Provincial Treasurer.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm glad to have this opportunity to speak to the estimates. Imagine getting maybe two chances to speak to a billion dollars' worth of extra funding.

A few things I wanted address in this that I can't help but mention. Can't the government predict at all what the expenses are going to be? I mean, we heard today from school boards across the province about their infrastructure deficit. There's a huge infrastructure deficit in this province. And you know what? Couldn't that have been foreseen at all? Certainly if you'd contacted school boards and health authorities, that could have been indicated and those kinds of things could have been addressed, I think, this year rather than next year or the following year or the following year.

You know, it's not always new buildings. Often it is maintaining old ones, because if you don't maintain those old ones, then by the time you go fix them, it's a toss-up as to whether you should fix it or build new. I mean, all of us I'm sure at one time or another have lived in an older building at some point in our lives, maybe going to university, maybe we do now, but certainly – my husband used to say that the only thing that works around this house is me. He meant himself not me, of course, but he meant on the house. So I'm sure that's straight.

But, Madam Speaker, my point is maintaining these buildings. Because I am the Infrastructure critic, I want to talk about some of those shortfalls that have not been addressed in this document that I've received, which is the amount of information we get. I would really appreciate from the Minister of Infrastructure – and I'm hoping he will get this information to me. It says here, "Health Care Facilities," but it doesn't list which health facilities were addressed, which school facilities were addressed. If anyone would relay that, I would ask for that list of what buildings were worked on. What did

the extra money go to? I would really appreciate knowing that. I don't think that's asking too much.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's on the web site.

MRS. SOETAERT: Pardon me? It's all on the web site? I really spend a lot of my time in here. I would appreciate it, then, if they could just table it.

In that Infrastructure deficit we've talked about priorities. In fact, that question came up today by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. That question actually had the minister squirming. He did not like the question, and the answer wasn't sufficient. The point is: how do you set your priorities? For example, the Parkland school division has a list of priorities. The first priority wasn't addressed, not the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth. The seventh one was addressed. So if we're actually listening – yes, it's confusing to me too, Madam Speaker. I'd like to know how the minister decided on the seventh priority of the Parkland school division rather than their first. I think that's a fair question.

AN HON. MEMBER: Is it political?

MRS. SOETAERT: I want to know if it's political, because the Member for Stony Plain has indicated that it is, so I'd really like that cleared up. I think I deserve, and I think my constituents and in fact all the people across this province deserve to know how priorities are set up and spent within this department.

I'm so glad that the Minister of Learning told people across the province that I was on tour down in Brooks. You know, each of the MLAs are allowed five trips a year, and I think if you're going to do a critic portfolio properly, you should use those trips. I think actually every MLA, whether you're in a certain portfolio or not, has to think outside of the area you're from, because if you're just from . . .

MR. DUNFORD: So you support overseas trips for ministers?

MRS. SOETAERT: No, not overseas. I'm talking Alberta; I'm talking Albertans here. [interjection] No, I didn't support a trip to Mexico by the Minister of Learning, but that is not about estimates right now.

I'm talking about when I went down to Brooks. If I'm going to be the critic for Infrastructure, then it's worth me knowing that it's highway 36. I'll correct that now. By the way, for people who used to wonder about highway 794, it is now highway 44, and it is two-thirds done. We have one-third to go there, just so you know that number changed. Seven years I've been here, but that's okay. So highway 36 and highway 1: a dangerous, dangerous intersection. Where's that overpass? Certainly it's been a priority for the area. Where is their MLA speaking up on it? So those are the concerns I heard.

The water in Gleichen: why has nothing been done about that? The people in Gleichen are drinking from bottled water. They all buy their water.

DR. OBERG: Point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising under *Beauchesne* 482. Would the hon. member entertain a question?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have only 20 minutes, and I want to use it for my speech on estimates, but I'll gladly meet with the minister afterwards.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: So the answer is no?

MRS. SOETAERT: The answer is no, but I'll gladly meet with him after, and we can talk about the people in Gleichen. It's funny. You know what else? This will be good, because then the people down there will know that maybe the minister is speaking out once in awhile for his constituency.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, the chair would remind you that we are on Bill 28. Come on; let's get back to it.

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes. That's the appropriation estimates. Yes. All the estimates. I'm asking how they set their priorities and how things get ignored and neglected across this province, and I want to make sure it's not political, that it is practical for people.

While I was down there, I also noticed . . .

DR. OBERG: Hey, Colleen, who paid for your trip to go down there?

9:40

MRS. SOETAERT: You know, my expenses are all there for my constituents to see anytime they want.

While I was down there, interestingly enough many of the councillors down there were concerned about the lack of policing and the shortage of police, and I'm sure the Minister of Justice has heard that. It's too bad the Minister of Learning is doing a Mexican hat dance while I'm trying to speak, but I must have hit a nerve.

With Justice estimates I would like to address the fact that the DARE program and the issue of underfunding of police, that we don't have enough police in this province, was mentioned down south, and that's not news across the province. I'm sure you're aware of that. If we want to support community policing and be active with the DARE program, then we need more police, because it's no doubt that they're the best ones to deliver that program. So I would encourage that.

The Catholic school in Brooks. I had a tour of that school, and you know what? That's dangerous. It's dangerous. A hallway during recess and going down that stairwell is a bit risky, and you know what? Now that school is being faced with taking their second – well, I wouldn't even say it's their second priority, but instead of getting a new facility, the choice they're being given is to take the building beside it and do major renovations on that. There won't be room for a decent parking lot, a decent track for the kids. They have to build a new gymnasium. So, you know, that's a poor second choice that that school is facing, and you think a facility doesn't reflect an education? It absolutely does. It absolutely does. A gymnasium that has a low roof – you know, the Member for Dunvegan I'm sure knows. I'm sure he knows that a quality building makes a difference in how healthy kids are when they come to school. Proper lighting, proper phys ed, proper track, a decent music room: all of it from an infrastructure point of view is absolutely essential to a good education. I'm going to leave for a moment the infrastructure issues.

I would like to talk about MRIs. It's been brought up in this

Legislature. I want you to know that a senior citizen came to my office a couple of weeks ago, and he needed an MRI. He was having headaches. He would have to wait four months, and he said: "Colleen, I can't. I can't wait that long." Yet he didn't have enough money. He had to kind of find it, maybe borrow it from his son. I didn't like doing this, but of course we will help him do this. The pity of it was that I couldn't get him into the public system, so we helped him find a private system where he had to pay I think it was \$450 to get an MRI. That's wrong. That's wrong. People shouldn't have to pay for that.

If people need an MRI, they should get it in a timely fashion. And you know what? It should be paid by public dollars. Medically necessary should be paid for, and it isn't paid for. It isn't paid. Then he says: they jumped the queue. It's because you've underfunded it. So Mourie Hooper should sit with back pains for nine months, the minister says. Neck and shoulder and back pains, and he would have to wait nine to 12 months for a prescribed test.

So his doctor recommended it at a clinic that is recognized by this government. He was actually . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: The doctor obviously didn't think it was an emergency.

MRS. SOETAERT: You know what? It was an emergency. [interjection] Well, would you consider not being able to work for nine months an emergency to a family? I certainly would. I certainly would. Obviously, Madam Speaker, they don't care about people who don't have the money to pay for things, that a family has to borrow money in order that somebody can go back to work. That's not respect of people.

The other thing that I want to talk about is long-term care beds. That certainly hasn't been addressed in this budget either and the issue . . . [interjection] You say you've heard that story before. Well, you haven't listened then. You haven't listened, because those of us who live near the capital cities, Edmonton and the other city Calgary . . . [interjection] Right; it's not the capital, Edmonton is. We like to think the outlying areas, though, are the most important areas of course.

The Member for Redwater knows well what I am talking about when I talk about boundaries and the inability to access a long-term care bed for somebody who lives in Villeneuve, five miles away from St. Albert. Can't access. Can't even get on the list for a long-term care bed in St. Albert. That's appalling, Madam Speaker, and that's not been addressed by this budget. St. Albert knows that well too. Absolutely.

MRS. O'NEILL: And you're wrong.

MRS. SOETAERT: Oh, she says I'm wrong. Well, I'll challenge you on that one any fine day.

Now, Madam Speaker, the other issue I want to talk about is how busy our emergency rooms are. I have seen nurses that are just run off their feet, that are asked to stay another four hours after their shifts, that are swamped, that are called back from days off. You know what? They legally can't say no. They can't say no. Now, that's not acceptable. I would venture to say that part of the reason we are short of teachers, nurses, and doctors in this province is because they have been undervalued by this government for the last few years. They have in fact cut their wages. They tell them they're not valuable. They make them feel like they're not valuable by how they're treated, so who would want to go into those professions? Professions that I absolutely admire and respect.

One person said to me, "Well, you know, we're in debt because

of the nurses and teachers.” Baloney. It was mismanagement by this government, absolute mismanagement: loan guarantees to Bovar, MagCan, and NovAtel, which continue on. So instead of valuing these fine people – and I will give credit to the Minister of Learning, who actually praised them today. I will give him credit. He’s the first education minister I have heard give that in the last five years. He’s the only one who has. Until that time, they were devalued. Now here we are scrambling to find teachers and nurses. What a pity in a province with a \$5 billion surplus, in a province that is the most beautiful one in this country, that should have all the advantages of being the wealthiest province and the most beautiful province. Instead we’ve created a human infrastructure and a physical infrastructure deficit. Sad, sad statements.

One more issue that is an issue that I received from Sturgeon school division, and that is the reality of fuel costs and how that ties to transportation with their schools. I know all school jurisdictions struggle with this one but certainly rural jurisdictions far more than others, because their bus trips are huge and long and their gas expenses are very high. As fuel costs increase, so are their increases. They have some recommendations as to how to adjust that. Their recommendations are that Alberta Learning examine the impact of increased fuel prices on school boards and provide additional funding as required for this increased cost and that Alberta Learning review fuel costs on a regular basis and adjust the fuel component of transportation funding on a quarterly basis in accordance with the variance in fuel costs. I know that might take a little bit more work for the department, but I think a quarterly review of that would be a bit fairer and would certainly serve our children better, because those costs then wouldn’t come directly out of the school board funds.

Madam Speaker, I’m going to conclude my remarks. [interjection] Well, I still have three minutes. I might keep going, then, since I got such encouragement from West-Yellowhead.

I have to say that this kind of budgeting isn’t fair to people. It’s good-time Charlie spending instead of a decent plan at the beginning of the year. One year kindergarten gets funding in September. Well, of course they’re grateful for it, but my goodness, they could have planned for it in May or before that. Couldn’t the government figure that out in the original budget? I bet they could.

9:50

MR. STRANG: School starts in September.

MRS. SOETAERT: The Member for West Yellowhead says that school starts in September. Who do you think plans for September 1? We all just walk in and throw ’em in a room, I guess. That’s the point: you don’t plan. My goodness, if you really don’t know how school works, you really should hop into some of the early, early meetings that start in April and maybe prior to that to see how many students you’re going to have, what grades they’re going to be in, what programs you’re going to offer, how many grades, how many staff you need. You’re planning in April, not in September. I can’t believe that, but anyway, we’ll keep working at them, Madam Speaker.

I think I ask on behalf of many, many people in Alberta: consistent budgeting, a fairer process, an all-party budget committee that actually looks at issues and priorities, that depoliticizes it so that priorities are made on people, that the kids who are going to school in an old building might be a priority before somebody else who just wants a new school. I think it’s about kids and it’s about people; it’s not about politics. [interjection] If kids are our future, then treat them right.

So, Madam Speaker, I’m disappointed that this government can’t plan properly, that people aren’t being taken care of like they should,

and that’s not to say that most of this isn’t needed dollars. What it is to say is that I don’t see the priorities that my constituents are telling me about, and I don’t see fair budgeting so that people can plan.

Those are my concerns with this budget. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would like to address Bill 11, and I’m taking a look at the schedule . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Bill 11?

MR. MASON: Bill 11. I missed that; didn’t I? I really wanted to be here for that, but the government’s timing was off.

All right. So we’re up to Bill 28 now, Madam Speaker, and I would like to address what I find to be quite shocking, and that is that in less than one fiscal year this government has spent nearly a billion dollars of money that was unbudgeted. That’s got to be a record. Maybe it’s not. Maybe it’s been worse in previous years. I guess what I’d like to suggest to the hon. member, Madam Speaker, is that I think the government should be able to plan its expenditures and get approval from the Assembly in advance of making those expenditures.

I just want to take one example. I won’t take all of them, but I’d like to take Health and Wellness. Here we have an amount of \$293,593,000 in additional expenditures. Now, the people on this side have been calling for the government to spend more money in health care. Well, we certainly have, and it’s not that per se that I’m objecting to; it’s just the manner in which they’re going about it. Now, just before the last election, Madam Speaker, the Premier, after denying it for years through all of the cuts, finally admitted that the government didn’t really have a plan for the cuts they made to health. He admitted it, and I have the *Edmonton Sun* clippings to prove it. Imagine my surprise that the Premier would admit that the government didn’t have a plan, but he’s like a cute little puppy who’s made a mess on the rug. What are you going to do? All you can do is clean it up. You can’t take a newspaper and go after him.

The question I have is: over that intervening time since the last election, has the government improved its performance? Has it pulled up its socks? Has it learned to plan for education? Has it learned to budget appropriately for the expenditures? I would say to that, Madam Speaker, that all you need to do is pull out the latest report of the Auditor General of Alberta, and you will find exactly the answer you’re looking for. I’d just like to quote some of the marginal comments in the section on Health and Wellness. Here’s one.

While payments to physicians have increased, questions of accountability remain.

While steps have been taken by the Department to contain drug costs in Alberta, costs continue to increase significantly.

The Department has limited information to compare planned and actual drug use and costs.

We previously reported delay in finalizing business plans.

And here’s the one, Madam Speaker. If I found this billion dollars in unbudgeted spending shocking, here’s what I find that’s appalling, and that is that the “health budget has increased more from interim funding than from annual budget increases.” Now, that’s the most telling comment that you could find.

I’ll just go on a little bit farther in the Auditor General’s report. It says:

Although budget increases and other steps have been taken, the pattern of prior years continues. The 1999-2000 health authority

business plans were not settled until well into the fiscal year. Most health authorities were asked for resubmissions or addendums to be provided to the Minister in the fall of 1999 when, again, more than half the year was over and the process of preparing new or updated business plans should begin again covering the next three fiscal years.

He continues.

The need to improve planning capabilities is also indicated by the extent of continuous additional funding announcements sometimes described for "one-time" purposes. These often repeat for such things as buying equipment, hiring more health care workers, covering physician payments in excess of planned limits, and eliminating debt and deficits of health authorities.

MR. HANCOCK: It's been tabled. You don't have to read the whole thing.

MR. MASON: Well, you know, I think it would bear if the whole thing were read, Madam Speaker, to the minister and the Government House Leader, because it's obviously not sticking in the government's head. It's not rocket science. It's not something that's hard that they need to figure out. They don't even have to listen to the opposition's side to get it. If they just read their own Auditor General's report, they would realize. I'll read a little bit more.

While subsequent additional funding may provide relief from immediate budget pressures, it is not conducive to good budget management since repetition may create the expectation of continuing amounts in addition to planned annual budget increases. This is evident in the latest business plan submissions where, again, many health authorities are forecasting operating deficits for the fiscal year 2000-01.

It goes on and on. I could read more, and I think it would be very beneficial to the government side to hear it. The point I'm trying to make is that there are very good reasons why they need to come forward and tell us that they spent a whole bunch more money than this Assembly allotted to them, and that is because they haven't fixed the health care system. They're not doing planning. They're not making sure that the budgeting is happening appropriately within the health authorities. All that adds up to big money that the taxpayers are expected to spend, and the government should be capable by this time of doing better than they are doing.

Now, some of this is not related to the mere common, garden-variety mismanagement from this government with which we are so familiar, Madam Speaker. A lot of this expenditure has the smell of an election to it. I think it's one thing for this government to collect a great deal of money from their corporate friends in order to finance their election campaign. That's legitimate. Certainly the corporations benefit from their largesse. But I would really say that it is wrong to use the taxpayers' own money to make large increases in expenditures when they ignored the public the whole time before the election. All of a sudden at the last minute they're flush with cash and they can spend the money and throw it into areas where they will obtain political advantage. That is what I find the most reprehensible about this bill.

So, Madam Speaker, needless to say I'm not going to be supporting this bill. I think the government should clean up its act first of all, and I think the people of Alberta can see through attempts . . .

10:00

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I have a point of order from St. Albert.

Go ahead.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MRS. O'NEILL: Madam Speaker, on a point of order in Standing

Order 23(h), (i), and (j). I choose to raise this issue. May I proceed here?

Madam Speaker, section (h) suggests that someone speaking in this Legislature cannot make "allegations against another member." Section (i) says, "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member," and (j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I would suggest that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands is imputing motives that are not valid. In fact, I think he has totally misspoken, and I would ask that he withdraw what he has said because he is making allegations that I think are quite out of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order, hon. member.

MR. MASON: Well, maybe, Madam Speaker, it would be helpful if the member could specify what statements created such offence.

MRS. O'NEILL: Madam Speaker, if I may, I'd like to point out that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands has suggested that the government would be making money from and certainly would be assisting certain businesses by virtue of our expenditures in this supplementary estimate and benefiting from our plan of allocating these funds. I take it very seriously. I think it's quite inappropriate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, do you wish to speak?

MR. MASON: Madam Speaker, I certainly didn't intend to indicate that there were specific favours in return for campaign donations, simply . . . [interjections] No, I did not. I simply said that it is well known that the Conservative Party receives a great deal of campaign financing from corporations, and it is also well known that the Progressive Conservative Party also does a great deal for the corporations in this province.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Sometimes when the debate takes place and I ask members to go through the chair, this is often why, because then we don't have the discussion going back and forth. You are addressing the Assembly through the Speaker.

On the point of order as raised by the hon. Member for St. Albert, (h) and (i) talk about "against another member." The chair did not hear the hon. member speak against another member.

I realize it's 5 after 10 on Tuesday night. I would just ask that we try to do two things, to go through the chair and to talk about the bill that we have in front of us, and avoid some of these side discussions and some of the side remarks, and then this type of thing won't happen.

Thank you.

Debate Continued

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I will attempt to sum up, because I think the point that I'm trying to make is that if the government were more diligent – and I've just used the example of one department and tried to draw upon the Auditor General's report to make the point – in ensuring that there were planned expenditures and that there was accountability within the system, then we would not be asking this Legislature to rubber-stamp postfact an expenditure of a billion dollars. It shouldn't happen.

You know, I suppose the more cynical of us would certainly think that the timing is suspicious relative to the election. That's for sure. I will not be supporting Bill 28, and I also will not be speaking for 20 minutes, although I'm taking direction from my colleague here in the Official Opposition and learning how to speak for more than five minutes at a time.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Minister of Government Services.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I'm pleased by the opportunity to speak in second reading to Bill 28, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2). This is asking us to approve an additional \$979,321,000, so almost a billion dollars in expenditures, which is a lot of money considering that the total budget that we just approved mere months ago was around \$16.1 billion, as I remember. As the Member for Edmonton-Highlands has pointed out, we're not even three-quarters of the way through the year and already there's a billion dollars more that has been spent without the prior approval of this Legislature, which I think is probably also a vote in favour of having this Assembly sit more often. If the government is going to be so keen on coming up with additional expenditures and no plan, then perhaps we could be of assistance to them in that planning if we were all in this Assembly. Even better would be an all-party committee, which we've often suggested, which would maybe cut down on some of the rancor which is created here.

Now, as I look through the list of departments that are asking for approval for additional funds, which I'm assuming many of them have already been given and have spent, the Auditor General is asking for more money to advise and audit all of the government services. That's an interesting one, because the Auditor General is actually quite a small department, and they get great sympathy from me in trying to follow this government around in tracking these expenditures. It's certainly not a smaller government. It's a larger government since I got here, and in trying to track that money, the Auditor General is in need of additional staff to help him do that. In particular, I understand that additional money had to be expended to pay for outside accountants to deal with the extra workload of coping with the move to the children's authorities, both to give advice and also to attempt to create the audit trail and track the audit trail on setting up those children's authorities, which seems to have created some large snags in the system. So that was a little over a million dollars for that.

You know, when you consider it, that's a fair amount of extra money to help chase down what happened when the government tried to start yet again another delegated administrative organization and push the responsibility for delivering services onto these regional children's authorities. No doubt they will experience the same frustrations as the regional health authorities did in that they have the responsibility to provide the services but don't in fact have the authority to do it because they don't have the authority to get enough money to provide the services that they're mandated to do. So I'm sure we'll be hearing more about that department in the future. The short-term result of it was that there was more than a million bucks that had to be expended by the Auditor General on that one.

I notice that under Agriculture, Food and Rural Development we have \$98 million in farm assistance, and I certainly don't begrudge those farm assistance programs. I'm more than willing to work along with everyone in here to discover how we can protect and promote and make the family farm stronger. But when I look at that, I'm also looking through the rest of them for what is comparable assistance to the metropolitan areas. Certainly I have to answer questions from people in Edmonton-Centre who say: "Well, what kind of assistance did we get? What assistance was available to our small businesses? What assistance was available to us here?" So I think they're looking for parity, and I can't fault them for that. But I also can't deliver them an answer why that happens and we don't see equal programs happening in the cities.

10:10

When we were debating supplementary supply, I asked the questions that I wanted and sort of got answers from the minister about how the increases to the employee wages were being distributed. I asked the minister to please ensure that the groups that were affected got clear information on how the money was to be distributed, how much into each area and exactly what that meant, because the groups that had spoken to me within days of my raising this, I think two days before, said that they still hadn't heard. They'd heard a rumour that the money was coming, but they weren't at all sure what area it was supposed to go into, how it was supposed to be done, how much they got. The minister was able to assure me that future budgets would in fact be raised to cover these increases and that it wouldn't be a onetime raise which was then rolled back come the first of April once we're past this one-shot injection here.

I also was able to speak during supplementary supply at length on community development, so I don't need to spend any more time on that. Well, actually I do need to spend more time on that, but I won't because this is my opportunity to comment on some of the areas I haven't been able to speak to.

Two days. Two days of debate on a billion dollars. I still find that shocking. Two days, and one of the days was two hours long. Thanks to the stamina of my colleagues here, we were able to get in almost four hours' worth of debate on supplementary supply yesterday. Six hours. Six hours of debate on a billion dollars. That will never sit right with me. It just does not seem right that that's all that's allocated. I know the government feels confident that they've discussed all of this internally, but that's not the point. The point is that this money is to be approved in this Legislative Assembly after full debate, and six hours for a billion dollars isn't full debate, not in my books, not in the books of the people that I represent. We haven't been able to ask all the questions that our constituents bring forward to us, have them asked and answered in this House. I still object to that. [interjections] Well, give me time. Are you willing to let me speak for more than 20 minutes? Okay. Well, when I hit my limit, I'll ask for more time.

MR. DICKSON: You can go back and reference the previous *Hansards*.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes, of course. I can go back and check *Hansard* for all those questions that were asked that weren't answered. Yes, you're right. I will come back to that.

Okay; I'll look at Environment. I notice there's \$33 million being spent there on fire control, if I'm remembering right, which pretty much always comes forward as a supplementary supply item because the government doesn't particularly budget up front for that, which again I always sort of question. You know that there are going to be some fires. Why isn't there some of that money in the budget? No, it always comes forward as a supplementary supply.

Government Services is a million and a half, which is a modest sum out of this billion dollar budget. My compliments to the minister for holding that one on the line. Then \$280,000 in compensation to the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council for revenue lost due to changes in regulation. That wouldn't be being in the business of being in business; would it?

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MS BLAKEMAN: Good. I'm sure the minister will talk about that.

Seven hundred thousand dollars for information systems enhancements, and \$520,000 for landlord and tenant advisory services in Calgary. Now, that one sounds like a good investment of money.

I'm sure people in Calgary really appreciate that, because we've all – well, I can't speak for the rural members, but, boy, I can tell you that any of the members in the cities get quite a few landlord and tenant questions and issues, and there isn't a heck of a lot that we can do for them under the provincial legislation. There's the Residential Tenancies Act and one other – I'm sorry – that I can't remember off the top of my head.

AN HON. MEMBER: Mobile home tenancies.

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, mobile home tenancies. No. Sorry; I don't deal with that in central Edmonton.

There isn't a lot that we can do for them. They're looking for more advice about how to handle the situation. [interjection] I think that would be very helpful. I know I'd like to see an expansion of what's available through Landlord and Tenant Advisory in Edmonton.

In Justice there's \$1.45 million, which is partial funding of initiatives for recommendations out of the Children's Forum and the Task Force on Children at Risk report. That's a million dollars, and the remaining half million, "for increased funding to contracted agencies and service providers to support employee compensation adjustments" – now, that's certainly an issue I've talked about a lot in this Assembly. With the increase in contracting out to either nonprofit organizations or private organizations, private companies that provide services that the government used to, there became a huge wage disparity between what government workers doing the same job were getting . . . [interjection] You're addressing it, and I'm giving you compliments for addressing it. Would you rather I not? I can harass you about something else if you'd prefer, but I thought you'd like to hear it.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, through the chair.

MS BLAKEMAN: I am sorry. Absolutely. Your wisdom is coming from the front in waves, and I regret deeply not having directed my comments to you.

AN HON. MEMBER: That is sarcastic.

MS BLAKEMAN: No, it isn't sarcastic. It's absolutely true. She certainly dispenses wisdom from there. Do you not consider it wisdom? I certainly do.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, through the chair.

MS BLAKEMAN: It is through the chair.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Not back and forth.

MS BLAKEMAN: It's your wisdom being dispensed. It's wisdom. It's just not sticking. I don't know. All right.

Municipal Affairs at \$21 million. There's a fair amount in different areas that's being assessed here, and I don't have the expertise to talk about it in a short period of time, so I'll let someone that has more experience do that.

Now, there are two areas I'd like to concentrate on. One is infrastructure and the other is health. I've raised this previously, but I just feel so strongly about it that I have to raise it again because it's really affecting the schools in the constituency of Edmonton-Centre. There's a little over a quarter of a million dollars that went to schools for growth pressures and the school facilities evaluation project. What I'm concerned about here is that previously when we

asked questions of the government about why weren't certain schools that were so in need of repair or money being put into it, we were told: "We don't make the list. The school board makes the list. When we've got the money, we give the money to them, and they take the first priority off the list."

What happened with this school facilities evaluation project is that a different list got developed with different criteria than what the school boards were using. I know that the MLA for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert had also talked about this, where I think she had a school that was number one on the list and it turned up as number nine on the other list.

MRS. SOETAERT: It was priority one, and they chose priority seven.

MS BLAKEMAN: They chose priority seven, and that absolutely reversed them.

I certainly have schools where I'm really concerned about the health of the students that are in them. They were rated at a high priority by the Catholic school board that was in charge of it, and it's not happening for them.

10:20

So I guess there are two issues here. How are we falling so far behind in maintenance of schools? I think in some cases it can be argued that we've created unhealthy spaces for children to be learning. With the increasing number of respiratory problems that we see from kids, to have them in an enclosed space with a very old furnace system, with poor ventilation capabilities, with old wood floors and old carpets and chalk dust, this is not a healthy atmosphere for a lot of these kids. It's not a good place to be learning, and I don't think in the end it's a safe place for those kids if we're making them feel ill or causing them respiratory distress. Because this is the classroom they've got, they've got to be in there.

So I still struggle understanding the choices that this government makes about where our money is spent in this province. I think that our schools and our children deserve more of that money, frankly. They are our future. There's a lot said by members of the government about how much they value families, how much they value students, but I just don't see that manifesting itself.

You know what? There have been a few of the very old schools in my riding that have received some upgrading, but there are several that have not and really need it. Then to find out that a different criteria is picked off by this school facilities evaluation project – I don't understand what went behind that, and I guess I'm challenging the assumptions that were made there. If the school boards have been trusted for X number of years to come up with the priority rating, what's wrong with them now? Why did their priority rating get put aside in favour of another one? I still have not heard a satisfactory explanation for that.

Health and Wellness funding I have not had an opportunity to speak on. You know, I've heard a lot from the government about onetime spending and injections and addressing pressure points, and none of this to me says rational plan. From everything I've experienced in my life – and I think there are many lessons that are easily learned out there in the real world. You know, you can waste money if you don't plan how you're going to use it, and you end up with onetime spending to stopgap a pressure point or however you want to put this. But that's not the best use of that money and the most efficient use of that money. Certainly the Auditor General had a lot to say about that in his '99-2000 report. You know, pointing out that more money was spent than was originally budgeted I think was one of the comments he made at one point.

Where is the plan? I keep seeing the government make choices here that are equivalent to someone coming to me with a project and saying, "This a \$40,000 project," and I in place of the government say: "Okay, fine. Then I'll give you \$25,000." And the person says: "I can't do the project for \$25,000. I can't do a good job at it. I can't achieve the performance measurements. It just won't be a very good project." "Well, \$25,000 is what you get." So the person tries to run the project. They can't hire as many staff. They get a smaller office. They make do with some borrowed equipment or something. It's obviously going to be a short-term project now, not one that's going to be ongoing. But wait. You know, a couple of months before the end of the term I'm going to go to them and say, "Okay, I'm going to give you the missing \$15,000 for your project."

Well, there's not much the project manager can do at that point. Most of the year's gone. It's not as though they can go backwards and somehow hire staff that they would have had in place for, you know, eight, nine, 10 months. You can't go back in time that way. I suppose you could manage to give raises to the existing staff for the few remaining months, probably raises that they well deserve, because the choice was made to pay staff less in the first place because they only had \$25,000 for the project.

What ends up happening is that because you can't do anything to sort of put the project back on the plane that it was supposed to be on — a lot of times choices are made: "Okay, we've got this money. We've got to spend it before X period of time. Well, we'll buy stuff, and then maybe next year we won't have to buy the stuff and we can put that money into the office space and the staff and the program services. Maybe we can keep the project going that way." So, you know, they buy the computers and they buy the photocopiers, whatever. But this is not good planning, and they're not going to be able to search around for a deal when they're running around with their 15 grand clutched in their fist, going, "Quick, quick, find me a photocopier. I've got to spend the money by such and such a date." It's not an efficient way to use what should be limited resources. This is taxpayer money we're talking about. Yes, in this province 35 percent of our budget is still money from resources. [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired] Oh, permission to have my time extended.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. member, but under Standing Order 29(d) that's impossible.

The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I wanted to talk about Bill 28. I usually get in once or twice during the debate on the appropriation bills. Tonight I thought I would get in now as opposed to a little later on. I guess some of the comments from the members opposite made me decide to get involved.

They talked about planning. I'm a member of the Treasury Board and have been on the Treasury Board for a number of years, and I've watched the fluctuations of the revenues that we're able to deal with go up and down like peaks and valleys. When the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert started to talk about no plan, there was very clearly a plan that was laid forward to put our fiscal house in order. She will remember that there were actual acts passed and laws passed in this Legislature to ensure that this government and this province had a plan that would take us into a position where our fiscal position would be such that we would be able to have a long-term plan future not only for us but for everyone else.

I heard a little yipping in the back row there about \$30 a barrel. I'll remind hon. members that about 18 months ago, maybe even less than that, we were sitting at \$13 a barrel for crude oil. It may not even be 18 months. The fluctuation in the crude prices has been

fierce. We saw in a six-week period an increase in crude prices of \$10 a barrel, which is a phenomenal swing in a commodity that we have absolutely zero ability to control or impact what that price will be.

We also saw at the same time a major increase in natural gas. It wasn't that long ago that natural gas wasn't even a separately traded commodity. It was rolled into the same revenue base, and it was very difficult. I've heard people talk about what a terrible thing it is to have the price of gas up at \$4, \$4.50, \$5, \$5.50 an mcf for gas, that this is terrible, terrible, terrible. I remember also when in my past portfolio as minister of energy we were sitting at 99 cents an mcf for gas, and nobody whined about how terrible it was to be down at 99 cents. It wasn't enough. So then we went up, and then we went down.

What I'm trying to explain is that the plan that this government laid out dealt with a responsible way to do two things: first, to eliminate the deficit and, second, to pay off the debt. The debt we all agreed was the burdens of the past. None of us could change it. We all wished we could. The fact remains that it was there.

If hon. members look at the budget and the second-quarter report that was filed by our Provincial Treasurer, they clearly can see that the debt-servicing cost, which when we started off was just shy of \$2 billion a year for interest payments on the debt that the province was carrying — today, because of the plan that brought down systematically the cost of our debt, we are now looking at well over a billion dollar reduction in the interest expense that we are paying. That reduction in that interest expense becomes long-term forever freed-up dollars that can be used for program expenditures. In the interim, when we have additional revenue from our operations in a given year, we are able to deal with some of the backlog, the pileup that hasn't been able to be dealt with because quite frankly we did not have the money.

10:30

While we were clearing our deficit and paying off the debt to bring down that interest expense money so we would have program funds, we were doing reviews. In fact, the Department of Infrastructure did an extensive review on the backlog of infrastructure that needed to take place within this province that hadn't because we didn't have the money. That involved school construction. That involved road constructions that were way behind. That involved upgrades in our health facilities, our postsecondary institutions, et cetera. We also had a school facilities review that was put together to help us identify the need areas that were immediate and those that could be stretched out as we had more dollars made available.

This year in our budget we did not budget for our oil revenues to be over \$30 when we started off. There are a number of reasons. When you're looking at budgeting for a commodity, you look at what is happening in the world market. Well, at the time we were doing budgets, we had requests, which I found, quite frankly, rather odd, from Canada and the United States to the OPEC nations to turn the taps on, to bring down the price of crude oil.

When I was back in the oil patch, we were doing the absolute opposite. OPEC was going in and turning the taps on and driving the price down to where we almost destroyed the industry. All of a sudden the United States and Canada were begging them to turn the taps on to drive the price down. Instead of saying that this is good because we have additional operating revenue coming through this year that can accommodate some of the backlog of projects that were not able to be accommodated because of the lack of revenue base, here we were out asking for a drop in revenue.

It didn't happen. In fact, revenues went up even more because of supply/demand needs within the marketplace. As a result, because

Alberta is fortunate enough to be the 10th largest producer in the world, we were able to take advantage of the increase in revenues that were coming through. In fact, our revenues went up to \$23.6 billion on our second-quarter forecast. That freed up some dollars to catch up on the backlog on our infrastructure that we had not been able to do.

We still were not able to put this into program spending, because that would mean we'd have to be assured that our revenue base was going to stay up there in the longer term. We made a commitment as a government that we would not spend money we didn't have coming in, because it's against the law in this province to run a deficit. It's also against the law for us to expend any more than 25 percent of any additional operating revenues that come in in a given year until the debt is paid off.

Now, this year we were able to put dollars out into some of the pressure points that have arisen because of the backlog, because of the growth scenarios at all levels of government in this province. The Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert said that none of these things apply or meet the requests of her constituents. Well, if these don't fit into your constituency, then there's a real problem in your community. I can't think of one community in this province that would not be grateful to have some of this additional operating revenue flow through to meet some of the demands within the community, whether it is to put in the road construction they've been wanting for quite some time, to upgrade some of the schools, to put in some of the new schools.

I'm like you. I have one of the fastest growing constituencies in this province. In fact, between the last election and this one, I have 6,500 new houses. I need schools. However, the school demands from the city of Calgary were different from what, naturally, I would like to see, so I did not get a school, but hopefully in the next go-round I will. I accept the reality of life that there are other pressure points that have to be dealt with first. [interjections]

There are other things that all of a sudden came forward in some of the major centres and into . . . [interjections] Are you going to keep yapping over there, or are you going to listen?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Please, through the chair.

MRS. NELSON: Madam Speaker, I was absolutely amazed, though, by the other member that spoke who talked about the \$33 million that went to Environment. Well, \$29 million of that went to fight forest fires. Nobody can predict what the forest fire situation is going to be in any given year. We've had fluctuations in this province of over \$80 million in a given year. No one knows what that will be, but the thing is that when it happens, we have to respond, unless the hon. member is suggesting that we just let it all burn away. You know, I don't believe that to be true. So when we have to put dollars into Environment to do forest fire fighting, it has to be there, and we have to come back to this Assembly to have that approved.

In this same budget there was \$1.2 million to upgrade airstrips to get in to fight those forest fires. If you can't get in there, how are you going to land them if you don't have a decent runway for them to land on? It's not safe. So you put \$1.2 million in to upgrade the airstrips.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

You know, we get into the health area. How can anybody object to the funding that's going into health? In health, as we know, there'll never be enough money to do it all. We all know that.

There never will be enough money to do it all, but when we have isolated areas and we put \$3.4 million . . . [interjections] You're not in the debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, when we get into areas of health and there's \$3.4 million in response to the Task Force on Children at Risk report, how can anybody object to that? That money is critically necessary. It's so very important that we deal with some of the instability within our youth programs and that we provide these children at risk programs. They have to be there. We are in a position because of the additional operating revenues to be able to deal with that today. We were not able to do that before.

We look at the \$10 million going into the nursing development initiative. We've heard people say that we need that development, we need that initiative to come forward now. We're in a position this year to deal with that.

We look at the \$13 million for the Alberta Mental Health Board. Surely no one could say that that is not in the best interests of Albertans. Surely they couldn't do that.

I'll refer members to page 46. We've tried to be explicit on how these dollars have been allocated. This doesn't happen in an hour meeting. This takes months to go through and try and allocate these dollars as best we can. In fact, we've even summarized them in this supplementary estimate report. It tells why we put dollars into the various regional health authorities: to reduce waiting lists, to look at long-term care facilities, to deal with salaries, and, yes, to deal with MRIs. Part of the debate on the MRIs was: is the federal government going to come into the supposed partnership? Well, it didn't, so we are not waiting for that. We're moving forward because we know we need to have these MRIs in place now. So when you look at this, we tried to put this out in as much detail as possible so that hon. members have an opportunity to clearly understand where these priority areas are going and what they're used for.

I look at the \$6 million that's going to assist in the construction of the information and communication technology centre at NAIT. This will allow an increase of a thousand students to come into the program. We've heard about waiting lists. We've heard about backlogs. Surely nobody can object to that. These are obvious pressures and demands that have to be met, and this year we're in the position with additional operating revenues to deal with these pressure points.

10:40

Hon. members, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert says: let us debate. Well, she hasn't debated at all. She turns around and isn't even listening to the topic.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre said that she had a bunch of questions. I asked her to give me her 10 questions, and I didn't get any. She talked for 20 minutes without giving her 10 questions. I wish she would give her 10 questions, and then we could in fact get back to talking about them.

She talked about the Ministry of Government Services, on AMVIC, and indicated what was the \$280,000 in AMVIC. Well, that was in support of the industry council, because what you had was a mismatch. [interjections] Just a minute. Don't tell me what it is. I'm going to tell you. It's my ministry.

Mr. Speaker, this program was put in place to be self-regulatory. It's gone through a transition process and actually got caught in the middle of the fees and service review program. This is the final draw on this funding to transition AMVIC forward so that it takes over the investigative and regulatory and licensing process through

the motor vehicle industry. They've done quite a job actually. They had over 91 investigations that were very, very important investigations through the program.

The other thing was the \$520,000 for the landlord and tenant advisory service in Calgary. I talked with the Member for Calgary-Buffalo earlier on that.

AN HON. MEMBER: Money well spent.

MRS. NELSON: It is money well spent, but it's a disappointment for me, I have to admit, quite personally. This was a situation where our major centres, Calgary and Edmonton, were offering this service for over 20 years and doing a very fine job, quite frankly, of dealing with difficulties under the landlord and tenant act directly, having firsthand knowledge of the community, of the landlords, and of the tenants for over 20 years. This year the city of Calgary's administration said that this wasn't a core program for Calgary, and literally said: we're not going to do this any longer.

This is a vital service for citizens in Calgary, they do a wonderful job here in Edmonton, and I'm terribly disappointed. I did try very hard to convince the council members and the mayor to maintain this program because of the service it does offer. I thought I had it worked out with them that they would continue on, and then this fall they informed us that they were not.

The difficulty I have is that we're going to have to run this program from here. I don't believe we'll be able to offer the same calibre of service that we could have from Calgary directly. I'm hopeful that the city of Calgary will change their mind and continue on because I think the program has been extremely effective.

So we're going to have to add extra operators here to pick this program up so that we can answer those calls and questions. [interjection] Well, they walked away from it. Edmonton has done a tremendous job. They are planning on keeping theirs, and I would encourage them to because they do a wonderful job in all honesty.

This one I'm not happy with, I have to be honest with you, but we cannot desert the difficulties that will arise in Calgary. That's why these programs are there, and that's why we've spent a lot of time on that one program alone. I've probably spent as minister five months trying to resolve this, to no avail.

So when someone says there's not a lot of planning and a lot of thought, I take great exception to that. We have spent as departments and ministers the good part of five or six months going back over numbers and trying to find ways to handle as many pressure points as we possibly can. We haven't hit them all, and I hope no one would expect we would, because we still have to follow the Fiscal Responsibility Act in this province. We still must follow the law, that says we have to pay down our debt. Quite frankly, if we get that debt cleared off, there will be 900 million additional dollars that can go into program spending. We're not far off, but we haven't completed the job. So we must stay the course and get that finished so we can in fact have additional dollars for programming.

Mr. Speaker, those are my comments for second reading, but I hope hon. members will think when they get into this debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to make some comments this evening about Bill 28, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2). I'd like to address my remarks primarily to the \$235 million for school facilities to address growth pressures and renovation and modernization, the backlog that was identified by the school facilities evalua-

tion project. I think it's fair to say that across the province school boards and parents welcomed the money that's being put into those facilities, but I think it's also fair to say that there has been a great deal of unrest and a great deal of dissatisfaction with the lack of facilities and the lack of money that's been available to address the problems over the last six or seven years. That backlog has resulted in some peculiar problems that are going to be very difficult to face over the long run.

The problem isn't an urban problem; it's urban and rural. I hear from school boards, I hear from people in small centres in the province who are frightened about the future of their school and the impact the closure of those buildings would have on the viability of their community, and I also hear from people in major centres, Calgary and Edmonton, who are disturbed about the impact the lack of a neighbourhood school has on their neighbourhoods. So it's a problem that goes across the province from border to border and involves both public and separate school supporters.

One of the real difficulties is the way in which the funds are distributed. For years now the government has used a utilization formula that looks at the amount of space that a school district has and bases any new moneys on the percentage of that space that's occupied by students. That formula, Mr. Speaker, is a most destructive formula. It destroys communities. It pits neighbour against neighbour. It's something that I think has to be changed. I think yesterday we were shocked by the death of a youngster in a Calgary high school and, prior to that, the death of Jason Lang. We have to ask ourselves, in terms of the kinds of communities that we're building: how wise is it to predicate the education of more and more youngsters in this province on sending them out of their home communities and allowing them to be placed in situations where they are absolutely anonymous?

10:50

I was at a Jackson Heights parent meeting where they're asking for a new junior high school, and one of the parents there made the argument most eloquently. She said: "We need a junior high school in our neighbourhood. I want to know where my junior high school youngsters are." She said: "If you're going to bus anyone, bus out the young ones. We don't worry about them." It's the junior high and the high school students that leave the confines of our neighbourhood and our community. There's no one that knows them, no pressure from the adults in the neighbourhood, no one that calls them to task for their behaviour. It's tragic, and it's rooted in large part in the utilization formula that's been applied over the years and that's still being applied. I think the government should just honestly say that there's only going to be so many dollars put into infrastructure for schools rather than playing this game with the utilization formula and using it really as a mechanism to cap costs for school buildings.

Information and evidence from at least a couple of boards I've been informed about that they've provided in terms of busing students over a 25-year period is that with what they paid for that busing, they could have had a building in the community for the 25 years and would still have the building after the 25-year period had passed. So the whole notion behind restricting the building of schools is one that the government should revisit.

In terms of accessing the funds from the government, I think there's a growing dissatisfaction with the separation of the capital projects and the capital budget into the Department of Infrastructure from the previous department of education or the Department of Learning. If you look at the Auditor General's latest report, on page 186 the Auditor General comments on it:

We noted opportunities for improvement in linking the information on strategic education program delivery, as developed by Learning, to the capital plans for school facilities.

There are several references by the Auditor General about the discrepancy. Infrastructure is sitting down and making plans and Learning is sitting down and making plans, and there's a mismatch. That doesn't serve Albertans well. It certainly doesn't serve the accommodation of schoolchildren well when you have that mismatch.

The Auditor General, in questioning at Public Accounts, indicated that there were some real concerns that the money being spent by Infrastructure on schools was being spent in the most effective and efficient manner and one that was congruent with the goals and aims of the Department of Learning. So I think it would be well worth the government looking at those two departments and evaluating how successful the split has been in meeting the needs of school districts at least. I'm not sure what the experience is with health facilities.

One of the things that has been lacking from the word go in this Assembly since 1993 is a long-term plan. We've had a couple of MLA committees tour the province and conclude that there was \$750 million worth of backlog in school construction. We've had a recent audit by the Infrastructure department. There's still no long-term plan. Again, it's not just the opposition saying that; it's confirmed by the Auditor General, and that's the reference on page 185. Referring to the Department of Infrastructure, it says:

The Ministry also requires information on strategic service delivery options and forecasted needs to develop strategic long-term capital plans. Such information would include strategic policy changes, options, and priorities as well as forecasted needs based on economic analysis and projected demographic data.

That, I think, has been our concern for years in this Assembly, that there wasn't that long-term plan, and there still isn't a long-term plan. Here we are spending an additional quarter-billion dollars on buildings, and it's being done in the absence of any kind of strategic planning or long-term planning. I think that's regrettable.

I was at a meeting in Jackson Heights in Mill Woods, where the parents were requesting a junior high school, and a representative of the Department of Infrastructure informed the meeting that decisions were made by the School Buildings Board and, further, indicated that the School Buildings Board was an independent body. I find great difficulty with that. The School Buildings Board is appointed by the government. One of the difficulties, of course, is that it's impossible to appeal their decisions. So there'll be decisions made that are not consistent, for instance, with the priorities of a particular school district, and there's no appeal to that decision. Again, I think that's unfortunate.

It raises the question that was raised earlier in question period today, and that is the whole business of priorities. School boards across the province go to great lengths to do demographic studies and projections, to survey their communities, to balance the kinds of needs as they see them in their districts and set down on paper and submit to the government a list of priorities as they see them that would be best for their community. They find it distressing and frustrating, to say the least, to find those priorities ignored.

There have been a couple of examples given already this evening. A board west of the city that submits a list of priorities and finds the number one priority ignored and the number seven priority funded by the government. That's not a singular case, Mr. Speaker. That happens time and time again across this province. Again, I think it does a disservice to the department when those kinds of things happen, and it certainly erodes any kind of confidence that decisions are being made on any sort of fair and equitable basis in terms of the allocation of those funds. So in applauding the spending of this \$238 million, it's done within the context of a real worry that funds

are not being allocated as effectively and as fairly and as openly and as transparently as those school boards and those parents, who depend upon the government for the financing of those facilities, would like.

I'd like to conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker, with a plea again for long-term planning. I looked at some projections for Edmonton public schools, and by the year 2010 Edmonton public is going to have 100 schools that are 50 years or more of age. That's a huge inventory of old buildings, and I don't understand, I can't see how the province is going to possibly meet the needs that district will find itself in the middle of come eight, nine, 10 years from now. They aren't alone in the province. I suspect that the stock in Calgary and other urban areas and in some of the rural parts of the province is aging and that the aging pattern is similar elsewhere.

11:00

So I go back to the plea for some long-term planning – certainly there's been enough information gathered by the government to make that kind of planning possible – and that again, when that planning is undertaken, the people it's going to affect be included in the discussions.

I'd conclude with those comments, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to have an opportunity to speak on the appropriation act this evening. I've been listening to the opposition members talk about this act, and frankly I think they've really missed the boat. It's not the first time, but I think that it's really necessary that I have an opportunity to talk about the appropriation act, the budgeting process, because it's obvious to me that despite the fact we've been talking about the budgeting process here for the past two or three years as we have been dealing with eliminating our deficit and now working towards eliminating our debt, they still haven't figured out what it is that we're doing and why we're doing it.

Let me begin by using a bit of an analogy, and then if you'll excuse me, Mr. Speaker, I'll certainly bring it back to the bill at hand. Before I became a Member of the Legislative Assembly, as you know, I managed a small business. In our small business we did things in much the same way, only on a much smaller scale, as what we do here in the Legislative Assembly and the government of Alberta. At the beginning of each year we would sit down and put together a budget, our best guess of what we could reasonably expect to have in income and what we could reasonably expect to require in expenses. We made the best efforts to develop that budget, and at the end of the year, like here in government, we wanted there to be a bottom line that was doable. What I mean by that is that if we estimated our expenses too low, then we would have a problem at the end of the year. If we estimated our income too high, we would similarly have a problem at the end of the year.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Well, what we do here in Edmonton in the Legislative Assembly – and we went through this spring a very prolonged process of going through government estimates. We went through that beginning of the year process, and the Provincial Treasurer used the best efforts, the best statistics available at the time to estimate what reasonable amount of income the government could expect.

One of the differences between government and small business is that with the exception of resource revenue, the projections that governments can make for most of the other sources of revenue are

relatively consistent. The nice thing is that when we determine what the tax rate is going to be, with a relatively small margin of error we have a pretty good idea how much revenue we're going to derive from taxes. That's because everybody has to pay, unlike with a small business, where when you estimate what your revenue is going to be, it's dependent upon people choosing to buy your services. In government we require them to fill out tax returns.

We do have the issue of resource revenue, and it's been mentioned by a number of members throughout the discussion, not only in the debate on the bill but throughout the discussion when we were in Committee of Supply on these estimates. The resource revenue tends to be very unpredictable. As a result, in order for there to be any opportunity or any possibility of having something resembling a balanced budget at the end of the year, it's necessary to be extremely conservative in the estimates at the beginning of the year and ensure that if prices should drop, which they're prone to do from time to time – we've all lived through that – there is sufficient cushion, there is sufficient margin within the budget so that the expenses which we are committing ourselves to can be paid. That's the process we went through last spring.

At the same time, the government through consultation with the citizens of Alberta some time ago said to the citizens of Alberta: you know, there is something happening in the government of Alberta that we're very pleased about, that we're very proud of, but we need your assistance. What is happening is that as we begin to pay down our debt – and when we started this process, we were talking about some day having the fortunate position of having paid down net debt – we asked Albertans through a mailer how we should as government prioritize our spending when it comes to dealing with resource revenue, which frankly can be very unpredictable. Clearly, very clearly, Albertans said that we want you to focus primarily on continuing to eliminate the debt, but at the same time we also want you to have some flexibility to deal with emerging issues, to deal with areas of concern with respect to growth pressures that we're experiencing in this province.

So I think that very prudently the government made it a policy and then in fact took it one step further, brought that policy here to the Legislative Assembly, where it was passed, and we have now legislation that says that 75 percent of any unbudgeted revenue, 75 percent of a surplus, a cushion, whatever you want to call it, must be allocated to continue to reduce our debt. That's in accordance with what the people of Alberta told us.

With the other 25 percent there is some flexibility. There are a number of things that can be done with that 25 percent, and a number of those things I think you'll see reflected in Bill 28 in the appropriations that we have before us. There can be a portion of that 25 percent allocated to onetime spending in infrastructure. When I look at the bill in front of me, in the schedule of the bill I see there are \$419 million allocated to Infrastructure, \$293 million that's allocated to Health and Wellness, a good portion of which is infrastructure.

We also had the opportunity to say: now, at the same time as we're dealing in this 25 percent realm, it doesn't all have to be spent. Some of it can be recognized in the form of the recognition to the taxpayers of this province that perhaps more taxes were collected than were required in this particular year. We're in the very fortunate position this year of being able to do that as well. While it's not reflected specifically in this bill, that is certainly part of the overall package that we're dealing with as a Legislative Assembly, and that's the \$300 energy refund that will be forwarded to Albertans over the coming weeks and months.

11:10

That is also within that 25 percent envelope, and that is indicating to Albertans two things. First of all, we're in a position where we can refund taxes to individuals that were not required as a result of unforeseen revenues from the volatile resource revenue side of our income statement. Secondly, we have to recognize that although high oil and gas prices are beneficial to the province of Alberta in the form of royalties that are collected, there is also a cost of that that has to be recognized, because all of the residents of Alberta are having to purchase their gasoline, the natural gas to heat their homes, other utilities that are dependent upon natural gas, and those prices have increased. I think it really does two things. First of all, there is an opportunity to share the unforeseen revenue with our taxpayers and, secondly, to recognize that there are some additional costs that must be borne by the residents of Alberta.

That's really where we find ourselves this evening. We find ourselves at the midpoint in our budgeting process. Madam Speaker, I talked earlier about the analogy of when I had a small business myself, and I talked about how we did our budgeting. At the middle of the year, which is where we are in the fiscal year from a government perspective, we sat down and we looked at it and we determined: how are we doing? We had projected X number of dollars for revenue. Does it look reasonable that we're going to be able to meet the projections? Perhaps we've been very fortunate. Our marketing programs were very successful this year, and it would seem that we have higher than expected revenues.

What did we do? We did the same thing as the government is going through right now. We looked at our priorities. First of all, we considered: is there some debt that we are going to be able to reduce as a result of having increased revenues? Secondly, we looked at some of our expenditures. We look at, first of all, whether there were some capital expenditures that needed to be addressed. Finally, we looked at programmed activities. Are there some expenses that we perhaps have had unanticipated and that have arisen throughout the first six months of the year? Are there perhaps some areas where when we were calculating our budget at the beginning of the year, we really didn't allow ourselves to do everything that we would have liked to do?

A good example is that maybe we have a staff education training program and have budgeted to have 10 employees attend a training conference, and now we can change that budget and allow 15 employees to attend that conference. Those are the kinds of midyear adjustments that every business, small and large, in Alberta does. Those are the same kinds of adjustments that we as the people who have been entrusted by Albertans to look after one of the largest if not the largest business in the province of Alberta, the Legislative Assembly and the government of Alberta – that's exactly the same process that we're going through right now.

We have just completed an analysis of the first six months of operation, and we found a couple of things. First of all, our resource revenue is higher than anticipated. As a result of that, we have some additional dollars that we need to deal with. We have legislation in place that says that 75 percent goes to reduce the debt, and I think that's the smartest and the best thing that we could do. Then we look forward to see where there are areas where specific dollars can be invested that will enhance the value of government to Albertans and enhance the quality of life for our constituents here in Alberta.

Most importantly, one of the things where we have to be extremely careful, just as you have to be very careful when you're doing midterm adjustments with your small business – I talked about the fact that in a small business you might be able to increase for this year the number of employees that you would be able to send to educational programs, but you have to be very careful that this does not become something that is going to be an ongoing cost. Because

we've been fortunate enough to have unanticipated revenues, we can't make decisions this year that are going to impact upon every other year.

So we talk about increasing the budget in certain areas, but that's a onetime increase. And when you look at the vast majority of the items that are before us in Bill 28, again we're looking at onetime expenditures. There are some areas – and we have heard about them in the discussions this evening – that will have some long-term implications. But in relation to the \$978 million that we're here discussing this evening, those decisions and those areas where there are some long-term implications are extremely small.

I want to express my support for this bill. I think the appropriations have been well thought out. They are something that I can support, and frankly I can feel very comfortable on behalf of my constituents in Medicine Hat in supporting these appropriations. I compliment the government on their prudent fiscal management, and certainly I can assure you, Madam Speaker, that I will continue to represent my constituents in Medicine Hat and will insist that the government continue to operate, from a fiscal perspective, in the prudent manner which we're seeing reflected here this evening.

These are appropriations that are based upon midyear reassessments that make sense. They were unanticipated, either unanticipated at the beginning of the year, when you talk about areas such as forest-fire fighting, or they are the kinds of expenditures that can only be made when revenues, in the case of the government of Alberta resource revenues, are sufficiently high to allow for some interim onetime spending, which we're seeing here this evening.

So I encourage all members to support this bill. I look forward to the vote on this bill later this evening and of course to continued debate when we get to third reading tomorrow.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have been sitting and waiting anxiously to participate in the debate on Bill 28 this evening. I look at this, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2), and I have an urge to change this to the blink money bill, because certainly the government has finally blinked in this province. We know there's an election around the corner. The frost is getting deeper in the ground every night now, and I think before the spring rolls around and that frost leaves the ground, the government is hoping this blink money, this bill, will make the citizens of this province forget about the last seven years and what has occurred in their education system, whether the adjustments to the health care system are adequate. We find it difficult on this side of the House to support the latest installment of this supplementary estimate without some explanation of how the new spending will contribute to meeting defined outcomes.

Now, hon. members from across the way, Madam Speaker, talk at great length about the three-year business plans. Well, perhaps they need to revisit these business plans. We have close to a billion dollars in extra spending. In fact, this amount is the second largest unbudgeted spending by any Provincial Treasurer since 1986. A lot has happened not only in this province but in this country and in the North American economy since 1986. We had, of course, in 1988 the start of the free trade agreement. The free trade agreements have grown, and they've gone from America to Canada to Mexico and beyond. I'm going to get to this a little later in my remarks, but it is very important to realize the changes that have occurred since 1986.

11:20

Perhaps individuals have been asleep at the wheel, so to speak, because there has to be a process of budgeting so that this doesn't

occur year after year. I'm not going to start in 1986, Madam Speaker, and talk about the special warrants. I'm not going to talk about what occurred in 1992-93, and I'm not going to talk about what happened with the previous Provincial Treasurer and missing the targets.

Hon. members, I heard the previous speaker talk about how individuals may have missed the boat. Well, this budgeting process has missed the mark by a billion dollars, and that is a large sum of money. I don't care if you're a small businessperson or the chairman of a multinational corporation; a billion dollars is a billion dollars. I can go down through the list. I can see where the money is going, and I notice that Human Resources and Employment is not on the list. That must be a tribute to the individual budgeting that's going on by the minister and his department officials. They're not here looking for any extra money, so there must be sound practices. I would have to say to the other departments here in the government that perhaps they should take the hon. minister aside and say: "How are you doing this? Can you show us how this is done?" Obviously the leadership shown is good enough in that department, so perhaps it should be in all government departments.

What we're essentially doing here, Madam Speaker, is in six hours allocating a billion dollars. It is important that everyone work together to reduce waiting times for open-heart surgeries, joint replacements, other elective surgeries, getting the MRI business settled, cancer treatments, and the hiring of staff not only at the Cross institute in Edmonton but also at the Tom Baker centre in Calgary. These are important issues.

We knew what was going on with the shortage of health care professionals two years ago, but what did we do? We did a study, and then we squirreled it away in the Legislature Library, never to be seen or heard from again with the exception of the good research that was conducted by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. This report became public information. This isn't new news about Health and Wellness and how much money is needed. That should have been addressed last spring. There should have been a plan in place. There should have been a plan in place two years ago to deal with a shortage of health care professionals.

Now, in this budget I have to question how much money in Health and Wellness went into the propaganda campaign on the health care privatization act, Bill 11, as it was affectionately called by everyone. How much of this money was spent on that campaign? In six hours any member from across the way can certainly join the debate and enlighten not only this member but all Albertans.

Now, we heard earlier in the Assembly the remarks from the hon. Minister of Government Services. The home constituency, I believe, is Calgary-Foothills. I, Madam Speaker, had the pleasure of visiting Calgary-Foothills recently. I was in a fine school there. I was in the gymnasium. I was at a meeting there, a public meeting, to talk about pine shakes. Yes, pine shakes. I met an individual there by the name of Mr. Harry Chase, the nominated candidate for the Liberal Party in that constituency. He was outside handing out cards and literature in Calgary-Foothills. This was a fine school. The hon. minister is talking about more schools. I believe the number she used was those 6,500 more homes or 650 more homes. I didn't quite catch the number, but that is dramatic growth. I was astonished to get out of my car in the school parking lot, and I thought for a minute I was in Twin Brooks in Edmonton. I looked all around. There were pine shakes on every roof, and I thought: wow, there's trouble here; there's trouble here.

I see no amount of money in here . . . [interjection] It doesn't matter. I hear the word "treated" shakes over there. It's been brought to the attention of all consumers in the province, and now the treated pine shake is rotting just like the untreated pine shake.

There was no testing done. There was no testing done on this product.

However, it occurred to me, when I was looking through this billion dollars, that there was no sum set aside for the homeowners. Now, I look around the Assembly this evening, Madam Speaker, and in the communities of St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Banff-Cochrane, Calgary-Fish Creek, certainly Calgary-Foothills, or Red Deer-North there are citizens there who are really upset and are looking for compensation from their government.

I know there's polling going on because people phone me and they say, "Mr. MacDonald, someone in my neighbourhood was contacted." But I don't see any amount in there that is going to satisfy these individuals from all over the province, because they're very, very angry with their government. They feel that the government has been inadequate in their explanation: how this product was promoted and authorized by the government.

Also, in her remarks the hon. Minister of Government Services was addressing this House regarding the terrible thing about gas prices, natural gas prices. This party has a very solid plan to reduce gasoline taxes. A very solid plan.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's why they borrowed it.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. I guess imitation is a fine form of flattery, and whenever hon. members leave this Assembly and move on to the federal political arena, they adopt our policies. Poof, just like that. Last summer we couldn't get them to talk about it, but this summer they were talking at length about our policies and adopting them.

However, the high price of natural gas and what it means to Albertans, what it means to an Alberta farmer. For instance, Madam Speaker, we think of the fertilizer plant in Redwater consumes an enormous amount of natural gas. What's that going to do to the price of fertilizer? That is one of the more unique fertilizer plants in western Canada and in the northwestern American states. Is the price of fertilizer going to be increased in the spring? It's going to increase because of the increase in the price of natural gas. We're looking at envirofuels out here on the east side of the city. It's feedstock, which is a derivative of natural gas. They've had a shut-in because their feedstock is not competitive with other jurisdictions in North America. So there are a lot of things happening here that we need to address in this Assembly.

11:30

We think of the price of ethane. I bring to the attention of all hon. members of this Assembly the statement that was made by the economics professor from the University of Calgary, Professor Robert Mansell, I believe. The statement went something like this, Madam Speaker: it is a major policy shortcoming of this government of how we have addressed the ethane issue in this province. Everyone knows that the economy has expanded here. Ten percent of all economic expansion in the decade of the '90s was as a result of the petrochemical industry, its expansion. The economy expanded around it. That expansion is going to stop because of this government's ethane policy.

I was in the library this afternoon, Madam Speaker, looking up electrical prices, and I noticed in one of the three budget documents that the amount of ethane used in this province, whenever you look at the total production in this province, has gone from 32 percent down to 29 percent in one year, yet the industry has expanded. So we have to look at our pipeline capacity. It's fine to say that we have to look after the producers of natural gas, but we also have to look after the resources of Albertans, and this government is not looking after the resources of Albertans so that they're going to be available perhaps for value-added manufacturing in the future.

Now, this is a University of Calgary professor who was saying that this is a major policy shortcoming of this government, a major

policy shortcoming. We need to have a good look at this. We have to consider in this the methanol plant in Medicine Hat. Energy prices: are we going to have to have another bill? Are we going to have to have another series of rebates for farmers whenever the high price of fertilizer occurs? Natural gas: are we going to have to have some sort of rebate for envirofuels? The methanol plant in Medicine Hat.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me one moment, hon. member. I would remind the Assembly that we are not in committee. We don't need quite this many interjections.

Go ahead, hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very, very concerned about what is happening in this province, because – and this bill is no reflection of this – I believe at this time in the history of this province that with prudent management there can be set up for generation after generation of Albertans a fund that can work for the benefit. But whenever we are spending money like this in billion dollar amounts without any respect for a budget process, we are doing those generations that are to come in the future a disservice.

We can say that times have changed from April to August, from August to November. We didn't know what the price of the natural resources were going to be. We had no idea. We lowballed it, and now look at it. But the reality is that we have a very, very good idea, Madam Speaker.

We can talk about energy tax refunds. We can talk about electricity auctions. We can talk about education property tax reductions, business tax reductions. We can talk about information system enhancements, risk assessments. But we need a budget process that Albertans can have confidence in. They cannot have confidence in this system. We need to look well into the future, not just past the next election. We need to think of a future where conventional crude oil reserves are dropping and dropping and dropping. We need to look into the future when through the western sedimentary basin, the Peace River Arch, the Alliance Pipeline will be connected up to the Territories. It will be moving gas from the Territories to Chicago, bypassing Alberta.

In five years I would like all hon. members from across the way to explain to me where our natural gas royalties will be. Where will they be in 10 years? What sources of revenue are they planning on using? Will the petrochemical industry continue to expand? I certainly hope it will, but I'm not convinced that is possible with the current policies that have been adopted by this government.

We have to think of the core programs, and whenever we think of the core programs of this government, Madam Speaker, we think of health care of course, we think of education . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Infrastructure.

MR. MacDONALD: Well, I just don't know about Infrastructure, because what I can see at Infrastructure, Madam Speaker, is sugar-daddy politics: we're going to pay this, we're going to build this, we're going to do that, but we're only going to do it while there's talk of an election. How much money will the Department of Infrastructure have in two years? I don't know, and I have to question that.

We need in this province, if the electorate is to have confidence in their government, sound budgeting practices. Whenever we repeatedly come back for more money and more money, that is not sound budgeting.

I'm very disappointed that I cannot continue this evening, Madam Speaker, but with that, I shall take my seat. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We're speaking tonight to the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2), Bill 28 as we are referring to it on the Order Paper. It speaks to the expenditures that have been allocated by the Treasurer and the various departments in response to those areas that have been identified by our constituents, by the people of Alberta, and by the organizations that we trust to care for the delivery of many of the programs in this province, be they education as in Learning or in the Health and Wellness department or Children's Services or certainly the Community Development portfolio as well, to say nothing of the infrastructure needs.

It is commonly understood, of course, that the business plans of this government deal with the base budgeting, and those are well planned. They are mindful of the needs that are current and growing in the province in the respective departments. However, there are some projects that do require funding of the nature of supplementary allocation of funding. Some of those are pilot project funding, pilot projects that are deemed necessary for us to assess whether they're going to be properly delivering some outcomes that can be sustained and that are fine or whether they need to be redirected and reformatting.

11:40

We also are certainly mindful of the targeted funding expenditures that we identify over the course of certain years, in particular this year, that are targeted to address a certain need obviously at a certain time, and that's what this requisition is speaking to. We do have the onetime expenditures that certainly compose most of these supplementary estimates. There is nothing wrong, and it's not a dirty word to speak of onetime expenditures. They are ones that are responsive to what we have had identified by our communities.

I'm going to use in particular some examples from the supplementary budget program. I'll speak specifically to the Community Development department. We all know that our libraries are well used. The use of them is in high demand. It certainly is in my

community. So the supplementary budget or requisition as identified here for the Department of Community Development speaks specifically to the Northern Lights regional library system at Elk Point, to the expense of \$775,000, looking at how it will be best allocated.

I'd also like to identify, of course, that we're looking to and we have begun as a government funding Alberta centennial legacy projects. These are projects that I think are befitting projects, befitting sites if you will, and endeavours that our respective and smaller communities will benefit from greatly in recognition of the fact that in the year 2005 we are ramping up to celebrate our centennial.

I want to mention, too, that there is acknowledgment in this supplementary budget of some of the workers in Health and Wellness, particularly in the area of providing services for persons with developmental disabilities or in the delivery of children's services to individuals and individual programs. There is an allocation, of course, for an increase in pay for those who are in the service of these respective clients.

So to say that our government works without a plan is, of course, something I believe the critics have to keep repeating to themselves because they want to believe it, not because it's a fact. There is a great deal of planning put into our budgeting, whether it be in the long-term planning of business plans or, as we are asking for in this particular bill, whether it be in response to what we know are needs within the community, what have been identified, what have been assessed as valid, and what we see as a government as a response because we have the revenues available to us prudently now.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for St. Albert, but in accordance with Standing Order 61(3) the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a second time]

[At 11:46 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 22, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/11/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Elaine Dafoe, who is the mayor of the town of Turner Valley in the beautiful constituency of Highwood. Her Worship is seated in your gallery, and I would now ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three guests who are seated in your gallery. We have Mr. Scott Sutton, the Alberta Ombudsman, and he is accompanied today by his lovely wife, Betty-Jayne Sutton, and also a staff member, Dixie Watson. Mr. Sutton is here today to witness the tabling of his annual report. I would like to ask our three guests to please rise and be recognized by the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two petitions to present. The first one is signed by 150 constituents from Carstairs, Didsbury, Cremona, Huxley, Trochu, Three Hills and the Olds area, as well as Albertans from the Calgary area. It petitions

the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

The second one is signed by approximately 4,700 constituents from the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills area, and it petitions the Legislative Assembly

to urge the Government of Alberta to establish a hemodialysis satellite unit in the Olds/Didsbury area which could eliminate the need for patients of the area to commute to Calgary Foothills hospital three times a week for treatment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here signed by 15 people. They're in support of Bill 212, the human rights conscience legislation for health care workers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition of 33 names from the Calgary community, seven of whom reside in Calgary-Currie.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition on behalf of 20 constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar to present to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. These constituents are residents of Ottewell Lodge, and they are very concerned that there are no bathtubs in the new Ottewell place.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table six petitions containing 111 names from the Drayton Valley-Calmar constituency, 8 names from the Dunvegan constituency, 140 names from the Barrhead-Westlock constituency, 115 names from the Rocky Mountain House constituency, 94 names from the Calgary-Lougheed constituency, and 15 names from the Calgary-Mountain View constituency. The petitioners are urging the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Alberta human rights act to allow "health professionals to opt out of those . . . procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present a petition signed by a number of concerned Albertans who are urging the government

to take an enlightened preventative approach and add the newer and more effective medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 215 individuals from the constituency of Redwater, and the petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

Thank you, sir.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to table this afternoon a petition signed by 246 Calgarians in Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-North West, and assorted parts of the city of Calgary urging the Assembly to urge the Calgary regional health authority "to reconsider the relocation of Unit 47 of the Foothills Hospital."

Thank you.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present a petition to the Assembly signed by a number of Edmontonians, and it reads as follows:

To the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, in the Legislature Assembled:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

They keep on coming in, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, today I'm pleased to present a petition signed by 54 people, 18 being constituents from Calgary-West and 36 being Albertans from other constituencies, all of whom support Bill 212, the human rights conscience legislation for health care workers.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name now be read and received. I believe there's more than one. You can do them all if you would, please.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on November 15 on osteoporosis and the Alberta drug list be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Alberta Government to take an enlightened

preventative approach and add the newer and more effective medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on November 15 be now read and received.

1:40

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta:

1. To immediately disallow any further development of the Spray Valley of Kananaskis Country, including those proposals currently under consideration;
2. To maintain Kananaskis Country in natural state that provides high quality wildlife habitat and nature-based recreational activities;
3. To create a Wildland Provincial Park which protects the whole of the undeveloped parts of the Kananaskis and Spray Valleys.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, may the petition that I presented November 15, 2000, against private health care be now read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 27

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2)

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2).

It's a bill which changes two pieces of legislation: the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Act and the ordinance to incorporate Alberta College. Mr. Speaker, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act is unlike other bills in that it has already been discussed by all parties and thus presumably would move through the House without too much debate.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of an agreement that is entitled Energy Agreement Brings Benefits to Health and Education. This is something that will allow every school, hospital, public college, and technical institute in Alberta to benefit from stable prices, price discount, and consolidated billing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table two documents today, both associated with the Alberta science and technology leadership awards, affectionately known as ASTech. They have an event every fall that celebrates the leading science and technology people in the province, the people that are contributing to the new economy. We have some copies of the program, entitled Celebrating Innovation, and then I have a list of the winners that I'm tabling as well.

It's interesting to note that one of the winners is known as the Edmonton protocol. It's a group that is developing a cure for type 1 diabetes and is known around the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the youth employment strategy brochure providing an update on youth employment strategy and part of this government's commitment to keeping Albertans informed about the strategy. This is a joint partnership of Alberta Learning and Alberta Human Resources and Employment and ensures that youth employment is looked at from the perspectives of youth in school and youth in the labour market.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings today. I'm also tabling the appropriate number of copies of each one. My first tabling is a letter from Arlene Chapman, provincial co-ordinator of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, who is opposing the Liberal Bill 211, the Alberta Taxpayer Bill of Rights. She is concerned that the bill will jeopardize stable, long-term funding for important social programs.

The second tabling is a letter from Shelley Williams, executive director of the Bissell Centre, who is opposed to the bill because the bill draws lines and divides people into camps.

The third tabling is a letter from Yvonne Schmitz, executive board member of the Calgary and District Labour Council, who believes the Liberals are feeding into the aggressive agenda of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

The fourth tabling is a letter from Brian Bechtel, the former executive director and would-be Liberal candidate in Edmonton-Norwood, who hopes that the bill is unsuccessful.

The last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is an editorial from the *Edmonton Journal* dated April 5, 2000, calling Bill 211 a Liberal "stupid tax stunt."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four documents to table today. These are fact sheets prepared by the Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary. The first document is called The Crisis for Alberta Graduate Students, and this indicates

that many students are accessing the campus food bank, incurring debt loads over \$25,000, and finding it difficult to complete their degrees in time.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is called Why Tuition is the Problem, and this document states that the underfunding of universities is responsible for unbearably high tuition levels and ever increasing tuition fees in the province.

The third document is called How Much It Would Cost, and it draws attention to the fact that for \$20 million the government could freeze the tuition fees of all postsecondary students in this province.

The last document, Mr. Speaker, that I'm tabling is called The Failure to Address Graduate Student Debt and draws attention to the grave consequences that students face as a result of very heavy debt loads.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of a document entitled HungerCount 2000: A Surplus of Hunger, Canada's annual survey of emergency food programs in association with the Canadian Association of Food Banks.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table letters that I've received from 130 residents of Fort McMurray, or the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, who work in the service sector and are struggling with dealing with skyrocketing housing prices. They've received no satisfactory action from government on this matter, and I'm pleased as Leader of the Official Opposition to place their concerns on the public record on their behalf.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I have four separate tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter from Manfred Lohka of Calgary addressed to the Premier and copied to myself as well as some other members. It is a very eloquent plea for more funding for universities and particularly notes the importance of basic research.

Mr. Speaker, the second tabling is actually two separate documents from the Advanced Coronary Treatment Foundation. The ACT For High School CPR training program was launched today in the city of Edmonton, and there are some documents which explain the program as well as the role of the Kiwanis, the school boards, the foundation, and the other partners in this very exciting and important initiative.

Mr. Speaker, the third tabling is a document entitled Analysis of Sessional Paper 1155, which is the text of the comments I would have said during my tabling yesterday, but I was interrupted.

Mr. Speaker, the final document is a document entitled Tabling Commentary, which compares tabling commentaries against number of words, based on those which have been interrupted and uninterrupted by the Speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted this afternoon to table a report that was done by Sue Olsen, former MLA for Edmonton-Norwood, and by the Edmonton John Howard Society. It's entitled Youth Justice Report: Views of Youth on the Justice System, May 2000, a report I commend to the reading of all members of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from Margaret Coutts, who is president of the Red Deer River Naturalists. This group is concerned about detrimental effects to their health and the environment from a proposed 12,000-head hog farm to be located close to the Red Deer River.

The second tabling is copies of letters from Anne and Dale Watson of Red Deer. They are asking that the government stop plans for logging in the area west of Nordegg.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter and a petition from the Kananaskis Coalition expressing their approval on the announcement that the "Spray Valley Provincial Park will become official in December 2000."

Thank you.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have tablings here. It's a letter from Sturgeon school division No. 24 and their recommendations as to how schools could better deal with the impact of increasing fuel costs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would file five copies of a series of postcards addressed to the Premier and to the Minister of Learning asking them to cap tuition increases at 2 percent. They're part of a campaign by representatives of the 107,000 postsecondary students in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a report on the supports for independence and benefit levels for women and children commissioned by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters.

The second tabling is copies of a letter from myself to the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee requesting "that the Public Accounts Committee summon a number of witnesses pursuant to Standing Order 66" to deal with the "\$18 million identified in the Annual Report of the Auditor General 1999-2000 on pages 111-118."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five documents to table this afternoon in the Legislative Assembly. These are documents that I received through freedom of information from the Department of Municipal Affairs. The first one is a letter from the Alberta Home Builders' Association to the hon. minister requesting a meeting to discuss the pine shake issue.

The second letter is from the office of the Premier, and it is a letter of acknowledgment. It is CCed interestingly enough to the hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

The third document is a letter to the Premier of the province, and it states in here, Mr. Speaker, that "the durability of treated pine shakes is no more certain than the durability of untreated materials."

The last document, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from the last official minister of labour in this province's history to a councillor of ward 3 in Strathcona county, Karen Bernard, regarding the whole issue of treated and untreated pine shakes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to table the appropriate number of art calendars. At the official launch today of 2001 artwork calendars held at the Edmonton Art Gallery at the 10th annual artwork calendar project put on by Capital City Savings, with participating school boards of Edmonton public, Edmonton Catholic, Elk Island, and northern Francophones, there were 2,600 submissions of artwork from young students throughout our capital region, and 14 were picked. I'm very proud to say that there is an up-and-coming fantastic bunch of artists in our community.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a series of letters from a gentleman from Calgary by the name of Robin White, no relation, although I gather by his summary that we do agree on a lot of items. He is totally opposed to the major development of the Spray Lakes area in Kananaskis Country and totally agrees with the Praxis survey and further agrees that the government is doing the right thing to care for the responsible stewardship of the environment.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to section 27(1) of the Ombudsman Act I am pleased to table with the Assembly the 33rd annual report of the office of the Ombudsman for the period January 1, 1999, to March 31, 2000, and the financial statements of the office of the Ombudsman as at March 31, 2000.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today to rise and to introduce to you and through you to all assembled a team of people that are going to lead throughout Alberta a CPR risk, react, recognize, and resuscitate for high school students through the ACT high school CPR program. This program will teach children in grades 10, 11, and 12 the importance of knowing CPR. Dr. Terry Sosnowski, medical director of Edmonton emergency medical services; Earl Clements, the past president of the Kiwanis Club; and Sandra Clarke, executive director of the ACT high school CPR program: I'd ask that these honourable people please rise and that we give them the customary warm salute.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have two separate introductions I'd like to make today. First, I'm very pleased to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly Mr. Jamie Rice, who is in Alberta for a co-op work term as an administrative resident with Capital health authority as part of his masters in the business administration co-op program from McMaster University. Jamie selected our Capital health authority for his residency because our Capital health authority just happens to have been identified as a leader in health care in Canada. I'm delighted that he's here and that he's accompanied by Mr. Brian Hlus, the director of government affairs at Capital health. I would ask both of them to please rise and receive a very warm welcome in our Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also very pleased to introduce to you and

through you to everyone in the Assembly Mrs. Vickie Belanger and her daughter Nicole, who are touring the Legislature today and are now in our Assembly to view our proceedings. Vickie, of course, distinguishes herself as being the cousin of my wife, Cristine. I would ask that she and her daughter both please rise and receive a very warm welcome from our Assembly as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislative Assembly two classes from Father Leo Green in Edmonton-Manning constituency. There are 19 students in the French immersion class, and they're with their teacher, Mrs. Manuela Ferrante, and their student teacher, Miss Ann-Marit Johnson. She just mentioned that she has a full-time job coming up in full immersion. The other class is 27 students in the English class, and they're accompanied by their teacher, Miss Marilyn Marr. They're up in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd like them to stand and get the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two members of the Progressive Conservative Youth association: the vice-president of organization, Blake Robert, and the first vice-president, Jamie Tronnes. They are both seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure today that I introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 49 students from one of my favourite schools, Holy Family Catholic school in Mill Woods. Today they are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Caroline Lepps, Miss Donata Christiansen, Mrs. Gail Kossowan, and one of my friends, Mrs. Beth Devlin. They are also accompanied by parents Mrs. Karen Young and Mr. Roy Marouelli. I would ask that they all please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. They are in the members' gallery.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not often I get guests up to the Legislative Assembly, and I'm extremely pleased today to introduce to you and through you four very special guests from the town of Olds. They are Gordon and Joyce Jorgensen and Fred and Marlene Campbell. It was their hard work that was instrumental in getting approximately 4,700 names gathered on the petition that I presented earlier today on satellite dialysis. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Viola Cassis, president of the Graduate Students' Association at the University of Calgary; Monique Tuffs, Graduate Students' Association at the University of Calgary; and Parminder Basran, a graduate student at that university. These three student leaders are in the city

today talking to legislators and trying to convince them that their campaign to cap tuition increases at 2 percent is an important campaign and one that they hope will be supported by members of this Legislature. They've left with me a series of postcards for the Premier and for the Minister of Learning, which I'll see are delivered, with important messages from students with regards to that tuition cap. They're in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask that they stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly a class of grade 6 students from Fultonvale elementary school. They are accompanied by Mrs. Karin Bittner, their teacher, and student teachers Mrs. Judy Prins and Miss Gayann Hutchison. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am just thrilled today to introduce to this Assembly and to you a great group of athletes. They are the St. Albert White Sox, the 55-plus slow-pitch team who just this summer won the Canadian championship in Whitehorse, Yukon. In fact, part of their claim to fame they have told me is that they have beaten teams that the Member for Lethbridge-West has played on and the Member for Whitecourt-Lac Ste. Anne. It's a great day for us in the Assembly. If I could read their names and they could stand up as I introduce them: Al Brown, Norm Carruthers, O'Neil Chevalier, Ron Crosby, Rod Gauf, Lloyd Haddon, Vern Holland, Stan Kolomyjec, Brian Kupsch, Clarence McDonald, Archie Miskiw, Larry Murray, George Odovichuc, Leo Provencal, Jack Rudd, Wayne Samis, Don Stewart, Jim Walsh, Glen Winder. They are also here with Marlene Miskiw, Joyce Odovichuc, and their daughter Kari. They are in that gallery as well. I would ask that we please give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 31 students from H.A. Kostash school in Smoky Lake accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Harris; parents and helpers Ms Fletcher, Ms Jarema, Ms Eldridge, Mr. Sawchuk, and Mr. Ponich. I believe they're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce 42 citizens from the city of Fort McMurray and the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo representing l'école Dickinsfield school's grades 4, 5, and 6 classes. Their teacher, Mrs. Ball, is accompanied today by parent helpers including Mr. Koskovich, Mr. Lowell, Mrs. Best, Mrs. Doblanko, Mr. Ball, Mrs. Clarke, Mrs. Mustard, Mr. Martin, Mrs. Gaudet, Mrs. Parsons, Mr. Lingelbach, Mr. Meintzer, Dr. Levitz, Mrs. Grewal, and Mrs. Chung. Now, the senior member of this afternoon's delegation is a very proud grandmother, Mrs. Mary Koskovich, with her 4-year-old

granddaughter, Angela. They're all here this afternoon representing l'ecole Dickinsfield, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Ministerial Statements

Diabetes Awareness Month

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand here today on behalf of the government of Alberta to recognize November as national Diabetes Awareness Month.

Mr. Speaker, in the 79 years since the discovery of insulin too many of us have come to think of diabetes as an inconvenience or at most a controlled condition, but for the 90,000 Albertans with this condition and the estimated 40,000 who do not yet know that they have the disease, the reality is serious. Diabetes is Canada's leading cause of death by disease. Heart disease is two to four times more common in diabetics. Diabetes is the leading cause of adult blindness and of half or more of all of the amputations worldwide.

Our doctors, nurses, and other health professionals provide exceptional care to Albertans with diabetes. To help them with that care today I added the new drugs Actos and Avandia to Alberta's drug benefit list to combat type 2 diabetes. These two drugs are the first of a new class of medications for diabetes therapy. These drugs help to control high blood sugar levels by reducing insulin resistance and enabling the body to respond to the insulin it produces.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a proud history of success in research in combating this disease. Ever since University of Alberta researcher James Collip worked with Banting and Best to develop human-usable insulin, Alberta has been on the leading edge of diabetes research. The University of Alberta has developed a groundbreaking pancreatic islet transplant therapy that holds the possibility to free some diabetics from insulin injections. Eight clinics around the world now use the Edmonton protocol.

Mr. Speaker, just today the University of Calgary announced a new gene therapy that has successfully put type 1 diabetes into remission in lab animals. These findings lay the groundwork for clinical trials on the use of this gene therapy to cure type 1 diabetes in human beings. This is yet another example of our universities using genetic research to solve medical problems and highlights once again the significance of the successful mapping of the human genome.

Mr. Speaker, the first description of diabetes was in Asia Minor in the first century A.D. Now almost 2,000 years later we stand on the cusp of a cure. We all look to the day when diabetes like smallpox will exist only in history books, and Alberta research will have been a significant part of that achievement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that diabetes requires public awareness and wider public understanding. Diabetes Awareness Month and the minister's remarks on this condition today help to serve this purpose.

Alberta does have a proud history, and the minister is right to laud our researchers, but conditions like diabetes also require sustained government attention and proper, stable government funding, attention and funding that recognize the high costs associated with this disease.

Mr. Speaker, costs for persons with diabetes can range from \$300 to as much as \$1,000 a month. Currently Alberta health care insurance covers a fraction of the potential monthly costs for Albertans dealing with this condition even with the new coverage for Actos and Avandia.

Mr. Speaker, some 90,000 Albertans have been diagnosed with

diabetes. This means their daily routine is in large measure directed by their condition. From their waking hours to the time they go to bed, persons with diabetes must monitor their blood sugar levels and inject their bodies with insulin or take other medication as required. Persons with diabetes must monitor closely their diet and eat only the kinds and amounts of foods their bodies require. For a senior on a limited income the additional out-of-pocket expenses associated with diabetes, including diet, testing, and medication, are a serious hardship.

It's all well and good, Mr. Speaker, for the minister to recognize Diabetes Awareness Month with words, but it would be even better if the minister would also recognize Diabetes Awareness Month with sustainable directed funding, funding that would help Albertans burdened not only with the weight of diabetic symptoms but also the costs associated with treating those symptoms.

Thank you very much.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Electric Utilities Deregulation

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are very fair-minded people, and they rightfully expect that the government is watching out for their interests. Like passengers on a ship they assume that the captain is on the bridge watching out for icebergs and sandbars and shoals and rocks, and they get angry when they realize that the captain has been sleeping on the bridge. The ship has hit the rock, and the Premier is still asleep. When will this Premier wake up to what Albertans know, and that is that his own deregulation policies have led to these higher prices?

MR. KLEIN: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are fair-minded people. The captain has not fallen asleep on the bridge. No captain of any ship remains awake 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, not even this member when she was captain of the health ship. As a matter of fact, you talk about someone who wasn't awake. You know, this hon. member, who was then the minister of health, was asleep at least three-quarters of the time.

2:10

Mr. Speaker, we have not hit a brick wall on this particular matter. The Minister of Resource Development has explained time and time again the causes for rising electricity prices. He's outlined a 10-point plan to address this issue. This is not hitting the wall. This is taking responsibility. This is guiding the ship to come to some kind of amicable resolution to this particular problem.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important issue. The opposition leader is sending a wrong message out there. I've said this before. Eighty-five percent of the electricity consumers connected to the Alberta electrical system, over 1 million residences, have up to five years – listen carefully: five years – before they have to make changes, and those are all regulated.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker – this is also very important – there are 124,000 customers that use less than 250,000 kilowatt hours of electricity that also may remain under the regulated system for another three years. Those are two very important areas. In addition to that, a lot of the large industrial consumers, commercial consumers, and municipal consumers have already signed long-term

contracts with the power purchase holders right now, and they are protected.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the person that's criticizing that there is a disaster out there is wrong.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would this Premier please explain to Albertans how the government intends to intervene against itself at the EUB when it's his government's own deregulation policies that have botched it up, led to skyrocketing electricity prices, and led to the whole mess that Albertans are in today?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the shriekings of the leader of the Liberal opposition simply are not true. No matter how loud she yells, what she is saying is not true. She is not being truthful with her caucus, she is not being truthful with this Legislative Assembly, and she is not being truthful with Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, while the intervention may not be typical, I believe and members of this government caucus believe that protecting consumers is the number one priority of government. That's what it's all about. The Leader of the Opposition may choose to fear monger and confuse the issues and distort the facts, but that is doing a disservice to Albertans.

The fact is – and the hon. Minister of Resource Development pointed out the facts – that we are currently in a regulated market. Albertans, as the minister pointed out, will still have the option of remaining on the regulated system for five years; that is, the average, normal consumer. That means the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board will continue to be a regulatory body, and while that role exists for them, we will get involved in a productive way to protect consumers. We have an obligation to protect consumers and to ensure that any regulated rate increases are justified.

Mr. Speaker, I point out again that any consumer can stay in the regulated environment for five years after January 1 of the year 2001.

Now, relative to intervention, Mr. Speaker, anyone can intervene in the hearing process. It is a normal part of the regulated environment, and I would encourage the Liberal opposition, rather than fear mongering, rather than choosing to confuse Albertans and distorting the facts, I would invite them to join with us in the intervention process. The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board hearings are open to the public and are a fair and impartial review process.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, we've been intervening for the past five years on energy deregulation. I don't know where the Premier has been.

Mr. Speaker, what we've got is market uncertainty, we have higher electricity prices, and we have inadequate supply to meet rising demand. Is the Premier now saying that he's going to re-regulate an electricity energy market that he spent the last five years deregulating?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker, we are not going to re-regulate. Indeed, the power companies and many of the people who have signed those long-term contracts do not want us to re-regulate. They want to make sure that there's going to be an orderly transition, and that's what the minister's 10-point plan speaks to.

Where we find anomalies in the system and situations in the system where we think extraordinarily high increases are being applied for, we do have an obligation to protect consumers, and we will do that. I would point out that section 28 of the Alberta Energy and Utility Board Rules of Practice allows for governments to intervene in the hearing process. We will do precisely what we're

allowed to do, and we would again invite the Liberals to join us in the spirit of protecting Alberta consumers.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has spent the last five years ignoring Alberta consumers, and the Premier knows it. The Premier ignored the chairman of ATCO. He ignored the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. He ignored a former minister of utilities, ignored the Alberta federation of rural electrification associations, ignored the Consumers' Coalition of Alberta, ignored the Public Institutional Consumers of Alberta, ignored the Industrial Power Consumers & Cogenerators Association of Alberta when they tried to tell him that his energy deregulations scheme was going to drive prices up. So the question is: why should anyone in Alberta believe that this Premier is interested in protecting anyone other than himself and his government from this massive mess we are in on deregulation?

MR. KLEIN: How would I be protecting myself and members of my government? We are consumers too. You know, we're all consumers of electricity in this room. Why would we do something that is going to deliberately cause pain to ourselves, Mr. Speaker? We know that a deregulated environment overall is going to increase competition and eventually drive the price down.

Relative to the associations to which the leader of the Liberal opposition alludes, there are other people and other organizations that have totally the opposite view.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue. We wouldn't want anyone to mislead Albertans in the information. I have *Hansard* here from 1998. I don't want to read all of it, but there are lots of your members from that side, Liberal members . . .

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Hon. minister, to the point, please.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, very carefully, the hon. members from the opposite side indicated in 1998: we support the principle behind deregulation. So we are moving forward with what you supported. We're listening to you.

Mr. Speaker, if the opposition members have some better ideas or better plans in relation to the whole deregulation process that would help Albertans, the consumers out there, please provide those plans to us.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition has been fighting this from the beginning. The promise of this government was that prices were going to go down with deregulation, and they're going straight up.

Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier is prepared to intervene against himself and his own flawed electricity deregulation scheme, is he prepared to admit finally here today what he refused to admit two days ago, and that is that his own deregulation scheme is leading to higher prices?

2:20

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it has been pointed out time and time and time again that deregulation has nothing to do with higher prices. We're facing a situation in this province of unprecedented economic growth. We're facing a situation of power companies not being able to bring on an electrical supply quickly enough. The electrical

producers will tell you that through the regulatory process they've been unsuccessful thus far in getting more transmission capacity onstream. That is being addressed in the minister's 10-point plan.

Mr. Speaker, when I say that the leader of the Liberal opposition is distorting the facts and confusing and misleading Albertans, I say that with all sincerity, because there are so many factors that are leading to high electricity rates. The hon. member is trying to imply that these rate hikes are occurring under a deregulated environment. We are not now in a deregulated environment. We are in a regulated environment, yet the applications for rate increases are taking place in a regulated environment. I think it's inherently unfair, and the hon. member does a disservice to herself and to her caucus and to Albertans by trying to imply that this is now taking place in an unregulated environment. That is not true.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, does the Premier agree with his own market surveillance administrator, who says that one of the key reasons for the uncertainty and the lack of supply in the market today is because of the deregulation process by his government?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, admittedly whenever you bring about change which eventually is for the better, it creates uncertainty. If there's anything that's difficult to bring about – I know that the leader of the Liberal opposition knows nothing about change, because she was always afraid to try something new or to do something differently. We know about change, and we know about change for the better.

Yes, change does bring uncertainty. I can recall when the liquor stores were privatized, Mr. Speaker: great uncertainty about the changes that would take place. When we franchised the registries: great fear about the changes that would take place. But it's all turned out for the better. The opposition yelled and they screamed and they said: uncertainty here; this is going to happen; the world's going to come to an end. Well, it didn't.

There are so many factors. Yes, admittedly, uncertainty is one of the factors. It's not the only factor. There are numerous other factors that are leading to higher power rates.

If the hon. member would like to hear once again from the hon. minister, I will have him respond.

THE SPEAKER: We're going on to the third main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Increased Utility Costs

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta families receiving assistance from the province were struggling to make ends meet well before this government botched the province's electricity supply and price structure. HungerCount 2000, an October 2000 survey of food bank usage, shows that 63 of Alberta's 70 food banks participated in this national survey. Interestingly, the province with the highest GDP per capita, the province with the highest surplus also has the distinction of one of the higher usage rates of food banks by children in the country. In fact, fully 42 percent of those assisted in Alberta are children. My questions are to the Premier. Given that 42 percent of Alberta food bank customers are currently children, how much higher does the Premier expect that number to go as more and more families are forced to divert food money to pay for electricity and heating bills?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again a complete, absolute, I would suggest malicious distortion of the facts. What the member opposite fails to point out is that every household in this province will receive

as of January 1 an automatic \$20 reduction in their electricity bill. In addition, every person over the age of 16 – and a 16 year old could be considered in some cases a child. In the case of a two-parent family, that would be \$600. That goes a long way, to the point where an average household, whether the salary level of that household is in the low level, the medium level, or the high level, will receive in the neighbourhood of \$840. That is very significant.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that HungerCount 2000 also shows that Alberta social assistance and disability incomes currently don't even cover one month's rent for a one-bed apartment in Calgary, how are Albertans on disability and welfare incomes to cope as their rents increase by \$25, \$50 – who knows? – on January 1 due to skyrocketing electricity prices?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is an absolute falsehood and distortion of the facts. When the leader of the Liberal Party stands up and mentions the \$20 a month reduction in electricity bills, when she mentions the \$300 per person rebate, then she's telling the truth. Then she's telling the truth. Yes, there will be increases, but those increases will be offset to a great degree . . .

MS BLAKEMAN: Not for renters.

MR. KLEIN: It all depends. You know, I heard this across the alley. I'm sorry. Across the way. "Not for renters." Well, there are some renters who pay electricity bills. There are different billing situations for different rental situations, Mr. Speaker.

The simple fact is that on average consumers will receive a \$20 reduction in their electricity bills plus the \$300 each cash in hand. Until the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition starts to mention that, she is not telling the whole truth, and she has an obligation to tell the whole truth.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll table again the estimated ATCO bill on an average residence that I tabled yesterday including the rebate.

Mr. Speaker, given that families and individuals working at Alberta's minimum wage must currently use, according to HungerCount 2000, 64 percent of their paycheque to pay for one month's rent in Calgary, how are these Albertans supposed to cope as rents increase due to electrical and heating bill increases on January 1, 2001?

MR. KLEIN: Well, again, I'm going to have the hon. minister or ministers respond, but I remind the leader of the Liberal opposition that very significant rebates are being put in place to compensate for the rising cost of electricity. Once again, I think it is improper and it is dishonest. No. I'm sorry. I take that back. It is not quite truthful of her to leave that very important component out.

Relative to the situation as it relates to low-income families, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't think it's fair to leave the impression with Albertans today that our SFI rates wouldn't even cover rent. I believe the location identified was Calgary. This is simply not true. We have a situation with shelter rates and with assistance to low-income families where we look at what is happening in the different situations, and we help certainly as best we can.

In terms of the reference that was made to people working at

minimum wage, I want to make sure that the leader understands that we currently have somewhere around 2 percent of Alberta's population that's working at a minimum wage level. Most of those are students. If, in fact, we have people working in that kind of an environment that have families, we have income supplement plans. We have children's health benefit plans. We have employment tax credits. I mean, there is a situation in Alberta where we do look after those that need our assistance.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

2:30

Contracted Podiatry Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On September 29 of the year 2000 as part of its PR campaign around the proclamation of Bill 11 the Conservative government announced that 18 contracts with private surgical facilities were being renewed or extended. In making this announcement, the minister of health said that Albertans will now know what agreements have been made, how much they will cost, and what's being provided. Well, the minister was not being entirely up front in making this statement. My question is to the Premier. Why did the government on the very day that Bill 11 was proclaimed fail to disclose that the Calgary regional health authority was signing a contract for podiatry services with the wanna-be Health Resource Group private, for-profit hospital?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know the situation as it relates to podiatry, but I can tell you that Bill 11 contains in it law that requires regional health authorities to abide by certain rules and regulations vis-a-vis contracting out and the disclosure of those rules and regulations and conditions of the contract.

Relative to the specific situation as it relates to podiatry, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the best of my information is that 34 contracts were approved under the Health Care Protection Act, and of those 34 contracts only four were with new providers. The rest of them were with existing providers, and there were no new services that were being provided. I'll be happy to look into the issue of podiatry services for the hon. member.

I can say that the global amount of the contracts that have been approved to this point total in the range of \$9 million. That's \$9 million out of a roughly \$5.6 billion budget for this year, so it's a relatively small amount. It's an important tool that regional health authorities will use. I'll do my best to provide the full information that the hon. member requests.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the Premier: if the government can't be trusted to be forthright with Albertans about the contract between the CRHA and HRG, how can Albertans trust the Premier's assurances that there are no secret plans to allow hip replacement surgeries to be performed at HRG?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I stand to be corrected on this particular issue. Podiatry, as I understand it, is a service that involves treatment of the feet. Now, it's my understanding that podiatry services have been contracted for some time now. It seems to me that some podiatry services are contracted to an agency like the Kerby Centre in Calgary. It's privately contracted.

Now, there are rules and regulations put in place to cover that kind of a contract. Those same rules and regulations would cover a

contract with HRG or any other institution, Mr. Speaker. I fail to see here what the problem is, but perhaps the hon. minister can shed some light on it.

MR. MAR: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I've given my undertaking to the hon. member to look into the issue of podiatry as it relates to HRG with the Calgary regional health authority. I see no reason why we can't look into that and have information brought forward if such information exists.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the minister would also inform this House whether podiatry surgeries already being performed at HRG are being performed despite the fact that the minister has not yet approved that particular contract.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, again, I'll be pleased to look into this particular matter. The process pursuant to our Health Care Protection Act is quite an involved one. It involves the College of Physicians and Surgeons approving certain procedures that can be done within private surgical facilities. They have very strict standards with respect to whether they can be safely done from a medical point of view, and then the regional health authorities must come to the minister for approval of contracts for such services.

As I have indicated, Mr. Speaker, I'll be happy to look into this for the member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Development of Former Gainers Site

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some questions regarding the former Gainers packing plant site, which is located in my constituency and which was sold to Fletcher's, now Premium Brands, some time ago. At the time of sale Fletcher's indicated that within a short time a bacon plant would be up and running with many new jobs. So far nothing has happened and the property has fallen into disrepair and my constituents await the jobs that have yet to be created. My questions are all to the Minister of Infrastructure. Could the minister please inform this Assembly and my constituents why there is no development taking place on the Gainers site?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The sale to Fletcher's was under the understanding and condition that Fletcher's would construct a bacon plant on the site. They have until October 2018 to exercise the option. However, at this particular time they are waiting for better security of availability of hogs in the province of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is: what will become of the site if Fletcher's doesn't develop the site? Was there any commitment in the agreement of sale that development must occur?

MR. STELMACH: Whether or not Fletcher's proceeds with the plant is up to them. However, we do have the right to repurchase the

property for the same amount of money we sold it to Gainers for. As I said before, we have till October 1 of 2019 as a province to exercise the right to repurchase the property at the same price we sold it for.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Could the minister tell this Assembly whether this government has received payment in full for the property?

MR. STELMACH: Yes, we have, Mr. Speaker.

Electricity Rebates for Condominium Residents

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, in just seven weeks time condominium owners and renters are facing condo fee and rent increases from \$25 to \$150 per month because of this government's mismanagement and supply of electricity and natural gas. Over the next month many of the 200,000 condominium owners across the province will attend annual general meetings to approve their higher condo fees to cope with massive increases in heating and power bills. Already renters in apartments are receiving notices of rent increases for January 1, 2001. To the Minister of Resource Development: will the minister mail out the rebate information notice by Friday so the condominium owners know exactly how this government's massive electrical price increase and their rebate, small as it is, will affect them?

MR. CARDINAL: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we can do that.

But I wouldn't say that the rebates are necessarily small. We are trying our best to serve the consumers out there when the need is there, and we've always said that we'll continue monitoring the situation and make adjustments accordingly as we move forward.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we will be selling an additional 1,900 megawatts of electricity by the end of this month. Those dollars will be added to the consumers out there once the sale is completed. Once we determine the formula to use to pass on those dollars, we will be doing that. So to assume that the dollars provided are too small is not fair.

MR. GIBBONS: My next question is to the Premier. Given that the Premier says that the power bills for condos and apartments like his own will drop \$20 on January 1, 2001, could he explain to apartment dwellers exactly why they are receiving notices of rent increases from \$25 to \$50 per month starting January 1, 2001?

2:40

MR. KLEIN: I will tell you exactly and precisely what is happening in my own condominium building. Yes, I did receive notice that condo fees are going up. As a matter of fact, I received a notice two years ago. The percentage of increase is less this time than it was the last time around, and that's before there was any talk of any electricity increases.

My condo fees will go up by, oh, I think it's about \$15 a month, something like that. I'll get the \$20 a month, but that goes to pay for things other than electricity, because I pay my own electricity costs. Every person in our condominium unit pays their own electricity bills. Mr. Speaker, this increase is for the general cost of the upkeep of the condominium, of the property. I pay my own electricity bills. As the reduction applies to my own electricity bill, even with the 14 percent, or whatever it is, increase by EPCOR, I'll still be paying in the neighbourhood of \$5 or \$6 a month on my electricity bill. That is not high.

What I would tell the condominium association, first of all, is that we have the lowest overall taxes in Canada, that personal and business tax cuts in Alberta since 1994 have totaled some \$3 billion.

In 2001 our single-rate tax on income will be fully in place. Albertans will be keeping an additional \$1.3 billion more in their pockets, thanks to the new plan. About 200,000 low-income Albertans will come off the tax rolls absolutely. We've announced business tax reductions of \$955 million a year, and these will be phased in as affordable over four years starting April 1, 2001. Education property taxes will be reduced by \$135 million in 2001 and frozen at \$1.2 billion a year. User fees have been reduced this year, saving Albertans more than \$60 million a year. The M and E tax has been removed. There's been a dramatic reduction in the aviation fuel tax. I could go on and on and on.

MR. GIBBONS: Finally, to the Minister of Government Services. As the protector of consumers in this province what monitoring and enforcement mechanism has the minister in place to ensure that electricity rebates will flow through to the renters?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the Provincial Treasurer and the Minister of Resource Development have indicated in this House time and time again that Albertans will receive, starting the first of the year, \$20 a month for their electrical bills. Those people that pay their electrical bill will in fact receive a refund of \$20. I don't know how clearer it can be if you can't get that. [interjection] If you'd quit yapping, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, I could answer the question.

The members opposite, Mr. Speaker, have had the fun today of trying to mix up rental increases with the power bills. There is a process in place under our landlords/tenants act that actually governs the due notice that must be given for rental increases in this province. I would ask the hon. member if he's not familiar with the statutes to please pick them up and read them, because they were debated fully in this House. I believe the members opposite actually supported the tightening up of rental increases that were put into the new statute.

I do know that my colleague the Minister of Resource Development needs to supplement this answer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Renal Dialysis Services

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dialysis patients in my constituency have to drive up to three hours two to three times a week to receive dialysis treatment. These trips, in addition to the treatment itself, are very physically demanding and have caused some people to actually move from their homes in rural Alberta to the city to access this service. My question today is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What steps has the minister taken to provide a better level of dialysis service to rural Albertans?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to acknowledge the people who organized the petition that was tabled earlier today by the hon. member asking the question. I'd also like to be able to give by way of background a bit of information on how these services are provided not just to people in rural Alberta but to all Albertans.

Renal dialysis programs, Mr. Speaker, along with other specialized procedures such as organ transplants, would be a good example, are considered to be provincewide services. The Alberta Department of Health and Wellness funds the Capital health authority and the Calgary regional health authority to provide provincewide services. Through this funding both the CHA and the CRHA operate separate renal programs in both the north and south areas of the

province. The northern and southern Alberta renal programs each manage dialysis outreach services throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial funding allocated to renal dialysis services for 2000-2001 is in the range of \$50 million. That reaches approximately 1,600 people and represents an increase in budget of 27 percent over the previous fiscal year. In addition, special onetime funding of \$6 million was announced on the 18th of May of this year to increase capacity for kidney dialysis to meet the increased needs and improve the quality of care that's provided.

MR. MARZ: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Why are the doctors in Calgary not referring patients to Red Deer, which is closer and more accessible, especially in winter months, and would be more of a convenience for those constituents?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the Red Deer satellite program is operated by the northern Alberta renal program and is already operating its sixth unit at full capacity. Residents in the Olds-Didsbury area, those constituents, would normally receive services through the southern Alberta program, which would be operated out of Calgary or Hanna.

MR. MARZ: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: when can my constituents who require dialysis expect to be provided with a more accessible service?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, knowing that this question was coming up, the Minister of Infrastructure reminded me that there are expansion plans that have been completed to double the number of dialysis stations at the Hanna site from two to four stations, with three shifts a day for a total capacity of 12 patients. Also, in the south there are expansion plans to increase renal service capacity in Lethbridge by 20 beds. Renal dialysis services are increasing at the rate of 14 percent a year, yet the need for the service continues to rise.

I should note, Mr. Speaker, that a Renal Task Force has been established to look at issues regarding ongoing planning of renal services in Alberta, and on the issue of accessibility I have asked this task force to consider that issue. The southern and northern programs also maintain contact with satellite units and regional health authorities to actively monitor the current and future needs of this program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Video Lottery Terminals

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission oversees a gambling industry in which \$13 billion will be wagered this year with a billion dollars of that flowing into the government pockets. This appointed commission answers to no one but the minister responsible for gaming and his cabinet colleagues. My questions are to the minister responsible for gaming. Given that for two years this government gave selected race track operators a cut of slot machine money that according to the Auditor General was illegal, why, then, did the minister and the gaming commission negotiate an illegal contract?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, that's probably the first preamble I've heard in the last 10 days that actually has a remote proximity of fact when he says: yes, the industry does wager \$13 billion, of which 93 percent is paid back in prizes and stakes, leaving

a mere 7 percent for the use of taxpayers and all Albertans in the Alberta lottery fund.

Now, with respect specifically to the Racing Corporation's normal review procedure, we looked at what we were doing, what were our practices. I think we are a best practices organization. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission asked the Auditor General to come in and say: "Okay. Let's look at this, examine it. Is it appropriate with how the funds flow?" We said: would you please review that? He did review it, and he came back and reported to us that the Appropriation Act is not correct, and the gaming act is out of sync with the way that you're moving the funds through.

Mr. Speaker, then we started to speak with the Auditor General, and on September 11 in the Auditor General's report he said . . . [interjection] "People don't rob banks to make out-of-sync withdrawals," says the member.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: Please, please.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I guess he's accusing the Racing Corporation.

THE SPEAKER: Sorry, hon. member. I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. The second question.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Gaming: with the apparent collapse of the Resortport in Calgary, who will be given the 450 slot machines ordered for the race track proposal? The Calgary Stampede board?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think it is important to provide clarification that we did not think the Racing Corporation was robbing banks to make out-of-sync withdrawals, as was reported by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. But what we do know is that the Auditor General said in his report that we need to take measures to correct, and then he said: I am satisfied that the operation and remedial and rectitudinal measures taken by the AGLC are correct in putting the direct flow of funds through the racing renewal initiative in proper perspective, proper accounting, and in accordance with legislation as set out by the Crown.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Resortport application the 500 slot machines were committed to that agreement. That licence has been pulled by the Alberta Racing Corporation, so without that licence, then, there will not be a requirement to put those slot machines in there. In fact, the member well knows that there is a freeze on gaming expansion, that there's a freeze on casino licences, and that nothing is happening until the proper reporting and the new policy come in place for the gaming policy review.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, my last question is again to the minister responsible for gaming. After already waiting for over three years, when can the residents of the Fort McMurray area finally get to see the VLTs removed, as voted upon by the citizens?

MR. SMITH: Well, taking your previous guidance, Mr. Speaker, this is a matter that is before the courts, and it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

Palliative Care

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With our aging population there is a growing need for palliative services to care for the terminally ill. During 1998-99 I was vice-chairman of the Alberta long-term care review, with my colleague the hon. Member for Redwater as chairman. We heard from many Albertans about the need for compassionate, palliative care. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How are we meeting the needs of palliative care patients in Alberta?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the issue of palliative care has been raised by a number of my colleagues in government, including the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, the Member for Redwater, and this Member for Calgary-West. We do take a compassionate and caring approach to palliative care and focus on quality of life for patients and families during a very difficult time.

Palliative care services are considered a core health service in the province, and they are managed and delivered through home care programs and hospice sites in some communities throughout the province. Regional health authorities are responsible for providing palliative care through acute care settings, homes, hospices, and lodges in their regions.

Since the release of the policy framework on palliative care in 1993 Alberta Health and Wellness and health authorities have enhanced palliative care in this province. As an example, Mr. Speaker, both the Capital health authority and Calgary regional health authority operate hospices throughout their cities, quite a number of beds. I should point out that palliative care is a priority in the 2000-2001 business plan for a number of different regions in Alberta.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, in March of 2000 Alberta Health and Wellness provided funding to develop a caregiver's guide. This guide describes supports that informal caregivers can provide to dying relatives or friends, and this guide will be distributed provincewide by the long-term care resource centre.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The long-term care review committee was asked to examine the issue of supporting drug costs for home-based palliative care. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness please advise the Legislative Assembly what has resulted from those recommendations?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I must say at the outset that that committee did an excellent job of addressing this particular issue. As a result of their recommendations on 1 February 1999, Alberta Health and Wellness launched the palliative care drug program, which has been very well received throughout the province. The program provides coverage to any Albertan who is eligible to receive benefits through the Alberta health care insurance plan and has been diagnosed by a physician as being palliative.

What the plan does, Mr. Speaker, is it provides premium-free coverage for medications that are required by palliative care patients. Most importantly, the program increases the quality of life for the palliative patient and supports the patient's choice to be treated in their own home, hospice, or in a lodge.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Can the minister further describe what type of response this program has received from Albertans?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that the response has been very positive, and there have been many supportive letters and comments that have been made. It is a program, I think, that has not only been demonstrated to be widely accepted, but it's widely used throughout the province as well. As at the end of March 31, 2000, we had 338 Albertans on the palliative care drug plan. As at September 30 of this year that number has increased to 655. I think this program has demonstrated that it provides a tremendous benefit to the patients and their families, as I said earlier, during a very stressful time.

Increased Utility Costs

(continued)

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's bungling of the electric market is hurting all aspects of society: families, seniors, small and big business, and also nonprofit groups, community leagues, and amateur sport associations. For example, the Knights of Columbus arena here in Edmonton in an estimate from EPCOR will see an additional \$75,000 added onto their \$135,000 annual bill for electricity if they lock in their rates now. That is a 55 percent increase that will need to be covered by families and adult group users of the facility, who are also being hit with increased electricity costs at home. My questions today are for the Minister of Resource Development. Are there any plans to lessen the burden faced by these and similar recreational facilities?

MR. CARDINAL: Of course, Mr. Speaker, we've been working. In fact, I'll be meeting with the AUMA in the very near future. A lot of facilities of that nature, that this member mentioned, fall under the urban municipalities and rural municipalities. A number of them, of course, are already eligible for the rebate program. The \$760 million that we provided back to those particular consumers will go to nonprofit agencies through their municipalities.

If this individual is concerned about prices for facilities in Edmonton, I would do this. If this happened in my own municipality and my own municipality was pushing increases on electricity rates and setting the rates, Mr. Speaker, then I as a member would be approaching the municipality to question the municipality, your mayor and council, as to why those rates are being increased, because they are regulating the processes.

3:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering that any assistance these facilities will be getting will not be enough to offset the increase and will still leave a huge increase in the bill, what other measures can be taken so the kids are able to continue to access these facilities when user fees for them will have to go up?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Again, I'd just like to indicate to the member that it's fine to bring questions of that nature to the House, and we definitely made a commitment. We made a commitment that we will provide all the services that we can provide at this time, and we will continue monitoring the process and making adjustments as we move forward.

Again I would remind the member, Mr. Speaker, that maybe he should also be addressing this particular issue along with his leader and the opposition to their city council. They do set the rates. They're the people you vote for to get elected. Go talk to them.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, the minister obviously doesn't realize that the deregulation program was provincially sponsored, not municipally. Therefore, how does this minister specifically plan and what programs is he going to put in place to ensure that amateur sports facilities are affordable to all children, parents, and adult users of this province?

MR. CARDINAL: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to remind the member that the city of Edmonton regulates the rates, specifically electricity rates, in Edmonton. That member, if he is a responsible member, should be approaching his own council on those particular issues.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we have a very, very strong economy. We have over \$30 billion worth of economic initiatives announced, and they are moving forward. The economy is hot in Alberta, and Albertans are benefiting, including through tax breaks.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, today seven hon. members will participate in Recognitions. We'll begin with the first in 30 seconds from now.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Ernest Manning High School

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, November 20, I was very proud to attend and participate in the annual awards ceremony at Ernest Manning high school, located in my constituency of Calgary-West. Ernest Manning has a proud history of achievement in many areas: academic careers and technology, fine arts, math, and citizenship. Twenty-seven recent grads were awarded a total of \$36,500 with the government of Alberta Alexander Rutherford scholarships, which honour the high school records of recent graduates presently enrolled in postsecondary institutions.

More than 200 special guests, students, teachers, parents, and friends attended this special annual event, Mr. Speaker. From the Ernest Manning choir vocalists leading *O Canada*, to opening remarks, to the principal's greetings, through an impressive number of individual awards, scholarships, and bursaries donated by the community and individuals, to the finale, the prestigious Governor General medallion, the specially decorated cafeteria was alive with an aura of celebration, caring, pride, and achievement. It was truly a special evening of community for all to remember and cherish.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

White Ribbon Week

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. White Ribbon Week begins on November 25, three days from today. Thousands of communities and millions of Canadians, indeed millions upon millions across the world will participate in white ribbon campaign activities to show their support for ending violence against women. I would like to recognize organizers and participants of White Ribbon Week. I applaud those who acknowledge their responsibility to urge men to speak out against violence against women. By wearing a white ribbon, they symbolize their opposition to men's violence against women. It is also a personal pledge never to commit, condone, or remain silent about violence against women. In Canada we wear ribbons until December 6, Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Frank Spinelli

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of myself, the government of Alberta, and I'm sure all members of this Assembly I wish to offer my deepest condolences to the members of the family of Frank Spinelli, who passed away earlier today in Edmonton.

Mr. Spinelli, who many know as the owner of the Italian Centre Shop, was not only an icon in the city of Edmonton and indeed the province of Alberta. He was a deeply committed family man and an outstanding philanthropist and community supporter. Many Italian immigrants owe Mr. Spinelli their beginnings in their adopted country through employment prospects and also through his generous support in helping them to get on their feet.

Frank Spinelli will be dearly missed not only by the Italian community but by anyone who had the privilege of meeting and knowing this extraordinary individual.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

St. Albert White Sox

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to recognize the St. Albert White Sox. This is the 55-plus men's slow-pitch team who hit it out of the park this past summer and won the Canadian slow-pitch championship in Whitehorse, Yukon. This strong team has also won the Canadian championship in '94, '95, '98, and 2000. In fact, four players have been in all four championships: Rod Gauf, Jim Walsh, Don Stewart, and Vern Holland.

The St. Albert White Sox are great athletes, and they not only know how to play ball, but they know how to have fun. I would like to mention their names: Al Brown, Norm Carruthers, O'Neil Chevalier, Ron Crosby, Rod Gauf, Lloyd Haddon, Vern Holland, Stan Kolomyjec, Brian Hlus, Clarence McDonald, Archie Miskiw, Larry Murray, George Odovichuc, Leo Provencal, Jack Rudd, Wayne Samis, Don Stewart, Jim Walsh, and Glen Winder.

Congratulations. You've made us very proud.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize members of the newly formed Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations. They are the co-chair, the hon. Gene Zwozdesky; members John Chomiak, Bud Conway, Dr. Ehor Gauk, Oksana Hnatiuk, Eugenia Leskiw, Yuri Moskal, Art Mykyte, Dr. Roman Petryshyn, Dave Sereda, Edith Zawadiuk; alternates Dr. Olenka Bilash, Ivan Kupchenko, Lisa MacDonald, Ed Piasta; academic adviser Dr. Bohdan Klid; advisors Wayne Clifford, Barry Mehr; and secretary Jeff Morrison. I look forward to working with this fine group of volunteers from our provincial Ukrainian communities.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Sierra Youth Coalition

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize the excellent work done by the Calgary group of the Sierra Youth Coalition. This is a dynamic network of youth that initiates and participates in environmental issues and actions. In October they

organized a two and one-half day intensive conference attended by more than 90 people entitled Bridging the Gaps, Understanding and Acting Towards Sustainability.

The purpose and goal of the conference was to offer an opportunity for youth to explore the many diverse and complex perspectives of sustainability through an open forum environment. Perspectives were provided from a variety of community organizations, industry, government, and First Nations groups. Youth were able to assess how sustainability fits into our society and may act as a tool for positive change, while working towards bridging gaps between groups and generations. Their efforts clearly help in advancing and integrating collective efforts towards social, economic, and environmental sustainability. They will be very effective leaders in our future.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Canadian Telework Day

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize today as Canadian Telework Day. Telework Day is an Internet-based conference which showcases Canadian telework initiatives and supporters. Telework uses new technology to enable employees to work away from a traditional office setting, usually from their homes. More than 1 million Canadian employees currently telework, and the number is quickly growing.

3:10

The Alberta government recognizes the benefits of teleworking and has developed and posted formal teleworking agreements on the personnel administration office web site. Last year's event to track the strong support from business and government leaders focused on the benefits of teleworking in our workforce environment, transportation, and economic development. The Minister of Human Resources and Employment has provided messages of support over the past two years.

What makes this day unique is that organizers of this event do not want people to come to it; that is, not physically. To save fuel, time, and air quality, the only way to get to this event is by logging onto their web site at www.ivc.ca/td2000.html.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: We will move very shortly to a point of order, but before that, hon. Member for Redwater, might I please draw your attention to *Hansard* of last Thursday and last Monday and ask you to perhaps review them, particularly those sections dealing with naming of names? Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a point of order.

Point of Order Provoking Debate

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, it was the second set of questions, and there was a supplementary response from the Minister of Resource Development. The reference in *Hansard* would be *Beauchesne* 408(2) with respect to answers not provoking debate.

I heard the Minister of Resource Development say – and I don't have the Blues – words to the effect that the Liberals supported deregulation in 1998, and in fact it sounded like he was quoting. I couldn't see, but it looked like he had some kind of a *Hansard* excerpt. What's provocative about that, Mr. Speaker, is that I recall being in the House in 1998 when the government had to resort to closure because the Liberal opposition was unable to get questions

answered. I would hope that the minister has not taken out of context some general comment where one of my colleagues has said that as a general rule we're not opposed to deregulation in any particular sphere but make the case that Albertans will be advantaged not prejudiced by doing so.

With respect to Bill 27 – and if somebody has *Hansard* available, I'll stand to be corrected – I specifically remember closure being invoked. Mr. Speaker, in the years you've been here, I know that you've never seen closure invoked when you have the opposition locked up in full support of a government initiative. It doesn't happen, has never happened. For him to suggest, as he did while the cameras were rolling, that this Liberal caucus supported deregulation in 1998 when in fact we were raising concerns in anticipation perhaps of some of the mess that we've seen unfold, is just as provocative as can be. I'd hope that we'd be able to clarify and ensure that that sort of unfounded provocation isn't repeated in the course of this fall's sittings.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on this point of order.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, it's always interesting when members of the opposition wish to allow the difference in time to allow them to change their position. The hon. minister was quoting from *Hansard*, in fact March 23, 1998, the Electric Utilities Amendment Act, when the member for Edmonton-Ellerslie said, "We support the principles behind deregulation." I could point to a number of other instances in *Hansard* where members of the Liberal opposition supported the concept. The Member for Edmonton-Calder, for example, on second reading debate on the Electric Utilities Amendment Act, 1998, on March 17, 1998, said, "I must say on behalf of myself and at least a good deal of my caucus that we intend to look upon this bill favourably."

There are numerous references in *Hansard* to when the Liberals, talking about electrical deregulation only two years ago, were favourable to the concept that competition – I could quote again from March 17, 1998, from Edmonton-Calder.

The system worked quite well for a long time, until such time as most recently, when across North America we've come into deregulation and allowance for some private enterprise to enter the market. Personally I don't have any difficulty with that. In fact, I think that it is the way of the world, and certainly we have to get [people] to a place where we may – and I stress "may" – be able to as customers reap some of the benefits that competition can and will serve.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals can try and reverse themselves, try and put time and distance between previous positions and now. My colleague was answering the question in a positive, straightforward message and pointing out that in the past they've supported the position that's been taken by the government. Now they're trying to show themselves as being the saviours of the consumer and trying to scare the consumers in this province by raising things and saying that there's a massive problem that the government has mismanaged, but the bottom line is that there was a favourable viewpoint from the opposition, which many, many instances in *Hansard* support, and they can't reverse themselves just because they don't like what they said in the past.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo did rise on a point of order, and he did give the correct citation, *Beauchesne* 408(2), that answers basically "should not provoke debate."

Here's what the Blues actually say. I quote the hon. Minister of Resource Development:

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue because we wouldn't want anyone to mislead Albertans in the information. I have *Hansard* here from 1978. I don't want to read all of it, but there's a lot from your member from that side, the Liberal member.

So the *Hansard* Blues point out 1978, at which point the Speaker says: "Okay. Hon. minister, to the point, please." Then the hon. minister says:

Mr. Speaker, very carefully, the hon. member from the opposite side indicated in 1998 . . .

So now we move 20 years.

. . . we support the principle behind deregulation. So we are moving forward with your support. [interjections] Yeah, we're listening to you.

Mr. Speaker, if the opposition members have some better ideas or a better plan in relation to the whole deregulation process that would help Albertans, the consumers out there, please provide those plans to us.

Well, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo rose on a point of order. Basically, I think the point he was making was "should not provoke debate," and the hon. Government House Leader came back and quoted from *Hansard* certain things which certainly added to the debate. My conclusion to the whole question period today was: one whole debate, period. So we've had a point of clarification raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, responded to by the hon. Government House Leader with respect to this matter, and we're now going to move on to Orders of the Day.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, I will now move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been served yesterday, I will now move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 210

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned November 21: Mr. Doerksen speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you will recall, yesterday afternoon I was beginning to speak on Bill 210. I'll resist the urge to go back and start my speech all over again, but I do want to assure members of the Assembly that today I will not wax poetic. I will probably leave that to another member who might choose to do that today. Today I will stick to some factual matters and try to debate the principles of Bill 210.

If I recall, I kind of left off with the fact that we were discussing the statistics with respect to alcohol involved in accidents, and I had noted that in 1998, 1 in 5 drivers involved in fatal collisions had consumed alcohol. To make matters worse, as the severity of the collision, from nonfatal to fatal, increased, the involvement of alcohol also increased. In 1998 there were 17,345 casualty collisions in Alberta. In 9.1 percent of those casualty collisions the drivers had either been drinking or were judged to have been impaired. For the same year, in fatal collisions 103, or just over 22 percent, of the drivers had been drinking or were impaired. This is unacceptable since we have known for decades that alcohol affects a driver's judgment, reaction time, perception, and increases the severity of traffic collisions. Therefore, it makes sense to consider further restrictions on drivers that drink, and there is a compelling argument to have 24-hour suspensions for anyone caught driving between .05 and .08 blood alcohol.

3:20

Reflecting back, one of the arguments that was presented when we debated the provisions of graduated licensing had to do with whether the tools used to measure blood alcohol were in fact sophisticated enough to be able to measure blood alcohol content precisely. That was one of the reasons in the debate on that bill why we didn't want to go to a zero tolerance: because we didn't think we had the equipment to be able to measure that. I think we have progressed to a stage where, in fact, we do have devices that are sophisticated enough to measure accurately the blood alcohol content, so to move from .08 to .05 in fact is a realistic attempt to try to improve and continue to reinforce the message in Alberta that driving while impaired is not acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, an impaired driver can be anyone. There is no single image or personality type that indicates a drunk driver, but there are certain statistical groups that remain prevalent. Young males are still the most likely group of drivers to have consumed alcohol before a crash. In 1998 there were more than four times as many male drivers as female drivers who had consumed alcohol and been involved in a casualty collision. The majority of these drivers were males younger than 45 years old. In terms of involvement per 1,000 licensed drivers, males between 18 and 21 years of age were most likely to have been drinking before the crash.

Impaired driving can happen at any time and anywhere, but the odds go up for collisions involving alcohol on weekends, in the early morning hours, and during warm-weather months. In Alberta in 1998 October was the month with the highest number of casualty collisions involving alcohol, almost 11 percent of the total. May had the highest number of alcohol-involved fatal collisions, with 13 percent. A little-known fact is that most fatal and nonfatal collisions involving alcohol in Alberta during 1998 occurred on Saturdays. The most likely time period for these collisions on any day of the week was between 11 p.m. and 3 a.m.

With these statistics in mind, police officers in co-operation with other organizations step up Check Stop initiatives to stop impaired drivers before an accident occurs. The compelling argument behind Bill 210 is that it is still possible for a driver who blows between .05 and .08 to drive away from these Check Stops. Currently an officer only has the discretion to impose a 24-hour suspension if they suspect that an individual is impaired through their behaviour. This clearly should not be the case when many credible studies by leading researchers indicate that drivers between .05 and .08 are in fact impaired, have judgment loss, and loss of sensory perception.

In addition to the loss of life and limb let us not ignore the incredible toll this takes on our health care system and the ripple

effect on other costs to taxpayers. It is not only an issue of death and injury. It is an issue of responsibility in so many ways.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall a rather tragic accident that happened in my own city of Red Deer and one that was actually the catapult that led to some changes to our regulations to do with riding in the back of pickup trucks. Not widely talked about in that case but probably more significant an issue was the fact of the impairment of the driver of that pickup truck. Not only do I consider it important with respect to riding unrestrained in vehicles, but the issue clearly in this case was a matter of intoxication.

With the rules we have and the legislation we have and the attitude we have toward drinking and driving, clearly we've been making progress in our society, but we must continue to take steps to encourage people to act responsibly. I think what the member has done here with this bill in allowing the 24-hour suspension of a licence for that .05 to .08 makes good common sense. It advances the yardstick, if I can use that analogy, to help us to continue to drive that message home.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I will now take my place and listen to the other comments from speakers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure this afternoon to make a few observations about Bill 210, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000. I think not only all members of this Assembly but all members of society here in Alberta and, in fact, the world certainly want to see impaired drivers off the road. We all have a responsibility to do just that.

Now, then, the federal government, when they decided to put in a level of .08, certainly had done an incredible amount of testing to come up with that figure. When that figure was established, there were quite a few cries that this figure was far too low, and there were other cries that this figure was high. It was a level that was set where people could still operate a motor vehicle and the maximum level where people could operate a motor vehicle. So when this was established, the intent of that law was to get at those people that violate that level.

This existing law certainly has altered – drastically altered – the behaviour patterns of people who are driving and particularly the youth of today. We certainly see a much, much more responsible attitude towards drinking and driving today from our youth than we've ever seen before. Now, then, as well we have many, many organizations out there who, again, are profiling and bringing the message to people. We have programs in schools such as DARE. We have a program, which will be starting very soon, called Operation Red Nose. We have the PARTY program. We have had for many years safe grads here in the province. So all of these organizations certainly are doing their part to educate to try and prevent drunk drivers on the road.

Now, then, in her opening comments the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek certainly outlined that the severity of the accident in very serious accidents and that the number of deaths certainly were attributed to higher amounts of alcohol. I don't think there is anybody in this Assembly or the province that doesn't agree that more can be done. So what are some of the things we can do if we truly are concerned about getting drunk drivers off the road? What can we do?

3:30

Well, let's look at what we can do as a province. What could we do to lessen the opportunity for people to be behind the wheel when they shouldn't be driving? This province licenses every liquor outlet

in this province that sells alcoholic beverages. We have not decreased the amount of time those are open, but we've increased the time. So have we done our part, our responsibility to shut that down? What have we also done for people that serve alcohol in the restaurants and bars or whatever in this province? Have we decreased the time that those establishments are allowed to stay open? No. We've increased the time, and we've also included Sunday drinking now. We as a province certainly could look at those two situations and say: "Yes, we have a responsibility. Yes, we are serious in cutting down the availability of alcohol when people can be out on the roads." We certainly can do our part there as well.

Now, I noticed that last week AADAC's annual report came out, and in reading this report, I was quite interested in some of the comments that they have here. One I'll quote out of the report.

The best prevention programs are based on efforts to "build better people" by focusing on the strengths young people have and encouraging adults to play an active, supporting role in children's lives.

This to me is how we are going to impact, how we are going to change the behaviours of people in this province and something that we can definitely be committed to.

When I look here in the supplementary estimates, general revenue fund, I see that we have an increase of \$1,826,000 for assistance to the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. Then I say: if we are truly committed to educating our youth, to educating our population, how much of this money went into further development of programs that will impact people and that will get them off the roads when they have been drinking and prevent them from going on and causing the carnage that happens when we have these horrific accidents?

Now, then, we can be proactive, Mr. Speaker. We can make a difference. I think that rather than an arbitrary amount of .05, we can do things that will impact our message much more strongly than that. What we want here is prevention. What we have to do is look at those people who are causing these horrific accidents, the people who are not at .08. The seriousness of the accident, as the speaker from Calgary-Fish Creek has said in her opening remarks, was that the people were far in excess. These are the people who are driving when their licences are suspended as well. So those are the people that we have to focus on. Those are the people that we should be targeting not with the law but with education programs and counseling.

As well, what else could we do in this province? Well, we have the right in this province to license at what age people in this province can buy alcohol. We also have the right to license at what age these people can go into an establishment that serves alcohol. Now, in many of the provinces here in this country that age is 19 years, yet ours remains at 18 years. So there again I think this is another area where, if we are serious, we can be very, very proactive in regards to that.

I think that when we look at these other suggestions, all we can do is get a much healthier attitude towards drinking and driving. We have come a long way, Mr. Speaker, since the original limits were put in, and we certainly can create much more awareness of what is happening in the province today.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

What we have to do here as well is expand the net. In other words, how can we reach these various groups that are out there? How can we reach those individuals who constantly get behind the wheel of their vehicle when their alcohol limit is over .08? That is our challenge today: not setting a limit lower, that I don't think will

have that much influence or would not have the lasting impact, the lasting influence that we seriously need in this society.

You know, we have organizations out there like MADD, SADD, PAID, and these people do a magnificent job. They are certainly bringing the awareness of impaired driving to the front, and certainly there isn't anyone that doesn't know the anguish that a family goes through when they lose a loved one due to an impaired driver. That pain is a searing pain. It's a pain that never goes away, and the intensity of that pain certainly is there for them for the rest of their lives.

What I would like to emphasize most of all, Madam Speaker, is that if indeed we are serious in this province about getting impaired drivers off the road, then there are many things which are proactive. There are many educational programs that we could certainly be supporting more fully. There is certainly legislation that we could bring in which would definitely impact those people who have been charged, who do have a degree of recidivism, when they are drinking again and trying to climb back behind the wheel when they are under suspension or when their blood alcohol level is greater than .08.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, those are a number of the observations that I would like to add to the record when we're dealing with Bill 210, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon to speak about Bill 210, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, in support of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who has brought this to the floor, and certainly I agree with the comments of the previous member, Edmonton-Glengarry, as well.

Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. members of the Assembly of some of the reasons why such an important initiative as Bill 210 is necessary in the fight against drunk driving. Alberta has the fifth highest rate of people charged. That's the fifth highest rate of people charged with impaired driving out of all the jurisdictions in Canada and almost two times as many as those in our neighbouring province of British Columbia and also in central Canada, in Ontario. This is quite alarming. In 1998 one out of five drivers involved in fatal collisions had consumed alcohol. As the involvement of alcohol increased, so did the severity of the accidents, and there was a direct correlation between the involvement of alcohol and the severity of the accidents. Back in 1998 there were over 17,000 casualty collisions in Alberta, and in 1,586 cases – that's almost 10 percent of them – the drivers had either been drinking or been judged to have been impaired. In the same year 22.6 percent of fatal collisions involved drivers that had been drinking or impaired.

Madam Speaker, outside the provisions of the Criminal Code, impaired driving convictions can also result in a significant consequence. An accused person routinely faces the possibility of additional sanctions. For example, just one example, most of the provinces and territories, including Alberta, have instituted administrative penalties against suspected and convicted impaired drivers, some of which may be effective immediately and independently of any Criminal Code conviction, and that again is an important initiative. I am very proud that Alberta is intent on that particular administrative penalty.

However, Madam Speaker, it is clear that even more can be done to address this problem and stop unnecessarily placing the lives of Albertans at risk. Every eight hours someone is killed by an impaired driver in Canada. Every eight hours someone is killed in this country because of an impaired driver. It's statistics like this

one that have prompted me to speak in favour of this initiative put forward by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

3:40

This Assembly cannot change the Criminal Code – it is out of our jurisdiction – but what we can do as a province is write our own traffic laws in the interest of public safety. That is what Bill 210 does. It prevents drivers who register between .05 and .08 blood alcohol content from driving for 24 hours. It is a very simple and reasonable request.

Now, Madam Speaker, we should be doing everything we can to make it harder for drunk drivers to offend and to get drivers whose judgment is impaired by alcohol off the road. That is why Bill 210 intends to do that. Other provinces have also legislated brief periods of licence suspension for persons whose blood alcohol content is over 50 milligrams but less than the Criminal Code limit of 80 milligrams. This allows the police to suspend drivers at the roadside for up to 24 hours in the hope of preventing an impaired-driving offence. Really it is preventative, this measure that is being introduced by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. In Alberta police have their own discretion, but let's strengthen that discretion and allow them to do their job legislatively, and that is the ability legislatively to suspend a person's licence for 24 hours.

Bill 210 would also make sure that there is no question as to whether an individual is competent to drive while in the danger zone of .05 to .08. This would give our law enforcement officers another tool in strengthening driving safety practices across this province. In British Columbia today if a driver is caught driving with a blood alcohol content between .05 and .08, that driver is subject to a 24-hour roadside suspension, which is recorded on his or her driving record.

Saskatchewan, our neighbouring province to the east, uses a point system to assess drivers and their infractions. If drivers are caught a second time with a blood alcohol level within the warning range of .05 and .08, they also will receive an automatic 24-hour roadside licence suspension, and more points are applied to their licence. If an experienced driver is caught a third time with a blood alcohol within this range, they receive an automatic 24-hour roadside licence suspension and must attend addiction screening.

In Manitoba a driver caught with a blood alcohol content level between .05 and .08 receives an automatic 24-hour licence suspension and must pay a \$40 surcharge when they renew their licence. For the folks in the far east, in Newfoundland, drivers caught with a blood alcohol level between .05 and .08 are subject to an automatic 24-hour roadside suspension plus a \$100 licence reinstatement fee to be paid within 30 days.

Madam Speaker, these are tough measures against tough opponents, drunk drivers, who are threats to us all, especially when we learn of young people being robbed of such a young life by being hit by a drunk driver. Bill 210 is not going to take drivers with .05 and .08 alcohol levels and lock them up and throw away the key. It simply takes a driver who is a danger to public safety and removes from them their driving privilege for 24 hours, no more and no less. What Bill 210 is saying is that drinking and driving hurts everyone involved, so just don't do it. Having had a 24-hour suspension is certainly going to make anyone think again before they drive after having a couple, because in fact many impaired driving accidents happen after just a couple.

I would encourage members to give strong consideration to this bill, not only to the legal ramifications but also to the spirit of its intent in protecting all Albertans. This legislation will work to keep drunk drivers off the road, making our roads safer for all Albertans. Having a licence suspension for 24 hours for the drivers in that range

is a small initiative that will pay huge dividends by saving the lives of Albertans. This initiative, I know, is very much supported by Students Against Drunk Driving as well as by Mothers Against Drunk Driving and, I believe, by the majority of Albertans.

Finally, I would urge all members of the Assembly to support Bill 210 in this fight against impaired driving. This initiative from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is why she has earned the title the princess.

Thank you so much, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today to speak on Bill 210, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000. I won't call her the same thing that our hon. member did, but I will thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this forward and for her dedicated commitment to the families who lost their loved ones. I listened intently as she spoke, and my heart goes out to them.

As I understand the bill before us, it is to allow peace officers to suspend a driver's licence for 24 hours upon tests, breathalyzers, showing the driver to have in excess of 50 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood. Currently a 24-hour suspension can be given if the level is in excess of 80 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood.

In studying this bill and looking back to see where other jurisdictions have it, I see that Manitoba moved to this limit in 1997, and other provinces also have similar provisions for licence suspensions for those slightly under the .08 limit. While I support legislation which makes Alberta roads safer, Madam Speaker, there are some questions as to whether or not the .05 limit for a 24-hour suspension will remove the truly dangerous drivers from the road.

We have to focus on and support education. Education is working slowly, but it is working. Society has become more responsible around drinking and driving. Statistics show that impaired driving is very drastic. Previous speakers mentioned the fact of where Alberta is ranked in Canada as well as comparing it with B.C. and Ontario. I think we have to look at how education is working. Our communities are working very hard with the public to inform and to educate, to bring out that drinking is not a responsible item to do if you're going to be driving.

I do know from raising children that you've always got to correct them as they're walking out the door, but I feel that from what I've been told by the last two of my children, there's always a designated driver. This is something that I'm really amazed by. It just happened to be that when I was growing up, liquor didn't give me a thrill such that I had to go out and drink liquor to have fun. I had fun anyway. I grew up in the country. I don't say that a lot of well-educated, well-established people that I know within the city or in the province did not have a good time by drinking.

I do look at a lot of the aspects around drinking, and I go back to the fact of education. You know, it was brought up by a couple of other members, one being the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, about the DARE program. The DARE program is a wonderful program, and if we could put money into education in this province, we should be putting it into that. As I mentioned the other day in an introduction, there was a Sergeant Ewatski . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for

Calgary-Fish Creek to close debate on Bill 210, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to close debate on second reading of Bill 210, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000. I appreciate all the comments that I've heard from members in the House. I just want to make one thing clear. What this bill consists of is the fact that if you are pulled over and you currently blow yellow, the police officer has the right to tell you to park your car. What this bill is doing, the only change that this bill is currently making, is saying: you must park your car. That's the only difference. Between what is happening out there now and what this bill contains is one word, and it's "must" park your car. I'd like members to think about that in the rest of the debate, and I thank you for your time.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a second time]

3:50

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd call the committee to order.

Bill 209 Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: I have no amendment at this stage. Should I continue speaking about the bill now?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, you can go ahead, hon. member.

MR. CAO: Well, thank you, Madam Chairman. I would like to begin by saying that I'm very happy to see that Bill 209 has made it to this stage in the legislative process. It is very gratifying for me to know that so many of my colleagues share my deep concern for the welfare of Alberta children. I also would like to thank the many Albertans, interested parties, and stakeholders for their expression of support and their help in developing and drafting the bill.

Developing this legislation has been a long process for me. In one sense it began when I assisted the former minister of labour. As the chair of the Employment Standards Regulation Review Committee, I discovered that the minimum parenting leave in Alberta is the lowest in any jurisdiction in Canada, and I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity, now the Minister of Gaming, for such an opportunity for me.

In another sense this issue has been with me for even longer than that. In my constituency work I have frequently encountered countless cases of hardworking parents who required parental leave beyond what the current rules allow; for example, one hardworking young family who had experienced the birth of their first child. Unfortunately, both the mother and the baby were not at all in good health, but the father could not take leave to care for them. Instead, he was forced to quit his job. However, having quit his job, he was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. I also learned of another case in which a new mother had to stay home longer than the current maternity leave period of 18 weeks. She, too, was forced to quit her job and lost all her seniority benefits with the company. I

also know that there are many hardworking new parents who are in distress because of the demands at work and the natural family duties for their infants.

In the course of my work as an MLA, I have also had occasion to visit a number of child care facilities. I realize that the level of care offered in many of these facilities is superb, and I'm also aware that economic realities leave no other alternative for many parents. However, I believe that as a government we should do everything in our power to avoid the type of scene that I've witnessed too many times: very young infants, practically newborn, lying alone in cribs, missing out on the warm touch of a loving parent. This is how I came to see the importance of parental leave from such an entirely new perspective.

It is not easy at first to view the issue of parental leave from the perspective of the newborn or recently adopted child rather than that of the parents or the employers, but once you do consider the issue from the point of view of the child, it becomes easy to see why these changes to parental leave make sense.

I'm extremely happy that so many members of the Assembly were able to adopt a new perspective and give their support to Bill 209. I also know, Madam Chairman, that some of my colleagues have serious reservations about this legislation. Considering the matter from the perspective of the employer, they raised concern that Bill 209 would interfere with business operations and staff utilization. Specifically, it is feared that the provision allowing for 27 weeks of parental leave would increase staff costs and thereby decrease competitiveness. I would like to assure everyone that I have considered this aspect of the legislation very carefully, and there are a number of reasons that the proposed 27 weeks of parental leave would not place a significantly greater strain on the businesses than the current 18 weeks of maternity leave.

First, I would like to point out that regardless of whether the period is 27 weeks or the existing 18 weeks, the cost of recruiting and/or training a replacement worker would be exactly the same. Even if the leave period was as short as one week or as long as 52 weeks, the worker would still have to be found, hired, and trained at the same cost to the employer. These costs are already budgeted in the normal business planning process. Clearly, this aspect of Bill 209 would not cause further disruption.

It has also been argued that businesses would face a drastic loss of productivity if the leave period were extended to 27 weeks. However, statistics confirm that this is clearly not the case. As I mentioned in previous debate on this bill, there are over 1.5 million Albertans in the workforce and only 36,000 births and approximately 200 adoptions per year. Please bear in mind that not all births or adoptions are by out-of-house working parents. Even in the worst imaginable case for the employer, if all eligible parents took the maximum permitted amount of leave, which they don't have to do by law, then there would be a reduction in the labour availability, not productivity, of less than half of a percentage point, according to my calculations.

Surely, Madam Chairman, the vaunted Alberta advantage and the growing size of the Alberta economy could sustain such an unlikely small reduction in labour availability, especially if it is for such a worthy cause. From my experiences in managing staff in the corporate world, I strongly believe that the productivity gained by caring employers and less stressed and loyal staff will surpass such a small reduction.

Not only is this bill likely to impose only a minimum inconvenience to business operations, but it may also result in significant cost savings for government. It is estimated that for every dollar spent on quality parenting programs for children in the earliest stages of development, between \$7 and \$10 in social costs are saved

by the time the child reaches the age of 19. In other words, when we say that Bill 209 is an investment in the future of our children, we mean it quite literally.

Now, Madam Chairman, in order to set the tone of today's debate in Committee of the Whole, I would like to share with you some other comments I received from stakeholders when this legislation was in the earliest stage of development. By referring back to these encouraging statements over the past couple of years, I have been able to remain firmly focused on and committed to the primary goal of this legislation. I hope that my colleagues will keep these sentiments in mind as they debate the finer points of Bill 209 today.

One person from the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre of Calgary wrote: thank you for the long awaited change in this legislation. Another wrote to say: at last, someone is proposing positive change, and I wholeheartedly support your changes; parents should have the opportunity to be with their new child and promote family ties from birth onwards. Yet another woman wrote: as an approved adoptive parent awaiting placement of a child in my home, I strongly feel that increasing the parental leave to 27 weeks is a much needed, family-friendly change, and the additional weeks provide for such critical bonding time between parents and child; please accept this letter of wholehearted support.

4:00

I received far too many encouraging comments to share them all with you today, but I'll just read one more, if you'll permit. I received a letter from the director of the Calgary Family Day Home Agency, who wrote: as an agency which has worked closely with mothers of newborn children for over 15 years, we certainly support this bill; for the very best beginning of the children of parents who must work, we suggest that parental leave should be even longer.

The director also informed me of research that clearly showed that 80 percent of a child's brain is already developed by age three. The same research has proven that a child's sense of security, which is developed through appropriate physical and emotional bonding with the parents in the first few months, is a prerequisite for proper development and independence. In fact, close parental contact and interaction make a significant difference during the earliest months.

I could go on, Madam Chairman, but I think I have made my point. I urge my colleagues to keep the big picture of child and family development clearly in mind as they debate the specifics of the bill today. I look forward to hearing and perhaps responding to any concerns they may still have. Albertans are looking at us to walk the talk of people, prosperity, and preservation.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to speak to Bill 209. Because it's a private member's bill and the restrictions of time, this is the first opportunity that I've had.

I like the idea of increasing the unpaid maternity leave portion so that people have the option of staying home longer with their new child, whether it be an adopted child or a birth child. I'm glad that adoption is included. I know that not every member knows, but I am going to take just a little moment, if I may, to brag about why I'm so proud of the adoption part of this legislation. It's because just last month I became a mother-in-law. [interjections] Yeah, I know. Don't you feel sorry for my daughter-in-law?

My new daughter-in-law has a little boy who's four. Now, Jordan is my grandchild. I am very, very proud of that, and I would

challenge anyone to question that part, because Jordan is part of our family, and that makes it pretty special for me. Hopefully, God willing, my son will be able to adopt him, because that's in the process too. So that's all important stuff. In fact, I have many nieces and nephews who are adopted, and that's been just such a gift to our extended family that I'm glad to see that adoption is included in this bill.

I also want to point out that I am glad the references have changed to include parental leave. I'm going to give men a few kudos for a minute, so I'm sure they'll all just perk right up and listen there. I must say that men of, I think, actually my generation, which should be a few people in here, are better nurturers than maybe their fathers were just because roles have changed in society.

Certainly I love my father, and I feel so fortunate to have him such a big part of my life. He brought home the paycheque, supported seven children and put them all through university and college and paid the dental bills. My mother ran our household, and God bless her for thriving through that. That was very much the '50s and '60s. However, I would say that in the '80s and '90s and into this new millennium men are doing more of a nurturing role, and that's why I think the leave for men that is addressed in this is very important. I have seen men take a year's sabbatical to stay at home and raise children or work part-time so they can help raise children. I think that's healthy for society, and I think it has to be, if we are going to have strong families, that men must take more of a role in raising children. So I support the change in those words to "parental leave" rather than just "maternity and adoption."

One of the things I was wondering about maybe the sponsor of the bill will have a chance to address for me. One of the things that I was looking at – I like to look at things of course from the mother's point of view and getting the extra time, et cetera, if you can afford it, because it's without pay, which of course eliminates quite a section of people who can't afford to just take time off. Right? Because they are without pay. In Alberta right now it's an employee's world. We're so fortunate here that I know employers who are just looking for people. The stores in the malls, especially at Christmastime, the Dairy Queens, the McDonalds, all kinds of restaurants are desperately short of employees. So I don't know. Have you talked to businesses about what this would mean to them and their reaction to it? I just would be interested to know if you have spoken to them and what has been the response from them.

Some of the sectional analysis that I'd like to take a moment to refer to – I had understood there might be amendments coming, but I hear today that there are not. So there are no amendments coming at all, as I understand it. Maybe the member would like to talk about what he was thinking, but it's decided: no more amendments. So I want to take a moment to speak about section 45, which only offers leave benefits to pregnant employees who have worked for an employer for "12 consecutive months." The requirement that the employee has worked for the employer for 12 consecutive months remains in place, but leave benefits would be open to all employees, and this would include birth and adoptive mothers and fathers. I'm wondering: would there be a restriction on the age of the child that you're adopting? Even if it's a 12-year-old child: is that a factor? That's my question to the sponsor.

The current allowance for unpaid maternity leave is a maximum of 12 weeks prior to the due date and a minimum of six weeks after the birth with an additional three weeks if a doctor gives a note. So right now, as I understand it, there are 21 weeks paid in a maternity leave or in a paternal leave, as it will be now. But this bill – I think it's under section 46 – will allow the birth mother to begin her leave up to 12 weeks before the expected due date, with a provision for a minimum of six weeks after the child's birth. Now, maybe I didn't

read it closely enough, but maybe the sponsor can say: can the two parents split that leave, one of them take 10 weeks and the other one take another 10 weeks? Can it be worked out like that?

4:10

It's been a long time since I've had maternity benefits, you know, so I haven't really dealt with it very much right now. In fact, interestingly enough, I don't think it's mentioned in our members' services. Maybe that's a good thing, but it would be interesting. One never knows. History could be made in the Leg., hopefully just not by me in that way. I'm glad the chair got a chuckle out of that. [interjections] There are a couple of people there catching on to this. That's good.

So I just wanted to ask that of this sponsor, if he would mind clarifying that.

Presently if you're employed – in any industry at all? – you're allowed parental leave. Okay. So this would extend it but without pay and without affecting their jobs. So if I'm a trucker for a big firm, I could extend that leave, but without pay, and my job would not be in jeopardy. Is that correct?

You know what? I'm going to support that. I realize that without pay this may not affect very many people because a lot of people need to work or choose to work, and that I respect. I think I always worked part-time while my children were young. That was a choice we made, and for us it was the right choice. For some people it's not. I respect that every family is different, and how you make it work is the best for you. But not everyone has that choice of taking an extra unpaid leave, so I don't know how many this bill will help. I'm sure it will help some. In reality, when you go on maternity leave, you're not getting full pay; you're getting part pay as it is. Then to go on no pay for an extra – it would be another six weeks; correct? It's another six weeks, I believe, that this bill would provide for. It's nice, and I support it, but I think a lot of people can't afford it.

I don't know if we're ready to extend paid benefits, because I don't know if businesses can afford that. I also don't want to penalize people for having children. My goodness, if we don't have children in this province, we're in a lot of trouble, and I don't think there's anything more important than our children.

So maybe the sponsor could answer a few questions, and since we're in committee I may have a chance again, because I had a few other things, but I'm interested in that before I continue, if you don't mind, Madam Chairman.

Chairman's Ruling Opportunity for Debate

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize another member, I would remind people that we are in committee and this does not restrict people to speaking once. People can speak more than once, so possibly after several speakers the sponsor of the bill might want to stand and answer some of the questions for the benefit of the debaters.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Debate Continued

MS EVANS: Thank you very much. I am very honoured to rise and speak in support of Bill 209 and to in fact endorse the 27 weeks of parental leave for either birth or adoptive parents. Clearly the legislation is of great importance because it affects so many Albertans having children or adopting children.

In 1988 adoptive parents were granted limited adoption leave with strict guidelines. They had to have been with the same employer for one year and adopted a child who was three or younger. They were

only given eight weeks' leave from the date of custody, and only one parent was eligible for leave. In 1991 the MLA for Ponoka-Rimbey introduced a bill that would have proposed to change the code so that employees could take advantage of all parental leave under the federal unemployment insurance program. It would also have allowed fathers the opportunity to take parental leave. However, that bill died.

Once again in 1991 the minister of labour at the time petitioned the Justice minister to change the code as it applied to parental leave. The changes would have followed the points outlined by the MLA for Ponoka-Rimbey, but it was never carried out. At that time, as a parent, as a local decision-maker I clearly remember some of the debate centering around whether or not it was appropriate for government to interfere with what parents chose to do and to impose values either on employees or parents for the disposition of parental leave following either adoption or birth.

Parental advocacy groups, however, across North America have vigorously promoted early childhood involvement by both parents for several years. Their belief is a commonly accepted one: that when parents take an active role in their children's early development, they are socially adjusted. Clearly, too, during our discussions at the forum last October with Colleen Klein several people came forward and said several things, among them that early brain development, the early bonding of a child with one or both of its parents preferably, would in fact enhance that child's opportunity for growth and development and for their natural adjustment to the rigours of living.

Inequalities between birth mothers and adoptive parents exist today, but by giving adoptive parents the same access to leave, we recognize the important role that adoptive parents play and that an adopted child is equally important in Alberta. Anecdotally, a very amusing story from my past suggests that in fact adopted children, when told of their adoption, could take pride in the fact that they were chosen by the parents; they didn't just happen to come and have to be accepted.

When you compare other provinces to Alberta, the entitlements for maternity are similar, but clearly Alberta lags behind on parental leave because we have thus far failed to grant leave for fathers.

Ergo I am in support of this bill. I feel the benefits would positively affect both the parents and the children. Madam Chairman, I am confident that with support for the bill by the hon. Member of Calgary-Fort, we will elevate the importance of children in our society and in fact enhance and benefit children who heretofore would not have been recognized.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to stand to speak to Bill 209, Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2000. I support Bill 209 because I firmly believe that allowing a parent or both parents to spend just a little bit more time with their children can have a significant impact on the future of the child. In fact, it is one of those more important factors ensuring that the children grow up to be caring, responsible, and well-adjusted adults. As other people spoke of with their children, my children were fortunate enough that my wife did stay home for the first few years, and I do believe that our grandchildren now, with their mother staying home with them, will be well adjusted.

Children do need a longer period of time with parents, and if parental leaves are in line with the government's other intervention programs, that encourages mothers to spend more time with their

newborns. Furthermore, there is currently an intensive volume of scientific evidence that suggests that children who have more direct contact with parents in their early months and years turn out to be better adjusted and healthier adults.

Now, as I'm looking at this, Madam Chairman, the objective of the bill is to increase the minimum number of weeks of unpaid parental leave available, create an option for . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. member. I would remind members that at the committee stage you are still supposed to be seated. Hon. Member for Redwater, at the committee stage we do allow some latitude, but standing is not one of them.

MR. BRODA: My apologies.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you. This bill increases the minimum number of weeks of unpaid parental leave available, creates an option for parental leave, and gives birth and adoptive parents access to the same leave options. We are watching that the federal government has brought in a change giving one year's maternity leave, but as we read the news, we're finding out that not all employers in the province will accept more than what was previously in our province. As an employee I can see some of those things. I do believe we should be expanding it by a few weeks. I think it's very, very important. I'll absolutely say I'm not in agreement totally with what the federal government is saying.

4:20

We also realize by listening to the presenter that the government will not be bringing any more amendments forward. I don't know if that's because the minister spoke out prior to him.

Also, listening to the presenter, he says that study after study shows that an early relationship between parents and children is one of the most critical factors in determining the future health and happiness and success of a child. Now, going back to this, currently a birth mother has access to 21 weeks of unpaid maternity leave. Maternity leave can begin up to 12 weeks prior to the expected delivery date and must be at least six weeks after the birth of the child. The six weeks' time frame can be reduced upon agreement between the employee and employer and with a note from the employee's doctor stating that this will not be detrimental to the mother's health. An additional three weeks of leave is available with a doctor's note. There is no legislative option for parental leave. This is an important issue, and if this is in the new legislation, then it's a very good step.

As we are going through some of these bills – and these are spring bills as well as the ones that are coming forward this fall – it's interesting and should be acknowledged that beneath the cloak of a private member's bill is something that is way overdue. In fact, our current maternity leave under the old Employment Standards Code of 1976 is 25 years old. Speaking in favour of the amendment, my rationale is that these amendments standardize the leave benefits available to all new parents, and options for paternity leave are created.

Similar legislation exists in other provinces, as we've heard from other members here: British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland. Some of these amendments could have had clearer wording, and minor changes would serve to clarify but not change the intent of these amendments. I do commend the member for bringing this forward.

All references to “maternity leave and adoption benefits” are changed to “parental leave benefits.” The amendment to section 1(1) replaces the first reference to “maternity and adoption benefits” with “parental leave benefits.” The third amendment makes the wording change to the title of division 7 of the act.

I believe it is time that we moved along. Hopefully the presenter has a few different things that he can bring forward from some of the questions from us, but I do believe that we have to move forward with this particular bill. I don't think that employers will be affected by going one step at a time and bringing it forward.

Madam Chairman, at this time I take my leave.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's my pleasure to stand before my colleagues and speak to private member's Bill 209. I'd like to commend the Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing forward this legislation.

The importance of investing in early childhood development has been demonstrated time and time again. This bill first and foremost is about giving infants the best possible start in life. Bill 209, the Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, responds to the need to provide more flexibility, options, and choices for parents by changing the Employment Standards Code to provide up to 27 weeks of parental leave benefits to be taken by either the birth parents or adoptive parents, by one parent or divided between both parents as they see fit.

There are significant benefits to extended parental leave, not only for children and parents but also for employers and the wider society. These advantages include better maternal and child health and well-being, increased time investment of parents in the early years, increased retention of female employees, decreased recruitment costs, and improved labour market status for women.

If we want the brightest future possible for our province, we must ensure that all our children have the best possible start in life. There's overwhelming evidence that success in the child's early years is the key to long-term healthy development. Nothing is more important than for parents to be able to spend the maximum amount of time with newborn children in the critical early months of a child's life. I say that from the perspective of one who has been a teacher all my life, having worked with children for many years, and also from the perspective of being a parent raising four of our own children and now, this year, as a new grandparent observing young grandchildren adjusting to a new life with a parent on leave from work.

One of the key provisions of Bill 209 is the creation of parental leave. Division 7 of the Employment Standards Code will no longer be entitled simply maternity leave. This may seem like a simple wording change, but I would like to speak in favour of this provision for a moment and explain its significance. The right to parental leave is recognized in a growing number of countries. Over 100 countries, including virtually all industrial nations, have enacted some form of parental leave policy, and, in general, parental leave entitlements are becoming longer.

In France there are 16 weeks of maternity benefits, 84 percent of basic daily wage for the first and second child, and 24 weeks for the third and subsequent children. They also have up to three years of unpaid parental leave, which includes job protection and can be combined with part-time employment or education and training.

In the Netherlands there are 16 weeks of maternity leave and full wage replacement, unpaid parental leave up to six months, and flexible employment conditions.

In the United Kingdom there are 18 weeks of statutory maternity leave at 90 percent of the previous wage for six weeks, 12 weeks at a flat rate, and 40 weeks of unpaid family leave.

When you look at the advantages of extended maternity and parental leaves, it's not hard to see why these countries are so committed to supporting their new families. Benefits for children and families include reducing household stress and fostering the nurturing of children by mothers and fathers, while simultaneously ensuring continuing economic support for these families. Long leaves of over 20 weeks are associated with better maternal health, as measured by mental health, vitality, and role function, whereas the reverse is true for short to moderate leaves of 12 to 20 weeks. Obviously, then, my colleague from Calgary-Fort was not out of line in establishing the parental leave threshold of 27 weeks.

An increase in maternity and parental leave supports healthy interactions between parents and their young infants and children. Longer parental leaves also allow both parents to share the work and caregiving responsibilities of parenthood. Significant time investments on the part of parents are associated with improved health for young children, and therefore parental leave can improve pediatric health. Such time investments may include breast-feeding, which is related to improved health through a decreased incidence or severity of many diseases and possibly enhanced cognitive development.

In an extensive study of nine European countries it was found that more generous parental leave rights reduced deaths of infants and young children substantially. Parental leaves may thus be a cost-effective method of bettering child health. I found this statistic particularly amazing: rights to a year of job-protected leave were found to be associated with approximately a 25 percent decline in postneonatal deaths, an 11 percent decrease in fatalities occurring between the first and fifth birthday. Those numbers cannot be ignored. Increased parental leaves also provide greater choice for parents regarding how and when to reintegrate into the workforce.

Parental leaves are not only good for children and their parents, but there are also benefits to employers. One is greater employee retention. Numerous studies in Canada and the U.S. and Japan have found that more women return to work after childbirth where parental leave systems are in place. The total length of available maternity leave exerts a strong deterrent effect on quitting the labour force or changing jobs, particularly for a second or subsequent birth. I believe it is clearly more cost-effective to develop a well-planned parental leave policy than to lose the worker concerned and have to replace him or her permanently.

4:30

However, we must ask ourselves whether Bill 209 gives employers enough tools to adequately anticipate their staffing needs. I know that as an employer I would find it extremely disruptive if one of my employees abruptly declared that they needed to take a leave or abruptly returned to work early. I've already discussed this issue with my colleague from Calgary-Fort, and I know he is working hard to address it.

Madam Chairman, no one is naive about the costs and concerns of extended parental leaves and benefits. While parental leave can disrupt an organization, especially in the case of small businesses or when it involves highly qualified workers, employers can also suffer heavy costs from the absence of formal arrangements for reconciling work and family life. Some employers, either on their own or through collective bargaining agreements, already offer workers options for longer or partial leaves, and some provide additional benefits to top up what is available from EI. Many of these employers recognize that such practices support productivity and aid recruitment and retention of valued workers, especially as competition for skilled workers increases.

Right now employers are experiencing massive amounts of

change. Many have recognized the need for and advantages of more flexible work arrangements. Extending parental leave provisions and benefits is an important and positive step towards developing a comprehensive approach to children and families and promoting a healthy integration of work and family responsibilities. The last 35 years have witnessed profound changes in the nature of work, in women's and men's roles, and in the ways workplace and public policies affect the well-being of individuals, children, and families. We must attain government legislation, workplace practices, and community supports that work in concert to support a productive economy while also supporting the well-being of families and communities.

Given the importance of the early years for children's development and the benefits of providing extended parental leave, I applaud the private member for his desire to extend parental leave. This province must meet the challenge of modernizing social programs to address the changes we are facing in the 21st century. Adequate and appropriate maternity, parental, and other leaves need to be part of a comprehensive approach to support parents in looking after their family responsibilities. Family issues are not strictly private concerns. They need to be addressed in constructive ways by governments, employers, and also employees.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's a pleasure today to rise in committee to address an important topic that affects the welfare and the development of Alberta's children. As both a parent and a community member the well-being of Alberta's children is always a matter of deep concern to me. I know my hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-Fort has their absolute best interests in mind in presenting this bill. It's obvious that if a child is afforded the opportunity to form a strong and loving relationship with one or both parents in the first few months of life, it can't help but have a positive effect on that child's life and on that child's future.

However, Madam Chairman, despite our common goal of raising happy, healthy children in the province of Alberta, the members of this Committee of the Whole may still debate whether the specific provisions of this bill represent the best way to achieve the goal. I would like to applaud the Member for Calgary-Fort for taking the initiative to bring the bill forward and have it debated. Suggestions on how we can improve the lives of Albertans are always welcome, but they need to be carefully examined and debated. Our proper role as legislators is to do our best to improve the quality of life for all Albertans, and in keeping with that goal we have to examine all legislation to ensure that what we pass in this Assembly is of true benefit to Albertans and does not represent excessive legislative intrusion into their lives.

Madam Chairman, you and I both know that this government has gone a long way to improve the quality of life of all Albertans. Our government does its best to use good, well-considered ideas to make Alberta's programs and services more efficient and more useful to Albertans, and these are exactly the things that this government is doing in the area of Children's Services, for example. The Ministry of Children's Services is constantly working with communities and individuals to bring even more effective services to children and families. In fact, the changes that have been implemented over the past several years in this province have made Alberta a leader in the country and indeed all of North America.

These changes have come from good ideas being put forward and debated, with only the best of those ideas being put into action. I

know my hon. colleague from Calgary-Fort, who has proposed this bill, supports the search for these ideas. That's why he has brought this legislation forward, as part of that search and to initiate debate on how extending parental leave can further improve the quality of life for Albertans.

With that being said, I must also state that I do have some serious concerns about specific provisions within the bill and the consequences they may entail. I don't mean to suggest that this legislation wouldn't benefit the children of the province. I don't doubt for one second that some children in this province could benefit significantly from such an initiative. However, my potential concerns are for the overall well-being of women in the workforce and the economic well-being of all Albertans, including children.

My concern with the legislation, Madam Chairman, is for the strong economy of Alberta and how this bill might damage the Alberta advantage, that is so crucial to the prosperity of this province. I must again stress that my concern with this bill does not stem from a lack of commitment to the children and families of Alberta. As an MLA the health and welfare of the families and children of Alberta is of utmost importance to me. I'm simply pointing out some potential problems with this legislation so that my colleagues and I can make a fully informed decision on this important matter.

Specifically, Madam Chairman, I'm concerned with this bill because I suspect the legislation could damage small business in the province of Alberta. It seems clear that we need to assess and consider the full impact that Bill 209 could have on business, particularly small businesses in this province. Small business plays a very important role in maintaining our prosperous economy. Small business is a large employer in this province, and one could say – we've said it for years and years in this Assembly – that small business is the backbone of the Alberta economy. The impact of this legislation could be detrimental to small business, and we must be sensitive to the fact that many operations in this province don't have the resources to deal with the loss of an employee for an extended period of time.

It's a fact that 75 percent of small businesses in Alberta employ fewer than five people. For these businesses the presence of particular workers can be crucial to the success of their day-to-day operations. Like everyone in this Assembly, Madam Chairman, many of my constituents are small businesspeople, and I consider it an important part of my responsibility as an MLA to represent their interests and to help promote the growth of their businesses. Such businesses are vital to the Alberta economy.

In addition to causing staffing issues for many smaller operations, Bill 209 has possibilities of opening up a system for potential employee abuse. Madam Chairman, I'm aware that many companies operating in the province offer generous leave provisions to their workers. For instance, the Alberta Treasury Branch allows employees to take up to six months of maternity leave, with an option for an additional three months without pay. Because generous leave provisions such as this already exist for companies that can afford them, we need to explore the issue in greater depth before proceeding with any change that would affect all companies.

It seems to me, Madam Chairman, that some large companies already allow for extended maternity leaves because they can afford it. It's important to them because of the type of business they're in, and they're trying to attract highly qualified staff to their organization. Many large businesses find it worth while to provide such benefits and have already taken steps to do so. As MLAs we have to consider whether it's the role of the government to require small businesses to provide the same leave. As we all know, every business is different, and their staffing needs are determined by the type of business they're in.

Madam Chairman, Bill 209 also creates another problem. Many companies that find themselves temporarily needing to replace a staff member could find themselves burdened with additional payroll taxes, and the increased costs could seriously undermine job creation in this province.

4:40

This legislation also impacts women in the workplace. While large companies should be able to manage the flow of temporary replacement workers, hiring and training costs at small companies could quickly become unwieldy. As a result, protracted absences from work will continue to cause women to lose their places in the promotion queue. With constant turnover, women risk being denied employment until they are through having children. For similar reasons this bill could lead to an increase in hiring discrimination against women. I don't believe it's in the best interests of this province to add reasons for either overt or covert hiring discrimination.

One example of the possible impact of this legislation is the current situation in the province of Quebec. Madam Chairman, the province of Quebec is thought to have the most progressive and generous maternity/paternal leave provisions in this country. Quebec offers 18 weeks of maternity leave and up to 52 weeks of parental leave. In fact, Quebec was the first province to introduce maternity and parental leave provisions into its employment standards act. This is relevant to our debate because workplace discrimination towards women is a serious problem in that province. In Quebec one woman a day loses her job because she's pregnant or recently had a child, according to the Quebec Council on the Status of Women. The official complaints – 352 in 1999, 359 in 1998, and 374 in 1997 – are probably only the tip of the iceberg. We can well imagine that there are many more cases that are not being reported because many women feel they'll hurt their chances for future employment if they in fact complain.

Madam Chairman, the problem persists even though labour laws and human rights codes have provided tools for addressing discrimination. It is indeed unfortunate that this sort of discrimination exists despite Quebec labour laws, which are thought to be the strictest in the country. On paper a woman taking maternity leave must be guaranteed the same job or an equivalent post with no loss of salary, benefits, or status for at least one year after she returns to work. Furthermore, an employer is forbidden to fire or demote a woman within 20 weeks of her return from maternity leave. However, it is clear from the numbers that even strict legislation like this may not be the answer.

Madam Chairman, what needs to be addressed is the stereotype that once women start having children, they will stop working. While that may have been true in the '50s, the reality today is that nine out of 10 women return to work within one year of giving birth. It seems quite clear, given the statistics, that Quebec's legislation is not working. In fact, by attempting to grant longer leaves to mothers, it may have created another problem altogether.

The final problem with Bill 209, Madam Chairman, is that it fails to address certain types of workers. Due to a changing workplace a growing number of employees are on contract or working freelance. However, many of these Albertans will not benefit from this legislation. Not only are they ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits, but their contracts also tend to disappear during a maternity leave because there are a hundred others waiting to snap up available opportunities.

For these reasons I submit to my colleagues that legislating extended parental leave may not be the answer working parents need. If you'll forgive the digression, Madam Chairman, ultimately

what we need to do is change the mentality of employers. Corporations have to realize they have social responsibilities, and when they hire a young woman, potential maternity leave has to be considered. I'm proud to say that many Alberta corporations have taken the lead on this and have already extended maternity leave over and above what is currently legislated.

Madam Chairman, as Alberta companies extend their responsibility for parental leave, increased competition in the labour force will pressure less progressive companies to get their act together on this issue. That's what I would like to see: market forces working to improve parental leave provisions in Alberta. It's possible that further government interference could prevent these natural market forces from occurring. In this province the reality is that if a company wants to hire young, dynamic, and competent workers, they have to recognize that many of these workers want families too.

Madam Chairman, companies are beginning to realize that it is of mutual benefit for employers to provide extended maternity leave. They're coming to see that it's not just a responsibility for them to create conditions favourable to women having children and to invest in family-friendly policies and practices, but it is actually to their benefit. We see many examples of this occurring already in Alberta. I feel that this legislation sends a wrong message to business and could prevent this evolution from occurring on its own.

I know, Madam Chairman, that all of my colleagues in this Assembly share a heartfelt concern for Alberta families. That I've pointed out some potential flaws in Bill 209 in no way diminishes that concern. I just think that we need to consider the entire picture before we make a major legislative change like this one.

Madam Chairman, in my riding of Calgary-North Hill most of the businesses are small businesses. I have chatted with them over the last couple of weeks when this bill, a private member's bill, came to our attention. Quite frankly, they're concerned about it. My feeling at this point in time is that I do need more time to do more consultation with those people in small business in my communities to make sure that this is the right thing for us to do.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Speaking to this piece of proposed legislation is a pleasure and long overdue. I'd like to thank the member opposite for bringing it to the attention of this Legislature and this city. It's unfortunate that it's coming so late in the sitting, but it will in this session certainly garner some interest and some debate. Regardless of the potential downsides pointed out by the speaker that went before this member, I do think it needs to be considered and certainly needs to be much more fully debated not just in the Legislature but out in the public too, particularly in those areas that he was most concerned about, the area of small business.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Parental leave has all those same arguments you hear about the potential for women in the workforce to be discriminated against. You hear all of the negatives. You hear those over and over again. What you don't hear enough of are the positives and an understanding of what fundamentally the parents' role is. Now, in days gone by it was the mother's responsibility to raise the children. That is not the case today. We understand the connection between early childhood bonding and the security and the social adjustment of those children. We understand a whole lot more of that, and the legislation has followed, followed way behind, mind you, but it is following.

This is just one more step. Alberta is way behind the times in recognition of the need for parental leave and the need for an overall framework not just to this piece of legislation that if and when passed would allow the extension of the leave but the whole recognition of a parent's responsibility and a government that lends an ear. Now, I'm talking about perhaps extension into areas of taxation and areas of suspension, promotions, all manner of areas that require some honing and an overall framework in order to bring children into the world and bring them into a loving and bonding relationship with one or both parents, preferably beyond just the parents but bonding with the grandparents in the early days too. There is absolutely no substitute for the bonding that occurs in those early days and the security that it passes along to the child.

Speaking in the broader sense of a society's investment, it's this member's view that there is no single more important investment in a society than in its children. We recognize that we the people of the province of Alberta invest a great deal in education from K to 12 and in postsecondary education, whether it be universities or a trade or any one of those areas, and we invest further in adult education. Yet when it comes to this fundamental area of getting a head start – getting that first step, getting the confidence in that little mind so that it is secure enough to venture forward, to break out of that secure position and expand the horizons, to look beyond just the need for a touch and feel secure that there is some support for that learning – that is so fundamental to the needs of a society that wishes to invest in itself.

I would think that this piece of legislation should pass with a breeze, should in fact be studied in society to say: look; here is an area where we really can make some contributions to society in the longer haul. We're talking 10, 20, 30 years when the investment will pay off. Moving from 12 weeks to 18 weeks may be the right number. This member certainly doesn't know, but it certainly needs some examination, and this piece of legislation is a very, very good start.

4:50

There are other areas of this particular bill that interest me: the nonsegregation of a parent, a parent being one or the other of the parents. It doesn't seem to discriminate as to male or female, partner or not, and I suspect that would cover same-sex parents perhaps. I know not. It doesn't seem to outline that. It may be in other legislation that this member is not aware of. Even if it is or it isn't, it matters little. The child is not looking for gender support at this level. This child is simply looking for some care and some attention and just the unequivocal devotion and the love of that parent. That appears to be the spirit of the legislation, and certainly this member would be very supportive of that.

The other area that it doesn't seem to discriminate against – and thank goodness for that – is the adopted child. An adopted child does have a little more difficult time later on. Particularly if there's a visual difference or a magnitude of difference between the birth parents and the adoptive parents and, therefore, with the look of the child, it does run into difficulty. But this child must know that he or she comes into the world loved, loved and cared for, and that is absolutely – absolutely – the most important. So to separate and segregate an adoptive parent from a birth parent would be an error, and I'm very happy and pleased to see that the member included an adoptive parent as equal to a birth parent. I'm not too sure that 12 weeks in advance of an adoption is required, but I do think it certainly requires that period thereafter.

I personally would extend that period well beyond the 18 weeks after a child comes into the world to make that bonding proper. Personally, it worked out exceedingly well. My children are now 17

and 19, both at the university across the river here. Their mother and I chose to go to the expense of having a stay-at-home parent. It was our choice to have my wife stay home, but the option was there to do that. She felt that she wanted to do that, and it worked out rather well for the first 15 years of their life. It seems to have stood them in very good stead in their life, in having a very even keel, recognizing their social responsibilities, and being very adaptive. They developed well.

I would think that giving that same head start to a child could be a little onerous to a society. I happened to be able to make enough money to support a family of four, and that's not the case in all instances. While I think it's certainly desirable, it's not necessary in a society. But if two parents are required to work, it would be nice if society could see its way clear to financing or in some way assisting a parent so a child could get that head start in the first three years of life, until such time as the child is willing to break out and to socialize in a larger community, even though it may be an hour or two at a kindergarten or a day care. That would maybe not be the perfect world, but it certainly would be heading in that direction.

I recognize that the provisions for parental leave in Canada are pretty well accepted now, save and except in Alberta. The proponent of the bill has said more than once that Alberta is lagging behind and it has the lowest level of parental leave. That is certainly not the kind of advantage one would like to think that an Alberta parent does receive from their government.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Quite frankly, this piece of legislation is long overdue, and it deserves much more consideration than that which it will receive in this Legislature in that this Legislature may be coming to a close rather shortly and this particular item may die on the Order Paper. I would like to think that this House will support this legislation to the extent that it is clear to the government caucus and the opposition caucus from this kind of legislation, maybe not this particular draft but other drafts, that there should be some energy expended in this area, in speaking of the wellness of children, working on parental wellness at the very early stages as opposed to trying to do it at the other end, when you're dealing with crime and stabbings and the like. Get this base down pat and start working at that level and I would suspect that the outcome would be proven to be most beneficial to society in general and to some parents, to the parents in the next short while, most beneficial to them specifically.

Now, you've heard all the objections. We've heard them from time immemorial. It'll put small businesses in jeopardy of closure. It'll put women at a disadvantage in the workplace by reason of the employer discriminating against a potential mother. You've heard all of that, and yes, it may occur. It does not mean that the legislation should not work towards educating those people. There are societal pressures to say that that is not the way a good corporate citizen would act and react. It is not the way that a reasonable person would react and prove the negative elements and the naysayers of this piece of legislation to be true.

We heard earlier that these kinds of things should be left to market forces. Well, I lay before you that if everything was laid to rest in that wonderful marketplace, then we would not have any WCB, we would not have any minimum wage, we would not have a number of safeguards, of checks and balances, if you will, in a society that does actually care for those that do want early childhood education, particularly for that kernel, that start of a life.

I could go on at some great length, but I would like to again compliment the member opposite for bringing this piece of legislation forward and hope – hope – that he is going to be able to gather

around him some like-minded souls in his caucus to push this legislation to the fore such that it will become a government bill and such that the government bill will then be able to examine the entire area of this parental leave. All of it is associated with bringing a child into a loving relationship with their parents and with the greater society.

With that, Madam Chairman, I will cede the floor to a member opposite. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.
5:00

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity this afternoon to speak to this private member's bill. It's not very often you have the opportunity in the Legislature to actually have such a strong influence on the future of society. This is a very strong piece of legislation that allows us to make a very clear statement about things that are important to us, namely our children.

Madam Chairman, I'm quite interested in the fact that this has been a very controversial piece of legislation relative to Alberta's position and where we are federally and the fact that the hon. member has looked at an opportunity not only to bring our legislation into a provincial model that we can showcase across this country but also the opportunity to take an important issue and give us the opportunity to discuss in our Legislature the value of children and the value of parenting.

Madam Chairman, a number of the issues that are raised in the legislation deal with the length of time leave is available. They talk about the opportunity for mothers and fathers, both birth parents and adoptive parents, to have the opportunity to be with their children. They also bring into fact that the workplace, which has an important impact on families, has also a role to play in this. I'm delighted with the fact that this legislation has engaged our employment opportunities and engaged our community to talk about what our values are.

We have some concerns, obviously, about what is the right amount of time. It means different things depending on where you're employed. We have the opportunity in this legislation – and I'm urging and encouraging my colleague for Calgary-Fort to continue his consultation with the community. The last thing we want is for people to feel uncomfortable with the impact to them.

We have some opportunities here, Madam Chairman, through this legislation to identify the crucial needs of bonding with children at the newborn stage and their parents but also to solidify the family unit. We also know that that's a very key factor in the health of our families. We also know that employers are going to be impacted by this legislation. We know we've got some conditions with the federal government coming into play at the beginning of January, so it's not as if the employment sector of our province isn't aware that there are changes that are coming, because this discussion paper has been out federally for quite some time.

So, Madam Chairman, I'm excited about the fact that my colleague has brought forward a very sound piece of legislation. It gives us an opportunity to share with our constituents, the business communities, our families, our social agencies, and our health

community and talk about the impact of this legislation. I daresay over the next several months we'll have the opportunity to continue to discuss this. I think it's important that the member bringing forward this private member's bill have an opportunity to clarify some of the concerns that have been raised in the debate in committee this afternoon, so I'm not going to take too much time. I'm going to ask if he has an opportunity now to answer some of the questions that have been raised.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I really appreciate that it's been an afternoon of some interesting speeches, and I have enjoyed hearing the different sides and the Minister of Children's Services. I think the consensus is that we all support families. We all want to make the best possible environment for our children. If that means making a longer parental leave available to people, then I appreciate that. I'm not sure if all the employers have had a chance to peruse this bill. Probably most would support it, because if you have people who are pleased with their work and happy with their job and able to balance family and home and work, then you have happy employees.

I hope we have a further chance to debate this, but I would like to move that we now adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

MR. HAVELOCK: Madam Chairman, can I just go straight to adjournment until this evening? Is that appropriate?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No. We have to now rise and report progress.

MR. HAVELOCK: All right. I move that we now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. RENNER: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on Bill 209.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:07 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 22, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 0/11/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Sub Judice Rule

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before starting second reading on Bill 29, Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000, the chair would like to make a statement about the scope of debate for this particular bill and the sub judice rule. As members are aware, there was a challenge to the constitutionality of the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act last summer. The decision by the Provincial Court of Alberta was the subject of a judicial review application in the Court of Queen's Bench, which has been argued but has not been decided upon yet. The Minister of Justice and Attorney may wish to comment on the status of the case if the chair's understanding is not correct or accurate.

The rule about matters that are sub judice is found in our Standing Order 23(g), and that order states:

A member may be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member . . .

(g) refers to any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination

(i) of a criminal nature from the time charges have been laid until passing of sentence and from the date of the filing of a notice of appeal until the date of a decision by an appellate court, or

(ii) of a civil nature that has been set down for a trial or notice of motion filed, as in an injunction proceeding until judgment or from the date of filing a notice of appeal until judgment by an appellate court,

where there is probability of prejudice to any party but where there is any doubt as to prejudice, the rule should be in favour of the debate.

This Standing Order was amended effective February 14, 1995, based on the 1993 report of the Select Special Committee on Parliamentary Reform, which was concurred in by the Assembly on November 8, 1993. Appendix A of that report states, "It is widely held that the rule does not apply to Bills, as the right of Parliament to legislate must not be limited."

There is broad support for this view. As *Beauchesne's* 6th edition states in paragraph 508(3), "The convention applies to motions, references in debates, questions and supplementary questions, but does not apply to bills." Furthermore, paragraph 510 states:

The Speaker has pointed out "that the House has never allowed the sub judice convention to stand in the way of its consideration of a matter vital to the public interest or to the effective operation of the House."

In the book edited by Marleau and Montpetit, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, the position of the Canadian House is put forward quite clearly at page 535.

The convention has been applied to motions, references in debates, questions and supplementary questions. It has also been applied consistently in criminal cases. However, the convention does not apply to bills, as the right of Parliament to legislate must not be limited. If the sub judice convention were to apply to bills, the whole legislative process could be stopped simply by the initiation of a writ or legal proceedings in one or other of the courts of Canada.

A point of order was raised on the subject of sub judice and a bill then before the Assembly on May 11, 1995. Speaker Schumacher

ruled at pages 1740 and 1741 of *Hansard* for that day in favour of the bill proceeding. He relied on the principle that the sub judice rule cannot prevent consideration of a bill.

As the chair indicated, the matter involving the constitutionality of the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act has been argued before the Court of Queen's Bench, but there is no decision. In considering the question of prejudice, the chair notes that the 1977 Special Committee of the Canadian House of Commons on the Rights and Immunities of Members found at page 727 of the *Journals* for April 29, 1977, that

it is very unlikely that a judge would be influenced by what is said in the House. Presumably the convention is concerned with the protection of juries and witnesses from undue influence.

To summarize, the sub judice rule is a self-imposed limit on the freedom of speech which Assemblies have adopted out of respect for the judicial branch of our system of government and for the rights of litigants. However, the authorities reviewed by the chair make it very, very clear that the rule is not meant to restrict the ability of Assemblies to proceed with their vital duty of considering legislation and making law.

In this case and after reviewing numerous authorities, the chair must rule in favour of freedom of speech and against the application of the sub judice rule, not out of any disrespect for the judicial branch but in support of the fundamental principle that the Assembly must be able to legislate. Application of the sub judice rule would in the chair's view unduly restrict members in considering Bill 29.

The chair would like to remind members that the other rules of debate such as relevance, the restrictions on unparliamentary language, and the other rules of decorum and order apply. The chair would specifically remind members that it is inappropriate to criticize or impute motives to a specific judge. The chair would refer members to paragraphs 493 of *Beauchesne's* on this point.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 29

Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely pleased to sponsor these amendments to the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. This important legislation has made a positive impact upon the lives of many sexually exploited children. With these amendments we will be increasing the act's effectiveness and our ability to provide these children with support and assistance. These amendments have two purposes: to enable children to obtain additional care and to protect their rights.

At a recent meeting with police, social workers, and service providers they made a number of recommendations. They suggested several changes that would enable them to provide additional care to these sexually exploited children.

In keeping with these recommendations, the amendments propose extending the initial confinement period from 72 hours to a maximum of five days. Social workers tell us that a child often spends the entire 72 hours recovering from life on the street, usually sleeping and usually recuperating. Sometimes the child is in an alcohol- or drug-induced state. There is often little time to work with the child before he or she is released. It is also insufficient time to properly assess the child's needs. These needs could include social/psychological assessments, medical exams, drug testing, and suicide risk assessment. This amendment would provide social workers with the critical time.

Confining a child at risk for a slightly longer time period has been

tried elsewhere. For example, in Ontario a child in need of protection can be detained up to five days without a court order. Ontario law has been upheld by the Supreme Court. This amendment gives a director the discretion to decide how long a child needs to be confined, up to a maximum of five days.

The amendment is also proposing allowing a protection of children involved in prostitution director to apply to a court for a maximum of two additional confinement periods of up to 21 days each. This additional time will enable social workers to stabilize the child, help the child break the cycle of abuse, and begin the recovery process in a safe and secure environment. Additional confinement could be requested when the child's situation involves significant long-term involvement in prostitution and a number of other risk factors, such as possible involvement with a pimp, drug or alcohol abuse, or illness.

Breaking free of prostitution is extremely difficult. It takes time, perseverance, and a lot of continued struggles. The need to apprehend youth more than once is a clear indication of that difficulty. Spending more time with them will provide them with additional encouragement and additional support.

As well, this additional time allows the child to attend a drug or alcohol addiction treatment program. Many children involved in prostitution are also dealing with substance abuse issues. A residential program of at least three-weeks' duration will provide an opportunity to offer sexually exploited youth programs to assist them in exiting prostitution. Again, another time when time is critical.

Other proposed changes to the act ensure that the children's rights are protected. As soon as the child is confined, that child will be informed in writing as to why he or she is confined, the duration of the confinement, court dates, and the right to legal representation. Providing written notice of their legal rights complies with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The child will also be given opportunity to contact legal aid. In addition, each child will be told he or she may request a court review of the confinement.

8:10

A review of an initial confinement of up to five days must be heard within one day of that child's request or, if the court is closed, at its earliest possible sitting. If the child is confined for up to 21 days or for a renewal of the 21 days, the review must be heard within five days of the request. Five days' notice is given to allow both parties, but especially the director, to gather evidence and to prepare their case. Policy will state that a director will provide the child with the request-for-review form and help the child complete the form if requested.

The amendments also provide for adjournments. An adjournment may be requested by a director or a child when a child requests a review of their confinement or for a show cause hearing. This step may be required if the child needs time to contact a lawyer, for example. This adjournment when a child is initially confined for up to five days will not be more than two days unless a longer adjournment is agreed to by both the director and the child.

These amendments also allow an adjournment when a further confinement of up to 21 days is requested. This adjournment may not be longer than seven days unless the court rules that a longer adjournment is necessary. An adjournment may be needed if the child or the director needs more time to prepare for the hearing, the child needs more time to contact a lawyer, or a court time cannot be scheduled, for instance.

As well, a number of procedural safeguards have been added to the act to accommodate these more complex legal processes. A child, a guardian, or a director may appeal a court order for a further confinement or a refusal to grant a further confinement order of up

to 21 days. This appeal may be made to the Court of Queen's Bench.

As well, a court may prohibit the publication of court proceedings that identify a child or a child's guardian to ensure the child's protection and confidentiality. The court may exclude a child from testifying if the evidence could seriously injure that child. It may also exclude the public from the courtroom to maintain the proper administration of justice.

It is important to note that these amendments do not affect our request for or the need to conduct a judicial review. As I mentioned earlier, a Provincial Court ruling found the act to be unconstitutional. The judicial review will further examine the Provincial Court ruling and establish the legislation's constitutionality. If a decision is provided when these amendments are being considered, we will quickly determine the decision's impact and proceed accordingly.

We feel this is an appropriate time to make changes. We see opportunities to improve upon this legislation and expand the help we provide through it. The law's development, inception, and implementation was made possible through a concerted community effort, including the community, police, service agencies, aboriginal groups, children involved in prostitution, parents who have had children involved in prostitution, and many, many others. Together we shaped and we implemented this visionary legislation.

Now, again, because of the impetus from the community, changes are now being brought forward. The law has enabled us to help many children at risk. The police, social workers, and service providers today also tell us that it is working well. They've also told us we can do more. These amendments enable us to do just that.

I believe these vulnerable young people need all available means of support and assistance. Strengthening this act is one way in which we can provide that help. I look forward to enabling the police, the social workers, the service providers, the children, and the parents to provide greater help and help them rebuild their lives. I believe we must do whatever is required to help the children in Alberta to break free from this exploitation.

Protecting children involved in prostitution is a subject of great importance to me. It is a matter that has touched me personally through my involvement in the community and has compelled me to find effective ways to help these children. It began when I met the parent of a child involved in prostitution, which led to the introduction of the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act in 1999.

A number of years ago, Mr. Speaker, I joined a parent support group. Through this group I met a mom whose child was involved in prostitution. I was appalled that a child from a stable, loving home in a good community could be lured into prostitution. I went on police rides in Calgary, saw Popcorn Alley, spoke to several children and adults involved in prostitution, and I even spoke to the johns and the pimps. I learned about the ugliness that occurs there. I felt that there must be something I could do to prevent this from happening to other children. I believe that these changes will help us to improve the support we provide to these children and will help us to take further steps towards addressing the sexual exploitation and abuse of our children through prostitution.

Mr. Speaker, I have received many calls and letters of support on this issue, two that clearly stand out in my mind. One was from a young woman who is currently on the streets. She called me and told me that if this legislation would have been there when she first started at the age of 14, she would not still be on the street at 23. She said the kids on the street like it, and also the girls do, and they feel it is the right way to go.

The second, Mr. Speaker, entails a young girl who I got personally involved with a year ago August. We rescued this young girl. I

guess we can call her any name we want. We got her off the streets, got her into a safe house. I recently attended her graduation from a drug and alcohol program. There were probably 350 people in that hall listening to this young girl tell us about her involvement in prostitution. But I think one thing that stood out in people's minds was a poem that she had dedicated "to all [those] who have helped me." I would like to read it, if I could. She says:

I have met angels that have saved my life.

I have met angels that were once black are now white.

I have met angels from the pit of hell,

Who now stand beside me sober and well.

These angels are beautiful and bright.

They have given me the wings that have helped me in my flight.

I urge all the members of the Assembly to support these amendments. These amendments strengthen our ability to help kids exit prostitution while at the same time protect their legal rights.

Our focus and commitment as a government has always been on doing everything we can to help children involved in prostitution and help them put their lives back together and offer them all the support we can to achieve this goal. With your support we can work together to stop this abuse of our children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I'm pleased to be able to participate in debate on Bill 29. The bill was introduced yesterday for first reading, and now we are embarking on debate at second reading. We have sent copies of the bill out to a number of agencies, frontline workers, people involved in dealing with teen prostitution to solicit their feedback. Obviously, we're in the early stage, and I expect we will hear a lot more from people directly interested in the bill.

I might start off by saying that my inclination is to support this bill at second reading. I have a number of reasons why my recommendation to my caucus colleagues will be to support the bill, but there's much to be said in terms of what's in the bill and in some cases what's missing from the bill.

I was fascinated with the news release that was issued yesterday, November 21. The headline proclaims: "Government to amend law protecting children involved in prostitution." I had the opportunity of attending the news conference that was conducted by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Children's Services, and I was disappointed that the news release, in my respectful view, was less than honest. It talked about a need for legislative change based on, quote, feedback from frontline workers. There is no question that there was feedback from frontline workers, but what the news release made no reference to is the real reason we're here today. It's because of the decision of a Calgary family and youth court judge, Karen Jordan. The decision that was rendered by Judge Karen Jordan and reasons for judgment are dated July 28, 2000. I've tabled that. I tabled that yesterday, Mr. Speaker, in the Legislative Assembly, so it's a sessional record. Members are able to access that, and I encourage them to take a look at that judgment from our family and youth court judge.

8:20

The facts of the case are really pretty straightforward. What we had were two 17-year-old females who were apprehended by Calgary police on September 13, 1999. They were taken to a protective safe house and confined there for two days. The girls applied for a ruling that the bill we are about to amend with the current bill is in violation of sections 7, 8, 9, and 10 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Judge Jordan found a couple of things. Firstly, she found that the

act was *intra vires*; in other words, it was within the legislative competence of the province of Alberta to enact. She found that the act violated section 7 of the Charter because children who were detained were denied the opportunity to answer the allegations. She found that the act did not violate section 7 because children were subject to an assessment. She noted that in cases of children in these circumstances there was no right to what we might describe as pretrial silence.

Number 4, she found that the act does violate section 8 because warrantless searches, searches without the benefit of a warrant obtained through appearing in front of a judicial official, were not subject to any kind of judicial scrutiny. She found, fifthly, that the act does violate section 9 of the Charter because there's no judicial scrutiny of apprehension. Number 6, she found that the act does not violate section 10(b) because there's no right to counsel and said that there is not a constitutional right that these children would have to counsel. She said the act does not violate section 10(c) because there's no access to habeas corpus. Then she found that violations can't be saved by section 1 of the Charter.

This brings up one of the most interesting things I've found. If you look through this very thoughtful decision of Judge Jordan, you know what was interesting? Most members I think appreciate that under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms there is what's called the saving provision, section 1, which sets limits as may be reasonable and "demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society." And one of the things, Mr. Speaker, I found myself asking when I read through the judgment was: why would it be that the province of Alberta, which litigated this case, chose not to submit any evidence on section 1 of the Charter?

There was no argument advanced by the province of Alberta that argued that there's a compelling societal interest, that there's a compelling interest in the safety of children that ought to override the specific Charter provisions. It was open and available to the province. If they believed that this legislation does all of the wonderful things that they contend, why did the Justice officials involved not make that argument? Why was it not raised? Why was there no evidence led? It's a puzzle to me, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that before the end of the debate we're going to get an explanation for that, because it's curious indeed for the Crown to be silent on that.

There are some key elements in that judgment. I have to say in the strongest possible language my discomfort when I heard the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek responding to Judge Jordan's decision. Her comments about the Charter displayed . . .

MRS. FORSYTH: I apologized for that.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I never heard the apology in this House, and I don't know whether the apology was extended to the judge.

Nobody else deals more directly with the problems that exist on the streets of our community than family and youth court judges.

The second thing I want to say is that the value of the Charter, Mr. Speaker, sometimes get lost, but that Charter is the only thing that protects the rights of individual citizens from governments that get carried away with interfering with those basic rights. When we see a lack of appreciation of the importance of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, I think that's a matter that warrants considerable concern and a great deal of attention.

The other thing I wanted to say was that there was no mention in the news release of a very peculiar strategy followed by the Crown, by the government. They had available to them the suggestion by the Leader of the Official Opposition that we could reconvene the Legislature in late August or September, and we could deal immedi-

ately with building in some of the procedural safeguards that Judge Jordan found were missing from the act.

What happened was that the province said: "Well, no. What we're going to do is we're not going to appeal it," presumably because they felt they would not be successful on an appeal. What they chose to do is a very odd and rarely used recourse. It's a judicial review application. That's being argued in front of Justice Rooke of the Court of Queen's Bench, and we await his judgment at this time. But it strikes me that the government is really trying to ride two horses at the same time. I mean, why wouldn't we just come back in and fix the flaws in the existing statute? Why is the province going and incurring the expense of this judicial review application? What may well happen is that we may see a decision from Justice Rooke that requires other changes to the legislation, so then we end up sort of fiddling with this thing again.

I think what we want is certainty. I think what frontline workers want is to know the rules under which they can apprehend and detain children at risk. What the government has done is they have in fact imported a great deal of additional uncertainty into this matter.

The other thing missing from the government news release the other day – and I thought this was interesting – was that there's no mention of what's been done in British Columbia. British Columbia has adopted an act called the Secure Care Act. I heard the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek talking the other day about Bill 6 in Ontario, but that's a private member's bill. In British Columbia they've actually brought in an act, and there are some things that I think are meritorious in that British Columbia act. It deals not just with teen prostitution; it also deals with drug abuse, which arguably affects far more young people in this province than those who are prostituting themselves on the streets of our province.

What the B.C. model does – it's a more holistic, more comprehensive plan in terms of how you deal with and protect children at risk. There are some similar provisions, but it's much broader, and I'm going to commend to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and to the government and to the Justice minister that they look more closely at the B.C. model because I think there's much to recommend it.

In looking at the bill, one of the things I did was attempt to compare it with the UN convention on the rights of the child. Members will recall that not so long ago, largely as a result of the work undertaken by the Member for Calgary-McCall, this province, quite silently and very late to the game, said that they would confirm and endorse the UN convention on the rights of the child. That means that we should be able to test Alberta legislation against that.

There are a couple of changes I'm going to propose by way of amendment to the bill. What Judge Jordan was concerned about is that when children are apprehended, in every case they are not brought in front of a judge. We know that because it's a human system, sometimes errors happen. You may have a young person picked up who in fact was not involved in street prostitution, and to the extent to which this person can be basically detained against her will, there are some concerns around that. Judge Jordan was concerned that a judge wouldn't be involved in reviewing every one of those cases. The government, on the other hand, in this amendment package has said: well, we're going to give some information. Presumably it would be a poster on the wall saying: here's the legal aid number. Or maybe they'll be given a slip of paper saying: if you want legal advice, this is who you can call. My proposal would be this: that we have a duty counsel system in the province. What that means is that anywhere in Alberta there are lawyers who are available to assist people and provide summary legal advice. In fact, if you go into one of the big criminal courtrooms in Calgary or Edmonton any day of the week, you will find there's a duty counsel available. So when somebody shows up without a lawyer and is

about to plead guilty or whatever in a system or forum they're not comfortable or familiar with, there's somebody who can give them some summary advice and perhaps give them some advice in terms of what they should do in court and can help give them some information in terms of how they can get legal representation.

8:30

My recommendation, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Children's Services and the Minister of Justice and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is: why wouldn't we ensure that we have a lawyer available in Lethbridge and one in Peace River and maybe a couple in Calgary and Edmonton who would be designated duty counsel so that when a child is apprehended under this act, they would be able to meet at least within 24 hours with somebody who would give them some legal advice? That is a compromise position, which means they wouldn't have to appear in front of a judge in every single case, but it would ensure that those children who choose not to avail themselves of the opportunity to go in front of a judge at least receive some legal advice. I think it's something that the government ought to look at. They're familiar with the duty counsel system. It works. It works well. I think it provides a measure of protection.

Is it not strange, members – I just ask the question. The reason we have the statute is because we say there are children on the streets of our communities that aren't able to exercise good judgment to protect themselves. Isn't that the whole *raison d'être* for the bill we're dealing with? Yet under this bill and this amendment package we then say: well, these children have the wherewithal and the maturity and the kinds of judgment to decide in what cases they should go to court and to decide in what cases they should seek out legal advice. The reality is that most of these girls that have been apprehended so far spend the first two days sleeping. They often come in either in a state of intoxication or having consumed some illicit drug. Not in every case, but this is a common circumstance. For this bill to simply say, "We leave it to the children. Here's a poster on the wall if you want to phone a lawyer. There's the phone number if you want to find out about your legal rights" – I don't think that's good enough, Mr. Speaker. So that proposal I think is one that has merit.

The second one would be this. When there was an analysis done of all Alberta legislation to determine whether it measured up to the UN convention on the rights of the child – it was done by the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre – on page 13 of their report, in talking about the Child Welfare Act, they say that this

represents one of the high points in terms of legislative compliance.

Though the CWA is certainly not without flaws, it is in strong compliance with the Convention . . .

I say parenthetically that that's the UN convention on the rights of the child.

. . . in several key respects. Most notably, the Act establishes an advocacy program for children in care, the Office of the Children's Advocate, which should be emulated in other legislative and service provision contexts, e.g., the young offenders system.

So why would we not require, members, in the annual report that's done by the Children's Advocate that we specifically charge the Children's Advocate with the responsibility to review the operation of this legislation? It just provides one other measure of oversight to ensure that the act continues to work the way we as legislators hope it will work.

Now, what I want to do is go back and point out some of the issues that Judge Jordan had identified. Before I do that, I'd just suggest that anybody who's interested in the area look at this report on UN compliance, *How Does Alberta's Legislation Measure Up?* You can look at articles that are impacted by the legislation. Those

would be articles 3, 25, 37, which all are things that we've agreed to as a province, so presumably that means we've got to make sure our legislation measures up. There are some areas that I'm not sure do measure up.

If I can just quickly touch on some of the things that Judge Jordan had raised. I quote from page 6.

The Act, not unlike the tobacco control legislation, is far from perfect. It merely locks children up for a few days so that social workers and child care workers can attempt to gather some information about them, information which will hopefully enable the families, child care and mental health professionals to help these girls avoid or escape this sad, deplorable, dangerous lifestyle. The time frame for such an assessment is short and may be inadequate.

Mr. Speaker, Sharon Heron, the director's witness in that case before Judge Jordan,

was frank that the girls, having been apprehended, spend a long time sleeping. This is presumably a response to the deleterious effects of their lifestyle; having been given the opportunity to sleep, their bodies demand it. These lengthy periods of sleep obviously reduce the amount of time available for any assessment to be carried out.

The judge goes on to say that there is a narrowness to the bill. When we contrast it with the B.C. Secure Care Act, what we find in British Columbia is that there's a much bigger focus in terms of providing a whole range of supports and programs. One of the things we're going to have to figure out with this bill is that now that we're going to have a longer period of possible detention, that's going to mean substantially more money is going to be required for the frontline agencies. I didn't hear the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek address this in her comments. Perhaps she did. There's going to have to be substantially more money available to ensure that those services are provided.

MRS. FORSYTH: You were at the press conference.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I attended the press conference, but most members in this Assembly didn't have that opportunity.

MRS. FORSYTH: Then you know the answers.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I didn't get a lot of specific answers.

I'm hopeful that the Minister of Children's Services will stand in second reading while we're debating this and particularize the kind of additional resources that are going to be available, because ultimately that's what's key to making this bill work.

I say again that I'm prepared to recommend to my colleagues that we support the bill, but we're going to bring forward amendments that we think recognize the fundamental concerns. Really what Judge Jordan said was that there was no problem with the purpose of the bill, except there had to be procedural safeguards.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Tempting as it is to launch into some, perhaps, remarks that would challenge the worthy opposition member, who has given us much to think about, I will first address some of the prepared remarks relative to the bill and then in my concluding period follow up with some remarks briefly to address some of the concerns he raises.

First of all, I'd like to give you true stories about child prostitution, stories that have been related by the people that were introduced in this Legislative Assembly yesterday and stories that I think will underscore the importance of child protection through the

enhanced and stronger Bill 29, that will improve and in fact give even additional tools to protect children involved in prostitution.

Around 11:15 Monday night of this week two Edmonton city police officers were driving around 118 Avenue and 88 Street and noticed a car pull up to the sidewalk and two young girls get in. They weren't sure if they'd been waiting for a ride or working the streets but after following the car for a while pulled up beside them and examined the situation. It was a john/prostitute scenario. After pulling over the car, it was determined that the driver was a 26-year-old man and that the girls were 14 and 15 years of age. The girls had been offered \$150 for sex, and luckily the police officers stopped anything from happening before it was too late.

Earlier in the evening, at around 10:30, a mother had called the crisis unit to report that her 15-year-old daughter had been gone for about a week and that a school counselor had informed her she was missing from school. The counselor explained she was worried that her daughter's behaviour could involve prostitution. She was really concerned. The mother was told she had a couple of options: a support agreement under the Child Welfare Act or the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. After hearing the options, the mother thought the PCHIP was a better fit and requested that a worker call her to discuss this potential help and services available. Ironically, less than an hour after the mother had called, the police walked into the crisis unit with the mother's daughter and a 14-year-old girl, who also happened to be the mother of a three-month-old baby. The local child and family services authority is looking after the situation involving those two girls.

8:40

This scenario paints a true picture of the PCHIP legislation. A mother heard the various options to help her daughter and chose PCHIP as the best route for help. Secondly, PCHIP is there to apprehend children involved in prostitution and to help these children deal with the challenges they have in their lives and to end this horrible lifestyle and regain normal youth activities.

Over the past year and a half of implementation of the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, community stakeholders and staff from various government ministries have identified a need for longer term holistic treatment that better addresses the specific needs of children involved in prostitution. Hereby goes one of my comments that I would make relative to the suggestion of the hon. member that we could have reconvened in August to quickly put in place procedural safeguards to address Judge Jordan's concerns. Mr. Speaker, that would have been impractical, given that we have taken some period of time not only to review legislation across Canada but to review the workers' attitudes and findings themselves.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, in the interval between Judge Jordan's ruling and the tabling of PCHIP, we have had two decisions from the Supreme Court in the matter of apprehension of children, one in Manitoba and one in Ontario, which further have underscored the right of the social worker to apprehend children and the right for child protection to be maintained. The five-day period, for example, comes from the Ontario ruling.

So we're quite confident that in the interval we've not only been able to gather information that's been valuable for the amendments that are proposed, but we have responsibly reviewed the track record of PCHIP in the first year and some months and been able to do two things: strengthen the act and address the concerns by Judge Jordan.

At a forum held with the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek and the Minister of Justice last summer, the need for longer term treatment for sexually exploited youth was reiterated by the community stakeholders. Recommendations indicated that programming must continue to ensure protection of sexually exploited children.

Relative to treatment related to addictions, Mr. Speaker, most of the three-week programs that are available from AADAC could be put in place pending the needs of the child. Dollars obviously are a part of those resources, but other reassignments of existing resources are possible within the treatment options that could be available, given the possible and hopeful proclamation of this bill in the near future.

The amendments are designed to provide strength. The legislation's framework will be maintained, and the act is solid and generally, Mr. Speaker, is working very well. With it we have effectively provided support to many sexually exploited and abused Alberta children. The amendments will simply complement the legislation's existing provisions and enhance its effectiveness.

We can only begin to understand the needs of young people by listening to their stories and thus providing better support for them and their families. This is where, in speaking to intake workers, the outreach Street Teams, and listening to the lawyers and other stakeholders that have come forward, perhaps the following two stories indicate what we most frequently find.

Kari was a shy and quiet 15 year old. During the course of the school year a group of grade 12 boys began to taunt her and laughed at her when she walked by, calling her ugly and leaving her alone. One guy in the group, Jason, began to stand up for her and tell the guys to leave her alone and began to pay more attention to her. During this time Kari's parents noticed changes in her behaviour. She seemed withdrawn and unhappy at times. Concerns escalated when the school counselor called Kari's parents with the news that he had noticed that Kari had been making superficial scratches on her wrists. The counselor began to meet with Kari but could not pinpoint the cause of her behaviour. Kari began to be sexually active with Jason. As the summer holidays approached, Jason began telling Kari that he had ideas of how they could make a lot of money over the summer. Soon he asked her if she would work as a prostitute. She was shocked and refused. He kept asking and became much more persistent.

One day when Kari was with Jason and his friends, the ones that used to make fun of her, he announced that today was the day she would make some money. When she refused, he threatened to kill her and her family. He set up a date for her. Fortunately, when the police learned of the situation and intervened before harm could come to Kari, charges were laid against Jason. PCHIP voluntary services became involved as a result of a referral from the vice unit, and a PCHIP worker now supports Kari as she sees a therapist twice weekly. She and her family have traveled a long road to recovery and are still dealing with pain and scars, but Jason has been charged and sentence is pending. Kari is doing relatively well and has not been involved in prostitution.

Brenda had been involved with child welfare for over a decade as a result of the family's inability to protect their children due to alcohol addiction. She still loves her family and, despite being placed in care a number of times, typically runs away from placement and returns home. Brenda runs to the streets when things are not going well at home and has become connected to a group of young people who use drugs and alcohol. At the age of 12 she became involved in prostitution, using crack cocaine, injecting heroin, and had been connected to a pimp that she called her boyfriend by the time she was 13.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on, but the most intriguing thing for me is the people who have spoken to me saying: aren't you concerned about children's rights? Of course I am, and that is embodied in the legislation that we have brought forward. But could you really imagine saying to a policeman: of course if my daughter exercises her rights, you should leave her with that john, that pimp, that person that is personally violating and sexually abusing her. Would you prefer that to having her brought home?

Mr. Speaker, when we have an opportunity for the extension of the drug treatment program under this legislation, access to drug and alcohol treatment programs will be available, a response tailored to the social needs, and early childhood specialists and others that can help these children regenerate and rejuvenate their lives. Education and job training will be immediately available and, most of all, housing in a safe place to provide them an opportunity to review their current dependence and set a stage for a new type of independence.

The protection of our children is the pertinent issue in this legislation. That was recognized by Judge Jordan. Action in the area of child prostitution needs to be dealt with on three fronts: prevention, early intervention, and treatment. We must realize that breaking free of prostitution is extremely difficult. It takes time and perseverance, time that is built into this legislation and perseverance by workers that know the course of treatment necessary. There are constant struggles, yet this cycle of abuse must end.

We will continue to encourage the end of the child's involvement with prostitution and will never give up on a child at risk. Additional time spent in a caring environment allows the child to attend a drug or alcohol addiction program. It's been found that residential programs of at least three weeks have a solid success rate.

An article in yesterday's *Edmonton Journal* noted that Vancouver is becoming a destination for sex tourists who prey on children. The Progress of Canada's Children Into the Millennium, '99-2000, says that the child sex trade exists everywhere in Canada, from large cities to remote logging camps. Mr. Speaker, it would be comfortable to say that it only exists in inner cities, but I would suggest that that's simply the geography where child prostitution occurs. The children that are involved come from all over Alberta and come from other places as well.

We cannot allow children to be involved in prostitution. On the 10th anniversary of National Child Day, November 20, the International Committee to End Child Prostitution explained that we have to do more to end the world's sex trade. Clearly this legislation and the support provided are needed more than ever. This concern is reinforced by youth who have been apprehended under the act. They say that we must emphasize to youth that other choices are available to them. We are at a time in our history where children have many choices but fewer people to really listen to them. There are people in our communities who are willing to take the time and help them overcome obstacles.

8:50

So what are our achievements to date? Our government is dedicated to helping sexually exploited children. The children are victims, and within our means we have taken many off the streets. In fact, since the Provincial Court ruling, 23 children have been apprehended using either the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act or our new policy directives in the Child Welfare Act. Since the act's inception in February 1999, 427 apprehensions have occurred involving 194 youth, 82 of which have been apprehended more than once, reaffirming our commitment to never give up on one single child. The ages of the apprehended children range from 12 to 17 years.

Our focus has always been and will continue to be the children. We're making a positive impact on their lives. Children and youth, who've had high regard for the community follow-up workers, comment: "You can trust them. They're caring. I tell them stuff I wouldn't tell anyone else." When you get these kinds of responses, it shows we're making a difference.

Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member of the opposition spoke, he asked why we did not challenge the Charter. I will not attempt to go

into the legal arguments, but I'd remind the members in the House that clearly we had an opportunity to wait for two Charter rulings, for two Supreme Court rulings relative to the apprehension of children. To in fact arrange for some opportunity for the child to review their apprehension in court – and I know that the hon. member has cited a duty counsel system. But to do that would in fact be unprecedented, for we do not have, in any circumstances, a challenge to the apprehension. Rather, we are enabling them to challenge the confinement. We have in fact provided for them to have a written opportunity to understand their rights, court dates, and the opportunity to receive legal advice. Clearly it could be some form of duty counsel system, but quite frankly the child may or may not have their own choices, and we should avail them of that.

Mr. Speaker, there is a public perception that this legislation is good. It is the first of its kind internationally. It acknowledges that children involved in prostitution are victims. It makes it clear that individuals who are children and who are being controlled and exploited and abused are victims and not criminals, and it is a significant shift in people's attitudes towards this issue. It is a community issue. Child prostitution is an issue that we all own. If we are all going to save the child, it behooves us to be involved collectively.

Mr. Speaker, one additional comment. With the longer period of detention, a significant number of dollars, I think I can assure this body, would be available. Clearly we can make those adjustments, not only with the agencies that are currently under contract but with other agencies that can be adapted. For example, the AADAC residential treatment facilities can provide additional assistance in maintaining the child in a well-cared-for environment.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, by allowing the victims of the sex trade to be confined in a safe house for longer than the original 72 hours, we give social workers and others more time to counsel and help the child toward the recovery process. We in fact give youngsters a chance to make a complete break with street life and the sex trade, our ultimate goal. We feel we have achieved a balance that addresses court concerns and the needs of the children and will continue to do whatever is necessary to end child prostitution and help children start a life free of abuse.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, I'm going to call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a point.

Point of Order Member's Apology

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thanks very much. Pursuant to Standing Order 23(1), I suppose, I wanted to apologize to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. In my comments a few moments ago I had taken issue with some things that she had said publicly after Judge Jordan rendered her decision. I understand from the member that subsequently she retracted the statements she had made. I wasn't aware of that. I appreciate her doing so, and I think it's important that the record should accurately reflect the fact that she withdrew the statements she made after learning of the decision from the youth and family court judge.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: And the chair very much appreciates the upholding of the decorum rules of our House.

Debate Continued

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to enter into the debate on this bill, and I would like to begin by affirming the minister's commitment to help sexually exploited children. I believe it is something the government has done that is very, very progressive and indicates that they would like to deal with some of the social conditions under which many Albertans live.

I think, however, that perhaps the bill has a little bit too much focus on the confinement of children who are caught up in this trade and not enough on what can be done to permanently help them make a break with the street. I think that the confinement element of this PCHIP bill could be strengthened if we talked more about the continuum of programs that can be made available to the youth in this situation and indeed to the families who are in this situation.

I think the bill could be strengthened if it required the government and the responsible agencies involved to adequately fund and make available all required programs which would be of benefit in allowing these young people to make a permanent break with the street. That should be a part of the bill, and I think we should be legislating government action as well as legislating the activities of our young people.

I have a number of questions for the minister that I hope she will be able to answer at some point in the debate. First of all, could you tell us, Madam Minister, where these children will be confined for the 21-day period and how you will ensure that this 21-day confinement is not experienced as punitive by the children. What services will be available during the 21 days that will ensure that the children get the help they need, assess their current needs, and determine their future plans? What new funding will be established to ensure that the children get the support services they need for this new confinement period? Will those with five-day confinements be in the same facility as those with 21-day confinements?

Support services that I think, Mr. Speaker, ought to be provided during the 21-day confinement period are as follows.

Psychologists to do a psych assessment to determine the trauma and abuse issues and the appropriate treatment required.

An addictions counselor. Most street-entrenched youth are dealing with substance addictions and the added addiction to the street life, which is often not adequately understood. I understand that AADAC is working on a program in this regard. Sexually exploited youth have said they need to have different treatment programs than other youth who are in secure custody. How is this being addressed?

A recreation therapist. Children certainly have lots of energy. They just can't sit around locked up for 21 days. The children need cultural and spiritual support.

I think there's going to be a significant cost to some of these programs, and I hope the government is committed to meeting that need. I'd like to know what dollars for programs will be available to increase the choices of sexually exploited children for voluntary programs which address addictions; physical and mental health concerns related to trauma, abuse, and poverty; transitional housing; schooling; and employment training.

I would further, Mr. Speaker, like to ask the minister: what sort of evaluation has been done on the effectiveness of the current three-day confinement? Why would the legislation be amended to provide for five-day and 21-day confinement if the three-day confinement has not been properly evaluated?

Those are some of the questions, Mr. Speaker, that I have on what happens to the children during their confinement and what steps are taken, other than taking them off the street, to make sure that they never return to it.

9:00

Mr. Speaker, I want to say a word also about the drafting. As I read this piece of legislation and try to imagine it from the point of view of a scared, 12-year-old girl, I think the drafting is designed more to meet court challenges and Charter challenges than it is to ensure that children actually understand what's happening to them. If you read the language, the intimidation factor is something that I think needs to be adequately dealt with. It may not have to be dealt with here in the legislation, but I would like some assurance that this is going to be child friendly so that when the children are taken into custody, things are explained to them in a way that they're going to understand and in a way that they don't find intimidating.

As I read through it:

A director must inform a child with respect to whom a show cause hearing is to be held under subsection(12), in writing, of

- (a) the director's reasons for, and the time period of, the confinement,
- (b) the time and place of the show cause hearing,
- (c) the right to attend the show cause hearing,
- (d) the right to contact a lawyer, and
- (e) the telephone number of the nearest office of the Legal Aid Society of Alberta.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that from the point of view of an inexperienced 12-year old this needs to be changed. This needs to be put in a fashion that they will understand, and I would certainly concur with the suggestion that someone, a legal aid lawyer or somebody, should be required to be available right at the point of confinement of the child rather than some director reading a list of rights or handing a written list of rights to this scared child.

Mr. Speaker, the last point I want to deal with in respect of this bill is in fact the whole question of poverty. Poverty exists throughout our province. It's not just confined to the rural areas. Poverty is a major contributing factor to the situation that many of these children find themselves in. It's certainly not exclusively caused by poverty, but I believe that poverty is a major factor with respect to all of these situations.

Now, in Alberta there are very, very serious problems with child poverty. In Alberta in 1998 the child poverty rate was 17.1 percent, Mr. Speaker. That's nearly one child in five in this province, and in absolute numbers it's 128,800 children according to the report on Child Poverty in Canada: Report Card 2000. So one in five, Mr. Speaker.

I would certainly be remiss if I didn't talk about the record of this government with respect to social assistance and the dramatic cuts that they have made in the 1990s in social assistance and the dramatic impact that that has had on the lives of many, many children in our society. The complete abandonment of responsibility for social housing to provide affordable and safe housing is another black mark on this government's record.

We know, those of us that have been involved with housing, that the government – and I certainly heard the minister of housing at the time, Dr. West, speak to a housing conference and lecture everybody about . . . [interjections] Well, he's the Provincial Treasurer now. At the time these programs were cut, he was responsible for housing. I heard him speak in Calgary, and he lectured all of the providers of social housing in this province on the need for people to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, Mr. Speaker. It's that attitude that's contributed greatly to the problems facing our young people.

As I said earlier, a couple of ministers are trying to stem the flood. They're trying to put their fingers in the dike to stop the flood, and another minister, the Provincial Treasurer, is going at the dike with a backhoe.

Mr. Speaker, the government needs to get all of its ducks in a row

if it's going to tackle this issue. It cannot just simply say, "We're going to apprehend these kids once they get into trouble," and not look at the cause and their culpability in creating the conditions that put these children on the street in the first place. I urge the government to reconsider its approach to social assistance, to reconsider its approach to the budgets for people on social assistance, the housing allowance, to look at many of the programs that have been eliminated in this province, and then we can begin to seriously tackle the real issues relating to child prostitution in this province.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to have the opportunity this evening to speak to Bill 29, Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000. Certainly we are happy to see this come forward into the Legislature. There was some concern that it wouldn't hit the floor this fall, but we are happy to see it brought forward.

Many of the amendments that we see in here I find to be improvements on what we saw before us in the Legislature in the spring, but I do still, Mr. Speaker, have concerns with one particular section, and that is the review of the confinement decision. I do have some concerns about that.

I agree with the Minister of Children's Services when she says that we all own prostitution as an issue in this province and in this country. Certainly we really have some responsibility towards children who are involved in prostitution, and we must make every effort that we can to eradicate it and to help those children through that process when they get involved in that kind of lifestyle.

With that in mind, I don't think, Mr. Speaker, that section 4, which talks about the confinement decision, is yet adequate enough in terms of addressing the kinds of issues there are. The way the section is put forward, where they give these young women who are put in care the right to ask for a review of the director's decision and the right to contact a lawyer and just give them the telephone number of the nearest office of the Legal Aid Society of Alberta, assumes a great deal more maturity and presence of mind than likely those people have at that particular time and space in their life. I think we have to take a look at that very seriously. This is one area where an amendment would be justified in terms of being brought forward.

In responding to that particular point which my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo had brought forward, the Minister of Children's Services said that to do something like bring in duty counsel for these kids, lawyers under contract, where they'd have access to the service immediately, would be something that would be unprecedented. But I respectfully disagree with the minister on that point. I think we do have a precedent for that kind of action in this province, and that is the action that takes place within WIN houses in this province.

When women come into WIN houses, they are mature most of the time. They are older women, not really younger women, a cross section of women. They are in a state of mind, Mr. Speaker, where they are unable to make decisions that have a great deal of impact on their lives at that particular moment. It takes all of their resolve and all of their ability just to have made it into the house itself. They are beyond the ability to make other kinds of choices that are going to require decisions, paperwork, often money. They're not able to do that, and WIN House has recognized that.

What they do is within 24 or 48 hours of the women having entered the shelters, they bring in social workers; they bring in legal aid counsel. They bring in the kinds of resources that these women and often their children require at that moment in time. It isn't a

choice. If you are there in the shelter, you are expected to show up for the appointment. I think that's good, because when people are at critical stages in their lives, sometimes they need an additional catalyst or a strong hand on their shoulder to help them along in the process that they have embarked on.

9:10

Once these children are confined, they're at a crossroads in their lives. They need some help in making the decisions that are going to help them leave the life of prostitution, leave the life on the street, and move forward. Leaving what you know always puts you in a state where you feel unsafe, where you're unsure, where you're not confident of what the next step is, where you're scared, where you're apprehensive of what can happen, what will happen, what could happen. All of those states render a person unable often to take the next step.

I would suggest that when we are talking about children here, young girls, we are placing too much responsibility and too much of a burden on them to expect that they are going to be in the kind of mind where they are going to be able to rationally exercise their right to contact a lawyer or to even physically be able to retain the phone number of the Legal Aid Society, make the first phone call, stay on hold while they get connected to somebody or wait for someone to call them back. All of those steps, while they seem very minor in nature to us, are monumental steps for those young women to take at that particular point in their life, and I say that we are placing far too much of a burden on them if that's the kind of request that we are making of them at that time.

They are under outside influences that can be very hard for them to say no to. Remember, these are girls that have been taken out of their environment, often not willingly, so now you're asking them to willingly choose to contact a lawyer who can help them take the next step. I don't think it's possible for that to happen, Mr. Speaker.

I think we have to recognize the state of mind that those young people are in at that time. Regardless of the fact that they have a lack of maturity and that they have a history of making decisions that are hurtful to them, not helpful to them, it's our job to give them a hand up in this process, and we can best give them a hand up, Mr. Speaker, if we automatically provide the kinds of services that will help them get one step further along in the process. For those reasons, I very respectfully request that the government take a look at this position and look at strengthening this particular section with an amendment, which I am sure would find support from all members in this Assembly.

Once that's done, Mr. Speaker, I think we also have to address issues of what isn't in this bill. It just isn't enough to provide the kind of short-term security that we're seeing here. There are still severe problems in communities in terms of the lack of adequate resources for street programs and adequate accommodation. All of us who have been the parents of teenagers or who are the parents of teenagers know how hard and how stressful that can be sometimes and how different teens react to their teen years in different ways. Sometimes they just leave. Well, where do they go? If they don't go on the street to make money, do they have other options available to them?

Why don't we look at solving this problem before those kids hit that kind of street life? We need to ensure that we have enough programming for them, enough accommodation for them, and enough resources that they can access before they get to that stage in their life. It's much easier to give a person a hand up when they're only one step away from the kind of life we would like them to lead than when they have involved themselves in lifestyles like prostitution or drugs or the other kinds of lifestyles that are so

detrimental to their health and their safety and their well-being and their ability to be contributing members of this society, Mr. Speaker.

I know that the Minister of Children's Services is very concerned about this very issue. I've heard her speak a number of times on it. I would support any endeavours that she undertakes to address this issue before it becomes a prostitution problem. I would respectfully urge all of her colleagues in the government to also support her in those endeavours. I don't think we can stress enough how important it is to support children before they hit the street and, once they are there, to support them in the process of getting them off the street.

Mr. Speaker, the dollars that we spend up front in preventative kinds of care and in providing adequate options for young people will be dollars where we reap the rewards tenfold after the fact, not just from a monetary perspective but from respecting the rights of human beings, particularly girls who end up on the street involved in prostitution.

Mr. Speaker, those are my comments at stage 2 of this particular bill, and I hope that the government takes them seriously and that we see some additional strengthening of this bill before it's passed through this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening and to speak in support of Bill 29 and to thank and I guess applaud the efforts of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for the work she's done in trying to bring the issue before the Assembly and to put it on the public agenda of this province. That takes a lot of determination, and it takes a lot of hard work to succeed, as she has done, in bringing the whole issue of child prostitution to the Alberta public in a way that I think has been caring and in the best interests of children.

I was struck, while driving across the city earlier this evening, by a radio report. I wasn't paying too much attention initially, but they were interviewing a speaker who was talking about the law before us and the changes that had been made to protect the rights of children. Somehow in the conversation the issue of residential schools for native children arose, and it caused me to reflect back on that time in our history when the very churches were responsible for believing that they knew what was best for children of native families and in those children's best interests took them from their homes and placed them in residential schools. At the time, Mr. Speaker, there was widespread public support for moving those children to residential schools, and it was sanctioned by the church, which was even more powerful in those days. There was a general feeling that if native children were going to succeed in this world, they had to be cut off from their culture, they had to learn English, and they had to be schooled in the ways of the majority white population.

Here we are a number of years later, Mr. Speaker, reflecting back on all those good intentions and what those good intentions did to that particular group of children. The story that has emerged, of course, is not very pretty. The kind of remorse and the kinds of apologies that some of the churches have had to engage in is something that I'm sure those hardworking missionaries and church people who were responsible for the program years ago could never, never have possibly imagined would be an outcome of their work.

I use the example, just as a word of caution, that when we become so enthusiastic about knowing what is right for a group of children, it also is incumbent upon us to take a few minutes to reflect in terms of: are there some downsides to this? Are there some things that we're not paying attention to in our enthusiasm to try to rectify what we see as a great evil being inflicted upon young Albertans? I started to think back about the context in which child prostitution in

this province thrives. We've been so concerned with fiscal realities of the province that I think we have to take some responsibility for the kind of social context that we've created in which these youngsters grow up. We have been so bent on creating an economy of winners and losers and we have been so ready to discard those who are not successful in that economy that I think we are reaping some of the side effects of those policy thrusts.

9:20

You see it manifested in a number of ways. I see it in some of the families in my constituency who are on social assistance. There is a resignation on the part of some of them that they have no value or that they are certainly undervalued, that somehow or other they are guilty for having to ask for help from the government and that they are worth less in some way or another than their fellow citizens. So I think we've started to create a context where the kinds of things like child prostitution can thrive, where youngsters who have little self-concept, who have little value for their own being are easily led into the kinds of grim circumstances that previous speakers have described. For that, we all bear some responsibility.

I guess the third thing I would like to touch on just briefly, Mr. Speaker, is the necessity for adequate resources for this program. I don't think there can be any doubt in anyone's mind that this is a very high-maintenance program. It's a program that is going to draw heavily upon professionals, be they childcare workers, be they counselors, be they police, be they lawyers. It's going to take some of most skilled in those professions to work with these youngsters and to bring about the kinds of changes that we all want. It would be sad if a bill that has been brought in and has such goodwill in the province and has such support – it would be a shame if the goals of that program were thwarted for the lack of adequate resources. I think that's a real danger, and I think we have some parallels with other programs in the province that are currently underfunded that should lead us to be a little wary and to question the resources that are going to be put at the disposal of those who are charged with carrying out the mandate of this legislation. We need to back up the good words of this bill with the dollars that will make it actually work.

I'm sure that the program will be watched carefully. The successes they've had to this point are impressive. The changes in the legislation that we see before us tonight will hopefully make the program even more successful. I look forward to hearing that, as do all members of the Assembly, and to the eradication of an evil that is probably one of the worst and one that preys on and destroys the lives of young Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this bill, and like many of my colleagues I will join in praise for the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for the work she put in to bringing this before us.

In looking back, I remember I had reservations about the bill as it was initially introduced. I've gone briefly through the *Hansard* and looked at the number of my colleagues who participated in vigorous debate about the proposed bill at the time and also noticed that three of the Liberal amendments were in fact accepted at the time we were debating it. It's certainly clear to me and I think it should be clear to everyone here that members of the Official Opposition in no way want to delay passage of this amendment bill. I think we all feel really strongly that protection of children is a major part of our responsibility as legislators, and we take that responsibility seri-

ously. But as legislators we are also responsible for passing the best possible legislation.

When I look at how the program as implemented has run, I think some of my original concerns were alleviated, but other of my original concerns were not. There is obviously an attempt to address some of those concerns in this amending bill as it is brought forward to us tonight.

The sort of history, the tale we will all tell in the years to come of how this bill came into being and the work that was done on it, how the initial program developed, I think is a really good example of the legislative input, the community input, the workers who've actually worked with this program, and the involvement of the court in pointing out to us as legislators that we had to make amendments to the bill to make it the strongest piece of legislation possible. It's a good example for us to look back upon, and I'm sure I will do that.

I think what's important here, certainly from the comments Judge Karen Jordan brought forward, is that the apprehension is not the concern here, but it is the ability to have access to have your day in court, if you want to put it that way, for anyone who is apprehended to be able to have their chance to explain in court if they feel they need an opportunity to explain.

I think it's really important that we do understand that all of our laws need to conform to the Constitution and to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and to place a limit on a personal freedom. It has to be subject to the reasonable limits prescribed by law and those that can be justifiably demonstrated in a free and democratic society. We hear that phrase, but what does it really mean? I think even children, even child prostitutes who are apprehended need to have that constitutional right upheld for them. I am certainly willing to come into this House and assist in amending a bill that is going to do that on their behalf. I'm proud to be involved in that process when that's what it's going to do.

One of the concerns I think has been raised previously, but I'll just go through it briefly, as I think it's important when you're dealing with children in particular. I notice that the provisions of the act are allowing that they will be given a piece of paper that gives them information which is very valuable: people they can call, assistance they can look for. That's all well and good, but when it comes to whether they actually want to apply to appear in court, that's sort of written on a piece of paper and handed to them. There's a leap of faith or a leap of logic here. If we believe that these children are so in need of protection that we're willing to apprehend them because we feel they can't make decisions about their life, then we take this leap of faith and say, "Well, if we just give them a piece of paper and tell them to phone this guy if they think they might be interested" – I'm not quite getting the connection there. I think more has to be done in an advocacy way or in an information provision way than giving them a piece of paper and saying: you can phone this if you want. One of the suggestions that's been made would be to provide a judicial counsel.

9:30

MR. DICKSON: Legal counsel.

MS BLAKEMAN: Legal counsel. I'm sorry.

It makes perfect sense to me that there's a human being there that a young person can talk to and ask questions of or perhaps have them provide information that they can then react to. Because not many of us, hopefully, have the opportunity to come into contact with the legal and judicial systems, we don't know what the rules are here. We don't know what we're supposed to get. Frankly, we all watch way too much American television and think that all the American rules apply to us, which they don't. We really are kind of stranded then. We don't know what's supposed to be happening.

To assume that a young person we've apprehended because we

don't think they can make their own decisions about their life at that point or they're unduly influenced by someone else can all of a sudden now stand up and go, "Right, I have to take control of my life and look after all of this; yes, indeed, I will follow through and contact this phone number," I think is a bit of a stretch. If we're really looking to being of assistance to these young people – and that is what the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has brought forward; we are trying to be of assistance to them – then let's do it in a very real and tangible way. Let's get this so that there is some kind of legal counsel available for them who's on a salary, who's available to give them information, and who, if they want additional help, can help arrange for that.

My bias as an MLA in a larger city comes through here, and I needed to be reminded by one of my colleagues representing an area outside of Edmonton and Calgary that that's all fine and dandy for a big city to have someone like that available, but what about the smaller centres or rural centres? Okay, this can be worked around. There's nothing to stop us from looking at having a team of lawyers who are educated specifically in this legislation offering this kind of counselor information and who are on call for various areas of the province. I hope that that will be taken into consideration and given serious consideration by the drafter of this bill.

My colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods just raised some really poignant reminders to us all of how quick we can be to decide that we know what's best for certain groups of people. What that brought to mind for me is that in all of this dealing with a bill around child prostitution, I don't know how many of us or how many of the public ever really grappled with the thought: what kind of a society are we that we have children selling sex, that that goes on in our society? Frankly, somebody's buying the sex, and that's why it's going on.

There's a lot more to consider in the context of this bill than merely talking about apprehension and constitutional rights of children that have been apprehended. I think we also need to take a moment and step back and say: what are we doing in this society that we still have child prostitution? Heck, while I'm at it, why do we still have adult prostitution? Why is this a part or a component of our society? Why do some people find it necessary or important? Because that's still not acceptable to me. I've worked the better part of my life on issues of concern to women and, frankly, on issues of concern to girls. We haven't really talked about what's underneath, the need for this legislation. I hope we'll all take some time to do that and maybe look at other leadership roles that we as legislators could be taking on this issue.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

The other thing that I just wanted to bring up is that we keep referring to girls, that they're girls. Yes, that's true for the most part. We are dealing with young women, but there are also young men, and we shouldn't forget that, because I'm sure that they will be some of the people that are also affected by the passage of this legislation.

I think this has been a good process. Some people might consider that it's been a little rough, and maybe it didn't go exactly the way they wanted it to or as quickly as they wanted it to, or maybe they didn't want to see it come back here for the amendments that were certainly recommended by the courts, but they were also recommended by the workers that had actually been in the system and had been working the program as it has existed so far. So the recommendations for longer term, protective, safe custody I think is a good idea, and it's obviously coming with words of experience from those that have actually worked in the program. Because it's true. You know, what on earth would make us think that in 72 hours we could

solve all these problems? I think that in 72 hours they would mostly sleep, because these kids have not had an opportunity for just plain old sleep and maybe a decent meal. So it makes perfect sense to me that we would be looking at a longer period of time for safe custody.

Beyond that, if you're going to get into any kind of treatment, you're looking at quite extended periods of time. I notice that the ones that are being talked about here are further confinement of up to 21 days, which can be renewed an additional 21 days. So we've got 42 days there. That's six weeks, which isn't a very long time to turn someone's life around. I am not, believe me, recommending that for some reason we incarcerate children for years and years, but I think we do need to understand that if we're going to be running programs for them – and they don't necessarily have to be run as safe custody – the kinds of issues that are going to be involved here, this ain't going to be solved overnight and it ain't going to be solved in 42 days. So I hope that there are the context of programs that are needed to support these children beyond the five days or the 21 days or the 42 days.

The last thing I wanted to do was commend the community groups, the grassroots organizations, who have been working on prostitution issues all the way along, usually with not a lot of fanfare, certainly the communities that I have spoken with and sat in on their meetings and their working sessions as they try and grapple with this kind of activity in their communities. I just want to take a moment to recognize the work that they do. They are trying to protect their communities and make their communities a safer spot, and they've always approached it with an understanding that they are dealing with human beings, human beings that are prostitutes. They've always treated them with understanding. I think that's a very admirable quality.

Some of them have been very inventive. I remember one woman who used to dash out on the street and paint, actually, the licence plate numbers of the johns on the street, which certainly had an immediate effect upon things. It was a very innovative way to look at moving the johns out of her neighbourhood, but it was really particularly affecting her children as they walked home from school and were propositioned.

So I just want to take the time to acknowledge the work that's been done all along by the community groups and what they have contributed to this very serious issue, that is really a scourge upon our society. If this is the least that we can do as legislators in passing this amending bill, good for us, and I hope that we continue to look for ways in which we can show leadership on this issue.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak.

9:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to rise this evening to speak on second reading of Bill 29, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000. Certainly at the outset I want to commend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forth the bill and the amendments and thank her for the consideration that's been given of the very important issues that were raised in Judge Karen Jordan's judgment earlier in the summer.

Certainly it was that judgment which led us as an Official Opposition to suggest that we return to this Legislature this fall to correct some of the imbalance that was noted in Judge Jordan's decision, an imbalance of, yes, to protect the child but also to protect that child's rights. I think it's exceedingly important, given the kind of lifestyle that virtually all of these young people have led, that they

understand that society is trying its very best to provide an example of fairness, an example of rights and to live in accordance with those rights and to give them an example of how they might live that way as well.

I think there's been a good deal of discussion on this legislation, and it has really focused a good deal on the issue of morality, that the actions of young men and women engaged in prostitution is a question of morality. I thought that one of Judge Jordan's points that she made in her excellent judgment that's very much worth noting was paragraph 27 where she said:

It is not axiomatic that the legislation is penal or criminal law because it authorizes the apprehension and detention of children engaged in prostitution. If the only reason for trying to eradicate this activity were moral, it would follow that legislation directed at this purpose would be criminal law.

Then reference is made to a Supreme Court of Canada ruling by Swain, which is cited in the judgment:

"A statute that includes a prohibition and a penalty and is enacted to serve a public purpose commonly recognized as being criminal in nature will fall within the scope of Parliament's criminal law power . . . such public purposes include peace, order, security, health, and morality". . .

There are, however, valid reasons for trying to eliminate prostitution in which children are involved which are not based in morality. Prostitution is a dangerous enterprise; female participants, whether children or adult, are subject to [dangerous] harm and even death at the hands of both pimps and johns. Alcoholism and drug addiction are widespread within the trade. The risk of sexually transmitted disease is so high as to be a significant public health risk.

I think it's a very important part of the issue that we are dealing with here, Mr. Speaker, and one that certainly causes me to participate in the debate. The legislation itself certainly deals with finding a child in the vulnerable practice of prostitution and in dealing with the apprehension of that child and then the confinement of that child for up to 21 days subsequent to the apprehension. I would like to think more in terms of what we can do as a society to prevent that scenario from developing, also what to do in terms of the rehabilitation of that young person once the 21-day maximum period has been expired.

On the prevention side, having long been a proponent and always will be of the importance of public education, I think really we need to look at our children and look at the reality of what some of our children are born into through nothing on their part except that they happen to be born into a world. They may be born into that world with poverty, with disease, with health problems which perhaps few of us can comprehend, with issues of an economic lifestyle that leads them to poor health, poor educational achievement, and a downward cycle which we as a society, I believe, have a responsibility to correct to the best of our ability. Obviously, we can't do everything for everyone, but surely we can focus our efforts on children and look at children with, perhaps, a new lens as we move into the next century.

In terms of children we know that when children are born, there are signs that will indicate the kinds of difficulties that child will have in later life. Assessment done of newborns will often pinpoint issues in terms of health and learning that are very critical to how that child then proceeds. So if we look at a model which I've spoken about before in this Legislature – and it's a model which was developed by the Calgary United Way in terms of looking at how we might better address the needs of children. Having done that initial assessment from, say, the birth of the child up to the age of three, we can identify as a society some of those problematic indicators in that child's life.

Then from age three to six is a perfect opportunity to intervene at an early point for the purpose of trying to make that child as ready as possible for school when they begin at age six. That requires early intervention for those children who need it the most and is often a key not only to that young person's learning ability but to their health and their ability to then thrive as an independent citizen in our country.

Then they move into school, and from six to 10 children learn basic skills. From 10 to 14 there's the same Calgary United Way model, where the children are learning social skills that give them the ability to function in a self-sufficient way and in an independent way. Then from age 14 to 18 in that same school system that the provincial government has a responsibility to run and run effectively, that child then emerges at age 18 with, hopefully, the very best that our society can give that child to going on to be a good citizen. I mean, that is the trust that we are given as legislators: the responsibility right off the bat for every single child born in this province. There is clearly no better way of preventing the kinds of things that are leading children to prostitution, to many other lifestyles which are going to harm them and make them in fact exceedingly dependent upon society and dependent upon others rather than giving them the independence and the rights of citizenship that I think all children, quite frankly, deserve.

That, then, is on the prevention side. The key to a model that looks at prevention is that it also identifies problem behaviours wherever they occur along that path from zero to 18 and, where there are issues that a child needs to be dealing with or that society needs to help that child deal with, surely to goodness identifying those needs within the school system and then supplementing with counseling, with health intervention, or with support in any way is clearly part of what we as a province I think have a responsibility to do. So that's the whole issue of prevention so that hopefully as we go through this process, as we pass this legislation, we will have fewer kids who come to the point where they are living in a way that takes away, surely, the greatest part of their self-esteem and their rights to be children and to become adults.

9:50

Mr. Speaker, that's on the prevention side. Then if we move to the apprehension of these young men and women, let's look at the time subsequent to that apprehension, and that's the whole rehabilitation side. The rehabilitation side is obviously one that several people have spoken about here in the Legislature. I would simply like to cite that the issue of kids that are vulnerable and on the street does not only include kids involved in prostitution. It certainly involves young people who are homeless, young people who have substance addictions, young people who have been demoralized and are vulnerable in our society and have probably been violated in many unspeakable ways. Often these young people are running away from abuse in one situation only to come upon abuse in another. They are running from one vile situation to another that can be even more wretched in terms of their lives, and often they see no hope at all and no way to extricate themselves from lives of hopeless misery.

Mr. Speaker, I think we also must be mindful that many of these young people are disadvantaged by maladies that often go undiagnosed, including fetal alcohol syndrome . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members who are attempting to make long-distance conversations, would you please take those conversations out into the Confederation Room, which is meant for exactly that.

The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, many of these maladies will go undiagnosed, including attention deficit disorders, mental illness, brain injuries, fetal alcohol syndrome, substance abuse, and many other issues. These are young people in need. They are in need of rehabilitation and all that we can do to set them on a track that leads to their own good health and good opportunities to learn.

One of the programs which I would like to offer to the Minister of Children's Services as a model for rehabilitation is one that she may wish to look at in Edmonton family and community services. It's actually called the phase 3 program, Mr. Speaker, and I was privileged to work extensively in this program when I was out of public life in the mid '90s. It's a model of preventing family violence. What it is is young women in this case. Certainly it could involve men as well, but at the moment it's just involving women.

There are three phases to the program. The first one is that the young woman presents herself to family and community services having been involved in some kind of violent situation. The first phase of the program is a clinical look at violence and how it has manifested in the lives of others. It's really trying to understand the whole cycle of violence. We know there are many patterns of violence, including the obnoxious triangle of rescuer, persecutor, and victim. That study of violence as a model is one that is the first phase of the program.

The second phase of the program is that the young woman will then look at her own life and try to determine how that cycle of violence is manifested in her own life, so in fact it's a personal chronicle of the kinds of behaviours, the kinds of choices and decisions that have been made that have led to this violent behaviour.

The third level, at which point I was very privileged to be involved, is called the mentorship model. Having examined violence as a behaviour, having examined their own behaviour and how violence has impacted their life, the young woman then moves into the third phase of the program, which would involve the victim, someone who has already gone through the program and has experienced the same kinds of violence issues, as well as a mentor. That was a woman who was in the community who might work with this triad of people to try and build a plan to curb violence in their lives in the future. Interestingly, for some of the women the best that they could do to come up with new behaviours to fight violence in their lives was the ability to stand before someone and say, "No, I do not wish to participate in that kind of activity, behaviour," you name it. That was a huge step for many of those women, as you can imagine.

For some the plan to eliminate violence from their lives was as complex as one woman who actually developed a training program for the city of Edmonton police in terms of entering into a family domestic violence issue and training the police as to what issues to look for, what questions to ask, and what kinds of behaviours would encourage both parties to deal with the issue. I would highly commend the program to the member because it really did get into the issue of building a support network for these women with other women in the community who were interested in helping them. It is an activity which I think would be very useful to some of these subsequent to the 21-day period.

There are also many women and men in this province who want to be part of and to help in creating a new culture of nonviolence in Alberta.

Finally, I just wanted to speak to the legislation and to alert the minister to something we will be bringing forward, and that is an amendment to try and measure the effectiveness of this legislation. I think so often, whether it's establishing a budget for a particular

goal in mind or drafting legislation with very laudable goals in mind, sometimes legislators will forget that we need to put in place at the same time a monitoring and evaluative tool that will ensure that the goals of that legislation or that budgetary process are in fact being met as we go down the road. Otherwise, we're just throwing money at problems rather than saying: this is where we want to get to in one year or five years, whatever the goals are. To build in those evaluative tools I think is an extremely important part of budgeting as well as in legislation.

Judge Jordan actually presents in chapter 37 in her judgment some very excellent suggestions in terms of how to describe the goals that we want to achieve. Then we will look at the legislation perhaps in two years' time and say: "Have we achieved that? Is there something that we need to do to amend that legislation to make sure we can achieve those goals?"

I'll just highlight some of the questions in the judge's decision, but I think it's a real credit to Judge Jordan for the work that she put into this judgment and the very fine direction she is giving us as legislators. Some of the questions that she asks are: "How many accept the services [that are being] offered?" Perhaps some will not. Perhaps some will shut down, and we have to know that. "How many return to the same lifestyle?" What kind of monitoring and follow-up is around for these young people? "How many gradually escape from that world?" What kind of success rate is there?

Are those numbers any different from the numbers where the prostitutes have not been apprehended and confined but have moved onto a more conventional lifestyle? How many children who have been apprehended and confined are subsequently beaten by their pimps? Are those numbers any different from the beatings endured by girls in the trade who have never been apprehended? Are beatings by pimps taking place because they are sending a message to these girls and others that they must not reveal anything during the assessment which would endanger the pimp or effect him economically? Are there beatings . . . which take place to encourage the girls to replace the income that was lost during the time of confinement? What attempts are being made to determine whether under-age prostitutes are actually leaving the trade or merely working in trick pads? The questions go on and on, but the Government of Alberta [she writes] has not made a commitment to provide us with answers even though the liberty of children is being curtailed.

So I think building some evaluative tools into the legislation itself would help in that knowledge that we are doing something. We are evaluating it, and we are forcing future Legislatures to evaluate it as well.

10:00

Finally, I wanted to close on the whole issue of the rights of the child and to cite the UN convention on the rights of the child, which, of course, we all know Alberta did not initially support. I have always been an advocate of the convention and deem it to be very much pro-parent and pro-family but most of all pro-children. The convention certainly talks about the fundamental importance of ensuring that children's rights are protected, no matter what their age. I think it is particularly germane to this legislation to look at the convention on the rights of the child and the several articles in it about recognizing children's rights. So many times I think young women and young men who become involved in dangerous behaviour like prostitution do so because there are some real difficulties with power and authority and with dominance in their lives. So often, while they have ended up in this kind of life, it's because they have been unable to grow and become themselves self-sufficient in order to make good decisions that are in their best interests.

If the legislation is not respectful of their rights, then what we as legislators are doing is simply perpetuating that pattern, which has

often led to their troublesome behaviour in the first place. I think the fact that the legislation is in the process of being amended to improve and protect the rights of children is a commitment we all need to make to continue in that advancement. I think it's very much an issue of ensuring that all legislation respects the equality of all persons, even those young kids who've ended up on the street and need help.

I would like to thank the hon. minister and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward the legislation. I hope the statement by the Minister of Justice that if subsequent suggestions came along that we felt as legislators would continue to improve this legislation, that we all make a commitment to certainly embody those in future amendments. Certainly for our part we will be bringing forth an amendment to do as I suggested, and that is to build an accountability mechanism into the legislation. We will be suggesting that the evaluator of that effectiveness of the legislation will be an independent children's advocate, which we have long advocated on this side of the House.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. members for the privilege of addressing this legislation, and I look forward to continuing to participate in its passage in this Legislature.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to join the debate on Bill 29 and the state of its reading. My colleagues, who have spoken this evening on the bill, made some important points on this bill, Bill 29, which is titled Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000. This piece of legislation clearly recognizes once again in this House the problem we are faced with; that is, we have lots of children on the street who are victims of prostitution. The bill focuses on providing protection to these children who are already involved in prostitution.

I support this. I certainly want to commend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for the passion with which she has pursued this matter for some time. I also want to thank the Minister of Children's Services for providing leadership and political will to take action on this matter. When the minister was speaking on the bill about an hour earlier, she was talking about the main assumption driving this bill, that is that children are not criminals; they are victims. The children who are in prostitution are victims, and we need to treat them as such. They need our sympathy. They need our care. They need our help. This bill is an attempt, I guess, to provide this help through a process of apprehension and provide them safe care for a period of time.

I think we'll agree that we need to work at both the apprehension and protection of children who get into this difficulty. But we need also to work at two other levels, the level of prevention, so that we can then hope to find two, three, four, five years down the line that our actions have in fact reduced the number of children who risk ending up on the street and ending up exploited in prostitution. So prevention, apprehension, and the third stage I think is the rehabilitation side, which in this bill is only marginally addressed. Mere apprehension, which in this case can last I guess about six, seven weeks altogether, may not be enough to protect these children unless we pay attention to the rehabilitative sort of measures that are needed even after these children are released from custody in the safe houses.

So I hope we will pay some attention during this debate to all three stages: how to prevent children from getting to the stage where they have to be rescued and then the rescue part, which is the apprehension and putting them in safe houses, and then the postapprehension and postrelease measures and programs that are

needed if we are to in fact provide these young people with hope and with skills and with the abilities and the capacities to be freed from this terrible exploitation that they willy-nilly get subjected to as they adopt this particular way of living, for however short a period.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo made an interesting comment, which I would like to revisit for a moment. The one thing that I find troubling, as he did, in the bill in its present form is that although the bill does now require the director to provide reasons to a child that's apprehended, give the information, give information on legal rights and the right to seek legal counsel, the bill seems to assume that the apprehended child is in a mental frame of mind psychologically sound enough and having the ability to exercise reasonable and good judgment in order to seek these avenues which are legally provided in the bill. But I guess the point the Member for Calgary-Buffalo made that I like is his attempt to draw attention to the fact that the very fact that these children are in difficulty is perhaps because they are not capable of making good judgment.

10:10

If that is the case, if they're not good decision-makers – and if they are in difficulty, we can infer from it that most of them are not good decision-makers – then it seems to me to be rather problematic to leave it to those children under conditions of apprehension to make decisions about whether or not to seek advice, legal advice in this case. So I am somewhat concerned about the arrangement that the bill doesn't provide which will ensure that these children indeed will have this right and the ability to exercise this right to seek legal counsel. I hope that as we go through the bill, as we try to amend it and improve it, we will build into it those provisions to address this concern expressed by several members on the floor of this House.

I also want to, since my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands spoke, I think eloquently, speak about the position that our caucus takes on this bill. I won't repeat what he had to say, but I want to spend a little more time on the prevention side. I think we will be remiss in addressing the problems our children face, particularly those who fall victims to prostitution, if we don't address seriously the issue of prevention and the conditions that seem to lead children into this difficulty in the first place. So with your permission, Mr. Speaker, I will quickly move on to that.

In order to do that, I would like to draw the attention of the House to a document that I tabled in the House yesterday. The document that I tabled in the House yesterday is called Child Poverty in Canada: Report Card 2000, and this document was prepared by Canada 2000, a nonpartisan, cross-Canada coalition of over 85 national, provincial, and community partner organizations providing information and recommendations regarding child poverty in Canada. Now, I would certainly hope that members with deep concern for this problem that this bill tries to address and rectify will find some time to take a quick look at this document, because it does provide some very significant and important information that we need to look at if we are to seriously discuss and address the issue of prevention.

I'm assuming, of course – and there are perhaps some who may disagree with me – that poverty is one of the key factors which leads children into the street first and from there on to becoming victims of prostitution. Poverty, as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands indicated, is not confined to a few parts of Canada. Child poverty is highly generalized. In our province it's quite high: 17.1 percent. These are 1998 figures. This is in spite of the fact that the rate of economic growth in our province has been good, has been very high. It appears that there doesn't seem to be a close relationship with reduction in child poverty and economic growth. There seems to be a disconnect between economic growth and the rates of child poverty.

According to this count, we have 128,800 children in this province

who live under conditions of poverty. Poverty is not something that's an abstract concept. It affects in concrete ways, in real ways the daily lives of families, children in terms of the safety that they enjoy, in terms of the housing that they have, in terms of family conditions under which they live. All of these conditions are germane for our consideration if we are interested not only in dealing with the problem once it occurs but in doing something about preventing this problem from occurring or from growing.

So the evidence is clear – some of this is reported in this document – that most of the children who are growing up in poverty are growing up in families where parents are working. Most of the families where children grow up poor are families which are working families, so we have a growing number of working poor in our country and in our province.

Some other interesting information here that we need to take into account and that I want to put on record has to do with children up to 14 years of age who are likely to be experiencing poverty. Aboriginal children: about 52 percent of them are likely to experience poverty. Children of visible minorities: about 42 percent, according to this document, Mr. Speaker. Children with disabilities: about 23 percent. So there are clearly some social groups in our society, in our community that are much more likely to have children who will be exposed to conditions of poverty. Poverty is I think recognized as one of the key determinants – certainly it's not the only determinant, I agree – for pushing children into all kinds of personal difficulties, including prostitution.

In order to then address the issue of the prevention of prostitution, I think we need to ask ourselves what needs to be done in order to reduce the likelihood that children, particularly those who grow up in certain social groups and communities, will not have to face those conditions of poverty which generate problems including prostitution. Unless we pay some attention to this, I think we will be simply dealing with the symptoms and the consequences and not with the causes of poverty, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to emphasize this. I know that this is a matter that's been recognized across this House, but I think it requires emphasis. It requires reiteration as we move towards putting in place a law which hopefully will withstand any future court challenges to its legality and constitutionality. We should not only deal with the apprehension side but deal in fact with the causes that lead to it, dealing with the problem of poverty and providing protection for children.

A few other factors. The youths that we are dealing with are between the ages of 16 and up to 24, and surely lots of youths between 15, 16, and 17 are apprehended, I guess, in terms of prostitution. According to this report, youths face particular hurdles in overcoming poverty. The demographic group of youth at this age that we are trying to provide protection to from becoming victims of prostitution is precisely the group that's exposed to a higher incidence of poverty than other age groups in our community, so we need to pay attention to that.

Before they get to be 16, 17, 18, young children of course need child care. Quality child care services are still not available nor are they affordable for most families, particularly for families that we categorize as the working poor. So that's another front on which we need to work, and I would hope the minister would be taking note of some of these matters as we discuss this bill.

Lack of safe, secure, affordable housing: another factor that's associated with it. Similarly, I guess, there's an interesting statistic here of who uses the food banks. Forty percent of food bank users are children, although only 26 percent of Canada's population are children. So that's another indication of the depth of poverty that many of our children experience and face on a daily basis.

10:20

It is these conditions of poverty that our children experience on a fairly large scale across this country and in this province which draw attention to why the problem of prostitution and other problems that young children face persist. The persistence of child poverty in rich countries like ours, according to this report, undermines both equality of opportunity and commonality of values. It therefore confronts the industrialized world with a test both of its ideals and its capacity to resolve many of the most intractable social problems, and prostitution certainly is one of the most intractable social problems that we are seriously trying to address in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to close by saying that I support the intent of the bill, the general intention and the goals of the bill, but I think what we need to do is work on more than just apprehension and putting these children in secure safe homes for a period of six or seven weeks. We need to go beyond that, both with rehabilitation after the release of children from these safe homes and, much more importantly perhaps, at the other end, at the level of their childhood experiences and the poverty that many children experience.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to close debate.

MRS. FORSYTH: I'll have the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a second time]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the committee to order.

Bill 28 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2)

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. There are some additional comments I'd like to make further to the comments I made in speaking to second reading of this bill.

THE CHAIRMAN: We're having a little bit of difficulty hearing. Perhaps your laptop is obscuring the microphone, which does inhibit the sound quality.

MR. SMITH: No, no. Leave it like that. It was good. It was fine.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your assistance, hon. minister. I think that will probably be better now.

MS BLAKEMAN: Sorry about that. My apologies to *Hansard*. I didn't mean to obscure the microphone.

Yes, I am pleased to continue with some of the points I was raising last night in second reading. I was speaking specifically of my concern about the proclivity that this government has shown for this injection of one-time-only funding in responding to pressure points. And let me be clear: this is not about saying that you

shouldn't be spending this money. Obviously, the demand from Albertans to have money restored to budgets like education and health, the infrastructure money going into maintenance and renovation of schools – the money has already been talked about by other people.

But what's important here is the whole planning process. I noticed that on February 23 of '99 in the *Hansard* debate on the Fiscal Responsibility Act – again, I always find that a little bizarre, that the government felt it had to pass legislation to keep itself from creating a deficit. That always struck me as odd. Did they need that legislation in order not to go over, that they had to somehow constrain themselves? That legislation will never make sense to me. Who did they think they were constraining? Obviously they had to constrain themselves.

Don't let me get off topic, Mr. Chairman. Keep me on topic. In this debate of the Provincial Treasurer, he says:

Twenty-five percent of [the surplus] will be available to us for items like infrastructure, pressures, and onetime capital spending that is in place already. There will be a plan where we can see in an orderly way what we can do to accelerate some of our infrastructure costs.

So the plan is simple yet detailed, but it builds in the fiscal discipline in terms of our own planning process. Every minister who's planning their budgetary spending has to realize that we have three-year business plans in place, that they're being reinforced by this particular act. This puts teeth in the three-year business planning process and puts discipline into our own particular planning [process].

But that's not in fact what's happened, and these remarks are 18 months old now. In fact, the three-year planning process for the most part has gone right out the window. Certainly that's what the Auditor General is bringing forward in his comments from the recently released '99-2000 Auditor General's report, that in fact the planning process isn't followed.

I used an analogy last night about, you know, if you restrict the amount of money so badly that's going into a program that they can't really do the program properly and then come flying in like some *deus ex machina* in the last moment and dump a whack of money on these projects, they can't in fact go backwards and do the project they were actually trying to do or offer the services they were actually trying to do or run the program they were actually trying to do. I mean, it's too late. Nine months of the year has gone by. So they take that injection of money and in trying to make some kind of recovery or perhaps looking forward into the future say: "Well, okay. We'll purchase equipment now with this injection of funds, and then we won't have to buy that equipment next year, and that'll free up money to put into programming." You know, this isn't part of the plan, folks.

So I'm really concerned, because I don't see the leadership coming forth from the government that is about a genuine planning process. At the same time, the government puts expectations on a number of groups that they work in the community, certainly on the nonprofit groups, that they're to develop absolutely gold-plated, blue-ribbon, award-winning business plans, and they're to know all this stuff and project three years into the future and absolutely stick to it, because if they don't, they'll get punished. They'll get less grant money. They'll get less contract money. They'll get punished. But nobody's doing that for this government or maybe the government has to pass another piece of legislation to somehow punish themselves, since they seem so keen on somehow passing legislation that's going to restrict them.

Another quote, again from the previous Provincial Treasurer from March of '99, A Plan for a Debt-Free Alberta: "Business plans are the cornerstones of Alberta's prudent fiscal management." Well, I

can see that that's what the government wanted to do or thought it was doing, but that's certainly not in fact what it's done. That's what I want to keep calling attention to. The planning process of this government has gone out the window, the baby and the bathwater, because they're not following these plans. They can't, not when the money is coming in such an unstructured and sort of peaks and valleys way.

10:30

Here's another comment from A Plan for a Debt-Free Alberta, issued in March of 1999.

Controls on in-year spending increases are legislated. No more than 25% of the economic cushion and any forecast revenue increases over budget can be committed to in-year spending increases or revenue reduction initiatives in a quarterly budget update.

Well, that's all fine and dandy, but even in this past year we saw that the government had to bring in an act in the spring to change its own Fiscal Responsibility Act, because they'd already spent more money than that 25 percent that they'd allowed themselves to. So they had to remove that 25 percent limit. They'd already broken their own rules, so, gosh, we'll just change the legislation temporarily. This is not a plan. This is fudging it after the fact to meet the reality of the choices that have actually been made.

I mean, essentially we've got a government that's operating on a three-month plan, not on a three-year plan. It's on a three-month plan. The amount of money that has been announced as released since – well, let me just pick three months back: September. Okay. Well, at the very end of August we had a whack of stuff come out. Oh, my goodness. There were press releases on the RHA salary settlements for \$39 million; a press release on eliminating accumulated deficits of voluntary organizations operating acute care facilities for \$8.9 million – I think that's bailing out the RHAs – Children's Forum and children at risk task force report, \$3.4 million; community mental health and eating disorders, \$13 million; centennial projects, \$50 million; seniors' housing and lodge accommodations, \$10 million; rent subsidies for low-income households, \$2 million; child welfare and handicapped children's services, Children's Forum, children at risk task force report, \$29.1 million.

Those are all press releases dated August 31, 2000. All that money poured out in one day. Oh, I'm sorry. I missed one: the Pine Lake tornado disaster recovery program at nine and a half million dollars. That also happened at the same time. Then we had the fire fighting costs, which were announced both at the end of August and on November 14; the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research also at the end of August; Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, August 31; 30 percent reduction in crop insurance premiums for farmers also August 31.

Then we get into September: energy tax refund, \$345 million; electricity auction rebate, \$60 million; senior supportive housing incentive program, \$10 million. Now, that's the one I asked the minister about when we were in supplementary estimates debate. That's the one that looks like the \$10 million for seniors has been announced twice, but I don't see more than \$10 million forthcoming, so I don't know what that second one was about. Education property tax reduction on September 13 is another announcement; farm income assistance program on October 6; Canada/Alberta infrastructure partnership on October 10. Oh, my goodness, this goes on for pages.

Well, there's no need for me to read this all into the record. I'm sure that the press releases are available. It does go on with another 20 announcements from the end of August up until – the last one I have here is November 14, which is when we started into this session. So over three months all that money was announced. It is a three-month planning process that we're operating under.

How is that manifesting itself? Well, here's the experience that I'm having at the constituency office. All this money is going back into health care. Certainly people were asking for that, and I've asked that money be reinvested into health care. But I have to ask about the planning process that's going on here, because the waiting lists are getting longer, not shorter. So what's going on here?

I mean, I used to phone up and try and argue my case on behalf of my constituents, that they needed to get into the hospital or get a bed or be considered on the waiting list for a particular type of surgery or treatment, and chances four years ago were pretty good that I could actually plead my case well enough to get the person in there. So obviously I'm successful at pleading cases. I don't think my ability there has lessened, but I'll tell you, I cannot get attention for anybody now, for any constituent. In the last six to eight months, nobody moves, no lists move, nobody gets added to them: "Sorry, ma'am; there are 30 people on that waiting list. They're all in as a bad shape as your constituent. Everybody's going to have to wait."

Here's another example: a constituent who has a pinched nerve in their back. They've now been at home since October, I think. They've been told that they'll have to wait until May to see the neurologist to even begin treatment. So here we have a person who is an active, contributing member of society, working hard, paying their taxes, whose now going to be out of commission for – what are we talking? – six, seven months.

Their point to me is: you know, this is costing the system a lot of money. This is costing WCB payments or insurance payments or the insurance coverage from the employer to keep this guy at home waiting to see a doctor. He goes, "You know, it's cheaper in the end run to fly me to Toronto to get the operation, and I'd be back at work in a month or two." At this rate he's not going to be back to work for a year. How is this a good plan? How is this addressing the system, not to mention what that's doing to that person and their quality of life and their family and their friends and their coworkers? How much is that costing, not only in money, which is important, but also in quality of life for them and for everybody around them?

Another example: someone that I work with has recently been diagnosed as a type 2 diabetic. You know, that's a very hard thing to face in your life. It's very difficult, and it's very tricky. At the beginning of this diagnosis to get it right you've got to learn a whole new system of what you eat, when you eat it, and all of this testing that goes on and how you get this right. With type 2 most people start out able to control the diabetes with diet and exercise and very careful testing. For the most part they don't need insulin, although some of them may be receiving medication for a sort of pancreas booster. So you've got to learn a lot when you're first diagnosed with this.

When does this person who's just been diagnosed get in for the educational component, what I call diabetes school, that they get sent to? March. That person has to go five months without the instruction about how they're supposed to manage essentially every waking hour of their life.

They said to their doctor: "Well, what am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to learn all this stuff? I know I'm supposed to be doing this. I know I'm supposed to be careful. You know, you can show me how to do the pinprick test and the pharmacist can show me how to do the test strips and things, but how am I supposed to do all this diet control? How do I learn all of this stuff? Who's going to tell me how to do this?" Well, "Sorry," says the doctor. "I can't get you into this diabetes school until March. I guess you could go to the library and get a book." This is, you know, a thoughtful person that this has happened to; I'm sure they will go and get a book.

But the system obviously intended that there be some intensive

counseling around nutrition and diet and exercise and a whole lifestyle change. The system intended that that counseling be available to them very quickly to help them get on the road to managing diabetes. This person is now going to have to wait five months. As described by their doctor, they're a raging diabetic. They're coming up, you know, 10 points higher than where they're supposed to be on their testing scale.

So what's going on? All this money is being put back into the system, yet we're not seeing improvements in the waiting lists. We're not seeing the improvements in treatment that's supposed to happen. We're hearing all the time about the cuts that happened in the mid-90s and the way the nurses were treated. They all left. We can't get them back now. This strikes me as really badly managed. That's my concern.

You know, it's our job here. This is what we're paid to do, to provide leadership and manage this budget carefully on behalf of all Albertans. I don't see the manifestation of that at all, and I certainly don't see it being manifested in a positive way.

10:40

We had the government cuts in '93, '94, '95. Money started to be put back in I think it was around '97 or '98. The government is recently going around touting: oh, we're back up to the levels we were at. Well, excuse me. You're back to the levels you were at in '94, which was after the majority of the cuts happened. So it hasn't really been restored back to where it was. Frankly, with the increase in population that we've had in Alberta, which is a good thing and is a good economic driver, the economic calculations that need to be done, the cost of living increases – a budget of a billion dollars in 1992 is more than that in the year 2000. You've got to allow for that cost of living and inflationary rate to be calculated into this.

So where do I see the movement of this government to the point where the health care system is renewed, rejuvenated, remodeled? I never saw that. That's what this was all supposed to be about. We were going to rejuvenate this health care system. We were just going to strip it down to the bones, and we were going to rebuild it right. I'm not seeing that.

The regional health authorities seem to have been the big panacea to this remodeling. Well, there are all kinds of problems involved with the regional health authorities and certainly with reporting and responsibility. Frankly, they may have the responsibility to provide the services, but they're kind of strapped if they don't have the proper finances to do it. How are they supposed to do it? That goes right back to this whole planning cycle. They can plan their little brains out, but if they don't have that sustainable funding, then their plans all fall apart.

When I look at performance measurements, at the performance of the government and of the health care system, I think we're sadly lacking. We're not coming up to the mark there, and in many ways I think we now need to develop different performance measurements.

I will certainly support the money that's in this appropriation bill, but I have serious concerns about the planning process that this government is using right now that is landing us in the position we're in.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this bill in Committee of the Whole.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've had some opportunity to speak to these estimates, but you know, I'm not quite done, so I was really pleased that I had this opportunity

tonight. I see a few things that I hadn't had a chance to mention.

I wanted to ask the minister about the Western Heritage Centre. I had a call from somebody who lives in Cochrane, and they just asked me what the plans were for the Western Heritage Centre. They've noticed that there are a lot of commercial buildings coming in there, kind of like a strip mall within the Western Heritage Centre. Did you know that? There's a restaurant now and a coffee shop. Something like that is either coming in or it's there, and they're a little worried.

I mean, if that's the goal, to make money there and try and balance - it's lost a lot of money over the years. If that's the goal, then is that what we want to do with museums? Do we want to make them commercialized? Is that the point in bringing those restaurants and commercial stores into the Western Heritage Centre? Now, when they were doing that they said: you know, there are some people who own restaurants in town that are a little worried that that isn't fair competition. That was their concern.

I really hope I get answers to this. I know the Minister of Community Development is going to read *Hansard* and answer my questions. Hello? Hello? And I don't mean *Hansard*. They're so good up there.

What else did she say about that? That was her question: what's the purpose of all these stores setting up in the Western Heritage Centre?

The other thing is: how did they get the contracts? Were they tendered out? Did different companies have the opportunity? I know. There's a catering business. That was it. A catering business supposedly gets a contract - and you could have banquets and dinners there. I'm embarrassed to say, married to my cowboy husband, that I haven't been to the Western Heritage Centre. Now, that is a crime, I know, and believe me, when we're in Cochrane next, I know we will. We spent three hours at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, and we spent a couple hours in Fort Macleod. [interjection] Oh yes, believe me.

You know what? As much I enjoy it, my husband, that's right up his alley. Anything western, anything native, anything cowboy: that's him. I guess we're on our way to Turner Valley next time. That's in your constituency, Mr. Chairman. You can brag, I know, but I have the honey producers' production plant in Spruce Grove, that I'll give you on a tour of.

So I really hope the minister will read *Hansard* in case he didn't hear all my questions about that, but that was the call I got from a constituent in Cochrane. So if that's happening, I would just like to know: why? Was it tendered out? I mean, maybe it's not happening, but this person - and I have the record of it in my constituency office - phoned me with these concerns of what's happening there, that it's changing from a museum to a commercial site. They didn't know if they were paying rent and how they got the contract and the catering contract. So if the minister wouldn't mind looking into that and responding, I would really appreciate that.

Another thing I was looking at was the seniors' housing. One of the other things that affects some of my constituents is the Youville home in St. Albert. Believe me, that Youville home has served the St. Albert community and area for a very long time. Regretfully, in the last few years it has not been able to serve the Sturgeon area, but certainly the people in St. Albert it has. In fact, just last month the Youville Sisters handed over the guardianship of it to Caritas Health Group. It was a touching and emotional time, because that has been something the Grey Nuns have done in St. Albert for a long time. They have provided health care for those people in St. Albert and area for a long, long time.

Now, the Youville home is an old building, and I know the board is seriously looking at building a new facility rather than renovating.

It just isn't feasible to renovate, so they're looking at this new building. I am wondering if there will be that centennial legacy funding coming for it, maybe for the legacy that the Grey Nuns have left. Maybe that could possibly be something that they could qualify for, or maybe that's already in the works.

MS BLAKEMAN: That's a credit to you if it is.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you. Thank you. Edmonton-Centre says it's a credit to me if it is. Well, I thank you for that.

MS BLAKEMAN: You worked on it.

MRS. SOETAERT: I thank you for that, but I would give far more credit to the board and the work that the board has done for the Youville home and certainly the residents and the people who continually work for the Youville home and most definitely the Grey Nuns, first and foremost the Grey Nuns.

My final thing in this opportunity was to talk about Milk River and the infrastructure that is slated . . . [interjection] Which highway is that? That's 4, I believe. You know, I have a map that I'm always going to bring out here just to remember all of those numbers. Of course everyone here knows that highway 794 has changed to 44. For seven years you've been hearing 794, and now it's 44. It was close to being named Soetaert Way, but at the last minute we decided 44 probably would be more practical and proper.

So back to Milk River and highway 4.

10:50

MS BLAKEMAN: Was that in the plan?

MRS. SOETAERT: Milk River?

MS BLAKEMAN: No. Changing the highway numbers.

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes, it was actually a good move, changing the highway numbers.

Now, Milk River, highway 4. Here is a community that for the most part wants the highway to pass - I'd better get this straight in my head - on the east side. The east side would mean going near a graveyard. Maybe there's a big hill that would have to be cut down a bit, worked within. Very few farmsteads disturbed; in fact, I don't think any. That's been the choice of most of the people in that community. Instead, the department has made it its priority to go on the west side, where a railroad track will have to be moved and access to the grain elevators will now be difficult. Farmers will have to travel, like, eight miles around to get to the grain elevators, where it used to be half a mile. About four or six farmsteads will be affected. Certainly one will be gone totally. The farmstead will be gone because of this highway.

The reason? I can't find out why. It isn't for financial reasons. It is more expensive to move the railroad tracks, to have more accesses, and to buy out those properties than it would be to go on the other side. People from the town have told me that it's political interference, that that's what happened, that there are one or two high-profile people down there who want it going on the west side rather than the east side. Now, Mr. Chairman, I would hope that the Minister of Infrastructure takes a second look at this, because this has split the town. This is affecting farmers. As a matter of fact, the town council of Warner had a vote: 5 to 6 in favour of lobbying the government to change that route. Instead of where the minister has decided to put it, on the west side, the county of Warner has asked the government to change their mind and put it on the east side.

Those are the people who live there. Those are the people who have to access that town, more so than the people traveling by.

I know there's a tourist information centre there, and I know that's what some people want people to see as they go by. I do know that if you want to access that information centre, you will, but if you're on that highway – and that's going to be part of the big Canamex – you're really not stopping at the tourist information centre. You're a big heavy truck; you're going through. You are not going to cross all the overpasses to go into town. But if you are a tourist looking for information on Writing-on-Stone provincial park or you want to canoe the Milk River, that's when you go into that wonderful tourist centre and get great maps.

I've actually canoed that Milk River. Some parts of it were pretty slow, and some parts of it were pretty good. They woke me up. Tipped only a couple of times. Tells you what a poor canoer I am.

The idea that I'm trying to point out here is that I know this is slated to be done next spring. I know that it is going on the wrong side of that town. I know that the majority of the people do not want it, and it's just shades of – I don't know. I don't know why. It's going to be more expensive to do it that way. It is going to disrupt more people, and local politicians in the county of Warner have said: we don't want it either for our farms. It's not convenient either. So, Mr. Chairman, I'm really worried about that.

If we had more time and a longer session, it would be a question in question period. Then I would most certainly hope to get a real answer from the minister. I can't get a cost-benefit analysis from him. You know why? Because I don't believe it's done. I think it is political pressure from a small group, who have insisted that the minister go by the west route come heck or high water, do it so that people can see the tourist centre and the dinosaur as they go by. That does not serve that community. It does not serve the people traveling. It does not serve industry as they go by. It just serves a couple of people, who for reasons I don't know have decided that that priority is more important than people, than established farms that have been there for decades.

I don't know how to get him to change his mind on that. I don't know what else I can do. As the critic of that, as a person who has listened to so many people – I've read all the articles from Milk River. People have called me. I know Lethbridge-East has a file that thick on it. I'm really worried about what's happening in Milk River. In the long run we're going to pay more and it will be inconvenient for people and I think it will take years, if that goes through, for that town to heal all the hurts that have happened over that highway. Now, isn't that a pity.

I'll tell you that when they decided to finally rebuild highway 794, the engineer said to me: we have never had such an easy time of talking to local people as to where their driveways will have to be put, as to whose yards will have to be cut up a bit; never had such an easy time planning a highway. Because the community asked for it and needed it. That's what happened.

In this case the community does not want the highway on that side. That's why it will be headache upon headache and heartache upon heartache for the people. I hope the minister is listening.

So, Mr. Chairman, those were three more points that I'm glad I've had the opportunity to speak to tonight. I hope the Minister of Infrastructure does a second think on this, because certainly the people of Milk River deserve that. I would expect their MLA should be speaking for them, as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, would like to add

some additional comments to supplementary estimates this evening. Listening to the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert reminded me of my trip to Milk River and a stop at the local Co-op gas station where the operator of that station, unsolicited, came out with this huge barrage of comments about that highway. Certainly what I heard from him echoes what we've heard this evening from my colleague. I think she has hit the nail on the head there. It is certainly a consideration for the minister in terms of whether or not they're going to go ahead with the proposed plans as they've been outlined. I think she is right: it has divided the community. People are very upset. This fellow told me that he is quite prepared to show his displeasure when it comes to the next election. So we'll see what happens there.

Also, once he got on a tear about the highway, he said: I've got more concerns about this government. He had issues around health care, issues that I don't see having been addressed in these estimates. Those were about access to health care for rural communities, once again. We've heard those concerns in the past, Mr. Chairman. What he said to me was that he hopes that if the Premier ever breaks his leg, he does it down in that backcountry. He's going to throw him into the back of the pickup truck and take him over the country roads to the local hospital, and then the government will have an appreciation for how necessary tertiary care is in rural communities.

Mr. Chairman, I certainly have to agree that all the money being asked for and thrown back into health care hasn't addressed outstanding issues at all. In fact, it was last night that I got a call from a local constituent who called me up at home on a rant and didn't even say, "Hi, how are you?" She just said her name and went into the concerns she had about her sister, who had recently broken her ankle in three spots and had been sitting in the University hospital for 36 hours after having been transferred from the Grey Nuns, which was a concern that I talked about the last time I talked in supplementary estimates, about how we can't get adequate care at our local hospital. Many people are being shipped out to the U, and what that does is add great stress and strain on families and pain certainly for the patient and uncertainty in terms of when and how they're going to be properly cared for.

11:00

Well, she was very concerned because, of course, her sister needs an operation to set the bones, and after 36 hours it looked like there was no end in sight. She called me at about 7 o'clock at night. Of course, unless it was an extreme emergency, there would be no further operations that evening, and she was wondering how long this was going to go on. Her sister was doped up regularly, so at least she wasn't in a great deal of pain, but of course she was missing work, not starting the healing process, looking forward to a recovery time that would be substantially longer than it would have been had the bones been set when the accident happened, and with no end in sight, Mr. Chairman.

I said to her that the good news was that her sister hadn't been sent home. We have had several instances where people with broken legs or ankles or bones in their feet have been sent home to wait until they could be called back into surgery, which doesn't seem to be a very efficient use of dollars, Mr. Chairman. We certainly don't see those kinds of concerns being addressed in these supplementary estimates.

So what I said to her was that it isn't all bad news in terms of how the process is working right now and that she needed to outline, write down a chronology of what had happened to her sister and follow it up as they go through the process so that it can be brought to the minister of health's attention. We don't seem to be getting any kind of a focus on those kinds of issues in this Legislature,

regardless of the money being dumped back into the system. We're not meeting the primary needs of people in need on any given day in this province, Mr. Chairman, and that is really unfortunate.

This woman was absolutely outraged. She said that her sister has to hobble to the washroom on one leg while the other one is in a great deal of pain through the hobbling process, having been broken in three places. She's on very heavy painkillers. They are worried about the withdrawal symptoms afterwards. She's away from her home, away from her family, away from her children. Her husband is having to take time off work, so now they've got two incomes that are in jeopardy, and the situation is completely disruptive for the entire family, Mr. Chairman. That's just this week's bad-news story about health care in this province, which none of these additional dollars seems to have adequately addressed.

I'll leave health care for the time being, because I really want to get back to the supplementary estimates on Environment. I didn't have much of an opportunity the other evening to speak to the Environment estimates because of the number of departments that we had to go through in that evening. I do want to come back and address some of the issues in fire fighting, which is where the dollars have been asked for in these estimates.

What we see here is a 77 percent increase in the funding asked for in fire fighting. Now, nobody wants to complain about dollars asked for in fire fighting, Mr. Chairman, because we all know how needed and necessary fire fighting is in the province of Alberta for many reasons, not just to preserve the forests but to preserve the forest industry, often to preserve wildlife and other agricultural land uses and buildings and towns. We want fire protection, but we also want estimates and costs for fire protection to be at least reasonably accurate, to be based on best case scenarios. It isn't just me asking for this. We literally see this document for the second year in a row in the Auditor General's report.

If we take a look at the annual report of the Auditor General, 1999-2000, we see that on page 104 they talk about the financial administration of fire fighting. What the Auditor General talks about there is that the year previous, being the '99-2000 year, five recommendations were made by the department regarding the financial administration of fire fighting. In addition to these recommendations, the AG is documenting that "the Department received dozens of other fire fighting-related recommendations as the result of internal operational reviews." Good to do internal operational reviews. Good to incorporate those recommendations. So what's happened so far? Well, really nothing, Mr. Chairman.

What the Auditor General goes on to say is that

in order to give the Department time to decide its priorities and to implement changes, we will wait until 2000-01 to follow up progress against our recommendations.

So what we have is a report that came out for the '99-2000 year where there were a number of recommendations, more internal recommendations. By the time of printing of the 2000-2001 AG's report nothing has happened so far. Let's hope that some of those recommendations are implemented quickly, Mr. Chairman, because certainly some of them are very, very easy to implement.

If we go back and take a look at the annual report of the Auditor General of Alberta, 1998-1999, we actually see those recommendations for what they are. Some of them I did mention briefly in my comments the other night in terms of fire fighting, but they certainly deserve a little more attention.

We want to know what the status is, Mr. Chairman, of addressing the recommendations from the '98-99 Auditor General's report. We want to know why these recommendations haven't been implemented, the one out of five or one out of any of the internal dozens of recommendations that were made, by this point in time. They're

quite easy to take a look at, quite easy to process, and just simply haven't been met at this time.

It actually shows on page 150 of the '98-99 report recommendation 27, where the AG states that

it is recommended that the Department of Environment budget for the expected annual fire fighting costs based on the most current information. Further, it is recommended that the fire fighting budget be subject to legislative approval, including approval for any supplemental estimates required during the year.

That recommendation is broken down into the five subrecommendations that the AG refers to in the subsequent year's report.

So what does he ask for first? He says that in his view "the fire fighting budget should be controlled by the Legislative vote process." Well, what a good idea, Mr. Chairman, something we've asked for on this side of the House many times. We know that the government doesn't like that kind of scrutiny and doesn't like to have to justify what they're doing, but in fact it's the best way to spend the dollars of the people of this province, and fire fighting is no exception.

What we see is that the fund that the dollars come out of provides the opportunity for expenditure without any legislative approval at all. At this time "it is a fund to be distributed at the discretion of the Minister, subject to guidelines established by Treasury Board." The AG believes, as we do, that the controls embodied in the annual estimates and the vote process are important to ensuring accountability throughout the process, Mr. Chairman. We have asked for more accountability in any number of instances, not just in this department but in many departments, and we see this backed up by the Auditor General.

What he goes on to talk about, too, is that "the Ministry is required to operate financially within centrally approved financial parameters" and having a separate fund arrangement for fire fighting "offers significantly greater flexibility than budgeting through the Legislative vote process." Well, the minister of course likes to have that kind of flexibility, because they can do what they want, when they want, how they want, and easily come back and ask for more money. It isn't a case where it's not possible for them to budget reasonably from year to year.

The AG goes on to talk about how in fact "the Department has the ability to forecast a severe fire season early in the fiscal year," which is a little bit of what I talked about before. The budget is brought in early in the year, before March. That's prior to fire season. We know what a lot of the weather conditions are at that time. You can make estimates based on several of the last years' fire-fighting expenses and rainfalls, and we know what the precipitation load has been in the province. We know where the groundwater tables are. There's good science, where we can make excellent projections in terms of what supplemental estimates might be needed, what costs there are that could be incurred at that time and should be incorporated into the budget at that time, not in a separate fund, as the minister so likes to do.

So preparing supplemental estimates, then, should not be a compelling reason to avoid the legislative process. This is a process that can easily be incorporated into budgets. If fire seasons then turn out to be less than what were expected or budgeted for, unused funds can just go back, and we'd be happy to support that, Mr. Chairman. I think it would be a really good idea.

11:10

He goes on to talk about how "best estimates for the year should form the budget request." Well, we've talked about that a lot. It's just best practice, good business practice, reasonable ways to

anticipate annual fire-fighting responsibilities, and they are. As the AG says, fire fighting responsibilities are routine in the sense that the department has to address these challenges each and every year.

He goes on to talk about how "prudent management and accountability dictate that an organization should budget for its expected annual expenditures based on the most current information available." Well, that's what you do in your household. That's what you should be doing in government, and certainly fires are no exception, Mr. Chairman. Easy to do that. He talks about, gives them good documentation in terms of the guidelines they should use. He talks about calculating the "recent historical results plus sophisticated predictive capacity based on systems that monitor and analyze weather," all of which the department has, all of which they do a good job at. Not just weather but vegetation and all the other significant forest fire factors, which we have gone over in detail in budget estimates and which the minister is well aware of.

They can't always predict the severity of a fire with the actual outcome of the cost for the season, but there is a framework arranged so that they can predict what is reasonable. So they can make a best estimate, which is what a budget is supposed to be, which is why they could incorporate it in the budgetary process rather than going through the separate fund that they estimate under now.

So having done that, then why do they ask for less money than they're going to need? We don't know the answer to that, Mr. Chairman, but we would expect those answers to be forthcoming fairly soon because we are soon going to be at another budget year and the start of another fire season. We want to ensure that we get a good estimate, the best possible estimate available from the department on that.

The AG goes on to talk about: "upcoming replacements and upgrades should also be budgeted." Well, I talked about that the other day just briefly when we talked about improvements to fire airstrips. The AG agrees. He says:

Of increasing concern in recent years, the Department needs to plan for the replacement or upgrade of its fire fighting infrastructure. For example, the Department feels that community airports need to be upgraded and aircraft and equipment replaced. These types of expenditure should also be budgeted annually as they support the essential service.

Airstrips do not disintegrate overnight. There's an erosion over time. There is a maintenance and upkeep standard that needs to be met, and you don't find out about that in one day or yesterday. There's a building process time for that, and as you would maintain any other type of infrastructure like roads, you should be maintaining fire-fighting infrastructure. All of that is completely predictable, Mr. Chairman, and certainly the department is able to forecast those in advance. So it is absolutely inexcusable that we see those kinds of costs coming forward in an estimate budget.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Now, the other point that he makes is that "financial reporting issues can also be resolved through Departmental budgeting." What that means is that solutions to existing financial reporting issues that we've heard about repeatedly could easily be taken care of if they'd just do adequate budgeting. If they did that, if they did forecasting for fires in a predictable kind of fashion, like we see other estimates coming through at budget time, then the need for the enhancement fund should also be reviewed, which is also one of the AG's recommendations. There wouldn't be a need for this large fund if they did proper budgeting, and we think that the department should certainly take a look at this.

A few other questions that I would like to address before I run out

of time. Does the department continue to tender for contract services, or does it now issue requests for proposals, as recommended by the Auditor General? We would like that cleared up. Certainly we would suggest that the department follow the Auditor General's recommendations. We would like to know what services are tendered. Hopefully, I'll get answers to those questions in a timely fashion. I don't want to have to wait to put it in a written question in the next legislative session.

Also, in addition to that, for which services is a request for proposals issued? So if we could get that information.

Does the department do a complete cost-benefit analysis, being sure to consider all relevant data, before contracting out services? The AG pointed out that the analysis that the department has been doing was not adequate and was sometimes done after the services had been contracted out. Easy to clean that up, Mr. Chairman, and I would like to see that addressed.

A couple of questions. What is the minister's projected estimate of the amount of Alberta's forest that will be burnt in the next five, 10, and 20 years? I ask that, Mr. Chairman, because these estimates must be taken into account when we talk about timber allocations and the impact of various commercial and recreational activities on Alberta's green spaces. This is going to be critical in the years to come. You know, when we talk to industry, they talk all the time about the overallocation of the timber resources. Every time we have a large forest fire, that significantly bites into their inventories and puts more pressure on areas to be developed in terms of timber resources, which puts more pressure on lack of access for commercial and recreational activities in other areas.

It also puts more pressure on protected spaces, and that is something this Assembly knows we are particularly concerned about. We need to start doing some adequate forecasting in these areas, because we have far too many requests for our green spaces now. The landscape is under a great deal of pressure, and that puts other species at risk in the province. We have seen the consequences of that in the past. We can completely alleviate those kinds of pressures with proper planning. That's all it takes, Mr. Chairman. Not lobbying by specific groups but proper planning that takes into account the sustainability of the landscape of the province in a manner in which we want it to go forward for not just the next five years but for our children and for their children. This is an issue that this government has neglected to take a look at. They seem to plan in election-year cycles rather than in viable, operational cycles that would maintain the viability of Alberta landscapes for all users, not just for environmental users or for species but also for agricultural users, for commercial users, and for sustainability in terms of access to water and the land.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I've been sitting and wondering whether I was going to get an opportunity. My colleague had so many questions and so many excellent comments that I thought I might not be afforded this last-gasp opportunity to raise some concerns and ask some questions before we retire the supplementary estimates for 2000.

MR. SMITH: The last time in your career.

MR. DICKSON: You know, I try hard not to wallow in nostalgia, Mr. Chairman, and I'm encouraged to do exactly that by the Minister of Gaming. If I had ever realized that being at the Tuxis and older boys' parliament with the distinguished Minister of Gaming would

land me here at 11:19 a month before Christmas, I might have taken some different choices in my life. At the time I'm sure he told me he was the leader of men, and I thought that when he came to the Legislature, I should come as well.

MRS. SOETAERT: You were here before him.

MR. DICKSON: Well, that's true too.

There were a couple of observations I wanted to make when we're dealing with supplementary supply, and I might start by saying how disappointed so many Calgarians were when there was a meeting at what's now called, I think, the Euro-Canadian club, in lovely Calgary-Bow on the banks of the Bow River. This happened about a month ago. The school community in Calgary got very excited, Mr. Chairman, because word went out, word spread out, fanned out through the community like a brushfire. The word was that the Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and the Deputy Minister of Learning were coming to Calgary to meet with the Calgary school community.

We must have had about 400 people in a room. There were people from the Calgary public school board, there were many, many school council chairs, and there were parents, teachers, and representatives of the teaching profession. I recognized a couple of school principals I knew. They were there as part of the LEAP program. You'd know, Mr. Chairman, that in Calgary the LEAP program is the device that's been developed by the Calgary board of education to try and decide how they go about determining what schools should close.

Obviously this is something that aroused a lot of interest. I'm sure in Calgary-Fish Creek it may not be so much a problem, but I know in some communities it is. I see my friend from Calgary-Fort there. He represents some of those older communities where we don't have as many children now as would have been the case a long time before.

11:20

In any event, I attended the Friday night of this Friday night and Saturday meeting. People were very interested to hear what was going to happen with respect to what the announcement was going to be in terms of the school utilization formula. What's happening is we have too many new areas in Calgary that cannot get a school, and we understand the province is saying: well, we're using the school utilization formula, and you'll get no new schools in Calgary until you have a higher rate of utilization. What was so distressing is that the government has been promising for at least the last year and a half that the school utilization formula would be revised, and every government minister – and maybe, Mr. Chairman, even you've shared this in your constituency – people have said that the formula is too arbitrary; it doesn't accurately reflect lots of ways that our public schools are being used on a meritorious basis, but they don't get credit under that existing formula. So the government had said that we will import some more flexibility.

Now, we happen to be lucky to have here a former chairman of the Calgary board of education as I look around. We have expertise here. I don't know whether we'll hear from the Minister of Learning here tonight, but maybe the former, former, former, former chairman of the Calgary board of education can tell us what's wrong with that school utilization formula. All the school councils in Calgary know it, and the minister has acknowledged it.

So I specifically went to the Euro-Canadian club because I thought we were going to have at least the outline presented to all of this Calgary school community of what the new school utilization formula would look like. I sat there and I listened to the Deputy

Minister of Learning and the Deputy Minister of Infrastructure, and they teased us. They said: well, we continue to work on this; there will be changes. I thought, Mr. Chairman: what an insult to these people who have come out, who have been waiting for an announcement of what the changes are going to be. You have all of these key stakeholders, to use the government parlance, in education, and we had no news to share with them. The government wouldn't tell us what that formula is going to be changed to, what the changes are going to be. What does that show us?

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Mr. Chairman, I'm so pleased to see you in the chair this evening, and I'm hopeful that you're going to have some opportunity to offer some input in this because of your experience in education.

I'm distressed. In the supplementary supply debate this would have been, if you like – in law there's an expression called last clear chance. This was the Minister of Infrastructure's and the Minister of Learning's last clear chance to come in front of this Assembly and tell us what the changes would be to the school utilization formula. As I look around, the associate minister of health may know what that new school utilization formula looks like. Our new colleague from Red Deer: somebody may have shared with her when she was working hard in the by-election campaign and given her some ammunition so that when she went door-to-door and people complained about education, she'd be able to say: you know, there's going to be a new school utilization formula, these are the new criteria, and this is how it's going to apply and this is when it's going to kick in. Maybe she has that information. I don't have it. Maybe the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake has got that information.

This is too much like the Whack-a-Mole game. I mean, we can go around asking people. I don't know who has the secret. I don't know who knows that information. So if somebody could put their hand up, it would save having to go from member to member to member to find out who has that information. But I don't think it should be such a game; do you, members? Do you think it should be so tough to find out what's happening with the school utilization formula? We need to know what's going on with that school utilization formula, and I haven't heard.

The other meeting that I found instructive was going to Central Memorial high school. It was a meeting organized by SPEAK, Support Public Education – Act for Kids. Once again a lot of school counselor representatives came together, and lots of concerns about overcrowded classrooms. Where in Bill 28, anywhere in this little flimsy four pages – I mean, you lose it. It's not even substantial enough to be a bookmark, it's such a skinny bill. Where in Bill 28 is anything that's going to address overcrowded classrooms? There's nothing that addresses the school utilization formula. So the minister comes along and asks for the extraordinary kind of relief, more dough, when we don't have a clear sense of answers to those questions.

All members maybe would want to spend a minute and reflect on this process. Is there anybody dissatisfied with this budget process, Mr. Chairman? Is there anybody dissatisfied with this process?

AN HON. MEMBER: Satisfied or dissatisfied?

MR. DICKSON: Dissatisfied with the process.

MRS. SOETAERT: I am.

MR. DICKSON: Anybody else dissatisfied by the process?

Chairman's Ruling Rhetorical Questions

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I don't know where it is that you're authorized to call these sort of impromptu votes. I think hon. members should know by now that rhetorical questions are not to be answered. I would ask the hon. member not to awaken too many people by your votes.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, you've caught me out, and I confess what I was hoping to do was to economize on time. The evening is late, and I thought if I could integrate some of the concerns that the government members had in my comments, we'd be able to save 20 or 30 other speeches that are going to be tried to be jammed in, but they're going to have to do it on their own. I tried.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: The point is this. We ask questions around the supplementary estimates, and do we get answers, Mr. Chairman? You will remember back to Monday evening, November 20 – this is only a couple of days ago – we were looking for answers from the Health and Wellness minister, and we didn't get them. If you look through *Hansard*, the kinds of things that call out for some explanation. We have the Minister of Health and Wellness on November 20 telling us that "our health authorities are doing a remarkable job in attracting physicians to this province."

Well, Mr. Chairman, in downtown Calgary we have a substantial number of foreign-trained physicians. Why don't we spend a fraction of the dollars that we pay headhunters to send off to South Africa to find physicians that we sort of take away from those countries that also need physicians? Why don't we recognize that in our communities, certainly in Calgary, there are plenty of people who have medical training, who have practised as physicians?

I remember a reporter telling me he was at the Westin hotel in Calgary, and there was a conference with physicians talking about the challenges of rural practice. People from all over the world were there. He left the conference, and the parking lot attendant setting up the bill had been a doctor in another country. This is the guy in the little booth in the parking lot taking the ticket and collecting payment for somebody parking at the Westin hotel. The reporter started talking to this fellow, and he explained how he had come from another country, had been trained as a physician, had practised in that other country, and has been waiting over four years to try to be accredited in Canada.

11:30

It seems to me, Mr. Chairman, if we spent just a fraction of the dollars we spend on headhunters, we'd be able to utilize some of the talent of those new Canadians, those people who are looking for work. And I'm embarrassed as an Albertan that that sort of thing happens and we don't do a better job with that.

Mr. Chairman, there were a couple of other things I was going to ask. The Minister of Municipal Affairs the other night told us about some of the reasons why he was looking for additional funding. What I didn't hear him say and what I was waiting for was a specific response to the recommendation from the Information and Privacy Commissioner. That report landed on our desk maybe last Wednesday or Thursday. [interjections] Well, I'm talking about what's missing, hon. minister, through the chair. What I'm talking about is that there was a recommendation from the Information and Privacy Commissioner of this province, who challenged the government again and said it's important that this province deal with the protection of privacy in the nonpublic sector. That's a recommendation he's continued to make.

You know, we've heard comments that this is something govern-

ment is working on, but the reality, Minister of Municipal Affairs, through the chair, is that other provinces in fact are holding public hearings. Other provinces are in a very public way moving towards legislation. I saw a draft bill the other day from Saskatchewan and draft legislation from Ontario. This Minister of Municipal Affairs isn't providing us with any information in that respect, and it makes it tough to deal with supplementary supply.

The Minister of Health and Wellness told us the other day that one of the things that's going to happen is \$13 million for the Alberta Mental Health Board to enhance community programs for people suffering. My question would be: why wasn't that part of the budget? Why wasn't that dealt with in March of 2000? The mental health crisis in this province is no more aggravated in November of 2000 than it was in March of 2000. Mr. Chairman, why would it be that that sort of thing couldn't be addressed then?

The Building Better Bridges report identified higher wages, so we see some provision for that in the supplementary estimates and in the appropriation bill. Why didn't we deal with that in March? You know, that's not in the category of a forest fire. I mean, that's something that could have been addressed then.

Mr. Chairman, I'd ask some questions about what was happening with Bill 40 and the fact that regional health authorities geared up, did in-service training, did a lot of work to prepare for the advent of Bill 40. December 15 was to be the date for proclamation of that legislation. It hasn't been proclaimed. We understand the deadline is off. What are the regional health authorities to do? They need certainty, and they're not getting it from this government. One would think that would be something government would be prepared to come in and talk about and to tell us.

Mr. Chairman, rent subsidies for low-income households. We've got a provision in an announcement made August 31, 2000. What I want to ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Minister of Infrastructure – I read that the Member for Fort McMurray, for the Wood Buffalo area, is talking about calling for rent controls. I applaud his advocacy on behalf of constituents who can't find an affordable place to live. He's doing what an MLA is supposed to do: he's raising those concerns and he's looking for answers.

Well, in Calgary-Buffalo over 75 percent of my constituents are renters. Many of them are facing dramatic rent increases, and that was before the KEP came along and the 20 percent further increase in electricity rates and 35 percent increase in natural gas rates. Those costs are all being passed on to my tenants. Where's the government remedy to deal with that? Maybe the member from the Wood Buffalo region has got some assurances that that's going to be addressed in some concrete way. I haven't heard them in this Assembly. I don't see that being addressed in a supplementary estimate package. Those are issues that are important to people not just in Fort McMurray but in downtown Calgary and I expect in Edmonton. Those are issues that we should be dealing with, we should be getting answers for, and I don't see them, Mr. Chairman.

It seems to me that for persons with developmental disabilities, we continue to have a real problem there, Mr. Chairman. I'll give credit to the government that they've decided to supplement the pathetically low salaries that are paid to people who work in that area, and that's positive. But we have a real problem with governance. I see the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness opposite, and he's working furiously away at his desk. He may be penning a note to the Provincial Treasurer this very moment saying: when are we going to clean up the mess that's been created with that structure of local PDD boards?

I'd remind members that when the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness came to Calgary and talked to those groups, people got really excited. They thought: here's a fellow who's taken the trouble

to come and listen. I think everybody was impressed. Everybody I talked to that met the Associate Minister of Health of Wellness was impressed. They got a bit excited when they heard the report was coming. But the difficulty is that we don't see any action on cleaning up the mess with governance.

Mr. Chairman, it's a good thing it's committee. I may get up again. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real pleasure to stand this evening and speak to the supplementary estimates legislation. It's important that we look at some of the issues that come up in terms of how the allocations are put out.

We notice that as we get into looking at, say, the Infrastructure dollars, there's a number of values that go out in terms of the allocation to different institutions. What you have to do is begin to question the methods that they're using and the protocol that they use to determine which institutions get their dollars and which do not.

I notice the dollars that are going out to NAIT to expand the capacity to put out a high-tech program, yet when it came time to do the funding for the University of Lethbridge's library, this group failed to provide the dollars to do that. What they did was allow them to borrow the money, and then they have to pay it back out of their operating grant. Well, you know, that's kind of creating a double standard as you go across and develop different methods of putting together the infrastructure that's necessary for the support of the education programs, especially the advanced education programs, in our province. If they want to finance these kinds of things over time and allow for local discretion to build their infrastructure with the materials they're putting together, what they have to do is look at the possibility of developing a per unit funding so they end up with a formula that allows them to have certain dollars for capital just the way they now have certain dollars for their operating grant.

11:40

But effectively what they've done at the University of Lethbridge is reduce the operating grant now by the amount of money that is necessary to service a debt load that's there because of the obligation they have now when they're building their new library. If you have to look at advanced education institutions, I don't think there's any part that's more critical to the appropriate and proper functioning of a university than a library that's adequate, a library that is modern, a library that has the kind of volumes that will broadly support the different programs that are being offered by the institution.

You know, we look at the University of Lethbridge, and they were always ranked quite high for the midsized university category, but one of the criteria that always came out in terms of their ranking was the fact that their library resources were limited. They didn't have what was considered an adequate library service for their students when they were compared to the other midsized universities across the country. We have to look at it and see how these kinds of priorities get put in place.

When we were in Committee of Supply, I also mentioned the fact that I was quite disappointed in the way the dollars were allocated to the income support or the supplementary payment to the agricultural sector this fall. What they did was just basically pay it on the past list of eligible farmers. Yet we look at the turnover of land in

the province, and a number of individuals were affected very badly by that. They were farming new land this year that they didn't get payments on because the list was made up of the people who farmed land in 1999. What in essence we did was we had some leakage out of those dollars to the nonag sector, and the individuals who were farming the year before were given these dollars.

I guess, Mr. Chairman, what we're really saying here in these two examples I give is that as we go through the initial budgeting process to give our budget debate and the budget authorization in the spring session and then we look at the potential for supplementary supply, we have to look at it also in terms of how those additional dollars either support or violate the kind of parameters that were put in place for the budgeting we had in the spring. I guess the formulas and the allocation procedures that are used in the initial budget don't really seem to follow as we get into looking at supplementary estimates and supplementary dollars to kind of fill in the needs of the province as we get to the subsequent opportunities to spend. These are also just a function of whether or not we happen to be having a good revenue year, and we get to spend that extra 25 percent and how it works out. You know, we're now down to the point where the contingency fund in the . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry to interrupt the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, but under Standing Order 61(4) I must put the question proposing the approval of the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for consideration by the Committee of the Whole. Does the committee approve the following appropriation bill: Bill 28, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2). All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no. Carried.
Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports Bill 28.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[At 11:47 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, November 23, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/11/23

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O divine Father, as we conclude our work and prepare to return to our constituencies, help us to draw strength from the opportunities to renew our friendships and acquaintances with the people we were elected to serve. Guide us to reflect upon Thy bounty so that we may more deeply appreciate how fortunate we are to live in and to serve in Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Hon. members, I'm pleased to acknowledge that today, November 23, is the 13th anniversary of the hon. Member for Drumheller-Chinook, the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. She was first elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in the by-election of November 23, 1987.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly Jeanette Fuhr, Bruce Fuhr, Murray Kulak, and Gerry Levasseur. These four generous individuals participated in an auction to raise funds in support of Team Canada and their preparations for the 2000 Culinary Olympics. Thanks in part to the support from good people like our guests today, Team Canada had an excellent showing at the Olympics held recently in Erfurt, Germany. The team placed fourth overall and came home with one grand gold, three gold, and one silver medal in the various competitions. Our visitors contributed to the team's efforts by bidding on lunch with the Premier, and I'm very pleased to be able to welcome them here today. Earlier I had the opportunity of sharing a meal with them. They're seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I ask you to please join me in offering them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed truly a real honour and pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all Members of this Legislative Assembly two very special people from the constituency of Vegreville-Viking seated in your gallery, a former MLA that served in this Legislature from 1971-86, Mr. John Batiuk and his wife, Rose. Mr. Batiuk and his very supportive wife, Rose, set the very high standard of work ethic and dedication to constituents in the former constituency of Vegreville, which now forms the larger constituency of Vegreville-Viking. I wish them all the best and good health. I know they have risen in the Assembly to accept the warm response, but please give them another hearty support.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to members of this Assembly members of the Northern Alberta Development Council that are seated in your gallery as well. The NADC covers 60 percent of the geographical mass of this province and yet has a population of only 10 percent of our province. The members of the public that represent the NADC

are here today. I would ask them to stand as I call their names. Representing Fort McMurray we have Art Avery. We have Doris Courtoreille from Kinuso; Berkley Ferguson from Boyle; Gerald McIvor, vice-chair of the NADC, from Whitecourt; Pete Merlo from Grande Prairie; Mike Procter from Peace River; and Al Toews from Fort Vermilion. Also here today from the NADC based in Peace River are Pat Nelson, Audrey DeWit, and Brad Bishop from our staff. They bring a wealth of experience, and I ask them all to stand to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on osteoporosis and mature women's health on November 22 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Alberta Government to take an enlightened preventative approach and add the newer and more effective medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had tabled a petition yesterday with respect to a relocation of patients at unit 47 of the Foothills hospital. I'd ask that that now be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Calgary Regional Health Authority (CRHA) to reconsider the relocation of Unit 47 of the Foothills Hospital.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition which I presented to this Assembly on November 22, 2000, requesting that the provincial government stop promoting private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I tabled yesterday be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

Bill 30**Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2)**

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 30, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2). This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will enable us to deliver the tax rebate to Albertans, some \$690 million in two cheques of \$150, the first of which is going out today. This bill defines the eligibility for that. It is required in order that the federal government will use their list of tax filers to deliver this out of Winnipeg. I'd be pleased to say that that involves 2.3 million people in the deliverance of these cheques.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise and table the appropriate number of copies of three reports: our response to recommendations of the Auditor General; the outline of the process and initiatives for addressing the child welfare caseload growth report, Connecting the Dots; and, finally, our response for notice of implementation for the contract wage enhancement amount announced earlier this month.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. One is the CFB West Master Plan supporting information document outlining the historic dedication for the military base in Calgary.

The second tabling I have, Mr. Speaker, is the minutes of the meeting of July 18, 2000, of the Citizen's Advisory Roundtable outlining the outstanding issues with respect to base development and community input.

1:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table some more monthly bill comparisons which have been supplied by ATCO Electric in their hearing on the regulated rate option before the EUB comparing the proposed price schedule for a consumer of 600 to 1,500 to 13,000 kilowatt hours of electricity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three documents to table. The first tabling is a document called Boyle McCauley Health Centre Annual Review. This community-owned health centre responds to the unique needs of Edmonton's inner-city residents through a wide range of holistic and accessible services in an effective and compassionate manner.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a copy of a letter to the Premier from Sylvia Campbell, president of the Southern Alberta

Environmental Group. This group is asking the Premier to commission a public review of the environmental, health, and social consequences and impact of factory farming and industrial livestock operations in Alberta.

The third and final document, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from Wayne Magnuson of Calgary requesting me to point out to the Premier that the provincial prosperity is passing by hungry children of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings, and I'll proceed as quickly as I can.

Firstly, a set of amendments that the opposition puts forward in the spirit of constructive opposition to Bill 29, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000.

Secondly, a copy of the Duty Counsel Manual that's produced by the Legal Aid Society of Alberta.

Next, a series of articles with respect to the Lougheed Building and the importance of the Lougheed Building being preserved. Firstly, an editorial from the *Calgary Herald*, May 29, 1999. Next, an excerpt from *Legacy* magazine, November 19, '99, entitled Time for a Change: The Alberta Historical Resources Act. Next, a *Calgary Herald* editorial, February 2, 1999, Historic Deal: Saving the Lougheed Would Set a Valuable Precedent. Next, an excerpt from *Alberta Views* magazine entitled Please Save the Grand/Lougheed. Next, an article which appeared in *Legacy* magazine, February 2000, entitled Time for a Change. Next, an opinion piece by Professor Donald B. Smith, department of history, University of Calgary, entitled Spare the Lougheed. Further, an editorial, *Calgary Herald*, November 5, 1999: Razing the Lougheed Building Demolishes a Part of Us All. And finally, an excerpt from a book entitled *Calgary's Century: Calgary in the Twentieth Century* from the vantage point of one of Alberta's most historic buildings.

Finally, Mr. Speaker – and thank you very much for your patience – the results of the Edmonton-Meadowlark constituency questionnaire conducted in October 2000 and submitted on behalf of my colleague for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have four separate tablings. The first tabling is particularly significant as today the Premier and the Treasurer announced a survey for Albertans. Well, I have just completed a survey of the constituents of Edmonton-Glenora. I'd like to table the results of that survey. It clearly shows that the priorities are targeting spending on priority programs, the elimination of health care premiums, and the reduction of postsecondary tuition fees.

Mr. Speaker, the second tabling I have is correspondence from Chantelle McNichol, the director of the International Adoption Families Association, which represents over 200 families in Alberta. They're asking for the speedy passage of Bill 209 and hoping that it will be passed in this session and the debate won't be truncated through some process.

The third tabling is a document entitled There is an Alternative. This is a policy document published by the Alberta New Democrats, and what it demonstrates is that their tax policy calls for a tax increase of some \$500 million, Mr. Speaker.

And finally, an article written by the former leader of the New

Democratic Party in Alberta, Pam Barrett. The article is entitled Canada Needs Flat Tax System. That's the New Democrat policy.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to our efforts to increase suicide awareness I have three tablings today. The first is Suicide Surveillance – 1999, completed by the Chinook health region and prepared by Population Health Information.

The second is A Summary of the Alberta Suicide Data Report, compiled by Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research, Suicide Information and Education Centre, Alberta Health and Wellness, and Health Canada.

And my final tabling today, Mr. Speaker, is copies of the Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program, a most comprehensive program, with credit to the Drayton Valley and Crossroads mental health and health care centres.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Consistent with the undertaking that I gave in response to a question by the hon. Edmonton-Strathcona member at page 2049, I am tabling the requisite number of copies of the response to him, a letter to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. The hon. member knows that podiatry services provided in this provincial facility are not insured and therefore do not require approval under the Health Care Protection Act.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings this afternoon. The first is from Jack Fife, the school council chairperson at J. Percy Page high school. The letter outlines the parents' concerns about the overcrowded conditions at their school.

The second is from Rhonda Brazeau, a parent with a child attending Sakaw elementary school, who is also concerned about funding for education in Alberta.

The next tabling is from CPAWS supporting the government's commitment to creating the new provincial park in Spray Valley.

The next tabling is from Doug Beaton, who is the principal at Crawford Plains school, and students Kevin Fox and Jessica who support Read-in Week, Mr. Speaker.

The final tabling is a letter from Coleen Taylor and Craig Harris outlining their concerns as parents of a child with type 1 diabetes.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to make three tablings today. The first is a letter to the Premier and the minister of human resources from an Alberta injured worker. In this letter they outline numerous instances where the minister and the Premier have indicated their support for the speedy implementation of recommendations from the two reports prepared by WCB. Also in this letter they ask when the steering committee will be named and whether there will be representation from injured workers on that committee.

The second is an article that appeared in the November issue of *Alberta Venture* magazine, and again it's a quote that was brought to our attention that the minister seems to think that the WCB is working on all cylinders and only requires fine-tuning.

The third is another article on WCB from *Alberta Report*, and in here it's outlined by injured workers that they feel that under the present system they are "guilty until proven innocent" and that they are "suspended without pay."

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a copy of the minutes of November 7, 2000, from the council meeting of the county of Warner, and at this they passed the following notice of motion. That

the County of Warner lobby the Provincial Government and Alberta Infrastructure to realign Highway 4 east of Milk River . . . [due to] safety concerns, projected cost savings, accessibility and less disruptions to fewer homesteads.

The second tabling is from CAUS. That is the Council of Alberta University Students. They have a very good brief that they've presented to all MLAs. In it they talk about tuition and fees, student loans, and learner assistance. If they haven't got you yet, they certainly will make their presentation to you, too, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters today, both of them concerning funding of the arts. The first is from George Fenwick of Calgary, who's urging the government to recognize the tremendous benefit the arts bring to Alberta and to increase funding to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and to the arts groups.

The second letter is from Dianne Johnstone, who's the president of the Alberta Music Festival Association, which is the umbrella group for the Kiwanis festivals, which is very well known to all of us. They also are urging the government to increase funding to the arts, in particular to look at the funding of this particular festival.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three documents to table this afternoon. All of them are documents I have received through freedom of information from the Department of Municipal Affairs. The first document is a memo sheet received in the Alberta department of labour September 11, 1998, from the Alberta new home warranty program. The Alberta new home warranty program is concerned with the treated pine shakes. They're not even sure they comply to the Alberta building code.

The second tabling I have this afternoon is a summary from September 29, 1998, of Alberta area roofers. Roofers have very little confidence in the use of the treated pine shake.

The third document is a handwritten note, document 001148. It's addressed simply "Murray," and it is talking about the rotting pine shakes in Calgary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly 52 students from the Innisfree school and their guests. They've traveled here today to witness this Assembly, and I must say that of significance is Innisfree's strong community leadership, which has produced more Rutherford scholarships on a per capita basis than I've ever seen in other schools in my constituency. As well, this school has fought hard in a community that's not as large as others to stay open, and one of the comments made by the people downstairs that were touring them was: I've never seen a better disciplined group of students from grades 6, 7, 8, and 9 that's traveled here. So I'd like to introduce them and have them stand along with their teachers, Mr. Leonard Grabas and Mr. Real Hryhchuk, and parents and helpers Mrs. Donna Saskiw, Mrs. Susan Cannan, and Mrs. Marianne Berg. Would they stand in the members' gallery to receive the warm welcome of this House.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Chairman of Committees.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you. On your behalf, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of 14 young Albertans from Holy Trinity Academy in Okotoks. They're accompanied today by their teacher, Mr. Mark Buckley. I'm pleased that they are able to see you in the Speaker's chair today. I would ask them to now rise in the members' gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to introduce an awesome group of students from Ormsby school in the constituency of Edmonton-McClung. The students were very glad to be among the first classes to view the latest portrait of His Honour Bud Olson, a former Lieutenant Governor of our province, and were delighted to be here at that time. There are 50 students along with their teachers in the public gallery. They are accompanied by Mrs. Linda Vanjoff; Mrs. Linda John, the teacher assistant; Miss Andrea Oikawa; and Miss Cynthia Scott, student teacher. I would ask all the students to please rise and receive a very warm welcome from the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to be able to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two very bright young university students. The first is Lanny Westersund. Lanny is a student in Calgary, a long-time supporter of Calgary-North Hill, and well known on this side of the House. The second young gentleman has traveled all the way from Acadia University in the Maritimes. In conversation with him there's no doubt in my mind that he's going to do very well in the future, because he states that he is a huge fan of our Premier. I would ask that Paul Barnes and Lanny Westersund stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I'm pleased to introduce to you and other members of the Assembly the

Feeg family from my constituency of Calgary-Lougheed. Visiting are mom and dad, Corinne and Curtis, and sons Matthew, 14, Nathan, 11, and Jordan, 4. These boys are all receiving their education in nontraditional ways. The youngest, Nathan, is being home schooled by his mother this year, and the older two boys are going to school electronically over the Internet. The whole family has a real interest in the way government operates at every level. They've been to city hall, and now they've traveled here to see how our Legislature operates. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly two community leaders from my constituency of Medicine Hat. They've joined us today to participate in the unveiling of the portrait on the third floor of another constituent of mine, His Honour the Honourable Bud Olson, the past Lieutenant Governor. I would like to introduce to you the mayor of Medicine Hat, His Worship Mayor Ted Grimm, as well as the president of the Medicine Hat College, Mr. Ralph Weeks. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and ask all members to recognize them.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Dunvegan I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you to the members of this Assembly five of his constituents from Fairview: Michel Buitendyk, Josh Zylstra, Miriam Buitendyk, Jennifer Buitendyk, and Jakie Weenink. They will be visiting the museum later on today. They are seated in the public gallery. I request that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 54 students from Sir Alexander Mackenzie school, which is located in the constituency of St. Albert. They are accompanied by Mr. Roger Bouthillier and Mrs. Janet Hurley. These are teachers who have year after year brought their grade 6 students here and have done a remarkable job of informing these students of the workings of the Legislature. They're also accompanied today by Mr. Paul Pringle, a teaching assistant. They are, I believe, seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my hon. colleague the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake – and I'm not sure if the group has come into the House yet, but I think it worthy that they be introduced anyway. He has 24 students and seven adults from John Wilson elementary school in his constituency, and they are accompanied here today by their teacher, Mrs. Linda Pederson, and six parents and helpers: Mrs. Leila Sehn, Denise Cartier, Leah Wile, Darcy Ramsell, Gloria Creighton, and Teresa Howard. I would ask that if they are in the galleries, they rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

2:00

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me today to stand and introduce one of the three people that keep my office in Lethbridge running on, I hope, a fairly consistent basis in support of the people in Lethbridge-East. I'd ask Inga Jesswein to rise. She was actually one of the candidates who ran against me in the 1997 election for the New Democratic Party, but she's joined our office now in the fight for the opposition to private health care and the support of the people in need. I'd ask Inga to rise and receive the warm welcome.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two very important people in my life: my husband, Bob, and my son Jeremy. They are here today to witness my maiden speech. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly five students who are participating in the home schooling program and reside in various Edmonton constituencies. They are Lauren Hucal from Edmonton-Castle Downs, Alexander Forsyth from Edmonton-Mill Creek, Miranda Pilipchuk from Edmonton-Mill Woods, Nicole McKenzie from Edmonton-Mill Woods, and Heather MacLean from Edmonton-Whitemud, the constituency which I have the honour to represent. With the students are parent helpers Teresa Cox, Debbie Forsyth, Della Marko, Sheila MacLean, and Pat Cox. The students have taken a tour of the Legislature, have participated in a mock legislature, and they're here today to observe question period. I'd like to take the opportunity to introduce them to you and to the members and ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: If there are no more introductions of guests, I'd ask unanimous consent to revert to tablings. We scurried on a little too fast, so if we may have your consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports
(*reversion*)

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table a very important letter from the Industrial Association of Southern Alberta. These are heavy users of electricity in the southern part of our province, and they just yesterday authored a note to the market surveillance chairman asking for a formal investigation into the noncompetitive pricing practices of some of the marketers in the province of Alberta. It seems that the marketers are requiring long-term contracts in the sale of assets . . . [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: It's a tabling, not a speech. You don't have to read the whole contents. I think you've made your point.

head: Oral Question Period

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Imported Power Costs

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Alberta consumers, as we know, are facing skyrocketing electricity bills because the wholesale price of electricity in Alberta has increased from \$14 on average per megawatt hour to over \$118 per megawatt hour so far in 2000 under the Premier's electricity deregulation scheme, the KEP. According to the province's own market surveillance administrator during times of constrained supply in power, importers of power such as B.C. Hydro's subsidiary Powerex can become a pivotal supplier and can affect the wholesale price of electricity on the power pool. The province's market surveillance administrator goes on to say that in April 2000, when the wholesale price of electricity in Alberta was over \$100 per megawatt hour, Powerex was setting the price for 51 percent of the time. Now there are reports that the federal Competition Bureau is investigating price fixing by Powerex to drive up the price. My questions are to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, how long has the government of Alberta been aware of the investigation being undertaken by the Competition Bureau as regards the importation of high-priced electrical power into Alberta from Powerex?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we too read reports of that investigation. It appears that the federal Competition Bureau began an investigation about a year ago. Both the federal Competition Bureau and the market surveillance administrator are independent bodies.

In answer to the question, never mind the silly preamble, but the question, we were not made aware of complaints that they received and were not aware of this investigation. We are concerned, however, about prices and any effort to clarify price concerns for Albertans is a positive thing. Obviously if they think there is something wrong or something that deserves investigation, certainly it's the attitude of this government that that investigation should take place.

I would point out that as with any other case before the bureau we are unable to comment on it while it is before the bureau and under investigation.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta consumers through the Power Pool have paid over \$170 million to Powerex over the past four years in order to import high-priced electrical power to cover Alberta's supply/price crunch . . .

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. leader, just so that we're all going with the same set of rules, in question period the first question may contain a brief preamble to set it up, and that's hopefully followed by a brief answer. Then the second and third questions carry no preamble.

Imported Power Costs (*continued*)

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the question to the Premier is: has the Premier instructed his market surveillance administrator to undertake a full investigation in conjunction with the federal Competition Bureau?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Resource Development supplement, but as I pointed out, both the federal Competition Bureau and the market surveillance administrator are independent bodies. I think it would be inappropriate for me to direct the market surveillance administrator to do anything.

As to how it all works, just so the leader of the Liberal opposition knows, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The market surveillance administrator, of course, completed a report recently to the Power Pool – and we received a copy of it – with a number of recommendations. The Power Pool itself will be following up on seven of the recommendations. I believe we will be dealing with two recommendations directly.

One of the items that came out of the whole process, of course, is the development of a 10-point action plan that will definitely deal with a number of the issues the opposition leader has identified.

One major . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: If we are going to apply the shortness to one side, we should do it to both sides.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, what assurances can the Premier give to Alberta consumers that the possibility of price fixing from power importers will not occur under his KEP, costing Albertans even more in their electricity bills?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the Minister of Government Services supplement this answer, but just to state the case as clearly as we possibly can, the federal Competition Bureau is looking into suspected electricity price fixing by the two corporations that were mentioned by the leader of the Liberal opposition.

The market surveillance administrator cannot – and this is in answer to her previous question – investigate interjurisdictional issues. In such a case, it may refer that type of issue to the federal Competition Bureau. I suspect that's what has happened.

2:10

The federal Competition Bureau has the capability to obtain warrants and has related legal capacities. In other words, they can do all that they possibly can do to collect the evidence and launch a prosecution if necessary. Mr. Speaker, if there is evidence that there was price fixing, I'm sure that the federal Competition Bureau will take the appropriate action. This has nothing to do with the government of Alberta. This has something to do with two corporations who happen to be in the power business.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Second main question. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Increased Utility Costs

MRS. MacBETH: Fine. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier finally admitted that his government's deregulation scheme is responsible for skyrocketing electricity bills being paid by Albertans, and although the Premier is trying to pass off his rebate scheme as a shield to these skyrocketing prices, it's clear to everyone in Alberta, except perhaps some of the members on the front bench, that the rebate doesn't even begin to cover the increased electricity prices approved under his KEP.

MR. HANCOCK: Point of order.

MRS. MacBETH: For example, the current price for an average user is \$70. The proposed price schedule by ATCO is \$120, a \$30 increase when you include the rebate, so will the Premier confirm that his rebates are a mere drop in the bucket and don't cover the increase?

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, if we have a long preamble with all kinds of things in it, then whoever has to answer that question has to untangle all the of the preamble before they can get to the question. One long thing doesn't necessarily deserve another but receives another. Mr. Premier, if you can break your way through this.

Increased Utility Costs (continued)

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you are absolutely right. You know, the longer the preamble, the longer it's going to take me to untangle the preamble to get to the question, and unfortunately after doing all that untangling, by the time it all takes place, often I forget what the question was, and I'm sure that the leader of the Liberal opposition forgets what the question was.

I did catch one thing in the preamble, and that is that the opposition is alleging the Premier has changed his tune regarding the role of deregulation in electricity supplies and prices. What I said is that when you bring about change, it doesn't matter where that change occurs, whether it's in electricity deregulation or whether it was the privatization of liquor stores, the privatization of registries, whether it was taking the 200 health jurisdictions that existed under the former minister of health, who is now the leader of the Liberal opposition, or taking the 181 school boards, 40 of which had no schools, that existed under the former minister of education, who is also now leader of the Liberal opposition – whenever you bring about dramatic change, Mr. Speaker, there is going to be some degree of uncertainty. That is one of the small reasons, part of the small reasons. There are other reasons as well, and they have been explained.

Mr. Speaker, relative to another comment in the leader of the Liberal opposition's preamble, she alluded to this measly sum. When did \$1.7 billion become a measly sum? When did an average of \$840 per household become a measly sum? It may be measly to the leader of the Liberal opposition because she lives in a totally different environment than the average ordinary Albertan. I don't think it's measly, and Albertans don't think it's measly.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, his rebate doesn't even cover half the increase.

How does the Premier explain the fact that a farm customer served by ATCO will still experience a \$30 per month, or 21 percent, increase in their power bill in 2001 even when his rebate is included?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that application is now before the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board.

Relative to the regulatory process, and appropriately so, I'll have the hon. Minister of Resource Development respond.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've promised to continue monitoring the pricing situation and make adjustments accordingly in the future.

When it comes to the whole pricing and confidence in the electrical system, one of the issues that keeps popping up from the opposition is the lack of confidence in deregulation by them, and the issue of supply keeps coming up. This is very, very important, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday one of their companies, EPCOR, which is part

of the city of Edmonton, announced that they will be moving forward a new 400 megawatt generating plant at Genesee. Most of those people are residents of Edmonton. They own EPCOR through the city of Edmonton. Their own company has confidence in the deregulation process, confidence that they don't have. Now, they can go talk to their company.

MRS. MacBETH: So, Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier: why would this Premier try to take credit for returning the customer's own investment in those plants, especially when he's only paying \$1 out of the \$4 that they're owed?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know that statement to be true, nor am I involved in the intricacies of electricity financing. [interjections] I am not. But we do have a minister who's very involved and whose department is very involved, and I'll have him respond.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, this won't be long. One of the things is that it was an open market, an open sale, open auction that was market driven. The opposition, of course, assumed that there should be \$4 billion raised. When you have an auction like that that is open, it is market driven. It happens that \$1.1 billion was raised, which was returned to Albertans. There will be another sale completed at the end of November. Those funds, again, once the formula is completed, will be returned to Albertans.

One of the things I'd like to mention, Mr. Speaker, is that over 85 percent of the residential consumers, residential farms have an option to stay with their existing supplier for up to five years under the regulated system. The residents of Edmonton will also be regulated by their own council, which is thousands of people. They can address that through their council.

Special Waste Treatment Centre

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, Alberta taxpayers paid over \$441 million to support the Premier's Swan Hills waste treatment plant and are on the hook for an additional \$22 million in cleanup costs. That \$441 million would have built a power plant the equivalent of Genesee 1 and could have protected consumers from skyrocketing electricity prices under the Premier's KEP plan. So while the Premier seems determined to wash his hands and his government is working furiously in the back rooms to have a new sweetheart deal to prop up the waste treatment plant, my questions are to the Premier. Since the Premier has been tied to taxpayers dollars flowing to the waste treatment plant since he was environment minister in 1989, how many more millions of taxpayer dollars is he prepared to spend to keep this negotiation hidden past the next election?

2:20

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, along with the hon. Minister of Environment we have had the opportunity to enter into negotiations with two companies that are interested in taking over the plant at this particular time. Interested. Nothing is conclusive at this moment.

Mr. Speaker, you know, it's very interesting how a change in political parties can change the tune. I go to the April 30, 1990, *Hansard*. I read from that *Hansard* an excerpt of the then minister of health waxing eloquently about the Swan Hills waste treatment plant. She was talking about a subject that related directly to her department at that time. I'm going to put her words back to her, because I'm sure she would like to hear them. It says:

Well, again, Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a leader across Canada, because we are the first province that was able to be part of the collection of dead drugs, and they are being disposed of by the

Special Waste Management Corporation out in Swan Hills. It's a perfect example of the link between environment and health which . . . speaks to the leadership of Alberta on the issue of the environment and our health.

She loved it then. What's the matter now?

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I know the Premier would like to hide the sweetheart deal, but let's go back to it. How could the Premier say that there isn't some kind of backroom deal going on to continue the relationship with Bovar when his own department is refusing to disclose the future ownership of the hazardous waste plant in a request under freedom of information to his department. I'll table that refusal.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I understand that there has been a FOIP request to my office. The Liberals have launched other FOIP requests. I'm sure that there are numerous freedom of information requests relative to Swan Hills with the Department of Environment.

To answer the question, quite simply there are no backroom deals taking place. There are none whatsoever.

MRS. MacBETH: Will the Premier guarantee Albertans that not one more penny of taxpayer dollars will be used to prop up the operations of the waste treatment plant after December 31, 2000?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the question comes down to whether there's going to be a handover, and certainly Bovar has indicated that it's going to happen. Do we close the plant down? Do we decommission it? Do we put all those people out of work when there is an opportunity of perhaps having another operator take it over? Do we go to that huge expense? This is what we're trying to determine right now.

Mr. Speaker, relative . . . [interjections] No. You didn't get the answer that you wanted.

What the leader of the Liberal opposition is suggesting is that we put the province . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'm at a loss to explain why somebody would ask a question and then continue to interject while an answer is being attempted. I wonder if we could . . . [interjection] Both sides. We have a number of people on the side of the Premier here who are busily talking while the Premier is trying to answer the question, just as there are people over here talking. Why can't we just allow the Premier to answer the question and the hon. members to ask it in some sort of civility.

Hon. Premier, if you can conclude.

Special Waste Treatment Centre (continued)

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've said basically all I'm going to say. It's too bad that the Minister of Environment isn't here, because he's been more involved in the detailed negotiations relative to what is going to be done with that plant.

But there is concern. There's genuine concern about closing the plant down, doing a full decommission, doing the environmental cleanup, and then having someone come along saying, "Hey, this is a plant that we can operate at a profit, and perhaps we can use different marketing methods and so on" and then going to the expense of starting it up again.

Those are all of the kinds of things that are being considered in the

context of the responsibilities and the duties of Executive Council, Mr. Speaker. They are not backroom deals. It's part of the normal business. Yes, it's a problem, and we're going to have to deal with it.

I would remind the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition that when she was minister of health, she was madly in love with this plan. What has happened?

Electric Utilities Deregulation

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, this government's botched electricity deregulation scheme was based on the California model. Electricity deregulation has led to havoc in California. Within the past week there have been numerous emergencies in California as a result of power shortages, and a full-scale consumer revolt is brewing. Power prices have quintupled from what they were last April, and there's growing evidence that power companies are engaging in collusion to drive up prices. To the Minister of Resource Development: why is the government continuing to promote a power deregulation scheme that has led the state of California to the brink of disaster?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to clarify the issue that the deregulation process, which has been in place since 1993 and 1995 legislation and an amendment in the energy and utilities act in 1998 – it is a completely different process. I understand that one of the problems with the California situation, of course, is the high demand for electricity and the ability for the state to be able generate electricity. I understand that during the period of time when Alberta developed over 1,400 megawatts of electricity, the state of California only developed 700 megawatts, and their population is probably 10 times or more greater than Alberta. So it is a completely different situation.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, also to the minister: why has the government put the California Power Exchange, which is responsible for power blackouts and skyrocketing electricity costs in that American state, in charge of the power auction that's scheduled to take place next week in Alberta?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, that whole process with that particular company was done through a public process where they did come up with the best bid and the best plan. They helped design the process, and now they are running the auction. It's straightforward. It's out in the open. Go talk to them.

Again, you know, I have to remind this hon. member that they may not have confidence in the Alberta deregulation process, but your own company does. EPCOR, which they own, which he understands – he was involved with it, Mr. Speaker – is building, they will announce tomorrow, a 400 megawatt plant. Maybe they should be talking to them. Maybe the ND leaders and also the Liberals should be talking to EPCOR, your own company. Maybe you should . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, having been in the House for the same number of years as the chair, you will remember that you address your answers through the chair, and don't engage in lively side conversations.

MR. MASON: Any power company, whether it's public or private, knows when it can make a killing, Mr. Speaker.

To the minister: why does the government continue to defend a deregulation scheme in which there are huge financial incentives for energy companies to engage in price collusion to drive up prices

while there is no one responsible for ensuring reliability of supply or protecting consumer interests?

2:30

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, there is a very serious allegation here. There has been one allegation which appropriately is being investigated by the Competition Bureau, but for this hon. member to make that kind of allegation in the House and to seek the sanction and protection of this Legislature, I don't think is showing much courage. I would challenge him to go outside and make the same statement and name the companies.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Public Consultation on Future Fiscal Policy

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Premier and the Provincial Treasurer announced a public consultation questionnaire that I have with me that is being sent out to Alberta households next week. My questions today are for the Provincial Treasurer. My question through the chair to the Treasurer is: what is the intent and the purpose of this questionnaire, that's called It's Your Money: Speak Out; We're Listening, and how is this going to impact potential government policy?

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this is to go to Albertans, whose money it is, now that they have choices and to ask them what they would like to do when the time comes when there is no provincial debt in the province of Alberta. As a result of the cyclical nature of revenues that come in through resource industries, we are going to ask them their choices, what they would like to do with their savings or the overage at that time.

The reason for this, too, is because we've always asked Albertans what they want to do. In '92-93 they told us to set the record straight, to balance our budgets, and to pay off the debt. Albertans knew that debt in the province of Alberta equated to paying high interest costs, which removes the flexibility to provide programming in the province of Alberta. It is a privilege for this government to go to the people, who they have answered to over the last 10 years, and ask them what they should do with their money.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Again, we seem to be livening up the issue of asking questions back and forth, rhetorical and otherwise, while there is one person making a question and there's only one that's being recognized other than in the last exchange with the Provincial Treasurer. Even though this chair's hearing is faulty, he could determine at least 10 or 15 people asking questions or purporting to answer them. Please, let us have one question at a time by that member that's recognized and a minister of the Crown answering one at a time.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Public Consultation on Future Fiscal Policy (continued)

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental. Of course, we in this Assembly all recognize the importance of what Albertans say in their individual constituencies. My question is to the Treasurer in this way. Who's going to be analyzing the data that we collect on this, and most importantly will the results be reported back to this Assembly?

DR. WEST: In the department of Treasury, Mr. Speaker, we have a statistics unit that is arm's length and works and gives us advice back on such, I guess, focus groups that we're going to have in going forward with this pamphlet. They will report to us approximately by December, and by the end of January we should have compiled that information and then will bring it back in a form so that Albertans will know what they have said.

One of the things that the opposition here doesn't like is talk about this, because it exemplifies the policies of this government which we have had the task of taking forward in the last decade, the ones that Albertans asked us to do almost 10 years ago. They said that we didn't need to make the cuts that we did or restructure this government, that with oil prices and gas prices this would have happened any way. If we'd followed their path in '92-93 and we had just frozen the budget and raised it according to population and inflation, we'd have been \$50 billion in debt today.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Treasurer: when Albertans speak and we collect the data that comes back to Treasury, my question then would be this: is the Provincial Treasurer prepared to act on what Albertans are going to say?

DR. WEST: One of the things that this will do will be to indicate in the strongest way to Albertans that they do have choices. They will give us their assessment of those choices, but they will know that the decisions we make in the future will be prudent decisions based on the revenues of the day.

There is one thing that Albertans know. They know how to cut their coat according to their cloth, because they've had to do that several times over the last two decades. They know that you must be fiscally responsible. So after they have given us their choices, we will measure that against the economy of the day, next year, the year after, what oil revenues are, gas revenues, and then we will apply their wishes prudently to future budgets and plans of this province.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Special Waste Treatment Centre

(continued)

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has promised Albertans that electricity prices would go down under his scheme. Now, that promise as of today has been broken. The Premier promised Albertans that his government was finished with the Swan Hills special waste treatment plant. That promise has clearly been broken as well. About the only promise that the Premier can now keep is to put Alberta taxpayers back into the business of hazardous waste treatment through some sort of secret, I guess, cabinet room deal. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier confirm that it will cost taxpayers up to \$5 million per year to take over ownership of the Swan Hills plant and to contract with Bovar or some other third party to operate that facility?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can't confirm that. As I say, we're trying to find a solution to this problem. Clearly, Bovar has said that it wants out of the operation of the plant, and we're exploring other opportunities at this particular time.

Again, I remind the hon. member of the remarks of his leader when she was minister of health. She saw nothing wrong with the

plant then and talked about the plant operating as a utility and the great job that it did to destroy dangerous, dead drugs in this province. I can't figure out what is so wrong with the plant now and what was so right with the plant then.

MR. SAPERS: It's a shame that the Premier's living in the past, Mr. Speaker. Albertans want some answers now.

Will the Premier confirm that it will cost taxpayers a minimum of \$2 million per year to enter into an arrangement where the government would guarantee that certain waste streams will continue to be disposed of at the Swan Hills plant?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can neither confirm nor deny it at this particular time, because we do not have firm offers from the two companies that are genuinely interested in taking over the plant as to what the operating arrangements might or might not be. Once those details have been worked out and once we set up a proposal – and I don't know if that will come about, but I suspect there might be a request for proposals. Once that has been finalized, then all the details surrounding the deal will come out at that time, but we're nowhere near that stage at this particular point.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. Given that the Premier refuses to confirm the details of the discussions going on between representatives of his government and the plant operators, will he at least agree to table in this Legislative Assembly the cost/benefit analysis that has been prepared by his government on the various options for the continued operation of Swan Hills so taxpayers know what they're on the hook for?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, when that information is available I would be very happy to table it, but we are not yet at that stage. I can confirm that two companies have approached the government. I've been involved in discussions with these two companies. Both are French operations with huge Canadian and American and international connections in the whole business of waste management, generally, but both with tremendous expertise in hazardous waste. We have said to these two companies: "Give us a proposal. Give us a detailed proposal as to how you would want to operate these plants." To my knowledge we have not yet received those proposals.

The Minister of Environment is not with us today, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if his department has received those proposals or not, but once we make a final decision, we'll be glad to share it with the opposition and all Albertans.

2:40

Affordable Housing

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, homelessness is a serious concern in many communities, including my own constituency. Now that we are in the winter season, it is most important that we help these people. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. What is your ministry doing to help these people?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, Alberta Community Development is taking the lead role to co-ordinate the government's response to homelessness in our communities, and a number of things are happening.

First of all, I have met in the past few months with the federal

minister responsible for homelessness. We both agree that the solutions are best generated at a community level. As a result of that, I've met with the mayors of cities in the province – the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Calgary, and Edmonton – and they are in the process of doing community plans. Some have been completed that will be acceptable to both the federal government, to the federal people, to access funding and to ourselves. We have also committed to supply \$3 million a year for this year plus another two years to deal with the problem.

MRS. JABLONSKI: My first supplemental is also to the Minister of Community Development. Now that we have communities planning and developing local solutions, how soon can they expect to see these funds?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, I know that Calgary and Edmonton have completed their community plans. We have made an initial installment of \$250,000 to Calgary. That will be followed shortly with the remaining \$750,000. Also, the city of Edmonton will be receiving a million dollars to deal with this problem fairly shortly.

I'd like to point out that there are also a number of other ministries within the government that provide a variety of supports to the less fortunate members of our society. I think Human Resources and Employment, Children's Services, Health and Wellness, AADAC, and the Mental Health Board do a fine job. So we're all working together to ensure that we can do as much as we can for these unfortunate folks.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental. The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is again to the Minister of Community Development. Aside from homelessness there is a concern about the lack of affordable housing. Can the minister tell this Assembly what his ministry is doing to help this situation?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Community Development, myself, is also responsible for the other end of it. We have increased the rent supplement program by some \$2.3 million this year. What that will do – and that's part of the supplemental requisitions, which we were criticized for, and it came as an emergency motion – is add 500 more housing units to take some of the pressure off to hopefully accommodate as many people as we possibly can. Some of the funding will also be directed to transitional housing as well as to emergency shelters.

I must stress that our priority is and remains dealing with and helping families and individuals who are most in need, and we'll ensure that they will make it through the winter as best as possible.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Treated Pine Shakes

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Consumers in this province are sick and tired of the government withholding information from them. My questions are to the Premier. Why did the government withhold test results in 1999 indicating significant noncompliance with the standards referenced in the Alberta building

code for the treated pine shakes? Why was this withheld from Alberta consumers and homeowners?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't take that as factual, that we are withholding information from consumers. Unfortunately, the minister responsible for this particular issue, again, is not with us, but I will take the question under notice. Perhaps the Minister of Government Services can shed some light on this information. I really don't know, but I'll ask her if she cares to supplement.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that this is before the courts, as the hon. member knows. There have been hundreds of requests through freedom of information on data from the government. I presume that anything that can be provided has, in fact, been provided to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Again, any further information will have to come from the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. MacDONALD: Again to the Premier. Given that the treated pine shakes case is not yet before the courts, why did top-level department of labour officials keep test results on the treated pine shakes from the Building Technical Council, which is the organization that's responsible to Alberta homeowners for the Alberta building code?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I understand now that the hon. member is alluding to treated pine shakes as opposed to untreated pine shakes, a subject which is indeed before the courts.

Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, I do not have the answer. I don't know his assertion to be factual, but I will take the question under notice and have the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs address it when he returns.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. MacDONALD: Excuse me.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Do you have another one?

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, please.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry. I marked you down as having three.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Speaker was just a little too eager and marked a third one off, and I apologize.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is also to the Premier. Who in the government instructed the top-level government officials in the department of labour to withhold this vital information from the Building Technical Council, which is responsible for the Alberta building code? Who did it?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't know that statement to be factual or true. This is a matter for the appropriate minister to deal with, and I'll take the question under notice and refer it to the appropriate minister, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, for an answer upon his return.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Currie Barracks

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my capacity as the Premier's representative on the intergovernmental liaison committee for the development of CFB Calgary, I'll be meeting with my counterparts on December 1. Further, on December 5 Calgary's city council will be holding its public hearings on the development of the former base. Given that one of the significant issues that is outstanding is the question of public ownership and access to the historic parade square, my questions are to the Minister of Community Development. Will the minister clarify the intent of the historic designation of the parade square to provide an open, publicly accessible area which is vitally linked to ceremony, history, and the memories of a great number of Albertans?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province has given the Currie barracks the highest level of historic preservation and protection that it can under the legislation. The provincial historic resources designation of the Currie barracks is made up of 10 structures. We also have the parade square designated.

I might stress that a designation does not ensure that a resource will be used for a specific purpose. However, changes to the parade square or any other designated resource can be made only by the approval of the Minister of Community Development.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental: with the designation of public buildings surrounding the parade square is it the intent of the minister to keep the parade square open to the public?

2:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Calgary planning department has developed a plan which would see that the large portion of the parade square would become a public park. I have not looked at these plans in detail, but I must stress two things. One, the historic designation does not necessarily make the resource to be used for a specific purpose. At the same time, we do have the authority to ensure that the parameters of the intent are followed.

I'm looking forward to seeing what the city of Calgary comes up with, to seeing if in fact we can ensure that the public does have access to this area.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question. Given that the federal government donated CFB Downsview in the city of Toronto for a parkland, at no cost to the citizens of Toronto, will the minister undertake to pursue a similar donation from the federal government for the remaining two acres, a small two acres not included in the municipal reserve, to complete the historic preservation of the parade square and to allow full public access?

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right on. When it comes to eastern Canada, the federal government chooses to give things away willy-nilly. When it comes to western Canada,

it appears that the federal government wants to give all their resources to the Canada Lands Company. The Canada Lands Company is an arm of the federal government, and yes, we will be asking for some co-operation from them. I would hope that they are more benevolent than the federal government, which cut Edmonton and Calgary out of the mix, if you will, in terms of giving us what I think we properly deserve, a large tract of it.

I'm hoping that the city of Calgary, the Canada Lands Company, the community, as well as officials from my department can work out a solution to this. Yes, we will be asking for a little bit of consideration, that I think both Edmonton and Calgary so rightly deserve. We have been so unfairly shut out by the change of these guards.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Health Information Legislation

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since October 1, 1995, in this province we've had a law that protects the privacy and protects the confidentiality of information that the government collects about Albertans. We know that privacy is important to Albertans, but since 1995 the government has refused to apply those rules to the most personal of all information, the most sensitive of all information, our health information. My question now is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will he confirm this afternoon that the announced date for proclamation of Bill 40, the Health Information Act, has been scrapped, that in fact the bill will not now be proclaimed on December 15, 2000?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, a number of concerns were raised by groups with respect to the implementation of the Health Information Act. It will precipitate a delay of the proclamation, but that proclamation will proceed early in the new year.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my follow-up question would be to the hon. minister. Well, why is it that the regional health authorities, that have gone to an enormous amount of time and effort, commitment of resources to prepare for a December 15 start-up date, have been left twisting in the wind and have not been given any certainty in terms of when that act will be rolled out and applied to their operations?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, upon my review of this legislation with various stakeholder groups I think some legitimate concerns were raised with respect to implementation. I've had discussions with the Privacy Commissioner, and we will be proceeding with this legislation. It will come shortly.

However, in order to overcome some of those hurdles expressed by groups like the Alberta Medical Association, the police chiefs, the United Nurses of Alberta, and the College of Pharmacists, a short delay will be required in order that all those groups can also be prepared for the new legislation.

MR. DICKSON: My final question, Mr. Speaker. Given the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision that says that privacy is now a protected right under sections 7 and 8 of the Charter, does the minister anticipate seeking a reference in the Alberta Court of Appeal as to the constitutionality of Bill 40 pursuant to the provisions of the Alberta Judicature Act?

MR. MAR: No, Mr. Speaker.

head: Members' Statements

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We'll have members' statements in 30

seconds, when we'll hear from Edmonton-Ellerslie and Calgary-Currie.

Protection of the Environment

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about the importance of effective government regulations and the importance of enforcing those regulations in protecting Alberta's environment. We have a government that talks about environmental sustainability, but what they mean is sustainability of the economic environment. They are not talking about the importance of protecting the quality of our air and water. They are not talking about forward-thinking ecosystem management for our forests. They are not talking about responsible investment in new energy technologies.

What they are talking about, Mr. Speaker, are business deals that provide economic benefits for a few but do little to ensure the preservation of our habitat and our health. In Alberta the environment has always kept behind business interests.

The regulations regarding intensive livestock operations have been drafted, but the government is ignoring the three years of hard work by the industry, community groups, and environmentalists. They refuse to pass more regulations, regardless of the need. Instead, they choose to do more studies with industry stakeholders. Effective technology exists to treat hazardous waste at the source. But what is this government doing? They ponder how to continue propping up the Swan Hills plant, a plant that may have had a chance at success if major sources of hazardous waste were not excluded by government regulation.

In the ongoing saga of our rivers again we have a warning for children and pregnant women to not eat certain types of fish. In the Cold Lake arsenic hearings monitoring arsenic levels is left to the responsibility of individual well owners.

When will this government take responsibility for ensuring the health and well-being of Albertans and our ecosystem before problems occur? Effective government regulation does not have to mean more regulations. It means eliminating unnecessary and archaic regulations and judiciously putting in place and monitoring regulations that enhance our ability to be sustainable in the long term and to protect the public interest.

The Alberta advantage is being squandered every time the government promotes industrial development without regard for the environment. Let's create a vision where bottom-line profits are not the answer to every question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Alberta Film Commission

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 23 of this year the Alberta Film Commission appointed its new CEO and president, Paul Rayman. I'd like to take this opportunity to take a few minutes and introduce his presence to the film industry to the Chamber. The board of directors is pleased to announce his official appointment.

Mr. Rayman has worked in the film industry and the television industry as a location manager and has worked on a number of feature films including *Honey*, *I Shrunk the Kids*, *Destiny Ridge*, *Alive*, and *Wild America*. He has assumed his position immediately and, in fact, within 48 hours of being appointed was in California meeting with film officials in that state.

3:00

We'd also like to take this opportunity to thank Murray Ord for

his leadership over the last four and a half years and the work that he has done to expand the current status of our Film Commission to a full-service, production-oriented commission. Mr. Speaker, he has been instrumental in promoting this province as one of the finest film locations of the nation and as a source of highly skilled technical and talented producers. The commission also became a not-for-profit company in May of 1999 under his leadership.

For the information of this House the total production dollars of activity in Alberta were up to \$272 million in the year 1999, and of that number \$148 million remained in the province.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to also bring attention to last weekend. We celebrated the annual 2000 Alberta film industry wrap party. This is the fund-raiser that we use within the industry in order to recognize and honour the work that's been done by the film community and also to support our not-for-profit organization. The proceeds go directly to the Alberta Film Commission in its ongoing marketing efforts to generate more film production in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as a member of the board and the Premier's liaison to the Alberta Film Commission I want to welcome Paul Rayman to the Alberta film family and encourage all constituents and all members of the Legislature to contact him and tell him how important the film industry is to their constituency.

Thank you.

head: Projected Government Business

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Actually, I was tempted to say that while we anxiously await the return of the Government House Leader's assistant, I had thought to myself that we should postpone the business of the House until he recovers and safely returns to the House. In any event, we wish him well and good health.

I'd ask the Deputy Government House Leader to advise as to the course of business we will see in this Assembly next week. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, let me recognize the kind remarks of the hon. member across the way. We've already conveyed our own caucus's feelings and expressions of gratitude to David Gillies for all the work that he has done, and we are wishing him a very speedy recovery. I also sent him a copy of the Order Paper, which he could read in the hospital, because I know that he's missing all the action here very much.

Now, getting back to projected government business. On November 27 in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders we will have third reading of bills 3 and 27. Then we'll go into Committee of the Whole, where we'll deal with bills 29 and 20; then second reading of bills 22 and 30; and then as per the Order Paper. On the evening of November 27 under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of the Whole, bills 29 and 20, then second reading of bills 22 and 30, and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, November 28, Mr. Speaker, later in the afternoon at 4:30 under Government Bills and Orders third reading of bills 29 and 20 and as per the Order Paper. That evening we will have third reading of bills 29 and 20 and then Committee of the Whole on bills 22 and 30.

On Wednesday evening third reading of bills 29, 20, 22, and 30 and as per the Order Paper.

Then on Thursday afternoon we'll have third reading of the remaining third readings and then as per the Order Paper.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair believes there were at least four points of order. The first two were by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, then the Leader of the Opposition, and the fourth one, that the chair caught, was again Calgary-Buffalo.

So, presumably in order, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MR. DICKSON: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. I think it was the first set of questions and the first supplemental question posed by the Leader of the Official Opposition. You will recall, sir, that she said "given that" and then proceeded with her question, and there was an intervention by the Speaker.

Under Standing Order 13(2), Mr. Speaker, I would be mindful of what the Speaker said on February 25, 1998, when he noted that (a) the Leader of the Official Opposition has some additional latitude in the initial set of questions and (b) starting a preamble to a supplementary question with "given that" was quite acceptable. In other words, it's not a preamble, but it's an integral part of the question.

So I just wanted to be clear, Mr. Speaker, with your intervention early on whether that meant we were departing from the direction we got from the Speaker on February 25, 1998, and the *Hansard* reference. It'd be page 556, for the assistance of the table and the Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From our perspective on this side of the House your ruling was absolutely correct. All too often the opposition structures questions in such a way so as not to offend the technical interpretation of the preamble prohibitions but still offend the spirit of the same. I rely on *Beauchesne* 409(2), where it states very clearly, "A preamble need not exceed one carefully drawn sentence." Then, as you yourself indicated, "A long preamble on a long question takes an unfair share of time and provokes the same sort of reply."

I also refer to *Beauchesne* 410(8): "Preambles to questions should be brief and supplementary questions require no preambles."

I might also like to point out a couple of other issues arising from this discussion. Mr. Speaker, I again refer you to *Beauchesne* 410(8), where it states that "supplementary questions should flow from the answers of Ministers." We know that never happens because, of course, the opposition doesn't listen to the answers, so that's a little tough to comply with.

I'd also like to finally refer to . . . [interjection] Excuse me, hon. member. I do have the floor, and I'd like to continue.

I'd like to refer you also to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 426 and 427, where it states very clearly, "Furthermore, a question should not . . . make a charge by way of a preamble to a question." Unfortunately, every day, day in and day out, the opposition offends that rule, and I think it's about time that the chair admonish the hon. Leader of the Opposition for doing so.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader has brought to attention the second question arising out of the first question. The Speaker would confess that he did not hear the trigger word "given" and thought it might be an idea, since parliamentarians frequently like to have their way when a new person is in the chair,

to try and set a tone that maybe we could be careful on the preambles and careful on the answers. That was the attempt that was put forth.

I'd also remind the House leaders that in April they signed a document, an agreement among the House leaders.

- (4) A Member asking a question shall, in the discretion of the Speaker, be allowed a succinct preamble, a main question and two supplementary questions to which there shall be no preamble. Any Member who, in the discretion of the Speaker, abuses the opportunity to give a preamble shall be called to order.

There was more in that.

If I understood the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, he was asking for an explanation, and that's what I was attempting to do. The hon. member did get part of the second question preamble in nevertheless, but it was trying to set a tone for the rest of the day. How successful that was only others can judge.

Does that answer your explanation question?

MR. DICKSON: Yes. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. The second point of order.

Point of Order

Oral Question Period Rules

MR. DICKSON: The second point of order arose from the second set of questions. The citation, of course, is *Beauchesne* 408(2). Just quickly, the Premier went on at length attacking the use of the word "measly," and that word was never spoken by the Leader of the Official Opposition, so I think it offends 408(2).

Would it be efficient, sir, if I also quickly address my comments to the other points of order now? [interjections] Well, no, no. Then obviously the Government House Leader has a chance to respond. I'm happy to deal with them severally, and you can rule on each one if you wish.

3:10

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Because there were four different interventions, it would be helpful for the chair, anyway, to deal with them individually.

MR. DICKSON: Fine. That's fine.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on the second point of order.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm looking at 408(2), "Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised, and should not provoke debate." The hon. member is suggesting that the Premier's paraphrasing of the hon. Leader of the Opposition's question by using the term "measly" was inappropriate. I believe that when answering questions, ministers and the Premier are certainly entitled to answer in any way they see fit. In fact, the convention and a rule of this House is that they actually don't even have to answer the question. Nevertheless, every day, day in and day out, we do answer those questions to the best of our abilities. So there certainly is no point of order.

While the member is referring to 408(2), "Answers to questions should be as brief as possible," I would like to refer you again to 409(2), "The question must be brief." Then there are comments regarding a preamble not exceeding "one carefully drawn sentence."

So, again, all too often the opposition sets themselves up in the way that they ask the questions, and this is simply another example of that. It really is another example of, I think, the hon. Opposition House Leader doing his best to simply clarify a position as opposed to really having a true point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, if I understand the point made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you quote the word “measly,” that was in the answer, and this was not in the question that the Leader of the Opposition had asked.

MR. DICKSON: It was a purported quote, and I’m saying that in fact the word was never used by the Leader of the Opposition.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, it really becomes an awkward thing for the chair to follow every nuance of (a) the questions and (b) the answers. I would look at 409(2), which I think the hon. Deputy Government House Leader mentions, but also if we could look at 417, it reminds us that questions should be short and so should the answers.

I think the more that’s in the preamble begs the more that’s in the question. Sometimes we lose sight of what the question really is and, therefore, what the answer really is. When we have so much in the preamble, that seems to oblige the responding minister to try and answer them all, and if they don’t answer them all, the end question perhaps could be forgiven. If there was one succinct question, as it suggests, then we might have one succinct answer.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

MR. DICKSON: The next one I’ll just speak to briefly on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition, if I might, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier at pains in responding to I think it was the third set of questions of the Leader of the Opposition made a purported quote from 1990. It’s the same citation in *Beauchesne*, so you don’t have to look at a different section of the text. I’m referring to the same citation. The issue is the \$100 million expansion of the Swan Hills plant, which, as the record clearly shows, happened long, long after the Leader of the Official Opposition left cabinet and left government. She clearly cannot be tagged with the responsibility in any part for that \$100 million boondoggle, I’d characterize it, which had to do with the expansion of the Swan Hills plant.

That happened long after the Leader of the Opposition had left cabinet. That’s the point I wanted to make on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition.

MR. HAVELOCK: Again, I appreciate the hon. member’s attempts to defend his leader. That’s part of his job. Nevertheless, a simple point the Premier was making, Mr. Speaker, is that at the time the Swan Hills discussion was taking place and Bovar, generally, the hon. Leader of the Opposition did fully support the project. She fully supported construction of a facility to destroy hazardous waste within this province. That’s the point the Premier was making. It’s accurate. No point of order.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think the point really was a point of clarification. The hon. Opposition House Leader has offered a point of view, and the Deputy Government House Leader has offered an opposing point of view, truly a difference between members and, at best, a point of clarification, should it be called that.

We have one more, I think. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Point of Order Exhibits

MR. DICKSON: We do indeed, and this can be dealt with very quickly. The authority is *Beauchesne* 504 and the ruling given by the Speaker on May 6, 1999, at page 1533 in *Hansard*. It has to do

with exhibits. I was struck by two things. In the exchange between Fort McMurray and the Provincial Treasurer, while the TV cameras were running, both questioner and answerer made a point of – a brochure becomes a prop when people stand up in terms of displaying the latest publication. The government has an \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau. They don’t need to use valuable question period time to promote publications of the government of the province.

The other point would be this, Mr. Speaker. If the minister wants to put out a ministerial statement, there’s a different place in the program to do that rather than using part of our 50 minutes in question period.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on the point.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, two points, Mr. Speaker. One, with respect to the hon. member’s last remarks he is implying that the issue that was being discussed is not important. He’s implying that it’s not something that should be raised in question period but that the more appropriate avenue is to use a ministerial statement. That underscores why the hon. member and those other hon. members across the way will never form government, because it is never, never frivolous to seek the input of Albertans. The sooner they learn that, the better off they’ll be.

The other point I’d like to make, Mr. Speaker, is with respect to the use of props. Let’s keep in mind that not too long ago the hon. Leader of the Opposition in this House was standing up with blank papers and representing that they contained something which they did not.

So until we see better behaviour on your side of the House, don’t question what happens over here.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, in reply to the last assertion by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader . . . [interjection] I think, hon. Minister of Innovation and Science, two wrongs do not make anything right. So if it’s wrong for them, it’s also wrong for the other side.

To the extent that people have been using this and stretching it – I think this has happened on a number of occasions – I would say to both sides of the House, whether they’re tabling a calendar or extolling the virtues of one of their publications, that it is not proper. Hopefully all hon. members can honour that, that we don’t use exhibits, however tempting it might be to do so.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

15. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mrs. McClellan]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give my inaugural address. It’s called a maiden speech; is it? [interjection] That’s why I prefer inaugural.

I’d certainly like to thank the House for setting aside the time for me and the Member for Red Deer-North to speak today.

MR. HAVELOCK: It's really for her, but we have to include you.

MR. MASON: But you had to include me, and I do appreciate the rules sometimes.

Mr. Speaker, on June 12 the residents of Edmonton-Highlands placed their trust in me by electing me as their Member of this Legislative Assembly. I would like to thank everybody who took part in that exercise in democracy, including the people that supported and worked for other candidates. I think that it's a very important part of our democracy, and everybody that participates in an election makes a significant contribution to our democracy.

3:20

It's certainly a privilege to represent Edmonton-Highlands in this Assembly. My family and I have lived in the Edmonton-Highlands constituency for over 20 years. In fact, we have lived in the neighbourhood of Highlands, which is located right at the heart of the provincial riding.

The Edmonton-Highlands constituency is one of the most ethnically diverse constituencies in Alberta. This ethnic diversity contributes immensely to the quality of life and economic well-being of the Highlands community. On the western edge of the riding are the inner-city communities of Boyle Street and McCauley. In recent years there has been a large influx of people from Vietnam, Hong Kong, China, and other countries. These newer Canadians not only reside in these neighbourhoods, but they also contribute to their economic revitalization. One only has to drive up 97th Street north from downtown to see clear evidence of this.

Little Italy is located in the heart of the McCauley neighbourhood. The Member for St. Albert yesterday paid tribute to Frank Spinelli, the owner of the Italian Centre supermarket on 95th Street, who passed away after a courageous battle with cancer. Frank Spinelli was not only a successful business owner. He was also an outstanding member of the Italian community and the McCauley neighbourhood. I, too, pass along my sincere condolences to the Spinelli family.

The river valley community of Riverdale has its own rich history, with its eclectic mixture of residents and strong sense of community. Apparently Riverdale also includes the odd left-wing nut.

Moving east, there are the communities of Parkdale, Cromdale, and Bellevue. These are communities that have been incredibly resilient, especially in having to fight for their very right to exist given the expansion-minded neighbour Edmonton Northlands.

Then there's my home neighbourhood of Highlands, with its tree-lined streets, its proximity to the river valley, and its outstanding schools and recreation facilities. I might be a bit biased here, Mr. Speaker, but I don't think there's any better neighbourhood in Edmonton in which to live and raise a family.

Further north is the Montrose neighbourhood, with its tree-lined streets and mature homes. There are a significant number of residents in these communities of Portuguese, Italian, and other origins. East of 50th Street are the Beacon Heights and Rundle Heights neighbourhoods in Beverly, which have their own rich history starting with coal mining in the early days of this century, and they have also strong Ukrainian and strong Dutch communities in them.

When I contested the Edmonton-Highlands election, I ran on some key issues that matter to my constituents. Statistics Canada data says that the riding of Edmonton-Highlands has on average the second lowest family income in the province, ahead of only the Edmonton-Norwood riding. The Edmonton-Highlands riding has an unemployment rate twice the provincial average and a seniors population that is 60 percent higher than average.

Residents of Edmonton-Highlands are incredibly hardworking people. They may not always be rewarded for their efforts with high incomes, but their ingenuity and resourcefulness are second to none.

Most of my constituents subscribe to the philosophy that government can and does play a useful role in their lives. They see the value in a strong public health care system. They objected in large numbers to Bill 11, which we believe is a blueprint for expanding private, for-profit health care in Alberta. I made a commitment during that by-election to repeal Bill 11. While I was only able to table a bill to repeal Bill 11 this session, it's a promise I intend to keep, even if it has to wait until after the next provincial election, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, being a newly elected MLA in an opposition caucus of two has been a bit of an eye-opener. There are no majority votes in our caucus. They're either unanimous or split. In fact, I begin to wonder whether as a result of Alberta's long history of one-party rule the invaluable role of a political opposition is not fully appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to be able today to quote a Conservative to the members opposite, so I did a little bit of research, and I'd like to quote the words of Conservative Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker, who, unlike the members across the way, had the opportunity to see the role of an opposition party from both sides of the House. Mr. Diefenbaker said:

The opposition that fulfills its functions makes as important a contribution to the preservation of the parliamentary system as the government of the day . . . If Parliament is to be preserved as a living institution, the opposition must fearlessly perform its functions . . . The reading of history proves that freedom always dies when criticism ends.

That's the end of the quote.

He also said something else, Mr. Speaker, which I like a little bit more. It's a little shorter. "It's the duty of the opposition to defeat the government." The duty.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very passionate about the need to strengthen and sustain our public health care system. Despite the fact that politicians of all political stripes like to pay lip service to medicare, I remind members of this House that it was the CCF that brought medicare into being in this country, and we believe that it's up to us, that the burden falls on us to be its most outspoken defenders.

During the by-election I promised to do what I could to fight high natural gas and electricity prices. We made that an issue, and we were pleased that shortly after we raised that issue in the Edmonton-Highlands by-election, Mr. Speaker, the government announced its rebate program. Now, that rebate program is certainly not what we were looking for, but we are quite satisfied that it was the issue that we raised in that by-election that convinced the government they needed to appear to do something about high energy prices. It's the prices of gas and power that have more than quadrupled in the past five years while family incomes have stagnated. The government's response of sending rebate cheques only treats the symptoms of this problem and doesn't really deal with the real issue, which is the rising prices themselves.

I campaigned against the government's unfair tax policies, particularly the flax tax. The net result of the government changes is that a proportionately larger share of taxes will be paid by average Albertans, including many of my constituents, and a proportionately smaller share will be paid by those who need tax relief the least. Large, profitable corporations will get a tax cut of 50 percent. High-income earners will get tax cuts of over 20 percent, Mr. Speaker, while many middle-income earners will get cuts of only a few dollars. That's not fair.

We also need, I think, to work to make our labour laws fairer and more equitable. We need to increase the minimum wage to at least

\$7 per hour, with graduated increases thereafter. Government needs to be much more proactive in developing safe and secure affordable housing. We need to give tuition relief to postsecondary students. Yes, while doing all of these things, we still need to be careful with taxpayer dollars, just as my constituents are careful with their household dollars.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to take the whole amount of time, but I do want to talk about one of the major issues that convinced me to make the leap from municipal politics into provincial politics. I have and continue to have the utmost respect for the importance of municipal government in our country and in our province. I believe that it's a form of government that is a little more practical than we find here sometimes and which allows people of all political persuasions to work together for the betterment of their constituents.

The issue that I really want to address while I'm here in this House is the question of poverty in our province. Poverty in this province is about 17 percent, according to the figures that I quoted in my speech last night. In Edmonton it's nearly 20 percent, and in my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands it is nearly 25 percent, nearly 1 in 4. I believe that this government, like provincial governments across the land, can either take steps to alleviate it and reduce that number or take steps, which they have done, to increase that number. Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that even as the economy expands and people are doing better, the number of people living in poverty still is tending to rise. There's something wrong with that.

Mr. Speaker, I deal in my constituency with many people who are dependent on programs from the Alberta government, whether it be social assistance or AISH or WCB or student assistance. They come and seek assistance from me in my constituency office. I can tell you that the rates they are expected to live on are a scandal. They are a scandal. There's no other word for it. These people are forced to live in abject poverty. There's a book that came out about a year ago by Mel Hurtig, a distinguished Edmonton author and publisher, called *Pay the Rent or Feed the Kids*. [interjection] You know, you ought to read his book. The hon. member ought to read that book, because it's a real eye-opener.

3:30

The other thing that I find, Mr. Speaker, is that people, often of limited education, who are dependent on these sorts of government programs are put into a real maze. There are so many catches, catch-22s built into the system. If you're on this program, you can't do this. If you get a little bit of money over here, you're cut off this. It is so complex and so unfair that it really ought to be incumbent on the government to seriously review that entire maze of contradictory regulations, that just traps people in poverty.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I know, Madam Speaker, that the government wants to get people out of poverty. That's what they say. Yet built into so many of these programs are traps that keep people dependent on government programs, and I really think the government should seriously take a look at that. I know that there are members on the other side, both in cabinet and in the caucus, that do want to do something about this. I will make the undertaking that if the government does do something that actually benefits people who are poor in this province, they will get no criticism from me. They'll get praise from me. I know that there are some people out there of goodwill across the way, and they need to be supported. I'll support them if they're willing to take that issue on. It's very important. I for my part will do what I can to bring these things to the government's attention.

I know that one of the things I've been doing is getting out to

different parts of the province and learning a little bit about other parts of the province and learning, particularly, about the lives of people who don't live in Edmonton, who live in rural areas, and trying to learn a little bit about agriculture. I think it would be of benefit for many members opposite if they want to come on a tour of my riding or sit in my constituency office for an hour and find out what the lives of people are like in the inner city of Edmonton. I think if they did do that . . . [interjection] I'll make that offer specifically, Madam Speaker, to that minister over there to come on a tour with me of Boyle Street and McCauley and sit in my constituency office. I'm quite sure that that minister has not, or he wouldn't be speaking the way he is. It's important. Those are real living and breathing human beings, Madam Speaker, and they deserve a better shake than they've gotten from this government.

In conclusion, I'm very honoured to have been elected in the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands. I've suggested that with an election imminent and my by-election just past, perhaps I should get a bye from this next election. I'm informed that that is contrary to the law, but I just don't think it's fair, Madam Speaker. [interjections] I know when not to step into a trap.

With that, I will take my place and thank the Assembly for their kind patience in listening to me.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure and an honour to rise in the House today and acknowledge the privilege and responsibility I have been given to represent the constituency of Red Deer-North in this Chamber. My constituents understand the need to make wise and careful decisions. I'm sure that they would be pleased to have this Assembly "approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the Government."

I am also very pleased and honoured to have this opportunity to present my maiden speech. I am the second person to represent Red Deer-North. I've been told many times that I have big shoes to fill. Madam Speaker, it is my intention to fill those shoes and to leave them one size bigger. Mr. Stockwell Day, now leader of the Canadian Alliance, served his constituents and all Albertans well. As a good servant of Alberta and Canada he has taken his dynamic leadership to the federal level, where he could become the next Prime Minister of Canada. He will show how the Alberta advantage can become the Canadian advantage.

I want to sincerely thank the people of Red Deer-North for giving me the opportunity to serve them as a member of the Alberta Legislature. Their friendly handshakes and warm smiles encouraged and energized me as I went door-to-door to meet them and discuss their concerns. I also want to especially thank the many wonderful volunteers who helped me, including all the members of caucus who took the time to go door-to-door with me. I would also like to thank the members of my family, who had faith and confidence in me, especially my husband, Bob. I would also like to thank two volunteers who were at my side every day and every night throughout the campaign, Cheryl Davis and Darin Doel.

As the representative for Red Deer-North I will serve my constituents to the best of my ability with all that is good and honest. During the past week in the House I have watched and listened carefully. I've heard and seen many things. I have heard a wise and patient Speaker of the House encourage each member to remember that honesty, integrity, and decorum play a major role in the MLA job description. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for your wisdom, dedication, and encouragement.

I have watched and listened as our Premier tackled difficult questions in the House. I watched and listened as our Premier took

the time to visit Michener Centre, the first Premier to visit since 1974, and to listen to a resident of Michener tell him that he had done a good job and that he had worked hard. I watched as the Premier talked to him and told him that, yes, he had done a good job. Thank you, Mr. Premier, for listening to these very special people.

I've watched and listened carefully to the ministers as they answer and explain the government's position on health care, energy, education, justice, children's services, labour, infrastructure, et cetera. Thank you for the long hours of dedication that it takes to develop good government policy.

I have watched and listened as the hon. members of the opposition have debated and challenged the government's business plan and fiscal policies. Although some people may think that their sole duty is to criticize the government, I have witnessed at times sincerity and good intentions.

I have witnessed a near miracle when the entire Assembly came together to pass Bill 26, the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act. I saw emotion in the faces of my colleagues on both sides of the floor, and I knew that deep down inside we are all concerned about the same things: freedom and democracy. It is only in true democracy that we can achieve true freedom.

Bill 26 reminds us that in one of the world's most horrific genocides, the Jewish people suffered terribly, as did the Ukrainians, the Polish, and many others. I am here today in this beautiful country of Canada because of just such a genocide. It was the first genocide of the 20th century when the Turks massacred the Armenians, and my grandparents were forced to flee to Canada. My grandfather had survived the Armenian massacre only because of the grace of God. He had been awake in the middle of the night and had felt and heard the heavy pounding of horses' hooves in the distance. He climbed to the top of a tree so that he could see what was going on. Before he had a chance to react, the courtyard of his village was filled with Turkish soldiers, who did not waste any time in massacring the entire village of his family and friends. He was the only survivor.

3:40

As my grandfather watched in horror, he saw the soldiers hang his young cousins upside down from trees. He saw the soldiers cut off their kneecaps and then light fires underneath them. I said to my grandmother that my grandfather must have had nightmares for years. She looked at me and said, "He still jumps in the night."

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Despite the horror that was inflicted upon the Armenians by the Turks, my grandparents never taught hatred of the Turkish people. This was because my grandmother's life was saved and she was raised by a Turkish family. They were neighbours and friends, and when it came time for her family to run for their lives, the Turkish friends offered to keep Mariam. She was too little, and she would not be quiet in hiding. They would say that she was their daughter, and when the war was over, her family could come back and get her. My grandmother's family never came back. Her Turkish family raised her with love, and they became her brothers and sisters.

Mr. Speaker, this is a story of hope and love. When we say "never again," we give it real meaning by making our province and our country strong and free. Good business plans and sound fiscal policies will help to keep Alberta strong and free.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to tell you a little bit about Red Deer. I've always said that Red Deer is the best place in the world to live. After all, where else can you find two NHL teams, two CFL teams, two international airports, two Jubilee Auditoriums, spectacular

mountains, and beautiful lakes, all within an hour and a half drive? My husband used to say that a traffic jam in Red Deer was more than 10 cars at a stoplight. Red Deer is growing so fast that the constant flow of traffic on the main road always looks like rush hour.

Red Deer-North is a community of approximately 30,000 people. The small businesses in Red Deer-North serve the oil field, construction companies, manufacturing companies, and farmers. The shopping is expanding beyond our two shopping malls and the downtown areas as major players such as Costco, Staples, Leon's Furniture, Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Zellers, where the lowest price is the law, compete for the market share of the people of Red Deer and central Alberta.

Red Deer-North looks forward to the government of Alberta maintaining a strong and vibrant environment to help the people of Alberta to prosper. Red Deer-North has a need for affordable housing. The fast growth of Red Deer and the demand for these homes leaves little supply.

We have a number of single-parent families in Red Deer-North who have told me that it is difficult right now for them to go it alone, and they are thankful for day care and rent subsidies.

Red Deer-North has some very exciting manufacturing plants. Travelaire Canada builds beautiful trailers that compete with American products. Our fibreglass manufacturing company makes many of the FRP exterior parts for these trailers. Superior Emergency builds some of the best fire trucks in North America. We have Parkland Industries, Quinn Pumps, Collicutt Hanover, Washuk manufacturing, and many more. There are also a large number of small business people. These innovative entrepreneurs help to create the jobs that give us security.

The people of Red Deer-North want safe communities, where they can raise their families without fear, and the seniors of Red Deer-North want a safe community as well. Mr. Speaker, the most important building block of any society is the family. We need to make sure that our business plans and fiscal policies help families to be strong and united. We need to encourage respect and love for all members of our families so that we might learn how to respect and help others.

In the last six weeks I have experienced the greatness of our beautiful city of Red Deer. I've had the honour and the privilege of handing out Rutherford scholarships to the students of Lindsay Thurber high school. That evening I watched as over 300 students received awards in many different areas of achievement. I found this to be very exciting. I participated in the hall of fame ceremonies where three internationally renowned former students of Lindsay Thurber were inducted into the hall of fame.

The awards and fame didn't stop there. I attended the Chamber of Commerce awards night as five of our most successful businesses won awards. We also celebrated the achievement of our Chamber of Commerce manager, Jan Fisher, who was awarded the Canadian manager of the year award.

I was so proud of all our award winners that you would have thought I was their mother. Mr. Speaker, the city of Edmonton may be the City of Champions, but Red Deer is the city of winners.

The city of Red Deer keeps growing and growing. I know that the hon. Member for Red Deer-South is as proud as I am of our beautiful city. The Minister of Learning called him a pain in the neck because he persisted until Red Deer College was given a much-needed grant for expansion. Red Deer College was originally designed for 2,500 students. It now serves 5,000 students. All of Red Deer is thankful for the efforts of the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

In the past six weeks I've also attended the Millennium Centre grand opening. This is a beautiful modern office complex in downtown Red Deer. I attended the grand opening of Safety City,

that will serve to teach our children safe habits on the street and on the farm. Hundreds of volunteers gave their time and money to make this project a reality. The province was also a proud contributor to this worthy project. We have just opened the Excel gymnastics club, which is the most modern club in Alberta. The province contributed to this project as well. This club is part of the brand-new Collicutt Centre, where all types of recreational activity will find their home.

The Kerry Wood Nature Centre just opened a new addition so that children of all ages can study, learn, and enjoy the wonders of nature. The Westerner association has added a new midsized building called the harvest centre, and it was not too long ago that the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame was opened on the outskirts of Red Deer on highway 2. Soon we will be developing the top floor of the Red Deer regional hospital, where we will have more beds and nursing care for our people.

Mr. Speaker, these are new and wonderful achievements that help Red Deer to grow. Many of them could not have been accomplished without the tenacious and persistent work of hundreds of volunteers. In fact, Red Deer is called the city of volunteers. Our volunteers contribute to the quality of life in Red Deer. They help to make it a better place to live, as do all our areas of recreation. Our park system is fantastic. The Waskasoo park system has many miles of beautiful biking and hiking trails that link historic and nature sites to parks and other recreation areas.

Every one of these projects is the result of someone's dreams. With hard work, tenacity, innovation, and courageous, persistent fund-raising each one of these dreams became a reality. Red Deer and indeed Alberta are made stronger each time a dream is realized. Without good business plans and solid fiscal policies that create a thriving economy and dynamic environment, these dreams could not come true.

Mr. Speaker, it was just over a year ago that I went to Kobe, Japan, to represent the Pacific Northwest region of International Training in Communication at the international speech contest. In my speech I searched for a hero. In my desperate search I quote Bonnie Tyler's award-winning song *Holding Out for a Hero*, which says:

Where have all the good men gone
And where are all the gods?
Where's the street-wise Hercules
To fight the rising odds?
Isn't there a white knight upon a fiery steed?
Late at night I toss and turn and dream of what
I need
I need a hero.

Mr. Speaker, I couldn't find a hero in Bill Clinton, who didn't even know the definition of sex. I couldn't find a hero in Jean Chretien, who had to finish a ski trip and could not attend the funeral of King Hussein of Jordan, one of the greatest Middle East peace-makers in history. I could not find a hero in Boris Yeltsin, who was in and out of hospital for his illnesses and addictions. I could not find a hero in the Olympic Committee, that would allow corruption and greed to control them.

I looked throughout history and around the world to find a hero, and there are many: Abraham Lincoln, Sir John A. Macdonald, Sir Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, Sadako Sasaki of Hiroshima, Nelson Mandela. In all these heroes I did not find my hero. But when I looked around, I found that my hero was in that very room. When you take the time to listen to people and their concerns, when you can give them a hug to celebrate their victories or share their sorrows, when you kneel down to wipe a tear from a child's eye, when you comfort the sick, and when you visit the elderly, then you are my hero.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, this room is full of heroes and our communities are full of heroes. The members of this Legislature are heroes when they show concern for our children by providing good education and passing legislation that protects them from predators, when they show their compassion for seniors who need caring support, when they encourage affordable housing for those who need shelter, when they provide a vision that protects our health care for the next generation, when they seek to protect our environment, and when they stand firm on a policy of fiscal responsibility. It takes heroes to make the tough choices to protect the future and it takes heroes to stand on guard for all Albertans.

Where have all the good men and women gone? Well, they're right here among us. I am honoured to be among these heroes of Alberta. I am privileged to represent the people of Red Deer-North. I am proud to be part of the Alberta advantage, and I will serve the people of Red Deer-North and of Alberta to the best of my ability and with all my heart.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. members from Edmonton-Highlands and Red Deer-North may be my political adversaries, but they are also honoured colleagues, and I think we have seen that demonstrated in their maiden addresses to this Assembly. On behalf of the Official Opposition caucus I want to thank them for their heartfelt words.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity, as well, to participate in the debate on Motion 15. Motion 15 reads: "Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government." It should come as no surprise to you that I will not be supporting that motion.

The government of Alberta has a responsibility to more than just the bottom line, particularly in the definition of bottom line that this government embraces, which is one of simply dollars and cents. There is little recognition of the social discord, the social disharmony that has happened as a result of this government's rather ruthless pursuit of its more ideologically driven policies.

If you look at the second-quarter fiscal update, which was released on November 14, and you turn to page 1, which is where you would think the government would put the most important information that it wished Albertans to know, in fact under the caption of Highlights, Mr. Speaker, which indicates of course that this is what the government wants people to pay particular attention to, we see that the very first highlighted bullet is that Alberta will be allocating over and above the budget an additional amount "towards repaying Alberta's accumulated debt." Now, I don't take issue with debt repayment. In fact, I think it was irresponsible of the Conservative government to get Albertans into that particular debt load situation to begin with. The whole time I've been in this Legislature, I've been talking about fiscal responsibility and, in fact, insisting that the government live up to its obligations.

I find it curious that a government that talks about people and prosperity would say, as the most important issue to highlight, that what we're going to do with this blessing of riches which we have is accelerate the debt repayment. Now, why do I find that so troubling? Well, I find that troubling because it shows where this government is focusing their attention. You could look at some of the other highlights as well. The second highlight talks about debt repayment. The third highlight talks about tax cuts.

This government seems to have forgotten that it has an obligation to do more than balance the budget. The balanced budget is simply

an achievement that allows you to then do other things. A balanced budget is not the sum total of the reason for a government to pursue fiscal policies. In this province of Alberta, with all of the riches that we have, in one of the most robust economies on the face of the planet, why don't we see a government that actually has a vision that does serve people, that recognizes that what we're talking about is much more than a balanced budget, much more than just a corporate bottom line? Why don't we see in fact some statements by this government that would be truly visionary, some performance measures to accompany those three-year business plans which would be so bold as to propose that there will be no homelessness in Alberta due to shelter allowances not keeping up with rental market conditions? Why isn't that a goal in the business plan of the minister of human resources?

Why is it that we don't see the Minister of Learning have a performance measure that says that in Alberta we will have the most affordable tuition fees in Canada? Why don't we see that as a goal? Why don't we see the Minister of Health and Wellness or his associate put into their business plan that Alberta will boast the shortest wait lists in Canada for surgeries? Why don't we see the minister of environmental protection include a business plan that says that we will have the highest standards in the country for air and water quality? Why don't we see the Minister of Learning talk about a classroom size performance measure that recognizes that a low student/teacher ratio is one of the best ways to guarantee the quality of the educational experience for the students? Why don't we have a performance measure that talks about the lowest student/teacher ratios?

Mr. Speaker, we have a government that seems to recognize the cost of things but doesn't recognize the value of things. We have a government that says that we will put effort into making sure we're ahead of Ontario when it comes to tax reduction, but we won't put any effort into making sure we're ahead of some of the poorest jurisdictions on this continent when it comes to actual dollars spent on classroom resources. Why is that?

Then the government wants us to unanimously endorse their general fiscal policies. Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not the job of this Legislature to pat the government on the back. The job of this Legislature is to hold the government accountable. I don't think the government has been doing a very good job of being accountable, and it's not just my opinion.

If we take a look at what the Auditor General has had to say about deficiencies in government financial management practices in just the last couple of years, I think it speaks for itself. Mr. Speaker, for example, the Auditor General has said that feedback from standing policy committees "relating to the content or format of business plans is minimal." Again, the Auditor General:

In the Budget 99 cycle, information on Alberta's economic outlook for factors such as population, unemployment rate, exchange rate, and interest rates were not provided to Ministries until October 1998, several months after some Ministries began their business planning.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General said in his '99-2000 annual report:

In Budget 99, core businesses are still defined variously in terms of goals, strategies, activities, or performance criteria. Strategies are sometimes defined as desired results rather than broad actions to achieve them. Goals are sometimes defined in terms of activities rather than end results.

No wonder this government presents a confused policy picture to Albertans. They can't get it straight. They talk a good game about openness and accountability.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

They talk about business planning, but we don't really see the evidence of the benefit of real business plans. In fact, well over 200 performance measures have been missed by this government. Performance measures are changed year to year. Performance measures are not always measured on an annual basis, and performance measures simply disappear when the results are too embarrassing for the government to report. That doesn't show openness or accountability or integrity, and it certainly doesn't show good management.

4:00

Madam Speaker, let me continue to quote the Auditor General:

In our review of the Ministry business plans in Budget 99, we found that over half the Ministries had at least one goal that did not have a performance measure associated with it. Overall, 24% of all goals in Ministry business plans did not have a performance measure. In addition, in many business plans where performance measures were included, the linkage between the goals and the performance measures was not apparent.

Certainly nothing to be proud of and no reason at all why this Legislative Assembly should approve Motion 15.

Madam Speaker, the Auditor General continued in his last report:

Our review of Budget 99 found that 82% of the performance measures had targets. However, two-thirds of Ministries had at least one performance measure that lacked [any] target.

The Auditor General goes on to say:

We have found that the results analyses of most ministries, made public in September 1999, did not discuss the reasons for variances between planned and actual performance and did not integrate financial and non-financial performance.

We can only be left to conclude that the government is either unaware or unwilling to tell the whole story. Now, it could be that they're unaware. It could be that the Auditor General is right. It could be that there is no linkage between the money that's being spent and the outcomes, that the performance measures are either invalid or inappropriate. It could very well be that the government is simply unable to do what it says it set out to do. It could be that they're unaware of the problems. It could be that they are in denial. It could be that they're just old and tired and think that all of this accountability stuff is a bunch of bother and that if they close their eyes and click their heels together, they can make it all go away and they'll end up back at home in their own bed and nobody will be looking over their shoulder.

It could be that this government just simply has ceased to care about being accountable to Albertans, that they somehow believe they have a divine right to govern and that Albertans will tolerate their incompetence because, after all, there is no alternative. Well, that kind of arrogant attitude on the part of the government will not serve them well, and it certainly doesn't serve the people of Alberta very well.

Now, over the years the Liberal Official Opposition in this province have provided many, many, many constructive recommendations to government to improve the budgeting and the accountability process. We've talked about changing the Public Accounts process. Why don't we have a Public Accounts review of the potential impact on the government of Alberta of the diminishing nonrenewable resources? There will come a point in this province when we will no longer be able to rely on the oil sands or on the conventional crude reserves or on natural gas for the billions of dollars that those resources now provide to the Treasury. Why don't we have a committee of this government looking into that and reviewing the implications of that and planning for that all-too-near future? Why don't we have an all-party process in terms of prebudget study, public consultation? Why don't we ever have the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations meet in this province?

The Alberta Liberals believe that what we do here is of importance, and the most important element of what we do here is that it is done in public, that it's done in full view of the taxpayer. We have talked about many initiatives which would open up the process, but instead of an honest review of those suggestions, we've seen the government continue to tighten things up. The former Treasurer, who now wants to be the Prime Minister of this country – when he was House leader, we had him retool the budget process so that subcommittees of supply were struck. The subcommittees of supply would be reviewing multiple departments of government at the very same time, therefore denying individual members of this Assembly the ability to participate fully in the budget debate, because you can't be in two places at once. The government had the audacity to say: oh well, this is going to open up the process. Well, in fact what it did is it made it harder, made it more obscure, made it more difficult for members of this Assembly to hold the government accountable in the budget process.

Madam Speaker, we find it very difficult to match the words of this government with their deeds. We see huge gaps between what they say and what they do. We see hypocrisy in their statements about accountability and fiscal responsibility. We see an indifference to the real concerns of Albertans, probably most dramatically evidenced when Albertans all over this province told the government not to pursue their privatization of health care scheme, to drop Bill 11, and this government's response was to call those Albertans names and dismiss and diminish them.

For all of these reasons, I can't support Motion 15. I would be surprised if most private members really could in their heart of hearts, and I know that no member of the Official Opposition can.

Madam Speaker, my time is running short. I understand that this motion will continue on the Order Paper. I've been asked by the Government House Leader to adjourn debate, and I will do so at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

MR. HAVELOCK: Madam Speaker, what I would like to do, if I could, is rearrange the order this afternoon a little bit and simply go to third reading of Bill 28 at this time.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Third Reading

Bill 28
Appropriation (Supplementary
Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2)

MR. HAVELOCK: On behalf of the Treasurer I'd like to move third reading of Bill 28.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to the supplementary estimates at third reading. The last time I spoke to the supplementary estimates, in Committee of the Whole, I had reviewed the requirements for supplementary estimates as they're laid out in *Beauchesne*. I'd like to return to that theme and look at just three ministries. The reasons for supplementary estimates are outlined by *Beauchesne*, and two of them seem to be applicable to three of the departments that I'd like to talk about: Children's Services, Health and Wellness, and Infrastructure.

Beauchesne says that one of the reasons that you have a supple-

mentary estimate is that there's a need to further grant moneys for an existing service or to add money to a vote for a new service that's being put in place. That's extending the purposes of a vote. It would seem on the surface that that would be the reasons for some of the sums that we see in those three departments, but that kind of superficial look is not really borne out when you look at what the Auditor General has said about those departments.

4:10

I'd like to look at Children's Services first, because we have before us a request for \$46.372 million by the Ministry of Children's Services for budgeted increases in the child welfare caseloads and the handicapped children's services caseloads, to address the recommendations of the Children's Forum and the Task Force on Children at Risk report, program enhancements related to the development of a risk assessment and reduction model, and improved permanency planning for children in the care of the child and family services authorities. Additionally, there are moneys for contracted agencies and service providers to support employee compensation adjustments, employee compensation costs with respect to staff seconded to child and family services authorities, and to assist youth in the transition from government care to independent living.

Those are the reasons for the supplementary supply requisition being in front of us this afternoon, but if you look at what the Auditor General says, the reasons may be more related to inadequate planning than they are to the provision of additional services. I refer the Assembly to page 70. The Auditor General, referring to Children's Services, says:

The Department is responsible to forecast the cost of children's services in order to provide a budget proposal. However, the Department does not have the system it needs to adequately forecast these costs.

In the margin he has made the same comment, and I asked in Public Accounts if any reason had been given for the lack of any forecasting model. The Auditor General said no, that there was no reason given. It makes sense that if the department can't adequately forecast their costs, then this is going to happen year after year. There's no provision in their budgeting process to ascertain what the costs might be. So we could expect with this department, as is the case now with Health and Wellness, that we're going to be back here year after year with requests for supplementary supply, and that isn't consistent with the reasons that are given in *Beauchesne*. It's a result of inadequate planning at the department level.

The Auditor General devotes quite a lot of space to Children's Services in the report and talks about the actual funding formula that's used to allocate resources and talks about it being a "population needs-based model" that is adjusted as the department moves through the year and has experience with programs. Again, it says that that's needed and that the funding formula needs to be enhanced. So two crucial junctures where the department is putting together its budget: the population funding formula and the adjustments they make to that and then the lack of a model for predicting and managing costs. The department is in the unenviable position of not being able to accurately put forward a budget. Again, that's why we're back here with supplementary supply.

The Auditor General also referred to the department not having information on whether the cost of support services is reasonable.

Therefore, the Department is unable to determine whether or not the funds were spent economically.

So the Auditor General points to a series of deficiencies at the budgeting level in the Department of Children's Services that can only lead to the department being here with a request in excess of \$46 million. I think that when those requests come, Madam

Speaker, they should be looked at very seriously, and every effort should be made to make sure that we're not here again next year with another supplementary request because of inadequate planning and not because of changing circumstances.

The second department that I'd like to talk about in terms of the planning – and again the words are not mine but the words of the Auditor General. Health and Wellness has a request for \$293.593 million. On page 132 of the Auditor General's report he talks about the department and the number of supplemental requests, the number of postbudget announcements that that department has made. He says:

While budgeting should accommodate some flexibility, for the past two completed fiscal years the health budget has increased in total more from additional subsequent interim funding than from the annual budgeting process. Between January 1998 and May 2000, more than 25 additional funding decisions were announced that affected health system operations.

Later on the same page he goes on to say:

While subsequent additional funding may provide relief from immediate budget pressures, it is not conducive to good budget management since repetition may create the expectation of continuing amounts in addition to planned annual budget increases.

So the Auditor General is saying that this is going to happen time and time again. They don't plan adequately in the first place, and they come before the Assembly and have to request money time and time again. The record of 25 different announcements seems to be one that should cause some alarm across the way in terms of how effective the budget planning is, a second example in these budget estimates, I think, of where the planning at budget time has not served the government or the people of this province very well.

I have as my third example the Infrastructure department, Madam Speaker. The request there is for \$419 million. The Auditor General again has made comment about that. A couple of things are disturbing in the Auditor General's comments. On page 185 the Auditor General says:

The Ministry also requires information on strategic service delivery options and forecasted needs to develop strategic long-term capital plans. Such information would include strategic policy changes, options, and priorities as well as forecasted needs based on economic analysis and projected demographic data. In the absence of this information, there is a risk that the government will not have the most cost-effective program delivery methods nor will it optimize the allocation of resources to the acquisition, preservation and maintenance of capital assets.

So there's no plan. There's no long-term plan in the Infrastructure department. As a result, you'll continue to see requests for supplementary supply.

In other parts of the report there are even more alarming warnings from the Auditor General. He goes on to say:

In addition, we noted opportunities for improvement in linking the information on strategic education program delivery, as developed by Learning, to the capital plans for school facilities.

So what he was saying was that here they have the Department of Learning setting goals and establishing priorities and the Department of Infrastructure, which is supposed to serve the Learning department and provide facilities that match the priorities of the department, not talking to each other or at least not sharing information to the extent that there's any assurance that the money is being wisely spent.

4:20

I heard a previous speaker from the government side try to explain away the supplementary supply by the fact that there had been windfall resource revenues, that that was what allowed this supply motion to come forward. But if you go back to what the Auditor General said, at least in three departments that seems hard to justify. In fact, if the kind of planning that one might expect would have

been done in those departments, we wouldn't have been here with supply.

With those comments, Madam Speaker, I would conclude. I must admit that I find it difficult to be critical of moneys that I think are needed. I guess my quarrel is with the way in which those moneys are requisitioned from this Legislature.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm mindful that it's Thursday afternoon, the second week of session, and the impetus for members to be thinking about other things at this point in the day or perhaps closing their eyelids is pretty strong. So I guess I'm contemplating whether or not I'm going to be able to keep people awake or keep them in their seats at this point.

You know, we're also this afternoon, in the context of discussing this expenditure of money in supplementary supply, on the eve of a federal election. Quite humorously, I woke up the other morning and thought perhaps I'd slept through our own provincial election call. Our provincial Premier was on the radio personally attacking the Prime Minister about a particular issue, and I thought that maybe in fact I'd slept through our own election call and we were in the midst of our own election campaign. I'm not sure I've ever heard a provincial Premier talk so often, make so many public statements in the context of a federal election.

It has been, Madam Speaker, in many other respects a very exciting campaign. I mean, we've even had the perpetually tanned leader of the Reform Party here many times in the province, particularly here in Edmonton, making comments about his vision for the health care system, his vision for the justice system, and many of those visions didn't entirely equate with the reality of things here in Alberta or the history here in Alberta under his leadership.

Now, let me relate these things to supplementary supply this afternoon. We, I think, make it a sport here in Alberta to take some shots at the federal government at least once a week if not every day. In a federal election campaign it seems to be every day. One of the things I think the federal government needs to be commended on is that they really know how to write a budget. They put forward, Madam Speaker, a budget that contains an estimate of what the expenditures will be. Granted there may be areas where people think they should have spent more money or perhaps they should have spent less money, but the budget is there. In contrast, in Alberta we really have two budget processes. We go through the big hoopla in February, generally in February every year, where the Provincial Treasurer has his podium and makes his sermon, or I should say his Budget Address, and that's put forward to the public as being the provincial budget. There's all kinds of media coverage and the rotunda's full of press, but, in reality, as we see here today, there's really a second budget. These supplementary estimates constitute a second budget. We're talking about the expenditure of money. We're being asked to approve \$979 million. To me that's certainly more than a slight underestimation of expenses. It's certainly more than "Oops; I overspent." That's a significant amount of money.

So while the provincial government likes to attempt to point out that the federal government is full of flaws and the leadership is not up to their standard, really, Madam Speaker, here's a perfect example where all is not what meets the eye in Alberta. We have a government that has adopted a process of bringing forward a budget in February, and then from February to November they pretty much spend as they please, whether or not that's within the budget.

In my term of office every year – I believe I'm correct – we've seen supplementary estimates in this same range if not consecutively

higher every year. Why is that? Because the government has had an agenda politically to try and underestimate expenditures, to ratchet down expenditures in this province so that they could profess that we're a trim, lean, deficit/debt-fighting machine, open for business; we're going to give tax cuts. All of that is being done in a manner, Madam Speaker, that really lulls or perhaps may even to some degree mislead Albertans into thinking: okay; what we're spending in February is what we spend. Well, that's not the case.

In large part because of a number of factors, this debate this afternoon and the contents of this bill will most likely not be covered to a large degree, and that's unfortunate. It undermines democracy. It undermines the budget process, because really the money we're talking about this afternoon comes out of the public's pocket in Alberta. It comes out of Albertans' pockets, and they have a right to know that there's a backdoor way of spending in this province that is called supplementary estimates.

That being said, there are some very legitimate expenditures contained within these estimates. But why weren't they included in the budget in February? The caseload growth in child welfare, as an example, was well on its way in February of 2000. Did we incorporate money to fund for sufficient staff and compensation to cover that? No. Similarly, we knew waiting lists in February of 2000 were very much an issue in the public's mind. Why wasn't the money incorporated at that time? There are a number of expenditures that talk about replacing medical equipment and funding additional MRI machines. These are all things, really, which accumulated because the government has not accounted for these types of expenditures in their budgets every year. That's one of the issues that the Auditor General is pointing out. Our budgeting process is becoming less than honest. That's perhaps the best way to frame it without being unparliamentary or inflammatory, Madam Speaker.

I actually find some humour in listening to the federal election campaign and the leader of the Reform Party professing to be this prodigal son of sorts, a tanned one at that, and that somehow Alberta has just got this all figured out. Madam Speaker, as we know, in this province the reality is really quite different.

4:30

I can't imagine budgeting at a federal level in the manner in which we are doing our budgeting here now. We might want to hypothesize a bit about how this government would rally if the federal government took this type of approach to the budgeting process. I somehow think we'd be hearing a lot of voices rising on the other side if that were the case. There are other ways in which this supplementary supply also relates to the whole federal election campaign, and that's through federal programs.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to be talking about several different ministries in my debate at third reading, but one of the things that I was very disappointed was not contained within the Children's Services estimates was provision for the claw-back of the child benefit to be removed. I have spoken about this before in the House, that we have a policy in this government that when a family receives the children's benefit, they subsequently have that same amount clawed back by the provincial government from their welfare payments. There's really no relief in sight, it appears, in that respect.

In a similar vein, we do not see any substantive relief for Albertans who are living on a fixed income with respect to rent relief, and this is something that I've been receiving calls and letters about in my constituency office for at least a year. Again, the official government line appears to be: well, in a growing economy, rent will rise. Along with that, of course, we know electricity is rising and utility costs are rising because of the government's botched deregulation plan. We see our municipal taxes rising because of the government's cuts to municipalities. Really, Madam Speaker, what choice do municipalities have? What choice do Albertans living on

a fixed income have? I'm not entirely submitting that we should be going through this process to this degree at this stage and time, but if we're in the process of allocating additional pockets of money, then why aren't these equally important issues on the table?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We also have heard much over the course of the last two years about the increase in tuition in this province. We hear it from every facet of the province, both undergraduate and graduate students. Alberta now is leading the country, really, in their lack of respect for postsecondary education and their unwillingness to do something about the rate at which tuition has increased in Alberta during their term of office. The average debt, which has been shared with us this week in a series of meetings that CAUS has had with members of the Assembly, is approximately \$18,600. We see very limited avenues for students to access student loans; again, a very limited number of scholarships. All of these additional things that I talked about – electricity increases, utility increases, rent increases – affect students. And on top of that, Mr. Speaker, they have to shoulder a very high rate of tuition.

Now, I believe also that we are the only province in the country that has not done something, either freezing or capping or reducing tuition. Every other province in Canada, I believe, has announced that they have in fact heard from students the burden they're incurring through their postsecondary education, and those governments have responded and done something about that. But we certainly don't see anything in supplementary supply that is going to bring any relief in the short term.

Speaking of disrespect, we went through a process again in March of this year of asking a series of questions to a number of departments. All of my colleagues participated in the designated supply subcommittees, asking questions of departments relative to their budget allocations. I sat on a number of those committees. One in particular that I sat on and asked a number of questions about was the department of health. Mr. Speaker, it's funny that we would go through that process of asking those questions and never get a response. It may have been an oversight, but I believe that it's been pointed out, prior to Thursday afternoon on the second week of session, and we still have no replies to those questions. So here we're being asked again to approve the supplementary estimates when in fact those questions that we raised about the legitimacy of the allocations in the initial budget have not been responded to.

That again speaks to this government's definition of respect, their definition of respect when it comes to the Official Opposition, when it comes to the taxpayers. They are of the belief that they own the primary right to communicate to the public of this province, whether it's about tax dollars, budgets, supplementary estimates, or even, Mr. Speaker, about how they should vote in a federal election campaign. That's the sad reality.

So as agonizing as it is, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to restate some of the questions, that I think were very important questions that were raised in March of 2000 in the context of the primary health budget, that were not responded to this afternoon. Some of those questions related to the health surveillance branch Trends report. We have been attempting to obtain an updated copy of that report since the spring at least. I believe the last edition was out in May of '99, and we were told at one point, in fact, that the updated version of the surveillance report would be out sometime around May of 2000.

Now, for the public's interest, the surveillance report is really a series of indicators, where the government was monitoring the health of Alberta from an environmental standpoint, from factors such as the incidence of asthma, the incidence of birth defects, the health of our water, the incidence of teenage pregnancies, of infant mortality,

those types of things. So that would have been very relevant this afternoon, to have been able to look at that and say: well, where we have a high incidence of low birth weight babies – which in fact was the case in 1999; I believe Calgary led the country – what has the government done, what has the department of health done with respect to that in the last year, and what allocations are within the budget to address that? But that report has been withheld, Mr. Speaker. We've not seen it tabled in this Assembly, although it's my understanding it is completed. I believe, pessimistic as it is, it's really so that that information wasn't available to be able to debate during the context of the supplementary supply estimates.

4:40

When we look specifically at some of the allocations under Health and Wellness in the supplementary estimates today, we see \$10 million for the increased cost of drug benefits. Really no explanation to any degree, Mr. Speaker, about what in fact is contained within that increase and what the breakdown was of those costs. It has been predicted, at least in my tenure within the health sector, for some time, several years, that pharmaceutical costs were going to increase in this country as a result of the patent protection that was afforded to name-brand pharmaceutical companies by a prior federal government, a Conservative government in fact, led by Prime Minister Mulroney.

I can't believe that my time is over. I really think the mood is right, Mr. Speaker, that I could get unanimous consent to continue.

[Unanimous consent denied]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure standing in this Assembly most of the time, but while we're standing up here speaking on this bill, Bill 28, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000 (No. 2), my question is: would we be back in this fall session if it weren't for this bill? Why are we here? Bill 28.

The Legislative Assembly is being asked to approve an additional \$979.321 million in supplementary supply in the 2000-2001 fiscal year from the general revenue fund. Of the \$979.321 million in new spending being requested as supplementary supply, \$978.276 million is for additional operating and capital expenses for government ministries, with the remaining \$1.045 million in funding for the office of the Auditor General; \$968.994 million is in operating expenses; as well, the remaining \$10.327 million is for capital expenditures.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it's called planning on the fly, especially on the eve of the election coming up. It's not enough for this government to miss their budget estimate and their target by very close to a billion dollars. I do believe that if we look back over the last few years, the previous Treasurer, Mr. Day, in 1997-98 was \$474 million under budget. In '98-99 the same past Treasurer was \$429 million out of whack. Last year he was \$1.324 billion out. The effect of this is that now we have a supplementary request for almost a billion dollars again. Since 1992 this government has replayed their spin so often, the spin being overspending by the previous government, overspending by the previous members, and a lot of these same members sit within this government. The thing that I think a lot of the members that are still around really forgot is to keep the "Progressive" in front of the Conservative side of their name. It's interesting that the present Treasurer has done a lot of grandstanding, along with a lot of rhetoric about the accountability and fiscal responsiveness that he has brought to Alberta over the last year since he has become minister. He's gone down a different road, though, in the last year, and that is to spend, spend, spend.

You know, I'll bring up something in *Hansard* from February 28, 1994. This seems to be what happens quite often in the last while, bringing up a past *Hansard*. The now Treasurer, was quoted as saying, "I told people I was fed up with bureaucracy, overspending by governments." And now, guess what? He's back to spend, spend, spend. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm really left scratching my head.

The hon. Minister of Government Services stands up, stating at long length that she sits on the priorities and budget committee. Well, they must always be napping while some planning or budgeting into the next year is being discussed. If I was looking at an agenda saying that another billion dollars was to be brought up to answer for and commit to moneys already handed out and promised, I think I would wake up pretty quickly.

The supplementary requests cover different ministries – Health, Environment, Community Development, Infrastructure, Justice, and Municipal Affairs – and now we're being asked for more money for the Auditor General. Mr. Speaker, I want to take a look at what this means in the context of the overall budget and financial integrity of the provincial government of Alberta. Shall we think of things to look at? Let's take a look at the supplementary supply bill as it relates to the second-quarter fiscal update that the Treasurer just released on November 14, far earlier than it has ever been released before. We can only conclude that the reason why the Treasurer was so anxious to rush this report into the public domain was to try to deflect attention away from the issues that are really troubling Albertans right now: the waits in health care, the overcrowded classrooms their children are facing, how thin their wallets are getting when they have to fill up their car at the gas pump, the rising prices on electrical bills, and the heating costs which are going through the roof.

Mr. Speaker, the other item that was brought forward today, Bill 30: is that a reflection on the fact that there might be a majority government next week that doesn't reflect what they have in their own flat tax?

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a look at what it means with other items. This is to actually talk more and more around why the Alberta Liberals cannot support this latest installment of supplementary estimates without some explanation of what this new spending will contribute to meeting defined outcomes and performance criteria such as reducing health care waiting lists, opening hospital beds, and reducing student classroom sizes. Although we recognize that funding is needed in these areas, we have serious concerns about the supplementary supply, symptomatic of lack of planning, which I referred to before as planning on the fly.

The Provincial Treasurer will have brought in this huge sum of \$979.3 million in supplementary supply during nine months as Provincial Treasurer. By contrast, past Treasurer Dick Johnston brought in \$2.124 billion in special warrants in six years as Provincial Treasurer. Jim Dinning brought in \$611.257 million in supplementary supply during four years as Provincial Treasurer. The Provincial Treasurer has brought in more in supplementary supply in 2000-2001 than did Mr. Dinning or Mr. Johnston, and in that one year through supplementary supply the Provincial Treasurer has brought in the second largest spending bill, \$979.3 million, more than any Provincial Treasurer since 1986.

4:50

Over the past year in this House I've asked questions around the money going to Alberta Hospital Edmonton versus Alberta Hospital Ponoka, being called all kinds of names in the House, whereas if you try to get that question answered outside the House, you never get an answer.

As I look through different spending and tax announcements subsequent to Budget 2000, we look at dollars that were projected for reducing waiting time for open-heart surgery, joint replacement,

other elective surgeries, MRIs, and cancer treatment. This is very, very important. I don't think there's anybody on this side, anybody in Alberta who would ever deny the fact that we have long waiting lists. But I really believe that instead of throwing money after money, we have to start building a plan in these areas, and six years of destroying doesn't reflect back into building again. I do know that we're living in a world of high technology. The fact is that MRIs have just come in in the last few years. But when we start having this amount of human infrastructure loss in our medical facilities as well as our cancer clinics, we do have to start looking in the mirror and wondering what went wrong.

We look at long-term and home care. Now, I look at what happened to our education system here. Years ago, in the 1980s, my wife, being a nurse, was told that within the next few years there would be a lot more home care. People that were registered nurses would have to be going back and finishing their degree so they could be working in the field. Well, we haven't got there yet. We haven't got the numbers we need out there in the field.

In my constituency, where you've got Alberta Hospital, the downloading has actually resulted in removing patients from the actual institute over the last few years. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that except for the fact that we do not have the care in the community that we should have to help them. If I could afford two staff in my office all the time – the trick that we use is that when there are two of us, there's a tapping effect. The next person runs over, looks at the phone and the number, and then we call the hot line that we have to Alberta Hospital to make sure that we get help out there right away.

School construction and repairs, the dollars that went to that. Well, I look at the nonanswer that we got from the Infrastructure minister in question period yesterday and the thoughts of some standing committee that feels that you have to have full occupancy of schools in cities like Edmonton and Calgary. That is totally a myth. It's wrong thinking. I've stood in here and talked about it before. In the inner city it's very important that we have kids that can walk to school because their parents aren't necessarily awake or capable of getting them there; they do not have cars. So if the occupancy of an inner-city school is 60 percent, I feel that is a figure that can be worked with.

Then you work out from there. You work out to the next ring of the circle, and you look at 75 percent. Then you get out into constituencies like I have, and for the most part I'm 150 percent overoccupied. I have the rural school of Horse Hill that is underoccupied, but they fall back into the equation of the ring that should be 75 percent. So if we have to wait in our city and in constituencies on the outer perimeter of our city with this type of attitude, that before we can trigger schools – I think the next generation of kids is going to be raised being bused into the city, because I've got schools, as I mentioned before, that are a hundred percent over. They're crowded. I've got new areas that are being built where parents are calling continuously about where their children are being bused to. I won't name names of schools, because they've still got fantastic teachers and they're very good schools. By all accounts, they are inner-city schools that they're going to.

The next item – I keep looking at different parts of where the money went to – is funding of long-term care facilities. This is something that's really interesting: how long it took for the Broda report to get off the shelf and be something that was actually looked at. Mr. Speaker, we will have to start planning very quickly, because not only are there a number of us in here that are getting closer to the time of retiring, but we'll be retiring into places where we can have care. Ninety percent of Albertans are still in their homes. That goes back to the fact of what I was saying about home care, not only in mental health care but in long-term care, making

sure that we do keep people in their residences as long as we can. People are actually able to stay in their homes a lot longer because of all the different technologies and health systems we have, better heating, eating habits, and so on.

Now, that takes me to the questions and concerns that a lot of people have called into the constituency offices about in the last few weeks as they're getting their new gas bills and electrical bills. Their question is: am I to think that by paying my electrical and gas bills, I'm not going to be able to buy the fruit, the pears and everything, that keeps me healthy the other way? It already is being talked about, and I'm talking to people that probably never voted in my direction before but are really starting to think that way now.

A new area in a new ministry was the Task Force on Children at Risk. We knew this was coming. We knew something had to be done, and I'm very thankful to the minister that has taken this position. But is it quick enough, fast enough? Where was the planning over the last few years?

Another area is community mental health and eating disorders. I just mention that both in the case of home care workers and the fact of the expenses that are affecting people on a fixed income and low income.

Senior housing, lodges: \$10 million, coming out of the Broda report presumably. It didn't need a report that took two years to do to find out that a lot of these figures needed to be spent. When we're talking in fast form, talking about how quickly we need to spend \$1 billion, it seems to take a lot to pull \$10 million out to work on some of these items.

One of the last items I want to talk about is the fact of education property tax and the cap and a committee that tinkers, a government that tinkers without coming out and being progressive and listening to their partners; that is, the AAMD and C, the AUMA, and the School Boards Association. I know the AAMD and C, even at their last week's conference, was still talking a hundred percent. Well, the other two sides weren't there, but they are talking 75 to 80 percent. I believe it is time that we moved forward on items like that and quit tinkering and showing, for great effect and everything, that a \$135 million cap is the only way that we're out to plan.

Why is this government operating on three-month plans when the Government Accountability Act talks about three-year plans? When I first got elected, every time I stood up here and talked on the budget, I said: "Where is the three-year plan? Where is the five-year plan?" Municipalities out there, the backbone of our province, have always had to work on a three-year or five-year plan, even when they had been downloaded on extensively by both the province as well as by the federal government.

Municipal governments, as I mentioned before, are the backbone of Alberta society. You know, we all live and raise our families in our communities, and our communities are very important. If we don't keep an overall plan moving all the time instead of onetime dollars, Mr. Speaker, where are we going with this? The quality of life within our communities is dependent upon the availability of local infrastructure.

With that, I'm going to take my leave, Mr. Speaker. But I am very concerned that we come back every few months, and all we talk about is supplements to the previous budget. Where's the plan? Where's that three-year plan, the five-year plan that we should actually have as a province as well as asking the municipalities to stay that way?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:00

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a third time]

[At 5:01 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, November 27, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/11/27

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Though we as legislators of this great province and its people are taken from the common people and selected by You to be architects of our history, give us wisdom and understanding to do Your will in all we do. Amen.

Hon. members, would you please remain standing so that we might participate in the singing of our national anthem.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly Mr. Ernie Isley. Mr. Isley served as the MLA for the Bonnyville constituency from 1979 to 1993. He served as minister of manpower from 1982 to 1986, minister of public works from 1986 to 1989, and minister of agriculture from 1989 to 1993. Mr. Isley is seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present two petitions today. The first petition is signed by 18 residents from my constituency of Calgary-Cross, and the second is signed by 20 RNs from Calgary, for a total of 38 names. Both petitions ask the Legislative Assembly to allow health professionals to opt out of medical procedures for reasons of conscience.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present a petition signed by 19 Edmontonians opposed to the Liberal Bill 211, which would require any tax increase to be subject to a provincewide referendum.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table four petitions containing 185 names from the constituencies of Calgary-Egmont, Calgary-Foothills, and Calgary-North West, as well as 1,451 names from Edmonton constituencies and also 25 names of doctors and dentists and 16 names of medical students from the University of Alberta. The petitions are urging the Legislative

Assembly of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Alberta human rights act to allow health professionals to opt out of those procedures that "offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred."

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented last week on November 21 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petitions I presented on November 21 and 22 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 10 of the Government Accountability Act I'm tabling five copies of the annual report of the government of Alberta. It's for fiscal year 1999-2000, from April 1 '99, to March 31, 2000. This contains the consolidated financial statements highlighting a record \$2.7 billion debt payment, one which we will beat this year.

Secondly, pursuant to section 14 of the same act I will now table the annual report of the ministry of Treasury.

As well, on behalf of the Premier I wish to table the Executive Council annual report.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling the annual reports on behalf of the following ministers and ministries again as required in section 14 of the Government Accountability Act: Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Children's Services, Community Development, Economic Development, Environment, Gaming, Government Services, Health and Wellness, Human Resources and Employment, Infrastructure, Innovation and Science, International and Intergovernmental Relations, Justice and Attorney General, Learning, Municipal Affairs, and Resource Development. The appropriate copies have been delivered to the Clerk's office; they're too voluminous to bring into the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the '99-2000 annual report on freedom of information and protection of privacy.

I have one more, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to table with the Assembly five copies of the annual reports of Municipal Affairs' delegated administrative organizations. The organizations include the Alberta Boilers Safety Association, the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association, the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta, the Alberta Propane Vehicle Administration Organization, and the authorized accredited agencies.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today five copies of the annual review of the Alberta Racing Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1999, and five copies of the 1999 annual report of the Alberta Gaming Industry Association.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I have four tablings today. My first tabling includes documents from the Alberta Federation of REAs Ltd. These documents summarize the REAs' concerns and recommendations regarding the staggering electricity price increases. Expected price increases range from 85 to 150 percent in the year 2001 when compared to the year 2000.

The second tabling is a copy of a letter from Lance Lamond, a member of the board of Poverty in Action, expressing serious concern with the escalating energy costs facing many hardworking Albertans, forcing them to become homeless.

The third tabling is a letter from J. Faminoff of Calgary to the Premier asking the Premier to answer the questions posed to him by the opposition on electricity deregulation and private MRIs and to stop ducking the issues.

My fourth tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from a past member of the Liberal Party expressing her opposition to the Liberal private member's Bill 211.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of the Edmonton public school board's newsletter, *The Compass*, featuring an article on micro-society, which is a program that first started in one of the schools in Edmonton-Centre, and that is Oliver school.

The second tabling is a letter from a constituent, Christopher Rivet, who is very concerned with what's expected to happen under the government's electrical deregulation, pointing out that he is currently living on AISH and cannot afford new increases in electricity on the income that he has.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would table five copies of a press release of the Graduate Students' Association of the University of Alberta released at noontime entitled Alberta Students Ask Province for a Mere 1/280th of the \$5.6 Billion Surplus, part of their program to have tuition capped at a 2 percent increase.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon. It is a document that I have received through freedom of information from the Department of Municipal Affairs. It is an e-mail between top-level officials of the Department of Labour in February of 1999 where there is a discussion to keep test results on treated pine shakes confidential from the Building Technical Council.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table two letters from seniors in my constituency. In the first one the writer has asked that I withhold her name because she is a recipient of AISH benefits, and she has provided for the government's information an accounting of how those benefits are spent and how the increase in electricity, utility, heat, and shelter costs are going to leave her in a deficit position every month.

The second letter is also from a senior who is 83 years old. She has written to me expressing her concern about the lack of support for health care for seniors and particularly the lack of coverage for major dental expenses for seniors living on fixed incomes.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair would like to table five copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek requesting that Bill 210, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000, be brought to the Committee of the Whole on Wednesday, November 29, 2000.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister for Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly an awesome group of students from Archbishop Jordan high school. Accompanying them as part of the group is somebody who normally is a page in this Assembly, and his name is Brent Shewchuk, but today he is one of the members of the ABJ school along with their teacher, Jim Ryan, and 27 other students. I would ask that they rise now so that we may give them the warm traditional welcome.

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through to members of this Assembly a friend from the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency, Lise Langridge. Lise is accompanied today by her aunt Jean McNally from Edmonton. I'd ask both ladies to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 16 and 17 St. Thomas More Catholic junior high school in Edmonton hosted a very successful youth justice conference. More than 400 students from the 18 Catholic and public junior high and senior high schools in Edmonton attended Caring for Our Communities: Student Youth Justice. They took part in workshops dealing with everything from bullying to alcohol and drug abuse to the youth justice system. The conference was organized as a joint effort between Alberta Justice and St. Thomas More. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the people who organized this very

successful event: Dr. Doug Nelson, the principal of St. Thomas More; teachers Mrs. Terry Volk and Ms Michelle Marlen from St. Thomas More; and from Alberta Justice, young offenders branch, the executive director, Kevin O'Brien, and assistant director, Paulette Rodziewicz. I'd like to invite these hardworking people who organized such a successful conference to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and introduce through you to members of the Assembly 43 students from Malmo elementary school. They're accompanied by teachers Joan MacDonald and Eileen George. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure this afternoon to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 26 students from Queen Elizabeth high school. They are visiting the Assembly today. They're all taking part in a social studies class. They are accompanied by their teacher, Ms Scaddan, and also by grandparent helper Mrs. Thorsen. With your permission I'd ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature two Banff-Cochrane constituents from the wonderful community of Bragg Creek. They are Shauna Hay and her daughter Keira Hay. Keira is a grade 6 student who is home schooled by her mother, and they're both visiting the Legislature today for the very first time. If I could please ask them to stand in the members' gallery and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Electric Utilities Deregulation

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's electricity deregulation program, becoming known as the KEP, is causing skyrocketing electricity bills for consumers across the province. Last week we brought forward the samples of ATCO's increases in the coming year. On Friday EPCOR filed information with the Energy and Utilities Board on the regulated rate option showing electricity rates will go up for consumers in southern Alberta under the KEP even with the rebate applied, and I'm happy to table those copies. My first question is to the Premier. How does the Premier explain the fact that a southern Alberta residential consumer served by EPCOR will experience a \$24.69 per month, or 37 percent, increase in their power bill under the KEP even when the \$20 rebate has been applied?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, the leader of the Liberal opposition is making some assumptions. The application is now before the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, and there will be an adjudication of that. To make that assumption at this particular time is wrong,

and it's awfully presumptuous on the part of the leader of the Liberal opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where the Premier is at if he's not even knowing what EPCOR is saying in terms of their billing.

Let's see if we can get his attention with irrigation services. Will the Premier admit that an irrigation service being served by EPCOR in southern Alberta will experience a \$308 increase in their bill, or 52 percent, under the KEP with numbers filed with the EUB right now even when the rebate is applied?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, it hasn't been determined relative to the \$800 million rebate that will be applied as to how much will go to various irrigation districts. Again, this matter is before the AEUB, as the leader of the Liberal opposition pointed out, and I think it's presumptuous of her to make those statements considering there hasn't been a ruling yet.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What instructions has the Premier given to his intervenor at the EUB hearings with respect to consumers, or is the intervention merely window dressing to cover up the fact that these massive electricity prices are coming under his KEP?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I've given no instructions whatsoever, but this matter is with the Department of Resource Development, and if the minister can shed some light on the matter, I'll ask him to do so.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, on this particular issue, because it is before the board, we'll have to wait until the decision is made.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Rural Electricity Costs

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More and more Albertans are speaking out against the Premier's electricity deregulation plan. Last week we heard about the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties and the problems which are resulting from inadequate supply to meet rising demand and skyrocketing prices for consumers. Last week the Alberta Federation of Rural Electrification Associations sent in a November 23 report to the government. It said: "The current structure is the result of five years of turmoil and uncertainty," – this is from the Alberta Federation of REAs – "and will now result in electricity rates skyrocketing. This current structure is unacceptable." My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier agree with the Alberta Federation of Rural Electrification Associations when they say that his electricity restructuring has contributed to skyrocketing electricity prices in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that all the groups mentioned by the leader of the Liberal opposition were involved in discussions and were involved in the design of the deregulation process.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, they may well have been, but they've now caught up with the reality of it.

Can the Premier or perhaps his minister of agriculture explain what happened during their meeting with the REAs November 23, last Thursday, and what kinds of discussions might have occurred at that time?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that that question was directed to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was a very good discussion. The REAs brought forward a number of their concerns. As I understand it, the Department of Resource Development is currently looking at the issues that they raised.

MRS. MacBETH: So can we get an answer please to the question: why is the Premier refusing to listen to the concerns of the Alberta Federation of REAs, to the AAMD and C when they say in their documents, in their resolutions that we have tight supply and rising prices and it is unacceptable to the people of rural Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: We are listening, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the Liberal opposition is absolutely right; there is tight supply. But there's also unprecedented economic growth in this province. That is one of the contributing factors.

I'd like to point out that we have put in place a very generous program which will be monitored to see if more can be done relative to . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: You broke it. Fifty six percent increase for irrigation customers.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, can I answer the question? There's an \$800 million program to accommodate at this particular time farm communities based on consumption. There's an energy rebate program. Cheques are being received as I speak, \$150 by each household. There's a \$20 automatic reduction in electricity bills that will take place as of January 1, 2001. I don't know of any other jurisdiction in Canada that has gone to the lengths that this government has to alleviate as best as possible the rising cost of electricity.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Caldor.

Electricity Auction

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 29 this government will sell the regeneration capacity of Genesee, Milner, Sheerness, and Clover Bar PPAs under a one-year contract in a desperate attempt to cover up its mismanagement and bungling of the electricity deregulation plan. It's obvious this government is trying to buy time in order to panic sell at this reaction and take money out of the pockets of consumers through the sale of this higher cost power in order to give them the onetime generous rebate just in time for an election call. Will the Premier confirm that the sale of the unsold higher cost PPAs under one-year contracts will result in higher costs for consumers?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. Minister of Resource Development respond, but in answer to the prelude or the ramblings, I guess, of the hon. member, if this hon. member does not like the rebate before an election or after an election, I can say one thing to him: hand it back.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the original plan was to sell the balance of the PPAs that were unsold. We've always indicated that the money belongs to the consumers. Therefore, once the sale is completed, we will of course be laying out a plan as to how we may return those dollars that belong to the consumers out there.

This plan has been ongoing for a long time, and the opposition members also had an opportunity to participate through the debates. In the 1998 amendment to the Alberta utilities act, a number of these members supported the concept of deregulation. In fact, the date 2001 was established at the time, and you will see some support from the opposition.

MR. WHITE: Is it the Premier's position to allow bidders to recover their investments now that he's disagreeing with the comments made earlier by the Minister of Resource Development when he said that higher proceeds from an auction will mean that consumers will have to pay more in electricity rates?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've always indicated that when a sale goes on, it's open to the market and that the market will determine what is reasonable out there by the people bidding. Therefore, we don't establish in advance what we feel the ultimate sale will bring. We assume it'll be good dollars that we can return to the consumer.

One of the things I'd like to clarify again, Mr. Speaker, is that there are over 1 million residential households that can remain under the regulated rate option for up to five years. Another 124,000 commercial, industrial, and municipal consumers can stay under the regulated option for another three years. In fact, EPCOR in Edmonton, which is your organization, will have 274,000 consumers which are regulated by the city of Edmonton which you can be directly involved in. If you were concerned about the consumers in Alberta and the city of Edmonton, you would be out there in front of the council.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, work with me. Go through the chair. Okay? Thank you.

MR. WHITE: In that the costs of this power production are already known to the government and the Premier, can the Premier now tell the Assembly: how much will this reaction have to raise in order for the government to rebate anything at all to the citizens of Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's an option, and I don't know for sure, but perhaps the hon. Minister of Resource Development can comment further.

2:00

MR. CARDINAL: We're always optimistic that processes like this will be successful, and you will see that the deregulation process will be successful.

We've always indicated also that we will be returning – as soon as the sale is completed, we will assess, analyze the outcome, and determine what formula to apply in order to return those dollars back to the consumers where they belong, Mr. Speaker. But to determine two or three days before the sale is completed what will be returned is foolish. Only the opposition that would do that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. deputy leader of the third party.

Electric Utilities Deregulation

(continued)

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday the Alberta Federation of REAs met with the government's own rural caucus. At that meeting the federation pointed out that its rural members are facing electricity rate increases in 2001 of between 85 and 150 percent even after accounting for the government's electricity rebate. The REAs lay the blame for these punishing cost increases squarely on this government's bungling of electricity industry restructuring. My question is to the Premier. Why is the government refusing to listen to stakeholders like the Alberta Federation of REAs, who blame the government's so-called deregulation for skyrocketing electricity rates, choosing instead to engage in a strategy of wilful denial?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no strategy of wilful denial, and as the hon. minister has pointed out, people can stay and farm communities can stay in a regulated environment. As I've pointed out before, there are a number of contributing factors that are involved relative to rising electricity rates. One is the phenomenal growth and the very bright and very positive economic climate that exists in this province.

Relative to the REAs, I understand that they were involved in the process leading to deregulation as was the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, as was the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, Mr. Speaker.

Relative to the discussions that took place with the REAs, I'll have the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development respond.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the federation has a number of concerns relative to the contracts and how they're being administered. As the Premier and the Minister of Resource Development have very clearly pointed out, those issues are before the EUB at the present time. They also had some concern about the fact that there was a differential depending on the type of user. Once again, that's a discussion that's going before the EUB. There was concern about the deferral account and how that was going to be addressed. Once again, that is before the EUB. So there are some things that the department and the EUB will be dealing with that I hope will alleviate the concerns raised by the rural electrification associations.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier continue to defend the indefensible proposition that deregulation is not to blame for skyrocketing electricity costs when the Federation of REAs, the Industrial Power Consumers, the Consumers' Coalition of Alberta, and every other stakeholder says that deregulation and nothing else is to blame?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that statement simply is not true. Coming from this hon. member, I find it really quite surprising that he would be opposed to deregulation when the company EPCOR, a board on which he served, was strongly in favour of the program.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, can the Premier confirm that the minister met recently with the mayor of Edmonton to ask him to pressure EPCOR to reduce its request for an increase in electricity prices, requests that they had made under the rules and conditions created by this government?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the hon. minister met with the mayor, but I think it would have been a wise and prudent thing for the minister to do so, if in fact he did, because our obligation as a government is to protect the consumer and to use all devices available to us to protect the consumer. But I will have the hon. minister respond.

MR. CARDINAL: It is normal for a minister of the resource industry who is in charge of northern development, the forestry and energy sectors, which is very, very important to Edmonton, to sit down with the mayor of Edmonton to discuss a number of issues, and, yes, we did talk about the high cost of natural gas, the high cost of electricity, Mr. Speaker. If the leaders of the Liberal opposition and the NDs were responsible citizens of Edmonton, they would be doing the same thing exactly. In fact, if the leader of the Liberals was responsible, she'd be out there every day in front of the council telling them about the high prices. They do regulate those prices.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Resource Development. Given that electricity deregulation is due to come into effect on January 1, 2001, and many people are uncomfortable with making a decision of choice as to who would be their provider, my question to the minister is: can he tell us what the options are that individuals have in their choice come January 1, 2001?

MR. CARDINAL: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, consumers will have a choice of options as to who they want to purchase electricity from. In addition to that and probably the most important option that consumers have – again I've mentioned that over 1 million residences have this option where they can remain under the existing supplier for up to five years, and that is regulated. In fact, another 124,000 commercial, industrial, and farm commercial consumers also have another three years to stay under that option. When the consumers are good and ready, they can make that change.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, then, my question to the same minister: can the minister explain how choice comes into play when there's apparently only one provider, as is the case in St. Albert?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, all consumers in the future will have a choice between the regulated rate option and also the competitive rate, like I said earlier. In fact, both EPCOR and Enmax have already said that they would be aggressively competing out there across the province, and they're already both licensed to participate and provide services in a competitive process. As a government, of course, we will monitor the competition, and we expect the companies to adopt competitive principles as they move forward.

Mr. Speaker, again I'd just like to indicate that the services EPCOR provides, for an example, in Edmonton and surrounding area – they are regulated, and the city, again, determines as to how changes will take place. I would advise the member that whenever the opportunity arises, if that situation is there, she would be able to go to the city to make sure the issue is addressed.

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. The minister has spoken about two providers, but my question is: is the consumer going to be protected against fly-by-night electricity retailers?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, like I've said before, EPCOR, Enmax, and other companies are very credible companies, and they're far from being fly-by-night operators. They do very well: well organized and business oriented. Of course, our top priority continues to be consumer protection while we provide a choice for people and top quality services at lower prices in the future.

I would ask the Minister of Government Services to supplement in that particular area.

2:10

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to supplement the answer. I think it's a very good question. Consumers should feel confident of the protection that is awarded to them through the Fair Trading Act, that protects them against unscrupulous marketers. In this act we have some very tough but very fair rules.

Marketers of electricity will have to post a million-dollar performance bond and will have to be licensed on an annual basis. Any violation of the Fair Trading Act will lead to prosecution and removal of their activities within the province. That, I think, clearly was demonstrated last year, when we had some difficulty with some natural gas marketers and we had to take some very strong positions and actually remove some from the province because they were not operating in an ethical fashion.

Again, as my hon. colleague the Minister of Resource Development has said, consumers will have the option to stay with their existing supplier or to make choices to go with a new one, and that will apply to the residents of St. Albert as well as the rest of the province.

Special Waste Treatment Centre

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, on November 14 Bovar reported a net loss of nearly one and a half million dollars so far this fiscal year. Bovar says that the ongoing inability to generate a positive cash flow has resulted in their decision to provide the province of Alberta with its notice of intention to cease all core operations at the Swan Hills waste treatment centre effective December 31, 2000. Under a July 12, 1996, agreement between the government of Alberta and Bovar, taxpayers are eligible to share in the net income of Swan Hills. Given that agreement, will the Premier confirm that taxpayers received just \$23,600 back on their \$441 million dollar investment in Swan Hills? That would be a rate of return of just .0000535 percent. Would the Premier confirm that?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if that figure is true or not, and I'll have the hon. Minister of Environment respond.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that thousands and thousands of tonnes of toxic material have been destroyed as a result of that plant being in operation. There is a price for garbage. Whether that waste is household waste or hazardous waste, there is a price to get rid of garbage. Thank God for that plant, a plant that was praised, by the way, by the leader of the Liberal opposition when she was minister of health, especially as it related to the tonnes and tonnes of dead drugs that have been destroyed at the plant.

Relative to the actual figure, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I will certainly check on the particular figures quoted by the member across the way, but the point here is that the government has never claimed that Bovar would be a major profit-making entity in this province. Its goal, its purpose from the very beginning was to provide for the disposal of hazardous wastes in this province, which it has done very, very effectively. At the time, while we hoped that the plant would be profitable, we also

acknowledged that there would possibly be losses and costs. The overall goal, which I hope the members across the way and the opposition would share, is that we provide for the safest possible disposal of hazardous wastes in the interests of a safe environment, a healthy environment here in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister of environmental protection just contradicted what the Premier said on July 28, 1995, when he said that the plant was entering into its commercial phase – that means making money, Mr. Minister. As a result of the net loss that Bovar has recorded so far this year, will the Premier admit that taxpayers will not receive one cent of profit, not one penny more this year in spite of the agreement that was signed by the government on the commercial phase of the operation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to figure out that if there's no profit, there's no return. I mean, even the finance critic for the Liberals can figure that out.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I say that there is a cost to garbage, whether that garbage is hazardous or nonhazardous. There is a cost. Because of that plant, we were able to make this province PCB free and free of other toxics. We're able now to at least address to some degree the whole situation of orphan sites where terrible toxic pollution has occurred.

I would remind the hon. member that his leader some years ago had nothing but praise for that plant.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They've spent over \$2,000 a tonne to process it, well above the market rate. They keep on throwing good money after bad.

Mr. Speaker, given that the Auditor General is not able to audit the operations of the Swan Hills special waste treatment plant, will the Premier commit to a full independent audit by an out-of-province auditor before his government commits one more penny of taxpayers' money to the Swan Hills plant?

MR. KLEIN: No. I'm not going to commit to anything at this particular time. Mr. Speaker, as we speak, there are some options that are being actively considered relative to the ongoing operation of that plant.

You know, I would ask the hon. member – and perhaps he can reply at some future date – what would he have the province do with this waste? Mr. Speaker, I go back to the days when I was minister of the environment, and we had the situation in St-Basile-le-Grand, where the Quebec government I believe spent something like \$50 million to try to ship PCB waste to Wales only to have the long-shoremen there refuse to unload it. It was sent all the way back only to have the longshoremen in Quebec refuse to unload it. Finally, in the middle of the night the captain dumped his load. I believe it was in the constituency of the then prime minister, Brian Mulroney. Quebec ended up with the waste, and they were \$50 million lighter. Is that the kind of action he would have the province take?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Highway Maintenance Contracts

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Department of Infrastructure announced the new highway mainte-

nance contracts for southern Alberta. The only surprise there was the significant savings for taxpayers regarding highway maintenance. My questions are all to the Minister of Infrastructure. Could the minister give Alberta taxpayers some details regarding the newly signed contracts? Are there indeed some savings, and if so, how much?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in 1996, when this government went to outsourcing all of the engineering and many of the maintenance contracts across the province, we saw some savings at that particular time, but since 1996 contractors have garnered more experience, are more knowledgeable in ways of saving money. I'm pleased to announce that since our last tendering we've seen over a 35 percent reduction in the latest tenders coming forward on highway maintenance, which moves it from about \$5,800 per kilometre per year down to about \$3,800.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Yes. Further to that question, could the minister elaborate on how the savings were indeed realized? Was it strictly as a result of the bidding process, or were there other factors?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, first of all, our staff, working very closely with the contractors, re-engineered the maintenance contract process. We also looked at redesigning the tendering process. As a result, at the end of the day we had much better results on the overall tendering process by a number of contractors. I think, as well, that a contributing fact was the economies of scale. All of the secondary highways that we assumed control and jurisdiction over added to the pool of highways to be maintained, and of course more highways to maintain, better use of the current equipment and much more value for the dollar.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

2:20

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: given that some of the unsuccessful bidders and current contractors have investment in equipment and buildings and commitments to employees, what will happen to their interests and the employees?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, what we have indicated very clearly to all of the unsuccessful bidders on the contracts is that we will meet with them, discuss where perhaps they could improve the bidding process. There's another batch of tenders coming forward on highway maintenance in the province, and we'd like to have everyone have a good chance at that particular process.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc.

Cancer Treatment

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Early diagnosis and treatment of cancer is crucial. The Minister of Health and Wellness stated in this Assembly that patients referred by their doctor to see an oncologist will in fact see an oncologist in a week or less. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that Mr. Andresson went for prostate tests in April, had a biopsy in May, was diagnosed with prostate cancer in early June but

did not see an oncologist until late July, how can the minister claim patients referred by their doctor to see an oncologist will do so in a week or less?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think it's well known in this Assembly that it's not my practice to comment on specific cases that are brought to the attention, and I think people understand the reason why that is so.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I can say that in answering the question about oncologists and the treatment of cancer – and let me say, first of all, that I do agree with the hon. member when she says that early detection and treatment is important. The Alberta Cancer Board had indicated to me earlier that there were waiting lists that were getting unacceptable earlier on this year but that they have used the money appropriately that the province has put in to dealing with waiting lists in cancer and a number of other areas and that they have currently brought it down. I can't speak to what the length of time for waiting may have been earlier this year, but currently I'm advised by the Alberta Cancer Board that from the time a physician assesses you and says that you need to see an oncologist, you will see one within a week or less.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the minister also stated in this Assembly that the average wait for cancer treatment following an appointment with an oncologist is four weeks, can he explain why Mr. Andresson then waited six months?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the answer remains the same. I won't comment on a specific case, but I stand by my earlier comments made in this House that the time for actually receiving treatment has been dramatically reduced this year. I think the hon. member will forgive me if I don't remember the exact figures. It depends on the type of cancer you have. Some cancer treatments you will receive within two weeks, and for other types of cancer it may be four weeks, but the times have been reduced dramatically from where they were earlier this year.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. To the same minister: will the minister offer an apology to Mr. Andresson and his family for the hardship this government's mismanaged health policy has forced them to endure?

MR. MAR: I'm not familiar with the specifics of this individual case. However, if the individual would want to send me correspondence, I would be happy to deal with him on that basis. This is not the time or the place to be offering such comments, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Climate Change

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is directed to the Minister of Environment. Albertans have a vested individual interest in climate change, both in terms of the environment and the economy. I understand that the Minister of Environment attended the international climate change meetings in The Hague, Netherlands, last week. Would the minister please update the House as to Alberta's involvement at the international level?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that before responding directly to the question, I'd just like to agree with the member's preamble, and that is that we certainly as a government in Alberta recognize the priority that the people in this province place upon a clean environment and upon the implications of climate change. For that reason, we have in this province very stringent standards with respect to emissions. It compares very favourably with other parts of the world. We do put an emphasis on protecting the environment.

In terms of the recently completed, completed I have to admit without any overall conclusion – in terms of the recent conclusion of the conference at The Hague we were involved with the Canadian delegation. We made representation with respect to the advantages here in Alberta of having a number of very clean energy sources, particularly natural gas, and the way that should be represented and given credit for in international negotiations. We also talked in terms of how we should be positioning ourselves as a province within the overall Canadian negotiating position with respect to climate change. I think a very important factor was the report, not only from ourselves in Alberta but from other provinces across Canada, which indicated the various measures across this nation which indicate that Canadians and their governments are taking climate change very seriously and taking measures to mitigate against deterioration in terms of the overall atmosphere worldwide.

We worked, Mr. Speaker, with the Canadian delegation. We, I think, tried our best to represent Alberta's interests and to co-operate with our other provinces and territories in putting forward Canada's position.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second and final question is also to the Minister of Environment. I'd like to know what assurance we have that Alberta is doing all it can to address the issue of climate change?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have in this province, as I said, established a very rigorous set of regulations and requirements as far as emissions are concerned. Secondly, we have established in this province an agency which is an arm's-length, independent entity which involves industry representatives and environmental group representatives called Climate Change Central. We're looking to that particular group to partner with agencies and organizations involved and interested in this whole matter and to provide recommendations and plans and initiatives for the province to go further with what I think is already a good environmental record.

So I think the important thing here is that while the discussions at The Hague did not reach any positive conclusion – and I understand that there's a further conference planned six months hence in Bonn to follow up on those deliberations – it does not mean in any way, Mr. Speaker, that here in Alberta we are standing still with respect to our overall commitment to making sure that we have a clean environment here, that we are not major contributors to the negative aspect of climate change. We will continue to work in that direction, which is I think the responsible thing to do.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Prostate Cancer Screening

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Breast cancer is a serious illness facing countless Alberta women. Vocal opposition from the Liberal caucus and women across the province convinced this

government to reverse its plan to stop annual mammograms. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that prostate cancer is one of the most common types of cancers afflicting Alberta men, why would this government not want annual prostate cancer screening tests for men?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're always looking at ways of delivering a health care system that can provide solid service to Albertans and is cost-effective. It strikes me that the area of annual prostate examinations may be one of those areas where it makes sense for us to cover it, an effort to spend money in order to save money in the long run. So I will say this: I do encourage men to ask their physicians for a prostate examination.

2:30

The issue of PSA tests, I am advised – and I don't know as much about this as many physicians will. I'm advised that it is not a perfect test and that there is no substitute for a rectal examination. That is something that men perhaps over the age of 35 should be asking their physicians for, and there's nothing that precludes men from getting that done on an annual basis.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, given that prostate screening will save incalculable human suffering and taxpayer dollars through early detection and prevention, why will this government not fund prostate screening tests for men?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how the second question really differs from the first one. I can only say again that men can get an annual examination for prostate cancer, and I would encourage them to do so.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government finally did the right thing for breast cancer screening. Will the minister now do the right thing for men and fund annual prostate cancer screening?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, such an examination is available to men. They need only ask their physician for that examination, and it will be done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. On October 1, 1999, the government announced changes to the assured income for the severely handicapped program including an increase in benefits. Will the government be increasing benefits again this fall to reflect higher living costs?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, as a matter of fact, we did increase the benefits last fall. We moved the AISH benefit from \$832 up to \$855. I want to notify the member, however, that we will not be increasing the rates this fall. We are helping AISH clients, though, to try to meet increased utility costs. One of the ways we'll be doing that, of course, is by ensuring that they receive their full AISH benefits and also receive the full energy refund and rebate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Can AISH clients rely on other sources of income to meet their needs, or does this government expect them to live on this amount?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, clients can actually go out and earn additional income over and above, of course, their AISH benefits. We have a program in place, then, that would allow them to earn \$200. There would be no deduction. If they earn beyond that, then we start to take some benefit off.

In terms of net earnings – I believe these calculations would be correct – a single client could earn up to \$1,332 a month and still receive at least a dollar in AISH benefit. Of course, the magic of that is that they would then be able to retain their medical coverage card. A couple or a single parent could have up to, again on a net basis, \$1,907 a month and still be eligible.

Clients, of course, are eligible for other sorts of income including GST rebates. Their families are eligible for the Canada child tax benefit. I think it needs to be pointed out that many AISH clients are in either subsidized housing or group homes or community housing. Some of them qualify for PDD assistance. We have made AISH more flexible. We're extending medical benefits for clients who work, and of course we've gone to introducing a rapid reinstatement for clients who need to return to AISH after a term in the workforce.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the government be increasing the \$200 amount clients can earn before there is an effect on their AISH benefits?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we're looking at that in our examination, but I do have to point out to the hon. member that each increase in that exemption increases the cost of the AISH program. Next year we're expecting the AISH budget to increase significantly because of rising caseloads. It's not within our current budget to increase this exemption, but we want to keep focused on flexibility, and really we want to be out there supporting the clients.

We really believe in the AISH program. We think the reforms that went through on October 1 of 1999 were reforms that were taking this program in the right direction, and of course we want to support it, then, as best we can.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's latest annual report shows that approximately 25,000 people were receiving assured income for the severely disabled, or AISH. The insignificant increase of \$27 does not begin to cover increases for rent, electricity, gas, and services, downloaded to the people accessing social housing. My questions are to the minister of human resources. When this province has billions of dollars in surplus, why does this government pursue regressive social policies that commit people with disabilities to a continual cycle of poverty?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I don't accept the question in its tone or even in the construction of it. The fact of the matter is – and the hon. member knows this – that when you compare the social programs that exist in this province because of proper fiscal management and proper caring for the resources, we do have the ability, then, to put safety nets in place. I would also remind the hon. member that we're in a situation that where AISH clients are on

assistance, we'll do the best we can for them, but the important thing is to find ways to support those that are actually in the workplace.

MR. GIBBONS: When is this government going to provide sufficient support for AISH recipients so they can cover rising costs associated with skyrocketing rents, electricity, gas, and food costs?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, we're working on that now, Mr. Speaker, and we continue to work on it. We're monitoring the situation. We're moving to market-basket measurements at some time in the future. We'll be keeping our eye on this, and we'll be doing what we can for those people that truly need our assistance.

MR. GIBBONS: My last question is to the same minister. Will this government index AISH payments to the cost of living?

MR. DUNFORD: We have no plans at this time. Cost of living is a measurement that many organizations use, but it can be criticized. I think for the fact that it just looks at an average Canadian, and whether an average Canadian exists or not, we're not sure. I think market-basket measurement will be the answer.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, 30 seconds from now I will call on the first of seven hon. members to participate.

Hon. members, might I recognize you first for your very attentive concern with decorum today. Much appreciated by the chair.

2:40

Jan Fisher

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, today I wish to recognize Jan Fisher for her excellent work at the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce. Jan has been the executive director of the Red Deer chamber since 1997. Under her guidance the Red Deer chamber was honoured as Alberta's chamber of the year in 1999, and this year Jan was awarded the Canadian Chamber of Commerce manager of the year award.

While Jan would be quick to give credit to the board and her staff, she in fact has provided remarkable and energetic leadership and is fully deserving of the award. It is people like Jan who make Red Deer such a great place to live and to do business.

Along with my colleague from Red Deer-North and on behalf of all Red Deer citizens we want to congratulate you for a job well done. We are proud of you, Jan.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

St. Albert Family Violence Program

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to take this opportunity to recognize the St. Albert Stop Abuse in Families Society. SAIF, under the leadership of Ireen Slater, has helped many, many families in St. Albert and area for over 10 years. Women and men find help in times of crisis and are helped as they make changes in their lives. The advocacy work may be in finding a new place to live, getting help through the justice system, or getting support through family counseling.

SAIF is involved in outreach and educational programs as well. The domestic violence rates have actually dropped in St. Albert, and I feel a large part of that is a tribute to the people involved with SAIF, a group of people who continue to make our world more peaceful, more loving, more whole.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Partners for Youth Program

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to recognize a unique organization that straddles the constituencies of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and Edmonton-Highlands. That organization is Partners for Youth, east end, which began some years ago.

Consisting of some 41 representatives – namely, politicians, service clubs, agencies, Catholic and public schools, police, et cetera – they meet on a regular basis to discuss problems related to youth in northeast Edmonton. The Abbottsfield area is known as an underprivileged neighbourhood, inhabited by numerous low-income families with all the problems common to families living in poverty, but the community is improving, Mr. Speaker, due to the efforts of Partners for Youth and the many volunteers.

Thank you, Partners for Youth, for bringing new hope to those in need. Keep up the good work.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Fire Services Exemplary Service Award

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to rise and recognize 199 Albertans who today received the fire services exemplary service medal. A number of my fellow colleagues were present this morning at the ceremonies in Edmonton, which were presided over by the hon. Lieutenant Governor, Lois Hole. A similar ceremony was held recently in Calgary.

The fire services exemplary service medal honours members of Canada's fire service, members who daily are called upon to risk their own lives in order to save our homes, our places of work, and in some instances our lives. The firefighters honoured today have devoted a major part of their adult lives, some up to 40 years, to a lifetime calling which demands courage and dedication not only from the firefighters but also their families.

I have the honour of knowing many Edmonton firefighters personally, and to all of them as well as all of Alberta's full-time and volunteer members of Alberta's fire service, thank you for a job well done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Student Youth Justice Conference

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to recognize the efforts of a dedicated group of professionals that work in one of our schools. St. Thomas More Catholic junior high school in Edmonton hosted the Caring for Our Communities: Student Youth Justice conference on November 16 and 17, 2000. More than 400 students from 18 Edmonton Catholic and public junior and senior high schools attended. Conference workshops dealt with a wide variety of youth justice issues, presented by people involved directly in the justice system: lawyers, police, and even offenders. Topics included the Young Offenders Act, probation, restorative justice, alcohol and drug abuse, bullying, and gangs.

The conference was spearheaded by Dr. Doug Nelson, the principal of St. Thomas More Catholic junior high school. Teachers Mrs. Terry Volk and Ms Michelle Marlen assisted with the organization. Staff from the Alberta Justice department's young offender branch also played a significant role in making the conference a reality.

The efforts of teachers and school administrators outside of their

normal roles and duties often go unnoticed, and I'd like to extend the appreciation of all Alberta citizens to those who made this Caring for Our Communities student youth justice conference a very valuable learning experience for everyone involved.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Esther Honens Piano Competition

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This last Saturday, November 25, saw a terrific event in the city of Calgary. This was the awarding of prizes and the gala performance at the third Esther Honens Calgary international piano competition, a competition held in this province every four years. This involved 27 young concert pianists from 14 different nations coming to the city of Calgary, and I can tell you that certainly on the basis of my attendance at the event on November 25, the Jack Singer Concert Hall was truly a magical place as we listened to the five finalists.

John Roberts, the chairman of the jury of Esther Honens, described Esther Honens as one of the most important competitions of its kind in the world. I'm delighted to report that Katherine Chi, born in Calgary, was named – and this is the first ever Canadian named – as the first laureate of the Esther Honens piano competition. There was special recognition of Jenny Belzberg. I want to thank Andrew Raeburn, the artistic director, and the board for a wonderful event.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Olds Branch of Royal Canadian Legion

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to congratulate members of the Olds branch No. 105 of the Royal Canadian Legion on their 70th anniversary in celebration of a proud history of service and community spirit. I'd also especially like to congratulate those members who were recognized with various awards of merit, including those who received certificates of appreciation and long-service pins and medals.

Olds branch No. 105 was constituted in 1930 and has a primary purpose to provide care and assistance to unfortunate veterans and to aid widows and orphans of servicemen. A second purpose and more so of today is in the area of social and community life. Since 1942 the branch has been the sponsoring body of the Olds No. 185 squadron of air cadets and over the years has been involved in a number of activities, such as armistice services, parades, dances, poppy and wreath sales, sporting events, community events, and various children's and seniors' programs. Every year the branch donates to some 25 groups and organizations, with donations reaching figures as high as \$120,000 per year.

I offer my thanks and gratitude to all Olds Legion members, both past and present, for their tremendous contributions to the community over the years of dedicated service. They are an inspiration to all.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 27

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move Bill 27, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2), for second reading.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I just take this opportunity to put on the record our understanding, as always, of a convention which has proven, I think, particularly useful in the Assembly – and that is miscellaneous statutes – and point out again that we appreciate the basis on which these statutes always come forward, which is that the opportunity is given to the opposition well in advance of its introduction in the Assembly. If there are items in the bill that the opposition has any concerns with, then they're removed from the bill, so when it gets to this stage, in fact we're satisfied, as an opposition, that these are remedial provisions that warrant acceptance.

That's the reason why you will not see debate on Bill 27 and why the opposition typically consents to additional readings being done. I just thank again, as is usually the case, Mr. Peter Pagano, the Legislative Counsel for the Department of Justice, and the Minister of Justice for ensuring that once again we're provided with miscellaneous statutes in ample time, and then the opposition is happy to cooperate to expedite its passage through the Assembly.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a second time]

2:50

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order, please.

**Bill 27
Miscellaneous Statutes
Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2)**

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill?

[The clauses of Bill 27 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

**Bill 29
Protection of Children Involved
in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000**

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Let me make a couple of comments before I deal with some amendments that the opposition intends to propose.

Let's be very clear. My caucus colleagues have instructed me that

they support Bill 29 and that they'd like to see expedited passage of it. That's because I think my colleagues think that we have an enormous responsibility as a province to protect vulnerable citizens, and scarcely anybody is more vulnerable than those 12-, 13-, 14-, 15-year-old children that we find on the streets of the communities of this province, mainly in Edmonton and Calgary – but it's not unique to the bigger centres – children prostituting themselves. Whether it's survival sex, whether these are children that are already vulnerable because they've had to leave dangerous situations, sometimes their own homes, suffice it to say that they are in distress, they are in trouble, and we have a huge responsibility as a province to support those children.

Now, having said that, Judge Karen Jordan of the Calgary youth and family court this summer gave some very clear direction to the court. What we have is, as I think has been said before, something of a dialogue between the Legislature and the court. The court has a responsibility to protect the rights of individuals, and that means children as well as adults. The court, in this case Judge Jordan, gave a very clear direction that there was a clear gap or lack of procedural safeguards for young children and the two young women in particular in the case that came before her. She gave some indication to the government in terms of some of the things that had to be done. So we're encouraged that the government has tacitly acknowledged that the first bill lacked those procedural safeguards, and they've now attempted to remedy that gap in the legislation.

Now, Madam Chairman, we have tried as an opposition – and I think we signaled almost immediately what some of our concern areas were with the bill. Just before I deal with the amendments, I'm still waiting for the Minister of Justice to tell us why, in the case in front of Judge Jordan, the agents for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General made no submissions, offered no evidence on the application of section 1 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What we know is that Judge Jordan found – and I went through the other day, and I won't repeat them all at second reading – that there were some issues and some elements of the act that in her belief and in her judgment offended sections 7 and 8 of the Charter.

What was interesting was that the Minister of Justice's agent, who was there, offered argument and submissions on section 7, section 8, and section 10 of the Charter but offered, apparently, no submission on section 1. Section 1 is the saving feature. I mean, this is the unique Canadian feature that doesn't exist in the U.S. Bill of Rights. In fact, as a consequence the courts in the U.S. and the U.S. Supreme Court have had to try and develop, in an awkward sort of way, a balancing mechanism in their jurisprudence.

In Canada when we drafted the Charter, I thought it was quite a clever idea to acknowledge that rights are about balance, and there aren't absolute rights. It was a question of finding some way that those rights, like in sections 3 and 4 and 7 and 8 and 9 and 10, would be balanced so that in some appropriate cases we would say that there is a larger societal interest which overwhelms the individual right.

But why is it, Madam Chairman, that I raised it in second reading and I still haven't got an explanation in terms of why the province didn't address section 1? The opportunity was there for this province to come in and say: there are some limits that can be justified in a free and democratic society, and this would be one of them. In comments made by the Minister of Children's Services and the Minister of Justice to the media outside this Assembly, you know, they made the case about the greater societal interest in protecting children, but I don't understand why those submissions were not part of the presentation in front of the youth and family court judge. Now, it's just a strange thing to me that that wasn't addressed.

3:00

There were some things that I also found in going through the judgment that haven't been answered with the kind of certainty I would have expected. I'm mindful here of not wanting to go through the judgment item by item, but I take it that one of the judge's concerns was that you will have some children who would not be brought in front of a judge in terms of the 72-hour detention, and she found that troubling and in fact something that offended the Charter. As I read Judge Jordan's decision, clearly what she's signaling in every case where a child is apprehended: the child should be brought in front of a judge.

Now, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Children's Services have argued: "Well, that's simply too onerous. We're not going to be able to do that." That's why I'm suggesting a middle course, which would be to say: okay; maybe it's not necessary that every child that's apprehended without a court order . . . Let me make a clear distinction. Where children have been apprehended pursuant to a court order, these comments do not apply, because then there is the judicial scrutiny. But in those cases where there's an apprehension, where it's not pursuant to a court order, I'm proposing an amendment which I think is a responsible one. What it does is require that duty counsel would have to see that child.

I know there are some people here who understand what duty counsel is. I tabled the other day the manual, Madam Chairman, and I'll bet that you were probably one of the first ones down to that excellent Legislature Library to see what Calgary-Buffalo was talking about and to see what was in this. We have an established system of duty counsel, that works very well. My proposal was: why wouldn't we ensure that as soon as reasonably practicable, a child has an opportunity not just to read a poster on a wall saying, "If you want a lawyer, phone legal aid," but that a duty counsel would meet with the child in question and be able to give some advice, answer questions the child may have? I think this is an issue that's significant.

Now, there were two responses I noted in the *Edmonton Journal* the other day. One was that the Minister of Children's Services noted that

when children come into the protective custody they're often on drugs, they're often totally incapable of understanding or speaking with anybody for a period of time.

I accept that, Madam Chairman. I accept that, but that's not a reason why we wouldn't ensure that they have legal advice as soon as reasonably practicable.

I understand that when some 15-, 16-year-old young woman who is whacked-out on drugs is brought into a protective facility, she's not cogent and not able to take legal advice, but at some point she becomes coherent and able to discuss her situation. All we'd ask is at that time there be that opportunity for the provision of counsel.

So to the Minister of Children's Services that's my answer: that we would deal with that by not requiring an arbitrary time limit for people to be able to see a lawyer, that it would be when they were coherent and able to converse with a lawyer, that that's when a lawyer be made available to them. Just to talk to a lawyer doesn't mean you're going to court. Madam Chairman, I'm sure you know that sometimes 15 minutes of legal advice can head off applications and all kinds of other material. It may be that the young woman in question has no intention and no interest in going to court, but at least we've provided her with some base information.

You know, I'm going to invite my friend from Calgary-Glenmore here in a minute to participate in this debate and my colleague from Calgary-Lougheed, because we have people who understand that we don't need to be threatened with a provision of some legal advice. Do we? It's not in some way undermining the system to answer

some questions by a lawyer and for the lawyer to offer some advice to the young person. Isn't that really what we want? If we're exercising our *parens patriae* jurisdiction with a piece of legislation like this, then it's incumbent on us to make sure that that child is not left simply to her own devices. That's irresponsible.

You know, I've often said the respect I have for the Minister of Justice, but I must say that I was very, very troubled when I read in the *Edmonton Journal* the minister saying that the government wants "to use the resources that are available to help the kids" and worries that additional money spent on lawyers could divert from that. Now, that may not be an accurate quote, but surely to goodness the minister knows that for a few measly hundred dollars for duty counsel to be able to see a young person for 15 or 20 minutes, you know, I would think that the Minister of Justice would understand more than anyone in this Chamber why that would be a good investment of dollars.

I can see already that I'm probably going to run out of time before I have a chance to finish making all the points I want to, and I've got some amendments coming in too. I know I've got some colleagues that will offer at least a couple of comments, while I catch my breath, Madam Chairman, as I run out of time.

The first amendment, when it comes forward, is going to deal with the provision of duty counsel. I can't imagine any reason why any member would be opposed to that. I can't imagine the Minister of Justice – I'm sure he has been misquoted. I'm sure he would not begrudge the very modest, modest dollars available to pay for a half hour of legal advice. I can't for a moment believe that he doesn't understand why that would be important to do.

Now, the second amendment has to do with accountability. Judge Jordan in her decision had a bunch of very good questions, and in the 52 pages of her judgment, as you take it off the Internet, she posed a number of specific questions. This is a paraphrase. She said that these were things the government had no answer for. These were things that the government, apparently on the face of it, wasn't able to answer. I have to come back when I have that in front of me.

Well, here are the questions. They're on page 7 of the judgment. I knew I'd find them. Here is what she said.

There is no provision for determining the efficacy of the legislation. The Director would have the public believe that because hundreds of apprehensions are accomplished in a given period the Act is achieving its stated goal of protecting children. Yet we are left not knowing anything, except by way of anecdotal evidence, of the lives of the children after their periods of confinement are completed. How many accept the services offered? How many return to the same lifestyle? How many gradually escape from that world? Are those numbers any different from the numbers where the prostitutes have not been apprehended and confined but have moved onto a more conventional lifestyle? How many children who have been apprehended and confined are subsequently beaten by their pimps? Are those numbers any different from the beatings endured by girls in the trade who have never been apprehended?

She goes on. I mean, I'm not going to read all the questions, but she asks legitimate questions.

So we have to build in, in my respectful submission, Madam Chairman, some vehicle, some device to be able to assess whether the bill is doing what we all hope it will do. Now, I would think the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek – and I haven't had a chance to show her the version of the amendment, which I think Parliamentary Counsel is signing off as we speak. I'd ask her and I'd ask the Minister of Justice this: what would be the problem with requiring the Children's Advocate office on an annual basis to report on the operation of the act? You know, it's good from a couple of points, I'd expect, and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek maybe can signal to me if this would be an amendment that she would find

acceptable. What it does is it allows the focus not to be lost. It means that at least once a year we as legislators have to sort of take account of what's happening with the children on the streets of our communities. What possible reason would anybody have for resisting that? So I'm interested in that.

3:10

If you had that kind of a reporting mechanism, we would know the answers to some of the other questions asked by Judge Jordan. For example,

are there beatings by pimps which take place to encourage the girls to replace the income that was lost during the time of confinement? What attempts are being made to determine whether under-age prostitutes are actually leaving the trade or merely working in trick pads?

Then I just go on to raise the final question raised by Judge Jordan.

The questions go on and on, but the Government of Alberta has not made a commitment to provide us with answers even though the liberty of children is being curtailed.

Well, Madam Chairman, this is the opportunity for government to provide those answers, and should they fail to do so, then the next best thing is at least to require the Children's Advocate report on an annual basis on the operation of the act.

If the Minister of Justice or the bill's sponsor have any issues with these amendments I'm attempting to outline, I hope they'd indicate so. I'd just say that I hope the Minister of Justice and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek understand we've had a very short time to deal with the bill. We've signaled in a general kind of way the kinds of amendments that we're putting forward. We have been working with Parliamentary Counsel as diligently as we can to get those amendments done. We will send them over to the bill's sponsor and the Children's Services minister and the Justice minister as soon as we get them, but it's not for lack of diligence on our side that we're trying to get them on the table. I don't want anybody to think that there's some surprise strategy here. We're bringing these things forward and trying to do it with as much dispatch as we can, because, as I've said, my colleagues want to see this bill passed, but they also want to make sure that there are some good amendments made to the bill.

Now, Madam Chairman, in fact the paper is still warm. This is the next best thing to Christmas morning. I open the envelope, and what's been delivered to my desk but a big stack of amendments we're putting forward. To economize on time, what we're going to do is: I've put all of the amendments together in one package. I'm going to propose that we debate them and vote them severally, but they're together in one package for the ease of members' reference. If I can get a page while I'm speaking, we can take these amendments to the table and then ask that this be marked as amendment A1 and then distributed to members.

This might be a good time, if I quickly read into the record while it's being distributed. We have the initial of Parliamentary Counsel on the second page, in the lower right-hand corner, and hopefully you've received the original of the two-page amendment. [Mr. Dickson's speaking time expired] Okay. Well, somebody else will carry on, Madam Chairman.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. I understand that the amendments haven't been moved. I'll leave it to my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo to actually move the amendments.

I'll take an opportunity to speak briefly to the bill in committee. Perhaps I'll leave my comments on the amendments until they're actually formally moved.

You know, there are a couple of experiences in my past that encourage me to see this bill and these amendments passed quickly. When I was in high school back in Burnaby, British Columbia, I went to school with a group of sisters. The oldest sister had actually dropped out of high school and then went on to try to find employment, and I was a classmate of one of the younger sisters. In any case, the older sister decided that the straight life at the time wasn't appropriate for her, and she ended up working first as an escort and then as a call girl and eventually ended up as a street prostitute. This was devastating to the family.

As I knew her two younger sisters very well, I kept in touch over the years. She ended up having a baby boy, and it wasn't clear who the father was at the time. In any case, when she was pregnant, her pimp moved her to Calgary, where she ended up giving birth to the baby boy and subsequently began, almost immediately after giving birth, going back to being a prostitute. The pimp had her working in Grande Prairie. The pimp had her working in Red Deer. The pimp had her working in Calgary and Edmonton. As time progressed, the pimp ended up being somewhat responsible for child care for this infant, and, Madam Chairman, one of the saddest things that I can imagine happened. The pimp ended up beating that baby to death with a coat hanger. In a very sick irony, I was employed at the time working for the John Howard Society up in Grande Prairie, and guess what? That pimp was going to fall onto my caseload. Of course, my sense of professionalism at the time made me declare the conflict of interest and to not have to deal with that particular offender.

Now, there is another experience that I've had, which was a more positive experience, that encourages me to see this bill pass and this program be operated in such a way that is consistent with the Charter as well as the needs of the young people affected. That is the experience I had in the early 1990s of serving on the Mayor's Task Force on Safer Cities here in the city of Edmonton, being the vice-chairman of that, and also being involved in the Action Group on Prostitution here in the city of Edmonton. That was a very interesting experience. I ended up doing a lot of research on things like massage parlors and escort agencies in understanding how they worked, and it got to the point actually where I was getting mail at home from the various lonely hearts clubs out there wanting to know whether or not I wanted to be matched up with somebody. This was a great source of dinner conversation between myself and my wife as these pieces of correspondence would find their way into my mailbox.

All joking aside, it was an additional eye-opener. As much as I thought I was familiar with the seamier side of the sex trade in this province, that was a real eye-opener, and the reason why it was such an eye-opener is because it showed me how closely these criminal enterprises operated as legitimate enterprises and how they mirrored what legitimate enterprises did and how they were using the same language and were using the same methods to further what in fact was criminal enterprise as those pursued by legitimate businesses. I struggled during that time to try to come up with some interventions that didn't require law reform. Because the regulation of prostitution is a Criminal Code matter and then we have some licensing and bylaw issues, which are municipal matters, there didn't seem to be much that the province could do.

Then we hit upon this notion that maybe the province could get more aggressive in the application of the child welfare legislation that was in place at the time. I remember convening a meeting of all the key stakeholders from the various government departments,

whether it was education, child welfare, health, social services, justice, solicitor general, brought them all together and went around the table. We were discussing this notion that maybe we could do something to protect children by more aggressively using parts of the Child Welfare Act, even to the point of apprehending children because they were at risk, at danger. To a person – to a person – as we went around that table, we were told as a group that, no, there was really nothing that could be done, that it either wouldn't be legal or wouldn't be fair or wouldn't be right, that that was not the purpose of the law.

3:20

It is encouraging to me that we've begun to think outside of that particular set of constraints, and this is why, when this legislation was originally presented as Bill 1, I was in favour of it, with cautions: that it be done correctly, that it be done with respect to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and that we not set ourselves up for failure by failing to pay attention to those very real and very legitimate needs to make sure that individual rights are protected to the degree that they can be in law.

So we get to committee stage on this bill – and I am in favour of the bill – and those two sets of experiences are very influential in my thinking, but I also know that the bill is still not perfect. Maybe it's too much to ask for. Maybe this is not the place where we will find perfection, coming out of this Chamber, and maybe it's always the pursuit of doing it the best and doing it right that we should be aiming towards.

I know that my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo has thought carefully about some of the deficiencies in the bill, and the one in particular that I'm concerned about is the lack of legal representation. Now, I know that that amendment hasn't been moved yet, so perhaps I should save my comments for when they would be most appropriate, and that would be speaking to the amendment. But I don't mind foreshadowing at all in terms of saying how committed I am (a) to making this legislation workable and (b) to ensuring that the individual rights of the young people who will be most directly impacted are protected.

One of the ways we can do that is to guarantee that they have access to counsel at the earliest possible stage. The amendment that will be forthcoming that would provide for duty counsel is, I think, an important amendment and one that only enhances the bill, does nothing to detract from it. So I look forward to having that amendment formally moved, and then I will rejoin the debate to express more clearly why it is that I think it's so important.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, thank you very much. I appreciate the comments of my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, who in fact has had a lot of experience in terms of trying to work with children and adults with problems both on the part of the criminal justice system and beyond.

Madam Chairman, what I'd like to do is this. I think all members have now seen the amendment, and my proposal would be this. It's in four different sections: A, B, C, D. My proposal would be to start with amendment A. I'd move amendment A. I'd ask that that be marked A1, and I'll just read it into the record. Section 3(c) is amended in the proposed section 2(13) by adding "and" at the end of clause (b), by striking out clauses (d) and (e), and by adding the following after the proposed subsection (13):

(13.1) A director must ensure that a child, with respect to whom a show cause hearing is to be held under subsection (12), consults a lawyer as soon as is practicable after being provided the information prescribed in subsection (13).

That is what I'm putting forward and asking that that be amendment A1. If I might, I'd like to offer some commentary with respect to why I respectfully suggest that this amendment is important.

I think that Judge Jordan in her very thoughtful decision – and you know, I encourage people to take the time to read the 24 pages. It's not difficult to read, and despite some ill-informed criticism I've heard in the media and elsewhere, I think when you read through the judgment, it's hard to take issue with her major findings. One of her concerns was when she talked about section 8. She talked about some of the provisions that exist in other places in terms of procedural safeguards. She said in her judgment, "For reasons which were never explained these procedural safeguards are not incorporated in the Act." She went on to say, "Are young prostitutes not worthy of the same safeguards as children who are conduct disordered, drug addicted or perhaps mentally ill?" That's really what happens here. With this legislation you have young people who are apprehended and detained, and we're effectively saying that they will not have the same protection, the same procedural safeguards that mentally ill persons have when they're picked up, that drug-addicted persons have, that conduct-disordered people have.

You know, in our haste to assist young people in distress and in trouble, let's make sure that we don't compound the damage and the injury to these young people by taking away their ability to be treated with respect. In my own experience as a lawyer doing a lot of family law work and working in family and youth court, you have children who have not been treated with respect, and we shouldn't be surprised that they become disrespectful. I'm not saying that that's the only factor, but how many times in youth and family court have people said: "Where were the parents? What were the parents doing that these children would grow up with the attitudes and the behaviour that they display?"

So what we're doing with this amendment, effectively, is this. In those cases where a child is apprehended without the benefit of a court order, where a court orders the apprehension, this amendment wouldn't apply because the court has reviewed it. But in other cases where there's an apprehension pursuant to an order, the requirement would be that the director must ensure that where there's going to be a show cause hearing, the child "consults a lawyer."

I mean, that could be by telephone. I got a copy of the duty counsel manual and tabled it. One of the things it provides for:

In March of 1990, pursuant to the Brydges decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, the Legal Aid Society of Alberta [instituted] a program which provides free telephone advice to accused upon arrest or detention.

It would be entirely foreseeable that this could be a telephone consultation. I think where young people are concerned, that's not as satisfactory as some experience-trained lawyer being able to do it on a face-to-face basis, but in emergency cases that telephone consultation is certainly preferable to no consultation at all.

The amendment goes on to say: "as soon as is practicable after being provided the information prescribed in subsection (13)." My initial thought had been to say that it should be mandatory within 24 hours, but as I thought about it, if you do have a child who is whacked-out on drugs, that's probably not very feasible. So what we do is we trust the judgment of the director and the judgment of the professional staff, who say that "as soon as is practicable" presumably means when that child is mentally competent to be able to understand the issue and to deal with it. It would seem to me, as I thought about it, that this actually gives a significant amount of responsibility to the director.

I'd just say specifically to the Minister of Children's Services, because I've probably not been very clear in my rambling, that what I've put forward is a series of amendments, and the first amendment

I've moved is the one entitled A. It's the one that would require that the director would have to ensure that a child "consults a lawyer as soon as is practicable after being provided the information prescribed in subsection (13)." This doesn't mean that every child apprehended without a prior court order is going to go to court, so in some respects this probably doesn't go as far as I understand Judge Jordan would like to see it taken. But in my discussions with people involved in this area – and it's been limited because of the short time – people think that this might be more flexible and might be more workable.

3:30

For example, one of the questions raised by Judge Jordan was when she talked about the application of section 9. Section 9 of the Charter is the one that provides that "everyone has the right not be arbitrarily detained or imprisoned." Madam Chairman, she said in respect to that:

What of the poor child who is wrongfully apprehended but has no opportunity to convince a judge that the apprehension, although well intentioned, was not justified in law? If she was wrongfully detained by a police officer or officer in charge following a police investigation concerning a criminal offence she would be taken before a justice to determine the question of release. Is her right to be secure against arbitrary detention which may result from the application of this Act to be ignored because she is a child, or because we are willing to sacrifice her constitutional rights so as to be able to protect another child?

I think the judge made a further telling point when she said:

What could be more arbitrary than a review of the apprehension of some girls and not of others? The government has argued that there is a criterion which establishes when a show cause application is required and that this removes the element of arbitrariness. They have never explained . . .

And the Minister of Justice may have to be held accountable for this. . . why there is no necessity for a hearing following every apprehension, a hearing similar in form and content to those required by the judicial interim release provisions of the Criminal Code.

Now, I've heard the Minister of Justice say: "Let's not treat this as criminal legislation. This is a different thing altogether. This isn't a criminal proceeding." He's absolutely right. But you know something? We're still taking away the most powerful right that anybody has. It's the right to be free. Detention has been seen as perhaps the most serious violation of all human rights: detention and depriving somebody of the freedom to go where they want to go or do what they're going to do. This is a huge element. Whether it's a piece of criminal legislation or social welfare legislation, it can't be done casually. It can't be done without some procedural safeguards.

As I pointed out a moment ago, these young girls picked up under this act as amended will have less rights than somebody who is mentally ill, fewer rights than somebody who is drug addicted under other pieces of legislation that would also affect a young person. I don't think that's what the government wants to do. I know it's not what the Minister of Children's Services wants to do.

Incidentally, I take this opportunity to applaud her for the funding announcement last week. I asked questions about that, because when the announcement of the amendment package to the bill came forward, people said: "Fine. But longer detention is going to mean that significantly more resources are going to be required." So I applaud the announcement of the Minister of Children's Services. I must say that I've been pleasantly surprised by the alacrity with which government is moving on this issue. They deserve full credit for that. I guess I'd just like the package to be not sullied in any way or tainted because we've not just gone that small further step of providing some adequate procedural safeguards.

There may be other people that wish to participate in the debate around this, and I think we want to consider what Judge Jordan said when she talked about this.

I can see no down side however, other than the expenditure of resources, to requiring that any child who is apprehended be taken before a judge or justice of the peace within 24 hours of apprehension for the purpose of having her detention reviewed in the same fashion that an accused in a criminal matter who is detained by a police officer and not released must be taken before a justice of the peace for the purpose of a judicial interim release hearing pursuant to S. 503 of the Criminal Code.

She goes on to say:

It would be possible to carry out such a review by the use of teleconference facilities such as already approved in the Act and in the Child Welfare Act.

I'm not going as far as Judge Jordan is suggesting. I'm simply saying in a much more modest way: let's make sure these children have an opportunity to talk to a lawyer. The Minister of Children's Services will note that we've not put in a time limit, so there's no arbitrary requirement that the child has to speak to duty counsel within 24 hours or 18 hours, and that's because the minister has convinced me that there will be some children who, because they're whacked-out on drugs or whatever, aren't able to meaningfully dialogue with a lawyer. So it would be in the judgment of the director when that child is competent to engage in that kind of consultation. There's nothing here, Madam Minister, through the chair, that would prohibit a telephone conversation, so it wouldn't mean necessarily that there would have to be the physical presence of a lawyer to give that advice.

I may be criticized for diluting this amendment too far. There may be judges who think that the Official Opposition isn't doing an adequate job of insisting on rigorous tests, and I guess my only answer is that I'm a bit of a pragmatist, Madam Chairman. I'd really like to see these amendments adopted. That's why I've tried to respond to the comments made by the Minister of Children's Services and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and the Minister of Justice and tried to go for what I thought was a reasonable compromise, although I acknowledge that maybe a court hearing in every case is the best thing. At least I would feel a degree of comfort that every child at least would have a core level of protection.

So those are the comments I wanted to make with respect to the amendment. Now, I know the amendment has just been circulated a few moments ago – and I explained earlier that it's because I just got it from Parliamentary Counsel – but I'm hopeful that we'd get some reaction from the bill's sponsor, from the Minister of Justice, and from the Minister of Children's Services. There are other things I could say, but I think I've been accused before of gilding the lily or talking myself out of a good amendment. I know that lawyers in Edson, Alberta, would be happy to see this amendment come forward and would think it is a responsible one.

I'm going to sit down and allow some reaction from the government to this specific amendment, A1, and then may have some other things to say, depending on what sort of reaction we hear from the government.

Thanks, Madam Chairman.

MR. SAPERS: I'll hesitate to begin my comments if the Minister of Justice or the Minister of Children's Services was going to join the debate.

MS EVANS: Madam Chairman, I would invite also my colleague the Minister of Justice to comment, but could I just clarify if the full extent of these amendments is being considered at this time, or is it simply section A?

3:40

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It's strictly section A that has been deemed A1. We're dealing with that one.

MS EVANS: Madam Chairman, we really believe that currently we have the opportunity for legal representation built not only within the amendments to Bill 29 that have come forward, but when a police officer apprehends a child, the officer immediately explains why the child was apprehended and tells the child that he or she has a right to a lawyer. So right off the bat when the child is apprehended, they are told about that.

When the director first confines the child, the social worker notices the child, and the reason for the apprehension is given right away. The notice is given, their right to counsel, the time and date of court, and that was something I mentioned quite succinctly in my opening statements on this bill. The court application is also served to the child. So if the child is under the influence of drugs or alcohol and incapable of understanding the information, the worker is expected to give this information to the child again as soon as the child is capable of understanding it.

I think, simply put, without digressing further, I'm not quite clear why the addition of this proposed subsection (13.1) would be any better than what currently exists in Bill 29 as presented. We believe that the child can access any service, particularly including legal counsel, and wherever possible we make everything available for them to make sure they get that additional help.

So at this time, Madam Chairman, it would be the position of the Minister of Children's Services, which I represent, that this is unnecessary, that it in fact is already fully embodied in the bill and its intent.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much. I appreciate those comments from the minister. There's a tremendous body of experience, though, in working with young people which would indicate that as true as it is that a young person may be advised that they can consult a lawyer, there is tremendous evidence that that doesn't happen. If you want to look at what happens within the existing process when a young person is charged with an offence and they're given that advice that they can consult a lawyer, it is not uncommon at all that if a young person is going to be receiving legal-aid counsel, the first lawyer they talk to is duty counsel at the time of first appearance in court.

Often it's not even duty counsel. In the case of many aboriginals it's a native court worker who asks for an adjournment in the proceedings so that the young person involved actually can sit down and talk to counsel and instruct counsel and receive advice. Even in the circumstances, through the chair to the minister, where a young person is charged with an offence and will in fact be going to court, which is, I know, different from the circumstances that we're dealing with in this legislation, those young people don't always get the benefit of legal advice, and if they do, it's not until the very, very last minute. Even at that point it usually requires the intervention of another adult on their behalf to ensure that their right to counsel is properly exercised.

So I would ask the minister and perhaps the Minister of Justice to consider this and to look at the reality of what actually happens to young people when they're going through these processes, whether they be as a result of a criminal charge or a child welfare apprehension. The access to counsel becomes very, very important because usually there is not an adult who this young person has a trusting

relationship with. I mean, think about it for a minute. We're talking about mostly young women but also some young men who are prostituting themselves on our streets. If they had healthy and supportive relationships with adults, they probably wouldn't be in those circumstances.

All we know is that something in their life has led them to that point. They've now been apprehended. That apprehension may, in fact, be a lifesaving event. It may be the best thing that would have happened to them, but in order for that to be fully realized, they need the advice of a neutral and professional and competent adult. There are many other things that would be going on in the life of the young person. They could have outstanding criminal charges. They may or may not be involved with a pimp or another criminal organization. There may or may not be legal issues to do with the adults that should have custody or do have custody over them.

The opportunity to consult with a lawyer to be reassured about some procedural issues, to receive the benefit of an understanding of the law and how it's being applied, to be able to deal with some of those other conflicting or complex issues that they're dealing with outside of the apprehension I believe is an absolute necessity and not a necessity that will be met simply because at the time of apprehension a peace officer advises that a person is being apprehended pursuant to the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. That in and of itself does not mean that that person will exercise the right to counsel or that even if they choose to, even if they try to, because of the pressures on legal aid, pressures that have been well documented so many times, they will be able to get the benefit of legal counsel.

So what we are doing in this amendment is simply adding a burden on the state that I don't think is unwarranted, considering that we are dealing with the deprivation of liberty of one of the state's citizens. We are putting a burden on the state to make sure that that young person, that child, does in fact receive the benefit of what the minister was referring to when the minister said that they're advised that they can seek legal counsel. We are now putting forward a mechanism where they will be able to be assured of that ability to get legal counsel.

Clearly, based on the minister's comments, there is no disagreement about the importance of legal counsel. What there appears to be is a bit of a disagreement about whether the current law goes far enough, and the suggestion coming from the Official Opposition is that the law will be enhanced in such a way through this amendment as to give fullness to what the minister is saying in terms of a child's ability to seek counsel. I hope that the minister won't just dismiss this and will understand the real difference between simply being advised that counsel should be sought and putting in place a mechanism to ensure that counsel is consulted.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, it seems, if I understood the Minister of Children's Services, that what she has said is that there's no additional measure of protection for a child between having a poster on the wall in the safe house or somebody handing to the child and telling the child, "Here's the phone number of legal aid if you want some legal advice," no difference between that and a living, breathing person trained in the law sitting down with the young person and saying: "I'm not here representing the department, the director, or any other person. I'm simply here to assist you. What questions have you got? I can give you some information." The minister, effectively, says that she sees no difference between the two.

Well, I guess two things keep going through my mind. At some point don't we have to get past the disconnect? If the children are

so vulnerable, so confused, so needy that we pick them up off a street and take them in the back of a police cruiser or the social worker's car in the first place, do we not at least have to have some question whether those children are able to make sound, wise, prudent decisions about whether they need a court hearing or whether or not they should talk to a lawyer?

You know, I'm a parent, and my wife and I are fortunate that our daughter hasn't provided some of the huge challenges many other parents deal with. But, you know, my experience as a parent tells me that 11- and 12- and 13- or 14-year-old children don't always know what they want. Sometimes the thing that's clearly in their best interest just sort of passes by them. We're talking about young women, in my experience, many of whom are very cynical. Many of these children have been abused by their own parents or caregivers. I remember the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek talking about this, that many teen prostitutes have experienced abuse at the hands of people who were supposed to protect them and shield them.

3:50

I have great respect for this minister, and I believe absolutely that she wants to do the right thing. But is her experience so different from mine? She thinks these young people have all these problems on the street and we apprehend them, but a matter of hours later now these children can be left to make a very serious, a very important decision just by giving them some raw information.

My experience – and, you know, what do we ever reflect here but our own experiences? My experience professionally as a lawyer and as a parent and as whatever else tells me that children that are confused don't always act in their self-interest, that they make dumb decisions, and sometimes they make no decisions. Just to sort of say, "Well, tough; that's it; no difference; we've given them some core information," I can't imagine that members would think that was good enough.

I think there's a difference between the passivity that government seems to recommend. I mean, we have a statute which is hugely interventionist. It is absolutely interventionist. We've gone outside the Child Welfare Act because we said that the welfare act didn't provide for enough intervention opportunity. Then when it comes to this other area, we suddenly adopt this amazing state of passivity, and we don't seem to care very much about what assistance this child gets. Madam Chairman, I can't understand that. I have a lot of problems with that.

For example, maybe the Minister of Justice can tell us. If he looks at the duty counsel manual produced by the Legal Aid Society, which he largely funds through his department, and if he looks at page 5 of 41 where we talk about why we have duty counsel in youth court and we go through the reasons – I can paraphrase by saying: because the same young person that's in the protective safe house and is confused and troubled could just as easily be in youth court at the other end of town, and there the Minister of Justice is suddenly really concerned.

It's unlikely that the child is going to lose their freedom, so the penalties typically meted out in youth and family court are far less onerous and far less major. I mean, we're not likely going to see a lot of these young people going into CYOC or EYOC, yet they get access to a lawyer. It's guaranteed. It's paid for. The Minister of Justice is responsible for that program. Why is it, Madam Chairman, that the Minister of Justice thinks those children in youth court need some counsel and some advice and he provides it by funding the duty counsel program there, but these young girls and, I suppose, men who are looking at being taken off the street and detained for a number of days don't need duty counsel? They get the poster. So you've got the A treatment over here for some young people, and

you've got the C treatment over here for some other young people. I have a real problem with that.

It's not good enough for the Minister of Justice to say that one is criminal and the other is social intervention. In both cases you're talking about depriving a young person of their liberty. I say again: how do you protect young people by not respecting them and by abusing their freedom? That's, I'm afraid, what we potentially do.

So I'm not sure what else I can say. We've heard the position of government. All I can say is that I expect many Albertans are going to be reading *Hansard*, are going to be following this because they're interested in children.

This is a pilot project. I think the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has pushed this thing, so with her pushing and with the support of the Minister of Children's Services we are leaders in this country in protecting children on the streets. But let's recognize that as we lead, that also means that people look to us as a model. I don't want people to look at this province and say: they've done a great job in terms of resources and other assistance to vulnerable young children, but in some key areas they blew it. I think by not actively ensuring a measure of protection for those young people and suddenly going completely passive when it really counts, we look like we're not really on top of this thing and we really aren't as knowledgeable about this area as our advocates would have Canadians believe.

It's an amendment that I think is consistent with what the Justice minister, through his department and through his duty counsel program in youth court, represents. It is a modest, modest, modest way of trying to respond to some of the concerns raised by the youth and family court, and for government to give the legislative straight-arm to what I think is a pretty constructive opposition amendment is extremely disappointing.

Madam Chairman, those are the comments I wanted to make. Thanks very much.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, I take it that we weren't persuasive and the amendment didn't carry. So I'd move on to amendment B. Or did you want to call this A2?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call that one A2.

MR. DICKSON: It would be amendment B on the paper that has been distributed to members.

This in effect is virtually the same as the last amendment. It just kicks in at a different part of the process, but once again it requires an act of intervention through the duty counsel program consistent with what we do with youth court, just at a different part, because we're here amending the proposed section 2.1. I'll just read it in so that it's part of the record, Madam Chairman. I'm moving amendment A2. Section 4 is amended in the proposed section 2.1,

a) in subsection (1) by adding "and" at the end of clause (a),

b) by striking out clauses (c) and (d), and

c) by adding the following after subsection (1):

(1.1) A director must ensure that a child, who is confined to a protective safe house under section 3(1)(b)(iii), consults a lawyer as soon as is practicable after being provided the information prescribed in subsection (1).

So that's amendment A2, Madam Chairman, and all of the comments and arguments I made before, if members would allow, I'd just repeat and incorporate by reference in support of this amendment. It's the same one again, and for all of those social workers and child advocates and child support agencies I just say: let's show that we understand that vulnerable, confused children don't stop being vulnerable and confused once they come into

custody under this act. You know, one lawyer who works a lot with teens in trouble made the point to me that for some of these kids we're talking about, this isn't a matter of days or hours. This may be months and years in terms of the reclamation project. The Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness knows that. When we talk about population health and we talk about how we make children healthy, this is a component of that.

4:00

So we might look at it this way. Members that voted hastily on the last amendment, A1, now have had an opportunity to reflect on that a little bit, and this is actually their chance – there is nothing to be ashamed of – to say: we made a mistake on that first vote, but we're going to try and remedy it here on amendment A2. So I encourage members to think about what happened on that first one and not forfeit the leadership this province has provided by going backwards, as we would with the passive system the government contends.

I commend the amendment, and I look forward to any other discussion or any other response. Maybe we'll get a response from one of the government ministers responsible or perhaps the bill's sponsor. I'd look forward to that comment.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I'm deeply disappointed in the response to amendment A1 and hoping that perhaps we'll get a different response but not really naively believing that we will. I'm particularly concerned that we didn't hear anything at all from the Minister of Justice in regard to these amendments. It is his department that will be picking up the cost, I'm assuming, through the legal aid scheme for the provision of duty counsel in some form to these young people.

What I heard the Minister of Children's Services say is that there is an opportunity for young people to be advised that they have the right to seek counsel and therefore we've done enough. Then I heard my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo say: well, how could it be enough when we're dealing with the deprivation of liberty of these young people? Considering that this is an act that goes directly into the lives of these people and is very interventionist, why would we stop short of doing everything we could that's in the best interest of the child? I didn't hear an answer to that.

I'm only assuming that the government's response to these amendments comes about for one or two reasons. The first reason would be that it's a fiscal issue, that it's just too much money, that we simply couldn't afford to provide legal advice to these young people. Well, if that were the argument, we all know that that would be poppycock.

First of all, any members of the legal profession that are present in this Chamber I think would be the first to acknowledge that the legal aid tariff for duty counsel is not all that pricey. It doesn't put a lot of money in the pockets of lawyers; it doesn't cost that much. Secondly, of course, the province is in a very healthy financial position. Thirdly, the commitment has been made of millions and millions and millions of new dollars to help provide services for these people on the welfare side. So the government has already made a financial contribution and a financial commitment, which I'm in favour of. But it would not be unwarranted to say that perhaps some of that money can be spent making sure that the legal rights of these people are protected as well. So any arguments to do with affordability would be spurious arguments. They wouldn't be

arguments that we'd have to take seriously for the reasons I've just enumerated, and I could go on to mention some others.

The other reason that I can think of why the government might not want to approve these amendments would have to do with the general tone and tenor of the government when it comes to issues dealing with the legal community, particularly with lawyers. This is a government that has had a feud with members of the bar for years. Perhaps we're just seeing another volley in that exchange being fired right now, that this is something that would somehow be of a business interest to lawyers, and this government has it made it clear that they don't like providing business opportunities to lawyers, so they are going to be opposed to this amendment.

Of course, if that's the reason the government is rejecting this, then I guess I would just respectfully suggest that they should pick another issue in which they could further their war of words with the legal profession. This one is just too important. This one is just too critical to the well-being of young people, and young people should not be caught in the cross fire between the government and members of the bar in this province.

It could be, Madam Chairman, that I'm entirely wrong, that the government is rejecting this amendment for a reason that has nothing to do with their apparent disregard for the legal community and has nothing to do with fiscal issues. If that's the case, if I'm entirely wrong – and I have never been more sincere in what I'm about to say – I would hope that somebody from the government would stand up and tell me that I'm wrong and then explain to this Assembly why it is that they are unwilling to provide a mechanism to ensure legal counsel is provided to these young people whose lives are already so delicately hanging in the balance.

I would appreciate some further commentary from the Minister of Children's Services because I know how important this is to her. Perhaps the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, the sponsor of the bill, could talk about, from her own experience, what the downside of providing legal counsel could be, if there is one. Maybe we'll finally hear from the Minister of Justice regarding how this may or may not impact the administration of justice in this province. In the absence of a clear and compelling reason not to support this amendment, I would hope that members supporting the government will put aside their partisan interests and do the right thing for young people in this province.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I was not going to enter debate on this particular issue, but I have to do so just because of the opportunity afforded to stand in my place and tell Edmonton-Glenora that he is in fact entirely wrong in the matters that he raised in debate.

In fact, one of the rationales for not accepting an amendment of this nature goes back to the whole concept or philosophy of drafting legislation. Some people draft legislation and put absolutely everything into it, codify everything. That would be the French Civil Code approach to drafting legislation. In common law the process that we normally use in the parliamentary democracy is to draft framework legislation and allow the rules to be developed under that framework legislation.

It's not necessary to put the minutiae into the legislation. Now, when I say "minutiae," I'm not suggesting for a moment that the right of a child to have a review of their confinement is minutiae, but the process by which they get access to those rights certainly can be more flexible than having it outlined and embedded in the act itself. So the bill as it is currently proposed sets out that children must be

advised of their right to counsel and given the means by which to access that counsel.

That does not preclude the putting in place of a duty counsel system or providing coverage through a family law project of the Legal Aid Society or providing legal advice in some other manner. It doesn't preclude it at all. But the question here is: does it need to be embedded in statute to ensure that children have their rights? I suggest that it's not necessary, and that's why this amendment need not be supported and probably should not be supported.

The arguments that are being put up about the deprivation of liberty lead one to conclude that people are looking at this act from the wrong direction. This act is not about the deprivation of a child's liberty. This is about the protection of a child from people who are abusing them and providing a safe environment for those children for a period of time in which they can be detoxified, can be given a good meal, a good rest, and an opportunity for some counseling in a circumstance where they will not be harassed by the pressures of the street or by the pimps and the abusers that have been abusing them.

This is not criminal legislation. This is not about treating children as criminals and making sure that they have access to a lawyer because their rights of liberty are going to be deprived. This is not about children who are picked up because they're in a confused state and then expected to make adult decisions.

This is about a situation where children are picked up because they are being abused, because they are at the perils of the street. They're being picked up in a parental manner and provided with an opportunity to get a good meal, to get a good rest, to get away from the drug culture, which most of them have been subverted to, to get away from the pervers that are degrading them, to be treated in a dignified and responsible fashion, and given an opportunity to have access to some counseling and access to some advice, which will take them off the street and set them on the right path and get them away from the hands of their abusers.

4:10

So the question, then, that's raised is one of whether or not, in so doing, we're asking them to make adult decisions. That's precisely why these amendments are before the House today, because if somebody wants to raise a suggestion that they have been inappropriately apprehended and confined – and it's the confinement that we're speaking of – they should have the right to raise that issue, obviously. If they're in a state where they're making that case, then they should have absolutely no problem availing themselves of counsel in order to do that. But if they are in a drug-induced state, if they are still suffering from deprivation, if they are confused, then it's not a question of providing them with legal advice so they can get out of that. Far better that we provide them with the counseling resources, the food, the safety, the shelter so that they can change their lives around.

I go back to the point that I started on. The reason for voting against this amendment, I would submit, is not because we are opposed to children having access to legal advice in the circumstances of their having been confined because they're being ill-treated on the streets, but rather one where it's not necessary to put this degree of detail into the statute. The statute makes clear that children have the opportunity, if they are being confined and if they disagree with their confinement, for a judicial review and access to legal counsel in order to have that happen.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, when the Minister of Justice drives home on the Whitemud freeway tonight and he sees a flashing sign on the side of the road pointing to "Photo radar 500 metres

ahead," he's smart enough to know that he's going to slow down – or maybe he always drives the speed limit anyway as Minister of Justice. If in fact he had a heavy foot and he was late for dinner and afflicted with a low blood sugar level and anxious to get home to enjoy dinner with his family and he got that warning that there was radar ahead, he would slow down; wouldn't he? We know he would.

The family and youth court here has put a big warning, a big sign on the side of the road. They've given notice to this government that what we all did a couple of years ago in doing the initial act was that we didn't pay enough attention to process.

Now, as I listened to the Minister of Justice speaking, I think he seems to have forgotten the reason we are here today. It's not because we got some different feedback from some frontline workers. We did indeed get that. The principal reason we're here is because a court of competent jurisdiction has determined that the Charter has been violated, at least sections 7 and 8 and 10, by the bill that we passed. That's why we're here.

Now, the amendment that we're putting forward we think, of course, advantages children, but it's also because we see our job as legislators is to try to make legislation Charter-proof. It's not by invoking section 33, the notwithstanding clause; it's understanding what the courts are telling us and then trying to craft legislation that deals with those things.

You know, one could say that the government has perhaps two options: they can listen to the arguments and try and deal with the merits of the amendments being put forward here, or they can do what they so often do, spend a ton of dough sending in lawyers from the civil section of the Department of Justice to battle this in the courts again. If I may say so – and it's certainly not all under this minister's watch – this government has a long and inglorious history of failed court challenges. So I don't know why the Minister of Justice would want to go there, but that's what he creates.

You know, when the minister talks about that we can codify so many things and he prefers and his government prefers not to codify, well, what in effect he says is: we're not going to particularize this; we're going to do something down the road. Well, you know, all the Minister of Children's Services would have to say is: "Member for Calgary-Buffalo and all colleagues, this is an announcement right now that we will implement a program and will do this immediately to ensure that every child will be seen by duty counsel. We choose not to put it in legislation, but that's a program that we're going to implement in this province." If they say that right now, I can sit down, and I'm not going to worry about the fact that the last vote failed and this one may well be heading that way with the direction of the Minister of Justice. But the minister hasn't said that.

The point is that there is a problem. It's been identified by Judge Jordan. We want to know how the government is going to solve it. We've offered a way to do it. The government's answer is no solution. Certainly I know that the lawyers in this Assembly understand the difference between the poster on the wall and actually providing a person to provide that protection.

Now, the other thing I have to observe is – and I'm not sure whether it's just late in the afternoon and whether the Minister of Justice really meant what he said. What I heard him say is that when it comes to depriving somebody of liberty, it's the motivation that really matters, not the consequences. Well, you know, in the 23 years that I practised law, my experience has been that the courts typically deal with the consequences. You may have the best motivation in the world, but if the consequences are detention without procedural safeguards, whatever your motivation, it offends the Charter and it's wrong.

What the Minister of Justice did not tell me is: why was it that

when Judge Jordan rendered her decision, on page 20 she said:

When this issue was being argued,
and I just say parenthetically that that was the application of section 1 of the Charter,

the director maintained that the Act did not violate any section of the Charter and chose not to make any submissions on the issue. As a corollary, of course, there was no evidence called which was specifically addressed to the s. 1 inquiry to assist me in my deliberations. I am left, therefore, with only the submissions of the Applicants to consider.

Those were the two counsel for the two 17-year-old young women involved there.

So if the Minister of Justice disagrees with me that what the courts want to see is not the motivation of the Legislature but the consequences of the legislation, then why, for goodness sake, did that minister not instruct his counsel and the counsel for the director, when this thing was being argued in youth and family court, to make the section 1 arguments? The more we get into this and the more detail we review this with, you start wondering: was the Children's Services department talking to the Minister of Justice? [interjection] Oh, don't assure me that happened, because that is even scarier if I think they were. You see, I can at least sleep tonight knowing that there'll be a Liberal majority government in Ottawa and, secondly, that the right thing happened . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member.

MR. DICKSON: Oh, I'm sorry. That wasn't relevant.

Madam Chairman, I'll be able to sleep knowing at least that the two departments hadn't spoken to each other. Maybe they will now. But if indeed it's a question that the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Children's Services, their departments, have been talking to each other, we have got a significant problem.

The minister said that he wanted to see children treated in a dignified and responsible fashion. If he really believed that, then he would be supporting these amendments in a heartbeat, and we don't see that.

There are a couple of other amendments we want to deal with, but I do say that the court on the next Charter challenge is presumably going to be looking at the *Hansard*, the reflection of the debate, and they will note that this government was provided a way, in my respectful view, to make the legislation Charter-proof. As so many times the opposition has offered ways it could do that, we have a government that so often says: "No. We will plunge on, because we'd sooner spend all this money in the courts fighting Charter challenges than getting it right the first time."

Madam Chairman, I don't know what else we can do. So those are my comments with respect to the amendment.

4:20

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I want to thank the Minister of Justice for entering the debate when he did and for setting me straight and letting my know that my cynicism wasn't justified in this case. That being said, I've taken no comfort from the minister's explanation as to why he and, I take it, by default the government that he's a part of won't be supporting these amendments. As I understand the minister – and I'll paraphrase, even though I run some risk of not getting the full weight of his words – this government doesn't believe in putting detail into legislation, that this is a framework.

Well, the minister might want then to explain to me and to other

members of this Assembly why it is that we've even dealt with the amendments to the child welfare legislation as it stood. Because, of course, there were critics who said when this debate first started: "We don't have to amend the law; the law as it exists is fine. What we simply have to do is implement it differently. If we simply looked at the Child Welfare Act, we have everything we need. You don't need this flagship bill." With respect to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, she would have been well intended but wrong, given the Minister of Justice's explanation, because we only have framework legislation.

If we only had framework legislation, I guess I would have to ask the Minister of Justice why it is that he just rushed through a miscellaneous statutes amendment act that in part changed one word in the title of one government-created organization, a word that I would say was just added by another miscellaneous statute amendment previously? If this government is only dealing with framework legislation, then why is it that we busy ourselves with passing legislation that changes one word in the title? We surely wouldn't have to be bothered with that kind of minutiae, according to the Minister of Justice.

Now, the Minister of Justice, amongst all members of government, should know best that the law is about detail. The law is technical. What we are talking about is providing a procedural safeguard. That certainly doesn't dictate chapter and verse of how and when and who. It simply says that something shall happen. This is not different from so many other pieces of provincial legislation. So while my colleague from Calgary-*Buffalo* has made some very valid arguments and I've heard some responses from the Minister of Justice regarding why this doesn't have to happen, I'm afraid that I'm not convinced by his arguments. I did not find them compelling. In fact, frankly I found them a little bit shallow in terms of what it is we are talking about here.

I certainly don't think any member of the Official Opposition needs to be told by any member of the government that we're viewing this from the wrong perspective, that we're looking at this as legislation that takes away the liberty of young people but that we should be looking at it as legislation that is in their best interests. It is members of this caucus that have provided support to the government in doing the right thing by Alberta's children. We fully understand the importance and the perspective of this legislation. We, however, also fully appreciate the importance of individual freedoms and liberty, and we in this caucus support the Charter of Rights, not like members of the government, who have stood in their places and have said that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is the worst thing that has ever happened to Canadian society. So I really don't accept being lectured to by a member of the government when it comes to issues dealing with individual freedoms and rights.

I would ask once again that members of the government make themselves familiar with how legal advice and services are provided to people in this province and make sure that they are comfortable, that they are entirely comfortable, that a 12- or a 13-year-old girl who has just been taken off the street will have the presence of mind to note a poster in a waiting room or will reflect on the momentary comments made by a peace officer suggesting that that young woman should go and talk to a lawyer, with all of the other things, with all of the other emotions, with all of the other issues that will be going on. I think when individual members do reflect on that question, they will come to the immediate and the apparent and the correct conclusion that, no, of course that wouldn't be enough and that that young person deserves more. And since we are providing assistance to young people, since that really is what this legislation is all about, then we should go the extra mile and make sure that that assistance takes the form of access to legal advice.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. I'd now like to move as amendment A3 that which is marked as the letter C in the two-page handout to members. I'll just read it into the record. Section 6 is amended by adding the following before the proposed section 3.1:

3.01 When any decision or order is made under sections 2 or 3, a judge of the Court, a justice of the peace or a director, as the case may be, must be satisfied that the decision or order is in the best interests of the child after considering the following factors:

- (a) the child's safety,
- (b) the child's present and future well-being,
- (c) the child's physical and emotional needs,
- (d) the child's level of development,
- (e) the child's cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage,
- (f) the child's views,
- (g) the effect on the child if there is a delay in making a decision, and
- (h) the importance of continuity in providing the child with services.

Madam Chairman, the reason for this amendment is that a court under Bill 29 is making very important decisions for a young person. They're making decisions in terms of potentially having a child detained for a period of time, even against that child's will. We have confinement of up to 21 days in a protective safe house, a renewal potentially for a further 21 days. These are major impacts on a child.

I quoted the other day that study that tested all Alberta laws for compliance with the UN convention on the rights of the child. The observation by the analyst, the author, was that our Child Welfare Act is the strongest piece of legislation, certainly in the province, in terms of compliance with the UN convention. If we look at that Child Welfare Act, that the Minister of Children's Services will be so familiar with, we look at section 2 and they talk about matters to be considered. It starts off:

A Court and all persons shall exercise any authority or make any decision relating to a child who is in need of protective services under this Act in the best interests of the child and in doing so shall consider the following as well as any other relevant matter.

We then have subsections (a), (b), (c), (d), all the way through to (m). So this becomes, if you will, the standard that judges and directors and social workers use in the intervention and protection of children.

Now, the government has elected or chosen here to say: we're stepping outside the Child Welfare Act; we're creating a stand-alone piece of legislation. If you do that, what you lose then are some of those other elements of the Child Welfare Act. If you look at Bill 29 and you look at the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, you know, there's nothing in here comparable to section 2 in the Child Welfare Act. When judges are making these decisions of a 21-day detention or an extension so it'll be a 42-day detention, what things do they look at? What are the criteria that are being applied? What are the tests? Unless the Minister of Justice says, "Well, Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you're being too prescriptive" – it wasn't too prescriptive to put it in the Child Welfare Act, an act that's being lauded as respecting the rights of the child.

4:30

We have nothing like that, so what this amendment attempts to do in a modest way is construct some purpose so that when the judge sits down, that judge or that director or that social worker has a number of criteria against which to test the difficult and important

decisions they have to make. I think that we need this sort of direction. If we had done this simply by expanding the Child Welfare Act, this would not have in any way been deemed necessary, but we've chosen not to do that.

Members may say that there's a preamble to the mother statute, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, and we see some vague sorts of platitudinous comments in the six clauses, I think, of the preamble. I suppose in a pinch the court might look at that and take some direction from that. They might look at the Child Welfare Act. But, you know, if you look through Bill 29, there's nothing that clearly identifies what we're trying to do. We've got judges making all these decisions, we've got directors making decisions, and there's no direction to them in terms of the kinds of things that the court is supposed to look at. Is that because we think it's so self-evident?

Well, we've already seen a very strong difference, a very marked difference between a judge and the Minister of Justice, who has said that in his view this is legislation that's for a good purpose and therefore it doesn't matter very much that there's a detention, that the purpose is a good and a sound and important one. Well, we've got a judge who answers back in that sort of important dialogue between the court and the Legislature, the executive, a judge who answers back: it does too matter, and it's important there be procedural safeguards. So it's clear that everybody doesn't see the world as the Minister of Justice does, and the very people who are applying the statute seem to have a different view of it than the Minister of Justice does. So would it not be helpful – and I say this to the Minister of Children's Services, through the chair – to set out what criteria, what factors we want the court to look at?

Now, this is an attempt to set out what we think are the – I think we've got eight factors. Maybe the Minister of Children's Services would disagree with one or two or thinks there should be some other factors. The Member for Calgary-McCall is trained as a social worker. He's dealt with the Child Welfare Act, I expect, in his earlier life, and he may have some suggestions in terms of changing some of the criteria. That's fine. Let's bring in a subamendment. Let's have the minister say what criteria they think should be applied. But with the limited resources the opposition has had and in the couple of days we've had to deal with this, we've come up with a list of proposals. I would wonder who could disagree, firstly, with setting out some criteria we would want to be considered in every single case when a judge makes an order. I don't even think the Minister of Justice would take issue with that. I haven't heard my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore take issue with that.

I mean, we probably have other people in the Assembly who, if they were concerned, I'd expect would express that concern. Who would disagree with the child's safety being a factor that would be involved in every one of those decisions? Who would disagree that the child's present and future well-being should be addressed and considered? Who would disagree that the child's physical and emotional needs would have to be looked at in every single case that comes in front of a judge, a justice of the peace, or a director?

The child's level of development. It has certainly been reported to me that many teen prostitutes, at least a significant number of them, have some cognitive or some learning disabilities. Would that not be an important thing to consider? I think I would want that addressed in every case.

The child's cultural, racial, linguistic, and religious heritage. The Minister of Justice a few minutes ago said that we must be respectful of these children, notwithstanding the fact that he won't insist that they get some legal advice. He didn't respect them that much, but he said that we must be respectful. Well, does that not also mean being respectful of their cultural heritage? If we're going to take a

child, lock a child up for potentially 42 days, is it not significant we make sure that there's some sensitivity around these parts? If any members have proposals for changing any of these, please stand up and offer those reasons. I'd be happy to see that kind of debate.

"The child's views," the proposed new (f). Well, I think the Minister of Justice again said that we must respect these children. Respecting young people means listening to them and soliciting their views; doesn't it? I mean, at some point is it not essential that you not completely disempower young people, that you don't shut them out of the process? How do you craft a solution for some kid who is on the street with a host of problems without at some point talking to them and asking them for their input and their advice and their views?

The other factor was "the effect on the child if there is a delay in making a decision." Is that not important? I mean, the whole purpose of this act is speedy intervention. So is it not important to determine, if there's a delay, what prejudice there might be to the child?

Finally, "the importance of continuity in providing the child with services." Madam Chairman, if you talk to people at Wood's Homes, if you talk to people at Avenue 15, if you talk to people at the Safe House Society in Calgary and their counterparts in Edmonton and in other communities, they continually talk about children who have some series of challenges that they cope with, and then they sometimes go through eight or nine social workers and different foster parents. All the experts tell us, as if we didn't know it intuitively, that children need some consistency in care. If you keep uprooting children and substituting caregivers – I may be running out of time soon, and I know if that happens, I have some colleagues that can offer some comments until I can catch my breath and resume following through on this. But continuity of care – I'm no social worker and I've not had that experience, but people who have the kind of experience that our friend from Calgary-McCall has had tell me that it is important. If I'm wrong, I invite somebody to tell me that.

So as I look through these criteria, I've got to tell you that I think our researcher did a pretty darn good job, and I think she's come up with some pretty responsible kinds of elements, Madam Chairman. I'm certainly prepared to see debate around what those issues should be, but the two propositions are that there has to be some outline of criteria, and if it's good enough for the Child Welfare Act, it's got to be good enough for Bill 29. If people want to challenge the criteria, I'm more than open to debate those, but let's make sure we're trying to craft the best legislation we can. It's important to do that.

So, Madam Chairman, I'll take my seat and see what response we get from government to amendment A3.

4:40

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: I'm going to be very brief, Madam Chairman, and just simply say that we believe – and I go back to my own personal experience relative to negotiating any type of agreement – that when you fetter any formula with additional criteria, you run the risk of not anticipating the criteria that would fit a very specific case.

The courts, we believe and have confidence, will consider each child's best interests on an individual basis. While I have looked at these amendments and contemplated what is missing, perhaps one should state that their social views are missing. But I'm more satisfied with my learned colleague who suggested that by defining what you think may well be everything, you run the huge risk of missing something else.

Bill 29 already requires – requires – that the best interests of the child be taken into account by a court before it may order a child to be further confined for up to 21 days or order an additional 21-day confinement period. So we believe that listing factors which in fact could limit the court's decision-making process in a way we may not even anticipate today is not conducive to improving the legislation.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, if that's the case, then when is the Minister of Children's Services coming into the Legislative Assembly and taking out section 2 of the Child Welfare Act, that also talks in the preamble about the best interests test but then goes on to say – so if we look for consistency from government and we're talking under Bill 29 of hopefully never more than 300 children in the course of a year, how many thousands of children do we deal with under the Child Welfare Act? There this minister's government has said that not only do we do a best interests test but must also consider:

- (a) the family is the basic unit of society and its well-being should be supported and preserved.

Are we going to take that out?

- (b) the interests of a child should be recognized and protected.

Are we going to eliminate that?

- (c) the family has the right to the least invasion of its privacy and interference with its freedom that is compatible with its own interest, the interest of the individual family members and society.

Are we going to take that out? I mean, I can go through and read out from 2(a) to 2(m).

Now, Minister of Children's Services, through the chair, you can't tell us that just saying best interests is self-evident and good enough, because we have a statute. So here's what we're doing, Madam Minister, through the chair.

We've got a Child Welfare Act that has existed and been tested and utilized by courts and social workers. It has been tested by the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre in the analysis entitled *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: How Does Alberta's Legislation Measure Up?* That's been done, we know what it means, and it works. I thought it worked for Alberta children. Now we have the Minister of Children's Services coming along and saying: well, really, this is very limiting. She just made an argument – I didn't find it compelling – which effectively would gut section 2 of the Child Welfare Act, because why wouldn't we just leave it at the best interests test?

Surely there's got to be some reconciliation of two absolutely contradictory positions: either we particularize these things or we could leave it at a best interests test. I'm not content just to ask the question. I'll go on and say that there are some reasons why it's not enough to leave it to best interests. "Best interests" is an amazingly broad expression, and courts have found it useful and helpful to particularize some of the things that the Legislature thinks should be considered.

I think the hon. minister has misunderstood the amendment, because what it requires is that the decision must be "in the best interests of the child after considering the following factors." It doesn't mean that any one of them overwhelms the others. It means that at the end of the day it's the good sense of the director, the good sense of the justice of the peace, the good sense of the judge. All we're doing – we're not binding anybody's hands here. I mean, we read the section. It says that these are factors we expect to be looked at.

I must say that I don't know who is providing legal advice across the way; I'm not sure who is providing advice to the Minister of Children's Services in terms of the law. I don't think she's going to bring in a bill to amend the Child Welfare Act in this session. I

suspect it's not on the list. I suspect that the minister of agriculture isn't busy studying a briefing paper for the next cabinet meeting which is going to rewrite the Child Welfare Act. Well, you know, Agri-News is a pretty useful periodical. There's probably something there about children on farms in the province of Alberta too.

I learn a lot in the Assembly, and I'm prepared to learn why we should go the way the minister wants to go, but I think there has to be some attempt, some genuine attempt to say: why is it good enough for the Child Welfare Act, which affects vastly, vastly more children, and it's not good enough for children here? Well, not only do I learn a lot; I continue to be mystified with the operation of government. I just think that perhaps people have listened to the Minister of Justice and, when he talks about not codifying things, not realized that we codify all kinds of things in this province, few of them as important as children. Another way of looking at this is that if you don't codify, let's not be surprised that occasionally you get judges who view cases very differently than we would here.

This is our last chance as a Legislature before we enact a piece of legislation that's going to be used and interpreted. This is a chance to sort of send unmistakable signals about the kinds of things that we thought were important in terms of protecting vulnerable children. We've got a government that says: no, we don't want to give that kind of direction. And dollars to doughnuts, a judge is going to make a decision, some member of cabinet is going to disagree with it, and we'll see some impertinent comment in a newspaper interview about: how could a judge make a crazy decision like that? How would that be possible? Well, one of the reasons it may be possible is because when we in this Chamber had a chance to fix some things, we elected not to take advantage of it. I'd think that wouldn't be a very good excuse down the road.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

So, Mr. Chairman, as I look around and I see the rapt attention that's being paid to the arguments on both sides of this amendment, my sense is that people are anxious to vote. They're anxious to register their opinion in I guess the way it counts most, by a vote. I can think of little else I can say other than I'm very distressed at a government that is tossing out amendments, opposition amendments, without the kind of deliberative, thoughtful response that I think Alberta's children are entitled to, and that's very disappointing. In any event, I'll hear what other debate there is on this amendment and look forward to the vote.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

4:50

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I hesitate to enter into debate on this matter because it has had a certain amount of airing from this side. Unfortunately, it hasn't had much from the other.

I look at this particular amendment – and it's a no-cost amendment. How can one disagree with giving context to reviewing a case? I mean, this does not cost anything save and except perhaps some pride of having a government accept an amendment from an opposition. Good heavens; that could not be the case. I mean, testosterone runs on that side a little heavy, but I would not have expected it from this minister at all.

This is simply a case of just laying out some very, very simple instructions for the judge to be able to review the matter as the Legislature sees fit. Now, I fail to see where any one of these items could be offensive. These are for the child's safety. I mean, this is

fundamental. This is what we all desire. If you review all of the speeches that were hitherto spoken on this matter both a year ago and most recently in this Legislature, you'll find that's precisely what we're interested in, recognizing that we're taking away a right of freedom and liberty from a person, albeit for a short period of time and for a purpose, for precisely this purpose: the safety of the child, the preservation of its well-being and physical and emotional states, and to respect the child's views.

I mean, we had earlier an amendment that was roundly defeated for financial reasons, I assume, because there was no real reason given other than something about French law and inclusion or exclusion when being explicit, which I thought would be quite reasonable. It's a sad day when an opposition cannot contribute by reason of the obstinance of a government, pure and simple obstinance. There is no reason whatever other than that it is not on the agenda, that: we didn't think of it. Well, I'm afraid this is such a horrible, horrible display of ignorance and bliss that it really, really does question the fundamental integrity of a government that does not care enough to make these kinds of inclusions in this kind of act.

It's a sad, sad day, and this member shall take his place.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, would like to stand up and support the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. I think this is a very sound improvement to this legislation, and I would urge all hon. members of the Assembly to support it.

I understand one of the hon. members of Executive Council is anxious to participate in debate, and I will cede the floor to the gentleman so he can speak. Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to say a few things. I've been listening to this amendment, and I heard the minister reply that we really don't need it, that it's obviously in there, and then my hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo pointed out that it's in the Child Welfare Act. So there does seem to be a conflict here. I sat back and I thought: why aren't they accepting this amendment? Have they even looked at it? It would make it a stronger piece of legislation. It would make it consistent with other legislation that deals with children.

I would like to urge all members who maybe haven't been paying total attention this afternoon to really think and consider that this will be a very good amendment. It will only make the bill stronger, it will protect children better, so I would encourage all members to support this amendment.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:55 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	MacDonald	Sapers
Dickson	Mason	Soetaert
Gibbons	Nicol	White

Against the motion:

Boutilier	Hancock	O'Neill
Calahasen	Havelock	Paszkowski
Cardinal	Herard	Pham
Coutts	Klapstein	Smith
Doerksen	Kryczka	Stelmach
Evans	Laing	Stevens
Fischer	Lund	Strang
Forsyth	Magnus	Thurber
Fritz	Mar	Trynchy
Graham	McClellan	Yankowsky
Haley	Melchin	Zwozdesky

Totals: For - 9 Against - 33

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Before we proceed with the next amendment, may we have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to not only vote against this amendment that just occurred but also to recognize four gentlemen that I've just had a very important and enjoyable meeting with. They are representatives of the Canadian thoroughbred breeders' association and the Alberta thoroughbred breeders' association. So I would ask the Assembly to please give the warm welcome to those who have traveled from Calgary and those who are here from Edmonton: Mr. Jim Thomson, Mr. Robert Malcolm, Mr. Mike Oslanski, and Mr. Rennie Gellner. If I could ask them all to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Bill 29

Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000

(*continued*)

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. Yeah, it was fascinating to see what government members vote against. We'll see with great excitement and look forward to see what the vote will be on amendment A4.

I move the amendment, and I'll read it into the record. Section 9 is amended by adding the following after the proposed section 7.1:

7.2 The Children's Advocate must prepare and submit annual reports to the Legislative Assembly respecting the operation and administration of the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Madam Chairman, one of the things that Judge Jordan quite properly identified is that when we passed the child prostitution bill a couple of years ago, there wasn't another act like it. Our friend from Calgary-Fish Creek was doing some pioneering work when she

brought that bill in, and I'm not sure there was a bill like this anywhere before the Alberta model. I'm not sure there's any U.S. model for it, so what happened was we were breaking some new ground and as a province being innovative in terms of dealing with it.

5:10

You know, we've now had the experience of seeing this act as it's applied. Notwithstanding that, when it came in front of Judge Jordan, what happened was that we still had the judge saying – and this is after hearing the evidence that was adduced on behalf of the Minister of Children's Services and the Minister of Justice:

There is no provision for determining the efficacy of the legislation.

The Director would have the public believe that because hundreds of apprehensions are accomplished in a given period the Act is achieving its stated goal of protecting children. Yet we are left not knowing anything, except by way of anecdotal evidence, of the lives of the children after their periods of confinement are completed.

Now, Madam Chairman, the point is that some of us come to the Legislature and think that it's not good enough just to pass laws willy-nilly. Some of us believe it's important to assess whether the law is achieving its stated objective. It so happens we have a way of doing this. We have a Children's Advocate. [interjection] I know people in Calgary-Shaw are going to be interested in the contribution that their member is going to make to this particular amendment.

Madam Chairman, if I didn't say it – I can't remember. Did I ask that this be noted as A4? Thanks.

The provision of the Children's Advocate office. We do have an office in this province, and its responsibility is to report on children's services. It finds its jurisdiction, if you will, in section 2.1 of the Child Welfare Act. Section 2.1(1) allows

the Lieutenant Governor in Council . . . on the recommendation of the Minister [to] appoint a Children's Advocate, who shall hold office for a term not exceeding 5 years.

Then the Children's Advocate shall do a number of things like

- (a) advise the Minister on matters relating to the welfare and interests of children . . .
- (b) receive, review and investigate complaints . . .
- (c) represent the rights, interests and viewpoints of children who receive services under this Act . . .
- (e) prepare and submit annual reports to the Minister respecting the exercise of the duties and functions of the Children's Advocate.

We're not creating any new bureaucracy. The office exists. It has a mandate which ought to encompass what happens with children under the bill we're amending today, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act.

So what possible problem would there be? You know, goodness, there may be lots of reasons, but I just can't think of any. What would be the problem in asking the Children's Advocate every year to have a portion of their report devoted, dedicated to the administration of this act, to identify if there are some problems with it, if some things are working well? You know what it does? When the minister comes in and tables that report under Tabling Returns and Reports, it's a bit of reminder. It becomes the sessional record. The members of the media have an opportunity to review it. All MLAs have a chance to look at it. It gives us what I would think the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek would want more than anything: to ensure that this isn't sort of a one-off bill that sort of is then forgotten by legislators.

If teen prostitution is as big an issue as we've said it was when we passed the bill two years ago, if teen prostitution and the sexual exploitation of children is as big an issue as I think it is today and during this session, why would we not want to make sure this is on the agenda, that on an annual basis it comes before the Legislature? I just think that part of what we do has an educative role. Part of

what we do here is to help to highlight problems in this province and highlight issue areas. I thought this amendment provides the government a chance to sort of beat its corporate chest and talk about what a great job it's doing in terms of protecting young children from the streets. It gives us as legislators a chance to say: maybe we need some additional resources in this area; maybe we need some additional programs. Maybe we need some other legislative changes to be able to protect these children better. I don't think we ever get it a hundred percent right. I'd say this with any government. I think governments always have to be on their toes and always have to be checking.

You know, I hate the analogy between governments and corporations, but corporations are always looking at a product, because if they don't find ways of making the product better, they find they will lose their market share. They continually reassess and reassess. There are some compelling reasons why with legislation you don't just do it one time and then put it on the shelf and never review it again. It's incumbent on us to look at ways that we can make this legislation stronger and make services for children stronger.

There was a wonderful conference held, Catch Them before They Fall, and my only regret is that we didn't have a Minister of Children's Services when that conference was held. I think it was about three years ago. It was chaired by Brian Edy, who is the Liberal candidate in Calgary-Buffalo. What Mr. Edy did in chairing that conference was bring in – and I wish the current Minister of Children's Services could have been at that conference – the Children's Advocate from British Columbia and the Children's Advocate from Saskatchewan. I discovered some things I didn't know before. In some other provinces the Children's Advocate has a broader mandate and can report on children in distress wherever they are, not just children in care of the province. I thought that was a good idea.

One of the things that came out of the conference was making the Children's Advocate an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly, reporting not just to the minister but reporting to all of us. I thought that was an important recommendation.

There are things we can do to make the Children's Advocate office more effective, there are things we can do to make it stronger, and there certainly are things we can do to make it more independent. We've seen a succession of Children's Advocates who have delivered reports severely critical, not of ministers but of systems, not of governments but of children being allowed to fall between the cracks, and then they've moved on. So it's a good reason why I think we need an independent Children's Advocate.

But that's not really the thrust of the amendment. We'd be willing to work at this stage even with the Children's Advocate office we have. Although the mandate of the office may be flawed, I have the greatest respect for the men and women who work in the Children's Advocate office in Edmonton and Calgary, because they are professionals and they are motivated by the best interests of children.

Madam Chairman, we're presented here with an amendment which just says that every year we get a bit of a window to look in and see what kind of job we're doing to protect those children on the streets of the province. Why would we not want to afford that window? What possible reason would there be?

This has nothing to do with legislative drafting, so the Minister of Justice cannot get up on this amendment and say: we don't like doing it this way. It's about more transparency. I remember a time when the current Premier was an advocate for more transparency in government. I remember a time when he thought it was important that more Albertans be able to see what government does. There's nothing more important than what happens with the children of this province and no children more deserving of our attention than these

13- and 14-year-old girls on the streets of our cities. The amendment is no more complicated than what you see here.

5:20

I may have some colleagues that wish to indicate what they think about this amendment. I may be getting close to my time, but I do want to say that of all of the amendments I've put forward, my view is that this is maybe the most important and also I think one of the ones that would be easiest for government to embrace, because it simply is a reporting on desperate children in desperate circumstances. To vote against this amendment – I'd really have to think that, firstly, if people couldn't step outside party discipline on an amendment like this and couldn't put children ahead of whatever the whip or deputy whip may tell them, I'd be disappointed. If any member thought it wasn't important that this kind of annual report be done, I'd look forward to seeing them come up and at least have the courage to register that vote in a way that people can see and test, because I think people would have some explaining to do to their constituents to vote against a proposal like this.

Madam Chairman, I look forward to further debate. We have the office there; there's no new bureaucracy. All this does is help to strengthen, hopefully stiffen the spine of MLAs but also to do what I think Albertans want to see us do. Those are the comments that I wanted to make with respect to this amendment.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm just looking at the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, amendment A4. In principle I agree with the amendment. I feel that this additional advocacy is important for our children, and personally I do not see any difficulty in having that office report back in a summary format.

However, my understanding is that there was a review of the mandate of the office of the Children's Advocate that recommended expanding the office's role. I believe that the Minister of Children's Services has a responsibility to review what other services the Children's Advocate should be providing and to make it more comprehensive in terms of all the changes that should take place and what should be included in the mandate of the Children's Advocate. So while I support the concept, I believe it may be a little premature to bring it into this act.

However, I would strongly recommend that the minister take all these points into consideration and come back before this House with that added responsibility being assigned to the Children's Advocate. I'd be very happy to support it at that point in time. However, at this point in time I'd like to see this bill passed ASAP so that we can carry through with the mandate of protecting our children from the streets. I will support this motion when it comes forward again in a new format.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I was listening to the Member for Calgary-McCall, and I thought he was going to support it. In a nutshell, he'll support it if the minister brings it forward but not the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I know that's just part of it, because you're waiting for a review.

In the meanwhile what happens to those children? How do we

evaluate if this bill is working? It could be a year before we have time to change that kind of legislation, a year before anybody has a chance to change the role of the Children's Advocate. You're willing to not follow this bill, to not track what's happening to these young people. You're willing to let it go for now instead of doing something that you actually fundamentally agree with. You actually agree with it, yet you're not going to support it.

I have a little trouble with that. I can't help but think that it's a partisan move rather than a practical move that will serve children better. He'll only support it once the minister brings it forward, and I have trouble with that. That does not serve democracy, and most of all it does not serve the young children on the streets. So I'm disappointed in that, Madam Chairman.

MS EVANS: Madam Chairman, just briefly. Clearly it's not a matter of partisanship. It is a matter of looking responsibly at what we're doing with the office of the Children's Advocate. It's a matter of looking today at the fact that we are reporting almost on a monthly basis about what's happening with the child welfare statistics, particularly as it relates to those statistics gathered under this piece of legislation.

If I could make an observation, it is not the number of children that are apprehended or confined that matter. It is what is happening within those communities. Both Calgary and Edmonton are quite different. More here in Edmonton are wards of this government than they are in the city of Calgary, and in Calgary many more have parents and guardians. I believe currently we're striving to get a common reporting mechanism that can work.

That's it for now.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Chairman. It never ceases to amaze me when it comes to raising the issue of what is or what isn't partisan. We have worked very hard on this side to put forward a series of amendments that would support legislation that we are primarily in favour of. We made that clear in the earlier debates. We made that clear when the government brought forward its own amending legislation.

We have commented from the beginning of this debate that we are in agreement with the thrust and the intent. We are very, very committed to doing the right thing for children, and we are very,

very committed to ensuring that legal rights are not put aside. Now, this government does not have the same ground to stake claim on. This government has on several occasions tried to limit or truncate or set aside the legal rights of individual Albertans.

Now, in this particular case we are dealing with some of the most vulnerable, most at risk citizens of this province, and all we are asking for in this amendment is a recognition – we already have what in my opinion should be a legislative officer. We already have an official of the government whose job it is to look over the shoulder of those men and women who are implementing child welfare laws and regulations and programs and make some determination on their behalf whether or not the best has been done for them.

As we've extended the role of child welfare legislation in this province to the point where we are apprehending young men and women off the street for their own good because they are involved in street prostitution, I can think of no better time spent by the Children's Advocate than making sure that the operation and administration of the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act has been done in a way that is consistent with what is clearly the intent of this Legislature. There is nobody on either side, the government side or the Official Opposition side or on the part of the third party, that is suggesting that we set aside these rights arbitrarily. I'm not suggesting that the government is doing that in an arbitrary way, but what I am saying is that they are abandoning a responsibility to have as neutral a third party as we have at this point in time, the Children's Advocate, look over their shoulder and make sure that it becomes part of the public record, to make sure that in that report some scrutiny is brought to bear on the operation of this legislation.

The Member for Calgary-McCall indicated that he's not opposed to the notion. Even the Minister of Children's Services didn't clearly say that she was opposed to the notion. Haven't heard from other government members. So for the sake of these children, if you're not opposed to it, then support it, and please do not be distracted that it is an amendment that is brought forward by the Justice critic and the Opposition House Leader. It would be a shame to be distracted by that thought, because this would make . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but under Standing Order 4(3) the committee stands adjourned until 8 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, November 27, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/11/27

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll reconvene the committee. I'll call the committee to order.

Bill 29

Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We are dealing with amendment A4. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, thank you very much. Just before we broke at 5:30, we had the benefit of hearing the Minister of Children's Services following the Member for Calgary-McCall in explaining why they thought amendment A4 didn't warrant support at this time. Now, as I understood the two members – and I'm sure they can clarify if I misheard. I heard the Member for Calgary-McCall say that this is the subject of a review now, that we're reviewing specifically what should be done with respect to the Children's Advocate office, what kinds of changes or modifications ought to apply to that office. The question was: why would we go and add this responsibility onto the mandate of the Children's Advocate while that study was under way? Then the Minister of Children's Services got up and said that this was something that would be looked at in the future and so on but that there would be no government support for the amendment at this time.

I don't have the Blues, so I don't presume that my memory has captured everything that those two members said in opposing the amendment. But I just would say this. The government may make all kinds of changes to the Children's Advocate office. They may shrink the mandate; they may expand the mandate. But there would be absolutely nothing that would prevent us as a sovereign Legislature tonight from expanding the jurisdiction in this respect.

All of the submissions that I'm aware of that went into the Children's Advocate review talk about an expansion of jurisdiction. I'm not sure I heard very many groups calling for a contraction, a reduction, a diminution in the range of things that the Children's Advocate could do.

There's a vigorous debate about whether the Children's Advocate office should be independent, like one of the other legislative officers, like the Ethics Commissioner or the Auditor General or the Information and Privacy Commissioner or the Chief Electoral Officer. I believe that that person should be independent in that fashion and accountable to the Legislative Assembly rather than to a minister of the Crown. But how could that in any way be adversely affected by making this change?

You know something, Madam Chairman? If as a consequence of the government's review they decide to do something different with the Children's Advocate office, it certainly will not be the first time or the only time that we've seen consequential amendments that would change other things. So all we're saying at this point, knowing what we know – I think of the report my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview presented not so long ago, Lost Promise and Potential, talking about a review of fatal inquiry reports involving children in care.

Madam Chairman, there's a huge and compelling need for a Children's Advocate that is independent, that can do own-motion investigations, that's not restricted to dealing with children in care, who can deal with children at risk wherever they are in this province.

You know, do we have to be paralyzed? Do we have to deal with inertia because we don't have the wherewithal to make changes that strike us as appropriate today? I don't think so, and I find the argument, as I've heard the other arguments, put forward by the Minister of Children's Services not only not compelling but not sort of persuasive in any respect.

Madam Chairman, I think there's got to be some better reason than simply the fact that there's a review of an office. I think there's no good reason why we couldn't start this reporting immediately. The point would be, as I had said before the dinner adjournment, that there's an educative element to this amendment. That's part of what we do. We don't just make laws of coercive power, coercive authority. There's also a leadership role, an educative role. That's one of the advantages in these kinds of reports when they come forward: they inform public debate; they encourage public scrutiny. Those are positive things, surely; are they not? They're positive things.

In any event, I'm not sure what else I can say to this other than looping back again to that Catch Them before They Fall conference. My colleague who has been our social services critic may have some comment on that and perhaps other aspects of the amendment as well, but it just struck me that those of us who were at that conference heard really strong arguments about how useful this role is and how much more effective it could be for protecting children. I'd hope that that would be perhaps a primary responsibility for every one of us in this Chamber in terms of protecting children.

I'm going to defer to others who may wish to speak but just register again my sense of disappointment and I guess say, as well, that when the protection of children involved in prostitution bill came forward, there were certainly many who said: you know, much of this could be done in the Child Welfare Act. Judge Jordan said that much of this could be done in the Child Welfare Act. But the path the Legislature chose was to hive off this niche area and develop a specific bill to deal with it. I think that if we're going to go down that road, then it means that to be consistent, we build in the protection to deal with that hived-off, segregated specific element.

So if we choose not to simply deal with amendments to the Child Welfare Act but to create a brand-new statute, then surely it's incumbent on us to build in corresponding safeguards and checks and balances and reporting mechanisms. In some respects you have the worst of all worlds. You're going down a sort of uncharted road, and you've forgone the kinds of reviews that are provided by the Child Welfare Act, specifically section 2.1.

One of the other things I might say is that if the minister feels constrained because there's a review going on with the Children's Advocate, I wanted to challenge her to tell me: who else should exercise this responsibility to oversee this important area? If she thinks it shouldn't be the Children's Advocate, tell us who it would be. Would it be the Ombudsman? What other officer would do this function? I just find that we're left with a most unsatisfactory situation.

I think I've made the points I wanted to with respect to the amendment that's before us. I think that people who follow the *Hansard* debate will form their own judgment in terms of the merit or lack of same of any of the proposed changes. I suppose, also, that people who review the *Hansard* transcript will have to test and assess and analyze the response that we've heard from the government to these amendments, and we'll see what sorts of judgments

people come to on the basis of the strength of the arguments they've heard.

In any event, I look forward to further debate on the amendment before us, A4. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

8:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before we proceed, can I ask for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, Edmonton-Manning.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 17 visitors tonight, two of them being teachers and the rest being English as a Second Language students. They're new immigrants. Most of them have been in Canada for less than six months. They're in the process of completing or have just completed their postdoctoral work. They're in the public gallery. The two teachers are Mrs. Janet Kan and Ms June Fong. With your permission I'll have them stand and have everybody welcome them here tonight.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Edmonton-Manning.

Bill 29
Protection of Children Involved
in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000
(continued)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Well, despite being somewhat under the weather with the flu and a cold, I have to say this evening that I'm really rebounding, because the report of a strong Liberal majority across this country just does my heart proud. It gives me a great deal of passion and energy to talk about another topic that's very close to my heart, and that is the treatment of children in Alberta and the government's treatment of them.

Early on in my tenure as social services critic I made a trip to Calgary and actually spent an evening and early part of the morning with a mobile unit operated by Wood's Homes in downtown Calgary. Its primary purpose was to build relationships with young women who were on the street working in prostitution and to try and encourage those young women to leave that and reintegrate themselves either into school or some other type of employment.

I found it a fascinating experience. I found many of these young women were bright, articulate. Many of them were educated. A couple of them had children at home. They were doing this, Madam Chairman, because it was a very lucrative form of employment. They were making a lot of money, far, far more money than they could have if they had been working at a minimum wage job. Many of them had cars that were paid for. They owned condos or had condos which they had made substantive down payments on.

The reality of their lives was: well, should I take a minimum wage job at the substandard rate that it is in Alberta, or should I resort to something where I can really actually make an income and make a decent living? And they chose that.

I had a great deal of admiration for the workers in this mobile unit. Over the course of time and going out night after night, they were building relationships with these young women and attempting to slowly but surely influence them to look at the dangers involved in prostitution.

In the context of the amendment that's before this House tonight, that the Children's Advocate would "prepare and submit annual reports to the Legislative Assembly respecting the operation" of this act, I think that is a very, very prudent recommendation. The reason is that if we simply pass this act and implement it, operationalize it in strictly a justice sense, we're missing out on so much information about these young women.

What type of information you might ask? Well, one of the things of course, a huge risk for them, is HIV or other types of infection. In the way in which I hope one day to see the Children's Advocate office operate in this province, in an independent capacity, that office would be in a position to look at and study what the incidence is of HIV amongst this group. What is the incidence of teenage pregnancies within this group? Also, if in fact there are births, what is the incidence of low birth weight? We know in Alberta that we have had consecutively very high incidences of both of those: teenage pregnancies and low birth weights. Is there a correlation between that and prostitution? At this point in time we can't tell that.

Another interesting bit of information that the advocate could look at is: what are the demographics of prostitution? Well, certainly having, as I said, toured in downtown Calgary, we know that the urban centres are magnets for that type of activity, but how widespread is the problem? Do growing communities with high transient populations like Fort McMurray have a growing prostitution trade? Are there issues in parts of rural Alberta? These types of things and coming to a real understanding about what prostitution is in Alberta and why people resort to it are going to be lost, because the act as it exists now will simply operate in a justice sense if we do not pass this amendment. And that, Madam Chairman, I think would be a travesty.

Another very relevant piece of information that could be examined by the Children's Advocate is how many of the young women who are turning to prostitution have in fact left home because of abuse, attempted to find funds through SFI or some type of government program and been turned away? As long as the Children's Advocate office has been operational in Alberta, we have seen consecutive advocates talk about the lack of programs and funding for 16- and 17-year-old youths, and this is also an age group that we see engaged in prostitution. Is there a correlation, Madam Chairman? That, I think, would be very, very relevant to know.

It's not good enough that we scoop them off the street. Even with the amendments to make this bill Charter compliant, we will one at time help these individual young women, but in order to actually prevent young women from going into this dangerous occupation, we have to understand: what are the factors that prompt them or force them to engage in this activity? We're not going to understand that unless we engage an office like the advocate into doing this type of reporting on an annual basis for the operation and administration of the act.

Now, if you think about it, the amendment's not going to cost the government really any money because we have the advocate in place. He's required to do an annual report. This would simply mean that in the context of his annual report, which he's already doing, one aspect of his reporting would be on the administration and operation of the prostitution act. So it's not a high-cost amendment, and really, Madam Chairman, I can't see any reason why the government would choose to not support this amendment this evening. It certainly is in the best interests of children. It's preventative. It makes us better equipped to reduce and prevent growing numbers of women resorting to this occupation and I think in the long term will serve the Assembly well.

So with those comments I am pleased to have had the opportunity this evening and look forward to perhaps hearing some government discussion about the amendment.

Thank you.

8:20

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, I appreciate the observations of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, and I'm glad she was able to attend and participate in the debate, notwithstanding the flu.

One of the things I was going to say is that there's another reason why I think this amendment is important. Members will recall that on January 13, 1999, the Premier wrote the Prime Minister expressing Alberta's qualified support for the objectives and principles of the UN convention on the rights of the child, and the comment by the Premier was as follows:

As a further indication of our commitment to children and families, we would like to extend our formal support for the federal government's ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our support is based on the understanding that the U.N. Convention does not usurp or over-ride the authority of parents and that any interpretation of same with respect to Alberta will be undertaken as though a reservation had been placed at the time of ratification in that regard.

Well, that's a representation by the Premier on behalf of the provincial Legislature, and what that means, then, is that we're entitled to look at the extent to which this bill complies with the UN convention on the rights of the child. It's interesting, that report I referred to earlier, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: How Does Alberta's Legislation Measure Up? by Anna S. Pellatt and the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre. On page 32 under recommendations for improving compliance she says:

The jurisdiction of the Children's Advocate should be expanded to include children who have applied for but been denied protective services under the Act as well as those who have registered reports of abuse and neglect.

This is something that should be done, and that expansion of jurisdiction is surely what we're talking about. Instead, what we have is the Minister of Children's Services, virtually by implication if not expressly, saying that the Children's Advocate office may in fact have curtailed responsibility.

We have to look at the following articles to determine whether we're in compliance, and I suggest that the amendment would ensure that we were in compliance. Let me just back up and say that one of the challenges of the UN convention on the rights of the child is that it requires that states parties monitor the progress of implication efforts and report to the United Nations committee on the rights of the child. That's the body charged with responsibility for monitoring compliance at regular intervals.

In 1994 Canada prepared and submitted its first compliance report. The next report was due in 1999, and 2004, presumably, is the next one. What we're going to have to be able to demonstrate is that article 3, which is directly engaged by this bill – article 3 has to do with:

States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

Well, this amendment actually speaks to one of those appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

Also in article 3:

States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in

the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

Well, what better way of measuring and assessing compliance with article 3 than having this form of annual reporting mechanism.

Article 19 of the UN convention on the rights of the child talks about:

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence.

Now, some members may be concerned, because they were members for such an embarrassingly long time, that the province refused to do what every other province had done, which was to affirm the convention. But, as I read a short time ago, that letter on January 13, 1999, from the Premier of this province to the Prime Minister expressed Alberta's support for the objectives and principles of the convention. [interjection] Yeah, well, actually if Alberta were a sovereign state, we would have an expectation that they'd be signing on, and the next best thing is a form of endorsement. I think we've got that now, although it was very late.

Anyway, article 20. I'm not going to read the whole thing, but if members look at it, it makes the case in terms of ensuring that a child

temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State.

This is perhaps the most important one, Madam Chairman. I should have dealt with this one first. I apologize for not dealing with it immediately. Article 25 says – and this is particularly important:

States Parties recognize the right of a child who has been placed by the competent authorities for the purposes of care, protection or treatment of his or her physical or mental health, to a periodic review of the treatment provided to the child and all other circumstances relevant to his or her placement.

Well, does this proposed amendment not directly serve that objective?

Judging by the scowls of some members opposite, I take it that the news is disheartening in terms of the federal election campaign.

But, Madam Chairman, I think the point is: we have an article here that would very effectively be addressed with the amendment. Also, article 27 deals with "appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible" for children and recognize the right of every child to a standard of living.

Anyway, the only other article I thought might be relevant would be article 37. I just emphasize article 37(d), which says:

Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action.

So this probably would be equally instructive in terms of the first two amendments, A1 and A2, and we've dealt with those, but it still speaks to the importance that the UN convention attaches, notwithstanding the curious view proffered by the Minister of Justice, that if your end is a noble one, it doesn't matter what the effect of the law is, which, as I say, is just plain erroneous.

In any event, I can't think of anything else to add, other than again to refer members to the UN agency report of November 20, 2000, sexual commercialization of children. If one reads through that and you look at the extent to which Canada in fact has not even done what it undertook to do in terms of compliance with this United Nations protocol to deal with the sexual commercialization of children, I think adopting an amendment like this would at least help to ensure a higher level of compliance than we have now.

8:30

Those are the observations I'd like to make. I would still look forward to any further debate, and if not, then to the vote, Madam Chairman.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

[The clauses of Bill 29 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 20 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We have an amendment that has been brought forward, amendment A1.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, are you standing?

MR. HAVELOCK: If I understand correctly, the Minister of Justice has moved all the amendments. Has he not?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The table has an amendment, A1, which is a very lengthy amendment. Yes.

MR. HAVELOCK: Okay. No, I have nothing to add, Madam Chairman. Thanks.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, I do have something to add, a couple of things I think it's important to put on the record. I think the opposition has been supportive of the bulk of the elements of the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000. I want to acknowledge that the Minister of Justice approached my former colleague, Sue Olsen, in the spring session and outlined for her what he was proposing to do. I appreciated his candour and the information he provided at an early date and an early enough date that it allowed us to do some consultation and review with respect to the elements of it.

I think it has been advantageous that in fact the bill didn't proceed faster in the spring, because we now have what looks like about 10 pages of amendments which have come forward to it. I wanted to spend a minute simply going through those elements we did not have a difficulty with.

I wanted to say that one of the sections that has been so contentious had to do with section 74, and certainly there has been some recent public discussion around this. I know there's an argument that the plaintiff's counsel hadn't been heard from until recently and that those are the people principally interested in the change. I'm not sure that's entirely accurate. I think this whole business of compensation on death for loss of future income is a difficult area.

I encourage people to read the Alberta Law Reform Institute's final report 76, *Should a Claim for the Loss of a Chance of Future Earnings Survive Death?* If you look at page 3 of that, you have the words of Chief Justice Brian Dickson. In talking about the exercise, if I can describe it that way, of assessment of damages for loss of a

chance of future earnings, former Chief Justice Brian Dickson had referred to:

"gaze . . . into the crystal ball;" engage in "speculation;" rely on actuarial evidence the reliability of which is "illusory" in relation to a specific case; and engage in "arbitrary" determinations.

This is a quote from the report of the Law Reform Institute.

Such a process is justifiable in order to ensure that a living plaintiff is properly compensated, but it is not justifiable when the damages cannot go to compensate a living person.

I know that my friend from Calgary-Glenmore will be familiar with this, because at the time this was written Alan Hunter was probably head of the Alberta Law Reform Institute.

I think I'm sympathetic to the concern identified by the Alberta Law Reform Institute in terms of how to deal with this, but I think part of the problem for any of us who have ever practised law and had to explain to parents who have seen their son or daughter killed, whether it's in a motor vehicle accident or some other kind of injury, is how you explain to them that there's really no significant compensation for that loss. Now, the finding of the Law Reform Institute was that you can't ever compensate for the loss of a child anyway, but if you get into this business of dealing with lost anticipated earnings, it's so speculative, and there are huge elements of speculation with it. We have a court system that, frankly, doesn't usually spend a lot of time dealing with conjecture and surmise and speculation and a legal system that looks for certainty and predictability. That becomes a real problem when we're dealing with loss of prospective earnings.

So what am I saying? Well, I think it was appropriate to undertake further review of this and perhaps some further consultation, but I think I simply wanted to record that at least this legislator, as Justice critic for the opposition, understands that the status quo isn't particularly satisfactory either, from what I might describe as a philosophical or a conceptual approach to dealing with these kinds of damages. I think the minister has done an appropriate thing, and I was encouraged that he didn't simply dodge something that attracted some flak and some contention by saying: "Well, that's it. It's out of the bill." What I heard him say was: we're going to look at this again and see if there is perhaps a more satisfactory way of dealing with this than just eliminating it altogether. I don't know exactly where he's going to go with that, but I think it's important we don't lose sight of the recommendations in report 76.

The other thing I might just note is that there was an interesting decision that came out of the judicial district of Calgary – that's where lots of interesting law is made, Madam Chairman – in the action *Lemke and Pottie*. It was a judgment by Mr. Justice Lomas. He wrestles with and applies the law insofar as we have a death claim. This was a case where the plaintiff's daughter, age 35, had been killed in an automobile accident near Ponoka. She was an unmarried person not living with another individual. The parents commenced a claim against the tort-feasor, the wrongdoer, and they claimed damages for their daughter's death pursuant to the provisions of the Fatal Accidents Act.

8:40

As one reads through the case, I think we're reminded again of the difficulty in providing compensation in cases like this. Justice Lomas, as he always does, takes us through in his reasons for judgment I think a thoughtful analysis of the legislative history and makes significant mention of report 24 and report for discussion 12, June 1992, titled *Non-Pecuniary Damages for Wrongful Death Actions*. I just would encourage members to read the analysis of Justice Lomas, who deals with the very issue that is before us and certainly before the Justice minister in dealing with this.

It might be appropriate to make this quote from Justice Lomas. It says at page 31 of his judgment:

In its Report No. 26 the Institute . . .

I say parenthetically that he's referring to the Law Reform Institute.

. . . comments "Grief flows from love of the child and this does not depend on the age of the child . . ." It also comments "No award or an insignificant award for their grief and loss of guidance, care and companionship of the deceased is a signal to the surviving families that the law sees their loss minor, trivial or insignificant."

I'd just leave it to others to review that analysis from Justice Lomas's decision.

As we go through the other provisions, we see an increase in the jurisdiction of the threshold, the jurisdiction of Provincial Court, and I think that is a positive thing.

I'm not sure we ever got an answer, Madam Chairman, to the question: what's the cost going to be of additional judges? I mean, what is it going to do to the caseload if you expand the small-claims ceiling to \$50,000? If we ever got a response from the minister to that, I'm sorry, but I didn't hear it.

The clarification of "in contempt" to "in civil contempt" is, I think, useful.

The section 12 amendment. What we have seen is a lessening of the standard for service. So we now get to a point where

(1.1) For the purposes of subsection (1)(c),

(a) a copy of a dispute note . . .

This would be in a small claim procedure, Madam Chairman.

. . . may be sent to a party by ordinary mail addressed to that party at that party's last known address.

You know, I have to record that in a constituency like Calgary-Buffalo the average stay of somebody in an apartment at an address may be four or five months. The voters list that's done for Calgary-Buffalo is probably already out of date, and I think it's only being produced by the Chief Electoral Officer this week.

So what happens is you're going to have – and I assert this caution – more people being sued in small claims court, and they're not going to know it because they're not ever going to get served with a copy. It's one thing if somebody is served personally. We know that they've got it. It's another thing when you send it double-registered mail or whatever or by certified mail. I can't keep track of all the things Canada Post now offers in terms of communicating material, but I think just to send it to the last known address is a very, very low threshold, and I want to register that concern.

I'm not going to go through each of the other changes that have been made. We've never heard, to my knowledge, an explanation of whether there was payment of the fees that were ordered to be paid by the Court of Appeal and the Court of Queen's Bench, one case involving a Provincial Court judge who was going to be reassigned by the chief provincial judge, and there was a determination by the court that – this is just a paraphrase because I don't have those decisions in front of me. There was a concern that this was something that went beyond the power of the Provincial Court. So we've spoken, and we've raised that concern in terms of the impact on judicial independence. I continue to have that concern.

As we go through the other elements, many of them have been requested or at least are satisfactory to the Law Society and the people who are directly involved.

The legal aid plan. Since I first became Justice critic in 1992, I had always suggested that the legal aid plan should be created as truly a separate society and have a kind of independence it hasn't had in the past. So I think that's a positive thing, although it's really important that government not see this as a chance to reduce their public responsibility to provide the funding for legal aid. Frankly, I'm quite worried about the future of legal aid, because I find that there's certainly a number of members in the government caucus,

from their comments that I hear, that don't appreciate the value of the legal aid program. I didn't say all the members of the government caucus. I'm talking about the comments that I hear expressed to the media and at town hall meetings and things like that. If anybody would like to come, we can attend some of those meetings, Member for St. Albert, through the chair, when some of your colleagues talk about justice issues and talk about their concerns about legal aid. So that's part of the reality, and that certainly happens.

I continue to raise questions about the divisions of the Provincial Court into a sort of a homogenization of the Provincial Court. I've thought there were some great advantages that accrue to having different divisions. We've seen that just like many lawyers don't like to do family law, many judges don't like doing that kind of material. I've always thought that those decisions that you make around custody and access are arguably some of the most important decisions in the life of those children. It's important that you have judges doing that who have a genuine interest in what they're about. But I've expressed that concern before.

I think in the course of what's been a very long debate, we have registered many of the concerns with respect to Bill 20. We are in a situation where the government has the numbers, so they're going to pass it as it comes forward with the amendments, but I hope they will pay some attention to the concerns that have been expressed, because I think there are some worrisome areas with the amendment package.

So those are the comments I wanted to make. I guess I just wanted to say that as we finish debate on Bill 20, I can't help thinking of our former colleague for Edmonton-Norwood, whose future political fate is in the hands, I guess, not of the electors; they've already registered their vote and handed it to the vote counters. I'd just put on the record my admiration for her courage and wish her well and hope there's a successful outcome for her.

Those are the comments I wanted to make at this point in speaking to Bill 20, Madam Chairman. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

8:50

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I did have actually some important issues that I would like to get on the record, if I may, this evening that relate to Bill 20. This bill, in bringing forward quite a potpourri of amendments, I believe warrants some thorough debate.

To begin, I'd like to talk a bit about what I see as the amendments proposing the regionalization, if you will, of the courts, that being that we would do away with the separate divisions, be they currently criminal, youth, family, et cetera. You know, we've adopted that approach in other sectors in this province, and child welfare comes to mind immediately. We've seen the complexities of trying to force people, in this case judges, to become generalists. In child welfare and in health care for the last two years at least the Auditor General's report has been riddled with issues and problems about the inability of those systems to operate in a regionalized structure, and that is really what these amendments are proposing for the justice system; that everything be melted down and cases heard in that respect.

Now, albeit in health care we saw different discipline, we saw, when health care was regionalized, an approach taken that required anesthetists to become generalists. Prior to regionalization anesthetists would specialize and perhaps do obstetrics or they'd do ear, nose, and throat or they'd do general surgery. When the health care system was regionalized here in Edmonton, all of a sudden anes-

tists had to be required to do procedures. I'm certainly respectful of the fact that there's a huge, huge difference in the practice of an anesthetist and the practice and judgment of a judge. However, I think there can be strong cases made for expertise and knowledge of the law in each of these divisions that the government's amendments are proposing to wipe out.

I haven't heard – and I read back through the debates to see what kind of consultation the government had done about this – what people that would be impacted by this change were saying about it. I don't believe there's been anything put on the record, Madam Chairman, that speaks to substantive support for that. I can't help but wonder: is this designed in some way to serve as retribution for those judges that caused the government embarrassment when the government tried to roll back their salaries by 5 percent and the judiciary pointed out, and rightly so, that that was not within the government's purview to do?

Just to move to another section of the bill, section 74, which really deals with the ability of survivors to make claims against the government and the ceiling that the government's proposing to put on that through this amendment. I couldn't help but think that in the past we've certainly had some cases in this province, i.e. the sterilization cases, where if this had been in effect, obviously, perhaps from the government's viewpoint, they would have saved the taxpayers a lot of money. What we see really now is that there was a crime committed and judgment needed to be achieved. This type of amendment would have ensured no justice for the victims that suffered that abuse, Madam Chairman. So I think that when we reflect on that in the historical sense, it's important to consider it but also consider what is being proposed in this amendment in the context of using an example from another provincial jurisdiction, the contamination of water in Walkerton.

A number of people died as a result of that, directly linked to the provincial government. This in fact would limit the legal actions that could be taken if such contamination occurred here. Is that partially what's motivating the government? We certainly know that in the southern part of this province, where we have intensive livestock operations, there is absolutely surface water contamination, and in many communities south of Calgary, in the Lethbridge area, the communities are having to boil their water or have bottled water on a regular basis. Are we in fact saying to those Albertans that if some type of outbreak occurred and there were deaths, their ability to litigate would be restricted by this amendment? I think that's a very important question, one that needs to be answered.

We also know that there have been many studies conducted relative to the Bovar waste treatment plant, the amount of contamination that that plant has caused both in wildlife population and in humans that are residing within proximity of that plant. Is the government saying through this amendment that if in fact in the future that plant and the fallout were linked to deaths, deformities, et cetera, the government is not responsible? Is that the intention of section 74? Difficult to support that, if in fact that is the intent, Madam Chairman.

Now, I wanted to also speak to section 21, and I did reference some of the subsections in 21 in my earlier comments on this bill. I should also note that I referred to Judge Reilly as Justice Reilly, and that was an omission on my part, which I'd like to make the point of correcting for the record this evening. With respect to 21.1(7), which is specifically the section in which the bill proposes that any decision or action by a Chief Judge would not be subjected to any form of judicial review, I don't profess to be any type of judiciary expert or legal expert, Madam Chairman, but I am aware that the Chief Judge is a government appointment. So why would we say as government, if we're appointing someone, that that person

shouldn't be required to make decisions and actions that are fully compliant with the law, and if there's reason to believe that they have not done so in that manner, that their decision should not be subjected to some form of review?

I'm thinking that the government appoints a number of other positions in this province. All of them would be most certainly subject to judicial review. Whether they be perhaps the chairman of a regional health authority or the chairman of a child welfare authority, they most certainly could have judicial review actions. But in the case of the Chief Judge, the government is saying no, and I don't understand why that person should be exempt. The power of the Chief Judge over the other judges in fact constitutes a serious threat to the judicial independence because the Chief Judge is appointed by the government and has the ability to use his statutory power over judges to control them according to the wishes of the government. Because of the crucial importance of judicial independence to the preservation of freedom in a democratic society, the exercise of any authority over judges should be exercised according to the highest standards of reasonableness, openness, and strict adherence to jurisdiction.

9:00

An alternative, Madam Chairman, if the government were open to considering it for this section and not to only criticize what has been proposed, is that it would be most easy to amend the section to say that every decision of a Chief Judge in relation to a sitting judge could be subject to judicial review and, if reviewed, should be reviewed on the principle that judicial independence requires that authority over judges should be exercised according to the highest standards of openness, fairness, and strict adherence to jurisdiction. I don't believe it's unreasonable to expect the Chief Judge to act and to rule to the highest standard. I don't think we should expect anything less.

Now I'd like to turn to just a couple of comments that arise out of a report which was produced by the National Council of Welfare titled *Justice and the Poor*. It was published in the spring of 2000. There were a number of recommendations in this very, very thorough report, Madam Chairman, that dealt with the treatment of the poor by the justice system. Because we have a bill before us tonight that has initiated the review of a number of aspects of the justice statute, I think it's relevant to question the government on why, in fact, some of these recommendations were not given more consideration and incorporation.

I found it very interesting that on page 77 of the report – we see amendments in the package that talk about the payment of fines. In fact, in the National Council of Welfare report they surveyed the different provinces for the number of adults admitted to provincial prisons in '97-98 for the failure to pay fines, including fines for federal criminal offences and for quasi-criminal provincial and municipal offences. Now, of all provinces, Madam Chairman, Alberta was in the position of ranking the second highest in the country, second only to Quebec. We had reported 12,709 people who were in prison because of their failure to pay fines. In contrast, Ontario only had 679; Manitoba, 72; Saskatchewan, 195.

In the research that the national council did, they looked at who went to prison for the nonpayment of fines and the offences they committed. There was very little recent information on this available, they found, and absolutely none available on young offenders. The only thing they could find about the situation in Alberta is that more than three-quarters of the imprisonments for fine default in that province in '97-98 were for violations of provincial laws and municipal bylaws. A study of women inmates in the late '80s and early '90s found that the fine default played a major role in

their incarceration, especially for aboriginal women in the prairie provinces. In Alberta we had 39 percent of female inmates admitted for fine default. That was the demographic.

The amendments before us tonight really do nothing to address that. I know that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre spoke earlier on in debate about the implications and their effect on women, but I think this gives more credence to the need to examine our approach to fine collection and the imprisonment of those who default.

I also wanted to raise from this report what I also believe were very prudent recommendations, and they related to the issue of youth crime. We know that young offenders and the issues of youth crime and youth gangs are very prevalent on the minds of Albertans, and we'd like to see the government doing something proactive to address it.

Let me just quickly read these for the record. The National Council of Welfare supported the approach of Quebec authorities towards minor crime and recommended that all jurisdictions adopt a policy of minimal police intervention except when absolutely necessary. What they found in their review was that again we were overzealous in incarcerating young people. In a similar sense they recommended that there be an establishment of a multidisciplinary team approach to deal with the multiple problems of many street people who end up in the criminal justice system with substance abuse and mental health problems. This also constitutes a large portion of our demographic population in prisons. We don't see that type of approach being taken, Madam Chairman, nor is it incorporated within the statute itself that is before us this evening.

So I think there is a need for a broader examination of some of the issues Bill 20 touches upon, Madam Chairman. With those comments I will adjourn my remarks this evening.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

[The clauses of Bill 20 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: I would like to move that the committee do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: Bill 27, Bill 29. The committee reports with some amendments Bill 20.

Madam Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 9:11 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 28, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/11/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

At the conclusion of the prayer would all hon. members please remain standing.

Let us pray. O God, grant that we the members of our province's Legislature may fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all of our people. Guide our deliberations this day. Amen.

Michael Maccagno

July 15, 1914, to November 25, 2000

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, it is with sadness that my office learned today of the passing of former member Michael Maccagno on Saturday, November 25, 2000. Mr. Maccagno was first elected to the Alberta Legislature in the general election of June 29, 1955, and served until May 27, 1968. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Lac La Biche for the Liberal Party and also served as leader for the Alberta Liberals.

During his years in the Legislature Mr. Maccagno served on the following committees: the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration, and Education; Municipal Law; Municipal Law and Law Amendments; Private Bills; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; Public Accounts; Public Affairs; Railways, Telephones, and Irrigation. Mr. Maccagno also served on the special committees on Centralization and Consolidation of Schools, Collective Bargaining between School Trustees and Teachers, Commercial Fisheries, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Electoral Boundaries, Ombudsman Search, and Preventive Health.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of his family, who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember Michael Maccagno as you have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table nine petitions containing 527 names from the Cardston-Taber-Warner constituency, 22 names from the Leduc constituency, 160 names from the West Yellowhead constituency, 54 names from Red Deer-South constituency, 36 names from the Livingstone-Macleod constituency, 97 names from the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency, 200 names from the Whitecourt-St. Anne constituency, 20 names from the Peace River Constituency, and 167 names from various Alberta constituencies.

Mr. Speaker, the petitioners are urging the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Alberta human rights act "to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition signed by 32 residents of Banff-Cochrane requesting the Legislative Assembly to allow health professionals to opt out of medical procedures for reasons of conscience.

Thank you.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by 110 Edmontonians opposed to the Liberal Bill 211, which would require any tax increase to be subject to a provincewide referendum.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 754 Albertans, most of them postsecondary students, and the petition reads as follows:

Whereas, post-secondary education is the key to Alberta's future prosperity,

And whereas, post-secondary education is becoming unaffordable for most families

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to reduce post-secondary tuition fees by 30%.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to have the petition I presented last Wednesday now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented on Tuesday, November 21, be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or belief that human life is sacred.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that the two petitions I presented on November 22 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and

Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the petition I presented on November 27 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly not to pass Bill 211, which would create social division and threaten long-term, stable funding for schools, hospitals and other important services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that the following written questions that appear on the Order Paper be called for consideration, being questions 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, and 37.

I am also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that the following motions for returns also appearing on the Order Paper be called for consideration. They are 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, and 58.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to give notice that at the start of private member's business today I will be seeking unanimous consent of the Assembly to advance Bill 221, the Public Health Care Protection Statutes Amendment Act, 2000, to be the next bill dealt with in private member's business. I would stress that there is urgency in debating Bill 221, which repeals Bill 11.

Thank you.

1:40

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of the School Facility Evaluation Project Final Results along with the summary of the audited results of all 1,463 schools. The individual reports are currently being loaded onto Alberta Infrastructure's web site and will be available next week through our home page by following the links.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a copy of a letter that I sent today to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar responding to the question that he had asked in the Legislative Assembly on November 23, 2000.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would today like to table eight copies of the Department of Environment's response to Motion for a Return 18 as requested by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today, the first being six copies of the Alberta Opportunity Company's annual report.

Second, six copies of the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation.

Also, six copies of the Livestock Identification Services Manager's Report for the period April 1, 1999, to March 31, 2000, which under its delegated agreement includes annual reports for the following four acts: the Brand Act, the Livestock Identification and Brand Inspection Act, the Livestock and Livestock Products Act, and the Stray Animals Act. The audited financial statement for the year ending March 31, 2000.

Lastly, I'd like to table the following information item: six copies of the Alberta Grain Commission's annual report 1999-2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 1999-2000 annual report for the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta.

Then on behalf of the hon. Minister of Learning I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 1999-2000 annual report for the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and table the Social Care Facilities Review Committee investigation report arising from the death of Mr. Wayne Oles at the Herb Jamieson Centre on August 7, 1998. This was obtained under the freedom of information act by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview on September 29, 2000.

My second tabling is a notice of motion filed in the Court of Queen's Bench between Ms J and the province of Alberta, which clearly cites that Ms J's failure to testify will result in her imprisonment, a fine, or the striking down of her suit.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another set of tablings from the association of brain injury outlining their concerns in the form of a questionnaire. I will table the appropriate number of copies in the House today.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five letters here today from constituents of Red Deer-South, Calgary-Varsity,

Calgary-Currie, and Medicine Hat, and I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the letters. All of them are talking about the lasting educational, social, and economic benefits of the arts in Alberta and, in particular, asking the government to increase funding to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies here of a letter sent from Doug Clavette to the minister of health. He's battling cancer, he lives in Calahoo, and he is requesting payment for the MRI that he had to pay for that was medically necessary. He wrote in June and has still not received a reply from the minister.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters from 15 tourism operators in the Solomon Valley area northwest of Hinton. They object to plans by Weldwood Canada to cut timber in the area known as Athabasca 4 in the Solomon Creek watershed. They wish to remind the government of the importance of a maintained land base for tourism activities in this area.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first tabling is a document prepared by the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations. It's called All Colours are Beautiful. This booklet is a teacher's resource kit which uses literature to illustrate situations of racial discrimination to young people and allows an open discussion of racism and its implications.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a copy of a letter from Paul Boisvert to John Pilipchuk, a board member of the Lakeland regional health authority. This letter seeks "full explanation of the events leading up to the disposal at the sanitary dump of totally functional computer equipment" from St. Therese health care centre in St. Paul.

The third document, Mr. Speaker, is a news release from the Flagstaff county area. It's a letter that's written by citizens opposed to the hog plant development in the area. The letter protests the approval by the appeal board of a large hog plant operation there.

The last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a copy of a letter of November 14, 2000, addressed to the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane in which Janet Brygger and Anthony Neilson of Exshaw express their concern over the already high pollution levels in the Exshaw and Bow Valley areas and over Lafarge Canada's proposed coal conversion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The chair would like to table five copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort requesting that Bill 209, Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2000, be brought to third reading on Wednesday, November 29, 2000.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a great pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all

members of this great Assembly some very special visitors who are here today from Julia Kiniski elementary school, which is definitely one of the best schools on the planet Earth. They are accompanied by teacher Janis Parrott. Yesterday they were here with Donald Douglas. They are participating in the School at the Legislature at the behest of yourself, Mr. Speaker, and we're very grateful for that. They're having a wonderful time. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the very warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly 30 members and their guests of the Probus Club of central Edmonton. Probus Club is a group of professional and business persons who gather together for the purpose of fellowship and certainly of lifelong learning. They are seated both in the members' gallery and in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to welcome and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly 11 students from Concordia University, Gold Bar campus, and their teacher, Dr. Linda Kerr, who are visiting the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. They are going to come to the public gallery at 2 o'clock to observe question period. I would now ask all hon. members to please welcome them when they visit the Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 90 grades 5 and 6 students from one of my favourite schools in the riding of Edmonton-Rutherford, Richard Secord elementary school. The 90 students today are accompanied by five teachers, Mr. Bryan Rosychuk, Miss Jan Scammell, Mr. Milles Collins, Mrs. Renee McLaws, and two parents, Mrs. Jayne Bawden and Mrs. Janice Peters. They are in the public gallery and the visitors' gallery. I would ask them to all stand at this time and receive the warm welcome of the House.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. The first one. I'm very, very pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Ms Lan Chan-Marple, who is the executive director of Edmonton Chinese Community Services Centre and a board member of the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations. She's also working on her PhD degree at the University of Alberta. Ms Chan-Marple is strongly committed to the promotion of human rights and elimination of racism in Alberta. Her organization, the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, is commemorating International Human Rights Day on December 8, 2000. I'll ask Ms Chan-Marple to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. She is sitting in the public gallery.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction. Again, I'm very pleased to introduce to you and to all members in this Assembly Merrill Stewart, who is a New Democrat candidate for Clover Bar-Fort

Saskatchewan. I'll ask Mr. Stewart to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly special guests that will be arriving in the Assembly at 2 o'clock. These are 29 students from Lamont high school. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Blair Charlton and Mr. Todd Eistetter. In their absence may we welcome them with warm applause.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 27 grade 6 students from the Thorhild school in my constituency. They also will not be arriving until 2 o'clock but will be observing question period. They are also accompanied by two teachers, Mr. Mike Popowicz and Mrs. Linda Ewaskow, and by parent helpers Mrs. Petra Roche, Mrs. Deb Hamilton, Mrs. Teri Green, Mrs. Sherrie Kapach, Mr. Kevin Kapach, and Mr. Harold Hamilton. I would ask that we please give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

Electricity Price Fairness Review

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this morning when I was thinking about my questions for today at 1:30, I was trying to think of what the government was going to do to bring down electricity prices that are skyrocketing on January 1. I decided that the government's answer was either going to be that they were going to intervene in the marketplace or they were going to subsidize a market with taxpayer dollars. Well, it's clear now from their announcement that they've decided to do both. So why did this Premier under his KEP mislead Albertans that prices were going to go down and has decided to intervene in the marketplace now that prices are clearly skyrocketing?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we still believe that prices will go down in about a year and a half, when more power comes onstream. It's a simple fact that supply and demand dictate price, and that indeed will happen. Deregulation is going ahead.

I would remind the leader of the Liberal opposition that this government always said – always said – that it would monitor prices and listen to consumers and respond accordingly. We have always said that, Mr. Speaker. We made two major announcements earlier this fall in anticipation of rising prices under a regulated environment. We introduced the energy tax refund and the electricity option rebate. This latest announcement, this announcement today, provides further relief from short-term – and I stress: short-term – price fluctuations.

MRS. MacBETH: Will the Premier admit that his deregulation plan, his KEP, is a disaster now that he has decided to try to re-regulate the market?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not.

MRS. MacBETH: How will this Premier's intervention in the

marketplace solve the fundamental problem of lack of supply of power in this province?

MR. KLEIN: That, Mr. Speaker, is a good question. It is a good question. If the leader of the Liberal opposition has the answer, if she can snap her fingers like this – you know, just as she thought this morning, if that bright light can go on just as quickly as her mind went into gear, we would have absolutely nothing to worry about.

Mr. Speaker, you simply don't bring on power overnight. You have to build generation plants, and that is a huge capital endeavor. We have indications now that the power companies plan to bring on more power. We've had announcements from EPCOR. We see Luscar now contemplating a major power project in southeastern Alberta. We've had some indication from TransAlta Utilities that they plan to bring on more power. We see a lot of cogeneration coming onstream, but I have to reiterate: it does not happen overnight.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, in relation to electrical capacity, as you are aware – and I have indicated this in the House before – the peak demand in Alberta at this time is 7,247 megawatts. We presently have access to over 9,400 megawatts. So the capacity is balanced presently. As far as new generation, we have over 400 megawatts that's on-line now and another 1,600 megawatts that will come onstream in the next two or three years. As the Premier said, when this stuff comes onstream, no doubt the electricity rates will go down.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, on a day-to-day basis we are getting inquiries as to people interested in putting electricity in Alberta, and we'll continue meeting with those people.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit that his actions today are going to create more not less, more uncertainty in the marketplace and that prices will rise accordingly?

MR. KLEIN: No. As a matter of fact, by law and through regulation prices will not rise. The announcement made today is to enhance the reliability of the Alberta electricity supply and to stabilize prices. There are some reasons, Mr. Speaker, and it's not deregulation. It's a matter of electricity that we have to import from B.C. Hydro, the good cousins of the NDs to the west, that is causing some severe spikes in rates. We're going to deal with that problem.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. CARDINAL: Yes, very briefly, Mr. Speaker. Today's announcement was part of the ongoing monitoring of the process of deregulation. It is only one part of the 10-point action plan we announced. We will continue monitoring the situation and make adjustments accordingly to serve Albertans the way they want to be served.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, when did this Premier change his mind about being back in business and become such a massive intervenor in the marketplace of this province?

MR. KLEIN: I am astounded. I am astounded. Here they have been chirping away for the last two weeks now saying: you've got to do something to protect consumers. We do something to protect consumers, Mr. Speaker, and they don't like it. Anything that we do that is good, they think is bad. Anything that we do that is bad, well, they think it's good. I mean, this is not the role of the opposition. The role of the opposition is to offer constructive criticism and to work with the government. The role of the opposition is to work

with the government to make sure the consumers of this province are protected. That is precisely what we are doing, and they refuse to help.

2:00

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, could the Premier answer the question as to how many other businesses in this province he intends to intervene in in the coming years?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is a situation that is very unusual, a situation that has occurred in a regulated environment, and we have an obligation. Our first step was to introduce the energy tax refund and the electricity auction rebates. We said that we would monitor prices and we would take, if necessary, appropriate action to protect the consumer. That's exactly what we are doing under this very severe circumstance.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, how much will it cost the taxpayers of this province to intervene in this manner that the Premier is proposing today?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the costs might or might not be. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Resource Development has a better handle on that.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It shouldn't cost the taxpayer any more than what we have, because we have existing staff doing the work that are paid already.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, could the Premier just explain for Albertans what is going on here? Is he continuing with deregulation, or is he back into re-regulation? The power suppliers of this province would like to find an answer.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we are continuing with deregulation. Those people who want to buy power in a deregulated environment will be able to do so after January 1. Those residential consumers and farm consumers who want to stay in a regulated environment can do so after January 1. What we have done today is we have announced that the prices are going to be held virtually constant for the next year while the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board conducts a full price fairness review. I think that that is a reasonable and responsible action on the part of this government in terms of protecting the marketplace.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the Premier can use all the bravado that he wants, but how much is he is going to spend to make sure that businesses and the economic cycle of this province generate more power rather than government intervention in the marketplace?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, one has to assume that if there is power to be used, there is power to be generated. Because of the tremendous economic growth and prosperity of this province it stands to reason that the power companies will be generating more power because the demand is already there and it's going to be increased in the future. So if there are buyers out there for the power, the power generators will make sure that there is power to sell. It's as simple as that.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members appear to be rather charged today.

Electric Utilities Deregulation

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, the government promised Albertans lower electricity prices under the deregulated regime. The opposite has been the case so far. Even the term deregulation is a misnomer. Prior to the so-called deregulation there were only four regulations governing the entire system. Until today under deregulation there were 32 regulations. I have them here. Today the government approved three more, bringing the total number to 35 regulations under deregulation. Will the Premier admit that the current regime is so complex that not even the government can understand it and that the only way to bring power prices under control is to completely reverse themselves and re-regulate prices as they have done today?

MR. KLEIN: Well, we're in a regulated environment right now. Mr. Speaker, if anyone should know about regulated price increases and raising rates without going through the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, simply going to city council – this hon. member knows all about raising rates in a regulated environment because he's been part of it for at least the past three or four years as a member of the EPCOR board.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is as usual completely wrong. His facts are not correct.

How can the Premier pretend that when the government is intervening in the marketplace, it is not re-regulating?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think there is a vast difference between re-regulating or going back into a regulated environment and protecting consumers from rising electricity costs under a regulated regime.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, after today how can this Premier look Albertans in the eye with a straight face and pretend that this government knows what it's doing in the electrical industry?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that all of the rate riders applied for by companies and in many cases approved, including EPCOR, were approved under a regulated environment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Doctors' Fee Negotiations

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday many of my constituents were astounded . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: And outraged.

MR. JACQUES: And many of them were outraged, Mr. Speaker. They're very concerned to learn about the Alberta Medical Association taking job action in the form of withholding services only some four months prior to the current contract expiring and despite an offer by the government of 28 percent over two years. All of my questions are to the minister of health. The first question is: how do the existing fees for doctors in the province of Alberta compare with those in other provinces?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we've done a survey of the 263 most frequently used fees in five provinces, the four western provinces and Ontario, and in 62 percent of the cases Alberta's rates ranked

either first or second. Of course, that means that the other fees are not in the top two, but we have made a fair offer that keeps Alberta's fees competitive.

Mr. Speaker, currently our medical services budget, out of which physicians are paid, is approximately \$1 billion. Our offer currently is to increase that by \$263 million, or 28 percent, over two years. That compares with the Alberta Medical Association's opening position asking for \$644 million. Currently their position is \$525 million.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to know what component of that government offer is with respect to specific physician fees.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the \$263 million relates to a number of different areas. With respect to fees, the portion of that that relates to fees, the 28 percent increase is 13.4 percent over two years.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Based on comparable taxable incomes for the next taxation year, as a result of the single-rate tax and other tax initiatives how much lower will income taxes be for Alberta doctors as compared with other provinces?

2:10

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, with the fee increase that has been offered by the provincial government in these negotiations, the average billings for a physician will go from \$195,000 to \$221,000 a year. That would be the average billings. In answer to the hon. member's question about the tax position of such a physician, physicians in Alberta in that range would be taking home between \$10,000 and \$30,000 a year more because of tax savings in this province compared to other provinces in Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Electricity Price Fairness Review (continued)

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board is supposed to be a quasi-judicial body set up to be an independent review of the amount of regulated oil, gas, and utilities in Alberta. Last week this government through the Premier was to intervene in these hearings. This week and today he is ordering the hearings to do something that we're not sure of. Sir, what has changed from last week to this week other than yesterday's election?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would read the act – he doesn't need to read all the act, just one page or so. Under the Electric Utilities Act the government of Alberta has the authority to direct the EUB to conduct fairness reviews. All we are doing is using our authority to make sure that what is done is indeed done fairly and in the best interests of the consumers of this province.

MR. WHITE: In that the board is currently under the understanding that they're doing exactly that, reviewing all the inputs for the costs for the stable rate option and for the proposed rider rate surcharges, what's different between what they're reviewing now and what we are proposing they review for the next year?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Resource Development supplement. The AEUB now is dealing with specific applications for rate increases. This is more of an omnibus kind of action that really in a more global and more generic sense studies and reviews the fairness of electricity prices in general.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. CARDINAL: Yes. Mr. Speaker, today's announcement, of course, was part of our 10-point action plan. It covers a number of areas: the rate riders, which the hon. member is asking about, and the import prices and also direct sales.

As far as the EUB's function, the EUB doesn't only deal with electricity. It deals with a broad section of responsibilities out there, and they continue to do a wonderful job. We are very confident that in the end they will do a good job of this added process that they are going through.

MR. WHITE: In that the minister continues to say that he has listened and responded to the needs of the province of Alberta and that there's the knee-jerk reaction of today's announcement, is that simply not another way of saying that you're flying by the seat of your pants in this electricity deregulation plan?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have to reiterate that this government said back in September that we would carefully monitor this situation, that we would continue to monitor prices, that we would listen to consumers, and that we would respond accordingly. We said that back in September. That was deemed to be appropriate action on the part of this government, and I didn't hear the opposition squealing at that particular time.

At that time and in anticipation of rate increases under a regulated environment, we made two major announcements. Well, actually we made three. We made the energy tax refund rebate, we made the residential electricity auction rebate, and we made the auction rebate announcement relative to municipalities, farm communities, industry, and so on. I simply reiterate that this latest announcement provides further relief from short-term price fluctuation and serves to protect the consumer. What could be wrong with that?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Coal Marketing

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As members of the House are well aware, the recent closure of Smoky River Coal north of Grande Cache and Luscar Ltd.'s Gregg River Resources mine south of Hinton and the unprecedented high cost of electricity raises an interesting question about the use of coal to generate electricity. In fact, the price of natural gas and the power demands both are rising. Some Albertans are questioning: why not coal, as it would be the sensible way to go? Could the Minister of Economic Development tell the members of the House what is happening in the coal industry and what the department is doing to respond to these closures?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Essentially there are two markets for Alberta coal. There's a domestic market for our thermal coal and an international market for our metallurgical coal.

Now, on the minus side unfortunately Alberta's international coal markets are in decline due to low world prices. However, we've seen some stabilization in some smaller markets; for example,

China, Egypt, and Brazil. That's been going on since 1999. We expect that trend to continue. Also, coal prices are stabilizing in Europe. So hopefully that will firm up the international market.

On the plus side, Mr. Speaker, the local coal market has increased its share of production as a result of stable demand from Alberta's electricity industry.

Now, with respect to Luscar and Smoky River Coal specifically, we are assisting both communities to address their long-term planning. Alberta Economic Development, for example, cosponsored the Yellowhead Regional Marketplace to identify opportunities for regional co-operation on economic development issues, and that includes the idea of forming a regional alliance.

In Grande Cache we sponsored a study to verify the viability of their proposed development as a tourism and retirement destination. We're working closely with the departments of Resource Development and also Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Speaker, what we're finding is that if you take care of the small things, the larger things will also take care of themselves. For example, in the Grande Cache area our department helped facilitate the first ever tour of the dinosaur tracks located at the closed mine. In fact, there were two Japanese tour groups that came through. They were absolutely thrilled that we were able to get them on-site. They very much appreciated our assistance. So while we're assisting and planning at a much broader economic level, we're also trying to get the smaller things accomplished.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question: in light of high electrical costs, could the minister say what the potential future is for coal-generated electricity?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know this is going to upset the opposition, but this really is a good-news story. We are fortunate because Alberta is home to the lowest sulphur content coal found anywhere in the world, and as I just mentioned, the local coal market has increased production as a result of stable demand from Alberta's electricity industry. Further, domestic demand for thermal coal may well increase if selected Alberta companies go forward with their plans to actually convert from natural gas to coal.

By way of another example, the proposed Brooks power project provides a logical step in continuing to use coal for our electrical needs. I might add, Mr. Speaker, that we need to ensure that the Brooks project receives equal treatment in terms of both the regulatory and environmental processes to ensure that competition between natural gas and coal-fired generation projects offer the lowest cost electricity options for Albertans.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that the domestic market for coal in Alberta is very strong. The future of the industry generally is strengthening every day. We are very supportive in encouraging additional electrical capacity in this province either through natural gas or through coal, but certainly we see a tremendous future for coal and electrical generation in that regard.

Thank you.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the Minister of Environment. There are a number of environmental concerns associated with coal-fired facilities. In light of these concerns, would an increase in coal-fired power negatively affect our environment?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, power plants are among a wide range of industrial facilities in this province that are regulated by Alberta Environment under the Alberta Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. Alberta Environment applies very stringent standards, standards which are ranked and recognized across Canada as being the most stringent or near the most stringent of any particular province or territory in this entire country. This set of regulations is diligently enforced by Alberta Environment, and we would do so, of course, if there are applications for expansion of coal-powered electrical generation in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's really important to point out that at this point in time in the province Alberta Environment is involved in continuing to monitor and regulate the emissions coming from a number of coal-fired plants in this province currently. We are continuing to enforce those high standards with respect to the existing generation that is present in the province, and we are certainly committed to doing the same with respect to any future capacity in terms of new plants that might be proposed and come onstream in this province.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Electricity Auction

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The re-regulation of the electricity industry to control price increases has created uncertainty in the electricity sector, especially in the area of prices. Later this week the government intends to auction the last 2,200 megawatts of power held in the power purchase agreements. My question is to the Premier. Is it the government's intention to cancel this auction?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is, no, it is not our intention to cancel the auction.

If the hon. member will permit, I'll have the hon. Minister of Resource Development supplement.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is always right. We're not going to cancel the auction, but once it is completed, we will carefully analyze the outcome and make adjustments or decisions at that time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that potential purchasers through this auction must know is the price that is the alternative. How will they determine that alternative price that they have to use as a benchmark to determine what they will bid in this auction when we're going through a reasonableness review now which could take two or three weeks, maybe two or three months, maybe till after the election to get put in place? How are they going to get a benchmark to judge what price to bid tomorrow and the next day when they don't know?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it is still market driven, and we're talking about people who wish to purchase power to provide long-term stability. We're dealing with a very specific situation relative to extreme price hikes under a regulated environment.

I would point out that the government has had an exceptional response to the pre-auction workshop, with over 70 companies and 150 people in attendance. So the auction will proceed as planned.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, the issue is that they have to know where the future is. This auction is a one-year contract that they're selling. They need to know the price next year. How are they going to have a base for that price to accurately bid in these auctions?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, they'll have to factor today in, and that is a good factor.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. CARDINAL: Well, Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, the consumers as of today's change will have access to direct sales between supplier and users.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

School Infrastructure

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the main recommendations of the School Facilities Task Force was to have an extensive audit of all the province's K to 12 schools. Today the Minister of Infrastructure has tabled the results of that audit. My question is: could the minister explain what the findings were?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure. [interjections]

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The school audit that was . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: I really don't know what there is about the personality of the hon. Minister of Infrastructure that causes such disarray to occur, but we'll go back again to recognizing the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for intervening.

What we did was complete a full audit of all 1,463 schools in the province. These audits were conducted by electrical and mechanical engineers following a very rigid set of criteria. They rated all of the schools according to priority in condition. Of the 1,463 schools about 689 were rated in good condition, about 639 in fair, and there are about 135 that were rated in poor condition. As a result, those are the first schools that we're going to work on in modernizing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the minister tell me how the modernization needs of the schools, particularly those in poor condition, are going to be met?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I have to give great praise to all of the school boards across this province, because during the summer they met with our staff to review the results of the audit. Now the school boards are conducting public meetings throughout their various divisions to see if all the schools audited are actually viable. Once we get back that list of priorities from the various school boards, we will then look at those schools that are put up for modernization. So the worst raw score is the first school to be done.

With respect to the new schools that are necessary, we are currently working on a utilization formula, but like I said, the trigger is 85 percent utilization in the school division to trigger a new school.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Is there sufficient money in the new century schools plan to complete the necessary work?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I believe there is. It's \$1.07 billion over three years. It's \$635 million new money: \$235 million this year and \$400 million additional next year. We would want to move our meetings through with the School Buildings Board so that we get as many projects approved in principle so we can start as many projects as possible next year in the province of Alberta to catch up with the backlog.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Electricity Price Fairness Review

(continued)

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Resource Development avoided taking responsibility for the mess in power deregulation and avoided answering questions in this House because he said that the issue was before the board. In fact he said, "On this particular issue" – and I'm quoting from *Hansard* – "we'll have to wait until the decision is made." Will the minister please explain why he has contradicted himself by today ordering that the EUB suspend its current hearings?

MR. CARDINAL: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier answered this issue very clearly earlier, and I did too. We will continue monitoring the situation. [interjections] I know you don't like that.

We will continue monitoring the situation, Mr. Speaker, and we will make adjustments as fast as we can once we determine there have to be changes. This is exactly what we've done.

I'm still waiting for their plan in relation to deregulation. About two weeks ago I asked for your plan to help us move forward and design a good electrical system for Alberta. We haven't seen anything yet. We're still waiting.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

2:30

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the government was really interested in listening to the Official Opposition's plan they wouldn't have invoked closure on the 1998 legislation.

Mr. Speaker, given that the government has now said that the hearings will be interrupted pending a review, will the minister please tell us what the timing of this review is? I guess the real question is: are Albertans going to get the answer to this review before or after the spring election?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, the press release today and the documents provided identify that process as to what the timing is. It's very, very clear.

MR. SAPERS: So to make it clear, that means after the election.

Mr. Speaker, earlier the Premier said that there was going to be a price reduction in a year and a half. So I'm assuming that the Minister of Resource Development will table the order to the EUB about this review, and while he tables that, he'll table all of the studies that have shown what the supply curve is, what the demand curve is, and how it is that these prices are going to go down and exactly what the price points are going to be a year and a half from now.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, only the Liberals would do something like that when the process just started. We will continue monitoring the process, and we will file documents at appropriate times, keeping in mind that it would be in the best interest of the consumer out there. Not like the Liberals. They'd file it today probably.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Workplace Health and Safety

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 15 Fiesta Party Rentals was fined \$100,000 in Calgary Provincial Court for breaking a safety regulation which resulted in the death of one of their workers. Can the Minister of Alberta Human Resources and Employment tell us if the fine reflects a new awareness of the importance of workplace health and safety and the responsibilities employers have to protect their workers?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, in regards to the fine, of course no amount of money can ever compensate for the loss of a life and the loss of a family member. My sympathies again go out to the family of the young fellow that was electrocuted on that site.

Having said that, I do believe that fines such as the amount of the fine that the member indicated in his preamble really do send a rather strong message to employers that the health and safety of our workers cannot and, of course, will not be compromised. We expect employers to take their responsibilities seriously. They must do everything they can to make sure that their workers perform their jobs competently and safely. This means ensuring that workers are properly trained, use the proper safety equipment, and, perhaps as important as anything, know and understand that they can refuse to perform unsafe work.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell us if prosecuting employers who violate the Occupational Health and Safety Act is a successful deterrent in reducing workplace injury?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I'm a very strong believer in proactive education. I believe in proper information being provided to people. The fact is that preventative health and safety programs are really more effective to make our workplaces safe.

We in this province, as we relate ourselves to any other jurisdiction in this country, I believe have shown that with voluntary compliance we have had success in reducing incidents in the workplace that have led to injury and illness. But we want to make that sure everybody understands, including all hon. members here in this House today, that if all else fails, we will prosecute violations of our health and safety provisions.

There is a clear understanding in this particular province about the mutual responsibility of both employers and employees to work safely. Our partnership program is one of the techniques and one of the programs that we have in place that we believe is showing a high level of success in actually reducing injuries and illnesses on the job. I want to use this time in question period today to encourage all employers and employees who might be listening to investigate that partnership program and get themselves involved.

We know this approach works. There are something like 3,200 Alberta employers that are currently under this program. We estimate that this covers 20 percent of the Alberta workforce. There

are clearly differences in lost time injury statistics between those that are in our partnership program and those that are outside the partnership program.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is your department doing to help increase awareness about health and safety issues with employers and employees?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we're looking at some different ways in which we might be able to further communicate awareness to employers and employees here in the province. First of all, of course, I've challenged our partners and my department to identify where we could make the most difference in selected workplaces as we try to create more safety. We're looking at initiatives like a call centre. Of course, we're going to be employing web sites, looking at educational and promotional activities to really drive home our message that safer workplaces make Alberta businesses stronger.

Now, we're also increasing our focus on compliance. We're adding more inspectors, and we're giving them more time for inspections, and we're starting now to target high-risk industries.

Electric Utilities Deregulation (continued)

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, with his announcement today the Premier has finally admitted that his electricity deregulation scheme, better known as the KEP, has resulted in inadequate supply to meet rising demand, critically low reserve margins, and skyrocketing prices. After five years of bungling and mismanagement this announcement is an acknowledgment that the KEP has been a dismal and fundamental failure. When utility companies have spent millions to go before the EUB on regulated rate option tariff hearings, can the Minister of Resource Development tell us why this government failed to consult with utility companies before making this announcement?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, the government has a responsibility when consumers are asking us to look at an issue very carefully, and the opposition has done the same. We've indicated before that as we move forward with this deregulation, we will make adjustments when they're required to address the issue of consumer need.

These announcements today are part of the 10-point action plan. We will continue making further announcements. We will continue monitoring the situation and make adjustments as we move forward. We are not changing. That is the direction.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, when the fundamental problem is supply, what will that one-year grace period do to increase supply when this minister just said this afternoon that it will take two to three years to increase supply generation? This government just doesn't know how to plan.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I indicated earlier that the existing capacity of electricity in Alberta is at 7,247 megawatts at peak demand, and we have presently more than 9,400 megawatts. So it generally addresses the issue that there is a reasonable balance.

In relation to new generation there are 1,400 megawatts that are on-line already. In addition to that, there are another 1,600 megawatts that will come onstream within the next two years. In addition to that, on an ongoing basis, either through the transmission administrator or through our department or through Economic

Development and others, companies are approaching us discussing the issue of electrical generation in Alberta. We are very, very optimistic that we will have the supply that you over there do not want to see because you don't want to see the process succeed.

2:40

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, nobody believes they know what they're doing. Why did this Premier and this minister change the rules just 34 days before deregulation is supposed to start when they have had over five years to care and listen?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, the rules are not being changed. We said that we will continue monitoring the whole situation of deregulation, and we will make adjustments. In fact, if the Liberals would come up with some good ideas, we could probably incorporate them in some of the changes we're making. If they're good ideas, only good ideas. So if you have good ideas, please forward them to my office.

Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Economic Development minister maybe supplement that particular issue.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, hon. minister. We need to keep in mind that there's going to be ample opportunity for companies to generate a reasonable rate of return over the next few years.

To go back to what the hon. member across the way was referring to regarding capacity, just this morning I was meeting with a company that's looking at a very significant investment in this province, in excess of \$400 million, to build a very advanced natural gas fired electrical generation facility that will generate over 500 megawatts of power. So what I'm hearing from the industry, generally, is that they have a great deal of confidence in Alberta, that they have a great deal of confidence in the economy, and quite frankly they have a great deal of confidence in this Premier, which drives those guys nuts.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Rural Electricity Costs

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've talked to constituents in Little Bow and residents in the city of Lethbridge who are business and residential owners. I've looked at their billings for the past couple of months, and I want to indicate that they're very confused about a dramatic rise in the consumption that's graphically illustrated in their Enmax and Utilicorp billings, which of course means a significant percentage increase in their cost of power. My questions today are to the Minister of Government Services. What assistance, Madam Minister, does your department offer to the residents that I've referred to in my preamble to clarify or validate the actual kilowatt consumption that's showing on their billings and the dramatic increase?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very valid question. We have had constituents from the riding of Little Bow contact our department with concerns about massive spikes in consumption. As most people will look at their utility bill, there's a little chart at the side that shows the last year, the change from the estimate to the actual on the consumption of their electricity and their water on a monthly basis. In this particular riding there was a massive spike in the consumption of electricity, particularly so far in what we've seen from this constituency.

We have gone and made some calls based on these concerns and complaints to the electrical companies, utility companies, to ask them if there was a flaw in the system or if there was some sort of an oversight that would cause the unbelievably unprecedented spike in consumption on these consumers' bills. We've asked them to validate the bills, because it is very, very strange to see three times the usage come up in one month that would be there for the previous year's registration on the charts.

We are working with that, and we hope that the companies will contact those consumers directly and have a resolution come between their consumer complaint group and the company. If they don't, then we will assist the consumers, with our own people working almost as an arbitrator between the consumer and the electrical company.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the answer.

With respect to the one specific utility, Enmax, Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of Government Services indicate just what exactly she and the Enmax officials have found out in their initial discussions on this consumption increase?

MRS. NELSON: Again, Mr. Speaker, we have been in contact with the officials from Enmax. There has been some concern that because of the new transition between the distributing companies this last little while there may have been some errors made, and these disputes may in fact be real between the consumer and the retailer of the electricity.

We looked at other scenarios that may have occurred down in the city of Lethbridge area. There was some concern with some water meter readings that had gone a little off-kilter and were overcharging and causing some difficulties. That ended up being the result actually, quite frankly, of faulty meters that had been installed in that area.

So we are looking at all angles of this along with Enmax, and they're very co-operative in the process. They want to have the dispute and the discrepancy resolved very, very quickly. We will, again, keep on with the program, and if more consumers come forward – I'm sure your constituents aren't the only ones, because they seem to span 100 miles apart – we will look at all complaints that do come through.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Instead of blaming everything on deregulation, then, is it possible for the minister to convey to these customers if it's possible to have an actual monthly reading on their meter rather than an estimated reading?

MRS. NELSON: Well, as the hon. member knows, most utility companies work on an estimate and then do a reversal to the actual once they have the meter reading done. Some utility companies read the meter every month. Others do it every second month. We have asked the question and inquired whether it could be consistently every month that the meters are read so that if there is something that goes astray, it can be picked up immediately.

We had some that said that they were going to read meters only once a year, which we were a little surprised at and thought that's not going to be really quite acceptable, I wouldn't think, to consumers. We asked them to come back to us with a plan and to reconsider

doing a reading more frequently as opposed to less so that if there are problems that do arise, they can be addressed between the utility company and the consumer very quickly.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we'll call upon the first of three members to participate.

In the interim, birthday greetings to the hon. Member for Leduc.
The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Friends of Seniors Foundation

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta I have heard that only seniors know what is best for seniors. I've also heard that seniors prefer to be only with seniors. I disagree with these statements, and I will use a truly wonderful example that supports my position.

The Friends of Seniors Foundation in Calgary is the brainchild of Brenda Wood, an intelligent and active parent who is also a constituent in Calgary-West. The foundation is a charitable organization and under Brenda's leadership provides intergenerational programs which help create caring partnerships between teens and seniors in care centres. In 1999-2000 five schools and five care centres participated with 150 students and 75 seniors interacting with each other on a regular basis.

The foundation has a present waiting list of 25 schools and care centres, or approximately 1,100 students and seniors, a strong indication of the demand for this fresh approach in meeting the needs of both generations. A few of the many benefits to youth are to dispel myths of race, culture, disability, aging, and other stereotypes and to acquire community service and job experience. For seniors a few of the many benefits are to alleviate loneliness, give them something to look forward to, and a sharing of life skills and experiences with youth.

Mr. Speaker, we must encourage the Brenda Woods in Alberta who dare to envision and to persevere. Seniors needing continuing care will increase in unprecedented numbers within the next 10 to 15 years. The Friends of Seniors Foundation provides our youth with training in dementia and Alzheimer's disease, creates awareness of seniors and aging, and influences youth who will be our future caregivers, builders, and architects of the future. The foundation is helping to ensure that the decision-makers of tomorrow will have experience, empathy, respect, and knowledge as to the aging process and will know what changes are required in order to improve the quality of life for seniors.

Brenda Wood, I strongly applaud the foundation and its goal to be able to offer its programs to every interested school and care centre in Calgary. Congratulations.

Thank you.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Intensive Livestock Operations

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last year has seen a number of cases where communities have been divided over the merit and the approval process for the planning development of large-scale livestock operations. The divisions have arisen because of a lack of a clear process and from a lack of flexibility at the local level in planning and land use decision-making.

In October the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development announced the appointment of a committee, headed by the Member for Leduc, to address the issues of the development of an

appropriate process for the approval of intensive livestock operations. The committee is made up of Ben Thorlakson from the Cattle Commission and also Roelof Heinen, a past president of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties.

The challenge for this committee, Mr. Speaker, is to incorporate a balance between the environmental needs of all Albertans and the local community and also the local development approval process that gives the local communities the choice to implement and to develop the kind of community that they really want. In order to do this, they're going to have to look at the need for provincial level intervention or supervision of the environmental process, but they're also going to have to look at the ability of the local community to develop the appropriate level of planning processes, which includes zoning, which includes development of a process that will allow them to, in essence, have the final say in whether or not an intensive livestock operation actually is established in their community. This will also require, then, some changes to the Municipal Government Act.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage this committee to look at those options, because we have to have a system that will allow for the flexibility for community control but also give our agriculture sector the opportunity for growth so that we can reach the \$20 billion of value-added and the \$7 billion of primary production that's the target by 2005.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Reidun Tatham

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and recognize a very uniquely talented and accomplished young athlete from my constituency of Calgary-Lougheed. That young person is Reidun Tatham and is one of Canada's finest synchronized swimmers. She represented Canada at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia, in September. Reidun returned to Calgary with her head held high, wearing her latest and most cherished accolade to date, an Olympic bronze medal.

Mr. Speaker, 22-year-old Reidun has been involved in synchronized swimming for 15 years. Since taking up the sport at the early age of seven, she has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to her sport. In her lifelong quest for Olympic glory she has not only developed outstanding athletic skills, but her sport has also helped her acquire the character traits and life skills necessary to succeed in life.

For the last two years Reidun joined the top 10 Canadian synchronized swimmers at the Centre of Excellence in Toronto to prepare for the Sydney 2000 Olympics. The training was intense and often demanded more than 50 hours per week, but the hard work of Reidun and her teammates paid off in a big way: international recognition on the Olympic podium for their bronze medal win. Mr. Speaker, I'm told that according to the team coaches, who are likely the harshest critics, they described the team's performance in both the long and short programs as the best swims ever for their athletes.

On behalf of all members of the Assembly I wish to extend our congratulations to Reidun and her teammates on their outstanding performance in Sydney and to say to these young people that they brought great honour to our province and to our country.

Thank you.

head: Orders of the Day

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, prior to proceeding, we had notice of motion today given by the hon. Member for Edmonton-

Meadowlark dealing with a motion that she wanted the Assembly to address, so we'll take it under consideration now.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon I provided notice that I would seek unanimous consent of the Assembly to advance Bill 221, which is the Public Health Care Protection Statutes Amendment Act, 2000, so that it would be the next bill dealt with during private members' business. Now, while I recognize that all private members' bills are important, it is also important to note that Bill 221 will put forward the repeal of Bill 11, which in fact opens the doors to private, for-profit health care in this province and was one of the most contentious bills in Alberta's history. Also, as we are all aware, it was opposed by a majority of Albertans.

MR. HANCOCK: Point of order.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader, briefly, because I was going to interject anyway. Go ahead with your point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, yes. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) this is a request for unanimous consent, not an opportunity to debate the merits of the bill or anything else.

THE SPEAKER: That's absolutely correct, hon. Government House Leader.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, quickly.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. The authority under which I move this particular request is *Beauchesne* 18, wherein it states:

Within the ambit of its own rules, the House itself may proceed as it chooses; it is a common practice for the House to ignore its own rules by unanimous consent.

Therefore, I am requesting that unanimous consent be given to move Bill 221 forward on the Order Paper.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is requesting unanimous consent from the Assembly, so there'll be one question.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call the Committee of the Whole to order.

3:00

Bill 209 Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any amendments, comments, questions arising out of this bill?

MR. CAO: There is no amendment to be introduced here, sir, but I

would like to speak further on it, Mr. Chairman, to answer a few questions. I will try to keep my comments brief today so that we can hear from as many members as possible in the limited time we have remaining at this committee stage.

However, there are two important subjects I would like to address. First, I would like to respond to a couple of the questions and concerns that were raised by my colleagues during the debate last week. Secondly, I would like to share with everyone some of the recent developments in the province of Ontario that I think are quite relevant to this debate. The general concern that I hear brought up on this time and time again is that this bill is potentially harmful to Alberta businesses, particularly small businesses. I don't know how much more I can say to respond to these concerns, but I will attempt once more, again, to clarify my argument on this issue.

First, as I have pointed out, the number of people actually taking leave in any given year is likely to be absolutely minuscule in comparison with the overall size of the Alberta workforce. Furthermore, I must emphasize that this leave is not mandatory. In fact, many parents may choose not to take it or at least not to take the full amount. Even the existing maternity leave provisions are not fully used by all eligible mothers. This legislation simply ensures that sufficient leave is available to those parents who assess their own family situation and decide to do it if needed. I don't see how the small number of parents who make this decision each year is likely to be too onerous for Alberta employers to bear.

Not only that, the cost of employers to locate, hire, and train replacement workers will remain the same whether the leave is extended or not, and even if we keep maternity leave at the current level of 18 weeks, the replacement worker must still be found and trained. Similarly, any administrative or planning costs associated with this leave are already being paid to administer or plan existing maternity leaves. Simply expanding the length of leave is not likely to substantially increase these costs.

I think that is all I will say on this issue, Mr. Chairman. I believe the potential negative impact of this legislation on Alberta businesses has been somewhat exaggerated, and it should not be allowed to distract us from considering the potential positive impact of this legislation on Alberta children and families.

I would, however, like to respond to a couple of specific questions that were raised by my colleague the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. She noted her approval of the fact that under Bill 209 adoption leave is to be amalgamated into the 27 weeks of parental leave. Then she inquired as to whether parental leave could be taken by adoptive parents regardless of the age of the adopted child. Could it be taken, for example, if the child being adopted was as old as 12? The short answer to her question is yes.

It was my intent with this legislation to give adoptive parents the same rights as birth parents. It seems to me that it is important for parents to establish a lasting bond with the new child in the first few months, regardless of whether the child is a newborn infant or an adopted child of any age. Even if they are not babies or young children, adopted children face the same difficulty of adjustment, and they can only benefit from having the parent close by their side as they experience that transition.

The opposition Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert also inquired as to whether two parents could split the 27-week leave between them. Again, the answer to her question: yes, they can. The intent of this legislation is to allow parents the freedom to determine for themselves which of them should take leave and for how long. Each family has its own set of values and its own unique economic circumstances. This legislation allows them to take all that into account and make their own decision on how they will divide the allotment of parental leave.

Having addressed this question, I now would like to move on to my second purpose here today, which is to inform this committee of some recent and exciting developments in the province of Ontario. In fact, while we were debating this legislation last Wednesday afternoon, Ontario was announcing sweeping changes in its own Employment Standards Act. Ontario was already ahead of Alberta in the area of parental leave, offering 17 weeks of pregnancy leave plus an additional 18 weeks of parental leave. Now Ontario will allow birth mothers to take up to a full year, 52 weeks, of leave. This would be composed of 17 weeks of maternity leave plus an additional 35 weeks of parental leave. Other parents, natural or adoptive, would also be permitted to take 37 weeks of unpaid parental leave.

Clearly, by changing the Employment Standards Act to bring parental leave provisions in line with the federal EI benefits, Ontario is moving even further ahead of Alberta on this issue. This is particularly interesting given that Ontario has always shared our concern for maintaining a positive business environment. For example, Ontario implemented a series of business tax cuts very similar to our own. Obviously, Ontario's commitment to a sound business climate has not disappeared overnight. Instead, it must be the case that the Ontario cabinet has reached the same conclusion I have on this issue: extending parental leave is not likely to have a substantial negative impact on business.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I understand why business owners and some of my colleagues have concerns about this legislation, but I believe that if they examine the issue more closely, they will reach the same conclusion as the government of Ontario did: these concerns are largely unfounded. Extending parental leave would not be overly harmful to the employers' interests. It would be greatly beneficial to the interests of children, parents, and families.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. [interjections] I appreciate the support from my colleagues.

I've gone back and read the *Hansard* on this debate, and it was interesting to see the kinds of concerns that were raised on this. Certainly the Member for Calgary-Fort has done everything in his power to try and calm those fears and alleviate the concerns that have been raised. One of the substantive concerns that was raised against the bill was from Calgary-North Hill. I have to admit that in the year 2000 I was really surprised to hear that sort of a concern being raised, but I'll accept it as legitimate. The hon. member seems to feel very strongly about it.

Essentially his point was that somehow this legislation and lengthening the amount of time of parental leave that would be available would impact badly on women in the workforce because businesses would hesitate to hire women at all and that that would result in a hiring discrimination against women. I'm struggling for words to . . .

MS CARLSON: Unbelievable at the very least.

MS BLAKEMAN: Unbelievable at the very least. Tsk, tsk. The member should know better at this point.

Later on in his debate the member . . . [interjection] Well, yes. That's what he deserves for that kind of comment. I mean, given that sort of thing, the hon. member wouldn't be sitting in this House. That's ridiculous.

Later on he goes back to say that he doesn't support the bill because he thinks the marketplace should decide this sort of thing.

Well, I have to disagree with him, because I think if we had left it up to the marketplace to decide, we'd have no defined hours of work for a start. The marketplace was pretty darned keen, if I remember, on about 80-hour workweeks and no lunch hours or coffee breaks for any of the workers. They just wanted them to work. We certainly wouldn't have any minimum wage, because the marketplace would prefer to almost not pay workers if they could possibly get away with it, certainly in some cases. We certainly wouldn't have health benefits, probably not pensions. We could be in a situation where we'd still have child labour, because we do see that in other countries where there are no restraints on the marketplace whatsoever. So I don't know that kneeling before the altar of the marketplace is really going to move us forward here in this millennium.

3:10

The marketplace certainly hasn't addressed the wage gap between men and women, for example. I think we're still struggling with a wage gap of somewhere between 63 cents for women and a dollar for men. It's just done nothing to address that. The only thing that has addressed it is pay equity legislation.

So what other things can we look at that the marketplace did not address and isn't ever likely to address? They don't want to address it. That's part of the purpose and the point of government: to enact legislation or to provide benefits and remedies that will protect the workers or in some cases the consumers. In that, this is very appropriate legislation to bring forward. We do now recognize and value the contribution that women make to the labour force, their ideas, their perspective on things, the creativity that can be brought to the workforce. I really did not expect to be standing in this Assembly having to debate the merits of this in the year 2000. For shame.

So I simply do not accept the argument that the marketplace should decide this. I think it's perfectly appropriate that we do have legislation that covers this. Let's look at a couple of examples then. We've got some sectors that are dealing with a gender inequity, and they're not doing anything to address it. Therefore the inequity is continuing to pose a problem. I'm thinking specifically of the legal sector, where we now have well over 50 percent – I think it could be toward 75 percent – of the graduates from law school that are women. Well, they get out into the workforce, and given that climate, that marketplace, if you want to call it that, women are leaving. We've got trained lawyers who are leaving those professions in droves, just saying: "Sorry. We're not going to play this kind of game. This is not in our interest or in our family's best interest." They don't seem to be jumping up and down and rushing about trying to correct that imbalance in that situation in the legal profession. Frankly, it's to their loss, and I hope they do start to address that soon.

One of the other accusations leveled was that somehow this legislation was an intrusion into people's lives. This government is more than willing to intrude into people's lives in economic policy, deregulation policy, in all kinds of things they're willing to do without batting an eyelash. So I don't know why extending parental leave by a few weeks would be considered any great intrusion into someone's life. I think it's improving quality of life, and if we really are talking the best interests of the child, then that certainly is attempting to address that.

When I spoke in second reading, I was urging the member but I think more to the point urging the wider government members to look at the other programs and legislation that exists to try and improve a number of the other parts that come into raising children in this day and age. I had talked about covering midwifery services under health care, the issues of child poverty, the issue of minimum

wage, which certainly affects quality of life and the best interests of the child. Employment and pay equity is another area that could certainly be addressed that would help families and working families. Health care. Housing is a huge issue. There was a symposium today on seniors' housing, and within the last few weeks I've been at other symposiums for social housing. It's a huge issue. Really, if we're going to talk about the best interests of the child and raising good children and all the information that I read in *Hansard* that was raised around the discussion of this bill – how we've got to get involved in prevention and spend more time with children at a younger age and all those good things – well, boy, if they don't have good housing to be doing that in, there's another area the government could be working on.

I talked about education and availability of education, the size of classrooms, additional costs associated with K to 12 education in this day and age, how much parents have to work to subsidize that, and I talked about higher education.

I thought about it some more, and I thought: well, if we were taking it from the angle of the best interests of the child, as the Member for Calgary-Fort suggested, I think there are a few other things that could be looked at. For example, it is in the best interests of the children to have a much stronger and much more rigorously enforced but, let me add, fairer maintenance enforcement program. Now, that's in the best interests of the child. We could have pay equity, where people were earning better wages. That would be in the best interests of the child. We could have better prevention programs like Head Start. That would be in the best interests of children.

I can't get Head Start programs. I can't get additional or new Head Start programs in my constituency because the funding is limited for it. We've got one on one side of the constituency. Well, tough beans for any kid living on the other side, because we can't get one in the school that's closer to them. So, you know, you want to talk about the best interests of the children? There's something. Let's look at the funding for Head Start programs and other prevention programs.

This bill is trying to do a simple thing, which is to extend the parental leave to parents so they have more time at home with a newborn or with an adopted child, and that's an admirable thing to attempt. I'm certainly willing to support it. As far as I can see, there's no hidden agenda here. I certainly hope I'm not proven wrong in the future. It appears to be a very straightforward attempt here to make it possible in this world, in this day and age, for parents to spend more time with their children. It's not a difficult concept. It's certainly not difficult to implement. We've got most of it in place already. This is a matter of extending the amount of time that is available and making it available to both mothers and fathers.

The Member for Calgary-Fort has already answered some questions about whether parents could each take time, that one could take 10 weeks and one could take 17 weeks, and yes, indeed we're being told that that was part of what was being planned here, which I think is a great idea.

So we should be able to support this bill. As I said before, I simply don't buy the arguments that somehow this is an intrusion and that the marketplace should be left unfettered to somehow come up with this, because frankly they're not going to come up with it. It's not going to happen.

I do underline that this is about unpaid leave, and for most of those families who are in poverty or struggling, this legislation isn't going to help, because they can't afford to take the leave. There's another huge issue that should be seriously looked at by this government if programs like what's being proposed by the Member for Calgary-Fort in this Bill 209 are to flourish. We really need to

be addressing seriously the whole issue of child poverty and poverty in general. I mean, poor children are not Cabbage Patch dolls. They come from poor families, and we're not doing much to address those issues here.

A look at my e-mails and the letters and notes that are being dropped through my mailbox on the effect of electrical deregulation on people in my constituency is telling me right away that it's having a huge effect on people. One of the problems with that is that if parents can't afford to be paying the electrical bill or the gas bill and they're looking to then put their children in care of the government, to give them up into custody of the government because they can't afford to provide for them, what kind of situation is that where we trap people into making those kinds of horrible choices? They certainly don't want to be there.

3:20

Now, I did look through the definitions. I'm not too sure on this one, but as far as I can tell, the definition of "parental" is not spelled out here. So I'm assuming, in fact, that it could cover or include gay and lesbian relationships, if they're choosing to adopt, for example, because there's nothing in here that precludes that. If indeed that's the case, then I commend the Member for Calgary-Fort on his inclusion, which is very nice to see.

I view this bill as an investment, and I think it could be the start of a series of preventative programs. I certainly encourage the government to view it that way, where it's the beginning of a longer trail, an expansion of an attitude towards the people in this province from the government recognizing that people are an asset and the government's willingness to invest in them. Part of that is in bills like this. But I strongly encourage the government to consider the rest of the society that this exists in and to understand that prevention is a key part in keeping families healthy, a key part of the best interests of the child. We need to view this bill in the context of what exists today and what is possible in the future and move forward on it.

I don't want to take up too much time today, because I'm aware there are others that want to speak to the bill. I'm interested in following the rest of the debate to see what other possible objections could be brought forward from members opposite.

I'm certainly willing to support it at this point, and I look forward to further comment in third reading. With those words, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to provide comments on this private member's bill, sponsored by my colleague from Calgary-Fort. I didn't have an opportunity to contribute during second reading. As you well know, as this is a private member's bill, there is only a limited amount of time, so I'll make my comments brief before the time actually expires. I'm going to take the opportunity at the committee stage of this bill to discuss what perhaps could have been brought up in second reading, but I ask the indulgence of the chair on this matter because I feel my comments have considerable bearing on the debate at the committee stage as well.

It seems to me that Bill 209 is a highly admirable initiative that could make a real difference in the lives of some Alberta children and families. We have the opportunity to commit to our children and to invest in the future so that they can turn out physically and mentally healthy. All of the research I have seen indicates that when children get the kind of care they need during the first year of their infancy, they have better physical, mental, and social health

outcomes. When that happens, it almost goes without saying that we will have lower health care costs, lower educational costs, lower social program costs, and even lower, perhaps, justice system costs.

I know that those who have gone before me have touched on similar themes, as my colleague before me has mentioned, but there is one important point about this legislation that I don't think has been mentioned yet. It occurs to me that Bill 209 could be an important way to ensure that rural – and I use the term “rural” – Albertans enjoy the same early childhood development opportunities as their urban counterparts. Mr. Chairman, this government has clearly demonstrated through initiatives like the supernet high-speed, broad-band network that it is committed to giving all Albertans, regardless of where they live in this province, the same access to government programs and services.

I believe Bill 209 has the potential to accomplish the same kind of thing because it will place parents across the province on a level playing field, and a level playing field is important. Currently, for those parents who do not live in or near major urban centres, child care facilities may not be realistically accessible or affordable, and in most remote areas of this province there may not be another family member, close friend, or neighbour available to provide the care that is needed for a newborn child. Obviously it would be particularly important to those areas for parents to be able to remain home with their newborn or recently adopted children for as long as possible.

In the course of reflecting upon Bill 209, by my colleague from Calgary-Fort, I have come to realize that it conforms with many of our government's other objectives in addition to the goal of providing equal access to services across the province of Alberta. The objective that stands out the most in this regard is expressed in the Alberta children's initiative.

Now, the question here today in having a clear vision and policy framework is to support the healthy development of Alberta's children. It has produced an important policy document entitled *An Agenda for Joint Action*. The very first, substantive line of that business plan reads as follows:

The Government of Alberta has made a commitment to putting children and young people first. All ministries in government have a role in ensuring that Alberta's children thrive in a healthy, safe and supportive environment.

The children's initiative document goes on to note:

Research shows that a complex range of physical, mental, emotional, cultural, and spiritual factors influence how a child develops. Preventive supports early in children's lives can help avoid more serious and costly interventions later [in life]. The healthy development of children is vital to their lifelong well-being and healthy functioning as individuals, family members and [also] community members

of our great province. As I read over the passage, I just kept nodding to myself in approval, because it seems to me as if it were written with this very bill in mind. It definitely seems that child care experts and senior policymakers within this very government have acknowledged the fundamental importance of a strong parental presence in early childhood development.

Having said that – I know my time is growing short – no matter if the number is 27 weeks or perhaps is 30 weeks or 34 weeks, I believe this initiative is a positive one for the future of young Albertans in this province.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'd like at this time to move for adjournment of debate on this particular bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports progress on Bill 209.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Pension Reform

514. Mr. Hlady moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to examine its future in the Canada pension plan or explore other options, including a made-in-Alberta pension plan or a mandatory personal retirement savings plan.

[Debate adjourned November 21: Ms Carlson speaking]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased this afternoon to rise and make some remarks relative to Motion 514, “a made-in-Alberta pension plan.” My reading of the history of this motion's inception takes us back to cover a bit of landscape in the history of this province, and it gives rise to the prominence of an individual who was quite prominent in last night's federal election. He didn't fare overly well in that election, and I would be hoping that his brainchild of a made-in-Alberta pension plan would also not fare well in this Assembly this afternoon.

My reasons are that when the hon. Provincial Treasurer past, the Member for Red Deer-North, first conceived the idea of having a pension plan, it really was sort of a reactionary thought, because the federal government had brought about Bill C-2, which was enacted to try and address the concerns that were being raised that the Canada pension plan over time, because of the population demographics, was not going to be able to provide pensionable earnings to those that were insured. So the federal government in a very accountable manner brought this bill forward to increase contribution rates. That raised some angst in Alberta, as quite often federal government actions are prone to do in this province, and it was that bill that then spurred the Provincial Treasurer of the day to say that we should develop our own pension plan.

Now, again, just to bring some of the history to light, we attempted at the time to obtain some of the documentation that the Provincial Treasurer was using as justification for why a provincial pension plan should be drafted. He refused to release documentation that was in his possession, some 18 pages that had been prepared between July '97 and October '98 which spoke to reforms to the Canada pension plan or options to replace the Canada pension plan. In an August 21, '98, letter the former Provincial Treasurer had said that the Cowell committee, which is John Cowell, did not prepare

separate reports on the feasibility of establishing a made-in-Alberta pension plan or the merits of turning the retirement component of the CPP into a mandatory or individual RRSP-style account.

We did learn, though, Mr. Speaker, that on December 1, 1999, the past Provincial Treasurer met with a group of policy analysts and academics to discuss the feasibility of the pension plan. So even though the analysis wasn't fit to be made public, in his estimation, he continued to fantasize to some degree with this concept. Although there was agreement that as a result of Alberta's younger population and high employment rates it could deliver a pension plan that would be similar to the CPP, with somewhat lower contribution rates, at least initially, there was concern about the portability of benefits, the costs of initial setup, and the overall and ongoing administration costs that the province would be forced to incur.

There was also concern about and a determination of and agreement on the distribution of assets and liabilities of the Alberta portion of the CPP if in fact Alberta had proceeded to disengage themselves from the federal plan. Noting that history, Mr. Speaker, for the record I think it's an honourable thing that the past Provincial Treasurer has moved on to greener political pastures, some might say. The landscape, even in eastern Canada, is a bit bare at this time of year, so the green may have to wait for another day. I acknowledge that this was his concept and that the motion that's before us this afternoon is in fact in some respects being further debated, instead of being pulled, out of respect for his service to the province. In that respect I'm happy to provide my thoughts and my voice of opposition to the proposal.

In reality, those things aside, Mr. Speaker, with due respect to the right of members to bring these types of initiatives forward, however far fetched they may be, would the creation of an Alberta pension plan really result in more benefits than costs, or, put another way, would the costs not outweigh the benefits in this scenario?

Even in thinking through some of the very simplistic repercussions of doing this, I was prompted to think about the rates that employees and employers pay under the CPP. While perhaps in its initial inception the Alberta type of plan might be able to offer some type of enticement to have lower contribution rates for employers and employees, we know that our economy is very diverse. It's also very prone to booms and busts. I in my time in this province have definitely been through one major one, in the mid-80s. We've now rebounded from that bust, and we're in a boom phase. In logistically thinking about how a pension plan and contribution rates would be customized to weather that boom/bust cycle, if you think about how that affects the number of employers, the number of employees, I'm really not sure, Mr. Speaker, that this is really a logical or achievable initiative.

We in the opposition believe that there are some alternatives that the government could be pursuing in this regard. If truly there's concern about the ability of the CPP to cover Albertans within the next several decades, then certainly the past Provincial Treasurer is well situated to voice alternative suggestions and to, respectfully, provide some concrete alternatives. Now, what might those types of alternatives be? Well, certainly we could encourage the federal government to take steps that would encourage Albertans to use the private pension plans that exist, retirement savings plans, without having to go the course of eliminating the CPP or disengage Alberta from the federal plan.

Other examples of concrete suggestions that could be made would include increasing contribution limits for investments in individual RRSPs, indexing those higher contribution limits to inflation, as well as increasing the amount of foreign property that Canadians and Albertans can hold in RRSPs from the current limit of 20 percent.

We believe these measures would encourage contributions to individual retirement savings plans and thereby generate a higher rate of return on contributions. Mr. Speaker, once you take the politics out of it, if you take the antifederal factor out of this bill, really I believe that the end result, the pure intention is to try and protect Albertans from a potential day when the CPP might not exist to be able to provide a pension benefit. If that's the case, these other mechanisms could be avenues that would achieve that end.

3:40

The scenario that was proposed by this motion – and I'm certainly anticipating it's not going to be passed this afternoon. But in the event that some force should strike the government caucus to propose it, I think there are other flaws within the proposal that need to be pointed out, and let me just include those into the record.

If we look at taking the route of mandatory self-directed RRSPs, as has been suggested, there are still a number of questions about the feasibility of defined-contribution retirement savings plans. These issues include things like the investment risk which is placed on individual contributors, the impact on long-term rates of return from low-risk investment, the incidence of administrative costs, the impact of higher female life expectancy on the level of retirement benefits, and the development of adequate transitional provisions which ensure that contributors do not have to pay twice to fund new individual savings retirement accounts.

Mr. Speaker, to something that I'm little bit more familiar with. It also strikes me that if this government was sincere in wanting to ensure that Albertans were able to access pensionable support in retirement, they would look at trends that exist in this province; as an example, the increasing exploitation of part-time workers for the primary purpose of not having to pay those employees benefits or pensions. Actually, I should qualify that in the part-time category those would be nonpermanent positions or using the casual or temporary classifications, as is rampant in the health care sector, in the social care sector, and in the disability sector.

We have widespread use by employers, because of the financial cutbacks of this government, of casual or temporary employees that are not in a position to receive any benefits or any pensions. They are also not in a position to earn sufficient money that they can put any money away into RRSPs. So, you know, while we could go to great lengths to design some made-in-Alberta pension plan, I think our purpose here in this Assembly is to really seek to respect and defend and protect the interests of Albertans, and I believe those would be best served through addressing some of the demographics of our workforce.

Another example of a demographic that requires addressment is the increasing number of women in the workforce, many in positions that are also not receiving an employer-provided pension plan. The demographics are across the map. Many of them are women who are approaching their senior years. Many of them are single parents. Many of them are of an ethnic background. These are another component of the workforce which is not going to benefit from a made-in-Alberta pension plan. They're basically scraping to get by as it exists now, and these are some examples of where I think our energies this afternoon and in the years to come would be better placed.

Now, I did read through some of the literary attachments of analyses that have been done by people who certainly have much more expertise on this issue than I do, and one that struck my eye was a study that was conducted by Robert Brown entitled *Alberta Opting out of the Canada Pension Plan: Can It Be Done; Should It Be Done?* In that study Mr. Brown said that Alberta would face financial implications for opting out of the CPP: while Alberta

would be able to claim some \$4 billion in assets of the CPP invested in provincial government bonds, it would also be responsible for the actuarial liability within the CPP of the benefits that its workers have accrued to date. Mr. Speaker, in my review of the debates on this bill I've not seen the government respond to that reality. So what is really the balance sheet analysis of this bill? What's the cost?

With due respect, I believe we have to be prepared to do a bit more research if we're going to put something on the agenda of this Assembly that gives all members the benefit of knowing whether or not it's realistic to even contemplate the scenario. In the case of creating a made-in-Alberta pension plan, Mr. Speaker, I think it's absolutely integral that there be, at least in a preliminary way, some estimation of the costs.

Mr. Speaker, I also could not refrain, in debating this bill, from referencing some of the Auditor General's remarks from 1999-2000. There's quite a substantive section in his report this year about Treasury, which I would direct the hon. member to. In a number of areas what the Auditor General found was that Treasury was having a bit of difficulty managing their business as it was. Again, if we want to be responsible legislators, I think we've got to look at: what's the capability within our public service to take this on? What I read in the pages of the Auditor General's report is that we have a public service that is barely making ends meet, and in many respects the ends are very frayed and are no longer holding the rope together.

Now, specifically on the Alberta pension plan issue, on page 278 of the Auditor General's report he talks about the administration of our existing Alberta Pensions Administration Corporation. He pointed out that

the audited financial statements for the Management Employees Pension Plan (MEPP) were not issued until August 2000, over 190 days after MEPP's fiscal year-end. The delay in the issuance of the audited financial statements was mainly due to the performance of an actuarial valuation as at December 31, 1999 to determine whether the pre-1992 unfunded liability was eliminated.

So there were issues about timely reporting even with the pension plan that exists through the administration corporation. That was significant enough to cause the Auditor General to comment on it in this year's report.

Well, my time is up. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I call on the hon. Member for Fort McMurray, I would like to remind hon. members that we're dealing with a motion and not a bill and that we're dealing with a private member's public motion. We're not talking about a government motion or a government bill.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

3:50

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Relative to my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View's motion, Motion 514, I feel compelled at the outset of my comments in this debate first and foremost to say – the hon. colleague on the front bench on the opposite side made comments relative to barely making both ends meet. Certainly I take exception to that. I am very confident and proud of our public service in Treasury in terms of the administration of whatever this government presents to it. They have proven themselves in the past and, I'm quite confident, will continue to prove themselves in the future. That's why so many other provinces are looking at the taillights of Alberta this day, because of that competence that is going on here.

Relative to the point of Motion 514 by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, I believe this motion really appears to be a very prudent response to a very evident problem with the Canada pension plan. This problem is indeed severe. We do not want to

understate the situation that presents itself to us today. Albertans have never put their heads in the sand and said: we don't want to take and deal with the problem. That's why I applaud the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his initiative today relative to Motion 514.

It is quite possible, perhaps even probable, that the Canada pension plan could in fact collapse in my lifetime. In fact, to support this evidence, the Fraser Institute survey of independent investment managers found that no fewer than 98 percent of respondents thought it likely or very likely that the Canada pension plan would face a major funding crisis sometime in the next 25 years.

Just this past January the Association of Canadian Pension Management issued its own very disturbing report. Its primary message – and I quote the vice-president of the association – was: don't rely on the government to look after you. The association also noted that there are currently four working taxpayers for every pensioner in this country, and even at that ratio the CPP, the Canada pension plan, is struggling to stay afloat. Given the demographic trends by the year 2030, just to provide some insight, there will only be two working taxpayers for every CPP beneficiary. Even if one does not conclude from this that the CPP is inevitably doomed, one must consider and certainly concede that a serious and urgent consideration of its future is absolutely essential. That's why I applaud Motion 514 by my colleague for Calgary-Mountain View, because that's exactly what the purpose of Motion 514 is all about.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, rumors of the CPP's demise have become so prevalent that a conference was held last year to discuss the issue. Presenters at the conference were asked to respond to just one question and one question only: should there be a separate pension plan for Alberta? The delegates engaged in spirited discussions and identified a number of important factors. I think it's important to recognize that Albertans are very strategic in terms of how they lay down a financial plan for the future, and in doing so, there is not always agreement. In fact, one distinguished presenter quite accurately likened the CPP to a huge, unstable pyramid scheme on a national scale.

Conference participants were not always able to answer the single question with clarity in a simple yes or no answer. The inconclusiveness only underscores the point of Motion 514 by my colleague, that the future of the Canada pension plan is an ambiguous one. We all know the importance of uncertainty in the marketplace, and ultimately there is lots of uncertainty in terms of the future of the CPP. It is incumbent upon us in this private member's motion to be responsible to explore its future in the plan as fully and extensively as possible.

My colleague's motion also suggests two possible directions should it be determined that Alberta's best interests lie outside the CPP. The first of these options would be to establish an APP, an Alberta pension plan, with roughly the same structure and level of benefits as the CPP. This is the current situation in Quebec, a neighbouring province, which established its own QPP back in 1966, I believe. However, from the beginning the reserve fund of the QPP was managed – and this is a key and relevant point – by an independent provincial investment agency. Nonetheless, the QPP also has fallen victim to some of the same problems as the national CPP, forcing it to enact similar serious reforms just three years ago. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the experiences of the QPP offer a number of useful lessons for Alberta to consider if we are to pursue the APP option, the Alberta pension plan. I should mention that for many of the following points I'm drawing on the excellent and thorough work of Francois Vaillancourt, an economist who participated in the conference that I just made reference to.

The first lesson to be learned from the QPP is that a separate

provincial plan generally offers far greater flexibility in terms of social policy. Yes, that's social policy. For instance, Quebec was able to offer reduced pensions to those aged 60 to 64 in order to counteract the incentive in most pension plans for employees to work right up to retirement age. This innovative policy was eventually copied by the CPP in the late '80s. I'm not suggesting that under an APP plan this province would necessarily want to offer retirement incentives one way or another, but the point is that we could if we wanted to, adding that greater flexibility to the challenges that face this country, and certainly Alberta once again wants to be out in front of those issues.

A second lesson of the QPP is that a provincial plan might not create costly incentives for people to take advantage of disability benefits. One of the most important factors in the recent rise in the CPP payments has been a dramatic increase in disability payments – interestingly, this increase has not occurred in Quebec – and one reason is that there is an incentive for most other provincial welfare programs to offload disabled recipients onto the CPP disability program.

Now, this is an important point, because it would not be the case in a province where the provincial government was responsible for the programs. The likely result is that disability payments would be much less of a drain on retirement savings and therefore would not create the same pressure and reason to raise premiums. Of course, that is an important component in the sustainability of any program.

A third possibility suggested by the QPP example is that a large public pension fund would have the effect of encouraging the development of the local financial services industry, a made-in-Alberta solution once again. Once developed, this financial expertise would be an easily marketable resource and an excellent way to extend the Alberta advantage.

In today's society I believe that in Alberta we want to continue to look for vehicles to be able to attract the venture capital that's required in the province, but we need a vehicle to be able to attract that venture capital. Rather than being at the beck and call of those on Bay Street or Wall Street, why don't we have the billions of dollars that are presently coming from Alberta invested in Alberta? Why can't Alberta have its own Bay Street and its own Wall Street in terms of investing Alberta resources to be able to attract and be able to use that financial vehicle for the benefit of all Albertans?

Mr. Speaker, a second option suggested by this motion is the creation of some type of personal mandatory retirement savings plan, or as I refer to it, an MRSP. Such a plan would have the potential for considerably greater investment returns. In fact, the first year that the limited CPP reserve fund was invested on the Toronto Stock Exchange, it earned a return of nearly 40 percent on a \$2 billion investment. That is a substantial and reasonable return by any account in terms of measurement. But this fully funded, privately managed MRSP option is also one that is favoured by several interested parties, including the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

The CTF advocates a plan that would be mandatory in order to limit the financial strain on noncontributory benefit programs. It also favours defined contributions rather than the current system of defined benefits. The current system also forces the government to intervene or raise premiums in order to maintain the guaranteed benefit level. Ultimately what we are talking about here is the sustainability of those who invest. But if only contributions were defined, benefit levels would be determined by each individual's chosen investment strategy.

4:00

The MRSP option also has been utilized in other jurisdictions around the world, so it is not a new concept. In 1981 Chile replaced

its pay-go system with a privatized MRSP system. Under the Chilean plan employees were required to contribute 10 percent of their salaries.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I can say that I support the motion. I think it's an important Alberta initiative.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm required to interrupt the hon. Member for Fort McMurray because under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on the motion under consideration.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 514 carried]

Snowmobile Trails

515. Mr. Coutts moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a pilot project in partnership with the recreational snowmobile industry that would include such initiatives as a cost recovery fee system, i.e., registration and user fees, to support the development, maintenance, and promotion of safe, multi-use trail systems for snowmobiling in the province's green zone.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 515. This, in essence, does wish to just examine the development of an industry sustainable, multi-use trail system for the recreational snowmobile industry in Alberta.

The necessity for snowmobile enthusiasts to define their role in the tourism industry is greater than that of some other recreational pursuits. This is because of the potential hazard of snowmobiling resulting from the extreme speed of the sport. There is also a large potential benefit for tourism in Alberta's smaller communities, as snowmobiling could bring excitement to touring rural Alberta during what is otherwise considered as a low or an off-season.

Unquestionably, there is a role for snowmobile enthusiasts to play in this development of tourism marketing, and positions such as tour guides, outfitters, language and trail interpreters will all need skilled and enthusiastic snowmobilers to help fill those positions. This value-added component – and that's what I'm looking at, the value-added component – to our tourism industry would contribute to local economies, which could mean more than just offsetting the costs of a trail network.

Mr. Speaker, many of the trails in the Crowsnest Pass area and the Pincher Creek area have historical significance as old trapping and ice fishing trails, each with an individual character and a certain amount of myth. Today, in the last 40 years, many cut lines and logging roads provide a very well co-ordinated trail system potential for southwest Alberta. One advantage of a trail network would be to begin the development of what are otherwise unused and remote areas throughout Alberta and provide greater economic and geographic diversity to our ever-expanding tourism industry.

In 1999 our own Pincher Creek-Crowsnest Pass area was ranked by *SnowRider Magazine* as the best overall snowmobiling area in western Canada. It was also ranked highest for the area where people would most like to ride in the future. So with increased tourist traffic, regular trail grooming becomes necessary in order to maintain the region as a competitive tourism destination. Trail grooming consistently ranks high in importance to vacationing snowmobilers in market demand surveys. With over 1,200 kilo-

metres of designated trails in the Pincher Creek-Crowsnest Pass area and with that overall ranking, a pilot project would be appropriate in the green area in the southwest corner of our province.

There is an expressed need to separate snowmobiling from some of its current, unofficial venues because of measurable harm being done both to property along particular routes and to the snowmobiling enthusiasts themselves. Snowmobiling is the root of much unintended harm to third parties, an issue that must be addressed as the popularity of the sport increases. Some of the negative aspects to nonusers include but are not limited to damage to farmers' crops, disturbance to farmers' livestock, as well as endangerment to other outdoor recreationalists.

The potential for ill will, worry, or even real harm to a sizable group of Albertans could be avoided by a separate designated trail system for snowmobiles. Not only would the snowmobile community welcome exclusivity over their trails, but other outdoor enthusiasts such as cross-country skiers, hikers, and winter campers could also enjoy the resulting peace. Farmers would be relieved of a major source of aggravation in real damage to their crops or to their livestock, and snowmobilers would no longer be prone to injuries such as the situation of being snagged suddenly by barbed-wire fences and that type of thing, which is devastating. The safety to our public health system alone would be substantial, not to mention the pain, suffering, loss of wages, and the potential loss of life to the snowmobilers.

Mr. Speaker, the cost of trail maintenance should be borne by the snowmobile community, as a lack of safe and well-mapped trails is primarily a safety issue with direct consequences to the snowmobiler. Harm to third parties would also be averted by separating snowmobile trails from other industrial and recreational venues, and the cost borne by the snowmobilers would represent a fair cost of participating in this activity.

Although it has long been the practice for snowmobilers and landowners to agree on land use for recreation, there is not always consensus. By co-ordinating activities provincially, there would be an assurance of a venue for snowmobilers and a greater assurance of safety. In some cases private landowners have been held responsible for damages suffered by trespassing snowmobilers. Because of this extraordinary capability for speed and manoeuvring, a snowmobile is capable of taking the life of a rider or causing serious injury. If for no other reason but safety, it is these types of incidents that cause trail development, maintenance, and mapping to demand our attention. I would hope that in the future there would be more discussion on the inherent risk of snowmobiling as well as a method of regulating those who have had the privilege of snowmobiling on designated trails in the province.

There are many issues surrounding snowmobiling that cross over into other areas involving dirt bikes and all-terrain vehicles, or ATVs, in the summertime, and it is reasonable that these similar pursuits could be and would be governed by a similar process. If these two sporting groups would come to an agreement, there could be a cost-sharing agreement for trail development. There could be some maintenance issues resulting from mud during the spring thaw, for instance, but these specifics could be left to the users to determine and to eventually settle and eventually participate in making the trail better for all concerned. Even if there were some issues that were difficult to resolve, with some initial guidance and the mechanism for the snowmobile industry to generate funding, problems could easily be addressed by the users themselves.

Mr. Speaker, even with Motion 515 there would still be a safety concern as new trails often have hazards. It is important that snowmobilers understand the risks involved with the trails where they are riding and that individuals are not placing themselves at risk

unless they choose to. An unfamiliar trail or cornering too quickly at an accelerated rate of speed can cause a snowmobile to tip and possibly harm not only the vehicle but the rider or others that are following. This problem could be avoided by offering adequate mapping as well as a simple rating system for the trails. Neither of these options pose a great cost but would nevertheless enhance the safety and reliability of trails.

It may also be necessary to address issues of determining how costs could be shared, where trails are to be developed, how trails would be maintained in remote areas, and how to incorporate the continued role of volunteers in this industry. Thus it is necessary to investigate these issues thoroughly and facilitate a consensus between users to solve the problems.

The Alberta Snowmobile Association has been actively seeking positive ways to increase the safety and the popularity of their sport, and I commend them for their participation so far and their concern for the industry. Many of their ideas have been developed into a limited trail system throughout the province. The focus on safe and well-maintained trails initiated by this fine organization could be extended to all potential users of the trails in the hope that they could also play a role in their maintenance and safety.

4:10

The lack of a co-ordinating policy has stifled growth in the snowmobile industry for far too long, and Alberta is behind nearly all other provinces in facilitating a snowmobile or multi-use trail system. Small clubs have attempted to create trails for the enormous demand, but they are unable to do so because they lack the resources and the volunteers for the task. Although the trails that have been developed strictly by volunteer units at this point in time are serving their needs, with the extra demand there is a need to go further.

Mr. Speaker, Marvin Eckert from Alberta Beach is an entrepreneur in the snowmobile industry, and he has expressed some very insightful points of view. Mr. Eckert is the chairperson of trail development for the Alberta Beach Snowmobile Club, and he is continually approached by people wanting to know where they can access new trails. The Alberta Beach Snowmobile Club has been given a mandate by its members to attempt to create a snowmobile or multi-use trail from Edmonton to Whitecourt, but so far they've succeeded in placing only seven kilometres of trail. Snowmobilers feel extremely frustrated in that they have no links between the trail system and they are forced to ride their snowmobiles along roads. Riding on roads and in the ditches is actually illegal.

Mr. Eckert, when asked, feels that there's great support for the province to take a leadership role in providing a pilot project for a self-sustainable multi-use trail system. He expressed a hundred percent support for increasing his registration fee if it were to include funding for a co-ordinated plan for a safe network of trails. The current system of snowmobiling along highways and ditches and on private property is limiting, and there are many voices and participants willing to change this situation if given the opportunity. Mr. Eckert from Alberta Beach likened the current situation to the registration of cars and trucks. It is, he said, the equivalent of providing registration but no roads to drive on, at least not legally.

He also described the incredible growth and the potential in the industry. Currently his shop, Ecco Marine, in Alberta Beach employs 14 people, all of whom stay there during winter months exclusively because of the snowmobile enthusiasts. The Alberta Beach Snowmobile Club has a hundred members, most of whom are involved in the club because of their interest in creating trails for recreational enjoyment. There are hundreds of others in the area not belonging to the club but who are equally interested in safe, well-maintained snowmobile trails.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, there is a multitude of uses for a trail system other than snowmobiling. The possibilities are almost endless if we consider the number of activities that take place in Alberta's remote areas. I mentioned dirt biking and ATVs earlier, but trail use does not have to be limited to vehicles. If some trails were to be specifically designated for use in the summer months by fishermen, naturalists, botanists, bird watchers, and foresters, I'm sure these people would make use of them. Almost any summer or winter recreational activity would benefit from good trails.

Mr. Speaker, improved access to more remote areas of the province through a trail system would create a truly unique experience for those seeking adventure in Alberta, and surely the opportunity for a hinterland adventure would be a further selling point for Alberta's tourism industry. I encourage all members of this Legislative Assembly to vote in favour of Motion 515 and increase recreational opportunities for all Albertans.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What a pleasure and a thrill and a delight it is for me to get up and speak to the motion put forward by the Member for Livingstone-Macleod on snowmobiling, my favourite topic. He's raised a number of interesting points that I'd like to respond to. I remember that a few years ago – I think it might have been '97 – the same member brought forward a similar motion, perhaps a little wider in scope than this one, and we had a good debate on this at that time. Oh, it might have been a bill.

I have a couple of questions for the member, if we could get a bit more specific about what's being proposed here. The motion says, "in partnership with the recreational snowmobile industry," and I'm wondering if the member had in mind any particular group. He did refer to the Alberta Beach club, and he also referred to the Alberta Snowmobile Association. Was he anticipating that there was a partner already picked out to do this with? When it says "industry," I'm wondering if this was meant to be a coalition of suppliers, dealers of snowmobiles. I listened carefully to what he was putting forward, and that doesn't sound like where he's going with this.

Part of my asking those questions is: why are we not working with the Alberta Trailnet system, which is the Alberta component of the Trans Canada Trail, which is already set up to be a multi-use trail? This is now trying to go off and establish a new set of trails. That may well be a good idea, and it may well be fine. I'm just wondering why Alberta Trailnet didn't get considered in this equation. Maybe if he gets a chance, he can answer me on that or perhaps answer me in writing.

Now, what sort of fee was this "cost recovery fee system"? I'm wondering what sort of fee the member was anticipating there, because snowmobiling is not a cheap sport. I think that the smallest machine you can buy in this day and age is probably around \$5,500. You could easily drop 10 grand, and you wouldn't be buying top of the line with that amount of money. By the time you get suited up with the helmet, the suit, and the boots, you're probably looking at another couple of hundred, up to \$500 more if you want the leather outfit. Then you can get into all the accessories, things like the two-way radios in the helmets, the electric defogger on the helmet mask. So this is not a sport for the thin of wallet. Having said that, as snowmobilers – and it must be clear to everyone by now that I'm actually a snowmobiler and proud to have been one for 36 years – we're also willing to spend money to ride, to go places where there are good trails, well mapped and groomed.

The last time we debated this, I talked about how I was unhappy

that I was having to take my snowmobile tourism dollars out of Alberta because there really wasn't any place for me to do that kind of recreational riding here in the province, how I had gone down to Montana and Wyoming and specifically to Yellowstone park to ride there. They really lay out the red carpet for snowmobilers. The park is open to snowmobiling for almost half the year. The town welcomes you. You can ride through the town, with a few restrictions as to which roads you're not allowed to be on. The hotels certainly cater to it. You can rent machines there. That's where a lot of Alberta riders go when they're looking for a week-long snowmobiling holiday. There really isn't any equivalent place to do that here in Alberta.

There have been various attempts over the years to try and establish that, so I'm wondering if the member is aware of or what happened with the government-funded snowmobile trail loops that were put together by the government just outside of Calgary. I'm going to stumble on the names. I think one of them was McLean Creek and the other one was Sibbald Flats, or I might have those reversed. One was a fairly short loop, maybe 30 K, and the other one was even shorter than that. You know, those trails were made, and I think they were supposed to have been groomed for a time.

4:20

I remember hearing last winter, I think, from a grand snowmobiler, a master snowmobiler named Bob from Calgary, and he was right ticked off, because he would take his motor home and park it in the staging area there and ride from the staging area, and all of a sudden there were all these fees. He was being charged, and he was being charged a day fee, but on the other hand they wouldn't allow him to stay overnight there. So he just kept getting charged this day fee, and it was adding up to a fair amount, but he felt he wasn't getting any service. There was no plug-in; there was no electricity. There was no nothing.

So the government has in the past put money into snowmobile trails in this province. What has happened to that investment, and can we not go back to that and continue the work that was originally envisioned? If we're looking at giving support to this industry, frankly it's a smart idea. There's lots of possible tourism there. As the Member for Livingstone-Macleod pointed out, there are lots of possibilities for small centres and tourism dollars there. Why don't we have a look at what we've already invested in and see if there's any way that we can continue with that work?

Also, speaking of work that has been done in the past, when I was the executive director of the Alberta Snowmobile Association, about 1984 or '85, one of the projects I did was a map of all of Alberta which showed all of the different areas where there were clubs and riding areas, with contacts. So if you were going to go to Bonnyville, you could tell by the map that there was riding there, and it also had a phone number to contact so you could call up the local club and see if you could arrange to go out riding with them. That sort of thing was not a very expensive project at the time and might be something else to be done in conjunction with what the member is suggesting here.

He's right in saying that in order to be attractive to riders, you need to have trails that are interesting and long enough. Given the snowmobiles we have today, a 100-kilometre ride, 150-kilometre ride: nothing; that's easy. So a 30 K loop just isn't going to cut it; that could be done before coffee break. Then what are you supposed to do? Load up the trailer again and go back to town? No. So we do have to consider, if we're looking at a project, that it is long enough and interesting enough to keep people coming back to it.

Trail grooming is really important, and that's a huge difference between Alberta and everywhere else. B.C. has put a lot of money

into trail grooming there. They help their local clubs buy the big groomers, and we're not talking some piddly little thing that you pull behind a machine. These are great, honking big tractors that have proper grooming apparatus on them.

AN HON. MEMBER: Honking?

MS BLAKEMAN: Yeah, honking. Sorry about that, *Hansard*. They'll figure it out. Big, big. Okay?

AN HON. MEMBER: How big are they?

MS BLAKEMAN: They're big tractors, and the grooming blades are about 10, 15 feet wide for the trail.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's not 10 feet.

MS BLAKEMAN: No.

I am so glad that I have engaged the other member.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair hesitates to interrupt this, but, hon. member, when you engage across the floor, that's precisely what happens: soon the people on the other side drown you out.

We would remind all hon. members that only one member is being recognized at this moment, and that member is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'm delighted that everyone is so engaged in this particular debate because snowmobiling is important to Alberta and it can be far more important to Alberta. It is a growth industry; it is value added. We really haven't paid very much attention to it here in this province, and I think that has been to the detriment of all for a number of reasons. Because there aren't a lot of known trails that are mapped and groomed, people tend to strike out on their own. It's very hard to get clubs together here, and certainly clubs are the backbone, as with a number of sport and leisure activities. They're the backbone of the sport. They're the ones that teach the kids safety. They're the ones that help sort of enforce with the adults that there's a safer way to do things and make sure that people don't drink and drive, for example, and don't cause damage to people's property, that there are trails laid out and carefully marked, and there are guides that will take you on the rides. That's the kind of thing that clubs can provide for you, but that's hard to get going in a small centre if everybody can just strike out on their own across the field somewhere because there are no trails to go on. So I think there's a lot that this province could be doing to really capture this, and they're not, so I'm encouraging them to do that.

Now, I was talking about trail grooming in B.C. That government has put money into assisting the local clubs to purchase these big groomers, and they do groom those trails. They are nice and flat and wide, and they have a maintenance schedule. There may even be money to pay an honorarium or perhaps a salary to someone to groom these trails. Again, B.C. has got a roaring tourism business during the winter in snowmobilers. They make a lot of money off Alberta snowmobilers going to B.C. because we don't have anything in Alberta. The grooming is really important, because I hear about it. People come back and go: oh, the trails on Clemina, they weren't groomed. There'll be a lot of complaining about it, and next time

they go out, they may not go up that particular mountain because they feel it wasn't groomed very well. So this is more than building the trails; it's also marking the trails and grooming the trails for usage.

Then beyond that could be mapping them, and that's certainly a possibility for a commercial venture. Mind you, I know that in Yellowstone everybody just hands the maps out. Any restaurant, any coffee shop, any souvenir shop, they'll all happily give you a map. Then other people make money by laminating them so when you drop them in the snow, they don't get wet, and things like that. There are all kinds of value-added things that are possible.

I do have a question about why this is being approached as a complete user-pay system. When I look at other sports and recreational activities, I go: hang on a sec. You know, there are a lot of them that have direct or indirect government support or community support for what they're doing. It could be municipal support. So I'm wondering why the insistence that the total cost be borne by the snowmobiler in this case. For example, ski hills get development money. NHL teams get money; that's hockey. Communities build arenas, and in the arenas then you can have curling and hockey and skating. So why this insistence that the entire cost is borne by the snowmobiler?

I'm now paying 35 bucks for snowmobile registration, and what am I as a rider getting for that 35 bucks, I'd like to ask. Now, I don't begrudge that; okay? I'm perfectly willing to obey the law and pay the fee. But this is 35 bucks, and I can only use this for less than six months of the year. So why isn't part of that fee being used to supplement the cost of building and marking and grooming and mapping these trails? Why is it now expected that I'm going to fork out even more money for this specific project? I'd like to know a bit more about where my snowmobile registration money is going first, thank you very much.

The second thing is that it can be a bit of a deterrent, and I'll fess up to this one. Because I'm now riding in central Alberta in the Athabasca area, I wanted to do the right thing and join the local club and support them. Now, the ASA has got a new scheme going whereby you now pay \$50 a machine a year, \$40 if you do the advance payment. You know, I rode once with that club up there, and I just thought: a hundred bucks for one ride; that's a bit steep, even for the snowmobile-loving person that I am. So I think we've got to be really careful about that.

The other issue that hasn't been dealt with here is occupier's liability. With decent occupier's liability we would have it made.

I'm going to get adjourned here, but I will come back.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm required to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. The time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded for the afternoon.

4:30

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 3 Statute Revision Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to move for third reading Bill 3, the Statute Revision Act.

We've had some discussion on this bill at second reading and in committee, so I won't dwell on it other than to say that this act provides an opportunity for us to become a much more modern jurisdiction with respect to how we deal with statute revisions by

bringing forward not only the full and complete statutes revision for the year 2000, which is necessary, which is needed by all of those who refer to the statutes of the province of Alberta from time to time in the course of their business or in the course of advising Albertans about the law, but also providing for the unique opportunity to do revised statutes on a statute-by-statute basis, where appropriate, where statutes have been amended from time to time and prior to the general revision, which would happen on a 10-year or 20-year basis.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

So by approving this act at third reading and by passing it into law, Madam Speaker, what we're doing is providing the opportunity for our statutes to be dealt with in a timely manner and consolidated and official versions provided on a revised basis, which will provide access to better and more timely revisions and which will give Albertans a useful tool in knowing the law that applies to them.

I would just conclude my debate, Madam Speaker, by thanking the Official Opposition. This is a bill which truly has been a model of co-operation. I had the opportunity to sit down with the opposition Justice critic from Edmonton-Norwood, as she then was, and the Opposition House Leader to deal with issues and concerns related. We even, I believe, consulted with the third party with respect to concerns that were raised and worked out wordings, which were passed by amendments in the Committee of the Whole, to deal with concerns that were raised so that we could truly work together to achieve a situation where Albertans would have access to updated laws on a timely basis.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, thank you very much. I'm pleased to join debate, albeit briefly, at third reading on Bill 3.

It's interesting. The bill has actually been before the Assembly for a long number of months but hasn't consumed a lot of debate. The reason is that in fact the government and the Justice minister in particular exercised some tremendous leadership here in terms of responding to what I still believe to be legitimate concerns raised from the opposition side, worked on and instructed his officials to draft amendments to basically address the concerns that the opposition had raised. I think it's fair to say that the opposition is quite satisfied now that Bill 3 as amended in fact is consistent with other legislation in provinces like Ontario, British Columbia, the federal government, and consistent with its earlier antecedents, the *Revised Statutes* of 1980, 1970, 1955, 1942, and even the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* of 1922. So I'm glad we've made those changes.

The only thing that might make this a perfect exercise in legislation would have been a referral of the regulations to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. But absent that, I understand we then get into a collision of different philosophies between the opposition and the government. So we might yet even have some opportunity to talk about my favourite amendment on other bills before we see the end of this fall session. I know the minister of natural resources is anxiously awaiting that debate, riveted to his seat, absolutely riveted, Madam Speaker, and looking forward to that clarification.

The other thing I just want to say, because I'm in some respects just the cleanup guy on this bill, is that I think something should be said about Sue Olsen, the MLA for Edmonton-Norwood. I think Bill 3 in many respects exemplified her leadership in the Assembly, her focus on being an advocate for constructive change, her role, I think, as a tough and assertive legislator but always a fair one, and one who I think was quick to point out and to thank the Justice minister when

he did the kind of disclosure and sharing of information on a timely basis as is the practice of the current Justice minister.

Maybe I'll see if I can get the signature of the Justice minister on a copy of the bill and be able to send it off to our former colleague from Edmonton-Norwood. It's simply a very small tribute to a small bill, but it exemplified, I think, her approach to this Assembly and to her job as an MLA.

Those are the comments I'd want to make to Bill 3. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Bill 27 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move Bill 27, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2), for third reading.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: I'd just make the observation, Madam Speaker, and restate the opposition commitment to continuing to work with government to expedite the passage of the miscellaneous statutes acts on the basis that the items in them are noncontentious, that they don't raise important issues of public policy, and that they're widely and strongly supported by those Albertans that as individuals and groups would be affected by those amendments.

I think we're making some headway. I'm not sure, Madam Speaker, but it seems to me that a number of years ago I remember seeing miscellaneous statutes acts the size of a Drumheller telephone directory or darn close to it. I think the fact that perhaps the government is being a little more selective in terms of those elements they propose to include is a very positive thing.

I hope the government and the next government, if we don't meet again, will adopt this model. For those members that are back, I know that ministers will choose not to take the easy way by saying every time they see a piece of legislation that it's easier to toss it into miscellaneous statutes than it is to take it through the convoluted internal bill review process of the government caucus. I know that the ministers of the current government wouldn't want to do that. Hopefully, their successors will have the same view of using the words "sparse" and "cautious" when they decide what comes forward for inclusion.

Those are my comments on Bill 27, Madam Speaker. Thanks very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a third time]

Bill 29 Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to once again speak to the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act. I would like to reiterate the importance of this bill, the importance of this bill to our children. Our

intent, our focus is and always will be the protection of children, children who have been sexually abused and exploited at the hands of adults. These children have had their lives torn apart by sexual predators. With the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, or PCHIP, as it's commonly known, and these proposed amendments to it we are protecting these children from abuse.

4:40

In essence it's child protection legislation, legislation that works to ensure that all children in Alberta are safe, safe from this abuse and safe from any harm in this province. With this legislation we are protecting vulnerable children and youth from sexual predators, johns and pimps who use and abuse them for their personal gain. Our current legislation is solid, and we know that it is working. With it we've helped many young people break free of abuse and begin rebuilding their lives, but the time is right for making improvements to this act. We're taking good, useful, important legislation and we're making it even better.

With these amendments we can strengthen the law and enhance its effectiveness, making it an even more powerful tool in our fight against child prostitution. First and foremost, these amendments enable us to provide even more support and assistance to these victimized children. Extending the initial confinement period and allowing for up to two additional longer term confinements allows us to provide more extensive counseling and support to children who are leaving prostitution. This additional time also provides for a longer recovery period, helping to certainly and clearly stop the cycle of abuse in which they are held. Breaking free of prostitution is an extremely difficult process. It takes time, it takes patience, and it takes perseverance. These children need the time to begin making the transition. We need the time to help them to take the first step.

These proposed amendments also ensure that children's rights are protected. As soon as a child is confined, the child will be informed in writing as to why he or she is confined, the duration of the confinement, and the rights to legal representation. The child will also be given the telephone number of legal aid and the opportunity to make their call to a lawyer. In addition, each child will be told that he or she may request a court review of the confinement. The review must be heard at the court's earliest opportunity. These amendments ensure that while we are protecting them, their rights are provided for and are protected.

The abuse of our children through prostitution is an increasing and pressing social issue. We cannot simply say that it doesn't affect me, or it doesn't happen in my community. Quite simply, it would be naive to make these assumptions. Youth have clearly told us that they are young people at risk. Whether it's street prostitution in Calgary or exchanging sex for food and shelter in Fort McMurray, no one is safe from this crime. We know these children could live in urban Alberta. They could live in rural Alberta. They could come from virtually any socioeconomic background, religion, or culture. They could even be your children or my children or our grandchildren. It's a chilling thought, and that's why we introduced this revolutionary new legislation last year and now the improvements to it today. We need to take a stand on behalf of our children.

I urge you to continually support and keep firm. We're talking about the vulnerable lives of our young people, the loss of innocence that can never be regained, the loss of hope, trust, and dreams. Our children need and deserve every possible means of support we can offer to protect them from their personal violation or devastation. It is up to us to ensure that they get it. I urge everyone in the Assembly to support this bill and watch over and protect our children. We want to keep them safe.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hundreds of people that have

written and phoned, the people that have participated in the amendments. From the children in the safe houses to the police, to the street workers, to all of those people I just want to say a simple thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On Bill 29 there has been actually considerable debate, although the bill has moved very quickly through. It moved quickly because the opposition, as we did when the original child prostitution bill was in the Assembly a couple of years ago, acknowledged and recognized that this was a serious problem and a blight in terms of the social landscape of our province. It was an issue, in fact, that the Liberal opposition had pressed the government on since at least 1992, as various studies were done in the city of Calgary. There have been motions that have been debated in this Assembly focused fully or at least in part on the pernicious evil of child prostitution and child exploitation. I acknowledge again, as I think my colleagues readily have throughout the debate at different stages on Bill 29, the work done and the leadership provided by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

I might say, though, that as I listened to her comments just a moment ago, it was almost as if she hadn't been participating in the debate we've had on the bill. Her comments were very similar to what she said when the bill was first introduced at second reading. That's fine. I mean, I don't disagree that there has been feedback from frontline workers and police and services and agencies involved, but something has happened since this bill was first given first reading. We have, I think, been able to look at the bill that the government brought forward and recognize a couple of things.

The first one. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek I still don't hear acknowledge that the primary reason we're here with this bill is because a judge in the Calgary family and youth court found that some elements of the existing law offend some provisions in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That's why we're here, and that's why we're dealing with this bill. That's not to say that there aren't other things that were not directly in response to Judge Jordan's decision. Clearly that is the case, and there are a number of those elements.

I didn't hear the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek ever acknowledge that we, meaning the Legislature, got some tremendously useful instruction and advice from an experienced and knowledgeable family court judge doing what judges are supposed to do, which is applying the Charter. It's the one thing that puts some kind of brake on the powers of big, powerful governments, and on behalf of who? On behalf of individual citizens, because children have rights too. I think it's the position of my caucus that you don't assist children who have already experienced often huge personal challenges and injury of different kinds and different kinds of distress by then compounding the problems they've experienced by not treating them in a respectful fashion.

If I could just reflect a little bit on some of the debate that we've heard in the Assembly. We've recognized that the government has taken an extremely passive approach in an act which is absolutely activist and interventionist when it comes to the provision of legal assistance. The government has gone, then, in a 180-degree different direction and become amazingly passive. We've attempted during the course of the debate to suggest that this isn't good enough, and I remain of that view. Notwithstanding my respect for the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Children's Services, all three of whom I genuinely believe are motivated by trying to advantage children in distress – that's not an issue – I had difficulty with their reasoning in terms of not requiring

that every one of those children have not just the opportunity but active assistance to ensure that they could speak with legal counsel in terms of what the processes were under the act, in the bill we're dealing with now, and to offer some advice to children who are in distress, because that's why they're apprehended in the first place.

I continue to believe, Madam Speaker, that this is a significant weakness in the bill, and I guess that as there is an implementation and an application of the statute, we'll have to find out how it plays out. But I'm going to be encouraging MLAs to ask questions and to find out, and part of it may be a form of exit interviews of young women who go through this program. We'll find out how easy or how difficult it was for them to get legal assistance when they should have had it at an early stage.

4:50

Let's not forget that what we talk about here is taking children off the street and putting them in a safe place. We saw the other day the Justice minister talk about: well, my motivation, my government's motivation is to protect children; therefore, somehow that means we've got a different view of rights. I've already made my observation that that was a bit of a distressing thing for the top law guy in the province to say, because it seems to me that what the courts do is look at results and impacts, not simply a purpose. Judges only tend to look at the purpose and intent of legislation when there are areas of ambiguity, when there are things that require difficulty in construing and interpreting. As a legislator, as an Albertan I wouldn't want to rely on that means of trying to provide clarity around the bill.

The other thing that I notice with the bill – and we've talked about it in this Assembly; in fact, we talked about it just yesterday afternoon – is the very strange approach taken by the Minister of Children's Services, who says that for purposes of this child prostitute bill we simply say that the best interests test will govern, but we don't want to particularize that and give specific criteria that a court must look at in applying the best interests test. Yet the very same minister who stood in this Assembly and said it less than 24 hours ago also manages, implements, and enforces the Child Welfare Act. We saw yesterday that in section 2 of the Child Welfare Act they talk about best interests, and then they go on and particularize specific factors and criteria that the court must look at in making a decision under the Child Welfare Act. We have all the way from (a) through (m) of subsections that set out particulars.

So we're left with, I think, a very strange situation, with the government having a Child Welfare Act for the protection of thousands of children – and I look across at the minister now responsible for the mess that we see electrical deregulation has become. I remember when he was a minister of family and social services about 1993-95, in that time, and, you know, all that time there's been talk about children involved in prostitution and how we deal with them. I never, ever heard anybody say: we've made a huge problem with the Child Welfare Act; we're going to have to start whacking a great big section out of section 2 and take out the elements.

So we're left with a bit of a puzzle and a conundrum, Madam Speaker. To the extent that the opposition has tried to explore that and test it and try and find some coherent plan, reason, or rationale, we've been unsuccessful. So it will be Albertans, those who work with this bill and the act, the young people involved, the judges and the courts and that sort of thing, who are going to have to deal with this.

I also want to comment, as we're here, that the opposition has always felt that not only is this issue so important, but it's sufficiently important that it warrants some special attention, at minimum

on an annual basis, in the Legislative Assembly. We've attempted to work with government and certainly to propose, Madam Speaker, an opportunity that would require an annual report on the application of this statute as it will be amended soon, because we thought it was important that MLAs at least one time every year have to confront the reality that child prostitution continues on the streets of our communities. Also, we would be challenged implicitly every year to ensure that we've got the appropriation of resources and dollars and programs to ameliorate this pernicious evil in our province.

We weren't successful in persuading the government of that. We've heard some talk that there are ongoing reviews and that something may change down the road. But once again we have a government that will move with alacrity when it seems to be fashionable to do that, yet when there are other meritorious needs that require important attention, the government seems to lose its resolve or its focus or its commitment.

The other comment I'd make – and I loop back to something I said at second reading. You know, I try to understand the logic and the plan that the government had in dealing with this bill. After Judge Jordan rendered her decision in the summer of 2000, I recall the Leader of the Official Opposition challenging the Premier to come back into this Legislature in late August, September and rewrite the bill, taking into consideration the advice and direction that we've got from a judge, applying sections 7, 8, and 10 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The government chose not to take that advice. Instead, they did something very peculiar. They launched not an appeal of the decision but a judicial review application. In fact, this is so rare that when somebody first asked me about it, I said that there must be some mistake. I'd forgotten that there was such a provision in the Criminal Code. Now, maybe that speaks more to my lack of knowledge, but it's a curious, curious route for the government to have gone.

We don't yet have the decision from Justice Rooke of the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta. While we're at third reading, let's recognize, assuming we pass this bill today, that we may yet have a superior court judge, Justice Rooke, telling us that this doesn't pass muster, that this doesn't go far enough. And do you know what, Madam Speaker? We're then going to be in a position where the government's going to bring in a third attempt to sort of patch this thing up. [interjection] Well, I still prefer the route that was mapped out and promoted by the Leader of the Official Opposition. I think that as we look at the uncertainty – and I'd go further and say that it's been a long time since I've argued a case in court, but it seems to me that some counsel are going to jump on the fact that with this bill I'm not sure that we've taken adequate protection. I'm not sure that we've gone far enough in the area to make this act genuinely Charter-proof, and I believe that's part of our job here.

You know, this government has sort of a *modus operandi* that what we do is we pass what are often clearly deficient laws. At least from the perspective of most of us in opposition we think they're clearly deficient. Then what happens is that it's almost as if the government is setting this up. There's some sort of Rod Love type sitting near, giving government some advice on terms of how to do this thing. So what happens is that you get a judgment from the court, and then of course you get the chorus of backbenchers saying – the Minister of Justice wouldn't say this – “You've got to invoke section 33 of the Charter. That Charter is the problem. If we can just use the notwithstanding clause, we'll hit this gnat over the head with our sledgehammer and be done with it.”

Well, you know, we saw in last night's election result, I'd like to think, a clear signal that Canadians understand that it's not the sledgehammer to eliminate the gnat, that they expect legislators to

have specific targeted programs and responses to specific issues and challenges.

Madam Speaker, my time is almost at an end. I know there are some other people who want to speak to it. I'd make the observation, though, that the opposition has been in a bit of a conundrum on this bill also from a very practical basis. The bill came in last week, and as we always do, we have sent out copies of the bill to people in the province that we think are interested and would have good advice for us and good information. As you'll appreciate, very few people and certainly not very many nonprofit organizations work on the basis of the kind of turnaround that's required with the speed of bills that move through the Assembly.

5:00

So the conundrum is this. As an opposition do you drag the debate out so that the Elizabeth Fry Society in Calgary and their advocacy group, which is specifically studying teen prostitution, has a chance to register their comments on the bill? Do you wait until the Alberta Association of Social Workers tell us what they think? Well, if we do that, the risk is that we finish the fall session and the bill is left outstanding. As an opposition we didn't think that was a risk we wanted to put the children on the streets to, so that's why we agreed to co-operate to move the thing through.

MRS. FORSYTH: Vote against it if you don't agree with it.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, the suggestion was made that I should vote against it if I don't agree with the bill. I would have thought that in the course of debate we had made it abundantly clear we supported the principle of the bill. We're prepared to join with members on all sides of the Assembly to ensure children are safe, but if the suggestion is that it's all or nothing, that somehow government has found a means of perfecting legislation where in every single bill they bring forward they have the absolute perfect model, well, that has not been my experience. In the nine years that I have been in this Assembly, that has not been my experience at all.

So I think that somewhere along the way we have to learn that opposition plays a role here, and part of the job of opposition is to point out what we think are weaknesses. Our perspective – and I can't speak for all of my colleagues, but I don't think most of my colleagues view things as black and white and bad or good. We recognize that you can have a good purpose in a bill and that the bill can still be flawed. Notwithstanding the comments from the sponsor of the bill, we continue to believe that there's a role to play to try and improve legislation. I'm sorry, Member for Calgary Fish-Creek, through the Speaker. If she thinks this is the perfect bill, then I don't think she has been in the Legislature listening to some of the debate that has gone on in the last couple of days.

You know, we may agree to disagree on this. It will be for others to judge who's right and so on, but I do expect that there has to be some understanding that this bill is still, in my view, flawed. It is not flawed to the point where I'd recommend as the Justice critic that we vote against it, but my prediction is and I guess my expectation is that this bill is going to be back in front of the Legislature again. It's going to come back in. I think if members don't like hearing constructive suggestions or that at least are offered in a constructive spirit from the opposition and want to push on ahead because they think they've got the ultimate bill, well, recognize there may be a risk we run that we have to do it over again another time.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I'm glad to be able to have the opportunity to join in the debate on third reading on Bill 29, because I didn't get as many opportunities to speak on this as I had wanted to. It has been an interesting journey watching this bill go through because I think there was a genuine desire on behalf of the sponsor of the bill to identify a problem and to attempt to address part of that problem. I hope it's clear to everyone in here that we're certainly not addressing the entire problem of prostitution or, more specifically, prostitution involving children. This is taking a small chunk out of the side of it and attempting to try and do something.

The idea of the apprehension of children is fine. You know, everyone is allowed their day in court. Everybody needs their opportunity to say that there's been a mistake made here or whatever they want to say to the courts. Their access to that process is important, and it wasn't incorporated in the original act. Indeed the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has spoken at length about Judge Jordan's ruling on the act and the need to bring it back into this Legislature and put amendments through that would in fact make it comply and be acceptable under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I think what's interesting about this is that at the time we were first debating this, all of these issues were brought forward. In particular, I remember the former Member for Edmonton-Norwood raising all of these points. That's part of my frustration with this process in here. There's a lot of talk about how boring it is for the government members to listen to the opposition, but in fact a lot of times we know what we're talking about and the suggestions we're bringing forward are valid and they're researched and they're backed up and supported by members of the community. I wish that we could have done this right the first time, but we did do it right the second time – or almost right. I'll get to that.

So we have, through these amendments, now addressed the need for the access to the judicial system. In reading the *Hansard*, one of the things that sprung forward to me was: well, yes, once a young person has been apprehended, they'll be told in writing why they've been apprehended, and then they'll be told in writing that they or the lawyer could access the courts if they wanted to. I thought: we're assuming a lot of things here like there's literacy and that there's literacy in the English language. In reading back through the *Hansard*, the Minister of Children's Services in fact answered this question and said: well, no.

When a police officer apprehends a child, the officer immediately explains why the child was apprehended and [then] tells the child that he or she has a right to a lawyer.

So as soon as the child is apprehended, they're told about it. When I read that, I thought: there are a lot of assumptions being made here. I mean, if you have a child, a young person that's working as a child prostitute, a policeman is not your friend. A policeman is going to arrest you, and then you're in trouble. So to assume that a young person who's now been apprehended by a police officer is going to turn to them and go: right; I'd like to take advantage of that offer of a lawyer, please . . . I could be wrong. I don't have a lot of experience. I have no experience in this business, but it strikes me that, you know, a kid is just going to keep their mouth shut and go along with it and try not to call any more attention to themselves.

I know we're in third reading and we're talking about the effect of the bill, but I sure wish that this suggestion had been taken. Maybe I do hope that we in fact have to come back and put that into the bill later. It's such an easy thing to deal with. I sometimes question the intransigence of the members opposite. It just seems they don't want to take the idea because it came from this side. That shouldn't be what this Legislative Assembly is about.

Now, I had raised the question about the literacy. The Minister of Children's Services seems to be addressing that question by saying that if the child was under the influence of drugs or alcohol and incapable of understanding the information, the worker is expected to give the information to the child again as soon as the child is capable of understanding it. So I'm assuming that they're trying to deal with this. But, you know, in the couple of experiences I've had in dealing with someone who was illiterate, they were pretty darn clever about not showing that. So we've got high expectations of these workers being able to figure out that the kid in fact couldn't comprehend what was written on that piece of paper and be able to explain it to them. I just think it would have been so much more straightforward and effective to have had the lawyer on-site, right there, offering those services, but it doesn't sound like it's going to happen this time.

5:10

One of the other issues that was brought forward by members of the opposition was defining the best interests of the child, and there was a list of criteria that was brought forward. I notice again that the minister responded by saying, "When you fetter any formula with additional criteria, you run the risk of not anticipating the criteria that would fit a very specific case." Well, I'm afraid the Auditor General would disagree. I mean, if you're going to have something, you need to have criteria defining whatever that means, because we could have a long and vigorous debate in this Assembly about what everyone's interpretation of best interest is. I think there are many differing views of what best interest is. I think eradication of poverty would be in the best interests of children. I think education would be in the best interests of children. I think programs targeted at societal acceptance of prostitution would be in the best interests of children, but that doesn't seem to be incorporated in this piece of legislation.

So why wouldn't you accept the criteria against which you can plan and measure the way you're interpreting this or whether you're going about it properly? To just throw it out there as best interests of the child strikes me as not as efficient as it could have been. I wonder if we aren't going to have more children fall through the cracks because of that, because we've got different views of what best interest is. You know, everybody's got a different view of what best interest is, and if you're trying to be specific about programs and services that are being offered – anyway, the amendment didn't pass, so I'll move on.

The effect of this bill is it does allow the apprehension. With the amendments now it's incorporating the suggestions from the courts to make it compliant with the Charter and the Constitution. I also note that there was response to the workers who have actually been working with the program around longer times in which the young person could stay in care and have access to counseling, which I think is a great idea, but we didn't go for the gold here. We didn't go for the blue ribbon, and I guess there are just no Olympic champs here that really wanted to make this an outstanding piece of legislation. I've already talked about the criteria, and I've talked about the lawyer.

The other thing that I think should have been done – and it's already been pointed out by my colleagues that this in fact would have been helping us comply with a number of other suggestions from other areas – is to have the Children's Advocate involved with this program and being able to access that and being able to report directly to the Legislative Assembly on it.

My compliments to the sponsoring member. I know it isn't easy to follow legislation through and get it through all of the various committees that approve bills like this and get it as far as she has.

So points for tenacity on that one.

We all know in this Assembly it is addressing a very small part of what is troubling children today and the barriers that children today are facing. We're all struggling when we read in the newspaper or see on the news that a child has hurt another child or there's been violence used in the schools or kids have been beat up outside of school. I mean, there are a lot of issues. What's in the news right now are those Inuit children and the gas sniffing. We think: how did this get so out of control? I had one guy say to me: well, where's the responsibility of the parents in all of this? Well, I think for any of us that really look at it, the parents are probably in just as much trouble, and part of what's happened to the young people is that they haven't had the guidance they needed.

The temptation there is to punish the parents and somehow just leave the kid out there, but in this case the legislation has tried to I think go as close to the heart of it as they can. We haven't been terribly effective in actually dealing with the johns. We haven't been terribly effective in dealing with societal acceptance of prostitution. But this was an attempt to deal with what could be dealt with or what was doable, I guess is another way to put it. I think it's important that you do tackle that legislation or tackle those programs that are doable, or we would never move forward in waiting for it all to be perfect, but that's not going to stop me as an opposition member from continuing to lobby for improvements in the bill. That's certainly what I've attempted to do today.

I have been impressed to see how quickly the bill has moved through the stages of readings, and I think that that is a compliment to everyone in the Assembly and is showing everyone's dedication to this issue. It's actually quite speedy passage, and I'm glad to see that. It has certainly been all parties pulling together on this one.

Those are the comments that I wanted to bring up in third reading. I appreciate the opportunity to speak at this stage of the bill. I'll be happy to see the passage of the bill and the implementation of it. Perhaps there's a way when the government is actually putting this amending bill into place to include some of the suggestions that have been raised by the opposition and indeed were put forward as our amendments, because I think they still are really good ideas and worthy of consideration.

With that, I will let the floor go. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to take a brief opportunity to comment on Bill 29 in third reading. Bill 29 is a very important bill because this government has had the objective right from the time when the PCHIP legislation was introduced as Bill 1 in a previous session of protecting children who are at risk, protecting children who are being exploited by perverts, protecting children who are engaged in activity which is demonstrably – and I think everyone would agree – not good for their health, not good for their well-being, and leaves them in a position where they have no self-respect.

It provides an opportunity for street teams working with these children to take these children off the street, out of the hands of the people who are exploiting them and into safe houses, into safe places where they can get a decent meal, get an opportunity to get some rest, and get an opportunity to get some counseling which will perhaps turn their lives around.

Now, we've had the opportunity, partially as a result of a case going before the courts and a decision of the courts, to review the act in its operation and work with the people who are in the front line of

this operation working with these unfortunate children and get feedback from them as to how the act can be strengthened so that those people can have a better opportunity to deal with these children and have a better opportunity to have an effect at changing those children's lives. That's what Bill 29 is all about, Madam Speaker. No more, no less.

It's an opportunity upon an early review of the operation of the act, which by accounts from all of the partners that have been involved – and I was at a youth justice forum at St. Thomas More church not a week ago and heard a sergeant with the Edmonton city police force describe to that forum, to the kids that were involved there and the parents that were involved there, what a good piece of legislation the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act is, what a useful tool it is in the hands of all the caregivers, all the people who cared on the street who were working together in a co-operative fashion and how it brought them together in a co-operative fashion and what a useful tool it was in their hands in order to be able to deal with this unfortunate situation where children are being preyed upon. So I was very pleased when I heard that description.

I was very pleased when I was able to attend with the Minister of Children's Services a meeting that we held in August with people from all aspects of the implementation and use of this tool as to what a good act it had been, what a useful piece of legislation it had been for those people in their attempt to take these unfortunate children off the street and give them the opportunity for a better life.

5:20

So I am very pleased that we're able to bring forward the amendments to that act in Bill 29 to make that act even stronger with the benefit of the input from those people in terms of how we can make it better. It is stronger by having the five-day period instead of 72 hours. I think everyone acknowledges that in 72 hours sometimes you barely have the opportunity to have the child sober up, have a good meal, have a good sleep. There's very little time left to provide counseling or to intervene in any way, to provide the child with guidance and an opportunity to move into counseling, to move into some other form of treatment, those good opportunities.

MR. DICKSON: Or phone a lawyer.

MR. HANCOCK: The Opposition House Leader says: or phone a lawyer. That's where I think we get off track in this whole discussion. Yes, children have rights, and in this province we're very conscious of rights that children have. But we're also very conscious of the need for parental responsibility and the need for parents, in this case parents in the form of government, to provide guidance, to provide help, to assist when children go astray, to assist when other people are abusing children. That's what this act is all about. It's society providing that parental authority to help provide guidance to children in need and to help protect those children from people who are abusing them.

So this act has been a very useful tool, and the amendments that are being brought forward in this act are going to make it even stronger.

Now, there have been comments made that perhaps we're not going far enough, that in fact we're not reaching for the gold medal. Quite frankly, Madam Speaker, I think the assumption has been made that because one member of the court makes a pronouncement, that's the be-all and end-all of the issue. I prefer the interpretation which suggests that there is an interim discussion between the courts and the Legislature on this whole question of rights and the balance of rights and how those rights should be balanced.

We've made a very sincere attempt, I believe, to meet the

suggestions that were made about the need for children to have the opportunity to have that confinement reviewed by the courts if they feel their confinement is inappropriate. But we don't want to take this to the stage where children are being treated like criminals, where every child who's apprehended and confined needs to be taken before the courts when they don't need to be taken before the courts and in fact they don't want to be taken before the courts.

What many of these children need, from the experiences that we've heard from street teams and from people who are working with these kids, what many of these children really want is an opportunity to get out of the hands of their abusers, an opportunity to get that treatment. They don't want to be going to court. They don't want the interaction with the court. They want the help that's being proffered. Those that do, have that opportunity available to them, and that's the important part. That's where their rights are protected. We don't need to codify in law some fancy process whereby everybody has to have something before their rights are protected. Their rights are protected in this act. That's what was called for. That's what's here.

There was also a reflection in earlier debate about section 1. One can always go back and determine whether or not a case has been appropriately argued before the courts. I tend not to second-guess counsel in court as to strategies that they use when they argue cases. I think the counsel that we had in putting this case before the court, both in terms of the initial situation and in terms of the review process, put a very, very able argument forward. I think the judge perhaps did much in obiter which was not particularly necessary, but it was interesting, and I think we've made every attempt to take those comments into account in drafting this amendment.

What we're attempting to do is to meet the needs of the Charter, meet the needs of children's rights in an honest and proactive manner, in a manner which will allow the people who are on the streets trying to help kids get out of the hands of people who are abusing them and to get the help that they need to have the tools that are necessary. If that requires us to come back time after time after time to improve the act, then that's what we as legislators should do, and we shouldn't be ashamed of it. We shouldn't think it's a bad thing. Laws are not things that you design and you put in a crystal case and say: "There. That's done." Laws are things which are an iterative process, that you improve as time goes on, that you make changes and amendments to as they're required. We have no need to be ashamed of that process. That is the process that we're elected to engage in, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity at third reading to make some comments about the implications of Bill 29, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000. I'd like to go back to some comments I made when I spoke to the bill at second reading, and that's to start with the proposition that if the problem of child prostitution is truly to be addressed, it's going to take much more than Bill 29. Child prostitution exists in our community because there are some members of the community that believe it's acceptable, and that's the only reason it exists. There are some people across this province who believe that having children ply part of the sex trade is an acceptable thing to have happen.

Certainly a law such as Bill 29 can rescue some of those youngsters from an immediate situation, but I don't think that in any way we should fool ourselves that it handles the problem or takes care of the problem. That's one of my fears, that having passed this bill,

we'll leave this Assembly, and there will be those who feel that the problem has been dealt with.

I was reading some comments by Etzioni about the relationship between moral regeneration and legislation. He was trying to tease out a balance, and I think he came up at the end with a balance that said that what really has to change is the moral order. Laws can help that move along, but overwhelmingly if a problem is to be addressed, it's going to be because public morals have changed, the public position, the public acceptance on a particular issue has changed.

There are a number of examples that we have seen in recent times, Madam Speaker. The whole business of drunk driving. When I grew up, the slogan was: have one for the road. It was quite acceptable that you would drink, and in particular if you were male, it was acceptable that you would drink. Well, that's changed quite dramatically now, the slogan now being: friends don't let friends

drink. I think that captures the difference in public attitudes and our stance towards drinking in our society.

I think it's going to have to be a change of the same magnitude and probably even more to change the public attitude towards prostitution. It is abhorred by a large majority of the population, but still it exists, and it only exists because there are people in the community who think it's acceptable.

I go back to Etzioni. He tried to balance off the difference between law enforcement and moral voice. He said that law enforcement, if he was going to come up with a measure, would account for about 30 percent of any change, but 70 percent, the overwhelming percent of any kind of change like this, has to be because moral voices have been raised.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 28, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/11/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 29

Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned November 28: Dr. Massey speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to continue comments on the implications of Bill 29. I'd like to pick up where I left off in terms of the notion that Bill 29 is not going to be the solution to child prostitution. It'll help in terms of temporarily getting these youngsters off the street and trying to get them started in the right direction. I think we all applaud that bill for that, but I think we would have to be very careful, as I said before, that we don't leave this Assembly smug in the notion that we have actually solved the problem.

I think a number of writers and a number of authors have talked about the problem, and one notion is that we have to start and create a community where children don't fall into prostitution or aren't leading lives that are less than we would wish for them. We have to blame ourselves I think, Mr. Speaker, for much of what has happened.

I was revisiting *The Growing Gap*, a report on the growing inequality between the rich and poor in Canada. The report is rich with information on what's happened to families in our country, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to just touch on four or five of the items from the report. They make the comment, for instance, that the rich are richer in our country. In 1973 the richest 10 percent of the families with children under 18 made 21 times more than the poorest 10 percent of the families, yet by 1996 the richest 10 percent of the families made 314 times more than the poorest 10 percent of the families.

The middle class has been shrinking, Mr. Speaker. In 1973 60 percent of families with children under 18 earned between \$24,500 and \$65,000. By 1996 that middle class had shrunk, and only 44 percent of families with dependant children made between \$24,500 and \$65,000. Most of the change has happened to the middle class. More importantly in terms of this particular bill women at work have increased, and families have increasingly had to rely on more than one income to get by. Two-thirds of mothers with children under three are in the labour force compared to one-third a generation ago. That's a marked change in family lives, and the absence of those mothers has to have an effect.

The report goes on to make some observations about the economy that we've created and the whole notion of a trickle-down policy, which had been so widely adopted, where the wealthy accumulate more and more in the belief that they'll make the investments that will eventually trickle down and make some benefits for people who are not so well off. These are parts of the kind of community, the milieu we're creating and into which we insert Bill 29.

One of the other observations they make talks about taxing and

how the tax burden has shifted in the country, the notion that there's been a marked change in who pays the bills from the corporate income tax payer to the personal income tax system. For example, the corporate contributions to paying for Canada represented 25 percent of all federal revenue in 1955. In 1973 they were at 17 percent, and in 1996 they accounted for only 12 percent of federal revenues, so a marked shift and that burden being picked up more and more by middle-class and lower income earners.

I guess the argument I'm trying to make, Mr. Speaker, is that we are responsible for creating the kinds of communities in which our children are raised and live, and some of the things we do are counterproductive in terms of making sure that child prostitution cannot flourish. If those children were in homes that fostered the kinds of values we would like all our children to have, we wouldn't have this law before us.

A final point, Mr. Speaker, is the whole notion of the inconsistencies, and I think those inconsistencies were pointed out by previous speakers on this bill. If you look at this bill and then compare it to some of the provisions in the Child Welfare Act, there doesn't seem to be a lot of consistency, and as other speakers have indicated, I suspect we'll be back here in the future making changes to the act so that it is more consistent with the ones we find in the Child Welfare Act.

In spite of the announcement the other day of additional funding, I'm concerned that the needed resources will be in place for this program to grow and to do the job that we expect of it. I think we all recognize that taking these children off the street is an emergency action, but that momentary action has to be part of a long-term plan to make sure that these children get the support and have the resources so that they are not led back into those conditions on the street.

So I think that with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would support the bill and conclude my remarks. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening and get an opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill 29. When the court case became public news this past summer regarding family court judge Karen Jordan in Calgary, my first response was that I was certainly part of the problem with this legislation because I was a member of this Assembly. I think that in some way all of us, all hon. members regardless of which side of the House they're on, are responsible for certainly this series of amendments.

There were certainly cautions from this side of the Assembly on whether or not the whole bill, the original bill, Bill 1 from the spring session of 1998, in effect would survive a court case and a Charter challenge. We all know that the Charter of Rights had been violated, Mr. Speaker, section 7 certainly – I won't go into detail – and section 8, where "everyone has the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure." We failed in the original Bill 1 to ensure that this had been looked at. So we all have to have an acceptance of the responsibility for this. We just can't get angry with the judge, in this case Judge Jordan, and bash the judiciary. It just is not appropriate. We cannot express outrage or indignation and use any means to condemn the family court judge's decision.

8:10

If we want to be responsible, Mr. Speaker – and I believe hon. members on this side of the House were responsible when we called on the government to reconvene the Legislative Assembly in September to deal with these changes immediately, but all members

of the House realize and Albertans do as well that this idea was refused or it was dismissed, and instead we embarked in the province on an application for a judicial review through Justice Rooke of the Court of Queen's Bench. I think this decision has yet to be delivered.

However, when we look at this problem, Mr. Speaker, again I have to say that the only people to blame are ourselves. Sometimes we're in a hurry to leave this Assembly. Now, I'm not talking about this bill, originally Bill 1, and the use of closure, but perhaps this is a lesson for all of us that we should not be hasty in our decisions in this Assembly. We should have a good look at every piece of legislation, and when an hon. member stands up, regardless of what side of the House they're on, and expresses a caution in debate, well, perhaps we should listen more seriously.

Now, the whole idea, Mr. Speaker, of Bill 1 certainly is sound, and there's not an hon. member of this Assembly that would tolerate any form of child abuse. That certainly would include the sexual exploitation of teen prostitutes. Now, I know that everyone worked together in 1998 to pass this law, and that's why, as I said before, we have to accept some responsibility for revisiting this. I am willing and my colleagues are willing, certainly the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo with his very sound amendments, which I was disappointed weren't added to this bill, to work to improve this bill. But we have to respect the role of the courts in protecting the rights of children.

What we have is a kind of dialogue on this bill between the Legislature and the courts. I know there are some hon. members of this House that have different views than I on the role of the courts, but it is up to our government to respect the very clear direction we get from the court and make the appropriate modification of a law that has been found in this case to be deficient.

Now, I heard, particularly on radio programs, where the original Bill 1 had removed child prostitution from the streets. It was removed visually, I should say, from the streets of Edmonton and Calgary and our bigger centres, but where did it go? Was it just removed from view? Out of sight, out of mind, so to speak. I certainly hope this is not the case.

This spring I recall talking to the hon. Minister of Justice during the Justice estimates about massage parlours and whether the province was going to do anything to regulate them. The hon. minister in due time – and I'm grateful for his response on this – informed me: no; it is a municipal jurisdiction. I cannot understand, for the life of me, why we're so keen on this, but another piece of the problem is the massage parlours, because I don't believe there's any regulation to police exactly who is working in there, what they're doing, and what age they are.

Now, I've conducted some research on this, Mr. Speaker. When you look at the licensing requirements of the municipalities – let's say Calgary and let's say Edmonton, and we'll use as an example also St. Albert – all three municipalities are different. The licensing course that you have to take in Edmonton is different than the one in St. Albert, and it's different in the hours that you need before you can get your licence. Calgary has no licensing requirements, as I understand. You can just walk in and have employment in a massage parlour.

Now, one part of the requirement was that you had to be over 18. I asked who was policing this. No one, Mr. Speaker, could answer. No one is doing this. I'm concerned that with their removal off the street, which is a very, very good idea, these same young prostitutes are winding up plying their trade, so to speak, behind closed doors in the massage parlours. I think that if we're serious about this – and I know we are – we have to encourage the government to also look at this as a provincewide problem, because each municipality can set up their own regulations, and they have.

Now, we have to look at this in the problem of teenage prostitution. The police forces across this province do not have the resources. They simply do not have the resources to go in and check to see who is working in these establishments and check even to see if it's a legal or an illegal activity. They just don't have the resources. If we have shifted from public view this whole trade, I would be very, very disappointed.

We need to have procedural safeguards that in no way prevent the apprehension of young women, but we at the same time have to realize that we have a responsibility. We have a responsibility to parents and their children. We also have a responsibility to the neighbourhoods, regardless of which city it's in in this province, because everyone deserves to grow up or to live in a neighbourhood where they can peacefully go about their business. This is a very difficult and vexing problem.

Now, where does the solution lie? I would hope that very quickly the government has a look at the role of these massage parlours and the role that perhaps – and I hope I'm wrong – underage prostitutes play in them and what sort of employment is going on there. This is a problem across the province. I can only hope that the hon. Minister of Justice will have another look at this, because when I asked about this before, I was not satisfied, of course, with the answers that I received. When we think of the young people of this province, we don't usually think of young girls being apprehended and placed under care, whether it be of a social worker or whether it be a police officer. We don't think of that, but unfortunately it happens.

8:20

Summing up my remarks this evening, I would like to say that this amendment, this Bill 29, this Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, should serve as a warning to all hon. members of this Assembly that perhaps we're not being as keen in our duties as we think we are. Some hon. members may get upset whenever the judiciary questions legislation. Well, in this case I would have to say: too bad if Members of the Legislative Assembly had their feelings hurt whenever this decision came about. I would encourage all members to in the future take their time and have another look.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise at third reading to speak to Bill 29. We've had a significant amount of debate thus far on this bill, and we've had a series of government announcements relative to the amendments proposed and the new funding that's to be provided.

It's quite extraordinary in many respects that we've focused the amount of resources and energies and commitments on an issue which demographically, I would say, affects somewhere in the neighbourhood of 500 or less children in the province. In fact, I may be significantly over in my estimate. In contrast we had on average last year approximately 12,000 children in the care of this government in some type of status – PGO, TGO – and we have yet to see the type of focused attention placed on those children's well-being that seems to be orientated towards the protection of children that are involved in prostitution.

I have raised at earlier points in the debate my concerns that this bill doesn't really address the root causes. In fact, last evening I spoke about some of the ways in which we could utilize this bill beyond a justice sense if we were truly concerned about addressing and preventing young women from becoming prostitutes. The bill

doesn't really embody that intent, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, but I have come across a piece of legislation that in fact does.

I was quite impressed by the statute that was created this year also in British Columbia entitled the Secure Care Act. Interestingly enough, the Secure Care Act in B.C. does propose to address the same issue as Bill 29. It does target prostitution, but it also is designed to address other forms of self-harm, such as severe drug addiction, it could be suicide, or other situations where a child or youth is placing themselves at risk. The act in B.C. creates an independent secure care board and a director of secure care within the Ministry for Children and Families. The ministry there committed over \$10 million to support a range of intervention after care and secure care services.

Now, I got looking at the specifics of the bill, and it occurred to me that had we had the foresight to design our bill in such a manner, this type of legislation could have in fact addressed and protected a great deal more children, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to speak to a document that I obtained through freedom of information this year. In essence, the information is a summary of deaths of children in the care of child welfare from 1994 to March of 2000. We had a total of 108 children die during that period of time while they were in some form of government protection. This includes foster care, parental care, residential care, extended family, or independent living. A total of 108. Of those, Mr. Speaker, there were a number of children who went through a large number of placements during their course of time in care. Unfortunately, the records don't show what the cause of death was, but it seems to me that given the reality that the children died and if we exclude those who died from a medical condition, deaths that were anticipated, it is my belief that there would still be a significant number of children who perhaps in this situation could have benefited from a secure care type of legislation.

One child, in particular, in the document had a total of 49 placements from 1994 to 1998, a total of 49 placements. So in four years' time the child was placed 49 times. You've got to wonder . . .

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Yes. Mr. Speaker, we're in third reading of a bill, as I understand it, and . . .

THE SPEAKER: You're rising, sir, on a point of something?

Point of Order Relevance

MR. HERARD: Yes. Relevance, *Beauchesne* 459. It seems to me that when we're dealing in third reading with a bill, we're dealing with what has been already debated in principle, has been amended or not amended. We are dealing with what we've got before us as a result of the deliberation of this House. I'm listening to this discussion that the hon. member is bringing up, and I find no relevance whatsoever to what's between the first page and the last page of the bill that we're dealing with. You know, I think I've heard this particular speech before on some other occasion. At least, it sounds familiar to me. But it certainly isn't relevant to what we're doing here.

MRS. SLOAN: I think, Mr. Speaker, I would accept that as some points of clarification. I'm most certainly speaking of the secure treatment of children. The bill before us speaks to confinement of children that are practising dangerous activities. I believe that it's prudent as legislators that all points of debate contemplate other statutory alternatives that are available to us in this country to guide us in making the best form of legislation possible.

8:30

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before the House is Bill 29, Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000. Let us continue on that bill.

Debate Continued

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. I was referring to the contrast between Bill 29 and the Secure Care Act of British Columbia. One of the other significant differences in relation to this is that in the B.C. act a parent can in fact identify a child and request that the child be placed in secure treatment. In my reading of Bill 29 it doesn't appear that a parent has that ability, Mr. Speaker.

I would also reference that in my review of fatality inquiry recommendations that have been made about the deaths of children in care over the course of the last 10 years, time and time again throughout these fatality inquiries judges have prompted legislators to look at the critical shortage of secure treatment beds for children and youth in Alberta. There have been some very compelling examples, even from the hon. member's own constituency and the city in which he resides. In 1997 a young man by the name of Isaac Mercer died by hanging himself. He was in the care of government. He had been placed in Hull Home. In the fatality inquiry arising from his death, the judge pointed out that there was a need for more attention to be paid to the placement of children, in hand with numerous other recommendations relative to that child's care and the gaps in it.

Olivia Calfrope was another where, again, had there been an appropriate placement for her in secure treatment, it was believed she would not have been successful in overdosing on morphine and, as a result, committing suicide at the age of 15. My point, Mr. Speaker, is that we could be doing so much more than what we're here tonight debating. There is, albeit, some political appeal in addressing the issue of prostitution. It's an occupation, as much as we might like to discount it or as distasteful as it is to us. It has been upon this Earth for some generations. It is laudable that the government is going to attempt to curtail prostitution, at least when it involves minors, but in that respect I think we could be doing much more.

Just to summarize and complete my comments on the B.C. legislation. Under that authority young people will be able to be detained for up to 72 hours in a secure care facility without board approval. The child or youth will be able to be referred to the director of secure care by police, the Ministry for Children and Families, family or friends, and community service providers. Inherent in that act they have already incorporated in that province safeguards to ensure the protection of the rights of young people and guarantee that the child is aware of their rights: aware of the right to legal counsel and the right to express their views. There's also inherent in that act the provision for the child to appeal. I think that's really the summary of my point with respect to that bill this evening.

Just to continue on the point of secure treatment, we know there has been for some years a secure treatment shortage in this province, and I referenced that earlier. The question now is: where is the ministry planning to detain these young women? There's been an expressed concern about not placing women who are partially rehabilitated with young women who are being taken off the street. I would suspect there is probably a desire to not mix these young women with other young women who may be vulnerable to falling into the same trap. So I guess I will be looking for further information about how in fact we're going to, from a facility standpoint, accommodate these children.

If in fact we're willing to make that accommodation, then let's

also make the accommodation for other young people that require secure treatment and are in the care of child welfare. As was referenced in a fatality inquiry, it's been common practice for social workers in child welfare to not designate the child as being in need of secure treatment simply because they know the reality is that there is not an adequate amount of beds and therefore there's no point in making that notation in the records.

If we say that as a standard we're going to provide for a high level of intervention, secure treatment, really the best we can provide for minors who are engaged in prostitution, then let us set that same standard for other children who are suicidal, who suffer from mental illness. Let's deal with the waiting lists we have in this province for children's mental health services. They have existed for at least two years, and I know there's some angst about these issues being repeatedly raised, but when they're not addressed, Mr. Speaker, what alternative do we have on this side of the House?

Really, if you will, it's the responsibility of governing. Right from the very onset when the government regionalized child welfare, they said that they were going to implement provincial standards in an accountability framework for child welfare, and this particular act will fall under that. Now, we don't see within the articles of Bill 29 any reference to that accountability framework, nor do we see any reference to the standard of accommodation. This bill is simply written as – well, how should I say it? It's primarily for justice purposes in many respects. The clientele are the clientele of child welfare, but the application, the implementation of this bill is largely going to be in the hands of the justice system.

What I don't find in this bill, which is what causes me concern this evening, is what child welfare is going to be doing relative to the treatment of these young women. There are going to be, unquestionably, issues of mental health. There most likely will be histories of these clients being sexually abused or having a history of violence in the home which has prompted them to leave home and enter this dangerous activity. So however we choose to implement the bill and however the treatment facilities are enacted, these young women are going to need services from other ministries of the Crown.

8:40

You know, this is the complexity of governing. You can write a bill that will perhaps dot all the i's and cross all the t's in a justice sense, and politically perhaps it may take you some miles because you'll be able to say that we did something about child prostitution, but behind the door it's not so easy for the public to see exactly how these victims are going to be cared for by government. The minister has made an announcement, made an announcement last week in fact, about the reinvestment of moneys into child welfare, and that's very promising and long overdue. I didn't hear, though, in there that we were going to hire and train staff to specifically deal with the care of children who fall under the confines of Bill 29.

The child welfare caseload growth report, which was completed in August 2000, this year, examined very, very closely the reasons why the child welfare caseload has grown to its highest level, on average 12,000 children in the care of government last year, the highest in the province's history. It cited a number of reasons, Mr. Speaker, which I won't be able to go through tonight, but one of the key areas that was focused on in this report was about the staff in the child welfare system. The authors went through in quite significant detail, which is most readily available to government members, that we have a workforce within the child welfare sector that is significantly undertrained. Alberta is the only province in the country that hires child welfare staff with less than a bachelor of social work. In addition to that, our turnover rate for staff is very high. Since 1993 over 900 child welfare workers have terminated or transferred out of

their position while combined with the hiring of new staff to respond to growing caseloads, recruiting to the vacated positions results in a chronic significant inexperience on the front line.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, there are no numbers available about staff working for First Nations agencies, and that raises another issue relative to the treatment of clients under Bill 29 who are aboriginal. Will the government in fact be planning to uphold their commitment to allow for the provision of services by First Nations communities to their own children who are in need of the care of child welfare? Will that commitment apply to the application of Bill 29? I am not sure.

I regret that my time is over, Mr. Speaker. I had a great deal more to say.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise this evening and speak to Bill 29, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000. I would like to make a few comments and a few observations in regards to this bill.

Of course, what we are dealing with here is an issue in society that's felt by all people. It's an issue that most people in society have very strong views about. This, of course, is about children prostituting themselves. This is something that the majority of parents certainly do take as a very, very serious issue. Not only parents but society as a whole realizes the awesome responsibility we have to protect children.

We're here at this particular time debating Bill 29 primarily because in Bill 1 there were a number of shortfalls, and these were pointed out in a ruling by Judge Karen Jordan. Now, when Bill 1 was introduced, certainly everybody was happy. We cheered. We thought we had much more protection for our children and that as a society we were certainly fulfilling our responsibility to some degree to these young people. But in her ruling Judge Jordan certainly indicated that Bill 1 fell short. So here we have Bill 29, which does address many of those issues that Judge Jordan outlined in her ruling.

Certainly one of the clauses I notice in this bill is that the 72-hour period has been extended to five days. Again, when we're looking at children who are in this particular position, where they are out prostituting themselves, then certainly an increase in time is desired. That was a positive step here as well.

In this innovative legislation, in Bill 1 and now the follow-up Bill 29, we still see, though, that there is a shortfall in the legislation, and this shortfall is in the area of accountability, in the fact that there is no power in the bill to produce a desired or intended result. I think this is one area, Mr. Speaker, where we certainly could have strengthened this bill an awful lot.

When we're looking at this, we're talking about the apprehension of hundreds of youth and how their behaviour is changed because of this bill. Now, our stated goal for the bill is the protection of children, and we're looking here at children that are hard core. We are looking at children where the success rate for behaviour modification is certainly going to be much lower than it would be with your average child.

When we look at behaviour modification for this type of child, we certainly have to look at a much more intensive program. We certainly have to draw on many, many resources that we do have in the community, and we certainly do have to involve many of the departments in government, but the desired outcome then would certainly have much more of an opportunity of success. So when we

look at this and we're looking at a success rate, nowhere in the bill do we have any measurable outcome as to the success rate of apprehending these children that are prostituting themselves.

We don't have, for an example, any answers to the question: how many of these young people, after they are apprehended, will return to the streets? How many of them will go back and recommit? Of course, we know there are many, many factors out there that do impact these children enormously. Certainly a controlling pimp is one of the issues here, yet we don't have in this bill enough regulation to address this issue.

As well, for many of these young people this becomes easy money, money they couldn't make at any other job in the amount of time they would spend. As well, we'll find that many of these young people also have a great dependency on drugs. So it's a vicious circle that they're caught in, where they prostitute themselves to get their money, they buy their drugs, and the wheel keeps going around and around. This is why I would have liked to have seen in this legislation something to assess whether the law is achieving its desired outcome.

8:50

Now then, there is a way of doing that, Mr. Speaker, and that is a Children's Advocate office. We do have an office in this province, and it is responsible to report on Children's Services. Earlier in debate on Bill 29 the Member for Calgary-Buffalo stated in his comments how the jurisdiction in section 2.1 of the Child Welfare Act certainly has many recommendations and many parts to it that impact how we can deal with youth. Particularly what I enjoyed about his comments was that certainly this jurisdiction is there under the Children's Advocate office. We are not proposing anything new. It is something that is existing at this time, and there is no additional cost. The office does exist. It does have a mandate, and that mandate is to encompass what happens to children under this bill.

As well, there were some excellent suggestions as to how we could have strengthened this bill. One of those suggestions that came up I would have liked to have seen accepted when we were debating the bill, and that would be that the Children's Advocate would have to every year table in this Legislature their report. What that would do is identify many of the problems that we encounter as the authorities attempt to work with this act, and they would certainly be able from their hands-on work with these young prostitutes have the opportunity at that point to see what parts of this act are deficient, certainly make very good recommendations as to how we could strengthen this act. Certainly this act would be a work in progress where we are constantly striving to make it better for the youth of this province.

As well, we wouldn't only be identifying the problems with this act. What would also happen here is that we'd identify problem areas, for example, with the prostitutes. Certainly there are many, many questions out there that do beg an answer. We would by the statistics that the Children's Advocate could collect in this regard see how we could best address the problems at hand.

Of course, the first question would be: how many of our youth in this province are apprehended under Bill 29? Once we have gauged that, there are so many other questions that could be asked. Do we have a predominant number of females or males that are prostituting themselves out on the streets as minors? If it does indeed happen to be one sex or the other, then at that point we can target that as a problem area and target that particular sex.

Now, as well, I think what we have to look at here is the age. Is there a certain age when these child prostitutes are most vulnerable, when their attitudes, when their behaviour can be influenced by others such as a pimp, such as an older person who would have some influence on them? Is there an age when we would have to target

them again for a greater chance of reaching them and pulling them off the street at a much earlier stage in this particular problem.

Another thing we can look at here as well is: is this a rural issue, an urban issue? Do the populations we're dealing with here occur more in one of those areas or another? Certainly that would be another area the Children's Advocate in fulfilling their responsibilities could seek out.

I also think another area we could look at is: how many of these young prostitutes come from a single-parent home, or how many have both parents? Maybe something else we want to look at is the work habits of those parents. In other words, how many of them have to work evening shifts or afternoon shifts or whatever where they aren't at home when these young people are out of school.

MS CARLSON: Do the kids have adequate life skills?

MR. BONNER: Yes. Certainly when we look at a bill of this nature I think it's very, very important that we know what sort of life skills those young people have. Are they streetwise, or are they being taken advantage of by some older, more influential person in their lives?

Something else that I think the Children's Advocate would be able to do in reporting which would be so much more valuable is: what happens in the home? In other words, how many of these children come from an environment where violence in the home is quite prevalent? How many of these homes have there been complaints to the police about or the police have had some contact with because of some issue? So, again, all these factors certainly would help in determining how we could best protect the child.

Of course, we hear so often that many of these children that are out prostituting themselves do come from a background where there was some type of inappropriate behaviour in the home. Usually they have been molested by family, by someone they know. Again, this is another area here where I think this report by the Children's Advocate would make a big, big difference. It would certainly give us the tools and the information so that we could strengthen this bill.

As well, I think another great advantage of having the minister table the report of the Children's Advocate in this Legislature each year is that it brings awareness once a year to the minds of the members in here, to the minds of the media, and certainly with their help we can keep bringing attention to this big problem that we do have in our society, one that we would like to fix.

What this would do as well is remind the MLAs in here on an annual basis of this problem and this bill. It was a couple of weeks ago that I was looking at the pictures of the group that was elected in '93, and I went through the little brochure that we have of our seating arrangement in here for the group that was elected in '97. Then I checked to see just how many of those members from '93 will be available for the next election. The maximum number we could have elected that would remain after those two elections is only 50 percent. That's assuming that everybody that's running or seeking re-election gets elected. So, again, I think it is critical that we do have reminders in here, that we do have information that hon. members in this House could review from year to year, and that we do look at ways of doing this.

Now then, if teen prostitution and sexual exploitation is a major issue, why don't we make this bill much, much stronger? Why don't we use the enormous resources we have as a province, that we have as legislators to assist these youths in changing around their lives? What we want to do is turn around their behaviour, and the sooner we do that, certainly the more success we're going to have. So those are some of the comments that I wanted to make in regards to accountability.

This is another way as well, Mr. Speaker, by this report being tabled in here, that we bring the issue to the front. It's not dealt with as it has been for so many years in this province, when we've had sexual exploitation of our youth. It is something that we don't hide. It's something that we bring to the front, and we combat the issue of child prostitution. We know that in this trade, as people have talked about here — the hon. members for Edmonton-Riverview and Edmonton-Gold Bar certainly talked this evening about how in their areas, whether it be in massage parlors or children in care, things can change very quickly. We do know that child prostitution is one of those moving targets. The people involved, particularly the adults, get extremely creative, and we require everything that we can to fight those people.

9:00

It is not inconceivable to think, Mr. Speaker, that the legislation we hopefully will pass in this session will have to be changed and updated as we move along. There is no perfect legislation in this regard, and we should be prepared to change it from time to time to make it much stronger.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo also brought out that in the provinces that border us, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, they go much further in their legislation to protect the children. I would certainly hope that as we progress down this road, we also can strengthen our legislation here. I think a major part of that strengthening of this bill would be the inclusion of the reports we get from the workers, the people that have to work with these children. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I certainly don't knock the people out there, the men and women in this province that are trying to deal with child prostitution. They are dealing with a very, very unique group of young people, young people who, for whatever reason, do end up on the street, and they do have an enormous task in changing their behaviour.

A number of us went on a tour here shortly after we were elected. We did happen to go down to the Remand Centre, we did go down to the police holding cells, and it was quite an eye-opener for myself. Whenever they were dealing with youth, they would put them in handcuffs, they would shackle their ankles, and the reason, the guards told us, was that young people, more so than anyone else, are very skittish. They will react before they stop to think. This was another excellent suggestion that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo brought up, that this would be an ideal time, a superb time to supply duty counsel, where they would have the opportunity to talk to a lawyer, for these young people that obviously have made some very, very bad decisions in their life for whatever reasons, people who probably at this stage are not in a very good state to make good decisions or to make any decisions.

So with those comments and observations, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Assembly very much for this opportunity to speak to Bill 29.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome this opportunity to speak one final time to Bill 29, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2000, at the stage of third reading, where what we have is an opportunity to review the bill in its final form after the shaping it has received in earlier stages.

Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that at this particular stage we see, with this bill having gone through the various stages available to us, that there has been no additional shaping to it. In fact, that outlines the major concern I have with regard to this bill, and that is the kind of attitude we have seen from the government when we talk about this bill, first in its initial stage as Bill 1 and now in its amended stage as Bill 29.

What we've seen the government bring to the floor of this Legislature and through every stage of drafting and throughout the debate that we've seen from members of the government is a real paternal attitude that has been incorporated into the drafting of the legislation. It's a we know best kind of attitude: it's our way; it's the right way; it's the only way. But in fact, Mr. Speaker, where this bill is concerned, we have seen already that it is not the only way and not necessarily the best way. Had it been the best way, we would have not seen Bill 29 hit the floor of the Legislature at all, because it is in fact amendments to the original bill, Bill 1.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, we in this House supported Bill 1. It's a case of where you have to take a look at the legislation and decide: is it mostly better than what we had, or is mostly not better than what we had? Certainly that bill was better in terms of addressing prostitution with minors than what we had before, which was virtually no legislation, so it was an improvement. Did it go as far, Mr. Speaker, as we thought was necessary? No, it did not. In fact, some of the very concerns that we see brought forward in Bill 29, which is the amendment of the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, address the concerns that we had brought forward in the original drafting of the bill.

Does it now address in its amended form all of the concerns we have? No, it doesn't. The paternalistic attitude that we see from the government means that they're not prepared to take a look at amendments from anyone other than themselves, and they have not seen fit at this particular stage to bring any in. So unfortunately we don't see any kinds of changes or shaping in the bill at its final reading.

The last opportunity I had to speak to this bill, Mr. Speaker, was in second reading, and at that time there were a number of excellent comments and recommendations made from many of my colleagues here in the Assembly that we certainly hoped we would have seen incorporated in the committee stage in amendments brought in either by us or by government. We would have been quite happy to see some strengthening of the bill, but we didn't see that. We brought forward excellent amendments that addressed some of the key issues that were missing from this bill, yet they were all defeated.

This portrays, I think, the next stage of this paternalistic attitude that we have seen from government members on this bill, where they move into a phase of smugness that I believe has clouded their decision-making process on this bill, Mr. Speaker. That's really unfortunate, because we're seeing a bill that I believe, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo stated earlier today, we are going to see again in another amended fashion next year or the year after, because there just are some situations here that have not been addressed that will become issues, I think, as this bill unfolds.

With that in mind, I would like to take a look at some of the comments made by the Minister of Justice earlier this afternoon with regard to that, when he was provoked to address some of the concerns that were being outlined, where we saw the government become quite prickly about some of the concerns we had outlined. When he talked this afternoon in defence of not accepting any amendments or changes to the legislation, he said that this government was in the process of reviewing the act in its operation and working with the people who are in the front line of this operation working with these unfortunate children and getting feedback from them. He states that that's what Bill 29 is all about.

9:10

In fact, part of that feedback, Mr. Speaker, talked about what's missing in the bill. That's the process that I'm primarily concerned

about, in terms of these minors taking a great deal of responsibility for decision-making processes after they have been taken into custody. The minister went on to talk about acknowledging a change in the bill in terms of 72 hours being the initial recommendation for the young people and it being made stronger by having a five-day period, which we agree with. Seventy-two hours was a major concern of ours in the original drafting of the bill. We felt that often in cases it wouldn't be a long enough time period.

The minister goes on, Mr. Speaker, to talk about why they lengthened it to a five-day period, and he talks about how you barely have the opportunity to have the child sober up, have a good meal, have a good sleep. There's very little time left to provide counseling or to intervene in any way, to provide the child with guidance and an opportunity to move into counseling, to move into some other form of treatment.

Well, he's right. There's no doubt that those are very good points. Those are also very good arguments for the amendments that we brought forward in this legislation. If 72 hours is not enough time to provide an adequate opportunity for the minor to even sober up, then how can it be enough time to expect the minor in custody to have the ability or the capabilities to make decisions in terms of whether or not they should be accessing a lawyer, whether or not they should be having a court hearing, all of those really good points that were brought up in our amendments? The Justice minister in fact made our argument for us in accepting the amendments, yet he was one of the people who spoke against them and who defeated those amendments in this House.

So my concern still is that those issues haven't been addressed, that these kids are not in a position to do good decision-making themselves, that they need some assistance. He in fact painted a picture for us here of minors who are incapable of making those rational decisions that are going to be life-changing decisions for them and that they're going to need definite guidance on. That was one of the reasons why we thought duty counsel was so important, so that we really talk about the best interests of the child in a comprehensive, inclusive fashion, which is not just handing them a piece of paper with a lawyer's phone number on it, Mr. Speaker. We just don't think that's adequate.

We believe that in practice that's going to be an issue, that this bill will be back here for more amendments. The Minister of Justice said that that's okay, that legislation is living and breathing documentation that should be amended. Well, we don't disagree with that either, Mr. Speaker, but the fact is that when you know you've got the problem up front, why not address it? Take a look at how long until this legislation has come back for amendment now and come back for amendment under the pressure of a judge's ruling. Even then it took many months. The ruling came down in the summertime. We're now talking about the very end of November. That's a time lag wherein we've seen a number of minors whose lives could have been affected in a much more positive fashion than they have been with the loss of this amended legislation. If we were to strengthen that legislation now when we have the opportunity, when we have it on the floor of the Assembly, we would have a chance to make a difference in many more young people's lives, and that's what I'm concerned about.

Finally we see a piece of good legislation that addresses some of the social issues that are at the core of the problems in our province, and we don't do everything we can to make it the best possible legislation available to us. That's really a pity. Time after time we have seen legislation or regulations from this government where symptoms are addressed, where the government hasn't had the courage to actually address the causes of the problems. Once again we're seeing symptoms addressed here, but they're starting to

scratch the surface of some of the causes. They've been talked about in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and that's a very good first step. We would have liked to have seen that role expanded with more debate, stronger legislation, amendments passed that would have really enabled the legislation and this government to move forward in terms of protecting minors in the most comprehensive fashion available. It's too bad we haven't seen that.

I hope that I am around and available to talk to this amended legislation when it comes before us again in the future, because as my colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry said, by the time of the next election we'll have had a 50 percent attrition rate since 1993. If you think we may not see this legislation for some years in the future, then certainly there will be very few people here who will remember what it looked like when it was first brought before this Assembly. We will have to go through the process of re-educating legislators on all the shortfalls and shortcomings of the kinds of social legislation that is needed and necessary in this province. So it's too bad, Mr. Speaker, that we've missed an opportunity.

With that, I'll conclude my remarks on this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a third time]

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move Bill 20 for third reading.

Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, as we've discussed at second reading and in committee, will result, in my view, in a significant improvement of access by Albertans to their courts and to dispute resolution processes within the province. It will provide us with a framework to have an opportunity to improve the level and amount of civil court jurisdiction in the Provincial Court as well as other jurisdictions in the Provincial Court, which will allow Albertans easier access to dispute resolution processes there. It will allow the court to organize itself in a manner which makes the most efficient use of its resources.

In addressing some of the issues that were raised at second reading and in committee with respect to the sections of the act which do away with the outlining of specific divisions of the Provincial Court, I neglected to address the concept that while we're doing away with the formal divisions in the Provincial Court, it's not intended that that will in any way, shape, or form require the court to lose any expertise in any one area. For example, in the family and youth division there will still be judges sitting who have expertise in family and youth matters.

What doing away with the divisions will accomplish will be to allow us to appoint members to the Provincial Court as a whole rather than to any specific division and, again, will allow the court to orient its resources so the Chief Judge of the court will be able to ask members of the bench to move into a particular area. If, for example, family and youth court in any particular region or section has a long time to trial, a long period of time before issues can be dealt with, those resources can be marshaled and put into that area by the Chief Judge to deal with that particular issue. Once again, the concept is not to interfere with the organization of the court or to interfere with the court's ability to address particular expertise to an area of jurisdiction or an area of the court's affairs but, rather, to allow for the easier movement of people by the Chief Judge into places where there's a particular need at a particular time.

I just wanted to add those comments at third reading because I had neglected to address that particular question when it came up from Edmonton-Strathcona at earlier readings.

Mr. Speaker, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act is a good bill. It deals with a wide range of justice issues, very important and significant issues – for example, dealing with the Surrogate Court and other issues – which will allow for better use of the resources, better access by Albertans to the courts, and I would ask the House to support it.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 20 has been an interesting bill, and it culminates in actually a fairly lengthy consultation process. I'm thinking how many months ago it was that I was invited to meet with the Minister of Justice and, to my recollection, Sue Olsen, the former Justice critic for the Official Opposition, to review at that point a number of suggestions that the Justice minister was looking at and contemplating in terms of updating a series of Justice-related statutes.

9:20

Both Ms Olsen and this member had an opportunity to offer some commentary at the time, and I remember my initial reaction was that many of the changes that the minister signaled he was contemplating bringing forward in legislative form were changes that were important, that were remedial for the most part, that clarified, improved, and streamlined elements of the justice system, the biggest focus here being in terms of the civil justice side. So I thought that was a very positive initiative and, I say again, in the style that the Minister of Justice has become associated with and in some respects distinguished himself by an advanced consultation with opposition critics, as he did this afternoon when we talked about his earlier consultation on Bill 3, and then his readiness to deal with opposition-proposed amendments to make that bill clearer, stronger. Bill 20 reflects very much the minister's same kind of approach to what I describe as constructive lawmaking. It's a treat as a legislator to be able to dialogue with the minister outside this Chamber as well as inside in terms of trying to remedy omissions, deficiencies, conflicts, that sort of thing that exists in current legislation.

I'm encouraged somewhat by the minister's comment that he understands the importance of some of the specialized skills and experience being built up by having separate divisions of the Provincial Court. I take his comment that he doesn't plan on homogenizing the entire Provincial Court – certainly there had been some concern around that – that the intention is that we will still have a number of judges, men and women, on the bench who will be able to do what Judge Jordan did in the child prostitution bill we were talking about earlier; in other words, discharging her responsibility in an area where she has built up some specialized knowledge and experience in terms of dealing with children in distress.

There are provisions in terms of regulations – and I'm thinking of 5(a)(ii) and some of those other provisions – that invite my customary criticism that subordinate lawmaking in this province continues to be done for the most part in secret, tends to be done for the most part without Albertans or their elected representatives, unless they happen to be part of the government caucus, knowing anything about those regulations coming forward. One would have hoped that in the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, if ever there were an occasion to charge the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations with the responsibility to review this subordinate lawmaking . . .

MRS. SLOAN: One last attempt.

MR. DICKSON: Yeah. One of my colleagues suggests this is Calgary-Buffalo's last pitch for the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. I hasten to say that there may be another opportunity, but I do take some modest satisfaction in knowing that those government members who are fortunate enough to return to this Assembly after the next provincial general election will sort of anticipate this amendment when they look at a bill. If the Member for Calgary-Glenmore and the Minister of Justice are back in their respective positions and they're reviewing government legislation, maybe, just maybe, somebody may say . . . [interjection] Well, I'm just indulging in the conceit of the government caucus that thinks they're coming back on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, it just occurred to me that just maybe somebody in the government caucus might say: "Hold it. You know, we're going to get beat up yet again for another four years by the opposition because we make regulations in secret. We're tired of being pummeled. We're tired of hearing the opposition take these shots at us. We're going to inoculate ourselves. We can wrap ourselves in kind of a cozy cocoon."

MRS. SLOAN: Like the flu shot.

MR. DICKSON: Very much like the flu shot. The flu shot would be simply taking that famous report written by Justice Cote and some other people who did that wonderful report, I think in the 1980s, on how Alberta could clean up their subordinate lawmaking, and we could have all those regulations vetted. And what better place to do it? What better minister to take the bold initiative? What better kind of statute to start regulating regulations in public view? Let's take it out of the secret lawmaking chamber. Let's bring it in here. This is the chance to do it.

I was sort of thinking the government caucus would be so happy to be rid of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo that to sort of hasten my departure, they might serve up a big, fat amendment that would in fact charge the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, but alas it has not happened, and time runs out.

AN HON. MEMBER: We're scared you're going to change your mind.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I'd be prepared to make an irrevocable commitment: I will not come back if on Bill 20 – and a Mr. Edy might have something to say about it as well – the government were prepared to do that.

You know, if they don't, I want all members to know and I want the Minister of Justice to know that this is one of those arguments that works as well on the first bill as on the 40th bill or the 25th bill, any bill that deals with regulations. All of those Albertans are watching and waiting.

I can tell you that when the Liberal opposition marches in with those dozens and dozens of MLAs on that side of the Chamber, that's going to be one of the first things they do. We're going to repeal Bill 11. We're going to repeal Bill 40. Then what we're going to do, hopefully, is we're going to move to instruct the chairman of the Committee on Law and Regulations – in fact, I will come back. I will attempt to get a seat in the public gallery so that I can watch that auspicious occasion when with great fanfare – in fact, it could be like a new member being inducted into the Assembly – the chairman of the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations could pound on the door, symbolic of all of the years that he's been shut out and never able to enter the Chamber and do business

in public. He could be marched forward. It could be all party leaders linking arms with you, Mr. Speaker, as they march forward to the front, and there would be a tumultuous thumping of tables as we would with a single, united chorus . . .

MR. SAPERS: Don't forget about the trumpets. Don't forget about the fanfare of trumpets.

MR. DICKSON: And trumpets. Anyway, I'm getting carried away, Mr. Speaker, and you've been very kind in indulging me here as we focus on but one element of the bill.

You know, one of the other things that I want to say is that I've never been able to persuade a Justice minister to deal with an innovative idea that came forward – one of the partners at Bennett Jones had mentioned to me one time a number of years ago in terms of video: with the video capability we have, why we don't have a video record of trials. As I looked through Bill 20, I thought this might be addressed someplace. [interjection] Well, the typical civil trial may be a day or two days.

As I look through, we have a number of changes being made to our civil process. The Member for Calgary-Foothills, you know, I'm sure has got some observation to make on this very issue. I just think that what would make sense is that in 2000 we have the capability of having a video record of trials. I think of the Court of Appeal. When the Court of Appeal sits, instead of having to rely on appeal books and factums, they would have the opportunity to be able to view witnesses giving their evidence. [interjection]

You know, I really stood up with the view of just making a couple of comments. I always start out, Mr. Speaker, trying to make the most direct point from the start until the finish, but I'm not strong enough. I am simply not disciplined enough. When I hear an invitation to meander off on a bit of a side route, I take it every time. But I'm going to try hard and be more disciplined.

9:30

I think if you look at the latest newsletter from the Canadian Bar Association, there's a focus in there where they talk about courts examining technology. There's much to consider in terms having a video record. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members on the front bench and the second bench and the third bench, I wonder if we could hear the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo out without all the additional helping comments and encouraging comments and if the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo could address his remarks to the chair, as he is wont to sometimes wander.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that intervention. It may be that our colleagues in the Assembly have forgotten that in fact we have 30 minutes to be able to debate this bill instead of the customary 20.

But I wanted to make another observation that one of the things that I'd hoped could have been identified and addressed more strongly in this bill – you know, I think we have a very farsighted Minister of Justice, a tough guy to criticize because he clearly brings a sense of fairness and a sense of . . . [interjections] There's some suggestion that I may be discrediting the Minister of Justice with my praise in front of his colleagues, so I'll go no further other than to say this. Mr. Speaker, the point I wanted to make is this: why has this Minister of Justice not seized the opportunity that Bill 20 would

afford him to be the first Justice minister in the history of this province that would say that the province has a responsibility for public legal education?

You know, one of the biggest problems we have with people getting access to justice is the cost, the cost of hiring a lawyer, the cost of going to the court system, and one of the most effective ways of addressing that is giving citizens more information. Give citizens more information about the system. The Court of Queen's Bench has recently produced a series of booklets. They're actually very good booklets in terms of information, and what they do is empower citizens to be able to find remedies and to be able to know how they're going to do some of those things.

I wasn't going to say, but, you know, I've thought there's some delicious irony every time I go in and see the Alberta Divorce Guide on the stand at McDougall Centre, because they've decided they haven't quite produced enough material to be able to assist people to do their own divorce but people are still asking for it. So there they actually have McDougall Centre – you go down there, and you find the Alberta Self-Counsel Press Alberta Divorce Guide smack in McDougall Centre. I can only suspect that the Premier hasn't been looking through the publications office. To see that displayed in fulsome fashion practically in the lobby of McDougall Centre is richly ironic and deserves some comment.

In any event, we have a chance to do something in terms of public legal education, and I've said it before, but we have in Alberta arguably one of the finest public legal education networks anywhere in Canada. The leadership that's provided with funding from the Alberta Law Foundation and the work that's being done by my old classmate Lois Gander and people at the Legal Resource Centre in Edmonton and Calgary Legal Guidance and Student Legal Services – it is amazing work, yet you know they don't get a nickel of money from the provincial government. We don't provide any provincial money in terms of public legal education, and I think we ought to do that.

Mr. Speaker, the other comment I wanted to make is in terms of legal aid. I wanted to say that I very much support the notion that we're now going to constitute legal aid separately. It's been always a strange, strange situation to have the Law Society of Alberta having to negotiate and be involved in this odd three-legged stool: you've got the Justice department, you've got the Law Society, and you've got legal aid. It's actually a big advantage in this bill to give legal aid some independent role and some independent status, and I think that's important. The difficulty is that legal aid funding still comes from the provincial government, and I get nervous because from time to time I hear members of the government saying some things that suggest to me they don't understand the importance of legal aid in terms of ensuring full accessibility to our legal system.

We've seen some adjustment in terms of legal aid rates, and I think that's a positive thing, but I think it's important that the government continue and in fact do better in terms of their funding for legal aid. I'm most anxious that as legal aid has a new governance structure that this is not seized upon by the government as some excuse to reduce funding or at least not increase funding to keep pace with the fact that we're growing as quickly as we are in the province of Alberta.

There are some questions that have been asked that I'm not sure have ever been fully answered in addition to the concern with respect to regulations. Some of the questions had to do with the kind of control that the Chief Judge will have with respect to the administration of the courts and, I guess, the privative clause, which will protect the decisions of the Chief Judge with respect to the administration of the court and insulate it, in fact effectively prevent any review by a superior court.

You know, I still wrestle with that, because the judicial independence is such a fundamental element of our legal system – and I haven't read the full trial judgment when Judge Reilly had gone firstly in front of a judge and then later in front of the Court of Appeal, but I had some very strong concerns, Mr. Speaker, around that. It seemed to me that it was important at the time that that opportunity be available. It certainly cost the province some money, and I understand that not being a very pleasant experience for them. They lost in front of the lower court judge, and they lost in front of the Court of Appeal.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, I continue to question whether the privative clause is appropriate. The privative clause, of course, effectively eliminates what happened in the case of Judge Reilly.

9:40

I just want to signal also a concern I'd raised the other day, and I noticed that the Justice minister hasn't addressed that tonight. It had to do with the reduced standard in terms of proof of service of documents. We've gone from a position where we now can send a document by ordinary mail to the last known address, and that will be deemed to be good service. That's troublesome, because in some parts of the province it may not be a problem, but I think of downtown Calgary where typically many people live on average about five months in an apartment and then move somewhere else. It's easy to imagine that an attempt is going to be made to serve a defendant with a small claim summons and they've moved.

Now, when the limit was \$3,000 or \$7,500, the prejudice was not huge, and there's always the opportunity, I suppose, of going to the Court of Queen's Bench and trying to open up a judgment that was obtained if there was a defect in the service. But we're talking about increasing the jurisdiction of small claims court to \$50,000. Fifty thousand dollars is a significant amount of money. If somebody sues me and if somebody thinks my address here in Edmonton is my last known address and of course I clear out as soon as the Legislature ends and the mail doesn't come to me right away because it was sent to what somebody thought was my last known address, I may not find out that somebody is suing me for \$50,000. If they don't hear from me and in fact they proceed to an assessment of damages, the next thing I may know is that when the bailiff shows up at my door to seize my wife's computer, that may be the first notice I have, and that's the first installment on a \$50,000 claim against me.

You know, I think that's the sort of thing we have to think about. Is that a process we want? I can think of lots of people who don't get mail on a regular basis and move and change addresses. In the normal course when you had to sue under the rules of court in the Court of Queen's Bench, you couldn't get away with just sending a document to the last known address. This is something I haven't heard the Minister of Justice address. I think creditors have an extensive array of remedies, and it's not a question of trying to make it easier for debtors to avoid process, but if people are going to be sued for up to \$50,000, shouldn't we try a little harder to make sure they've got notice of the action, rather than just allowing the plaintiff to send it to the last known address?

In any event, it's one of those concerns I have in Bill 20. I understand the Law Society has reviewed this, and my information is that this wasn't something they had concern with. I don't know whether that's because too many plaintiffs' lawyers were offering commentary. I remember as a young lawyer starting out, as most young lawyers do, doing a collections practice. Boy, you know, it's not uncommon. People just don't get notice of those claims right away. So it's something I'd invite the Minister of Justice to review. It's not reason enough to vote against Bill 20, but I think it's very troubling to reduce the standard.

When I look at what happened with the federal voting list – and we may see this with the provincial voting list. I was one of those people who thought it was terrific to have sort of a universal voting list. We didn't have to go through the enormous cost of an enumeration, but you know we found in downtown Calgary, in Calgary-Buffalo very significant problems because you've got so many people that are moving. In fact it got to the point: I was sitting on the Legislative Offices Committee, and the Chief Electoral Officer told us that he, in effect, had to go in and not do an enumeration but do some fairly exhaustive checks and attempts to update the list.

Well, it's the same kind of problem. What we find is that lots of things can happen because people move around, and it potentially means people may end up with judgments of up to \$50,000 and the first they'll know of it is when their car is seized or their cheques start bouncing because they have no money in the bank account because it's been cleaned out by a garnishee. Things to consider, in any event.

I've talked about legal aid. We've identified the issue in terms of looking at a video record of trial proceedings to enhance the scrutiny by the Court of Appeal. I remember asking the former Minister of Justice, the current Minister of Economic Development, and it was something that he said he wasn't looking at in particular. I think he said that he'd take it under advisement, but we've never heard any further. I'm not sure I've asked this of the current Minister of Justice. I suspect I have and notice that hasn't been addressed.

We've talked about the need for the Justice department to recognize that they have a huge public responsibility in terms of public legal education. I think we've talked about that as maybe the single most empowering thing that we can do. When Calgary Legal Guidance was started in Calgary, when Student Legal Services was started in Edmonton, what you found were lots of people who didn't qualify for legal aid and yet couldn't begin to afford a lawyer on a private retainer. So what do we say to those people? What happened was lawyers in this province with help from the bench created the service. We created a model in Calgary, Calgary Legal Guidance, that now there are attempts to replicate in other places, and it has expanded far beyond what it was in 1973.

I think it identifies that there are needs there. I think the Justice department and for that matter the provincial government have been getting a kind of free ride, if you like, because organizations like the Alberta Law Foundation have been providing funding, and organizations like the Public Legal Education Network of Alberta and the John Howard Society and all those organizations that do important kinds of public education are really carrying the ball. I think it's high time in this province that we accepted there was a public responsibility in terms of providing that education.

The Minister of Community Development I think is signaling that he'd like to hear more. I was going to sit down, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I expect that we may not hear a lot more from other members on this bill, and that's why I'm trying to be as comprehensive as I can. So I hope that allays the concerns of members that are watching the clock.

The provision in terms of management of exhibits, I think, is a positive one. I think the prospect of providing clear provision for civil contempt in Provincial Court is good.

One of the questions we haven't heard answered yet – and I'm sure one of my colleagues has asked this – is when we said to the Minister of Justice: tell us what sort of costs we're looking at. We have the chair here in the Assembly this evening of the task force looking at a unified family court. I've had a chance to attend one of those hearings, and one of the things I haven't heard and I think Albertans want to know, Mr. Speaker – I understand there being

some cost analysis done in terms of the cost of the unified court.

Those are my comments. I'm out of time, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000, has probably attracted a little bit more debate than the Minister of Justice would have anticipated, but it just is an indication of how important members of the Liberal caucus feel the whole area of justice is, appropriate responses to crime, dealing with some of the issues that contribute to criminality, and, of course, the administration of justice. These have always been priorities for the Liberals in this province and will continue to be a priority focus of ours.

9:50

I just wanted to make a couple of comments about Bill 20. As I read through it again in preparing for third reading debate and I had the chance to review the minister's business plan, the minister from the Department of Justice, I was trying to find how Bill 20 would fit into this business plan, and I note from the justice . . . [interjections] I thought the Minister of Gaming was making an intervention, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, I think the hon. Minister of Gaming, in fact, is reading aloud. Hopefully, so he doesn't interrupt you further, he will go back to silent reading.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As I was reading through the minister's business plan, I noticed that the starting point on the minister's business plan is the justice summit and the justice summit report. The justice summit was held in about January of '99, I guess. A hundred and thirty-six delegates got together. The government, I know, made a real effort to gain a variety of opinions on a number of very important issues.

There were 25 key recommendations that came out of that justice summit, and those 25 key recommendations were in eight theme areas. I would like to just refresh the memory of those in the Chamber on what those themes were. Number one was to improve public knowledge, education, and awareness. Number two was to simplify the justice system. Number three was to increase sensitivity and cultural awareness. Number four was to enhance community partnerships. Five was to increase the role of victims. Six was to clarify accountability. Seven was to take action on previous studies and reports on justice, and the last one was to increase funding.

Now, I think there are parts of Bill 20 that address the second theme area; that is, to simplify the justice system. There may even be some attention being paid to clarifying accountability. But I'm very confused because I can't find how Bill 20 addresses the other six theme areas out of the justice summit report, which was supposed to influence the entire business plan this year for the minister.

I'm particularly concerned that the very first theme area, the one that calls for improving public knowledge, education, and awareness as it regards the administration of justice, hasn't been addressed at all. Now, there has been some discussion of the need for enhanced public education activities, and my colleague for Calgary-Buffalo has referred to the Public Legal Education Network of Alberta. I must say that made me feel a little nostalgic. Having been a participant in the Public Legal Education Network of Alberta for some time and even having had the privilege of chairing that organization, I'm somewhat familiar with the endeavours and with the member agencies.

You know, part of the discussion – and I'm not sure if it would be

picked up in *Hansard* or not, Mr. Speaker. When Calgary-Buffalo was making reference to the good work done by the member organizations of the Public Legal Education Network of Alberta and he asked, not rhetorically, about the lack of funding, there was some suggestion: well, if they do it for free, why should they be paid? Well, in fact, they don't do it for free. There's a real cost. It's just not a cost that the provincial government has recognized, even though one of those theme areas for the recommendations is to increase funding, including funding for the first theme area, which was to improve public knowledge, education, and awareness.

So we would have had an opportunity, we would have thought, for the minister to clarify that, perhaps even in this legislation, to build it in instead of relying as it were on the kindness of strangers, in this case the strangers being the Alberta Law Foundation, which is set up by the Law Society of Alberta.

I heard some rather disparaging comments from some members in this Chamber in regards to lawyers. I must say that if it wasn't for the lawyers of this province making a commitment to public legal education and ensuring that the Alberta Law Foundation was there and that its mandate was to pay for public legal education, it wouldn't be happening at all.

I think, you know, it's easy to take shots at members of the legal profession, but I just want to remind members in the Chamber that in most public opinion surveys lawyers rank just slightly above politicians in terms of the public perception of honesty and trustworthiness. Now, perhaps if you're a lawyer and a politician, it means you're in double trouble, Mr. Speaker; I'm not sure. My point is that it's easy to point the finger at the legal community and say they're not doing enough, but that sure sounds hollow when the finger is being pointed by members of this government. If it weren't for the legal community, very little in this area would be done at all.

Now the other sort of general comment I wanted to make had to do with another one of the goal statements in the Justice minister's plan. Goal 3 is "to provide access to justice services for persons in need," and it goes on to say that

families and the community are principally responsible for protecting the vulnerable, but critical contributions are made by the justice system. Access to justice services for Albertans in need is provided through maintenance enforcement, public trustee services, victim assistance, and the support for legal aid.

For the minister's reference I'm reading goal statement 3 on page 221 of the budget document that was provided to every member of this Chamber.

I guess I was looking for some more clarification as to how this particular goal was being achieved through the changes in Bill 20. Perhaps in the minister's closing comments he can let us know how these issues are being addressed, particularly when I look at some of the measures having to do with the collection of maintenance, maintenance payments, client satisfaction with the Public Trustee's office – there have been some questions raised about the Public Trustee's office that have not been satisfactorily answered – also to do with the number of persons receiving legal aid. Seeing as these are the measures, I would expect the minister would have paid some attention to how they may be impacted by his Justice Statutes Amendment Act.

Now, the one goal statement that is probably most on point is goal statement 5, which is "to improve access to civil and criminal justice." The ministry business plan goes on to explain that "the justice system is responsible for providing the infrastructure to resolve criminal and civil disputes" and then talks about, as the only goal statement, the "median elapsed time from first to last appearance." There is no measure in the document for the most recent past year, '98-99. We're told that the target is the Canadian average, but

we don't know what the Canadian average is because the department doesn't report it in this document.

I would expect, of course, that the minister has asked officials in his department to prepare some sort of briefing or a synopsis of how this goal statement will be achieved through the changes made in Bill 20. If we are working towards the Canadian average for the median elapsed time from first to last appearance and we are seeing a major reorganization of the courts, then I'm expecting that this must have something to do with the speedy access to civil and criminal justice. If that's the case, then I would invite the minister to tell us what his expectations are and to do it in such a way, Mr. Speaker, that informs us not before he adjusts his business plans but prior to when this Assembly is being asked to vote on his plans. He asked us, when he moved third reading, to please give his initiatives our support.

I would like to give this minister my support in these plans. I think he's got a very difficult portfolio, and one that he has done relatively well in achieving a balance between those who see the justice system as being too lax and those who are seeing the justice system as being too punitive. I think being Minister of Justice means you never make anybody particularly happy, and this minister is – well, I was going to say this minister is doing exactly that: he's making nobody happy. That may be a clever quip, Mr. Speaker, but I really meant to say it in a more complimentary way. I think this minister is achieving a reasonable balance between all the competing demands that are inherent in his portfolio.

10:00

So with that in mind, I would like to support this minister's initiatives in terms of reformation of the system, particularly if it will truly improve access to the process, but he hasn't given us any indication that these changes actually do address the goal statement. Now, this is troubling specifically because we're being asked to approve something, but it's troubling in a more general way as well, and that is it reminds me of the Auditor General's most recent report, when the Auditor General points out that department by department governmentwide there is a real mismatch between goal statements and the activities of ministries and that often we don't see money being attached to measurable outcomes and don't see any real accountability thread that is woven through the actions of the ministries and the goal statements and the outcome measures, if there are any, and the legislative initiatives.

I share the Auditor General's concern. I think that if a government is going to in part stake its reputation on its business planning, then there ought to be some consistency, there ought to be some accountability, and we certainly ought to see some relationship between the money that's being spent, department by department, and the stated or the hoped-for outcomes and of course the measures we would employ to determine whether those outcomes are met or not.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are my concerns about the Justice Statutes Amendment Act. We've had lots of time in debate on this statute, and we've raised, I think, some very legitimate concerns. I do appreciate that the minister has taken some time to answer some of the concerns, but really the answers have not been forthcoming to the more serious issues that have been raised in debate in second reading, in committee, and now in third reading. This would be the minister's last chance to stand up and get on the record and clarify his position and his government's position on these matters before we're called to vote, and of course the nature of his comments will have direct bearing on whether or not this member can support the minister's request for this bill.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought I would begin my comments on Bill 20 at third reading this evening by utilizing a quote that was made by the Church Council on Justice and Corrections in 1999. They said:

Let's end the talk about getting tough or being soft on crime, being for victims or being for offenders, as if you can only be for one . . . These young people in conflict with the law are members of our communities, not aliens. They come from our families, as do their victims. They are coming back to our communities. What we do with them in the meantime through serious interventions that stress positive and meaningful accountability and services to their victims will make the difference in whether we are a strong or weak community.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke to this bill last evening and talked about the aspect of the bill that relates to fines and the high incidence in Alberta of incarcerating people who default on fines. This evening I would like to continue to raise some issues on this statute and the broader issues related to it from the Justice and the Poor report produced in the spring of 2000 by the National Council of Welfare.

Just continuing on in a general sense, we have, as I indicated earlier, a statute which is bringing forward a number of different amendments. I'm cognizant of the fact that this may be the last bill I speak to in this Assembly. Probably in most respects, Mr. Speaker, I would have preferred that it would have been a health care bill, because I would have certainly felt much more competent to be analyzing and categorizing the effect of these amendments, but as fate would have it, tonight we're talking about amendments to the justice statutes.

I certainly have to admit that the debate on this bill has proven to be educational for me. I've learned a number of things. I've also learned in my time in the Assembly that the debate and the discussion that goes on in this process is not simply about the words or the paragraphs or the pages of the bills before us, but it is very much about the intent of those bills, what effect and what change they will bring about, and how that will affect our citizens individually and collectively.

We have had much good debate on Bill 20 already in this Assembly. In reviewing the *Hansard* and the issues that have been brought forward, I think that in summary there's certainly a good deal of support for the bill. There are some reasoned questions that have been made and await answers.

I have in my time in the Assembly been responsible for the portfolio of family and social services and under that category have become very familiar with this government's record on the treatment of the vulnerable in this province, whether it be the people who are utilizing disability programs, welfare programs, services for the homeless, child welfare services. In that context, Mr. Speaker, we have amendments before us, amendments about facilitating payment of fines through registries and, through that process, the incorporation of an additional surcharge. We know that certainly there's a large degree of fines that are levied that are municipally based and that there is also in the demographics of those fined a certain degree of those people who would fall into a vulnerable category.

Now, logistically I don't know how many government registries are right in the downtown core, but it would seem to me that if you are going to make it compulsory that people pay their fines at a registry, somehow for those people who don't have transportation, who can't afford bus fare, the government shouldn't be trying to make it additionally difficult for those people to pay their fines. But de facto that may be the case. We may have by agreeing to this

amendment – while for many people in the province it won't pose undue hardship, for those who are of limited means it perhaps may, both in terms of the surcharge and in terms of the location of the registry.

MR. DICKSON: It's a tax.

MRS. SLOAN: It is very much a tax, and that's been stated clearly before. I won't restate the obvious, but there's certainly been a long history of that type of hidden taxation in the policies of this government in my tenure.

I wanted to just raise a couple of other observations that were made in the Justice and the Poor report. Haveman in 1984 said that "the persistence of jailing in default of a fine as a Canadian problem is astounding." Going back much earlier to the Archambault Commission in 1938, the following statement was made:

Imprisonment for non-payment, when the convicted person has not the means or ability to pay, is, in fact, imprisonment for poverty . . . Your Commissioners are of the opinion that many . . . criminals receive their first education in crime upon being committed to prison for non-payment of fines.

That was evident, Mr. Speaker, to that commission some 60 years ago.

10:10

While we're in the process tonight of discussing how we pay fines – and I've stated the reality that we have a very high imprisonment rate for defaulting on fines – we don't have the political will within this Assembly tonight to address those issues. Mr. Speaker, we simply want to create another avenue to additionally tax people, through a surcharge on fines, and create more business for the private registries. In fact, that's another valid point, that again de facto this bill is generating business for private registries. It's taking the fine payment and basically in some ways telling these private registry owners: listen; this is going to be a market that you ought to be ready to accommodate. So in that respect I have concerns about that particular section of the justice statute that's before us.

I stated in my earlier comments as well that I'd like to continue for a bit on the lack of addressment within the amendments relative to their effect on women. We talked about the regionalization of the court system, the requirement for judges to become generalists. We talked about, I guess, the lack of consultation that has occurred in advance of this. We also talked in an earlier section about the lack of government respect for the judiciary, the historic issue of the 5 percent rollback and the angst that caused between the judiciary and government.

I have a great deal of respect as well for the Minister of Justice, and I think many of these amendments are well intended. However, I've come to learn in my term of office that there's an ideology embedded within this government that goes back far beyond the current Minister of Justice, and we write our laws to symbolize or give current reality to that ideology: pull up your bootstraps; children are parents' responsibility; if you can't make it on your own, don't expect government support. Some of those very, very callous and hard-nosed ideologies I've run headlong into, Mr. Speaker, as I've fulfilled my role in this Assembly. If we're going to take the opportunity to significantly amend the way in which our justice system operates, which in fact Bill 20 does – it talks about quite a significant reorganization of the court system – why not also look at the potential impact of that and the impact this ideology has had over time on certain segments of our society?

Again citing from the Justice and the Poor report, the observation that was made in the report was:

Even if judges treated men and women equally in handing out sentences, the impact would be harsher on women. Because more women have incomes below the poverty line than men, they cannot afford to pay the same fines.

We don't have a tiered structure of fines in this province that takes that gender disparity into consideration. Most imprisoned women are poor mothers, and the worst offence many of them commit is shoplifting. The study of women who appeared before Halifax courts between 1984 and 1998 found that the major crime they were charged with, accounting for 42 percent of all the charges, was theft under \$1,000. Overall 68 percent of the charges were for crimes against property, and the number of charges for theft over \$1,000 started to increase in August, when children needed school clothes, and peaked in December around Christmastime.

So, Mr. Speaker, in the context of talking about fines, why not talk about this reality, the reality that in the demographics of those charged with crimes and fines levied, this demographic exists and incorporate within the bill something that speaks to that? We have certainly seen the statistics. The municipalities in Alberta have studied the concentration of poverty in Alberta communities, and these statistics are related to the same demographic I'm speaking about tonight. In fact, the reality may be that the justice system is perpetuating those women's poverty.

Again speaking about who is affected by imprisonment for the nonpayment of fines and what offences they committed, I haven't seen anything in Alberta relative to statistics on this issue, but the minister may have information that he will make available to me. This was a reality: about three-quarters of our imprisonments are for violations of provincial laws and municipal bylaws in Alberta, and we are second highest in the country for the incarceration of women for fine default. The only province that has a higher rate of incarceration of women is Saskatchewan, and that is at 47 percent. Alberta is at 39 percent.

That's probably information that many members of the Assembly weren't aware of, Mr. Speaker, so I think it's important to make those issues to give this bill some context. Simply, if we were here tonight to do a finite analysis of the sections and the amendments within it, except perhaps for the esteemed lawyers amongst us, it would be a discussion which for most of us would not have a lot of relevance.

I've certainly learned a great deal from my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo, and I've considered it a privilege to sit beside him in this Assembly. He's a fine member of the legal profession, and I am so compelled by his campaign to activate the Law and Regulations Committee that I really think a motion should be brought forward to rename the committee the Dickson Law and Regulations Committee. [interjections] I would definitely vote in support of such a motion, and I hear the hon. members and minister on the other side expressing their support for that as well. Let's make it happen.

10:20

One of the last issues I'd just like to raise on a similar vein is relative to how the offences break down for people that are sent to prison. The top 10 offences that send the largest number of people to prison include two small offences: a minor assault and theft under \$1,000. Why are such small offenders sent to prison? There are many reasons, and all of them work to the disadvantage of the poor. When an Ottawa duty counsel was asked whether poor and affluent defendants received equal treatment in the court where she worked, she indignantly denied any possibility of discrimination. On second thought, she admitted that poor defendants had less negotiating

power in her bargaining sessions with prosecutors over less time for more fine. Because poor people have no money for more fine, they routinely end up doing more time for the same offences, an aspect which again Bill 20 does not address.

This reality that more poor people are sent to jail when better-off people are fined is confirmed by a Winnipeg study which examined more than a thousand cases heard in provincial court. The following conclusion was reached. Whether income, social status, or type of job is used as a measure, similar results emerge: those of lower socioeconomic status are treated more harshly. The best measure has proven to be employment status. The pattern is clear. Those who are employed pay for their crime with money, and those who are underemployed with a relatively short loss of freedom.

I could go on, Mr. Speaker, because there's a very relevant part in this report on the sentencing of aboriginal people, which I think applies in a number of amendments contained within Bill 20, most specifically the reorganization of the court system. I know that for those courts that have reserves within their boundaries, the location of the courts is most certainly what warrants our attention and discussion. You know, I've heard of judges who routinely pick up members of aboriginal communities on the side of the road and give them rides to the court hearings. That's not something which,

perhaps, members of the Assembly would think to consider, but we have to ensure, as we make these laws, that they're going to be functional, that they're going to be operational in a manner that serves all people in this province well. That's really one of our primary responsibilities.

With those thoughts, Mr. Speaker, I am most thankful to have had the opportunity to have spoken on Bill 20 this evening and, in a similar vein, to have had the opportunity to serve in this Assembly. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a third time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fall session has been very productive, so it's now my pleasure to move that pursuant to Government Motion 25, agreed to by this Assembly on November 14, the Assembly stand adjourned.

[Pursuant to Government Motion 25 the Assembly adjourned at 10:25 p.m.]

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No.205 Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000

No.206 School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act, 2000

No.207 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act

No.208 Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2000

No.209 Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2000

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No.212 Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2000

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No.215 School (Early Childhood Education) Amendment Act, 2000

No.216 Labour Statutes (Workers' Rights) Amendment Act, 2000

No.217 Public Highways Development Amendment Act, 2000

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